



# *Fine lines*

Summer 2017

VOLUME 26 ISSUE 2

EDITED BY  
DAVID  
MARTIN

*FINE LINES: Summer 2017*

Volume 26 Issue 2

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~ Summer 2017 ~

VOLUME 26 ISSUE 2



*Edited by*

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## ABOUT FINE LINES

*Fines Lines* is published by Fine Lines, Inc., a 501(c) 3 non-profit corporation. David Martin is the managing editor. In this quarterly publication, we share poetry and prose by writers of all ages in an attempt to add clarity and passion to our lives. Support is provided through donations, all of which are tax deductible. Join us in creating the lives we desire through the written word.

Composition is hard work. We celebrate its rewards in each issue. Share this publication with others who love creativity. We encourage authors and artists of all ages. Our national mailing list reaches every state. Increased literacy and effective, creative communication is critical for all.

*Fines Lines* editors believe writing of life's experiences brings order to chaos, beauty to existence, and celebration to the mysterious.

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## SUBMISSIONS

- We accept submissions via email, file attachments, CDs formatted in MS Word for PCs, and laser-printed hard copies.
- Editors reply when writing is accepted for publication, and if a stamped, self-addressed envelope or email address is provided.
- Submissions must not include overt abuse, sexuality, profanity, drugs, alcohol, or violence.
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- Address changes and correspondence should be sent to the *Fines Lines* email address: [fine-lines@cox.net](mailto:fine-lines@cox.net)

We encourage readers to respond to the ideas expressed by our authors. Letters to the editor may be printed in future issues after editing for length and clarity. Reader feedback is important to us. We support writers and artists with hope and direction. Write on.

*“Language is courage:  
the ability to conceive  
a thought, to speak it, and  
by doing so to make it true.”*

SALMAN RUSHDIE



# Sometimes, I Need a Push

SAMANTHA AGUILERA

Words can make such an impact. Whether they impact children, just starting to learn, or elders, who have heard it all, words matter.

Growing up, I was never too good at writing, because I did not know what to write about. Years would pass, and I simply finished the minimum amount of work necessary. One day, my sister came home with a brand new journal. This new purchase spoke to me, and I wanted one just like it. She filled hers with stories, songs, and drawings, absolutely everything. At that moment, I realized keeping a journal meant so much more than just writing what happened throughout the day. Writing the truth and keeping a record of my thoughts allows me to be more open and honest with myself. It lasts forever — whatever was important in that moment. Most young writers like to believe their writing will be kept for their eyes only, because they will never make a difference. The truth is, once ideas are exposed, words have so much power, and sometimes, it is frightening.

I have always loved to write and journal, but never have I thought about how important my words are. I forgot about who inspired me to write and why I should inspire others to write. Writing in a journal helps me become who I want to be. Nowadays, young people love to know that their voices are heard and they can make a difference. Anyone can be a great writer, and great writers can come from any culture and any situation. Most young writers do not know how amazing they are. All it takes is for someone to give me a push.

# Why Are You a Writer?

## CREATIVE WRITING CAMPERS QUESTIONNAIRE 2016

I try.  
I write.  
I imagine.  
I want to be.  
I notice details.  
I never give up.  
Words love me.  
Poetry is my art.  
I love dictionaries.  
I paint with words.  
I always ask, "Why?"  
It is what I love to do.  
I can accept criticism.  
I find power in words.  
I have found my voice.  
It costs less than therapy.  
Composition is freedom.  
My characters talk to me.  
Bad grammar annoys me.  
It keeps me out of trouble.  
I am searching for myself.  
Metaphors rock my world.  
I am not afraid of the truth.  
It puts me in my happy place.  
Plot-holes keep me up at night.  
A thesaurus is my writing bible.  
It stirs every emotion in my soul.  
It lets me express my spirituality.

I have been published in *Fine Lines*.  
I believe in the mantra — “Write on.”  
It lets me feel like I can do anything.  
I live for writing camp each summer.  
These thoughts need somewhere to go.  
Why else would I have 80,000 pencils?  
Sometimes, being an artist is not enough.  
What else would I do with these notebooks?  
I always have a pen and paper in my pocket.  
I want to create books that will be remembered.  
I think of my life as a book. Each day, I turn a page.  
I am on my knees, begging for my voice to be heard.  
My characters surprise me by what they think and do.  
There are no mistakes, just different directions to take.  
I don’t want to say something. I have something to say.  
Words are my passion. They are exciting and challenging.  
Stringing words together is my way to find universal justice.  
What started as a gift to others has become a treasure for me.  
My pencil can never place the words on the page fast enough.  
When a favorite character in my book dies, I lose a close friend.  
Why else would I have graphite smudges on the side of my hand?  
When I escape reality by diving between the lines, I find what is real  
to me.  
I have no trouble working on an idea until 3 AM and smiling the whole  
time.  
I can say what I mean with written words in ways that I can’t with  
spoken ones.

# My Creative Writing Class

*KATIE ANDERL*

This class has changed me in just about every way a simple class can change a person. Normally, classes are something I dread. A waste of time, sitting there learning useless information. Who really needs to know how to multiply a matrix? Do people ever use that outside of school? Not very often. Nevertheless, in Creative Writing this year, I've learned things I can take home with me.

I've learned about poems, essays, proofreading, and style. I've learned how to give writing a voice. Most of all, I've learned from my classmates. I've learned their inspirations, what influences them, what they feel strongly about, and I've even come to recognize their style. I have never been in a class with such a diverse group of individuals.

There is Alex, president of the Fine Lines Club. With his fake quotes and poem contests, the guy keeps class alive. Every once in awhile, he quips a witty comment aloud and keeps the class laughing. His strong beliefs in equality for all illustrate his views and morals.

Another highly entertaining individual is Marcus. At least twice a week, Marcus "performs" his works in front of a captivated class. His passion for his work is overwhelming, and it is hardly possible to stop him, once he has the attention of the room. I have no doubt I will see him on television someday.

These are only two of the unique people in my class. Others include Ann, with her abrupt corrections and deep interpretations. Then there is Corey, a childhood friend who has grown into a talented poet, and who could overlook Josh, a daydream believer with the ability to silence a crowd with his lyrics. There are so many inspiring individuals. We are all different, yet in some ways alike. I see a little bit of myself in everyone.

I have learned so much in this creative writing class. As well as learning from my classmates, I have learned from my teacher. He has taught me to be proud of my work and write with a voice. I no longer dread reading in front of the class and have slowly become proud of my work.

My class has grown with me. Shy kids aren't afraid to speak up, and followers are becoming leaders. This class breaks boundaries, and in an odd way, it seems to change every day. I know I can count on something out of the ordinary to happen or someone to approach a topic in a way I never imagined.

The most unusual element about the whole class is the atmosphere of the room. Posters about writing line the room with inspirational quotes and poems printed upon them. It is a casual atmosphere, as if you were among friends. So many of the students are different, yet they all have one thing in common. They all love to write.

////////////////////////////////////  
*“If there’s a book you really want to read but it  
hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.”*

TONI MORRISON

////////////////////////////////////

# Minimalism and Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs"

JARLIN ARROYO

Self-Actualization, defined by *Merriam-Webster* as "realizing fully one's own potential," is something that I strive for. Everything I do in my life is in the hope of achieving that state of mind. I am not alone in the endeavor to reach the peak of Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs;" many people try, but very few succeed in reaching self-actualization (1-5%). Although Maslow's pyramid comes in five levels with detailed instructions and steps about how to reach the highest level, realizing the steps is the hardest part. Maslow's "Hierarchy" gives us the steps to self-actualization, and minimalism should be our guide to the top.

Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, identified the five basic human needs. They are illustrated in the form of a pyramid with the lower level being where we must begin. To reach self-actualization, we must complete the base level, so that we can then advance to the next level, until we reach the top. Physiological needs are what make up the first level in the pyramid: breathing, shelter, sleep, water, and food are some of the conditions that must be satisfied to complete this first level. Safety and Security are on the second level: employment, health, family, property, and social ability. The third level in the pyramid is Love and Belonging: friendship, family, intimacy, and sense of connection. The fourth and fifth level contain deeper more complicated needs: creativity, confidence, the need to be a unique individual, acceptance, inner potential, and spontaneity.

The steps to self-actualization seem very straightforward, and they should be easy to achieve. Why are more people not satisfied? My first thought was, "Only wealthy people could reach the top." We have all heard that "Money can't buy happiness." I thought this was just

something rich people said to not rub in how happy they were, but when you think about it, there must be truth to that statement. What do celebrities have in common besides drug addictions, depression, and a lot of money? How can they be depressed, when they have so much money? They could buy whatever they wanted in bulk. I looked at the pyramid again and found that money could only help them in the first and maybe the second level of the pyramid.

After thinking about how I could reach self-actualization, if money could not help me with it, on the Internet, I came across a group of people who call themselves minimalists. Minimalism is a way of living with only the things you need, or “The intentional promotion of the things we value and the removal of everything that distracts us from it.” When you get rid of your “wants” and keep only the “needs,” you have more time that can be spent on things money cannot buy. Celebrities have everything; they can buy anything; we look up to them thinking they are completely happy and attribute that happiness to the material items they own. All these items are distractions. “Minimalism brings freedom from the all-consuming passion to possess” (Becomingminimalist.com).

I imagine Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” to be like the Aztec Sun Pyramid, which has a lot of steps, but they are not all to be walked at once. There are breaks in between sets of stairs, like the levels of Maslow’s pyramid. Going up the first set of stairs might be easy, but we have just started out, and we have a lot of energy. By the time we get to the second set of stairs, it is a little bit harder, and we might not feel as satisfied going more steps. We try to achieve the same level of satisfaction buying or doing meaningless things. We think we have reached that same feeling, but when we try to continue up the steps, we are pulled down by gravity. We want to feel that happiness again, and we need it fast, so we buy more. The more we buy, the more we are being held down by these items that give us minimal satisfaction. This cycle and the feelings described within are similar to the feelings produced by drug addiction.

Self-actualization is important to us as human beings. We value the opinion of others more than we care about our own, but happiness is when we accept our true self. Each step is important because we can reach the top once we have completed everything else. We get stuck on a level and try to fill our hole with material objects, but we have to find what it is that holds us back and attacks our problem at the root. Objects get in the way of our view. Minimalism is helpful in going up the pyramid, because we do not have objects in the way. We see clearly what is in our way and what is missing in our lives.

Living the minimalist life is not for everyone. I do not need my ukulele, but it is my passion. That does not mean I should donate it to Goodwill, because I should rid myself of everything I do not need. As long as I know that the ukulele is a distraction, a break from going up the steps, and it will not be my self-actualization, I can advance. The problems with distractions are when we have too many.

Self-actualization is a lifelong process for some. It is not a race. Some people have a better understanding of what they need, and others are just lucky. Finding what is important, what we value, and fulfilling our needs are keys to self-actualization. Minimalism or a form of it is a great way to help clear our view and lead us towards the ultimate destination. Let's be part of the 1-5% who have reached self-actualization and help to make it a bigger percentage. I hope we meet at the top.

# Sticks and Stones

CAROLYN BERGERON

I was watching an awards show, and one of the hosts said “sticks and stones” in response to what their co-host had just said. I don’t recall what the initial comment was, but it made me remember the old saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me.”

Not True!

The words you speak to yourself are the ones that bring harm. They destroy self-confidence and foster incompetence. They bring loneliness and help you disbelieve the good, supportive, and positive things people say to you and about you, because you know those things are not true!

We all know these harmful words: “would have,” “could have,” and “should have.” Here are some other winners: “if only,” “Why didn’t I?” “Why did I?” and the names you call yourself, like “Stupid.”

People do say things that are harmful, and they can be devastating. Sometimes, harmful is a perception, not the reality. You may overhear someone and think what the person is saying is about you. They could be talking about something entirely unrelated to you, but your mind is so desperate to grab onto that. You’re geared to it, and expect it. You wear it like a cloak — a cloak of darkness. You revel in the failure and know that you and what you do is not quite good enough.

Your mind doesn’t work anymore. It can’t think straight — your logic is gone.

You’re afraid to try the new ideas you have and tell anyone about them.

All these words are about the past. It’s all gone — the good and bad. Can you just leave it there? Take what is? “Is” — that’s now — today — real. You can smell it and feel it. You can hear it. The future — who knows? It can come out of what is today. Can you just do that?

# The Triumph

ELLY BIEDERMAN

Bunny set up the kitchen chairs just so, then raced into her bedroom. The next moment she yelled, “Mommy! Daddy! See what I can do!” and raced back into the kitchen. *Thump, thump, thud, thud, bounce* went her feet. She reached up and grabbed the top of each ladder-back chair firmly in her tiny fists. She pulled herself up, then her arms pushed the chairs down onto the floor and straightened. Her head and body rose a full arm’s length above the chair backs.

From that exalted height, she pumped her legs back and forth, back and forth. Her blonde pigtailed flew away from her three-year-old body and back again. Bunny looked like a child riding a playground swing.

Mommy’s and Daddy’s heads appeared together in the living room door. They caught sight of Bunny’s printed sky-blue bloomers and dress rising above the chairs. White oxfords and ruffled ankle socks reached out straight before her and plopped comfortably on the air. The princess was now on her magic carpet. Her hands released the chair backs, and she floated forward. She rounded the corner of the kitchen table and headed for the back door.

A broad smile, extending from one golden pigtail to the other, glowed on Bunny’s face. Her bare arms embraced the whole big world. She sailed with ease.

Mommy’s and Daddy’s jaws dropped wide open in surprise. Eyes fixed on their daughter, they remained frozen in place watching her go.

Soon, she dropped down a bit to grab the screen door handle and open the door. The door creaked on its hinges, as Bunny floated into the warm, sunshiny back yard. “I’m flying, I’m really flying.” she whooped. The screen-door spring recoiled with a *whap*, slamming the screen shut.

Bunny saw grass that was much greener than she'd ever seen it under the brighter than ever blue sky. Everything was smaller and clearer. Mommy's flowers looked so much... , oh, my. The "Golddaddy" boys were into Mommy's flowers! Petals and leaves were falling to the ground.

"Get out of Mommy's flowers!"

The pair of urchins, pulling up flowers, jumped and turned to discover where that piping, high pitched, shout came from. Their eyes grew big as saucers, and their jaws crashed into their knees as they spied Bunny, seated cross-legged in the air, her fists firmly planted on her hips.

"Well?" proclaimed Bunny.

The "Golddaddy" boys found their feet and scrambled off like a flash. They couldn't get home soon enough.

*Well, how about that! Those two never mind the grown-ups.*

Bunny flew to the end of the yard and watched the pair of stubby-legged boys flee into the street. Assured they were really gone, she let out a high happy sigh. "Whee!"

*Plop*, she landed on the ground.

"Ouch!" Bunny rubbed her sore fanny and scrambled to her feet. The big smiled returned to her face. *I flew, I really flew! And I made those nasty "Golddaddy" boys go away!*

# From Nepal to the USA

ANJANA BISWA

In the 1990s, the Bhutan government kicked out its Nepali citizens because they wanted to unify their culture. Lots of Nepali protested the exile. They were attacked by Indian army officers. Many protesters lost their fingers in the protest, some became deaf, some were shot, and others were disabled. My uncle was one of the protesters, and my parents' friend was killed in a conflict.

My family did not go to the protests, because they were happy for getting into a refugee camp. They did not become homeless or get killed. My parents got married when they met at the camp. They never knew each other before the camp. My dad was 21, and my mom was 18 years old. Mom gave birth to my sister, my younger brother, and me in the camp. My grandparents were reunited with their oldest daughter, after they got kicked out of Bhutan, because they all ended up, accidentally, in the same camp. We had to struggle to live, but there were some good times, too.

Daily life in camp was difficult. People had to go out of camp to work and feed their families. We struggled a great deal. Outsiders used to mock us and treat us as servants. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) fed us by bringing food and vegetables. Sometimes, we did not get enough to eat because of the floods, and there wasn't a bridge for vehicles. We starved some days. When we asked outsiders for help, they talked to us rudely. Those outsiders used to get jealous for what we were getting from UNHCR. Some people got excited because the UNHCR was sending us to foreign countries: United States of America, Netherlands, Norway, Australia, Canada, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. My family wasn't interested in leaving because my aunties married Indian citizens. We

learned the Indian culture and got used to the atmosphere there. We started to live our lives in India, but we decided to come to the United States, because my grandpa had cancer, and my family thought there would be better treatment for him in the USA. We suffered in that camp for 20 years.

The UNHCR did great work by letting us come to other countries. When we filled out the forms, we were excited about it. We were going to the world's most expensive and rich country. When we rode the airplane, we were so excited, because we never traveled on a plane before or ever saw one up close. When we reached America, we did not know anything about it. We were nervous about what we would do and what it was like to live here. We did not know how to speak English. Everything seemed strange and difficult.

There were different people from all over the world in this diverse country. My future was full of opportunity and success that I never realized. Now, I am here at my dream college, because of many opportunities this country has given to us. Our parents sacrificed everything for our future. We have a better life than what we expected, and our parents' sacrifice has not been wasted. We are glad our parents chose a bright future for us rather than returning to their motherland. We have more opportunities for a successful future, because our parents made the right choices.

We are living in a world that we never imagined. I'm glad that my family and relatives who lived in camp with us have come here, too. People get to share their opinions in this country, and nobody can deny our freedoms. We never thought we would end up like this. Sometimes, I get lost in my memories, as if the past has come to the present. I am glad God planned everything from the beginning of our refugee life to come to the United States. I am happy for all of the refugees who got to come to this country. If we were in refugee camps, now, we would not get the opportunity to have a full education, banking, social media, and learn about western life.

Going to school and learning this new language was hard at the beginning. When I started school, I was lost in myself. I had lots of memories of my country and relatives. My memories still haunted me and made me cry. I did not have any Nepali speaking friends, and my English was broken. Today, whenever I speak English, people can figure out that I am an ESL student. I never give up, and I try hard whenever I need to speak English with international students. Over time, my English is getting better. My successful future waits for me and tells me not to give up on my dreams.



View from Celarian Lighthouse *photograph by Anne Obradovich*

# Teens

*SHEILA BOERNER*

A mystery to many, teens make their mark  
in our frustrations and in our hearts.  
They want to please but can't decide  
to whom they owe their loyalty.

As a teacher, I saw the good side of kids,  
while dealing with them one to one;  
with their peers watching us, though,  
their actions sometimes came undone.

Coaches have an ideal role,  
shaping young athletes' lives,  
discipline, teamwork, integrity,  
qualities that receive high fives.

Some parents can't understand why  
their son or daughter doesn't excel,  
but without their encouragement  
life can become pell-mell.

Removed from the trials of daily life,  
grandparents treasure their grands,  
take joy in seeing teens mature, and  
cheer for them up close and in the stands.

Siblings can be enemies or friends,  
acting sometimes as angels or mimes.  
My sister proved to be a godsend,  
helping me through trying times.

Service often helps a teen,  
gives him a broader look on life,  
teaches him how to empathize, and  
makes him identify with others' strife.

Our world has such a fast pace;  
teens feel caught up in a race.  
Understanding and compassion  
help ease the burdens teens face.



*“Every human being has hundreds of separate  
people living under his skin. The talent of a writer  
is his ability to give them their separate names,  
identities, personalities and have them relate to other  
characters living with him.”*

MEL BROOKS



# Meet Janet Bonet: *A Fine Lines* Special Editor

## AN INTERVIEW

Janet writes fiction as J. Eleanor Bonet to honor her Aunt Eleanor, who encouraged her to “just be as crazy as you want to be and don’t give a hoot about what others think.” She writes non-fiction as Janet E. Bonet, for academic and community activism purposes. Her educational background reaches to the “all but thesis” level in anthropology/sociology, and she has a BA minor in Spanish. She is a freelance professional translator and interpreter, because she loves words, and she is dedicated to social and environmental justice. She resides in the house she was raised in on the edge of South Omaha’s Spring Lake Park. She is happily letting her yard revert back to the wild wood it was meant to be. In her mind, nature should be natural.

Raised by hard working parents in a 1,200 square foot house, filled with seven siblings and an endless stream of neighborhood kids, she had a full and happy childhood that moved her with ease into adventuresome adulthood and helps keep the accumulating decades from intimidating her. Her childhood and that of her three children are a wellspring from which flow many of Janet’s stories. She draws on her eight years of life in Mexico for tales that illustrate how variety is the spice of life. During the almost ten years of semi-isolation, while caring for her father-in-law and mother, both of whom were 98 years old when they died, she came to depend on journaling and letter writing as her outlets for all the frustrations, fears, and joys of caring for her elders. In 2012, she suddenly became a widow and spent every morning for one full year writing out her anger and grief, while sitting in the garden, crying, then sighing, and finally, smiling again.

Often asked why she writes, Janet's answer is simple: her fifth grade teacher told the class that a brilliant but unshared thought is a waste, because it dies in your head when it might have changed the world. Through choosing to fearlessly express her thoughts and tell her stories, Janet knows she can change the world, even if it is the world of only one reader. Experience has taught her that honesty is the best foundation for creativity, because if a story comes from a truth within us, it will illuminate a corresponding place in the reader. When a friend invited her to a panel on creative writing, the floodgates opened, and a part of her woke up. She had to stop letting her ideas die in the journals that filled her bookshelf. Taking her life's moments and weaving them into a really good read for someone else is now a need, a pleasure, and a profound satisfaction that, ironically, is beyond words.

"A Book-Marked Path" is the title she gave her writings in the little journal she uses, and this is thanks to a bookmark she uses with a quote from Carl Sandburg. She knew little about him, so she looked him up, and now, she is intrigued by one of his books entitled *The People, Yes*. So, after she finishes reading Susan Brind Morrow's *The Names of Things* and continues to read *Samuel Johnson's Prose and Poetry* by Boswell, she will also be on the hunt in used book stores and garage sales for Sandburg's books. It is the archaeologist in her that makes her enjoy the hunt rather than just going to a bookstore and buying a newly pressed book. While she is on that hunt, she will find some other treasure about to be discarded by someone who was not moved to read it. Every day, she is motivated by reading and living to WRITE!

# Autumn

*JILLIAN BOSTON*

Now we have reached the end  
of cool breezes and a gentle rain,  
trees abloom with lively voices:  
the soprano rose,  
the alto red,  
the tenor blue,  
the bass a delicate green,  
Green has taken over —  
it has become a sea ...  
the sun once smiling,  
now burns blue sky to pale ...  
trees bow under the glare  
and we go to bed with restless winds  
kicked up against the peace.  
Midsummer. The beginning  
of the burn —  
until all is scorched brown, and  
at last, we cry for Autumn.

# My Struggle Gave Me My Strength

JACOB BURNS

A little while ago, I read something written by an author named Alex Elle. She wrote, “I’m thankful for my struggle, because without it, I wouldn’t have stumbled across my strength.” A dragon is a symbol for great struggle. Everyone has them, and these dragons can take many different shapes. More often than not, when people conquer great struggles, they come out the other side all the better for it. A dragon I found myself faced with was one that took the form of responsibility. I had to become the man of the house at a young age, after my parents separated and my older brother got himself kicked out, but that job played a large part in making me who I am today.

My siblings and I had a nice upbringing. I am the third of four children. First came my older brother, then my older sister, followed by me and my younger brother. We lived in a nice house. Our grandparents lived just down the street. Dad worked, and Mom stayed home with us. It was a nice little setup we had. My brothers and I shared a room, so we grew very close to each other and fought with my sister all the time.

The days came and went without consequence, for the most part, then one day everything changed. When I was in the first grade, my mom asked all of us to come to the kitchen. When I got there, she was crying, and my dad stood in the corner looking upset. That was when they told us they decided to get a divorce. I am not sure what I did after that. All I remember is being confused and not knowing what was going on. After that day, my mom, my siblings, and I moved to Nebraska City. My dad came to get us every weekend, and that is how I grew up. I was still pretty young, so it was not all that hard on me, but

my older brother was in the fourth grade, when they split up. It was very difficult for him.

My older brother and Mom fought a lot. They argued about everything. One night, Mom had enough. When he was in high school, she caught him and a few of his friends smoking pot in the basement. The next day, my Dad came and got him. He had to transfer schools.

There I was, half way through the seventh grade, a dirty pair of glasses on my nose, and not a clue what I was doing. All of a sudden, I was the man of the house. It was rough in the beginning. Mom needed help, and I did not always know how to help her. I got frustrated a lot. It was hard seeing her upset and feeling like there was nothing I could do.

One of the worst things was when I got into trouble at school. First, I would get yelled at by the teachers, and then I would have to go home, so my mom could yell at me. It was not the yelling that I hated. It was seeing that I was upsetting her over whatever stupid thing that I did. Most of the time, it was dumb and not worth the grief it caused. She already had enough on her plate.

I wanted to take some of the load off her shoulders. Mom was in-between jobs, and money was tight. For a long while, we did not have cable or Internet. I would go to the public library with my little brother and my sister, when we needed a computer for school or just to get out of the house, so she had some quiet time to work and take care of things. I tried to help out as much as I could with the yard work. If anything broke, I would try and fix it myself. If a drawer fell out, I would screw it back in. If the drain got clogged, I would “snake” it. Whenever I was not sure how to do something, I would give my dad a call, and he would try to explain it to me. I relied a lot on my friends, too, although they made things worse instead of better. I remember when Mom asked me to paint the fence in the backyard. A couple of my friends were helping me, and it got a little out of hand. She came home to us throwing paint at each other rather than putting it onto the fence. Man, did she smack me for that.

Eventually, she got a job as an insurance agent. She had been studying and taking tests to get certified for a while. After that, she seemed a lot less stressed, although she was still working all the time. Between us and work, I do not think she had any free time left for herself. She did everything she could to make sure we had what we needed.

My little brother looked up to me, so I tried to set a good example for him, whenever I could. I used to help him understand his homework and did my best to answer any questions he had. We were always close, but over those years we grew closer. We still shared a room, so even if I wanted to, getting away from him was hard. He and I always had the best Army men wars.

I still saw my older brother on the weekends. He had trouble switching schools and figuring things out for a while. Time went on though, and he got everything straightened out. That was just how things were all the way through high school. Life got messy, sometimes, but whose does not?

Sometimes, I think about how things happened, and I wonder how they would have turned out differently if my parents stayed together, or if my brother had not moved away. How I would have turned out? Every time, I come to the same conclusion. I would not ask to do any of it over again. It was everything that I went through that made me who I am. The bad and the good. It was the struggle that helped me find my strength.

# The Nebraska Passport: A Beginner's Guide

*STU BURNS*

Back in 2010, I visited the John G. Neihardt Center in Bancroft, NE, with an old girlfriend. As we were leaving, the attendant asked if we had a Nebraska Passport from the tourism commission. When we lackadaisically shook our heads, she pressed the cardstock brochures into our hands with enthusiasm while describing all the places we could visit around the state to get our Passports stamped and earn prizes. We tried to let her down easy; neither of us had much paid vacation, and we probably weren't going to do any more travelling that summer. Like Elizabeth Warren, however, she persisted, and we left with our Passports in tow. I'm not sure what became of them. I'd like to think we passed the offerings on to someone more apt to participate. We inadvertently picked up a hitchhiker on that trip; maybe he took them.

A few years later, random thoughts of that Passport percolated to my consciousness, as thoughts are known to do. Wondering if it was still a thing in 2014, I Googled "Nebraska Passport" while sitting cross-legged on my bed, my faithful dog lending moral support. I was rewarded with a much-expanded program of eighty attractions. There were tourist mainstays like the State Capitol and the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument, along with more selectively popular sites like seven quilt shops scattered all over the state. The list was broken into ten tours, each with its own theme. The quilt shops were one tour (along with the International Quilt Study Center and Museum in Lincoln), while other tours embraced subjects like history, military service, and products made in Nebraska. The whole thing struck me as a great outline for a trip or two. Before long, I was telling everyone

about what I'd found. In a rare moment of self-awareness, I realized that I was acting a little like a missionary for Nebraska Tourism, which a Mormon friend of mine affirmed. That didn't stop me, though. I just tucked my Passport under my arm like it was holy writ and approached friends (and strangers) placidly: "Hi. I'd like to talk to you about the difference Nebraska Tourism has made in my life."

Beyond the proselytizing (which goes over well at parties, by the way), the times have been great. I've taken my family though the Sandhills and out to Chadron, had a day trip to the Winnebago Reservation with a carload of friends, gone from one end of the state to the other dodging rattlesnakes with a buddy from college, taken pictures of Chimney Rock and Carhenge with talented photographers, and hustled between Wilbur's Czech Museum and Burchard's Harold Lloyd home with a guy everybody thinks is my son. The most elaborate trip, so far, saw me drive eight people in a 15-passenger van following the Oregon Trail. It was raining at Ash Hollow, so we didn't get to see the Trail's wagon ruts, but you can bet we made it to Carhenge. The solo trips have been good, too; audio books and my own company really are a good combination. That, and you're never really alone with Nebraska Tourism. The interactions you have on the road are real. I accidentally followed a group through the state's southeast corner, catching up with them now and again. By the time I got to Hillside Perk Coffee Shop in Culbertson, that group had left word, and the hostess greeted me by name. (People recognize me; it's the hat.)

When the 2017 Passport sites came out in February, a local luminary asked me to put together a "beginner's guide" — what to emphasize, what to ignore, and what dogs to pet. The first part is easier; I can brag on my favorite sites all day, and several of them are on the Passport this year. (For a full list, go to [Nebraskapassport.com](http://Nebraskapassport.com).) First, Smith Falls State Park finally made the list. That part of Niobrara Valley is amazing, with up to six ecological regions (depending on how you count) coming together; it is striking to see the Sandhills

abruptly end where the northern forests begin. Floating down that river is something every Nebraskan should do, and the scenic cliffs and lackadaisical river bends would be outstanding sites anywhere in the world. There are the Falls themselves, breathtaking even in context. Inside tip: the boardwalk leading to the Falls takes a sharp bend right before the spring-fed wonder comes into view. Station yourself at that bend and watch visitors' faces, as they see the Falls for the first time. Their expressions of awe will stay with you.

Perhaps even more impressive are Ashfall Fossil Beds. The supervolcano now known as Yellowstone Park erupted 11.83 million years ago, burying a good chunk of North America in ash. (Yes, this could happen again. We don't like to talk about it.) In what is now northern Nebraska, Miocene beasts desperately tried to wash the ash from their throats at a big water hole, eventually suffocating in the weeks and months after the eruption. Ancestral rhinoceros, horses, camels, saber-toothed deer, raccoon dogs, cranes, turtles, and other species were buried in the volcanic layer, their bones perfectly preserved. The ancient waterhole is covered now by the Hubbard Rhino Barn, a million-dollar structure that allows interns to uncover the bones gradually while visitors look on. The skeletons are perfectly articulated in their last living positions. A baby rhino still curls up next to its mother, seeking comfort in its dying posture. A raccoon dog's head still pokes between the ribs of another rhinoceros, as if trying to get a last bit of meat. Discoveries still happen all the time. If you are fortunate, you may see a "eureka" moment on your visit.

The Nebraska notable who commissioned this essay works in the State Capitol Building, regularly, so that site may be old hat to her. To the rest of us, however, this blend of Renaissance, Art Deco, Native American, and Postmodern styles is always worth a visit. Depending on how you feel about taxidermy and Rocky Mountain Oysters, Ole's Big Game Steakhouse is either a place to emphasize or a place to avoid. (The Bonfire Grill in Broken Bow's Arrow Hotel is more my style, but Ole's is a Nebraska legend.) I couldn't get my elders

to get out of the van when I took my family to Carhenge, but there's no accounting for taste. I would advise you to see that installation of junked autos in the shape of Stonehenge, sometime before you die. All this said, now is the time to confess my ignorance. I visited every Passport stop over the last two years and came close the year before, but the Passport changes every season. I have seen less than half of 2017's featured sites, so I am a discoverer this time, too. I look forward to Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard, where the eponymous stream runs right through the winery. I have wanted to visit Wildcat Hills for years, especially after reading Loren Eiseley's writings about the area. Fort Sydney has escaped me up to now for some reason, and I hadn't even heard of York's Clayton Museum of Ancient History. I may not finish the 2017 Passport, but I will see these.

Beyond specific stops, there are general principles to follow. First and foremost, Nebraska Tourism is all about consent. This is actually a line I came up with when someone at a party joked about kidnapping a mutual friend in Columbus. The more we thought about it, though, the more true it seemed. To enjoy the trip, you have to consent to it. You have to allow yourself to enjoy it without cynicism or preconceptions. Granted, not every site is for everyone. I am an unrepentant fan of museums, but many of the quaint shops on the Passport just aren't for me. You may feel exactly the opposite, and that's OK. I will say that I went into each of the stops I visited with an open mind, and it was rare to find one that I didn't enjoy in some way. The biggest mistake I made last year was subtly warning some friends away from the Robert Henri Museum in Cozad; I'd been there years before, and it was unimpressive. When I finally visited the place, I found that it had completely transformed. Today, it is one of the outstanding attractions in the region. I hope the good people there accept my repentance.

Almost as important as consent is the following oxymoron: be prepared, and be flexible. Have a plan when you go on a trip, and keep time in mind. Take special note of when stops are open, and call ahead to confirm that they are open that day, especially the smaller

attractions. I'll single out the Speakeasy in Kearney County. I have tried to eat there in the past, but it has been either fully booked or closed for a private party each time. It's a great place, and you don't want to miss it, so call ahead. On the other hand, allow yourself the flexibility to do what you really want to do. My college buddy talked me into visiting Toadstool Park when we were in the area, even though it wasn't on the Passport. We had to miss a few stops, but our decision made it a better trip. Toadstool is amazing, Passport or no Passport, and we had planned things so that we knew what we could cut out and still see the things we really wanted to see. If you're an art lover and you're in Cozad for its 2017 stops, treat yourself to the Robert Henri Museum. A great visit is worth more than a Passport Stamp. If you take too much time at Ashfall, you may miss the Klown Doll Museum. Verily I say unto thee, Ashfall is the only thing like itself in the world. It might be worth missing other places to spend more time appreciating the ancient skeletons, especially if one of the head paleontologists is around. (The site's most dedicated explorer, Mike Voorhees, is an amazing person. If he's there, listen to what he has to say.) Carhenge wasn't on the Passport last year, but there was no way that big van of mine was missing that place, so we made time. The more prepared you are, the more flexible you can be.

Finally, when in doubt, do it. Fortune favors the brave. The van trip I took included natives of California and Colorado. I assured all of them that Nebraska history had no cases like the Donner Party or the Alferd [sic] Packer Expedition. This is Nebraska. No matter how bad things get, it will generally turn out all right. Even historic fur trader Hugh Glass, horribly injured and left for dead, managed to crawl across the breadth of the state to Fort Atkinson and get his gun back. As a rule, even if you try something unwise, it will be all right. That said, travel with a good road emergency kit, and when signs say "Watch out for rattlesnakes," watch out for rattlesnakes. I neglected this and punted one of those suckers off the trail at Scott's Bluff last year. Thankfully, it didn't want to mess with me any more than I

wanted to mess with it, and we parted amicably. The whole thing made for a good story, and my college buddy got some good photos.

That's my brief guide. I can't really say anything about what stops to ignore; the last time I tried that, I regretted it. Be open to everything, and give yourself consent to enjoy it. Plan your trip to a good level of detail, then put that plan to the side and have fun. When in doubt, do it. Everything will be more or less OK. Go by yourself, if you like. Go with family and friends, if that's more your way. Above all, do what you want to do. And pet every dog as long as the owner says it's fine.

See you on the road!



Jaipur Balloon Ride *photograph by Kim Sosin*

# Being My Own Firefighter

MELISSA BYINGTON

I have a voracious mind.  
Wild and unpredictable in its path  
Like prairie fire driven by the wind  
Swirling and jumping, touching things all along the way  
Moving out in a dozen directions at once.

I have tried to tame it, to fence it in, to channel it.  
Sometimes, it can be held  
Briefly — trained up and kept in a ring —  
Constrained to serve a purpose  
Kept small and safe with limited fuel and air.  
But, in the end, that is not the wicked way of fire.

We only delude ourselves when we think we have tamed it.  
It only needs a breeze, a distraction —  
Just the right fuel to jump out of its place —  
And to blaze away in all of its glory  
But in its path of blackened earth and a spent firefighter,  
It leaves opportunity for verdant growth.

# For Good Measure

MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Recipes used to be simple:

1. *Hit bird with rock*
2. *Pull off feathers*
3. *Hold over fire until black and crunchy*

Next came the invention of tools. Cave-man cooks, sensitive, because up until then, they had done nothing but burn things over a fire, decided they would get more respect if they re-named every tool specifically for cooking. Pokey sticks became *utensils*.

After they invented the arrow, the knife, and the alphabet, things moved quickly. Food could be cut into smaller and smaller bits until it became too little to hold. This fostered the invention of bowls, mixers, and measuring spoons to assemble the bits back together into something manageable. Instructions were called *recipes*. Cooks became *chefs*.

How can you screw up something as simple as a spoon? When a recipe calls for a tablespoon of ground pigeon flakes, you can't use a spoon off the table because a *table* spoon holds only a teaspoon. How much does a *tea* spoon hold? Who knows? Even the British don't use tea spoons. They stir tea with a *demi-spoon*, which, despite its name, is not half a spoon. That soup spoon nobody uses holds a tablespoon.

*Heaping teaspoon*: two words nobody thought would be paired together. A teaspoon is not your tool if you want to make a heap.

Does a drinking cup hold a cup of liquid? Of course not. It holds 1.5 cups. If I cup my hands, I can carry 1/8 of a cup. A cup holds 8 ounces of flour, which weighs 4 ounces. This is why we throw up our hands and go to Burger King.

Heaven forbid we use the metric system like the rest of the post-Cro-Magnon world. You know you are on shaky ground when your

only compatriots using cups, pints, and quarts are the British, who should not be trusted with food or naming things. The British call a spatula a *scoop*. The Scots call it a *tosser*, but that's forgivable: if your homeland was famous for haggis, you'd toss your food, too.

Consider the indistinct measurements, like a *pinch* and a *dash*. Not precise, but they use our fingers, which we always have handy.

We can do better. How about a hand of thyme? A finger of cake frosting? Remember the Super Bowl when Justin Timberlake introduced a cup of Janet Jackson?

Care for a glom of yogurt? A swipe of peanut butter? I know you can get a schmear of cream cheese, but I always feel a little cheated. No wonder: I looked up "schmear" and the word translates as "corrupt."

I love coffee because I grind the coffee beans in a coffee grinder, put them in a coffee maker, and make coffee in a coffee cup. I appreciate such clarity first thing in the morning.

But not too much clarity. Do we really need to call it a *frying* pan?

In my kitchen, I have a whisk, which is used for mixing. My mixer uses beaters. I beat with a tenderizer, which mashes, but to mash potatoes, I use a ricer, and I cook rice in the steamer, while I steam vegetables in the colander before I toss them into a salad with dressing I whip with my whisk.

My blender has buttons for *chop*, *grate*, *crumb*, *purée*, *liquefy*, and *whip*. Guess what it doesn't have a button for.

# Subway

GRACE CAREY

Shoving and pushing, everywhere about,  
So separated, our guide has to raise her voice and shout!

Now on the train car, signs flashing past,  
I don't know when to get off, it's all happening so fast!

Finally our stop!  
Time to get off.



*“The secret is to create people whom readers can care about. I do an enormous amount of groundwork on them. I know my characters. I know where they came from, who their grandmothers were, how their parents treated them when they were little. It’s the characters’ history that makes them who they are, and my characters are very real... people relate to them and their relationships.”*

DANIELLE STEEL



# Father

DAVID CATALÁN

Father loved movies  
Saturday nights would find us on the road  
To the nearest town lucky to have a theater  
That played films from the Golden Years of Mexican Cinema  
Sometimes we would go to a drive-in theater  
And catch five movies for a buck-a-carload admission price  
He was in his glory in a darkened regular theater, however  
Laughing at the comedy of *Cantinflas*  
Brooding at the drama of *Pedro Armendariz* and *Maria Felix*  
Mouthing the songs of *Jorge Negrete* or a *mariachi*  
And transported by the sights and sounds of the Mexican Revolution  
Of which he had been a part and had escaped  
Father was not a conversationalist  
He could not analyze and discuss what he had seen on the screen  
But I could feel the vibrations of his enjoyment  
And his fulfillment of some vague need just satisfied  
I knew that for a couple of hours  
His soul had been nurtured in a way only he could feel  
It must have been painful for him not to talk about those feelings  
And I dearly wish that I could tell him now  
How his love of movies transferred to me  
I love movies  
Father also left me the legacy of the Catalán family name  
From Spain to Mexico; then Santa Fe, New Mexico  
A journey of discovery continuing to unfold  
Visions of the New World  
Already ancient when my father's footprints touched it  
Opening pathways  
Through valleys, mountains, deserts, oceans  
Depositing seeds of ancestral life  
Eternally a part of Cataláns everywhere

# My Imagination

*KAMRYN CHASTAIN*

Imagine a world where being gay wasn't frowned upon,  
where skin color wasn't important,  
where rich or poor wasn't the way friends were chosen,  
where race wasn't an issue, discrimination was just a thing of the  
past,  
where anyone could get along, no matter the circumstance,  
where anyone can dress or look however they'd like no matter  
their gender.

Imagine a world of peace.

We can only imagine,  
where bullying wasn't popular,  
where teenagers cared about their futures,  
where cheating on partners wasn't the "popular" thing to do.

Imagine a world filled with success and riches and fame,  
where tragedy wasn't the only way to get attention in the world.

We can only imagine.

# Story Mountain

KRISTEN CLANTON

A black haired boy chases a blonde  
girl along a cliff filled with red tulips.

There are no windmills. Just red tulips.  
The blonde girl walks a little black sheep

through the field of red petal heads.  
Each proud flower bows, as she passes, and each

presses its ear to the soil. The boy cannot  
catch up. The tulips refuse to lie down again

and instead stretch their spines to the sun;  
they laugh and pretend to lean into the ledge,

as the black sheep charms the girl to follow farther  
along, closer and closer to the cliff's subtle end.

////////////////////////////////////  
*"Happy is the heart of him who writes;  
he is young each day."*

PTAHOTEP, 4,500 BC

////////////////////////////////////

# My Second First Date

*ED CONNOLLY*

First dates are kind of scary. The first time you ask someone on a date takes some courage. I don't think any of us like rejection. What if they say no? What if they laugh at you? What if... (You know what I mean.)

I was married for 17 years before getting a divorce. I had a daughter who was grown at the time. I belonged to a computer organization called Association of Systems Management, basically computer programmers, systems analysts, etc. There were very few women in the group, but there was this one. We talked at the monthly meetings; however, neither of us knew the other was single. She had a young son (Christopher) whom she talked about quite freely. I just assumed that she was married. I guess she thought I was also married, maybe because I didn't hit on her?

When I became President of the organization, I attended some committee meetings. It was at one of these meetings when I became aware that she was in fact divorced/single. I learned this from a guy who worked at my office and was on the committee. I thought about it for a long time and finally decided to ask her to a movie. Because it had been many years since I asked anyone out on a date, I had some of the same first date feelings, maybe even stronger. It would be embarrassing if she said no. She worked at the same company my ex-wife worked at. I knew a lot of people from that company. What if she said no and told some of those people. That would really be embarrassing. This was like my very first date, all over again.

It took me a couple of weeks to build up enough courage to pick up the phone. At the time, I blamed the delay on waiting for the right movie. We all know it was the First Date Syndrome, and I was scared

to death after not dating for so long. I'm not a shy person, but there is something about dating. I don't know.

Finally, I gathered the nerve to give her a call. I said, "How would you like to go to a movie on Thursday night?" I picked Thursday, because if she was busy on the weekend, I still had a chance.

She said, "I can't I'm busy."

My heart fell, but I had a Plan B. I said, "How about Friday night?" I just knew this would work.

She said, "I can't, I'm busy."

I was floored. My Second First Date was not going to be. I told myself I would never ever ask her out again.

She then said, "How about Saturday night?"

Trying to sound cool and collected, which I was not, I said, "Great, how about I pick you up at 7 PM?"

On Saturday, I arrived a bit early, so I drove around the neighborhood, as I didn't want to appear too eager. At precisely 7 PM, I knocked on the door, fully expecting this beautiful woman to answer the door, give the babysitter last minute instructions, and we would be on our way. Her mother opened the door and invited me in. I almost collapsed. Her mother lives over 100 miles away. What was she doing here? Once inside, I noticed that my date was not ready to go out. I was a nervous wreck. Had she changed her mind? Was her mother there to offer support, when my date told me she wasn't going with me?

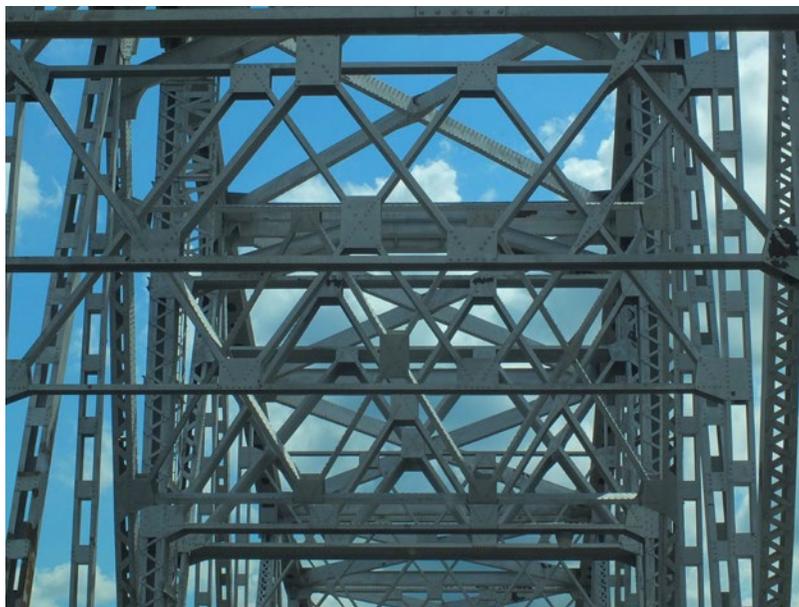
My date then said that she and her mom had been pitting cherries. I had never heard that one before. She said she would need some time to get ready, and maybe, we could go to the late movie.

I said, "Sure, why not?" without fully realizing what that really meant. Women take a while to get ready to go out, especially if they were pitting cherries for several hours. Guess what I got to do while she got ready? You're right, visit with her mother for 12 hours on our first date. Okay, maybe it was only an hour, but it seemed longer. My date called the neighbors and had her son come home to meet me.

He came, stuck out his hand and said, “Pleased to meet you.” Then he asked his mom, “Can I go back to Jeff’s now?”

My date got ready, the babysitter came, and off we went. It was an enjoyable evening. Jan and I have now been married over 30 years. Oh, by the way, the movie was *Romancing the Stone*, and she really was busy on Thursday and Friday. Her birthday was Friday, and she was celebrating with her family on Thursday and her neighbors on Friday.

Never again another first date.



*Steel Quilt photograph by Cindy Goeller*

# Michael D

DANIEL J. COX

Thanks

for laughing at the same insanities 'til our eyes water  
hanging a puppet moose head in your pickup  
giving Clayton his first haircut  
being there (without being asked) when I'm away  
helping do the dishes after a two-family feast  
getting your own beer and bringing me one  
using the downstairs bathroom  
lending a hand and anything else I need  
crying at a movie, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and  
sadness  
coming back from Nam  
talking about it  
listening to me talk  
understanding  
chewing out all four kids indiscriminately  
making sure I got home all right  
letting me know I'd been stupid  
celebrating my successes like they are your own  
appreciating our differences  
teaching me what you know  
growing happily older together  
discovering life with me  
being  
my friend.

# Spread Your Wings

MARY CLAIRE DOUGHERTY

There once was a bird,  
Who was afraid to spread her wings.

She didn't spread her wings,  
so she couldn't sing.

It became very lonely  
With no birds who could sing.

So as you can see,  
You need to spread your wings.



*“There’s a blaze of light in every word.  
It doesn’t matter which you heard,  
the holy or the broken. Hallelujah.”*

LEONARD COHEN



# The Early Morning

MARINN DRICKEY

In the Early Morning  
The moon on one hand  
And the dawn on the other

The moon is my sister  
And the dawn is my brother

The moon on my left hand  
And the dawn on my right

My brother good morning  
And my sister good night



*Milky Way photograph by Cindy Goeller*

# Candyland Life

*AUBREY DUELING*

There once was a world far, far away with the sweetest treats you could desire. Here is the life of a regular child who lives there.

I wake up early in the morning not caring for breakfast. I head right out the back door to the Milky River. I jump on a cookie that floats on the river's surface. That day the river was fierce. It crashed me into the bank and a bit of the cookie fell off. There is a big jawbreaker boulder where I stopped. When I get off, there is the big field full of nothing but fresh lemony grass. As usual, I bring a few water bottles to make lemonade for dinner every night. I grab some grass that grew high and blow some of the lemon dust into a few water bottles. I run up to the mountain of cake, and I get some fruitcake sitting high up to eat for breakfast. Of course, I need a bit of the sweet chocolate cake. I grab a handful of the cake and put it in one of the many plastic Ziploc bags I have. I put it in my lunchbox to keep it from melting. Then, I go down the slide I made out of the beaten down cakes.

I run over to the weeping licorice tree and get a few vines of red licorice. I eat a bit of it and leave. Trying to look my best, I walk to the Candy Cane forest.

The big tall elves that guard it say, "Welcome. What is your reason for coming here?"

I reply, "To get some candy canes."

They opened the gates and let me in. When I saw there were no candy canes left, I tried not to cry. We were going to make chocolate mint cake.

I walked home, and when I finally got there, Mom said, "Sweetie, cheer up, and come eat." That night we had roasted marshmallows and chocolate candies. After I ate, Mom told me I could go to bed early.

I went upstairs to my room and lay down. My sister came up to my room and was grinning. I knew she was up to something.

I said to her, "Get out, Lydia," but she didn't budge. "NOW!"

She ran off crying, "MOM! Mia just yelled at me!" Mom didn't reply.

After a while I fell asleep. When I woke up, I did my daily routine, but this time my mom, sister, and dad were not home. I searched for them everywhere, but still I still couldn't find them. When I got home from my routine, Mom and Dad were hiding in a cupboard, and my sister was under my bed.

Wow. I love my family.



*"I see but one rule: to be clear. If I am not clear,  
all my world crumbles to nothing."*

STENDHAL TO HONORÉ DE BALZAC



# Selected Quotes from *The Star Thrower*

LOREN EISELEY

Once, on ancient Earth, there was a human boy walking along a beach. There had just been a storm, and starfish had been scattered along the sands. The boy knew the fish would die, so he began to fling the fish to the sea. But every time he threw a starfish, another would wash ashore.

An old Earth man happened along and saw what the child was doing. He called out, "Boy, what are you doing?"

"Saving the starfish!" replied the boy.

"But your attempts are useless, child! Every time you save one, another one returns, often the same one! You can't save them all, so why bother trying? Why does it matter, anyway?" called the old man.

The boy thought about this for a while, a starfish in his hand; he answered, "Well, it matters to this one." And then he flung the starfish into the welcoming sea.

"Primitives of our own species, even today are historically shallow in their knowledge of the past. Only the poet who writes speaks his message across the millennia to other hearts."

"There is nothing more alone in the universe than man. He is alone because he has the intellectual capacity to know that he is separated by a vast gulf of social memory and experiment from the lives of his animal associates."

“Black magic, the magic of the primeval chaos, blots out or transmogrifies the true form of things. At the stroke of twelve, the princess must flee the banquet or risk discovery in the rags of a kitchen wench; coach reverts to pumpkin. Instability lies at the heart of the world. With uncanny foresight, folklore has long toyed symbolically with what the nineteenth century was to proclaim a reality — namely, that form is an illusion of the time dimension, that the magic flight of the pursued hero or heroine through frog skin and wolf coat has been, and will continue to be, the flight of all men.”

“The venture into space is meaningless unless it coincides with a certain interior expansion, an ever-growing universe within, to correspond with the far flight of the galaxies our telescopes follow from without.”

“The evolutionists, piercing beneath the show of momentary stability, discovered, hidden in rudimentary organs, the discarded rubbish of the past. They detected the reptile under the lifted feathers of the bird, the lost terrestrial limbs dwindling beneath the blubber of the giant cetaceans. They saw life rushing outward from an unknown center, just as today the astronomer senses the galaxies fleeing into the infinity of darkness. As the spinning galactic clouds hurl stars and worlds across the night, so life, equally impelled by the centrifugal powers lurking in the germ cell, scatters the splintered radiance of consciousness and sends it prowling and contending through the thickets of the world.”

# Writing

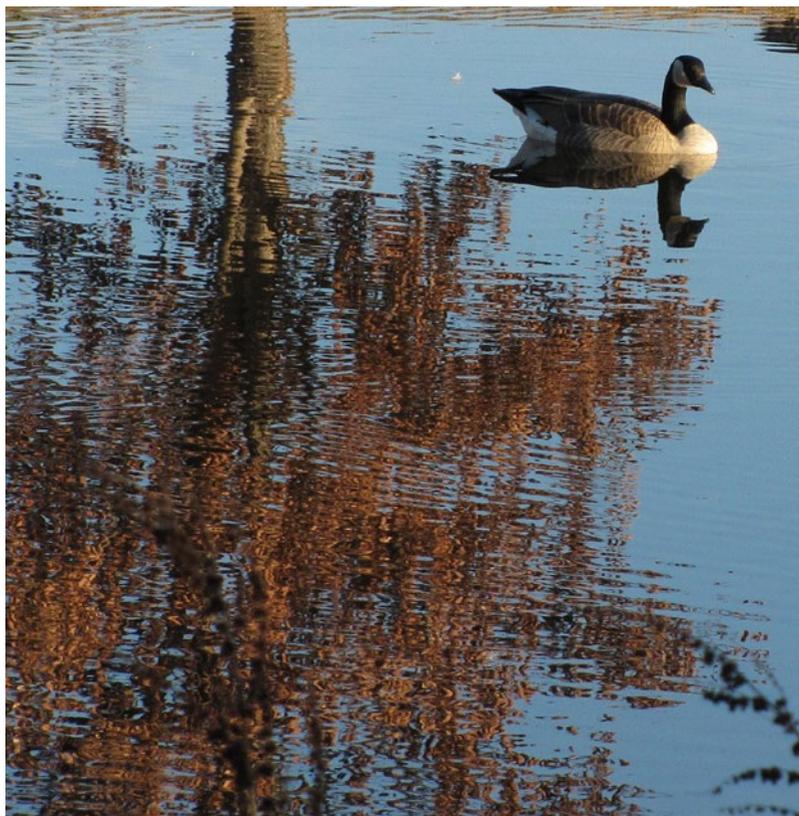
JESSICA FALKE

I used to think I was not a writer. I used to think that my ideas and word choices could never be something someone wanted to read. I never wanted to “waste” my time writing something that would be thrown away as soon as I released the pen from the paper. I was always convinced that writing was for the people whose minds wandered and the people who were lost in a deep sea of thoughts and problems. I never wanted to write, because it seemed like it was just for attention. Now, I can see I was wrong; I am very aware that it is not for those who are lost. It is for those who have “soul” and need to share it. It is for the people who are far more creative than I ever thought. For me to change my opinion, it took one professor to give me a chance. It took someone saying that he saw potential in me to change my views.

I am beginning to fall in love with writing; it has been just a few weeks since I started, but I am already realizing that I turn to writing more than I used to. Writing is such an amazing way of telling the world that you are proud of your thoughts and ideas, despite what anyone says. Writing is about being able to sit down with a blank piece of paper and turn it into a new world. Writing teaches discipline; it teaches people to analyze the world around them and then be able to put it on paper. Writing has very few limitations. It can be as simple or complex as you want it to be, and either way, it will be brilliant, because it is you. Your writing only needs to make you proud, and that is what I have begun to learn.

A person’s writing has one’s deepest emotions woven ever so carefully through it. Writers only allow the people who are willing to look to find those hidden secrets in each line, and that shows strength. Having a publication like *Fine Lines* gives people the incentive to work

towards something. It gives them the feeling that what they are writing is important, and it provides students with enough courage to push them on their paths to becoming brilliant writers, and I appreciate the time and love given to those students. Without someone telling me I had a chance, I would have never picked up the pen.



*Peaceful Place photograph by Barb Motes*

# Rainbow Ink

MIKE FARAN

*(In Memory of Juanita Hill)*

The new Poet Laureate of Bellwood, CA,  
is an old Mexican woman,  
who, sometimes, says she has a  
Green Card and is legal here.

But it doesn't matter  
Because you don't have to be a citizen  
to write a good poem.

Sometimes, she says that she's a full-blooded  
Shoshone, born in Colorado, when it became a state.

But it doesn't matter,  
if you can write a great poem.

Once — at a Presentation Award Ceremony —  
she told the microphone  
that she was born in China and moved  
to Dade County, FL,

when Truman eased up on the immigration rules —  
the sun made my skin dark, my voice funny.  
But all this amounts to a hill of beans,  
when you write fantastic poetry.

When and if she dies,  
no one will have any idea  
where to begin to seek her origins,  
and no one from around here would consider it,  
because she wrote wonderful poetry  
without blurred borders or visions of shame.

# Sticks and Stones

*CARRIE FEINGOLD*

Every day,  
she tried a different route  
or exit time, until she could be sure  
they'd given up their vigil, granting her  
anxiety delayed, a day's reprieve.

Pleading illness sometimes bought a day  
seeded with fear for what the next would bring —  
their bursting forth from some dark alleyway.

Hell's angels, riding bicycles to school,  
racing to surround her with their taunts.  
Sometimes, she wished for missiles from their hands,  
blunt, bruising stones, sharp sticks to pierce her flesh  
providing evidence of their contempt,  
proof for her parents' skeptical concern.

Day by day, only the scathing words  
diminished her sore, beleaguered heart.  
Years have dulled her memory's fading hold,  
but even now their shouts corrupt her dreams.

# I Am Forgetting

*BRIANNA FJUGSTAD*

The date is April 7 of 2045, and the time is 2:32 in the afternoon. My name is Caroline Rose Stapeson. I was born in Maples, Florida, on April 8, 1990. I will be 55 tomorrow, and I have just been diagnosed with early stages of Alzheimer's. The doctors say I will, increasingly, begin to experience more decline, mentally and physically. I am forgetting who I am, and I will no longer know who my family is. I am terrified, but within these following journal entries will be my everyday experiences, until my disease takes the last out of me. I hope you find comfort in hearing from me during my last chapter of life.

Like I mentioned, I was born and raised in Maples, Florida. My parents were pretty wealthy, and for that I consider myself lucky. I grew up with everything I needed and, mostly, everything I wanted. My father, Daniel, was a well-known dentist, and my mother, Karen, made and sold clothes for children. She was an amazing, and kind-hearted person. She passed at the age of 62 from a stroke, and my father passed away six months after her. They say it was from a broken heart; he was a very healthy man.

I have two siblings, one older brother, Jeremy, and a baby sister Claire. Jeremy had our backs from the moment we started school. Mom and dad put us all in private schools for our entire education. The food was always good, and the schools were spectacular, but I never got to experience getting into trouble with my friends; they were all as wealthy and privileged as I was. My sister is still around, but my brother moved to Japan with his wife a few years back.

My next door neighbor, Melissa, was my best friend from the age of six until now. She grew up with only her dad; her mom left when she was four and never came back. Her father was never really home;

he was a lawyer and had a permanent nanny for Melissa. She would spend the night with me more than not, which made life easier for her, since she did not have much family, and her dad was always working. She had a cousin who would visit in the summer, but she was a lot older than us. Basically, she was a babysitter, while her dad left for Paris for four weeks in June every year.

Melissa and I used to go to a fruit farm two-and-a-half miles away from home, and we would pick strawberries for my mom to make fresh jam in the spring. One year, on our way down to the farm, we stumbled upon a puppy in the middle of the road. The poor lab was limping to get to the other side. That day, instead of bringing mother fresh strawberries, we brought home a broken puppy. Mother always knew how to fix things, and a month later, we had a healthy puppy named Charles, who only had three legs, but he had more energy than I did, most days. Melissa and I taught him how to do neat tricks. We even took him swimming and used him as a show and tell project in the 5th grade. Mother was not too happy about that.

My senior year of high school, I met Joseph in physics class, the most difficult class I took that year. Luckily, Joseph was amazing at science, and he offered multiple times to help me. Eventually, I gave in and took the help I needed. I thought Joseph was the guy to lead me on and leave when he found somebody who offered more than I ever could. He asked me to prom that year and rented a limo full of roses. Money was never a problem for either of our families, but he showered me with more than just gifts. He was thoughtful and kind. He was not perfect, but his soul was pure. The first year we went to a county fair, and it fell on my birthday. Joseph dedicated the entire weekend to me. The fair was my favorite part, because it was so exhilarating going on all the rides that I would never have gone on alone. Even when we fought about simple things, he was my favorite person to be around. He was my person.

At 22, Joseph took me to my favorite spot in Clearwater, and on July 18, he got on one knee to invite me to spend my entire life with him.

I was never more confident. I wanted to live with him, through thick and thin. One year later, we had a summer wedding with both of our families and all of our close friends. Everything was baby blue, and the sunset that evening was the prettiest view I ever witnessed. That day could not have gotten any better, until I announced to everyone I was pregnant. My husband obviously already knew, but that was the icing on the cake.

We lost our son when I was five months along. He just was not growing properly, and now he is in Heaven watching over us. That was the hardest bump in the road that we had to overcome together. A year later, we were expecting a girl, and we prayed it would go smoothly, but we were still very scared. I was bedridden the last month of my pregnancy, but she was healthy, and neither of us could wait to officially meet her. Alison was born and weighed seven pounds. We got to take her home a few days later, as I recovered from a Caesarean section. She was a blessing, and Joseph was so excited to be a daddy.

We gave Alison the best life we possibly could. We moved from Maples, Florida, to Denver, Colorado, when Alison was four years old. Joseph's family and better job opportunities for him were all there. Moving made me nervous because I had never been anywhere other than where I grew up, but everything worked out for the best, and we all grew together. I got to experience a winter there, and Alison loved the snow. Even though we were living far away from home, we visited often, and my parents were still involved in our lives. Melissa even came to us quite often. She and I remained close, despite the fact that we lived so far away from each other.

At the age of 55, I was diagnosed with early stages of Alzheimer's. Losing my son was the worst news I ever received. There was no cure. I was not going to just overcome this in a year or so. My disease would become worse with time, and it would completely take over me. I was scared. It started with me forgetting simple things, like how to turn off the lights when I left the house, and eventually, it became serious to us, when I got stuck at a red light that turned green, and I did not

know how to take my foot off the brakes. I began journaling when I forgot who my husband was on a Tuesday morning, while he was preparing breakfast for me, like he had always done before work.

*Journal Entry #1:*

*September 4, 2045* — I forgot who Joseph was today. It took a few minutes to realize he was my husband. I remembered who Alison was, but forgetting Joseph even for a few minutes gives me an uneasy feeling. I am scared for what is to come. I am so sorry, Joseph.

*September 20, 2045* — Today, Alison came over to make dinner. It was a Thursday, and ever since I can remember, she has been coming over to make us dinner on Thursdays. It was usually pasta. Tonight, she made burritos and even brought over a cheesecake. I used to make them when she was growing up, they were her favorite, but I forgot about that. Alison told me a story about how I burned the cheesecake on Christmas, and we ended up all eating chocolate pudding. It all came rushing back like a flood, when I was lying in bed, later that night. I started crying, and my husband just held me. Not having control over my memories is frustrating, I know it will only get worse from here.

*November 1, 2045* — I woke up today, feeling nothing. I was not sad, but I had nothing to feel happy about either. I think I am depressed.

*November 8, 2045* — I stayed in my room all day today. I locked my door and did not talk to anyone. I am starting to hate everything, and I feel like I should be enjoying the time I have left remembering who my family is. I am beginning to just isolate myself, and it is only worsening me, and it is making my family really concerned.

*December 24, 2045* — We went to a few assisted living homes, yesterday, and the day after Christmas, I will be going to Sunshine Living Home. I am scared, but I know it is the best for me, because I cannot even cook myself meals anymore, nor can I always make it

to the bathroom. I need assistance, and my husband has been in and out of the hospital. He has stage 4 lymphoma. I feel like my life is just spiraling out of control.

*December 26, 2045* — There are really nice people here. I think I will be okay.

*December 28, 2045 (10:08)* — I fell yesterday, and I am in the hospital. I do not remember how I fell. I just know my hip is broken, and I am about to go in for surgery.

*December 28, 2045 (11:56)* — I fell yesterday. I am about to go into surgery. I do not know what happened. I screamed at the nurse who just came in to check on me. I did not mean to, but I could not help it. I am so angry.

*December 28, 2045 (12:02)* — My hips hurt.

*January 6, 2046* — I am healing nicely; the nurses here told me I took a bad fall, and now I cannot place any weight on my right side. I am in a huge amount of pain. My husband came, today; he brought me flowers, but he told me he could not handle this any longer, and he needs to leave, because this is affecting him more than he thought. He told me that he has been thinking about doing this for a very long time. How selfish can he be? I am going through this alone, and this is not my fault.

*January 23, 2046* — My daughter came today and brought me my favorite meal, spaghetti. I have not seen her in a while, so it was quite nice.

*January 26, 2046* — Today, I needed help with everything; it was a bad day. I did not remember who I was or where I was. I called my husband and was heartbroken all over again about him telling me we are divorced.

*February 14, 2046* — This is one of the caregivers here, at Sunshine Living. Caroline is unable to write today; she even forgot how to write her name. I have been watching her closely today. She used the bathroom on her own by herself once today. Other times, she either went in her pants or cried, until I realized what it was that she wanted. She refused to take all her medicine and has only eaten ice cream. She is able to carry on conversations, but she did not remember who her daughter was today, and she left crying. During dinner, Caroline asked me about her husband and whether he is still alive. He passed away last week, and she attended his funeral yesterday.

*February 28, 2046* — This is Alison. At 3:45 this morning, my mother had a stroke, and she is in the hospital recovering, and she is doing well. She remembers me, and she knows my father passed, and most importantly she remembers who she is and what is going on. Today was a good day, until 4 this evening. She bit one of the nurses who was taking her vitals, and she is very confused on where she is and what is happening.

*March 2, 2046* — My mother passed this morning at 7. She passed in her sleep, and she left with this note on her chest. “Dear Loved Ones: It is 10 PM, and I cannot sleep. I feel very weak, and if I go tonight, I am okay with it. I want you to all know I love you. I do not know what is wrong with me. Please tell Joseph I still love him. Tell Alison to enjoy her 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I am so sorry I will not be there.”

# On Greatness

MARCIA CALHOUN FORECKI

I consider myself a free thinker and date the beginning of my independence from the incident of my public defiance in Mrs. Manning's class for gifted fourth graders. The year was 1962, and the subject of my defiance was mathematics, specifically, multiplication.

Mrs. Manning's class was an experiment by the school board. She told us on the very first day that ours was an accelerated class. "Other students may mock you, call you names, and envy the high level of work we do in this class. I expect you to ignore their comments. What small minds think is of no importance to us. I expect each one of you to appreciate the opportunity you have been given by being in this class. You can repay me, and the school board, by growing up to be leaders in your professions and in your communities. I expect you to be great and nothing less."

Our classroom was in the basement of Bancroft Elementary School. B-1 was our number. With a consonant in our room designation, we were further set apart from the other classrooms upstairs. Across the hall, our basement-mates were the home economics room, the boys' wood and metal shop, and the boys' bathroom.

I loved Mrs. Manning. She went all out for her little eggheads. We repeated phrases in Spanish to a smiling face on a television screen. Senorita Flores's class met twice a week via educational television, the forerunner of PBS. Mr. Campbell, a World War II veteran with a wooden leg, set up the television in our classroom twice a week. He was the only teacher with access to an extension cord. After learning conversational phrases and a couple of children's songs, Mrs. Manning arranged for us to correspond with pen pals in Mexico.

The accelerated class listened to classical music. We raised our hands every time we heard the theme repeated in a fugue by Bach

or Pachelbel. Mrs. Manning brought us her favorite album by Harry Belafonte, and we sang the *Banana Boat Song* on the playground, screaming at the end of the phrase, “six foot, seven foot, eight foot BUNCH.” My mother wrote a letter to Mrs. Manning complaining about the appropriateness of the calypso songs. Mother thought “daylight come and me want go home” was not the grammar of the gifted.

Mrs. Manning never coddled us, even though we were the smartest kids in school. We knew we were because the other kids hated us. Mrs. Manning never minced words when talking to her prodigies. “You have to grow up and become great. It’s your obligation because of your gift of high intelligence. Success for you will never be enough for me. I want — no, expect — all of you to achieve leadership roles in life, or the future is doomed. For you, anything less than greatness will put you at risk for losing your gift.” She read us *Flowers for Algernon*, and I had nightmares for weeks about waking up one day a muttering, drooling idiot.

Mrs. Manning had a good deal of the Jean Brodie about her in motivating students, but I loved her. She took me to see *The Miracle Worker* with her daughter. She drove me back to school that Saturday afternoon, not wanting to get too personal and drive me to my home. As I descended from her car, she said, “Patty Duke was on Broadway when she was your age.” On the walk home, I silently vowed not to disappoint Mrs. Manning in word or deed.

I believed every word she spoke. I wanted to be her, be her daughter. I wanted to remain in fourth grade for the rest of my life. I wanted her to love me, notice me. To be ignored by Mrs. Manning was to be reduced to unimportance, to be forever barred from greatness. My devotion to Mrs. Manning was such that I anticipated her chagrin when she wrote on the black board:  $4 \times 0 = 0$ . I took her embarrassment for my own.

Anyone can make a mistake, but Mrs. Manning simply did not. Yet, there it was, a glaring mistake in white on black. I was confident that she would notice her mistake at any moment. She would laugh, or

more likely, try to cover the error with, "Doesn't anyone see a mistake here? Come on. You are supposed to be the gifted ones in this school."

I looked around, nervously. Any second, someone would start sniggering at my favorite teacher's expense. I had to save her. Up went my hand. She nodded at me, and I pointed over her shoulder to the blackboard. She scrunched her eyebrows together in the universal expression of not understanding.

I pointed again. Determined I was to give Mrs. Manning a chance to correct the mistake on the blackboard without anyone calling it to her attention. I tried to call it to her attention myself.

"I think you made a little mistake," I said in a stage whisper.

"Later," she said. I thought she sounded insufficiently contrite. Confident she would thank me later, I pointed to the blackboard again. "You wrote  $4 \times 0 = 0$ ."

"That's right. Class, today we will cover multiplication by zero. Any number multiplied by zero is zero. No exceptions. There, it's covered. Some of the classes upstairs practice that concept for 2 days. Let's move on to negative numbers. Can anyone give me an example of a negative number?"

Aaron Guren never raised his hand; he just spoke out. "In the winter, when the temperature is below zero. If you get frostbite on your toes, they have to be amputated. Want to see how a person walks with no toes?"

"You're correct about the negative number, but no, I don't want to see you walk like a person without toes."

Everyone laughed, except me. I looked around the class. Aaron rose from his seat and walked around his desk on his heels. More laughter, except from me and Twain Harper. He never laughed with the rest of us at Aaron's jokes.

My beloved teacher had made a mistake. The school board had transferred her to my school specifically to teach the newly organized class for gifted fourth graders. None of the existing teachers were smart enough, apparently. And yet, there it was for all to see.  $4 \times 0 = 0$ .

I could not help wondering what else Mrs. Manning might have taught us that was less obviously in error.

I raised my hand. "I think you mean that  $4 \times 0 = 4$ , don't you?" I gave a little conspiratorial laugh. I was trying to save Mrs. Manning. I needed her to be flawless, to be as great as she constantly told us we had to be.

"No.  $4 \times 0 = 0$ . I wrote it on the board correctly."

"But, it isn't right," I blurted.

"It is correct."

"It can't be. Four multiplied by nothing stays the same.  $4 \times 0 = 4$ ."

"It's zero. Believe it. All higher mathematics is based on zero."

"If I lay down 4 apples and multiple them by 2 — I put down 4 more apples — now I have 2 groups of apples with 4 in each group. Count them up, and I have eight apples."

"I think this class is way past apples," Mrs. Manning said. She looked at me over the top of her cat-eye glasses.

"But, if I put down 4 apples and I multiply them by zero, I put down zero more apples. Count them up, and I've still got 4 apples."

"Red or green?" laughed Aaron Guren.

Mrs. Manning grabbed the chalk out of the blackboard tray, as if picking up a weapon. "Write this down class.  $4 \times 0 = 0$ .  $5 \times 0 = 0$ .  $1,000 \times 0 = 0$ .  $100,000 \times 0 = 0$ . Shall I go on? I can write, and you can copy all day."

Mrs. Manning actually scowled at me. I had not seen her so obviously reigning in her impatience, since Mary Beth Thompson threw up on the floor by her desk. Mrs. Manning looked at me with the same contempt, now. Our special relationship was finished, of that I was certain. Still, could Mrs. Manning be right? Was all higher mathematics based on this lie? She pressed on.

"It's a mathematical rule. I'm preparing you for multiplying by double-digit numbers. For algebra, geometry, calculus, trigonometry, don't you see?"

To me, that sounded much like, “You’ll understand when you are older.”

As I stood in line to be dismissed at 3:10 PM, Mrs. Manning handed me a note. “Take this to your parents. Bring it back tomorrow, signed.” The students fore and aft of me in line giggled. Aaron Guren wrote a note with his finger in the air, folded it, and handed it to me. “Bring it back tomorrow, signed!” he mocked.

In the back of the line, Twain Harper stood patiently, reading a paperback book. Mrs. Manning ignored him, never called on him, and tossed his returned homework onto his desk without a word. In fact, Twain didn’t need Mrs. Manning’s approval to excel. He was probably smarter than any of us, but I did not realize it then. I lamented for him and for myself, should I also be driven from the light of Mrs. Manning’s favor.

As I walked home, I remembered that the liberal Mrs. Manning respected those who spoke truth to power. She was a Camelot Democrat; she voted for John Kennedy. She admired Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She challenged us, even at ten years old, to speak out for the truth. I convinced myself that once Mrs. Manning had time to think about things, she would be proud of me for holding my ground.

I understood multiplication as an active, even transformational function. Take a number, “times” it, and it becomes a different, larger number. If you go through the act of “times” with a number, it changes. If you “times” a number by zero, it just doesn’t change. The number stays the same. It made such perfect sense to me, walking the five blocks between Flora and Virginia on 46th Street.

“If only I could lay out some apples or oranges — even eggs — she would have to see things my way.” I thought of a great demonstration with eggs that would surely make my case in class the next day in a dramatic way. I place 6 eggs on a table covered in plastic. With a potato masher, I would smash each egg, one stroke for each egg.  $6 \times 1 = 6$ . Then, placing another six eggs on the same table, I hold the potato masher above the eggs, menacingly, but without striking

a single egg. No strikes, or you could say “zero strikes,” and what do I see? Six perfectly egg-shaped eggs.  $6 \times 0 = 6$ .

At supper, my sister Barbara announced that I had a note from my teacher, and it had to be signed. A hush went around the table. Dad reached out his hand and wiggled his fingers. “Give it here.” He put the note in his pocket. “Nothing is going to disturb this delicious supper,” he said.

I choked down my pork chop and formed fork swirls in my mashed potatoes to postpone the reading of the note. After supper, I went into the living room with my father. “Turn on the television,” he said. “Find the news, please.”

“The news isn’t on yet. If we lived in New York, the news would be just finishing.”

“Um hmm,” Dad hummed, as he unfolded Mrs. Manning’s note. He skimmed the short paragraph, folded the note, and slipped it under the ashtray on the coffee table before him. He leaned his head back on the hand towel Mom placed on the back of his chair, to protect the slip cover from Dad’s Brylcreem. Slip covers and a hand towel was Mom’s way. She put a napkin under a coaster.

“Says here you have been disruptive in class. What’s that all about?”

It felt like a rhetorical question, so I didn’t answer.

“I wish teachers did their jobs,” Dad said. “They’re in charge of kids during school. We hand you off at 8:00 and take you back at 3:30. If you were disruptive, why didn’t she just handle it?”

“I don’t know,” I agreed. I wasn’t positive that he was talking to me, but I answered to show my support for his views, as I hoped he would be supportive of mine.

“Do we ever send her a note? ‘Dear Mrs. Whatzit, Angela refused to eat her Brussels sprouts at supper last night. Please discuss the starving children in China with her and sign this note.’”

“That would show her,” I said.

“So, what was your disruption about? Did you hit another kid, throw a spitball, what?” asked Dad.

“No one in Mrs. Manning’s class would throw a spitball.”

“Glad to hear it.”

“We call them saliva missiles.”

“Anyway, what happened today?”

I seated myself on the coffee table facing Dad. I looked up at him. “I pointed out a mistake to Mrs. Manning.”

“Whose mistake?”

“Hers.”

“That seems unlikely. The school board brought her from another district to teach your class. Did you argue with her?” Dad asked.

“She might have thought I was arguing about her mistake.”

“Nobody likes a know-it-all.”

“Teachers do. Makes their job easier,” I laughed, expecting Dad to join in my joke. He didn’t disappoint.

“What was the argument about?”

“Math. Specifically about multiplication by zero.”

I explained about the apples and the eggs.

Dad leaned forward. “You make a good point,” he said.

“See?”

“But, there’s a problem with your approach.”

“What’s that?”

“The world believes — teachers, bankers, foremen, generals — all believe that some number, any number you want to name, multiplied by zero is zero.”

“And we have to accept it?”

“We do. I accept things every day I don’t understand. The telephone, the TV, radio. And not just gadgets. When you think about how intricate a pattern is on a butterfly wing or how no two snowflakes are alike, what difference does a little arithmetic problem make?”

“How do they know that no two snowflakes are alike? Who could possibly look at every snowflake since the beginning of time? Is there a card file, somewhere?”

“Forget snowflakes.”

“But, Dad, we have to stick up for what we believe. We have to try to prove things. People used to think the world was flat,” I said.

“I don’t know how to explain it. I just know you can’t fight city hall.”

“What does that mean?”

“To me, it means pick your battles. If someone cheats you or treats you unfairly, then you have to speak up or fight back. But, don’t worry about this, honey. Zero is nothing.”

Dad smiled at me. “No more arguing with your teacher. Okay? Now, go help your mother with the dishes. When you finish, I’ll drive you to the store to get those eggs.”

“Never mind about the eggs,” I said. “I just don’t believe it. The zero, I mean.”

Dad sat back in his chair. The news was starting. “You don’t have to believe it. Do what your teacher says, for now. Do what you have to and think what you like. It works for other things besides arithmetic, too. Give your teacher your best work, but keep your soul.”

“Is that what you do?”

“Every day,” he said.

Dad signed my note. I returned to school and handed in my arithmetic homework. Mrs. Manning looked it over and smiled at all the perfect little zeros. When she reached the bottom of the page, she stared into my eyes. I met her stare and held it. Was this respect I saw in her eyes?

“Touché,” she whispered.

Mrs. Manning hated totalitarianism worse than Mary Beth throwing up in class. She read us *A Wrinkle in Time*, which is as political as it gets, all that synchronized ball bouncing. She was all for the individual. I knew I was back in her good graces again. At the bottom of my math homework page, I had printed: “Under Protest.” I had done what she asked but kept my soul.

As I walked back to my seat, I passed Twain Harper’s desk. “Very impressive,” he said.

Twain often wore a bow tie. His belly touched the front of his desk. Twain was the best-read kid in class, by far. He was also terrified whenever a ball came toward him in any game. He said he had a hemp allergy, when the gym teacher had us climbing ropes. Twain was clearly a person who wanted to know things rather than do things. I was of the same inclination, so that was one reason I liked him.

The whole class made fun of Twain. The boys imitated his walk. The girls ran up behind him and pulled his shirt tail out of his pants. He called us all "Philistines." We did, however, love Twain's mother. Mrs. Harper brought cupcakes, pointed hats, and chocolate milk for Twain's birthday in October. She told us that Twain was a Libra and explained that the date of a person's birth determined his path in life. We all shouted out our birthdays, and Mrs. Harper told us our astrological signs. I'm a Taurus, loyal, stubborn, hard-working, a plodder.

When the party was over, Mrs. Harper gathered up the trash, pulled on her sweater and kissed Twain goodbye on the lips. When we settled down, Mrs. Manning explained that astrology was superstition. "You must ground yourself in pure science, if you want to grow up to be truly great." She went on for a while about our responsibility to society to work harder, achieve more, and sacrifice more selflessly than people with ordinary intelligence. I looked over at Twain. He was wearing his mother's lipstick, where she had kissed him, not even trying to rub it off.

On the day of my heartless acquiescence to multiplication, I approached Twain at recess. He leaned against the chain link fence, away from the games. He held an open copy of *The Call of the Wild* in front of his face. When I approached, he turned the book around for a second. Behind it was *I the Jury* by Mickey Spillane.

"How come you get to read at recess?" I asked. "Mrs. Manning says everybody plays."

"I just brought out a book one day, nothing untoward happened, so I have kept reading."

"Untoward." Twain had the best vocabulary in the class.

"I'm having some trouble in math," I whispered.

"We know."

"Can you help?"

"I not only can, I will." Twain closed both his books and held them over his tummy.

I leaned against the fence next to him. "How can  $4 \times 0$  be zero? It makes no sense to me."

"You are looking at it the wrong way. It's not that four is multiplied zero times, as you say. It is zero multiplied four times.  $0 + 0 + 0 + 0 = 0$ . Four "times" zero is ...?"

"Zero!" The heavens opened. "Put the zero first?"

"Of course.  $4 \times 0$  is the same as  $0 \times 4$ . That's algebra.  $A + B = B + A$ ."

I was in awe of the class pariah. Maybe a little bit in love. Even though the wires of the chain link fence were not very comfortable, I wanted to stay there for the rest of the day thinking about just how smart Twain was. An Einstein, at the least.

Mrs. Manning came onto the playground and blew her whistle. All her little bookworms, and egg heads, and lispings, sniffing geniuses ran to form a line.

I pushed off the fence and looked back at Twain. His book was open in front of his face. One leg was crossed over the other.

"Are you coming?" I asked.

"After I finish this paragraph," he said.

My devotion to Mrs. Manning ended on that day. She was nothing if not ambitious for her little geniuses, and she surely instilled ambition in us, although it is clear to me now, as an adult and much less than great, that her ambition was for herself. She truly believed that one day a judge, or an astronaut, or even a governor would credit his or her success to that great teacher: Mrs. Manning of the fourth grade class at Bancroft School.

Mrs. Manning had indeed made a mistake — about Twain. Of all her "brainiacs," Twain was the most likely to succeed. Mrs. Manning knew her math, but she did not know him. Twain took pride in

defying her. In truth, he lived out her beliefs more devotedly than she did. He always stood on his own truth of what he did and who he was. In the years to come, Twain, more than any of us, would be asked to surrender his soul to make his way among the Philistines. I believe as surely as the law of gravity, he never did.



*Herald photograph by Laura Leininger-Campbell*

# Wonderland

REVIEW BY MARCIA CALHOUN FORECKI

Stories by Samuel Ligon  
Art by Stephen Knezovich  
Lost Horse Press, 2016

These stories are precise and sharp. Reading *Wonderland* and *The Little Goat* is being in a crowd next to someone with sharp elbows. So many little surprises. Jab, jab. Every extra word has been excised. Ligon points — no, pushes — the readers in the direction he wants us to move and to feel. “Glazed” is a tiny piece about the last glazed donut. Ligon turns a few paragraphs into a chronicle of a relationship. His stories are like fractals, in which, the whole is reflected in a microscopic portion. “This Bed You Made,” tells — no, hints — the story of country singers who use their tempestuous threesome to produce hit songs, and find when the danger goes, good stories go with it.

You can read these thirteen precious stories in a sitting, but please don't. For your own sake, take them one bite at a time and savor. You'll be very satisfied, I promise.

# Tuesday: 3 AM

STEPHANIE FOSBINDER

I fell in love  
At 3 AM on a Tuesday  
There was just a moment  
A subtle shift  
From not being  
And I fell  
Into it  
And he was  
And I was  
And we were just  
in love  
At 3 AM on a Tuesday  
Maybe it wasn't quite love  
But it wasn't nothing.

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*"Don't write about Man.  
Write about a man."*

E. B. WHITE

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# Just a Simple Word

*CHRISTOPHER GARCIA*

“Gay” is just a simple word that, today, has little importance. I could go up to pretty much any person and say, “I am Gay,” and that individual would not care. That was not the case for me growing up. As a child, I was flamboyant and not much has changed since then, but for that reason, I really did not fit in anywhere. There were times where I would wish that the Earth would open and swallow me into an oblivion. At other times, I would just cry myself to sleep, wishing to be like everyone else. As the years went by, I learned to love myself for the way I was, but although it might sound easy, the journey getting here was not.

I grew up in a very religious home. A household, where going to church seven days a week and listening to nothing but gospel music was the norm. It was a strict place where if I wasn't thinking of Jesus every five minutes of the day, a spanking would be coming my way. Although I grew up in these conditions, my mother usually let me be myself. I was my Barbie playing, flower coloring, flamboyant self. To her, it was all a phase that I was going through. Later, she came to find out that it was no phase at all, but the reality of who I was. I never had to come out to my mother. To me, I always assumed she knew. In my freshman year of high school, I decided to bring my first boyfriend home, so she could meet him. That decision changed my life.

My mother disowned me at the age of 14. I remember her slamming the door in my face, as she told me that I was an abomination to her, and if she ever saw me again, she would run me over with her car until there was nothing but blood and bones left in her driveway. I left my house with nothing but my school backpack and the clothes that I had on my back. From that day forward, things got tougher and tougher. Most days, I would sleep in a park; sometimes, I would stay late at school and hide until all the janitors went home. Then, I would

sleep in the school. There were days that I would go without eating, because I did not have any money to buy food, and I refused to steal. I would cry every night, hating who I was. A couple of years passed, and I, eventually, got a job and could support myself. My junior year, I got my own apartment and my own car; from then on, things started to get a little bit better.

Finally, graduation day came, and I was ready to leave this awful town and start my new adventure in New York City, but that quickly changed when my mother decided to show up to my graduation ceremony. At first, I did not want to talk to her, but I gave in and said, "Hi," to her. She started to cry and told me how sorry she was. She told me that she accepted me for who I was, and she missed me. I did not believe her at first, but then I looked into her eyes, and I saw the sadness in them. At that moment, I decided to forgive her.

I ended up going to Midland University in Fremont, NE, because I felt bad going so far away and leaving her alone. This sounds ridiculous, right? She didn't do much for me, but although she did what she did, I still loved her. My mother and I, to this day, have a functional relationship. There are times when we still fight, but it is nothing that cannot be resolved by talking.

There is more to this story than I have given here, but if I gave the full story, this would be a 90-page paper. Anyway, the moral of this story is that I hated myself. For the longest time, I wanted to be like everyone else, which was the worst thing I could have ever done. I learned that being me is okay, and if people did not like that it was okay, because if I loved myself, love would be coming my way. It was a hard lesson to learn, but my skin got tougher. Someone could come up to me now and call me names or tell me that they do not like me for who I am, and I would look at them and let their comment roll off me like water off a duck's back. My biggest advice for anyone who is going through a similar situation like this one is, "Do not be scared to be yourself, because if you are not, you are robbing the world of the wonderful gift that is you." If you cannot love yourself, how in the heck are you going to love somebody else?

# The Family Tree

JOAN GARDEN

The last brittle leaf clinging to the tree  
releases its tenuous grasp

set free by a biting autumn wind  
and crumbles to the ground below.

On the forest floor,  
beneath a layer of newly laid snow,

fallen kin huddled in the cold  
prepare the Earth for the reunion.



*“Person to person, moment to moment,  
as we love, we change the world.”*

SAMAHIRA LYTE KAUFMAN



# Fractured Land

WILLIAM KIRK GASPER

The pre-dawn morning was cold and still. The coals of last night's fire smoldered and crackled. Henry, covered by his wool blanket, wore a faded blue buttoned shirt, a tan cassinette, and a hat over his face. He slept in his oversized boots. The sound of hooves spurred him to roll over on his pad, and he saw Frank leading the horses towards him.

"What're you doin'?" Henry asked, as he sat up.

"Bringin' them horses back," said Frank.

"Where's Uncle Walt?"

"I don't know, Henry. He ain't here."

Henry glanced around. The grass was still. The sun waited just below the ridge. One of the horses kicked and snorted, and the moisture of its breath hung in the air. Walt's gun hung from his saddle.

"Where you think Uncle Walt went that he didn't take his gun?" asked Henry.

"I guess I expect he ain't gonna need it where he is."

Henry drank the last of his water from his canteen.

"I'm goin' down to the river to get some more water. You want to come?" Henry asked.

"Nah, we best get moving now, you can get water down the way," Frank replied.

"Where the hell is Uncle Walt, Frank?"

"Look Henry, he ain't here, and he ain't comin' back. We just need to keep on movin', or else we gonna run out of food before we make it to town."

Henry halted his questions. The boys rolled up their pads and blankets and threw them in their saddle bags. The boys rode out and made their way up to the top of the ridge that followed the river. The

sun ascended over the horizon, illuminating the short brush with a brilliant golden glow for a few minutes. Henry looked back across the spare land towards the hills and the distant mountains and thought for a moment about those circumstances which befell them.

“I miss Ma and Pa.”

“I do too, Henry.”

“What would Pa do right now, Frank?”

“He’d just keep movin’ and take care of you and me.”

“Where do you think Pa is right now?”

“He’s in the ground, Henry. Now, quit askin’ questions like that. He is where he is and where he’s gonna be forever, and nothin’ is gonna change that. It don’t do no good to think about that stuff.”

Henry’s oversized hat obscured his brow, and a tear formed in his eye.

The boys rode along the ridge above the winding river for several hours. In front of them appeared a vast, barren mesa carved through serpentine by the river, giving way to a broad canyon. The boys took a gradual path down from the high ridge towards the river. The brush was interrupted only by a single, leafless tree. A hawk in the tree examined the weary youths and their horses, and then departed from its perch, uninterested. The boys took up water and let the horses drink. The meltwater was cool and translucent, and for a brief moment the quenching of his thirst allowed Frank reprieve of the ache in his back from riding. Frank had never taken much to horses and would rather be on foot. The sparkling minerals in the band of black silt along the wide curve of the river glimmered like stars in a night sky. A hawk screeched overhead.

Frank and Henry pushed on. They stuck to the low ground, as the valley grew deeper, and the walls steepened with every bit of forward progress. The air was still. The boys and their horses were the sole inhabitants of the land surrounding them. The notion of their solitude left Frank at peace but left Henry visibly disturbed. They moved across land where other men had not stepped for some time.

“Where are we goin’?” asked Henry.

“We’re goin’ to town.”

“How do you know where town is, Frank?”

“Look, Uncle Walt told me we’re just gonna follow this here river, and it’ll take us right into town. So, that’s what we’re gonna do.”

“What happened to Uncle Walt, Frank?”

“Stop askin’ about Uncle Walt.”

“What if the river don’t go to town, Frank?”

“Then you live out here and eat rabbits and tubers for the rest of your life like you always dreamed. You drink water from the river, and hell, maybe, you even find yourself an Indian bride.”

This prospect seemed to intrigue Henry, who quickly fell into reverie. The land grew more treacherous as they pushed forward. The boys dismounted the horses and led them by the reins. Spires of brittle stone, shaped by eons of wind and water, rose from the rock, ready to topple at the slightest provocation.

The river bed disappeared, and the river seemed to carve its path directly from the canyon stone. The boys were forced to push upwards. They led the horses up a gradual incline to a steep ledge which followed the river. As they passed it, Henry examined the solid brown line of the high water mark, easily twenty feet high, which gave way to lighter stone, untouched by canyon floods. Henry slipped as a piece of fragile, khaki-colored stone broke way under his foot, and he fell sideways into the incline of the canyon wall.

“You all right?” inquired Frank.

“Yeah, I’m all right.”

At the moment of Henry’s response, the ground supporting the horse behind Henry skittered away, and the horse fell sideways and went with the rocks down the wall of the canyon. The horse slid quickly down the steep wall and was unable to right itself. It came to a halt just above the river, which had now turned to white rapids, and in its injured state the animal was unable to walk. Henry started to cry.

“It’s gonna be all right. He ain’t sure-footed, not like we need a horse that can’t walk up a damn hill. Besides, he wasn’t carryin’ nothin’

important, and you never liked that one much anyways,” Frank said, as he held Henry to his chest.

“We gotta go get him, Frank.”

“There ain’t nothin’ we can do. It’d be bad enough just to get down there, and what’re we gonna do when we get there? We can’t pick ‘im up and carry ‘im up here. We just gotta let ‘im be and keep movin’. There ain’t nothin’ we can do.”

Henry continued to sob, as they continued onwards. They could hear the whining of the horse at the bottom of the cliff, which abruptly halted for good after several minutes.

Never wanting to lose sight of the river, the boys meandered up and down the walls of the canyon, always opting for the path of least peril. For a short time, they followed the path of some animal. A hapless mouse, the first sign of life in the desolate land, scurried slapdash across the path in front of Frank and retreated into a random assemblage of rocks. A short, wide cave, its entrance cloaked by shadow, loomed above them.

“What do you think lives up there, Frank?”

“Probably some snakes.”

The scalloped canyon walls pressed closer, and the boys were driven near to the river. The velocity of the river quickened, and the flow became tumultuous with the rapids. They could hear the consistent, boisterous bellowing of a waterfall reverberating off the canyon walls. It came into view as they rounded the corner. A steep but navigable path led them around the water and downwards. The powerful water created a step-change transition in the lay of the canyon, as the treacherous, undulating high ground transformed into a wide, peaceful riverbed. As they moved past the bottom of the waterfall, Henry glanced over his left shoulder and discovered a lone, mangy dog, curled with its head in the nook of its flank. The dog, in a delayed, absent-minded reaction, raised its head and twice-wagged its uncurled tail. The dog plodded over to Henry’s outstretched hand and sniffed. Frank looked back at the two new friends.

“Shoot, that’s the last thing we need right now,” Frank remarked, but he left the matter at that, as he was not of the mind to abase Henry’s disposition any further.

The grungy, emaciated canine immediately took a liking to Henry and merged itself with the trio. Henry reached into the pocket of his cassetette and retrieved a piece of jerky; he bit off half the jerky and gave the other half to the dog. The dog appeared at once satiated and optimistic, and Henry smiled with delight at having provided for another living creature.

A half mile ahead, Frank could see the slipshod framework of an abandoned mineshaft bored into the canyon wall. Their makeshift path soon intersected with the skeleton of an older trail, used in years past, which led to the mineshaft. A vulture was perched on what had once been an awning, and the boys approached cautiously. There was an indecipherable message scrawled on a dilapidated, sun-bleached sign. It was impossible to see into the pitch black with their eyes adjusted to the daylight, but Frank thought he discerned a slumped-over figure sitting inside the entryway.

“I’m gonna have a look. You wait here, Henry.”

Frank slowly made his way towards the figure, which sat inert as every rock in the lifeless canyon. He observed a man’s corpse, its hands clutched to its lower right abdomen, mostly undisturbed save for a few pecks from an adventurous vulture. The remains were partially mummified by the daily dry swelter of the canyon lands. He squatted in front of the body, unsheathed his knife and used it to lift up one side of the jacket at the break point. He looked under each side of the jacket and checked the pockets. Frank shifted his gaze towards the opening of the shaft and sat for a few moments staring into the picture-window of light framed by the black walls of the mine.

“What’s in there Frank?” Henry asked, as Frank exited the mine.

“Ain’t nothin’ in there.”

It was late afternoon, and the sun had dropped below the wall of the canyon, leaving the boys in its shadow. Across the river, the

opposite canyon wall was still illuminated by the orange-gold light of the setting sun. The boys, the horse, and the dog clambered up to higher ground to make camp. Frank sent Henry to fetch water from the river, while he busied himself with starting a fire from some drift wood. When Henry returned, they each drank their fill, and then Frank suspended the pot above the fire. He let the water boil, and then dumped in some black beans from a burlap sack.

“Why do you think bad things happen to us, Frank? I never did nothin’ wrong. Every day, I helped Ma and Pa, and Mr. Deakins down the way. I even helped Uncle Walt cut that wood, and he never once said a kind word to me.”

“I don’t know, Henry. When you find that out, you tell me. It don’t pay to be good in this world, but that don’t mean you shouldn’t do it.”

Frank paused for a moment, and then started again.

“It ain’t easy to be good. It’s easy to kill a man, to hurt someone. It ain’t easy to take someone in, help them, and feed them. Most people just do what’s easy I suppose.”

The boys passed the pot and spoon between themselves and ate their fill. Frank watched on in silence, as Henry spooned some beans onto the ground in front of the dog. After dinner, the boys laid on their pads in the cool night air, covered up to their chins by wool blankets. They watched the white-hot stars maneuver counterclockwise through the sky. For a brief moment, a luminous fiery comet fell through the heavens and then vanished. The dog slept at Henry’s feet. In the near distance, an owl hooted.

Henry woke before dawn to the sound of last night’s coals smoldering and crackling. He sat up on his pad and looked at Frank, who was already packing up their things. Henry put his things together without saying a word, and the boys began walking. Frank led the horse by the reins, with Henry and the dog in tow.

“Frank, where are we goin’?” asked Henry.

“I don’t know.”

# Echo

JENNIFER GODFREY

*(In the manner of Li-Young Lee's "Nocturne")*

That squealing of vocal cords vibrating when a mouth  
is too small, why is that? Something God didn't make  
nor intend, though it and others bark and breed.  
Sometimes short, quick, then suddenly, long, without  
pause, as if its lungs could expand and contract with no  
need for breath. Half tiny body, half blood and guts,  
nothing that serves a purpose might make this noise  
of squeals and fits, a shrieking and shouting  
of "I'm here! Notice me!  
No one hears me at my house!" Tonight, a door opens  
that should not. Something runs around the yard that  
should not. Something, small and not right,  
howls or sings to itself all night.

# My Family and the Fire

*GARRETT GRAEVE*

Life is so fast paced, and no matter how old one is or where on Earth one lives, it does not stop. We forget what matters most to us and toss it to the side like a pillow on the couch. Sadly, that was what happened to me. I did not realize how lucky I was to have my brothers, sisters, and parents by my side all the time. Everyone needs a wake-up call, once in a while; some get it worse than others, but everyone gets one. I lost my home but found what it meant to be a family, and this was a true eye-opener.

Family is one of our greatest support systems in life. I have been lucky to be blessed with a family that loves me. They have always helped me, whether it was in school, sports, or my desired goals. My family is always excited for me, no matter what I do. This time I was going camping at Camp Cedars, which was emotional because I was going to be gone for a few days. A lot of pictures were involved in my departure that would hold memories of a lifetime. I did not enjoy taking pictures, like my mom did, but I smiled anyway. I figured the sooner I got them done and over, the sooner I would be on the road to camp.

It was a 45-minute car ride to Camp Cedar, which gave me some time to think about what we would do and my family. It had been a long week, and I was ready to get away from home. This was going to be my first campout in several months, because I always had sports to play. I was excited to be at camp with all my friends, but most of all, I was ready for the bonfire. Little did I know that same fire I loved watching at camp would change my life.

We had a long day of running around the woods, and it was time for dinner. We made spaghetti and meatballs for dinner and built a fire as

big as the sun. Brad and I stayed up all night watching the fire flicker in and out. I grabbed more wood every so often, and he would stoke the fire, giving it new life. It was truly a majestic fire, consuming wood like a giant wood chipper. The next day was a lot of fun, and rain was supposed to head in overnight, so we went to bed a little earlier. We talked for a while, because the loud rain beat down on our tent preventing us from falling asleep. Eventually, both of us fell asleep. We awoke in the morning to a slightly damp and uncomfortable sleeping bag. Sunday, we packed our bags and discussed how excited we were to get back home to our warm beds and breakfast. I was really looking forward to my mom's usual Sunday pancakes. The car ride home seemed to drag on, but we showed up at the parking lot where everyone's parents were gathered.

I jumped out of the car I was in and walked over to the troop trailer to grab my bag. I got my gear and headed towards my parents. There was a group of people huddled around Mom and Dad, but as I got closer, they all left one by one. At the time, I did not think anything of it. I set my stuff in the back of the car and turned towards my parents. I remember smelling a thick scent of burnt wood. I figured it was me from the bonfire the night before, but then I looked at my parents, and they did not have their Sunday best clothes on. My father had his old jeans on with a flannel gray jacket. Mother had faded jeans, dirty shoes, and her friend's jacket on. Mother was looking at me with a tear in her eye, while my father was looking at the ground. I could tell now that the smell was not from me, and there was definitely something wrong with my family. My mother choked up, telling me that our home burned down. Dad and Mom hugged me, and we all started to cry.

We got in the car and drove to our home about five minutes away. Once we got to the house, I sat in the car, staring in disbelief at the burned site. Black soot left stains seeping out of the garage, vents, and windows of what I called home. We sat there for what seemed like an eternity. We proceeded inside through the garage and headed straight

to the source of the fire: the basement. Everything was black as night and looked like something out of a horror movie. All the windows were boarded up, and we had to use flashlights to see. The smell was so overwhelming it gave me a headache after only about fifteen minutes of being there.

Everything was gone. One of the most valuable things lost was our family photo album. We had a lot of memories stored up in those pictures and family videos that we will never get back. We also lost our dog and our cat in the fire. My dad tried to save them, but it was too late by the time he got there. The only thing that was left was our family, and that is what I am most thankful for. I took a lot of things for granted, and that is something I will never do again.

Everyone has their struggles, and mine happened to be my house burning down. It is something that nobody expects to happen to them, but it does. The only thing we can hope for is that our families end up okay. It took eight long months of construction for our home to finally be put back together. Those eight months were hard for the six of us. Everyone took turns sleeping on the floor of my uncle's three-bedroom house. Family was the reason I got through my struggle, because we stuck together and worked through the pain. My family was also supported by our church and friends. I may have lost my home, but I will never lose my family.

# My Future: Physician Assistant

*MONJIKA GURUNG*

Our futures are unknown, but we still dream about them. I want to become a Physician Assistant and work in a hospital, because it is the best way to serve others who are in need. I want to go into the medical field because I believe my eldest sister died when she did not have a good doctor and there was not enough knowledge about her disease. When my sister was sick, we did not even know that type of heart disease existed. Medical care was poor in our refugee camp because everyone was poor, and the government did not care much about refugee people.

Our refugee hospital was just a primary hospital, where they only treat fevers, colds, headaches, vomiting, etc. If anything occurred more than that, people had to go outside of camp, and it would take more than an hour to reach the city hospital. Sometimes, an ambulance would not come because they provided us only one ambulance for each refugee camp. Most of the time it would be at the city hospital waiting for us to call for them to come to our camp. If someone got sick, they needed to fill out a registration card so they could meet a doctor, but they had to stay in line for their turn to come up. It did not matter how the weather was; they had to wait for the doctor to call them. Sometimes, people would faint while standing on a sunny day because of the heat, and during the rainy season, people would get wet and become sicker than they were. When it was a person's turn to go see a doctor, he would only check for heartbeats and respiration; then he would write down some medicine's name. Most of the time, no matter how sick they were, the doctor would only prescribe one medicine for a few days.

In 2001, my oldest sister got sick. At first, we thought it was a minor illness, so we took her to a refugee hospital. The doctor could not figure it out, because it was small a hospital, and they did not have much equipment. Later that day, they transferred my sister to Biratnagar Hospital in the city, and there they kept my sister for a few days and said she was fine. She was fine, and she started going to school. During that time my eldest sister was 13; another sister was 10, and I was 3. After two months, she had an exam, so she was preparing for it. During the exam time, she thought she saw the paper all filled up with answers even though it was not. It was a hallucination, where she saw things that were not there. When she gave her answer sheet to her teacher, the teacher said that it did not have any answers.

After five months, my sister got sick again, but this time it was more serious. Doctors sent her directly to the city hospital. Since my dad was not at home, my mom and my aunt took her to the hospital, leaving me and my other sister in our grandparents' home. In another country, my dad and my brother were trying to come to Nepal. Unfortunately, in India vehicles were not able to go through cities because of a strike. They could not walk because it would take more than a week. On the second day in the hospital, the doctor said that my sister had a heart disease. Mom was devastated hearing this, because my sister was so young, and Dad was not with her. It was the biggest family crisis we had. My sister was looking for him and asking every person who came to visit her about Dad. Before my sister's illness got very serious, Mom and her sister took her to the hospital every week for about a year, but, it was not enough. On June 23, 2002, my sister passed away.

Later that day, Mom brought her body home, so we could have her funeral. Since Dad was not at home, we tried to keep my sister's body, because we all wanted him to her see her for the last time, but it started to smell, so we decided to bury her. In our culture, if a girl dies, and she is not married, her parents do the funeral. From the day people took my sister's body to bury her, Mom sat wearing white clothes keeping her distance from people. In our culture, we should

not touch anybody except those people who are in mourning. They are not allowed to eat anything with salt, and they must cook their own food for 21 days. Every night for three weeks, people came to our home to play cards, chess, and other board games. This is our tradition also; we served drinks and food to those who came there to support my family. On the second day of my sister's funeral, my dad got home, and he was so upset because he didn't get to see my sister's face for the last time. All the teachers and friends of my sister came to honor her and told us how hardworking she was. We finished her funeral by calling all relatives for the last prayer, wishing her to go to Heaven and stay there, peacefully.

Going through difficult times in the refugee camp has motivated me to choose the medical field. We did not have good facilities, such as good doctors, medical cards, and equipment, like here in the United States. If something happened, people had to go the city hospital which would cost so much that no one could afford it. Most of the time, people hide their illnesses, so they do not have to go to the hospital, and people end up dying at home. My sister died at a young age, because we did not have the money to take her to a big hospital where they could treat her. If she was in the United States, she would be alive now. I was young when my sister died, but I heard about her disease. No matter how my sister died, I do not want other people to die like she did. Now that I am in the United States, I have many opportunities for my education. I want to become a Physician Assistant.

# To My Son as He Applies for His First Job

*ALLY HALLEY*

I remember my first job. It was the summer before my senior year of high school, and I was thoroughly enjoying doing a whole lot of nothing, but my parents decided it was time for me to start contributing to my own expenses. We lived in a small town, and options were limited. I got a job as a waitress at the local Pizza Hut. I expected it to be very straightforward and was shocked by how difficult it was. The constant interaction with strangers and having to be “on” all the time was way outside my introverted comfort zone. It also took me a long time to adapt to how much a waitress juggles at any given time, but once I did, I settled into a not-quite-as-uncomfortable routine. I never got to a place where I enjoyed that job, but it became tolerable.

My first five jobs were entry-level service positions, and I didn't like a single one, but they served their purpose: helping me pay expenses and developing my character. Those experiences made me appreciate how hard service jobs are, beat the teenaged smugness out of me, and motivated me to finish my bachelor's degree. I firmly believe that everyone should work a service job for at least a year. You will never be guilty of being rude to waiting staff once you've been a server.

In the twenty-plus years since those jobs, I've worked in the business sector as both an employee and employer. Between my service experience, mistakes I've made, and my employer experience, I have accumulated some knowledge about how to succeed in starter jobs so that they become doors to something better. Please indulge me as I share.

## **KNOW YOUR SCHEDULE:**

The quickest way to be fired is be a “no-show,” and you don't want to have to explain your firing on your next job application. If you don't

have a set schedule, your boss likely posts the schedule for the coming week on a certain day of the week. Even if you are off that day, come in and get your schedule; write it down, and put it on the fridge or some other prominent place. When you leave work every day, double check the schedule for unannounced changes.

**DO YOUR JOB WITH PRIDE:**

An entry-level/minimum-wage job is rarely fun, but it's a stepping stone to something better. Your boss, today, is your reference tomorrow. In addition, if you stand out in your job for doing it well, good things happen:

- you earn your boss's trust, which leads to him giving you the benefit of the doubt when you screw up;
- that trust also earns you freedoms from the boss's need to hover over a less-trusted employee;
- your boss will be more likely to let you cross-train into a more pleasant or better-paying position

**BE ON TIME:**

On time means 15 minutes early. This gives you time to clock in and get settled by the time your shift starts. It also gives you a traffic cushion.

**FOLLOW DIRECTIONS:**

Your boss may ask you to do something that's outside your typical responsibility. Unless it's illegal, do it anyway — without complaint (including dramatic sighs or eye-rolls). It's a boss's job to delegate, and he's delegating it to you. That means he trusts you to get it done. Do it well. See above.

**AVOID IDLENESS:**

You may reach a point in your day where you're caught up and don't have anything to do. *Find* something to do. Clean your area.

Restock your area. If you can't find something, ask your boss what jobs need to be done that you can do for him. If you're not on break, you should be busy. A good employee seeks out ways to be productive even when things are slow.

**CLEANLINESS/HYGIENE:**

Shower and shave before work. Make sure your hair is tidy. Wear deodorant, but do not wear cologne (a lot of people are allergic). If you are facing customers, this is even more important because you represent your company to the customer.

**BE PLEASANT:**

Greet co-workers and customers, including a smile. Make eye contact. Use "Excuse me" when you get in someone's way. Use "Please" and "Thank you." If you have a co-worker you don't like, do your best to be civil. If the person is a difficult person in general and is making you miserable, ask your manager for help in handling this person.

**TEAMWORK:**

Look for opportunities to help your co-workers. This will pay dividends when you need help from them. Maybe you're super busy and overwhelmed or you forgot to request a day off and need to find someone to trade with you. If you're on good terms with your co-workers because you've been generous with helping them, they'll be more willing to help you when you need it. Bosses also LOVE people who are good team players.

**KEEP COMPLAINTS AND PERSONAL PROBLEMS TO YOURSELF:**

No one wants to hear about your bad days, your car problems, your fights with your mom, etc. — particularly customers. Customers expect and deserve for you to be focused on helping them, and complaining about your day tells them that you're not concerned about

*them*. Complaints about an inefficient way of doing things at work or interpersonal work problems are different and may require reporting to your manager, but come to her with proposed solutions at the same time.

**KNOW THE COMPANY POLICY FOR REQUESTING TIME OFF:**

Most places require a minimum timeframe of notice for requesting time off (probably at least two weeks) and for the first year, your time off will likely be unpaid. It's also probably going to be first come, first served. So, if your co-worker already requested that day, it may be blacked out for other requests. There may also be days that no one can have off, such as Mother's Day and Valentine's Day in the restaurant industry and the day after Thanksgiving in the retail industry.

**GET YOUR CO-WORKERS' CONTACT INFORMATION:**

If you can't make it to work for any reason, it's your job to find a replacement. You need your co-workers' phone numbers to find someone to cover your shift (another reason to be on good terms with your co-workers). If you can't find someone, you have to work or risk getting fired for a "no-show."

**YOU MIGHT NOT GET BREAKS:**

Although the law states that you get two fifteen-minute breaks and a 30-minute (unpaid) lunch for every 8 hours of work, the reality of service industries is that breaks are dictated by the rush. If it's too busy for you to leave your post, you'll just have to wait until the rush subsides — without complaint.

**YOUR CELL PHONE STAYS OUT OF SIGHT:**

Your employer expects you to be focused on your job while at work. Your cell phone should only come out on breaks.

**DATING AT WORK:**

You will meet a lot of dating prospects wherever you work. This seems great, at first, but if the relationship ends, it will be extremely

awkward, uncomfortable, and maybe even painful to have to work with that person every day. Your employer may also have rules against dating at work. Think long and hard before going down that road. If you do start dating a co-worker, keep it professional — no PDA at work.

**LEARN SPANISH:**

My tiny high school only offered two years of one foreign language: French. I have had exactly zero opportunities to use this knowledge in the real world. Approximately 13% of people in the U.S. speak Spanish as their first language. Chances are, you will work with people who are most comfortable conversing in Spanish, and you will be able to work with them better if you also speak Spanish.



Red Crown *photograph by Doug Kuony*

<https://500px.com/dkuony>

# What Could Have Been

AMANDA B. HANSEN

One more hour, one more second,  
one more step;  
broken heels, torn veil  
shadows my lingering tears.  
His picture tight in my hand,  
I felt his touch  
on my skin.  
He would send me telegrams  
about the beauty;  
but not the magic or stars.  
As my bridal gown  
fades to black;  
I walk to the beat  
of bullets, not “Here come the Bride.”



*“Writing is an exploration.  
You start from nothing and learn as you go.”*

E. L. DOCTOROW



# David Albee

*BILL HANSEN*

To me, our great choir has always seemed strong.  
And it only got better when David came along.  
We needed an artist to sit at the Grand  
So David decided he'd give us a hand.  
That decision was great, and now we're quite glad  
As little we knew of the talent he had.  
When he starts to play, it's like a magical thing.  
And in addition to that, he also can sing.  
When we landed him, we were truly in luck.  
With all of his talent, we got a lot for our buck.  
He always is cordial and has a nice smile.  
And his appearance always exhibits great style.  
You know when he's playing that he's having great fun.  
For he and the keyboard then become one.  
When he's on a roll, better hang on real tight.  
Sometimes, I'm afraid, that the keyboard might ignite.  
Karen no longer puts things on the piano lid.  
When David's fingers get flying, things often have slid.  
When he gets on a roll, the piano can shake.  
That's when things can fall off and possibly break.  
When these hit the floor, a ruckus is raised,  
But David plays on, as he's completely unfazed.  
He plays with great feeling and also with flourish.  
For this we are thankful, as our souls it doth nourish.  
I can't help but think of some real busy bees  
When I see David's fingers dance over the keys.  
He can play it quite soft and, sometimes, a bit loud.  
And having him in our choir has made us all proud.

# Bent but Not Broken

HAILEY HANSEN

*A Story of My Experiences with an Unhinged Father*

There is no such thing as a perfect world, and there is anything but a perfect life. No matter who people are or how they were brought up, everyone undergoes suffering, to some extent, to get to where they are now. Even the most successful people have gone through difficult obstacles; a large amount did not have their accomplishments handed to them. For example, Benjamin Franklin dropped out of school at the age of ten because that was all his parents could afford, and yet, he continued to teach himself through constant reading and eventually invented the lightning rod and bifocals. Helen Keller, despite being deaf and blind since the age of two, learned to read and write and campaigned on issues of social welfare, women's suffrage, and disability rights. Everyone on this earth has hardships, but not everyone can overcome them. However, when people do succeed in jumping those hurdles, it gives experiences and wisdom that shapes them into who they are.

It is quite true, however, there are many fortunate people that were born with privilege. Even though their conflicts may not involve finances, everyone encounters some sort of hardships, because life has a way of doing that. For instance, Drew Barrymore, who was born into a long line of Hollywood actors, has one of the darkest pasts of any celebrity. Her alcoholic father was never around, but when he was, he was verbally and emotionally abusive. This caused her battle with depression, which in turn led to drinking and drugs at just the age of ten. The young star was already in a downward spiral at just the start of her life until, with the help of her mother, she went into rehab at

thirteen years old. There were instances where she relapsed, but finally got clean for good after her teen years.

Drew Barrymore's experiences relate closely to mine. I was born to a financially decent family, but similarly, I had a deranged father. Correspondingly, all of my personal problems were most likely derived from him. Those struggles were parallel to Barrymore's depression and drug addiction. The drug addiction is a hindrance I have overcome, but the depression is a lifelong enemy, which I still fall victim to on some days. Nonetheless, associating my pre-teen self to who I am today — there is no comparison. The dragons I have overcome made me a stronger woman, and I appreciate life more than some might.

I am sure the drug addiction part caught your attention, so I will start from the beginning. My mother became pregnant with me when she was just a junior in high school. My father just graduated from high school and had his own apartment, which my mother thought was the coolest thing ever. She gave birth to me when she was a senior and, to her horror, her water broke in the middle of the cafeteria. I cannot imagine how hard that must have been for her, keeping up with school, the classmates' whispers and stares and the birth process. I appreciate her every day for choosing to give me life, because I know if I were in her position, I would not. Furthermore, what inspires me so much about my mother is the fact that she still, despite being a teen parent, defied all of the stereotypes and graduated from high school with a perfect GPA. I was blessed to have such a strong mother.

Unfortunately, after I was born, she came to realize that my father was not the greatest person in the world. In a matter of three months, his true colors came out, revealing a manipulative sociopath. There were times when my mother was truly afraid of him. One day, while he was at work, my grandmother came to his apartment and quickly helped my mother pack her belongings and leave for good. My mother was offered a full ride scholarship to the College of Saint Mary and planned to attend, while my grandmother would help take care of me. My devious father was already enraged that my mother left him, and

when he found out about my mother's college plans, he did not take it well. He was in a gridlock; my mother had success in her sights, she had me, and he was out of the picture. He was not in control, and he did not like that. He threatened to take her to court and win custody of me, if she went to college, because "she needed to focus on her child and not on herself." With him having the upper hand, she turned her back on the bright future she worked so hard for in high school, all for me.

My father ended up moving to California, and my mother started to become happy again. She got a part-time job as a receptionist at an ENT clinic and met another man she was crazy about. When I was three years old, she gave birth to my brother, Brennan, who turned out to have severe autism. When my mother's boyfriend found out about my brother's condition, he left. She was now a single mother of two. She had to quit her job to take care of Brennan and moved back in with my grandparents, because she could not make ends meet under these circumstances. I wonder how she stayed sane, given that everything was going wrong in her life.

As if on cue, my father came back to Nebraska, when I was around the age of four. For whatever reason, he filed for joint custody, and I had to go to his house every Sunday. I remember on Sunday mornings, I would strip naked, because I thought, "Well, I can't go if I'm naked." I can visualize being in the car with him traveling to his house; these are the first memories I actually remember with him. He would turn the volume up so loud to the point where I could not even hear myself screaming, "TURN IT DOWN, DAD! PLEASE!" He would just laugh. I have only a few recollections of actually being at his house. I recall playing with Barbies by myself in an empty room most of the time. I also remember him making me watch scary television shows, holding me down and tickling me until I cried, and giving me baths and unnecessarily scrubbing me vigorously with a washcloth "down there." I did not see it then, but when I look back, he was really creepy.

One Sunday, as I was waiting sadly to be picked up, my grandmother saw him drive by the house. He did not stop, he just kept driving. He ended up moving to Illinois. I did not know why he left so suddenly, but I did not care. I was so content. I no longer felt anxious on Saturday nights, worrying about not being able to break free from his tickling, and fearing the burn that stemmed from the rigorous soapy washcloth. I began school and made my first friends. They all had the typical two parents, who seemed madly in love. When I would play with them at their houses, I was aware of this, but I do not remember ever feeling envious or sad. I think that when you are a young child, your mind does not think in that way yet.

Everything was going well. My mother met another man, got married, and had my little sister, Lauren. She was the cutest baby ever; I used to haul her around in those fake strollers that were made for life-sized dolls. We ended up moving out of my grandparents' home and into my mother's first house. Then, on signal, yet again, my father bombarded our lives. This time, he filed for custody, again, but he wanted the entire summers. He won. I cried, feeling like I was in a nightmare, like I was going to get sick everywhere. Eight-year-old-me begged my mother to not let me go, and I remember her crying because there was nothing she could do. For a while, I was sad and in disbelief. Then, in the spring, I was angry. My friends would all be hanging out without me, and I would be with him.

When school was out, I had two weeks before I had to go to Illinois, and I made the most of it. My mother drove eight hours, and, when she dropped me off, I ran after her car, crying, all the way down the street. She still tells me it was the worst day of her life, not only leaving me with a monster, but also, on top of that, watching me in the rearview mirror chasing after her, not being able to turn around and take me home. I walked back down the street to his house I just saw for the first time, feeling like the cement was going to sink beneath me. I was in a foreign land with the person I feared most, and I had to live an entire summer with him.

I did not know what to expect; he was very unpredictable. He had gotten fat since the last time I saw him. He looked disgusting, with his chew tobacco stuffed behind his upper lip and dirt in his ears and pores. He worked with pipelines and was gone from early in the morning to late at night. When he was home, he was either playing “World of Warcraft” or trying to convince me how terrible of a person my mother was. Now that I think of it, part of the reason why I cannot remember much about things my father said, was because I blocked it out most of the time. Literally, all he talked about to me was my mother in the nastiest ways; he never asked about my interests or anything not related to my mother. Why did he even want me there?

The only thing that kept me sane was his girlfriend and her two children, who were around the same age as me. His girlfriend’s name was Lauren, and she had a hard life. Her daughter’s father was in prison, and her son’s father recently died in prison. I felt sorry for her, because my father abused her. She had multiple bruises on her arms and stomach. I thought that she had bruises because she was very pale. He would yell at her condescendingly for smoking cigarettes outside, and yet he chewed tobacco. She had to send my mother e-mails from her work e-mail, about how I was doing, because my father blocked my mother and grandmother’s phone numbers, cutting all contact from me. She put up with all of this, because her children finally lived in a decent house, for once. I remember telling her that she deserved much better, and she should just leave. About three summers later, she ended up listening to me and left him. I remember helping all three of them pack and watching them load up the car and leave forever. I cried all day and spent the rest of the summer alone with my father.

When I was twelve, I learned a lot of information about my father my mother kept from me. My mother never talked negatively about him, ever, but that is all he ever did. I found out that the reason my father started making me come every summer was because, for some reason, his child support got raised. Apparently, every year my mother begged to have the time I was required to spend with him shortened,

but he refused. Finally, my mother said, “If you don’t have to pay a penny of child support anymore, can she just not go at all?” and he said, “Yes.” Even though I did not love my father, this made me realize, “Wow, this is my father, and he doesn’t care about me at all.” It really hit me hard, because I was older and smarter, but yet, not smart enough. All I thought about was how there are other kids who have the perfect family and two parents who love them more than anything. I did not yet see the fact that it did not matter. I hit a big low; I was diagnosed with severe clinical depression and anxiety.

The really difficult part was not getting enough support from my mother. She, like I have explained, has been through a great deal and is the type of person whose attitude is, “Shake it off, and don’t cry about it. You’re fine.” She thought I was a crybaby, because if I do not have to see him again, what was I upset about? This just made everything worse. I was a mess, and all I could see was what was wrong and not what was right. I just wanted to be coddled and for someone to be sorry for me, because I was too miserable feeling sorry for myself.

When I began high school, I met a boy I liked and who liked me. The thing that attracted me to him was his confidence and his “bad boy” aura, something that I was definitely not. He was very sweet and made me feel like someone cared about me, something I desired. After we had been talking for a while, I found out that he smoked weed. This took me aback, at first, because I was still innocent at the time, but then it seemed intriguing. When I smoked it for the first time, I did not feel super “stoned,” I felt ... *good*. I ended up smoking weed every day, because I liked it and because I wanted to fit in with my boyfriend’s lifestyle. I not only became addicted to marijuana, but I also became dependent on my boyfriend. I did not belong in that life, but at least I felt like I belonged somewhere. I thought about leaving him and that life many times, but I never did because all of my friends were his friends, and I would lose them.

It took me all of high school to figure it out. When I was smoking every day, it felt like the same day repeating itself; I was miserable. I

finally broke up with him the end of my senior year and quit smoking at the same time, for good. The first week was hard, only because I had no appetite at all, and I ended up losing ten pounds in that amount of time. After that, I felt more alive than I had in a very long time. At first, I was irate and blamed my ex-boyfriend for wasting my high school years. However, after a while, I accepted it, because he gave me something that I needed. He gave me a friend. He gave me love. I learned a lot about relationships, and I feel like it was an experience that made me grow a great deal. I was honest to my family about everything, and they were there for me.

Everything I have gone through in my life, so far, has made me stronger and wiser. I can spot vile characteristics in people quickly, as well as recognize a genuinely good person right away. I also take cruel words towards me as light as a feather, because it does not matter what someone else thinks of me, unless it is someone important to me. I know the importance of love. Receiving animosity is not a good feeling, but receiving love is the best thing there is. I learned that giving it is far better. I appreciate the little things. Even the simplest of compliments will make my day, observing the kindness of a sincere man makes me optimistic, and most importantly, witnessing a noble and loving father gives me hope.

# The Box

*KATHIE HASKINS*

Sturdy wooden box,  
Carefully constructed,  
Held together with  
    the tiniest of nails.

Two-door lid, fastened with  
Mismatched antique hinges  
and delicate glass knobs.

On the outside, intricate designs  
Paint a story,  
A very personal story  
Of the box's owner.  
Who is she?  
What makes her tick?  
Nature.

Gardens filled with  
    marigolds and daisies,  
Cheery yellows and oranges  
    warmed by the dazzling sun.  
Light green foliage, vines intertwined,  
Wrapped around the perimeter.  
Bees and butterflies hover and flit,  
Tiny dots indicate movement  
    in sweeps and swirls.

Open the doors and peer into  
    her inner sanctum.  
Deep into the sheltering woods,  
Cool, dark, green forest.

Cardinals, woodpeckers,  
and birds of all kinds,  
Provide the lifeblood within her.

Inside each door of the box  
Are written her innermost thoughts,  
Of nature,  
Of God,  
Of her very being,  
Her essence,  
her soul.



UNO Flags *photograph by David Martin*

# Peonies

DAVID PRINZ HUFFORD

When peonies come again or never come  
Or songs of spring rejoice each lonely heart;  
When nights are thick with scents, sad-parting hands  
Will sadly once again not touch and tremble  
And sift the air forever like the sands.  
Or let the peony be kissed and let the words  
We utter over loneliness be our last call.  
Let lovers like a feverish rolling drum  
Rush headlong in a murmured, aching run.  
Ephemera unfolds before the love.  
But on the brink of autumn, summer's gone,  
A bright finale made of leaves alone,  
And only love remembers it had grown.  
And only love may wish it will again.

////////////////////////////////////  
*“Words are, of course, the most  
powerful drug used by mankind.”*

RUDYARD KIPLING  
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# Why Am I Here?

*JONATHAN KAZHILA*

“The day you stop dreaming is the day you stop living.”

“Purpose” is a word that we often question. How do people discover their real purposes in life? I am not referring to our jobs, daily responsibilities, or even long-term goals. I am referring to the real reason why people are on Earth. When I hear the word “purpose,” I think about the very reason why people exist. What is my purpose? My purpose is to make a difference in people’s lives, by being the best city planner that I can be.

I struggled to find my purpose. It took me longer than most to discover why I was on the Earth. Many of my friends had it figured out during high school, while I kept bouncing around from idea to idea. I was running in a circle, not making any progress. During the early years of my high school career, I stressed about not knowing what my purpose was. Despite the pressure from my school counselor and parents, I did not want to force the situation. I wanted the purpose to come to me, and not just to create a purpose to make my parents happy.

I first thought that my purpose was to be a professional soccer player for Arsenal FC in England. From a young age, I had always been the best, or one of the best, wherever I played. My primary school team was one of the best teams in the city of Pretoria. I represented my province of Gauteng in a national under 13 tournament. I felt like I was on top of the world. Every game seemed to flow naturally. Goals and assists would come easily, and the attention around me was building.

As 2007 concluded, I needed to make a decision about which high school I wanted to attend. Unfortunately, many of the top high schools

in South Africa focused on rugby, cricket, and field hockey. Soccer is an afterthought and not taken seriously in these schools. This created a dilemma, as I wanted to attend a high school with great education standards, as well as one that prioritized soccer. I eventually decided to join St Albans College, a great school with wonderful traditions. I had a blast there and made lifelong friends. My soccer career took a hit though, as I was not playing as frequently anymore, and when a person is not playing, the person is not improving.

Sometimes, I wonder where I would have been, had I pursued soccer with more gusto. Moving away from the sports field to the classroom, as I was nearing the end of my high school career, I had no idea what I wanted to study. For some reason, accounting was the degree that always caught my eye, whenever I would search what degrees each university had. After high school, I took a gap year and decided to find an accounting job to observe firsthand what the life of an accountant would be like. I did not want to rush into studying accounting and then halfway through, realize this was not my path. That would have been a waste of money.

My thought process going into this new job was that, if I could see myself doing this job for the rest of my life, then I would apply to study accounting. On the other hand, I went into this job knowing that if I could not see myself doing this for the rest of my life, I would choose another degree and have an extra 365 days to make my decision.

I started the new job eager to learn and soak in as much as my mind allowed me to. I worked at Venter Enterprises for 8 months. While I was there, I worked on bank statements, cleaned the offices, and dropped off documents at multiple locations. I enjoyed the experience, as it was my first job, but I could not see myself doing what the accountants did every day, for the rest of my life. Surely, my purpose was out there, I just had to find it. Tick tock, tick tock, time was moving, and I started to get nervous.

I have parents who guide me. As I aged, I realized they have accumulated precious wisdom that I need to tap. During my gap year, there was a day that turned my life around. My parents and I went to a leadership conference, where the speaker mentioned something that has stuck with me until this day. He said, "If you're looking for directions, follow your heart. Do what you love. Love what you do. Be fulfilled." Immediately after the conference, I rushed home and started thinking about which school subjects I enjoyed the most and how these subjects could help me work towards a more productive future.

My parents and I quickly came to the consensus that geography was the winner. From a young age, I was fascinated about the formation of the Earth, how the land formed, and the different weather patterns changed the world. The majority of the world's population lives in horrible conditions. Overcrowding and informal settlements are an unfortunate reality for many people. I like my warm bed, a roof over my head, and not having to squeeze myself into my residence. Billions of people pray for the things I take for granted.

It was a process, but I ended up deciding to study Environmental Science, with a specific focus on sustainable development. This degree allows me to combine my two passions of geography and, helping people's lives get better by improving living standards of people from all social classes.

In Africa, we still have the highest rates of poverty in the world. Yes, economies are growing, but most people there live in informal settlements. Whether I work for a large organization like the U.N or a small sustainable development company, I believe that by providing better housing for people, I will be fulfilling my purpose.

I have had to leave home to fulfill my goal of graduating in Environmental Science. All my friends and family are back in South Africa, and it was not easy to leave. I could have taken the easy option and studied there, but that would have been confining myself and staying inside my comfort zone. Growth happens when people explore and take risks. It is easy to stay in the boat and follow the current,

but the real life-changers are those who have gotten out of the boat and created their own paths. Somedays, I really miss home, but my purpose keeps me going. I know why I am here, and I am not going home without a degree.

Life has continuously thrown me around in the pursuit of my purpose. I went from thinking that I would become a soccer star to an accountant. When someone finds a purpose, there is an internal peace when working towards fulfilling it. I have that internal peace, and it is beautiful. Everyone has a purpose. Some just take longer to discover it. If someone wants to find his or her true purpose in life, he or she must first get rid of the idea that he or she has no purpose at all. When a person finds his or her own unique answer of why he or she is here, the correct one will resonate on the inside. Discovering one's purpose can be the easy part; the hard part is keeping the purpose within on a daily basis and working to the point where that purpose becomes a part of the person.

My purpose is to change lives. Power, wealth, and fame do not always change lives. In my career of being a city planner, I am going to provide better housing facilities and amenities for many people. This will put a smile on their faces, give them hope for the future, and will be the best compliment I can receive. The two greatest days of my life were the day I was born and the day I found out what my purpose for living was.

# Dragon Slayers

MARGARET KEHLER

*Fine Lines* is a non-profit organization, which is dedicated to allowing people from all over the world to send in creative writing of all kinds. It helps students of all ages to share their work and grow in their craft. It offers writers a unique experience of publishing their ideas.

When I was in high school, there was a creative writing club, but the teacher wasn't very kind or creative. The purpose of that class was to fulfill the assignment, not to satisfy being creative. Writing just to get a grade was not any fun.

I had no idea that *Fine Lines* existed. I like the free, creative atmosphere of this publication. I would like to think that if creative writing like this had been brought to my attention, I would have done much better in school.

This *Fine Lines* is a great idea. I hope the "Dragon Slayers" keep writing for a long time. Someday, I hope to slay my dragons, too.



*"I am learning every day to allow the space  
between where I am and where I want to be to  
inspire me and not terrify me."*

TRACEE ELLIS ROSS



# In Our Waters

*KASSANDRA KIZLIN*

The snarls of foul, cruel men calling towards me,  
baiting me closer to the waves and their cold bite.  
The demons choose to be deaf to my crying plea.  
Quips like strings tug me to the vindictive waters.  
Deep in my soul, there's burning with the want to fight.

The sea struck like a knife used in a slaughter.  
Blood seeped from my veins around me in a mist.  
It links with the ocean and made me her daughter.  
I was checked throughout my mind and all my being.  
One by one I passed all on Calypso's list.  
Eyes wide, I still didn't know what I was seeing.  
Water and lace covered my vision and senses.  
If I could see, I still didn't have the feeling.  
Motion engulfed me, and I became the coldness.  
I knew that my life was done with false pretenses.

From her spark I was brimming with some new boldness.  
I then felt stronger, the deeper the cold knifed in.  
My feelings for the men who pushed me became oldness.  
The hatred for the beasts turned to indifference.  
My outward self-changed, along with the death of sin.

Scales grew, and limbs melded to make my defenses.  
My clothes waded away. The swathe was now obsolete.  
My eyes turn silver, and my breath condenses.  
My heart slows, and this body is now truly mine.  
This is the first time I am content and complete.

With my new self in tow, I am grasped by her twine.  
I followed it and swam to discover my fate.

Without much convincing, a contract I did sign.  
The destiny chosen for me is my true sect.  
With luck, all this happened not a moment too late.

Now, I swim with my friends to a ship to be wrecked.  
Their repellent intentions are a call to us.  
The sides of their ship we all come to and deflect.  
Hardwood changes places with my strength and my push.  
We play with the sailors and watch all of their fuss.

We surround them, they cannot escape to the bush.  
The sea is our world our power with our faith,  
This is not wrong, and this is not my first ambush.  
The power, the act is from Calypso's command,  
Even so, we still choose to commit this mundane wraith.

I look to my sister, for the time is at hand,  
Her frame draped in pearls rushes forward to strike first.  
With her hit, the wood cracks, and what comes is the band.  
We watch the water bleed into their fragile home.  
There is fear in them, when they realize they'll never thirst.

The mariners should know, when they come through our foam.  
The waters are sentient and know where they sail.  
Into our domain did these men decide to roam.  
For the first time, their actions have consequences.  
Our world encompasses them, as we watch them sail.

We circle and observe those there, for a census.  
We watch them to see how they act toward us now.  
The final splinter of the carnage commences.  
The knowledge is then set, and we make our choices.  
I go to where it's planned with the grasp of my vow.

I swim and take him. They never hear our voices.  
The men go to sleep, when their cold bane engulfs them.  
We proceed so fast the water mutes all noises.

Distance is nil as we near our destination.  
Hearts slow but don't stop, and to the water they succumb.

Carving through waves brings me to my fixed citation.  
Sunlight dies here in the deep sea at the entrance.  
There Davey Jones waits at his ghostly station.  
Surrounded by rock and through currents I lead him,  
Why I chose this man is a call for penitence.

The Dutchman lingers, placed where he has always been.  
Dead green eyes stalk our approach to the fated seabed.  
There he waits out his long eternity again,  
Sword at his hip, hat on his head like in his life.  
On the tip of his tongue are the words always said.

Releasing the man, I am as hard as a knife.  
Once out of my sturdy hold he isn't free long.  
Man's presence in the waters is known to be rife.  
Davey clasps this man's body and rips out his soul.  
In his final moments, he hears Calypso's song.

With his torn out soul, his body is abandoned whole.  
The locker opens. The accord will be honored.  
The tomb kept safe by water will never be full.  
Davey imprisons him with the jut of his arm.  
With my aid, this mariner is justly conquered.

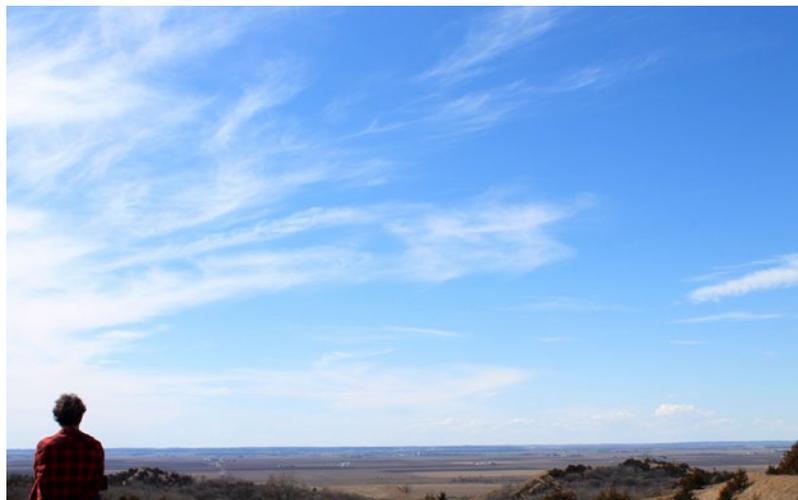
Davey looks now for what is meant for me, the charm.  
Disappearing to his hearth, he leaves me there alone.  
This long agreement doesn't cause the world harm,  
It helps Calypso's waters, and my life is fair.  
My deadly deeds for the sea, I love to condone.

I hear his wraithlike stirring from his glowing lair.  
He unlocks a wardrobe and opens an old chest.  
I yearn to hurry, Davey, but I wouldn't dare.  
Anticipation burns within me for my prize.

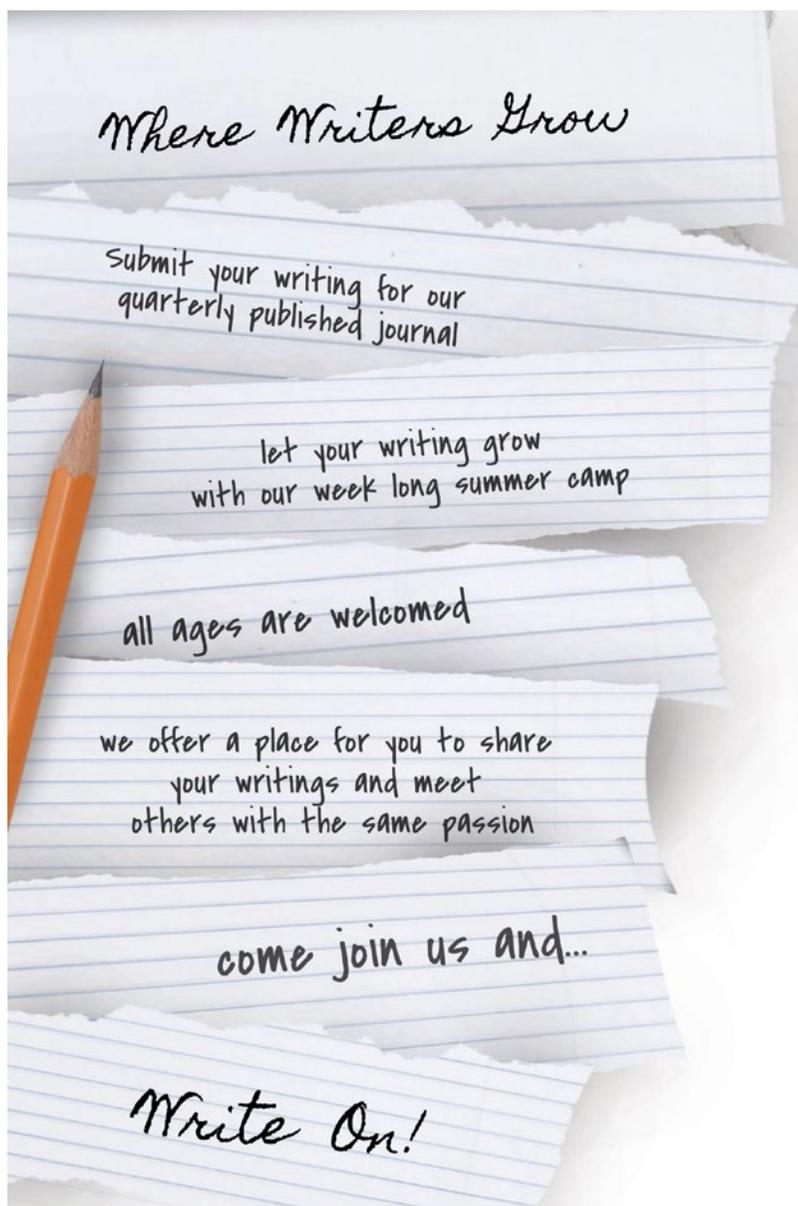
I've come here for so long, but I am still a guest.

He walks past ancient stone, sensing me agonize.  
I beckon him forward, without changing my spot.  
My eyes meet Davey's, and I know him to be wise.  
This life outshines what I wanted as a young girl.  
Contentment courses through me. I cherish my lot.

I reach out my hand, around us dark waters swirl.  
We have no worry, and Davey drops it in hand.  
Once my prize descends, around it, my fingers curl.  
Its smooth surface soothes like nothing that comes from land.  
Now, with my pay, I celebrate my single pearl.



*Big Sky View photograph by Laura Leininger-Campbell*



Fine Lines collage by Kristi Bolling

# On Second Thought

PATRICIA LANGTON

As the elevator doors start to close, a demanding voice roars, “Hold the elevator.” Leaning back against the wall in the already crowded car, you wonder why people always run for buses and elevators during the rush hour when they know another one will be along in a minute or two.

No one can reach the “open door” button, but a burly hand appears between the doors just before they close. A much too large middle-aged man pushes his way in. Your fellow passengers mumble apologies for crushing you and treading on your toes. You nod an irritated response, then relax. Nothing can upset you today. This is the day you have been waiting for, a chance to join the editorial staff of a major prestige publishing house!

You glance at your watch. Fifteen minutes to ten, plenty of time to stop in the restroom on the 38th floor and make any necessary repairs before your ten o’clock interview with Clarence Haney. Your skirt isn’t too short nor your blouse too revealing. Your lightweight beige jacket brings out the highlights in your honey-blond hair, and your shoes are modestly high, the stilettos left in the closet. In your portfolio are glowing recommendations and ironclad references. Only the best samples of your work are included. True, they are products of one small publishing company, but they had won awards at local workshops and book fairs.

The elevator crawls up the shaft stopping at every floor. The big man doesn’t move. Exiting passengers squeeze by him. Fortunately, no one tries to get on. For a moment, you feel a pang of regret that you will be leaving your friends at your current job. With them, you work hard and play even harder. The first day on the job the co-owners

told you to call them Bob and Paul. You are part of a team, no hierarchy there. Each year you receive a cost of living raise, but a small publishing company doesn't make much profit, and the Christmas bonuses are small. It is comfortable there, too comfortable, like being at home with family. You need to move on and up, to make your mark in the world

You smile at that analogy as the elevator approaches the 38th floor. The only passengers left are the big man and a small woman who is clutching her briefcase to her chest, as though the elevator were still crowded. She timidly returns your smile and shrinks further back into her corner.

The car stops at the 38th floor. You prepare to squeeze past the mound of flesh blocking the door, but it steps out ahead of you. You glance out at a young man in a grey suit who says, "Good morning, Mr. Haney, sir," to which Mr. Haney gruffly replies, "Is my 10 o'clock here, yet?" The timid little woman steps around you, as you turn aside and press the down button.

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*"Art is whatever makes you proud to be human."*

AMIRI BARAKA

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# Creative Writing and Me

*CAMILLE LARSON*

Writing is a place that people can go to solve problems, learn more about themselves, and explore new worlds that do not exist, yet. Writing should never be turned into a punishment, as it is difficult enough for people to enjoy it and practice it on a daily basis.

On the first day of the semester, when I was told that I would have to write a 170-page journal, my heart dropped. Creative writing was never my strength. I enjoyed research-based writing far more, because I learned about things I was interested in and was able to display that interest to an audience of my teacher and peers. What I did not realize was that creative writing would teach me many things that directly relate to my own existence in this world.

Creative writing has helped me reach deep down inside of myself and drag out memories to make peace with my past. From the abuse I received in past romantic relationships to the first time I was ever objectified, my journal has helped me move past the demons that have been silently creeping in the shadows of my life. It has helped me explore new ideas, like whether or not love exists, and if it does, then what it is supposed to be like. It has helped me cope with the decline in health of my long-time pet, Copper, and think of the ways that my family and friends have affected my life.

I have used creative writing to realize how my life has been shaped by my past experiences and how those experiences influence me today. Creative writing has only just begun to shape my life and help me explore the amazing person I can become.

# What's in Your Wallet?

CHRISTOPHER L LASLEY

## *The Importance of Native American Rights*

One of the first times an American Indian was allowed to stand trial, Chief Standing Bear of the Ponca tribe said: “My hand is not the color of yours, but if I prick it, the blood will flow, and I shall feel pain. The blood is of the same color as yours. God made me, and I am a man. I never committed any crime. If I had, I would not stand here to make a defense. I would suffer the punishment and make no complaint.” Chief Standing Bear’s son and half of his tribe died of starvation or disease after being forcefully moved to Oklahoma. Standing Bear was a civil rights activist who was taken to trial for wanting to bury his son in his homeland of Nebraska. I am proud to say that Chief Standing Bear is one of my ancestors. From the first moment Christopher Columbus “discovered” America, American Indians have been faced with injustice. Even today, Native Americans are faced with struggle and prejudice from the government. Only recently has the American government apologized for the treatment of early Native Americans. Native American rights are important to me, because they are a part of my heritage.

In order for me to speak on the topic of Native American rights, I would like to discuss the history of Native American rights, starting with the removal of Native Americans from their homelands. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act. This law forced the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and Choctaw tribes away from their homelands and forced them onto reservations. The Cherokee were forced to march from Florida to the Indian reservation in Oklahoma. This march resulted in the death of over four thousand Cherokee Indians and would later be known as the Trail of Tears.

There was also the Indian Appropriation act of 1871 which stated that Native American tribes were no longer independent, sovereign Nations. This was done to justify America not honoring the treaties that were made to American Indians. While this was being done, the American government kept taking away what little land the Indian people owned using the Dawes Act of 1887. Natives were still being forced onto reservations where life got worse for them. They often were poor with no job opportunities along with little to no education.

When the Fourteenth Amendment was passed in 1868, it allowed citizenship to anyone born in the U.S.A. You would think that American Indians were included in this, considering they were Americans before America even existed. This was not the case, however; Native Americans were not allowed to vote until the year 1924 when the Indian Citizen Act was passed. This law included citizenship for American Indians as well as the ability to vote. However, it was not until 1948 that Natives were allowed to vote in every state. Finally, in 1968 the Indian Civil Rights Act was passed, which gave American Indians every right that is in the Bill of Rights.

While all of these laws have been passed to allow Indians the same liberties as any American, Natives still struggle today against the government. Recently, with the rise of the Dakota Access Pipeline, Natives have been standing up against the government. This pipeline crosses into the Standing Rock reservation and violates multiple federal laws. The Indians there have been pelted with rubber bullets, sent to jail, and shot at with pepper spray. They are still struggling today. There was also the class-action lawsuit *Cobell v. Salazar* which came from the mismanagement of over three thousand Indian trusts that the U.S. government was supposed to take care of. This resulted in over 21 million dollars being transferred to the Indian Education Scholarship Fund.

With all of this said, why does this matter so much to me? The answer is simple, I am an indigenous member of society. All of these laws, struggles and settlements are a part of my people's history. They

are a part of me as a person. I was born to Carey Dean Phillips and Andrea Lasley; my mother is fifty percent Native American, while my dad is one hundred percent. I identify as Native American, proudly, I can even trace my lineage to my great grandfather, Chief Standing Bear. He was a civil rights activist who stood up for what he believed in: the rights of his native people. Throughout my life, he has been a big inspiration to me. I consider him my hero.

In conclusion, Native American rights are important to me, because they are a part of me as a person. My people's history started way before America was "discovered" by Christopher Columbus. They've been beaten, robbed, and taken advantage of; however, we've still stood strong and are proud of our heritage. We continue to be taken advantage of by a government that thinks they can do whatever they want and get away with it. Examples of this include the conflict at the Standing Rock reservation and the *Cobell v. Salazar* case. I consider myself a proud Native American man.



*"The test of literature is, I suppose, whether we ourselves live more intensely for the reading of it."*

ELIZABETH DREW



## LIBRARIES

“A library is not a luxury but one of the necessities of life.”

— *Henry Ward Beecher*

“A library is the delivery room for the birth of ideas, a place where history comes to life.” — *Norman Cousins*

“A library is a good place to go when you feel unhappy, for there, in a book, you may find encouragement and comfort. A library is a good place to go when you feel bewildered or undecided, for there, in a book, you may have your question answered.”

— *E.B. White*

“I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library.”

— *Jorge Luis Borges*

“I was made for the library, not the classroom. The classroom was a jail of other people’s interests. The library was open, unending, free.” — *Ta-Nehisi Coates*

“Libraries raised me.” — *Ray Bradbury*

“My alma mater was books, a good library... I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity.” — *Malcolm X*

“People can lose their lives in libraries. They ought to be warned.”

— *Saul Bellow*

# The House Guest

LOREN LOGSDON

Jane Armstrong was worried. Her husband Tug had just come home and announced that his roommate from his college days was coming to “crash” for a couple of days. Jane had never liked Tug’s roommate because he had some eccentricities that irritated her, and she could not imagine living in the same house with him. The roommate, whose name was Mick Sigafoos, needed to get away from his problems, and his first thought was of his college friend Tug. He had crashed there once years before, right after Jane and Tug were married.

When Jane complained to Tug that he should have at least consulted her before he agreed to allow Mick to stay, Tug explained that Mick sounded so desperate he didn’t have the heart to deny him a place of refuge. “I think Mick did something this time that has gotten him in deep trouble, something really bad from the way he sounded,” Tug added.

“Well, if it is really bad, do you think he will bring trouble into our home,” Jane replied. “Do you have any idea what his problem is? Will you please do your best to find out? I think we have a right to know, don’t you?”

“All right. I’ll tell you. He told me he was having an affair with a married woman, and her husband came home unexpectedly and caught them in a compromising position. Mick barely escaped with his life. In fact, the woman’s husband threatened to kill Mick. He yelled at Mick that he had better find a place to hide because he would find him and kill him if it took forever to do so,” Tug said.

“Now, that’s just great,” Jane said. “Our only hope is that the husband was just angry for the moment and making wild threats to frighten Mick.”

“Dear, I don’t think so. The husband turned out to be a hit man for the Mafia, an expert hired killer. Mick received a letter containing the Ace of Spades and a copy of a contract to kill. The contract reads that anyone who kills Mick is in line for a large sum of money with no questions asked.”

“Tug, what have you done? Don’t you realize that you are putting our family in jeopardy? We could easily become what Mel Gibson calls collateral damage. Now you call Mick and tell him he can’t come here. We can’t take him in this time,” Jane ordered.

“I can’t do that,” Tug replied.

“Yes, you can, and you must.”

“No, it’s too late.”

“Why is it too late?”

“Because he’s already here. He’s hiding in the car waiting for me to see if the coast is clear.”

“You go right back out there and tell him to drive somewhere else, as far away as possible.”

“Dear Heart, he isn’t in his car. He’s in our car. He hitched a ride here on a semi hauling hogs. He concealed himself among the hogs. I picked him up at the truck stop in Peoria. He stinks like a barn lot on a sultry August day. He needs a shower in the worst way.”

“And you are bringing him into our house smelling that way?”

“Light of Love, he has no other choice.”

“Yes, he does. Now take him to the Big Sleazy and shove him in. Better take some soap with you. On second thought, take Billy’s baseball bat and hit him over the head before you shove him in the river.”

“Jane, you are really hard hearted. I didn’t know you could be so unkind.”

“All right, let me explain the matter clearly so even a small child can understand. If we let Mick come into our home, again, he will be as hard to get rid of as Kato Kaelin. And you know the trouble Kato Kaelin caused. From what you have said, Mick’s enemy might even be meaner than O.J.”

“I forgot to tell you that he has more than one enemy looking for him. The Mexican drug lords want to kill him because they think he is the one who told Sean Penn how to find El Chapo.”

“Good heavens! Is there no Balm in Gilead?”

“Dear, that reminds me — do we have any calamine lotion? Mick has an awful case of psoriasis and possibly shingles to boot.”

“Now that’s just fine. I suppose you are going to tell me that he has leprosy as well.”

“The doctor wasn’t sure about that. He won’t know until the test results come back from the Disease Control Center in Atlanta.”

“I have the feeling there’s still something else you aren’t telling me. You’re holding something back. Now let’s have it.”

“Dearest, we have to put Spot in Paul’s Puppy Palace and send the kids to your mother’s. Mick can’t stand dogs and children. They make him nervous.”

“Make him nervous? That’s a good one. Does he realize his little peccadilloes and mannerisms set my teeth on edge and give me migraines?”

“Mick is aware of that. He thinks you should stay in a hotel while he’s here.”

“Oh, really? Who does he think is going to cook his food, do his laundry, and wait on him hand and foot? You know he can’t or won’t do anything for himself.”

“Well, Mick has thought of that. His mistress will be coming in a day or two to perform those tasks for him. Mick thinks of everything, you know.”

“Now that’s just great! He’s inviting his mistress to live in our home. What are you supposed to do while she’s here?”

“Mick wants me to put up a tent and sleep in the back yard, so I won’t disturb them when I leave for work in the mornings.”

“Move out of your own home? That’s the last straw. Can’t you see Mick is asking too much of us? Can’t you see something is wrong with this picture?”

“Dearest mother of my children and my greatest treasure, it’s just for a couple of days until Mick’s trouble blows over.”

“I need to remind you that the last time we took him in “for a few days,” he stayed for three months, and we were on the cusp of a divorce when he left.”

“Yes, I remember that well, but this time he has no place else to go.”

“My God! Did you hear what you just said? If he has no place else to go, we could be stuck with him forever this time.”

“Yes, my only Main Squeeze, but you know what they say about the friends you make in college; and, after all, what are friends for?”



*Kissing Foxes* photograph by *Kris Chelf*  
[www.featherednest-photography.com](http://www.featherednest-photography.com)

# Works in Progress

*DESHAE E. LOTT*

Brushstrokes in primary colors and black and white,  
Render Pinocchio,  
Nose sticking out like a thumb, not a snake,  
Perched on a Disney store shelf awaiting adoption.

I ponder my saintly mother's  
Attraction to this image.  
Watercolorist herself, she admired  
The impressionistic way the colors bestow  
Animation to the inanimate.

What drew her to this painting, though,  
Must have stretched beyond artist admiring artistic style.  
Full of joy rooted in inner strength, kindness, and generosity,  
She still would contend,  
"People will always disappoint you."  
This realism did not supplant other truths:  
Love. Forgive. Hope.  
For all of us are works of art in progress.

How exquisite if our missteps are  
Thumb-size, not snake-size,  
If like Pinocchio, we choose to cultivate  
A more pristine character,  
If we understand "good" and "truth" and then,  
Work consistently to move ourselves  
Closer to embodying those ideals.  
In adopting such habits, such primary principles,  
We honor ourselves and those who  
Might welcome us into their lives

Despite our imperfections:  
Our pronounced noses,  
The imprecise lines  
Suggesting our burgeoning  
Noble characters.



*“Writing for yourself is not as arrogant as it seems. Of course, style should befit the occasion—you don’t wear black tie to a picnic—and no integrity is lost by taking different tones, or even choosing different subjects, in addressing the garden club, the political convention, or the professional society. But in the big writing decisions, from the selection of them to the evocation of character, the good writer thinks only of an audience of Number One. Self-indulgent? Sure; that’s one of the pleasures that come with the pain of pulling a real purpose out of your mind. Creative authenticity comes from seeking to suit oneself and rarely springs from a desire to please others.”*

WILLIAM SAFIRE



## MAIL

Dear *Fine Lines*,

Oh, how wonderful! Until this day, the only fan mail I ever received was from my mom, and even she sent it, reluctantly, feeling it could give me a “fatter head than I already have.”

Thank you!

*Daniel Sharkovitz*

*English Department Chair*

*Martha's Vineyard Regional High School*

*Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

Your message about the publication of “Beginnings” in the spring edition of *Fine Lines* arrived, as I was flying to Hawaii with my husband for a long-anticipated vacation. Needless to say, your email made an already-special day even more so. Thank you so much!

I will look forward to seeing and purchasing the spring issue when it appears in print. I'll also promote it with my family and friends. My brother in particular enjoys seeing my stories of our childhood.

*Fine Lines* is an excellent venture. I'm proud to be part of it.

Warmest regards,

*Jeri McIntyre*

*Retired University Professor*

*Salt Lake City, Utah*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

I am so proud to be part of this publication. I hope there will be many, many more issues to come. This time I bought a print copy from Amazon for each of my kids. The piece you published is so much

about them and my grandson that they will get a huge kick out of it.  
Thank you for having faith in my work.

*Janet Bonet*

*Community Activist*

*Omaha, NE*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

I am a big fan of *FL* and will continue to sing its praises! It is such an honor and a privilege to be a writing teacher and celebrate what truths students have to share with their readers. As a *Fine Lines* Special Online Editor, I will continue to support this wonderful journal by encouraging all of the writers I know — those published and those beginning — to submit their work! You will, over the next several months, receive some of those submissions. Plus, I will submit more of my writings. I believe in *Fine Lines*, especially, the philosophy which is its bedrock! I send you joy and positive wishes for your writing, your mission, and your publication!

Happy writing!

*Nancy Genevieve*

*Retired University English Professor*

*Reading, MA*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

Thank you. What a handsome production. I'm proud to have my work among the ones chosen for this volume. Keep up the good work.

Thank you,

*Anna Roseboro*

*National Board Certified Teacher, Retired University Professor*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

Thank you for taking the time to read, digest, and truly appreciate my writings, as a “begin-i-isher.” It means the world to me and my confidence.”

Fondly,

*Kristen Grace Norman*  
*Martha's Vineyard, MA*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

The editors of *Fine Lines* are so affirming! I'm so pleased that they consider my submissions for this publication. I'm grateful to Steve Gehring for connecting me with your devoted work to the creative processes of writing. It can be such a challenge to express a thought or a feeling in the gut with a word or phrase that says it accurately, genuinely. Doing so, nonetheless, helps us, I think, express the Call in our souls. So, again, thanks for your devotion to all of us involved in these verbal processes of creating.

My best,

*Lee Van Ham*  
*Novelist*  
*San Diego, CA*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

Thanks to everyone who helps make *Fine Lines* a reality. This publication is a positive difference in our world, in our time.

Peace,

*Vince McAndrew*  
*Retired English teacher, counselor, and administrator*  
*Union, NE*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

I just ordered my copy from Amazon.com of the most recent *Fine Lines* issue, after looking at it online. Again, thank you for such a fine publication that allows writers to share their work.

I am happy to be on the Membership Drive Committee. I am planning on sending information to several contacts again. I am sending emails to teachers in my area of the state and informing them of the advantages *Fine Lines* offers to their students. I also substitute in two area schools. I plan on taking copies of *Fine Lines* to share with the English teachers and donate some to the school libraries. I also will donate copies to the Kearney Public Library.

I am now co-director of the Kearney Literacy Council. We have 22 volunteer tutors working with area adults who want help with reading and speaking English. We also give away new and gently used books. We help fill back-to-school backpacks, which is a very big project in Kearney. I know last year over 1,000 backpacks were given to area students, and we had enough books to put in all backpacks for K-3rd grade. We also have a huge book sale/giveaway in February. I call it that because we sell books for a dollar, but we pretty much give them away by day's end. I started as co-director last January, and I want to serve one year before starting new projects; however, I have been thinking of ways to get writing as well as reading into our goals. It would not be difficult to get more writing under the umbrella of literacy. Our grant writer has been very resourceful in getting books for reading; I am going to work with her on getting some ideas for writing as well.

I am also on the Board of Directors for SAFE Center, and that's another world. However, I have wondered if getting our advocates to encourage the victims and their children to write about their experiences would be helpful.

I just want you to know that I am still very interested in helping others learn about *Fine Lines* and that I am expanding my contact base for doing so.

Take care and have a lovely day.

*Dorothy Miller*

*Retired high school English teacher in Kearney, NE*

Dear *Fine Lines*,

We all subscribe to papers and magazines, and what we get is what the media wants us to know. Most of what we get to read are press releases by persons or organizations grinding their own axes. Sometimes, there is investigative reporting, but even that is most often tainted by prejudice. I have been sending “Saturday Musings” that I compose to most of you for a few years. I think you read it because I’ve never had a message requesting that you be taken off the list. I would guess that you must enjoy some of what I compose.

I have got a deal for you. I subscribe to a publication called *Fine Lines*. It is a quarterly publication dedicated to giving young and old writers a chance to see their work published. It covers writers from grade school through adult seniors. They write from their heart about any subject that interests them, and I know that many of the subjects they write about will interest you. They cover the broadest range of materials from poetry to essays to fiction. I have subscribed for over a year and find myself waiting for the next issue to arrive.

I skip around reading articles whose titles appeal to me, but I find I have read every article before the next issue arrives and am panting for more. It is a great bargain. I think all of you are online, so check out their webpage at [www.finelines.org](http://www.finelines.org) and subscribe to one of the best literary investments you will ever make.

Your friendly composer,

*John Thompson*

*Retired District Attorney, Corvallis, MT*

# Learned from a Bird Brain

*BONNIE MANION*

Hearing a random series of clicks  
in my kitchen, I investigate to find  
an energetic brown bird with red  
markings on its wings and tail,  
a female cardinal, moving along  
the outside windowsill, every now-  
and-then attempting to fly into one  
of the closed windows, beak banging.  
Not put off, she tenaciously repeats  
this effort over and over, everyday,  
day after day, all summer long.  
Once, her scarlet mate briefly  
joined her on the ledge, but flew  
away as soon as he saw her fail  
to fly even once through the glass.

I speculate that she, perhaps, sees  
(but does not recognize) her own  
reflection, perceiving it as an  
intruder into her territory. Or  
maybe she sees a space she  
wants to explore, unable to  
understand the glass barrier.

Famously aggressive, heretofore,  
whatever she could see was open  
to her world. Now, her beak  
merely bangs ineptly against  
a wall she can see beyond, but  
cannot penetrate. This anomaly is

beyond the cardinal's understanding.  
Repeated attempts to fly through  
the window are doomed. But,  
she cannot resist trying.



Coming Home *photograph* by Kris Chelf  
[www.featherednest-photography.com](http://www.featherednest-photography.com)

# Where I Stand

*DAVID MARTIN*

No longer a bibliophile  
I leave my cloister  
to rejoice in different lands  
and imagine my dreams becoming real

where no problem is too tough  
no greed  
no pain  
no sadness

my pusillanimous nature left behind  
warmth and happiness abound  
no longer you and me  
only us

the chutzpa and ethos of rugged individualism evaporates  
as sore muscles accomplish worthwhile goals  
believing what I see  
seeing what I believe

with precious sweat  
and long hours  
the pain of now  
becomes tomorrow's bliss

forgiveness and compassion turn into oxygen  
the adult reclaims the child  
the journey becomes the reward  
each day an adventurous smorgasbord

to work at one's passion turns sweat into prayer  
as the universe continues to expand  
into endless dawns and bountiful harvests  
accepting existence in all of its grace

called to each diurnal task  
my voice  
speaks truth  
not offending — not offended

mental pabulum turns into kaleidoscopic colors  
creating beauty  
and simple wisdom  
in my heart's burning chalice

translated it says  
"Come in.  
What is your story?  
How may I help?"

living what I believe every day  
with a sumptuous flood of energy  
in a web of good  
This is where I stand

# Wheel of Summer, Wheel of Light

VINCE McANDREW

The wheel of summer  
turns here in this time and place slowly,  
rhythmically day by day, night by night, sunrise, sunset,  
moon and stars shining against a dark velvet sky before  
fading out at dawn.

The wheel unearths a fecund richness of green from soil,  
sun, and rain, sprung from Generosity of Being, spilling over  
in a slow motion, tumbling, rushing cataract,  
a profusion of lavish, intricate beauty free-falling through light.

A hummingbird, its wings an indistinct blur in the early light,  
comes unexpectedly close, as it  
quickly, agilely flits from one long-stemmed lavender hosta flower  
to another, sipping the gift of nectar.

The wheel of summer turns.

# The 17th Day

MARY McCARTHY

It was the sixteenth day of thunderstorms. I had been sleeping for nearly a week. He told me this later. We had thunderstorms before, but nothing like these. These were peculiar. There was no rain, just lightning and the occasional rumbling in the distance. I learned in science class a few years back that dry lightning is the most dangerous. When I awoke, the curtains in his room were open. The entire sky was illuminated by the violent, white bolts. It was still hours before dawn, but it could have been a sunny afternoon in July.

I said to him, "My hands. They hurt." Ever so carefully, he folded his fingers around mine. *Why is he so cold? Why am I so warm?* My skin was on fire. I imagined myself as nothing but a pile of splintered bones. *Was I going to melt?* I began to worry. I peeled off my t-shirt. It wasn't mine. It must have been his. The fabric was entirely soaked with sweat.

"Better?" the boy asked. I nodded. *Why is he so cold?*

We lay beside each other in the bright room, and he told me stories of a place with beautiful trees. Thousands upon thousands. So impossibly tall they felt holy. The air thick with the smell of living-things, of growing things.

I asked, "Can we go there?"

He shook his head. "When your burns have healed a little more. My uncle has a cabin up there. We can swim in the lake and climb the mountains. I promise I'll take you."

I had forgotten. Burns. That is why I was so warm, why he felt so cool. I began to pick at the peeling, pink skin on my palms. Fragile, like a newborn.

"My brother would like to come along and climb the tall trees." My voice felt funny. "He was here last night. Did you see him?"

The boy just looked at me. *Why does he look so sad?* I wondered if he knew about my dream. I didn't remember telling him, but when the lightning shook me awake, his body had been pressed up against mine. Perhaps, he had listened in. The warmth from a bonfire, *had he felt it?* A girl, alone in the street choking on smoke. *Had he seen her, too?*



*“Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It's the one and only thing you have to offer.”*

BARBARA KINGSOLVER



# The True Story of the Ginger Bread Man

CHARLIE McGOVERN

Hello. I am Alex T. Wolf. You might have heard of me? I am the “Big Bad Wolf” from the *Three Little Pigs*, *the Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, oh, and *The Ginger Bread Man*. Don’t worry. I won’t eat you. I am just here to tell you the true story of the Ginger Bread Man.

It all started on a hot summer day, when I was wearing my fox costume, so the police wouldn’t find me. It was getting so hot I decided to take a dip in the river. It had a whole bunch of sticks and rocks at the bottom. While I was swimming, I kept on hearing, “You can’t catch me, I’m the Gingerbread Man (GBM),” in the distance. I thought it was nothing, so I just kept swimming. I did this until the sound got so loud that I could not stand it. I got out of the water and saw a GBM. Now, ever since that cup of sugar accident, I tend to stay away from that white stuff, but this time, I made an exception.

The GBM looked like he needed to get to the other side of the river, so I asked if that was true.

He said, “Yeah,” and jumped on my snout.

Half way through the river, I slipped on a rock and gasped for air, but I, accidentally, inhaled the GBM. I thought, “Oh, no,” and ran all the way home.

The next day on NBC Forest News, I saw my friend Jack P. Fox arrested for eating the GBM. I had forgotten to take off my fox costume, when I gave him a ride across the river!

# Character Questions

ELOISE JARVIS MCGRAW

Start with character.

Choose the person you want.

When you've chosen him, ask yourself these questions:

1. What does this person want?
2. What prevents him from getting it?
3. What does he do about this obstacle?
4. What are the results of what he does?
5. What showdown does all this lead to?
6. Does he get what he wants, finally, or does he not?
7. Now exactly what have I said?

I guarantee this recipe.

////////////////////////////////////  
*"I live my life in widening circles  
that reach out across the world."*

RAINER MARIA RILKE

////////////////////////////////////

# Writing Marines

JONITHON MILLER

Being able to start from nothing and end with something is what defines hard work and dedication. *Fine Lines* is a publication where writers can show their skills and express their feelings. It was a small newsletter, but it flourished into something greater. The writers of this issue and many others ignored all impossibilities and made their voices heard by many. This example of success in the arts is something others should look to for confidence.

Today's world consists of unmotivated and self-conscious individuals, people who think they cannot make themselves heard. They must ignore negative impulses that prevent them from becoming something better. Having faith in ourselves is what will get us where we need to be in life. Nothing we do can be perfect, and it will always be that way. We must observe our work closely and not take it for granted. Even the most talented people make mistakes. However, there is only one way to become talented and noticed, and that is to never give up.

I have doubted myself many times. Even when it came to things I knew I was good at. I never really observed my work or revised my actions. I just thought it was "good enough." This is a mistake many people are not fortunate enough to catch.

Take *Fine Lines* for an example. It started off unnoticed, but it became recognized. How did this happen? The writers never gave up, and they observed their work closely. They did not expect their work to be golden. They made it that way. Revisions and practice are what made them the "Writing Marines" they are today. Perfection takes dedication, and it takes close and careful observation. In the future, do not overlook anything. Observe your work closely, because you might find a piece of excellence to share with others.

# Training under Masters

*SAM MORRIS*

Honor, courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, courage, community, strength, humility, and knowledge; these are words I recited every time I was in a Tae Kwon Do class for six years. Those words shaped who I am today, and they are now indelible to me. I have seen those words shape the lives of others, and they come from our masters and instructors. Masters of martial arts teach much more than self-defense. They are the wisest of sages and the true Socrates of our time. Without them, the wisdom learned from martial arts could not be passed down from generation to generation. I will always have the greatest respect for all of my teachers; they helped me discover the truth and the secrets of martial arts.

I started martial arts at a very young age, at Kim's Tae Kwon Do School, and trained for four years. My mom signed me up for classes when I was five, and I trained under Master Kim. He was a ninth degree black belt, and at five years old, I did not realize the magnitude of that rank. To be able to train under the highest rank in Tae Kwon Do is nothing less than an immense honor and privilege. I did not understand how important it was to listen and study all I could. Training under Master Kim gave me a stronger foundation in Tae Kwon Do than I could have ever asked for. It would enable me to grasp the complex body movements and rigorous discipline I would need for the next martial arts school I attended.

Master Kim was an excellent instructor, but he was very strict with children. This caused me to lose interest in Tae Kwon Do; however, just before middle school, I wanted to try again. I went to Tiger-Rock Martial Arts, I had multiple instructors at Tiger-Rock, Mr. Maple, Mr. Traut, Mr. Dark, and Mr. and Mrs. Baluch. I spent the most time with

Mr. Maple. I think he knew, better than anyone, the importance of the values we would recite in class. He took the time to make a story an opportunity to learn. He would make the wisdom he shared easy to understand and apply. I was always humble and joyful in his presence, not only because he was 6' 2" and 230 pounds but because he had a persona about him that would make anyone feel welcome and comfortable. Unfortunately, Mr. Maple left. He is currently in South Korea teaching English and learning Tae Kwon Do from its birthplace.

After I heard why Mr. Maple left, this was one of the biggest bitter-sweet moments I ever had. I was happy for him but sad he was leaving. I remember only being able to say, "Wow." In his place came Mr. Traut, who helped me get really good at the physical side of martial arts. He would help me with my form and help me set goals, to become an excellent martial artist. For approximately three years at the Fort Street Academy, most nights it would just be Mr. Traut and me, which allowed for unparalleled growth and instruction. That time with an instructor, who focuses on one side of martial arts, will produce incredible abilities. I owe my physical state of martial arts to him. Without him, I would not be able to produce a round kick that can go well above my head or flying side kick a target ten feet away. Mr. Traut eventually left Tiger-Rock, which caused the Academy I attended to close down, as they could not find a replacement.

This caused me to leave Tiger-Rock after 6 ½ years. I searched for other schools, read reviews online, weighed my options, and then made my choice. I am currently attending Midwest Tae Kwon Do and learning from Master Todd. He is, by far, one of the most tenacious, respectful, and disciplined men I have ever met. When he walks onto the floor, he does not need to say anything; I can feel the respect he commands among his students. In the seven months I have attended, I have grown more than I could have predicted. I started to learn Shotokan and Judo, along with what I already know: Tae Kwon Do, Krav Maga, Jiu Jitsu, Shaolin Kung-Fu, and Aikido.

At Midwest Tae Kwon Do, we follow some of the same principles as Tiger-Rock, along with a student creed we recite before every class. It is good to see other schools teach discipline and life values, so the students become more than just martial artists. They become respectable men and women. The values in martial arts have been handed down from generation to generation, along with the art itself. I am eternally grateful for those who have mastered their arts and discipline, so I can discover what they have left behind. If wisdom and knowledge was not handed down from those before me, I would not be the person I am today. I can take what they left behind and build on their wisdom with some of my own to pass onto future generations. The cycle will continue from one generation to the next.

My most recent and indirect teacher is one of the most legendary and revered martial artists of all time, Morihei Ueshiba. He founded Aikido, *The Art of Peace*. He taught that the real way of the warrior is based on compassion, wisdom, fearlessness, and love of nature. He left behind some of the greatest wisdom I have ever found in books like *The Art of Peace* and *Takemusu Aiki*. His writing delves deeply into the human heart, aspects of the warrior, and the true meaning of Samurai, “those who serve.” I needed the wisdom he left behind. When your techniques have the power to kill, being taught to love your enemy is immensely important.

Aikido takes the motions of your enemy, and uses it against them. The attacker’s energy is redirected and drawn close to the defender. While being able to balance a glass of water on the defender’s head, the attacker is redirected onto the ground. It is truly amazing to watch an Aikido demonstration. I would recommend this to everyone; they are fascinating. I would not recommend this martial art for beginners. The motions are very complex, and Aikido would not work against someone who is deranged. However, Aikido will work against those who are just angry, making them realize the folly of their actions by countering their fire with water. I really want to grow in Aikido; I want to know the physical side and the philosophical side. That way I can be prepared to act upon the values I have chosen to follow.

There are no discernible features that separate a martial artist from other people. Physically, it is almost impossible to tell, unless their forearms are absolutely ripped. Mentally is where the differences are clear: martial artists have great patience and focus. They are not often swayed from what they believe. They have no desire to pick fights but have no hesitation to end them. The traits that martial artists possess can be traced back to their disciplined training. Every martial artist will always have a deep sense of honor and a shared creed between those they train. That is what I love about martial arts: the silent, lucid brotherhood between warriors.

Martial arts can change just about anyone. In my six years at Tiger-Rock, I watched a young lady transform from reckless and callous to disciplined and humble, and she could surprise most people in a sparring match. It was truly incredible to watch. That is the purpose of training in anything, to tighten up the slack. I have trained with ex-convicts, professors, the mentally challenged, and all walks of life between. Anyone can become a martial artist and empower themselves to aspire to become someone they would be proud to know.

In my twelve years of martial arts, I have learned so much, and yet only scratched the surface of what is possible. Martial arts is the only activity I know where the mind, body, and spirit are trained in unison. In that training, I can discover new truths of what is possible and how I can grow beyond who I am now. That is why it is so important to me; it shapes my future and enables me to become who I aspire to be. The growth and the truth I have attained can be traced back to those before me, to the masters who have selflessly taught me what they learned from their masters. I owe who I am now to them; I can never repay them for their time or dedication. They have my eternal gratitude. They will never be forgotten, and they will live forever in my heart.

# The Two I Love

LISA MORRIS-SNELL

He told the truth. He loves me.  
I told the truth, as well.  
He'll never see the dawning  
that rings our wedding bell  
for I have loved another  
so deep I grew quite strong  
and looked into past pleasures  
and saw that they were wrong.

For what is love of evenings,  
if not the love of years?  
And what is love of kisses,  
if followed up by tears?  
So, I have left one weeping  
to wed an honest man,  
whose heart well holds my wishes  
within its golden span.

////////////////////////////////////  
*"It is life itself that must be our practice."*

DIANE MARIECHILD

////////////////////////////////////

# Feminism: Today's Issues

*ALLY MORTENSEN*

I am a feminist, and I am proud of it. Upon hearing the words “feminist” or “feminism,” too many people have a negative reaction towards them, unfortunately, because they are uneducated on what the true meaning of the words are. Many believe that feminists are just male hating anarchists, when in reality that is not the case at all. Feminism is described as the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men. So a feminist is obviously a supporter of such simple, yet barely achievable, policies. Organized feminism did not really kick off until the first Women’s Conference, held in Seneca Falls in 1848. Three hundred women and men signed the Declaration of Sentiments, a plea for the end of discrimination of women in all spheres of society. In 1869, the first woman’s suffrage law was passed in the territory of Wyoming. By the 1900s, every state granted married women some control over their property and earnings. Only in 1920 was the Nineteenth Amendment ratified, allowing women to vote in any and all elections. Women possess the rights that we do today because of the courage of our foremothers. Today’s society, unfortunately, is not perfect on that front. While fighting for property rights and women’s suffrage were the issues in that era, today, females have just as daunting matters to fight.

The portrayal of women and men in television and movies demonstrates that society still has not reached an equilibrium. In today’s television, male-dominate plot lines continue to thrive. Based off the top 500 movies from 2007-2012, the average ratio of male actors to female actors is, two and a quarter male to one female. Only 30.8% of speaking characters are women, and a third of those women are shown in revealing attire and/or partially naked. Compared to the 7% of

men, 28.8% of women wore sexually revealing clothes. A common role women play is the dull minded, yet beautiful character, showing that beauty outshines brains when focused on women. Now, if there was a strong willed, natural looking (meaning no cosmetics), independent woman shown, she would read as “butch,” since one must be masculine, if not the stereotypical female. Women are, more often than not, portrayed as emotionally sensitive, with childlike actions. “Adults in power expect children to obey, and a child is more susceptible to social conditioning. Therefore, a childlike image contributes to the ideal of a moldable woman,” writes a student at South Dakota State University. The idea that women are incapable of handling themselves, or must always be saved and protected by a man, is still a popular plot-line. A good example of such plots can easily be seen in the *James Bond* series, when a “Bond girl” with not a thought in her head needs to be saved by a clever, sturdy, manly man. Some may make the argument that in more recent films such as *Ghostbusters* and *Star Wars*, the leads are female and fierce ones at that. This may be true, but people don’t account for the amount of backlash such leads triggered. They think that just because we have one respectable representation for women out there that we should be happy. One in the sea of thousands, seems reasonable enough, don’t you think? To put it simply, it is easy to see the representation of females in television and media is not where it should be.

Moving from the entertainment industry, let’s take a look at women in the workplace. Discrimination starts even before they have their foot in the door. A study shows that a qualified male is rated higher than an equally qualified female. Her resume may look the same as his, but because she is female, recruiters won’t take a second look. Let’s say she did get the job, there is still the issue of the wage gap, which is expressed as a percentage; women earned 78.3% as much as men, and this is calculated by dividing the median annual earnings for women by the median annual earnings for men. A woman only makes eighty cents, compared to a man’s dollar, when they do equal work. Women

have made tremendous strides during the last few decades, by moving into jobs and occupations previously done by men. Yet, little progression has been made on gender integration in the workplace. Having such segregation contributes to the lack of progress in closing the pay gap. Setting that issue aside, there is also the problem of women being able to move up in the workplace. Men are more likely to receive a promotion than women, who are judged on the work they have actually done, while a man's "potential" is enough to win him the promotion. Women rarely get the credit they deserve, because it is often given to a male teammate, since they are the assumed leaders. Don't get me wrong, there are successful women in the work industry. A problem that comes along with being successful is they will be seen as unlikeable. Just like in television and movies, unfeminine and aggressive women are more likely to be found intolerable.

One of the biggest issues females face today is violence against women (VAW). Such actions were and still are so prominent that an Act was set in place in 1994 to protect women. It is a sad reality that not only this country but other countries have to face. There are many subcategories under the umbrella topic of VAW. Acid throwing, domestic abuse, forced prostitution, forced marriage, sexual assault, and rape are only a few examples of what women have endured. Many actions go unreported due to societal norms, taboos, stigmas, and just the sensitive nature of the subject. Although the history of violence against women is difficult to track, it is clear that much of the violence was accepted and even legally sanctioned. Examples include a Roman law that gave men the right to chastise their wives, even to the point of death. The burning of witches, which was condoned by both the church and the state, is another. An 18th-century English common law allowed a man to punish his wife using a stick "no wider than his thumb." The history of violence against women is closely related to the historical view of women as property and a gender role of subservience. Although there has been positive progression with VAW, it is still prominent today. Femicide is a sex-based hate crime

defined by the killing of women. On average, two women a day are killed in Guatemala. In India, 8,093 cases of dowry-related death were reported in 2007. An unknown number of murders of women and young girls were falsely labeled “suicides” or “accidents.” In Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa, and the United States, between 40 and 70 percent of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partners. Human trafficking is the illegal movement of people, typically for the purposes of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Women and girls are 80% of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked across national borders annually, with the majority, 79% trafficked for sexual exploitation. Within countries, many more women and girls are trafficked, often for purposes of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Sexual harassment is harassment (typically of a woman) in a workplace or other professional or social situations, involving the making of unwanted sexual advances or obscene remarks. In the United States, 83% of girls, ranging in age from twelve to sixteen, have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools. Between 40% and 50% of women in Europe experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work. Need I go on? The amount of violence towards women, based solely on the fact that they are women, is revolting.

Even by researching and writing about these topics, it brings me to tears. Just by thinking of it, not even the act of experiencing it, makes me weep for my fellow sisters. I haven't even brushed the surface on how many gender biased issues females face in today's society. All women have their own heartbreaking stories of sexual discrimination. They are inescapable, and that's not okay. Be it from unrealistic stereotypes of women to unfair working conditions to more serious matters of VAW, women persevere through these hardships, and achieve exactly what men can. We do it in heels, no less. It isn't right that women have to work that much harder to overcome such discriminations to reach our goals. Misogynists and bigots alike can try their best, but we will not be broken any longer. Women are intelligent,

independent, talented, proficient, powerful, valid, and so much more. We must keep fighting like our foremothers did, to break down and dissolve the issues stacked against us. We have tasted the flavor of equality, and we want our helping of it now.



*“One thing that helps is to give myself permission to write badly. I tell myself that I’m going to do my five or 10 pages no matter what, and that I can always tear them up the following morning if I want. I’ll have lost nothing—writing and tearing up five pages would leave me no further behind than if I took the day off.”*

LAWRENCE BLOCK



# Sacred Dance

*BARB MOTES*

At the beginning of each new day, the early fog rises and burns away. The eagle screams above, as the gray wolf returns from its hunt. The earth is moved aside by the new growth of plants, and kindred spirits traverse to the other side of life. Some will be reunited with their soulmates, while others wait for their “dance partner” to make the passage. Now, the reunited couples will resume the sacred dance forever.

Many individuals start this quest, but only a few dance for life, as they are soulmates.

The dance steps are unknown to couples in the beginning, but as trust and love grows, so does their subconscious understanding of this ancient quest. This dance starts slowly, and each step leads into the next: touch of a hand, a hug, a quiet laugh, a smile, and a soft kiss. As the rhythm of love beats, the dancers are driven by a force greater than themselves. It is as if an omnipotent breeze is moving their hearts and souls across the dance floor of life. During the dance, each must share the secrets of their hearts and souls and absorb those of the other. The love, as well as, the pain, must be explored and felt, if this sacred dance of the souls is to be preserved. This ancient ritual is as old as all living things and has been followed by the true soulmates since the beginning of time.

At twilight, on the other side of life, this sacred dance continues. The gentle sound of the flutes and drums cut the silence of the dusk. The drummers and flute players await their partners, while the reunited couples are the dancers. Their movements are defined by both grace and magic as the dancers float from the ground into the early night sky.

On a clear night, stargazers might witness this sacred ancient ritual, as the couples become the dancing waves of the Northern lights. Only the caliber of their passion and love can create nature's brilliant colors, painted across the night skies.



Dust at Mahoney State Park *photograph by Barb Motes*

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# Perfection: A Wooden Quest

JON NGUYEN

Humans, since their inception, possess an attraction to the flawless. It is a hardwired compulsion that draws us to seek out the pristine, beautiful, and peaceful. This behavior has come so far that we have created specific words, such as “model” and “utopia” to describe a desired standard that may not be achievable. My pursuit of perfection has become so important that it has become an integral part of my life. I still wonder about the necessities of perfection and imperfection.

I would describe myself as a perfectionist. This side of me is shown through my hobby of carpentry. I am working on some shelves, with sanding taking up a good amount of my time during the week. When any of my relatives come and see my work, they are genuinely surprised at the slow pace at which I work. My father, most of all, finds it hilarious that I can stretch a two hour job into one that will span two weeks. This, however, shows the disparity in our beliefs.

There is a small flight of stairs in my house that leads to the second floor, and my father built it when I was five years old. I remember that he completed the project within a day of buying all the materials. When I walk up them with bare feet, I feel a slight roughness accompanied by a slight sticky feeling. This was the result of my father not sanding the wood and neglecting to varnish it properly. He calls the finish on the stairs a “grip” for the feet, while I call it poor craftsmanship.

With my shelves, I am determined to make everything perfectly. I have spent the last week progressing from 60 grit to 400 grit sandpaper and preparing the wood for the varnishing process. Most carpenters stop at 220, but I could not bring myself to leave the slightly rough surface alone. Even with these strenuous efforts, I know that

from past experiences the varnish may be ruined by the presence of knots. While visually appealing, they can leach resin overtime that will stain the finished product. With this in mind, it would seem foolish for me to try to achieve perfection. I know that perfection is impossible, but I strive to get near it. I see my life as one wrought with flaws, with family issues, and difficult personal accomplishments to name a few. Carpentry is way for me to escape that reality. I can shape the outcome and feel in control. That is my idea of near perfection.

I want perfection in the lives of others, especially my mother. She was born in a farming village in South Vietnam. She had a large plot of land full of crops and animals and room to play with her four siblings. The threat of violence from the Vietnam War forced her family to move to a strange land called Omaha, Nebraska. The city did not have places to grow crops, and my mother's parents figured out that they had to get their five children an education. They took a meager job at the Campbell soup company, which was enough to put food on the table, but it was not enough to secure a college education for any of their children. As a result, my mother, for a good portion of her young life, took to waiting tables to sustain herself. She lived a "no frills" lifestyle that did not let her enjoy the one thing she loved, music.

When I came of age, my mother wanted me to play the piano, as my sisters had done. She wanted her children to have the opportunities she lost. I hated the piano with every ounce of my heart. It was a strain to try to separate my hands from their synchronization to play any piece given to me. I could have walked home or not entered the instructor's house after my mother dropped me off, but I did not. I knew that my mother lost a great deal of happiness in her life, and I did not want her to lose anything else.

If it is impossible to achieve, what purpose does perfection serve? As I have mentioned before, perfection and other synonyms have come to serve as a standard for improvement in the modern world. Only a few select countries are able to relish in the near utopian standards of health, economy, and living, while the rest are confined

to wallow in poverty, war, and corruption. It can be generally accepted that the liberation of the oppressed unleashes some of the best sparks of mankind. These sparks, whether they be colored, women, or gay, have contributed to a better world, and it is more knowledgeable, diverse, accepting, and habitable for all. An acceptance of stagnation would only serve to deny the people of their basic human rights.

At the same time, there may be a need for the imperfect. Whether it be a product of nature or man, everything has a flaw. Big or small, they add a dissonance to life that breaks up the monotonous symmetry to which we have become accustomed. In essence, they are a spice that adds flavor to a soup, which encourages their consumer to eat to find these joyful oddities. There is a beauty in the ugly which adds a diversity to the world. Such diversity is what makes the Earth appealing to the senses.

If the world was perfect, it would not be worth living. Yes, tragedies such as war and poverty would be eliminated, but those things are a terminal illness that humans are destined to keep. A world free of blemishes would be a life with a straight path. Life is supposed to have those anxiety inducing twists and turns, which shape the character of developing minds. Without that, the world would be filled with more people who are willfully ignorant and narcissistic, because their world would be tailored to suit their immoral behavior.

By the time I complete this paper, I should be varnishing my shelves. I will continue to work slowly to ensure a good finish, but not a perfect finish. It is inevitable that I may botch up a section, or resin may stain the surface. These blemishes will give the wood character. They will give me a reminder that perfection is an ideal, but one that should not be relentlessly pursued. The results are not what matters. The experience one gains by toiling through life's struggles will be.

# The Field

*KRISTEN NORMAN*

The field's tilled over now  
To a soft rich brown Earth  
Delicious and warm  
Sun not stretched up  
Quite yet

Still cries out for me to roll across  
To toss fistfuls to blue air  
Landing heavier than crisped leaves  
Autumn's lasting  
Tasted darkness

A few Guinea hens  
Scattered Dullards in feathered sweaters  
Pecking  
Pecking  
Looking about aimless  
Peck some more  
Dining hypostatized on worms and bugs  
Bugging and worming I suppose

Do they munch or just swallow?  
Really not sure they even know  
Even keeled their temperaments  
Assured their brains can't be very crowded  
In those teeny heads of theirs.

# How to Escape

*HENRY NUNN*

Beneath a dated yoke of wood, I sway.  
The weight of water, quick to make itself  
at home on aching shoulders, dances-to-  
and-fro as buckets hung with bailing twine.

They work me harder here — so much to change  
my mind. To try, to think, to feel — to be  
a horse of certain temper for a herd without  
an alpha, willing onward 'til the day  
we can escape this cave's wet steel and cold cement.

One thousand pounds of animal,  
as sure as pastures greener — and growing tall.  
But growing tall upon a farm and kept  
without control. I wish they were the gods  
of grassy knolls that bloom upon white bones.

But guilt is no just cause, and I must stand,  
until these buckets brim before I can  
deliver. These animals need water,  
and sunrise comes with raindrops on the roof.

# A Piece of the Sky

MARIE OHLINGER

A jewel of blue,  
Carried close to her heart,  
Each and every day of her life.  
People passing her ask where the gem was found, and  
A story lies deep in her eyes.

The simple answer  
Is that it came from the earth  
A miner, a boy by the river, perhaps  
Found the piece of sky  
Marveled at it, then sold it with regret in his heart  
To a man and his newly wed wife.

The man fashioned a chain  
For the jewel of blue  
His wife had stars in her eyes  
And wore the chain close to her heart everyday  
Through times of plenty and strife.

One day the wife caught ill and lay  
In a bed, a small girl by her side  
For the first time in years  
The gem left her chest  
And found a new home to reside

And now that small girl

Is not quite as small  
Though the gem is still blue as her eyes,  
One day, perhaps, another small girl  
Will receive the gem, blue and wise.

# Front Porch Fugitives

*TANNER PARKER*

John and Nancy Wright were the best old couple the town of Stilwell, Kansas, had ever known. John was a hardworking man and one of the best neighbors anyone could ask for. Nancy was a committed housewife, with a loyalty to her husband that was something to be admired. Normal, most would say were the Wrights, but something very special was hidden in the shadows of this couple's life. John and Nancy had a secret some would call a blessing, but to others, it was a curse.

John was an ex-federal agent with the Witness Protection Program in a very corrupt time in America during the prohibition era. John's early retirement came with much controversy from the Bureau, but the toll it was taking on his family made his decision clear. It was time for John to move his family to a small town in Kansas and settle down. The Wrights lived a quiet life for the next 30 years and raised their two children. Inside John's head and in his heart, it was all quiet. John never lost his love to make people disappear.

It was a beautiful, crisp, spring morning in Stilwell in the late '60s. John would read the newspaper every morning on the front porch. Nancy prepared breakfast and a nice hot cup of jet black coffee, extra strong, just how John was accustomed to drinking it at the office, due to many sleepless nights. Making people disappear was no easy task. Nancy joined John and began going on about her usual gossip of the town. Mary Farnsworth, on the East side of town was in a violent marriage, and her husband treated her with a heavy hand. She also mentioned George Fletcher, who lived at the end of the block. He was in so much debt that he was losing his house, and he wished he could start over. What he would give just to go back and start over with a

clean slate. It was not long before John began to see a similarity in the heart of Nancy's gossip. Everyone had something in common. They all just wanted to disappear from the life they found themselves trapped in and begin again.

For the next few nights, John could not sleep. He rolled around in his bed so much that Nancy could not take it anymore.

"Okay, John, give it up. What are you wrestling with in that head of yours," Nancy asked.

John had no choice but to lay it all out for Nancy to process, because after 46 years of marriage, there is one thing a man just cannot do, and that is hide things from his wife, even his thoughts. John had an idea so crazy, he thought his wife might send him to the funny farm, if he did not lay it out just right.

"You know all the people you talk about every morning, our friends, especially the ones who just need a fresh start? Well, I have been thinking. Why can they not have just that?"

Nancy had a look on her face, as if she was either in deep thought or on the verge of getting a kernel of popcorn dislodged from its home between her molars. After leaving John in what seemed like a lifetime of anticipation, Nancy spoke two simple words, two words that would change a town forever.

"Why not."

Nancy ignited something inside John's soul like a forest fire. She knew what John was thinking and was already on board. After all, it is what John was born to do, and this time, it would not be for people hiding from ruthless mobsters. It would be for good people, who made a few bad choices and needed a second chance to live life.

Within a few short days, John re-connected with all his old contacts and a few new ones he knew he could trust. He had everything: passports, IDs, plane tickets, deeds, and everything it took to get someone a fresh start.

Nancy was not wasting any time getting the first candidates ready. Mary Farnsworth was the most logical person to be removed from

the abuse she faced on a daily basis. Within a few short days, they had successfully done it. Mary had a new life, one free and clear. Of course, the local precinct had its hands full with the missing person's report, but as far as John and Nancy were concerned, it was worth the effort to give someone a fighting chance at happiness.

Within a year, John and Nancy moved 31 people to better lives that were free and fulfilling. The whole town began to notice John and Nancy had a new, vibrant youth gleaming from their smiles. Freeing people from their traps brought John and Nancy closer than they had ever been. It was not long before the rollercoaster reached the top of its ascent, and there was only one place for it to go from there. John and Nancy focused so much on the good they were doing for the few that they completely lost sight of the fact that 72 missing persons in fewer than three years, in a town of 20,000 people, raises national attention. The quiet life John and Nancy had been living for so many years was about to get loud.

Early one morning, John was awakened to a loud knock on the front door. "Police Department" followed the knock. Like a flash bang, the words exploded a few feet from John's ears. His heart sank, but he managed to gather himself enough to invite the cops in. They didn't have time for coffee, and there were quite a few houses on their list to question, in an attempt to gain evidence on the missing person's epidemic that was plaguing the town. John knew what they were doing wasn't within the guidelines of the law, but his heart knew something had to be done to give people better lives. One thing John never got to see all those years working for the government was the people who got left behind after the people disappeared. Giving people new lives meant taking them out of countless other lives. Many loved ones would never get to see them again.

The choices that John and Nancy Wright made were meant for good. They quickly learned that taking people away from their problems only creates more problems. John had never seen the effect on the families and friends of the people he made disappear. It wasn't

long before he regretted what he had done. John and Nancy landed themselves in jail due to their failure to see the bigger picture. Making good choices, now, and taking responsibility for the bad ones, leads to a better future and a clear conscience and keeps good people like them out of jail. If they would have stepped back and taken a look at the bigger picture, once, on the front porch, they might have gained a new perspective. John and Nancy had hearts of gold and every good intention to do what they thought was right. It was the failure to see the impact of what they were doing that made them the most famous and unsuspecting criminals Stilwell, Kansas, ever saw. This amazing couple with a heart for giving others new lives had unknowingly lost theirs that morning on the front porch.



*“The first sentence can’t be written  
until the final sentence is written.”*

JOYCE CAROL OATES



# Lessons Learned in Speech Pathology

REBECCA PATTERSON

My dragon never roared. This dragon was a quiet fellow, who stuttered, slurred, and choked the life out of my words for years. It didn't show up with fanfare; there was no drama, and many thought it to be trivial. To me, however, my speech articulation disorder was an unending battle. In the end, perseverance won out, but not before taking me on a nine-year-long journey. This trip taught me that dragons hide gold, and we often walk away richer for having met one.

Speech-sound disorders are not uncommon, but they differ vastly from individual to individual. They have a multitude of causes ranging from brain damage to delays in muscle development. Other disorders, like mine, have no known cause. Articulation disorders deal specifically with the sounds that make up words. This becomes a disorder, when it encompasses a list of sounds long enough to impair speech. Many speech disorders are minor enough to grow out of, but others can be severe enough to warrant intervention from a speech pathologist. Severe articulation disorders often lead to the development of other classes of speech-sound disorders, such as stuttering. Each case is individual and unique, often making them difficult to treat.

My lack of communication caused me to become lonely and solitary. While speech disorders can be hereditary, I was the only one in my family to acquire one. For a long time, they were the only four people on the planet who could understand anything I said. I learned to rely on them to interpret for me, and that reliance made me especially close to them. At the same time, not even my family could understand me, sometimes, and only having four individuals to speak

with is isolating. It is frustrating not to be able to communicate, and I started to feel trapped.

Speech therapy is a long and painfully slow process. I met with a therapist three times a week for nine years. I had my mouth poked at with tongue depressors. I repeated the same sounds over and over, and I dutifully exercised my facial muscles. In the beginning, it seemed to do nothing. Years of work seemed to go nowhere. I was in group therapy, sometimes, and I watched dozens of other kids come and go. My list of “problem sounds” encompassed most of the alphabet in some form. The repetitive attempts at trying to get words out made me start stuttering. Things seemed to go downhill. That changed one night, when I successfully said “lobster” for the first time. It was an accident, but that one word had three sounds I struggled with and represented a major victory. It does not seem like much now, but it meant the world to me then. The dragon got a little bit smaller that day.

Most people do not remember learning to say their own name. I do. Until third grade, I loathed telling people my name. I could not get “Rebecca Patterson” out properly to save my life. I went by nicknames most of my childhood and avoided introducing myself. It is a little demoralizing, not being able to say one’s own name. I finally did it one hot day in July, while waiting for my mom to pick me up after therapy. We had been practicing my name that day, and it hadn’t gone well. It was just me, the sidewalk, and an ant. I was bored, and I like insects, so I introduced myself to the ant. Much to my shock, and the ant’s indifference, my name came out perfectly. There were no “r-r-r-r’s” or slurred sounds. It was glorious. I chanted my name continuously for days. I only got it correct about a fourth of the time, but it didn’t matter to me. I felt like I could slay a million dragons.

When I was fourteen, I was officially freed from speech therapy. In nine years, I made massive progress. Once the underlying articulation issues were smoothed out, my repetitive stuttering began to disappear. I no longer slurred words or mispronounced sounds. I felt that I had killed my dragon. My disorder was only noticeable when I was tired

or nervous, giving me the chance to move on with my life. I struggled with public speaking and school presentations, but I found ways to avoid them. The dragon temporarily lost consciousness and would show up again, so I would have to kill the beast one more time.

Towards the end of my senior year, I received the chance to slay my dragon. I knew months ahead of time that it was going to happen. I went to a tiny school, and it did NOT take much number crunching and detective work to figure out I was going to have to give a speech at my high school graduation. Despite my last-minute efforts to sabotage my grades, I was the valedictorian. My classmates were amused and started placing bets on how long I would last on stage. I cursed myself for not thinking far enough ahead to see this coming. I was going to have to give a speech in front of several hundred people.

The realization sent me into a frenzied panic. I concluded that I could not be held responsible for giving a speech if the administration never had the chance to tell me about it, so I went into hiding. I slunk around the school, hiding under desks, eating in stairwells, using unusual exits. In hindsight, this plan was always doomed to fail, but I was not thinking rationally. They caught me midway through March. I tried to weasel out of it, but the administration and my parents both felt that it was a great idea. Needless to say, I disagreed. I negotiated the time down to three minutes forty-five seconds and accepted my fate. Thus, began two torturous months of speech giving, reciting, and misery.

My speech was far from perfect. I have never been able to speak continuously for more than three minutes without relapsing into a garbled mess. My mouth goes numb, and I forget which tongue positions to use. When I am nervous, the garbled mess does not even have the manners to wait three minutes before showing up. No matter how many times I practiced, the last forty-five seconds of the speech sounded as though it was in another language. The day of graduation, I consoled myself with the fact that the first three minutes were mostly understandable.

Graduation day came, and I had to face my dragon once and for all. There seemed to be thousands of people there that day. There were only a few hundred. I sat panicking through the salutatorian's ten-minute-long speech. At some point in that ten minutes, I turned my brain off. I stopped caring if anyone could understand me. This speech was the culmination of years of blood, sweat, and tears. What the audience understood of it didn't matter to me. What mattered was that I got up there and did it, and I refused to let the dragon stop me. Listening to the recording, it is nearly impossible to tell that I have ever had any problems speaking. The dragon was dead.

Dragons often impart lessons, leaving their combatants richer for having faced them. The journey from kindergarten to my graduation speech was a long and frustrating road. At times, I seemed to be stuck, making no progress. However, very little is earned without hard work. Learning to persevere has been just as valuable to me as learning to speak. By overcoming my dragon, I learned that good can come from facing obstacles. The challenges of my future are opportunities to learn and grow.

# Memory Lane

*REBEKAH PLUMMER*

You're standing on a lonely stone bridge,  
Gazing out at the fog covered ridge.

That ridge is your future; both far and near,  
Hopes and fears filled with laughter and tears.

Below you the river of life happily bubbling,  
Hiding the obstacles with which you are struggling.

It flows on and on soon fading from sight,  
No one can stop it, try hard as they might.

It finds a way through and keeps pressing on,  
Twisting and turning whilst singing its song.

My friend you have traveled long and far,  
Not always knowing where exactly you are.

The road you now travel is yours alone,  
Others will cross it, but never for long.

From back whence you came, you clearly can see,  
Everything you have done, each a warm memory

Thy very beginning is now rather misty,  
But see it you can, though the path is quite twisty.

Some memories are bright, just as if they were new,  
While others have faded, though hopefully few.

Every so often, even if it is in pain,  
Remember me from your own memory lane.

# How to Cope

*CATHY PORTER*

What to make of this new darkness —  
This new normal that has dropped in uninvited,  
Crashing the party with determined resolve?  
There is no plan for this

Now comes the part nobody wants to hear:  
This is not a gift — this is not a life lesson,  
Or a great time to re-evaluate “where I’m at.”  
This is a kick to the soul and to pretend  
Otherwise is a lie

You can get onboard or take a pass.  
We can’t all be in the same boat  
In such shallow water

I have prayed as hard as I can  
This new darkness is no friend of mine,  
And I won’t pretend  
To make you more comfortable

# The Origin of *Wind on the Water*

JOHN ROBINSON

*April 30, 2005*

I went to Nibert Pond today and fished a few hours. I saw two or three things I wanted to write about, though I didn't take pen and paper so I kept them in mind until now. One of the first things I noticed was depth or the magnitude of the landscape because the open pasture geography is very different from the experience of surrounding forested lands. Descending the hill to the right of Big Hollow, down the farm access road through open pasture and approaching the pond, this last hill looms in front of you in all that openness with only two trees at the top; one a Cedar, further back, and the other, a three-trunk growth of Osage Orange. The whole landscape resembles a scene from a painting by Grant Wood.

The images: grass is about a foot tall, though approaching the last hill, the wind caught the tops of all the grass and whirled through the whole thing like a wave of the ocean. This spectacle is something to witness and even more interesting and intricate when the grass is higher. To visualize the whole scene in context, imagine a weaving tree line that suddenly gives way to open, rolling slopes of Kanawha River Valley pasture cleared of most trees. As you walk through the pasture, the vastness of all this openness is the most predominant effect. This is very immediate and overwhelming. As you move toward the pond, you move with a projecting tree line down a slope and then back up at almost a seventy-five to eighty-degree angle. At the top, you see the tree line suddenly give way to nothing but the sheer openness of the pasture grass at one of the highest points on the property. Walking

down this slope into the part of the farm that contains two cattle ponds provides an unusual effect. Everything described above then comes into view; the sea of grass, distant hill and the trees. Nibert Pond is at the base of this hill.

At the pond, there is a similar effect, though the ground has partly dried from previous rains. The water was not muddy, though a little murky. The fish wouldn't bite, and the wind was very strong. At times, the surface resembled flowing water, a movement counter and cross-ways. There were scattered, scalloped effects where the force was strongest and reflected obscure patterns of clouds. The water resembled melted silver, dulled mercury, or a distorted pattern like the gray tone in a photo-negative. In "A Note on the Local" (1961), Robert Creeley writes that the "local is not a place but a place in a given man — what part of it he has been compelled or else brought by love to give witness to in his own mind" (Hall 74). This is the sense of the local, of place, which I have written of in my work. Richard Hugo says in "Statements of Faith" that in our modern times one "problem for modern poets is the wholesale changes in what we see — the tearing down of buildings, the development of new housing, the accelerated rate of loss of all things that can serve as visual checkpoints and sources of stability... the accumulated losses of knowns, the imagination is faced with the problem of preserving the world through internalization, then keeping that world rigidly fixed long enough to create the unknown in the poem... Today, memory must become thought's ally. Though the process becomes more complicated and challenging" (*The Triggering Town* 73).

This sensibility is inexhaustible. The idea of the prompting material cannot be limited to nature, those seemingly stereotypical subjects most commonly found in the literature of nostalgia. The poem begins anywhere; inside consciousness or out there in the physical reality of objects

The deepest end of the pond lies in the East and the shallowest at the West-South-West. This entire body of water is, perhaps,

twenty-five to thirty yards wide and at least forty yards long. On one side, there is a pasture access road pocked in the wetter areas with hoof impressions of cattle. On the opposite bank, there towers a steep embankment rung with trees and a path to fish the entire circumference. At the mid-point, there is a small sandbar where people often choose to navigate lines in one direction or another. The Easterly end holds a metal tile protruding from the water several feet from the dammed end. The grass at the shallow end, a stand of bull-rushes, which were not very tall in April, though when the sun had shown through them in the break of clouds, the wind parted and shook them so that their double green colors were exposed, deep and rich, almost ineffable. This pleasing aesthetic was caused as the sun shined through the lighter green of the leaves in a way that brightened their color. The effect was just as that of looking through stained glass. This single experience and further descriptions of that day later became the poem "Wind on the Water" in an unpublished collection of poems titled *June's Fisher of Solitudes*. "Wind on the Water" appeared concurrently in Canada through *Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy* and in the United States in *Green Hills Literary Lantern* of Truman State University, 2017.

I didn't intend to write anything, though I had kept the experience of the walk to myself, in my mind as one of those private thoughts we keep to ourselves. Because of its mundane origin, not because anything else would ever happen; just because of the sheer joy in the walk, the enjoyment of fishing. Still, it turned out to be a bad day for catching anything, except the experiences which eventually became the poem. Beneath this, is the power of place, though only to the extent of what it is in and of itself beyond the associations of other people. This idea may be difficult for some to understand, though I will attempt a brief explanation.

My intention in writing was to capture an aspect of nature beyond those things I saw so many times as only what they were while fishing. My intention was only to remove the environment of the poem a little further from other, common associations, to illustrate something

some readers may not be aware of in life or the descriptions in the poem. This area was to me a kind of borderland. Once across the property line, the open and rolling pasture began as the grazing acreage for the Nibert Dairy Farm. This undulating landscape with its vast openness and varied features; taller grass with wildflowers and clover blooms, cattle, deadwood from older trees that fell during storms, now sun-bleached, scorched in the teeming summer heat of all those years. In the most remote corner of the property stood enormous oak trees and younger locust on the point where the pasture began. The sky there looked endless with clouds in fleets of tufted white. More than these visual things, every time I walked the land, I would feel some small part of its sacredness. Perhaps, my own associations have created this aspect, though I also think that even this is what Creeley meant. The work *should* concern *your* inner self in that regard. One good memory from childhood is when my father brought the family here one Sunday afternoon. This is where the title *June's Fisher of Solitudes* originates, though not from place, from my father. John Hencley Robinson was born June 2, 1942. He was the person who taught me how to fish, took me hunting, and gave me my first exposure to nature.

I first read Hugo in the summer of 2015. My father had died of cancer almost three years before on October 29, 2012. I had been at work on a dissertation and returned to "Wind on the Water" to see if time would change how I felt about the structure. In Hugo, I found another affinity in disposition, whom I align with my core group: Donald Hall, Maxine Kumin, Charles Simic, Louis Simpson, James Wright, Marge Piercy, Theodore Roethke, Galway Kinnell, Robert Bly, Denise Levertov, and Robert Creeley, among others. Of all the essays in *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*, his essays "Writing Off the Subject" and "The Triggering Town" remain those I liked most. There always exists beneath each poem a complex web of associations for the poet. Hugo, however, makes two interesting distinctions. He says there exists "the initiating or triggering

subject,” that which “causes” the poem to be written” and “the real or generated subject, which the poem comes to say or mean, and which is generated or discovered in the poem during the writing” (Hugo 4). I can say for “Wind on the Water” the poem’s final form was resolved through compression of language after conceptualizing of the poem early as a series of groups of images that purely described the effect of the wind on the water commonly observed while fishing. I then changed the line breaks and pulled the poem into a tighter, one page form while also removing repeated words and keeping the clusters of varied images in the final five stanza pattern. After a brief editorial review with Kelly Shepherd of Athabasca University at *Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy* in Canada, the poem took its final state when we discussed a few aspects for clarification and slight revision.

The initiating subject of “June’s Fisher of Solitudes” was fishing at a pond located along an access road of McClintic Wildlife Management Area in Mason County, West Virginia. This pond has no special, personal history. I think we only fished here together one time. I had been there with friends on occasion, though this poem was from a much later time in my life when the area was not new to me. For quite some time, the poem was mostly a series of visual descriptions, the pond at dusk and things within that habitat. I liked the images in the poem, though there was no conflict. I kept thinking of Donald Hall’s theme in “Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird: The Psychic Origins of Poetic Form,” that “energy arises from conflict. Without conflict, no energy” (Hall 141). The poem illustrated a very loose allusion at its conclusion to some other possible context, though what that was remained unclear. I revised the poem with thoughts of my father when he first taught me to fish. The things he literally said became part of the poem in quote form. They seemed to cohere with what was already the poem’s imagery. I had moved a few lines around, changed a word or two, and created six stanzas from its original three or four. Then, I remembered Uncle Jim, my grandfather’s brother who used to fish the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers or stand for hours fishing in Krodell Park.

I remembered the story Dad told me not long after uncle Jim died about all the money they found in his glove-compartment. No explanation. I guess it's a good mystery for a poem and certainly creates a lot of skepticism and depth for the concluding images of the last two stanzas. When my father died, he had no death-bed confession. His only last words to me were, "Take care of your mother."

WIND ON THE WATER

Blasted by noon sun, I had given up with nothing caught  
except a loose curve of line,  
my mind, somehow, held by cross-winds,  
lost in grand figures of Big Hollow;  
titanium blue, cumulus tuft,  
steep, sloping, April hills rung with cow-paths.

On water wheeled and purled recurring circles,  
the sudden angle, whirled and gone.  
Calm would settle. Turtles sunned their necks on deadwood.  
A chulp of one fish come to surface;  
smell of manure and mud drifted down from pasture.

Midway, directly across the pond,  
at a shallow place beside honey-combed hoof-prints,  
damsel flies hover over sunken branches of algae  
where snags of severed line  
became floating ghostly forms in water.

Bank to bank, lines cut almost of an engraver's knife,  
stacked contours in tight movements over the pond.  
Breeze-warped, wide arched patterns  
slipped through shadows almost unnoticed.  
In the broken arc,  
little washboard ripples formed, then disappeared.

I stood there all day, alone,  
carefully walked the narrow ledge  
beneath Box Elder, maple and locust trees.  
As languid waves receded, Bulrushes shifted in the light,  
their stained-glass green of leaves, an old secret I was never told.

JUNE'S FISHER OF SOLITUDES

Drops of rain fall here and there.  
Circle in circle, heavy-honed wide rings  
disappear in shapes of softer rhythms.  
From pond's edge, overcast reflections  
fade into other forms.  
My dad would say,  
"You can't fish in the rain. They won't bite."

After a while, the clouds break.  
Tree frogs and toads fill voids of silence.  
Everything else seems far away.  
"Don't talk. You'll scare the fish."

Spatterdock blossoms are curled away  
in brilliant, yellow coils.  
A Sand Crane glides down in quiet flight.  
One cast splays water  
like mercury on green velvet;  
the pond in stillness, is dark, green glass.

I still see Uncle Jim standing at Krodel Lake  
beside that huge Impala.  
After he died,  
they found twelve grand in the glovebox.

Summer evening draws shadows over water.  
A loose, spiraled line sinks, disappears.  
Dusk slowly darkens.

Traffic slows on the gravel road.  
Headlights fan this enfolding night,  
and drift up through dust  
as twilight stars that shimmer in a fading glow.  
They sink and burn to deeper depths,  
remnant of an old dream.

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# Another World

HEATHER SAARELA

I have always loved reading and writing, but I must say that I love them in different ways. I love the act of writing; I find it very relaxing, and it keeps me busy. Growing up, I did not enjoy writing, as much as I do now, and in fact, I much preferred reading back then. The book series that changed me the most is without a doubt *The Lord of the Rings*. So many things in the trilogy have impacted me. The characters, the themes, and the world of Middle Earth are just a few.

The characters in Tolkien's story are very important. They come alive in our minds. One of the reasons the characters came alive for me was because they were all realistic. Frodo and Sam are two of the most important characters, because they are hobbits, very common and normal folk. There was nothing special about them, except certain hobbits, like Bilbo, were quick on their feet.

My personal favorite character was Aragorn, because he was a very intelligent and innovative character. In the first story, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we do not know much about him, except he is powerful, a helpful character, and has good intentions and morals. I enjoy characters who come off as mysterious and possibly evil who turn out to be good.

As the stories progress, readers soon learn more about Aragorn. Readers discover that he is in fact the rightful heir to the kingdom of Gondor. This is one of my favorite aspects of Aragorn. In the beginning, readers simply knew him as a man who went by the name of Strider who was willing to help the hobbits. As the story moves on, we learn he is compassionate, a skilled fighter, and a king.

Another important aspect of *The Lord of the Rings* are the themes. I feel that the most important theme is corruption. One of the biggest

examples of corruption has to do with the character Gollum, who was a normal person, a simple life-loving hobbit. Before Bilbo Baggins got ahold of the ring itself, Gollum was its owner. The power of the ring corrupted Gollum, and he lived an extremely long time, longer than he should have lived. It consumed Gollum, turning into a shadow of what he once was.

Gollum is not the only example of corruption; the ring also kept Bilbo looking young for quite some time as well. The ring itself was a vessel of corruption; it had the power to consume anyone who had any desire for power. Once someone went down the path, it was hard to come back. This is why in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Gandalf has to push Bilbo to give up the ring. Although the ring did not corrupt Bilbo nearly as much as it did Gollum, there were still some effects of it on his age.

Ultimately, the ring left an impact on Frodo, the main character. The ring emotionally traumatized Frodo. He began to treat it like another person, almost like a woman, and that is one of the ways it corrupted him. It twisted Frodo's mind and made him begin to forget about what was really important. Several times through the story, Frodo mistreats Sam due to his nature being changed due to the ring. Frodo became more agitated, sometimes forgetting about the ultimate goal of destroying the ring. Frodo was young when the journey started, so the ring didn't have a chance to completely corrupt Frodo. Even in the climax of the story when Frodo and Sam are just about to destroy the ring, Frodo rejects the idea of wanting it destroyed. Ultimately, he and Gollum destroy it together, as they fight, and in the end, Gollum dies happily with the melting ring.

The ring traumatized Frodo to the point of not finding peace. At the end of *The Return of the King*, Frodo is unable to find peace and recover from the corruption. This is why he and his uncle travel to the Grey Havens, in hopes of finding peace elsewhere. Readers are unaware if this peace is achieved, but I like to believe they may have

found it. Both of them endured trauma, more so Frodo, and I would like to believe that he was able to find comfort.

Middle Earth is another reason this story means so much to me. Despite all of the destruction and terrors that Middle Earth endures, it is also a beautiful place. It is magical and very realistic. It is a place where readers want to go, regardless of how dangerous it was. Everyone has wanted to visit the Shire at some point due to the homey and comfortable feeling it gives. Without watching the movies or seeing where they shot the Shire, readers are able to picture it well, while reading the trilogy. That is important because the world needs to be immersive in a great story. Readers have to be able to input themselves into the plot if need be. The world in a story needs to be something that readers can picture without seeing the movie adaptation.

Most people growing up have had moments where they may want to have an escape. Tolkien's writings are a great way of doing that. Reading is an escape for most of us, and it is a healthy way of escaping the real world. There is nothing wrong with picking up a good book, and Tolkien does such a great job of making readers feel like they are in another world. Tolkien's story impacts those of all ages, and it takes them to an entire different universe. It opens up their imagination and makes them think about ideas and concepts that they may have never thought about until reading or watching *The Lord of the Rings*.

Reading is an important part of my life and a healthy way for me to escape the real world for a short time. Another that had great significance was the *Harry Potter* series. Now that I am an adult, I have to say that *The Lord of the Rings* has impacted me just a tad more. I find that the adult themes suit me better, even though Harry Potter also has some adult themes as well. *The Lord of the Rings* opened my mind to another universe through its characters, the many themes, and the wonderful world of Middle Earth.

# How Bedded Should I Be?

JAMES SALHANY

How bedded should I be,  
As time passes?

How self-centered should I write poems  
Penned about emotions?

And there is a meter ticking  
Near the beat of my heart.

And when the heart beats faster  
It escapes from my chest.

This is the knock on Lazarus's door,  
Where you meet the one foretold.

He/she who is a companion  
For all of eternity to behold.

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*"I don't need an alarm clock. My ideas wake me."*

RAY BRADBURY

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# Women in Islam

*NAHEED SANA*

Islam was born in the Arabian Peninsula, now Saudi Arabia, in the seventh century AD. The pre-Islamic era dates to more than 1,400 years ago. Those were the darkest times for humanity in general and for females. Female offspring were either abandoned or buried alive, as their birth brought shame and dishonor to the families. Women had no rights at all in marriage, inheritance, or education. They could not own businesses, own property, or have any independent legal rights. Polygamy and sex slaves were a norm for the society of those times. Women were not allowed to carry their family names and were treated as slaves after being forced into marriages. There was no hope left as the darkness of ignorance prevailed forever, and this inhumane behavior was well accepted. As they say, the darkest hour of night is right before the dawn, the light of Islam shined on the dark Arabian Peninsula, and the women in Islam gave a light of hope to the darkness of the world.

Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), who never learned to read and write, was chosen by the divine power to reveal the last and final message of divinity to humanity. The first revelation was a terrifying experience for him, and the only thought of comfort for him was the shoulder of his beloved wife Khadijah (RA). She has been the prime example of the most successful and powerful business women of Islam. She was a pillar of strength for her husband, who was left alone against the cruelest society after acclaiming prophethood.

When he told her, “Khadija, if I tell you that God sent me his angel and I have been given prophecy, are you going to believe me?”

Her reply was, “Do not worry, for by Him who has dominion over Khadija’s soul, I hope that you are the Prophet of this nation. Allah

will never humiliate you, for you are good to your relatives, you are true to your word, you help those who are in need, you support the weak, you feed the guests, and you answer the call of those who are in distress.”

These were not just the words but the supporting pillars of a prophecy. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) held a great respect for Khadijah, and he remained in love with her all his life. He paid a great tribute to her services and considered her the best first Muslim woman. He said: “God Almighty never granted me anyone better in this life than her. She accepted me when people rejected me; she believed in me when people doubted me; she shared her wealth with me when people deprived me; and God granted me children through her.” (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad, Sahih Muslim.)

Khadijah married Muhammad (PBUH) at the age of 40, and she was his strength through the most difficult times of his life. Her love and support were a major strength behind a great prophecy. Islam gave women rights as wives. They have equal rights in marriage and are not considered any less than their husbands in any situation. Khadijah was a successful business woman of her times. She inherited a lot of wealth from her father and ran a reputable, flourishing trading business, and she had many people under her employment. She had more than 80,000 camels. Her business interests extended to Ethiopia and Egypt. She was the wealthiest woman of Mecca, but for marriage, she preferred character over wealth and married Prophet Muhammad.

She devoted her whole life for the establishment of Islam, per famous scholar Muhammad b. ILamovi: “Islam was established with the sword of Ali (bravery) and the wealth of Khadijah.”

Another great woman in Islam whose name crowns the annals of history with the distinction of having established the world’s very first university, is Fatima Al-Fihri. She migrated with her family in the early ninth century from Tunisia to the city of Fez in Morocco. Her father, Mohammad bin Abdullah Al-Fihri, had become a great business man after struggling in their initial years of migration.

Fatima Al-Fihri received a good education in Fez and had grand aspirations to continue to give back to the society, which helped her family in every possible way. She built Masjid Al-Qarawiyyin, one of the largest mosques in North Africa, which housed the university and was to become a major center of advanced learning in medieval times in the Mediterranean. Many Muslim scholars, thinkers, and authors were given to the world by this university. Non-Muslims were welcome to matriculate. One of the most famous students was the Jewish physician and philosopher Maimonides. The university housed Al-Qarawiyyin library, which remains one of the oldest in the world. Al-Fihri's story is one of timeless dedication to the Islamic tradition of learning and academic excellence. She was, and still is, an inspiration for many young women who aim to enrich their lives, as well as the lives of many others with education and enlightenment.

Lubna, originally a Spanish slave girl, attained a well-known recognition in the city of Cordoba. She was a skilled mathematician, a well-known writer, and a poet. Per Ibn Bashkuwal: there were none as noble as she and proficient in other sciences in the Umayyad palace (Ibn Bashkuwal, *Kitab al Silla*, Vol. 2:324).

History has given numerous examples of Muslim women warriors and rulers who fought many successful fights on the battlefields and on political grounds. They have been an iron shield to protect the legacy of Islam. If we poke at history, we come across a series of the legendary and brave efforts of Prophet Ayesha, Razia Sultan of Delhi, Arwa b. Ahmad b. Muhammad al — Sulayhi, queen of Yemen, and many more who have given their intellect and bravery to the world. In Caliph Umer's reign, Shafa bint Abdullah, a wise trader, was the supervisor of the market place.

The Muslim women have not only made a history, but their accomplishments in the world of art and design have also given a remarkable touch to the beauty of the world. Zaha Hadid, the famous Muslim Iraqi architect, is the first Muslim woman to receive a prestigious Pritzker architect award. Her design includes the Guangzhou Opera

House, Rome's MAXXI National Museum of the 21st Century Arts, and the London Olympic Aquatic Centre. She is the first architect whose designs have a style full of smooth curves and massive concave shapes. She was the first woman to be awarded the "Royal Gold Medal" from the Royal Institute of British Architects. She is well-known for her unconventional thinking. If looked at with an artistic eye, her buildings look like sculptures and a unique, dynamic structure of art.

There are many other women in the history of Islam with unmatched achievements not for themselves but for their generations to come. Malala Yousafzai, is one of the very recent examples. A young girl from a very remote area of Pakistan, she decided to raise her voice against those who claimed to be Muslims, but held wrong agendas and influences which have nothing to do with Islam. When she was stopped from continuing her education and got threats from these so-called Muslim organizations, she refused to get scared by these people. She was shot in the face in front of her friends, so they all would get scared and would never dare to go to school. Not even this close encounter with death could stop her from her ambition. She fought with all her might and survived that brutal and cowardly attack. She came back from this even stronger and now is the youngest Noble laureate in the history of the world. Now, she is running not just one but many schools for girls in that village of Pakistan, where she was shot. All those schools have many more girls like her who have an example to look up to and be proud of.

Islam, like many other religions in the world, teaches peace, love, and devotion. It empowers women like no other religion. That is the reason for all these great women serving as genuine benefactors to humanity. In Islam, women are neither oppressed, inferior, nor unequal to men, nor are they meant to follow the cultural practices. They have been given equal rights and opportunities to progress in all spheres of life. They have the right to get an education of their choice and marry the person they choose. They have an authoritative

right on their property. They can vote, seek protection by the law, and participate in civic and political engagements. Islam gave them the right to divorce and end their marriages if they decide. Islam abolished the practice of killing female children and raised their standard high to attain esteem, dignity, and privilege in society.

God clearly states in the Quran that all human beings are equal, He says: "To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, we shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions," (16:97).

God has privileged and protected women under Islamic law. I cannot do justice to all that God has blessed women with, neither can I throw light on all the Muslim women's accomplishments, but this is my little effort to tell that this world is richer, because of these beautiful women, and their efforts are priceless to make a difference in this so-called male dominated world.

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*"You must write for children in the same  
way as you do for adults, only better."*

MAXIM GORKY

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# Success Is Sweet

HEENA SAYAL

“Change does not change tradition. It strengthens it. Change is a challenge and an opportunity not a threat,” said Prince Philip of England. In my Indian culture, traditions can shape many opportunities, such as those described in my previous essays: “A Dragon Overcome: Surmounting a Difficult Personal Experience,” “Wisdom — A Lesson Learned the Hard Way,” and “Follow Your Bliss” by Joseph Campbell. All these topics explain how beautiful one’s life experience can be. My journey has been challenging with the changes I have made, but my traditions supported and strengthened the opportunities that I was given.

It was spring, when I graduated from high school in India. In grade 12, students are required to take exams in a different school allotted by our home school. Whenever exams used to come I always started going to Gurudwara (“door to the Guru”). It is a place of worship for Sikhs, like temples for Hindus. People from all faiths, and those who do not profess any faith, are welcomed in Sikh gurudwaras. *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Holy Scripture, is placed on a takhat under the Darbar Sahib, which symbolizes the current and everlasting guru of Sikhs presence in each gurudwara. My religion represents a combination of two cultures and traditions; Hinduism and Sikhism. My elders believe that if we pray for our wish to come true, we should visit Gurudwara continuously for forty days. In this time period, we are restricted from any intake of alcohol, drugs, and non-vegetarian food (fish, chicken, meat). At that time I had to finish grade 12, and I still had to take one more exam before taking any further steps towards my career. It was a spring afternoon when my mother took me to the Institute for Art and Design Study by the name of ‘Pumpkin Academy of Digital Arts’ for the enrollment in short-term design program.

To reach our destination, we have to make our own path towards our journey. I started taking classes at the Institute without knowing what the future had in store. After a few months, I decided to continue my education in this field, but after doing research on degree options, I could not find anything suitable. Then, one day my mother told me to come to her office and look at how people work in the real world in advertisement agencies. I went there in the summer time and started to attend there.

I started this journey when I was nineteen years old, which is early as per Indian education and working systems. I was shy, introverted, lacked confidence, and did not have many communication skills either. I joined as a visualizer at Marvel Group of companies, which has its own pre-schools, high schools, hospitals, institutions, non-governmental organization, banquet halls, party lawns and in-house advertisement agency where I was supposed to start working as per my mother's plan. I was a pampered child in my family, and had never worked in advertising. Before this job, I never had any experience in dealing with real world.

I enjoyed my first day at work because everybody greeted me there, since my mother is one of the directors of the company. On the second day, I was asked to introduce myself to my boss. He is known as the father of design, and he is labelled with hundreds of International awards, such as One Show Design — New York and Cannes. He is going to be a jury member for the second time in One Show Design 2017. At my first time meeting with him, he asked me, "Do you know why leaves are green?" I acted dumb, because I was shocked at what he asked me. I did not say anything. Then he asked, "Do you know why M.F. Hussain is known for painting horses?" I reacted the same way this time, too, but this time, I was more nervous. I thought, what if I do not give answers to these questions? Is he going to make fun of me or maybe he will tell me to leave right away." I was sitting idle, and I was thinking deeper inside my brain. Then, after a couple minutes, he gave me a task; he told me to take a paper and write what I wanted

to be or where I saw myself in the next 5-10 years. I was not supposed to disclose this to anyone, not even to him; then he told me to fold that paper and keep it inside the drawer at his work station. I kept that folded paper, but I was still nervous and afraid of him on my first day. I was worried about what he could ask me again or maybe ask something about what I wrote in the paper.

What he did next was surprising. He drew a line and told me, "If and whenever you draw a line or anything on paper, that should be your identity; make your own identity." I had no words to ask, to respond, and to say "thank you." It was a surprising and challenging task for me to start my journey. From that moment, I started learning about my journey. I knew that it was not going to be easy from that moment on. I decided I would either quit this field, or I would make a change.

In the beginning days, my boss told me to look at design magazines, like *Communication Arts*, *Noveum*, and *GQ*. It was the second or third day when I entered in his work room. It was calm; there was no noise, and nobody was inside, but there was the smell of his vanilla flavored cigar. I can still feel that scent through my nostrils. Time passed, and after staying under observation for three months, the moment was around the corner, when I received my acceptance letter on October 4, 2009. He decided to start my stipend which was around Rs. 8000 per month. I was so happy, first, because he accepted me to be a part of his team, and secondly, that was the moment from where I started my work career.

Every company has its own rules and regulations, such as sending work through our seniors to our boss. I struggled a lot in my journey from beginning until the end. After working for a few years, I came to the point where I was asked to design a new layout for a Christmas carnival. I tried working on the layout, and so far I liked it, and I e-mailed all my design layouts to my senior to send to the boss. She sent her design layout and my layout but did not tell him that it was my work. I never got credit for my approved campaign, until now.

I was surprised and shocked how people can ruin or change our behavior towards them. I cannot ignore these people, if they are an unnecessary part of my life, but I learned a lesson that I should not trust people like her in the future.

Around every special occasion, almost every brand launches their new campaign; there was one by Cadbury “Celebrations” with a tag line *shubh kam karne se pehle kuch mitha hojaye*, which says “it is good to eat sweets before we take new steps towards a new phase of life, a new job, or job interviews, housewarmings, marriages, and invitations.” After this campaign, my colleagues and I started eating sweets before we presented our design options to our boss. Each time we took our design layout options to our boss, he rejected them, and we discovered the rituals of sweets did not work. After struggling for a few more months, our boss scheduled a brainstorming session (to get ideas), and we were supposed to bring some of the ideas that would be considered for awards.

It was my turn, I was nervous, and I started sweating. My face turned red due to a lack of my confidence and an inferiority complex. What will people think, if this will not work? Fortunately, one of my ideas impressed my boss, and he decided to work on that idea. We started working from that day on, and it took us a week to figure that out with the brand. After a few weeks, my boss sent my individual logo design work to Spikes Asia in 2011. Unfortunately, I did not win, but I learned a lesson — “never give up.”

There was a time when I was done with my job and day-to-day life, and I decided to leave the job. I left in January 2014 as an art director after working there for 5 years, deciding that was the moment to move forward. I decided to get an education in Graphic Design; I researched in the city where I was living, then in other cities and states. I could not find anything interesting, and my mother denied my proposal to study in any other city in India, because of safety reasons. I started my research for other countries, such as, Australia, England, Canada, and New Zealand. I was preparing for my I.E.L.T.S English exam,

which is similar to the TOEFL exam for any other country. I took all the English exams, but I was not very good in English, as it is not my first language, but as we all know, English is commonly used in India. After finishing my research, I applied at five universities in and around London, and got selected to three of those universities. The topmost university known for design is Glasgow University in Scotland, and it was a surprising and blissful moment for me to express feelings at that time. My mother refused to send me to all of these universities. She thought if she sent me there, I would be depressed because I did not know anyone there nor did I know the culture. I was so upset and thought, “Where am I going? Where is my career now? Is this the end of my career? Or does this mean this is the age for my marriage?” But I wanted to focus on my career, not on my marriage.

After months passed, I dropped the idea to get an education. I joined the other department of that same company, but there I was working as an individual designer. My heart was pursuing an education; things were not going in my way, and I felt the need to receive blessings. In India, when we feed people who are homeless and poor, they give us blessings. This is a part of Indian tradition, to feed people on every occasion, such as marriages, housewarming parties, birthdays, festivals, death ceremonies, and other rituals.

In November 2014, I talked to my aunt.

“How are you doing?” she asked.

“I am doing okay,” I said.

“What is your plan?” she asked me.

“I want to study abroad,” I answered.

After a week, we decided to start looking for courses online at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Fortunately, I found a degree in studio arts, which is related to my major area. We both started together working on my online applications and the admissions procedure. After a week or two, I got a response from UNO with an acceptance letter. My parents were not aware of this until then, and when I told them about this news, they were so happy and could not

believe me. We started the application for my visa. It was not easy to get these all done within a month to start the fall session. Around December 3, 2014, I got admitted at UNO, and the latest date for an interview was December 12, 2014. I was nervous to go for an interview that time, but my parents took me to the embassy and said encouragingly, "You can do it." I was going for something new and good, so I was supposed to visit the temple before going to an Interview.

I left my home in the morning for the interview and was on my way to the Embassy. I went to the temple with sweets and fed God and took blessings from the spiritual person there. At the embassy, they do not allow anyone to go inside except the person who is going for the interview. I started shivering, when my mom and dad dropped me off outside of the US embassy. I passed all the formal procedures, along with the security check. I was in the queue for fingerprints, and my heart beat was getting higher and higher. I was not aware of what was going around and what the next step was. They asked me to move towards the queue for the interview. As far as I remember, people who were in front of me were rejected. I was scared. I missed my mom and dad, and I was praying, "God please help me."

The interviewer said, "Ok. You will get your visa within 3 days."

"Thank you," I said loudly, even though I was shocked and surprised. I turned around and asked the security guard, "Where is the exit?"

He laughed and said, "It is right here in front of you."

"Are you okay?" asked a nearby travel agent. "Do you need help?"

"Yes, I desperately need a phone to contact my parents."

The travel agent gave me his phone, and I called my mother. Her phone was continuously busy. I forgot my dad's phone number. After 2-3 minutes, I called Mom again, and she picked up. I said, "It is me mummy; please come. I am outside."

"They kept the passport?" she questioned.

"Yes!"

My parents were thrilled and excited about my visa for the United States. They picked me up from there, and again, we went to the temple to thank God for his blessings. We called my uncle, aunt, grandparents, and every other relative. We reached home and started planning my trip dates, warm clothes, and other things. My aunt told my mother to book tickets before Christmas, so that I could celebrate Christmas in the States. There were only nine days left to fly after I got my visa. My parents planned a ritual ceremony to meet all the family members before I left and pray as a thankful note and for the future. Believe me, it was not easy to leave my family within a week. I was excited and upset to leave them. I flew on December 22 from India to the States.

I think all of this happened because I was nice to everyone. I fed food to lots of people, and I always visited the temple with sweets, whenever I got something new and good. My parents always supported me in terms of finances, as well as emotionally. I really miss my family a lot; it is not easy for me and for them, I guess, to live far from each other. To get success in life, I compromised with lots of things, such as, starting work in an early age according to Indian culture. When my other friends were partying and going to college, I was working. I continuously worked for five years and then started pursuing my degree. After experiencing life for five years, I realized that I needed to get an education in my Graphic Design field to be successful. Now, I am well on my way, and I can say, "Success is sweet."

# Snapshots in Time

SKYLER SCHRECK

Life is filled with moments in time. Some big, others small — these moments make up our memories. Some do not seem important at the time, but looking back, they stand out. They are hyper-realistic, frozen forever in our minds. I had one of these moments standing on the top of a mountain pass in England's Lake District, looking at the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

My mom and her sister, Cyndee, have always been close, and Cyndee's daughter, Olivia, is one of my favorite cousins. When I was seven, Olivia married a British gentleman and moved to Yorkshire, England. Cyndee remarried soon after and moved away as well. It was strange that these people who were such a huge part of my life were not there anymore. I missed them terribly.

Being seven, I did not know much about this exotic "England" Olivia moved to, so I started learning everything I could about England. For years, every book I read, every movie and television show I watched was about England. I knew more about British history than I knew about my own country's history. For a while, I could even list most of the monarchs in chronological order. Needless to say, I was obsessed.

As soon as I started to make money, I put aside a little for a trip to England. I saved my change and worked as many extra shifts as I could. Even though I could see my trip fund growing, I did not really believe I would ever, actually, get to go. It was just something that I was going to do in the future. As my high school graduation present, my parents said I could go, and my mom would go with me.

After years of thinking and dreaming of this, seemingly mythical, place, I was actually going there. I would stand on its earth, walk on

its cobbled streets, and breathe its foggy air. We planned this trip for months. Each day we planned, I started to understand that this place was real. England was not just an amazing, fictional story that lived only in my mind anymore.

A couple of months into planning for our trip, Cyndee called. She was melancholy for all the important moments she had missed. I had grown up, and she was not there to see it. She offered to meet us in England. She could be a part of this important trip and see her niece and sister at the same time. My mom and I were so happy that she could come!

The day arrived, and we were actually going. My dad dropped us off at the airport at four in the morning. We finally landed at Heathrow Airport in London at eight in the morning the next day. We were exhausted and overwhelmed. After leaving our bags at the hotel and drinking an absurd amount of coffee, we set off to see the city. It was an amazing feeling to walk down streets I had read so much about and to connect smell and sound to things I had only seen pictures of. It felt humbling, almost like a privilege, to be a part of something I loved so much.

We spent four days in London and one in the Cotswolds. The physical beauty and architecture in those places were amazing, but I think the gravity of the experience had not sunk into my brain, yet. Being there was overwhelming; it was a sensory overload. I loved this place.

The next day, we drove up to Yorkshire. Olivia, her husband, James, and their two boys, Felix and Morris, live in Brighouse. It is a small town spilling into other small towns to make a continuous sea of civilization. I could not wait to see them all: my cousins and aunt all in one place! The drive to their house, even though it was about four hours long, flew by.

Finally, we walked through their door. Immediately, it felt like home. Felix and Morris were a little shy of us at first, but soon we all felt comfortable, in a way only family can, like we had never been

apart. After a nice dinner and a good night's sleep, we all climbed into our cars and drove up to the Lake District. It was nice to sit in the car with them and just talk. I loved hearing all their stories and about their day-to-day adventures.

The road to the Lake District was mostly highway. I had read that the Lake District rightly deserved its reputation of being one of the most beautiful places in England, but at this point, I had not seen anything to prove it. Then, we got off the highway, and Olivia led us up back roads, climbing higher and higher into the mountains. The sky was grey, heavy with moisture. The fields, oh the fields, were the most vibrant hue of green I had ever seen. They almost glowed in the rays of sunlight. The fields were crosshatched with moss covered stone walls. In the valleys between the peaks, there were herds of fluffy, cream-colored sheep. The farmers spray painted them to differentiate the flocks. We could see clusters of white, pink, blue, and yellow jumping over the low, gray walls.

As we crested one hill, I yelled, "Stop!" We all got out of the car, and standing on top of one foothill of the tallest mountain was Shefffield Peak. The wind around us was brutal. It hurled the rain at us like daggers. We stood there, looking at this snowcapped mountain.

I had been dreaming of standing on that island for so long. I missed these people so much, but there I was, standing in the middle of the one lane road, surrounded by people I loved, looking at my little cousins giggling. I knew this was going to be one of those moments, one of those hyper-realistic moments frozen in time that is always memorable, a moment so full of the vibrant earth and lovely emotions: peace, love, joy, and contentment. How could this not stand out? It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

# At a Reading Once More

*D.N. SIMMERS*

We are an old group

At an open mike that picks up  
political poetry and sadness.

The main readers are  
rehearsing their lines.

It is Mid-afternoon on a Sunday.

We eat pizza with some  
good coffee.

A few laughs and the main features start.

They tell of dead friends  
and protested pipelines.

After questions. Answers.

Words are tilled and the feet shift  
into afternoon.

Sentences climb  
with the sun

and fall down with the shadows  
of hours.

We talk and hug and walk.

Day going into night.

# Johnny Bookcase: The Author's Portal

*BRAYDEN SIMPSON*

The thief ran down the alley. He reached into his bag and disappeared! Suddenly, the whole alley turned to blank notebook paper and was gone. Johnny erased some more.

“Ugh!” he groaned. “This story is terrible!” He got up from his desk, picked up his phone, punched in the number for his friend Franklin Jones (a.k.a. Wasp, due to the robotic bugs that he invented), and held it up to his ear. “Hello? Yeah, it’s Johnny, and I need to know if I can come over. I need help with my newest story. Okay, be there soon!”

Johnny put down his phone, picked up his notebook, went outside, and got on his bike. After only thirty seconds of pedaling, Johnny knocked on Wasp’s door. “Is Franklin home?” Johnny asked Wasp’s father (only Wasp’s parents still called him Franklin).

“I’ll get him,” he replied.

Wasp showed up on the porch in seconds. “Come in,” he said. “I want to show you something.” Once in the security of Wasp’s room, Wasp pulled out a pencil.

“Fascinating,” Johnny said, sarcastically, “I didn’t know those existed!”

“All right, smart guy!” replied Wasp. “Look, and you’ll notice it says, “Write your own story!”

“Ooh! Cheesy sayings!” snapped Johnny. “Will wonders ever cease?!” He took the pencil, ready to prove Wasp wrong. It was just a pencil. He went over to his notebook and started writing. Nothing out of the ordinary, just as Johnny had been telling Wasp, but when he turned to tell him, he couldn’t hear a thing, due to the police car in

the street. But it wasn't in the street; it was in the notebook! They both looked at the blue and red lights pulsing from the notebook. Then they blacked out.

Johnny woke to the sound of "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH-HHHHHHHHHHHH," while falling through the air. Three cop cars blinked red and blue below him. "I just wrote about this!" Johnny yelled to Wasp.

"Do you believe me now?!" he replied, angrily.

"Oops," said Johnny, and they landed on a cop.

An ambulance showed up for the officer, and a cop car took Johnny and Wasp to the police station, where they were interrogated.

"Despite the fact the officer is in the hospital, this isn't so bad," Wasp said. "We could've hit a car."

"Yeah, but now, we're in for questioning. You don't think they thought that two kids falling from the sky was normal, do you?" Johnny replied, looking around the police station. The chief called them into his office, and they sat in front of him. He was a tall man with tired eyes and a stern expression, but next to him was a boy radiating energy, who was currently jumping up and down.

"Hi, I'm Benjy!" he said, quickly. "What's your name? How did you fall out of the sky?" He was now running in circles.

"Uh, we wrote with a pencil and woke up falling?" Johnny said, not quite sure what happened when he was unconscious. "Oh, and I'm Johnny, and this is Wasp."

"Really?! I knew you had names, I'm not surprised about that, but that's how you got here?"

"No son, that's ridiculous," the chief said. "Don't trust those boys."

When he left, Benjy stayed. "I want to see where you're from," he said. "When you leave, take me with you!"

"I don't know how to leave," Johnny said, sadly, his hands in his pockets. He quickly pulled them out. In his hands were a pencil and a notebook. He did the only thing he could think of. He wrote, "Home." Then, there was a flash.

Johnny found himself on a spaceship zooming towards a distant planet. The first thing he did was a face-palm. He had once written a story called “Home” that was just like this. The spaceship touched down, and spacemen trotted out into the large cockpit from rooms that formed a ring around it. Johnny ran into one of the rooms and found Benjy and Wasp chained to the wall.

“You guys live in a strange world,” Benjy said.

Johnny banged his head on the wall. A secret hatch opened. Inside was a wrist device, which Johnny strapped on. It automatically blinked to life. “I AM P.A.R.,” it said robotically. “PERSONAL ASSISTANCE ROBOT. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?”

“Uh, free my friends!” Johnny answered.

“COMMENCING LASER REQUEST!” P.A.R. responded.

“Wait, what?” Johnny screamed.

A laser blast shot out of P.A.R., and the chains exploded. Johnny and his friends walked into the cockpit, but at the same time, the spacemen from before walked in with more wrist devices. When they saw the trio, they opened fire. Johnny ran forward and slid baseball style under a spaceman, tripping him. He stole the spaceman’s helmet and threw it under the quickly closing slide-down door to hold it up. He and Wasp slid under the door, and Benjy came after them, grabbing the helmet.

“Your world is scary,” he panted.

“Benjy, this isn’t our world,” Wasp said. “It’s just another one of Johnny’s stories.”

“I should probably explain,” Johnny said. “In this story, it is the year of 3022, and Earth has become so polluted that humans need another planet, so they come here. But it is already inhabited by other aliens, and the military has to fight them off. So-oh! Here they are now!” About fifty mechs were tromping out of the spacecraft and toward them.

“Uh-oh!” Benjy said.

“What do you mean?” asked Johnny. “We can take these weirdos in cans!” Suddenly, a mech turned into a plane and started firing at them. “Right,” Johnny said. “I forgot about that, and we can’t take them. Run!”

So they did. Benjy ran towards the plane, though. It swooped low, and Benjy jumped on top, as it began to rise and ripped open a hatch. He dropped inside, and seconds later, the plane started to dip towards the ground. Just before it would have crashed, the plane turned back into a mech, and inside was Benjy. He flicked the previous pilot out of the mech and transformed into a two-wheeled armored transport vehicle. Benjy drove it to Johnny and Wasp, and they hopped inside. Once inside, they noticed that the mech wasn’t stored in a random space; the inside had changed, too. There were more seats, and in the front was Benjy, looking extremely serious, with a set of headphones and a walkie-talkie, through which he was telling soldiers to get out of the way.

“Johnny!” he yelled. “Get us out of here! Also, this time, be specific!” Johnny was about to write his address when the vehicle hit a bump, and the pencil went all over the page. But one word was clear: pirates.

“Benjy, does this have a boat mode?”

Yes, apparently, it did, and the “new” boat was being hammered by baseballs. This might not sound bad, but these were the size of cannonballs. Johnny went upstairs to the deck and found himself staring at a giant pirate ship with a picture of a skull and crossed baseball bats.

“Oh no,” Johnny moaned. “It’s the Jolly Dodgers!” Men in baseball uniforms lined the deck. Most were waving baseball bats, but others were shooting the baseballs from cannons. Suddenly, another ship appeared. “Phew!” Johnny said. “The Super Sails Sox have arrived!” The new ship was larger, had gears and electronic parts in protective casings, and their flag was the Red Sox symbol. Benjy and Wasp joined Johnny.

“What’s this story?” Benjy asked.

“Pirate Papi vs the Green Monster!” Johnny replied. Suddenly, the wind blew their boat towards the Dodgers’ ship. A wire shot out of the Sox’s ship and reeled them into the ship. Inside, a sheet of metal came out of the wall and connected to the boat. A door opened, and a man stepped onto the bridge. He wore a Red Sox jersey and carried a baseball bat.

“Welcome aboard!” he said. “I’m Shane Victorino, the first mate!” He led them through the door into a bigger room, where everyone else was gathering.

“Begin sinking process!” a man yelled.

“Big Papi!” Johnny breathed. Suddenly, the ship began to lower into the water. The walls rolled away, and floor-to-ceiling windows could be seen. Through them, Johnny could see swimming baseballs and bats. “Just like I imagined it!” Johnny said. Soon, though, a shadow covered the creatures.

“Yankees,” Shane announced. “Grab a bat!” Everyone did as told, and Shane piloted the ship into the Yankees. Once inside, and out of the ship, the Red Sox stepped onto a lifting platform. Up on deck, they faced the Yankees. In the front of the Yankees was Babe Ruth.

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen Babe Ruth as evil,” Wasp commented.

“In this story, the greats of the team are the crew,” Johnny explained. “That’s why the Babe is a good guy, too!”

“Babe Ruth was a Red Sox pitcher!” Wasp realized. The Babe looked up.

“Play Ball!”

The two teams clashed as Johnny and his comrades figured out an escape plan. “I’ll write the address, then we’ll jump. Everybody-OOF!” The evil Babe Ruth stood over Johnny, holding a baseball glove.

“Not very violent,” Wasp laughed, quietly.

“Foolish boy,” the Babe growled at Johnny, who quickly wrote his address and threw the notebook into the sea, jumping after the portal forming around it. He awakened on the trampoline in his backyard

and quickly got off, for his friends were now falling from the sky. As soon as they landed, he joined them, only to look up at the sound of “AAHHHHH!”

Shane was coming, too! But soon he stopped falling. Babe Ruth had him, and if the portal closed any more, it would cut off Shane’s hand! The trio gripped Shane and pulled him through the portal, but Ruth followed. As the group ran into the street to get away, Johnny gripped his pencil so hard that he felt something move. The pencil grew to a five-foot staff, which he plunged into the ground. A chasm grew through the street, and the Red Sox ship came out of the road. Out came the whole army from “Home,” the aliens that Johnny created, but never saw, and the police force, including Benjy’s father. The huge literary army mowed over Ruth, plowing him down, but he kept getting up again. “I will beat you!” he screamed.

“Really?” Johnny asked. “I created you. You’re just a character in my bookcase!” He threw the notebook at his feet, a blank page on it, and a portal formed. It drew him in, though he grasped for a handhold to keep him anchored.

“I’ll get you, Bookcase!” Then he disappeared.

That night, Johnny lay in bed thinking about the past adventure. He couldn’t believe it had only been a day. He thought about what he and Ruth said. Bookcase. Suddenly, he saw a glowing light in the form of a bookcase. He got out of bed to examine it. On the side, it said two words: Johnny Bookcase.

# The Letter

JANET SOBCZYK

We sat in stunned silence,  
mouths gaping,  
not believing our ears.

Such gentle words revealed tenderness,  
innocent yearning we didn't know he'd ever felt.  
The terms of endearment  
*darling, sugar, my dearest*  
had long ago died on his lips.

We hadn't witnessed them spoken,  
could hardly believe he'd used them,  
but there they were,  
in inked cursive,  
on yellowed paper from the war,  
unearthed by his first-born's fingers,  
from boxes of fading photos.

At a large family gathering  
a grown granddaughter read them  
reverently  
as teens and in-laws  
watched uncomfortably.

His daughters and sons listened in awe,  
not the words of the Dad they'd known.  
Affection was rarely shown until Mom's end,  
when he sat helplessly holding her hand,  
shedding silent tears.

The father's son said to me,  
*I wish I could have written letters like that.*  
He hadn't been away at war,  
but even so,  
I told him with a smile,  
*When you courted me, you did.*



Oh, Deer photograph by Michael Campbell

# The Great Unknown

HANNAH STACEY

I was fifteen years old. I was in the process of learning a brand new concerto, the *Kabalevsky Violin Concerto in C Major, Movement 1*. I had just switched teachers to become part of the studio of Ruth Meints, one of the greatest women I have and probably ever will meet. Together, with Ruth at my side and the Kabalevsky under my fingers, I prepared for the first concerto competition of my musical career, and I was scared out of my mind.

A lot goes into learning a concerto. First, a piece must be picked; this is not as simple a task as it sounds. It can take hours of listening to different composers, weighing whether or not a certain movement even has the potential to win a competition. Once chosen, next comes the actual learning, the most time consuming part of the preparation process. It looks something like this: Step 1, listen to the chosen concerto for hours and hours and hours on end. Step 2, once the tune is trapped inside the brain, a song bird flapping about in a cage, its song must be translated to the fingers. Learn the notes, then breathe life into the music through personal interpretation, until it's in its most perfected form. Step 3, memorize. Play the song over and over and over again, until it can be played forward, backward, while sleeping. The concerto is learned to completion. Finally, step 4, the most daunting step of all: perform.

This is a process that many a musician knows well, and it is one that I love. Listen. Learn. Perform. Rinse and repeat. Although up to this point in my life I had never learned anything as hefty as a concerto, I had used this process on maybe hundreds of less substantial pieces, using this method with each until the process of learning a new song was as natural as breathing. Why then, was the idea of competing with this music that I loved so horrific to me?

The root of my problem was fear. That seems to be a common theme in my life. Something big, something unknown, rears its ugly head, and I freeze up. Fear grabs hold of me, and I become incapacitated. The unknown sweeps right by me, taking with it chances missed, opportunities lost, and leaving personal growth stunted. I was a timid child, a worried youth. I was afraid of the opinions of others, looking foolish, not amounting to anything, the usual anxieties of the adolescent. Hindsight is 20/20 they say, and looking back the fears all seem so unfounded. But I remember myself the week before competition, a nervous wreck, hardly able to eat anything, instead that wretched fear eating at me. *What if I fail? What if I completely screw up my piece? What if my teacher thought less of me, my mother thought less of me, my peers thought less of me?* Thousands upon thousands of what ifs swam in circles through my brain, until at long last, the Day of Judgment arrived.

I went. I played my concerto reasonably well. I did not win. Even though I did not win, something changed in me between the time I walked into that competition building and the time I walked out. As I unpacked my instrument and prayed to God for peace of mind, I did it. I squared my shoulders, looked those demons swimming in my head straight in their eyes, and told them “What happens here happens. I have prepared. I have done the best I could possibly do, and that is enough.” That was the key thing I learned that day. *It is enough.* Maybe it is untrue that I was as prepared as possible; one can always be more prepared. Despite this fact, I had worked hard, done a good job. For me, I decided that was enough.

# Wee Warrior

*JANET STEVENSON*

A slightly undersized mouse with an  
exceptionally long hairless tail  
alerts an Arizona family of five  
to a den of snakes under their porch.  
This all-powerful tiny creature not only  
forewarns, but hypnotizes the family.

The mouse singsongs an impressive string of rapid fire  
falsetto tones with a register of operatic caliber.  
Each family member holds an unbreakable gaze  
scrutinizing the Rodentia's pumped-up, room to porch  
adrenalin scampering that unveil the dreadfulness  
of the slithering hideaway.

Trained snake trappers are called and safely remove  
a dozen rattlesnakes burrowed underground in a covered  
gap unearthed in the concrete foundation under the porch.  
The peewee hero with the tail of a lion never revisited.  
Coyotes howl in the antics of the wind.

# Affirmation

PARKER TEDROW

I love learning new things.  
Each and every day I do.

I find new topics and  
Look at the sum of their parts.

What I love can be found deep in my heart.  
It is natural to desire knowledge.

It makes me who I am.  
Specializing in something is great.

That is what makes productivity possible.  
Wisdom is my fate.

////////////////////////////////////  
*“If your compassion does not include  
yourself, it is incomplete.”*

JACK KORNFIELD

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# Roses are Red

KATHY THOMPSON

Roses are red.  
Violets are blue.  
Words are profound  
Like a metaphor stew.

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Roses are red.  
Violets are blue.  
Passion, anger, love, and hate  
Are descriptive words I offer to you.

////////////////////////////////////  
*"It is life itself that must be our practice."*

DIANE MARIECHILD

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# Grandpa's Hands

*TIM TIPTON*

Grandpa's hands  
were kind, old, tan from the hot sun.

They told more than his face did about life  
and where he had traveled in his eighty years.

His hands were masterful in finding lost gems,  
making fishing lures and carving something  
out of wood to last forever.

His hands were always open, never closed.  
I grew up wanting to have those hands,

Touching earth, and arranging space.  
I found it natural when his hand held mine.

# Meeting at the *Thursday Night Boys Club*

LES (ANONYMOUS)

“Two years ago, I did Garden Talk.

“Tonight, the follow up is a how to make the garden grow better: sort of what you need to keep and what you need to throw out. To paraphrase a quote from Bob Ingersoll, ‘In a garden, there are neither rewards nor punishments, just consequences.’”

“Gardens have boundaries, sometime fences with gates. They are created by passing of judgment on what is in the garden, as well as, what influences it. Vigilance is the price to be paid for the garden’s survival. Recognizing weeds from flowers is central to a garden’s welfare.

“Spirituality is the primary gardening tool. Proper use keeps the garden in full bloom. This tool must be kept sharp. If not properly maintained, it can cloud judgment. Being judgmental and becoming complacent usurp room in the garden; hence the need for eyes of others to help you distinguish a flower from a weed.

“Passing judgment on a flower that you planted in or near the garden requires good spiritual tools. Expectations not fulfilled invite resentments. Always gardening in the same way becomes boring. Before considering redoing the garden and discarding a flower that did not fulfill your expectation, look at the soil in which the flower was initially grown. Given the adaptation required to survive in poor soil is the bloom that you have, the best the flower can be, coming from spiritually impoverished soil?

“Any good garden is the product of hard work. Boredom is the consequence of a lack of personal vigilance. Every day, you and I have the option of abusing minutes and hours with negative thoughts and to turn labors of love into mindless habit. Nobody is keeping you from

having a good day or creating prospects for a better tomorrow, except yourself. Every day, we get a reprieve in which we can tend to our gardens and not those of others.”

Larry claims the talking stick

“Thanks, Les. I apologize for taking the dialogue off topic, but I need that third party guidance. My spiritual tool is a little more than blunted. My son is in jail again on drug charges. I’ve already bailed him out once. He’s been to a half dozen treatment centers with obviously no success. To use your analogy, I have a self-destroying plant in my garden.”

“Les: I had you in mind when I introduced the topic. There are no punishments, just consequences. LET HIM LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTIONS. Give him the dignity to make his own mistakes. Your interventions have been with good intentions, and continuing to redo the steps that have already failed is a form of insanity. Your plant suffers from over watering. Let him find his bottom, and only then, if asked, re-water your plant. In Al anon, that’s called ‘detachment with love.’ It is the hardest thing in the world for a loving father to do.”

# A Strange Day in July

*LUISA URRUTIA*

Penelope Miller reached up towards the rusted doorknob. Placed towards the top of the door rather than the middle, her small fingers squirmed to grasp this antique, lever-operated latch device. Stretching her whole body, her feet transitioning into the tippy-toe position, and her hand grabbed ahold of the doorknob, twisted it to the right, and pushed it open. Penelope let out a sigh of relief, and she was able to get out of her house and explore the grove her parents kept her away from for ten years. Squinting her eyes, the brightness of the sun obstructed her vision so she lifted her left hand, palm outward, over her eyes. Her mouth formed into a grin, and she sprinted across the lawn, her feet disturbing the fresh dew that rested quietly on the grass.

Penelope's arms oscillated on both sides of her body, carelessly swinging back and forth, fighting the slight force wind that came her way. The fine strands of her dark blonde hair almost danced in the wind and in front of her eye, as she jaunted towards a body of water that seemed to fascinate her. This small reservoir was masked by sycamores, white pines, and various forms of shrubbery that she tried to prod away from her face with her arms. Her hair continuously got caught in the thick vegetation, and her forearms acquired scratches from the limbs sprouting from the bush. The scratches, not cruel enough to break skin, just caused a stinging sensation.

She sighed, finally getting through the heavy shrubbery, making her way towards a small pile of throwing stones. Pausing, she took in a deep breath and exhaled, finally being able to breath in fresh air, Penelope let a small high pitched giggle escape her lips. Penelope crouched down near the small stack of pebbles and began to extend her left arm, her fingers making their way towards a circular, gray

tinted pebble that seemed to be close to the size of her palm. An abrupt clearing of the throat startled her, causing her arm to lurch suddenly, knocking some of the pebbles off the edge of the boulder, plopping into the water.

“Now, what exactly do you think you’re doing girl?” a small boy asked, the word ‘girl’ accompanied by a slight crack in his voice, his hand resting on his hip.

Penelope turned around, her brows furrowed with confusion, “Now, where did *you* come from?” she asked, cracking her voice, attempting to mock him.

The boy pouted his lower lip and stomped his right foot, “How rude!”

Penelope began to giggle, realizing what she was doing, and hastily covered her mouth and continuously laughed. The boy’s eyebrows reached down together, interlocking with frustration, his mouth forming into a straight line. He tried not to break his current stance, both arms at his sides, his hands balled into fists, and his legs like pillars, upright and unmoving. Yet, his mouth, yearning to keep the uniform straight line, began to twitch. Different forms of laughter escaped from his throat, until he broke his stance and crouched down and started laughing with Penelope. A few moments later, their laughter subsided, leaving them both with a shortness of breath, their hands resting on their own stomachs.

Penelope began to fold her legs underneath her jumper and asked, “So do you have a name? Or should I just call you — ” she looked at the boy, trying to find strong characteristics that stuck out to her, and there it was, masked by his lips, but only when he wasn’t smiling, was a shiny white pair of two buck teeth and a gap between them, Penelope grinned, “Bucky!”

The boy’s eyes opened wide in shock, and he quickly lifted his right hand to cover his mouth, “You, girl,” he said, his hand trying to conceal his teeth, “Are quite rude.”

Penelope scoffed and lifted herself up from the ground, “Then. What. Is. Your. Name?” she almost demanded, her hand propped upon her hip, head cocked to the side.

The boy let out a sigh of frustration and placed both his hands in his pockets, stood up straight, and left his head up, declaring, “I am Alfred Charles Butterfield, the Third. Son of Alfred Charles Butterfield the Second.” He stopped speaking and released himself from his stance and continued, “You can just call me Alfie. Everyone else does.”

Penelope extended her right arm with a smile, “It’s nice to meet you, Alfie. I’m Penelope.”

Ignoring the handshake she offered, Alfie walked towards the small stack of pebbles and muttered under his breath, “I don’t remembering asking for your name, *girl*.”

Penelope crossed her arms in disbelief and puffed up her chest. She looked around for something to throw at him but nothing that would harm him to the extent of a serious injury. She lifted her eyebrows with joy and picked up a stick. It was less than a pound, but more than enough to teach him a lesson. Penelope threw her arm back, behind her head and launched the branch, aiming it towards his head in hopes it would knock some sense into this rude British boy. Yet, right as it was about to come in contact with Alfie’s head, he dodged the twig. It was almost as if he knew it was coming. With a mission failed, the branch plopped into the lake water never to be seen again.

“You shouldn’t throw those kind of things at me,” Alfie said, turning around to face Penelope. “A girl shouldn’t be doing mediocre things, such as that.”

She crossed her arms in defeat, “Fine, I guess you’re right.” Penelope kicked at the ground with her bare feet, pebbles smaller than that of an ant scattering in every which way there was to scatter, some tiny stones plopping into the lake water and others rolling into the sparse shrubbery that surrounded them both.

Alfie nodded his head in agreement, smiling “Come check this out,” he replied, nodding her over in his direction, his auburn hair flopping to each corresponding side.

Penelope made her way towards Alfie, a question forming on her lips, “How did you know I was throwing it at you?”

Alfie paused, fluffed up his hair, and said, “Well the lady in the water told me, of course.”

Penelope cocked her head to the side, “The Lady in the Lake?” she asked, pointing towards the vast body of water.

Alfred looked dumbfounded, confused as to why Penelope hadn’t heard of the Lady in the Lake. No one had ever actually seen her, of course, yet there were people who claimed they had. Spitting notion after notion on either what a monstrosity she was, her teeth bigger than one’s own pinky finger, her eyes, small and beady, like one who’d passed away and came back only under the circumstance of devouring people’s brains. Or describing a glamorous woman whose skin sparkled in the sunlight on a hot day. But there was no evidence from these sightings that provided a relief to the people of the town.

“You haven’t heard of her?” Alfie asked, glancing down at the pebbles, thinking of how to show Penelope the lady he spoke of.

Penelope shook her head, her hair whirling around on her shoulders, and leaned her back against a nearby tree, scarred with hearts and letters, some reading *J+M* and others with the *J+L*, *J+H*, *J+E*, each one containing the letter *J*. She ran her fingertips over the ones she could reach.

Alfie’s hand shot up, cutting into the air, index finger pointing upward towards the sky, “I’ve got it!”

Penelope looked confused, “What did you find, Alfie?” she asked, pushing herself from the maimed tree, patting her jumper down, making her way towards him.

Her steps coated with a cautious curiosity, a slow and steady one-foot-in-front-of-the-other. Alfie looked confused whilst Penelope almost tiptoed towards him, her eyes facing the ground, hands folded behind her back, and her hair curtaining her face. He wondered why her stance changed all of a sudden, she was so lively until he mentioned the

Lady in the Lake. Finally connecting the dots in his mind, Alfie realized why she was acting this way. She thought he was crazy.

Out of stupidity, he said, "I'm not crazy, ya' know. I'm not making this up."

Penelope let out a hesitant nod and continued her way towards Alfie. "Yup," and with the pop of the *p*, Alfie brought up a balled-up hand facing downwards, then slowly twisted his hand so his palm was open and facing the clouds that provided a cool shade during this hot summer day. Encased in his fist were three throwing stones, each roughly the size of a widow's spare change.

"Watch this," Alfie kindly demanded, then threw the pebble across the lake, skipping it five times. There was a tense moment that followed the skipping pebble, almost as if something was supposed to happen after the skipping of the stone. Alfie's shoulders fell.

"Wow," Penelope exclaimed, placing both of her hands on her hips, "You can skip a rock! Well, I never," she finished, hunching forward with laughter.

Alfie, looking stressed, mumbled, "Lady, you know what you're supposed to do. *Please.*"

Penelope's brow became heavy with concern, *What if this buck-toothed British boy is actually crazy?* she thought.

Seconds later, Alfie was back at it, skipping the second stone in his hand, grunting with frustration. He snapped the stone out of his hand so quickly that Penelope thought it would break. Suddenly, Alfie tapped his forehead with the heel of his palm. "Duh," he proclaimed.

"What is it?" Penelope asked.

"Come here," he beckoned, motioning her towards him with the same hand he hit his forehead with.

Penelope did as told and walked towards him once more, less cautiously than before, and stood next to him, near the edge of the boulder. If they took one more step, they'd be in the water. Alfie kicked all of the other pebbles off the boulder and emptied out his pockets, leaving them inside-out.

“What are you doing?” Penelope asked, taking a few steps away from him.

“See this?” he replied, pointing to the set of empty pockets and the lack of pebbles that were on the boulder beforehand.

Penelope nodded.

“One last try, Lady,” he whispered.

Penelope watched the third, and last, pebble that Alfie held in his hand. His arm in the “skipping stone” position and looking ridiculous with his mis-dressed pockets looking similar to a bird’s wings, he threw with all his might, but the third stone came skipping back.

Penelope’s eyes widened. “What that ...”

Alfie nodded his head in satisfaction, “I told you I wasn’t crazy.”

“But what if we’re *both* crazy?” Penelope asked, both of her hands cupping her cheeks.

The boy shook his head. “That statement is highly unlikely. Come back over here, please,” he said, noticing that Penelope was slowly backing away forming into the crouch position.

“Right,” she replied, with a nod of her head, raising herself from the ground.

“Do what I do. Okay?” Alfie said, extending his arm over the lake and opening his palm towards the sky.

And as Penelope said she would, she copied his movement. “Now what?”

“Close your eyes, and lift your head up,” he replied, doing what he said, immediately.

Penelope did the same. She could sense a slight grin forming on Alfred’s mouth, almost full of pride. She could feel the wind getting stronger, pulling her hair from left to right, like angry siblings would. Suddenly, two pebbles plopped up, out of the water, into their hands.

“Bloody hell!” She exclaimed, with a smile.

Alfie laughed and smiled back.

# Lies

*JUAN VALADEZ*

In a world full of lies,  
The truth seems so lost.  
We hear fake news,  
And we are spoon fed lies from Washington.  
What is the truth?  
Do we speak only in lies?  
We speak so many lies,  
That what we say becomes our reality.  
How do we get back to the truth?  
The truth is what is right.  
Listen to the truth.  
Know the truth.  
Speak the truth.  
Fight for the truth,  
If we let the lies win,  
We all lose.  
The truth must be spoken.  
The truth must win.  
We know the truth.  
We can see through their lies,  
The truth will prevail.

# Dear Deshae E. Lott

JIM VAN ORNAM

I have read your piece titled “You Are Worthy” in *Fine Lines*. I like your writing style a lot, and your topic was one that made me think. After only reading the title, I could tell the writing would be good, but I was not sure just how good. The first bit spoke to me, because I want to be a teacher. Teaching people things that I’m passionate about is my favorite thing. Unfortunately, I didn’t know I wanted to teach when I was a kid, so I didn’t take opportunities to teach little lessons to my grandparents. Though, I’m sure someone would have listened, I didn’t figure out that I want to teach until just a few years ago, and now, I’m a college student well on my way to a career in education, but enough about me.

One part of your piece that I particularly found to be true and that I found myself reading several times over was about halfway through when you wrote that to ask ourselves what we can rebuild in the wake of loss we first have to deem ourselves worthy to be a part of the good in the world. Self-worth is such a big problem in our culture, and it is vital that people know this. You go on to say that it’s not about passively letting people walk all over us or being entitled to something. It’s more about finding a reason that you have worth. People find worth in plenty of different places, but once they do, they can know their purpose and live it.

Another thing I appreciated was what you said about investment in others. Just as your grandmother invested in you, you invest in others. I believe that, in general, we are only able to show the love, care, patience, and compassion to others that has already been shown to us. It sounds from your writing like you received a sufficient amount of those things. I personally feel like I also received a good amount.

A lot of people have invested in me, so I really know how to invest in others, whether it's by teaching them in a formal classroom setting, being a mentor to someone, or just parenting. As a person who is able to invest in people, I hope to be able to show others that they have worth, just like it has been shown to me.

Sincerely,  
*Jim Van Ornam*



Ranthambhore Fort Monkeys *photograph by Kim Sosin*

# Locked

DAVID WALLER

I can't help but stare at the box my grandfather always keeps on display in his room. It looks like a small, stone coffin, emblazoned with thorny vines, twisting and tangling around a human skull. Strange runes line its sides, and amongst them a tiny key hole stares at me. It would almost be beautiful, if it wasn't for the fact the stone itself is rough and grainy. Whoever made that thing clearly wasn't choosy about their materials. Still, it isn't the weirdest thing in his collection. No, that would be the key that always sits next to the box. It is a small, thin thing, carved to a sharpened point. It looks like someone carved it out of bleached bones. Perhaps it had been whittled from a cow bone, or an antler, or something. That would be the most logical explanation. My grandfather, unfortunately, is *not* a logical man, especially when it comes to these cheap trinkets.

"Understand this," he explains to my little sister and me. "That box must never be opened. It must never be touched. Your great, great grandfather carved it from the walls of his family's tomb, and he made that key from the bones of his own mother — a horrific, but necessary sacrifice. You see, a great evil plagued his village. Every night, when the sun went down, it would steal through the village, bringing misfortune and death to whomever it chose. There was no pattern to the killings, only the whims of a sadistic demon, and nothing the people did could keep the evil at bay. Then, one day, a gypsy appeared. Moved by the people's plight, she instructed them to carve this box and key out of these materials. Only then could they seal away the evil. Your great, great grandfather risked his life to stop it, and he succeeded.

"But the evil could only be sealed, not destroyed, and he carried that burden in this box. When at last he grew too old and weak to

protect it any longer. He entrusted it to his son. He passed the responsibility to my father, and *he* gave it to me on his deathbed. In the same way I will give it to your mother in my final moments.” With a somber look on his face, he turns to me. “Someday, it will be your responsibility to guard this Pandora’s Box with your very existence, Nora, lest the terrible force within escape once more.”

He says all this, but I know he’s lying. I may be twelve, and a girl, but I’m no idiot. “If it’s so important that this thing never be opened, why don’t you just destroy the key?” I give him a smug grin and adjust my glasses. It’s such an obvious hole in the story, I’m surprised he never caught it himself.

The old man just sighs, as if I’ve asked the dumbest question in the world. “Such powerful magics cannot be woven without consequences. The magic in the key and box is too strong, and has left the key unbreakable. Our ancestors tried to break it, but to no avail.”

He seems to think this answers the question, but that’s the dumbest explanation that I’ve ever heard. Does he think I’m an idiot? Well, he may be an irritating old man, but he’s not going to get the best of me.

“Then why don’t you just hide the key far away, like in the bottom of the ocean or something?”

“The magic in the box and the key are tied together,” he grunts. “They are strongest when in close proximity. Separating them would only weaken the seal, and may risk letting the evil out.”

“But then...?”

“Nora, why can’t you just accept what I’m telling you?!” my grandfather snaps. “Why must you always question everything I say? You have no respect for your family or our traditions! You are acting like a fool!”

“Oh, so *I’m* the fool for questioning some stupid old ghost story!” I snap back. “That’s rich! You senile old...!” But then I stop. My grandfather’s chest is heaving and he’s starting to clutch at his heart again. Sometimes I forget about his condition, the poor old fool.

“Whatever,” I mumble, as I march out the door, hiding myself away in the guest room. I slip my tablet out from under the bed, pop in my headphones, and let my music bury my resentment for that old man.

Why did he make such a fuss over that old box, anyway? It’s just a superstition, right? People in those days were ignorant, and explained everything bad with evil spirits and witches. Hadn’t we grown beyond the Salem Witch Trials already? That box is probably empty, or just houses an old, dead bat or something.

Still, as much as I hate his stubborn, backwards attitude, I like the box. I love dark, “Gothy” things like that. When I was in that room, I felt pulled to it. I wanted to hold that key. I wanted to turn it in the lock. I wanted to prove my grandfather a fool.

Hours pass. I can’t help but think about that box. I’d finally managed to fall asleep, but the thought of that thing woke me up again. What’s really in it, anyway? I know this whole evil demon talk is garbage, but still, I felt almost a ... connection to that box. I can feel it pulling at me, now, beckoning me to find it. It’s stupid, and I *feel* stupid, but I have to open it. I creep down the hall, my bare feet making only the softest of sounds. I slowly make my way to my grandfather’s room, and gently open the door just a crack. The old man is sound asleep. He doesn’t make a sound. He just lies there, still as a statue, sleeping like the dead.

I shiver a little. Why did my brain go to such a morbid thought? It wasn’t that long ago that he’d had that stroke. I always thought that had something to do with why he thought this story was so important. That sort of thing addled the brain, right? Still, my mother worried about his health every day. I’d better be more careful. It’d be pretty bad if he woke up.

The box is right there on his dresser, waiting for me.

That was a strange thought. Am I really anthropomorphizing a box? Still, ever so quietly, I pick it up. It feels strangely light in my hand, almost like it was meant for me. As if my body is moving on its own, and not at my will, I feel the key fill the contours of my fingers, so

strange, and yet so familiar. My breath stops as I place the key in the lock and turn it.

I feel nothing. Did it work? Aren't there supposed to be tumblers and stuff in these locks? I should feel them turn when I open it, right? I feel a sense of unease slowly creeping up my throat. I can't explain it anymore, but I have to open the box. Now!

I throw open the lid. It's empty. No demons, no monster, not even the dust of long dead vermin.

I knew that would be the case, but somehow I feel disappointed. I also feel like an idiot. Did I really just get suckered in that old man's worthless stories? Disgusted, I close the box and replace it on the shelf, alongside the key. Then I sneak back to my room, and try to go to sleep.

But before I manage to lose myself in my sleep, in comes my mother. I'm about to let her know how I feel about her breaking my privacy, when I notice something's wrong. Her face is grim and white as bone, her breathing is shallow, and she's holding back tears.

"Girls, I'm sorry," she says, her lips quivering. "Your grandpa ... he's dead."

My heart almost stops. "What do you mean?" I ask.

"He died in his sleep," Mom explains.

I feel a chill run through my blood. Was that why he was so quiet? Had he been dead the whole time? Had I just snuck into a room with a corpse? I feel sick. I cover my mouth with my hand, trying to keep anything from vomiting, words or otherwise.

"What are you gonna do, Mama?" my little sister asks, still trying to blink the sleep out of her eyes.

"I'm going to call my brother. Your father's already called the doctors." And with that, she leaves us alone. A long, unsettling silence seeps into the room. Am I supposed to sleep now, knowing all that? I don't think I'll be able to get a good night's rest until after my teens.

"Nora?" my sister asks. I turn to her. She has this gloomy look on her face. She's not crying or anything, though. Makes sense. We hardly

knew our grandfather, and she was so young. Kids are always weirdly detached from these things. Still, I'm the big sister. I should offer her some comfort.

"Yeah?" I ask.

"Is Grandpa dead 'cuz of the box?"

I freeze. Why would she ask such a thing? Did she really think that old trinket was cursed? I shake my head, trying to clear this superstitious fear out of my brain. Of course she believes it. She's like, five. Kids that age believe anything you tell them. She still sleeps with a nightlight and blanket, for crying out loud!

It still bothers me, though. Not because she believed that crap, but because, in some way, I'm starting to feel like maybe *I* believe it.

"D-don't be ridiculous," I tell her. "He was just old. His body was breaking down. That stupid box had nothing to do with it." Then why does it bother me so much? Is it... am I feeling guilty because of our argument? Maybe I aggravated his condition. That would make sense, right? As if I could tell something like that would happen! I'm just a kid, too! It's his fault for getting so worked up over that story, not mine! I can't blame myself for this.

"Are you sure?" my sister asks.

"Of course I'm sure," I mutter, despite the fact that a tiny part of my brain is screaming at me that I'm lying. "I went and opened that stupid thing, and nothing came out of it. There was no 'evil,' no demons, none of that garbage. Now *go to bed!*"

I throw the covers over my head, seething with anger. Why did she have to go and make such a big deal out of that stupid box, anyway? Can't she just accept that the old man's dead, the box is fake, and move on?

After a moment, I feel myself calming down. I shouldn't have said those things. She's just a kid, after all, and she just lost her grandfather. I should have been gentler, more supportive of her. I open my mouth to apologize, when she cuts me off.

"It wasn't empty when *I* opened it."

# An Autobiography

CAROLYN WEISBECKER

When I was a young woman, and just starting out, I came across a poster at a workplace. The poster was that of Winston Churchill, with a quote: “If you’re going through hell, keep going.” At the time, I collected quotes as a hobby, so I scribbled it down and later placed it in a book for a bookmark.

Winston Churchill’s words made an impression on me, because I was in my own personal hell and saw no way out. I was seventeen years old and unprepared for my father’s death and the prospect of going to college.

A few years before I began my undergraduate studies, my home life was in turmoil. Physicians diagnosed my father with terminal lung cancer. My mother, a stay-at-home mom, refused to accept the reality of my dad’s condition, developed severe anxiety, and relied on me solely for comfort and encouragement. However, I didn’t have anyone to provide me with either, and I felt scared and overwhelmed. Based on the uncertainty of our financial future, I got a job at age fifteen, working for a neighbor who owned an insurance business. Every day, after school, I took a bus to his office to work the phones until eight or nine. To say I hated the job is an understatement. The job was lining up new business by flipping through the phone book and cold calling. Each time I dialed a number, my heart raced, and sweat dripped down my forehead. With money worries hanging over my head, I did the job as long as I could, but after a year, I quit when a friend got me employment as a server in a local restaurant.

After graduating from high school in 1981, I enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and selected computer science as my major. At the time, I had no idea what to study. I chose computer

science because I had been in the computer club in high school, but deep down, it didn't interest me, and frankly, I had no one to go to for advice. My high school advisor didn't advise me. Neither of my parents had gone to college and had no interest in advising me, either. In fact, my mother was against my going to college, and said that I'd be better off working as a secretary or office clerk. I went to college because it seemed like the right thing to do. During that time, my father's health further declined, and I developed severe depression and anxiety. As my own emotional stability worsened, my grades suffered, and the school placed me on academic probation. During the second semester, my father died, and my world collapsed.

I turned to alcohol for relief, and later, an anti-anxiety drug called Xanax. It was an easy drug to get as my doctor readily prescribed them, and my best friend always had a supply. I became addicted.

I had now been in college for several years, taking a few classes here and there, but mostly working. Unfortunately, I was hopeless. Suicide seemed like an answer, so I started cutting myself. I had reached rock bottom.

At that point, I broke down. I was hopeless, but even more than that, I was angry. I blamed God for everything; I spent several hours letting him know it. The emotional purging was long overdue, and afterwards, I felt better. Eventually, I weaned myself from drugs and alcohol and threw myself into daylong hikes and bicycling for hours until I collapsed. It's hard to think too much when you're exhausted.

In 1986, I enrolled in a class called "Personal Writing," and with each day, the darkness lifted. The instructor encouraged me to be honest, no matter how difficult, so I let myself go, regardless of how painful, and it helped to heal me. My instructor told me how interesting it was to see my entries change over the semester, from hopeless to hopeful. It was the best class I'd ever taken, and I devoured it. Before that class, I hadn't written anything since sixth grade, when I won a first place in a writing contest, and it felt right.

The field of real estate interested me, so in 1987, I switched my major to real estate and land use economics. Later, I discovered both my grandfather and uncle had sold real estate, so I got my real estate sales license, and eventually, my broker's license. I continued writing (mostly essays and journal entries) but believed I could never make a career of writing.

In 1993, after twelve years attending college part-time, I graduated. I had worked several jobs while in college, but finally settled on one full-time job at the National Park Service. My job was to help local communities obtain federal funds for recreation land, and I loved it. I felt so good knowing I was helping put playground equipment into disadvantaged neighborhoods. Unfortunately, my department downsized, so I went to work for ConAgra, Inc., a food processing company, where I began as an information specialist, then after a few promotions, became an insurance specialist for their aircraft program.

By this time, I was in my early-thirties. Getting married was never on my priority list, but then I met Jim Weisbecker. We instantly clicked, and after six months, we got married. Jim had done taekwondo for over twenty years, and being intrigued, I took lessons and eventually became a second-degree black belt. My husband and I opened a taekwondo school, and I continued selling real estate while teaching taekwondo. I enjoyed helping kids, so I volunteered to teach bully prevention classes, as well as confidence classes, to both elementary school children as well as the Girl Scouts. I tried to be a mentor to as many kids as possible because I knew the importance of having someone to build you up and to confide in. Because of my time spent with the girl scouts, I began writing middle grade girls' fiction, based on some of the stories that my students told me. My writing turned into freelancing, and I eventually became published in some local newspapers, and later, a few national magazines.

In 2003, my mother died from ovarian cancer. During her illness, she went into denial (a familiar pattern for her), and I was forced to make some difficult decisions on her behalf. My mom had problems

dealing with change, my marriage being one of them. At the time of my engagement, Mom became distant and refused to participate in the usual mother-daughter traditions of an engagement, like helping to pick out a cake, wedding dress, etc. She came to my wedding but kept her distance. Eventually, our relationship improved, but at the time of her death, I struggled with feelings of regret and sorrow because our relationship hadn't been what I had hoped for, and I wanted more time.

Last year, my husband and I wanted a change, so we moved to Arizona. After arriving, I completed a writing workshop at Wilkes University and another one at Arizona State University. Both workshops ran for several weeks, and I loved the writing material and atmosphere. This time, being in a university environment was right. I loved every bit of it. Currently, I'm now the organizer of a bi-monthly writers' group. I've gotten my Arizona real estate license and now work for Coldwell Banker. I continue to freelance, and recently, *Catholic Digest* magazine purchased my essay entitled, "I Wasn't There."

After my recent move, I cleared out some old books and discovered a slip of paper — the quote from Winston Churchill — and realized that those words, scribbled down so many years ago, have made me into the person I am today. I *have* gone through hell but kept going. Now, unlike then, I believe there is no other choice but to move forward.

# Read All About It

AUGUST WHITBECK

## *What You Don't Find in the Newspapers*

Sometimes, you can't find out everything from books, the Internet, newspapers, and magazines. You have to put yourself into the world and experience things to learn life's true lessons. All we know is this moment, but we can all learn more.

I have learned many things from books and the news. Modern social media is almost a necessity now-a-days with all of the issues and advancements we have in the world. True human nature isn't defined by the front page of today's issue. What's behind the words and how we prove to others and ourselves that we are "civilized" are the most important realizations. Real feeling and expression comes from how we act towards others. Expression is the physical act of feeling, and if we express ourselves in ways that are true to our feelings, we will reach an equilibrium.

My grandmother taught me the true meaning of sacrifice and selflessness. She would give a stranger the shirt off her back, if she knew the person was in trouble. She supports all people and their decisions, even when she disagrees, but she is always ready to help them, at the end of the day.

In the midst of my wonderful grandmother's open heart, she has forgotten to give to herself. She sacrifices her happiness for everybody else, proving that it is just as important to love yourself as you do others. With the valuable lesson she has shown me throughout my life, I have come up with a better solution: "Treat others the way you would want to be treated, and treat yourself the way you treat others."

# Narrative

*ANNA WOBSE*

She climbed into the driver's seat  
Her friend jumped in on the other side  
Car doors slamming, the sound of the ignition  
It was summer  
And they were free

Coasting down the highway  
Fading rays of light like the final spark you see in someone  
Before they close their eyes for good  
The sound of June bugs and laughter  
Reverberating in their ears

Wind whipping through their hair  
Tangled and messy  
Two Rapunzels ruling the world.  
Warm summer breezes  
Skimming along vulnerable skin

The smell of happiness  
Drifting through car windows and intermingling  
With the sound of John Lennon's voice  
Fading out of a scratchy radio  
Like someone telling you something

But you're too far away to hear  
The sound of gravel and old voices  
Pulling into a forgotten gas station  
With a sign saying  
"Serving you since 1922"

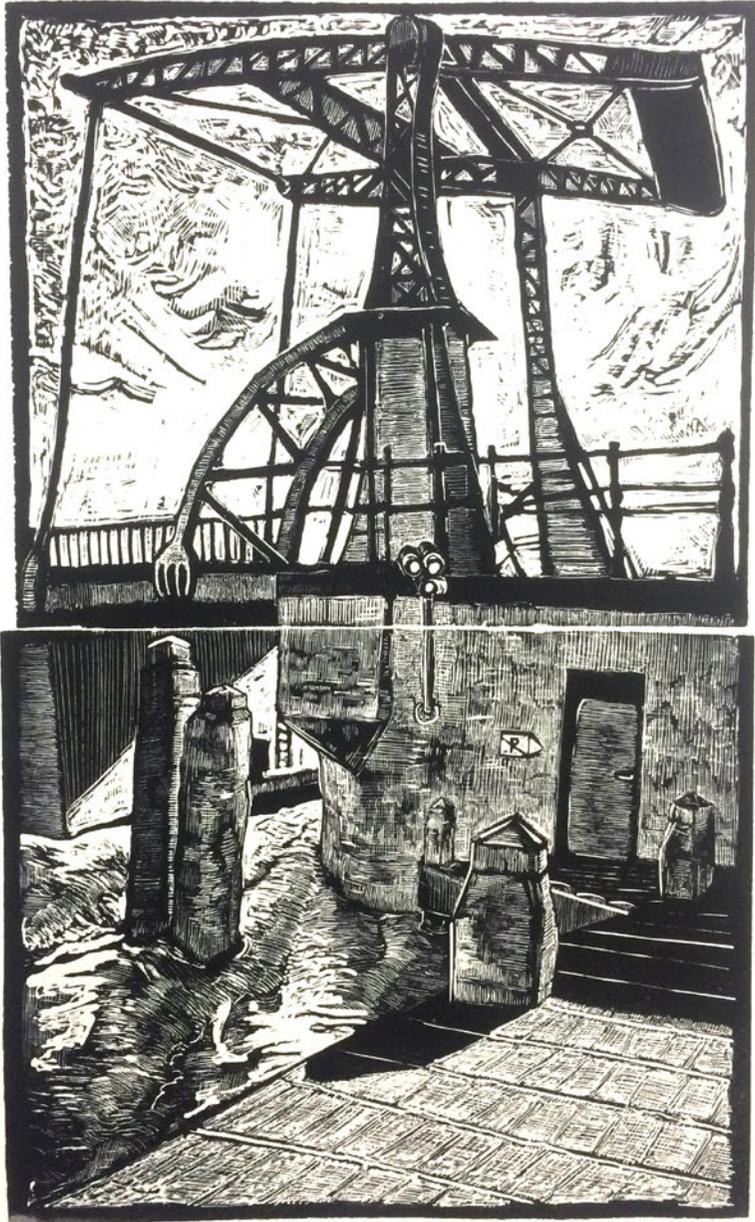
They walk in together, bringing the smell  
Of long nights spent doing nothing at all  
Just riding down the same old lonely stretch of highway  
Going nowhere in particular  
Just going

Soon there would be things  
Bad things  
Such as  
Deadlines  
Jobs

Responsibility  
Places needed to be  
But not today  
Just two souls  
Walking out of an old gas station

Ice cream already melting  
Dripping down hands  
Like the summer rain  
I love so  
Dearly

Two souls with nowhere to go  
Nowhere to be  
And sometimes,  
Just sometimes,  
That's the best way to be



The Lift Bridge woodcut by Watie White  
[www.watiewhite.com](http://www.watiewhite.com)

*“If you would be pungent, be  
brief; for it is with words as with  
sunbeams — the more they are  
condensed, the deeper they burn.”*

ENGLISH POET ROBERT SOUTHEY WAS POET  
LAUREATE FOR 30 YEARS, 1813–1843, AND  
WAS FRIENDS WITH WILLIAM WORDSWORTH  
AND SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE



## CONTRIBUTORS

**QADEER ABDUR-REHMAN** is from Sialkot, Pakistan, which is the city where the whole world gets sport instruments products. “I have never studied for a literature degree, but I have read a lot of poems, and I love to explore nature, so I write poems.”

**RYA BAIRD** is a new writer with *Fine Lines*.

**KRIS BAMESBERGER** lives in Elkhorn, NE, and is a Special Editor for *Fine Lines*.

**LAURIE BARRY** is a senior at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, knocking on the door of caps and gowns, majoring in Religious Studies with a minor in Accounting. Filling her plate with 12 credit hours a semester and working a full-time job for a local general contractor, the line between waking and sleeping starts to blur, occasionally. Much to her surprise, an English Composition II class this past semester and a supportive professor brought about a passion for the written word, opening a new chapter of her life. Her wish is to forever crave knowledge, always seek understanding, and to live every day as if it was her last.

**GARY BECK** has spent most of his adult life as a theater director, and as an art dealer, when he couldn't make a living in theater. He has 11 published chapbooks. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes, and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City.

**ANJANA BISWA** is a native of Nepal, lived in a refugee camp in Bhutan for several years, and immigrated with her family to the United States. She is a freshman at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and wishes to specialize in fashion design.

**SHEILA BOERNER** was an English teacher at St. Patrick's Jr.-Sr. High School in North Platte, NE, for many years. Before that, she raised a family of six children.

**J. ELEANOR BONET** writes fiction as J Eleanor Bonet to honor her Aunt Eleanor, who encouraged her to “just be as crazy as you want to be and don't give a hoot about what others think”. She writes non-fiction as Janet E. Bonet,

for academic or community activism purposes. Her educational background reaches to the “all but thesis” level in anthropology/sociology, and she has a BA minor in Spanish. She is a freelance professional translator and interpreter because she loves words and she is dedicated to social and environmental justice. She resides in the house she was raised in on the edge of South Omaha’s Spring Lake Park. She is happily letting her yard revert back to the wildwood it was meant to be. In her mind, nature should be natural.

**JILLIAN BOSTON** graduated in 2008 from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in English and History. She lives in Lincoln with her energetic cat, Beatrix, and is at work on a science-fiction novel, blogs about storytelling, and pursuing restful creativity at [joyandmoxie.com](http://joyandmoxie.com).

**JILLIAN BOSTON** graduated in 2008 from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in English and History. She lives in Lincoln with her energetic cat, Beatrix, and is at work on a science-fiction novel, blogs about storytelling, and pursuing restful creativity at [joyandmoxie.com](http://joyandmoxie.com).

**RACHEL BRANNEN** is currently majoring in Chemical Dependency Counseling at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE. She is a young mother of three, and she supports her family by waiting tables and rehabbing furniture for profit. Her children inspire her to change the world. She hopes to soften the world, one heart at a time, through her newly discovered passion for writing.

**SARAH BRUNER** is a new writer with *Fine Lines*.

**LAURA LEININGER-CAMPBELL** is an actor, playwright and photographer. She received her theater training from Connecticut College, the National Theater Institute, and received the Lee Strasberg Institute Scholarship, training in New York City. As a playwright, Laura has written a number of adaptations for Joslyn Castle’s Literary Festival, including Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and *Dangerous Beauty*, a retelling of Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Her original script, *Eminent Domain*, was a 2016 Eugene O’Neill National Playwrights Conference finalist and will have its world premiere at the Omaha Community Playhouse in August 2017.

**MICHAEL CAMPBELL** is a singer/songwriter with four albums of original music. His latest, *My Turn Now*, was released in 2015. He is a regular humor columnist for *Food & Spirits Magazine*, where his “Dumpster” essays close every issue. His first book, *Are You Going to Eat That*, was released in 2009 by Prairie Moon Publishing, and his latest collection of 70 humorous essays, *Of Mice and Me*, was published in May 2017. His off-beat observations have appeared in various issues of *Reader’s Digest*, and his weekly humor blog, MC, ([mcwritingessays.blogspot.com](http://mcwritingessays.blogspot.com)) reaches thousands of readers.

**GRACE CAREY** was born in Papillion, NE. She is a freshman at Duchesne Academy and enjoys it very much. Her hobbies include dancing, piano, oboe, drawing, and writing.

**DAVID CATALÁN** is the founder of Catalan Consulting. He was the executive director of the Nonprofit Association of the Midlands from August 2002 to February 2008. David is the President of the South Omaha Business Association and the author of *Rule of Thumb: A Guide to Small Business Marketing*. His recently released book of poetry, *Vagabundo*, was created to honor friends and family.

**KAMRYN CHASTAIN** is an eighth grader at King Science and Technology Magnet in Omaha, NE. "I started writing when I was in sixth grade; my interest in it has grown majorly since then. I write because it helps me calm down and get my feelings out."

**KRIS CHELF** is a web designer, graphic artist, photographer, bird watcher, musician, and avid golfer. See more of his photos at: [www.featherednest-photography.com](http://www.featherednest-photography.com)

**DANIEL J. COX** is a retired college professor and high school English teacher living in Omaha, Nebraska. After 41 years teaching teachers and high school students in Iowa and Nebraska, he is spending his time catching up on his writing, his grandchildren, and Roots/Americana music in the thriving Omaha music scene. In addition to writing poetry since grade school, he is trying his hand at short essays, short fiction, and is working on his first novel. He has always explained that teaching is not what he does, but who he is, even in retirement! His first book of poetry, *Dandelions & Other Flowers*, is available from CreateSpace.com and Amazon.

**AMY CUMMINS** is a student at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE.

**ALISON DAY** is a student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**MARY CLAIRE DOUGHERTY** is 11-years-old and loves reading mystery books. She has been writing stories as long as she can remember. Her favorite subjects in school are English and Reading. Soccer is her favorite sport, and she loves jellyfish and the color purple.

**JULIA DRICKEY** attends St. Cecilia grade school in Omaha, NE. She likes to write about family and nature.

**MARINN DRICKEY** attends St. Cecilia grade school in Omaha, NE. She discovered her passion for writing at the 2015 Fine Lines Writing Camp.

**SOPHIA DRICKEY** attends St. Cecelia grade school in Omaha, NE. Her interests are spelling, phonics, social studies, reading, religion, and playing soccer. She enjoys singing, cooking, exploring and rhyming. When she enters the working world, she wants to be a veterinarian, a cook, and a writer. She has attended Fine Lines Summer Writing Camp for five years.

**HAROLD W. DWYER:** “The columns I have written the past 30 years were for country newspapers. Their subscribers are human beings. Human beings differ. Their tastes differ as do their inclinations. They differ in mental capacity. But everyone on the list is a subscriber. Each has laid the old filthy on the barrelhead for the privilege of reading a specified number of issues. Down the years, I have guarded against the tendency to write to only those of one mental plane. Rather, I have tried to make the column more of a ‘splatter shot’ some of which may hit most everyone who has ante’d his hard-earned into the kitty to help create a subscription list so the publisher could publish. – (Wrinkles and all) but of this you may be certain: if you ever start out (or in) to write 40,000 words with one finger of each hand and a thumb to kick the space bar, the other thumb and the rest of the fingers going along just for the ride, when you get it finished you’ll laugh too, and probably have wrinkles.” He was born 1887 and lived in Hastings, NE. His book *Uphill and Against the Wind* was published in 1963.

**ANDREW EIHAUSEN** is a student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**MIKE FARAN** lives and writes in Ventura, CA. He spent his childhood in the United Kingdom. After his return to California, he served a four year stint in the USAF and then went on to graduate from Cal State Fullerton. His poetry has appeared in *Over the Transom*, *Rattle*, *The Comstock Review*, *Abbey*, *Ship of Fools*, *Atlanta Review*, and in *Homestead*. He is the author of *We Go to a Fire* (Penury Press) and is a Pushcart Prize nominee.

**COLLETTE FEAGINS** is a sixth grader at Kiewit Middle School in Omaha, NE.

**CARRIE FEINGOLD** is a retired English teacher and lives in Bellevue, NE.

**MARCIA CALHOUN FORECKI** lives in Council Bluffs, IA. Her academic background is in the Spanish language. She earned a Master of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her first book, *Speak to Me*, about her son’s deafness, was published by Gallaudet University Press and earned a national book award. Her story “The Gift of the Spanish Lady” was published in the *Bellevue Literary Journal* and nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**JOAN GARDEN** was born and raised in a small town in North Dakota. She attended Iowa State University before marrying and moving to Omaha.

**WILLIAM KIRK GASPER** is a student at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE.

**NICK GENIA** is a student at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE.

**LINNEA GILLESPIE** is a student at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE.

**CINDY GOELLER** has a University of Nebraska at Lincoln Bachelor of Arts degree in education, specializing in math and computers. While nurturing a family of three children and farming with her high school sweetheart, she taught for both Northeast Community College and Wayne State College part-time and substitute-taught at many northeast Nebraska area schools. She is a lifetime photographer and says she used her first 4-H ribbon money to buy her first camera, a Brownie Fiesta.

**ALLY HALLEY** is a financial analyst, mom, wife, and zombie enthusiast. As a recent empty-nester, she is starting to explore long-forgotten interests. Last summer, she learned how to sing/shriek her favorite Italian aria and frequently belts it out, all alone, in her car. Creative writing is her latest foray into unadulterated joy.

**JACQUELINE HALOUSKA** felt she was terrible at writing in elementary school and wanted not a thing to do with it. She would forget introductions and conclusions, not giving any detail at all. When 5th grade came along, it changed her life. At first, she struggled dearly. Her teacher, Mr. Wiles, told the class to write what they felt and what they wanted. At the time, she thought she was, but she could not have been more wrong. She just wrote what she was told to, and she went by what others said, ignoring herself in the process. Now, she expresses herself in her writing, and she loves doing it. She owes him more than words can express.

**AMANDA B. HANSEN** is proud to call herself a recent graduate of UNO. She holds her Bachelor's in General Studies; certified in English Lit., Music & (of course) Creative Writing. She is a recent addition to the Fine Lines Journal of Omaha Editorial staff (and posts for their Social Media sites) where she feels she is part of a team. She works at West Corporation as a Client Contact Center Agent. Amanda owns an Etsy shop called Stitchery Poetry, where she cross-stitches her own poetry. She currently resides in Omaha with her husband, Greg. You can find more about Amanda at her website, [www.amandabeatricehansen.com](http://www.amandabeatricehansen.com).

**BILL HANSEN** is an Omaha native and retired after 37 years in the construction industry. He is interested in writing poetry and has become a master gardener.

**KATHIE HASKINS** grew up in Papillion, NE, and currently lives in Millard with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing poems and reflections about nature and everyday life, and hopes to one day publish a book of her poetry.

**TIMOTHY D. HAZLETT** is a student at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE.

**GARY JONES** is a member of the last generation of rural veterinarians who remember working with cows that had names and personalities and dairymen who worked in the barn with their families. He practiced bovine medicine in rural Wisconsin for nineteen years, returned to graduate school at the University of Minnesota, earned a PhD in microbiology, and spent the next nineteen years working on the development of bovine and swine vaccines. In retirement, he writes stories and an occasional novel.

**CLAIRE KALLHOFF** is a ninth grade student at Springfield-Platteview, NE, High School.

**DOUG KUONY** is an American multi-media artist, writer, photographer and musician. See more of Doug's photos at <https://500px.com/dkuony>

**PATRICIA LANGTON** is 81 years old, lives in Chicago, IL, and writes like she means it, which is the best thing any writer can ever do.

**CAMILLE LARSON** is a freshman at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She hopes to attend medical school.

**LOREN LOGSDON:** "As a freshman in college, I wanted to write like Washington Irving because of that eloquent, graceful style, but I discovered that in an age of technology, Irving's style was too old-fashioned. Then, I came under the spellbinding influence of Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*. I discovered that Irving and Bradbury had several things in common which became valuable to me: a strong sense of place and community, a genius for drawing characters, and a talent for metaphors. For me, as a writer, the end is in the beginning. I believe in the mission of *Fine Lines*, especially in its intention to reach a wide audience of readers and to include a wide variety of writers. I like the emphasis on clarity of writing, which is central to the purpose of the journal. So much writing today defies clarity and seems to delight in obfuscation. Write on."

**DESHA E. LOTT** teaches at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. She worked at Texas A&M University and the University of Illinois at Springfield. Spirituality and living with a disability both infuse Deshae's professional scholarship, essays, and poetry. In 2011, Lott received for one of her essays an EXCEL Gold Medal from Association Media and Publishing. She has served as a co-editor of the *American Religion and Literature Society Newsletter* and has published on a variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Americans including Margaret Fuller, George Moses Horton, Mary Mann, Julia Smith, Walt Whitman, Jack Kerouac, George Oppen, Maya Angelou, and Annie Dillard. A mixture of syncretism and individualism appears in mysticism, and the mystics whom Lott studies endeavor to contribute constructively to their communities.

**SAM LUBY** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, NE.

**WENDY LUNDEEN** retired from teaching in the Omaha Public School District, where she taught Spanish at Central High School and at Alice Buffett Middle School. She is an adjunct instructor at Metropolitan Community College and substitutes in the Millard Public School District. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Organizational Communication, a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Secondary Education, and Masters of Arts Degrees in Secondary Education and Educational Administration. Señora Lundeen is a "Yaya" to six grandchildren and is writing a book about her two grandsons' struggles with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, a terminal illness. Her passions include writing poetry, singing in the church choir, traveling, acting, and dancing every year as "Oma" in Nutcracker Delights, sharing her love with her grandchildren and leading a group of young writers every year at the *Fine Lines* Summer Creative Writing Camp.

**BONNIE J. MANION** lives in Hoopston, IL, and has been composing poetry for twenty years. It's been her good fortune to have had 600 poems published in fifty journals or online venues since the year 2000. See more of her published work at [www.BonnieManion.com](http://www.BonnieManion.com).

**KASSANDRA MARKER** is a student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**DAVID MARTIN** is the founder and managing editor of *Fine Lines*, a non-profit quarterly journal that has published creative writing by "young authors of all ages" for the last twenty-five years. All writers are welcome to submit their poetry, prose, photography, and artwork. This publication has printed work by authors from all fifty states and thirty-eight other countries. The

website ([www.finelines.org](http://www.finelines.org)) has more information about submission guidelines and a sample journal to view. He has published two books of essays and poetry (*Facing the Blank Page* and *Little Birds with Broken Wings*), which may be found at Boutique of Quality Books (<http://www.bqbpublishing.com>).

**VINCE MCANDREW** is retired from the Omaha Public Schools, where he was a teacher, counselor, and administrator. He is now giving full attention to his grandchildren and his poetry.

**BREIA MCCAIN** is a student at Millard South High School, Omaha, NE.

**MARY MCCARTHY:** Growing up on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Mary has enjoyed countless days stretched out in the sun, book in hand. As a child, many hours were spent sitting in the back of the library, flipping through any piece of writing she could get her impatient hands on. She fell in love with words at an early age. Reading helps satisfy her desire to understand the world and the people who inhabit it. How wonderful that one can hear a million different stories with only the flip of a page! As Mary has grown older, writing has become a way for her to understand *herself*. Putting her thoughts and emotions onto a piece of paper make them seem far more manageable. She is eager to continue to travel, swim in the ocean, watch sunrises from rooftops, and grow as a writer. Her hands are open, ready to catch all the stories this terrifying, wonderful world has to offer.

**LILY MCEVOY** is a fiercely fabulous 13-year-old with an obsession for strange thrift store fashions and art, mainly photography and writing. She is an 8th grader at Beveridge Magnet Middle School in Omaha, NE. She lives with her mother and father and 2 problematic cats, May and Buddy. Lily likes exotic foods and has yet to find a food she dislikes. This is her second time being published in *Fine Lines*.

**JERILYN MCINTYRE** is a retired university professor and administrator now embarked on a career as an independent writer. While she has written and submitted for publication a few essays and humorous short stories, she is still learning her new craft. "*Fine Lines* stood out as I was searching outlets for this piece because of the quality of the issue I found on your website and because of your mission of nurturing and encouraging new writers. The fact that you are published in Nebraska was also important. My late parents, both of whom were teachers, were born and raised in Nebraska. The setting for the story is Norfolk, the small college town where I spent part of my early childhood."

**MASON MCKENNA** is a student at California Trail Middle School in Olathe, KS. She enjoys writing for the school newspaper. Her favorite author is John Grisham, because he writes the Theodore Boone book series.

**HENRY MILLER** is one of this country's best writers of novels and essays. *Stand Still Like the Hummingbird* is a collection of his personal philosophical ideas.

**ROWEN MITCHELL**: "As a child I always loved writing and reading. I like to read stories which in turn prompt me to write. The entry I'm submitting was made at my grandma's house. A poem popped into my head. I wrote it down. Suddenly, I had this great poem on paper, and I've had it ever since. I am a student at Kloefkorn Elementary School in Lincoln, NE."

**GILLES MONIF** has had a long career as an infectious disease researcher and medical doctor. Now, he is writing books to express how he see our changing world.

**SAM MORRIS** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, NE.

**LISA MORRIS-SNELL** is a new writer with *Fine Lines*.

**ALLY MORTENSEN** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn, NE.

**BARB MOTES**: "As a retired educator, I plan to spend time exploring the life and environment around me. Being a Colorado native I have always had an appreciation for nature and its beauty. The use of photography enables me to express that passion for nature."

**MICHAEL J. NADEL** is a new writer with *Fine Lines*.

**KATHERINE NETZER** is a native North Dakotan. She is a recently retired Assistant Professor of English from Bismarck State College where she taught composition, developmental writing, and served as a tutor in the learning center for 29 years.

**JON NGUYEN** is a Nebraska native currently studying at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Born to refugee parents from Vietnam, Jon finds his inspiration in the blending of cultures he experienced while growing up. Writing has been a constant throughout his life, but only recently has he chosen to share his work through Fine Lines. Jon enjoys writing poetry on the go, photography, and practical dreaming.

**ANNE OBRADOVICH** works as a lab technician at Creighton University, Omaha, NE, researching zebra fish inner-ear development. She completed her B.S. in biology and French at Creighton University. In her free time, Anne enjoys writing poetry, playing the trombone, knitting, and scuba diving.

**ANGELICA OCHOA** is a student at Castelar Elementary School in the Omaha Public School District.

**MARIE OHLINGER** is a sophomore at Tri-Center High School in Portsmouth, IA. I enjoy writing poetry and short stories as a way to relax. Some of my other hobbies include drawing, playing piano, and playing saxophone. I enjoy reading science fiction, watching Marvel movies, and listening to all kinds of music.

**HOLLEY OXLEY:** Born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, she was exposed to many cultures as she moved around the U.S. to 9 states in all. Graduating from Elkhorn high School in 2011, she took classes at Metropolitan Community College and transferred to the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Originally in the Education Department, she felt more comfortable in the ESL sector and wanted to work with adults. She completed two internships, one with ILUNO, and one with the Yates Community Center before her graduation. Having earned a B.A. in English-Language studies, a TESOL Certificate (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and a history minor, she has been accepted into the M.A. English program at UNO.

**TANNER PARKER** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn, NE.

**CATHY PORTER** works in a dental clinic in Omaha, NE. She has been writing her entire life. Her work has appeared in various journals throughout the United States and England. She writes to process life and its mysteries. She found Fine Lines a few years ago and has been hooked ever since. She has two chapbooks available and is working on a third.

**JESSICA PELCHAT** is in the 9th grade at Gross Catholic High School in Omaha, NE.

**ANDREA PENA-ESCOBAR** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn, NE.

**DILLON PETERS** is Wendy Lundeen's 13-year-old grandson. He has a terminal illness and likes to write and sing. He is an 8th grader at Buffett Middle School, Omaha, NE. We asked Dillon to write to other families who have sons with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD).

**SATORI PETTIT** is a student at Kiewit Middle School in Omaha, NE.

**OLIVIA PIKE** is a student at Omaha Metropolitan Community College.

**CATHY PORTER** works in a dental clinic in Omaha, NE. She has been writing her entire life. Her work has appeared in various journals throughout

the United States and England. She writes to process life and its mysteries. She found Fine Lines a few years ago and has been hooked ever since. She has two chapbooks available and is working on a third.

**ZUHA QADEER:** “I’m a Pakistani Muslim – American and a sophomore at Millard North High School. I just moved to Omaha from a small town called Augusta, Georgia. As a younger kid, I’ve always loved to read and draw, but I’ve tried my hand at writing before, and it’s something I enjoy. I hope for my writing to reflect who I am as a person, and I hope I continue to write as I grow older.

**LAUREN RAYNER** is a sixth grade student at John Neihardt Elementary School in Omaha, NE.

**JESSICA REDWING** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn, NE.

**LILY REGIER** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, South Omaha, NE.

**KAREN ROSALES** is a first time writer with *Fine Lines*.

**JAMES M. SALHANY** is a retired professor of internal medicine and biochemistry at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, where he taught and performed research in molecular biophysics. He did his graduate studies at the University of Chicago, where he obtained his Master’s and PhD degrees. His undergraduate studies began at Wayne State University in Detroit, where his interest in poetry and music originated. He completed his baccalaureate degree in chemistry at the University of Florida. His poems attempt to present scientific concepts in humanistic terms.

**ANDALEEB SANA** was born and raised in Pakistan, where she earned a degree in economics. She and her husband are parents of two children and immigrated to the United States. She recently started studying interior design at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE, and observes life through an analytical approach. “I feel accomplished to admit that my writing has given me the opportunity to get closer to life.”

**HEENA SAYAL** was born in India and found her way to Omaha, NE, where she is studying at Metropolitan Community College.

**SKYLER SCHRECK** is a student at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE.

**WALT SCHUMANN** is a retired psychologist who resides in Bucks County, PA, where he and his wife Barbara (now deceased) raised their three children.

Before becoming ill, he enjoyed carpentry; as a young man he helped his father build their house, and later he did finish carpentry on his family cabin in Maine. Walt enjoys writing, and painting with water colors. In years past, he worked with the elderly in group and family therapy, and remains very interested in applying lessons from Martin Buber and Paulo Freire. Walt is interested in a humanistic and relational basis for his work and writing, and he regards dialogue as a necessary approach to relationships, education, and the political scene. His writing topics include his own treatment in several nursing homes, and now in home care, as well as his enjoyment of baroque music, and nature.

**DANIEL SHARKOVITZ** serves as the English department chair at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School in Oak Bluffs, MA, where he teaches English, journalism, and creative writing. His fiction, poetry, and essays have been published in a number of places including *Teaching & Learning: the Journal of Natural Inquiry*, *The Leaflet*, *Nebraska Language Arts Bulletin*, *Bread Loaf and the Schools*, *Stone Soup Poets*, *Vineyard Poets* and the *Martha's Vineyard Gazette*. He has been the recipient of two National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships. He lives in West Tisbury, MA with his son and cat.

**SUE SHELBURNE** is originally from Kentucky but now lives in Omaha, NE. She enjoys decorating, photography, acrylics, and writing, which has been a constant companion in her life for as long as she can remember. Writing is her therapist, her friend through lonely times, and her mirror that reflects best. Putting words together has never been a laborious thing for her because she writes the words that want to be written and in the way they want to be expressed. It is her responsibility not to censor them. When she honors that responsibility, they read back to her with a light of their own truth.

**D. N. SIMMERS** lives in British Columbia, Canada and writes poetry.

**MICHAEL SIMON**: "I am 62 and have been writing for many years. I live on a forested hillside near Eugene, Oregon, with my wife, dogs, and cat. I have published several poems in a few other journals and have previously published one poem in *Fine Lines*, 2013."

**ROXANNE SLATTERY** attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**CONNIE & BOB SPITTLER** live in Omaha, NE, where she is an avid writer and he is a professional photographer.

**KIM MCNEALY SOSIN** was a professor and department chair of economics at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, until her retirement a few years ago. She published numerous articles in economics journals and created and

continues to maintain several websites. She enjoys photography and writing and has been focused on reading and writing poetry. She also collects vintage fountain pens.

**HANNAH STACEY** is a homeschooled high school student and an early enrolled student at Metropolitan Community College. She has played the violin since elementary school and is a music/English major.

**CONNOR STEDNITZ** is a regular writer for *Fine Lines*.

**MARY K. STILLWELL:** “My most recent collection of poems, *Maps & Destinations*, was published in 2014 by Stephen F. Austin State University Press. The *Life and Poetry of Ted Kooser*, my full-length study, was published in 2013 by the University of Nebraska Press. My chapbook, *Fallen Angels*, appeared the same year (Finishing Line Press). I studied writing in New York with William Packard and on the plains with Ted Kooser and earned my PhD in plains literature from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.”

**BEN NOAH SURI** is a new writer with *Fine Lines*.

**OLIVIA TORRES** is a sixth grader at Kiewit Middle School in the Millard Public School District. Kathleen Pugel is her teacher.

**LEE VAN HAM:** In 1999, he joined others in forming Jubilee Economics, a nonprofit focused on One Earth living. Born to a tenant-farming family in Iowa, he pastored in the Midwest for 32 years before switching to work explicitly on the interplay between justice, ecology, economics, and spirituality. His recent book, *Blinded by Progress*, expresses such interplay. He and his spouse, Juanita, were part of the intentional community, *Peaceweavings*, in Chicago, before relocating to San Diego in 2002.

**DAVID WALLER** joined *Fine Lines* as an intern in the fall of 2014, and has since become a permanent member of the journal’s staff. He regularly submits essays and short stories, the latter which he hopes to collect into a book after he’s written enough of them. He has had numerous pieces published in *Fine Lines*, and his favorite thing about writing is the characters he creates.

**COURT WALSH** was a school teacher before he took to writing fiction. His longer stories have appeared in various literary journals, such as “*Callaloo*” and “*The Long Story*.” He lives in Hudson Falls, NY.

**CAROLYN WEISBECKER** enjoys writing mainstream short-story fiction, middle-grade and young adult fiction, especially while hanging out at Starbucks where she finds daily inspiration and great coffee. Recently, she was awarded The Glimmer Train Honorable Mention Award in the Family Matters category. Her non-fiction writing has been published in local newspapers, business periodicals, and a national trade magazine.

**AUGUST WHITBECK** is a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn, NE.

**JOELL WHITE** lives in Omaha, NE, and has been published frequently in *Fine Lines*.

**WATIE WHITE** is a professional painter, printmaker and public artist who uses both traditional and new techniques to channel his insatiable curiosity about the lives of others.

**ANNA WOBSE**r is currently a student at University of Nebraska at Omaha. “Scott Fitzgerald, my absolute favorite writer, was quoted as saying ‘You don’t write because you want to say something, you write because you have something to say.’ These words influenced me to write myself, and allowed me to take out all of my stress and emotions and passion out of my head and onto a piece of paper.”

**JACK ZIMMER** is a high school senior and a first year student at Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn, NE.



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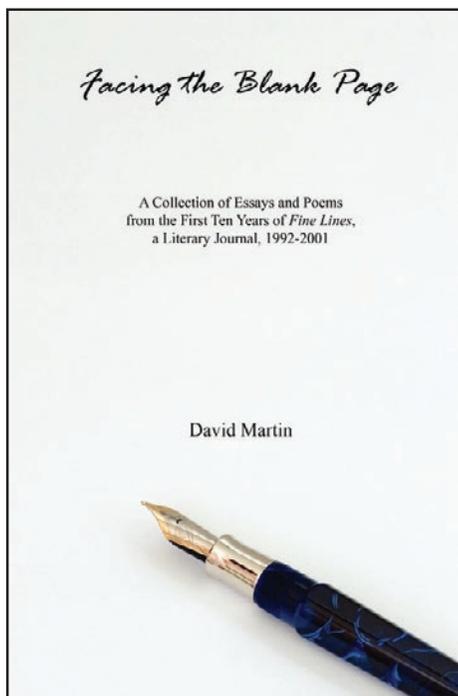
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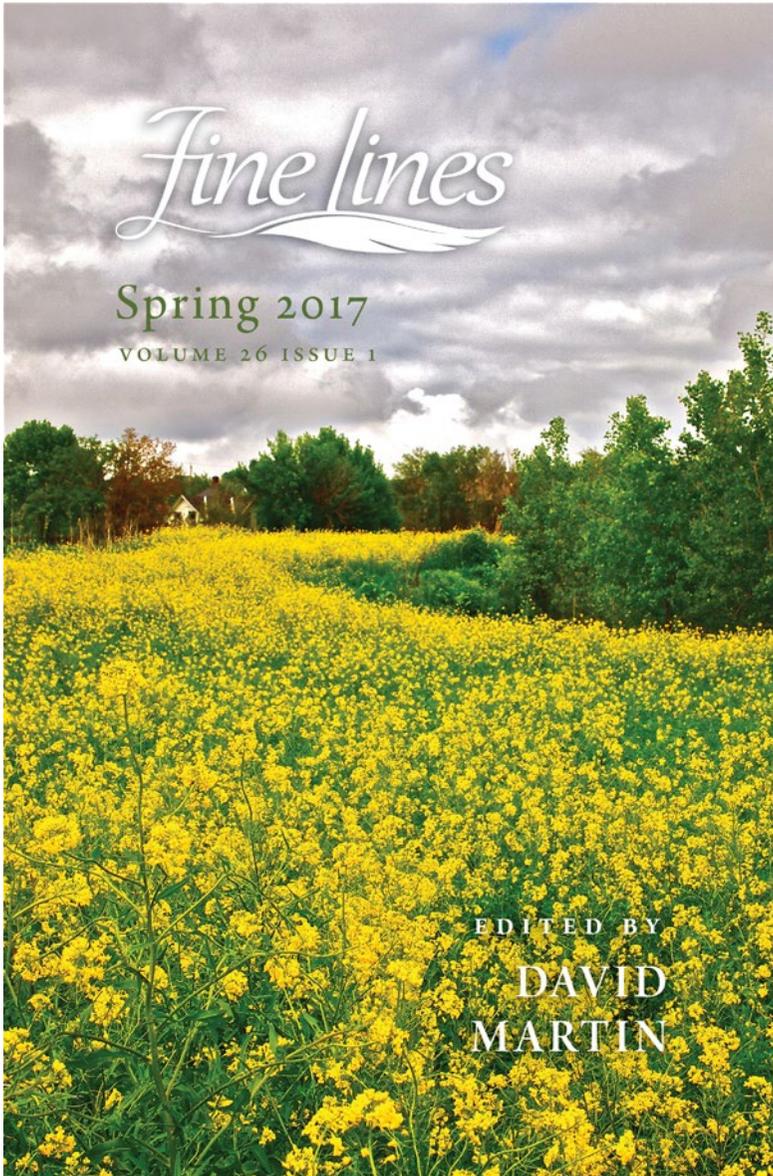
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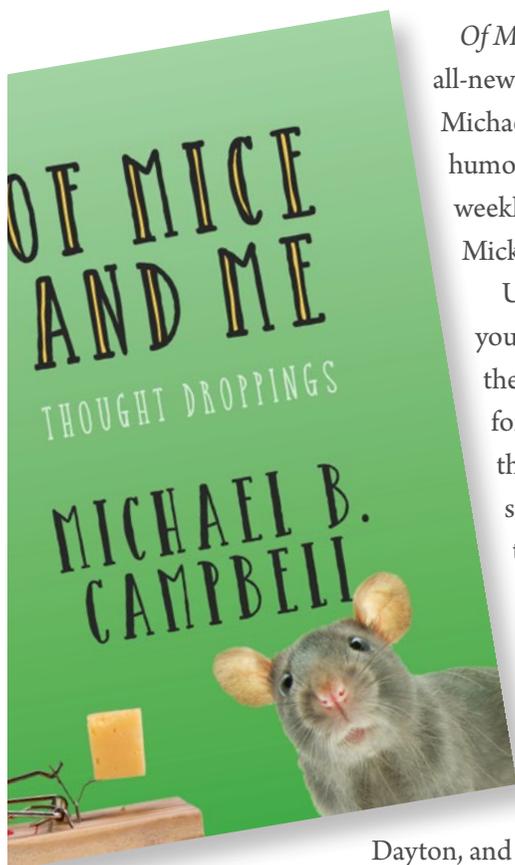


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