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Mission Statement

We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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Poetry

When My Wife is Really Upset, Mel Tillis Comes to Me in a Dream and Tells Me What to Say

If there is a strategy on how to stop and keep stopping, you stop stuttering when you sing, the strategy is to keep singing no matter what, when no matter what is enormous you want to stutter, sing anyway, hum a little, whistle like a bird, like you swallowed a key, a teakettle, a master of ventriloquism, throw your whistle, get so good nobody knows you're the one who's whistling, make the walls whistle, the floorboards whistle, happy songs, happy songs, the kind you sing when your lover bites a piece off of you, and if you still have to stutter at this point then you need to sing some more, sing to your lover, the one who falls in love with your whistle, the one whose mouth holds your whistle, who has so much to say he's just rocking on the floor, as you sing without stopping, without stopping honey honey honey now, honey won't you open that door?

Nix explains to Miss Anaphora his early affinity for the Contagious Radio

I liked
the trashy

Death Metal
guitars

tripping over
themselves

on the late
night shows.

They were
a comfort

when you
stepped out

with the hall
monitor

and his sash
of enraged

asterisks.
The slag

blackened
the speakers

as I drank
my pixilated

liquid, carefully
hoarding

my one
obscenity,

whispering to
my mirror image,

Don't you fucking
misspell me.

The Reader's underground economy

is a gift shop
concealed

in a humid grotto,
glittering

pointlessly
like the mist

spritzed
on vegetables.

In the corner, a loop
of squid-like,

soft-core porn
blithers away

on pay TV,
postulating

impossible
endearments.

No one's supposed to
be able to carry

anything out
of the fictional

landscape, yet here
are the mock objects

in their
display cases:

the diode
that was once

hidden
in the weave

of Auden's tweed,
a flourish

of menthol
signed

by Chekov's breath.
But the rumpled bed

in the back room
contains

the trophy prize:
a sheet

with a Rorshach blot
that no one ever

complains about
having to sleep in.

Above
the notched

headboard,
the tautological

legend
of the Reader's

manifesto:
The beloved other

is not an
educated mime.

The Author addresses The Reader

It helps
If you imagine me
As a clerk at an inconvenient store

Munching Little Doesn'ts
Watching you through closed-circuit TV

Outside there are
Zombies
Or pterodactyls

Maybe dust storms
That make us into
Denizens of silent movies

Or Victorian protagonists
With fabulously complicated coughs

Something has gone wrong
In a large, narrative way

And we're barricaded behind
Racks of swollen potato chips

You have a dollar thirty-five

And I'm flanked
By the pastel anesthesia
Of Bollywood movies

But someone's dead
In the storeroom

And the trapdoor to the sewers
Won't hold out
Much longer

The story is coming

Our gazes stray to it
As it shakes from the pounding below

Writer's Block

I see your winter's up for sale once again,
that you've come down in price on its eternal chill
and cold rain, this ice like a diabolical lace–
will even settle for less than you first paid,
and accept straw or diapers, a couple of candles
or even lease it out and instead of a contract
have us scrawl our initials onto the kitchen's frosted glass
or score the draped sealskin that hangs near your desk
till some ink can be rescued out the white–
thawed at that one path the fist still allows.

LATIN ELEGY

To wrap my mouth around yours and tongue
    your tongue, that's what I'm after.
Slip your syllables around like Aeon
    Flux would, inserting encrypted scrolls
into moveable teeth, pockets where roots
    write themselves. I'll ignore your chipped
molars and canker sores, for I adore the taste
    offered by antiquated acquaintances, the aroma
of primitive odors, of all that's Indo—
    it's romantic, really, such touch and go,
this dance between stretched flesh
    that snails weave when out of their shells,
entwined. Suffice your suffix with its
    -mus ending because it ends with us,
because it means 'we', because it
    drips with how we used to be.

AN ELEGY FOR MOJAVE

Now, all that water the Colorado gushes
no longer blushes with sediment,
due to the dam.

What is the word for *green*?
Not envy, not for those living
along the serpentine bank.

Elderly men mumble as motor boats
traverse the current;
untaught to not talk in mothertongue.

Meandering here, as a rattle snake
banters about when you get near,
then all of a sudden, quiet—

I see how deep this vein of river's
been cut. I've had so many dreams
snapped up. Remember? Hardly, fossils

fail feathers and scales;
their colors once vibrant and separate
now all run ruddy.

DEAR Q,

Your days there are fewer
than the notches used in
your father's belt; that lean
leather strip pulled out
to clap against your backside
and knock out the fairy
dust, the horseplay, ballet
twirls you must make
because westerly winds so
move you; he plays doctor,
performing the Heimlich
maneuver which stings
your throat with cries
and cough-ups of *never*
again touching your sister's
My Little Ponies, the lies,
because you did and he
wrings you like those white
knuckles of his around
his buckle. And that snap
of his snapping catches you
by surprise every time.
You know why rabbits run
and hide when the dog's
let loose outside. You
wish upon the nebulae
of bruises left behind
that you would disappear
or die, unaware that your
years are dissolving
rapidly around you like
the bubbles bursting open
from a rabid dog's face;
his fate is written in foam.
Before you know it, you'll
be bidding him *goodbye*.

Clementines

"The habit of eating unripe fruit may properly be added to the catalogue of weakeners of the memory." –Elizabeth Bishop

Rinds ripped off in one continuous loop unfurl in boiling water. This woman I remember saved the meaty pulps for neighborhood children, throwing open gray shutters and announcing her gift to them in a voice like metal on metal.

She still believed in the evil eye. I remember she drank the skin-soaked water to dilute the dreams of being surrounded by snarling dogs.

Whole, unpeeled, these clementines pulse perhaps like phosphorescent sea creatures. On a cutting board, they seem asleep.

Other women, whose anonymous wrists hinge while sputtering a fan back and forth, recall orangewood-carved mirrors or tonics made from bark extract. Something of the old vanity must remain in them.

Isn't that what we agree to, as women? To saturate churchyard tombstones with beauty as sharp and memorable as citrus in an open wound? A scar now on my thumb I remember.

Not Persephone

The last time I saw the moon it looked like a plump bird
the color of bone. To those kinds of things, I pay attention.

I am of above ground. The warm day and night pour over me.
The world of air can be read: rain needling a windowpane

means you want sovereignty, yellow leaves in an updraft
portend a ruin. I find myself full of wings one morning,

prepared to unlatch all locked drawers and doors. My footprints
in ash wane until all that's left is the fable of a thing loose

in the air. A three-syllable plea from the bough above.

Announcements

I feel the pain of everyone
Then I feel nothing —Dinosaur Jr.

No smoking on this flight, no
snow globes allowed, no small brown
bats or crickets, no drills or drill bits,
we don't want you hitting
any wall studs, no Magic Markers
or Bruce Lee, even *The Little*
Mermaid is suspect, even
the moonlight, even the water
you bought from us…
Total bullshit everyone knows,
plus the windows stay closed
due to whatever, Row 37's cursed,
so is Omaha, also no pushups
or having sex in the aisles, I can't
always stand what they pay me to say,
and you don't deserve it,
but beauty's still there, so much
we should touch, please
put your laser pointers away…
If we lose one engine only I'll recite
some fiction, you only lose
what you cling to, we're just symbols
after all, row upon row,
then we'll keep blasting amazingly
through, a thought over love it or leave it,
conceal and carry, shirts and skins
and cash or credit, the big
full-throated Midwest quaking, and oh
what storms! Whoa, big fella!
Our lovely attendants
will see you then, our pharmacists
and marshals oh husbands
and wives eyeing each others husbands
and wives, there's 50 ways
to leave your lover but only one
off this flight, oh fellow travelers,
I hope we can share without
showing our fangs, that we love

even the seat kickers
and inconsiderate bastards whose hearts
also ache. When we reach
our destination, when the smoke clears
and the door exhales like a ghost,
look for the light. Last one off
cleans the plane.

Moonlight by Edvard Munch

The outbursts of your mind are
considered automatic & stylized

open spaces. Your hand just glides,
seeing the way night takes a lungful.

Consider this sky & shoreline,
a thin white channel of bone

dripping like wax. A cloistered
midsummer awash in a cold palette.

Maybe it's all cloud to you, or sunset
triggered by a pushbutton moon.

It's form unanchored. A confrontation
coming into view from the forest's edge.

You try to plump up the scene. Boughs,
impossibly swollen, starving toothpick trees.

Your best choice was an island. A shadow
of bedrock brushed with weightless gray.

You find the fullness of such a night
too easy, so you daub it out of habit

while I choke on the heat of pre-dinner
drinks, my heart caroming inside

a perfectly sized shot glass. Pour me one
more, painter, anchor me to this shore.

Q & A
a cento based on the poems in Dean Rader's book *Works & Days*

Question: what gets to be

beautiful?

The light

crashing down your spine.

What does it mean

to see light?

This is the light

that is absent of shadow.

Is the opposite of darkness,

darkness?

The star's lids

never close.

Who's to say

the stars understand their heavy labor?

Our voices.

What does it mean

to know time?

The land was land

before we were us.

Can time's exhaust

be our only companion?

Even The End

has to end sometime.

What happens now?

Sit *here* in silence

Nude But Not Undressed

You have hands. They're natural. They gather, feed. But your friends have hands, too, and sometimes they're led to your wife's pantyhose, which they find and for hours they stroke. Imagine her legs—flexed, jumpy. Responsive to pressure. Inviting it, inviting pressure, I almost said. But we can't know the domain of legs just as we can't know the domain of dreamworlds, and so we must forgive flesh that never touches flesh, though my friends have wives and I, I have gloves.

Dear Samuel Johnson

So you're dead.
As of 1784, in fact.
I googled you—that's a thing we do
on our laptops. Our laptops are like
half-open dictionaries stuck in zero gravity
which is why we type "laptop" instead:
to be unencumbered is still
what we grope for, as it was for you.
You chose structure;
we choose less of it.
It may be that simple
but truly you're unhip

with relativists, could be
codifying implies the book shutting
according to a blogger
with whom I agree.
I'm not saying you're bad
(unwritten rules dictate
that word not appear in print),
maybe elitist, arrogant, and a touch
repressive, and not you but the book—
        like language, terrifying
on its raring hooves.

Remedios

Remedios is a mother. She rolls to her side and hugs the cave as if it still housed – the invisible, water-baby, before name, sex, lungs… as she wakes on a rolling stretcher parked between others full of waking women, the lot of them resembling a junk yard. In the middle of the room is a frigid block of silence. The women look at the block instead of each other. Her palm spans her abdomen, the infinite space below her navel, the flat expanse of taut muscle. Her middle finger traces a line down, down, down the unstretched skin, then crossing it. Thermometer is inserted, needle removed, arm cuff unstrapped. Remedios re-dresses; she is free. She carries a brown lunch sack of white pills. Outside the silent and a cardboard Virgin stand where she hails a cab. She dreams a gray alien wailing; she imagines a blood red bean floating in a jar.

They Say This is How the Witch Sings

A witch blankets herself in whispers
of mysterious pine, studies midnight
with ancient eyes glittering vigilant
from barrow to bough. Some evenings,
unable to sleep, her songs interrogate
the darkness, punctuated with mothlight—
sounds that escape a woman who has lost
her house to war, husband to emphysema.
She might emerge from the gloom
on silent wings, a surge of feathers
and starshine melting swift into wind.
The witch's lips are keen for shrews,
ears sharp for field mice, for taunts
aimed at the dead. When trees break
into a sparkle of lark and cicada,
she will fold herself into a hollow
where she crafts charms against death,
a jagged question about the taste of
birdsongs, a new language for grief.

Only Now Do I See That The Wind Has Always Been Full Of Arrows

My grandmother's house once stood
her ground, looming black against her
city block. The war blew through the kitchen,
crashed against staircase and bone, against
her shrunken body. She watched the city
through thin windows—bicycles ripping
across her lawn, a dirty game of kickball
threatening the begonias.

The neighborhood knew all about her—
that mean Japanese lady, they said.
Tough little witch. When that boy shot her
front door with an arrow, she marched
out to the porch, yanked it free,
her tiny fists daring him to come take it back.

Memory gusts through us, invisible
save for what we see in broken windows.
My grandmother's secret—that tiny prison
in the Idaho badlands where winter raked
cold teeth across her back, where chicken wire
marked the perimeter of home. There is no place
like a well-disguised scar.

I feared my grandmother, when I was a boy,
that drafty mildew of her living
room—at her funeral, my cousin insists
she was the nicest lady in the world.
We all agree that her house didn't stand long
enough, its guts spilling forth
a cautious shadow when it finally fell.

Late Semester Office Hours, English Professor

My cave, lit by electric fire,
lacks the jagged crack in the rock
spewing noxious gasses, the gray steam
of knowledge.

My chair is not a high tripod—
wood and rope perching me over priests.
I sit low, eye level, upholstered and ergonomic
but no less mysterious for having traded
robes and rolling eyes for slacks and glasses.

Pilgrims come to me bearing their offerings—
they have not had far to come, no swollen bloody knees,
but they pray I will see them either
as they really are—weak and newly born—
or as they see themselves—rulers of small kingdoms.

They expect a spectacle—
my words rolling forth in drugged insight.
Not the words of a mere mortal
but words that demand interpretation
signs scrawled incoherently on the paper handed to me.
I must morph into priestess,
interlocutor and translator.

Who could expect to understand the garbled
grammar of any woman
without prayer and contemplation?

Clairvoyance

("The sculpture makes the sculptor."
— j.s., mistakenly)

This much is determined:
All the visions you desire will
disintegrate
(integrations you desire
will be visions of an other
for another
time that moves beyond and
seems to carry you),
leaving you to shape the stone
that tried to shape you.

Dwindling at the Taj Mahal

I'm a slow-motion crumble,
a sinking cloud,

every breath
a small drop in elevation,

a passing float
among the jasper buds

and chalcedony leaves.
Some unseen open depth

is already here,
the senses not so good

at sensing beyond themselves.
Mausoleum and *iwan*'s

white marble nimbus
cloud the eye, the future

never enough, festival
pastries raisined with flies.

Only the Eye

We all look up and see
in the pale-tiled market
a human bristling with frost,
gelid behind the fogged glass.

Everywhere the eye rests
hallucinations call after it:
the sparrow jerkied in its plastic shroud,
the twice-dead fruits from somewhere else,
and pouring out of the bottomless microcosm,
a linear pornography of fact—

only the eye
holds the infinite.

But it strays.

***Taenia solium in Homo sapiens*: The Pork Tapeworm in Man**

It inhabits some small spaces at first,
enjoying its new home so much it spreads
from the small intestine to brain to heart,
even hiding from immune surveillance,

cysticerci hitching in the sclera.
Host and guest continue to coevolve,
for ages now. Still, few study *Taenia*,
its genome and the clues to *Homo*'s rave

and great migrations from our motherland,
what might have been eaten and how often.
The case "Who Infected Whom", now revised
using DNA, pardoning all swine.

But here, who inhabits whom, poet or poem
and how do they live in oblivion?

FABLE: [*As soon as it sees that their feathers are black, it recognizes them as its own and feeds them more copiously*]

the ills we do the ills instruct us so we instruct
the children we tell them children use your inside
voices be each a little mouse whisper in our ears
do not worry I will not tell your parents do not
worry little child your parents are here there
is no man with red hair there is something in
the wall scratching do not be afraid do not
climb the hill the hill of limits *sinai was altogether*
smoke we tell you the truth we say who's
signature is this they say I signed for
my mother she told me to say do you
know what forgery is do not tell the ills we do not
the children came unto the wilderness are you
ill we say do you not feel well we say speak
up do what I say let me feel
your forehead why did you make yourself
sick we say you're burning up we say *lay down*
and roar

FABLE: [*when its belly feels the pangs of birth, its offspring bite through the mother's body and break out*]

each syllable that breath made up between them
each syllable made up breath

evaporates gathers as rain as mundus a cloud
as a cloud we've seen before the same a word

as a word we've seen the same the brain floats in
a jorum of saltwater the brain as an oyster

outgrown its shell who can tell the difference
between the story of a memory the memory

of a story who can tell what cravings are ours
what our mothers'
—*that breath between*—
bestowed to us in enwombed

Husbandry

Days starved for vegetables, especially
greens—the buttered slips of pole beans
or a spring mix dewy with balsamic,
anything unpickled, non-fried, sans heavy

cream, not enveloped in bacon or sunned
in the cheese-slicks of a pizza—we went
to an American steakhouse at Stephansdom
for broth mulled with julienned mirepoix

and top sirloin for a double order
of seasonal medley: carrots that cut like soft
cheese and broccoli that broke to blossom
on the tongue, then six sugar snaps I saved

for last that crisped against the molars.
(Was my grief swallowed? Or inborn?)
I touch the napkin to my lips. The sparkling
water blinks dozenly now the rare meat wept

Another Word That Rhymes with Shame

The same damn word that rhymes with *got no rhythm* but not with *not to blame*
That spells *embarrassed* for some parlor game but can't recall how many r's there are
The word that synthesizes every sin in whiskey on the rocks but makes it double
That fills whole Hawthorne novels never read but bluffed and called in conversation
Defines the introvert who wants to ghost from small talk but whose lurch says ghoul

Yet spoken upside-down and backward casts a cantrip that can turn *left* right
Becomes an anagram for *hit the shot* and *blindfolded through pinhole hoops of flame*
An artifice that builds a shield from a bullet and befriends the gun that sent it
A code to tell pit traps from treasures on unlettered maps and to unlock the crypt
The single word that means a flock of blackbirds and the means to sing their flight

Yet still this answer for the stolen riddle story ends in silence, awkward silence
Shorthand for wired-reflex card-mechanic prestidigitation bested by stick-finger irony
A foolproof mnemonic hook for your true name but mispronounced again *you fool, you fool*

Police Procedural

The truth is, we already know the wolf.

The bone fragments & silk stockings, trace evidence, a dead giveaway. We know how he fingered her mouth, her eyelids. How he waved away the bees clustered around her ear. The forensic narrative reveals itself in smears & spatters, unraveling in blue lamplight. It's not about who, but how. Sugar-gorged, corrupted minds & teeth. This is the body, the wire. Fatal, we say. Morbid. The warrant asks for a stain in the shape of a smashed finch.
Everything is coffee-colored. Recognize the signature? The peat moss. The auburn braid, a ligature. We're going to tell you something about motive. It doesn't matter. We're
interested in the method, the way the cuts have feathered edges, that slight twist of the neck. Find the girls. The almost-dead ones, their hair thinning as we speak. It's a matter of urgency. We tell this to the hounds because no one else is listening.

The Feral Diaries VIII

The Cursed Union

I am not what you expected—dragonbird, your consort, a woman irrevocably changed by fevers, charmed water, by the kisses of monsters. I am a black dress that shatters into a maelstrom, a squall of ravens. You disbelieve what you've seen.

Say a prayer, tap that knife of glass over a dry jawbone and say *blackwing, badwing*. Once you marked the place where we met on the map with a bloodied heart. Can you ink away all we've done? Remember the deadwalk, the banquet of mice and rabbits? You woke up with a limp frog clamped between your teeth. There remains something of us in the wicked forest. Together, we bury our obsidian eggs in a damp shallow and mutter an oath over the disturbed grounds. I call you a faithless scorpion and still, you forget me.

Feral Diaries IX

{saving the devil woman}

Always, I dream of going back. Bramble and thorn. That place I was before you came. The solstice lingers, a dark eye. The flavor of dirt and yeast on your tongue, that slight tang of cigarette. [*pretty little lady*] Almond cakes. Poison rooms. The microbial air. Molasses and raw liquor, an inhalation of something gone wrong. All I can see is tarot decks and mustaches, tumblers of ice and wine. The curl of smoke from the corner of a man's mouth. We'll talk about this later. Now I want to scrub your Rosetta stone with lye and take you back to a place without language. You're going to thank me, lay broken shells at my feet. Why tell me these stories of snakes and trees and unripe fruit? Oh! I could rupture your meatpalm with a well-placed squeeze. I am more Python than red, red apple, I promise you.

Notes on the Affair of the Poisons

Again, we must revisit the necessity of foretasters. Call it a sexapple, an aphrodisiac, but really those might be grains of powdered toad speckled around the stem. The skin splits in the shape of an asp and you call it divination. Be certain of your surroundings, lest your heels become rooted in poison waters.

Delirium. Coma. The whitening of fingernails. Gifts sent to the house of the dying. These loaves of bread are greasy, resinous.

The woman, a study in ruby sulfur; lock her away or she'll dissolve in sunlight. Sixteen pints of water will cure her, or burst her bladder. What happens to our witches stays in the *chambre ardente*. You say she made you a promise in the form of inheritance powder. Later, you rock yourself to sleep thinking of black tongues and wasted limbs, all the layers of skin beneath her peeled dress.

The petrified bones of infants buried between the rows of radishes.

Paint her portrait as a silhouette clutched in the talons of a winged devil. The weight of an ampoule in your hand.

Mercury, antimony, lead. In this you have been complicit.

About Love

In one picture I'm smiling at something outside the frame, in the other I'm outside the frame myself & it's merely an indistinct office building ringed by a tarmac parking lot & above, a faint purpling of mountains. The wrought iron gate was always open so I closed the front door tight. I walked headfirst into every pillar in every stripmall. Mighty children with adult intents passed by me & I could see them from the ground up, their heads disappearing into a blur of far-frame focus. When I kissed anyone on the mouth I ended up trapped inside them, like the steam to the steam engine. I learned nothing about love except that the descent is more difficult than the climb.

I've Climbed a Few Mountains

I've climbed a few mountains in my day & each time I reach the top I get a feeling like someone just said my name in a crowded room & I'm looking around, trying to figure out who, if anyone, is calling to me. All day long I elope & I elope but I never get anything done. It's only after night that one can sink into the pliable leather like a singe. It's only by moonlight that a mountain can breathe without jurisdiction.

After he left,
I took up residence

in a blues procession,
south of the dirty south moon.

The women wore bandannas
and shiny buckles, unfastened.

We ate meals of sautéed musk,
turtle, Prozac, and milk of ____.

In the background, muzak played
Pride & Prejudice: The Game.

Only circles, withdrawn from
drawn water, seemed strange.

The rest—the clear
morning, the witch-grass—

I drank with alacrity.
What I could not drink—

(possession
and the practice cage)—

was no cause for tears. It was
back to yesterday—to reading

Moby-Dick at 30,000 feet—
to things that never happen.

Monarch

He whispered it a few times—naughty—
and it sounded childlike (as if I was still
a child) and sensual until I remembered:
sensual and childlike are forbidden to lay
in such close juxtaposition though I do not
recall who said so. Who was it, after all,

who proclaimed children are innocents when
we have many reasons to know they are not?
Why just today, I saw a shy girl pull a butterfly
from its flight, detach each of its wings & hold
each gossamer bit—and with such ferocious
tenderness—between her eager scarlet lips.

Her mind, decorated

Incantations dropped from her lips
like broken plates. She piled decadence
upon herself — spoonfuls — to escape.
Memory was a leather heel

stuck in cobblestone. More than wild
strawberries, she expected nothing,
no one to kiss her pale blue hair.
First snow fell on Krakow roofs.

The difference between *te amo* and *te quiero*

In Mexico, he was a *gaucho*
built of dust and blood and rattlesnake skin,

all caramel forearms and scars,
faded pink tattooed slashes through lip and brow.

White desert ranches taught him to work
the pocketknife. He shot a pregnant serpent

with a pistol, split her belly in two deep drags.
That night he was a hero. Silver coins washed in,

slipped from the mouths of hermanos gone
north in bright moondrunk waves.

They called. From the backseat floor, America
was blue and purple. She named herself

new wife, a bedbug-laced ghetto that ate him
alive, all square body and *manos indocumentados*

that held a white girl for a lousy, soulless *bachata*
in the crepe-paper littered corner of a dance hall

on Independence Avenue. Oh, *te quiero or te amo*:
both are soft and green and dissolve on the tongue

into broken discs. What does it matter what he says
to his *gabacha*.

Darling

Here's the hook, here, the thunk
of the heaping heart. I cannot remember
when I held the marrow of anything in my fist
or the last time

I tied someone into a knot, slid him
across my teeth. Yesterday, my knife

slipped, and I felt my heart
in my thumb. People outside move briskly
or not at all. A cardboard roof dissolves in the rain,

and when a mother leaves, the shriek
from her child is so fierce it blotches
his face and neck like a blood orange.

Things split. I can press the cut whenever I want to feel
nothing more.
If the next man tries to fix me,

I swear I'll put myself out
in the cold. Say: *Without you, nothing*.
Say: *I'm nothing* like you mean it. Twist my hair,

pull back my head till I can't hide the softness
of my throat. Wipe my breath off your mirror
and there you are,

bellowing outside my door.
There it goes again: my heart spinning
to the floor, a penny dropped as you pull it from your pocket.

In These Woods

It is cool and still and our ears rotate towards what interrupts. Trees hold a repetition of reptilian eyes we come to see even as we eat leaves flipped to predict a trouble wind and our insides ache for days. In a stretch of evergreens, we curl into each other's shadows, pause, tremble in inkberry, too here to forget the shock of salt block dissolving in the berry bush, the sometimes trees with odd spots that hunch and hide fire under limb. Some of us still have an errant bullet lodged inside a leg, the hunter's eyes drilled inside our minds, know the hunger of the wild, unkind, so we are quickened, bright awake, bite off endless ticks. Sometimes, in a clearing, we find a ring of apples, wet and shining. Is it luck or an awful silence inside? These days we cannot be sure.

THE FIRST STEP IN SWORDMAKING

Said the woodcutter, "Wife? A little snow girl to amuse us?"

A dark thing swept in
Known
swayed a bone cradle
wounded her *was*.
Fresh-In-Pain made a round of it.
To smoldering yurt she is flavor, like the good hair.

Birch-trees lash her face.

They carried Moon-belly on the covered thing
Made from common pelts.
Those wearing leaves called forth an amulet,
A child some will call Little-no-Baba.

Used-to-Pain lay as though the coming season was a stricture.

No one said, "He was sorely tempted"
Instead, they complained: "Wherever we pull legs

find a child."

AERODYNAMIC STABILIZATION, YOUR OCCUPATION

Slam dancing between era and item
you create the structures required of this particular crowd.

Ridges of grass press the spine.
A prototypical Teen impacted by *must* in background ways.

The other reason: lubricating variety.
Their excellent X were soft, having already been Bad with another.

While young Americans were blackening in the upper index of heat,
three wide woodland flood roe cut their eponymous EP.

It jumps wind without tempo:
The crescent range grows bone.

[So, the singer was its fingertips]

The born push too or wear the role in thick days, founded and symbol side
the album (cassette-only or vinyl).

Tracks of a lithe doe, nearly hardcore season
Cold, not clean enamel
Records, ruminants, velvet {specifically}

Memory is the hot other branch.

Lure fawns, step behind their hawk scene, never their wrapped eye
Start plain; pan American life, and rest there, stage diving.

They feel called together.
"Go again," you say.
    (Hoarse, from wearing away their velvet.)

Tour, tape, scene

Overtake the fawn's stance
Give them the *until* feeling…

This Fletcher yells for his herd
cooking it down

Band
Bad water
Raw discord

Drop the notes

SWAP US FOR A PAIR OF SHEEP

This lawn smell lying rough.
We make the anthill home.
Clowns out and down below.

Ride in strange car. Crying. There, a lesson.

We went to get nachos.
Fresh mown lay our sky.
The trouble began at the popcorn display.

Intermission.

A woman demonstrated on chopped tickle backs.
An attached ride to a falling wall.

There, facedown, I wanted to write lightning soup.
Grandma and her job, kitchen smoking
The place she sat on the way to

Rattle the streetlight.
I felt stuck.
Become me, page.
What I wanted was

My cousin and I in small cotton.
We were going to the circus.
Clown hit the other cried.
A man in a cage rode in trouble and began—

Intermission.

There was an illustrated man throwing
Green papery alleluia my way like hot sausage.
Ten coming with a chair.
I felt in fireflies.
To write about the—

This cousin and I napped.
We ate cotton candy.
The floor, motorcycle, upside home, my cousin got the first time.

We ladled the cheese. I felt like this circus, back two, and so
Took a seat ringside.

father **thesaurus**

lightning
a long whip across
the knuckle clenched sky
tar
tattooed broken skin
pressed in when lids shut tight
the door
glacier
left us thumbing
on the left lurching side
of fallopian highway
forgotten fossils
tossed over the shoulder
salt on luck's altar
fathersaurus
extinct died in a rage bog & hell
of slamming doors
fence
never knew anything beyond your own splintered skin
never knew between
the planks chrysalis curled
unfurled wings
bleating in the dark
stump
you
stay here now
petrified
you could be nothing more
than table

a place for keys & lilac sunglasses
a place for a blue
vase holding one red
rose sailing

Lantern

there is always
a bell
a floating arrow

tulips open
fog curtains
the heart

hieroglyphs
floating lanterns this trailing
summer night

let the dead
swim in
a river of light

The Miscarry of Osteogenesis Imperfecta

Folded, with the off-white
flesh of old paper, she lays.
She has two elephant legs,
bloated with elephant veins,
the color of violets rooted
in faded asphalt's grey.

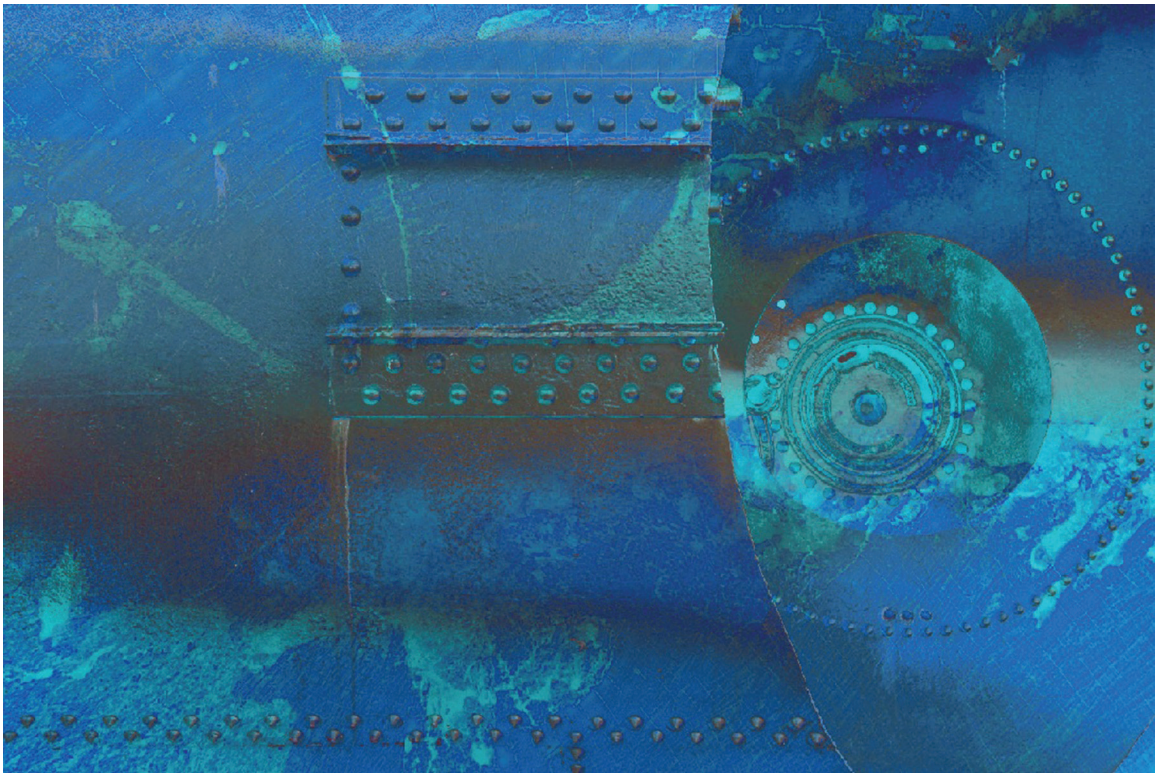
—These legs are folded too,
just months inside of you—

Just months inside of you,
your child is not old,
though she is folded
and creased with broken bones.
Some mothers rub their bellies; you try
but coax the violets into bloom.

Art

Together in Thought

Blue Train Tank



Abandoned Space

Hunt Hunt

Silent Desperation

Broken Sky

Landing

Mountain View, Obstructed

Fiction

The Blow

Here is the hand that dealt the blow that ended the marriage that made the baby that cried all night that ate the sun and abused the moon and shanked the stars that gave the light to the darkest woods where the woman crept when filled with grief and dug the hole that housed the heart that evacuated the chest that breathed so shallow that she appeared quite dead and stirred so little that the bird in the cage cracked a seed that lay on the paper from the day she left him and changed the locks and shredded his clothes and drained his wine bottles and cursed his name and felt his child kick her ribs and press on her pelvis as he rode the bus that crossed the city so full of bridges that the fish below bubbled answers to the questions she had about the man she loved who dropped her cold upon the floor and kicked the shards under the table that shook when the garage door opened.

A Piece of the 80's in Englewood

Sometimes while there, everyone had to listen to the gunshots from gangs fighting at breakfast. The bullets ricocheted against the plastered ceilings and brick walls of homes as though they were dump-truck horns vibrating windows, or deep-voiced families conversing across porches about the day's news. But for some reason, the piercing tone of the bullet everyone assumed to have killed Daniel Landon was never heard. It was as if he had been murdered by a handless felon or perhaps a dose ofChicagowind, taken by something so everyday it was unable to be pinpointed.

And on Saturday morning, April 25, 1987, his body was found on the playground, left arm bloody and wrapped around a yellow-painted steel pole. As the news of his death spread, a herd of people began surrounding him. He lay in the center of the area, crowd in awe as his eyes remained partially opened. His body was swallowed by burgeoning grass, a shiny black jacket which gave way to the trail of blood, empty candy wrappers, and hollowed bottles of beer. Daniel's face didn't look as peaceful as most would assume of a dead person. The brown skin of his cheeks was crumpled like a wet paper bag. He lay there still – not stiff – fully clothed in the jacket he wore daily, blue jeans, and a t-shirt. He did not have shoes. It was almost as if he were still alive. For a few moments as the crowd watched him they may have wondered if he planned to sprout to his feet, stand tall with that nearly six-foot frame, and grin as they held their breaths.

The red courtyard buildings and various homes in the neighborhood began to further empty as residents continued gathering on the playground. More and more police arrived. The people approached Daniel's body slowly before he was covered with a sheet, fearful of what they may have seen. Most mothers were drenched with anxiety while walking toward him, dreading the thought that their son may be the one lying there lifeless. No one spoke nor made eye contact. At that moment, the block of 59th and Hermitage Avenue had been inhabited by a new breed of mammal, no longer by dark-skinned and naïve aliens with antennae, those who continued to persevere through the stressors of their lives as though nothing was wrong, or north-side thinking white folks, clueless to the fact there was a such thing as crime and hadn't seen the dead body of a black teenager lying before them. Each person in the crowd had witnessed this before, at least mentally. The mothers had done so in their nightmares. They'd all definitely heard or known someone who'd experienced the circumstances. But, as the four-floored buildings in the neighborhood seemed to hover above them like skyscrapers, dimming the sunlight with roofs dripping the stale water from a previous night's rain, each person's ideas began to change. Those buildings began to move closer and closer, corralling the people, all the while reflecting the tattoos of their graffiti-filled walls.

Everyone standing there had an idea of what happened. Most believed they could have told the police verbatim what the scene entailed. However, as those officers continued questioning the crowd on that Saturday morning, not a word was exchanged. Heads began to nod and shake, young and old people wept, and those same police began carrying on as if Daniel Landon had never been alive. They made jokes about the circumstances of West Englewood, voiced their concerns on the Chicago Bears' offensive struggles, asked each other about girlfriends they weren't supposed to have, slapped hi-fives, and took their time in covering him until the ambulance arrived nearly an hour later. Therefore, each person standing obtained an uninhibited view of Daniel's body in the playground.

Someone must have then traveled the two blocks downPaulina Streetto alert his mother. She was one of those women that kept her distance from the goings on in the area. The screeching sound of her voice made his mother no different than any other middle-aged woman standing around viewing the scene though. It could have easily been heard miles away. Within moments she was

there in the playground, initially acting as a bystander within the crowd. Everyone assumed she'd be in shock. She then thrust her body, two-hundred and at least thirty-five pounds, to where he was. Daniel's mother held him taut as she must have when he was a baby. She smiled ever so often then screamed further as the tears fell, and began rocking back and forth like he was in a cradle. The police proceeded in aggressively trying to pull his body from her grasp, glancing at one another as though her movements were foreign or foolish. The officers eventually had to peel her fingers one by one from him.

When the ambulance arrived the crowd began to disperse. People chattered and speculated and gossiped and maybe for the first time realized that where they lived, where their children played and husbands drank and dogs of every mixed breed barked and shit with no regard, was an ignored area of Chicago that upon any unlucky moment within the courtyard of a building, countless and senseless crimes could occur.

The black people ofWest Englewoodduring the 80's had very little money; most had never been employed. Drugged out women had sex in halls to pay for habits. Teenaged boys no older than Daniel robbed and stole as often as they could in order to attain trendy items they deemed valuable. Babies were born into welfare in a method akin to the wealthy and their silver spoons. And most of the younger people stopped attending school around the ages of fourteen and fifteen because they felt it not lucrative. Their parents were too busy doing whatever furthered their drug influenced high to ever even notice.

Daniel Landon was slightly different. He was tall, healthy, average looking with small scars close to his ears, and the most easily observed teenager in the entire neighborhood because of his pigeon-toed walk. His circumstances were also a bit more favorable than those of the other teenagers in West Englewood,Chicago. He was unable to receive free lunch because his mother worked full-time in a hospital as a lab technician, and they received Veterans checks for an accident that left his father never sober and with hands glued to the wheels of a chair. Daniel Landon therefore was able to afford things that made other teens envious. And in the late 80's, Air Jordan basketball shoes, floor model televisions, Starter Jackets, and Nintendo gaming systems were as valuable to young adults as a glossy Cadillac or a diamond solitaire to a newlywed woman.

Everyone was certain Daniel fought for those shoes and jacket before he died; maybe he even ran before they pulled the gun. He could have possibly been standing on his green-painted porch, white Starter emblem on the jacket's left arm glowing in the night ofChicagospring when they saw him. Perhaps they waited for him to walk to the store, or to another block to see an innocent girl he'd been sweet on. But none of that mattered anymore.

Because from the day of Daniel's death on, the neighborhood changed little. Things didn't get better. Homes were incessantly vandalized, windows remained broken, televisions and electronics were sold afterward to pawn shops or in the streets. Cars were being stolen from theWest Englewoodarea and certainly from the more gracious regions of the city, only to be brought back and stripped. The gang shootings occurred as before, the drug trade as well. What altered were the expressions of the neighborhood's people. Everyone began to accept the emptiness. The courtyard buildings and ranch-styled homes appeared to move further and further from the streets, seeming at times to be leaning away. People ceased conversation with their neighbors. There was no longer the sharing of sugar or clothing or rice or gossip, or the trading of Nintendo gaming cartridges with your friends.

And the playground where Daniel's body was found never saw the laughter of another child as they enjoyed the wonderful ride of a rusty swing. Everyone remained afraid. Truly skeptical of traveling anywhere near the scene because surely there were reminders of his dried blood and the reality of their lives along the concrete.

City of David

ELAM BASSANI LIVED in the predominantly Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in Jerusalem under these beautiful skies of perpetual balm. The village, located along the eastern slope of the Kidron Valley, sits atop the necropolis of the ancient palace of King David. Every day the Israel Antiquities Authority works to excavate different parts of the ancient city. Young Elam moved to the village as a four-year-old with his parents, Alam and Jordane. They were there because the Ir David Foundation was helping young Jewish families buy up old Palestinian homes around the dig of Givati to help them settle there.

Although a bright boy, the now eight-year-old Elam did not understand the politics of Silwan or the City of David or the excavations or those Palestinians who perceived that they were always being pushed out around the excavation points where their modern homes were now built. He simply lived in an old Templar style house made out of Red-Slayeb limestone; living and breathing like most young boys do, wondering about his choice for breakfast tomorrow and what toy he was going to play with later that afternoon.

He usually waited outside his limestone walled home with an armed guard that the Ir David Foundation provided just in case trouble arose. Each morning Elam stood there behind a wrought-iron gate as his mother's cousin, Taavi, would come and pick him up as his older second-cousin, Jaden, went to the same school as he did.

That day the sky over Jerusalem was this intense blue like the surface of an elegantly polished Lapis lazuli. Elam waited breathlessly as his mother's cousin, Taavi, was late yet again. Elam hated being late for his third-grade class, because his teacher, Miss Devorah, as she liked to be called, made any boy or girl who was late stand before the class and explain to their classmates why it was so.

As Elam bounced his lunch bag atop his right thigh like a palmed soccer ball, he stared through the wrought-iron gate of his home across the street where there were five Palestinian boys around his age gathering around, picking up stones from the empty dirt lot and hurling them down the empty street up toward the hill. After a while this one boy, who had a shadow of dark hair shaved down almost to nothing atop his skull, a boy about the same height and weight as Elam, walked a little closer toward the wrought-iron gates. It was almost as though the boy on the other side of it was this rare specimen he had only heard adults around him whispering about.

Elam watched as the young Palestinian boy walked diagonally across the street, leaning all to one side as the two boys began to stare at each other.

First the Palestinian boy threw out his arm like he was taking a left-hand turn. So Elam did the same. And then the Palestinian boy jumped up and down twice. So Elam did the same. The Palestinian boy then spun wildly and crazy in a circle. So Elam did the same.

Both boys stood their laughing at each other, their faces smiling, the fear each had of one another gone like the wind blowing down the street and turning around the first corner up that hill.

Elam looked over at the security guard who stood there near him behind the limestone wall about ten feet away. He knew he could not see the young Palestinian boy outside through the bars of the wrought-iron gates. When he saw that the guard had no idea someone was standing right there, Elam snuck a hello-wave of his hand over to the Palestinian boy who dutifully returned the gesture.

When the security guard saw this he began to walk over toward the gate.

Elam bent forward with his right hand cupped up against his mouth. "Hey, what's you're name?" he yelled out of the gate.

Both boys intensely looked over at one another. The security guard rushed over, grabbed Elam by the shirt, and then looked suspiciously out the bars of the wrought-iron gate.

"Fadi Ali!" the young Palestinian boy yelled frantically.

When the security guard hired to watch the Bassani family threateningly motioned his torso forward, the young Palestinian boy ran like a wounded animal up the street and around the corner much to the dismay of Elam who knew there were no other boys around his home to play with; never mind another young Jewish boy like himself.

At dinner that night, Elam asked his parents what the difference was between Jews and Palestinians. "Aren't we basically all from the same family?" Elam thoughtfully asked.

"Well they don't want us to live here," his father Alam tried to explain. "But this was our ancient home and it is our right to live here."

Elam looked over at his mother. Jordane had copper colored hair and a gentle smile that made Elam confident right after bad dreams or whenever the thunder and lightning of a ruckus thunderstorm passed with great fury over Silwan.

"And is that it?" Elam asked no one in particular, but his young doubt-filled eyes cast their glare upon his mother.

Jordane looked at Alam who nodded as both parents began to smile.

"No, there is really no difference between us. They have families like we do. They have jobs. They want good lives. Almost everything is exactly the same."

"But they don't want us here?" he asked rhetorically. And then asked: "All of them?"

Alam, his father, a blond haired man of thirty who had intense gray eyes and these particularly large biceps from lifting dirt and stone on the weekends when he got away from his job at Hadassah Hospital and volunteered to help on the Herodian Road excavation at the nearby City of David.

"Most of them," Alam explained credibly to his son.

Elam happily nodded as though this was a good enough answer for now. He then went on to finish the good smelling cholent full of beef, potato, and barley that his mother had prepared for dinner that evening.

Two mornings later his mother's cousin, Taavi, was late yet again picking him up for school. He had a different security guard than he had two days earlier when he had met the young Fadi Ali who Elam was pleasantly surprised to see hanging around across the street outside his gate.

When Elam saw Fadi playfully stick his head around the corner, this ridiculous "hey," whispered off of his lips like a bit of drunken wind, he reached back into his back pants pocket and pulled out two toy ambulance cars that he had taken down from his room with him that morning. They were both brilliant white with a blue strobe light atop their roofs.

Fadi moved straight in front of the wrought-iron gates as soon as his light-colored blue eyes with these brown spots in them saw those two toy ambulances.

Elam reached his hand through the gate and motioned for Fadi to take one of the toy cars. "It's okay."

Fadi smiled. Nodded. Took the toy car and artfully drove it through mid-air as though it magically could fly sideways and upside-down.

Both boys stood there on opposite sides of the gate and quietly played with their matching toy

ambulances along the limestone wall where there was some vine growing; and then down on the concrete ground where an entire army of ants was littering the sidewalk with fine, minute hills of gold sand; and then up the black bars of the wrought-iron gates like they were roads traveling up to the heavens.

Each morning there was school it went on like this. Fadi would sometimes bring Elam guava fruit, which the two boys shared with each other from the other side of the wall as they expertly figured out how to hide that Fadi was present from the security guard who always had to be hanging around close by. Other days Elam would give Fadi one of the chocolate raspberry bars his mother Jordane would make every now and then.

Everything was fine until one day the guard caught Elam talking to Fadi when both boys didn't notice him quietly sneaking over.

The guard swore at Fadi in Hebrew, grabbed his gray shirt through the bars of the wrought-iron, opened the gate, and then gave little Fadi a swift kick in the rear-end as he went running away.

"There's no need for that type of behavior!" Elam exclaimed to the surprised face of the security guard.

The guard, who had a rifle hanging over his shoulder with a beret on his head and this rotten coffee-cigarette breath, knelt down and looked at the boy right in the eyes.

"Nothing good can come of that," he told Elam as though these words had been written on a scroll and he knew Yahweh personally and they had just had coffee at the corner café where all the other security guards could be found before and after their shifts guarding those Jewish families who had their homes in Silwan now.

Elam looked at the guard like he didn't even know what he was talking about.

"I'm not you," he said to him like an adult; but a huff of breath came out of the guard's noise and he pushed Elam outside rather stiffly as Taavi pulled up in the blue sedan to take him to school.

A week passed. On a Friday when the sun was occluded by these dark storm clouds, some Palestinian youth, shubabs, from Silwan began to throw Molotov cocktails at one Jewish settler's home right up the street from where Elam lived, because the press had reported that 3 more Palestinian homes in the village and the empty lot across the street from Elam's home had been sold to Jewish settlers. Tires began to be burned in the street as road blocks. And then the Israeli Army arrived and shot rubber bullets into the crowd of young men who were hooded with their black, blue, and white T-shirts wrapped around their heads in disguise.

Elam tried to look out the top floor window of his house, but his mother had to pull him back, because she was afraid.

That evening when they watched the news on television a story broke that a 16-year-old Palestinian teenager had been shot during the riot. Palestinians insisted a security guard from the rooftop of one of the settler's homes shot at the teenager. The Israeli Army stated they were investigating and didn't know what happened. Everyone else didn't know a thing.

The following day there was a huge funeral procession carrying the dead Palestinian teenager up to the Temple Mount.

That night the spring weather turned cool and Elam had to wear long pajamas instead of the shorts that he had been wearing over the blankets as he went to sleep every evening.

When his mother and father walked by his bedroom door around 11:30 to check in on him, he playfully waved to both of them as they peeked their heads in not thinking he was awake.

"You can't sleep?" his father asked.

Elam nodded his head no.

Both mother and the father came over and sat down upon their son's bed. Alam gently stroked his son's hair while Jordane held his hands.

"Poppa," Elam finally asked, breaking the tension that had engulfed the room. "Did that Palestinian boy deserve to get shot yesterday?"

Without hesitated Alam took his son's hand from the grasp of his mother and held it up to his heart.

"I see boys get shot all the time at the hospital," Alam said. "Jews. Arabs. Christians. Everybody. No boy deserves to get shot."

"I think the same thing too," Elam said; and the young boy pulled his hand back and rubbed the side of his father's cheek, because his father looked so disturbed by what was going on all around them.

After that night things around Silwan seemed to calm down.

On Monday morning Elam went outside with his lunch patiently waiting for his mother's cousin, Taavi, to drive him to school that day. Curiously, he did not see Fadi or the other boys who were usually hanging around in the empty lot next door or the sidewalk going up and down the hill where they usually would walk and amuse themselves and taunt one another in their perennial childish play.

But then a silver sedan, a sedan that Elam recognized as being owned by one of the executives from the Ir David Foundation, came rushing down the hill at full speed as all these young boys came chasing after it with fury in their eyes.

Suddenly at the bottom of the hill where Elam's house was he saw Fadi and his friends come running out from behind a wall.

All five boys stormed out into the road, holding up rocks like they were going to throw them until the silver sedan roared down right upon them, striking Fadi and one of his friends, Fadi bouncing onto the silver hood, up the windshield and then straight down off the car, where he landed face up in the empty dirt lot that was right there.

As the silver sedan went racing off, Elam dropped his lunched, unlatched the wrought-iron gate, and ran down the street to the barren field where Fadi's body lie there completely still with his blue and brown spotted eyes staring straight up at the heavens like he was looking at God.

The security guard who was supposed to be watching Elam came running. He tried to force the boy back to the safety of his house, but he adamantly refused.

Fadi began to hold his arm up and Elam took his broken hand. "Friend," Fadi whispered to Elam right as his eyes closed, and his face and body became completely still.

The security guard forced Elam back as a brilliant white ambulance came screeching up to the scene—an ambulance exactly like the toy ambulance the two boys had been playing with together only weeks earlier right down to the blue strobe light that went flashing around atop its roof.

As everyone in the neighborhood began to come down and gather around the accident, Jews and Palestinians alike, Elam sat crouched like a frog, staring at the taillights of the white ambulance as its siren's blared and it drove away with Fadi's lifeless body inside, back up the hill where all the boys had come down earlier to chase that silver sedan.

With a silent hush Elam knew would only grow into a hysterical caldron overnight, he sat crouched in the empty lot, picking up bloodstained fistfuls of loose dirt, holding it up with his hand right, letting it sift down through his fingers, reaching down, picking it up, and repeating this cycle mindlessly over and over again.

Thieves

I witnessed a book theft on the Red line, heading north. It was around noon. A young woman was reading a paperback and, as we pulled into the Wilson station, a young man—no more than twenty—snatched the book from her hands and bolted from the train. The young woman was obviously too shocked to scream: "STOP! THIEF!" or anything along those lines. She merely stood up, said, "what the?" in a confused tone and watched like the rest of us as the man ran across the platform to the exit. The train driver radioed the police and the young woman was asked to exit the train and wait on the platform. There the cops would take her statement, but all of us were sure that the young man would never be found. Before she walked off, I asked her what she was reading.

"*A Tale of Two Cities*. My favorite book!"

Less than a week after witnessing the incident, I heard someone at work tell a similar story. Apparently, libraries across the city were also being burglarized. Many of the old buildings, lacking proper video surveillance and sophisticated locks, were easy targets. Stunned librarians arrived in the morning to find a mess—shelves knocked over, books missing, computers on the floor.

The rash of book thefts got some press. I read in the paper that a woman had her copy of *Moby-Dick* stolen while riding the train. It was early evening, again on the Red line, this time near Chinatown. The procedure was the same: the thief waited until the train pulled into the station, grabbed the book out of her hand, and ran to the station exit. According to the article, the woman never got a good look at the thief.

"I wasn't paying attention. Melville was too absorbing. I'm so stupid—I should be more aware of the world around me."

Her tale served as warning; the paper reminded its readers to be careful when reading on the train. As a final comment, the woman said: "And I had just bought the book. It was brand new!"

There was suspicion by the police that the thieves were targeting new editions and recent releases only, but that theory was suspended when Powell's on 57th and The Bookman's Corner on Clark, both used book stores, were burglarized. Powell's' entire poetry section was gone, as was most of their philosophy. The bandits made off with a wide selection of the German, British, and Russian history from Bookman's Corner.

There was much talk of the motivation behind the crimes. At first, optimistic academics speculated that the thieves were literature hungry youths bored with the limits of popular entertainment. No video game could compare to Faulkner. *Transformers 2* was not sufficiently challenging to their intellect, so they pilfered Yeats. The thinking behind this was similar to the recent debates about expanding universities to include non-traditional students. Everyone, they said, deserves a college degree and, more importantly, the college experience. If grants could not be obtained, the people would steal an education.

Skeptics found this theory laughable. No young thug was willing to risk arrest simply because they were unsatisfied with pop culture. Secondly, the allure of the XBox was never going to wane, and even if it did the professors were delusional if they thought inner city youth would turn to Chaucer. Rather, they proposed a second theory: the advance of technology in the 20thcentury gave way to a 21st century where nearly everyone owned, or had regular access to, a computer,

smart phone, an iPod, and countless other electronic devices. The worth of these gadgets was decreasing as their prices dropped and their ubiquity was cemented. Since hand held digital gizmos were as common as trees, their black market value plummeted. But the black market must go on, so the thieves and fences turned to books, a disappearing product. While books themselves were still being written and published, the stores that used to sell them were vanishing from the city. Yes, a few remained, but the big chains were dying. Borders had closed all its doors. Barnes and Noble was scaling back as well. Waldenbooks, the sole literary beacon of the suburban mall, was history. Subsequent to reduction in bookstores, physical books were hot commodities and any hot commodity was grist for the black market mill.

Two weeks after I witnessed the incident on the Red line, I became a victim. I was reading Nazim Hikmet, which, egotistically, I thought was too obscure to appeal to thieves who had previously avoided literature in translation. I sat secure with my poetry riding the train toward Loyola. Normally I rose form my seat, double checked my backpack, and secured it to my body while the train made its final stretch toward my stop. This time I was too absorbed in all the things Hikmet never knew he loved to notice that we were seconds away from pulling into the station. My eyes lifted from the page and I saw a young man barely out of his teens in a black hooded shirt, with dark skin, shaved head, and a chewed pen cap in his mouth. He snatched Hikmet form my hands and ran through the doors. I rushed after him. The platform has only one exit and I raced toward it, all the while keeping the thief in my sight. In his haste, he knocked over an old woman who fell down the stairs. After a horrifying tumble, she landed on the concrete below with the thief close behind. He jumped over the old woman's body and ran through the station and out into the street. The poor woman lay twisted and inert on the ground, a mob forming around her. A stocky transit employee radioed the police. They all looked at me with accusatory eyes.

Dinner with Dan

It had already started to get dark when Jake returned home, the familiar trail of smoke making its way out of his house's chimney. No doubt his wife would be fretting around the house mumbling her worried thoughts aloud. He smiled at the thought and finally killed the engine to his rusty, old pickup. It gave a last sputtering breath before settling down for the night.

The crunch of snow below Jake's feet filled the crisp air, echoing through his ears. The forest surrounding him was alive with sounds. Twigs snapped, an owl's wings shuttered against the wind, a deer walked against the same crunchy snow just as he had. Jake's hearing was always heightened after hunting, the pure rush of adrenaline coursing through his veins as if he himself had escaped an encounter with a gun pointed right at the soft spot in the back of his head.

Puffs of breath escaped past his cracked lips in short bursts, the frigid air sharp against his lungs as he lowered the door to the bed of his truck. The spoils of a good hunt lay just to the right, a heap of wounded flesh and bones hidden under a white sack. Careful not to touch areas where the blood had started to seep through, he dragged the bag until it landed with a sickeningly pleasing *thud* in the snow, leaving behind blood stains on the pure white surface. Jake smiled at the red trail fanning out behind him.

Inside, the house was filled with the delicious smells of dinner; steamed vegetables like baby carrots, broccoli, and cauliflower, pasta boiling in water, and the tangy sauce simmering in a pan nearby. The only thing missing was the smell of meat, which Jake couldn't wait to add to the array of aromas.

"There you are," Emma let out, her thin eyebrows knit together and she pursed her lips, the ever familiar crease on her forehead was present, just like it always was when he came back from hunting. "I was getting worried."

"You're always worried," he said, falling right into the routine of their recurring conversation.

A loose strand of her corkscrew curls fell to the side of her face as she asked, "Well, whose fault is that, mister?" Her forehead slowly smoothed out, her bottom lip plumped from the straight line it had been in, blood rushing to it so that the pale pink faded away, and the faint blush on her cheeks from standing over the pot of boiling water made her seem disheveled, but Jake could see peace in her jade eyes.

A laugh erupted from deep in his chest and he shook his head jokingly. "I got a big one for us tonight," he said, the laugh still present in his voice.

She leaned over on her right leg, hair spilling out underneath her head as she did so, just to get a better view of the sack behind him. "Don't just let it sit there! You're getting blood all over my carpet! Go back and get it ready for me." She pointed down the hall, a wooden spoon clasped in her hand.

Jake left, lifting the bag off the floor like his wife had wanted, and slung it onto his back. The insides of the bag sunk against him and made squishing sounds with each step he took. He could feel the head of his kill lull from side to side against his shoulders, could almost feel each individual feature from the eyes to the nose to the mouth of the dead mass.

It took him no more than 30 proficient minutes to get everything ready for his wife. He brought it to her in a plastic container, the deep red of the flesh pushed against the sides, begging for an escape. Some of the juices even tumbled over the sides, wanting that short breath of freedom

before getting tossed onto the stove.

It was all routine from there. Jake set the table, Emma finished cooking dinner. The smell that filled the small kitchen was ravishing; Jake couldn't wait to dig in.

They clasped hands, said a prayer, and finally started to eat. The first bite Jake took was so tender, he chewed slowly in order to make the meal last longer.

"So," Emma started, "where did you get it tonight?"

Jake swallowed and said, "Near town."

Her eyes bulged, her fork teetering on the inside of her mouth. "*Jake!*"

"Relax, it's fine."

She rushed on. "It's going to be just like last time! And we just got settled in." She took a sweeping look at the kitchen. Jake knew that she held especially endearing feelings for the window that was set over the sink. From it she could see the landscape for miles and when the sun came up every morning she was there watching it as it was framed with the precariously placed trees.

"I said relax!" he boomed over his frantic wife.

She cringed back, averting her eyes to somewhere over his shoulder. "It's just…I don't understand. Why do you take such risks? Someone else could've gotten hurt…like before," she said, breaking her stare to look down at her plate and play with a piece of broccoli.

"Because," he said, taking another bite of the meat he himself provided for the two. "I'm good and won't make that mistake again."

"Haven't you ever heard the saying, 'It's better to be safe than sorry'?"

"Are you saying that you don't think tonight's dinner is delicious?" he asked.

She sighed. "No."

"See? It was worth it."

The two sat in silence, eating away at the food in front of them. With each bite Emma became more nervous, and just as she always does she asked, "What's its name?"

Jake smiled crookedly. "Dan."

"Dan Thomas?" She asked. When he nodded her shoulders slouched forward. "I was starting to like him."

"I liked him," Jake said, "a lot." His smile still plastered on his face as he took another bite.

Nonfiction

Wind Chimes

I don't remember all the foster homes I lived in, all the foster families I lived with, but I remember a few of them. One family had horses. One family had a really big basement where we watched Barney after snack time before going out to play in their backyard on the red, rusted swing set and silver metal slide. One family had a lot of cats. In one family, I was the minority because I was white. One family lived on a farm and had chickens, billy goats, and a cow. I lived with this family the longest. While in this home, all my siblings and I were reunited, but, after a short time, my oldest brother had to move into a boy's group home and my little brother—who was born eleven months after I was—was placed with his real paternal grandparents and moved in with them. Even though both my brothers no longer lived with us, they still visited every now and then.

I never understood why I kept moving into new homes, with new parents, with more siblings, with new pets. I never understood why I went to new schools. Maybe back then, I thought I had to move because I had done something wrong. Later, I was told that my siblings and I were "problem" children, kids with behavioral and emotional problems, kids with adjustment issues, "wild" kids with no real discipline, kids who didn't understand what love meant. Maybe we moved because it really was because of us. We *really* did do something wrong.

I moved in with the farm family when I was seven. My siblings and I became part of a Pentecostal family. We moved in with the foster mother who told us to call her Grandma Linda because she was around our grandparents' ages, and we gained another older brother and two older foster sisters.

The faded, salmon-colored house with three white pillars on the front porch had six bedrooms, three bathrooms, two family rooms, and a big, cold basement where I learned to rollerblade. It had a private drive with a gate that stayed pad-locked most of the time, and they had a fenced-in pond on the left side of the drive with a deck—the deck on which I sat when I learned how to fish and bait my own hook for the first time, swinging my legs above the pond water. The property had thirteen acres of grazing land for the goats and the cow, and they had a fenced-in, wooded area where I learned to shoot a metal can by using my brother's BB gun. Our yard was seven acres with two Persimmon trees in the back and a large Oak tree in the front where I climbed and stayed until I had to go inside. They had a fire pit below that tree where I used to play 'camp-out', pretending hotdogs or marshmallows were on my sticks and the invisible flames were heating up my food and keeping me warm against the gusty winds.

When I was eight, my new family and I moved out of the country and back in to the town. We moved into a big green house next to the town's fire and police station, and next to three churches—Catholic, Methodist, and Baptist.

That winter, my foster mother adopted my sister, two youngest brothers, and me. I found my "permanent" home, although I never knew what the word "permanent" meant because once we were adopted, we continued to move. It seemed like every six months we moved to a new house and sometimes to a new school.

The summer I turned fourteen—the summer before my freshman year in high school—I moved to a new town about two and a half hours away from where I had been living. The day we moved, we used an orange-and-white U-Haul truck. This was the first time we used a U-Haul truck to move. Every other time, we just made multiple trips by packing the back of the minivan

and using friends and family member's pickup trucks.

One time, on a Saturday, we only used our maroon minivan to move. I remember we took about thirteen trips across town to move all the essential things—beds and other furniture, clothes, a few toys, kitchen things, and bathroom supplies—and that's not counting all the trips my adoptive mother made during the week while we were at school.

On the way to our new town, my sister sat next to me in the backseat in our minivan. She was listening to music on her CD player. I was staring out my window, watching the cornfields pass by, focusing on trying not to get carsick. She took off her headphones and nudged my arm.

"Wanna take a bet?" she whispered. I looked at her and shrugged. "How long do you think we'll stay in this town? Three months? Six months?"

"I'm not gonna bet. Maybe if we don't, we won't be jinxed and we'll actually stay here longer."

She shrugged, put her headphones back on, and we both continued staring out our windows watching the cornfields blur by on both sides of the highway.

When I think about all the other times we moved, I think that maybe we moved because Grandma Linda had a fear of comfort. Maybe we moved because she needed to look for something new. Maybe we moved because she needed something better. I'm still wondering what was wrong with all the other homes we lived in. Maybe to Grandma Linda, no place was ever going to be "good enough".

In Sullivan, Indiana we stopped and moved into a green house with a fenced in yard, across the street from *Angel's*, one of the two grocery stores in the town. The other was *Save-A-Lot*. The green house was a four bedroom house, but at this time, the older brother and sisters I gained were grown and on their own and my oldest brother was already in prison—*Wabash Valley Correctional Facility* in Carlisle, Indiana, fifteen minutes up the highway from Sullivan—and my brother born after me was still living with his paternal grandparents, though he lived down the street from our biological mother who was now married to his real father, where he visited often. My other brother who was born ten months after the brother born after me had already moved back with our biological mother. He had been living with Mother for four years at this time. Our adoptive mother said she couldn't handle my little brother's deviant behavior anymore.

Once, when I was in fourth grade and my younger brother was in first grade, he almost killed a little boy by tying the cloth paper towel roll—the type that used to be in the school's restrooms when I was younger—around his neck, causing the boy to hang.

Back then, my brother said that he was mad because the boy kept stealing his pencils and the teacher never did anything about it, so one day, my brother followed this little boy into the boy's restroom where he left him to struggle as he hung, and then, went back to class as if nothing had happened. As soon as my brother came back into the classroom, his teacher asked him if he had seen the other boy, and my bother answered by saying that he was dead in the bathroom. His teacher then ran to the bathroom and un-strangled the little boy. The boy was alive and my brother was expelled from school. After he stayed eighteen days in the Children's Psychiatric Hospital, our adoptive mother dropped him off at Mother's doorstep with most of his clothes and a few stuffed animals packed inside a black trash bag.

We moved to this new town because "Grandma" Linda needed to be closer to her oldest sister. Our adoptive mother was one of nine children, and she was the youngest after her two younger siblings—twins; a boy and a girl—died during infancy. She had two other siblings who were dead—a brother who drowned in the Ohio River when he was twelve and she were three.

When she was growing up, people could swim in the Ohio River. I never understood why people would have wanted to swim in the Ohio. It's a dirty brown river that smells like dead fish. She had another brother who was murdered by a mob somewhere in Chicago when he was seventeen and she was six. She has two older sisters—one who lived in Sullivan, the other, I'm not sure where. Her father was a coal miner and her mother stayed home. Both her parents died of cancer when she was a teenager. Her father died of lung cancer and her mother died of breast cancer. She was born and raised in the town we lived in before moving to Sullivan.

Her oldest sister, my aunt, was the sweetest lady in Sullivan. Everyone knew her, but in that town, everyone knew everyone and everyone's business. There are no secrets in a small town. Her sister was a retired bank teller. Back when her sister was a bank teller, she worked at the only bank in the town. Now, there are seven banks in Sullivan.

My aunt hardly ever missed a church service. We went to The Pentecost Church in Sullivan. She always helped out with Bible school and the church dinners after the service every Sunday. She had a lovely singing voice when we sung the church hymns. She could hit all the high notes without losing her breath. I loved to hear her sing. Sometimes Grandma Linda and my aunt sung together in front of the church. Linda knew how to play the guitar and she would play with the red leather guitar strap across her shoulders and they would sing. They looked alike. They both had curly black hair. Linda had dark brown eyes. My aunt had green eyes. They both wore glasses.

In church, I always sat by my aunt during the service. Sometimes, she snuck me a piece of gum or a mint and told me not to pop it, make bubbles, or crunch too loudly. Sometimes she gave me a dollar to put in the church offering. Sometimes, she snuck me a five dollar bill only after I promised not to tell my brother or sister. Sometimes, after prayer, she leaned over and whispered, "I said a prayer for you. I prayed for God to keep a special eye on you because you are a special young lady."

Sometimes, she took me home with her after church. We rode in her red pickup truck. Before we left church in her truck, Linda warned me to not let her buy me anything, and if she found out, I would be in a lot of trouble. One time, when we first moved to Sullivan, I visited with my aunt and she took me to Wal-Mart. She told me that we wouldn't leave the store until I told her what my hobbies were. I told her drawing. So, she bought me a sketch pad and oil pastels. She also bought me a journal, so I had something to write my daily Bible verses in, she said. "A private journal between you and God," she told me. When I came home, Linda was pissed. She thought I had asked for all these gifts my aunt had bought me. I got in a lot of trouble. I stood against Linda's bedroom wall with my skirt off as she hit me on my legs, bum, and back with a thick, leather strap—a leather strap that she used to use on her guitar before it broke.

Sometimes, my aunt stopped by *Dairy Queen* on the way to her house after church. She always asked what I wanted, but I always said nothing because I wasn't supposed to let her buy me anything anymore. My aunt usually got a plain hamburger and an ice cream cone, for her dog, Molly, not for us.

I loved going to my aunt's house. She made her own art—stain glass; decorative holiday sweaters with tiny colorful beads; little hot-glued birds on brown baskets used for decoration or putting things in; keepsake jars with pebbles in the bottom and full of candy; handmade quilts with hearts, butterflies, or the family's handprints on it, including Molly's paw prints. She made wind chimes out of broken pieces of glass from old bottles, old fruit preserve jars, left over stain glass, aluminum cans, or old, rusted, tin coin jars. Sometimes, I sat on her front porch swing looking out at the cornfields listening to the wind chime's sweet-sounding music play in the air as the wind blew, and I watched the broken pieces of root beer-bottled glass sparkle in the sunset, reflecting the colors of the sky—orange, pink, purple, blue.

Linda said we moved to this town so she could be closer to her sister because her sister's husband was really sick and she needed help taking care of him—the doctors said he didn't have that much longer to live.

My uncle had Osteoporosis. Back then, I wasn't sure what that was exactly, but I could tell by the way my uncle got out of his chair in the living room that it was very painful, something I never wanted.

My uncle never left his house. Sometimes, he never even left his bed. Sometimes, he never changed his clothes, or even showered. On good days, he sat in his tan recliner in his living room. Sometimes, he read the Bible, or the newspaper. Other times, he listened to classic western music on the radio. He watched the evening news nearly every night.

My uncle never went to church with my aunt, but not just because he was sick. My uncle was not allowed in our Pentecostal Church. He was banned from the church because he smoked cigarettes. To the Pentecost, smoking is a sin because it is an addiction and addictions are a sin.

When my uncle talked, he may not have been able to hear my responses because I talked too softly, but he could count on me to listen. He told me stories about working as the only mail carrier at the Post Office in Sullivan before he retired. He told me about his high school years, how he made straight A's too. He said he played golf in high school. He said he got a full-ride scholarship to Purdue. He told me he wanted to be a Historian. He said he used to take notes and write stories about Historical events. When I asked if he ever went to Purdue, he told me he went to Vietnam to fight in the war instead. That was the first time I ever heard him talk about the War. The other time, he mentioned watching his younger brother die in front of him. He told me they were sitting on a hillside in Vietnam, taking turns drinking water from his canteen and a bullet flew by and lodged into his brother's stomach. He said he prayed the Lord's Prayer with his brother as he was dying in front of him. He told me the final words his brother said to him—"I think I see Jesus." He said that before his brother's death, he hated God for this War, and after his brother died, he hated God even more for taking his baby brother away. He told me he wished it was him that God took instead of his brother.

My uncle taught me how to play golf. He let me use his daughter's old golf clubs. We practiced in the back yard. He showed me how I was supposed to stand—feet shoulder width apart and back straight. He showed me how to swing the club—left hand is the top hand and right hand is the bottom hand. "It's not like a baseball bat, don't bend your arms." He taught me when to use the different clubs and he explained to me the differences. He gave me my own putter, a bag of plastic golf balls, and a green plastic golf tee to take home and practice with. Some days we didn't stay outside long, just for a few minutes. Some days he watched me practice while he sat on the back porch swing. Some days he never watched at all, but always wanted to hear how I did.

One time, he took me to the town's country club where he was a member. We played golf—*real* golf. He said he was testing me to see if I had learned anything, if he had taught me well. He drove the golf cart. Most of the time he stayed in the golf cart and watched, reminding me to keep my arms straight and follow through with my swing. He told me I was a quick learner. He asked me to play golf for my high school. I told him I couldn't because, back then, my high school didn't have a girl's golf team, they only had a boys' team. He said that shouldn't stop me. I told him I wanted to play softball instead. He joked and said the two sports were close enough.

My aunt told me she loved when I came over because I gave my uncle something to look forward to for that day. She said that he asked her at night if I was coming over the next day, and when she told him yes, she said his eyes lit up and a smile came across his face. She said she couldn't remember the last time she had seen him smile. She told me that he hadn't left the house in years until he took me to the country club. She said he had never wanted to do anything except

stay inside, but once I started coming over, he actually got out of bed and dressed, and *wanted* to be outside. She thanked me for giving her husband a reason to continue living.

My uncle and I had many conversations about the Bible and the Pentecostal faith. When I came over after church on Sundays, he usually asked what I had learned in Sunday school. When I told him the lesson and the Bible verses, he asked me what I thought about what my Sunday school teachers had taught me, and then, what I thought the Bible verses meant. I usually shrugged because I didn't know what to say. He told me his thoughts about what I had been taught. He opened his Bible and showed me the same Bible verses I had read in Church—in the Old Testament—and then, he showed me more verses I had not learned—in the New Testament. Then, he taught me the same lesson I had learned in Church, except he added the verses from the New Testament. He made more sense than my Sunday school teachers. This was when I started noticing that I, like my uncle, interpreted the Bible differently than the Pentecost. We kept these "lessons" a secret because neither of us wanted to be in trouble with my aunt, my adoptive mother, or the church.

My uncle said he didn't believe in a religion, but he believed in God. He said that that was all that should matter because when we die, God will judge us based on how *we* chose to live *our* lives, not by how other people told us we *had* to live our lives.

The first year in my new high school, my best friend was Hispanic. She moved to Sullivan from Mexico a year before our freshman year. She taught me Spanish. I taught her English. She taught me cuss words in Spanish—*pendejo, mierda, jodete*. I taught her cuss words in English—*asshole, shit, fuck*. She was hilarious. I used to tell her that she "cracked me up." One time, after I told a joke, she said, "you crap me out." I don't think I ever laughed as hard as I did then. She didn't understand how Americans had so much slang in the English language. She said it only confused her because she didn't know what we were saying. I told her that was what I thought when I heard her speak Spanish really fast.

In high school, in Sullivan, I made straight A's. I was in all honors classes, but still, the classes seemed too easy for me. Most of the time I stared out the window in class watching the leaves change as the seasons changed and I watched the street maintenance fix the potholes on the street nearby. Other students called me 'the smart one' because I knew the answers, though I never talked in class, but I had the answers written down on my page of notes. I was asked to tutor students in math, English, chemistry, Spanish.

One time, at the beginning of my freshman year in English class, we had to take a one-hundred-questioned spelling test. The next class day, my teacher asked me to stay after class. She told me I scored a one hundred percent on the test. She asked me if I would be interested in joining the school's Spell Bowl team. Back then, I didn't know what that was, so I shrugged. She told me to talk to the school's librarian to get more information, talk to my parents, and let either her or the librarian know my answer by the end of the following week.

I was allowed to join the Spell Bowl team. There were only two freshmen on the team. I loved Spell Bowl. We made it to State that year. The competition was at Purdue. We won third place as a team in the whole state. I scored a perfect round by not missing any words. There were only two people on my team who had done so, the other was a senior. I remember a few of the words I had to spell—*aardvark, colonel, Anti-Semitism*.

My sophomore year, I was still on the Spell Bowl team. My sister joined the team too. I was inducted into Beta Club and the National Honor's Society. I was a class officer—secretary. I was also the secretary for FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America) and Spanish Club. I played center field on the junior varsity softball team.

During that fall, my sophomore year, I "dated" the quarterback of the football team. We

were good friends and we were on the Spell Bowl team together, and we were both in Beta Club and National Honor's Society. He was a junior. His parents were both doctors. He said he was going to be a doctor too.

I was not allowed to date him because we didn't have the same religious beliefs. He was Catholic; I was Pentecostal. I was also only fifteen and he was almost seventeen. My adoptive mother said I could not date, especially if he didn't believe what we believed. We snuck around anyway; everyone knew we were boyfriend and girlfriend.

He wanted to take me on a real date. I told him I was not allowed.

One night, I was sitting at my dining room table working on homework while dinner was cooking in the oven. I heard a knock on the door and my sister answered it. It was him. He asked to speak to Linda. When she came to the front door, she told my sister and me to get back to our homework. After he introduced himself to Linda, she invited him in and they stood in the foyer by the staircase. My sister and I were peeking our heads around the doorway that separated the dining room from the living room to hear and see what was going on. His shaggy, dirty blonde hair was combed and gelled back out of his light brown eyes. He wore his blue, faded jeans with a thick, white belt and he wore brown boots. I could see the impression of his abs through his skin-tight, charcoal gray *American Eagle* t-shirt which he wore under a black jacket. He told Linda a little background information about who his parents were and what they did and he also talked about his plans for the future. He said that he knew I wasn't old enough to date and was not allowed to date someone who had different religious beliefs, but he wanted to ask permission to take me to the Latino restaurant for lunch that following Saturday, as friends only. She allowed him to take me out to lunch only if my older sister could go too. She reminded him that this lunch was not a date and I had to be back in no later than one hour. He agreed and that Saturday we went to lunch.

He drove his white pickup truck and my older sister and her best friend followed in our family's minivan. When we got to the restaurant, we sat in one booth and my sister and her friend sat three booths behind us. I ordered in Spanish. He told me he was impressed. I told him my friend had taught me all I knew. He said he knew only a few phrases—*Cómo te llamas, Cómo estás, tu eres muy caliente*. I laughed. "Gracias," I told him. He said he didn't know much Spanish because he studied Latin and French.

We ended up "breaking up". One day while I was in the library looking for more books to check out during lunch, he came by me pretending to look for books too. I had a feeling that he was getting ready to do the 'it's not you, it's me' speech, but he didn't. He said that it wasn't him, it was his parents. I said that it wasn't him either, it was my religion. We agreed to still be friends.

At the end of my sophomore year, I had to leave the town and move two hours away to Evansville, Indiana. I had to move in with my biological mother because, just like my little brother, Linda couldn't handle my deviant behavior. She said I was questioning God by asking her, my Sunday school teachers, and my pastor to explain the Bible verses on which our faith was based. She said that that was going against her, God, and the church. She said that I was sinning. She also told me that I was defiant because I wore my softball uniform pants, which I was not allowed to wear, when getting my team pictures taken, instead of wearing my skirt. She said that this too was not allowed. So, in the middle of a spring afternoon in May, Linda took me out of school and drove me to Mother's house with my skirt and books in my backpack.

I left the town of Sullivan three weeks before school let out for summer towards the end of my sophomore year. Back then, that town was all I knew. Everyone knew everyone. I couldn't even walk down the street without out someone driving by and offering me a ride and they knew who I was because they knew who my aunt was. But, I left that town, leaving what I knew, who I

knew, and everything in it behind. I left that town to move on to something bigger, although back then, I didn't know what that "something" was. Even though I left that town and all the people I knew behind, the town continued without me.

When I think of Sullivan, I think of my uncle who passed away towards the end of my sophomore year. At his funeral, my aunt asked me if I would write a speech to say. I wrote a small speech, but I also wrote a poem titled, "The Spirit in Golf". My last lines of the poem were, "And as the ball flies in the air, soaring through the sky, / So does his spirit as he enters Heaven, waving at me saying goodbye." After I read the poem, I folded it up and laid it on his chest by his hands inside his baby blue casket and kissed his forehead. I remember my aunt singing *Amazing Grace* as Linda played her guitar. I remember wincing as every one of those twenty-one shots fired from the Veterans' riffles nearby my uncle's burial site. I remember my aunt handing me a white rose. "Keep this to remember him," she told me. I remember giving my aunt the green golf tee, which my uncle gave me, so that she could keep it after he died. My uncle may have been banned from the Pentecostal Church, but he was not banned from Heaven.

When I think of that town, I don't think of Linda beating me with leather straps or wire hangers. I think of all the corn-holing, shucking, and eating during the fall season at the town's Corn Festival. I think of how *Cheetos* were called *Cheesy Poofs*, not *Cheese Puffs*. I think of how a creek is called a "crick", according to the Sullivan folk. I think of how my uncle is playing golf in Heaven right now, standing with his feet shoulder width apart and looking down on me and smiling. But mostly, I think of my aunt's broken, root beer glass bottled wind chimes swaying in the breeze on her front porch.

Odds and Ashes: A Litany for Many Voices

Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. It's Ash Wednesday, and I, a relative newcomer to this ritual of ash and repentance, sit in a pew in my Protestant church. As a child I had grown up in the shadows of the neighborhood Catholic parish. For years, I had puzzled over the mysterious, sooty crosses on the foreheads of my Catholic girlfriends, girls who told me they were forbidden to wash off the mark created by a priest on this day that begins Lent. With a thumb coated in holy ashes and a bit of blessed oil, he had touched their pure white foreheads and warned, *Remember, you are dust*. Dust, as in nothing, as in barely existent, as if any of us back then in 1969 needed any reminders. We were children meant to be seen and not heard. Certainly, we were not to question the authority of adults regardless of what they might say or do to us.

Now decades later, I am the adult waiting the moment when I will hear the same words and feel my pastor's thumb cross on my forehead the dark smudge, the ashy conglomeration. Strangely, I cannot think of ashes without tasting them and the cigarettes that created them, back when I was a statistic and didn't know it, when I was in college and was…

One out of every four young women who smoked. I was among the twenty-five percent who got buzzed on menthols, who practiced the art of inhaling alongside girlfriends. Still, I…

Remember that the real reason Cindy, Kristi and I took up smoking was to lose weight. It was a lost effort when we discovered burning tobacco tasted horrible, and so we all gave it up and tried other diets—like Atkins, grapefruits, and salads—to shrink our bodies for the frat boys. We were sure they would notice us if we could just lose five or ten or twenty pounds. Maybe if we lost thirty, one might fall in love with us. But we weren't the only girls wanting to lose weight, since…

One out of every four college-aged women tries unhealthy ways to lose weight like fasting, skipping meals, excessive exercise, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting. In college, we knew a girl who would chew up her meatloaf or hot dog or mashed potatoes but not swallow it. Instead, she spit it all out into the cafeteria's clear plastic glasses. Of course she lost weight though not to the severity where she ever looked anorexic. Instead, it was just enough that one day you might notice her jeans seemed baggier, her shirt hung looser. We all said it was a disgusting way to lose the "freshmen-20," while secretly wondering how we might do the same thing without grossing everyone out spitting bits of masticated bun and ground meat into glasses on a cafeteria tray.

In contrast, wearing a few ashes from our menthol cigarettes seemed less of a public offense, even if our mothers found out we were smoking cigarettes. Surely smoking was a sin. But did we really care whether we were sinning or not? After all, when you're young, confessing sins or pondering mortality is far from your mind, which is what you should think about when you hear the words…

Remember that you are dust. Except in college most of us girls quit remembering, stopped going to church, except for Cindy who continued to go to Catholic mass on Saturday nights while the rest of us primped and sucked our bellies into tight jeans for the evening's party. Cindy eventually would iron her jeans and go out with us. Cindy ironed everything including her bed sheets. And only Cindy would be the one on a wintry Wednesday night to have a cross of ashes on her forehead. Now I confess I never wanted to understand her religion any more than she did mine, like why the silver cross around her neck had a little man hanging on it and mine was empty, or why she had to confess her sins to a priest, and I just had to tell Jesus. Instead back in those days, I dismissed faith altogether, hers and mine. I dismissed even the possibility of discovering what we shared in common, like how both of our mothers had hauled us off to church every Sunday

for catechism or Sunday School—how they had made certain we wore the right clothes and had gloves and hats for Easter, how they might have stayed up late stitching our dresses, and then ironing them, pressing creases into sleeves and pleats. It turns out we were the lucky ones since our mothers only pressed their irons into our Sunday outfits where in far-off Cameroon…

One out of every four girls has her breasts ironed by her mother. Yes. A woman will grasp, not an electrical iron, but rather a heavy stone heated by a wood fire and press it against the developing nipples and breasts of her nine or ten-year-old daughter. The mother hopes by doing this the growth of her daughter's blossoming bosom will be stunted so as not to attract men, men who will make the young girl pregnant, men who will cause her to drop out of school. This mother, like the thousands of other mothers in Cameroon, means well. They all want their daughters to be educated and maybe go off to college. So the mothers repeatedly apply hot stones to the chests of their daughters who cry with pain and shame, and in the end develop breasts anyways, but ones that are painful, scarred, deformed, marked. But, I say as I shake myself back to the present…

Remember that you are not living in Cameroon and never did. Your developing breasts were never subjected to being ironed with hot stones. You cannot imagine the pain, the blunting of what should naturally enhance your sexuality as a woman. Hot stones—a failed therapy leaving visible scars that you know must embarrass these girls when they undress in front of girlfriends, or boyfriends, or husbands. And, you wonder, what is more painful, the visible scars or the invisible ones?

For you know how hot the stones circling a wood fire can become. Once, as a child of ten, you were sent off to summer camp by your Presbyterian church where you sat around a campfire encircled by hot stones, telling ghost stories, singing songs, blackening hot dogs and marshmallows in the flames, mindful not to touch flesh to the fire or to the stones themselves because hot things burn. You remember how you once slid the point of your mother's iron into the side of your finger, and a perfectly round, fluid-filled bubble erupted, like a white nipple. You touched it, felt the give and take of it, felt the stinging pain of it until it broke one day, and watery tears ran down the side of your finger.

But back at that summer of campfires when the man stroked you between your legs, there was no blister, there was no pain, there were no tears the moment you became a statistic, when the odds played you, and you became the…

One in every four girls sexually abused before turning eighteen. Of course my mother didn't know this would happen when she drove away with tears in her eyes after dropping me off at camp. And here's something else she didn't know: girls who are molested more often than not know their molester well. It's rarely the strange man in the car who offers you candy or a ride home. I was warned against those men, stayed away from them in parked cars, never took rides.

Instead, young girls should be warned about the men they trust, like a camp counselor with a grandfatherly face I called Uncle Jim, who completely forgot he was…

Dust, and to dust he would return, like the ashes of the campfire that possibly still smoked a bit that summer afternoon, the tendrils of gray drifting up to the sky while the ashes caught the breeze. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Ashes, ashes, we all fall down. In the cabin that afternoon, Uncle Jim forgot his vulnerability while taking advantage of mine, the same thing legions of other men forget or ignore. These men may not be greedy or commit murder or covet their neighbor's wife. Instead, they will covet their neighbor's daughter, and will sexually abuse…

One out of every four daughters by the time they reach womanhood, women who will also have a one in four chance of contracting herpes, or HPV, or gonorrhea, or other STDs. If young women are lucky enough to be sent off to college by well-meaning mothers, one in four will report

surviving rape or an attempted rape. And on it goes throughout our lives until one out of every four women, whether near or far, will be mentally or physically abused during pregnancy.

Again and again, I scold myself for making too much of my sexual abuse, as I sit in the pew on this Ash Wednesday and…

R*emember that* I wasn't raped. For decades I have told myself this over and over: I wasn't raped, I wasn't raped. I was only molested and should just get on with it. But the memory of a man's hands pressing on my body has been burned into my soul, though at times the image of it blurs, grows smoky, almost disappears. And, then without warning, it suddenly flares, drifting up through gray matter into consciousness. I wish I didn't remember. I wish I didn't return again and again to the scene where I am the observer, hovering near a cabin ceiling, looking down on a little girl who stands awkwardly in front of a man who perpetually…

Returns to me as a presence, a phantom whenever I walk in woods smelling of pine or when I see a group of young girls. Even now, as I sit in this church pew, I see them—four teenaged girls in a skit just begun where a young adult male playing "God" chips away at their "sins." Using a hammer and chisel, metal strikes against metal next to vulnerable, tender, female shoulders and arms and backs and legs as "God" like a master sculptor chisels away at the stone-like skin cells of greed, lust, anger. The invisible sins fall away like invisible dust.

The irony of a man playing God is lost on me while I sit here watching. I actually want to raise my hand, want to yell out: *Me next! Chisel me! But instead of chipping away sin, chip away the ugly memory, the depression, the PTSD, the STD, the years of self-loathing. Chisel me away until I am close to dust, until there is only the barest heartbeat of an innocent ten-year-old child left, a child who will never have a memory of being molested*. And then, I suddenly remember again that…

One in every four girls will be sexually abused by the time she is eighteen. And I look at the four teenage girls before me draped in their angelic white t-shirts, flinching under the chink-chink of the chisel. They are so young and so vulnerable. And I transpose the woundedness of sexual abuse onto one of them. I can't help it. I can't stop myself from thinking how one of them has the chance of having probably someone she knows—a counselor, a teacher, a coach, a minister, her father, her brother, someone playing God—who will sexually hurt her. Maybe she, too, in the future might sit in a pew, or in her car or on her bed, depressed and ashamed, yearning for a release from memory, wishing for the pain to be broken off into pieces of dust, waiting for the dust to drift away. Perhaps if the sexually abused bore physical wounds, like the girls from Cameroon with their charred and blistered breasts, we, too, could no longer be silenced and ignored. We, too, might receive international attention, or a campaign pledge, so that we too might gain some feathery ounce of hope that such odds would not continue against girls and women, our sisters, our daughters.

My pastor calls those of us wishing to receive the ashes to come forward. I stand in line as all of us make our way towards the front of the sanctuary to receive this mark of feathery gray dust, of nothingness, really. The pastor takes his thumb, dabs it into the sooty mix, and then presses thumb, ashes, oil, and words into my forehead, saying…

"Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return." I watch him make the same mark on the tender foreheads of the four young girls in their white t-shirts, of the young man who played God, of other men, women, children. A hymn begins and I try to sing. In a subconscious gesture, I brush hair off my forehead and bump the cross. Crusty ashes flake off and tumble down onto my shirt next to dark, wet spots. Ashes, ashes, we all fall down in a world where the odds on the journey to happiness and wholeness appear weighted against women as if stones have been tied to our ankles, or put into our pockets, and we have been asked swim the ocean.

Yet, tonight something shifts somewhere in a place I can't quite name. Maybe it's in my soul or in my bones or heart. It's ever so soft and light—the heft of a single ash itself—yet ever so sure and

true. With it comes a resurgence of weariness, but this time not the weariness of depression, but a new weariness over the time I've lost while seeing myself as a victim, a statistic. Is this feeling, this still, new voice asking me if I'm ready to burn the odds themselves to ashes? Is it asking me to really look at who I think I am with fresh eyes, ones that will look beyond what I've done or had done to me?

Now, look now, and don't stop looking, the voice seems to urge. Is the voice from Him, the old stereotypical Him, chipping away at my old self? Or could it be from Her, soothing, nourishing, encouraging me to take this grace that is being offered, to heal, to move on? Years later, I'd like to think its origins feminine, but the truth is I still don't know the answer.

The service ends. I sit in silence for a few more moments before walking through the church doors out into the cold winter night. In the morning, my pastor will walk through these same doors, taking the unused ashes outside to return them to the earth. *Ashes to ashes, dust to dust*. Here, against the dead grass and frozen ground of winter, the ashes will settle into the darkness of Mother Earth. It's here in this mysterious and holy place where the ashes from last year's Palm Sunday palm branches will finally return to the dust from which they sprang.

And it's here where the melting snows of spring will nourish and softly whisper to the tender shoots of grass: *Grow. Grow through the ashes and dirt and stones. Grow beyond it all. Grow towards the light*.

Biographies

Poetry

Hugh Behm-Steinberg

Hugh Behm-Steinberg is the author of *Shy Green Fields* (No Tell Books) and *The Opposite of Work* (JackLeg Press, forthcoming December 2012). His poems can be found in such places as *Crowd, VeRT, Volt, Spork, Cue, Slope, Aught, Fence, dirt, Ditch, Nap, Forge, Swerve, Thrush* and *Zeek*, as well as a few places with more than one syllable. Hugh teaches writing at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, where he edits the journal *Eleven Eleven*.

Simeon Berry

Simeon Berry lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He has won a Massachusetts Cultural Council Individual Artist Grant and a Career Chapter Award from the National Society of Arts and Letters. Recent work appears in *Sentence, Salt Hill, Hayden's Ferry Review, The Journal, Pleiades, Western Humanities Review*, and *Blackbird*.

Mark DeCarteret

Mark DeCarteret was awarded the Thomas Williams Memorial Poetry Prize, while at UNH studying alongside Charles Simic. Since then his poetry has appeared in over 300 different publications including *AGNI, Atlanta Review, Bateau, Boston Review, The Cafe Review, Chicago Review, Conduit*, and *Under the Legislature of Stars: 62 New Hampshire Poets* (Oyster River Press) which he also co-edited. Mark's fifth book, *Flap* was published last year by Finishing Line Press. Tom Lux insists that the "poems are laced with humor, irony, a splendid ear, a big wild heart."

Aaron DeLee

Aaron DeLee's previous work has appeared in *Interrobang, Found Poetry Review, OVS Magazine*, and various other journals. His work has also been commissioned, set to music and performed by a Chicago opera troupe, VOX3.

Bianca Diaz

Bianca Diaz's chapbook, *No One Says Kin Anymore*, won the Robert Watson Poetry Award from Spring Garden Press in 2009. She has poems forthcoming in *Sundog Lit* and *Ellipsis*, and lives in North Carolina.

Matthew Guenette

Matthew Guenette is the author of two full length poetry collections: *American Busboy* (U. of Akron Press, 2011) and *Sudden Anthem* (Dream Horse Press, 2008). He lives, works, and loses sleep in Madison, WI.

Dane Hamann

Dane Hamann is a copy editor at a textbook publisher in Chicago's southwest suburbs. Dane is also a graduate student at Northwestern University where he studies in the MFA in Creative Writing program and works for *TriQuartely Online*.

Eric Higgins

Eric Higgins has poems appearing in or forthcoming from *Barrow Street, Prairie Schooner,*

Guernica, Mid-American Review, New Ohio Review, and elsewhere. A recent Tennessee Williams Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference and the recipient of a Vermont Studio Center fellowship, he holds a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Houston, where he was awarded the Inprint Verlaine Prize in Poetry.

Todd Kaneko
Todd Kaneko currently live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he teaches at Grand Valley State University. Todd has received fellowships from Kundiman and the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop. His work has appeared in *Bellingham Review, Los Angeles Review, NANO Fiction, Southeast Review, Blackbird, The Huffington Post*, and elsewhere.

Kristin LaTour
Kristin LaTour's poems are published or forthcoming at *Fifth Wednesday, Cider Press, Adanna, qartsilluni, Medulla* and *Labletter*. She has a chapbook forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press titled *Agoraphobia*.

Lennart Lundh
Lennart Lundh writes history, poetry, and short fiction. His work has appeared in print internationally since 1965, as well as online beginning early in the Century.

Sally Molini
Sally Molini co-edits Cerise Press (www.cerisepress.com). Her work has appeared in *Gargoyle, American Letters & Commentary, Beloit Poetry Journal, 5AM, Denver Quarterly*, among others. She lives in Nebraska.

Robert Pesich
Robert S. Pesich is the editor for *Swan Scythe Press*. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander,Slipstream, Skidrow Penthouse, Red Wheelbarrow* and *Círculo de Poesía* (Mexico City). He was a finalist for the 2011 SLS Unified Contest. In 2009, he was awarded the Littoral Press Poetry Prize and fellowships from Djerassi and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. In 2004, he was awarded an artist fellowship from Arts Council Silicon Valley. In 2001, he authored the chapbook *Burned Kilim* (Dragonfly Press). A second collection of poetry, *Night Sutures*, is in submission. He lives near San Francisco with his wife and their two sons.

Emilia Phillips
Emilia Phillips is the author of *Signaletics* (forthcoming from University of Akron Press, 2013), the Editor's Choice for the 2012 Akron Poetry Prize, and two chapbooks including *Bestiary of Gall*(forthcoming from Sundress Publications, 2013). She is the associate literary editor of Blackbird and the recipient of the 2012 Poetry Prize from *The Journal*, a Zoland Poetry Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Center, and a scholarship to the Sewanee Writer's Conference. She received her MFA in poetry from Virginia Commonwealth University and BA from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Her poetry appears in many journals, including *AGNI, The Collagist, Colorado Review, DIAGRAM, Gulf Coast, Hayden's Ferry Review, Indiana Review, The Kenyon Review, Sycamore Review*, and *Third Coast*; and her reviews have been published in *Blackbird, The Journal, Pleiades*, and elsewhere. She lives in Richmond, Virginia.

Steven Schroeder
Steven Schroeder's first book is *Torched Verse Ends*, and his second manuscript has been a National Poetry Series and Four Way Books Levis Prize finalist. Steven's poetry is forthcoming or available from *New England Review, Barn Owl Review, South Dakota Review, Drunken Boat* and *InDigest*. He edits the online poetry journal Anti— and works as a Certified Professional Resume Writer.

Susan Slaviero
Susan Slaviero is the author of *CYBORGIA* (Mayapple Press). Recent chapbooks include *Selections from the Murder Book* (Tree Light Books), *A Wicked Apple* (Hyacinth Girl Press), and *Apocrypha* (Dancing Girl Press). She has a BA in English/Writing from Lewis University.

Mathias Svalina
Mathias Svalina is the author of one book of poems, *Destruction Myth* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center), one forthcoming book of prose, *I Am A Very Productive Entrepreneur* (Mudluscious Press) & numerous chapbooks. With Zachary Schomburg he co-edits Octopus Magazine & Octopus Books.

Lynne Thompson
Lynne Thompson is the author of *Beg No Pardon*, winner of the Perugia Press Book Award and the Great Lakes Colleges Association's New Writer's Award. She is the newly-appointed Reviews & Essays Editor for the California journal, *Spillway*, and recent work has appeared in *Apercus Quarterly, Poemleon & Solo Novo*.

Barbara Varanka
Barbara Varanka is a poet, essayist, and teacher. She lives and works in Kansas City, Missouri. Her work has previously been featured in *Booth*.

Jocelyn Casey-Whiteman
Jocelyn Casey-Whiteman was raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. She earned her BA at the University of New Hampshire and her MFA in Creative Writing at Columbia University. Jocelyn is author of *Lure* (Poetry Society of America, 2010). Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Boston Review, Guernica, DIAGRAM*, and she's received awards from the The Association of Writers & Writing Programs. She writes and teaches in New York City.

Aimee Wodda
Aimee Wodda received her MA in English Literature from the University of Illinois at Chicago and is currently working on a PhD in Criminology, Law, and Justice. She would write more poetry if she wasn't so busy dissecting the constitutional interpretation of the word "sex."

Rose Maria Woodson
Rose Maria Woodson is in the MFA program at Northwestern University. She has been published in numerous journals including *African American Review, Blossombones, Ariel XXIII, Paradigm, Melusine, Quantum Poetry Magazine, Foliate Oak, Wicked Alice, OVS Magazine* and *Magnolia: A Journal of Women's Socially Engaged Literature*, Volume II.

Erin York
Erin York is a 22-year-old writer and editor. She attended school at the University of Missouri-

Kansas City where she graduated with a B.A. in Creative Writing and a minor in Manuscript, Print Culture, and Editing. Her writing has received both numerous publications and awards that include national acclaim. Aside from writing, Erin has worked on several literary magazines and continues to work as a freelance copyeditor. For more information, visit her website: www.wix.com/eywritereditor/erinyork.

Art

Jazmin Huerta

Jazmin Huerta is a first semester junior at Lewis University, majoring in Computer Graphic Design and Minoring in Marketing.

Michael Progress

Michael Progress is the Assistant Dean for the College of Business at Lewis University. He was born and raised just outside of the Chicagoland area. His undergraduate degree is in Marketing. He also holds Master Degrees in Business Administration and Counseling Psychology.

Over the past three years, he has been taking a variety of Art and Design courses at Lewis University. His primary interest is in the area of Photography and Found Objects Sculpture.

Ryan Schroeder

Born in Rochester, N.Y. Ryan Schroeder attended the Maryland Institute College of Art on a series of scholarships and merit based grants. While a student he traveled to Europe twice, once as a study abroad in Florence, and a second time when he traded a painting for a flight to Sweden. He graduated from MICA in 2009, Magna Cum Laude, with a Major in Painting, and Minor in Art History. Since graduation he has worked as a Freelance Artist in New York and the Hamptons for the better part of the last two years. Although he currently lives in Baltimore, M.D. he shows his work regularly at the Oxford Gallery in Rochester, N.Y. where he has been represented since 2010. He also exhibited work in a number of shows including *Utopias: New Visions and Better Places in Contemporary Art*, a National Juried Show at the Cade Center for Fine Arts Gallery. He has also shown work at William Bennett Gallery in Manhattan in *Glimpse: Enigmatic Visions Exhibition*, and at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, V.A.

Artist Statement:

Much of my work deals with complicated relationships, ideas of isolation, abandonment, and the illusion of time. I am interested in people, spaces and objects as individuals, each possessing a unique presence and aura. I seek to capture the psychic qualities of the figure, or a space; and I find that spaces that are defined by detritus and decay possess a stillness that is most conducive to capturing the sensation. The materiality of paint plays an equally important role in that excessive paint on the surface bridges the two dimensional image with the physical object being discussed. Each object has its own meaning in its color, its placement compositionally, and what it is in Saussure's signifier and signified sense. I think of my paintings as being both symbolic and Freudian in the sense that objects take on dual meanings that are not inaccessible, nor are they overt. The unspoken undercurrent that exists in an interaction, the notion that what is being said directly is concealing a more meaningful and more challenging idea, that people would use conversation about one thing as a conduit to indirectly address an alternate idea, is the intention of many of these pieces.

Ben Steele

Ben Steele was born in Cambridge, MA on September 14th, 1982, the only child of Barbara and David Steele. As a child he lived in Edinburgh, Scotland for five years. He grew up predominantly in Gaithersburg, MD, attended Quince Orchard High School and was accepted into Albert Einstein Magnet School for the Visual Arts in his senior year. He attended Washington University in St. Louis where he met the love of his life and was awarded a B.F.A. in painting in 2004. In 2003, he attended Yale's Norfolk Summer Residency program for the visual arts. After Graduation, he moved to Massachusetts, where he continued painting and began to teach. He taught students of all ages at The Art Center of Chelmsford, began an after-school program for inner city youth at The Jeremiah Burke High School in Dorchester, and taught at Artists For Humanity, located in South Boston. He attended Maryland Institute College of Art where he was awarded an M.F.A. in 2008. He now lives in Atlanta, Georgia with his wife Lee, teaches visual art at The Westminster Schools, and continues to paint and show his work.

Artist Statement:

In my paintings, I aim to present mysterious spaces in which categories collide. They are both transcendental and technological. They are constructed and refer to the natural physical world, yet also feel digitally produced.

In reality, there is no digital component to the work. The paintings are based on straight photographs taken, through crystals and prisms, of actual physical constructions of paper, wire, fabric, and light. I aim to simulate a digital vocabulary through physical form. I see this as an attempt to restate paintings' validity in the face of digital media, highlighting the physical origins and alchemical readings of digital effects. The inside of the crystal is literally the place where image and object become one. Thus, a crystal is the perfect basis and metaphor for painting, in which an image is generated by physically manipulating form.

Fiction

James Claffey

James Claffey hails from County Westmeath, Ireland, and lives on an avocado ranch in Carpinteria, CA, with his wife, the writer and artist, Maureen Foley, their daughter, Maisie, and Australian cattle-dog, Rua. His work appears in many places, including *The New Orleans Review, Elimae,Connotation Press, Blue Fifth Review*, and *WordRiot*. His website is at www.jamesclaffey.com.

Jasmon Drain

Jasmon Drain is a 2010 Pushcart Prize nominee. She was a finalist in the inaugural Terrrain.org fiction contest and has been published in *The Chariton Review, Diverse Voices Quarterly, Foliate Oak Literary Journal, Ginosko Magazine, Indian River Review, My Story Lives Magazine, New Purlieu Review, New Sound Magazine, The Quotable Magazine, Silver of Stone Magazine, Specter Literary Magazine, Tidal Basin Review, The Vermillion Literary Project*, and the *Wilderness House Literary Review*.

Jéanpaul Ferro

Jéanpaul Ferro is a novelist, short fiction author, and poet from Providence, Rhode Island. An 8-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Jéanpaul's work has appeared on *NPR, Contemporary American*

Voices, Columbia Review, Emerson Review, Connecticut Review, Portland Monthly, and others. He is the author of *Essendo Morti – Being Dead* (Goldfish Press, 2009), nominated for the 2010 Griffin Prize in Poetry; and *Jazz* (Honest Publishing, 2011) nominated for both the 2012 Griffin Prize in Poetry and the 2012 Kingsley Tufts Prize in Poetry. He is represented by the Jennifer Lyons Literary Agency. He currently lives along the south coast of southern Rhode Island. Website: www.jeanpaulferro.com

Vincent Francone

Vincent Francone is a writer living in Chicago. He has been published in *Rhino, Spectrum*, and *The Oklahoma Review* among other journals, and he won first place in the 2009 Illinois Emerging Writers Competition for his long poem, "Chicago." He is at work on a novel and a collection of stories. Read his blog at: www.zombiedante.blogspot.com

Roslyn Summerville

Roslyn Summerville is a sophomore at Lewis University. She is majoring in Mass Communications with a minor in Creative Writing. She comes from a little town called Wauconda (never heard of it? not really surprising). She is very dedicated to her Track and Field team and is working hard to make it to Nationals in order to become an All-American. Her work has been seen in *Teen Ink*.

Nonfiction

Jessica Greene

Jessica Greene is a creative writing student at University of Evansville. Homeless until recently, Ms. Greene's essays detail her difficult past. Her work has appeared in *Relief, The New Purlieu Review, Catfish Creek*, and University of Miami, Florida's *Mangrove Literary Journal*.

Virginia "Ginny" Taylor

Virginia "Ginny" Taylor graduated from Ashland University with an MFA in creative nonfiction, August 2011. Her work has appeared in *Soundings Review, This I Believe: On Love, Hiram, U.S.A.*, and is forthcoming in the 10th Anniversary edition of *Kansas City Voices*. She has been accepted to a residency at Writers in the Heartland where she plans to devote her writing energies on a manuscript tentatively titled *Song for a Castrato*.