

The Blue Guitar

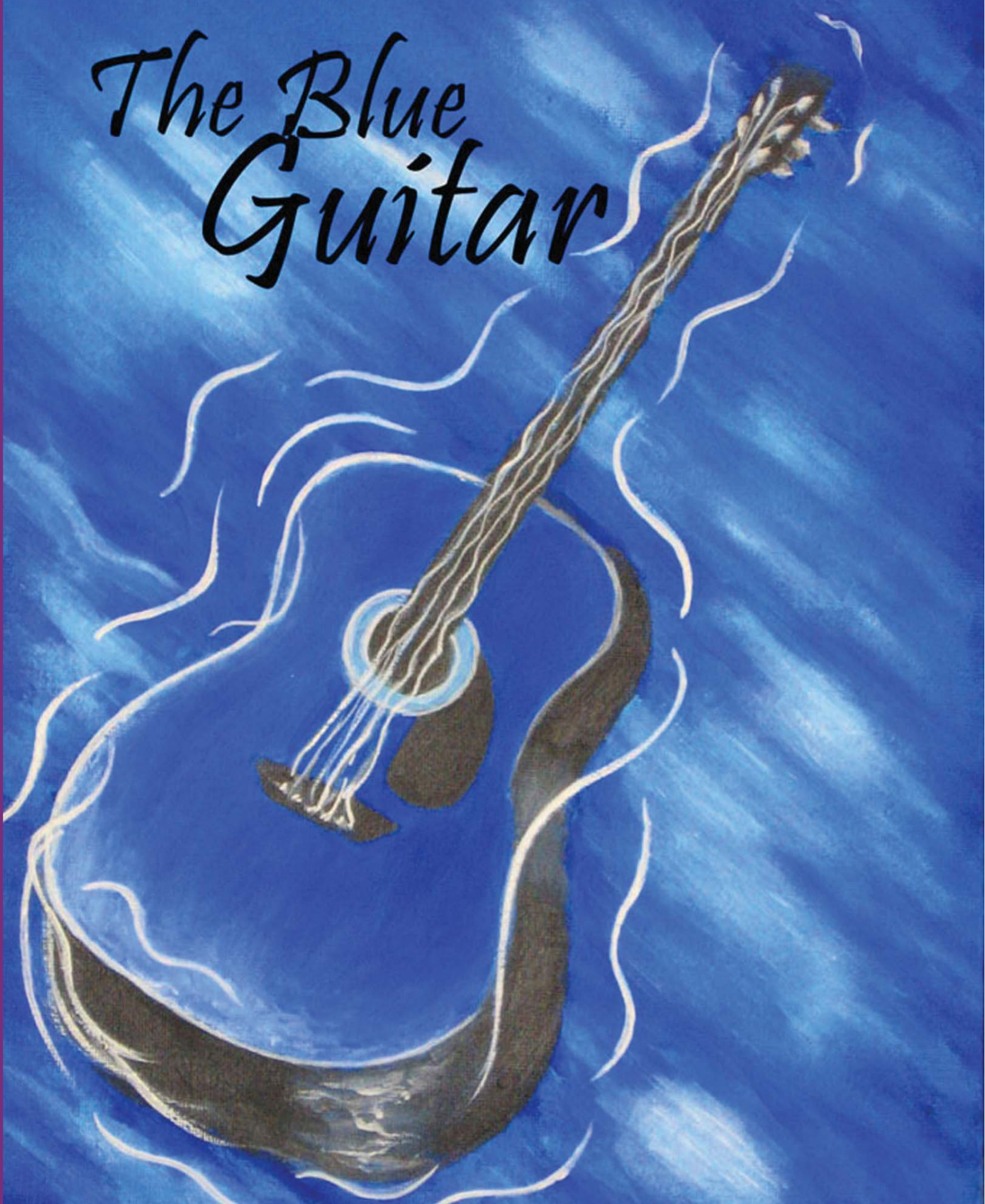


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Editor’s Note

Welcome to the Spring 2010 issue of The Blue Guitar! It’s hard to believe, but we’re celebrating our first anniversary!

We have so much to be thankful for and feel truly blessed by the outpouring of remarkable and wonderful work! It’s a testament to the unlimited talent of the people who call Arizona home and their unlimited power to make this world, and Arizona, a better place to live. Our cup truly runneth over, so much so we are launching a third edition, an issue that will come out in summer.

With every edition, we find that all roads lead to Arizona. From Russia, Haiti, Havana and Mexico, from New York, New Mexico, New Jersey, Minnesota, California and Hawaii, all are represented here, as well as the immense home-grown talent, from the southernmost part of the state to its northernmost reaches.

As always, folks, please keep submitting! And a huge thank-you to all who helped put this Spring 2010 issue together! We couldn’t do it without you!



Rebecca
“Becca” Dyer

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Spring 2010

I Won the Battle, But My Sisters Are Losing the War

By Michelle Castro Smythe

© 2010

“If one more person tells me what a strong woman I am, I’m going to break,” she said in a shattered voice as tears flowed from her desperate eyes. “If anyone knew what I go through every day, they’d know how pathetic I am.”

With those words, Dolores, my closest friend, confessed the secret she’d guarded so carefully during our six-year friendship. The revelation came out of nowhere, as most secrets do, triggered by an off-handed remark I made about her ability to handle anything.

We were sitting in my car, parked in her driveway after our weekly lunch date. Music played softly from the radio, and the car hummed in idle, cushioning our voices as we talked.

I commented on the two piles of mismatched mattresses piled in her driveway. “Mark must be busy selling beds,” I said, referring to the business her husband runs from their home.

The conversation veered to her frustration with her husband and her life. I knew some of the problems from what she’d told me before — his tight fist over money, his verbal abuse of her in front of their children, his affairs — but this time she needed to say more. This time she needed my silent support as she struggled to reveal her deepest and most shameful secret.

The fight had started over a disconnect notice from the electric company. “He told me to ask my dad for the money,” she said in a voice tight with anger, looking at me with hollow eyes. “He called me a fucking whore and a fat bitch, and he got so close to me that I could feel his spit hitting my face. Then he slapped me.

“I put my hand on my cheek, and I could feel it hot and throbbing. All he fucking did was smirk at me and walk out. One day he’s going to drive me over the edge, and you’re going to see me on the news for killing him. That’s how far he’s going to push me,” she threatened with false bravado.

In a tormented voice she told me all the times he’d called her names in front of their four children. The other day, she

continued, their 7-year-old daughter grabbed a knife from the kitchen and put it in her hand for protection. “What kind of shit is that?”

I knew without her saying that this wasn’t the first time he’d hit her. Her pain was visible in her taut jaw and clenched fists. The words kept pouring out of her mouth as if, once started, she was powerless to control emotions pent up for so long.

I knew it was pointless to tell her to leave him. I’d offered room in my home to her several times before. I tried to keep the anger building in my chest from showing on my face — anger at her, at him, at the situation.

My thoughts jumped to Dolores’ children. I knew what it was to stand helpless, watching your father beat the hell out of your mother. Back then, all I could do was stay out of the way and clean up the mess afterward. I swore that no man would ever hit me, and I’d never let anyone kill my spirit. I’d watched my mother’s wither away, insult by insult, punch by punch, until my father tired of his sport and moved on.

The mattresses in the driveway transported me back to a childhood memory. I was 6 and my little brother, Phillip, 3. I was anxiously trying to distract him from the dull thuds and yells coming through our closed bedroom door from down the hall.

Phillip was having none of it. “I want mommy,” he said with stubborn fixation, walking around me to the door.

“Not yet. Let’s play a game,” I coaxed. Holding his shoulders, I guided him toward one of the two twin beds in our room. “Let’s jump on the bed and sing ‘Five Little Monkeys.’”

I clutched his arms and heaved him onto his bed. “Five little monkeys jumping on the bed,” I chanted as he bounced, nodding my head to the rhythm of the bedsprings. I walked over to my bed, climbed up and started jumping.

“Come on, Phillip, let’s see who can jump higher,” I goaded.

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Michelle Castro Smythe is a Journalism and Transborder Studies student at Arizona State University. The mother of two wonderful children, she is owned by Buddy, the wonder dog. Her goals are to make a living by writing and to use her multimedia skills to help her family achieve their dreams. Her favorite saying – “Never give up, never say die” – has served her well through life. She can be reached at michellecsmythe@gmail.com.

“One fell off and bumped his head....”

Our parents’ fight had started over a broken egg yolk. My brother and I were eating cereal at the kitchen table while our dad read the morning paper. Our mom bustled around the kitchen, flitting from sink to refrigerator to oven making breakfast for our dad. The aromas of fried eggs, toast and coffee enveloped our family in the comforting ritual of breakfast together. The normalcy of the moment ended in a jarring crash when my mom placed the plate in front of my dad.

“What the fuck is this?” The beast that took over our dad’s body snarled as he picked up the plate in one hand, and grabbed our mom’s hair with the other. His clenched fist pushed her face into the plate. “You think you’re going to give me a broken egg yolk, goddammit! Bullshit!”

I grabbed my brother and ran with him down the hall to our bedroom, slammed the door and locked it. The sound of our dad’s fist making contact filtered through the closed door.

“Four little monkeys jumping on the bed, one fell off and bumped his head. Mommy called the doctor and the doctor said, no more monkeys jumping on the bed....”

I left the memory in the past and looked over at my friend again. She had become as close to me as my own sister, and I felt as powerless to help her as I did with my natural sister.

My younger sister had repeated the same cycle of abuse in most of her relationships since she was 15. I’d protected myself, but I’d failed to protect her from repeating the cycle of abuse. Born after our parents divorced, she never saw the things my brother and I witnessed. I thought that would be enough, but it wasn’t. She sought relationships with abusive partners as if to replace the love she never received from our father. I failed to teach her that some men are dangerous, that they can hurt us emotionally and physically. I failed to warn her that sometimes monsters hide behind a good-looking face and a strong set of arms.

I warned her of the danger, but I still had to pick up the pieces when the last bastard pushed her to slashing her wrists with a butcher knife rather than running out the door. I nursed her back to sanity as she lay in a broken heap on my couch, unable to care for herself or her baby girl for endless weeks until, finally, a faint smile appeared when she looked at her daughter.

As I sat in my car and listened to my friend, I wanted to share my own family history of abuse with her, but I stayed silent. I wanted to tell her about my sister, but I knew she didn’t want to hear it. I wanted to warn her of the danger, but I held my tongue. I wanted to shake her into reason and tell her to take her children and run as far away as she could, but I sat still.

I’d played this scene out too many times before. So this time I listened to my friend, wordlessly giving her the support she needed from me. Inside, I prayed that her daughter would watch, learn and make the same promise I’d made to myself so long ago.

The Steps She Took

By Chelsea Josten

© 2010

"Clack, clack, clack" went her shoes.

Each step echoed through our small house as she prepared dinner. The kitchen was lined with cheap white tile from the '70s, so I could monitor every step she took in her high heels, never shorter than three inches and almost always stilettos.

"Clack, clack, clack." She was at the sink.

"Clack, clack, clack." She was at the fridge.

"Clack, clack, clack." She was at the pantry. The clacking stopped for a few minutes. That's where she always stopped. I knew what she was doing. Each night she'd prepare dinner, and each night she'd drink herself to sleep.

* * *

My mother liked to drink. I would listen to her heels as she readied our meals, and I used to count the number of times she'd stop at the pantry. As time went on, I stopped trying to count. It was too many.

Now, my mother was smart. She didn't leave bottles of vodka lying around. No, that would be too obvious and too hard to lie about.

My mother had found a cheaper, easier way to get drunk. She frequented the pantry for her drink of choice — vanilla extract. Yes, that bitter, dark liquid you add to baked goods. See, vanilla extract is made from soaking the beans in alcohol. Pure vanilla extract is 35% alcohol by volume, only slightly less potent than Smirnoff vodka at 40% alcohol by volume.

I was 9, but I knew what was going on. The fighting between my mother and stepfather would burn through the paper-thin walls and punish my ears. I would try to get away from it by turning up my boom box, playing hip artists such as Ricky Martin or Britney Spears, who always knew how to express feelings so well. Usually, though, I would just play with my Barbies.

I used to hide the fact that I still played with Barbies because my older brother would make fun of me. With my Barbies, I could escape to another world for a while and pretend everything was fine.

One day my mother was fixing dinner as usual and making her frequent, unnecessary stops at the pantry when I opened my dresser drawer to find a stranger sleeping alongside my Barbies. Now, usually only Ken got the privilege of sleeping with Barbie, but this time one of my mom's vanilla extract bottles had snuggled in with them.



Chelsea Josten is pursuing a bachelor's degree in print journalism and a minor in communications at Arizona State University. She hopes to one day write for a sports magazine or an online publication. She can be reached at cjosten@asu.edu.

"Clack, clack, clack." She stopped at the pantry.

I studied the bottle frantically, trying with all my might to find some incriminating evidence to prove to her she had a problem. I read the label. I read the ingredients, but many of the words I didn't understand.

"Clack, clack, clack." Another stop at the pantry.

I debated whether to show my brother and older sister first or just go straight to my mother. I decided to confront her with this secret bottle, believing I was the only one who could convince her to stop.

When I presented her with the bottle and asked why it was in my Barbie drawer, she snatched it from my hands and threw it in the trash. She told me to stop bothering her and said it was nothing. She headed toward the pantry again, heels clacking.

I wanted to scream at her that she had a problem. Her drinking was not only affecting her. It was killing all of us. Her kids were afraid of her. Her husband resented her. The fighting continued.

Instead, I kept my usually loud mouth shut and retreated to my room.

I didn't play with my Barbies that day, or any other day after that. I was too scared to open my drawer and find proof of a lie.

* * *

And so it went on, until one day she crashed into a semi-truck and totaled her car. She walked away with nothing more than a scratch. Thankfully, no one else was in that car.

She spent the night in jail for driving under the influence. We didn't post bail. A judge ordered her to go to rehab for 28 days.

She missed a month of our lives. A month! My brother turned 14, and she couldn't celebrate with him. I hated her for what she did, but I was hopeful for a new future that would not involve drinking.

After she came back from rehab, my anger vanished. The fighting also vanished, along with the lies and the vanilla bottles.

My mother has been sober for 11 years, going on 12 in July. When she put other people's lives at risk, she realized she had gone too far. Each year when she celebrates her AA birthday, she writes to the judge to tell him her progress. I couldn't be more proud.

My mother hasn't relapsed once since becoming sober, which shows me how strong she is. I now look to her for support and courage, something I was unable to do in previous years.

Alcoholism is a disease that can tear families apart, but it doesn't have to. Luckily for me, my mother and her heels made it through that tough time. Now, when I listen to those obnoxiously high heels clacking around the kitchen, I don't have to worry about them stopping at the pantry.

In Defense of My Father

By Janice Vega

© 2010

“Okay, let’s go,” my mom said as she took my pink Beauty and the Beast suitcase off my bed and out the door.

I didn’t say anything because I couldn’t speak with the lump in my throat. I didn’t ask where we were going. It didn’t matter. I knew we weren’t coming back.

She led me down the dingy, unlit hall toward the front door.

That’s when I saw him. My dad, sleeping in the living room. His body carelessly slung over our worn-out brown couch as if he’d simply dropped from the sky and landed that way. He probably had come home and never made it to the bedroom. Not a care in the world. Not aware we were leaving him.

My heart broke.

“Don’t wake him,” my mom said. “I’ll be waiting in the car.”

I stood there, small for 7, staring at my father lying there, helpless because there was nothing he could do to stop us from going. Instinctively, I ran to the hall closet, yanked down a small maroon quilt and placed the blanket over him, gently, so as not to wake him.

As I gave him a quick kiss, tears filled my eyes and the lump in my throat grew thicker. Before I could cry, I forced myself to turn around and run out the door.

The split didn’t come as a surprise. My parents had separated before, but they kept trying to work things out. But this time seemed as if there was no going back.

Growing up, I’d become accustomed to their yelling and fighting. I learned to tune out the noise. If it got real bad, I’d pick up my baby brother, take him to a quiet room and play with him, knowing that soon the argument would blow over and the butterflies in my stomach would go away.

Although their fights were rarely violent, my dad did break the occasional plate or punch a hole in a wall. My dad loved us all very much, but he had a hard time controlling his anger. He dealt with his problems in all the wrong ways, and he hurt my mom and our family. He did what he wanted, and she didn’t like it. When she protested, he got angry and said hurtful things,

but he never laid a hand on her. To me he was always good, but he was hardly around.

Only rarely did I get between my mom and dad. One evening as I was doing math homework at our dining room table, they began to argue in the kitchen. I knew my dad had come over to try and work things out with my mom.

“I’m going to win your mom back,” he had told me one night before dropping me off at home. I smiled, knowing he had good intentions.

Well, somewhere along the way, my dad’s conquest went astray because their shouting was not of a love rekindled. I did my best to focus on the long division problem in front of me. Soon, however, the numbers became a meaningless jumble as the screaming grew louder.

My breath stopped when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw my dad lying on the floor and my mom standing above him, holding a knife to his chest. Time froze. That image will forever be embedded in my brain.

Without thinking, I jumped up from my chair and threw myself across his body, sobbing with fear. My mom drew the knife away and knelt down. We just sat there, all three of us, holding each other.

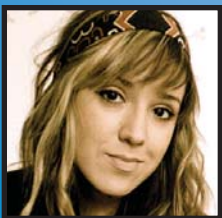
I knew my dad wasn’t a bad guy. My mom’s family always criticized him for treating our family the way he did. They had forgotten how they used to love him, but in the end they took my mom’s side.

I was never hateful toward him, though. Sometimes he did scare me, when he yelled and the time he pulled the car door off its hinge.

I remember that day because it started out as a happy one. But on the way home from lunch, my parents started fighting. I don’t even remember what the argument was about, but my dad was heated.

When we got home, he got out to open the door for my mom, but he was in such a rage that he pulled the door too hard. It

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Janice Vega is a print journalism senior at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. She grew up in Tucson, but soon left the city to pursue bigger dreams. She loves people, travel and music. Most of all, she likes writing about them. Her work has appeared in ASU’s State Press and State Press Magazine as well as Arizona Foothills Magazine. One day, Janice hopes to combine her passion for the arts and writing as a writer for Anthem magazine. She can be reached at javega1@asu.edu.

Continued from page 6

broke.

My mom panicked, picked me up and started walking back to our apartment.

Looking over my mom's shoulder, I saw dad in tears. "I'm sorry," he yelled after her. "I was just trying to help."

All I wanted to do was run back and hug him.

Though I loved my mom, seeing her cry made me sad. Still, I felt I could never abandon my dad, let alone be angry at him. He was selfish, impulsive and aggressive, but he was also

passionate, smart and charming. He was my dad, and he loved me.

What he didn't know was how to nurture the relationships most important to him. Instead, he responded in anger and frustration when he couldn't get a point across or did something wrong yet couldn't bring himself to apologize. He was prideful.

In those moments I felt that if I didn't defend my dad, if I didn't love him, no one else would. Even if the world knocked him down, I would always be there to catch him. Or comfort him with a blanket.

The Blue Guitar salutes Allison Gatlin

Third-place winner in the prestigious national 2009 Hearst Journalism Awards Contest for her nonfiction essay "Playing His Twisted Game," which appeared in the Fall 2009 issue of The Blue Guitar.

Congratulations, Allison!



Allison Gatlin

2009 Hearst Editorial Writing Winners were announced in December.

Top ten scholarship winners include: Allison Gatlin, Arizona State University, third place, \$1,000 scholarship.

The 50th annual William Randolph Hearst Foundation's Journalism Awards Program encompasses 110 undergraduate journalism programs at colleges and universities across the nation that are eligible to participate.

Five Poems By Cathy Capozzoli

Stairs to the Cottage

© 2010

I gave away your lamp yesterday,
the one you gave me when I married
your cousin—Irish glass isn't meant
for the tropics, and I needed to let go
of that marriage anyway, as I have
for years, it seems, and you, who died without me,
my Christmas card to you returned to me
that year, you left the ink in my hands.
I would call your sister, but she wears
a gray feather boa. I couldn't bury you,
I just laid myself down
after a red-wine sleep
to stare blindly into the surge.

Cold Plates

© 2010

He left that morning as he always did—
worn gray bag slung over hip,
green canvas pants rolled at cuff,
beard and hair wild with sleep.

The sun moved over the hill earlier that day,
a few leaves brown on the ground—
not fall just yet.

Later, they found him where the trail
shortcuts the switchbacks.
Blue skin a veneer—
Dead with his mouth closed.

With the table set for two,
she slept on a chair,
dreamt of dark mirrors,
two strands of blood-red pearls;
dirty winds that come
before a storm.

Night Watch Woman

© 2010

Awake,
asleep,
maybe both,
I watch
a whirlpool stop
above me,
and the water calms
to a stranded nest.
I emerge from this water,
but cannot breathe—
two silent hands,
magnets
in orbit
around shared poles,
hold my voice.

I myself stand naked,
skin the tenor of sepia
leaks from the frame of my remains.
Eggshell bones cleave,
and my soft interior perishes,
like the dancer's last face
longing to know the hush of sleep.

Around me, then,
courtyard walls appear, and dissolve.
A dove lands on a drum
that arises from mud before me.
Fire comes, and
my hair blazes in smoke
that burns ovals around my eyes.

A snake curls to my wrist,
and in a single moment,
a cul-de-sac of despair—
my figure is restored
from sea urchin to night watch woman.



Cathy Capozzoli's poetry and short essays have been widely published in print and on the Internet. She holds an MFA from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. Cathy has performed her poetry at many venues in Arizona. Contact her at cathycap@gmail.com.

Stranger in Perpetuity

© 2010

A single street light
discloses snow
circulating
up into the air.

These are the nights I
can't sleep for the heat
in my skull, the wheel
sliding from my grip.

Someone said those things
about heaven & hell
as a promise
to the chariot driver
who makes the reins a friend.

The hawk's circles aren't lazy—
she's searching earth
from the sky—the way
I search the sky from earth,
and a girl's room
no longer holds her,
daylight fading like snow
on a warm, dark street.

The day I realized
what a lucky rabbit's foot
really was, that the teacup
in front of my doll
actually was empty, and
the coin purse that pinched
my finger didn't
keep me from spending
myself anyway—
then I knew:
how to fall through
a closed window.

Next came the time when
the snow stopped swirling
under the street lamp,
stopped dancing
stopped rising to the light.

Who was I to the walls
of the sun porch?
The unplugged phone rings.
I haven't cried like this—
in a long time.

If an Archeologist

© 2010

If an archeologist
someday dug up unmarked land
where this house once stood,
the findings would be as follows:
ink holders and ghee lamps,
fine linen text wove, in shreds.
A wall calendar,
pages unturned but spent—
a cupful of misplaced rocks and stones.

The archeologist would find
a collection of pens,
a magnet once applied
to a sore elbow,
various half-burnt candles—
sooty wicks untrimmed,
and the tarnished candle snuffer.

A half-dressed peasant doll.
Rarified bits of glass
that when dusted and recomposed
would yield a smooth
glass lingham.

The broken paddle of an overhead fan.
A sage leaf carried from deep inside
the desert's living edges.
A warped board—a lap desk,
with a thin notch gone from the
top left, where once it was dropped.

The books of a woman who
loved deeply, and the curled
remnants of a telephone cord,
once a conduit.

A tarnished door handle,
a thin strand of silken hair,
the gray-white porcelain lid
of a ginger jar
that once contained the ethers.

Various sets of spectacles
to redress tired eyes;
plus one sturdy lamp,
the worn seat of a desk chair,
mismatched tea cups from old China.

An endless knot of cables,
all in black, of course,
like the hats of proper ladies
in churches.

All these
the one who digs
would gather,
and, smelling the rubrum lilies
that often bloomed in a vase near the
stove,
would surely know
the woman who once lived here.

The digger would sort
dust and dirt
with fingers and tools,
and hear words line up,
knocking, bearing witness
to the endless march of language
that would never face the scrutiny
of scholars—
yet once lived before dying on the page,
lived in a heart,
lived among these finds
now liberated from the earth.

The archeologist would sit on her heels
and hear
the hovering spirits, essences like rare
perfumes
and the pinpricks of scorpions,
who might persuade her to take up
the old pen and strive
to answer the artifacts with echoes—
returning them forever to the wind.

Four Poems By Eman Hassan

And Now, a Strange Concerto

© 2010

Harp, what sounds you make
through your heavy bow-bent back,
strung out to reconcile wire and wood.

You could have been a trumpet
bellowing your life's music, instead a winged clavicle
of conflicting tunes.

As if you were a guitar,
warped along the frets of your strained wood neck,
spoilng every bar. And if you

think you are immune,
weird harp, know that you too are a strange instrument,
no stranger than a cactus,

not yet able to sing,
who raises its prickly arms to desert skies, whispering
por favor, I am thirsty.

Gracelessly

© 2010

Suddenly—

the breath of spring barely exhaled—

the pink lush petals of the flower bush turned pale yellow—

where did the time go

now how many poets have written on *the darling buds of May*

the flickering

blush of bloom caught out of the corner of an eye instead of looked at
directly as if to say *everything that grows holds in perfection but
a little moment*

rather than focusing on a dimple you wish you had, green eyes
or bigger breasts, noticing that furrowing third
eye on your head

or those kilos you needed to shed off your thighs because
then you really would be beautiful. We take notice only in the leaving,
in the fleeting

departure of things,
holding up our hands under the harsh summer sun, taking note
of growth rings around our knuckles.



Eman Hassan is an MFA student of poetry at Arizona State University, where she teaches English writing courses and will be teaching her first poetry course in the Fall of 2010. She came to the valley three years ago and decided this was a good place to stop being a rolling stone. Contact her at ehassan1@asu.edu.

'Not With a Bang'

© 2010

And what was it we raced to with arms open wide,
after opening the door? Flinging

ourselves forward, into its embrace, as if it were our lover
at the end of the corridor we ran through the day to meet,
calling our names.

But it's not them, is it?

How short.
The sprinted length of it. The earth-womb of it.
Towards a red-haired Siren in a white satin dress
her parting gash of lips; red cave-mouth calling out for your last kiss.

This is the broken digit.

A flung-open manuscript on a wooden table. A
speed reader weeps at the end of a book. Pages flip
in the wind. Frequency of flesh (or,
a composite worn like fake jewelry).

*This is the indignity
of it.*

Because we carry sorrow in our knees, blessed are the rooted trees.

*This is the sideline story
the way we run
with one hand clinging onto a myth
the other clutching at wind.*

Perfectly Clear

© 2010

From up here the mountains seem
like hills that seem so big to ants
below all details are perfectly clear

the rivers make out as veins that snake
around those earthen mounds like
water running itself clean they

remind me of my mother sitting next to me
who once loomed so big now a foot hill her words
flowing non-stop encircling the slopes of
her body though now she is standing still
as though her stream of speech embodies
a longing she will hear if she stops

talking long enough she will hear the only
thing she has not spoken waiting around
the bend of her words an echo of

a former question only an echo of
the original it is perfectly clear my mother
is afraid of the end of every sentence

you can see it deep in the unwinding
water of her eyes you can hear it in
her speech running rapid incessant

as if each question were an
imposter posing for another
all of them secretly only one

innocently born in the longing
mouth of a child long ago on an
airplane who asked are we there yet?

Aurélio, soup, and love

By Patricia Friedrich

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“**H**ora de dormir, Aurélio,” announced his mother in her melodic native Portuguese. Aurélio, who never became quite fluent in the language, knew well what that meant, though. It was time to sleep. He had been reading Jules Verne under the covers again, illuminated only by a small gas lamp which he kept by his bedside table. His mother knew he only pretended to sleep; she always knew everything. She knew when he was sad, scared or hungry. She also knew that their situation was very worrisome.

And so did Aurélio. He could gauge the status of the family's finances by the tenor of the dinner menu: if soup was served several times a week, things were bad, and this week he had already had potato soup, cabbage soup, and onion soup. Worse yet, it was only Wednesday. He knew that what went into the soup were relatively affordable items which would not overburden the family. But even if they had been able to afford fancier food, they would have been curtailed by rationing policies. The war had forced whole communities to observe restraint since the previous year.

Aurélio's mother did not complain; she sang softly as she peeled vegetables and cleaned the kitchen. She always believed better times would lie ahead. She had seen both adversity and bounty and remained impressed by neither although having a child had made the former a little more poignant.

Aurélio did his best not to burden her any further. Apart from not respecting curfew and reading until his eyes burned, he was a very good son. He studied hard in school and did his chores diligently. When he was done, he sat by the window, his chin supported by his knuckles, while he listened to the radio and waited for his father to come home.

John Allan, the father, was a bus driver who worked to the point of exhaustion. But like Aurélio's mother, he never complained. He believed that, despite the economic hardship, he was a very lucky man. He had what mattered; he was married the love of his life, Maria Eugênia, a beautiful Portuguese woman who had given him his beloved son. He was not an ambitious man, not beyond reason, and although he wished their funds were a little more abundant, he figured his

problems were small and manageable, especially because to offset them, he had Eugênia.

While she cooked, Maria Eugênia ruminated over the possibility of working. With the war and so many men sent abroad, positions had opened, and although her husband had miraculously escaped being drafted, possibly because he was older than those in the optimal age range, his salary alone was insufficient. Secretly, Eugênia also had a desire to work for her own sake, and now that many married women held jobs outside the home, she felt entitled to at least dream about it.

But John was a proud and traditional man, and Eugênia hesitated about even bringing up the subject. So instead of troubling her husband, she started doing odd jobs which she could accomplish within the confines of the house. While he was away at work, she ran a small business: first came the laundry baskets full of clothes which she washed and pressed to perfection. Then came the sewing of children's dresses. Finally, she accepted orders for the delicious pies she baked.

Soon the dinner menu improved, though Eugênia tried to be subtle about it. When the main course was soup, it came accompanied by delectable breads and possibly a baked dessert. In addition, more often than before, dinner was not soup, and John commended her on her home economics skills.

However, as it happens with many innocent lies, Eugênia's deception was not to go undetected forever. Once while walking home from work, John ran into one of his wife's wealthy customers, who saw in the chance encounter an opportunity to profusely praise his wife's baking. John, although confused, kept the farce going, but upon arriving home demanded an explanation. Aurélio eavesdropped from behind a door which he managed to keep ajar. Eugênia, not schooled in the art of lying, confessed to everything right away between bouts of crying and attempts at interrupting. Despite her claims, though, John proceeded to outline everything which was wrong about her behavior. Not only had she lied to him, he pondered, but she had also emasculated him by overtaking his role as provider.

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Patricia Friedrich, PhD, is an associate professor of rhetoric and composition/linguistics at Arizona State University's New College. She has written extensively on the spread of English and on issues of language and peace for several academic publications, including *World Englishes*, *Harvard Business Review* and the *International Multilingual Research Journal*. She is also the author of "Language, Negotiation and Peace: the use of English in conflict resolution" and the editor of "Teaching Academic Writing" both by Continuum Books. She has recently become more engaged in fiction writing. She is working on a book project for young adults and on several short stories. She can be reached at Patricia.Friedrich@asu.edu.

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Eugênia's tears were a burden too heavy for Aurélio to endure, and, unable to contain himself any longer, he leaped into the room and confronted his father. He argued that his mother was an angel who only wanted to help, that since her enterprising idea, the home had been running more smoothly, the food had improved and he, Aurélio, was even feeling his pants tighter around his waist.

Unfortunately, Aurélio's reasoning caused an effect which was the opposite of what he had hoped, for it only reinforced in John the feeling of humiliation and of having failed to fully provide for his family. His face turned an unbecoming shade of red, and he stormed out of the room slamming the door behind him.

Eugênia, still shaken after the uncharacteristic outburst from her husband, wiped her tears and hugged her son. She smelled of soap and lavender. "Não te preocupes, Aurélio, do not worry. Your father is a good man who just needs to calm down for a few minutes. Go listen to the radio. By the time dinner is ready, everything will be fine again."

Aurélio found it hard to concentrate on the radio shows which usually sent his mind soaring. It seemed that daydreaming had just become an impossible task. Adventures in distant lands and horseback riding escapes could not remove the images of the early evening from Aurélio's memory. In the

end, he fell asleep while trying to make it through the radio broadcasting. His mother, her heart full of love and tenderness, brought a blanket to shelter his slumber.

The following morning, Aurélio woke up to the little silvery sounds of the kitchen: china being brought to the table for tea, knives arranged by the plates ready to spread the homemade jam he liked so much. The smell of freshly baked bread invaded his nostrils and, carried away by the music of breakfast, he sleepwalked into the small room. His father sat there sternly; his mother, her stomach glued to the sink, did not betray any emotion. Aurélio wondered just when things would go back to normal.

It took a little longer than he expected. Yet, slowly but surely, things started going back to usual. The changes were subtle — his mother went back to singing while she cooked, his father commended her on her soups, her hairdo, or the cleanliness of the house. In time, the two of them resumed their routines, the same habits that made Aurélio feel so secure and loved. One morning, after leaving the house, John slid a note next to his wife's cup. Aurélio, who usually knew his place, could not resist. While his mother was outside, Aurélio sneaked a look and grinned. The message read:

Mrs. Gilbert needs three apple pies for Wednesday.

I love you,

John

Winners of The Blue Guitar Jr. Contest

The Blue Guitar congratulates and is proud to announce the winners of the inaugural The Blue Guitar Jr. contest for young writers and adults writing for children. The winners will be recognized at The Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts on April 18 at ASU West.

The Winners' Circle

First place for writers 10 and younger:

Meena Venkataramanan — "Time for Change"

First place for writers 11 and older

Mira Takamura — "Franco"

First place for adults writing for children:

A.L. Means — "A Change of Scene"

First place for poetry for children

Victoria Turnipseed — "A Sniff of Sadie's Magic," a poem for children

Five Poems By Nanette Longchamp

Cacheu

© 2010

Cacheu,

A paradise beautiful as Eden sat on the south bank of a long,
Meandering river in Guinea-Bissau.
For centuries, her stolen riches,
Enriched others who cared little for her.
She was a temptress, who quenched the thirst for gold,
And fed that certain hunger for souls.

Cacheu,

A tropical town of deep red sunsets, sparkling shores and aged shade trees,
Fulfilled the dreams of her first people in tranquility.

Cacheu,

Capital of the Kingdom of Gabu,
Her people moved freely through the wants of their day,
Flourishing in living colors, and children's laughter.
Her women pounded rice to their fill, and her men traded salt for bills.

Cacheu,

Once a free port, watched her children coming and going,
As they pleased, without the weights of chains to anchor them down.
Then, one ever so sunny day, Portuguese sailors fell upon her shores to
Take in her bounty and free spirit. Ah! Cacheu, if only you knew!
Such genteel people they first appeared. Your Portuguese citizens,
Made strong by Forts built to defend their new trade of gold and souls.
How they basked in the gold that once lined your caves,
To make colorful dwellings gleam in the sun.
Great castles towered above bustling ports for the sole purpose of the
Export of souls.



Marjory Boyer's "A Slice of Paradise"

Continued on page 15



Nanette was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, during the Duvalier era. Haiti is her muse; in her writings, the Haitian experience looms large. When a child, Nanette immigrated to Brooklyn, N.Y. She received her B.A. degree from the City University of New York. Nanette is a poet and short story writer. She is currently working on a novel that takes place in Haiti during the early 1960s. Nanette is married and has one child. She is currently attending the University of Arizona. The poems she has enclosed are all in a way, semibiographical. *Stolen Moments*, she wrote during the negotiations for her father's release after he was kidnapped in Haiti. *A Demitasse of Love* is a short memory of a winning moment in her life with her Grandmère Therese Gourgues. *Cacheu* she wrote as she imagined her ancestors in Africa. *Mort Mon Amie Adieu* she wrote in celebration of breast cancer survivors and *Ode to Tucson*, is her love story with Tucson. Contact her at nlongchamp@cox.net.

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Cacheu,

Once a paradise, became a place of no return -
Though she grew stronger, she offered no refuge to the hunted.
Her deep, dark, cold caverns emptied of gold,
Received her first citizens and others as weary slaves' souls preparing
For a life-changing journey; if iron chains housed your body, and
The tea leaves of fortunetellers told of your incredible destiny as
Human cargo, there you would be in the bowels of the dungeons, in
Colorful Portuguese castles. Your ears would fill with the moaning
Agony of a neighbor whose language was foreign. You too would
Be en route to the ship, if that was your fortune.

Cacheu,

Newly baptized, Portuguese Guinea,
Still retained her name in the heart and soul of her people
Who longed for their bygone years.

Cacheu,

Still the temptress, despite your horrid past,
You lured my ancestress' soul to fly back home for eternal repose,
Not to the gardens of Mole Saint-Nicolas
Of Isle Saint-Domingue, Ayiti,
But to your arms, outstretched from a time no longer known.
And now, I stand, witness to her plight and eventual flight,
As told in the lore of my native land, Haiti
Of restless souls of slaves, returning home to your shores.

Cacheu,

Be it known that,
Unlike my beloved ancestress, I, her descendant, shall not be so tempted.
I shall instead digress; I shall not follow the road map of Haitian lore.
No, I will fly to Brooklyn's wide streets where trees grow
In cement sidewalks, where fire hydrants cool nights made wakeful
By the sound of colorful barrios. Where Korean markets feed the belly,
And Guinean fabrics wrap the body; where children playing Double
Dutch are as common as Hasidim in all black with strings attached,
Walking amidst the call of the Muezzin in harmonious AS-salaam
Alaikum. No, Cacheu, I will fly, over the old, wooden benches of
Eastern Parkway, where I will muse over my childhood memories;
Over, Fulton Street, the Children's Museum and Prospect Park; over
The trees of Ocean Parkway, despite its multiple lanes of congestion
And pollution to make my way to Coney Island to take one last ride
On the centuries old wooden roller coaster of dreams. Once there, I will
Find my place of eternal rest, looking towards the place of my ancestress.
Oh, Cacheu!



Marjory Boyer's "Breezy Tropics"

A Demitasse of Love

© 2010

A demitasse of love is the sunny mornings of my early years
In the Caribbean, waking up at dawn to crowing roosters
And bells of bleating goats, to steal out of the house,
To make my way to Grandmère's house.

Daybreak provides little light. I pick my way around
The room I share with great Tante Eva. Morning toilette complete,
I unlatch the heavy metal crochet hook and slip out into the waiting
Arms of dawn.

I am fearful, yet careful, to be quiet so as not to wake
The giant sorceress who, Mamma told me,
Owns the early parts of the day.

A forbidden trip I take; a laborious trek for one so young -
But I risk it all to be with Grandmère. Unlike my Tantes
And Mamma, Grandmère did not scold without reason.
Se combs my hair with gentleness and care.
She does not reprimand turning and twisting with the back of the comb;
Allowing a helping hand to hold the braid, lessening the pain that was
Sure to come.

On Tuesdays, Grandmère took the first grandchild to arrive
On her pilgrimage to Chapel de St. Antoine, house of the family patron
Saint. Though I wish we were going to Mount Calvary to see the Man
On the cross at all stations of his journey.

This morning, a light breeze, brushes against my skin;
Morning dew sprinkles my face and arms, refreshing, enveloping.
Surrounding mountains stand high above, mysterious as they raise the mist
Camouflaging them, as the lifting of a veil, invites the first glimpse
Of a virgin bride.

I make my way through neighbors' silent gardens,
Along a narrow footpath cutting through dense live Caribbean foliage and grass.
But fragrant flowers cannot cover the sweet aroma of Grandmère's strong,
Black, syrupy coffee that greets me, then guides me to her courtyard.
At last, I arrive!

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Marjory Boyer's "Kona Beach"

Continued from page 16

There she sits under the centuries old mango tree, witness to the passing
 Of such morning ritual, in her colorful muumuu, braiding her raven black curly hair,
 Parting each side into wispy, round brocaded crowns,
 Wound tight above her ears. She sees me, smiles that certain knowing smile.
 Her eyes fatigued from morning chores still twinkle, for she knows, today,
 I have won the Trip to St. Antoine.

I walk to her, and kiss her forehead. I lift the coffee pot from the
 Round linen covered table beside her; pour her coffee in her special
 Demitasse from the set Grandpère gave her half a century ago.
 With a grateful nod, without a word, Grandmère takes the gold rimmed,
 Hand painted cup, pours the sweet nectar of love into the saucer,
 breathes in deeply, closes her eyes, and takes a soothing sip as steam rises,
 Veiling her face.

Stolen Moments

© 2010

Frozen by fear,
My icy skin provides little comfort for my shivering soul;
I pray for an end. Twenty-four hours have passed;
Yet, tears elude me. How can it be? Last night, I was on top
Of the world, encased in happiness and sequins ready for the Christmas Ball.
Like a ton of bricks, the news fell upon me. Heavy with pain,
I am immobile. What cruelty? Yet, I am mindful: I am not alone.
It's a plague that casts its shadow upon our society.
Many others have been touched, that I know. Still what loneliness?
Has common sense abandoned us? Oh! Haiti Cherie, Land of my father
Destroyer of slavers, what ails you?
I am confounded by the prodigious ill will
That turns your custodians into daemons. Once a country of beautiful,
Good people, poverty and hopelessness fester in the bidonville of the heart.
Citizens become human catchers and prey. What would Toussaint L'Ouverture
Say to this horror? My father, a man of strong will, listened not to my words,
"Take care; don't go to Cite Soleil." The warnings still ring in my ears.
Yet a man of liberty, such as he, captured and held for ransom – seated,
Shackled, in a dark, airless room, without windows, watched by a man,
A captor without face, without shame, without soul.

Waiting for words of his fate, filled by a moment in time
Held steadfast by suffering. A moment in hell, caught in the fervor
of anguish. A moment that prolongs the nightmare. Exhausted by the
unknown and the all consuming roar of the silence.

Thus, to hold back insanity, I walk out into the cold December day
Into my garden and take from the offering of the desert
Solace for my pain.

Mort

Mon Amie Adieu!

© 2010

Truth necessitates my confession.
I have, unwisely perhaps,
Decided this very moment
It is best for us to part ways.

Do not despair,
Constant friend who lurks in my shadow,
Grim specter of good and bad times,
Wicked devourer of cells;
Shadow of misfortune,
You, who waits with open arms,
Cuckolded my destiny.
We will meet soon enough.

Strongest Friend,
You who sits on the left side
Of the circle of life,
Must understand my desire
To break free from your clutches,
And your scythe.
Behold! I am. I breathe, thus I live!
I am, simply a victim of unintended consequences.

Wiseest of friends, I must stay,
And cocoon myself
In this temple I worship and depend upon.
Eventually your sweet slumber
Understandably will grab me,
By invitation or surprise.

But, oh! All knowing friend,
For now with sound mind,
I must decline -
For, your offer is inopportune.
For now,
The joy of living and loving
Have overwhelmed my being.

In truth, impassionate friend,
I have encountered love:
In the colors of spring flowers
Swaying in early morning breeze;
In Woodpeckers tapping their secret codes
On my tin roof;
And the lingering memories
Of those I have embraced.
I have too encountered joy:
In the flutter of a butterfly's wings;
The boom of ocean waves crashing against side cliffs;
A baby's laughter;
The twinkle in the eyes of an elder;
The purring of a feral cat;
The sting of rain upon my face;
The canvas of a painted-desert sunset;
The scent of a stranger;
And the crinkling of starch in the doctor's coat.

Dearest friend, I look to a miracle -
A desire to, one day,
In the far future,
See my son
Dress his father
With the same loving care
His Father dressed him,
Mingling with the melody
That soothes daily living,
Floating through the air
From the flautist next door.

Alas! Oh looming friend, please step aside
For all have catapulted me back,
To the land of fresh herbs and spices
That stands, not on my horizon,
But on the cusp
Of what will certainly be,
A dimming memory.
Until such time, when we meet again,
When our embrace will be mutual,
And as inviting as nectar
To a humming bird.
I have thus decided, Mon Amie,
We must for now,
This very instant
Say a fond,
Adieu!

Ode to Tucson

© 2010

Out of Hypnos' comforting arms, his son, Morpheus,
Hovering over me, I wake in the shadows of dawn.
With lead in my soul, caused by jealous whispering.

My trek begins, away from Nemesis' prying eyes,
Up Tumamoc's volcanic slopes, until dawn's first light finds
Me atop engulfed by your wilderness' melody. Not in the arms
Of an anthrop, as first accused by a vile tongue poisoned by
Jealous fervor.

In early morning stillness, where love blossoms between
Us on our rendezvous, surrounded by craggy mountain ranges
Sonoran, Rincon, Catalinas whose silhouettes radiate endlessly,
I sit and rest my heart. I fill my lungs with your essence, as a lover,
Before he tastes the lips of his betrothed.

Who has known your verdant and colorful desert?
Where thorns jump at intruders, providing shelter for winged
Friends; where spiky, fiery-orange tipped Ocotillos bloom
Against delicate yellow flowers of Palo Verde, peacefully.

Amidst such splendor, it was no wonder our love was
Sudden, oh Tucson! Spontaneous, as youthful love, unlike the slow
Grind of mature love that could have been; was I not ripened for novelty?

Our affair began, on first encounter, my hesitation brief, my
heart belonged to another. Brief moments of passion, a glimpse of
your beauty blinds me. Your majestic purple mountains capture my soul.
My bosom fills with guilt for cuckolding my first love, still keeping you
From him, celebrating of our love.

Wandering through your forest of thorns, I greet your majestic
Sentry of multiple arms: Greetings, old friend, says I,
Greetings, from Haiti, land of Tainos and crowing roosters;
Greetings, from cavernous mountains of my Hispaniola, home of
Brave Marons; greetings, from Nuevo York, Brooklyn my first love,
Where life lives endlessly in plated glass buildings,
Steel spires reaching for the stars.
Greetings, says I, from the places of my footsteps past.

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Smoldering heat warms your morning from time
Immemorial blurs my vision as I follow Ha:san Sentry's arm
Of needles, held high above pointing to the past, tracing footpaths
Of ancient desert Puebloans fills me with inner peace.
My footsteps follow trails made by O'odham and Yaquis,
Gathering thousands of years ago under stars that dictate your
Rhythm of time for planting and harvesting, for ceremonies
And story telling, so say pictographs, bearing silent witness
On your rocks burned bright by the sun.

Though I am at peace, a sense of loss overwhelms.
Oh, Tucson! You who hold secrets ten thousand years old
Solitude drew me as I reimagine your Ancient Ones, the
Hohokams, along the banks of the Rio Santa Cruz,
Surveying wide expanses of your plains, below the volcanic remains
Of Sentinel Peak, whose watchful fires no longer burn bright.
Amidst blooming Saguaros, standing for a moment in time,
Long Cactus Puller in hand, ready to harvest bahidaj
Off your Sentry's arms for sweet red syrup and wine.

Imagine me, why don't you? I, who lean against the Mesquite's
Trunk, face shaded by my sombrero following the muse Clio,
Watching Mexican Hombres and Comadres, standing firm on once
Sacred grounds, your custodians before El Venta de la Mesilla,
Leading through the desert, Father Kino, prospective guardian
Of their souls.

Dawn now brings searing red rays of light illuminating mounds
of clouds in your sky, above the old Pueblo. My gaze shifts north,
Following faint echoes of cliff dwellers, your cousins, Anasazi,
Who surely ventured down for trade; visitors like so many forgotten
Others, leaving behind their celestial Towers of Babel,
Set against cliffs.

Like me, were they reaching for the sky? Alas! The arms of your
Sentry retreat, with each step away from your tiny sanctuary atop
Tumamoc where Pronghorns and Javelinas roam, now without me
And into an uncertain future, a place that may be no more,
Soon amidst the swirl of a congested downtown,
Paving over your children's past. My heart renewed for I accept
Our love with arms wide open. Still my soul is troubled
For what may come. Oh Tucson! Woe is the old man
Who stood strong, your Sentry for centuries, his woe, now ours!

Do You Believe in Magic?

By Carter Nacke

© 2010

Creating Disney magic takes a special person. Because Cast Members (aka employees) are constantly interacting with visitors, being positive is the key to success. Smile at all times. Respond to an angry guest with concern and kindness. Keep smiling.

But what happens when a Cast Member loses his grasp on the elusive Disney magic?

In January 2008 I was a seater (aka glorified host) at the Crystal Palace in the Magic Kingdom at Orlando's Walt Disney World Resort. I looked out the front door every day at Cinderella Castle and watched the fireworks every night. My polyester costume—a canary yellow shirt with white pinstripes, a white vest, a white bowtie and black dress slacks—suffocated body and mind. Day in and day out, I watched the same Castle Show (a daily performance at Cinderella Castle), sat different guests at the same tables and ate the same snack on my break. Every day. And nothing ever changed. Except how often frustrated guests yelled at me.

My magic was gone. I wore the costume, I seated the guests and I smiled. I never did anything to act out or get in trouble, but I'd stopped caring.

Until the afternoon I went to sit that last table. Just before I called out "Winnie the Pooh and friends would like to welcome the Stevens family" with a disguised sarcasm, a young English girl ran up the brick steps toward me.

"Excuse me," she said in a thin voice with a British accent. "Can you please help me?"

Naturally, I replied in the affirmative. She and her parents were having difficulty finding their way out of the park. I pointed the way, past Casey's Corner, the hot dog place that always smelled like fresh sauerkraut, and straight down Main Street, U.S.A. to the park exit. To me, this walk was more familiar than my itchy polyester costume.

"Please, sir. Just help us out of the park," she said. Tears were forming in her ice blue eyes. With a sunburned finger, she pointed to her parents.

As I looked at her backpack-laden parents, tears formed in

my eyes as well. Both were completely blind. They didn't have the stereotypical black glasses and long white sticks. They didn't carry Braille maps. But their eyes were clouded. No one from Disney was guiding them.

This little girl was their eyes. At age 12, she had navigated a foreign country—not to mention the world's largest amusement park—with two blind parents.

It was impossible not to help this child. I took her hand and asked her name. "Katie" came the slow, shaky reply.

I knelt down, eye level with her. "Katie, what say we take you guys out of here?" I asked with a wink.

I took her down the steps and met her parents, Mark and Susan. They were staying at the Grand Floridian hotel, which was a 45-minute boat ride away. They had to reach their hotel in 20 minutes so they could catch a bus to the airport and their flight home.

To make matters worse, the afternoon parade was starting and Main Street was packed with guests eager to see Mickey and friends. I had to try.

We walked quickly. I led the way, with Katie hanging onto my shirt and her parents hanging onto her. I took them to the end of Casey's Corner and told Katie the exit was straight on. She couldn't possibly miss it.

I smiled at her, told her to have a great trip home and said I was very proud of her for helping her parents. She looked up, teary again, and whispered, "Please don't leave me."

I couldn't. Katie had pierced the armor around my heart. I took the family down Main Street while talking to Mark about his love for English football (soccer). We argued over which team was best and laughed off our respective differences. Susan gushed about how "wonderful" the weather had been and how she dreaded returning to "dreary" England.

Katie wanted an ice cream for a reward, but Mark refused to wait in line as we had extremely little time. I ran to the front and used a Magic Moment (essentially a giveaway Cast Members are allowed to offer) to grab her an ice cream. After receiving special permission for me to exit the park, we made our way to the boat crossing for the Grand Floridian hotel.

As they stepped into the boat, Katie gave me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Susan departed with a hug as well. Mark pulled me aside, with tears running from his clouded eyes. He shook my hand and told me, "Thank you. You made the end to our perfect trip."

They caught the last boat. And I caught hold inside: They gave me back my magic.



Carter Nacke is a senior at Arizona State University who will be graduating with a print journalism degree in August 2010. In his spare time, Carter is cheering on Manchester United and planning his next excursion to a random location. Contact him at carter.nacke@gmail.com.

Snapshots from the December 2009 Day of Culture



The Blue Guitar Magazine photos/Richard H. Dyer Jr.

Five P.M. at the Apple Grove

By E.A. Cervino

© 2010

Adler was shortsighted and lanky. A lock of his shoulder-length-salt-pepper hair hung over his right eye alongside the large beak of his nose. He wore a white, soiled lab coat, and was close to finishing the hole he had been digging in the floor of his basement laboratory. Sweat beaded on his forehead.

Suddenly, after a WOOSHH sound, a burst of light blinded him as the contraption he had been working on for twenty years lit up. His shovel clattered to the floor. His heart pounded. He knelt to feel for his eyeglasses—the jolt had knocked them off his face. Then he saw through the smeared lenses a naked woman with a small package in her hand.

“Inga?” he called. “I just left you upstairs! What happened?”

“Marvelous, isn’t it?” she exclaimed. A glimmer dwelled in her blue eyes. “Except your wife is still upstairs. I’m your wife’s duplicate.”

Her arms were crossed and she cupped her breasts in her hands.

“Unbelievable!” He adjusted the glasses on his nose bridge, and admired her desirable body. “Beautiful! My dear,” said he, “did I do this?”

“Yes, in a manner of speaking,” she said, shivering.

It was a cold November day in Pennsylvania and the basement was chilly. Adler Muller, the apple grower, removed his lab coat and draped it around her shoulders, while glancing at the flickering apparatus.

Not yet recovered from the event, Adler was wordless. She smiled pleasantly.

“How is this possible, Inga? That thing doesn’t work. We stopped trying months ago. Got tired of working on my stupid time-traveling idea.”

“I know that,” she said. “However, your machine can receive, but not transmit. My Adler, your duplicate, succeeded in opening the portal. I brought you this for your machine,” she said as she tendered the small package. “It will make it possible to travel through the portal. Should we go upstairs? It’s cold down here. I have to dress before he arrives.”

Nervously, Adler led the way. The stairs creaked under their weight. Muller warned, “Careful with the last step; it’s kind of loose.”

“I know.” She smiled and rolled her eyes.

They entered the kitchen, and Adler called aloud. “Inga dear.” His forty years’ smoking habit made his voice crackle.

“I’m here,” a female voice yelled back.

“Dear, something extraordinary has happened,” said Adler, as they entered the dining room. A woman turned and faced them, “Oh my, we did it. I never doubted you,” she said. “She is my duplicate. It’s disconcerting to meet her. Please come, let me get you some clothes.”

The dining table held an uncorked bottle of wine and two glasses. He brought a third one and waited.

When they returned, Inga’s duplicate wore jeans and a heavy, light blue jersey. They sat with Adler for a glass of wine. He compared the women’s short, golden-wheat hair.

“I know you and my wife are the same, but may I call you... Olga, to make it easy for all of us.”

She smiled and nodded.

“So tell me, Olga, how the future turns out for us,” asked Inga.

“Not the future. I come from a parallel universe,” responded Olga.

“OOOOH, so they do exist,” said Adler. “What do I do there, dear?”

“We are apple growers, and part-time inventors, like you.”

“And how do I finally solve the portal algorithm?”

“With the help of what I brought you now—a computer chip such as you have never seen.”

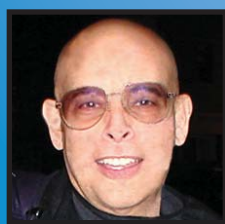
“Did I ask you to try the portal?” Adler asked.

“My Adler needed to stay to operate it, so I made the decision to come.”

“How did you know we existed?” asked Inga.

“A while back, our portal began to receive short impulses; we sensed someone else was working on a portal like ours,

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Eduardo Cervino was born in Havana. He was a student of architecture and painting when Castro’s regime came to power. Eventually he traveled to Europe and later immigrated to the United States, where he worked as an architectural designer. He has exhibited his paintings in the US and abroad. As an avid reader, he is familiar with Spanish, European, and American writers. Soon after his arrival in the US, he decided to record his experiences with the revolution’s lack of compassion, and in 1970 wrote *Unleashed Passions*, an autobiographical novel in Spanish. Cervino also enjoys the short story genre, and two of his recent ones are included in this edition. The dark and magical overtones of these stories are the cultural residue of his native land. He met his wife, Lesley, also a voracious reader, in New York City. Since then, they have independently produced mystery and sci-fi novels, and have collaborated on a series of mysteries with supernatural components. They can be contacted at ecis@cox.net. They are long-time residents of Phoenix, Arizona.

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as we did in our spare time. Our computers did a reverse engineering and determined your temporal address, as well as why you have tried and failed. So we reworked our algorithms and used the latest Intel chip in our world, and it worked. Your computers are too slow to solve space-time compression calculations, but you are on the right path.”

The sound of a car crunching the snow on the road interrupted them.

“He is here,” said Adler.

“We don’t have the money this time,” said Inga.

“I know. He wants more every year and the apple crop price was lower this season,” he responded. “If we had completed the time-travel portal, we could have escaped our past.”

Adler opened the front door and a stocky, gray-haired man entered. “Cousin Max—you are nothing if not punctual,” said Adler. The man did a double take at the women, while removing his coat, but said nothing.

“This is Inga’s American cousin; her name is Olga,” said Adler. “You didn’t know she had one. Olga, can you let us talk with Max in private for a minute?”

Olga stood up and went to the bedroom.

“I brought the last of the family pictures and the negatives. Do you have the money?”

“Come and sit, Max. Have some wine. When did you leave Amsterdam?”

“Yesterday. Why do you care?” he responded in Dutch.

“I don’t. I’m making conversation.”

“May I have my money now?” said Max.

“May I see the pictures first?” Adler opened the envelope and stared at the pictures, his expression grim.

“Inga! Bring what we have for Max, please.”

She stood and went to the kitchen cabinet. As she walked back to the dining table, Max turned to face her, and a .38 caliber bullet went through his left eye. The chair rotated backwards and Max lay on the tile floor, facing the ceiling.

“What a mess,” exclaimed Inga.

“Let’s carry him to the basement,” said Adler.

Olga came out of the bedroom, unperturbed. “I can help with that, but we can’t bury him in the basement.”

“Why not?” asked Adler

“Because he will miss his flight two weeks from today;

the authorities will come asking questions, and they’ll find the body before we have time to upgrade the portal in this universe. We have to bury him out there in the apple grove.”

“After all that digging in the basement?” complained Adler.

“Sorry, but I have told you how it will be. We will say that Max is traveling, and if asked, we will tell the immigration fellow that we are building a cistern in the basement.”

It was dark when they finished the grisly task in the apple grove.

For the next two weeks, the three of them worked together on the portal. The computer chip from the parallel universe was capable of googol calculations per second. All was ready for them to travel off world.

As predicted, an immigration official showed up at their door the evening before departure. After he left, they sat to listen to music and chat.

“Olga, did you also try to bury Max in the basement in your universe?” asked Adler.

“No, we love our cousin Max. He is a fun fellow. We really are installing a cistern in our basement. I improvised here on your Earth; not every event is the same in the multiverses.”

“I can’t wait to escape to the parallel universe,” said Inga. “It’s hard to live in fear.”

“Do you still have the pictures you took from Max?” asked Olga. “May I see them again?”

“Of course; I’m proud of them.”

Olga’s eyes showed the same twinkle as the day she stepped out of the old portal. “There is a last-minute thing I have to do before going back,” she said.

Adler opened a locked drawer, pulled out a manila envelope, and returned to the couch.

Meanwhile, Olga retrieved the .38 caliber revolver from another drawer, and two shots rang out. Adler and Inga held their guts and looked at her in agony.

“Why?” he mumbled.

“I forgot to mention that on the Earth I come from, my Adler and I are Jews. We travel the multiverses in pursuit of ourselves. Shalom,” she said, let another two shots ring out, and went down to the basement. The grandfather clock chimed five times.

The pictures lay on the table. Adler and Inga looked arrogant in their Nazi uniforms. The inscription read, “To Cousin Max, from Adler and Inga Eichmann, Dachau 1938.”

The Companion

By E.A. Cervino

© 2010

A single can light hung from the ceiling, out of reach. Its narrow beam projected a shiny spot on the concrete floor in front of my feet, and barely illuminated the base of the three barren walls I could see. The lack of windows had confused my circadian clock and I had lost track of time. There was a door behind my back, and shadows loomed above it all.

A green nylon rope held my feet to the legs of a metal chair. The same rope snaked in circles around my legs, my waist, my upper arms, and tied my swollen hands behind my back. Pulsating pain crept upwards from my beaten soles. An acrid smell permeated the sweltering air. My only comfort was the cold concrete in contact with my bare feet.

In the zone where light and shadow kept a synergetic relationship, a somber soldier sat on the floor in the lotus position. He wore no boots and his feet showed at each side of his knees. When my captors were out of the room, we talked softly. Occasionally, I found the strength to lift my head from my chest just enough to see him. His hands, resting on his knees over the camo-pants, were clean and white, with long fingers.

"Can you tell them what they want to know? It would help your situation, don't you think?" he asked.

"I don't have the information they are asking of me; I have nothing to tell them."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Those two guys are determined to make you confess. Although I think they would be disappointed if you actually told them anything and they had to stop."

"Would they stop if I lied to them?"

"Maybe for a while, until they find out, and then... well, you know... tell them something and see, but remember that what they do to you feeds the darkness in their souls."

"Can you dry the sweat on my forehead? It's rolling into my eyes... please," I asked.

A fly buzzed around my head, landing at the corner of my eye.

"Sorry, I can't. It's not permitted. I'm not here to make you comfortable. I'm here as an observer, to keep you company."

The soldiers returned. When the room was briefly flooded with outside light, the pesky fly hurried away, to be replaced by talons of fear tearing at my entrails.

"Hellooo," said one of them.

A piece of a rubber hose appeared at the corner of my eye. It came from behind with great velocity and wrapped around my shoulder, molding itself to the contours of my flesh with morbid exactitude.

My scream lacked conviction.

I waited for the next blow. It didn't come.

"I'm thirsty," I croaked, not expecting water.

"Tell me the names of the guys working with you, and I will give you water, a big glass of ice water," his throaty voice said, inches from my left ear.

My right ear had been ringing persistently; it didn't bother me anymore. He filled a glass, letting me hear the ice cubes tumble from the plastic jug. After noisily drinking, he tossed the rest on the floor; the ice cubes shattered where I could see them.

"I told you. I don't know what you are asking of me."

The soldier pulled back the hose from my body; it slithered away out of sight like a harmless garden snake. This time I knew it would return with the force of devilish satisfaction. It didn't take long for my vision to be fulfilled.

Lacking surprise and saturated with pain as I was, the malevolent act did not elicit a guttural expression and I remained silent. I took this last blow with stoicism. The light spot on the floor seemed to contract, while my mind mercifully closed down.

I awoke when a bucket of water wadded my hair and washed away the sweat over my eyes, neck, and shoulders. It made my skin slippery and the rope gave a little, making the tiny needles of nylon prick the wounds in my pectorals. With the tip of my tongue, I collected the moisture from my lips.

As a third man entered the room, daylight outlined on the floor the distorted angles of the door at my back. The temperature differential drew fresh air inside the space; it had a salty tang. I felt gratitude for the gift the nearby sea had sent my way.

As he closed the door, the bright rectangle on the floor diminished until the last sliver of light died. In that fleeting moment, while my eyes adapted to the near-darkness, I caught another glimpse of the soldier seated on the ground. The guards remained oblivious to his presence.

I thought his presence was an added psychological attempt to mess with my mind—a way to make me hope that help could come from this mild-mannered person, and make me confide in him whatever they thought I knew.

A microburst of air outside the door shuffled the huge leaves of the palm trees located by the building. I imagined these majestic palms gently swaying in the wind. The rustling sound tricked my mind and I felt the breeze's cooling effect roll over me.

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Spring 2010

The wire cage cell where I had been held was exposed to the celestial dome. This was the third time the soldiers had taken me from it, and brought me to this room. As before, we had followed the winding road at the edge of the palms to the pleasing-looking building with trimmed hedges. From the instant the two bulky officers, neat in their freshly pressed military uniforms, showed at my gate, the etheric realm connecting me to them let me know about the bestial instincts they intended to unleash upon my body once again.

The viciousness and duration of this session exceeded the previous ones.

“Save yourself some trouble, and talk to us,” said the new man in the room. Before I could protest my innocence, he held the back of my head, and with his free hand, covered my nose and mouth with a wet rag, suffocating me.

“Don’t be an idiot. We have others who said you knew of the plot, so we will be here until you change your mind.”

This third man’s face was over mine. His clenched, tobacco-stained teeth showed under a graying mustache. His long hair had fallen forward. Suffocation filled my senses with panic. My heart thumped wildly; however, the asphyxia was having a sedative effect and from a full gallop it began to change into a slow-motion pace.

He asked the same question as the other men had done before, but was not letting go of my head or the rag. I rocked my head from side to side. My eyes bulged, my resolve weakened, and I contemplated the idea of implicating others in the plot they were mentioning, whether they were or not.

I imagined other men taking my place. As quickly, an inner voice spoke to me. *Why hurt others? Let go; it is your time, not theirs*, it said. My heart was now misfiring.

The movement of my head was not an indication of my refusal to talk, but a desire to shake away the rag and breathe. When he let me go, my lungs were on fire and I gasped for air with desperation. The ropes around my chest were too tight for my lungs to be able to exercise their full bellowing action. The gulps of whistling air were insufficient.

A knock on the door halted their handiwork.

“You all come out for a minute,” said someone standing outside the door they had opened. “We have new orders.”

They left the room, but the door did not fully close after them. A thin ray of daylight on the floor ended where my companion sat. It bisected his body from head to crossed legs. His bald skull was shiny, his eyes had a calming luminosity, and there may have been a faint smile on his lips.

I heard the voices outside; one sounded authoritarian, the others compliant.

“Are you sure about that, Sir?”

“Yes. We have to stop. It was a mistake and those are the orders. Are you questioning me?”

“No, I’m not...”

“No, I’m not what?” screamed the one speaking like a man in command.

“No, I’m not. Sir.”

“Do as you are told, then.”

“Yes, Sir.”

I heard the steps of a man walking away, but did not understand what the other three were arguing about outside the door. Surprisingly, I had lost interest in my surroundings and only the gaze of the man on the floor was of any interest to me. His large green eyes were full of compassion.

One tear rolled from his right eye, while a second was nested on his eyelashes. His mouth opened a little; the smile included his eyes and cheeks. A tender blow from his mouth bridged the distance separating us. I opened my lips; I knew he wanted me to. The streaming breath entered my lungs with the refreshing sensation of the morning dew, and yet the pain I was feeling in my arms and chest told me that my heart was tired of the abuse it had sustained.

What was that, he said? I thought. *Oh yes..., “Forgive them, Father, for...”*

The rest of the phrase I was thinking of came to mind, “*for they know not what they do.*”

My heart thumped once more, and went silent.

It didn’t matter to me as long as the eyes of the stranger kept crying for me. He rose and glided over the floor toward me, with the ease of a cloud in the sky, and extended his hand to me in a friendly gesture. Mine were tied so I did not attempt to take his.

The smile now grew into a soft, amused grin. “Do you prefer to stay in the chair?”

I shook my head, realizing at that moment that I was free of the rope. I accepted his help and stood.

The door swung open and the soldiers came inside, stopping behind the chair. This was the place from where they had dispensed their cruelty with malign complacency—making menacing comments, cocking their pistols, or, more to their liking, flogging me.

I felt refreshed and free, and enjoyed the expression of concern of the soldiers when they saw my lifeless body. One touched my neck, checking my pulse.

“Damn, look what you did,” he said, pointing at the mustachioed soldier.

“We did as we were ordered,” he replied worriedly.

“Yes, it was our job. But we had orders to keep him alive. Look what you have done.”

“The commander will understand; I got carried away. He will stand by us,” said the third soldier anxiously. “Surely it has

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happened before.”

The engine of a plane flying low over the building screamed and faded in the distance. The two soldiers looked back at the open door and saw, framed by it, the silhouette of the craft, gaining attitude over the Caribbean Sea.

“Was that the commander’s plane?” asked the third man, looking up at the ceiling where the can light swayed.

“Yes, he flew in this morning to review this guy’s files.”

“I’m sure he will be back; we’ll talk with him then.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“About what?”

“That he will return to the base; he is not stationed here.”

“Do you know where he is stationed? Do you know his name?”

“He never said, and I never asked. Damn.”

There was no answer, only concerned glances at one another. They turned their eyes toward the door; the plane was a dot on the horizon. Close to the shore, a pod of dolphins romped on the waves.

“I really didn’t know what you wanted from me,” I said to them one last time, but I was ignored.

My companion touched my arm; the wide open door beckoned us. He eased his way through the soldiers. I glanced one more time at my corpse in the chair.

“Excuse me.” I mumbled, and I followed him outside, no more concerned than two fellows leaving the neighborhood bar.

A fast-developing monsoon rain pelted the tin roof of the isolated barracks. Steam hugged the ground that the noontime sun had been baking minutes ago. Beads of water rested on the giant leaves of the banana trees; there, they fattened up, then rolled, fell, and pooled on the ground below.

A hummingbird darted across our path on its way to collect nectar from a wild orchid; steady in the air, his wings beat the rain into a delicate spray.

“I can’t feel the raindrops,” I said to my companion.

“Of course not; what do you expect? Wait until your next incarnation.”

Knock Me Down, Knock One Out

By Tyler Killian

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This isn't how I'd played it out in my head. I'm lying on the ground, my pinstriped white pants covered in dirt. My blue aluminum bat rests a few feet away, and the searing pain shooting up and down my left leg is consuming my thoughts. My ankle and heart are throbbing almost simultaneously, one in agony and the other in fear. When I look up, all I see is two figures approaching with anxious looks on their faces, and all I can envision is my precious chance to be a hero slipping away.

* * *

It was a clear, crisp Southern California afternoon — the kind that baseball was meant to be played on. An occasional breeze made everyone comfortable; well, everyone except the people sharing the dugout with me, that is. My team was down 7-5 in the bottom of the sixth inning, which meant we had only two more chances to scrape together a couple of runs or we'd suffer a crucial late-season defeat. My teammates managed to rally and load the bases, with nobody out, but our momentum stalled and the opposing pitcher retired the next two batters.

That's when I, the skinny high school sophomore who'd always been known more for my glove than my bat, found myself up at the plate with the game on the line and the most important at-bat of my career in front of me. Succeed, and I'd be cheered endlessly for coming through in the clutch. Fail, and I'd be the guy who let his team down when it needed him the most.

As I began my short journey to the batter's box, I heard a familiar voice behind me. "Hey, I want to hit this inning, so don't strike out."

It was Mike, the guy who'd replaced me as the on-deck batter and was now grinning at me from beneath the brim of his faded blue helmet. He was employing a common sports trick — trying to relieve some of the pressure with a little good-natured ribbing.

I chuckled under my breath and shot back a grin of my own. "Sure thing, Mike," I replied as I once again turned my back to him and prepared to hit.

Without a home run to my credit, I'd never dared to think of myself as a slugger or someone who could change a game with one swing of the bat. So as I stepped into the box, my main concern was making the pitcher throw a lot of pitches and forcing him to either walk me or throw me something I could line into the outfield for a base hit that would keep the inning alive.

I accomplished my first goal, eventually getting to a full count — three balls and two strikes — and fouling off a few tough pitches that increased my confidence against the pitcher.

That's when my plan took a painfully undesired turn. I saw a fastball coming low and inside, so I churned my hips to try to bring the bat to the ball. Next came three sounds I'll never forget, one after the other in rapid succession.

First, the sharp ping of the aluminum bat meeting the ball, a sound I'd heard thousands of times before.

Then, the sickening crack of the ball meeting my unguarded ankle, flush on the bone.

And finally, the dull thud of my body meeting the dirt, crumpled in pain.

Now I'd fouled plenty of pitches off my feet and legs in the past, and it usually hurt, but this was a whole new level of pain. Shockwaves rippled through my entire leg. All I could do was sit there, grimacing and holding my ankle while I waited for our coach and team trainer to emerge from the dugout and follow my footsteps to the batter's box.

"Well, that didn't look good." Coach Gonzalez was always one to point out the obvious, and he made no exception here.

"Yeah, it didn't feel too good either," I replied through gritted teeth. My ankle was already puffing up through my white sock. It would be swollen and tender for more than a week.

The trainer quickly established that the bone wasn't broken, but even light pressure made me pull back in pain. "Okay, let's get you up and back into the dugout so we can get some ice on that thing and figure out how serious it is," he said after witnessing my contorted expression.

Coach Gonzalez nodded and looked back into the dugout,

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scanning the faces of the players anxiously looking back at him. “Yeah, I think I’ll send Paul up to finish your at-bat. He can take over for you in center field, too.”

Something snapped in my head. *Wait a second*, I thought to myself. *This is my at-bat. Nobody’s finishing it but me.* As long as I could stand in the batter’s box and swing a bat, there was no way I was coming out of this game. Anybody who calls himself a competitor knows that in a situation like this, there’s nobody you want to decide the outcome but you.

“Coach, I’m fine,” I pleaded with him, using every ounce of energy I had to suck up the pain and speak without revealing my anguish. “I can do this, no problem.”

“Uh-uh. I don’t want to take a chance,” came the cold reply. “Go get some ice and hopefully you’ll be good for our next game.”

“Coach, listen to me.” Now I was being a little more forceful. “I can finish this at-bat.”

He sighed. After a few seconds he turned to the trainer. “What do you think?”

“I’d advise against it,” the trainer answered. “But if he says he can go, let him go. Just hope he doesn’t have to try to beat out a grounder.”

That was all I needed to hear. I gingerly got to my feet and did my best to conceal my limp, not wanting to allow any chance for second thoughts. I picked up the bat and took a few practice swings, feeling thankful I was a right-handed batter and could keep most of my weight on my back foot — the healthy one.

As I got back into the box and faced the pitcher, I recalled the situation: two outs, full count, bases loaded. Just try to hit something solid, I told myself, and then we’ll figure out the rest.

The trainer’s words echoed in my head as the pitcher prepared to enter his windup. *Just hope he doesn’t have to try to beat out a grounder.* Yeah, that would suck. In the back of my mind I thought of trying to hit one into a gap in the defense so I wouldn’t have to push my ankle too much. But then I reminded myself that I didn’t get here by calling my shots. Stick to the plan.

The pitcher made his delivery. As the ball left his hand, my brain screamed out: fastball, chest high. Once again, I churned my hips, and once again, I heard the sweet sound of aluminum connecting with rawhide. But this time the ball didn’t go down. It went up. Way up.

I knew as soon as I hit it that I’d crushed it, but never one to take anything for granted, I began sprinting toward first base. They say adrenaline can make people do incredible things, and for those few seconds I felt not a speck of pain.

As I rounded first, I looked up and saw the ball clearing the fence in left-center field, but I kept racing toward second. Then it finally hit me. That was a grand slam — the first home run of my baseball career — and I’d just turned our team’s two-run deficit into a two-run lead. We’d go on to win by that same 9-7 score.

My teammates were waiting for me at home plate. As soon as my metal cleat hit that rubber, they mobbed me and took turns pounding my helmet — baseball’s slightly more affectionate equivalent of a pat on the back.

Mike was one of the last to congratulate me. He had on the same grin as before, and I prepared myself for another of his wisecrack comments.

“You sure got a flair for the dramatic,” he beamed, shaking my hand as he said it. “That was like something out of a movie.”

Yep, I thought silently, allowing a smile to creep over my face. Just the way I’d played it out in my head.

Out on Highway 61

By Ryan Wolf

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The seatbelt buckle digging into my back was impossible to ignore. Katie and I had been pawing at each other in my truck for about an hour in a frantic make-out session that only high school virgins can truly appreciate. I hadn't wanted to mention the seatbelt for fear it might derail the special moment we were sharing in the darkened parking lot of a local Blockbuster Video.

The warm October night was thick with sweat and bad radio. The windows of my truck had fogged up, documenting every interaction between skin and glass. All the fingerprints gave the truck the look of a television crime scene. The floor of the truck was littered with old homework, used CDs and various articles of clothing. Our parents thought we were at the movies.

I kept trying to hoist myself away from the seatbelt, but this simply fueled our dry humping fire. I felt like a religious zealot sacrificing my body for a higher calling. I was on the brink of abandoning my pilgrimage when it happened.

Bang!

"What was that?" I asked.

Two more bangs followed. A bright shaft of light bounced around the truck, highlighting our semi-naked bodies.

Katie screamed.

I seized the opportunity to shift myself off the seatbelt. This moment of bliss was cut short. As my fingers fumbled around the cup holder, searching for my glasses, the mysterious intruder said, "Open the door, please."

"Holy shit!" I said. "It's a cop."

Katie screamed again.

"Open the door!" the police officer repeated.

I panicked. Flashes of long, lonely nights in the clink spiraled through my mind. I didn't know what to expect; I'd never dealt with the police before. I've never done anything particularly illegal, aside from stealing a miniature scarf from a troll doll when I was 6 (and even then I felt so bad that as soon as I got home, I burst into tears and confessed to my mom). Even so, I've always felt uneasy around law enforcement. Part of me wanted to sit up, slam the car into reverse and just peel

out of there. Embark on a high-speed chase and start a new life on the lam.

Instead, I cracked open the door as Katie covered her exposed breasts with my jacket. As calmly as possible, I managed to say, "What seems to be the problem, officer?"

He lowered his flashlight and took a step back. Balding and probably in his late 30s, he looked like your stereotypical cop. His stomach spilled over his belt, and a thick brown mustache dominated his sweaty round face.

"Sorry, guys, but you can't do that here," he said in one long, bored sigh. "Can I see your IDs?"

After discovering that we were both under age and thus out past curfew, he told us we had to call our parents. The plan was for Katie's mom or dad to pick her up, and I'd follow my mom or dad home in my truck. I really didn't want to call my parents, but I figured any attempt to reason with a cop would be fruitless.

So at about 11:15 on a Thursday night I begrudgingly reached into the front pocket of my unbuttoned pants, pulled out my phone and called my mom.

"Hey there, mom," I started. "I need you to come to Blockbuster because Katie and I ... well, we were napping in my truck because she was really tired and a cop found us and well it's after curfew so yeah, uhh ... can you come down here?"

"What?" she asked, sounding annoyed. "Which Blockbuster?"

"Not the one we always go to but the other one," I replied.

Surprisingly, my mom didn't know where the "other" Blockbuster was, so I had to give my phone to the cop and have him give her directions.

Katie didn't have as much luck. She couldn't reach her mom or stepdad, which meant she'd be going home in the backseat of a squad car.

Katie started crying. The cop looked at me. His eyes suggested that I should comfort her, but honestly, I didn't know

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how. I know I wouldn't have wanted to show up at my house in a Crown Vic.

So the three of us waited for my mom. I leaned against the bed of the truck with my pants still unbuttoned, my shirt off and my bare feet on the asphalt and wondered what was going to happen next. Katie sat in the truck. She'd barely moved the entire time.

As the initial shock of what was happening began to wear off and an avalanche of awkward silence settled in, the police officer did something unexpected.

"So, you like Dylan?"

I didn't know what to say. I would've been less surprised had he pulled his gun out and shot me in the face.

"Wait, what?" I asked.

Sensing my confusion, he gestured toward the floor of my truck. I leaned over and saw a copy of Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* peeking out from under my shirt.

"Oh ... yeah," I said. "He's pretty cool."

"Pretty cool?" he said in mock astonishment. "He's a genius. It doesn't get any better than 'Like a Rolling Stone'."

Feeling a little more at ease, I said, "Well, sure, but I mean he hasn't released anything listenable since like 1967."

As we debated the legitimacy of his 1969 album *Nashville Skyline*, I realized this police officer was just a regular guy. He probably couldn't wait to get off work so he could go make out with his girlfriend or wife too. I'd always tried to be open-minded, so this realization caught me off-guard. Never one to make fun of someone because of religion, color or sexual orientation, I'd never considered how prejudice could even apply to the boys in blue.

That brief interaction taught me three things. 1. Seek out more secluded locations for expressing your love. 2. Don't tell your mom you're being investigated by the cops for napping. She won't buy it. 3. And, most important, approach the world with a more tolerant eye.

Five Poems by Sean Medlin

Reality of War

© 2010

21 gun salute,
For 21 dead sons
Lives reaped by the Reaper's black scythe-
100 rounds fired from a red sight-
4 hollow tips pried out by a sharp knife,

21 bodies left to rot over night,
21 corpses festering in the sun!

That's 42 mothers and fathers weeping, no longer holding back tears-
21 fellow comrades shed their uniform for a suit with a matching tie.
The government cuts the ties and tries to hide-
Connections of oil to the dead soldier's mission;
All while numerous mourners cry.

Deep inside biblical lands, that's where they were sent,
To disarm one Al-Qaeda bomb was the magazine cover
Thousands of screams sent them off to war,
500 pounds of fireworks, 24 hours of celebration, 28 F-16's soar

72 hours later, hot lead pours-
From a AK-47, and a M-16-
The desert is the scene, 110 degrees
A small brown village-
60 miles from their mission destination, the 21 sons decided to pillage,

Rape and plunder-
The evils of men, all seven deadly sins,
Surface sententiously like rocks from the sand!
21 men, one commander, that's twenty-two.

Each one holding a standard issue rifle, and a twenty-two,
None of these young Americans were over twenty-two-
All of them 18, just old enough to draft, poor boys who never flew-
On a airplane even once before the Army,
Now whole families sink into depression when they receive a letter from the military, claiming
they're sorry.



Sean Medlin writes: "I didn't start writing poetry until 6th or 7th grade. It was then that I realized my love of rhythm, rhyme, and metaphors. Growing up, my dad always played jazz, R&B and Hip-Hop. He would always make CDs for me; he never let me listen to the radio. My mom also greatly supported my hobby of reading; she would buy me a book whenever I wanted one. Because of my parents, I learned to express myself through words at an early age. Over the years my poetry and writing talent has grown, but I still believe I have much more growing to do! I won an Editor's Choice Award for one of my poems, 'Ghost' in September 2008. My English teacher at Agua Fria High School used to let me read my poetry in front of the class; however this year, I started performing my poetry every Friday at a Spoken Word Coffee Shop called the Fair Trade Café, on 1st Ave. and Roosevelt. The Spoken Word experience has helped me mature and learn more about the art of poetry and how to write and perform better. Just recently I was one of the top scoring Brave New Voices Slam poets; I've made it into the Grand Slam taking place on April 2nd at Fair Trade Café, with a chance to be on the Slam team to represent Arizona!" Contact Sean at chronic_poetic@yahoo.com.

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11 dead sons, murdered in a village they took-
Killed by a suicide bomber clutching the Holy book-
Tight to his chest, to conceal the bomb vest,
Howling, Jihad, Jihad, Jihad, with fright in his 12 year old
breath,

In anger, 10 dead sons laid waste to the bystanders-
Genocide of the elder, extermination of toddlers in pampers
U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Trooper
Turned into an avenger, a murderer, a looter!

10 dead sons chopped down by machine gun.
Beating Man's wife, pistol whipping Man's crippled son.
Man gets away, scrambles to bedroom,
Underneath bed-frame, finds submachine gun,
Spray, spray, spray, now there are 10 more dead sons-
Completing the death toll of twenty-one dead sons...

The harsh reality of war.

Her Words

© 2010

Hope, is a feather in a storm,
The slightest bit of warmth,
Like a blanket, during a raging blizzard.

Home, feels a thousand miles away.
The distance is so great!
I can barely feel the memories, like the slightest ocean spray.

You, you were always right.
No matter how much I would fight.
You always knew just what to do,

You, girl you, you never ran.
Back straight you'd stand.
And when my life was too hot to handle,
You'd be standing firm, with helpful words and a fan,

You, the most beautiful spark of hope,
Above the rainstorms you can float.
And sometimes you make home feel so close to me because you-
Were right, seldom wrong, wise, young, and undeniably strong.

When things came crashing down-
Relationships, affairs, and facades,
When I have to take my mask off-
I can trust you not to judge my face.

Fate seems to draw me close to you.
But I could never hold you.
God's gift to me, beauty in the purest form, you!

You were right!
I know you're right!
Hope that shines so bright!
Behind glass, three feet in front of me!

You!
You know the way home!
You hold up the walls!
You gently touch the scars!

I want you to give birth to my memories!
I want to share your energy!
I want to break us down and relive the day we meet because you-

Have always been right!

Warrior

© 2010

What the future holds-
Is in the palm of my hand:

Clutching the precious dream of
tomorrow.

The wishes of the world-
Are positioned on my shoulders.

Manifested as wings but-
They seem to only hold me down.

The hope of my ancestors,
Sits in my kidney
like a stone, rough, heavy-
And round.

The expectations of my mother
Clogs my arteries;
Blue blood mixed with her words,
Flows through my veins.

The values of my father-
Seem to form into existence.
And wrap around my heart.
Be all you can be!
Is what he would say to me.

The aspirations of the poor,
Sit behind my eyes,
When I'm tired, or when I blink,
I see millions of unfulfilled prayers...

Innumerable pressure's bombard me.
All I can do it stand strong.

While they bash against my body-
Yet I am above.

Rough of skin,
Born of leather
I am Atlas
Exerting against my will,
Always fighting harder.
Harder, harder, HARDER!
Until my limit breaks;
And I continue to push harder.
Until the point where-
My external form threatens to crumble.

I am Hercules, Shaka Zulu, and Samson-
Champion of struggle:
I am Warrior.
Representation of what is to come.

Elevation

© 2010

I wonder if God will ever take me higher-
Lift me up above Hellsfire,
Above my Earth and above their world,
Where I can feel color and sound swirl-

Where the stars hurl comets and black holes vomit,
And light is sustained for centuries,
And energy projects-

If God is real can he protect-
Me from the chemical evils,
Sin, emotion, and sulfide

Can I go any higher than,
A drug could take me?

In my quest for ecstasy, will the Gods decide to break me,
Will I be reborn then?
Will the world then remake me?

I don't ask anyone to pray for me,
Or any God to save me.

In my eye's that's disgraceful pity,
Cast upon me like the shame of a old virgin,
The pain I feel is so little,

To this world I am a virgin.
To philosophy I am a surgeon:
Dissecting and correcting.

Asking for blessings; despite my lack of faith.
Sometimes I lay awake,
Dreaming with wide eyes,
Dreaming of being so high, oh so high...

What is the sky?
It is not a barrier.

What is Heaven?
It is not one specific area.

To dream of a dark world,
May not be hysteria.

So I continue looking, yearning, and thirsting,
Hoping for- elevation.

Fly and Then Fall

© 2010

It's like a whirlpool,
Dragging me under,
A swirling riptide,
Booming like thunder!

A flash of bright red,
Followed by yellow,
Then a struggle- a battle,
Boom, clap, rattle!

A beast in the waters,
Lurking in shadow, holding my head above the waves I-
Punch and I straddle-

Grabbing the bull by the horns-
Man against cattle,
Fighting for survival;
Victory without a saddle!

... Then I see green; evergreen serene-
A-peaceful elongated far-fetched scene...
But the question is-
What does this mean!

My mind, MY MIND, working like a machine, inserting fear and emotion into all of my dreams!
My life, MY LIFE, what is its purpose?
They say live life to the fullest that's only the surface!
To live, TO LIVE, is so much deeper then definition I see reaction and emptiness in poetic premonitions!

Darkness then BREATH, feeling is the ignition,
Then I'm back in the ocean choking in my own submission-

Vicious cycle, perfect circle,
My instincts form a triangle of abreaction...
And my only action is to-

Fly and then fall.
Fly and then fall.
Run on the ground, fly and then fall.
Drown in my nightmares, combat my fears.

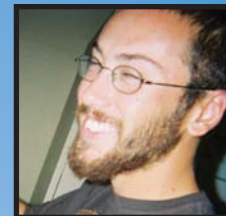
Hide from reality.
Fly and then fall...

Two Poems By Joshua Hunter Hensley

Simply From One Cat Person To Another

© 2010

I wanted to get out
of that filthy town, so I did. You know there is nothing wrong with
that.
I am only an old
man, just like any other animal, sometimes I feel the urge to flee
from filth.
That crack-ridden
and increasingly-becoming-gentrified city was far too much for me,
so polluted and
scummy. It was like living in a kitchen sink, just that no one
bothered to unclog the drain. Ever.
And the people, you
know how the people are there.
But all around, I
suppose it is a nice place to live and die, not for me, not to raise
your brainwashed kids.
Pleasant parks and
an uneven pebbly beach. Life is as bountiful as you believe it to be.
Rather, the place
had a stench, a rot and she and I both needed to clean our respective
noses.
Made a rash decision
and got on a bus for Phoenix Arizona, United States Of Amerigo
Vespucci, from Long Beach, California, birthplace of Sublime and a
rapper and me, alone.
Full of hopes and
dreams and wonderment and a bewildering lack of direction in time or
space,
I was set on a
mission to provide protective, and sometimes financial, care of three
sentient beings, only intuitively knowing it at that time. Therefore
not really knowing it.
And so I was
determined to do my best and that petered out. I gave up.
But I had to shake
my head dreaming through the desert landscape abyss, I wrote only to
stay awake. And as a prayer that SOON I would be saved and get you
there as soon as possible.



Joshua Hunter Hensley has lived in a California ghetto, aboard 2 boats, in a mobile home in the wine country, in 4 different apartments, in an 18-wheeler container in the woods of Oahu, and now in a house in the sprawl of Phoenix, Arizona. Contact him at joshuah.hensley@yahoo.com.

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Which happened on
the very day we wanted it to. Thank You God.
Cactus sprang
ridiculously viciously from the spiny ground and the pricks served
you convenience in the orange and pink sunset of the waning Arizona
evening, as I passed by all this, obsessed with my freewill, force,
and using love and you and cats for comfort.
All around me I saw
no cities, nor ocean, neither animals nor plants, but rocks and black
mountains. And lost souls, divided families houses, a photo album of
somebody's birth, all thrown into various landfill establishments.
And you and the cats and I were in love
at the time. You probably feel the same way too.
It was very
beautiful despite the state of things in me at that moment, yes? And
now.
I love you, friend,
it's not as if I was
dying.

Simply there was too
much confusion in the city and in that home that I, as a youth,
always loathed.
Here, my brother's
boss has no clue what is going on with his company, let alone (I
imagine), his soul. Still.
I want to serve and
express and create and love. I'm always figuring out how.
Though I'm not going
to get started with all that.
I am fine, I lied.
The same thing that
was killing me was making me stronger.
However tired out
that cliché may be, it holds true. Like all government, kind of, you
know that.
She and I and the
fox and the moon lived something. Can you, or should it even, be
named as a performance to judge?
All is spectacular,
old friend. Rest, most easily, assured.
She and I had a lot
of fun together.
A lot of theater. A
lot of cheap food, beer, [censored]l, and [censored].
That's why I
[censored] left the city in the first place. To create a secular body

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of it in an apartment on 16th Street and Bell. But not
knowing that and later resenting it and of course later seeing the
situation as integral in my, ours?, life path.
I saved a cat, was
weirded out by another, and she and I both pretended to be in love.
That doesn't mean we
weren't actually in it, though. We were very much. It was beautiful,
wasn't it? You and everybody who saw.
Got on the
greyhound, switched in San Bernardino, seemed like everything was
going to be okay.
Guy smoked me out
with some bizarrely named kush for a cigarette, I had plenty of
legroom, plus the upper body space that an old man like myself must
enjoy.
Frequently.
Stretched out on
that ass-smelly seat, thinking only of you.
And Phoenix,
Arizona, with its soul-beating occupations,
harder-to-find-than-it-should-be "reg" (pronounced rehj), humane
society reject, tweakers just like home yet worse and without souls,
Top Ramen with eggs, doing our own chores, washing each others
clothes, beautiful, beautiful sex, forty's, movies, computer games,
fashion, video games, cat training, family and pain, my purposeful
drunkenness, proposals of marriage followed by intoxicated, violent
once-knife-wielded fights, doing our willingly best, and angry
[censored] is another story entirely.
I love you.
Life is not as
serious as it seems on paper or in behaviour.
For your own good,
please leave that town, and everybody that witnessed it.

Brand New Cellular Phone

© 2010

War abroad, Ignorance at Home
Purchase the most expensive cellular phone

Death in Street, Lies at the school
Buy the latest style, Look real cool

A ship of fools, govt. of Thugs
Trust all your pharmaceutical drugs

A pig flew, PsychoLogical Manipulation
We the Prisoners of our nations

No Original Art, be suspicious of Foreigners
Don't trust doctor, can't trust coroner

Lack of Culture, but to Buy and Sell
Each other
Throw pennies down a well

War Everywhere, no such Thing as Home
They can track you on your brand new cellular phone

Why Dwell?

By Danny Paskas

© 2010

There they go, kicking again. Hey, at least they're still moving. At least I can still feel them. Most people in my situation can't even feel their legs, I rationalize.

Then an argument breaks out in my head. Why me? Why am I the one stuck in the wheelchair? What did I do differently than other people while growing up?

Oh, stop feeling sorry for yourself already. You're not Nancy Kerrigan. Don't start this "Why me" garbage. It happened. You lived, so make the best of it.

What happened was a drunk-driving accident when I was 18 that sent my life completely off course. I was registered to start college close to home, majoring in civil service. I'd already picked out a roommate for the dorm. I was supposed to follow in my father's footsteps and become a fireman. I was supposed to stay in New Jersey, get married and start a family before 30.

All my plans changed on that one crippling night.

That night also ended the life of my friend Kyle. He was driving that night while I was sitting in the passenger seat. He'd started drinking at his house before coming to pick me up. When he got to my house, he seemed fine to drive. He wasn't noticeably drunk, so I got in the car and we headed to Burger King before going to our normal hangout spot. A trucking outlet nicknamed Global. It was where local high school students gathered to drink, race cars and engage in other not-so-wholesome activities.

So there I was, riding shotgun, eating a double cheeseburger as we approached Global. We must have been going about 70 miles per hour when Kyle hit an oil slick and lost control. We skidded out and crashed underneath a parked tractor trailer, causing it to slam down on top of us.

Kyle was wearing his seatbelt. I wasn't. Kyle was nearly beheaded. I ducked.

The next thing I remember was yelling "Get me out!" to the rescue workers. Later on, I was told that Kyle's head blew up to twice its size. He died three days later. I supposedly saw all this and even talked to Kyle as he was unconscious. I don't remember any of it, the doctors had me on so many different

painkillers that it was as if I was having an out of body experience.

There goes that foot jumping, yet again. You know, it's just very surreal, this whole spinal cord injury. I mean, my legs jump around on their own, so they obviously can work, but when I try to move them myself ... nothing, no cooperation.

Worst of all, when I try to move them, I feel a tingling on the insides. It's as if someone gave you back your car without the keys. You can't even get in it. All you can do is look at it and think about what you used to do in it and what you'd like to do in it. Meanwhile, everybody else around you is in their car, driving, circling around you.

A few years after the accident, I started referring to my body parts in the third person. My legs, feet, fingers aren't mine anymore. They control themselves. I'm no longer in full control. Sometimes they show their strength. A hand will spasm while I'm typing, causing me to pause. Hips thrust forward if I don't carefully maneuver my wheelchair over a bump. Legs start kicking during the night, waking me or practically throwing me out of bed.

I've become the spectator in my own body of my own body.

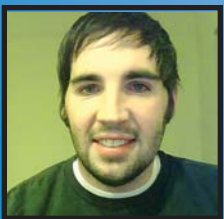
Not only did the accident take my body, but it also forced me to enroll in a different kind of college. Its name was Kessler Institute of Rehabilitation. There were no classes. Instead of partying, drinking, hooking up and Spring Break trips, I was learning how to use what was left of my body all over again.

I was also getting an education on just how cruel life could be. After meeting my "fellow students" and hearing their stories, it felt as if God were playing a cruel joke on them.

There was Dawn and Ashley, both in their 20s, both with broken necks. How did they break their necks? By diving into ocean waves. Dawn left rehab walking, while Ashley left in a chair, where she remains to this day. I still remember the spite Ashley felt toward Dawn. And who could blame her? Both had the same injury but only Dawn recovered.

Then there was Marvin, whose car crashed into a tree while

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Danny Paskas was born and raised in New Jersey. He moved to Arizona five years ago and has yet to go back. His dream is to one day make his writing profitable. To reach Danny, e-mail him at dpaskas@asu.edu.

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he was arguing with his girlfriend. As a result, Marvin couldn't move from the neck down and needed a respirator to breathe. His girlfriend, who was the passenger, walked away with no injuries. She would come to visit him almost every day until he found out she was cheating on him with our rehab's receptionist.

Finally, there was Phil, a businessman in his 40s. He was working at his desk in New York City on the 20th floor when a stray bullet pierced his neck. Not only did the bullet confine Phil to a chair, but it also caused some brain damage, forcing him to communicate through a computer. Though his eyes reminded me of those of an ape imprisoned from the wild, I could see Phil knew what was going on.

All my experiences keep bringing me back to the same question: "Why dwell?"

Sure, my legs and body can be a pain sometimes, but at least I can move somewhat. Marvin can't move at all.

My mind still works fine, and I can communicate fully, unlike Phil.

Sure, life is tough, but at least I'm living, unlike Kyle.

These are cruel rationalizations, but they are true. There is always somebody who has it worse. There is no sense in dwelling on the negative. I choose to move forward. In my mind, there is no other choice.

Living in the Gray

By Tim Guseynov

© 2010

I believe that home is not just a place with an address but rather a shelter from the outside world, a retreat where we seek tranquility and solace while surrounded by our loved ones. Over the years, my home has changed several times, from street to street, city to city and country to country. As a result, I have little attachment to locations, knowing they're bound to change in my life.

But others choose to remain in one place, regardless of how distressing things get. These people are becoming rare, as so many of us flit from one city to the next, like urban nomads. And I would have never understood the stay-at-homes if not for a short trip I took one summer to the Donbass region in easternmost Ukraine.

A series of large, fractured folds rich with coal, metal and more coal, Donbass helps power the Ukrainian economy. Although mining was once a profitable profession after the breakup of the Soviet Union, money rarely filtered down to the workers, vanishing instead into the hands of corrupt bosses.

From what I'd seen on TV, Donbass resembled Tolkien's Mordor. Black dust is inhaled with every breath, and miners in soiled clothes hack away at rocks all day.

I would have never stepped foot in those parts if not for some distant family matters. One summer, when I was visiting my grandfather in Ukraine's capital, Kiev, he asked me to visit his sister and her family. My great-aunt Lucia hadn't seen me since I was a baby.

After all my excuses to avoid the trip failed, I was on a train heading for the strange, murky place that Aunt Lucia calls home. Of course, Donbass wasn't nearly as hideous as I'd imagined. Even the overcast skies couldn't conceal some of its charm. Small, peaceful villages occasionally flashed by the window, the air smelled of freshly mown grass and the wild, windswept steppe seemed endless.

My great-uncle Constantine and his son Sergey were waiting for me at the station and, to my surprise, instantly recognized me. Constantine was an energetic man of about 70, with a firm miner's handshake and a rare hearty smile that radiated sincere

joy. During my four days in Donbass, not once did I see him angry or somber.

"How are you, kid? You're finally here," he said, patting me on the shoulder. "Trust me, your stay here won't be as miserable as you think."

"I never thought it'd be miserable," I lied.

Sergey, much quieter than his talkative father, was a successful computer programmer who was visiting with his wife and two kids. At first, we didn't say much until our mutual love of the Rolling Stones, Doors and other rock 'n' roll bands gave us plenty of topics to debate during the drive home.

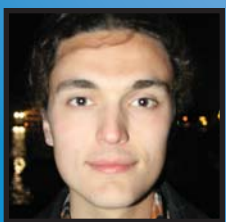
The weathered, century-old house where Uncle Constantine and Aunt Lucia lived stood on the far side of a quiet village, fairly close to the mine. It was roomy enough for seven people. The furnishings were a mixture of the very old and the recently outdated. A large, wood-paneled Toshiba TV with outstretched antennas stood near a vintage, gold-coated gramophone. A beat-up Soviet touch-tone phone shared a table with a couple of early model, brick-like Nokia mobile phones. Everything seemed worn out, in the last stages of operational life.

The quality of life in Donbass was below average for Ukraine and poor by Western standards. Men and women labored from dawn to dusk, some in rickety mines unprepared for emergencies. Pulmonary complications, ranging from coughing to black lung disease and even cancer, made life miserable for victims. The sun rarely broke through the heavy clouds, and those who had nothing to look forward to simply drank.

I couldn't understand why Uncle Constantine and Aunt Lucia wouldn't just abandon their museum of nostalgic paraphernalia and move elsewhere. Sergey was trying to convince his parents to leave Donbass, forget the mines and the metal works. Aunt Lucia seemed a lot fonder of the proposal than Constantine, who didn't even want to hear of relocating.

"Are you kidding me? I was just thinking about purchasing part of the neighbor's land to expand the backyard," he would

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Tim Guseynov is a junior at Arizona State University. He originally moved to Phoenix from Russia, learned English, and decided he likes to write. Before, he was a bit confused about the future. Now, he is pursuing a degree in print journalism. After, he hopes to write about sports, music, politics, food, more music, life and everything else that inspires us. Tim can be reached at tguseyno@asu.edu.

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jokingly respond, irritating his son.

Finally my stay ended, and once again I was at the train station, shaking great-uncle's hand, but this time to say goodbye. Curiosity overpowered my usual reticence, and I asked him a question in hopes of figuring out his stubborn attachment to this forlorn province.

"Uncle Constantine, why are you so drawn to this place?"

"Well, it's home. I can't find this peace anywhere else. My whole life was spent here. It has become part of me, whether I like it or not," he responded.

"But you'd be better off in the city with your son. It doesn't seem like there is much future here."

He placed his hands in his pockets and looked down at his rugged work boots for a brief second. Then he said, "I'm an old man. It's pointless giving the future too much thought. My future is now. There was a time when I wanted to leave, but that urge is long gone."

The train's long, loud whistle interrupted our conversation, and the conductor asked me to step inside.

"You see, it's the only place I really know," Uncle Constantine continued. "People understand me here. I can put up with the mines, the late paychecks, the bad weather and everything else."

And that was where our talk abruptly ended. The train signaled again, and I hurried inside. Looking through the stained window at Uncle Constantine waving both hands, it finally came clear why some never leave their villages, cities and neighborhoods. They simply don't possess the urge to seek home in new places. They ask little of life to stay happy.

I understand them, but take the opposing viewpoint. Sergey left home because he wanted a better life. He didn't want to be another miner. I would have done the same.

Five Poems By James Gaitis

Encountering William Blakely's Grave

© 2010

William Blakely 5-5-1885

the stone
itself
set forth the words
waylaid and murdered
thirty years
three months
two days

I can

hardly
feel the pain
he must have felt
before they lay him
coldly down
three months
two days
and thirty years
seems time enough to die

What coin held William Blakely in his vest?

What charge of fault
against him
harshly vie?

to, underneath the sycamore,
(the Gila, even then, too high)
waylay the man
beneath the sun
waylaid and murdered

1885

These things, also

I shall never come to know
except
that someone
once
cared that I would
so spare, the words
so deep and sharp
the shading canyon walls
trailing off into the mountain's lofty den

My friend,

Why ever chance the forest's time
for nothing less than this?

And now,

one hundred years full on
the cities' sounds
come to me
(over tired plains and ridges treed and high)
remind us all
of man's swift grace
waylay the land
black murder to the very sky

William Blakely,

you and I
cried loudly through the restless pine
the cutting edge
of then
and now
you for yours
and I for mine
eighteen, nineteen, eighty-five

James Gaitis – 1985



James Gaitis has a BA (cum laude) in English Lit from the University of Notre Dame and a JD from the University of Iowa College of Law. He is the author of two novels – “A Stout Cord and a Good Drop,” which is a novel of the founding of Montana (Globe Pequot 2006), and “The Nation’s Highest Honor” (“an Arizona novelist’s environmental satire”) (Kunati 2009). He is a Tucson resident and may be contacted at gaitis1@aol.com.

Turkey Vultures

© 2010

It delights us so

to see the turkey

vultures play

wind to one

on top of the other

over heated

lava flows

On thermal

carpets

of billowing air

their silent dirge

goes

unnoticed

by the succulent life

dying below

And when the blackened surface

draws

more reflective beams

they leave us

sadly waiting

for winter

to leave the desert

Requiem to a Malamute Puppy

© 2010

Beneath the scaling cottonwood

in failing southwest summer leaf

(in sands that wash an unnamed creek)

the stars

ascending into dark

do break your deep

and timeless dream

For this

and all that was allowed

(so brief)

to scent the trees and air

you passed before us

(as on a breeze)

to sleep

my little malamute

in sands that wash this blissful creek

through night's eternity

And, still

they do remain for you

the icy winter snows

that we shall never share

the mountain winds

the deer's faint path

time, and all there is

of circumstance

(the stars are casting overhead)

so dream of these

and nothing else

my little malamute

And yet, I think

with tears of soft and glad remorse

at least that this of sadness

you will never feel

that all the innocence of life

was yours to take into the night

so sleep

my little malamute

through all eternity

Mesa Redonda Spring

© 2010

Early dawn gleams light

and warm

the dewpoint low

the fence rails long

and you and I

slowly awake

on mesa

redonda spring

To morning

light and low and long

I am of you

an essence

only we can share

you of me

light and low

warm and long awake

Dusk falls slow

and shadowed cool

the stars aloft

the breeze so smooth

and you and I

together sleep

to evening

and mesa

redonda spring

To evening

slow and cool and smooth

I am of you

a dream

for each to hold

you of me

aloft and slow

cool and smooth asleep

Intruder That I Am

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It was in the early spring

with the pond alive

and greening to the southwest sun

the warming breeze

and I bent (innocent enough, I thought)

to rinse my hand

of the morning's toil of work

And the tadpoles

(pollywogs, she called them, in her way)

flushed and fled

from underneath the sprouting waterweeds

in waves

and waves

of fearing flight

And the fish began to gather

even then

and align themselves to me

waiting, motionless and patient

at my feet

hundreds, perhaps a thousand

(bluegills, all, I do believe)

supplicating me, their god

for the crumbs

of bread and crackers

of stale yesterdays

And as I watched

they waited, ever more

(far too many for me to count, they were)

motionless, and the pond turned static by their inhibition

and I thought

by the measure of a prior loaf of bread

how insignificant my effect upon the pond had been

and how adverse

and so profound

it was by any other scale

And so I sat

(as I sit here still, arranging words)

and the fish . . . mostly they drift away

lending motion to the pond

and the pollywogs return

to ply and wriggle underneath

as, motionless, I sit

with empty hand

giving and taking nothing more

intruder that I am

Eluvio

By Jenny Wales Steele

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July's storms flood the Sloan River. Tibias, fibulas, skulls, and ribs float into this Colorado mountain town of Sloan and lie white and obvious on the muddy red banks. The water recedes and as those with riverfront homes scrape their decks, rake their terraces, shovel out private debris, they find these bones and bring them into the sheriff's office. How they treat the bones, reverently or as if eerie or gross things, how they tell of their discoveries, shyly or slyly or boldly: Sheriff Harris observes and listens.

"I was walking along the river." This is Sid, a prissy man who escaped L.A. and settled here. A newcomer. "Something white caught my eye. It was tangled in a clump of weeds." He has a shoebox, a small jaw in it. "Notice the tiny teeth. Baby teeth."

"Thanks for troubling yourself." The sheriff ushers Sid out the door, then seals the jaw in a thick plastic sleeve, labels and lists it, locks it in a steel evidence cabinet with the other bones. The obvious questions about these bones: whose?, why? The wild guesses too: a massacre of Indians or pioneers?, a cult sacrifice? But the sheriff resists the guesses; there are methods and science to pursue, facts to verify, the narrowing down.

He sits at his tidy desk in the corner, taps a pencil on a stack of papers, tips his chair back, balances. He looks across the room at the framed photo of his father, the original Sheriff Harris. This has become a habit recently, as if his father's flat stare and fixed mouth will tell him about these terrible bones coming into town. He needs wise words, coolly considered advice, though he cannot remember his father's voice, its timbre, its rhythms. He was only eight when Curtis Harris Sr. died of pancreatic cancer; in this photo, he hadn't yet been diagnosed and wasn't yet aware of what would kill him, was only aware of a cramp in his gut. He posed with shoulders squared, with his chapped and reddish hands resting loosely on his holstered pistols; he was hatless, his thin hair neatly combed, the strawberry blond hair his son inherited. The uniform of the era was a dark, authoritative blue, not the warm beige uniform of today; and below his polished brass badge, out of the lip of the breast pocket, spilled a vivid yellow handkerchief.

"Sheriff?" Deputy Fisk out in the lobby. "Mrs. Carter called. She found a bone."

"Yes. Okay." Curtis leans forward and looks again at his father. This man never flinching, not while on duty, not at home, not when the child Curtis sneaked around to the flagged patio and shot him with cap guns on a Sunday afternoon. Never flinching, this fine man, and Curtis thinks, *was this a trick of the muscles, a forbidding of the muscles?* How not to betray oneself, that terrific skill.

"Sheriff?" Deputy Fisk is boyish and eager, the gloss of academy yet on him; he has rookie reactions (shock, vomit) and he has to turn away. But Curtis has faith in him, faith that the job will round and temper him. In the midst of people, the unpredictable goodness or badness of ordinary people.

"Yes," Curtis says again. In a bowl on his desk are the keys to the 4x4. The bowl is a turtle's shell, what remains of that sick turtle Helen brought with her. He plucks the keys out of the turtle bowl and rises towards the deputy. "Are you chewing that damned bubble gum? Spit it out, please."

The Dodge 4x4 is the same amiable beige as their uniforms, with decals promising courtesy and vigilance, with a rack of blue and red pulses on the roof. Sheriff Harris and Deputy Fisk drive north on the road parallel to the Sloan River. There isn't a lot of traffic; the floods have damaged summer tourism: motels are vacant, kayak and rubber-rafting businesses are idle, cafés and shops have cut hours.

Fisk says, "What about these bones, sir?"

Sir. Curtis is only thirty-seven; he can't get used to *sir*. "We'll solve this. There's an answer, of course."

"The size of the bones. Awfully little."

"Yes." But Curtis won't discuss this yet, won't yet acknowledge that the bones don't seem adult bones, but children's. "You have to stop chewing bubble gum. It's juvenile. Chew tobacco."

"Tobacco causes cancer."

"Not always." Cancer, how it had thrashed Curtis's father.

Continued on page 48



Jenny Wales Steele's fiction has appeared in Pebble Lake Review, Salt Hill, Harpur Palate, The First Line, The Bullfight Review, Quay Journal, juked.com, darkskymagazine.com, applevalleyreview.com, jerseyworks.com, verdadmagazine.org, and will be in a future issue of The Ampersand Review. She's been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. A graduate of the College of Santa Fe, she has since lived in her native Arizona. Contact her at hibou@earthlink.net.

Curtis sneaking around to the patio on a Sunday afternoon, *bang!, bang!* with his cap guns, his father folding his hands across his heart, *you got me, Sheriff.*

North of Sloan, a valley, lushly wooded and wet, with traces of iron-red cliffs. And here, a simple house, white with emerald-green trim. This is The Tackle Box, Pauline Carter's; she sells bait, lures, nets, rods, reels. Fisherman convinced their luck is jinxed seek her out; her words *good fish* are magic words, curse-erasing.

Curtis and his deputy park in the gravel lot and Pauline comes out to greet them. She is a handsome woman, in jeans and a plaid shirt, her gray hair pinned into a bun, with keen, sky-blue eyes, with the athletic reflexes of a true sportswoman. A wicker basket is hooked on her wrist, the same basket in which she had delivered a pair of orphaned kittens to the sheriff's office. Curtis adopted the charcoal gray kittens himself; these cats have become sullen judges, meowing verdicts as Curtis shaves, cooks, builds a fire, seduces Helen. Used to seduce Helen. In the basket now is the bone Pauline has found, a dainty pelvis. "Wedged under my footbridge," she explains. "In a cove of lilies."

Curtis observes, listens, but Pauline is never rattled. There is red mud in the curves of the pelvis and this makes it seem obscene, lewd. His deputy lifts the bone out of the basket and deposits it in a latched box in the 4x4.

"I've got freshly brewed coffee," Pauline says.

"Maybe half a cup," says Curtis.

"Unless you're too busy fighting crime, Sheriff Harris." She is teasing him, but merely softly, and it is oddly soothing to Curtis.

"Crime? Yes. The McNulty boys shoplifting. They got my harshest lecture."

"And the town of Sloan is safe again. Our hero."

Curtis smiles, then gestures *come on* to his deputy and they follow Pauline inside. Pauline goes into a back room and Curtis and Fisk sit on a split-log bench. There are no customers in The Tackle Box; yellow and red sales tags flutter through shelves, racks, and bins. Pauline has mentioned the idea of liquidating the business and retiring to a beachy village in Mexico. Curtis prays she isn't serious about this; her absence would equal the loss of a limb.

Deputy Fisk is restless; his legs bounce, he drums his fingertips on his thighs, and as if quoting a manual, he suddenly announces, "Establishing connections with the community is vital to effective policing."

"Be quiet." Fisk is raw, Fisk is forgiven. Curtis was a deputy once; he had quit the Vo-Tech after two semesters, enrolled in the academy in Grand Junction, then worked under the previous sheriff, the heart-attacked Jack Coy. Coy had forgiven him too (rookie flubs and indecision). Curtis glances at his deputy, at his

sharp profile, and he remembers the skinny kid, Robbie Fisk, track champion of the Sloan Sabercats, how he lifted the trophy above his happy body; *Fleet-Of-Foot-Fisk*, the caption in the *Gazette*.

Pauline comes out with a tray of hot coffee in enameled tin cups, sets the tray on a squat, tree-trunk table. Fisk flaps packets of sugar, tears them into his coffee, slurps, scalds his pink mouth, says, "Mrs. Carter, have you witnessed any suspicious activity in this area?"

Curtis grins behind his cup's rim; Pauline sits opposite them and frowns at the deputy (how familiar Curtis is with this amused sincerity of hers). "Suspicious activity?" Pauline says slowly. "No."

"Anything unusual?"

"No, Deputy Fisk."

"Any unknown persons loitering?"

Deputy Fisk's questions fade and Curtis concentrates on the geometry of the Navajo rug on the floor, on Pauline's bare feet on the rug. Pauline Carter is a piece of Curtis. After his father's death, his mother was mad, grossly mad. Alcohol and church, *miserere mei*, this woman not herself, wild and unwashed, Curtis in her ragged shadow until she killed herself (gin, valium, the attic). Pauline Carter took Curtis's hand at the funeral and she took him in, steadied him, taught him how to function. She packed sack lunches of ham or chicken sandwiches, an orange or an apple, a toss of unshelled peanuts or pistachios; she took him to school, helped him with math, cheered his minor successes on the Sabercat baseball team. And she had no qualms interpreting his boy body without prudish euphemisms. Why had she bothered with him?

"You would have fallen apart," she said. "Flown apart. And your father was a cousin. It was only right."

Curtis slept upstairs in The Tackle Box; he remembers those nights now, how he listened to Pauline's nocturnal pacing, how he denied his adolescent crush on her, how he dreamed of her taste, maybe jalapeño Velveeta, creamy and hot.

He stayed until he was eighteen; he rented a room above Dutton's Hardware where he jobbed sorting nails and bolts and hinges. He tried the Vo-Tech, thought about applying to Colorado State, but talked himself out of it. Pauline said to him, "Listen to your heart." His heart told him that he belonged here, that this was where he fit in the world. He spent holidays with Pauline; in the summers, he fished with her (the joy of a tug on a line, the lovely flash of a fish reeled out of the water).

"We appreciate any information, Mrs. Carter," says Fisk.

"Sure." Pauline smiles at Curtis and it is a smile he loves, how it both warms and warns. She smiles this same smile at his deputy. "And what is your opinion, Deputy Fisk?"

"We'll solve this. There's an answer, of course." Fisk nods a brisk *yes, yes, yes* at Curtis and it takes all of Curtis's patience not to punch his deputy in the mouth.

Pauline leans towards Fisk. "Got a girlfriend, Deputy?"

A blush brands Fisk's face. "Yes, ma'am. Her name's Krista." Curtis wasn't aware of this, but Sloan is a discreet, rumor-less town, and nobody pries into the lives of others, nor is there malicious invention.

Pauline touches the nape of her neck, tilts at Curtis, and her voice seems flirty. "And Curtis? How's Helen?" Gently wily, that sky-blue stare.

Curtis blinks rapidly at her, then shifts his eyes to the varnished rainbow trout mounted on a plaque above the register. "She's fine." How not to betray oneself, that terrific skill: he has failed in this, in this moment, and too easily.

"You send her to me," Pauline adds. "I'll chat with her. Let her know what a catch you are."

But Helen isn't home, she's in Denver again, and Curtis won't share this. He stands abruptly, yanks at Fisk's sleeve. "We have work. Thanks for the coffee, Mrs. Carter." Pauline squints hard at Curtis; his formal *Mrs.* is a knife and it hurts her. Curtis is glad about this, glad to have caused a little pain. And now in the 4x4, he revs the motor and the wheels spin, spit gravel.

* * * * *

"We've sent bones to a forensics lab in Denver," Curtis says to Helen. "They'll figure out if the bones were adult or not, male, female. How long they've been buried." Curtis pauses there. The gray cats enter and rub against Helen's calves.

"It's terrible, isn't it?"

"Yes. Terrible." He describes to her what happened yesterday: a cyclist on the road along the Sloan River had stopped to snack when he noticed a scatter of bones below. Curtis and his deputy rushed there and descended the red bank. The river bends deeply here and creates a peninsula; the flood had ripped into this peninsula and exposed the bones buried in it. Fisk knelt in the red mud, clapped one hand across his mouth. Curtis said, "Jesus." It seemed a grave of several skeletons. Mud in eye sockets, muddied vertebrae. Curtis fetched a skein of nylon rope and using broken boughs as stakes they cordoned the area.

Helen flips the chrome clasps of her suitcase. She has driven back to Sloan through the night. Curtis has again failed to convince her not to travel this distance at night; inebriates and sleepy truckers and wild animals make the highways hazardous. Hadn't he scooped mangled crash victims into ambulances, touched final pulses under his fingertips, vacuumed blood and glass out of the asphalt? But Helen rejects his advice: he's of less and less use to her. "Speaking of Denver," she says. "I had fun in Denver." Out of the pouch in her suitcase's lid, Helen draws a pink camisole and pink panties, and she tosses these

into the plastic hamper. Curtis is sitting in an antique chair in the bedroom and he observes Helen. "The fair was great. Carolyn took in eight hundred dollars. There were lots of people. She appreciates my help." Helen's younger sister Carolyn is a photographer; in stark light, at skewed angles, she snaps urban architecture (columns, gates, arches, ramps) and then frames the pictures in thin metal and sells them out of a booth at street fairs. Curtis admires her art: he has no reason not to. "And amazing food too," Helen adds. "Lamb shish kebabs, dim sum with ginger sauce."

"And you're home now?"

"With a gift." Under a blouse in the suitcase is a bird carved out of ironwood; she lays the bird into Curtis's slack palm. "The booth next to us." She shrugs. "This cool couple. Ex-hippies."

Curtis rubs his thumbs along the bird's wings. This is a beautiful thing, but he says nothing about it; he sets it on the window sill. He asks again, "You're home now?"

"I'm here today, Curtis." Helen scowls at the gray cats; both submit chiding meows and then bounce into the hallway. Curtis rises out of his chair and steps to Helen. She smells of mulled spices: cinnamon, orange zest. This is not her normal scent, that leafy and lavender mist she uses. Curtis takes Helen's wrists, holds them loosely, and he feels the bones in them: ulna, radius. He has borrowed an anatomy text, has learned these Latin words (what flashes through his mind: his mother caressing beads, *mea culpa*, and his boyhood self galloping toy horses of a toy ark across the back of the pew, the feeble priest sermonizing in Latin). Helen twists her wrists within his grip, but he does not let loose of her. Neither moves now; they are in pain, this is painful.

Curtis met Helen clerking at Kline's Market; she price-scanned a loaf of bread, a package of meat, a carton of milk, and he collected pieces of her (knuckles, elbow, throat, mouth). She was with somebody else then, a real estate agent named Gary. Curtis often sat alongside Gary at the Swiss Kitchen: cheap pancakes, bacon, bitter coffee, and sports and weather chat, that meaningless chat between men who didn't want to seem unfriendly. Gary was a jovial but clumsy man; one thumbnail was always purplish-black (he blackened it with a hammer as he pounded signs into front lawns).

"For those open houses," Helen said. "Saturdays usually." She scanned a jar of mustard, a cylinder of oatmeal. "This Saturday too. And I'll be alone." This was subtle, seductive because of its subtlety.

Helen and Gary shared a modest clapboard house on the outskirts of town; the house had a tiny porch with redwood troughs of geraniums and a blue windsock. Curtis coasted his motorcycle into their driveway, leaned it against a sycamore. He went around to the backyard, a square of uncut grass edged

with hedges, and he found Helen there. Her hair was not in its ponytail, it was a flow of honey; she wore a kimono of aquamarine silk, its hems embroidered with silvery floss. She slipped out of the kimono and Curtis walked to her. They made love on the thick lawn; their sex was as silent as their shadows.

A little turtle trundled out, nosed into the lawn. Helen said, "It's always been here. I feed it lettuce and carrot sticks. But it's sick. It's got scabs underneath. Mildewed scabs."

"Sad."

Helen traced Curtis's eyelids, eyebrows, the rims of his ears, and she kissed him, and her tongue was wonderful in his mouth. He sped home on his motorcycle and he passed Gary's open house. He glimpsed the man perched on an aluminum folding chair in a barren room, waiting, hoping. Gary had nothing in Sloan but Helen; he fled town the following week when Helen claimed Curtis. She lugged all of her possessions and the scabby turtle to Curtis's. He cleared shelves and an entire bureau; he adjusted easily to her, to this. Now their eleven months are uncoupling. Helen vanishes suddenly, maybe puts a note on his pillow (*Denver, visiting Carolyn*) or maybe there's no note at all, no clue, only absence. Curtis once noticed beach sand in the treads of her sandals: California? But Helen calls him controlling if he quizzes her. How good it had been between them, simple and without sorrow.

Curtis inhales. This spicy, citrus smell of her is wrong. He tips his face into her, inhales again. Dirty oranges. Helen turns her head abruptly and says, "Don't."

"Are you home now, Helen, or not?"

"Damn it, Curtis."

"I'm not allowed to ask anything?"

"Can't you just let me get to it?"

"Get to it."

"At the street fair, this guy came along. He browsed through Carolyn's booth and I talked him into buying a smallish photo. It was of an indigo blue door in an adobe alcove. I wrapped it in butcher paper. His name's Seth."

This bit of data knocks Curtis, but he bites any reaction, only says, "What?" His hold of her wrists now seems as tethers; he imagines that Helen is fastened to him, a helium balloon or a fugitive.

"His name is Seth. He invited me to a club where he plays."

"He's a musician?"

"Jazz saxophone. Real jazz. Pure, free. Euphoric. Not this junk on the radio, all watery."

"And who exactly is this Seth person?"

"You want a witness description, Sheriff Harris?"

"Sure. Height, eyes, hair. Any distinguishing marks, scars, tattoos."

"He's lanky. His skin's dark, island dark, tropical. And his

eyes? Sparkling hazel. A scar too, an appendix scar, a crescent moon." Curtis lets loose of Helen's wrists and she slaps him hard. She raises her hand to hit him again, but her hand only falls, a blunt blade, against Curtis's collarbone.

"Clavicle," he says. "Linking the scapula with the sternum."

"I'm here today, Curtis. Kline's Market owes me a paycheck. I need to empty my checking account at the bank. I have a load of laundry too."

Curtis's cheekbone is stinging; the sting hardens under his skin: *forbid the muscles, learn the trick of forbidding the muscles*. The cats dash through the room, a sooty blur. The newspaper boy flings the *Gazette* onto the front walk and it skitters on the cement. These things are Curtis's focus as he absorbs the coming loss of Helen.

"Seth's performing this weekend with his quartet. Why don't you come with me?"

"I should refuse, Helen. I should yell at you."

"No. You can't."

"I could arrest you. Put you in jail."

"How romantic. The threat of lock and key."

"To keep you."

"You won't and you can't. You're reasonable."

"It's the job."

"It wasn't a criticism, Curtis."

"I have to go to Denver anyway. To get the analysis of those bone samples."

"Fine."

"We should sever this cleanly."

"No. Jagged is better. Thank you." Helen walks out of the room. Curtis listens to the clatter of the kettle and utensils in the kitchen, listens to the lovely clang of metal cat bowls set on the tile floor. The sun lifts into the sky; a bar of sunshine sweeps Curtis hip to foot.

* * * * *

He orders another amber beer; this beer is brewed locally in copper vats and it layers the tongue with a wheaty film. Other people enter the club and cluster around the little tables; they greet and kiss and fit their coats across the backs of their chairs. Curtis hears his heart pumping, that mad and bloody muscle; he glances at Helen, takes in the details of her, knuckles, elbow, throat, mouth, and he figures them strange now. Helen adjusts her borrowed silk shawl and smiles at Curtis: that mouth, yes, newly strange.

Through bat-wing saloon doors a guy emerges hugging a double bass; he steps onto a low platform and he sets his bass on its support pin, plucks a series of scales. Another guy follows (red goatee, green fedora); he slides in behind a drum kit, inspects the cymbals, the screws on the rim of the snare. Curtis thinks, *Hell, forgot aspirin*.

"All packed, sir?" Deputy Fisk, this morning.

"It's only one night." Curtis squared the paperwork on his desk, folded it, tucked it into his jacket pocket.

"Hard to believe the test results are already in."

"Priority." After the first bones were found, Curtis wrapped them in bubble wrap to send them to a crime lab in Denver. At the post office, he took a number and joined Mrs. Thompson on a bench. She tapped the box on her lap and said, "I knit mittens for our soldiers in Iraq." How indecent the contents of Curtis's box seemed. He mailed the bones first class; he imagined the bones traveling along with those innocent mittens.

"And then we'll know," said Fisk.

"At least something." Curtis stood, gestured at his desk.

"You're in charge, okay?"

"Yes, sir." With a pink fingertip, Fisk traced the lip of the turtleshell bowl, then picked the 4x4's keys out of it; his nostrils flared rouge, greedily.

"Don't get ideas," Curtis warned. "Nobody's going to confess to you."

"No, sir."

"And don't take your girl out riding in our vehicle."

"I won't."

Why not? Curtis remembered a girl named Julie, how he had tried to impress her with lights and sirens, how he then got Sheriff Coy's frown and chide. "I trust you, Fisk. You're becoming a fine deputy." Fisk glowed under this uncommon praise.

Helen loaded her things into her Civic and Curtis followed her on his motorcycle; they cruised across the bottom of Colorado, then turned north. Scenic miles: forests and mountain peaks, immense pastures with herds of antelope. Cool pine air sucked into the lungs and the mind unfastened of grim images. They stopped in Pueblo and had a quick lunch at Sonic, grilled cheese and cherry limeade. Curtis aired out his sweaty helmet, rinsed the grime under his goggles, shook the buzzing numbness out of his limbs. They continued into Denver, to Carolyn's duplex; tacked to its door was a note: *sofa bed ready, help yourself to anything, sorry to miss you, at the darkroom until late*. Helen curled into a nap and Curtis went on to the crime lab.

The waitress delivers fresh pints of amber to Curtis and Helen. On the low platform now, a pianist slouches at a bruised upright and a tall, slim guy stands in the center, a saxophone leashed to his neck. "There he is," says Helen. "That's Seth."

Seth bobs his chin, one, two, snaps three, four, and the music starts, a tantrum of notes. Curtis allows it to pummel him, this tricky music, sarcastic then tender. Thirty minutes of this and it makes no sense to Curtis. Nothing makes sense to him anymore and it puts him out of place in this sure crowd. This crowd hoots and claps now; the musicians take a break and vanish behind the

bat-wings.

"This isn't your fault at all," Helen says suddenly. "This isn't because of anything about you. You're terrific, Curtis. But for somebody else."

"You could marry me."

"Don't ruin it totally now."

"You don't have a clue what you're doing, Helen."

"That's hateful. Vicious."

"It's the truth."

"Can't you suffer, Curtis? Be a little bit devastated."

"I am. I'm trying."

"Bleed, Curtis. But no, this is nothing. This isn't the tiniest cut."

"Eleven months, Helen. I was planning an anniversary. A weekend in Santa Fe. Now I'm another Gary."

"Stop talking. It's too late." And there is pity in her voice. She claws into a dish of pretzels, munches, sips her beer, and it is too calmly awful. The musicians come out again and Seth gestures at Helen; Helen smiles back, constructs a smile Curtis cannot enter. The music starts again and now it seems both furtive and rowdy; the pianist cunningly inserts a nursery rhyme into it, the drums sound like a car wreck. Seth's flat fingertips flash on the nacre keys of his horn; the horn veers and thrusts. Curtis studies Seth; he's exactly as Helen described him: lithe, brown, bright. And how cool and serene he is in the midst of this chaos; he's unburdened too and maybe this is what appeals to Helen.

* * * * *

"What about it?" Helen was in the bathtub; she would dress soon and then she and Curtis would head out to the jazz club. "What's in it?"

"What I feared. Confirms it." Curtis had been reading the forensics analysis, thin and succinct, sealed in a blue envelope. What he had suspected: the bones borne into Sloan with the summer floods are children's bones, a boy's skull, a girl's shin. The bones had been embedded in the area's red clay thirty-five to forty years. There are no indications of malnutrition, but the bones have fractures, hairline or severe and not rightly healed. Fractures: this meant hurt, this meant a child cowering, terrified. A swift and hard adult fist, a child's body thrown against a wall. All the worst of adult evil and the deficit of kindness in the world. Abuse, punishment, maybe calculated torture. What could merit hurting a child? Or children. A lot of children, maybe a dozen, and not only hurt, but killed or allowed to die and buried at the river. Silent under the red earth, unknown until the floods released their bones. Curtis thought of the grave site that he and Fisk had secured with rope. He had fished and picnicked there with Pauline; happy memories now tainted. "We've already contacted the FBI," the forensics expert said. "They'll arrive in Sloan on Monday."

A baby, a toddler: what Curtis was when these children were buried. Curtis Harris Sr. was the sheriff then, a man serious about right and wrong. How often Curtis had been told of his father's benevolence, though it was wary benevolence, and his wits, and his observant nature. But what had he missed? What clues, what aberrant behavior in such a small town? How could a slaughter of children simply happen?

Curtis would need to interview Pauline Carter. He would visit The Tackle Box without Fisk; he would not let Pauline tease him, not let her undermine him. He had to embody authority; better to call her into the sheriff's office, into the space he could control. Pauline was savvy, smart: would she know anything about this nightmare? *Hopefully not, please not.*

"Curtis?" In a towel turban and a terrycloth robe, Helen came into Carolyn's front room; steam was hooked around her neck and ankles. "Didn't you hear me?"

"What?"

"Who were they? Were they kids?"

"Yes. It's a damned mess." He looked at Helen, this beauty, this joy. How she had cooed naughtily to him, urgently, and they had tumbled into sex without an agenda; in the winter, he shoveled snow and she pelted him with snowballs and how pleasing was the sound of snowballs shattering against his coat; in April, he showed her old silver mines in the mountains, their rusted tracks and cables, and she said that was fun. But now they were finished.

The evening glides along and Curtis ignores his two beer limit, has a third, a fourth. The music, relentless, now yields, now pools; notes plop out of the bell of Seth's horn. The musicians bow casually and collect the crowd's sloppy applause; Seth winks at Helen and she touches her throat as if the wink has alighted there.

"I want you to meet Seth," she says. "It's important to me." She guides Curtis through the bat-wings and into a dim hallway. The musicians are here, drinking herbal tea and smoking Marlboros. Seth is kneeling at his instrument's battered case. The case is lined with crushed fake fur, dark red, and it is out of this, oddly, that wafts the smell of mulled spices, that cinnamon and citrus zest Curtis identified on Helen's skin.

Seth reaches out and takes Curtis's hand in his moist hands. Curtis's brain isn't beer-dulled, but ultra-aware; he evaluates Seth's body, its facility, its contrast to his own, but he cannot come to any conclusion about it. He says, idiotically, "I enjoyed your music."

"Thanks." Seth twists the mouthpiece of his saxophone, loosens the glistening reed, unhooks the gooseneck, greases its cork, stows these pieces in his case.

"Go back to Carolyn's now," Helen says.

"I have to get home."

"Crime wave, Sheriff?" *Smug bastard*, Curtis thinks. *Turn, go, turn a cold back to them.* But he doesn't move, he only watches Seth. Seth takes out a long string with a lead weight at one end of it; he feeds the weighted end into the neck of the saxophone, then tips the saxophone so the weight falls through its bell. Tied to the other end of the string is a square of soft yellow cloth; Seth pulls this cloth through the body of his instrument, soaking the residue spittle into it. As this damp cloth emerges, Curtis thinks of his father's photo hanging in his office, of the yellow handkerchief tucked into his father's breast pocket. He imagines that handkerchief as a giant cloth; he imagines pulling it through the Sloan River and the cloth absorbing all of the children's bones and the dread meaning of the bones.

Seth locks his saxophone into its case and he stands and puts his arm around Helen's waist. Helen says, "It's time, Curtis," and her eyes are sad and victorious.

"Don't regret this, Helen. Don't reconsider me."

"Good luck, pal," says Seth as he spins Helen away. Curtis gets out of the smoky hallway, this dank club, and returns to Carolyn's duplex; he gets his things and the bone analysis and buckles them into a saddlebag on his motorcycle. He speeds out of Denver and into the night. He doesn't heed his own warning about not driving any distance at night. He swerves to miss a dead deer, a dead skunk; he stops at a convenience store, buys fuel and a microwave burrito and a soda. He motors on, crazed, his mind clamped, not breezy-purified. Fifty miles out of Sloan he hits rain and is soon drenched, but he doesn't seek shelter. His heart empties, is entirely emptied when he comes to the town limits, and inside his chest now is a hollow the exact volume of his heart.

* * * * *

The lunch hour and he instructs Fisk not to disturb him. He puts a legal pad and a ballpoint pen on his desk. Out of a tin he takes a menthol lozenge; he has a sore throat from the trip home in the cold rain, though he slept deeply under the guardianship of the gray cats.

Pauline enters; her hair has been cut short, masculine, and she wears a multi-pocket fishing vest. Curtis does not rise to greet her and this is deliberate. Out of a plastic sack, she takes out chef salads, puts one on Curtis's legal pad with a plastic fork and a pouch of ranch, then she sits. "Why am I here, Curtis?"

"The FBI is getting involved. They're going to interview everyone who's lived here a long time."

"And you want to interview me now."

Curtis explains about the bones: fractured and children's and that they've been buried thirty-five to forty years. "What was happening then, Pauline?"

"There was a summer camp north of town, north of The Tackle Box about ten miles. Nobody paid any attention to it."

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Spring 2010

"You noticed nothing peculiar about it?"

"All I noticed was a small blue bus, kids in it, at the wheel a man with a beard, a woman with him. Nothing suspicious about it. They would arrive in June, stay through July. Self-sufficient. They never came into town to buy supplies, groceries."

"Summer camp." Curtis scoots the salad aside and jots a note.

"Normal. Normality. On public land, national forest property." Pauline squirts ranch across her salad. "You remember that forest fire about twenty years ago? It burned that entire area and what remained of that camp. Buildings, sheds. No loss there, of course, nobody there. It didn't matter to anybody."

"That fire. I was sixteen," says Curtis. "I was with you then. We had to evacuate."

"Yes."

Curtis jots. "Why didn't you mention this after you found that pelvis?"

"I didn't make the connection, Curtis." Pauline bites into a fold of ham, forks a wedge of tomato.

"Help me, Pauline. Those kids at that summer camp. Are those bones their bones?"

"We let them alone. We're private people here. They weren't bothering anybody. We forgot all about it. Thirty-five years ago? Forty? You would have been in diapers. Or maybe not yet born. How happy your parents were. Your mother giddy. Your father strutting, how proud he was, a son, a son, he could hardly contain himself, and there was that banner, *It's A Boy*. You were always loved. And I tried hard to be what I could for you."

Pauline pacing nights, insomnia or worry. This beautiful woman who had rescued him, this woman of mettle who became his brace and essence.

"Sloan is blameless." Pauline puts her cool blue eyes into his. "Eat your salad."

Pauline's nocturnal pacing; how he would come back to The Tackle Box after a date with a girl, after the boyish dilemma of what, where, when, and Pauline would cajole and lull him. He says, "Helen's moved on."

"I'm sorry, Curtis. It's her misfortune. She always seemed a fool."

Curtis nods once, breaks Pauline's eye-lock. He thanks her and she leaves. He wolfs the salad, sets Fisk the task of finding any files about the summer camp, then spends the afternoon at the *Gazette* reading articles about the forest fire. The fire burned seventy-five acres and several structures, pioneer cabins and root cellars, and the abandoned summer camp, its cabins with bunk beds, its main hall, its chicken coop. The fire is vague in Curtis's memory; he was all crude hormones then. He asks the editor, Charlie Wells, if he remembers the summer camp. "Yes. Never met them though. And no trouble, nothing newsworthy. Is this about the bones?"

"Yes."

"The whole town coming in here now," says Charlie. "They want their stories in print. How they found a bone. Instant celebrities."

"Okay." He returns to the office and Fisk gives him a sheet of paper, foxed and brittle; he takes this home and studies it at the kitchen table while a thin steak sizzles in a skillet and canned beans heat in a pan. His father's penmanship is predictably neat but oddly delicate; there is a brief summary of an incident in June 1969 while he was on routine patrol. *Two miles south of the camp. Found a boy wandering. Lost, but not scared. Too shy to speak. I took him back. The woman met me at the gate. She invited me to supper. Children already at the table, the man putting pork chops on plates. Children behaved and quiet. One boy had an arm in a sling. Clean and ample conditions. Joanna and Walter Carruthers.* Only this sparse information. Had his father accepted supper, chatted with them? No answer to this, but at least now Curtis has names.

* * * * *

Two FBI agents check into Thompson's Lodge. Fisk says, "Can I come with you?"

"Notice my mood? You stay put." Curtis finds a plain black van parked at the lodge. A man in khaki pants and a black t-shirt introduces himself. "I'm Dave. This is Tom." Tom is sitting on one of the beds and is tapping at a laptop.

"I have names," Curtis says. "Joanna and Walter Carruthers."

"Search the database, Tom."

"They ran a summer camp," Curtis adds. "A kids' camp. I'll show you."

"And the grave site."

In the van, Curtis directs Dave north. They find what was the road into the camp, now only ruts. Dave parks at a barbed wire gate and they walk the ruts, the ascent and slope. Pines, shrubs, a bluejay squawking. The earth is wet, muddy; the suck of the soles of their boots in the mud. There are flat areas where structures would have been; in among weeds and columbines are scorched chimney bricks, bits of charred wood, mattress coils. This sinless view, no lurking evil, no ghosts. "Five or six summers in the late sixties. They kept to themselves. My father was sheriff. He witnessed a boy with an arm in a sling. That's all."

"Not local kids."

"No."

"We need all the bones."

They drive to the grave site and Dave gives Curtis a pair of latex gloves. The peninsula is yet cordoned with rope though the bough-stakes are leaning. They lift bones out of the mud and lay them in plastic boxes with snap-on lids. Rubbermaid ossuaries. They return to the lodge and Tom tells them, "The Carruthers."

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They're wanted on charges of fraud. Fugitives all this time."

"Fraud?" says Curtis.

"Maybe murder now too. Or criminal negligence." He gets bottles of beer out of an ice chest, uncaps them, thrusts one at Curtis, then continues, "The Carruthers had custody of a bunch of kids. Underprivileged kids, orphaned. They got government money. That's what the fraud is about, false claims, misappropriation. They established a summer camp, hauled these kids out of the city. Introduced them to the outdoors. Archery, lanyards. But maybe these kids were already damaged, too fragile. Couldn't survive a game of tag or a nature hike. This is only a preliminary theory, Sheriff. You understand that."

"Speculation?" This, a knife blade drawn across himself.

"Right. Maybe the Carruthers were abusive, maybe they were overwhelmed. If a kid died, the kid was buried. Indifference? Panic? Maybe both. But back in Denver, nobody was missing them."

"Jesus."

"We'll hunt the Carruthers," says Tom. "Justice crawling, but they'll pay."

Dave adds, "You've provided the groundwork, Sheriff. The FBI will take it now."

"My father was sheriff then."

"Right."

"He met them. He found a boy. I can Xerox his report. I can give you a list of long time residents."

"We can use all that. We'll drop in tomorrow. Thanks," says Dave, city-brusque. "You can finish your beer though." This permission. But Curtis won't flinch; he forbids the twist in his gut to become a flinch, to betray his sudden despair. He sips the beer and looks around the room. The blue chenille coverlets; the quaint lace curtains; the cheap acrylic paintings above the rustic headboards, paintings of cowboys crouched around a campfire, cowboys herding cattle. He takes all of this in as he accepts the severance of his obligation to the bones. *We should sever this cleanly. No. Jagged is better.*

Curtis finds Fisk tossing the 4x4's keys palm to palm. "Those McNulty boys. Shoplifting again. Mr. Dutton has them at gunpoint."

"Okay. You handle it. Arrest them this time."

"Yes, sir." Fisk bangs out the door, peels out of the asphalt lot. Curtis marches to the framed photo of Sheriff Harris. *These pork chops are delicious. How did this child break his arm?* What this man could have said to the Carruthers. Curtis unhooks the photo and puts it in a storage unit behind a carton of brochures about crime prevention. Now on the wall is a rectangle of slightly lighter white than the rest of the white wall.

* * * * *

Not hectic weather now, safe and blue skies above Sloan, a hard blue cap, not dangerous. Curtis relaxes in his leather wing chair, props his feet on the coffee table, eats a bowl of syrupy peaches. He listens to the radio on the mantle, a station out of Gallup: country music with logical melody and lyrics about all the aspects of love, music that requires no effort and purges his mind of sticky, rude jazz. He finishes the peaches and then, without tally or rancor, he gathers all the evidence of Helen: a pink sweatshirt, pink nail polish, metal bracelets, the carved ironwood bird, a school notebook. He flips through the notebook and finds a page with her loopy handwriting, *Dear Curtis*. The start of a love letter, an apology, a screw-you-and-sayonara? He puts it all in a box and shelves it in a closet. Cold case.

He decides at once and furiously on a home improvement project; he goes into town, buys a sledgehammer at Dutton's Hardware, cradles it home, picks a target.

* * * * *

The heft of the sledgehammer swinging around Curtis's shoulder and into the wall. A deep punch into the drywall, the shudder of the sledgehammer's handle reverberating back through his arms. Another swing, the gray cats berserk. Another swing, his muscles flexing. Orphaned? Neglected? No. Never. Swing: drywall explodes, a cloud of dust. He was not one of those children, he was not damned. Swing: a pine vertical cracks. Swing: a thick splinter twirls out of the wood and cuts Curtis's cheek. *Bleed, Curtis*, Helen had said. He wipes the blood onto his wrist. And swing. He knocks through the outside wall and bright, rough light spills across him. The faultless sky. *Eluvio. Dei irati*. How he had galloped a pair of horses across the back of the pew. Mankind's punishment the sermon that Sunday. The toy ark lifted in the priest's palms. Curtis's reeky mother kneeling and murmuring and frantic. *Mea culpa?*; no, it was God's fault instead. Swing: this extravagant gape.

"I heard a terrible noise." Pauline is there, in the field of weeds. "Come out here."

Curtis steps through the hole. A hard block at the back of his throat unlocks and he weeps, and it is tough, soul-centered weeping.

"I haven't been sleeping," Pauline says.

"You can't worry about me anymore."

"You're a true and good man, Curtis."

"The credit is all yours, if that's true."

"It is true." She touches the cut on his cheek, smears the bit of blood on her own cheek.

"I was always grateful to you, Pauline. How you saved me."

"I know. Hush now." Pauline holds him and her strong heartbeats replenish the void in his heart and it is again filled entirely.

Six Poems By Richard Fenton Sederstrom

When We Are Six

© 2010

We sat on the fallen log of a centuries old
And enormous cottonwood, only a lost limb,
Gigantic though, dropped through the indifferent
Moan of some passing anonymous spring storm
Or petty tornado forgotten in the distraction of flood time,

From somewhere among limbs less weighty than the subject
Of the entire tree, like the subject we considered,
Where the river passed by behind our backs
And we could not see what debris it herded
Slowly down stream, rafting down time toward some
Richly blossomed delta, the wine dark, fruit dark sea.

We talked of our fathers' news of the sunglint muzzles
Of new war in a far somewhere called Korea
(A place of fragrant silken blossoms, of red
Crowned cranes fishing idly in rice paddies).
I do not remember now what conclusions
About the newfangled conflict we may have come to,

Steve, Robbie, my little brother Jack, and I.
I was six. Sixty years later the thirty-eighth
Parallel is more demilitarized than it was
After the cessation of appointed bleeding,
(The unpeopled zone a paradise for untroubled
Species of birds, the sacred tonsured crane ?C

Of mammals, even the near gone amur leopard ?C
Of trees, peacefully flowering kin to the long rotted
Cottonwood limb under our boys' rumps,
Dogwood, pungent with blossoms, fecund pollen,
Sweet life-honey flowing fruit). Sixty years later,
Still we are six. Still we talk of the news

Of the polished scythe of new war, or a single
Liquidation and enveloping cloud of nuclear winter,
Somewhere called Korea, a place of fragrant silken
Blossoms, blood lust right there and spreading again
Right back here, where the river passes by
Behind our backs, and we cannot see what debris

It herds slowly down stream, rafting down time
Toward some richly blossomed delta, the wine dark,
Blood dark sea, the petty seep of violence
That will come burbling back again up stream
Like Cosmoline on water, where we are six.



Richard Fenton Sederstrom lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and Mexico and the North Woods of Minnesota, the places in which he was raised. "I am fortunate to have retired from all respectable pursuits, especially teaching. Now I return to the classroom as a visitor, where, instead of teaching out of pedagogy, I teach out of confusion and into it, the way teaching should be done." He has published poems regularly in Big Muddy, The Talking Stick, Red Owl, and Saint Anthony Messenger. He has also been published in Tar Wolf Review, The Tule Review, English Journal, Plainsongs, Mother Earth Journal, and Ruminant, among other journals and magazines. His book of poems, "Fall Pictures on an Abandoned Road" came out last December, and a new book, "Disordinary Light," will be released this summer. Contact Richard at richard_sederstrom1221@q.com.

The Autumn Convention

© 2010

The woodpecker has moved from my garage wall
To the top of my neighbor's utility pole.
Perhaps he is sizing up the difference
Between my oil based wood stain and the good
Traditional creosote of the power co-op.

Because I am standing too near the feeder
The hummingbird thrums the air at my ears.
Does he care that the feeder happens to be empty,
or does he remember when we last
Remembered to fill it? How well does he
Understand possession, does he hum "Mine!"?

Three female goldfinches circle the mesh
Of a feeding bag, having nothing today
To argue about. Round about they go,
As though their orbits make some difference
In the quality of the seeds.

Woodpecker expands the sound of his territory
by resorting to technology, smashing his brains
at a metal sign, resounding an ownership he grasps
No better than the hummingbird does its empty feeder.

Two nuthatches dance up and down
The bark of that red pine between the houses.
They scoot about on several branches, then back
To the trunk. In want of nothing, they alone live
In perfect freedom from our seductive artifice.

First Lesson at Boarding School A Child of the Navajo Nation, c. 1950

© 2010

Because she is scared and she is lonelier
Than she has ever been,
Who has never in her six years been lonely before,

Because she is so unaware of what loneliness can be
That she is solely directed at what she cannot name,
Directed perfectly in her bone-white fear,

She is the deer mouse who has seen the shadow of the owl in
moonlight
And knows nothing of the owl,
Only the shadow, of which the mouse also knows nothing,

Javelina

© 2010

I have heard of hikers sent like flocks
Of terrified digits into inhospitable branches
And inch long thorns that protect those branches
And entertain the humourous mesquite.

It must be a good thing for them, the hikers,
To forget the pain and the bleeding
And learn to accept and maybe learn to love
The wonderful blue distance, cloud ringed
Above those jagged javelina colored mountains,

To forget the mundane business
Of climbing back down again somehow
And tip-toe away, among the rooting tusks,
The nervous alertness of their bearers,
Every animal its private xenophobe,

While we all learn something of ourselves
From the frightened wielders of no weapon so fierce
As anything we might wield to kill them back.

Only the single perfect fear, the second of perfect mouseness.
She utters a mere sound, languageless,
Which the teacher takes to be a noise in the girl's native Diné.

The teacher removes from her blouse pocket a small pair
Of classroom scissors, reaches out to the terror of the little girl.
The talons of scissors, the owl beak, snaps,

Clips a few wet eyelashes,
The girl and the mouse silently eaten.
In a week, the wind through the classroom door nudges mouse hair,

All that is left of the children,
And the teacher:
The smell of digesting fear.

Two Poems About Sitting

1. People Who Have Never Sat

© 2010

I sit again in this wooden folding chair

Which is the same folding chair

I sat in for the reading only an hour before

Which is almost the same

Folding chair I sat in last night

Which is almost the same folding

Chair I sat in yesterday afternoon

Which is exactly the same folding

Chair I sat in the afternoon before

I sit reading *Imperfect Thirst* by Galway Kinnell

While I wait again for a lesser light to flicker and

To ease my perfect thirst for a comfortable seat

Then I lay the book down on the chair

Next to the chair I sat in an hour

Ago and last night and almost

Yesterday afternoon and before

In the previous afternoon

Because the book although it is the hard

Bound edition is not very heavy

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But it is weighing on my hands

Enough though slightly

That my hands are weighing on my thighs though very slightly

And my thighs are weighing on my bum also very slightly

But enough that my bum is reminded again

As it was introduced in the afternoon

The day before yesterday

And yesterday afternoon

And last night

And an hour ago at the last reading

And again now and

In laying the book down I turn

Just enough that my bum is relieved just a little

And so I cross my

Left leg over my right

Then I put my left foot down on the floor

And I cross my right leg over my left leg

And then I put my right foot back on the floor

And I lean forward with both

Feet on the floor before I lean

Back again and decide that this

Chair was designed by someone who has never sat

So now I find myself trying to make a list

Of people who never sat

Moses never sat

Pope Gregory the Great never sat

George Washington never sat

Benito Mussolini never sat

George S Patton never sat

My third grade teacher Mrs Purdy never sat

Virginia Woolf never sat

My father's mother never sat (Her husband sat once briefly)

And although we have all seen him in chairs

Richard Nixon never sat

I can think of several more people who never sat

But the prickly individual who pretends to gentle Buddhism

Approaches to enlighten us

And I think it is time for you to take your mind off your sitting

Therefore I am leaving three lines for you to fill out

With names of people in your own lives who never sat

There now Hush It begins Don't even try to ease your bum

He's watching

2. A Writers Conference Poet, on Someone Else's Music

© 2010

He smiles at us evenly, easily.

He talks easily too, fluently, and in perfectly tuned judgment

That he needn't pass judgment on Dickinson's music,

Which, in his own constant jive, he never really mentions.

He almost swats the fly, misses again, and simpers.

It is, I suppose, the music of her age

That he doesn't quite bother to dismiss,

How sound and sense merely coincide.

Clearly, Emily isn't clever enough.

He might have spoken about how the vowel

Length of the end words of each line guide us to the sound,

Or the length of silence we feel,

Whether the line is end stopped or

Enjambed, or whether the slight breath

Left for prayer eases somewhere between.

Why, he muses, can't sound be antithetical to sense,

Chatter in a somber poem, like the new ones he reads?

Because it can't.

Because the poem's own glibness slaps the poem off the page.

How hard it must be to keep current with our age,

Our clever, rushing resignations,

For a poet thoughtless enough to have been born

A hundred and eighty years ago,

And what will happen when he gives poor

Anne Bradstreet her four centuries' minute on stage?

The young people in the audience,

And, yes, we are glad to have them here, their energy,

Must love this.

We all enjoy his bubbling pother, his easy patter, in which,

For the kids he even says shit now and then,

He lets us all know what a snap the semester test might be,

In tuneless bubble sheets, serendipitous blanks.

Five Poems By Robin Krevitsky Ferguson

Another Day in 1918

© 2010

Yellow rose petals, scattered just below the widow's walk,
Caught on tangled roots, soon will fall down to the sea.
I hold on to the iron railing -
The cool wind my only companion moves through a tall stand
of pines
Over wild lilac bushes, and down into the waves
Where any sign of happiness breaks like brittle bones.

My happiness died on Flanders' Field
Where they tell me rich red poppies grow

Promises made in the green-gold meadow down the rocky lane
Fly away like the petals on a dandelion,

Or the handful of the purple blossoms that lay at my feet,
I'm surprised they stayed so long.
I pluck them from the dirt,
Drop them one by one by one

Down onto the water, so far down, I lose sight, yet,
Some, caught on the wind, come back.
One small flower lands in the loose tendrils of my hair.
I leave it there.
A touch of color, a sign of rebellion

While I am forced to wear black,
Plain black skirt and black blouse,
Devoid of lace or carved buttons,
A black silk scarf covers my head.
My long brown curls tucked away,

I miss your calloused hands,
Making long brush strokes down my back
Your tanned fingers on my pale flesh.

No one weeps with me
My eyes, still the blue of my youth,
Now red and wounded from dried salt caught in my lashes.

Ode to Sherman Alexie (On the Diabetic River)

© 2010

A plump rainbow trout breaks
The surface of Hawley Lake
He rises.
His silver body glistens
Under the noon day sun.

My father is dead.
His body is gone to dust.

Yet today his spirit hovers
Over the tip of my fishing pole
He teases the line.

He wants me to hook just one fish
So he won't miss the first pitch
Of the Diamondbacks – Mets game
Back home.



Robin Krevitsky Ferguson writes: "Half Russian, one quarter German, and all Arizona Desert Rat, I am an office goddess for the Veterans Administration, and a travel junkie. Phoenix is my home base as it has been my family's hometown since my great-grandfather helped get Roosevelt Dam built. While Teddy was here to christen it, he held my grandmother on his lap for a photo-op. The Phoenix College Creative Writing Department is my home within my home. I had my son late, and married later. Turning 50 last November has been the best thing to go my way. Writing is my passion. These poems are just part of my portfolio. I have one novel completed, a folder full of short stories, and a second novel taking a life of its own on my new laptop. When I'm not working, or writing, I'm wrestling with my two large dogs, Harley and Peaches, or keeping track of my cats, Gus, PJ, and Tigger Too (but like all cats they know where they are). If you like, or have issues with my words, feel free to email me at phxwriter@gmail.com."

To Black

© 2010

She gravitates to black.

Does it cover the streak of madness?

The gift from her great-grandmother and her daughter after her.

It gives the girl comfort to know the hospital,

Where straight jackets and a rainbow of drugs wait just for her,

Just down Thirty-Fourth Street,

Walking there would be so easy.

The parents don't want to see the blackened streak.

It runs between their daughters' large breasts

Segregates her from the rest.

Some days it darkens their way,

But their ignorance is bliss, and she suffers at their leisure,

She sleeps when the headaches attack,

She never learned to pray, but she asks God to not let her go crazy.

She cracked and spilled onto the living room couch once.

She begged her parents not to let her go crazy.

But their ignorance is bliss, and she suffers at their leisure

Left to float within herself

Until she thought to drown herself off Coronado Island,

Fear of failure is always there.

She knows how simple it is to take the wrong step.

She fears she will not come out the next time,

Ignorance is bliss, and she suffers at their leisure.

And she wears black to hide the truth.

Hitchhiker

© 2010

I gave the Holy Spirit a lift to the last truck stop on Highway 101.

He told me I was a part of the In Crowd if I liked it or not.

My name was written in blood years ago, and my spirit was strong.

And then he said I needed to get out of my own way.

We sat and drank cocoa with lots of whipped cream and marshmallows,

And he ate apple pie smothered in French Vanilla Ice Cream.

I didn't eat because I wasn't hungry, but I was cold,

The Spirit couldn't warm me; he said I could only warm myself

From the inside out with hot chocolate.

I left Him there to eat another slice of pie, and traveled on my way.

What's In My Name???

© 2010

You can ask me where Batman is

I'll try to give you a clever answer.

Call me Rockin' when you come a knockin'

I might whistle a silly tune.

But if you are man enough to ask if my breast is red,

Then try to get lost in the sway of my ample gifts,

You may not come out for days.

Few men have tried, fewer have succeeded.

Losing themselves in me until I am bored

And I send them home to their wives,

Their new sweethearts, or their mothers,

With my name carved upon their hearts.

Dual Citizenship

By Lilvia Soto

© 2010

“My name is Lilvia. El - i - el - ve - i - a,” I say when making a reservation or ordering something on the phone. Face to face, when someone expresses difficulty with the pronunciation, I explain, “The *ve* is pronounced *be* because Spanish has no *ve* sound.” If he says he likes it or comments on how unusual it is, I add, “My mother made it up.” If he asks, is it O.K. to shorten it to Lil because it’s too hard to pronounce? I refuse. I like my name and will be glad to teach him how to pronounce it: “It’s Silvia but with an L.” When he has time to chatter and is interested in the origin, I tell him the story.

When my mother was pregnant with me, she was reading a novel whose main character was Silvia. On one page, there was a typo--instead of *S* it had *L*. Mother liked it and decided that if her baby was a girl (this was in the days before sonograms), she would give her that name. Unfortunately for me, Mother was neither materialistic nor sentimental. She spent her life giving away everything she owned. The result: no book, and by the time she told me the story, she had forgotten both the title and the author.

On October 2, 1954, in preparation for our move to the United States, Mother, who had gone from Mexico City to Chihuahua for her brother’s funeral, obtained a copy of my birth certificate from the *Registro Civil* (Department of Vital Statistics) in Nuevo Casas Grandes, my birthplace. This was a typed facsimile of the original. Its accuracy was certified by J. Rosario Luján, Municipal President and Judge of the Civil Court. This signed, sealed, and certified document of the State of Chihuahua states that my name is Livia, that I am the legitimate first offspring of Alberto and Lilia, that I was born at 2:35 p.m. on November 25th, and that on December 11th, at 2:00 p.m., my father registered my birth in the office of the *Registro Civil*.

The first time I had occasion to read my birth certificate was sometime in the ‘70s when I filled out the paperwork to make my derivative U.S. citizenship official. I translated the document myself and asked Luisa, my linguistics professor

from Stony Brook University to certify the translation. I translated Livia as Lilvia, for I knew my name. Luisa accepted the translation. She was a Hungarian refugee and understood about governments, tired, hard-of-hearing bureaucrats, and rickety old typewriters. As a medievalist and a linguist, she also understood about the different versions of a document and the constant evolution of language. The U.S. bureaucrats in the State Department also accepted my translation. They understood that immigrants sometimes deserve a new name.

In July of 2000, in preparation for relocating to the border state of Arizona, I thought it might be nice, even useful, to reclaim my Mexican citizenship, given that the Mexican government had at last caught up with the concept of dual citizenship. I went to the Mexican Consulate in Philadelphia to apply. The Vice Consul examined my birth certificate and agreed that I was entitled to my Mexican citizenship, but only under the name that appears on the certificate. I explained the obvious – the small *l* in the old typewriter was broken, the typist was hard-of-hearing, he had never heard *Lilvia* and couldn’t believe it, if he did hear it. It was so long ago, maybe that particular official book was archived in some dusty cellar and that particular page was smudged or there was a mouse dropping right on the *l*. Maybe the 1939 scribe was doing a little celebrating of his own and had a *sotol* or two for lunch, or the 1954 scribe did. The handsome young man in the dark Brooks Brothers suit looked me straight in the eye and informed me that my birth certificate said Livia and therefore my name was Livia. I pleaded that I knew what my name was, had known it for over half a century, everybody knew me by that name, all my documents – U.S. citizenship, college degrees, marriage and divorce decrees, daughters’ birth certificates, driver’s license, passport, poetry, academic publications, social security – said Lilvia. He said I must be mistaken. I told him my mother knew what name she had given me, and she had called me Lilvia all my life. He informed me that my mother had been mistaken – it was clear that she had not known what my name was. At that

Continued on page 64



Bilingual, binational, and multicultural, Lilvia Soto divides her time between Chihuahua and Arizona. She has a Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literature from Stony Brook University, has taught at U.S. universities, and has published short fiction, poetry and literary translations and criticism in Spain, Mexico, the U.S. and other countries. These poems are from her manuscripts on the Iraq War. Contact her at lilviasoto@hotmail.com.

Continued from page 63

moment, the Consul intervened and offered to send away for an “official” copy of my birth certificate to settle the matter. Since I had never seen the original, I gave him a check for \$25.00, thinking it would be worth it to satisfy my curiosity.

Five months later, already living in Arizona, I received a letter from the Consul with the 2000 version of my birth certificate and a \$2.00 refund. Bureaucracy has progressed since 1954. Modern-day scribes need only fill in the blanks of the printed form. There are some discrepancies between the two documents as to the number of the book in which the original appears and the number of the certificate itself. Beyond that, they both have my name as Livia. They also have my Scottish grandfather’s name as Fhayne instead of Thayne. My father’s mother’s Irish last name McNerny transforms itself from McNery to Nerny in the 1954 document and is finally reduced to N. in the 2000 version.

There are other typos and spelling mistakes in the 1954 document (and perhaps in the original), but, being a daughter of literature, I much prefer the first version, for its language has a rhythm, and it tells a story: “In Nuevo Casas Grandes, District of Galeana, State of Chihuahua, on the 14th hour of the 11th day of December, there appeared before me, Fernando Flores, Judge of the *Registro Civil* of this place, Señor Alberto Soto McNery [sic] of Mexican nationality, 26 years of age, married, born in Ciudad Camargo, Chihuahua, Catholic, a member of the military, and a neighbor of this place...” Father was 23 when I was born; Mother, 27. He lied to protect her, for it embarrassed her to be older.

The scribe is entitled to err, the university-educated bureaucrat certifies reality, I choose my name and my citizenships. For my first citizenship I choose to go back to my 10th grade-educated mother’s sense of possibility and poetry.

Camera Eye

By John Mikal Haaheim

© 2010

It is that time again.
Camera bags blossom and pedestals
periscope to tripod length.
Spring has energized our Father.
Equipment mushrooms
across the floor in random-sprouting heaps,
Kodak, Pentax, Leica, and Bolex.

I am plucked
of clothing, stripped
to bare skin, scrubbed and
dressed to perfection, ready to be shot
in celluloid, captured
in frames and hung
to dry in his darkroom.

I wriggle in little-man suit
with neon bow tie, pork-pie hat
replete with feather in blue band.
My sister stumbles onto the couch;
we, a matched set. She
in shiny shoes, patent leather purse,
ornament embellished
with white gloves and pillbox hat.

I kick the shiny shoes once, twice, three times.
Forehead furrowed, my sister glares. "Stop."
Her purse bestows a becoming-red
mark on my face.
Our mother demands we grow up. Her
imprint no less than the purse,
we dwindle into the furniture.

We ready ourselves - purse and pork-pie,
patent leather and red marks that don't wash off with spit.
Bolex perches outside, camera eye
trained, we elbow out and trudge down the walk.
Hands shade eyes, faces frowning
in eight millimeter stride
at the command to smile.

When opportunity pounces, our parents
trot us out in childhood purity,
project our crafted images against
their opaque screen.
My sister and I flee in perpetuity
down the walk, hand in hand,
red mark faded to yellow.

Lights on, the uptake-spool spins our forms
in reverse jerk-step motion, reels us back
into that long-ago home,
canned and stored to their satisfaction,
like insects ensnared
in amber film, still snarling
at the camera eye.



John Mikal Haaheim is a retired counselor and educator with a B.S. in English from Iowa State University. His M.A. is in counseling from the University of North Dakota. He was raised in a military family and served as a Psych Tech during the Vietnam Conflict. He lives with his wife, Linda, and cat, Taz, in Sun City West, Arizona. Contact him at mikalhaaheim@yahoo.com.

Holly Wagner

Third-Place Winner In Cover Contest

I've spent my entire adult life as a reporter and editor, which has exposed me to interesting and often strange things, especially in Southern California.



I love what I do but my life was just too hectic and I had little time for myself. So four years ago I decided to get off the hamster wheel. I moved to sleepy little Winslow. They don't call this place "The 'Slow" for nothing. Yet there is a small community of mostly home-based artists here.

I've long wanted the time to free the artist I felt wanted to get out from inside me. I had started taking art classes in SoCal, but time just didn't allow much. In Winslow I went to freelancing full time, which lets me control my schedule much more and spend more time on art and other personal pursuits like gardening.

I've been working on painting and stained glass here for the last three years. When the call for a Blue Guitar went out, I had just finished a blue piece and the idea

just sprang to mind. I didn't end up using the same blues, but I hoped to capture the smoky sounds of the local landscape and music; the magic of our mesas, and of course our abundant sunshine.

I've been sewing since I was three years old and came from a very DIY family, so I love working with found objects and unusual materials. Sometimes that means incorporating them into art, other times, as with furniture, it is more reinventing, repurposing or recreating something to suit my style. I also like the sustainability of reusing and recycling.

My sewing background is useful for stained glass because you are used to working with things in pieces and visualizing how they will look put together. It also gives you an idea of structure that's helpful because with glass, you have to use lines for strength as well as imagery.

I'm still in Winslow with my three dogs, and expect to be moving soon to a larger home with a space I can dedicate to glass, sewing and other art. I'm looking forward to being able to start a project or even just cook dinner without having to pick up a project first!



This is a piece Holly Wagner did as a surprise tribute for a friend after her beloved white German Shepherd died. This shows Eddie becoming glass. "Eddie" was a labor of love for a friend. It's not easy making life in glass. You can't make the same blending choices you have with paint. You have to use the glass as you find it, and make seams where you wouldn't in paint," Holly said. Other works by Holly, from top left: "Baby Collared Lizard, Homolovi," "Time Spiral," "The Solar System" and "Wire, Wicker and Glass Shelf." Reach Holly at documentarydvdiva@yahoo.com.

www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

Spring 2010

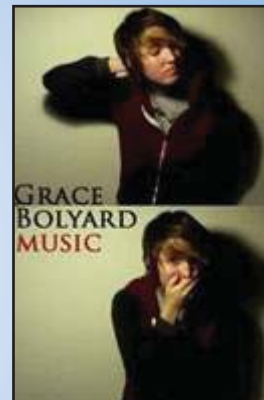
ASU Kurdish Youth Club and Arizona Consortium for the Arts present

2nd annual Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts at ASU West Campus April 18

Date: Sunday, April 18, 2010

Time: Noon-5 p.m.

Location: Arizona State University
West, La Sala, 4701 W. Thunderbird
Road, Glendale, AZ 85306.



The festival will include performances by the “Arizona Classical Kids” Musicians, Arizona School of Classical Ballet Students, a presentation of the Filipino Martial Arts by two sisters, Nikki and Grace Tordil, who are sixth-graders at Luke Elementary School. Singer and Acoustic Guitarist Neil Dicks, Singer-Songwriter Grace Bolyard, Opera Singer Maria Restivo, Singer and Acoustic Guitarist Jonathan Gabriel, Singer Edna Elizabeth Abeyasundra, Musician Vincent Alexander Chavez, “SMUDD,” local Rock and Roll Band that will have you rockin’ and rollin’ to your all-time favorites, readings from The Blue Guitar magazine and many other artists. There will also be dignitaries and local personalities from the community speaking about the importance of promoting arts and culture in our communities.

This event is FREE to attend

Please come join us for a day of fun festivities.

www.artizona.org - www.theblueguitarmagazine.org - www.kurdishyouthclub.com

About the Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a Non-Profit Organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008.

We now have 501c3 tax-exempt status. We are all volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.

The Arizona Consortium's vision is to create a multicultural arts center, where children, teens and adults will become inspired, to develop their creative abilities, in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery,



theater setting. Please visit www.artizona.org or www.theblueguitarmagazine.org for more information about becoming a member, networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting to The Blue Guitar magazine.

Blue-letter date in the history of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts has won final nonprofit, tax-exempt status and can now receive tax-deductible donations.

The Consortium has completed the final step in becoming a nonprofit organization by receiving its 501c3 status from the federal government. The Consortium can now receive contributions from generous members and supporters that can be deducted from their yearly taxes.

A huge thank-you to Sara Vannucci for shepherding The Consortium through this much-needed and crucial process! The Consortium can now move forward on its dream to establish a nonprofit center for the arts in Arizona!

"Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar."

— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens' 1937 poem "The Man With the Blue Guitar." Copyright reserved, Random House Inc.

Thank You To Friends, Contributors, Supporters

A Big Thank-You From The Arizona Consortium For The Arts And The Blue Guitar Magazine!

Gail E. McCauley * Phoenix Art Space * Angie Williams-McMichael * Viki Turnipseed * Nate Anderson * Toby Fesler Heathcotte * Grace Bolyard * Miss Penny * Nora L. Niles * Denise Landis * Dr. Trish Dolasinski * Nicole Romine; Arielle Sylverne * Darren Ingram * Maureen Kanagaratnam * Tordil family * Vincent Alexander Chavez * Arizona School of Classical Ballet Students * Nadya Zubkov * Maria Restivo * Edna Elizabeth Abeyasundra * SMUDD * KellyAnn Bonnell; Richard Fenton Sederstrom * Shea Stanfield * Marina Leonov * Rachel Greenfeld * Luisa Cox * Dennis Yuresko * Gioia Boerrigter * Aileen Frick * Albina Manning * Allena * Angelika Ahlbrandt * Anna Yakupovich * Annette Simpson * Aris and Zepure Jerahian * Arizona Classical Kids * Artisan Markets AZ * Astrid Olafsen * ASU West, Glendale campus * ASU Kurdish Youth Club and NuhaSarraj * ASU Mercado Galleria - Chris Kyselka * ASU Phoenix, downtown campus * Guillermo Reyes * ASU Tempe, main campus * Audrey Thacker * AZCulture * Barbara Bowman * Barbara Love Newport * beBroad, Inc. * Bela Fidel * Bessen Howard * Best Jewelry * Beth Cornell * Beth Staples * Bill Carlos * Bonnie Lou Coleman * Borders Bookstore on Cactus * Brian Wllia * Bruce Howden * Carlos Bill * Carol Shapley * Catherine R. Capozzoli * Chompie's * Chuck Mallory * Janessa Mckibin * Ralph Skrzypczak * CJ Ryder * Coe Wil * Colette Colosimo * Colleen Sugden * David and Janet Bowman * Debra Barnes * Delgado Phillip * Diana Matatova * Diane Brand * Donita Hillis * Dr. Cie Scott * Dr. Gordon Wilson, D.D.S. * Dr. Judith Brandstadter * Elena Eros * Eric Sponseller * Erika Schafer * Evelyn Beltran * Forakis Law Firm * Fred Kask * Heather Trevino * Holly Wagner * Howard Scherer * Inis * Irina Gorbunova * Jack Howell * Joyce White * Karen Allmon * Kelly Depp * Rebecca Sedergran McAneny * Jami Lyn Lanser * Jane Cooper * Janice Kleinwort * Jay and Nancy Schwartz * Jennifer Vollmann * Jessica Dimino * James Thornton * Joan Collins and Daphne Azzi * Joan McConnell * Joe and Maria Pinker * Joe Draper * John Chavez * John Mikal Haaheim * Jonathan B. Gabriel * Josh Louchheim * Josie Medina * Kathy Goren * Katie Jones * Keli Medcroft * Keri Mosier * Laine Seaton * Lana May * Lenora Mosby * Linda Jenkins * Luisa Cox * Lupe Cavanaugh * Marjory Boyer * Mark Faraday * Mary Guy * Mary Jane Tripp * Maureen Poorman * Meenakshi Matai * Melanie Tighe and Thom Butcher * Michael Price * Michelle Hamett * Michelle S. Hawkins * Mira Rumyantseva * Mistie Hague * Moshe Bukshpan * Nancy Troupe * Neil Dicks * Olivia * Paradise Valley Artists League * Pepper and Company * Rachel Greenfeld * Ralph "Rafal" Skrzypczak * Ramona Richards * Raven * Rebecca Dyer * Richard H. Dyer * Robert and Nellia Nektalov * Roger Kirk Nelson * Ron Floyd * Ruth, Bob, Michael Goldman * Sandra Eastman * Sandra Grigg * Home and Garden Expo Centers in Scottsdale, Peoria and Phoenix * Sara Vannucci * Sharon Lee Peters * Sharon McCarthy * Shirley Peters * Sofya Nektalova * Sonoran Arts League * Stone Stringers Unlimited * Susan Stephens * Suzanne Eaton * Sylvia Howard * The Hunger Artists * The Trunk Space * Thomas Lanser * Toyota Scion - Jennifer Lynn Rickel and Guillermo Gastelo * Tracy Penwell * Veronica Hoganson * Wendy * Willi Waltrip * Windy LynnHarris * Yelena Babadzhanov * Zhanna Tevan *



Dear members and friends,

It is with great excitement we are informing you that the Arizona Consortium for the Arts is now a 501c3 nonprofit tax-exempt organization.

A sincere thank-you to Sara Vannucci for helping our Consortium through this much-needed and crucial process!

For the past two years, we have been busy, growing, networking, learning and sharing. We have held many shows and events. We are grateful to all of the volunteers who have been organizing, participating, donating items for raffles, donating space for events, and performing at our events.

Our first project, The Blue Guitar magazine, is in its third, Spring 2010 edition. It is well-known around the state. We receive submissions from all over Arizona. Additional summer and winter editions are in the plans. Thank you to Rebecca and Rick Dyer for their tireless work. We will continue to publish the magazine online until we will be able to afford to print it and distribute it for free to hospitals, schools, senior centers, etc.

We are eternally grateful to everyone who has been helping us for the past two years. Your contributions help with our monthly credit card payments for our startup costs, hosting of the websites and printing of the informational brochures.

Please support our Arizona Consortium for the Arts! Our immediate need is to raise \$3,000 to cover our legal fees.

Here is a great way to show your sunny Artizona spirit.

It today's economy, any gift including \$5, \$10, \$15, or other, will really help us. You can make your contribution today, fast, easy and securely via PayPal. Just click on the Donate button on our Donate page on <http://www.artizona.org/donate.html> or send your donation to the Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The address to send donations is: Arizona Consortium for the Arts, 14608 N. 40th Way, Phoenix, AZ 85032. The continuation of our goals, mission, vision, projects and programs will only be possible with your contributions. Please note: Now we are able to provide you with a tax-exempt letter.

We are looking forward to seeing you at our 2nd ANNUAL BLUE GUITAR FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS on Sunday, April 18th at ASU West Campus in Glendale. The event is in collaboration with the ASU Kurdish Youth Club.

The festival runs from noon to 5 p.m. and will be held at Arizona State University at the West Campus, La Sala Room, 4701 W. Thunderbird Road, Glendale, AZ 85306. It is free to attend!

Thank you to all. May you continue to be healthy, happy and prosperous.

Sincerely,

The Board, Advisors and all the volunteers

Arizona Consortium for the Arts
www.artizona.org
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org
www.artizonaorg.blogspot.com
602-263-5373

www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

Spring 2010

A Call for Summer!

The Blue Guitar is pleased to announce the launch of a new summer issue!

A call to writers in all genres
for the summer issue of The Blue Guitar magazine

The Blue Guitar will accept submissions for its summer edition from
June 1, 2010, through July 15, 2010

The
Blue Guitar seeks
submissions in all genres — fiction,
poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers
must submit original work and must live in
Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted,
but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible
if the work is accepted elsewhere. Submissions selected by the
editor will appear in the summer edition of the magazine, which
will be published online and potentially in print. Please include your
name and the best way to contact you on your submission. It is free to
submit and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Submissions
will be accepted from June 1, 2010, through July 15, 2010. Manuscripts
and photos that are mailed to the magazine cannot be returned.

Send submissions to:

Rebecca Dyer at: rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org
or the Arizona Consortium for the Arts at info@artizona.org
or mail to:

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts
14608 N. 40th Way
Phoenix, AZ 85032

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and
fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts.
The Blue Guitar Magazine, www.theblueguitarmagazine.org, is a project of The Arizona
Consortium for the Arts.



Volume 2,
Number 1

**Spring Issue
FREE!**

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