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bio**Stories**

sharing the extraordinary in ordinary lives

Like the image that graces the cover of the Summer/Fall Issue for 2017, in this volume you will encounter unexpected, sometimes long forgotten gems. You will meet people you won't soon forget, alongside some that have haunted their authors for a lifetime, while others have proven elusive or were never known by those now narrating a slice of their lives. Many of the eighteen essays you find in this issue are united by telling stories of change and transformation, recognizing that growth that takes place in us as we open ourselves to others' lives and experiences. Certainly, we have felt changed by the process of reading these diverse stories and are pleased for the chance to share them with you.

Cover Art: "Rummage Sale" by John Chavers (photograph). This piece has previously appeared in issues of *Gravel* and *THAT Literary Review*.

bioStories is edited by Mark Leichliter and is based in Bigfork, MT. We offer new work every week on-line at www.biostories.com.

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Arribadas

by M.K. Hall

That August, the week I was supposed to deliver the baby I had miscarried, Joe and I went to Costa Rica to watch the turtles lay their eggs. The trip had been my idea. I wanted to both run away and press into my loss. “The turtles arrive in the rainy season with the new moon,” I had said, enchanted by the grand synchronicity of their motherhood. “They come out of the water all at once and dig their nests in the night.”

When we arrived, the sun was setting. Exhausted by our travels, we decided to forego the guided nighttime expedition into the Ostional Wildlife Refuge, opting instead to stretch our legs at the beach not far from our hotel. The formal tour was supposed to be spectacular. Our innkeeper told us that in a span of only four days between 150,000 to 200,000 olive ridley turtles visited the beach. It was a phenomenon, he assured us, “not to be missed.”

At Playa Ostional, the tide was low. A faint odor—like a fish tank due for cleaning—tinged the summer wind. Black winged zopilotes pecked at broken shells, the beach otherwise empty. Without a guide, we didn’t know where to look for turtles and spent more time taking photos than watching the water. Photos of the sunset that failed to capture the multitudinous sky. Photos of our bare feet covered in sand. Photos of us looking not at all mournful.

Perhaps because we were not paying attention, her arrival in the early blue dusk felt like magic. She dragged herself onto the gravity-stricken sand, her carapace heavy without the sea’s buoyancy. After a flip or two of her fins, she would pause, her neck panting, and blink those big wet eyes at us. I had not imagined her journey to the nesting zone to be so laborious.

“Come on, mamma. Lay some eggs,” I said.

At my first prenatal appointment, my doctor had been unable to detect a heartbeat so she sent me across the street to the hospital where their equipment was more sensitive. I lay down on the examination table in a too cold room while the technician unwrapped a condom for the ultrasound probe. When it was inside me, she

maneuvered the probe around like a joystick, and did not hide her impatience whenever I winced.

"Sorry, just a little bit longer," she would say unapologetically, then complain that my doctor had called a few too many times to check on the results. The technician had to pause the exam at one point to answer the phone.

"She's the mom of a childhood friend," I explained. "I guess she cares about me."

The technician started to ask me questions about my friend and we realized that we went to high school together. I remembered auditioning for Model United Nations in front of the technician and doing a terrible job because I didn't know anything about global politics or making oral arguments. She had the same unimpressed look on her face when she confirmed that there was no second heartbeat in my body.

"And what do you do now?" she asked, helping me sit up.

"I'm a lawyer."

She laughed, "Of course you are."

I laughed too, grateful for her lack of bedside manner. Maybe what was happening to me was not supposed to make me feel so sad? For her, my loss was routine.

Later I researched the mundanity of miscarriage. The March of Dimes website states that ten to fifteen percent of recognized pregnancies result in miscarriage. Falling down the Internet's rabbit hole eventually lead me to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to the CDC, nearly one in five women in the United States is raped, and that eighteen percent only represents reported cases.

"There is something terribly wrong with the world," I thought, staring at my computer screen. My grief had grown in the aftermath of the exam, after telling my friends and family that I was no longer having a baby, after recovering from surgery to remove the 'uterine contents' that I had already named. "Still. I want to bring new life into it."

As dusk deepened at Ostional, more turtles heaved themselves from the water. Between the high tide line and tall grass, the turtles began to dig, their flippers ineffective shovels, scattering broken shells. At first I thought the shells—soft and

smooth as ping-pong balls—were remnants of hatchlings who had made their way to the sea the season before.

Then the zopilotes came. Black shrouded and wearing wrinkled gray masks, the vultures brazenly snatched eggs right from the prostrate bodies of laboring turtles. Those delicate orbs were broken before they even touched the nests meant to incubate the babies for the next three months. Other zopilotes would riffle through just buried nests, devouring, as the mothers scurried toward their true homes, their flippers leaving divots in the sand. It was with palatable relief that the turtles crashed into the waves and disappeared.

As the day faded to twilight, more tourists arrived. Groups would encircle a nesting mother, shooing the birds. (For their part, the turtles did not exhibit a preference between vultures and voyeurs.) I watched one girl break from the circle to chase the zopilotes away, chastising the birds in a British accent when they returned to their watchful positions, and I recognized a younger version of myself in her futile anger. At thirteen I would have done the same. At thirty-three, I thought I understood something about death's role in the cycle of life.

I read afterwards that while predators consume a few thousand eggs, the majority of eggs do survive. In fact, harvesting eggs is permitted at Ostional Wildlife Refuge in the seventy-two hours after the turtles first start to appear because subsequent arrivals destroy the nests of their sisters as they dig to make their own. Still, those avian thieves with their Grim Reaper robes and scythe beaks were hard to root for.

Since we had sneaked onto the beach without a guide, Joe and I were at liberty to remain loyal to our turtle. The first arrival. We kept a respectful distance, grumbling about the groups farther up shore who crowded the nests, as if we ourselves weren't eco-tourists invading the spaces that belonged, for generations, to these reptilian creatures.

Other mothers had already constructed their nests, labored, and left. Our turtle was still only partway to the grass. A wash of iridescent pink and soft beige brightened her skin. The turtle lifted her head toward the grass and the ravenous black birds and the great distance she still had to climb, and suddenly changed course.

“Mamma turtle, I didn’t see you lay any eggs. Where are you going?” I asked, though it was clear she had turned back toward the sea. Her tracks made an actual “U” in the sand. Joe and I watched a wave swallow her.

I didn’t know turtles could do that. I thought their biology compelled them to swim thousands of miles to the same natal beach where they had been born, to lay their eggs, to return season after season, year after year until they died out in the water. It never occurred to me that a sea turtle might journey to the beach and decide not to participate in the tremendous feat of motherhood. To change her mind.

Or maybe it hadn’t been a choice. Maybe her body simply could endure no more. Maybe our presence frightened her away.

I stared at the place she had vanished for a long time.

“She did good,” I told my husband. “She tried really hard.”

He held me as the sun went down. We made our way blindly to the car, arms outstretched against the dark, afraid we were stepping on buried eggs.

I should add that a few days before our departure, I found out I was pregnant. Joe had phoned me from work, frantic. “We forgot to get vaccinated. Call your doctor.”

She was able to squeeze me in that afternoon. We had only just started trying again, but I figured Typhoid and Hepatitis A were probably unwise injections to receive in the unlikely event I was with child. I took a detour to the drugstore, rushed home. On the toilet, I did my best to aim my pee at target surely better designed for a man to hit. The result came back positive. I peed on another. And then one more.

I found my happiness untrustworthy. Late for my appointment, I decided not to call my husband until I was certain. At the medical office, my doctor said she would run a blood test, but that the drugstore results were reliable. She recommended precautions to avoid disease, assuring me that although I would arrive uninoculated, Costa Rica would be safe.

And so, the trip that was originally intended as a kind of closure on mourning turned into an unexpected babymoon. I had to skip surfing lessons and hot springs and tropical cocktails. At one point, Joe and I got into a fight because I insisted on flinging myself down a resort’s spiral water slide, laughing as my body crashed into the pool.

“If you lose this one, don’t blame me,” he said, darkly.

We argued. I cried.

Then I went down the slide again out of spite.

At my various doctor’s appointments over the next several months, I would routinely be asked, “Is this your first pregnancy?” No matter how domed my belly grew or how forcefully my baby kicked at my guts, there remained that pecking reminder of loss.

I told myself that once I cleared the first trimester and the risk of miscarriage subsided, so, too, would my worries. When I entered my second trimester, I reasoned that once I felt the baby move, I would be relieved of my anxieties. By my third trimester, I accepted that I would never stop fearing for the safety of my child. I was already a mother.

We never did go back for the guided expedition to see the turtles fill the beach. At night, there were supposed to be so many arrivals the shore seems made of turtles. Maybe the spectacle would have stirred something deeper inside us, but Joe and I agreed what we had witnessed was enough.

Hide and Seek

by Steven Wineman

I was sitting next to our cabin in a low-slung canvas folding chair, waiting to see what would happen next. It was the summer of 1962. I was thirteen, my brother was seventeen. He had called my parents from Detroit, saying he was going to kill himself by driving his car into a tree. It was over a boy, David, who apparently had rejected him. My mother told me all this. She spoke in an even voice, trying to be calm and matter of fact. But I had been reading my mother's emotional state all my life, always on the alert for the next outburst, and I could tell she was using every ounce of strength to hold herself together. “I don't think he'll do it,” she said. “It's a plea for help. If Jimmy meant to kill himself, he wouldn't have called.”

It was a warm, bright day, and I maneuvered the chair into a patch of sunlight that managed to wend through the branches of tall trees surrounding our cabin. I felt the heat of the sun on my face, on my bare arms, and I listened for the approach of my brother's car. Instead I heard the subdued voices of my parents from inside the cabin. It was a rare event for my mother and father to be carrying on a civil conversation. I couldn't catch the words, but their tones said everything I needed to know.

I was riveted on all of it—the depth of my parents' concern, the looming panic in the air, the drama of the moment—and feeling nothing. It was an old trick, one that I had mastered over many years of being the quiet, good boy in a family where everyone else was ready to explode at any moment

I had an internal switch that I flipped to turn off my feelings. I used it every time my parents screamed at each other. It had become an automatic response, one that enabled me to take in all the details of their fights—the points of contention, the escalating decibels, the swearing, who was more logical (always my father), who was irrational (always my mother), the predictable patterns at the end when my father would denounce my mother as impossible and walk away, and my mother would fling her final epithets and dissolve into sobs as she shrieked to the walls, “What did I ever do to deserve this?” I somehow knew that I couldn't afford to feel how my parents' warfare was affecting me, so I didn't. I listened, I noticed, I drew conclusions, and then I went on

with my life.

With Jimmy, I was not as successful. When I was four he started physically assaulting me. He'd lure me into wrestling matches by promising to let me win, and then he pinned me on the floor and clawed at my stomach. From my perspective, he was an impossibly big boy; he had complete physical command over my body. Each time I let myself be tricked into believing that he would keep his word, that he wouldn't hurt me, that I could have fun with him the way I imagined other brothers relating and come out unscathed. At the key moment, every time, my trust was betrayed and I knew then exactly what was coming, the physical reality of being held down on my back on the floor, unable to move, his legs on top of mine, one big arm dominating the upper part of my body as I tried to squirm and push back without the slightest effect. I could feel what he was going to do to my stomach before he did it, a physical memory that had been stamped into me. And then it came, the abdominal claw hold. With his big hand Jimmy dug into my belly, and it was as if his fingers were inside me, twisting, stabbing, inflicting a burning relentless pain at a depth that didn't seem conceivable, and all I wanted in the world was for him to be off me and for the pain to stop, and there was nothing I could do to make that happen. He announced what he was doing like a sportscaster at a wrestling match, and he laughed and said that the fans were going wild, and after an expanse of time I could not measure, he would pin me to a count of three, pounding the floor with his terrible hand, and declare himself the winner.

Afterward, when he had left and I had rolled over onto my stomach in a hopeless gesture of self-protection, as I sobbed and felt the fibers of the rug moisten under my face, I would fantasize about growing up to be bigger than Jimmy and beating him up mercilessly, so he would feel what I was feeling.

When I was ten we moved to a new neighborhood, and something about that change of place somehow affected Jimmy and the abuse stopped cold. In many other ways, he was still a pain in the neck, with his domination of the TV and his nasty habit of jerking the sports section out of my hands, his bizarre behavior in public and his constantly provoking my mother to yell at him. But he never touched me again; and I didn't look back. I left behind my revenge fantasies like a bad dream. Jimmy's role in my life was to be someone I moved away from. He was the bad brother; I was the good

one, an identity which my mother assigned to me and I eagerly embraced. My mission was to be as unlike Jimmy as humanly possible, not to emulate his sadistic behavior.

Now, at thirteen, sitting outside our cabin in the warm afternoon sun on my personal suicide watch, I could so easily have hoped that Jimmy had gone ahead and killed himself. But I didn't. I just stayed small and quiet and out of the way, and waited to see what would happen, not hoping anything. When, after about an hour, my brother pulled up in his blue and white Buick, I allowed myself the thinnest sliver of relief.

We spent summers at the University of Michigan Fresh Air camp, where my father served as Clinical Director of a program for disturbed and delinquent boys. Well before Jimmy threatened suicide and was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit in Ann Arbor, I was aware of the irony that my father had a son who was deeply disturbed.

But camp had always been a respite for all four of us from the troubles that beset my family the rest of the year when we were at home in Detroit. My father was in his element, doing work that he loved and too engrossed to get sidetracked into fighting with my mother. Besides, we had our meals in the huge dining hall filled with campers and staff, our cabin was in earshot of a women's dorm up the hill, and these benign social facts of community life helped to keep us on good behavior. Camp was the only place I can remember my mother being happy, as she spent her days at the waterfront sunbathing and chatting with other staff wives. And at camp, Jimmy kept his hands off me.

That summer of 1962 had started with Jimmy bringing David out with us for the first few days before the campers would arrive. Neither of us had ever had a friend visit before. I was aware that Jimmy was gay (not the word we used then); I knew this because my parents knew and talked about it freely in front of me. But it didn't occur to me, during the time his friend was with us at camp, that David might be his boyfriend. The living presence of a same-sex relationship, the tenderness and pain of longing and rejection between two boys—all of us together in one small cabin—was beyond my imagination.

David was a pleasant guy, polite to my parents and nicer to me than I had any reason to expect. He and I practiced golf shots on the vacant athletic field, and he

reassured me that I was hitting the ball a good hundred yards with my seven iron. I didn't see anything weird, in any sense, happening between him and my brother. Just the opposite: David's entire visit seemed refreshingly normal. Jimmy, who had gone through high school without any apparent social connections, finally had a friend, a regular guy. Then it was time for David to leave, and Jimmy drove him to Detroit.

When Jimmy returned to camp, not having crashed his car into a tree, he went with our father to the back room of the cabin. They stayed there for a long time. They had to be talking, though I couldn't hear anything. Finally, Dad came out and told my mother and me that he would be taking Jimmy to Ann Arbor to go into the hospital. I don't know if my brother actively agreed to this, having reached a place of desperation from which he wanted help, or if he only acquiesced, feeling he had no other choice. Jimmy wasn't saying anything; I had never seen him so subdued.

My mother, in tears, started gathering his things to pack. She found a marker and as she wrote Jimmy's name on the collars of his shirts, the waistbands of his pants and underwear, she kept saying that she was ruining his clothes.

My brother wrote me bland letters from the hospital. The Tigers were collapsing again in the heat of the summer; did I think they could rally? If not Detroit, did any team stand a chance to catch the Yankees? What was going on at camp? Would I be swimming across the lake? Or had I already? Nothing about what it was like being in the hospital, or how he was coping with having had a breakdown. No acknowledgment of the dissonance between these friendly, superficial letters and the long years when he had terrorized me.

I wasn't happy to be hearing from Jimmy every week or ten days, but I took it in stride. My overriding feeling was relief to have him out of my daily life. I wrote back, short dutiful letters, matching his tone, despairing of the Tigers, answering his questions about life at camp. And for me, underneath that dissonance between our vanilla correspondence and a history I was desperate to leave behind, there was something I recognized: Jimmy liked me. I always understood this, a barely articulated knowledge from which I tried to shield myself as best I could. All those many times that Jimmy pinned me on the floor and clawed at my stomach, it was a wildly distorted act of

affection. There was a reason he wrote to me and not to our parents.

Two and a half years later—after he would get out of the hospital, enroll at U of M, drop out after one semester, and spend the better part of a year sitting in his room at home rocking back and forth while he listened to music on his phonograph; after he would enroll at Wayne, and drop out two semesters later; after he would be called in by the police for questioning following complaints that he was sitting in his car during early morning hours looking into people's homes with his telescope—at age twenty Jimmy would place a collect call to me from somewhere in Ohio, saying he had left the state and not to worry about him. And forty years later, following decades of adult life in which we had almost nothing to do with each other, Jimmy and I would again correspond, this time while he was serving fifteen years in a Michigan prison for child molesting. He would sign each of his letters, "Love, Jimmy."

Homosexual was one word we used for my brother's attraction to boys. But my parents, both of whom were social workers, also referred to it as Jimmy's symptom. This reflected a conventional wisdom among mental health practitioners, taken to be a kind of enlightenment, that homosexuality did not make a boy like Jimmy bad; it made him sick.

It was a distinction without a difference, given the stigma attached to both sexual "perversion" and mental illness. But in my mother's case, it was hardly even a distinction: she had been calling Jimmy bad for as long as I could remember, out loud and using that exact word, if not about his sexuality then in regard to many other things about him. He was disobedient, causing scene after scene. He was bizarre, engaged with imaginary playmates, the Pookeeboo Man and the Klockaboong Man, long past the stage of early childhood when this could be considered appropriate. He embarrassed her in public, for example by asking waitresses personal questions or quizzing them about obscure facts when we went to restaurants. To my mother these were devastating events, and later in the car, or at home during yet another incident, she screamed at Jimmy that he was throwing his life away, that he would grow up to dig ditches. During Jimmy's senior year in high school, my mother was called in to speak to his guidance counselor after he had written the lyrics of a rock song, "Mashed Potatoes," on a math

test. When she got home she was in a kind of frenzy, shrieking at my brother, mortified that a child of hers could do such a thing.

Mom talked openly to me about Jimmy's problems. She said she discovered his homosexuality by reading his journal when she was cleaning his room, also during his senior year. Growing up in my family I took things to be normal—like my mother cleaning the room of an able bodied seventeen-year-old—that later I would see as signs of dysfunction. Even at the time, though, it seemed creepy to me that my mother had read Jimmy's journal. But she persuaded herself that he left it out in the open because he wanted her to read it. It was his way, she said, of letting her know about his symptom.

The closest town to camp was Pinckney. Its business district consisted of one long block with angle parking. There was a general store; a drug store with a soda fountain, a pinball machine, and racks of comic books; a Gulf gas station with a red coke machine; and La Rosa's bar, where my father took me sometimes and we would get individual-sized pizzas, not slices but small circles topped with pepperoni.

We were sitting at a table at La Rosa's a couple of weeks after Jimmy was hospitalized, my father having a beer with his pizza, me drinking a coke, when he asked me if I wanted to see a therapist.

"Why?" I asked.

"You know, Steven," my father said. "With Jimmy in the hospital, I thought—well." He took a sip of his beer, put the glass down, then raised both hands, palms up. "I wondered if it would be helpful for you, to have someone to talk to."

"About Jimmy being in the hospital?"

He nodded, his eyes regarding me from behind his glasses with kindness I could not miss, even in the semi-darkness of the bar. There was a Johnny Cash song, "Walk the Line," an oldie even then, playing on the jukebox.

"I'm fine, Dad," I said.

He said okay, he just had wanted to check and to let me know this was an option. If I felt differently at any time I could tell him. I said sure, but I didn't think I would feel differently. And that was the end of it.

I took my father's offer as a genuine expression of concern, which it surely was, though I was a little taken aback that he couldn't see how Jimmy being in the hospital and out of my life was *great* for me—almost to the point of finding the conversation humorous. It was so easy to see my father's blind spot, and impossible to see my own. I had no clue what a good thing it might have been for me to talk to a therapist about my brother—not because he was in the hospital, but because of everything that had happened before, the vast swath of damage he had inflicted on me for most of my conscious memory.

There was a kind of conspiracy between my father and me to believe I was fundamentally okay. Neither of us could see beyond the immediate question of how I was affected by having a brother in a mental hospital. We explored the terrain of surface wounds, a comfort zone for each of us. It didn't occur to him or me that there might be internal bleeding.

Several years later, when I was in college hundreds of miles away from Detroit, I would start making efforts to understand my brother's life from his point of view, a project which has continued episodically ever since. In college, I wrote a play with a character based on Jimmy whose parents view him as sick because he speaks in poetry. In my thirties, I would spend a few years working on an unfinished novel in which the protagonist is a reindeer, born into a human family, his true nature invisible to almost everyone despite the antlers sticking out of his head. Only his mother, in her most desperate moments, acknowledges his antlers, his hooves, his impossible body; she sends him to a psychiatrist, and eventually puts him in the hospital to be cured of being a reindeer. Just as Jimmy was put into psychiatric care to be cured of being gay.

Who would my brother have become if he had grown up in a family and a society that had embraced healthy gay sexuality? The answer is that I don't know. Homophobia must have played an important role in distorting Jimmy's sexuality. After his debacle with David, Jimmy would become sexually oriented to younger boys, I believe, because of the safety and sense of control he got from his ability to manipulate their acquiescence, as well as the sheer physical attraction. But Jimmy's own humanity was crushed by many forces—a social intolerance of difference that included but went beyond

homophobia; a mother who placed impossible demands on him to conform to her desire for a child he could not be, and who consequently made him an object of her rage. It's true that I was raised by the same mother, with very different results. But I had the advantage of being designated the good child, in maximum contrast to the bad older brother. Being good imposed its own costs, but nothing like the burdens suffered by my brother.

If I think of Jimmy being a victim—of homophobia, of a mother who crushed him—as one theme in a fugue, then the second theme, the stark counterpoint, is the incalculable harm he has done. When Jimmy was finally arrested in 2000 for fondling two boys, the police searched his apartment and found bags of boys' underwear, more than a thousand recordings and photos of his sexual encounters with boys, pictures on his walls of adolescent and adult males whipping him, which he acknowledged having paid them to do. These monstrous acts, the suffering my brother caused others and himself, the number of lives he touched, the cascading effects of his abuse: these things make his life an excruciating story about chains of violence, how suffering passes down and passes through so many people who stand in its path, how it can spread like wildfire. Within the broad and awful sweep of Jimmy's acts of abuse and manipulation, there is a long string of personal stories that I don't know but can imagine from my own experience. Stories of boys who are now men and harbor secrets and shame. Men who carry deep and private violations, who are hounded by unbearable feelings which in some of them undoubtedly erupt and cause further damage. Men who were lured by my brother into sadistic acts, a descent into their worst selves.

Then there are my feelings, the third part of the fugue, feelings I've been playing hide and seek with all my life. I have tried to escape or resolve my feelings by leaving home, by taking Jimmy's point of view, by analyzing how the same person can be victim and perpetrator, by going to therapy, by not thinking about my brother and attending to my own life. For all these efforts, inside me there is still a little boy lying pinned on the floor under the big body that I can never budge, helpless against the onslaught of Jimmy's fingers, his relentless will to dominate me, my world reduced to the burning pain in my gut. Decades after I moved away, when I was back in Detroit for one of my infrequent visits with my family, I was standing next to Jimmy and found myself shaking

with rage; the years collapsed, I could feel him all over me and all I wanted was to get him off my body. Becoming a father released an onslaught of feelings tracing back to my childhood abuse that left me barely able to function. I still feel shame at never having said no when Jimmy wanted to wrestle, at having allowed myself to be duped over and over again by his promises to let me win. Now, in my sixties, I work at accepting what seems obviously true, that these feelings are here to stay, that I can't outrun or outflank them, that my task is to find ways to hold and be with the history that lives in me.

When I was a little boy, our house had a vestibule with a coat closet, and on the closet door was a full-length mirror. Sometimes when I had nothing to do and no one else was around, I would stand in front of the mirror and imagine that the boy I saw was not me. He looked a lot like me but he was someone else, standing in the vestibule to a different house. If I moved all the way to the wall on my left and turned my whole body at an angle, I could glimpse into the living room of that other house. I would try to crane myself to see more but there was always a limit. Somewhere in the other house lived a different family, which must include a different brother, always beyond my reach.

Jimmy and I corresponded for several years after he went to prison. It was something I undertook with hugely mixed feelings. How to strike a tenable balance between some kind of compassion for my brother and an allegiance to the vulnerable part of myself that still carried wounds Jimmy inflicted when we were children? I don't think I was ever able to adequately answer that question.

The first letters reminded me of our correspondence when Jimmy was in the hospital in 1962—they were mostly chatter. Jimmy described the daily prison regimen, but said nothing about what it meant to him, emotionally, psychologically, to be there. Eventually I asked what he thought about the things he had done that led to his imprisonment. He acknowledged having made mistakes but in the next breath dismissed it, writing that gaining insight in prison is like locking the barn door after the horse is out.

By this point it had become important, maybe necessary, for me to communicate honestly to Jimmy about what he had done to me. I wrote him a long letter in which I described how he had abused me, and that he had done this many times over a period

of years. I told him that he had injured me psychologically in ways I had never fully recovered from. I said that I thought he had also wounded himself, even more deeply than me, by treating me so badly. I told him I believed he had the capacity to learn from mistakes and use the learning to heal old wounds.

In Jimmy's response, he said he didn't remember events from our childhood as well as I did, though he didn't deny or dispute my account. Then he wrote, "Sorry if I overdid it." That was it, five words, a throwaway line. I felt like I'd run into a stone wall. It didn't surprise me, if anything it was what I had expected, and still I was furious.

I don't think that committing monstrous acts makes someone a monster. I believe there is a core of humanity in my brother. But it's also true that I don't know how to reach it.

On Saturday afternoons during the summer of 1962, my parents would drive to Ann Arbor, twenty miles from camp, to visit Jimmy and meet with a hospital social worker. For days after each visit my mother would berate the social worker—that vile woman, she called her, the nerve of her to suggest there was something my mother might have done to cause Jimmy's problems. "I was nothing but good to that boy," she would say over and over again, to my father, to me, to the air.

Most of the Saturdays I stayed at our cabin. I would listen to a Tigers game on the radio, or I would read. I enjoyed the quiet of the surrounding woods and the time to myself. But as dusk would gather and my parents had still not returned, I found myself anxious that they had gotten into an accident and were dead. My father was a careless driver, but I didn't worry about him crashing the car at other times. Only on those Saturdays. I sat in our cabin holding an image of myself as an orphan. What would my life be then? I didn't really believe this would happen, but I couldn't shake the fear. I waited, straining to hear the sound of my father's car. Then they would pull up, and I would let out a breath, and my life would go on.

Proxy

by Paul Juhasz

A father is the world writ small.

On a cold, clear winter weekend morning, of the kind pictured on postcards and calendars, Derrick called to see if I had any plans.

I didn't.

"Why don't you come over and bring your bike. There's a park near me with some trails and a pond. There's usually someone playing pond hockey, so bring your skates and stick."

"Sounds great. See you in a bit."

I hung up and went to ask my father for a ride.

He was, as always, lukewarm about any plan involving Derrick. To counteract these nascent reservations, I told him we planned on playing hockey, assuming his love for the sport would trump any misgivings he might have.

This turned out to be a tactical miscalculation on my part.

Fixing me with a piercing stare, he asked, "What are you *really* going to do?"

Puzzled, I repeated the plans Derrick and I had made.

"Yeah, right," my father scoffed. "Try again."

"What?" I asked, spreading my hands in the universal sign of befuddlement.

"I don't think *hockey* is Derrick's sport," he dismissed.

In the summer of 1985, it was decided by whomever decides such things that it was no longer financially feasible for the small borough next to my town to operate a junior and senior high school. Thus, the borough was subsumed into the surrounding school districts and as a result, the North Haven class of 1989, as it entered its eighth-grade year, ballooned by about two dozen students.

The only ones I really interacted with was a somewhat shady triumvirate named Paul, Jason, and Derrick. All three boys hailed from a section of town that bordered on New Haven, and thus they had the exotic appeal of inner-city kids to the student body,

while being tainted with a suspect (for a middle class, predominantly white, demographic) urban past for the faculty.

I quickly made friends with Paul, who insisted we shared a bond as “name brothers.” Unfortunately, he was the first to confirm the fears and suspicions of the faculty. On a weekend school trip to Martha’s Vineyard, he was caught shoplifting and, in a desperate attempt to escape, punched a police officer. A rumor (later confirmed) quickly circulated amongst the rest of us that this was not his first run-in with the cops, and thus Paul faded out of my story to seek the educational merits of the Lincoln Academy for Wayward Boys.

Jason was clearly headed down the same path. He would regale us with accounts of his half-dozen or so sexual conquests (most of them confirmed directly or indirectly by the other party), some of which I now recognize toyed with the definition of date rape. He was in no less than four fights and had been suspended twice. He narrowly avoided getting busted for selling weed in the boys’ locker room, and to impress some girls (or perhaps because word got back to him that it was my big mouth that started a chain of events that led to him nearly getting busted for selling weed in the boys’ locker room), he reenacted a scene from some horror movie by dragging his plastic unbreakable comb across my throat, drawing blood and leaving a gash that was visible for days after.

And this was all in the first two months of the school year.

Even though he had been friends with the other two since first grade, Derrick was different. He rarely got in trouble (although he was not in the least adverse to some illicit alcohol or a bag of Jason’s wares). While not terribly successful academically, he at least seemed to understand what school expected of him. Perhaps because his father and both older brothers had spent years working the night shifts at local factories, he had a matter-of-fact worldliness and maturity about him, as if he knew what his niche in life was fated to be, had accepted it, and was simply waiting until it was his time to grab a punch card and begin a life of hard labor. While most of us rode the adolescent wave of emotional turmoil and soaring dreams, Derrick kept us grounded with his stoical pragmatism. Many interpreted this as pessimism and found Derrick depressing; I found

it comforting, as if when around Derrick, I was excused from having the goals and future plans adults expected me to have. With Derrick, I could just be.

My father, however, while never outright blocking me from it, preferred that I not hang out with Derrick or invite him over to our house.

"Why don't you call someone else instead," he would frequently respond when I would ask if Derrick could come over, "like Jason."

"I like Jason," he would respond to my unasked question. "He plays baseball. I remember him from last season."

So the fact that he supplemented his income by dealing pot, that he was a burgeoning rapist, or that he tried to slit my throat with a comb, all of this, in my father's mind, was trumped by the fact that he played baseball.

I was always confused why he would prefer the nascent criminality of Jason to the calm, placidity of Derrick.

Of course, I understand it perfectly now.

Derrick, you see, was black.

I was able to overcome my father's myopic, stereotype-fueled sense of what sports black people could play (although I did not recognize that this was the issue at the time) through a sustained program of wheedling and cajoling. But still, as we drove over to Derrick's house, I could tell he wasn't thrilled.

For all the inner-city associations Derrick had placed on him by others, his house was not actually inner city. He lived in a run-down and forgotten residential niche engulfed by an industrial complex separating North Haven from New Haven. But his neighborhood was far from the hygienic, well-maintained, and hermetically-sealed slice of suburbia most North Haven residents enjoyed. Chickens roamed the front yard at one neighbor's place, while a screen door frantically clung to its frame by one hinge at another. In the midst of this disrepair, Derrick's house stood out, an older home desperately struggling to maintain a noble decency amidst such advancing squalor.

I think this also upset my father. I believe he would have much rather preferred Derrick live at the chicken house or the house with the clichéd car on cinder blocks. If

he was irresolute at the beginning of the drive over to Derrick's, he was downright grumpy as I left the car.

"I'll pick you up at 2:30," he yelled as I grabbed my bike, skates, and stick from the backseat.

I stopped for a moment and gave him a confused look. This was another strange development. He never gave me hard deadlines when he drove me to other friends' houses. Typically, I got a cursory "Call me when you want to be picked up," before he drove off, already mentally engaged in whatever activity he had lined up next.

Perhaps I should have collected, pieced together, and heeded these early warning signs, but I didn't. Instead, I rode through the brisk winter air with Derrick across backyards, service roads, and scraps of evergreen woods until we reached the park. There was indeed a pick-up hockey game, so we laced up and played. My father's racial assumptions notwithstanding, Derrick proved a perfectly adequate hockey player. After a few games, Derrick smoked a cigarette on the pond's frozen banks with a few other kids, then we rode over to a nearby Cumberland Farms for a post-game meal of Honey Buns, Bugles, and Mountain Dew, with the now-extinct Bubble Burger for dessert. Then we rode back to Derrick's house.

We were so frozen by the time we got back that the tepid water with which I washed my hands was scalding. Derrick's older brother, Donnie, insisted we have some hot chocolate to warm up. As we were alternately drinking and using the mugs as hand-warmers, Donnie turned to me and asked, "What was your name again?"

After I responded, he continued, "I think someone was here asking for you."

I looked over at the clock on the kitchen range and noted that it was 3:45. Muttering a mildly annoyed "Ah, crap," I asked to use the phone and called my father, not looking forward to the lecture I assumed was coming.

I barely got out a, "Hey, Dad," when he cut me off with a growled "I'll be right there." Before I could say anything else, he hung up.

Still, I wasn't too concerned. I had been late before and had been forced to listen to lectures on the importance of responsibility and punctuality, so I figured that that was what was in store for me this time too.

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The first indication that this was something different, that what was coming my way was not a product of my father's annoyance but of his fury, was the fact that when he arrived at Derrick's house, he did not come to the door. Eschewing the driveway to pull up at the curb instead, he sat in the car, both hands gripping the wheel as he stared straight out the windshield. My bike was jammed in across the back seat, so he had clearly gotten out of the car, but for whatever reason, he chose not to come to the front door to get me. In fact, I don't really know how long he was waiting there; only a serendipitous glance outside by Donnie let me know he was there at all.

"Is that your dad?" he asked.

After glancing over his shoulder, I confirmed it was.

We all watched him for a few moments, expecting something, a wave or a honk, some indication that this was a normal adult picking up a normal son at a normal friend's house. When it seemed clear that nothing of the sort was likely to happen, I headed for my shoes and then the front door.

The previous summer I had worked in my father's factory. He had long since left a cushy job at a scrap metal conglomerate and, bit by the American entrepreneur spirit, used most of his retirement fund to start up his own precious metals recovery plant, and he hired me to work on the factory floor pouring various compounds of molten metals into fifty or 100-pound ingots.

The air was opaque with the fumes given off by the smelting metals, and temperatures at the furnaces frequently passed 120 degrees, making for a day of sweltering, physically-draining labor. The other factory workers were all Jamaican immigrants with varying levels of English fluency, and their amalgamated cacophony of Creole and broken English completed the picture of what I imagine one of the levels of Hell looks and feels like.

After my first day at work, my father called me into his office perched above the factory floor, which granted him a god-like view of his impish, dark-skinned factory hands. He told me to sit and I gladly did, completely used up from the day's work, muscles aching where I did not know I had muscles. As I was trying to recover from the physical cost of the day, my father said, "I want to show you something."

He then called out to the floor below.

“Ernie! Come up here!”

Almost before the order faded, Ernie was standing in the office. He must have run across the floor and up the stairs to get here that quickly; no easy task after a ten-hour shift on the factory floor.

“Ernie, take off your shirt,” my father directed him.

“Sir?” a confused Ernie replied.

“Take off your shirt,” my father repeated. “I want to show Paul something.”

As if suddenly in on the plan, Ernie replied with an enthusiastic “Oh, yes sir,” and complied, revealing a staggeringly developed chest, carved with canyons and mesas of muscle mass. It was as if his chest was chiseled out of the very material he spent his days pouring into ingots. The smile on Ernie’s face left little doubt that he was fully aware of the impression this muscularity had.

My father walked around Ernie, beaming with pride.

“You see this?” he asked. “Impressive, isn’t it? Ernie, tell him how old you are.”

“I’m sixty-two, sir.”

“Sixty-two, Paul! Sixty-two,” my father could barely contain the satisfaction the entire scene was giving him. “Look at those pecs,” he added, slapping his hand against the solidity of Ernie’s chest. Ernie’s smile, impossibly, grew even wider.

“OK, Ernie, that’s it. You can go.”

“Hey, Dad,” I began, sliding into the passenger seat.

“Don’t you say a word!”

Still not believing he was seriously angry, I ignored this initial piece of advice. “But Dad . . .” I countered.

Through gritted teeth, he once again cut me off.

“Not. One. Fucking. Word.”

And so, I didn’t say a word.

He, however, said many.

“Do you know what it’s like,” he asked, “to knock on a strange door and be told by the man who answers that not only are you not there, but he doesn’t even know who

you are? I had to stand there and be told 'I don't know your boy.'! Do you have any idea what that's like? To be told by that kind of man that he doesn't know my son? I had no idea where you were, if you were okay, which house you were even in."

While I could not say so, I found these positions rather ridiculous. He knew which house I was in because he dropped me off. Why should he fear for my safety when he knew where we planned to go and what we planned to do? If he was so worried about me, why didn't he drive over to the park and try to find us? And I could only assume "the strange man" in question was either Donnie or Derrick's father, and since both were still sleeping when Derrick and I left, it made perfect sense that they did not know who I was. All of this, I thought, should have been quite apparent to my father.

But enjoined to silence as I was, there was no way to interrupt the diarrheic flow of logically questionable rhetoric, I did the next best thing—I zoned out, escaping into a world where I was vaguely aware that things resembling words were being spewed at me while I occupied my mind with more interesting matters. I started, inspired no doubt by the day's pursuits, with a quick review of the current roster of my beloved Philadelphia Flyers, identifying whom I would trade if I was in control of the team. I then moved on to an impromptu list of words that sound dirty, but really aren't ("pumpernickel," "bumper pool," "English muffin"), before closing with a quick assessment of what I thought some of the hotter girls in my school probably looked like naked.

I was interrupted by a particularly loaded phrase of my father's: "So, this is what we're going to do."

This was a phrase he had used for years to transition from the instructional portion of a lecture to the punishment phase. I think he adopted the first-person plural to gild whatever he had in mind with an *espirt de corps*, as if whatever punitive measures he selected were a group decision and something, that while unpleasant and inconvenient, just had to be endured by the whole group, which, of course, was just me.

When I was six or so, my family took a trip to Disney World, and at the airport, I remained with my father after he dropped off the rest of our group at Departures, and then walked to the gate with him. As we negotiated the ever-shifting expanse of people

and luggage, we were approached by a Hari Krishna. Much of what he said to my father was beyond me, but I do recall him saying he would like to present us with a flower and a gift, offering me a candy cane. Although my father did not stop, he politely slowed down his pace. “Keep the flower,” I remember him saying, but he made no objection to the man handing me the candy cane.

As we left the spiritual proselytizer, I was in high spirits, having scored some free candy early in the morning. I was admittedly a tad bit uneasy about the fact that it was late spring and thus not exactly prime Christmas-themed treat season, but if my father was not concerned about a stranger with a straggly cat tail dangling from the back of his head handing me five-month-old candy, then I sure as hell wasn’t either.

Before we got to our gate, we were hit by another solicitor, this one a well-dressed young black male.

“Excuse me, sir,” he began, stepping in front of my father, who had no choice but to stop. “How are you today?”

Perhaps because we were within sight of the gate with ample time before our plane boarded, my father responded, with a slightly bemused “I am fine. Thank you.”

“Wonderful. I am collecting donations for the United Negro College Fund today and . . .”

“N—,” my father began.

Anticipating the coming rejection, the man quickly changed tactics. “And what a lovely young man you have with you. Here you are, young man,” he said, handing me a beautiful, inviting, red paper-wrapped, cherry-flavored Tootsie Pop.

Two pieces of free candy, all before nine a.m.! I had no idea what to expect from the Magic Kingdom, but at this point the airport seemed magical to me.

The man turned his attention once again to my father.

“Now, sir, I know you want the very best for your son, and I’m sure that includes wanting the very best education he can get. And I know you feel, as so many other generous Americans do, that young boys and girls of color deserve the *very same* educational opportunities as your son.”

I glanced up at my father, expecting to see him confirm what the young man so clearly took as a self-evident truth. The bemused look was gone, replaced by one of

pure malice. Grabbing the lollipop from my hand, he smashed it into the man's chest, growling "Keep your fucking candy." Seizing my hand, he pulled me toward the gate without a backward glance at how his "donation" was received.

Naturally, I asked why I couldn't keep the lollipop. He grumbled something about how taking candy from strangers was dangerous.

"So, this is what we're going to do. When we get home, you are to go directly to your room and take down your pants. I will be in there shortly to give you a spanking."

Ignoring his earlier injunction for silence, I blurted out "A spanking? I'm fourteen years old!"

"I don't give a shit if you're fourteen or forty-two," he replied. "If I want to give you a spanking, I'm for damn sure going to give you a spanking!"

Having now passed the age of forty-two, I realize this last claim is just silly. I'm quite confident that if he tried it now, I could take him. At the time, though, I just thought this was a bizarre idea. Not bizarre in the sense that he used the phrase "If I *want* to give you a spanking,"—a declaration that would cause any decent Freudian to reach for a notebook while nodding knowingly—but bizarre in the sense of "How in the hell did we get here?" The punishment, from my perspective, just did not seem to fit the crime.

The remainder of the drive was spent in deafening silence. Once we pulled into the driveway, my father said, "You go directly to your room and get ready; I'll be in there shortly."

Gradually recognizing that he fully intended to go through with this, I went to my room and waited.

And waited.

And waited some more.

While I was waiting, my phone rang. It was Derrick, calling to see if everything was "cool."

"Your dad seemed to be acting weird," he explained.

"Tell me about it. Do you know what . . ."

In the very definition of "unfortunate timing," that was the moment my father came into the room, preceded by the scent of Scotch.

“Who are you talking to?” he demanded.

I realize now that things would have been better for me if I said I had started calling the 1-900 phone sex numbers again (an issue I would really rather not discuss), but I wasn’t thinking fast enough for that at the moment.

“Derrick,” I blurted out.

His eyes seem to glaze over a bit and then he drawled, “Hang up the phone.”

I started to comply, but I feared taking my eyes off him. I wanted every nanosecond of advanced notice I could get to prepare for whatever he had in mind—for I now fully realized that this was for real. Because of this, the process of hanging up the phone was sloppy and, apparently, too slow for my father’s taste.

He helped by grabbing me by one shoulder and forcefully spinning me around, then pushing me over the edge of the bed in what is known worldwide as “assuming the position.”

And then the spanking began.

My dad only managed a few smacks before his arm got tired or his hand got too sore. Whichever the reason, he quickly decided the spanking was not going as well as he had hoped and called in the big guns. Even though he had never used it on me before, I intuited what the crackling sound of leather sliding over denim meant. And the subsequent slicing pain, followed immediately by a sharp, cracking sound, confirmed those intuitions.

When I was nine, my father and I were driving down the Merritt Parkway to a youth hockey game in some rich New York-wannabe western Connecticut town when he noticed he needed gas. He was already in a foul mood when we pulled into the next Mobil station.

I think his disgruntlement was mostly caused by the embarrassment of looking unprepared. My father liked to present (in front of me particularly) the image of complete control; he extolled the virtues of preparation and responsibility, and missing something as basic as making sure you had enough gas to get where you’re going before you set off I’m sure caused a fair amount of mortification.

Usually in these situations, he would deflect any blame onto me, transferring his self-imposed humiliation into a lecture on how I was culpable for this unfortunate and regrettable lapse in preparation. But in this case, he had no such option, for even the most self-deluding excuse cannot be founded upon the idea that when a nine-year-old borrows the car, he needs to remember to return it with a full tank of gas.

In the early 1980s, the gas stations along the Merritt were still full service, so my father was able to channel some of his frustration at the situation by ignoring the humanity of the approaching attendant. Staring straight through the windshield, he barked a terse command of "Fill it" before the attendant even cleared the rear passenger door. Forced to cut off his routine greeting, the attendant could only get out a garbled "Goo—yassir" before spinning on his heels to begin the process of feeding the car. Something in the tone or style of the voice must have caught my father's attention, though, as he spent the filling process spying on the attendant through the side-view mirror, breaking his concentration only once to glance at the dashboard clock and complain about how long it was taking. This seemed unfair to me, as this pumping the car full of gas seemed to be taking as long as every other pumping the car full of gas, but I did not say anything, shamefully thankful that someone else was the target of his petty frustrations.

Then we heard the hollow thump indicating that the pump had shut itself off.

Then we heard it again.

And then, a few seconds later, again.

And then one more time.

I had had enough experience at gas stations to know what the attendant was doing; he was playing the game "Hit the number," when you try to coax the pump to stop on the bill amount you prefer, usually an even dollar amount, but sometimes to match the exact amount of cash you had on you at the time. My father played this game quite frequently and I can recall vividly one time when he was caught without his wallet and euphorically matched the gas total to the $3.27 he had in the change compartment.

So I was as surprised as the attendant when my father growled "Don't ever fucking top-off my tank again" as he handed his credit card through the window.

"I didn't mean anything by it, sir. I was just trying . . ."

“I know what you ‘were trying,’” my father cut him off, the last two words offered in a mocking impression of the halting speech pattern the attendant had.

“You were trying to run up the bill on me,” my father accused.

My father then violently shoved the clipboard and completed paperwork back at the attendant, adding, in lieu of gratuity, these parting words:

“You fucking nigger!”

As he peeled out of the station in either anger or with the bravado that often masks fear, I looked through the rear-view mirror in time to see the attendant throw the clipboard down onto the pavement, sending the paperwork he would need to submit so the station’s owner could collect on the sale twirling out across the highway to be churned into irrelevance by an endless stream of automobiles.

I had always prided myself for the noble, if not heroic, manner in which I met the few, more age-appropriate, spankings I had received as a younger child, stoically accepting each whack of the hand while denying my father the satisfaction of seeing me try to squirm out of the way of the next blow.

But against the belt, no such stoicism was possible.

After the first two strikes, my father had to use his off-hand to hold down my thrashing body as he continued to lash out with the belt. My reptilian brain was on full-fledged escape mode and eventually I slid off the foot of the bed. My dad, consumed within the moment, used a foot to pin me down by the shoulder before continuing to strike. As I rolled about on the floor, I caught a glimpse of him in the floor length mirror I had hanging behind my bedroom door. He was twirling the belt above his head like some demented do Indiana Jones.

With me on the floor, the arrangement of the room furnishings now made my ass a more difficult target; that or my father was not satisfied with the force he could generate with the altered arm angle necessary to whip the belt past the corner of the bed. After one last attempt, he tossed aside the belt.

But this did not mean my beating was over.

It just meant the kicking began.

As I desperately tried to find an orientation of the fetal position that would protect my battered ribs while not unduly exposing my impossibly sore ass to the unrelenting assault of my father's work boot, a most incongruous series of thoughts occurred to me.

I thought once again about the scene with Ernie.

Once he was dismissed from my father's office, an insinuation of an object lesson haunted the silence. Only, there didn't seem to be a clear lesson. My father didn't seem to be trying to make a point, or if he was, he was being far too subtle. In fact, the scene did not really even have the father-imparting-wisdom-to-his-son feel. The display didn't seem designed to imply, "Here's what happens when you work hard" nor did it seem a more generic lesson on the merits of physical exercise and its connection to aging well.

Instead, the whole episode was like a man proudly showing off one of his more prized possessions. Re-situating the principle characters into the 1850s, it would not have seemed out of place in the least if my father had me inspect Ernie's teeth.

As the blows continued, I thought of that gas station attendant and the lost credit card receipt.

I, of course, have no idea what, if anything, happened to him because of this (although, with the arbitrary significance that children frequently attach to random events, I did worry about it from time to time in the years that followed) but I do know what happened to me because of it:

Approximately four years later, while my father was savagely beating me, I would recall this moment and have an epiphany:

I think my father may be racist.

Of course, I realize now that the evidence was conclusive, but it hadn't registered until that moment. When my father had excused his bigotry by asserting that he "wasn't prejudiced against black people but against lazy people; it just happens that in my experience blacks tend to be lazy," or by insisting that "some of his friends were black," I had accepted this as sage refutation of any charge of racism offered against him. It was only as I grew older, and gained a greater depth of life experience, that I realized just how pathetically cliché he was being with these feeble attempts to gild his intolerance.

Finally, I thought once again of that young man at the airport, and of my father grabbing the lollipop from my hands and forcibly slamming it into the man's chest.

The mistake the man made was, I think, similar to the one Ralph Ellison depicts in *Invisible Man*, where the narrator runs afoul of a group of white men when he dares suggest the goal for blacks is not just "social responsibility" (an idea with which his white audience does not seemingly have a problem) but "social equality" (an idea to which his white audience responds with much hostility). When the young man was simply asking for donations to help black students pay for college, my father found this a charmingly amusing topic; but as soon as he made the implication that there should be equal rights to equal opportunities, my father's sense of racial propriety was offended, and the young man's petition was dead on arrival.

I think something similar was driving my beating. My friendship with Derrick represented a threat to my father. By ignoring his passive aggressive efforts to steer me toward alternate friends, I was unknowingly rejecting the fundamental assumptions upon which he built a portion of his world. Since he styled himself a decent man (and his bigotry aside, he was), he did not outright forbid me from playing with him, nor did he directly challenge my innate view of Derrick as an equal.

Yet over the months of my friendship with Derrick, the tension was building. Whatever internal checks his basic goodness provided ultimately proved insufficient when he had to go humiliate himself in front of Derrick's father, for I have no doubt that to humble himself by asking a strange black man—a poor, working class black man at that—for help with something so personal as finding his son must have been a humiliation for him.

His internal checks overwhelmed, he had to have some type of release, and while, as a functioning member of a civilized society he couldn't get his release by beating Derrick or Derrick's father, he could find it by beating me in the privacy of my own bedroom.

I say in the privacy of my own bedroom, but that turned out not to be the case. Although neither of us noticed it at the time, when my father forcefully spun me around

and pushed me down over the bed, I was unable to fully comply with his previous demand to hang up the phone; I only got the handset partially on the receiver.

As a result, Derrick heard the entire attack. At some point, he got his brother Donnie on the phone to listen in as well. I found this out a few moments after my father, his sense of ethnic hierarchy satisfied, had left the room. As I lay on the floor trying to catch my breath, wheezing through my bruised ribs, I heard Derrick's muffled voice call out, "Paul?"

He had to call out a couple more times before I was able to understand what was happening and pick up the receiver.

"Are you ok? Do you want me to call someone?"

"No, I'll be all right."

There followed a silence, as neither one of us knew how to address what had just happened.

Fortunately for us, Donnie did.

Piercing through our collective awkward silence, he did an impromptu impression of what he just heard.

"O, God, Dad, please stop beating me! I swear I'll hate the darkies, too, just please stop hitting me."

Using an exaggerated squawking voice for my role, Donnie went on. "O, dear Jesus, stop kicking me. I won't be friends wit da niggas; I swears I won't be friends wit da niggas."

Despite ourselves, and despite the pain it caused, both Derrick and I were soon rolling with laughter.

While Donnie used humor to address my pain and embarrassment, Derrick ultimately opted for a different tactic.

The next day seemed normal between us. He gave me a big smile when he saw me in homeroom, then told me that Donnie had decided, in light of my sacrifice for the cause, to make me an honorary black man.

Derrick said he planned to make up at T-shirt for me indicating such, but nothing ever came of that.

But in the days, weeks, and months that followed, Derrick subtly and gradually began to talk to me less and less until one day I discovered an unbridgeable divide had been constructed and that I had lost my friend.

For years, I assumed that Derrick rejected my friendship out of disgust or fear of my father's explosive form of racism.

But then, years later, re-enacting the traditional pilgrimage of all freshman in college, I ran into him at our high school's Thanksgiving's Day football game. After the scripted—and therefore comfortable—exchange of greetings and pleasantries, there was once again an awkward pause.

I decided to fill it by plunging right in.

"Hey, Derrick, I'm sorry my old man scared you off. But you know, just because he is what he is, that doesn't make me him."

Derrick looked away, staring at the horizon silently for a few moments, before slightly shaking his head and responding,

"That's not what happened. I didn't stop talking to you because I thought you were like that too. But what I heard on the phone …," he trailed off, was silent again for a beat or two, before finishing "I didn't want you to ever go through that again. And I was afraid if I was your friend, you would."

Life is funny; even when Derrick was no longer my friend, he was one of the best I ever had.

And he didn't even play baseball.

The Quilter

by Joanne Passet

My great grandmother spent forty-six years in the Toledo State Hospital. In the only picture I have of her, Elizabeth Ross Frank stands in a grove of pine trees on the hospital grounds. Taken in the 1930s, it shows her wearing a slightly rumpled long-sleeved dress sewn from dotted fabric, a few wisps of silver hair escaping a pragmatic bun at the nape of her neck. Despite being institutionalized for over four decades, she stands erect and dignified, hands relaxed at her sides and dark eyes gazing into the camera's lens. She does not look insane.

I first learned about my great grandmother the year I turned thirteen. One warm Saturday in the late 1960s, the pastor drove a station wagon full of teens across northwest Ohio to tour the state hospital. Eager to spread good cheer, we crafted fluffy flowers from colored tissue paper and fastened them to green pipe cleaner stems. Clutching bouquets in our hands, we entered the ward, but came to an abrupt stop when we encountered a long hallway lined with wheelchair-bound patients. Heads lolled on chests, muttering filled the air, and the smell of urine stung our noses. An elderly woman reached out to me, but I recoiled at the sight of cloth ties binding her body to the chair. Forcing an awkward smile, I thrust my flowers into her gnarled hands and retreated outside.

All the way home I kept thinking about the horrors I had seen. How could anyone live like that? After dinner as I dried dishes, I poured out my concerns to my mother. I couldn't imagine anyone regaining their mental health in such an environment. The kitchen grew silent, except for the sound of dishes being rinsed, then I heard Mom inhale. "Your Dad's grandmother was a patient there."

"What?" I had researched our family tree for a school project, and had never heard such a story. "Why was she there?"

Mom glanced at Dad, engrossed in the sports page of the daily newspaper. "Childbirth injuries." Mom shook her head. "Such a shame."

I knew better than to ask Mom to elaborate. As much as she loved to gossip, she was a bit of a prude when it came to discussing "female complaints." Only years later

did I realize she attributed my great grandmother's hospitalization to postpartum depression.

"I have one of her quilts. Would you like to see it?"

Nodding, I followed Mom into the bedroom and watched as she positioned a metal step stool in front of her closet. Steadying herself, she reached to the top shelf and tugged at the corner of a rectangular box. Dust floated through the air as she removed it from the shelf. Reaching up, I let the box slide into my arms and carried it to the bed. An aroma of mothballs filled the air when I opened it and parted acidic tissue paper.

I was disappointed when we spread the quilt on top of the bed. Quilters today sew with colorful wrinkle-free fabric, but my great grandmother had made do with scraps of old dresses and shirts—blue and brown plaid, lavender and white checks, black and white gingham, a yellow floral print, and a field of red dotted with tiny flowers. Bits of yarn bound the pieced top to a striped flannel backing. I had expected to see intricate applique or a familiar pieced pattern like Grandmother's Flower Garden or the Double Wedding Ring. Yet when I took a closer look at the quilt, I discovered amazing precision. My great grandmother had sewn forty-two pieced squares in orderly rows, six across and seven down. I admired her even stitches, twelve to the inch, and the precise way the corner of each piece met the next, yet I was puzzled. How could this quilt be the product of an unsettled mind?

Eager to learn more, I dug through a box of family portraits in search of her picture but came up empty handed. Instead, I found a solitary image of my great-grandfather at midlife and a portrait of Elizabeth's children taken shortly before she left home. In it, her firstborn, Will, wears high-buttoned boots with short pants and a neatly pressed dark suit jacket, a handkerchief peeking from his breast pocket. He is seated, a self-satisfied look on his face, while his pudgy sister Alma stands to one side in a pleated winter dress, relieved only by a bit of white lace at her neck. Unbeknownst to the photographer, his image unwittingly captured the waning days of Alma's childhood. Only nine when her mother was hospitalized, she had not yet mastered the secrets of whitening sheets, sewing a fine seam, or baking an apple pie.

Sadness washed over me as I pictured my preadolescent grandmother, denied a mother's love and forced to exchange her childhood and schooling for a lifetime of cooking, canning, baking, mopping, scrubbing, ironing, washing, darning, mending, and gardening. Dead by the age of seventy-two, people at the funeral said she had worked herself to death.

One day a few years later, a padded envelope arrived in the mail. "I thought you'd like to have this picture of your great grandmother," an elderly cousin had scrawled on a yellow Post-it note. Pulling out a manila folder, I opened it and found myself staring into my great grandmother's eyes. If only the picture could speak. I waited until after dinner to show it to my father and was stunned when he pronounced it a good likeness.

"How could you possibly know?"

"Once Mom and Dad took us boys on the train to visit her."

This was news to me. "What do you remember about that visit? About her?"

"She was much like any other old person. She commented on how much we had grown, then sat next to Mom talking in low tones." Whatever they discussed, nothing seemed out of the ordinary to my father, not even the hospital grounds, where he and his brothers played until it was time to return home.

Haunted by my great grandmother's story, I set out to discover more about her life and the real reason for her commitment. Elizabeth Frank's tombstone provided a death date and led me to the local newspaper archives for a copy of her obituary. Born in the spring of 1856, she grew up in a northwest Ohio county named for the Wyandot Indians who, like her, experienced forced removal and life in confinement. Her German-born father focused on material success, mining gold in California until he earned enough money to buy farmland in Ohio. Unfortunately, success did not guarantee happiness. A bolt of lightning killed his namesake in 1871, and his weary wife died four years later. As the oldest girl among five surviving children, nineteen-year-old Elizabeth assumed responsibility for the household and her younger siblings.

No portrait survives to commemorate the day in August 1879 when my great grandmother married George Frank, the son of a neighboring German Lutheran farmer. Sporting a Van Dyke beard, her husband was a hardworking first-generation American,

determined to establish himself by putting in long hours. Five decades later he was still clearing trees from his land with an axe when a stroke took his life.

Like other farm wives of her generation, Elizabeth filled daylight hours with work, sewing clothing, baking bread, cooking meals, and canning fruits and vegetables on a wood stove in the summer kitchen. In 1881 she gave birth to a son, followed by a daughter three years later. While her husband cleared 160 acres of oak and maple trees, Elizabeth planted nearly two dozen eastern white pines along the bend in the road at the front of their property. Each day she carried two-gallon buckets of hand-pumped water to the saplings, coaxing them to grow. Today a half dozen remain as her legacy to us, having survived years of drunk drivers and high winds.

Tragedy struck the family in 1885 when the failure of the Central Bank and the loss of an eight-hundred dollar investment led Elizabeth's father to suffer a "dethronement of reason." Eluding his family, he entered his workshop, climbed up on a barrel, tied a rope to a rafter, slipped a noose around his neck, and jumped. I initially dismissed his suicide as situational, but after reading studies about suicide, I began to question if the family had a history of mental illness.

No documents survive to shed light on my great grandmother's life from her father's death until the day in March, 1894, when my great grandfather petitioned the county probate court to declare his wife insane. Under Ohio law at the time, a husband could commit his spouse to a state hospital upon the recommendation of a judge, a physician, and two witnesses. More than 120 years have passed since that day, yet her commitment papers remain sealed under the HIPPA Privacy Rule, making it impossible for me to discover why she lost her freedom.

Approaching the question from another angle, I contacted the Ohio Historical Society, which houses the Toledo State Hospital's records. Upon learning that her oldest living descendant, my father, could petition for access to some information, I assisted him with the paperwork. Six weeks later he received an official letter in the mail, a single sheet of paper containing three short paragraphs.

Scanning the page, I devoured the few snippets of information: the date of her committal, the person accompanying her to the asylum, and her diagnosis: chronic mania. Immediately I pictured a fastidious German-American housewife scrubbing floors

and windows over and over again. Then I noticed two more words: homicidal behavior. I couldn't believe it. Not in my family! When I told my father the shocking news, he nodded, then shared another piece of our family's unspoken history: my great grandmother believed her husband wanted to harm her and attacked him with a butcher knife. Saddened by this discovery, I filed the letter away in a folder bearing her name, convinced I would learn no more.

Years passed. My father entered a nursing home, and our farmhouse grew too much for my mother to manage. While sorting through dishes, correspondence, pictures, clothing, furniture, and papers accumulated during sixty years of marriage, we once again removed the quilt from its shelf in the closet. "Would you like to have it?" she asked, eager to see a family heirloom passed on to the next generation.

A chill filled the air the October evening I took my Elizabeth's quilt home and spread it on my Civil War-era bed with its carved walnut headboard. It looked brighter than I remembered. Exhausted from days spent emptying Mom's farmhouse, I crawled between the sheets and pulled the quilt up to my chest, fingering its coarse Depression-era cotton and the lumpy batting inside. Tears came to my eyes as I thought about my great grandmother's life. I would never know what she thought or felt, but I vowed to renew my effort to piece together as much of her story as I possibly could from scraps of information preserved by the hospital and others incarcerated there.

Turning to annual reports, I reconstructed the day my great grandmother arrived at the Toledo State Hospital. She and my great grandfather traveled by train because the trip would have taken two days by buggy. The county sheriff or a trusted friend may have accompanied them on the journey. It was not unusual for the patient to wear a straitjacket.

Upon her arrival, an attendant would have taken Elizabeth to an Admission Room and examined her for scars, bruises, and vermin. She stood five feet seven inches and weighed 135 pounds, a sturdy farm wife who kept herself neat and tidy. Donning hospital clothing until her own could be marked, she was then escorted to the ward, where she learned about hospital routines and met her housemates, other women

suffering from mania, melancholia, menopause, menstrual disorders, overwork, pregnancy, and religious excitement.

A frugal man, my great grandfather must have taken some comfort in knowing the state covered the cost of his wife's care (until 1910, when the hospital began charging four dollars per week). But what was he thinking as he sat in the administrative building speaking with the hospital's superintendent? Was he numb? Or was it a relief to turn his wife's care over to others so he and his children could sleep in peace? Life with her must have been worse than living with the stigma of having a wife in the asylum, but nonetheless he was losing his companion, the mother of his children.

I like to think a farmwife like Elizabeth would have found solace in the hospital landscape—150 lush acres punctuated by trees, shrubs, well-manicured lawns, and lakes. Opened in 1888, the Toledo State Hospital initially operated on the premise that environment was the best medicine for a troubled mind. Instead of being locked in a sterile hospital ward, restrained with straps and mittens, Elizabeth and other "moderately disturbed" patients lived in solid two-story brick cottage with spacious day rooms and inviting porches with inviting chairs lining the front porch. Three times a day, attendants escorted patients along tidy sidewalks to the women's dining room, where other attendants served as wait staff.

Examining pictures of the hospital found online, I try to envision how the grounds must have appeared to work-weary farmwives with demanding husbands. Could a woman raised with my great grandmother's rigid German-Lutheran background ever learn to relax? I can see her attending church services in the chapel, but it's hard to imagine her joining other residents at dances, concerts, theatrical performances, baseball games, lantern shows, and lectures. Did she ever accompany other patients on outings to the circus or the nearby Walbridge amusement park, with its colorful merry-go-round and wooden roller coaster? Was she in the audience when the newly emerging African American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar recited his recently published work?

In addition to providing a healing environment, hospital employees administered noninvasive hydrotherapeutic treatments, including soothing baths, needle sprays, salt

glows, and wet sheet packs. Only later, after state hospitals grew overcrowded, did they experiment with electric shock therapy and lobotomies.

In the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the state hospital superintendent believed work assignments would give able-bodied patients a sense of purpose and accomplishment. In keeping with this premise, Elizabeth became a bed-maker, stripping soiled linen, turning mattresses, applying clean sheets and blankets, and fluffing pillows. I don't know if she had other gender-specific assignments, for instance, cleaning wards, washing and ironing clothes, and working in the kitchen. I know she sewed, because I have her quilt, but in all those years there she may also have tried her hand at making woven baskets, rag rugs, and paper flowers—anything to pass the time in a constructive manner.

A number of patients recovered their health and returned home. According to the document from the Ohio Historical Society, a hospital physician pronounced my great grandmother ready for a trial home visit in March 1896 and promised to discharge her into her husband's custody if all went well. In the two years since Elizabeth's admission, her son had grown into a young man of fifteen and her daughter, now eleven, had become the mistress of the house. Imagine the tension and uncertainty.

Likely uneasy in his wife's presence, my great grandfather arranged for a neighbor to sleep in the house at night. In an environment filled with constant scrutiny and emotional distance, Elizabeth's paranoia resurfaced. In less than six weeks, she accused her husband of trying to poison her, and he returned her to the hospital. The admitting physician recorded her inability "to remain adjusted to home conditions," noting she had threatened "injury to her family and herself." It was her last visit home.

When I told my father about Elizabeth's home visit, I sparked another memory, this time of a day in the early 1930s when the state hospital informed his parents of her eligibility for discharge. The hospital had grown overcrowded and administrators deemed a number of patients eligible for release. By this time, Elizabeth's daughter Alma was caring for a household of men—her father, husband, and four strapping sons. She worried about how her mother and father would interact. Alma's husband, my grandfather, feared his mother-in-law would be too much of a burden for his already

overworked wife. And my great grandfather, a small man, still feared his wife might cause him harm.

Meeting to discuss their options, the family could not figure out how to reintegrate Elizabeth into the household, so they decided to leave her in the hospital. The decision came at a cost. It was the Great Depression and the fees for her care had reached $600 per annum, far more than many farm families earned in a year. In her seventies and illiterate, she had nowhere to go.

Their decision appalled me, but I was not surprised. My childhood was peppered with stories about neighborhood men who failed to get ahead because they had wives who insisted on doing frivolous things like buying store-bought clothing and going on vacation. Good daughters, I learned, took jobs in town, lived at home, and turned their earnings over to their fathers. I knew the barn was more important than the house, crops than flowers, sons than daughters, and land ownership the most important of all. There was no place for Elizabeth in this worldview.

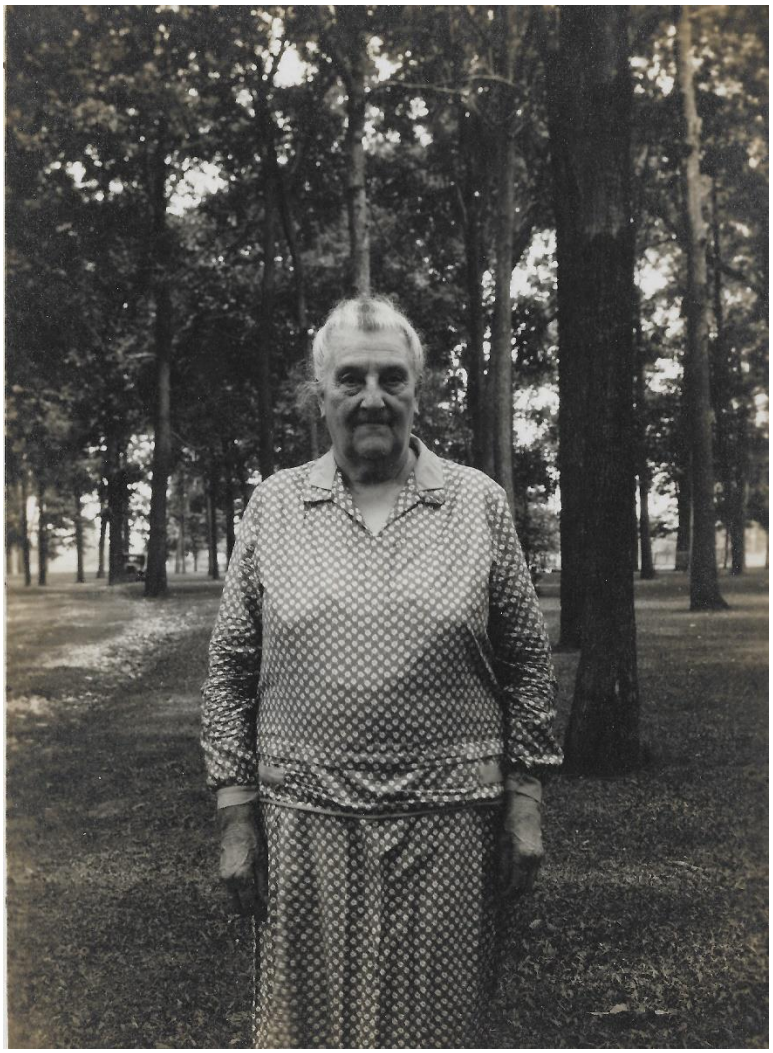
A simple five by seven card records great grandmother's death from bronchial pneumonia on December 23, 1940. During her time in the hospital, her diagnosis, originally chronic mania, changed to dementia praecox with paranoid tendencies, a diagnostic box appearing in American asylum records beginning in 1896. According to historian Richard Noll (*American Madness*), state hospitals at one time assigned this label to approximately twenty-five to fifty percent of patients. As I read more about this premature form of dementia, later relabeled schizophrenia, I started questioning my great grandmother's diagnosis. Given the progressive disintegration of dementia praecox patients in a pre-pharmaceutical era, I doubted her condition would have improved enough to justify a proposed discharge after forty years of hospitalization.

When I first learned about Elizabeth's lengthy hospitalization, I assumed it must be an aberration. I wouldn't allow myself to believe others suffered a similar fate. Then I read an article about the Toledo State Hospital cemeteries, where at least 1,994 men, women, and children who died during their hospitalization lie interred under brick-like stones inscribed with patient numbers. Like Elizabeth, many of them had spent decades

in the hospital, but upon their death, no one claimed their bodies. Some had outlived their families, while others had been abandoned, in life and in death.

With the passage of time, state hospital cemeteries in Toledo and throughout the nation fell into disrepair, their neglect perpetuating the stigma of mental illness. In many locations, only rows and rows of depressions in the ground remained to mark patients' graves, the numbered stones obscured by layers of dirt and grass. In recent years, however, volunteers working under the auspices of state hospital cemetery reclamation projects are restoring grave markers and identities to these faceless patients, and they are transforming hospital cemeteries into places of remembrance and reflection.

As I scrolled through the names of hundreds of women buried there, I wondered if I had found my great-grandmother's friends, women who she knew better than members of her family: Gertrude G., Phoebe H., Grace L., Jennie P., Lettie S., and many more. Year after year, decade after decade, they had celebrated Easter, July 4th, Thanksgiving, and Christmas holidays together. They had walked to and from breakfast, lunch, and dinner talking about the weather, flowers in bloom, and squirrels running across the lawn. They had worked with one another in the hospital kitchens, laundries, and sewing rooms. The optimist in me wants to believe they grew to care for one another.



Unlike the patients buried in the hospital cemeteries, my great-grandmother's body returned home for interment in late December, 1940. During her lifetime, our nation matured as it endured the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. Women earned the right to vote, experienced the autonomy that comes with driving a car, and had their voices heard in public as well as in private, but she missed out on these rites of passage. A daughter, a sister, an aunt, a wife, a mother, my great-grandmother was denied the day-to-day reality of these roles. Yet the day after Christmas a handful of mourners, all of them family, gathered in her former home for a subdued funeral service. For his text, the pastor chose Luke 8: 4-8, the parable of the sower. He may have compared Elizabeth to the seed scattered on a busy path where it has no chance to grow, or to seed spread among rocks and thorn bushes, but I prefer to think of her growing where she was planted, on the grounds of the Toledo State Hospital, as friend to other patients, helper to attendants, seamstress who mended clothes, and creator of the quilt that comforts me on cold winter nights.

On Hitchhiking, Horses, and Heroes

by Joshua H. Baker

"Here come cowboys, here to save us all." –Psychedelic Furs

My wife and I were attending the western-themed annual banquet for the local fire department when a fellow firefighter greeted me and assessed my outfit, head to toe.

"Those aren't cowboy boots!" He said as he took a gander at my second-hand boots. I knew what he meant, even as I felt defensive. The boots have somewhat rounded toes and low heels befitting a western work boot or Wellington, rather than the steep-heeled style so unpleasant for walking many associate with the vocation of cowboys. Having grown up in a small western town, Ron had redneck credibility as I did not, and his gibe crept under my skin. My defensive reaction may have been rooted in my history.

As a young man ready to graduate high school, I had made no plans for college or career. I'd pored over college information books, but nothing fit. I did not want to be a doctor, lawyer, or biologist. My dream had been more outlandish. I wanted to be a cowboy.

In one of my mother's yellowing photo albums, there is a photo in which I wear a cowboy outfit given to me by Grandfather Baker. In retrospect, the tan vest and hat seem more Roy Rogers western dandy than Larry Mahan rodeo badass. At age eight, however, I loved it.

My first ranch visit was a highlight of the Baker clan's seventies version of the Oregon Trail migration, our wagon not a Conestoga but a green Chevy. Visiting the Klondike Ranch on the east slope of Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains brought home the reality of the Rocky Mountain West in all its scrubby beauty. The genial owner of the spread took us on a horseback ride to a pretty waterfall. In a group photo, my hair was seventies-shaggy and my grin was huge. This was definitely better than stuffy New York.

The next summer, I attended summer camp on a Montana ranch. Big sky country. Campers spent time riding horses, hiking, and rafting. We learned basic wilderness survival skills, from picking edible plants to building shelters and starting fires. I returned for the next three years. At fourteen, I spent two nights by myself in the Montana wilderness carrying only a knife and three matches. I ate glacier lilies and huckleberries and tried unsuccessfully to find frogs. I had to swat flies on my head and pick them out of my grungy, smoke-infused hair.

Under the sway of Montana folk, I started chewing tobacco. I began listening to country music like Don Williams and Eddie Rabbitt as a guilty pleasure. At home, I fell asleep reading Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour, in love with the manifest destiny dream notion of the American West, its wide open dusty landscapes and hypothetical freedoms. Saturday afternoons spent with John Wayne and Clint Eastwood contributed to the appeal.

Much had changed across the American West since the cattle drives of the 1870s brought tens of thousands of cattle to Dodge City and Abilene. Still, I wanted to be a cowboy. To hell with realism. Reality meant microwaved dinners, zit cream, cubicle work, and cul-de-sac living. No thanks.

A few days after my eighteenth birthday, I arrived in Bozeman, Montana, the end point of a 1500-mile hitchhiking epic. It was the second week of September and snow was already painting the Montana pavement white. In short order, I sported a yellow baseball cap reading, "Rodeo, America's #1 Sport" featuring the outline of a rider on a bucking bronco. Instant Montana credibility.

After a few fruitless days of halfheartedly looking for work near West Yellowstone and sleeping in a spartan bunk room for a few bucks a night, I contacted a friend and arranged to stay and work on his family's small ranch outside Darby, Montana. I fed chickens and horses at the crack of dawn, moved irrigation pipes, bucked hay bales, gathered firewood, and did other chores. I slept in a spare bedroom and almost became a part of the family. Almost.

A big chunk of the ranch income came from their outfitting business. That meant setting up hunting camps deep in the wilderness of the Bitterroot Range for deer, elk, and bighorn sheep hunters. Tom had stashed small potbellied stoves in the woods and

brought a chainsaw to cut poles from downed timber to support big canvas wall tents. The saws were illegal in a designated wilderness, as were the stashed stoves, but this was his livelihood. A ranger could have written Tom an expensive citation, so I stood watch on a rockslide half a mile away with a .357, instructed to fire a warning shot if necessary. Luckily, I didn't have to fire the weapon. I enjoyed being in the camps. The canyons were well timbered and lush down low, craggy up high, with wide meadows and small lakes dotting the upper ends of drainages. Deer and elk were common sights. When we were packing out of one canyon, two bears lumbered through huckleberry bushes thirty yards off the trail. I was glad we were on horseback.

Montana turned bitter cold by November, and I grew lonely. The extent of my social life was one visit to church, one school dance where the best songs were by .38 Special and April Wine, and one movie at which I secretly held hands with a girl I barely knew. Then weeks of nothing. Maybe I was wrong about the whole cowboy thing. I loved riding horses and being in the mountains, but I didn't feel at home. I decided to leave. I hitched west with $240 in my pocket and more than a few lessons learned about horses and humans.

In Portland, I fell back in with groups of old friends. I went skiing and climbing with some and partied with others. The cowboy dream still bubbled beneath the surface of my days. I bought cowboy boots at the Portland Outdoor Store. Outside a Baskin Robbins where my sister worked, someone laughed at my boots and western shirt and made a snide reference to *Urban Cowboy*. The comment stung a little, as if I was a simple poseur. My outfit was not stylish in Southwest Portland, yet I'd ridden a horse deep into the Montana wilderness and bucked many a hay bale. I understood I wasn't a cowboy from 1881, yet still I debated becoming one, albeit in a simplistic way. Cowboys were American icons. They were tough guys who rode horseback with no patience for weakness or foolish rules. Right? So, I partied.

After Christmas, my mother gave me a polite but firm ultimatum to get a job or leave her house. Fair enough. I headed south, thumb out, more resolve in my belly. I was more prepared, yet I ran into more problems. Rides were harder to come by. I got harassed by a car full of people slowing down at the I-5 entrance ramp in Redding.

When their car neared, a guy stuck his head out the window and yelled “Get a job!” Charming.

I spent a glorious open-air, sleeping-bag night in the sagebrush outside Tehachapi. The next day, a speeding stoner almost got me arrested. When a cop pulled him over for driving eighty-five, he pretended the pot and the beer bottles in his truck were mine. Luckily, the cop saw through the act. I’ve never been a good liar. When I hit Phoenix, I spent a couple nights on my cousin Kate’s couch and soon found that without a car, it was difficult to look for ranch work. After a few false starts, I landed a job as a dishwasher on Rancho de la Osa, a guest ranch on the Mexican border. The ranch’s history included visits from Jesuits priests in the eighteenth century and an attack by Pancho Villa. The older buildings had two-foot-thick adobe walls, the desert landscape was fascinating, and there were plenty of horses. It was a start to a cowboy life, a glorious start.

The ranch owners were refurbishing some of the property’s older adobe structures. A group of Mexican men crossed the border daily to do the bulk of the work. The two horse wranglers were a nomadic weather-beaten couple. The man wore a dark vest over long sleeve shirts and a silk bandana at his throat. His wife had badly bleached hair and jeans tucked in her boots. They looked the part, yet they were fired a month after my arrival when they were caught mistreating the horses. The owners promoted Tavo, one of the construction workers, to be the head wrangler. They asked me to assist him. I felt an elation almost like young love, but this was a love of life. Everything was finally matching up with the dream.

I had grown up hiking in mossy woods and scaling glaciated peaks, not riding horses in the desert. Tavo had to teach me a lot in the tack room and corral as well as on the trail. I shoveled a lot of horse manure and moved a lot of hay bales. I saddled horses and learned some Spanish. It was no Zane Grey tale. There was no huge drama, no fighting for a girl’s honor, no dealing with evil land barons, and in the kitchen, Blue Oyster Cult was on the radio. But the rides, oh, the horseback rides through the magical desert that promised freedom in its distances!

Monday through Saturday, I woke at six a.m. to feed the horses in the corral behind our bunkhouse, then headed to the kitchen to help with breakfast. After the

meal, I washed dishes, then returned to the corral to prep for morning rides. Depending on the number of guests, one or two of us would go with them. Tavo always rode. If there were enough guests, I would ride too. The rides were an hour or two long. Around noon, everybody had lunch in the *hacienda*. Afterward, there might be another ride if there was demand. Working in both the kitchen and corrals, I worked long days, six days a week. I snatched free time when I could. I was usually exhausted when I headed back to the bunkhouse at the end of the day.

Tavo didn't show up after St. Patrick's Day. Apparently, he'd gone on a bender, and not for the first time. Suddenly the wrangling was all on me. This was a big step. I received a token raise to bring my salary to a stellar $350 a month plus room and board. I had no car, and the ranch was sixty miles from Tucson, so I had little on which to spend my hard-earned money but sodas and stamps when I walked the half mile to town. I had to catch a ride into Tucson to buy more clothes. Although it was frequently hot, I preferred long sleeve shirts as protection from sun-scorch. I bought a real cowboy hat too. I wanted to look the part. Along the way, I observed the landscape, the steep and rocky Baboquivari Peak and the slopes covered in majestic saguaro cacti. The desert looked very different than my green Oregon.

My wrangling learning curve was steep. In addition to memorizing the geography of arroyos and hills, gates and trails, I needed to learn how to care for horses. That meant feeding them, brushing them, and cooling them down properly after rides. I learned to work with the farrier. I saw a stud horse at work. That was eye opening for an eighteen-year-old virgin.

The nuts and bolts of being a wrangler meant learning the different types of bridles and saddles. Each horse responded differently, and one might require a curb bit while another needed a hackamore. I broke a few reins along the way when I forgot to use a lead rope to tie up a horse, and they easily broke the leather if they jerked their heads away from the hitching post. Saddles had variations too, and I learned how snug each horse needed to be cinched. Some would try to fool you by puffing up their chest. I spent time adjusting stirrup heights for different riders and keeping inexperienced riders away from tough horses like Velvet, Casino, and Princess.

A few months of working with horses went to my head. I thought I was a real cowboy. Real cowboys wore spurs, or at least the tough guys did in movies when they entered a saloon knowing a showdown was in their future. One day I borrowed spurs from the owner's ten-year-old son. I thought I looked and sounded cool. After I got the small group of guests on their horses, I mounted the gray and white dappled mare, Princess. As soon as I was seated, she began to buck. After a few jumps, she managed to throw me like a rag into the dirt, right in front of customers. Earlier, listening to jangling spurs, I'd thought I was a badass. Now I felt a fool.

After my humiliation, I worked harder at becoming a good rider, soliciting tips from more experienced riders. Soon, I was tackling the horses even the owners wouldn't ride, like Casino. I rode on my own time in the sandy wash south of the corrals, challenging the horses as they challenged me. Stop, start, fast, slow, turn, turn, turn. I learned to ride bucking horses and control them when they didn't want to mind me. It was hard work, and it was rewarding. My confidence level climbed.

Much of my job was being a tour guide, leading the way on the trail, but also pointing out key features of the landscape to guests. My favorite trail dropped into a grove of holly trees, its smattering of dark green and bright red glorious in that otherwise brown world. A great contrast was a difficult trail that headed up a steep rocky ridge to a peak with a view far into the purple-brown immensity of Mexico.

I thought I'd arrived when a customer gave me a six pack of beer as a tip. He was a nice guy with a fifteen-year-old daughter I'd chatted with more than most customers. I was the closest thing she had to a peer while they visited the ranch for a week. Everyone else was under twelve or over thirty. Just when I was getting comfortable, however, I saw someone who was obviously wrangler material headed to the corrals on one of my days off. I was confused. Then I heard that the boss wanted to talk to me.

I met Bill in his office behind the hacienda kitchen. He was blunt but kind at first, calling me smart. He told me I seemed cut out for college, not ranch work. He probably meant it to be a compliment. I didn't take it that way. The litany of my mistakes followed, most of which had occurred more than a month earlier: the spurs incident, the broken reins, not cooling a horse down enough. I pointed out how much I'd learned, but I also got too defensive. At one point, I said "I bust my ass for you for twelve hours a day" or

words to that effect. Good move, Sherlock. Bill disagreed. I was crushed. I was also fired.

The next day, I stepped onto a bus in Tucson wearing my boots, western cut jeans, western shirt, and cowboy hat. I was so tan, some people thought I was Mexican. My wispy dark mustache may have contributed to the illusion. A stoner girl made out with me on the way to L.A. She liked the cowboy look. The dream was deferred, but I could milk the benefits of pursuing that dream for a while. When I got home, suburban friends wanted to hear stories of hitchhiking and horses. It seemed more interesting than their academic pursuits even as it led nowhere. To them, I was a cowboy. Image is everything.

Over time, I became a soldier, firefighter, and teacher. I no longer wanted to be a cowboy, yet the cultural perception of a cowboy remained fascinating. Presidents Reagan and George W. Bush were both labeled cowboys at times, and they played up to that tag, wearing cowboy hats at home while talking tough in Washington, as if they were actually going into the street to shoot it out with an enemy rather than sending working class men and women as their proxies. The cowboy lone wolf archetype is still widely disseminated through pop culture. Consider traits that run from ancient characters like Sir Gawain through Rooster Cogburn to Tony Stark. When we expect people to be as tough, witty, strong, and independent as such characters, failed expectations follow.

I will never become a cowboy, but I still appreciate the romantic myth of the hero riding across the miles, defending the little people. It's nice to believe.

I like the feel of the leather snugging around my heel as I pull on my black boots. I won't pretend my boots are the coolest, and I don't wear them ironically in hipster Portland. The boots are comfortable, they are easy to don, and they are good for working outside if the streets are not icy. The scrollwork on the uppers is lovely, but the leather encasing the foot itself, the insole, the sole, those parts have a simplicity calling to mind sage, dust, sun, and wind. The distance of dreams.

I never told Ron about my work on ranches. It probably wouldn't have mattered.

He probably would not have understood if I had. The cowboy references with which we are most familiar often distort, misunderstand, or trivialize the historical reality of the job. No matter. If trends continue, the curious cultural influence of the cowboy will last for centuries, long after all our beef comes from a test tube and robots do the herding.

Becoming A Real Girl

by Pam Munter

I was never much good at becoming a girl and I loathed every bit of the relentless indoctrination.

Early family photos either show me looking uncomfortable in frilly girl's clothing or smiling broadly while wearing my preferred dirty jeans and tee shirt. My mother offered to teach me to cook, but I had no interest. Sewing was completely a non-starter. I wanted to be outside, hitting a tennis ball against the wall or riding my bike around the neighborhood. When my mother decided I had earned too many Girl Scout merit badges, she refused to sew anymore on the sash "because it might hurt the other girls' feelings." When I was in the first grade, I wanted to be called Phil. An outlier at an early age.

All this is coming up now because I've been having phone conversations with my junior high school Homemaking teacher. We first met over sixty years ago, a time when becoming a paragon of the socially acceptable female was a more urgent matter than it is today.

In the 1950s, girls were expected to learn the gender-based domestic arts to train for their foreordained positions of wife and mother. The only women I knew with a real job were my teachers and all of them were married. I felt as if I were living in a parallel universe. I didn't want to sit around and gossip over coffee every morning, make fun of men's foibles, or mold a rug rat into some better version of myself. So I went my own way, not an easy road in that unforgiving sex-role stereotyped era.

Contrary to conventional expectation, however, junior high provided a sense of freedom and worth, an oasis of achievement and recognition. I thrived in band and drama, excelled in English and social studies, and looked forward to PE every single day. Eighth grade would have been just about perfect if it hadn't been for that dumb requirement all girls had to take Homemaking.

I walked into the Homemaking class that first day to a noisy room of eighth grade girls, spotless kitchen appliances adorning every wall, and a youthful-looking teacher smiling at us in optimistic expectation.

“Welcome to Homemaking class, girls. I’m Mrs. Potts.”

I laughed derisively.

“Is she kidding?” I asked my best friend Jacquie Weiss sitting next to me. Jacquie never took her eyes off the teacher. I could see she was transfixed.

“She’s so pretty,” Jacquie cooed. I hadn’t noticed, but I saw how perky and animated she seemed, her long dark brown ponytail bobbing around with every movement. She didn’t look that much older than we were.

Jacquie and I had been friends since the fourth grade when we met as we walked to school. We were an odd pair from the start. Jacquie was gawky with frizzy hair and a big nose. I was chunky, already a victim of persistent acne and my blonde hair always seem to go in its own malevolent direction. Mrs. Potts was perpetually pulled together, dauntingly so. I was not happy to be in there at all and, as the days wore on, I began to look at her as a daily reminder of the woman I could never be. I was both repulsed by the assigned meaningless tasks and yet fascinated by the teacher expecting me to do them. My way of dealing was passive-aggressive resistance. When we had projects like baking cookies, I leaned on my baking partner to make the decisions. I became the flamboyant official taster. As the students were entering the room each day, I wrote a mordant aphorism on the board or some sarcastic comment I had cadged from a joke book. I quoted H. L. Mencken: “A cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin.” Or, “If you can smile when everything is going wrong, you’ve found someone else to blame.” A thirteen-year-old wisecracking iconoclast is hard to stop.

Jacquie’s approach was more direct. She hung around after class as long as possible, asking her questions.

“I saw an E in your signature. What does that stand for?” This was a cheeky question in this era, a time when there was a strict wall between student and teacher. Knowing a teacher’s first name was pure gold even if moot, as we never would and never could use it.

“My first name is Elizabeth but my friends call me Liddy.”

This was a major coup for Jacquie. We had always been competitive, at least I was. But this was a contest I didn’t think I wanted to win. I let Jacquie do the

reconnaissance and continued to hide behind sarcasm and trenchancy, my go-to demeanor in adolescence. And yet I wondered who this alien being might be. Liddy Potts? Really?

To her credit, Mrs. Potts never stopped my blackboard protests. I knew I was pushing the limits of convention but she treated me as she did all the other girls, with warmth and friendliness. It was confusing.

I had already found two strong female role models among my teachers who were much more to my liking: my drama teacher, who good-naturedly challenged me at every turn, and my band teacher, whose warmth was exceeded only by her wry sense of humor. Mrs. Potts was running a distant third. I decided to cede her to Jacquie. While I made it eminently clear who I did not want to be, Jacquie had long ago decided her fondest dream was to be a wife and mother, a sort of Mrs. Potts without the professional career.

I had thought of Mrs. Potts from time to time—on my wedding day; when lecturing on the role of sex-role stereotypes while teaching a class on the Psychology of Women; and, oddly enough, as I walked to the podium to deliver my keynote address before 2000 people at an International Women's Day conference in the 1970s. I didn't understand the reasons for these flashbacks but they were surely there.

The years and decades passed. Jacquie and I reconnected on Facebook. She had, indeed, become a housewife and mother, living in a small town in Northwest Washington. I became a collector of college degrees on my way toward becoming a clinical psychologist and a writer, among other things. I did marry and have a son. A year after the divorce, I met a woman with whom I shared my life for three decades.

With the passage of time and a senescent sense of responsibility, I decided to contact those few teachers who had impacted me so I could thank them. The older I grew, the more aware I had become of their overarching influence. My band teacher had tragically died of diseases related to alcoholism and Alzheimer's; my drama teacher and I exchanged a few emails, had dinner once, but she died soon afterwards. I Googled Mrs. Potts and found she was teaching ballet in Oregon. I emailed her and she answered almost immediately, asking me to call her.

Unexpectedly, I felt the flush of that familiar adolescent anxiety. Call my Homemaking teacher on the phone? The formality of the past clung like cobwebs inside my head. But I did make the call, and she sounded happy to hear from me.

"Mrs. Potts? Um. Liddie? It's hard for me to call you that."

She laughed. "It's OK. Call me what you wish."

"I am surprised you remembered me. It has been, what, well over five or six decades, right?"

"That long? Of course, I remembered you. Really, you're the one I do remember from all my years of teaching."

I paused to take that in and inhaled deeper than necessary. I was afraid to ask, but I did.

"Why is that?"

"I don't know. There was something about you. I could tell you needed something from me, but I didn't know what it was."

Of course, she was right. I needed her acceptance, her reassurance that I was OK as I was, that it was perfectly fine if I didn't fit the feminine stereotype. It was more important coming from her because, as a teacher of the "feminine arts," she was the avatar of the cliché I was expected to approximate.

We chatted for a few more minutes, then she told me she was coming to stay with her cousin just a few miles from where I lived in Palm Desert, California. Would I be up for a visit?

"Absolutely," I quickly responded. Still, I wasn't sure I wanted that to happen. Did I want to be reminded of my obstreperous past? A time that was painful, poignant and uncertain? And yet, maybe I could learn more about myself and answer a few leftover questions I had about her.

Twenty years earlier, I had written an autobiography and more recently, recorded a CD at Capitol Records. I sent both of them to her with trepidation. She was not mentioned in the book in favor of the other two role models and I hoped her feelings wouldn't be hurt. It turned out she didn't read much of it. I wondered why.

I had quickly decided not to serve lunch because the mere thought of preparing something to eat for my former Homemaking teacher was too fraught with anxiety. It

was bad enough that she would inspect my interior decorating. I could still remember the lecture about how to file one's nails (in only one direction) but I knew I had missed other more relevant Homemaking tips. I had a fear of being graded again.

A few weeks later, the doorbell rang. I opened it and saw an older Mrs. Potts, but the same bubbly elfin woman I had observed so long ago—and still wearing the ponytail, now completely gray. We hugged and she sat down on the couch. I brought her up to date, briefly outlining the past fifty years or so, and she did the same. Her husband had died many years earlier, leaving her with three children. They had lived in a remodeled schoolhouse, where she was now teaching classes in bodywork and providing an occasional B&B retreat for groups wanting a bucolic place to meet. At a pause in the conversation, she looked down at her lap.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

Her big brown eyes met mine like a laser. "Why were you so angry back then?"

It was the ghost of Jacob Marley coming back to haunt me for my misdeeds. But, needless to say, she had nailed it. I thought I was being funny and clever and hadn't experienced it as anger.

I gave her a perfunctory, abbreviated answer but knew I'd have to think more about this. Whatever I told her was enough, apparently. We moved on to more casual conversation and she left, promising to write.

Over the next ten years or so she sent me her Xeroxed Christmas letter, adding a few personal sentences. I wrote back, telling her what I was doing. Then last December in her annual note, she said she wanted to call me and asked for my phone number.

Two months passed and I wondered if she had become ill or even had died. By now she would be eighty-seven or so, living alone in that big schoolhouse. Then the night of the Oscars, I was preparing for bed about ten o'clock when the phone rang. The caller ID told me it was E. Potts. Liddie.

"I'm so glad to hear from you. How are you?"

She told me she had been ill for more than a year, lacking energy and losing lots of weight. It didn't sound good.

“I read your book finally and listened to the CD, trying to hear what you were trying to do with each song.”

This was a different Liddie than the one I had entertained in my living room years before. When she referred to my book, she didn’t seem to realize it had been over thirty years since it was published. She was confused. Her thoughts wandered.

“I was such a young teacher then. We aren’t so far apart in age, you know.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll be seventy-four next month.”

“That’s young!” we both laughed and then she added. “You’re the only student I’ve ever talked with outside of class. I have thought about you through the years.”

I was stunned. “Oh, yeah? Why is that?” I kept my tone of voice casual but steeled myself, afraid to hear what she might say.

Her voice grew louder. “You made it clear: ‘I don’t want to be here.’”

That made me laugh again. I guess an adolescent is no expert in subtlety. She continued, “I didn’t know what to do with you. I had taken classes in education and psychology, but I wasn’t prepared for that. Or for you.”

“Looking back on it now, I was intimidated, I think. You were pretty, effervescent, accomplished in the areas in which I had no interest or aptitude, and feminine—everything I wasn’t.”

She seemed surprised at this characterization. While I had sensed her openness to conversations like this, she didn’t seem a habitually reflective person. Then I realized she was seeking information about who she was then, just as I had been.

“You know, I told you I’m finishing up a degree in creative writing. In fact, I just had an essay published about that time in my life. I don’t mention you by name but it mentions what went on for me then. I’d be happy to send it to you, if you’d like.”

“Yeah, I would. I remember you saying when we met that you felt unattractive and fat back then but the photos in your book show you looking thin.”

“Well,” I chuckled, “Do you think I’d show the reader a photo that wasn’t flattering? But my body did change a lot, up and down. My weight was part of the power struggle between my parents. You’ll read about it when I send the essay. Maybe it’ll help answer the question you asked back then about my anger.”

Another pause, this one a little longer.

“I admire the fact you’ve found meaning in these years. I wish I could.” She went on to tell me that she never read a newspaper or watched TV and didn’t keep up with what was happening in the world because it was too distressing. I could hear the sadness in her voice.

Now we were entering the well-trod territory I had once occupied in my role as a clinical psychologist. The next comment I would make could launch me into a different type of relationship with her—helping to guide the last part of my junior high school Homemaking teacher’s life. Almost sixty years ago, she wanted so much to teach me how to be a real girl. Now, in one of life’s many ironies, I was capable of helping her learn the essential skills she would need in her final years. As I carefully chose my words, I thought of it as paying it backwards.

My White Tribe

by Vic Sizemore

On July 7, 2016, I forced myself to watch the video of Alton Sterling's son breaking down and crying, "Daddy," as his mom spoke to reporters about her husband's death at the hands of the Baton Rouge police. The video was heartbreaking, but the endless cataract of online news almost immediately churned it under.

One of my daughter's summer reading assignments for fall semester was Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. Both of her older brothers had read it for English class as well. It was first published in 1945. In an autobiographical sketch, Wright speaks of the "dread of being caught alone upon the streets in white neighborhoods after the sun has set." He says, "While white strangers may be in these neighborhoods trying to get home, they can pass unmolested. But the color of a Negro's skin … makes him suspect, converts him into a defenseless target." Reading Wright's book, my daughter will get a glimpse into what it was like to be a black boy in the United States seventy years ago.

I never read *Black Boy* in school. In fact, I cannot remember being assigned a single black writer until I chose an African American Literature elective my junior year in college. I was raised in a place that was not only lily-white, but white with a red neck. No black people lived up the Elk River until a woman moved her black husband and mixed-race children into a trailer beside North 119, between Elkview and Herbert Hoover High School in Clendenin when I was young. From passing cars, people hurled slurs and rocks at the children as they tried to play in the yard. Kids laughed about it at school. Eventually someone burned a cross in the trailer's front yard—that was the story going around—and the family moved away. Nonwhite people did not often venture up the Elk River, not willingly.

My world was even more circumscribed than redneck Elk River culture. I was part of a frightened tribe that hid inside the Baptist church and looked with suspicion at every passing fad, television show, and popular song. Everywhere and at all times, Satan was trying to sneak his subversive message into our homes. We had to be diligent.

White Evangelical Christians, by definition, could not allow nonwhite Christians to join the tribe. They did allow nonwhites to come around for worship and fellowship, within reason, as long as they behaved in an appropriately white-Evangelical way. Acceptable nonwhite Christians—born again and in doctrinal, political, and social agreement with my tribe—fit into two basic groups: black believers, and nonwhite-other-race believers. The only times I ever saw nonwhite-other-race believers up the Elk River was as an object lesson for one missionary or another, a curiosity to marvel over. This was the 1970s.

However, because a born again black family sent their children up the river to Elk Valley Christian School, I became good friends with several from the Black Believers tribe. I played football and soccer with them, chummed with them in the hallways and classrooms. What I didn't understand back then was how difficult it was for Doug, Tammy, Donald, and Steve, riding up the Elk River from Charleston every day on the green EVCS school bus with kids Tammy, in a conversation many years later, called "country ass creekers." Not a single day went by for them without racial taunts from open racists. In addition, there was the continuous stream of microaggressions from us who liked them and meant well.

On a long ride home from a football game in seventh grade, Donald and I sat together in the dark bus, outside lights flashing across our faces. The bus reeked of sweat and diesel, and the plastic bus seat in front of us was cracked and dry. I talked of a job I'd been doing since sixth grade, picking up garbage in the parking lot down the street in Elkview, at the Goody Shop. They paid me seventy-five cents and a milkshake of my choosing. I usually got cherry because it finished with a pile of chopped up maraschino cherries in the bottom, slippery and chewy and sweet enough to make your stomach hurt. Sometimes I brought my brother or a friend to help pick up all the trash, and the shop owners—they were the parents of a former classmate, from my days in public school—would pay us in money and milkshakes. I remember them as kind and generous people.

Donald and I talked of other things, and eventually, because the bus ride from Ohio Valley Christian School was long on those old busses, we eventually fell silent and

listened to the cheerleaders harmonizing beautifully, but for far too long, on the *nana nananana* part of Journey's "Loving, Touching, Squeezing."

"If I lived in Elkview," Donald said after a long stretch, "we would do that Goody Shop job together, wouldn't we?"

"Yeah," I said. "We would."

At that point, I felt a rush of deep affection for my friend. However, I knew even then, that life would be dangerous for Donald if he lived up in Elkview. I was not angry or outraged—I had no idea it could be any different—but I was deeply sad for my friend sitting on the bus there beside me.

Looking back, I see the green and white Elk Valley Christian School bus lumbering across the Ohio Valley, hitting I79 South back toward Elkview, West Virginia. Inside, the girls in their green cheerleading culottes, and boys in their grass-stained uniforms, flirt and sneak kisses and touch those secret, off-bounds body parts, just as teenagers have on busses since teenagers have been riding busses and did on carts or in barns and woods before that, back into prehistory. On this bus, there were these two boys, one black and one white. The white boy was not rich—far from it; his father was a poor Baptist preacher in a poor place—but he had white skin and blue eyes. He had a free pass into a world barred from the black boy, no matter what he did to gain access.

I had the same affection for Steve, Doug, and Tammy that I had for Donald. They were in my core group of friends until I left Elk Valley Christian School trying to get away from oppression of the religious kind. I loved them, but I also I remember hearing white students say things like, "Hey man, who hit you and blacked your face?" and "What's worse than a face full of zits? One *blackhead*."

In 1955, a black boy named Emmett Till from Chicago made the mistake of whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. White men dragged him from his cousin's house in the middle of the night, strung him up in a barn, beat him, and gouged out one of his eyes. He was defiant, cursed the white men who tortured him, so they shot him dead, tied a seventy-pound fan to his neck with barbed wire, and threw his carcass into the river.

That's what it was like for a black boy in 1955.

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In 1958, Liberty University founder Jerry Falwell preached “Segregation or Integration, Which?” In the sermon, he preached, “When God has drawn a line of distinction, we should not attempt to cross that line." He warned that integration "will destroy our race eventually.” For shock value, he added, “In one northern city, a pastor friend of mine tells me that a couple of opposite race live next door to his church as man and wife."

In the early nineties, I attended seminary at Liberty University where there were more South Koreans in my classes than African Americans. For all the rebranding, the black community had still not forgotten Falwell’s civil rights record. One of the black students was Hiawatha. He educated me. He told me to watch how people reacted to him, and I did, hanging back so their reactions wouldn’t be mitigated by the presence of a clean-shaven white guy in a tie. Indeed, people gave him nervous glances in convenience stores. The young white girls at school gave him wide nervous berth in the hallways. I was astonished. Hiawatha shrugged it off in weary resignation.

Hiawatha became president of the graduate student body after the faculty deemed the elected president unfit to serve because he had been divorced. A charismatic speaker, Hiawatha received invitations to preach all over the south, and was eventually extended an offer to come on staff at the seminary after graduation.

We discussed it over lunch one day, and he eventually said to me, “I don’t want to be their token black.”

“What are you talking about?” I said. “They love you.”

“Yeah?” he said, looking straight into my eyes. “Let me try to date one of their daughters.”

Recently, after I’d watched the documentary about food deserts called *A Place at the Table,* I was being taxi-dad, driving kids around town. I discovered that a kid I know and see relatively often is not only poor but experiences every day what is now euphemistically called “food insecurity.” Not incidentally, the kid is African American.

All three of my kids are musicians and the circles in which they move are as diverse as any you will find in Lynchburg, VA. They have formed friendships with their

black peers. It could be heartening to see what appears to be Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of "little black boys and black girls … able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."

Outside of school, however, things can get awkward fast. The disparity is undeniable—even if it is uncomfortable to acknowledge. One side of town is booming economically due in large part to the torrent of federal financial aid money pouring into nonprofit Liberty University, where Donald Trump recently gave the graduation address. At the same time, Lynchburg's poverty rate is abysmal—for whites it is nineteen percent, which is over four percent higher than the national average. For blacks in Lynchburg, the poverty rate is thirty percent. According to the City Council's analysis, the poverty is intergenerational.

Just as it was with Donald and me, these kids are on a path that will likely split along racial lines as they grow into adulthood. While they are reaching an age at which they notice and show discomfort with these inequalities, they also encode poisonous systemic notions about race, wealth, merit, and opportunity.

Take opportunity: My children do not have limitless opportunities—we live on teachers' salaries—but their family and social situations have placed them on a springboard that, if they choose to use it, will launch them into success. They will have to work hard, but their work will pay off, and there is a safety net if they fail once or twice. Not so for many of their friends on the other side of the racial divide. Where my kids find a springboard, these friends too often find a fence, and behind that a wall.

I get push back from members of my tribe on this. Because they do not want to the *R* label, they discuss this issue carefully. Why do I hesitate even now to use the word, when racism—individual, institutional, and systemic—is such a massive and undeniable problem?

Is racism undeniable? Not in my tribe. I inevitably get some variation on two defensive responses: "You are the one who is racist, because you think black people need handouts, can't be successful on their own merit," and, "It is not fair to take away what I have earned fair and square and give it to someone else who refuses to work." Race is always close to the surface in these discussions. In an online argument, one of my tribe—a member of my family—wrote to me, "Excuses, blaming whites and one-

party voting will never allow the African American community to excel. Ditch Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson and make some changes."

The root assumption of both these claims is that most everyone starts with a similar array of opportunities, and some have squandered theirs, or at least not worked quite hard enough. This is simply not the case. In “The Case for Reparations”, Ta-Nehisi Coates gets to the point. He writes, that, “America was built on the preferential treatment of white people—395 years of it.” It is not ancient history either. We live in an America, “in which black college graduates still suffer higher unemployment rates than white college graduates, and black job applicants without criminal records enjoy roughly the same chance of getting hired as white applicants with criminal records.”

I do not want my children growing away from their black friends, but I fear it will happen. I do not want them to grow into the advantaged Monopoly players who will someday run into these childhood friends in line at the movie theater and assume they are better off—which is nearly a statistical certainty—because they are smarter and have worked harder. I do not want their black friends—bright, beautiful, and talented kids—to circumscribe their dreams as experience is teaching them every day that they must.

During the winter of 2014, we were at my parents’ house for Christmas. They were both old and feeble. My mother had Alzheimer’s, though they had not told us yet, though we could tell she was getting forgetful. My parents are still Fundamentalist Baptists; more topics of discussion are potential sources of conflict now than are not. We sit cringing, waiting for comments about Muslims killing Christians, or gays trying to take away religious liberty. This particular Christmas, making small talk in their living room while we waited for my brother and sister to arrive with their families, dad asked me about my community college teaching.

“You teach a lot of black students?” he asked.

“Yes,” I told him. “I do.” Some of my composition classrooms are over fifty percent black.

“They struggle a lot more than the other students don’t they,” he said. It was not a question.

I went into a monologue about all of the students I teach, the economic and social conditions under which many of them have to cobble together a college education, the challenges they face. He looked at me blankly and nodded. It was clear I was talking to myself.

Flipping through their new Elkview Baptist Church directory, on one of the ministry team pages, the men who run the sound booth stood proudly for their picture. One—a man I had gone to high school with—wore a tee shirt with the Confederate flag emblazoned across his chest. The caption: *If you think this is hate, you need a history lesson*. I pointed it out to my sister. She shook her head.

My mom asked our oldest son Evan about his life, and he talked about school and marching band and his girlfriend. She was interested in the girl, so Evan pulled out his phone to show her a picture. Evan’s girlfriend was in marching band with him. He was a drummer and she was in color guard. She was also Asian. My mom looked hard at the picture and said, “Oh.” She said, “Is she a dark girl?”

He looked at me, his eyes wide, somewhere between bemused and astonished. I shook my head, and he understood. Let it go. How can you possibly call it out every single time? Why would you ruin Christmas by being bristly? Anyway, she’s old, what good would it do?

What good does it ever do? The response I saw from my tribe to the murder of nine black worshipers in their church in Charleston, SC was not encouraging. They were angry and they were outraged—outraged not because nine human beings were dead, but that people were calling for the Confederate flag to come down. People who attended Elk Valley Christian School and were, as I was, friends with Doug, Tammy, Steve and Donald posted Confederate flags to their Facebook pages, just above diatribes and cartoons disparaging President Obama. No mention of the nine dead. I was dumbfounded in the face of it.

As 2015 ended, the news filled with reports that a grand jury had decided not to indict the police officer who gunned down a twelve-year-old boy with a BB gun. He was a big boy, one witness said, and scary. He was a black boy.

In August of 2016, a blistering report from the Justice Department outlined a culture of racial bias in the Baltimore police department after all the officers involved in the death of Freddie Gray were acquitted of any charges. This followed similar reports coming out of Seattle, Chicago, and Ferguson, MO. Members of my white tribe posted videos of police officers pulling over black people and giving them ice cream, and called this evidenced that black people were overreacting, being too sensitive.

I watched the news of Alton Sterling's death at the hands of the police, and wondered what has changed. I saw his boy weeping uncontrollably. I heard him call out, "Daddy." He was a black boy. Summer, 2016.

In 2017, White nationalism has roared into the public square, commandeering the American flag to fly alongside the Confederate flag as symbols of the real—white—America. The concerted efforts at black voter suppression continue, now at the national level led by the President's own executive action. The Attorney General is dismantling the checks on abuses in the criminal justice system and rescinding the previous administration's directive that the Justice Department begin to disengage from the for-profit prison industrial complex. He is ramping up the war on drugs with its racially discriminatory laws. His Justice Department will begin suing colleges and universities, on behalf of white (and Asian) people, over affirmative-action admissions policies. This is what making America great again looks like to my tribe.

Yesterday, up the road from my hometown, in Charlottesville, VA, Richard Spencer led a crowd of white nationalists who carried torches and chanted Nazi slogans. They were protesting the slated removal of a Confederate statue—or maybe it was the Festival of Cultures happening in the same park, which celebrates the rich cultural diversity of the city. It looked for all the world as if they were trying to take the United States back to the time when Richard Wright wrote of not being able to walk in a white neighborhood without fear. Then again, maybe less has changed than I want to believe.

The city council in my town recently held an open community meeting called Poverty to Progress. I attended the breakout session on education where citizens brainstormed ways to help underserved kids in our city meet the many educational challenges they face. My wife attended the housing session, as her teaching and research involves service learning in the poorest downtown neighborhoods.

I volunteer with a nonprofit called WordWorks and we tutor the children in these neighborhoods in language arts and creative writing. I also see my teaching at the community college as a way to work directly for the causes of racial and economic justice. It is embarrassingly little; I could do more.

Because I am white, I could easily disengage. By default, I could move in circles no more diverse than those of my youth up the Elk River. I could still talk a good liberal game at parties, decry the actions of the present regime, and forget all about it on the way home to my white neighborhood where I will sleep without fear. My black friends and acquaintances—my black students—do not have that luxury. I remember what John Stewart said in the wake of the Ferguson unrest. “I guarantee you that every person of color in this country has faced an indignity, from the ridiculous, to the grotesque, to the sometimes fatal,” he said. For them, “race is there and it is a constant. You’re tired of hearing about it? Imagine how fucking exhausting it is living it.”

Harvest Moon

by Lisa Conquet

It was our seventh anniversary but being first time parents made our marriage seem new again. Still, I struggled to focus on this exciting beginning while I was dealing with another life coming to an end. It was past evening visiting hours when my mother sent me home. Staying as late as possible had become our daily ritual. On this night, the doctor and nurses were impressed with her turn-around. Her fever was down, her stats were normal, and they told me she was out of the woods. Both the doctors and my mother insisted I go home and get some rest.

I held her hand and looked right in her eyes, “Are you sure you want me to go?” She smiled at me, “I feel better. Go home and at least have a late dinner with your husband. Besides, it’s cold in here and you should be wearing a sweater.” She winked while squeezing my hand and I was relieved to feel some strength … and warmth. I lingered a bit longer, hoping my idle chatter could fill the void of my conspicuously absent siblings. Two extra visitors’ chairs had sat empty for weeks, since the first day they promised to come, then used traffic and distance as an excuse to opt out.

I slowly walked to the door, then stopped and suggested I call the house so she could say goodnight to my daughter. She and her granddaughter spoke briefly, then she said something that caused a noticeable shift in my level of confidence, “Grandma will always love you, goodbye my precious.” She never said “goodbye”. It was so strange to hear, and it stayed in my ears like the phantom shadow that remains after staring at a naked light bulb.

My mother was in a hospital forty minutes from my siblings, but just down the road from the sweet dollhouse where my baby girl would soon be fast asleep in her crib. I got home quickly, with enough time for my husband and I to piece together a dinner, but I could not feel celebratory.

Too worried to sleep and too exhausted to stay awake, I lay in bed in that odd mental space that allows you to remember dreams and merge them with the days’ thoughts. I dreamed a future with my mother living in the new house we were planning

to build. I dreamed her watching my daughter playing with the siblings she did not yet have. I dreamed a house filled with love and laughter. I dreamed until I drifted off.

The phone pierced the peaceful silence of that autumn night. I knew what I would hear as I fumbled for the receiver. Today, I can't be sure if the voice was male or female, I just know it said, "Come back, she won't make it through the night."

I do remember grabbing that sweater, cozy and wool, an optimistic gift from her that never fit my wardrobe but became my security that fall. Like a blanket, it gave comfort and a warm embrace during those lonely nights when the cold chill of knowledge lingered in quiet hospital corners and the wind wrestled the remaining stubborn leaves to the ground.

As I pulled that sweater over the t-shirt I had been sleeping in, I frantically dialed my brother. I begged him, "Come now." I knew there would be no visiting hours for her tomorrow. My siblings would have no more opportunity for an excuse not to show up … again. I called my sister who protested—it was late, her car wasn't working, it was a long drive—she always had excuses. I told her to ride with our brother, or hitchhike, but get here.

I drove blindly, blinking back tears, my throat filled with a scream that had no sound. I wiped my eyes as I turned onto the empty highway and found myself staring in disbelief at the oversized, red-orange moon hanging before me. My heavy heart tried to soar but any hope was tied to the weight of reality.

When I arrived there was chaos, a patient was coding, nurses raced a crash cart down the hall. I held my breath. I crossed my arms. I tried to find warmth in the sweater. I knew. I walked slowly in the wake of the scrambling nurses and doctors. I heard them yelling, "Come on, your daughter is on her way," and their collective sigh when the heartbeat returned.

I hesitated. She had a DNR order. They all knew that. Yet they did every thing they could to bring her back. I backed down the hall a bit and watched them hurriedly clean out the room. I slowly walked up to the nurse's station to ask how my mother was doing. She looked up and stared for a second. I pretended. She played along. "She's not doing very well. Really, you need to say your goodbyes."

I called my brother again. They hadn't left Queens. My sister was stalling. My brother was angry. I knew they would not make it, still I insisted they come. I really wanted them to show up for her, just once. I caught my breath and went into her room. Her skin was no longer pale, but ashen, the sad remains of what once offered so much warmth and light.

I kissed her forehead and was startled by how cold it felt. I grabbed her icy hand and told her I would not leave her alone. I felt as if she sighed, but really it was just the machine breathing for her. I told her they would be here soon. I so rarely lied to my mother. I told her the baby was sleeping and dinner was good, though I couldn't tell you what I ate.

I talked until the priest arrived to give her the last rights. We prayed. I checked the clock. I knew she was waiting for them. She always waited for them. They were always late, if they showed at all. The machine faltered, or she did. The nurse flew in to check. My mom had been here for a while, and I could see in the nurse's eyes my mother had found a way into her heart. She looked at me solemnly and took a deep breath. As she exhaled, the machines began screaming and the code was announced again. I was hurried out the door. The doctor came to me, "Your mother has a DNR …"

I looked into his eyes and they softened. I thought for a moment about the magnitude of the decision I was about to make. One never thinks they'd be so casually dressed for something as important as deciding if your mother should live, even if it's only for a few more minutes.

I held his eyes as I spoke. "I know, but let's see if we can keep her here until they come to say goodbye." So they ran in and I watched the flurry of activity. A well-orchestrated dance of madness. Purposefully attempting the impossible … again. To what end?

They did all they could. I know. I watched. They … we … ignored the inevitable until it became too obvious. Finally, the doctor looked up at the clock and I knew. Instinctively, I checked my watch as well. Yet, just like when someone asks you the time seconds after you've looked at your watch, I had no clue what time it was. At that moment the past and future collided, leaving a present filled with pain.

Moments later I heard a mournful howl in the hall. I knew it was my sister. My siblings had finally arrived. As usual, they were late. This time, she would not forgive them. This time, they would not forgive themselves.

That fall I let go of my mother … and my family. My siblings blamed me for their missed opportunity to say goodbye and stopped speaking to me.

I donated that sweater in the spring.

Muito Perigoso

by Jeremiah Bass

When we got off the plane, the first thing I noticed was the smell. Every foreign country I've visited has its own odor. Brazil was no different. A mild hint of salty air reminded me of Jamaica, where Casie and I had been wed nearly eleven years earlier, but the lingering smell of unsanitary bathrooms reminded me of the Greyhound buses I'd frequented as an adventurous youth. The smell was just the first in a long line of surprises and potential hazards.

Side streets were shared with horses, mules, donkeys, goats, cows, sheep, and the occasional iguana. Healthy trees weren't cut down when roads were made, either. These mid-road diversions were spray painted white and orange so motorists didn't crash into them. The abrasions and bits of plastic and glass embedded in the bark indicated how well this tactic worked.

We arrived for our seven-month stay at the end of the rainy season and the thin layers of asphalt had washes and gullies that would have destroyed our 1980 VW Beetle had we been unfortunate enough to veer into one. To make drivers aware of these mid-street chasms, Brasileiros filled the holes with whatever broken bits of furniture they had lying around. One morning there was a bent, metal, fold-up chair sticking about six inches out of a hole big enough for a child-sized desk. A few mornings later, that same hole required a fold-up table to raise awareness.

While Casie worked at the university—a forty-minute drive one way—I taught English lessons at the university and to private clients near our vizinhança. My students were professors, children of professors, business managers, lawyers, doctors, and my favorite, Paolo, a middle-aged man who designed water slides for *Beach Park*—the home of the *Insano*, Brazil's tallest water slide.

Paolo and I spent many days walking up and down the beach in front of the apartment my wife and I were fortunate enough to stumble upon—a two-bedroom that came fully furnished, including dishes, pots and pans, sheets, and a drying rack; all clothes were hand washed and air dried. In front of our apartment, there was a baía: a small bay that filled with high tide and emptied with low tide. "Muito perigoso!" Paolo told

me on our first long stroll down the coast of the Atlantic. At first, I struggled to see the danger. Water went in, water went out. During high tide, from our balcony, I'd watched kite-surfers skim the waves of the too-blue water, their boards moving as fast as the sea birds they'd startle from the resting water. During low tide, fisherman would rush around the ankle-deep water netting stranded fish, crabs, and mussels. But then I recognized that between high and low tide, when water rushed through the bottleneck of the bay, no one, not even the boldest kite surfers, would skim through those vacuum-like rip currents.

After Paolo showed me the safest way to get from our apartment to the bay, I ventured there daily as part of my mental health regimen. Walk on the beach, yoga on the beach, meditate on the beach, then trudge back through the cacti and discarded coconut husks that lined the goat trail connecting our apartment to the seaside. I could have driven the two and a half kilometers from our apartment to the nearest road that wasn't flooded or filled with livestock, but on most days, the walk to and from the beach was enlightening.

I'd come across multiple squatters in the scrub brush. They lived in a halfway finished apartment complex where construction had been suspended indefinitely since the complex's proprietor didn't actually own the land upon which he'd started building his multi-million-dollar luxury suites. Not only were these unfinished skeletons the only thing impeding our view of the bay, they were also a perfect home for unsavory types. There was constant access to fresh mango and cashew fruits in the scrub, but they also fished and crabbed. While these squatters didn't have much money for luxury foods, rice and beans—staples of the Brazilian diet—were cheap. Recycling was one way to get enough money for these essentials, mugging was another. Helping people park and then guarding their car as they strolled the beach was easiest and therefore, most common labor for the squatters.

For fifty American cents, you could have one of these squatters stop traffic, direct you to the best parking spot, stop traffic again when you wanted to leave, and clean your windows. Meeting them in the scrub between our apartment and the beach wasn't the same kind of interaction. If they thought you might have money, you could give them some, or they may try to take it—which is why I would walk to the beach in nothing but

my bathing suit and a pair of worn out running shoes. My broad tattooed chest may have been my saving grace. Standing nearly a foot taller than the average Brasileiro may have helped too. Or perhaps it was just the odd luck that had followed me throughout Brazil. On more than one occasion, our VW died during the commute to or from the University. On every one of those occasions, within a three-minute walk—or ten minutes of pushing the Fusca—an able and inexpensive mechanic had us back on the road in minutes. Luck, it seemed, was on my side.

Near the entrance to the bay, there was a rock formation that had been shaped by eons of high and low tides. It was filled with holes that held water at low tide. Aquatic life like crabs, sea anemones, sea urchins, and things I can't begin to name in English or Portuguese lived in these holes. During low tide, the rock formations were about shoulder high on me. Casie and I would explore the holes, looking for whatever creatures we could find, daring one another to touch these unnamable entities.

At high tide, the rock formations lingered under mere inches of water like stony crocodiles. Throughout my life I've had a strange fear of things sticking out of dark water. As a young man, it was trees that hadn't been cut down during the creation of the many small lakes my family fished. The underwater moss that crept along the rotting bark of uncut trees sent shivers up my spine. The ten, twelve, or fifteen feet of dead tree that reached through the surface, standing in lakes like Devil's Kitchen, had the same spine-chilling effect. In Brazil, the rocks that were such a source of pleasure at low tide were an equal source of fear during high tide.

Most days I'd time my mental health walks and lessons with Paolo for low tide. Not only did this give me the chance to explore the rock formations, but it also offered an extra hundred yards of flat, packed sand to stroll down. Depending on the tide, the walk could be heavenly path or a scalding, shell-filled road of perdition.

On the weekends, Casie and I would hit the beach early, before the hordes of city dwellers overtook the sandy retreat. Often, we'd drive the two and a half kilometers to the nearest safe parking spot to avoid the potential mugging waiting for us in the scrub. Down a one lane, cobblestone road—with only a few trees and pothole obstacles threatening harm—a narrow parking lot lay hidden.

After a breakfast of Pao de coco, eggs, and bananas we'd slip into our suits, start up the Beetle, and pilot the rust bucket down the cobblestones. All valuables were locked safely in the car, where our fifty-cent guardian would stand barefoot, scaring away would-be thieves.

On a normal Saturday morning, about four months into our stay, we woke up later than usual but still decided to drive to the beach in hopes for a spot among the crowds we knew we would find. We found the last parallel parking spot outside the parking lot. There were three cars behind us that would have to use the lot and pay for their day at the beach. As per our usual routine, we disrobed, sluffed off our sandals, and I tied the car keys to the inside of my swim suit.

The tide was higher than usual, but not "high." If we walked fast, we'd still be able to dig through the cavernous rock formations. The sun, already blisteringly hot, forced us to take a few time-consuming dips in the Atlantic, though typically we just walked along the edge of the water, skimming our feet in the waves.

The closer we got to the bay, the further back beachgoers seemed to be moving their gear. When we neared an old fishing shack a few dozen yards or from the bay, sunbathers had positioned themselves almost at the dunes—where the water broke during the highest of tides.

"Do you want to turn around," Casie asked.

I thought about it for a second, and replied, "Let's keep going." It was a beautiful, cloudless day, the breeze was cooling, the sound of the waves crashing against the beach drowned out all the noise of weekenders. A kite-surfer hit a high wave and took flight for a few seconds before another high wave caught the bottom of his board. It was a spectacular showing of control.

"Did you see that?" I asked. But Casie's attention wasn't on the kite-surfer. Where the bay met the ocean, a group of people stood shouting and pointing at the water. A few weeks before I'd seen a huge loggerhead in that very spot. I know thatCasie, like I, hoped it was the cause of the excitement. We looked at one another and started running.

In the water, where ocean tide was rushing into the bay, there was a current strong enough to keep the kite-surfers away, a current that had ensnared a young Brasileiro.

“Ajudem-no! Ajudem-no!” “Help him!” The excited crowd shouted at no one in particular. Fifteen people stood around watching the boy sink, then struggle back up through the surface, then sink again. By the time we arrived, he was exhausted to the point that he couldn’t keep his head above the water.

Two men with life jackets stood waist deep in the rushing current trying to wade out to the boy. At the rate they were going, neither had a chance of getting him in time. A heavy Brasileiro threw the lid of his Styrofoam cooler, but the current pulled it away before the boy could grab hold. Panicked chants of, “Ajudem-no! Ajudem-no!” continued.

My heart raced. Casie squeezed my hand tightly. I looked at her, questioning. We both knew I could get to him before the waders could. I’d been trained as a lifeguard and knew how to grab the boy and swim him to safety, but Paolo’s caution echoed in my mind, “Muito perigoso!” “Muito perigoso!” “Muito perigoso!”

I took my sun glasses off, handed them to Casie, walked across the terrifying, cavernous rock formation, and dove in into the current. My feet scraped down a hidden edge of the rocks. A stinging burn shot up my leg as salt water debride the wound. I looked for the boy as I swam but could not see him. The current pulled on me like the g-force in an accelerating car. Taking slow, heavy breaths, I pushed on.

When I got to where he should have been, the boy was gone. Fighting against the current, I looked for help from the crowd of shouting onlookers. It was like trying to get answers from a panicked, foreign language speaking audience of *The Price Is Right.* There wasn’t anything coherent at first, but the shouting made sense after a few slow-moving split seconds, the boy was under the water.

I dove.

I opened my eyes, salt water stinging them, my leg burning.

I dove deeper, fighting against the current.

When I finally saw him in the dark, sand-filled water, the unconscious boy spun, limp, like clothes in a washing machine. I grabbed him, locking my left arm around his

shoulder and head, and pulled toward the surface. When we emerged, we'd been pulled almost all the way to the other side of the bay's opening. Five strokes, from the edge, a cramp in my back, three, my body burned, two, I needed a rest, one …

On shore, I let the boy go and realized that he wasn't as much a boy as a young man. A mouthful of water passed his mustachioed lips as he rolled onto his side, coughing. I shook a few thankful hands, gave modest, possibly incoherent responses to the onslaught of "Obrigado," checked to make sure young man was breathing regularly, caught my breath, and swam back through the settling water.

I've often wondered if Casie and I hadn't slept in that morning, or if we hadn't gotten the last parking spot, or if we hadn't walked the rest of the way to the bay, or if my fear had caused hesitation at the last second, what might have happened. I always tell Casie, "Someone would have saved him." She disagrees. But I wonder what forces of the universe put me in that place at that time and helped me overcome my fear of what lay hidden in that murky water—a fear that has never returned. Maybe it was fate, maybe that young man is destined for great things, or maybe it was just the luck that followed me on our exotic journey…

Appalachian Eulogy

by Robert Dugan

I grunted while wrestling the heavy, dusty box wedged in crawl space of my apartment. I had outgrown the cramped place, and my teacher's salary allowed me to purchase my first home. In preparation for the move, I divided my possessions neatly into two piles. One held the things I would take with me; the other I would donate to a local thrift store. The destiny of the current box was unknown as I dragged it from its lightless resting place. I pulled the box into the open air through a flurry of coughs and sneezes.

I opened the box, and a face stared up from a pile of crinkled photographs. The face was that of a young man who sat in a small plastic kiddie pool wearing torn Levi's, an oversized belt buckle, and a camouflage ball cap. There was a scuffed, golden fishing hook bent around the bill. A cigarette dangled from his lip, and he held a beer in his hand. There was a pile of cash on the coffee table in front of him. He couldn't have been older than eighteen or nineteen. I studied him for a moment, ashamed that it took me so long to remember a good friend.

A redneck from Roanoke, Chris drove a red Camaro with peeling and pock-marked clear coat. His southern drawl deepened toward incomprehensibility the more he drank; I loved the musicality in his speech and the way he spoke in southern aphorisms. We were part of an inseparable group of friends joined by our shared fondness for engines and alcohol.

The night I took this picture eleven of us were jammed into Jake's trailer back in the woods. Jake and I had been childhood friends. His father died of alcoholism and left him a house, fifty thousand dollars, and a social security check. He'd pissed it all away by the time he was seventeen.

It was a Friday, pay day. Jake added his wages from his job sweeping factory floors to the pile of cash on the table. I hunkered in the threadbare chair and listened to their planning. I'd begun to tire of their constant pill chasing.

"How much we got all together?" Jake asked.

“About eighteen hundred,” Chris replied.

“Make sure and save forty for pizza,” I added.

“Call Doddy and get him over here to make a sale,” Chris said.

“Already done. He said he’d be here in thirty.” Jake shuffled the cash together and removed two twenty-dollar bills. *Varsity Blues* played from a VCR connected to the flat screen. I took a sip of my whiskey and crushed my cigarette in the ashtray before lighting another. I’d never seen so much cash up close.

It would buy a lot of pills and many hours of oblivion.

We’d graduated from drinking and smoking in our parents’ basements. We used to raid their liquor cabinets and replace what we’d taken with water. We prayed they wouldn’t notice a missing pack from a carton of Camel Lights. Things were a lot different now.

I could hear someone crushing the last of the old pills on the kitchen counter behind me.

“When you gonna get in on this?” Jake asked.

He’d been pressuring me to join everyone else snorting pills.

“Leave him alone,” Chris said. “If he don’t want to, he don’t have to. He’s got good grades. Let him drink his Jack and smoke if that’s all he wants to do.” Chris was a couple years older than us and had more perspective. He worked for a mom and pop tiling outfit. He was skilled enough to work, but not certified, so he struggled to make a living wage. He hadn’t advanced since high school, unable to afford an education. I watched him work and spend, resigned to a wretched circular existence. He knew how life would change after high school. He knew enough to realize that whatever grand ambitions we held would devolve into Appalachian hopelessness. I appreciated that he took it on himself to defend my restraint to the others and wanted to believe that he admired my discipline, my ability to say “no,” that he respected my good grades and envied my stable home life.

Doddy’s headlights shone through the front window glass and obscured my view of the TV. He stumbled in through the front door, eyes glassy. “Hydros are eight, so are percs. Oxy is twelve a pill. How do you want it mixed?”

“Just give us a little of everything.” Jake handed over the money.

Doddy counted out the pills, and just like that, a week's wages for a group of young men walked out the door.

Chris cut up the first pill from the newly acquired baggy on a ceramic tile that sat on the coffee table.

The pills, the pizza, and what was left of the money were gone by Sunday morning.

Pills were more expensive than heroin, but the guys rationalized their purchase through denial. Pills had none of the social stigma of heroin, which seemed the stereotypical drug for the hardcore addict. Heroin use represented an indictment, the acknowledgement that they had moved from occasional drug use to dependence. For a time, they paid more to be able to say that they did *not* do heroin. But eventually the price of denial became too high, heroin, too cheap. When they finally gave in, they snorted it for a time. Shooting it seemed a step too far.

When I started my first semester of college, little by little I parted ways with my friends. Once I was exposed to more people and greater ideas, I chose Saturday night study groups over weekend parties at the trailer. In time, I replaced my old drinking buddies with English professors and education majors.

I had been walking to my car after a class when an unfamiliar number rang my phone. It was Jake. All he said was, "Chris is dead. Overdose. Viewing is Friday. I hate to be so short man, but I got a lot of people to call." Jake hung up without waiting for me to ask questions. I was shocked, and sorrow hit me hard.

They'd found Chris dead with a needle in the back of his arm among a pile of dirty laundry. Chris didn't look real lying in the casket with his ball cap on. The fishing hook crimped around the bill reflected the glow of the overhead lights. I wondered if the morticians polished it when they did his makeup and stitched his lips closed.

"Chris loved cars and fishing." The minister stated flatly as he looked down at his notecards. I resented the old man for giving the eulogy. The speech meant to immortalize him in our memories should've been given by the friends he had left behind. His grandmother had taken quick control of the funeral arrangements. She cut many of Chris's friends out of ceremony in an effort to minimize attention to the way he died. The

ceremony would be tightly controlled, the minister the only speaker. “It’s a difficult thing when the Lord takes such a young life. Chris was in the fullness of his vigor, but like all life, he was suffering. He’s gone home to be with Jesus now, to be clothed in the splendor of his glory, to walk without pain or torment for all eternity.” The irony of the minister’s words gave my grief a jagged edge. Chris was an atheist; of that I was certain. The minister’s words were for Chris’s grandparents, not for us.

When the preaching concluded, we stood and filed past the casket. After I said my goodbyes, I turned to leave, facing the family. I struggled to avoid eye contact with everyone gathered to mourn his passing as I made my way down the aisle. I was ashamed. I knew I played no part in his overdose, but I felt complicit in it.

I hadn’t seen the bulk of my old friends in years. I’d stopped coming around once I started college, once heroin entered the picture. At the time of Chris’s funeral, I was in the midst of student teaching and wrestled with a schedule that left little time for socializing or drunkenness, and I was worried that, despite my successful resistance thus far, I would find myself addicted to something far worse than Marlboros.

We left the funeral hall and headed to the FoodLion parking lot to sit on tailgates and bench seats, a familiar and comforting ritual. I was the last to arrive, and I noticed that Chris’s usual spot was empty. I imagined the faded red Camaro sitting on the cracked asphalt between the barely perceptible white lines. I made a lap around the parking lot just like I used to and drove up to a warm greeting. I parked, got out, and lit a cigarette. One by one, I met the eyes of those around me, lingering on each person for just a moment.

We caught up and took stock of everything that had changed between us and within us. Our tight-knit group had splintered into several smaller ones, divided along the lines of what was considered acceptable substance abuse. But for that brief time, all of those divisions melted away. Tragedy brought us a fleeting togetherness we thought we’d lost. We picked up where we’d left off. We talked about the days before life became so complicated, before we’d experienced loss, and for those few precious hours we were together, unencumbered and honoring memories of Chris.

As we were starting our goodbyes, Jake grabbed a can of white spray paint from a truck bed tool box and sprayed Chris’s name in big, sloppy letters in his empty parking

space. We all contemplated the awkwardly-drawn letters, and then one after the other we left the scene, the roar of muscle cars and lifted trucks underscoring our vandalism.

Now, years later, I barely recognize that young man in those photos, with his smirk, the cigarette dangling from his lip. I struggle to recall the names of all of those young men I once held so dear, and I wonder if any of the others have died. I have grown so far away from them, and from that place we made for ourselves. I've traveled the country and expanded my worldview. I have my own family. I earned a Master's degree in education. I run my own classroom and am regarded as an expert in my field. I now have kids of my own, one natural, but hundreds more who I work hard to guide as a teacher.

I still make my old lap around the Food Lion parking lot, though only after buying groceries. On Friday nights, teenagers still gather under the florescent lights. They sit in the same spot that we did a decade ago, smoking cigarettes and talking. The spray-painted memorial has been covered by fresh asphalt. As I pass them and they wave, excited to see their teacher outside of school, I survey the faces, and in some of them I see someone from my past, someone nearly forgotten.

River Passage

by Susan Pope

Hockey posters—two walls' worth. A row of ball caps slung on hooks. The requisite electronics—TV, computer, smartphone. Dishes caked with dried food. And over every inch of floor space, camping gear, some with price tags still attached.

Perched on the bed in my fifteen-year-old grandson Cason's bedroom, I watch him pack. Tomorrow we leave for a raft trip, on a river we've never seen with people we've never before met. He's had five months to get ready. His mom—my daughter—has quit nagging. He could have recruited his grandpa, my husband, to help. But he knows that Papa—the name Cason calls him—would just say *you've got the list, check it off, pack it up.* That leaves me, the organizer, explainer, and most of all, the soft touch.

I miss talking with Cason. We used to have moments of conversation in the car, on the way to hockey practice, when his sister and parents weren't around. Little things: How he hated math. Liked his new hockey team. Hoped to catch a king salmon this summer. Now he rides with his buddies who drive, so the two of us rarely speak except in passing.

Cason asked for the trip. Not this trip specifically, but any river trip. I'm not sure why. "Sounds like fun," is all he said when I asked.

His family—my daughter's—does not camp or fish or hike. "Roughing it" is a cabin with running water on a lake surrounded by all the mechanized toys an American family could desire. To Cason and his pickup-driving, four-wheeling, dirt-biking friends, my husband Jim and I are the quaint old bird watchers, nature lovers, greenies.

But something made him curious, made him want to find out for himself if our stories were true—the river journeys that changed our lives, the adventures, mishaps, near disasters. Maybe it was the passion in our voices or the faraway looks in our eyes as we sat around a family dinner while Cason half-listened to us reminisce about running rapids through the Grand Canyon or dodging ice on an Arctic river. Maybe he just wanted a way to impress his friends. Whatever his reasons, here was this boy turning sixteen asking to spend time with his grandparents—on a river, no less.

As his life is opening up, our lives are narrowing down. We have this brief moment in time when the dreams of the old and the young intersect, while Jim and I are still hardy enough in mind and body to give him this gift. Of course, we said yes.

Pen poised to mark off items as he packs them, I read from the gear list.

First aid kit. He unzips the small nylon bag with the Cabela's tag still on it. Band-aides, gauze, alcohol swab, tweezers, eye drops, Neosporin ointment.

Check.

Socks. Two pair.

Check.

Bandana.

"Why do I need one?" He asks.

"To keep the sun off your neck, wipe the sweat off your face. We're going into the desert in summer."

"I've got one, but you won't like it," he says.

"What's not to like about a bandana?"

He ducks into his closet and retrieves a neatly folded blue and red piece of cloth. With a flip of his wrist he opens it out. It's a Confederate flag.

"Not appropriate. Not anywhere." I'm about to launch into a lecture and history lesson when I notice the half-smile on his face. He's baiting me. Of course I won't approve. He knows that. I remember doing this with my father, but not until I had left home and was in college. It's called breaking away.

What I can't stand is Cason's sullen, sarcastic, and disrespectful side. Screaming and door slamming are easier for me to handle than silence or outright refusal to help with something so simple as carrying groceries up the steps.

Yet just a few weeks ago, at a Father's Day barbeque, he was the perfect son and grandson, serving food, cleaning up, smiling. Which person will he be when we're out in the wilds without his parents as the enforcers?

As for me, I've taken a silent vow to be the warm, relaxed grandmother who lets Cason experience the river in his own way, enjoying the terrain and our companions,

taking responsibility for himself. No nagging, no hovering, no treating him like the four-year-old he sometimes seems to be.

But I draw a line at the Confederate flag. “Dump it,” I say. “If you don’t have another, I’ve got an extra.”

Cason shrugs, then drops the bandana back in his closet. We return to the last few items on the packing list. He starts pulling knives out of drawers, off his desk, from his closet. “I’m not sure which ones to take.”

“No knives on the list.”

“But I’ve got to take *one*.”

He lays them out on the bed. A small stainless-steel pocket knife, a bigger one with a bone handle, a sleek silver one that when he hits a button pops out a long, menacing blade. We used to call it that a switchblade, the kind used by gang members and criminals in the movies I watched as a kid.

“What are you doing with so many knives?”

“I collect them. I buy them with my own money.”

I’ve known this kid all his life—changed his diapers, cradled him when he was sick, comforted him when he was hurt—and these are the tools he shows me to prove he’s grown up. Inhaling slowly, I hit the pause on my internal alarm and point to the plain silver knife on the bed, the kind that unfolds into a pocket tool kit—knife, screw driver, pliers, everything you could need to repair anything. “Take that one.”

He slips the knife into a small nylon bag with his first aid kit and resumes packing from the list. Broad-brimmed hat, camping towel, long sleeve shirt. With each item he grills me. “Why do I need this?”

I should be more patient, relishing this rare opportunity for conversation, but there’s only so much you can explain about a raft trip through the desert Southwest to someone who’s never been there. Besides, I have to get home to my own packing.

“Trust me,” I say. “If it’s on the list, you need it.”

1:00 a.m., Vernal, Utah. In our motel room, a pale blue light radiates from the next bed. Cason’s face is aglow with flashing images from his cell phone screen.

“Cason,” I whisper. “Shut that thing off.”

A grunt. Covers rustling. The flashing glow shifts from one side of the bed to the other.

"We have to get up early."

Another grunt.

Beside me, my husband kicks the covers, mumbles, and turns over.

No electronics on the river. No cell phone coverage there, so that's our deal. Cason said he was fine with that. Later, I'll find out he's loaded his phone with an entire season of Grey's Anatomy and brought a solar charger.

I want Cason to find life more compelling than images on his screen. I want this trip to be successful, memorable, even life-changing for him. I want him to fall in love with rivers, canyons, the desert, a world beyond.

I believe one journey can change a person's life. The Grand Canyon changed mine. I was fresh out of college, traveling with my then-husband, backpacking with cheap equipment and ill-fitting shoes. We descended from the rim in February to two nights of camping in single-digit temperatures, hiking the trail beside the river, then trekking ten miles back up, icy trail beneath our feet, stars scattered extravagantly across the ink-black sky. Every step was agony but also triumph. For two Alaskan kids on their first traverse of the United States, the world opened up, the map of the country becoming more than just abstract shapes on the pages of our social studies books. More than that, I discovered a person could strike out into unknown territory for no reason other than to find out what the rest of the world looks like.

Sluggish here at our put-in, the Yampa River, which straddles Utah and Colorado, will gather speed until it merges with the swifter, bigger Green. At the end of the trip, we'll run a long string of rapids as the Green rushes to join the Colorado.

Helmets on, life jackets zipped and buckled, paddles raised, the two men I love most in the world are poised to shove off into the brown water on this first day of our journey. Grandpa and grandson. They've never kayaked together, and Cason has never floated a river. Yet without hesitation, he slips into the inflatable double kayak in front of Jim. A few moments of circling, drifting, bickering, swearing, and they float away. I'll see them—hopefully—at our first camp.

This is what I wanted, grandpa and grandson working together, sharing an adventure. As I snap their picture, I'm proud but also a bit jealous. They're off without me.

I find an empty space on one of the blue rubber rafts and hop in. Together, we are twenty-two guests and six guides in a flotilla of six rowing rafts, one paddle raft, one double kayak and three single kayaks, all traveling at different speeds but never out of sight of each other. With the exception of our guides and two sisters ages thirteen and ten, everyone in the group but Cason is over fifty.

In early evening, we dock our boats on a hard-packed river bank. Jim and Cason—wet but intact—have managed to propel themselves successfully down the river. Together with our group, we haul the rafts and kayaks up on shore and tether them, then form fire lines to unload gear—folding tables, chairs, stoves, pots, pans, dishes, coolers of food, and waterproof bags containing tents, sleeping bags, and personal gear. A pattern we will repeat at each new camp on our five days along the river.

When the boats have been emptied, Deja, our trip leader, yells, "Campers: Set up your tents."

We each grab our two waterproof bags and scurry to find shady camp spots. After surveying our options, Jim picks out a flat space big enough to pitch two tents and far enough away from any snoring neighbor. Working together, we three assemble the tents we've rented from the guiding company. When we've mastered the mechanics of poles and pegs and our two identical tents are pitched within a few feet of each other, Cason throws his gear into his tent, then stands beside me while I pull out clean clothes to replace my smudged and sweaty ones. I hold back a barrage of questions I want to ask—about the river, the guides, our fellow travelers, and most of all about whether he's having fun.

"What do we do now?" he asks.

I'm not sure what to say. The options seem obvious. "Sit, watch the water, swim, take a nap, go for a walk, take pictures," I tell him. "I'm going to wash up in the river."

He wanders off to sit by himself in the crescent of canvas chairs facing the river. I stifle an impulse to rush over and sit beside him so he doesn't feel lonely. This is the empty space I wanted him to experience.

Day two. Cason tries out his skills in the paddle raft with some of the seasoned river runners in our group while Jim and I split up into separate rowing rafts. Our journey takes us through narrow canyons, sweeping meadows, abandoned ranches, and old outlaw hideouts. We tie up in early afternoon and make camp on a floodplain at a curve in the river.

When we've pitched our tents, the group scatters to find patches of shade, awaiting a hike that will start when the heat of the day has passed. An hour later, we fill our water bottles and pull on day packs.

Cason remains in his canvass camp chair in the shade. "Hiking is boring," he's declared repeatedly whenever I've invited him to join me for a walk at home. The truth is that hockey has made him a sprinter, not an endurance athlete.

Bross, our wiry, twenty-something guide, will lead the hike. With his rumpled brown hair, big sunglasses and gray hoody, he could be one of Cason's high school buddies. "You coming?" he asks Cason.

"I don't know."

"Sure you are. Get going."

Bross grabs a pack, tucks in a first aid kit and a bag of granola bars, slings a jug with extra water over his shoulder, and starts walking.

Cason jumps up, fills his water bottle, and hurries to catch up with Bross.

The trail that begins behind our camp switchbacks up the canyon wall. At the top, we've been promised a vista of the river, where we've traveled and where we're headed. As our group of twenty snakes up the hill, Jim dallies to take pictures, while I fall behind trying to spot birds with my binoculars. Cason takes the lead with Bross.

At a fork in the trail some forty-five minutes into our climb, Bross and Cason pause in the shade of some thorny bushes while we stragglers catch up. I sip from my half-empty water bottle, feeling light-headed. Even now, in late afternoon, the air feels

no cooler than when we made camp. Alaskans, we're not used to this desert heat. I worry that Cason's not drinking enough water.

As I weigh whether to express my concern, Bross articulates it. "Drink water," he commands, and Cason obliges with a big swig out of his red bottle.

From here the trail is not as steep, but now we labor in soft sand, so the way is no easier. Where we reach solid rock, the trail levels off, ending abruptly at the canyon rim. I peer over the edge at the brown river curving gently below, bright yellow pods of our tents spread out along the bank. I'm dizzy—the heat, the height, the edge—so I step back while others pose for pictures against a backdrop of unobstructed sky. I take pictures of the guides, the other hikers, and Cason, slightly apart from the group, at the rim's edge, smiling back at me in his red Oklahoma Sooners tee shirt, blue ball cap with American flag on the front, red water bottle in hand.

While I fill my bottle with the extra water Bross has carried all this way, Cason wanders off. When I turn back, he is sitting by himself on an overhanging ledge, feet dangling into oblivion, gazing over the canyon. My brain yells *get back, stay away from the edge, you'll fall off*, while my stomach flips and lurches in its own panic dance.

Even if I yelled, he's too far away to hear my pleas, so I motion for him to get back, but he doesn't see me or pretends not to. I wave again. He lies back on the flat rock and stares at the cloudless sky. In my mind, the ledge cracks, gives way, and his body hurtles to the valley floor.

I turn away. He's showing off, testing his limits, feeling the power of his own body.

When I turn back, my husband is approaching the ledge. He's talking some sense into Cason, I think. But no, they're both leaning over to watch something below the precipice. I gesture at the two of them, but they pretend not to see.

I rush to Bross and point to the two crazy guys on the brink. Bross shakes his head and waves them back. Moving slowly, Cason pulls in his feet, takes a swig from his water bottle, leans over for a final look, then rises and rejoins us. Jim follows.

Day three. I join five other women in the paddle raft with Travis, one of the guides. We're at his command, relying on his well-timed directions and expert rudder

skills to pivot us from lethal boulders and rubber-piercing logs. The afternoon heat beats down on my bare legs. Even though slathered in sunscreen, they feel as if they've been basted in olive oil and roasted in the oven. Whenever we have a few seconds' break in paddling, I unzip the mesh bag strapped to the pontoon in front of me and gulp water from the bottle within, only to be put back to work by Travis' sometimes frantic orders to *forward left, right, back paddle, stop.*

In my peripheral vision, a shape drifts past. It's a big rowing raft with Cason at the oars. Bross stands behind him, ready to avert a disaster if necessary. Cason flashes a quick smile and continues rowing. I grab my camera from its waterproof case and snap his picture. Broad-brimmed hat, orange-framed mirrored sunglasses, faded red life jacket, blue tee shirt, yellow and blue and orange gear bags lashed behind him. Facing forward, he's leaning into the oars, propelling his raft through the riffles.

How different we are. My life has been careful, measured as I've mustered the courage to take risks, unsure in my body, while Cason is confident, competent, a risk-taker. In another culture, he'd have harpooned his first whale by now, shot his first seal, killed his first caribou. Instead he's here, learning to master the art of reading a river.

Later, as we sit next to each other watching the river at sunset, Cason says, "I wish my family could be here."

"Your sister hates bugs and your parents don't like to camp. They'd hate it."

I catch myself before blathering on, realizing I've cut off a chance to find out what the trip means to him, and to say what it means to me.

"You'd like to share this with them," is what I finally blurt out.

"Yeah."

Day four. The Yampa, the last undammed tributary of the Colorado, has merged with the broader, more powerful Green River. We're camped near a wide, grassy valley just past Jones Hole Creek, a clear, swift stream that empties into the Green.

Cason is now Bross' sidekick. "Guide in training," Bross calls him. Bross has mastered the unique set of skills essential to a good river guide—river running, local knowledge, yarn-telling, bravado, and above all, patience. Not a bad role model for a teenage boy.

We ready ourselves to hike a trail that follows the creek. The guides promise opportunities to cool off with plunges into the cascades and to view rock pictographs and petroglyphs left by the Freemont people who lived in this country long before the first Spanish explorers.

Bross will stay behind, on dinner duty with Deja and Bob, another guide. I call out to Cason who has slipped into his tent to take a nap.

A muffled moan.

I call again.

“Uh, uh,” he mumbles.

I want him to have this experience. But I want him to choose it.

We leave without him. When we return hours later, bringing stories of still-vibrant drawings by ancient people, immersions in icy water, and encounters with snakes, Cason greets us with a slight nod from a chair in the shade. Hair combed, clothes changed, he looks fresh and clean, his red shirt drying on a tree limb above his tent.

“Bross and I floated down the river,” he says.

The logistics elude me. After floating the river, they’d have to paddle back upstream to return to camp. “How’d you manage that?”

“We hiked up to the creek, put on our helmets and life jackets, floated down the creek, then down the river and back to camp.”

Slowly, I comprehend their feat, undertaken without boats. Frigid water, bouncing over boulders, dodging sweepers, dog-paddling like mad to reach camp before being swept down the mighty Green. “Wow, that’s quite a trick.”

What I don’t say is *What were you thinking? What was Bross thinking?* I wanted Cason to discover a sense of himself on this trip, but letting go is harder than I imagined.

It’s our last night of camping. Exhausted hikers leave the campfire one by one, saying goodnight before they slip into bed.

Cason sticks with the guides at the fire. I take toothbrush and water bottle down to the river. On the way back to the tent, I contemplate nudging Cason out of the circle, allowing the guides their night to kick back and drink a few beers, sparing Cason the inevitable foul language and stupid tourist stories. But, as I catch his face in the glow of

the fire, he looks older, like a taller, leaner version of someone I once knew. So I duck into my tent, slip into my sleeping bag next to Jim, and leave Cason and the river crew laughing around the fire.

The next day we face the biggest whitewater on the river. One long intense stretch that must be scouted, pondered over, strategized by the guides. They've done it before, many times. But each run is different. The river never stays the same.

I decide to ride with Garth. Measured, cautious, conservative, college math teacher in his other life. Jim chooses a different raft, while Cason of course rides with Bross, who takes the most aggressive run through the rapids, drenching everyone in his boat. When we reunite at the take-out, Cason's grinning, eyes wide, wet clothes clinging to his body.

"That was so much fun. I want to do that."

"Do what?"

"Be a river guide."

This is what I wanted: For him to fall in love with rivers, to find a world beyond cell phones, hockey, and pick-up trucks. And for me: To step aside and let him.

Back at the Microtel in Vernal, I awake to a familiar blue glow in the bed next to me. I get up and gently tug the cell phone from Cason's sleeping grasp. He jerks awake and snatches it back. Doctors and nurses flicker on the screen. He's back to Grey's Anatomy.

"Cason, we have to get up early."

"I don't care."

I climb back in bed and think how nothing has changed. And how everything has.

What Doesn't Kill You

by Helen Coats

On June 16, 1944, a pack of cigarettes saved my life.

My grandfather, only twenty-one years old at the time, lost his squadron just outside Budapest after his fortieth mission as a P-38 Lightning fighter pilot. He dipped several hundred feet above a lake to search for his friends—low enough to remove his oxygen mask. He stuck his hand into his flight suit pocket and fished around for something—maybe a stick of Juicy Fruit. He accidentally dislodged his box of Lucky Strikes. It fell to the cockpit floor. As my grandfather leaned down to retrieve his smokes, two Messerschmitts ambushed him from above, shooting directly at the acrylic bubble canopy where his head had been just a second before. The gas tank exploded. Flames engulfed my grandfather's arm. The plane shuddered and groaned as its nose tipped toward the lake.

When pilots ejected from P-38s, they often snapped their backs, struck by the plane's twin booms. Not my grandfather. He launched above the wreckage and cleared the water below. His parachute barely had time to slow his descent. So many things should have killed him—the sulfurous rain of debris, the bone-jarring impact, the thicket of wooden spikes bristling not fifty feet away. But he survived.

The Nazis sent him to Stalag Luft III, the air force prison camp featured in the movie, *The Great Escape*. There was no escape for my grandfather. Instead, there were gray days. Days when disease settled on the camp like falling ash. Days that smelled of earth and mildew and ten thousand unwashed men, their ears tuned for news, any news, of rescue.

None came.

I only see my grandfather once a year. He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, about eleven hours from my house. Shadows of his imprisonment cling to the walls. A Purple Heart and Distinguished Flying Cross and other medals I cannot name glimmer from a hanging display case in the basement. The last piece of his P-38 Lightning's ruptured engine greets visitors in the foyer. But my grandfather rarely talks about these in front of

me. He's quick to peer over the top of his morning game of solitaire or daily crossword puzzle and dismiss his time in Stalag Luft III as little more than an episode of *Hogan's Heroes*.

And in a few, small ways, this is true. Since the guards at Stalag Luft III were all former pilots, they held a grudging respect for their captive counterparts, an attitude not found in countless other prisoner-of-war camps. The security was just lax enough that my grandfather and his friends managed to smuggle in a radio to listen to BBC news. But I do not believe for one second that his situation was as comfortable as he claims.

My grandfather spent his first few weeks as a prisoner-of-war in solitary confinement. He kept his mind busy reliving lessons the nuns taught him at Catholic school. His dry tongue rasped over Bible verses and prayers and Shakespeare. Later, when the food ran out, my grandfather learned to stomach spiders. I wonder if he preferred to swallow them whole, or pick their legs off one by one, counting the days since his last meal.

One time, the Nazis stripped my grandfather naked in an interrogation chamber and saw that he was circumcised. The room rippled with their cries of "Jew, Jew." They raised their guns. He raised his hands. He said, "No, Roman Catholic." A translator repeated his words. The Germans didn't believe him, but a priest convinced an officer to check his dog tags. He confirmed his Christian faith. The Nazis backed away and lowered their weapons. Little did any of them know his mother was half-Polish, half-Jewish.

In winter, 1945, the Germans and their prisoners marched away from Stalag Luft III and the approaching Soviet forces. Rumors flickered down the line. Some of the prisoners believed that the Nazis were taking them to death camps as a last-ditch attempt to wound the unstoppable Allies. Angered voices rose from the crowd in English, French, and other languages, but the Germans pressed them onward. In all the commotion, no one noticed as my grandfather and his friend slipped away and hid in a ditch by the side of the road. One row of Germans passed by. Then another. The two watched as the captives and prisoners slid away into the distance. Thousands of men melted into a single column—a dark snake winding its way north.

I often wonder what would have happened if my grandfather had tried to escape earlier, if he would have been shot. In March of 1944, just three months before my grandfather's initial capture, seventy-six men fled Stalag Luft III. Seventy-three were recaptured. And of those seventy-three, fifty were executed. The more I think about it, the more I am astounded by the sheer number of times my grandfather could have died and didn't. He could have crashed in that lake and drowned. And what if he hadn't crashed at all? What if he had flown on, only to be killed later in some air battle over Berlin?

But he hadn't. He made it home, his burns faded, a Purple Heart in his pocket. He returned to his wife. To raise a family. To name and feed and teach a little girl, who, in 1998, became my mother. My mother, who passed down my grandfather's eyes to me. His eyes that never needed glasses, so that even at ninety-three he can read the timer on the kitchen stove a room away.

Now, when I stand in the checkout line at Wal-Mart, I look at the shelves of cigarettes behind the counter. Marlboros and Winstons, Camels and Newports. I will never smoke them. I know they are deadly, like the fire my grandfather faced on June 16, 1944. But when I see them, I feel only gratitude.

Gunfire and smoke and cigarettes. In spite of this—because of this—here I am.

We all survived.

The Shoulder of Orion

by K.C. Frederick

I saw two planes collide over Detroit when I was a kid. I was in our back yard, where my father had covered a patch of dirt with concrete and installed a swing set. It was next to a lilac bush and, in my memory, the lilacs were in bloom. In most of my memories of the back yard, the lilacs are in bloom. I once buried my coin collection near the lilacs: there were Indian-head pennies, flying eagle pennies, even a large cent, bigger than a silver dollar, from 1818. I started collecting coins from the piles of change that showed up each night on our kitchen table, my father's leavings of the day's play in the numbers.

The coins were in a tin box that may have held tobacco once. Some of the coins I bought from dealers, and I think the hoard may have been worth a bit of money after a while, but all my later efforts to dig it up proved fruitless. Did the stuff just disappear?

I was near that lilac bush and it must have been spring with the fragrant purple flowers in bloom around me. The only other flowers I remember from that yard are the peonies that were always covered with ants. Maybe I was on the swing. To my right was a cyclone fence that looked into the alley, its concrete surface covered with broken glass that never deterred us from playing softball in its narrow confines, playing balls off roofs of what we called barns. The alley was also the place where the black rag-picker came with his horse-drawn cart. We called him the sheeney-man. He had a white beard and he was missing a hand, as I remember, but there's no way of verifying this.

If I looked in the other direction, I could see the church towering over the roof of our house—the brick wall of the church was what you saw when you looked out our front window. With the adjoining brick rectory and the large brick-walled yard where I'd go at night with my flashlight to get night crawlers, the church took up the entire block. On the other side of the block were the grade school, the high school, and the nuns' residence. The nuns, as I remember them, were always prophesying doom, God's wrath inflicted on a faithless people. Maybe I was the only one, but I believed them. I was a lonely kid, so what God thought of me was important. I tried not to incur His wrath, but in case others did, I generally kept from looking at the night sky, since the nuns had made

me aware that the stars could begin to slide out of place, the prelude to a cataclysmic demonstration of God's disfavor.

I have no way of knowing what I was up to on the day I saw the mid-air collision, but my memory is that I just happened to look up at the sky above Sam the barber's and I saw two silver planes crossing each others' paths, then something bright and glistening tumbling earthward. In my memory all this happens in complete silence. The day is warm, the sky is cloudless, there's the flash of silver, smooth motion followed by a fluttering fall, like the strip of cellophane you used to have to tear off of a pack of cigarettes. Silent, weightless, the world turned into a snow globe with only a single shining flake making its way slowly downward through the transparent medium.

The details elude me but I know I'm not making this up. My father took us later in the day to see the place where one of the planes crashed into a house. My father was a big man in the numbers then. A sharp dresser, he held himself a bit stiffly and was known for the big parties he threw at his place on Harsens Island, parties even the mayor might attend. This was before the cops raided our house, before the trial in which my father's lawyer persuaded him to separate his case from that of his associates, some of whom went to prison; it was before my father started drinking heavily, a behavior that would result in his losing the numbers and losing most of the properties he owned. He was in and out of rehab after that. Sometimes he saw bears in the house. When he was sober, he worked at low-paying jobs like being a night watchman for the city. He'd gone from the top to the bottom, driving to Hamtramck in his beat-up Ford (he left it unlocked in our street hoping someone would steal it, but nobody took him up on it) looking for a bargain on kielbasa or Silvercup bread. Having lost his high station, though, he didn't blow his brains out but soldiered on, a Polish peasant to the end. His capacity for survival was a remarkable lesson to me.

Though he was gregarious with his friends, he wasn't warm with his children. He used a strap on us, but he was less physical than his own father. Later he was too distracted to inflict severe discipline. When he was dying of lung cancer many years later, I wheeled him out to the back of the house that looked toward the alley, where every now and then a sound would come from the scrap yard near the railroad tracks, the protracted, unsettling shriek of metal scraping against metal. Di I was leaving soon

for Boston, where I worked. It was likely we weren't going to see each other again. "I'm going to miss you," he said.

I've done a little Googling and I've discovered that there were two collisions of planes over Detroit in the spring of 1948, both on the east side, which would have beenconsistent with my memory. I would have been thirteen. The earlier collision seems the one I likely saw. The student pilot, I learned, was thrown from his plane, fell through a roof and a porch, and his body was driven into the ground. I didn't know any of this as a kid. I suppose our car dragged along with others past the scene, we may have glimpsed a part of the wreckage, certainly we'd seen the damage to the house, but all that's blurred, and I must reconstruct it. What I do remember is looking up to see a silent encounter in the sky, a piece of silver fluttering down toward the houses of Detroit, a distant, wondrous sight.

My family left the city long ago, but not before the neighborhood deteriorated precipitously. Today weeds come up from the sidewalks, there are lots of vacant lots, and many of the houses that remain are ruins. In the right mood, you could convince yourself that wolves roam there at night. The huge church has been empty for some time. Shorn of its statues, it was sold to some Baptists who couldn't afford to heat the vast spaces and sold it for peanuts to a developer. I wonder if the lilac bush is still in our back yard. Is it possible that a lucky kid will dig up my coins some day?

In Ridley Scott's' *Blade Runner* the replicant Batty, facing extinction, feels compelled to tell Deckard, his pursuer, "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain."

Indeed.

Continental Divide

by Priscilla Mainardi

Sasha, my daughter, sits next to me in the car, dressed all in black. Navy blue is the brightest color she ever wears, but beneath the dark clothes she's all sunniness. We're driving across New Mexico. The weather has finally warmed after the chill of Illinois and Missouri, and winter sun heats the car through the windows. The road is long and straight with nothing but empty fields of winter-brown grass on each side, dotted with dark shrubs. We have three more days together in the car before we reach Riverside, where Sasha is moving with her boyfriend Ty.

We pass faded billboards and abandoned ranches, climb some hills and descend the other side. A small sign tells us we just crossed the Continental Divide. "I always thought that would be a bigger deal," Sasha says when we stop for lunch an hour later.

"It is a big deal," I say. "It means that now all the rivers are running west."

Sasha rubs her eyes and stretches. She's been reading "Pet Milk" in the car, the Stuart Dybek story of time and memory that I'm thinking of having my upcoming freshman composition class read. Or at least she was reading it until she set it aside to search Yelp for a place to eat lunch. We've already driven forty minutes out of our way, following a sign promising "fry bread" that brought us to a store that looked like it closed twenty years ago. Each time we've gone in search of something that sounds exciting (caverns! trading post! petroglyphs!), it's been a long detour. Still, five days into the trip, here we sit in a cafe near the Arizona border, and the waitress, a teenage Navajo, has just set down a basket brimming with sopapillas, deep fried squares of bread, crispy in places, doughy in others. Sasha and I both reach for the same piece, let go, laugh, then each select a different one.

"What did you think of the story?" I ask.

"I love the line about how he's already missing his girlfriend while he's still with her."

I glance up at her. "Seems fitting for this trip," I say.

She sits up straighter, narrowing her eyes at the bottles of hot sauce and ketchup on the table. "I think it's about how hard it is to hold on to moments of your life while

you're living them. You know in your mind that everything passes too quickly, but you can't really feel it."

A woman comes up to the table holding a tray of turquoise and silver earrings. Sasha glances at them and shakes her head. There's been a steady parade of these vendors. We're trying to resist buying things we know we won't wear anywhere else but here, any other time but now. I wait until the woman moves on to the next table, then ask, "What was your freshman composition class like? Did you have to read stories like this?"

"The theme was the ocean," Sasha says. "We had to read *Moby Dick*. That's all I remember."

All I remember about her freshman year is that she called in early October to say she'd spent the whole semester's allowance. All I remember about my own is that while sneaking home to visit my high school boyfriend, I fell down the steps in the train station and broke my ankle. I spent the rest of the semester on crutches.

Another vendor stops at the table, a man this time, holding a box of beaded bracelets. Maybe we should buy something, I think. That way he won't have to leave his home on the reservation and travel to Texas or Oklahoma for work, as I've heard many Navajos do to support their families. But Sasha says, "No, thank you," and he moves on.

There is a notice on the menu that says if you don't want the vendors to stop at your table, you can place a Do Not Disturb sign on the table, but we don't see these signs, handwritten on scraps of paper, until we're waiting at the cash register to pay, on our way out.

Sasha at the wheel, we weave back through the streets of Gallup. Interstate 40 unfurls in front of us. Behind us possibilities fall away, petrified forest, Indian casinos, painted desert. Soon after we cross the border into Arizona, Sasha points straight ahead to a black mass, dark against the sky, with a wide level top and vertical sides that rise straight up out of the flat land. “What’s that?” she says.

I reach into the back seat and draw up the road atlas, useful for providing the names of mesas and the heights of mountain peaks, marked on the maps with tiny x’s. I

open it to Arizona. “Black Mesa,” I tell her. “Or maybe Second Mesa.” Even with the atlas it’s hard to tell.

We stop for gas in the middle of the afternoon. After filling the tank, I pull the car into a parking space to wait for Sasha to come out of the store. Suddenly I’m afraid she won’t reappear, that she’s gone forever. Then I think that when she does come out she won’t see me sitting in the car, which is hidden between two white trucks. She’ll think I’m the one who’s disappeared. I get out and stand on the curb in front of the car. A minute later Sasha comes out, brown ponytail swinging, a bag of popcorn dangling from her fingertips.

I’m sitting in a chair in an empty room. Birds sing outside the open window: three notes and a trill. Inside the clocks no longer tick the silence away as they did on so many afternoons with everyone gone, my husband at work, Sasha and her brother Ned at school. Two men come into the room. I stand and they lift the chair and carry it outside. I go outside too, and take a last look at the house, which I somehow know, in the way of dreams, that I’ll never see again.

A swerve of the car jolts me awake. Sasha’s muttering to herself. “Jerk,” she says. “Asshole. You have your own lane. Do you need mine too?” She pulls around a black pick-up, accelerating as we climb a pass, mountains all around us. The land levels off again, becoming so flat we can see the earth curving away at the edges. A train goes by in the opposite direction: matte-black tank cars, flat freight cars the dark red of dried blood. It’s hard to tell how long the train is, or how far away. Such a long train is unimaginable in the East.

The day revisited in the dream was the last day we lived in that house, six years ago. When my husband and I were cleaning up before we moved, we found a stash of liquor, big bottles of cheap brands, most of them nearly empty, at the back of a basement closet. We hoped they were Sasha’s brother Ned’s, but we had our suspicions.

Sasha was eight, in third grade, when we moved into that house. I picked her and fourteen-year-old Ned up at school and brought them to their new home. Their day had begun in one place and ended in another. When we arrived, Ned ran around the

outside, then the inside, up and down the stairs, then out again through the back door and down the steps to the pool. He lay down beside the pool and dipped his hand in, but yanked it right out again. The water must have been colder than he expected.

The movers were still coming and going, lugging furniture up the stairs. I was emptying boxes into kitchen cabinets. Sasha sat down at the kitchen table, took her books from her backpack, opened her math book, and started her homework, as if it were the most ordinary day of her life, as if nothing had changed, not the house, not the neighborhood, not the table itself, which we had bought from the sellers. Maybe she believed that if she acted as if nothing had changed, nothing ever would. And how much had really changed for her? We'd moved to a bigger house in the same town, and she attended the same school. She soon adjusted to the new house and made friends in the neighborhood. I ask myself now what that moment meant, what that child has to do with the carefree grown-up person sitting next to me driving the car. They're like two sides of a foreign coin I don't recognize.

We arrive in Riverside in darkness and pull up in front of our hotel. Sasha shuts off the engine but makes no move to get out of the car. I don't move either. Getting out will mean it's over: the vast open spaces, the truck stops, the junk food, the otherworldly desert scenery. We sit in silence, other cars piling up around us, until the valet appears and opens my door. We reach into the back seat for all the things strewn there over a week of travel: books and postcards, "Pet Milk" and a half-eaten bag of popcorn.

Palm trees, wide streets, not too many cars and even fewer pedestrians. Small detached houses, a smattering of taller buildings, all of it surrounded by brown mountains and covered in a light layer of smog. I thought Riverside would be grittier, with more traffic and more people on the streets; not so hilly, nor quite so dry.

We spend two days looking at apartments and houses in the foothills that surround the downtown, Sasha seeking the familiar along the strange new streets. Do you think there's a Starbucks? She asks. I hope there's a local bar, Ty will want that. And movies. There has to be a theater around here somewhere. The hint of desperation in her voice tells me she has more doubts about the move than she's let on.

Sasha decides on the last place the realtor shows us, a compact brown house at the end of a cul-de-sac near the University, a small mountain like a pile of dry rocks rising beyond it in the distance. There's a patio out back, bordered by flowering shrubs we can't name and paved with square red-orange tiles, the color evoking Spanish-style roofs and tropical sunsets.

Nearby we find an organic market and buy coffee and sandwiches. They sell condensed milk and Sasha looks for Pet Milk but they don't carry it. I wonder if it still exists.

That night we eat in the hotel restaurant, where it's warm enough to sit outdoors under heat lamps. Sasha orders a steak; perhaps she feels it will be her last good meal for awhile, one that I'm paying for, anyway. We splurge on cupcakes for dessert, German chocolate cake topped with half an inch of fluffy coconut pecan icing. "When will I see you next?" I ask, peeling the paper from the rich dark cake. "Do you think you'll come for the shower?"

Ned is getting married in the fall, and his fiancée's mother is planning a shower six months from now, in July. Sasha had said she'd come back for it, but now she says, "I'm not sure. It depends on what I find for work."

"Teaching, do you think?" I ask her. She gave up a perfectly decent job teaching English as a Second Language to make this move.

Sasha shrugs. She begins to talk about her plans, to hike up the nearby mountains with Ty, to grow herbs on the patio, to learn to cook. I go back to eating cake, but soon put down my fork. It tastes too sweet, and I can't finish it. The efforts she's making on behalf of this venture, her vision of her and Ty's happiness, fill me with a familiar ache, the ache of watching your children make their way through life, knowing there are so many things you can't help them with.

Sasha too puts down her fork. "You know, Momma," she says, reverting to her childhood name for me, "the liquor you found in the basement when you moved? It wasn't Ned's. It was mine, from a party I had senior year when you and Daddy went to Italy for your anniversary. It was the night I met Ty."

She offers nothing further, and I don't press her. I never gave my parents an explanation of what I was doing home from college when I fell in the train station and broke my ankle, letting them believe I was making a surprise visit. I wasn't too concerned about what they thought. My ankle was giving off hot jolts of pain, and I was already worried about how I would get across campus to my favorite English literature class, where Sasha's father had sat down next to me on the first day.

I look up at the flowers hanging from the hotel balcony, thinking about the small space I take up in Sasha's head compared to the large space she takes up in mine. After a moment I start eating my cupcake again. Sasha says, "Where's the river? If this place is called Riverside, how come we haven't seen any river?"

Sasha drops me at the airport the next day. There's something unnerving, even unreal, about flying, about covering in six hours the distance we drove in eight days, as if time were a rubber band that had stretched and stretched then snapped back quickly when I left Riverside. I reread "Pet Milk" on the plane, thinking about how quickly our last hug, the feeling of being with Sasha, is fading from me, even as I try to hold onto it.

Priscilla and Sasha on the California Coast

Two days later, I stand in front of my new class, holding the writing assignment I'm about to hand out, on which I've reduced Sasha to a "reader," a speck on the other side of the map. "Discuss the following comment made by a reader. At the heart of 'Pet Milk' lies the question: How can we hold on to the things we love in life?"

I look out at the students, so young they don't yet know that they'll spend their whole lives trying to answer this question. Then I walk forward and hand out the assignment, beginning with the only student brave enough to sit in the front row.

Butterflies

by Christina M. Wells

The small piece of paper had a name, address, and phone number written in a hand I didn't recognize. "Betty Friedan," it read. I wondered if Friedan had scrawled this in a meeting somewhere, maybe in the living room down the hall. "Betty Friedan sat on my divan," my grandmother, Juanita Dadisman Sandford, had said so many times. I could see her in the kitchen, gesturing with her arms as she mentioned *The Feminine Mystique*'s author. But now my cousin was down the hall, packing up the dishes for the estate sale.

"Hey, we could call her," my wife Jen said, looking at the slip of paper. "Maybe she'd like to know."

"Unfortunately, I am pretty sure she is also dead."

"Yeah, she is," my aunt MK confirmed. She was going through a heap of my grandmother's letters, deciding what should be kept and what should be thrown out. I had two stacks of books in front of me. They were a small part of the piles we had surrounded ourselves with in my grandmother's lavender home office. My other aunt, Susan, had told me that I couldn't throw away a Baylor University flask because it was probably a collector's item. I looked at the books, the papers, and what was probably a dead feminist's handwriting. I looked at my grandmother's letters stacked before MK—definitely a dead feminist's handwriting. These materials had real meaning.

How would we figure out where to put all of this stuff? How could I even think of categorizing it?

The week before, Jen and I had listened to a five-year old nephew play the drums and had gone through the 3D *Flight of the Butterflies* exhibit at the science museum we toured with family in Greensboro. We watched the orange and black monarchs as they seemed to come closer and closer, then fade into something more ethereal. It was surreal, watching transparent butterflies seem to come closer and closer, only to fly away and disappear.

Before we left Greensboro that weekend, my father called to tell me my ninety-year old grandmother had fallen and broken her hip. She was in such bad shape that no one expected her to survive.

She was my maternal grandmother, but my dad had been her colleague in the sociology department at the state university in my hometown—that was where he had first seen my mother. For years, my father and grandmother had had offices down the hall from one another. Sometimes when I was little, one had been in class, and the other had watched me, while my mother worked somewhere else. Everything was tied up together: work, family, work, people from work.

On the way home from Greensboro, Jen and I stopped at a bagel place and a winery in the Charlottesville area. We needed to be outside, to talk about what was going on with my grandmother's health. The winery was small and desolate, a little way off the main road. The woman overseeing the tastings seemed angry and raw, irritated at having to be at work on a sunny fall day. I didn't want to be near her, and we sat outside on a long wooden deck, lost in memories and concern for my grandmother. I looked at the small glass of wine in front of me, recalling how my grandparents had once sat with me in the bar at a Mexican restaurant in one of the cities where I'd gone to graduate school. My grandmother had picked up a bottle of beer and said, "I like this brand. It gives me the best buzz." She had always had a way of saying the unexpected, nothing like the grandma rhetoric of the south. Once she had said, "These Baptists give their kids such hang ups about sex. When people are Puritans, their kids can't be normal." Then there was the time when she said, "I'm so glad you're a lesbian! Now you don't have to deal with men's shit!" She had cried over my announcement as if experiencing real joy, like experiencing Christmas in July or an unexpected lottery win.

Our left-wing grandma was the most unusual babysitter in town. No one in the history of her Ouachita Hills neighborhood had ever had been so open-minded. Opposite my grandmother in every way, the judgmental old woman across the street always had to know the comings and goings of the neighborhood and believed anyone passing time there had to conform to a rigid standard. She had looked at my cousin and me through binoculars once when we were little girls, and we had found a pair of

binoculars and looked right back, unafraid of her judgments. We were our grandmother's granddaughters.

This was long ago and far away. People no longer talked about my grandmother's trek to a Joan Baez concert, or the time she took her little white daughters and some students to see Martin Luther King, Jr. speak or to a black church when he died. They no longer talked about how she wore purple everywhere for years, her style legendary among friends, students, and community members for this chosen uniform. No, in recent years the hushed talk about my grandmother had shifted to how she kept repeating herself, and how aggressive she'd been with the nurses' aides who took care of my grandfather or the repairmen who couldn't help her put the closet door back on its hinges.

"I don't get why people don't grasp how memory loss works," I said, watching the tree limbs blow above the deck at the winery. "Do you know what my dad said to me? He said, 'You know she called us six times in a row the other day!' And he was angry. So, I just said, 'You get she has dementia, right?'"

Somewhere during a long conversation about how people were handling my grandmother's decline and her loss of independence, Jen and I saw something flying toward us, lyrically in a rhythm all its own. It was a purple butterfly, the first I'd ever seen outside a butterfly habitat.

All my life I had associated butterflies with my grandparents. My grandfather had died several months prior, and I recalled one of my favorite images of him when he doused himself in aftershave to go to the St. Louis Butterfly Habitat. The butterflies landed all over him while we took pictures. Strangers stopped to see the man who was covered with striking butterflies. He was perfectly still so they would move towards him—and the aftershave didn't hurt the process, either.

He was calm when he died, and even though he was in his nineties, I really hadn't been expecting it. He had recovered from a stroke, had had serious intestinal problems, had had his gall bladder removed, and had sustained a major head injury in his driveway. Still, he had lived. I saw him as a survivor. On one of his more recent birthdays, he had said, "Can you believe I'm this old? I don't think I'll make it to 100,

though." His late life diet had included innumerable mini-frozen pizzas, lots of bread, and plenty of "breakfast for dinner." He lived on fat and carbs, and he was diabetic to boot. Yet he lived. He always lived.

And then an infection that wouldn't have touched a younger person killed him. He had been an English professor, like I am, and I stared into the living room at the eyeless Shakespeare bust that I was supposed to take with me, eventually. I had been scared of it as a child, for its stillness, and well, for the missing eyes. Now Grandpa was gone, and that was more frightening than anything.

Jen and I had spent the night with Grandma the night after his funeral, after a lunch where Grandma sat next to me with a glass of wine and a plate of food she could barely touch. "Many of these people have never seen me drink before. And you know what? I DON'T CARE." She couldn't consistently remember who all the children present were, but she remembered well enough that most of my grandfather's colleagues were Baptists, and that a lot of the neighbors claimed not to drink.

"You've probably never seen me drink before," she said to a woman sitting across from me.

"Juanita, I think you'd be surprised what I know about you."

This was moderately funny, until it wasn't. Later that night, Jen and I had to get my grandmother back to bed several times.

"Where's Herman?" she said to me that night and the next day. It was like the voice of a child waking into a nightmare.

At some point that week, when she was calmer, I tried to see how far back the forgetting went. "Grandma, do you remember staying up with me and ordering pizza, watching OJ go down the freeway in his Bronco?"

"No," she said. "Why would we have watched that? I guess the whole country did. The whole country probably did. Why?"

Another time we had asked her about working on the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women with Hillary Clinton, who had once given my grandmother a handwritten note, praising a speech she had given. "Yes, yes. And now she's running for governor. They'll never let her win." We didn't have much chance to talk about Clinton's run for the presidency or how my grandmother drifted in and out of knowing

what it was she was running for. What happened over and over again was that my grandmother would say, “You know I used to teach a course in Death and Dying? But now I know nothing about death and dying. Can you believe that?”

The week she died, I couldn’t help thinking of how she had said that, said it again, and said it again, as if for new emphasis and clarification, and not only out of Alzheimer’s. At some point she fell into a sleep that lasted for several days until she didn’t wake up. At that time, Jen and I had already flown to Arkansas and people were beginning to talk about the funeral. I had called her and had someone put the phone to her head. Among many other things, I said, “Grandma, maybe dying is like being yourself, only with super powers.”

She already had super powers, to me, as evidenced by every story I ever told about her. Years before she had had plans for what she wanted various people to do at her funeral. She wanted a cousin and I to read essays, things we had written when we were in high school. Mine was about a time she was futilely trying to clean her study, the lavender one. I think this was from the same era where she had a poster up that featured Golda Meir, with the caption, “But can she type?” This was the world she lived in, and I stayed within its orbit whenever possible. In her files, she found this little plastic bag of green and white buttons that said “ERA Today.” She handed them to me and suggested I pass them around to friends.

This was either fifth grade or sixth, therefore the mid-eighties. I didn’t know that the ERA hadn’t passed—only that I already believed fervently in equality. It’s not a hard sell on a playground filled with ten and eleven-year old girls, still sometimes hanging strong to monkey bars while boys taunt them and act a fool. Only one person gave me back a button, and that was because her mother told her the feminists had changed her hymnal at church. That didn’t even make sense to me, and I don’t remember what my grandmother said in response. I imagine that she sighed and rolled her eyes, if only because that was a typical Grandma response when people didn’t get it.

That is still my favorite Grandma story, even better than the one where she allowed my cousin and I to camp out in a tent in her living room or the time she took us for ice cream in our pajamas. It doesn’t even compare with her not being mad when we

took more of her butterfly stickers than she had offered us, and we plastered them over several free surfaces.

At a theoretical funeral, I wouldn't have read the teen-age version of the story, but I would have written a grown up one, reflecting on the buttons, the ERA, the resurgence of the ERA, and what it was like to learn that Arkansas, where I was born, was one of the states that completely screwed that era's version of the ERA because of its nay vote. My grandmother had taught me that activism and progressive opinions matter. That is how I always remember her.

At the real funeral, I brought a book with me, one I thought my grandmother had given me. I had held it in my office in Virginia, and it had fallen open to a poem about death by Mary Oliver, one that my grandmother's friend and former student, the minister for the service, later told me she regularly uses at funerals. I had found it by accident in a book I hadn't yet read. And I would read that poem at the funeral instead of my own stories. It felt right, when I didn't.

There are many stories I don't remember because I wasn't there. My grandparents both protested the Vietnam War outside a ROTC building. My grandmother started a chapter of NOW and led interracial meetings designed to help bring peaceful integration to the town where I lived. A housekeeper once told her that she should beware the KKK. Later, much later, Grandma wrote a book on poverty with some students and served with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.

But I remember from life, not from stories, that both my grandparents made an extra place at the table for a student, a friend, or a combination therein. I remember how many people they kept up with over the years. I remember my grandfather's walking tour of Scotland, and I remember my grandmother singing "Midnight Train to Georgia" and Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, and Emmylou Harris's *Trio* album in the car, while I associated my grandfather, chair of English at a Baptist college, with Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler." I remember Bing Crosby at Christmas and my grandmother's glass manger scene in the front window.

I remember being the head monarch butterfly in a first-grade play. It was on a nature trail, and another girl gave me grief for wearing pants—jeans, no less, something my whole family thought was normal. I stand in the pictures, strapped into a large

butterfly, turning around and around in back of a cocoon. Looking at the images, I know so much now that I didn't know then. For instance, I know that as I rotated as a butterfly, my grandmother was sitting in an outdoor amphitheater, unknowingly having her purse invaded by ants.

I remember countless family triumphs and tragedies. I also remember how it felt to know that my grandparents' house was a shell, and that none of us would ever be in it again. There was always a tree in the backyard, hanging over the house. It always seemed precarious, but it held tight to the ground, never particularly blowing in the wind, and never, never blowing the house down.

Jen and I bought a house some months after my grandmother's funeral, a kind of family home for the new generation. It's a very different design from the houses I knew in youth. Sometimes, though, I catch a butterfly hanging close to the ground, or I see something familiar from the past in a house that's still largely new to me. I even think of growing a butterfly habitat in the backyard, something to pull the butterflies to me. I wonder, variously, what it would take to bring a monarch to me, or a purple butterfly. Perhaps we don't know what we draw towards us, or what gets drawn to us by the inexplicable. I don't believe that because something is invisible that it isn't here.

Juanita Dadisman Sandford

Someone once took a picture of my grandmother, all in purple, front door wide open. She is glowing in the sunlight that's pouring in the front glass, and she looks radiant and otherworldly. She is smiling a large wide grin, sporting a white and green ERA Today button. She looks like something has beamed her in. Then again, she looks planted to the ground.

Chapatis and Change

by Sean Talbot

The traveler sees what he sees; the tourist sees what he came to see.
—G.K. Chesterton

Days float through Udaipur, Rajasthan, like beggars indifferent to distinction. The warm January sun shimmers on Lake Pichola, reflects the region's august history in its murky water. There are three clouds in the sky, more than in the week since I arrived.

Across the street from Café Edelweiss, where I am eating dessert before breakfast, a blind local man stands on a speed bump, white cane in hand. Dark skin and cataracts, thick mustache, carefully combed hair. A rusty sign hangs from his neck. A message in Hindi is painted in beautiful script. What I presume to be the same message in English is written in a sloppy hand, blue text on white:

My Eyes Opration.
Please Help Me.

He holds a receipt book in his left hand, a written record of those who have not ignored him. It is open to the first page. He wears a five o' clock shadow, and leather cross-trainers, dirt-ridden and worn like the oily hands of the motorcycle mechanic who works in the open air nearby.

Does the blind man know that the gold chain fitted to his neck shimmers in the sunlight? Can he hear my steady eyes upon his, or sense the traces of my guilt for staring into a face of India which cannot, for once, stare back?

In my ears, these are raucous, electric thoughts; my heart beats amplified in my ears like the temple bells ringing in a nearby alley.

We both turn our heads toward the clangor.

A group of boys line up outside the cafe, on the street side of a chainlink boundary; one, then three, then seven of them, holding hammered iron bowls, like

lidless kettles. Inside them, small, sculpted men sit upon beasts soaked in black oil, covered in marigold petals.

For weeks, I've wondered what gulf exists that would keep the "open-hearted" traveler in me from connecting with, or relating to, the locals, a land that defies and contradicts every adjective I've used in attempt to capture it.

"*Kana*," a boy says, over and over again. "*Pani.*"

He can't yet be nine years old. He looks me hard in the eye, points to his mouth, then to my plate, and back to his chapped lips.

Food, water.

Every guidebook, hotelier, rickshaw driver, and doctor I've met since arriving in India has given me the same advice: *do not give to the beggars; they come into the cities because there's more money in tourists than in farming. Giving does them no good.*

"Chapatis, sir, chapatis," says a barefoot boy wearing soot-covered clothes. The boys stand one meter away from my table, behind a chain hung like a velvet rope in a cinema queue line. There are no chapatis on the silver screen of Café Edelweiss; only white people and pastries and dark chocolate. My table is on the front lines: fellow tourists talk and eat behind me, seated strategically deep in the cavernous, piss-yellow dining room.

I want to show my compassion. I want to let the boys know that I see and hear them, that change is possible. But that's just what they're looking for, my doctor friend had said.

The boy adorns puppy eyes and whimpers. I want him to leave. I cannot even use the Hindi phrase I learned in Varanasi for banishing touts—n*ahi chaiye, I do not want.* These children offer me nothing, want only my food.

"Hello, sir, chapatis." A hoarse, intimate whisper from the old beggar this barefoot pre-teen will someday become: "Please."

Two nights ago, I saw him squatting in the street, near a fire of burning garbage. His companions were huddled in tight circles: understanding, community, friendship. Things I cannot—do not—offer him.

Instead, I ignore him, all of them, and their pleas for *kana; hello, please, sir, chapatis.*

Sir, please. Hello?

I cannot—will not—eat in front of them, nor can justify teasing them with the two sandwiches on my table, both heaping with eggs and bacon. I pretend the sandwiches are not there. I write instead, holding my tears back because maybe they'll think I'll break, and then they'll have full stomachs for the day, and return tomorrow, psychologically and digestively reinforced, expectant.

My downward glare renders me into another deaf tourist. The tourists at the tables behind me talk louder as the boys hold up the bowls and ask, in the same melancholic whine, *kana, pani, please sir, ma'am, chapati*.

Silence from the nosebleeds. The boys leave.

I am an awful, selfish voyeur. Another white invader whose economic contributions profit hotels that shun locals as a cultural norm. A Bikaner hotelier said to me, *any unmarried Indian couple cannot, by Indian law, stay in a tourist hotel.*

If, by chance, a foreigner befriends a local, the latter is typically not allowed in the foreigner's hotel. In the case of my friend Rita, a British woman who invited an Indian restauranteur to dinner at our hotel, the owners enthusiastically said the local, who worked at the hotel across the bridge, was "a good Indian man, and is welcome here!"

For most of us tourists, however, they fear rape, or robbery, or some other sin for which we do not have a word.

After twenty eternal minutes, the rest of the boy beggars move on, unfazed by rejection, determined as when they arrived. Will the customers at the next café feed them, or the one after that?

There are programs to help the poor, the guidebooks say. *If you want to help them, donate to the following causes.*

The guidebooks say nothing, however, of the heartache in seeing a man, like the one sitting under a tree in Pokhara, Nepal lifting his amputated, gangrene femur in the air with one hand, and a rusty tin can in the other, marked simply, *$.*

That gulf between us seems wider than the Pacific Ocean. Airplanes and cargo ships could not bring me closer to the little boy standing three feet away, who has

returned to the cafe's chain barrier. Perhaps he saw something in me and came back to retrieve it.

Who am I, exactly, that I would refuse a child food at the word of a rich doctor or a guidebook written by a western author, which both say it would do the child 'no good'? How can one who has not known true hunger say such a thing? If my friend Kokayi, an American activist whose mission is to end child hunger in the United States, saw me now, he would dash our friendship to the dogs.

Who am I to deny a request for a photo, as I have, from an Indian family on holiday, or a few rupees to a local woman in the park? Is it because I wish for a connection based less on transactional experience, or that I would prefer the barter economy of buskers or street artists, a few rupees for a song? What if these children have not had the opportunity to learn an instrument, or how to use their voice, but to beg to survive the day, or a mother's callused hand?

What inalienable right have I, a fellow human, to project expectation or desire upon a culture that asks *so little* of me? To think: I want an experience to have a particular impact on me; I need to see this or that, or need to feel as if my experience is somehow authentic. I loathe the roles this little boy and I have been born into, pointlessly, for we are equally bound to our respective ranks in the caste system.

In many parts of India, tourists and travelers alike—particularly Westerners—are automatically inserted into a predetermined slot of economic import. We are ushered to the front of lines at train stations, hospitals, treated kindly by hoteliers who routinely hit dog- and boy-beggars with sticks.

Oh, that I could offer them *anything!*

Already I deny the boys something so easily given. I could buy each one of them a sandwich, filled with protein and served on fresh-baked bread. I could pay out-of-pocket for the *eye opration* for the blind man.

So why don't I?

Because I've been conditioned to think that it wouldn't change anything. *Lonely Planet* and *Slumdog Millionaire* declare that compassion and guilt are juicy prey for the Begging Industry; that, regardless of my intention, the money would certainly end up in

the hands of kidnappers, rapists, and sleazy businessmen, and that no amount of change would keep these boys from returning to Café Edelweiss tomorrow.

The impossible gulf between local and foreigner widens. If it is not, as they say, what happens to us that matters, but how we react to it that hones our character, I wonder if compassion, in this case, isn't quite enough.

Hot Work

by Joyce H. Munro

Music to cook by: "My Funny Valentine," the Vedran Ružić Trio

I'm pretty sure I know how the fire started, though I can't be certain. Newspaper reporters weren't certain either. You can read evasion all over their conclusion: "The origin is supposed to have been a defective flue in the basement of the Riverside Hotel." Defective flue, my eye. Something more combustible happened down in the basement that night in 1875.

Eight o'clock—closing time at Nat's Oyster Saloon. Knowing Nat, he probably told his kitchen help to go home early, business was slow anyway. Then he stayed on alone to close up the place. His pride and joy. Recently opened in downtown Milton, Pennsylvania, on the lower level of his father's new hotel. The place of resort for gents *and* ladies. Good square meals at reasonable prices. Best desserts in town. Fresh bivalves served in any style desired. Raw. Baked. Stewed. Scalloped. Fried.

If you're like me, you eat your oysters on the half shell or fried. Forget chopped-up or soupy. My husband likes them fried, he, being from the south where frying is *de rigueur*. Ever since we moved to the Philly area, he's been on the lookout for restaurants serving decent fried oysters, but there's only one that meets the desires of his taste buds—the Oyster House in Center City. So on occasion, we have resorted to frying them up ourselves.

The recipe from Nat's day calls for dipping oysters three times. First in cracker dust, then in beaten egg, then cracker dust again. Dipping is done with the fingers—piercing oysters with a fork destroys the flavor (so said cooks in those days). Then they're laid in a wire basket and fried in a pot of lard so hot blue smoke rises from the center. It's not a good idea for lard to boil unattended. But, knowing Nat, he was probably multitasking. And voila, the perfect ingredients for a block-buster fire.

I need to point out that Nat's was not the only place where the fire of '75 could have started. There were several oyster saloons in town where blue smoke rose over kettles of boiling lard. Oysters, once considered fancy food for fancy people, were all the rage, east to west, north to south. Good eating was the reward for hauling gobs of crude

oil out of the depths of Pennsylvania. And newspapers, like the *Sunbury American*, carried recipes for good eats. They also reported tales of overeating. Like the one about an old lady who downed “two dozen fried oysters, a pound of crackers, three slices of fruit cake, half a mince pie and some apples, after which she was threatened with a spasm, and in the effort to prevent it, she sacrificed all the wine there was in the house.”

Oysters sped their way from the Chesapeake Bay to towns like Milton by railway. Bedded down in straw and moistened with salt water, oysters made the trip in only sixteen hours. An hour or so later, as fast as shuckers could shuck, they’d be sliding down the throats of gents sitting at counters all over town. Followed by a pint of cold lager beer. Knowing Nat, he probably kept his place open later than other establishments and wore himself out. Feet so sore, fingers so achy. So weary, he didn’t realize the fryer was still boiling away, crumbs from the last oysters popping into the air. Flash point—and poof!

The blaze that night was hungry enough to eat up a whole block of businesses. Nat wasn’t hurt, at least not bad enough to make the newspapers. But four years later, Nat *did* make the papers. Another fire. This one blew him out a window head first when flames licked at gas pipes. The papers dispassionately reported that he suffered a broken arm and contusions.

Here’s what happened. Nat was working at his restaurant and heard people yelling, Fire! He ran down the street and dashed into Brown’s building to help Gus Lochman save his confectionery shop. But while he was grabbing goodies off the shelves, he got tossed out unceremoniously. Brown’s, a frame structure on Front Street, was reduced to glowing embers. And the cause of the fire? The usual suspect—a defective flue.

Then in 1880, on a warm and windy day in May, fire erupted yet again, this time at Milton’s largest industry at the edge of town—the Car Works. And yet again, Nat’s restaurant burned to the ground, as did his father’s newly rebuilt hotel, his brother’s bakery, and his sister-in-law’s confectionery.

This was the fire of all fires, landing Milton on the list of largest conflagrations in North America. Residents saw their town burn from one end to the other. Their houses, businesses, schools, churches reduced to a blanket of ash six inches deep. Their just-

planted vegetable gardens, shade trees where they carved their initials, canaries perched in gilded cages in their parlors. Tintypes of Granny and Pa-Pa. Letters from the battlefield back in the ‘60s. Marriage certificates. Lockets holding strands of their stillborn baby’s hair. Ashes of all that was sacred, blown about the streets, into the west branch of the Susquehanna River, floating down to the Chesapeake Bay, metamorphosing into food for oysters.

Nothing left to hold onto. Other things people held dear—like their emotions, their brains, muscles, immune systems—charred as well. As psychologists have told us, the trauma of massive destruction can lead to depression or long-term anxiety disorders or debilitating physical ailments. Some individuals never regain hold.

What happened to Miltonians that May day is similar to what happens to soldiers. It happened to Nat during the Civil War. Back in the spring of ’62, Nat’s regiment of the Pennsylvania Reserves, the Thirty-Fourth, was charged with protecting the nation’s capital at Fort Pennsylvania, on the outskirts of Washington, D.C. It was there that Nat saw—as up close and personal as a fort full of soldiers can get—President Lincoln and General McClellan, who came out to review the troops. McClellan was the bigger draw. He was a Pennsylvanian and how those soldiers loved him.

Nat’s regiment was ordered to Manassas, Virginia, then deeper south to Fredericksburg and on to Richmond, where they engaged in the Seven Days’ Battles and lost to the Confederates. Then up to Bull Run, then up farther to South Mountain, then over to Antietam. Then back down ... then up ... then over ... then down ... Along the way, the Reserves were picking up a reputation for their “magnificent and stubborn valor,” as McClellan put it. They were also picking up diarrhea, rheumatism, frostbite, typhoid fever.

At some point on the war path, after the battle of Antietam, when the regiment turned south again, Nathaniel Huth bolted. Emotionally or physically or both, he abandoned the cause and for that offense, he was dishonorably discharged by the General Courts-Martial in November of 1862. His motive for bolting will never be known, but it certainly didn’t help that McClellan, his beloved General-in-Chief, had just been ousted by Lincoln for not pursuing the enemy aggressively enough. The Reserves were

fuming mad when they got word—they had sworn they would stand by him. Some of those reservists, no doubt, acted out that fall.

Nat was nineteen, stood five and a half feet, and, judging by his photo taken later in life, weighed a hundred pounds. Judging by that same photo, his slack-jawed, shell-shocked expression probably infuriated the court; they wanted to see loyalty and energy in that face. The charge against Nat was an action considered egregious, like falling asleep on post, vulgarity in the presence of a lady, gross intoxication, or insubordination.

Nat did not come home unscathed. He did not come home, period. After his discharge, he went west, just shy of the Ohio border, where he met and married Martha Jones of Portersville. But his heart and his livelihood were in Milton, so he hauled Martha, pregnant with the first of eleven children, back home where he could make the tasty morsels of his dreams.

One after another, when they were old enough to hoist themselves up and grip the cold marble slab with their fat fingers, and their eyes followed the rolling pin back and forth on the pastry table, that's when Nat would have commenced his children's education in cookery. Those round, rosy faces intent on kitchen work. Sieving, mixing, kneading. Their non-stop baby chatter. Rolling, greasing, grating. Could children have more fun than this? Mashing, spooning, tasting.

And one after another, Nat and Martha's children took to cookery. All but four. Willie who died of scarlet fever. Ralph who died of spinal meningitis. Mattie, of diphtheria. Marian, cholera. And with each child's death, the kitchen mourned. Lamentation falling in the stew pot, scooped into dishes served to customers who, unless they saw tears in Nat's eyes when he served them, ate unknowing.

Father Huth and Mother Huth they were called after they moved to Brookville, Pennsylvania at the turn of the century. But what about Henry the earlier father and Catherine the earlier mother? All it took was migration up the Schuylkill River in the 1850s, then a couple of block-buster fires to lose track of begetters. Maybe Nat's children asked him where great-granddad came from and all he knew was some place in Germany. Maybe they asked what their original name was and he said Hutt, Hoot, or Hott. Maybe they asked him to say something in German and all he knew was *Sie lustigen kleinen dummen Kopf.* Thus, the current elders became the only elders.

The skimpiest family tree I've ever heard of, penned on a scrap of paper and tucked in a Bible, reads in part: "Mother Huth's father's mother was ... Father Huth's father's name was ... Your great grandmother Huth's name was ..."

No dates, no places, no stories. This is the whole of Father and Mother Huth's family tree, a paper version of Charlie Brown's Christmas tree with six bedraggled branches. I learn about this scrap of paper during Christmastide, the season of gift-giving and feasting. Some gift, this sparse tree with its flimsy information.

Henry Huth's descendents may not have talked much about their past, but they molded it out of spun sugar and fondant and marzipan. Huths were, and still are, bakers and confectioners. A family-wide, generations-long love affair with sweets. You can follow the scent of rum-laced fruitcake as Huths moved across Pennsylvania into Ohio, over to New Jersey, down to Washington, D.C., opening bakeries with trendy names like Vienna, Globe, Bon-Ton. And who knows how many Huths have baked in the privacy of their own kitchens, gluey-doughed fingers leaving prints all over cabinets in the search for nutmeg.

The recipe for Nat's fruitcake, handwritten on a card, is tucked away in my recipe box. Every year around Christmas time, I get it out and I remember when my Dad baked hundreds of pounds of fruitcake each year. Yes, hundreds. Then came a deal to bake the cakes for Woodward & Lothrop Department Stores in Washington, D.C., until they learned Dad didn't have a commercial kitchen license. Over the Christmas holidays, Dad and I emailed about fruitcake, not that I planned to bake any. But he reminded me of a few things anyway: "This is important—put a pan of water on the bottom of the oven, otherwise cake will be too dry. Use brown kraft paper for pan liner, but grease the pan too."

And where did Dad learn these insider tips? From his Father Fred who learned from Father George who learned from Father Nathaniel who learned from Father Henry who learned from Father name unknown. It is rude to tell fruitcake jokes in my hearing—I have blood kinship with the stuff.

Nat's fruitcake is the type that improves with time, though not as much time as fine wine. The recipe brought by memory from somewhere in Germany to Reading, Pennsylvania around 1819 and adapted through the generations, thanks to ever-more-

convenient ingredients. Three types of raisins, plus currants and dates and figs and prunes. Pounds and pounds of candied fruit, walnuts, eggs, a minimal amount of flour. Nat must have used a wash basin, not a bowl. And it was a hands-on situation. Elbow-deep in batter. Then he'd plop it in pans and let it slow-bake for half a day. Along about fruitcake-mixing time each autumn, Nat's growing children likely soured on kitchen work. But he wouldn't let them bolt. Nat had rules for cooking and rules for children, which none dared break. Customers craved fruitcake—the baking must be done.

The ritziest Christmas gift I ever received was a "Little Lady" stove. A real electric stove for cooking real food. There it gleamed on Christmas morning, under the tree, surrounded by a pile of mini-sized accoutrements. Mixes for pie crust, gingerbread, pancakes, cookies. Pots and pans, cookie cutters, rolling pin. I cooked all the mixes in short order, one after the other, then scoured the kitchen for something else to make. Mom gave me dollops of left-overs to cook in my mini sauce pot, biscuits to reheat in the oven. My culinary education was well on the way when my brother decided to sauté something made of plastic directly on the stovetop. Then he satisfied his urge to bake using a model airplane. The oven didn't actually catch fire, it just smoldered for the longest time after the babysitter yanked out the plug.

Nat got a new oven after he moved to Brookville, Pennsylvania and opened a bakery on Main Street. A modern oven that could hold a constant heat, perfect for crusty breads and delicate sweets. But when Nat hung out his shingle, he was dealing with stuff other than the sweet stuff. Three children and a daughter-in-law lived with him in the apartment above the bakery. Within a year, the daughter-in-law died in childbirth. That same year, a granddaughter was born blind. Two more granddaughters and a grandson died the following year. Knowing Nat, he bristled at small things, grumbled at kitchen help, punished the dough with his fists, ramming his wordless homage into yeast rolls, sold to customers who spread them with jam and ate unknowing.

Then his youngest daughter, Helen, and her husband moved in. Who knows what Nat thought when Helen married John Frazier, a newcomer, come to Brookville to establish a new industry—horse racing. I'm guessing Nat took John's ambitions in stride, maybe went out to see that plot of level ground John wanted to buy and build horse stables, a race track, start a racing association. Nat didn't invest in John's

schemes, but eventually the tables turned. John became business partner with Nat. They registered the corporate name, Huth & Frazier, and modernized baking operations, streamlined delivery of bread around town, won prizes for their baked goods at country fairs.

Maybe John's horses stopped winning races or maybe Helen begged him to quit traveling so much, stay home now that they were expecting a child. Maybe it was the lure of a well-stocked bakery, begging to be expanded into a retail chain. Apricot tarts, pfeffernüsse, raisin biscuits, shortbread, laid out in precise rows. Trays of butter küchen and almond crusted French bread. Layer cakes, custard pies. Stacks of light and dark breads and rolls. Oh, that tantalizing yeasty aroma. Oh, the lusciousness of it all. Oh, the sales potential.

I own all sorts of baking pans. Square, round, sheet, bundt, loaf, mini-muffin, muffin-top, brioche, spring-form, tart. But I have never owned a lady-lock pan. I didn't know such a thing existed and it didn't, until Nat Huth invented it in 1914. And with this invention, I realized I didn't know Nat as well as I thought. But this I know: lady-locks were all the rage, like oysters, at the turn of the century. *Fulhorns* in German. Puff paste horns filled with sweet buttercream or pie dough horns filled with savory cheeses. This delicacy could be filled with almost anything, if it was finely minced and sauced. I'll bet Nat would cook up a dozen lady-locks filled with creamed oysters if you asked him.

There was such a demand for lady-locks, he had to invent a new devise to bake them faster. Instead of rolling out rich pastry dough late at night, I figure he was over at the machine works, cutting tin sheets into exact forms, bending them with a forcer, applying solder, the bead of molten metal like thin royal icing flowing over his arthritic fingers, stinging. Tiny bits of sparking metal showering the lard-soaked apron he forgot to take off, so weary, dropping the arc welder, slapping at his apron before it could combust and burnish his wrinkled skin. But someone was there to keep fire watch because soldering is "hot work," the risk of fire ever-present. Burns, heat stress, heat stroke.

Decades later, folks in Brookville would wander into Uzi's Pastries on Main Street and ask for buttercream lady-locks, but they were out of luck. Nat was the last baker in town who made them, just across the street at Vienna Bakery. It's a pizza parlor now.

Still standing after all these years. Amazing it never burned down. Baking is hot work. Ovens, stoves, gridirons, broilers. Fired up ten hours a day, spilling out temptation. In those days the walls glistened with butter, the air was cinnamony and Nat's skinny wrists, protruding from rumpled shirt sleeves, quivered.

Father Huth they called him. When he asked his children and grandchildren to come over, they left their homes straightaway and gathered round the pastry table, eager to taste the latest concoction in his search for culinary goodness. When he won blue ribbons for lofty loaves of bread, I'm sure his wife displayed them in the sales room. When he created a four-tier wedding cake festooned with doves and blossoms, they took his photograph, in batter-smeared apron, next to the cake. And on the day of his funeral, businesses in Brookville closed. In honor of the slumped and inelegant bakerman who made them the staff of life and indulgent confections.

Nathaniel Huth, Proprietor of Vienna Bakery, c. 1910. Courtesy of Jefferson County History Center, Brookville, PA

There are a couple of things, not-so-sweet things, Nat didn't know about. That his son-in-law never did turn Vienna Bakery into a retail chain. That his daughter and a daughter-in-law were hospitalized at the same state hospital for psychosis of an indeterminate nature. That his grandson was a prisoner of war in World War II. That his great, great granddaughter gazed at his photo and laughed at the sight of him. Then she cried as she came to understand what his eyes, droopy and dispirited, had seen.

What his mouth, loll and parched, had tasted. His fingers, bent and swollen, had touched.

Rambling Man

by Wendy J. Thornton

Once, long ago, when roving bands of hippies traveled the country, moving from place to place, drawn by dreams of freedom or just by the idea of living in a place with better weather, I met a young man who was kind enough to save me from sadness. See, I had fallen madly in love with a surfer who lived on the east coast of Florida while I lived on the west coast. The surfer was charming, popular, so handsome he practically made my heart stop and he didn't know I was a nerd. We had a wonderful fling that I thought was the love of my life, but that he thought was—strangely enough—a fling.

When the surfer dumped me, I fell into a severe depression. I wrote bad poetry about my lost love, poems that included lines like, "Let me winterize my spirit so I will feel no pain." I played mournful music like Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" and Dionne Warwick's "I'll Never Fall in Love Again". It got so bad my parents begged me to turn the stereo down or let them buy me headphones. I read tragic stories of lost love, *Wuthering Heights, Anna Karenina*, and even, God help me, the insipid *Love Story*. Echhh. I contemplated becoming a Buddhist. Then I could give up everything, including my never-ending crush on Surfer Boy.

One day I was walking on the beach, reading. That's what I did to avoid talking to anyone. I walked up and down the beach with my nose in a book, daring anyone to interrupt my contemplation. But on this particular day, someone managed to insinuate himself into my consciousness.

He swam just offshore, and as I walked by he leaped in and out of the waves like a dolphin, laughing and yelling, "Hey girl." I looked over at him reluctantly. I didn't want to be disturbed by happy.

His hair was curly and wild, and he wore thick glasses even in the water. But he didn't look or act like an intellectual. He had on baggy black shorts with bright flowers, and he picked up his towel from the edge of the shore and started dancing with it, twisting it across his shoulders, wearing it like a skirt, acting like he was a matador brandishing his cape for a bull. I tried not to watch, but whenever I looked up, he was dancing, watching me. When he saw me look, he'd let out a maniacal laugh.

“Whacha reading?” he asked suddenly, appearing so close beside me that I could reach out and touch him. I was startled. I didn’t know how he got there. He was magic, teleporting. He grabbed the book out of my hand. “*To Kill a Mockingbird*? Why don’t you just cut your wrists now?”

“This is a classic,” I protested.

“Classic depressive,” he said. “My name is Billy and you’re too young to be reading such sad books.”

“I’m not that young,” I said. “I’m sixteen.” *And I have lived forever in this agony…*

Billy waved his fingers in the air. “Ewww hoo, ancient woman. Pardon me, oh ancient one for not recognizing your sage wisdom.”

I tried not to like him. Really. He was quite obviously a hippie, one of the first I’d ever met. He talked about traveling around the country, hitchhiking from place to place, with no discernible means of support. I had a huge family, two very overprotective parents, two brothers, two sisters, and lots of other relatives, all of whom felt it was absolutely necessary to tell me what they thought about everything I did all the time. Truly, I could not imagine what it would be like to travel the country alone. It sounded like heaven. Particularly in my current state of depression and sadness. To me, Billy was very lucky.

We talked a lot over the next few days. I even skipped school to visit him. He told me that he was sleeping in a stand of woods just off the beach near my house. So one morning, as the sun came up, I got dressed as if I were going to school, and slipped out to visit him. I walked into the woods, looking for a tent or something, some kind of campsite. To my surprise, once I got fairly deep into the forest, I found Billy curled up in a sleeping bag, a backpack by his side, and nothing else. Did he really just sleep out in the open like that?

I slipped up beside him in the early morning light. “Excuse me,” I said politely. “Uh, good morning.”

Billy looked at me, then scrambled up, a startled look on his face. “Girl, are you crazy, coming here by yourself? Don’t you know I could rape you? How do you know I’m not some kind of crazy murdering fuck who’s going to stomp you to death and rip out your heart?”

“I just know,” I said.

“You have too much trust.”

“Actually, I don’t care what happens to me.”

“Now that’s a really stupid statement.”

“I have some money,” I said. “Would you like to go somewhere for coffee?”

Billy thought about it for a moment. A very long moment. I so wanted to talk to him. There was something about him, something so free of the normal attachments, the usual accessories of life. I wanted that freedom. I wanted to stop thinking about my lost boyfriend, about our recent move to a new city I hated, about my old friends I would never see again. I wanted to take off and travel the world, be independent with no ties to anyone. I thought Billy could make that possible.

For hours, he let me talk about all the things in my life that seemed to have gone wrong. He nodded and smiled and sipped coffee and never seemed to judge me. “You’re having a tough time,” he said.

Well, finally! Someone understood. I mean, yes, I was a sixteen-year-old white girl living in an upper-crust middle-class neighborhood on St. Armond’s Key cherished by multiple family members, but damn it, *I was suffering*!

Only thing bothered me: Billy didn’t seem take me seriously. He had to be at least ten years older than me, maybe fifteen. But he seemed so youthful, not like the adult men I knew, men like my dad who worked long hours, who always seemed to do what was right. I knew without even bothering to ask that my father would absolutely hate Billy. Billy did what he wanted to do. He was a free spirit.

At breakfast, he told me that he had gone over to New College, a local liberal arts school, and sat in on some classes. This small college had been designed by the famous architect, I. M. Pei. In my new high school, I’d demanded that our high school newspaper cover some of the concerts held at the college, instead of just covering sports and cheerleading.

New College was considered very liberal and its students were supposedly a little “loosey-goosey” as my father would say, but I couldn’t imagine someone walking into a strange classroom and listening to lectures without permission. Billy said he liked the lectures, but not as much as the ones he’d attended at Antioch and Oberlin. I was so

jealous—I wanted to go to Antioch or Oberlin. I couldn't wait until I graduated from this nerdy high school in Sarasota so I could go somewhere they could teach me something important.

"Why do you just sit in on classes?" I asked. "Why don't you sign up for college?"

"Who are you?" he replied with a laugh. "How do you think I would pay for that?"

It had never occurred to me that anyone would have to worry about such a thing. I knew I would go to college, knew that somehow my parents, who didn't have a lot of money, would come up with the means for me to go. Of course, I'd be expected to work, to help carry my own weight. I'd get scholarships. But I thought anyone could go to college if they wanted to.

We spent the afternoon on the beach, talking. He told me about all the countries he'd visited, and all the amazing places he'd seen in America. "Have you ever seen the Grand Canyon?" he asked.

"I haven't seen anything," I replied morosely.

"Oh, man, you gotta ride on the Pacific Coast Highway, Kid. You ain't lived til you've seen the Pacific from those cliffs. Have you ever been to the Rockies?"

I repeated, "Really. I've never been anywhere."

"Poor baby." I was young but I knew sarcasm when I heard it.

Late in the afternoon, he told me to go home. "You got to eat dinner with your family," he said.

"They don't care."

"But I do. Go on. Get out of here. Don't come back til tomorrow. And Kid?"

"Yes."

"Wait on the beach—don't come back into the woods, okay?"

I shrugged and walked home. It was so exciting to have a secret. I never got in any trouble. I was the kind of boring girl who answered all the questions in class before the other students had a chance. I was the "curve breaker." My family had recently moved from Ft. Lauderdale where I had finally started to make friends, to Sarasota where I knew no one. I'd finally found one serious boyfriend, Terry, and he dumped me for—wait for it—an older woman. She was seventeen.

Now it seemed I had something special going, a relationship with someone new. I was a virgin—I couldn't even imagine sleeping with someone. But Billy seemed safe. He seemed like someone who wouldn't take advantage of me. He didn't even try to kiss me.

The next day I showed him some of my poems. He read a couple, then paused over one particularly sad piece. "What is this?" he asked, showing me the poem.

"Oh, I was a little depressed when I wrote that," I answered.

"A little depressed? *Winterize my spirit*?" he shrieked. "What kind of crap is that?" Before I could protest, he ripped the poem into a hundred pieces and threw it into the wind like confetti. "Don't write stuff like that," he said. "You don't know how lucky you are. You're beautiful."

"You're not even a good liar."

"I always thought I'd meet a beautiful girl like you someday. I thought I was Jughead, you know? You know that cartoon?"

Confused, I asked, "Archie and Jughead?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he said excitedly. "I was the guy who could eat and eat and eat and close all the restaurants down. Had my good friends Archie and Reggie. I was in love with poor old Betty and she was always in love with Archie. You could be Betty. You're in love with someone else."

How did he know?

Later that afternoon, I said, "You know, I've always wanted to travel. We could run away together. I could be Betty and you could be Jughead."

"Aww, Babe," he answered, "I stopped being Jughead a long time ago." He was so unutterably sad. This was the first time I realized that perhaps I wasn't the only one recovering from a broken heart.

But as the day drew to a close, I knew he'd be leaving soon. "I want to go with you," I said.

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

"Are you fucking crazy? I live in the woods. You're a baby. I can't take you with me. How would you live?"

“I could live in the woods with you.”

“How would you eat?”

“I don’t eat much. I have some money.”

“How much?”

“Uh, sixty-eight dollars.”

He laughed. “Sixty-eight dollars? You’re kidding, right?”

“We’ll be living in the woods. How much money do we need?”

He shook his head and laughed again. “You’re crazier than I am, Kid. Sure, sure, you want to go with me? Let’s do it, what the hell. We’ll go. I’m heading to California. You’ll like it there.”

“When are we leaving?”

“Tomorrow. I’ll meet you at New College. You know where the Student Center is?”

I nodded. I’d been to the New College Student Center a few times.

“I’ll meet you right there,” Billy said. “At the newspaper stand. You know where that is?”

“I do,” I answered. I was finally beginning to get excited about something. I would travel the world, hitchhike around the country with this wild man, forget all the heartbreak and the boring trajectory of my old life. Billy kissed me goodbye on the forehead, and I told him I’d meet him at nine the next morning.

That night, I had serious misgivings about my plan. My family suddenly seemed so precious to me. My parents, those hopeless people who didn’t understand me at all, suddenly seemed perceptive and kind. My rotten brothers and sisters, who tormented me and made my life hell, had suddenly become funny and happy. I’d miss them all so much. But by God, I was going.

The next morning, I got up before dawn and snuck out of the house. I rode my bike to the newspaper stand in front of the Student Center. I had a paper bag full of clothes, dresses and underwear, and I had my sixty-eight dollars. I had a big sunhat and a tiny bikini. I was going to California. I would lock my bike to the newspaper rack, leave my mother a note attached to it, and be off on a new adventure.

I waited. And waited. And waited. The sun rose on the horizon until it beat down on my shoulders and warmed my sunburned back. Finally, feeling like a lost child, I got back on my bike and pedaled into the sun towards home. I never even learned his last name. It took me years to realize what a decent thing Billy did by leaving me behind.

Contributors

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Jeremiah Bass is an English Professor at the University of Wisconsin—Stout. He has written and published multiple short stories and poems and is currently searching for homes for his first two novels. Jeremiah lives on a small farm in Spring Valley, Wisconsin with his wife, dog, horse, and two ornery cats.

John Chavers (cover art) enjoys working as an artist and photographer. His work has appeared in *The Oakland Review, The Emerson Review, THAT Literary Review, Azahares Literary Magazine, Saw Palm*, and *The Healing Muse*. Recent juried exhibitions include the Missoula Art Museum, Foundry Art Center, Amarillo Museum of Art, Mary Cosgrove Dolphin Gallery, Orr Street Studios, Rochester Contemporary Art Center, and Purdue University Fountain Gallery. This coming September he will be the artist in residence with The Gilfélag Society in Akureyri, Iceland.

Helen Coats is currently enrolled as a Liberal Arts major at Purdue University. Her fiction is forthcoming in *One Teen Story* and *Toasted Cheese*. In her spare time, she keeps a research blog on film scores and storytelling.

Lisa Conquet grew up in NYC where she thrived on the energy and the mix of cultures that reflected her own blended heritage. The city fed her soul and her love of words. As a copywriter for a Madison Avenue ad agency, she utilized her psychology degree to entice consumers, then went back to school and turned the tables. Now she is a psychotherapist who uses poetry to help her clients. Lisa has had many work-related health and wellness pieces published without a byline. She has also been published in *Babble* and her poetry was recently published in *The Ekphrastic Review*. She is working on a poetry collection about motherhood and loss as well as a guided journal to be used in conjunction with therapy.

Robert Dugan lives in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia with his wife and daughter. “Appalachian Eulogy” is his first publication. He teaches creative writing and secondary English. He hopes to teach his students to find strength in writing about their life experiences. He wants to thank Anne Larson for encouraging him to seek publication and his wife for her unwavering support.

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Paul Juhasz has presented at dozens of academic conferences before turning his hand to creative writing. His mock journal, *Fulfillment: Diary of an Amazonian Picker*, chronicling his seven-month term as a Picker at an Amazon Fulfillment Center, has been published in abridged form in *The Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas* and is currently being serialized in *Voices de la Luna.* Currently, he is working on *Daddy Issues*, a collection of short stories, and has just completed his first novel, *Junk,* based on his experiences riding a truck for 1-800-GOT-JUNK the last eighteen months.

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Vic Sizemore's fiction and nonfiction has been published or is forthcoming in *StoryQuarterly, Southern Humanities Review, storySouth, Connecticut Review, Blue Mesa Review, Sou'wester, [PANK] Magazine, Silk Road Review, Reed Magazine, Eclectica,* and elsewhere. His fiction has won the New Millennium Writings Award and has been nominated for Best American Nonrequired Reading and two Pushcart Prizes. Sizemore teaches creative writing at Central Virginia Community College.

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Christina M. Wells is an English professor at Northern Virginia Community College who is currently circulating her first novel to agents. She holds a PhD from the University of Maryland and an MA from the University of Arkansas. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Rough Copy*, *Story Circle Journal*, *Northern Virginia Review*, New Ventures West's blog, and *Crab Fat Magazine*.

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