The very fact that I no longer have any need of America means that I am a disturbing factor in their midst. "Remember that you are an American," my mother used to say to poor aunt Melia. That phrase has always stuck in my crop. I heard it said to Tante Melia under the most cruel and humiliating circumstances.

~ Henry Miller, *Hamlet* (1939)

I don't have the feeling of being an American citizen anymore. The part of America I came from, where I had some rights, where I felt free, is so far behind me that it's beginning to get fuzzy in my memory. I feel as though someone's got a gun against my back all the time. Keep moving, is all I seem to hear.

~ Henry Miller, *Aller Retour New York* (1935)

But my place, I don't know. It was a reprieve. I let him be. And possibly, I was the first woman to give him that room and space. I hope he realized that at some point, because I honestly think we had something real together. And I want that to count, as I have lost so much else.

But the dead baby changed everything. The doctor left after trying to get rid of it. The man must have panicked, as he knew that it could all land us in jail. I was in and out of consciousness and I think I could have bled to death …it was all a blur, frankly. But Henry, who finally did come home, told me there was a baby limb floating in the toilet, and when he opened the drawers in the bedroom, there was the poor infant, a perfect little baby boy with a missing arm. It was as if Henry had seen a ghost. I mean, I think he found the baby first, then went to the bathroom to throw up, which was when he saw the arm, clogging the toilet.

… a life yanked out of darkness and thrust back into darkness. It has no name, nor has it been loved, nor will it be mourned. It was pulled up by the roots, and if it shrieked no one heard. What life it had was lived and lost in sleep. Its death was only a further deeper plunger into that sleep from which it never awakened.

~ Henry Miller, *Sexus* (1949)

It almost got us arrested once the landlady found out. She screamed and yelled at Henry but once I had the strength to get up, I told her we would leave— and pay an extra month in rent. That shut her up. Everyone's for sale, my dad used to say. Not that I had that kind of money but having a little bit of debt is still better than sitting in prison for a child I had no intention of losing.

We will be told to move, the room will be fumigated, the crime will be unrecorded.
~ Henry Miller, *Sexus* (1949)

But Henry's gruesome find in the dresser was the death knell of our relationship. Touching me reminded him of the baby in the drawer. He had to get out of town.

So he disappeared—then I got a postcard, written from somewhere in Colorado. He had gone out West, hoping to be a cowboy. Told me he had heard a life in the outdoors might do his eyesight a world of good (he was always sensitive about having to wear glasses). But he wasn't a man to hang with cattle, horses, and flies the size of hairnets. He was a man who resided in his head a lot. His life of the mind was his reality and more colorful than the life of a laborer, or a life in an office. I later heard that he did manual labor at some lemon ranch or orange grove in California. Never even rode a horse.

I look back rapidly and I see myself again in California. I am alone and I am working like a slave in the orange grove in Chula Vista. Am I coming into my own? I think not. I am a very wretched, forlorn, miserable person—I am more nearly an animal.
~ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939)

So ... he came back. But not in my arms. He had met someone else. He never told me of course, but a woman knows. And it hurt, and all the more so when George died and the apartment was empty with nothing to remind me of Henry, except for his books.

I hadn't seen Henry in ages, so I called his house and told his father about George's death. I had to tell someone as I had no one else. His father didn't say much, so I am not even sure Henry got the message. Later I realized I shouldn't have called.

They might have seen it as more “blackmail from the widow.” Yes, they called me the widow, even though I was never married. They knew nothing about me or my life, so who were they to judge?

But that was his mother, I am sure. A very judgmental woman. A hard mother to grow up with. Unforgiving, rigid, strict, and cold. I often wondered how Henry could be so soft—he was the very opposite of her. He was a good man. He just didn’t know it yet. He was floundering and having a dead baby and a grieving “widow” to complicate his life was not the kind of party he was looking for. A man and his ego need room to grow and women or wives are often seen as standing in the way of that. So men can play and we, the women, pay. Don’t get me wrong. I don’t hold any grudges. Just sad that I had become so disposable.

She understands his fear. Men have run away from her before.
~ Henry Miller, *Moloch* (1992)

I saw Henry one more time. I had to take a second job at a theater that smelled like stale piss and broken dreams. In walked Henry. Upon seeing me, he became flustered. The very guilt in his eyes made me realize I hadn’t been so alone in my grief. We talked and I told him that I was fine with him having left me, but that I was hurt by the way he had left me.

She had not changed greatly; the eyes had grown larger, more sorrowful. They were brilliant and haunting.
~ Henry Miller, *Sexus* (1949)

He had simply run away from me. No goodbye, no nothing. As if I were air, or no more than the dirt under his shoes. Like I said: disposable, although a little less disposable than that sweet little seven-month-old.

“You can’t just stick me in a drawer with your old socks, like that quack of a doctor did with our baby!” I told him. He was shaken and practically crying.

He was sorry he said, and asked me if I needed any money. “To buy me off? I’m not that kind of woman, Henry…” He said he didn’t mean it that way—he wanted to know if I was doing all right financially. I wasn’t. I was two months late on my rent and about to be evicted. That had become the story of my life.

She was weeping without tears. I could hear it gurgling inside her, like a toilet box which won’t stop running.

~ Henry Miller, *Sexus* (1949)

“Let me talk to my wife,” he said.

“Your *wife*?”

He told me had married. They had an extra room in the apartment, which he offered—for free— until I got my bearings again, financially. It was a generous offer but a daft suggestion. How was he going to explain this to his wife? Can we please take in a woman who gave birth to my dead child, which they tried to flush down the toilet, then stuck in a drawer? She’s fallen on hard times and needs a place to stay. Ha.

I never heard from him again. And that was that.

It seems to be the lot of women to suffer. For the pleasures of the flesh they offer us men, we give them in return only pain.

~Henry Miller, “Pauline”, *Henry Miller’s Book of Friends* (1976)

♦

Although Henry reminisced about Pauline and his relationship with her in “Pauline” in his Book of Friends*, his first stillborn son would never make it into any of his writing except for the above quoted passage from* Sexus*.*

When women miscarry or have abortions, the ghost of the lost child is always with them, and for Pauline this mustn’t have been any different. How many times would she have been haunted by the memory of the infant who was born prematurely but likely might have survived in our time? He might have been the replacement for the son

she had lost to TB, the son with whom she used to sing, a fact Miller mentions as particularly endearing.

She would forever be changed due to her relationship with Henry. Henry, on the other hand, stayed pretty much the same man he had always been, and would claim that "the only lesson" he had learned from the kind of "affairs" he had had with women like Pauline was that "an artist should never marry."

Yet marry he did, and no less than five times.

Inez Hollander, Ph.D., is a writer and translator. In 1999, she published a biography of the American novelist and journalist Hamilton Basso (Louisiana State University Press), which was followed by two memoirs, *Ontwaken uit de Amerikaanse droom* (Amsterdam: Archipel, 2004) and *Silenced Voices* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

In spite of the long overdue #MeToo movement, Hollander feels that Henry Miller's work deserves a second hearing. She tries to do this in her new, creative nonfiction manuscript and bio-memoir *Crazy Cock.* Following his life and work through the different and most important women in his life, she has channeled the women's points of view and feelings which are so woefully absent from his autobiographical novels. This puts Miller in a different light, as a man, and as an important American writer.

For the Land of the Free

by Christine Kiefer

I am wrapped up in a map of the United States of America.

I have an artsy map of the country hanging above my bed. I look at it when I lay on the bed backwards to pet my cats. When I drift off to sleep, I see myself, smack dab in the middle of the U.S. of A.

Missouri is tricky. We touch six other states. Just a slight brushing against Tennessee and Oklahoma, in addition to the obvious ones. Of course, I am aware that many people in The United States of America can't find Missouri on a map at all. I have no hard feelings about this. I know its body, its jagged lines, its little "bootheel" at the southeast corner, how one could travel along Route 66 and find kitschy historical landmarks, like "Gary's Gay Parita," where the "gay" is actually a woman's name, not a queer person like me.

For a time, I pictured my body on the map straddling Iowa and Missouri. The foot in Iowa is married, the one in Missouri is not. Missouri isn't exactly progressive, but to have a place like Iowa come to their senses about same sex marriage before us was surprising, comical almost. The red state to the north of me said, "Don't take our guns, no big government, and nobody gives a damn what the gays do."

This wasn't the first time that maps made me restless. Anytime I was away from home, when it was time to go to sleep, the imagery began. I was in a bed, in a room, in a hotel, or a house, in a city, in a state. I saw that place on an old map of the United States of America, like the one that pulled down from a roll in the ceiling of my childhood classroom. I would picture me in that place and then look to where my family was at the exact moment. It was like the maps in magazines on airplanes, where a line is drawn from city to city. The longer the route from my bed to my mom's or my sister's, or later, my daughter's, the worse my agitation. How could my body be this far from the other bodies?

Later, it was easy for me to keep an anxiety map in my head of the gay marriage states, imagining a different kind of distance. The long-held American principle of "leaving

things to the states" always played a role in drinking laws, juvenile justice, the death penalty, taxes, and whether a person could ride a motorcycle without a helmet.

On the Martin Luther King bridge from St. Louis, my hometown, to Illinois, motorcyclists would stop, pull over halfway across the Mississippi river on the wobbly bridge, and remove their helmets. They sure as shit weren't going to have their rights trampled on for a second more than required. They went from the oppression of Missouri to the "die if you want to" freedom of Illinois like they were removing shackles.

When I passed over state lines with a marriage certificate on the dashboard, we didn't pull over to remove our rings. I didn't announce, "Now you are just my girlfriend." But I wanted to.

It's American to travel over state lines for tax perks, cheaper cigarettes, abortions. The imaginary lines have always ruled us. People travel to Oregon for the right to die and dip their toes into Nevada to buy a brothel blowjob. Breaking polygamy laws in Utah is now only equivalent to getting a traffic ticket. The sister wives lobbied for the right to have a husband in their bed every Monday and alternate Fridays.

The polygamists and I have things in common. They only felt married sometimes.

Prior to 1967 Mildred and Richard Loving, an interracial couple, were married in Washington, DC, and then not married when their bodies walked into Virginia. On a map, this is such a short distance. They could take a walk and go from married to not married and back again. Then the Supreme Court decided that they were married regardless of the placement of their bodies. This was because of the Court's interpretation of "Due Process," which is a very unromantic way of saying we all have the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In my mind's map, the Lovings were birds, flying everywhere with little baby birds behind them, getting little bits of liberty from Rhode Island to Arizona.

My parents would not have to fight as the Lovings did to have their marriage recognized wherever they went, and they probably did not see their significance in their lives or the lives of their children even if they did eventually go on to have two gay daughters. Unlike with my state, coming out to my family was a simple, smooth, I-love-you-no-matter-what conversation. My mom does sometimes quip, "What are the chances

that both of my daughters are gay?" I tell her I hear it has something to do with testosterone left over in her uterus from also having my four brothers.

Meanwhile, my country, and especially my state, made my sister and I not so sure about being "loved-no-matter-what." From 1967 to 2015, our Due Process was up for grabs. Especially if our bodies were in Missouri.

Many years ago, I drove towards a road blocked by people with signs saying, "Marriage = One Man + One Woman." Interesting math. Even the "God hates fags" folks were out in force. There is still a billboard on Highway 70 with the same message. It's a jarring experience, to go along your normal day, not thinking about sex or who you prefer to have sex with, not worrying about love contracts, just keeping the grocery list in your head. Then there are humans taking up space to say you're disgusting.

While the straight world worried about me getting married, I was in law school. This was the period when I was having have Map of the United States of America anxiety. Law school was all about the Feds versus the States, the Commerce Clause, the Supremacy Clause. All fancy ways of figuring out what to do with a government that was both united and divided. To memorize cases, I put them on my imaginary map. Little Matchbox cars traveled across state lines, or a bus of people would travel north, gaining more rights along the way. I had figurines on my map, yelling "fire" from a theater in a state I can't recall now.

I understood that we are a United States confused about our unity. I sympathized with my America. Autonomy was sweet when I had it: selfish decision making, freedom to ruin myself if I so chose was a right I flexed throughout my life. Hell, I went without a helmet every chance I got. But when I got sick, I still called my mom. When I was lonely, I still walked into a gay bar looking for my people.

My individualism didn't quite work when I had a partner, one I let chip away at my self. I allowed a coming together that felt like being squeezed out of clown car. In another kind of clown scenario, she was always chasing me, trying to lasso me with an imaginary rope. I'd give in and then she'd say, "But wait, there's more." She was an all or nothing type of arrangement.

I know now that I held a weak, desperate fear that I'd travel my map alone if I didn't acquiesce to her romantic notions of marriage. After all, it was I who proposed to her. I

did so in the traditional way of surprise in a romantic setting, giving her a diamond while we overlooked the river and the autumn trees. My proposal was extended at a place in the country where queers weren't welcome, let alone allowed to tap into our own due process.

I was a liar, saying words like "soulmate" or "perfect match" when I just didn't want to travel into the next state alone.

We drove four hours north in the bitter cold to get married outside a cabin in Iowa, in front of a fire. The route on my map heads straight north and then veers just a touch to the west once you get into a state where license plates read, "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain." Good on you, Iowa.

We lit paper lanterns. They all floated directly into a nearby tree and were shredded by its limbs. We had a marriage license that we should have used as kindling for the fire that hosted our ceremony, but my Iowa wife held onto it like a prize, all the way into Missouri, a symbol to her of love and commitment. I passed the drive picturing myself on a train, seeing the border of Missouri ahead, where I would be asked to "show my papers" as I entered. Instead of the warmth of the fire, I thought I felt a burning in my arm, a brand burnt there.

I came home to a shrinking map. In my little town, gay existence was denied. Ten miles away, we had "domestic partnerships" and employment and housing protections. When I sat on my porch, I was free game.

My suffocating discomfort grew like too many blankets piled on my bed as I struggled to find sleep. In my bedtime map images I morphed too much I was one person when I left the driveway and another when I arrived at work.

It may have been my underlying disgust in these United States, in being only half-way married, or not even married at all, that drove her away. She said we could take up a fake address in Iowa, a suggestion that made me laugh and hurt her feelings.

I tried to get a divorce after she left me. Funny thing about being "kind of married." No judge will "kind of divorce you." Missouri said we weren't married at all. Iowa said we weren't residents. And so it went, my due process and me. We were kind of living, kind of liberated, and just a little bit pursuing happiness. My map was a blur now. When I traveled, I didn't see the anxiety bedtime map. I wasn't anywhere.

My dad called me on June 26, 2015, the day the Supreme Court came to their senses and used the same logic from 1967 and applied it to same sex marriage. Recognition of marriages like mine suddenly blanketed the entire United States of America. My mind's map tried to be a cool aqua blue sigh of relief. On that day I was all-the-way married. My due process was so glad, I could feel its goosebumps all over my body. But I sobbed and shook telling my dad, "Now I'm married to someone who left me. I don't get to celebrate this!" He said it was a huge victory nonetheless and that I should go for a hike to clear my mind.

I was officially married to a woman who told our friends I needed medications and a nice long stay in a hospital. She probably was right about that. One day she was not my wife and the next she was. I lived in the United States of America, and nowhere could I go to change my marital status. I was married everywhere. The map became just a big blob of gray country, with no states, no borders, no change in landscape.

Thank you, government of The United States of America, for giving me a right I wasn't born with. Thank you for letting me be in a love contract with someone who left me for a younger, prettier woman. I had gotten over the betrayal, even feeling relief that she met someone else and left me alone. I lacked the self-awareness to be a good wife. I didn't love her. Truth is, I didn't like her much, even before things went awry. She wanted to fight, and I wanted to pretend she didn't exist. I slammed doors when I was with her. I yelled and screamed and then sat silent, refusing to apologize. Ours was a bad marriage, even when it wasn't one. I was a terrible kind-of wife.

I proceeded to get divorced like every other straight person has done in the history of straight people. I've been told that mine was the first same-sex divorce in Missouri. I imagined my divorce as a walking piece of paper, pissing all over the state, all over every Missouri rainbow flag parade. I told my dad I wanted to publicly apologize to all the Missouri gays. I had terrible timing, and I didn't get to celebrate what was a huge victory for me and so many people I care about. My dad said I needed to move on with my life and then asked how things were at the office.

The United States of America is a strange place, where so much of what we can do is decided by nine people in black robes. I'm what due process looks like one day and

doesn’t look like the day after. I am the beneficiary of the right people getting the law right. And I am the beneficiary of those who spent years demanding that the people in black robes apply a part of the law that has been present since the U.S of A was founded. I’m living with the right to liberty and happiness, but I do so within the reminder that, at any time, those in black robes can take it away. Or at least they can take it away in Iowa and give it in Missouri. Our bodies are pins on a map. The pen marking your position, that space you take up in the world, it’s not yours. It never was.

Christine Kiefer is an attorney in the middle of the U.S. of A. She has self-published a novel and a collection of poems but now is accepting that nonfiction and memoir may be her niche. She is an MFA candidate in the Creative Writing Program at Lindenwood University.

Piano

by Lori Lindstrom

I was nine, sprawled on my bed writing in my five-year diary when I heard the first five notes (alternating E and D-sharp) of “Fur Elise” by Beethoven. Oh good, Cindi’s playing again. I opened my bedroom door to allow her music to enter, awestruck at the sound of her fingers flying across the keyboard, never missing a note, never missing a beat.

Lord, can she play. She even plays better than dad.

Cindi played the classics—Bach, Mozart, Tchaikovsky. But her favorite piano book—a red cover with a boy and a girl dancing on the fire escape stairwell—was music from *West Side Story*, a modern-day remake of Romeo and Juliet starring Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer. If she wasn’t playing show tunes from *West Side Story*, she was listening to the film soundtrack, flitting around the living room singing, “I feel pretty, oh so pretty/I feel pretty, and witty and bright.”

Like Natalie Wood, Cindi was a petite brunette, pretty enough to be a teenaged model at a local department store, popular enough to be on the student council, commencement and prom committees, and honor society treasurer. My sister was thriving despite her juvenile diabetes. Diagnosed at age thirteen, she did not seem to be affected by the disease.

I wanted to be like her when I grew up. Not petite—I was already the tallest in my class—but I wanted to be pretty, popular, adored by all.

When I turned nine, I rushed home from school every Tuesday and headed straight to the piano. I played frantically, trying to squeeze a week’s worth of practice into one hour, then slid my books into my black plastic briefcase and raced down the hill to my piano teacher’s house.

Mrs. Cannon was skillful, no-nonsense, and popular with many of my classmates. Whenever I played a song well, she placed a coveted little gold star—sometimes two—

at the top of the page, adding, “If you keep up the good work, you can be a church organist like me one day.”

I didn’t want that. I wanted to play like my sister.

Halfway through the first year, Mrs. Cannon held an informal recital at her house. At the end of the year, her students played in a piano festival at a nearby school.

On the day of the festival, I stared at my music, hoping for a photographic memory while my mother drove. When we arrived, my mother introduced me to a woman sitting behind a table by the stage, then wished me luck and stepped outside. I handed the judge my music, climbed three steps, and walked centerstage to the shiny, black grand piano. I sat on the luxuriously cushioned bench, aligned my feet with the pedals, wiggled my fingers, and began. After I played the first song, I looked at the judge. She nodded, I continued. At the end of the second piece, I walked off stage, wiping my sweaty hands on my skirt. The judge finished writing her remarks and handed me my music. “You play very well,” she said.

One week later, Mrs. Cannon presented me a certificate with an “Excellent” rating along with a gold pin in the shape of a piano.

That was how it went for four years, each passing year bringing me one step closer to playing like Cindi.

At age thirteen, the rules changed: the festival became a competition. That year, I played in a classroom before fellow pianists, parents, and a judge sitting at the teacher’s desk.

When the judge called my name, I squirmed out of my desk and handed her my music. Next to the green chalkboard stood a worn, brown upright piano. I pulled out the hard bench, sat down, and aligned my feet. I turned to the audience and announced the name and composer of the song. I started strong, but in the middle of the song—the part where the piece turns in a different direction—my mind went blank. I panicked. I stared at my hands, willing them to continue, but they felt separate from me. Stiff. Uncooperative.

I looked to the judge for help.

“It’s okay. You can start again,” she said.

I took a deep breath, shook out my hands, and began again. Halfway through the song, my mind went blank at the same exact spot.

The judge looked at me. “It’s all right. You can go to your seat.”

Head down, I walked to my seat, avoiding my fathers’ eyes.

Why I didn’t run out of the room, I’ll never know. I’d never felt so humiliated. Instead, I sulked. The last student played, and the room emptied.

“What happened?” Dad asked in the hall.

“I don’t know. My mind just went blank.”

“Sorry that happened,” he said, patting my shoulder.

We entered the gym that echoed with anxious chatter. Dad spotted my teacher. “Stay here.”

While they talked, I wondered how it all went so wrong. Did I have less time than usual to prepare for the recital? Was I over-confident because I played well in past recitals? Was the new format the problem? Was I lazy? Had I played the song enough times—memorized—for my teacher? For my parents? For myself?

What was different that year?

That year was unlike any other. I could not focus on anything. Not even a piano competition.

In eighth grade Home Economics class, my teacher read recipes aloud for us to write down. “Girls, at the top of your index card, write ‘Breakfast cake.’”

Long pause.

“Now go down two lines, and on the left side, write two cups flour. Use a little c period for cups.”

Another long pause.

“On the next line, write one cup sugar.” She listed the remaining ingredients agonizingly slow, reminding us again and again to “use a capital T period for tablespoon” and “a small t period for teaspoon.”

I hated being spoon-fed. It was like being back in grade school. I huddled with a few classmates, and together we came up with a plan. One afternoon Mrs. Manning stepped out of the classroom. Giddy with the thrill of doing something we knew we shouldn’t, we ran to the window and threw it open. Grabbing fistfuls of spoons, we hurled

them as hard as we could, howling at the shining silver pieces as they flew through the air, doubling over with laughter as they clattered on the ground two stories below.

I was summoned to the principal's office—a first. One glance at Mr. Blake and I wanted to bolt. He was a big, heavy man with a flat, grey crewcut; a flat, downcast face with jowls and heavy wrinkles; a thick, short neck and massive, broad shoulders. He looked just like a bulldog—the only thing missing were two incisors poking up from his lower jaw.

"Did you throw spoons out of the window?"

"Yes."

"Don't ever do that again. Now get back to class," he growled.

I stood and opened the door.

"Wait a minute."

I stopped. What now?

"Are you Cindi Johnson's sister?"

"Yes." Did he remember my sister after ten years? Boy, am I in trouble.

Mr. Blake had been a Guidance Counselor at Cindi's high school before becoming the junior high principal and likely remembered she was voted "the most studious senior." He shook his head, didn't say a word, but I knew what he was thinking: "Cindi would never have done that.

Months before the competition, I woke to the sounds of distress and leaped out of bed. My parents dressed hurriedly in their room across the hall.

Moaning sounds came from the living room. Cindi, home for the weekend, was slumped in a chair, wrapped in a blanket, her head hunched over a trash can.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Ugh…get me a glass of water," she asked faintly.

Hearing this, my mother yelled down, "DON'T GIVE HER ANY WATER!"

I didn't know what to do. Cindi wanted water. My mother was likely following doctors' orders from similar situations. Confused, I did nothing. I stood by her side.

My parents came downstairs—bleary-eyed—and threw on their coats. Dad helped Cindi stand and slowly guided her, still shrouded in a blanket, carrying a trash can, to

the car. My mother, upset over another night of disrupted sleep, huffed out after them. “Go back to bed,” she said.

The next day, my teachers’ lessons fell on deaf ears. All I could do was think about Cindi and watch the clock. She sure was lucky to be home visiting when she got sick. How long will she be in the hospital? Would she pull through this—she’d done so before—or would this time be different?

I rushed home after school and called my mother.

“Cindi’s feeling better. We’ll visit her tonight.”

“Oh, good.” I hung up the phone, exhaling fully for the first time that day.

After dinner, my parents, brother, and I drove downtown to Washington Hospital. Cindi was sitting up, watching tv, wearing a faded hospital gown, and attached to an IV. Her face lit up when she saw us. With her blood sugar back to normal, she was chatty and happy—a far cry from the night before.

“We brought you something to cheer you up,” my mother said, handing her a box. Cindi removed the lid and held up a two-piece silky, animal print pajama set. “I love it! Thank you!”

A few days later, my sister returned to her apartment in fashionable Georgetown. She resumed island-hopping in the Caribbean with her female roommates, taking and developing pictures of her many adventures. To give us a taste of her travels, she invited us to dinner and served Jamaican curried beef and rice and peas on square, hand-carved, wooden plates like those she ate from during her carefree jaunts.

Cindi was on top of the world.

Then she wasn’t.

That year, my twenty-three-year-old sister had lived with diabetes for a decade, using tools now considered archaic: urine tests instead of blood tests, long-lasting insulin instead of quick-acting insulin. She had difficulty keeping her blood sugar levels in a normal range and was hospitalized with uncontrolled blood sugar levels so many times I lost count.

When Cindi received a ticket for driving the wrong way on a one-way street in DC, we were startled. Did she simply miss a one-way sign? Or was she having vision

problems? She'd had eye hemorrhages in the past, but we didn't know how many. And we didn't know if they were affecting her vision.

One afternoon Cindi returned to her office holding a bag of groceries she'd bought during lunch hour, and someone called her name as she unlocked her door. She turned her head at the sound and cut her eye on the paper bag.

The eye doctor told her, "I have bad news. You cut your cornea. And…" he added, swallowing hard, "You're going blind—not from the cut—but complications from diabetes."

The next day I went to my friend Tina's house for a birthday party sleepover. A dozen girls played miniature golf, ate pizza, danced in the basement. I went through the motions, pretending to have fun, but my mind was elsewhere. Towards the end of the night, I couldn't keep up the act any longer, and I started crying, sobbing.

"What's wrong, Lori?" Tina asked. "Is it a boy?"

I shook my head, unable to speak.

"Turn off the music," Tina said to a girl. Girls with concerned puzzled looks gathered around me. "Come on; you can tell me," Tina said.

I wanted to tell her, but I didn't know how to say what was bothering me. I had never been in this situation before. After a few minutes of Tina's dogged persistence, I blurted out, "My sister is going blind!"

"Oh no!" The group tried to console me, but I was beyond consoling.

Soon after Cindi got the awful diagnosis, she sold her beloved baby blue VW bug, packed her belongings, and moved home.

Cindi, somber and sullen, moved into her big, normally-bright corner bedroom; only this time, the shades were drawn. We tried to cheer her up, but we were incapable. Her situation was dire, hopeless, and there was nothing we could do to bring back her sight. We were all depressed.

All this happened around the time of my last recital.

I began to steer clear of the piano. I figured if I played, I'd be doing a disservice to anyone within earshot—especially Cindi. Playing would only serve as a reminder of all that once was. My talented, gifted sister—whom I looked up to—would never play the piano again.

Dad, a talented pianist, and accordionist felt the loss too. He was the only one who played anymore, but he rarely did.

In the '60's, there was no technology available to treat eye hemorrhages. Laser treatment had yet to be developed. Cindi rolled the dice and had a risky, experimental procedure done on one eye. I don't know what the procedure was, just that it failed, and she went totally blind in that eye.

In another last-ditch effort to save her sight, she had yet another risky experimental surgery. Surgeons removed her pituitary gland, thinking its absence would reduce the pressure on her eyes, and she'd keep her vision. We held our breaths in the days and weeks that followed.

The surgery failed. My sister went blind at the prime of her life.

Conversations I never thought I'd hear became commonplace.

"Do you want to walk with a cane or get a seeing-eye dog?" my father gently asked.

"I hate dogs!"

I wasn't surprised. We'd always had cats—all named Smokey.

Cindi, distraught and resigned, packed her bags and headed to the Pittsburgh Guild for the Blind. After a few months, my parents, brother, and I visited her in the cold, dark city in the dead of winter.

Cindi greeted us, surprisingly upbeat. "Follow me." She tapped her cane back and forth on the long, tiled hallway, introducing us to staff and fellow students along the way. "Here's my room," she said, leading us into a room with six single beds, three on each wall. "You can put your coats here." She patted the metal footboard of her bed, then tapped her way across the room to a sink. "Check this out." She began filling a glass with water, and when the glass was nearly full, she turned off the water.

"How'd you know when to stop?" I asked.

"I listened to the changing sound the water made as it rose. I'm learning to rely on my other senses."

"Amazing," I said.

Cindi sidled along her bed towards the nightstand and picked up a thick book. She opened to a random page, ran her fingers over the small raised dots, and read aloud. I

gasped; dad wiped a tear. She closed the book, tapped her way across the room to a typewriter, and sat before it. She put a piece of thick white paper into the machine and hit the return key a few times. “Dad, pretend you’re dictating a letter to me.”

He cleared his throat and said, “Okay. January 21st, 1969…”

She typed as if she were typing on her beloved portable blue Remington. This time when she hit the return key, instead of black letters, the paper revealed row after row of raised dots.

After several months, her smiling face appeared on the Guild’s newsletter front page, and below was an article describing their stellar student’s graduation.

She returned home a different person. Not upbeat and chipper but resigned and accepting of her fate. She strived to be independent using her new skills, yet there were times she needed help, times she needed our eyes.

We explained the location of food on her plate as if it were on the face of a clock. “Chicken is at three o’clock, potatoes are at six, and a salad is at ten.”

I filled her syringes with insulin and read her the labels on prescription bottles. I looked for spots on her clothes to see what needed washing or to be dry-cleaned. I read to her, and if something wasn’t intended for my eyes, she snatched it out of my hands. When she bought two pairs of shoes of the same style, but in different colors, I sorted them out. If conversation ceased in the middle of a TV show, she asked what was happening, and I told her.

My heart broke watching Cindi walk with a cane, a cane that folded up. The elderly walked with them—my grandfather walked with a wooden one—but my sister was twenty-four. I grappled with Cindi’s losses, and I wrestled with our reversed roles. I felt like the older sister.

After a long absence, Cindi returned to work. No longer able to read detailed contract clauses, she switched from the Procurement to Personnel department. Our father, then retired, helped her transition by reading aloud the Office of Personnel Management’s manual, from nine to five, for months.

Dad did everything in his power to help his legally-blind daughter. He drove her for lab work and doctor appointments and took her shopping. If she didn’t answer his call on

a weekend, he'd drop everything and go to her apartment. More than once, he found her passed out on the floor from low blood sugar and revived her. He spent more time with her than my mother, who was still working. I grew accustomed to seeing Cindi clutching Dad's bent arm, Dad guiding her path as they walked. And I grew used to Dad spending more and more time with Cindi and less and less time with me.

While Cindi adjusted to her new world, I adapted to mine.

I became aware of things I could do, but she could not. I could see my parents' worried faces, differentiate subtle colors, scan a room and find something I misplaced. I could glance at a clock or a watch to check the time. I could set the oven temperature and the timer and tell if food was moldy. I could read books, letters, newspapers, recipes, and entries in my diary. And I could read sheet music.

But I had no desire to play. I felt guilty I could play, and Cindi couldn't.

A few times, I worked up the courage to play. I got out my piano books and opened them to a familiar song. My hands hovered over the keys, about to play, when in my head I heard Cindi playing "I Feel Pretty." I couldn't play.

Another day, feeling brave, I took out the piece I choked on. I closed one eye and squinted the other. All I saw was one big blur. I moved my head up and down, left and right; nothing helped. The music sat right in front of me, but I could not make out the clefs, the lines, the notes, the sharps, the flats, the rests, the dynamic, the accents, the octave marks. I bent my head down towards the keyboard. I couldn't find middle C.

Then I opened my eyes. At the top of the page was the prophetically-titled recital piece: "First Loss" by Schumann. Next to the title were two tiny gold stars.

My first husband's father was a gifted pianist, as were all five of his children. My husband said his mother set a timer for thirty minutes every day that he and his siblings practiced when they were young.

When his father heard I took lessons, he grew animated. "How many years did you take lessons?"

"Four," I gulped, knowing my husband's lessons lasted years longer.

"Four? That's not enough. You should have taken lessons for longer than that!"

I was taken aback, not yet used to his direct manner. While I stood there thinking of a reply, it all came flooding back. I thought of what I wanted to say.

But I didn’t say anything. There was too much to explain. And I wasn’t quite ready to tell the story.

“I wish I had,” I said instead.

Lori Lindstrom rekindled her love of writing after retiring from a thirty-year career in financial management. She is currently working on her memoir, which, when finished, will include "Piano." Her work has appeared in *Potato Soup Journal*.

On Want and Need

by Susannah Q. Pratt

It isn't normal to know what we want. It is a rare and difficult psychological achievement.
— Abraham Harold Maslow

"Oh," say people who hear about our decision to refrain from shopping for a year. "How great. So, like, you'll just be buying the things you *need*."

Yes, it would seem. Though I am no longer sure.

My in-laws are fond of recalling how, as an adolescent, my husband was expert at making a case for his "needs". Among the items he *needed* were an Atari, a Ralph Lauren polo shirt, and a hot tub. His own father, Howard, grew up on the shores of Lake Superior in a small town called Grand Marais. Howard's father Harry, the town dentist, passed away when Howard was eight. From that time forward, Howard, his brother, and his mother lived off of her first grade teacher's salary until the boys were old enough to contribute to the household income. It is not surprising to me that John's pleas for a hot tub went unheard.

My husband's adolescent self is not the only one with a tendency to conflate want with need. I, too, have sat by and watched 'want' slide lazily into 'need' in our family conversations. We *need* to get AAA batteries before leaving on our road trip. We *need* to get some new throw pillows for the couch. I *need* a pair of navy shoes to wear with a new dress. Any close examination of our syntax would indicate that we are constantly in need. I know this not to be the case.

In an attempt to draw a bright line between want and need, I went to the (online) dictionary. Here is MerriamWebster.com on the noun "need": "1. A necessary duty or obligation; 2. A lack of something requisite, *desirable* or useful." Desirable?

And now, on the verb "to want": "1. To have a strong desire for; 2. To have *need* of." Need?

I am beginning to think it is not just our family that tends toward conflation here.

In his 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation” Abraham Maslow debuted his now famous Hierarchy of Needs, an iconic pyramid depicting how our higher order needs—self-actualization, self-esteem—rest on first having satisfied our more basic physiological and relational needs: food, safety, love and acceptance, belonging. Though the framework has had its share of critique in psychological circles, I’ve always liked it. For me, Maslow’s pyramid operates like a secret decoder key for human behavior, a reminder not to take other people’s tension, stress or anger personally. More often than not the source of these emotions is a little bit of crumbling somewhere in the base of a person’s pyramid—a sick parent, a divorce, a move.

Maslow came to mind as I was puzzling over this want/need question with Elliot, my nine-almost-ten-year old. Far more helpful than Merriam or Webster, Elliot offered the following response when I asked him how he would describe the difference between want and need: “Want is pretty much, like, optional. Need is, well, like not optional.”

Maslow and Elliot have it right. It’s hard to think about formulating a college savings plan when the electric company is threatening to cut off the lights. The light bill *needs* to get paid first. My middle school kid can’t feel great about himself when he is out of sorts with his friends. He first *needs* to feel a sense of belonging among his peers. There is a requisite interdependency and sense of progression built into the whole thing. Need gives way to need, as want gives way to want, but satisfied need—different from want—moves toward realized potential, a fulfilled life, and ultimately, goodness toward others. In 1970 Maslow added to his pyramid a topmost layer, Transcendence, describing it as the state in which one reaches full actualization through the giving over of one’s self to some higher goal involving altruism or spirituality.

Continually satisfying our desires does not point us in this direction. In fact, it is quite possible that it moves us in the opposite direction, as the Avett Brothers explain in their song *Ill with Want*:

“I am sick with wanting.
And it's evil how it's got me.

And every day is worse than the one before.
The more I have, the more I think,
'I'm almost where I need to be,
if only I could get a little more.'"

If satisfied need, taken to the extreme, is actualization—consistently satisfied want, the song seems to suggest, is addiction.

Desire is more than the anemic, optional cousin of need. It is a singularly powerful emotion, and no one understands that better than those in charge of selling things to us. My family is enrolled in a department store points program. In this ingenious strategy, making purchases on specific dates gives you "triple points" to be redeemed strategically on certain days. And—here's the brilliant part—unused points eventually expire. Points equate to discounted dollars, and to remind you of this, the store sends you a note to tell you how many points (dollars) you have available, and also to alert you to their expiration date.

The first time we received one of these reminders during our year of no buying, my stomach lurched with anxiety. Fearful that we were leaving money on the table, I, chief guardian and enforcer of the no-buying rules, panicked. I ran from the front hall clutching the reward certificate to find my husband to ask him if we should make an exception and go shopping. The store had succeeded in creating in me a powerful mix of desire and obligation. To be a responsible steward of my points, I couldn't just let them disappear—good things might slip through my fingers.

Except, of course, there is no real money waiting for me at the store. To realize the value of the points I had to first expend money on an item for which I did not have any intrinsic desire. No want existed before the store manufactured it in me. But once they did, *my sense of desire didn't even have to be attached to a specific item to be activated*. Through the point system they had created just enough urgency and hunger to get me in the door.

The magic of marketing is such that not only can it manufacture longing out of thin air, it can also take just a hint of interest and massage it into something more. Shortly

before our no buying experiment started, my husband and I were considering a wooden trellis for our backyard. Clicking idly around on my computer, I followed a trail of links that led me to a website with discounted garden furniture, including a trellis of the type we had been discussing so (here was my big mistake) I clicked on it.

In short order that trellis, and others like it, found their way from around the Internet and onto my computer screen. Constantly. They were there when I checked my email, the weather, or the news. I found myself thinking more and more about a trellis until, when I looked out in my backyard, I could envision one where there was once only a notion. Since we were in the year of no buying, I did not click on anything again and the trellises (trelli?) began showing up with less frequency—gradually retreating to the various websites from whence they came.

Children hear the phrase “whet your appetite” as “wet your appetite”—which seems not entirely inaccurate, as though it might be a reference to our salivary glands. The actual phrase, however, means to sharpen one’s taste for something, the “whet” referring to a whetstone—a device used to sharpen knives. This is how I think about what is happening with my stalker-trellis and the marketing scheme it represents. A raw lump of vague desire is gradually being carefully honed by the messages all around us—beautiful pictures, low, low prices, convenient delivery, easy assembly. Without my even being aware, my appetite for a trellis is being slowly sharpened until this desire now takes the shape of a hook. Eventually, the tip will be so sharp that my want will snag. Were it not for the year of no buying, I would have eventually clicked again on the trellis—this time to buy it.

Not all of our cravings have been manufactured or stoked by the forces of marketing. Human beings are obviously quite capable of genuine desire. It is the pang we feel when we come across something that delights and surprises us, and we therefore suddenly want to own it. It’s the rush of emotion, unbidden, that my husband feels when he sees a Porsche drive past. Or when he walks into REI.

Children express genuine desire with great regularity and sincerity. On a recent trip to New York City we made our way to 30 Rock and to the NBC store at its base. We’d been in the store no longer than five minutes when Oliver and Foster came running up to

us holding a mug decorated with *Parks and Recreation* star Nick Offerman's mustachioed silhouette. "Please," Foster begged, "it's Ron Swanson." The fervor with which they made the case for the mug was impressive, considering a) it was our year of no buying, b) neither of them drink coffee, and c) it was a $17.00 mug with Nick Offerman's face on it. The earnestness with which they explained why this particular mug should be added to the collection of over twenty mugs we already own could only have been born of real desire.

Genuine desire—different from manufactured or cultivated want—deserves to be heeded as it reveals something true about us, or our situation, that has not necessarily been created or exaggerated by the forces of marketing. Our cravings are a part of the mysterious algorithm that makes us who we are. The danger of fully responding to this type of want, however, is that the way it presents in our children—intense, fleeting—is true of our adult desires too.

Here was my mistake: in our consumer culture there is no bright line between want and need. If there is any boundary between them at all, it is porous. For years, the only functioning thermometer in our house was a digital ear thermometer that, for some reason neither my husband or I could explain or fix, read out in Celsius. We'd be woken in the middle of the night by the cries of a feverish child, and in that drowsy and somewhat dread-filled state that only a child in distress can produce, one of us would take the temperature of the sick child huddled against our chest, while the other would stumble around in the dark looking for a smart phone so that we could convert the thermometer reading to Fahrenheit. It was, in the words of our favorite sarcastic twelve-year-old friend Max, "genius".

Why, you wonder, did we not just take ourselves to the nearest pharmacy and get a new thermometer? I have wondered this many times. For starters, we only felt the need acutely at 2 a.m. As soon as we had converted to Fahrenheit and had returned the sick child to bed, the more pressing purchase, the one we would remember the following day, was Children's Tylenol.

But I also think, in the words of mothers and grandmothers immemorial, we were just "making do" with our quirky thermometer. We lacked a perfect item, but we had jerry-

rigged a good enough solution. And I think it is here, in this space, that want finally brushes up against need. Did we need a new thermometer? Debatable. But now, at last, is the debate we should be having.

Our year of no buying forced us to dwell in this space, to develop a tolerance for doing without. A few weeks into the year we noticed that John's standard brown leather belt, the one he wears to work almost every other day, was cracked and looking shabby. In an attempt to forestall a purchase, Foster retrieved a brown marker from his art set and colored in the cracks. I don't think we were kidding ourselves to say the belt didn't look half bad.

Eventually, however, the marker will rub off, and at that time I suppose I will be willing to concede that we have approached something akin to need. John will need a new belt. In our privileged lives, this lack of something daily or essential may be as close as we will ever come to need. But it is still not need in the way we understand food and shelter, or love and belonging, to be. A brown leather belt is not critical to a fulfilled life.

Entire fortunes and a tremendous amount of human capital are spent preventing us from remaining too long in this condition. Marketing professionals would have us lack for nothing—eradicating the practice of "making do" in favor of buying early and often. "Go ahead," they would tell John, "Get that replacement belt. Do it now, while it's on sale. And maybe get an extra one at half price while you're at it." To our ridiculous thermometer situation they would inquire in a solicitous tone, "Why do that to yourselves?"

Why indeed? It's hard to come up with a defense for restraint. The best most of us can do is give a weak nod to environmental concerns…why add another digital thermometer to the landfill? But in truth we know that our new thermometer has already been made, shipped and stocked at our local pharmacy. As have 100,000 more like it. We're already too late. If we don't buy it, someone else will.

The case for attending to, and ultimately fulfilling, our desires is all around us. It's omnipresent and incessant and drowns out most everything else. But if we listen only to this siren song, we will miss the good stuff—the stuff of the pyramid: relationship and love, self-efficacy and change. Maslow's list of needs isn't just psychological formulation; it is a recipe for meaningful life. It falls to us to resurrect the case for our real needs—to listen for them, to draw the conclusion anew for ourselves. In the dark of my sick child's

bedroom, what he needs—what we both need—is to simply hold tight to one another while we wait for the fever to pass.

Susannah Q. Pratt is the author of both essay and review that has appeared in *Literary Mama, Motherwell, The Mindful Word, Chicago Parent, Under the Gum Tree, Essay Daily* and *The Week* (website), among others. She is a regular contributor to *The Waking*, the blog at *Ruminate Magazine*. Pratt is currently at work on a collection of essays about her family's "year of no buying" experiment; “On Want and Need” is taken from this collection. Pratt, her husband, three children and two dogs make their home—still full of too much stuff—in Evanston, IL.

The Loom

by Alicia Robinson Geilen

For the last twenty-five years, I have carted around the pieces of a barn loom that has been in my family for at least six generations. And until recently, the idea of putting it back together again had begun to seem like a pipe dream. The story of how a 100 plus year-old loom got from a chicken house in Oklahoma to a basement in New Hampshire, with the help of a stranger from Connecticut, is one of true serendipity.

The loom, when set up, is a five-foot cube of thirty or so hand-hewn oak timbers. God only knows what it weighs. My Grandaddy was taught to weave on it by his grandmother, who was born in 1863. Sadly, nothing woven by his mother or grandmother survives. But each of his eight grandchildren received a small piece that he wove out of dime-store-quality string and yarn. Next, he wove a small piece for each of the eleven greatgrandchildren who had been born by that time. Eventually he had to stop weaving as his health declined, and the loom sat abandoned in the old chicken house at the back of the garden, which he had used as his workspace. Then in the late 1990s, my grandparents were moved into a nursing home, and the contents of their house divided among family. No one wanted the old loom. It was slated to be thrown out, so I offered to take it. Problem solved! Except that it was in Tulsa, and I lived in Massachusetts.

My dad gamely offered to bring the loom home to Kansas City, and then on to Massachusetts later. I videotaped the disassembly, naively hoping that I would be able to reverse the process and put it back together again someday. And so, the loom traveled from Oklahoma, to Kansas, to Massachusetts. There it sat in my barn, still in pieces, until I moved to New Hampshire, where it sat in the basement until I got divorced and moved again. The timbers languished in the basement of my new house, until I remarried; the pile of wood then moved with me to the garage of my home in Newton, NH.

Nine years later, my husband, John, read an article about a young man from Connecticut, named Nevan Carling, who had reassembled someone’s centuries-old loom. The piece also mentioned the Vermont School of Weaving. I reached out to them,

and they were kind enough to put us in touch. Nevan, who hails from Hartford, CT, is an undergrad at the University of York. In his spare time, he surveys 18th and 19th century American looms. It was hard to tell who was more excited about my loom, Nevan or me. When he—a stranger—generously offered to drive up in the midst of a pandemic and set up my loom for free, I was flabbergasted. In anticipation of Nevan's visit, my husband and I carried the loom parts into the house and awaited the appointed day.

Nevan arrived, double-masked, and we escorted him to the basement. He took one look at the jumble of timbers and said, "I think this is a Dutch loom." I have no Dutch heritage, but I am married to a Dutchman, and I had to laugh. Nevan donned a tatty old pair of overalls and set to work. At first, he was unsure how it all fit together; he had never seen this particular design before. He began by putting together the pieces he was sure about. After a strenuous hour and a half of chiseling mortises and beating tenons with a rubber mallet, he fit the last few pieces together. Triumphant, he installed wooden pegs to hold it fast, some of which had just been made for the occasion by John.

At my request, John took a photo of Nevan and I, masks off, socially distant across the loom's bulk. I looked at this young man with whom I'd just spent the morning, and saw his face uncovered for the first time. I felt a thump in my heart. His smile was warm and infectious as we beamed at each other over my reconstructed treasure. I was reminded of what a strange and wonderful world this can be. The photo is a visual testament to his joy in giving, and my joy in receiving.

It may seem absurd that I dragged around thirty heavy timbers from pillar to post for twenty-five years. I am an irrational optimist. I was absolutely confident that someday I'd put that loom back together and weave on it like Grandaddy did. But equally important, this loom is a tangible link to my family's past. Although my people have pretty much been in this country since the 1600's, they were poor farmers and miners who migrated west over the centuries, looking always for a better life, until they reached the Ozarks of Missouri. They had no jewelry, art, or furniture to pass down, and I have no photographs

of my family beyond my grandparent's generation. What is worse, their stories have been lost. Yet, when I place my hands on the loom's beater bar, worn smooth from generations of my family's hands, I am immediately connected to them. I am grounded in a line that stretches back beyond remembrance, and continues forward through my daughters into the unknowable future.

Alicia Robinson Geilen is a wetland scientist for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She holds a Master's Degree in Urban and Environmental Policy from Tufts University, and a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Kansas. She lives on a lake in rural New Hampshire with her husband and black cat, which possesses ninja-worthy stealth, but no mousing skills. In her spare time, Alicia writes poetry and prose (fiction and nonfiction), plays in a ukulele band, and volunteers for several environmental organizations.

Contributors

Tim Bascom's newest book, *Climbing Lessons*, is a collection of forty brief personal narratives about fathers and sons in his Midwestern American clan. Bascom is also the author of a novel, a collection of essays, and two prize-winning memoirs. His fiction has appeared in *Fiction Southeast, Mainstreet Rag,* and *Lalitamba*. His essays have won prizes at *The Missouri Review* and *Florida Review*, being selected for the anthologies *Best Creative Nonfiction* and *Best American Travel Writing*.

Emma Berndt was born and raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts and now makes her home in Chicago with her husband and two young sons. She holds a A.B. in history from Harvard College and a MSc in Regional and Urban Planning studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Emma spent over a decade working in the fields of urban and environmental policy. In 2018 she left her role as the Executive Director of the Energy and Environment Lab at the University of Chicago to focus on raising her children.

Gabriella Brand's creative non-fiction, poetry, and short stories have appeared in over fifty literary publications. Her travel essays can be found in *The Christian Science Monitor, The Globe and Mail* and in several anthologies. Her most recent work appears in *Herontree, Adventures in Ideas,* and *Still Point Arts Quarterly*. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee. A hiker and a kayaker, Gabriella lives near New Haven, Connecticut. She teaches languages and writing in the OLLI program at the University of Connecticut.

Jill Dalton is an award-winning playwright whose plays *Whistle-blower* and *Collateral Damage* were both semi-finalists in the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. Her book *My Life in the Trenches of Show Business: Escape to New York - Act 1* is available on Amazon, and Act 2 is coming soon. She has also been published in *Auntie Bellum Magazine, Delmarva Review, Evening Street Review, The MacGuffin, Pine Hills Review,* and *Progressive Activists Voice*. Jill is an accomplished actress and has performed on television, in film, and both on and off Broadway. Her acting credits include *Saturday Night Live, Law & Order*, and Oliver Stone's *Wall Street*. She enjoys walking in Central Park and taking care of her bossy cat, Magpie.

After spending thirty-five years practicing law in Philadelphia, **Joe Dworetzky** launched a second career as writer and journalist. In 2019, he was an intern at the *Los Angeles Times*. In 2020, he graduated from Stanford University with a Master's degree in journalism. He is currently a reporter at *Bay City News* in Berkeley, California. More than two dozen of Joe's stories and essays have been published in online and print journals,

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Osama el-Laithy (cover art) is an Egyptian artist and an art supervisor for the Ministry of Education in Egypt. His work has been featured in individual exhibitions in Cairo and in numerous collections in Egyptian galleries and museums.

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Alicia Robinson Geilen is a wetland scientist for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She holds a Master's Degree in Urban and Environmental Policy from Tufts University, and a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Kansas. She lives on a lake in rural New Hampshire with her husband and black cat, which possesses ninja-worthy stealth, but no mousing skills. In her spare time, Alicia writes poetry and prose (fiction and nonfiction), plays in a ukulele band, and volunteers for several environmental organizations.

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Lori Lindstrom rekindled her love of writing after retiring from a thirty-year career in financial management. She is currently working on her memoir, which, when finished, will include "Piano." Her work has appeared in *Potato Soup Journal*.

Susannah Q. Pratt is the author of both essay and review that has appeared in *Literary Mama, Motherwell, The Mindful Word, Chicago Parent, Under the Gum Tree, Essay Daily* and *The Week* (website), among others. She is a regular contributor to *The Waking*, the blog at *Ruminate Magazine*. Pratt is currently at work on a collection of essays about her family's "year of no buying" experiment; "On Want and Need" is taken from this collection.

Pratt, her husband, three children and two dogs make their home—still full of too much stuff—in Evanston, IL.

Terri Sutton lives in Toledo, Ohio. Her work has been published in the anthology *Age Ain't Nothin But a Number*, *The Best of Milwaukee Writer's Circle*, *Under the Sun, HowWeAre,* and *Solstice Literary Magazine*.