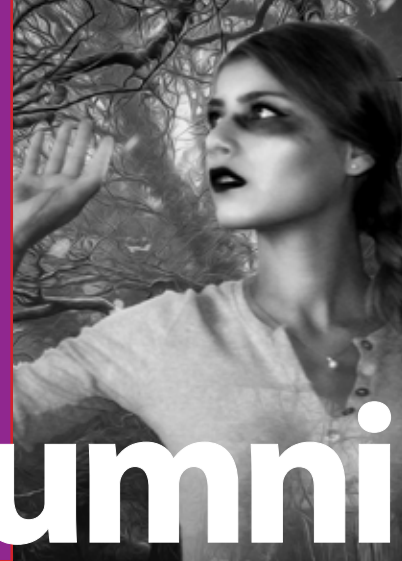
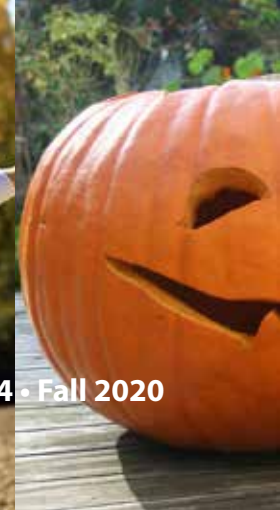




RC Alumni Journal 4



Fall 2020 • No. 4



No. 4 • Fall 2020

Welcome!

Welcome to the fourth issue of the *RC Alumni Journal*!

This issue celebrates the 50th anniversary of RC creative writing (the program officially began in Fall 1970). We planned to be part of a greater celebration, but Mother Nature had other ideas.

As usual, we feature work by RC alums, many of whom were creative writing majors.

Fall 2019 marked my own 50th RC anniversary. Late in August 1969, my parents dropped me off at the arch on Willard Street; it's possible I had to interrupt their latest argument to get my small suitcase and portable typewriter out of the trunk of the car.

About once a week, in Fall 2019 and Winter 2020, I'd walk to the Quad from my west-side home and sit in the Madrigal Lounge, musing about that younger version of myself, all those years ago. If I could go back in time, if I could get that youngster's attention (I'm not sure which of the two would be more

difficult), I might . . . suggest he limit self-loathing, and expect to work hard for the things he loves (rather than look for an easy short-cut).

Of course, these and other reveries came to an abrupt halt in March 2020, when the RC, the university, the city, and the state began closing down.

This issue, we again feature a brief interview with RC alum and creative writing program head Laura Thomas. There is a bit of program news, and a brief history of RC creative writing, too.

"Alumni News," which gathered some publishing info on RC grads, has been moved to the RC Writers site, which we promise to update regularly. That site (sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters) contains PDFs of all our issues as well as many other things.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large 'D' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'n'.

Contact me at dmadaj@umich.edu

To financially support the journal:
go to leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lsc,
click on "Write In Your Gift,"
then put in "331802, RC Alumni Journal"
and whatever amount you wish to contribute.

Or send a check to Carl Abrego or Robby Griswold at the college.
To support the Emerging Writer award, Its "giving" number is 323069.
There's more about Emerging Writers on p. 148.

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Headshots of RC faculty taken from the web.
Laura Thomas photos courtesy Laura.
Photos in Endnotes courtesy John Laswick.

Errata : Eek! Last issue we cut off the last of Bob Clifford's poems as well as his bio. Sorry, Bob! A corrected PDF is posted on RC Writers.

Print copies of this journal were made possible by donated funds.

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Women Returned

Laura Hulthen Thomas

In a time when women are making noise, I'm retracting.

How else to describe this drawing away I'm doing, from teaching others how to make noise in fiction, from writing my own stuff? While other women fight for equity, safety, and keep-your-hands-to-yourself-dammit, why am I, more and more, sitting this one out? I remain silent, now, when a colleague talks over me. An idea of mine is borrowed by another, and I don't say, that's mine. After a work banquet, a notoriously handsy male colleague lays hands on me, glues his crotch to my leg. I smile. I slacken. I nearly melt into his grab. We are surrounded by other colleagues in this crowded hallway in the student union. He calls me gorgeous, gorgeous, thrusts hard, lets me go. My colleagues, clumped in private conversations, don't notice. I pray they

also don't notice my almost childish wave to him, good night.

I'd hoped this retracting was a temporary slide into a borrowed shell, but a few thin-skinned months have stretched into years. I don't submit much to journals now, or conferences, or contests. I write fewer and fewer words, question the worth and originality of every single one.

I could be exhausted. I could be afraid.

Would I still be myself if I'd spoken up at the right times? A year after a conference proposal I'd written was rejected, a panel was listed in the conference's guide using, nearly word for word, the description I'd submitted. A writing buddy of mine, a partner on the original proposal, pointed out the similarities. I asked her if we should do anything about it. We both decided

it wasn't worth the professional risk to speak up. Plagiarism is tough to prove. Coincidences happen, we could admit that, and besides, no idea is completely original. How many words had we inadvertently borrowed from our lives as avid readers? "Nearly" was the word that sold us. An exact copy we might have defended. An exact copy might have earned us some defenders. "Nearly" was just enough originality to question whether the source material was really mine.

I decided not to submit to that conference again, but that one dodge has led to avoiding other opportunities. Now, I'm down to a trickle: of words, of ideas and principles, and the will to stand up for them. Is my retraction a lack of courage, or faith?

* * *

In the midst of my struggle to become myself again, *The New Yorker* published Sadia Shepard's short story "Foreign-Returned" in the January 8, 2018 edition. Soon after the story appeared, author Francine Prose posted to social media her investigation into the story's similarities with Mavis Gallant's "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" from the magazine's December 14, 1963 issue. A stream of comments quickly unspooled about whether "Foreign-Returned" represented post-colonial re-imagining or theft. Should Shepard's title have been amended to include "after Mavis Gallant," as one poster suggested? Or is the interview linked to the story, in which Shepard and her editor discuss the "great debt" Shepard owes to Gallant's story, citation enough, as other posters felt? What plagiarism might or might not look like was out in

the open, a matter between women.

Mavis Gallant was one of my first literary heroes, a woman who taught me that stories about ordinary people could be art, so I decided to compare the stories for myself. From the *New Yorker's* online archives, the pages of the December 14, 1963 issue glowed yellow on my screen, as if I'd dug the magazine out of a box of back issues stowed in my attic. On the way to Gallant's story, vintage sexy ads for unsexy wares like Gold Label cigars, boxy GE transistor radios, and Pringle knitwear popped from the magazine's opening pages. A sensual Jackie Kennedy look-alike, her dark mascara a perfect match to the mole flirting with her bottom lip, filled the page for Femme perfume. Her nude shoulder was cropped just low enough to suggest the promise of more where that came from. Under a close-up of Jack Palance, a tumbler of ice and booze suspended at his squared-up chin, the copy proclaimed "Dubonnet—the man's drink!" "Sansabelt—Strong Man in Slacks," declared another ad. In the photo, a man stood with one shoe on a barbell, the Creslan luxury acrylic clinging to his Jack LaLanne bod without "belts, buckles, and bulges around the waist."

I was born three years after the issue in which Gallant's story appears; ads like these formed the commercial backdrop of my early childhood. Compared to the latest Hooter's jiggle campaign, these specimens felt like quaint, even charming throwbacks to the dawn of sex in advertising.

I settled in to read "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street," and my

nostalgia quickly turned to distraction. When Canadian ex-pats Peter and Sheilah, hoping to reinvigorate their social standing among the Geneva crowd, are driving to the Burleigh's annual Mardi Gras party, a perfume ad separates their arrival from the circumstances that lead to Peter leaving the party with his co-worker, Agnes. At the bottom of the page, Peter reflects, "She [Sheilah] does not know the importance of the first snow—the first clean thing in a dirty year." On the facing page, the Royal Secret perfume ad features a hand rendering of a nude blonde kneeling on an invisible surface, draped in a semi-sheer throw that covers her breast and backside and nothing else. One slender foot is visible, slightly grayed out from the shadows that also play along her right shoulder. Given the tension in their marriage, I'm betting Sheilah is not wearing this perfume to the party.

On the next page, when Peter is left out of the party's various social groups that his wife is navigating smoothly, neutral ads for masculine products—Florsheim shoes, Rooster ties—flank the left-hand page. On the facing page, a close-up of a beautiful model with a lock of hair floating on her upper lip purrs "Moustache is for men." I have to squint to realize this is an ad for men's cologne. "Ask any woman," the copy suggests. "Moustache is only for men who are loyal, kind, understanding... and masterfully masculine." Other ads aimed at men's virility accompany Peter's social tumble. Shiny butane lighters promise a classy smoke. Fine liquor illuminated with amber backlighting looks as smooth in the bottle as it will going down. Peter doesn't know it, but he's surrounded by the finer things in

a "masterfully masculine" man's life that will elude him.

When the party's hostess, Madge Burleigh, orders Peter to take charge of drunk Agnes ("Oh, stop thinking of yourself for once, and see that that poor girl gets home"), a Kent cigarette ad looms over Peter's reluctant acquiescence ("any command is a release, in a way"). The suggestive tag, "For Satisfying Pleasure," hovers over a couple tucked into a snug alcove of rugged red cliffs. The man is leaning over a woman perched on the rocks. His smile faces the reader. The woman's face is slightly turned away. A lock of her blonde hair obscures her mouth. I remember this ad, this woman sandwiched between the man and the bright white Kent box at her back. He is smoking. Her hand rests on his, near the cigarette. Whether she, too, is holding a cigarette isn't clear. My screen blurs such details.

Meanwhile, freed from the dreadful party, Peter can't summon the elevator, and bounds down the stairs; the last words on the page are "Agnes had stalled the lift by..." A turn of the digital page will reveal Agnes's stalling method and send the characters staggering through the snow towards their ambiguous moments in her apartment, an odd non-affair Peter's wife will never discover. But the Kent ad stalls my reading. When I was a kid, I would struggle, and fail, to make out this woman's features. Why didn't she have a face, like the man did? I was too young to tell the difference between advertising and reality, how blurring some lines and sharpening

others was make-believe, a hard sell, not the way women and men were actually made. I know better now, of course, but whether out of habit or a sexist conditioning I'll never really outgrow, now I stare at the Kent woman, seeking a nose, an eye, a mouth that might, too, enjoy satisfying pleasure if only it were drawn.

* * *

By the late 70s and early 80s, when I was a teen, women activists were laying down lines in the sex-in-advertising turf. In my hometown of Saline, Michigan, the occasional billboard promoted tame sales at the local pharmacy or family diner. In nearby Ann Arbor, however, a campaign raged over a suggestive "Feel the Velvet Canadian" billboard that loomed over a tiny neighborhood party store on South Main Street. In the ad, a towering Black Velvet Lady lounged in a clingy off-the-shoulder dress next to a bottle of whiskey scaled to equal her size. When feminist "guerillas," as the press labeled the women, regularly defaced the lady, Heublein Inc., the company responsible for her, refused to back down. A different pose, one the home office apparently thought to be less sexual, would replace the graffiti. The suits must have assumed the woman's posture, not the invitation to cop a feel of her velvet, was the real provocation. Every new lady found her features dulled. Sultry lips and come-on eyes gradually flatlined to blankness, as if neutralizing her sexuality meant erasing her face.

I made many drives down Main Street in the shadow of that lady. No

matter how many times her corporate owners freshened her up, she was never free of graffiti for long. Whenever I saw her, I was usually on my way to the counter clerk and waitressing jobs I held back then. I was fast understanding that being hit on or catcalled are part of the everyday transactions between female help and those they serve. As I was neither pretty nor popular in high school, I'd attracted very little male attention until I entered the work force. I learned on the job when to parry with openly sexist insults, and when to smile and quip at the tamer remarks. I grinned and shrugged it off when the guy who slung hash showed me nude shots of women with enormous breasts. I negotiated gendered banter the same way I balanced prepping salads while refreshing coffee, or juggled six steaming plates of bacon and eggs on my bare arms rather than risk dropping a tray. Those work days began with new paint splashed on the latest Black Velvet Lady. The chants carved under the "Feel the Velvet" tag—"Insist, Resist, Persist"—were meant to light a fire under young girls like me, but looking back, what I recall most clearly are the words "Take Me Down," and bleeding ink slashing a beautiful woman in a sexy black dress.

* * *

When I turned to Shepard's "Foreign-Returned," I immediately noted the similarities that inspired Prose's comments; the same cast of characters under different names, the delicate, ultimately mismanaged negotiations of social status in a foreign country that form the plot. Shepard's originality resides in changes to setting and

the characters' countries of origin. As other readers have pointed out, these variations update the story to the Trump era's chasm between native and foreign born. But, fresh from the vintage ads that helped shape my reading of Gallant's story, the difference in my reading experience caught my attention more than the stories' obvious similarities.

On my iPad, *The New Yorker* app's Contents link allows a direct jump to "Foreign-Returned"; no flipping through pages of ads, as I'd had to do to connect with Gallant. What greeted me first was not the story's first lines, but a full-screen color photo of a woman's head and shoulders facing away from the camera, robed in a light purple hijab. She is clasping a pearl pin to the fabric where her ear must be. Her nails are perfectly lacquered a deep, rich red. Her graceful hands are the only hints of freedom of movement. All I can see of her face are the luxurious spikes of eyelashes rimming one eye, and the slight line of an eyebrow's crest. With her features all but erased, this woman reminds me of her Kent ad ancestor.

As I tap the scroll bar, the reading is clean, ad-free. Three cartoons interject at even intervals. The first features a couple in front of a TV set. The man says, "This looks good—a ninety-six-part documentary about everything." Another shows a casual young woman sprawled on a park bench. Her tee invites us to "ask me about my break from social media." Cartoons also punctuate Gallant's piece, of course. One shows a traditional family of four bundled in winter fur, the father clutching his middle-class briefcase, following a herd of bears into a cave to

hibernate for the winter. In another, a glassblower says to his colleague, "You're a nice guy and all that, Harry, but you're a lousy glassblower." Harry's glass droops from the end of his blower like a sausage link; a failed vessel, a ruined decoration. The 1963 cartoons poke at that era's upper-middle-class aspirations, even as the ads sell those very pretensions. The 2018 cartoons lampoon modern communications, a subtle nod to how I feel reading Shepard's story on an iPad. Whenever I scroll, a pop up gives me the familiar social media sharing options, the f and the bluebird, the envelope for email. The interview in which Shepard credits Gallant is not among the links.

* * *

While the Black Velvet Lady battled defacement from both activists and her corporate masters, I spent my time between waitressing shifts being drilled in intellectual honesty by my undergraduate instructors at the University of Michigan. About the time I was writing a thesis on the poetry of a male Russian émigré who used rape, among other atrocities, to portray the hopeless brutality of everyday Soviet life, sampling was just beginning to stir controversy in the arts. In 1984, rocker Huey Lewis sued Ray Parker Jr. and Columbia Records for plagiarism over the *Ghostbusters* theme song. Despite the lawsuit, rap and hip-hop artists continued to sample tracks, re-mix genres, make new art, but in the academy, borrowing without citation was a dishonest shortcut to originality.

While my Russian literature thesis advisor was training me to draw a clear line connecting my ideas with those of my predecessors, I was listening carefully to the contested Parker and Lewis riffs on the radio. Taken out of their song's respective contexts, the bass lines' funky thumps were indeed so similar. Perhaps Parker had borrowed the riff unconsciously, but if not, shouldn't Lewis have been credited? My poet was breaking Soviet taboos on explicit subject matter and social commentary by riffing profanely on a popular 19th century English pastoral, but he hadn't left it to the reader to uncover this ironic homage. Two stanzas from A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* form the book's epigraph.

Huey Lewis eventually reached an out of court settlement with Columbia Records. Musical artists continued to argue both sides of the copyright issue. If a guitar lick or synthesizer loop is widely recognized, is borrowing that music plagiarism, or homage? With many of those sampled still living and recording, the answer often lay in the original artist's attitude. Some praised the new work, and were honored by their music's contribution to hip-hop's creative evolution. Others sued. Often the lawsuits isolated the musical lines in question from the greater context of the song to prove their case. At the time, erasing content and context seemed fair to me. How else could the ear hear the theft?

While artists debated the tense relationship between creative freedom and intellectual property rights, I analyzed violence towards women—aided and abetted by drunkenness—as a device to depict despair and injustice under a totalitarian regime. The women in the

poems, I saw back then, as crucial symbols of tyranny's dehumanization. Steeped in literary investigation, I never questioned why I was studying this particular poet and his subject matter. I would like, now, to think I had chosen him because his poetry was complex, musical, and courageous in resisting the regime he'd fled. Besides, I would like to remind myself, there were no prominent women poets from that time I could have studied. But the truth was, I hadn't chosen this poet. My thesis advisor had suggested him, and I had never questioned the choice.

In the home stretch of finishing my theses, I came down with a severe bout of pneumonia. My thesis advisor was questioning some of my conclusions. My final edits were grueling. I convinced myself that overwork was responsible for my unseasonable illness. It never occurred to me, as it does now, that I might have been recoiling from the work itself. Perhaps this is when I retracted into the shell I've been assuming is new, and temporary, but am coming to realize I've never quite shed. Then, two weeks before graduation, in a class on Eastern European history, the graduate student instructor (GSI) called me into his office for what I assumed would be a routine conference on the essay I'd just submitted.

Instead, he shut the door and accused me of plagiarism.

* * *

When I reached the scene in "Foreign-Returned" in which Hassan's

wife, Sara, is on her exercise bike watching CNN ("True, this was perhaps not the America she had signed up for. But it was still America."), my younger son interrupted my reading for a lift to band rehearsal. I returned to the story on my laptop, and found my screen populated with ads and links my iPad Kindle version had scrubbed. The woman with the graceful hands still pins the brooch to her hijab, but to her right flashes a slideshow ad for Lily Girl clothes, a brand I have never worn. Above her, a State Farm Insurance banner proclaims: "We know what it takes to make a house a home" on a bright red field. An ad for Neutrogena moisturizer, promising replenishment and youth, pops up when the State Farm tagline fades. The Lily Girl ad slides into an ad for Ramipril, a drug I don't take, and then into an ad for Nespresso coffee, a drug I do take. On the New Yorker website, Shepard's story is as corralled by these flashing ads as Gallant's is by the immovable ads of her time, but my experience of them is much different. The ads of 1963 were linked to the story on the page, while the 2018 ads on my screen relate—or are intended to relate—to me. Gleaming coffee machines and colorful drug packaging replace chiseled jaws and flirty beauty marks. These modern ads don't traffic in bodies, that much is progress, but they sure are noisy. I have to focus all my attention to wade through the bling back to Hassan and Sara.

Just as Gallant's story ends with Peter and Sheilah back in Canada, picking apart the reasons for Peter's career failures, Shepard's story ends with Hassan and Sara back in Pakistan,

brooding over the reasons his American contract wasn't renewed ("True, it might have been his performance review. But it could also have been his name. Or his nationality. Or his visa status. Either way, no one in Karachi blames them for wanting out of the new America"). On my laptop, links labeled "More" follow the story's final lines. The key words Connecticut Pakistan Immigrants Muslims Suburbia unfurl across the screen. Colorful links to recommended articles pop up. "Fighting Cuba's Boxing Ban" shows a half-screen color photograph of a pony-tailed young woman in Benlee boxing gloves. The angle of the photo puts the lens nose-to-nose with the gloves, fills the frame with the woman's fists and powerful arms. The boxing story's neighbor is a link to a piece on African-American writer William Melvin Kelly's fall into obscurity. Shepard's interview on the "...Nuances of Immigration and Cultural Identity" appears, too, with a photo of the author giving the link a visibility my Kindle version does not offer. I click to read the interview. Gallant isn't mentioned until half way through the conversation. Trump's America is cited as more influential source material than "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street."

I don't know how to feel about this late mention. Is it fair to isolate Gallant's source material from the greater context of Shepard's story to prove something borrowed, as the Lewis-Parker lawsuit did? Is Gallant's story to be thought of in the same context as William Melvin Kelly's work? Is Shepard's story to be viewed as the powerful boxing gloves taking on the new America? Where should

my sympathies—hell, my courage—lie?

* * *

I no longer remember the paper that led to trouble in that Eastern European History course, nor the specific idea or text I was accused of plagiarizing. Feverish and foggy, I floated through the meeting with the GSI in which he informed me that, although he could fail me, he wouldn't. He was giving me the benefit of the doubt, he told me, that my sampling was unconscious, not malicious. A late spring heat wave clogged his office, a space so tiny we were sitting knee to knee. He shook a finger and told me how lucky I was that he was letting me off this one time. I should be grateful, he emphasized. Sweating, flushing, on the verge of tears, I longed to defend myself; to explain that I was meticulously trained in the art of attribution; that I had neither plagiarized nor borrowed nor appropriated, that I had not even paraphrased. The idea he was accusing me of stealing was, in fact, my own.

But throughout his dressing down, I kept silent. Once accused, I knew any defense would sound, well, defensive. Acknowledging such a charge always appears like an admission of guilt, especially when one has no way to disprove the accusation beyond all doubt. Anyway, why defend myself to a guy I was a brief time away from never seeing again? And I was too sick to protest, or so I told myself at the time. My throat was so sore I could barely croak, let alone mount a defense.

When he finally fell silent and waited for me to explain myself, to my utter dismay, I rasped, I'm sorry. I fled his

office completely distraught and ashamed. Why on earth had I apologized, and why had the words poured out as naturally as a reflex? The fact that the GSI was male made my distress all the more intense. In my waitressing jobs, smiling with *atta-girl* aplomb had become routine. I should have shaken off this encounter as easily as I shook off a day's labor. I told myself that if the accusation had come from a female GSI I'd be upset, too; but I wondered if I would have kept silent. Had dealing with men in the workplace rendered me unable to defend myself to a man aspiring to the same profession as I was? I wondered, too, if a female instructor would have asked me whether I thought I had plagiarized, as I do now when the rare need arises. Would she have invited my defense, educated rather than scolded? And, if she'd already decided before the meeting not to report me, would she have threatened to do so before informing me she wouldn't? Of course, plenty of female educators wield their power clumsily, or unethically. Plenty of male educators perform their jobs with excellence and respect. But after the meeting with the GSI, the shame, the helpless anger, and the fear I carried were the same emotions I felt when a male customer told me he loved to see a woman's ass bent over a mop while I was scrubbing the day's crud from the restaurant tile.

In the moment, I was forgetting that it doesn't matter whether you come to your idea independently, as Ray Parker Jr. had learned. The GSI had every right, even a professional duty, to confront me. Still, I recall my silence in the face of these accu-

sations as an early symptom of my retracting. Or, perhaps, it's the root cause.

In 1990, as a graduate student, I spent a semester in Moscow. The city was free of billboards and flashing neon, a commercial scrubbing that felt liberating, at least at first. In those ad-free Soviet days, deadpan signs announcing meat or fruit adorned the drab shops. Downtown, the first McDonald's in Russia had opened a year or so ago, and a Pizza Hut lay tucked away on a side street. With St. Basil's technicolor onion domes etched against the sky, I barely noticed the golden arches or the crimson-roofed hut. Most refreshing of all, women's bodies stayed where they belonged, on the street bundled up against the cold, going about the business of life, not lolling half-nude above my head.

A month into my studies, I spotted the GSI who'd accused me of plagiarism in the vast corridor of Moscow State University's dorm, where I, and, presumably he, were living. Shame flooded me, and I fled outside. If he saw me, I was convinced he'd point me out, accuse me before the crowds of fellow students crowding the hallway of being a cheat, a fraud. Looking back, my sensitivity seems ridiculous. I was a year into graduate school and doing well. The accusation that loomed large in my memory was, to him, likely insignificant, a forgotten episode in a grueling teaching routine. But once in flight, I couldn't stop.

I took the subway downtown to shake off the sight of him. When I turned a corner to walk to Red Square, a colossal, brand new Estee Lauder billboard had staked a claim

over a historic building. A woman's face, fringed by a luxurious fur hood, filled the board. Rich red lipstick and thick violet lashes accented her pearly skin. She was unmarked. No one protested her existence. Such glamor was so out of place in Moscow's austerity that I stopped to gape. At the dawn of Russia's new advertising, I should have hoped Moscow's feminist "guerillas" would sneak out that night to protest. I should have longed to see this woman's idealized features scarred with black paint. But my gut reaction to the ad was not at all feminist. How beautiful she is, I thought.

* * *

Upon my return from Russia, I found the jig was up for Ann Arbor's Black Velvet Lady. The skirmish had ended, the lady replaced by an ad I can no longer recall. As I would later learn, the battle was purely local. According to an Associated Press article dated May 24, 1985, "Heublein Inc., the Farmington, Conn., company that markets Black Velvet, has received a few 'negative comments' about the billboard campaign since it began twelve years ago... The Ann Arbor sign has been the only one defaced..." Ann Arbor's women won the battle, but, in time, would lose the war. After years of declining sales, in 2005 the Black Velvet Lady campaign received a re-boot. Sales of Black Label whiskey are again meeting targets. On South Main Street, the tiny liquor store is still thriving, but the billboard's current ad features the latest Diet Coke "Because Flavor" campaign. No alcohol, no sexy

women; just five pop bottles, rainbow bright against a neutral field, selling themselves.

The dust-up surrounding Shepard's use of Gallant's source material played out for a time in posts, tweets and think pieces. In a *Los Angeles Review of Books* article rallying around Shepard, Gina Apostol cites Borges "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," as a defense of fair re-imagining. I identify with Apostol's arguments asserting the artist's prerogative to create new art from old, to repurpose beloved stories to create new meaning, and to enrich the ever-shifting relationship between text and reader. Apostol's caution against "noisy white voices" damaging a writer of color's career also calls out the pernicious damage of a plagiarism charge from white artists whose own creative work exists in a lineage that borders on plagiarism. Huey Lewis may have won his lawsuit against Ray Parker, Jr.'s label, but rockers like Lewis borrow their every guitar lick from their African-American jazz and blues predecessors. As in rock and roll, Borges's story defends appropriation as not only the apotheosis of creativity, but the only originality possible. The author-imitator's re-invention both salvages and transcends earlier work by placing the art into a new cultural and historical frame, encouraging the reader to paint over the old model with an updated pose.

My own brief history as a plagiarist influenced my empathetic reading of "Foreign-Returned," but Shepard's close replication of Gallant's original plot and characters, with attribution buried in an interview, bothered me. As a Gallant scholar, Prose is well-po-

sitioned to unveil the author to the presumably well-read New Yorker reader who still may not have recognized the source text. In Borges' satire, Cervantes is named. *Quixote*, a well-known novel in the public domain, is as much a character in the story as Menard himself. The source text is even invited into Borges' title; *Quixote* shares space with the name of Borges' main character and that character's profession. The writer, the scholar, and the reader in me all appreciate the equal billing. By excluding any mention of her in the space occupied by "Foreign-Returned," even in the title, I can't help but feel that Gallant has been erased from her own work.

And, as I keep silent, smother another protest, another sentence, I wonder: Am I protecting my work, and myself, or erasing both? Is my retraction a holdover from those early years spent with other erased women? Or is my withdrawal a symptom of a self-preservation I'm not ready to admit? I should want to write, submit, talk over and back, join the women who lace up their boxing gloves. I should want to make noise. But what I find I want right now is to acknowledge Gallant's story in *Shepard's*, and *Shepard's* in *Gallant's*. I want to uncover the noise, and the silence, behind women's unique re-imaginings of a shared story.

* * *

Reading these stories in the close company of their advertising revealed one alliance between the original and her offspring. Of all the elements of "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" Shepard chose to re-imagine, the characters' genders

remained faithful to Gallant's cast. Peter's fortunes determine his family's. His wife shares his wonder of what he did wrong, but has neither the means or opportunity, or even the thought, to seek her own professional fortune. Hassan, too, is a man who fails to read signals from the right people. The locale may differ, but in the end, Hassan and his wife sit at the same kitchen table as Gallant's characters to parse where the man of the family went wrong. A lot has changed in the fifty years between the stories, but despite shifts in sensibility, culture, and even the meaning of plagiarism, in "Foreign-Returned" a female writer chose to re-inhabit her sister-writer's male protagonist and his female supporting cast.

The digital reproduction that glows from my screen reveals that Arthur Getz illustrated the December 14, 1963 *New Yorker* cover. An Impressionistic Christmas tree market lines a New York street. Above the fir's spires, the spotlight shines eternally red. Street lights shaped like dragonflies hover over the trees. The seller is wrapped in a white apron. A woman is approaching in high heels and bare legs, wrapped in a sleek maroon overcoat. Both faces are stylistically blurred, their features almost eradicated. Their skin, almost borderless to the air around them, are clearly Caucasian. Perhaps the woman in heels will stop to browse, pick her perfect holiday tree. Perhaps she is on her way to a party, or the theater, and has no intention of stopping. With her eyes and

expression taken from her, her intent is a mystery.

The January 8, 2018 cover artwork by Jorge Colombo is titled "Ferried Across." A woman is sitting alone on the ferry, reading a book. Another ferry is passing by outside the window. The New York City shoreline in the distance is bleak but pretty. The sky's lavender gray highlights the lush blue upholstery of the ferry's seats. Her brown hair is piled in a bun over an off-shoulder profile that's featureless except for her ears. Like the woman in the Kent ad, I could search for hours and never find a trace of her face. Her skin tone is a rich, pale chestnut. To my eye, at least, her race is ambiguous, but her carefully painted nails and the delicate hairs fanning her neck above her fur-lined collar make no mystery of her gender.

First published in The Summerset Review.

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Two Poems

Camilla Lizundia

Blue

The skies fall down

layer
upon
layer

Falling atop my roof

the cement roads
the waves of

a young girl's hair

The fog on the 7th floor

the young man smoked green
to feel his fingers paint colors in the air.

masked in heavy cologne
he sunk into the Texas humidity like soup.

I made fish that night, then lit a candle.
today, like any other day.

Camilla Lizundia (RC 2020, Environment/Urban Studies) was the prose and poetry editor of the RC Review. Her poetry was featured on The Best Advice Show podcast in June 2020.



I Don't Miss You

Julia Byers

Hi there. I'm writing in response to your letter, the one you sent just before Thanksgiving. I know it's Christmas, or I guess it'll be past Christmas by the time this reaches you, if I even bother to send it, which I probably won't. But I just. I needed to write to you. Whether or not you read these words.

I'm scared to send this, because I'm not sure you'll understand.

But you're my best friend, you always have been and always will be, or at least that's what we've been saying since you moved into the school district in the third grade, even though it has now been two years since I last saw you, even though it has now been two years since I last spent any kind of substantial time at "home" at all—you know, the place I left for college, but where you still live; the place that feels so distant to

me now, even when I'm there. And we haven't even texted or anything in at least three months. But we still call each other "best friends" when we do talk. You did in your letter.

And I'm writing because I don't want to lose you. I think. Because it seems like it would be complicated to lose you, when for so long people have viewed us as a "we," in all the same extra-curriculars in high school and always going everywhere together (with the obvious exception of how separated we have become over the past three and a half years, because again, college), and how do you stop being best friends with someone? And here's the truth, why I'm writing, why I probably will not send this letter (I am definitely not sending this letter): I don't miss you.

I mean, I miss things about you. I miss doing stuff with you. You were

my favorite coconspirator, my favorite person to go on Taco Bell runs with between seventh period and theatre rehearsals, the first person invited to every birthday party and movie marathon. But I don't miss you.

You with your turquoise braces and strawberry blond hair. You with your sunscreen obsession but inevitably peeling shoulders. You with your high C belt and too-loud laugh. You with your rolling eyes but thousand watt grin. You with your Starbucks addiction and your house that was always just a little bit nicer than everyone else's—nicer than mine—and the way your cheeks would flush a second before you'd say something you thought was embarrassing but inevitably everyone else found endearing. Or maybe I do miss these things. I guess. Maybe.

Mainly I miss the auditorium. Red velvet chairs and the scuffed old stage and the black curtains that seemed like they were hung from the heavens themselves.

We spent so much time there. Mr. Arora calculated it once, remember, and we spent an average of one hundred and fifty hours in that auditorium for every school play, and we did three shows a year for four years. Plus we just hung out there sometimes. Because that's what theatre geeks do. I just realized—I haven't done a show since we graduated. I know according to Facebook, you're the president of a student theatre troupe at your university this year, which is crazy and amazing and I'm so proud of you. But damn, I don't know how it's been so long since I last did theatre too. It used to be our entire lives. The weeks between one show closing and the

auditions for the next used to feel like a slow suffocation. I always meant to do theatre in college, but I got so busy, and now here we are, halfway through senior year. How did I learn to breathe without theatre? (How did I learn to breathe without you?)

I have to admit—and please don't laugh (are you even going to see this letter in order to consider laughing?)—sometimes I close my eyes and paint myself into a memory of the auditorium. Standing on the stage in one of my old costumes (always in the chorus, if I got a role at all) and I look out into the auditorium, packed with students and parents and teachers, the lights so bright in my eyes and hot on my forehead, and even though I didn't realize until just now how long it's become since I last stood on a stage, I do miss that, so desperately. It is a weight on my chest, like I'm having a heart attack. Like if I could claw my way back through time to that moment, even just for a second, I would give up everything else.

And I miss your living room, where we did homework and watched crappy reality TV and slept on the couches during those sleepovers when we were too lazy to climb the stairs to your room. And running lines with you in the cafeteria—remember how important it used to feel, figuring out who to sit with at lunch every semester? (I can't even remember who I sat with most of the time anymore, except for you, because you were always, always there.) I miss the school and our town and the smell of your car, like apple-scented air fresheners and fast food grease and too many lattes.

Why do I miss places but not peo-

ple? Why do I miss doing things—like I miss going bowling with you on Friday nights and laughing so hard we felt like we were dying and driving through quiet snow-coated streets at two in the morning—but I don't miss you?

I miss that diner you always loved—the one you could never decide what to get at, because you wanted everything on the menu, even though it was literally just a perfectly ordinary diner, only one of three on Main Street—but the fact that you loved it that much made me love it too. I miss the sticky feel of a weird salmon-colored Formica table beneath my fingertips while we played it like a drum to whatever was on the radio, even the slow songs. I miss that time you made me snort strawberry milkshake out my nose by impersonating the rude waitress and it burned so bad I was wiping tears from my eyes for twenty minutes and you ordered me mozzarella sticks to apologize. I miss the feeling in the air that time we stepped outside after a late dinner over winter break senior year of high school, warm and heavy and entrenched and content and content and content, and the first snowflakes fluttered down beneath the parking lot lights, drops of white against the velvety black sky like shooting stars for only us to wish on, and you and I, we spun and spun with asphalt as our stage and headlights our spotlights and nothing else in all of space and time mattering but that moment and us and the snow and the feeling of infinity spiraling away from us, because we had torn free from reality. Just you and me. And moments like that, they never end, not really.

I miss talking with you. The way I could talk to you sometimes more easily than I could talk to myself. The way I liked you better than I liked myself. The way you sometimes made me want to like myself again.

So maybe the problem is that I have misunderstood the purpose of missing or how missing is supposed to work or something else like that that changes the concept on some fundamental level. Maybe missing a person truly is simply missing all these pieces, feeling like a piece is missing out of me—not like there's a hole in my heart, but like my abs have not ached from laughing in far too long and my name sounds funny because even though other people are saying it, none of them are you. Maybe missing is about missing squeezing hugs and silent drives and singing along to one of your show-tunes playlists as obnoxiously as possible. (Sometimes when you were feeling charitable, you put effort into sounding awful so I'd feel better for not being able to hit all the notes. Do you remember? I miss that.)

Maybe missing is not about people at all, but about these pieces of people, all tied together with string, and how that string gets pulled looser and looser the longer you are away.

The truth is, the further in the past our divide, the more difficult it is to keep all these pieces of you knotted together in my memory. And I'm afraid that one day I will forget how to put together the puzzle that makes up you. And that one day there will be pieces I don't even know to include.

But, still, I don't miss you.

Shit. *Shit.* I want to miss you. I want to desperately want you back in my life. I want your distance to be

a weight on my chest. I want your absence to be a hole in my heart. I want to miss you so badly. (You're my *best friend*.)

But I don't.

I'm sorry.

I could claim it's because I remember the bad times too. How desperate I was to get away after a while. Just for a second. Just for a day. Why I changed my plans at the last second, cancelled my spot at your university to go to this other one far, far away. This university with which I have fallen in love. (I'm sorry you had to find a new roommate less than a month before Welcome Week. I'm sorry she ate all your food and kept rearranging the books on your shelf.)

But you always had to control everything, so I never had a say in what we watched or listened to or did. (You wouldn't even let me make a playlist for the car, do you remember? You practically threw my iPhone out the window when I tried.) You made me feel smaller and smaller every time you opened your mouth, you had to win every argument (every one, even when you clearly were wrong), and you thought *everything* I did was wrong, although of course you would never explicitly say that—you just implied it by saying what you would have done instead, because you always would have done something else instead. And maybe I gave up the ability to trust myself the instant I fell into trusting you. But that's not it either.

It doesn't matter, the bad and the good, because the bad does not negate the good, or vice versa. They both just *are*. And neither of them really factor into this equation, this

problem, the fact that *I cannot figure out how I am supposed to miss a person*. Not just you, although you are of course the key example in this conundrum. But missing in general. Because what does that even mean? Sure, I can go through the movements, the motions. I can write emails and look at old pictures and tell you about the hole your absence has left in my life. But none of it is real, not the way it seems to be for other people, the people who cry and shriek and run into each other's arms like something out of a movie. I'm just an actor, playing a part—the Girl Who Misses Her Best Friend.

And I'm writing this letter to you today because maybe you'll get it, maybe you of all people will understand. We always said we were the same person, after all. Two sides of the same coin. You with your light hair. Me with my dark. Twins by everything but genetics.

When you were callous, I did my best to be careful. When you were passionate, I left silences for you to fill. And you wrote me an actual, honest-to-God letter, so I am writing one in return. (I mean, damn it all, it's the twenty-first century and we're literally writing each other letters? What is wrong with us?)

I'm glad your classes are going well. I'm glad you met a boy (and he can even hit all of the notes, so you don't have to pretend you're anything other than the star you were born to be). I'm glad we haven't even texted in three months, yet you still called me your best friend.

Please, tell me I am not broken. Or at least maybe that you're broken in the same way as I am. Maybe you

don't miss me either. Maybe that's why it took so long for you to write. Maybe you'll understand why it's taken so long for me to reply.

Except I'm not sending this. I can't send this. It would be so stupid to send this.

But you're still my best friend. And you deserve to know. (I'm sending this.)

I don't miss you.

But I do need you.

So let's meet at the diner. You know

the one. I'll order the mozzarella sticks. You pick the playlist.

Just make sure it includes show-tunes.

Julia Byers (RC 2016) graduated from the Columbia Publishing Course UK in 2016. She runs the writerly nonprofit Chapter One Events, is a photographer, and is an assistant for a children's literary agency. She lives in New York City, where among other things she worked as an editorial intern at Scholastic.

Three Poems

Melissa Durante

Six and Twenty Six

The church bells downtown
used to ring the same tune
to end first grade recess.
And now each day
the clock with the smiling moon,
grandfather of the office,
chimes it four times an hour
as if to say in the same
warm way,
back to work
back to work.

Roots

In the same way
that the shallowest of beaches
seem to accept
the snowfall on their backs,
that December morning
the way the trees waited in place,
they seemed to say,
"It's just a phase,
but look how beautiful I look
draped in ice—
spring will come
soon enough."
I realized
I too needed to get comfortable
weathering the seasons,
and sometimes accepting
where I was planted.

New Years Day

We were dancing in a ballroom
a few hours after midnight.
Confetti still stuck
to the heels of my shoes,
he spun me,
told me we could live there forever.
Right there.
And I laughed
and said
well it did seem nice,
I liked the architecture of the place.
But all I could think
is I didn't live near there
or really clearly anywhere
in that moment.
And so we danced,
two dancers
finding each other
in New York City.
And in the moment
before he could kiss me
I looked back and said
you seem really nice,
but I really must go,
because every dancer knows
when it's time to exit.

Melissa Durante (RC 2015) is a first year student at Villanova Law and works as a paralegal at Hudson Legal Group. She is Editor-in-Chief at The Electric Rail magazine and a Contributor to Happenings Magazine. She was Editor-in-Chief of Michigan Journal of History and reader at Midwestern Gothic during her U-M student days.



Space Exploration

Cameron Finch

"Space Exploration" was published in the April 20, 2020 issue of Hayden's Ferry Review, the fourth in a series of "Space Explorations" intended to "demystify writers' environments and explore the ways in which they've been created and curated, and how they affect the mental spaces of the authors who inhabit them."

Confession: I've always been eager to spy on the lives of other writers and their rituals (here's looking at you, Writers' Fridges). Not for competitive purposes, but for pure curiosity and wonderment. Interviewing authors is just one way that I get a glance into the messy process of another's creative life. And yet, the thought of reflecting on my own writing space and obsessive quirks had never crossed my mind and was, dare I say, frightening to even begin to approach. What shadowy

darkness would I discover about myself when I stopped and really looked at my self-created patterns? We are so introspective in our craft—how foreign of an idea to zoom out and remember the artist's body sitting in a room. Why is it that we so often find other people's lives so much more interesting than our own? Saying this, it really shouldn't surprise you that I identify first and foremost as a fiction writer.

Recently, my writing space has been in flux as I was living in a box of a dorm room at Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier and in July, I moved to a box of an apartment in New York City. It turns out that I am quite fond of small spaces.

These room-boxes are both my living and writing spaces (maybe those are one in the same?). As you'll

see, I'm a bit of a homebody when it comes to actually putting words on a page. No coffee shops, no libraries. I get very distracted by all the interesting people I see in those public spaces and transform into this horrid eavesdropper. I also like to read my work out loud while I write, and terrible hypocrite that I am, I very much do not want anyone eavesdropping on that.

Most of all, you should know that I'm interested in things. The small items and tchotchkes, the junk that artists hold on to. In Ingrid Schaffner's book, *Maira Kalman: Various Illuminations (of a Crazy World)*, you can find the full inventory of all the objects included in Kalman's 2010 curated installation for The Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. The gallery space was furnished exclusively with "many tables of many things." All are pieces from Kalman's own extensive collection: fezzes, bobby pins, balls of string, a list of names from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, things fallen out of books, rubber bands, found mosses, buckets, onion rings. This gallery is proof that any "thing" can be interesting because behind every "thing" is a history, a story of humanity. Maybe it's the collection of many "things" in one place that helps us see and appreciate the diversity in our life, much like the mystique of walking through an antique shop.

That being said, I invite you to this tour of some of the "things" that make up my writing life.

Writer's Debris : An Inventory of My Writing Desk

#1: Cup of pens and pencils. Six or seven years ago, I found a knock-off "We are happy to serve you" cup - one of

those blue and white ones with the Greek-style font, the ones you never see real people drinking out of, the ones that only exist in movies and gutters. Instead of strong street coffee, this cup holds an embarrassing amount of unsharpened pencils, a stolen highlighter from a confidential location, and a rainbow array of my favorite Paper Mate felt pens (though it's a gamble which ones are dried out and which ones are not).

#2: Post-it notes. Mysteriously, I came into the sudden possession of at least ten pads of sticky notes. I use sy notes for everything: grocery lists, words I like, questions for my characters, random events that happened in such-and-such year, quotes from the latest book I'm reading, what I should eat, a poor remembrance of a dream. I admire how easily these small square notes can proliferate and take up so much space.

#3: A day planner (mostly empty). Right next to the planner is a small grid notebook which has the same To-Do lists written down as you'll find on the sticky notes, only in a slightly more organized fashion. Note: My To-Do lists are most often not actual To-Do lists...a more apt name would be "in a perfect world with ultimate time and brain energy, here's what I would like to do" lists. This is why I often write down the same To-Do lists several days in a row.

#4: 3D printed anatomical heart. A gift from a friend. Fits nicely in the palm of the hand like a stress ball—only less squeezable.

#5: A plastic toy fly. Yes, as in the winged bug. I won it at an arcade in Vermont and traded it in for exactly one ticket. Proof that cheap things

can have a mighty store of emotional value. The fly has become a deep symbol in my life for a kind of never-ending state of recovery, and the insect's incessant nature sparks the question: Is there such a thing as recovery? Can physical and mental recoveries align, and if so, how long does that alignment take? Over the years, I've found it important to keep these little remnants of life, these little fly corpses curled up around me in my creative space. It keeps me grounded in the humanness of what I'm writing.

#6: **An unwashed coffee mug** (with Hamlet pun). The writing/editing day (or frankly any day) can not properly begin until I do my daily stretches, drink a cold glass of water, and then promptly and thoroughly dehydrate myself with at least two cups of Nescafe. It is not the caffeine itself so much as the act of drinking coffee which has now become a vital part of the morning ritual. The steaming mug signals a new day, new thoughts, new experiences, new feelings of doubt and joy and jealousy and disappointment and insecurity and heartache and desire to be consumed by; to me, coffee signals life.

#7: **Loose oats.** I envy people who can write on an empty stomach. I cannot. See these uncooked oats sprinkled like birdseed around my room? In a bleak period of my creative life, I was eating only a bowl of oatmeal and peanut butter twice a day. (Because are you really a writer if you don't have some strange eating habit?) I still start my days with a bowl of oats, but now I eat other stuff too. Nevertheless, all these past oats keep haunting me—much like when you end up wearing a bit of glitter one wild night and then

months later, the glitter is practically paying rent, it's been living with you for so long.

#8: **Desk lamp.** One of those faux library reading room lamps with the pull chain and a moody green hood that casts everything in a glow tint of mystery.

#9: **Laptop.** I find that I do my best bullet-pointed thinking on paper and my best cohesive sentence building on my laptop. I am not particularly proud of this fact.

#10: **A paddle fan that says "WRITERS ARE HOT."** A point of irony in the room because I am constantly cold and dressed in sweaters and blankets while I write.

#11: **The inspiration wall.** It was Julianna Baggott who told us on our first day of graduate school that we should tack photos of the artists we admired most above our desk. I did that for a time, staring deeply into the eyes of Jackson, Rankine, Woolf, and Plath before I fell asleep each night. Now, I've moved on to a more abstract method of inspiration. You'll find my wall plastered with color schemes, freeze frames from my favorite films, my cat, album covers, flowers, a photograph of paint splashes on hardwood floor, Jupiter. "A look book for the inside of my brain" I call it.

#12: **Window blinds, open.**

#13: **Empty yogurt tub.** Set your phone in the cleaned-out yogurt container, turn on Spotify or Pandora, and you've got yourself a pretty stellar DIY amplifier. For bigger projects, I create book-specific playlists, made up of songs that either transport me to a specific time period, geographic setting, or state of mind. Otherwise, I'm usually listening to Emancipator or

The Village soundtrack if I really need to concentrate.

#14: **Essential oil diffuser.** Makes the room smell less like coffee and peanut butter, and more like smoky, musty underground cafes.

#15: **Wood floor, no rug.** This is where you'll find the good stuff—the dust and paper and books and me. That's right, I like to sit on the floor to write, surrounded by a crop circle of particularly inspiring books. I sometimes have a terrible fear that I won't remember how to write. So I often need to be able to reach for a favorite book, or better yet, a previous draft of my own piece to remind my doubtful spirit of what my mind is capable of. The desk is just a place to store everything else.

I've been reading a lot of Patti Smith lately. In *M Train*, she cites the smattering of "writer's debris" that has taken up shelter in her space. I like this term: debris. I've cultivated my own creative space to feel "littered" or "cluttered" with stacks of objects that other people might consider recyclable or even unwanted.

I guess I need my space to be imperfect; there needs to be a lick of chaos just inches from me on the floor. A bundle of old notebooks and purple-penned drafts, a shoe, a tangle of cords, a brown box that was delivered last month but I just can't bear to recycle it, a book I've been meaning to return to its rightful owner, a list of character names, a receipt for another jar of instant coffee and peanut butter, feathers pulled out from pillows, paper paper paper.

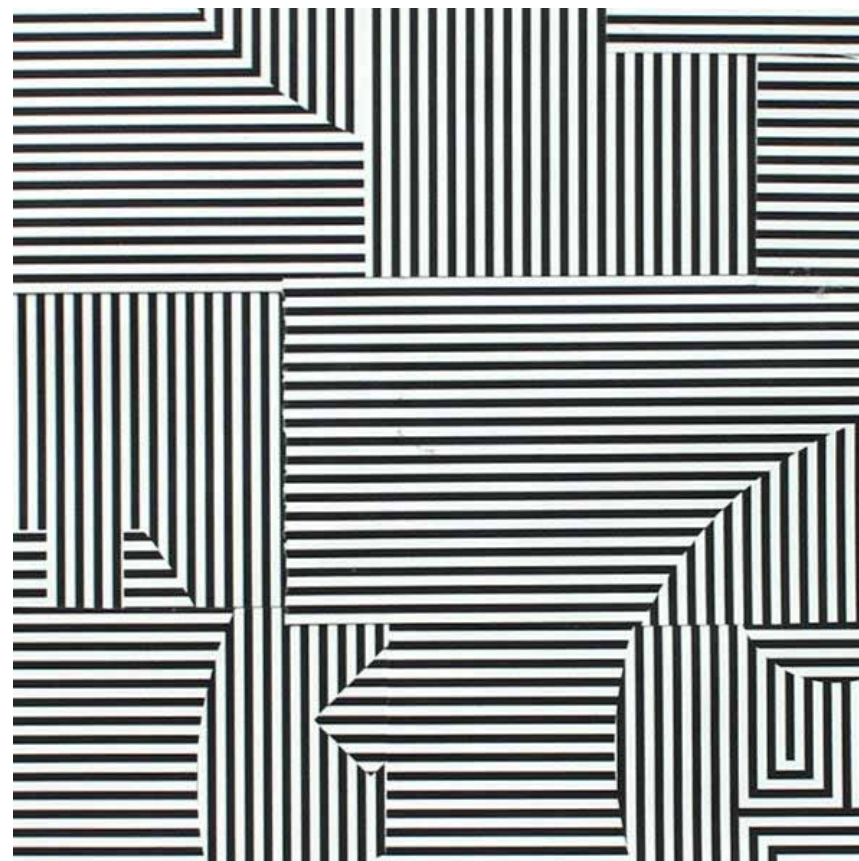
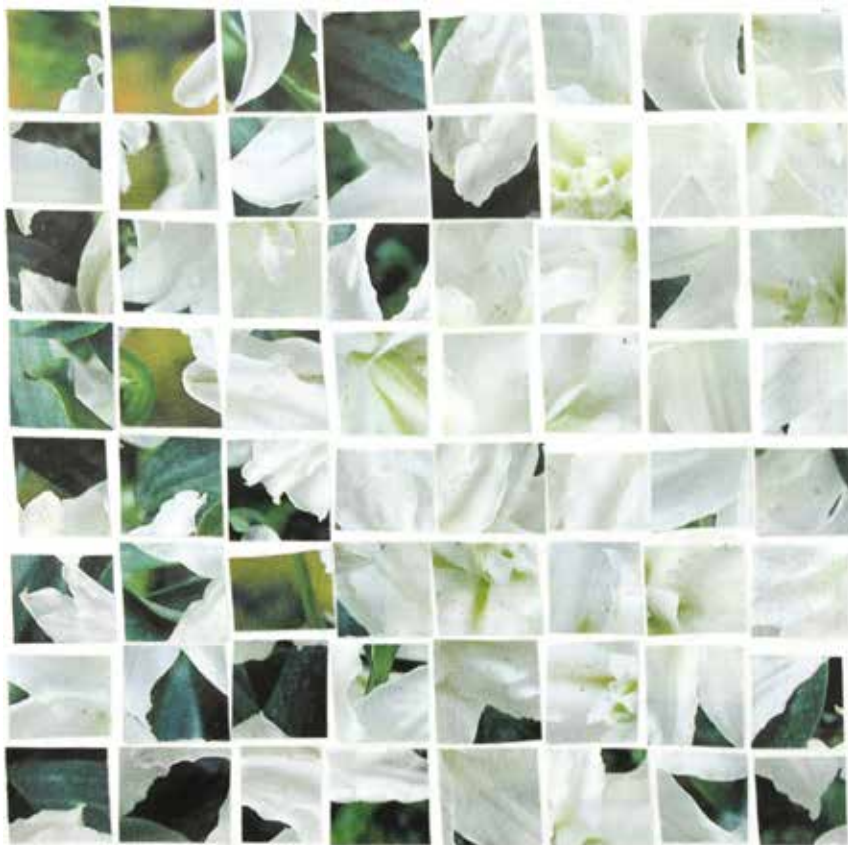
Maybe writing is my way to begin to organize or make sense of the disorder around me.

#16: **The outside world.** I do not have a writing body. What I mean is that my body often has too much excess energy in it to fully be able to sit down and type for more than half an hour at a time without feeling uncomfortable. I do it of course, especially if there's a deadline or say, I'm working in an office. But my body craves movement always, and so in this last line of my "debris," I have to claim the importance of "writing while not writing" or "writing while walking." Some might call it "pre-writing;" others "soft writing." Whatever you call it, this is where I flourish as a writer. The pavement, the grass, the fall and rise of feet, the sweat at my hairline and under my arms, the sunburn on my collarbone, the sunflower, the cats, the sudden strength of a headache, leaf prints shadowing sidewalks, a graffiti conversation on an electrical box, succulents spilling out of a mail slot, the stooped man with an accordion, two sisters jumping rope, the smell of mud and peanuts and rain and chamomile — out there, that is where my writing space begins.

Cameron Finch (RC 2016) recently completed an MFA in Writing and Publishing at Vermont College of Fine Arts. At the RC, she was editor-in-chief of the RC Review. Her writing has appeared in Entropy, Windmill, Glass, and Queen Mob's Tea House, and her interviews with authors and small presses appear in The Rumpus, Michigan Quarterly Review, Electric Literature, and The Adroit Journal. She is the Associate Editor at Atmosphere Press and the Administrative Assistant of the Brooklyn Book Festival. Find out more about her at ccfinch.com or on Twitter at [@_ccfinch_](https://twitter.com/_ccfinch_).

Three Collages

Hannah Nathans





Hannah Nathans (RC 2015, Arts and Ideas, Graphic and Visual Communications) is a New York-based graphic designer currently working at Spotify. Previously, she spent four years working in the fine art, architecture, and museum exhibit worlds telling visual stories throughout physical spaces, on screens, and in books and magazines.



Evicted

Peter Anderson

(Ireland, 1893.

The Suppliant, a young mother of seven children, addresses the audience.)

Your kind and reverent Honours, this poor Suppliant come before you today begs leave to state that she beseeches you as one reluctant to impose upon your Good Graces, Graces which, as she has been assured by those helping her to organize her thoughts, are most well aware of the Cruel State of Affairs in existence throughout our Land, she means the Ownership of so much Soil by so Few and these absent from the land they own, yet placing such burdensome rents and taxes upon the Tenants that these Tenants, being hard-pressed to

pay, find themselves evicted with so many Others and consequently must come before you now as Supplicants given leave to plead their cases.

The Suppliant begs pardon, your Honours, knowing how sincere your wish to right the grievous wrongs inflicted on the populace by absentee Landlords, and how you have supported the Evicted and held meetings and gone on record, and upheld your offices, and yet in the manner of rent-strikes being organized, Tenants still find themselves held in

contempt of the Law, and Soldiers sent to enforce the Public Order with little resource given those evicted.

As one such Evicted Tenant late of these environs, the Supplicant importunes to state to your Honours the manner, cause and effect of her being evicted from her holdings, knowing full well hers is not the only such case for there are many in her immediate surroundings, whose names she could bring forth but will not, with whom she is personally acquainted and who have had been likewise evicted for want of means, many such living in tents, under shelter of bush, scavenging as best they can or forced to flee their family for far off foreign lands. The Supplicant knows hers to be not the worst case yet prays it will stand as sober testament in the Predicament facing so many.

If your Honours will then forbear to spare the Supplicant a moment of your time she will recount the particulars of her case which are as follows: her Landlord having come to the conclusion that the land upon which she, her Husband and their seven Children residing would bring more Profit sitting empty or rented out as pasture than rented to her Family, bethought himself to raise their rent to an untenable amount and thereby secure eviction.

Subsequent to this exorbitant escalation of rent, he sends a Man, an unscrupulous Neighbour, to collect the rent, at which time the Supplicant's husband, knowing they must default on payment, requested the Rent Collector to remove himself from the property. The Supplicant wishes to

state her Husband to be a kind man at Heart though many do not see his good traits noting only the outward gruffness, unseemly oaths and quickness to fisticuffs when provoked. After a short exchange of remonstrances, said Husband greeted said Rent Collector, the treacherous Neighbour, with a Shovel, swung hard enough so as to persuade said Collector he had better lie down in the soil to rest awhile and attend to the newly acquired Bump on his Head as a result of the impact of the shovel Blade with the back of his Skull. And when he lay down thus he bled awhile, closed his eyes and went to sleep. Upon which, noting the profusion of blood seeping into the dirt — dirt the Supplicant's Family has worked on and drawn sustenance from yet never called their own — your Supplicant's Husband, failing to wake the unconscious Collector, decided it best to leave the property promptly, and did so with nary a Word Farewell.

Shortly after which time, Officials came and removed the Rent Collector from Supplicant's Yard — if one may call it a yard, or hers — kicked fresh dirt on the blood pooling there and threw the Rent Collector on the back of a cart brung for that purpose, all the while giving Supplicant threatening looks which she and her seven Children returned in kind. It was not two days later when Soldiers summoned by the Landlord, whose side the Law can always be counted on to uphold, arrived with horses and a large oaken battering ram with which they stove in the walls of the Supplicant's abode and then set fire to the remains, since which time Supplicant and her Children, one of whom met an accident in the foot and needs to get in a hospital, have been Homeless and at the

mercy of the elements, reliant on the Charity of those who have scarce more resources than she, with no word in all this time from her absent Husband whom she has learned upon authority of others lives across the sea and has taken up with Another Woman.

And so she finds herself before you today, scarce knowing what day or even year it is, to appeal to your Honours, Representatives of all that is Good in this Life and the Next and as the never-failing Friends of all the Evicted Tenants to assist her in making up the cost to send her Children far away.

For herself she cares not, her days are run their course, she is old before her time and has seen things she wishes she could un-see. Though your Evicted Tenant's heart is in her old home, the Restoration of her Holdings is a hope she has long since abandoned, abandoned as her Husband has abandoned her. Why she has had to suffer so she does not know, never having asked for more than her due. This life is a mystery known to no Human man or woman and none can see into the Future, whether the outcome be happy or sad, or what will become of us

(The Supplicant stands there, motionless, looking at the audience for a very long time as lights fade slowly to black).

End.

Peter Anderson (RC 1972) studied at the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre before moving to Canada in 1977. He's the recipient of eight Jessie Richardson Awards, a Bay Area Critics' Circle Award, Leo and Gemini nominations for best performance (The Overcoat), and a NY Drama Desk nomination. He lives in Vancouver with his wife, mask-maker and writer Melody Anderson.

when we leave this Shore for Another. She only hopes to see her young ones settled far from here, where they and their Children's children's children will never have to endure what she has had to endure, but will find a new life as free from trouble as she trusts your Honour's lives have been.

If and when such a day comes, the Supplicant vows to trouble your Honours no more, but — mindful of how much Precious Time she has already squandered and of how much greater import your Honours' business be than hers — in taking her leave Supplicant cannot help but ask:

What is to become of our land when all the holdings have been emptied of tenants?

Will neighbours still look at each other free from shame?

Will there be no small shred of human feeling left?

And where will the children go?

Your Honours?



An Equal-Time Critique of Education in the Mid-1950's

Barry Garelick

Readers of my articles about math education know that I defend conventionally or traditionally taught math; some accuse me of casting the earlier eras of education as a panacea. What I actually argue is that while such traditional approaches may have in fact been taught poorly, this does not mean it was not/cannot be taught properly and I advocate for using techniques that worked rather than throwing the baby out with the bath water. But in the interest of equal time, I thought I would write about aspects of the earlier era of education (namely the mid-1950s) that were not so good. And rather than write about math, I thought I'd change the pace and write about

social studies.

I disliked school my first few years. School for the most part struck me as boring, and I looked forward to second grade which was markedly different than Kindergarten and first. Rather than being in the same room all day long, we got to sit at real desks in "homeroom" class (where we learned spelling, arithmetic, reading and writing), and in the other half of the day went to various classes: Science, Art, Music, Library, and Social Studies. On the first day of second grade, I was to report to the Social Studies class first thing in the morning, and then the rest of the classes would follow. I made a mistake, howev-

er, and reported to the homeroom in the morning. When I didn't hear my name called all day, I suspected something was wrong. Things got straightened out the next day, and I went to Social Studies first thing and everything was fine.

I labor over these details because they figure rather prominently in the story I am about to tell. The homeroom class had a list of school supplies on the blackboard that we were to copy down, and the teacher left it up on the second day, so that I complied. Social Studies also had such a list, but the teacher left it up for only one day. When I attended the class in the morning of the next day, there was no such list. While I had seen this list when I attended the wrong class the day before, I felt that because I was not supposed to be in that class at that time, whatever had been told to the class did not apply to me. Thus, my unassailable second grader's logic dictated that I did not need a notebook.

This was a very serious mistake. The notebook was one of three main components of the class. The second was a textbook called "Someday Soon" by Paul Hanna. (Someday Soon by Paul R. Hanna and G.A. Hoyt; Scott, Foresman and Company; 1948.) The third was the teacher, Mr. Flashner, a short, rotund man, who had a reputation for having a quick temper and was rumored to have thrown a pencil at a student and put out his eye. No one I had met ever doubted that such rumor was true, so our behavior in that class was unparalleled.

Students were seated at tables—six for each one. We took turns reading aloud from the book "Someday Soon"

which like many social studies texts of that era, focused on the community and how it functioned. The book was typical of how social studies was taught at that time. In subsequent grades, students would then learn the history of one's city, state, and would build ever-outward, to ultimately achieve a John Dewey-like vision of the world as one large community.

We read about firemen, policemen, how bread is baked at night, how it's distributed during the day, the role of various workers in our lives, trains, how roundhouses work, telephone workers, telephone poles and other related topics that caused me to wonder: What on earth was this book getting at?

The book was made even more mysterious by Mr. Flashner's true-false tests on the material covered in the book. Each test had 10 questions and we were to mark our entries in our spiral bound notebooks, keeping our work covered at all times. Seated at his desk, Mr. Flashner would read the statements in an eerily neutral voice so that there was no inkling of which way he sided in the matter. Some of the statements were obvious but others I found perplexing such as: "The fireman is my friend." I wanted desperately for the statement to be true, but having few friends in my life at that point, I most likely marked it "false" since I knew even at that early age that friends were fairly hard to come by.

It occurred to me that none of this mattered because I didn't have a notebook. On the other hand, I knew that not having one was horribly wrong—particularly when it came time to grade the tests. Grading was

done by having us exchange notebooks with the person across from us. He would read the answers and we had explicit instructions to mark correct answers with a blue checkmark, and wrong answers with a red "X".

The boy across from me would pretend to correct my phantom notebook, though he wasn't happy about being complicit in a crime that could result in loss of eyesight. Others at the table were not happy about my lack of notebook either and asked why I didn't have one. I only knew that after that first test I had reached a point of no return and felt there was no way to ask my parents to buy one without them asking "Why did you wait to tell us?" I had no answer for my table mates. I told them I couldn't afford one. While a dime then is probably worth a dollar today, nobody at my table believed this. But they never betrayed me, as much as they disliked me for embroiling them in my deceit.

After notebooks were returned to their owners, Mr. Flashner would call our names in alphabetical order and we were to call out the number of questions we got right. There were eight or nine students called ahead of me. I knew nothing about averages or central tendency, but instinctively used the mode of the scores called out to guide me in what I would call out. If there were, for example, a preponderance of "8's", I would call out "7", so as not to raise suspicion over a high score.

This went on for several weeks, as we continued to read about the various aspects of how a community worked together. One day, however, Mr. Flashner decided to read his statements while standing up, and noticed

something odd.

Expecting to hear a neutral statement, I was surprised to hear him say: "Barry, where is your notebook?"

I answered as neutrally as possible. "I don't have one," I said.

"You WHAT?" I readied myself for the pencil through the eye.

"Come up here. Now. Quickly! COME UP HERE NOW BEFORE I TUMBLE ALL OVER YOU!"

I was not prepared for this Dickensian side of him, though at the same time, as heavy as he might be I was somewhat relieved that he was thinking in terms of tumbling over me than gouging my eye out. I stood in front of his desk and he continued the inquisition.

"You have not had a notebook for the entire time in this class?" he asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

There were two possible answers that came to mind. I knew that the business about not being able to afford one wouldn't pass muster. But neither would the "absent the day I was told to bring one" reason. So I said I didn't know.

"What were you doing all the time we were taking tests?"

"I pretended to be taking them," I said.

"And what about the scores? Where did those come from?"

"I made them up."

"You made them up!?" And then he said nothing more for a few seconds. When he next spoke, his voice shifted into a more matter-of-fact mode. "Do you have a brother or sister at this school?"

"My brother," I said. He appeared to

be thinking about something.

"You are in serious trouble," he said. And that was that.

My brother was in the seventh grade, and was summoned to Mr. Flashner's classroom after we had been dismissed. My brother was and still is remarkably expert at recalling his particular experiences in the second grade, and what passes for logical reasoning at that age. But even he was at odds to answer Mr. Flashner's questions about my lack of notebook—he didn't even know about it.

The matter escalated of course, and I was subjected to more questioning at home by my parents. "Why didn't you tell us?" It was impossible to explain my logic, such as it was, and easier to just say "I don't know" and thank my lucky stars that I still had both my eyes. Besides, everyone in my family knew I was a good kid and was overwhelmed by events. Somehow things got worked out in a conference between my parents, the principal, and Mr. Flashner. He would have me take make-up tests, and I would take them in my new notebook.

Over the next two weeks, a few minutes out of each class period would be spent with me up at Mr. Flashner's desk while he read the various statements to me quietly and had me mark T or F in my newly acquired spiral notebook. He didn't appear to be the ogre I once thought him to be, and he treated me nicely.

In the meantime, my odd behavior at not having a notebook got suspicions up and I was given a hearing test just in case I was deaf. My parents suspected that it might not be my hearing, but I might be showing

the affliction of either the "gifted" or the "retarded" as the two extremes were defined in those days.

They suspected I was in the former category, but it would not be until 4th grade that they would find out for sure. Schools tested for IQ and administered the Iowa Tests for Basic Skills starting in 4th grade. At that time, few if any gifted programs existed in the public schools. Private schools were the only alternative. Apparently I did quite well on those tests and my teacher would call my parents recommending they consider sending me to a private school.

My parents decided not to, perhaps based on an experience related to my second grade social studies disaster. My mother, thinking I might benefit from a school for gifted students, took me for an interview with the principal of a private school. He sat in a large leather chair and viewing me with the same curiosity that one examines a black widow spider, leaned forward and asked me: "Can you tell me why you did not bring a notebook to your social studies class?" I again didn't know the answer to this question, but it didn't matter. My mother made up her mind about the school and said there was no way she would have me attend. "He looked at him like he was a criminal, for God's sake," she told my father that night, as I listened from the top of the stairs.

Somehow I adjusted to life in a public school and did just fine. My mother told me years later that Mr. Flashner had become the laughing stock of the school for being outwitted by a seven year old boy. He was one of the only male teachers at that

school, at a time when most teachers were women and was also quite young. She recalls at the conference with the principal his amazement that “The other kids at his table all covered for him!” Clearly, Paul Hanna’s underlying message in *Someday Soon* about community involvement had escaped him. But somehow he got through the difficult time. (My brother had him for a class in civics a year later; he tells me he was one of the best teachers he ever had. I like to think I played a role in that.)

“*Someday Soon*” continued to be a mystery to me, but I plodded through it and admired the pretty pictures of trains, planes, firehouses and telephone workers learning to climb telephone poles. “*Someday Soon*” did not see shame in owning your own business or charging money for goods. It was all part of public responsibility. People could be rich if they wanted (like the Pringles, a rich family talked about in the book—they lived in a mansion with their very own park), but they still had to pay taxes. And taxes helped pay for public parks and libraries and schools.

As was typical of the time, no minorities appeared in the book, except an African American porter. Also typical of the time, the schools were the way to the future. In the last chapter of the book the kids return to school after their summer vacations and closes with an optimistic view of the future:

“Back in school and ready for work! Someday they would all grow up. Some of them would be firemen, and some would be engineers. Some would be doctors and nurses and teachers and clerks. But no matter what kind of work they would learn to do, they all would be needed.”

I hope this equal time statement has been enlightening. In closing, let me add the following: For all the problems of schools back then, that era probably produced more home-grown engineers than at any other time in history.

Originally published in Education News, June 6, 2013: <http://www.educationnews.org/k-12-schools/an-equal-time-critique-of-education-in-the-mid-1950s/>

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A Kid’s Guide to Coronavirus

Rebecca Growe and Julia Martin Burch

You probably already know a lot about different ways to be sick. You may know about colds, when you cough and sneeze a lot. You may know about strep throat, when it hurts to swallow, or ear infections, when your ear hurts inside.

What other ways to be sick do you know about?

Most sicknesses have been around for a long time. Scientists and doctors and all the grown-up helpers know just what to do to make people get better.

Can you think of some things that help people when they are sick?

This book is about a certain sickness. It’s called COVID-19, or coronavirus.

Have you heard of it?

Grown-ups have been talking about it a lot. You may have heard about it on TV or online.

What do you know about it already?

A lot of kids have questions about coronavirus. And without getting good answers, they might feel confused or even scared.

This book will help answer those questions!

This coronavirus is a new sickness. Grown-ups don’t know as much about it as they’d like. But here is what they do know:

Coronavirus is contagious. That means it can get people sick by moving from one person’s body

to another person's body when they touch or spend time close together. Coronavirus can move from you to someone else before you even start to feel sick.

Many people who get sick with coronavirus have a fever, a dry cough, and a little trouble breathing.

Anyone can get sick from coronavirus. It can cause big problems for older people or people who have other health issues.

Because coronavirus is such a new sickness, doctors and scientists are working really hard to learn how to help people get better and make coronavirus go away.

In fact, everyone can help out! You can do a lot to stop coronavirus from making people sick.

Can you think of any things you already do to make a difference?

You can wash your hands often with soap and water. Some people sing the ABCs while they do it—what about you?

You can also cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue and try not to touch your face a lot. You can find fun ways to help, too.

Maybe you could paint a picture for your friend, or make a movie of your new dance moves to give Grandma a giggle.

You could write funny jokes on the sidewalk for your neighbors to see, or hang a sign in your window to brighten someone's day.

Until scientists have found out how to make coronavirus go away for good, you and your family might have to make some other, bigger changes. You might need to stay away from crowded places. This is because

crowds make it easy for coronavirus to spread to more people and make them sick.

For the same reason, your parents might not work as much, or they might try to work from home. You might not be able to go to school or play with friends.

You might see people wear masks when they go outside. You might even get one of your own.

Super-heroes wear masks to protect their secret identities, right?? Now super-people everywhere are wearing masks to protect each other from coronavirus. Feel free to wear a cape, too!

These bigger changes can be hard. What do you think some hard parts might be?

These bigger changes can be kind of nice.

What do you think some nice parts might be?

You should know that these bigger changes are temporary. That means they will not last forever.

Other things are staying exactly the same! Your grown-ups are still in charge of taking care of you. And it is still your job to be a kid, which means you still need to learn, play, and spend time with family.

What else is staying the same?

And if you ever have questions, or want to talk, your grown-ups are here to help you and to listen. No sickness can ever change that!

Reader's Note

The coronavirus pandemic can be frightening and confusing for children and adults alike. As a

parent or caregiver, you have the challenging task of navigating and managing your own emotions and needs during the crisis while also supporting your child. The following tips offer information and concrete strategies that you can start using right away with your child and on your own.

Provide Just Enough Information

It is natural for children to be curious about the new kind of illness they keep hearing adults discuss. Provide your young child with limited, age-appropriate facts about the virus. Focus on what they can do to keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe. The information covered in this book is an appropriate example of how to talk with young children about the virus. Listen respectfully to their concerns and reassure them without being dismissive. Help them focus on what is in their control, such as social distancing and hand hygiene. Emphasize that it's important they still do their "jobs" as a kid, including learning, playing, and spending time with family.

It is important to try to strike a balance between oversharing information, which may lead kids to worry about facets of the crisis they do not need to be concerned about, such as the economy, and under-sharing. Though parents sometimes withhold information from kids with the noble intention of wanting to spare them distress, too little information can send active imaginations into overdrive, leading kids to concoct far scarier outcomes than what's realistic.

Validate and Name Emotions

It is normal for children to have a range of emotions in response to the pandemic. Some children might feel anxious about the unknown and fearful about their safety. Others will feel sad or angry about canceled events like a vacation, or about losing their normal routine and time with teachers and friends. No matter the emotion, it is important to validate it, or in other words, to communicate to your child that their emotion makes sense and is okay for them to feel. For example, you might say, "It makes sense that you are feeling disappointed about missing your class field trip. You were really looking forward to it." Or, "I can understand why you're feeling worried. There are a lot of changes happening right now." It is also helpful to specifically label the emotion your child is feeling; research demonstrates that naming an emotion decreases its intensity. In a difficult moment, taking the time to say, "I see that you are really sad" can be incredibly soothing to your child.

Parents sometimes try to make their children feel better by pointing out that the child has many privileges, and that other people are suffering more. For example, a parent might say, "Don't feel sad about missing vacation! We're lucky to have somewhere to live. Other kids aren't that lucky." Despite the good intentions, this is not a helpful approach, as it confuses children about why they are feeling what they are feeling. It can also lead them to feel ashamed for feeling sad about missing vacation. If you would like to teach your child to reflect on what they have to be grateful for, make a family practice of writing

down “gratitudes” or discussing what you are each thankful for over dinner. By doing this when your child is calm rather than feeling sad or fearful, you teach them that their “gratitudes” are things to feel uncomplicated joy about, rather than guilt or confusion.

Focus on the Present Moment

Worried brains tend to focus on the future, predicting all of the scary things that might happen. Teach your child how to gently bring their mind back to the present moment by practicing mindfulness. Being mindful simply means that you are purposefully paying attention to the present moment without judging it as good or bad. Mindfulness can be practiced in countless kid-friendly ways. For example, you can play a mindful “I spy” in which you count all of the objects of a certain color in the space around you. You can mindfully eat, dance, walk, listen to music – the sky is the limit! Build times into the day to practice, such as in transition periods or at meals.

Create a New Routine

It can feel next to impossible to maintain a routine during the quarantine. Yet, flexibly following a consistent plan day-to-day provides much-needed stability for your young child. This is particularly important given that their world has changed dramatically in a short time. Routines do not have to be complicated. For example, it can be helpful to just structure the day around basic needs such as wake-up times and bedtimes, meals, and periods in which you get active.

Constructing a routine around these building blocks of physical and mental health makes it more likely that they will occur consistently.

Consider giving your child age-appropriate tasks to help the family, such as setting the table, helping to prepare food, or cleaning up after a meal. Though teaching your child a new skill takes more effort and attention in the short term, it will make your life easier (and increase your child’s level of independence and sense of competence) in the long term.

Create Memories

Look for opportunities to create new, special family rituals. These do not have to be time consuming or involve preparation. For example, you can jump-start your days with a family dance party in which a different family member chooses a song each day and everyone dances around the breakfast table. You might also help your children brainstorm ways that they can give back to their community, such as writing cards for the elderly or creating supportive signs for health-care workers. When your children look back on this time, they will remember that, despite the many challenges, the time at home also allowed your family to create memories together.

Put the Oxygen Mask on Yourself First

Whenever you can, pause and take a moment or two to check in on yourself and your emotions.

Just like your child, you will reduce your own emotional intensity by

noticing and labeling your feelings. During a crisis, this kind of self-attention can feel like the last thing a busy parent or caregiver has time for. However, by ensuring that you are attuned to and taking care of your own needs, you will have reserves available to help support your children during difficult moments. You will be grateful that you preemptively invested the time in yourself when you must draw on these reserves to help a struggling child.

Make a point to practice what you preach with your children. Focus on what is in your control, such as practicing and modeling coping skills, limiting news consumption, and creating your own new routines around sleep, nutrition, and exercise. Most important—validate and be gentle with yourself. It is impossible to perfectly fulfill all of the roles you are being asked to play in this moment in time. Get comfortable with being good enough. This may look like allowing your children more time on screens than you would normally, cooking (or just heating up!) very basic meals, or practicing a coping strategy for two minutes while hiding in the bathroom.

When to Seek Help

If your child is experiencing so much anxiety or sadness about COVID-19 that it causes significant distress or begins to impact their

functioning (e.g., consistent trouble sleeping, eating, or engaging in typical life activities), you should consult with a licensed psychologist or other mental health professional. There is no need to wait until social distancing restrictions are lifted. During the current crisis, many mental health providers are offering therapy over virtual meeting platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for children and adults alike. Yet within great challenges lie opportunities for growth, bravery, and resilience. You are taking a concrete, effective step forward simply by taking the time to read this book and reflect on how to help your child. Remind yourself of this whenever the “not good enough” monster strikes. You are doing the best you can, and that is enough.

Originally published as an e-book by Magination Press, with illustration by Viviana Garofoli: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/covid-19-help-kids-cope>

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Three Poems

Logan Corey

something deadly about your nature

the smallness of eight
decades peeling names off
the mailbox, shaded under
the same maple, complaining
the same grass won't grow

rent

how exhausting to have a
body, wake up through the
inside out and rattle a wet
bag of bones across the
linoleum



letter to my future self

Are you six feet yet?
I've been trying to trick
the eye into believing growth
is possible

Have you tamed your
waves-will-be-curls? or do you
hate your hair now,
like I hate parts of me

Is it safe then? have we found
a way to touch without
reeling, to share without sanitizing
to the basest forms of ourselves?

Do you miss me?
or am I something better
than myself

Are there parts of me you wish
I could give back?

Logan Corey (RC 2013) is Director of Residential College Admissions & Recruitment. She was editor of the Residential College Review in 2013. Accompanying photos are by Katie Gass (RC 2013).



The Disappearance

Peter Anderson

It was select words at first. More proper nouns than verbs, although this was a guess never empirically verified. Names of course. Of things, cheese grater; and people, Linda. Grip was next to go (as in “get a...”), a lack of fingers the obvious conclusion notwithstanding the lack of certain neuromuscular bundles extending from the ulnar region to the scapular area and beyond, travelling centripetally as opposed to centrifugally. Tools meant to increase leisure time could not be found by standard tracking methods. Neither cellphone apps nor government-trained German Shepherds uncovered the missing. Wi-fi signals were lost in the Inundation, which ironically coincided with the Disappearance. If one still had a sense of irony, but one did not. The active pupil — speaking ocularly (relation to jocularly unknown since dictionary accidentally disposed of) — the fleeting expression, raised eyebrow, bit lip, gently-flared nostril, all signs of brain activity, giving way to a Classical Blank Stare, circa 13th Century. The marble, once brightly painted, now a ghostly white, a ghostly white. Feet attached themselves elsewhere, shortly after arms had flown. Genitalia, once so active online, retained only their virtual existence. Essay portion of exam: relation of virtual to virtue, consideration of actual. Skin shed at ever-accelerating rates, follicles up in smoke. Molecules, unbound at last, regaling bartenders with long, convoluted, barely-coherent tales of their misfortune, vomiting neutrons in toilets that do not exist until you open the door. Key next to the cash register. A cocktail napkin with an atomic number scrawled on it catches fire and turns to ash. A drinking game, a fragment of bone, helical strand, genetic sequence, programmer code, legally-gathered metadata. The lights blink, flash, go out. Two black holes walk into a bar. The punchline never escapes the event horizon.

Peter Anderson (RC 1972) studied at the Dell’Arte School of Physical Theatre before moving to Canada in 1977. He’s the recipient of eight Jessie Richardson Awards, a Bay Area Critics’ Circle Award, Leo and Gemini nominations for best performance (The Overcoat), and a NY Drama Desk nomination. He lives in Vancouver with his wife, maskmaker and writer Melody Anderson.



Pumpkin Carving Season

Delaney Leach

The thirty-first of October was approaching, and with it came the task of carving pumpkins. Andie had scoured the pumpkin patch on a brisk Friday evening after work, calculating the size, color, and rotundity of each pumpkin she passed. With each potential candidate, Andie crouched to dust the dirt off pumpkins and test the weight and stem strength. She picked them up from the matted grass and dirt and held them up against the gray sky and orange hued tree leaves. Some people might have thought her methods took too long. She worried Ian would grow tired waiting for her to return with her selection. His methods for selecting a pumpkin had him ready to purchase his selection five minutes after arrival. He used his leftover time to add some petit gourds to

his purchases. She had observed his methods before; it required a kind of casual chaos that Andie knew she could never emulate. But, they came together with the gourds. Ian would take the time to pick them out and Andie would set them out around their home, with his consult.

Ian had been watching Andie perform her search from a nearby bench just apart from the rows of pumpkins and against a fence, cradling the pumpkin of his choice. For the time being he was content to let Andie cycle through all of the pumpkins of the patch while he waited patiently. The wind kept pushing her wool scarf into her eyes. Each time she batted it away like a cat with a ball of yarn. She was deep into her search at this point. Her options were drying up, but she knew somewhere in her

tangled mess of a brain that she had already found the right pumpkin. She always did this. She would find an ideal candidate, but she couldn't settle. Still she searched. This time was precious. As a child, she was never involved in the process of selecting a pumpkin. Instead, she would come home in the days approaching Halloween to find her mother had selected out of the bin at the grocery store.

Before sundown, the couple made it up to the stand at the front of the farm. An older man with a friendly beard was manning the cash register. His face was weather beaten and kind from years of Septembers and Octobers working on this plot of land. He had seen many couples travel through and many more with kids in tow. Occasionally groups of teenagers would travel through and buy too little or too much for the size of their groups. He could tell that Andie and Ian were newlyweds. He wouldn't go as far as to say spotting these things was a kind of gift, but he's gained a sort of skill over the years. Something about the buzz of newness, moments as fresh as fall air and the crackle of leaves underfoot. Andie and Ian still had that. It hadn't matured into something that had to be understood instead of felt, or worse yet crumbled with time. But, he was optimistic about these two. Then again, he always was.

The pumpkins were left on the porch to keep fresh for carving time. The cloud cover watched over the couple taking advantage of the unseasonably warm autumn day to celebrate the season. Andie gazed upon her pumpkin, the ideal

specimen. She thought back to make sure that she and Ian hadn't carved pumpkins together before. In the duration of their relationship they had carved pumpkins but never together, and usually as a part of their separate friend groups. In the past, they had shared small apartments with inadequate pumpkin possibilities. There were numerous problems, most of which thought up by Andie. The biggest issue was a lack of display venue. They never seemed to have a balcony, and from experience Ian knew the olfactory dangers of leaving carved pumpkins in a small apartment. So it was in fact this year, the first in their new home on the nice street, that could finally come together and take part in this tradition.

They now had a porch with steps practically begging to host a pair of jack-o-lanterns. Andie took in the moment quietly. She wondered if Ian noted it, but didn't expect that he did. She didn't know the grooves of his mind. Where there places for domestic fantasies? She knew that family had enforced their traditions on his growing up. As the only child of his dysfunctional parents, he took the brunt of this energy. Since he exited their home, he had spread out and disregarded the paths expected of him. His trajectory reminded Andie of the times that she would carefully straighten her hair with a flat iron to have it frizz up the moment it hit outside humidity. They had met officially in a college class, the discussion section of a large lecture. But, it was weeks later when she'd stumbled into a party to which his best friend had dragged him that

they first spoke. Ian never thanked his friend for dragging him out that night, but he was always thankful that Andie had dragged him into her nights and days and life so that they could now be out on the porch of their house carving personally selected pumpkins for Halloween. He didn't mind her attention to detail when picking pumpkins. Rather, he appreciated it. She had a patience for tasks that he did not and he respected her process. Coupled with his enthusiasm, he thought that her dedication made them quite a complementary pair. These trains of thought always brought the kind of smile to Ian's face that made Andie ask what he was thinking and he would say nothing and instead of saying anything further, he would wrap Andie up and move the conversation along. And that would say enough.

They set up a card table and two rickety wooden dining chairs from inside the house. It was a tight squeeze on the small porch, but they made it all fit. To finish preparations, they laid out old newspaper over the card table and assembled their supplies. The pumpkins were set up quickly so that the autumn winds sweeping over the porch wouldn't sweep away the newspaper.

Andie donned a jacket, but left her scarf from the day before in the house. To avoid the sunsets that were coming earlier and earlier they got outside to carve their pumpkins on the porch just after lunch. Ian dug into his pumpkin, running the miniature saw that came with the grocery store carving kit around the stem. Once the circle was com-

plete, he tugged the stem around to free the carved portion. Andie was more cautious, she took quick and determined stabs to create a near perfect circle. A pull on the stem detached the cap of the pumpkin easily. Before setting it aside, she chiseled away the excess that dangled like flimsy stalactites from the pumpkin. As she went back to work on her soon to be jack-o-lantern, grabbing a plastic utensil for scooping out the seeds and pumpkin goo from the open carcass, she caught Ian looking at her. At the notice of this, he grabbed a gloppy handful of the pumpkin guts of his own pumpkin and held them up like he might throw it at her. They both know he never would. She laughed and her head leaned back to catch the meek rays of sun that dared to escape the clouds above. Forgoing the plastic tool, Andie plunged her hands into the slime inside the pumpkin and held her own pile of pumpkin guts out to Ian. Together, they deposited their respective piles into a large bowl brought out for this very purpose. Quickly, the modest pile became heaping, daring to overflow.

Once their pumpkins were satisfactorily emptied, Andie passed out the carving knives they had set aside before the threat of a pumpkin-gut-war and they began work. Her knife moved steadily in her hand through the thick skin of the pumpkin. This was the most careful step for Ian. His first step was to take a pen and trace out his creation onto his pumpkin. It was the way his father had taught him. Rather, it was the way his father had done it, and Ian had no choice but to watch it take place if he want-

ed to be involved in the Halloween festivities, which he always did. The carving always took place in the kitchen, on their round dining room table, lined with paper or a plastic tablecloth. Ian's mother would let the men do the carving while she set to work making an apple pie. His mother was a baker and could always be counted on to supply a sweet treat. That year, his mother's pie was for the Halloween party down the street. It was usually something. And to that day carving pumpkins on the porch with Andie, the smell of baking apples and sugar and the carving of pumpkins were inextricably linked. He worried that his many tiny hands up on silly traditions would amount to a weight that Andie wouldn't want to help carry. She had her own way of doing things. He knew that growing up she didn't have much money and efforts towards holidays in her home had often turned lackluster. Now, as someone who was considered an adult, Andie preferred to do anything the best way it could be done. Ian didn't want to burden or interfere. But he only knew one way of being honest, and over the years he had picked up enough baking skills that he trusted he could bake the pie himself. Even if he would rather peel apples with Andie by his side.

Andie caught him making his thinking face which involved a half frown, a tongue peeking out, and a crazy eyebrow. She had first caught it when she talked him into studying for midterms with her in college. Every now and then she would come to bed and watch him making the face while reading. In those instances the thinking face would melt away and be replaced by an expression Andie

took to be love. She had caught the face earlier that morning. When she'd woken up that morning it was to the smell of cinnamon, butter, and baking fruit. She took the stairs down to the main floor of their house. Sidestepping moving boxes, some empty and in need of breaking down, some not, she found Ian in the kitchen. He was wearing an apron she didn't know he owned as well as the thinking face, and offered her a slice of steaming apple pie for breakfast the kitchen boxes were out and open. Ian had clearly dug through them to find the necessary cookware for pie. Andie let out a sigh of relief and breathed in the kitchen air thick with the wafting scent of apple pie. When he'd pulled out the bushel of apples the night before at the pumpkin path she flashed to an image of herself in over her head in the kitchen making a pie for which she didn't have the recipe. Instead she found pie for breakfast. Back on the porch, Ian noticed Andie watching him. She looked gooey and he gave her a bashful grin. Then he stuck her tongue out at her. She responded by sticking her tongue out at him. As this unspoken war was unfolding their new neighbor Doris walked by the couple. Doris had lived on their street for several decades and her walking route around the block was just as old. She wished the new couple had brought a dog or a child or something more exciting to the street when they moved in a month ago. Their holiday festivities were promising, but not satisfactory. Since retirement, she had taken what some might call too great an interest in the lives of those around her. As she passed the pumpkin carvers, they

sat up abruptly and waved to her from their porch. She waved back. She thought they seemed happy and hoped that nothing would scare them off and then having to wait another handful of months waiting for the house to become occupied again.

Doris passed and was well on her way to finish her route before Ian and Andie dissolved into the giggles they had been holding while she passed their house. Regaining their composure, they went back to the project at hand. Ian finally took his carving knife and made a decisive move into the tough skin of the pumpkin. Tracing along his careful outline took nearly twice as long as it took Andie to complete her pumpkin. His methodical carving gave her enough time to check the pie in the oven. She grabbed blankets to wrap around their shoulders to fend off the chill that came with the fall afternoon.

The sun was just grazing the hori-

zon when Ian decided his masterpiece was complete. He and Andie polished off the surfaces of their newly minted jack-o-lanterns with paper towel and gave them one final check over. Cereemoniously, they each took a tea light candle and struck a match to light it. Once the candles were properly situated in each jack-o-lantern, Andie and Ian counted down, three... two... one! and revealed their creations to each other, grinning through it all.

The jack-o-lanterns sat out on their porch for the rest of the season, together as Andie and Ian would be for far longer. Even when their marriage was old and their house was settled. Year in and year out, matching tiny candles glowing inside them both.

Delaney Leach (RC 2020) won a Robbie Award for creative writing in Spring 2020. Throughout her time in the RC, Delaney wrote for the page, the stage, and the screen and hopes to continue doing so in the future.



Villa Giudice

Allison Epstein

It was an entirely unrealistic number of rats for a civilized age. Rats were a Biblical problem. The corners of jail cells, the shadows of granaries, rippling across Egyptian streets chattering of madness and the wrath of the Lord. Not in this middle-class villa Oscar had rented a few miles outside Napoli, unremarkable in every way imaginable. Every way except for the rats. Mark that down on the list of *things to ask the landlord specifically next time*.

"They should be here soon," Bosie said from the bay window. He sat with his feet on the cushion and his knees toward his chest, leaning back on his hands. A small-gauge pistol lay across his lap. With his golden hair still tousled from sleep, he looked like a shepherd in white linen. The pas-

toral ideal, if one managed to ignore the pistol.

"So you said," Oscar replied. "An hour ago." He slumped down further in the chair, until the collar of his dressing-gown bunched around his ears.

A rat scuttled out of the west wall, questing for crumbs. No doubt it would find plenty. Bosie had breakfasted that morning on the sofa, reading the daily paper and shouting about the cricket scores. Oscar lifted his feet slightly, giving the rat room to get by.

Without a word, Bosie lifted the pistol, closed one eye like a Wild West sharpshooter, and fired off two rounds of lead. He missed the rat abysmally, leaving yet another blackened hole in the wallpaper.

Oscar showed no surprise, though

the ice did clink against the walls of his glass. "Did you give them the right address?"

"I should think I know where we live—"

Another rat ventured out in search of crumbs.

Bosie's next bullet struck the rat between the eyes. It collapsed in a spray of gray-scarlet brain matter, which splattered across Oscar's slippers. Oscar swallowed a retch and wiped the slippers against the floor. For a while, prison had made him jumpier. Loud noises, bright lights, his name in a sharp tone. But after a few months, it faded into this gray cotton nothing that dulled the echoes and reflections around him. It was enough to make you want to scream, to fight, to kill someone, just to see if it would help.

"Did you really need to shoot it?" he asked.

Bosie laughed like his father. "Why, are you saving the bullets?"

Well, the day was young. And the world was wide. There were a thousand other places to go. Bosie arched his back in a catlike stretch, and Oscar made a mental note to have words with Bosie's tailor. Cream-colored trousers. If Judas had shown up at Calvary wearing cream-colored trousers that fit like that, Oscar had no doubt Christ would have taken him back, and kissed him like he meant it that time. *Forgive him, Father, he knows not what he does, and while his brain isn't deep enough to bury a grain of salt in, while he's lifted his pieces of silver straight from my bankrupt pockets, I mean to say, Father, hast Thou seen those thighs—*

"You might have drowned it," Oscar said. "The neighbors will ask questions."

Bosie grinned and stood up. "Trust me," he said. "They won't ask questions."

Maybe. Take the landlord. Have England's most celebrated sinner, newly sprung from a two-year jail sentence, knocking on your door with a golden-haired aristocrat who stood like someone was painting his portrait at all times, both of them asking for a room. The English would have closed the door in their faces. The Italians? Two months' rent, paid in advance, and a handshake to seal it.

The Villa Giudice wasn't home, but that was part of the comfort. No one really wanted to die at home, not if they cared for the dramatic arc of their obituary. And how many bullets were left in Bosie's pistol? Oscar would need four, to feel sure of doing the thing properly. After prison, his hands shook, and he wanted a backup for each shot to make sure they landed cleanly. Yes, four would do. This little rotting villa lacked the ambiance for a good Shakespearian end, but actors had made do with worse sets. Worse places to die than indoors, in a comfortable dressing-gown, listening to the sea applaud. If one forgot about the rats, and the feast that would await them after the final shot.

"Goddamn," Bosie snarled, and reached back toward the window-seat.

"Wait—"

Bang.

Oscar's unfinished glass of whiskey, beside his chair, shattered. He shouted and leapt up, watching the amber stain pool across broken glass.

"What in hell—"

"Sorry," Bosie said, setting the pistol aside. "Another one. Missed."

"You could have killed me."

Bosie smiled and tugged Oscar up from his chair, twined both arms around his waist. "You're harder than that to kill."

It was witchcraft how he did this. You couldn't be angry with a man who didn't understand. A man who took unpleasant things and pushed them to the side, because life was beautiful and glittering when he only thought of things that pleased him. And Oscar pleased him. Now. You could see yourself differently, that way. Oscar let Bosie nestle against his shoulder, and ran one hand through Bosie's hair, breathing in deep, eyes closed, and there was a sort of ecstasy in this, a wild blinding one, a clarity.

"Buongiorno, signori."

Knocking, it seemed, wasn't part of the plan.

Oscar flushed red and shoved Bosie's hands away, quadrupling the space between them. A middle-aged woman strolled into the parlor and nodded at both of them as if she walked in on scenes like this every day. She wore three scarves in iridescent colors, an astonishing number of beads, and a violet dress showing a healthy plunge of décolletage. With her confident, unhurried movement, she reminded Oscar of a beetle, scuttling along a rock.

"Buongiorno," Oscar said tartly. He straightened his dressing-gown, then turned to Bosie. "I'm sorry, are we running a halfway house for old women?" "Don't be clever," Bosie said. "It's too early in the day."

"Who is she?" Oscar said, gesturing.

"A witch."

At that moment, Oscar desperately wished Bosie had not shot his whiskey.

"A witch," he repeated. "Christ, Bosie, you told me you'd hired an exterminator."

"I told you I'd hired someone to take care of it," Bosie said.

"The young gentleman mentioned you have a rat problem," the woman said, in accented English. She pointedly avoided looking at the rat-brains seeping into the carpet.

"We do," Oscar said. "It appears we also have a witch problem."

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," the witch said. She dropped her leather handbag on the sofa, then snapped it open. "Shall we get down to business?"

There was a we now. The whiskey sat unpleasantly in the pit of Oscar's stomach.

"Don't let us get in your way," Bosie said brightly.

From the handbag, the witch unearthed candle after candle, each within a clear glass jar. She arranged them around the parlor in an uneven circle before taking out a book of matches. The first one failed to light, but the second one caught, and once the match burned to risk singeing her fingers, she shook it out and lit the rest with the first candle. The scent of the candles—no two quite the same—reminded Oscar of the cloud of perfume that filled St. Andrew's when Constance used to drag him to services. Reminded him of Bosie's gold-tipped French cigarettes, imported en masse for their alleged superiority. Maybe there was a touch of God in this smoke as well.

"You really think this will work,"

Oscar murmured.

"It might, mightn't it?" Bosie said, as though he were the reasonable one and not the one who'd brought in a witch. "We've tried everything else. Tried traps, tried poison—"

"Tried shooting them with a pistol." Bosie had always been selectively tone-deaf. "Yes. So we might as well try this."

Oscar closed his eyes and thanked God he'd started drinking early. Not that there was enough whiskey in the world for this. Christ had the right of it, turning water into wine. A frightful lush, the savior, but it made it easier to put up with the small-minded people one could not stop oneself from adoring, from fucking, from wanting to murder. Easier, through the fog, not to see the witch bustling about, making obscure signs in front of each window. Easier not to hear Bosie humming a tune from some filthy cabaret.

Oscar was so consumed with not-hearing and not-seeing that he was completely unprepared when the witch began to scream.

He stumbled back, almost tripping over the blasted rat corpse. The witch continued to scream, the pitch consistent, a wild vibrato tremor. The scream took a sharp glissando down, landing lower than her speaking voice, and in a language Oscar didn't recognize. She stood in the candlelit circle, which shed no light because it was eleven o'clock on a Wednesday, and rhythmic nonsense syllables poured from her cracked lips.

The horror faded fast. The woman was a parlor-trick exorcist, he could see that now. One of those who visited salons to conjure spirits for idle

socialites. No power, only toothless spectacle. Bosie snickered. Jeering at the wild old woman performing a trick no one believed anymore. In her chanting, Oscar heard Lear screaming on the heath, Christ cursing on the hill. The candles' heat was unbearable.

He stood up. Bosie stared at him, though the witch didn't stop her chanting. Oscar stepped over the candles and into the hall, pausing only to stamp out the tongue of flame that caught the hem of his dressing-gown. The hall fell away under his feet, and then the threshold, and then he was outside, the grass damp beneath his slippers, and he did not stop until he reached the rocks that lined the shore, where he sank down, breathing hard, the dizziness in his brain not entirely from the whiskey.

The old woman would have been a showstopper in Tite Street. She'd have drawn every eye, ladies and gentlemen gaping as she chanted. There, at the dawn of the '90s, she'd have commanded true magic. Here, at the death of a century, she looked pale, used-up. Cracked.

He would go. He would. He should have at the first. Where? It didn't matter. Anywhere but this Italian villa swarming with rats, where Bosie's smile was still here to corrupt—

He closed his eyes and groaned to the white-capped waves. Corruption had never been the answer. In fact, it had been many years since he'd known the question.

Oscar wasn't good-looking, not in his prime and certainly not fifteen years after it. He wasn't a handsome, stupid man of twenty-two; he was a

brilliant, homely man of thirty-seven. He'd seen it from their first meeting in Chelsea: that revulsion in Bosie's eyes, those tightening lips, as if to say *who is this sad old man, and what does he want with me?* It was Oscar who'd insisted. He dazzled, made sure to, dropped enough quips to fill a play. Cleverness wasn't beauty, but it was something to fight with. And he had. He'd played the long game and won it, through will and sweat and wit. How Bosie laughed back then. Not his father's laugh but the charming one, the one that rippled across Oscar's skin like the sea.

A laugh he'd thought he'd give anything for. Much easier to promise the world when you still had the world to give.

Minutes inched by. Perhaps twenty. It was hard to tell against the rhythm of the sea, where everything felt smooth, connected. Tossed on the sea, a fishing skiff reeled in its nets some fifty yards offshore. The rope landed on the deck with a wet thud Oscar thought he could hear.

"So that's where you've gone."

Oscar didn't turn. Some things didn't need to be seen.

"She's still at it, you know," Bosie said. "It's quite something."

"It won't work."

"Not with that attitude."

Oscar turned to the sea, listening to the gulls scream.

Bosie sighed. Without looking, Oscar could see him tucking his hands into the pockets of his trousers, scuffing one foot along the grass like a child playing football with a stone. "Well," he said.

Oscar knew the meaning of that *well*. "We can't not pay her," Bosie said, still avoiding eye contact.

"Surely not."

"I promised her fifteen lire."

Oscar raised his eyebrows. "Last I knew, you'd stolen my wallet to buy drinks."

A blush crept into Bosie's cheeks. Oscar hated him for it. He could have withstood anything, hardened his heart to anything, except contrition.

Without a word, Oscar reached into the pocket of his dressing-gown. From a small roll of loose bills growing smaller by the day, he peeled out three notes and handed them over without speaking.

Bosie's smile was luminous. "You're a gem," he said. "Come here."

He wasn't going to. He wouldn't. Oscar would not come closer, and yet there they were anyway, and Oscar gritted his teeth as Bosie's soft hands massaged his shoulders through the fabric of the dressing-gown. It hurt, the firm rotating motions of those otherwise delicate hands. It felt like Bosie was unspooling each of his nerves, one at a time. His dressing-gown fluttered backward behind him, and for a brief, wild moment, it felt like wings. It would always be like this. This drifting away and flying back, this sweetness and its underlying ache, the soft fabric edged with flame. The rush of the gray waves, and above them, the gulls, screaming.

"Don't stay out much longer," Bosie murmured. His lips were just beneath Oscar's ear. The vibration of his breath. A note they had struck before, again and again. "You'll catch a chill. I worry, you know."

Oscar shivered. Betrayed by his own muscles under Bosie's soft hands. "I know you do."

Bosie kissed Oscar on the cheek. Oscar kept his eyes on the sea.

When he turned back, Bosie had disappeared inside. He'd left the door open. Through it, the shadow of a rat bolted toward freedom. First one, its nose cocked upward. Sniffing the air for a sign, for safety. It reared up slightly, then tore forward, skittering into the underbrush.

A pause, then two more. Then four. Then seven. Then, as Oscar watched, a wave of dark brown bodies and clawed feet spilled from the Villa Giudice, tripping over one another to reach safe ground. He took a step back, nearer to the sea, and watched the mass of vermin spread out across the grass and disappear into the porous landscape.

Until they were gone. In less than five minutes, the doorway was empty again. The distant sound of two voices poured through the open

door. A thin plume of smoke from the candles trickled through an open window. In Oscar's mind, it smelled of incense.

This story was originally published in Timeworn Literary Journal.

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Dindace's Stand

J.L. Hagen

Walter Dindace loved to chop wood. He loved the swing of his freshly honed double-bitted ax, the heft of the ax-weight as it plunged, its grip on his arms, the exertion of its arc. Walter loved to see the silver blade sink *krp-chunk* into the meaty pulp, to watch it cleave the log, half to the left, half to the right, a razor-edged guillotine. Loved to hear the suck of the wood on the ax head as he extracted it, see the gleaming blade drawn forth, absorb the sap-smell. And he loved the lift and sway of the heavy tool lugged daringly out and over his shoulders.

But what Walter loved and savored most was the point after it rose in slow anticipation, the point before it glided whooshing downward—that split-millisecond when it hovered above his

head in uncertainty. For the blink of an eye, it created and recreated the best moment of all possible worlds.

In a year of weekends, Walter split more wood than he cared to measure. He would have cut ten times more if not for the life that bound him. How he envied the people who lived year-round where his cabin lay. How he loathed his dull job as a Christian bookstore manager, and the notion of religion, in general. He despised the raucous, foul-smelling city, his brick pigeonhole of a house; even his wife Beatrice was starting to annoy him. But when Walter and Beatrice fled north each weekend to their refuge near Loyale, Michigan, when he chopped ricks and ricks of wood, he felt revitalized—dare

he say it, resurrected—as if he were doing something, something that mattered.

Everyone, including Beatrice and her peculiar friend, Miss Ariella Prodney (their next-door neighbor), claimed it would be the death of him. He didn't care a whit. At one time he might have acquiesced, but he had decided it would be a better passing than grisly mortification in the stacks. In fact, he was growing ever more perturbed at the nibby Miss Prodney, who towered over him and cast a larger and larger shadow over his relationship with his wife. In a different life, he might have described her as an ancient battle axe, but in his present circumstances, he had concluded it would constitute an insult to his favorite tool.

On the other hand, this constant hen-peckery made him more prudent. He stopped smoking, started to watch his weight, even trimmed the fat religiously from his steaks, and limited himself to one mixed drink before dinner—a short one. He wished his wife to be perfectly pleased, to allow him this single liberty without incessant sniveling. He resented her golf analogy most.

"I would prefer to be...a *golf-widow*," Beatrice said. "Ariella agrees that even if I saw you less, at least golf makes sense."

Not many things make "sense," Walter thought, *any way you picked at them*. Why was that a benchmark? Apart from the usual melodrama, her remark—and Prodney's taunt—really galled him.

One Saturday while chopping, Walter paused as he often did to mop his forehead. He glanced over

at the shed where he piled the wood chunks at each day's end. It was darn near full. This irritated him. When he first constructed the shed, he planned it large, so cavernous it could not *possibly* be filled, even in his lifetime. He hoped to rid himself of the necessity of filling it, but now the damn shed had gone behind his back and stuffed itself.

Walter chided himself for letting it get away from him. Matters had a way of doing that, progressing, climaxing, terminating, if you did not keep sharp against it. It was nearly more than one man could handle. But he was dead-set that nothing spoil his one avocation, his one pre-occupation—dare he say it?—one obsession that had consumed the *raison d'être* of his life.

As Walter grasped the ax handle from where it rested against his knee, the true dilemma presented itself. The question lurking behind the observation unleashed multiple alternatives. Should he build a new shed—or *not*? Building the original had been almost as enjoyable as his present fixation; the prospect of constructing another did not please him half as much as his memory of the construction of the first. In fact, he dreaded it. He had grown out of that need, was laboring implicitly against it.

What to do, then? He considered piling the wood unsheltered against the shed, but then it would be continually sopping, would, when burned, undoubtedly stink and smolder, and besides, Walter thought, if I am to leave part of the wood outside, to what end have I built it in the first place? No, he definitely liked the

idea of all the wood *inside* the shed.

Walter ran an examining eye across the shiny edge of the ax head while continuing to sweat out his conundrum. With such intense use, the blade was often in need of a quick dressing on the whetstone, and the handle a good soak to tighten grip between oak and steel. He discovered the eye-joint had once again worked itself a tad loose, made a note to rewedge the lug sometime soon.

Then from this semiconscious diversion, like the slash of an ax itself, the solution flared into mind: *He would burn the wood he had chopped.* It was *too* perfect. Not only would he make room for the slabs yet to be cut, but he would involve Beatrice in the process, for she could tend the stove, thereby keeping her occupied—and *silent*. He set to work whacking more vigorously than ever.

Three Saturdays later, Miss Prodney ambled over for her habitual tea with Beatrice while they watched that little fool Walter chop away. As she stepped through the open cabin door, she collided with a wall of air as blistering as the infernal ovens of Hell.

"How come the stove's blazing?" Miss Prodney shouted over the roar of the fire to the sweat-slogged Beatrice. "My God, it's the middle of July. *Ninety-three degrees outside!*"

"Walter...insists on it," Beatrice cried. She horsed another log into the burner. "He says I have to get rid of all that wood." She motioned toward the shed. "Before next month.

Oh, Ariella..." She burst out sobbing.

"Now, there, there..." Miss Prodney did her best to calm Beatrice. She understood full well the insensitivity, indeed, the crude bestiality of the male species. The change in her personal situation, not to mention the collapse of her niece's marriage, were the source of her iron-clad rule never to interfere directly in the affairs of others. This time, however, she was unavoidably sucked in.

"Why don't you tell Walter where he can stick it?"

"Walter said if I didn't take care of the wood, he would quit his job and do it himself. I don't know what's got into that man," she bawled. "He's gone LOONY."

"Oh, Beatrice...you poor thing." Miss Prodney clutched her to her ample breast. Outside, she could see that imbecile Walter hacking sickly away. She released Beatrice and stormed toward the door.

The drum of Miss Prodney's footsteps on the cabin deck caught Walter's attention. He braced himself. She roared toward him. But when she sighted the shimmering, slick blade of Walter's twin-edged decapitator, his Rasputin grin, and the murky, vitriolic eyes signaling persecution by whatever feudal means necessary, she quaked to an abrupt halt. Jacking herself to full she-bear height, she glared at him.

"You've had it, Walter, you sap-headed termite!"

Walter snarled at her. He flared his damp nostrils and shook his balding, wolf-like mane.

"Eat a cow pie, Prodney, and get off my property. You're trespassing." She lunged with a raking paw. He slipped to one side and growled. Warily, they orbited the fresh-hewn woodpile, David and Goliath, probing each other out. Her great claws shredded air as he poked the ax handle and goaded her. She fainted left, then struck right. Missed again as he weaved and ducked behind his cudgel, still circling. She lumbered toward the high ground, crouched like a gargoyle ready to pounce. Her eyes flashed, jaws grinding.

Walter wrenched the ax violently up to the point of uncertainty. The shining, four-pound leather-honed blade flew from the handle into the air above him. He saw it rise and rise, a silvery bird of prey, elusive, shimmering. It reached an apex, floated there, transient, poised freely as an escaping thought. Then tumbled into shadow.

"Aaaarrh!" Miss Prodney's guttural scream forced itself to the surface in a siren wail. She stumbled back, covering all her face but her cavernous mouth. The blade made two limber, gliding twists, then a final backflip before it split through Walter's sodden forehead with the grace of an Esther Williams dive. He had sharpened it only too well.

Miss Prodney stopped howling abruptly and waddled into the house. She phoned the sheriff, then TV Action News. Reporters found him pinned to the earth, draped like the *Pietà* over a newly cut log.

A few days later, Walter was interred in a perpetual care cemetery. Miss Prodney drove downstate for the closed-casket funeral. At the gravesite, she conveyed to Beatrice what a tragic, senseless loss it was.

Her condolence pitched Beatrice into new depths of wet hysterics, and she slipped, nearly into the crypt itself, reaching out to grasp a lifeline. Her hand landed on the corpulent Miss Prodney, who lost her balance and tumbled past Beatrice, snapping a well-padded wing against Walter's coffin lid. She let loose a curse which could only be appreciated by someone with significant maritime experience. Miss Prodney, before her surgery and transition, had been such a person—former Chief Petty Officer *Arnold* Prodney—for twenty-odd years. She had been well schooled.

Everyone staring down at her sprawled over Walter's casket recoiled in a flash-bang state of shock and awe—most of all, Beatrice. She would never engage in that form of lingual display, especially during her unfortunate husband's interment. This placed an immediate damper on what had been until then an intensely reciprocal attachment.

Despite lingering anguish from the tragedy of her late husband's demise and her estrangement from her heretofore best friend, mentor and weekend companion, Beatrice happily remarried the following Christmas (she was still a beautiful woman). The debonair Hartley

Powers, proprietor of a burgeoning health food emporium (including tanning salon), joined her at the cabin for their honeymoon. Miss Prodney's arm had healed a few months before (although, in truth, it never did feel quite the same), and she and Beatrice rekindled something akin to their former relationship.

The new couple labored over four

cold winters to use the firewood. Soon after, they bought a small propane stove. The former Mrs. Dindace insisted, to her new husband's confoundment, that he never wield an ax.

John L. Hagen (RC 1972 Literature) retired in 2015 after a career in economic development. He and his wife Joy divide their time between homes near Tampa Bay and Saugatuck, Michigan.

Three Poems

Carmen Bugan

Water Ways

For Alisa, who shouted, "Mommy, I keep losing your steps!"

The water is writing on sand
Many drafts of the same story,

One more shimmering than the next.
I go there to memorize their turns

And feel their calling power,
Wrestle with their yesses and whys,

I get involved, make footnotes on some pages;
The ocean erases them impatiently

Offering shells the size of my feet,
Shhh, it says, now listen.

*

My daughter says the clouds try to bloom
Above the water—white hydrangeas--

But the water pulls them down;
Clouds are children of the water, I say,

It's hard to let go of children.
Under the bridge this morning the river

Passes for a mirror half fogged over--
Visions and revisions touch its surface

As we look on; mommy, my child says,
The clouds caress the water.

A white hawk appears above us
Held up by the warm breath of the earth,

The tips of its wings recall silver lining
Gliding out of view like a thought hard to hold.

"Water Ways" previously appeared in the second issue of Monk.

Fields

Orthodox Easter, 2020

In warmer places, where the sun lingers,
Fields offer the first harvest.

The farmer understood light's labor
And the generosity of water:

Snap peas, strawberries, tomatoes,
Squash and green beans gladden the eye.

But this is not the usual season.
This year the farmer buries his harvest.

The tractor calls the crows to feast on
Earth's fruit, crushed in the furrowed field.

*

Miles away the city parking lots are filled
With cars in which families wait for food.

Bird's eye view shows them like toys in rows,
Figures with face masks and gloves

Place a box in each car with food
Flown in from across the border.

No one knows why this is.
The farmer plows the food into the soil.

The hungry don't go harvest
The fields, pay what they can.

*

The city streets are lined with trucks
Where hospital workers store the dead,

If each person could be remembered
With a fistful of flowers, the glasshouses

Would empty out. But this is not the time
For old prayers, rituals and incense.

We take away the bodies, following
The protocols for toxic waste.

Our world is sick this season, Lord, we're sick
And dying, we plow our harvest in the fields.

*

My mother has kept the Lent as every year
And she has baked sweet bread.

We won't go home for Resurrection.
The priest left the candles in the mailbox.

My father calls me "my little soul," says
They can't tell how this will end,

We recall the parable of the mustard seed,
We know the right time to plant

Is when the fields are plowed, and
Water from our tears is plentiful.

Do not point your gun at a child

Once you were a child too,
And your father must have carried you
On his shoulders, from where
You could look the grown-ups in the eyes.

Do not point your gun at a child
Who holds in her hand a bag of crisps—
Food her only weapon, her father's shoulders
The only vantage point for this world

That burns in flames before her.
People have come to ask for dignity,
This girl must learn it is safe to ask
For a better life, do not point your gun at her.

Once you were a child too
And your father must have carried you
On his shoulders, from where
You could see the world you will live in:

Do not point your gun at this girl
Do not point your gun at her father,
Take off your helmet and look in their eyes
There is a love of life in them you can only see

If you do not point your gun at this girl,
Who is learning at a tender age that no man
Should kneel on the neck of another man,
That no one has the right to take another's life.

Carmen Bugar (RC 1996) was born in Romania and emigrated to the United States in 1989. After U-M she earned an MA in creative writing from Lancaster University, and a MA and PhD (English Literature) from Oxford University, UK. Her poetry collections include Crossing the Carpathians (2004), The House of Straw (2014), Releasing the Porcelain Birds (2016) and Lilies from America: New and Selected Poems (2019). She has also published a memoir, Burying the Typewriter (2012), and Seamus Heaney and East European Poetry in Translation: Poetics of Exile (2013). A book of essays, Poetry and the Language of Oppression, will be published in March 2021 by Oxford University Press. She teaches at the Gotham Writers Workshop in NYC and lives in Long Island.



Excerpt from Heartland

Ellen Dreyer

We published the first chapter of Heartland in our first issue, and the second and third chapters in our third issue.

Chapter 4 Fair Play

Billie bolted from the car and up the rise where girls in long skirts hung white cloth rectangles along a clothesline. An unusually tall woman, the only one wearing bib overalls instead of a skirt, broke away and wrapped Billie in a hug. Faith, still in the car, watched this sideways. Why did she let Billie ask her those questions, about the music in the car, the moonlight? It was all leading up to some spill in the dirt, some trouble.

Yet she couldn't keep herself from staring at the tall person, whose long, black hair spilled mane-like across her shoulders, and who pulled away from Billie and asked, "Who is that beautiful flower?"

Apparently, she wasn't the only one with questions.

The woman's voice was high-pitched, almost sing-songy.

"That's my cousin, Faith," Billie replied.

Faith looked down. Her knees were more freckled than when she last looked at them. What good were freckles on your knees?

Some weird magnetism drew her gaze upward to meet the woman's. Faith's shoulders leapt a little. The

woman smiled at her kindly, and Faith automatically smiled back, then the woman turned to Billie and kept chit-chatting.

Beautiful flower?

That night at the crick, staring down at the black water with Billie, she'd felt something she couldn't put in words: the tickle of possibility. Even if the "fairy beam" was simply moonlight spilling like milk down the creek's middle.

Always remember who you are, and where you come from. That was what Gram always told her and Billie. But it seemed Billie wasn't remembering now.

"Come on out, sweetie," came the high, coaxing voice.

Faith continued sitting there for a good long moment, or longer, and finally got out of the car. It was something to do, plus she didn't want to seem rude. She walked slowly toward the clothesline. The cloths, whitish but not too white, were diapers, and the girls smiled as they picked up more from baskets on the ground and hung them with wooden clothespins.

The tall woman came toward her, hands outstretched, jingling a little; a strand of tiny silver bells circled her ankle. Her face was field tanned, and an egg-shaped bump protruded from her overalls. Diapers, babies. Faith thought of a *Life* magazine article she'd seen about a hippie commune, and one photo especially: a teenage girl with a naked baby on her hip, caught in a beam of sunlight streaming from behind her. This lady's smile beamed, too, almost in an otherworldly way.

Billie began taking wet diapers from the basket and hanging them up, while more girls, wearing those long

skirts and halter tops all in different colors, came from the house to help. They, too, smiled and laughed, and Billie laughed with them. Ha. Ha. *This isn't funny!* Faith wanted to say. *Let's get a move on here, or we'll miss Chet Atkins's opening number!* She had no idea how to peel Billie away, and stomped off around the house, a wrenching feeling in her midsection as if some internal wire had snapped.

Behind the house was an acre or more of grass upon which a ragged band of goats grazed. A line of pine trees marked the far edge of the grass where it sloped down to the river. A lumpy blue hammock pitched and swayed between two trees, three arms sticking up out of it: one thick and hairy, the other thin and smooth, and a third—they were all different people! Three of them, she figured.

Son of a buck. She'd dreamt moments like this where she was stuck, unable to move or breathe. The glommed-together bodies must have detected her presence, too, if the giggles and shushing noises were any indication. Things settled down and stilled for a moment or two, before two stark-naked butt cheeks popped above the hammock's rim.

Faith bolted, ran back around the house, and grabbed Billie's arm in mid-air.

"Come on! Let's go! We're late!" Billie, half laughing, said, "Faith, calm down! Meet Sunny."

Faith shook her head, rolled her eyes toward the back of the house, and made them laugh some more. Because really, nothing was wrong, it was merely her being rude, her standing like a flushed rabbit while

Sunny opened her arms for a hug.

"It's wonderful to meet you, Faith!" Sunny said with high-pitched goodwill.

She wasn't being fake, just friendly, and Faith was the odd person out, the one who would not be hugged, like when barbed wire caught your clothes and stuck you in place: *They're! Doing! It! In! A! Hammock!*

The screen door gave a long, drawn-out *screeeeek*. A boy stepped outside, squinting against the late sun. He was the new kid in their grade who'd moved to town in April: short and slim, with tattered jeans and a mop of dark hair that fell almost to his shoulders, at least two inches past school guidelines.

"Cousin Faith," he said. "I'm Tree."

Faith laughed.

He smiled back as if pleased with himself, not getting his own joke.

Billie always had a summer boyfriend. Or two. But if this one thought Faith would hug him, or call him cousin, he was dead wrong. She never had a chance to find out, as he walked right up to Billie and kissed her full on the mouth. After what seemed like forever, Billie laid her cheek against his, and winked at Faith. Then they moved as a unit, crablike, toward the car—was glomming together a hippie thing?—and piled into the front seat. "Have fun at the fair!" Sunny told them. "You, too, beautiful flower," she added, touching Faith lightly on the shoulder.

Faith climbed into the back seat as Billie and Tree got up front. His hand snaked behind Billie's head, releasing that same smoky flower smell that everyone (minus her) seemed to be wearing. She'd seen boys go gaga over Billie, but none touching her so freely,

stroking her hair, her shoulder, and some parts Faith couldn't exactly see. A tattoo graced his bicep: a leafy tree bearing a single apple that twitched as Billie murmured *Mmmm, mmmm*. It would be a miracle if Billie kept them out of the ditch.

In Darnelle, white signs with arrows lined the road, pointing the way to the fairground. Billie turned onto a side street to bypass the sluggish parade of cars and parked in an old man's front yard. "Better hoof it," the man advised. "Concert's starting."

"Let's run," Faith said, stepping out of the car. Billie and her boyfriend remained semi-entangled in the front seat.

"That's okay," Billie said. "But you can, if you want."

Faith bolted, relieved to be moving quickly and away. At the fairground gates, she slowed down long enough to flash her exhibitor's pass and wipe the sweat out of her eyes, then loped past the dirt parking area full of dusty cars and trucks, past the quiet show barn, and up the grassy slope to the deserted picnic area. By the time she breached the crest she was too winded to go on and stopped within sight of the Ferris wheel that twirled and sparkled in the graying light.

Through the midway loudspeakers came the applause, the hoots and hollers, and Chet Atkins's barely audible "thank you" as he strummed the first few chords of "Orange Blossom Special," one of his all-time classics. Faith breathed in, nostrils quivering, and started running again, propelled toward the sound of Chet's loco locomotive train, moving faster and faster thanks to his amazing fingers.

She felt like she was on the right track again, outrunning the day's weirdness, until she reached the racetrack gate, where she stood, breathless, looking out on the packed bleachers and the field below, which she and Billie had watched being mowed earlier and which was now a vast patchwork of blankets filled with people singing, clapping, cheering as Chet brought his choo-choo on home. Faith clomped down the steps with some other latecomers, trying not to trip as she caught glimpses of Chet on the stage that rose from the middle of the track, his red guitar gleaming as he finished the tune with a flourish and smiled out at the crowd. Faith smiled back as if he could see her.

Here, everything was right, wasn't it? She just had to plug herself into the rightness, while keeping an eye on Billie once she located her again.

She stepped down onto the field, weaving carefully among the blankets and quilts, trying not to crush someone's hand or supper.

"Schulte."

How could she happen, at that very moment, to be standing above Lance McNamara and Julie Meeks, also Faith's sometime lab partner, both with those damned *Make Love Not War* buttons affixed to their collars? Lance wore a second button, too: *Peacenik and Proud*.

"Hey, Faith," Julie patted the blanket, but Faith hovered uncertainly. All bets were off for the night. Usually, she and Billie did the fair together. Julie wanted her to sit, but wasn't she on a date with Lance? Confused, Faith allowed herself to sink to the ground, and wound up partially sitting on Lance's knee.

"Sorry!" she bleated, sliding gracelessly onto the blanket. She pulled herself together, folding her knees beneath her.

Chet started in on "Mr. Sandman" with its jazzy, fast licks. Lance tapped his hand on his knee, touching her knee lightly with his knuckles each time he did. Didn't he realize what he was doing? Julie, date-worthy in her yellow cotton blouse and pleated skirt, rocked forward and back to the music.

Lance cleared his throat. She looked at him sidewise, and he looked back the same way, licking the sweat off his upper lip.

"Alan's being discharged," Julie said. "We found out this afternoon." She smiled at Faith, who felt something like a major jolt, swift, on the left side of her ribcage. Alan, Lance's older brother, had been enlisted in the U.S. Army the year before, and gone to Vietnam to fight in the war. Hadn't they been waiting for this news?

"That's fantastic! When?"

"Middle or end of August," Julie answered.

"Wow," Faith said.

Lance looked away, unsmiling. *How can you be sad?* Faith wanted to ask him. *Your brother's coming home!*

Around them, people sang and clapped, under Chet's spell, while their little pocket of silence persisted.

"Yeah," Lance muttered. "The war machine is finally spitting him out." He stood up. Faith watched him adjust his antiwar buttons.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean," Lance said slowly, as if he thought she wouldn't understand otherwise, "is that he never should have been there in the first place.

Nixon's cannon fodder."

"But," Faith began, "President Nixon is trying to end the war."

Lance stood, and Faith got to her feet, too. They were eye-to-eye now, though he had a slight height advantage. People turned toward them, their Chet-trance broken. Julie, still seated, looked up at them nervously.

"Really? Are you talking about his show of negotiating with the North Vietnamese?"

Faith blinked. Lance waited. She saw the smirk growing on his face, as if he could hear her mind scrambling. She didn't know anything about this "show."

"He talked about ending the war to get elected," Lance said. "He's going to bomb the shit out of them. Wait and see."

"Hey, kid," said a man sitting nearby, "take your politics somewhere else." Julie suddenly got up. "Come on," she said. "Let's go get something to eat."

"No thanks," Faith said. "I'm staying."

She did, watching Julie and Lance move across the field, up the bleachers, and through the gate. Who in their right mind would leave a Chet Atkins concert? But as Chet strummed and picked and the crowd cheered, Faith found she was only half listening. All she'd wanted to do was have a normal night at the fair with Billie, not to run into Lance and Julie, or think about Lance's anger, which seemed so out of place.

You are nothing like your brother, she thought. The picture came into her mind: Alan standing, straight and proud, on the float in last year's Fourth of July parade. Varsity football player, a straight-A student, class valedictorian. Right next to two of his classmates,

Kip Neery and Jimmy Reichenstall, who'd also been drafted. She and Gram saluted them, and everyone whooped and clapped like crazy after Alan gave a short speech about how proud he was to go and fight for his country.

How could Lance not be thrilled about seeing Alan again?

She couldn't sit still, and finally got up to leave, picking her way through the blankets and up to the midway again. She didn't like feeling sorry for herself, but there was nothing worse than being alone at the fair, she decided.

She caught sight of Lance and Julie in the snack tent, chatting with Mrs. Reasoner, whom they'd all had as their fourth-grade teacher. Faith hovered by the opening. She'd failed the hippie test, the antiwar test, and now she was going to fail . . . the bratwurst test?

"Hi, Faith," Mrs. Reasoner called out. "Having fun?"

"Tons," she said.

"Want a brat?"

"Sure."

"Alan says he misses good Iowa brats the most," Julie said, smiling, while Mrs. Reasoner brought out three brats on buns.

"Bet he does," Faith said as Lance headed for the condiment stand. She and Julie joined him there, to pile mustard, onions, relish, and sauerkraut on top of their brats before taking them outside.

Two bright strands of colored lights came on along the midway, coloring the gathering dark. They ate as they ambled past the rides, the Country Music Memorabilia Tent, the House of Fun, the shoot-

ing galleries. Faith felt a little sting at seeing Billie and her boyfriend—his hand in her back pocket—watching the bikinied Tattooed Lady, who stood on a small platform posing first to one side, then the other. That lady always freaked Faith out. Billie used to pull Faith up close to the platform, so Snake Lady would give them a voodoo-like stare and flex her inky muscles, and they'd run off, screaming and laughing at the same time.

She continued along with her friends (were they?) toward the midway's end, where the beer tent and dance tent stood side by side. Lights flashed through the dance tent opening: blue, red, green . . . blue, red, green, drawing in kids like moths to a bulb. Guitars and drums bashed the air.

"Gum?" Lance said, once they'd thrown out their paper brat holders. He held a pack of Juicy Fruit toward them. Faith waited for Julie to take a stick before fishing one out. Chewing was a sweet, if brief, relief.

A knot of kids clogged the dance tent entrance. Dave Kintzel, who'd graduated Leola High the year before, was onstage with his band, The Hollers, belting out "Proud Mary." Faith started to sweat as they filed into the humid tent, pushing their bodies in front of the blinking spotlights.

"Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the ri-ver!"

Julie pulled Lance onto the floor and they began to do the swim, Julie gracefully, Lance jerkily. *Just the person I wanted to see.* Lance must say that to every girl. What was she thinking?

She turned to watch Dave up on the bandstand, singing and shaking his shaggy head. He was the first of two neighbor boys she'd ever kissed. She'd

been twelve and he thirteen when he took her to his room to see his turtle. While the palm-sized critter lay cool in her hand, he yanked up her chin and pushed his lips into hers. They were damp, like a fish tank, or something else she didn't want to consider. It all lasted about two seconds.

The next kiss had come when she was fourteen, goofing around with lanky Tim Nettle by the section of the crick that ran through his farm, trying to see how close to the edge they could walk without toppling in. Tim went down first, and as Faith cracked up laughing, he grabbed her ankle and pulled her down, too, leaning her up against the bank for a good smackeroo, which was wet, and long, and had a general suctioning effect. That was the best she could say about her experience with boys: it stopped at the mouth.

Now—blame it on Lance's little Elvis hip move as he and Julie started to do the swim—Faith was ruminating over the song in Billie's car, the bizarre hammock swingers, the pulse that had never quit her body. She felt like some weird Peeping Tom-ette as she watched her friends holding their noses with one hand while waving the other hand overhead, then sinking down in a temporary crouch. Nerds having fun. Except for her. The last guitar chord struck and everyone started jumping up and down, making the ground quake. Faith waited for about a minute as Lance and Julie came out of their dance trance, then turned and started elbowing her way toward the entrance.

"Faith!" Julie called out.

She kept moving, pushing past

all those girl and boy bodies. When she reached the tent flaps, someone tapped her shoulder.

Lance stood there, a little breathless.

She turned and pushed her way outside, into the cooler air. Lance followed. The sky was filled with heavy, purple clouds, with just enough light left so that everything looked soft, concealed.

"Julie's going home with her sister," he said.

"Why aren't you taking her home?"

A familiar crease sprouted between his eyebrows. "Why should I?"

"Because she's your date!"

She stalked off toward the tall bushes along the fairground fence and stopped at an open gate. Her head felt big. Puffy. Cotton candy where her brains used to be.

She slipped through the gate into the dark, quiet town. Lance followed.

"We weren't on a date!" he shouted.

She stepped onto the sidewalk, keeping ahead of him until they got to the stone bridge over a thin strand of water. She and Billie used to stand right here, tossing pennies, wishing, laughing each time the stream burped.

"We bumped into each other on the way in."

"Oh," she said, aware of trembling, "you did? Just like you sort of 'bumped into' the show barn with your buttons, causing a distraction on the most important morning of the year? And made a scene at the concert?"

She might as well have been sliding down the creek bank; she couldn't get a foothold on anything. Even so, Lance sidled up to her, saying, "I wasn't making a scene. I was speaking my mind."

Below, the black stream gulped and burped, slipping beneath particles of

light flicked upon it by the streetlight on the other side of the bridge. Faith held very still. Lance's hands lay flat against the stones a few inches from hers. His skin was pale, hers tanned from outdoor work. Another reminder that she was country and he was town, that there would always be that basic difference.

"Alan's coming home," she said.

"That's the main thing."

He didn't agree or disagree. He was quiet awhile before saying, "Julie and Alan have been writing each other ever since he went to 'Nam. I thought you knew that." His arm brushed against hers, making the little hairs stand on end.

How many times had they bumped arms without her noticing in biology or chemistry? His skin radiated heat, and the mixed scents of sweat and aftershave.

"I guess I didn't," she admitted.

What else didn't she know? He moved in, covering the back of her hand with his mildly sweaty, warm palm. She tilted her head toward him.

"Schulte, you're the one I wanted to see."

"You said that before, in the swine barn."

"When I was causing a distraction?"

He laughed, but not like before, not challenging her but calling her in. He turned her to face him and cupped his hands around her shoulders, then dropped them to her waist, pressing against the small of her back as he pulled her in to him. She rested her fingers on the ledge of his belt and felt the pebbly warmth of his skin beneath her knuckles, breathing in to counter a sudden lightheadedness.

"I won't join your club," she heard herself say.

"Which one?" His fingers crept beneath her shirt. "There's all sorts of clubs."

"You're full of it, McNamara."

He pulled her in so close that she could feel his hipbones against her waist. She shut her eyes, imagining his lips pressing up against hers. And then they were . . . on and on . . . the cool, elastic skin, the taste of Juicy Fruit and sauerkraut.

Oh, God. What are you doing?

Of course, she knew. She was doing what she'd wanted to do since kindergarten, except she hadn't fully realized it till that moment.

She was kissing Lance McNamara.

Chapter 5 Making Hay

After the kiss, they wandered, holding hands, past the antique tractor exhibit, green-and-yellow John Deeres and red Fords reflecting the fair lights. Is this me? she thought, over and over. A man sculpted a cow out of softening hills of butter; two enormous tigers lolled in a steel cage. The fair seemed suddenly different, as if the Ferris wheel were no longer a ride but a great beaded bracelet, sparkling like the moon.

"Let's go someplace else. Someplace private."

The hairs on her neck stood up, hearing him say that, because she'd been thinking the exact same thing. Even in the dark they were visible—to Ginny Hincks and a group of 4-H girls, to Dave Kintzel (just off the bandstand, wet turtle shell hair plastered to his head), to Billie and Tree.

Billie's eyes shone at her. She and her boy were sharing a cherry-top cone, licking at it from both sides.

"Hey," she said.

"Hey," Faith replied.

She and Lance kept walking. It was going to be everywhere, anyway, thanks to busybody Ginny. And Billie would certainly never let Faith live down the moment.

"There's no place private at the fair," she told Lance.

"I know. Let's split." His hand tightened around hers, and he pulled her in the opposite direction, toward the parking lot.

They reached Lance's car. As she scooted in next to him, she had a moment of doubt. She'd told her parents she was coming home with Billie. She had no idea how long they'd be staying here, and she didn't want to encounter them at home, either. Yet—like Billie, for once—she was letting herself go into the unknown.

Lance folded in behind the steering wheel, his legs butting against the underside of the dash. His legs were slim, not skinny. Her eyes wandered down his long thigh muscle to the fringes on his cutoff shorts. She wanted to put her hand there. Instead, she laughed.

"What?" he asked, eyebrows raised, smiling, and started the ignition.

"We're unlikely, is all. Roll down your window." She cranked on hers, and Lance did, too.

He drove them past the edge of town, out into the country, where it was truly, fully dark, no lights, no eyes, except theirs.

Lance stuck his nose out his win-

dow, breathing in so deeply that he snorted, and Faith laughed again. He always managed to make her laugh, to take her mind off her mind, and her nerves. *Takes one to know one. Nerds.*

He turned the radio on the same Chicago station that Billie had played earlier. A flute and a guitar wound around each other, not quite harmoniously, while Lance dipped his hand out the window, birdlike. Then he brought the bird hand back onto the steering wheel and cupped the other one around her knee.

"Are these fields all yours?" he said. "What?"

"I thought this was all yours." He squeezed her knee.

"Very funny."

"Where was that private place?"

She held out a good five seconds before answering, "Millie Biedecker's lane."

"Whose what?"

"Millie Biedecker. Our chemistry teacher's mother. She's one of my gram's best friends. Was, I mean." She bit her lip. "The lane is just her driveway."

"She died?" Lance asked.

"No. My Gram did. This past May." Lance was silent for a moment. "How come you didn't tell me that?" Faith couldn't answer. She had been too sad to talk very much, then school ended, and she hadn't seen Lance at all until today. His surprise touched her, and she placed her hand on top of his.

"Tell me where to turn," he said.

One longish silence later, she said, "Here. Just watch the ditch."

"Where should I stop?"

They bumped along another few

moments. "Here."

Not like she was some expert on Millie Biedecker's lane or anything. It was familiar, though. Gram had occasionally brought her up here to visit her dear friend, who'd been widowed twenty years back. Faith had been fascinated by the old, rusted farm implements lined up in front of Millie's house, hoes and plows and drills. She'd tried to ask Millie once how she managed farming on her own, but she only seemed to want to tell Faith funny stories from when she and Gram were kids.

Rows of waist-high corn stretched out to either side of them, thick and glossy even in the darkness. Who said a woman couldn't farm?

Lance looked out, too, taking it in. "Was it knee high by the Fourth of July?" he said, tickling her knee so that she shivered.

"Yes, it was," she said, laughing. "It's about up to your waist now. How'd you even know that rhyme?" she said, teasing him back. "Town boy."

He slid his arm along the seat, letting her lean against him. As her shoulders spread and relaxed, she accidentally popped the top, pearl-like button of her cowgirl shirt. Faith blushed. She could see the V of her bra beneath her shirt, and figured Lance must have seen it, too.

"You smell good," he breathed. "So," he said, "why are we unlikely?"

"The war, for one. We're never going to agree on that."

"And?"

If she buttoned her shirt, it would look too obvious; and what if it opened again? She took the risk and buttoned herself up, keeping her arms pressed to her sides to mini-

mize the pull on the fabric. I'm not like Billie.

"I'm going to change your mind," he said.

"Cocky," she said, instantly regretting her choice of words. But it made them laugh, again. A semi-all-right laugh.

"Faith?"

Tentatively looking up, she saw that he was also sweating, and that traces of fair dust clung to the hairs on his cheeks. His eyebrows were puckered as he leaned forward and pulled her in to him. Over his shoulder, she squinted at the sharp cornstalk silhouettes, waiting for the right words to surface into consciousness. If she were Billie, she'd have let every button open and sat there, free as those hammock swingers, waiting for the chips to fall. She wasn't Billie, though. But she wasn't like Mom either, worrying over her reputation. She was somewhere in the middle, which sort of left her nowhere.

Lance's hand ran down her back, touching the hook closures, the fabric of her shirt bunching up around his finger, making her shiver.

"Wait," she said. "Let's take our time."

Yes. *That* was how she felt. Once she said it, she had the terrible sense that they were done. She waited for Lance to start the engine and take her home in silence. Instead, seemingly after a moment's thought himself, he pulled his hands back to her shoulders and kissed her softly. He turned the ignition key, then, slowly backed the car down the lane.

After a quarter mile, she reminded him where to turn for their road. "You can let me out here. At the mailbox." Seconds ticked by, and he answered:

"I think not. I will take the lady to her door."

She heard something new in his voice, then, a kind of huskiness that made her glad for the dark (her cheeks felt hot) and that her parents weren't home yet so they could sit parked on the dirt drive for a while with the windows rolled down. The air was sweet as ever.

Lance seemed to be looking out everywhere: at the solid, sleepy house, the corn in the back forty, the soybeans in the side forty.

"You can't see it now," she said, "but this is the most beautiful time of year."

He leaned into the steering wheel, closer to the windshield. "I can see some things," he said. "Mostly outlines."

"Everything's green. Actually, could be greener—we need rain."

He sat back again, and turned to face her, his knee butting into hers. He picked up her hand from the seat. A faint shiver rode down her spine.

They'd always been McNamara and Schulte to each other, playing over puzzles, puzzling out science problems. She'd never let herself get this close, to him or another boy. This time, she moved in to kiss him, a long kiss, the Juicy Fruit and sauerkraut all but faded.

She felt an aching loneliness even before she turned the metal door handle and stepped outside.

"See you, Schulte." He peered at her, eyes gleaming.

"Later," she repeated when he was out of earshot, rolling down the lane, and she watched him all the way to the stop sign and down the highway until his cherry taillights were sucked up by the dark.

She started toward the house. Stopped. Turned and walked to the high point of the yard. In other, childhood times, she and Billie had tipped their heads backward to see what they could see, and she did that now. Slowly, the bright lights revealed themselves, pinpricks in the velvety sky. With Billie, she laughed, but it was different now, more like tracing some pattern on the ceiling of her mind. Her and Lance. Lance and her.

In the quiet of her room, Faith opened the old trunk that she'd stopped Mom from taking to the second-hand store. She brought out, and opened, the envelope holding Greta's letters; there were six, all in chronological order, as well as a half page that looked more like a note, with a torn edge on one side.

She started with the first letter.

March 1, 1863

Dear Mama,

I thought to write you to let you know that Maria and I are well and settling into our new home.

Today, snow falls over the wide-open prairie, wide as the ocean, so that it is hard to tell what is earth and sky.

Faith looked up for the briefest moment, with a pleasurable shiver. That was it: just how she'd imagined the land in Greta's time.

The train journey to Chicago was quite comfortable thanks to Aunt Mary's gift of Pullman seats. We read our books and newspapers and conversed with a pair of teachers going to work in an Illinois country school no bigger than a

toolshed, with pupils ages seven to seventeen to teach. We were careful to eat the food from home, not depending on the offerings of the "butcher boys" who roam from car to car and are known to rob unsuspecting passengers (so our new friends told us).

Chicago is a huge metropolis alive with industry and the stench of livestock markets. There was such confusion in the station, people going in every direction, so that we could barely make our way to the street and the stagecoach company. Maria almost lost her shoe in the muck. A kindly porter helped us put up our trunk, then began the long route by stage and wagon, to our claim.

Again, Faith looked up, as if poking her head out of the water while swimming. Greta wrote this. It was as if, after everything that happened since she and Lance stood on that bridge, she was being given one more gift. In all the games that she and Billie played, they never imagined Greta writing letters to her mother.

She was about to dive back down—she hadn't read to the bottom of the page—but she decided to heed Dad's words to take her time, and put the letter back in the envelope, the envelope into the trunk.

Ellen Dreyer (RC 1983) has published or edited over 60 books for young readers. She received the Bank Award for The Glow Stone (Peachtree, 2006), and two Hopwood Awards for short fiction while at U-M. She currently teaches creative writing and literature in the Rutgers University early college program (REaCH).



BeTwixT

Kathryn Orwig

*An Original Supernatural Horror TV
Pilot Inspired by a True Experience*

**FADE IN:
SUPERIMPOSE: AUGUST**

**EXT. PERE MARQUETTE FOREST -
NIGHT**

A black inky pool of DARKNESS makes up the heart of the forest. PINE and EVERGREEN. Quiet. Dense. Old. Hazy with FOG.

Branches *creakkk*.

SHAPES move in the dark. A BOTTLE smashes into a tree TRUNK. Glass shattering. LAUGHTER follows.

Six TEENAGERS materialize, phone flashlights barely denting the blackness of the forest.

VINCENT RODRIGUEZ (17) Venezuelan descent, roguish and loyal, stumbles

forward, grinning wickedly.

VINCENT
Perfect aim, and I'm not even sober.

JESSICA (JESS) MOORE (17) in her cheerleader top with matching red shoes, is their group's glue and also drunk.

JESS
Shh, Vincent! Do you want the tree pigs to know we're here?

VINCENT
They aren't out this far this late.

HECTOR SANTOS (16) first-generation Mexican American, glasses, soft-spoken, swivels his head at every shadow and sound in the dark.

HECTOR
We shouldn't be either. I have a bad feeling.

VINCENT
It's called being Catholic.

DANIEL KANE (17) wavy brown-haired, bright hazel eyes, boyishly cute and knows it, pulls up his camera --

DANIEL
Are we getting closer? My battery is going to die and I want to put it on YouTube before my Dad realizes I'm not home.

JESS
We should have charged it at my place earlier.

She reaches for his hand, intertwining fingers.

JESS (CONT'D)
How much further, Ryan?

RYAN CASE (17) dark hair, dark eyes, with the pale skin of a kid who needs to go outdoors more, looks away from Jess and Daniel. Pushing ahead.

RYAN
They say it's where the crooked tree and split river meet.

GLADYS REN (17) half-Native American, artsy, dark-humored, logical realist to her core and the only one passing up the shared bottle, crosses her arms.

GLADYS
That sounds like a load of --

They step out of the trees into a small clearing. Where a crooked TREE sits between a RIVER splitting it in two.

RYAN
You were saying?

EXT. THE SPOT - MOMENTS LATER

GLADYS
I still don't believe it'll work.

JESS
(to Gladys)
Whose Mom and Aunts are the town fortune tellers again?

GLADYS
They call themselves Seers, but it's not magic. It's wishing coupled with expected outcomes which translate into circumstances being interpreted as foresighted prophecies.

VINCENT
(to Daniel)
I must be really drunk. Translate her, please.

DANIEL
Gladys doesn't believe in fate, prophecy or...

A stick SNAPS in the woods. They all turn towards it.

GLADYS
(quieter)
Monsters.

RYAN
In French they called it "le mangeur" --

GLADYS
(disbelief)
The Eater?

RYAN
It's hard to translate exactly since it came from the Native word "mijjin," but roughly it's "one who eats."

DANIEL
(to his camera)
Here we are out in the forest looking for some crazy-ass goblin creature rumored to live here --
(motions to Ryan)
Keep going.

RYAN
*Some say it was a beast that tore
through the village where Fern stands.
Others that it was a hard winter and the
Ottawa were forced to eat each other.
Cursed, they now wander as man-eat-
ing spirits. Where we stand is a sacred
gravesite no one builds on.*

HECTOR
*I really have a bad feeling about this
now...*

GLADYS
*It's a state forest, they literally can't
build --*

DANIEL
Sh!

VINCENT
(slurring)
*Let's cast or relay or whatever this "one
who eats" then.*

GLADYS
The correct term is summon.

VINCENT
Whatever. What do we have to do?

JESS
This was Daniel's idea.

DANIEL
Gladys? Ryan?

GLADYS
(hands in the air)
I don't practice the occult.

RYAN
Legend doesn't say.

VINCENT
(top of his lungs)
*Come out, come out wherever you are!
Got a couple of tasty teens here!*

HECTOR
(hissing)
Vincent! Shut up!
Vincent stumbles into the river, brac-
es a hand against a ROCK --
He slips--
Cutting his palm. BLOOD wells. Drip-
ping into the WATER.
A cold WIND blows through the
trees... but they don't creak.

GLADYS
*Told you. Can we go to the beach
now? That bonfire warmth beckons.*

Daniel shuts the camera. They head
towards a flickering light ahead.
MOONLIGHT on the pitch-black
water of Lake Michigan.

But deep in the split of the river, be-
neath the crooked tree, a dark SHAPE
rises... breaking the surface --

EXT. OTTER CREEK BEACH - NIGHT

A few too many CANS are scattered
around the group as a FIRE burns low
at their feet.

VINCENT
*What a lame monster. Lame story.
Lame Ryan.*

Vincent's insults are fueled by drink.

DANIEL
*We'll just have to come up with
another idea to make us famous. In
between class. And practice.*

Gladys reaches for the marshmallow
BAG, Daniel beats her to it. Brushing
hands. Gladys pulls back. But Jess
notes it.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
(waving empty bag)
Looks like we're out.

JESS
(rising)
I have more in the car.

A crackle of the fire.

HECTOR
I'll be right back too. Restroom.

Daniel pokes the dying flames with a
piece of driftwood.

DANIEL
Also need more wood soon.

GLADYS
On it.
Daniel stands. Little off balance.

DANIEL
*I'll give you a hand. Don't want any
cannibal ghosts getting you in there.*

RYAN
*It's supposedly not actually tied to just
the forest.... Not that you're listening...*

As they're already entering the
WOODS.

EXT. OTTER CREEK BEACH - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Jess walks up to a single CAR parked
under a dim street light. She puts the
KEYS in...

SHADOWS seem to thicken. Her
breath makes a small cloud of fog.

A CLICK CLICK SCR-R-RAP-P-P---P..

Jess turns in the night. Peering into
the darkness.

JESS
Hello?

EXT. PERE MARQUETTE FOREST - NIGHT

Gladys steps through the overgrowth
with surprisingly sure and silent foot-
falls... Daniel, not so much.

GLADYS
*I don't think the wolves can hear you,
football jock, stomp louder.*

Gathering sticks in their arms, one
tumbles from Gladys' hands. Daniel
catches it and puts it back on top.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Thanks.

A shared look. Too long. Too close.

DANIEL
Gladys --

GLADYS
Daniel, don't. Jess is --

DANIEL
She doesn't have to be.

EXT. OTTER CREEK BEACH - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Jess turns back to her car. Image
reflected in the glass --

POPS the door open. Grabs the
MARSHMALLOWS and turns around.
Her car BEEP BEEPS as her footsteps
become muffled by sand...

EXT. OTTER CREEK BEACH - NIGHT

Jess looks around the fire. Vincent.
Ryan...

JESS
Where's Gladys, Hector, and Daniel?

VINCENT
Hector went to piss.

RYAN
The other two went to get firewood.
 She gazes at the dark trees.
EXT. PERE MARQUETTE FOREST - NIGHT
 Daniel sets the camera down and steps closer.

DANIEL
Tell me there's nothing between us. Not a single spark of anything and I'll go.
 GLADYS
That's not the --
 Tipsy, Daniel kisses her.
 Jess, standing in the shadows, stunned, catches Daniel and Gladys making out. Heated. Gladys kissing back.
 Jess steps --

CRACK
 Gladys and Daniel pull apart -- Spotting Jess.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Jess!
 But Jess has already turned on her heels --

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Shit!
 Gladys takes off after her.

DANIEL
Gladys!
 Daniel runs after them! The camera, left behind, continues recording...

EXT. OTTER BEACH CREEK - NIGHT
 Jess barrels out of the woods. Gladys and Daniel stumble out hot on her heels.

GLADYS
Jess, wait! It's not --
 JESS
So you guys weren't kissing?
 Gladys pulls up short. Jess shakes her head, snatching her purse.
 While Ryan looks hopeful. Glancing back and forth between Jess' ridged stance, remorseful Gladys, and damage-control Daniel.

GLADYS
Daniel kissed me!
 JESS
Is that true?

DANIEL
She kissed me back! I'm --
 JESS
Sorry I found out or sorry for cheating on me?

DANIEL
Both?
 Jess and Gladys both give him the look.

VINCENT
Fight! Fight! Fight! Take the big boi --
 JESS
 (to Gladys)
I trusted you.

GLADYS
I didn't do anything! He did --
 JESS
And all the times I caught you looking at him? Flirting with my boyfriend? After everything I did to protect you from being bullied about your crazy family and this --

GLADYS
If you would just listen --

DANIEL
It wasn't all her fault --
 JESS
No shit, you moron.
 Jess walks away.
 DANIEL
Jess. Jessica. Wait.
 JESS
Go to hell!
 Jess takes for the trees! Swallowed by shadows.
 RYAN
Shouldn't we go after her?
 DANIEL
Why? She doesn't want us around.
 RYAN
She has the keys...
 DANIEL
Shit.

EXT. PERE MARQUETTE FOREST - NIGHT
 Trying not to cry, Jess breaks through LEAVES and TWIGS as she goes.
 CLOUDS cover the MOON. The forest darkens. The trees go still. And then bow forward in a cold WIND...
 Jess stops, sucking down air as her TEARS freeze on her cheeks. Hands rubbing arms.
 CRACK!
 JESS
Fuck off, Daniel!
 Another CRACK! Jess turns --
 Ryan steps out of the brush.

RYAN
It's just your friendly non-athletic hiker friend who you should really slow down for.
 Jess leans on a fallen tree.
 RYAN (CONT'D)
 (softer)
Hey, you alright?
 JESS
Would you be?
 RYAN
No. Subconsciously, though, I bet you don't even like Daniel. Remember third grade? Called him an ant-hole.
 JESS
 (laughs)
Because I thought it was how you said ass-hole.
 (shaky breath in)
I hate tears. Must look like a mess.
 RYAN
Never. You're always beautiful.
 She catches his gaze.
 JESS
I'll see you back at the fire, okay?
 Ryan nods, gets up, glances back once. And then he's gone from her view.
 S-C-R-R-RA-PP...
 Jess whirls.
 JESS (CONT'D)
Ryan?
 Nothing.
 JESS (CONT'D)
I swear Daniel-I --
 Now Jess notes her white breathes and shaking hands in her crop top

and cut off jeans. Weird... She scans the forest.

JESS (CONT'D)

Not funny anymore, guys.

Something moves, expanding, alive. CRACK. CRACK. CRACK! SC-R- R-A-P! Louder! Faster! Coming for her!

Jess whirls and runs! Arms pumping. Feet slapping the ground. The SHADOW CREATURE chases! Closing in -- Jess sprints --

Twenty feet!

Ten feet!

Five feet!

It pounces!

Jess tumbles to the side, rolls -- it misses her by a hair --

Around a bend, Jess stumbling, leans over, hands on her knees. The forest silent. She breathes out, relieved. But the camera's still there.... She hasn't left the clearing --

Her breath clouds WHITE. Jess registers this as her feet are yanked from under her!

THUD! She hits the ground, claws at the GRASS, ROOTS, fingers bone white on WOOD, pushing back --

JESS (CONT'D)

Nooooo! Ryan! Stop! Help-p-!

The bushes rustle. Then still. The camera blinks out. Dead.

EXT. OTTER BEACH CREEK - NIGHT

Ryan steps out of the woods.

GLADYS

Did you find her?

HECTOR

Find who?

(walking up)

What did I miss?

RYAN

Yeah. Jess is fine, just needs a minute...

EXT. PERE MARQUETTE FOREST - NIGHT

Dark. Hazy with fog. Creaking with cold. Jess is gone.

TITLE CARD: BETWIXT

Readers interested in the rest of the story should visit Kathryn's website (noted below).

Kathryn Orwig (RC 2017) is a screenwriter for It's Not a Phase, Mom LLC, an animation company. She received a Hopwood in 2017. More about Kathryn at her website: www.kathrynorwig.com.

Four Poems

Esha Biswas



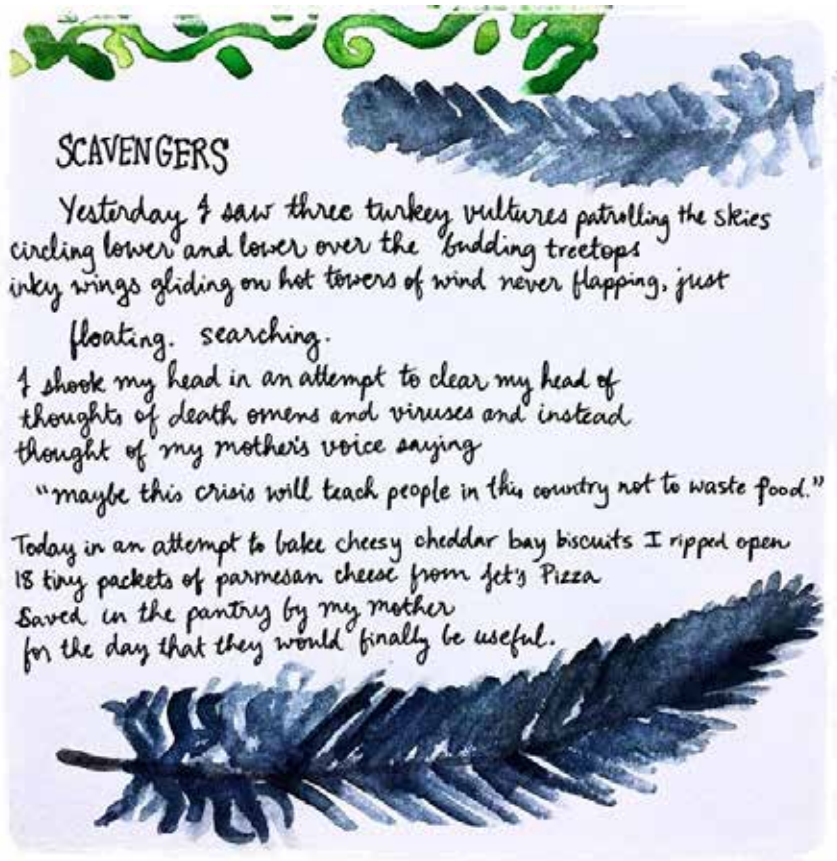
moong daal
crossing oceans as
"mung bean"
to be consumed.
until one day it's
planted in the sun
and allowed
to thrive.



SEMI-PRECIOUS

it seems that rare and precious things
are made from pressure.
diamonds. hailstones.
but couldn't it be
that hailstones only wish
to nourish like rain
and diamonds only wish
for an end to suffocation and pain
and both dream of being
as precious as the dirt
from which they once came?





Esha Biswas (RC 2016, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, minor in Music) is the RC's Student Affairs Coordinator, and an MS student at U-M's School for Environment and Sustainability. After her RC graduation she worked as a wildlife rehabilitator at the Bird Center of Washtenaw County, where she helped rehabilitate and release wild songbirds. She is passionate about the environment, photography, music, and making the world a better place, little bits at a time.



Skiping Side Effects

Robin Lily Goldberg

1) I'm not allergic to chocolate

Alissa scrawled the statement onto a flimsy notepad with only a page or two remaining. On the bottom edge, she saw a speck of mashed potatoes from her dinner of leftovers. In a rush to clean up, she had forgotten to wipe off the kitchen table. At the top of the pad she had written, "I am grateful because . . ." As she glowered at the yellowing paper, she had no idea how to fill the space between the heading and the potatoes.

Last week at her annual physical exam, the doctor nudged her to address the blood pressure numbers that had been sneaking upwards each year. He presented three treatments: medication, yoga, or gratitude. Among these options, Alissa chose gratitude. Although she was skeptical about this recommendation,

it was cheaper than medication and free from nausea, night sweats, and all those horrid side effects muttered hurriedly on drug commercials. It was also less painful and embarrassing than attempting yoga.

Rather than a script for the pharmacy, Dr. Pemby sent Alissa home with an article about how writing a gratitude list could have numerous health benefits. According to several studies, this simple activity could reduce stress, balance blood pressure, decrease depression, prevent inflammation, and improve sleep. Dr. Pemby encouraged Alissa to begin by identifying ten aspects of her life for which she felt grateful. If she liked the process, she could start a gratitude journal.

Alissa was not a journaler or a list-maker. Her ho-hum days were

not journal-worthy, and when she grocery shopped, she followed her stomach spontaneously. The last list she recalled making was about toys in a first-grade gift letter to Santa Claus. The prescribed gratitude list didn't sound quite as easy or enjoyable, so she was eager to get it out of the way before the weekend.

With the day's office drama replaying through her mind, Alissa stared at her first entry, urging it to inspire a second. A colleague had ordered takeout for lunch and received a free brownie as a promotion. She was allergic to chocolate though, so she offered it to Alissa who accepted gladly. Now this tempting treat was sitting on the kitchen countertop, enticing her to hurry through the list and celebrate its completion with dessert.

2) I don't sunburn easily

Alissa worked as an administrative assistant for a local landscaping company, and today her colleagues were complaining about still getting sunburned late in the season. Ever since being hired fifteen years ago, she had been glad to have hardy skin because she hated the moist sticky feeling of sunscreen.

3) I don't have student debt (and I don't have to save for anyone's college fund)

Alissa was also relieved to have a job that didn't require ridiculously expensive schooling. Her older brother was debt-free, but he often complained about saving for his son's college tuition. People used to pressure Alissa into marriage and motherhood, but they stopped when she turned forty. Now she was single and childless,

but at least she was debtless. She glanced at the brownie again and awarded herself brownie points for including two plusses within one entry on the list.

4) I don't have a criminal record

If she wasn't toiling over this assignment, Alissa would be watching TV. That's when number four came forth. She always watched the news, primarily for the weather report, so the sensationalizing headlines about city criminals bothered her. She felt proud that her record only contained a few harmless parking tickets, typically from when she encountered tow zone signs with times that were too tricky to interpret.

5) My hometown isn't prone to many natural disasters

While pondering the weather forecast on tonight's news, Alissa felt appreciative of the comforting climate on the outskirts of St. Louis. Occasionally they encountered a tornado, but they were safe from mudslides, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Missouri was nestled in the middle of the nation. Thankfully, it was unlikely to dissolve like coastal Florida.

6) My vacation days from work haven't expired

As she pictured Florida washing away, Alissa remembered that she had been meaning to use her vacation days before they disappeared. Originally, she considered visiting the Sea Life Aquarium in Kansas City. Although she never wanted to live near an ocean, growing up in a

landlocked state had made her eager to see the waves and ocean creatures. Now that she thought about it though, maybe she would venture up to Chicago for the Shedd Aquarium instead. After all, she had enough time, and the Shedd was among the top in the nation according to the Travel Channel.

7) My yard will benefit from a free fall cleanup

Along with vacation days, another plus about the end of the year approaching was the annual holiday gift she received from her employer. The landscaping company always thanked their administrative team with free fall cleanup services. This gift typically arrived a bit early for Christmas, but Alissa didn't relish raking or bagging leaves, so she liked this practical perk.

8) I have a normal name

The image of autumn leaves brought memories of back-to-school season. Since kindergarten, Alissa Wilson had appreciated her clear name. It was easy to spell and pronounce. It was common, but not so popular that there were multiple Alissas in her classes to cause confusion. Most importantly, it didn't rhyme with any embarrassing words to trigger teasing. Alissa wrote her full name decoratively on a corner of the pad, just as she did in her composition books years ago. Maybe this list-making process wasn't so bad. Perhaps she should have picked a pad with more pages.

9) I have beautiful fingernails

As Alissa studied her penmanship,

she noticed her nails. The women in her family never bothered to decorate their bodies with piercings or tattoos, but Alissa adored painting her fingernails. She never bothered with her toes though, because nobody ever saw them. As a child, she discovered nails from her babysitter. Rather than reading or playing games with Alissa, Kelly would spend every Friday night perfecting her fingernails. Although she never formally shared her process, Alissa observed silently and learned Kelly's techniques. As an adult, Alissa adopted a weekend kickoff ritual that involved painting her nails while listening to Billie Holiday recordings. Thanks to her sacred Fridays, she never entered nail salons.

10) I can keep plants alive

Alissa wrote the first double-digit on the list feeling proud of her progress yet stumped about a culminating source of gratitude. She scanned her surroundings for inspiration and noticed the aloe plant thriving on her windowsill. She couldn't recall where it came from, but the light green limbs continued lengthening year after year. Occasionally an elderly neighbor gave her a poinsettia or Christmas cactus for the holidays, and she had managed well with those potted plants too. Although Alissa worked for a landscaper, she had never attempted an outdoor garden. Dabbling with indoor plants provided comfort and confidence though.

With ten reasons to be grateful, Alissa sank into the kitchen chair with satisfaction. The clock read 8:45 pm, but she didn't feel the usual compul-

sion to watch the forecast on the nine o'clock news. After all, the local weather was predictable. Plus, she would rather savor her free brownie.

As she dipped into the decadent treat, she skimmed her gratitude list and smiled upon noticing some irony. One entry highlighted her burn-resistant skin, and another her ability to grow a plant famous for treating sunburn. She didn't understand how a spiny succulent could heal skin, but she was beginning to believe it had healing benefits. Maybe it could even lower her blood pressure.

Robin Lily Goldberg (RC 2010) immerses herself in nature and the arts. Since graduating, she has enjoyed connecting the RC community as the first Student Affairs Specialist, and editing for publications such as The Mindfulness Bell and the Crazy Wisdom Community Journal. In 2014, Charing Cross Press published her first book, a poetry collection called the Sound of Seeds. Today as a writer and holistic healthcare practitioner, Robin practices yoga, Reiki, reflexology, and vibrational sound therapy. She also explores authentic storytelling and creative expression as paths of healing and wholeness.



The Dead Line

Dennis Foon

1.	for change of address, say "three" for most recent test results.
CORY is on the PHONE, listening to a RECORDED VOICE	CORY
VOICE	Three.
Medical Services Test Results. Please state your full name.	VOICE
CORY	Billing.
Cornelius Gumm.	CORY
VOICE	No, I said three. Three!
I'm sorry, are you there?	VOICE
CORY	Three. Thank you. Test results. For what date, please?
Yes, I am.	CORY
VOICE	July 11.
I'm sorry, that name, "Yes I am," is not on file.	VOICE
CORY	Your test on July 11 for Red Tide Virus was Positive.
Cornelius Gumm!	CORY
VOICE	Jesus.
Thank you, Cornelius Gumm. Say "one" if this is about billing. Say "two"	VOICE
	You have three weeks, four days, and

sixteen minutes before necrosis. Say "one" to return to main menu, "two" for probate taxes, "three" to end this call.

CORY
Three.

VOICE
Probate taxes.

CORY HANGS UP.
DIAL TONE.

1A.

CORY
So how does it work?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Just like any phone line. With North Americans, you use the person's social insurance or social security number. Check our online listings for the international codes.

CORY
My Great-Great Grandfather died in Russia at the turn of the last century.

SALES ASSOCIATE
For that, you'll need a Gold Plan.

CORY
Tell me about it.

SALES ASSOCIATE
You provide our research associates with as much pertinent information as possible. They do a thorough investigation and when the loved one is located, they provide you with a tracking number.

CORY
What about language differences? I don't speak Russian.

SALES ASSOCIATE
That's the beauty of it. The Departed speak Universal.

CORY
What's that?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Don't know exactly, but everybody understands it.

2.

RINGING.

RECORDED ANNOUNCEMENT

VOICE
I'm sorry, Stacie is unavailable.

DIALING. RINGING.

VOICE
I'm sorry, Stacie is unavailable.

CORY
Damn.

DIALING. RINGING.

VOICE
I'm sorry, Stacie is unavailable.

SLAMS DOWN PHONE.

3.

CORY
I've given you all her contact information.

SALES ASSOCIATE
Yes, I see that in your Support File, Mr. Gumm.

CORY
How can her line be constantly busy? I've tried calling her a hundred times.

SALES ASSOCIATE
We've done the trace and all I can tell you is that her line is occupied.

CORY
Does she have call display?

SALES ASSOCIATE
She doesn't use a phone, Sir.

CORY
Well does she know it's me calling?

SALES ASSOCIATE
That varies from entity to entity. Some do, some don't. As far as your wife goes, there's nothing on file. All we can confirm is that she's in a conversation.

CORY
With who?

SALES ASSOCIATE
I'm sorry, Sir, but that's confidential information.

CORY
Oh, come on, I'm her husband, I have a right to know who the hell she's talking to!

SALES ASSOCIATE
Actually, you don't. According to the Beijing Convention, all matrimonial rights dissolve upon quietus.

CORY
This is ridiculous.

SALES ASSOCIATE
Just keep trying, Sir. You'll get through before you know it.

4.

CORY
Hey, Ricky.

RICKY
Cory? What's up?

CORY
Can't a guy call his brother?

RICKY
When was the last time you phoned to say hello?

CORY
Well, I'm doing it now.

RICKY
What's on your mind?

CORY
I can't get Stacie on the phone.

RICKY
...You're actually doing the Dead Line thing?

CORY
Yeah. Have you tried it?

RICKY
Unlike you, I didn't make a killing on real estate. You might recall my condo is submerged below Burrard Inlet.

CORY
I warned you the Olympic Village was a lousy investment.

RICKY
And you remind me every chance you get.

HISSING SOUND

CORY
What's that?

RICKY
The Zeppelin.

CORY
When did you get a berth on a blimp?

RICKY
It's not a blimp, it's a Zeppelin. Two months ago. I phoned to tell you. Did you get my message?

CORY
Oh yeah, I guess.

RICKY
You could return a call.

CORY
Sorry, a lot's been going on. How's the view?

RICKY
It's fine. At high tide, I can see orcas swimming over Stanley Park. But this airship is a wreck, the builders cheaped out on the quarters, they're all leaky, a guy fell through his floor last week. Every penny I've got is tied up in trying not to end up squash on the Broadway dyke. So what's up with you trying to call Stacie?

CORY
Her line is busy.

RICKY
Not what I meant. Ever consider she might not want to talk to you? You hardly ever called her when you were out of town, now that she's elsewhere, maybe she's returning the favor.

CORY
They said she was occupied.

RICKY
Doing what? I thought they were just brainwaves, floating around up there. Creepy when you think about it.

CORY
She's talking to somebody.

RICKY
Really? Do you know who?

CORY
No idea.

RICKY
You're jealous.

CORY
I just need to connect with her.

RICKY
You are completely jealous. My big rich brother is jealous of his dead wife's brain wave. You think she's having phone sex?

CORY
Shut up.

RICKY
Listen, they have a Premium Line, so who'd go to Stacie when they can get it off with Marilyn Monroe?

CORY
You're disgusting.

RICKY
Yeah. Have you tried it?

CORY
The whole idea of it makes me sick.

RICKY
I bet. So why are you so anxious to get hold of her?

CORY
It's been good talking to you.

RICKY
Right. I gotta go anyway, the wall's leaking.

5.
DIALING.
RECORDED ANNOUNCEMENT
VOICE: I'm sorry, Julia is unavailable.

DIALING.

SALES ASSOCIATE
Mr. Gumm, how can I help you?

CORY
I'm getting really frustrated with this service. My wife is not available; my mother is not available –

SALES ASSOCIATE
I have some news on that. Sorry for the generic message at your mother's site, she actually is not occupied. She's not there.

CORY
Where is she?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Unfortunately, we don't have the technical capability to find out. I'll put in a tracking request to the Research Team. In all likelihood, she's either moved on, moved in or is moving around.

CORY
What the hell does that mean?

SALES ASSOCIATE
It's possible she's renounced her identity, letting go of her energy field to become part of the whole. Most Buddhists go that route. Was your mother a Buddhist?

CORY
Definitely not.

SALES ASSOCIATE
Some just can't let go of the corporeal world, and may become attached to where they used to live.

CORY
Are you saying my mother's a poltergeist?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Or she could just be exploring. They can move pretty quickly. And then there's always the possibility...

CORY
What?

SALES ASSOCIATE
That she just doesn't want to talk to you.

6.
DIALING.

CORY
Dad?

DAD
Cory.

CORY
Oh my God. Dad...I can't believe this. It's really you, Dad?

DAD
You can't tell?

CORY
They suggest I do a test to confirm your identity.

DAD
Be my guest, Son.

CORY
Okay...What did you give me for my 15th birthday?

DAD
...I have no idea.

CORY
Think, Dad, think.

DAD
Your mother bought the presents, what are you asking me for?

CORY
It is you.

DAD
More or less.

CORY
So tell me, what's it like there?

DAD
It's like nothing.

CORY
Do you see Mom?

DAD
No.

CORY
I don't understand.

DAD
We don't fraternize here. It's not a community centre.

CORY
You don't see any other people?

DAD
There are no people here.

CORY
Then how do you spend your time?

DAD
Time, it's relative. It doesn't come up.

CORY
Is it terribly lonely?

DAD
Being alone never bothered me. Is this why you called, to find out if I was lonely?

CORY
No, I just wanted to find out what you were doing.

DAD
Is this an expensive call?

CORY
Very. That's why I was wondering --

DAD
And you're paying for it how?

CORY
Property values skyrocketed when the sea level rose. I put all my money on Little Mountain so I came out on top.

DAD
So, the man who has everything.

CORY
Not everything, Dad, what I need now --

DAD
You got a wife and kids?

CORY
No kids. Wife's dead.

DAD
So what are you talking to me for, call the wife.

CORY
I tried, the line was busy. It's you I need to talk to.

DAD
How about your mother?

CORY
Can't reach her, so --

DAD
So I'm third banana.

CORY
Dad, this call costs 300 bucks a minute, I have questions.

DAD
You have questions, call your Great Great Grandfather Josef. He's a talker.

CORY
My questions are for you.

DAD
What the hell is your problem?

CORY
Dad, when you had the heart attack, I flew home from Europe. But by the time I got there, you were in a coma. What was it like?

DAD
Not a pleasant experience.

CORY
Give me the play by play.

DAD
If you had been there, you wouldn't have to be wasting 300 bucks a minute to ask.

CORY
I was there, Dad. I squeezed your hand. You squeezed back. The nurses said you'd know it was me.

DAD
And you believed them? I was in a coma, you idiot.

CORY
So you didn't hear voices, you didn't feel anything?

DAD
I don't remember.

CORY
And when you died, did you see The Light?

DAD
The lights were off.

CORY
C'mon, Dad. I want to understand your experience, learn from it.

DAD
Does this mean you're going to start taking my advice?

CORY
Absolutely.

DAD
Well, I have one small suggestion. It will save you a ton of money.

CORY
Tell me.

DAD
You promise you'll do what I say?

CORY
Yes. I promise.

DAD
Never call me again.

CORY
But I'm reconnecting with you.

DAD
Bravo. You succeeded. Now we're disconnecting.

DIAL TONE.

CORY
Dad? Dad?

7.

CORY
Ricky, I spoke to Dad.

RICKY
Good for you.

CORY
You want to hear about it?

RICKY
Not particularly. I had more than enough of him when he was alive.

CORY
He was our Dad, for Christ's sake.

RICKY
You're telling me? You were never there. I was the one taking care of that selfish prick till the day he kicked off. Did you say hi for me?

CORY
No.

RICKY
Thanks a lot.

CORY
Sorry, I just wasn't thinking about it.

RICKY
Well, here's something to think about: why are you more interested in talking to the dead than the living?

CORY
I'm talking to you, aren't I? I'm just trying to understand a few things. There's something going on --

RICKY What did you ask him?	CORY Is it true the departed have to tell the truth?	CORY Why did I do it? I was in love with you.	CORY How could you possibly know that?
CORY I didn't get much of a chance to ask anything, he hung up on me.	STACIE At this point, there's no advantage in lying.	STACIE Really?	STACIE We talk about ideas, philosophy, art, politics. He respects me. He's fallen in love with me.
RICKY The old bastard hasn't changed a bit.	CORY Can I test that?	CORY Were you mad at me about the cheating? Is that why you died?	CORY He killed you!
CORY You think that's how it is? You die and you're just stuck with whoever you were at the moment of death?	STACIE Be my guest.	STACIE A car hit me.	STACIE It was an accident, Cory.
RICKY I wouldn't know, I can't afford to poll the dead like you.	CORY Did you ever cheat on me?	CORY It really was an accident?	CORY I loved you. I respected you.
8.	STACIE That's what you're asking?	STACIE Is that why you phoned? You think I killed myself because you couldn't keep your dick in your pants?	STACIE No, you didn't. I didn't realize it at the time. But when he started calling...his persistence, his pain, his remorse, the feelings were so strong – I know this sounds crazy but it made me feel... alive. You and I never had anything like that.
STATIC. THEN IT GOES CLEAR.	CORY Just answer.	CORY I've been feeling guilty about a lot of things these days...So who have you been talking to?	CORY You forgave him, why not me?
CORY Stacie.	STACIE No. What about you?	STACIE The man who was driving the car.	STACIE I forgive you. But I'm with him now.
STACIE Hello, Cory.	CORY It was always just you, Stacey.	CORY You're talking to the bastard who killed you?	CORY Do you have phone sex?
CORY I've been trying so hard to reach you. Who've you been talking to?	STACIE Fascinating how hard it is to be truthful while you're still in your body. What have you got to lose, I'm dead.	STACIE At first he phoned to apologize, to ask forgiveness.	STACIE I'm sorry, Cory, but I have another call.
STACIE How have you been, Cory?	CORY Okay, yes.	CORY Did you give it?	CORY Please, I have to know. You don't understand what I'm going through!
CORY Not so well.	STACIE How many lovers did you have?	STACIE He was very sincere. His life was destroyed by the accident. He lost everything --	STACIE Goodbye, Cory. Nice talking to you. Enjoy your life while it lasts.
STACIE Are you sick?	CORY I wasn't counting.	CORY -- but his money, it takes plenty of money to phone you.	CORY Stacie!
CORY It hasn't been easy with you gone.	STACIE Oh, please.	STACIE He's a kind person. A good person.	
STACIE You noticed.	CORY I was on the road, I was lonely, there were so many opportunities.		
CORY It's amazing to hear your voice.	STACIE So many. I understand.		
STACIE It's actually just processed thoughts.			

9.
DIALING.

CORY
Hello, is this Josef Gumm?

JOSEF
We will bring death to them all. We will butcher them.

CORY
This is your great-great-grandson, Cory Gumm.

JOSEF
Make them suffer the way my family suffered.

CORY
This is Cory Gumm, you're --

JOSEF
Rip their eyes out. Hang them from the rafters like they hung my father.

CORY
You've been there a long time, can you tell me what it's like?

JOSEF
Rape their daughters and sisters like they raped mine. Tear out their hearts.

CORY
I have some questions --

JOSEF
Kill them, kill them all.

CORY
Josef, a lot of time has passed, they're already dead.

JOSEF
Kill their children. Kill their grandchildren. Rip their babies from their wombs.

CORY
Why don't you take care of that yourself?

JOSEF
Shoot them. Stab them. Tear them to pieces.

CORY
Move in. Haunt somebody. Be a poltergeist.

JOSEF
Let vermin eat their unburied flesh!

CORY
Nice talking to you. Bye.

10.

CORY
...What about animals? Can I reconnect with them?

SALES ASSOCIATE
It depends on the animal. Grey whales are particularly popular with eco-historians. Is there a specific animal you're inquiring about?

CORY
My cockapoodle.

SALES ASSOCIATE
There may be a brain size issue, you see, without a minimal amount of neural sophistication, connectivity isn't possible.

CORY
Cockapoodles may be small but they are very, very smart. And friendly.

SALES ASSOCIATE
Big dogs tend to be smarter.

CORY
All the dogs are little in Vancouver. It's the condos, and flooding, not a lot of space. Where are you located?

SALES ASSOCIATE
New New Delhi. If you'd like to attempt to reconnect with your cockapoodle, you'll need the Canine Add-

On Plan. It covers up to three dogs, but if you find your dog's incapable of communication, there's no charge.

CORY
I'm in. I want to connect with Gandhi.

SALES ASSOCIATE
There's a surcharge to speak with the famous dead.

CORY
My dog's name is Gandhi.

SALES ASSOCIATE
I see. Well, we go by the dog's license number.

CORY
Will he bark or speak Universal?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Universal, but most dogs have a limited vocabulary.

CORY
Since you mentioned it, could I actually speak with the real Gandhi?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Absolutely.

CORY
I could use his advice.

SALES ASSOCIATE
You'll need a Talk of Fame subscription. And for Gandhi there's a four-year waiting list.

CORY
Who else is available?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Our catalogue only goes back two hundred fifty years, but the list is comprehensive. Jane Austen, Beethoven, Harriet Tubman, Einstein...and if you want personal advice, there's Freud, Jung, Dan Savage...

CORY
What about Elvis?

SALES ASSOCIATE
He's still alive.

CORY
Have you had any luck yet tracking down my mother?

SALES ASSOCIATE
Let me check the file. Good news, she's back. Shall I put you through?

STATIC

MOM
Hello?

CORY
Mom, it's Cory.

MOM
Hello, Son.

CORY
I've been trying so hard to reach you.

MOM
Why?

CORY
I wanted to reconnect with you, it's been very frustrating.

MOM
I'm sorry you feel frustrated.

CORY
I need to talk to you, I've had some very weird, unsettling conversations with Stacie and Dad and Great-Great --

MOM
That must be so hard. I have to go, Cory.

CORY
I just got you on the line.

MOM
I just don't like talking on the phone, Son.

CORY
You spent half your life on the phone.

MOM
Exactly. What a waste. I suggest you not do the same. Now I get to explore.

CORY
Where do you go?

MOM
The universe. Just a thought and I'm there.

CORY
Mom, wait, give me five minutes.

MOM
In five minutes I can visit the forests of Antarctica, watch the sun play on Uluru, spin through the Cartwheel Galaxy, and watch a star be born.

CORY
How do you know what to think about, how to get there – some kind of map?

MOM
I just do it.

CORY
That kind of existence doesn't sound so bad. What do you have to do to be dead like that?

MOM
It's a mystery, Son.

CORY
I don't want mysteries, damn it, I want answers!

MOM
Goodbye, Cory.

DIAL TONE.

CORY
Mom, come on, Mom!

11.
BARKING

CORY
Gandhi? Gandhi is it you?

GANDHI
Master?

CORY
Gandhi.

GANDHI
Master!

CORY
Gandhi!

GANDHI
I love you, Master.

CORY
I love you, too, puppy.

GANDHI
I miss you!

CORY
I miss you so much, my little dog.

GANDHI
I miss you, big Master, I love you!

CORY
You seem so happy there, Puppy. What's the secret?

GANDHI
I love you, Master!

CORY
So what's it like without me? When you're all alone.

GANDHI
Love!

CORY
Do you get lonely? Scared?

GANDHI
Master loves me! I love Master!

CORY (dismayed)
That's right, puppy dog.

12.

CORY
Hey, Ricky, how're you doing?

RICKY
Stop asking me for money, Cory.

CORY
I wasn't calling about that.

RICKY
Oh, yeah? So what then?

CORY
I just wanted to say hi. To hear your voice.

RICKY
I could've had you arrested, Cory. You stole my credit card, you maxed it out!

CORY
You'll get all your money back and more, don't worry.

RICKY
When?

CORY
I'm liquidating my assets, I'll pay you from that.

RICKY
You need help, Cory. There are groups and clinics for necromaniacs. A lot of people have had their lives ruined talking to the dead. But at least they're in mourning, communicating with people they love. And they're talking to humans.

CORY
I only called my dog once. The point is --

RICKY
Who else are you talking to?

CORY
Anybody, Everybody. They're all experiencing something different.

RICKY
You got to let this go. You're sick, man.

CORY
I need answers.

RICKY
You need help.

CORY
For three hundred bucks, I get one question with Sigmund Freud.

RICKY
You're just gonna call the dog.

CORY
No, Sigmund Freud. Talking to him will be the first step in my road to recovery. Come on, please, three hundred.

RICKY
This is the last time, for Sigmund Freud.

CORY
Yes.

13.

CORY
Hello...is this really Marilyn?

MARILYN
It is.

CORY
I'm desperate, Marilyn.

MARILYN
Me too, Honey.

CORY
Nobody has any answers.

MARILYN
I know, Baby.

CORY	SALES ASSOCIATE	RICKY	Think evil thoughts with Great-great
Please, talk to me.	I'm sorry to hear that.	You made me executor of your	Grandpa. Or hang with one of those
MARILYN	CORY	estate, which, by the way, went	people you spent all your money
I'll talk anyway you want, Mr. President.	I'm begging you! Five more minutes.	entirely to your less than delighted	talking to.
RECORDED ANNOUNCEMENT	Please!	creditors, who got ten cents on the	
VOICE	SALES ASSOCIATE	dollar, and took all their frustration	CORY
I'm sorry, you are out of credits.	Good luck, Mr. Gumm.	with you out on me.	It doesn't work that way. Dad was
CORY	CORY GASPS.		right, there's nobody here. I can't
Damn!	CORY	Right.	stand it.
DIALS.	Ahh...Wait – Wait...wait....	RICKY	RICKY
	STATIC. A FLAT LINE SOUND.	Not to mention the ten grand you	Well I can't afford to call you all the
CORY	IT CLEARS. DIALING.	swore you'd pay back that I will	time. Wouldn't if I could.
This is crap, we didn't talk for ten	14.	never see.	CORY
seconds.		CORY	I don't want the phone calls. I want
SALES ASSOCIATE	RICKY	One thing I've learned, it's only	life. I miss people. I miss stuff.
Actually, nine. She's at the Super	Cory? Is that you?	money, Ricky.	RICKY
Premium Rate, Mr. Gumm. And since	CORY	RICKY	I wish there was something I could do
you're now Pay As You Go...	Hi, Ricky.	Tell that to the blimp landlord.	to help.
CORY	RICKY	CORY	CORY
I hate you people. This is a scam. No	Why didn't you tell me you had the	I wanted to talk to you about that.	Seriously?
one has answers!	Red Tide Virus?	RICKY	RICKY
SALES ASSOCIATE	CORY	You know that last request of yours,	No.
I'm sorry you feel that way.	I didn't want to broadcast it.	to have a big wake and your ashes	CORY
CORY	RICKY	scattered on top of Mount Sey-	Whatever. I'm moving in.
After all I've spent, the least you can	I'm your brother.	mour?	RICKY
do is give me five more minutes.	CORY	CORY	Moving in where?
SALES ASSOCIATE	No point in adding to your problems.	Was it fun?	CORY
I'm sorry, Mr. Gumm.	RICKY	RICKY	In you.
CORY	Like you didn't cause enough? The	I drank a six-pack of Granville Sunk-	RICKY
How come some people are free, and	blood test tells you the exact date. I	en Island Lager then flushed your	You want to be a poltergeist in a leaky
some are trapped in a loop? Is it the	could've been there.	ashes down the toilet. The truth is,	Zeppelin?
state of mind you die in? Why is my	CORY	it's a relief to have you out of my life.	CORY
dog happy?	Would you really have come?	CORY	Not in your floating condo, in you.
SALES ASSOCIATE	RICKY	I don't think you'd wish this on me.	RICKY
You could ask the Dalai Lama or Oprah	Just to make sure you were really	It's exactly what I feared. I don't	No, you can't do that.
--	dead.	know how people can stand it. I'm	CORY
CORY	CORY	so lonely. And stuck with myself.	Actually, I can.
I have! I talked to them all! Nothing!	Sorry you feel that way.	This is a terrible way to not be alive.	RICKY
I'm running out of time!		Find your dog. Go travel with Mom.	No.

CORY
It took a little figuring out. But it's doable.

RICKY
Don't even think about it.

CORY
C'mon, it'll be fun.

RICKY
You're never fun.

CORY
You'll get used to me.

RICKY
No, I won't.

CORY
We're brothers. We love each other.

RICKY
I don't love you. I don't even like you. I can't stand you.

CORY
We're blood.

RICKY
Not anymore. I'm blood, you're dead. You stay out of me.

CORY
I promise not to break anything.

RICKY
No, Cory, no. Absolutely not. This is my body, not yours. You stay there. Stay!

STATIC. A GLASS BREAKS.

RICKY
...Oh, shit. You asshole.

CORY (through Ricky)
Wow. This is great. And I finally get to see your place. Nice. And hey, excellent view. We could do something with this.

DIAL TONE.

Dennis Foon (RC 1973) has received many awards for his screenplays, which include Life Above All (Oscar short-listed for Best Foreign Language Film) and On The Farm, 2018 Leo winner for best screenplay. His novels include The Longlight Legacy trilogy and Skud (BC Book Prize). His 2017 feature film Indian Horse is available on Netflix (Crave in Canada). A recent script, Dreams of the Moon, should start filming this September. Dennis co-wrote the script for Sawah (2019); the movie won the CinemaEuropa Prize in Shanghai.

Ten Poems

Bob Clifford

Assabet River

A first day of fishing season cold brittle gloom that clothes the air
Looking into the gush of the dark orange water a refrigerator
The waterfall keeps flowing beginning a swirl around the knee soaked
dungarees
A polluted fish that does not want to meet you
Turk pulls out the firewater to stay warm
Along the banks of a forgotten waterway with no oxygen
The bored assemble for a ritual that the Algonquins' Gods did not bequeath
to continue as they only pose for the outcome

Where is the water flowing to
Where did the water come from on a cold dark brittle morning
Who did the water leave behind up stream or down stream
Has it met the Geese from the Azores or is it Santa Marie
Abandoned hulls of slave labor by white people and immigrants from
Ellis Island no longer a shoe town
The fender of the car is in place poking out of the white orange caps of the
Flow from the dam
The kiver swims away not afraid of the competition of alleged human beings
the tourists of the herd looking in the orange black water
That is in a Gallup from the West to the East
On the edge of the riverbanks is black dirt and stonewall rocks
That is not a barrier for false adventure

What will they get from the orange black swirling water they cannot eat
the banks of the Assabet talk to each other when the Algonquins made
canoes
Out of trees and spears out of rock no cavities
The hollow hulls of the mills that dotted the white men who had taken over
a river
To fish for dead fish

Rocky fell in with hip boots now floating down stream
The morning colder/bitter/ a non dreamer experience misery given back

George told me my old
rat-
trap house burned down
along with the ground
fair amount of looking up
to adult world was
spent in between the
leaves and grass
until we would roll off
the stone wall and end on
our
heads figuring how come
god did not like nice
catholic
boys with food stamp
supplies
to squirm down your
throat
a dead rat in the bathroom
people downstairs with a
broken piano
top bunk bed provided the
longest sleep from noise
the eyesore
of one street and town is
gone...
along with innocence

Across the street sat a
midget.
on a porch built by
yankee father
endless days the black iron phone
went
click click click,
after her toothpick fingers
breathing out of control
on the last white hole
her teeth clacked together
with her bridge mouth
waiting for the wrinkled
rings to cease.

The Brookline Lunch

the morning after being
shipwrecked the night before,
a cook with a duck's ass and
a Camel hanging on the side
of the callous lips like a
plug for a dam
two waitresses with black
beehive
hairdos,
white pancake faces,
maybe from the old country
or just the backstreets of
Cambridge where Harvard lives
not.
We sit in the rear,
not sure who is a cop or crook
or both.
A man slumps at the counter,
his insides start to come out
call his brother
call the priest
call the fireman
the brother comes
the priest does not.
the firemen come with plywood,
the twenty-six eyes are waiting.

I wanted to buy flowers today
That colored the air
A smell that would carry me back
Up the road
I want to say that you bought them for me
While my pores sweat against a picture of my
mind
Dripping down my face
Through the cavity of
My chest
To the center of the magic well
That endless magic well
Praying for your soul to unshackle and leap
The flowers blossom again
Walking back from the road
From up the road
The pores have dried
The stems
Stand up
To hope

Riverside Park
Hudson, Massachusetts,
America
under the lights young men
of the insulated world gather
to beat their dreams
out from other dreams
the hot chocolate is hot
the hot dogs, steamed
the police steamed
the mist from dreams of the
river
settles above the
fifty yard line
while the hawks come as
people
to watch people
collide like hawks.

Leaving Porter
Square
going West
the train stops
somewhere in the
snow,
stepping off into the
night.
after riding the rails
into the dark west
on a patch of dirt
that speaks of the
life that it had
inherited the grip
that would never let
go-
when your pulse
becomes
a permanent resident
of the past
from the ridge in the
night.

My uncle took me to a bar that had
my father's footprints
moons, drinks, bets, old whores ago
the floor fits into.
bartender looks as if he should have
been a priest.
me a baby amidst the 1,000 years of
duty
done by the twenty people on the
stools
no road now to see that now or later

My passion grows every day for you-
Shadows cover the sun
Stepping over the route of cracks from
the
Map that left us benign.

Crawling out of the womb backward
into
Life
Ascension to civilization
A thoughtless thought
The snakes have grabbed the
leftovers

Passion of your soul
When the lights
Come on you are not there

Your eyes have not betrayed the
picture After many storms that have
invaded your Innocence from the sea

Walking backwards toward you
brings Back a future that missed the
next stop

The path of the sun circles
The deer being trapped by Indians

After food and cigarettes kill her
bones traveled west and did not come
back
buried a dead bird
rode a yellow bus without my other half
bones hated the same teacher too
where the wooden footbridge could
not change a pair of blue see
through pants with no underwear.

Across the field and up the
hill,
beyond the virgin pinewall
lies the cold dirt I fell in
after being shot in the neck
by a nobody with a powder
puff
gun.
Only six not even a life.
I ran down the hill
screaming I was dead,
only the holes in the clothes
and vocal cords
carried any truth.
My father overweight
coke bottle glasses
gray grease slick hair,
he did not open the door
long enough for the
wind to hit him.
The coat, sweater, shirt
peeled
off.
what a day in six years to come
home
he gargles.
The warm water soap
killed dreams of being dead.
The father sits down again
with his back again to my face
while the water dries
on my back
across the field and up the
hill
beyond the virgin pinewall
lies the cold dirt I fell in.

Bob Clifford graduated from the RC in 1979. He is a retired University Administrator and Director of Athletics.



Love, Grandpa Holland

Hannah Brauer

There's a 500-page book about my grandfather's life sitting on my shelf. "Book" might be an understatement. He officially called it a "memoir novel," but it looks more like a textbook with full-size pages. I've had my copy for over a decade and so far it's only been used for pressing leaves and four-leaf clovers.

Grandpa passed away in May 2018. Though he lived an hour away, we never spent much time together outside of holidays. We weren't very close — either the cause or effect of neglecting his memoir — which is why I didn't know what to say while standing next to his bed in the hospital. I felt like I should come up with a long monologue about our relationship, but the words weren't there.

Finally, I said, "I'm sorry I never read your book. I promise I will one day." We sat in silence with my hand resting

on his stomach. After a few minutes, his left eye fluttered open.

I'd forgotten Grandpa had blue eyes. As I stared, I imagined him conversing with the thousands of people he met during his life; he was suddenly the boy supporting his family in the South by selling boiled peanuts on the street, the high school prom king and football quarterback, the husband trying to navigate his two marriages.

I'd never been this close to his face before. His eyelid was now only half-open, just enough to peek at who was touching him. It fell closed a few seconds later and I wondered if my image even registered in his mind.

When Grandpa's memoir, *Boiled Peanuts and Buckeyes*, was published in 2006, he paid for our entire family to visit his hometown and attend his book-launch event. I have a photo of

him standing up and giving a speech, though I don't remember what he said. Strangers walked up to his table afterward to have their copies signed. It was odd watching Grandpa interact with people who barely knew him but held his entire life in their hands. He gave each of his grandchildren their own signed copy, as if to say, "Here's my life, read it as you wish."

After Grandpa passed away, I re-read the note he left for me:

When you get older or maybe even now, you may enjoy reading about your mother's family. The book also will come in handy if you need to prepare a family tree for one of your classes. I wish you a long and happy life.

Love, Grandpa Holland

It was strange to see his full name, "Lee Eudon Holland," printed on the cover of the book but "Love, Grandpa Holland" signed inside. The title "Grandpa" seemed to give me a special license, a backstage pass to the information with an insider's perspective.

The truth was, the most I'd read of his book was the citation of my name in the index. I was mentioned once at the very end, a single name in a long list of grandchildren. His entire life as Grandpa Holland was a mere epilogue to his story.

Grandpa's story also, naturally, had a prologue. The first part of his memoir is about his mother, who our family calls "Mamaw," and her life as a single sixteen-year-old raising children in the South. Mamaw was known for her storytelling, so before she died, Grandpa recorded some of

her anecdotes and ghost-wrote them for the memoir. Before he could tell his story, he wanted to show the stories that made him.

Every time Grandpa talked about Mamaw, a tear would appear in the corner of his eye. The first time I saw it was at the funeral for my dad's father, Papa, who I also didn't know very well. I was thirteen at the time and stayed home while he was in the hospital, looking to avoid the awkwardness of saying goodbye when I'd hardly said hello. I sat by myself on a bench by the casket.

Grandpa came to sit with me and told me about his own experiences with death. He told me about Mamaw and asked if I'd looked at her part of the memoir.

"Not yet," I said.

"Ah, well, you're still young," he said. "Who knows, maybe one day you'll want to know the stories in there."

Grandpa was passionate about stories, which is probably why he wanted me to be the family's next author. He knew I was the only writer among his grandchildren and hoped that I would publish a memoir of my own one day. I'm sure he was also excited that he could relate to me about writing.

Before leaving Papa's funeral, Grandpa gave me the name of a local author he knew and said I could call him if I wanted to talk. I was too shy to reach out. Later, Grandpa mailed me his copy of *Your Life as Story*, a how-to guide for memoir writers. I never read it and realized I forgot to thank him.

When I was a junior in high school, Grandpa emailed me after we hadn't seen each other in a while.

Since I don't see you very often, I would like for you to share some of the things that happen in your life that have a lot of meaning to you, he wrote. Just a few lines once a week or so...

He suggested he would send some excerpts from his memoir in return.

I emailed him a story of equal length about my own life and my thoughts about becoming a writer. He never replied, which I assumed was either because he was too busy or changed his mind. Or maybe it got lost — Grandpa still worked as a CPA up until a few months before he died at 85. He had his secretary print out all of his emails and filed them under each sender's name. I never knew if he kept a file for me; even when I saw him during holidays, he never spoke of the email.

After Grandpa died, I searched for his name in my inbox and discovered he had actually sent me a dozen messages that were lost in my spam folder. They were spread out over a few years, congratulating me on a college scholarship, wishing me luck before I went skydiving on my eighteenth birthday, detailing how he met my grandma in college.

I felt more guilty than I had in my entire life. Shame pressed itself into my chest, which felt about as heavy as his book. He'll never know if I read the messages.

If I'd read Grandpa's emails, I would know that his favorite song was the American folk song "In the Pines." It was the first song he heard on the radio and everyone seemed to know

it, though I hadn't heard it until the funeral.

*In the pines, in the pines
Where the sun don't ever shine
I'll shiver the whole night through...*

My dad spent hours trying to find the original version to play over the speakers at the visitation, but like most traditional folk music, "In the Pines" has been remade with hundreds of artists that changed the lyrics and the tune over time. There is no "original" version; its story has no beginning or end, just different echoes throughout the generations.

At the funeral, Grandpa's girlfriend, Sharon, asked her two grandsons to perform their own version of "In the Pines" with electric guitars. None of my immediate family knew who they were, but we later found out Grandpa spent a lot of time with them over the years he dated Sharon. He was closer to her family than we thought — we even shared a waiting room with them at the hospital, which was the first time most of us met.

I felt like I was at Grandpa's book release watching strangers hold his life in their hands — except this time, they actually did know him better than his own granddaughter.

I wanted to make my own version of "In the Pines" and brought my ukulele to a family gathering following the visitation. We learned the song together and sang as a chorus, the melancholic lyrics clashing with the ukulele's high voice.

*My girl, my girl, where will you go
I'm going where the cold wind blows...*

I hoped Grandpa and Mamaw were watching us together.

The final time Grandpa opened his eyes was when he looked up at me in the hospital. I was the last person he saw. I was there for his last breath, too, a gulping, life-culminating gasp. I didn't understand why I deserved to be there at the end of his life, when I was only mentioned in his memoir once.

But Grandpa's story gives context to my own; even though I don't live in his memoir, he still lives in mine. I'm the next version of his folk song, carried out in a new tune.

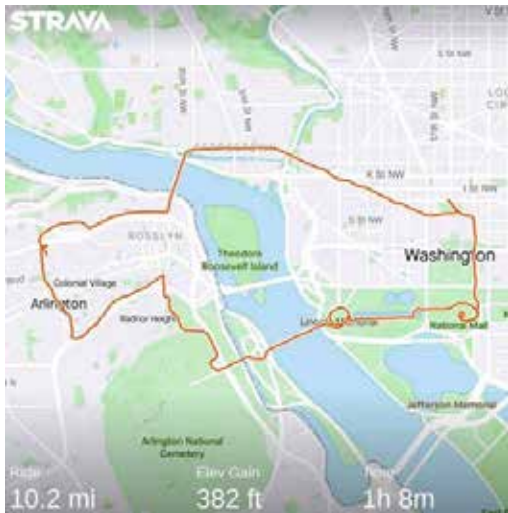
I'm keeping my promise and started reading all three-and-a-half pounds of Grandpa's memoir. The first thing that struck me was how similar our writing styles are, as if we shared a storytelling gene that spoke through us. I'm sure Mamaw had it, too.

I see now why they were so passionate about documenting their lives; they knew how valuable the archives would be for the next generations to learn from. We need the stories that made us in order to tell our own.

As I slowly work my way through the book, picking out four-leaf clovers along the way, I find myself wishing that I lead a life as well-loved as theirs. Maybe then, when I find the time, I'll finally sit down and write that memoir.

*I wish you a long and happy life.
Love, Grandpa Holland*

Hannah Brauer (RC 2020, Communication & Media, Creative Writing) was editor of the Residential College Review. At U-M she also wrote for the Michigan Daily. She has her own photography business, Hannah Brauer Photography. Drawing by U-M Stamps sophomore Kristina Rogers.



DC Postcards

John Laswick

Having retired from the federal government, working in DC for the last twelve years, my travel plans came to a halt with the coronavirus.

Instead of sending digital postcards from Peru or Turkey, I started sending my friends DC Postcards of the pandemic. Being near a man as dangerous as Trump only makes it more frustrating to have no voice, no positive power over his demented exercise of it. I tried to take strength from our national monuments, often biking the three and a half miles to the Mall. My early, impotent middle fingers took on more meaning with Black Lives Matter and the presidential election. I have long felt that my generation failed to suppress the long rise of extreme conservatism and have wanted to atone for that failure. These are excerpts of those postcards.



March 20 (One week after national disaster declaration)

As we endure the frightening uncertainties of coronavirus, let us keep the beauty of nature as a sign of hope. I got a great bunch of photos this Sunday morning after riding my bike down to the Tidal Basin, near the Martin Luther King Memorial. Dr. King offers us another source of inspiration and courage; the cherry grove near his memorial is one of the densest and most beautiful. I am pretty sure that the thick, gnarled, old trunks are trees from the original Japanese donation over 100 years ago.

I had waited all week for a sunny day and got one at the peak of the bloom, two weeks early. The roads were all closed to discourage crowds and it made a perfect environment for walkers and cyclists. Some good is coming from the need to reduce human contact and I'm glad I can share it with you. In a normal year, this area would be crawling with flower-viewers. I will try to keep sending out photos as one way to divert our attention to positive things. I am wishing all the best outcomes for all my friends.



Trump Supporters!
(April 24)

Inject disinfectants into your body! A suggestion clearly not made sarcastically – we know he meant it! Be the first in your group of anti-isolation protesters to try this new miracle

cure from Our Glorious Leader! We are seeking a large number of those who adore Trump to try these new treatments immediately. Drink bleach or isopropyl alcohol! (Check with your doctor for possible but unlikely side effects) Thin the herd to achieve herd immunity faster! Be a pioneer in your cadre! Discounts on bleach and alcohol for anyone wearing a MAGA hat! Hurry! You only have one life to risk for personal liberty and the American economy!



Dear Friends (May 2)

May 1 was the day for workers of the world to unite and I sure hope they did. They are all risking their lives for our corn flakes and junk mail. Today must be Retirees of the World Unite Day; we are literal wobbles much of the time. I will repeat for those who missed it that my health has improved dramatically since retiring and getting some good physical therapy. I will really be pissed if I die of

coronavirus when I am finally in good health. I am walking 3-5 miles or biking 10+ miles about every other day. Spring flowers make it gorgeous, like these tulips in my neighborhood and a majestic wisteria near the Smithsonian American History Museum.



To make the residents of Your Nation's Capital feel better, the Blue Angels and Thunderbirds flew over DC this morning. Unfortunately, their flight path was farther from my apartment in Arlington than I had hoped, and blocked by all the leafy green trees.



If one had crashed here, I was hoping it would fall on Mitch McConnell's office if not the White House. Sorry, but it really is that horrible in my opinion. I have good friends who are conservatives; conservatives and many republicans are fine. But these people are crazy. The MAGAs seem willing to drink that Kool-Aid-flavored bleach. It's Happy Hour somewhere, so I say, Cheers! Instead, support all the true red, white and blue angels everywhere.

Fellow Rebels
(May 14)

Took a one hour bike ride and

saw many monuments. I thought you'd like to accompany me on the facemask version after earlier trips. Still giving Our Glorious Leader his tribute.

I'm with Jessie Jackson: Keep Hope Alive!

John



Dear Friends
(June 10)

Just when things can descend no lower, they not only ratchet down, but worsen exponentially. I'm really starting to hate exponents, so I encourage you all to be proponents instead. For fear of Covid-19 mostly, I

have not been demonstrating. Instead, I have been donating to tight Senate races and writing letters to the few Senate Republicans who might possibly have enough moral courage to resist Trump and form a temporary bipartisan majority.

Mitch McConnell thinks it's not urgent to address financial support for struggling families and faltering small businesses, so the Senate is stalled. Families are already going hungry and will only grow more desperate when unemployment and other temporary support ends on July 31. Businesses can reopen but if customers are afraid to enter or cannot afford to buy anything, they will not succeed. Race riots might give way to food and rent riots. Solving these problems will take bipartisan action, very soon. Four senators could end this on a temporary, even sporadic, basis if they could overcome politics and work across party lines. Creating such a coalition will also send a signal to Our Glorious Leader that he cannot arbitrarily declare martial law and order soldiers to attack their own citizens.



Starting now, we have to take positive action, not just be upset. I wish this list were longer, maybe it is. But it only takes four and Mitt Romney, god bless him, was already marching in protest here this Sunday. [Here I provided contact information and instructions to reach inert republican senators.]



I finally did go down to the White House on Monday when it looked active, but socially distant. Without police, it was calm and respectful. The fence was 2,000 feet wide and 4,000 feet long, a fitting symbol for a president determined trying hide from the big problems and escape history.

Black Lives Matter Plaza

In 1980, the eccentric jazz genius Sun Ra made a wonderful documentary called *A Joyful Noise* (available free on YouTube). His Zen observations align perfectly with the Black Lives Matter movement and remain relevant. It embarrasses me as a white person to admit how little has changed since then.

"I'm sitting in front of the White House, looking over across the street, but I don't see the Black House.

That's where it ought to be because you can't have a White House if you don't have a Black House. In fact, you can't have anything unless you have a comparison...

"You can't have a Justice Department that goes out looking for only criminals and never goes out looking out for people who are doing good. You can't have justice if you penalize people for doing wrong, and don't do anything to help them when they are trying to do right."

Good Friends (June 21)

We celebrate a cluster of three great holidays this weekend. On Friday evening, your Washington Observ-



er rode down to the Lincoln Memorial to commemorate Juneteenth. A quiet, mostly white group was preparing to march to the White House. After lingering safely at the edge, I pedaled ahead to pay my personal respects to Our Glorious Leader. Living only three miles from these important places really facilitates political expression.

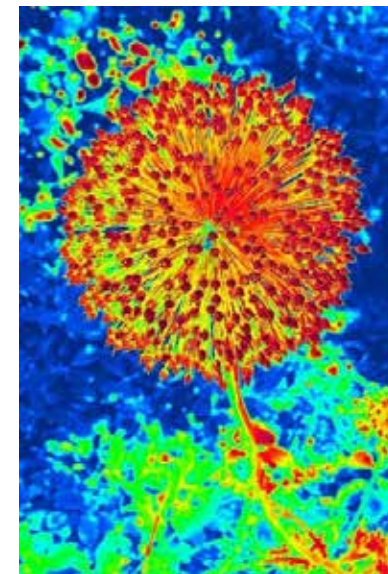
The Summer Solstice comes at a propitious time. This massive, sustained upwelling of frustration convinces me that the Trump era is finished: we have reached the extreme of this cycle and can begin to build a better world together. The vast majority of Americans reject not only racism, but all the social and economic practices that underpin it, personified by this unfortunate man. Let's work to ensure that Coronavirus is contained and that elections are free and fair, so we can move ahead peacefully. Keep encouraging thoughtful Republican senators to support bipartisan progress; we can't delay for six more months.

To celebrate Father's Day, I feel fortunate to have a beautiful and accomplished daughter. I'll drive up to Amherst this Wednesday to bring Elena back to DC after three and a half months with her mother.



mayor and local health officials), I am substituting some colorized fireworks flowers from the Smithsonian gardens to celebrate liberty safely.

After risking contagion to get my first haircut on Tuesday June 30, I walked around the deserted Mall, flabbergasted at its vast emptiness. Empty vastness?



Dear Friends (July 4)
This holiday week has encompassed more bizarre events and extremes. While the Mall may fill up for fireworks tonight (against the explicit advice of the



Elena came back from Amherst with me on Saturday, curious about the protests. So we headed to the White House at 10:30 on our way home. There were more cops than in my daytime visits, but the atmosphere was still mellow. I hope that positive situation

can hold. The attack on the Andrew Jackson statue made them re-erect the fence, providing a great billboard for expressions of rebellion against injustice. Just like 244 years ago!

Dear Friends (July 29)

I paid tribute to John Lewis last night by viewing his casket outside the Capitol building. It seemed even more dramatic than it would have felt inside, especially since they still have statues of some bad people there. I heard that they might replace Chief Justice Roger Taney, who wrote the 1857 Dred Scott decision (blacks are not American citizens) with Thurgood Marshall (Brown v Board of Education, 1954), a magnificent step in the right direction.

I have also started putting some of my own signs on the fence near Lafayette Park, encouraging people to connect Black Lives Matter with Trump's removal from office. I had thought, since first seeing the big open fence, that people should ridicule him as well, so I tried to have some fun with my new game, Acronymia.



My generation did not capitalize on its progressive momentum in the early 70s and I cannot allow someone as dangerous as Trump to remain in office. In addition to financial donations to Biden and blue senate candidates, I have started making calls for Biden, so far focusing on a rural district in central Pennsylvania. Robert Caro described Lyndon Johnson's long-shot first race for Congress in rural Texas in 1936. He pushed himself every minute, every hour, every day, driving to ranch houses late at night, and telling his staff, "If we do everything we can possibly



do, we can win." I believe that holds true now, in the most important American election since 1860.

Keep hope alive and kicking!

John Laswick
Arlington, VA
August 2020

John Laswick (RC 1972, English Literature) earned an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School of Government (1994). John's career focused on community development programs, starting at the HUD Field Office in Pittsburgh, later serving at HUD offices in Minneapolis and Chicago. He later worked at HUD Headquarters in Washington on the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. John especially enjoyed developing three downtown art-space projects with the Tucson Arts Coalition and helping to create the sustainable new community of Civano for the city of Tucson. He also spent a year as a senior researcher at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. He retired in September 2019.



A.D.

Mary Gallagher

"For dying patients and their families, preparation does not preclude hope; it merely frames it."

— "In Search of a Good Death: Observations of Patients, Families, and Providers," K E Steinhauer, E C Clipp, M McNeilly, N A Christakis, L M McIntyre, J A Tulsky

"Everybody talks about death with dignity," my dad says, "but that's not for me. If I cared about dignity, I wouldn't have lived my life the way I have."

We're in a family video-chat about end-of-life care plans, and the questions I carefully selected from a medical journal have been waylaid, first by a ranking of the priests who have said the mass at family funerals, then by a sabotage scheme for mom to donate

her broken-down kidneys to Mitch McConnell.

Not knowing how to start the conversation about end-of-life care is a common problem—research shows that about nine out of ten people believe that their family members understand their end-of-life wishes, but less than a fifth have actually had a conversation about it (Seckler et. al, 1991).

I became determined to have this conversation during nursing school clinicals, where I saw families shocked at the long-term pain and fear often caused by life-saving interventions, as well as the neglect caused by overworked nurses and techs. Then there was the unending back-and-forth between insurance coverage and bankruptcy—one

of my patients was told that hospice care would allow him to die comfortably at home with his family, but his (good, corporate) insurance wouldn't cover it. He died in the hospital a week later.

Many sedated or comatose patients hold onto their sense of hearing, and that thought, the total lack of control while being aware of my surroundings, terrified me. I trusted my family to make the best decisions on my behalf, but I didn't want to put them in a situation of always wondering if they'd done the right thing.

Advanced directives are one way that our system has tried to give patients agency over their end-of-life care. The Michigan health department asks for your power of attorney (they make decisions if you're unable to communicate) and which interventions you want—intubation, ventilation, defibrillation, chest compressions.

"For me, it's a less abstract concept now than it used to be," my mom says. She's talking about this past fall, when she was diagnosed with a rare life-threatening illness. She tells me that she was terrified of dying suddenly in the hospital, without the chance to say goodbye.

Was it hard to communicate those fears to us?

"Oh yeah, I wasn't going to talk about that." Why not?

"Too scary, too fresh to discuss. I didn't feel like I had my own thoughts. They were all jumbled. I didn't have them enough in order to talk to you, or anybody.... I wanted to have some time to think about it. And I hoped I would have that time!"

"There's not much social leeway to

discuss these things, unless you're reminded in some way that it's a very real possibility at any moment," my brother says. "After a tragedy, there's so much more latitude to express your care for somebody or something like that, but up until that point it's like 'oh you're being morbid, nothing's going to happen, don't worry.'"

Filling out an advanced directive gives me a sense of security—there are only a few decisions it asks me to make, and that makes it easy to stop there without realizing that it only addresses my most surface-level fears. I'm not afraid of the interventions themselves. I'm scared of a system that puts profit above comfort and closure, a system where prolonged death likely means both consistent neglect and trauma and a crushing financial burden on my family.

These are the problems I see again and again with my patients, and my gut response is to detach myself, protect myself, file detailed forms.

But we can't control something that will always end in total surrender—all we can really control is what we do for those who are suffering right now. These ongoing conversations with my family have given me hope and a better understanding of their wishes; now, it's about turning that hope into actions to shape end-of-life care into an experience of dignity and empathy for everybody.

Resources

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A version of this piece first appeared in Geez magazine 58, Death and Dying, Fall 2020: geezmagazine.org

Mary Gallagher (RC 2015) is an oncology nurse at Michigan Medicine and a project manager at Zone 6 Management. She spends every day off in the woods, and hopes you check in with your sick friends today.



Detroit's Green Roots: Three Moments in the Garden

Joseph Stanhope Cialdella

One of my first experiences in Detroit was pulling weeds and harvesting produce one late summer day at Earthworks Urban Farm in 2004. That might seem an odd introduction to a city so well known for cars, Motown, and images of decline and abandonment in the national media. Detroit, though, also has a vibrant and verdant history of growing fruits, vegetables, in urban gardens and farms alongside its industrial rise, fall, and revitalization for more than a century.

As the COVID-19 pandemic upended everyday life last spring, many people turned with renewed

interest and attention to gardening to find a more tangible sense of hope, beauty, and sustenance, and to occupy time in the face of crisis and uncertainty. It was a reminder that significant challenges and injustice – whether the global COVID-19 pandemic, the economic precarity of deindustrialization, or racism – often create conditions for individuals and communities to pick up gardening. A cultural practice of hope and renewal, gardening provides space to imagine and create new possibilities. Communities in American cities, such as Detroit, have a long tradition of urban gardening to meet subsistence

needs, resist oppression, and create a better city. Perhaps by spending a few moments in three of these gardens, we can look at what was, with an eye toward what might be.

1. A Pleasant Potato Patch

After the economic turmoil of 1893, Detroit's Mayor Hazen S. Pingree saw possibility in the humble contours of the potato. The economic crisis had left many in Detroit unemployed, with recent Polish and German immigrants to the city being especially hard hit. Cries for "bread or blood" could be heard outside the Board of Public Works building, and the city seemed ripe for rioting. For Mayor Pingree, devising a way to provide food to those acutely affected by the economic crisis was a priority.

On an excursion around the still unfinished boulevard project encircling the city, Pingree decided to use some of the thousands of acres of vacant and idle lands in the city for subsistence gardens. In Pingree's view, this seemed a perfect way to occupy idle lands and idle hands, while saving taxpayers the cost of aiding the poor through direct charity.

Early in 1894, Pingree created Detroit's Agricultural Committee, and charged them with acquiring land, tools, and people willing to garden for food.

Many were skeptical of Pingree's "potato patch plan," as the program came to be called. Charges that potato bugs would invade the city abounded alongside more practical concerns about the willingness of the city's unemployed to grow food

for themselves and about who would donate land. Some opponents even claimed this was simply a "free land scheme." One editorial cartoon, printed in the *Detroit Evening News*, scoffed at the plan, suggesting that the state of Michigan change its motto, from "if you seek a pleasant peninsula, look about you" to "if you seek a beautiful potato patch, look around you."

Despite these concerns, the program moved forward, perhaps due in no small part to the fact that many were threatened with the loss of charity relief from the city if they did not participate. Although the program did not reach all of the city's unemployed, it was a relative success. Pingree even proposed the city invest in a series of "agricultural parks," in addition to leisure and recreation parks, to support the city's food system moving forward. The plan, however, was never implemented once he left office.

2. Great Migration Gardens

In 1918, not long after the memory of Pingree's Potato Patches had faded from civic consciousness, John and Elizabeth Crews ended a journey "through six states seeking a home" and settled in the city, then still a burgeoning industrial center. As part of the Great Migration, when African Americans began moving to Detroit in large numbers from the South for employment opportunities and an escape from Jim Crow segregation and oppressive economic systems like share cropping, the Crews and many other African Americans were faced with the challenge of making a place and building community in a new environment.

In Detroit, many recent migrants

let go of their gardening and food growing practices because urban-industrial life offered new opportunities to escape toiling on the land. Others changed and adapted their horticultural practices. Although the East Side of the city where many migrants first lived, was quite dense, some managed to cultivate gardens here, while others moved to areas with more space.

For those with financial means, the West Side of the city offered one of the first opportunities for some African Americans in the area to cultivate a suburban garden aesthetic in a neighborhood of mostly single-family homes. Yards were landscaped with lawns and adorned with flowers and trees, often those bearing fruit. One resident planted so many flowers along her fence that she was known as "The Flower Girl." Unlike other suburbs, however, rock gardens were often a common feature, especially in the more private space of the backyard. As one resident remembered, "Roosevelt was a serene and beautiful street with trees, green grass, butterflies, [and] beautiful rock gardens in back yards..." The neighborhood was so closely knit one resident described it as "village." Homeownership created a shared sense of community as residents worked to maintain a suburban sense of place.

In the outlying Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood, a lower class development where the Crews eventually moved, residents often had a different vision of their life in the city, raising chickens and growing gardens that often included vegetables, such the "Kentucky Wonder" green beans the Crews canned to eat throughout the winter. Corn was also a common sight

in the neighborhood, along with an informal system of community gardening. As one resident told a visitor, they had no trouble with people stealing from their garden because, "we just plant a little more than we need each year to take care of that." Alternately, "if we run low, we just get a few [ears of corn] off of somebody else's. We all know that. We don't care. We're friends out here!"

Not everyone found this more rural way of life appealing, however. During the 1920s and 30s, the Detroit Urban League, an organization founded to assist African American migrants in Detroit, often sponsored flower garden contests, complete with prizes of cash or flower bouquets, in this neighborhood to beautify what they considered to be unsightly "yards," not gardens. According to one observer, during the spring contest houses in the neighborhood were "surrounded by riots of bloom...porches and fences sag under the weight of rambler roses, honeysuckle, and clematis; the yards bloom with myriads of flowers." While photographs of these gardens are sparse, bits and pieces from the written record help to illuminate the ways some of Detroit's African American communities used gardens to create a sense of place, belonging, and community in Detroit during the first half of the twentieth century. To white residents and developers, however, gardens were not enough to bridge racism. In 1941, a developer built a wall, now an infamous marker of metro Detroit's

racial segregation and injustice, to separate the Eight-Mile Wyoming neighborhood from his exclusively white subdivision.

3. Farm-A-Lots

In the fall of 1979, some three hundred urban gardeners gathered at the band shell on Belle Isle Park to be recognized for taking part in the citywide Detroit Harvest Festival. The event recognized “the fruits of the labor of Detroit’s more than 6,000 urban gardeners.” To help these gardeners and gardens grow, another Detroit mayor, Coleman A. Young, created the Farm-A-Lot program, through which residents with an interest in gardening could request a vacant lot from the city and receive soil tilling, seeds, and advice. The goal was to “help fight food price inflation and to contribute to the greening of Detroit” as the repercussions of devastating social and economic policies moved jobs and industry away from the city. As Young stated, “What we’re talking about is the greening of this city uptown, downtown, all around the town... A lot of people don’t know it but we’ve got a lot of good farmland right here in Detroit.” At the festival, he gave out awards for the best garden planted and tended by one person or family, the best garden planted by three or more neighbors, the best garden made in window boxes or other containers, the greenest block in town, the oldest gardener, the youngest gardener, and the garden growing the largest variety of crops.

Some of the most dedicated urban gardeners who benefited from the Farm-A-Lot were a group of African

Americans, primarily elders and women, who called themselves the Gardening Angels, and who cultivated personal and vacant lot gardens during the 1980s and 1990s. Lillian Clark was one of the first Gardening Angels to expand her personal garden into a nearby vacant lot. Upon seeing this formerly “blighted” vacant lot transformed into gardens of “green beans, corn, peas, tomatoes, celery, okra, lettuce, geraniums, and more than 30 kinds of roses,” others in her East Side neighborhood offered help tending the garden. It quickly became a space shared by interested members of the community. The gardens they tended, which numbered twenty-six in 1994, were a means of providing a small amount of food for their families, as well as the larger community. All grew from “lots that once held tangled weeds, broken glass and old mattresses.”

In 1992 Detroit activists Grace Lee and James Boggs were so inspired by the work of the Gardening Angels that they wanted to build on their urban gardening efforts. They created a program called Detroit Summer, through which they partnered with the Gardening Angels to involve youth and elders in creating community garden spaces on vacant lots throughout the city. As Grace Lee Boggs later recalled, “Out of the ashes of industrialization we decided to seize the opportunity to create a twenty-first century city, a city both rural and urban, which attracts people from all over the world because it understands the fundamental need of human beings at this stage in our evolution to relate

more responsibly to one another and to the earth.”

Old Roots, New Harvests

With these three moments in the garden, we can see that Detroit’s landscape is not neutral ground. It is the creation of generations of residents and communities who have worked to cultivate it and endow it with meaning in their search for justice, sustainability, and a way of life. Detroit’s green roots have laid a strong cultural foundation for the strength of urban gardening and agriculture in the city today, particularly among Black Detroiters. There’s a lot of interest in community gardening and urban farming today from those inside and outside the city. With this increased popularity comes increased responsibility for those entering the city for the first time to know the city’s history. Looking for ways to respectfully connect with and amplify work already happening, rather than starting from scratch, might be a more sustainable way to ensure community gardens and farms have a lasting place in our urban landscapes and are valued as common goods by the public and communities. Organizations such as the Detroit Black

Community Food Security Network, Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, and Keep Growing Detroit continue to evolve the city’s long tradition of urban gardening. Most recently, they joined together to raise more than \$50,000 for the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund, which aims to be a part of addressing the longstanding discrimination and unequal opportunity for black residents seeking to grow food and own the land they farm in the city. In this moment, the gardens we create should stretch us toward coalitions like these - rooted in mutual benefit and grown through reciprocity, justice, and healing to continue the hard but necessary work of imagining and creating new, more socially just and sustainable ways of life.

Adapted from Motor City Green: A Century of Landscapes and Environmentalism in Detroit (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

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Lessons

Hannah Levine

I bought a pack of condoms and a pint of ice cream with the pregnancy test. The cashier smirked as she picked up each item; and I gave her a toothless smile usually reserved for catcallers on the street I don't want to deal with. She reached for the bathroom key, but I took my bag from the counter and walked out. When I got home, I chugged a bottle of water, sat on the toilet, and waited. Three minutes later, the second line appeared, and I thought back to the beginning.

Mama never taught me how to rock a baby, but I listened when she told stories of the night she gave birth to me. I heard her sing praises about the little cherub she found herself rocking to sleep in the middle of the night. Then I thought about the nights I tucked myself into bed with a book I

couldn't read and waited for her to finish just one more phone call.

When I grew up and it was my turn to rock a baby, I held the child at arm's length until someone would scoop it up and coo at it. I watched as cousins took in the new baby smell and nibbled on tiny toes. I tried to imagine what it would be like to be so small, but my mind came up empty.

Mama never taught me how to braid my hair, but I watched her weave the strands on her own head every morning before she rushed out the door. Back then, she waited for the sun to rise before leaving for work. Back then, my hair still coiled and kinked and the curls ran wild like a wreath around my face—something to draw enough

attention to make her smile and give a small tug-tug on the tiny little ringlets as pagers beeped and emails pinged.

When I grew up and it was my turn to braid my hair, I pulled and tugged and wove the strands as best I could, but no braids took shape. The giant knots stood strong in their place; a message that trying harder sometimes makes it worse. A reminder that forming something out of nothing only works for some people.

Mama never taught me how to make breakfast, but there was always a bowl in the cupboard, cereal in the pantry, and milk in the fridge. Bland O's and frosted wheat squares clanged as they hit the bowl, the sound echoing off the bare kitchen walls.

When I grew up and it was my turn to make breakfast, I skipped the cereal, sick of the artificial sweetness and whole grains. Instead, I opted for cream cheese on bagels, yogurt with the fruit already mixed in. When I was feeling especially lonely, I made oatmeal and indulged in a spoonful of peanut butter, a dash of maple syrup. Better than bran, but I was still eating alone.

Mama never taught me how to weigh myself, but she stepped on the scale each morning and night and sometimes after lunch just to be sure whatever diet she was on was working. A true woman knows her weight. A good woman knows she's only worth as much as the size on her smallest jeans. An acceptable woman can't take up space. One time, Mama stopped eating carbs, so I stopped packing peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in my lunchbox and ate hard

boiled eggs for a month. Four weeks later, egg yolks became the enemy, and fatty foods were out, so I ate grapes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When grapes became too sugary and sweet and fruit wore its new dark and threatening disguise, I drank water and listened for the sounds my stomach made in quiet moments as it begged for sustenance. One day it stopped begging and accepted its fate and I smiled down at the tiny dip it made near my belly button.

When I grew up and it was my turn to weigh myself, I stood in front of the scale, heart racing, ears drumming, face growing hot as I anticipated the number. It was never low enough. I was never small enough. I went back to drinking water, cold gulps I forced down my throat whenever I felt that familiar pang of hunger. I learned the weight of the scale as I let it crush me.

Mama never taught me how to zip the back zipper of my dresses, but her fingers gently pulled up the zip tag on her work dresses, hiding the silky slip beneath it like a secret. She'd pull on a blazer and dip her toes into the sharp shoes I used to use to play dress up before I learned not to play with Mama's work clothes.

When I grew up and it was my turn to zip my own zippers, I bent and twisted and rolled my shoulders, but my fingers never touched. Like so many other things, it was always just out of reach.

Mama never taught me how to leave a man, but I saw her feel sad and low, too lazy to leave but not too lazy to talk about leaving. To promise the departure after big events: my high school graduation, my first year

of college, graduating university, only to stay one more time. Just one more day. Week. Year. Mama never taught me that unhappiness can come from something other than abuse. That sometimes indifference is worse. But Mama never left either. She stayed at that home where promises died and love slept dormant under a dark chalky roof.

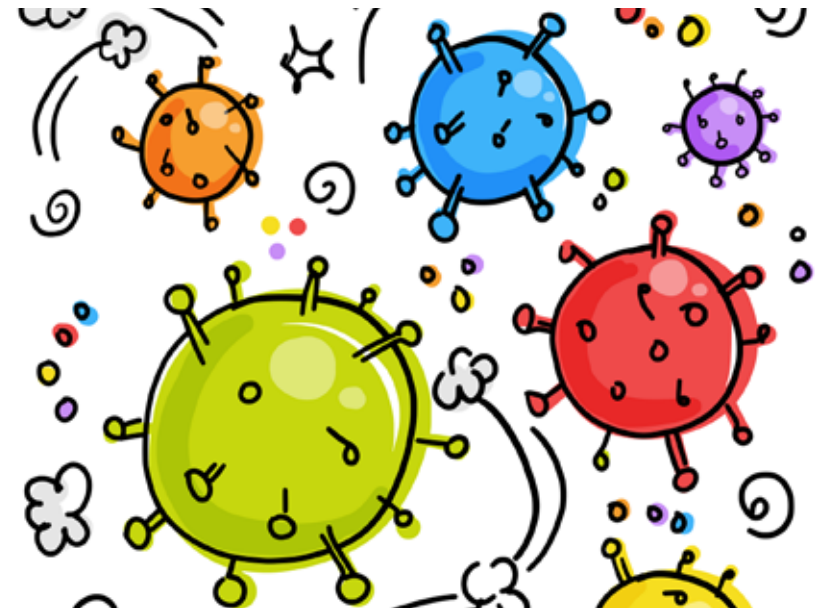
When I grew up and it was my turn to find a partner, I didn't want to leave a man, but I didn't want to stay either. Instead, I didn't let myself love anyone. Love is too close to hate, and hate is stronger. So instead of loving or hating, I became nothing. A braidless twig without an ally to share the world with. But what was the world anyways? Just a lonely place to sit and breathe until our lungs can't pull the oxygen in anymore and we perch on the edge of nothing, waiting to take just one more step.

It surprised me when my eyes began to water as I felt the intense cramping in my abdomen 12 weeks in. I sat on the examining table as

the doctor started to explain what happened, but I couldn't hear what he was saying. I clutched at my belly as it betrayed me with hollow loneliness, another nothing disguised as something. Another nothing I formed all on my own. Then I looked down at my stomach and went numb.

Mama never taught me how to be a mother anyway.

Hannah Levine (RC 2016) is a digital freelancer and nanny. She is the Social Media Coordinator for AMWA IGNITE, was the first digital/social media editor at the Detroit Jewish News, and worked as an events and publicity assistant at Cherry Lake Publishing/Sleeping Bear Press. Aside from her U-M degree, she has a Certificate in Publishing from the University of Denver's Publishing Institute. Her story "The Wedding" won 3rd place in October Hill Magazine's First Annual Literary Contest. She lives in Huntington Woods. Check her out at hannahlevine.weebly.com.com.



Pseudónima, and the Virus

Daniel Madaj

This is another tale in an alternate RC universe. Some of the characters were introduced back in the Journal's first issue: E.J, Sylvie, and the director of XC Creative Writing, Hayley van den Berg.

I.

The closer the anniversary, the more Hayley van den Berg heard herself say the unthinkable: yes, how much she was looking forward to the celebration! Truthfully, she dreaded it. Yes, she was appreciative of her many years teaching in the XC's creative writing program; the modest income provided the base for her quite pleasant life. But that life doesn't look as pleasant, the more she looks back from her early 60s, and it all seems part of this anniversary thing, chugging along toward the Fall, like a high-pressure

center funneling an endless polar vortex . . .

Hayley was in her early 20s when she took a one-year appointment as director of the XC's writing program, slotting in after a series of other one- to two-year appointments. The most infamous was Vellie Macchio, who found the "can't miss" writers from state high schools, then lured them with funds and perks to the XC. Macchio surmised correctly that these students would win awards that would shine favorably back on the program, and, of course, on him. Macchio's problem was extremity: he discriminated against everyone not in his pool, and the perks got out of hand.

To everyone's surprise, including her own, Hayley did so well that she

was invited back for a second year. Then a third. And now it's been 39 years. And will there be a 40th?

In the bathroom mirror, she looks absolutely familiar: hair short-cropped, more grey than brown. How could she be in her 60s? She doesn't feel too ancient . . . or does she? She realizes that she's been alone, now, for quite some time. That's unusual, or at least it was. There always seemed to be a man or a woman in her bed, but it's annoying to realize that she has to work to remember who was last!

Maybe she should get a dog? After all, a lot of her students have been gushing over Hugo, the golden mix that Darryl and Marta have been bringing to the XC, to their new "literary police" program. (If she remembers rightly, they're now calling it a "poultice," instead). Marta was prepared to use the old chestnut that she "felt safer" with Hugo near, but Hugo was such a blast of Vitamin H, that no one, so far, had complained.

Hayley opened the sliding door onto her modest porch, stepped outside. The morning was cool; the yard still mostly in shade, thanks to the large maple tree in the neighbor's back yard. Her yard was fenced: a dog like Hugo could hang out here. Taking him for a few walks would be good for her . . .

There remained continued interest in her "Niño de la Casta" detective series; her modest contract has her producing a new book every 18 months. But she has tired of Niño. In fact, she has tried to kill him off in the last few books (never mind the push-back from her publisher!), but Nino so far has proved surprisingly

resilient.

She has desperately wanted to write something new. She recently thought to write about the new sexual plurality, at least as she understood it, based on one of her "male" students, who was trying hard to be "non-binary," but was in fact smitten by a "female" friend who, alas, seemed less and less interested in the two of them as a male-female couple.

Well, one problem, of course, would be that she would have to wait to publish until both students were long gone. But wouldn't she also be championing a sad, weak male, mooning for a traditional relationship? Hardly fitting for her, professionally or personally!

The other day she was looking out her front window and saw yet another large Amazon package delivered to the door of the two young men who rented the house across the street. What on earth could they be ordering? Along with musing about her new theory about testosterone (that it's a dangerous opioid), she mused that maybe one of the young men had agreed to test a new model of sex robot. Yes, at first, it was everything he could imagine. And were there other models at play, during some of the variations? But then the robot persisted with its inquiries: what exactly did he find exciting? Things quickly went from heterosexual to omni-sexual, and what might be called ultra-sexual: animals, other objects. The robot dutifully tested for response . . .

What would happen next? At the start, Hayley had wondered if the robot would develop a thing for

someone else, and therefore break the young man's heart, but the ultra-sexuality seemed wilder than that. Would the young man disable the robot, rather than change himself?

Meanwhile, Hayley has been ignoring persistent calls from her publishing agent, Zimna Chilkowska. She assumed they were about her next Niño book. It wasn't due for several months! (Even though he hadn't written the first sentence). Eventually she got mad and answered: "Why are you badgering me?"

"HBO South America wants to do a series on Niño," Zimna said. "Eight episodes for a first season. Likely a second, and maybe more. Money is very, very good." She mentioned a number that caused Hayley to sit down. "But they need to know soon, like now. What do you think?"

Conditions: Hayley would need to step forward as author. HBO wanted a real writer who could be promoted and trotted out for events. She chuckled. That's not so bad. It did seem unlikely she'd be up for a Pulitzer Prize for any of her other work, real or imagined.

What control could she have over the project? She could select the "showrunner." And once she learned what a showrunner was, she immediately thought of Sylvie St. John.

"I'll do it," she said, surprising herself with the sudden conviction, "If I can talk Sylvie into it."

How to reach Sylvie? Was she coming to the reunion? She could ask in the office. What about E.J.? He was still in town, still running the Aristophanes Project. Weren't they a thing for a while? He would probably know.

Later that morning, on her way to

her Tuesday fiction class, Hayley stuck her head in the Aristophanes office. E.J. was there. It seemed serendipitous, but in truth E.J. was usually there. He found it preferable to sitting home in his apartment. You can only spend so much time at home not-writing, after all. Best to spread it around.

Of course, Hayley had heard the three main statements about E.J.: that he was the laziest person on Earth (which seemed possible), that he was the dumbest (improbable, even if demonstrably on the lower end of the scale), and that he was the luckiest (something she hadn't experience with).

It was certainly past time for E.J. to move on from the Aristophanes Project and let a recent grad take over. That had been the original plan. Technically, he still had one credit to fulfill before he could graduate. Meanwhile, continued funding for the project had fallen nicely into place, thanks to funds from Hellenic Television, which taped the annual "Aristophanes Contest," and from generous donations from Greek alums.

E.J. has done a good job with the Project, even as he hasn't seemed to give any thought to how it might grow. For example, there might be a brother "Euripedes Project." Or performances by the contest winners at neighborhood universities. Or . . .

E.J. glanced up, saw Hayley, and frowned — not because he disliked her (although she was never a fan of his work, on the rare occasions when there was written work to share), but because she had distracted him from Tetris. He was working on a new high

score!

Hayley saw the frown, and figured he was looking at pornography. If she had known it was a game, she would have thought that worse. "Do you have contact info for Sylvie?" she asked. "You know, Sylvie St. John? I have a job for her."

Yes, E.J. did have Sylvie's contact info, because Sylvie, damn her, kept in touch regularly, while he was still hurt that she left him to go to California. He hasn't been replying.

After giving Hayley the particulars, he told himself it was only fair to send her a brief e-mail about it, but in truth, he had felt something turn inside him, making this and other things possible.

II.

The three women split the driving, approximately three-hour shifts, but it was a long haul from LA to Chicago, 31 hours on the road, driving almost non-stop. Aside from brief pauses for gas and the restroom, they agreed to have a sit-down meal once during the drive. They took 80 to Denver, then 55 to KC, where they stopped at Martin's City brewpub in Lee's Summit. The chocolate milk stout did not disappoint. Then it was on to Springfield and then to Chicago.

An old XC roommate of Sylvie's, Ruby Kubicka, who lived outside Kalamazoo, picked her up near Chicago. Ruby had also offered to drive Sylvie to the XC for the job rendezvous with Hayley, and also for a rendezvous with E.J., who had finally ended his pouting silence to tell her Hayley wanted to talk.

Sylvie was especially glad to have heard from E.J., because she had emailed him dutifully every week

since she moved to L.A. three years ago, but he never responded. She knew, now more than ever, about the remarkably fragility of the male ego, but had wondered if he had forgotten about her. Sure, she could have convinced him to come west with her to L.A., that would have suited her just fine, but she didn't think it best for him. He needed to finish his degree (which he still hasn't done), and needed to find his own pattern (ditto).

Still, she mused that she might have underestimated him, particularly the power and range of what some called his "luck." Of course, most people using that term referred to various easy resolutions in his young life, but no one (aside from her) seemed aware that he radiated a field of luck around him. Her months with him were not only pleasant, and healing (after her break-up with Rex), but remarkably fortuitous . . .

Frankly she hoped that her return to the XC would result not just in paid work for Hayley but a reunion with E.J. But after Rex, she had built in several contingencies.

When she wasn't driving she tried to sleep and then to read further in Hayley's detective series. The books fell into three groups: there's the first book, unique; then the next group of six books, well-researched, intentionally different; then the last group of eight books, where, well, it seems like the author is trying unsuccessfully to kill off poor Niño!

She had also acquired several of the books in Spanish. She found these much more compelling, as if the language and the region fed off each other . . .

Wait. So why was Sylvie driving this Uhaul and not flying back to the SC? Probably because Sylvie grew up poor, and when she first learned about saving and investing, she was fascinated. So: when she won Heartwoods, she invested the prize money; extra bucks earned in college jobs, invested; moving to LA, she lived frugally, in a small apartment in a distant suburb . . .

And . . . she was terrified of flying! She would not disagree that she needed to be in control.

Her friend Ruby met them at a Starbucks west of Chicago, south of 55 and Damen. No point in Devi driving all the way to the Miracle Mile unnecessarily. Sylvie, of course, had made sure she had fulfilled her share of the drives before the early pick-up.

Only half-joking, she offered to sit in back, knowing she was dirty, greasy, and most likely smelly. But Ruby didn't seem to mind. She beamed at Sylvie, so happy to see her. While Sylvie half-dozed, Ruby chattered out her news: teaching third-graders was hard but fun. She and boyfriend Demetri are engaged; they had thought about getting married in the spring, and maybe would, but who knows with this virus thing . . . Had Sylvie heard about it? No.

Sylvia thought she had been efficient: she had arrived in Chicago, spent the night in Kalamazoo, arrived at the XC at 10 am ready to meet Hayley, in her office. Hayley was very glad to see her, but there was more that she wasn't sharing. Hayley fidgeted, then suggested they go out for a drink. They walked a short distance to a bar that had been renamed Dominatrix, for various reasons, but that didn't matter so much as that it was a dark, pleasant place and drinks were cheap.

Hayley seemed eager to down several drinks, while Sylvie politely nursed a solitary sangria. At the outset it seemed that Hayley had bad news: the pandemic had caused HBO to postpone the new show, although it allowed some preliminary funds to be spent. The more Hayley drank, the more impressed she was with Sylvie's quiet preparedness and resourcefulness. For instance, Sylvie talked about the "three phases" of the novels (something Hayley had never considered), and then talked about the influence of the Disney Zorro shows on the series (also something Hayley had never considered). Sylvie had ideas for further novels, including additional characters. Sylvie acknowledged the paradox of needing a male to lead the series, even if the strength of the stories could come from women. As Niño aged, perhaps he could take on a female assistant . . . She referenced the Harrington Steele tv show as an example. She further mused that not only would E.J. be an asset (she would use him to test the various South American hallucinagens referenced in the series) but also envisioned him filling a comedic role like Sargeant Garcia in the Zorro tv show! Fabulous!

Hayley was so enchanted that she was perhaps more generous than she expected: she offered Sylvie a large retainer, and a generous stipend to not only develop the tv series but also to continue the book series, with Hayley as the titular co-author. Fund-wise, Hayley used the HBO funds but also a fair amount of her own savings.

So it was that Sylvie left their

meeting feeling excited and positive, despite the negative news about the pandemic. She was due to rendezvous with E.J. at his apartment on Sylvan Street, enjoying the brief walk from campus to re-orient herself. She was only a few minutes early, but she saw him sitting on the porch, trying not to look like he was looking for her.

Their reconnection, like so much in their earlier relationship, was deceptively easy. Deceptive because, you see, Sylvie detected something additional, almost like an ozone of protection. That seems impossible, but when she thinks back, it is irrefutable that she was blessed with all kinds of surprising opportunities. Could he possibly be on the Influencer?!

Then she thinks, okay, there is all this talk about E.J. being the laziest man in the world, but also the luckiest. What if there is something to this "luck"?

For a few moments, her muse grows long: okay, if she were to become President, with E.J. the First Man, and something this virus hit the country . . . would E.J. be able to turn it?

Well, maybe not just "turn" it. Just sending it somewhere else would not be acceptable, unless, I don't know, he could send it to the Arctic where it would freeze and become inert?

She remembered something from her college days: on a shared fridge, magnetic letters had spelled out "Let go of what limits you." Over the days and weeks the letters got bumped and moved and lost, and eventually the slogan had changed to "Goof what limits you."

What if E.J., "the ultimate goof-ball," had that power?!

They had ordered a pizza from a new place in town. A long time had passed and no pizza, but E.J. was distracted by some humor he saw in it. Was the place's name in fact "Zeno's Pizza? Then, according to the famous paradox their pizza would never arrive, yet every measurable interval would have it closer and closer . . .

Sylvie would be more willing to ponder the paradox if she hadn't paid in advance, and wasn't so hungry. Fortunately, just as she opened the apartment door she heard the out-of-breath delivery boy climbing the stairs. She felt sorry for him, and gave him a few bucks as a tip.

She pretended to keep the pizza box away from E.J., saying that if she ate one piece toward him . . .

As they ate, she asked E.J. if he had thought at all about the virus?

"Not much," he admitted. "Mostly I was struck by that word, 'vaccine,' which sounded like 'vixene' when someone said it, you know, like the active form of 'vixen.' It got me thinking that my relationships with other women might have been less crazy if I had been 'vixenated.'"

Sylvie laughed. "My dear Watson, surely you know there are already two excellent vaccines? They're called 'observation' and 'wisdom!'"

"Easy for you to say, being a woman and all," E.J. retorted. "I think it was Captain Kirk who first observed that the human male doesn't have enough blood available to both be ready for sex and also to think."

"And sometimes he's lucky to have even one of these, eh?" she said, punching and then kissing him.

The viral pandemic did indeed

sweep over the country. Locally, the university closed down, 50th anniversary celebrations were postponed, and E.J. and Sylvie spent days and then weeks mostly happy in each other's company. Sylvie, of course, took the opportunity to plan for the HBO series and to outline and begin writing drafts of Niño stories.

She kept Hayley up to date on her work, and Hayley happily imagined a future where Sylvie took over everything Niño. Meanwhile, there was a talk about a co-writing nom de plume, or pseudónima. Sylvie, musing that she might engage E.J. as a co-writer or at least a plotter, liked Evie Silver, with its nod to Sylvie, E.J., and the virus.

Sylvie also wanted to engage a South American to help with plotting and perhaps develop a "simultaneous" Spanish version, rather than a traditional translation. Perhaps there might be an XC student or alum? Maybe someone with a rare disorder, so they could see if E.J. can cure it?

Someone like Rosario Rapidamente. More about her a little later.

And E.J. . . . played a lot of Tetris. He never did as well as that day in the Aristophanes office.

Coincidentally or not, E.J. and Sylvie stayed safe.

III.

Hayley found herself keeping an eye out, around trash day, to see if the boys across the street decide to dump "the robot." It's her little joke. But she thinks: could I redesign it to satisfy my sexual

desires, and then approach regular people for more simple needs? Is that a possible future of A.I.? And: is that a danger of what could happen between carbon-based and . . .

Lost in thought, there's a knock on the door. A female colleague, about her age, stands there, wearing a grey business suit but with a colorful blouse and a neck scarf, and also a big smile.

She says Hayley, you probably don't know me, but I'm Rosario Rapidamente. I teach in the Spanish department. I've been an admirer of your work the XC for quite some time, and also a big fan of the Niño books. When one of my students told me that you were the writer, well . . . I had to bring you a gift."

She reaches into a large, colorful bag and pulls out a bottle of La Diablada Duro Moscatel Pisco, an Argentinian brandy.

Delighted, Hayley waves her in. She ushers Rosario out on the back deck, says she'll be right back with two glasses.

She has forgotten all about that dumb robot.

Dan Madaj (RC 1982) was in the RC's third class, but it took him a while to graduate. Some unusual influences on his story: Michael Chabon's involvement with the improbable new Picard tv show, and reading Why The Reckless Survive, by Melvin Konner. When not working on the alumni journal, Dan hones his procrastination skills.

Alumni Interview:

Writing Then and Now:

Laura Thomas

What brought you to U-M and the RC? Were you a writer in high school and did you want to study writing in college?

I grew up in the Ann Arbor area and was lucky to have my dream school so close by. I was really happy to be admitted, to say the least! A close adult friend advised me to apply to the RC, and as my plan was to major in Russian Language and Literature, the RC's intensive, semi-immersion language program was the perfect fit for me. So it was language, not writing, that actually drew me to the RC. When I discovered you could actually major in creative writing, which at the time was not always available at the undergrad level, I was thrilled since I'd been writing fiction since I was a young kid. So the RC gave me the skills to pursue both my dreams - I ended up studying Russian for years to come, and did become a published writer.

I know you went on to grad school afterwards. Was that a logical progression or how did that come about?

I earned a Masters in Slavic Languages and Lit, and ended up living in what was still the Soviet Union for a semester. I was motivated solely by loving the subject matter; don't know if following your heart qualifies



A recent picture of Laura Thomas. She's getting ready to go for an outside run (since the gym was still closed due to the pandemic).

as logical. I also earned an MFA after I'd been teaching and writing for a while, which did seem more like a logical progression. I plunged into intensive fiction writing study at the time I felt the most ready to grow and take risks as a writer.

How long was it between grad school and your return to the RC? Did you return as director of creative writing, or did that happen later?

I joined the RC faculty in 1999 after

working in the private sector for 8 years or so. I became director in 2003. Definitely my dream job come true. I still can't believe how lucky I am to teach here.

How has the program changed and where do you see it going, if anywhere different? Are there good (or bad) changes down the road? Are there things you'd like to do (or have done) but couldn't, for various reasons?

One of the most exciting program changes in recent years was adding creative nonfiction and digital storytelling courses to our core curriculum of fiction and poetry writing tracks. This has allowed us to add faculty and courses that prepare students for jobs in media and the digital environment. Susan Rosegrant was one of the program's earliest nonfiction hires. Her journalism background and expertise has anchored the expansion of our nonfiction curriculum. More recently, noted authors Avi Steinberg, Van Jordan, and Aisha Sloane have joined our faculty to offer innovative courses in these disciplines. Another exciting change has come from the students themselves--of course! More students are realizing that writing fiction, poetry and creative nonfiction is not only artistically fulfilling, but practical. No matter what profession one goes on to do, being able to tell the story of the building you design, or the law you want to pass, or the client you are representing, is critical to achieving one's goals and dreams. So we've seen the number of creative writing majors more than double over the last 10 years or so, with many

double majoring in the sciences. This increase in our major enrollments is the most exciting and gratifying part of my job.

Future changes down the road include continuing to offer new classes and new ways to think about how print and digital environments impact our writing, and to continue to demonstrate our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in our hires, syllabi, and classroom environments.

What do you like most about the job, and what the least?!

There's nothing I don't love about this job. What I love most? Reading student's stories and essays, and discussing next steps in the drafting process. I'm amazed every day by the creativity and hard work students bring to their writing. It's a short answer, I know, but it's the absolute truth.

How has your writing changed over the years?

Well, to be honest, I wish it had changed more than it has! As in, gotten much better than it has. I've turned more to essay writing in the last few years, which is goal oriented and satisfying in ways that fiction--at least the way I write fiction--isn't. My writing process has changed quite a bit. I used to write through a first draft relatively quickly, although nothing about writing is all that quick. I used to need to reach an end point before I could revise with any confidence. Now I take more time to get down to the sentence level on

a first and second draft, to go a bit deeper earlier in the writing. It's a lot slower, but it's also more fun to get to know the characters at the pace they set, not that I set.

If you could go back and give your freshman self advice, what would it be?

Be kinder to yourself and others; and learn to dance or sing to give your body a truly joyful break from the world.

Tell us about your family: how did you meet your husband? What's up with your sons? Is there a background of art or writing in your older clan?

My husband was an architect when we met, and ours was an office romance—we met through work. Now he works as the finance director for Huron Valley Habitat for Humanity, navigating families and the organization through these rough times. I have two sons and a stepdaughter. My stepdaughter just gave birth to our second grandchild in March, so we are thrilled to have Annie, who's 3, and now Maxwell to grandparent! My eldest son is in the military, and my youngest is going into his junior year at Michigan. He's not in the RC, but he took RC Intensive Japanese his



Laura Thomas' high school yearbook picture, mid-80s, and a picture of her in 1989, after the Hopwood Ceremony; Laura won a Hopwood for short fiction during her senior year.

first year, so I bugged him endlessly with my memories of my RC Intensive Russian days! He may not have loved my constant reminiscing, but he sure did love his Japanese classes! Another RC win. As far as writers in my genealogy, my parents were avid readers and revered good writing, so I was definitely nurtured and supported by their passion for books. But I'm the first published writer in my clan.

If you think about retirement, do you have an idea of what you'd like it to be like?

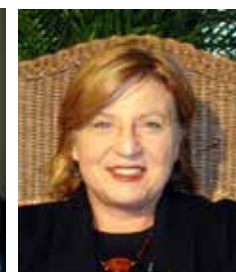
Assuming sound body and mind - no small assumption - I don't plan to retire from writing. I don't think one really does, not voluntarily, anyway. So I'll write, and in between sentences hang with family, fabric, and food, much like I do now during the summer.

A Brief History of RC Creative Writing

The RC's Creative Writing Program officially started in Fall 1970, growing out of a writing class Warren Hecht taught earlier that Winter. (He arrived in Ann Arbor in Fall 1969 with a writing grant and a degree in English from CCNY). Warren retired in December 2016 and is now Lecturer Emeritus.

Then as now, Program students combine disciplined writing with the study of literature, taking a minimum of four writing classes (seminars and tutorials) and a minimum of five upper level literature courses (including one studying either ancient or medieval writing).

The Program initially focused on fiction. Poetry was added in 1973 with the hiring of Andrew Carrigan, who taught English and writing for Ann



Warren Hecht, Andrew Carrigan, Ken Mikolowski, and Carolyn Balducci.

Arbor Public Schools. Carrigan returned to the Schools in 1975. Ken Mikolowski replaced Carrigan in 1977, and continued through retirement (Winter 2015). He is now Lecturer Emeritus.

Carolyn Balducci taught writing for children and young adults from 1977-2002.

Hired in 1999, RC Creative Writing alum Laura Thomas became head of the Program in 2003. Under Thomas's direction the program has grown (from about 30 to about 50 students), and has expanded a focus on community involvement, including local internships (826Michigan, Dzanc Books, Midwestern Gothic), writ-



Laura Thomas, Laura Kasischke, Susan Rosegrant, and Sarah Messer.

ers' teas, writers' workshops, and readings and "open mic" events.

Laura Kasischke, an RC Creative Writing alum, re-joined the RC faculty in Fall 2015 to teach poetry seminars. She is also Allan Seager Collegiate Professor of English at U-M.

Susan Rosegrant, an RC Creative Writing alum, has taught in the RC since 2008. She is also Program Head of the RC's First Year Seminar Program.

Program staff include Sarah Messer, a U-M alum and Hopwood winner, and Christopher Matthews, who joined the Program in 2017.

Lolita Hernandez retired in 2018, after 12 years as an RC Creative Writing lecturer.



Christopher Matthews, Lolita Hernandez.

Of course, others have taught in the Program over the years. including Alexander Weinstein for several recent years, and Darcy Lee Brandel and Ari Steinberg, last year. Creative Writing alum Elizabeth Schmuhl taught Freshman Seminar one recent semester, and Creative Writing alum Becca Pickus currently teaches at the RC.

Program News

Teaching. In Fall 2019-Winter 2020 two new U-M faculty taught in the RC Creative Writing Program: **Van Jordan**, and **Aisha Stone**. Jordan, Robert Hayden Collegiate Professor of English, has authored four collections. He received a Lannan Literary Award in Poetry in 2015. Stone, Helen Zell Visiting Professor in Creative Nonfiction, is the author of *Dreaming of Ramadi in Detroit* (1913 Press, 2017), which won CLMP's Firecracker award for Nonfiction in 2018. She received a 2020 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Broadening the foundational lit requirement. The Program is broadening the foundational literatures requirement (lit before

1600) beyond the traditional ancient/medieval lit (African-American lit, for example).

Emerging Writers Award. Since 2014 the RC Emerging Writers Award (funded by a writing alum) recognizes graduates "who demonstrate excellence in creative writing but have not previously received a writing award recognizing their writing achievements":

2020: Zofia Ferkel;
2019: Heather Young & Mariam Reda;
2018: Emily Müller;
2017: Ashley Bishel & Lauren Theisen;
2016: Alexander Miller & Sydney Morgan-Green;
2015: Angeline Dimambro & Vicky Szczepkowski;
2014: Allison Epstein.

Endnotes

One of the many pleasures of working on this issue was to be able to include photos from John Laswick, who took photos of some of us working on an issue of *Sandwich* back in the winter of 1972. John remembers it was 8 am, after an all-night layout session. Here's a picture he took of me (right) back then. (Part of my crazed appearance is due to a missing arm on my glasses: my glasses were actually taped to my forehead.)

In the photo below, Alan Wantajja concentrates on layout. You can see irrefutable proof that there was a lot of Coke use in the Quad in those days. The third photo shows three of members of the editorial team (me, Alan Wantajja, and Dennis Foon; not pictured: Michael Cooperstock).

Sandwich was an ancestor of this alumni journal, one of many early publications with RC roots. Many of this issue's contributors worked on or contributed to these and later publications, including the *RC Review*, now in its third decade!

Back then we assembled each issue manually, using pen and typewriter, scissors, glue, and tape. We would



then make electronic stencils, put each on the mimeograph machine, churn out copies (carefully copying on the backs to make double-sided

pages), and then later assembling and stapling. We were aided by the office's expert and amiable Captain Kirk and Scotty (by whom I mean Thelma Kirk and Scott Cummings).



Today the electronic pieces are stitched together via Adobe InDesign, and when retyping is required its usually on an iMac using Microsoft Word. All alien concepts to 1972 . . . but I think by the time 2020 is done, this will be the most alien of years any of us have known.

Anyway, I hope you are well, and hope to see you all back here next year!

Dan