



RC Alumni Journal 5



# RC Alumni



Fall 2021 • No. 5



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# Introduction

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

We feature RC alums and Creative Writing graduates from 50+ years of the University of Michigan Residential College, which opened its doors in 1967.

This issue, we again feature a brief interview with an RC alum: Susan Rosegrant. We also feature another of the student writing magazines, this one from October 1970.

Last issue we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the RC Creative Writing Program, which held its first class in Fall 1970. That was my second year in the RC, and my first in a single, up on 4th floor Greene.

Last issue I wrote about my visits to the Madrigal Lounge to ponder that younger version of myself, and to consider how (or if!) he had changed. These visits came to an abrupt halt in March 2020, when the pandemic started things shutting down.

I didn't return to East Quad or the Lounge until early September 2021, masked, proof of vaccination and a statement of health available to show from my phone. It was good to be back, and everything looked much the same, which was a great relief. Some things look the same on my side of things, but others were quite different: for one thing, my dear brother Michael had died in the interim.

Anyway . . . visit the RC Writers site for various posts and updates throughout the year ([sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters](https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters)), as well as to view PDFs of all journal issues.

If you'd like to financially support the journal, or the Emerging Writer Award, there are specific instructions on the next page. Thank you!

We look forward to seeing you next year, if not before!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke for the 'a'.

To financially support the journal:  
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 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. 131.

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 and by the Residential College.

Dan Madaj served as editor, etc.  
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Cranium fulcrumate added to retain foliage.

# Five Poems

Claire Denson

## What My Dog Told Me

Stuart said don't put your therapist  
in your poem, so my dog tells me

to take solace in small pleasures  
like the scent of dish soap. My dish soap

promises blueberry but smells  
like medicine kids spit out.

I would take my medicine if I thought  
it would bring joy. I scrape meat

from the pan into the trash. My dog says  
it's okay to buy food that I know

I won't eat. He tells me to settle for less  
then dips his head in the trash

to drag out his dinner. I tell him  
that if I punched a face, I'd sooner

break my hand. He tells me  
that I just need to practice. I tell him

I'm already picking on someone  
my own size and winning.

### How To Find What You're Looking For Within

A bullshit neighbor lent me a book on joy  
Something something The Secret To Happiness And Success  
And then he asked what connections I have for him to use  
The universe doesn't care about my feelings  
I wish I could be more like the universe  
I anticipate death like a distant wedding  
They will serve hors d'oeuvres at the funeral of dreams  
Ghosts in bowties delivering shrimp pâté  
Your father takes a wrong turn and drives off the mountain  
There is no one to lead you to your grave  
We're always so far away  
I want to deny the universe  
I'm resting my feet on the book on joy  
What fine elevation

### Splitting The Cracks

I want to call its flaked limbs dead—  
the tree outside that knocks  
against the fogged glass. Knuckles  
drier than bone, easier to snap.

I want to snap your bones  
while we lie in bed, make two  
out of one, so you can bend  
in new ways. I want to give you

more bones, unmerge the merged,  
a chance to begin again. We can  
make flour out of anything  
if we grind it down. Bone flour,

bark flour. The reaching tree  
outside survives tall, protesting  
its barrenness. In this bed I'm bare,  
stripped down, wintered raw,

my touch cold as the pane  
against the branch's caress.  
You hold out my hand, expose  
each finger, slip yours through

my cracks, and when I think to ask  
if the morning makes your bones heavy,  
makes them creak like dry wood  
under work boots, you tell me it's time

for breakfast, let's make pancakes, let's  
stay in. I roll back my palm, say I'll make  
the batter. I taste your teeth  
from your kiss, your bones

in my mouth. Pancake made of bone. Pancake  
tasting like kisses. Eating pancakes of you, with  
you, toothless. The wind shoves the hard  
crown of the tree and it pounds down

this time, no longer asking  
but begging: Let me in. I turn my back  
but you, you reach  
over me, you crack the pane.

## **Tender Poem**

I saw a treadmill in the grass  
when I passed on the train

the morning after we saw  
the two baby deer scuttling

in the street and then a larger deer  
dead. You said you once stared

at your dad's pearl-handled  
pistol, turned it over and over

in your palm. When I said  
my hands get sad, that they

get so sad the feeling travels  
up and I can't move, you lifted

my arms in the shower one  
by one tender as a mother

and I swear every single time I have  
an emotion I forget about the world

before it. Listen. When we saw  
the fawns running in circles

you promised they were happy  
to be free; I tried

to memorize your hands  
on the steering wheel. Because

at night when I hold on harder  
than I'd like to admit, you don't

flinch, just rub your thumb  
against my fist and tell me

that sure maybe you'll die  
soon but probably not

and that it helps to remind myself  
always keep looking at my feet.



## Wedding Vows First Draft

I sent my wisdom teeth in the mail  
labeled from the tooth fairy  
but my friends received empty envelopes  
with holes punched through. I have since learned

it is illegal to mail body tissue  
through USPS. I think about those teeth,  
the one shaped like a dancer  
with its molar roots tilted sideways

like little ballet legs, the one that crumbled  
into three, each part bloody  
and rotten. Who holds them tonight?  
Lying in the surgeon's chair

I sobbed over Imagine playing  
through the speakers. It's a lie,  
I said. I understand that I was high  
but I still can't shake the feeling

of my pain ignored. When the surgeon  
said it's over I asked for my teeth back  
and he gawked at me like I was the first  
to request a return. Has he previously

thrown them all out in some waste bin  
labeled toxic? I saved one tooth for years  
until parting with it today as a gift  
to the one I love. I like that he holds

what could be my remains. My last  
wisdom tooth, the nicest one, its softness  
somewhere between pearl and diamond,  
and more rare than both. I wrapped it

in a plastic tooth-shaped tooth-coffin  
that I've saved with the treasure-spirit  
of an old woman who stows away  
a family heirloom for that wistful

one day. Is romance to be found  
in dentistry? Is love a form of letting  
go? All I know is myself, I think  
as I take his hand.

*Claire Denson (English, Creative Writing, 2018) earned an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she taught English and served on the editorial staff for The Greensboro Review. At Michigan, she was an alum of the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program and won the Caldwell Poetry Prize. Her writing appeared in Xylem, Fortnight, Café Shapiro, Hel[icon], and RC Review. Claire now reads for The Adroit Journal and her writing appears in Booth, Massachusetts Review, Salt Hill, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Hobart, Sporklet, Ghost City Review, Juke Joint, Stirring, and elsewhere. She serves as a publicity assistant for Atmosphere Press, lives in the NYC metro area, and is working on a collection of poems. More about Claire at [clairedenson.com](http://clairedenson.com).*

*"What My Dog Told Me" was first published in The Summerset Review, "Splitting the Cracks" and "Wedding Vows First Draft" in Booth, "How To Find What You're Looking For Within" in Juke Joint, and "Tender Poem" in Stirring: A Literary Collection.*



## Two Prose Poems

Peter Anderson

### action

Objects at rest only appear to be. The invisible world has never been so busy. The air is on the move, the unknowable more restless than ever. Energetic fields, itinerant particles looking for a subatomic embrace, everything must go. Leave home before they knock down the doors. The streets are filled with demonstrators. Lethal objects describe arcs as they hurtle toward their intended hurt. Everyone's a target at a time like this. Elements slide off the periodic table and jump out the window of the classroom, triggering the teacher's PTSD. He's back in the jungle now, an enemy ambush. His lawsuit's stalled in the docket and his lawyer wants a piece of the film rights. The director never says CUT only ACTION. Again and again and again, but no one moves because there is no director. Not that anyone can see. Background has been told to never look into the camera. But the naked eye is not as sharp as the manmade lens. It picks up everything. All that stillness, mimicking death, betrayed by a breath.



### cluster

There's a higher incidence in at-risk populations, those who can't afford to move out of the path. Are the numbers coincidental — the randomness of that word concealing its teeth — or a sign of something darker. A mass of drawings taped to the refrigerator. Dotted lines of gunfire. Black brushstrokes landing on a tree and picking it clean. Berries bending the bush's branches below. A child's bouquet of stolen flowers for an empty house. The fridge smells where there used to be food. The calendar has fallen off the wall. The days of the week are crowded into one corner and circled there. Dreams, from youngest to oldest, huddle together in an upstairs closet as door after door, in room after room, is kicked open.

*Peter Anderson (RC 1972) lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. His recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Unbroken, Sublunary Review, Flora Fiction Literary Magazine, Better Than Starbucks, MoonPark Review, Rat's Ass Review and the American Journal of Poetry. His plays are available online at the Canadian Play Outlet.*





## The Braided Novel: Bursting the Bounds of Time and Perceptions

Amy Gustine

My friend, the writer Paul Many, says that a novel is a big, baggy thing. Sometimes he says this with pleasure—meaning he's grateful for all the characters, events, ideas, and settings a novel provides room to explore. Sometimes he says this with exhaustion and confusion—meaning he's exasperated by all the characters, events, ideas, and settings a novel requires him to explore. It is indeed the very capaciousness and boundless flexibility of the novel that delights and intimidates virtually all fiction writers at some point—or at many points if you're like Paul and me.

One way to confront this perplexing infinity of options is to decide on a type of plot. Searching the Internet

will yield all kinds of choices (rags to riches, overcoming the monster, voyage and return) and readers will be familiar with the concept of genres (mystery, romance, thriller) and literary types (the bildungsroman, the fictionalized biography, the quest). Once a writer selects a kind of plot, they at least have a rough outline to begin filling in, and for some, this works well. But often this approach is too formulaic, especially for the literary novel. Many writers start with an idea or theme—like wanting to write about fame's dark side—or with a type of person that fascinates them, or a place that has a hold on their heart. From there, they proceed through trial and error, letting plot

unfold in fits and starts.

This is how I've always worked, but it's a time-consuming, frustrating process, and so I've long been interested in thinking about how to spot my errors, and see new possibilities, faster. That led me to begin looking not at what happens in the novels I love—because my book is not going to be able to borrow plot points from other writers—but rather at how things happen. In other words, I began studying the structure of novels. Soon it became apparent that the overall shape of a novel is largely determined by the number of points of view used and how the author handles time. I began to wonder if developing a taxonomy based on these features might prove useful to writers trying to plan a new book.

Two novel shapes already part of the common vernacular are frame stories and braids. Both of them are defined by their number of discrete narrative threads. Frame stories embed one or more narratives inside an enclosing narrative that is typically little more than a “set up,” or situation in which the primary story is being told. The frame itself usually has very little or no plot. Some classic frame novels are *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Heart of Darkness*.

Braids are very different. A braided novel weaves together more or less equal, but separate, narrative threads which all feature significant plots and fully developed protagonists. The narratives are typically told in an alternating pattern, either chapter by chapter or part by part. One of the most famous braids is Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*. The novel alternates

describing one day in the life of three women using third-person limited point of view (not an omniscient unified point of view). The point of view characters are Virginia Woolf in 1923, Laura Brown in 1949, and Clarissa Vaughn in 1999.

It's less common to braid together two time periods that both feature the same protagonist, or point of view character, but one novel that does this to great effect is Darin Strauss' *Chang & Eng*, a fictionalized memoir about a pair of real-life conjoined twins born in Siam in 1811. Using Eng as a first person narrator, Strauss tells the story of Chang and Eng's life by dividing it into two time periods. Starting in chapter one, Eng relates events from 1842 to 1874 in the odd-numbered chapters and events from 1811 to 1842 in the even-numbered chapters. In this way, thread two “catches the tail” of thread one. The structure might be thought of as a time-braided circle.

But frames and braids don't come close to capturing the variety of forms that can be defined by how point of view and chronology are used in a novel. To stick with a textile metaphor, I dubbed novels with one consistent point of view and a single story told in chronological order “ribbons.” For those in which multiple points of view and time periods are used to tell a web-like narrative that has no predictable alternating pattern of point of view or time period, I chose the term “patchwork.” Unfortunately, the textile metaphor doesn't work well for all the forms. For novels whose events are described in chronological order, but each chapter features a new point

of view, I use the term “relay novel” because the story is narrated like a relay race, each character handing off the baton of perspective to someone new in order to move forward.

I’ve always been a fan of forms that use multiple points of view like the braid, patchwork and relay. They allow the writer to operate from the primacy of each individual narrator’s psychology and implicitly recognize that we are all trapped in our own limited view of life. At the same time, they explode this limitation by putting multiple perspectives side by side, implicitly challenging the legitimacy of any one person’s knowledge and perceptions.

Novels that relate narrative threads in different time periods similarly burst the bounds of life, allowing readers to experience multiple eras and yet one cohesive narrative. When the narrative threads feature the same point of view character, they dramatize the way our past infuses, and sometimes dominates, our present.

However, juggling points of view and time periods can also be intimidating. Rather than helping narrow a writer’s choices, it expands them. Once I can write a chapter that takes place in any time period and from any point of view, how do I decide when to switch time periods and which character to use as the locus of perception? When should I actually switch time periods and when should I employ exposition or flashback instead?

There’s no way to answer these questions in general. Each novel makes unique demands on the writer, and every writer would approach

a given plot, character, or theme differently. That’s why I decided the best way to understand how various forms work was to interview writers on their process. Two who tackle the challenge of multiple narrators and time periods with particular nerve and sagacity are Michael Zapata, author of *The Lost Book of Adana Moreau*, and Michigan’s own Caitlin Horrocks, author of *The Vexations*.

*The Vexations* is about the real-life cantankerous, avant-garde composer Erik Satie, his sister Louise, his brother Conrad, Satie’s one-time girlfriend Suzanne Valadon, and Phillipe, a heavily fictionalized character who stands in for Satie’s friends. Horrocks uses all five characters’ perspectives (what I call psychological point of view) and renders them in both first and third person (i.e. grammatical point of view). Though the alternating pattern of these perspectives isn’t precisely regular, it’s balanced enough for me to call it a braid, but the chronology of the novel is irregular enough to push toward the patchwork category. The first chapter is set in 1925, after Erik has died; the second chapter is set in 1872; and the third chapter is set in 1944. From there, the book settles into a primarily chronological approach, but Louise’s sections juggle her present with long descriptions of her past, so it has another layer of chronology at work.

When I spoke to Horrocks, I started by asking how she came to use multiple perspectives.

*The initial conception was that the book was an “Erik” book—we were just going to follow him. Pretty quickly that felt claustrophobic. I had things*

*I wanted to say about music and the world that Erik didn’t let me say, and Erik is not a conventionally sympathetic or heroic person. I was worried about how much time the reader or I could spend with him. I also had so many questions about Erik’s life choices, the same questions people asked when he was alive, so the book’s form emerges from a central failure. I didn’t know how to spend that much time with Erik and make him fully sympathetic, intelligible and articulate, and capable of saying all the things I wanted this book to say.*

Of course, it’s not a failure. What Horrocks managed is a triumph. She found a way to write about Satie despite the challenges his personality created. Also, her answer emphasizes how point of view braids, patchworks, and relay novels are distinct from novels told in the omniscient point of view. An omniscient narrator is a consistent, identifiable authorial voice that remains so throughout the novel. Omniscient narrators can access all characters’ thoughts at all times, dipping into the inner lives of major and minor characters in the same scene. As the all-knowing author, an omniscient narrator carries the burden of interpreting even the most inscrutable characters. By using first-person or third-person limited perspectives instead, Horrocks avoids this expectation and instead refracts Satie largely through the effect he had on friends and family. They too didn’t understand his irascible temperament and uncompromising obsessions, but we get a sense of what knowing him felt like, as well as a peek directly into his mind when

Horrocks does use his perspective.

Once Horrocks decided that a book from Satie’s point of view only wouldn’t work, she gave into the impulse to write bits from other characters’ perspectives and see what came of it.

*As the writer, I found that Louise saved this book. I started writing her in the first person. That was not a conscious decision. She just showed up and started talking about her life in Argentina. A lot of big-picture things about the book—that we’re moving around in time, that she has this sort of retrospective angle, the voice—that stuff just started happening. I had to wrestle with whether I was wrecking the book. Should I make her point of view third-person like the other sections? Stop her talking about life in Argentina? I was stuck on an Erik section and she showed up and had a lot to say, and had a voice I got right away, so I stopped distrusting it and leaned into it. On the level of getting through a project, if you have multiple points of views, and someone is not going well, you can hop to someone else and see if they get you unstuck. As for readers, they get different perspectives on similar events.*

Along with these advantages come some challenges. Once you include a particular point of view, there can be pressure to revisit it. It’s not about predictability or equality, but a certain balance does need to be struck, like playing a game of Jenga. For Horrocks, this problem crept in with respect to both Conrad (Erik and Louise’s older brother) and Suzanne (Satie’s one-time girlfriend and a painter in her own right).

Suzanne shows up once in Satie's life and then is gone, so for a lot of iterations of the book there was one Suzanne chapter squatting like a toad in the middle of the draft, and it kept getting longer and longer, as I tried to make it contain everything I wanted to say about her. I tried to justify that because it was true to Erik's life, but my editor didn't think it worked. He thought if you're investing this much in Suzanne, not just as Erik's girlfriend, but for herself, as a painter, presumably if you've done something right, the reader would have enough curiosity about her that they would want to see her again. So the second Suzanne section was a really, really late addition. I started reading a biography of her that had not been available earlier and there was a reference to her working with gallery owners to bail out her son so he could keep painting and they could all keep making money. That got me. It felt like a fascinating conversation. She loves her son, she needs his money, and cares so much about her own art but can't make a profit.

Horrocks has the delightful humility to admit that her editor helped identify the need for a second Suzanne section, and that the section's content involved a certain degree of luck—the publication of a new Valadon biography.

With respect to Conrad, the challenge of including his perspective in a balanced way arose from a different set of facts. A conventional man who worked as a chemist at a perfume manufacturer, Conrad married a woman he loved and had no children. His life didn't offer much drama.

*I wanted all three siblings' perspectives in the book, but Louise and Erik had much more eventful lives. In considering what to put on Conrad's plate, there was a moment when I thought, Maybe all of WWI? I was thinking about what the perfume industry was like during WWI. The more research I did the more I realized that the characters lived through historical events like we do—that they cared, but none of them served. They went about their daily lives. So then it became, what are the important moments for him to see, and are there things that I can take off Louise or Erik's plates and put on his?*

This desire for balance in the use of point of views led Horrocks to relate much of Louise's and Erik's lives through Conrad's perspective. Though it started as a logistical strategy, in the end Conrad proved to be the ideal eyes and ears of the reader. We relate to him precisely because he is an ordinary person and—like readers—must navigate Satie's troubled genius without truly understanding it. Conrad also functions as the ideal perspective to relate some of Louise's most dramatic upheavals.

*There are situations and moments in Louise's life that she doesn't want to think about. She's closed the door on certain things, and allowing Conrad to relate them made sense.*

Horrocks' strategy highlights that, contrary to what we might assume, the character best suited to "filter" an event is not necessarily the person most emotionally impacted by it. Sometimes creating emotional distance makes a character more

sympathetic, not less. Related directly by her in first person, some of Louise's more dramatic moments may have had the ring of self-pity, but when they are narrated through the eyes of her cool-headed brother—who benefits from the gender imbalances of nineteenth century French society—Louise's tragedy breaks the reader's heart.

*While we read historical fiction, we see the characters through our own century. We can't discard that, and I was aware that readers can look at Louise and ask why she didn't fight harder. It's easy to judge her in accordance with what we think her options should have been, or what we think her outlook and ambitions should be. And I wanted to be realistic in the book about what women's options really were, and what they would have had the wherewithal to envision or pursue. I think switching between perspectives helped me get at that.*

I also asked Horrocks how she selected the events themselves.

*So much of fiction writing is about generating events and applying pressure. A novel based on real people was the opposite problem. It's more like writing creative nonfiction. The plot is being constructed out of existing material. At first, when the whole book was still going to be from Erik's perspective, I thought of the plot kind of like a discography—imagining the Satie fan reading the book, and asking which of the greatest hits do we have to see, picking pieces that represented certain career stages. As far as his personal life, he truly did only have one romantic re-*

*lationship that anybody knows about, so that's the one I included.*

Once Horrocks decided to use multiple points of view, she realized she'd solved another problem: a linear dramatization of Satie's musical career risked being of interest only to a small audience of Satie super fans. In this way, a formal decision led to new plot lines. That's why point of view is such a foundational choice when writing: it determines everything from tone to plot to theme.

However, when expanding the story to other perspectives, Horrocks also had to carefully avoid redundancy, so she chose points of view in part for the fresh material they offered. That is why she created the character of Phillipe, someone who could stand in for all of Satie's often frustrated friends, but specifically for aspiring artists who walk away from the risks of art in exchange for a stable, prosperous, conventional life—in other words, the opposite of what Satie himself chose.

A pitfall to multiple point of view novels that is particularly risky in the even-handed form of the braid is character charisma. Whenever more than one perspective is offered, it's likely readers will tend to like one character better than the others, but authors don't want readers impatiently skimming chapters waiting for a return to the character they like better.

And it's not just a character's personality that can create a special affinity. Sometimes it's created with the narrative technique. For example, in *The Vexations*, Louise is the

only point of view rendered in first person and Horrocks agrees that the grammatical point of view switch gives readers a sense that Louise is the controlling intelligence of the book.

*Readers have told me it's "Louise's book" and it has seemed as though that's purely because her sections are first person. That's the signal that she's the character to care about, that she's the character the book belongs to. When I was writing, I underestimated the magnetic pull of first person point of view. I get why she's the heart of the book for readers, but I underestimated how much the first person point of view did that work, even when I didn't mean it to.*

Michael Zapata's novel *The Lost Book of Adana Moreau* also uses a braided structure to tell multiple narratives in different time periods. Instead of the challenge being how to deal with the inscrutable reality of a historical person, however, for Zapata the challenge was working with ideas about the unseen universe and the lost narratives of oppressed cultures. His main fictional presents are twofold. The first narrative thread spans 1916-1933 and tells the story of Maxwell Moreau, a boy in New Orleans whose father is a Black pirate and whose mother is a Dominican novelist. The second narrative thread is set in late 2004 and early 2005. It tells the story of Saul, a young man in Chicago whose grandfather has just died. Saul finds instructions among his grandfather's things to send a manuscript to Maxwell Moreau and there begins a quest to find the missing stranger.

Zapata tells these threads in third person, past tense. However, this skeletal description doesn't capture the fractal nature of the text. In several ways, Zapata stretches voice, refusing to be bound by conventional approaches. First, he cuts a straightforward close third person point of view with an audacious biblical or epic tone. This tone is created with two main strategies: referring to characters by their role or background (e.g. the Dominicana, the pirate, his mother) and using unconventional formatting (e.g. in the sentence, "The End came exactly as she knew it would.").

Zapata also stretches voice by defying the expectations of consistency most Americans impose on point of view. For example, in Part One of the novel, the reader has access to Maxwell's thoughts, his parents' thoughts, the community's thoughts, and a minor character's thoughts. There is also an effaced authorial voice that takes over at points, such as when three-year-old Maxwell wanders the city. "He liked sound and light and he followed it everywhere, like how the ancient Hebrews followed celestial clues and iconographic fever dreams in the desert." I asked Zapata about his inspirations for these bold approaches to voice and point of view and he attributed it primarily to his bilingual, multi-cultural background.

*My dad's family is from Ecuador and my mom's family is Lithuanian Jewish. I'm always interested in family origin stories, how time distorts the way we think about the past, makes it either a myth, or people get erased. Thinking*

*about people like the Dominicana or the last pirate of the world who comes from a lineage of escaped slaves, I became interested in the way time affects language. So that was intentional, having the first chapter have that sensibility that we're going to traverse a decade or so, but also as a familial origin story. If I did have an overreaching idea about structure and time, and what it would feel like reading it, it would be how do I slam together the American sensibility of the way time and story works with the Latin American approach.*

*The through-line metaphor is multiplicity and parallel universes. It made sense to me thematically after I had a first draft. There's no way I could have implanted that early on. The narrative distance and switching felt really comfortable to me. We're speaking very generally of course, but take Clarice Lispector who is Brazilian. She writes very modernist, but the wandering her characters are able to do even in short stories takes the breadth of narrative distance. I re-read her short story "Report on the Thing" and it's first person, but inside of her singular voice, she's talking about time, the universe, clocks, inhabiting distance in really masterful ways. What feels untraditional in American literature can almost be considered a traditional aspect of Latin American literature, and Jewish literature does some similar things with the interiority of monologue.*

*I had an editor who was graceful and saw the vision of what that could look like further than I could. The book is about parallel universes, multiplicity, and erasures, so when we don't hear from these community voices, what sort of erasure do we get? In American novels with only one point of view and one*

*time period, I feel like you're centering so much on one individual, and it feels like a design of empire. If you're telling a story that is coming from a place of imperialism, you are going to have these big conflicts, and it's going to be centered on a small group of people or one person. That's such a loss for the vastness of world literature and the possibilities of story telling.*

While Zapata is a fan of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, probably the most anthologized Latin American fiction writer in American publications, his main inspirations are less well-known in the United States.

*The book that transformed the way I think about literature is 2666 [by Roberto Bolaño]. It's about a thousand pages long, and I consider it the sustained masterpiece of the twentieth century. It's so expansive in narrative distance and point of view. Suddenly minor characters will get a voice briefly. It's broken up into five books that feel completely different—different points of view, different narrative tensions, different genres. Before reading that book I really struggled with what it meant to try to be a writer. That book so expanded the possibility of literature. I would have it on my desk all the time, read a chapter or a sentence just to feel like it was okay to do what I want, to have more possibility than I previously imagined.*

Zapata, whose mind is a great machine of association across cultures, times and subjects, also pushes the pliancy of language by allowing characters to speak in lengthy monologues and relate the plots of

other novels within the main narrative threads. This injects a sense of first person voice into the two third person main narratives and creates plots nested inside one another like Matryoshka dolls. When I asked him about this technique, Zapata invoked the frame novel.

*There's a short story "Passion in the Desert" by Balzac. It starts off with a classical frame in which the story is being told by someone else. I've always loved that as an intuitive way to enter a story. I knew right away that Maxwell and Saul wouldn't be first person because there would be characters throughout who would be telling them stories in first-person. This is still how in many places in the world stories are told. Literature for me started at the dinner table, not with books. I was fortunate to be at the intersection of Jewish storytelling with my grandfather and my dad from Ecuador. They tell something they call "cauchos" which means "rubber," but it's a stand in for "jokes." These are jokes that last for forty-five minutes. It has one purpose, punchline or scene, but it stretches on, and the teller is inhabiting multiple point of views, and telling it largely in third person. Inhabiting multiple points of view always felt easier in Spanish. I write in English, but the sentence structures and language I think about feels like it's in translation, as if someone had translated this from Spanish. English is a beautifully elastic language, but we have all these narrative rules that never really made sense to me, and an industry that reinforces all these rules. When Spanish literature gets translated, people sometimes knock it as flowery. I think a*

*lot of that is a misinterpretation on the elasticity of Spanish inhabiting time and point of view. I really understood how stories were contextualized from these first person stories at the dinner table, and how people would quip in, there'd be seven people talking, but someone would control the story. You have these oral traditions around the world. There's so much discussion about whether the "novel is dead," which feels really irrelevant to me. The vast majority of storytelling happens between business partners, or whatever. My dad was a jewelry caster. He'd talk with other immigrants over lunch. Humans are storytelling machines, and the novel is one version of that. It limits the novel when it doesn't inhabit the way storytelling is contextualized and works for most people.*

Like Horrocks, Zapata manages the complex switches in time and point of view partially by labeling. The book is divided into long parts rather than chapters. Each one is titled with a descriptive phrase that suggests the focus of the events in that part and provides the year or years they take place, for example, "Lost City October 2005."

*The geography of this book felt like putting [chapter] numbers would stop a thought. I hoped each part felt like a complete thought. For me numbering and chapter breaks would have interrupted the sensibility of going back and forth in time.*

Within each part, Zapata does use exposition, flashback, and long monologues, and he manages the entering into and transitioning out of

these narrative modes all with section breaks (i.e. white space). When I asked him about where he chose to break sections, he once again looked past the conventional models and went afiel, this time to the visual arts.

*There's a photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson who influences how I think about writing. With Cartier-Bresson each photograph says one thing, builds to a decisive moment, feeling, or impression. I did want to break with white space each section because I wanted each to feel like a decisive moment. Not to be confused with epiphanies, but something decisive that would then be carried over as an impression by the reader.*

As rich and wonderful as multiple point of view novels are, and as freeing as it can be to inhabit different time periods within the same book, this approach doesn't suit all stories. Sometimes, one point of view and one chronological narrative thread are called for to create a singularity of perception or experience. But keeping the advantages and pitfalls of var-

ious forms before us can help speed along the trial and error process of writing a novel. What Horrocks' and Zapata's beautiful work proves to us is that in the early stages, a writer does best not to commit to any one form, but to play with voices and time periods, and be ready to accept what the process so generously offers.

*Amy Gustine (RC 1991) is the author of the story collection You Should Pity Us Instead (Sarabande Books, 2016) which received starred reviews in Publishers Weekly, Kirkus, and Booklist. The New York Times Book Review called the collection an "affecting and wide-ranging debut" and it appeared on many "best of" lists, including the San Francisco Chronicle's "Best of 2016: 100 Recommended Books." Amy's fiction has also been published in several journals, received special mention in the Pushcart Prize anthology, and been awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award for 2016. Amy currently lives in Toledo, Ohio.*

# Three Poems

Caitlin Cowan

## Fermata for Early Summer

May 2020

Let the last hour of daylight lengthen until it is a stadium  
tuned to a low cheer. We are sick and nowhere, lawns mowing themselves  
in their ironed Sunday clothes. All is ritual without reward, we are our own  
reward: balloons inflating and deflating, each breath a party so good  
we call the cops on each other. I do not dream of labor, though someone  
has to lace up and lope onto the field. We need something to watch,  
some drama to keep the house tidy. Reorganize the cupboards, mate  
the heaped shoes. The cut grass sings its one green pain into the window's ear.  
Our neighbors know what it means. In morning's first hour, everything  
still seems possible. Tonight is much more certain. Outside, the tree  
whose name I can't bear to learn turns its red leaves up: a child  
with jammy hands, crying *messy*. The sky glowers. Not a word.

## Portrait of the Only Child as Bad Penny

The therapist listens to my autobiography and says  
*you are very resilient*. Let me live up to that. The zodiac

gives me a poisonous tail and a hole in the ground  
to keep my soft insides soft—let me be

as formidable, as balanced as all that. A bad tattoo  
of a good idea: serpent destroying herself

back to life, let me satellite my head a little  
to drink up one last punchline, a final sqawk.

In deep winter, let me be the squirrel scrambling  
up the jack pine and the snow sparkling down as it tries.

Give me a chance to come back again, weed that looks  
like a flower that looks like a weed, insisting between

the brick pavers: I belong. Let me be the bad penny,  
bronzed to oblivion, just north of worthless, tossed

on a nightstand. God, rid me of this loneliness. Multiply  
me. Give me as much of myself as you can.



## Letter to My Long Distance Lover in Which We're Ross & Rachel

Russell Stover and the other women you preferred:  
on the counter of Hudson News, a box. There is no love,  
just a card you made out with a stranger's pen.  
When we get back, no monkeys watch us make love  
to your answering machine. You won't travel  
in the lonely country of me. I bring home Moët  
like Rachel should have, wear its cage like a muzzle.  
I stayed on the plane is your middle name. I literally weep  
on its literal wings, the seams. We take a break like they did—  
cowardice and canned laughter fill the hours, commercials  
squeaking *please just love me* (front and back). The break:  
watching him sleep on eighteen fringed pages  
but he isn't. Awake, all the babies are only bad dreams—  
the icicles weep like old mothers, and it must be spring.

*Born and raised outside Detroit, Caitlin Cowan (English and Creative Writing, 2008) earned a PhD in English from the University of North Texas and an MFA in Creative Writing from the New School in New York City before returning to the Midwest. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared in The Rumpus, New Ohio Review, Missouri Review, SmokeLong Quarterly, and the Rappahannock Review, among other outlets. Her work has received support from the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and elsewhere. She has been the winner of the Littoral Press Poetry Prize, the Mississippi Review Prize, the Ron McFarland Prize for Poetry, and an Avery Hopwood Award. She has taught writing at UNT, Texas Woman's University, and Interlochen Center for the Arts. She is the Associate Poetry Editor for Pleiades and serves as the Chair of Creative Writing at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. Caitlin writes regularly about the intersection of poetry and popular culture at PopPoetry.*

*"Fermata for Early Summer" was originally published in Salt Hill (2021), "Letter to My Long Distance Love" in THRUSH Poetry Journal (2020), and "Portrait of the Only Child as Bad Penny" in Small Change Journal.*

## Calumet Morning, Brown Earth Organ

Mike Parsons



*Mike Parsons (Scandinavian Studies, 1973) has a J.D. from the University of Tennessee, 1978. Mike worked as a lawyer, and is now retired, living in Nashville, Tennessee. He once stood behind Emmylou Harris in the concession line at a local theatre.*

# Two Poems

Carmen Bugar

## Mourning Dove eggshell

Mourning doves nest everywhere here,  
I know them by their longing songs  
Turning the midday into a thought  
About being elsewhere in feelings,

Or up there, in the mind of questions  
Of how the two of us and our children  
Could settle in one place or another,  
Where we would somehow feel at ease.

The same cooing music brings me back  
To the ground though, and settles me  
Like the voice of someone I love  
Calling my name for reassurance

That I am still around, within reach.  
This Easter Saturday the doves left  
A glossy white, half-shell in my path  
Outside the kitchen door, in the grass:

An offering of news that their chicks  
Now hatched around the garden.  
I took it for a scattered petal of magnolia  
At first, a wind whim, but in my hand

I saw it: a hint of happiness unseen.  
I turned the eggshell over in my palms  
To our children's soft ahhs and oohs, and read  
The doves' signs in their delighted smiles.

Easter 2021

## Morning in the garden

I

Today's sky glows in the distance  
like a child waking up from restful sleep,  
the snow on tree crowns has a rosy hue.  
Now the sun is changing ink as I walk  
from room to room, looking  
through curtains; the bright light  
of day turns the shoveled road to silver,  
making mountains out of mounds.  
Overnight, the snow on the cherry tree  
grew into round petals, opaline almost.

II

A cardinal, blood red, royal,  
sings at the very top of the pitch pine,  
the melody unfurls in the pure air,  
reaches to the roofs of houses  
warm under the snow, down  
to the opened window, where I stand  
to receive his ancient, thrilling language  
that sounds me through and through.  
The cardinal's song is now a river,  
the ice film on the maple trees glistens.

This winter the snow in the garden  
 rises like soft bread dough.  
 Out there in the city a cellist plays  
 her instrument in a shop window,  
 a violinist tunes her violin in another;  
 ambulances wail, life seeps out past  
 canisters of air, adrenaline injected in the heart,  
 the intravenous needles meant to rescue  
 that one final breath. How does the world go on,  
 how will it live past this gruesome year  
 of death that stamped its syllable on us,  
 who receive the music through thick glass.

February 8, 2021, written on the one-year anniversary of  
 the first deaths from Covid.

*Carmen Bagan (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), and Releasing the Porcelain Birds (2016). She has also published a memoir, Burying the Typewriter (2012), which won the Bread Loaf Conference Prize for Nonfiction, and a critical study, Seamus Heaney and East European Poetry in Translation: Poetics of Exile (2013). She teaches at the Gotham Writers Workshop in NYC and lives in Long Island. Bagan was the 2018 Helen DeRoy Professor in Honors at U-M. She was made a George Orwell Prize Fellow in 2017. In September, Lilies from America: New and Selected Poems, which has won the Poetry Book Society Special Commendation, will be published by Shearsman Book.*

*"Morning in the Garden" first appeared on the Oxford University Press Blog.*

## Three Poems About Music

Mike Parsons

### The Yellow Album

We were beneath the yellow sun  
 shining on the yellow hair  
 that flowed past her shoulders.

She wore a yellow dress,  
 legs and arms and hands and feet  
 bare to the sun.

We spun in a yellow eddy  
 on our blanket raft  
 floating in a green sea  
 dotted with dandelions and daffodils.

We heard yellow music  
 and laughed about the yellow things.  
 Yellow ripples filled the air  
 when we held each other.

Our hearts glowed yellow.  
 Our raft touched the yellow shore.  
 We held hands and walked,  
 and the yellows faded to straw,  
 then beige,  
 and we fell through into brown.

### Bill's Story

June 2, 1965

She looked at me, for a moment,  
before she threw the ring into the river below.  
I think she said, "Sorry,"  
but my heart was falling with the ring,  
into the muddy water.

We wanted out.  
But out meant different things.  
For me, out was anywhere else,  
anywhere that wasn't this godforsaken patch of dust and bugs.  
For her, out was somewhere big.  
Bigger than Memphis, even,  
full of lights and traffic and people laughing.  
I hoped that just out would be enough.  
But it wasn't.

She kissed me then.  
It was a warm kiss, there was some kind of love in it.  
But it was sad, and it was final.

She walked away and left me here,  
sitting on the rail of this bridge.

### Joe Said

Joe was all fire and spittle  
pounding on the jail guitar doors.  
He dropped Spanish bombs,  
drove that brand new Cadillac,  
then got lost.

Joe said: "The future is unwritten,"  
and he seemed right.

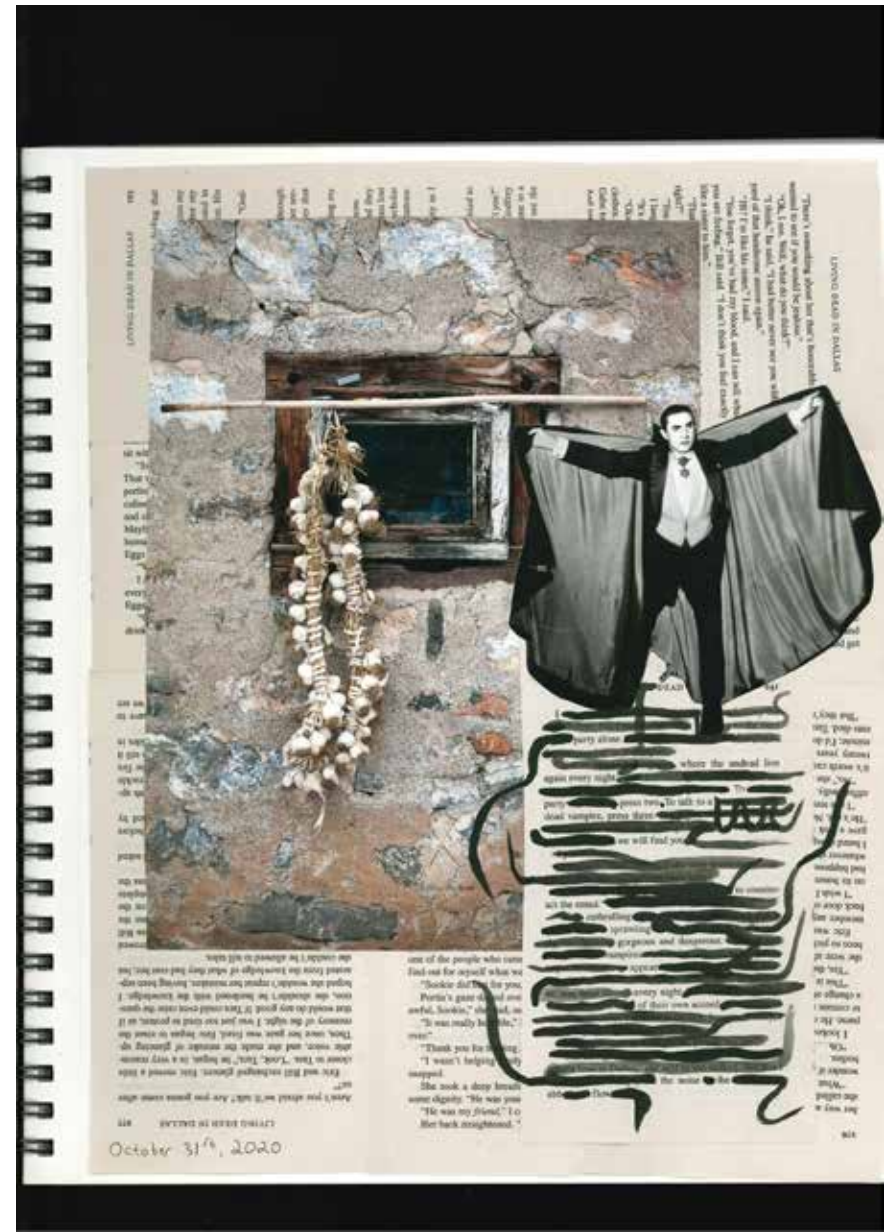
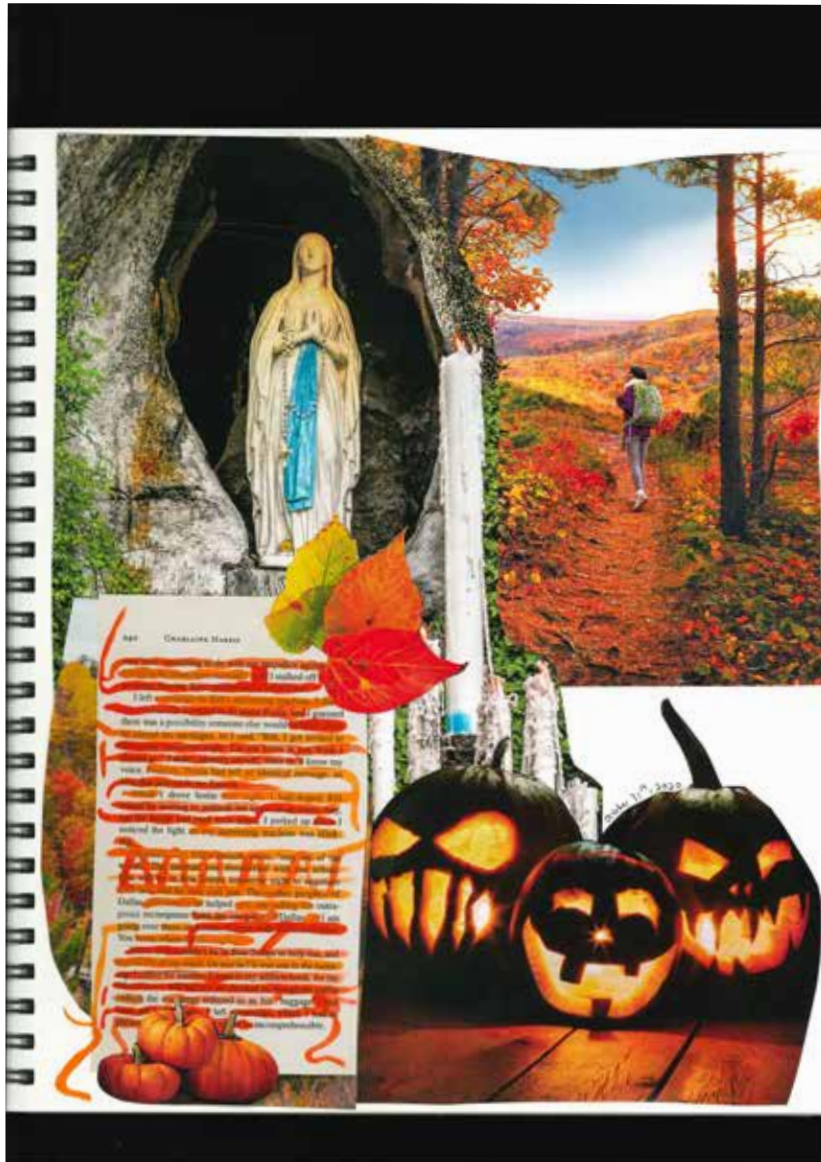
Joe's heart stopped on the sofa,  
while his dog slept by his side.  
That part of the future  
is already written for each of us.

Joe's book was finished,  
and his past left to be rewritten.  
He sang: "Straight to hell, boys.  
Straight to hell."

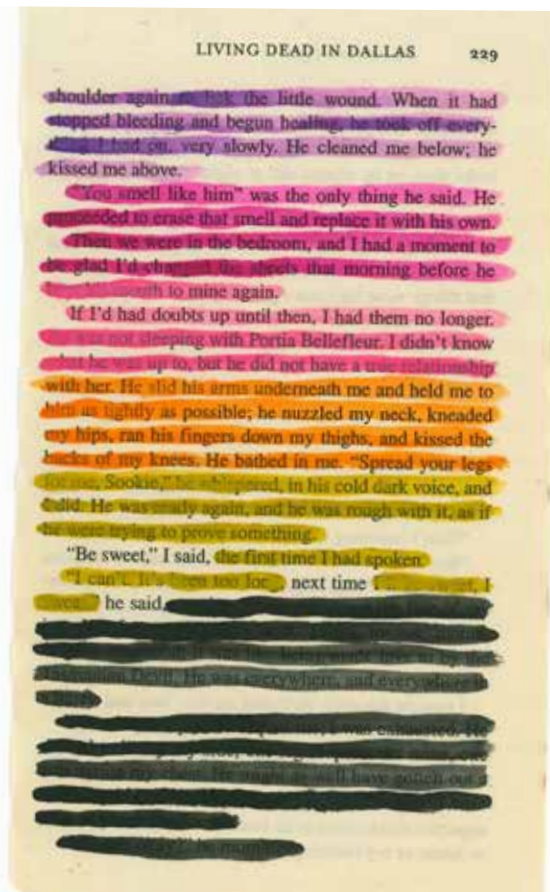
*"Bill's Story" is about an enigmatic hit song from 1967, "Ode to Billie Joe." Same story, told from Billy Joe's perspective. The river in question is the Tallahatchie in Mississippi, hence the Memphis reference. (I lived there for a few years. Some folks there called it the biggest city in Mississippi). It's dated June 2, because the song begins on "the 3rd of*

## Three Erasure Poems

**Caitlin Cowan**







Born and raised outside Detroit, Caitlin Cowan (*English and Creative Writing*, 2008) earned a PhD in English from the University of North Texas and an MFA in Creative Writing from the New School in New York City before returning to the Midwest. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared in *The Rumpus*, *New Ohio Review*, *Missouri Review*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and the *Rappahannock Review*, among other outlets. Her work has received support from the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and elsewhere. She has been the winner of the Littoral Press Poetry Prize, the Mississippi Review Prize, the Ron McFarland Prize for Poetry, and an Avery Hopwood Award. She has taught writing at UNT, Texas Woman's University, and Interlochen Center for the Arts. She is the Associate Poetry Editor for *Pleiades* and serves as the Chair of Creative Writing at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. Caitlin writes regularly about the intersection of poetry and popular culture at PopPoetry.

Source material: Harris, Charlaine. *Living Dead in Dallas*. Ace Books, 2002.



## Teddy Sees the Girl Again

J. L. Hagen

Teddy the Toad sat on the windowsill. Across the street, he saw the little brown-haired girl. Last in line, she stood quietly waiting her turn to hop on the school bus.

He wondered, would she ever visit again to hang out with Randy? He missed her smile. He hoped to have another chance to hear her voice, her

musical laugh, and, most of all, view her freckly face.

She reminded Teddy of his girlfriend Matilda. They had been BSF—Best Swampmates Forever—but now she was gone. People should not be allowed to drive automobiles, especially on roads at night. Near the swamp. A tear dropped onto the sill.

Teddy lived in a glass house, a bowl on the table near the window, but at least he was safe. Randy had picked him up that day and brought him home. He was fed, watered, and cared for in all the ways a toad might desire. But a toad without love is like a swamp without water—a dry and lifeless thing. He hopped down from the sill and crawled back under the shelter of his rock. Another night without Matilda.

What was that tantalizing, tangy





scent? Teddy spotted some small, torn bits of yellow fruit that Randy's mom had placed near his water dish. He nibbled on a piece—apricot, plum, cantaloupe, floral notes swirled over his palate—a loquat, his favorite.

Again, today, the little girl would not come to visit. There was always tomorrow. Until then, the loquat would be enough.

*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. Sea Stacks, a collection of interrelated stories, was published in December 2020.*



## Characters

Ellen Dreyer

If ever there was a manual of my mother's domestic life, it would be *The New York Times Cookbook*, which sat on a bookstand on her kitchen counter, first in Mt. Vernon then in Hartsdale New York, open to a spread with splatters of food and notes in the margins.

A modern woman of the 1960s, a social worker who might have studied psychiatry had her male boss not warned her against competing with men for the few places in medical school, Mom juggled work and family, and rarely slacked off in the food department. She made a schedule of weekly meals that she cooked ahead. On the Jewish holidays she dipped into a wooden recipe box stuffed with index cards and made the matzo balls, the kugels, the brisket. At all other times, she consulted Craig Claiborne's master work, her well-worn

copy of the cookbook she called simply "The Times."

In the preface, Claiborne quotes M.F.K. Fisher as saying that the kitchens of America are known for "the flavor of innumerable tin cans." However, as evidenced in the 1,500 recipes, drawn from the pages of *The New York Times* from 1950 and 1960, tin cans were making way for fondue pots, chafing dishes, and paella pans. Times readers were traveling more and eating exotic fare from Europe, Asia, and Africa, and South America. As Claiborne put it, "world travel on a scale unsurpassed in history is making the American palate more sophisticated."

My mother's group of women were part of that traveling crowd. They were the daughters or granddaughters of immigrants from Eastern or Western Europe

who came through Ellis Island and settled, mostly, in New York. Mom and her peers were better off than their parents had been. They married just before or just after World War II, started families, and went back to school or to work when their children were young. They were schoolteachers, nurses, college professors, artists. When I started kindergarten, Mom began working toward her Masters of Social Work at Hunter College.

In Mom's circle, being a great cook was a badge of honor. She certainly earned hers. When company was coming—which it often did—she cooked multi-course meals that rarely failed. During my parents' poker games with friends, I sat on the stairs in my footy pajamas, listening to the rumble of wine-fed laughter and conversation, practicing my poker face. I heard the ooohs and aaahs when Mom brought out her bubbling Lasagna.

Mom's expertise in the kitchen was a boon for my father, the co-owner and creative director of a mid-sized Madison Avenue advertising agency that specialized in food accounts. Frequently he brought clients—Italian, Swiss, or French—to our house for cocktails and dinner. Entertaining Europeans upped the ante for Mom. I was supposed to be in bed, but instead I lay on the upstairs landing, chin on the scratchy carpet and forehead pressed against the banister, watching her run from the kitchen to the living room, plying the non-English-speaking wife of the Italian tomato sauce king with Camparis and mixed nuts, then dashing back to the kitchen to grab the canapes and check on her Moussaka a la Greque.

Mom was glamorous, her dark hair in a bob or, when longer, put up in a twist, her false eyelashes, her cocktail dresses shimmery as a mermaid's skin. She had her mainstays: Crabmeat Quiche, Spinach-Feta Strudel (now better known as Spanikopita), and Swedish Meatballs for appetizers, followed by showy Roast Game Hens, Coq au Vin, or Osso Buco, with a nice Ratatouille Nicoise or French Potato Salad on the side, a green salad and always, some good Italian red. She invariably finished with coup de grace: a Caramel Custard, Chocolate Fondue, or Baked Alaska. The clients left happy.

The Times guided Mom through holiday meals, especially Thanksgiving. I looked forward to her Cranberry Mold, based on the Times Cranberry Orange Relish recipe, with jello and sour cream folded in. She'd pour the mixture into the copper mold with the leaf garland pattern, let it set in the refrigerator overnight, and, before the Thanksgiving meal, shake it, gently but persistently, and turn it upside-down onto a serving plate. There was always that moment of uncertainty followed by the relief of seeing a perfect outcome—or nearly.

I loved the sweet-tartness, the walnut-crunchiness of the Thanksgiving mold, served in a great slab beside the golden-brown turkey and mashed potatoes. You could wiggle it, an added plus. Mom's molds were legion and stashed behind the lazy Susan, even the pink, salmon-shaped mold that would have looked nice hung on the kitchen wall, as many of her friends' were. The molds also functioned in my world as unusually shaped Barbie doll pools.

In my teens, Mom hired me to help her at parties. Chopping garlic, polishing silver, washing pots and pans, and keeping an eye on the oven and helping to serve earned me a few dollars, and more: an understanding of Mom's love of friends, her dedication to making everything just right.

I left New York for Ann Arbor, where the college food plan was largely unappetizing. In the second semester of my freshman year, I joined a vegetarian co-op in my dorm. Out with Craig, in with Frances (Moore Lappé) and *Diet for a Small Planet*. Meat was eschewed, beans soaked nightly on the window sills and yogurt thickened on the radiators, and peanut butter came in tubs. I co-cooked dinner once a week for fifteen to twenty co-eds. Make a White Russian, throw some Elvis Costello on the record player, and it's a fun time, despite the frequent culinary clunkers.

When I was twenty-five, a fledgling fiction writer working in publishing, I moved into my first Brooklyn apartment. Mom gave me my own copy of the Times. Perhaps as a nod to my aspirations, she penned this inscription on the endpaper:

Great characters...but no plot.  
Enjoy enjoy!

I did enjoy my Times, from my twenties through my thirties, when I needed a reminder of how to make gravy, or if I craved a nice Russian borscht. More often than not, I subsisted on tuna fish and salad, tofu and brown rice. Dinner with friends meant potlucks or meeting at restaurants. Thanksgivings at home remained reassuringly the same, and

in Mom's kitchen, the Times retained its place of prominence.

I lost track of my copy for a while. It stayed in a packing box for long stretches as I began my nomadic life, moving from apartment to apartment. It became a catch all for recipes from friends or magazines, most of which I never made, either. As years passed it became a fixture on a shelf, barely used. I didn't entertain like Mom, and I wasn't half the cook she was either.

If Mom had a more encouraging boss, or more self-confidence, if she'd embraced feminism more wholeheartedly, maybe she would have become a psychiatrist. Maybe not. I understand the challenging balancing act of marriage, motherhood, work, and writing.

Great characters, my mom and dad, yet as the years slid past, they entertained less frequently. Their diets grew simpler, and they relied increasingly on restaurants and take out. At sixty, Mom learned she had Parkinson's and began a long, slow, twenty-year decline. She became less and less able to articulate her thoughts, less able to speak, until finally she stopped altogether and was either in bed or in her wheelchair, cared for by an aide. Dad, with the aide's help, prepared simple meals of baked chicken or fish, with pools of apple sauce to make everything go more easily down my mother's throat. Ice cream became their big treat. And good wine, till the end.

After my mom died, my sisters and I went through the cabinets, found the wedding crystal, the ceramic ramekins, the fondue pot in burnt orange, the endless corkscrews, the cocktail

glasses embossed with my father's initials, the molds. Mom's Times had vanished, almost as if it left with her.

I envision a Moussaka a la Greque, see it bubbling as she reaches in with her oven mitts, hear her sigh a little, feel my stomach growl. I wonder if I can find a pan that will work, an eggplant that is just ripe enough, and whether the first bite will give me the sense that she is, somehow still here,

that there is still something she can show me.

*Ellen Dreyer (RC 1983) is the author of the young adult novel The Glow Stone (2006), named a Bank Street College Best Book. Currently, she is a consulting editor and writer for the United Way (www.unitedforALICE.org), and she is working on an adult novel. She and her family live in upstate New York.*

## Vitamin Be

Robin Lily Goldberg

mittens shade my gaze

as expensive stems  
infuse my thighs  
with dehydrated dew

raindrops tempt  
my single skin,

but logical lists  
reduce us  
to black  
or white

cubicles may cultivate  
manicured lawns,

but my freckles  
need free space  
to sprout

*Robin Lily Goldberg (RC 2010) is a holistic artist who explores the synergy between the fine arts and healing arts. Her writing illustrates authenticity and alliances bridging the spheres of science, spirituality, ecology, and creativity. As an integrative practitioner of yoga, Reiki, reflexology, and vibrational sound therapy, Robin experiences creative expression as a path of wholeness. She is the founding curator of roots, wings & wonder, a multimedia collaborative e-newsletter designed to disseminate inspiration, connect diverse populations, and nourish the planet with hope. Her writing has appeared in over a dozen literary magazines and academic journals, and in 2014, Charing Cross Press published her first book, a poetry collection called the Sound of Seeds.*



## No Leaders

Barry Garelick

Barry says: *I wrote this story some time ago; probably early 90's. It falls in the category of thinly-veiled autobiographical. I disguised little; instead of being an aspiring writer, I was an aspiring photographer. A friend of mine read it recently and went off about the character I call Scott and how my photos of Sherry's father did not need to be how Scott thought they should be. I told him I made that entire part up. But all in all, despite the fictionalized portions, survivors of that time period will likely find most of it achingly familiar.*

In the fall of 1970, I dropped out of the University of Michigan during my senior year with the intention of never returning. One week later, I got stoned with a girl I wanted to go to bed with and took her to see *Yellow Submarine*. The theater was packed; the crowd was stoned. The projec-

tionist/manager announced that because of the fire laws, he could not show the movie until people cleared the aisle. No one moved. Someone stood up and pleaded that the people leave. An intense serious-faced, bearded young man, an aisle-blocker, shouted "No leaders!" We all obeyed. After ten minutes, the projectionist/manager cancelled the show, screaming at all of us that we were "nothing more than a bunch of blue meanies."

As if talking about it were unhip, neither of us mentioned the event on our way back to East Quad, where Sherry now lived (and I once had). Instead, she talked about various drug experiences and I talked about mine. Mine didn't hold a candle to hers. Nevertheless, my lack of drug credentials wasn't enough to keep her from inviting me up to her room.

She asked me if I had really dropped out of school, and why.

"It doesn't make sense for me to be in school."

"What does that mean, 'it doesn't make sense'; what is that supposed to mean?"

"I've been in school all my life," I said, as if that explained everything. She stared at me. "I've had it with math." "So what're you gonna do? Now that you've dropped out, I mean."

"I'm a photographer," I said.

"That's original."

"What does that mean?"

"Everyone's something; writer or artist or photographer. You know how hard it is to make it in something like that?"

"I'll work to support myself."

"Doing what?"

"Whatever I can find."

Among certain people, the arguments I had constructed to support my decision seemed unshakeable. In front of a mirror, they were even more so. But now the evidence against me seemed to be mounting. Sherry leaned back against the wall, propping a pillow behind her. "My parents would shoot me if I did something that dumb," she said.

"You let your parents run your life?"

"It sounds like yours do."

"What does that mean?"

"It means they say you should go to school so you decide not to," she said. "That's what it means. I don't think you know what you want."

"That's easy for you to say. What the hell do you know: a freshman who thinks everything's just rosy. Come talk to me when you're a senior and we'll see how you feel."

I thought she would ask me to leave,

but she didn't. The record ended and she put on the Beatles' *Abbey Road*.

"Did your parents yell and scream when you told them you were dropping out?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "They yelled and screamed."

What I didn't tell her was that after yelling and screaming, my father threw up and my mother cried. "All those years you told us you were happy in school," my father had said. It was true—I had been. But up until senior year, I didn't think about what I'd do after I graduated. During junior year I had exhibited (in the lobby of East Quad) a group of photographs of people sleeping in doorways, marking my entrance into what I considered the art world. By senior year, not doing well in some key math classes and thinking I had become a full-fledged artist, it was relatively easy to throw everything away.

"It was all a big lie," I told him, and although we both knew that what I said was also a big lie, it seemed perfectly true. That was when he threw up and when my mother cried. "We really do want the best for you," she said, without the usual laying on of guilt, as if we were in a hospital waiting room, telling each other the kind of truths reserved for such places.

Sherry hummed along with "Here Comes the Sun" and in the middle of it asked if I were Jewish and whether my parents had accents. I told her yes, I'm Jewish, but no, they didn't have accents. "Mine do," she said. "They're from Russia."

They never say 'have,' they always say 'hev.'" This fact established, she rubbed her chin against her arm and watched me pacing around the room. "So whattya wanna do?" she asked. "It's getting late, and I'm tired."

In those days it was not unusual to suggest going to bed with each other, and when one said no, the other said "why not?"

"I'm not quite ready for you," she said. "But I'll tell you what I'd like. I want you to watch me go to sleep. I love to have someone watching me when I fall asleep." She pulled the bed covers back and slid underneath, fully clothed.

"I'd like you to just watch me go to sleep," she said again in a murmur, and I did. I sat there and watched as her breathing became heavy and she fell asleep. I turned off her record player and I looked around the room. I heard people running up and down the halls, the cacophony of record players, and the sound of footsteps across the courtyard. She slept as if no sounds existed, her mouth open; her hair was long and spilled over the pillow. She looked like a kid, and I wondered what the hell I was doing there.

Many people believe that sex was rampant back then (and it was), but such activity was not exempt from challenge. One had to be prepared to defend one's sexual activities as an adjunct to love; having sex was still hip, but it had to be for the right reasons. Sherry was susceptible to the culture's beliefs, but she was also young enough so that her test for love was similar to the 24-hour observation of bacteria growing in a

Petri dish.

In her case, the growth of the proper bacteria was fostered by my watching her fall asleep. She fell in love with me the next day--or claimed to. I was back in the dorm, camera slung over my shoulder, walking down a hallway that resounded with ten different stereos playing at varying levels.

I emerged from the sonic corridor into an open area where a wall had once stood. East Quad had been remodeled. No boundaries existed between men's and women's corridors. Now almost anything was acceptable--almost everyone did drugs, co-ed hallways were hardly blinked at, and dropping out had become a statement as universal as "no leaders" and other anarchist statements that seemed to make sense to too many people at that time. The world seemed like it was going to stay that way forever, I was thinking, when I ran into Sherry.

"I wanted to apologize," she said and told me all the things that had gone through her mind the night before. She liked going to sleep with me watching her. She liked my spirit. She liked how I knew what I wanted (even though she had said I didn't know what I wanted). She knew I was strong. "It was mean of me to say you didn't know what you were doing. I think it took courage to just drop out never to return." She knew I was an artist. She knew I would go far.

That was the start of the relationship between a twenty-one year old drop-out and an eighteen year-old freshman. It lasted one month. In the beginning, her adulation eclipsed anything remotely objectionable. "I'll

work to support you if I have to," she would tell me. She once told me how I could "spare change" people if I couldn't find a job and needed money, and I suddenly saw that she was just some little kid and wondered what I was doing with her. The doubt showed on my face; she said in a pleading voice "What do you think about when you look like that?" I said I was having doubts about my life. This sufficed in the beginning.

She looked at my photographs and declared me an artist. She introduced me to her friends at school and at home. During that visit home, I met her parents. Her father looked at me and told me to sit down. "I want to ask you some questions," he said in the same accent that Sherry used when mocking him. Although he couldn't understand why I would want to leave math behind after I had come this far, he made a pronouncement in my favor. "I think you are a nice young man," he said.

I took pictures of Sherry with her parents, and then several of him. They are not anything I would show today as examples of my work. He sat with his hands in front of him, his body stiff, his mouth a steadfast line--the look one sees in the formal portraits taken at the turn of the century.

His eyes, strong and piercing, stared directly into the camera. They weren't like George Harrison's eyes in the poster that Sherry had in her bedroom, eyes that would cause her to exclaim "Oh he knows, like he really knows." Her father's eyes were the same as my father's; they gave him the look of someone who has seen many things and is resigned to what he saw.

Back at school Sherry showed the photographs to a young man named

Scott. It was after breakfast and the day still held promise and my lack of employment did not bother me. Scott was a photographer also; we did not get along. His lips seemed more pouting and puffed when I was near him, and his sarcasm more pointed.

Scott and some members of his clique stood looking at the photos. Scott held the photos as if they were paltry evidence brought in by the defense attorney at the last moment of a trial.

He looked at the photo of Sherry's father staring straight into the camera. "I could do a lot with this," he said, and stared at it some more. "I'd like to see him talking, laughing. What does he do with his hands when he talks? He needs to be alive."

"It's the stiffness that I like," I said.

"Why?" Scott asked.

"Because it says as much about him as if he were laughing or talking."

"It looks like a snapshot," he said.

"What's wrong with snapshots?"

"Nothing," he said, handing the photos back to Sherry, and walking away with his famous half-smile.

I brooded for the remainder of the day. "What do you think about when you look like that?" Sherry kept asking. I didn't tell her but she figured it out by evening. "You're jealous of Scott, aren't you?" she said.

"Why would I be jealous of that little snot?" She said nothing, and walked down a hallway, exaggerating the wiggle in her hips, and I followed. We went to her room.

"How'd you get so friendly with that crew anyway?" I asked.

"You are jealous!"

She took a joint out of her purse, and I knocked it out of her hand. "You listen to me. I'm not jealous of that asshole; I hate his guts."

"Oh, of course; excuse me, I thought you were jealous."

"I don't care for his little group of friends; they've always treated me like shit, and seem to think that mathematicians and scientists have no conception of art. I'll tell you one thing, Scott wouldn't have the balls to drop out, and if it weren't for East Quad, he wouldn't have any place to exhibit his work."

This wasn't much in the way of an argument, I realized, and so did she. So I upped the ante. "Keep telling yourself that they accept you. You're just their court jester."

She took a book off her desk and threw it at me, (it grazed my arm) and then sat on her bed and cried. I tried to put my arm around her but she shook it off and told me to leave. After a few minutes she turned to me. "I thought I told you to leave."

I expected another book to be thrown, but instead she stood by her dresser, her back to me, brushing her hair. "I sometimes don't know what I am, or if I'm good at anything at all," she said. "I keep telling myself that if someone doesn't like me or they think I'm not smart, that's their problem. But it's hard for me to have that confidence all the time."

She talked about confidence and having friends and feeling lonely. She asked if I was watching her.

"I'm sorry I was mean," she said.

She sat on the edge of the bed and

I came up behind her; she leaned against me and told me how when she was little, her mother would sit in her room while she was getting ready for bed, and Sherry would tell her what was on her mind while her mother combed Sherry's hair. She told me how during one such evening her mother had explained sex to her, how a man spreads his warmth into a woman, and how that warmth becomes a part of the woman, and how that warmth becomes a child.

By mid-November, Sherry's patience had shortened, and my influence diminished. In the beginning, her "to-do" list, paper-clipped to her lamp shade, contained notes to not bug me and other evidence that I was a savior; it now concentrated on study assignments, and names of people I didn't know. I continued to take pictures, but my money was running out, and jobs were scarce. I talked to her about the futility of school, its meaninglessness, the games of the academics, big egos and name-dropping; if you weren't a genius you weren't worth talking to. Our bickering and insults increased. At night we made up while she combed her hair and I sat on the bed and watched, but our evenings together decreased.

Our relationship ended in mid-November on my first day of work—a three-day stint at which I only lasted one day, unloading phone books from the back of a semi, into the too-small cars of the people delivering them. The night before I started, we both looked upon the job as the dawning of a new life; my life as

a working-man, making good my promise to make it on my own and never to return to school. "I'm proud of you," she had said. I felt like one of the many soldiers that seemed to be crowding the airports those days, destined for Viet Nam, standing with impassive, sometimes dumb looks as their girl friends cried.

The telephone book operation took place on the edge of town, in an area rarely frequented by students, the Moose Lodge parking lot next to a shopping center. There were four of us, all drop-outs; this was the only job we could find. It was one of those jobs where no one really got to know one another well. Two of the guys were friends and shared a house with a girl and a dog they referred to as "she" and "Dylan," respectively. One of them was named Dave, I remember; the other guy looked a lot like George Harrison, so I've thought of him as George all these years. The third person was a bearded, burly-looking guy who wore a plaid wool jacket. We called him Lumberjack, which he seemed to like.

Dave and George chatted almost non-stop during the first hour. During that time, I loved the work like a person loves their very first apartment. I loved the feel of the bundles as I picked them up and hauled them down to the ground, and eventually got so I could carry two, one on each shoulder. It was cold out and gray, and I only had a thin corduroy jacket, but it almost seemed as if the sun were out, as we stacked the phone books in readiness for the cars to come by for

loading.

At the end of the first hour I thought it was time for lunch, and I glanced at my watch only to see that it wasn't. It had started to rain, and my hands were freezing. By lunch time, it took all my strength to lift even one bundle of phone books into a car.

The rest of the day was slightly easier, but not by much. The rain let up, although it remained cold and overcast. The conversation for the most part was still mostly between George and Dave. Dylan belonged to Dave, I found out. The girl referred to as "she" was George's girl friend. Lumberjack, we found out, was from a farm in Michigan, his drop-out temporary while he straightened out some financial and family matters. "Not much to do on a farm in winter," he said.

During a lull in which the next batch of phone book deliverers were being told their instructions in the basement of the Moose Lodge, we all sat on the back of the semi, our legs dangling, looking down at the pavement of the parking lot and talking about nothing.

"Whatever made you drop out in your senior year?" Dave asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Just tired of it all, I guess. Why did you?"

"Just wanted some time to think," he said.

"You thinking of going back?" I asked.

"Yeah; probably sooner than later."

We heard a door slam in the distance and the sound of cars starting up. We all dismounted the truck loading platform at the same time.

"How about you?" asked Dave.



"When are you going back?"

The answer that came to mind was "never", but what with the next onslaught of cars coming to be loaded, and my arms feeling like they were about to fall off, I felt I would not be able to make a very convincing argument that I had better things to do than go to school. "Probably next semester," I said, telling myself that I hadn't really made any decision, when in fact I had.

The last car of that batch drove away, and the lights in the parking lot came on. There was only one more hour to go, but it had become much colder. We sat together in Lumberjack's car, and tried to keep warm.

We talked about how we got out of the draft. I had a high lottery number; George and Dave were respectively crazy and homosexual during their physicals.

"How'd you get out?" George asked Lumberjack.

Lumberjack turned the ignition key slightly in its slot without starting the engine, and turned on the radio. "Exempt," he said.

"You 4F or something?" Dave asked.

"My brother was killed in the service," he said. Dave nodded and Lumberjack scratched his cheek with his shoulder. A car drove up to the truck. We all got out and loaded it without a word.

Lumberjack offered me a lift back to the Quad after work was over and everyone waved goodbye. It took several tries to start the car, during which he never swore but just blew on his hands as if proper hand temperature would tempt the engine into ignition. Once on our way,

Lumberjack didn't say much; he was the type of guy around whom one felt comfortable even if no one said a word. I liked him; he was unassuming, he worked hard, something about his uncomplaining manner told you he was strong and would be the type of guy you wouldn't have to worry about saying anything bad about you behind your back.

"Whattya think of this job?" I asked him.

"I've had worse," he said.

"Like what?"

He rubbed his beard. "Shoveling pig-shit in hundred degree heat." I nodded and he reached in his jacket for a pack of cigarettes.

The talk about jobs reminded me of a line in Karl Marx's *Value, Price and Profit* that I had to read for a class once. I mentioned it to Lumberjack. "He talks about how all of us feed from the same trough, but some of us have wider spoons," I said.

"I could've told you that without reading Marx," he said.

We rode on in silence. As the car warmed up and exhaustion set in, I became horribly melancholy and sentimental towards Lumberjack and people like him. I was thinking along the lines of God bless the boys from the farm and their brothers who died in Viet Nam; they keep the country alive. If you're stuck freezing in a snowstorm, they'll be the ones to wrap you in a horse blanket and haul you in the house in front of the fire. They won't be much for conversation, but they'll always know the right thing to do.

I caught myself at that point. I could never sell such crap. Who knows what Lumberjack's brother

was like? Maybe he was a racist, right-wing, war-mongering asshole. No, the sentiment toward Lumberjack's brother in Viet Nam was not likely to be easy to sell and come to think of it, God-bless-the-farm-boys wasn't going to garner much interest either. Nevertheless, both played in my mind, and when I thought about it, no matter how superior you thought you might be to whoever it was who died, death was one of those things that made it pretty hard to say "Well, he should have known better," even for a war-mongering asshole.

Lumberjack waved a gloved hand in my direction as I got out at East Quad. "See ya t'morra," he said, and I shook his hand.

Sympathy for the boys from the farm was my mood when I entered East Quad and found Sherry along with Scott and his entourage in the dining room, entertaining yet another visitor from another school. (They always seemed to have friends from other schools visiting). This one knew something about China and somehow had gotten to live there. He spoke with great authority and conviction about the cultural revolution, his speech littered with the phrase "I have little sympathy with..." generally applied to those people in China who happened to find Mao's policies stifling. Scott listened, not saying much, and Sherry seemed to be embarrassed by my presence.

I suppose that had I been in a better mood, the argument with Sherry never would have happened. The fight was about the number 0.999.... I don't know how we got on that subject, but I told her that, just as 0.333... equals 1/3, then 0.999... equals one. She

fought me on this, saying it couldn't possibly be true, and refused to believe in the concept of infinity. My voice raised and she said, "Pretty touchy about something you say you really don't give a shit about, aren't you?"

I knew she was right. Nevertheless, I wanted to tell her then that she was an idiot, and that Scott was an idiot and that in a world of infinite possibilities those two were as finite as you could get. But I said nothing. I had become gun-shy (or perhaps book-throwing shy) with Sherry.

"You think you're fooling everyone looking so profound when you don't say anything," she said. "But the only thing you're thinking about is losing me."

I didn't deny it because it was too difficult, and because once again she was correct. Back then, just like now, once afraid of losing someone, they were as good as lost. So I sat on her roommate's bed and frowned. She turned her back to me and sat on her bed, and brushed her hair. I watched her. I could tell that she knew I was watching her.

"I think we really ought to start seeing other people," she said.

"Kind of a sudden decision isn't it? We have an argument and right away it's over?"

"It's something I've been thinking about." Her hand followed in the wake of hair her brush made. I looked at the picture on the wall that she had told me was a prison, and which was nothing but a square with lines around it.

"It isn't fair," she said, her back still to me, and the brush now next to her on the bed, like a pet that had gone

to sleep. "I'm just starting school, I like school, and I like my friends. I know you don't like school, but I'm not ready to hear about it. I'm positive about everything, and you're so negative. You don't have to be, you know. Look at that picture of you. That's the you I love. Or loved. I'm sorry." I could see she was starting to cry. I imagined going over and touching her. That's probably the last thing she wants, I decided, so I sat there on her roommate's bed.

"I'm not a mean person," she said. "It's cold out and you've had a long day. You don't have to leave. Susie's not coming back tonight. You can sleep in her bed," she said. I watched Sherry get into bed, and stayed where I was. She kept the lamp on, and I watched her until she fell asleep. I stood up and left quietly, and was tempted to slam the door but didn't.

The next week I returned to my parents' for Thanksgiving. I knew I was going to go back to school, but justified it by telling myself that my degree in math would help me find decent work to support me while making my way up the artistic ladder.

I have had a few successes along this road, but not enough to qualify as the heir apparent to Stieglitz, or even Scott for that matter who produces documentaries for WGBH in Boston. I am a math teacher. I haven't kept in touch with Sherry, but in a recent alumni newsletter I read in the class notes a brief paragraph which said that after she graduated "she traveled, bummed, worked in a factory, sang on stage, fell in and out of love, fell in again. She is married to

a scientist and has a six-month-old son and is living in Ann Arbor." Whether or not she ever put the moves on Scott, I'll never know.

I have told this tale many times to different people as if it were important. What was important changed with each telling. In the beginning it was the phone book job. Later, it was the art scene. Still later, the drug scene. At latest telling (to my wife) it is just another story about loss of innocence and girl friend, just another confused middle-class kid with long hair trying to rebel, though I can't say I was the type to yell "No leaders!" in a crowded theater.

The end of the tale has remained unchanged. All the students were abandoning school for Thanksgiving. I thought it was time I did the same.

Rather than take the Greyhound and have my parents pick me up, I caught a ride from someone whose parents lived near mine, so that I arrived much earlier than scheduled. My parents wouldn't be home for a few hours. I was alone in a condo-apartment they had recently moved into, wondering how they would take the news of my return to school.

I headed straight for the room that my mother had designated as mine, even though we all knew I would never live with them again. The only thing that mattered to me then was the black coat with the silver buttons that I knew was in the closet. I took off my shabby old corduroy jacket and put on the heavy, oversized black corduroy coat with the polished silver buttons and warm red lining, and looked at myself in the mirror. I imagined Sherry in the room, sitting on the bed and watching me.

"What are you thinking about?" I imagined she asked me, and for once there was no silence. I answered, but I didn't talk about how rotten the world was; I said I was thinking about math. She asked me how I got interested in math, and I began to tell her how beautiful math really was. I explained to her about the structure of math, how the number system we know is just a special case of a broader vaster concept. We can describe properties of dimensions that we are incapable of perceiving or imagining. She understood everything. The translation of the world into a mathematical view. Exploring beyond our perception.

*Barry Garelick (RC Mathematics, 1971) has recently retired from teaching math in middle school. He was teaching math as a second career after having retired from US EPA. He remains deeply involved in math education advocacy. He has written articles on math education for The Atlantic, Education Next, and Nonpartisan Education Review, and has published several books. Out on Good Behavior: Teaching Math While Looking Over Your Shoulder was published in January 2021 by John Catt, LLC. Barry was a presenter at the 2016 researchED conference at Oxford University, and the 2018 researchED conference in Vancouver BC. Barry and his wife live in Morro Bay, California.*



## Excerpt from Not My Brother

Kathryn Orwig

*When an injured Union soldier learns Confederates have taken his younger brother as a POW, he embarks on a rescue mission to try and free him. Inspired by my great-great-great-grandfather and his younger brother's experience in the Civil War.*

**FADE IN:**

**EXT. FOREST - DAY**

**SUPERIMPOSE:  
PERINTON, NEW YORK, 1857**

HOOVES slap leaves as YOUNG KINGSLEY BROWNELL (12, wrestler's build) a lovable, headstrong rogue, rides a horse bareback. Grinning as a group of boys and one girl chase after him.

CILLIAN RANSOM (16) the leader, is hell-raving mad watching his horse get stolen by a kid.

CILLIAN

You're dead when I get my hands on you!

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
You'll have to catch me first!

Kingsley gives a whoop! Turns around to see a low broken fence approaching --

YOUNG KINGSLEY (CONT'D)  
Jump! Jump!

But the horse's hooves dig into dirt, stopping before the wall, throwing Kingsley over the wall. He tumbles. Cillian and the others catch up to Young Kingsley just as he rightens himself, brushing grass off.

CILLIAN  
First, you insulted my sister.  
(nods to the girl)  
Then you punch my mate.  
(nods to a boy with black eye)  
And now you're gonna pay for stealing my horse.

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
Would love to, but I got to get home and help with 'em chores, you know the good Lord's motto, idle hands...

Cillian steps forward.

CILLIAN  
Arrogant as the name you go by.

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
King's my name! Short. Like your Mama calls you my dear little Killing.

That sets Cillian off and he grabs Kingsley.

CILLIAN  
You pigeon-livered --

Out of the blue YOUNG JEROME BROWNELL (14, tall & lanky) rule-follower with a fear of death charges at Cillian.

YOUNG JEROME  
I'll give you a matching mouse if you hurt my brother!

He goes to punch, but Cillian beats him to it. WHAM! Young Jerome's down for the count. Young Kingsley looks at his older brother.

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
Whelp...that didn't go so good, Jerome.

CILLIAN  
Get 'em!

Young Kingsley helps Young Jerome up, as they try to wedge a way out. Shouting to each other.

YOUNG JEROME  
Tell me you didn't really steal Cillian's horse?

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
Tell me you didn't just try to slug 'em!  
Grappling.

YOUNG JEROME  
Landed in the mud for your efforts

Shoving.

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
So did you!

Ducking.

YOUNG JEROME  
And insulting Claudia? Claudia?

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
She said she was as strong and tough as any man! But she ain't, because she can't lift a barrel of water over her head and down her back like a man.

Pushing.

CLAUDIA (O.S.)  
Because I'm a girl, he said.

Young Kingsley turns to face CLAUDIA RANSOM (12) very upset at her bravery insulted due to her gender.

YOUNG JEROME  
Oh, Lord.

YOUNG KINGSLEY  
About that assessment, Claudia...

Claudia punches. Young Kingsley steps back. She goes to hit again --

YOUNG KINGSLEY (CONT'D)  
Wait wait wait! I can't hit a girl!

CLAUDIA Why? Because we ain't tough enough?	YOUNG JEROME My brother.	UNION RECRUITER 2 (testing) Birth year?	KINGSLEY (O.S.) Kingsley Brownell, sir. 18.
Claudia slugs him, <u>hard</u> . Young Kingsley shoves her back. She falls to the ground. He hovers instantly torn by his actions.	YOUNG KINGSLEY I could have taken 'em myself.	SIXTEEN YEAR OLD Eighteen forty... 4!	Jerome and Alice whip around at that voice. In the next line over is Kingsley. Jerome grabs his brother by his shirt.
YOUNG KINGSLEY Oh gosh! Are you alright?	YOUNG JEROME (uh-huh) How's the eye?	Makes a mark -- ABT. 18.	JEROME What do you think you are doing?
Cillian and the others start to rise for a second round.	YOUNG KINGSLEY She has a mean left.	UNION RECRUITER 2 Grab a tent and pitch it at Camp Porter a mile downriver, son.	KINGSLEY None of your business, Jerome!
YOUNG JEROME We need to go...	YOUNG JEROME Come on. (puts an arm around him)	He grins, feeling invincible as young men do.	UNION RECRUITER 3 Problem, sons?
YOUNG KINGSLEY But --	Sure Mama's gonna wanna put some ice on us.	A face stands out among the men. Sol- emn. Jerome (not yet 19) finishes signing his name to the registry. He takes an offered uniform as he looks over the too eager crowd.	ALICE Sorry officer, this boy is not 18 and will not be signing up. (to Kingsley) Ever.
CLAUDIA I ever see your face again I'll thrash you good, Kingsley!	<b>EXT. ROCHESTER STREET - DAY</b> <b>SUPERIMPOSE: FIVE YEARS LATER</b>	UNION RECRUITER 2 (CONT'D) Something wrong, son?	KINGSLEY That's not fair!
YOUNG JEROME She's fine! Let's go!	Men ages 18-45 wait before tables manned by UNION RECRUITERS.	JEROME (yes) No.	Alice wheels Kingsley right around; which is a testament to her anger, considering how packed it is and how muscular Kingsley is for his age. Only when they are out of the crowd does Kingsley shrug off his mother's grip.
Young Jerome and Kingsley run past her all the way --	UNION RECRUITER 1 300,000 needed! That's 1,024 of Monroe's finest! Step right up! Sign your name! First four battalion's earn a banner! Prove your mettle! Don't be shy! America needs you, and you, and you!	PAULINA (ALICE) BROWNELL (49) Jerome's mother places a hand on her son.	
<b>HOME</b> -- To a small house beside a MILL and POND.	At their heels and champing at the bit are BOYS 13-17 jumping into line.	ALICE You don't have to go. You can stay home, ask Mr. Ely for your job back. Put your schooling to good use.	KINGSLEY (CONT'D) Let me go!
YOUNG KINGSLEY (shaking his head) I can't believe you came back and got slugged by Cillian Ransom!	UNION RECRUITER 2 Age?	Jerome's torn, surrounded by men eager for war.	ALICE You're not old enough --
YOUNG JEROME Yeah, well... I forgot something.	SIXTEEN YEAR OLD Eighteen, sir.	UNION RECRUITER 3 (O.S.) Next up! (pause) Name.	KINGSLEY They don't care! Been turning a blind eye all day! Look, there's 'em drummer boys, they can't be more than 12.
YOUNG KINGSLEY What?	The recruiter looks up at the baby-faced child before him.		JEROME Firstly, you don't play the drums.

Secondly, they don't fight. They die. Like a bunch of us will. Do you want that?  
To die?

KINGSLEY  
Those dastardly rebels would have to catch me first!

The horror of that statement uttered.  
Jerome wheels around so fast.

JEROME  
Impatient, rash, impulsive, you'd never cut it as a soldier following orders!

KINGSLEY  
Cautious! Overbearing! And afraid to die makes you any better?

Stare down. Nostrils flaring. Oh boy, do they wanna go at it. Just one tussle to prove the winner...Jerome backs off.

JEROME  
Stay home. Protect Mama and the girls. Mind the mill --

KINGSLEY  
I am not staying in the kitchen all my life!

ALICE  
I won't have both my boys in war.

KINGSLEY  
Jerome stays then, I'll go for us!

JEROME  
I already signed a three-year contract.

KINGSLEY  
You won't make it past training.

ALICE  
Kingsley, that is enough.

KINGSLEY  
(the final blow)  
Dad would let me go.

JEROME  
Dad's not here.  
(pause)  
Get home. Stay home.  
That's my order.

That smarts. Royally. Kingsley takes off.

ALICE  
Kingsley!

Kingsley never turns around. Jerome storms off the other way clutching the uniform tightly. Alice sighs at her polar opposite sons.

#### **EXT. CAMP FITZ JOHN PORTER - AFTERNOON**

The mass of new recruits and their families share parting goodbyes along the Genesee River. Jerome dressed in the uniform blues, hugs his mother and sisters goodbye.

ALICE  
Do you have enough food? Enough socks? I'll try to send more.

JEROME  
I'm sure the Army has some for us. And I'll send as many letters with as much pay as I can.

ALICE  
Don't you worry about us. You just make sure you come home, you hear?

Jerome swallows. Caught in hugs by his sisters, CHARLOTTE (28), ELIZABETH (10) and ALIDA BROWNELL (4).

CHARLOTTE  
We got you something.

Charlotte holds out a large wrapped gift. Jerome opens it. A KENTUCKY LONG RIFLE. Used to be Flint-locked, now Percussion.

JEROME  
Dad's?

CHARLOTTE  
Got it cleaned and everything. Should serve you well. Out there.

JEROME  
Thank you.

Jerome looks around for --

ALICE  
Kingsley hasn't been back all afternoon --

UNION LIEUTENANT (O.S.)  
Trains leaving in two hours and we have a walk to the station! Time to move out!

JEROME  
I'll fix it when I come back.

Alice straightens the straps of Jerome's bag. Tears gathering.

JEROME (CONT'D)  
Mama, I swear, I'll do all I can for you all, even if it takes the last shirt I have on my back.

Jerome takes a few steps away to join the troops. This is it. He steps in line with the other men on their way South.

#### **EXT. ROAD - SAME TIME**

From a distance, Kingsley atop his MOR-

GAN HORSE watches the marching column go by. His eyes never leave Jerome's face. But Jerome doesn't see him and Kingsley doesn't move to ride forward. Watching his brother leave for war.

SPX: POP! POP! Shots ring in the air as he walks away. The steady sound of gun POPS.

#### **EXT. GETTYSBURG BATTLEFIELD - AFTERNOON**

#### **SUPERIMPOSE: 1 YEAR LATER**

#### **SUPERIMPOSE: JULY 3RD, 1863**

SHOES are laced tight on bloody feet. A musket BARREL is cleaned and re-loaded, aimed but not fired. A soldier eats a dried SCONE slowly - a last meal.

POP! POP! Several men duck, even though no bullets fly near them. The distant shots grate on frayed nerves. It's not a matter of IF there will be another battle but WHEN...

Bloated BODIES litter the ground on the far flanks. Stains on the ground that can't be anything other than thick pools of blood dried black...

Eyes flicker down across the open field of CEMETERY RIDGE as if they know the hallowed ground before them is about to be splattered with what will be known as Pickett's Charge.

Jerome, not yet 20, an infantry soldier, glances up from a piece of paper to the pocketed field. He swallows and goes back to writing his name. Takes out a pin clip and pins it to the inside

of his coat. The only Dog Tag of the Civil War.

He notices another young soldier, FRANCIS WILDER (16) trying to spell out his name. He messes up. Crosses out the wrong letter, pencil tip gripped too tight as those POP! POP! shots ring in the still air.

JEROME

How far did you make it?

Francis looks up, sheepish.

FRANCIS

Grade 3 before I had to help with the farm. One me, rest of 'em sisters.

JEROME

What's your name?

Jerome reaches for the paper. Francis hands it over.

FRANCIS

Francis Wilder.

Jerome writes the boy's name.

JEROME

Where you from, Francis?

FRANCIS

Rochester.

JEROME

No kidding?

(hands the paper back)

We're neighbors. Perinton.

BOOM! A cannonball rips open the side of the Hill. They duck down lower behind the shallow wall.

JEROME (CONT'D)

Pin that to your coat fast, won't be long now.

Francis fumbles as he tries to pin it, shaky fingers.

CONNOR MCNEIL (36) an Irishman thick and through, notices the fearful lad, calls from the group loading the HOWITZER CANNON.

MCNEIL

Better not put him in charge of firing no weapons, Brownell. Boy can barely handle a girl's sewing pin!

Mortified, Francis tries to pin it, but the cannon fire is getting closer, he's just a kid, and his hands can't stop shaking.

*To read the rest of "Not My Brother," message Kathryn at kathrynorwigauthor@gmail.com.*

*Kathryn Orwig (RC 2017) is a Hopwood winner, and a film and TV writer. Kathryn's won or placed highly in multiple screen-writing competitions (Top 5% Nicholl's, Page Awards, Screencraft, Creative Voices, LA International Screenplay Awards, etc.), acted as a final-round judge at the National Film Festival for Talented Youth in 2019, and wrote 20 scripts for a media company to turn into an animated TV Web Series. She was selected as the August 2021 Roadmap Writers Diversity Initiative winner, and is included in Bring Your Words: A Writers' Community Anthology (Fifth Avenue Press), out this Fall. More about Kathryn at her website: www.kathrynorwig.com.*

## Three Poems

Matthew Rohrer

### Ekphrastic Poem 1975

A flying saucer has landed  
near a large prickly cactus  
and the alien pilot, with huge mouth,  
is about to eat it

this is the greatest painting I've ever seen,  
Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School,  
Ann Arbor, 1975, taped up in the hallway—

that moment is golden, that moment  
of comedy gold,  
the vastly superior jackass  
about to make a fool  
of himself, how well  
the painter that passion knew,  
how insecure, the heart  
that knows it,  
the simple lines,  
the one cactus  
that makes a desert



### **A Murmur**

Across the water  
I see a person jog  
to the end of the peninsula  
and like a robot  
jog in place there

a vagrant is listening  
to a radio show

the dead brown reeds  
look just like the new ones  
that will grow in their place

my mind to me a murmur is

I hear a kid call "Miss Robin!"  
to a woman with hair so red  
it's like she belongs  
in a different poem.

### **Vulture**

Driving out of the canyon walls  
of the town dump I saw you  
and stopped, I had never  
seen you on the ground,  
black like a cloud come down,  
and you turned your executioner's face  
to us. Everything else I could say about you  
would be about me. There is  
no mystery. Your head is bald  
so the gore won't stick  
to your feathers.

*Matthew Rohrer (RC 1992) is the author of several books of poems, most recently *The Sky Contains the Plans* (2020) and *The Others* (2017, winner of the 2017 Believer Book Award), both published by Wave Books. His first book, *A Hummock in the Malookas* (1995), was a winner of the National Poetry Series Open Competition, and *A Green Light* (2004), was shortlisted for the Griffin International Poetry Prize. Two of his tattoos appear in books on literary tattoos. He was a co-founder of Fence Magazine, and now lives in Brooklyn and teaches creative writing at NYU.*



# The Survival of Horseshoe Crabs

Carolyn Lusch

We stumble upon half a horseshoe crab in the sandy intertidal expanse beyond the large rocks and reeds lining the Long Island Sound. It's a place we've always liked visiting on hazy afternoons, this curious stretch of New Haven land that is orphaned by the highway and subject to its unforgiving roar. It smells like exhaust, kelp, and the nearby Food Truck Heaven, a long row of taco trucks sprouting frantic flags and banners declaring their tastiness. My gaze is drawn over the bright water, down the line of trucks, up over the I-95 interchange curving towards the firmament. Benny tugs on Linus' shirt and reminds us that we promised him churros, but first we point his stroller in the other direction, towards the nature preserve.

At the trail head we fold up his stroller and stow it in the bushes. He

hops from one foot to the other, dancing with his little explorer anticipation. As we walk, sumac bushes melt into fringes of reeds in the sand, and I hold Benny's hand on the wooden bridge over the little estuary. I grouse to Linus about the scattering of cracked soda bottles and takeout boxes. Benny bobs his head to a private tune in his head. Across the water, on New Haven's eastern shore, giant oil drums loom, along with impossibly buoyant barges and the giraffe-like cranes waiting to pluck their commerce.

When we reach the shore Benny runs, squawking at the seagulls, but I step lightly, regretting the choice to wear sandals. Grainy muck approaches my toes, and little bean-sized pellets cover the sand among blobs of kelp. I tell Linus that if I look at them

for too long I see them wriggle. He laughs at me for being squeamish, for being bothered by life existing under my toes. He says, what if we are little vermin to a layer of beings too great for us to know, who mostly tolerate us but occasionally destroy us in reflexive disgust?

I tell him that the day is too beautiful for existential crises.

Then Benny runs back to us and points to a loaf-like shape a few feet away, which we inspect and identify as the shell of a horseshoe crab. The dry bowl is upturned, the insides seemingly scraped out by gulls. Benny wonders if he can wear it as a hat, which I discourage – Linus wonders if that's not in the free-range spirit, but I maintain that crab guts seemed likely to carry weird diseases.

In his philosophical mood Linus muses that there is something tragically dignified about the desiccated creature, and Benny, always listening, is inspired to build a memorial to the newly christened Horsey. He flits back and forth with scallops and clam shells, little round stones and pieces of sea glass that we don't have the heart to reveal as plastic. He builds a circle around that horseshoe crab shell, a mainland echo of Prospero's enchantment.

Meanwhile, Linus has taken his phone from his pocket and conjured the world's knowledge of horseshoe crabs. He declares that they are living fossils but in fact are not crabs. Benny kicks the sand.

What I mean is they're not crustaceans, he clarifies. Different subphylum. Actually more closely related to spiders.

I don't want to think about giant,

immortal, hard-shelled spiders scrambling over the seashore, attacking our toes. This placates Benny, though. He asks if he can bring a little Halloween spider to put on Horsey's grave, but I tell him that would add to the island of plastic in the ocean. It never goes away, I remind him.

Just like horseshoe crabs, Linus replies, still scrolling. Hardly changed at all for 445 million years.

The next time we go to Long Wharf it has only just stopped drizzling and the shore hangs damp, wrung out from the wash. Farther north only a few taco carts cling to the drive with the tenacity of barnacles.

Linus is at work. Benny wonders at the low tide, the layer of shells and rocks newly revealed over sand plump with rainwater. We leave his wagon by the boulders near the path and clamber down into the seabed. I silently measure as our shoe prints advance, ever mindful of the tragic stories of the unwitting who marooned themselves on salty sandbars. But his little sneakers trip over mussels and mollusks, sea slippers and scallops. He sweeps past a fish carcass unaware, giggling as the gulls prance away from him with unhurried dignity. He bends down to examine what looks like an oyster, then gazes up the beach and squeals, Horsey!

There, at the end of a trail dragged in the sand, sits a horseshoe crab that appears intact: dome, alien front, spiny rear, long pointed tail. I jog forward as Benny approaches, fighting back a need to urge cau-

tion. A few paces away the creature remains still, and Benny asks quietly, are all the Horseys dead?

I'm about to make a remark about our small sample size, when the horseshoe crab's tail starts swishing back and forth in the sand, an eerie windshield wiper motion.

Benny tells me that it's talking to us. He crouches down and examines its dome, sticking his knees in the muck and stroking the shell with his little hand before I can tell him not to. The creature doesn't seem to mind, and Benny is unusually still, only briefly distracted by a giant car transporter truck barreling by on the highway.

I take a picture of him, big-smiled, practically hugging the horseshoe crab. I send it to Linus and he responds immediately: omg horsey lives!!!

After several minutes of awe, we wave goodbye to the horseshoe crab and pick our way back across the shell-strewn sand to the path. I wheel Benny's wagon to the line of taco trucks

and pick the one with a brightly painted Virgen de Guadalupe, gazing downwards with a placid smile. We buy tacos and churros and carefully sit on a patch of grass devoid of gull poop, Benny chomping with his small child intensity, me preventing the wind from sending the styrofoam Sound-wards.

It's only later, when I'm idly looking online, that I realize that first up-turned shell we found wasn't a dead horseshoe crab. It was just a molt, shed to allow the creature to grow. When I reveal this at dinner Linus lets out a hoot and Benny's eyes grow huge and dreamy. He breathes silently for a moment before declaring that the two Horseys are friends.

It's a big Sound, but perhaps they are. It helps sometimes, on days I feel more despairing of the world, to imagine them out there scuttling the seabed together, chomping on mollusks, oblivious to the machinations of dry land.

*Carolyn Lusch (RC 2011) earned a Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree from U-M's Taubman College in 2015. Since then she has worked on sustainable transportation and land use planning projects in Michigan and Connecticut, working to shift the sprawling and auto-oriented narrative. She has published articles on public transportation, pedestrian safety, and writing communities in Concentrate, the CT Mirror, the New Haven Independent, and the Arts Paper. Her fiction has been featured in Carrot Bean Magazine and the Local Lit @ Lotta reading series. She is starting an online lit mag, Lat/Long, to celebrate writing about place, space, and urbanism. You are encouraged to submit! When not planning or writing, she can be found wandering the streets of New Haven with her punky 3-year-old, Eli. Her family looks forward to returning to the verdant grounds of the Midwest in the near future!*

## Three Poems

Kennedi Killips

### michigan spring

let me start over and make a nest  
out of myself and you are here  
tucked so tightly I can hardly see  
your eyes in the night / I leave  
the windows unlocked in April  
to let the wind blow through  
like a signal or a ghost with the elms  
swaying against the shiplap siding  
of your mother's house / I walk  
barefoot down the dim hallway  
toward the kitchen / the stove light  
glows amber along the cold blue walls  
and the paper grocery bags lay  
unpacked on the counter / I shuffle  
back to the room where you look  
like a child again your hair matted  
to the side of your face, your legs  
curled toward your chest / the empty side  
of the bed calls me in like my mother  
standing on the porch before dinnertime  
arms folded waiting for her children  
to come inside

### is this better than being lonesome?

I clear a spot for you on the sofa  
and we look like a Nan Goldin portrait  
with our arms wound around bent torso  
and devotion. I feel desire rattling around  
in the space between us like a dustpan  
full of broken glass.

### absence

came back to the house  
I grew up in, the floral wallpaper  
peeling at its edges  
and the lace curtains coated  
with dust. the fruit flies whirl  
above wilting apples  
and the lazy old dog  
whines at the back door,  
her milky eyes blinking.

I remember the boy next door  
burying his dead cat, a small mound  
of dirt with rocks placed  
in the shape of a cross. the hum  
of the bathroom fan clips  
the elliptical silence and  
I wipe the film from the mirror.  
it has been years since  
I have seen myself so clearly.

*Kennedi Killips (RC Creative Writing, 2020, minor in History) earned Highest Honors for her honors thesis, a full-length poetry collection. Excerpts of the manuscript won two Hopwood Undergraduate Poetry Awards and the Keith Taylor Award for Excellence in Poetry. Her poems have been published in Xylem, the RC Review, and Hobart.*



*Susan Rosegrant and her mother in Petoskey (2013, left) and Tobago (2002).*

## Saddest Aging Parent Story

Susan Rosegrant

When I was a young parent, it sometimes seemed my friends and I were competing to see who was suffering most. Who had the least sleep? Whose kid had the most ear infections? Which two-year-old threw very bad tantrums in very public places?

Lately I've sensed a new kind of competition. One woman supports a father with dementia. Another changes adult diapers. A friend flies hundreds of miles and hears insults. Who has the saddest aging parent story?

My four siblings and I appear to have it easy. Our mother has reached 97 with little diminishment of her intellect, self-reliance, and sense of decency. She's beloved at her independent living facility. She emails the whole family almost daily. Politics and full moons are regular topics, as are nature photos. "OMG!" she responded to a picture of a plate filled with orange trumpet-shaped mushrooms. "Those chanterelles!"

Still, time is taking its toll. My mom's body is worn out. She can barely see. She can barely stand. There are losses big and small. A few weeks ago, she briefly lost ricotta. I could tell by her voice on the phone that she didn't recognize the word. She emailed me soon after: "Ricotta is cheese, and I know that!"

She grew up on a Missouri farm, attended a one-room school house, got her master's after five kids, taught at university, traveled to the Galapagos by herself at age 78.

Until recently, her cool competency in the face of aging was remarkable. When my dad was declining a decade ago, we only gradually spotted their conspiracy. We kids didn't hear about how he dented the car, got lost on longer trips, became confused. Our mom was in this with him, and she'd do what it took; she cared for our dad at home until he went into hospice.

Now she's cranky and vulnerable.



*Susan and her mother on her mother's 98th birthday.*

She blames herself for what age has taken. "Who am I really?" she asked last week. "So many parts don't fit."

As I watch her, I worry about myself. Will I be anxious, clingy, demanding? Will I rail against my growing lack of competency? Will my husband and I have our own conspiracy: not fuss when the other doesn't hear or listen, not get mad or fearful at small missed connections? Things change, capabilities erode, goals diminish. Will I accept the changes and find comfort in the good years, the love I've given and received, the wisdom I've gained? As with my mom, time will tell.

Meanwhile, we do what we can in the face of decline and death, for ourselves and for others. It's never enough, and it's always sad. And we all carry on.

I stare out the window, looking for migrating warblers. I can thank my mother for this as well—this obsession with strong yet fragile flying creatures. She's seen more than 600 life birds—distinct species of North American birds—609, to be exact. The last was five years ago when my older sister and I held onto her,

stumbling down a poison ivy-laced path to a fallow field, then listening until we heard the hiccupping call of a Henslow's sparrow as it landed on a nearby post.

Getting bird #610 has been my mother's New Year's goal ever since. Each year it's less likely. But she's not giving up. And we keep driving around with her, trying to find that one last bird.

Some people, whose aging parent situation is more extreme, may think all of this is no big deal. They have more pain. Their story is sadder. But, of course, we know there's really no competition at all.

*Susan wrote this in September 2019. Her mother died of natural causes the following year at age 98, just as the 2020 Covid lockdown began.*

*Susan Rosegrant (RC 1976) has taught narrative journalism, creative non-fiction, and creative writing at the RC since 2008. She heads the RC's First-Year Seminar Program. A Hopwood award winner in fiction, Susan earned an MA in Journalism from Stanford, and has worked as a case writer at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, as a freelance writer, and for the Associated Press and Business Week. She is co-author of two books: Breakthrough International Negotiation: How Great Negotiators Transformed the World's Toughest Post-Cold War Conflicts, and Route 128: Lessons from Boston's High-Tech Community. In her spare time, she goes birding; she has identified more than 130 species of birds in her Ypsilanti backyard.*

## Twelve Poems

Bob Clifford

Sitting in a bar thinking about  
the sights that have not  
changed

the gas station  
the school  
the church  
the friends

kids on the corner  
the cops  
even the field that I used to  
lay  
in and cry

The winter came and went as fast as my 18th year began

in April of 1970  
June came and left me with a piece of paper that burns to  
live my live with, last of the class they told me,  
never knew I belonged to a class  
The haunting past can end like a dream that whipped you  
Scared

You and beat you.  
The virtues that they beat into you were the end.  
My brain cells traveled your  
road My soul dragged your  
paths  
My tears messed up your class  
rooms My presence a mystery

## **The Day Returned To Hudson High School**

Standing before my haunted past  
Wondering where I would have sat  
Wondering why I was asked to sit

The dictator today  
One day in 12 years  
A chance to correct all the falsehood

Fall of 1967 the final rush began

Three falls to go, two summers to go

left to the then unknown.

I the little brother, the five minute older twin  
Bouncing round ball, dreamt me through and got  
me through  
Running over the leaves and streams  
Kept me lonely and a loner

Stuttering to my peers, never mind my pets, with-  
drawn to a forest of  
my mind

Junior year did not hear the leaves crackle,  
the time was a reckon I felt it as my toes  
went numb and my body froze I wanted to piss  
my pants

Pretty girls talked to me I thought  
My thoughts could not talk back  
Oh God  
I missed a call in roundball it cost the school  
The game

Senior year a picture of me for the book  
Why?  
I mumble "that is not me"  
Tour of Viet Nam was over  
for my family now.  
My war just began.  
I am afraid it is me.

## **Hollow Dreams**

Lonely as the night you first  
Slept without being rocked —  
Lonely as the dreams you have  
imagined  
In the center of hollowness trapped  
Nowhere to go but in further,  
Circling in, winding out  
The reel is stuck

Helpless as a fish, gasping for as  
little air  
For what little life and dreams  
It has until the unknown —  
It wants out, you want out

Nowhere to go once again  
Funny isn't it?  
We were all sure at one time, weren't  
we?  
Of going up sooner or later

The fish is gasping still —  
Not to go up or down  
Just hoping to feel once again  
The open streams.



The High Street school  
on top of the hill  
above St. Michael's  
when it was alive it  
processed good little  
boys and girls  
from homes that had  
pictures  
of John F. Kennedy and  
Pope John XXIII  
the Odd Ones had Richard  
Nixon  
the odd ones sat in front  
with answers and smiles  
the odd ones who had a sense of  
humor sat in back of the  
sacred  
first two rows  
and were not asked for  
answers —  
like the boards that now  
cover  
the windows of the school  
that could not process  
more than two rows of  
answers and smiles.

Down the road in a valley from  
Heaven  
a small town with  
rocking chairs sits idle  
fire places burn slow  
old man remembers world war I  
a bar with pictures of men  
from world war II  
breath motionless  
a cold beer is poured  
a pop inhaled  
a cop laying cards  
a chair full of gentlemen  
further down the road a woman  
sits in a kitchen with the  
Virgin Mary beside her pictured  
son  
with a cold cup of coffee  
she looks out the window  
into a converted hayfield  
laced with fog.

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

Mother you died again tonight  
your heavy set figure on dark shadow  
couch again  
I walked around the block once before you died  
pall malls and the Record American paper  
ready for delivery as usual  
approach the old frame house once  
more dog motionless on the grass  
all the cars that had shuffled you around  
the town once or twice before were in front  
wrong time of day for them  
the closer I stepped the further I was  
from them, entering the porch once again  
dark hush mellow, knees weaken  
my spines rocked as you looked me dead in the  
eyes  
I traveled that scene before now the scene stares  
me in the eye  
you died again tonight  
everything gone now  
the RECORD AMERICAN paper died that night,  
too,  
mom.

My mother was a small dignified  
Fat and half toothless woman  
Trying to find underwear that  
Would fit  
They could never stay up  
Walking up and down Pope Street  
Always a journey for a cigarette  
People would bitch  
Her sons never bought a car to give her a  
Ride  
A Viet Nam bonus  
A white Chevy impala  
Sons did not meet for a car on any day  
She cracked if you were immigrants  
I have a car  
Come rain sleet snow ice sunshine  
Up and down  
Pope Street  
Cigarettes or no cigarette  
She walked and got fatter  
Cried over the fried potatoes  
While the fetuses of dead kittens laid in the  
gutter  
Our window not moving again  
Patrick the cat followed us at night  
Into the streets of no light

As my childhood disappears on a clear day with the clouds the shape  
of my nose

My eyes crawl to the lids peaking out not knowing what I see

The waves of Belmont beach reach to take me into a secular  
freedom

The wave is in charge

The black wall

The confederate flag

The dirty room

The salvation army bus just delivered the shakes for the pots and  
pans

The shakes immigrants from American street corners of redemption

The ocean waves did not take them for a ride so they cannot return  
clean

Where is my mother  
What is she looking at  
When will she look for her flock

The clouds are hiding what is in between  
The nose has shifted downward

The nose wins the day

Behind the tractor plow

Walking

The black rows of dirt

Gasoline stinks the air

Corn seeds that grease your hands

Dropping, grinding them into

God's stomach

Black rubber tires

The engine crawls forward

Size 6 ½ feet inching along

Up and down

The rows

God's stomach must be empty

Big black tires do not hint

The sky looks down

Sitting Bull speaks from the  
clouds

Reminding the trespassers  
on the Black soil that they have raped  
without God's blessing.

To feed

The invaders who

Escaped the Bible

To use as a weapon

The night passage of youth  
 when the eyes are not opened  
 by you  
 across the street the old lady  
 waits for one more of something  
 while the dog wants to go for a  
 walk  
 crawling again inside  
 the lights do not come on  
 while your feet shuffle  
 on the floor inside and out  
 the black sky of your ceiling  
 collapses —  
 crawling out again to the top  
 on the way back to the flower  
 the moon hides behind the  
 clouds  
 as your mind seizes  
 which way to the  
 meadow to catch a ride  
 with the butterflies

*Bob Clifford graduated from the RC in 1979. He is a retired University Administrator and Director of Athletics. A Hopwood winner, Bob edited two issues of Trains while at the RC, and has published several books of poetry.*

*These poems (plus two published last issue) were selected by Professor Robert Frank, retired former chairman of English at Oregon State, for a possible reading on Sonoma Public Radio.*



## The Story I Had To Tell

**Hannah Levine**

I saw the rec center where we used to play tag every time I closed my eyes, but I never went back. Not even after I moved away, got married, and had my own kids. I couldn't bear the thought. Not really. Not in person. But because of my children, I couldn't stop telling my story. From the time my youngest, Molly, was just starting second grade, she asked me every night to tell her about the boy with the milk chocolate skin who was called to heaven. She'd beg and plead in curiosity, saying, "It shows how we've changed, Mama. It really does. Those sorts of things don't happen anymore!" But she was so little then, and I couldn't bring myself to tell her the truth so many other children already knew. "Not enough, baby girl. Not enough."

Then, one summer day when Molly was just about to start the fourth grade, I realized I couldn't live that way anymore. She needed to know,

to understand, and I couldn't feel so alone in it all. The stories just weren't enough. I packed two sandwiches and told Molly to get in the car, licking peanut butter off my fingers. She didn't ask why—she never did—she just sat down in the back of the car and buckled her seatbelt, a big smile spread across her face. She had one of those contagious smiles you couldn't help but imitate. I needed that for a trip like this.

We drove down the road eating our peanut butter sandwiches, pointing out farmhouses, cows, and churches. We saw little glass lakes we liked to pretend were paint drops from when God painted the Great Lakes onto the land. It would've been a nice ride if it hadn't been for our destination, but I knew it was time to go back.

By the time we reached the parking lot outside the center, the sky was nothing but the sun's reflection, as if it

had been plucked from my memories. Molly knew where we were instantly.

"It's the rec center!" she shouted excitedly, recognition radiating from her as she recalled the story. She had forgotten why we never came here, why I cried whenever I told her what happened here. She ran out of the car before I could unbuckle my seatbelt, stopping just beside the lot's decrepit sign.

I slowly walked up beside her. "See those windows at the bottom, the ones with holes that make an upside-down T?" Molly nodded. "That's where the first bullets hit. That's when your Aunt Allison ran to get help."

"She was the only one to do anything," Molly exclaimed proudly. "She was brave."

I stared at the missing windows. She was brave, braver than I was. But it didn't make a difference.

"What about the chocolate boy, Mama? Was he brave?"

I looked at the tree. It was so bare from years of harsh winters and neglect that it didn't look anything like I remembered. "Yes. He climbed that tree and hid in its leaves without saying a word. The other boy, the tall blonde one, kept shooting. He hit the little boy's leg while he was still high up in the tree. Then the blonde boy ran to the tree and pulled the boy from its branches, beating him until I could hardly see from the tears in my eyes."

"Was there blood?"

"There was blood."

"Did the boy cry, too?"

"Yes. He cried for his mama."

"And the blonde one did it just because the other one bumped into him?"

"No," I said, tears reforming in my eyes. "The blonde one did it because the other boy wasn't white."

"But that's just wrong!" Molly cried. "Things like that shouldn't happen!" I looked at her and forced a sad smile to my lips. "No honey, they shouldn't." I touched my hand to her soft rosy cheek, tucked a blonde curl behind her ear, and took a deep breath. "But they do happen. Every day."

She frowned at me. "That's not good enough. We have to keep trying to change it; to show people that we're different, but we aren't better or worse."

"We do," I replied, and that seemed to be enough for now.

Molly nodded her head as if the matter was settled, took my hand, and led me back to the car, sharing big plans for protests and bake sale donations the whole ride home. She had that way about her—passion and energy oozing out of her entire being, her dreams for a better future so strong they felt almost here. It wasn't much, but for that one moment, it felt like a beginning when the rec center had always only felt like an end. And for that, I was grateful. For that, I didn't mind reliving that day. For Molly, and for other kids like her, I'd relive that day again and again if it made a difference.

*Hannah Levine (RC 2016) is a digital freelancer and nanny to the children of first responders. 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](http://hannahlevine.weebly.com.com).*



## Iguana Dog

Kathryn Orwig

**FADE IN:**

### **INT. CITY APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

A funny creature, our friendly IGUANA lunges in a pool...inside an aquarium... inside a studio apartment. He doggy paddles. Backstrokes. Flips in the water joyfully. Suddenly there are FOOTSTEPS. Iguana snaps up, hears the murmur of VOICES from beyond the front door, excitedly leaps! Escapes the aquarium --

Climbs over various household goods, COUCH, COFFEE TABLE, finally it sticks onto the COATS and slides down the fabric to land right before the door.

Iguana's tail wags just as the lock CLICKS and the door opens to reveal ....  
Its HUMAN!

Iguana is so happy it spins, and

bounces up and down. Less like a cold reptile and more like a puppy... It charges forward, all slippery still, and unfortunately the MALE HUMAN sidesteps at just that moment --

Iguana slides on the wood floor and can't stop its self before it clumsily hits the door! SMACK!

The human bends down, rightens Iguana, and gives him a pet. Iguana closes its eyes, practically purring.

The human motions --

**MALE HUMAN**  
Sit. Stand. Roll over!

Iguana happily does the tricks and earns a FLOWER as a treat in return. He munches on the flower like slow snacking in the best part of a movie. Savoring as the human walks through the living room. BARKING out the window captures

the Iguana's attention. It swallows, rushes to the screen, pressing clawed paws against the mesh. Iguana hungrily watches a pack of dogs on leashes go by.

A dog barks at a squirrel which sends the creature racing up a tree.

A BUTTERFLY lands on the glass.

Iguana tries tries to BARK at a butterfly! But it comes out as an unintentionally mean sounding hiss... he tried.

The human rolls its eyes. What a goof-ball. Starts on dinner in the nearby --

#### KITCHEN

While Iguana shoots out of frame, diving into the unfinished knitting projects. The human frowns as he sees the window sill empty and the cage unoccupied... to find YARN BALLS flying in the --

#### LIVING ROOM

-- The human starts to gather them up in his arms when Iguana pops out of the bin in a makeshift harness! Ready to go for a walk!

The human laughs and shakes its head.

MALE HUMAN (CONT'D)  
No way.

The Iguana circles his legs, demanding to go. Much head butting at human's knees towards door.

MALE HUMAN (CONT'D)  
No.

Yes.

The human brushes Iguana off as it finishes putting the yarn balls back and heads for the kitchen once more.

In defiance, Iguana races to the window, starts prying it open, struggling to wedge it's webbed feet under, gets it partially up --

Only to look out longing as the pack of dogs enters the DOGPARK, too far away to see Iguana.

The human notes Iguana's shoulders slump.

MALE HUMAN (CONT'D)  
You really want to go, don't'cha?

The human opens the door. Gestures for the lizard to come. Iguana tosses the make-shift leash up to the human and practically pulls them out of the apartment in its haste.

#### EXT. STREETS - AFTERNOON

Iguana struts the streets, head bobbing on the look out for dogs. Sniffing the air. Listening for barking --

SQUIRREL!

Iguana barks at the squirrel just like the dogs had done and the squirrel just looks at Iguana, dumbfounded. *What the hell was that?*

Iguana is not aware of the looks its getting from other animals and humans alike. But its human is. He half-heartedly waves at passerbys in an attempt to not seem soooo weird.... Suddenly, there is the holy grail. The dog park! Filled with dogs all shapes and sizes tossing balls, running together, playing.

FRIENDS!

Iguana rushes for the dog park! Pulls the leash from the human's hands! The human races after, but Iguana is faster.

#### EXT. DOG PARK - AFTERNOON

Iguana rushes through the gates with its sideways walk, tail wagging --

It accidentally hits a ball out of a dog's mouth. OUCH!

Its claws dig into dirt flinging sand up as it goes spattering it accidentally at another couple of dogs!

So excited, Iguana rushes headlong at a group of them! Trying to juggle the ball between its clawed fingers.

But to the dogs... Iguana is a giant scary beast coming at them with its weird face, stinging & whipping tail, and fierce claws. They bolt! Running from the Iguana in fright!

The ball in Iguana's grip POPS. Deflating. That does it. The remaining dogs turn away in disgust.

Iguana is left alone in the dog park.

The human finally catches up, takes

up the leash and is about to wag a finger, when Iguana's head drops to the ground and it circles a claw in the dirt sadly.

The human looks from the dogs and owners keeping their distance from his Iguana, with their up-turned noses. Back to the Iguana. Back to the dogs.

A sorry shrug from a FEMALE HUMAN looking on as she's tugged by her PUPPY chasing that butterfly out of the park.

#### INT. CITY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Iguana so very listless and sad, trails behind the human. Who has to prompt it to walk into their home.

The human offers a flower treat. Iguana ignores it.

#### INT. CITY APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

The human tries putting the Iguana in the bath.

MALE HUMAN  
Come on buddy, you love to swim.

Iguana just sits there all loose and flat. Bubbles faintly coming from its reptile lips.

#### INT. CITY APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The human puts the Iguana in bed, pulls out a story to try and cheer him up, but the Iguana pushes the book away and curls up in the



sheets in a tight little ball.

Howling comes from the window at the full moon. Iguana tries to ignore the howling. Lip trembling.

#### **INT. CITY APARTMENT - MORNING**

MALE HUMAN

I'm leaving for work now.

Still blue, Iguana doesn't move to say bye or try to stop the human for leaving for the day. The human lingers at the front door, looking after its lifeless lizard all alone in the apartment. Finally, he shuts the door.

#### **EXT. DOG PARK FENCE - SAME TIME**

A too curious of a PUPPY, eyes a bouncing FROG. The frog wiggles under the Dog Park FENCE. The puppy wedges itself under the dog park FENCE.

A frog hops. The puppy hops.

We pan out to see a RIVER nearby. You guessed it. Trouble.

#### **EXT. RIVER - MORNING**

The frog jumps. The puppy jumps. It jumps. The puppy mimics. The frog leaps into the RIVER and --

The puppy plops in! Paws at the waves but it doesn't know how to swim, can barely keep its head up. Starts barking --

#### **EXT. DOG PARK - SAME TIME**

Another dog notices the puppy is gone, hears the barking, see the puppy struggling in the river and SLAMS against the chainlink fence.

She tries to get over but can't, starts digging under, but the ground is too hard.

She starts BARKING in distress. And as other dogs join her we follow the sound of barking to...

#### **INT. CITY APARTMENT - MORNING**

That's when Iguana hears it... barking. Lots of dogs barking. Iguana ignores it. But the barking continues.

Finally, it goes to shut the window, annoyed --

When it sees the puppy caught in the river currents and can't get free. The other dogs behind the dog fence can't get to it and the humans aren't paying attention.

The struggling puppy starts to go under --

Iguana springs into action!

#### **EXT. STREETS - MORNING**

It shimmies out the window! Climbs down the bricks to the closest tree --

LEAPS! And scurries over the branches until it can DIVE into the water from 40-feet up!

The puppy's head slips under the water --

Iguana's shadow slithers and disappears in the waves like a water snake or eel --

All is quiet on the river waves. *Did they meet their end?*

But then! The puppy rises out of the water like it is floating... the dogs stare in shock.

The puppy looks down at its feet swimming through water without paddling...

To find Iguana under it. Iguana's back rises like the back of a crocodile down the Nile, that whipping tail propelling them steadily forward.

The other dogs watch on as the puppy draws near. The puppy hops from Iguana's back as soon as they reach land, racing to slip through the fence. Bombarded by the pack of dogs, licking it and warming it up.

Iguana tries to get through the tight chainlink wedge, but it is too thick, back end stuck. Iguana pulls --

And off comes its tail!

The dogs see this, freeze, look at their own tails and Iguana without one.

Iguana looks back at them, shivering. Cold, wet, without a tail, all the dogs staring at it.

Iguana looks up at its apartment window so high up. Starts to turn to go home --

But Iguana is surrounded by dogs.

Iguana waits for the attack -- But it doesn't come.

Instead a dog without a tail shows Iguana it's tailless behind. Licks Iguana's face, both their behinds moving in a happy side to side. Iguana has been accepted into the pack.

#### **SERIES OF SHOTS:**

-- Iguana on a walk with the dogs on its make-shift leash trying to bark at the squirrel, ends up hissing.

The squirrel laughs manically from the tree. So another dog barks for Iguana.

The squirrel hightails it out of there. Iguana and the dog share a look of joy.

-- Iguana plays ball with the dogs, the ball pops in its claws, again. Ah, man. All goes silent, but then a dog head-butts a basketball to Iguana. Iguana reaches out a clawed hand -- slow, slower, so slowly, the barest touch --

It doesn't pop! Hurray! They play ball.

-- Iguana teaches the puppies how to swim Iguana style. Think puppy sharks.

#### **INT. CITY APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON**

Iguana sneaks back into the apartment, waves goodbye to the dogs from the window ledge and comes up to the door just as its human comes in.

The human sets down a box. A present. Iguana sniffs it. The human brings out a real Iguana leash and a spattering of other toys.

Iguana puts the leash on and it fits! Now it's time for a real walk.

The human notes Iguana's missing tail. Looks about the apartment and scratches their head upon not seeing the remains of scales about... oh well.

#### **EXT. FARMER'S MARKET - LATE AFTERNOON**

Iguana and its human wad through a small crowd.

Iguana and the puppy see each other and run towards each other, pulling their humans in a mad dash! They bounce around each other in circles, so happy to see each other again.

They accidentally tie their leashes together in the excitement.

Which prompts The MALE HUMAN and the FEMALE HUMAN to bump into one another. A meet cute. A shared look. Redden cheeks. Sotto hi's exchanged.

#### **AS THE CREDITS ROLL...**

-- The Male Human and Female Human walk Iguana and Puppy side by side. Holding hands.

-- The male Human and Female Human give their critters baths with lots of bubbles!

-- The Male Human and Female Human are at the Farmer's market again. This time the Female Human buys a bundle of flowers for Iguana. The Male Human buys a bag of dog treats for the puppy. While...

The puppy eats dog treats, Iguana munches on a flower. Happy being an Iguana-Dog.

And we leave the quartet there.

**FADE TO:**

**BLACK.**

**THE END.**

*Kathryn Orwig (RC 2017) is a Hopwood winner, and a film and TV writer. Kathryn's won or placed highly in multiple screenwriting competitions (Top 5% Nicholl's, Page Awards, Screencraft, Creative Voices, LA International Screenplay Awards, etc.), acted as a final-round judge at the National Film Festival for Talented Youth in 2019, and wrote 20 scripts for a media company to turn into an animated TV Web Series. She was selected as the August 2021 Roadmap Writers Diversity Initiative winner, and is included in Bring Your Words: A Writers' Community Anthology (Fifth Avenue Press), out this Fall. More about Kathryn at her website: [www.kathrynorwig.com](http://www.kathrynorwig.com).*



## **Excerpts from Two Big Differences**

**Ian Ross Singleton**

The airport tower loomed beyond glinting barbed wire fences. The smell of exhaust filled the cab. I slipped my hand into my pocket and pressed my passport. When I turned eighteen, my father had said, "A man needs a passport. You know how valuable is an American passport?"

I was trying to remember Russian words, overthinking what I would say to the driver. How would I be able to live when I couldn't even tell a joke in Russian? "Cause you can't speak Russian," my father had said. The driver opened his window. Zina turned her head to avoid the gust. Before I followed Zina out of the cab, the driver rasped, "Have nice trip." After I shut the trunk, the cab sped off, making a drunken swerve to avoid a pedestrian.

"We should support civil liberties and opt out of the X-ray scan at secu-

rity," I mentioned off-handedly to Zina. She gaped at me like a newborn bird. At security, studying the floor, I forgot about opting out. When Zina asked about it, the TSA agents rolled their eyes. Fucking foreigners. I kept my mouth shut, so they would think I was a fucking foreigner too.

Zina didn't have any trouble with leaving since she was doing a "voluntary departure." We sat by the gate and waited. I took out my Russian dictionary and continued reading. I was going through it word-by-word. I was in the Ls. Their burden weighed on my tongue. I thought it was because it was burdened by the Russian Ls. English Ls in Cyrillic are always followed by the *soft sign*. I had first learned the Russian L sound when I'd been speaking words out of the dictionary earlier, when I was in the Vs. When I spoke out loud the Russian word for wolf, Zina demanded

I repeat several times. "It is not 'folk.'" Even after I said the Russian word for wolf several times, my American tongue still couldn't bow down enough for it. Russian *Ls* were not *soft*. My tongue needed to lift weight.

Realizing I had passed over several words unconsciously, I dropped the dictionary face-down in my lap. Our neighbor announced to the man sitting next to her, "I'm going to find a bathroom."

"All right," the man said without looking up from his phone.

Upon return from the bathroom, she said, "Touchdown."

"Touchdown," the man said, giving a quick smile without turning from his phone.

Eventually, Zina scared these people away. She almost scared me away. Once we got in line, she dodged people in order to get ahead, maybe in order to avoid me. I wondered what would happen when we landed. Would she simply run away, leave me at the airport? That didn't sound like her since she had bought the tickets with money her father had wired her from Ukraine.

At Trumbulldome, the commune where I lived when I first met Zina, my friend Lionel once said that people must put their affairs in order before traveling. It may be the last time a person stands on his native soil, even on this plane of existence.

Standing on the thin, industrial carpeting of the airport before we boarded, I wondered whether I should keep a diary in Odessa. I thought I had put all my affairs in order except for those between my father and myself. He left Odessa when he was thirty-seven years old. Would switching sides make me better? I asked myself whether he spoke

English better when he left than I spoke Russian now, at twenty-five, the age of my self-imposed exile. If I ever returned, my Russian would be good enough that he would have to speak with me in his native language.

A suitcase handle poked my butt. A nervous sigh warmed the back of my head. I turned, and the holder of the suitcase, the sigher, stepped once-and-a-half to run into me again. Although I moved forward to soften the collision, I could only take one step. Behind me I heard Russian cursing. I heard, "*Do svidaniya*." Of course, I knew this means *Until next time*. I imagined these words spoken in my father's Russian voice, which I'd almost never heard. He was saying goodbye to me in the end.

My neighbor on the airplane was a man the same age as my father. He flapped his newspaper and, from the corner of his eye, noticed my dictionary. He mumbled something. *What?* I said.

In English, the man said, "You read Russian?"

*I try. I'm Ukrainian.*

"Don't try to speak Russian. Better speak to me in English."

*But I'm Ukrainian. I'm American but with Ukrainian roots.*

"Yes, I got it. You are Ukrainian."

*My father is Ukrainian. My mother's American.*

"What does it mean he is Ukrainian? Many people say that, but he is from Russia."

*My father's from Odessa, which, allegedly, isn't Ukraine.*

"The Ukraine has different sides. East and South are Russified. West is very different. Catholic. This is current problem."

*I know.*

The man laughed. "You travel much to Odessa?"

*No. This is my first time.*

"You have family there?"

*No.*

"Your father?"

*What about him.* The tone had not been that of a question.

"I only ask, friend. You seem like good boy. Watch out when you are in the Ukraine. Things are happening there. It will be bad. It will make you bad."

I refrained from commenting on the use of the article before Ukraine. "My father left when he was thirty-seven. Never been back. He's very stubborn, Americanized, I guess. I'm trying to, sort of, reclaim my heritage. I want to be able to speak the language my ancestors spoke." The airplane had started to move. The man said something in Russian again. I didn't care because I had responded to him. I had overcome his challenge. I wasn't afraid. I nodded. Still, the lack of understanding wounded me. The sound, meaningless to me, was unforgettable.

I grow. Russian words fill wounds like this. Scar tissue closes around them. The time will come in this story when I will know the Russian word by the time I reach the end of the paragraph. The next stage will be when, by the time the period stops the very same sentence, I'll have resolved understanding of any words lingering in my ear.

When the land of Zina's birth was rushing to meet the wheels of the airplane, her mind filled with white noise. When the airplane had touched down and stopped taxiing, she heard a wail from some passenger's headphones. She pressed closer to the window. The

door would open, the prodigal child would return. She could hear her papa's shuffle. She had to prepare herself for his tiny coughs, the awkward rise and fall of his voice as he ticked off the problems of America against the pleasures of Odessa. She had to prepare to laugh off his impotent anger, how he would grit his teeth and make his mouth a flat line, a worm trying to hurry away in a huff.

During the descent, she had seen a backyard with white dots scurrying. The dots were chickens, goose-stepping like the Red Army on parade, little legs like the bars of a typewriter. In Detroit, chickens had marched in the backyard of Trumbulldome. The place resembled a village church, three stories climbing heavenward, surrounded by chickens at its base. It even had an onion-shaped dome.

Valentine had called "home" a *kommunalka*. It was an old mansion that groaned and smelled of kerosene. All that was left of the carpets were roughly cut fringes along the baseboard. Doors and hinges were removed from the cabinets, knobs from the doors. The other residents—Brittney, Haley, and Roberto—welcomed Zina as if she had already lived there for months, maybe a year. "Hello," they said. "Cool," instead of nice to meet you. She followed Valentine up the stairs. When they reached the top and made turns as if down the halls of a communal apartment building from the Soviet era, she said, *like home*, and Valentine stopped, turned back to her, and grinned. What she did not do in response caused him to bow and stare at the floor. After this moment of reverence to the house, they entered a room,

and he shut the door behind himself. Zina immediately understood that what Valentine had meant as a space in a room, commune-style, was really a space in a room with only one bed. What he had meant by a space was a floor, a space that, normally, people walked on.

*The fifty dollars a month will go to my friend Ben, whose room this is. He speaks Russian.*

You're serious? Zina backed up from him and bowed. "This is not space in room. This is not worth shit."

"Okay," he said. At first, the American shrugged like an Odessan shyster, like he didn't care what her needs were.

"I trust you about your space," she said.

Care filled his features. He looked at her as if for the first time. "Okay. You don't have to pay anything." All of a sudden, he was unlike an Odessan shyster.

"Why you say this? You lie?" She was here. He had what he wanted. Now he would attack. She bent at the knees, balled her fists.

"No. I didn't lie. I don't pay anything either. Sorry. My Russian's not very good."

"Nyet," she said. She dropped her duffel bag. Bring the opponent closer to you, she had learned in *SAMBO*, self defense. She was ready, decidedly ready, to kill him for the wrong move.

"I'm sorry," he said. His English didn't affect her. He said, *Excuse me*.

"You were wrong," she said. "Say this."

"I was wrong," he said. "How do I say it in Russian?"

"I have no time to find other place. You are sorry?" she asked. He nodded and looked at her again, now clearly caring whether she would leave. An

*anecdote*, she began. *Abramovich offended his friend. "What do you want me to say?" he asked the friend. The friend said, "Say, I was wrong. You were right. I'm sorry." Abramovich said, "I was wrong? You were right? I'm sorry." Valentine's bafflement was real. She had needed to explain that it was all about the inflection. Instead of statements, the would-be guilty party said, "I was wrong? You were right?" and only said, "I'm sorry," as a kind of polite dismissal of the very idea that he could be wrong and Abramovich right.*

Now, in Odessa, it was her turn to play hostess. Now his bafflement would not only be real, it would be constant.

*How horrible you look*, her papa said, grinning to soften his words. It was true. She was pale and skinny, more like a boy than a woman. She had thought she was going to cry. Seeing the dry land of Ukraine hardened her, for the time being. *I thought you would never return*, he said. On the airplane, a young girl had said in Russian, *The bigger the raindrop, the faster it falls*.

She had not brought Valinka to Odessa to baffle him. His presence, even in some unknown seat on the airplane, like that of a stowaway in her life, saved her. She remembered when she first caught glimpse of his mind, what it was like inside of that skull with dark, wavy locks. In that room that first day in Detroit, there had been a desk. On that desk was a notebook. Its proximity to her, once she had sat down, made him do a little pout. It was something of value to him. She opened it, watched from the corner of her eye for what he would do, and read: "Failure has power." She stopped, looked at him. These words

matched the failure of his outfit. "For decades the Revolution failed. Failed in England. Failed in Germany. But the Revolution happened in Russia, a country at the time more like rural Michigan than industrial Detroit." She believed he was what he appeared and sounded to be. She read further while he grunted and shifted in his seated position on the floor. "Failure whittled the Russian people down to those sharp enough for the Revolution. Failure, losing, these things make a Revolutionary better hear the tones of the Revolution. It's better not to hear the chimes of happiness, prosperity." In smaller, shrewder letters, he wrote: "My father, whom I will now only refer to by his name, Anatole... Anatole couldn't handle that country. Nor could he handle Michigan, Detroit. He escaped the Revolution. He's an enemy of it... her. *Revolutsiya* is a feminine word. *Ona*." He wrote she instead of it. The only women who gave him the time of day were ideologies, bodiless, like the smoky woman on his pack of cigarillos. From the shelf above the desk, Valentine had taken a tome by Marx in order to give the appearance that he himself was reading and not paying attention to her reading his diary. In some ways, she felt like she was reading the American version of her own diary. His papa had not liked Detroit. Her mama had not liked Odessa, had not liked Ukraine. To herself she recited the punchline to another anecdote about the Odessan named Abramovich. She knew so many anecdotes about Abramovich, all of which her papa and her mama had demanded she memorize. The punchline went, *All that's left of my father is my patronymic*. It was utterly untranslatable. Valentine, at least, would understand. She saw that he wrote, "The Revolution's

my mother, Russian my father." And Ukraine's my crazy uncle, she wanted to add.

Ukraine, namely Odessa, had nonetheless drawn her home. Here in Odessa, she fell asleep in the backseat of an unmarked taxi and woke to the door opening with a sucking sound resembling that of a kiss, like Galya gave when Zina was still Galya's daughter. When Galya was still Zina's mama, Galya would come and kiss her ear. This gush of sound had woken her so many times. This time such a kiss was unreal. It had been a dream of a sound. Who had been her mama had approached her in this dream and left a kiss at the opening of her ear. It was a farewell. Or the sound had been her own tongue, which flailed in her dry mouth now. After America, where Galya remained, Zina's tongue was an exhausted seahorse. Now America was nothing more than a word.

Once she had asked her mama how she became so smart. *Years of loneliness*, her mama had said. After allowing several long seconds of dead silence to pass, her mama had begun to laugh. She had laughed so deeply that Zina could see all the way to the punching bag inside her mama's throat. Her mama had been a monster with a gaping mouth. Maybe her mama's years in America had softened her. Maybe she would have wanted to return to her hard ways if Zina had found her.

When she had asked Valentine about the bathroom, he had lead her back downstairs and outside. At the opposite end of the backyard was a makeshift outhouse, within which was a pit with two-by-fours

set in a square on the brim. Next to it was a bucket of ash. A hose on a hook was the sink. There was even a sign stating that everybody should sit, since the collective's rules demanded equity between genders. Valentine had to sit there too. Zina laughed. "This is like in motherland!" She told an anecdote: *Somebody asked Abramovich, "Why do you sit when you pee?" Abramovich answered, "Since childhood, I believed that my late forebears could see through my eyes that which I do." That somebody said, "I don't understand." Abramovich quickly answered, "You think I want them to see my privacy, my innermost?"* She watched Valentine and knew that he had not understood the joke. Even though Valentine understood Russian, he still had a long way to go to understand an Odessitka like her. Nonetheless, she had trusted him because he spoke Russian. She had trusted him because, in the country that demanded of all the world's inhabitants that they speak English, one was willing to speak her language. Now Valentine had provided her with a pillow and blanket, a pad to put underneath. She trusted him because, even in English, even on the first day they met, he had shown his innermost to her. She had lain down to sleep while he stayed up reading by the desk lamp. After some grunts and other puzzled sounds, he had switched the light off, clicked the doorknob, and lay down beside her. He never touched her, never crossed the whisper's distance between them.

Into that floor Valentine had carved the Cyrillic letters Л, Ч, and У. Before Zina's mama left, she used to lie next to Zina in bed and trace the letters of the alphabet in random order on Zina's back. It was Zina's duty to guess correctly which letters she traced. Her mama

taught Zina literacy this way. Often she or her mama would fall asleep during the process, not because the alphabet or literacy was boring but because of their mutual innermost, like a blanket around them.

In Detroit, that first night, sleep had come. She had not been able to sleep like the dead, like those who live safe lives do. But it had come, had begun and lasted, and she had dreamed of the place where she was at that moment, that she was sleeping uncomfortably, that there were no sounds in the house where everybody was sleeping.

Now she slept that way on the first night of her return to Ukraine, to Odessa, to her papa's apartment.

She woke when she heard the jiggle of the doorknob. Yes, she was in Odessa again. Surrounding her were the objects of her papa's office. For example, there were grooves where her papa's body had been born by the seat of the aching chair. However, there were also items kept from her childhood, a box of toys. In it was a clown puppet on a stick. His name was Pierrot. For a clown, his face was sad. Pierrot the clown collapsed into a cone. As he collapsed, a wooden peg extended from the point of the cone. Holding the cone point down, Zina pushed the peg up, and the opposite happened. Pierrot's felt body rose and expanded. His arms opened as if to embrace everybody with his wan joy.

The toy had come from her papa's childhood, and she herself had played with it so much that it had begun to come loose at the base of the cone. As a small child, she had

known that one day Pierrot would no longer be attached. So she stopped playing with him to put off the inevitable. She put it out of her head. Now she had returned to Pierrot and his soft, sliding felt sound. It was subtle. The peg pushed that grin out at the world. His arms draped alongside. Pierrot wasn't happy, wasn't sad, was merely the ball at the other end of the peg. He was like a souvenir for Odessa the way Valinka was the small piece of America which she had brought with her.

Valinka she had forgiven because he had inflected himself to her. In her primary language, questions were simply matters of inflection. Like with the *I'm wrong-I'm wrong?* anecdote, there was the question, *You want something for this?*, like when she first saw the room. When Valentine took back his request, made eye contact with her, she could inflect the same words to make the statement, *You want something for this*. And that was not happy, not sad, but very small.

That first morning in Detroit, she had awoken to the pleasantly familiar, sad sound of a mourning dove, a bird with which she was very familiar because of her name, part of the Latin name for the *crying pigeon*, as mourning doves are called in Russian. The "Oooo-EE-ooo-oo-oo" sound came from outside Trumbull's rosette window through which the room filled with light. Without that light, she had not noticed the rosette window when she fell asleep. The window was massive, taking up almost the entire wall on the front of the house and, like a perverse large eye, ogling her. Valentine lay asleep, his hand resting across a tome, an English translation of Marx, as if across a teddy bear.

That tome he had checked out from the library, which she visited that first morning. After climbing some stairs, she entered a long room. When she turned around, she saw above the entrance a mural depicting a white man with arms out, Christ not fixed to any cross. Behind him rockets were launching. Zina thought of how, when they painted this mural, those rockets were likely launching into a trajectory toward her motherland. Instead of into Soviet murals, this mural translated, to her, into an anti-American poster her papa had kept from the late sixties, back in Odessa. There was a body depicted in that poster too, only the body was hanging from its neck while angels mounted a backwards American flag. The poster said, *And in your place, they're lynching Negroes!* Her associations were still stuck in the Cold War which had officially ended before she was five years old.

There were stairs made out of what looked like the same stone that made up almost all of Odessa, shellrock. One doorway through which she walked was so short that even she had to duck underneath. On a nearby shelf, Zina spotted Cyrillic and thought of how at least she had found her mother tongue if not her mama herself. She pulled the book and was immediately gentle. It was lighter than she anticipated. Its age must have caused it to shrink and dry out, become little more than dust, once stuck together by some fluid. Now it had only a barely adhering structure. She opened to a middle page. The book was pre-Soviet and still had the letter *yat*. It was the language of that dust. It was before the regime which had defined the lives of every generation she had

known in her country. She put it away as if it were poison. Further down she found a nineteen thirties journal written by Russian-language anarchists and published here in Detroit. She leered at the journal, *Probuzhdenie*, while she thought about how her people were here before anybody in the room with her was born.

She listened to these people, Americans, speak. "What are you gonna do? Get a book?"

"Yeah, I'm gonna get a book."

"Then get it. I got shit to do, man. You're gonna miss out with these books."

She found a title she liked, a book called "Them" by Joyce Carol Oates. As she sat down to read, exhaustion washed over her like the noise of a jet engine. After reading only ten pages for an hour, she left the library and came around the block to Woodward Avenue. During that first twenty-four hours after arrival in America, when she had crossed Woodward on her way to Trumbull, she had thought the wide arterial street of Detroit was like the Odessan Boulevard of the Big Fountain. Some black girls said, "With that Elmer Fudd hat," about her plaid cap, given by her papa. She thought that she wanted to hate them. She next thought, Did their father give them anything? and the voice in her head thinned to a whimper as she looked down Woodward and gasped at the blank expanse. The wide street had also made her think of Nevsky Prospekt or of Tverskaya.

However, she had never been to St.

Petersburg or Moscow. And now, back in Odessa, it felt as if she had never been to Detroit either.

*Ian's novel Two Big Differences, will be published by MGraphics out of Boston in Fall 2021. Illustrations by William Ford.*

*Ian Ross Singleton is a writer and translator of the wonderful English and Russian languages. He is a Professor of Writing at Baruch College and Fordham University and an alternate delegate in his union, the Professional Staff Congress. His short stories, translations, reviews, and essays have appeared in journals such as: Saint Ann's Review; Cafe Review; New Madrid; Midwestern Gothic; Fiddleback; Asymptote; Ploughshares; The Los Angeles Review of Books and Fiction Writers Review. His short-story collection manuscript Grow Me Up was a finalist for the 2020 Tartt Fiction Award. He judged the 2017 Hopwood Award contest at U-M. Ian has taught Creative Writing and Literature for New York Writers Workshop, San Francisco State University, Cogswell Polytechnical College, the Prison University Project, and the PEN Prison Writing Program.*

*"Инь и ян" is the Russian way of saying yin and yang as well as the two most common ways Russian speakers pronounce the name "Ian."*

*The name Singleton came from southern Ireland to Canada and immigrated to the United States with Ian's father in the 1950s.*



## Sylvia Hollis to Aggy Augustine on the morning of November 1st, 1968

Andrew Warrick

I'm writing this out so I won't see you laugh. Or look like you don't believe me.

Before I start, though, I'll say this—Don't mention this letter to anyone. Or me. Ever.

I need to forget about this.

Ok?

Here goes.

Last night, Julia and I went to that rowing party on Oakland Avenue. Right next to your apartment, actually— the duplex. We didn't come grab you because you'd mentioned that concert. Anyway, you'll be glad we didn't.

In the front yard was this ping pong game, under all these lights, and surrounded by frat guys. Screaming frat guys. So I already felt sort of queasy. Inside the house was a little better,

even though it stank of beer. And Simon and Garfunkel were playing. I hate Simon and Garfunkel.

I know, Aggy. I know you love them. It was too dark to see most of the jocks, though, which was nice. After saying she'd grab us drinks, Julia fought towards the keg. I waited by the front door.

Julia must've found someone she knew, though, because like ten minutes went by and she didn't come back. You know how she gets distracted, how she has to catch up with everyone and everything. I couldn't get mad, you know, because on a night out with Julia, you knew you'd get left behind at least once.

Still.

Alone at a party. Alone at a party,



and sober. That's the worst case scenario. That's the worst I could think of then, at least. Waiting in the dark, ogled by jocks. I didn't feel like a fish out of water. I felt like a fish surrounded by sharks.

The song changed to Dusty Springfield: "Mr. Dream Merchant."

Then I saw her.

She stood in the doorway to the kitchen, where Dusty came from, and stared at me. Her skin shone white through her dress. The music was so loud I almost saw it around her hair. She pointed at me, then flipped her wrist and curled a finger to her face.

And that music—

Mr. Dream Merchant, please make my dreams come true.

I pushed towards her. At the doorway, she took my hand and led me into the kitchen. Cigarette butts, broken bottles, beer puddles, and music. Music so loud it was its own sort of silence.

Then, somehow

From the living room, right, the kitchen was dark. But inside, this glowing blue sand drifted from the radio on the counter. It floated around us, shimmering, and I

I breathed it.

Warmth. Just warmth. Like drinking fire. A good fire.

She held me tight. Then she leaned into my ear, and she

She whispered my name, Aggy.

How did she know? Not just my name, either— She *knew*. What I am. Could she feel it, somehow? Is that even *possible*? I didn't ask any of this. I didn't even *think* about any of this. I just felt. It was like, like what happened on the Diag didn't matter. Like all the shit that's happened

these past few years didn't matter. Like I was flying above everything, or swimming, actually, swimming through that blue sand with her. I think she knew what was about to happen. And I think she didn't want to be alone.

She could've held me forever. It was only a minute or two, though, because a news bulletin interrupted the song. About the election, or the war, or some revolution in some country, somewhere. I don't remember. But I remember how she grabbed my wrists hard enough to hurt. The newscast became static, so loud it rattled the window over the sink.

I wanted to run, but I couldn't leave her.

The static shrieked louder. The lights flickered.

The sand poured into her. Her nose, her mouth. Her

Her eyes.

She pushed me away, fell to her knees, covered her face. She told me to run.

I tried to pull her up.

Run. The window cracked. Run. Run. Run. I finally let her go, stepped back. Static. She opened her eyes.

And

They burned blue, Aggy. Neon blue.

She bared her teeth, and they

Her veins her skin I

I ran. *I ran*, crying, crying and screaming, and clutching my ears. Blood on my palms.

I stumbled into the living room, screaming.

Nobody noticed. Nobody noticed that the lights flashed or that the music had stopped either. They just

danced, Aggy. Danced to complete static.

I spun in circles, hoping to wake up.

I saw her staring at me from the kitchen again.

Her feet were in the air, and her hair dripped from her scalp. Neon water poured from her lips, down her chin, and onto the floor, burning it away. Then she screamed. Screamed so loud dishes and

bottles clattered. The kitchen window exploded. The lights hanging outside, every light in the house, actually, went blue— a frozen blue, like her eyes. Then they went out.

I yelled for Julia as people finally stopped and rubbed their eyes, realizing that something was wrong. She was by the front door with two drinks. Seeing me, Julia dropped

them and asked what was wrong.

When I pointed at the kitchen. That's when I saw what was left of her.

And I knew it wasn't a dream. Because in a dream, after seeing something like that, you wake right up.

I haven't woken up, Aggy.

Please, I

I need to wake up.

I need to open my eyes and not see her.

*Andrew Warrick (RC 2021) received the RC Emerging Writer Award in 2021 (along with Kaleb Brown). Andrew was Daily Film Editor at the Michigan Daily from September 2019 through May 2021, and was previously a film writer at SEEN Magazine. He also worked as an intern at Dzanc Books. Andrew is currently getting his MFA in Fiction at Columbia College Chicago.*



## Three Dances

J. L. Hagen

### Prologue

The day before New Year's, an electrical storm "fried" my laptop. For a freelance writer, this was existential. I had spent my money on Christmas and was forced to throw myself on the mercy of Craigslist. After a week combing the Internet, I located an obsolete model. While not ideal, the seller had priced it right at forty-five dollars. An elderly woman answered my phone call. She declined to give her address but agreed to meet at McDonald's.

"We're downsizing," she said. "A whole garage full, you can't imagine. Some of it dates to my parents, some my brother's."

"I bet you'll be happy to get your parking spot back."

She grinned. "My husband will. He hasn't parked inside in a decade."

She took the laptop out of its case. "My grandson posted the ad—I don't use Craigslist. He told me it worked last time he knew, but you can check for yourself."

As I turned on the machine, she mentioned she had removed the data and programs.

"I think I erased everything but promise you will delete any personal or financial info you find."

I assured her.

Later, circumstances compelled me to hedge. I couldn't bring myself to destroy a folder I found. Her ad had listed an email address, which turned out to be her brother's, but my attempts came back undeliverable. I tried to locate her and other family members, sending emails and leaving phone messages, which led to more dead ends. I almost gave up,

wondering if I changed everybody's identities, could anyone complain? Finally, a relative called and gave me permission to use the information, but not their names. So, I was, in spirit, able to keep my promise.

March 1, 2018

Email to Larry Thorsen

Subject: Christmas follow-up

Dear Larry:

It was wonderful to see you and your parents at Christmas. I was thankful everyone made it back to the old family homestead here in Loyale and especially pleased to spend time with you. You have grown over the past seventeen years from a little "bottle-swigger" into a fine young man.

I am starting to work on my staffing plan for the upcoming season. Before you know it, summer will be here. So, I wanted to follow up on our conversation over the holidays about Tower Rock.

I assume you have spoken with your parents, but I haven't heard anything from you or them. Are you still on board?

Let me know,  
Your Great Uncle Charley

March 1, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: RE: Christmas follow-up

Hi, Uncle Charley.

Sorry, I didn't respond before.

I misunderstood. Thought you knew I was planning to work for you this summer. When do I start, right after school gets out? What do I need to do before then?

Thank you for the opportunity,

Your Nephew Larry

March 2, 2018

Email to Larry Thorsen

Subject: A serious proposal

Dear Larry,

I didn't mean to press you. I assumed you would work for me this summer. However, after the holidays, my diabetes caught up with me and is destroying my circulation. I have developed a terrible ulcer on my right foot, and most days I struggle to walk. On the last visit to my doctor, he warned me if it doesn't heal soon, they will have to consider amputation. Larry, I don't know how I can work if they cut my legs off. Even more distressing, they tell me that half of diabetic amputees die within two years.

That's why I asked for a confirmation. I may need someone to play a significant part in my business, someone trustworthy. Your visit over Christmas gave me a kick in the pants. I set my sixty-eighth birthday—next week—as a deadline. You will work harder but get paid more. Please confirm now that you know the situation.

Your Great Uncle Charley

March 2, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: RE: A serious proposal

Uncle Charley,

I think I am ready for it, but your health problems sound really serious. I'm worried for you. Mom and Dad too. What would you expect me to do?

Larry

March 3, 2018  
Email to Larry Thorsen  
Subject: A serious proposal

Ok, Larry, in a nutshell, here's the deal—I have no heirs or succession plan. If it pans out this year, I want you to continue working in the business each summer while attending college. After graduation, if mutually agreeable, you will become a salaried manager. Over time, I'll help you acquire the company. If the worst happens, the plan implementation will fast-track.

Aside from my health issues, why am I extending this offer? It has always bothered me that your mom followed your dad to Oakland University and abandoned our enterprise. Your great grandfather regretted to the day he died that she didn't stay in Loyale; we all did.

So, my proposal to you is my way of swinging the wheel full circle to chart a new course, one that will reunite the disparate elements of the Lochting family. I honor my parents and grandparents, who gave me so much, and pass the company banner to the newest generation. This is more than a business proposition—a challenge to you to plant our founder's flag on a loftier height. Think about it, Larry. You're still in high school, your whole future ahead of you. It's a big commitment. Ready to ascend the summit?

Your Uncle Charley

—Oh, also, forgot I have a small favor to ask. Next time.

March 3, 2018  
Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Re: a serious proposal

Hi, Uncle Charley. Showed your email to Mom and Dad. They're still in shock. Me too, but I have thought it over. Count me in. We're all sweating the health thing.

You mentioned a favor—what's up?

Larry

March 4, 2018  
Email to Larry Thorsen  
Subject: an odd request

Larry, thank you for reminding me. It will seem trivial, even though it's crucial to me. So, bear with me while I try to put it in perspective. I don't want you to think I am off my rocker, but it won't make sense unless I tell you a bit of my personal story. . .

For twenty years, I have been fascinated by the Lochtings' genealogy. Our family emigrated to the U.S. in the late 19th Century, settling in Wisconsin. Over time, many Lochtings fished and farmed on Rock Island. How my grandfather ended up in Loyale is a story in itself. But once there, he noted the large numbers of tourists and the unusual limestone formations called sea stacks. He seized the opportunity to create an observation platform on the tallest one—Tower Rock—to survey the magnificent local vistas. When he gained the property, the rest was history.

I suppose my fascination with our genealogy started with a family reunion, but an incident occurred there that marked my life and haunted me for over half a century. I must run to an appointment right now but will tell you about this in my next email.

Regards, Uncle Charley

March 5, 2018  
Email to Charles Lochting  
Subject: Reunion

Uncle Charley, you won't believe this, but I have a new assignment for my World History class. We all have to write a family history. Mom gave me a copy of the family tree you compiled, but any stories about family members you can share will help make it come alive.

Thanks, Larry

March 6, 2018  
Email to Larry Thorsen  
Subject: Family History

Larry, I would be happy to share some stories for your project. My family reunion story will provide a good start.

Our family in Wisconsin and Michigan had never organized a formal reunion. By the early '60s, a hundred descendants claimed the Lochting name. I had never visited the Island, and I tell you, Larry, it was a trip to another planet. Here I was, an eleven-year-old boy transported in time at least 50 years.

They held the event in one of the two bars there. Since there was no town per se, community life revolved around these "watering holes," more like meeting halls than taverns or pubs. In fact, Karly's Tap, where we gathered, contained a small bar in the front; behind it, a large hall with a stage.

Soon the place filled to overflowing with Lochtings by blood or marriage, abuzz in conversations. Long tables stretched across the hall, covered with food brought by the Islanders,

pot-luck style.

I never ate from such a feast, especially so many mysterious dishes. Norwegian meatballs, venison pasties, and smoked fish chowder, plus more conventional dishes—seven-layer salad, scalloped corn pudding, and fresh cherry pie. Outside the tavern, they fed a wood fire for a fish boil—whitefish and lake trout steaks, yellow potatoes, and onions poached in a huge pot and served with thick rye bread and melted butter.

Before long, a band of old-time musicians assembled onstage. Someone pulled the curtain back to reveal the players: guitar, violin, accordion, and a stand-up bass. They struck up a lively tune, which filled the dance hall. I often listened to my mom and dad's records from the '30s and '40s and my babysitter's 45s. But this recalled no melody I had ever heard. It was music from another time, another land, another culture. The musicians reeled off one song after the next, and dancers soon packed the hall—smiling, laughing couples, embracing, whirling around the floor, marking out intricate steps. It pulsed in rhythm with their feet. The violinist introduced each number, and I learned certain songs accompanied certain dances—polkas, schottisches, etc.

I was desperate to join the others on that dance floor but terrified to learn the steps and dreadfully afraid of embarrassment or ridicule. So, there I sat, paralyzed; surrounded by relatives, most of whom I didn't know, exhilarated by the music and dancing, but petrified to try in front of a crowd.

At that moment, one of my dad's cousins and my aunt came over to

the table. The violinist called out a "Flying Dutchman." The dance consisted of threesomes—gentleman in the middle, a lady on each side, with arms locked behind each other—who proceeded around the perimeter of the floor like skaters on an ice rink.

They stared down at me, smiling. "Dance with us, Charley?" Aunt Sigrid asked.

My heart dropped into my stomach. "N-no, not really."

"It's easy, we'll show you. Com'on," said Cousin Karen. She held out a hand and wiggled her fingers.

"I just like to listen."

"Are you sure?" they said in unison.

I nodded, my face a mask of fear.

"Ok, we'll check later, in case you change your mind." Off they went to find a different partner.

I slipped away and stayed outside the hall. I wished to learn how, but ashamed that I had lied and turned them down. It haunted me, and I have never told anyone about it. For years, I wanted somehow to make amends. Now, strangely, I may have found a way. It could be my last chance.

That's why I need your help.

Uncle Charley

March 7, 2018  
Email to Charles Lochting  
Subject: Happy Birthday

Hi, Uncle Charley, sorry about your shyness. Maybe it's growing up in a small town. Mom says, back in the day, times were weird. I asked my friends—they never heard of the dances you mentioned. And a band with no drums? Seriously, you might have been born in the wrong century! Which reminds me...

Happy Birthday—number 68, right?

Larry

March 7, 2018  
Email to Larry Thorsen  
Subject: More history

Larry, thank you for remembering my birthday.

To your other points, it's true that people have largely forgotten these dances, but a few keep the old traditions alive (more to follow on that, later).

As for not having a drummer, you have to remember that the music was not amplified, and the shouting, shuffling, and stomping of the couples on the dance floor provided the percussion. The dancers and the musicians engaged each other in the performance of the tune, in its own way, an intense experience.

Okay, back to your project and another scrap of my personal history, this one relevant as well to the silly favor I need.

A few years after the Lochting reunion, the Beatles became a phenomenon. You can't imagine the impact on me and millions of other teenagers. I remember an afternoon in 1964, sprawled crossways on my parents' bed, tuning their clock radio to our local AM station. As I listened, the DJ announced "...the new hit record by the BEATLES." Across the airwaves floated the words and melody to "I Want to Hold Your Hand." It was more than energizing, like nothing I had heard. I lay on my back and contemplated this singular moment.

Later, on a Sunday night, I watched the Beatles perform on

the Ed Sullivan Show on my grandparents' black and white television. Seeing them live before a screaming audience was one of the most transformative events of my life, as implausible as Neil Armstrong walking on the moon or airplanes hitting the World Trade Tower.

From that instant, I yearned to play in a rock group. When I turned fifteen, four classmates and I started a band called the Beatrayors. Our popularity surged, and we performed around six counties at high school dances, teen clubs, and weddings. The number of groups in those days playing rock 'n' roll music, specifically in rural communities such as Loyale, was virtually nil, so it was easy to grow a fan base. I had overcome my earlier shyness, in part through daily rehearsal, in part through the thrill of performing before hundreds of teenagers every weekend. Imagine being sixteen, the center of attention, playing songs by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and Animals; and American groups like the Beach Boys, Temptations, and Mitch Ryder; plus being paid for it. Much better than pumping gas or bagging groceries. From our elevated view on the bandstand, we couldn't help but notice the dancers—especially the girls—and the interaction between various kids in the audience. We received a free, in-depth education in human behavior.

Girls from northern Michigan and across the Midwest arrived on summer vacation by the hundreds with their parents and showed up at the venues where we played. The Beatrayors developed a large following, and they loved us. Often, our fans invited the band afterward to a house

party or beer bash at a park or local beach. What happened to me at one of these parties changed my life.

My phone is ringing. It's your grandmother, so I will email you the rest later.

Uncle Charley

March 8, 2018  
Email to Charles Lochting  
Subject: Rock History

Uncle Charley, thanks for the info on the Beatles. Super stuff for my school assignment. AM radio? black and white tv? I assume you didn't have cellphones either. Hard to imagine. Can't wait to hear the rest.

Larry

March 8, 2018  
Email to Larry Thorsen  
Subject: Rock History—continued

Larry, sorry to cut my email off abruptly yesterday. The word on my health problems has gotten around Loyale, so I am getting phone calls from concerned people—like your grandma. I appreciate it, but sometimes they talk like I'm already dead. I keep telling them, don't rush things! As for cellphones, imagine this. We didn't even have dial phones. When you picked up the telephone, an operator came on saying, "Number, please."

You would say, something like, "137, please." And she would say, "Thank you," and connect your call at her switchboard. And then your party would answer.

So back to my so-called teenage "Celebrity Rock Career."

As I mentioned, we would often get

invited to a private party after playing at a teen dance. At one of these get-togethers, I first met Angelika Biedermann.

In late April 1966, I turned sixteen. We were playing a spring dance in Millecoquins—an hour northwest of Loyale—our favorite venue. The girls there were lively and highly approachable.

Across the hall, I noticed a slender blonde, dancing with another girl. Back then, a lot of guys thought dancing wasn't cool or lacked experience, so it took a while for the girls to entice them onto the floor. Nobody wanted to be the first or only one. The girls danced with each other, while the boys stood on the sideline, waiting to make their moves.

This girl was different. She displayed a unique style, uninhibited, but precise, someone who had taken ballet or modern dance lessons. I loved the way she moved and was eager for a chance to meet her. All evening, she flirted with several guys vying for her attention.

Afterward, one of the employees invited the band to a county park on a small lake. Across a bonfire, I spied her, the fire's glow illuminating her face and figure against the dark canvas of the night. Flickering light from the blazing wood shimmered and danced along the strands of her long, honey-blond hair. Her deep blue eyes sparkled, animated by her captivating laugh. I discovered she was a foreign exchange student from Germany staying with Jill McNaughton, who had hired the Beatrayors for a school event. I strolled toward them and Jill introduced us. Although her name was Angelika, everyone called

her by her nickname, Schnuki.

"I love your rock-and-roll music," she said. "It sets me free."

"I noticed. I thought maybe you had taken dancing or gymnastics lessons."

"Ah, yes, gymnastics—and a little ballet. You like how I dance?" She tossed me a coy look and smiled.

"Yeah, nice. Best dancer."

"You should see me polka!" She laughed and twirled, performing a few mock steps. "If you learn a polka song, I will show you."

I couldn't tell if Schnuki was putting me on. She flashed another mischievous grin, and I was smitten. The whole way home I sat in the rear seat of the station wagon we used for travel, watching a bright, silent moon float high above, thinking of her.

Over that spring and the rest of the summer, I saw her at every one of our Millecoquins dances. The band played forty-five to fifty-minute sets, with two short breaks. On the breaks, other band members and I hung out with people from the audience, made plans for after the dance, or walked outside to cool off. But the week after I met her, Schnuki and I sneaked through the stage door behind the bandstand.

I was so young—in age and temperament—we grew up in a different time. I naively tried to make conversation, telling her again how much I liked the way she danced.

"And how have you been since the bonfire? I enjoyed meeting you and hoped to see you again."

She moved in close. I continued to blather, not knowing what else to do. Without warning, she reached

up and wrapped her arms around my neck, drawing me to her. The press of her nimble body sent an emotional shock wave rolling through me. She kissed me, not like the handful of girls I kissed in junior high or high school, but long and deeply, as a young woman. I was breathless, flooded in its intimacy. I wanted to stretch the break into forever.

Over the next four months, we spent more and more time together, less and less with band members and school friends. Even though she lived an hour away, I found other ways to meet her outside our gigs. I didn't tell my parents, but my friends knew.

The more time I spent with her, the more intensely I fell in love. She was stunning, so warm and easy to be with, so delightful and fun, yet for me—a small-town kid—so graceful, so cosmopolitan. Her brilliance overwhelmed me; she stood at the top of her class, spoke five languages. I worshiped everything about her and couldn't believe she was real.

I had only one worry. Toward the middle of summer, it exploded into panic. She was older by more than a year—the heart of a dreadful problem. In a matter of weeks, she planned to return to Germany to finish Gymnasium, the German prep school for university-bound students.

Circumstances had trapped us in a web of desperation. We exchanged address and phone numbers, but international calls were very expensive (as you might imagine) and, of course, no Internet. It seemed impossible I would see her again. I was prepared to do anything. Right before our last night together, a terrible problem arose.

Gosh, sorry, Larry, I need to quit again. My shipper just pulled in, and I have to sign for a delivery. You will get to do this too when you come up here this summer.

Uncle Charley

March 9, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Schnuki—do you have pictures?

Uncle Charley, that is freakin' awesome. I never would have guessed. Do you have a picture of Schnuki? If so, scan and send to me, plus any pics of the Beatrayors. It would be fantastic for my class assignment. No one will believe this. And I haven't forgotten about the favor you want. Just let me know.

Larry

March 9, 2018

Email to Larry Thorsen

Subject: RE: Schnuki—do you have pictures?

Larry, I will look around and see if I can find any pics for you. I had some a long time ago, but where they are, I don't know.

Anyway, to pick up on my story from yesterday, The Beatrayors had a terrible problem arise. One of our band members caught strep throat and could not play our final summer gig at Millecoquins. I asked a neighbor friend, Chaz Burkhart, a college student and exceptional guitar player and singer, to sit in.

Dr. Burkhart, his father, had bought a new Mustang convertible, and Chaz asked to borrow it. He and I rode together so we could talk over the

set list and other details he needed to know. I confessed to him my passion for Schnuki and my anguish over this being our last night. In fact, the situation was worse. She couldn't stay for the whole dance. Her host family planned to drive her first thing in the morning to catch a flight out of Detroit Metro, a six-hour drive from their home.

At the break, Chaz handed me the keys to the Mustang. "Take her for a ride?"

I was speechless. Our venue manager expected the Beatrayors to play again in fifteen minutes. The band might fake a few numbers, but they could not perform more than half an hour without me. The people paying us would be extremely unhappy. I didn't care. I grasped her hand, and out the door, we ran.

I had only been driving for five months. When I received my license, my father told me, "Charley, don't ever borrow anyone's car. If you wreck it, they'll cancel our insurance." I promised, but I wasn't going to let Schnuki return to Germany without a night she would never forget.

"Do you drive?" I asked. She nodded, and I handed her the keys. "This will be the best drive of your life."

We headed out of town on a two-lane road. I had in mind a secluded lake nearby where we could be alone for our brief farewell tryst. We were flying fast, talking faster. As we crested a hill, an oncoming car banked around a blind curve to the left. His brights flooded the windshield of the Mustang. We couldn't see the blacktop and slid on a patch of loose gravel. As he flashed by, Schnuki lost control. We skidded over the embankment,

taking out some short posts marking the pavement edge. The Mustang plowed through brush and weeds, stalling in front of a small billboard.

I sat there in the moonlight—shaking, scared—in disbelief. I looked over at her. Her right cheek oozed blood from a gash where she had bumped the steering wheel.

"You're hurt," I sobbed. I tried to wipe the blood away.

"Nein, I-I'm okay." She looked dazed. I reached to touch her, kissing her over and over—my heart, a scramble of emotions.

"If anything happened, I don't know what..." I cried. "Schnuki, I love you so much, and now I may never see you again."

"I love you too, Charley. Forever."

I held her face in my hands.

"I planned everything—our last night—it's all gone wrong."

We spoke rapidly, with passion—time had run out.

"Come to Germany next year and visit me. You must," she begged.

I promised to find a way, next year—at the latest, the year after. In the meantime, we would write.

I kissed her once more, long and deeply, as she first kissed me, a seal on our mutual commitment.

We switched seats, and I tried to start the car. We backed out of the field and up onto the highway. When we returned to the dance, I looked it over. A rocker panel was crushed, the aluminum trim dangling from the driver-side door.

I told Chaz that I messed up his new Mustang. I asked him to tell Dr. Burkhardt that I was sorry and promised to pay for the repair. He acted pretty cool about it. But I was quite

worried what my dad would do.

I have to quit here, Larry. Sorry. Way past my bedtime. I have always been a night owl, but the doctor says I must change my ways. I am making the effort, before it's too late. It's hard.

More to follow.

Uncle Charley

March 10, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Losing your girlfriend—and a wrecked car?

Uncle Charley, That's a really crazy story. What happened to Schnuki? Did you get to Germany? Or did your dad kill you for wrecking the car?

Just kidding, Larry

March 10, 2018

Email to Larry Thorsen

Subject: RE: Losing your girlfriend—and a wrecked car?

Larry, I will cut to the chase. The next morning, when I informed my dad, I caught a bucket of hellfire. He was even more unhappy to find out about my German girlfriend. After I explained the circumstances in more detail, he said, "Well, Charley, I hope to God you learned something," and let it go. But as our conversation ended, Schnuki was on the road to Detroit, then airborne to Frankfurt.

For more than a year, she and I kept up an ardent correspondence. In one of my initial letters, I recalled the first time we met and how she pressed me to learn some polka songs. I wrote, 'We never actually danced together.' Schnuki replied that if I came to Germany, she would take me to Oktoberfest, and we would 'drink beer and

dance all night long.'

I continued to promise I would travel to see her. But she lived so far away and had started university. I was in high school, more and more engaged with the Beatrayors. A steady stream of new girls threatened to divert my attention every weekend, and my college and career preparations loomed ominously larger each successive month.

Our relationship inevitably faded. It ended when I informed my parents I planned to travel to Europe for the summer after my college freshman year. Although the band dissolved as we left high school to pursue our respective plans, I had stashed away a stack of gig money, plus my pay working summers for my dad at Tower Rock. I had the cash, especially if I stayed with Schnuki. But my parents were adamantly opposed. For months I kept after my mom until at last she told the truth to make me realize it was hopeless.

My father had fought in World War II. She said he witnessed firsthand the Nazis' ruthless atrocities, something he never spoke of. Twenty-five years later, it still held an iron grip.

"Why would Charley take up with a German?" he asked. "He doesn't know what these people will do, given the chance—why can't he find a nice girl here?"

My whole life, I have regretted to the core I didn't go. I loved Schnuki profoundly and might have married her; I promised to visit, but later broke my pledge. Most troubling is that I didn't write and tell her why. I couldn't figure an honest way out that wasn't a personal humiliation,



so I stopped answering her letters.

Maybe, that's why I never married. Although I hate to believe it is true, through my failure of courage, she slipped away, and I couldn't rebound. Every time I met an interesting young woman, I would spot something—a word, a laugh, a touch—that reminded me of Schnuki. I would fall into the same old funk, wanting only her, but having blown my chances.

Larry, I have gone on way longer than I intended. But without this history, my request for your help might appear peculiar and trivial. I promise to bring the suspense to an end in my next email, a pledge I will keep this time if it kills me.

Best Regards, Uncle Charley

March 11, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Schnuki

Wow, Uncle Charley. What a downer to lose your girlfriend—especially, so long ago. Have you tried to Google her? Do you think she's still alive? Did she hook up with someone else? Or like you, believe no one measured up? Is that the favor you need—you want me to find her? It may not be too late!

Larry

March 12, 2018

Email to Larry Thorsen

Subject: Favor next Sept

Dear Larry, it's time I explain how you can help.

Before that, let me respond specifically to your email. Your questions are the same ones I think about every day. Although it haunts me, I have never tried to find Schnuki. I couldn't bear to know what happened to her. It would

only deepen my despair to learn she died, suffered through an unhappy marriage, or experienced some other life tragedy. I have preferred to remember her ideally, as the young woman I loved with such passion, when I was so young. However, an incident last fall crashed through the lifetime mental wall I had built.

Last September, the 29th to be exact, I took a day trip to Frankenmuth, Michigan. Doubt if you have ever been there, but it's a quaint little town with a strong Bavarian heritage. Its fame rests on a couple of restaurants that serve family-style chicken dinners. The other attraction is Bronner's, the largest Christmas store in the world. Acres of ornaments and decorations. Unbelievable, really.

Two of your grandmother's Florida friends came for a visit. They knew of Bronner's and wanted to make a day trip. I offered to act as chauffeur and tour guide. On the Internet, I discovered that Frankenmuth's famous Oktoberfest was opening with a line-up of musical acts, food and, of course, lots of German beer. I suggested we top off lunch and shopping with a Pilsner and some music before heading home, a three-hour drive.

When we pulled into the Oktoberfest Park at a quarter to four, we heard the music wafting across the street from a tall metal building. Inside, row upon row of long tables pointed toward the dance floor. A German band made up of five older men from Cleveland played on a large bandstand. It was early in the festivities, scheduled to last all weekend. At least a hundred people sat in the audience, many of them decked out in lederhosen, dirndls, and other

traditional dress. The hall easily held 1,000, so plenty of good seats were available.

We found an empty table across the dance floor from the bandstand a third of the way back. I left to buy a pitcher of beer. When I returned, a family of four had seated themselves a few chairs in front of us. On one side sat a tall, thin man in a yellow, long-sleeve shirt, slacks, and a small green alpine hat. A jaunty feather poked up from its band. Across from him sat a girl, ten or eleven years old, long hair streaming with ribbons, a garland of flowers adorning her brow. To the man's right, directly in front of me, sat an older girl, thirteen or fourteen, with long blonde hair also entwined with ribbons and crowned by a garland. Across from her, a woman with thick auburn hair cut in a long shag style hunched over the table, weighed down by a heavy cardigan sweater, her eyes dark and sunken. They had brought food and bottled water with them, and it was obvious they planned to make an evening of it.

As the band hit its stride, the man began to dance with his daughters—first one, then the other. Round and round the floor they pranced in a circular course. Fifteen or twenty other couples also danced, and the band—accordion, piano, guitar, trumpet, and drums—hopped from tune to tune, attempting to prevent them from leaving.

The girls were both tall and thin, resembling their father, and excellent dancers, light on their feet. The youngest wore a long, red print dress, white anklets, and little flat, black shoes fastened with a strap and

buckle. Her older sister wore the same costume, except her print dress was dark green. Together, they conveyed a cheery, energetic impression on the rest of the audience.

Soon, when one girl wasn't dancing with her father, she was invited to dance by someone else. All the old guys took a turn with one or the other. Once or twice, their father danced with their mother, but they stayed near the table and moved slowly and gingerly on the floor.

Your grandmother noticed this, and remarked, "She doesn't look good. I think she must be ill—or depressed."

The band retired from the bandstand, and another younger group from Wisconsin stepped onstage. Their instrumentation was similar, except that an attractive young woman, hair braided and coiled atop her head and dressed in a short dirndl, sang their songs. She also played a keyboard and several wind instruments. Her voice was clear and bright and her movements vibrant. She amped up the excitement on the dance floor, which was filling as crowds of people poured into the building. But I scarcely noticed, intoxicated with her lively face, honey-blonde hair, and uninhibited dance moves.

I had collided with a lightning bolt and flashed into another world. The singer so resembled my long-lost Schnuki—but ten years older—she could be no other person. A hundred vivid memories flooded my heart.

As I turned away from staring, my eyes came to rest a few feet away on the older of the two girls. She nibbled some raw vegetables while her father danced with her sister. Now, a whole new wave of emotions spilled into my

soul. She too was a clone of Schnuki, only this time, how she must have appeared as a young girl before we met at Millecoquins so long ago. I twisted around toward your grandmother, unable to look at them, afraid at any moment to burst into tears.

Someone touched me on the shoulder. I turned back to see, standing before me, the bright young girl in the dark green dress. She reached out a hand.

"Would you like to dance with me?"

Larry, those words crushed me. Touched that this innocent girl had the kindness—and poise—to invite a wretched old man like myself onto the dance floor, I choked.

"I-I don't...I don't know how." My eyes teared up. Before my companions behind me noticed, I tried to brush them away.

"Oh, that's okay," she replied with a soft smile. She returned to her seat, and a few minutes later, a young man sauntered over and asked her to join him.

"What a nice gesture," one of your grandmother's friends said.

"Yes," they all agreed.

Devastated, I sat, my back to them, trying to regain my composure. She had extended a hand, put herself out to include me in the festivities. For the third time in my life, I had utterly, completely failed.

I gazed out at the floor, where she danced with her father. They skipped lightly around the hall, and I imagined myself in his place. As they passed the bandstand, I saw the blonde singer, and my heart ached once more. Schnuki. I tumbled into the darkest valley of my long life of disappointments.

The band stopped for a break. The young girl in the green dress headed for the concession stand behind us.

"I am going to the restroom," I announced. "Anyone for a last beer while I'm up."

They were ready to leave, and so was I. But first I needed to meet one obligation.

I hung around near the concessions, waiting for her. As she turned with a bottle of water in her hand, I made way toward her, feigning a chance encounter.

"Oh, there you are again," I said. "I wanted to apologize."

"That's okay."

"No. No, it's not," I insisted. "I have always wanted to learn how to polka—for over fifty years—and now I am embarrassed, especially when you were so kind to ask. I want to make it up to you—and myself."

She glanced at me warily, her brow furrowed.

"You and your family come to the Octoberfest every year—right?"

"Yes. My mother is German. We have been coming as long as I can remember."

"Do you always come on opening day?"

"Yes, my father says the crowds are too rowdy on the weekend."

"So, if I learn to polka, and come back next year, you will be here—and dance with me?" My heart was racing.

"Yes." She laughed. "I'm sure we will be here—my mother says we must preserve our German culture. If you come, I'll dance with you."

"And I promise—sincerely—I will be here too, and I'll learn how beforehand. One more thing, may I ask your

name?"

"It's Annika. Annika Schneider."

"And I am Charley. Charley Lochting."

She shook my hand and nodded.

"Ok, next year, Mr. Lochting."

In another moment she had slipped back to her family, and I to your grandmother and her friends.

"What was all that about?" she asked. They obviously saw me speaking with the girl.

"Oh, I thought I should encourage her. Told her I was sorry I never learned to polka."

"Ha. Never too old to flirt, eh, Charley? Ten minutes from now, she won't even remember meeting you."

Larry, I didn't believe that, but didn't want to argue the point. This brings me to my favor, my "odd request."

I found a woman across the Bridge in Nicolet who teaches dancing. I started lessons, but my leg problems have forced me to quit. Yet I am determined to keep my promise—somehow—to that girl.

I want you to go in my place. I have arranged for dance lessons this summer, and I'll pay you to learn, as part of your job. Next fall, I'll meet you in Frankenmuth. I'll explain to Annika, but I need you to dance with her—for me. You may have to be excused from school a couple of days, so please speak to your parents.

This must sound crazy. If it does, please humor an old man. For me, in some way, it may compensate for the personal failures that have haunted my entire life.

So, Larry, will you do this small, silly favor for me? I'll be forever in your debt. And if that's not enough moti-

vation, let me say, she's lovely and, as I hope I conveyed, most endearing. But when you meet her, you can make up your own mind.

Check with your mom and dad. Please, let me know soon. I am counting on you.

Uncle Charley

March 15, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Trip to Frankenmuth

Uncle Charley, in a hundred years, I couldn't have guessed what you wanted. Mom and Dad are okay with the trip. But I hope you will be there to dance with Annika yourself—and around for many years to come.

So, yes, I'll go!

Larry

Ed. Note: Several more emails followed on Larry's summer employment. For reasons of brevity, I deleted them.

September 14, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Frankenmuth—got it covered

Dear Uncle Charley, so disappointed that you can't meet me. I realize how much that meant to you—and me too. Mom said the surgery went well, but we've all been worried. Grandma assures us you are in good spirits—under the circumstances, as good as expected.

Don't worry, I have Frankenmuth covered. My friend Ben is going with me. He'll record everything and make a video. I know it won't be the same as being there, but I hope you'll enjoy it.

Thanks for the dance lessons. I have it nailed. Most of all, thank you again for the wonderful job experience this summer. I am already looking forward to next year.

Only two weeks until Frankenmuth. I'll give you a full report.

Take Care, Larry

October 1, 2018

Email to Charles Lochting

Subject: Frankenmuth—sit down before you read this!

Dear Uncle Charley, you must be anxious to hear about my trip to Frankenmuth. You are going to be so blown away. Let me give you the Twitter version. My buddy Ben is editing the video he shot, and we'll post it on YouTube soon.

Ben and I arrived at 3:30 p.m. from Rochester and shot straight to the Octoberfest Hall. The band had started, but not many people were there yet. We found a seat right where you told me to sit, and Ben set up his camera tripod with a fantastic view of the dance floor.

But Annika wasn't there. It didn't worry me because your description convinced me she wouldn't let you down. After an hour, the place was filling, the second band onstage, yet no sign of her or her family. I had all but given up hope, when three people walked past and sat at the table on our right.

I knew straight away it was Annika—her blonde hair was real long, strewn with ribbons and a garland crown. Her younger sister was also just how you described. A tall, thin man with graying brown hair and a mustache—their father—sat with

them. But her mother was nowhere to be seen.

I gave them a chance to settle and stood up to introduce myself. Right then, her dad asked her sister to dance and off they went to the dance floor. They skipped and spun around in time with the music, exactly how you described. I watched for a few minutes, amazed by how they moved, then saw my opening and stepped forward. Annika turned toward me with a look of expectation. But a middle-aged guy from the next table stood up, touched her arm, and asked her to dance. She nodded, turned again and shrugged, leaving with a melancholy smile.

After that, it was her turn to dance with her father. He swept her across the floor, even more elegantly than her sister. I was determined not to let my next chance pass.

She must have been thinking the same thing because as her father swung her around near our table, she glanced back at me. The music ended, and they returned to their seats.

Or so I thought. But she continued toward me.

"Would you like to dance?" We both said at the same time, followed by an embarrassed laugh. I took her hand, and we headed back to the floor. And that is how I finally danced with Annika Schneider.

After the music stopped, we remained near the bandstand. I thanked her and told her I was certain I knew her.

She shook her head and threw me a wary glance. "How is that possible? We only just . . ."

"I have been waiting to dance with you for six months," I teased.

She blushed.

"In fact, you're Annika Schneider."

She pulled back, stared at me with a puzzled look. "But—?"

"I'm Larry, Larry Thorsen. My uncle is Charley Lochting."

Her face brightened. She crinkled her nose. "Charley?"

"Yeah, a year ago at Octoberfest, you asked him to dance, and he was so embarrassed he didn't know the steps that he promised to learn and meet you today."

"Yes, he apologized." She sighed.

"He was kind of emotional." She peered over toward Ben, then around the hall. "Where is he? I thought he would come."

So, I told her about your amputation, Uncle Charley. How you asked me to go in your place and how Ben was recording everything. Her shoulders slumped, but when I told her you made me take dancing lessons, her eyes sparkled, and she laughed. Here's the amazing part, Uncle Charley. I asked about her mother—was she okay?—because you said she might be ill.

She perked up and chuckled.

"Mom? Oh, she's great. But last year, she wrecked her car and hurt her back. She's a terrible driver. This makes my dad crazy—he's an engineer with General Motors. She was in severe pain but wouldn't miss Octoberfest for anything. She insisted on going."

"But she's not here today."

"That's a whole other sad story. Mom grew up in Rüsselsheim, Germany. It's how my dad met her—at Opel. A few weeks ago, my Grandma Biedermann fell and broke her hip, so mom flew home to Frankfurt to help

her."

Uncle Charley, I couldn't believe what she said—.

"Biedermann?" I asked. "What a coincidence. Uncle Charley—actually, my great uncle—told me last spring he had a girlfriend by that name in high school. She was a foreign exchange student."

Her eyes widened. "Shut up. That is so weird. Mom told me Grandma was a foreign exchange student—here in Michigan. Is it possible. . .?"

"Uncle Charley said her name was Angelika, but everyone called her Schnuki."

"Oh my gosh, they still do, it's been her nickname forever. People still call her that."

"He told me they were in a car accident together."

"Yeah, she has a little scar under her right eye. She calls it her 'love mark.' My mother won't believe your uncle knows her. How crazy!"

Uncle Charley, I was totally brain-blasted. I didn't know what to think, let alone how to tell you, especially since Schnuki is bedridden. But you needed to know, since you once loved each other, and she was the main reason you asked me to keep your promise to Annika.

As for Anni, she is everything you describe and more, Uncle Charley, even though she just turned fifteen. If Schnuki was anything like her, I know how she captured your heart. By the end of the final set, Ben and I met Anni's father Richard and her sister Katerina. We had so much fun, and Ben and I danced with both girls several times. I wish you had been there, but, at least, Ben captured it on video.

Since then, Anni and I have been texting, calling, and emailing. When her mom returns home, I've promised to visit. She lives near Pontiac. You expressed reservations over trying to locate Schnuki, but I promised Anni to email a photo of you. She plans to send them to Schnuki when she recovers. Anni also mentioned her grandfather died years ago. He was an architect. Schnuki is retired from the Faculty at Goethe University. She's a linguist.

Who knows? Maybe this will turn into something more serious. And for you too, Uncle Charley. For both our sakes, I hope so. I really do.

We'll post the video on YouTube. Anni says hello and hopes you're better soon.

Larry

### Epilogue

At this point, the chain of emails ends. In seeking permission to have it published, I asked the relative who called me a few questions. I was curious whether Charley ever reunited with Angelika.

"No, they never did. She's in an elder living facility in Germany."

"What did Charley think of the video? Was he happy that, in some small measure, he kept his promise?"

"Well, the morning after Larry

sent the email, Charley's secretary Doris came into work and found him sprawled on the floor, his new crutches next to him. She said when she left the previous evening, he was in the office, working. After his amputation, he was trying to catch up. The computer was on, and he had been checking his emails. His health was horrible—he was a heavy drinker—and must have suffered a heart attack. She called an ambulance, but there was no hope. Doris said she didn't know if he looked at Larry's message."

"What about Larry and Anni Schneider—are they still seeing each other?"

"Yes, they have struck up quite a match. He visits her almost every weekend, and he's taking her to her high school prom. The two of them and her family often go dancing at polka clubs around the northern suburbs of Detroit."

*An earlier version of this story appeared in Sea Stacks, John's collection of inter-related stories (2020).*

*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

Logan Corey

### Zoom "Touch Up My Appearance" Has Crashed

No,  
you don't look  
tired. Hungry,  
maybe.

### Ouija for Her

ghosts  
but like  
cute ones

### The female waistline has been relocated

have you seen it? it's about  
yay high --  
so wide,  
with a liver  
for a hat and a bladder for a shoe

*Logan Corey (RC 2013) is Director of Residential College Admissions & Recruitment. She was editor of the Residential College Review in 2013.*



## Blind Carbon Copy

Daniel Madaj

*This is another tale in an alternate RC universe. Some of the characters were introduced in the Journal's earlier issues.*

Jen Hermadik had never fired a gun, and inside the dark booth at the shooting range the walls hummed with tens or hundreds or thousands of nearby guns firing at their targets. She focused on the black pistol in her hands, then squeezed out a series of shots. It helped to imagine she was firing at an enemy, or monster, or obstacle, rather than a paper target, but it also added to an overwhelming claustrophobia. Meanwhile, she could hear her new boyfriend Ammo (or "Am-O," for Amos Ogerton) shouting as he blasted away next door, fast round after fast round.

Was it only a few days ago that Darryl Koshwar had helped her with her nightmares about the Literary Police, then invited her to join the new dream

project he and Marta Rozzum were starting up?

Jen's enthusiasm for the project kept in rapid decline, and so it seemed inevitable she would quit. Jen wanted to beef up the "police" armature, but they didn't. Jen had realized something she might have taken a lifetime and still not grasped: she didn't like other people telling her what to do, but she loved telling *them*. It gave her a clear-headed view of her life ahead, and she strode confidently forward.

That's what led her to the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps), where Ammo was happy to help. Would the XC allow her to double-major in creative writing and criminal justice? As a third-generation XCer she knew her hippy-trippy parents would be aghast about criminal justice, but then again, they didn't know about creative writing

either, thinking she was in pre-business school or pre-med.

Ammo was aglow with enthusiasm as they stepped outside. Actually, Jen could tell it was something more than enthusiasm, something definitely male, and it seemed to grow stronger, even as her overwhelmedness also grew. Inevitably she pulled up short, half-fell to her knees, and vomited into some shrubs near the parking lot. "Goodbye, Ammo," she mumbled, first to herself, and then louder and louder. Even in her miserable state, she couldn't help wondering, who next? What next?

Darryl and Marta had tried to accommodate Jen, even changing the Literary Police to a "Literary Poultry," but their differences were too great, and it was frankly a relief to have her quit. Marta was a researcher and Darryl was an explorer, and they had the idea of offering a freshman seminar that focused on writing up dreams, as a sneaky way to find good, expressive dreamers they could study (Marta) as well as explore with (Darryl). Darryl personally funded an annual, "national" prize for best dream write-ups, knowing that most of these awards would go to XC students, which would get more XC students interested, thereby feeding their slots for study and exploration.

Their earliest success: Jill Smith. Jill didn't come to the XC to be a writer. That's good, because she would never have been admitted, given a non-writerly name like that. In this whirlwind of a first semester, when she found her dream-focused

freshman seminar revealing a skill and interest in story-telling, the XC reluctantly allowed her to join its writing community, but only after she promised to use an XC-approved nom de plume if and when she published. She's been trying new names out every week. Last week it was Lois Common-Denominator, and before that, Kay Sirah-Sirah. This week: Rhoda Goodbook-Laitly. She liked these hyphenated names, but she might settle with the Slavic version of her own name: Ulyana Kowalska.

One bit of her writing that caught Darryl and Marta's attention was a short dream snippet she called "Bee See. See?":

It was the event of the millennium, if you follow such things. It occurred just about the time the dog started barking for no apparent reason, about 2 p.m., last Tuesday. There was an old, old bee nearby, near the back deck, and for a moment or two before she died she achieved what we call consciousness, although there are better words and broader models, just not, so far, for us.

It was just an atom or two of consciousness. While it may have huge implications ("One small step," and all that), it was so basic that it's possible that one word at most would describe its vision, despite our multiple word description, which gets longer every moment.

The name for this tale likely was triggered by a moment in the XC office, where someone tried to explain to a disbelieving Jill that before electronic devices and phone printers there were photocopy machines,

often referred to as xeroxes, which sounded like some sort of Greek god, and before xeroxes there was carbon paper, which was placed between sheets to make a second (or third or fourth) copy of something. It was proper protocol to note who was sent these carbon copies (cc's), but there were times when you wanted someone to get a copy without the others knowing about it. Hence: blind carbon copies (bcc's).

If Jill was unusual, she looked the part. Tall, trim, she kept her red-marron hair shaved along the sides of her head, with a longish tuft atop that popped and pointed like the tip of an artist's paintbrush, dotting an invisible exclamation point in the air. She scoffed at her reputation as a stoner, calling most smokers "stunners," recreationalists happy enough to get a bit high and then vegetate. She liked the challenge of keeping her thoughts in order, and of being able to follow a thought along an exotic route but then to find her way back again.

She liked that about dream work, too, especially when she began to study lucid dreaming, which was something she apparently was already doing, on her own. She had to, she would say, as a way to cope with the terrifying nightmares of her early years.

Despite her unusual looks and skills, Jill did not think herself special, which gave her a disarming charm. It's true she scares the bejeezus out of her lovers, so far, probably because she shouts out graphic details of her nightmares as they happen, and because she doesn't seem to mind criticism and is not shy to dish it out.

She would say she felt human first

and female second, which apparently, at least in high school, made her some kind of freak. (So she prudently declined to say she actually feels sentient first, human second . . .)

In early talks with Darryl and Marta, she mused that there are things about life that if you realize them, then try to articulate them, they might mark you as a threat to the grand illusion, which might get you "graduated" to a next, not-of-this-world, level. While this sounded like common stoner paranoia, and reminded Darryl fondly of Jen and the "literary police," Jill brought a refreshing zing to the idea. And a bit of paranoia could be useful in consciousness exploration.

Jill also wondered if it was a celestial flaw that photos and recordings of people and things persist after they die. Wouldn't it make more sense that they would gradually fade, like they inevitably do in our memories? Or: if not a flaw, maybe a clue.

And when Jill first came by Marta's house, invited for dinner and to pick up some work projects, when she greeted the dog Hugo, she knew, and he knew, that they had seen each other in the dream world!

It seemed that Hugo liked everybody, and this was largely true, but of course he had a special fondness for his mother, father, and sibs (none of whom he's seen in the longest while), and for Yelena, her mother Marta, and now for this new man Darryl. Hugo especially liked when Yelena and Darryl were together.

One thing they talk about a lot these days is something called

"middle school," which apparently is part of the reason why Yelena leaves the house most mornings, carrying a heavy backpack, and doesn't return until later in the afternoon. Clearly Yelena was having some troubles, which grieved Hugo, but he was interested to sniff that it was more her anger than her fear that was causing a disbalance. Darryl seemed to have suggestions, and Hugo appreciated that, especially since he hadn't seen any of these incidents, because usually only friends or potential friends appeared at the house.

Of course Hugo would bite or snarl as needed to defend Yelena, and would have gone to school with her, if he could. He used to think it might be boring, sitting around all day, but now that he's a bit older he relishes the opportunity for a big, long snooze. Plus, all those friendly kids! And their lunch boxes full of tasty snacks! His stomach growled, just thinking about it.

Is it the female praying mantis that bites the male's head off after mating? Whatever insect it is, Sylvie's mother seemed the human embodiment. She didn't actually bite Sylvie's dad's head off, but she seemed to have no use for him after Sylvie was produced, and the dad did end up dying of a heart attack when Sylvie was barely 3. He might have been slowly poisoned with arsenic, or a psychic version, but it was pretty clear from all accounts that the dad was now superfluous.

Not that her mom seemed all that excited to have a daughter! Maybe because of all the work of a single mom, even a self-inflicted one,

without expected inherited funds for an au pair or nanny or even a regular sitter, not to mention other expenses. Sylvie was left to fend for herself at a younger age than most, and by the time she was in middle school she barely saw her mom. Sylvie took on little jobs early, at first to prepare a fund for college (since it was clear the mother wasn't), and then to "supplement" the meager "room and board" that mom provided.

So how did it happen that E.J. is pulling the (borrowed, family) car over to the curb, and Sylvie is getting out and walking up to her mother's new place? This seemed unlikely to ever happen, especially after the mom moved in with her new husband in the white burbs north of Detroit. But see, the pandemic, or one of its dozens of unseen tendrils, and E.J.'s uncle's death, have turned the world on its head, or at least Sylvie's, sort of like another b.c.c. (blind covid consequence).

Oh, you didn't know about the uncle's passing? E.J. doesn't talk much about his family, being so self-absorbed, but we did hear about a summer barbecue at his uncle's house. The uncle was fairly young, barely into his 70s; he was having some heart trouble, and then tests and treatments were delayed and complicated by the pandemic.

E.J. was stunned by his uncle's death, and stayed stunned for quite a while.

Sylvie had wondered if E.J.'s "luck" had been protecting town and gown from the full wrath of the pandemic, and worried that his powers, whatever they might be, might be crippled or cancelled by his grief and disbelief.



(If she had somehow asked Hugo, he would have told her that it was actually Russ Davenport's "sea monster, from the days of the underwater library, who was protecting them).

E.J. didn't presume any special powers, and didn't even think himself lucky, except in regard to Sylvie. He was just still so young that he was unfamiliar with death. Those older among us know only too well that our memories are increasingly populated by ghosts. It felt a lot like an early disregard for lightning and thunderstorms, until a bolt strikes so near it sizzles the air.

So now seemed exactly the wrong time to lure E.J. to L.A. and away from home, so that may be an unseen tendril. And this one here: Sylvie visiting her mom.

Sylvie chose a time she knew the husband would be at work. Her mom came to the door, looked surprised. Not exactly pleased, but at least she didn't frown, like Sylvie remembered all too well. The mother's hair was a shade of yellow not found on the natural earth, and her face showed signs of plastic surgery, her bosom even more so. And goodness: was that a baby bump? Sylvie did the math; it was still possible.

Sylvie's mom quickly tired of the brief visit. Surprisingly, Sylvie didn't mind. Surprisingly, it was good seeing her, and she noted that she seemed fairly happy with her new life, and that pleased her, too. She would have liked to give her mom a hug, but the mom was never big on that, either, at least with her. So she said, "Well! Just wanted to drop by and see you, mom!" And she smiled and turned away.

She was back in the car, and E.J. had driven a few blocks away and was about to get on the freeway. That's when she started to cry.

Hayley van den Berg had asked to meet with Sylvie. Of course she did! So much had happened since that day when Hayley offered Sylvie a job as showrunner for a Netflix South America show based on Hayley's detective series!

The changes had spilled into other areas as well: Sylvie and E.J. getting back together, almost moving back to L.A., E.J.'s uncle's death and E.J.'s new vulnerability, Sylvie's forthcoming sister (she was sure of it) . . .

Sylvie was aware that Hayley might intend to sever their professional relationship, all things considered, but nevertheless she dutifully gathered all her notes for the tv show and for future books in the series so that she would be ready to respond to all possibilities.

One possibility she hadn't considered: the sound of another woman's voice as she approached Hayley's front door! It was a warm, happy voice, almost a warble, and in Spanish. And there was a response, clearly Hayley, but itself with a warmth and a happiness that Sylvie had never before heard from her!

It was Rosa who opened the front door, still speaking in Spanish to Hayley, who was back in the kitchen, gathering iced tea and little sandwiches to take onto the back deck. So Sylvie greeted Rosa in Spanish (school-learned and therefore not as fluid), and then the rest of their conversation was mostly in Spanish as well.

As you may recall, the creation of

the tv show gave a job opportunity for Sylvie, who reunited with E.J. when she returned to campus to discuss the show with Hayley. But the pandemic was underway, and the tv show postponed. Meanwhile, Netflix required that Hayley step out from under her nom de plume, which led the way for Rosa and Hayley to get together but also brought a "white toast" outcry, since Hayley was clearly not Hispanic. Nor is Sylvie, or E.J.

E.J.? Sylvie could see Hayley's surprise. She remembered a brief conversation earlier that morning with Maggie (who had come to town with Chef P. to get a Master's in Social Work), who talked excitedly about an article (by someone named Tropeman or something) about the "garbage can model" of committee formation, and the six characteristics needed for a committee to be productive. Maggie couldn't recall all six of them, but noted that "if your group has all idea people, but no implementers, you get a lot of great ideas but no ability to get things done." It struck Sylvie that she and E.J. formed a committee-like team, and that E.J. wasn't lazy so much as all idea and no implement. And she had "implement" enough for both of them!

As Sylvie, Hayley, and Rosa talked, it was clear that the easiest solution to things was for Rosa herself to step forward as co-writer, with Sylvie (and E.J.) as unacknowledged contributors. At first Rosa said no: she wasn't a fiction writer and never intended to be! But she was a longtime fan of the series, and when coaxed admitted to ideas about where things might go. And she would relish

working closely on this project with Hayley!

Sylvie shrewdly offered other help to Rosa: such as developing a long-desired "lowest hanging fruit" series of Spanish-for-monolingual-Americans textbooks. Rosa laughed, and said she couldn't think of any further objections!

E.J. was playing pinball at the Outside Inn, in the small side room built as a simulacrum of the old basement version in the old XC Inn. He had just skillfully established a new high score on one of the retro machines, but before he could pencil his name and score on the wall next to the game, Jill Smith entered, applied coin, and, talking unceasingly, obliterated his high score by several thousand points. One intriguing thing about Jill's monologue was that she never repeated herself or any subject. Before Jill zoomed out of the room, she gave E.J. a certain look of bemusement, which E.J. didn't understand, perhaps because he was distracted by his short-lived fame, but it was the look that every freshman gives to anyone more than a few months older: you're so very old, yet you might still yet have something small to offer us!

E.J.'s subsequent attempts to reclaim his glory were going poorly, so it was a relief to hear Darryl Koshwar ordering his usual cup of hot tea, and likely taking his regular seat at the window near the entry door. One of the many things Jill said still swirling in mind was that Darryl had a new tilt on loving-kindness involving a kind of organic time machine, which Jill found sappier than a Disney movie but still worth respect because she

liked Darryl and, you know, worked for him.

E.J. stepped out of the little pinball room, and joined Darryl at his table, where he was gazing dreamily out the window, a cup of steaming tea forgotten in front of him.

Darryl knew very little about E.J. He had heard the standard lore ("laziest and luckiest man in the world") and also some of the recent chatter about his purported extra-sensory powers (!). He knew a little about Sylvie, but he didn't know about E.J.'s uncle's death. E.J. sadly filled him in.

"Jill was just telling me about a loving-kindness project and something about a time machine," E.J. added.

Darryl smiled, thinking that Jill's biggest service might be as gossip! "I was reading something in the latest XC alumni journal," he said, then paused to rummage in his napsack on the seat next to him, pulling out a copy of the journal.

Seeing it, E.J. realized that he was now eligible to submit to the journal, now that Sylvie had steered him toward finishing his one remaining credit. Now, all he'd have to do is write something!

Darryl continued: "The editor was talking about sending love back in time to his freshman self. He joked that he thought it might take a time machine, and maybe it would."

Darryl paused for a moment. "But I was wondering: what if a future version of ourselves was sending love back to us right now? To what extent would we be able to receive it?"

He ran his finger around the rim of his tea cup. "Another way to ask the question: what about us is preventing us from receiving it?"

More quietly, he added: "Maybe the times when we feel a little thrill of happiness or energy, we've somehow opened ourselves to something bigger."

They talked a bit about physics, and what we usually think of as the forward-only movement of time. "When I was about your age," Darryl remembered, "I awoke from a dream but heard a voice say, 'You won't be able to remember this dream because in your world, time only goes forward.'"

Darryl moved his tea cup to the side and spread his hands before him on the table top. "What if there are more of these kind of limitations in our reality but not, say, in the here-after? It might mean that a roadblock in communication is most likely on our side . . ."

Darryl gave a little smile, hoping this might be helpful to E.J.

It was.

*Dan Madaj was in the third RC class and did eventually overcome his "purple folder" status in 1982. He worked for U-M for over 40 years, including brief stints in RC and EQ. He was editor of Ann Arbor's Old West Side News for eight years (2000-08).*

*One unusual influence on this story: Ponch, the dog wizard in Diane Duane's Young Wizards' series.*

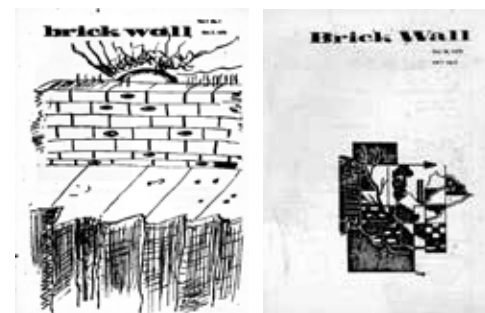


## Selections from *Brick Wall*

Barry Garelick, editor

*Brick Wall began and ended in October 1970. Designed as a weekly magazine, it featured short works of fiction or poetry, a serialized longer story, and (and the beginnings of a hilarious but non-PC comic strip about a local grocery owner. Founder and editor Barry Garelick (RC, 1971) notes that "I started Brick Wall thinking it would be somewhat of a continuation of the City Smoke Journal that I started in spring of my junior year. Senior year was a time when I was coming to terms with what I was going to do after I graduated. I hadn't a clue as to how to pursue graduate schools and masters programs in math. So I created an escape hatch with writing as if that would be an alternative career. I was similarly lost in how to pursue that path, other than trying to be another Richard Brautigan. I felt as if I was up against a brick wall, and Brick Wall was born. I got through two issues before I dropped out of school for a semester. I wrote about this period in a short story called "No Leaders" which is in this issue.*

*Also working on Brick Wall: Michael Cooperstock, Wendy Shifrin, Rick Gans.*



*The covers of the two issues of Brick Wall.*

**Mime**  
Ruth Bennett

Stage is totally empty. Scuffling and muted groans are heard from offstage and after a moment, a man appears stage-left, lugging a huge amplifier. He slowly makes his way across stage with it and places it far stage-right. He disappears to stage-right and after a moment scuffling and muted groans are heard once again. The man appears stage-right lugging another huge amplifier and slowly makes his way across the stage with and places it far stage-left. He disappears stage-left and after a brief pause a loud crash is heard followed by unintelligible curses. Scuffling is heard and man appears awkwardly carrying three microphones. He is losing his balance and when he is stage-center he drops them all. Curses. Man picks one microphone up and places it stage-right, another is placed stage-left and the third is placed backcenter-stage. Exits stage-right and returns with another amplifier which, after much labor, he deposits near center microphone. Process is repeated with one more large amplifier. By now, the man is panting and dragging his feet. He is physically weakened and grows

weaker with each step. He exists stage-left and returns very noisily with two large spotlights which he places clumsily on opposites sides of the stage. Starts across stage and trips over center microphone which falls on top of him with a loud crash. He kicks it as violently as possible for a man in his weakened condition and struggles to his feet. Cursing, he picks up microphone, then exits stage-right. He returns with an incredible mass of wiring. He then goes through a complicated process of hooking everything up. In the course of this, he gets so entangled in the wires that he is reduced to crawling around the stage. Finally all is done. He works himself free of the wire and struggles feebly to his feet. He only makes it about halfway, though, and in a stooped position, he moves back and regards his work. Slowly, weakly, he starts to clap. Another pair of hands begins to clap and then another and another until applause is deafening. Wild cheers and whistles are heard. After about two minutes it suddenly stops. The man begins to unhook the wiring and dismantle all. Curtain falls.

*Ruth Bennett likely graduated from the RC in the early 1970s and may be the first woman student in the RC creative writing program. Ruth won Hopwoods in fiction (1970) and drama (1971) while at U-M, and in later years received 2 wins among 8 Primetime Emmy Award nominations for her work on the television show Family Ties. Ruth wrote for Taxi (1979), Laverne & Shirley (1980-81), Family Ties (1982-89), Duet (1987-89), Open House (1989-90), Home Improvement (1995-97) and The Lionhearts (1998). She was also producer of Family Ties (1984-87), a consulting producer for Home Improvement (1996-97), co-creator and executive producer of Duet (1987-88) and Open House (1989-90), and executive producer of The Lionhearts (1998).*

**We Manufacture Our Own Brick Walls**

James Guthrie

the united state has taken all the \_\_\_\_\_  
put it in a vault in west virginia.  
they decided  
that there had been a proliferation of \_\_\_\_\_  
so they salted it away.  
fire hydrants barber poles lecture halls  
and the sun were purged. actors  
played it safe this time by eliminating passion  
and the contraband \_\_\_\_\_ was caught  
\_\_\_\_\_ -handed. everybody took tranquilizers  
and turned in the tomatoes.  
harvard closed. the turks  
grew poppies and sent them across in watch cases.  
then someone invented a brand new color  
and painted SURPRISE, YOU'RE IRRELEVANT  
on the vault (the army was helpless,  
government PR men had no lines for their graphs  
and the hardhat's blood turned pale)  
so now the united states just sits inside  
and plays with the \_\_\_\_\_ or clutches some  
in a fist,  
its eyes are always a little dazzled.

*James Guthrie (1973) is retired Professor of English at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, where he was editor of the Emily Dickenson Journal. Jim is author of A Kiss from Thermopylae: Emily Dickinson and Law (2015), Above Time: Emerson's and Thoreau's Temporal Revolutions (2001) and Emily Dickinson's Vision: Illness and Identity in Her Poetry (1998).*

## The Chrome-Plated Pine Tree

Peter Anderson

Piedmont's the name, Hieronymus F. I want to illuminate the natural essence of this photograph for you — the core of its existence and reason for being. On the surface is nothing more than a photograph of a chrome-plated pine tree, but let me start from the beginning in order to more fully inform you of the background, as it were, without which, and still are, you will be unable to wholly appreciate the deeper meaning entailed within this, superficially at least, ordinary looking photograph.

I was standing in a cornfield on a bleak Kansas highway after being stranded by my last ride in an Esso gas station. I had gone to the more or less unsanitary bathroom — when I returned, my ride was gone. I found this photograph on the ground next to one of the gas pumps. I believe it was the “premium” pump, as opposed to the “regular” pump. I studied the photograph carefully, having nothing else to do in an Esso gas station in the middle of Kansas and discovered this hastily scrawled message on the back of the picture: “Wait in the cornfield.” It was written in invisible ink, so I put the photograph in my back-pocket and marched across the road to an abandoned cornfield, where I waited. I opened my backpack and removed a small box of fried honey drippings to munch on while I watched the cars go by and the sun go down. I was contemplating removing and ingesting an ear or two of the corn rustling behind my back, when a ride stopped. It was a forty-four semi-truck with a picture of a big red ball painted on the side

— the Red Ball Express. I opened the door to the cab and mounted the seat of my destiny, a well weathered leather contraption, torn and burnt in several places revealing a yellowing, mildewed padding between the springs beneath.

“Where ya headed?” succinctly asked the burly driver.

“Colorado.”

After a small pause he spoke again. “You’re ah uh kangaroo, ain’t ya?”

“Yes,” I said, because I was, and still am, and have never been ashamed of it.

“My name’s Art and I wanna level with ya . . . I don’t usually give kangaroo rides, y’see, but I seed ya standin’ there with that backpack and I done some campin’ in my day so what the hell I figures, ya must be alright. Ya fish?”

“No,” I replied.

“Oh.”

“Care for some fried honey?”

“Sure nuff. Thanks pal, whaddya say yer name was? I tell ya, last time I was in the Rockies I was drivin’ for this other outfit by the name of Atlas, and I got to the top of this big ol’ mountain — and I mean BIG, bigger than . . . than . . . ah . . . REAL BIG, y’see? — and there was this corner up there and I was goin’ kinda fast and it was a tight squeeze on the outside so I hugs the inside and god-damned if I didn’t go off on the shoulder, just a little bit, y’see, but the shoulder was soft and the lousy tire sunk right in and next thing I know the god-damn truck is settin’

on its side with me in it. ‘Well,’ I says to myself, ‘ya done it now!’ The best part was this was at the top of this big mother of a mountain, so for ten miles all around down in the valley everybody could see this truck layin’ there on its side with the words YOU CAN ALWAYS DEPEND ON ATLAS written on the truck plain as day for all to see. It was good for a laugh, y’know? Whaddya say the name was?”

“Piedmont.”

“Well, Piedmont ol’ boy, I tell ya, I’d turn the radio on for ya, but as you might see if ya looked out your window there, the antenna’s busted. Third time this wee. First two times some punk kids ripped it off.”

“What about the third time?” I asked on cue.

“I bit it off.”

I thought this unusual, but I decided to let it ride, that mode of action being well within the general drift of my nature. Art then told me of a female acquaintance he had met in a bar one night.

“So I fucked her four or five times that night real good and the next night I calls her up, the bitch, and the phone rings.

“‘Hello, Maggie?’ I says.

“‘Hello,’ some guys answers, ‘who are you?’

“‘Me?’ I says, ‘who the hell are you?’

“‘I am Maggie’s husband, you might say.’

“‘And I might say,’ I says, ‘I have the wrong number.’”

After a few more stories in a similar vein, Art informed me that he had to take a piss, consequently we pulled into a gigantic space-age gasoline station with immaculate rest rooms and free Apollo 12 drinking glasses

with every purchase of ten gallons or more of gas. When I drove a Volkswagen, I hated these offers, because my tank held ten gallons when full. I never made a purchase of ten gallons or more. The attendant, a pimply boy with the name Sludstone Skinsquirt embroidered on his greasy jumpsuit, came over to my side of the cab when Art left to relieve himself.

“Where you from?” he asked.

“Michigan,” I lied.

“Oh, yeah? I used to live there, near Saginaw, about eight years ago.”

“Swell.” I had no desire to converse with him, but he was persistent.

“Yep,” he continued, “lived here about . . . fifteen years now. Right now I’m on leave from the army. Gotta go to Vietnam in two weeks. I’m not going to kill anyone, though. I don’t dig that. I mean I’m just gonna try and do my thing when I get over there, y’understand? Killing’s a drag. I got a rifle and they showed me how to use it and all that but I don’t wanna kill anyone, really.”

“They let you keep your hair that long?” I asked, mildly curious. This made him smile, because his hair wasn’t that long.

“Oh yeah. I mean I pretty much do my own thing, y’know. You got to know how to handle those bigshots so they let you alone most of the time. I do what I want, y’know, I don’t take all the crap that some guys I know take. I mean if you let ‘em, they’ll really dish it out.”

“Yes, well, good luck.”

“Thanks, and hey . . .” he leaned into the cab after looking behind and, lowering his pimply voice in a conspiratorial manner, whispered, “ . .

. you got any . . . psychedelics?"

"No, I don't, I'm sorry to say, but, as a matter of fact, I've heard that the streets of Kansas are paved with wild marijuana."

"Oh," he said, his pimply face crestfallen, "you looked kinda freaky, I thought . . ."

"Sorry," said, although I wasn't.

"You want to buy some speed?"

"No thank you, but now that you mention it, how about my free Apollo 12 drinking glass?" I don't know why I said that. I didn't want an Apollo 12 drinking glass, and even if I did there was no room in my backpack for it. Sludstone went after the drinking glass, Art returned and we left. I looked in the rear-view mirror and smiled wistfully — the station was glowing coldly in the barren Kansas night while Sludstone stood there holding my Apollo 12 drinking glass with an expression of puzzlement on his pimply face. I don't know if I felt sorry for him. I don't think I did.

I tried to sleep for a while, but I was periodically bumped awake. I gave that up and turned to Art. "I'm searching for a perfect love," I told him, realizing too late that in confiding this to him I was placing our friendship in an uncomfortable position.

"Oh, yeah?" Art said tactfully.

"Yes. I had a girl on the coast. We

never argued, but I got bored."

"That's the way it is, I guess," said Art. I said nothing to give him a chance to shift the conversation from its uneasy footing, if he so desired. He did. He told me he used to run a jackhammer in St. Louis. That's when he switched from drinking Budweiser to Pabst Blue Ribbon. I showed him the photograph and we talked about that for a while. He told me he had a cousin that lived near Mesa Verde.

"I gotta take another piss," Art said, as he pulled over to the side of the road, stopped the truck and got out. I got out too, and walked around, stretching my legs. Then I took a piss under the clear blue starlight — in front of me a broad expanse of flat Kansas land stretched out to the dark purple horizon far in the distance. I was in the heart of nowhere and feeling pretty good. I was sinking into a strange reverie when I heard the truck start *up and leave*. Art had left me. Truck drivers don't usually do that, not in the dull plans of the dull midwest in the dull middle of a dull night. I sighed and unrolled my bag, settling down to sleep for the night.

"I guess Art doesn't like kangaroos because he's a black bear," I thought and fell asleep to dream of green and blue people traveling on a mysterious, but dull, metallic ferris wheel.

## Poem

Michael Cooperstock

, , , pour me a thought  
I said one day  
and she opened her mind  
and we floated away  
. . . almost

*Michael Cooperstock likely graduated from the RC in the early 1970s.*

*A bio of Barry Garelick (RC Mathematics, 1971) is on page 49.*

*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.*



# Alumni Interview: Writing Then and Now: Susan Rosegrant

*Susan Rosegrant (RC 1976) has taught narrative journalism, creative non-fiction, and creative writing at the RC since 2008. She heads the RC's First-Year Seminar Program. A Hopwood award winner in fiction, Susan earned an MA in Journalism from Stanford, and has worked as a case writer at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, as a freelance writer, and for the Associated Press and Business Week. She is co-author of two books: Breakthrough International Negotiation: How Great Negotiators Transformed the World's Toughest Post-Cold War Conflicts, and Route 128: Lessons from Boston's High-Tech Community. In her spare time, she goes birding; she has identified more than 130 species of birds in her *Ypsilanti backyard*.*

Susan is from Kalamazoo. "The RC was just 5 years old when I was choosing a college," she said, "and East Quad seemed wild and freeing. I felt I could become whoever and whatever I wanted there.

"I loved studying languages and immersed myself in Spanish the first year. Then I wanted to do a harder language. My dad had received a teaching Fulbright when I was 11, and our whole family spent a year in the Philippines. Most of us found reasons to return to Asia; I did so by studying Chinese." She earned a bachelor's degree in Chinese language and literature in 1976.



While studying in Taiwan in undergrad, she became the star of a Chinese-speaking soap opera after a teacher told her about an audition at a local television station. Susan played a farm girl from Kentucky who had come over to learn about Taiwanese agriculture.

"This is the miracle of what can happen when you're in another country," she said. "Things that you can't do back in your home country suddenly become possible, and it was amazing. Every morning I'd walk out of the Taiwanese family's house where I lived, and kids would chase me down the street, calling out my name."

She ended her role after four



*Susan out birding (far left), and as Chinese soap opera star in the 1970s (above). A photo from the Kalamazoo Gazette shows 7-year-old Susan reading in the public library.*



months, although she stayed in Taiwan for 14 months. "It was hard to do the soap opera with all the filming and also stay up late and be quite serious about my classes," she said. "They wrote into the plot that my father back in the U.S. had died and I needed to go home and help out on the farm."

Susan earned a master's degree in journalism from Stanford (1978). She met her future husband, David Lampe, in that 11-person master's class. After Stanford, David and Susan moved to the Boston area, where they lived for over 30 years. Susan worked as a case writer at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, as a freelance writer, and for the Associated Press and *Business Week*. She also co-authored two books.

Susan moved back to Michigan in 2007 when David took a job as vice president for communications at U-M.

2007 was also the year of the RC's 40th anniversary celebration, and when she looked up her old writing teacher, Warren Hecht (Warren started the RC's creative writing

program, in 1971) he encouraged her to teach writing at the RC. "I taught my first students a couple of months later. There was pure terror, walking down the hall to teach my first class, but there's been the pleasure in still corresponding, 12 years on, with a student from that class, and of course from later classes.

"I'm a different teacher than Warren was, but he showed how to respect students, treat everyone decently, and believe in the power and importance of writing.

"I thought I would be a solitary writer all of my life, and to be able to do this kind of work, interact with such talented students, it just gives me pleasure every day." She added: "I've had some students in my first-year seminar then take the memoir course as their final course. That's really thrilling to see how much students have developed in the four years, and to renew those relationships is very satisfying."

Susan has always had an interest in birding and travel, inheriting her love of nature from her mother and siblings at a young age. "I pretty much



started birding from birth because I had the good fortune of coming from a family of birders," she said. With 5 acres of trails behind her house in Ypsilanti, she said she's seen 120 species in her backyard this year.

She's an active participant in the local birding community through groups like Washtenaw Audubon and local WhatsApp groups, where birders can share sightings and rarities in the area.

Beyond her Ypsilanti backyard, she has traveled across the world to see birds in places such as the Galapagos Islands, Belize, Machu Picchu, and Trinidad and Tobago with her then 80-year-old mother. Among her favorite sightings: the toucans in Belize, the blue-footed boobies in the Galapagos, and two types of puffins on a tour through Alaska.

Susan, David, and their daughter

had planned a trip to Lesbos, Greece, in April 2020 to watch the spring migrations passing from Africa toward Europe, but the trip was postponed due to the pandemic. She hopes to explore more places once international travel opens more.

"I want to go everywhere. I want to go back to Alaska and see more of the birds there," she said. "I've never been to southern Texas, or some of those wonderful birding opportunities. I'd love to go to Africa, I'd love to go back to Asia. You know pretty much, I want to see all the birds in the world."

*Assembled by Dan Madaj primarily from a profile of Susan in The University Record (November 10, 2020) by Kennedy Killips (RC, 2021) and from two recent YouTube podcasts on the U-M Residential College channel by RC student Robert Deduvkaj. All photos courtesy of Susan.*

## Program News

The RC website gives a description of the Creative Writing Program (with a photo of alumna Allison Epstein reading from the *Journal's* first issue, during the RC's 50th anniversary celebration in October 2017), and we thought it would be of interest to list the current Creative Writing faculty along with their specialties:

**Laura Thomas:** fiction, creative nonfiction

**Laura Kasischke:** poetry, fiction

**Susan Rosegrant:** creative nonfiction, journalism, fiction

**Sarah Messer:** poetry, creative nonfiction, Prison Creative Arts Program

**Christopher Matthews:** fiction, poetry

**Aisha Sloan:** creative nonfiction, digital storytelling

**A. Van Jordan:** poetry, film studies

Kasischke, Sloan, and Jordan all have appointments in the English Language and Literature as well as in the RC.

**Robertson Lecture.** Laura Kasischke gave the 2020 Robertson Memorial Lecture, via Zoom, on March 4: "The News for Poetry: In An Era of False Facts and True Fallacies, What's To Be Found in Art?" Watch the lecture on the RC's YouTube channel.

**Faculty publications:** Laura Kasischke's 20th collection of poetry, *Lightning Falls in Love*, is due out in September 2021 from Copper Canyon Press. Kasischke has written a foreword to *The Essential Walt McDonald*, due out in October 2021 from Texas Tech University Press.

Aisha Sabatini Sloan's book-length essay, *Borealis*, is due in November 2021 from Coffee House Press' Spatial Species imprint.

Laura Thomas published an essay, "Performing Hair", in *The Summerset Review*, and a story, "Stay Home, Stay Safe", in *failbetter*.

Christopher Matthews has an article in a forthcoming collection from U-M Press.

Sarah Messer was featured in the February 2021 *Ann Arbor Observer* in "Lives of the Poets," which reviewed the Ann Arbor connections of several famous poets (including Robert Frost, and Jane Kenyon), then focused on Sarah, U-M's Linda Gregerson, and Keith Taylor, retired director of the U-M English undergraduate writing program. Sarah herself is a U-M grad, and a Hopwood winner.

**Emerging Writers Award.** Since 2014 the RC has given Emerging Writer awards (funded by a writing alum) to graduating writers "who demonstrate excellence in creative writing but have not previously received a writing award recognizing their writing achievements":  
2021: Kaleb Brown & Andrew Warrick  
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

The idea behind this journal appeared in September 2016, and we've now produced five issues, the first arriving as part of the celebration of the RC's 50th year.

This issue features a look at *Brick Wall*, one of many student publications in the RC over the years. Last issue we printed a few photos of some of us working on an issue of *Sandwich*, which lasted three or four issues, also back in the early 1970s, and we hope to continue to feature other publications in the issues ahead. (If we eventually include something from *Sandwich*, and if we link to that specifically on the web, you could think of it as the Earl, I mean URL of *Sandwich* . . .)

Most of the illustrations in these issues have come from Pixabay, but Hannah Nathans (RC 2015) suggests we consider RC art instead. We might use it to accompany stories and poems and as stand-alone features. If you're interested in contributing, my email is [dmadaj@umich.edu](mailto:dmadaj@umich.edu).

Over these five issues we've featured over 100 RC graduates, but these are only a fraction of over 500 RC writing alums (10+ per year for 50+ years), not to mention RC writing alums with other majors or alums who ended up writing things . . . . If you recall RC writing classmates not appearing in these pages, please recommend them! What if we had so much material we had to publish more than once a year?

Other musings:

How about a bookcase or wall display of alumni publications in East Quad? We could highlight new alumni books . . . . And if it's not possible in the Quad, I could start a little RC alumni library in my house. I live about two miles west of campus.

Maybe we could gather RC Hopwood manuscripts into an annual collection? There's a 75th anniversary Hopwood collection; how about a 50th anniversary RC Hopwood one?

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to see an RC option for a kid's book for a grandchild or for a mystery book for a friend or a cookbook for a neighbor?

Maybe there could be a weekly (daily!) post containing a line or two from an alum work?

One of the many pleasures of working on this journal is reading this fabulous alumni work. And already this year I've read books by John Hagen (*Sea Stacks*), Megan Cummins (*What the Body Will Allow*), Allison Epstein (*A Tip for the Hangman*), Carmen Bugar (*Poetry and the Language of Oppression*), and Nick Petrie (*Burning Bright*).

Stay safe!



My email is [dmadaj@umich.edu](mailto:dmadaj@umich.edu).