

TRANSITION

FALL 2007



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Salvatore Difalco brings us a story of a caregiver you won't want to miss -- page 21

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CANADIAN
MENTAL HEALTH
ASSOCIATION
(Saskatchewan
Division) Inc.



TRANSITION

MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER:

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(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.

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Founded in 1950, The Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc. is a volunteer-based organization which supports and promotes the rights of persons with mental illness to maximize their full potential; and promotes and enhances the mental health and well-being of all members of the community.

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TRANSITION publishes two kinds of works: those directly about current mental health issues; and those about the individual's personal experience of those same issues. Both kinds of works celebrate lives in transit -- lives of change, growth, and transformation.

TRANSITION solicits original, unpublished articles, as well as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and visual art that represent current mental health issues in our province and reflect on their impact on individuals. Payment is \$25.00 per printed page (\$12.50/half page), contributing artists/photographers receive \$20.00/published piece, and \$100.00 for cover art.

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Editorial

This issue of TRANSITION signals a change, though it is not yet that change itself.

First of all, Byrna Barclay, who was the magazine's distinguished editor for 24 years, has taken her well-deserved retirement from the job. Byrna grew TRANSITION from a four-page newsletter to a substantive magazine featuring writing by people across the world who experienced mental health issues from the inside out. In her capable hands, TRANSITION became a literary magazine with a specifically mental-health twist. Almost all the pieces published in this issue were on my desk when I became editor: they were submitted to the former TRANSITION, and might be said to reflect the excellent production the magazine was.

Secondly, moreover, major changes of the past decades will soon be seen, perhaps only partly in this issue, but more clearly in those to come. An artificial distinction between so-called "literary" writing and other writing has pretty much broken down; the notion that there are privileged points of view (an "objective" one, for example) has given way to a recognition of the multiplicity of our individual voices; and a still-dominant medium, print, is rapidly being overtaken by a medium that conflates text, image, and sound, and, some say, has its own language - the Internet.

Thirdly, and most significantly for this magazine, concerns about mental *illness* have expanded to include mental *health*, which is after all the *raison d'être* of our own organization. Of course mental illnesses persist, and research continues to try to find new and better ways of dealing with them, just as society continues to try to improve its delivery of services to those who suffer from them. But the concept of mental *health* has implications that push far beyond the categories of ailments called depression, psychosis, schizophrenia, to name only three. Mental health is a matter of degree, not kind, and thus includes us all; mental health is founded on specific practices, and therefore implies a fuller and better way of life; mental health is a positive term, not negative, and so helps to eradicate the lingering stigmas associated with mental illness.

These changes will be reflected in this and future issues and in various ways. More and fuller examinations of mental health issues in Saskatchewan will be represented by more articles in the new "Living the Life" section. In this issue, for example, we present the text of an address by a world expert on basic income (income security), a matter of prime concern to persons with any sort of disability. In future issues, we hope to

feature articles on and from the various CMHA branches in the province. A "Reviews" section has been added, and we will rely on our readers to suggest what to review or to write the reviews themselves. Each issue will contain a "Director's Report," but only some issues will require an editorial. Writing of all kinds and in all genres by individuals who are impacted by mental health issues will constitute the "Writing the Life" section. And finally, we will continue to publish as much visual work as we can. All this in a new and larger format, and a push toward more than one issue per year.

TRANSITION'S new masthead, thanks to our Managing Editor,

may be taken as a visual sign of the magazine's unchanging focus on mental health in all its aspects. The word, *transition*, itself refers to a dominant characteristic of lives lived by many of us; it signifies also the new developments in the mental health field; the lower-case, dropped "i" followed by a return to its usual level represents the changes that the self typically experiences. And the Fall issue's splendid cover photograph shows a window, temporarily boarded up, in a brick wall - no explanation needed.

I am proud to be associated with TRANSITION, and I look forward to your continuing support of a magazine that helps promote and enhance the well-being of all.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PENELOPE SNELGROVE

Transition's new Editor, Ted Dyck, on holiday at Pine Cree Regional Park, takes care of his mental health

Director's report

We welcome you as a reader to our "new" TRANSITION magazine, the voice of CMHA in Saskatchewan.

It is an exciting time, both for TRANSITION, and for the mental health system, and those it supports.

We welcome Ted Dyck as our new editor of TRANSITION, and have come to see he brings a wealth of new ideas and energy to the magazine.

This year marks the start of what we hope is a new direction and energy in mental health as well, with the Canadian Mental Health Commission being formed federally, and some resources being put in place to raise the profile of mental health and better address the needs of those the mental health system serves.

In our own province, our Association has been very active this past year, working on a number of important initiatives. These include:

- Taking a key role in working with our partners and sister agencies in a new Coalition called DISC (Disability Income Support Coalition). This broad-based coalition is pushing hard to improve the income support for all those with a disability, including those with mental health/illness issues.

- Working to finalize the new Early Psychosis Initiative, which will be based in Regina and serve southern Saskatchewan. This has been the two year project of the Early Psychosis Initiative Community Committee, led and supported by our Division.

- Developing a project to look at the need for a more effective method of intake for mentally ill persons than the usual Emergency Room intake.

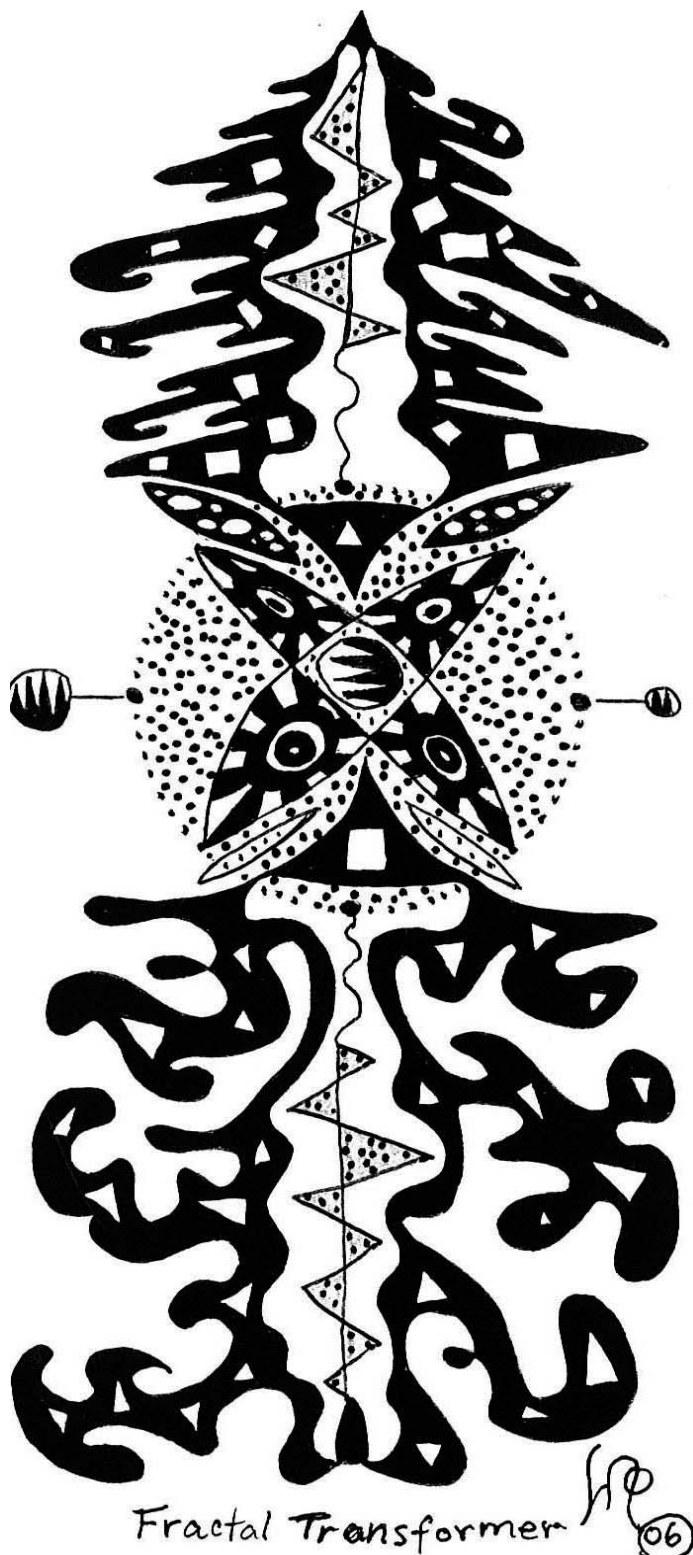
- Studying the idea of "step down" units, which are, as in some other jurisdictions, a more gradual but still supported transition from acute hospital care.

- Working closely with and supporting, in a variety of ways, our Branches and the consumers and their families that look to them for support.

Individual and systems advocacy is a major role of our organization, and we are hopeful that we are on the cusp of positive changes for mental health.

Collective public policy development through our work with groups such as PIND (Provincial Inter-agency Network on Disability) and the Saskatchewan Mental Health Coalition is also part of our ongoing work to improve public policies on a full range of needs for those with mental health/illness issues.

Please consider joining our Association in this worthy cause.



Fractal Transformer *hp* (06)

Art by Henry Peters

Night of the red rug

By Kay Parley

Francis Huxley is playing host. He's house-sitting for Dr. Osmond and his family while they are away, and he's probably finding it lonely after senior quarters, so it doesn't strike me as odd that he says, "Come as soon as you've had supper." We work shifts at the mental hospital, so the hours of our social life are a bit erratic. Francis just says, "To hear some music," and it doesn't strike me as odd, either, that he wants to know if I'm working tomorrow. The fact is, I'm facing a double, which means I have the next two days off, so if it turns out to be a late evening, it won't matter.

I'm living with my Dad right across from the hospital grounds where the river road meets the highway into Weyburn, so I walk the path along the river twice a day. It's a pleasant walk on a summer afternoon. I put on a blue gingham dress I made for myself. It has a full gathered skirt and a narrow pink velvet ribbon sash, and it's the first time I've worn it. Life feels great – wonderful summer evening, a new dress, people I enjoy to socialize with, and a Huxley in town. Francis is Aldous Huxley's nephew, Sir Julian's son, and he came to Weyburn over four months ago to do a study of patterns of interaction on wards. A social anthropologist with endless originality, he's added a lot of stimulation to our life here.

I'm first to arrive at the cottage and, when I remark on that, Francis says, "There may not be anyone else showing up," That's odd. People usually gather wherever Francis is these days. He asks me if I'd like a cup of tea and when I accept he suddenly seems to change his mind and says, "Or would you rather have LSD?"

I think he's joking, but he seems rather serious about it. I remind him that I'm forbidden to take LSD, on orders from headquarters. When I asked Dr. Osmond if I could try it I received a firm "No." He said, "You might get into a space you can't get out of." After all, I've had a breakdown and Dr. Osmond is insistent that anyone who may show the least sign of instability not be given LSD.

I say, "You know I'm curious to see how it compares to the real thing."

"You mean your own experiences. There's no such thing as 'the real thing,'" says Francis. I've learned a lot about mental fencing with a Huxley, so I don't try to argue the point. Should I press Francis to tell me

whether or not he has permission to give me the drug? Oh, what the heck! Francis is an insider in the research. He's not only taken it several times, and written about it, he's been sitter with quite a few subjects. Dr. Osmond would trust him to make a decision like this.

I may know more about what's going on than most of the staff. Not only am I friendly with Francis Huxley, I also have a pal working in research. She tells me they've given LSD to a few of the staff members they weren't too confident about. There are people who may show a few abnormal symptoms but who, unlike me, haven't faced it yet. Nobody wants to tell a person bluntly, the way Dr. Osmond told me, that they might get lost in inner space, so they give them a minute dose. "What you do," my friend explained, "is dip your finger in LSD and wipe it on the inside of the glass."

Francis shoos me into the living room, so I don't see what he's doing about dosage. I suspect he's giving me the wiped glass. But I know I'm in good hands. If Francis thinks I can handle LSD, then it will be okay. I relax on the chesterfield, facing the picture window, drink the little medicine glass of water when he hands it to me, and settle down to talk and listen to music. Francis takes the big chair in the corner to my left. There is a standing lamp behind his chair.

I always find the Osmond living room delightful. They keep a set of bright brass angel chimes on top of the bookcase, year 'round, and the furnishings all express comfort and hominess. There is no pretension, just a wonderful sense of personalized uniqueness.

I've heard the onset of the drug is sudden, but I couldn't have imagined how sudden. One instant I am talking normally to Francis and the next instant the lamp behind him is producing approximately the same amount of light as the sun. I wince and close my eyes and Francis casually reaches up and turns off the lamp. That's the job of the sitter – to be there for the subject every instant, never to let the concentration stray, to pick up on the cues and make the journey as smooth as possible. And Francis is a pro. But turning off the standing lamp doesn't begin to end the sharply enhanced perception I'm experiencing. Now I am drowning in the music. It has become unbearably loud and I'm lost in it. I want to swim in it, but I can't. It frustrates me. I don't know if I'm giving any signs, but Francis asks quietly, "Music bothering you?" He gets up and turns it down.

I become mesmerized by the angel chimes. Francis walks over and sets them spinning. They twinkle and

I could feel myself settling at some new level of understanding . . .

tinkle but they are metal. They reflect light. They seem to deflect me. My attention turns instead to the red rug. I've always loved that rug. I know of no one else who has a red rug in the living room. I don't mean a patterned rug and I don't mean a dark, wine-toned rug. The Osmond rug is a rich crimson-red, exciting enough in any circumstances. Under LSD it is beyond description. I just sink into the rug, explore the recesses in the nap, feel it comforting me, hurting me, making my visual sense real. As I sit staring at the rug, the red is ingesting me, the music is swallowing me, and I am overcome by depression.

I've always seen myself as a helper, and I've always had satisfaction from that. But suddenly I feel resentful. I feel as if every request for advice or assistance has piled up on top of me, like an actual load. My talents have been useful, but where is the appreciation? Feelings of worthlessness leave me beyond forlorn. I lay my head against the back of the chesterfield. I suppose I want to cry, but I can't identify any feeling. I am wiped. The heaviness is so bad I can no longer hold myself up. I slip from my seat and crouch on the floor with my head on the couch and I am nothing but suffering. No me. Just something negative and overwhelming.

Francis' voice is saying, "Get up, Kay." It is said gently, but it is a command. He is not going to let me wallow in self-contempt. I get up, but I feel mortified because, in slipping off the couch, my knee has caught the skirt of my new gingham dress and ripped about seven inches from the waistline seam. Soon after that, Francis gives me niacin to swallow. He doesn't want me to spiral into despair. As I climb slowly back to some kind of reality, the ripped dress brings a feeling of shame. Childish as it is, it makes me feel normal. My agitation probably shows, because Francis says, "Take peace Kay." I must be extremely sensitive to suggestion, because I am able to find that peace.

* * *

That is all I remember of my LSD experience. It was 1958, a long time ago. I took the drug around 6:45 and sometime around midnight I heard Francis asking if I'd like a cup of tea now. I said I would. I felt dazed, disoriented, and had so little memory, yet when Francis remarked, "You have it now," I knew exactly what he meant. I could feel myself settling at some new level of understanding of self and other. We talked about what had happened and when I told Francis about my little bout of paranoia, of feeling so

used by people, he answered without hesitation, "You may as well face it. You're one of the strong ones."

No wonder people reported achieving insight when under LSD. I got a totally new impression of myself in that instant, and it was to strengthen me many times through the years. I, who had considered myself a weakling, was one of the strong ones. It was a revelation.

Sometime about two a.m., Francis walked me home along the river road. Noticing that I was stepping gingerly, he asked, "Can you tell where the road is?" I answered, "Yes, I know where the road is. I'm not sure where my feet are."

At my door, Francis ordered me to go straight to bed, and he emphasized, "Don't you leave this house tonight under any circumstances." I was back inside my own head sufficiently to hear what he said and I obeyed him, but I didn't take any of it in realistically. I was myself the next day. Francis phoned in the morning to check on that.

Research into the effects of LSD had been going on in Saskatchewan for five years by then. Dr. Humphry Osmond became superintendent of the hospital at Weyburn in 1953 and he was an eager partner for Dr. Abram Hoffer, head of psychiatric research for the province. Dr. Osmond had a theory that schizophrenia was caused by some biochemical imbalance in the body when adrenaline was breaking down. He was interested in mescaline, a derivative of the peyote cactus, so he and Dr. Hoffer attended a ceremony with an aboriginal group so Dr. Osmond could take the drug. He was convinced the feelings of withdrawal and the hallucinations he experienced were very similar to what was described by schizophrenic patients. The doctors found a pure source of LSD that they felt was suitable for experimentation. Because the Native people had taken it in a group setting, they wanted to use it in groups, but first they took it themselves, to get an idea of possible effects and how it might be controlled.

It could be a very unpleasant experience, unpredictable in the extreme and sometimes causing panic. It was never safe to leave a subject alone when they were under the drug. It was less stressful if the atmosphere was quiet and pleasant, so they introduced music and flowers. The sitter, who had not taken the drug, tried to guide the episode by asking questions, but nothing could be done to really determine the direction a "trip" would take. They found that a high dose of Niacin would terminate the experience if it proved to be leading into dark places.



Those who took LSD in a group were usually senior staff like doctors, interns, psychologists, social workers, creative therapists, or senior nurses who had taken training in counselling. They were the dedicated professionals, people who were willing to enter the frightening world inhabited by their patients if it would make them more effective in trying to help. Despite the fact that subjects were withdrawn while under the drug, they found it enhanced a feeling of empathy for those who went through the experience together. Better yet, the feeling lasted after the effects wore off. This was a double plus for people working in psychiatry, because it increased awareness of others while, at the same time, providing a new understanding of what it felt like to endure the distorted perceptions experienced by so many of the mentally ill.

Student nurses were not encouraged to take LSD, but a small handful of the very curious persuaded the authorities to let them try. I entered training in 1956, and my first encounters with LSD were witnessing, at a distance, someone under the effects. Sitters often took subjects for walks in the spacious hospital grounds during those first years. A friend asked me to be her companion for a few hours when she was slowly returning to normal, and that was my first experience as a sitter. Next, a long-term patient who had been tried on every known therapy without improvement volunteered for a series of eight treatments with various hallucinogens. I was booked to be her sitter in the evenings, when she was past the worst. Occasionally a staff member who had taken the drug in the morning would be in staff dining room at supper time, likely acting a bit fey. The more I saw of LSD, the more curious I became.

I had had a breakdown and, though my diagnosis was not schizophrenia, I thought I might be able to discover whether this drug they were all so excited about really bore any resemblance to mental illness. After the night of the red rug, my conclusion was negative. Although there was a resemblance, it was thin. For one thing, the LSD experience was so brief. It didn't begin to compare with the years and years of distortion endured by so many of the mentally ill in those days.

Also, when I was ill, I had very little in the way of visual distortion. What I had was far too many hours of auditory hallucinations. It was also my observation while doing psychiatric nursing that auditory hallucinations far outweighed visual in most instances. I never heard an LSD subject report hearing voices. So, aside from the emotional 'down' feeling of panic, and the fact that it did distort perception, I didn't feel that LSD really provided the model of psychosis the researchers felt it did.

Whether LSD really increased empathy, no one could ever prove, but when I worked in psychiatry at University Hospital in Saskatoon I won a reputation as a good LSD sitter. A sitter had to be able to concentrate for at least eight straight hours. You couldn't let your mind wander from the subject, even for a moment, and this didn't mean simply watching behaviour. You had to intuit yourself into what he was feeling and experiencing from moment to moment. It was

an intensely draining experience, but a very satisfying one. If my own little "trip" had something to do with it, then I know what Francis meant when he said, "You have it now."

By that time they had discovered that LSD was most effective in treating alcoholism, but its days were numbered. When Dr. Osmond went to California to give LSD to Aldous Huxley, and Huxley wrote his books about the drug, they made the mistake of talking to Timothy Leary about their hopes and plans. Unfortunately, Leary put a different spin on the story and LSD

became part of the "hippie" age. By the mid-sixties, so much impure LSD was being given to unscreened subjects in dangerous circumstances that there was a hue and cry from the public. The drug could no longer be acquired, even by responsible doctors using it in controlled settings, and Saskatchewan had to discontinue its use.

Admittedly, the bit I took is hardly worthy to be called an experiment, but it is one experience I will never forget: I took LSD from a Huxley, the nephew of the very man who wrote *The Doors of Perception*. I have never been a stranger to serendipity.



Art by James Skelton

Economic security for all in Canada?

Insights from the debates on a guaranteed basic income

By Yannick Vanderborght

Editor's Note:

This article is based partly on a presentation given at a Conference on Economic Security at the University of Regina in June 2007. It draws also on a book Yannick Vanderborght co-authored with Philippe Van Parijs entitled *L'allocation universelle* (Paris, Decouverte, 2005). An expanded English version of this book will be published in 2008 by Harvard University Press.

TRANSITION is grateful to Dr. Vanderborght for permission to present our readers this seminal paper on income security and its implications for Saskatchewan.

The interpolated comments are excerpted (with permission) from David Nelson's article, "The Problem of Income Security" (TRANSITION Fall 2006, pp. 106-107).

Introduction

Since the late 1960s, Canada has been a forerunner in discussions on economic security. Through numerous official reports and academic publications, but also through the action of several groups ranging from trade unions to small associations, innovative proposals have been debated. Among these proposals, the most controversial might be the idea of giving all Canadians the right to an unconditional and universal "basic income." In December 2000, it resurfaced once again on the front pages of Canada's main newspapers, as some sources indicated that Premier Jean Chrétien wanted to "leave his mark with cradle-to-grave program of guaranteed annual income."¹ The trial balloon was quickly shot down, but remains significant as part of a debate which never really disappeared from the agenda of social policy reform since the 1960s. In the Spring of 2007, the *National Anti Poverty Organization* (NAPO) decided to launch a campaign on a so-called "Guaranteed Adequate Income,"² thus fitting in with a long tradition of discussion of this idea.

Why would basic income represent a good way to ensure economic security for all in Canada? Why would it be superior, in terms of social justice, to existing targeted schemes? How should it be implemented? Several important issues are raised by this proposal, and the purpose of this introductory paper is to give the reader a few tools to get a better grasp on the discussion, and form his own conviction. From the outset,

it is important to stress that I do not consider basic income as being a magic bullet. But I see it as a crucial component of any coherent strategy to improve economic security.

1. AN OLD IDEA

By universal basic income, I mean *an income paid by a political community to all its members, on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement*. This proposal has germinated independently in the minds of many people living at different times and in different places, and it has been given various labels. In the United Kingdom, for instance, one generally refers to a "citizen's income." In many countries the expression "basic income" is used, in English but also in German (*grundeinkommen*) or Dutch (*basisinkomen*). In this respect Canadians are somewhat eccentric, since throughout history the expression used was "guaranteed minimum income" or, more often, "guaranteed annual income." One of the first academic papers advocating the introduction of a basic income in Canada was significantly entitled "A guaranteed income for Canadians."³

Income security: "Work for those
who can, security for those who can't."
-- David Nelson

Such a basic income is different from current mechanisms of social assistance which provide basic economic security in a conventional sense, such as the social assistance programs implemented in various Canadian provinces. It actually differs from these minimum income schemes in three crucial ways. Conventional schemes are always restricted to the poorest (means-test), they take into account the family situation of the recipient, and are most of the time conditional, for instance through a work requirement. This last feature means that *responsibilities* are closely connected to rights. A good example can be found in the Saskatchewan's *Social Assistance Handbook*, which includes a section on "Your rights" directly followed by a section devoted to "Your responsibilities."⁴ In contrast, a *basic income* is granted to all, rich and poor, on an individual basis, without any requirement.

¹ *Ottawa Citizen*, December 9, 2000

² See for instance Rob Rainer, 'Rebuilding Canada's Social Safety Net: A Role for Guaranteed Income', *NAPO News*, Spring, 2007

³ CUTT, James (1968), *A Guaranteed Income for Canadians*, Toronto, The Ontario Woodsworth Memorial Foundation, 1968.

⁴ Government of Saskatchewan (2007), *Social Assistance Handbook*, Regina: Saskatchewan Community Resources



Income supports for disabled and multiple-barriered, vulnerable persons will provide supports in the following basic manner:

- They should give persons an adequate basic amount of monies while they try to find work.

- They should give extra monies to persons who try to do things to help them get back to work as a financial incentive.

- They will give more monies to persons who are assessed as not being able to presently work at all due to disability or other multiple barriers.

- Allowing persons to do some part-time work without losing benefits is critical to supporting persons with disability and multiple barriers. The amount allowed before clawback should be at least twice the current amount, and more if possible, to provide meaningful incentive.

- "Work" needs to be broadly defined including volunteer work, as all "work" helps people learn the skills, which may allow them to participate.

-- David Nelson

The idea is far from being new. Since the XVIIIth century, various thinkers have advocated the idea of equal ownership of the earth, i.e. that every human has the right to be owner of a plot of land, be it a very modest one. Thomas Paine, for instance, argued that the earth is the common property of mankind. Since some have appropriated parts of it, the worst-off, those who have no property, should be *compensated* by an income by right of some sort. Thanks to the research of devoted historians, we now know that the English radical Thomas Spence (1750-1814) is probably the first to have regarded this idea of the earth as common property as the justification for a regular income under the form of what we call today a "basic income."⁵

This line of argument has actually been used to justify the introduction of the only existing basic income, even if it was without any explicit reference to ethical issues raised by Paine and Spence. The only genuine basic income introduced to date has been implemented in the State of Alaska (USA). In the mid

1970s, Governor Jay Hammond suggested setting up a fund to ensure that the wealth generated by the exploitation of oil in the State would be preserved for future generations, but also that part of it would be redistributed among all citizens. Since implementation of the programme in 1982, every resident in Alaska has received a uniform dividend every year. This dividend almost reached 2000US\$ in 2000 (1100 US\$ in 2006).⁶

Even if Alaska might seem to be a very special case, it remains interesting because of this connection with the first ethical justification of basic income, namely the idea of "common ownership of the natural resources." But it is also worth looking at because it might inspire governments in provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan in Canada, facing high poverty rates but with abundant natural resources at their disposal. Note that the Alaskan Dividend is also currently used as an example of what should be done to ensure economic security in countries facing more important challenges, like contemporary Iraq. Interestingly, one of the main advocates of workfare in the US, Republican candidate Tommy Thompson, has recently endorsed a basic income in this context.⁷

2. MORE EFFICIENT?

Would such a basic income perform better, in terms of economic security, than existing schemes like the social assistance programs implemented to date in Canada? To most of us it seems quite obvious that a minimum income of the conventional type, strictly targeting the poorest and involving a work requirement is far more effective against poverty. After all, a basic income seems to waste valuable tax revenues by distributing equally among all what some do *not* need in the least.

This is the conclusion many arrive at, even the most well-meaning. For instance a French official report, published by a socialist-led government in 2000, included a whole section devoted to basic income, but rejected it for the following reason: "*it makes no sense, from the perspective of economics, to give an income to everyone, since some do not need it.*"⁸ Advocates of basic income believe these kind of conclu-

⁶ For further information, see <http://www.pfd.state.ak.us/>

⁷ See http://www.tommy2008.com/War_On_Terror.aspx

⁸ BELORGEY, Jean-Michel (Ed.) (2000), *Minima Sociaux, Revenus D'activite, precarite*, Paris : Commissariat General Du Plan -- La documentation Française, pp. 110-111.

⁵ In a pamphlet published in London in 1797, and entitled *The rights of children*. One of the other first proponents of basic income was a Belgian thinker, Joseph Charlier (1816-1896).

The only genuine basic income introduced to date has been implemented in . . . Alaska.

sions are based on a short-sighted view of poverty and on a naive conception of what constitutes the cost of an anti-poverty program. "From the perspective of economics," one could even add that basic income has been advocated by prominent economists, including several Nobel prize-winners.⁹

Of course it is feasible to finance a basic income out of pure "distribution" in countries (or provinces) with expensive resources at their disposal. But most detailed scenarios for implementing a basic income imply an adjustment in the way in which the tax system is structured. The introduction of basic income would, for instance, go hand in hand with the suppression or reduction of some existing programs, of several exemptions and deductions that have regressive effects, but it could also be linked with an increase in marginal taxation for higher income groups. It is important to keep in mind that *it is not because both rich and poor receive a basic income that implementation of a basic income would amount to making the rich richer*. The richest would have to finance, in addition to what they already finance, both their own basic income and a considerable portion of the basic income of the poorest.

Why would it be more efficient? Some think that targeted schemes are better tools to ensure economic security. In fact the so-called "liberal countries," like the US or the UK, but also - to some extent - Canada and Australia, rely very much on *targeting*: benefits are targeted at the poor, i.e. the worst-off are the target of specific anti-poverty programs. These schemes seem to follow the logic of Robin Hood: taking from the rich to give to the poor. But when looking at comparative data, a real paradox appears. The most egalitarian countries, namely Scandinavian countries, rely very much on universal programmes, i.e. programmes that are accessible to all, irrespective of their income, occupation or social position (e.g. universal child benefits). It means that in these countries the State transfers money to the poor *and* to the rich. And yet they perform better in terms of *maximin* (maximization of the minimum), i.e. in terms of reduction of inequalities and reduction of poverty.

⁹ Think of James Tobin, James Meade, Herbert Simon, Jan Tinbergen, and Milton Friedman.

¹⁰ KORPI, Walter & PALME, Joakim (1998), 'The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality: Welfare State Institutions, Inequality, and Poverty in the Western Countries,' *American Sociological Review*, 63 (5), pp. 661-687



Art by
Henry Peters

Swedish researchers have called this the *paradox of redistribution*.¹⁰ There are at least two complementary ways to explain this paradox.

1) First, there are important practical difficulties implied by the very idea of targeting. To target benefits at the poor, one needs to know *who* is poor, and this is far from being an easy task. Most targeted programmes rely on two types of tests to get a clear picture of who is to be counted as poor: the income-test and, more broadly, the means-test. In other words, one needs to control the individual income, as well as other means such as income of other members of the household, properties, savings, etc. These controls might take some time, and more often than not the poor get access to the benefit after a few months, sometimes after years, when it might be too late. In this sense, these schemes operate *ex post*, on the basis of a prior (even if approximate) assessment of the beneficiaries'



income. But *ex post* might be too late for the poor. All universal programmes operate *ex ante*, hence ensuring real income security for all.

On top of that the poor do not always know what their rights are. They do not necessarily have the social capital needed to get the information that might be required to pass the tests. By contrast, it is much easier to get access to a universal programme such as a universal child benefit. Some targeted redistributive programs in provinces like Saskatchewan have take-up rates of approximately 50%, meaning that another 50% of recipients do *not* actually get the benefit.¹¹ In the case of the American *Earned Income Tax Credit* (EITC), a significant proportion of the working poor pay experts to fill in the forms required to pass the test. “The trouble is, getting money costs money,” David Shieler argues. “[Most low-wage workers] are so desperate for the check that they give up a precious \$100 or so to get everything done quickly and correctly.”¹² These kind of practical difficulties led Richard Titmuss, one of the leading experts in social policy, to argue that programs for the poor are poor programs.

2) The second way to explain the paradox is related to the idea of a “poverty trap.” When benefits are targeted at the poor, they generate traps. Take the example of targeted child benefits, as they exist in most liberal countries: only the poor, below a certain level of income, get the benefit. Again it might look more efficient against poverty. It is not, because this means that as soon as the recipient gets a job, as soon as she improves her income, she loses the benefit. In some cases, when different means-tested benefits are combined, access to employment means a marginal tax rate of 100% or more. People actually lose money when they get access to the labour market. If one agrees with the obvious fact that access to employment is the best way to combat poverty and ensure economic security, as well as social recognition, then something must be done to spring this trap.

One solution might be to have higher minimum wage, or lower benefits, even if in liberal countries such as Canada benefits are already very low. Among the other solutions, there is the option of transforming targeted schemes into universal schemes. When someone receives a universal benefit, she can keep it when

getting access to the job market. Obviously at some point one starts paying taxes and social contributions to finance it, but this will only happen *ex post*.

3. PAY THE LAZY?

Basic income has sometimes been presented, and is still presented, as the ideal *alternative* to full employment. Some criticize basic income for this very reason, because they are afraid that basic income will amount to “pay the lazy.” As one columnist of the *Toronto Star* commenting the Macdonald Report in 1985 said they believe “basic income will spawn idleness.”¹³ But keeping in mind the “paradox of redistribution” discussed above, one can see that to have an *effective* right to work, an effective right to a job, it is essential to have the *right to an income*. By focusing on the unemployed, conventional schemes definitely help reduce poverty but they also create a genuine trap, because they penalize people who manage to find a job. The earnings people receive for low-qualified jobs are minor, since they lose the benefit that was given when they were unemployed.

The introduction of basic income guarantees that even a poorly paid job can provide people with a higher net income than they would have if unemployed. As people can keep the whole of their basic income, whether they work or not, their financial situation clearly improves when they have access to employment. Work really “pays.” In this sense a basic income is *not* an alternative to full employment, but it is closer to a job subsidy which would be given to the employee, not to the employer. And this makes a tremendous difference in terms of real freedom.

Interestingly, it was precisely the main reason why the *Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada* (the Macdonald Commission) in the mid-eighties was advocating the introduction of a so-called “universal income security programme” (UISP). In a recent interview, the head of the Commission, Donald Stovel Macdonald, argued that the main issue, during the discussions on Economic security within the Commission, was precisely the question of the “working poor,” “the number of people who wanted to work but who were punished by the structure of the support system.” According to Macdonald, the UISP was “representing

¹¹ As was acknowledged by a top civil servant during an Economic Security Consultation forum held in Regina (SK) on June 8, 2007.

¹² SHIELER, David K. (2004), *The Working Poor. Invisible in America*, New York : Vintage Books, p. 15.

¹³ JONES, Frank, ‘Basic income will spawn idleness’, *The Toronto Star*, Sept. 9, 1985.

Basic income favours employment, not idleness, *but not under any conditions.*

a way for enabling the working poor in [his] constituency to work their way out to get something from a job.”¹⁴

Of course, some on the Left counter this argument by saying that society would then actually subsidize “bad jobs,” degrading jobs, jobs that actually should not exist. What basic income supporters reply is that freedom should be given to individuals to choose for themselves what is a “bad job” and what is a “good job.” Civil servants, the government, or trade unions should not decide for them what is a *good* and a *bad* job. Only workers are really able of assessing the many facets of the job they are doing, or that they are considering doing. The fact that there is no work requirement attached to basic income provides the most vulnerable with a negotiating power enabling them to refuse jobs that have no future. In other words, because it is universal, basic income functions as a subsidy for unproductive work, and because it is unconditional it does not serve as a subsidy for degrading jobs.

Basic income makes it possible to offer and accept poorly paid jobs, but since there is no requirement these will only find takers if they are sufficiently pleasant, stimulating, and formative, or offer real career prospects for other reasons, not if they are repulsive, degrading and lead nowhere. Basic income favours employment, not idleness, *but not under any conditions*. Here again the idea is to improve the situation of the worst-off in different dimensions: freedom, income, self-esteem. What a basic income does is provide them with *economic security*, with a firm basis.

4. INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN TRENDS

At international level, the discussion on basic income and related schemes is fostered by an association called “BIEN.” BIEN was founded in 1986 in Belgium as the *Basic Income European Network*, but it expanded its scope and turned global in 2004, becoming the *Basic Income Earth Network*.¹⁵ In fact basic income

has been discussed in most industrialized countries, and has mainly been advocated by academics, a few activists, and most green parties. Such a reform has often been advocated by anti-poverty organizations, like NAPO in Canada. Take the example of Patrick Johnson, at the time Executive Director of the National Anti-Poverty Organization, in his letter to Donald Macdonald in the framework of the Macdonald commission hearings:

“As you may recall, many of the questions posed by members of the Commission related to the concept of a guaranteed annual income. You may also recall that we did not have hard and fast answers to most of the technical questions. (...) NAPO does not have the resources to undertake an up-to-date study on the feasibility of a guaranteed annual income. I understand, however, that the Commission has a budget for research. I would like to suggest that the Commission itself initiate or contract with a third party to undertake research on a guaranteed annual income.”¹⁶ Already in the 1970s, NAPO had published some documents in order to explain the differences between a negative income tax and a so-called “guaranteed annual income” and, more recently, it launched a new campaign on the topic.¹⁷

As just mentioned, in industrialized countries the political forces that have manifested most interest in basic income are the ecologist movements and ecologist parties, including most European green parties. In 2007, Canadian Green Party Leader Elizabeth May proposed the idea of a “guaranteed annual income for all Canadians” at a party convention in Vancouver.¹⁸ In July 2007, the Greens at the European Parliament organized an international conference on basic income in Brussels, at the initiative of German MEP Sepp Kusstatter.¹⁹ In recent years similar events have also been organized by Green parties in Sweden and Finland.

Part of the explanation of this connivance between ecologists and basic income can be explained by referring to arguments similar to Paine and Spence's, as well as to the arguments justifying the *Alaska*

¹⁴ The interview was conducted by Patrick Tanguy in Toronto on January 11, 2001. For further information on the Macdonald Commission and UISP, see also Tanguy's Master Thesis (Universite Laval, Quebec, August 2001). Today this argument is also used in developing countries, where basic income advocates oppose the means-tested schemes currently in place. In Brazil, for instance, workers prefer to go into the underground economy, because if they get a job in the formal sector they will improve their income, and lose the benefit.

¹⁵ www.basicincome.org

¹⁶ October 31, 1983. The letter is available at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa.

¹⁷ See *NAPO News* Spring 2007, or visit <http://www.napo-onap.ca/>. See also ‘Income key to stopping poverty,’ *Leader Post* (Regina), June 8, 2007.

¹⁸ See *BIEN NewsFlash* 44, March 2007, available at www.basicincome.org

¹⁹ See www.greens-efa.eu.



Permanent Fund. All greens insist on the necessity of preserving the interests of future generations, and so they logically regard nature and natural resources as the common heritage of mankind, that should benefit to all. From this perspective, those who possess the earth have to contribute to a fund whose dividends are to be unconditionally shared among all.

And yet it is important to stress the fact that one can find proponents and opponents of basic income in almost every political party, from left to right, at both sides of the political spectrum. During the debates around the UISP proposal made by the Macdonald Commission, the *Winnipeg Free Press* significantly ran as headline “guaranteed income gets support from all sides.”²⁰ Donald S. Macdonald himself was not precisely a left-wing radical, and basic income was already discussed within the Liberal party in the late 1960s (for instance at the *Harrison Liberal Conference* in November 1969). During the same period, one also could find some publications on the topic by the *New Democratic Party* (NDP). Recently, Tory Senator Hugh Segal -- a long-time proponent of a guaranteed annual income -- told delegates to Toronto's city summit alliance conference that he believes Canada has the money to ensure every Canadian can live with dignity. “When we look at the billions we now spend on social policy, it's clear we have the capacity,” he argued.²¹

Regarding the debate in Canada, it is also striking in comparative perspective to note the impressive number of official reports that have been published over the past 40 years on the question of a “guaranteed annual income.” Among the most famous are the Croll Report (1971, Federal), the Castonguay-Nepveu report (1971, Québec), the Fréchette Report (1978, Québec), the Macdonald Report (1985, Federal), and the Forget report (1986, Federal). Social experiments on a guaranteed annual income have been conducted in Manitoba in the 1970s, but the results were never published in an official report.²²

Finally, one should stress that basic income has also been discussed by governments in various countries, such as the Netherlands (in the mid-nineties), or Ireland (in 2000 the Irish government published a Green Paper on the topic). Currently it is mainly

debated in Germany, Spain, and in countries like South Africa and Brazil, where a law on basic income was signed by President Lula da Silva on January 8, 2004.

5. TRANSITIONS

Some actually agree with the main justifications of basic income, but think that some alternative schemes would be better because of the need for “soft transitions” in social policy. Among these alternatives are a so-called “participation income” and the idea of “capital grants.”²³

5.1. A Participation Income

A “participation income” is proposed by British economist Anthony Atkinson.²⁴ According to Atkinson, the idea of a true basic income makes sense, no doubt, but it is politically unfeasible because of the “reciprocity objection.” Since, as comparative data show, most people believe in the importance of reciprocity, one should link basic income with some obligation to contribute, i.e. with the idea of a “socially useful contribution” in the broad sense. The basic income should then rather be called a “participation income.”

But in Atkinson's work on the topic this “broad sense” is very broad indeed. To some extent, one could even argue that almost everyone fulfills the requirement and is therefore eligible for a uniform and individual basic income. According to Atkinson, not only those who are engaged in full- or part-time waged employment or self-employment are eligible, but also job-seekers, people who are unable to work due to sickness, work accident or disability, people who have reached retirement age, who are following an approved study program or training course, who look after children, elderly people or invalids, or people who do other “recognized forms of voluntary work.”

Another problem is the fact that if the level of the “participation income” is to be significant, the introduction of such a measure has to be accompanied by the implementation of mechanisms to check whether socially useful activity is actually *being performed*. These could rapidly become very difficult to implement, given the intrusion into privacy required in order to check domestic activity, the perverting of the

²⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, Sept. 11, 1985.

²¹ According to the *Toronto Star*, March 5, 2007.

²² See for instance HUM, Derek & SIMPSON, Wayne (2001) ‘A Guaranteed Annual Income? From Mincome to the Millennium,’ *Policy Opinions*, January-February 2001.

²³ Not to mention the idea of a “negative income tax.”

²⁴ ATKINSON, Anthony B (1996), ‘The Case for a Participation Income,’ *The Political Quarterly*, 47(1), 67-70.

We need a support system that supports instead of punishes people with mental illness.

spirit of associations responsible for monitoring “volunteers” and the related administrative costs. What some have argued is that if the level of benefits is low, it would probably be possible to rely on presumptions or easily provided proof: young children, a certificate of registration for a study program or a document certifying regular voluntary work for an association would suffice to give access to benefits. But obviously as soon one starts doing this type of compromise, one gets much closer to a truly universal . . . basic income.

5.2. A Capital Grant

Another proposal similar to a basic income is the idea of introducing a “Stakeholder Grant” or “Capital Grant,” that has also been called the “universal basic endowment.” The idea amounts to giving a cash grant to everyone at the age of 18, as a lump-sum, a grant that is given once, instead of a regular payment as in the case of basic income. For instance in a proposal designed by Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott, the Capital Grant would approximate 80.000US\$ for every American citizen aged 18. A huge amount, needless to say.²⁵

One could argue that such a cash grant would be more egalitarian than a basic income. If one dies at 25, one will have received the whole amount (at 18), whereas if one has lived in a society with a basic income, one would have received much less than the others. One counter-argument might consist in saying that such an amount is of no use when one is dead. But obviously people can spend their grant straight away, as soon as they get it, whereas in the case of a basic income they have to wait for the monthly payment. This is what is called “stake blowing.”

Precisely because of the danger of stake blowing, some think that such a “Capital Grant” is less egalitarian in a more complex sense of the word, which is very much related to *equality of opportunities*. As argued by Philippe Van Parijs, “Lifetime opportunities are (. . .) powerfully affected by intellectual abilities, parental attention, school quality, social networks of various sorts, and so on. On average, those young people who are already favoured along these various dimensions are precisely those who are most likely to make the best possible use of their stake.”²⁶ The others might blow it, and hence should be protected by the

more paternalist version of it, i.e. an unconditional basic income paid to all on a monthly basis. Exit “Capital Grant” . . .²⁷

CONCLUSION

We are aware that many of the long-term users of the social assistance program in Saskatchewan are those with chronic mental illness. Mental illness and mental health issues are more prevalent than cancer and heart disease, and one in five persons are exposed to mental illness or suffer from it during their lives. It is important that attention be paid to the needs of those with mental illness.

. . .

We need a support system that supports instead of punishes people with mental illness.

Sharon Lyons, then President of CMHA (Saskatchewan Division) Inc., in a letter to then Minister responsible for disabilities, Buckley Belanger.

In conclusion, I should stress again the fact that one should not see basic income as a magic bullet. Of course a country like Canada needs a whole package of measures, which also includes benefits in-kind, rather than in-kind, such as universal health care, free education, public housing, or targeted schemes for the disabled. But even if we consider basic income as a long-term objective, it can be very helpful to discuss this proposal and its cognates, because it might inspire more modest reforms in terms of economic security, such as the expansion of universal child benefits. As it was the case with universal suffrage before it, it is not in one day that basic income will be transformed from a fantasy of a few eccentrics into something that is obvious for all.

²⁶ VAN PARIJS, Philippe (2006), ‘Basic Income versus Stakeholder Grants: Some afterthoughts on how best to redesign distribution,’ in Erik Olin Wright (ed.), *Redesigning Distribution. Basic income and Stakeholder grants as cornerstones for an egalitarian capitalism*, London: Verso, P.204.

²⁷ And yet an official report of the French government has recently focused on the idea. See Centre d'analyse strategique (2007), *Les dotations en capital pour les jeunes*, Paris: La Documentation Francaise.

²⁵ For further details, see ACKERMAN B. et ALSTOTT A. (1999). *The Stakeholder Society*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

A love letter to my mother

By Bernadette Green

My mother is so sweet – if she were an apple she would be Delicious. Though we've had our ups and downs, her strength never wavers, her support never ends, and her love is always unconditional. I am truly blessed to have a beautiful woman such as her in my life. I know there a lot of amazing mothers in our world and in our community and may God bless them all, but to me my mother is the perfect role model.

It's been almost two years now that I landed on my mother's doorstep like an unkempt raggedy doll with my emotions completely out of control, sad, and in despair. Depression had completely taken over my life, so much so that I had lost 15 pounds on my already very slim frame, and my digestive system had completely shut down. I was under so much stress that even digesting food was now impossible. When I ate, I would almost pass out. I had traveled to a very dark place where I was uncontrollably crying and at times literally paralyzed by fear. I had no idea of how to break free from the powerful hold depression had over my life. I had hit rock bottom and my mother without even one complaint started helping me pick up the pieces. I wasn't home for more than a half hour and she had me in the emergency room at the Weyburn General Hospital. I was admitted immediately under Dr. Schwe's care and for the next three weeks my mother visited me every day, most times two and three times a day, just to see how I was doing and to reassure me that I was not alone. She became my personal manager, making necessary phone calls, paying bills, and without even a sigh she graciously became my leader making sure all my responsibilities were met so that I could completely focus my attention on regaining my health. She brought me snacks, magazines, and a number of other things to make my hospital stay more pleasant. She did absolutely everything in her power to show her love and support. And never did she once expect a thank you. My mother stood by me when others ridiculed me, she believed in me when those who were once close to my heart abandoned me. With each visit, she brought her smile and words of encouragement, and each time a little piece of my self-confidence was restored. At the end of the three weeks, I was a little better, and like a small child I went home to be in the protective arms of my mother. There my mother cooked for me, cleaned for me, did my laundry, and once again like when I was a child, became my

around-the-clock care-giver. At the age of 31 I was like a helpless child who could not brave the world. A week later with my mother's and step-father's support I swallowed my pride and admitted myself to the mental health ward at the Regina General Hospital. The depression had such control over my life that even my mother could not heal the wounds.

The best way I can describe this powerful disease is this: remember a time when you were really scared or sad, but this time there's no way out, there's no help. What's worse is that you don't even know what you're scared of or why you're sad or why there is so much pain. A cloud of guilt, fatigue and anxiety smothers your heart, mind and body. You are like a car that won't run properly and you don't know how to fix because you can't find the broken part. Of course there is help, lots of help, but it is very difficult to see through the clouds that envelope you in this very debilitating and dangerous disease. Society has yet to fully accept this disease for what it is rather than for what it isn't. If all I had to do was pull up my socks, believe me, I would have done that in an instant. "Pulling up your socks" is not only an unrealistic request but food for the very thing devouring you. Depression will continue to remain a threat to all, whether it's you, your family, or a friend. Until we as a whole are ready to embrace this disease for what it is, we will never be free from this very debilitating and dangerous illness.

Now a patient in the mental health ward, I was the most scared and alone I had ever felt in my life. I was both embarrassed and ashamed: how could I let myself sink so low? Destructive dialogue kept running through my head. "I am a weakling. I really am crazy, a Loony-Tune, I'm part of the infamous Funny Farm aaaaaaahhh! Let me out of here, how did this happen to me, let me out of here." Feeling completely helpless I would turn to the only person who knew how to be there for me – I would call my mother. With her loving patience and calming voice, she would reassure me that I wasn't crazy, that I was just sick and I needed to get better. Admitting you're mentally sick is not easy, but it's even harder being the number one support person for someone who is mentally ill. If I was in my mom's shoes, I don't know if I would have had the same strength and tenacity. Being around a depressed person is very exhausting, both physically and mentally. Their ill thoughts can start to wear on you, leaving you devoid of your own joy and emotional health. Knowing that I was the only one who could truly help

. . . I did the only thing I
knew how to do: I said,
“Thank you.”

me, I tried to settle into my new home.

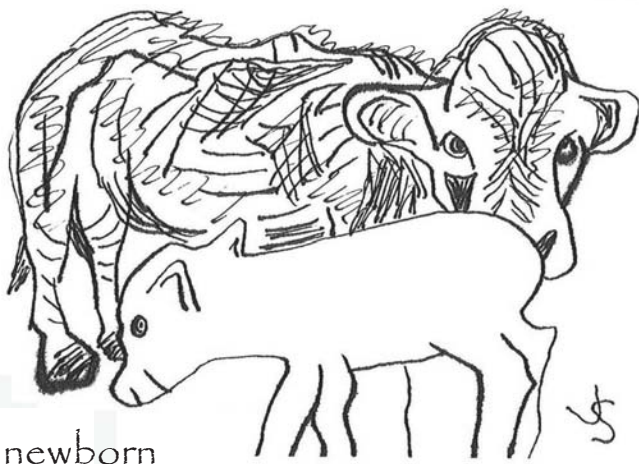
The first part of my stay in the mental health ward made the depression even stronger. It was a sterile environment with cement walls, small windows and poor ventilation, uncomfortable chairs and beds, community bathrooms, and co-ed showers. I could think of a lot better places to be. I was completely afraid of my “new family” in the hospital. Though I was blessed with a wonderful doctor and an amazing nursing staff, I was very frightened of my fellow inmates. I was exposed to the effects of their trauma, patients with bandages, hiding their unsuccessful attempts to take their own lives. This was an enormous eye-opener for me. Now more than ever I knew I had to get better, if not for myself at least for my son. I had not gone to as dark a place as many of the other patients had, and I did not want to. As I gained more confidence, I began to talk with many of the other patients. Their stories were far scarier than mine. Most of these patients did not have family or friends. If they had family, their family would have nothing to do with them until they “smartened up!” One particular young woman who had been on 24-hour suicide watch confided in me that she was already a widow at the age of 30. Her mother and the rest of her family would not have anything to do with her until she “got her act together.” As I got to know more of the patients, they too had similar stories, their friends and family would have nothing to do with them. Regaining mental health when everyone you know and love has turned their back on you and makes jokes at your expense is a dreadful and very frightening task. Knowing how lucky I was to have such a remarkable and brave mother, I did the only

thing I knew how to do: I said, “Thank you.” Thank you doesn't sound like enough, and really it isn't enough. But I truly knew then for the first time in my life how much my mother loved me. I began to feel sorry for all the terrible things I had put her through when I was a teenager and even a young adult. I realized for the first time in my life that my mother was my very best friend. No matter what kind of support I needed, Mom was there. Whether I needed a shoulder to cry on, or a sounding board to release pain and anger, Mom was and still is always there. I honestly don't even want to think of where I would be today if it wasn't for my mother.

My mother, without blinking an eye, gracefully tossed all social prejudices aside and took me in under her wing and saw the good in me when I and others didn't. She saw my wisdom when I thought I was dumb, she saw my beauty when I thought I was ugly, and she saw my strength when I thought I was weak. Never once did she make me feel indebted to her, or try to embarrass me, or tell me to “snap out of it.” Instead, my mother chose to see the best in me when I and others didn't. What's even more amazing is that her support and the support of her husband didn't end here. My mother helped me move out of an unhealthy relationship and I lived with them for four months and never once did either of them make me feel I had worn out my welcome or was a burden. Mom helped me find a beautiful little home for me and my son and helped me move in slowly and on my own time. Mom's incredible support would not have been possible without the love of my step-father. Milton loved and supported me as if I were his own child. Milton taught me that I was important and very loved. With a long journey still ahead of me and unable to be completely independent, Mom was always there, gently pushing, reassuring me that I would get better. Even when I would get upset with her, Mom chose to focus on the effects of the disease rather than on what a jerk I could be. Mom knew I was working hard to change my life, and that for her was enough. As long as I was working to regain my health, my mother was there.

Now with my second anniversary nearing I am proud to say I have successfully overcome many obstacles which I know would still be a problem today if it wasn't for my mother. This letter is an opportunity to show my mother how grateful I am for all her support and compassion. At last, I'm able to say more than thank you.

May my mother always know how much I love and respect her. May she always be blessed with a loving and prosperous life.



newborn

Art by James Skelton



I wouldn't change a thing

By Jaydean Krupski

Living in a world few people are familiar with was always very conflicting for me. I felt sorry for myself, wishing I could be "normal," but eventually when I was properly diagnosed, taught how to live with my illness, and my medication had started to work to stabilize my moods, I felt entirely different.

Diagnosed with a mood disorder, my intense highs and devastating lows were sadly missed once I was medicated. I felt flat, practically devoid of emotion

To my sister Loretta

By Lorraine Warren

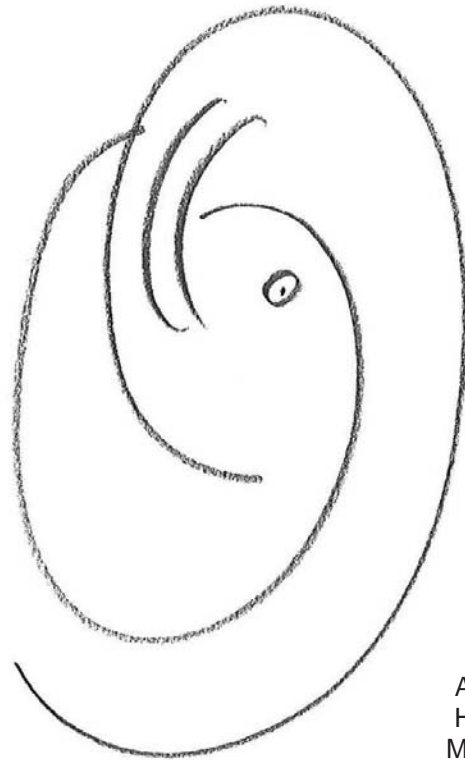
I want to write about my sister: she was my twin, my other half – we were one. She was a part of me that is missing. She took my other half when she died. Without her I was nothing. She took happiness, some interests, companionship, and wholeness when she left. When crisis entered my life she was there for me. We were always together. Before she died I asked her: If something ever happens to me will you look after me? She said she would. But when she wanted to share something with me, I wasn't there for her. She woke me up and she was crying. I can't forget it. I should have been there for her. I can't get over it. Maybe someday when we meet in that better-off place, she'll tell me about it. She'll share it with me. But until then I'll never know. I'll only wonder and I'll grieve because I wasn't there for her. She took the light out of my eyes when she left Christmas morning and I could only grieve alone for awhile. Then it was despair when Mom and I were at her graveside when they lowered her coffin. All I felt when she left was that my better half was taken from me, my whole being was being broken and without her I was nothing. We looked alike: we had the same interests, the same dislikes, the same hatreds, the same clothes, the same interests in men. When she left she took everything.

I feel for my sister, I need her, but she's not there for me now. I started drinking pretty heavily after she died and she was in my dreams. She would talk to me and we would walk together. After I stopped drinking she stopped appearing in my dreams. It's like she said, My work is done. My healing process is turning out for the better. I write this to my sister who loved life and died of a broken heart.

altogether, until I learned that I was not flat at all I was level. My highs and lows had become very subtle and not so disruptive.

It is sad to me that many people will never experience the extreme feelings of happiness, the intensity of the deepest love, the energized feeling that can drive you for days on end, or the severe days filled with bottomless anxiety, depression, and despair. I am grateful for the peaceful life I live now; however, I would not change the experiences I have gone through. Embracing the good with the bad, I cannot imagine living any other life.

The lessons I have learned have made me a strong, persistent, and spiritual person. I thank God for all I am blessed with, including the memories I have as I live with a greater sense of control and serenity, taking things one day at a time. My only hope is that one day the stigma attached to mental illness will be gone and people will realize that it is an illness and not a character flaw.



Art by
Henry
Markus

Anger can grow to peace.

Unanswered questions about the Titanic

By Laura Best

Two-thirty three in the morning. My mother's voice wakes me up. It is evident that she's attempting to keep her voice low but her bedroom is next to mine, the walls are not so thick to drown the noise out this late at night.

"Pills. God only knows how many."

"Right here in the house.... The living room"

"Of course she didn't want to die. You don't take pills if you want to die."

She's talking to Linda, her best friend. I can tell by the tone in her voice. That and the fact that she talks everything over with Linda. Everything in her life--and mine, that is. When I got my period at thirteen, Linda said, "Your Mum tells me you got a visit from our little friend."

"Do you have to blab everything," I cried, hurrying from the room.

"Hormones," I heard my mother say, casual as a cool summer breeze.... Hormones.

The sound of her voice brings about a sigh to the surface of my being. I'm too old to crawl beneath the bed and hide. I have memories of muffled voices reaching my room at night when Dad still lived with us. The voices were something to be feared. They spoke of dying, of life beyond the grave, the afterlife and reincarnation. Intellectual conversations, my mother called them. All those Ruth Montgomery books she was reading at the time. For many years my mother was obsessed with the notion.

"What would you like to be when you come back?" she would ask of anyone; Linda, my father, one of the other mothers in the park.

I reach suddenly for the lamp, needing its comfort, needing this escape from the dark with her voice in the next room talking about me to Linda.

"Right now? Just keep an eye on her. Christ. I feel like a failure.... I don't know how I'm going to keep this quiet. If Rose Gillis finds out it'll be all over. I can't begin to imagine."

She begged them to keep me in the hospital for a while but they said I was ready to go home.

"Just ship them out. Is that it? Get them out of your sight. Out of sight, out of mind," she said to the nurse.

She still doesn't get it.

How can she get it?

Even I don't get it.

Besides, she'd be the last one who'd ever get it.

It's dark and heavy and weighs me down the moment I wake up. The thought. Constantly in my head, peeking around the corner. Teasing. I push it away; so far back that I think it is gone forever. But it returns at the oddest times. Bringing a fork to my mouth at the dinner table or combing my hair. Sitting in history class.

The word. The D word that claims such great power over me.

Die . . . Die . . . Die.

Sometimes it changes. Sometimes it says, *You're doomed*. The words are inside my head and behind my eyes. But the pressure comes from the outside and pushes downward. A constant weight; the proverbial rope around my neck. Even when it's not there...it's still there if that makes any sense. I don't think there's any escape.

These are all the things my mother would refuse to understand.

I can hear her moving about the room, and I imagine her stocking feet imprinting the thick blue carpet. Sometimes I feel sorry for her. Most times I don't. She gives a sarcastic laugh. She's right about one thing, though. I don't want to die. Not yet. I don't want to die.... and I don't want to feel this way.

In the morning my mother is drinking black coffee. She smells strong after cigarettes. A half empty pack of Cameos are sitting on the table beside a dirty ash-tray.

"You should stay home for a few more days," she says. Her voice sounds hoarse.

"I'm fine," I say pouring some cornflakes into a bowl. I sit eating the dry cornflakes with my fingers. It seems too much effort to add sugar and milk; to dirty a spoon.

"I'll have to call your father," she says.

"Go ahead." The cornflakes have little taste. I never liked the taste of cornflakes I just now remember.

I'm aware of her watching me.

Her eyes will burn holes if I look directly into them. That's what I used to think when I was small. I try to avoid looking into her eyes.

"Why?" she asks, her arms folded at her chest, demanding ever so quickly. Impatient. She thinks I'll be tricked into giving an answer. I don't respond. How am I to respond? It hurts my head to even consider the question let alone contemplate an answer. Only my



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mother thinks that answers will solve everything. She likes to dig in deep, uncover all the sore spots, expose them, believing the air will dry them up.

"No wonder you're so skinny. You don't eat enough to keep a bird alive I suppose you're anorexic, too?" She's digging in, looking all around like a doctor taking x-ray pictures. She thinks she'll find all my flaws. She'll dig till she uncovers them one by one, fractures so fine, so slight. But those are the best kind. No one will figure it all out but her. She'll be **THE MASTER**. I know. She's done it before, the day my grandmother's dress was cut up.

The day of the family reunion so many years ago with all the family members present, all the aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews and a piece of Grandma's beautiful dress tucked in beneath the buffet in the dining room. Mum was the first to spy it, so small, so tiny, overlooked by any normal person; only she pulled it out and stood there waving it like a flag. Grandma

gasped. Mum's sisters gathered like a pack of wolves. Within seconds Mum had the rest of Grandma's dress in her hands, stretching it out for display.

"Who did this?" she urged to a room full of frightened faces.

Silence.

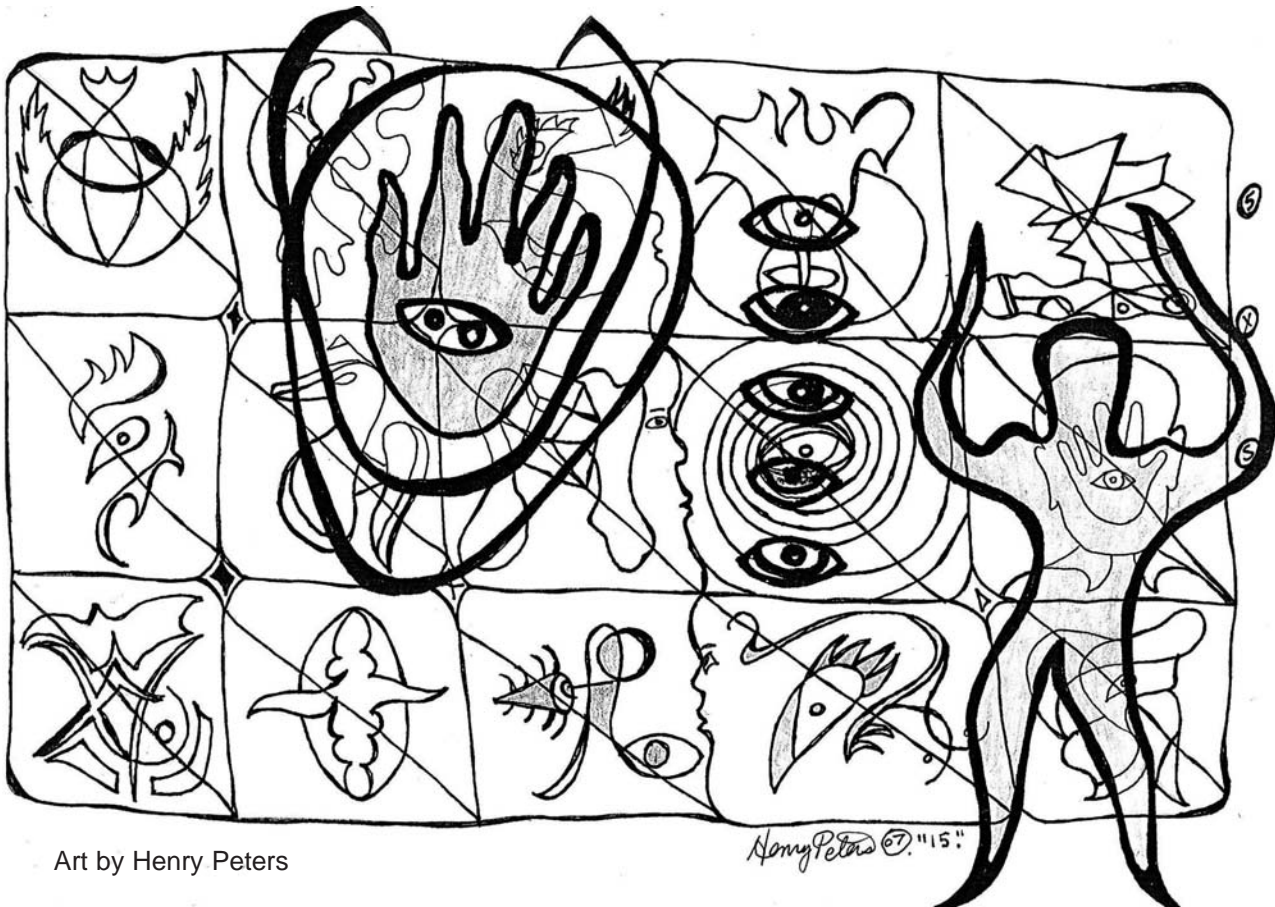
"Who cut poor Grandma's beautiful dress to shreds?"

Silence again.

She produced a show of tears that turned immediately to anger as it dawned on her that no one was about to speak up.

"I'll stand here all day. No one eats. No one moves. So make up your minds." She crossed her arms at her chest and perched herself on the arm of Grandma's chair.

Finally Fletcher, barely four at the time, who had just learned how to cut out shapes in pre-school a few weeks ago, spoke up. "It was me," he said in a tiny voice.



Art by Henry Peters

Henry Peters 67 "15"

“Death.” I repeat the word, this time leaning in closer to the guy sitting next to me.

"Bullshit!" she said tapping her foot.

"I just want to have some cake," Fletcher whined.

"We'll all have some cake as soon as we find out who cut up Grandma's good dress."

"It wasn't my good dress," Grandma interjected. "I was thinking of sending it to The Daisy as a matter of fact. They're always looking for good used clothing to sell and the money goes to a good cause."

"That's not the point," she snapped. "I don't care if you were going to use it for dust rags. No one had any business cutting it up."

Finally Harmony admitted to the crime.

"Prove it," my mother said. "Where did you put the scissors?"

When Harmony came back with the scissors she still wasn't satisfied. "Why? Why did you do it?"

"I don't know why," Harmony said.

"Of course you know why. No one does something for no good reason," she barked.

"Paula, please," Grandma implored. "It was going to good will."

"No. I want to get to the bottom of this."

Claw and dig. Claw and dig... It might very well be her mantra.

"Aunt Paula's a bitch," Shawn, the oldest of my cousins said, later as we stood gathered near the swing outback. Not one of us disagreed.

I now understand what Harmony meant when she said she didn't know why. Despite what Mom thinks not everything can be explained.

"Are you listening to me, Trudy?" Mom asks as I dump the remaining cornflakes into the compost bin beneath the sink.

"I always listen."

"Well?"

"No. I'm not anorexic."

"You still haven't told me why." She lights a cigarette. Her fingers are yellow, trembling. I hate the way she looks, the way her hair is messed and the black smudges on her eyelids, her clothes wrinkled and bunched.

"Can't we talk about this later?"

"It's always later with you. Even when you were small."

"No offence Mom but this isn't about you."

"Of course it's about me. My failure as a mother, at least." I know she wants more from me, an apology perhaps or for me to drop to my knees and beg her forgiveness for putting her through hell. I look up at the

clock.

"I have to go," I say grabbing my book bag.

I practically run from the house. I can hear her calling my name. The fresh air strokes my face. This is what freedom feels like, I think.

Georgia is smoking a cigarette near the school fence surrounded by a group of girls. I don't consider them to be good friends even though sometimes we hang out together. It's different with Georgia; I've known her since kindergarten. She knows more about me than my own mother. I, in turn know more about her than I care to most days. She told me about the first time she did it. Jeff Dunne. She was sixteen.

"It was okay," she'd said. I didn't believe her. The part about it being okay. Jeff is a jock. Even I know what that means.

I take the cigarette from her and inhale. It tastes like shit.

"Where have you been?" she asks. "I called. Didn't your mother tell you?"

"No she didn't. Besides I was indisposed."

"Indisposed?"

"South Shore Regional... These nasty pills I swallowed. I'm afraid I interrupted Paula's life again. She hates hospitals, you know." Georgia's mouth drops open. I can see the shiny, gold stud in her tongue. I think how Mum would have a conniption if I came home with something like that.

"You're kidding!" she gasps.

"Then there's this business about keeping it all hush, hush." I look down at the cigarette in my fingers. I don't know why I took it. I despise cigarette smoke. I hand it back over to Georgia. "Paula hates for the neighbours to talk. Her only child. What a disappointment I must be."

The school bell rings and we head off to class.

"We need to talk," Georgia says.

"I've got nothing else to say."

The day is a blur. Math class, a jumble of numbers and equations that requires too much of my brain. Georgia keeps watching me. I wish she'd pay more attention to Mr. Williams.

"What happened? You should have called me," Georgia says later in the cafeteria. She's wearing an anxious look, certain that I'll deliver her some long, heart-felt explanation or else she'll accuse me of keep-



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ing secrets. I take a sip of milk. The cafeteria is crowded; voices are scrambled, mixed together and turned inside out. I pick at the food on my tray.

"I couldn't call."

"Why not?"

"I was in a dark place." I really don't want to discuss this with her. With anyone.

"Promise you'll call me next time," she says. She sounds certain that there'll be a next time? Curious, her choice of words.... Next time. It sends a chill down my spine.

"Do you believe in reincarnation?" I ask suddenly.

"I don't think about those things," she says. "Neither should you."

"That's why it's so dark. So mysterious. Tempting. Something you can't quite figure out."

"You're scaring me Trudy," she says, only there's no fear in her voice. "Coming outside? I need a smoke."

"I know what you're doing," I say as Georgia lights a cigarette.

"Having a cigarette," she laughs.

"I wasn't talking about that."

"Did I tell you? Cory Strong's having a party Friday night. Why don't you come?" she inhales quickly. "It'll be fun."

"I don't even know Cory Strong."

"Of course you do. Tall, good looking, a little on the goofy side. He's in our math class."

"I know who he is," I say. "That doesn't make him a friend."

She links her arm in mine. "But you're my friend," she says. "So you'll come?"

"Georgia," I say looking into her eyes. "I'm an iceberg. Most of it's below the surface."

"Well, I'm an open book," she replies with a tiny laugh. "Everyone knows everything about me."

But of course that's impossible. No one knows everything. There are too many layers. Too many sides. Questions we haven't yet asked ourselves.

What would you do if? Anyone who can answer that is a liar.

You're smoothing it over, pulling out the wrinkles. Trying to make it better by you saying so. Wanting me to go to parties that I have no interest in because you think this thing in me does not exist. These are the things I'd like to say to Georgia but can't.

The music is blaring. Definitely not intended for any one wishing to make conversation.

"Death." I repeat the word, this time leaning in closer to the guy sitting next to me. He gives me a strange look. "You did ask me what I was thinking about," I remind him.

"I didn't expect you to say that," he says.

"Then you shouldn't have asked."

"What?"

"If you don't really want to know what a person is thinking then don't bother asking. It's like you're saying I only want to know if I approve of what you're thinking about."

"This is a party," he says. "Lighten up." He takes a drink of beer and walks away.

Georgia is up dancing around. She's crazy about Leif, the guy she's dancing with. She didn't come with him to the party, though.

"I'm going with you, my best friend," she said when I asked her if she had a date. I knew it was because Leif hadn't asked.

I try to remain invisible as I sit on the couch. With all the noise and the people mingling it's easy to pretend I'm not here. Georgia brings Leif over to meet me.

"This is Trudy," she says. "We've been friends for always." I can tell he's not interested. He's not even looking in my direction. He's watching two girls standing near the foyer talking, their skirts excessively short, shapely legs that likely never need shaving.

"Are you having a good time?" Georgia asks me.

I think about the iceberg, how the Titanic struck it out in the middle of the ocean. Supposedly unsinkable. No, I'm not an iceberg.

I'm the Titanic.

I look up at Georgia, see her smiling face. She's hoping she has fixed me, mended what needs mending, the same way my mother does. She's hoping there's nothing else that's required of her. Who needs the needy in their lives? Who needs a suicidal teen who hasn't yet figured out the *why* they all seem so desperate to know. A jewel. Discovered and named. Forgotten.

Die . . . Die . . . Die.

It's come back from the dead but changed in some way. Reincarnated this time.

Do it. Just do it. You know you want to do it.

No, I don't! I silently scream. I'm sure I don't.

Almost sure. Almost certain.

I look up at Georgia.

"Yes," I say. "I'm having a great time."

Christmas Eve

By Salvatore Difalco

They say the work hardens you, makes you cynical. I was already hard, and cynicism was my middle name. I booked myself in for the Christmas Eve shift on purpose. Told my girlfriend I had no choice. Same with my sister, my only family. She was celebrating with her husband and two kids in another town. I'd been invited to stay with them a few days over Christmas but I'd never felt comfortable there. Anyway, I signed on for the Christmas Eve shift. It seemed fitting. Sidra Patel was on with me. Dressed in a white blouse with a red brocade vest, she looked quietly festive.

"Bobby, I'm surprised to see you here. Thought you'd book off for Christmas Eve."

"Yeah, well."

"Aren't you Christian?"

"Does lapsed Catholic count?"

She smiled.

"I'm not religious, Sidra."

"We all are. Sometimes we just don't know it."

I gave this a moment's thought. Maybe she was right.

My first booking was with Barry Gomes, a bitter paraplegic. Barry had been shot in the back of the neck while visiting Jamaica. He hated the world, and most of the world hated him back. He treated me indifferently, courteous in a perfunctory manner, his directions brief and clear. He knew next to nothing about me, and I knew nothing about him except that he'd been shot in Jamaica.

His leg bag needed draining. He sullenly sat in his wheelchair.

"How are you this evening, Barry?"

"Just dandy," he said.

The television was off, no radio, no Christmas tree, no Christmas anything. Not a card, not a ribbon, not a single piece of tinsel. I didn't bother wishing him a Merry Christmas. Barry's urine was pale yellow from drinking gallons of water. He sat there, dark eyes looking through me. I had no inkling of what was on his mind, and that was fine. I finished with the leg bag and washed my hands in the bathroom.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"A glass of water," he said.

I filled a glass in the kitchen and brought it out to him.

"I'm going to bed at midnight," he said.

"See you then." I answered the telephone in the staff lounge. Dick Wong needed assistance. Told him I'd be up in a minute.

Dick had to go to the bathroom but refused to be moved from his bed because of the pain. I brought him his pot. He looked at me with disgust.

"Number two," he said.

I put on latex gloves and got out the bedpan. I shifted his hips and slid the pan under his buttocks.

"How's that?"

"Under more."

"And now?"

"More."

I shoved.

"Okay," he said.

I stepped out of the bedroom. A Buddhist, Dick had no family, no friends. I don't think he would have celebrated Christmas even if he was Christian. He'd have wondered why his prayers weren't being answered. Dick had muscular dystrophy, his body a wonder of asymmetry, his skeletal limbs monstrously warped and bent. His ventilator breathed for him, a feeding tube nourished him.

"Bobby, I need help."

He needed his belly pushed. I held my breath and pushed with the palm of my hand. I didn't look. He groaned. I pushed.

Finally, it was done.

I wiped him, emptied the bloodied bedpan. I threw out my gloves and washed my hands with antibacterial soap.

"Anything else?"

"A glass of water from the fridge, please."

I got him the water and held the straw to his cracked lips.

"Okay," he said.

"That's it?"

"Yeah."

I returned to the staff lounge. Sidra was eating a rice dish.

"Hungry?" she said.

"Uh-uh."

My next booking was at nine thirty with David Field, a quadriplegic, but that didn't mean no one would call in the interim. These men were needy, high maintenance. The women Sidra cared for were far more independent and self-sufficient. Part of it had to do with the illnesses. At our facility the men had it worse. Every one of them lived on a sort of death row.



I'd been around for five deaths myself. Only a week ago they'd found Chris Cops dead in his wheelchair just outside his apartment door. Heart attack. Just made his twenty-sixth birthday. He weighed about fifty pounds when he kicked it.

David Field called. He needed his tea warmed up.

"What's wrong?" asked Sidra.

I stomped out of the lounge. David always made these annoying calls before scheduled bookings. His wheelchair rested by the door and he sat in it with an expectant look on his big doughy face. He had on the red plaid shirt he'd been wearing for most of the month. A Christmas tree stood in the corner of his living room, decorated with tiny candy canes in wrappers, a small real tree.

"Hi, David."

"Hello, Bobby. My tea's lukewarm. I like it hot. You know that. And how are you this Christmas Eve?"

"Fine, David." I nuked his half-filled cup of gray tea and stared at the time as it ticked down the seconds.

"I need suctioning, Bobby."

My heart sank. He could have waited until his booking. I think he got off on it, though I don't know how anyone can get off on having a catheter stuck in their throat. I gloved up, unhooked his ventilator tube, and switched on the suctioning pump. I poked the catheter into his inner canula and pushed down until he nodded. Then I engaged suction. Yellow clots with red filigree flashed through the catheter and the suction tube. I had to hold my breath. I repeated the process six times – till nothing but red showed. He wanted more.

"You're bleeding."

His eyes watered, teeth and tongue stained with blood. I re-hooked his ventilator. "You stop when I tell you," he said, a red bubble forming over his lips.

"David, you're bleeding."

"Again!"

"I'm not doing it."

He fell silent. I propped his tea cup on his chair stand, and left.

Back in the lounge Sidra held the telephone up. "It's David Field, he's gurgling."

"God."

I went back up. Blood frothed from his mouth and out of his stoma. I grabbed a towel, wiped him up, and readied the suction pump. I tried to suction as much of the blood as I could but it just kept coming.

"I'm calling 911."

He shook his head.

"Fuck you, I'm calling."

I was put on hold. I started panicking.

David's eyes bulged and he made great sucking sounds. Finally, I got through; an ambulance was dispatched. My First Aid training never covered hemorrhaging lungs. I tried suctioning again, and this time got it under control. I cleaned up his canula and the tubing and washed the blood off his face.

"That was close," he said.

"The ambulance will be here soon."

"What do you think they're going to do for me?"

"Well, I can't help you."

"I wish I'd just fucking die sometimes."

I said nothing to this. I didn't need his head trip. I didn't disagree with his position, but I kept that to myself. The ambulance came in time and they took David away.

"Is he going to be all right?" Sidra asked.

"Who's to say?"

In the staff washroom I drank water right from the tap. I looked at myself in the mirror, looked away. A booking with Don McCoy loomed. His multiple sclerosis with brain involvement made him bewildering to be around. Only a year ago he had been articulate, energetic. Now he was a babbling fool.

"Bobby Bobby Bobby, get my feed bag. I'm ripe for some cheese and fruit. Toast me brown bread too, wouldja? Ma's not coming tonight. Said she would. She's sixty six years old. Doesn't look a day over forty. Ha, that's my age."

"Yeah, Don, it is."

"The cheese tastes like shit," said Don, spitting it up like a child. "Did you affect it?"

"I just sliced it."

"You affected it."

"No, I didn't."

"That's okay. I won't eat it. The fruit will help me poo tomorrow. Are you doing my B.T. tomorrow? Are you?"

"No, I'm not, Don."

"That's too bad. It would have been good, I swear. The whole kit and caboodle."

He was fucked. He barely touched the apple and pear I had peeled and sliced for him. A few Christmas cards were arrayed on the coffee table, one with a glittery white angel. At least he had a few people thinking of him. I catheterized him and he fell into a stupor, his eyes staring at the ceiling.



Art by James Skelton

I left Don to his own devices. Maybe his mother would visit tomorrow. A mother should visit her damaged son on Christmas Day.

In the staff lounge I made myself a quick coffee. I was drinking it on the sofa when the telephone rang. For a second I dreaded a call from Barry to get his leg bag drained, or David Field, but then I remembered David was in the hospital. It was my sister.

"Bobby?"

"Yeah."

"How you doing?"

"What can I say? I'm up to my elbows in blood and shit."

My stomach fluttered. I looked at the time. Ten minutes to my next booking: Barry Gomes.

"Bobby?"

"Yeah."

"We missed you tonight. The kids were asking for you."

My sister had drunk a glass or two of wine. Her voice was slightly higher-pitched than usual, always a giveaway. "Hey, I'm sorry I couldn't make it."

"You couldn't say no to the shift?"

"That's right."

"How are things there?"

I could hear Christmas music in the background, "Silent Night." I listened for a moment; I could hear the kids singing along in the background. I felt stupid, but it hooked me right in the guts. Suddenly, the staff lounge was blurry.

"Bobby?"

"Yeah."

"Merry Christmas, eh."

"Yeah, you too."

I hung up. Sidra entered the staff lounge.

"Are you okay?" she asked, pulling up a chair beside me.

"Yeah, sure," I said.

"Bobby?"

I felt her hand on my shoulder. I took a deep breath and tried to clear my head. Sidra's hand was warm.

"Hey," she said softly.

"Just give me a sec, ha."

She handed me a Kleenex.

I blew my nose and dabbed my eyes. I looked at the clock. Almost midnight.

"Thanks," I said.

She smiled and that smile was like a balm. I stepped into the washroom and splashed water on my face.

I went up to Barry's place. He sat in his wheelchair sound asleep.

"Barry," I whispered. He startled easy when he was asleep. "Barry," I said more loudly.

His head jerked up. His dark eyes studied me. His shoulders relaxed. His leg bag was bursting. He nodded. I emptied his leg bag. Then I pushed him into his bedroom and transferred him from wheelchair to bed. I undressed, him, removed the leg bag and hooked up the night bag. He fell into a soft snore instantly. I pulled up his comforter and dabbed his cheek with my palm.

In the bathroom, I washed my hands. Then I stepped into the living room, straightened magazines on the coffee table. I rinsed a few glasses in the kitchen, wiped the counter. I stepped out on the balcony. It had started snowing; the city lights shimmered. The air was pleasantly cool. I remembered I had to call my manager and let him know David was in hospital.

And with the snow falling, and the lights shining, and the carols tinkling in the distance, I wanted to feel something. I wanted God or whatever it was to fill up that space inside me, to stir me, to convince me that all of this had a purpose, that I wasn't here just spinning my wheels. But then these feelings seemed so vain and self-pitying I was embarrassed for myself, and wiped away tears that had started.

"Bobby."

"Yeah, Barry."

"Bobby – some water." He nodded to the empty glass on the night-stand.

I hesitated for a moment. Then I went into the bathroom and filled the glass from the tap. I thought I heard my name being called again and paused. The glass slipped from my hand, cracking against the white ceramic sink. I waited. I waited while the shards settled and the last of the water trickled down the drain.



Little beauty

By Glenna Gordon

The tabletop shakes over my head like the sky shakes when it thunders. The toe of my old man's boot searches the air next to me, wanting a rib or a stomach to connect with.

It doesn't matter. I'm safe, crouched here under the place where an hour ago I was eating supper. He's too lazy when he's drunk to get down on all fours and drag me out. I'm grateful to the person who decided to push the table up against the wall, even if it was him.

My sisters are under their bed and they will stay there until I go in and coax them out.

The foot lowers, comes to rest beside the other, both of them facing me. The boot toe is scuffed, steel shines beneath the broken and curled leather. The room is quiet except for his breathing. Nothing is shaking now but me and I don't know why I am. I expected this.

The house changes before he enters as if even the walls and windows don't want him here. It's hard to explain. Everything in the house pulls into itself, becomes separate from everything else. The stove and the fridge stand in their corners, not really belonging to the kitchen or to anything.

"Rotten little bastard." He kicks once more just to be sure I haven't let down my guard, exposed something he could break or crack.

My mother's purple-slippered feet approach; she is going to offer herself as a decoy. I feel bad when I hear the solid sound of his hand striking her face, but mostly I'm just glad it isn't me.

I lean my cheek against the cold wall, hug my knees and think about tomorrow. No matter how drunk the old man gets on Saturday night, on Sunday there is peace. We'll wake up to the smell of pancakes and bacon. The old man will push back his chair and leave, and Janny and Shelley and I will take our places around the three sides of the table, while Mom stands at the stove, tightening the belt on her shabby robe, holding her head at an angle she thinks hides her blackened eye.

Then we will get out the gun. I was looking at it, thinking about tomorrow, how the old man would take it down from the rack and hand it over to me, when I heard him outside and felt the house shrink into itself.

"What you lookin at? Lazy little bastard." His sly eyes had taken in the room. I was under the table before he could block the way.

His boots are gone now and my mom's slippers. A crack of light escapes from under their closed bedroom door. His voice grates and shreds the silence that is my mom's answer to his bullying. He is too drunk to last much longer.

I crawl out from under the table and stretch my legs which are stiff from being crouched so long. I pick up the book that bounced off the table onto the floor, listening for any scrape or click that would warn me the old man's coming back. It's my mom's, Light in August by a guy called Faulkner. A few days ago I saw her reading it; her face was calm, interested, not a look she wears very often. I asked her what it was about, mostly just to get her to look at me, to see me. "It's about a guy named Joe Christmas," she told me. She went on to tell me about his life, how he'd been abandoned as a baby, how he'd been adopted and beaten by the man who adopted him, how he'd fallen in love with the wrong woman and gotten beaten up again, and she was only half way through the story. "It's very sad," she'd said and then she'd lowered her eyes about to disappear back into the book, when she looked up at me. "Oh, yeah," she said, "he killed the man who adopted him." I felt a chill run through me at the words, but I knew right away why she liked the book; it was about someone who had a worse life than we do.

I open it now and read a few lines, something about a street that ran in a circle for thirty years. And further on, Joe Christmas says to himself, "I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo." The words are simple enough, but they seem to go in a circle that makes no sense to me, so I close the pages and place the book back on the table.

I tiptoe to the gun rack and stare up the .22 I'll be allowed to shoot tomorrow. I've been shooting it for a whole six months, since I turned eleven. Living on the farm like we do, we could shoot it anytime, but the old man only allows it on Sunday morning. It's the price of the bullets, that's his excuse.

Now, on tiptoe again, I enter the girls' room. The moon shines on the Little Mermaid comforter that is lumpy from being washed so much because Janny, at five, still wets the bed. I drop to my hands and knees, hold up the covers and look into the darkness.

"Janny," I whisper. "Shelley."

"Dale?" they say together.

"It's ok. You can come out now."

I move back and hear the scuttle noises their

As if we are one body, we freeze and breathe again when there are no more noises.

nightgowns make, then their heads pop out from under the bed.

"Get in," I tell them, and they do.

"Sleep with us, Dale," Janny says. The moon now is shining on her, on her blonde baby hair and her fearful eyes. She has scooped over in the bed, is holding the Little Mermaid cover in the air, hoping I will slide under it. I am eleven. I have my own bed. I am too old to be sleeping with my sisters.

"Just for a little while," Shelley says. She is nine; she knows the scoop. She knows I can't fall asleep here.

"Ok," I say, "just for a little while."

When I'm under the covers, Janny wraps her arms around me, presses her cheek into mine and for some reason I see the colour pink in my head. Shelley reaches across Janny and rests her fingers on my shoulder.

"Tell about tomorrow," Janny says.

We hear a dull bang, like a boot or a person being thrown into a wall. As if we are one body, we freeze and breathe again when there are no more noises.

"We'll get out the gun," I say, "and we'll put the target on the bale. And I'll be first, because I'm the oldest. Shelley can hold the bullets, and you can hold her other hand. And this time, I'll hit right in the center. When we walk up there and look, there'll be a little hole right in the middle. And, then it'll be Shelley's turn and you can hold my hand. And maybe, after that, I'll let you hold the gun with no bullets and you can point it, and me and Shelley we'll be there to help you."

"It's heavy," she says. Her voice is not drowsy as I was hoping, it's excited.

"Yes," I say. Get to sleep now."

Her arms tighten around my neck. "Don't leave," she says. I see Shelley's eyes shining like a cat's in the dark.

"I won't," I say.

"Yes," Janny says, "you always do."

The whole tight house relaxes then. The moon slides away somewhere and we lie together, our warm breaths mingling in the calm night air. My eyes close, just for a minute. I hear the creak of bedsprings from my parents' room, but it seems very far away.

"You could do it tomorrow," Shelley whispers. Though her voice is low, it is sharp and urgent and jerks me out of my drowsiness.

"I don't know as I'm ready," I say. "I believe I ought to practice a little more."

"It wouldn't be hard. He'll be out in the field, beyond us. All you'd have to do—"

She checks herself, knows I won't accept her bossing. "Nobody would blame us. It'd look like an accident." Her fingers tighten on my shoulder. "You could do it."

I crawl out and stand beside the bed and look down at the two of them, my feet on the cold linoleum floor. Janny sleeps in a ball with her face pressed into the pillow.

"We'll see," I say. I tiptoe into my room, strip to my ginch, climb into my own bed and watch the crazy patterns the moon-shadows of the tree branches make on my wall.

The sheets are cold on my bare skin; though soon enough they warm up, it's not as warm as lying in with the girls. I start thinking about the compass James's old man gave him yesterday. I stopped there after school; their place is only a mile down the road and I figured the old man wouldn't notice as long as I didn't stay too long.

Their house is a lot like ours, on the outside, a one-story spread out under some trees with the barnyard not too far off. Inside, the windows were open, an agreeable breeze moved the frilly curtains and the place was filled with daylight. There was a smell of bread and cinnamon in the air.

We sat at the table in the middle of the kitchen and ate the buns his mom had baked. When his old man came in, they all smiled at each other. His old man is nice, always grinning, patting James on the shoulder, telling him he's done a good job feeding the cows.

Yesterday, he brought out the compass that had been his when he was a boy and passed it on to James. "Even though I got this in the olden days, it still works." As he said the words "olden days" he lifted his squirrely eyebrows and his voice, so I knew it was a joke and I was supposed to laugh. It was right after that I messed up, good and proper.

We were standing outside on the porch when it happened. "Most people think the needle points in the direction you're facing, but that's not right. Now look," he said. James and I leaned over the silver needle, red-tipped on one end, floating under the glass, in a round metal case that he held in his hand. "The red end always points North," he said. At the same time, he lifted his other hand and pointed.

I knew he wasn't going to hit me, or my mind



WRITING THE LIFE

knew, but I ducked. It was automatic, as if my body was so used to being on guard, so used to acting before thinking set in, because if I waited to think I was hit. Halfway into the duck, my mind took in the situation and said, they are going to know. I pretended a bug had flown into my eye and bent over and poked my finger into it.

I wanted to leave then, to go home where it was normal to duck when a hand was raised, but it would have looked like something was wrong, like I was hiding something, so I stayed there on the cement step and stared into James's old man's light green eyes. It wasn't what I expected, that look. It didn't hold surprise or curiosity or any hint that he thought he had to do something, not pity or concern. It wasn't as if he was a grownup and I was a kid; it was as if we were two humans who both knew something nobody should have to know.

It only lasted a second or two; I don't think James even noticed. I didn't get to hold the compass; I remembered the old man was waiting and I took off for home. The side of my head still hurts where he smacked me for being late.

I close my eyes now and imagine the cool metal on my palm, see the silver red-tipped needle begin to spin, and wait for it to settle and point North, but it spins faster, and I wait and it spins, so I start to pray, show me the way, show me the way. And it spins.

* * *

Sunday morning comes in exactly the way I knew it would. I smell the salt of bacon; I hear the old man

eating, the scrape of his fork on the plate. Mom stands at the stove, her head on that bruise-hiding tilt, flipping pancakes.

"Bout time," the old man says.

I settle in my chair and begin eating the pancake the second it slides off the spatula. I keep my eyes down and keep bringing the food to my mouth and chewing. The girls do the same.

The old man pushes away from the table and stands. I look up and see him wipe his hand across his mouth.

"Guess it's Sunday," he says. "Is that what you're thinking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come on, then."

His hands are massive, calloused on the palm, decorated with scrapes and scars, and I know how hard they are, but he handles the gun as if it were a precious baby.

"I've shot many a gopher with this little beauty," he says. He places it in my hands. His sly eyes rest on my face. "Could be next year, I'll let you take it in the field."

I try to keep my face without expression, knowing he can snatch back the promise whenever he chooses. If he doesn't know what I care about, he can't take it away, or break it in order to hurt me. That's also why I don't let him catch me lying in with the girls and why mom doesn't show us she loves us unless he's not here.

Looking satisfied, he leaves, calling back over his shoulder to the girls, "You listen to Dale, now. He's the



Mask 1 James Skelton



Mask 2 James Skelton

I hold out the gun to her and when I feel her take the weight, I let go.

man."

As the door slams closed behind him, I feel my mom's warm hands on my shoulders. "Go on and have your shoot," she says. As soon as we're gone and she's done the dishes and enough house-cleaning so the old man won't smack her for keeping a dirty house, she'll be back in the book. I avoid looking at Shelley.

The gun the old man calls a little beauty is a Remington. A bolt action repeater, with open sights and a leather sling which someone tooled with his initials. I fit the butt to my shoulder and I cup the front section of the stock in my left hand, while the index finger of my right hovers over the hook of the trigger.

Shelley rattles the bullets in her hand, holds Janny's with the other. I close my left eye and line up the sights on the center of the target, that single black dot surrounded by black rings that make me think of circles that widen out on the surface of a slough when I throw a rock into it.

Beyond the barnyard, with his back to us, the old man is working in the field. I can't make out what he's doing, but his head is unmoving and enormous.

"Just a little to the left," Shelley says. I swallow. The hand supporting the gun, without me even thinking about it, moves a little to the left. His head is centered in the notched v of the sight. It is huge, like a melon. In my mind, I see it explode like a rotten melon would if you shot it with a shotgun, fat chunks spraying out and falling to the earth.

"Janny wants you to," Shelley says. This is not fair

and she knows it.

All I can think is *what if I miss?* I know from experience, if you think about missing, that's what will happen. I must think about my target. I must think about the bullet slicing into that enormous melon.

I have waited too long. My arm begins to tremble with the weight of the gun. The target begins to blur. I squeeze the trigger.

Then, I turn and kick Shelley in the shin. "I'll do it when I'm goddam ready to," I say. My boot has made a red imprint on her leg. Her eyes tear up. Janny just stands there, looking blank and calm, holding Shelley's hand.

Beyond us, the old man hasn't looked up, he continues as if the girls and I and the gun don't exist. I jerk the bolt action back and the spent casing flies from the chamber and shines in the barnyard dirt. I start for the target attached to the bale. At first, I don't see it, then Shelley reaches out and touches her finger to the paper.

"Well, look at that," she says, "you got yourself a bulls eye."

In the gleam of her cat's eyes, I see next Sunday and all the Sundays to come and the Saturday nights that will lead into them. Suddenly, her face looks just like the old man's. It's not the expression or the eyes but what's behind them.

I want to save her from what she is going to become; she is going to grow up and terrorize people, not with her fists, with her tongue. But, I can't save any of them, not Shelley, not Janny or Mom, not even the old man. If someone is going to do something that can't be undone, it's not going to be me. I don't have the guts.

I hold out the gun to her and when I feel her take the weight, I let go. My hands feel light and empty. "It's your turn," I say. I spin and walk, not seeing what I'm passing, because in my mind Joe Christmas is leading my family through a thick fog, they appear and disappear, as they follow Joe with a slow, steady pace around a circle they cannot escape. When my boots hit the dirt on the lane, I pause, then begin to walk again. I hear, as if from a great distance, as if it is a sound that has nothing to do with me, the pop of a gunshot. My legs continue walking but, suddenly, my mind is calling for Janny, turn back, my mind says, you can save her, my heart says, but my body knows better and I break into a run down the road that points straight out in front of me like the needle on a compass.



Mask 3 James Skelton



Across the Universe

By Lori Hahnel

Walsh Junction, AB

Monday, December 5, 2005 1:35 PM

"Will you have a big family dinner when you get to New York?" the woman in the seat next to me asks.

"Oh, probably not until my brother gets home, too. He won't be back from Europe until the twenty-second. He's been over there doing research for a film he's making."

"Oh, my, that's exciting, isn't it?"

"Isn't it?"

I just hope she gets off the bus pretty soon. She keeps falling asleep and leaning on me, and she smells like she could use a bath. It's actually better than when she's awake, though, because she keeps talking to me. "And that's not so bad, I can handle chit chat. But she keeps asking me questions. The good thing is, I just make up any old answers I want. I guess we're both doing the same thing, really. She's bored out of her mind, so she's asking the stranger beside her questions. I'm bored out of my mind, so I'm just making up stuff, like the filmmaker brother I don't have."

The sun is bright as we pull out of this town near the Alberta - Saskatchewan border. There's lots of snow out this way, now it feels a little more like December. We haven't had any snow in Calgary yet this year; it's one of those dry, brown southern Alberta winters where we have to watch out for grass fires. It's always a little weird when that happens, you lose track of what season it is. I'm sure I'll be losing track of time over the next few days, always do when I'm out of town. Either that or I'll be hyper-aware of it. I've been on this bus since eight-thirty this morning, and it's almost two and a half days until I get to New York. I've taken the Greyhound from Calgary to Vancouver before, even rode it out to Victoria once. That's going to seem like nothing compared to this trip. It's almost three thousand miles.

When it happened that Monday night in 1980, I was working in Jeunesse, formerly the Misses' Wear department, at the downtown Bay. We'd just started opening Monday and Tuesday nights for Christmas shoppers, and it was dead, dead, dead. I finished my homework by 6:30. Could have shot off a cannon and not hit any one, said Peg over in Career Wear. Pretty much the only customer who came by was the old transvestite who wanted to try on angora sweaters. I

wasn't really supposed to let him into the ladies' change rooms, but I didn't care. There weren't any managers around. I hoped he'd come out and show me how they looked, but he didn't. Later, I took an extra long break in the cafeteria. It seemed that night would never end.

Finally, I got home and sat in my room flipping through my records, trying to decide what to listen to. I was so brain-dead from my shift I couldn't think. Then my friend Kevin called.

"Hey, Kev. What's up?"

"Are you by a radio?"

"Yeah. Why, is your band on CJSW again?"

"No, Maggie. It's so weird. John Lennon's been shot."

"Get out of here. Who would shoot him?"

"I'm not kidding. Turn it on to CBC."

I sighed, switched on the radio and tuned it to CBC, expecting to hear a Neil Young song, or something even worse. Kevin was quite a prankster. But this time he wasn't joking. John Lennon had been shot outside his New York apartment building, the announcer said. He'd been rushed to hospital, but they couldn't save him. He was dead.

Moosomin, SK

Tuesday, December 6, 2005 12:50 AM

It's got to the point now where if I ever listen to a Beatles album, I skip all the Sir Paul songs. As well as the George and Ringo songs, which I've skipped for many years. One day I'm going to get organized and burn all the John songs onto their own CDs. The thing is, it can still depress me, even now. I'll listen for a while, but then it gets to be too much. I got this *Lennon Legend* CD a few years ago, a greatest hits collection. It's hard to listen to, because it's in chronological order. There's the good stuff at the beginning, but then the sappy stuff from *Double Fantasy* starts. The album was getting mediocre reviews, and then he got killed and all of a sudden it was number one and practically every song off it became a single, and it was so sad. Sad because he was dead, sad because that last album was just so damn dull. And don't get me wrong, I loved him. But it was a dull album before he died; then it became a dull, depressing album.

But Rock'n'Roll I can always listen to with pure pleasure. It's an album of fifties standards he put together in 1975 with a fantastic group of musicians. That's the one I'm listening to now, on my iPod. Brian gave it to me for my birthday last year. It never

I'm a middle-aged woman riding a bus three thousand miles to mourn a man I never met . . .

occurred to me to get one before, but he convinced me I'd like it. I do like it, but it was part of Brian's campaign to get me to stop listening to "old music". When he gave it to me, he'd already put a bunch of music on it, his music. I don't even know what a lot of it is. Some of it is that mash-up stuff, where they take some "old music" and stick little bits of it into a techno-sounding background. That bores me, I'm afraid. For a while I started thinking he was right, that I should get with the times. That the stuff I listened to was bad, wrong somehow. Not cool. I started listening to my stuff on the sly, when I was alone, or on shift in the store. Then I realized I was embarrassed to like what I like, for a while. How stupid is that? So now I've taken his music off the iPod and replaced it with mine. Still, every time I look at it I think of him. It kind of makes me mad.

It's dark out there right now, can't see much except snow. There's a lot of snow in Saskatchewan in December. I'd almost forgotten that. Maybe I've been in Calgary too long.

Portage La Prairie, MB Tuesday, December 6, 2005 4:20 AM

I'm a middle-aged woman riding a bus three thousand miles to mourn a man I never met who died twenty-five years ago. I'm older now than he ever was. And nobody cares that I'm doing this. Not Brian, not my family. Not John Lennon, God knows. Actually, it's putting Crystal out, I forgot about that. This time tomorrow, I'll be standing in Central Park with all the other freaks and losers and weirdos, and we'll all be singing "Give Peace a Chance" or "Imagine" or something, swaying back and forth, holding candles, tears streaming down our faces. But I don't think it'll really be like that for me. I'll just say a prayer and think about him for a while. Part of me can't believe I'm doing this. I'm not one of those weird people who hang out at Graceland or outside the Dakota or make pilgrimages to Jim Morrison's grave. Yet here I am.

Crystal was pissed when I asked for a week off at the beginning of December, right in the middle of our busiest season. And especially when she found out why. "You're not really going to do that," she laughed.

"Why not?"

"It's stupid."

That helped me to make up my mind, actually. I've never been to New York before and I was going to take two weeks, wanted to arrive early so I could look around. But Crystal made me feel guilty, so instead I'll

get there at 5:30 in the morning on December 8th. Still, that should give me a little time to explore. And then I'll have to leave the next morning to come back.

Brian and I went to a movie one night last winter, a couple of weeks before Christmas. It was really cold, snowing little dry, hard flakes like ice crystals. He'd been quiet all night and didn't say much on the way home, either. He drove past my apartment building, down the street by the park. He pulled over and parked the car, and I was just about to ask him what was up, what was wrong, when he turned and looked me in the eye. I knew from his face the conversation wasn't going to be about what I wanted for Christmas.

While he spoke I looked at the frost-covered branch of an ash tree on the riverbank, lit by a streetlight. I couldn't look at him. He was saying it wasn't working between us anymore, giving me all that stuff about it isn't you, it's me, let's still be friends and all that crap. Then he told me not to cry. I kept crying and he asked if I was okay, did I want him to walk with me up to my apartment? No, I said, and got out of the car. If I'd been able to, I would have said, "I don't want to listen to this crap, Brian. After five years all you have is clichés? Don't you have the guts to tell me what's really going on? All I want is the truth. Just gimme some truth."

But all I could do was cry. Merry fucking Christmas, Brian.

Right after John Lennon died, the press called it an assassination. Then they changed it to murder, like they felt calling it an assassination gave him too much gravity, too much importance. What was he but a self-taught musician, after all? And then all the theories about who did it, and how, and why started to pop up. The insane fan theory, of course. The US government-backed brainwashed assassin theory, masterminded by either Ronald Reagan or George Bush, Sr., depending on where you read it. The CIA did have a massive file on him. I've read a theory that Stephen King did it, based on the similarity in looks between him and Mark David Chapman, and King's gory writings. There's even some nut out there with a web page saying Paul McCartney did it, claims it's a Mozart - Salieri kind of situation.

An interviewer once asked Lennon how he thought he would die. What a question. He said he thought some loony would probably pop him off. I've been



thinking about that, and wondering what kind of loony loves a person they've never met. Am I a loony, am I getting into my own little Mark David Chapman space, here? Yet we all need heroes, don't we?

Dave, the old hippie who used to own Records Galore, got a real charge out of Crystal and me when we used to come into his store when we were young, just about twelve or thirteen. The Beatle girls, he used to call us, and after a while he started saving stuff for us because we came in every Saturday afternoon. Then ten years ago, when he decided to retire, Crystal talked her Dad into buying the store for her and now she and I run the place. We finished paying Mr. Davis back a couple of years ago, but it still feels like it's

Crystal's store. Even though we both work an equal amount of hours, even though she's never given me anything to complain about, really. And she's used most of my suggestions, too, about advertising and expanding our product lines. So we've been Records Galore and More for five years now. We still sell records, books and memorabilia, but now we also carry incense, jewelry, posters, magazines, that kind of thing. I think we should branch out into coffee, but she says we could never compete with the Starbucks down the road. Maybe she's right.

I will be a loony if I don't get some real sleep sometime soon, I know that. I doze off for maybe a half-hour at a time, but that's all I can manage. Man, this is a long trip.

Kenora, ON

Tuesday, December 6th, 2005 10:15 AM

Now there's a young girl sitting beside me, blonde, about sixteen. I don't know, it's hard for me to tell anymore, maybe she's older. But she doesn't look old enough to be out of school. She's reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. That's the book Chapman was apparently reading at the time he killed John Lennon. I read it a long time ago; I didn't see what the big deal was. Anyway, this girl's a lot quieter than my last seat mate, which I appreciate.

Come to think of it, I guess she's probably around the age I was in 1980. I remember being in shock for weeks after it happened. I went to school the next day, but I couldn't concentrate on anything. Crystal and I skipped classes that afternoon and went and hung around downtown, wandering aimlessly, trying to understand it. We eventually ended up at Records Galore. Dave looked about the way we felt, just kept shaking his big bearded head. He said he'd sold every Beatle-related item he had in the store before noon. The three of us just stood looking out the front window of the store a long time, watching people trudge by through the snow.

Since then, Christmas has never been the same for me. I'm always depressed at the beginning of December, and for at least a couple of days after the eighth. I know it seems crazy, especially after all this time. But I can't help it; it's hard to be all holly and jolly when I'm thinking about John's pointless slaughter. That's why I can't believe Brian chose this time of year to break up with me. It was last December 11th, exactly two weeks before Christmas. I was just start-

That's the worst part, I had all these plans for us, and they're all gone, now.

ing to feel better, starting to get into the holiday mood a bit, and then he goes and takes me down. Let me take you down. How could he do that when he knew I already had December 8th and Christmas to stress me out? So I'm really not looking forward to Christmas this year. Last year, it had just happened and people were kind of looking out for me, making sure I wasn't spending too much time alone, that kind of thing. This year, I think people are feeling I should be getting over it, moving on. Well, dammit, I guess I'm going to get over it when I'm ready. How long is it supposed to take? I mean, I was with him five years. I'm not just going to get over him overnight.

I heard he moved to Montreal in the summer. Heard, because all the crap about staying friends was truly crap; I haven't spoken to him since he broke up with me. He was always complaining about the city getting too big, too crowded, too much traffic. And I agreed with him, I wanted to leave, too. Only I thought we'd do it together. That's the worst part, I had all these plans for us, and they're all gone, now. And I admit it - I feel old, I feel like I'm missing things in life. When I see my sister and her family, for instance, like I will be repeatedly over the holidays. I thought Brian and I were heading that way, but I was mistaken. Sometimes I wonder what I did wrong, what I could have done differently.

My life hasn't turned out the way I thought it would at all.

On Highway 11 Between Raith, ON and Thunder Bay, ON Tuesday, December 6th 2005, 6:25 PM

I do have one song from Double Fantasy on my iPod, the one song from it I kind of like. "Watching the Wheels" is playing and ironically, we're not moving. We've been pulled over at the side of the road, in the middle of a blizzard, for almost an hour. The wind is screaming around us, and you can't see a thing. There's something wrong with the bus, too, I think. The driver's been outside, around the back a fair bit, and on the radio a lot. He hasn't said much to us yet, and people are getting nervous.

I knew something would happen. I knew this whole thing was going to screw up. I've been thinking of doing this for twenty four years, and now that I finally get the chance, what happens?

The girl next to me finally looks up from her book.

"I wonder what's wrong," she says.

"I don't know. The bus driver said there was a

mechanical problem. I just hope we can get going pretty soon."

"You on a tight schedule?"

"I have to be in New York tomorrow."

"I'm sure we'll get going pretty soon. Can't do much about the storm, though."

Thunder Bay, ON

Wednesday, December 7th, 2005 12:07 am

We got moving eventually, crawled along the side of the highway and finally made it to the Thunder Bay bus depot. The storm is still going full blast and they say no buses will be going anywhere until the storm breaks. In the meantime, the depot is full of tired, pissed-off passengers.

There's a group from my bus off in a corner, complaining about how everything was handled, how they're going to demand a refund. They can't believe there's not even a restaurant, and are they really expected to drink coffee from a vending machine? I can't even go there. Because I can't believe it, my trip is just evaporating in front of my eyes. If we don't get going soon, I'm going to miss the whole thing. Even under ideal conditions, it's still supposed to be twenty-four hours until we get to Buffalo and then another ten hours to New York. So even if we left right now, I'd arrive in New York around 10:00 AM on December 8th. Not even taking into account going through customs, or the road conditions. But who knows when we'll actually get going?

Sleep is the only thing that makes any sense right now. But I can't. There's nowhere to stretch out, and you can't even slouch much in these plastic seats. Besides, there's too much noise, and I'm too mad. Late again. It seems like I'm late for everything. Not little things like arriving on time, I'm always on time. But the big stuff -- I'm always late for that. Too late for sixties music. Too late to get a real career, besides working in a record store. I'm so behind the times I even still call it a record store. Too late to have a family, too late to even have a boyfriend, dammit. And now here I am, sleep-deprived, sitting in a bus depot in Thunder Bay, too late for the twenty-fifth anniversary of John Lennon's death. I'm going to miss the whole thing. I'm so mad I can't even cry. I just sit here, grinding my teeth. My iPod comes to "Watching the Wheels" again and I flip it off.

Brian, this is your fault. I wouldn't be sitting here in this stupid bus depot by myself in the middle of the



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night if it wasn't for you leaving me. I would be in our bed, asleep, with your arms around me. This shouldn't be happening to me. My life is a mess.

Fuck.

I must have been even more exhausted than I thought I was, because I managed to sleep for over five hours, the longest I've been able to this whole trip. And in this lousy plastic chair, too. Outside, the drifts of snow are three, four feet high, and there's very little traffic besides a few snowplows and police cars. Now it's 7:30 AM and the ticket office is opening up. Almost everybody in the place is rushing the counter, wanting a refund, an explanation, an apology, something. I don't see the point. I just sit and watch them, figure I'll wait until they're all done before I go up there. Catcher in the Rye girl comes and sits down beside me.

"How come you're not up there complaining?" she asks.

"About what? The weather? What are they going to do about that?"

"I know. I mean, things happen sometimes and there's nothing you can do. You just have to let it go."

"Exactly."

"Did you say you were going to a meeting or something in New York?"

"Yeah. A meeting. It looks like I'm going to miss it. I don't think it matters, though. What about you?"

"I'm just going back to Toronto. Not in a big hurry."

"Good for you."

Bassano, AB

Thursday December 8, 2005 4:30 PM

After some more waiting around and a little negotiating in the Thunder Bay bus depot, I managed to get them to cancel my fare to New York and give me a ticket home. We're back on the prairies now. I can see the sun again, even though it's on its way down, and I feel better. Lighter, though I don't know why that should be. Must be the iPod - I decided to give it to Catcher in the Rye girl. Dayna's her name, actually. She was very grateful, although I'm sure she thinks I'm nuts. Whatever. She's not the first.

So it turns out I'm going to be in Calgary on December 8th, 2005 after all. I thought about going over to Records Galore, since that's where we ended up that awful next day twenty-five years ago. But to hell with it. I'll be spending enough time there over the

next little while. In return for letting me go on this little pilgrimage, Crystal said I'd have to work our Boxing Week sale, so I'll be in every day from Boxing Day to New Year's Eve, absolutely our nuttiest week of the year.

And here I thought I'd be spending the holidays alone.



Art by Henry Peters

Birthday party

By June Mitchell

Hard for a guy from the farm to end up in a place like Sunset Lodge. Been his own boss all his life, choosing his Case tractor over John Deere, canola over flax, summerfallow over zero till. Taught his kids to drive the truck and clean out the combine and six thousand uses for binder twine. Even after he and his wife retired to the city and his daughter and her husband took over the farm there was the garden in town, poker with the guys down at the Legion, the porch to level.

Steve wasn't one to spend much time reclaiming last year's crop. Next year country. Maggie was dead. He'd had his stroke. Here he was.

And it was his birthday in a week and a half.

"Eighty-nine." Steve grinned. "Better have my fun now. Who knows what ninety might bring."

Patty from Recreation had reminded Steve of his birthday. Marked it on the Playboy calendar the guys from the Legion had sent him. Tuesday, April 10th. A week and a half away.

"Sunset Lodge Party for the April Birthday Boys and Girls will be in two weeks," she announced in that Nutri-sweet voice of hers.

Steve fumed. He was no boy, dammit, an' his birthday was none of their cotton-pickin' business. He'd look after his own birthday. He hated cake an' ice cream. Seen too many cows in his day. It was spring an' the sap was running. He wanted beer, kielbasa, strudel, an' a woman in his bed when the lights went out.

Elsa visited every Sunday. With Joe in Toronto and Florie married and living way down in San Bernadino, Steve knew she felt the weight of responsibility for her father on her rounded shoulders. She had always been the one to tighten the wire on the pig pen door, to search out the chicks the broody hen had hidden away in the bushes, to admonish her little brother and sister when they spent their Sunday School nickels on penny candies at Wong's, so temptingly close to the Lutheran Church in town.

"Now Dad," she frowned, "you know they don't allow beer in here, and as for kielbasa, I just can't imagine what the cholesterol count would . . ."

"Blast it Elsa, I want kielbasa an' strudel an' beer."

"Your blood pressure, Dad! Don't get so upset . . . you want another stroke?"

"Let's not get goin' on that again. Holy Toledo,

can't you leave a guy alone to live his own life?"

"All right Dad," Elsa sniffed and picked up her coat. "If that's the way you feel . . ."

"Come now, that's not what I meant. Sit down. You know your own heart ain't so great."

"And you know who always gets blamed . . ." Elsa sighed, then brightened. "I just thought of something. They have those wieners made of chicken and . . ."

"Forget it."

In happier times Steve would have turned to the guys in the Legion, and solutions would have been found. Well, they were only phone calls away.

The next day Steve phoned Arnie.

"Sorry Steve, I'm not allowed to drive anymore, an' my knees keep me tied to the house. The only guy in the old gang who still gets about is Joe, but he's in Mesa with his son an' daughter-in-law. What about the Ukrainian Co-op? Do they deliver?"

They did. Steve put the precious package of sausage on the top shelf in his closet.

Now for the beer.

The guy with the toupee in room 312 (Steve could never remember his name) was consulted. He roared with laughter when he heard Steve's plan, and promised to help.

Steve joined the group going to the mall. Patty was astonished. Mr. Worobetz wasn't known for co-operation with the Recreation Department. He threw a tantrum when she suggested a wheelchair, and she reluctantly agreed to his walker. Each volunteer looked after one wheelchair and one walker. Steve and the guy in the toupee hooked up as partners. When the busload of seniors and volunteers entered the mall, Patty from Recreation said in a sweetly condescending voice, "Which hall do we wish to explore first, kids?"

Steve exploded. "Whad'ya think we are, a herd of cows? We'll each go our own way."

The toupee guy, Steve, and their volunteer shuffled and rolled down the hall toward the liquor store. If only Steve could keep his balance during the manoeuvre! Good. Just one customer. The guy with the toupee was a natural. He screamed that he saw his old buddy at the far end of the corridor. "Hurry! We'll miss him." He almost cried.

The volunteer hesitated and looked at Steve. "Go on," said Steve with a flourish. "I'll wait here. Hurry!"

Steve bought a six-pack and asked the clerk to place three bottles in each of his big coat pockets. On



WRITING THE LIFE

the way out he lost his balance and slammed into a display of wine. A burly woman came out of nowhere, grabbed his arm and steadied him. "Dammit, I hope I didn't break any."

"Nope, they're okay." She was looking at the wine, he at his pockets.

The volunteer returned, wheeling rapidly, still smarting from the curses hurled at him by the guy with the toupee because they had missed his buddy. Hadn't even caught a glimpse of him. Yep, the guy was a natural!

During her Sunday visit Elsa told her dad she would make him some Strudel for his birthday, and bring some of those chicken wieners. "They taste just like real wieners, Dad, and I'll bring some root beer to go with it. Maggie and I will celebrate with you and your friends on Tuesday."

Steve's mouth went dry. "I wouldn't want you to make the drive into town . . ."

"It's your birthday, Dad, of course I'll come." She compressed her lips, and Steve knew that was that. Then his guardian angel took over. He remembered the old story about the three little pigs and the time switch.

"Good, Elsa. The party will be at two-thirty in the afternoon, next Monday. Tuesday is Physio day. Don't forget the three bottles of root beer . . . and bring lotsa strudel . . . it'll keep me happy for days."

"No more than three bottles of root beer?"

"That'll be enough. I just want a party with you an' Maggie an' me there. There'll be ice cream an' cake with the others sometime this month."

Now for a woman. Definitely a buyer's market at Sunset Lodge. Better wait till Tuesday lunch. Memories around this place were mighty short.

Mrs. Charles looked great, always had her hair done and dressed to the nines, but Steve knew she couldn't keep her mouth shut. Yap yap yap.

Ida was a mouse, and smelled faintly of Listerine, but she rarely spoke. Good.

"Come to my room at seven o'clock tonight. It's my birthday. Don't tell anyone."

Ida blushed and nodded.

Mrs. Murphy liked a good time. You could hear her laugh all the way down the hall. Steve figured she could use a bottle of beer. Then there was Sylvia, or was it Sally? Didn't make much sense, but she had that look about her."

That made three wheelchairs. Fortunately for

Steve's plans, his crabby room mate, Eldon, had passed away last month, God rest his radio-playing, snuffling, snoring soul, and the new guy wasn't due for two weeks. Tuesday afternoon, he'd get Quan to move the arm chairs into the hall and the other bed against the window. Quan was a good sort, and never asked questions.

Tuesday night Steve couldn't eat supper. Too much on his mind, and too many dips into his stash of Strudel – loaded with saskatoons and pin cherries, along with the apples and raisins. Just the way he liked it. He had to hand it to Elsa. She was no slouch as a cook. He asked Quan to help him into his pyjamas, and said he didn't want to be disturbed.

At seven sharp the guy with the toupee wheeled in the door. "Where's my beer?"

"Right here. Fergot an opener, but there's a screw sticking outa the closet hinge."

"You also forgot nowadays the caps twist off."

"Not fer me they don't. Damn right hand . . ."

Mrs. Murphy wheeled in, wearing a red pant suit, and a big lipsticked grin. Stella (that was her name) followed right behind. She carried a half-full box of chocolates which she presented to Steve with a twist of her wrist which almost turned the whole lot onto the floor. All four were relaxed and the noise level was on the rise when Ida shambled through the doorway at seven-thirty.

"Sorry I'm late. They always get me ready for bed early," she whispered in a husky voice. Her hair was brushed out, and a ragged terry-cloth housecoat covered her pink nightgown. She set her cane on the bottom of Steve's bed and sat beside him.

Steve said he was sorry there was only one bottle of beer each, but it was the best he could do.

"Don't worry," Mrs. Murphy laughed, "it's amazing how far you can go on one bottle."

There were sighs of ecstasy when Steve pointed to the other bed, where the chocolates, strudel, and kielbasa which Quan had sliced, and the slightly stale buttered bread Steve had been hoarding were arranged on a large hard covered book titled Regulations for Sunset Lodge.

Never was there flakier, fruitier strudel, better brewed beer, more authentic kielbasa, sweeter chocolate. Never were there funnier jokes, or warmer companions.

"Happy Birthday" was followed by "Beer Barrel

Stella kept saying, "Sing it again, Sam," and then bursting into tears . . .

Polka" and "Happy Days Are Here Again." The man in the toupee still had a mighty good baritone voice, and knew all the verses to "North Atlantic Squadron." He censored a few, though not quite as many as the red-faced Ida would have liked. Stella kept saying, "Sing it again, Sam," and then bursting into tears, though whether they were tears of sorrow or joy nobody was quite sure. She seemed to be enjoying herself at any rate.

At eight-thirty sharp, after a cursory knock, the door opened.

A delightfully decadent sight met the eyes of Helena, the new aide – that tight-lipped, self-righteous, tale-carrying excuse for a woman! Beer bottles littered the tops of cabinet and dresser. Mrs. Murphy and the guy with the toupee, hands joined and swinging, were in the middle of a stellar rendition of "There

Was a Young Man from Boston." Ida was draining the last drops of her beer, the bottle tipped high. Stella, her hair disarranged and lipstick smudged, clutched the last piece of kielbasa in her teeth like the ragged stump of a cigar. Surveying the scene with complete satisfaction, Steve grinned and grinned.

There was a storm of quickly-called aides remonstrating, removing bottles, speeding wheelchairs on their way. Helena was clucking her tongue, but Steve caught fleeting smiles on the faces of the other two aides, and a wink from Quan. "Happy birthday, Mr. Worobitz."

After the lights had been turned out and Steve was lying in bed, proud of his success, reliving the excitement, he heard the door open and close. His bedclothes moved, and a skinny body snuggled close. Steve could smell a faint odour of Listerine mixed with beer.



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POETRY

Heart's breath

By Carla Braidek

at the pow wow my granddaughter
bounces against my leg
moves in her tiny moccasins
in time with the big drum
grins as her dark head bobs

for months she lay curled in dark
her mother's drum
the beat she moved with
now there is light and motion
jingle dresses and fancy dancers

the very earth throbs
traditional dancers circle
ancestral blood gives air to the crowd
the drum pushes them along
step and step

we breathe she bounces



Art by James Skelton

That morning the moon

By Donna Burks

She wakes to the sound of foreign music
floating softly from the radio beside her bed
and in the crowded space where dreams linger
the rustle of something rubbing
against something else.
The walls have all been painted
a dull yet blinding yellow.
There's no trace of where things used to be.
She's put all the memories in storage boxes
with tight-fitting lids and stacked them
in the farthest corner of the attic.
Her shoulders still ache from the weight.

Later she rides the bus to work.
The distant sound of a train whistle mingles
with the moan of a sharp north wind.
The moon, stark and white in an indigo sky
rides along beside her. She watches it glide
through the branches of elms and poplars
and above snow-covered rooftops.
She can no more escape the moon
than her own death.

At the park she gets off the bus
and in large letters slowly writes
her name in the snow.
The wind has vanished and the moon is fading.
She listens to the sound of no birds
and to the footsteps of those who are not walking.
Exquisitely alone in this strange
familiar landscape she begins to sing.
Clean clear notes rise and hang like jewels
in the cold air around her as she watches
the glow of emerging sunlight scatter
the grey breath of dawn.

The other side

By Lorraine Burgess

I am strong, I am determined
I am crying, I am small.
I am strong, I am determined
I am damaged, I will fall.

I am strong, I am determined
I will never be the same.
I am strong, I am determined
I feel crazy, I'm insane.

I am strong, I am determined
My heart's pounding, I can't sleep.
I am strong, I am determined
All the flashbacks make me weep.

I am strong, I am determined
For my children, I'm not there.
I am strong, I am determined
I don't care, I don't care.

I am strong, I am determined
I am laughing, is that me?
I am strong, I am determined
It is someone else I see.

I am strong, I am determined
I can't sing, I cannot cope.
I am strong, I am determined
Will I be the same? I hope.

I am strong, I am determined
I am told that I need help.
I am strong, I am determined
I won't go to Mental Health.

I am strong, I am determined
I'm not sad, I'm not depressed.
I am strong, I am determined
I'll stay in bed. I won't get dressed.

I am strong, I am determined
This isn't me, this isn't me.
I am strong, I am determined
I need help, yes I can see.

I am strong, I am determined
This medication makes me shake.
I am strong, I am determined
I feel better not awake.

I am strong, I am determined
Sudden noises are a fright.
I am strong, I am determined
I can't drive when it is night.

I am strong, I am determined
There are cobwebs in my brain.
I am strong, I am determined
Will I multi-task again?

I am strong, I am determined
I can do it, I can think!
I am strong, I am determined
I could really hug my shrink.

I am strong, I am determined
I have help to find a way.
I am strong, I am determined
I will fight this every day.

I am strong, I am determined
I'm afraid I will regress.
I am strong, I am determined
I fight Post-traumatic Stress.

I am strong, I am determined
I will fight this, I will win.
I am strong, I am determined
I will be the same again.

I am strong, I am determined
Have I gained back what I lost?
I am strong, I am determined
Has my family paid the cost?

I am strong, I am determined
I have crawled out of the hole.
I am strong, I am determined
I have fought with all my soul.

I am strong, I am determined
I am better than before.
I am strong, I am determined
I have fought and won this war.

I am strong, I am determined
In my friend I will confide,
I am strong, I am determined
I have seen the other side.

~This poem is about my battle with Post- traumatic Stress and my fight to be the person I was before. I dedicate this poem to my family and friends who stood by me during this difficult time in my life and to my therapist who helped me through it all.



Lament

By Greg Button

i)
 Tonight I relax with a few drinks and remember. Remember those who have fallen, like leaves in some great, golden autumn. Those who have died in the line of lunatic duty, taking with them the minds and hearts of those left behind. Schemers. Dreamers. Poets and angry young apostles. Lorne, Jesus Lorne, who danced in barrooms oblivious to the death-wish that eventually consumed him. Rolled his car. I never really knew him. Night wept. And Duncan. Duncan who at twenty-one had a gun and that was all she wrote. Left a note. For fuck sake. And Ron, a year later, dying in a boozy baptism that led him to the feet of some gentler god, drunk one last time and burning out his liver incarnate. And Greg and Betty, victims of the dark side. Suicide. And Dennis, who hung himself in the criminal penitentiary, shades of Manson but he didn't deserve to die. And Bill, sensitive Bill, poet as much as I like to call myself a poet, one day blue splotches on his skin a week later another angel of the bottle sent back to his maker. A shaker. Shit. I'm starting to cry. And Pat and David and Garth and Mary and all the children of the wilderness wandering, wandering, to hell with the heart the shattered heart who the fuck needs it. I'm standing here witness to worms witness to this world O don't follow me I am mad and don't ramble down this road and you probably will anyway if there's a God in heaven he'll protect you and guide you through the inferno through purgatory into the arms of Eden and

the bosom of beauty and truth I'm standing here stunned alive alive if only for this brief and shining moment alive if only for this lament this lament of rage of rain of what is in the end, glorious and generous redemption. O.

ii)
 Since I found you. Since I found you, roses reign. Since I found you, doves dance. Knowing night, moonlight and its madness will return, but for now O I weep and wonder and witness. You. Here where the heart sings softly home.

iii)
 Too much. Too much. I am driven to revelation in a diner at the side of town, I am standing beneath a howl of stars. Bring me home, bring me to my bed and cover me, cover me, cover me. Sweet Lord, though I walk through the valley I am just as vicious as the rest of these vultures, sparrows are falling, doves are cooing and I check the weapons of my soul at the door. Fists. Froth. Fever. Skies open and warm rain falls. Tonight I relax with a few drinks, I open the door of my dreams and sit dreaming, dreaming, my woman in embrace beside me. Tonight I pour the wine, I remember those who have passed on, and as the sun sets I say a prayer for them all, for each and every one, precious to this day.

Days of simple madness

By Greg Button

These are the days of simple madness. These are the days of death and dancing. Night shines its knife. Love leads us to slaughter. These are the days of easy insanity. These are the days of rant and roses. Horror finds our heart a home. Terror draws blood. After all is said and done, we are left screaming with these. These, the days of ordinary lunacy. These, the days of savagery and song.



By Catherine R. Fenwick

Tree Nature

Old and brittle tree
toppled in the seething squall
leaves an empty space.

Tiny tree is staked.
Bark scar thickens and grows strong
sapling roots in place.



Human Nature

Unkind words are storms.
Slash-wounds leaving injured marks
tumults of the heart.

Tittle-tattle talk.
Myths and misunderstandings
trusting torn apart.

Hunting for the light.
Courageously seeking truth
ways to get unstuck.

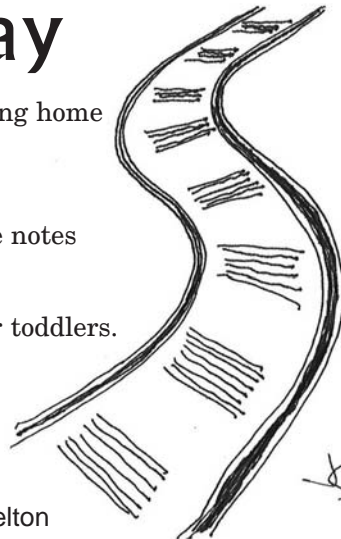
Always speak kindness.
Like seeds from a gardener's palm
nourished souls grow strong.

By Sharon MacFarlane

A Good Day

Together we drive to the nursing home
my friend to visit her father
I to see my mother.

On the way home we exchange notes
"Dad called me by name."
"Mom took a few steps."
We beam like parents of clever toddlers.



Art by James Skelton

Fog

Midnight on a country road
our car creeps through
a tunnel of white tulle
we cannot see
what lies ahead

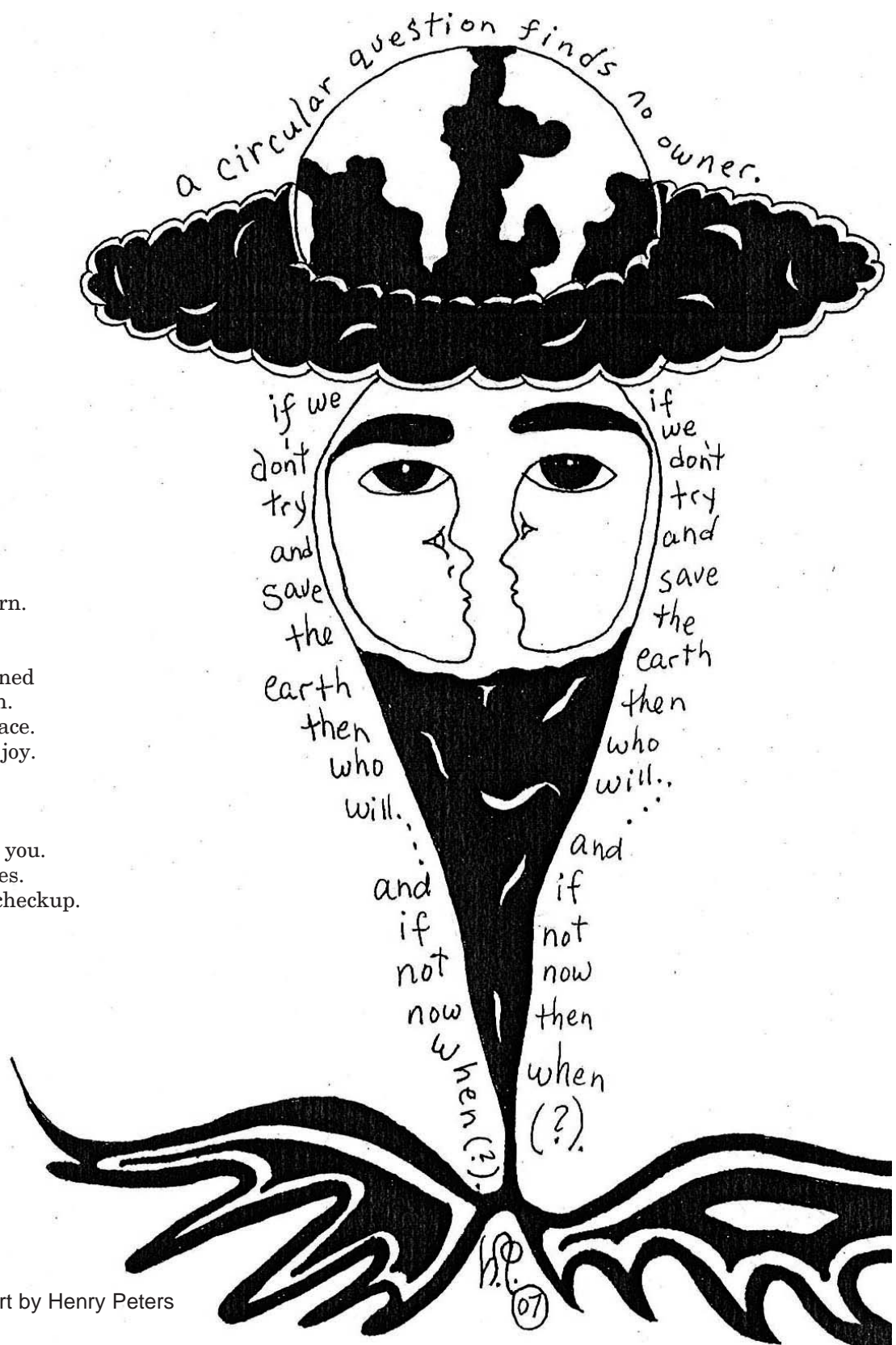
We've traveled miles and years together
struggled to find our way
our journey is long
but at last
we see the lights of home



Twins

By Gloria Morin

You bring me home
 along with your firstborn.
 It should have been
 a time of celebration.
 My whimpers have turned
 into wails of frustration.
 I suck away at your peace.
 I milk you of maternal joy.
 I give, only, in return
 a blanket of darkness
 a pillow of numbness
 under which I smother you.
 The health nurse arrives.
 A routine postpartum checkup.
 I am given a name
 but to you, I am
 the unwanted twin.



Art by Henry Peters

Devotion

By Mark. A. Murphy

If I could win you with words
I would write, "Come and lie naked with me.
Oh, come and lie naked with me."

And you would give yourself
without hesitation in the lacerated city
of my nearly ruined dreams.

Alas, we do not live by the rules
of happy circumstance. The real story,
sad though it is, unfolds like this:

if I told you in the encroaching darkness
how much the night derides me,
you would only turn your back

and keep the moonlight for yourself.
If I told you that I held my hand
in the flame for you, I know

you would not believe me.
If I told you that I cut myself
in the dark cellars of self-knowing

for all the saints and martyrs
but most of all for you,
I know you would only shrink back

and think me mad. If I told you
that I had stolen these seconds
from the silence that lies between us

to tell you, you are more beautiful
today than I ever imagined,
you would only recoil and say,

"You cannot win me with words."

Affinity

By Mark. A. Murphy

We are the public statues, stirring, stirring
in the town squares at night.

We are private beings, moving, moving
through this public space.

We are strangers in the head, clutching, clutching
at our ribboned hats.

We are Ithaca's wings, moving, moving
in the scattered breeze.

We are the Bronte sisters, dreaming, dreaming
of dying, always dying.

We are Anne, Emily and Charlotte, moving, moving
through the graveyard of our father's ministry.

We are the bronchial children, playing, playing
in the grounds of the Parsonage.

We are the breathing ghosts, moving, moving,
breathing and moving in the dark.

We are the human creature, crying, crying,
treading the boards thin.

We are Balzac's cloak, moving, moving
unceasingly in the night wind.



Art by James Skelton



Bulimia

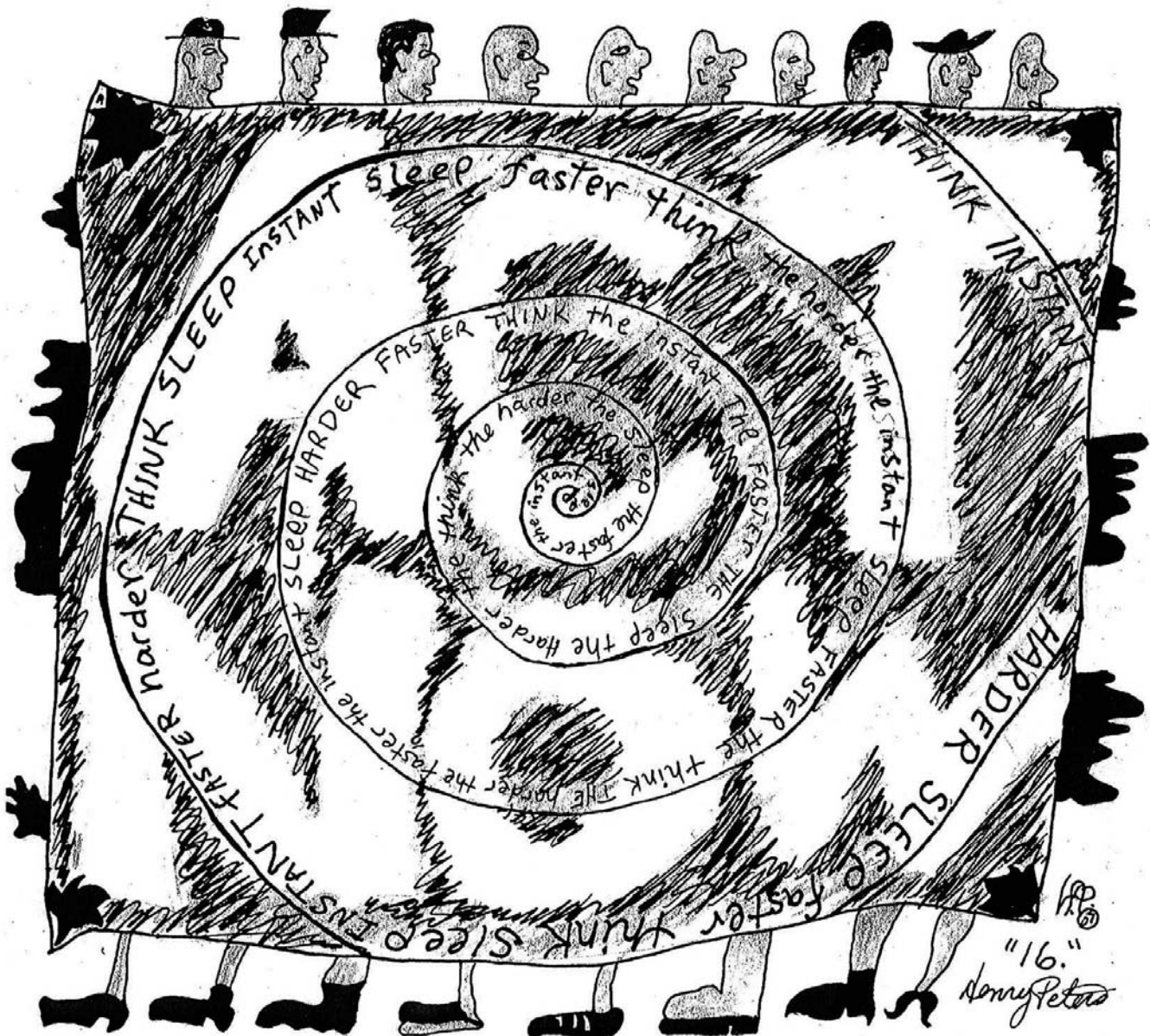
By Katherine Richards

I am the wolf at your door
Lunging in with hungry eyes
Devouring everything in sight

I take no prisoners
I will not be reined in
Drinking tea in small faint sips

I do not force you to eat with me
I do not encourage you
Simpering like a dog with sweet words

I destroy what I do not like
I rage with abandon
I am the wolf at your door



The inner hostile

By Adam Staite

Born 'n' raised I spent time recovering deeds of me
and those others related to me.

For that lost one of my brothers never seen no image
of his face. Memories have all left me. Still to this day
no words are spoke of that day, that tragedy.
No need to, it's all one's self. Myself forever.

Me and those who did it still reject it, more
me. Don't know about them. Outside it's funny.
Only one of this city. Am I wrong on that?
Doesn't seem like it yet.

I am a loser born 'n' raised myself when able to.
But for when it happened one of the many.
My Grandma and her Daughter took care of me.
Besides aware the hospitals.
All such great help.

I'll always hate myself for those so-called mistakes.

No one yet wants to see or hear the real problems of me
besides the one you can't help when looking at me.
I am a boy nobody wants, take a look at my body
feet and head, you'll see I've been broken
many times before.

Remade again and again. Building to be perfect.

Though shadows 'n' death hate and anger always
rest on my mind.

::Day after day building to be perfect.

No drugs or shrinks. I had been granted
myself a pair of Angel Wings. And made
my mistakes over 'n' over again.

The music I listen to isn't really rough.
Nice guy you never tried to do any wrong.

Wrong to that Death Metal, Metal. Alternative,
Rock, and Rock 'n' Roll are by far the best.

Nice 'n' easy really never cared about this 'n' that.
Day to day never really mattered to me anyway.

Losers don't count. Wrong.
A loser in one's self doesn't count.

People think they're cool rough and tough.
That shit ain't me.

I'm better now than ever before
though still crying as I'm trying to be perfect.

All round.

Don't get it wrong crying does great.
It's perfect when feeling down.
So is writin' games music
And definitely my pets
They're the shit.

-Seigrik Maru



Strangers

James Skelton



Looking

By Adam Staite

As looking I begin to race through thoughts
I start to wonder so many things

The sparkle of what looks like glass on the sidewalk as I walk
The different kinds of fliers there above me in the sky

Little squirrels run up trees
Many people walking with their dogs
In the park all the gorgeous ducks
The beautiful white structure of Mother Swans

As I look in wonder of Mother, few of many
things that roam
things that swim
things of massive size
things so tiny



Art by Henry Peters

you couldn't even see with your eyes
even if you tried until you died

Little things
rubber balls tennis balls and hockey pucks
ties and flies that eat shit

Great large things in so many places
elephants
semis and trains
sharks and blue whales
don't forget an octopus
Even things my eyes of any others' eyes could not believe
stars moons and the sun
the size of the galaxy
in which we happen to be staying
as long as we can!

Though I see with insight from my eyes
and decipher from my mind
I can't yet fall to hatred filled in my mind

Things all I have come to not amuse of any good intent

I see also the pollution coming from cars
The crap coming from industry pipes
The killings and street wars on the world for ages

This I feel so much anger
in so many ways
in so many directions
it can't be contained

Why of many questions seem so far from me to be asking
Like the reasons that humans have been able to create
so many questionable things
Tools that fly, drive, and make you swim

So small it is when science shows so many things
that science is something makes my brain scream
Come and let me join!

I wonder if you, science, can tell me why religion is
vain

that life is something that isn't over when it's over
that life after death is something that can't be realized
as something that's real like this false real
that seems to be all life has to realize each day.

—Seigrik Maru

REVIEWS

The end of melancholy?

By Ted Dyck

Kramer, Peter, *Against Depression*. Viking, 2005. Hardcover. 368 pp. \$36.00

This is an excellent book -- well-written, totally current, fully informed, evidence of a mind long engaged in the serious play of life and thought.

First, Kramer surveys, compellingly, the evidence that depression is a disease in the classical sense, with a stable cluster of identifiable symptoms, grounded in specific pathologies of the brain, and capable of irreversible damage to the human being. Hence, the title: *against depression* in the sense that it must be treated and if possible eradicated.

Second, Kramer updates our (or at least my) knowledge of the current *hypotheses* (which he calls, misleadingly, *myths*) about depression. The 80s-90s model of *serotonin/norepinephrine imbalance* (leading to inappropriate message transmission) has been augmented in the 90s-00s by a *stress-and-impaired resilience* model, in which neural problems in the pre-frontal cortex and hippocampus lead to a *stuck-switch* syndrome.

Third, Kramer surveys, with devastating effect, western culture's love-affair with depression, AKA heroic melancholy. In particular, he thoroughly disposes of the notion that depression is somehow an essential part of depth, creativity, and so on. In his view, and my experience bears this out, depression is a dev-

astating disease that robs the individual of her/his capacity for depth, creativity and so on. This debunking of melancholia as the pre-eminent mark of the artist is as refreshing as it is grounded in the latest scientific research in neurology and the best contemporary practice of psychiatry. As Kramer says.:

But alcoholism is not the ecstatic intoxication of the modern soul. Panic disorder is not the existential angst of the 21st century. Post-traumatic stress disorder is not the universal injury that history imposes on us. Migraine is not *weltschmerz*; it is a specific headache that in bad poetry might *stand for* spiritual pain. . . . phrases like *melancholy (depression) is the depth of modernity* have that tinny sound. (230)

The fuller relations between the artist and hypomania/bipolar disorder/ schizophrenia are only slightly explored. Kramer thinks hypomania is the most constructive link so far, but, in truth, the evidence he presents is sketchy.

Kramer's book, however, has two shortcomings. He seems overly enthusiastic about genetically engineering depression out of existence. Given the very real dangers of genetic manipulation, this enthusiasm is sadly misplaced. Also, Kramer does not even mention recent successes in using brain pacemakers, electrodes implanted in an area of the brain (Cg25) known to be overactive in depression, to induce tiny electroshocks which seem to resolve mood disorders. This latter development, however, may have occurred too late to make it into his book.





Notes on Contributors

BEST, LAURA

Laura writes out of Springfield in Annapolis County, Nova Scotia.

BRAIDEK, CARLA

Carla lives and writes in Big River SK.

BURGESS, LORRAINE

Lorraine Burgess is the pseudonym of a writer with an uncommon name.

BURKS, DONNA

Donna has been writing - and publishing - poetry since 1997. She is a member of the Saskatchewan Poetry Society and lives in Regina SK.

BUTTON, GREG

Greg is a regular contributor to TRANSITION. He is the author of *Inside of Midnight* (Thistledown, 1993) and a member of the CMHA Writers Group in Moose Jaw.

DIFALCO, SALVATORE

Another of Salvatore's stories, "Grassy Brook Road," was published in TRANSITION Fall 2006 under a misspelling of his name. Our apologies.



Art by James Skelton

FENWICK, CATHERINE

Catherine is an educator and writer from Regina SK. She has published *Love and Laughter: A Healing Journey* and a chapbook of poetry, *Telling My Sister's Story*.

GORDON, GLENNA

Glenna lives in beautiful Eastend SK, where she is a member of a writers' group mentored by Sharon Butala.

GREEN, BERNADETTE

Bernadette's fine tribute to her mother was written in Weyburn SK.

HAHNEL, LORI

Lori's story was accepted by the previous editor. She was also published in TRANSITION Fall 2006.

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Jaydean lives and writes in Regina SK.

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Sharon lives and writes in Beechy SK

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Gloria is a member of the CMHA Writers Group in Moose Jaw SK.

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Mark lives and writes in Huddersfield UK. He is the author of two books of poetry, *Tin Cat Alley* (1996) and *Our Little Bit of Immortality* (2005).

NELSON, DAVID

David is the Executive Director of CMHA (SK). His writing appears regularly in TRANSITION.

PARLEY, KAY

Kay, who has experienced some of the unique history of LSD research in Saskatchewan of which she writes, lives in Saskatoon.

RICHARDS, KATHERINE

Katherine lives, writes, and undergoes transitions in Prince Albert SK.

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Adam is a beginning writer and member of the CMHA Writers Group in Moose Jaw SK.

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Saskatoon-born, Doug lives near Livelong, Saskatchewan, where he maintains a studio and works as a freelance Exhibit Technician.

VANDERBORGHT, YANNICK

Dr. Vanderborght is Professor at the Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis in Brussels and the Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

WARREN, LORRAINE

Lorraine is a member of the CMHA Writers Group in Moose Jaw SK.



Ten Tips for Dealing with **Stress** AND **Tension**

1. Recognize YOUR symptoms of stress.
2. Look at your lifestyle and decide what you can change in your work situation, family situation, or schedule.
3. Become acquainted with relaxation techniques -- yoga, meditation, deep breathing, massage -- and use those that work for you.
4. Exercise -- Physical activity is one of the most effective stress remedies around!
5. Manage your time effectively -- Break large tasks into manageable bits, do essential tasks in order of priority, and use a check list to give you a sense of satisfaction as you achieve each task.
6. Watch your diet -- Alcohol, caffeine, sugar, fats, and tobacco all put a strain on your body's ability to cope with stress.
7. Get enough rest and sleep.
8. Find Strength in Numbers -- talk to your family and friends, professional counsellors, and support groups about what is bothering you.
9. Avoid trying to be "perfect" -- tackle one thing at a time and avoid trying to be everything to everybody.
10. Give yourself a Break -- Have some Fun! Laugh and be with people you enjoy!

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