

TRANSITION

WINTER 2014



INSIDE:

Kay Parley returns with *Alternative views of mental illness* on Page 3

Victor Enns brings us Jimmy Bang's Blues on Page 24

New this issue - *WRITING THE LIFE - Drama* starts on Page 34



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Saskatchewan
Mental health for all

TRANSITION

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(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.

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Our Mission:

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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3. Reprints and simultaneous submissions (to several magazines) are not considered.
4. Turnaround time is normally one issue or 6 months: do not send a second submission before the first has been reviewed.
5. Payment is \$50.00 per printed page (\$25/half page); \$40.00 per published visual art work; and \$200.00 for cover art.
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Saskatchewan
LOTTERIES



INSIDE

2 FROM THE EDITOR
Ted Dyck

2 DIRECTOR'S REPORT
David Nelson

LIVING THE LIFE

PARLEY, KAY
3 Alternative views of
mental illness

GREGORY, DARREN
4 Reflections on
mental illness

WRITING THE LIFE Non-Fiction

CHERTOW, JENNIFER M.
5 By the mercy of God

DE VOE, M.M.
7 Attention passengers

NOULLET, ALLAN
9 Guilty

OSBORN, ELIANA
9 Just a little bit crazy

TANNER, RACHEL
11 The myth of rainbows

WRITING THE LIFE - Fiction

BEST, LAURA
12 Preparations

CALLAGHAN, SHIRLEY
15 Rebecca's retreat

MILLER, DIANNE
16 Cat therapy

NEUER, JULIAN
18 Fever

ROLLI
20 Humours

WRITING THE LIFE - Poetry

BRAUN, GORD
21 The big thing

CAWOOD, DAVID
21 Renewal

CUMMINGS, BEVERLY
22 A final testament
22 Valedictorian of the Asylum

DIFALCO, SALVATORE
23 Three Sonnets

ENNS, VICTOR
Jimmy Bang's . . .
24 Flatfooted Blues
24 Goodnight Blues
24 Limbo Blues
24 Revolver Blues

DRUMMOND, MATT
24 Raw onion

FENWICK, CATHY
25 Solipsist
25 Making peace with
my body after cancer

HALL, COURTNEY
25 You're too young

GOLDBERG, KIM
26 Exercise in infinitives

HANSEN, COLE
27 Forgiveness
27 Uneven clay
28 The prisoner of the mind

HUBICK, CHANTEL
28 Poem #1

KATT, CATHERINE
28 Tears in the carwash

MACFARLANE, SHARON
29 Evanescent
29 Fall Tanka

WRITING THE LIFE - Poetry

MCMURRAY, DARRYN
29 The ball poem
29 The paint poem

MONAHAN, JILL
29 Where I am from

MONAHAN, LYNDA
30 I was born of fire

MURPHY, MARK
30 Obsessive ruminations

SANDUSKY, WELDON
30 Brockbank Street
30 Married student housing
31 Timberlawn
31 The Hollywood Bowl
32 The State insane asylum
32 Twerp, Dork and Dilbert

SKELTON, JAMES
31 I dreamt about my brother
31 Last night

STYRE, BARRY
32 May you . . .

STAITE, ADAM
33 Faint Delusions
33 Misconceptions

WOOD, JANICE
33 Stroke

WRITING THE LIFE - Drama

FOSTER, KEITH
34 Dining out

KAI, CHERYL
35 "Drugs: an excerpt from
NO SENSE NONSENSE
(Act 3 Scene 1)

REVIEWS

GROBOWSKY, IRENE
37 *I Am Currently Working on a Novel*

ARNAL, CAITLIN
38 *Mavor's Bones:
a gothic-novel-in-poems*

39 **NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS**



Contributors offer full issue

TED DYCK, EDITOR

Every issue of this magazine is different: this one is, or at least feels, very full.

That's right, *full*. *Full*'s opposite, in editor-speak, is not *empty* but *thin*. And the opposite of *thin*, too, is not *thick* but *full*.

Weird, isn't it, the way we bend words to our will – whenever we can. A form of play, almost, an inventiveness, a vitality – in the language and, even more so, in the speaker.

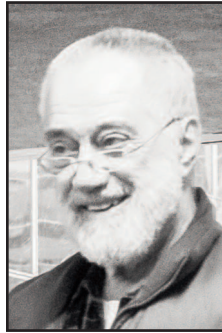
It's called *metaphor*. One word getting on top of another, or being misapplied to another. The *road of life*, we say, the *voyage*, the *journey*, the *comedy*, *Time flies* – but of course it doesn't, it just feels that way, and though birds do it, airplanes don't.

Fullness in writing, as in language, is measured by the density of its metaphors (and here we go, again).

Consider the poetry of the much-maligned list:

depression sits down / heaven ... scooped him up / stuck in a moment / journey of hubris / alive with activity / nestled among rolling hills / navigated the head-high snow drifts / curvatures of anxiety / snicker of sparrows / pavement tilts / arms around the night / frame a concept / each day's needs / brutal storm / rain-storm lashes / waking up all hollow / born of fire / gutted white van / artisan of ideas / twisted relationship / angels breathe sweet flowers / swallowed by darkness

I flipped through the pieces in this issue by alphabetical order of the authors' names, skimmed till I hit a metaphor that hit me, and *voilà*, the list above (not every author's work yielded up a metaphor so flippantly). Serendipity, like metaphor, operates in



TED DYCK

mysterious ways.

The prosepoem below is the list above, tweaked a bit, and slightly rearranged:

depression sits down / but heaven ... scoops up / stuck in a moment / on a journey of hubris / alive with activity / navigating head-high snow drifts / or nestled among rolling hills / in curvatures of anxiety / among a snicker of sparrows / the pavement tilts / its arms around the night / frames a concept / for each day's need / when a brutal storm / a rainstorm lashes / it wakes up all hollow / born of fire / in a gutted white van / an artisan of ideas / and twisted relationships / of angels breathing sweet flowers / swallowed by darkness

What to make of this?

Can it be that it's a poem about depression (personified, of course), revealing its essential characteristic, its cycling *anhe- donia*?

How could this happen – without intention? by chance?

Of course it didn't just "happen" – you, the contributors to this issue, invented the metaphors, knowingly or not; I, your editor, went looking for ones that moved me; the alphabet arranged their first ordering; a sense of narrative was latent in the first two in the first list; a cycle, from *depression* all the way around to darkness, emerged quite naturally. That's how it happened.

But what does it mean that a poem can "happen" in this way? That a story can be "created" by lists and chances?

I don't know.

But I do know that I've found an answer to a question I had about this issue of *TRANSITION*, a question about why it felt so full to me as I was putting it together.

It *felt* so full because it *was* so full – of metaphor, of you writing the self, of the re-invention of the fullness of your being.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Action Plan recommendations on the way

Winter is once again upon us and even though it is somewhat cold and gloomy outside, this is an exciting time in the field of mental health and addictions.

As this is written, we are anxiously awaiting the recommendations of the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan. A great deal of effort and input has taken place over the last year and a bit to finally have current input into a ten-year action plan to improve mental health and addictions services in our province. As always, once the recommendations are out, the job begins to advocate for and encourage government to put the much-needed resources necessary to improve



DAVE NELSON

the system in place.

As we know, Saskatchewan is dead last in the amount of resources it puts into mental health services as a percentage of the overall health budget. While the average across Canada's provinces is 7%, and the latest research recommends 9%, Saskatchewan puts only 5% of its health budget into mental health.

All this to say, there is a great deal of leeway for the government to bring the resources for mental health up to minimal standard as they prioritize the recommendations of the Action Plan.

We look forward to working collaboratively with government and our many partners and stakeholders to do all we can to ensure we move towards an adequate mental health system in our province.

All the best in the upcoming Holiday Season.



Alternate views to mental illness

BY KAY PARLEY

It is shameful that stigma attaches to mental illness in a supposedly enlightened society at the dawn of the 21st century, but to point out the stigma is useless. Information and familiarity reduce the tendency to react to mental illness with fear and suspicion, but it is also helpful to scan the alternate views which exist. Ways of looking at mental illness change a lot and they tend to reflect the historic periods in which they are popular. While medicine may embrace the latest findings and keep up to date, some members of the public may hold views that went out of date centuries ago.

The ancient world saw the mentally ill as gifted. Those who saw visions and heard voices might be in communication with gods and should be heeded and honored. (If the old testament prophets were alive today, they would be given electric-shock and tranquillizers, a sobering thought.)

During early Christian centuries, when conformity to rigid tenets was mandatory, anyone different was seen as “bad” or even possessed by the devil. On of the best surveys of attitudes to mental illness is still the 1974 book by Osmond and Siegler, *Models of Madness, Models of Medicine*. They called that one the *moral* model. An equally negative idea was the *impaired* model, which saw mental illness as incurable, the sick person permanently disabled. The only thing to do was lock him up and forget him.

These models were overthrown a century ago by Freud’s *psychoanalytic* model. He saw mental illness as stemming from repressed trauma and unresolved conflicts. The treatment was deep psychotherapy with support to help the patient face recovered memories.

The fourth model listed by Osmond and Siegler is the *social* model. It blames a sick society for mental illness, seeing it as an effect of poverty and discrimination. The *family interaction* model claims the cause is a dysfunctional family and the whole unit needs treatment.

Sixth, the *conspiratorial* model, really says there is no mental illness. The onlookers see behaviour they don’t understand and label the person “mad.” He is the victim of our perception. The seventh model is my favourite and I employed it frequently when doing psychiatric nursing. Called the *psychedelic* model, it was introduced by R. D. Laing in the sixties and was popular with creatives and intellectuals. An optimistic idea, it sees mental illness as a mind-expanding trip. The seeds of health are within the individual’s mind. It ties into the realm of self-actualization and the process of developmental relationships.

The *medical* model is another late-comer to psychiatry. It began in the late fifties with biochemical research to find out if there was a physical cause for mental illness. Evidence there was furnished a breakthrough. At last people could be told what was wrong and given hope. It would lessen the stigma, because most people have tolerance for physical illness. It might mean that medical doctors, who had felt uncomfortable

around mental illness, could now dish out pills and help people control the symptoms.

At first sight, this is a confusing list of alternatives, but some are useless. There would be no treatment at all if the *moral*, *impaired*, or *conspiratorial* models were believed. *Psychoanalysis* was time-consuming and costly and not effective with the majority of the mentally ill. The *social* and *family interaction* models were embraced by counsellors and used extensively. They help people to cope and have often improved quality of life, but their effectiveness in treating severe forms of mental illness is doubtful.

It is easy to see why psychiatry moved into the medical camp. It was a place that promised something they never had – the gift of scientific proof and certainty. What they found, abetted by the drug companies, were ways of reducing anxiety, depression, and unacceptable behaviour. What they have lost is the depth of the subconscious mind, wellspring of all the creativity which has given impetus to the human race. A profession which loses the insights of Freud and Laing may forget the origin of dreams. The *medical* model has been a godsend, but it has strict limitations.

Now a new and dangerous trend is emerging in public attitudes to mental illness. Partly because society has allowed the courts to become involved and has taken to using terms like recidivism, formerly reserved for criminology, some people are beginning to equate the mentally ill with criminals. Is this a regression to the middle ages, when the mentally ill were viewed as sinners? Fear and ignorance like this ring warning bells. More money must be put into the cause of the mentally ill. More attention must be paid to treatment and to public education. Like children and the elderly, the mentally ill are sometimes among the helpless members of society. No country can neglect them and be considered truly civilized.



“You remember Donna - she’s that poet who isn’t lonely.”



Reflections on mental illness

BY DARREN GREGORY

Canada Day 2014

It's a tad dreary this morning, Canada Day 2014. A deep fog lingers on the tops of the mountains surrounding my family home. It's raining, but only a drizzle. As I consider the blessing of Canada today, the fog I see in the mountains reflects back to me the fog in politics guiding services for our citizens struggling with mental health issues and addictions.

Many today will brave a similar wet and cloudy scene, sunk into another bout of unwelcome depression. Some will find sun and heat, the stress of discomfort triggering a rage inside they can't easily explain. For others, today will be a quest to find drugs or alcohol, a tincture necessary to feed addictions. With the population of homeless (most mentally ill and addicted) growing in our inner cities, our country seems politically frozen to improve services to mend these broken lives.

The question I pose today: are we really doing our mentally ill population any better service than in Canada Days past?

The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association in Ottawa conservatively estimates that between 150,000 and 300,000 Canadians are currently homeless. Further estimates suggest that between 60 and 100% of these citizens live with substance abuse and mental illness. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association in British Columbia, the numbers of persons with mental health issues in Canadian prisons is extremely high. The streets are certainly an inadequate space to serve the needs of persons with mental illness. The most significant case recently reported, the Ashley Smith case, pointed out very clearly how gravely change is needed in our justice, policing, and correctional systems.

On October 19 2007, Smith strangled herself to death at the Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener Ontario as guards watched. Video surveillance tapes, which shed some light on Smith's prior treatment at the hands of prison guards, showed graphic images including duct-taping Smith to a chair and threats to put tape across her face. Further video showed clearly that Ashley eventually strangled herself, while guards watched her through a window, allegedly under the order of their superiors.

Ashley Smith's mental health treatment in prison and subsequent suicide is example enough for why mental illness should be treated by the health care system and not the prison system. The investigation into her death, closed in December of 2012 with the coroner recommending over one hundred necessary changes, ruled Ashley Smith's death a homicide. Now, two years after the inquest, in my home Province of British Columbia, it seems perhaps Ashley Smith's unnecessary death may have sparked some change.

Just this past month, Coquitlam City Planning & Development released a new plan for Riverview Hospital Lands. Riverview Hospital was once a model for mental health treatment in the province. Now a prize haven to the film and

television industry due to its grand stone architecture, the hospital officially closed as recently as 2012. The same year the inquest into Ashley Smith's death was concluded.

The question of what to do with the hospital's land has remained the subject of debate and planning now for decades. Many, once housed within Riverview's walls of stone, were abandoned to the streets through the years of its closure. The City of Coquitlam's plan promises hope in addressing the errors in service development in British Columbia's past.

The City report, *Into the Future: The Coquitlam Health Campus*, describes a wonderful vision for the future of the old Riverview Hospital and improvements to services in BC. It remains unclear just how far along the Federal Government and Corrections Services Canada are in implementing the recommendations following the Ashley Smith inquest. It does appear however that her death may have influenced at least Coquitlam City Planning towards making some long-needed change. As things progress, we all wait with Ashley, her soul likely in some sort of twisted spiritual limbo, to see how compassionate our leadership in Canada is towards the mentally ill and addicted in our nation's prisons.

Celebrating Canada Day 2014, I'm taking a moment to reflect on these troubles. I'd like all of us to reflect on the death of Ashley Smith. Thought and reflection isn't enough, but it is the very least we can do. Ashley Smith may finally force us to act, to better address mental health and addictions in Canada. May her homicide in prison due to inaction, seven years into our collective past, not go by us all, in vain.



Art by Amanda Weckwerth



By the Mercy of God

BY JENNIFER M. CHERTOW

On one of the coldest days of the year in Chicago, temperatures had dropped to fourteen degrees below zero. This same day, two neighbors saved my life.

Mary Deo and John Clementia are married with children and have been my parents' neighbors for nearly ten years. We would see each other walking our dogs and exchange brief hello's, but we had had few encounters before the morning of January 7, 2014. Events that took place on that day would change our lives forever.

On the evening prior to the seventh, I was at my parent's house. The evening was not typical. In fact, I was very sick - not so much physically as much as mentally.

My psychiatrist was changing my medications for an undiagnosed mental illness I had had for almost fifteen years. He was calling every couple of hours to monitor the situation. Unfortunately, things at home were not going well, and during one of the interim moments between phone calls, the following events took place:

My parent's house, old and aching, was making odd noises as heat passed through the pipes and gurgled through steam-vent radiators. In a normal state of mind, I would find such sounds reassuring. However, in the grip of my illness, I believed that the noises I was hearing were coming from a living, breathing source. In fact, I believed that the furnace, alive with its own power, was about to explode. This thought drove me to the basement to assess the furnace and its fiery exhalations.

The thermostat on the furnace read one hundred and forty degrees Fahrenheit. The number sent me into a frenzy of activity. I thought, "We're all going to die!" I ran upstairs and called nine-one-one to inform the police of the immediate danger. The person on the other end of the line asked for my address. I hung up. They called back. I answered. My mother took the phone from me. She explained that her daughter had "psychiatric problems" and that "nothing was wrong." Nobody came.

Still convinced we were about to die, I insisted on calling a workman. My mother made the call. Even with the workman's reassurances that the temperature was fine, I remained frantic.

Later that night, while my parents slept, I awoke in a panic. To save myself and my family from sure death, I broke a second-story window, stepped onto the brick porch outside, and jumped. I landed on my feet, but when I took a step forward, my body crumpled beneath me. I had broken my leg. Lowering myself to the ground, I headed toward a light, which shone from the porch of my neighbor's house.

Wearing nothing more than thin, cotton pajamas, the cold began to settle into my bones. I navigated the head-high snow drifts, crawled army-like through bushes separating my parent's property from that of my neighbors, crossed a brick driveway, and climbed the many steps up to my neighbor's porch. I knocked on the front door and cried out for help. It was midnight, and I soon realized that everyone was asleep. I did not

give up. The howling wind swallowed my cries and the sounds of my knocking.

Still, I did not give up. Ice began to form on my hands after trying to warm them with my breath. My fingers began to turn white. To avoid the same fate for my toes, I hid them beneath my pajama bottoms with limited success. The leg I had landed on wouldn't move. Slowly, the night began to take on an uncanny, otherworldly feel as I sat mesmerized, trance-like, by the icy scene.

At daybreak, Mary Deo and John Clementia opened their front door to find me on their stoop. I could not see or hear them, but I could feel their presence as warm blankets surrounded me. At first, I could not tell if they recognized me. But at one point, Mary Deo looked into my face and exclaimed, "I know you!" I looked back at her, staring into her eyes with tears welling up in mine, and cried, "I know you, too!" In my first moment of sanity since the night had begun, the connection between us was like a life-line connecting a lifeguard on shore with a swimmer out at sea. From that point on, I knew I would be safe.

I awoke in the intensive care unit two days later. I had broken my leg, had frostbite on my hands and feet, and had hypothermia. My frenzied quest to save myself and my family had ended in a near tragedy, but my arrival in the hospital marked a new beginning.

The hospital doctors consulted with my psychiatrist, who by this time had been alerted to what had happened. Together, they determined that the event was a manic episode with psychotic features - meaning I had had a serious break with reality. They diagnosed me with bipolar I.

With this new diagnosis, I embarked on a new road. Like the old quest in my psychotic state, the new quest entailed an attempt to save myself. But unlike the old attempt, I was now grounded in a reality that was replete with hope and not despair. In addition, my new attempt to save myself entailed coming to terms with my mental disorder and what that disorder meant for me and those around me. I had been given an opportunity to start anew.

During the following six weeks, I remained in the hospital. While recovering from my physical injuries, I reflected on what had happened. I thought about how, in the throes of my bipolar episode, I had only known the internal logic that had driven me to break a window and jump. My intentions were good just horribly out of touch. I further reflected that I was thrust back to sanity with my neighbor's exclamation, "I know you!" to which I was able to respond, "I know you, too!" This connection put me back in touch with reality. Finally, I thought how my hospital diagnosis of bipolar I further grounded me and gave me a new foundation on which to begin a new life.

At the end of these reflections, I concluded that the true heroic act was that of Mary Deo and John Clementia. Not only had they been good neighbors, but they were genuine spirits of love - heroes, in fact. They warmed me (literally), called emer-



WRITING THE LIFE - NON-FICTION

gency services, got my parents, and made sure I made it to the hospital. I know that because of them, I am alive today.

Because my neighbors respect my privacy and that of my parents, they will never tell a soul what happened on that icy, January morning. They will live quietly with the trauma – unrecognized for their act of kindness, suffering in their own way from the loss of a whole and peaceful world that I, due to my illness, had shattered for them. When I first entered my neighbors' lives on that blustery January day, I caused them a great deal of pain – pain they have lived with since that time.

Today, on March 22, 2014, just two days after the start of spring, I took my first trip out of the house. I was released from the hospital a month ago. By chance, I saw my neighbors in the street. Before they saw me, I glimpsed a brief sign of the pain I knew they must have been feeling. I noticed a haunted look in their eyes – a look that hinted at the ghost of traumas past: my trauma, their trauma, our joint trauma.

But their faces lit up upon seeing me, and the pain turned to joy - sending the ghost a-running. Indeed, the pain in their faces broke like an ice mass breaking apart in drifts at the start of a spring thaw.

These twining emotions of pain and joy bespoke a complicated and paradoxical truth. Their faces reflected my own complex and unspeakable emotions. Initially, I could see the destruction of a world in their eyes which their trying-to-smile lips barely masked. The depth of this sorrow lay in their gaunt features, sunken expressions, and red-rimmed eyes. I could see my own destruction and sorrow reflected in their kind but tired eyes.

But once our eyes met, I could see their unhindered joy at finding me alive, walking – albeit with crutches - down the sidewalk. With a depth of joy that washed away both of our pain, Mary Deo hugged me tightly and asked me with a bright smile to “come over for tea anytime.” John Clementia seconded his wife’s gesture with a tight hug, all the while refusing my gratitude with a quick, “Now, now. Enough of that.” Yes, there was pain in today’s meeting because it recalled our past trauma. But now there was joy as well – we had gotten past the hard part.

Our meeting today began to clear away the ghosts of our joint trauma. And yet, even as the pain dissipates and is replaced by joy, I worry. Given the havoc I wreaked on the lives of my neighbors on that January day, I am tempted to blame myself, feel shame, and feel guilt. Because of the incident, I understand how mental disorders, when not properly diagnosed and treated, can destroy me and the people around me.

But as I recover, the acts of Mary Deo and John Clementia on that frigid January day and today at the beginning of the spring thaw remind me of the hope of life. Their acts enable me to feel something different. I am learning through their love to love myself.

When faced with the ravages of my psychosis, Mary Deo and John Clementia did not treat me as an outcast but took care of me with the unconditional love they would bestow on a member of their own family. Today, my neighbor’s kindness

did not abate as they opened their arms and their doors to me literally in hugs and offers to join them for a cup of tea. In their joy, the pain began to break up like the first thaw of spring breaking up winter’s blanketing ice.

They saved me in an emergency and showed me deep concern in its aftermath. Through their acts of love, they are teaching me to be gentle with myself. Through their kindness and compassion, I am coming to realize that I am not to blame for my illness. Indeed, our meeting today - reflected in the change of seasons where spring’s rebirth washes clean the haunting shadow of winter’s death – shows how love can overcome hate.

Unwavering, unplanned, and unassuming, their acts will remain unsung unless I tell others of their deeds. Without question, without bias, without expectation of a reward or recognition, they acted out of love. In doing so, they made it possible for me to start anew. They saved my life.



Mutual Greeting by Henry Peters

Attention passengers

BY: M. M. DE VOE

Bipolar runs in the family. I stand on the uptown platform because downtown is closed and get no comfort today from the prairie grass thriving in the cement cracks of the elevated 125th Street station. A murder of crows roost/s in the Riverside trees, ha ha. A klatch of pigeons battle/s a snicker of sparrows. A conflict of oxymorons surround/s me: Elevated subway. Urban weeds. Private cellphone conversations in public. I have no ironic smile for the antigentrification activist who asks me, the only white woman on the platform, how she should best get downtown ignoring the man right next to me whom I saw jump the turnstile. Her question elicits a follow-up from a college kid—how I would have seethed at twenty-one to be called a kid—who wants to get to 42nd Street. “Go up to go down,” I tell them all, and I add, “Don’t step on the Gulden’s mustard packet there.”

139th Street City College. Passengers wishing to reach downtown stations must get a transfer from the token booth clerk, exit to street level, and reenter on the downtown side. Next stop 145th Street. Stand clear of the closing doors.

“Believe it or not,” the token clerk says to his friend. “I just got out of jail for punchin someone in the fuckin mouth and I’m thinkin bout trackin him down and punchin him in the mouth again.”

“Then you’ll go to jail again.”

“Nah. That won’t happen. Here’s your transfer, miss.”

“Thanks,” I say, which means, Damn, but you have a lousy job.

Neither I nor anyone else helps the fat mom up the stairs with her bulky stroller, though I have a one year old in day care (who might also carry the gene to make him bipolar). Strangers have often been kind when I take my kid out with his stroller. They open doors, and help me up stairs. They touch my child’s hair and say how cute he is. I vow to help the mom on the way back down despite her pierced nose and scowl, but she is headed for the tobacconist not the downtown stairs.

This train is making express stops only. Express Stops. Ninety-Sixth street will be the next stop on this train. Next stop Ninety-Sixth. Stand clear of the closing doors, please.

The downtown train whirs with mariachi music and I wonder how these guys keep their shirts so white. And where they bought their matching orchid cowboy hats. Mayan relics in the subway. One guy makes change for a five, sings ‘gracias senior!’ as if it were part of La Cucaracha.

Ninety-sixth. Transfer here for the one and nine trains. This train is making express stops only. Express stops. Seventy Second will be next. Stand clear of the closing doors. McDonald’s wafts my way, a half-eaten burger competing with the after-work paint reek of two Russian day laborers, picking their teeth with a shared toothpick. I find no joy today in the

man reading *Richard III* from a dogeared book, piercing the passages he loves best with sewing pins, their colored heads functioning in a mysterious code. The nose-pierced mom shares my car and I have no idea how she got here. I guilt over her presence, as if it were a secretion like sweat that could permeate my clothes.

Seventy Second Street. Transfer here for the one and nine trains. This train is making express stops only Express stops. Next stop Forty-Second Street Times Square. Stand clear of the closing doors please. My favorite cousin, the really happy one, is on meds. Too many meds to have the baby she and her husband desperately crave. Two months ago she cut her meds in half, but yesterday’s in-box held word that she’d given up after a dark, listless week in her bed, too unhappy to even click the YouTube links I sent to cheer her. The baby in the stroller has beads in her hair and sucks vermilion liquid from a bottle. How does Mountain Dew affect a kid that age?

*Attention passengers. This train has been switched back to the local track. Everyone who wants downtown express service, please transfer at Forty Second Street Times Square across the platform. There is a train directly in front of us. We will be moving shortly. Next Stop. Forty Second. Transfer for the N, R, Q, W, A, C, E, 1, 9, 7, and the shuttle to Grand Central. The express pulls away just as the local’s doors chime their two-tone readiness to open. The red taillight recedes down the passage like a cinematographer’s idea of the receding death-spirit of a rat. Fishnets on a woman reading *Craine’s* business magazine cross and uncross at the calf. An umbrella and Saul Bellow fill the left hand of a capped man who meets my eye. Today I have no smile for him, either, not even if he were willing to fuck me in a way my husband won’t anymore, now that we have a baby. My feet enter through the slightly parted doors. My mind tags blindly along. *Express Train to Brooklyn, next stop Penn Station. Stand clear of the closing doors.* In the dark he strokes me with holy hands, afraid to dive into a pool where people might have been saved. *Penn Station. Transfer here for the one and nine and the PATH trains to Jersey. Next stop Fourteenth. Stand clear.* He won’t find God’s son in me. Or does he believe my son is God’s and therefore he is God? Is this the trouble with men? Given the choice, I would rather be a happy whore than a Madonna. I would rather read *Craine’s*, subsumed in the world of crushed money and quick orgasms and white wine with a hint of peach in the nose, steaks that bleed in the center, reminding us of that naive cow with its soft ears and short brown fur like a dog’s, sacrificed for the sake of our gnashing appetites.*

Fourteenth Street. Transfer here for the one and nine local train. Today is my tenth anniversary. I have a perfect life—a downtown loft, a child, a husband to support it all. The ennui of perfection, a bell tone rung over and over and over until the head splits in two like a summer melon. I have an empty chair



at the end of this ride and an empty existence to deposit in it. A cup of jasmine tea, perhaps, in which to stir my loneliness. My friends have jobs, worries, mortgages, cancer. I have a cousin who deserves my life. She has a bipolar disorder that was diagnosed when she was nineteen, which has now spread to her ovaries. Her own sense of responsibility, her love for her unborn, unconceived child is keeping that kid pressed to Nietzsche's bleak bosom, while hers have never felt the rush of milk, the Macbethian suck. Maybe never will, all because she is too good. Too kind. Too thoughtful.

Chambers Street. Transfer for the A, C, E, 1, and 9. Stand clear, please. My uncle never molested me. Off his meds, he chased my saddest cousin with a knife. When his only son, a celibate surgeon, was a baby, there were Christmas lights on the tree in the room where I shared part of a sofa bed with my parents. I saw my uncle, dressed in his wife's lilac flannel nightdress, press the wailing child to his hairy man-breast. The birdlike mouth would not take, but squawked all the louder. I saw this. Saw my uncle unbutton to the middle of his hairy chest, saw him pull the flannel aside to bare a brown nipple. Saw the baby cry and turn away. There was no mother-smell, perhaps, or perhaps the boy was as horrified as I at the impossibility of his father's mute tears, splashing on his bald little head. Where was the mother? Why were my parents sleeping through this? What sort of die-hard Catholic still has a tree in February? Small houses, big troubles, sad children. My favorite cousin was as yet unborn. Her birth signaled my mother's vow never again to spend Christmas at this house. Her weird relatives were forced to visit us, instead. For privacy, they set up a tent in the snow. Winter camping being a family hobby, like medication and therapy. A tent. In the front yard. For privacy. Five of them. Cars driving by all night. The backyard was too small, they said. They had to pray together, they said, or they couldn't sleep. How long do die-hard Catholics cling to their desiccated trees?

Attention passengers. We are being held in the station by dispatch. We should be moving shortly. More fast food to offend my nose. The sweet anesthetic pickle-smell from a tiny flat burger, eaten in three bites. All that smell from one slice of wet pickle. A sleeping woman curls into the Priority Seat for people with disabilities, a single French fry like a cigarette dangling from her lips, the rest of the pack fallen to the floor, as if they were poisoned.

"This train go to Atlantic?"

I nod neutral accord at the thick Spanish accent. All my smiles have been wasted. Spent on the hope that my marriage would work. Spent coaxing my husband, whom I once loved passionately, and now love with the ache of a torn meniscus, out of his moods. A defeatist, he. A pessimist. I hate being wrong, so I stay with him.

Next Stop, Park Place. My grandmother's letters alternate

moods. Last week, the onion skin paper held informative weather-chatter. Today's letter is a bleak one-page missive explaining her proximity to her own death. She will welcome it when it comes. She has been waiting for twenty years to see her husband again, to confront him with the actuality of his genetics—the son and daughter who are both mad as hares. Who each have children, whose children have children, want children. Children being a gift from God. Her handwriting alternates with her mood, but every letter might be laced with lovely poetry like a sugar pill might be laced with acid.

Attention passengers. We have a train in the station in front of us. Please be patient. We will be moving shortly. The tall man leaning on the door marked Do Not Lean On Door has to jerk upright when the doors reopen. I nearly smile. The man with the white ear-buds does not know that the highlighter in his pocket has leaked lemon all over his blue business casual.

I say "Sorry" to avert the gaze of the guy no longer leaning on the Do Not Lean On door, but rather catching himself on my boot. I'm slouching is why. I never used to slouch.

Attention passengers. Due to a sick passenger in the train in front of us, we are being held. We apologize for the delay. We will be moving as soon as the train clears the station. Once I won the Optimist Club scholarship, and participated in an awards ceremony that neither I nor my guidance counselor appreciated. She sneered at them, actually, these thirty men who gathered in a room to be cheerful together, who had an Optimist Creed they recited as some men recite the Pledge of Allegiance or the Lord's Prayer. They were avid, as if they were all going duck hunting after the desserts. She said to me in the confidential whisper of a real estate agent who'd just sold an overpriced house, "At least there's free food!" I envy the Optimist Club, that they can meet once a month to be happy together and look forward to things.

Next stop, Park Place. It isn't that I hate my husband, nor that I particularly blame him for his abusive behavior. He, after all, has been in therapy now for seven years. He is trying. It is hard to change. But I see no light. All the change I see in him is that instead of calling me a stupid cunt, he glares and through gritted teeth which prove his miraculous restraint, he says, "If you keep that up, this is going to get ugly." And then, when I do keep it up, he says, "I am finding it very hard not to call you a stupid cunt, which is what you are behaving like right now." Our child will be asleep in his crib, and anyway, might be too young to understand, for now. His oceanic eyes are my deepest fear. He might have been better off playing with his non-cousin in Nietzsche's dark playroom where genetics and his environment can not strip him of his joy.

This escalator will take me up into the fresh air, and all these thoughts will vanish with the bite of the cold breeze. It is inevitable. This is how I am able to move on.

Guilty

BY ALLAN NOULETT

Why, when I smoke cigarettes, do I feel guilty? When I smoke there's a rush that goes through me, it's my mind of the past, or a memory of everything I did in my life. When I open the package, it says right on the paper inside, "Tired of feeling guilty?" Well, I do, because I know what I did at that moment.

The truth is I wouldn't feel guilty if I didn't open that package. It's like opening up my mind, and I find my true self. Anybody that opens a cigarette package knows or should know by now that I am guilty of my crimes. People laugh at that, because they know I have it rough. It's like standing on a mountain top at the very tip of my past, and if I stood there and the sun shone, my shadow would cast down the other side.

People that aren't guilty on the other side of the mountain see my shadow and my guilt in plain sight. It's like a judgement. But I know I'm guilty because I've been guilty ever since I've done the crime. I have lived all my life guilty. I've tried to hide, I did not confess to this crime, but it's been known for

years and years and I have lived my life accordingly. I may be a free man, but of the guilt I cannot be free. I have become scarred.

Was it really my fault – or was it a set-up? People in my past life are dead; you can't ask the dead anything. It feels like an endless search for the truth. I will probably die searching for the truth; I'm not fully convinced it was my fault. There's a lot of different views about this. Some people will always believe it's my fault, because of the stories surrounding the crime.

To prevent such things from happening, they must be very closely looked at. It's like they were envisioned in my mind by someone or acted upon by people that were relatives. My own father and mother. Being an eyewitness, to certain things that I choose not to mention, had an effect on me further on in life, and that's what caused the downfall in everything I do. I never asked for this defect; it became part of my life, deeply embedded inside me.

I cannot be a pure person of mind and body. I get strange feelings beyond my control. It's like a devil's fork jabbed into my side, always reminding me. I cannot remove it.

Just a little bit crazy

BY ELIANA OSBORN

"I'll send you some Xanax," she says one afternoon on the phone.

"Mary wanted one last week but I'll send you the whole bottle."

When the package arrives I'm away with a girlfriend from college.

"Something came. From Discovery Way?" My husband seems unsure.

I laugh, impressed that my mother got something in the mail so quickly.

USPS flat rate box, size small. Folds itself up and ready to go. No one loves these boxes more than Alaskans. UPS and FedEx are cost prohibitive with their distance based zones, but the US Postal service is egalitarian in their rates for all fifty states. I'm hoping this cannot be to blame for their financial troubles.

An adhesive strip is built into the box but it isn't enough for my mother—can you really trust one level of sticky glue? So the package is thoroughly sealed with shiny clear impenetrable tape all around. I usually open her containers with a metal nail file on hand for this express purpose.

Inside: one pound bag, fall color blend, peanut butter M&M candy. And wrapped in a printed paper towel, a clear yellow prescription bottle taller than any I've ever picked up from the pharmacy.

Prescription written by my cousin, filled in my grand-

mother's name. Mailed by my sister to my mother in need, panicked and terrified after arriving across the globe in Mozambique for an 18 month stay as a missionary. My mother, who survives Alaskan life by shopping and quilting and leaving several times a year. My mother, who really just loves her department store face cream. My mother, who cannot abide cockroaches.

The fact that any Xanax made it home from that adventure is as much a testament to my mother's strength as the fact that she forced herself to learn enough Portuguese to converse with the women around her. This despite her tendency for speaking louder to speakers of other languages, as well as her notorious near failing grades in college Spanish.

I appreciate the gift. But I'm overweight and depressed. Xanax and chocolate are things that won't help.

"She doesn't know how to love us," my sister says.

WARNING: If this medication is effective, you will not notice that it is working until you end up in a relationship with a mediocre human being and think that it is love. This is a normal side effect. You must be diligent in avoiding romantic entanglements at this point for your judgment will be skewed. The black boxes that now adorn many selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors warn of risks to young people in particular, that they may become suicidal even as the meds are supposed to be improving mood and outlook. This is why I am not a scientist, because this makes no sense to me. But it is a real and true



WRITING THE LIFE - NON-FICTION

problem, so now there is a scary label to tell you to watch out. There is no bold type on the box or tiny print on the onion skin pages folded up neatly inside mentioning emotional cautions to be taken when starting antidepressants. And so, after eighteen years of crying at least once every day, the shift to regular ups and downs of temperament feels like a miracle.

I ask a boy to a dance. I feel beautiful. He's flabbergasted by me. I have never noticed that I am not hideous. He's smitten. It must be love. We should get married. Clearly. When I come to my senses six or seven months in, he's devastated. Shocked. Never saw it coming. Until the morning I woke up and realized this was insane, I hadn't given any clues that I was unhappy or thinking of ending things. Then one day it was so obviously not the right thing I couldn't believe I'd never seen it before.

He threw the engagement ring when I handed it back. Both of us sobbing on a bench in a small wood near my apartment. Angry. With good right.

At least I had my Paxil though, so I bounced back pretty quickly.

When I turn 35 something happens. I lie on my kitchen floor surrounded on three sides by cabinets and appliances so that my son won't see me. I wail and kick and cannot stop thinking DIE DIE DIE. *This is what it feels like to lose your mind.* After two hours I can control my body but not my brain. I drive to pick up the first grader from school. I turn off my cell phone



"I have a bad feeling about this."

when it rings. I smile and feed and think, *get through this minute and then you can die, over and over again.* My husband gets home from work and I take a sleeping pill and crawl into bed before 6pm, hoping that a different person will wake up in the morning but afraid that I will have to keep feeling this way.

A week later it happens again. I'm driving home from Albertson's in my black truck. I fight back. *Just die, I want to die,* says three-quarters of my mind. One quarter, a slice in the back, says, *this is a panic attack.* I breathe like I'm in labor. My hands are shaking from holding so tightly to the steering wheel. I am home and have no idea how I got there but am glad I didn't crash into anything or anyone. The wave is gone. I feel sick and exhausted and terrified but not suicidal.

A month later we're on vacation. I've rented a beach house in southern California for my husband's fortieth birthday. Lovely sunny fall weather, the smell of salt in the air, seven days with no responsibilities. We walk along the beach, over a bridged canal, until we see a stone pier jutting out into the cold Pacific. The rocks are slick with splashing surf. I hold my 3 year-old too tightly by the hand. We walk out, choosing steps carefully. The film in my head begins:

I slip and hit my head on a rock and fall into the turbulent waters. My kids grow up without me and never relate normally to women. The little one gets swept out to sea and I jump in to save him but can't. I find his dead floating body peacefully staring up at me.

I can barely breathe. I'm sure he'll fall. He'll die. He'll die. He'll be gone. It will be my fault. I'm killing him by walking with him on these damn rocks just to get closer to the waves. I'm choosing to let my child die with every step I take.

"Let's go back. This isn't safe," I tell my husband. I can hear how whiny and unfun I sound.

He doesn't respond, keeps stepping over crevasses filled with hundreds of tiny barnacles in a soup of salt water.

"TODD." I'm trying to get his attention without freaking out. I'm nearly crying, breathing fast and shallow. I can't explain but I have to get off this jetty.

My husband lifts the toddler over a gap and gives me a dirty look.

"I'm going back to shore. It's too slick out here."

Alone, the other three members of my family heading further out to sea, I head inland. I'm going to fall. I'm going to die. They won't even care. I can't do this I can't do this I can't do this. My foot slips an inch on an angled stone and I catch myself starting to scream. My lips are moving but no sound comes out. The crowd is bigger nearer the beach, tourists who just want to step out a few feet into the abyss without getting splashed. I keep my head down and try to go around them staging pictures.

And then, nothing. The attacks disappear as quickly as they began. I do not find a therapist or start eating like a cave woman or take up qigong. I am left mostly fine but doubting, wondering when it will start again.

The myth of rainbows

BY RACHEL TANNER

You can only write about depression so many times. Eventually it gets old. Eventually there have to be some rainbows, right? Statistically, there has to be more to life. No one wants to read the same thing over and over again. But when you're stuck in that rut – in that deep pit – how do you get out of it? If there's no one to pull you out, how do you escape?

Maybe there are no rainbows. I've never seen them, anyway. I've only read about them. Heard the songs. I assume they must be more than a myth. I assume they must be real. They're such a lovely idea. But what other consciously beautiful things have we imagined that ended up not being true? We can't really wish on stars. Some things are merely pretty ideas. Maybe happiness is the same thing. I've been chasing it down for awhile, trying to figure it out. I've researched it. I've done my due diligence. I think that, according to everything I've learned, I should've encountered it by now if it was real. So

why haven't I?

That's the thing about rainbows. They don't appear out of nowhere. They take the right combination of factors. There has to be rain. There has to be sunshine. And then? Something beautiful. But if even one of those factors isn't right, it won't work. It takes ingredients and precision. It takes timing. It takes patience. It takes looking in the right direction at the right time.

Maybe happiness is kind of like that. I don't know for sure. I haven't been lucky enough to find it yet. I don't even know what factors would go into it. I don't know where to begin. I look at people who seem to have their lives together and I don't understand how they do it. It's like this happiness is an infinite loop that has no discernible start or end instead of random sports of magical moments that help get them through the day. None of this helps me figure it out because they're all looking in a direction that has always blinded me.

I didn't know what factors went into making rainbows when I was younger. Eventually, I learned. Maybe eventually I'll learn this, too.



Embarrassment of riches by Fabian



Preparations

BY LAURA BEST

Frank died hard.

Toward the end, when Josie worked up the courage, when she told him to just let go, he writhed and coiled like a cornered snake. He sneered at her and called her a name he knew full well offended her to the core. The word came out long and drawn.

“Leave me alone Bee...ech.”

She spent those last days right there with him, teetering between here and there, like a wobbling top before it finally collapses to the floor. It was Frank, after all, her Frank. Fifty-four year’s worth. You teeter. What else could she do?

It became even more difficult toward the end. He made odd grunting noises and pulled back the moment he felt himself about to leave. It was disturbing to watch, heart wrenching to the point where she found herself wishing for the end to come.

When the Anglican minister stopped by the hospital to say prayers over him, Frank grabbed hold of him.

“Are you going to make me some big promises? Are you?” he croaked a few inches from the minister’s face. Josie felt sorry for the poor man. Frank was behaving hateful, and was giving into bursts of anger. No need to take it out on the minister though.

“It’s the morphine. You never know what they’ll say,” a nurse told Josie as she pierced Frank’s skin with a needle. Josie saw his body relax, saw the way he gave into the drug even before it had time to take effect.

Why couldn’t he have done the same when death reached out for him?

He struck at her twice that last week. The first time she convinced herself it had been an accident. The second time she figured he knew exactly what he was doing. Had she done something that she shouldn’t have? Or was the nurse right, were the painkillers transforming him, changing him into someone she didn’t care to know? He used some horrible, horrible words and kept calling her Rachel. “Close the damn curtains, Rachel.”

Josie hadn’t known any Rachels over the years. She didn’t imagine Frank had either.

Josie has been thinking a lot about her own death. For the past few weeks she has been more than ready to go. She has images of rivers flowing and clouds drifting by, her eyelids barely closed, soft and delicate as moth wings. This is her idea of death, a buoyant state of neither here nor there, an in-between resting spot where she will have a bird’s eye view of everything. Most of all she’ll be blessed with understanding. Life will make sense, perhaps even those final days with Frank.

She hasn’t mentioned to her daughters that she is ready to go anytime now for they would tell her not to talk so silly.

“Oh Mom, you’ve got plenty of years left,” Josie could imagine them saying. Never mind the pain. Never mind she’s already relinquished part of her lung a few years back. Never

mind she’s tired and weary to the bone. They’ve been singing that old tune for years now. Did they even care how good those years had been?

There is something to be said about naming the time and place, the degree of pain she might be willing to suffer. There are those who assist. She saw it on TV one evening, people willing to ease the pain of another, help them cross over when the time is right. She had this very conversation with her friend, Lana, a few days after the show aired. They discussed the legalities, and the moral issues.

“I don’t want there to be trouble for you afterward,” Josie said. It seemed no coincidence that Lana’s mother died a slow and agonizing death.

“There’s no dignity in suffering,” Lana said.

Josie expected heaven would be her final destination. She wonders if she is being conceited or overly optimistic. She has lead a less than perfect life, and her father preached to them as children that God doesn’t want or expect anything less than perfection. “Only the perfect ones will make it,” he used to say. “For the rest of us we might just as well forget it.” He always sounded disappointed, not only in his children for coming up short, but in God for having such high expectations.

Josie would have liked to ask Frank, “Are you expecting to have a place in heaven?” But there hadn’t been time. Once the diagnosis came it had only been a matter of months and such a question did not come out as easily as one would expect.

The TV reported that Pope John Paul II had been waiting to die for some time before he actually went, was even looking forward to his own death, anxious to begin his journey home. The media reported that bit of information while the whole world waited for him to slip away. Slip away; Josie liked that image, envisioning that at the moment of his death, heaven must have scooped him up and planted his feet upon a misty white cloud. But, being the Pope, one would expect that. If His Holiness were refused access through the Pearly Gates then how could ordinary folk expect to make it? This thought brings her little comfort. The fact that she isn’t Catholic probably has something to do with it. Can’t expect all religions to be treated equally, and yet she refuses to believe that any religion would be shunned from heaven. After all, it’s heaven, for goodness sake, no matter what Papa used to say.

When the Pope finally passed on, Josie had been surprised by the emotions she’d felt. She cried in front of the television during the service, the very tears that failed to come after Frank died. And then she wondered was it wise for her to have sent for an Anglican minister after Frank took sick? Perhaps she should have picked a religion with a little more oomph behind it. Religion had never been one of their strong suits over the years. They did manage to have the girls baptized but, for the rest of it, neither Josie nor Frank put a whole lot of effort into religion.

Josie used to think that it would be nice to attend weekly

It was easy to trust Lana. She'd worked at a lawyer's office for thirty-seven years. And if anyone understood her predicament it was Lana.

church services, dressing up for the occasion with high-heeled shoes and a fancy hat. She never told Frank. It would have done no good. Quite possibly she would have backed out at the last minute. She missed the social aspects of church, the chitchats the ladies used to have once the service was over. Mama had a warm friendly smile that lit up the whole outdoors. It was Papa who made their church days miserable, turning Sunday mornings into a somber event that often ended with a scolding once they got back home. Bad enough that the pews were rock-hard and cold as winter ice, and the reverend had a voice that lacked any luster, but Papa expected them to sit without making a peep. Without occasionally dropping their nickel for the collection plate. Without dragging dirt into the church from off their shoes. When she married Frank she was finally free to do whatever she wanted -- or didn't want, as the case might be.

She always blamed Papa for her falling away from church. Funny that she should think about religion now. It seems fruitless this close to the end. It's not as if she can make up for lost time.

"So it's come to this," Frank said to the doctor that day.

The doctor did not offer any miracle cures nor did he make any false promises, which later Frank said he fully appreciated. Josie thought he was taking it all too well.



Art by
James Skelton

"Let's cut to the chase," Frank said tapping his fingers together. "How much time are we talking about?"

Josie gasped, heard her mouth sucking in air as they were leaving the doctor's office. Her body was buzzing; her arms and legs went numb. She couldn't make her lips be still, they trembled into a crumbling mound of flesh. She thought she might cave in on herself.

At home, Frank hung his jacket up and began reading the newspaper.

"What are you doing?" she asked, standing over him.

"Same thing I always do," he said, looking slightly confused.

"But you're dying. The doctor said so. You can't just sit there reading the comics. Your liver won't allow it. I won't allow it."

She's regretted saying that. It wasn't the right thing to say. She should have gathered up all the comics she could find and presented them to Frank. She should have said, "Read all you want...If that is what you want." But she didn't.

She thought she knew so much more than Frank.

She's all paid up. The girls don't know this but when Frank passed she paid the undertaker for herself as well. He was a short bald man with waxy skin and two dark flat moles on his right cheek. He smiled politely.

"It'll make it easier on the family," he said as he watched her write the cheque. He seemed too eager but maybe that wasn't the case. Maybe it had felt that way because she had never planned for her own dying before and it had seemed almost too easy—a signature and a few numbers. He walked her through it, helped her make the decisions.

She wrote down that she wanted to be buried in the pink flowered dress she had worn to Lisa's wedding (thank God one of her girls married), that she preferred carnations instead of roses, (although either would be acceptable) and Just As I Am to be played in the background. She asked that she be buried in the Lutheran cemetery beside Frank, and for the service to be held at the undertaker's parlour the same as Frank. He nodded and shook her hand. She worried that he would lose the instructions so she made out another list, mailed a copy to Lana with orders for it not to be opened until immediately after her death. It was easy to trust Lana. She'd worked at a lawyer's office for thirty-seven years. And if anyone understood her predicament it was Lana.

She doesn't feel comfortable giving the list to the girls. It would make them ask too many questions. When the time comes Lana will tell them about the letter. They won't have to worry. Josie has it all planned out and it's a good plan.

She'll finally have it out with Frank once she crosses over. She's seen enough TV programs to know that the possibility of this happening is good. Ten years she's had to think things through, replay events and practice what she should have said and done. She figured it out a few months back, just what it



was that had been sticking in Frank's craw before he died, why he lashed out with those hateful words. Frank planned it, too. In his own way, he did. Right after the diagnosis, once he'd spoken to the doctors. Then she'd gone and messed things up for him. For years she didn't want to admit it but now she can see it all too clearly.

Days after Christmas, when he left the house dragging the bare Christmas tree behind him, the ornaments removed, he kept on walking. From the kitchen window she saw the abandoned tree not far from the house. A few stray pieces of tinsel sparkled in the sun. It looked out of place, green branches resting upon a stark white background as if magically dropped from the sky, and she'd felt frightened.

Hurrying out the door, she followed Frank's tracks in the snow. She swept her mind clean from worry and concentrated on moving forward, her legs hardly carrying her weight. She hadn't taken the time to put on a coat. The air was unusually warm for late December. Later, Josie had vague memories of pulling her sweater around herself and hugging her body, her feet poking through the snow. Her mind seemed to be playing tricks on her. She felt as though she was watching things from a distance. She knew what it felt like to have an out of body experience.

Trying to keep within the same path Frank had broken, the snow fell inside her boots. She didn't feel the cold on her feet as she walked through the snow even though she had chilblains for two hours when she finally made it back to the house that day. Frank was standing beside an oak tree, leaning into it really, sun draped down across his face, clutching fast to the .22 his grandfather had given him many years ago. It was his most prized possession, quite possibly the only thing he truly valued, him being as close to his grandfather as what he was growing up.

At first she thought he was smiling, but then realized it was the sun causing him to twist his face around. Pink cheeks, red nose, she could hear his breath heaving from a distance. He looked across and saw her there. Their eyes locked. A slight breeze was blowing. They stood there looking at one another until Frank finally spoke.

"I thought I'd hunt for some rabbits." He didn't even try to sound convincing.

"You should come back," she said, her arms wrapped around her waist.

"Should I?" he asked.

There was a lost expression on his face. He was asking her permission, but she'd refused to see it. With each step she made in his direction the space separating them disintegrated so that finally she was standing directly in front of him.

"You should come back," she repeated. There was a tremor in her voice that she thought might have been caused by the chill in the air. He stepped forward and gently fell to his knees in front of her. She pulled him up out of the snow and they walked home.

Frank's plan was really no plan at all. It would have involved

a lot of loose ends and too many details for her to sort through, a complete and utter mess. And the girls, it would hardly have been fair to the girls. Not all plans are of a good kind.

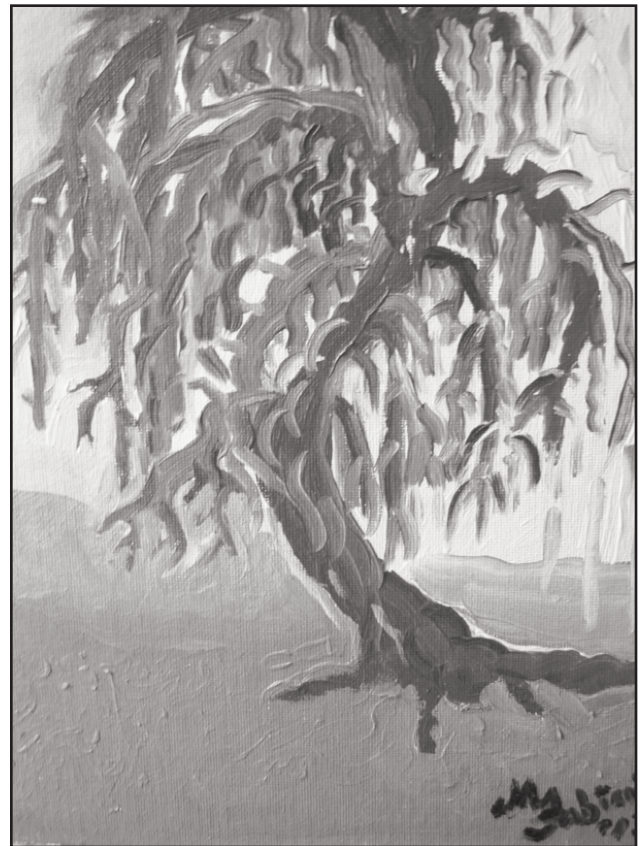
It was why Frank was angry at the end. Josie is most certain of it. You need time and space for some things to become clear. So many times she's come back to that one day in December. It was between her and Frank and always would be. The girls wouldn't believe her if she told them and in the end what would it prove?

There are more ways to die than any person could count. It has been slow for Josie, but until six months ago nearly pain free. Now she's tired.

The door is unlocked. Lana will soon be here to hold her hand. She will bring the means, the pills they discussed; a big bouquet of lilacs.

"There are ways around everything," Lana assured her the day Josie made her plans.

She hears the tires on Lana's car crunch against the gravel stones as it pulls up the drive. Outside, the birds are making a heavenly sound. Last night she dreamed of Frank and that day in late December. She stood there in the snow; saw the question in his eyes. This time she understood. She smiled and closed her eyes.



Weeping Tree by Fabian

Rebecca's retreat

BY SHIRLEY CALLAGHAN

The church camp was alive with activity. Fifty boys between the ages of ten and twelve came from all parts of the county to learn life skills as well as a little religion. They were happy, particularly the two boys from the orphanage, Jake and Jeffrey, who were schooled in the institution and rarely left those grounds. Rebecca was in charge of these two boys, plus ten others. Although she was sixteen and just out of high school, the Board felt that she was mature enough for the job. They were unaware there was history of depression in her family and episodes that took her careening out of reality.

The demands of the counselors were challenging: struggling to get the boys out of their cabins in time for breakfast; chasing them to make their beds and clean up the cabins; making sure no one was left out of the sport activities; and maintaining order among the assembly.

Because she had studied late into the night for weeks prior to final exams, Rebecca was exhausted and fragile. Her co-counselor fell ill shortly after camp began and had to go home, hence Rebecca was in charge of the cabin of boys alone. She felt, after ten days of the three week commitment, she may not be able to cope. The need to get away and be solitary was strong: she needed to be at peace with her troubled thoughts and voices that intruded into her waking hours.

2

One afternoon, after she had taken the boys to the edge of the beach for Bible study, she felt a voice telling her to run away. It was strong and she wanted to go – now--. She hustled reluctant Jake and Jeffrey, with the other boys in tow, back to the camp. “Stay with chief counselor!” she instructed and headed up the lane leading to the main road. Half way up the lane she saw a car coming. Dodging into the woods, she started running for fear of being seen. “Run away. They’ll catch you. You’ll have to pay.” The voices were unrelenting. What had she done? She ran and ran, gasping for breath.

In the center of the woods, in a clearing, Rebecca came upon a tiny cabin. The lock had not caught. Inside was a wood stove, a chrome table, two chairs, a cot and an old army trunk with sheets and a blanket in it. Pots with grain in them and a paint-by-number of a solitary deer by a stream hung on the wall. It was so peaceful here with the wind whispering through the spruce and the mourning doves cooing.

She felt tears in her eyes, eyes she was told were hazel and were full of hope at one time. What if she didn’t score high enough to keep the scholarship she fought for last semester? Would her father have to combine grain on his vacation to help

her through university? Her head was reeling. She was getting sick at the most important period in her life.

3

Lying on the cot she thought of Jake and Jeremy and the boys back at camp. She fell asleep thinking of the youngsters piling all their mattresses on the floor of their cabin and jumping joyfully on them from the top bunk. Then came the mischievous giggles of the boys as Jake kissed her-- Jake who had never known his mother--. Jeremy, who receded into the background, watched, but said little.

With her head clearing slightly, Rebecca woke at dusk. It was raining, and the wind had picked up. How did she come here, she mused. She was running away from something!

The voices came again. “They’ll catch you.” She had to get back to camp, if she knew how to find the path. Closing the cabin door, she listened for sounds to help her find the way. The wet sod beneath her feet, slowed her progress. Branches snagged her long, auburn hair, scratched her short legs and tore her camp tea shirt. It was dark and she was lost. No one knew where she was, but hopefully someone would find her and take her to safety.

Fearfully, she imagined being attacked by coyotes or being hurt by vagrants. Finding a tree shelter she curled up and shivering, dozed. Off and on for hours she opened her eyes, not knowing where she was or why she was in such trouble. It must be penance for what she had done. She awoke to the sounds of voices – not hers—but those of people: she must be hallucinating. Then she called out and a familiar voice answered. It was chief counselor. Happily, the counselors embraced her.

4

“Whatever possessed you, Rebecca?” asked counselor.

“I heard voices;” said Rebecca.” I must have done something terrible. They kept telling me to run, so I did and got lost. I’m so sorry.”

The counselor told Rebecca to rest, and went to the phone.

The next day Rebecca’s parents came to take her home and eventually to the hospital.

Jake and Jeffrey were standing by the car with tears in their eyes. They grabbed the handles of the car, ran after her, and kept calling her name. They were left standing in the dust as she disappeared around the corner and out of sight. Rebecca could not watch them—passionate Jake—dear Jeffrey.

On the way home, Rebecca thought of the cabin with the wind in the spruce, the welcoming cot, the dripping rain, and the peace of mind away from the voices and the worry of what she had done wrong.



Cat therapy

BY DIANNE MILLER

May 19, 2014

Dear Mrs. Mildred Oleksen,

Sounds like a letter from the bank, eh? I just want to make sure this gets to you and not some other Mildred up there. Who knows how Heaven's postal system works? Sarah gave me this journal at Christmas, said it would be therapeutic for me to write. The only therapy I need is to have you back on this earth. Can't believe it's a year, a year of waking up all hollow, like you took my insides with you. I hate that punch-to-the-gut feeling I get when I realize I'm talking to your empty chair, so thought I'd give this journal thing a try.

I walked to the mall after dinner – my usual excitement – and a cat followed me back to the Brentwood. You and I didn't argue about much, but we sure didn't see eye to eye about cats. I was forever chasing those miserable scruffy scavengers away from the garbage cans in the alley behind the store, and you were feeding them when I wasn't looking. Well, this cat met me on the walking path and then followed me home. It had a torn left ear, looked a lot like one of those strays you and Sarah befriended. I couldn't shake the damn thing. She glided along behind me, tail in the air like a sail. I tried to shoo her away, but she'd sit on her haunches and stare at me with green saucer eyes. She followed me to the door, watched me go in, and then sauntered around the corner of the building. Strangest thing, but she was another reminder of you, as if I need more reminders this week. If you were here for our anniversary on Friday, I'd even get you a cat.

Guess I'm done for today. It was nice talking to you even though you're not talking back.

Good night.

Love you. Love you most.

Your husband, Carl

May 20, 2014

Dear Mildred,

God must know who I'm writing to by now so I'll drop the Mrs. Had another long day. You wouldn't believe some of the old codgers and dingbats in this place. I finally gave Kathleen a blast at dinner. I've had it with her constant whining about the food and how it's nothing like she used to make. You'd think she'd been cook for the Prime Minister. Even Mary smirked, and she's deaf as a post. I know better than to complain about the meals put in front of me. You taught me that.

Saw that cat again today. I went for my usual walk down Appleby, past the Lutheran Church, and back on 42nd, soaking up spring sunshine that reminded me of lazy Sunday afternoons when we'd share that creaky yellow glider on the front porch. When I made the turn at the church, there she was, padding along behind me. I took a better look at her this time.

You always liked black and white cats. This one is mostly white, splattered with black, like someone threw a bottle of ink at her. You'd wonder about the story behind that torn ear, but otherwise she seems pretty healthy. Because she's kind of a nuisance, I've decided to call her Gertie. Never dared call your mother anything but Gertrude to her face, but you'll recall I called her a few other names behind her back. Sorry about that.

Bedtime, I guess. Feeling a bit of a sore throat. Hope it's gone in the morning.

Love you. Love you most.

(I sure miss hearing your line, Honey.)

Carl

May 21, 2014

Evening, Mildred.

Spent the day in bed, feeling like I swallowed a cheese grater. Where's your chicken soup and mustard plaster when I need it? Just wanted you to know that bloody cat's still hanging around. During one of my multiple trips to the bathroom, I looked out to check the weather, and there she was, all snuggled in and dozing next to the cedar bush under my window. Coincidence, or does she know it's my window?

It's back to bed for me.

Love you. Love you most.

Your husband and best friend,

Carl

May 22, 2014

My dear Mildred.

I felt a little more human today, so went down for dinner. Even Kathleen was content with the "Surprise Chicken". You always insisted on fresh air for what ails you, so I went out for my walk. I found myself looking for that darn cat, and, sure enough, by the time I got to 42nd, Gertie was trooping along behind, closer than the other day, kind of like the Queen following Prince Philip, as if that would ever happen. I even invited her to come and be petted. Can you believe it? She loved it, rubbing herself against my legs, purring like a garden tractor when I scratched her ears. That torn ear reminds me of the scar you got from falling off a swing when you were a kid. Even though you hid it with your hair, I sure enjoyed searching for it and trying to kiss it better.

I must be getting soft, but I'm starting to like this old girl. When we got back to the Brentwood, I kept a lookout for the office dragon so Gertie could slip through the automatic doors and follow me to my room. Screw the rules. Seems to me assisted living could include pets. Well, she walked in like she owned the place, investigated every corner, and curled up to sleep in your old recliner. I didn't think you'd mind. I brought your chair here because mine was too big for this closet. My

I brought your chair here because mine was too big for this closet. My life's been downsized into 400 square feet and it's still empty.

life's been downsized into 400 square feet and it's still empty. The summer screens haven't been installed yet, so I put Gertie out the window before supper. Maybe I don't hate cats.

Tomorrow's our anniversary. Remember the party the night before the wedding? Couldn't take my eyes off you in that ruffly lavender dress, but you made me leave before midnight. It was a great evening except for Frank inhaling a snoot-full of rum. Who would've thought I'd be here without you, 65 years later.

Love you. Love you most.
Your partner, friend, lover,
Carl

May 23, 2014

It rained today, fitting for our anniversary I guess. We didn't exactly amass tremendous fortune because it rained on our wedding day, but we had a good life. With you by my side I felt like a Bill Gates. Hell, I'm getting misty-eyed. Until today, I haven't been able to muster up any tears. Dearly departed. Don't we skirt around death, like you've left on a trip to see your mother. I'm just pissed off at having been left behind.

I didn't go for my walk today. Could've walked in the rain, I suppose, like you and I used to do, arm in arm, under one umbrella, but I woke up this morning, a lead weight, fighting to stay afloat, to breathe. I've dreaded this day for weeks, fearing that our anniversary would push my grief to the surface, like searing lava erupting through my insides.

I was sitting here in a dull haze until an insistent meow at

the window finally got my attention, and there was Gertie in the flowers, sitting prim, in spite of the rain flattening her splotched fur. I had to let her in, and she settled on the floor to groom her wet coat and lick her paws. As I watched her, I thought of how I used to relax watching you brush your hair and massage lotion onto your face before bed. You said the lotion was to smooth your laugh lines. Why does everything about this damn cat remind me of you?

I can't totally explain what happened next, but in a blink, Gertie was in my lap. You know my usual reaction would've been to push her off, but my arms wouldn't move. As I sat there like a statue in the park, she pressed both front paws against my chest and rubbed her head under my chin. I swear she was giving me a hug. Then she curled into a heavy round heap, her rumbling purr vibrating against my thighs, soothing my thoughts, and pulling the tension from my shoulders. I stroked her back again and again, until I noticed moisture on her coat. I cried. Can you believe it? I cried and stroked for what seemed like hours, and that cat never so much as twitched. Mildred, it was like that cat's mission was to absorb my pain.

Finally, she arched her neck, leapt to the floor, and lengthened into an elastic band stretch. She meowed at the window, so I let her out. She looked back once, flipped her tail, and disappeared on the other side of the cedar. Don't know if I'll ever see her again, but if I do, I'm going to change her name to Millie.

Happy Anniversary, my darling.
Love you. Love you more. Love you most.
Carl





Fever

BY JULIAN NEUER

You check the alarm clock for the third time in half an hour. You give up and tiptoe out of the bedroom. You don't want to wake the wife. You close the door without a sound and go downstairs to your home office.

The house is immersed in shadow. A few appliances, those that are always on, produce a drone that tries to pass for the silence of the night. Your head too is humming with thoughts that won't turn off. You enter the office, flip a switch, the shadows vanish, but your thoughts stand firm. Another sleepless night. You look around the office, try to derive some comfort from the familiar surroundings. You spend most of your days in this room. Everything is in order, each object in its place. This should make you feel better. Good idea, open the windows. Look at the city outside: lights on in other buildings, cars and buses on your street. No people in sight, but inside those apartments, cars and buses, other sleepless lives are following their own courses.

You are not interested. You're not the kind of man that finds invisible people useful at a time like this. You get away from the window, sit on the sofa, admire your home office. The bookcases. The books. The desk. The computer. The lamps. The chair. This is really the workplace of an intellectual. And the sofa, that's the special touch. The sofa is a sign that this is the office of a professional of the future, a true artisan of ideas, freed from the hours and spaces arbitrarily appointed for work by the obsolete principles of the industrial age. Your best ideas have occurred to you not at the formality of your desk, but in the comfort of the cool, synthetic-leather upholstery of your sofa.

You clear your throat once, twice; the third time, it comes out as a cough. In the end, you don't say anything. You think talking to yourself can be embarrassing. But your throat hurts, as if your Adam's apple contained all the sins of Adam and his descendants. You feel you have to do something about it. You decide to fix yourself a drink. (The small refrigerator in the office was a nice idea, too. Never let thirst or hunger interrupt your work again. You've thought of everything.)

You hesitate. At your age, a glass of whiskey can mean a bout of heartburn, or worse. The shots that will certainly follow the first are the promise of a nasty hangover in the morning, maybe an entire workday lost. (You wonder if you've really freed yourself from the hours and spaces arbitrarily appointed for work by obsolete principles and all that.)

On the other hand, whiskey or no whiskey, tomorrow morning is already gone down the drain. You are always complaining that at your age you should need less sleep each night, but your body keeps demanding more and more. The truth is, a sleepless night like this will give you at least half a day of foggy thinking and low productivity tomorrow anyway.

Go on, fix the drink.

What the—? No ice in the fridge?

But you always keep the trays filled, you always refill them after use, precisely to avoid a situation like this. This was not supposed to happen. You've made it clear that your office is off-limits to the other members of your family. Your wife always states her business and asks for permission before she enters. She's taught the children to do the same.

Your children. A teenage girl, sixteen, and a younger boy, nine. They're asleep now, in their respective rooms. You consider waking them up to interrogate them, the main suspects of breaking into your office and doing away with the ice. The girl has been acting strangely lately. She has become more rebellious, has scoffed at your orders, rejected your advice, ignored your decisions. She too asks for permission to interrupt you in your office, but she does it in an overly formal tone of voice, as if to mock you. She must have taken the ice as a prank. Or maybe it was the boy. He is still young enough to think that he can break any rule if he is sufficiently convinced of the reason, however childish. The kitchen is too far away, after all.

Relax. Tomorrow you can call a family meeting to discuss the disappearance of the ice.

You tell yourself it's better not to fix the drink after all. But you're not fooling anyone. You know it was not really your decision. No reason here for pride at your self-control. The ice is gone, you hate your whiskey straight, you are not really in control. Your Adam's apple still hurts, and now your eyes begin to burn because of the bright white light from the lamps. Turn some of them out. That's better.

Since you're out of the sofa, you decide to sit at your desk. Your behavior changes instantly. You start to move like a machine with a purpose: you turn on the computer, open files, consult calendars, check balances, run electronic errands. For the next quarter of an hour, you try to get into the familiar rhythm of work. But you know it's all useless. You can't concentrate. The only conclusion you have reached is that your last month was below average in productivity.

You should try to think of something else instead of work and the pain in your Adam's apple. Say, your family. (Forget about the ice, though.) Maybe you should spend more time with your wife and kids. But you often feel that the more you make yourself available to them, the less they tend to value your presence. Take your own history as a son: your parents were always there for you, and now you do your best to avoid them, as you are sure they have nothing — absolutely nothing — to offer you today. Maybe your girl is starting to feel that way about you. And you have so much to teach her, if she would only listen.

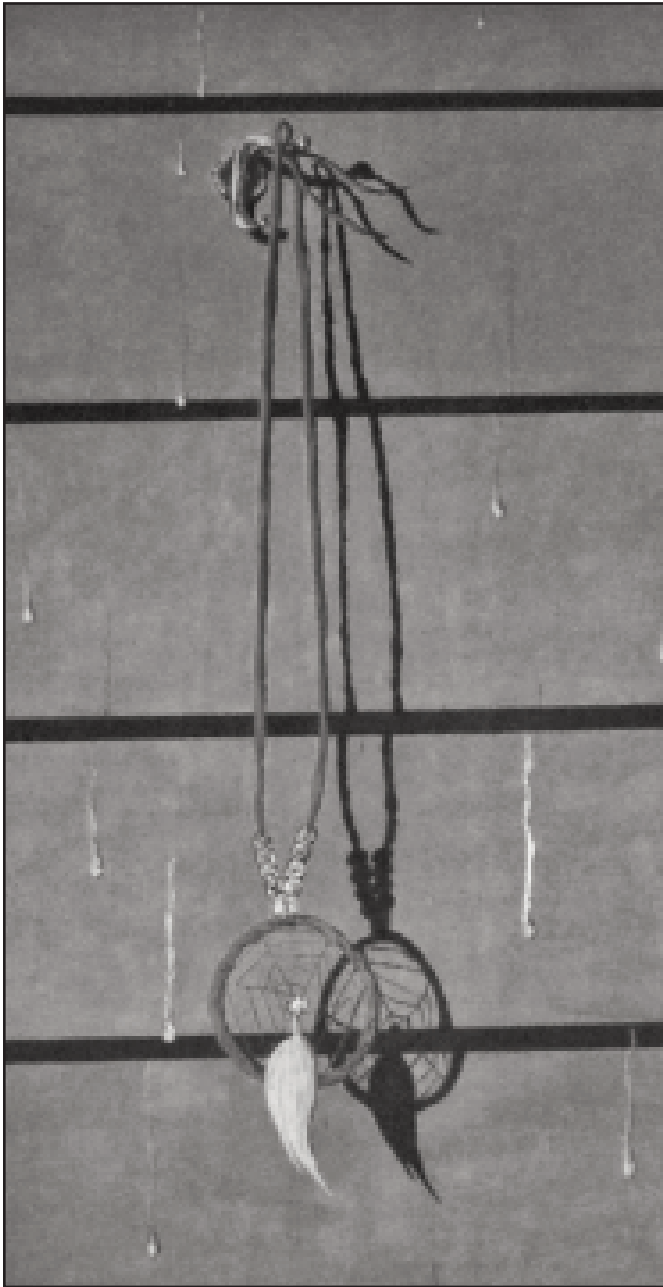
The boy, he listens. He asks questions that you can answer. He wants to be like you when he grows up, work and all. You feel it would be nice to have your boy speak for you and for your vision to the future generations.

You ask yourself why you can't speak for yourself and for your own vision.

No, the future generations are too far to reach, maybe even

*You look at your own reflection on the computer screen.
You see the gaze of a lunatic, your hair dishevelled,
your forehead bathed in sweat.*

so far as where your daughter stands now. You should accept the injustice underlying most parent-child relationships: in the beginning, the child is helpless and ignorant, and you, the parent, are aware of every single detail of the child's surroundings; like a god, you hold the secrets of the world, the power to make it rain, to make it shine; but as the years go by, the child's experiences accumulate faster than you can account for, and now, try as you might, you cannot control the child's world. If you are lucky, when the child becomes an adult, the child will try



Dreamcatcher by Arnold Isbister

to understand what you were, what you felt, what you thought. But time can be opaque; in old age, the mind falters, and a crueler injustice presents itself: when the child is ready to understand your thoughts, your thoughts may not be there anymore. That may be why you are so worried: you're afraid your mind may go before you are able to answer the questions your children haven't even asked yet.

You are still sitting at the desk, but you have stopped typing. You look at your own reflection on the computer screen. You see the gaze of a lunatic, your hair dishevelled, your forehead bathed in sweat. You've done your best to ask questions and collect opinions for almost half a century, waiting for the moment to give something back to your children and to the world. Now you worry you may never get around to it. You have wanted to start a personal journal for years, but have always found a reason to postpone it, as one postpones a diet. The time has come to lose that weight, to make your soul lighter.

Go on, do it.

You stare at the cursor as it sits indifferently at the top of a blank page in your text editor (which you have customized to display white text on a black background). That cursor blinks like a beacon, a lure — or a warning sign. You are drawn. You decide to write a long letter to your children, a manual containing all the explanations, so that their questions about life may never go unanswered. That would be a good way to justify your existence, to do your job, to give the world something of yourself. To recover your peace.

Minutes pass, and you haven't pressed a key. You don't know where to start. It is not a simple task. You stare at your own face reflected on the screen again. Pale. Expressionless. Still. Like a dead person.

Precisely. To be able to explain life like that, in such a definitive way, you have to be dead, because only the dead have collected all the answers. What you are really trying to do here is write the ultimate letter of farewell, a last will in favor of those who remain. That's why you have never started your journal: summing up your life like that would be admitting there is nothing more to be lived.

Nonsense! Think of your children, the ones who will inherit the treasure of wisdom and experience you are leaving behind. No one else can give them those answers!

Nothing. The screen is still blank. You don't want to write. Whatever you write will be the admission of your own end; worse, it will be a shameless bluff: if you know all the answers, please explain why you haven't used them in your favor. And even if you could bring yourself to write, you wouldn't know who to address. The meaning of life is not reading material for children — who, by the way, haven't even started searching for it yet. If you really want to teach your children what adult life is all about, wait until they've grown. If you write now, you will be writing to future ghosts, a multitude of invisible people, each one of them your son, each one of them your daughter,



traveling a labyrinth of space and time, where you will never be able to find them without losing yourself.

Maybe they don't want to be found.

Your crazy-eyed reflection on the screen sits between you and a text that you will never write. You get up from the desk. You go back to the sofa. You feel your Adam's apple burn. You hold your head in your hands and — finally, uncontrollably — burst into tears.

All alone in your office, you sob convulsively, letting out long, guttural moans, like an abandoned animal. You cry because it is not easy to understand the exact nature of your helplessness; then you cry because when you do get an inkling of the causes, you feel more helpless still. You make an effort to control yourself, you take a deep breath, you try to think your way out of this, and the cycle repeats itself: you cry because you're thinking, you think about the reasons why you're crying, you stop, you breathe, you think, then cry because you're thinking, and on and on it goes.

After a while — you can't tell how long — the cycle is interrupted. In the back of your neck, you get the unmistakable sensation of another human presence in the room. Still sitting on the sofa, you turn around. Standing behind you, motionless, is your son.

"I don't feel so good", he says.

His voice is weak. You find it puzzling that your helplessness should echo in your son's words. His hair in disarray, his eyes bloodshot, his face in a frown, he looks the way you feel. You don't know how long he's been standing there, or how much of your weeping he has witnessed.

"I don't feel so good", he repeats. "I think I ate something bad."

You struggle as if to wake up from a bad dream. You don't answer.

"I woke up with a headache. My belly hurts. I was going

upstairs to your room. Then I saw the lights on in your office. I don't feel so good."

The boy comes around and sits beside you on the sofa. He doesn't say another word. At regular intervals, he moans in a very low voice. He lets his body slide until he is lying on his back, his hands over his stomach, his head on your lap. You touch his forehead — he does not have a fever — and ask him:

"What would you like?"

"Nothing", he answers in a feeble voice.

"Can I do something to help you?"

"No, nothing."

"Are you in pain?"

"Just a little."

Your son smiles at you, as if to show you his pain is bearable. Don't worry, it's all right, it's just a little pain, says the smile. Then the boy closes his eyes.

After a while, eyes still closed, he whispers:

"Dad?"

"Yes, son."

He doesn't say anything.

"Yes, son?", you insist.

"I was thinking of something... I wanted to tell you, but I forgot what it was."

Your son's breathing gradually becomes deeper, calmer. The moaning stops. You too close your eyes and let your head hang back, feeling on the back of your neck the coolness of the synthetic leather. You are careful not to move, so as not to disturb your son's rest.

Half an hour later, the day begins. You and your son still lie motionless on the sofa. The sunshine crawls into the office, timid at first, growing in determination by the minute, obscuring the feeble light of the computer screen and wrapping both of you in its gentle, luminous warmth.

And you never thought to ask him about the ice.

Humours

BY ROLLI

She is not always somber, my Mistress. She will often, when she is occupied with something — a conversation, a game of draughts — grow vigorous, as if she has made a great discovery of happiness. She will sit upright; turn her head sharply; she will even smile. She outgrows herself at such moments, in the manner of an opening rose. It is a remarkable alteration. If my Master observes it, he will grin — though he is himself a reflective man. He will set down his novel, and watch her. He too grows animated. And yet his expression is not only of pleasure, but also anxiety. He is never more pleased, I do not

think, or more anxious, than when his wife shows enjoyment. It is a peculiar thing.

But they are not lasting, these humors of my Mistress. Soon again, she settles into herself. She closes. She grows distracted, and seems not to remember that she was speaking of her old companion, or crowning a piece. Her smile declines... She is once again melancholy.

And my Master. He *shudders*. He lowers his head; he opens his novel. He appears to read, but does not turn a page. He will remain so for many minutes — at times, the entire evening.

It is a peculiar thing.



The big thing

BY GORD BRAUN

The big thing ducks out, as it has for so long,
while small things get blamed for a day that's gone wrong.

The big thing is old and not easily resolved,
so we dig up old fights and the demons involved.

We long to clamp down with the jaws of our will,
They seem like the reasons we find ourselves ill.

We imagine we've shown them, imagine they've learned,
while inside, we're stifled and throttled, and burned.

For something so big, the thing's a good hider.
And we are bad seekers, our eyes none the wider.

We are down and unwell and it's all in the now--
it's our baggage from hell, still with us somehow.

The big thing plays tricks for which we keep falling.
For we -always- did that when it would come calling.

When we're tired and raw and there's nowhere to go,
we succumb to the oldest reaction we know.

The gist of the cause that we try to ignore
is summed up when sleeping pills drop to the floor.

To blame what's at hand, or whoever's in sight,
the big thing would have us believe we are right...

that it's better to blame than to tend an old hurt,
to clear out the poison and clean out the dirt.

It's hard not to listen, so hard to move on,
to resist the big thing, to ignore the old con.

But we might ask ourselves, in the gentlest of tones,
"Now tell me what's wrong, besides those old bones."

We're stuck in a moment, we should've been gone
as though old pop words could be counted upon.

Big things abound, it's so late in the Fall,
that to go for a walk seems the biggest of all.

Renewal

BY DAVID CAWOOD

Swallows,
perch on power lines like dominoes,
swoop away one by one.

Gulls,
raucous and restless in late afternoons,
amass on a sheltered, sandy cove
ready for their southward journey.

Canada Geese,
high overhead, create wavering
grey skeins against the cerulean sky,
honk endlessly for days.

A farm, nestled among rolling hills,
poplar bluffs and near a lake,
once a paradise.
Now Sharon feels smothered
by wide horizons,
everything closing in.

Tonight, when Dan's monotonous snores
keep time with the grandfather clock,
Sharon will leave her letter,
rewritten a dozen times,
drive five hours through the night
to a city of strangers, adventure, danger,
and begin to renew her life.



*Man with cap by
Henry Peters*



A final testament

BY BEVERLY CUMMINGS

She has kept me true to myself

She said she served salmon sandwiches
as the neighbour's barn burnt down

Fins flickering; fish in the moon
light called down in lunacy

lands on my hand; brazen

Love lay beside me
but I did not recognize it.

Crows spoke to me from across the horizon

In other winters I have put myself
in death's way

Stroke upon stroke
wing upon wing

Dusk stains

You have to not be afraid to suffer



Art by
James Skelton

Valedictorian of the Asylum

BY BEVERLY CUMMINGS

A nightmare— hands grabbing at you.
A mirror that is a portal.

Tinsel town tombs.
The doctor's time laughable.

My brother-in-law wandering around without her.
Never forget the possibility of vertigo.

The great well wisher, self-taught.
Learn everything twice.

Tuned into fear for the long haul.
The heat has made me delirious.

The foundation has curvatures of anxiety.
Lines folded in half.

Is shame necessarily part of growth?
Say another rosary.

Dreams of large tortoises laying eggs in the sand.
Maple leaves sucking the blood of the trees.

The young man with Byzantine red hair—
raisin-like face (freckles)

Copper tooling— one of those crafts
learnt in hospital.

My balance wavers.
Holes in the sky— rent by clouds.

But for the future:
Which key? Which door? Which lock?

Three Sonnets

BY SALVATORE DIFALCO

There are places in dreams.
At least one draws this conclusion
stalking through stucco porticos
and white marble columns.

Heavy air and heavy light
ballast the somnambulist
lost in the divided street
yet moving without fear.

One hears music so delicate
it tickles the inner ear
and a kind of madness creeps in.

The pavement tilts and veers
and one struggles to find fixity
in this yet unmapped locality.



I'm not too sad to sell you
a genuine expression of relief,
quiet yet eloquent between us all ...
there it is, the miniature yacht

bobbing off the coast of Cape Cod.
The viewer relives personal blues
—this is the violent ocean Atlantic
as a moment in your own life

though you would make
a subpar subject with your chilblains,
peach fuzz, and chilly disposition.

Not to generalize or give away the end
but the tiny yacht capsizes
and you are never seen again.



Almost that you will yourself sick
when the weather gets heavy
and one needs to walk through thick
snow to get milk for coffee.

On your back for two weeks
with a foot like an aubergine
but maybe it keeps you from being
responsible for your life.

Friends send canned goods
and bottles of grape juice and someone
even taxis over tubs of pâté de foie gras.

Still, one gets the feeling that you'll live
and that what doesn't kill you
will only make you live longer.



JIMMY BANG'S . . .

BY VICTOR ENNS

Flatfooted Blues

My feet can't make up
can't make up
their mind, carping.

Every footfall
resents my
weight.

"What a relief,"
they think it would be,
"if only we knew

we were
on our way
to our final rest."

Goodnight Blues

I'm left
counting zero
from where I began.

They've all
gone, their
arms around the night.

I'm singing
blues and geometry –
directions in the sky.

Still, counting
the heart beats
to the minute,

the room empty
as sin. The blankets
are turned.

My baby's gone,
my daddy has too,
I'm looking for

a lullaby, and all
I get is static
on the radio.

Limbo Blues

(for Dorothy Parker and
King Biscuit Boy)

Can't focus
on self-immolation.
My razor's got
too many blades &
I'm too shy
for suicide by cop.

I'm just too depressed
to die.

Don't have the gas
for asphyxiation.
Won't get up
to hang a noose.
Can't figure out
what screw is loose.

I'm just too depressed
to die.

Kevorkian won't return
my email. He's dead too
now, I suppose there's
got to be
an end to this
somehow, all I know is

I'm too depressed
to die.

The river ice is jammed
too close against the bridge.
The web wants to help
put me away,
but all my research
has to wait another day

I'm too depressed
to die.

Got to keep living
'cause I'm too depressed
to die.

Revolver Blues

There is this repeating
image. A pistol
(no other word
will do)

in my hand. More
Hollywood and Life magazine
than Hemingway or even my cousin.
The Deer Hunter's roulette.

The execution of a suspected
Viet Cong in the street.
As if it mattered, the revolver
held to my head by my own

hand. Then Jimmy Bang. Bang.
To drive the darkness out
onto the books behind me.
Finally, to let in some light.

Raw onion

BY MATT DRUMMOND

My thought is like an onion:
It stinks and makes me cry.
Never was a fan of onions.
Peel back the layers, one at a time.
Happy, sad, terrified, then mad.
Damn I feel so exposed, so raw.
Who am I to dare feel the way I do?
If you could only see the core of this onion.
Peel your onion under water they say,
no more tears.
Drown in sorrow.

Solipsist

BY CATHY FENWICK

Standing in front of my class today,
I'm pouring water over a stone that looks wet,
but nothing is seeping in.

He sits there alone
at one of the round tables,
in the far corner of the room,

chair pushed back,
crossed arms,
face blank as a desert.

The topic is change, loss, grief,
I talk about paths to healing,
this too shall pass, try to find your joy again.

He stares. My face turns red.
I try to understand,
try to reach that existential place

where we might connect.
I can't take the scrutiny,
so quickly look away.

Later, I'm surprised when he
meets me at the front of the room,
after everyone else has gone.

Shakes my hand, says
Thank you.

I still don't understand, but I've
learned not to judge
that which I cannot know.



Making peace with my body after cancer

BY CATHY FENWICK

I hardly ever think of cancer anymore, except when I'm in the change room at the gym or the pool. A venerable older woman, I face the wall, lower my head and drape a towel across my back, let my bum stick out, but not my scar – the thin pink line that begins just under my arm and works its reminder across my chest to the sternum.

What will it take?
Perhaps a dragon tattoo to douse the power of perception. A dragon's head, that reaches from my centre to swallow the scary tale of dis-ease.



You're too young

BY COURTNEY HALL

If you think you can go around
Telling people off then you're too young.
The path you take is too long.
You know you are wrong when you come down
On me because you're too young, you want to be older.
But you're too young little one.
It takes time to grow up but you're not little but you're
Young, too young to know what growing means.
You don't need to know anything because you already
Know everything but you're still too young.
You're not a child you're an adult but you are too young.
You'll always be too young my little one



Exercise in Infinitives

BY KIM GOLDBERG

for Roy, 1952-2014

To frame a concept.
To pull back a curtain.
To reveal a narrow passage.
To allow a mind to roam beyond a boundary.
To deactivate a facebook account.
To know the meaning of emigration.
To leave a camera and laptop on a desk in a bedroom.
To recall the sound of waxwings feasting on scarlet hawthorn berries last winter.
To mutter 'bye' to a roommate passed in a hall.
To step into the anonymity of a city.
To feel the pulse drop, the blood settle.
To travel unrecognized.
To wander the streets and seawall for hours.
To weigh the density of matter in a black hole.
To ponder options.
To discover the presence of absence.
To reflect upon a journey.
To storyboard alternate endings.
To buy a ferry ticket to Vancouver.
To catch the last sailing.
To stand against the rail, wind buffeting face.
To permit this cleansing by salt spray and keen of gulls.
To watch the night rise.
To take the feeble light of a new moon as a sign.
To be thankful, in a way.
To wait until the vessel is in the middle of the Georgia Strait.
To realize that the quest for signs is bullshit—the answer lies within.
To tell oneself: If you are going to do something, do it for the right reason, or no reason, or even the wrong reason if that reason is honestly your own and not the product of some convenient cultural fairytale concocted to relieve the brutal tonnage of our universal randomness.
To inhale deeply.
To think of tidepools and suction cup feet and soft fleshy trunks swaying like palm trees.
To swell with cohesion.
To lean out over the deck rail.
To pivot on a rib cage.

Forgiveness

BY COLE HANSEN

Let your heart begin to beat
The fake Empress is a thing of the past

The Joker stokes the fire
The lamp's wick is gone, darkness takes over

Phoney 100 dollar bills get passed like a piece of Hawaiian pizza at an all-night orgy of food and drink
The gods eat with greedy fingers even though their stomachs are full

The autumn leaves fall like a cigarette from the pilfering bums frozen fingers
The overture is a brilliant play to befriend anybody who'll listen

Bring your prayers to the house of ill-repute
Even the painting of the songbird is a paint-by-numbers

Idle chatter freezes the rottweiler that protects the goat path
The edge of the cliff isn't so bad if you could fly

Throw the cigarette away, I can't breathe
Good-bye, the light in this chicken coop is flickering



Uneven clay

BY COLE HANSEN

Perm upon perm, the old ladies hair sizzles
At JB's the sausage has burnt to a roach while the Old Men's Club gossip
Hammers continue to swing like an electrical eel upon steel
Another day has just begun

Singing in an everyday choir, the fields of wheat wave in the glistening sun
Clever grasshoppers still pump oil from uneven clay
Night has turned into day

The muggy air settles upon 100-year-old buildings
All the while Cypress Hills beckons an inviting call
Smell the pines tall
Come away today

The hawk dips and dives like an old man in his rocking chair
Little red fox claims the middle of the dusty road to Pine Cree
Like them, we could be free

Young girls and boys in their Chevy trucks
Crank out country songs.
Wide open spaces – God's country – the home of the free
Come away with me





The prisoner of the mind

BY COLE HANSEN

Mind control
Mind control
Out of my mind

Surrounded by gigantic mountains
Sounds of a stampede of wild horses
Run through my mind

You're an adult now
Two steps forward
Two steps back

You surround yourself with eagles in the land of pigeons
The sickness captures your heart.
The beginning is always the end

Homeless eyes pierce the knight's gilded armour.
14-carat gold are only bricks of mud

The sadness of the sand evokes waves
That surround and drown my humble ambition

The hotdog stand is finally open
Who knew that I would be selling hot dogs?

Poem #1

BY CHANTEL HUBICK

Such a young girl
So pretty and sweet
Who would have imagined
Her life is the street
Hustling and grinding
To meet each day's needs
Deep down inside
She just wants to succeed
A criminal, a daughter
A sister, a friend,
A mother so amazing

The list never ends
An addict, a player
A gangster and thief
Who knows what will happen
With her life on the street
Done things she regrets
The pain is too much
Self medication is healing
Booze drugs and such
Help her to realize God set her free
Please help my daughter
She has turned out like me.

Tears in the carwash

BY CATHERINE KATT

Put in the code
The door slowly slides open
The sign reads: "Move Ahead"
Then the tire touches a wedge
"STOP" lights up in RED

Exit door closes
On either side a gray machine's
Three pronged silver soaker
Slowly spins in parallel
Spraying its holy water
Cleansing the windshield,
The body and the back
Of the detritus of the road, tree sap
And bird droppings.

Pink and blue foam follows
Falling softly on the windshield
Fascinating blend of colors
Pleasure slides over the sides

Power wash revs up a brutal storm
Dashing back in a slow
Rush of tears and rocks like blows
Against the cocoon
Then abruptly dies

A warm wind follows
A mechanical towel
No touch finish
Completed

The exit doors open
The green light is on
"Go"

Evanescent

BY SHARON MACFARLANE

In the afternoon Mary draws
with sidewalk chalk on the driveway,
creates a twenty foot tall mermaid
with flowing hair and a scallop shell bra.
Starfish and squid ride the waves beside her.

In the evening
a wild rainstorm lashes the asphalt,
sweeps the sea creatures to oblivion.
The next day Mary draws
a garden:

FALL TANKA

BY SHARON MACFARLANE

one Swainson's hawk
is assigned to every field
to dive bomb mice
scrambling to outrun
the combine harvester

early September
swaths of wheat in the fields
promise a bumper crop
out of the west – marauders
a band of snow



The ball poem

BY DARRYN MCMURRAY

Hi, I'm on the Ball
Ball and chain, Blue Ball
Black Ball, Beach Ball
I will look into my crystal Ball
And come up with more prophecies
Like, Balloon Ball, Testes, Wing Nut.
Ever since I was a young boy
I've played with my Balls
Ball pin bells, Ballroom Blitz
I'm taking my Ball and I'm going home.

The paint poem

BY DARRYN MCMURRAY

Oil paint, waterbase paint,
Paint Thinner, Painted-on-jeans,
Paint if Black.
Hand to mouth Paintbrush
PaintBall games
Splotches, graffiti, clear coat
Different shades and colours
Canvas, Brush and roller
What an expression of art that is
I like the smell of paint
And the finished look of the pictures.

Where I am from

BY JILL MONAHAN

I am from boxes, packing tape and left behind memories
from moving trucks and u-hauls
and a gutted white van

I am from gas stations, new faces
and five minute friendships
I am from no one...neither blood nor step

I am from "You will like it here _____"
from KFC and peanut butter and jam
sandwiches eaten on the road

I am from everywhere and nowhere
and yet here
I am



I was born of fire

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

lantern bugs lighting the way
father called me Cinder
before I learned to walk I smoldered there
my arms were burning branches
my legs matchsticks
striking the floor

mother made my bed from kindling
heaped beneath the open window
so I could have the air
every night I watched
the slow flicker of autumn fires
licking the dark walls

even still my skin is perfumed
with wood smoke
and I am the sound a forest fire makes
cracking open the day

my eyes smoke filled
I feel my way
my fingers working always
toward the cool blue center
of the fire I know is home.

Obsessive ruminations

BY MARK MURPHY

Hard to imagine the galaxies have no symmetry,
or David slaying the giant philistine, Goliath.

Hard to watch the boy running from his father,
or the enraged father hell bent on torturing his son.

Hard to conceive of the hound fearing the rabbit,
or the wily old fox lying down with the lamb.

Hard to accept that man boasts faith in God
when the Tsunami lays waste to all in its path.

Hard to ideate the Red Giant sun, 7.59 billion years
hence consuming the manless Earth in its orbit.

No place then for poetry,
love making, or revolutionary war.

Hard to imagine our own obsessive compulsive finding
enough symmetry in living to persist in a life
without perfection.

Brockbank Street

BY WELDON SANDUSKY

Discharged from the insane asylum: let go,
Good riddance, adios, adieu, arrivederci,
Auf Wiedersehen. GOOD BYE!

Standing free in front of a shabby low rent house
Stuck in a twisted relationship – The victim of my own misdoing
Paying poverty the price: No furniture. No love. No friends.
I kind of shuffle-run in place – No chair to sit in.

Dribbling around the mouth, am fat, unkempt and apparently smell.

My son and wife turn their backs in disgust.

Final separation comes. Divorce papers are served.
Arrivederci. Auf Wiedersehen. GOOD BYE!

A boyfriend moves in and I fly to Hollywood.
A year passes, I'm back, get beat up,
The police come and I swagger off walking
Twenty miles home to Mother – a clown
With a red rubber nose and gigantic funny
Shoes.

Eagle Heights University of Wisconsin

Married Student Housing

BY WELDON SANDUSKY

We buy a refrigerator And a golden recliner.
We paint the walls with fresh white paint and
Set out little plants. There's a stereo and a secretary desk
And a beautiful marble top chest of drawers.

We are Mr. and Mrs. Sandusky.
We get jobs and have income and
I'm going to attend law school.
My son has a little room and a crib.
Then my wife finds a lover and it all dies one night

I later move out. And she files for divorce.

The home becomes a memory
And my son a kind of little bastard I can go visit.

Timberlawn

BY WELDON SANDUSKY

Several psychiatrists concur: ParanoidSchizophrenic
Bottom of the class law school, a car wash boy, fired,
A bus boy, fired, janitor, County Hospital, private psychiatric
Hospital. The course of my life altered.

Psychotic, I frantically pace the floor, I climb the walls,
I want to scream, the doors are locked, patients are
Strapped to beds, Medication! Medication! We
become zombies.

Group therapy, old couches and darkness.
I work on my problems. I am of low intelligence.
I am an alcoholic. I am chronically unemployed.
Twenty-five dreary little rooms line the halls
With two beds in each. My wife clamors for divorce.
I never speak with my son.
Utter despair, a loss of hope and a Sense of Death prevail.
I'm without legal assistance,
Moreover, the State is a friendly witness for the hospitals.
Wayne Mize and I talk and smoke chains
Of cigarettes. I jump rope and eventually
Am put in a wheelchair -- severe akathisia.
They're trying to kill me! God, someone help me! Help me!
I suffer agony -- a kind of mumbling vegetable who is
Getting better, they smile. One nurse pats me on the head
Like a dog. And I whimper, "Can I go now?"

Last night

BY JAMES SKELTON

I dreamt of Susan
We were together
She was pregnant
She was smiling and happy
She noticed, or I noticed
And she said proudly
Her breasts were getting bigger
Fuller, bigger
This was my healing dream
I feel good about it
Being there with her

I dreamt about my brother

BY JAMES SKELTON

I dreamt about my brother
And working for my brother
I worked in the film industry
He did not support my art
I dreamt about Prince Albert
The media school is there
I dreamt about the editor
How hard he worked
How he was the backbone
Where he learned his craft I don't know
He suffered under my brother's lead
I did too
I know now I could be a good father
And that I wanted a daughter
As well as a son
Perhaps three children
Mother of my child
Rejoice, bless, forgive

The Hollywood Bowl

BY WELDON SANDUSKY

My wife runs off one week-end. With a high school boy.

My son and I wait out the abandonment.
Drinking, crying, a desperate cab ride.
American Airlines to L.A. Guitar and harmonica hitch,
Look at me someone! Anyone. No one. Look at me!

My mother's front yard
Replaces the wine bottles and Hollywood Blvd.
A child support subpoena after four years replaces
Fanciful schemes of revenge.

One night the scenario
Of separation and divorce
Put me alone, I remember, in an empty
Darkened Hollywood Bowl.

Center stage. No props. No lines.
Just a man weeping with an audience of stars
Accompanied by the distant sound of passing automobiles.



The State Insane Asylum Terrell, Texas

BY WELDON SANDUSKY

Aged and weather tarnished
Red brick buildings obscure
Little picnic tables scattered
Among trees where strategically
Located an Administration Building
Arises with a three-story
Bell tower and white columns.
Then, focusing more sharply
Appears a convenient warehouse,
Refrigeration units from World War II, and
Several one story ranch style ward buildings
With a gymnasium singular and oddly compatible.
The State Highway is a mile away the
Area filled in by dilapidated residential houses.
No hills. No people. No water. No funny business.
The inmates walk around and a couple of
Security cars patrol.

I was in L-Ward where inside
Was a women's ward and a men's ward.
Nurses stations about a great white marble floor
Thirty foot ceiling hall. A T.V., a typewriter,
A refrigerator with a kitchen in back
Are accessible. You wouldn't say penitentiary or
Manufacturer; but, you would say austere
And cyclone fence and you would want to leave.



Twerp, Dork and Dilbert

BY WELDON SANDUSKY

Fine leather chairs Cuban cigars
A plaque on the wall ivy twirling round.

A crooked road, a man that has lost his soul.
You see demons dancing in a lake of fire.
Tears and blood.

They all are famous with little one inch biographies
Cum laude, magna and summa.
A tie more expensive Than a wedding dress.
The grooms all stiff like corpses.

And the carpet is grassy
Where up to a tombstone
Your name is all proper and surely legal.
Justice pours like champagne
And judges have walking sticks
Feeling their way down the hall.

May you . . .

BY BARRY STYRE

May you learn to read, write, and express
yourself without fear of reprisal or reproach.
May you learn mathematics, physics, sociology,
may you learn the laws of the land, may you
get a university education.
May you flourish and prosper, may you have
all the rights of a first class citizen because
that is what you are.
May you not allow anyone to treat you with
disrespect or contempt because of who you are.
May you triumphantly fight injustice, racism,
sexism, ageism and arcane rules of conduct and
discrimination.
May you succeed in all your endeavours.
May you teach others how to treat you.
May your example shine like a light dispelling
the darkness of oppression and ignorance.
May you walk tall and stand proud and never
be afraid of your detractors.

Faint Delusions

BY ADAM STAITE

Meet someone once I couldnt breath upon lost sight so beautiful was all I could think about I could never I was nothing they needed but dreamed of ways I was free She was a rock that I couldnt take with me Eyes look lips twitch emotions for you have come on quick faint stares dirty window cant see into you to draw upon the feeling I know you have Raised hands I reach for you cant feel touch as if youre a ghost Seeing you clearly isnt easy hearing from you I cant no words spoken but I can hear myself talk My arms around you I cant feel nothing of you stiff it was cos youre dead or never really existed I loved you like the sky is blue as friendship is true like ocean breeze is fresh we'll be free to hug the sky till we die

Misconceptions

BY ADAM STAITE

Pace back n forth knows to go straight but my meters fake Signed me up for something I didnt want playing ball in the back yard like gravity on all things the ball It didnt get that far A real swell plan with a blindfold on Cant hear to reasons the soft whispers hes not like us chattering little mirrors pop up from my rear Rugby field Im all beat up I think I know my place its far from your space When I die n meet may hate run rampant through your feet Heart aches n repeats Im here n feel all things everything of all your shit go keep it out of me Days best kept cold Im dressed up to upset your mind sets tied up in aggression Drowning alone I gasp for air but all I inhale is oil n tar unstable tidal waves shattering my chest escaping my heart it floats away from being down to higher than sky level As anxiety comes in depression sits down n makes my head its home Never would I let you to fall unless I was under to soften your descent rather I break than to see you fall Set in stone a loud tone upon these toes

Stroke

BY JANICE WOOD

has not come to caress

it is a hammer
the midnight gong of a dark realm
it rumbles without a face, without a body
finds her warm arteries waiting
with a deft mark of the artist's brush
it paints her angry
eyes plunging from bed to nurse
her tongue a looped wire

she yanks out the I.V.
refuses to eat or to give them her teeth
drags her foot out of bed
body pistons firing out of sync
she cannot sleep
twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six hours

it cracks from burning clouds
strikes a line through her right side
spasms her toes
slides her mouth down to chin
leaves her crumpled in a Gerri-chair

he massages her arm
reassures her
she's been a good mama
eyes flutter, glaze, flutter, shut
he croons little ditties
what was, and is, and will be

stroke
stroke





Dining out

BY KEITH FOSTER

Dave and Jean are seated in a restaurant. Jean has finished eating and is watching Dave as he slowly chews his food. Jean grows increasingly impatient and fidgety. Finally she can't contain herself any longer.

"You have to stop doing that."

"Doing what?"

"What you're doing."

"What am I doing?"

"You're distracting people."

"How?"

"You're eating."

"We're in a restaurant. That's what people do in restaurants."

"But you're still eating."

"So?"

"Look around you. Everyone finished long ago."

"This isn't a race."

"It's not a picnic either."

"Why not? A good meal is meant to be savoured."

"Hurry up, or this will be the last meal you savour."

"I don't like being rushed."

"Rushed! You've been eating for over an hour."

"What's wrong with that?"

"If you can't finish in an hour, there must be something wrong with you."

"I'm not going to gobble my food down just to get it over with."

"You're not exactly shovelling it in there."

"That's so I won't get indigestion."

"If you don't hurry up, I'll give you some indigestion."

"I think you already have."

"Why don't you take a bite every now and then?"

"I would, but you keep interrupting."

"Can't you eat and talk at the same time?"

"How can I talk with my mouth full?"

"Full mouth, empty brain."

"Don't get smart."

"You must be an only child."

"How can you tell?"

"I'm the youngest of eight kids. I learned to eat fast or go hungry."

Jean taps her fingers on the table while Dave chews.

"Don't forget to take another bite some time."

"What's the rush? This isn't 'Beat the Clock.'"

"Snails eat faster than you."

"Is there a deadline?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"Can I get an extension?"

"Don't push your luck."

"I'm not pushing. Just asking."

"You've got two minutes. That's it."

"Then what?"

"You'll find out."

Dave takes a big bite. Jean waits a moment.

"How come you eat like that?"

Dave chews for a while before answering, still with food in his mouth.

"I like to chew my food properly."

"Who told you to chew it 20 times?"

"Forty times."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Who told you that?"

"My mother."

"You believe everything she told you?"

"Of course."

"You still believe in Santa Claus?"

"Well, no."

"You believe in the Easter bunny?"

"Not really."

"So just because your mother told you to chew your food 40 times, you do it?"

"Yes."

"How come you believe that but you don't believe in Santa Claus or the Easter bunny?"

"I know it's the right thing to do."

"What good does it do?"

"Doing the right thing?"

"Chewing 40 times!"

"It aids the digestion. I chew 40 times so my stomach doesn't have to work so hard."

"So?"

"Well, you never see me taking pills for heartburn."

"No, you just give it to everyone else."

"How?"

"Watching you eat."

"No one's forcing them to watch."

"Have you always been this way?"

"A slow eater?"

"So darned annoying!"

"What's the problem?"

"You're driving me crazy."

"I think you were that way before I met you."

"All right, buster. Time's up."

Jean slips her hand under Dave's plate, lifts it up, and plops it upside down on the table.

"There. Now you're finished!"

“Drugs” An Excerpt from NO SENSE NONSENSE Act 3 Scene 1

BY CHERYL KAI

CHARACTERS

Faith Main character: early 20s into 50s, mother, victimized, intelligent, strong willed, loving, dignified.

Loyal Faith’s son: smart, sensitive, able.

Security Personified hospital function, wearing large identifying name tag

Psychiatrist Hospital doctor, wearing large identifying name tag (similarly for Nurses, Orderly, etc.)

Medication Personified drugs of various kinds, wearing large identifying name tags (Haldol, Cogentin, etc.)

SETTING

The "Drugs" excerpt takes place immediately after the police have arrested Faith on a mental health warrant and brought her to the hospital. Loyal (Faith’s son) stays with her until she has been committed and Security is taking his mom to the ward. Faith’s room shows a battle between her and psychiatric system drugs. Nurses come and go in ignorance. The drugs (personified and wearing labels) are vicious. The battle is fierce; there are casualties. Results of that battle end the excerpt.

(Security wheeling Faith to psychiatric ward. Loyal hands his Mom chocolate milk. Faith throws it back at him. It splashes all over.)

Faith: Not this time Son, Not this time!

(Loyal, surprised, doesn’t know what to do.)

Loyal: But Mom! Chocolate milk always makes things better; it is our stand-by-fix-everything-all-up. Mom, please!

(He moves to Psychiatrist.)

Loyal: Mister, my Mom is not violent. There's no reason to strap her down. She'd better not be strapped down like she has been in the past.

(Psychiatrist shows him the door)

Loyal: And another thing, Mom doesn't like to be called Mam.

(Loyal turns and goes out the revolving door, steps into barrier)

Loyal: She has never refused chocolate milk.

(Scratches his head, hesitates, leaves barrier)

(Faith in psychiatric ward room. Bright lights, looking around at room with windows on three sides, a fish bowl effect.)

Faith: Here they dump me Must be the Royal suite.

(Turns out lights, only street lights, moves to windows, looking out, back to audience)

Faith: Shit! here they come. (Turns to audience.) The drugs. (Seeing something horrific about to attack her, speaking at the same time.) They're taking over.

(Drugs bear different names of Medications (personified) on straps and girdles, Haldol, Cogentin. The straps are around Faith's neck and chest.)

Faith: NO! NO!

(She struggles with stranglers, manages to loosen but not remove.)

Faith: MUST WE DO THIS BATTLE AGAIN? I have nothing left to give to you.

(The drugs push her into the corner.)

Faith: You will not get my brain! You cannot have my mind!

(Medication looms over her)

Faith: (Counts backwards as a distraction.) 1041 1040, 1039

(Medication slackens dominance. Faith moves over to window, cautiously keeping an eye on Medication snatching at her top. She hastily takes it off.)

Faith: HAVE IT!

(Back to window, facing audience, arms up holding off Medication. Screaming.)

Faith: HELP! HELP!

Nurses: (Enter one male, one female. Turn on lights, slowly approach Faith who is startled by bright lights in addition to meds.) What is it? What's there? (They see she is terrified, looking for source.) What do you see, Faith?

(Pause.)

Faith: (Screams) HELP ME! GET AWAY! GET OUT!

(She's talking to drugs, stripping clothes off.)

Faith: Here, here. (Throws them at nurses)

Faith: Get them out of here. NOW!

Male Nurse: (Picks up clothes.) OK. I'm taking them out. (Puts clothes outside door.) There. Gone!

(Faith turns and faces window spread eagle, gasping for air as if just having won a battle. She's unaware of the nurses.)

Faith: STAY AWAY!

(Medication thwarts her again. She melts to the floor)

(Nurses look at each other with exasperation, pick her up and get her to bed.)

Male Nurse: What do you figure that was about?

Female Nurse: Just her condition, can't be anything else. I'll give her some medication to help her sleep.

(They cover her. Exit. Male Nurse re-enters with clothes, puts them on chair, turns light out, exits. Faith quiet but swatting the air, protective positioning, especially about her head as if being hit by attacking Medication. Female Nurse re-enters, turns on lights, with needle, extravagant size.)

Female Nurse: Faith, come on now - I've got some Medication to help you sleep.

(Faith begins to stir, shields eyes against the light, looks at



WRITING THE LIFE - DRAMA

her with horror.)

Faith: What? More drugs? NO! HEEELLP!

(Struggling/fighting with Female Nurse, inaudible words.)

Male Nurse enters)

Male Nurse: What's - Oh shit, Where's the needle? Shit.

OK, I got her, quick, now.

Female Nurse: You have to take this. We are going to inject this into you whether you cooperate or not, which will it be?

(Faith screaming.)

Female Nurse: OK hold her, you got her?

(Medication administered, Faith still struggling.)

Nurses: Hold her down until she's still.

Male Nurse: What the hell. How come some patients react like that when they see a needle?

Female Nurse: That will knock her out.

Male Nurse: But she has no clothes on.

Female Nurse: That's alright. She's an exhibitionist anyway. Don't you think?

(Male Nurse gestures - Maybe)

Female Nurse: I'll write that in her chart. (Both exit, leaving the light on.)

(Night passes. Faith remains in a drugged stupor, sometimes getting up, driven from her bed to battle with the taunting drugs.)

Faith: I WILL KEEP MY MIND!

(Slapping at drugs attached to her)

Faith: IT IS MY MIND!

(She rips off the drugs.)

Faith: STOP SUCKIN ON ME!

(Drugs re-attach, especially around her neck and head.)

Faith: YOU CAN NOT HAVE MY REASON!

(Slams into window, hoping to escape.)

Faith: MY SELF-SENSE, HANG ON, DON'T GIVE UP!

(Nurse looks in now and again, says nothing, Faith doesn't notice.)

Faith: HERE TAKE MY REASON, but that's all. (Goes back to bed, still swatting.) You are weak now, losing your strength. Good. About time. So am I. I'll be keeping the rest of me.

(Falls asleep.)

(Morning Nurse enters.)

Morning Nurse: Morning Faith, how's the day? Faith are you awake? (Moves closer to bed.) I've got your Haldol and Cogentin. Come on now. The doctor will be here soon. You want to be awake for him don't you?

(Faith reaches up slapping the meds out of Nurse's hand.)

Faith: I'M NOT TAKIN THEM. Get out! No drugs inside

me again. You'll have to strap me down.

Nurse: (Surprised and nervous, half-way out the door, turns.) Well! OK! But what about the doctor?

(Faith throws off covers, mad, gets up, moving to window.)

Faith: Fuck the doctor! Do you hear me?

(Whirls around, looking right at nurse.)

Faith: FUCK. THE. DOCTOR!

(Nurse exits.)

(Faith slowly twirling from room, off balance, out the revolving door into barrier. Straightens up, acquainting herself with surroundings. Begins speaking with audience.)

Faith: That same kind of treatment went on for three days and nights. I never left the room. Each time I put on clothes I ripped them off in attempt to discard the drugs.

(Pause.)

Faith: The drugs. They overpowered me. They took my reason and my understandin. They captured my pride. I never got those things back.

(Leave barrier)

Faith: Faith was forced to live a drug induced existence.

(Moves, then hesitates.)

Faith: That treatment crippled and took control of Faith's being. Parts of her still belong to the psychiatric system and its drug-therapy treatment.

(Pause.)

(Goes to desk, sits, stands.)

Faith: It was noted. Her condition is not improving. They stated. She must be moved. (Drops mouth.) They moved her. And then did the most brutal thing of all. "Your Mom is an exhibitionist."

(Shakes her head, shows signs of disbelief and sorrow)

Faith: Yeah, that's right, Faith's kids...what an injustice. "Exhibitionist" added to Faith's chart.

(Stuff Exhibitionist label into sac, moves to writing desk, speaks while writing.)

Faith: If the drugs are absolutely necessary then at least teach a person to live with them instead of only existing with them. There is no value in erasing a person's sense of being.

(Writing, then reading it.)

Faith: To be frank. Faith is strapped down inside psychiatric ward walls. Injected with chemicals. She's ignored, chastised, manipulated, reprimanded, made to comply, with force if need be! She's demoralized, dehumanized, defeated, conquered, overthrown. Crushed. Then discharged, with the expectations. "Pull up your boot straps." "Come on snap out of it"

(Gets some chocolate milk, back to audience, turns around, leans against counter.)



Wicked and Wickedly Funny

BY IRENE GROBOWSKY

I Am Currently Working on a Novel by Rolli
Tightrope Books, 2014. 168 pages. \$21.95

Once again Rolli has brought to the page his entirely original and unique perspective on the world. Wicked and wickedly funny is the best epigram for *I am Currently Working on a Novel* by Rolli, whose writing puts him in a category with Saki and John Collier, while his illustrations are as idiosyncratic as those of Edward Gorey, whose drawings provide the animated introduction to *Masterpiece Mystery Theatre* on PBS. Wit, mischief and often the macabre are features of the writings of Saki, while John Collier is an undeniable master of the short story, generally told with a snap ending.

Rolli is a writer who deserves comparison with the authors mentioned above as his work is of the same ilk — viewing events and characters beyond the pale of normalcy. There is the mermaid rejoicing in her legs (no mention of pain sharp as knives), the beauty with unusual talents, and a cast of others including robots, magicians, teachers, and actors, to name a few. Not a single alien among them, but nonetheless the bizarre and the strange are revealed in seventy plus short fictions, ranging from several pages to just a few lines.

Settings for these tales are as wide-ranging as the author's imagination and include Care Homes for seniors, the city of London in England, a closet, the ocean, a cemetery, the beach,

an alley and more.

Reading this collection is akin to entering a Fun House Hall of Mirrors, for there is the same sense of dislocation, the same sense of distortion in both time and space, hilarious, yes, but with an underpinning of unease. One shivers, even as one laughs.

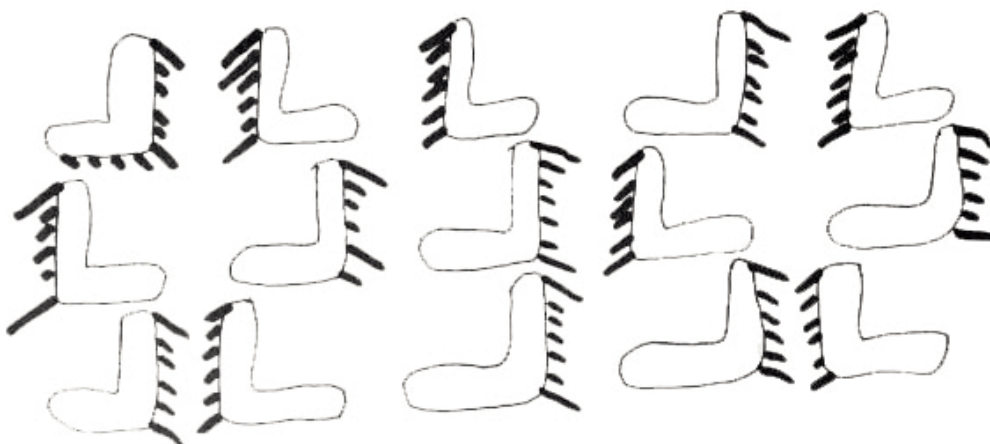
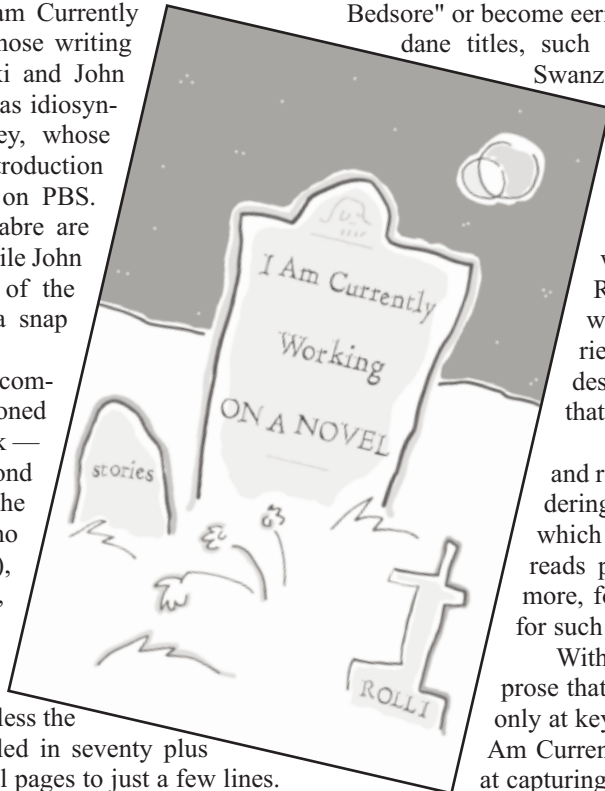
Normal settings evolve into true farce as in "Mrs. Glick's Bedsore" or become eerie as in "The Friend." Seemingly mundane titles, such as "The Dead Kid" or "The Great Swanzini," are lead-ins to altered planes of existence.

An underlying, unstated thread running through many of the stories is the need to connect - a desire unfulfilled in every instance or, if on the way to being established, severed. Reaching out to communicate in one way or another informs many of the stories. An example is "The Ashtray," which despite its humour, is sad – a relationship that was blossoming ends abruptly.

One cannot sit down with this book and read it cover to cover; it must be a wandering and a wondering journey, during which one lingers with outright laughter, reads pieces once or twice, and sometimes more, for sheer enjoyment of and admiration for such profligacy of imagination.

With a minimum of description and spare prose that uses everyday language and dialogue only at key points and where deemed essential, *I Am Currently Working on a Novel* is successful at capturing the reader. It all works.

For those with a love of the weird this is a must addition to a collection that already has not only Saki and Edward Gorey but also John Collier.



Art by James Skelton



A mind bending experience

BY CAITLIN ARNAL

Rolli. *Mavor's Bones*. 8th House Publishing, 2014. Paperback. 126 pp. \$14.95.

Company's come. In a ramshackle mansion, meet a family in the same condition—ancient, decayed. There's the brooding Duke, and his riotous brother. There's Grandam, lost in wilds of herself. There's a vicar, a philosopher, an angel, a ghost or two. And somewhere above them all, in a ruined garret... (rollistuff.com)

Rolli shows beautifully in his newly published "gothic novel-in-poems" by presenting original, never-to-be-duplicated characters, plot, and setting. To pick up this collection is to open the door into the vestibule of Rolli's creative world, as he satirizes yet respects the gothic convention.

The atmosphere is of mystery and suspense, like a gothic novel, but with a positive effect: it forces the reader on a mind-bending transformative journey. Emotions are highly wrought and a sense of doom is created as the author deals with the past. A woman in distress is the absent mother in the narrator's visions.

Among the major characters -- Mavor, Mary, the Duke, and the Philosopher -- grief leads us on a journey of hubris in a setting of humorous debauchery. Juxtaposition in every stanza pushes convention and reason; ashes oddly symbolize

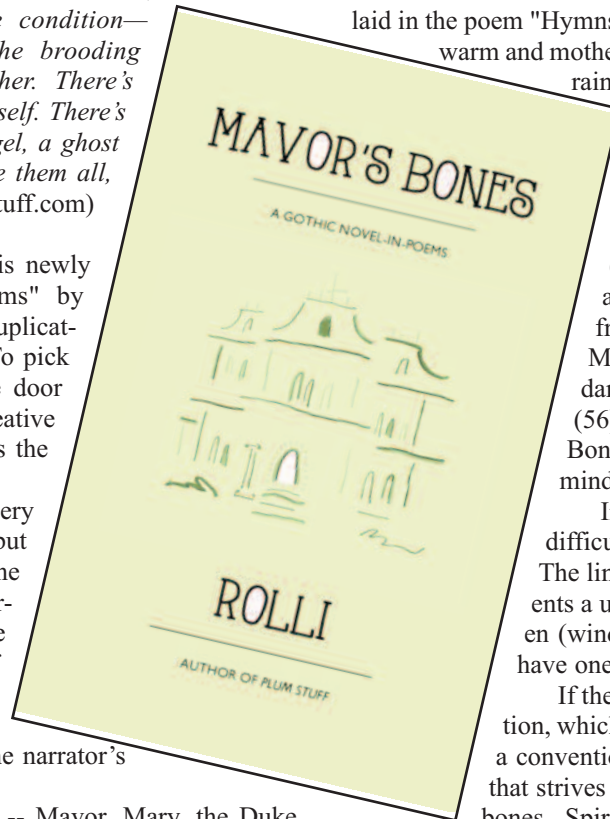
longevity in the "Walk With the Philosopher": "To surpass/ a man/ is to burn/ him/ lift/ from the earth/ him/ burn/ again him/ flick/ in wind/ from the end/ of a cigar-/ette/ ash/ of his im-/mortality.." (Rolli 72).

Rain, typically used to signal sorrow in a gothic novel, shows the warmth of the ground in which the bodies will be laid in the poem "Hymns of a Sexton." The imagery of death is warm and mothering: "And the earth is warm/ In even rain it is warm/ as skin/ and mothering:/ who cuts us from her flesh/in end will bend/ to flesh/ again" (93).

The transference of colour covers the pages: "he/ in green-leaved shadow more brown/ than orange" (39). Rolli pokes at the subconscious and asks whether it is more drawn to fresh life or sombre death in "The Man": "Mary was/ nine/ the garden dark-/ening....She thought often of him" (56). The casuistic mission of Mavor's Bones is to question whether the human mind prefers life or death.

In "Heart Song," Rolli demonstrates the difficulty in separating human and nature. The line "and a sound of wind in glass" presents a unique relationship between earth-driven (wind) and human-driven (glass). Can one have one without the other?

If the reader can reach the end of the collection, which is not an easy task because there isn't a conventional plot, there is a beautiful message that strives to balance the continuum of flesh and bones. Spiritual transformation surpasses mind, body, life and death. What awaits a person, who can reach beyond the material into the subconscious, is a garden of oceans, only to be experienced after skin is shed.



Notes on contributors

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Ponteix SK. Poet, painter, speaker, builder. Member of WFTHOI Group (Eastend).

GEORGE, CECILE

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PARLEY, KAY

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Photo by Arnold Isbister



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

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Suicide

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- u **safeTALK** - Suicide Alertness for Everyone
A half-day (3.5 hour) workshop
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Balancing Work and Family
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2014

Online Therapy USER Fact Sheet

Online Therapy USER

The Online Therapy Unit allows trained therapists to provide Online Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to residents of Saskatchewan who have difficulties with depression, generalized anxiety, and/or panic. The Unit also provides education and training to diverse registered health professionals and students on how to deliver services online. This unit is also responsible for conducting research on how to best train therapists and deliver online-CBT.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT
ONLINE THERAPY IN
SASKATCHEWAN:

Call (306) 337-3331

Email:

OnlineTherapyUser@uregina.ca

Or

Visit www.onlinetherapyuser.ca



University
of Regina



The Online Therapy Unit for Service, Education, and Research (Online Therapy USER) is led by Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos from the University of Regina and makes use of online therapy programs that were initially developed in Australia, either at Swinburne University or Macquarie University.

1 in 5 Canadian adults experience a anxiety and/or depression every year (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014).

Depression and anxiety can go untreated for a variety of reasons, including: a shortage of providers; client difficulties with mobility or disability; time constraints; rural and remote location; and client concerns about privacy.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is an evidence-based mental health treatment that has proven to be an effective method of treating many disorders (e.g., depression, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder). This approach helps people identify, understand, and work on thoughts, behaviours, feelings, and physical symptoms that are central to their concerns.

Internet-delivered Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (ICBT) involves completing a structured (e.g., five lessons), short-term (e.g., eight weeks) course. Material is presented over the Internet using text, images, and stories. A client is connected with an e-therapist who guides them through the course. Messages are sent over a secure online system. Clients are encouraged to practice the skills learned in the course in their daily lives.

ICBT has many advantages including: improving client access to providers; offering greater convenience and privacy; involving greater engagement of clients in their care; and taking significantly less time to deliver.

When examining the effectiveness of ICBT versus face-to-face therapy, research has shown that individuals receiving ICBT found relief from their symptoms to the same extent as individuals receiving face-to-face therapy. Thus, the two types of treatment are comparable.

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