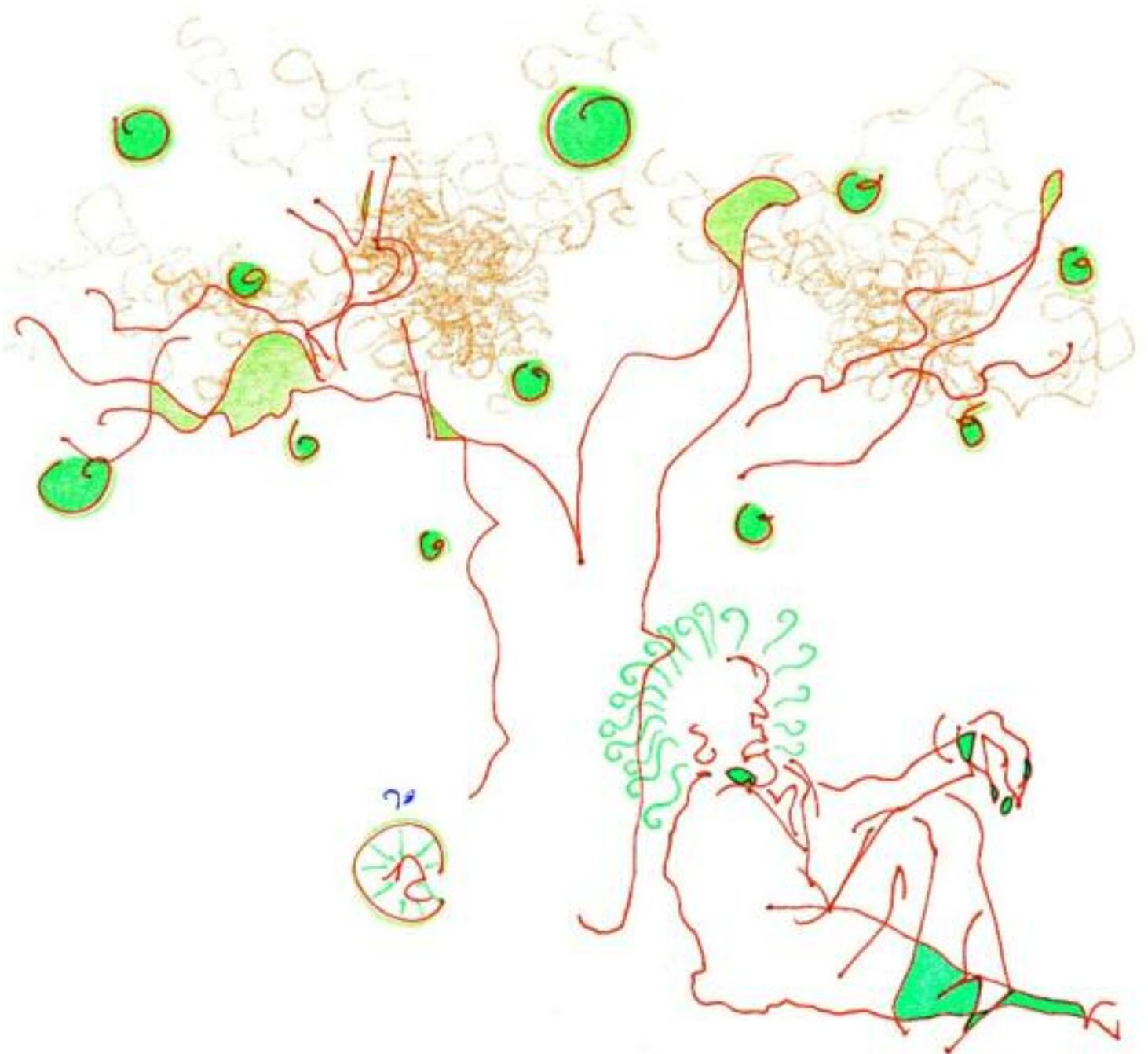


TRANSITION

FALL 2010



INSIDE:

Page 3

New contributor William Caton explores the importance of female self-esteem in counseling women.

Page 28

James Trettwer last appeared here in 2004. He returns with a poem 'How I met myself at the Institute after I left the Institute.'

Page 40

Siblings, secrets and suicide all contribute to the 'Burden' Wayne Wuschke writes about in his first appearance here.

CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.



TRANSITION

PUBLISHER:

David Nelson, Executive Director
Canadian Mental Health Association
(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.

EDITOR: Ted Dyck

MANAGING EDITOR: Lynn Hill

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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CONTINUOUS SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR TRANSITION

In addition to our usual continuous submissions, Transition is calling for submissions for a SPECIAL ISSUE ON HUMOUR FOR FALL 2011:

- Gut-wrenching, thigh-slapping, roll-in-the-aisles, laugh-till-you-cry, cry-till-you laugh, light, dark, or any other kind of humour is requested, all of it answering the question – WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT CRAZY?
- THE USUAL GUIDELINES APPLY – PLUS ONE ADDITIONAL RULE:
- Include the word HUMOUR in the subject line of your electronic submission.

1. TRANSITION is published twice a year by The Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc. Subscription by joining CMHA (SK) is \$15 per year.
2. Send original, unpublished articles, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and visual art that represent current mental health issues and reflect on their impact on individuals.
3. Maximum manuscript lengths: articles – 15 pages; all other prose – 10 pages; poetry – 10 poems or 10 pages, whichever is less; visual art – 10 pieces.
4. Reprints and simultaneous submissions (to several magazines) are not considered.
5. Turnaround time is normally one issue or 6 months: do not send a second submission before the first has been reviewed.
6. Payment is \$25.00 per printed page (\$12.50/half page); \$20.00 per published visual art work; and \$100.00 for cover art.
7. Electronic submissions are preferred (with full contact information and a brief bio). Submit manuscripts in Word or WordPerfect format (12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, 2.5 cm margins) as e-mail attachment to: contactus@cmhask.com or directly to the Editor at tdyck@sasktel.net.
8. Or send hardcopy manuscripts (typed, one-sided, 12-point, double-spaced, 2.5 cm margins), together with full contact information, a brief bio, and self-addressed, stamped return envelope with sufficient postage, to:
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Regina, SK S4T 1J2



Adam 'Rasta' Staite in Shaunavon SK on Canada Day 2010. Check out Adam's poems on Page 27.

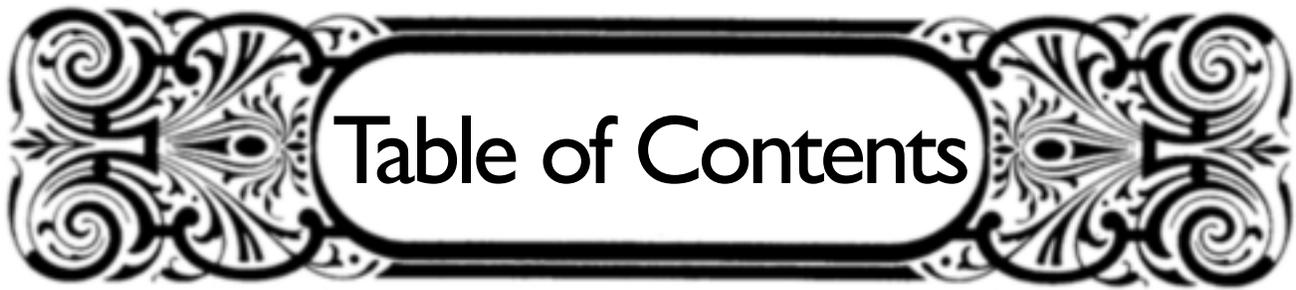


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You lose some, you win some

BY TED DYCK

To my very great regret, I have to inform our readers that the writing therapy project has been discontinued for next year. The Saskatchewan Arts Board (SAB) has declined to move the project from last year's "exploratory" status to our proposal's full "partnership" status. The reasons for this will of course never be known (the usual governmental "transparency"), but our internal review has given us a basis for reapplication next year.

On a more positive note, if the writing therapy project has not been supported for next year at home, it seems to have been recognized abroad: I have been invited to present a paper on the pilot project, "Writing for your life: a small-group experiment in writing therapy," at the Sixth World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and Prevention of Mental and Behavioral Disorders in Washington DC this November.

Of course I'm delighted to have this opportunity to showcase the work of the writers in the groups, to pay tribute to the branch directors (Ruth Smith – Swift Current, Donna Bowyer – Moose Jaw, Gladys Perepeluk – Weyburn) who supported these groups, and to promote the forward-thinking cooperation

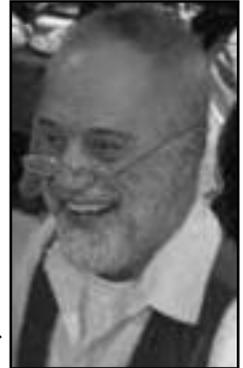
between CMHA(SK) and SAB in funding the project. And I want personally to thank Division for covering my costs to attend the conference.

What lies ahead for writing therapy in SK? Speaking for myself, my involvement in writing therapy has only just begun. More evidence of the significance of this approach to mental health has recently come to my attention (see my article in this issue). And I will move forward with one of the goals of the proposed project – namely, to secure stable funding for writing therapy that is independent of SAB largesse.

To that end – if any of you have any suggestions about how such funding might be secured, please get in touch me through Division office or TRANSITION or directly.

In the meantime, I shall be staying in contact with the three groups through their facilitators and Skype – playing long-distance, itinerant writer-residence, in other words.

Write on!



TED DYCK



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

CMHA key player on committees

DAVID NELSON, RPN, RSW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we look towards the fall season, we review the current status of important issues for mental health in Saskatchewan.

Progress is being made regarding the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Persons with Disabilities (SAID) with the reappointment of a Program Implementation Advisory Team (PIAT) for the coming year.

We also have good community representation on Ministry of Social Services implementation teams such as Eligibility and Research. The main thing we need, howev-



DAVE NELSON

er, is a commitment from Government to put some monies into benefits for those who go on the program, to provide more for those living on very meager and inadequate amounts with long term and enduring disabilities.

Our Association has been one of the key players in speaking to MLAs, Treasury Board members and the Minister of Finance re this important issue for many thousands of people in our Province.

Another key issue is encouraging and convincing government to proceed with the replacement of Saskatchewan Hospital, Battlefords, with a more modern building which allows an appropriate therapeutic environment, not the century old building which is decades overdue for replacement.

If you have the opportunity, please speak to, or write your MLA or the Premier regarding the above issues which are critically important for persons with mental health and mental illness issues, and their families in our province.



Self-esteem

BY WILLIAM CATON

[Editor's Note: This article is based on a project the author conducted recently for Psychology 343 (Issues and Strategies in Counselling Women) tutored by Deborah Foster, Athabasca University.]

Project:

To explore the role of female self-esteem in counseling women using the questionnaire method.

Rationale:

Self-esteem is arguably the core of the individual's concept of self. It would follow that self-esteem is one of the most important issues in counseling women. This hypothesis will be explored using a simple questionnaire.

Discussion:

Feeling good about ourselves could be the most important aspect of who we are and what we do every day of our lives. I would argue that all of us are looking for a state of mind, a way of being, in which we are more happy than unhappy. Whenever I confide my troubles to a friend, or they to me, the desired result is not only to find solutions to a problem, or a reinforcement of ideas, but in some way to improve the way I feel about myself and the world around me. Everything that I have read or thought about, for any problem in a person's life, leads me to believe that feeling good about ourselves is the key to starting the improvement of our life situation. Confidence in ourselves and in our abilities is absolutely essential if we are to survive and prosper in whatever situation we might find ourselves. This sense of the individual's own value or worth, equivalently, how she feels about herself, is called self-esteem.

Self-esteem is important to the client, to the therapist, and is integral to the client-therapist relationship. The client is in counseling because of some untenable situation, some perceived sense of the situation not being satisfactory, or some perceived sense that they are not measuring up personally to the situation in which they find themselves. The therapist is there in the capacity of helping the client to help themselves to sort out a solution to the problems or the perceived problems. The therapists' ability to fulfill this role is dependent on the sense they have of their ability to do this, the confidence they have in their own abilities to guide the client through the possibilities of solutions. The therapist's self-esteem is integral to this confidence and to her/his eventual success in being able to help the client to help themselves. The relationship between the therapist and the client is also a key to success in solving the problems. Each in turn must feel good about the relationship and their individual abilities to work together to make the counseling successful.

My initial curiosity about how women might perceive

their own self-esteem led me to study its role in counseling. The specialization of general ideas on personal self-esteem to women could lead to possible ways of improving their feeling good about themselves.

Questions and Responses:

I asked twenty-one women to help me with my research and sixteen responded. The ages of the respondents varied from nineteen to sixty-four and the mean age was forty-eight years old. The women I asked to fill out the questionnaire live in Canada, Australia, the United States and France. The Canadian respondents live in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Quebec. I have attached the Questionnaire with a brief summary of the answers as Attachment One.

1. The first question in my mind when I designed this research paper was where women perceived the balance point between positive self-esteem and negative self-esteem to be. My wording of the first question comes from the idea that when asked how we feel at any given moment we would naturally respond that we feel better than we feel worse, or worse than we feel better. The exact question I asked was: What do you think your balance point is between positive self-esteem and negative self-esteem? Most of the women I interviewed answered this question with a number like 70/30 or 20/80. They also talked about how being aware of how situations were unfolding was part of how they were feeling about themselves. They talked about the importance of knowing where they came from to assess the way they felt about themselves in their present situation. They talked about self-esteem evolving with time and circumstances and about the importance of working at improving their self-esteem.

Having had the advantage of thinking about how the women I interviewed answered the question on what the balance point of self-esteem is has enabled me to formulate in a clearer manner what my own ideas on the question are. I think that the idea of self-esteem has to first be thought of as a continuum. It is a sliding scale that is constantly in flux, the events of the day and our life circumstances continually changing our perspective on what we are thinking and feeling at the moment. The self that is having positive or negative feelings is also experiencing continual change or adaptation. According to the French psychiatrist Lacan, each person in her present moment has "a past futurity and a future pastness that is mixed together in an unstoppable signifying process" (Bowie, 1991, p.185).

One simple way that we could think of the balance point of our self-esteem is to think of our lives as the board on a teeter-totter and to think of our personal sense of self worth as the fulcrum that could be shifted to our advantage. The stuff on the teeter totter board is the stuff that has happened to us ever since we were born, the things that are happening now, and all the things that we might imagine will happen in the future. How we interact with these events will affect both how we react to others and also how others will react to us. Our reac-



tion to past events can possibly effect change in future occurrences, and at the same time affects our state of mind about who we are and how we are feeling about who we are. We can only know ourselves through the other (Bowie, 1991).

If we accept the idea of a fluctuating self with a fluctuating sense of self-esteem, it is not because we think that we are not responsible for who we are, but rather that we want to become aware of all the ways in which our environment contributes to who we are. When we take the time to get to know ourselves, we will become more aware of where our thoughts and feelings come from, if we are viewing the world in a realistic manner, or if our thoughts and feelings are rooted in distorted cognitive processes.

Most children exhibit an exuberance and happiness to be alive. Self-reflection and self awareness might lead us back to that feeling of positive well being and happiness that is so elu-

sive for many adults; it might shift the fulcrum of self-esteem so that life's teeter totter is balanced with more energy, happiness, and a positive outlook for the future. It is important for every woman to become her own authority and to have power over her own life, to achieve self-esteem and become a fully actualized human being, and to feel personally empowered to effect changes in her life (Morrice, 1997).

2. The second question dealt with what each particular woman judged to be important to her personally about her life at present and her own socialization process. I couched this question in the negative so as to get a feeling for the negative aspects of female socialization that a therapist would be encountering in a counseling situation. The question I asked was: What events in your life, remembering back to your childhood, up to present day, may have started you on a road to possible self-hatred or low self-esteem? In retrospect I think I should not have used the word self-hatred in this question. I think I should have asked a neutral question using neutral language. The answers then would probably have been more balanced as to positive and negative life experiences. However the question was asked and the answers supported to large extent the literature on the inequities for women in our society as they were growing up and today (Sudbury, 2005).

It is the opinion of many thinkers, and it is an opinion with which I agree, that many women have feelings of low self-esteem because of the no-win situation in which they live their lives. They live the double bind of being socially conditioned from childhood to try to be one kind of person and then finding out later in life that that kind of person is a second-class citizen in a patriarchal society. The resulting self-doubt and feelings of low self-worth can easily escalate to feelings of self-hatred and despair. The added constraints of living in a racist and classist society only compound and aggravate the problem for many women.

The therapist as guide to the client on their journey of self discovery can help by encouraging the client to think about how she was taught to be a woman when she was a child, about the assumed roles for a girl, and the mixed messages she may have received from parents or peers as she was growing up. One startling example of this is the young woman who told me the story of how when she was a young girl their family dog had puppies. Her father drowned all the female puppies. When asked about this he told her that the females were useless because they were only good for breeding. Another woman told me that her mother used to spank her if she caught her masturbating. Many women talked about never quite feeling good enough, and about the beatings they received from their mothers if they even were suspected of misbehaving. Others spoke about the beatings that they witnessed their father giving to their mothers. Many talked about the continual verbal fighting of their parents and of the feelings of insecurity that this must have instilled in them even if they didn't realize it at the time. Many women noted the humble place in the family that children had. Comments that the parent knows the child better than the child knows itself must



ART BY JAMES SKELTON

“Society conveys to women that they should find their greatest happiness and fulfillment in giving to, and serving others . . .”

lead to feelings of always doubting oneself, of growing up to not trust one's own ideas or instincts. Not surprisingly, a high percentage of women reported being sexually abused or raped at a very young age. It is heartbreaking when a woman tells you that she did tell her parents about being raped or sexually abused, but her parents did not believe her.

The therapist or counselor can also help the client to understand she is not alone in her conflicts and confusion about the roles she has been taught to play. The female half of the population has been placed in a double-bind, no-win situation: “Society conveys to women that they should find their greatest happiness and fulfillment in giving to, and serving others, and at the same time conveys on another level that they are not really valuable for doing this, or that they should be more like men. The situation is sealed off for women by a further injunction that women are abnormal if they do not want to fulfill their role, forbidding them to get out of the situation or dissolve it by commenting on it. Women are thus in an untenable position. They cannot make a move without catastrophe” (Heriot, 1983, p.11). It really is not surprising that so many women report feelings of low self-esteem, self-hatred, anxiety, and depression. Women are an oppressed group in our society today, and much of the pain experienced by each woman individually is a direct consequence of this oppression and not the result of private failings or personal inadequacies (Laidlaw and Malmo, 1990).

Feelings of low self-esteem are often found in clients who are depressed, or suffer from mood disorders, or exhibit addictions that are often the result of self-medication in an attempt to deal privately with the primary disorder. This is not to deny that many types of mood disorders are diseases. “Depression destroys families. It ruins careers. It ages patients prematurely. It attacks their memories and general health. For us – for me – the truth that depression is a disease is unqualified. Depression is debilitating, progressive and relentless in its downhill course, as tough and worthy an opponent as any doctor might choose to combat” (Kramer, 2005, p.7). My observation is that within these disorders there is also quite often the element of low self-esteem. I think the empathetic counselor can be of immense benefit to the suffering client by supporting whatever medical treatment has been advised by a knowledgeable psychiatrist. We are in an era of aggressive psychopharmacology. If the new psychotropic drugs work for disorders like depression and anxiety, let's use them. This is an important place for the counseling and helpfulness of a trained therapist.

I cannot therefore agree with the radical therapist Bonnie Burstow when she says, “Cooperating with the psychiatrization of our clients or using the medical model ourselves is unacceptable regardless of what shape our client is in” (Burstow, 1992, p. 49).

There is too much evidence that psychotropic medications do give relief, do save lives, and do help many women lead normal lives. The therapist should rather emphasize the effect of the sociopolitical environment on women, as well as of

intrapersonal factors. Personal dispositions may make one vulnerable to depression, but such dispositions themselves may begin in oppressive experiences. A primary vulnerability that predisposes a person to depression is negative self-esteem. A good therapist will help the client to develop new interpretations and solutions (Hurst and Genest, 1995).

3. The third question was about how each potential client might deal with and reduce feelings of negative self-esteem: What techniques do you use personally to keep yourself as much as possible in a positive frame of mind? A brief summary of the answers I received are as follows: I meditate and exercise. Good nutrition. I walk. I dance. I will not be a victim. I self-talk. I am around people who seem to think I am okay. Friendships. I use humor. I do things I feel good about. I am learning to take good care of myself, to trust myself and to listen to myself.

Good advice for all of us, it seems to me.

The role of the therapist being to guide and assist, there is one practical idea I would like to explore as a path toward self-discovery and higher self-esteem. As we weave our way deeper into an understanding of who we really are, are there techniques we could use that would assist us with this? Many people who are not feeling good about themselves are not sure why. Many have forgotten the many small steps and stages that have stacked one on top of the another to bring them to the feelings and thoughts they have about themselves today.

I have discovered that art as therapy helps many individuals on this inward journey of self-awareness. The drawing or painting of a picture will relax the mind and help a person to feel the idea that they are trying to express. The activity of making art seems to combine the emotions and the cognition in a way that can both express the idea to some other and also to ourselves. Some memories are initially just too painful to talk about. When we abstract them or hide them in colors or shapes it gives us an opportunity to express the emotion without all the gory details. The abstraction or ambiguity of the process gives us protection in communicating who we think we are to the outside world. As we become more comfortable with the idea of who we think we are, eventually most of us will develop the courage to talk about it. “More recently, researchers have discovered that traumatic experiences often become encoded in the mind in the form of images. That is, when we experience traumatic events such as violent acts or catastrophes, our minds may take them in just like a camera taking a photograph. It seems only natural that these memories would first emerge in the form of images. Visual art may offer a unique way to express traumatic images, bringing them to consciousness in a less threatening way” (Malchiode, 1998, p.10).

The process of attempting the communication of what we are feeling and thinking is easier for some people using simple shapes and colours rather than words. Once the process of communication has been engaged, it keeps getting easier. Although it begins with the attempt to communicate with some other, the process's true beauty is that the making of art actual-



ly engages the self with the self. Self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, happiness, personal success at any endeavor, and personal empowerment all seem to begin with an understanding of who we are. The making of art seems to facilitate this process. Many learning disabilities and trauma can be mitigated with a multi-sensory approach (Montessori, 1964). There is really no way to objectively qualify the personal benefit to each individual as they endeavor to make art. However, when you see happiness replace sadness, despair turn into hope, and uncertainty change to confidence, you know that art as therapy is working.

Conclusion:

In conclusion I would like to thank the sixteen women who helped me with this research essay by answering the three questions in such a forthright, honest, and illuminating manner. Their answers not only verify the tremendous amount of

research that has been done on gender role socialization in Canadian society, but their positive suggestions for good health and changing the future give me a feeling of optimism going forward. Women's biology seems to predispose them to be caregivers. They are also socially conditioned to care for others. Nurturing can lead to a sense of loss of self when not valued by significant others or society. Personal empowerment, self-management, self regulation, and a positive sense of self-efficacy, will all increase the feelings of personal self-esteem (Bandura, 1997). Feeling good about ourselves leads to an enrichment of life and a balanced approach to living.

The counselor as guide must respect the belief that each client is the best expert on herself, and that in a safe environment she will learn to listen to herself and find her own voice. Therapist and client must be aware of the socio-political environment in which we live, have lived, and could possibly live. It is important that we grow and change in a positive and healthy way, and that we do our best to offer every member of society that same opportunity.



ART BY HENRY PETERS

Attachment One - Research Project

Feeling good about ourselves is important if we are to live happy and productive lives. I am looking for three things with this research paper:

One: What do you think your balance point is between positive self-esteem and negative self-esteem?

Two: What events in your life, remembering back to your childhood, up to present day, may have started you on a road to possible self-hatred or low self-esteem?

Three: What techniques do you see personally to keep yourself as much as possible in a positive frame of mind.

All information is confidential and no person will be identified as to name or family.

Gender: female Age: Country: Province or State:

One: [Most women answered this with a number (70-30 or 20-80).] - my balance point is constantly being aware of how situations are unfolding - when I see it slipping I try to contrive it back up - it is an on-going struggle - the balance comes from accepting where I came from - it evolves with time and circumstances

Two: - self-hatred is pretty strong - children were kept in a humble place in the family - the results were pretty hard on self-esteem - I often had a sense of emotional abandonment - learning from family dynamics that what I wanted wasn't important - learning that what I wanted was selfish- I never thought I was pretty - always being compared to others - never quite good enough - being told I would never achieve my goals - I remember having high self-esteem when I was a child, I lost it when I divorced, I remember thinking, I am smart, this can't be about me - girls had to do inside things - girls were only good for breeding - I watched my mother being beaten by my father - my brothers got all the good stuff - there was a con-

. . . *I do things I feel good about - I am learning to take good care of myself, to trust myself, and to listen to myself.*

stant demand for chores – women were only there to raise the kids – women were there to look after their husbands – my mother wanted her daughters to marry rich men.

Three: - I meditate and exercise - good nutrition – I walk – I dance - I will not be a victim – I self-talk – I am around people who think I am okay – friendships- I use humor - I do things I feel good about - I am learning to take good care of myself, to trust myself, and to listen to myself.

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Of tides and therapy and writing

BY TED DYCK

The tidal model of mental health recovery?

It sounds like a tired metaphor: ocean of experience, tides of life, storms and lost at sea, piracy, safe havens, anchors down or aweigh, sail by the stars. You get the drift.

It's off-putting? For sure. Trite, you say? Indeed. Overworked, even dead? Yup.

Yet Nancy Brookes's clearly written, comprehensive analysis of Phil Barker's and Poppy Buchanan-Barker's tidal model is positive to the nth degree.

Recovery model is of course a current buzz-phrase (some would call it a fad) of the mental health profession. Some of those who have had direct experience of mental illness are understandably less than ecstatic – so many buzzwords, so many attempts by "them" to help "us" – who can blame "us"!

But Brookes's phrase is *mental health recovery*. Not the *recovery model*, but *recovery* as we normally understand it.

Still – it doesn't look promising – a cliché metaphor, an unhappy buzzword – same old, same old?

As Brookes points out, though, Barker has earned his credentials: trained as a painter, a PhD dissertation on cognitive therapy with depressed women, widely published, professionally active for over twenty years, professor and guest professor of psychiatric nursing at various leading institutions, winner of several teaching and research awards, influenced by Eastern philosophies, and so on (673-674). Co-author Poppy Buchanan-Barker, a self-styled "coal miner's daughter," has been a social worker, therapist, and counselor for more than

thirty years, many of them with her husband Phil, and is in addition the primary author of "Ten Commitments" (see below).

The book in which Brookes's article appears is a standard textbook used in nurses' training across Canada and internationally. Perhaps the model isn't as fluffy as it appears? Nurses are known for their practical and caring approach to health, not their rosy-eyed theoretical idealism. Think Florence Nightingale.

The tidal model has been internationally applied – over 100 projects are underway in various settings and countries around the world; in particular, it has been used in Canada's Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre and its associated institutions since 2002 (693-694). A significant fact is that the author of the article on the tidal model, Dr. Nancy Brookes, is the nurse-scholar who leads the Royal Ottawa Hospital's Tidal Project (see <http://www.tidal-model.com/Royal/Ottawa/Hospital.htm> for details).

Better take a closer look, then.

Brookes's article quickly gets to what she sees as the "metaphorical compass" (675) of the Barkers' tidal model with its Ten Commitments – a nice biblical echo, there – of the practitioner to the *person* (their preferred replacement for the usual labels of patient, client, consumer). In summary, the practitioner / therapist commits to (677-678):

- (1) value the person's own voice by having her write her story, directly or indirectly;
- (2) respect the person's own language, his style, his figures;



- (3) be genuinely curious about the person's story about her/himself;
- (4) become an apprentice to [the real expert on] the person;
- (5) use the toolkit the person naturally provides;
- (6) encourage the person to craft the next step;
- (7) give the person lots of time;
- (8) help the person reveal the wisdom in the writing of her story;
- (9) recognize that change is everywhere and inevitable;
- (10) be transparent – accept the person's story, in the person's words.

(The Barkers' original list, which appears also in most of their publications, is fully reproduced in Brookes's article.)

Very close to the centre of the model is an emphasis on the person's [re]telling his story in his own voice, while moving from the past into the future.

In other words, the tidal model seems to use *writing/telling* in a fundamental way, undergirds it with philosophy and science, and wraps it into sellable package. The websites associated with the Tidal Model show how far the Barkers have gone in this direction, for the model is also a serious, commercial business.

Let's identify the substance of the Barkers' apparent use of writing: they emphasize *story*, *voice*, and *language*, all fundamental, technical aspects of writing/telling; and they insist that

writing/telling can help the person to heal and move on to the next stage of her/his healing.

But how much does the model *actually use writing* itself? Or is writing merely a *metaphor* for the person's *verbal interaction* with the professional?

A further and deeper look is in order.

Email contact with Brookes led me to an email conversation with the Barkers. In the latter, four points emerged: (1) the Barkers are (rightly) proprietary about their model ; (2) the ten commitments are (particularly) Poppy's contribution to the model; (3) they insist full credit be given where credit is due; (4) many persons in their practice are not ready to write their stories themselves.

The first three are all good points, all of which a professional writer will respect. The fourth is no doubt true, but only mildly helpful for this paper's analysis. Not much else is there, except an additional note that the Barkers are going on vacation and will respond more fully when they get back.

Next, I investigated some of the Barkers' many publications on the tidal model. One of their books, *The tidal model* (2005), deals chiefly with the historical development of the model and its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. Interestingly, the Ten Commitments, which are the only part dealing with writing, constitute the very last chapter of the book.

The Manual (2007) yields a bit more: in addition to the very



UNTITLED AMBIGUITY #1 BY HENRY PETERS

. . . *what matters here is what happens first – the client is given the opportunity to write, not just tell, his story.*

useful and full explanation of how to implement the model, there is one rather leading comment about writing. In their discussion of the importance of recording the client's story *in situ*, they say this:

NB: The person's own words are always used to record the person's contribution, and where the nurses are making plans, the person's own words are also used as 'direct quotes'. *The person is always offered the pen at the outset, and invited to complete the record. (Where people are unable or unwilling to do this, the person can return the task to the nurse, with their dignity intact).* (41) [italics added]

In other words, the therapist functions as the person's scribe in those cases where the person does not or cannot write her/his story her/himself. But the offer to the person to *write* her own story is always overtly made. The tone of *The Manual* suggests that *in most cases* the person will not do the writing herself – but what matters here is what happens first – the client is given the opportunity to write, not just tell, his story. In either case, the person's own words will be used.

Perilously close, don't you think, to using writing in an integral way in therapy whenever possible?

More support comes from further perusal of both the book and the manual:

- From the book:
 - o a person's identity is the conflux of the "stories" she tells herself (11)
 - o the person's story moves from history to her-story to my-story – "People are their stories" (12)
 - o narrative-based practice is preferred to evidence-based practice (12)
 - o all assessment material is "written entirely in the person's own voice" (13)
- From the manual:
 - o because people are their stories, story-telling is essential to therapy (3)
 - o the three domains of personhood and therefore of therapy – Self (42+), World (66+), and Other (92+) – are all explored through story-telling and/or story-writing
 - o all the templates for implementing the model (116+) involve writing, and in each case the person has the chance to do the writing directly (41)

The overlap with, the similarity to writing therapy is astonishing. To take just one example, the practical and theoretical primer *writing at the edge* (2005) by Jeff Park touts narrative as a way that the person may:

- know and be its self (Chapter 3)
- integrate and research both its self and the other (Chapter 4)

And Park would put expressive writing, especially narrative, at the centre of the educative process (Chapter 8).

No wonder the Barkers would put narrative at the core of their therapeutic practice.

Of course, writing therapy deals explicitly with the role of

writing in therapy, which is implicit in the tidal model: *free expression in writing* is emphasized in writing therapy, *directed expression in writing or telling* is emphasized in the tidal model. Probably this is the way it should be, for writing therapy assumes that the mental health of participants is such that writing is feasible; the tidal model makes no such assumption, indeed, actively un-makes it by suggesting a scribe for the person wherever needed.

Time to return, briefly, to the metaphor with which I began this piece and ask the same question: What exactly is the role of the water metaphor in the tidal model?

Of course, it gives the model its name, and beyond that, it serves as a way of organizing the model's theoretical and philosophical bases as well as its explaining nursing as a profession. But in the actual therapy generated by the tidal model as given by the manual it has no role whatsoever. The metaphor, in short, is there for the practitioner not the person. Perhaps it does not seem "tired" to the therapists who are practicing the tidal model – besides, in contrast to the largely unexamined *medical* metaphor hidden in the phrase *mental illness*, the water metaphor is as bracing as a dash of fresh sea water.

If the tidal model implicitly supports the use of writing as therapy, the converse also holds: writing therapy implicitly supports the tidal model. If people *are* their stories, then *telling* those stories may enhance their sense of [well]being; if the teller also *writes* her/his story, then the re-writing and re-visioning that inevitably accompany the writing act may help define the person's [emergent] sense of [well]being even more clearly.

Thomas King in his 2003 Massey Lectures re-tells, a number of times, a wonderful story about the fellow in the audience who questions the storyteller about the familiar Aboriginal myth that the world is resting on the back of the turtle.

On what, the fellow asks the storyteller smugly, *and on what does the turtle rest?*

The storyteller shrugs: *Nobody knows for sure*, she says, *but they know it's turtles all the way down.*

As King next remarks, *The truth about stories is that that's all we are* (2).

To which I add, yes, and all the way down.

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Letter to Moran and Barr, my nieces, and my nephew Tom

BY RACHEL (ROZEN) BARKAIE

Did you know that your grandmother Lili already at age fifteen was involved in World War Two? Your age, Barr, today.

Lili was born and grew up in the Czech city of Chust, on the border with Hungary. In the Moskovitch family, a modest and religious home, there were the parents Freda and David, and six children: Gizi the oldest, Helen, Lili, Joseph, Magda, and Rosie. With the completion of the elementary schooling, Helen and Lili were sent to a boarding school in a big city in Hungary. There they learned sewing, cooking, and high school subjects. Gizi went out to work to help the parents.

The Nazis came into Hungary towards the end of the War with their objective to eliminate the Jewish communities, to the last man, woman and child, as quickly as possible. They did not have time to gather the Jewish communities into ghettos or new concentration camps, therefore the extermination of the Jewish community in Hungary was massive, brutal, and quick. The boarding school for girls was bombed heavily, and many were killed. Lili was only scratched when the building collapsed. At the same time, she was put in a hospital because they thought she had a burst appendix. (By the way, your Grandpa Yitzhak was a student in a boy's boarding school nearby, and met with the girls on Fridays and holidays in the synagogue, and other entertainment places.

As Lili was in the hospital almost two weeks, she did not know that Helen was taken by the Nazis to a work camp, somewhere in Hungary. An Hungarian engineer, responsible for the running of the technical side of the boarding school, began to work in the underground against the Nazis. He and several friends worked together and began to forge transit passes. This way they were able to smuggle children to safer areas. Lili worked with the engineer, using the several languages that she spoke, in order to be able to move about in the city. She had long black hair, which she braided to make herself look like any local Christian girl. This way, she was able to smuggle many children out of the city, able to get to the hiding places of orphaned children, and provide them with food and transit passes (forged id). She used newspapers and hay from old mattresses to roll her own "cigarettes," not to be cool, but to stop the hunger pains. The Nazis were suspicious of her and followed her many times. The Nazi Gestapo had wanted posters put up, with her picture. The engineer hid her, but she insisted on doing her part in helping the children. Remember, she was only fifteen.

Her sister Helen had a very difficult time in a work camp. When the Nazis realized that the Russians and the Americans were closing in on them, they took all of the concentration camp prisoners and marched them across Europe to Berlin. It was a horrible march in the dead of winter, with most of them

without proper clothing, many without shoes. The food was very limited, sometimes only once a day. The prisoners helped each other, with many of them suffering from great fatigue, hunger and cold, and half dead from the beatings of the Nazi guards. Most of them died on the way and were left as they fell by the wayside. Lili heard where her sister was, managed somehow to get to her in the long line of marchers, asked her to come with her out of the line, as she could help her and get her to safety. But Helen stood her ground, very frightened, and stayed with the march all the way to Berlin, with all of the horrors she went through on the way. Not many survived this long march that lasted many, many days.

Gizi was captured and sent to Auschwitz. At the beginning, she was a "camp worker" because of her strength, toughness, and stubbornness. She was chosen by Dr. Mengele, the monster, to be used in his experiments. Of course, she had the number tattooed on her arm, like Helen had. The medical experiments that were performed on her body were beyond the scope of understanding, without any anaesthetics or medicines. You are too young for me to describe these horrors, you don't need these pictures in your mind.

The parents were captured and sent to different camps. Frida, the mother (my grandmother), with the two youngest daughters, aged five and eight, were sent to the gas chambers in Auschwitz, almost immediately. Frida, by lucky happenstance, saw Gizi and said to her that she **MUST** survive in order to be able to tell what happened to them. I was named after the youngest daughter Rosie. Rachel is the Hebrew version for the Hungarian name Rosie. Three of the sisters survived, somehow: Gizi, Helen, and Lili.

Your grandmother Lili went to her original home in Chust, and found her beloved cat that had died on the front step. Christian neighbours told her that the cat would not accept food from strangers and died from starvation waiting for her. From then on, she promised herself not to keep cats as a pet.

The story of Joseph is strange and sad. No one knows what happened to him during the war. At the end of the war, the Jewish survivors began to search for family members and relatives. They would go to information centres where there would be lists of those that survived and where to find them. During one of the times Lili was at the central train station, a friend told her that he saw Joseph, healthy and well, but before he could talk with his friend, he was kidnapped by the Russian Army. He was taken onto a Russian train and disappeared off the face of the earth. The Russian generals were obliged to return to Russia with the same number of soldiers they left with – which caused many, many local men to be kidnapped in order to fill the ranks.

There is no record anywhere in any country of his name. My mom (Lili) and I and Bill (my husband) wrote to many inter-

Yitzhak was one of the seven survivors of some 30,000 Jewish prisoners that were tortured, murdered and died in that camp.

national organizations, and nothing. Every time Lili would visit in Europe and Hungary, she would put ads in the local papers looking for him. We searched, asking the Red Cross, the Blue Crescent, through many embassies, through the Russian authorities, but the answer was always the same: If he got to a work camp in Russia, they needed his identification number in that work camp.

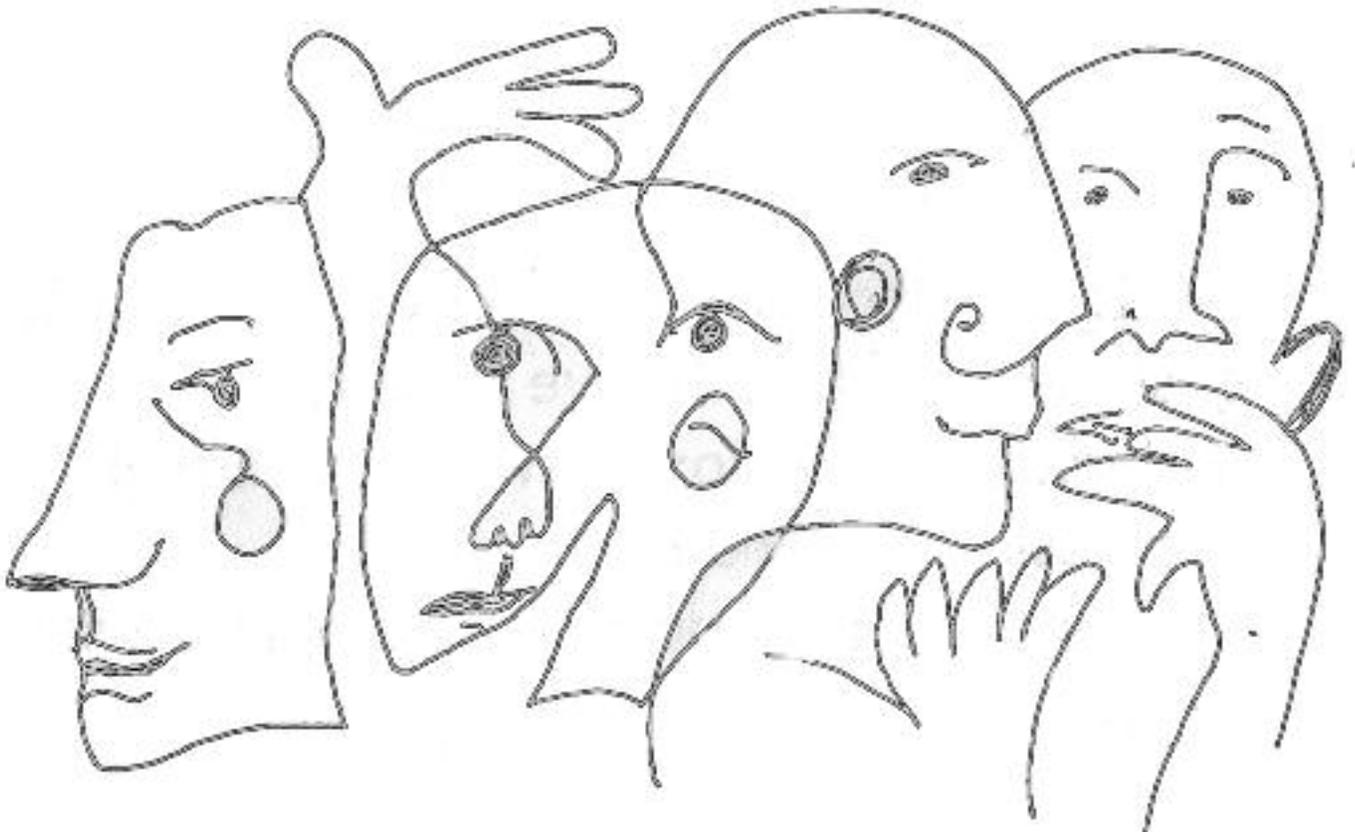
Where were we to get such a number? Joseph never contacted the family – it is possible that he never knew if any survived the war. When your father was born, Lili decided to use the first two letters of her brother's name: yod and vav, to name him. Yoram, the name of a king mentioned in the history of the Jewish people, was, for her, perfect.

Somehow, the surviving sisters met. Gizi told them that she had met with their father in the area of their home in Chust after the war, but he disappeared totally from the family, never to make contact again. The sisters came to a collection point for the survivors in Romania, and in 1946, went to Israel. The Jewish Agency (and other Israeli agencies) went out to Europe to find the war refugees, to organize them in groups for Aliya (immigration to Israel).

Your grandfather, my dad Yitzhak, gave very little information as to what happened to him during the war. Born in

Budapest, the capital of Hungary, his mother died in childbirth. He was raised in a religious household by his father, and attended boy's boarding school. There he met Lili for the first time. His father was a doctor and therefore spared by the Nazis. He passed away in Budapest when I was 2 years old (1950). Of course, the Nazis pillaged the aristocratic family home, taking valuable heirlooms, something that Grandfather Yitzhak never really got over. He came from a very comfortable family life, and was only sixteen years old when he was captured and sent to one of the most horrible concentration camps in Hungary. Yitzhak was one of the seven survivors of some 30,000 Jewish prisoners that were tortured, murdered and died in that camp. After the war, Lili and Yitzhak luckily met again, went to Israel together, and I was born two years later. Since Yitzhak went through a horrible time in the concentration camp, (always refusing to tell us), he left his beliefs and did not believe in G-d anymore. He was mad at G-d for not stopping the murder and torture and not sparing the lives of more than 1,000,000 innocent children. He refused to go to the synagogue. But he respected every person in his beliefs.

This is a short version of the history of the family from the time of the Holocaust. I felt a need to be sure that the story be told to the next generation.



ART BY JAMES SKELTON



Steel rail blues: The real CP Rail story

BY BRUCE BLOM

Well here I go the second time around as the first time I sent this story in wrong format and they lost it and I didn't save it what a fool I was; I am on a short time frame here I only have a about a hour this time to write before I have to get my three girls up for school age five, twelve and fourteen. Now I know what writers mean when they say writer's cramp or cram! I thought I had a lot of time but I don't I got up a hour ago at 5:30 a.m. as I couldn't sleep anymore well I wonder why!

We live in a housing cooperative in Saskatoon and three days ago in the high wind the flashing about six feet of it blew half way off and is as loud as a train, HA! HA! I am writing about a train how convenient maybe this is why after three days our maintenance man hasn't been around yet to fix it...are my three girls, wife and myself caught up in the system! What do you know after almost twenty years of being diagnosed with Bi-Polar Mood Disorder I can say I know what this means! Oh Yeah! Well I guess I better get to my story as that is probably why you are reading this; hey another off the beaten track with another thought, maybe the reason it didn't go through last time I mean my story about two weeks ago is because I was meant to write it now: Now is the time; Now is Mental Health Week across Saskatchewan; Now is May 4, 2010; and most important "NOW" is the time to let everyone know how my psych doctor royally screwed my butt to the wall on what was and probably will be the best job I could have ever gotten!

"Steel Rail Blues" ... a song by a Canadian blind singer who himself when he wrote this might have been screwed by the system as well how do I know. Fred McKenna wrote the song when I was a kid of about ten and I listened to it when Dad and Mom played it on the record player; now you know how old I am. For you younger people a record or LP is something you play on a stereo it is a lot bigger than a CD and surprisingly they sound better than a CD almost like a MP3 and yes I have been told LPs are making a huge come back in Europe and Japan so I guess that means they will be back in here in the next three to five years so save your money and buy something that is coming back in and not something so small you will lose it like my oldest daughter's MP3, then blame her little sister for taking it.

Well back to the good old CP Rail story here I don't think you want to hear my personal stuff right now as you are probably going through the same old crap I am you know the system is screwing you! I need a job as my pogeys is running out in about a month, kids need clothes and food, the wife and I need gas to go to work and in my case to go for job interviews and most important we need money for rent! Oh God please bless my Dad and Mom for all the help they have given us over the past three to six months or we would have been on the street looking for a place to live and the food bank for food to eat! I have to hurry I am down to almost forty five minutes now

before I have to wake my girls up for school, please help me God to get this done so I can wake them up then again start the process of looking for a job again.

Where should I start now? I think I will start with my last real job, I was working for almost two years at what at the time was a job I loved: Assistant Warehouse Manager; getting along great with the boss all within six months and helping unload semi's of batteries and helping to train temporary manpower people; I was set for life with a great job. They even paid for me to get all my tickets; I mean Forklift, Dangerous Goods and Transportation and even WHIMIS. NOT! After about a year and a half the boss decided to hire a young punk half our age to help out as we were starting to take on more commercial accounts and the two of us could no longer handle it and needed a more stable person. Along he came on the pretenses he had a good record from working at one of the places we sold batteries to and he knew someone there real good that my boss did.

So he started and he was a good kid until that day! The day was about two months after he started, he said, So did the boss tell you I know his daughter? I said No, he then said Well I will tell you a secret, and I said What? He then said Don't tell him but I am going out with his daughter! I thought oh great here we go like the wife said You just watch things will change! Well they did and for the worst! I started to lose confidence in myself big time; I mean after a year and a half of a great rapport with the boss, car pooling since the boss only lived a few blocks from me, willing to stay with overtime without a question and more all just went down the tubes.

I was now the one that did everything wrong! I couldn't car pool anymore cause he said Maybe the kid would think I was choosing sides if there was a disagreement and you were not involved, if an order went out wrong I forgot to check something, it was all just ME ! ME ! I couldn't handle it and when I went to human rights and the labor board they said I am sorry we can't do anything for you. They are making you feel like they back you into a corner and make you guys sign papers you are not comfortable with and it is basically covering their butts so if you ever go to the human rights their butts are covered by getting you to sign the papers automatically saying you know what is right and what is wrong and it is all your fault! All we can tell you is tell your boss you want a leave of absence so you can relax due to your mood disorder but during the two months you are gone look for another job and DON'T go back it will literally kill you!

So last June 2009 I took a break, visited a friend in Calgary and looked for another job and what do you know the day I went back to work at the battery place two months after my so called "stress leave"(as I had to I didn't find any other job) I got a call from another business to become their warehouse manager! I told my old boss they wanted me to start in three days as they haven't had a warehouse person in almost two months and they want me to start now. I didn't care that I left the boss high and dry for look what he did to me, I also didn't care that the wage was two dollars less an hour as I was

probably spending at least that on gas having to commute over Circle Drive not including the stress of having to drive through rush hour traffic going to the battery place! This was one reason I did like to car pool with the old boss ... give him a big Texas Mickey of vodka every six months for gas and I don't have to worry about getting in an accident. This new job was great first of all because it was only a ten minute bike ride from home; the manager told me and assured me that I would still have a job after the warehouse was reorganized and cleaned up and my hours would still be the same. Same as the battery place Monday to Friday from nine to five thirty and no weekends!

What a great job same hours pretty much just a little less money though but no big deal! Well I was ready to be screwed again and the wife again saw it and I didn't or didn't want to believe it. After two weeks the manager got a guy about my age forty-ish to help with the clean up and he was the one in the third week to tell me the day he started he was her unemployed boyfriend! I bet I don't have to say anything else cause you know where I am going with this one too! You're right, third week comes she docks me an hour every day to give him hours to help me clean up and the next week's schedule so-called had to be revised since she gave him forty hours and didn't put me on the schedule! Later that week and after a month of work there she calls me into the office with her assis-

tant manager and says I have to cut back hours and lay you off; I even have to get rid of my boyfriend! Now how should I feel? She told me I had a full time job with no layoffs, or I wouldn't have left the stupid battery job and did she ever think that maybe she could have waited a few days longer to tell me instead of the day after I was the pallbearer for my uncle at his funeral the day before!!! No she didn't care at all . . . here we go again with the system screwing you over! Well, on this one as my Mom says What comes around goes around was true! I went a few weeks later to get my record of employment only to find out that head office found out about her and him and they let them both go, Ha! Ha! But she still did a number on me; on my record of employment she wrote FIRED!

This was it I couldn't handle it any more and I ended up in the "Dungeon" as my Dad and Mom and I call it for a week in November 2009; the old RUH-Hantelmann Unit. I didn't know if I qualified for poge as I didn't have a job and of course we had no cash for bills as the wife was going into slow mode at work for the winter and her hours were being cut back! Like I said Thank God for Dad and Mom they have helped my family out more than I can imagine and for this Dad, Mom I love you and can't tell you how much we would love to pay you back but just can't! So when we ask you over for supper or a BBQ or to a cheap night at the movie please know that by this

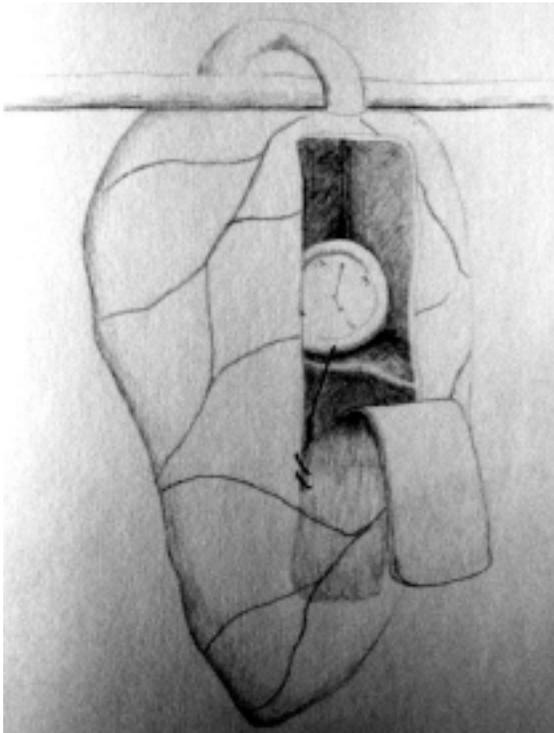


PHOTO BY BRUCE BLOM



gesture we are trying our best to pay you guys back.

If you are wondering when I will get to the Fred McKenna story of "Steel Rail Blues" it is now or should I say HAS GONE with what my psych did to me. A couple of days after I got out of the Hantelmann I was going home along my usual route when I saw on a billboard . . . Now Hiring! CP Rail was looking for seasonal labourers. WOW! Would I love this job, so I applied in mid-November and got a reply email early in December that they were impressed with all my qualifications and that I was a mature adult not some young punk wanting a good paying job to pay for my drinking or drug problems. They wanted an interview with me in early February and I told my psych and he was happy for me and wished me luck and said Make sure to be there on time. Mid-February rolls around I am the first one there by about twenty minutes and I could tell the CP Rail staff were quite impressed as the next guy to show up comes in just shortly after 8 a.m.! Everything is going to my advantage, wow, I even passed the twenty minute interview by three employees that my Dad said I probably wouldn't if I go in the way I did but I told him they will find out sooner or later so that's why I went it with a short sleeve shirt with tattoos showing. I told them they are not nasty jail house tats or anything and they had no problem with that. The only thing I was worried about was the next thing they told me I had to do and do it right there. I had a ten minute timed exam; oh boy I crammed in high school and at SIAST Kelsey for Auto Mechanics and didn't do good and now this. I thought I was sunk before my boat left the dock as the guy who finished his



BROKEN HEART REVIVED BY DI DECAIRE

interview before me was still answering questions and looking at me for answers! So I did what my Mom always told me to do when the going got tough . . . Pray and Pray I did. I managed to finish before the other guy did and had about two or three minutes to spare and passed it with no problem and was given a date by the pretty assistant to go for my medical and pee test the drug test in about two weeks so I walked out the door and saw that guy still writing thinking hopefully I can pass the drug test with all the meds the doc has me on.

Well two weeks went by and the first part of the physical I passed. The drug test the CP Rail Nurse told me I had nothing to worry about as when they say drugs they mean illegal street drugs, man was I happy only one part left to pass then I am hired at a \$20 hour job to start and it is seasonal just what I want. The wife will work in the winter and my down time and I will see the kids off to school, make them lunch and all that and she will do this when I am gone for four days at a time from mid March to mid November; basically thaw to freeze up. Yes; I am going to be working on the chain gang like my Grandpa did when he was young and alive in the 30s and 40s when my Mom was little. All I have to do is pass the medical which I should be able to do with my eyes closed I thought.

I went in and saw the CP Rail Doctor and he said everything looks good all we need is a letter from your physio guy to let us know about your feet and back; by the way he sent it off to them in time and there was no problem. I had to get a letter from my Doctor saying my headaches which are migraines are now only kid induced when there is a big kafuffle around the house and this is rare, so he was ok with this as she got the letter to him in time so who does this leave now to get a report in on time? If you guessed who you think you are correct . . . the man that knew a month or so before the other two; yes I mean my psych.

I told him in mid March I needed this letter to get the job; the best one I would have ever had and my family and I would be set for life he assured me that it would be done by the time I needed it around the first week of April so I called the CP Rail in Calgary and asked if they received it yet and they said NO! They also told me that all they need for me to start in a couple of weeks was this letter from my psych. I called him back the next day and told his secretary CP Rail wants the report next week or I am out of the running. She said He is waiting for you to come in and sign the release papers. I said: WHAT! I was in about a month ago and he now tells me I have to sign papers; I was furious so I went on Monday and signed the one paper I needed to and of course he was in his office with the door closed so I couldn't tell him what I really thought.

So the next day I call the CP Rail back and talk to the lady that I am now on a first name basis with to confirm she received his letter, she said No but you call him and tell him we need it by this Thursday at the latest! So I called him again on Wednesday and asked if it was sent yet his secretary said it was typed and would be faxed on Thursday, the deadline I told them a few times about so I thanked her and hung up. The next

*So I did what my Mom always told me to do
when the going got tough . . .
Pray and Pray I did.*

day comes it is Friday my favorite day of the week and in my email I notice a letter from guess who . . . the CP Rail right on! I got the job I am so happy! NOT!!! The letter said: We are sorry to let you know we didn't receive the letter from your psych in time and we have to let you know you are not being considered for the position of Seasonal Laborer based out of Saskatoon; with the pick up place only about seven blocks away from home, a short fifteen minute walk! I was livid and of course since it was now 5:15 p.m. when I saw this I could not talk to my psych I had to wait till Monday three days later.

I called him and his secretary said I will patch you through to him, I was ready to tell him where to go but I didn't. I asked why he didn't send it off in time and all he said was I typed out the paragraph they needed and gave it to my secretary to fax off before 4 p.m. on Thursday. I said Well I think someone screwed up big time and it wasn't me! He turned around and told me to then contact them and see when they received it. WHAT! I thought this was your job to do not mine but I did call them anyway. CP Rail said No we didn't get it on time and they sent me an email confirming this.

I was so irate I buggered off to Battleford to visit the in-laws for a week and to cool my jets! So while I was there I was thinking maybe I should call my psych and see if he could do something for me so I do and he says Fax me the letter back they sent you. I said Hey I am in Battleford how do you expect me to do that! I also told him that I don't have a fax, can I email it to you, he tells me that they have no email ... BULL! So I wait three more days and when I get home I talk to his secretary and ask for her personal email so I can send it as the money to fax would be the same price as a jug of milk for my

daughters so she gives it to me.

The next day she calls me back and says she doesn't think she can use the letter as I addressed the letter Dear... and I shouldn't have addressed it to her personally! I told her I didn't know how to cut and paste and resend so she told me she would try something and get back to me. Well that was on April 29 and I am still waiting, waiting for what? Another let down? Probably, just like while he was to have to sent off my report I had an interview with Sears Portrait Studio here in town for their Manager position another job I was set for life with and almost at the same wage to start; but I just found out today May 4 from his phone call to me that he is not considering me anymore even though he said I was very qualified to do the job but I was waiting too long with this CP Rail job and he thought I wasn't mature enough for this position!! I was now ready to tell him where to go but like my Mom always told my brother and me If you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all. So I didn't and I started writing this CP Rail story again and no I didn't get it typed before the kids went to school but again like my Dad or Ma would say That's life deal with it!

So here I sit listening to Gordon Lightfoot's Canadian Railroad Trilogy wondering if someone will help me out with my CP Rail predicament, wondering how long my pogeys will last, wondering if I qualify for Social Assistance, wondering if someone will take a chance on me and hire me, wondering if my kids, wife and family still think of me as their Dad, Husband or Son or if I should check myself in to the new fancy hotel on the river bank called "The Les and Irene Dube Center for Health Care" maybe I should. Only time will tell how this "Steel rail blues: The real CP Rail story" will end!

The turtle without a shell

BY TIM MARKLINGER

Once upon a time there were two turtles. They were happy turtles with colorful shells, thick and strong. They lived on the beach.

When they wanted to say hello to each other, they would poke their head out of their shell and say "Hello."

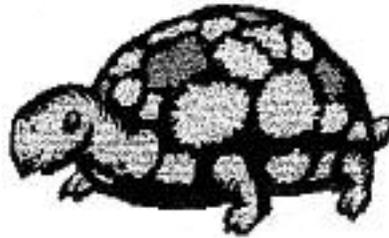
They liked to swim. They liked to walk on the sand.

One day, they had a baby turtle. This turtle was special because it was born without a shell.

This little turtle grew up like any other turtle. He listened to his mom and he listened to his dad. He was loved.

But down the beach were the snapping turtles. They were quick and they liked to bite.

The little turtle was scared of the snapping turtles. He didn't have anything to protect him.



One day he found a clamshell. It looked just like his mom's and dad's shells. He put it on his back. He couldn't wait to show his mom and dad.

They were happy that he was happy. The next day, he walked by the snapping turtles. They still snapped and chased him away.

Scared again, he went back to where he found the clamshell. He found an eagle's beak. He put it on his face and he felt brave and headed back to the beach. He snapped and he snapped but the snapping turtles still chased him away.

Crying he went back to his mom and dad. He asked, "Why don't the snapping turtles like me?"

The dad put him on his lap and the mom said "Because you are a very special turtle. The reason you're not like them is you were born with nothing to hide. Now go and be yourself."



Look in the mirror

BY STACIE MCLEOD

All you women out there who suffer from mental illness, I have a special message to tell you. No, I am not exactly going to say work at MacDonal'd's and clean, volunteer, meet new people and go to school. I do mention that a few times in my article, and I am sure you'll get the message loud and clear.

What I am going to say will help you see who you truly are, even though the world seems cruel and unkind. I will give you a tip which could help you put resumes out and find a job to fit your qualifications. Here's a message that could help you reconcile with your family and be able to forgive. This tiny bit of advice could make you believe you can make good friendships and change the world.

It's not a gratitude novel, writing ten positive things on a piece of paper, or talking to your social worker every day.

It's a little simple technique that only takes ten minutes of your day. It will help you realize that despite the fact that you are on life-long medication, live on welfare, and your days are somewhat limited, you're still a beautiful, strong, lovely and amazing woman, no matter what the world says or how it labels you. So how do you discover that?

Look in the mirror: study your face, older women. Take a good look at your grey hair, wrinkles, scars, dimples and birthmarks. For the young woman, look at your soft glowing hair, your sad and lost eyes, your freckles, your pimples, and clear white or dark skin.

Now you are in a lot of counselling; your doctor is trying to find the right amount of medication. Your social worker is teaching you important skills and how to function normally while you are battling mental illness. When you work you can only earn under a hundred dollars per paycheck, because the government will take any more away.

You have no car, you are too afraid to try new things, and you think you are unworthy to be in a good relationship with a good man.

So how does looking at the mirror solve the problem, ease the pain, and make you forget that you are in a rough and lonely situation?

All you women with long grey hair, wrinkles on your face, scars or birthmarks below your eyebrows, on your chin or close to your nose -- each line, scar or dimple tells a story of how magnificent and amazing you really are.

The wrinkles show you worked hard all your life. You always provided for your children. You washed your family's clothes, put food on the table, and cleaned the entire house. You fed the animals and were employed to help pay the bills.

Even though you could have been a chef, nurse, journalist, or even a doctor, you chose to walk down the aisle with the man you married. You helped give him a warm bed to sleep in, made sure he was taken care of and well provided for.

Your children can experience many adventures, can see the outside world with innocent and curious eyes. They get to play, go to school, and be loved by you and the people around them. Because of you, they have a life and have the opportunity to explore and accomplish many amazing things, and all because you had the courage and the strength to bring them into this world.

If you are a young woman with pimples, freckles, long tangled hair, spotted glasses, a lot of history: your life is about to begin.

You may feel you are stuck in a cage, and your wings have been clipped. You feel like someone pushed you into a dark corner, screaming at you to change. You are scared, confused and uncertain if you can ever meet the demands that have been placed on you.

When you are dealing with mental illness, you have to realize one thing: You have a lot of life ahead of you, and you need to learn that to get back into the swing of life takes effort, support, counseling, and trying to explore new things.

Who is to say you are going to be stuck in rehab? Or be put on pills, or live all your life at a group home?

Your freckles prove that there was time in your life you enjoyed being a kid. Having a water fight under the bright hot sun, wearing your favourite pink bathing suit. Throwing water at friends and family, having a dog chase you. Noticing your parents looking out the window with huge smiles on their faces.

And those pimples show that you already know a little bit about being a woman. You kissed a young cute boy, went on a few dates. Saw a few movies with friends, a few guys have told you they like you. Your parents encouraged you to get a part time job, so you could afford to buy clothes, jewelry, purses, and shoes, and do a little traveling with friends or family.

Your reflection in the mirror proves you already know how to be a normal human being. In order to get the job, get that apartment, or even have more of a happier, busier life, you need to see yourself as the same person you were, tucking your child in bed or going out with your kids to see a family movie.

The same confidence you had back then you need to rekindle now. Life is too short to let the label of mental illness tear you down, oppress you, and shame you to the point you don't see yourself as a person or believe you will be happy again.

I didn't want to have the label of mental illness either; I wanted to be normal like everyone else, and I didn't enjoy being told what I could do or couldn't do by people who didn't believe in me. As a kid I always wanted so badly to get married, apply for a daycare job, and one day own my own home. To this day, I still want that. I want my dreams to come true so much that my heart beats harder, my brain gets all confused and cloudy. All of a sudden my body tingles with excited nerves.

*This tiny bit
of advice could
make you
believe you
can make good
friendships
and change
the world.*

What life really boils down to is having confidence, self-esteem, and a good sense of self worth.

When I look at my reflection, I see a talented young beautiful inside and out girl who can make a man happy, be a good mother, and have more of a better life.

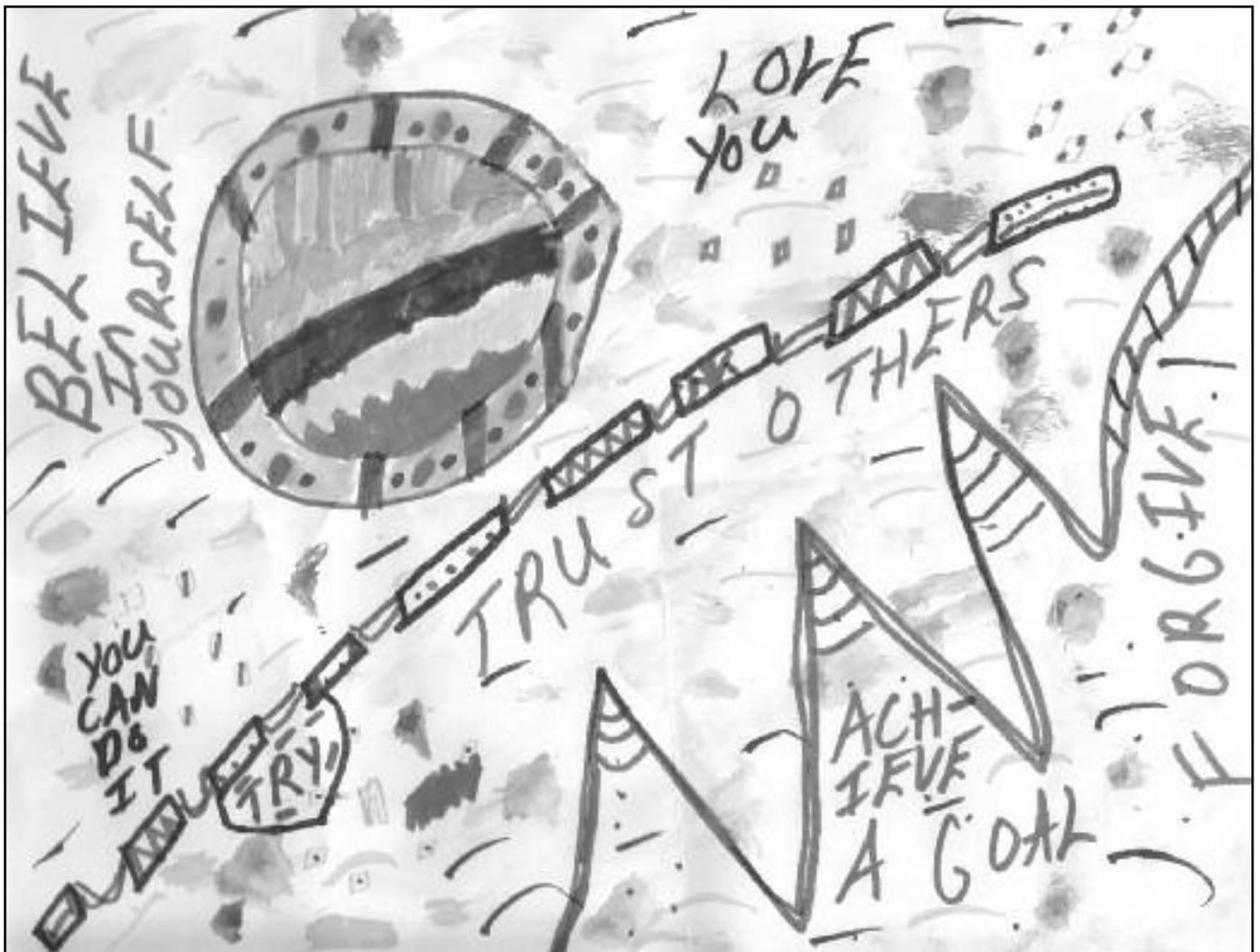
But if that day doesn't come, I am going to laugh, smile, tease, write and show compassion to people who could use my smiles, hear my amusing stories, and read one of my articles. When I am sad, lonely, and discouraged, I could phone one of my close friends. We could get together to drink coffee, eat some spaghetti, garlic toast, a tossed salad, and chocolate cake, then watch a movie.

Sometimes life has other plans, or circumstance leads in another direction. It doesn't mean I am less of a person or a complete failure. I just have to learn to enjoy my family, my friends, and my volunteer work, and continue building my career as a writer. It doesn't do any good to say I am a failure when I have everything I need.

If you want to be around people, work, own your own

place, and see more of the world, you first have to see yourself as an amazing person who can do whatever you set your mind to, no matter what people say about you or how the world labels you. You can still be happy, accomplish some of your goals, try new things, and discover what you are capable of doing. All you have to do is look in the mirror, like what you see, and believe you're still an important person.

This world has many amazing adventures to experience, good memories to create, and new people to meet. Once you step out into this world, you'll see your surroundings in a new way. But first you have to love yourself. Do what you want and say, 'I can do this.' What life really boils down to is having confidence, self-esteem, and a good sense of self worth. Without these important things, your life will be hard, even though there is a good life out there for you. So look in the mirror, see yourself in a positive light, and do what's right for you. All you have to do is learn to like what you see.



ART BY STACIE MCLEOD



The last call

BY JILL SADOWSKY

When we talk to G-d, it's called prayer.

When G-d talks to us, it's called schizophrenia. Lily Tomlin.

Israel. Friday, January 18, 1996

I brewed my morning coffee, poured some into my favorite blue mug, and then sat down to scan the morning headlines in the Hebrew newspaper.

The telephone rang at 8:05. I leapt to answer it, but it was not my son, David, it was Inspector Cohen from the Petach Tikvah police station.

Our son died three months short of his 34th birthday. That haunted being found his way to a deserted construction site, and on the coldest, wettest night of the year, threw himself off the scaffolding of an unfinished building. My son, David, was long gone, dying bit by bit over the 16 year period of his fight against schizophrenia.

For me, the question: "How many children do you have?" is a hard one to answer. Although I normally respond: "Two daughters," I didn't always have two children. I had a son, David, who died at the age of 34 after losing his last battle with paranoid schizophrenia. His life was measured by before, when he lived in the world with us, and after, the long years he lived in hell with demons tormenting him till the end when he removed himself from both worlds, leaving a place in my heart where tears flow.

I did not understand what went wrong; when it started to go wrong. "Classic," the psychiatrists said. What did we know of this illness, classic or not? We had barely come across the name schizophrenia. In Israel, where David grew up, mental illness was what the shell-shocked of Holocaust survivors had to deal with, what soldiers in arms suffered from. It conjured up no images that we could remotely associate with our good-looking, strapping, six-foot first-born on his surfboard.

In a strange way, with no preconceptions and having faith in modern medicine, we understood that, like appendicitis, with the proper treatment, our son would get better. It was a medical condition and the same way that many cancers are resistant to some treatments and responsive to others we were sure that David could be treated successfully. And mostly, we understood that just as we could not cause AIDS or cancer, we could not cause schizophrenia. We put our faith in the army of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists and orderlies.

David joined the Israeli army with a medical profile of 97, the highest score possible. His first cry for help came during his three-year compulsory army service when he took an overdose of pills. He'd refused to sign on to do an officer's course and was coerced into doing so. Incredibly, he was returned to his unit despite his misery. Oh, if we had only known how miserable he'd been. He received his honorable discharge at the age of twenty-one from his unit on schedule, with a reduced pro-

file, of course.

He started and stopped various business ventures which didn't seem too unusual. The transition to civilian life often takes time. When he began studying at the Tel Aviv University and requested earplugs, we were impressed that he was so intent on blocking out his neighbor's radio to concentrate on his studies. How could we have known that he was trying to still the voices within his head? I only know that after being hospitalized for a year, we heard the diagnosis. Then he was discharged. This all came as a shock to us as we'd had little explanation of what we were up against. We believed that David would emerge healthy.

He was given Thorazine, Haldol, Mellaril. He tried psychotherapy, occupational therapy, group therapy yet he continued to be out of focus, angry, hostile then suddenly apathetic and listless. He stopped worrying about how he looked until he finally appeared on the outside like the wild man clawing at him from within.

Our two young daughters started shying away from their older brother. They stopped bringing friends home, visited him in the hospital less, and steered away from him at home as they suddenly became afraid of him – so were their friends. We started family therapy at the hospital.

"What can we do to help David?" we asked.

"What do you think you should do?"

"We don't know what to do when he gets violent and abusive."

"Tell us what you do."

The girls are afraid to have friends over as we never know when David will start ranting or how he will react."

Act normally."

I wondered whether this was what they spent ten years on in graduate school.

David took Clozapine and Risperidal but they did not turn out to be the miracle drug we were after. We tried living with him at home, allowing him to get on with his life, as one psychiatrist put it. Then we rented an apartment for him as no group home would take anyone who was not working even a few hours a day. We ended up paying for two homes, two cleaning persons and two telephone lines. I was left doing our laundry at home as well as my son's. I cooked David's favorite foods at home to stock his otherwise empty refrigerator and often stood by and watched as he threw out the food, convinced that I was poisoning him. And sometimes, he stayed in his apartment for days, filling us with dread, wondering what he was up to. Other times he came home to crash in his old room. Then I worried that he might suddenly turn hostile.

Meanwhile, our daughters did without: without enough time and energy from us, without vacations and parties at home, without frills and extras where every available shekel was poured into another prescription, another treatment, a different psychiatrist. My husband and I did without too. We minded less.

We tried private, out-of-hospital doctors. We turned to

I promised myself that one day I would write a book explaining what the appropriate things to say to someone with a chronically ill child are . . .

friends and family for support but it appeared that although we knew that David was ill, to most of the world, he was crazy, undeserving of much attention. Our 13-year old summed it up with; "If David's body were hurting, people would send gifts, but because it is his mind, they throw bricks." Many friends called less and visited less; not because they no longer cared, but because they did not know what to say. Many people asked about David when we were attending functions when I was so desperately trying to think of something other than the ravages of schizophrenia. How were they to know? I promised myself that one day I would write a book explaining what the appropriate things to say to someone with a chronically ill child are, as well as to parents who have lost a child.

And then we were thrust into the stigma blame loop. "She's the one with the crazy son. Maybe he's crazy because she is?"

And I wanted to shout; "But I have healthy daughters. Are they healthy because I am?"

And all the time in the background and often in the foreground, David was alternately withdrawn or aggressive, often tearing us apart with his recurring taunt; "I'll dance on your graves."

For sixteen years we searched for a way to help him and for sixteen years we looked for just one health care worker who would sit with us, explain things to us, guide us and include us. I needed someone to show me that they cared. We were kept at arm's length; "Patient confidentiality, you know." Did those same doctors realize that the David who said such hurtful things about us said equally horrific things about them? We should have all been working as one. At one session, David pulled out the grubby notebook he carried with him at all times, turned to a page in the middle and asked me to read out a poem he'd written.

*Autumn is drawing near
Soon I'll see the leaves falling.
Autumn, I am waiting for you
because the summer is lost.*

*There is no sea, no sun
no sunbathing, no swimming
Here I am, waiting for the
leaves to fall from the trees
to symbolize winter's arrival.*

*And so, spring, summer, autumn, winter
I'm stuck in the same place.
Doctors refuse to help me
and leave me in the same spot.*

The silence in that hospital office was palpable until the psychologist said;

"You only speak about David at these family sessions"

I was unable to reply as I needed to recover from what

David had read to us.

I hope that health care workers learn the importance of a kind word and the offer of hope to the patient and family in continual crisis. No one can live without hope. If the general readership gains insight and compassion for the plight of a



CLIMB BY HENRY PETERS



family coping with mental illness, David's plea to understand his demons will not have been in vain

As a mother mourning for her only son's mental health situation, I make a promise to myself to fight the stigma of schizophrenia. I am simultaneously longing for my handsome, sporty son while coping with his soul destroying mental illness. This mother's pain will penetrate any parent's heart. I write about institutions and police stations instead of about work and social events, the everyday places the rest of my friends encounter their twenty something children.

Dreams of a police officer training program begin to take shape in my mind as I realize that the horror of my encounters between mental illness and the law may be something I can prevent for future victims of mentally ill people and their families. I have tried to turn my personal tragedy into hope for others.

"Don't you have other problems other than David?" the psychiatric intern asked.

I burst out. "Don't you understand that schizophrenia is all-consuming, all-encompassing, dictating our have-to-be-coordinated timetables so that someone is always available for David's needs? We visit, take numerous phone calls every day, step in when there are crises. Do you really think that we

believe that this is a good, healthy way to live? Help us help David and then we can talk about other problems."

Eventually I discovered how many families are torn apart by the 'identified patient.' I discovered how many marriages dissolve as blame and guilt become the parents' daily fare. Our family held together, sometimes barely, but then, we never for a moment felt that we were to blame, that anybody was guilty. Too many families living with a schizophrenia sufferer are consumed with both. And, too often, the doctors seem to assume that they should feel that way even as they try to help them work it through. I wonder whether they make parents of cancer patients feel that bad too.

A social worker vetoed David's participation in a workshop and I asked; "What can we do when he doesn't take his medication?"

"I don't know," she answered. "He seems to be medication resistant but, you must try not to upset him."

"To do that," I replied. "We'd have to avoid scratching, walking, talking out loud, moving. We'd have to allow him to live with the stench of urine in the bathroom, sheets that are never laundered."

"Oh" she added. "And you must never let him hurt you."



PHOTO BY JAMES SKELTON

We tried to live on hope at first – hope for an easy cure, then hope for any cure, then hope for a miracle cure but that was not to be.

“I am 5ft. 6 ins. And weigh 120 pounds. My daughters are 13 and 16. My husband’s strength comes from within; besides, he’s at work during the day. Perhaps you should send us a supply of pre-filled syringes and teach us how to knock him out the way an orderly does in the hospital when he gets agitated.

To this day we have no idea of how we were supposed to deal with David at his craziest. Obviously when he took his meds, and they were working for a while, we didn’t need help nor when the David of joy and love erupted through his illness and we could laugh and relax. But, after 16 years, we realized that the only options under stress that all the trained professionals could offer had nothing to do with medical science. The first was to keep a straight jacket on hand and the second was to employ two orderlies. Of course we could always call the police.

Oh how many times we had to call the police. And then there were the times that they called us, like when David suddenly threw a large boulder at a passing car, or hit an elderly woman on the bus. Does anyone have an idea of what it takes for a mother to come to the conclusion that she is so powerless to deal with her child that she has to turn on him and then turn him in, in order to protect whatever sanity she has left to protect the rest of her family? And always asking myself; is this real? So we called police. And then followed the forced hospitalizations, the hearings, the warrants and the reviews, all ending in the same place: a straight jacket, two orderlies and a hypodermic.

Once again, how I longed for a word of comfort during the long years we struggled with mental illness.

During the times when David was released, we tried a sheltered workshop but David was deemed too ill. We tried to live on hope at first – hope for an easy cure, then hope for any cure, then hope for a miracle cure but that was not to be. We wanted David’s doctor to offer a glimmer of hope to us, to him. Everyone needs a corner of hope. But they could not offer a word of comfort to any of us. And to this day, I don’t understand what psychiatry’s answer is to schizophrenia.

In retrospect, I don’t know how it was possible but the word chronic only crept into the diagnosis years later.

One day David yelled; “I don’t take medication because I’m ill because I take medication.” Nonetheless, he started to take it religiously, desperate to get well, unable to sleep without it, lethargic and sleepy even when awake. My husband and I were never warned about the side effects of David’s medication and this occurred before I bought a computer and learned to surf the net.

Despairing of professionals, we joined a parents’ support group. We met in a bomb shelter, the only available space we could find and sat in a semi-circle with other parents. Every single one of them knew what David’s illness was doing both to him and to our family. We shared our grief, anger, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness freely with them. A year later, it became clear how much I needed that group but it was difficult for us to express our deepest feelings in Hebrew. So, on a

voluntary basis, I started a self-help support group for English speakers who were sharing our hell. We opened under the auspices of the Israeli Mental Health Association, ENOSH. Before long, our numbers swelled to twenty participants while the ENOSH social workers wondered what damage we might be doing behind our closed doors. None of us wanted a professional to run the group but together with the woman running the group with me, we consulted with a social worker when we felt the need. We invited the odd psychiatrist or psychologist to talk to us but as they had little practical advice to offer in the field of coping with a mentally ill child at home, we changed direction.

The session on humor was very successful as it showed how to deflect tension. My husband did this naturally but I seldom managed. We invited someone to teach us relaxation techniques and I used them often. We encouraged the healthy siblings of our sick children to talk to the group about living with a mentally ill brother or sister. We cried with them as we listened and learned. They begged us not to push them to seek help as they had sat by watching us all drag our sick child from one doctor to another with little success. They insisted that if and when they needed psychological guidance, they would ask for it. Only now, in the year 2009, one of our daughters has written a manuscript entitled *Living with a Mentally Ill Brother*.

The group helped me deal with the terrible anger I was carrying around inside that was destroying me. I was angry at David, at the doctors and at all the people who did not understand our grief and who so often said the wrong thing.

The director of David’s hospital asked two of us to talk to his staff which we did. Our main message? Work with the parents, help them fight the stigma accorded mental illness. Teach them what we learned at our support group – take one day at a time.

Most important of all, make sure that every parent out there knows that parents cannot cause schizophrenia no matter what society and some professionals may imply. I shared my regret that I had never had a real chance to say goodbye to my son, David. He’d disappeared into the illness so imperceptibly.

Three times David tried to take his life. Three times he stockpiled the pills doled out under *close supervision* in the hospital. My David, my beautiful son whom I’d carried in my womb for nine months, to whom I gave life and what I thought was the promise of a good life, tried to kill himself over and over. He wanted to get better. He wanted a girlfriend, someone to love who would love him. But most of all, he needed peace of mind.

Three months short of his 34th birthday, my son finally came to the conclusion that the David who had been sparring with demons the past 16 years would never know that peace of mind again. Unless . . . and so he threw himself to what we can only hope is a place of calm, peace and endless waves fit for a surfer.

I love you David, rest.
1962 – 1966



Kept

BY CARLA BRAIDEK

I keep myself between pages of books
take quick peeks between work and supper
sometimes settle in for a good read just before bed

I keep myself in the rich scent of a beeswax candle
swirl the aroma through my life trying to retain
some of the glow cast by the flame

I keep myself in the black spruce cone: small and tight
reluctant to tear from the branch but surviving
extreme conditions and acidic soil

I keep myself in prisms
shattered by a random touch of light
prepared to dance up walls

I keep myself in a small wooden box
next to stones on the windowsill
content against the wave of the grain

Keep myself in an old woollen sweater
unravelling myself bit by bit
I kept

This Bit Of Music

BY GORD BRAUN

here is

a little space where I'm not hating
where I'm satisfied with what I've got
where this bit of music is enough
all that needs to be understood
all that's needed, to live

let it stay here
and if it goes
let me know enough to love it again
next time it passes by

let my daily doom-sayer
not dismiss it
and sink me again

and let these words not crumble it
with their damned analysis



ART BY JAMES SKELTON

Two Voices

BY GORD BRAUN

1.
It's better to leave things alone. It's best to disregard.
She didn't mean to put me down. He didn't hit me hard.

I maybe had it coming. And they need me, so I'll stay.
I stay because I love them. And they're not always this way.

You make too big a deal of this for everything is fine.
There is no problem to be fixed. And all the fault is mine.

2.
I'm nothing but the victim here. At me the rocks are hurled.
Showing him and showing her, that's how I show the world.

We keep it in the family and we keep it under wraps.
You didn't hear the angry words. You didn't see the slaps.

He makes me mad, she asks for it. So don't be so obtuse.
I'm only trading hurt for hurt, therefore it's not abuse.

Waking

BY GORD BRAUN

O sweet blessed Waking
after a night's sleep,
if anything deserves praise,
a poem, it's you

I lie here in bed and for a little while
my mind is cleansed
of yesterday and yesterday's . . .
new possibilities

Even in my used-up things
you are faith renewed, though delicate
innocent as I was when a child,
forgiving like my mother

You want to live,
for me to do likewise,
giving hope
that needs no proofs

My body and I --
we leave you, let you down,
break your heart
soon after we rise



I'd love to drown in my own abyss

BY DELANEY BRUYERS

I'd love to drown in my own abyss
Like a poplar smothered by the leaves
Of its own vividness
I'd love to fall completely in love like
Cold Autumn leaves waiting to be blanketed
By the comforting warmth and unconditional
Love shown by October snow
I'd love to be that dying undergrowth
Looking up at the thriving life above
Knowing in my heart that one day
The best is yet to come
I'd love to be as enlivening as that
Rare vaccine given to a sick child in need
My purpose being here cut short
But remembered by a sweet ending
I'd love to be as strong as that weightless
Stone that manages to hold on, and to withstand
The shoving hands of a raging river, powerless
When it comes to its own downfall
I'd love to be as sporadic as the ants
That travel the land without a fixed destination
Planned and just as faithful when it comes to the
Impending dangers that loom above
I'd love to be and grateful to be reincarnated
As that glistening sparkle that's now fully alive
Inside my angel's eyes as she absorbs that last
Memory bequeathed before my demise
(her loyalty and faith is no longer required)
I'd love to be as enthusiastic as the feelings
Held captive inside, waiting to introduce myself
Without a resentful temperament, to reunite with
The one who's terrified of love's company
I'd love to be able one day to express my true
Feelings in the poetry I write
Instead of writing about these feelings that are
Not my own - and what I mean by saying that
Is that I want to feel them as my own
And not simply by thought alone

Scarlet skies

BY ANNA CATES

Once upon a time, she walked
beside the purple lilac bushes
and Kwanzan flowering cherry trees
into the woods
under the shadows beside the bog
among the pussy willows and cattails,
the brook burbling with crawdads
then icing over in winter like faeries's lace.

She trod the woodland path,
checking toadstools for gnomes,
her mind a Kaleidoscope of innocent dreams—
plastic toys that meant so much,
ponies crayoned green,
life still all magic.

Now the swing wags emptily in the wind.
The garden overgrows with weeds.
The house fades away into the countryside
with secrets to keep —
there is a kind of death
that makes the angels weep.

She used to have a nightmare
of falling through the dark,
terrified of hitting bottom,
terrified too of bears and wolves,
crawling through the bedroom window
from the blackness outside.

Then the dreaming ended.
Night turned into blood,
a scarring of stars and wind,
scratching out the sign,
foul as a goat's hoof,
memories a mess of merds.

Nothing but scarlet skies!
First a field of daisies
then a garbage heap—
there is a kind of death
that makes the angels weep.



For want of a nail

BY GARY CHAPPELL

we sat in his plain greasy kitchen
I in my bell-bottoms
he in a bad polyester jacket

his mid-morning dash home from work
for 'breakfast'
three fingers of whiskey, neat

been thinking of killing myself
he said, like chatter about the weather
with a close friend, which I wasn't

why the hell would you do that? I countered
but he was already half out the door
the question hanging in the air

years later, the phone rings
his brother's voice
words flat as a gravestone

*did you hear? he shot four inches of his
backbone out the window
they planted him last week - I didn't go*

a final exit from his last kitchen
no one there to grab him
by the collar

my question still drifts
against his kitchen walls
leaves smears of dried tears

My toolbox

BY CANDACE LUCEY

Father held the key to our shed
where the tools were kept for men only.
Forbidden
though for mother or me
to hold them
was too phallic. As though we wanted
to be like them.

When I asked to push the mower
so that I could own the consuming sound
the men ran outside with yellow extension cables,
like crime scene tape
guarding me from noisy blades
that could devour anger
mulch, grind and spit it out.

Roosters
with forked steel crests flung back
hammering metal pins like the ones
in the paneled prison
of home.

I would have prised them out
buried their glint deep in plaster.
To clutch the heavy rubber-covered handle
would have changed the shape of my hand forever.

I was desperate to clench a wrench
to twist, loosen, tighten
kill fury on the edge of a bolt,
learn to piece something together
my whole weight and gravity
pushing against resistance.

Lead scales
beneath my apron
caught the grit of hidden hopelessness
particles, small as germs, flying
from the end of a workbench.
Invaders embedded, festering.
My flesh itched for the scrape of sandpaper
against skin.





Endless shrieks now . . . homeless

BY MIN KO LOI

you were once
a tree fearless
against torrid winds
the shrillness
our enemy's searing
howl
unyielding you
pitched your scream
your green pride
voice railing
arms
cursing
forced invisible fingers
prided them
kept them
from ripping my clothes
skin
now
shredded
you are fleshy
mute pulp
a pummelled mash
endless
cheap matchsticks
splintered heads flying
phosphorescence flaring
ripping darkness small
roars melting impossible
holes
countless
my only
raincoat
blistered
wet memory
trembling



LOST FROM GONE "MENTAL" BY MIN KO LOI



WORTHLESS FROM GONE "MENTAL" BY MIN KO LOI

Eight prose poems

BY ADAM STAITE

CON-ASH COAST

Apathetic's when life beats ya down leaves ya ass at less than nothing if at best I've been here way too long I'm losing my goddamn mind For no way will life let me gain with what I've got Drowning thoughts of what was then back when Must be out your bitch-ass mind

My frustrations burning so much makes hate boil in my brain Crazy writing / wanting the need / means to blast meteors upon your brains So much anger pain feels so bad it's as hells razors make up my veins Give anything if I had it, to feel that gift of life and self once gained nothing's more when drowned with despair and anguish left in the heat of battle Those cowards should have been the ones to burn Angels demons hellfire the brimstone hail that will be my resting peace

IGNORANT

While lying back living it upside down spending smoking like I 'n earth don't mean shit Check rewind that message wasn't feeling right Sitting here trying to be powerful enough to handle this Switch me controllers we'll change sides oh wait that can't happen you're still spitting/spilling shit out It's all that matters kindness sincerity being free something that will definitely never be living like china shop bulls In this whack-ass machine.

KNOCK! KNOCK! DEATH THERE?

Thinking you're great your pride so high All need trip to death's door knock on it for awhile death is infinite all power no remorse you can wait I'm tired don't care to quickly clean the lost and found Let go till you realize life more than just who you are Would love the wait with you all instead rushing the unanswered doors Trying to take all that is from those who have yet to visit it Waiting is natural running clumsy slip/trip through the doors you won't be leaving with your soul's damn fine gift Dreams Hell Paradise Whichever you choose it's great to fight back along with it

STRAIN

My body aches pain severs mental and physical break walls to access the spirit the will to desire life lies on the bottom of my heart deep within Brain switch breaks self worth activate at same time your body feels numb eyes flicker about to pass out heart 'n mind ready to burst TV off trying to come down slowly hurts too much turn around legs buckle thoughts stop back to black maybe not only for a nap (I hope)

SUFFOCATE

Many come 'n go family friend's killers just those who are them. So back well protected tight a choker chain is noose snug tight kitties security blanket Faces are even better than the stickers Don't carry guns nor blades if that's them then subdue the problems or go berserk madness drives you to throw sticks 'n stones Fire child been back-stabbed dragged thrown through all sorts of wastes Been long 'n rough Done good once Rest's been bitter and sour It's what you get when cook's a scav serves nothing more than ground beef Been no justice to this murder they got off skunk free I sense - feel their stench when near

SURGE

Don't want to be part of this world's disorder Greeting death feels best way to order free it from contamination We're plaques to this beauty get back on a field you know how to play cause trying to swim or float in my ocean of sorrow will just get you drowned When all's broken there's none left to fix no floating device of courage stands up to fear of bombs drowning in oil leaves us so numb

TROUBLESHOOTING

As I lie another weak-ass day in my bed spirit disguised worry of a closer end with my soul Lying here my body my head hurt from dry days I lie they start reacting a force as I lie fall sleep pictures pain all that were to be fixed Glimpses flash a body lying in dark body 'n mind Torture starts painting new displays a wicked force body lay as did mine Pierces begin aching rumbling so did mine Bodies shook 'n shook fury rocking back 'n forth energy ripped from each limb Six orbs light three from legs two from body one from the head Confusing Confusing what this never had anything reach me this way There it is again chanting Life Death live with no will but always scream fuck you All foe the world Grim reaper titles you foes to this world.

WE'RE CLOSED TOO!

Life all too real loathe the way I feel even as deeply falling into sadness 'n shame willing heart – desire held back by all that's been shattered 'n scattered hearts forever dying in so many questions with no answers Y am I Yara my binding is fading dark now only mask this face smiles Demise of others is the happiness the sadness calls forth Everything to feel 'n be Wanting make right this . . . myself everyone's near 'n far True peace the only struggle chaining me Hear starboard wish . . . Me Which's practically impossible to achieve That day new reckoning to reek across these lands

How I met myself at the Institute after I left the Institute

BY JAMES TRETOWER

i

At the Institute
policies of preclusive privacy prevail
protection of proprietary information paramount.

Sweat off your back, a literal sanction
abrasive paper-tissues sop
said sweat, wring salty drip

per
salty
drip
into a petri-dish

mix with a mere one hundred
cc's of your blood extracted
in standard style
Ms Herbert, RN come med tech says
(this won't hurt a bit)

add a dash of grey matter
absorbed by the cylindrical, mushroom-headed Synaptic
Transfer Device (don't fuss so, we're taking so little)

sapping mentally encoded said proprietary
tidbits (no, I can't tell you how it works, it's proprietary)
releases spores of thought into the dish's
organic cocktail.

Low voltage currents pass
through bared red and green cable pair of copper
wires energizing this slow-swirling, filigree stew

add to the recipe two strands of DNA
(they're teeny-tiny, merely ensuring no organic rejection
upon restoration)

when thoughts are returned
next morning, after an evening away
and I'm allowed to continue my toiling
moils by my high-rise office windows
and experience the vista.

i a.

(Why, you ask? Biometric backup, of course. We
borrow a few select thoughts -- remember
you get them back -- to prevent you
from inadvertently squawking Institute intelligence
after one too many brewskis.

Did I mention
we need a morsel of your liver for protein

development of undifferentiated cells
'just in case.'

Hold still now.)

The scalpel glints silver.

ii

I drudge through decades
vistaing drear days for a healthy sum
couldn't bear to care, for I had none
until

I fall

into your almond eyes
green-flecked irises reflect verdant
abundance beyond vague, heat-wave rising
city desolation viewed from my office tower
the occasional plane gouts black
in pristine sky above a world of polycarbonate
and polyester.

ii a

You take me to a dry-land's meandering stream
in a lush glacial valley, we enthrall in the natural
world, travel from that green
dale to northern boreal forests, find sand
dunes by a lake flowing over the horizon
circle south west
to deserts crawling with life, find
rolling hills and pine forests in highest
elevations east of the Rockies, sojourn
the immense eastern flat, where we see
over the edge of the world.

ii b.

Through our travels and titillations
I remember I forgot
to return to the Institute and mention
it to you.

You ask -- first assuring me
I have not overstayed my welcome,
I was definitely something better
to do and you hoped you were too
you're just asking -- while we linger
naked under soothing sheets
did I really want to go back?
to return there? I assure

... *continued*



you are something better to do too, yet
I am committed, bound
by oaths both long and short
and didn't they take something from me?
Perhaps I should discover
the cost of this possible loss?

I must leave you in our commodious
abode by a prairie poplar bluff, northwest
breeze blows, I promise
I will return to you

but please don't make it overlong ... you say you'll wait,
you don't wish
to find someone else.

iii

I return to swirling Institute Street
flounder against black-clad eddies of humanity
flowing over asphalt and concrete
past pillars and posts and a girl
with a pink gel pen.

I mount the vestibule of my tower find
access denied.

Over there, I appear to smile and wave
in a mirror in the distance

no mere
reflection but an usurping doppelganger
who enters the inner foyer
leaves me wondering why
I see myself disappearing into an elevator's maw?

iii a.

I have to ask.

iv

Ms Herbert says that I
(didn't come back so we've managed
a new 'you' from tidbits left behind.
I see you're doing fine without
them and the other 'you' up
there, now experiencing your
surrendered vista, has only proprietary perceptions
not muddled mind clutter.

That 'you' disclaims healthy
sums and sleep
neither eats nor defecates
and oh, what washroom-sundry savings
since the dis-continuity of your presence

please leave.)

epilogue

What was Institute lost matters
least, or not -- and mustn't be at the mercy
of what matters most

I hasten back for I choose not to lose
you too, who
by preference, waits patiently for me
in the prairie breeze.



HUMOROUS ?



LUCKY ?



RELIGIOUS ?



MENTALLY ILL ?

FACES BY JAMES SKELTON



The shape of breaking

BY LYNN CECIL

Raucous birdcalls shatter Olivia's sleep like bodies slamming into glass and she bolts awake, groping at the air and her thoughts for something intangibly lost. Then she remembers. Her stomach clenches with guilt, harbouring relief that it was Marlyn's daughter who was hit by a car three days ago, and not one of her own children.

In the morning half-light the room seems submerged, aqueous, and for a moment Olivia imagines unstitching the fabric of routine, floating away. For once she would like to stay in bed, sleep soundly without dreams, awaken without a sense of drowning.

She hasn't been to the hospital, yet. Can't walk through the corridors with their heady musk of blood and gauze, recycled air and latex. Doesn't want to think about Marlyn sitting next to Jill, scanning the machines for signs of life. Hospitals are where lives start to fall apart.

She settles back against the pillows, senses the warmth of Calvin's body fading from the sheets, marking another night turned away from each other, the gap between them wider than the span of the bed. Outside, the birds screech and cackle like disapproving neighbours.

A rhythm, like sudden rain, begins behind the bedroom wall. Olivia pictures Calvin in the shower, his olive skin reddening in the hot water, sees herself slipping in, circling her arms around him, kissing bristled neck hairs, her hands seeking a truce. *No*, she whispers. He'll have locked the door.

"Mom!" An urgent and distant voice. "Come here!"

"Get your father," Olivia mumbles beneath the covers, smothering her head with Calvin's pillow, the weight of the morning already heavy.

"Mom!" Her daughter Nikia rips off the blankets and knocks away the pillow. "Get up!"

Olivia blinks. "*What*, Nikia? Can't you let Mommy sleep?" Pulled out of bed Olivia allows herself to be led down the hallway, awed by the power her daughter hoards in her small body, her insistent voice.

"Is she still moving, Kev?"

"Yeah—she's alive," Kevin yells from the sunroom.

"*Who* is?" Olivia whispers, stumbling in the sudden light. Below the window lies a chickadee in the snow, its feathers ruffled as if by tiny, hurried fingers. "Did you see it happen, kids?"

"Yes." Nikia squeezes between her mother and Kevin on the loveseat. "It went *thunk!*"

"I thought it was going to crash right through the glass. Something's happening to the birds." Kevin's eyes flash a feverish blue. "It's like they're delirious—look. Seven dead."

"Seven?" Olivia follows Kevin from window to window as he points out the birds, feathers whorled, necks bent, eyes dulled. As abstractions, they are almost beautiful, but still Olivia shivers. When she was five, she accidentally stepped on a bloated gull at a beach with her bare feet. She still recalls the stench of the body as it deflated, like rancid sausage and rot-

ting fish.

They return to the loveseat and Olivia watches the sky rise and break, dark wings like solid shadows. She hopes Calvin will gather the birds in the garden so she won't have to see them, deal with them. She wouldn't, anyway. She'd ignore them, hoping they'd disappear on their own.

"She's dying, Mom." Kevin touches the windowpane, tracing the bird's outline, invisible on the warm glass.

Olivia stares at her ten-year-old son, makes a move to brush back the hair falling across his face, but stops herself. To



ART BY HENRY PETERS

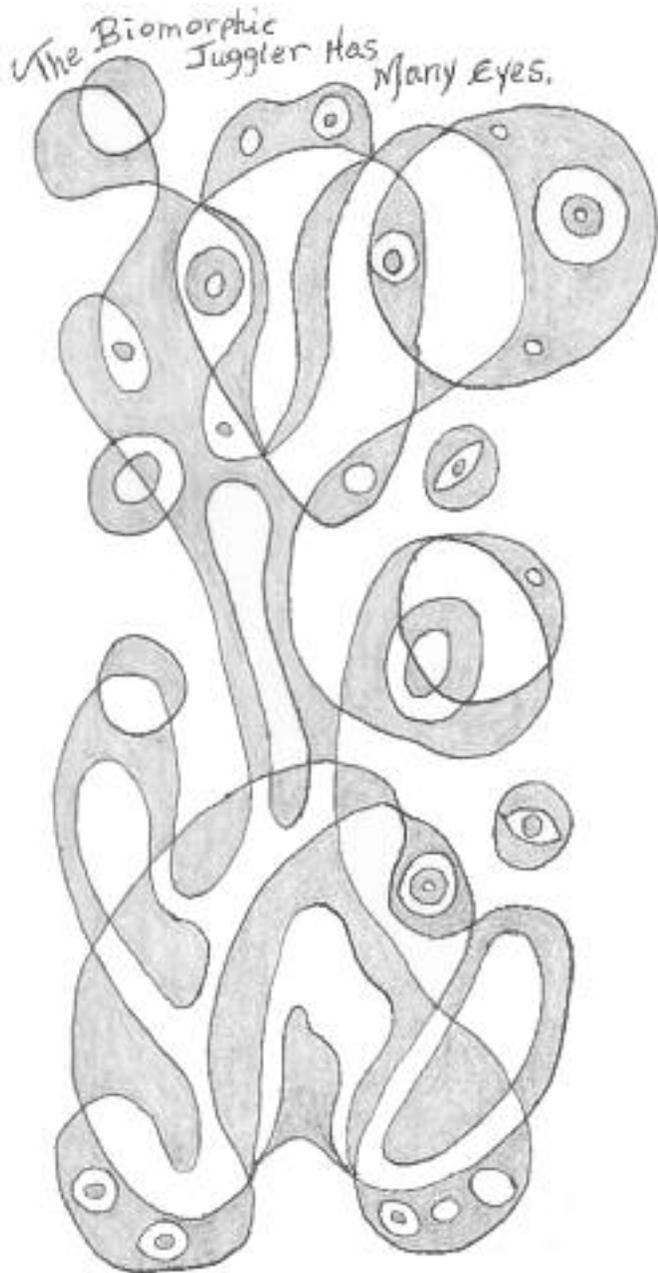
. . . all Olivia has received from a few curious women in the elevator are candied words glazing pickled glances.

see a friend hit—Kevin was only a few steps behind Jill when a car ran the red light in front of the school. It could just as easily have been Kevin.

A rush of wings grazes the windows and a flock of sparrows alights on the lilac bush, seed husks falling like delicate flecks of burnt air.

“See!” Kevin yells, scrambling off the loveseat. Nikia clutches at Olivia.

“You’re afraid of them, aren’t you, Mom?” Nikia says, dark eyes flashing.



ART BY HENRY PETERS

“Terribly.” Olivia tries to laugh. She focuses on the silver-grey threads of trees loosely stitching sky to snow.

“I’m hungry,” Nikia announces, turning abruptly away from the window. “I want toast and—brown sugar!”

“How about toast and peanut butter?” Olivia suggests, following Nikia into the kitchen.

Kevin rushes from the sunroom. “Dad! Where are you going? It’s a holiday.”

“It is?” Olivia asks, trying to remember. She searches the erasable fridge calendar—Good Friday. Glances guiltily at her children. The Easter Bunny hasn’t bought any eggs yet.

“Work, buddy.” Calvin tousles Kevin’s hair. “We’ll do something later today, just you and me, okay?”

“Sure.”

“Me, too?” Nikia asks, and Olivia clutches a bag of bread, glances hungrily at Calvin, almost repeats her daughter’s words.

“Of course.” Calvin looks at Olivia, seems to hesitate.

“You can’t possibly have to work today—it’s a holiday, Cal.” Olivia says.

“O—” Calvin sighs and kicks off his shoes. He walks over towards Olivia, leans on the open fridge door to talk. “I’m going for a drive.” He lowers his voice. “I’ll try to be back by lunch. I just need to think about what you said last night.”

Olivia feels the bag of bread slip from her hands. She had told him he should leave if he wasn’t happy.

Calvin glances at his watch. “I’ll be back soon. Kids, be good.”

Kevin locks the door behind his father and yells, “I’m going to play Nintendo.” He disappears downstairs.

Nikia picks up the bread, hands it to her mother. “Wait for me! I want to play, too.”

Slumping hard against the fridge, pulling Nikia’s drawings with her to the floor, Olivia closes her eyes, feeling sidelined, not quite whole, like she’s twenty-seven-years old again, back in Calgary and can barely sit down, not without a donut pillow, even two weeks after giving birth. The stitches are supposed to fall out on their own, or dissolve. When she touches them she feels a meshed web that couldn’t possibly ever resemble real flesh again.

The baby, a boy, is crying, but she can’t will herself to go to him, to pick him up, nurse him, even though she can feel her milk soaking into her breast pads. She folds her arms hard across her chest to staunch the flow. Her fingers are tingling and she squeezes them into a fist. Calvin returned to work a day after the birth, designing too-tall buildings with stackable floors, glass walls mere illusions like water easily traversed into air. Buildings that make Olivia sick, like she’s stepped into a vortex simply by imagining their existence.

If she goes to the baby, brings him into the living room, she will have to pass the sliding glass door of the balcony to sit on the couch. The curtains are drawn closed, but Olivia still sees the door, has imagined unlocking it so many times she can feel the smooth handle, the sharp tug needed to slide it open one-handed, the feeling of concrete on her bare feet, the press



of metal hard against her still swollen belly.

She knows if she makes it this far, she will feel the terrible pull inside her chest, the need to lean over the fourteenth floor railing. And they'll fall, tumbling, soundless except for the displacement of air. She can feel it: the crumpling as they hit the ground; the broken darkness. Like a hunger she cannot satiate, a compulsion she repeatedly envisions, she understands why sometimes people veer into oncoming traffic, step in front of trains—not because they want to die, but because the mind has already completed the act so many times, the body eventually has no choice but to follow.

So she can't. She simply can't pick the baby up, not unless she focuses on getting him out of the apartment, her legs wobbling, stitched perineum throbbing. Down on her knees, crawling, marsupialling the baby inside her sweatshirt, to bring him to the storage room, to the stroller. She's safer, staying low to the floor, less apt to reach for the handle of the sliding glass door.

Once in the windowless hallway, she'll have to scurry past the doors of the other apartments, too many with crumbling dried flowers swagged around the peepholes. In the elevator, when it finally arrives, she'll touch the curves of the baby's face, no longer feeling the need to hold her hands behind her back. Outside, she'll walk around and around the apartment building, drive to the grocery store, the park, a friend's—anything at ground level.

The baby's really crying now—he'll be full of gas and won't feed well. She's waited too long. What if the neighbours hear him? So far, no one has complained. Aging seniors generously populate the building and all Olivia has received from a few curious women in the elevator are candied words glazing pickled glances. She has no one here, in this city far from her hometown. Not even Calvin who spends more time at work than with his family. If she tells anyone what's going on in her head, she'll lose the baby and be locked away. Fear has settled into her cells like inmates, taunting her to go ahead and jump, in voices so loud she sometimes rushes fully clothed into the shower, trying to drown the noise.

She rises unsteadily, slinks past the balcony door to the nursery, once her darkroom. The baby is bright red, his tiny arms and legs rigidly flailing the air with every toothless wail. His blue eyes have disappeared in the creases of his contorted face.

A few days ago, she was still in the hospital, quarantined with the baby since his birth, relegated to a room high above a parking lot, on a ward with the premature babies, their breath raspy and mechanic, ribs like incomplete graphite rubbings on paper skin. Beside the nurses' station: photos of babies, those who lived; those who didn't. The brass plate, like a miniature gravestone on the rocking chair arm in her room: *Riley, rest in peace*. She didn't know who Riley was; didn't want to know, couldn't know, but she sat in his memory chair by the window, gazing at the concrete view below throughout the nights, into the days, listening to monitors, unable to sleep, until she became obsessed with slipping through the glass and tumbling to meet the ground.

Now looking down at the baby, one arm cradling him, one hand anchoring the two of them to the rug in his room, Olivia knows she should switch him to her other breast, but he is sleepy, spent from crying. His mouth puckers at air and he sighs, settling heavily in her arms. When she looks at him, her stomach reacts as if it's being scraped hollow. Every movement is a decision made from a single edge. Move one way and you're safe. Move another and you're not.

Olivia looks up. The diaper bag is on the change table, her keys and shoes are at the front door, the stroller in the storage room. If only she could make it past the glass door without opening it.

A noise startles her and she looks around the kitchen, disoriented. "I shouldn't have stayed," she tells the linoleum floor, alive with the chaotic shadows of birds crisscrossing a patch of sunlight. She reaches out as if to block the moving shadows, remembering the metal bars against her face, the shock of empty arms. Calvin arriving home early that day.

"Where's the baby, O? Where's Kevin?" Calvin's voice unusually frayed.

The strange cry, coming from the front of the apartment.

"What did you do? Leave him in the *storage* room?"

She clutches the balcony railing, unable to stand, knowing if she does, she'll stretch out, try to touch the centre of the sky where nothing solid pins it down, where there are no loose threads. Calvin is already back inside the apartment, moving towards his idea of a rescue.

She sips hot coffee, holds it in her mouth like a sun-warmed stone before swallowing, wanting to feel something other than the clamped fist of her stomach. She wonders how two people can live together for years and not really see each other, not connect. What happened to her and Calvin being co-conspirators, whispering dreams and fears under the covers on Sunday mornings, planning adventures around the world?

When Calvin decided to open a small engineering firm in Regina, the year after Kevin was born, Olivia insisted they move into a bungalow. Gradually she started feeling like she could breathe again, walk through rooms freely without fear of windows, of the open spaces beyond them. Lately though, since Nikia started grade one in the fall, Olivia has experienced random feelings of vertigo, of always being one step away from falling.

She searches the kitchen cupboards, pulling out items without thinking. Realizes she has several ingredients to make ginger cookies, and takes eggs, flour, and butter from the fridge. She cups her hand around an egg, squeezes it hard in her palm, wanting to crush it. What is Calvin thinking? What did I say last night? *If you're not happy—leave*. I didn't mean it. I wanted him to say he *is* happy, that he's tired, that he needs to take time off from work. Spend more time with us. I want him, to *want me*.

She thinks of picking up each egg, flinging them one after

So much of her identity has been packed away, suppressed with pills, she feels like a missing person.

the other at the windows in the sunroom to make the large panes opaque with yolk and albumin. Too much glass has been making her nervous lately. She spends her days in darkness, curtains drawn while the children are at school, Calvin at work. When she leaves the house, she feels blinded, hides behind dark glasses, layers of clothes. Calvin has barely touched her in months. She wonders where he goes in his mind when they are together, how he perceives her. So much of her identity has been packed away, suppressed with pills, she feels like a missing person.

She cracks an egg on the edge of a glass, checks for blood spots, veins, then measures brown sugar, butter, molasses; creams them together with the innocuous egg into a sticky mixture and wonders if this is how her mother felt, as she drank herself to death so many years ago. Memory wasted, the present a fog, the future untouchable. For two years after her mother died, Olivia ate to quell the ache inside, her petite teenaged body ballooning out to the size of three people squashed together. Then for six years she barely ate at all, her body shrinking to pre-pubescent status, as she cooked and baked simply for the sake of not being stilled, for the need to resist consuming anything she made.

Only when she worked with food did she remember her mother as she was before she started drinking so heavily, a

young girl really, laughing and playing with Olivia and her three sisters, showing them how to navigate the realm of the kitchen, taking them to the park, teaching them to ride their bikes, how to swim. Her father is on the periphery of these memories, occasionally stepping in and surprising everyone before disappearing again. Were he still alive, Olivia would ask him where he went, why he left them alone so often, why her mother needed to drink when he stayed home.

A dribble of molasses runs down her hand and she licks it, thinking of the unfilled prescription in her purse, the assorted bottles of pills, empty now for three days. If she is to follow the string back to herself, she needs to find the remaining threads, without her emotions padded in cotton.

For the first time in months, she is hungry, not only for food, but for change, a fluctuation in routine, a chance to step outside the boundaries shaping her life. In the basement she has been slowly assembling a darkroom over the winter, purchasing fresh chemicals, film, photographic paper, a fisheye lens for her camera. A few months ago she applied for a job for the fall, teaching French, something she hasn't done since Kevin was born.

She pictures the empty photo frames purchased over the years, the albums never taken out of their cellophane wrappers. Her distress at the gap in her exhibition history as an amateur



MELANCHOLY BARD
BY ROLLI



photographer is nothing compared to how she feels about the gaps in the family photos. No visual records of being a family. Nothing tangible to hold and say, *Look, this is you, this is me, here we are together*. Her children will never be able to see what they looked like as babies, how they toddled their way into childhood. She has unwittingly created a form of memory loss at the beginning of their lives.

She pushes back a strand of stray hair, measures flour into the bowl, then baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, more cinnamon that she shakes rapidly over the mixture, clouding the air. She inhales deeply as she kneads the dough. *What if I were to leave?* What would Calvin do? He's been leaving me for a long time. Ever since the hospital, since Kevin.

She rolls a ball of dough on the palm of her left hand, pushes it onto a sugar-sprinkled plate and sets it onto a baking sheet, anticipating the hot scent of fresh gingerbread, the taste of it thick on her tongue. Roll, push, set. Her body sways to the beginning rhythm, the feeling of calm that spreads within her whenever she bakes, easing apart the anxious knots in her chest and stomach, the tension in her head. Relaxing into this familiar rhythm, she feels as if she is back in her darkroom, moving instinctively.

She squashes a cookie too flat, has to re-roll it. She wants to jar Calvin into seeing her, instead of acting like he can't find her at all. Like she's the invisible woman—an O, not a letter with meaning, but a negation, a *zero*.

"Mom?" Nikia appears holding a stack of new drawings. "Kevin turned off the Nintendo and it was my turn."

Olivia tosses a lopsided dough ball into the bowl, washes her hands. "How about a puzzle?"

Nikia nods. "Want to see my drawings?" She waves the papers in the air.

"Not now. Take them to the living room—I'll look at them soon," Olivia says heading towards her daughter's room.

"Mom! Phone!" Kevin's voice carries from the dining room where he is setting up his racetrack, clamping it to chairs, winding it under the table.

Olivia rushes past Kevin down the two steps to the living room. Calvin. It has to be Calvin. He wants to apologize for last night, tell me he's sorry he ignores me, that he's been worried about things at work. Blame it on ten years of stress. "Hello?"

"Is this Olivia Cole?"

"Yes."

"It's Meryl Davis calling, Marlyn Emery's sister."

Olivia feels her hands go numb. She has forgotten about Jill.

"Marlyn asked me to call you." The woman's voice continues, soft, tired.

"Yes?" Olivia breathes in sharply. Jill's dead.

"I know you and Marlyn are close." A pause. "Olivia, Jill is awake. She's talking. She's alive."

"She's okay?" Olivia swipes at her face, teeters unsteadily, and sits on the coffee table, not noticing Nikia's drawings.

"She's even moving her toes. The doctors are hopeful she'll make a full recovery—no paralysis or brain damage.

Listen, I know Marlyn will want to talk with you, but we've been up for three days. She'll try to call you soon."

"Thank you. Please tell her how happy I am for her, for your whole family." Olivia hangs up the phone, the inadequacy of her words like a pocket of silence stitched into her mouth. She jumps up, scattering Nikia's drawings on the floor. "That was Jill's aunt. Jill's going to be okay."

"I knew it!" Kevin thrusts a piece of orange racetrack into the air. "I knew she wouldn't die."

Nikia picks up her drawings and spreads them out on the table. These ones are of birds falling from the sky, their wings folded, useless at their sides. Other birds are crushed against windows, sprawled in feathery masses across the snow.

Olivia thinks of the stacks of pictures Nikia has produced over the years, how she has recorded more of their lives at age six and a half than Olivia ever would have with her camera. Taking one of the drawings from the pile, Olivia holds it up to the grey north light of the bay window, tracing the broken bird, the memory of what the whole object once was.

Nikia is standing over her, staring. Olivia pulls her close, presses her face against her daughter's stomach. She is surprised at how solid Nikia feels.

"Let's go outside," Olivia suggests, giving Nikia a tight squeeze before letting her go.

"Why?" Kevin has returned to his racetrack at the dining room table.

"You'll see." Olivia crosses the room to the closet, pulls out coats and mitts.

"What are you going to do, Mom?" Kevin asks as they step outside and crunch through the snow.

"Gather the birds."

Nikia takes her hand.

Olivia finds a shovel and garbage bag in the shed. She breathes deeply, inhaling the fermented scent of winter apples, the hint of wet earth exposed in patches. She leads the way across the granular snow to the chickadee.

"She's dead, Mom."

"I know, Kev. I know. We'll start with her."

"No! She's not. She's breathing." Nikia crouches low to the ground. "See?"

Olivia focuses briefly on the blue shadows of trees, fluid as watercolours. The other birds have left the yard. When she looks back at the chickadee, Nikia is stroking its feathers.

"Nikia!" Kevin scolds. "If you touch her, the other birds will abandon her."

Nikia continues to stroke the bird. "They already have."

"Don't touch her," Olivia says.

"I have to," Nikia answers.

"Why?"

"She's broken." Nikia's eyes are brilliant in the low sunlight.

Olivia stares at Nikia, feeling as if she barely knows her daughter. Something shifts, not in the yard, but Olivia senses the difference as if she has stepped through glass into the sky and instead of falling, she finds solid ground.

Burning letters

BY JOANNE SHANNON

The weights on her wrists and ankles don't slow her down as she dances to the African rhythms blasting on the stereo. She moves to the beat, quickening the pace until she whirls like a dervish, arms and legs flying. She is filled with the joy of the moment. The music stops and she collapses on the couch, removes the weights and listens to the quiet of the afternoon. Joel will be home from school soon. His kindergarten class is holding a bake sale to raise money for UNICEF in Africa. Joel is always proud to share his stories of the two years he spent in Africa. Marie has made puffed wheat cake. It is always a favorite among the children and sells quickly. It is also easy to make. She has too many things on her mind to fuss over fancy, time-consuming recipes for bake sale items.

The African music and the fund-raiser bake sale take her right back to Africa, so recent but so distant. It was a good experience for Joel, and for Keith. It was for her too, until Keith decided to take a mistress. The woman, the daughter of the village chief, had many suitors. Marie worried about AIDS. She had decided to stick it out with her husband, partly because she loved Africa and partly because she didn't know what else to do. When they arrived back home in Canada and she had the support she needed from her family, she decided to end the marriage. The funny thing is that what she misses most about Africa is not anything to do with the culture; it is a man she has left behind. Mark worked with her husband and they had many opportunities to meet over supper or special events and even traveled together as a group. She and Mark often got together for a game of scrabble and a beer when Joel was in bed and Keith was busy watching football. She thought that she and Mark had a connection, that she communicated with him on many levels. She'd been able to confide in him about many things, including Keith's infidelities, and she considered him a very good friend. She counted on the support he always offered. She was a married woman and Mark had a girl friend back in Canada so nothing physical came of what she believed was a mutual attraction. She thought he would be a good catch for her single sister. Marie wishes she could talk to him now. He would help her sort out the problems in her life. Unfortunately there are no phones where he is living and she doesn't have the internet. A good old-fashioned letter would have to do. She takes a pad of paper from her desk and writes:

May 14th
Hi Mark:

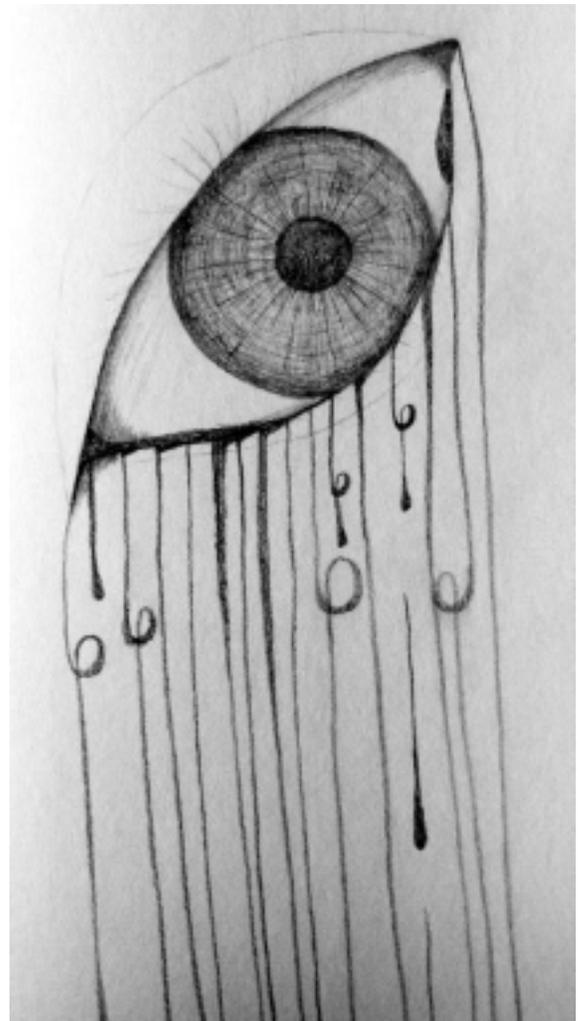
Just a short note to let you know how things are going since we arrived back in Canada. Keith and I have ended our marriage, although he is living at present in the basement until I am able to find work. He feels it is best for Joel too, to have both parents close. I would be fine with this but he does bring women home, which I find somewhat disturbing and an invasion of my privacy. I don't know if it will be easy to find work

since I had a two year break when I was in Africa and my computer skills are a little rusty. I continue to paint and am now working on a painting with an Egyptian influence. I guess the Cartouche cards that I consult are making their way into my subconscious.

I miss our evenings of playing scrabble and our long talks. I feel that we had a real connection that perhaps went beyond time and space. I hope that we can keep in touch.

Your friend, Marie.

She knows it will take a long time to get a reply to her letter, but she feels confident that Mark will write her back soon. She busies herself with daily life of doing laundry, keeping up the house and making meals for Joel and herself. She usually paints in the afternoons when Joel is busy with school. Her dreams are her inspiration. The painting based on Egyptian mythology is almost complete.



ART BY DI DECAIRE



WRITING THE LIFE – FICTION

June 7th

Dear Mark:

I haven't heard back from you yet, but wanted to let you know that I am doing fine. I had a couple of interviews for jobs but nothing has come through yet. This gives me a lot of time to work on my art. I could try to sell some, but they seem so personal and private that I can't let them go. I have become even more interested in Egyptian mythology, especially Isis. I sometimes feel that I could actually be a reincarnation of this goddess. I am also using runes and tarot cards and the Ouija board to give me some insight in what directions I should take in my life.

Love Marie

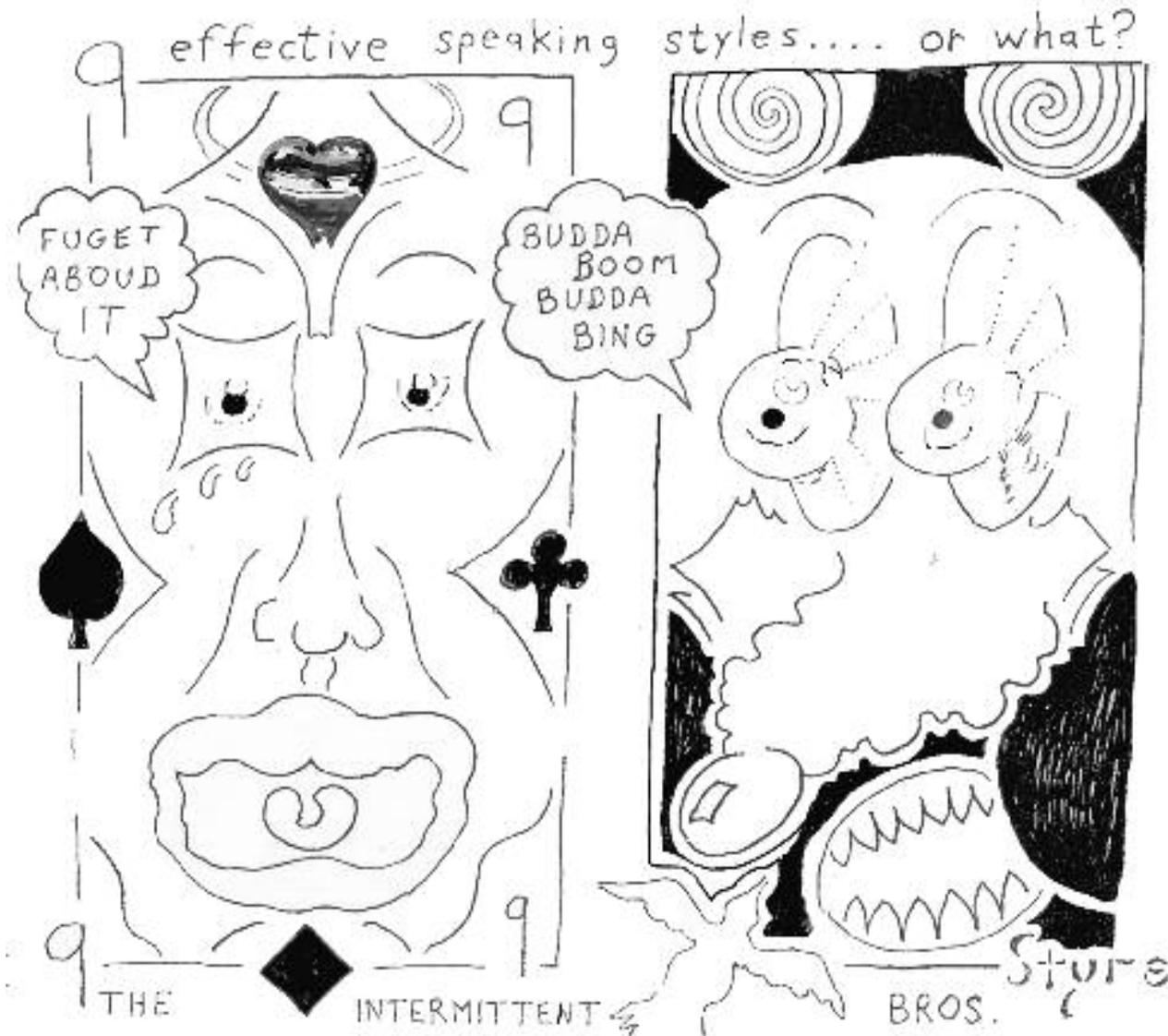
Two months pass and she still doesn't hear from Mark. She starts to have trouble sleeping and is full of energy. Keith has

quit paying all of her expenses and she applies for welfare. She knows that she should be more concerned with not having a job but her mind is turning to higher things. Joel continues to occupy some of her time especially now he is at home for the summer, but he seems to be happy playing video games. Marie spends more time in her room reading tarot cards and meditating. She feels a lightness and strength and even a power within her that she has never felt before. She feels that she has a special insight into the workings of the universe.

September 4th

My Dearest Mark:

When I get "this feeling" I find it impossible to concentrate. I wander. I dig through files reading snatches of old thoughts and ideas. I open books and read short passages. I look at the map of the world tacked upon the wall. I shun food.



ART BY BARRY STYRE

That night she clears off a wooden chief's throne she brought from Africa and adds a candle and a conch shell with the photo of Mark inside.

“This feeling” is a different kind of hunger. It drives me to the edge. If I could leap over the precipice like the Tarot’s Fool, then the unknown would become known. When I get this feeling I search for the cliff. It happens every new moon.

Last month it was Russia that fascinated me, and biblical myths about the beginnings of civilization on earth, the union of mind and spirit. I pondered it in drawings, pored over my son’s school atlas, revised my dreams, and then, like a vision, a ray of light, the pieces fit together in some kind of pattern. There is a place I found called Mary, which I believe is the place where the spiritual humans first dwelled and went out in the four great directions. Now I think I know and understand questions that have lain dormant within me since childhood. I know that the Star of David, the symbolic union of heaven and earth is also my star – for I am also a daughter of Una.

This month, I am drawn to Singapore, to the rain forest of Malaysia. I search for meanings associated with the tree of life and I am tormented. It is like a tiny worm is in my brain, acting of its own volition, searching the pathways of my mind, leading me to select certain elements around me that might assist in reaching understanding. It prods, it pushes, and it creates passageways in my brain that allow the messages to cross over, to mingle, and to come together. This is how I learn truth.

Love Marie.

Finally, in October six months since she left Africa and said goodbye to Mark with a light kiss on the cheek, Marie finally gets a reply to all her letters. Mark’s message is short and to the point: DO NOT WRITE ME. She is confused. What could be the meaning of this message? That afternoon she has a meeting with a psychic. Surely she will have insight into what is happening.

The psychic uses tarot cards to map out Marie’s life. She can hardly concentrate on the words but two things stand out as she leaves. The psychic tells her that she has an extremely strong energy flowing down from the heavens into her. She also tells her to continue to write Mark.

October 15th

Dear Mark:

I was going to respect your wishes and not write you. It seemed as though your message could not be more clearly stated – you do not want any further contact with me. But it doesn’t matter if I write or not, we are psychically linked. Your anger kept me awake last night. I think I have a right to know what I said to hurt you so badly.

Mark – when you feel joy, I feel joy. When you are ill, so am I. When you are filled with hurt and sorrow, my heart breaks. Please help me to understand why it is I am crying.

When I was in Kumasi, I felt an overpowering need to see you – to communicate with you. Those needs have not changed even though I am thousands of miles away. If you really, truly in your heart and soul want to end contact, I will listen to reason. Please, just give me your reasons.

She wrote again the next day:

Mark, strange things are happening in my life. Since Keith has moved out there has come the release of what has caused a blockage in my spiritual growth. If through my influence, you have been pushed too far and fast along the same path, I can understand you’re wanting to avoid me. I didn’t want to cause you pain, but with pain comes growth. Keith was my blockage for growth. You gave me strength to let go, helped guide me through. If I can, let me help you now as you go through radical changes. Talk to me.

Love Marie

She wished she could phone, to communicate directly. Surely if she could only talk to him everything would be okay. That night she clears off a wooden chief’s throne she brought from Africa and adds a candle and a conch shell with the photo of Mark inside. She believes that she will be able to communicate directly with him using telepathic thoughts. She concentrates and suddenly has a breakthrough. Mark’s voice comes across clearly in her head “I AM HERE”.

Over the next few days, Marie finds that she can hear more voices, not just Mark’s. Sometimes it gets confusing, there are so many people talking at once. She does up a list of individuals that could be counted upon to start a new society when the time comes and sends it to Mark.

Two weeks later a final letter comes from Mark.

I DO NOT WANT YOU IN MY LIFE IN ANY WAY. DO NOT WRITE ME. IS THIS CLEAR ENOUGH FOR YOU. DO NOT BOTHER ME. I THINK YOU ARE SERIOUSLY UNSTABLE AND NEED COUNSELLING. GET AWAY. I DO NOT WANT TO SEE ANOTHER LETTER FROM YOU. THE NEXT ONES I WILL BURN AND SAVE POSTAGE.

Enclosed are all the letters she has sent. The last two are unopened.

She feels deflated. She will not write again. Marie sets a fire in the fireplace and slowly burns the letters one by one. She can no longer hear Mark’s voice in her head. She does hear the voices of the others and they are telling her that they will come tonight to take her and Joel in a space ship to start a new society on another planet. She is excited enough that her disappointment over Mark does not linger.

She is still awake at two a.m. waiting for a signal from the others. Joel wakes up from his sleep and calls out to her. She knows that the time is right. She dresses in a long gold robe that she had made in Africa. She wraps herself in a shawl and Joel in a feather comforter and goes out to wait on the front porch. She is not cold, even though it is late October and the temperature is near freezing. The space ship will land in a park nearby. Her head is filled with the voices of her friends. “We are coming” they say. She waits in the dark and cold with Joel sleeping on her lap.



Etiquette

BY ROLLI

Ev heaped the spoon with sugar, sank it in her tea, then replaced it, dripping, in the bowl.

Joanne grimaced a little, despite herself. She was a *good hostess*, and a *good hostess* shows no displeasure at the conduct of a guest, not even if she's being unsanitary. But Joanne was fairly sure that Ev - who'd been staring, the last half-minute, at the tablecloth, and its pattern of grapes and cheese wheels (perhaps it was a bit loud) - hadn't noticed. So really, there was no harm done.

A few months earlier, Ev had experienced a "nervous breakdown," whatever that meant. Joanne had thumbed through a few psychology textbooks, but could find no mention of the phrase. After all, no one was ever diagnosed with a "nervous breakdown," as far as she'd ever heard. She'd a general idea it implied "went crazy," but was equally luckless, in her research, finding anything under that heading.

Ev was a neighbor of Joanne's, had been for the past ten years. If they'd never been friends, exactly, they'd at least been on friendly terms - neighborly waves, weather griping, and even, here and there, a piece of gossip shared guiltily, like rich cake. But then one morning, quite out of the blue, an ambulance screamed into Ev's driveway. And Joanne - like the rest of the neighbors, no doubt - took her breakfast to the kitchen window, and watched the hysterical woman being removed from her home, tied down to a gurney, and taken away - an unaccountable bit of business to Joanne. She'd talked to Ev only days earlier, and found her - aside from the mismatching socks, which she'd dismissed as carelessness - completely balanced, and rational. Besides, nothing ever happened on King Street (named as it was after William Lyon Mackenzie, the dullest of all PMs). And yet there it was. So when Ev finally returned - in a taxi, this time, and much more tranquil a mood - and remained there for the better part of a month, without leaving, or having a single visitor, Joanne thought that she really ought to have the woman over for tea. It seemed the proper thing to do.

Ev lifted her cup, and took a sip; then, with a dissatisfied look, added another helping of sugar. This had been the third or fourth teaspoon in a not very large cup. Joanne wondered if there was anything *irregular* in this, or if, perhaps, the woman simply had a sweet tooth. She *had* eaten the better part of a plate of cookies, already - and her teeth had a distinctly false look to them.

The talk, so far, had been minimal - limited to tea, and which kinds they preferred, and how there was really nothing like it after a hard day's work. But that well dried up pretty quick, giving way to such a very long pause that Joanne felt something must be said, now, to keep things up. And since she couldn't think of anything better, she asked what civility alone had kept her from asking from the get go.

"So what *happened*?" she asked, leaning in, and looking as sympathetic as possible.

The question couldn't have been an unexpected one, but her guest, in the midst of dipping the last cookie in her tea, started enough to drop it directly in. Seeming to ignore the question, for the moment, she fished the cookie out, swallowed it, and wiped her hands dry on her pants. Then she propped her head in her elbows, and sat there with her eyes closed, saying nothing. Joanne was about to repeat the question - she'd contemplated touching Ev's forearm, as a sign of quiet encouragement - when the latter, opening her eyes (but not lifting them) began to speak.

"I'm not a real person. I haven't been for a long time now."

She seemed reluctant to continue, so Joanne touched her forearm after all.

"I was married, did you know? This was before I came to King Street. Happily married for more than ... twenty years. Robert was a - tall man, I would say. Six one. Possibly six two. Closer, I think, to one," she decided, growing quiet again. Joanne nodded thoughtfully. It was clear this was going to be a roundabout sort of explanation. But those are often the best kind.

"It was - around suppertime. It *was* suppertime. I called Robert, but there was no answer. Which wasn't unusual, when he was reading the paper. I called again. I walked into the living room. There he was, as I expected, with the paper in front of his nose, so I pulled it out of his hands. His *hands* stayed where they were, completely stiff. And his face - the *expression* - was purple," tapping the nearest tablecloth grape. "I knew he was dead." She rubbed her eyes, then her hands on the cloth. "I called an ambulance. It seemed they arrived before I hung up the phone, even. But it was too late. I knew it was too late.

"Things sort of fell apart after that. It got really bad, Joanne. It was especially bad for me, I think, having no one around. A strange family. *Estranged* family," she corrected herself. "And then . . ."

Straightening her posture, she drew a deep breath through the nose, exhaled slowly, and continued.

"I had a son. Did you --"

Joanne *didn't*. Odd, the way one could have a person live practically next door for ten years, and know nothing of them.

"He would've been twenty, or so, on his own, when I came here. An athlete, like his father. Very popular. He went boating, one weekend, up north, with friends. On the - what's the river?" squinting with reflection.

"Churchill?" guessed Joanne. That was one of only two rivers in the area that she knew the names of. Not being a very outdoorsy person.

"No, no, not that. It starts ... with a G, I think."

"Germane?" Joanne tried, after a time. That was the other one.

"The Germane River, yes." Then a sudden change in her aspect, as if a big cumulus had passed overhead, and left her wishing for a jacket. It was powerful enough, the effect, that Joanne instinctively folded her arms, and pressed them tightly against her body, for warmth, as her friend continued, "It's a

terrible thing to drown, Joanne. It's the *worst* thing."

Ev seemed, to judge from how still she'd become, and the fixity of her stare, to require a little something in the way of support, here. So Joanne nodded several times, as empathetically as possible.

"And it was particularly hard," she continued, with the same dark severity, "the news, coming when it did, so soon after Robert, in such a bad place. So unprepared." She took another breath, drank the last of her tea, and added, "Then I lost my mind."

Joanne was very quiet. Because really, what does one say after that? And her confidence that she could grab the Emily Post down from the shelf, and skim through it for a proper conversational follow-up to *Then I lost my mind* was, for the first time, dismally low. So she said nothing and, embarrassed, waited for Ev to continue.

"I just - can't work. I haven't been able to work. Can't concentrate. I can't remember anything. Not even *faces*, sometimes, of people I knew. I just can't remember." She stared - not *into* her teacup but, as it seemed to Joanne, onto the surface of the dark liquid, penetrating no further.

"I'll be losing the house, soon."

Joanne found herself, at this point, withdrawing from the conversation - from listening, even. Ev's voice became fainter and far-off, then vanished altogether. Because this wasn't at all what Joanne had wanted to hear. *What* she'd wanted a nervous breakdown to entail was foggy even to herself. But it might've involved BRIEF NUDITY or RUNNING AMOK (something like that had happened, she was pretty sure, to an uncle) or temporarily confusing oneself for a French monarch, but coming out of it, in the end, quite refreshed. But this - was just painful.

"It means so much to me, Joanne, you're listening."

The meeting had to end.

"Mmm hmm"

"So very few people," squeezing her hand, "*really* listen."

"Yes."

Definitely.

"You're a *good friend*, Joanne."

The good friend shut her eyes. Not to look TRULY TOUCHED (which she did anyway), but to buy a little thinking time. She weighed her options. A mock-remembrance might work - a dental appointment, a bus to catch - and then



FM BY ROLLI



one had only to sweep her out the front door. It would have to be done with expert caution, though, not to appear insensitive. She wouldn't've cared as much a minute earlier; but after all that outpour . . . It struck Joanne as disappointing that, despite *feeling* the same, and as determined to do something, it took only a pathetic cough, or a well-timed smile to change one's whole outward personality, and behavior. Like when she was at the café, and thought of some vicious quip for the poky old waiter, when he finally came round, all she ended up saying, as he held out the pot, making a grave little face was, "It's no problem, really," and swallowed her bitterness and her coffee



K BY ROLLI

together. Joanne wondered if she was the only woman in the world who was continuously perverted into being a better person than she really was.

In the midst of her rumination, Joanne abruptly became aware that her neighbor, now completely silent and still, was staring at her with such a puzzled expression that she could interpret from it only that a question had been asked, and an answer was both expected and overdue. So this is what she said:

"Why don't you stay for supper, Ev, and we'll talk about it."

If this was a mispronunciation of "there's the door," there wasn't much that could be done about it now.

Of course the widow assented - if ever anyone's heart "leapt up," it was hers, at that moment. Joanne read more than gratitude in her expression, too, but a readiness to impose, as often and unseasonably as possible.

Which is just what happened. But what could Joanne say, after the fourth or fifth time she was drawn away from lunch by a tremulous redhead scratching at the door like a stray tabby? (She might've said plenty, of course, if it weren't for the initial slip-up.) And what could she do when the woman, coughing feebly, or fingering her crucifix, happened to let it drop that she was a trifle shy on her utility bill, but slip her the difference, and a soothing word or two, even if the *idea* of it, a minute later, made her absolutely sick? Or lend her an eggbeater, or a pair of stockings, as the circumstance dictated?

This kept on for the better part of a year, a tedious one, which ended with - a discovery.

Joanne had been baking that day - a Saturday ritual - and had enough leftover dough for an extra pie (a Famous Raspberry, as it happened). So she walked it over to Ev's, though it was a little over-hot, still; awfully hot, actually, and her knocking, as she passed the pie from one hand to the other, grew louder every second. But there was no answer - not atypical for Ev, who was often, for no good reason, too frightened to open the door (nervous people could be like that, Joanne had heard). So she let herself in. Desperate to find a spot to set down the hot dessert, Joanne raced into the kitchen and - well. There Ev was, dangling from - a wall-mounted plant-holder, of all things - the borrowed stockings wound tightly around her neck. This seemed an unnecessarily gruesome flourish to Joanne. She even dropped the pie, out of clumsy shock - and to waste a Famous Raspberry Pie, neighbours agreed, afterwards, was a true sign of friendship, and devotion.

Joanne really wasn't sure what to think of the whole affair. She was sure she'd done the *right thing*, even if the prospect had been, at least initially, unappealing. But ours is a world of exteriors, of judgment by action, only, and not of the moral jigsaw one fits together prior to doing a good thing for a bad reason, a bad for a good (thank goodness). Still, she wasn't satisfied, and sat for a long time after, thinking the affair over. Finally, lifting a hand to the bookshelf, she touched the worn familiar spine of the great *Book of Etiquette*, opened it up to page one, and began to read. The next time something like this happened, she wanted to be fully prepared.

A glimpse

BY SYR RUUS

Her house was spotless, her person well-groomed, her hair done at the Cut & Curl once a week, her nails – fingers and toes – filed and polished. No one ever accused her of being slovenly.

She had washed the vegetables twice. Breaking up the lettuce and rinsing each leaf carefully under cold running water. Rubbing the bowl with a clove of garlic, snipping green onions into precise little circles, slicing radishes, shredding purple cabbage, quartering tomatoes, peeling and chopping cucumbers, adding small bouquets of cauliflower. The result was quite pretty, if she did say so herself, the colourful mixture piled high in the large wooden bowl that Jamie and Sharon had sent her for Christmas three years ago. She covered it with plastic wrap and stored it in the refrigerator to keep it nice and crisp until dinner.

And now they were all waiting for her around the dining room table, the hot food cooling fast, steam rising from the mound of mashed potatoes, the roast beef thinly sliced, string beans from her own garden dotted with melting butter, carrot coins sprinkled with parsley, bread from the bread maker still warm. She had forgotten the salad.

Tossing the vegetables with the large wooden serving forks that came with the bowl, out of the corner of her eye she sees it. A large black insect, speedy as a cockroach. Scurrying to hide under a sliver of purple cabbage, long and hard-shelled, its tiny legs quivering like pubic hairs, black eyes filled with meanness. A slight shudder scuttles down her backbone. Pressing her lips together to withhold a scream, she forces herself to poke around in the bowl in a vain attempt to find it.

Could it be just a shadow on her brain? She had seen a similar one before in a dream. And what should she do now? Bring the salad to the table and hope for the best?

This is the first time her three sons have been together since Dad's funeral. Jamie and Sharon making their annual trip home from Up North. Mark and Linda driving down from the city. Calvin and Doris from next door. Hugs and kisses all around. You're looking well, Ma, Jamie, her youngest says. She knows he's lying.

And she's also aware of the real reason for this gathering, although everyone is pretending to act normal. Calvin's mouth, as usual, has been working overtime, making every little thing bigger than it had to be. *Shut up, can't you for once in your life*, he had told her. *We're trying to get this thing straightened out the best we can.*

He never called her Ma like the other two. Not like a real son to her, Calvin. Not in the raising. Born off her after she was raped, as they would call it nowadays, though at the time she considered it an adventure. Dapper he was, home from the service, smelling of something other than common sweat. He knew what to do to get her wanting. She hadn't felt that way with a man since, if truth be told. Nanny brought Calvin up as she was just thirteen when it happened and still looking to get

herself a husband.

She gives her firstborn a scrutiny, her lips pressed tight, her head waggling, but he takes no notice, busy heaping spoonfuls of mashed potatoes onto his plate. "Let's have some of that gravy," he says, smacking lips greasy with buttered bread. He's grown a paunch, no doubt about that. Bald and fat and barely fifty.

She peers suspiciously at their salad plates, fighting off the panic churning in her intestines, which nevertheless gushes through her open mouth like swamp gas. The creature has not yet dared to venture forth.

"What's the matter, Ma?" asks Mark.

"She's swallowed a fish," laughs Calvin.

If anything should ever happen to me, Dad always said, *you sell this place and move into one those modern condominiums in town.*

But she didn't want to leave, there was no need, she could handle things. She even attempted to tell him so at the time. He had never trusted her to make the smallest decision on her own and thought it his husbandly duty to order her about, to pick out her clothes, to take care of her as if she were a child. He never allowed her to work outside the home or learn to drive a car. Supper at 5 o'clock, the house kept neat and tidy, that's what he expected. When he retired, she didn't have a moment's peace. He kept track of her every move. Refused to be sick, even though he was ailing. Made the boys promise to watch out for her if he should go. They seemed to like him at work though, so she found out at his retirement party. They were sorry to see him leave, they said. An easy-going fellow, they called him, always ready with a joke. At home he ruled the roost. Cock of the walk. King of the castle. Not that he hadn't been good to her. What other man would have taken in Jamie and raised him as his own the way he did?

Ever since Dad died Calvin had scrutinized her like a watchdog, just waiting for the wrong move. She had to be wary.

"More meat, Sharon?" she inquires. "How about some beans, Mark? Carrots, Jamie? Pass the rolls to Cal, will you dear?"

"We're all fine. Don't fuss so, for godsakes."

It was obvious Calvin resented her. Always had. But what could be done about that now? How could anyone else understand her insides, the circumstances which caused her life to turn out like it did? People were judged only when their actions led to consequences. No one cared that Dad was away on the boats for months at a time and the neighbor man was willing to look out for her. She hadn't ever been beautiful, but she always did have a good figure. She couldn't help it if men were drawn to her. One thing led to another, as it often does.

Afterwards just the results and not the reasons for, became important. She had been unfaithful to her husband, yes, and the evidence had grown visibly inside her, becoming Jamie. Desperate enough at the time to jump into the river. A passerby saved her. They took her to the psychiatric ward in the basement of the hospital. She was a case of nerves, she knew that for a fact. But he forgave her. He came off the boats and started work at the plant in town. To his credit, and she could say



this with certainty, he treated her sons all the same, even though only Mark was truly his own.

You can't keep a secret like that in a small town. They moved out to the country when Jamie was born, and she did her best. She thought it was only Calvin who never forgave her. Lately she had come to realize that perhaps Mark and Jamie hadn't forgiven her either. The private looks passing between them at the table were as secretive and obvious as a tongue probing for stray bits of food.

"Pass me some of that rabbit food, will ya Ma," says Jamie. "Up North we pay through the nose for that stuff."

She pretends not to hear him. Picking imaginary lint from the sleeves of her blouse. Neat and tidy. Sucking a big mouthful of air through her teeth in apprehension.

"What are you bugging your eyes out for?" Calvin asks, handing the salad bowl across the table to his half-brother.

"It's only fear itself you have to fear," she says.

Her three daughters-in-law look downward at their plates, but the three men stare directly into her face.

"We're all really concerned about you, you know that don't you, Ma," says Jamie, clearing his throat officiously as if about to begin a speech.

Everything had been arranged beforehand, that much is certain, with Jamie selected as spokesperson, since he is the only one with a degree, having put himself through teachers'

college with a part-time job and student loans. As if this were the agreed-upon signal, the wives rise up and begin to clear the table. She tries to get up as well, but their common purpose pushes her back down into her chair.

"We'll take care of this," says Linda. "You just sit there, Ma."

"Don't touch my pots and pans," she cries. "I don't want no one messing about with my pots and pans." She cranes her neck anxiously backward and catches Doris making a smirk and raising her eyebrows at the other two.

Left alone at the table with her sons, she waits with heavy dread for she knows what is coming.

Jamie speaks:

"Ahem, we're all really concerned about you, as I said, living out here alone in this big house. You're not well, Ma, you've got to face that fact. Cal has been filling us in on some of the stuff."

She makes a little sound, a small gasp way down in her throat, but Jamie holds up his hand.

"Like, for instance, after Dad died, how you scrubbed everything – the floors, the woodwork, the cabinets – until he had to take you to the doctor because your fingertips were all bloody. That's just not normal, Ma." He glances at the other two for confirmation.

"And then how you disconnected the answering machine because of all the weird messages. What weird messages, Ma?"

She tries to answer, but he raises his hand again.

"We've got to face facts here. You're sick, Ma. You've always been high-strung, a nervous wreck. Why, just look at you now!"

She becomes aware then of her hands, both of them, the perfectly filed and painted fingernails picking, picking, picking at her clothes, at the invisible lint which she lifts to her lips to blow away.

"Why are you doing that, Ma? There's nothing there to clean off."

It is silent in the kitchen. The clatter of dishes has stopped. The daughters-in-law are busy listening. She has to defend herself. She doesn't want to move out of her house into some small apartment in town. It shouldn't be that much of a burden for Calvin to carry in wood for her and take her to town once a week for groceries and such.

"So Ma, we've come to a decision," Jamie is saying. "We promised Dad. It wasn't his intent that you stay out here alone after he was gone. You can't take care of yourself, Ma, you know that, without someone keeping an eye on you. We've talked with the doctor, Ma. We've told him your symptoms. He's aware of your past history. He suggested we bring you to the hospital. He thinks you should sign yourself into the Psychiatric Ward. Just for awhile. Just for observation. Until they find something that will help you. You can't go on like this. It'll just get worse."

She opens her mouth then, but what comes out is a scream as she sees it there among the lettuce, glistening with salad oil, the tiny black legs wiggling feebly in the air.



ART BY JAMES SKELTON

Burden

BY WAYNE WUSCHKE

“**Y**ou have to help. I can’t do it anymore. He’s in the hospital. He tried to commit suicide.” Only the sound of her sobbing is heard in the darkness. He is Jim’s brother Bill, an alcoholic. This is a phone call Jim has been expecting from his mother, waiting for it to come at some late hour in the night. Death lingers in the air around Bill like cigarette smoke. The only thing left to be known is how. Jim offers nothing to console her. There is nothing he can say to take away the pain, take away the sorrow. “You have to come see him. You have to come help. I can’t do it anymore.” The line goes dead. There is no more to be said tonight. Jim lies awake wondering if the weight over him will come crashing down killing him as well.

Their mother phones back the next day. This time it is to tell him that the doctors have admitted Bill into the psychiatric ward for another two weeks of observation. Jim glances at the calendar. Bill was to appear in court at quarter to eleven. The proceedings are going to take his house away. His actions make sense now. She asks if he had gone to see him yet. Guilt suggests action. It is a trip he doesn’t want to take. He has nothing to say to his brother, nothing to say to her. Bill doesn’t want help, he wants sympathy, someone to tell him it is ok for him to be the way that he is. It is something that Jim won’t do. He offers to meet with Bill and the psychiatrist together. It seems a reasonable enough request to make. A chance to see that his brother would finally get the help that he so desperately needs. The line goes dead again. The request will go unfulfilled.

Bill’s alcoholism stems from secrets. Secrets that the family does not want known. He is a man with a troubled past, victimized by circumstances beyond his control. The family doesn’t talk about it. Doesn’t want to talk about it. They want the doctors to cure the symptom, the alcoholism, and to ignore the infection that causes it. Bill hides behind false stories. Stories of disadvantage and hardship. He is convincing. Convincing enough for the doctors to medicate him. His official diagnosis has for sometime been Clinical Depression. Bill wears it like a badge of honour. It makes him untouchable. It is the reason why he doesn’t have to work, why he doesn’t have to pay his bills, why he doesn’t have to do anything. Something to elicit sympathy, something to elicit antidepressants to help cloud his consciousness as he drinks himself to death. The stories are manufactured, contrived, and well rehearsed. The doctors must see it. How could they not? Perhaps they know that he doesn’t want help, doesn’t want to tell them the truth, doesn’t want to change. The lies drape over him like a blood soaked cloak. The other patients in the ward want help. Need their help. They simply scribble a new concoction onto paper and send him on his way. Hoping when he ends up in a morgue he is alone.

“Have you visited yet?”

“Will the Doctors meet with me?”

Jim’s request has fallen on denying ears once again. Jim is the enemy. He would rip the veil off of their cleverly contrived

stories to reveal the truth. Bill’s depression induced alcoholism does not come from hardship. That fate had been more than kind to him. It pleaded for him to succeed. Jim would speak of the dream job offers that were heaped upon him. That their parents paid for Bill’s education, his home. That they had afforded Bill everything in forsaking Jim. No, Jim would reveal the secrets of their youth that they try to hide, try to deny, the infection that causes his brother’s disease. The true reason why Bill is an alcoholic, why he is depressed.

The truth. Jim knew it all too well. He grew up with it as well. It was the reason why they weren’t popular in high school, why it always seemed that the town folk talked behind their backs. Why he and his brother would move away never to return. The truth that couldn’t be changed, couldn’t be denied. It was forced upon them before they were even born. The shame of a family, the shame of a community. Jim accepted it for what it was. Something that he couldn’t change. But it was the reason why Bill was the way he was. A simple inconvenient truth that was the noose around his neck. That they were somehow not normal. It is that simple little truth that the family hide from the doctors. Why they tell lies. Why Bill never receives the help he needs. Why Bill will never get better.

Jim’s request goes unanswered. He is supposed to be strong and bear the weight of the family’s decision of secrecy. Not to tell the truth. Not to tell that it was his hopes, his dreams that were scarified so that Bill could succeed. Jim is the enemy. His success speaks of their failure to suppress him, to undermine him, his hopes, his dreams, all for Bill’s benefit. It weakens him. Eats away at him. Poisoning him. He hates Bill, hates their parents. He hates them and all they meant to him. Bill cries for help, demands help but refuses to reveal the root of his sickness. He doesn’t want to be helped, doesn’t want to be cured. Doesn’t want them to know the shame that he feels inside. It would mean that others would know the secrets of their family. The reason for his disease. Anger seeps through Jim’s pores. The words, the anger. Idiot, moron, ungrateful, they boil under the surface, erupting not at Bill, not at them, but at his own children, his own family. It sickens him. It makes him ashamed, that they won’t let him face the demon sitting in a hospital ward destroying his own family, their family.

Jim lies awake watching the covers raise and fall as his wife sleeps peacefully. Anger, guilt, shame that his family has inflicted upon him, upon them. It keeps him awake in the darkness. Mary says she understands, that she supports him. She knows the truth, why Jim’s brother is the way he is. The stress wears away at her as well. They long to live their lives away from their families and their drama, their refusal to accept the responsibilities of their actions. Their families want to infect them. For them to carry the burden of the lives that they have created, have enabled, their alcoholism, their abuse. In the darkness there is no remission, no redemption. Only amputation, a purging, a cleansing. Jim can only turn his back on his brother . . . hoping that his end will soon come.



Mental illness amongst us

BY DOLORES EWEN

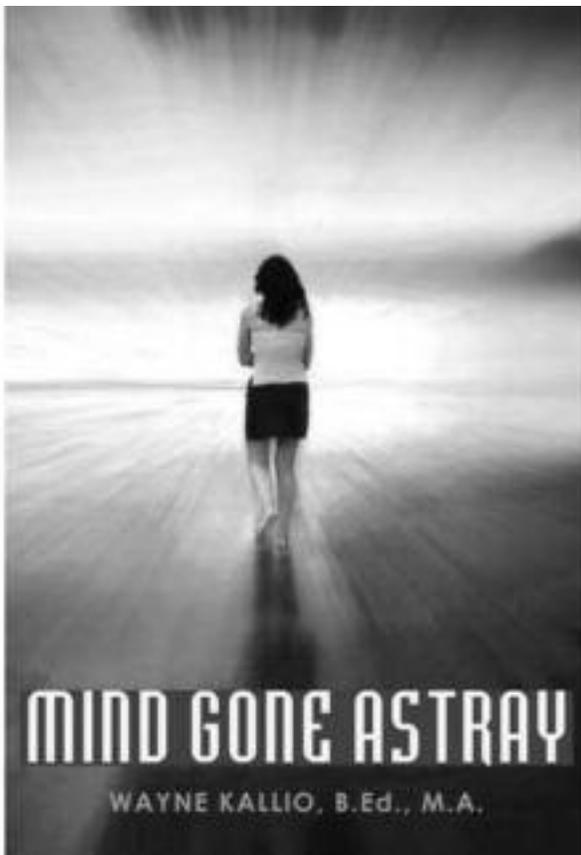
Kallio, Wayne, *Mind Gone Astray*. iUniverse.com, 2009
Softcover. 272 pp. \$24.59

[Editor's Note: Ms Ewen suggested an alternate review of this book, first reviewed in our Fall 2009 issue, was warranted – and I agreed.]

In this first person account Wayne Kallio relates the experience of living with a wife suddenly stricken with schizophrenia—a disease incomprehensible to the patient, the family, the community, and often the medical profession. But there is hope in this account. Hope that we as a society have progressed along the road of compassion and are ready to stretch out a hand to the vulnerable in our midst. There is also evidence that still much more research is needed into this disease with all its variations.

Kallio writes in an intimate person to person style that the reviewer found gripping. We are dropped right into the first cycle of psychosis on page one:

“Where are you?” I had called. No response. Then suddenly, she was there before me, pale, eyes wide with apprehension.



Stereotyped in movies, TV, and novels, in reality schizophrenia has multiple variations and its onset is unpredictable. No inkling of what lay before him could be sensed from the declaration coming from the helpmate, the lady who had worked at his side on his farm, and had years ago been struck on the mouth with a grain auger handle suffering a brief concussion with no seeming ill effects. Now she states:

“I was hiding because they were out there in a black car waiting for me....They had Tasers on them. But the guys never came back.” (page 1)

“I had been flabbergasted,” the author says, and that state would continue as the revolving door of schizophrenia and its incomprehensibility and inaccessibility descended on the couple and their family and their friends. It is stressful to have a schizophrenic in a group. Those affected feel a recurring pattern of helplessness, shattered hopes, and impatience with the victim and themselves also for not finding the way to deal with this psychosis. And this is the pattern we find in Wayne Kallio’s book.

He shows us the stratagems, the games that are necessary to deal with a patient. And perhaps how our ideas of individual freedoms must be refined and re-defined He admits:

I saw through Dr. McRae’s ruse right away, but it satisfied her at least for the moment and it was achieving what I knew was necessary—hospital admission and professional care. (page 4)

The rest of the book is written in the same everyday style. Don’t look for the psychological vocabulary of journal dissertations, nor for the polished statements of literature. This is a husband’s anguished account about the immediate repercussions of a disease that has laid hold of a loved one. With him we witness the seamless shifting from rational to irrational as his wife reports “ad libs,” and while she has hallucinations of sound, and when she communicates with someone out of sight.

Mind Gone Astray can serve to enlighten readers about the impact of this psychosis. It deals with a number of issues including the stress on relationships, the personal aspects of the disease, and some treatments. A whole pharmacopoeia of drugs must be tried, effects assessed, interactions with other medications kept in mind, and side effects weighed. And when the seemingly worthwhile drug no longer works for Kaija, another drug and a new trial and assessment must begin anew. The author mentions some seventeen drugs that were tried. More may have been tried without his knowledge while his wife was institutionalized.

There is pain for the patient and for those close to her. Especially for Wayne Kallio. He writes:

As I got into my car to drive over to the psych wing, I

sobbed uncontrollably. It was a long time before I was able to go inside. I was an emotional wreck and afraid, but little did I envision what the next chapter would bring. (page 26)

Then he goes on to describe pain and frustration in the rest of the book. But there are also flashes of humor and tenderness that show hope can live amidst despair. He reports:

I wept. Kaija comforted me. Role reversal again. (page 54)

Often schizophrenic patients and even their families experience non-acceptance. However, Wayne Kallio found his teacher colleagues “very understanding.” Kaija’s hairdresser did not refuse to do a style job when her customer was antsy amidst people. Is this a sign of a positive evolution toward greater acceptance of persons who in the past were stigmatized and discriminated against? It is the hope of the reviewer.

Wayne Kallio needed to face reality along with his wife. The medical staff were professional, compassionate and supportive. It was that support that kept hope alive in the author.

The last nightmare, and one many families will identify with, was finding somewhere to place Kaija. And after many hurdles, even that was achieved for the author by caring and competent individuals. And after a time, Wayne Kallio brought his wife home with the hope that she would stay longer this time.

He has found reassurance in reading the lives of others who suffered an even more debilitating form of the disease, and like Nobel Prize Winner, John Nash, whose story is told in *A Beautiful Mind*, he realizes that people can learn to live with the disease and contribute to society. So the author can learn to accept comfort in living in hope one day at a time.

Mind Gone Astray is a book that belongs in the hands of the stricken and all who live with schizophrenics. It belongs in libraries so that knowledge can bring hope, and perhaps lead to grants for the study of this disease.

An R & R review

BY CAROL REMPEL AND LAURIE RASMUSSEN

Rolli. *Plum Stuff*. Montreal: 8th House Press, 2010. Softcover. 124 pp. \$18.99.

In *Plum Stuff* Saskatchewan author Rolli (aka Charles Anderson) creates a menu of diverse poetic whimsy and fills its pages with culinary metaphors inspired by all things English with an occasional sprinkling of French, reflecting the bilingual mix of our province. Contrast and simplicity provide the book's framework, but the surprise is the string of bitters that weaves through the author's words and punctuates his art, revealing a cynical perspective and contorting our view through his observations and understandings.

The element of contrast is clear in Rolli's poetry and artwork. His drawings exploit positive and negative space well, often using a combination of black and white and/or complementary colours to heighten the contrast. For example, the drawing accompanying “The Girl in Th’umbrella” (p. 51) employs positive and negative space and black and white superbly in order to heighten the emotion of anguish and the sensual message of the artwork. However, there is notable contrast between the point of view of this artwork and of the accompanying poem: while the poem is about the speaker, the image accompanying the poem spotlights the woman, and in so doing, provides good balance. On the other hand, the satisfaction Rolli portrays in the image of “Mrs. Bennett’s Rage” (p.

65) creates disparity with Mrs. Bennet's anger heard in the poem, a contrast that is disturbing.

Contrast of movement, colour and tone abound in Rolli's work, from the intuitive lilt of language to powerful prose and images that jump off the page. The most surprisingly active piece is the Asian gymnast drawing that accompanies “What Peppy Cigarettes” (p. 93): the yellow lines beside the purple bodysuit propel the gymnast off the table. Most sharply debated by the reviewers is whether the language of the simple poem is full of movement or distinctly contrasts to the art as we consider the impact the drawing has on our sense of the words. What we do agree on is the author's most active and colourful pieces are often the most memorable and enjoyable, particularly when words and art speak in the same voice on the same page, as with “Literally” (pp. 73-78) and “People Falling, Cakes Falling” (p. 106).

The author's gift for using words and images in a way that celebrates the auditory and the visual is a delight. For example, the rise and fall of the written words call to be read aloud, to experience the contrast of the sharp and smooth language and to hear the impact of punch lines that punctuate in coy English ways. The lights and darks, complements of reds and greens, and palettes of the primaries invite viewers to experience impact and strength through contrast in the artwork.

Just as contrast fills the pages of the body of this work, simplicity is the spine that supports it. Rolli forms the skeleton of his artwork through manipulation of simple lines and



shapes. For example, the image in "VSGD" (p. 57) uses varying line thickness and simple shape to empower its message. Repetitions of line and/or shape add interest and provide cohesion in all his drawings.

Simplicity and variety of line are also visible in Rolli's poetic signature. A thought, a word, or sometimes a phrase, Rolli is not hindered by consistency of form in line or stanza. It is interesting to see his use of repetition within a poem ("I too" in "I TOO," pp. 24-26) or in groups of poems (the questions in "Jumper (High Five)," p. 107, "The Swiss Thin Immigrant," p. 109, and "Death, He Said," p. 114), underscoring a punch line in the same way he underscores a feature in his art. The title in many of his poems forms the first line, and numerous poems flow as lists from their title line.

These simple tools display Rolli's natural conversation with poetry, his carefree expression of a first language.

Rolli's defining tool, however, is the iron screw of contortion that shocks readers, drawing out a range of emotions. Upon first viewing, the proportions of some of his figures appear haphazard, nonsensical, without reason, even amateurish. A more careful study of the artwork and poetry allows readers to understand many of these contortions.

A constructive use of contortion is Rolli's portrayal of the anorexic "...Swiss Thin Immigrant" (p. 108), as it outrages with its contrast through both horror and sorrow.

Various offerings and obsessions also hint at the powerful role bitterness has played in shaping the author's work, contorting his point of view. It stands as a naive display, without apparent understanding or demonstration of emotional growth, in contrast to the literary growth evident within this work. The reader can explore the emphatic dissent between the reviewers on this point through many pieces, but we offer a glance at "Das Prof" (p. 67), unveiling a careless experiment in revelation, carefree abandon or a perverse exhibition, "pausing in lamplight, swapping innocuous nods, and opening one's trench coat."

This book is an offering of Rolli's best – at age 30. It exposes the naked insecurities and maturing observations that preface the story of a young man on the brink of entering mid-life – half-humbled, half-proud, and fully cynical in his search

for meaning. Communicating despair behind a light veneer, the writer explores gluttonous excess, as the audience hears the echoes of King Solomon, "Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!"

In searching for "modern, radical, enduring, insightful, inventive" writing, 8th House Publishing has found a work that may serve as a cry of the author's generation; one that shudders through contrast, calls for simplicity, and exposes the contortions of embittered youth.



Our readers say

Menno from Swift Current: . . . what interested me most was the material produced by writers who are finding the exercise of writing therapeutic. Very touching stories there! One can feel the pain that so many experience when emotional illness strikes. [Permission granted]

Juanita from Regina: Thank you for sharing the link to TRANSITION. I forwarded the article on writing therapy to several of my colleagues who work in classrooms designed to support students at risk. I hope they find the information useful and are able to incorporate findings into their teaching.

Notes on contributors

ARTISTS

BLOM, Bruce

Saskatoon photographer and writer
(see Author notes).

DECAIRE, Di

Saskatoon resident.

PETERS, Henry

Winnipeg artist and long-time contributor to
TRANSITION.

ROLLI

Artist and writer from Southey, SK
(see Author notes).

SKELTON, James

Writer and artist from Saskatoon and long-time
contributor to TRANSITION.

STYRE, Barry

Weyburn artist and member of Weyburn CMHA.

AUTHORS

BARKAIE, Rachel

Moose Jaw SK artist and writer, previously
published in TRANSITION, whose mother
was a Holocaust survivor.

BLOM, Bruce M.H.

Longtime member of the Saskatoon (SK) Branch
with Bipolar Disorder. Frequent photo contributor
to Cash Calendars (see 2011 cover and
<www.lasting-impression.ca>). First-time
contributor to TRANSITION.

BRAIDEK, Carla

Works and plays in the boreal forest near Big
River SK. First book *Carrying the Sun*
(Thistledown 2005).

BRAUN, Gord

Frequent contributor to TRANSITION out of
Yorkton SK.

BRUYERS, Delaney

Originally from Ontario, still recovering from
diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder in Saskatoon SK.
New contributor to TRANSITION.

CATES, Anna

Born in Maine, currently resides in Ohio.
Advanced degrees (MA, MFA, PhD). Teaches
college level English and creative writing online.

CATON, William

Eastend SK recluse who lives in the bush along
billy goat creek. First publication in TRANSITION.

CECIL, Lynn

Emerging, well-published writer from St.
Catherines ON with a strong Saskatchewan
connection. Editor of *Outside of the ordinary:*
women's travel stories (Second Story Press,
2005).

CHAPPELL, Gary

Lives and writes poetry in Saskatoon SK.
Previously published in Spring by the
Saskatchewan Writers Guild. Board member for
the Saskatoon Writers Co-op and member of the
Obsessors poetry group.

LUCEY, Candace

Freelance writer from Salmon Arm BC with
poems published in Purpose, Prairie Messenger
and articles in local media. Former president and
co-facilitator of Mothers for Mothers Post Partum
Support Group.

MARKLINGER, Tim

Fabulist writing out of Saskatoon SK.

MCLEOD, Stacie

Very patient contributor from Yorkton SK. Out
of a family of five girls and with diplomas in
creative writing and social work.

MIN KO LOI

Avatar, photographer, and poet. Born out of war
and now living in Singapore with animals,
homeless yet home. Grateful for every tree that
reminds him why he is "still here on this earth
breathing groundless."

Continued . . .



ROLLI

Pseudonymous writer and illustrator from Southey SK. *Plum Stuff*, a book of poems and art, reviewed in this issue. Website <<http://rolliwrites.wordpress.com/>>.

RUUS, Syr

Widely published Nova Scotia writer born in Estonia, educated in the USA (BA, MA, MS). Lovesongs of Emmanuel Taggart, winner of H.R. (Bill) Percy Prize (Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, 2006) was published by Breakwater Press (2009).

SADOWSKY, Jill

South African writer living in Israel and widely published in non-fiction. Particular experience with and interest in schizophrenia (her son's) is recounted in *Search for Sanity*, unpublished but looking.

SHANNON, Joanne

Regina SK writer, film and video artist, and painter with degrees in arts and arts education. Winner Children's Literature Award (SWG). SWG member and executive director of Common Weal Community Arts.

STAITE, Adam

Moose Jaw writer and frequent contributor to TRANSITION. Nickname – "Rasta."

TRETTWER, James

Emerging writer from Regina who has previously published two short stories in TRANSITION.

WUSCHKE, Wayne

"Bad Uncle Monkey" Moose Jaw born writer, freelance journalist, and columnist for *The Busted Knuckle Chronicles* and *Bikernet.com*. First publication in TRANSITION.



MAINTENANCE BY JAMES SKELTON

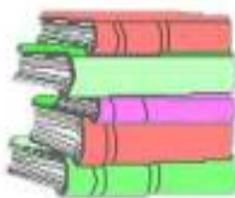


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Members' Phone 525-8433
info@cmharegina.com

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info@cmhasaskatoon.ca

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