

TRANSITION

SUMMER 2013



INSIDE:

- Page 3 Reinekke Lengelle on writing and healing
- Page 20 Kate Baggott is back with Lunch with Paulo
- Page 33 Poetry from Braun, Desjarlais, Enns . . .



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Saskatchewan
Mental health for all

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.

TRANSITION Magazine is published twice a year by the Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc, 2702 12th Ave., Regina, SK S4T 1J2.

First serial rights reserved.
© Copyright 2013 The Authors

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission from the author and acknowledgement of first publication in TRANSITION, is prohibited.

Statements, opinions and viewpoints made or expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the opinions and views of the Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc.

Readers' views are welcome and may be published in TRANSITION. Comments and views should be forwarded to the Division office c/o TRANSITION Magazine, at the above address, or:
Call 306 525-5601 or toll-free 1-800-461-5483 (in SK)
Fax 306 569-3788
E-mail: contactus@cmhask.com
Website: www.cmhask.com

Printed in Canada ISSN 1913-5408

Cover art: Transport by Henry Peters

Special acknowledgement is given to the Saskatchewan Arts Board, Saskatchewan Lotteries and the United Way for financial support



CONTINUOUS SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR TRANSITION

1. TRANSITION is published twice a year by The Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc. Subscription by joining CMHA (SK) at \$15 / 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 Send original, unpublished articles, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and visual art that represent current mental health issues and reflect on their impact on individuals.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; \$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:

TRANSITION
2702 12th Ave.
Regina, SK S4T 1J2



One Step at a Time by Judy Swallow

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 EDITORIAL
Ted Dyck
- 2 DIRECTOR'S REPORT
David Nelson
- 3 REINEKKE LENGELLE
Writing and healing:
Research, a model,
and practice
- 7 JEFF JAMES
The history of a social work
pioneer

WRITING THE LIFE Non-Fiction

- 10 TREVOR L. BLACK
The night of the triangle
- 14 SHIRLEY CALLAGHAN
Sissy
- 15 ELAINE MARIE DITNER
Worriedly yours
- 15 DONNA MAE JOHNSTON
God's masterpiece
- 15 SHELLEY A. LEEDAHL
Where I once belonged
- 17 LU RITZA
Caring for Mom
- 18 DOT SETTEE
Belly up!
- 18 MEGAN SHORTLAND
The girl behind the smile

WRITING THE LIFE Fiction

- 20 KATE BAGGOTT
Lunch with Paulo
- 25 CHANTEL MORIN
Letter
- 26 HELEN PEREIRA
C'est la vie
- 27 ROLLI
The dead kid
- 28 Live forever
- 29 DENISE WILKINSON
Hollow
- 30 LILY WATSON
Diamond earrings



Art by James Skelton

WRITING THE LIFE Poetry

- 33 GORD BRAUN
Breathing lights
Empowerment
- 33 MELODIE DESJARLAIS
Remember
- 34 VICTOR ENNS
Green
- 35 KEITH FOSTER
Airborne
How to live forever
- 36 BETH GOBEIL
Ribbons
Tightrope
Untitled
- 37 AYAMI GREENWOOD
Love songs
- 37 CATHERINE KATT
Pond
Reunion
- 38 GLADYS MACDONALD
My realm of dreams
- 38 VONETTA MARTIN
The rhythm of life

- 39 IAN McINTYRE
For crying out loud 2
- 39 JAMES SKELTON
Keep your chin up
- 40 HOLLY SPRATT
Lost angel
- 40 ADAM STAITE
Figurine to my life
Fires tale
- 40 BARRY STYRE
My heart

REVIEWS

- IRENE GROBOWSKY
41 A book of courage
42 Shifting perspectives

- 43 NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



The WFYL conference on communality

BY TED DYCK

defn: communality noun a community defined by a decisive common interest, e.g., writing for therapy

goal: to determine how to develop and maintain a communality of writing groups in a CMHASK context

rationale: to meet the primary need identified by the six writing groups in the WFYL Project 2011-2012

sponsors: CMHASK, SAB, SWG

participants: all members, facilitators, and venue directors/programmers of these groups

1st guests: all clients of all branches of CMHASK

2nd guests: all persons interested in writing for therapy

restrictions: registration and max. 30 in two workshops; max. 50 in panel; max 50 at reading / launch of Transition (Summer 2013)



TED DYCK



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

New program will provide direct support to violent offenders

DAVID NELSON, RPN, RSW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This has indeed been an outstanding year both for our Association and potential changes for the mental health system in general.

Our Association continues to be a major player in the ongoing development of the Saskatchewan Assured Income Program for Disabilities (SAID).

We also participate as a founding member of the Provincial Interagency Network on Disability (PIND) which works with Government on a broad range of disability policies.

Our sponsorship and support of the Mental Health Coalition of Saskatchewan has brought together a dramatically growing number of stakeholders thanks to the efforts of Jeff James, Coalition Coordinator and Tanya Condo, our Systems



DAVE NELSON

Navigator Development staff.

There has been recognition and growth in our Problem Gambling Community program with an additional staff person funded to provide expertise in communication and media strategies.

Our new Community Justice Support program, headed by Kim Hoffman as Director, will very soon be up and running. It will provide direct supports to persons with violent offender and mental health issues in Regina, Saskatoon and North Battleford. This is a much needed program for those with these service support needs.

We are pleased the Minister of Health has announced a Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan, in particular as it is multi-ministerial in nature and, with proper input from stakeholders, should result in a better developed and client centered mental health and addictions system.

Overall, even though this has been an incredibly busy year for all, many new and important initiatives are coming to fruition. We thank all who have worked so hard to make it happen.



Writing and healing: Research, a model, and practice

BY REINEKKE LENGELLE

"Fiddling with words has always been the most natural way for me to respond to life, as it gives me an added perspective on my problems, a view which is wider than my own."

– Gwyneth Lewis, Welsh poet

When Linus Pauling was doing his research on vitamin C, it's rumoured he used himself as a guinea pig and took copious amounts of it himself, keeping notes on the results. This is how I too did my first anecdotal research on writing and from an early age, it seemed, I knew whether I needed a dose of preventative poetry, truth-detecting fiction, or an unsent letter in the face of anger or despair. At twenty-five, I rescued myself in the aftermath of a break-up by writing a book which I would have bought had I seen it on a bookstore shelf and since then I've used writing to work through a myriad of life challenges, including miscarriage and divorce. I have also seen my students 'restore-y' their lives in the face of things like unemployment, trauma, depression, and domestic violence – it seems unearthing the shame and offering ourselves a new story about 'what is,' provides the balm of acceptance and healing.

It's noteworthy too that even non-writers grab their pens in times of crisis. My neighbour, who spends his spare time in the garage rebuilding jeep engines and watches sports on a flat screen TV big enough to light the front street – not the type we expect to be journaling in the wee hours – told me he wrote himself through his divorce. My friend Jim, a former bush pilot, started writing in the aftermath of horrific workplace murders. He needed to write because, "I have to get my life message out, in my writings. Maybe then, freedom will be mine, because for every worker in our country, union leaders, my family, and myself, I will have completed my difficult life task."

Writing works. We know because we remember what happened when we finally dared to say the unsayable and the world didn't collapse. We know this from having read our story aloud to a group of trusted writer colleagues who understood what we were trying to do. Sometimes it was a matter of finally admitting to something that allowed us to burst open and grieve. Sometimes it was discovering that the story we were telling ourselves all those years, wasn't even true. In other moments we just needed to write to remember who we are and give ourselves permission to express that without apology or justification. Often writing allows us to be with whatever life is offering in the moment, whether that is loss, illness, or a niggling discomfort we can only just name.

In the field of writing and healing there are many hopeful stories of putting pen to paper, some from centuries ago, but in the last three decades research is backing up what many poets and artists have known for eons: writing is therapeutic. Perhaps

the most notable research done in this area is by Dr. James Pennebakerⁱⁱⁱ and colleagues at the University of Austin, Texas. His expressive writing paradigm has grown out of experiments he started in the 1980s that show that even a person's immune system can be boosted when one writes about one's deepest traumas. The healing combination, it turns out, is to write about what happened, but also to express the emotions surrounding the events.

The studies show that those suffering from asthma or rheumatoid arthritis^{iv} had fewer symptoms after writing about personal traumas and that keeping secrets is detrimental to one's health. Similarly, a study done on unemployment showed that those who have been recently laid off, found work more quickly if they first wrote about their deepest feelings and thoughts surrounding the layoff^v.

Most recently Pennebaker and his colleagues Francis and Booth have developed the Linguistic Index and Word Count program (LIWC), which actually counts and categorizes all the words in a particular text. This is how they found out that suicidal poets use "I" more often (so do more honest people, mind you) than non-suicidal poets^{vi}. The non-suicidal poets they researched tended to write about their struggles using a variety of other pronouns like he, she, we, and you, as if to keep more distance between themselves and their suffering. You might say that being "in the self" too much isn't very good for healing, but revisiting and even feeling aspects of a traumatic past can be essential if moving people forward and even alleviating physical pain.

Pennebaker concludes in this latest book *The Secret Life of Pronouns*^{vii} that a story is 'healing' when it is in the process of being constructed (and not already set), when one uses a fair number of positive emotion words, and a moderate number of negative words, and if there is evidence of pronoun switching. That means that if you started writing using "he" "she" and "they" but later use "I" and "we" more frequently and then switch back again, your story is more likely to be healing than if you are more consistent in your choice of pronoun. These language markers are the signs that a story is indeed changing for the better.

That said, there are pitfalls to writing for personal development too; Pennebaker warns against over-intellectualizing, using writing as a strategy to avoid action, or repeating a familiar story over and over again and thereby turning writing into a form of rumination. To avoid these and other pitfalls, it's important that writing for healing practices are underpinned by good research and theories that identify and describe processes that work. Exercises and guidelines are needed that help writers and facilitators work in the directions most likely to support well being. Along with a facilitator's instincts and personal experiences, a conceptual framework that describes what



works, why, and what to watch for is helpful.

To that end, my colleague Dr. Frans Meijers^{viii} and I developed a model of ‘transformation through writing’ based on learning theories and almost two decades of work with students. The model is a way of explaining what people are trying to do when they sit down with paper and pen in the face of crisis and change. It takes into account what researchers like Pennebaker have discovered about both the cognitive and emotional aspects that are at the heart of successful therapeutic writing. The model supports the view of healing as a learning process that happens in steps, requires a dialogue, and where specific writing exercises can be used at the various stages.

Before explaining the learning stages, it’s important to note that writing to heal has little to do with positive thinking. This is a point worth emphasizing – penning a poem or narrative to ‘heal’ is *not* about staying on the sunny side of the street or lifting ourselves up wilfully by the fibres of our dishevelled mops (the hair-style of the traumatized). In fact, pretending our way towards happiness is frequently what got us into deeper trouble in the first place.

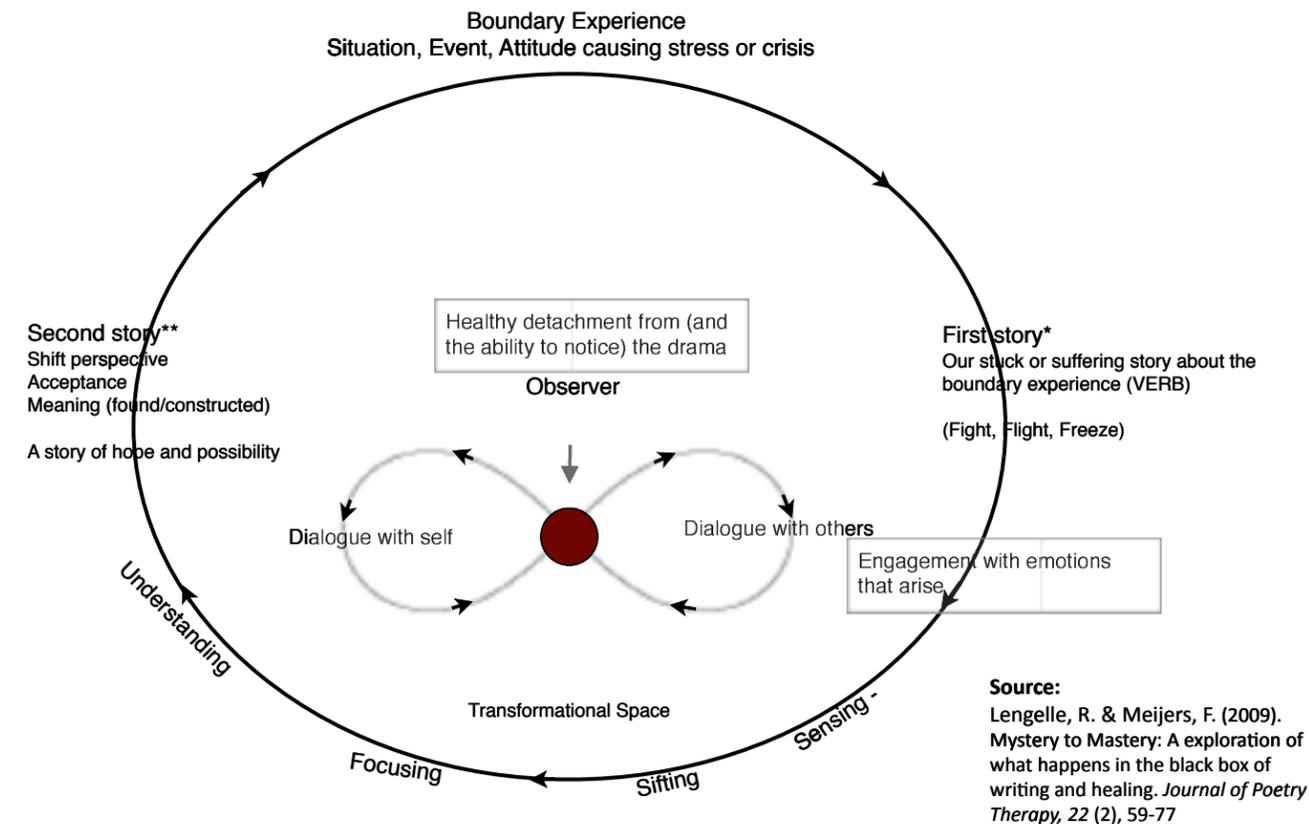
Those who are using writing to heal are trying to *restore* (“re-story”) themselves through the creation and construction

of a workable narrative. They are often stuck with a (‘first’) story that is no longer life giving and the perspective shift and are trying to move towards (or as one student put it “groping in the dark to discover”) a ‘second’ story that must appeal to both sides of the brain; it must *be felt* and *make cognitive sense*.

A healing story means that we’re willing to allow ourselves to feel what we feel, but not add to our suffering by creating a ‘woe-is-me’ discourse, where we fuel our pain with habitual patterns of thinking and lamenting. Dan Baker, author of *What Happy People Know*^{ix} describes the way in which we disempower ourselves in the useful acronym, “VERB.” VERB stands for feeling **V**ictimized, believing we’re **E**ntitled, imagining we need **R**escue, or **B**laming someone else for our misery.

At the top of the circle, we have what we call a *boundary experience* – it’s when the proverbial ‘shit hits the fan.’ It might be getting fired, getting cancer, getting cheated on, having an existential crisis of faith . . . (or choose your own adventure). In academe we talk about “an experience whereby an individual encounters the boundaries of his or her existing self-concept and cannot cope with a situation and its exigencies.”^x This situation, event, or attitude is made worse by those unwelcome

Model of Transformation Through Writing



Sensing has been likened to ‘making a map’ and admitting to all the feelings and thoughts in response to a particular situation.

visitors called stress, anxiety, despair, rage, and fear – everything that we swear is conspiring to defeat and discombobulate us. Our reactions to crisis are basic and predictable: we fight, try to take flight, or freeze. We also tell ourselves an awful story about what’s happening. We actually cling to a first story because it’s all we’ve got; on some level we believe it’s going to prevent us from having to go through even more pain. Paradoxically, we have to lean into our feelings and create enough cracks in our first story to allow the light of other perspectives to shine in.

The first step of getting out of the ‘cycle of lament’ is to identify that we’re in it or to have a facilitator who understands that we’re trapped in our ‘first story’ and encourages us to start writing. A writing teacher or guide frequently starts by focusing, not on the pain, but on the art of putting words skillfully on the page. This form of play and developing competence fosters the courage a writer needs to eventually use writing as a transformative tool. It also brings joy, a sense of accomplishment, and redirects energies that might otherwise be focused on rumination or lament.

One’s first story often needs to be purged in ink in detail, though doing so usually offers only temporary cathartic relief and as a ‘definitive work’ such a tale is often a depressing tragedy. A first story is by definition an S.O.S (stuck or suffering) narrative. And even if we’re absolutely right – that we’ve been wronged and are innocent and suffering – it will not set us free. The first story of someone who has been unemployed long-term, for instance, might sound like, “The economy is bad. Nobody wants me. You need diplomas to be considered for that job.” S/he may have all the evidence in the world to back up this story, but it will not bring new opportunities and perspectives; it won’t lead to a more workable narrative.

If we’re willing to leave the prison-like safety of our first story and we have a good writing facilitator or exercise that allows both our thoughts and our feelings to be expressed, we enter the sensing stage. Here we bring a myriad of thoughts and feelings to the page – engaging with the emotions on the one hand, but also allowing our inner witness or observer to view our struggle with some detachment. This seems like a contradictory movement, but it is complementary in healing processes. We can get in touch with emotions by using specific details in our writing (e.g. She lifted her red suitcase slowly. It was the one I had always carried for her during airport pick-ups. She didn’t look back, even when her heel got caught on the threshold) and the act of writing itself allows us a level of detachment. The words on the page are literally – and thus metaphorically – ‘outside’ of us and become viewable from this distance.

Sensing has been likened to ‘making a map’ and admitting to all the feelings and thoughts in response to a particular situation. For example, when I had a miscarriage^{xi}, I noted that alongside the disappointment and grief, a myriad of other feelings was also present. They sounded like this: “*this is nature’s way; drink lots of hot water, it will help the process along; now you see that you’re not perfect; at least you won’t have to suf-*

fer any nausea now.”

One of the exercises that is best suited to the sensing stage is a journal method called Proprioceptive Writing^{xiii} which asks that one listens for what wants to be written while also paying attention to what is being written, and asking the proprioceptive question. The proprioceptive question is, “what do I mean by . . .” (e.g. What do I mean by *feeling lost*? What do I mean by *never again*?) and is written out in full. The 20-24 minute writing session is accompanied by Baroque music which corresponds with the human heart rate and a candle to anchor the writer at the desk or table – as if to remind us to be present to the process. The exercise ends with several concluding questions that allows for further explorations. Those questions, (e.g. What was heard and not written; How do I feel now) also focus on both cognitive and affective aspects. Writing proprioceptively while getting room to express “anything and everything”. It can help the writer access more subtle levels of feeling, helping a person to move past the human tendency to repeat our stories and stay mired in VERB.

If we have spent time sensing, we often move quite naturally towards sifting, though we may also move back and forth between the four-stages before we arrive at our second story with confidence. Sifting means we start to determine what is more and less important in the material that appeared during the sensing phase. Sifting is the stage at which important fragments and insights start to emerge, but aren’t ordered or integrated.

Poetry or list-making exercises are good at this stage and metaphors and analogies might start to take shape as well. As we write, however, it’s important to be aware that we don’t (and frequently shouldn’t) work in isolation. A supportive word, feedback on aspects of our writing, and/or a conversation can provide new energy, hope, or insights, enriching the writing we do. A dialogue is actually a key part of what propels us through the stages of the transformational space. This is why the presence of a writing facilitator can be essential during the writing and healing process. He or she can serve as both guide and witness and can remind us that it’s quite normal to feel like we’re making no progress. The conversations we have in the midst of our turmoil and growth can also be with friends, books, dead philosophers, and being with other writers as part of a peer group that shares work can be powerful.

In the focusing stage we begin to articulate actual viewpoints. This is also the stage where we often see that pieces of the puzzle of our lives we thought we’d be able to put back, don’t fit anymore. More amazingly, what we thought we couldn’t afford to lose might now be relegated to pile called: ‘who I thought I was and what I thought I believed’. There are hints of hope and closure.

An exercise that is particularly helpful to move us beyond stories or versions of ourselves that hurt or no longer fit is Byron Katie’s^{xiii} four-question inquiry process. We write down a thought that is particularly stressful and then ask, (1) Is it



true? (2) Can I absolutely know it's true? (3) How do I react when I believe the thought? (4) Who would I be without the thought? We write out all of our answers and find out what is at the core of Katie's exercise: "who would you be without your story"? The 4 questions are followed by a turnaround, a veritable trying on of a perspective that might be as true or truer than our original statement. To use the example of unemployment from above, a person writing might start with "No one wants me (to do work for them)," go through the four questions with this statement, and then try on a turnaround like "Someone wants me (to do work for them)," finding bits of evidence to support that statement.

One of the most poignant jokes I've heard about our human tendency to want to 'be right' at great cost to our freedom is the one where the gravestone reads, "I had the right of way." That's why writing to heal requires courage; the process is asking us to consider giving up the story that we've been believing and that provides us with evidence of our innocence or rightness; it asks us to see that what we insist is true is crippling and stifling.

It turns out the thoughts that keep us stuck in a first story, are rarely as solid and convincing when we write them out and inquire. Our story starts to feel less suffocating and that space often allows us to move into a phase of new understanding. It doesn't mean we're going to be employed right away or that we can bring back the dead or be forgiven our trespass, but we come to see that other perspectives are possible and hopeful. Surprisingly a perspective like "that loss should have happened, because it did" can feel empowering at this stage, and no longer be lined with the flavor of VERB.

As our second story takes shape in a way that is felt and makes sense to us cognitively, we look back and notice that our first story was sucking the life out of us – that it was often this version of our lives and not life's actual circumstances that were contributing to our depression and despair. Indeed, a second story is workable and hopeful, even if it requires revising later on and in the process of writing it, *we have changed*. In more academic speak: we've given voice to and digested our lived experience on both emotional and cognitive levels. And those who have helped us along, succeeded in helping us to find the right words to articulate honestly our experiences.

A second story usually means we've either (1) changed our perspective on what happened, (2) accepted it as an unalterable part of our past, or (3) found meaning in the events, and we know we have succeeded when we feel a return of our energy or health or if we feel we can be more congruent with ourselves and others.

That is, of course, until the next boundary experience comes along . . . challenging us again to tell, question, retell, and reformulate our default first version . . .

Good writers know that writing is a process of rewriting and editing; in the same spirit, writing to heal requires the rewriting and editing of our lives. Healing with words requires presence, a willingness to be with feelings, an ability to be or

have a benevolent witness on the journey – in the shape of a poetry therapist or compassionate writing instructor – and a dialogue with ourselves and others. What is not included in the model, but should really radiate from it, is self-compassion. "You do not have to be good . . ." as Mary Oliver says in her poem *Wild Geese*; you just have to be willing to fiddle with words and let a few of your favourite plots (and maybe even characters) die off. Gulp. Don't forget to light a candle.

End notes

ⁱ Lewis, G. (2002) *Sunbathing in the Rain: A Cheerful Book on Depression*. London: Flamingo.

ⁱⁱ Lengelle, R. (2006). *Bath Oil for Heartbreak*. Edmonton: Black Tulip Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pennebaker, J. (1997). *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others*. New York: Guilford Press.

^{iv} Smyth, J.M., Stone, A.A., Hurewitz, A., & Kaell, A. (1999). Effects of writing about stressful experiences on symptom reduction in patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis: A randomized trial. *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association*, 281, 1304-1309.

^v Spera, S.P., Buhrfeind, R.D., & Pennebaker, J.W. (1994). Expressive writing and coping with job loss. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37, 722-733.

^{vi} Kaufman, J. & Sexton, J. (2006). Why Doesn't the Writing Cure Help Poets? *Review of General Psychology*, 10 (3), 268-282.

^{vii} Pennebaker, J. (2011). *The Secret Life of Pronouns*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.

^{viii} Lengelle, R. & Meijers, F. (2009). Mystery to Mastery: A exploration of what happens in the black box of writing and healing. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 22 (2), 59-77

^{ix} Baker, D. & Stauth, C. (2004) *What Happy People Know: How the New Science of Happiness Can Change Your Life for the Better*. New York. St. Martins-Griffin.

^x (see viii)

^{xi} Lengelle, R. (2001). An Early Miscarriage. *Birth Issues*. 2001 (<http://www.dialogicalpractice.com/component/content/article/36-personal-experiences/57-an-early-miscarriage.html>)

^{xii} Trichter-Metcalf, L. & Simon, T. (2002). *Writing the Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method of Finding Your Authentic Voice*. New York: Ballentine Books.

^{xiii} Katie, B. (2002). *Loving What Is: Four Questions that can change your life*. New York: Harmony Books.

The history of a social work pioneer

BY JEFF JAMES

Prepared For The Saskatchewan Mental Health Coalition

Life can take one some very strange places. Perhaps nobody I've ever met knows that sentiment better than 82 year old terminal cancer patient Ruth Dafoe. As a social work practicum student I worked on expanding the Saskatchewan Mental Health Coalition, a provincial umbrella group dedicated to increasing resources and improving services for the mental health system in our province. On May 28, 2012, I attended and helped to facilitate what was my first meeting with the Coalition, an organization that had been functioning for close to 30 years. The meeting went well, but the strangest occurrence during the meeting was an elderly lady coming in, aided by a walker, and sitting down at one of the tables. She appeared frail, as you would expect from a woman of advanced age, but otherwise in good health. In a naive way I wondered what exactly could this elderly lady contribute to the meeting? I welcomed her to the meeting none the less.

The meeting went well as we had a good turnout and lots of positive discussion. The idea was floated around that I should research the elderly lady's career to compile a historical brief about mental health services in Saskatchewan during the height of community-centred funding – the 1960s.

Ruth approached me after the meeting, eager to talk. She told me that she was currently in a care home. I found it odd that she was well enough to travel around the city, but still in need of personal care, but that was before I learned of her medical circumstances.

It was a beautiful day in early June before I finally got around to seeing Ruth again. Having just finished university, I didn't expect to be doing anything like this! One social worker to another sitting down and talking history, the only separation were the generations between us. I was excited to hear about how things used to be since I've always had a tremendous respect and curiosity for history, especially hearing oral history from a primary source. I didn't know what to expect from the first meeting. I imagined a cancer patient would grow weary rather quickly, but she didn't. Ruth seemed to have added life and excitement from just being able to re-tell her experiences. I knew coming in that she had been a part of the first community mental health program in Saskatchewan out of Yorkton in the early 1960s, but little else.

Ruth was born in 1929, making her the same age as my grandfather, but she seemed to have the strength, energy and memory of a person my age, of 23. I was really impressed, not

only with her ability to relate her experiences, but with her energy for life. My grandfather, being in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease can't remember who I am and yet a lady of the same age recalled minute details about her life and career from well over 60 years ago! Ruth was clearly a very strong, sharp lady whom I could learn a great deal from.

Ruth went to the University of Saskatchewan from 1947-1951 and received a BA in Medical Sciences. During the summer months she worked as Psychiatric Aide at Saskatchewan Hospital in Weyburn. From 1951-1952 Ruth worked as a Lab Technician at Weyburn while also completing the first year of her psychiatric nursing diploma. From 1952 to 1954 Ruth worked as a Lab Technician at Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford. By the age of 25, Ruth had already moved around a great deal.

For those that don't know, Sask. Hospital Weyburn was one of our province's two long-term care facilities or institutions for mental health patients. The hospital operated in some form continually from 1921 to 2006 when it was shut down. The Weyburn hospital was torn down in 2009 and the one hospital still remaining in North Battleford is a shadow of its former self as it is slated for replacement in the near future. The institution is one of the few remaining remnants of a mental health system that was what many would consider oppressive today. The facilities did serve

their place in a time that should not be viewed in a negative way; Treatment, diagnosis and understanding have all improved a great deal over the last 100 years. At the time the facility held over 2000 people, currently it is equipped for no more than 300 patients. Mental health service delivery has changed a great deal since Ruth Dafoe started her career in 1947.

Ruth worked at North Battleford for a few years and then with the newly developed Cancer Clinic until 1956 as the very first Isotope Technician in the province before she was drawn toward an entirely different career path. While working at both Sask Hospitals Ruth witnessed the desperate isolation many patients faced. Often families ceased contact with their loved ones after admission to the hospital. When the Government began the de-institutionalization process in the 1950s, many patients and their families were left in complete shock. Social and community ties were largely non-existent for patients being discharged from the hospitals. Dafoe saw the role of the social worker at the hospital and she knew changes were required. She thus enrolled at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in September 1957 after a brief stint with the Department of Social Welfare. That was the start of her brave



Ruth Dafoe



new career as a social worker.

On an interesting historical note, Ruth spent her summers working at Saskatchewan Hospital Weyburn back when Dr. Humphrey Osmond was in charge. She couldn't believe the changes at the hospital every new summer she went back to work. In the midst of the creation of the training facility in Moose Jaw, otherwise known as Valley View Centre, the Weyburn Hospital was changing rapidly. The Government was working to reduce the over 4000 people it had in care between

the two provincial hospitals by admitting a great deal of patients back out into the community or into training programs for the intellectually disabled. From these changes, smaller in-patient units or psych wards sprung up in communities across the province. Most often, in-patient units were simply an additional ward at the local hospital.

Dafoe completed her Bachelor of Social Work in 1958 and by the early 60's she had completed her Master of Social Work degree from UBC. The first community mental health pro-

gram, established to meet the needs of the many patients being discharged into the community was established at Yorkton. Ruth was the first social worker hired in 1960 to work in tandem with a psychiatrist at Yorkton. In total, six social work-psychiatrist teams would be established by 1964 to provide service to the growing city and surrounding community.

Dafoe recalled having a caseload of over 2000 clients at one time, but she was able to meet the demand largely by working in and with the communities she was assigned to and by constantly moving around. Logging over 100,000 miles a year in travel around her area, she obviously kept busy. It was certainly a different time and different atmosphere where she had a person, almost always another discharged client themselves, in almost every community keeping her updated on other discharged patients. Ruth had a schedule that her clients knew and followed. She told me that she never ate lunch alone. A large part of her job also involved working with the general practitioners in her district, many of whom would ask her for advice before making a referral.

In the year 1964 to 1965 alone social workers and doctors combined for nearly 2000 home visits per team in a region with a population of 94,000. The Yorkton Psychiatric Centre, in its first year of use, accommodated 492 people or roughly 41 people per month. Dafoe recalls her psychiatric ward having never been full during her tenure in Yorkton. Mental health services had already come a far way from the days of mass institutionalization a mere 10 years before. The issue that continues to linger to this day though is that the community-centred care model was never completed. With the change of government in 1964, a new philosophy for mental health came with it.

Ruth left Yorkton in 1964 and briefly returned to the Weyburn Hospital for a year doing research based work. The institution was in the midst of a massive overhaul at the time and much of the original beautiful and notable architecture was removed. One interesting note from the overhaul was the moving of the marble walls from the hospital to the Saskatchewan Legislature; clearly the focus of the government was not on services for the mentally ill.

Dafoe moved on to medical social work in March 1966, working as a consultant for Saskatchewan Health for over 10 years. In this consulting role, Ruth was involved in a number of health innovations such as organ transplant programs, Home Care, prosthesis programs and many more. She again went back to school in 1976 to work on a degree in Health Care Planning and Epidemiology. The remainder of Ruth's career was split between a number of different areas in the government such as Home Care consulting, Seniors Bureau Research and consulting the government on seniors issues.

Looking back, it is amazing to consider the number of revolutionary fields Ruth Dafoe worked in. She first worked on a program to recruit social workers into hospital settings, putting the number of workers in the health field in Saskatchewan into the hundreds. Moreover, she worked with the Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan was the mecca for innovative healthcare in Ruth's time, not only for physical ailments, but also for mental wellness.

Cancer Foundation, with early organ transplant programs, with early prosthesis programs, and setting up long-term care centres and programs. As her career wound down she worked toward seniors rights and resources in Regina. Since retiring for good from the government in 1987, Ruth remained active working for or volunteering for a number of different agencies such as the Council on Ageing and the Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan.

Ruth Dafoe's time spent working with the early community mental health program is the most intriguing to me because I believe it was an innovative, community-based system that worked well. They of course had better funding and were working in the midst of dynamic and drastic changes. Saskatchewan was the mecca for innovative healthcare in Ruth's time, not only for physical ailments, but also for mental wellness. Over the past 10 years Saskatchewan has sat at or near the bottom of all Canadian provinces in spending on mental health services. Priorities have changed, but the fact remains that mental illness and addictions affect a high percentage of people in Canada every year. Our funding per capita as a country lags behind almost all developed countries. In a country where we take such civic pride in our healthcare system, it is discouraging to witness the current state of mental health care.

I believe much can be learned from the long social work career of Ruth Dafoe. She believed in the social aspect of social work. Ruth believed in working with the family. Even today, for the sake of client confidentiality, families are often left in the dark. If we are to commit to changing the state of mental health care in our country and province to a community-based practice, we must focus on a family-centred recovery model. The recovery model is inclusive and works within the community to foster proper supports for a client once discharged. Many people have noted a revolving door system, especially within our prisons and jails which house a disproportionately high number of mental health patients.

Ruth Dafoe can attest to the fact that social issues don't change quickly. Just imagine some of the changes that have been made since Ruth began her career in 1947. Tommy Douglas was Premier; MacKenzie King was Prime Minister; universal health care was just a wild idea; The Universal Declaration of Human Rights didn't exist; people with mental illness were mostly all considered defective and housed in institutions; the Second World War was still fresh and the Korean and Vietnam Wars had yet to occur; the USSR was the enemy; the Canadian flag and Constitution didn't exist. Thus it is most fair to claim we have come a far way as a society, but our work is not complete. The job of improving our way of life can never be completed, but it can be expedited by revolutionary changes. It is time to once again put healthcare and the all important aspect of mental well-being back at the top of our priority list. Ruth Dafoe has been involved in many health care reforms in Saskatchewan, but she is still waiting to bare witness to the proper transformation of the mental health system.

Local poet earns honourable mention in international mental health poetry contest

SUDBURY, ONTARIO – “We planted mother’s ashes, memories of bones, heavier than brass.” The vivid imagery of Linda Biasotto, a Regina-based poet, captured the attention of poetry judges and earned the writer an honourable mention in the 11th Annual BrainStorm Poetry Contest for mental health consumers for her poem “In the Pioneer Cemetery.”



Linda Biasotto

Biasotto's poem will be published in the Fall 2013 edition of literary magazine Open Minds Quarterly. The contest was hosted by Northern Initiative for Social Action in Sudbury, Ontario, a non-profit that works closely with and supports mental health consumers in their recovery.

The annual contest is open to poets from around the world and highlights the creativity of consumers of mental health services. 286 entries arrived at NISA from across North America. The top three poems were awarded prizes, and four poems merited honourable mentions.

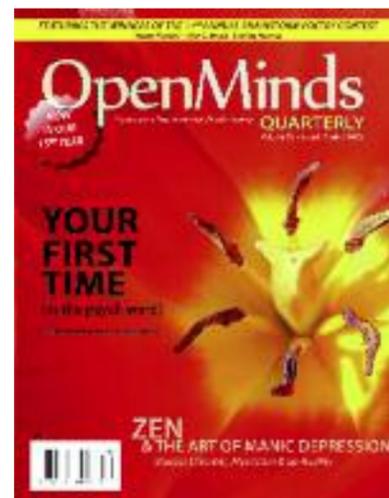
Linda Biasotto has published poetry in Carousel Magazine, Transition Magazine, the society and Spring Magazine. One of her poems won a Saskatchewan Writers Guild Short Manuscript Award. She is currently working on her first novel, for which she received a grant from the Saskatchewan Arts Board. Her first manuscript of short fiction is looking for a home.

“All of us are directly affected by how well our mental health services can detect, prevent and treat mental illness,” says Dinah Laprairie, editor of Open Minds Quarterly. “If you have any question about how debilitating and lifelong these illnesses can be, pick up any issue of Open Minds Quarterly — you’ll see how resilient someone must be to recover from one of these illnesses. People aren’t battling only their depression or mania or hallucinations, but the side effects of their medication, the assumptions of the public and the loss of their self-esteem.

That we saw so many high-quality submissions in this contest is incredible. These writers deserve credit: to be able to produce such beauty despite the distraction of illness shows us that, yes, it is possible to recover yourself after a diagnosis, no matter how lost you may have felt.”

Open Minds Quarterly is in international circulation. It is published by NISA/Northern Initiative for Social Action. NISA is built on the premise that consumer/survivors of mental health services are intelligent, creative, and can make a valuable contribution to society if given the opportunity to do so. The purpose of Open Minds Quarterly is to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness by enlightening others of our experiences and illustrating that this illness should be viewed the same way as any other.

Interested readers can contact the Open Minds Quarterly office at openminds@nisa.on.ca or 705-675-9193, ext. 8286 to pre-purchase a copy of the Fall 2013 edition in which Biasotto's poem will appear. It sells for \$7.00. Subscriptions are also available.





The night of the triangle

BY TREVOR L. BLACK

1971

We were at home on our ranch in southeastern Saskatchewan. Orvin, my brother, was lying on the couch watching our black-and-white television after supper, his '70s-long red hair in disarray on the cushion, the lenses of his glasses reflecting tiny figures from the television. I was spying on him from the hallway. He would have been about 16, 12 years older than my four years. He never paid any attention to me, but that didn't dissuade me from hoping he might start. LaVonne, my 18-year-old sister, did pay attention to me. Loneliness filled my days as I waited for Orvin and LaVonne to come home from school. My dad drove the school bus, and they would arrive every day about 4:30 p.m. I would run up the gravel lane leading into our yard so I could catch a ride on the big yellow bus. When was I going to be able to go to school? Soon, I hoped... But, in the meantime, I was stealthy in the shadows at the end of the hall, and I prepared my attack. My toes made no sound as I crept down the hall toward my brother on the couch. Nobody was quieter than I was. My legs pushed me into four quick steps, and I launched myself into the air, laughing with success when I landed on his chest.

1975

Orvin's 21st birthday party was an outside party, and there were people everywhere. I wondered why we were at my aunt and uncle's farm across the lake from our place—maybe because their yard was bigger. I was stuffed full of the roasted pig they had cooked in the ground, and now some sort of contest was starting. A crowd watched as, one after another, a rider of a big Harley-Davidson planted his foot on the ground, twisted the hand throttle of the bike until I could feel the thumping of the engine in my chest, and spun the rear tire, the bike carving a lazy circle as the rider hopped on his flexed leg to keep his ankle from twisting, too. The motorcycles were loud, so loud that I wanted to cover my ears with my hands to keep the din of the barking bikes out, but there was no way I was going to embarrass myself like that. One of the bikers fell over, and his Harley fell on top of him. Everyone laughed as they swarmed in to lift the bike off the red-faced rookie.

Sometimes, little boys want to be a fireman or a policeman when they grow up. Not me, I wanted to be just like Orvin. Although I was blonde, and not red haired, I hoped I'd be as big as him when I was older. He was cool: he rode a Harley-Davidson chopper he had built, he worked in the oil patch on drilling rigs, and he had many friends. The weekend-long celebration of his birthday, called *The Annual*, was held every July and was famous, or infamous, for drawing party-goers from within a 500 kilometre radius to its festivities.

I was at the very first Annual, but the feeling I remember from that day wasn't joy, but sadness because Orvin didn't talk to me at his party. Now, when I think about my preteen years, I realize I was desperate for my brother's attention, and he

didn't even see me. Instead of being angry with him, I idolized him.

1980

Orvin watched me as I hauled two round bales into the heifers' pen with the tractor, one bale gripped with the front-end loader, and the other piggy-backing along on the two-pronged bale lift at the hind end of the tractor. Space was tight in the pen, but after much jockeying around to and fro, backwards and forwards, this way and that way, I dumped the first, then the second, bale into its respective feeding ring. There was a triumphant feeling in my chest as I backed out of the pen. I was skilled in the trade of close-quarter tractor tactics; I had shown him I was someone worthy of his fraternity. Orvin signalled me to wait, shut the gate, and walked toward me where I sat on the idling tractor.

"What was all that back and forth business?" he said.

Didn't he see how tough it was to move around in the pen? My triumph sank to embarrassment. "It's too tight to turn around in there," I said.

"Look, you should have dropped the back bale by the first ring as you went by it, and then dropped your front bale in the second ring ahead of you. Then you could have backed up past the first bale, picked it up with the front-end loader, dropped it in its ring, and then backed out."

He was right. His solution was simple and quick. I felt stupid. Maybe he noticed the look on my face, because he moved up onto the step of the tractor to get closer.

"Use your head and think: before you do anything, look at what you're getting into, think about what you want to get done, and then visualize how you're going to do it," he said.

I've never forgotten that advice, though I don't delude myself that I've always followed it. And I've also learned having a plan doesn't guarantee success. Some things you have to learn on your own.

1990

Moving to Vancouver in the fall of 1989 was a last minute decision, like many of the decisions I made at that age. No more prairie winters: no more snow, no more scraping windshields, and no more -40 degree temperatures. I ended up working in a warehouse at a job that, while monotonous, kept me dry and solvent.

My mother got a call from me every Sunday. Near the end of March, 1990, I made my regular Sunday call to home from my cramped, one-room apartment in East Vancouver. Soon after answering the phone, Mom told me Orvin wanted me to call him, and she thought he wanted my help during the spring calving season—Orvin had taken over my parents' ranch, and in 1989 he and his wife, Tami, had moved into the three-bedroom bungalow on the ranch when Mom and Dad moved to Oxbow. Mom and I said our goodbyes, and I punched Orvin and Tami's number into the keypad right away because I was eager to help him.

Orvin and I never talked on the phone, much, so I felt self-conscious when he answered. Should I wait for him to ask me to come home, or should I just volunteer? I shouldn't have worried. The conversation was short.

"Hi, Orv, it's Trev," I said.

"Can you come home?" he said, without even saying "How are you?" "I need help, here. I need someone I can trust."

I said, "Yeah, I can come home. I have to give my notice, and pack up my stuff, so I can't get there for at least a couple of weeks."

"Can you come right away? I can't talk about it over the phone, but I need you to come home as soon as you can," he said. He'd never asked me for help, before.

"Ok, I'll tell them it's an emergency, and I'll quit tomorrow. I need to pack, and it will take me a couple days to drive, so I should be at your place Wednesday night."

"Come as quick as you can," he said, and he hung up.

The phone call left me uneasy and disconcerted. What

Asking him to justify his pronouncements was silly. His answers simply led to more questions.

could be going on that he needed me there so quickly? What was this 'trust' business? I felt humbled he had asked for my help, but now I was scared that something bad was happening. I started cleaning my little apartment and making a to-do list of things to take care of before I left the west coast. There wasn't much to pack because I could fit everything I owned in my car. Looking back, my instincts were right. Something bad was happening.

My boss at the warehouse was a fair man, and I liked him. He deserved better from me than such short notice of my quitting. Perhaps he sensed my urgency, because when I told him my brother had asked for help and I was very sorry, but I couldn't give him a proper two-week notice and that I had to leave, today, he just nodded. He was unhappy to be short a worker, and my face burned red with shame when he told me he hoped everything would work out OK. Shaking his outstretched hand, I thanked him and left.

The packing had gone quickly on Monday, and Tuesday I drove as far as my brother Wayne's house in Calgary. Wayne was 20 years older than me, and we had never lived in the same house. Sharryn, Wayne's wife, had always been kind to me. Wayne and Sharryn would come home to the ranch for visits, and Sharryn used to make tea and toast for me when I was a child.

The report of the strange telephone call baffled Wayne. He hadn't heard anything strange or out of the ordinary, but he agreed Orvin wasn't acting normally. Wayne wanted to call him, but I asked he wait until I got down there and got some sense about what was happening, and he agreed. Wednesday dawned clear and bright as I drove the last 1000 kilometres to the tract of prairie where I had grown up—on which sat a white house with a cottage roof, a barn and its barnyard, numerous outbuildings in various states of repair, all surrounded by a shelter-belt of tall poplar trees.

I was staying in the guestroom at Orvin and Tami's (the white house with the cottage roof is their house, now). Do you know the feeling when you're not quite asleep, and you're not quite awake, and suddenly you're free-falling, your body weightless? Then you remember you can't be free-falling; your body spasms to a halt, your senses come back to you in a heart-exploding instant? For a microsecond you still think you're falling but you're not, really, and the sensation of the jerking stop reminds you that you have mass. The adrenalin surges through your body and makes your fingers and toes tingle, and as the memory of the falling sensation fades, you mourn the loss of weightlessness? That's how I felt as I came to my senses on a night about a week after my arrival. And to startle my heart back into rhythm, there, at the foot of my bed, stood Orvin.

He was wearing his barnyard coat, and his red hair was covered with a toque. His eyes weren't his, but they hadn't been his since I'd come home from Vancouver. They belonged to someone else, now. This New Orvin was different because



Art by James Skelton



he had all the power of logic and persuasion of the Old Orvin, yet, unlike the Orvin I had loved for all my 23 years, this one was unpredictable, paranoid, delusional, and saw portent in every detail surrounding him. His cognitive filter was broken, and his mind interpreted things in bizarre and novel ways.

"Mom and Dad are in danger, and I have to go protect them," Orvin said, "You have to check the cows."

Oh, what now, I thought. His ideas had been getting more and more bizarre over the last week. Either Tami or Mom had made some inquiries, and there was nothing we could do unless we considered him a danger to himself, or a danger to someone else. Pushing that thought aside, I swivelled my head to peer at the clock: 2:00 a.m. It was calving season, and the cows needed checking every couple of hours to see if any were in labour. Hopefully, there would be no calves to pull, tonight.

Dreading Orvin's answer, but compelled to ask the question, I said, "Why are Mom and Dad in danger?" It was probably something to do with the Devil, a favourite theme of his. Religion had never been important in his life, yet now it was all Tami and I heard about when he wasn't ranting about being watched by the CIA and the RCMP. He replied as if we were having a rational conversation.

"The Devil is coming for them. I have to go to the shop, first, and then I need your car."

Was he asking, or telling, I wondered. This was a new development; he'd never asked to borrow my car, before. My chest tightened and a ball of anxiety constricted my breathing. Prior to the New Orvin, I would have enthusiastically let him take my car and felt proud that he was interested in something of mine. His approval used to mean everything to me. New Orvin was doing the asking, though, and I was scared he might see an apparition of evil in the ditch and decide to attack the poor, unsuspecting deer using my car as his weapon of Truth and Light. I'd never said no to him, before, and my automatic reaction was to let him take the car, even though I had misgivings. There wasn't a need to worry, though, because he changed his mind.

"No, I better not take your car. It's a Hot Rod, the Devil's instrument."

The Devil's instrument, in this case, to his mind, was my Camaro Z28. A temptation to ask how he'd arrived at that deduction was quickly quelled in my mind. Adjusting to the New Orvin was taking some time, but I was learning. Asking him to justify his pronouncements was silly. His answers simply led to more questions. This was the first time, in my experience, he had come up with one of his ideas during the night. To me, he seemed to calm down a bit at night when Tami was home from work, and I was always relieved to see her Toyota pull into its parking spot in the evenings. Swinging my legs out of the bed, I reached for some pants as he hurried out of the room to go on his mission to save Mom and Dad.

Barnyard smells of piss and cow shit assaulted my nose when I opened the porch door and stepped outside. The night was clear, and a slight breeze stroked my left cheek. The tem-

perature was below freezing, even though it was spring. Forgetting my brother for a moment, I marvelled at the stars, but then focused on looking at the cows.

Stepping carefully in the muck of the barnyard, I checked my footing before placing all my weight on a leg. There were icy spots, still, under all the shit, and I didn't want to revisit a memorable experience I had when I was 12. The cows placidly chewed their cud, and I watched for sure signs a cow may be going into labour: restless behaviour, an udder filling with milk, or a swelling vagina noticeably beginning to protrude. All seemed quiet with the cows, so I moved on to have a look in the heifers' pen.

A hugely pregnant little black heifer was acting restless in the pen. Wandering around sniffing the straw, she seemed to be looking for a place to lie down. There was an opportunity for me to shine my light on her hind end when it was toward me, and sure enough, I saw a thin, glittering string of mucus hanging from her engorged vagina. She was going to have a calf, and hopefully it would be soon. Somewhat concerned about her small size, I reflected that many of Orvin's better cows were surprisingly small, and I hoped she wouldn't have any problems. My immediate concern was where she was going to lie down. Though I had no control over them, it was frustrating to see cows or heifers walk over nice, clean straw, only to pick a low spot in the yard to lie down and give birth to their calf, pushing the calf out into a cesspool of pissy shit. Sending her positive thoughts, I resolved to come out and have another look at her in an hour. My watch showed the time to be about 2:20 a.m.

Worries about the heifer were foremost on my mind as I rounded the corner of the barn. My brother was still in the shop because the shop's windows were pulsing from the blinding flash of a welder as it lit the interior of the shop. His truck was parked in front of the shop, and the big sliding door was open, letting the night air pull away the fumes from the molten metal. The truck strobed in and out of existence as it was exposed in contrast to the darkness by the welding arc's relentless blue-white light. Though I was reluctant to talk to him—he likely had new enemies to watch out for and a list of new instructions for me—he needed to know about the little heifer. Coming up on the open shop door, I noted he was welding some lengths of scrap metal together.

"WHAT ARE YOU WELDING?" I said, hoping he could hear me above the frantic zaps and hum of the welder. The air smelled of electricity and steel. He finished laying down his bead and took off the welding mask, the red hair of his beard tipped with frost from his breath.

"I made a triangle to protect Mom and Dad from the Devil."

"Shouldn't you have made a cross?" I said, regretting my question as it left my mouth.

"Cross won't work. The Devil laughs at a cross. You know he's a fallen angel, right?" The triangle was quite big. It was about three feet to a side.

Hoping to talk him out of it, I tried another tactic, "It's only a couple hours 'til dawn. Why don't you take them the triangle in the morning, when they're up? Besides, we have a little black heifer that looks like she's going to calve."

"I've gotta go, now. I have to get there before dawn, that's the whole point."

With that, he flicked the welder's switch to *Off*, picked up his newly-made religious totem, threw it in the back of his GMC pick-up truck, and spun his rear wheels as he sped down the gravel road to my parents' house in Oxbow, 45 kilometres away. Suspecting Tami was already on the phone to Mom, I walked to the house. I sure hoped that little black heifer wasn't



Stream by Henry Peters

"Yes. Yes! You have to cut the poison out!" he said. I'll never forget the intensity in his blue eyes. He'd just flicked the blade out.

going to have any problems giving birth to her calf.

It was about noon. The wind's near-constant wail filled my ears and it pushed at my back as I walked with Orvin toward the house. His repeated assertions, earlier, that the wind was the Devil tormenting us as we worked on the little black heifer, had annoyed me.

We were 20 yards from the porch door when Orvin stopped. His brow furrowed, he stood in place, flexing his left hand and arm as if he was pumping an imaginary dumbbell.

"That's weird," he said, "I can't feel my arm."

"What? What do you mean?" I said.

He unzipped his coveralls and hunched his left shoulder forward as he pushed the coveralls down to bare his arm. A pale, perfect circle had formed on his bicep, a small drop of blood marking a bullseye in the centre.

"Holy shit! You must have jabbed yourself when you were freezing the heifer!" I said.

"It's the Devil. He made me stick myself."

"No, Orvin, it was an accident."

"No, it was the Devil. Don't you see? Look, it's my power arm! He's trying to hurt me." Orvin was left handed. "You gotta get the poison out!" He fished around in his pocket with his right hand.

"Get the poison out?" I said. Then, out of his pocket, he pulled his Swiss Army knife. "Oh no, I'm not going to cut you open. You have to go to the doctor!"

"Yes. Yes! You have to cut the poison out!" he said. I'll never forget the intensity in his blue eyes. He'd just flicked the blade out.

"No! No! I'm not going to do it!" Then, I saw the thought shift behind his eyes, and I knew exactly what he was going to do next—he started moving the blade towards his exposed bicep. "Wait. Wait! That's what he wants you to do," I said. The blade stopped. "It's the Devil. He wants you to hurt yourself."

"You're right! You're right! It's the Devil," Orvin said.

"You gotta go to the hospital, you gotta go right now."

"I can't drive my truck"—his truck was a standard—"I'll take your car."

"The keys are in it," I said. And then he was gone. I watched the rear end of my car fishtail down the lane, then I ran into the house to call Tami at work: Orvin had crossed the line—he had been about to harm himself.

Orvin spent three days in the psychiatric ward at Weyburn. He slept almost the whole time he was there, and when he awoke the Old Orvin, my Orvin, was back. Weeks later he told me he had been trapped inside himself, watching a stranger do strange things, unable to act.

Early in the morning of October 24, 1990, six months after these events, Orvin took his own life.



Sissy

BY SHIRLEY CALLAGHAN

When the door to the kitchen opened, I saw her with her eyes all red and puffy. She didn't hug me, but took her suitcase and went straight to her bedroom, crying all the time.

Sissy was far away at school for a while until she had to come home. She went to a hospital by the water and stayed for a very long time. I missed her and wanted her to stay home with me and talk to me about school. You see, I have lots of friends in my class, but teacher says I might not pass Grade Three if my arithmetic and reading don't get better. That makes me scared.

When Sissy came to our house from the hospital, she slept all the time in her bedroom except at night when she wandered around and flushed the toilet keeping us all awake. Mommy said not to bother her because the pills were bad for her and she couldn't go to the bathroom. When I asked her how she was, she would cry. I wanted to help her get better, but I didn't know how.

I couldn't play my drums which were in the basement below Sissy's bedroom, and that made me mad. I loved to play my drums and I played them a lot. I wanted to be in a band some day.

Mommy used to give Sissy grapes and cheese for treats, and then she would go to the phone and tell all her friends what was happening to my sister. Sissy would just put the pillow over her head so she couldn't hear her. Poor Sissy had nowhere else to go.

One day in the basement Sissy tried to hit Daddy with a stick, and he almost hit her back. I was in the corner and I was scared of a fight, but he cried and said, "I should have let you marry Harry."

I met Harry at her school and he was black. I never met a black man before and I didn't like it when he ran his hand over my crew-cut. Why didn't Sissy marry Charlie from Grade Twelve? He was good at arithmetic and taught me my tables.

I wanted to go and visit Sissy in her room, but I was scared she would cry. Maybe I would cry too and I wouldn't want to do that. She told me once that tears were water from the gods and made you feel better, but I didn't believe that story.

I waited a long time to talk to Sissy. She never wanted to have breakfast with the family so Mommy would take porridge to her bedroom, and I would peek in the door. Sissy was thin, her face was white and she had black circles under her eyes. Her bedclothes were all wrinkled and there were books everywhere. I heard her tell Daddy she couldn't remember what she'd read. I'm like that at school and doing my homework. I'm always doing something else or thinking things.

Every week she would take a bath and curl her hair before going to the clinic to see the doctor. Mom said on the phone to Myrtle her neighbor she wished he would come more often because she didn't know what to do with Sissy. I wished somebody knew how to help my sister. She was so sad and she was cross too. One time she yelled at me for making a noise. She

never used to do that. She was always nice to me.

One day I rode my bike to school, and just as I got off it Jeremy from Grade Six pushed me and told me I had a crazy sister. I hit him and made his nose bleed. I thought he would punch me out.

Teacher phoned Daddy and told him what happened and what Jeremy had said to me. My father told me not to bother with him, that Sissy was just taking a little rest from school, but I knew she was not feeling good. She was not my happy, funny Sissy.

At last Sissy left her room and began to dust and cook and help Mommy. I was real happy when she tickled me and hugged me and told me she loved me a lot. I sure loved her too and I gave her the ring I found in my popcorn box, and made her a window stop with her initials SMR carved on it.

A long time later she decided to go away to school again. I hated to see her go. Who would help me with my homework now? I told her I'd get Daddy to take me to see her at her school real soon, but Daddy couldn't go often and I was into hockey and getting help with my reading. The tutor told me I was plenty smart, just was "wired" different from other kids. I sure was happy to hear I wasn't stupid. When Sissy came home at Christmas I played my drums for her and she said I'd be famous some day. She made me feel proud.

I hope Sissy never gets sick again, and she can even marry Harry if she wants. I hope to see her this summer when she takes me swimming. She's pretty good looking, you know, and she swims like a fish.



Canyon Inspired by Judy Swallow

Worriedly yours

BY ELAINE MARIE DITNER

You signed your recent note—"Love and worry." Personally, I think the world would be a happier and less catastrophic place if more people worried—about volcanoes erupting, tsunamis roaring, asteroids hitting the earth, etc. After all, it is estimated that only about one percent of the events we worry about ever take place.

Let me see. What shall I worry about today?

- whether the toothpaste I use will really restore my teeth to pristine whiteness

- whether the luscious, fat-filled dessert will put me over the edge so my slacks will fit only if a button is undone

- whether I will pass the driving test before my 80th birthday (I'm in my 60's)

- if I slip and fall on ice, whether I will be hospitalized for six weeks with no one to water my plants

- whether the earth will stop spinning if I have a sleepless night and so am too tired to attend exercise class

- whether the newest baby in the family will survive measles or chicken pox.

You see, it goes on and on. Some worry, about which I can do nothing, will serve to dim the light of joy in my life and other worry may spur me to make wise and constructive changes in my life.

I leave the decision to you and me.

God's masterpiece

BY DONNA MAE JOHNSTON

Alana had a bake sale at her school. Each of the moms had to bake something. I don't bake, but I thought I would give it a try. We went through a lot of ingredients till we got it straight!

I let Alana and her brother help. Of course my oven was hotter at the back than at the front. So I'd have to turn the pans around in the oven to get everything to bake even. Alana was watching me pretty closely. She asked me why I had to turn them.

Why couldn't the cookies be baked all at once? For lack of an answer to her question, I told her it was like God's Masterpiece. Some people are lighter than others. They are no different from us. We are all made out of the same dough. Then she started to ask about some little native kids in her class and one little girl in a wheelchair. Are they the same as us? I told her yes. We are all of the same dough.

When Alana grew up I was at her house one day when she was doing some baking for Taylor's school. She told my grandson, Taylor, what I told her about being God's Masterpiece.

I was really touched by that. My story is still carried on for the next generation.

Where I once belonged

BY SHELLEY A. LEEDAHL

Just once more. Just once more I want to wake with the morning birds and not have to go anywhere, do anything or be who someone else expects me to be. I want to grasp the atom of time before wonder was flattened. Before merry-go-rounds ceased being fun. I want to be a girl in pigtails on a purple banana bike with streamers. I want to put handles on all those turns.

I want to go to a birthday party where everyone wears a homemade newsprint hat and the cake is shaped like a rabbit, with pink frosting in its ears. I'll cross my fingers, hoping to get the slice with the foil-wrapped quarter inside, though a dime would be just fine. I promise I won't look when we pin the tail on the donkey.

I want to play jacks again. I want to play "Mother-May-I" and "Red Light, Green Light" on the church sidewalk during

Vacation Bible School. I want to sing: "The ants go marching one by one" and "One bottle pop, two bottle pop ..." as loud as I can.

I want it to be 100 degrees Fahrenheit so no one will get mad if I pour water or even lemonade over my head and get my clothes wet. I like my lavender hot pants with the purple and white checked trim, ordered from the Eaton's catalogue. My mother let me tear open the package when it arrived. She is 35-years-old. She told me so.

2\Where I Once Belonged

I want to spend one holy hour between the rows of peas in my mother's garden, plopping one perfect globe after another into my waiting mouth while I'm supposed to be weeding. I want my mother to see me and pretend she hasn't.

I want permission to slice off a stock of rhubarb, fill a



bowl with sugar and dip through an August afternoon. On the hottest day of the year I want to invite every kid on the block to my house to run through the oscillating sprinkler. I want to hang my head directly over the spray and see how high I can count. Later, when the sun relents, I want to be my father's chosen child, running to the store to buy Revels or Popsicles for the whole family.

I want to experience that first explosion of light one more time, feel it, like the flutters our hearts made when father let us cut the grass, the whole yard, finally, by ourselves. At night we held our glowing secrets on the ends of branches, stirred tangerine swirls against the northern night sky. We aspired to blazes, let them burn, then stamped them out. I loved the fire that beat us to father's Datsun in the back. The colours the grass turned underneath that car, the neighbour kids yelling Run, run, and water a lifetime away. I desire the small fires we grew up in.

I want to be wedged between siblings in the wood-paneled station wagon, all of us queasy from too many hours on the highway, too many glasses of warm orange Kool-aid. I long for what comes after the road games, "First to see the water tower" and "That car is yours, the next one is mine," the moment when the squabbling stops and each of us falls silent, when we hold our collective breath between the telephone poles. It's like swimming underwater.

I want to be back in that particular car, peeking over the seat just as the blue of the promised lake teases us between the hills and butterflies swarm in our stomachs.

3\Where I Once Belonged

I want Dad to hurry up with the tent trailer so we can run barefoot to the beach and feel the water's blue sting. I want to race my siblings to the buoys, do back flips off the dock when the lifeguard's not looking, try out my brand new flippers and dig myself to China. I want desperately to get my Survival\Junior\Intermediate swimming badge, so I can sew it onto my bathing suit.

I have a dollar burning a hole in the pocket of my past. I want to hit the souvenir store and buy sand dollars like I've seen on the beaches in Archie comics. I want to add another pennant to my bedroom wall collection. There's room between pictures of Donny Osmond and the Jackson Five.

I want to play rummy with my sisters and brothers when it rains. I want to skate my finger along the tent trailer's weeping canvas while someone more responsible says: Don't touch the sides.

When the sun sinks below the tree-spiked horizon, I want to watch the Park staff dress like moose and put on bad skits. I want to see my parents, tanned and relaxed, and have them with me always.

I want Dad to take us to the drive-in beside the cemetery where grandma is sleeping. We'll watch "Willard" and "Tales From The Crypt" and I'll never forget.

I want to spring onto a horse without being told which side to get on and wind my way through a trail ride. No one will even know I'm terrified.

I want to turn on the radio and hear "King of the Road" and "These Boots Were Made for Walking."

I want to go golfing with my father and wash the grass-stained golf balls in the soapy ball-washer that goes squish-squish. I'll rake the sand greens when he's done putting.

4\Where I Once Belonged

I live in the Co-op House in Kyle / Turtleford / Wilkie / Meadow Lake. I want to make new friends from Kindersley, Weyburn, Canora, or some place really exotic, like Edmonton.

I want to balance these moments, like the time I shared a teeter totter with a girl exactly the same weight as me. To stop it all there, steady.



Photo courtesy of the author, Shelley Leedahl

Caring for Mom

BY LU RITZA

In 1983 Mom had started to get sick. We had taken her to the doctor. He said Mom had a cancerous lump in her breast. She was admitted to the hospital and a surgeon told her he would only take the lump itself. He ended up having to remove her entire breast. When Mom found out she went crazy, started to weep. The nurse gave her a sedative to calm her down. They kept her in hospital for two more weeks then let her home. That is when I started caring for Mom, cooking, cleaning, shopping for food, bill paying, banking and looking after two dogs and a cat.

Now we had to make several trips to Saskatoon Cancer Clinic at the Royal University Hospital. Mom didn't want to take chemotherapy. Because she was scared of losing her hair and throwing up all the time during treatments. Now the doctor had to think of something else to help her. He gave her a new medication.

After taking this medication for two years Mom went into remission. Mom still needed caring for. I made sure she got to her appointments. I remember the first time I took Mom to the cancer clinic. I was amazed. Children of all ages with their limbs amputated, many children taking chemo. One set of parents with a baby in their arms. It was always a very long trip home from Saskatoon.

Since Mom was in remission we thought maybe it would be okay to go back to Edmonton for a bit. While we were there Mom started getting sick again but this time it was her lungs. The doctor said it was just a chest cold. He gave Mom cough medicine and sent her home. Mom didn't get better. This time the doctor said she had bronchitis.

Once we were back in Prince Albert Mom was still bothered with her lungs. I took Mom back to her regular doctor. He sent her for ex-rays. He told us Mom needed her lungs drained. The doctor said he drained so much fluid that he had three and a half bottles full! He said she would be in hospital for a few weeks. The results of the tests came back and we were told Mom had lung cancer. I tried to hold back the tears but I ended up out in the hallway. Once I had gotten myself together I went back in the room and sat with Mom.

After four weeks we took Mom back to the cancer clinic. I thought to myself, this is it, I really have to watch her closely now. We had palliative nurses coming in with supplies for me to use for Mom. They brought Mom in a hospital bed. I noticed Mom's left leg was swollen. Her leg got so huge. It broke open and leaked a lot of fluid. Every ten minutes I had to try to change her bandages. I was going day and night. I didn't get much sleep. After a while Mom was in a wheelchair. I bathed her and carried her to the toilet. I lifted her in and out

of the car and took her to her appointments. My brother wanted to help but my Mom would only have me.

I was often too tired to even make my own supper. One time when I took Mom to the cancer clinic I was so sick .I couldn't breathe and my chest was congested. I knew I needed help with Mom but the doctors still wanted me to take care of her. We had no animals any more but it was still so hard. I pleaded with Mom to let my brother help me, but she still refused. One morning I checked on Mom and was shocked to see her pillow and nightgown were soaked in blood. I called the doctor and he said to get Mom to the hospital emergency and he would phone and tell them we were on our way. They gave Mom a blood transfusion. After they were done with Mom she got to go home. I stayed awake all night watching to make sure she didn't start bleeding again.

Things started to get very complicated. Mom was getting harder to feed. She couldn't keep anything down. She started getting severe pains in her right arm. More ex-rays, more treatments. The doctor told me Mom was dying. I said that I know. Things got worse. Mom couldn't eat at all, her head started to slide off the pillow. I phone the palliative nurse and she came

right over. She called an ambulance. It took the four of us to lift Mom off the couch to put her on the stretcher. We got Mom into her room when suddenly she sat up and said to me "Where did you get that up to date picture of your Dad?" He had been dead since 1979. And then she asked " How did you get all those people here from Ontario so quickly?" All those people were dead many years back. The nurses gave her morphine, a patch for pain.

I went home but I couldn't sleep. At five thirty the doctor phoned and told me Mom wasn't doing well and he

asked if she stopped breathing what did I want them to do? He said it was the humane way to just let her go. So I said just let her go. I phoned my brother and told him I was coming to pick him up. I called Mom's sister to meet me at the hospital. I wouldn't leave the hospital now because I had promised Mom she wouldn't die alone. They gave me a cot but I couldn't sleep.

For three days and nights I just sat there on the cot watching Mom breathe. I was looking at Mom when she took a deep breath and let it out. I went to get one of the nurses. They checked Mom's pulse and heart rate and told me she was gone. I stood there for some time just watching. Some of the nurses came and gave me a hug. I called Mom's sister and told them Mom had died. All I wanted to do was go home and spend a little time with my brother .I went to go and I started to fall to the floor. They laid me down on a couch and in a matter of seconds I fell asleep. My mind and body were totally exhausted. Mom passed away September 1999.

I remember the first time I took Mom to the cancer clinic. I was amazed. Children of all ages with their limbs amputated, many children taking chemo. One set of parents with a baby in their arms. It was always a very long trip home from Saskatoon.



Belly up!

BY DOT SETTEE

I remember when my two girls were young. We had a huge aquarium and it came time to clean it. While I was scrubbing it I accidentally put a huge crack in the aquarium.

I went to the Co-op to buy some rubberized caulking compound to fix the crack. Once the glue was dry I poured water in and waited until it reached warm room temperature. It was

all ready so I put the fish back in the tank. We had a lot of fish.

When my girls came home from school they checked the fish. Oh no! All the fish were belly up! I had used the wrong kind of glue and I had poisoned all the fish.

We had a funeral for them all at the back of the house and we had a feast following the funeral of Oreo cookies and milk. It was a sad day for the fish and for us, too.

The girl behind the smile

BY MEGAN SHORTLAND

Writing was never a passion of mine. I was never the young woman who had a pen and paper attached to her hip, ready to write down inspirational words. I was never the person who was gifted in English and Grammar. Words and phrases never popped into my mind like the images that I could create with a pencil in my hand. So when I did start to write, it was a wonder.

I do not know the exact time I first wrote in my little red-and-black book or even where I got it from. But I must have been somewhere around the age of 14, because that's when my childhood came crashing to a halt. That's when the effects of my brother's negativity on my family pushed me to my breaking point. My parents and I were frustrated with everything and everyone for trying to intrude in our family. My brother was deeply into drugs and alcohol and the whole town knew about our family's problems. I had no one to turn to, so I wrote.

At the time, I dismissed my poems as meaningless outcries of a pissed-off adolescent. But reading them now as an adult, I realize they were a child's cry for help. The things I wrote were dark and full of hurt and anger, all directed at one person: my brother. I poured out all my feelings into rambling, formless poems that were filled with spelling mistakes half obscured by scribbles and stained with tears. My lines were very literal without many metaphors or fancy words. And you didn't have to search for the meaning behind it all. An example here is the poem I wrote where the Angel is my older sister:

*My Angel came
She took me away
She took me back to the swing
The swing I had once gone before
We talked about our broken family
She said that I could talk to her anytime
But how can I?
When I can't even talk to myself
She said that it's good for me to talk
But how can I talk to anyone?*

*They don't understand
The pain I feel growing inside me everyday
The silent Hell I have to block out of my head when I go to school
I hide behind this smile
A smile that's mostly fake
Plastered onto my face like a painting
But one day this painting will fade and no one will see it
All my emotions tucked away inside
Away from the world forever
Until I break*

My poems were the key to my heart, which I hid from everyone. I was angry with my brother and wished I could say the things I had put down in my notebook, but I didn't have the strength at the time. My writing got progressively darker and I contemplated killing myself.

*He almost did the thing I wished for myself
For the pain and suffering to boil up like a kettle
The self-loathing
The hatred
What's the point?

I cry to think of what I want
How I could think that way
To see a knife and want to hurt myself
Seeing a tub full of water and think, what would it be like?
Would anyone cry for me like I've cried for myself?
Would they come to me like they are to him?
Would anyone care?
The battle going inside me
The good always wins
But maybe it won't*

At a time where I desperately needed help, I wrote out some of my less barren creations and slipped them under my parents' bedroom door. When my parents read my poems, they began to understand how I was feeling about our family that was falling apart. They tried to help me through the tough times by shielding me from their arguments with my brother. I

*. . . if I had not had the strength to show it to my parents
and if they hadn't found a way to shelter me,
I might not be here today.*

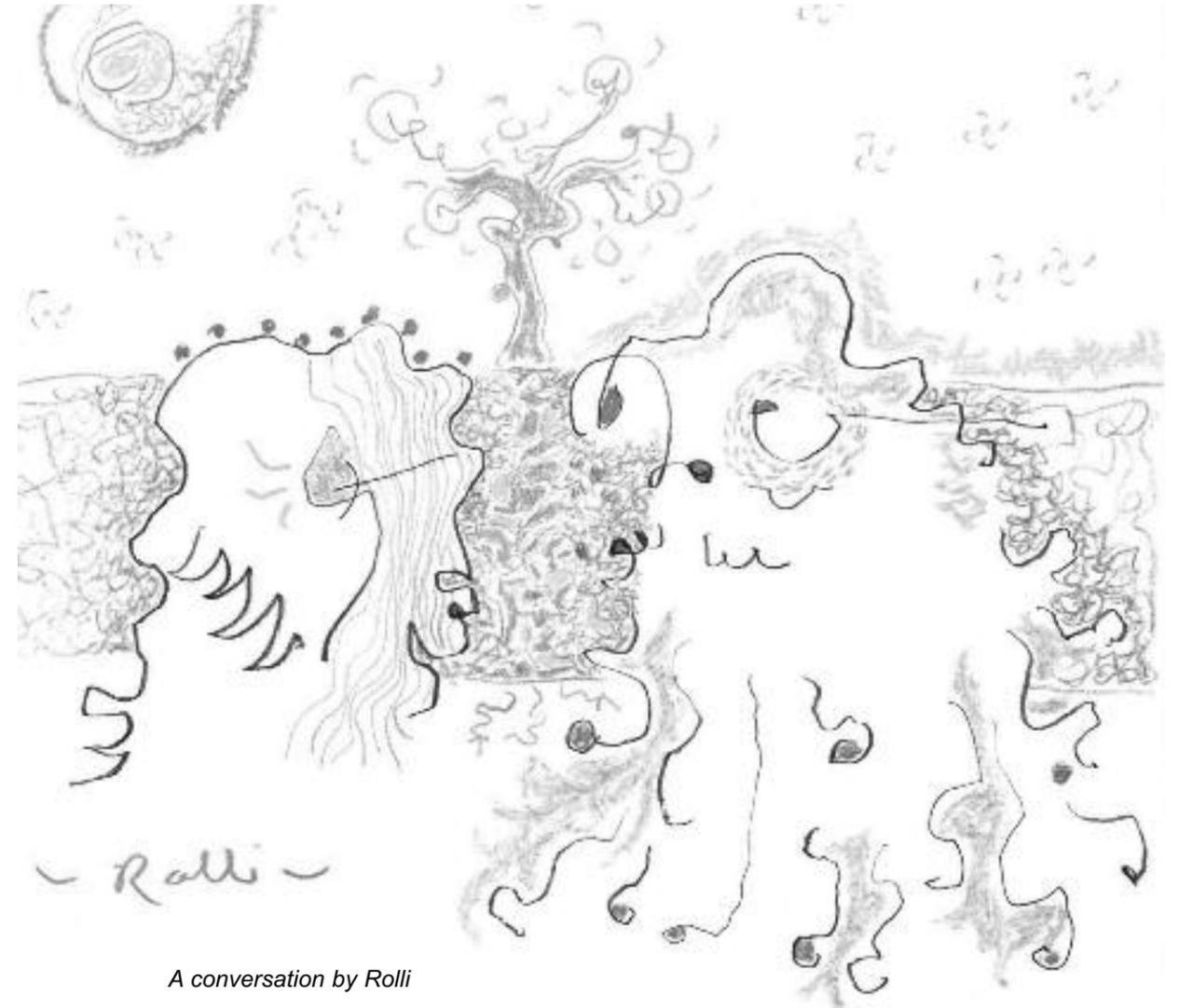
did not tell my loved ones or anyone else of my depression and self-destructive thoughts until eventually I wrote out all my problems in my book and came out of my depression, when I was a much stronger individual.

To this day, no one except me has read my book in its entirety. I re-read it once in a while and realize that, if I had not had the strength to show it to my parents and if they hadn't found a way to shelter me, I might not be here today. My writing has been a way for me to heal and climb out of my pit of despair.

Writing is a very personal and emotional escape from the highs and lows of the everyday world for me. I admit that I am not the best writer in the world. I do not know how to classify my poems. And I know that they are not the greatest works of art. But I still cherish them. When I hear people say that they

are emotional writers and do not want to show their works, I understand completely. I tell them my story so that they feel more comfortable about sharing, in the secret hope that they'll let me read their words one day. I try to convince people that I do not intend to judge them and that I will keep their confidence. Anything I hear is sealed unless they want me to talk about it.

As a closet writer myself, I take this theme very seriously, especially when I hear about kids committing suicide because they don't get the help they need. Words can have so much power and influence over us all; we tend to forget this in everyday life. So if I can help one individual step out of the shadows and show their words to one or a thousand people, I've accomplished my goal.



A conversation by Rolli



Lunch with Paulo

BY KATE BAGGOTT

Starters

Paulo is a reliable friend and a trustworthy husband, albeit not my husband. Paulo, however, was an early and enthusiastic convert to the science of psychology – until the pharmaceutical companies got involved. Now, he believes psychoanalysis is a perfect science. He also believes in the meaningful magic of symbols and coincidence.

“A funny thing happened when my wife spoke to your friend on the phone,” Paulo told me.

We were having lunch to celebrate my release from hospital. The turkey medallions had been set before us, the plate a shallow pool of pepper sauce. Paulo reached for the bread, he always ate the sauce first. I suppose it made the meat easier to find.

“He responded to the news of your condition using the same words you did, my wife said,” Paulo lowered his voice, as if he were about to share a secret of international importance. “Your friend asked my wife how a woman of your age, who already has two children, could have had an ectopic pregnancy.”

“Well, that is the most obvious question,” I told Paulo.

Paulo motioned to the waitress and pointed to the empty bread basket. She raised her eyebrows in surprise. She was new to the restaurant. She didn’t know Paulo and his massive appetite for bread and wine while the rest of the Western world was trying to cut down on refined carbs and alcohol.

“No,” he said, continuing our conversation once more bread had been brought, “that is where you – and he – are unique. The most obvious questions in situations like that are about physical well-being, recovery and emotional states.”

I said nothing. I knew, once his language became more precise, that one of his theories was coming on. I found a piece of turkey floating in my pepper sauce and tried to fortify myself before the moment came.

“It’s the emotional state I want to talk to you about,” Paulo informed me. I swallowed quickly, while I still could.

“When you woke up from surgery and my wife told you the source of your pain, she was surprised at your calm. She was surprised that you didn’t express any sense of loss,” he told me.

I put my fork down. I didn’t want to appear defensive.

“I had no idea I was pregnant, how could I feel any sense of loss? Plus, I do have two happy and healthy children. They are so beautiful, how could I ask for more? It would be selfish.”

“There’s no need to defend yourself,” Paulo said. “Your reaction was the right one for you.”

Paulo’s plate was empty even though he had been doing most of the talking.

“Your reaction, though, made your friend’s reaction that much more interesting. He used the same words to ask the

same question, but he was grief-stricken. My wife could hear the tears in his voice. If we didn’t know you so well, my wife said, she would have thought it was his baby you’d lost.”

“Of course not!”

I pushed my plate away. I may not cook. I may not clean. I may not earn enough money to matter. I am still a good wife in the ways that matter.

“No, no, that isn’t what either of us thought. I just meant other people would have thought that. We’re just saying that he reacted like a grieving father,” Paulo explained. “Reacting and being are different things.”

The waitress approached to ask if everything was all right with my meal. I told her I wasn’t feeling well and she could take it away, but Paulo said he’d eat it and took my unfinished plate.

“Obviously, you had memories of past joy to draw on when you were ill,” Paulo continued, emptying the bread basket again. “When your friend heard about your condition, he only had memories of sorrow. You had opposite emotional reactions even though you had the same rational response.”

I knew it was time for Paulo to deliver his theory.

“You know the expression ‘there are two sides to every story,’ don’t you?” he asked.

“I know all the clichés,” I told him.

“Well,” he continued, using his fork to punctuate his words, “most of us live our one-sided stories, but don’t you think it makes sense to assume that, somewhere in the world, there is someone living the opposite side of exactly the same story? That, I believe, is the source of the connection between you and your friend.”

Paulo sat back, satisfied, and patted his belly.

I let his words sink in. Perhaps I really hadn’t been feeling well. Paulo’s theories often left me feeling cold, but this was the first time I had to leave the table.

This theory had awakened a long-forgotten part of my memory of you.

The last time I saw you, the time before last summer, before I got married, before I moved away, before my children were born, I saw you at a bar. There was nothing unusual about that, it was how we always ran into each other.

There was an exciting band playing that night. Their sound was new and exciting and everyone knew they were on their way to bigger things.

I was there with a man. A man whose attention I had been craving. I had a job, I had friends, I had my mother and siblings and grandparents to visit. I don’t know how I had so much time to dedicate to chasing him, but chase him I did. Eventually, I wore him down to the point we went to hear a band together. I’m a different kind of woman now.

The band took a break. The man I was with saw some people he knew and took a break from me to talk to them. I played that game too. I found you.

You were glowing with happiness and there was a ring on your finger. Yes, you told me, you and the tough, tattooed girl-

friend had gotten married and had a baby girl.

“That’s perfect!” I said.

“It’s not perfect yet,” you replied. “The baby isn’t doing very well. We don’t know if she’s going to make it.”

“She’ll be fine,” I said, even though I had no idea why she wasn’t doing very well. I insisted on buying you a beer to celebrate. You didn’t want a woman to buy you a beer, but I didn’t have a pair of booties or a little rattle in my purse to give you instead. Obviously, knowing what I know now, I wish I hadn’t bought you a drink.

We didn’t know anything then, though, did we? We clinked our glasses together and toasted the arrival of your daughter. You didn’t have a picture in your wallet, but you told me what she looked like and that you could hold her in your two palms. It didn’t occur to me, as the woman I was then, that even in your big hands the baby would have been very, very tiny.

The man I had been craving come looking for me. He seemed jealous that I’d been talking to you and I probably thought that was a good sign of interest from him. Like I said, I’m a different kind of woman now.

When I saw you again this summer, there was no wife, no daughter. Considering the shape you were in, the shape I’d heard you’d been in for years, it was easy to assume they’d left you to live alone with your addiction. After hearing Paulo’s theory, I knew that things were much, much different than I’d assumed.

She didn’t make it, did she?

Afters

Once I’d recovered I went back to the table and I told Paulo what his theory had made me realise about your tiny baby daughter. You are so far away and I know you will never meet Paulo. There is no reason for me to guard your privacy or feel disloyal when I tell him about you.

“If it had happened to me, I would have taken to drinking too,” I told him.

“Alcoholism is a disease, not a reaction,” Paulo replied. “No one would react to loss like that. And the reason you wouldn’t is that doing anything to numb the pain feels like a betrayal of your dead child. At first, your grief is the only expression of your love.”

I was shocked. I knew Paulo and his wife had four children. I had met them all; their children’s partners, their children’s children and step-children too. They were my age and a little older.

“Yes, unfortunately my wife and I have some personal experience in this matter,” he confessed. There were tears in his eyes. I ordered our coffee and asked the waitress to bring some water.

“Don’t forget my dessert,” Paulo said. “I’m going to need the extra energy to tell you everything.”

I pushed my plate away. I may not cook. I may not clean. I may not earn enough money to matter. I am still a good wife in the ways that matter.

Paulo didn’t have to tell me his story. I told him he didn’t have to put himself through it, but he wanted you to have the benefit of his experience.

To be honest, I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear it. I am the mother of two healthy and wonderful children. I worry about them constantly as it is, I didn’t need “to go borrowing trouble” as my mother would say. I have a parent’s healthy terror of tragedies involving children.

Still, it was Paulo’s story to share. I also felt guilty that he always seemed to know me so much better than I knew him. If a sad story could even things out, I would listen.

“Have you ever noticed that I am half Amazonian Indian?” Paulo began. I laughed. A little coffee came out my nose. The waitress brought me an extra napkin.

“No,” he said. “I wouldn’t have expected you to notice. Only very old-fashioned Europeans from my homeland can see my indigenous features.”

Like all stories, Paulo’s began a generation earlier than you’d think.

Paulo never met his father. He didn’t even see a picture until after his mother’s death when she left him one, sealed in an envelope with her lawyer.

“These were the ways of old-fashioned Europeans,” he sighed. The waitress set Paulo’s cake in front of him.

“The extra scoop of ice cream is from me,” she whispered. Eavesdroppers are at their most generous when they are shameless.

Paulo was raised on a huge cattle ranch by his mother and grandparents. The cattle hands treated him like one of their own sons, so he never wanted for a father’s attention. He learned to speak Spanish and German and to stay quiet when his mother slipped out of their shared room late at night.

“You’d think she would have been able to arrange a meeting between you,” I said as Paulo paused to eat another bite of cake with extra ice cream.

“He may have had a wife and more children than he could count already,” Paulo shrugged. “These things are common in my country.”

“I’ve read about that,” I assured him.

“Common” turned out to be the word that caused Paulo so many problems when he met his wife. Her name is Louisa. I haven’t told you her name before because hers is a name you may might recognise from TV or the radio and I do have to protect her privacy. Louisa’s parents were exactly the kind of old-fashioned Europeans who noticed Paulo’s indigenous features immediately. They rejected him and made him irresistible to their daughter.

“We were students of literature,” Paulo explained. “Of course we had read Romeo and Juliet. We knew exactly what love demanded of young lovers.”

“Did you put a ladder under her window?” I asked. “Did you steal her away in the night?”

“Of course,” Paulo told the waitress and me.

The waitress brought Paulo another cup of espresso. She



patted his shoulder to let him know that it, too, was from her.

A young Franciscan priest conducted the wedding ceremony at 5 o'clock in the morning. The bride carried flowers that had grown along the vine outside her bedroom window.

Of course Paulo should have been happy when Louisa became pregnant the first night they spent together.

"It did not feel like luck," Paulo sighed. "I had never thought about fatherhood. I never thought of not of having a father. I never thought of becoming one."

Louisa was already his wife. He had stolen her away in a white nightgown and surrendered before a priest who put the crime of stealing her right again. There would be no going back.

"Literature students," Paulo repeated. "We knew nothing."

Louisa was desperately tired with the pregnancy and, perhaps, with homesickness and the shock of married life. Paulo took her back to his grandparent's ranch and into his boyhood room. His mother had long since moved into another set of rooms in the ranch house.

As his new bride slept, Paulo sneaked out of the room, just as he'd watched his mother do as a child.

"My misbehaviour was not what you think," Paulo explained. The waitress had looked away from our table when Paulo confessed to sneaking out of the bedroom. "I went to the campfire where the ranch hands spent their evenings telling stories and singing. I went to be among the men I had grown up with. I wasn't ready to give up my freedom, but I had an instinct that is exactly what fatherhood would mean."

The waitress stood at her station polishing butter knives. She threw them into the cutlery tray so they would clank and rattle disapprovingly. I folded my napkin into a triangle and then into a smaller triangle and did not meet Paulo's eye.

Both the waitress and I knew what motherhood did to freedom. Fatherhood and freedom, though, matched like a pair of socks. It was a failure of natural justice. We were disappointed in Paulo.

As Louisa's energy recovered, the more time she spent with her new mother-in-law. They often went into town to walk and shop, the younger woman taking the older by the arm. They did not wander into shops and exclaim over little dresses or tiny shoes. There were still superstitions, in those days, about bringing anything for a baby into the house before a birth. It was seen as "tempting fate" as my parents would say.

Instead, the two women indulged in long and delicious lunches and showed each other off to the acquaintances they met. Paulo's mother bought her daughter-in-law shoes of the finest Argentine leather in the hopes they would stop her feet from spreading as her body expanded. It was on the steps of the shoe shop that they met Louisa's mother.

Paulo's in-law's never accepted their daughter's marriage. At first it was the anger over their daughter's defiance. After that, they were kept away by the guilt over words that could never be taken back.

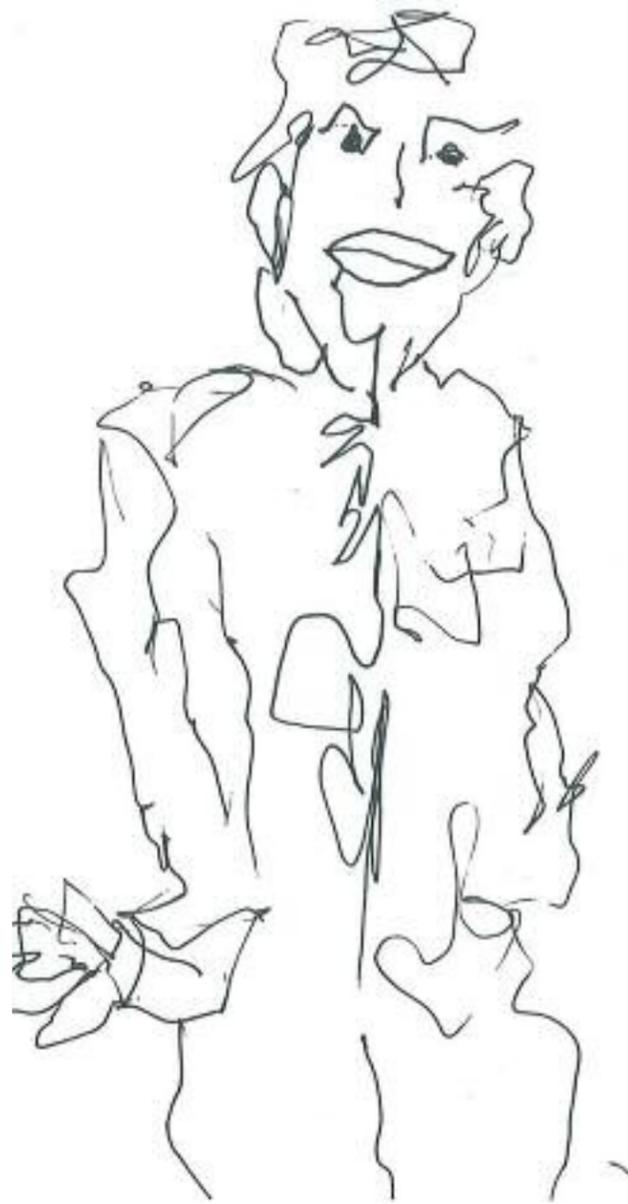
"Birds of a feather, I see," Louisa's mother had spat. "Two

sluts brought together by their Indian lovers."

Louisa's mother did not stop. She had drawn a crowd.

"Well, curse you and your bastard," she shouted at Paulo's mother. "And curse you and yours too," she shouted at her daughter, throwing her hands out at Louisa's belly.

Paulo shared his disgust at his mother-in-law's behaviour with the ranch hands. They were as affronted as they would have been had one of their own son's been insulted. Each of the men cursed the mother-in-law and spat into the fire. Paulo did



Art by James Skelton

The waitress stood at her station polishing butter knives. She threw them into the cutlery tray so they would clank and rattle disapprovingly.

not recognise the fatherly solidarity for what it was. It did not inspire him to think about how he would love and protect the young life that was due to arrive in two month's time.

"Due to arrive" is one of those carefully constructed expressions, isn't it? Now, whenever I hear it, I feel the potential for sadness more than the expectation of joy. I have to force myself to think the best wishes for the mother-to-be in the hopes that good wishes may protect her.

When Paulo sneaked back into his room that night, it was to be greeted by his mother and his pale, bleeding wife. His two-months-early daughter was wrapped in a lamb fleece and struggling for breath.

"The university clinic," his mother snapped. "Are you coming or not?"

For two hours, Paulo sat in the back seat of the car while his mother raced to the nearest city. Poor Louisa moaned beside him each time they went over a bump, the tiny baby cradled in her lap. When she was not moaning, Louisa was chanting the prayers known to every mother of a sick child.

"Please little baby, live," Louisa begged. "Please God, let her live, I love her so."

Paulo reached out to comfort his wife, but could not extend his arm past the bundle in her lap. He could not look at his baby daughter.

"It was guilt, you see?" he tried to tell us. "I needed to let it punish me until I deserved to look at my baby."

The waitress rolled her eyes. I looked at my watch.

At the hospital the baby was put in an incubator, was given a tiny tube for oxygen.

"Even those interventions were new. It was all they could do then," Paulo said. "They did all they could and advised us to call a priest."

Louisa needed treatment too. She was put to bed in another part of the hospital, her feet elevated above her head to help stem the bleeding. Paulo's mother attended to his wife and left him to see to the infant's baptism by the hospital chaplain.

"Tell her you love her," Louisa demanded as she was wheeled away. "Tell her again and again. Give her a reason to live, tell her life with us will be wonderful."

Paulo sat by the incubator and did what he was told. By the fortieth time he repeated the phrase, he could look into his daughter's bluish face. By the fiftieth time, he knew what he was saying was true, that he had never felt such love in all his life.

"What is your daughter's name?" the priest asked.

Paulo did not stop to think.

"Christianna," he said, and the priest repeated the name, sprinkled the holy water, gently rubbed the oil into the baby's tiny forehead.

"I love you Christianna," Paulo told his baby daughter. Only after he had used his daughter's name did he realise he had named his daughter after his mother-in-law, given her exactly the name he and the ranch hands had cursed as they spat into the campfire.

"Tradition is automatic when all thought stops," Paulo explained to us. The waitress shrugged her agreement. I wasn't so sure. My new world upbringing had taught me differently, but I stayed silent.

Little Christianna surprised everyone. She lived through the night and the next day and the day after that.

"Sometimes," the head nurse said, "if they can pull through the first 40 days..."

The head nurse didn't finish her sentence. A lot of hope in the face of a little hope is best left unexpressed. Besides, we know how this story ends.

"With a father who has learned how to love his child only to lose her after five short days," Paulo said. The waitress wiped her eyes on a napkin. She handed one to me.

"I won't tell you of our heartbreak, Paulo said. "You are both mothers and you'll go home and expect your children to return fierce embraces they cannot understand."

"Instead," Paulo continued, "I will tell you how we came out the other side because none of us, not ever, should be defined by our tragedies."

There is a point when grief ceases to be automatic, when it continues only because it is nurtured.

"It can turn into simple self-pity," Paulo said. "Louisa and I used to torture ourselves with our self-pity and call it grief."

They returned to the city as a married couple and resumed their studies. They kept the birth and death of Christianna a secret from all but their closest friends. In the evenings they took long walks, arm in arm, to discuss their despair.

"There is a quote from Yeats we often reminded each other of," Paulo told us. "The point when he realised that there was one thing worse than the death of his daughter and it was facing all the years ahead without her."

One evening on their walk Paulo and Louisa passed a playground. It was late in the spring and the last of the children must have just run home for dinner. The roundabout was still turning and the swings were still swaying back and forth. The place was still alive with the energy of momentum, the after-joy of play.

"Oh look," Louisa said bitterly. "This is where all the empty-armed parents come to watch their ghost children at play."

"They were the saddest words we had ever shared," Paulo told us. "Saddest because they were cynical. I grabbed the chain of one side of the swing to still it and sat down on it myself. 'How I loved my daughter,' I moaned to my wife."

Perhaps because she had uttered the saddest words possible, Louisa's grief crested and broke.

"Oh, how I still love my daughter," she said. She took the chains holding the swing in her hands, pulled back and pushed, sending Paulo sailing through the air."

He laughed out loud in surprise.

"OK, Papa," Louisa said. "If we can't play with her, we will play for her."

And that was how Louisa and Paulo took to living extra

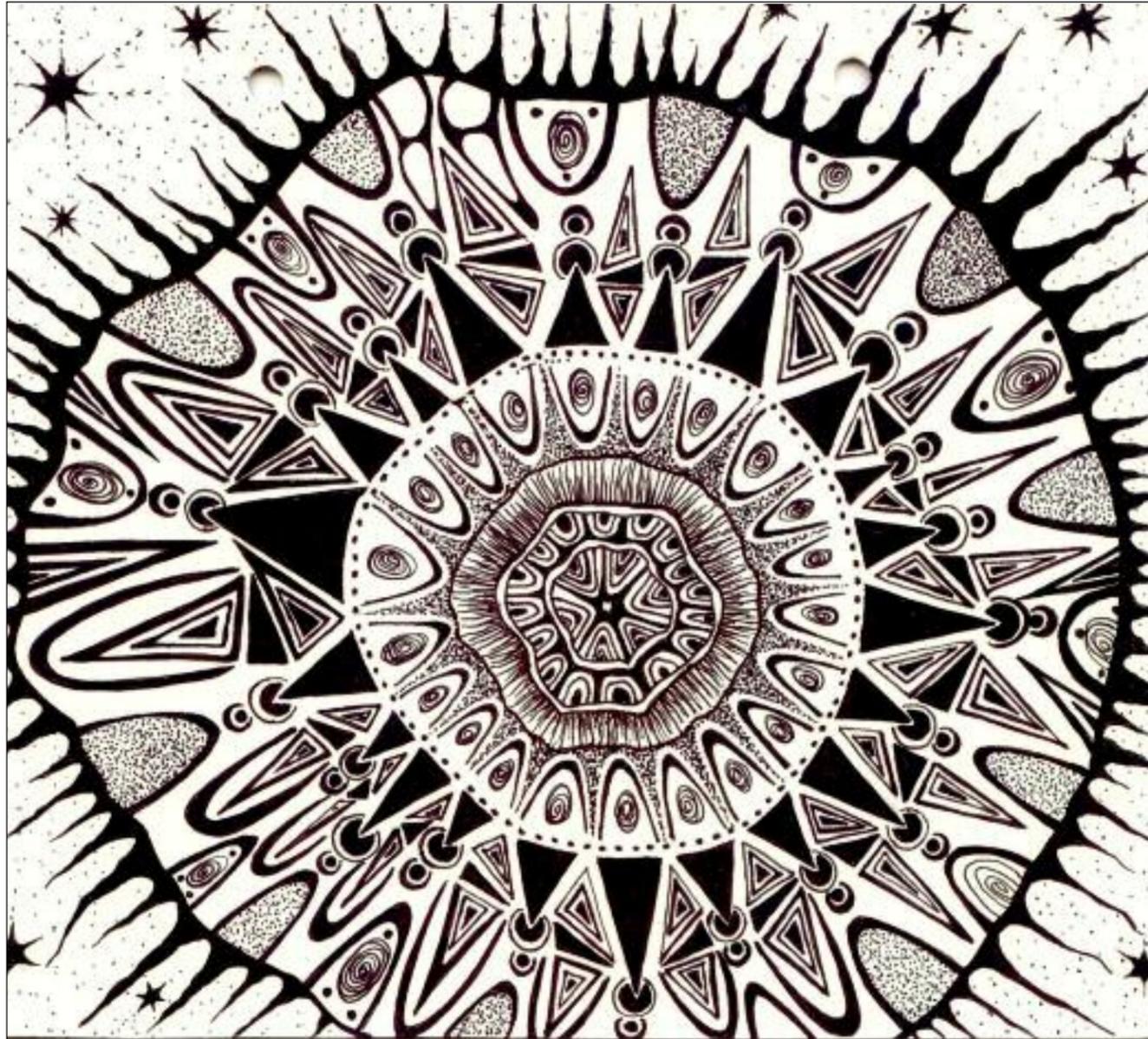


for Christianna.

“Notice how the whole world helps me to do it?” Paulo asked. “There is always extra ice cream on my cake. There is always that little bit more to squeeze out of each situation for her to experience through me. Our children do it too. They have always known to take one more turn around the carousel, one more trip down the slide for their sister.”

The waitress poured herself a cup of coffee, added a spoonful of sugar, paused for a moment and stirred in a second spoonful. She lifted the cup to her lips and smiled.

“Tell your friend,” Paulo told me. “Tell him about the happy old man you know. Tell him I said that alcoholism might be a serious disease, but self-pity is just a habit that can be broken.”



Circle of Angels by Judy Swallow

Letter

BY CHANTAL MORIN

Dear concerned,

You are incredible. I want to thank you for truly caring about me. I know that you genuinely want what is best for me, but despite your wise words, I have decided to drop pre-calc class. You've told me many times to challenge myself, and I thought that I only wanted to quit math because it was hard for me, and I was lazy. I'm not lazy. It took me a while to figure out, but now I know and it has led me to this decision. The truth is that depression is crippling me. It hides in every nook and cranny of my home, behind every door and beneath every surface. Last semester was hell for me, and I thought that once it was over the darkness would leave with it. It didn't. I don't know if you have ever experienced depression, but if you have, you'll know it's a bitch and it never truly goes away. It doesn't heal like a wound or fade like a cold. I do not mean to mock your authority when I'm late for school; it's just that there are some days when getting out of bed doesn't really seem worth it. I've realized that I am challenging myself. In fact, I've never worked harder in my life. Simple tasks feel like marathons, and even when I do well, I'm so exhausted by the effort that I can't even enjoy my successes. Getting out of bed is a challenge, choosing an outfit is a challenge, opening my math book is a challenge. It has been a tough six months with ups and downs I can't explain. For a long time, I thought I was just weak. I was crumbling under the pressure that everyone else seemed to be able to handle. Often I still feel weak, and like I've let everyone down including you. I've been working really hard to convince myself and others that I'm okay, but I'm not. I don't want everyone to walk on eggshells around me, thinking they'll set me off or something, but I do need people to support me even if they think I'm making the wrong decisions. I'm sorry I didn't let you and others know about this earlier, but I made the mistake of thinking I could fight it on my own. I just need to empty my plate of some activities, because between five classes, two one acts, choir, SLC, work and a social life, I've had little time to deal with my heart. I've tried to continue on like everyone else, but I'm not everyone else, and I have to do what's right for me. Thank you for understanding.

-Chantel



C'est la vie

BY HELEN PEREIRA

I've just moved up north to Cobalt and into this apartment. It's a lot smaller than the one I used to live in back in Toronto, but it's lots easier for me to get around in with my walker. It's great, really. This is a nice building with lots of other seniors but I like it that students and families also live here – they help to liven things up. One thing I really do enjoy is a little library off the laundry room where I help myself to detective novels to help pass the time. Television gets boring after a while.

I don't know this part of Ontario at all. It's to hell-and-gone away up north. I can actually see Quebec across the lake, which probably accounts for all the French I hear being spoken. It's pleasant enough living here, but except for the daughter who dragged me here, I don't get to see the rest of my family very often. My grand-kids live down south where they grew up. That's where they want to live because that's where the action is. I can't say I blame them.

I'm trying to get used to people asking me if I'm Helga Kimmel's mother. Gone are the days when she was Mary Kimmel's daughter. It's as if I don't exist in my own right anymore. Helga is the high school principal, a position that must be a major status job in this town because I'm getting fed up with people telling me how great Miss Kimmel was to them when they failed grade 12, or how she never kicked their son out of school for smoking dope. I could explain that one – she was stoned out of her skull from grade nine until she graduated – that was back in the days when I was important – the high school secretary who lied for kids when they played hookey or lost their report cards.

It would be hard for me to shop for groceries if it weren't for this great deal the landlord of this apartment worked out with the local supermarket. The store sends a special bus every Wednesday to pick up seniors from here and other buildings that drives us to the store. Apart from the convenience, I enjoy it because I get to meet other people. I can't remember all their names. Not because I'm old, but because many of them are French. I envy the French passengers. They smile and laugh a lot more than we Anglos do.

On the last shopping excursion, I sat beside an Anglo lady who wore a fur coat. She talked my arm off bragging about her upcoming trip to Florida and about her precious possessions – her formal dresses and her jewelry which she doesn't wear because "it's too valuable." At least I won't have to put up with her while she's away "on vacation." On vacation from what? Grocery shopping? Another bus passenger invited me to Wednesday night suppers at a local church but I passed on that one. Not because I feel guilty about not going to church, but because eating with a bunch of strangers just doesn't appeal to me. I'll stick to those nice pre-packaged frozen dinners, right

here in my own so-called home, watching TV. Another lady who takes the bus is wife of a minister who has his very own church. He claims that he can heal people and stares pointedly at me and my walker. It takes all kinds I guess.

Then there's that lady in this building who does *NOT* take the bus. Oh no. Her husband *drives* her. She's not the sort to mingle with those of us she regards as the unwashed. I met her in the laundry room. While I was waiting for the dryer to finish with my load, she went on and on about her life in England where she attended the horse races. She saw me returning some Dick Francis novels and just had to tell me that she knew him personally when her family owned race horses in their stable "back home." I couldn't stomach all her la-de-dah, so countered about races I'd seen when I visited Kentucky. I actually impressed her. She'd have been less impressed if she knew I picked up this racing lore from my ex, the gambler. Well, at least the people on the bus are company, so I guess I'll never get bored or lonely.

My son was going to visit me here but changed his mind to – get this – row across the Atlantic! Why, for Pete's sake? Columbus and all those Spanish and Portuguese guys already did that. Worse still, he took my

grandson with him on this junket. I guess he's hot to be on one of those TV reality shows about weird people doing unreal things. I'm glad they're both good swimmers. They're both "personal trainers," as Phys Ed types like to call themselves these days. Well la-de-dah. My son spends more time on those crazy projects than he does coaching the great unfit.

My daughter Helga, the good offspring, who's "taking care of mother" as she tells everybody, "the angel" as everybody tells me, is off sailing in the Bahamas during her spring break. With all the pirates and environmental disasters, she'll be lucky if she makes it home, so I'm finally enjoying a few weeks freedom. What about this spring break? When I went to school there was summer, Christmas and Easter holiday, period.

I better get my grocery list ready for the shopping trip tomorrow, even though I always forget I brought a list until I'm checking out and it's too late. That's when I discover that I've forgotten all the stuff I came for but have loaded up on magazines and crossword books to keep me amused. Then I have to go a whole week without essentials like butter or milk. They shouldn't sell all that non-grocery stuff at supermarkets, it just confuses people. I suppose it's a way to boost sales. I really wish they'd sell lottery tickets but they don't. I have to walk uphill to the little convenience store nearby to get mine. I have high hopes of winning some day. If I do, I'll buy a flight to Havana to check on Fidel. I was always such a fan of his. I wonder how he is and whether he uses a walker.

I read somewhere that working on crosswords is good for seniors. It's supposed to help the memory. Not that I want the kind of memories I have.

As they say up here, "C'est la vie."

My son was going to visit me here but changed his mind to get this – row across the Atlantic!

The Dead Kid

BY ROLLI

I'm pretty famous since I killed myself.

I asked the man for a rifle and he handed me this huge thing, like a hunter would use, or a farmer. I actually laughed. I was severely depressed. Eventually he brought me what I'd pictured, a *pistol*. I argued with him, but he said no, the price is not negotiable. I handed over the \$200. "Oh, there's a waiting period," he said. I became enraged. It was a two hour period. That's too long when you're suffering.

There was an Ismael's Coffee across the street. I drank probably five or six coffees as I stared out the window. One guy in there was wearing a winter coat with no shirt underneath. He had a burned face but his chest was like pale winter. He'd take a drink of coffee, then jot something down in his white notebook, sweating and sweating in his winter coat.

I got a headache pretty soon. I hate waiting. I thought I should've just bought a rope. No, I could never suffer like that. When you've suffered a long time you can't stand anything. Even a hangnail makes you crazy. The headache was making me crazy.

At 11:00, I went back and got my gun. I was so jittery, the man stared at me. "Everything okay, chief?"

I went straight to my apartment. I hate my place, my old place. It was just one room, just barely big enough for my emotion. I suffered so much there. Fuck it, don't think about it.

I went to the closet and got ammo. In the department store, ammo is as close to the stuffed bears as it can get.

I didn't actually know how to load the pistol, I'd thought it would be self-explanatory. I got frustrated and cried. It was embarrassing how easy I'd cry then.

There was a knock on the door.

Again. A man said, "Police."

I was figuring out the bullets. A little paper came with them. "Police." Knock, knock, knock.

I just shoved some bullets into the one hole.

"Are you alright in there, Mr. -----?"

I fired a test shot out the window. The glass vanished in silence, in the eruption. A vanishing ray.

At the exact moment, the police kicked down the door and I shot myself in the mouth.

My book sales really took off. I'd written - well, a dozen, but I'd only published one book. Writing is hard but selling is so hard. Publishers don't really read books, my agent told me. Then she fired me. I thought she was working for me.

My book was good because I worked so hard to make it good. I really put the sweat of my life into it. If you wring it, that's what should come back out. But nobody even read it or heard of it. Or they must have read it, the reviewers, and determined it was shit not worth it and threw it away. If I wasn't passionate, I could've found something, but this was the only thing to me. I was dead for a long time, really.

I'm torn because ... it wasn't really me. My suicide was on

the news and the book kept selling. One place reviewed it, another place, another. It won all the prizes. It sold and sold, and still sells, I'm guessing. My old agent does my estate.

But it wasn't me, it wasn't my writing. They say it's this brilliant gift but no one was *saying* that. It was my dying. Everyone is dead and crazy. I may not even be good, though I think I'm good, or am I? I needed to know that, and now I can never know.

I'm famous. I'm dead. The Dead Kid. It's what they call me. I may be a part of history. I'll just have to wait and see.



The Dead Kid by Rolli



Live forever

BY ROLLI

I was dizzy and there was blood coming out of my head. A man said, “Don’t move.” A woman said, “Don’t try to move. The ambulance will get here any second. We found your glasses.”

“Where were they?” I asked.

They were on top of the train,” she said.

I threw up.

I was going to jump off the bridge when a man slipped something into my pocket. He didn’t even stop or talk to me. I looked at him walking away. He was carrying a suitcase. I got down off the railing and took something paper out of my pocket.



Live forever by Rolli

et. It said LIVE FOREVER. I took it home.

The idea in the pamphlet was that a man had come up with a way to give you immortality. About the man: he was a writer who’d given up writing. He’d won several prizes. I’d never heard of him. He didn’t trust god enough to believe in him. In this man’s opinion, you could still be immortal if you were rich or clever. Rich was the easiest way. Not a lot of people are clever.

The pamphlet didn’t give specifics. It didn’t have a phone number. But there was an address.

There had been a lot of strange deaths lately. One homeless guy ate leaves until he died. I think that was what was depressing me so much. Someone jumped off a building downtown in a costume. I think it was Dracula. This was in June.

The woman at the desk told me to have a seat. The couple sitting across from me were well-dressed and looked at me like I was riffraff. Even though I have a degree.

When she called my name – this was the woman at the desk – I followed her into a room and sat down at a desk. A man was sitting behind the desk. The woman left us. I was wondering if this was the man with the suitcase. But no, he was too old and fat.

We talked for a long time. He was a nice guy. I made it plain to him that I had no money. He said that was alright. “It’s not about the money.” For some reason I believed him.

I chose the “C” package, which was the second cheapest. The “D” package doesn’t guarantee immortality. The “A” and “B” packages give you better odds. It’s too bad they cost so much.

I didn’t want to sign anything, but Mr. Tubman – that was the man – required a contract. He wanted to see me on the 15th. I left my name with his secretary.

Mr. Tubman was watching television this time. He had a small TV. “Just a minute,” he said. He smiled. “Watch this,” he said. I looked at the screen.

A reporter was talking about how a man cooked his wife in a slow-cooker. He ate his wife and then climbed into a cement mixer. He was clinging to life.

“That was one of our ‘C’ packages,” said Mr. Tubman, proudly.

By my fourth visit, we had everything planned out. By then I’d upgraded to a ‘B’ package, even though I had to sell my lawnmower.

Our main problem was the skeleton. Mr. Tubman had contacts in several zoos. He knew a good plastic surgeon. “But it will take time,” he said. “We’ll call you.”

Ultimately when it came time to do it, I couldn’t do it. The actor had sad eyes that made it harder. I gave him metacarpals and a glass of water. That was as far as I could get.

I am currently serving 12 years in the Florida State Penitentiary. Though I hope to get out in ten. I have a phone appointment with Mr. Tubman. We’re still working on something. A “D” package isn’t much, I know, but it’s something.

There’s still hope for me.

Hollow

BY DENISE WILKINSON

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

- TS Eliot

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know you’ll be surprised to find me gone, so I left this for you. You’ve always nagged me to let you read one of my stories, to see what I scribble endlessly in my journal. Well, finally I’m going to write a story for you, but I don’t think you’re going to like it. I want you to read it though, because it might be the best thing I’m going to write. It is the best thing I’m ever going to do. Please don’t look for me. Read this instead.

I used to be too happy and always get into trouble for jumping around and not paying enough attention. Then I was too sad and always overreacting. Remember in grade six my teacher said I was melodramatic? You told me it meant I should be an actress. I looked it up. She meant I was too excited and emotional. She dismissed me, but you didn’t. You knew I needed help, and you tried to help me. We went to lots of doctors and you missed lots of work. Finally I got some pills, but they made me numb; I felt separated like I was watching my own corpse wade through life. So I quit taking them. Don’t be mad. I’ve been saving them. It seems impossible to narrate one’s own death, but Mom and Dad, you always told me I

could do anything I put my mind to. I know this isn’t what you meant. Please don’t be mad at me. This is the best answer for everyone, especially me. I see how worried you are all the time; my emptiness is emptying your life too. It’s too much.

I know what will happen because I’ve thought about it a lot. The night will be twinkling and calm and my breath will dance in foggy clouds. I’ll wonder if it is possible to blow misty rings with my breath into the chilly air, but then dismiss the idea as quickly as my breath disappears. I picked Little Red because that’s where we used to go on weekends with the dog. Remember, Mom? That time Dad went golfing and you took me there? You let me play in the sand and didn’t say anything about how dirty I was getting. There was a big hole. How did it get there? It was about ten feet wide and six feet deep, but to my tiny frame it seemed enormous, and it felt like we spent hours, you laughing and taking pictures, me climbing in and out like an explorer, Bruce, just a puppy then, nipping at my heels. Keep a picture of that in your memory. That was a good time before life became hollow. That’s what I’ll be thinking of as I snuggle into a snow bank under the stars and swallow the pills like Pez. I looked it up. I’ll slip into a coma. That sounds ok. No pain. Just a transition into something else. Something better than this. Maybe there I’ll feel like more than a shadow.

Don’t be mad. You’ve always said you want what is best for me. This is best. It’s time to go.

I love you,
Jan



Freebird by Henry Peters



Diamond earrings

BY LILY WATSON

When I was 22, we lived in Vancouver, on Twelfth Avenue and Hemlock St., one block away from South Granville, a trendy, upscale shopping area. It was just down the hill from Old Shaughnessy, the most prestigious and beautiful area in Vancouver.

I lived with my husband Matt and our baby Dustin in a 1920s era high ceilinged, hardwood floored apartment with a brick wood burning fireplace, which cost us \$250 a month. We had no large overhead, no debt, and my husband was earning a healthy salary.

Dustin and I made the rounds of the nearby parks, baby exercise classes, and went for excursions up and down Granville St. We lunched at local trendy eateries, and when he fell asleep in his stroller, I would walk the street leisurely exploring the boutiques, pressing my nose up against the windows of the stores to see what caught my fancy.

The Chinese grocers had their display of flowers outside the shops every day, in long rounded tin containers. I would buy a small arrangement of freesia, which had been my wedding flowers, to take back to the apartment, where the perfume of the delicate blossoms would pervade the air for days.

One spring day when the cherry blossoms were out and the robins chirped early, I walked past Ragnar jewelers. In the window was a tray with three pairs of diamond earrings, in staggered sizes. The sun shone through the window on the earrings; they glistened, refracted and sparkled as only diamonds can do.

A pleasant saleslady showed me all three of the pairs of earrings and encouraged me to try them on. I chose the middle size and looked in the mirror. The diamonds sat there on my earlobes like drops of prism water.

I asked, "How much are they?"

She said, "They are \$1,200."

I looked at them longingly and held them up to the halide lighting, watching them sparkle.

She said, "We do have a layaway plan. If you put down ten percent, we will hold them for two months. You can pay them off at your leisure."

"I'd like to do that." I handed her my debit card.

I couldn't stop thinking about the earrings; I went back the next day and put the balance on my Visa.

They came in a leather box. With my purchase came an appraisal, on official looking stationery. I put them both in the bottom left hand drawer of my dresser.

My husband worked as a helicopter pilot away from home, and was only home ten days a month.

Matt breezed in the door that week and kissed me with intent, "Hi Gorgeous..."

Dustin, took a few tentative steps up to the dresser, opened the bottom drawer and pulled out the appraisal. He handed it to his Dad. It was uncanny what he did, but we laughed. Matt had no idea what the piece of paper was.

Matt's face lit up with generosity as he read it, "Where are they?"

"In the bottom drawer,"

"You don't have to do things like that. What was I going to say? You can't have them?"

I put them through my ears and showed them to my amused husband.

After that, I wore them constantly. They made me feel special. I wore classic clothes that suited my features, and the diamonds were a touch of elegance. When I told my friends, they thought it was a hoot that I had bought myself diamond earrings.

I went to exercise classes with Dustin up the hill in Shaughnessy, with all the ladies that really had it, the money, the homes, and the prestige. But despite my age, my position in life, my husband's career choice and my appearance, I fit in.

With a pat on the head I was told by one of the smiling ladies, "Aren't you cute with your baby and your bike," I may have been 22, but I looked 16; I didn't care. I was in the best shape of my life, and I felt great while doing it. To me, that was all that really mattered.

Three years later, we were living on Vancouver Island in the town of Parksville, in a renovated heritage home with the ocean down at the end of the street. The sea breeze mingled with the rain and the chimney smoke from the wood stoves to produce a smell that was uniquely Parksville. In spring the gardens erupted into a riot of colour and scent, the rose bushes were heavy with petals and perfume, and the honeysuckle gave off its heavy sickly sweet scent.

Dustin was now four years old, and I also had Geoffrey, 16 months. My husband still worked away from home.

I had my diamond earrings, but there were more pressing things to think of, such as mortgage payments, and taking care of two small children. I filled my time with trips in the car down a long windy country road to exercise class. I no longer rode my bike; I had no use for it.

I attended Young Mum Bible Studies on Tuesday morning, church on Sunday and tea five days a week with my best friend Janet.

But I was fragile. I was young and alone much of the time, dealing with the pressure of being married to a man that was away from home 20 weeks out of the year, performing a dangerous job.

Every spring was a vulnerable time of year for me. I had been diagnosed bipolar when I was 16. This year in particular, I found myself having a hard time sleeping, my thoughts raced around my head in loops and I was very talkative.

I made impulsive purchases, going on shopping sprees for things I neither needed nor could afford.

I was feeling shaky, but I went to exercise class, where I saw Jim, the husband of my hairdresser; he had just been deserted by her.

Later on in the day, I felt regret for the sympathy I hadn't been able to express to him. I went over to his home, and found

him in the driveway.

"I have to apologize for my ignorance this morning. The separation must be a really hard thing for you to contend with," I said.

"Why don't I come over to your house tonight, and we can talk some more about it?"

In my fragile state of mind, it seemed like a good idea. I never suspected anything untoward.

Jim showed up at around eight o'clock. I hadn't taken him all that seriously, I was already in my night gown; the boys were in bed. He had brought a bottle of wine, which he uncorked, and we sat in the T.V. room and drank a few glasses. What followed was worse. We ended up on my bed.

He was incredibly inept. He told me to go to sleep, and he let himself out. That was the last I saw of him.

The next morning after a fitful night's sleep, I got the boys and myself ready to go to Bible study. I couldn't think of what else to do.

I believed there was nothing amiss about any of the events



of the previous 24 hours, when clearly there was. All I knew was that I had to hang on and keep going.

All of my Christian friends were there. The Anglican Minister was there, as he usually was, and we had our study.

Everyone had noticed I wasn't acting normally during study. I was argumentative and my speech was agitated. I was prone to suggestion, my reasoning abilities were skewed.

My friend and neighbour Kyla came over later on in the day to see me.

"Lily, we're all worried about you, you don't seem like yourself, what's wrong?" Her enormous blue eyes were filled with concern.

"Oh, there's nothing wrong, I'm just doing my thing. I've got things to do, Matt is away, I'm a little tired, and you know, usual stuff. I've got a list here of 20 things to do..."

I zipped around in the kitchen trying to do several different things at once. My sentences were frantic. I was trying to make lunch and keep the boys happy.

"But it sounds as if you are coming apart... Let me make some phone calls, I can't leave you like this."

Word of mouth went up and down the community grapevine. Every helicopter pilot up and down the coast of B.C. was trying to radio my husband to tell him he had a family emergency. He took the first flight out. He took me to the doctor the next day who advised immediate hospitalization.

One of the women in my Bible study found a nanny who was able to look after my children while I was hospitalized.

I was sitting on the hospital bed, amidst the smell of nauseating antiseptic floor cleaner after I had been admitted, Matt left to go back to work.

When I was finally alone, I felt utter and absolute shame that I had let my family down, I was my children's mother and I needed to be a responsible and faithful wife.

I was now 26; it had been ten years since my last hospitalization. My illness had been under control and now here I was locked up with every other mentally unstable person in the Nanaimo/ Parksville area.

Every morning I put myself together with the makeup and hair routine with a good splash of Chanel No. 5. It wafted down the hall with its scent of rose petals, orange blossoms and vanilla. I wore my diamond earrings and spoke to the other patients as if I was somebody. But in the middle of a conversation, or group activity I would burst into tears and hurry back to my room.

The common room, where all the patients congregated, was thick with cigarette smoke. I thought I didn't fit in, but I went around from person to person in unaccustomed friendliness. They were misfits of society most of them. Many were drug addicts. There was a woman who barely talked, a man who was schizophrenic, and there were others. One woman, coming off a bad combination of street and prescription drugs came out of group therapy looking and feeling raw.

"I told you to get out of my face and I meant it," Sarah's frustrated voice echoed down the hallway.



“Who do you think you are, speaking to me like that?” Rachel echoed back with utter contempt.

They made menacing gestures towards one another.

I stepped in between them and grabbed Sarah by her shoulders with my face two inches away from hers. She smelled of cigarettes and bad teeth.

“Come on now, it’s not worth it. Relax, have a cigarette.” I said.

Sarah’s anxious tears flowed, “I’m feeling awful and I have to go home to that jerk I’m living with. You wouldn’t believe how he treats me.”

I hugged her. She smelled like she hadn’t washed in days. I felt her desperation through her tears, her words and her anger.

The nurses got wind of the near struggle and rushed belatedly down the hall to avert the fight.

She gestured towards me, “She’s my angel.”

A woman who was married to one of the doctors in the hospital was in the process of separating from him, a separation she did not want. She was desperately trying to hang onto her marriage. She checked herself into the psychiatric ward to embarrass him into a reconciliation. She was in her mid 30’s, blonde and attractive. She was intelligent and educated.

“This whole thing came about as a result of my husband Arthur going gray at the temples. He tells me about all of these wild affairs he is having, but I know it’s not true, he works at the hospital 60 hours a week, and doesn’t have the time. Oh, but he likes to talk. He told me he no longer wants the marriage and I should get a job.”

I went for walks around the grounds with her and she ran into doctors and nurses whom she knew. A few days later she had humiliated him enough and went back to her home which was probably beautiful. Her revenge made for good company.

Christopher the Minister came to the hospital and I spent some time talking with him. I had no idea what he did when he wasn’t in church or at bible study, but when I was having challenging times, he always showed up.

Once when I was at home, exhausted looking after two small children thinking life was over, Christopher came over and sat with me for three hours while I cried more and talked about the injustices of life.

“All I do is run after my kids, I can barely sleep when Matt is away, I didn’t think life was going to be like this.” I said.

“You are maturing now Lily,” he said philosophically. “You have responsibilities now that you didn’t have a few years ago. Right now your biggest challenge is being a mother.

In the aftermath of my peculiar behaviour that resulted in

my near disaster of adultery and my hospitalization, everyone in town was talking about what I had done and this included members of our congregation. One thing about living in a town of 8,000 people, everyone knows your business.

“I’ve heard the gossip,” he said, “But I won’t pay attention to it.”

It meant a lot to me that he thought of me so highly, if only mistakenly.

Then there was Morgan. She was a young girl who was hospitalized at the same time I was, for reasons no one was sure of. She was 16. She cracked jokes constantly; chain smoked incessantly, used coarse language and decided she liked me. She followed me around like a puppy dog.

My behaviour was regressing. I was behaving more like a 16 year old than a 26 year old mother of two. Part of me was trying to find the 16 year old that had been hurt and lost by the onset of the illness so many years before. The stigma and embarrassment of my breakdown had followed me for years.

Adolescent acceptance and denial can be cruel and I felt the sting of rejection by many of my peers. That was the attraction of Morgan; she was in part that lost 16 year old.

We played pranks on the nurses. We went for romps around the hospital grounds on the newly mown lawn that gave off its cool fragrant freshness. We smoked cigarettes and got stoned on marijuana that smelled earthy and sweet. I was fascinated with this little anomaly of human behaviour.

After group therapy she said, “Do you know why I am in here?”

“No.”

“I’m going to tell you why. I was in a foster home ‘cause I was taken out of my home ‘cause a bunch of guys abused me.”

“What did they do to you?”

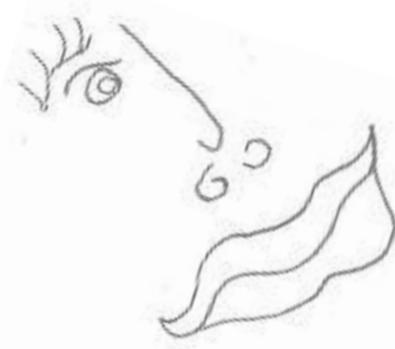
She said, “They got together in my back yard and they all raped me. They laughed, but someone heard about what they did and reported them.”

She broke down in scared tears. “They are up on charges for what they did to me and they might go to prison. They threatened me and said they will kill me if I don’t drop the charges. I might do that and then they’ll leave me alone. That’s why I’m in here, It’s the only safe place they can put me.”

My heart broke. I started to cry too. I didn’t think two seconds; I pulled my diamond earrings out of my ears and handed them to her.

“You need these more than I do. I want you to know that you’re special.”

What else could I do?



Art by James Skelton



Breathing lights

(for a laptop, that which has no insomnia)

BY GORD BRAUN

O how I wish I slept like you
your breathing lights, your silent snore
fading in and out, in blue
Fn-ESCAPE-- it takes no more

You can rest at any time
but as for me, I need the pills
'Fn-ESCAPE' would be sublime
no side effects and no refills

Empowerment

(for a desktop computer)

BY GORD BRAUN

1.
somewhere in this mini-tower
lies the promise of "more power"
yet only when it's working, am I fine

I was led to understand
that it would leap at my command
but which end of the leash is really mine?

2.
and here once more a cable
drops and tangles 'neath my table--
once again my tech has made me crawl

once again I end up swearing
cuz I'm pissed-off beyond caring--
for this is not empowerment *at all* !

3.
no computer, and no warning
puts me in a kind of mourning--
you'd think a loved one were about to die

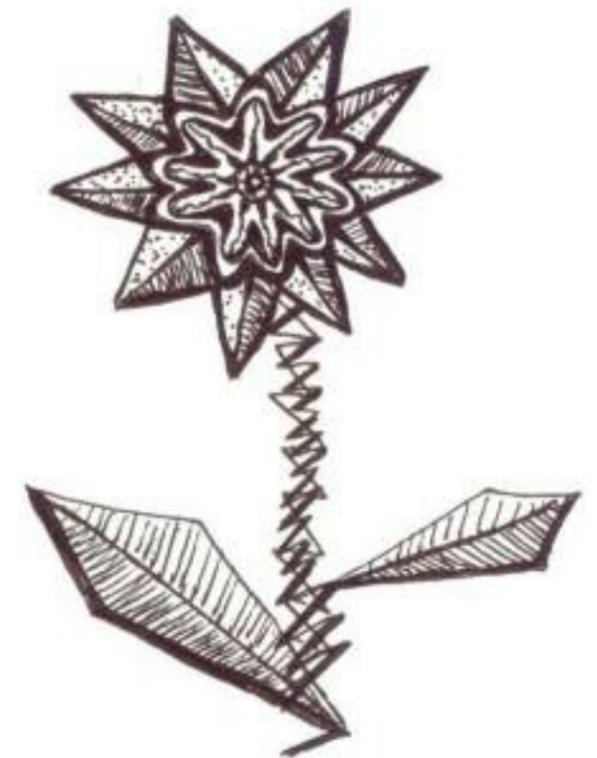
truly, in this mini-tower
lies the promise of "more power"--
for the promise of "more power" is a lie!

REMEMBER

BY MELODIE DESJARLAIS

Remembering many lives
Which one should I pick?
So many hurts and curses
And why did I get hit?
Which way should I go?
Rocking rocking in the flow
Is this all I know?

Sitting in this jail
Reminiscing about my past
Wishing I was out there
It really was a blast
I think I'll just fast forward
While I'm sitting here in class
And make some better memories
To make my time go fast.



Flower Power by Judy Swallow



Green

BY VICTOR ENNS

the colour
Gilles de la Tourette
remembers

she has opened
a door
she has entered

her hallucination

a green dress
long sleeves pull at her
wrists as she raises her arm

her hands clasp
the ivory
handled silver pistol

she pulls back
the hammer, he puts down
his pen, he is writing

his sister, her picture
on his writing desk
next to the green shaded lamp

this is not his mother
who has entered his chamber
with an ivory handled silver pistol

cocked, with a message
in her hands
a memory of green,

she is patient
her hallucination
stepping into his

quiet green light
with her long white fingers
the trigger

her green eyes
see his head turn
towards her

the bearded daemon
sprouts horns
his hairy mouth gapes

opens, utters
her name. She squeezes
the trigger in her hot palm

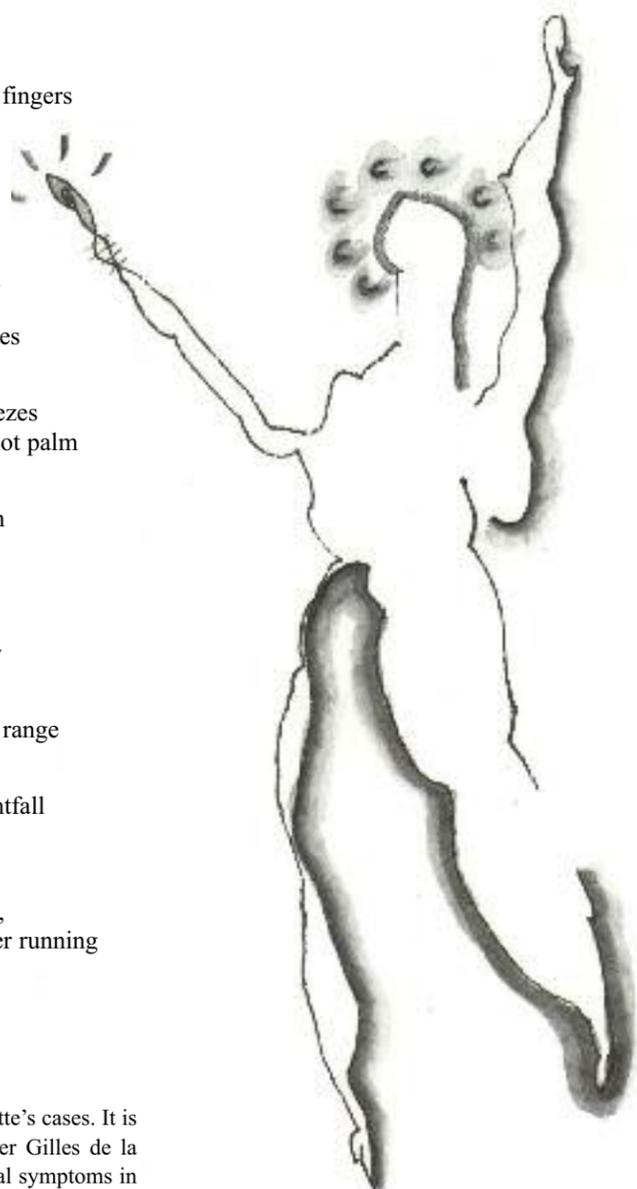
the first shot enters
his shoulder through
an elegant lapel

she raises the pistol
slightly, the second
shot shatters his jaw

still unsatisfied she
comes again, closer range
for the third shot

opens his head, nightfall
his last memory
green flame

the smell of sulphur,
the sound of disorder running
down the stairs.



Coprolalia is a presenting symptom in only 10 to 30 per cent of Tourette's cases. It is only one presenting symptom of "Tourette's Syndrome," named after Gilles de la Tourette, first to describe its complex and neurological and behavioral symptoms in 1885. Freud initially considered a genetic and neurological cause for brain dysfunctions, of which this could be one, before discarding the theory and integrating it into his theories of repression, and the unsuccessful integration of the oral and anal stages of childhood development. In 1893 a former female patient shot Tourette in the head, claiming he had hypnotized her against her will. Both Tourette and many modern hypnologists state that this is impossible. His mentor, Charcot, had died recently, and his young son had also died recently. After these events Tourette began to experience mood swings between depression and hypomania. Nevertheless, he organized public lectures in which he spoke about literacy, mesmerism and theatre. Around 1902 Tourette's condition worsened and he was dismissed from his post. Gilles de la Tourette died on 26 May 1904 in a psychiatric hospital in Lausanne, Switzerland.

—from *Involuntary Tongue*

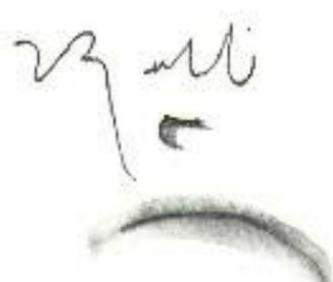


Figure Two by Rolli

Airborne

BY KEITH FOSTER

As a professional photographer,
I get some tough assignments.

Last week, a farmer hired me
to take aerial shots
of his fields.

Talked my friend Jack
into taking me up
in his little Cessna.

I couldn't see clearly
through the pint-size window,
so opened the door
for a better view.

Got some great shots
— until sudden turbulence
threw me onto the wing.

I held on with one hand
and gripped the camera
like a vice
in the other.

I didn't dare let go
— of the camera.
It cost me \$1,500.

Jack put the plane on auto-pilot
and somehow managed
to pull me inside.

Got home with some great shots.
But my wife has serious concerns
about my priorities.



Art by James Skelton

How to live forever

BY KEITH FOSTER

My friend Gloria says
we don't have to die.
There are other options.

The secret, she says,
is to think positively.
And surround yourself
with happy people
who think positive thoughts.

Watching funny videos
also helps.
A belly laugh an hour
works wonders.

Put them all together
and you'll live forever,
says Gloria.

Personally, I think
there may be a kink
in her cable.

I certainly hope so.
Otherwise I've made all
my funeral plans
for nothing.



Ribbons

(To Donovan's lung donor family)

BY BETH GOBEIL

He came in from a run,
slammed the door, sat down to remove his shoes
and socks, which he draped on the back
of a dining room chair

I start to tell him
take those stinky socks—
when it bubbles up in me
like a geyser,
stinging my eyes
leaving me speechless

I want to take this moment,
and a thousand more just like it,
wrap them for you as a gift:

My lanky son, his wind-reddened face,
a smile playing at the corners of his mouth,
and the jubilation of his sweaty socks
like first place ribbons,
draped on the back of a dining room chair.

Untitled

(from *Breathing Room*)

BY BETH GOBEIL

We count weeks without illness
instead of new baby teeth

Stack pill bottles like they
are building blocks

Clap your back to make you cough
others play pat-a-cake

Make countless trips to hospitals and specialists
instead of visits to great aunts or old friends

Cheer for higher lung function scores
like they are straight-A report cards

Learn that normal is a relative term
best used to describe a setting on a dryer

Tightrope

(from *Breathing Room*)

BY BETH GOBEIL

This illness stretches me thin
as the tightrope we walk

I lose my balance
time and again

slip and hang
from fingertips

you pull me up
hold my hand

take small steps together
we never look down.



Ducks Splash by Henry Peters

Love songs

BY AYAMI GREENWOOD

I
Attraction is only a fraction
of the total stimuli
that goes into action,
when it's just you and I.

When it's just you and I,
there's no lack of satisfaction.

II
For your care, there is no rival.
For your care, I strive.
I go into overdrive,
When I prepare for your arrival.

III
I have sung far and wide
In the past,
Sung of love that being strong lasts.
But now, that is all cast aside.
Being near you,
I confide : I am tongue tied.

Pond

BY CATHERINE KATT

Winter sylph skates
on the black icescape.
A little ballet turn and
a diamond sky shifts overhead.

The world of Snow and Ice
spins under a dark canopy,
a grace note step
the blade cuts across
the night –

The sound swish, swish,
scrape and swoosh,
hard against the
empty open space
below.

So we go, skate and twirl upon
our pond of silver,
each day,
until sunlight fades,
and the stars appear
to light the way.



Reunion

BY CATHERINE KATT

Today we visited Robert Frost's grave.
You cleaned snow off the stone,
with your bare hands, to uncover his name.
Below that was engraved:
"He had a lover's quarrel with the world."

I snapped a photo of the site
just before you bared him to the sky again.
You were standing at the base of a blanketed slab,
that hardly made an impression in the powdery snow.
Disconcerted by death's quiet sleep,
You swept with your hands and then your forearms
when your hands began to freeze.

"Here's his wife. Here's his son," you said.
Finally, when you reached his name at the top,
you touched your hands to the stone reverently.

We passed by it, at first.
I turned back and called to you.
"It's back there, at that arrow."
A hand-painted, little yellow arrow on a green board,
crookedly pointing, a terse indicator for the tourist.
"Here it is."

I took another picture of you standing at the foot of it,
for our commemoration ceremony and you one of me.

Two Frost lovers, who read his poems at twilight
and in the middle of a sleepless night to one another,
Meeting at this point in life for inspiration and meaning
in an otherwise haunted world
that we have cause to cling to with our wounded hands,
as grave sweepers
stand silently smiling into a camera lens,
looking for our future.





My realm of dreams

BY GLADYS MACDONALD

I watch the other children as they go about their play,
 Dreaming of places far away and near.
 I hear their childish laughter ringing clear
 And long to join them in their winsome way.

They chase the impish squirrels and friendly birds,
 Then capture snakes and frogs beside the pond,
 Or sail their boats into the great beyond.
 I watch with envy, longing -- void of words.

And, when they ride their swings up to the skies,
 It stirs in me a rhapsody in song,
 Teasing my inner soul to sing along,
 Oblivious of the tears that blur my eyes.

Carefree they dance about the meadow green.
 Nonchalant, gracefully they flit
 Beckoning little creatures, "Come and sit."
 I watch with wonder at the touching scene.

When August days are warmed with summer sun
 The youngsters scamper to the swimming pool
 And splash about -- their way of keeping cool.
 I dream that I am joining in their fun.

Then Daddy lifts me from my wheelchair throne --
 Shoulder high! I shout and sing!
 "This is my castle! I am the King!"
 My realm is filled with dreams that are my own.

Note: This is Macdonald's original version of the poem. An edited version was published without the author's consent in our Fall 2012 issue. My apologies -- Editor

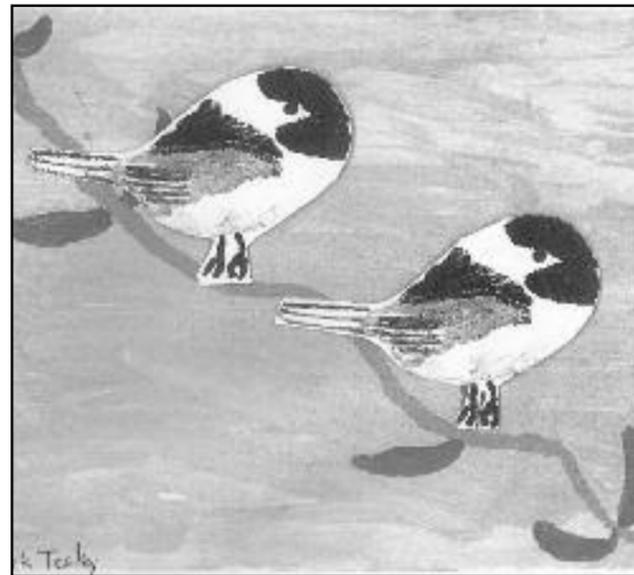
The rhythm of life

BY VONETTA MARTIN

Beat, beat, beat...in a rhythm
 A rhythm that sings...
 Sings a song of the drum
 The drum of life
 Life that is growing in each direction,
 In a path that will give me options
 Options to choose...
 Choose to understand, to learn...
 To learn of what to speak
 To speak of truth, knowledge...
 Knowledge of right and wrong
 A mind and body that is evolving
 Evolving into someone we want to be
 *

Beat, beat, beat...in a rhythm
 The words grow, grow, grow
 Grow into the woman
 That one day I will be

Beautiful. Strong. Patient.



Art by Mark Teskey

For crying out loud 2

BY IAN MCINTYRE

For crying out loud
 I am better now
 Like a birdcage
 The door is open I am free
 I was sick but now I'm not

My life is off to a good start
 In flying colors I write this poem
 It goes out to all of my friends
 Here at The Nest
 For the memories we share
 For crying out loud
 You are my friends
 Always will be forever
 And never the end



Art by James Skelton

Keep your chin up

BY JAMES SKELTON

Cold-cocked
 Bone
 Hitting
 Cement
 Stillness

A car waits
 for me
 to rise

I feel
 the place
 where
 I was waiting
 to leave

Now
 I have stitches
 to stitch
 in my own face

I hurt myself again.



Lost angel

BY HOLLY SPRATT

Angels down devils die
 You were the apple of my eye
 You were my love, so full of grace
 I miss your touch upon my face
 I lost my love and my best friend
 I always loved you till the end
 Please don't leave me
 I'll always cry
 Please don't baby
 It's no way to die
 I lie awake shaking at night
 For this is hell I'm all a fright
 I lost your hand, I lost everything
 What joy what pain that you did bring
 You were my hope, my joy and pride
 I lost my angel to suicide.

My heart

BY BARRY STYRE

My heart was
 so heavy that
 I got a sore back
 from carrying it around.

I stood on the precipice
 and a staircase appeared
 and written on the wind
 were these words:
 Pay attention to yourself
 Be kind to yourself,
 Accept yourself,
 Be your authentic self.

You are learning
 This is my Torah
 This is my Talmud
 This is my Koran

Just when I got used to
 how good it was, it got even better
 A gentler safer kind,
 Yes, that kind.

Figurine to my life

BY ADAM STAITE

*Met fucked left some months after Born into a world life
 damned to merge with destruction*

*Three years into life death comes to take souls leave bodies
 Careless fucks brought him there day before*

*Incident it was to be forgotten Lives lost but just forget about
 it... Im still alive Talk Give me some reasoning was frowned
 upon Told its over with Sadness can't heal with just that friend
 gone I branded He was there by my side but then died*

*Lying despaired Body melded mess by fires bath Screaming
 hatred always listening Sounds of machines controlling tug of
 war with my life Never knowing when it be over If ever I
 would be fixed same again*

*Whenever waking frustrations still living Daily injections fed
 by tubes Sugar water only substance body needed to operate
 co-operate Drugs make body feel numb Those machines
 sounds felt not even human*

*Out the health institution Life dull pains to die over Had to
 realize recovering takes more than wishes n dreams Death
 doesnt come for ya with chants n pleads Comes with misdeeds
 Stop this before youre rolled over cant be restored*

*Happy What to be alive pay offs that days cant stay steady
 bodies ruined To fight dangers n conflicts survive for just one
 more day Rage against fate deny being scared.*

Raylincoma

Fires tale

BY ADAM STAITE

*Sun shines Heart turned cold Darkness is whats in there
 What if we don't give back If talkin n' talkin is all thats that
 then how if not giving back be given back Taking will no
 longer be takin It be stealin stolen robbed pillaging means no
 more I didn't see a cent remorse for my seer You saw n went
 out a window with two upstairs How to cope when all that had
 been had been selfishly ruined never grieving falls noose You
 went on to have your own lives as ours were on life support
 Souls left dead she was home left to endure Up the stairs
 screaming you came Put us out to a window A walker by seen
 then came reason for recovering us N where the fuck were u
 Nothing left to restore that what had been left if any was to be
 left to begin with*

Raylincoma



A book of courage

BY IRENE GROBOWSKY

Hidden Lives: Coming Out on Mental Illness. Eds. Lenore Rowntree and Andrew Boden. Foreword by Gabor Maté, M.D. Brindle and Glass, 2012. 256 pages. \$24.95

Editors Lenore Rowntree and Andrew Boden, who contributed their own stories of afflicted siblings, have assembled from sufferers or family members a collection of real-life experiences dealing with various forms of mental illness.

Within these pages there is an entire education on the diversity of mental illness which includes bi-polar disorder, previously known as manic-depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, clinical depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and dissociative disorder. And this is entirely apart from senile dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

Intensely personal, these revelations put the reader in a space that feels voyeuristic. However, the very fact that there is now more openness about mental illness and its effects shows a shift in public opinion.

The silence and stigma surrounding mental health is finally being broken and attitudes are changing. As the sibling of a schizophrenic says, "If [my brother's] body were hurting, people would send gifts, but because it is his mind, they throw bricks." Families attempt to cope, but all too often the stress of living with a situation that can only be termed a ticking time bomb tears them apart.

Frustration with health care professionals is evident in many of the stories - some of it justified by the all too often

arrogant lack of true understanding and empathy for the agony of those who never know when the facade of daily life will break down.

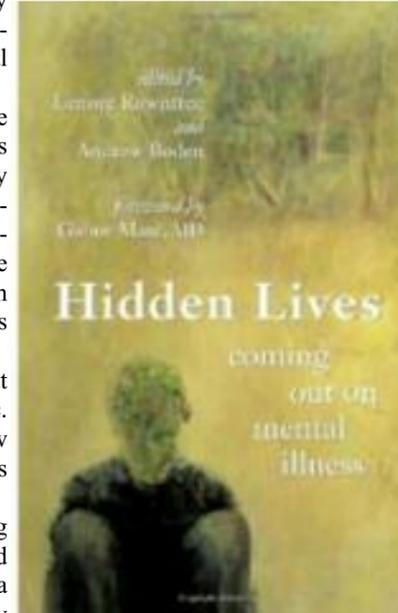
An acceptance of the limitations imposed on families by the varieties of mental illness is reached only after much struggle. Oddly, even in the despair there is an appreciation of the moments or hours or sometimes days when a stretch of relative calm and sanity happens.

There is no time line for the development of mental illness which can occur in children, a surprising fact well illustrated by the stories submitted by Rowntree and her schizophrenic sister. It can appear in later years, even into late middle age.

All these stories deal with emotions, particularly the roller-coaster of fear and frustration, combined with hope for the value of new treatments and new drugs. Individuals often have to cope with employers who do not recognize the impact of stress and trauma on mental health. There seems to be a real reluctance on the part of organizations to recognize that mental illness requires every bit as much support as, and possibly more than, physical disabilities.

Upon closing this book, I realized that these were accounts of true bravery — courage that lies in the everyday — simply in "doing" and not giving up — continuing

to strive to get through the dark times often without nurturing and consistent medical and community support. Despite some humour and lighter touches, this is essentially a sad book because it reveals how slow is the progress to full acceptance and understanding of mental illness. It is, however, a book that deserves a wide audience.





Shifting perspectives

BY IRENE GROBOWSKY

Jayne Melville Whyte. *Pivot Points: A fragmented history of Mental Health in Saskatchewan*. Canadian Mental Health Association (SK). 141 pp. Pb. \$20.00.

Not a book to be read at one sitting, *Pivot Points* deserves careful consideration and thoughtful assimilation. Author Jayne Melville Whyte has chosen to discuss the overall story in discrete sections, each with headings stating the focus of the immediate information.

In the brief introduction the author self-identifies as, firstly, a consumer, and then as a member of the Saskatchewan division of the Canadian Mental Health Association. Her first public contribution as a member was stepping forward to participate in a panel dealing with mental health care issues. It was not a matter of feeling particularly well-qualified to do so, but as she says, “[S]omeone needed to do it” (p.9).

Depending upon any particular interest, the reader can now choose to concentrate on the development of the Canadian Mental Health Association and its branches and the services provided or on the reports generated by the various committees, both governmental and non-governmental.

Beginning in Ottawa in 1918, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene became in 1950 the Canadian Mental Health Association and the province of Saskatchewan, a leader in so many other fields, became the first provincial branch.

Whyte carefully traces the multiplicity of reports generated over the years by governmental, non-governmental agencies, and others. These groups regularly acknowledge the need for an integrated system to provide, across varied demographics, access to support with housing, education, work, and income. Fulfilling lives can be achieved when active education provides opportunities for community involvement, family support, self-help, and recreation.

The self-help groups monitored and supported by CMHA have played a particularly important role in assisting those with the lived experience of mental illness to feel validated as members of society. One of the most rewarding validations has been the encouragement of creativity with art and writing. An outlet for these has been provided by TRANSITION, a magazine which evolved from a simple newsletter.

Throughout the history of CMHA's Saskatchewan division, volunteers have played a key role. How reassuring it must have been for patients to know that there were people who cared enough to maintain a regular routine of visiting; people who would be a part of their lives in the institutions at Weyburn and North Battleford. With the closing of these institutions, the role of the volunteers continued to be a vital

adjunct to regional branches which provided social and recreational activities.

Individuals who needed more assistance and were not able to meet outside employment requirements were provided employment assembling, making and sorting items. Contracts were pursued for useful work. Community contact - not isolation - stressed in many reports has been a very important part of today's model for dealing with mental health issues and one which CMHA strives to meet.

This book does an admirable task of revealing the changes in attitudes reflected not only in the dry recommendations and reports drawn up through the years, but also in the growth and development of the services provided by CMHA.

Educating and informing the public is a key role of CMHA which distributes brochures, pamphlets, and engages in public meetings. Combating the stigma associated with mental illness has been and often still is hard work.

To make information about CMHA's wide range of services available to youth, parents, and family members is one of the most pressing of needs, and since 1993 special efforts are on-going to reach children and youth affected by poverty and high risk environments.

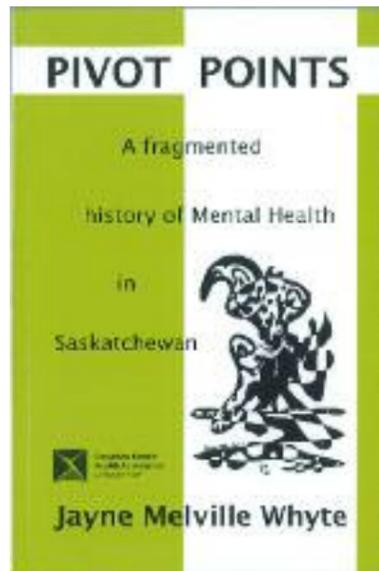
Helping those with lived experience of mental illness avoid isolation has been slow in coming, but the book clearly reveals that it is finally happening. With the fading of stigma, progress has been made possible in more facets of mental health care. More opportunities for integration into work, recreation, and the social life of the community are available as the apprehensions of both individuals and groups are allayed.

The paperwork generated over the years gives a primary impression of progress at a snail's pace. Integration of individuals into community, education of the public and of families, comprehensive cooperation among professionals: practical fulfillment of these needs a constant theme. Changes in attitudes will be one of the most important factors for progress, and this is gradually happening.

Although fragmented, Whyte's overview is comprehensive, and each section deals with positive achievements as well as defining goals yet to be reached. Working with “consumers” and their families to ameliorate the sense of isolation is one of the most important of these.

The necessary acronyms were confusing, but the index does list these with full names. Sources listed in the endnotes revealed the amount of research done by the author and make it possible for the reader with a vested interest to search these out on their own.

All in all, *Pivot Points* is a worthy contribution by one who has been involved in both sides of the mental health story in Saskatchewan.



Notes on contributors

ARTISTS

HENRY PETERS

Winnipeg artist and long-time contributor to TRANSITION.

ROLLI

See Author notes.

JAMES SKELTON

See Author notes.

JUDY SWALLOW

Artist and illustrator from Alameda, SK. Online at <<http://www.swallowsartnest.com/>>.

AUTHORS

BAGGOTT, KATE

Canadian peripatetic living in European. Work ranges from experimental fiction to chick lit, from creative non-fiction to technology journalism. Links to recent work <http://www.katebaggott.com>

BLACK, TREVOR

Saskatchewan born, bred, and educated writer now completing degree in Professional Writing at Grant MacEwan University, Edmonton AB.

BRAUN, GORD

Ironic humorist and poet out of Yorkton, and a regular contributor to TRANSITION.

CALLAGHAN, SHIRLEY

PEI writer becoming a regular contributor to TRANSITION.

DESJARLAIS, MELODIE

Cree - Mic Maq - French poet from Thunderchild First Nation SK presently writing in a Healing Lodge.

DITNER, ELAINE

Retired legal assistant, poet, and author of children's stories. Published in TRANSITION Fall 2012.

ENNS, VICTOR

Lives, loves, aches, reads, writes, works, and maintains <www.victorens.com> in Winnipeg.

FOSTER, KEITH

Regina poet and wit appearing regularly on TRANSITION.

GOBEIL, BETH

Meets regularly with Sans Nom, a group of Prince Albert writers. Studied creative writing with Lynda Monahan and at Sage Hill Writing Experience. Published on CBC radio.

GREENWOOD, AYIMA

A Prince Albert poet writing since her early twenties. Poetry, she says, slips her into a calm meditative state, somewhere the words can easily flow.

GROBOWSKY, IRENE

Moose Jaw bibliophile, Festival of Words activist, and regular reviewer for TRANSITION.

JOHNSTON, DONNA MAE

Member of Prince Albert CMHA Writing for Your Life Group whose artwork has previously appeared in TRANSITION.

KATT, CATHERINE

Studies, writes, and paints from life in the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Avid photographer inspired by the beauty of nature. MA in Interdisciplinary Studies.

LEEDAHL, SHELLEY

Widely published fulltime professional writer with ten books in various genres, including short stories and poetry. Frequently published in TRANSITION.

LENGELLE, REINEKKE

Visiting graduate professor (M.A.) at Athabasca University. Writer, consultant, and owner of Black Tulip Press. Designs, organizes, and teaches workshops and courses in writing and personal and professional development, online and face-to-face.

MARTIN, VONETTA

Cree Woman and Proud Mother from Ahtahakakoop First Nation in Saskatchewan.

MCDONALD, GLADYS

Writer, educator, and member of Prairie Pens (Moose Jaw).

MCINTYRE, IAN

Member of the Prince Albert CMHA Writing for Your Life Group. Prolific songwriter and poet who performs from memory. Published previously in TRANSITION.

MORIN, CHANTAL

Moose Jaw student. First publication in TRANSITION. Daughter of co-facilitator of the Moose Jaw Muse Writing Group.

PEREIRA, HELEN

Widely published short story writer and novelist out of Halebury ON. Previously published in TRANSITION.

RITZA, LU

Member of the Prince Albert CMHA Writing For Your Life Group. Non-fiction writer and sometimes poet who writes about her life experiences.

ROLLI

Widely published writer and illustrator from Southey SK: God's Autobiography (short stories), Plum Stuff (poems/drawings), and five forthcoming titles for adults and children. Regular contributor to TRANSITION. <www.rolliwrites.wordpress.com>

SETTEE, DOT

Member of the Prince Albert CMHA Writing For Your Life Group. Raised in a little log cabin in Prince Albert National Park. Grandmother extraordinaire now writing her life story. Previously published in TRANSITION.

Notes on contributors

SHORTLAND, MEGAN

Student of non-fiction at St. Peter's College, Muenster SK. "Writing is a ... powerful medium ... [for overcoming] ... depression."

SKELTON, JAMES

Saskatoon poet and artist. Long-time contributor to TRANSITION.

SPRATT, HOLLY

Member of the Prince Albert CMHA Writing For Your Life Group. Half of the dynamic Holly and Dale Spratt writing duo. Poet previously published in TRANSITION.

STAITE, ADAM

Member and co-facilitator of Moose Jaw Muse CMHA Writing Group. Author of "Reaper Poems," unpublished writing beyond the literary,

STYRE, BARRY

Member of Weyburn CMHA Writing Group. Long-time contributor to TRANSITION.

WATSON, LILY

Very active and well-published writer out of Calgary of letters, essays, fiction, and non-fiction. Work posted on Alexander Writers Centre Society's Writers page. Scholarship to Fernie Writers Conference.

WILKINSON, DENISE

High School English teacher in Prince Albert. Writes from perspective of the suicidal. "Mental health issues are rising in our youth, and it seems there is not enough support for them."



Spirit Turtle by Judy Swallow

CONFERENCE AGENDAS

Friday, June 28 - Delta Regina

Connecting Communities: A Saskatchewan Mental Wellbeing Forum

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| AM | 8:30 | Registration and Hot Breakfast |
| | 8:30 | CMHA Annual General Meeting (AGM) - Umbria/Lombardy Room (2nd floor) |
| | | Schizophrenia Society of SK AGM - Novara Ballroom (main floor) |
| | 10:00 | Welcome and Opening Remarks |
| | 10:30 | Kathleen Thompson , PhD - Strengthening Mental Health within Primary Health Care Reform |
| | 11:00 | Representation from SK Ministry of Health- What does the Future Hold for Mental Health within Primary Health Care Reform? |
| | 11:30 | Connections in the Community - Tanya Condo , Systems Navigator and Jeff James , RSW, Mental Health Coalition Coordinator |
| | 11:45 | Networking |
| PM | 12:00 | LUNCH and Schizophrenia Society of SK Awards |
| | 1:15 | PANEL: Community Innovations (A)
◆ Community-based Primary Care
◆ Innovations
◆ Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy |
| | 2:00 | KEYNOTE: Shelagh Rogers , CBC Radio |
| | 3:15 | PANEL: Community Innovations (B)
◆ Housing-affordable, adequate, accessible
◆ Innovation in Crisis Management Services
◆ 211 |
| | 4:00 | Closing Remarks |
| | 4:15 | CMHA Incoming Board Meeting - Verdi Ballroom (Main Floor) |
| | | Schizophrenia Society of SK Incoming Board Meeting - Novara Ballroom (Main Floor) |

WRITING FOR YOUR LIFE Communality?

- | | | |
|----|-------|---|
| AM | 9:30 | Mixer: Coffee & muffins |
| | 9:45 | Small-Group Workshop
Writing your Life Story with Lynda Monahan, poet, editor, and facilitator of Prince Albert WFYL Group |
| | 10:45 | Coffee Break |
| | 11:00 | Small-Group Workshop
From Page to Stage: Performing Your Writing with Shayna Stock, performance poet, facilitator, and community builder |
| | 12:00 | LUNCH in Lombardi Room (CMHASK) |
| PM | 1:30 | PANEL: Moderator Lynda Monahan
The What and How of a Communality of Writing Groups Aspect to be Explored
Category & Representative
<i>Writer/branch-based communality</i> – Writers Gloria Morin, MJM
<i>Branch/writer-based communality</i> – Branches Doug Kinar, CMHA (P.A.)
<i>Partner-based communality</i> – Festival of Words Donna Lee Howes
<i>Computer-based communality</i> – SWG Judith Silverthorne
<i>Magazine-based communality</i> – Transition Ted Dyck, Editor
<i>Combinations</i> – Facilitators Tasha Collins, CMHA (Wey) |
| | 2:00 | Discussion & Questions
"But what's it all mean, Alfie?" |
| | 2:45 | COFFEE BREAK |
| | 3:00 | Reading/Launch TRANSITION 13 |
| | 5:00 | AFTERWORDS: CC Meeting |

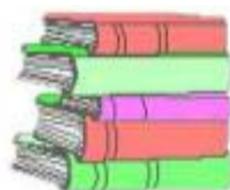


FRIENDS FOR LIFE

RESOURCE CENTRE *available on-line*

Hundreds of books, articles, videos, games and programs are available for loan from the Friends for Life Resource Centre. Topics include (along with many others):

- ◆ Anger Management
- ◆ Anxiety Disorders
- ◆ Balanced Lifestyle
- ◆ Bipolar Disorder
- ◆ Bullying ◆ Conflict Resolution
- ◆ Cutting (Self-Harm)
- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Eating Disorders
- ◆ Girls' Issues ◆ Grief
- ◆ Homophobia ◆ Laughter
- ◆ Mental Illness ◆ OCD
- ◆ Relationships ◆ Self Esteem
- ◆ Separation & Divorce
- ◆ Social Skills
- ◆ Stigma ◆ Stress
- ◆ Suicide ◆ Suicide Prevention



All materials can be borrowed directly through our web-site at

www.cmhask.com

(Click on the Library button)

visit us in person or call

1-800-461-5483



DIVISION OFFICE

2702 12th Avenue, Regina, SK S4T 1J2
Phone 1-800-461-5483 (SK) or 306 525-5601 (Regina)
FAX 306 569-3788 • email contactus@cmhask.com
Web Site www.cmhask.com

CMHA Branches

BATTLEFORDS
1011 - 103rd Street
North Battleford, SK S9A 1K3
306 446-7177 • Fax 306 445-7050
jane.cmhanb@sasktel.net

ESTEVAN
1201 - 2nd Street
Estevan, SK S4A 0M1
306 634-6428

KINDERSLEY
Box 244 (113 - 2nd Avenue East)
Kindersley, SK S0L 1S0
306 463-8052 • Fax 306 463-5506
a.w@sasktel.net

MOOSE JAW
Rm 324 - 650 Coteau Street West
Moose Jaw, SK S6H 5E6
306 692-4240
cmha.mj@sasktel.net

PRINCE ALBERT
1322 Central Avenue
Prince Albert, SK S6V 4W3
306 763-7747 • 306 Fax 763-7717
pacmha@sasktel.net

REGINA
1810 Albert Street
Regina, SK S4P 2S8
306 525-9543 • Fax 306 525-9579
Members' Phone 525-8433
info@cmharegina.com

SASKATOON
1301 Avenue P North
Saskatoon, SK S7L 2X1
306 384-9333 • Fax 306 978-5777
info@cmhasaskatoon.ca

SWIFT CURRENT
176 - 4th Avenue NW
Swift Current, SK S9H 0T6
306 778-2440 • Fax 306 773-0766
sccmha@shaw.ca

WEYBURN BRANCH
404 Ashford Street
Weyburn, SK S4H 1K1
306 842-7959 • Fax 306 842-3096
cmhawey@sasktel.net

YORKTON
Box 1226
Yorkton, SK S3N 2X3
306 621-5925 • Fax 306 783-9662
ybranch@cmhask.com

RURAL COMMITTEES:
Duck Lake • Nipawin • Shellbrook