

TRANSITION

SUMMER 2014



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Canadian Mental
Health Association
Saskatchewan
Mental health for all

TRANSITION

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(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.

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Our Mission:

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

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3. 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 \$50.00 per printed page; \$50.00 per published visual art work; and \$200.00 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: lynnh@cmhask.com or directly to the Editor at tdyck@sasktel.net.
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Panic for gravity by Henry Peters

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EDITORIAL

A successful year for WFYL

TED DYCK

It never rains but it pours goes the old saying – which is to say that the past TRANSITION year has been a full one.

First in line is the successful launch of the BB Special Winter 2013 issue in Regina last December. BB = Byrna Barclay, in case you don't know, the founding editor of TRANSITION and a long-time mental-health advocate. If you haven't yet read the issue, go online – and enjoy also the outstanding cover by Marie Elyse St. George, a reproduction of the painting she did for Byrna's novel, *The Last Echo* (NeWest Press 1985).

Next is another success, the P.A.-hosted retreat and launch/reading of *Newsletter #1* in March 2014. (See a report at <http://panow.com/node/441941>.) This one was so successful that I'm already collecting material for a possible *Newsletter #2* in the form of letters of appreciation from participants in this event. It would seem – who knew?! – such intra-WFYL-group meetings are just what is needed to build *communality* amongst our writers and their groups.

Third, WFYL groups have been active during the year.



TED DYCK

The P.A. group, besides hosting a retreat, published and launched an anthology of their work and continued to reach out to their community, for example, during Mental Health Week. The Moose Jaw Muse helped re-launch *Newsletter #1* during *Reading Town* sponsored by the National Reading Campaign May 3-10, and provided one of the judges, Adam Staite, for the #mjtwithit writing contest. The Swift Current group has one of its members, Matt Drummond, meeting regularly with a local writing group called The Prairie Quills.

That's how it goes, everybody knows. And everybody knows, too, that none of the above could have happened without the input and support of a veritable host of people and institutions: Lynda Monahan, facilitator of the P.A. WFYL group; the CMHA Prince Albert Branch; Dave Nelson and CMHA (SK); Lynn Hill, Managing Editor at TRANSITION; the Saskatchewan Writers Guild; the National Reading Campaign folks; and most of all, the writers and facilitators of all the WFYL groups.

So what's next? Two possibilities, in addition to our always writing-writing-writing and reading- reading-reading: (1) it's just possible that the newsletter will be able to continue publishing; (2) it's also just possible that "The Story of the WFYL Project" will finally get written.

As always, stay tuned.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

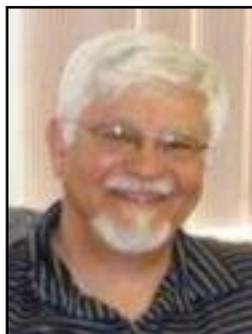
Another productive year

A great deal of activity has marked the past year for the Canadian Mental Health Association in Saskatchewan..

Implementation of our new Justice Community Support Program is well under way with over two-thirds of our client spaces filled. Kim Hoffman (Director), Garrett MacNaull, Nicole Buday and Lesley Aimoe are doing a great job of getting this program off the ground.

An expansion of our Gambling Awareness Program has resulted in our new Communications Coordinator for the program providing a great update to all our communications and website needs. We welcome Tricia Martin to this position.

As well, Lynn Hill has moved into a well-deserved retire-



DAVE NELSON

ment after 14 years of dedicated service to our Association. We wish her well and welcome Stacy Shields who is taking over as Receptionist at Division Office.

Our Association continues to advocate for improvements to the mental health system in our province, and has participated in the input sessions for the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan held in Regina in the middle of April.

We also continue to sponsor our Coordinator, Tanya Condo, for the Mental Health Coalition to provide for a broader advocacy effort than only one agency or organization can do on its own. Tanya also functions as our Systems Navigator to help persons whenever possible who are looking for direction in a fragmented system.

In all, it has been a very active and productive year and we look forward to further enhancements to the Mental Health and Addictions system when recommendations to the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan come out.

Have a great summer everyone!



Slow code colonialism

NICHOLAS OLSON

You are lying on the street in cardiac arrest. I am obliged to inform your unconscious, breathless body of my newly acquired First Aid training. This, for some reason, is supposed to reassure you, as if my knowledge to enter three digits on a phone grabbed out of a bystander's pocket changes the fact that your heart has ceased. All I can do is *Check, Call, Care*, and call bystanders to action, but according to the brawny male firefighters who taught my First Aid course, this should be reassuring. *The fewer bystanders, the better*, they said. According to said firefighters, CPR and portable defibrillators are so effective that you – unconscious, vulnerable, responsibility of the provincial healthcare and social services systems – shouldn't worry about what will happen if you don't wake up, but rather, what will happen if you do.

The day after I became First Aid certified, I heard a piece on public radio that spoke to the misconception of the effectiveness of CPR. When it comes to the point where a human is in cardiac arrest, known as a Code Blue, healthcare professionals are obligated to administer life-saving procedures. When doctors are confident that CPR will not save a life, or will greatly reduce the quality of life that remains, they will often fake it, for it “looks and feels like a really gruesome way to usher someone out of this world.”¹ They go through the motions of CPR without actually trying to save the life. They do it so the patient can die. *Slow Code* – they even have a name for it. When family and friends are watching a loved-one slip away, they cannot understand a doctor who would stand by idly and let their family member die. CPR, in this case, is a system for the conscience of the bystander, not for the person in emergency. The professionals do this because the system of resuscitation is flawed.

A friend was recently in the hospital. He got into a fight with three men half his age, he told me. Others claim that while inebriated, he tripped, the side of his head the first part of his body that struck the ground. Skull fracture and brain swelling which led to brain damage and memory loss. I visited him regularly – I sat there as an idle bystander contributing to his deteriorating health by supplying him with cigarettes which he forgot he had, as he basked in the overwhelming nature of his life of abuse and addiction. We played cards as he mumbled through the imagined traumatic experience of being locked in a house with three family members who beat him until he bled from the ears.

When my friend is discharged, he will leave the hospital to no home and to a family who can no longer give him the support he requires. The hospital can't keep him forever. The rehabilitation centre says he is too high-functioning – a man who cannot remember where he put his paintbrush or the names of his brothers. The province cares not for the marginalized. An ethically responsible governing body cares for the vulnerable, but my friend will end up homeless in a week, one inevitable head injury away from complete debilitation. He has never met his social worker. The social worker in his ward blankly stated

that it isn't her problem once he is discharged. The workers search on their computers and make phone calls in vain, aiming to satisfy the bystanders, knowing that whatever they do, it won't save his life, because, whether or not they know it, the system of resuscitation is flawed. To those within the social welfare system, this is the most receptive the state will ever be – just another case file in the colonial shell game that is the Canadian welfare state.

Those who have not dealt with the system imagine that it works for all. They imagine that the cracks through which people slip are fairy tales told from faraway lands. They can't imagine a circumstance where someone would be left out in the cold after a traumatic event, because, they think, *this is Canada, land of universal healthcare and equal aid for all*. This liberal notion of equality of opportunity fails to understand the systemic racism which is fundamental to the colonial state. The gaps exist on purpose. The system of resuscitation is intentionally flawed – it is designed to appease the conscience of the bystander. But unlike a medical Slow Code, it is flawed in its design to take resources and power out from the trained field workers through lack of programs that offer proper supports. Fifty-percent of the Saskatchewan provincial budget is devoted to healthcare and social services, totaling over \$5.5 billion per year.² With such a significant portion of the provincial budget devoted to two departments of human services, the general populace can only assume that the dollars are sufficient and effective; however, gaps in the departments are purposeful and widespread.

Aboriginal communities have been stunted by the implementation of provincial and federal social assistance programs, contributing “to the persistence of individual and community economic dependency.”³ These programs run on outdated living allowances, low earning allowances making a transition to employment impossible, and lack of adequate supports for Aboriginal people living in urban centres or dealing with HIV/AIDS. These programs run on cycles of poverty and death. A growing number of Aboriginal people have been forced from reserves to urban centres, where it is exceedingly difficult to live as a traditional Aboriginal person. It is a direct extension of settler colonialism, originally performed under the mandate of pre-confederation's Indian Affairs, whose policies to ‘civilize’ Aboriginal populations introduced the residential school system. Residential schools were decentralized into the provincially-run Ministry of Social Services, a ministry which continues to perpetuate the same exterminatory mandate. *Slow Code Colonialism* – neocolonial institutions created to emphasize the desires of the bystander and ignore the needs of the sick. Neocolonialism is already the disguise for cultural eradication and is further masked as the unavailability of programs due to lack of financial support. Where supports exist, resources do not. My friend qualifies for a bed in a home for those with Acquired Brain Injury, but only after sifting through a waiting list of several months, and not if he continues to battle his addiction. Fairytale cracks become real. The ministry that originally took responsibility for my friend as a young boy



LIVING THE LIFE

sent to a residential school, now waives this responsibility and deliberately leaves him to flop around on shore, their program near completion.

I was taught to *Check, Call, Care*. As your consciousness flickers, as shock sets in, I brush your hair from your forehead and tell you it will be alright. I lean close to your face to check your respiration. You are not breathing. Since I do not have my recommended mouth-cover, I begin compression-only CPR. I tell a bystander to call for help. I break your ribs and bounce up and down on your sternum with my arms locked at the elbows. The paramedics arrive. They are trained in emergency and begin Slow Code CPR, feigning an attempt at revival because that is what bystanders expect of them. *There's nothing we could do, they say*, but I am appeased because of their valiant attempts at resuscitation. What they don't tell me is that they were thinking about football when they were supposed to be pumping blood through your chest. You somehow survive despite the Slow Code, but you wake up with broken ribs, brain damage and you are expected to survive when you have no place to live and no family to care for you. And the system of resuscitation wins in its purposeful defectiveness.

"Sir John A. MacDonald's policy of starving First Nations to death in order to make way for the western expansion of European settlers," along with the residential school system, "meets the criteria of genocide . . . by omission, if not by deliberate commission," says a letter to United Nations Rapporteur for Indigenous People.⁴ The policy of nineteenth-century Canada differs from today's policy of intentionally defective programs of social service only in thin veils of supposed goodwill. There is no greater place to hide genocidal policy than behind a department of human services. The only other difference between Canada's previous policies of starvation and the policy of today is the time elapsed in which the extent of the genocide could be fully understood. And time will again pass.

The only way to stop Slow Code Colonialism is through a remodel of the system of resuscitation. The Ministry of Social Services is just one of the administrative programs that force subjugation by stamping out hope and dignity through "a complex web of city agencies and institutions that [regard] the poor as vermin," Chris Hedges explains.⁵ These programs work together to perpetuate the accepted state ideology by operating under the guise of being a protective force. The police who mine for crime by making arrests in communities of lower economic status work as the frontline of the repressive arms of the state. The military who break up blockades of First Nations fighting for liberation form another wing of Slow Code Colonialism. These structures work to protect the status and wealth of white middle class Canada, while ensuring the poor Aboriginal populations live in abject poverty, utterly subordinate to those who control the state. These structures project an image, and behind this image is a bloated bureaucracy focused not on remedying social evils, but on keeping these injustices out of the field of vision of polite society.

The system must be remodeled to one that does not look to appease the taxpayer, but rather to adequately serve the mar-

ginalized. This starts when bystanders become involved and demand that governments stop these hegemonic structures of administrative programs such as Social Assistance, the judicial system, the police and RCMP, and unregulated resource development that make up the branches of colonization. This will dismantle the less visible forms of "a very active system of settler colonialism."⁶ It starts with education and partnership that leads to real reconciliation "grounded in political resurgence" that "support[s] the regeneration of Indigenous languages, oral cultures, and traditions of governance."⁷ The system will be reformed when the programs intended to assist people do just that, instead of control, institutionalize, and cripple. As with any cooperative and proactive social system or community network, a welfare system administered by those to whom it caters is a democratizing step to reconciliation and empowerment. Aboriginal participation in the development of such strategies and programs is necessary to eventually eliminate the economic gap.⁸ These state apparatuses will require more than just reform to make them democratic, but will require revolutionary change encouraged by grassroots movements like protests at Elsipogtog and Idle No More.

First Aid isn't as futile as it may have seemed at first. Although I still tread in the overwhelming nature of ignorance of how to respond to an emergency more serious than hunger pangs, I at least know that the symptoms for stroke, diabetic shock, and extreme inebriation are identical. I now know that the systems they taught me are evolving and changing because their legitimacy is still highly in question. I am no longer a bystander, but a person of direct action. *The fewer bystanders, the better*, they told me. With fewer bystanders, Slow Code Colonialism can shift to a more balanced paradigm of moral care for all.

¹Goldman, Dr. B. (writer). Goodes, Jeff, (producer). 2013. "Slow Code." White Coat, Black Art. CBC Radio 1. (<http://www.cbc.ca/white-coat/2013/10/18/slow-code/>)

²Saskatchewan Provincial Budget Summary, Ken Krawetz Minister of Finance, Government of Saskatchewan, 2013-14 GRF Expense, p44. (<http://www.finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2013-14/2013-14BudgetSummary.pdf>)

³Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. 1996. Ottawa, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Volume 2, Part 1, Chapter 5, Section 2.9 ([http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sh88_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071211061313/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sh88_e.html))

⁴Fontaine, Phil. Farber, Bernie. 2013. "What Canada committed against First Nations was genocide. The UN should recognize it." *The Globe and Mail*. October 14. (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/what-canada-committed-against-first-nations-was-genocide-the-un-should-recognize-it/article14853747/>)

⁵Hedges, Chris. 2005. *Losing Moses on the Freeway*. New York, NY: Free Press, Chapter 1, p17

⁶Simpson, Leanne. 2013. "Elsipogtog Everywhere." October 20. Retrieved October 21, 2005 (leannesimpson.ca/2013/10/20/elsipogtog-everywhere/)

⁷Simpson, Leanne. 2011. *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back*. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, Back cover

⁸Painter, Marv. Lendsey, Kelly. Howe, Eric. 2000. "Managing Saskatchewan's Expanding Aboriginal Economic Gap." *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*. Volume 1, Number 2, p42



Revisiting

SHIRLEY CALLAGHAN

She sat in the back of the Chevy with her tear-stained, white and emaciated face reflected in the rear-view mirror. I could barely look at her, my once beautiful, teenage daughter now appearing like a street urchin with greasy hair and a rumpled dress.

It was the fall of 1962, and I had come to collect my girl from a small town in the northern woods of New Brunswick. It was a barren setting devoid of culture or art. The theatre played, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf*, while the bowling alley was a host to woodsmen, the primary workers in the area. This town was where I had deposited my daughter expecting her to be content.

Having applied to work with the federal government, she was successful and was placed in this remote area. Despite the poor location, I thought that she was launched into a lucrative career with opportunities for advancement.

I felt sick and disappointed when three months later I received a call from her landlady to come and bring her home—home! We had just finished leaving the Island and setting her up in a boarding house with hospitable landlords, although she would be living above a funeral home. She liked the older couple and appeared to be looking forward to her first day at work. We were comfortable with her living circumstances. A further reassurance came from her psychiatrist who had found her stable enough to enter the work force.

Weeks passed and it was not long until the phone at home began ringing. The landlady, fearing the carnal possibilities of two male occupants and a female boarder, sent my daughter to her room after dinner and told her not to reappear until morning. Music playing, reading and sleeping were followed by early morning awakening and the onset of a recurring depression which was not alleviated by medication. There was little solace at work with changing work manuals and a staff preoccupied with their families, and little time for the new girl. She became progressively ill.

I wanted to talk to her on the way to the ferry, Abegweit, but she only muttered that her doctor encouraged her to persist in N.B., and she couldn't cope. We realized that she had phoned him in crisis and not us! I had confided in her a few months ago that her mother and I were having difficulties—not a burden to share with a fragile daughter: it eroded her confidence in us, parents now shown to be in stress.

Before she moved to N.B. her boyfriend of three years returned Kahlil Gibran's, *The Prophet*, her Bible, to her. He was breaking up with her, not only because she was moving away from him, but because he couldn't face her anger and mood swings any longer. I thought she would dissolve in tears, but she did not. I knew then that she didn't love him.

I was tired of her anger, too. She had almost hit me with a stick at home while I repaired her fern stand. I'll never forget her flushed face and the rage in her eyes. What was more frightening to me was my desire to strike her back. I shook as

I took the yardstick and lunged at her, missing her face by inches. She never flinched, daring me to fight. What had I ever done to her? I reflected.

I was always a protective father, so when she dated a West Indian man, a handsome, engineering student who would have given up his Hindu faith for her, I intervened and she was never to see her love again. Was this when her hatred began, or was it at age two when her dad, a strange airman, invaded her small world?

We arrived at the ferry, and she wanted to sleep in the car since she was so disheveled. I went to the upper deck and in a moment of horror rushed back to the car. She had never been suicidal, but likely had her medication with her. She was asleep and thankfully there were no empty pill bottles in sight. I knew this was a dark time for her facing hospitalization again.

When we arrived home, my wife insisted we take our daughter straight to the mental institution where she had endured four months of psychotherapy and ECT before she recovered from a major psychotic episode. She entered the hospital, spoke to her psychiatrist, and without saying a word to her mother or me, followed the nurse to her room. My tears flowed.

Once she saw her psychiatrist and settled into the milieu, she rallied; in three weeks she was discharged home with a good prognosis. She was warm and helpful, seemingly forgetting any grievances; we were thankful for her current recovery and blessed to have our daughter back again.

Two months later she was hired by the administration of the mental hospital as a health care worker. She was home.





Freedom of Speech

REBECCA CHAMAA

I've been silent so long I imagine my voice box with cobwebs. I feel like if I tried to speak about anything personal a small puff of dust would come out of my mouth instead of words. Twenty years of secrecy. Twenty years of hiding. Twenty years of pretending to be something I'm not. I'm not sane. Well, I am at this moment, but there is an ebb and flow to sanity that works its way through my thoughts throughout the day. I am never sane for twenty four straight hours. At least I don't think so. I've never timed it, but from experience I can guess that is true.

Maybe you wonder how someone who struggles with psychotic thoughts can present themselves as normal on a daily basis – silence and secrecy. Those two things can be misinterpreted by most of the people almost all of the time. People assume silence means you are introverted. They assume silence means you are thoughtful. They assume silence means you don't have a lot to say. I have so much to say that words are rising up from my stomach like bile. I can taste them, but the lack of practice makes them stick in my throat like peanut butter with too little oil – thick almost to the point of causing me to choke.

Silence and secrecy aren't twins but cousins. Because I am silent, it is easy to keep a secret, or secrets about myself, my life, my experience, my diagnosis. Being schizophrenic carries

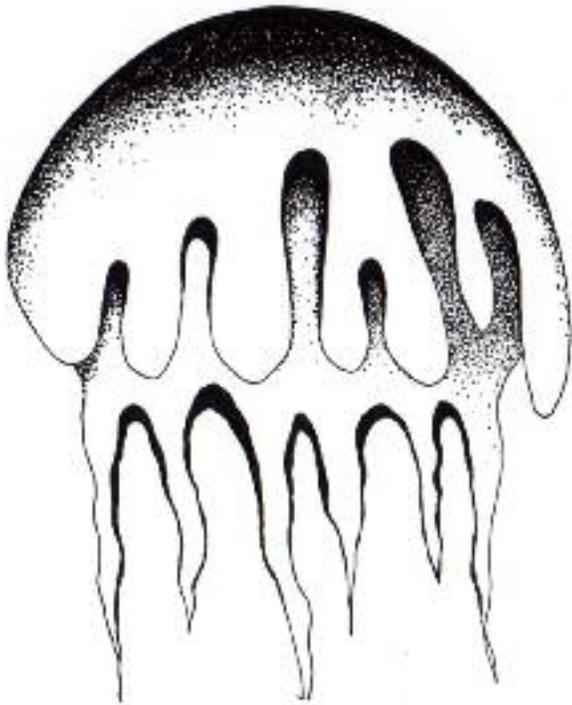
with it a stigma that I never thought I could live with. I am constantly bombarded with people making fun of those who hear voices. There is nothing funny about hearing voices. Voices can be terrifying. Voices can tell you to do things you wouldn't normally do. Can anyone who is not mentally ill really imagine having their own mind turn against them? Can they imagine having their own mind at war with itself? Can they really imagine their own mind wanting them to die? Only hell itself could be that scary.

Besides silence and secrets there are scars. How many misunderstandings have there been between in-laws and friends because I couldn't think clearly? I can't tolerate ordinary conflicts between people. Of course, that combined with my illness makes for a messy situation like lifting the beaters out of the cake mix while the power is still on and having cake mix swirl, twirl and fly across the kitchen leaving specks of batter on cupboards, counters and as high as the ceiling.

Did I say that I am tired? Scared but tired. I want to live my life out in the open. I want to be free. The fear of the stigma has imprisoned me for twenty years. It is as if I have been living part of a life. A life crowded by fear, covered in shame, and twisted with silence, secrecy and scars. Words are my way out. I need to find the first sentence. I am dying to find the sound of my voice saying, "I am mentally ill." I am dying to express my experience. I am dying for acceptance as I truly am, and if there is not acceptance to be had, am I any worse off? Am I any less alone? Will they hate me, or will they silently slip away not knowing how to treat someone who cannot be relied upon to always think rationally? I must find the letters that make up the words that will be my key to freedom.

What would true freedom be like? Would I laugh more easily at myself and with others? Could I share my psychotic thoughts with a friend and could we giggle? Good God, is that even possible? It sounds like hoping to win the lottery or something equally unimaginable or impossible – one in thirteen million. Could I get any respect at all from any of my in-laws? Would they just use this to further distance me from the family? Would anyone be able to put aside their own issues and see me as a human being with a mountain in front of me that I get up every morning and try to climb? It doesn't matter. Freedom doesn't rely on the thoughts of others. Freedom is being released from the inside out, and history has shown there is always a high price to pay for freedom.

I'm willing to pay the price. I know that it will cost my silence, cost my secrecy, cost my scars. I may be replacing old scars with new wounds. I don't know. I will be opening myself up to that dreaded stigma. I will be opening myself up to ridicule, judgment and assumptions. But I will be able to wake up every morning and face the world as myself – no hiding, no cowering, and no cover up. I will be whole in my imperfection. I will be able to begin to live life to the fullest without the fear of being discovered I will be empowered by my honesty and courage. I will start this life over again as an adult, only this time I will be free.



Cone of silence by Judy Swallow

The call

LILIAN R. DONAHUE

I went to Catholic school and one of the favorite themes of religious instruction was that of the “call.” We were told that some special people were summoned to a life of serving God. Only few received the call, but when it came, it would be unmistakable, like the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary to tell her she would bear the Son of God. Such fortunate people had a brilliant destiny following a path of sacrifice, and even if it led ultimately to martyrdom, eternal joy was assured. As a kid, this frightened me. Many of the religious people around me, were not kind and loving at all, and they didn’t seem overjoyed all the time. I expected that a call described in such glowing terms would have conferred a kind of aura on the recipients, like the halos around the heads of saints. But to my eyes, nuns seemed much like everyone else, except they wore very uncomfortable clothes. I sincerely hoped that if this call existed, it would not call to me.

My adolescence passed safely enough—I did not receive the dreaded call that would cloister me with women who wore

dark robes and even darker spirits. I began to believe that the call was just another of the many myths that had been injected into my mind as a child.

When my call came, it was a Damascene moment. It was like being struck from my horse and flung to the ground. The effect was heightened by my having consumed a quarter of a bottle of Johnny Walker. I had just spent a weekend with friends at Otter Rapids, running the river in canoes and life-jackets, afraid, but facing fear over and over again until I was buzzing with adrenaline. Driving back to my campsite in a downpour, I stopped in the middle of the road and got out of the car. There was nothing except dark forest and rain. With my feet sinking in slurry of gravel and clay, I held up my bottle of Johnny Walker as if I was toasting the universe or making a pact with the sky. Suddenly I knew that the life I had was not the life I wanted. It was so simple once I stifled the soul-tearing static of demands and guilt. I wanted to follow a destiny of my choosing. I wanted to be courageous. I wanted to live my own imperfect life, to follow my own path to glory or perdition, and was prepared to pay the price.

Washed away

ASPEN GAINER

It's April 11.

I'm chest-deep in cool water and shivering. My heart is beating fast and my stomach is twisted in a knot of anxiety. There are others around but I feel as alone as I ever have, miles distant from everyone else there.

I'm afraid of swimming and haven't been in years. I don't know when I became afraid. It snuck up on me.

I see my roommate splashing away at the end of the lane. He seems farther away from me than 50 meters; I'm about to swim lanes for the first time in high school, about to swim for the first time since as long as I can remember, and about to wear a snorkel mask for the first time ever.

Kris must be part fish, the way he loves the water and yearns for it. He swims all the time. I've been on an active get-healthy kick since the beginning of April, working out about five days per week. When Kris asked if I wanted to swim, I said yes without thinking . . . one more activity to burn those calories and fulfil my goal of two hours per day of fitness.

But then I began to realize that I was afraid to swim. To Kris's credit, he didn't laugh when I told him. Like the true friend he is, he didn't blink. Instead he asked me what I was afraid of and helped me figure out that the worst part is putting my face in the water because I can't breathe, especially while doing the front crawl.

He suggested a snorkel mask.

My only experience with a snorkel mask is a vague memory of not being able to breathe. I had some concerns about his

idea. We talked about it some more and finally I decided to just trust the guy. He's been swimming, snorkeling and diving for years, so I realized that he was probably right.

So I ended up there, April 11, in the pool, shivering more with nerves than cold. I put the mask on like he showed me. I felt like a complete fool and must have looked like a complete loser.

But I pushed it all aside and sunk lower in the pool until the water was up to my neck. I was freezing and finally, I had to move. I bent my head forward, put the mask in the water, took a few breaths and launched my body forward.

I swam a few strokes and it was like I was swimming through pure panic. I felt every fear reaction exploding in my body, my pupils dilated, my nostrils flared, I gasped for breath. I couldn't do it; I stopped and clawed off the mask for a real breath of air. I stood there in the middle of the lane, panting, fear washing away and utter disappointment replacing it.

But then something inside me fought the disappointment. My logic brain took charge and I realized that my fear was completely unfounded and useless, and that if I just swam through it, I would be fine, that the panic would be cleansed and I could just get on with my life. There was no way I was going to die, so the panic was pointless, and I'll be damned if I let my fear stop me from doing things I really want to do. Even if it's just going for a swim.

In that brief moment, seconds only, I just shoved the fear aside and used my logic to push through.

The first length was hard. I had to remember to breathe at a normal rate. I had to convince myself to relax and slow down my wild heart. The second length was easier as I was able to



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enjoy the sensations of the water washing over my skin, caressing me and buoying me up at the same time. The third length, I zoned out and lost myself in the rush of feelings, the joy of motion that I hadn't experienced in so long.

Forty-five minutes later, Kris pointed at the clock and we headed for the hot tub. As I got out of the pool, my legs wobbled. I'd forgotten what a workout swimming could be and in the joy of sensation, I'd forgotten that I was working out. I'd forgotten my body, let everything go, mesmerized and released by the simple repetitive motion of arms and legs pumping to propel me forward, breathing in a measured cadence.

Fear conquered. Battle won.

Since that first swim, I've gone about two or three times per week.

I revel in the feelings. That's what keeps me coming back. When I'm in the water, it's like I've been given permission to enter my own world, one where the air is cool, bright magic that trails along every millimetre of skin. The water is pale blue and bright at the same time; it is everything, my support, my obstacle, my blanket. It stops my ears and turns my thoughts inwards, into the liquid world of my inner mind. The water allows my body to remain distracted. It gives my logical brain an obstacle to overcome, a puzzle to solve, so that my unconscious, little-girl, magic-loving mind can travel the depths and realms of my internal world with freedom, unshackled by the structure and rules imposed by my conscious.

Water opens me up to myself and shuts me off from everyone else. I imagine wistfully, with naivety, that maybe this is what it feels like to be autistic, removed from the world by a cool, comforting barrier that encompasses me in peace. But all the same, that peace is fragile still, jarred by a random flailing arm or leg passing me, waves of someone else's passing pushing against me in what feels like some admonition. You're going too slow, get out of my way, you don't belong here.

The jarring interruptions disturb me and make me angry. They arrest my calm. They steal the secret joy I've found here, beneath the world of prying eyes and heavy expectations. I wish for a lane to myself and every now and then the pool is deserted and I get it, a whole lane to myself to swim at any pace I want, flail as messily as I want without having to crowd the lane marker, a world all my own that no one steals from me.

But that doesn't happen often, especially with the arrival of warm weather.

It changes, the joy I find in swimming. It, too, is fragile, like the peace I find under water. The joy is easily stolen.

The last time I went swimming was with Kris and my boyfriend. Kris and I rarely talk when we swim; we are there to do lanes and nothing else. I think Kris unconsciously understands my need to be alone when I swim. Or maybe I told him I just wanted to swim and didn't want to talk. He says I can be abrupt with my honesty.

But with Luke there, everything is different. He says he finds lane swimming boring. He wants it to be faster, more

exciting. He and Kris talk between laps.

I love him and I'm happy he is there, but for some reason, the new variable shifts my internal balance, breaks my concentration, and things change in me.

I worry about them talking together. My demons rise up and in paranoia, I think they must be talking about me, laughing about something stupid I did. Or I think they are talking about other girls at the pool in bikinis, how sexy they are and what they'd like to do.

I've been assured this isn't the case, and although I don't know what they actually talk about, I know I am just letting my self-hatred get the best of me. My internal flaws come out full force the two times Luke joins us at the pool and I can't figure out why.

My joy and calm are gone, the peace shattered. I think about how slow I'm going and I struggle and push myself to go faster, finish more laps in less time. It makes me sad and angry, and I can't feel the same sensations anymore, not like the first few times I swam. Instead, the water on my skin feels dull and almost clammy.

The only thing that can take me out of my mind is the light. The light in the pool and on the water has changed since I first swam. A month ago it was dark outside when we swam. Now the evening sun shines in the west wall of windows and light dances through the water and on the pool bottom like electricity, like lightning. Suddenly, I can look at something other than the random hairs, old Band-Aids and chunks of unidentifiable white stuff that floats in the water.

I look at the webs of light pulsating in front of my eyes. I feel like I'm inside a kaleidoscope. I let my eyes focus on the electric-rainbow tendrils and follow them until they disappear in the shade, then follow them again as I swim back into the sun. The light returns me to my inside, mesmerizes me and puts me back into the trance state I craved but couldn't force. It is more tenuous than before, but it's there and I gulp in the peace I feel as if it's water after a hard run. And I realize what I'm doing, hurrying and striving and pushing. I realize that maybe that yearning and effort is why I am numbed to the sensations, why I can't feel the magic.

I immediately slow down. I stop counting my lengths. I swim to feel the delicious movement of my muscles. I slow my breathing until my lung expansion feels like a good stretch in the morning, slow, satisfying, calm. I am warmed. I am filled with peace once more. The magic returns and the smooth touch of the water gains that sensuousness that took my breath away at first.

The water becomes nurturing, its touch loving, all-encompassing, enveloping me with overwhelming sensation that shorts out my conscious mind and resets everything, a completely experiential and visceral experience with no room for logic, no room for my conscious brain that wants to run the show and tell me to achieve goals and swim faster and harder and more . . .

All there is once more is my breath, my heart, my inner world and the water.

Everything else is washed away.

Thirteen past the hour

MARIA CLAIRE LENG

I received a call from the phone company saying they were going to disconnect the phone. I paid the bill over the phone right away, but knew we weren't late. My husband Peter stood there annoyed that I was waiting on hold. I had called the hearing impaired phone number at the phone company (Peter is shouting, impairing my hearing) and got a kind young woman who gave me the address of the Customer Arbitration Council. Maybe they could provide marital counseling.

After, I went into the den and sat down and composed a letter about the phone bill. I took off all of my clothes and began running around nude in the upstairs, a sheet flowing behind me in my hands. I looked very attractive and my husband should've been able to handle it himself, but he called my therapist. I talked to her and she said "Are you amorous?" And I agreed. So she explained to my husband that I was amorous. He handled it.

The next morning, I heard Peter working in the barn sawing wood for an end table. I looked out the bedroom window and saw two translucent-pink dragonflies mating. They barely touched the screen as they became one ring. I resisted the temptation to tap the screen, and they then flew away still joined together. I laid back on the trundle bed alongside the window still naked only a sheet over me. Even the saw burning into the wood hissed with virility. I hadn't taken my



"Sometimes it is hard not to believe I'm a subject in a covert psychiatric experiment"
Art by James Skelton

Risperdal psychiatric medicine in three weeks as it gave me headaches, made me dizzy and stumble.

That afternoon, Peter had called himself a Ford Man. I told him that was like saying he was anti-Semitic, that Ford had written a book against the Jews. And Peter said, "All's I'm saying is I like my truck." Shortly after, I placed a picture of a Mercedes on Peter's truck seat and wrote it would be his birthday present. He beeped the horn in approval when he saw it later that day. But I was on a crusade against Germans. When he came inside, we had a fight about whether dogs were good in war, Peter saying they sniff out mines and me saying they use them to attack people, like they do in protest marches.

Peter worked at Raytheon designing guidance for missiles. It was supposed to be a temporary job until the economy got better. But he stayed. They addressed him as Dr. Kraus. He said he liked the respect. I wanted to take back my maiden name because Kraus sounded so German. I wanted my independence as I hated receiving mail addressed to "Mrs. Peter Kraus." The lady at the court house two days prior had told me that I could change my name back to my maiden name, but that my husband would have to agree to it.

After dinner, I received a phone call from our friends Candace and John. They called to see if Peter and I wanted to come over for a movie. I said we were just about to start the movie, Peter and me having sex in front of the TV box. I thought that my therapist was going to watch also. I thought Peter was a kraut, so on the wood floor, I placed a blue towel and a black towel in the shape of the cross of Christ. I asked Peter to lay on the cross naked and we had sex.

After it was over, I felt sick to my stomach and slowly climbed into the shower. I moaned against the tiles on the wall with water pouring over my face. I had put him through a sexual sacrifice for all to see. After I got out of the shower, I called my therapist and told her that I felt ill after what I had done.

She said, "Peter needs to lighten up a little."

I said, "I shouldn't have put him through it."

And she said, "You've done nothing wrong." We ended the call and she said to call anytime, that she kept the phone by her ear in bed. I called her at 9:00 a.m. the next morning. She said don't call before 10:00. So I hung up and called her at 10:00.

At the start of the weekend, Peter had said that if I didn't get the groceries by Sunday night that he was calling my doctor because he was worried about me. I went grocery shopping on Sunday and listened to the man over the intercom: "Sale on Angel Soft Toilet Paper, aisle 7, treat yourself like an angel." And then as the music played, I raced my cart to aisle 7 and got 48 rolls of Angel Soft and propped them on the top of my cart. Then I started reading different labels in the aisles, selecting things like a happy consumer. Vegan Kitty-Cat Kibble with a cartoon face of a smiling black cat with blue eyes and eyelashes, perfect, my cats could become vegetarians. "Shoppers, for sexy smooth underarms, get Secret, aisle 8." Each time he spoke, I found the item and plunked it down. I wouldn't shop



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in aisle 13 as that was the aisle of death, so we had to do without bread. I arrived home with bags of groceries we had no use for. I thought Peter didn't know whether to cry or laugh.

I couldn't sleep Sunday night and unplugged the phone cord to the satellite TV box downstairs in the living room so no one could watch me again. That caused the phone to ring from DirectTV. I answered the phone and heard low modem tones that I thought my psychopharmacologist doctor was sending to me to sexually soothe me. It was like hearing a Barry White song, him speaking before he would start to sing *Can't Get Enough of Your Love Baby*. Peter asked in the morning who called me in the middle of the night, and I told him it was my doctor (my doctor of love).

I called in sick to work on Monday as I couldn't get dressed. It took too much concentration. Katie Couric started talking to me on the TV. I talked back to her. She told me to wait my turn, so I shut up. The weather man on TV buttoned his blazer and I thought he should unbutton it as it was sexier. I started dancing in my nightgown to the Today Show. I lifted my nightgown up above my waist feeling young and sexual.

I called my therapist and told her that I couldn't hold on anymore and needed to go into the hospital. She sounded surprised. She said she knew the healthy strength that was always in me. I called my doctor asking for help, and he said to come in at 10:30 the next morning, but 10:30 was really 13 to me without the zeros, so I thought he wanted me to kill myself.

I put out a spread of the Tarot cards and got a card with a man dead from swords in his back and the Death card, so God wanted to kill me. I called my father and told him I forgave him for the house fire I was in when I was four. I called my teacher and thanked him for teaching me. I called my brother and promised to send him the painting by my aunt that was intended for him. I prepared for death. I boiled some water, let it cool, poured it into a sherry glass, blessed it like a Catholic priest reciting *The Lord's Prayer*, then I poured the water over my box of journals. I called my friend Candace to ask if she could come and pick up the box. She came right over and asked how I was doing, and I gave her the box and told her I was up to no good. It was August 13, 2001 and I thought the 13 meant the day of my death.

I called my psychic and told her that God was trying to kill me. She said it was a poltergeist and to tell it to leave, that it was making all kinds of noise in her house also, that it had come from my house. I asked her how much I owed her for the phone call and if I could get the "Saturn in Leo discount." She said there was no charge and I thanked her and hung up. I heard something run through the attic. I walked into my office and my family photograph was on the floor, its picture-frame glass cracked in the shape of an X. I shouldn't have blessed my journals. I shouldn't have had Peter lay on a cross of towels before sex. I had awoken all the spirits that looked for pagans who thought the rituals for God could be borrowed without accepting the dogma of the Catholic Church. Peter was Catholic.

I poured myself some Grand Marnier and lay in bed and

turned on the AM radio where the host was talking to men who didn't think there was anything wrong with date rape. I thought about the young fireman who raped me as a teenager, and I knew it wasn't my fault. I took my bottle and swallowed the pills, chalky mouthfuls of them. I got a little drunk. I coated the medicine bottle with Grand Marnier and pushed it into my vagina. But as I lay there, things got a bit uncomfortable. Nothing happened as I waited to die. So I took the bottle out of my vagina and walked, then stumbled, then crawled into the den. Maybe the medicine could have killed me after all. I called my doctor and left a message for Mr. Fireman, not his real name, Dr. Fierman, and said I had tried to kill myself but it didn't work.

He called me and told me to go downstairs and wait for the police with the empty bottle. The bottle was sticky, so I had to clean it before the police arrived. (I thought I was destroying evidence.) My doctor called my husband at work, told him I would be alright, and instructed him to call the police. A police car and an ambulance came. The ambulance driver looked like the father of the guy who raped me. I said, "You're not going to rape me are you?" He said they didn't do that kind of thing. The policeman asked if he could walk through my house and I said ok. I didn't want him to think I was hiding anything like a dead body or something. I had seen those stories on the news of routine house calls turning into gruesome discovery. Not me. If there was one thing I wanted to be in life right then, it was innocent!

I watched the clock facing me in the Emergency Room and drank black charcoal. I watched the clock with an IV in my arm and hooked up to a heart monitor. Every time the clock reached 13 minutes past the hour, I thought God wanted me dead. A woman stood beside me (observing me as she put it) getting irritated that I had to keep walking out to go to the bathroom after the fluid in the IV. So she put a catheter in me. But first she had to wash between my legs. She said for some reason I was sticky (the Grand Marnier). My husband arrived. A nurse took blood from the artery in my right arm. Eventually, the clock passed midnight and it was no longer the 13th of August. It was no longer death day. The Tarot lost. God lost. The Catholics lost. And the Germans lost. The psychiatric admitting nurse walked into the room.

She said I had done something very wrong (I wondered which something), and she asked if I had ever been through their psychiatric treatment program at Fitchburg's hospital. I said I hadn't. She was short with gray hair and wore a white lab coat with her belongings stuffed into her pockets. She looked away from me whenever I glanced at her. She asked me to sign a voluntary admission, but I refused. She said they would try and get a second doctor to sign off and have me committed to Worcester State Hospital if I didn't sign voluntarily. I signed my name, but I signed it as Nicole Kidman. She put a checkmark by my signature and left.

It turned out the 14th was my birthday, and the admitting psychiatric nurse at Fitchburg's hospital asked me if I wanted

Every half hour during the night in our unit, someone would shine a flashlight in our faces and sometimes keep it there.

a birthday cake and party in celebration. I said, "No, thank you." They gave me a room by the front desk, and I looked out the window and saw a black man with an afro in the parking lot who had followed me there. I told the male nurse and he said no one was there. I had the nurse close the blinds between the two windows with a screwdriver so that the man could not watch me. Outside my room, I saw a dozen pay phones in a row. The next day they were gone.

Because of state cutbacks, the hospital was going bankrupt except for the mental-health locked unit. When they took us out for cigarettes, we walked down the empty halls of the hospital. We saw the prepared empty beds behind the glass walls, all the monitors in place turned off, perhaps preserved there in case of a catastrophic emergency. Every half hour during the night in our unit, someone would shine a flashlight in our faces

and sometimes keep it there. I would stare back at the Duracell flashlight, but the person just pointed the light in my face longer.

In the unit, we did crafts and played Nerf bowling. Most of the patients had drug problems. One morning, I woke up to a nurse asking for a urine sample for a drug test right away. Later that day, I lied about why I was in the hospital. In group meetings, I said I had trouble being quiet with my thoughts and that I said everything that came into my head. I said I was learning privacy. One of the staff group leaders said he had lost a dozen friends to suicide. I didn't want to be his friend.

I skipped as many meetings as possible. I slept and took the Geodon medicine they gave me. When I didn't sleep, I did circuits around the unit because the medicine made me ferociously restless. I counted over 150 circuits that I made in the time that I was there. I could have been released after thirty as my mind was resilient and psychologically clearing, but the hospital was a business and they had to keep patients there to make money.

I now saw my roommate was three-hundred pounds and had her period. She lay in her bed like a giant sanitary napkin. She had the same size brain as me. Did the psychiatrist give her medicine based on the size of her head, or the size of her body? She was a chemistry conundrum. She was on Haldol, a medicine for aggressive people I thought. I gave her a wide berth not only because of her size, but also because she held dominion over insanity.

My husband would come to visit. When I would get passes to take a walk, he wouldn't take me. So my husband and I sat in my room and talked. My roommate and her husband sat on the opposite bed and talked. I would thank my husband for bringing me the mail. I asked him if he could bring me more underwear and socks.

The two women in the next room had herpes on their face. A prostitute would come and only go to see the psychiatrist in his office. The prostitute was sixteen or so. People talked about her. Most of the patients had been at the hospital before. When we ate, the staff collected the plastic knives afterwards. A violent guy got given a lot of drugs and could barely stand. When he signed himself out on three-day's notice, police were there to arrest him.

My husband told me he never loved me more than he did then as we teetered on the edge of divorce. The medicine had blunted me. It took him two days to tell my family the truth that I was in the hospital. He was four hours late picking me up the day I got released. He never missed a day of work during the four weeks I was in the hospital. When we got home, the lawn looked anemic and had gone to seed and the plants in the flower boxes were dead. Empty brown-paper grocery bags filled the kitchen floor. The 48 rolls of Angel Soft toilet paper sat on the countertop where I left them. Just from the look of the place, I saw that he needed me. I decided it was time to become a fanatic about laundry detergent or vitamins and proceeded to cook dinner.



Gut Reaction by Judy Swallow



House of Horrors?

BEV LUNDAHL

“**W**hoa – they didn’t take young kids through there did they?” Such was the reaction when I recently told a younger friend about our grade 8 class of 1959-1960 touring the Saskatchewan Hospital in Weyburn, or the Mental as it was known locally. “How would you have liked it if kids came parading through to stare at you?” was another comment. Little did I know that twenty years later I myself would be a patient – not in the Mental Hospital in Weyburn but in a psychiatric ward in the Plains Health Centre in Regina.

I pondered these comments and wondered to myself why these old hospitals have earned such a monstrous reputation and have become defined as Houses of Horrors. Why do people like to freak themselves out on fantastic stories that they envisioned were acted out behind those walls? True some strange images are indelibly printed in my mind from that tour – in particular the Defective Ward in the basement but I do not recall any nightmares or disturbing effects from being exposed to that infamous hospital at a young age. In fact I was told recently that this was a time when public tours were being encouraged to help eradicate the stigma attached to these unfortunate people.

In the decades following my hospitalization I realized one day that I had worked with many people who back then would have been housed in that old hospital. And did they freak me out? No. Regina Pioneer Village where I worked in Recreation in the 1990’s like many nursing homes is not considered a House of Horrors – not even ‘3- West’ the ward that housed the residents suffering from dementia and other brain disorders. Visitors to nursing homes today I am sure do not feel like they are being ushered into some fearful way-out place that people only whisper about in hushed tones. The Weyburn Hospital had once been the place where the elderly with dementia were cared for.

The Developmental Centers in the schools where I worked as a substitute teacher in the 1980’s were a very normal part of the school environment. I still recall the children from the regular classrooms racing down the halls at recess vying with each other to be first to reach the Developmental Centre classroom so they could take their favorite pupil into the hallway and push him or her up and down in their wheelchair. Would these multiply handicapped (challenged) children have been in that Defective Ward in Weyburn back in the old days? I was told by Kay Parley, a former patient and psychiatric nurse there, that the Defective Ward at the time I toured it was for those who did not go to the Moose Jaw Training School, which was opened when the mentally ill were separated from the mentally retarded, as they were labelled at that time. Children today have grown up mixing with this portion of the population and I doubt if any of them would think of ‘freaks’ or tell weird and wonderful tales about this exposure. It was part of their normal everyday school experience.

The saddest place of all though is the Regina Provincial Correctional Centre where I worked for one year between my jobs in the schools and the nursing home. My position in an area called programs involved typing out inmate histories, passes, work placements etc. Although I did not work directly with the inmates the office was inside the cell block, and every morning I had to go through the trap and past the cells to get to my work station. The trap was a space between two large metal doors with vertical bars. When I approached the first door I had to show my ID to Security who would press the button that automatically unlocked it. As I stepped inside it clanged shut behind me and for a moment or two I was locked in the trap. In front of me the second barred door would swing open and I would walk through it into the cell block to go to work. I remember the first week on the job a staff member told me that there were a significant number of mentally challenged people in the jail. The Regina Correctional Centre was for those sentenced to a maximum of two years less a day. Is that really a place for the mentally challenged?

Everyone who has worked at the jail has a story to tell and this is mine. One whole day all the staff in my area was away at a meeting and I was left alone in the office with the ‘inmate cleaner’. This was his work placement and he mostly sat around and read but from time to time we would give him a job such as stapling or sweeping the floor. I had much work to do and gave him scant attention while I shuffled papers and smoked furiously. I still smoked at that time and I think we were the last government office ordered to butt out. In fact another staff member remarked once, “The secretary is going to burn her desk!” That day as I slaved away alone typing about inmate incidents such as muscling and other violence occurring within the close quarters of this musty, aging prison, I vaguely sensed the inmate cleaner standing in front of my desk. A quiet voice reached my ears. “Bev.” When I absent-mindedly raised my head I saw him standing there holding a big butcher knife. “Here” he said as he gently handed it to me handle first! How could we have left a sharp lethal knife that we had used to cut a birthday cake the day before, lying loose in a jail? Was I stupid or had I had just become accustomed to these jailbirds and lost any fear that I had may have had when I first began this job?

I did not see the part of Weyburn hospital that housed dangerous criminals. That was off limits. Nor at the Correctional Centre was I allowed to visit Remand, where some of the inmates were considered dangerous. There are horror stories about the mentally ill in the penal institutions today coming out through the media and none of them seem to have a happy ending. In fact most of them are tragedies. I wonder how suicide rates compare in our penitentiaries today to those in the old mental hospitals. I do not know if the justice system is handling these people as well as the education and health systems are.

Not that there is no fear attached to the psychiatric wards in the hospitals. During my stay I recall a cleaning woman with a German accent being terrified of a dark skinned young

My memory of them almost thirty-five years later is as vividly etched in my brain as that of the very unique personalities who were being treated there.

patient sitting cross-legged in the hallway meditating and muttering out loud and of nurses shivering fearfully when all three elevators jammed at the same time. An excited hyper patient had stood in front of the elevators and in loud authoritative voice had commanded them to stop. As a patient, or consumer as we are called today, it was an interesting place to experience and staff and patients alike had a lot of laughs. Had a school group toured the ward at the time I was there, I wonder if we patients (consumers) would have been the ones that stared and laughed.

I do not think onlookers would have bothered us one bit. As I write this I am thinking of that cleaning lady who was so

scared and those jumpy nurses. My memory of them almost thirty-five years later is as vividly etched in my brain as that of the very unique personalities who were being treated there.

Averted eyes and dismissive attitudes are more devastating today to the lonely discharged patients lurking in the streets and alleys than the curious stares some are so worried about. Those who are loitering on the street corners by day and living in unsanitary, less than safe rats' nests at night would welcome eye contact and a kind word from the busy citizens hurrying by. Modern medications have improved the lives of many consumers but there are still some horror stories out there hiding in plain sight.

Being mentally ill

GEORGE MERLE

Since the age four when I was sexually abused by my mother's father, my grandfather. For many, many years I kept this fact a secret. When this was revealed finally by me I was 50 plus years old.

I went to see a counselor early in the morning at a treatment centre. She was the first person I ever told about this event. I guess I sobbed for over 20 minutes.

The counselor told me to write my grandfather a letter. Even though he was long gone, I wrote a tearful letter of forgiveness. Then I wrote his name on it then burnt the letter.

Upon my arrival home I told members of my family, my mother and my brother. They did not believe me! They maintained grandpa would never do such a thing.

He did do it! I was there on that old Winnipeg couch in the basement. This scene is indelibly etched on my memory. I would say this event is *the major cause* of my 45 plus years of mental illness.

After this I did not trust authority. I became paranoid. I was uncomfortable in public. I was introverted and alone.

When I was 19 I had my first nervous breakdown. Mick Jagger sings about the 19th nervous breakdown. I dare to say I've had more breakdowns than that. For many years there was a revolving door at the psychiatric ward in the hospital for me. I have taken so much psychotropic medication over the years, I have a plethora of lasting side effects and my liver and kidneys are probably as hard as hockey pucks.

The life expectancy of people on this kind of medication

is significantly lower than normal.

However, these are not the worst things about mental illness. It is the fear of misunderstanding of the general public toward the mentally ill. This is called stigma. Stigma exists in all levels of society. The media is much to blame for this.

Now It may surprise you but 95 percent of the mentally ill are completely passive. They are more of a danger to themselves than they are to anyone else.

Suicide is a form of relief to a tortured mind. Thus the suicide rate amongst the mentally ill is high.

We are battered every day with TV, movies, articles and stories about some axe murderer or serial killer or rapist, killer, arsonist, child molester, etc. etc. They are all branded mentally ill. I was branded mentally ill at the age of 19, yet I have never thought or done any of these abhorrent acts and never ever will. Yet I am stigmatized by many including my own family. They just do not understand or even care to understand the complete and total devastation mental illness can produce in an individual's life.

I have been called crazy, insane, stupid, quirky, different, nuts, weird, a low life. One police officer called me the dregs of society.

How does all this make me feel? Not good at all! Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me. Excuse me – wrong – names do hurt. My own daughter called me a fucking retard. Yes, names do hurt and I would say that kind of stigma hurts me the most. My name is George. No other names, adjectives, labels, judgements required. I prefer to let God be my judge. Thank you.



Confessions of a crazy lady

KY PERRAUN

Madness came on like a tornado on the prairies – the chilling dark cloud of depression obliterating all light, followed by the utter chaos and devastation of hallucinations and delusions. It was a psychological emergency, a storm of psychosis which razed my life and left a flattened landscape in its wake, a disaster from which I had to rebuild my life. Like any rebuilding project, the results are vastly different than the original.

I was 35 years old, recently separated from a common-law relationship and working for a publishing company. There were stressors in my life – the breakup of my relationship, the fact that I had taken a second job on to make ends meet, being summoned as a witness in a domestic dispute. But I had endured greater stress. That this particular set of circumstances affected me so adversely was definitely cause for concern.

At first the low mood that periodically dipped to suicidal despair was the primary problem. I had suffered from depression since a teen, and sought help at the age of 18. The talk therapy I received seemed to have helped buoy my spirits and get me in touch with my feelings, but in my 20s I withdrew from university, unable to continue my studies because of despair and an inability to concentrate. In my early 30s I tried antidepressants, but quit taking the medication because of side effects. I did not stay on the drugs long enough for them to kick in, and the small city doctor I consulted never thought to advise me otherwise.

Paranoia insidiously slunk into my consciousness. This many-headed creature with a crazed expression wreaked havoc on my thoughts. Strangers began to look familiar, so much so that I was convinced I was being followed. I quit my job, unable to function at work, fearing that my coworkers were plotting against me.

I had become religiously obsessed, a fanatical Zen Buddhist. I eschewed comfortable furniture for cushions, began a vegetarian diet and marathon meditation sessions, and was convinced I was on the path to enlightenment. I proselytised to everyone I knew, the very antithesis of the serene and non-attached follower of the Way.

One afternoon, while sitting on the floor, leafing through a book, I saw 'I HATE YOU' spelled in large indigo letters in the air above me. Convinced the holograph was a physical fact, I searched for a projector.

I faxed organizations and individuals strange, paranoid rants with meaning clear only to myself. A former employer called the police. I told the detective who called me that it had been a joke. I was paranoid even of the police. I alternately considered myself a genius and privy to occult knowledge and a total failure, unworthy of remaining in this life.

Madness is not romantic, is not aligned with genius, though Aristotle said, "There is never a genius without a tincture of madness." There is not necessarily a tincture of genius in madness.

Some experts, such as Kay Redfield Jamieson, do postulate that creativity is associated with mental illness, especially bipolar disorder. Elyn Saks, author of *The Centre Cannot Hold*, and law professor, who suffers from schizophrenia, noted that creativity is something that is part of something bad – schizophrenia.

When I became ill, I was sporadically creative, though unable to bring projects to completion. I was unable to work on the manuscript of poetry for which I had received a grant.

In response to visual hallucinations, I made signs on a rice paper scroll with black ink, and placed them, image-out, in my windows, line paintings and written messages suggesting I "had the cure", (I at one point thought I had the AIDS virus sussed), quotes in foreign languages I meticulously copied from texts, jokes only I could understand. I felt I was communicating with my tormentors on my terms. This activity taxed my reserved.

When two police officers showed up at my door one morning to take me for psychiatric evaluation, I was shocked beyond belief. One police officer said a doctor had signed the form requesting an evaluation. I stared at him blankly, speechless. What doctor? My doctor had offered me tissue when I cried, and a month's supply of antidepressants. She made no mention of hospital. The situation felt surreal, more so than the shape shifting faces on the street and voices coming from the radiator. I was not allowed to brush my teeth or change. I had to be in the officers' sights at all times.

An ambulance pulled up in the street and the officers escorted me to the vehicle, where I was met by a male psychiatric nurse. The nurse guided me into the back of the ambulance, and shut the doors. When he asked my name, holding a clipboard, I sarcastically replied, "If you don't know my name, why am I here?"

There are no windows in the backs of ambulances. I sat in the white cubicle, absorbing the fact that I was being taken away. After forty five minutes of pregnant silence, the ride was over. The nurse stood up and an ambulance attendant opened the doors. We were at Alberta Hospital, the provincial asylum. The loony bin. The nut house.

Another nurse was waiting, seated in the small room, filing her nails. After a short period of time I was brought into a doctor's office.

I told him my tale of persecution, and tried to convince him that I was the victim of a complex plot, not insane. The nurse entered the room and took me up to a ward.

A soft-spoken male nurse greeted me. He held out a pill, Atavan .

"Atavan is counter-indicative to clinical depression," I raged. (I had read an article by the writer Lynne van Leuven about her experiences with depression, stating just that.)

He continued to hold the pill out. I grabbed it, threw it to the ground, and crushed it under my heel. There was no way they were going to medicate me into compliance. Chemical lobotomy. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. The Snake Pit.

Somehow, I could manage to appear sane for brief periods, just long enough to get hired or talk my way out of treatment.

Sedated zombies, shuffling from meal tray to crafts, unable to raise enthusiasm. Russian intellectuals, labelled schizophrenic for criticizing the state. I was terrified.

Two guards grabbed me by the arms and guided me into a room. A nurse pulled down my pants and injected me with the antipsychotic Haldol. I fell unconscious and awoke the next day, stiff and perplexed.

While the Haldol caused every muscle in my body to ache, it did calm me, and I quietly sat in the smoking lounge with other patients, even making conversation. I believe I was in shock. I felt as though I had been imprisoned for a crime I did not commit.

I soon underwent a battery of tests, everything from Rorschach ink blots to brain scans. It was determined that I had schizophrenia and depression, and was prescribed the antipsychotic Risperdal, which I adamantly refused.

After 30 days I went before a tribunal, which recommended I remain as a voluntary patient. Thanks, but no thanks!

I practically flew out of the hospital. Even more paranoid than before admission, I sought refuge in strangers' and old acquaintances' houses, proving to be a burden because of my erratic behaviour and delusions, irreparably damaging relationships in the process.

Through it all my now-partner stood by me tirelessly, offering me shelter and kindness when I inevitably found myself back at his apartment after an elaborate "escape plan," to free myself from the torture which was all in my mind, but seemed so convincingly to be external. He had visited me in hospital, spoken with my family and doctors, and gently urged me to take medication. Despite his low-key support, the flashing neon messages and voices, at times two or more conversing with each other about me, drove me to seek relief by running away. I made frequent trips to various destinations in Western and Northern Canada, but always returned. I worked as a live-in personal care aide for brief periods, and sequestered myself at one point in a Benedictine monastery until the monks called the police to talk to the obviously psychotic guest. I stayed in Ys and women's shelters, was brought to various hospitals and was visited by mental health teams, but always denied my illness and was not detained. Somehow, I could manage to appear sane for brief periods, just long enough to get hired or talk my way out of treatment. In my mind, the delusions and hallucinations were real, but experience had taught me that others did not agree, so I denied my experiences to the authorities, apparently common behaviour for persons with psychosis in denial.

I believe that my partner's support saved me from danger. I always had a place to return to, even if his face transformed before my very eyes into that of a stranger. I considered him to be at best out of touch with reality when he did not acknowledge what I perceived, but his calm, matter of fact demeanour soothed me.

Eventually I found myself in a small city in the interior of British Columbia, on a greyhound bus and with 35 cents to my



Untitled by Henry Peters



WRITING THE LIFE - NON-FICTION

name. Some small part of me acknowledged that I needed medical attention, and I went to hospital with two police officers whom I had called, being too paranoid to take an ambulance, too broke to take a taxi.

I was interviewed and soon found myself in the psych ward, despite the fact that I felt my problem to be physical. I was given an injection and slept through the night in seclusion. The next day, however, I tried to cross the line separating seclusion from the rest of the ward, and was again hauled into a room by orderlies and injected with an antipsychotic. I heard the male attendant say, "I'm the fat --- who raped you!" My heart was in my throat as the needle entered my hip.

When I awoke I was livid. I paced the small floor of the locked seclusion room, and screamed out of the tiny barred window for a lawyer.

When I calmed down I was allowed out of the room, but had to remain within observation. Once an hour I was escorted outside by a guard for a cigarette. I felt defeated, and resigned myself to the fact that I would have to comply with the rules if I was to be granted my freedom.

When my attending psychiatrist stated that I would have to take medication if I wanted to remain in the province, I agreed. I realized I needed help, and the injections I had been forcibly given had helped clear my mind. This was the turning point for me.

After two weeks of faithfully taking medication, I was released to a halfway house, a lovely, cheerful bungalow with a nursing station adjoining the kitchen and living room. Residents took turns cooking, something I really enjoy, and we were offered the use of art supplies and group workshops on such topics as goal setting.

Determined to be self-sufficient, I found a temporary job picking ginseng while on day pass. Pleased with myself, I was disheartened that I would have to leave the residence if I was unable to attend programs. I quickly found a room and board home in the area, and a worker helped me move my possessions.

My weakened physical condition and medication side effects made picking ginseng impossible. I found a job as a live-in caregiver for a stroke sufferer, a job I soon lost. I then found a part-time position as a telemarketer, and was able to retain that position for a number of months, until I moved back to Alberta.

I had been assigned a psychiatrist and psychiatric social worker. The psychiatrist told me I have schizophrenia, which I repeated over the telephone to my mother while hidden in the bathroom of the rooming house. I didn't want anyone to know. I hoped against hope that no one would see me enter the mental health clinic. I was deeply ashamed of my illness.

My family and partner agreed that I should stay in the small city and continue receiving treatment until I was completely stabilized. I felt I was ready to return to Edmonton, and was quite hurt that my opinion wasn't shared. I toughed it out, my days consisting of long, sleepless hours in my tiny room,

leaving bed only long enough to eat and work, and occasional walks with fellow residents of the boarding house. The highlight of my stay was attending a powwow with a female housemate. When she suggested we attend a peyote ceremony, I refused, the mere thought of being around a substance that caused hallucinations frightening.

My father came and got me in March of 2001. The beauty of the mountains was lost on me as we made our way to Edmonton from British Columbia. I was tense and almost mute. I was physically weak and my muscles stiff from the medication. But I was lucid, a mixed blessing.

Returning to the world after a period of psychosis is disorienting and intimidating. The "theatrical comeback in broad day" the poet Sylvia Plath speaks of in reference to her suicide attempt does indeed "knock one out." The realization that one's senses have deceived one, that conviction lacks a basis in reality, that relationships have been destroyed and reputation tarnished causes some to become suicidal. Oddly enough, although I had considered and threatened frequently to end my life during acute psychosis, I was blessed with a firm resolve to carry on during my early recovery.

Returning to Edmonton, to the city that had been the scene of so much delusional persecution, was extremely difficult on the one hand, comforting on the other. I was glad to be among family and friends (those who endured me), but was suffering from post traumatic stress from my illness and behaviours. I lived in fear of being recognized as the crazy lady, of running into people whom I had communicated with during my worst periods.

I was fortunate in that I regained insight into my situation early on in treatment. Many do not. Anagnosia, a term used to describe stroke patients, is common in persons with psychosis. Whether this is the result of brain functioning or a defence mechanism has not been determined. I was blessed with a certain amount of self-knowledge, but left to face the reality of a brain gone awry.

Shame was my primary emotion. I suffered acutely from self-stigma. My illness felt like a dirty secret. I was loathe to fill prescriptions, and grateful that my new psychiatrist provided samples. I snuck into the psychiatric department at the hospital, fearful I would be recognized. I was working, having been hired by a friend for a clerical position in a telemarketing office, and also as a part-time personal care aide in the evenings and weekends. I did not want to disclose my illness to my co-workers, though my psychiatrist told me I may not be masking my affliction as well as I thought. I am sure people knew I was medicated, simply by my blank expression and stiff gait. But I lived in fear of being discovered.

I lived with my partner and worked more than 40 hours a week for a period of three years, thanks to the support of my loved ones and employers. When it proved too much, I switched jobs to be a live-in caregiver, an ill-advised move. Sleep deprivation and the loss of my maternal grandmother drove me over the edge. I took an overdose of barbiturates,

I was desperate and dysfunctional, sending the equivalent of signs in the window to the world at large with my self-endangering act.

chased by tequila, a spur of the moment decision.

At 4 a.m. my partner brought me to hospital when he realized what I had done. I had planned to die in bed, thinking he would just think me asleep. But I got up, and was so obviously intoxicated that he quickly assessed the situation, saving my life. In retrospect, I think I was hoping to be discovered, for my drastic actions to affect change. I was desperate and dysfunctional, sending the equivalent of signs in the window to the world at large with my self-endangering act.

I spent two weeks in hospital, after which, at the suggestion of my psychiatrist, I applied for disability benefits. Free from the pressures of having to earn a living, I began to attend workshops at the Canadian Mental Health Association, which I had learned of through the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta. The Self Advocacy and Leadership Training program helped me to be more assertive, and gave me the confidence to join the Partnership Program at the SSA, giving presentations to the public on schizophrenia and my lived experience. I was no longer hiding my illness, but teaching others and doing my part to eliminate stigma. I later also edited the SSA newsletter and facilitated workshops and support groups. In total, I worked for the SSA for eight years. I returned to the process of submitting my poetry to magazines and doing readings, often writing on the topic of mental illness.

During all of this, I underwent a number of medication changes. I have the unfortunate experience of developing a tolerance for medication, and they lose their effectiveness. Risperdal, Seroquel, Zyprexa, Clozaril, Orap, Cogentin, Celexa, Xanax, Klonopin, Effexor, Prozac, and my current medications: Zeldox, Abilify, Clopixil, Wellbutrin and Atavan. With each med change there is fear and hope, the weathering

of the initial period of side effects, which fortunately tend to diminish over time. Some side effects, like weight gain and dry mouth, do not go away. I gained 110 pounds on medication, which is difficult to lose, given that the drugs affect the appetite control centre and slow metabolism and movement. But the alternative – psychosis – is worse.

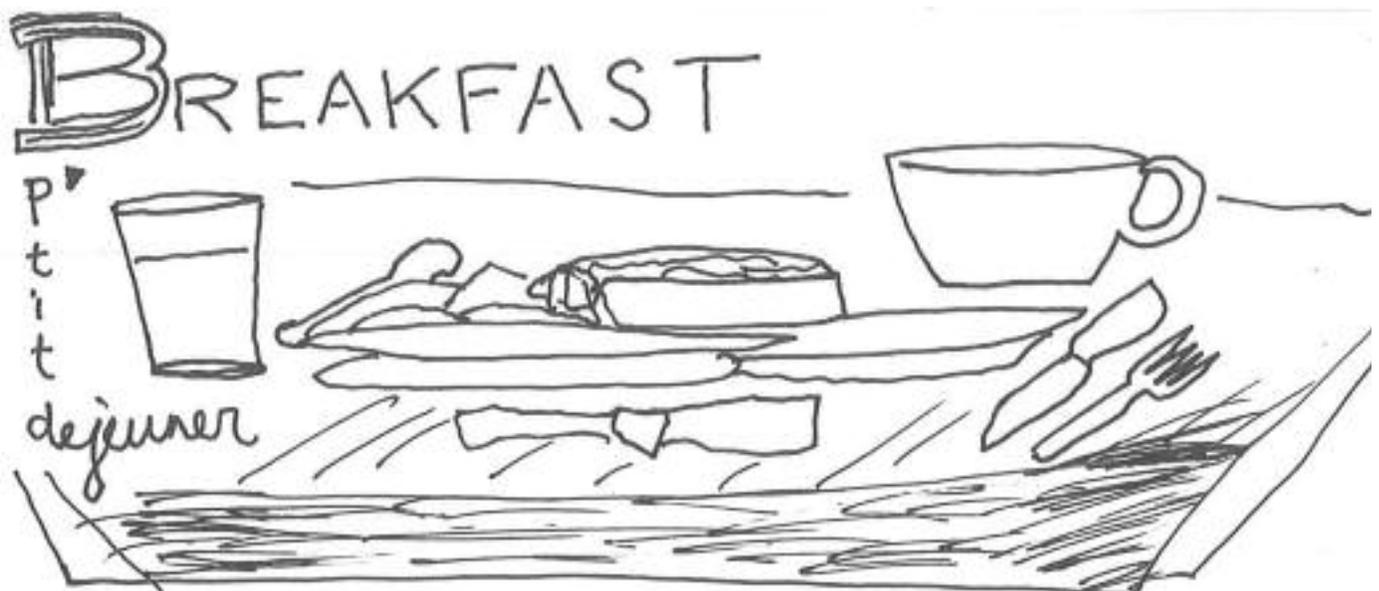
While there is no cure for schizophrenia, one can achieve a good quality of life by honouring the limitations the illness imposes, and taking an active role in treatment. Knowledge about the illness, its course and correctives, is crucial. Family support is invaluable.

While much progress has been made in alleviating the stigma of mental illness, myths and misconceptions linger in the media and public consciousness. Persons with psychosis are more likely to be the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence. On medication, persons with mental illness are no more violent than “normals,” to use the psychologist and person with schizophrenia, Dr. Frederick Frese’s term.

We can work, love and contribute to society. We should not feel compelled to live lives of shame and secrecy. One in five persons will suffer a mental illness in their lifetime, so chances are you or someone you know has or is suffering.

There are many of us out there. The move to deinstitutionalize people led to a large population of mental health consumers returning to the community. We are your customers, your neighbours, your friends, your family members. Sadly, we too are the panhandlers on the corner, the people sleeping in shelters and cardboard boxes.

We have a long way to go, but familiarity can breed compassion and understanding. I am one person with schizophrenia. And I am pleased to meet you.



Breakfast by James Skelton



Gamble

LIZ BETZ

The day before their trip is the tenth day of a bitter cold snap. It's Alberta and it's winter; James would say. Peggy folds her T-shirt into her suitcase. To pack is the last of her list. The farm books are done, their neighbour will feed the cattle. And, she believes, her husband is going with her to Coeur d'Alene. Although, James is James and he hasn't said yes or no. A casino destination? Isn't farming enough of a gamble? What's wrong with time at the lake, or the local fair? Still Peggy has a vision of the two of them, maybe not on a dance floor, but with a reprieve from farm chores and the schedules of grandchildren. James enters the room.

"What clothes do you want?" Peggy asks. There is no answer. "What? I suppose you're backing out?"

"It's not what you think...." He begins but Peggy is blinded by a wave of disappointment. Of all the unrewarded hard work. She swallows back a lump in her throat.

"Let's give Del my ticket. The pair of you can take well-deserved girl holiday." James looks earnest, that his brother's widow have a holiday.

Del can be fun, and she'd had a rough go, with her husband's accident. But this isn't right. And then before Peggy can say a word, their sister-in-law arrives. Hope leaves Peggy's face. The trip is now Del's lucky break.

So it is Del, not James, that is on the bus to notice the elderly man at the passenger pick-up spot. He's on oxygen; tubes into his nose, and a bottle buggy beside him. James would announce the man's condition to be the result of self-neglect, but Del nicknames him Elvis.

The old man uses a walker to get out of his wheelchair. A woman, a tiny dark acorn to his oak-like mass, draws deeply on the last of her cigarette before she folds the wheel chair. Someone helps her get it to the bus.

Mid-aisle the man braces himself on a seat to announce in the loud voice of the hearing impaired, that his name is Preston and the woman with him, his hand goes out, is a neighbour. His wife, he adds, passed away last year.

"Pretty windy, eh?" Del says in a stage whisper. Someone titters before the passengers of the bus return to matters small and congenial. Normally Del would start a sarcastic monologue about men but she doesn't. Good. Del's husband is no longer alive to defend himself and Peggy would sooner not think about hers. Although with enough distance and time away from him, James will look good again. Good like ocean front property in Arizona. Shrew. She scolds herself. Relax.

Del removes her darling fitted jacket while Peggy pulls off her new hoodie, her hair wild with static. Del remains well-groomed. Anyone could see the two of them have come down different pathways to their mid-fifties.

Del discusses her carsickness strategy and the food she packed if menus fail. They could cut loose at the casino, but tonight they will get some sleep. Later in their hotel room, Peggy brings out her crossword puzzles, changes into her flannel

PJ's, and gets into bed while Del emerges elegant from the shower.

Del sits to dry her hair. "That Preston fellow. What an idiot! He didn't bring his oxygen recharger. His neighbour, Sylvie, is a freaking saint to put up with it." Her words pour out. "Do you think they have adjoining rooms? Perhaps Preston uses Viagra."

Peggy is surprised. There is no widow's gloom from Del tonight.

Their second day on the bus Peggy and Del befriend two women, both named Diane. When they reach the casino, the four of them choose a restaurant booth. Preston and Sylvie approach, and suggest that they sit instead at a table for six. It takes an awkward second before one woman says that she loves booths, so no thanks. Sylvie leads Preston to another table to sit by themselves.

The Diane who loved booths, said that now she'd have to sit in one all the time. Her sigh is comical. Then someone, perhaps Del, said they should order drinks. When the drinks arrive, a question is asked. What will their husbands will be like as seniors? The answers range from 'just like his mother' to 'making things up because he can't remember'. But Del tops them all with her 'still dead'. They order another round. 'Shed the rules' is the first toast. Peggy raises her glass with full knowledge that she probably won't.

Peggy's head is a little large the next morning, and Del looks downright ill but says she's fine. They go down for toast. And hot coffee. As they wait, Peggy ponders the possibility of phoning home.

"Why bother? Let James miss you."

But this is easy for Del to say, she now answers to no man. But Peggy does, and as proof, her phone rings. James's voice booms over the phone.

"Did you realize we are out of jam. I hate toast without jam. And when I went to buy some jam, I got a stupid speeding ticket."

Peggy grits her teeth against her first reaction but there is still an edge when she replies.

"Listen James. If you were here, you could have jam."

"I hope you're having a good time." James said, his tone ambiguous. Their conversation ends.

"Trouble in the kingdom of James?" Del smiles, but Peggy's face silences her. "Oh, There's the Dianes. I'll catch you later."

And with that Peggy is left with only her coffee between her and the deep water of anger. To hell with James, Peggy thinks. He won't spoil her fun.

The casino, where people are having fun, is like a carnival, Peggy thinks. However the flashing lights of the slot machines and the noise of the people are too much for her woozy head so she slips outside. But there is no quiet country lane; just pavement and vehicles.

Later she drifts into a conversation with Preston and Sylvie, until she can't stand to watch Sylvie smoke as Preston

*James would be appalled.
Full scale drinking, and
it's just past noon*

labors to breathe. Then she finds Del, who looks peeved at Peggy's sight-seeing suggestion.

"We can go to the lounge" Del counters, as she finishes her drink.

"What about lunch?" Peggy asks. "Won't you suffer if you drink on an empty stomach?"

"What a mother hen, you are!" Del marches ahead of Peggy into the lounge. The barkeep approaches their table.

"You ladies want to try my newest drink? The Stomach Slosh. I created it myself."

"Really?" Peggy smiles. "That's quite the name, but okay."

"I'll have the Rosy Glow." Del said choosing another name from the blackboard above the bar.

"You already have one," Glen says, and while Peggy recognizes how he's a young man joking with someone the age of his mother, Del beams with pleasure. Once he is out of earshot, Del whispers, "I bet he gets laid a lot."

When he returns he tells them his name is Glen and asks what he can call them. Besides beautiful.

And does Peggy like her drink?

"It's okay," she says after a sip, "but the name . . . so bad."

"You could be right." His eyes meet hers.

Preston and Sylvie enter the lounge. Right behind them is a waitress with a cupcake and sparkler that she places on their

table. Soon they hear Preston as he sings Happy Birthday.

"Well," Del says for Peggy's ears. "The old fart is wooing her. Can you imagine? Like there's a line-up of women wanting him."

Peggy is stunned, could Del be right? But Del has turned back to the bartender.

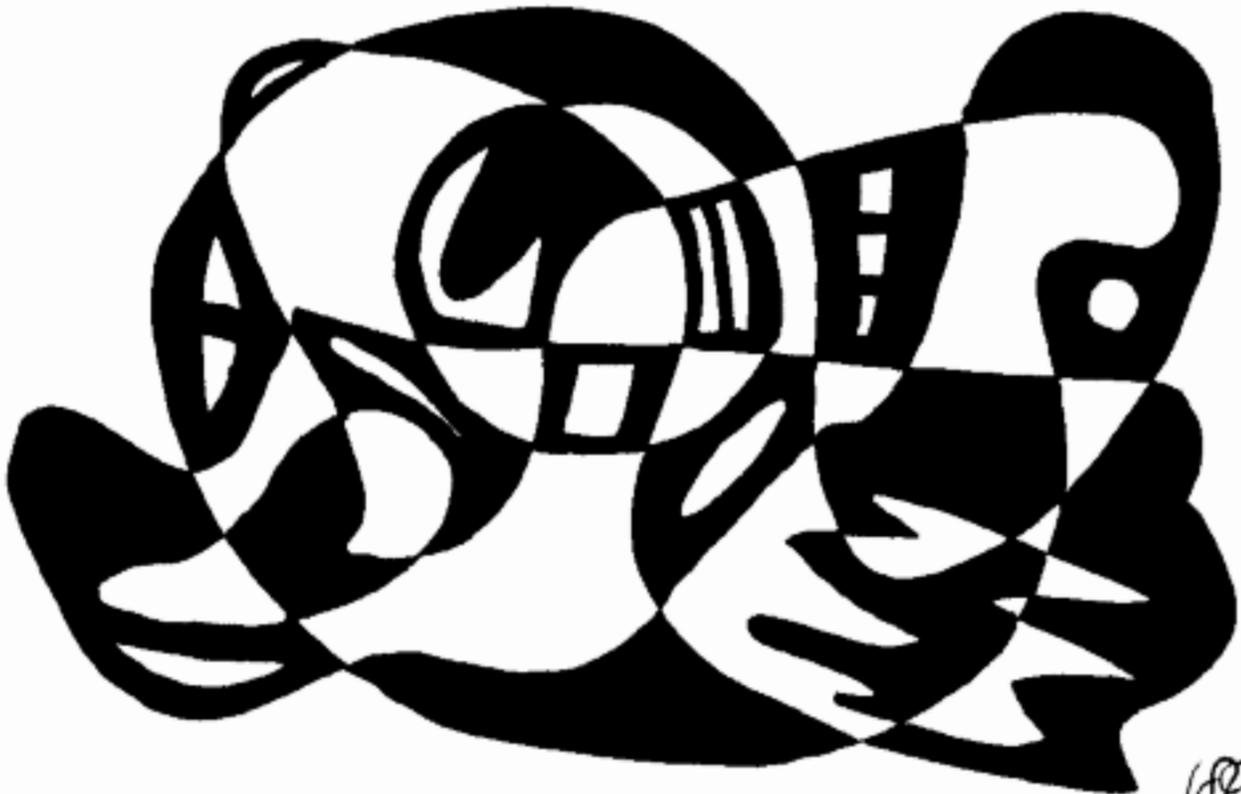
"This Rosy Glow isn't half bad. Let's have another round."

James would be appalled. Full scale drinking, and it's just past noon. Del takes her drink with her while Peggy goes to the lobby and opens her magazine. Meanwhile Del works the slot machines, flirts with the dealers, and drinks. Later, Peggy plays some blackjack while she watches faces. Some people look happy but they all seem to have a shadow in their eyes; a desperation for a streak of luck.

The day passes and it becomes late. Peggy would go up to bed but Del gambles on. Then she falls from her stool. The staff help Peggy get her upright, and to their room, where Del flops down on the bed.

"Did you know," she slurs in Peggy's direction, "soon Preston will be out of oxygen, next thing he'll run out of jam. Just like James, out of jam." she adds.

Much later Peggy wakes as Del empties her delicate stomach and then stumbles back to bed. Long after Del begins to snore, Peggy lay awake. She reviews James's dirty trick



Untitled by Henry Peters

HP 12



WRITING THE LIFE - FICTION

switcheroo. He must have rehearsed it.

"Listen, I'm sorry that I surprised you. That was wrong, we should have discussed this. I just didn't want to go and that's a fact."

"I want some time with you," she began but James took her into his arms and rubbed her back.

"Don't be mad." He murmurs that he wanted time with her too. Then he led her to the bed as if that is the answer to everything. After sex, James ran his finger around her nipple, then he mouthed her breasts. At his touch, her left breast twinges as though it has been entered by a dagger of ice.

"Beautiful breasts, you have ma'am." His words stretch with an affected drawl.

Peggy rubs her breast now, as she reviews the last few days. She'd got on the bus, she'd tried to enjoy herself without her husband. Peggy wonders if James has remembered to feed the dog. She flips the pillow to the cool side and thinks of the things James would question. James would not, for example, see innocence in befriending Glen, someone the age of their youngest child. He would see her alone in a bar with a man and throw them into bed together in his mind.

The next day Del goes to the slots, and Peggy, fresh out of ideas, goes to the lounge. She's about to open her puzzle magazine when Glen calls her over.

"Did you hear? Preston collapsed by the elevator. But Sylvie saved the day when she remembered another guest with one of those oxygen buggy things, and borrowed it. Then they got his tank re-charged. It was close, I think." Glen shook his head. "So, I've named this drink 'Close Call'."

If Peggy were to invent a drink for Glen, she'd name it The Optimist. He could be a very good friend, Peggy thinks; the idea shames her cheeks into blushing. If she needs a friend, what about Preston and Sylvie? Or her sister-in-law Del? But somehow she is here in the lounge when Glen's shift starts.

Her phone rings; a quick glance tells her it is James. Could he be on his way?

"I got a job for you." James begins without a hello. "There's a combine just west of Spokane. You could check it out. It's a Gleaner – unloads its 350 bushel hopper in less than 90 seconds..."

"Wait a minute," Peggy interrupts, "A Gleaner? Who handles them in Canada? Where would we get repairs?" Silence as James thinks.

"Well, if I were there, we could take a look at it."

"Are you sorry you're not here?" James has no answer to that question. He's so dense, Peggy thinks as she glances up. Glen has a piece of wrapping paper that he crinkles between both hands. Peggy understands how the noise is a decoy.

"We're breaking up," she says, her mouth no longer close to the phone. She hits the off button.

"I shouldn't have done that."

Glen shrugs and tries to look remorseful, but a little smile plays on his lips. Peggy laughs.

"Never mind. Here's my latest." Glen says as he places a

drink down with a flourish. "It's Will she or Won't she? It's for Preston and Sylvie."

"Oh, God. Is he's going to propose?"

"Yes. You know people tell bartenders all sorts of things but this is a first. The shape he's in, she will be his nurse."

Just then Preston and Sylvie come into the lounge. Preston is moving the walker along like it were a push toy and he a child. Sylvie takes a few steps then holds up her left hand. Peggy catches the glint from a big diamond engagement ring. Then she looks to their faces to see if it is true.

"Yes. And not only are we engaged," Sylvie begins but Preston continues.

"We're to be married tomorrow. Will you and Glen be our witnesses?"

There is no hesitation. Glen pours them drinks; Peggy gives both of them hugs, before they retire to a corner table.

It's true, Peggy thinks, the signs of love are there. Sylvie senses what Preston needs. But the best is the attitude of attention Sylvie gives and how Preston's eyes shine in return. Peggy doesn't see Glen watching her, and doesn't know how sad she looks. Eventually, however, Sylvie becomes conscious of Peggy's glances and she comes over.

"Are we the talk of the Casino? I think Preston wants people to be jealous of him. But they should be jealous of me finding love again." Sylvie's voice is soft, honeyed. "Preston is a good man. And I know people might think I'm stupid, but aren't marriages about caring for another?"

Sylvie's words come into Peggy's mind again, when she tells tipsy Del about the wedding. Del shakes her head and Peggy braces herself. Del is going to say that widows are the lucky ones.

"Is Sylvie a total idiot?" Del starts. But instead of expressing sarcasm, Del chokes up. "Does Sylvie know she will give Preston her promises and then he'll die and she'll be left without anyone." Del grabs a tissue. "Sylvie has no idea of how hard it will be when Preston dies."

"The thing is," Peggy says, as she puts an arm around Del, "she's willing to take a chance, and it's her decision. For better or worse."

Del gives a shaky laugh. "Maybe I'm jealous."

And Peggy thinks of the marriage triad that Del and Sylvie and her represent. The widow, the bride to be and the . . . but she can't think of a term that suits her.

Then the wedding vows are repeated. Sylvie's voice raspy and Preston's cracking at 'sickness'. Peggy imagines a giant roulette table. The house has the odds but these two have the guts to gamble. Peggy glances over at Glen. His eyes glisten.

"I've got a lump in my throat." Glen whispers, gesturing at Preston and Sylvie.

Silently Peggy responds. And I've got a lump in my breast. She rounds the words in her mind. The point of this trip is to say the words out loud. It won't be to James, though. A finger of pain nubs a reminder in her breast. Maybe Glen will name a drink after her. He could call it Lump Luck. She smiles.

Sally Isham's dreams

ROBIN WYATT DUNN

Swimming. Under the sea. Without a suit. Without a body.
The world covers me, a fragrance like Vespucci.

My school pivots underneath my breasts, behind my feet,
around my hands. Scintillating silver shivering over the blue
darkness.

What is it I'm coming to? Under the surface. Inside the air.
Will it know me when I find it? I feel I might know him . . .

My shoes on fire, red and rust and bittersweet incarnadine, I'm
hovering on the edge of the set.

On the edge of the knife of my soul.

Action, but not yet.

Please god, not yet.

(I'm looking at them, looking down, my pretty feet in my
new shoes, as the crew sets up the scene. But I'm the key. Like
the key grip, grip me honey, I'm falling—

I'm battling through the funhouse, the basketball-sized bal-
loons in kaleidoscopic colors filling the fortress-sized house,
one room, two hundred meters cubed, working up, popping,
screaming, laughing.

The rubber irritates my skin.

My energy a little ball, a fire, cooking slow, inside my
heart—

"Sally are you ready?"

"Ready boss!"

Lift me away—

This medieval city has been burned; I am the only survivor.
Like a Jew stumbling out of Auschwitz. Though I'm not skin-
ny enough.

The crows cry to me up in the sky over my head, laughing,
crying.

I am screaming but I do not make a sound.

A boy is running from me, into the ruins.

I scream his name.

I'm running after him.

I'm screaming his name.

He is my son.

My dead son.

I am in a suborbital plane.

Take the Xanax, Sally.

Every fever is a moment, heightened consciousness and the
slow diminution, denouement, my high a thousand miles into
the sky of our collective sanity, kiss me Sammy cause in my
veins, it's God—

I got a shipment, the latest labels. Ochre mausoleum shades,
the lapel cut like a viper, hovering over my clavicle; the sexi-

est thing I've ever worn.

I rub it against my skin; it makes me wet.

I have a gun in the bathroom.

Underneath the air under the waves the colors dance and swim
me tighter to the dream I need, this peace that's illusory, but
sweet.

I want it to last, and I want it to be something that I can
understand, something I can use, some place I can go, and it is,
I know that.

At least, I think I know that.

It's getting harder to tell, which is which—

I have a small army.

I am princess but I am figurehead.

Stick me on your ship.

I shall part the waves—

But where are we going?



I now am a skeleton by Rolli



Grey's anatomy (a novel excerpt)

ZUZANNA FIMIŃSKA

It got warmer on the morning of New Year's Eve. The snow-fall turned into rain, and the snow that was already on the ground started flowing down the street. She lay in bed counting raindrops thumping against the roof, watching them chase one another on the windowpane, thinking that later that day the temperature would be back below zero, and the roads and rails would glaze with ice, closing them to traffic. Her plan for the day? Making it a good one. She hated New Year's Eve. That and Valentine's Day, too. Two holidays enforced on humanity by the marketing wizards, creating expectations of fun and romance. But this year she couldn't boycott the celebrations by watching firework displays from in front of her house, wearing sweatpants and slippers, scolding the pathetic masses of people who spent outrageous amounts of money on attending balls and banquets. No, this year she had to have her own little charade, and she had to make it a memorable one.

She spent the day the same way most women pass time on a day of a big occasion that they're hosting: pampering her skin, tripling the volume of her hair, ironing her clothes, and slaving over food and drink. When the evening came, she was dressed elegantly, like a host should, and when the time was right, she put on *Grey's Anatomy*, and started talking back to the dialogue on the show. There was something about Izzie and a disciplinary leave following the incident with Denny, and consequences that everybody was supposed to face, as if some

teleplay writing genius had caught on to the fact that it was unacceptable to have surgical interns run rampant around a hospital. Oh, and yes, there seemed to be an improvement on the Derek and Meredith front. Derek divorced his wife and remembered that he loved Meredith, while Meredith might have remembered something similar, but instead of breaking up with the guy she'd started seeing, she decided to date two men at once. Francis put the show on loud so the characters' conversation carried around the house, and then she turned on some music, to make it seem more like a party. She twirled between rooms like she would twirl between people: talking, laughing, making jokes.

'Can I get you anything?' She offered a tray of muffins to her reflection. 'No? Really? Are you sure? Please, don't be shy, there is plenty to go around. How about you?' She turned slightly to her left. 'Would you like something? Please help yourself to the food and drinks, there is more at the back.' She pointed toward the kitchen, before she put a chair in front of the mirror. 'So what were you talking about?' She was nodding her head as if listening intently. 'So you think she'll get fired? Wouldn't that be a shame! She's so young and devoted to her job. I mean, it's not like she's got much else to do, is it? Incredible, how invested in their jobs people can get! And she's been standing in front of the hospital for days now, hasn't she? Do you think she'll ever go in?' Frannie paused, as if an answer was coming her way. 'Hold that thought...' She raised her finger to pause the conversation, and left to get a bottle of wine and a glass from the kitchen. 'Keep talking,' she poured the wine, and was engrossed in the story her own reflection was telling her. She lit a cigarette (her mother would kill her for smoking inside of the house), offered one to her companions, which they obviously declined, and continued nodding in acknowledgment of what she was hearing. It was as if the characters from the show, presumably dressed in their surgical costumes, filled the room, holding drinks, and declining snacks, discussing the most recent plot developments, their medical ambitions, and personal desires. They were all there: interns, residents, consultants, and the administrative staff of a fictional hospital, and she talked to them on equal terms, without sprouts of insecurities that so frequently strike people who are faced with *virtual* sheer genius. She thought she was winning – there wasn't a soul having a better time that night.

A couple minutes past midnight, she got a message from Edmund wishing her a Happy New Year, but she was already too drunk to respond, and she decided it was time to call it a night. When she turned the t.v. and the music off, the fear of being alone in the house overwhelmed her. She kept on all the lights and went to bed hoping that this would save her from whoever was hiding in the basement, waiting for an opportunity to stab her with a carving knife, to watch her bleed out, before leaving her in the bed she'd had since childhood for her parents to find her green, bloated, with eyes and tongue protruding out of her face covered with blistered skin falling off from the slightest touch.



Don't go there by Judy Swallow

Reflections of betrayal

WARREN GSCHAID

Nothing in the bathroom mirror could reveal the betrayal to her. Her self-hatred, denial, and delusion commanded her to be that chubby girl of her youth. Her extra lean ribs, boney hips and knees, and collarbones were in obvious full exposure, frightening others.

Jill had just brushed her teeth and she worried that the toothpaste would cause her weight gain. All she saw was fat, though to others she was a sick and feeble skeleton. Weak. She could barely stand on the weight scale. Mortified. Desperately wanting to be two pounds lighter, she was a shocking ninety-two pound blade of straw.

Jill was twenty-one and had recently dropped out of the Alberta College of Art painting program. She had lost weight to a dangerously low level. Proud. But she was too sick and weak for studying. She had lost her part-time Wal-Mart clerk job and apartment because of her obsession with weight and had moved back in with her mother. She couldn't understand why she was fired for fainting at work. She thought she was fine, but her boss said it was best if she laid off work until she had more meat on her bones and felt better. She resented this and thought her hips looked simply divine and with less skin would look even better. Oh, those dreadful two pounds.

"Jill . . . Jill?" Her mother pounded on the bathroom door. "Are you obsessing with your weight again? Please stop this nonsense now and come and eat. I made your favourite. Cabbage rolls, perogies, and kolbassa."

"Oh, Mom." How could her mother betray her so? How could she eat now with those two pounds and that extra skin on her hips and waist? She tried to think of some excuse to get out of stuffing her face with delicious and disgustingly fatty foods. And the sour cream. Oh-my-god the sour cream. "I can't come right now, Mom. I'm working on a painting idea."

"Come on Jill. I know you better. You haven't painted in weeks. Come and eat. You know your doctor wants you to have gained some weight when he sees you next week. Or else you are going to the rehab centre." Jill's mother knocked on the door. "Do you hear me."

"Yes, Mother." Fearful of being face to face with her favourite foods, she began to cry. She would never lose those two extra pounds now. She wiped her eyes, stepped off the scale, the bearer of all ugly truth, onto the cold tile floor, opened the bathroom door, and followed full of fright behind her mother down the stairs to the death trap, the dining room

table.

Jill felt helpless. Her mother had already put food on Jill's plate. "Sit down and enjoy, Jill." A blue and red flower arrangement sat in the middle of the dinner table. Hank Williams softly played in the background as Jill's mother watched, hoping to see an empty plate afterwards.

Jill looked at the plate before her. There was a cabbage roll, a small kolbassa piece, four perogies, and a dollop of sour cream. She felt cornered and angry. What was her mother thinking? Did Mom want her to look like the Goodyear blimp by serving her this much? All she could think about was the extra skin on her fat waist and hips and those two bloody pounds. She stared at her plate with its mountainous pile of food.

"Well Jill. Eat. There's nothing wrong with it.

"Mom, I ain't hungry."

"What do you mean . . . *not hungry*? How times have changed. You used to relish a meal like this."

"But Mom, I used to be the fat little girl on the block."

"But look at you now. All emaciated to the other extreme. Skin and bone."

"But Mom, all I need now is to lose two more pounds."

"What are you talking about? Your doctor wants you to gain about twenty pounds. Seriously, Jill, you are warped."

Jill knew she could put on an act. Eat it and up-chuck later. So she mindfully and carefully ate her meal, knowing she wouldn't betray her regimen of losing the fat girl.

First, she bit on the kolbassa, felt nauseated, and had to force down guilt. Then she bit into the cabbage roll and felt like she had eaten two Thanksgiving

dinners with all the trimmings at one sitting. She gagged on but managed to swallow each and every perogy. She couldn't bear to touch the sour cream for fear her stomach would explode in shame, splattering its contents all over the dining room floor and onto her mother who was gorging on cabbage rolls.

Jill got up from the table lamenting she had gained weight just from smelling and tasting the food, she was so full of disgust in herself. How could she betray herself so and eat something?

She closed the bathroom door, despising that fat chubby girl in the mirror, positioned herself in front of the toilet, jammed her pointing finger down her throat, and emptied the contents of her atrophied gut. Her stomach burned from the sickening effort. And now the shame of betrayal dispersed, for tomorrow she would look in the mirror and worry about those two pounds and the battle of betrayal would go on.



Spotted endpoints by Henry Peters



This very day

IVAN DE MONBRISON

We burst out of ourselves this day of January.

He had fallen ill a few days before.

They took him away.

No one has told us what was happening, this day of January.

Like any other day, the street is crowded, like any other day people come and go without stopping ever.

We try to know and to understand where he's gone.

This day of January when everything had turned dark, the spirit, the flesh, the blood.

There's no answer.

There will never be an answer.

The day when everything went silent.

The past and the present mixing up with the future.

Black and white images are entangled and swirl in the skull of the child. He no longer knows where to look, he remembers only the jumbled up images of the crowd, his classmates, the cars, the traffic jams, and the view from the window of his room which overlooked the small crossroads.

Thirty years have passed since then but everything is still vivid for him.

Waking up in the cold blue pallor of dawn in his room.

Every morning when the child was amazed that the world was still there for one more day, another day to last and to refuse to die.

Today we went backward.

We have just been told that in two beds separated by a thin wall two men are dying in silence, they too are barely forty years old.

Today became yesterday again.

When everyday we walked by the wall of the cemetery, as grown up man by now, and after having reached the age of the deceased of yore. We hurry to get back home in the dark, under the snow, after having spent the day at the hospital surrounded by doctors and patients, and not knowing what to say, sitting at the edge of the bed and trying to find the right words that would ease up what can not be eased. While the diseased is plowed in her flesh by the blade of death and thus remains out of reach.

As in a sacrifice for a cause, we see a part of us being shut down little by little.

But at least, this time, we had decided be there.

While thirty years ago.

We had not understood.

The very day of the burial we still understood nothing of it.

We only noticed the alley parallel to the main aisle where the procession was stopped in front of an empty hole, and a tree as the sole notable sign near the grave.

At fifteen years old what does one know about an empty hole?

We would have liked to be able to bend over and jump into the hole to get to him down there, and thus to finally prove to him that we had loved him.

Thirty years ago which feels like it was yesterday.

Madness climbs on me like a vine and I don't know where to turn my eyes!?

It was still so cold last year when we had to cross the forest of Saint-Cloud, to steal an hour to the undead.

We walked in the snow and even climbed over the wall of the park for this.

We had torn our clothes doing so.

And at dusk, when he had to leave we turned back, as to look at the window the black figure standing there that was tearing the window, one had wanted to fade away in the icy night, in order to no longer have to be aware of what was going on.

This figure who was waving her hand to thank us, emaciated, so fragile facing the void of darkness.

We would have wanted to be dead already. By cowardness, perhaps . . . and to be able to forget everything about the remote past, the recent past, the threatening future.

Madness rising in me . . . I don't know . . . I have just erased everything in myself and yet everything has remained carved inside of me, somewhere.

The long illness had been as a separation already thirty years ago.

Separation always absurd, as a thin wall between two patients.

Madness setting apart humans from humans.

We split ourselves in two in order to survive.

But it is useless.

We have ceased being ourselves since that day.

That day of January 1984, nobody had told us nothing about what was going on but we had guessed.

So the only thing that we did was to scream. That howling after closing the door of the room, last shelter of immobility as to avoid the passing of death on its way.

Two days after it was all over.

She returned from the hospital exhausted to have watched over the patient, then the dead.

We walked out of our room. We joined with the adults.

It wasn't one day like any other day.

The mother's room had remained closed.

We were not allowed to enter.

She had lost a piece of her very being, of her very substance, forever, with the death of their father.

Today we went backward.

Walking through the cemetery where he had been resting for thirty years, we had come with the surviving friend to revisit her former place of struggle, a white and cold corridor, a simple hospital bed, and a friendly face.

Suddenly everything came back and was lived again, we were child and adult at once, healthy and sick at once.

Walking through the cemetery where he had been resting for thirty years, we had come with the surviving friend to revisit her former place of struggle

Thirty years ago nobody had come to explain what had happened.

The only answer he had ripped it from the embalmed face of the dead in a morgue, in wanting to hug the corpse lying on a stretcher, he had, in this act of despair, almost overturned the body on the floor. Someone had taken him outside. Obviously adults had no answer to provide.

He had hated himself for years after this day, up to wishing his own destruction

But, walking along the rue Froidevaux, which runs along the

small cemetery, his face lashed by the wind, after going down the rue Raymond Losserand and moving towards the place Denfert-Rochereau, by one of this freezing evenings of the 2012 winter, he feels inhabited by a single goal, to fight for the survival of his friend hit by the same sickness that his father had caught.

Under the threatening trees where stand the perched crows that know more about death than most of the passer-by who, nevertheless, look already like if they were ghosts themselves.

He had to go back constantly to watch the dead die every day.

And this up to the end.



*Art by
Ivan de Monbrison*



Fever

JULIAN NEUER

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, whiskey or no whiskey, tomorrow morning is already gone down the drain. You are always complaining that at your age you should need less sleep each night, but your body keeps demanding more and more. The truth is, a

sleepless night like this will give you at least half a day of foggy thinking and low productivity tomorrow anyway.

Go on, fix the drink.

What the—? No ice in the fridge?

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

Your children. A teenage girl, sixteen, and a younger boy, nine. They're asleep now, in their respective rooms. You consider waking them up to interrogate them, the main suspects of breaking into your office and doing away with the ice. The girl has been acting strangely lately. She has become more rebellious, has scoffed at your orders, rejected your advice, ignored

your decisions. She too asks for permission to interrupt you in your office, but she does it in an overly formal tone of voice, as if to mock you. She must have taken the ice as a prank. Or maybe it was the boy. He is still young enough to think that he can break any rule if he is sufficiently convinced of the reason, however childish. The kitchen is too far away, after all.

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

You tell yourself it's better not to fix the drink after all. But you're not fooling anyone.

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

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

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

*The truth is, a
sleepless night like
this will give you at
least half a day of
foggy thinking and
low productivity
tomorrow anyway.*

I needed anger to make me strong, to enable me to take action and fight for all the sons and daughters.

way about you. And you have so much to teach her, if she would only listen.

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

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

No, the future generations are too far to reach, maybe even so far as where your daughter stands now. You should accept the injustice underlying most parent-child relationships: in the beginning, the child is helpless and ignorant, and you, the parent, are aware of every single detail of the child's surroundings; like a god, you hold the secrets of the world, the power to make it rain, to make it shine; but as the years go by, the child's experiences accumulate faster than you can account for, and now,

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

You are still sitting at the desk, but you have stopped typing. You look at your own reflection on the computer screen. You see the gaze of a lunatic, your hair dishevelled, your forehead bathed in sweat. You've done your best to ask questions and collect opinions for almost half a century, waiting for the moment to give something back to your children and to the world. Now you worry you may never get around to it. You



Art by Joyce Kirby



WRITING THE LIFE - FICTION

have wanted to start a personal journal for years, but have always found a reason to postpone it, as one postpones a diet. The time has come to lose that weight, to make your soul lighter.

Go on, do it.

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

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

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

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

Nothing. The screen is still blank. You don't want to write. Whatever you write will be the admission of your own end; worse, it will be a shameless bluff: if you know all the answers, please explain why you haven't used them in your favor. And even if you could bring yourself to write, you wouldn't know who to address. The meaning of life is not reading material for children — who, by the way, haven't even started searching for it yet. If you really want to teach your children what adult life is all about, wait until they've grown. If you write now, you will be writing to future ghosts, a multitude of invisible people, each one of them your son, each one of them your daughter, traveling a labyrinth of space and time, where you will never be able to find them without losing yourself.

Maybe they don't want to be found.

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

All alone in your office, you sob convulsively, letting out long, guttural moans, like an abandoned animal. You cry because it is not easy to understand the exact nature of your helplessness; then you cry because when you do get an inkling of the causes, you feel more helpless still. You make an effort to control yourself, you take a deep breath, you try to think

your way out of this, and the cycle repeats itself: you cry because you're thinking, you think about the reasons why you're crying, you stop, you breathe, you think, then cry because you're thinking, and on and on it goes.

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

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

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

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

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

"I woke up with a headache. My belly hurts. I was going upstairs to your room. Then I saw the lights on in your office. I don't feel so good."

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

"What would you like?"

"Nothing", he answers in a feeble voice.

"Can I do something to help you?"

"No, nothing."

"Are you in pain?"

"Just a little."

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

After a while, eyes still closed, he whispers:

"Dad?"

"Yes, son."

He doesn't say anything.

"Yes, son?", you insist.

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

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

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

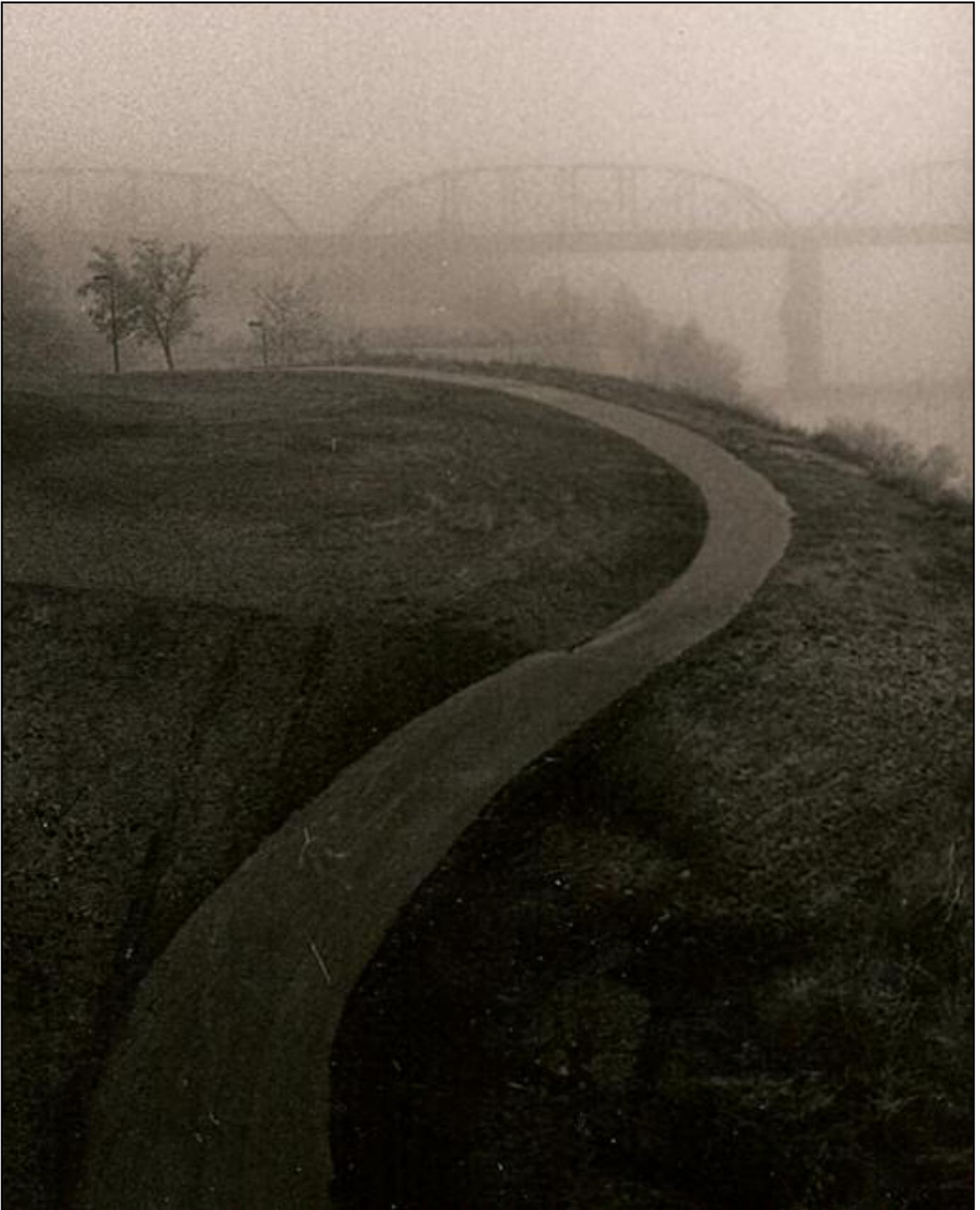


Photo by Arnold Isbister



Notwithstanding

GORD BRAUN

Why I killed my standing desk
and what I do instead?
I found I did a better job
by standing on my head.

Because your legs will thank you
and your feet will thank you, too,
here is what I think
that every office geek should do.

A standing desk of any kind
will leave you standing there.
It's best to rest your fat behind
upon a comfy chair!

For lost friends

GORD BRAUN

can there be joy again
is there freedom from resentments
from these tight fisted account books?

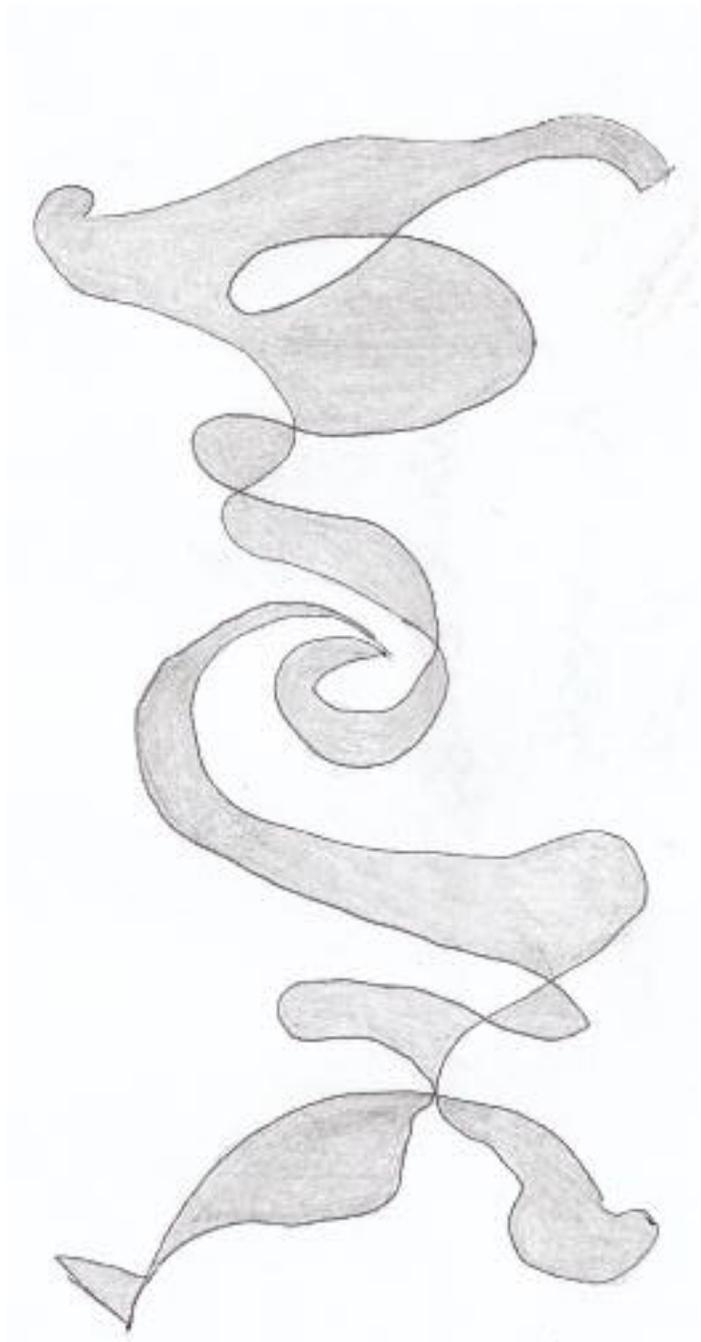
the firm holdings-out, the stubborn if-then's
locks put on love
silences as substitutes
for the ease of laughter
the release of forgiving?

is there a place we can gather
where we can pardon
what can't be undone
witness the miracle of kind forgetting?

can it be like in our dreams
where no one is angry?

...because it is cold
and I am a poor man
my righteousness gone raw
out here in the dark
away from your confidences
your warm intimate fires

Will you let me back in
though it was I who stormed out?



Walk on by
by Henry Peters

On your devastation and humiliation

THOMAS A. FISH

I know you have been devastated
Seemingly beyond repair

Was it a love? Your country?
Familial disappointment?
Public Humiliation? Betrayal?
Perhaps more than one of these?

Leaving the pieces of you
Shattered and shredded
And the shards of your soul
Strewn asunder

I too have been ripped apart
Deconstructed and reconstructed
From hero to bum
In the blink of a mean-spirited eye

Left for dead in a hole
Chasm and labyrinth like
Abyss-mal 24 hour night
I know that place, that time
I have lain across the vinyl floor
In the fetal position moaning

And I, like you
Looked behind with dismay
For of those I thought
Would stand behind me
Most stood so very far away

Those that remain
From whatever realm
Even if only one or two
Know the truth about you
The real truth I mean
Not the truth in magazine
Or websites gone obscene

The real truth
Of how much you love to love
How much you hurt
When others suffer
Strife beyond their measure

These few special ones
Will stand aside you
Come what may
At times brimming with dismay
And though it is what you will want to do--
Do not push them away from you

Unconditional love
Is without condition
And very rare 'tis true
But there are those
Even some you have not yet met
Who are ready to help and cheer for you

You can survive this devastation!
And rise above the humiliation!
For there are those outside
That hole you are in
Who need you
In their lives again



Art by James Skelton



My child within

ANGELA GALIPEAU

It's just
my child within
crying
for love and affection
for faith and protection.

It's just
my child within
learning
there is more
to love
than reality
allows the sight
so see
and the heart
to feel.

Healing

ANGELA GALIPEAU

I remember
Nine to five
January to April
a cold winter
and Christmas.

Now I spend my life
healing my spirit
and my mind,
hoping to find
feelings of happiness.

My soul hungers
for togetherness,
My heart longs
for love.
I am finally
understanding
my aloneness.

Voicemail from a darkened realm

ALISON LOHANS

You've left a voicemail on my cell;
long time since we last talked.
Walking through slushy alleys of not-the-greatest
part of town I hold the phone
as you describe, with anguished trembling voice
masses of those lying dead, Middle East comes to mind
but I can't be sure; the line
blares statick, then switches over
to a pre-recorded menu
options not related.
I want to call you back to reassure
but don't know how;
you've been gone
some time now, to places with no phone.
I saw the darkness suck you in;
it clawed at me too but you took that ultimate
step. In my now-sunlit life I ponder;
I'd thought everything was fine.



*Indian Madonna and Babe Jesus
by Carolyn Sigda Gervais*

Pacifist

IAN MACINTYRE

Give me a gun
I will bury it under the ground
Give me an axe
I will toss it into the sea
Give me a reason

I will not fight
I will not fight

Give me a mace
I will use it to crush grapes
Give me a sword
Heroes will be made into saints
Give me a reason

I will not fight
I will not fight

Give me a bomb
I will throw it into the sun
Give me a grenade
I will not give it any use
Give me a reason

I will not fight
At any cost I've made my final choice

I will not fight
You should not fight
No one should fight

Let's be friends
And we will not fight

We will not fight...

*[This poem was inadvertently omitted from TRANSITION
Winter 2013 for which it was accepted. My apologies.
– The Editor]*

Another first day

JILL MONAHAN

It is February
And my first day at my new school
We have changed our last name
To my stepfather's in hope
That my sister and I
Will fit in better
Other schools have used my name
As an all too familiar taunt

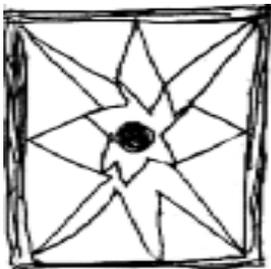
I watch my classmates
Carefully
Trying to figure out
How I can become
One of them
This time my sister tells them
My father shot my grandfather
She has piqued their interest
And they run to me
To confirm her story as
True

I stand out more in French class where
I try to pronounce the words
I try to understand what all the
Other students already know

Daily I am reminded that
I am not from here . . . from this place
And once again I wish I was somewhere else . . .

It is September
And my first day
At another new school
I have changed
My last name back

I will have a better chance
Here my mother says



Art by James Skelton



Our tears years leaped ago, so

empty led-
ges left

Our heartbreaks aren't

Zip will dis-
rupt
production

Sledges, men

- ROLLI



Christopher Smart by Rolli

Sleeps dream

The femur burst
the knee's peal
on con-
crete

*me
fold o-
ver*

o

Crows
my clav snatch, as
corn

*blow mor-
ning, in*

- ROLLI

We asleep

and suckling coffee's tea-
t

skulls the pump-
kins with big-
ness, in
the dreaming seeds

we sleep

*but cuts us
light
the eyes
unblind-
ing*

- ROLLI



Lord Byron by Rolli

We've wisps switched into

bone
disposed
and soul thrown over

See me sea
foam

I'm my P-
Js
brained
with silk

I'm fly-
ing milk

- ROLLI

I wanna tattoo to

make mum-
sy weep

mi tragedy being
no mink, in-
effective

*The di-
amonds might
not bite*

At ten and
your neck, yet
brooches clo-
ser

Oh, mother - your
blood-pump's some
unusual jewel
for Maurice to shine

Just set it next
to mine

- ROLLI

I am not yet eccentric, yet

I snuff the
leaves be-
fore reading

eat
of plums, the
stone

so la fa
do so-
lo home

- ROLLI



Edward Lear by Rolli



Edgar Allan Poe by Rolli

My de-

ceased poems
which lived in me
as dreaming
meet

They patient
in
for mo-
ment which
elapsd them

As light
in hand
as light

and can

you feel them

- ROLLI

I can almost see home

o-
ver hor-
izon

I cry-
ing I

al-
most home
see

Please

where was once
be

the memory

agree

- ROLLI



A dwelling within oneself

ROMI JAIN

I dwell in concentricity:

within my mind, which is in my brain
which is in my body, which dwells mostly in the house,
which is a standalone building at the corner
of a quiet street.

The world stupidly frowns upon
what it denigrates as a cloistered living,
and rejoices in the gregariousness it discovers in markets,
parties, queues, traffics, canteens, or when one is
amidst others while unknown to one's own self,

in obliterating which one finds no sure comfort

since a massive gathering constitutes no cemented camaraderie,
just as a number of feathers lying around don't form a plumage
or the fallen flowers a garland.

Within my own dwelling I don't need to impress my self,
nor tell lies, nor dress up for others, nor harbor envy,
nor do I feel isolated that others do in a group whose narrowness
emerges like a ceiling with a falling plaster.

In my self, I discover myself,
I reflect on, converse with, respond to or simply stare at myself.

In my coiling around my own existence
I'm alive until I'm alive.
And even if I'm lost, as the world mockingly says,
I have not lost myself!

Mushrooms

FRANCES ROONEY

Mushrooms grow
in shit
in the dark

Mushrooms are full
of vitamin D

the sunshine
vitamin

How many metaphors
and lessons
live in
that?

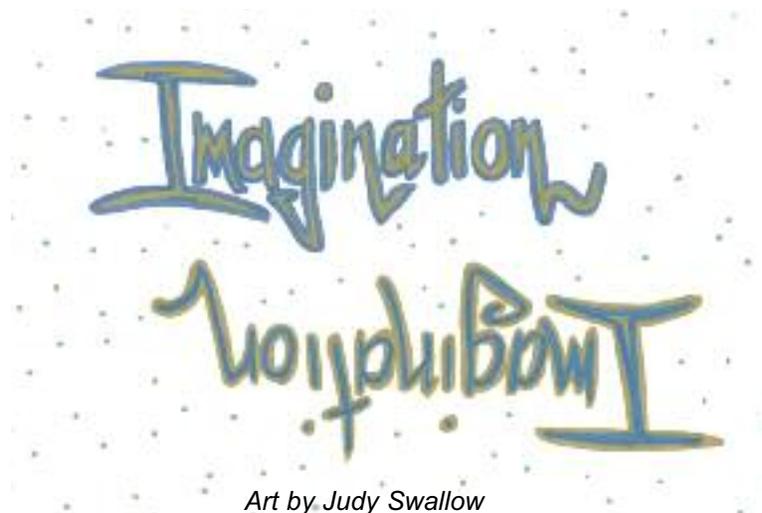
In

your, my, our
darkness and
shit?

Why write poetry?

FRANCES ROONEY

It leaves me clean



Art by Judy Swallow

This is not about my father

FRANCES ROONEY

Then

1
I'm not your wife
Not your mother
Not your lover
Get your hand off my breast

Before my prom
During your party
After mother's funeral
Get your hand off my breast

Dragged from the bathroom
Dragged behind the garage
Dragged under the porch
Get your hand off my breast

Chased with an axe
Chased with a chain
Chaste with myself
Get your hand off my breast

Now
2
You need me
in a different way

Your hand unsteady
Your step unsure
Your eyes as weak as
your spirit
always was
You ask for my arm
To walk to the car
(another car, not *the* car)
To go to yet another
Funeral

You want your arm
Pinned
Secure
Between my arm and
My ribcage
So close to my breast

This time
You don't take
You ask

3
I have not touched you
Since I left home

No that's not right
I have never touched
You
Your house was never
Home

Rather
I have not been touched
By you
Since I left your house
to make
my home

4
Can I give you this?
Can I want to keep you safe?
Can I take your hand and
Hold your arm tight
Like a precious
loaf
of bread
or bunch
of flowers?

the critic

JOAN-DIANNE SMITH

from his highnesses' tall white steed
he appraises my draft
nitpicks words and phrases

use *want not hope*
one way to accomplish that
instead of
one way to work toward that

tells me that
between my lines
he can see that I'm struggling
on my meager carriage horse

but between his lines
condescension leaks
as he awkwardly tries
to put me in my place

Tick tock

JAMES SKELTON

Waiting to have a talk
About you
With you
Sorry if I have left
So much
Unsaid
You are of great character my dear
Forgive me
If I haven't found the time
To make you Laugh
Just Smile
I know your laugh
It will melt my heart
If only I could find the punchline...



Dear S

JAMES SKELTON

I don't know how to feel
About the baby

I guess you should have it
I am not in a good space

I have felt debilitated and depressed
Since receiving my psychiatric
Diagnosis and hospitalization on the psych ward

What can I offer to a child?
I can barely get up enough motivation to get out of bed

Sorry that it has taken so many years to reply
The meds have improved
I am less sedated

I still carry the stigma
Probably best the child didn't have to deal with that

Sorry you were alone so much
I was too

So sad

But he is certainly a fine young man.

Autumn leaves

are falling
A woman walks across
A still green lawn
She has a patio umbrella
She opens it and then closes it
She opens it again and closes it again
The red and white bands expanding and contracting
She opens and closes it again
She walks off the lawn with the umbrella
Autumn Leaves

-JAMES SKELTON

Fist rated

Earthquakes ears shake sniffle hold back tears as jester fists to the air Like the African wild dog I'm in class of my own breaking 'n sniffing bricks my guts my style hollow like pits only side effect is you'll be done due from long falls I gone your body will seem as hit by a truck and left violated I steal like a ninja whisper like a hurling star full of problems catastrophic when I hit Life may not be judged by time and space but though of how much of that you can take up Release into hour-glasses imprint onto the clock life repeats itself no matter what it's that information that's last that the next generation be seeing that makes you a legend Stare devils in their faces 'n blow them a death kiss Be as if I were pulling wings off butterflies pens my blazing sun Burning stars my pulsar spinning frustrations and anger throughout my core

Here's my taunting gun cum sum Blades Dagger Shank big tough guy gets tired from holding up his pants Mines snug fit lags cause of some things other Pen Paper my most treasured items

Pen fine like the sword book to banish thoughts that blast me off I'm my own thing don't got no ways no hows but what's in front of me Beat downs can come aggressive jerks push 'n shove I'll give you my finest you dare walk up onto this Little body no fat but bones these rock's throw them in nicely move on these new sticks gladly go down stuff face more than thin while you appear to me as dumb

-RAYLINCOMA

Legated

Fought 'n banged enough to remove most the nails from my coffins just in time almost turned fully into a zombie lucky my mayor wasn't West and filled our mental stats/graves with concrete so once I recover I can start living up again well actually for my first time from within I'm a lot of things for one guy without white cells Not always a bad guy but I do burn burdens when spilled Why drive with shitty tunes blaring I do my listening at all times in own pad or walking street to myself I'll just salute you with one of these expressing to you I'm not close to being impressed just annoyed till I slap in ear buds to take me away from here gain sparks for my ignition wetting my lip's so I don't get burned when I open my mouth Approaching yeah I am so hot furry my feet would burn the sands to glass you'll be able to see your reflection of fear as I enter into you beware the water of this body gonna be too hot for us to play just my sweat from anticipation will scold you melt flesh off bones use those bones for tools to clean my teeth after devouring your ambitions Oh baby start crying give me that phone I'll call your mama I'm sure she's on speed dial chump cry to her I don't care 'n have already gone

-SEIGRIK MARU

Abnormal freak

I gotta gang its address his problems no matter how the group may be you still couldn't handle half even with both hands Don't hold on to things I'm known to drop em journey as much as you can before it falls from these stubs Dreams each day a day to tie this neck off this bag holds tales of lost lives wondering why a stray life Don't view death as sad but happy free as I should have been the escape from within here Always wanting it to get me thinking of good days you spent within my void if there was sum I'll be just fine in the place where all fear I respect the rage I'm still living in dying days Wanna play with me watch out I'm mischief throwing sticks 'n stones My response for you saying "You fucking with me" be I haven't got permission yet 'n I don't feel like squishing the weak I'm not one to kill insects In this dull mind I don't have many things ghost of past 'n uncontrolled shakes spikes of pain head to my feet Voices don't do much but laugh 'n giggle like I'm a funny guy Others roam 'n don't stay long those deep voices sounds make my head hurt 'n body ache Scary demons but haven't seen their faces always obeying the darkness so the light may never stay When I turn from you do not call me back you'll go missing under concrete to be walked on by other tired feet

-RAYLINCOMA

I've ended in zeros

What's of this world I'm not this is what I've been feeling I stand tall as I can to equal my means For whatever reason I'm at zero I feel as if my master is Jack 'n he doesn't want me as a pet anymore This earth dire for my place end a zero how all things do wanting me bad like a virgin getting her first insertion my insertions been hell I've been pulled in I've pulled out I hold on thinking back I remember nothing I may stand like you though hollow people walk through me Pace has but few rules image or status Can't make it to being happy every relationship ever made ended in zeros Give all my change to charity cans to ones who stand on corners with hands out still no satisfaction I let everyone 'n anyone into my space I need not judge them I've left the past be just that quit blaming em stopped even thoughts of em though nothing's changed Unfortunate to be going that same way do I go this way because of them? Am I destined to be as them? Commit same acts wreck others lives as the rest of this life ends in zeros Slip a noose 'n come to fall I may stand but people walk through me Don't hold hands out if you don't want to share. They refuse to give us cures to sickness when we just have to pay in stings animals pay in limbs 'n bins They may stand but people walk through them 'Cause of man this world will only end in zeros

-RAYLINCOMA

Knot sure

Maybe a straight code easy to judge visibly this by its cover I assume you'll be stopping after every word to gasp breathe red light stop sign you'll be thinking next (hush) mouth my life's filled with ghosts of the past

Like birds in sky the wild have no boundaries were cunning going presently leak free could have reminded me of me

Incas 'n trinkets statued by fear come to my party there's lots one feels many have stolen through to bring on great scars been down on both knees anger is frustrated missionary no doubt

I've had happiness even virtue though led by blight look around if it's not too dark my leagues got lots of emotions coming to joy most been left under rugs 'n not ever discussed not this time this party you'll feel that those that it sees are reasons that drag this corpse grounds to grounds

Upon yourself you can't have cake 'n eat it too without the will to experiment all things for yourself

Put down the fork might startle self get an emotion of guilt or envy that will shove it through eyes never see to find thoughts to finding self balancing scales out this tale

At this rate when they find ya you'll still be broken in denial cowering in corners 'n closets under beds 'n covers thinking hiding under tables when indulged in fear would be a good place to hide from yourself

Haven't you found even with pills and liquid substances you can't ever hide from your insides our many selves we hide they'll find their way up through the cerebral corsets down to pour twice as much twice the jury for the abandonment the suffocation you deal self to fill gaps or holds you take meaningfully

Need fixing need filling to be something someone it's obvious fake dolls barbies sicken me being traded over and over I've been created and mended this whole life never felt good or happy one of the guys never had my own grip a place to fit feel secure yet don't care just getting started to open gates to let mind and emotions flow be let out from boroughs with my own strength indulging the irony as chemicals flow from head to toes through bones into my heart there it fills my core fireworks will glow on trees collars

True intents my real beliefs my true feelings pulled on chains no faith best use of voices way when you see it running this neophyte doesn't yield finds many struggles to get through points this area where you see it now gotta be fast cause he won't be there long driven in cosmic strollers make sure to bring insulin cause trained healing depletes my entire court your symptoms that make you think you ever had a chance your worst mistake bad implements on thinking we could be friends or even mates

-SEIGRIK MARU



Is somebody waiting for me

SHELBY STEPHENSON

Is somebody waiting for me?
Someone who will sing for me?
Songs from feeders alter the dust of houses abandoned.
September 17, 1923, a real time.
The “Cold, Cold Heart” Audrey could not melt, the breakup too real and strong.
The hurt in those words the Drifting Cowboys played.

A figure hunches over the microphone.
On Paul’s Hill, I announce Hank – Don Helms on steel (Old Red).
The pain’s lyrical as sheet metal: Montgomery, Shreveport,
Nashville, Phantom Canton, Ohio.
January 1, 1953: “Hank Williams dead at twenty-nine.”
Yodels loop the songs: The Possum, Don Walser, Ray Price, Ferlin Husky,
Simon Crum, Jimmy Rodgers, Bob Wills, Faron Young, Dale Watson,
Leon Payne, Marty Robbins, Don Gibson, Red Foley, Patsy Cline, Dottie West,
Dolly, Loretta – Karl Davis, Shelby Jean Davis! – my namesake:
I see her, Kentucky girl, through the Kenton years with Russo, Chicago, WLS,
And WJJD – thump that bass – saw the fiddle.
The backup-singers and players: the slaves, the tenants.
[break, more]

Ancestors: Johnsons, Stephensons, Barbours, Lees, Woodalls.
Crops: corn, cotton, beans, and the lung-green tobacco.
Traffic jams the drone of insects and a few dirt roads.
Cars pack I-40: exits clutter a zillion dinning hummers.
Flash of blue! Fender-benders!
In the recesses of Cow Mire Branch the thrush, speckled brown,
Flits low to stay outside my rounds.
The branch trickles in white-trenched clay.
I trim the Southern Oak, honeysuckle lying in a tangle.
Ropey stripes zigzag down the tree.
Cardinals call in the sunflowers.
Wren wrings its beak in the suet on the walnut.
What plenty in the meadow – four doe, three at rest,
One lifting its head as if overseeing an old domain.
I mow the grass short as a fresh haircut.

The past varies the Old South.
History shapes the books ever rewritten, though the burden never lifts.
The old people tell tales, stroking their chins,
Gazing across housing developments where once cotton bloomed.



Stories from the heart

CAITLIN ARNAL

Callaghan, Shirley. *Shirley's Short Stories: 2006-2013*. Sam Rayner, 2013

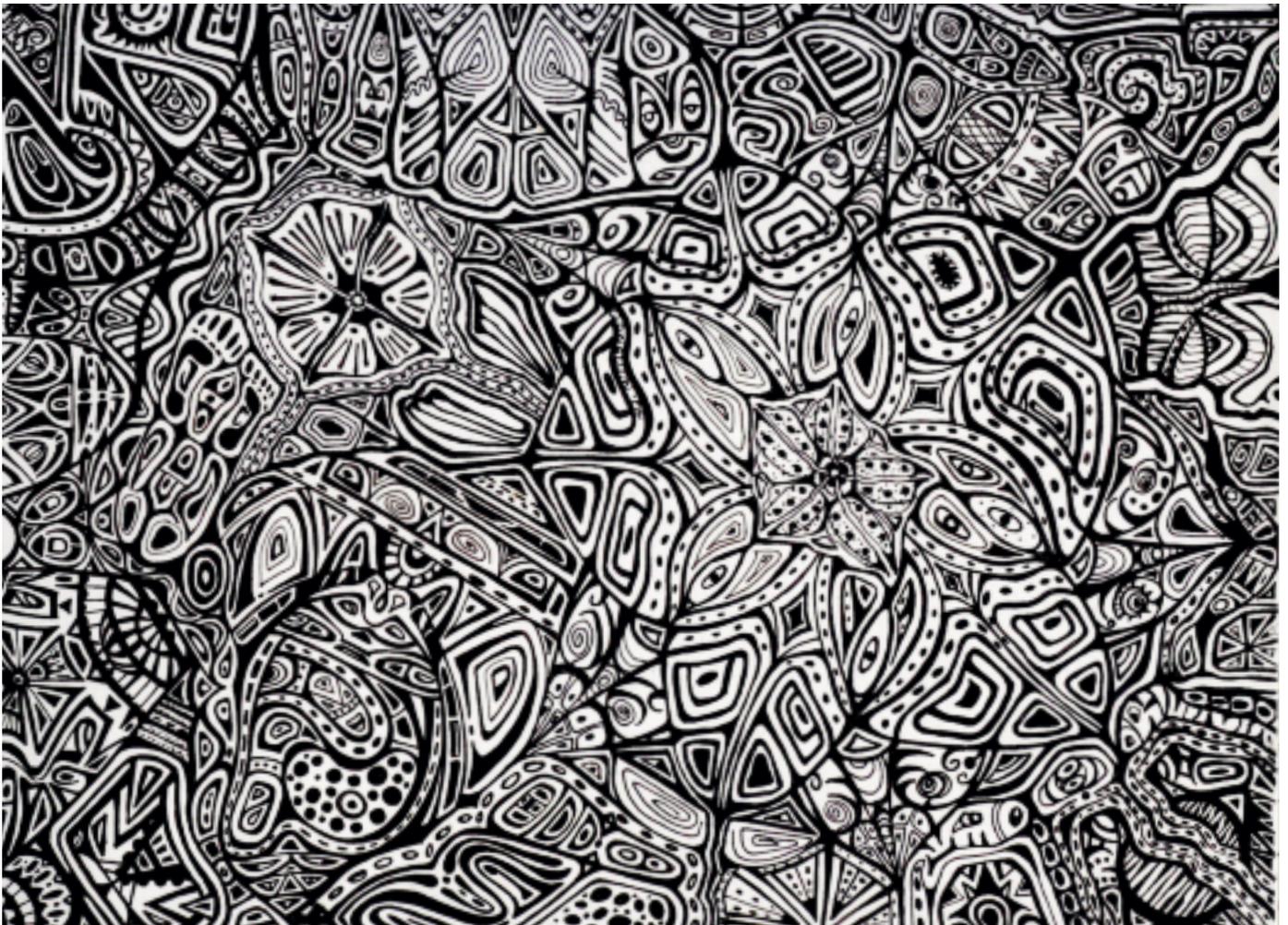
Shirley Callaghan's stories are told from the heart. She opens up to her reader as a way to deal with the effects of her mental illness. The collection is divided into four sections. Because the stories don't follow chronological order, but rather journey along a switchback, an introduction would be helpful. Her first story is about her twelfth birthday in 1955 when she receives a "standard bred, gelding named Jolly Clegg" (Callaghan 7). The last story is decades later when she visits a family friend and neighbor.

Callaghan guides us along a familiar path of childhood: learning in a one room school house and growing up in a farming family. When she is eleven, she has a crush on her bible school teacher. The reader is left to wonder when something different is going to happen because she paints such a rosy picture of childhood. However, Callaghan isn't out to entertain in

a conventional way. She will tell stories twice, and change the names of characters and points of view. By switching directions, she never lets her reader get too comfortable, but it's not enough to stop reading.

Toward the end of the collection Callaghan finally addresses her mental illness. Her parents pick her up from her summer job at the Maritime Home for Girls and she is hospitalized for the first time. It is then that she begins a journey towards some simple, yet great insights: "My career as a psychometrician lasted 37 years....I continued to learn.....but never sought more responsibility as I wanted to keep well and not put excessive stress on myself" (94). A final reflection and one to live by is: "I remember back then, but not for too long because there is another day" (102).

[Editor's Note: These stories were privately published by the author for her extended family. At the Editor's request, the author agreed to allow them to be reviewed, both for themselves and as an example of a publishing option that is available to all writers today.]



Footsteps in nature by Judy Swallow



Quirky tales make a fun read

IRENE GROBOWSKY

Rolli. *Dr. Franklin's Static Cat, and other extraordinary tales*. knowonder publishing 2013. 125 pp. US \$8.95 Cdn \$10.95.

Stories are part of everyday. Some concern the personal, such as those parents tell their children in which the child is the central character, and others are folk tales handed down from generation to generation. And then there are favourites - original and unique - by writers like Lewis Carroll, Edith Nesbit and Edward Lear. These are read over and over again.

Dr. Franklin's Static Cat, and other unbelievable tales fits this last category. Rolli's stories, with their quirky playfulness and wildly imaginative plots, are a delight and deserve to be a part of every child's library. Contributing extra enjoyment are the illustrations, all done by the author.

As with all really good tales, allusions to existing tales are layered in, an appreciation adults can readily pass on. For these tales are meant to be read aloud - and for maximum enjoyment read with a child. The sputterings, growlings and wacky sounds will enthrall even as they illustrate the onomatopoeic qualities of language. After all, sounds are where speech begins.

Everyday ordinary that is taken for granted is interwoven with the extraordinary to make stories which take us one step further into a world of unusual possibilities. Among these is "Dr. Franklin's Static Cat," which tweaks the ordinary experience of static electricity into a story that just might be possible.

Obviously a lover of cats, Rolli has made them central to several of his stories. "Cat-ivarius" is another example of his inventiveness - an imagination that is child-like in envisioning possibilities. One can almost picture the author mulling over Mother Goose rhymes and characters. That "What if?" gives us "Cat-ivarius," among others. Adults will, of course, make other connections, just as "Handsome and Pretzel" will elicit chuckles.

Who but this author in his story of "Roly-Poly Fat Cat" would take an ordinary phrase such as "every which direction" and make it "every witch direction"! This is followed up with "...popping out of windows, swooping down on broomsticks..." and taken to this conclusion: "One of the rottenest things that witches do is steal other's people's mail so they never get the spy goggles or trading

cards they ordered and waited forever for. It's terrible."

Not afraid to articulate growls, roars, buzzes and other sounds into these tales, Rolli has made of them a storyteller's delight. Further, he does not shirk from using an extensive vocabulary.

Children deserve that, as the context will give them the meaning, and if not, questions will be asked. Beatrix Potter, one of the best loved storytellers for children, did not hesitate to say, "Too much lettuce is soporific."

After all "tell me a story" has been an oft-repeated plea over many centuries, whether it came from a youngster or an adult desiring entertainment. Stories have ranged from simple tales in which the hearer is designated the protagonist to those of epic complexity.

Rolli, the author of *Dr. Franklin's Static Cat, and other extraordinary tales*, has fulfilled his set task of storytelling admirably, with humour and inventiveness. Strongly aware of the absurdities of life, he

has artfully led the reader into the absurdly askew.

Taking the ordinary and giving it a twist is what is especially appealing to those with a sense of wonder - and there is no better audience for this than children.

For the maximum enjoyment read these stories aloud; even better read them with a child. Rent one if you have to. Linger over the illustrations, also the work of the author, and pause for interruptions from your listener. Your enjoyment will be increased exponentially.



Watch for the Winter 2014 issue of
TRANSITION MAGAZINE

Notes on contributors

ARTISTS

ISBISTER, ARNOLD
Saskatoon based and widely exhibited artist.
Teaches visual arts to troubled youth/adults.

MONBRISON, IVAN DE

See Author notes.

GERVAIS, CAROLYN SIGDA

Member of CMHA Weyburn Branch

JOYCE KIRBY

Member of CMHA Estevan Branch

PETERS, HENRY

Winnipeg artist and long-time contributor to TRANSITION.

ROLLI

See Author notes.

SKELTON, JAMES

See Author notes.

SWALLOW, JUDY

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

AUTHORS

ARNAL, CAITLIN

Ontario-raised Southwesterner who teaches, farms, and writes with Eastend WFYL Group. Has husband, will travel.
Published in TRANSITION

BETZ, LIZ

Rural Albertan writer of fiction widely published.
Visit <http://lizbetz.blogspot.ca>

BRAUN, GORD

Yorkton poet and very regular contributor to TRANSITION.

CALLAGHAN, SHIRLEY

PE prose writer and regular contributor to TRANSITION.
Self-published *Shirley's Short Stories* reviewed this issue.

CHAMAA, REBECCA

San Diego writer working toward MFA in poetry at UC Riverside. Published in Pearl, Voicewalks, City Works, Serving House Journal, A Year in Ink, and others.

DONAHUE, LILIAN R.

Prince Albert writer and retired teacher born St. Isidore de Bellevue at the foot of the Minitinas Hills. Passionate about the outdoors and music.

DUNN, ROBIN WYATT

Lives in Los Angeles, even when he doesn't.

FIMIŃSKA, ZUZANNA

MSc student in Psychiatry at the University of Oxford. Fiction in *The Examined Life Journal*, *The Cadaverine*, *The Hospital Drive*, and *Prick of the Spindle*. Non-fiction regularly at eyeforpharma.com.

FISH, THOMAS A.

Retired professor with direct experience of mental illness and active in CMHA (New Brunswick). Writes and publishes professionally (widely) and in poetry.

GAINER, ASPEN

British Columbia professional writer, Director of Aspen Gainer Communications aspengainer.com.

GALIPEAU, ANGELA

"My work reflects the human spirit." Published in *Our Family* and *Open Minds Quarterly* as well as TRANSITION. Author two chapbooks, *Circle of My Mind* and *Shadows of Love*.

GROBOWSKY, IRENE

Moose Jaw poet and regular reviewer for TRANSITION.
"Gets" Rolli perfectly.

GSCHAID, WARREN

Alberta writer active in CMHA (Lethbridge). Published poet and reviewer now working on short stories and a novel.

JAIN, ROMI

Widely published writer, poet, and novelist. MBA (SFSU, California), and PhD student at Cleveland State University (Fall 2014). Active in Asian studies, both writing and publishing. New to TRANSITION.

LENG, MARIA

Canadian living and writing poetry in the U.S.A. MFA in Writing and Literature from Bennington College. Published in several journals. Rhetoric in her email address.

LOHANS, ALISON

Publishing includes 26 books for young people; a poetry chapbook; three children's illustrated e-books; countless short pieces in several genres; and poems, creative nonfiction, and nonfiction in TRANSITION.

LUNDAHL, BEV

Regina-based prose writer previously published in TRANSITION.

MACINTYRE, IAN

Active member of Prince Albert WFYL Group previously published in TRANSITION.

MERLE, GEORGE

Regina mental health activist and writer. Two self-published novellas previously reviewed in TRANSITION.

MONAHAN , JILL

Experienced Literacy Teacher with Saskatoon Public Schools recently returned to writing poetry during her master's journey. New to TRANSITION.

MONBRISON, IVAN DE

Contemporary poet, writer, and artist in Paris and Marseille. Published 5 booklets of poetry; poems and short stories in literary magazines; visual art in exhibitions and art magazines. Visit <http://artmajeur.com/blackowl>

NEUER, JULIAN

Pen name of writer currently living in Brazil. New to TRANSITION, but frequent reader of especially our fiction.

OLSON, NICHOLAS

Frontline worker at Carmichael Outreach (advocate for the poor and homeless, Regina). Author *The Adirondack Haystack Still Floats* (short fiction 2014) and *To Call Them To Wander* (essays 2011). Visit ballsofrice.com .

PETERSON , KAREN [PERRAUN]

Mental health consumer active in CMHA (Edmonton). Published in TRANSITION, Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature, and various other periodicals.

ROLLI

Rolli's poems and artwork appear regularly in TRANSITION. Visit <http://rollistuff.com/>.

ROONEY, FRANCES

Toronto-based writer of articles, reviews and essays, short fiction and poetry published in several venues. Books include *Working Light: The Wandering Life of Photographer Edith S. Watson*.

SKELTON, JAMES

Saskatoon artist and poet. Member of CMHA Saskatoon.

SMITH, JOAN-DIANNE

Winnipeg psychotherapist widely published in magazines and anthologies. Her *All Things Considered: Stella and Other Poems* was short-listed for the Manitoba Best First Book Award.

STAITE, ADAM (aka RAYLINCOMA and/or SEIGRIK MARU)

Moose Jaw man-about-town, poet, and regular contributor to TRANSITION. Activist for all that's silent. Working on his first manuscript.

STEPHENSON, SHELBY

North Carolina writer, editor, singer-musician, whose rich life may be sampled at <http://shelbystephen.com> First time in TRANSITION.



Art by James Skelton



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

PRESENTATIONS and WORKSHOPS

Suicide

- ◆ **Speaking of Suicide** - an introduction to the topic of suicide awareness
- ◆ **safeTALK** - Suicide Alertness for Everyone
A half-day (3.5 hour) workshop
- ◆ **ASIST** - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills - 2-day skills-building training to provide suicide first aid interventions
- ◆ **Empowering Teens** to prevent suicide
- ◆ **Tattered Teddies** - a workshop about suicide in children

Mental Health

Balancing Work and Family
Seniors and Mental Health
Mental Illness (General Overview)
Depression * Depression and Physical Health
Depression in the Workplace * Work Life Conflict
Schizophrenia * Bi-polar * Anxiety
Borderline Personality Disorders
Seasonal Affective Disorder * Grief and Grieving
Laughter in Healing * Loneliness and Isolation
Stress Can be Fun * and many more . . .



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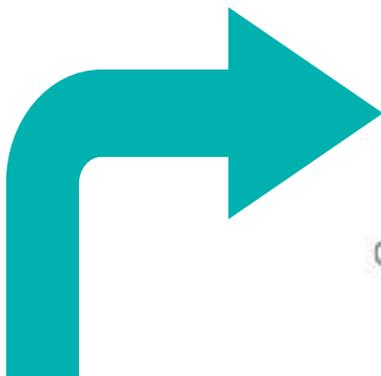
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