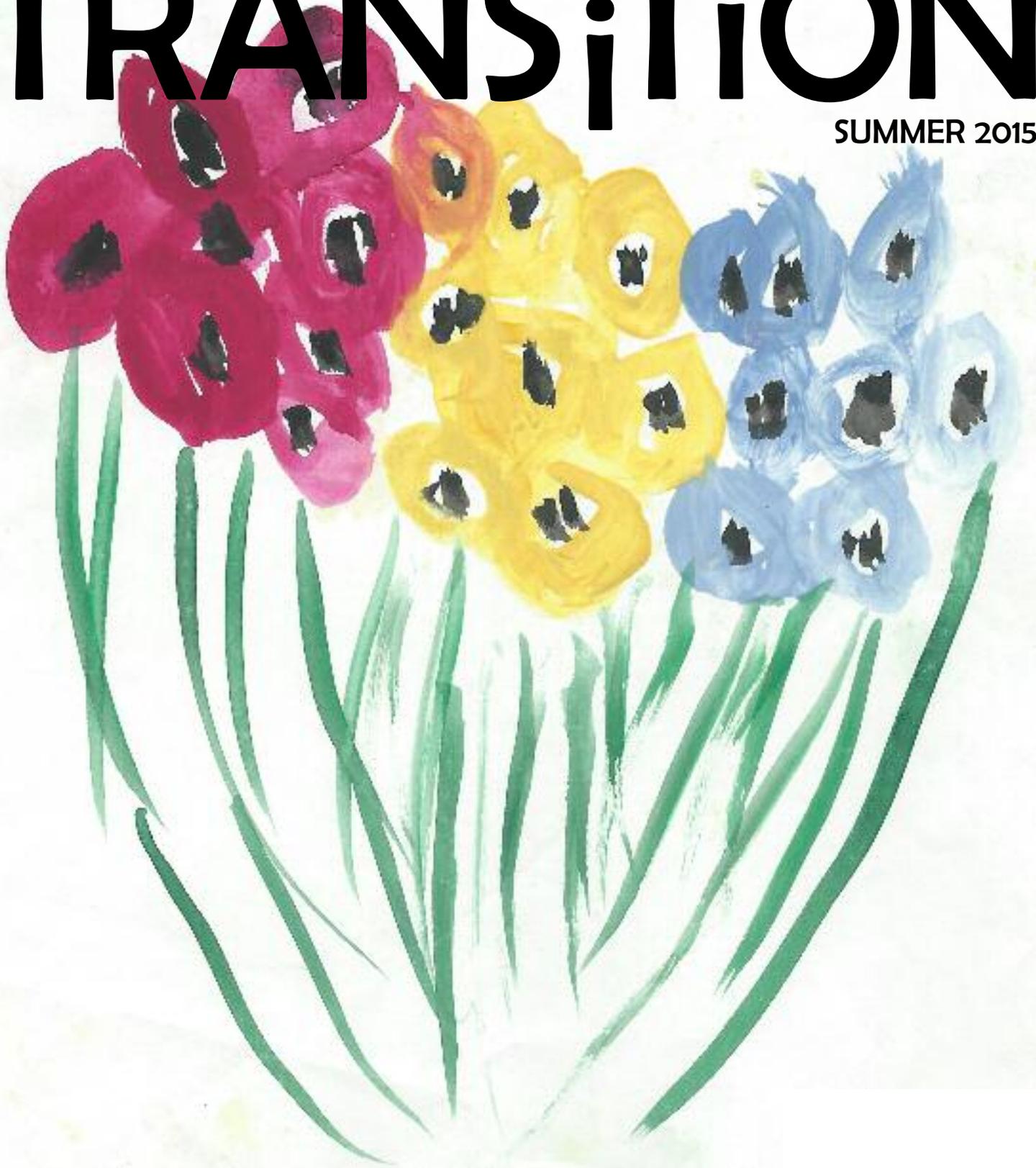


TRANSITION

SUMMER 2015



INSIDE:

Shirley Callaghan brings us *Ties that bind* on page 3

Rolli returns with *Melodramas for depressed persons* on page 20

Catherine R. Fenwick has a trio of poems on page 28



TRANSITION

PUBLISHER:

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

EDITOR: Ted Dyck

MANAGING EDITOR: Lynn Hill

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

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1. Send original and unpublished articles, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and visual art that represent current mental health issues and reflect on their impact on individuals.
2. Maximum manuscript lengths: articles – 15 pages; all other prose – 10 pages; poetry – 10 poems or 10 pages, whichever is less; visual art – 10 pieces.
3. Reprints and simultaneous submissions (to several magazines) are not considered.
4. Turnaround time is normally one issue or 6 months: do not send a second submission before the first has been reviewed.
5. Payment is \$50.00 per printed page; \$40.00 per published visual art work; and \$200.00 for cover art.
6. Electronic submissions with full contact information and a brief bio are preferred. Submit manuscripts in Word or WordPerfect format (12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, 2.5 cm margins) as e-mail attachment to: the Editor at tdyck@sasktel.net or to TRANSITION at contactus@cmhask.com
7. Or send hardcopy manuscripts (typed, one-sided, 12-point, double-spaced, 2.5 cm margins), together with self-addressed, stamped return envelope with sufficient postage, to:

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Art by William Coombes

INSIDE

SUMMER 2015

2 FROM THE EDITOR
Ted Dyck

2 DIRECTOR'S REPORT
David Nelson

WRITING THE LIFE - Non-Fiction

3 CALLAGHAN, SHIRLEY
Ties that bind

5 DUNLOP, BONNIE
How is the weather?

6 JAMES, SOREN
The bi-polar northern lights -
in black and white

7 TOOKENANY, JOANNE
The garden and the unicorn

WRITING THE LIFE - Fiction

10 BARKMAN, WENDY
New beginning

12 HARDY, MIKHAILA
Burning people

14 LE GROS, BENJAMIN
Remember me

15 NEUER, JULIAN
By the book

18 ROBICHAUD, CHELSI
Damaged

20 ROLLI
Melodramas for
depressed persons

22 STUFFLEBEAM, BONNIE JO
The hanging tree

24 WHITE, LINDA
The graveyard buck

WRITING THE LIFE - Poetry

BIASOTTO, LINDA
26 Waiting for an answer

CHEN, CHIEN-SHUN
26 Mrs. Ogilvy

DRUMMOND, MATT
27 Just another manic Wednesday

FENWICK, CATHERINE R.
28 I fantasize about being in her head
New market trends
Just another day in the news

GOLDBERG, KIM
29 Exercise in infinitives

GREENWOOD, AYAMI
30 Love songs

HAMILTON, SHIRLEY M.
30 Sadness

HARDING-RUSSELL, GILLIAN
30 Ode to the mosquito

31 Meditation on a compost beetle
envoi:
Ode to a dandelion
Fly slaughter

MONAHAN, LYNDIA
32 I was born of fire
taken away
sightless
shadow woman

33 unsent song for my sister
Fox poem

THOMPSON, CHRISTINE WESSEL
34 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

TRUSSLER, MICHAEL
35 Of these things I'm certain

Boogie Birds
by Judy Swallow

WRITING THE LIFE - Poetry

WILKINSON, DEINISE
35 Wait

WILLOW, ROSE
35 Battleford

WORRELL, P.J.
35 Conditional love

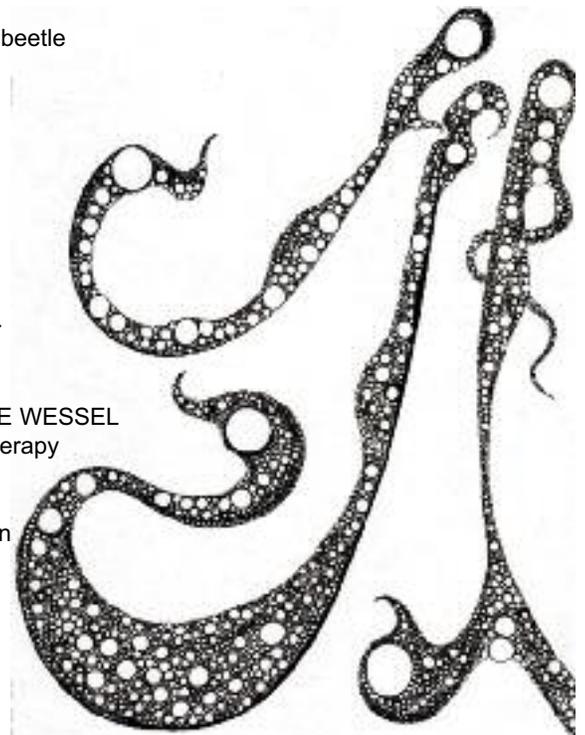
REVIEWS

36 DYCK, TED
Hawk-ing for your life

37 FOSTER, KEITH
FitzGerald's search for answers

38 GROBOWSKY, IRENE
The broken word not so broken

39 NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS





Who am I?

What, then, is the self? Here are ten takes, derived from my “livin’, readin’, writin’, ‘n ret’rik,” arranged chronologically according to their [approximate] emergence and/or dominance:

1. Rhetorical self – I speak, therefore I am.
2. Medieval – I believe, therefore I am.
3. Renaissance – I’m a little world, therefore I am.
4. Enlightenment – I think, therefore I am.
5. Romantic – I feel, therefore I am.
6. Victorian – I ought, therefore I am.
7. Modern – I’m split, therefore I am.
8. Existential – I do/act, therefore I am.
9. Postmodern – I am/not, therefore I am.
10. Virtual – I click, therefore I am.

All of these views of the self are with us today. Sometimes one is held singly to the exclusion of the others; several may be held in combination; and a single self or a combination of selves may change to suit the times and their circumstances.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Spring is here

Once again spring is here, and with it an exciting time for our Association. We have several interesting, and hopefully productive projects on the go in hopes of seeing improvements in Saskatchewan’s mental health system.

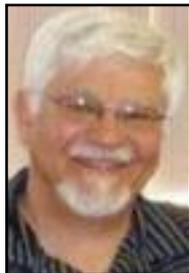
First, we have just completed a telephone survey, which resulted in a report entitled “It’s Time...A 21st Century Mental Health System”. In this survey, over 1100 of the general public showed a 97% support for Saskatchewan to put at least as much of a percentage of their health budget into mental health as other provinces. 93% were in favour of a Federal transfer innovation fund to help fund action plans such as our new Ten Year Action Plan released in December 2014. As yet, there are no resources attached to its recommendations.

We are working in partnership with our National Office and Ontario Division to push for such a transfer fund as we move closer to a Federal election.

As well, in collaboration with our Mental Health Coalition partners, we are putting together a “real life” demonstration budget as to what a relatively small investment could fund to support community-based organizations to improve the mental health system.

We will be using both of these initiatives to push for improvements as we get closer to a Provincial election as well.

Overall, an interesting and busy time. In fact . . . time for a 21st Century Mental Health System.



DAVE NELSON



TED DYCK

Taken together, these views support the insight from neuroscience (and other sources) that the self, whatever it *really* is, seems above all to be *plastic, malleable, and changing*.

TRANSITION embodies this idea of the self in two ways: first, the self is assumed to be in *transit*; second, *writing*, insofar as it *articulates* a self in transition, *participates* in such transition.

All of which I rediscover in the writings of our contributors every time I put an issue together.

This time the discovery happened in fiction.

When the central character, Pedro, of Neuer’s “By the book” hears the airport P.A., announcing that a flight is boarding, address him directly in “a tone that sounded sincere,” that voice belongs to a self that lives chiefly in speech or as a figment of the character’s fervid imagination. The abused child that surfaces in Sandra’s memory (Barkman, “Beginnings”) repeatedly crying, “My mouth is tired. My mouth hurts,” measures the belief of a distraught self, insisting on its right to a break out of the past and begin again. Similarly, Susan’s discovery that “Evie tasted like apples” (Stufflebeam, “The hanging tree”) situates Susan’s little world (microcosm), an artist’s block about painting a tree, within a larger world (macrocosm) which includes Evie’s tree with its apple of temptation and delight. The narrator’s calm, rational account only heightens the anticipated fall: “Susan kissed Evie right on the mouth. She waited for something, anything, to happen . . . but silence hung all around them.” Contrast the emotional despair of Robichaud’s narrator who feels she is “believed [by her peers] to be unworthy, bereft of [her] intrinsic worth” and “no better than a lizard, left to die” (“Damaged”). Not for her the solace of a daughter’s moral duty to tend to an aging father – “I gave my word so I keep it” (White, “The graveyard buck”) – until, like the buck that he hunted in his day, “His tail flashes white, . . . [she] catches a glimpse of [his] high, wide antlers . . . [and he’s] gone.” Closer to our times, a split self is figured in the speaking cat (Hardy, “Burning People”) who warns the teenager who alone can hear it about a terrible “hole in the world.” Yet this split is mended, perversely, in the man suffering dementia who, by continually scratching at “the mites [that] are biting [him] again,” reveals a self that still acts but no longer exists (Le Gros, “Remember me”). The familiar self that is/not, however, is perhaps best seen in the character who observes that “The funny thing about being depressed is that you forget everything that was important to you,” only to muse moments later, “I guess it isn’t that funny” (Rolli, “Melodramas for depressed persons”).

If I feel I’m virtually all the selves listed, it’s because in writing them down I’m transitioning so rapidly from one to the next that I might as well be clicking away online.

For the writing self, the self we feature in *TRANSITION*, is always, necessarily, a self in transition.



Ties that bind

BY SHIRLEY CALLAGHAN

In the early seventies Erin came into my life and left her mark. This Irish colleen, a midwife, took people here by storm leaving questions unsolved, a broken heart, and for me memories that have been haunting.

With a white towel covering a part of her raven hair, she appeared at the door of my tiny house. Even then I could see she was a beauty with her black eyes, white skin, ruby lips, and pearly teeth. She had come from Ireland to live here, but there was no room for her to stay with her sister and family. We were to see if an apartment might work for us both. Since my rooming house was dreary, I was ready for a change.

To look for an apartment, I wore baggy jeans and had borrowed my father's '57 Chevy for transport. "You're a psychologist? God! I thought you'd be wearing furs and driving a Porsche!" she erupted. I felt a tinge of anger and dislike. Could I tolerate this outspoken Irish belle?

I worked with her brother-in-law, a psychiatrist, who put me up to this rendezvous, and did not want to offend him, but this outspoken woman would be a challenge in any relationship. However, somewhere in my thinking I considered that she might bring life to my quiet, predictable existence. At the moment we were both in a hard place.

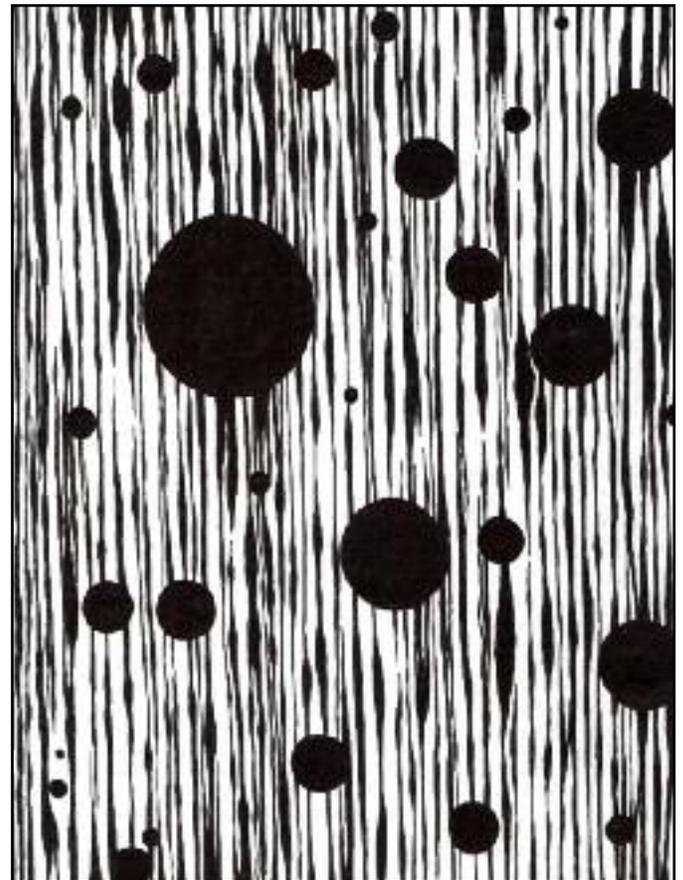
Later, I found below her melodious laughter, clever comments, acute perception, and forwardness was a psychiatric secret that would manifest itself in her drinking, our troubled social relationships, and my angst.

We found an upstairs apartment close to the hospital where she was to work and within walking distance from my clinic. The landlords were in their late seventies. He was older than she—his first cousin—by ten years. Since they lived below us, they would provide much entertainment, as she could not tolerate his dementia and his forgetfulness would lead him on many a merry chase around town and in driving expeditions. He drove over plowed fields to get Erin to her sister's, and even drove to the Mayo Clinic in Boston to address his wife's multiple concerns that turned out to be psychiatric as well as physiological. This mental illness became clear to Erin and me as time went on and the landlady began to deteriorate; however, we opted to live in an inexpensive lodging and cope with the landlords as well as we could. He was happy with us, but not his wife.

Erin's midwifery was not an acceptable practice on the Island, but by all reports her nursing skills were excellent. She did not need an IQ test to verify her high range of intelligence. Her work in the nursery was applauded. Not only did she do good work, but her charm made her popular, and her outlandishness added colour to the unit. Babies who died were subject to her baptism, regardless of the faith or creed of the parents. She would not see the babies in limbo or worse, for the doctrine of original sin was etched into her psyche. I don't believe anyone knew of her intervention in this area of religion, but it seemed a reasonable act to me, a lapsed Protestant.

Why such a beauty remained unattached seemed peculiar to me. There was an Irish love about whom she talked a great deal, but the relationship ended with no clear explanation. Many years later she told me he was knighted. On the Island Erin caught many an eye, especially that of a handsome Scot who saw her at the theatre and phoned the apartment immediately. He was a teacher and scholar and their astute minds as well as their physical attraction enhanced the friendship. However, it was one of those relationships that could never survive because of their alcohol abuse and Erin's unresolved psychological problems. I recall seeing her in a yellow negligee standing at a mirror totally engaged with her own loveliness. A psychiatrist addressed her concerns by telling her to read the Bible.

I would go to work at 7:30 a.m. only to meet Erin coming home after a midnight shift at the hospital to pour a double whisky. Since I liked a glass of wine, I never thought too much of a woman having a drink after work, but I soon detected a concern as the weeks went by with the giggling ever present—the voice slurring on the phone—the awkwardness in walking. It was not healthy for her Scot or even me to be enveloped in her world where drinking held a prominent place. What was the underlying cause? Why did her brother-in-law not inter-



Retro by Judy Swallow



WRITING THE LIFE - NON-FICTION

vene or tell me about her background? Why did our local celebrated psychiatrist not appropriately address her concerns? Most questionably, why did I stay in this situation? I know now I was caught in her web of seduction: I was captive.

I had many happy moments with Erin. One day when I was home with laryngitis we made tapes. I played Lauren Bacall with my husky voice and Erin the interviewer. Such laughter! Another time we giggled heartily at the window while our six foot landlord, who had locked his keys in the trunk, stood scratching under his fedora while his five foot wife fanned herself in exasperation in the front seat—all this to go in his old black Mercury for an ice cream 100 yards down the street. Each of us knew this couple provided fodder for stories. As it turned out their lives would be tragicomedies.

Erin was a gifted storyteller. Audiences were captivated with her Irish lilt; I was enthralled. She could spin yarns all day and won acclaim from my friends. They, however, saw how she overpowered me and after many months it became obvious, that my own mental health was beginning to falter with her association. I was gaining weight with extra medication to control my sleeplessness, and she was interfering with my relationship with a new boyfriend. She wanted to be the center of attention to me, her Scot, my boyfriend, and my friends. She had associations at work, but few were lasting. She drank excessively: it was rare not to see a glass in her hand. Her family knew, but had returned to Ireland leaving me to cope with her problem.

A crisis arose when our landlady went to a mental institution and her dear gentle husband broke her out. Her paranoia raged. She called the Mounties to take him away and set knives on the stairwell for us, telling Erin and me to get out in two days. We knew it wasn't safe there – she had even set fire to the house at one point. There were four of us in distress in the same household: both landlords, Erin, and I; it was time for relocation and intervention for all of us.

Erin found herself a flat and I moved to a housekeeping unit in a motel. She and her Scot, once a good friend to me, visited me rarely. I later married my boyfriend who had gone off Island to study and returned two years later. A few months later after we were settled, Erin phoned at 2:30 a.m. after her father died. Her speech suggested to me the deep psychological trauma she was going through in relation to him. I had met him and watched them relate and drink together in the wee hours. Her mother died years ago, but not before Erin had given up her job to care for her. Later the death of a sister was a tragedy for her and the whole family. Who understands the complexity of family relationships?

Erin's departure from the Island was unexpected. Her Scot stayed behind. In the small city where she worked off- island stories returned to me of her drinking escapades and strange associations. My husband and I visited her to see how she was getting along, but she was giggling and out of control. How she kept her nursing jobs was a mystery.

In 1980 my husband and I went to Toronto to work and

study for a year. Erin was located here, but we never looked her up. However, we were shocked at a subway station on New Year's Eve by a bomb threat. On leaving the train we saw Erin on the platform trying to talk sense into some youth who had set firecrackers on the tracks. As we were miles out of the city, it was a holiday, and cabs were rare, we shared a drive into the city. It was like I had never been apart from her – her charm won me over – drunk or not she could entertain – she was my best story. All the anguish dissolved into the background for this half hour: I forgot how damaging she could be to me and to herself and was held in her magnetic presence.

Retired, Erin is now in a lovely little dwelling in Belfast, Ireland. She papers walls, paints, grows gardens, and yes she is writing. Her letters to me are exemplary – not James Joyce – but streams of consciousness of her life and living. She says she looks young at seventy except for a perverse white streak in the front of her hair. Her voice is still slurred: she only phones when she is drinking (all these forty years), but she is in a program in the city. I feel the same tie as when she interviewed "Lauren Bacall." I wonder if I shall ever see her again – the Irish belle of my life.



*As opposed to the ego,
the superego has a little cape.*

How is the weather?

BY BONNIE DUNLOP

It will be okay.” What am I saying? It is already not okay. For on this freeze-dried December day, your husband is in another city, in another province, having surgery on a ruined rotator cuff. Two years on a waiting list is far too long and you had insisted he go.

“Don’t worry,” you told him. “Katie will take care of me.”

The oncologist opens a blue file folder, clears his throat. I take your hand.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “Lung cancer. Unfortunately, already spread to the liver and the bone. Large cell, of the most aggressive kind.”

I look at you, my sister. Did he just say “. . .?”

“With treatment,” he adds, “you may have a few months. But I suggest you go home, get your affairs in order.”

I am suddenly sorry for this trim young doctor, bearer of unbearable news.

We are sitting on the couch in your sunny living room, the view through the south-facing window pristine snow. This day, no hint of clouds in the sky you have studied for more than forty years, planting by the phases of the moon, marking three months from a foggy morning to the promised winter storm, pointing out the constellations to your grandchildren, starting with the North Star, the most steadfast of stars.

“I have to go,” you say.

Your skin has taken on a slightly yellow caste, the palms of your hands stained, as if you’d been careless while making chokecherry jam or grape jelly.

“I know you do,” I answer.

“You’ll be okay.”

I move closer to you, pick up your delicate hand and turn it over in my own. I touch the raw redness of your palm, not knowing that crimson palms are a symptom of liver failure, the cancer already rampaging to other vital organs in your body from its origin in your smoke-filled lungs.

I have read a bit about dying, about the process itself and what a dying person might require. Never once thinking that I would need to apply those skills so soon, but because I am curious about how my own dying might go.

You turn your hand so that we are touching, palm to palm. Yours so hot and mine so freezing cold. “I’ve prepared the children.”

“I know you have.”

But what about me?

Two days after your diagnosis you say, “I am having the craziest thoughts, like what will I wear to my funeral?”

Unable to choose, you had purchased two dresses for your fortieth anniversary party in November. One passion red, the other eggplant purple.

There was nothing pastel about you.

In ten short days, your dying is done.

I put my hand on your forehead, ease your eyelids closed, for it is clear we are gone from your sight. A patchwork quilt, the one you had used to cocoon your baby girl, had been retrieved from your cedar chest upstairs. Someone has tucked it around your shoulders. Your son has folded your hands beneath your silent heart.

It takes four and a half hours for the hearse to reach your farm, a mere ten miles from town. But December 17 is a busy day for dying and your dear body has to wait its turn.

How I wish I had thought to do your make-up, for you never went anywhere without being perfectly made-up, perfectly coiffed. I should have smoothed pale blue beneath your neatly plucked brows, and applied a smudge of campfire grey above your lashes.

I should have highlighted your cheekbones with layers of blush, because by then, you were an unearthly pale. Candy Cane Pink, your lipstick colour of choice when we were girls, had been retired long ago. You chose a fuller colour now. Cinnamon Stick? Riveting Red?

When I was thirteen you initiated me into the magic of make-up. “Blend, blend, blend,” you told me. “Always stroke upward.” Your reason being, we must always work to combat the force of gravity. As if we, so young and firm, had any fear of that.

The tiny comb you’d used to separate your heavily mascara’d lashes was steady in your hand. I watched as you blotted your lipstick, added a touch of gloss to the centre of your bottom lip. You were so beautiful, my sister.

I stand beside your cooling body, tuck a stray curl behind your shell-like ear. I kiss the centre of your forehead, your brow, your cheekbone.

I trail my fingers down your cheek, a downward stroke, for direction means nothing to me now.

Surprisingly, the seasons change, our ice-clad winter melting into soft spring. It was only I who remained, fixed and frozen, with no hope of a sudden thaw.

Someone has planted your flowers. A multitude of bedding plants – red geraniums, your favourites, and purple wave petunias too. Baby’s breath, pansies and sweet potato vines. The vines are fussy and will fold at the first sign of frost, but their lime green leaves do look lovely hanging from a pot.

It has been an unusually wet spring, so the flowers flourish for all of May and most of June with minimal tending. Since then, my husband Jack’s watering schedule has been unwavering, although he nearly lost the hanging baskets to the plus-thirty heat we had for all of last week.

The rusted wheelbarrow you’d rescued from the dump became your portable planter and it now spills waves of petunias to the neatly mown grass. The flowers, night purples and sassy pinks, bloom as if you were still here to admire their beauty against the backdrop of the vast prairie sky.

Jack tells me he had no idea how much work flowerbeds



could be. And that he has forgotten to pick up the mail for weeks on end. That cooking and cleaning are full-time jobs.

We have had some soft soaking rains again of late. The mid-August pasture, usually stunted and brown, is velvet multi-coloured green.

Remember the smell of rain? How we used to revel in sudden summer showers, our mouths wide open and our arms reaching to the sky?

How is the weather, there?

Jars of raspberry jam, jewel-like, capture the sun. I count ten pints, more than Art and I will ever use. The jars have been lined up on my kitchen counter for an entire week, for the sight of my own preserves gives me more pleasure than I can ever explain.

Today is salsa day. A large mesh bag of yellow onions leans against the backsplash and baskets of Roma tomatoes cover the counter to my left. Red and green peppers bob in the cool water of my deep granite sink. The jalapenos are still encased in plastic, for they can be nasty and I always leave coring and cutting them to the last.

I have purchased the largest jug of cider vinegar, the secret ingredient to my sauce.

As I begin to peel the onions, my eyes leak tears that will not stop. This year, I cannot phone you, to check which one of us has put up more preserves. Our sibling rivalry had mellowed with the years, and we had come to treasure it and nurture it to keep it alive.

Damned onions, I think.

Goddamn lung cancer.

Goddamn Number Seven cigarettes.

My granddaughter, who is three, has been uneasy, pacing around the living room, through the kitchen, through the darkened dining room and back to the living room, peering through the long narrow windows, feathered with frost, searching, I am sure, for the sight of her mother as she beds the horses in the ungodly cold. It is minus thirty-two outside.

The fireplace crackles, throwing a kindly light on the darkened wainscoting, deepening the orange of the prairie lilies in the stained glass window. Two mugs of hot chocolate sit on the coffee table, the marshmallows I have added melting slowly to fluffy cream.

Still, this child longs to be outdoors. So we bundle up, walking toward the red hip roof barn, a glowing coal in the monotone of another wintery twilight. I can see the horses, their breath frosty against the silvered wood of the corral, hear the soft snuffle of their breathing.

“Grandma is going to Mexico for a month,” I tell her. “And I will be lonesome for you.” What I do not tell is that I am tired of being sad, and so I am running away.

Her mittened hand in mine, she stops mid-stride.

“*But Grandma,*” she says, her blue eyes swimming with sudden tears. “*Don’t go. Please don’t go. What about me?*”

I think of you, my sister, and I tighten my hold on her hand.

The bi-polar northern lights - in black and white

A journey in and out of bi-polar disorder

BY SOREN JAMES

In my head there’s a conditioning system. It consists of a white light and a black light. If I press the white light, I get a small reward. If I press the black light, there’s no reward.

I tend to press the black light a lot, making myself feel empty and worthless. Though occasionally I inadvertently start pressing the white light, and I feel good. Really good. A synthetic, drug-happy good - full of elation, and flying, and soaring so damn high that I become dislocated.

Which scares me, so I start to press the black light - pressing it so much that I completely drain the happiness from me. Until all that’s left is a familiar, empty blackness.

I’d like to have the white light on all the time, after all, I’m frightened of the dark. But I was told as a child that leaving the light on was wasteful, and I should learn to put up with darkness - to save power.

Then, I discovered a semi-light, and as I understood more about how to be here, steadily I began to notice colours emerging - colours that previously were either bleached by too bright a light, or invisible in the darkness.

My world has now become richer, and brighter, to eventually find myself living with the light on all the time, and this making no difference to the available power - as all anyone ever saves is themselves from seeing their power.

The garden and the unicorn

BY JOANNE TOOKENANY

Introduction

Being a victim of sexual abuse is an outrageous life sentence to live with, mainly because it's hard to comprehend the many stages of past events that seem to take control of my life and emotions today. There is never a true way to explain things to someone that will help them understand exactly how I felt at the moment the abuse was taking place. The feelings I feel today are exactly the way I felt as a child; a child's mind and body cannot have words for such emotions at a young age. Today as an adult, I need to acknowledge what happened for my own sake and do the work needed to heal myself. So, for my own therapy I decided to write about my abuse in a way that reflects my understanding of what happened and what it's going to take to overcome the loss of trust that I once had.

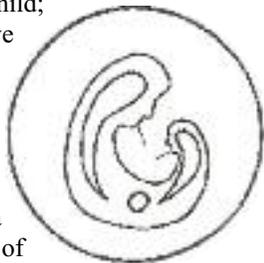
I am an Ojibwa Native from the northern part of Ontario and I come from a small, isolated reserve. The abuse took place when I was four years old until the age of twelve. I've had more than several perpetrators in different towns where my family and I had moved. I have lived a life of silence from myself and others for thirty years and today I've decided to stop the secrecy forever.

The garden and the unicorn

I look through the windows with the heart of a child, whose spirit is being swallowed by darkness and pain. The beauty beyond the window only makes the pain more real. Realizing that's the way it was supposed to be. For my reality should have been mine alone, not yours.

[1] The vision:

A garden that the Gods created out of their breath blows colours across the way. Each breath paints a mural of trust, love and understanding, each being represented by designs of nature's beauty. Together they embrace one another by rising



and showering energy towards the sky. The streams and waterfalls whispering to their relations the sound of unconditional love as they faithfully abide by one another.

The vision brings tears from the deepness of the little girl's heart as voices from the past, present, and future overwhelm her. Feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability only magnify the fear and confusion that en-wraps her little being. Then, without realizing the will to escape, she creates her own exiled spirit.

[2] The vision:

The winged creatures glide about leaving trails of spirited ribbons across the skies, as some sit in meditation of their next song. Mellifluous melodies become a part of each heartbeat as they sing the beauty and charms of the Creator. The four legged beings dance as they listen attentively to the messages of love that are being sung for them.

Real or just a mirage, it always leaves the girl gasping for a life that she never really knew. The raped spirit has no room left

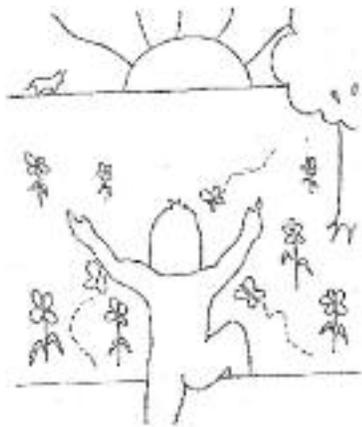


WRITING THE LIFE - NON-FICTION

for nightmares or fantasies of either good or evil. Freedom, trust, kindness and caring were ripped and shredded while they took her reality away from her. As a child she could not comprehend the hell that they imposed upon her for life. Will her spirit ever be free again? Will she have the courage to set herself free from the terrible past she lived through? She is left with questions she had never faced before, causing her natural instincts to whirl uncontrollably; searching for an emotional landing.

[3] The vision:

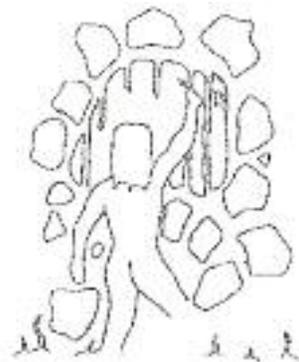
Something mysterious and beautiful is going on out there. The sight of the heaven-like scene is stirring the sleeping and wounded spirit that had lain quiet and unmoved forever. Butterflies fly in and out of her body, playfully teasing and tugging at the chain of wall that she has built unconsciously to protect herself. All this is making it impossible for her to stay caged in her own insane conditioned world.



Slowly and cautiously, she steps out of her past, but not completely tearing away the cobwebs of the nightmare behind her. The voices of danger still close in and fear paralyzes her as she rises from her grave of an emotionless cemetery. Emerging forward is like challenging the forces of the winds of cyclonic demons. At every moment taking her breath away and leaving her struggling for acknowledgment of her own life. Do I exist in this world or just a memory of someone else's nightmare?

[4] The vision:

Silhouetted in the forest behind her is a dancing unicorn with a soul that prances about freely and firmly. With each step she awakes the delicate flowers from their beauty sleep and flirtatiously brushes against the protecting totems of the forest. The innocent spirit she portrays allows the rays of the sun to waltz with her through symmetric melodies.



The terrorizing ghosts still cling onto her as she thrusts for-

ward. Images of darkness and silence are chaining her existence to shadowy roles she has no control over. The director and actor combine together to produce the most horrifying screen play to tantalize a soft heart and mind. Peering from behind the horrid dark gates that separate the two entities, she shatters the black wall and lunges forward to a world unknown; to her own true being.

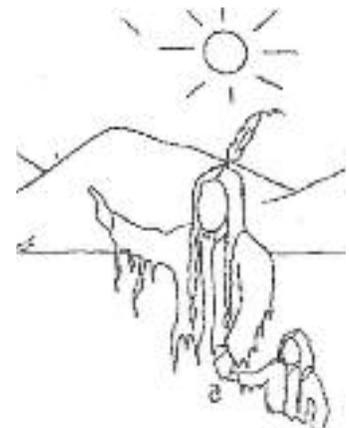
[5] The vision:

Greeting and encouraging is the dancing animal. Her mane flowing about expressing freedom and happiness as she prances around the garden. Butterflies colouring the air around her briefly stop to salute her with gentle taps of affection. Giggling with an amusing sound of its own sacred laughter, she joyously links her world to the audience of one spirit, one who longs to experience real life.

Between truth and mystical thoughts she extends her faith and vulnerability to the heaven beyond. In deep wonder and with vast hesitation she cautiously begins the new journey, a journey that will infringe upon every evil law that holds her prisoner. Her idle existence will slowly emerge into the shadows of the futuristic mirage that still lingers in front of her.

[6] The vision:

Suddenly from the South, a scene briefly whisks her attention to another sight. Through an opening in the haze, a beautiful man dressed in an attire of soft deer hide appears. Ribbons dangling the four colors of the people and precious gifts of feathers hang alongside his long black shiny hair. The moccasins he wears carry him lightly on the Sacred Mother he is honoured with.



[7] The vision:

Embracing the enormous, strong and soft hand is a tiny palm of an angel that has yet to bloom. The innocence of a baby daffodil, the vulnerable spirited child openly trots alongside his charming laughter. The guide carries her up over a creek and gently puts her down. Suddenly, feeling the thunder in her heart, lightning flashes and pierces the true reality of her being. She weeps silently, only the echoing cries can be heard: "You weren't supposed to take my reality away from me, that's the

An elder from the turtle family graces her spirit and offers her life as she slowly paves the road for the journey ahead.

way it was supposed to be!”

Resurrection from the tainted unbearable images of sorrow is hard to achieve. Being bonded to the past is difficult; living the tired soul of a wounded child leaves no room for internal growth. But each step in and out of reality gives her more purpose to escape the hostage life that she had survived. The longing in her heart to just dream is powerful; the two wounded entities walking hand in hand are just the beginning.

[8] The vision:

The Unicorn, determined to help unlock the deformed spirit from its own procession of a lamented suicidal journey; invites all her relatives of the land for a special gathering. The four-legged and winged beings of the day show respect for each other by listening to each other's instinctual manners. Invisible boundaries can erupt like a volcano when threatened and reach a point of no return when exploded. To offend another is a law that disrupts the spiritual cycle that all abide by.

The grand-mother and her helpers light up the universe, while the carousel of the living quiet down to rest. From the south, the loon sings a lullaby as she floats on the shadow of the moon; even the waters subside to the composition of the night. The northern skies light up with the dancing spirits as the wolf howls to wake the midnight's shifters. Beneath the shadows of the grandmother, they frolic and perform without fear; once again teaching and sharing the gift of trust and freedom.

[9] The vision:

Hypnotized by the magical and exotic world, she rests without thought and gazes through the now coloured glass. Exhaling and releasing inner forces of frozen time sounding like chains of an anchor from an old ghost ship, she cautiously invites her inner being to cross the internal boundary. For a brief moment she allows herself to become one with the butterfly spirit as she openly releases her true colours. The Unicorn offering and presenting the sacred gift of a new vision that only the original author will be allowed to rewrite.

Appalled by her own actions, she retreats into her old domain quickly; to stir would only wake the demons that have made a permanent residency in her soul. The terrifying conflict between past and present is a war that she has no desire to play



a part in. Ironically, the energy she uses to avoid reliving the haunting scenes is just as destructive, for the techniques of survival only silence her spirit even more.

[10] The vision:

Becoming aware of the child's fear and hesitation, the Unicorn bows her head to honour her feelings of distrust. Slowly she finds a bed of soft petals and positions herself to lie down by the walls that separate the two. Listening to the waves of silence that howl from the other side, she sways her head in acknowledgment; for empathy and understanding are a gift that the Creator uses to create all beings. An elder from the turtle family graces her spirit and offers her life as she slowly paves the road for the journey ahead.

Conclusion

Taking the first steps to make the vision a reality is just a beginning of a longer journey, that will give me back my life. With the guidance of the helpers, whose hearts have not been tainted, I will honour myself and feel my wounded spirit's pain; I will mourn the child within. Without shame, I will cry out loud to the Spirits of the Universe and share with them the horror that haunted my soul, for I am all I have.

To take back my life and to regain control will be like receiving a life time achievement award, for the will to survive is a battle that I will have won. A mural designed by the wand of a new birth will make the heavens appear and a new chapter for an old novel will be revised. Without the bad spirits hovering, the new teachings will allow me to give love as well as receive love. Tranquility, like a fallen lead of the new moon, will allow me to cradle my head in your arms and enjoy human affection without fear. Your simple validation of my crazy world will gently unfold my eyes to a New Vision that I would not have been able to see alone.

One day with my arms extended up to the skies, I will rejoice as my mystical Unicorn and I will gallop together out into the wide open space without fear. The compassion and healing medicines of the elders of life itself, will grant me the knowledge and wisdom to begin a sacred journey into a new world. With the gifts of empathy and trust, I will ready myself to receive your pain with respect. When you cradle your vulnerability into my arms I will be honoured and embrace you with a spiritual admiration as we share this New Vision together.





New beginning

BY WENDY BARKMAN

Sandra sat down and bent over to take off her work shoes. She'd need her winter boots for her walk to the car. The school was almost empty now, the hallways mostly quiet except for the odd sound of one of the cleaners emptying a waste bin or flushing a toilet. This was her favourite time of day. She put away her work thoughts in anticipation of collecting Zack and Mavis from day care. Her family. How long had she dreamed and prayed she'd be able to have a family like this and now here they were.

She was bending over to tie her left boot when it happened. Pictures of that memory washed through her mind. She sat up.

She bent over to tie her right boot. Back came the memories. Stronger this time.

Sandra sighed.

She looked up at the clock.

"Ok," she thought, speaking to the memories. "You have 20 minutes. Till 4:30. Go."

Sandra got some loose-leaf and a pen, always handy in the classroom. She started to write.

I see the hems of white robes, two on my left, one in front of me and one behind me, holding me up by the hips. I'm bent over at the waist, my arms and head dangling towards the ground. Some of my fingertips are touching the blades of grass below. I can see the trunk of the big tree on my right. It's my favourite tree - the big one just past the white fence as you walk into the pasture. It's close to the river but I can't see or hear the river tonight.

Sandra got up to find her water bottle, took a few sips, then sat down to continue writing.

Sometimes they laugh - or say some words to each other and then laugh - but mostly they're quiet.

The one behind me is grunting and groaning. With each grunt pain sears through my little body. I must be four years old. It hurts my bum. I feel like I'm going to explode. I feel like my body is being ripped apart. My neck jerks each time he slams my bum into his legs. He says, "uh!" and my bum makes a slapping sound, skin against skin. Ow, ow, ow. That's what I want to say. That thing, what's that thing he keeps pushing in and out of my bum? It hurts so much. Ow, ow, ow, I want to cry.

She could have written more, but the clock showed 4:30. She hadn't written nearly all of it down – how when he had finally put her down and she thought it was all over, it wasn't long before the next one picked her up and had his turn. And the next. And the next. She hadn't written how alone she'd felt – alone and uncared for. There was so much she hadn't written and yet... Yet, it was easier now to put the memory aside.

Sandra had temporarily freed her mind to enjoy her small family of four this evening. She had the car ride from work to day care to get her mind ready to focus on the joys Zack and Mavis would bring. Joys and squabbles, to be more accurate.

As she stepped into the sunny outdoors, she made a men-

tal note, the next time she saw Dr. Thiessen for a prayer session – Immanuel Approach, they called it - she wanted to pray about this memory. She wanted to ask Jesus to be there with her, to heal her. "What will You want to show me, Lord?" Sandra wondered as she walked to the car.

Sandra was sitting in her special spot – her desk with special pens, a trickling water fountain and hanging plant. This was her corner. Sandra smiled as she picked up her pen and prepared her page. She was thankful for these content and peaceful, happy moments. Conversely, the memory she was about to write – while being cathartic - would also be painful and emotionally exhausting.

"I won't preface it," Sandra thought to herself. "I'll just write what I remember."

The table is so hard. It's made of dark brown, rough, thick pieces of wood. I think it's my dad's workbench.

"I wish I was closer to my sisters," Sandra thought. "I'd ask them if we really did have a workbench under the stairs in that old brown house. I think I was four when we built the purple house. This happened before that - how old was I?"

I remember lying on the rough wood of a workbench. It feels like we're under the stairs. I'm naked. Why don't I just jump off?

I'm naked and my hands are tight above my head, my feet are lying sideways and open, held tightly to the table.

I'm trying to raise my head to look at what's happening but it's difficult to get it high enough.

My dad is chuckling softly beside me.

There is a white overturned 5 gallon pail on the floor in the corner of the room behind him. There is a snake on my naked body. More than one. There's one on my tummy, too, but the one that is making my dad chuckle is the one on my leg close to where I go pee. I really don't want it to go there, I really don't. Twice when it starts to slither away my dad picks it up and puts it close to where I go pee again.

I want to get out.

Sandra put down her pen - maybe that was enough for tonight. Turning off the water fountain, Sandra thanked God for the day she'd drawn the line in the sand. From here on in, there's no more abuse in my family tree. Zack and Mavis won't need to deal with this. Zack and Mavis' children won't need to deal with this. We're starting a new line of Bergens.

Ah, the cold water felt so refreshing as Sandra stepped into the pool. Once a week she spent a good two hours doing something for herself, by herself, pampering herself in a decadent way. Often she chose a specialty coffee at Starbuck's and a good book or two but today she had wanted to swim. Swim, swim and swim. It had been too long. Sandra was looking forward to the next two hours. She'd take it easy, she'd visit the sauna and she'd do as much breast stroke as she liked.

At least, that had been the plan, the dream. But every time she put her head into the water, she came spluttering back up for

Sandra licked the last of the sour milk off of her lips, booted up the computer and started to type.

air. Snippets of memory played at the back of her mind as she tried to get her breathing under control. The lifeguards kept looking at her as if she were in trouble and honestly Sandra was starting to get a little scared. After two lengths, attempting to swim but hyperventilating instead, Sandra got out of the pool, walked over to the sauna and decided to try her new little trick for dealing with flashbacks. She would imagine herself and Jesus sitting together on a park bench in the sunshine, a slight breeze in the air. She'd rest her head on Jesus' shoulder, so to speak, and ask Christ what He wanted to show her. She looked forward to his kind words of love and healing. With that love surrounding her, she sat in the sauna and "told" Christ what she saw.

He holds my head under water. I'm standing on an overturned 5 gallon pail, leaning over the edge of my mom's laundry sink, the bottom of which is filled with cold water.

Up! He lets me raise my head out of the water but I'm still partially bent over.

"Again!" barks the uncle with the beard angrily.

The boy pushes my head back under water. I try to breathe. I take in water. I sputter. What if I die?

Up! He lets me raise my head a little again. I try to see. I see their dark pant legs. Four men standing in a line.

"Again!" Still angry.

Back under water. Deep breath. Sputter. Try not to breathe. What did I do? But I know what I did.

Up! The first man keeps rocking on his toes. The man with the orange beard is at the far end. Farthest away from me.

"Again!"

Water over my eyes, my nose, my mouth. I keep my eyes open as I think. I had told them what they were doing was wrong. They wanted to show the boy what they do with me. I walked right up to one of them and said...

Up! Grab air. Breathe. Try to look around. Will this ever end?

Yuck! Sour milk tastes awful and burping after accidentally drinking sour milk was even worse. She'd made her decision, though. Sandra was going through with it. Tonight she'd write another blog entry. Maybe a takeoff on the night her parents told her not to talk. The night they told her how her dad - and others like him - had been taught why and when it was OK to use your daughter's body. If you had only girls, by the third or fourth daughter you were allowed to use her body as a consolation prize. Disgusting. Sandra found the notion revolting.

And what about the timing of their explanation?

Earlier that long ago afternoon, she'd sat across from Mr. B, tears and snot streaming down her cheeks and chin. She'd cried and licked her lips and come so close to telling Mr. B. the whole thing, the words she'd never before said out loud. At the deepest of levels, she'd wanted to tell him but so much had stopped her.

Saying it out loud would make it that much more real.

Saying it out loud - especially to Mr. B - would start an

investigation. How she longed for the validation of others knowing her secret. How she feared the recompense if her dad's name was smeared and they ended up believing him instead of her.

Besides Mr. Plett was the principal. And Mr. Plett was right in the middle of the whole painful story that just longed to be told. She liked her English teacher, the school counsellor, Mr. B. No, she couldn't get him into trouble.

Then, that very evening as she and her parents sped, driving 110 km/h along the gravel roads to Bible Study, her parents had explained, had told her she could never talk and why.

That was then. This is now. Sandra licked the last of the sour milk off of her lips, booted up the computer and started to type. Tonight she was going to start talking. Online. Using her blog.

Another memory:

It's dark. I'm suffocating. At the front of the church. It's not Sunday. The church is empty. Except for here on the stage.



I can't breathe. The taste is horrific. It fills my mouth. I want to gag. I want to clamp my mouth shut. My mouth is tired. My mouth hurts. I wish it would end. I feel so small. I want it to end. I can't see his face. All I can see is different shades of darkness. Brown hair on my cheek. Purply blackness if I look down past my chin. I try to swallow. It doesn't help. It still tastes and feels like rotting potatoes filling my mouth and crawling all over my skin. I feel so dirty. My mouth is so full. My mouth is so tired. I want this to end. I try to look up. Why can't I see anything? It's as if my head is pinned down. I don't want to see this. I don't want to feel this or taste it or be here. I see shadows of two or three others. Male voices. I think there are three or four.



Barnie. Sandra imagined Barnie had sat in his office, tidying up some paperwork at day's end, his basketball-shaped potbelly brushing against the desk as he worked. It had been a full day, a good day, perhaps he'd thought. He had played well - all the teachers had - on the intramural volleyball team at lunch hour. They'd even managed to beat the High School boys team.

As he packed his papers for the evening, there was likely only one small worry on his mind. This recent trend may have worried him. Alfrieda Wheeler had been the first. She'd told her story and she'd been believed. Everybody was all aghast - "sexually abused by her dad and by her brothers." Inwardly Barnie must have fumed, his anger matching the red in his thinning hair and bushy beard. Did he have friends with whom he could commiserate, "How dare she be so disrespectful so as to speak out! This kind of behaviour can't continue. Hasn't the so-called abuse taught her anything?"

Arnold. Arnold was a trucker - a tall, sturdily built, heavy man. He had tattoos up and down his thick arms - more tattoos than bare skin. All you saw were tattoos. He walked with big, heavy steps and warned you of his coming by taunting you in his deep, growly voice. He seemed to delight in scaring little boys and girls.

Like Barnie, Arnold grew up in a small Manitoba community and, if what Sandra's dad said was true, boys like Barnie, Arnold, Frank and Jack had all learned the secrets of sexual power and entitlement on threshing days, as the uncles gathered behind the machinery to eat their lunch. In the 1960's,

similar to Barnie, he moved 20 to 30 miles south of their hometown.

Frank. Frank was the kind of guy everybody trusted. He started a church and for 25 years pastored the congregation without receiving a salary. He was the kind of predator who was always smiling, who loved going out for coffee and greeted people with special handshakes. One would certainly never think him capable of sexual abuse. Would they?

Jack, tall and slender Jack. Uncle Jack worked in the hometown in which all four of these men had grown up. He drove the 30 miles back and forth every day - to and from his job as tress designer at the local lumber shop. Sandra would always remember how he'd rock forward onto his toes as he stood near the kitchen, waiting for Aunt Helen to finish making the meal.

Four men and four names.

She wondered, how many children have they preyed upon?

How many adult lives are still being affected today?

Sandra recalled her passion - victim, survivor, thriver. Victims can and do survive. Survivors go on to live hope-filled lives. She thought of how her own childhood had been affected by these four men.

"Take a stand!" she wrote in huge letters across the page.

What if other survivors stood up to tell their stories?

This could be a new beginning.

Burning people

BY MIKHAILA HARDY

In the beginning of May, a teenage girl walked carefully through the rain, crashing through each puddle and ensuring her boots never touched dry pavement.

Splash, splat, spit.

She wore jeans and a black raincoat, and the rain had made her hair dark. Her boots were red, livid against the fences and garages she passed.

Spit, spool, spark, space. Space is a face chase for lace.

She went to school in the suburbs, and lived in the suburbs, but between the two were a few streets of older, more colourful houses. They couldn't really be called a neighbourhood, there weren't enough of them, but they couldn't be counted as part of the beige neighbourhoods, either.

That's what she called them. The beige neighbourhoods.

The two streets ran parallel to one another, so she could only walk down one on her way. She went down John Street on her way to school and Nash Street on her way home. It never changed.

It was very important that it never changed.

Something had changed that day, though. That day there was a white cat sitting in the middle of the sidewalk.

"Hi, kitty." She reached an arm out. "I'm Amy, what's your name?"

The cat blinked at her. It had big yellow eyes.

"My name doesn't matter. I don't have one anyway," the cat replied. "The part that matters is the hole."

Amy shrank back a bit. "What hole?"

"The hole, the hole in the world," the cat explained. "There's something in it, and it's hungry, and it's coming. Stall it, keep it in the hole and together we can patch it."

Then the cat slipped between two fence posts and disappeared.

Amy ran home as fast as she possibly could. Her mom was home already. Her mom had started coming home early when Amy stopped cooking for herself. She just couldn't be bothered to eat, and besides, the chemicals they put in most food was poison. Companies were just out to poison people, that was the truth of it. But today she took all the food she could without her mom noticing and pushed it all underneath her bed. Apples, bread, some sliced ham, a few bananas and left over mashed potatoes and gravy. It wouldn't be enough. It was coming and she

had to do something, had to feed the hungry thing coming from the hole in the world, had to stall it and keep it where it was.

She was so scared she felt sick.

The next day was hot and muggy. Amy wore jeans, a black raincoat and red rubber boots. She walked carefully, avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk.

The cat was back.

“It’s not enough. It’s still coming, and it’s hungry, hungrier than ever,” the cat said. Its yellow eyes were wide. “Look, look at me.” The cat shook itself off, and its white fur fell away in clumps. There was mottled black and orange fur underneath. “Look at me, I’m burning up. It’s burning me up.”

Amy tried to find the words to comfort the cat, but there were none. Maybe all the words had burned up with the cat’s white fur. The cat shook the last of the white off and warned Amy again to feed it, to stall it, before disappearing between the same two fence posts it had before.

Amy went to school, but she couldn’t concentrate. A dark, muscular fear was growing in her. She was almost sure she spent one period in the principal’s office, getting reprimanded for not acknowledging the teacher. She was sure she had failed a chemistry test. It didn’t matter. Grade 12 was too hard – she had been failing a lot of tests lately.

She didn’t eat lunch. She had to save all the food she could. When she got home from school, the chicken sandwich, four chocolate chip cookies, bag of carrots and carton of milk were hidden with the rest of the food she had saved.

Weeks passed. Amy didn’t see the cat again, but she knew the hole in the world was still there. She could smell it as she slept, the rotting, creeping smell of the creature in the hole, overstuffed but starving and greedy, greedy, greedy.

She wondered if it was a creature in the hole or just more humans.

June was a bad month. Nobody signed Amy’s yearbook (not that she cared about any of them, they were all idiots and drug addicts and liars), but it didn’t matter because she wasn’t really graduating. She would be getting her GED sometime within the next year, hopefully.

It was the last day of school, a clear and beautiful day, and Amy was walking home wearing jeans, a black raincoat and red rubber boots. She was trying to think of how to tell her mom that she had failed (but her words were gone again; she would probably just say “I failed” and walk away), when she noticed the cat.

It was all black now, but its big yellow eyes were the same.

“It’s worse,” said the cat. “The hole in the world is worse, and you should really see. You really should. Come here and see, just see what’s in the hole in the world.” The cat sat beside the gap between the fence posts and curled his tail around his feet.

Amy walked over carefully and peeked between the wooden slats.

Everyone was burning. Flames licked their way around the world, people ran and screamed and thrashed. It was a vision of hell. And in the middle of it all was a huge black creature,

solid one minute, smoke the next, and he roared and screamed as he picked the burning people up one after the other and threw them into his mouth. Long, sharp teeth cut his tongue and gums as he chewed the people. His lips were charred, when they existed. The stench of smoke and charred meat was everywhere. Amy launched herself away from the gap in the fence.

“You have to help. Save food and help feed it so that they can repair the hole, you have to help repair it. It’s coming after you next.” The cat blinked at her again. Its eyes were red now. “It’s coming. When the burning people are gone it’s coming for you, coming to get you.”

Amy turned to run, as fast and as far as she could, but a pair of arms were around her and before she knew it she was being put into a car and driven away.

Amy was sitting in a hard plastic chair by the door. She could hear her parents on the other side, talking to Dr. Michaels.

“Very typical, yes,” Dr. Michaels was saying. “Wearing the same clothes repeatedly and failing to prepare food for herself were early signs. The struggles in school, the food hoarding, and the vague speech were later signs, but all very typical.”

“I found her peeking into someone’s yard, watching them barbeque,” her mother said. “She was mumbling something about hell and burning people, and how a cat was telling her to do things.”

“That’s also normal in later stages. It’s all very textbook.” There was a noise of paper shuffling. “The way we treat schizophrenia is with an antipsychotic drug called olanzapine. Around half to two thirds of patients improve significantly on olanzapine. It’s possible for Amy to return fully to her previous behaviour, but quite unlikely. Most schizophrenia patients fall into a chronic pattern of cognitive, emotional and motivational impairment, with occasional episodes of hallucinations and psychosis. We’ll have to see how Amy does on this medication, and once we have more information we can discuss our options further.”

There was some conversation between her parents and the doctor after that, but Amy had stopped paying attention. It would all amount to the same thing anyway. Before she knew it, she was going home with her parents and a blister pack of small white pills.

They reminded her of white fur.

It was a bright, hot day in August, and Amy was walking down Nash Street wearing shorts, a tank top and flip flops when she saw the cat again. It had white fur.

“Oh, hi,” she said. “So, apparently you can’t really talk, which is a shame.” Amy stared down at the cat, half-hoping it would say something, but it just stared at her and blinked its big yellow eyes. Finally Amy turned away.

“Well, bye, kitty.”

“You can’t see it anymore, can you?” the cat asked suddenly. “Coming up right behind you and you can’t even see it anymore.”



Remember me

BY BENJAMIN LE GROS

At night I can hear them, when I'm drifting off to sleep, when my eyelids grow heavy. I listen to them munching on my faoma, enjoying my soyience. Dust mites, everywhere. No, the indignity of age is not enough. Nor those miniature moments of unthoughtfulness, those accidental gifts from the evergreen care-team. The home chooses to compound our infirmities with tiny torments: woolen blankets made from recycled scouring pads; with food, or what used to be food, blended into a paste, beige, with the after-taste of sweat and the texture of papier-mâché. These and the dust mites and more.

I remember arriving here. I cannot recall how many months ago that was. Time moves like treacle dripping from a spoon. I rode in a wheelchair: up the ramp, past the frau who guards the door, past the chairs that line the entrance's walls, some seats filled, some seats empty, some of the eyes saw me, some did not, none smiled. And this was the fastest I'd moved in years. I should have been excited, twas a rollercoaster for one. I rode past pot-plants and past doors, doors with numbers, mostly open, and behind each door a diorama, a still life, tiny dramas being played out in slow motion, of bodies being washed by orderlies with frowns and sponges, of board games midway through and yet weeks in the playing, of inmates rocking back and forth, crying, holding pictures of loved ones or books they used to be able to read, of merely sitting still and waiting, just waiting.

When I wet myself last, I cried. I think it was two nights ago. I washed myself with the glass of water that sits on my bedside table, the one I keep my teeth in at night, the one I keep on the coaster with a picture of the grand canyon. I have two. My wife brought them back when she visited. The coaster reads: Set yourself free.

I've never been.

My wife had dementia. She passed away three years ago. Six years ago I interred her into this very care-home. She declined, I watched. One by one her memories puffed out of existence and one day she'd disappeared. The husk took six months to die. She begged to be allowed to leave. My days are filled with karma.

The orderly for our wing, Ricky, he smiles at me even as he wipes the dried on food from my moustache. He's been here for as long as I can remember, a lone survivor of the Home's revolving door recruitment policy. Ricky has a bucket with soapy water and a sponge. I'm his third appointment. The water's still warm, and not too many flavours in it yet.

Ricky remembers me from when I used to visit my wife. He thinks I'm rich. I used to slip him notes, tens, twenties, whenever, whatever, I could. Look after my girl, I'd say. And I'd wink. He'd fold up the note in those big black hands of his and he'd flash his big white teeth.

And now he's not smiling. I say, "Some days are harder than others." He says nothing, keeps his hands busy and his eyes on the job at hand: my limp nether regions. I may have dribbled a bit last time I went. His nose is wrinkled against the smell. Such scant protection. Ricky's tabard is stained with the aftermath of vomit. That'll be Maeve's. She's got a nasty cough and she can't hold down her food, doesn't like to wear her dentures, doesn't chew.

"The mites are biting me again," I say.

He sighs and shakes his head. He keeps on unbuttoning my shirt, begins dabbing my chest.

"I want a new mattress," I say.

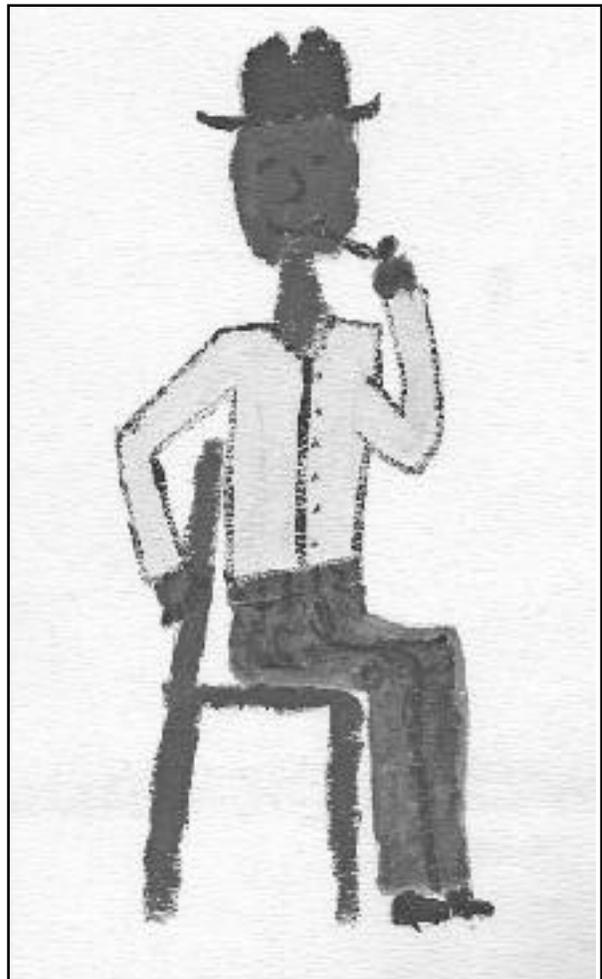
Ricky stops. He sits on the bed next to me. He takes my hand in two of his, says: "Mister Gupney, I am very sorry, but you had new mattress just last month. You remember this, no?"

I shake my head.

"There have been many cleans of your room . . ."

I shake my head.

"Your wife, she has visited many times; your room is very clean, she has checked."



Art by Cole Hansen

By the book

BY JULIAN NEUER

Hi, Professor Dias. The usual?" The bartender flashed a neutral smile at Pedro. No hint of judgment, although it might be too early in the afternoon for a drink. How convenient that classes were done for the day, and that the *Buenos Orígenes* sat just across the street from the university's main entrance.

"Yes, double, with extra ice, please."

"Hot today, isn't it?"

When the drink came, the bartender left him alone. As Pedro dropped some ice cubes in the ouzo, the liquid turned from clear to milky, as it should, and the glass misted up.

The TV blabbered at the bar. A soccer game. Pedro ignored it. In his head, his own private match had been playing over and over for almost a week, and the result was always the same. Elena had won, he had lost.

Seven years of his life. Of *their* lives. But now, with Elena gone, he felt like the seven years were only his, not hers, not theirs. Hadn't Elena made it clear that she was glad to leave them behind?

Pedro had started seeing Elena while they were still graduate students in Brazil. They did not go to the same university, which made it all the more complicated. They had met at a conference far from home, in sunny Rio de Janeiro. (The heat in Buenos Aires this time of the year always reminded him of Rio.) They had spent the entire night at the hotel bar, just the two of them, drinking ouzo, pouring their souls out, laughing and crying about each other's stories.

"Elena, everybody invents their own complicated rules."

"Yes, but it's all about power. We like to feel we're in charge, but it's all coincidence. Or chance. Or God. Or fate. Or synchronicity. Whatever. Not us."

"But we still have some say in what happens, don't we?"

"We like to think so, because we are obsessed with control, but whatever little part of the world we manage to affect will sooner or later revert back to chaos, and so will our little games. But we shouldn't worry. It's not the end of the world."

Ouzo or no ouzo, Pedro could get drunk on Elena's laughter alone.

"And what would you do if you had control of things?", he asked.

"I'd keep the morning from coming."

When morning came, they were still together.

After the conference, they met frequently. The flexible schedules of the academic life would allow them to see each other for days, now in his city, now in hers. They longed for a real life together. The situation in their native Brazil was bleak for young PhDs then. No job openings anywhere. No research opportunities. When they heard of the tenure-track positions in Argentina, they did not hesitate.

Six years at the university of Buenos Aires. He had been

Pedro Dias before; now he was Professor Dias. Elena became *Professor* Mendes. They moved to a nice little apartment in the Recoleta neighborhood. An apartment with a study. They could work from home part of the time. They progressed in their careers. They made friends.

After six years in Argentina, they had learned to feel at home at their new job, at home in their new country, at home with their new language. Pedro loved to hear Elena speak her perfect Spanish, no trace of a Brazilian accent to it.

Elena would mutter to herself, even when Pedro was around.

"Where did the nice people go?"

"What, honey?"

"Nothing."

"—"

"My mother used to love artists. Musicians, dancers, actors, painters."

"What?"

"Never mind."

"—"

"She didn't like writers, though. Which is funny, because writers are the only artists that are honest. All the others pretend to be what they are not, to be doing what they are not doing. But writers are themselves all the time. They always admit that they are just doing what they seem to be doing: telling us stories. Writers are honest all the time, even when they try not to. Even when they don't want to."

Elena was no writer. Elena was a linguist. Pedro, a computer scientist. The conference where they had met had been about Computational Linguistics. Its main theme had been the development of computer systems that could generate and understand natural language, the everyday language that people speak among themselves. Such systems existed, but were far from perfect. According to Elena, they would always be. As people have trouble understanding people, so do machines, she used to say.

"It's over! Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't understand! Will you please explain?"

"I can't. I don't know. Sorry. I have to go back."

"Where to?"

"Home."

"Where's home?"

She packed two small suitcases and flew to Brazil the next day.

Around seven o'clock, the *Buenos Orígenes* began to fill up with students. The noise drove Pedro away. Stumbling out the door, he found himself in a river of people. He stopped in the middle of the crowded sidewalk and rested the palm of his hand on top of his head, with a slight pressure towards the front, as if trying to keep his receding hairline from receding further. It was a habit he had. He did it every time he needed to think. He stood there for almost a minute, motionless while the



WRITING THE LIFE - FICTION

flow of pedestrians adapted to his presence, deflecting around him.

He decided he didn't want to go home.

Pedro felt his thoughts misting up, like the ouzo he had consumed. He knew that the secret to drinking ouzo was in the ice, which kept the mind cool and the body hydrated. Did the monks who had invented ouzo in 14th-century Greece know this? Pedro liked to think that the ouzo gave him access to some ancient Greek wisdom — albeit with the right to use modern conveniences, like iceboxes and taxis. He flagged a cab and asked the driver to take him anywhere. No particular destination. He rolled the windows down to feel the wind in his face.

But the wind was too warm. Minutes later, Pedro started to feel queasy, asked the driver to stop, paid the fare and got out, somewhere on *Avenida Córdoba*.

"Pedro, I resent the way you speak to me sometimes. It sounds like you're telling me what I can and can't do."

"Sorry, dear, I'm just trying to help. Sometimes I see you take a wrong step and I want to warn you."

"But you shouldn't do it. You shouldn't judge me so lightly. I had my reasons."

"But—"

"You know, people shouldn't try to police or correct other people. Nobody's perfect enough to do that."

"I'm not saying that I—"

"You know who should police and correct people? Machines. Computers. And you're not one of them. You're not rational enough. I hope not."

She had said it seriously, but he couldn't help laughing. After a while, she laughed too.

Now, try as he might, he couldn't remember what that conversation had been about.

Walking down *Avenida Córdoba*, Pedro reached the *Galerías Pacífico* mall. He hesitated to go in. The clash between the sumptuous architecture and the pragmatic store windows made him even queasier. But he needed water, coffee, some *alfajores*, and a restroom.

Then he remembered the *Galerías* housed a *Centro Cultural* dedicated to the writer Jorge Luis Borges and to Argentinian art in general. Elena had often come here, and many times had invited him along. He had never shown much interest. Now, eager to relieve his ouzo-induced malaise — and to somehow atone for his past indifference — he proceeded in.

He had to negotiate an army of plastic human figures sitting at a hundred tables equipped with chess boards, geometrically disposed around the entrance to the *Centro*. One of those contemporary art exhibits, probably. What do they call them? Installations. Yes, an installation consisting of hundreds of dummies playing chess.

How quaint.

As he passed, he accidentally brushed against one of the

boards. The two players glared at him, one of them sounding out his anger in a loud grunt.

"¡Perdón!," stammered Pedro.

People, not dummies! Hundreds of people playing chess, motionless, silent, each one of them striving for control of the black and white chessmen in their respective game.

How quaint.

Elena liked to quote Borges: "The individual is all that exists. The masses are just an abstraction."

Or something to that effect.

"I don't like Borges," Pedro had said. "If he thought the individual was so important, then why did he always make his characters look so insignificant as they faced up to magical monsters, to large libraries, and to immortality as a curse?"

Inside the *Centro*, past the chess players, Pedro found an exhib-



"It's not you. It's me."

He wondered what would be waiting for him in his home country, a land he had turned his back to six years before.

it about the work of Fernando Amaral, an Argentinian writer he had never heard of, someone who, according to the booklet, had been forced into exile during the military regime and had died abroad a few years ago. Glad to learn something not about Borges, Pedro checked out an audioguide, put the earphones on and ambled around the panels, listening to Fernando Amaral's biography and to excerpts of his books in a baritone voice.

When people die, are they freed from the shackles of cultural relativism? And if so, do they become absolute? I have yet to die, but I have left my country, and with it my culture. Am I absolute now? Or am I going mad? When people go mad, do they become absolute?

What if Pedro went back to Brazil now? He wondered what would be waiting for him in his home country, a land he had turned his back to six years before.

Religion amounts to trying to convince other people that they should talk to themselves to feel better about their fears. I had a friend who used to talk to herself. Whenever I asked her what she had said, she would talk to me about something else. (I wish religious people would change the subject too.) When I left Argentina, my friend stayed behind. Now I miss her, even though I know her quiet speeches were not directed at me.

I know how it feels. I miss Elena too.

Where are the good people? The sages? The artists that can make the human race worth paying attention to? Where have they gone? If you're anything like me, you must feel most artists just lie to you nowadays. The only hope we still have is the writer, because writers find it hard to lie, even when they try to.

Funny. Elena used to say that. Who was this Amaral guy after all?

That is why I write. To keep myself from lying. To remind myself that I am not in control, that my life is like a labyrinth — or like a large tree, rather, with many branches. I climb all the way up to its canopy to get a good view of the surroundings, but all I can see are the leaves. You ask me what the leaves are? Fate? God? Choice? Coincidence? Synchronicity? Call them whatever you like. It doesn't matter; it doesn't change what they are. To me, they are the pages where I write my life, and they never, never let me tell a lie.

Was Elena quoting this Amaral writer in all those conversations?

No, she was not.

Pedro startled. What had the audioguide said?

No, Professor Dias, she was not quoting me, insisted the audioguide.

Pedro looked around, searching for something to provide a rational explanation to what he was hearing. All he saw nearby was a life-size cardboard stand-up of Fernando Amaral.

The answer is not always in the rational, Professor Dias. The rational is just another attempt at control. Didn't Elena tell you how it works? You should know better.

Pedro rested the palm of his hand on top of his head. Other patrons of the Centro walked by, indifferent to him, although

he was having a conversation with a machine that seemed to know him and his personal history in detail.

I am not a machine, Professor. Machines can't understand people well enough to talk to them. Machines can't even talk in any reasonable sense. You of all people should know that.

But hadn't Elena said that only machines were rational enough to judge, police and correct people?

Yes, she said that. If you'd rather think of me as a machine, that's fine. It doesn't matter. Just listen to me. You want Elena back? Then go find her.

"I—", started Pedro, but checked himself when an young man with a ponytail cast a curious glance in his direction.

The audioguide went on:

Afraid to go back to Brazil? Afraid you'll be a foreigner in your own country after all these years? Remember you were a foreigner here six years ago, and you made it. Now you wonder whether going back to Brazil is the right thing. Don't you know that question makes no sense?

Don't you know that question makes no sense?, repeated the guide. *Haven't you learned anything, Professor Dias?*

Don't you know that question makes no sense?

That was all he could take. Pedro snapped off the earphones, dropped the audioguide and stormed out of the exhibit. Outside, he rammed into the array of tables near the entrance, knocking chessboards over, sending tens of black and white chessmen tumbling chaotically all over the polished floor of the *Centro Cultural Jorge Luis Borges*.

A week later, Pedro had partly gotten over the incident. Partly. No sane human being could entirely recover from an experience like that. He certainly hadn't forgotten it. He was sure he never would. He remembered every sentence, every inflection in the voice that had spoken to him from the audioguide. His memory replayed the text several times a day, everyday.

Don't you know that question makes no sense?

Don't you know---

"Your coffee, sir."

The girl behind the counter did not smile — not even neutrally. She obviously did not care about Pedro, or about whether he was coming or going.

"*Gracias*", he mumbled, but she had already turned to wait on another customer.

Pedro was careful not to burn his fingertips on the hot cup. He gazed at the smoke spiraling up from the black coffee. When he thought he had waited long enough, he drank it all in one gulp.

He returned to his reading. When the announcement came over the PA system, in a silky female voice, he carefully closed the book.

Flight AR2276 to São Paulo, Brazil, now boarding at gate three.

The voice on the PA paused for a second and added, in a tone that sounded sincere:

Have a nice trip back home, Professor Dias.



Damaged

BY CHELSI ROBICHAUD

If I tried to find justice for what was done to me, I would only be disappointed.

Yesterday was my complete realization of that.

I'm surrounded by invalidation. My peers have called me insane, out of it. Damaged.

Damaged.

Michael Priske, one of my employers, stood by the podium in front of the press conference. His shirt was neatly pressed, his mouth twisted downwards in sorrow. He enjoyed the attention, but had to put on a show.

My eyes burned as I raised my hand for a question, and my throat nearly closed up before I could speak.

"Yes, Miss Bordeau?"

"In your novel, you use the word 'damaged' to describe the patient. Would you still consider him damaged, sir?" I asked.

"Yes," Michael said. "I would."

There were a few murmurs from the crowd, but not as many as I had hoped. My question was meant to be provocative. I was disappointed, but kept my head high.

"Thank you. That is all I had to ask."

Michael approached me once most of the press was gone.

He was angry. I was supposed to help promote his book. I had already started drafting the article, with the approved quotes. Today I had messed it up, and we both knew it.

"Will you say something?" I asked dryly.

"What the hell was that stunt, Katherine?" The words erupted from his mouth.

"I found your language offensive."

"What? In reference to Kaden? The kid is insane, and you know it. Everyone knows it."

Kaden was a soldier we had been interviewing for months before he was deployed on a peaceful mission to Israel. He had been shot twice, in the shoulder. He was still recovering.

Insane. I bit back a retort that threatened to escape my lips.

"Goodbye, Michael."

Michael grabbed my sleeve, pulling me back towards him. I jerked away.

"You're making this about you, aren't you?"

"I don't owe you any explanation."

"So you are." He laughed. "Of course."

"You have no idea what you're talking about."

"You're right. I've only heard one side of the story, and that's yours. There's two sides to every story, Kat, and every good journalist should know that."

"Two sides implies that he had an excuse. If I had attacked Kaden, it would have made sense for him to try to break my fingers and crush my windpipe. But I didn't. He did not need to defend himself."

"Still. You could have spoken to the cops."

"If I had, they would've pressed charges immediately. I didn't want to get involved in court."

"Lost cause before you even brought it forth, hm?"

"Shut up. I'm leaving."

He called after me, cursing, but I wouldn't turn around. When I reached my car, I broke down, letting the whirlwind of the day flood through my eyes.

His final words as I strode off resonated in my head: "He was your boyfriend, Kat. Nothing happened. Grow up."

When I was younger, I had found a lizard in my backyard with a broken leg. It was caught under a piece of plywood that must have fallen off from the shed. I gasped in horror when I found it and immediately released it, but despite my assistance it would not move. I urged it on, pushing it by the tail with a stick I had picked up nearby, but nothing worked. It squirmed frantically, mudding itself, and in its eyes I believed I saw a frantic will to live.

My mother looked at it when I called her over and told me: "It's damaged, Kitty. It would be kinder to let it die."

In the eyes of my peers, I was no better than the lizard, left to die. And perhaps I wasn't. But was my life so devalued because of this? No, I could still function. My leg was not broken – I could still walk. But even if it were, there would be hope that it might heal. How did I become less of a person, and more of a lost cause? I'm believed to be unworthy, bereft of my intrinsic value.

I wanted Kaden to gasp and cry like I did at night, haunted by the memory of what happened. I wanted revenge. I wanted him to know that he could not try this again—that any woman he touched was now protected. The weight of the knowledge pressed into the sides of my skull. If I could tell these women what I knew, I might be able to prevent this from happening to them. But I know how quickly I would be dismissed. Quickly, rigorously, without mercy.

I spoke to my doctor when the dreams hit.

"You haven't missed a day of work, so surely you must be fine."

I stared blankly at the doctor who surveyed me with a gaze that betrayed no sympathy. Fine? I finished my days with great difficulty – yet the path seemed to mean less to him than the result. I was incensed by his lack of empathy.

The look in Nadi's eyes held a similar rage when I told her about the press conference, and the conversation with Michael.

"How could a country like Canada have such poor defences in protecting their people?" Nadi exclaimed. Her brow was creased, her mouth pressed into a hard line. She knew well the struggle certain Canadians faced. She was Métis. I had met her two years ago while reporting on a peaceful protest by the members of her community.

I took her hand in mine.

"I don't know."

"You can't let people talk down to you like that, Kat."

"But I can't bring this to the public. I'd lose credibility in my reporting. I might even lose my job."

"So will you still write the article promoting his book?"

She possessed a mastery over her emotions that I had never come close to wielding.

"I might."

"How could you, though?"

"I don't need to go through the experience firsthand to know what is in store for me if I bring this story to the media. We see it on the news every day, Nadi - people being violated and told it was their fault. Women being disbelieved. Killing themselves because the shame was too great."

"You think you would do that?" Nadi slipped her hand from mine, her eyes wide and horrified. "You might kill yourself?"

"No..." I sighed. "I hoped that people would recognize my strife, but they didn't. I've been told over and over again that I'm being 'too sensitive'."

"They're wrong."

"But what if they aren't? I feel ashamed that I'm in so much pain, Nadi. Kaden got shot. He was in a war zone, for God's sake - and me? I was sexually assaulted by Kaden here. I wasn't out in the field. I wasn't protecting the country. I was just living my life. How could I stand up for myself when his suffering is so much more noble than mine?"

"Kaden went through a lot, yes," Nadi said. "But that does not mean your pain is nothing. The only people who can quantify the pain you're experiencing is yourselves. I know you want to make the world a better place, babe, but you can't put yourself down when you're trying to heal."

The conversation lapsed into silence and Nadi offered me a cup of tea. I thanked her, enjoying the warmth as it flooded through my throat. She took a sip of her own. The way she looked at me over her mug reminded me of one of our first meetings. Her eyes had held a coy playfulness. Now they were round disks of concern, and I could do nothing to quell it. I couldn't even control my own sadness - how could I help her with hers?

"There's something I've been meaning to talk to you about," I said, swallowing down my nervousness.

"Okay," Nadi said, shooting me a suspicious glance. "What is it?"

"I don't know if I should be in a relationship."

Nadi blinked several times, lifting her feet up onto the chair and folding her legs to her side.

"Okay," she breathed, then bit her lip. "Would you like to tell me why?"

I admired her ability to keep calm in stressful situations. She possessed a mastery over her emotions that I had never come close to wielding.

"I'm too dependant on you. I'm worried that I'm using you as a crutch for my problems."

"I'm here to help you, Kat."

"But I don't want to feel like less of a partner to you because of this."

"Where is this coming from?" Nadi looked shocked. "I don't think less of you because you cried after your superior treated you badly. Your reaction was reasonable."

"But what about the times you leave for work, and I can barely function without you?"

"So this is about me leaving next week," Nadi sighed sympathetically, and reached out to cup my face. "I know it's difficult and I will do everything within my power to be there for you. I know you might think you're a burden on me, but you're not."

I closed my eyes. She was right. She could always see right through me.

"Don't worry," Nadi said softly and smoothed back my hair. "Tonight we'll rest. Tomorrow you'll make a decision. I believe in you."

I was seated in my office, polishing up an article, when Michael knocked on my door.

He didn't wait for me to tell him to come in. Michael sat down in the chair before me, making himself comfortable, and cleared his throat.

"I read the article," he said. I expected him to continue, but he did not. "For

God's sake, Katherine, would you quit being so childish?"

"I see it didn't take long for the insults to resurface," I observed, then turned to look at him. He was dressed in a suit, most likely in preparation for a book signing. Dark circles coloured the contours of his eyes.

"Would you prefer I act stoic about all of this? You've been ignoring my calls and messages for two weeks. I didn't even know if you were going to pull through on this."

"Well, I did. Is there something else you'd like to say? Because I'm pretty busy here."

Michael's brow rose, but to my surprise, he did not spit back a retort. After what I guessed were several calculated seconds, he asked: "If you're so disgusted with me, why did you publish the article?"

"Because I'm a good journalist, and that's what I had to do," I said. "But I don't owe you anything now. Please leave."

Michael stood, shaking his head.

"I could have offered you a great position, Kat. I'm really disappointed."

The door clicked.

When I began working as a journalist, I believed I would be welcomed by the system that was meant to protect me, but it would not.

I would need to protect myself, and that would have to be enough.



Art by Lucy May Tataryn



Melodramas for depressed persons

BY ROLLI

I couldn't get out of bed, so I went for a walk. There weren't a lot of people in Emergency. An old lady kept rubbing her breast. A man staggered up to Triage and asked the nurse out on a date. She pressed a button and he vanished. I thought, *I could use one of those.*

"Have you been drinking?" the nurse asked me.

I was having trouble putting the failure of my life into words.

"Take a seat," she said at last.

I waited two hours, three hours. The room really filled up.

I hadn't realized I was wearing two different colored socks.

After four hours, I got up.

"What are you doing tonight?" a man asked the triage nurse as I pushed open the door.

There's a park across from my apartment. You can walk there and watch the prostitutes. One pretends to talk on the pay phone in the middle of the park. If a man approaches her, she hangs up. I've never once walked past when she wasn't on the phone.

I go to the park when I'm depressed because I don't care about the danger.

"You wanna buy a knife?" said a voice.

I looked up. A young guy was holding out a hunting knife.

"Okay," I said.

I pulled out my wallet. The young guy grabbed my wallet and took off.

The prostitute was watching me. I approached her. She hung up the phone.

"Did you see that?" I asked her.

She thought for a long time.

"No," she said.

She picked the receiver back up.

"I love you too, Mom," I heard her say, as I walked away.

The funny thing about being depressed is that you forget everything that was important to you. Work. Hobbies. Friends. Sex. They all float away from you like helium balloons. For a while, you wonder where they're going and when they'll ever come down. Then you just don't care.

I guess it isn't that funny.

It was a nine month wait, I found out, to see a psychiatrist. I wondered how I'd survive. Someone recommended a drop-in center where you could talk to volunteers. They weren't qualified but they were good listeners.

"There's no one here right now," said the lady at the desk. "But if you'd like to watch the video, I can put it on."

I followed her to the Lounge. She put a cassette tape into a VCR. I hadn't seen a cassette tape or a VCR in years. I almost laughed.

"You think it's hopeless," said the woman on the screen. "But our love is brighter than the stars, Jerome."

"What is this?" I asked.

"It's therapeutic," said the woman, on her way out of the Lounge.

"I thought about ending it all. Then, Beverly, I remembered your loveliness."

After a few minutes, I pressed Eject. The label on the tape said:

Melodramas for Depressed Persons, Cassette One

I laughed. I felt a bit better.

It was Friday night. The bars were all busy.

Emergency was busy. There was a lineup out the door.

"Hey buddy, can you help a guy out?"

"I'm a writer," I said.

He kept walking.

It was just after midnight when I got a room. A hairy doctor came in.

"What's wrong?" he said.

I tried explaining it.

"Do you hear voices?" he said.

"Just yours," I said.

He shook his head.

"That's not enough."

He popped some gum into his mouth. He disappeared.

I thought, *I could use some of that.*

Pills are unpredictable. Cutting your wrists is barbaric.

I jumped off a bridge.

At lot of people jump off the Millennial Bridge. It's so high that when people hit the water, their spines shatter. They don't even have to worry about drowning. I thought that was a plus.

I climbed onto the cement column and looked around.

I had a lot of memories. I just couldn't remember them.

I looked down at the water.

"What's up?" said the policeman. He didn't get too close.

"I know things seem bad right now but it's not as bad as you think."

"Why don't you come back down?"

"Don't do something you'll regret."

I smiled. Maybe I'd regret jumping to my death. Probably not.

"You've got a lot to live for, probably."

"You want to tell me about it?"

"Don't do something you'll regret," he said again.

I laughed.

I jumped.

The funny thing is, when I hit the water, I didn't die. I broke every vertebrae, I think, and my left arm. But I paddled with my right arm long enough for the rescuers to get to me. I

*At first I didn't feel anything but then I felt amazing.
I started to laugh more. When I laughed
too much they cut back.*

just did it automatically, like a cat. I wasn't thinking.

I was in the hospital for three months. Since I was there anyway they gave me drugs for my depression.

At first I didn't feel anything but then I felt amazing. I started to laugh more. When I laughed too much they cut back. "It takes a while to get the right balance," someone said.

When they felt I was balanced enough, they sent me home.

"This is the end," said the woman on the cassette.

"No," said the man. "This is the beginning—of a glorious new life of love."

I laughed. It really was therapeutic.

I was walking in the park one afternoon. I was feeling a lot better now. I carried a knife for self-defense.

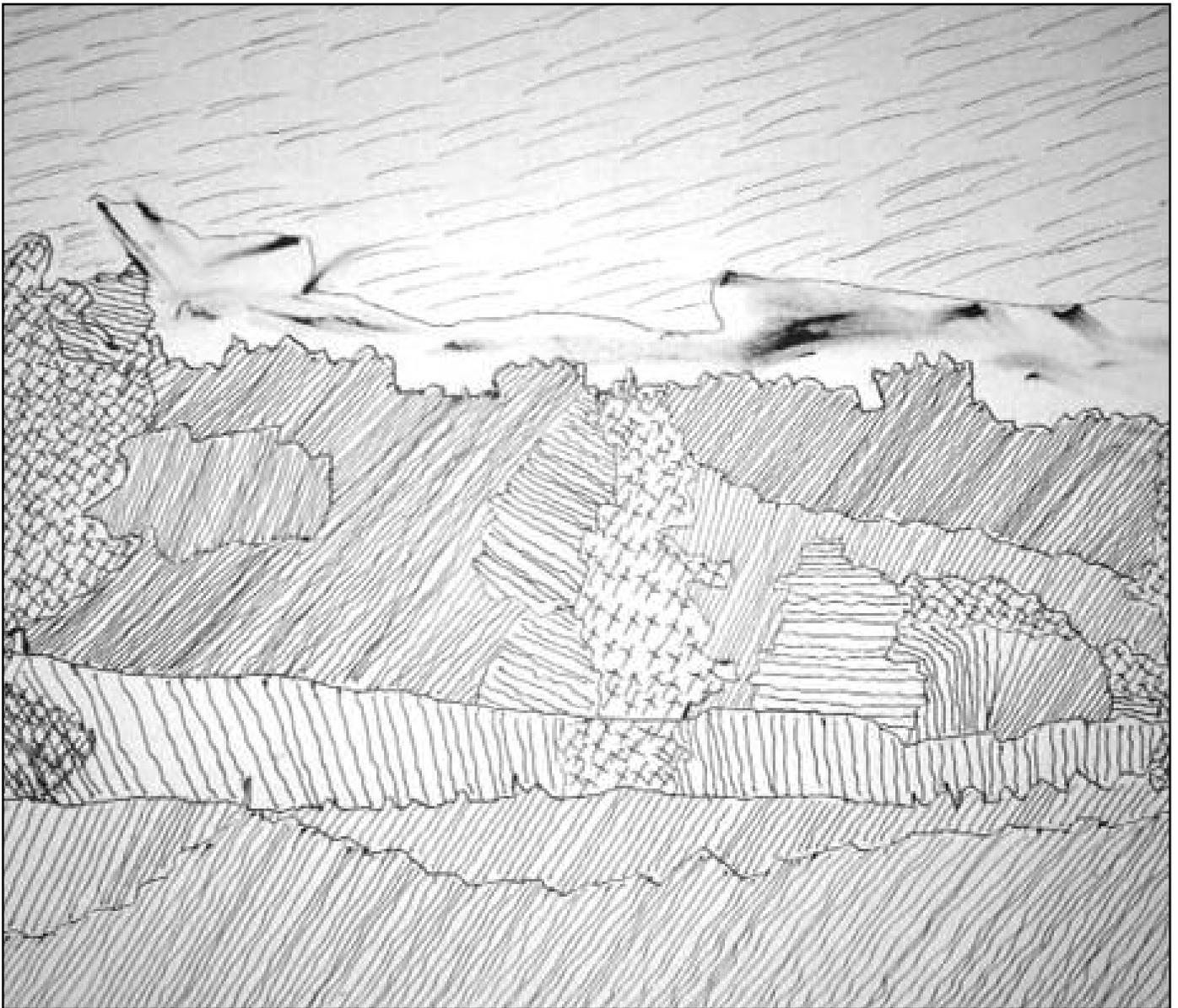
The prostitute was on the phone.

I thought, maybe I was pessimistic. Maybe it was the depression talking. That girl might really be talking to her mother. And she just loves her that much.

Probably not.

But you never know.

"I'll be fine, Mom," I hear her say, as I walked on.



Art by James Skelton



The hanging tree

BY BONNIE JO STUFFLEBEAM

A woman hanged herself from the tree across the street from Susan's house. At least that's what the neighbor girl said the first time she came over, two weeks ago. Since then Susan has been trying to paint the tree. Every morning when her husband, Harold, leaves to serve as supervisor at the library downtown, Susan takes her easel from the front closet and stands in the window, paintbrush perched above blank canvas. But she can never seem to funnel the tree through her eyes.

That first time the neighbor girl came over, she handed Susan a sheet of paper with her name, Evie, scribbled beside three misshapen hearts. The girl towered over Susan in the doorway, two pieces of metal hanging from her lip. She told Susan that she and her roommates were having a housewarm-

ing party that night and asked her to please call them if they got too loud, rather than calling the cops like so many of the stodgy old neighbors they'd had before.

"Okay," Susan said, pocketing the paper.

"Wow." Evie peered into Susan's house. "Neat painting. Who did it?"

Susan glanced to the wall behind her, where a watercolor of a crape myrtle hung. "Me."

"It's nice," Evie said.

Susan buried her hands in the pockets of her jeans.

"So, lady, are you shy or something? Do you have a name?" Evie said.

Susan smiled a little. "Sorry," she said. "My name is Susan Knight."

"You paint trees," Evie said. Susan didn't say anything. "Well, you know all about the tree in my front yard, right?"



Origins by Judy Swallow

Evie went straight to the food and piled three ham sandwiches and two slices of pie onto her plate.

And then Evie proceeded to tell Susan about the crinkled newspaper clipping she'd found in the attic when they moved in, the faded picture of the woman. Then she said Susan should stop by the party later.

Susan didn't go to the party; she didn't even tell her husband that they'd been invited. Instead, when he got home from work, she hugged his stiff body. Over dinner Susan talked, but Harold kept his eyes to his plate, his fork scraping the good china. Afterward Susan asked him if he wanted to watch a movie, but he had work to do, so Susan excused herself to bed. She dreamt of the tree's branches; they reached and stroked her cheeks until they were raw.

The next week Harold was throwing a holiday party for his coworkers. "You should invite one of your friends," he said. Susan didn't like any of her friends since all the decent ones moved away when they earned their degrees or their husbands, but she said she'd think about inviting someone from yoga. But after yoga on Saturday, Susan marched straight to her car without looking at anyone. She decided to invite Evie instead.

Once she'd had a proper shower, Susan walked across the street and knocked on Evie's door. "You," Evie said when she opened it. "Want some tea?" They sat on the porch with their steaming mugs, the scent of mint, and talked about music. Evie liked the classic rockers; they discovered a shared affinity for Pink Floyd as well as Bowie. Evie offered Susan a Parliament, which she declined. Instead she watched Evie smoke, watched the smoke lift through the dense air and collect between them like fog.

Susan asked Evie if she'd like to come to the party. Evie wrinkled her nose when Susan said her husband was a librarian. She was surprised to find that Evie didn't read. It always shocked her when people didn't read, almost as if they didn't believe in God. She suspected that Evie didn't believe in God.

"You're pretty, Mrs. Knight," Evie said. "Anyone ever tell you that?"

Susan blushed. "It's been awhile."

Evie's smile was softer than her face; she said she'd drop by the party later. "But I sure as hell am not going to talk Shakespeare with any droopy librarians."

That evening, cars lined both sides of the street. Susan had spent all day cooking. Cranberry and pasta salad in fancy snowman-shaped serving bowls covered the surface of the dining table. She'd also baked two apple pies and made a tray full of miniature ham sandwiches. Harold had dusted and vacuumed and pruned the hedges outside, even though it was windy and he had to wear two coats. The guests began to pile in around seven, and Susan wished she had more time to be alone in her own home.

The librarians didn't talk about Shakespeare or the latest young adult releases, which were hard to keep on the shelf. Instead they talked about the teenage barista at the coffee bar downstairs, who everyone suspected was losing her mind.

They talked about the Indian food restaurant down the street. They talked about traffic on the highway and the weather, which would soon turn to snow. Susan nodded along with her husband's friends but kept glancing out the window at Evie's door, and the tree.

Finally, after most of the guests had packed tight into Susan's house, Evie arrived. Susan had already downed two glasses of red wine, and when she saw Evie she hugged her tight and introduced her to Harold. He welcomed her to neighborhood then returned to a heated discussion about management.

Evie went straight to the food and piled three ham sandwiches and two slices of pie onto her plate. Her wide eyes darted around the room. "Lot of people," she said.

Susan grabbed a fork and Evie's empty hand and led her through the house, through a hallway and through the door to the office. Bookshelves lined the walls, and in the middle of the room there was a computer desk. They sat on the edge of the desk. Evie shoveled pie into her mouth. Susan talked about the room, how she used to paint beside the window while Harold wrote his reports and checked his e-mail. These days, Susan said, Harold did all that at the library, and she didn't paint as much as she used to.

The last bit of pie disappeared into Evie's mouth. She set the empty plate behind her on the desk. "Good pie," she said. "Did you make it?"

Susan turned her head from the window. Evie's eyes were bright and blue and wet, and her skin was smooth as the piecrust. She wondered what the girl wanted to do with her life, and what she would want to do with it in ten years.

"So that tree, you know, across the street?" Evie said. "The woman lived alone her whole life. At least that's what the article said. She must have been so lonely, you know. Just couldn't take the silence anymore. Can you imagine the neighbor, looking out her window that morning and seeing a fucking body there? Can you imagine?" Evie's lips were chapped and curved into a smile, despite the horror of her story.

Susan kissed Evie right on the mouth. She waited for something, anything, to happen, for Harold to burst through the door with a gaggle of new librarians eager to see the library, for a book to fall off the shelf, but silence hung all around them, so she stuck her hand into Evie's skunk hair and pressed harder into the kiss. Evie tasted like apples.

Now Susan stands before the window, trying to figure out which curve of the tree's trunk to start with. From the bottom up, one of the branches, the top? No, no. Something's missing, she thinks. I'm missing something.

Evie steps out her front door, a line of multicolor Christmas lights trailing behind her. She brings the ladder around the front of the house, leans it against the siding, and climbs. She stands on the top rung as she staples lights to her roof. Susan begins; she paints the curves of the body, the limbs, the fragile hands cupping the smallest slips of light.



The graveyard buck

BY LINDA WHITE

My father says, "Sometimes I worry that all the deer I killed are waiting for me to cross over." He falls silent but his watery blue eyes are anxious. What do you say to something like that?

It's no fun visiting Dad. He talks nonsense. He's 94 but he's always been with it.

I have plenty on my plate. Jeff, my son, acts like Ozzy Osbourne's love child. He hangs around in his room playing "metal" and I'm sure he's on something.

He won't visit his Grandfather. They used to be close but maybe Jeff can't stand to see the gnarled, bent old man Dad's become. He's like those dwarfed twisted aspen in the sand hills where he used to hunt.

The aide, Audrey, comes in with his meds.

"C'mon, Mr. Schantz. It's time for your pills." She hands him a little plastic cup with a variety of capsules. Obediently, Dad puts them in his mouth but when she offers water from the silver cap off the ice water container, he bats her hand away.

The metal cap hits the wall and clatters to the floor. Most of the water hits Audrey.

"Dad, for God's sake!" I exclaim. I get the water cup from the floor and put it on the bed table. Dad takes it and although his hand trembles a little, he pours his own water and swallows his pills. He stares at us.

"It's okay," says Audrey. "I'm sorry Mr. Schantz. I know you can take your own meds."

She fusses around, tidying the bed and when she leaves I follow her.

"What was that about?" I ask.

"He's frustrated. But I'm worried because he's so quiet. He just hasn't been himself the last little while. He's lost his appetite. Maybe there's something you can do."

I try to smile. "Thank you." Audrey waits and when the silence becomes uncomfortable, she goes.

"I have other patients," she says.

What does she expect me to do? Dad's an old man. He didn't exactly lead an exemplary life. All that red meat, hard liquor and no vegetables.

I go back to Dad's room. There's another 10 minutes before I can leave.

I'm 94. Useless old fucker but I can take my own damn pills. North Africa, Sicily, Holland during World War Two. Blood, mud, guts. But the Krauts didn't get me.

Our people were always hunters. We hunt but we eat. It's not like war with the killing for no reason.

I wish Julie would go home. Likely after my money. Never expected to have any. Margaret did the books. She knew how to apply to the government's farm programs. When's Julie going to leave?

She's not like her Mum. Dried up, miserable like a tough old cow. She visits because she's afraid people will talk if she

doesn't.

Roger, her husband. Pallid, pale Englishman. Teaches at the High School and acts like it's Oxford.

Julie's always unhappy. Maybe if we could have had other children. We sent her to that fancy school. Didn't make her happy. Made her meet Roger.

I miss Margaret. Where is she?

"I want to visit Margaret," I say.

"Dad, she's dead. You know that."

Like I'll forget that. "I want to go to the cemetery. You can take me when you come next time." I glare at her so she'll listen. Julie is stubborn.

The headstone is a shock. Shouldn't be. I chose it. I know my Margaret is gone. Granite and marble-cold and hard. The angel is dusty and streaked. I touch the engraving. Beloved Wife.

"Oh, Margaret." I didn't mean to speak aloud.

Julie stares. "What?"

"Nothing," I say and look away across the fields past the tough old poplar that protects Margaret. My mind drifts.

It's like Margaret's here. I smell her perfume.

"Dad, it's time to go," says Julie. "Roger will be wanting his tea."

"Can't Roger make his own tea?" I'm not ready to go.

Julie ignores my question.

"Did you see it?" I ask.

"See what?"

Julie never was interested in the natural world. Couldn't wait to escape to the city and now she's back.

"The deer. It doesn't matter."

Julie frowns.

Maybe Dad is developing dementia. Talking to himself, seeing imaginary deer. I don't know if visiting Mum's grave was a good idea. Still he made me promise to bring him again. It saved trying to think of things to say, and that's a good thing.

I drop Dad at the door of the Lodge. He shuffles off, a diminished figure hunched and thin. Funny, he was always so strong.

I gave my word so I keep it. Every two weeks all spring and summer, I take him to "see" Mum. I sit on the bench and he wanders around muttering. Thank God for my phone or I'd die of boredom.

Audrey, the caregiver stops me one day as I leave Dad after another graveyard visit.

She says, "These trips to see Margaret cheer your Dad up. It's so good for him to get out."

I nod and say something noncommittal. If only she knew. He sits by the grave mumbling to my mother. That's not normal but what am I supposed to do?

Waiting for Julie to pick me up. I can't wait to talk to Margaret. I asked the staff for paper because I forget things I want to tell her. I don't let Julie see my lists. They're in my pocket but I

*Weathered grey sky with clouds scudding along.
I smell snow and the wind is
mean against my face.*

never need them. If I write it down, I remember.

There she is. "I'm ready," I say and get up off the bench.

"We can't go today," she says. "It's getting too cold, Dad. I'm sorry."

I don't think. I just shove her. "We have to go," I say.

Julie stumbles and I see the flash of anger. When she catches her balance, her mouth is set in a tense line. I don't care.

"Then we'll go," she says, forcing the words past those tight lips.

It is a bitter day. Weathered grey sky with clouds scudding along. I smell snow and the wind is mean against my face.

Julie is silent with an expression darker than midnight. Crevices deepen around her mouth and I think of Margaret saying, "Do you want your face to freeze like that?"

I hunch into my parka. I fed cattle in much worse. They still need to eat. Julie huddles on the bench, her total focus on her phone. Stupid. Maybe I'll smash it.

But not now. Now I'll talk with Margaret. I tell her it's a late fall day. Snow is coming. Do you remember when we went to the mountains once Julie went to University?

The wind picks up. The grass undulates, brown and fluid. I remember all the past falls.

"It's time to go, Dad."

I want to argue but she might not bring me again. I nod and turn back with her.

The call comes in the morning. Even when you know it's coming, even when your father's 94 and even when you don't get along, you're never ready. I brush away a tear and hang up.

"Roger, Dad died in his sleep," I say.

"He had a good life," says Roger and that settles it for him. Just once I'd like to shake that phony British reserve. I admire it but right now I need support.

Audrey is waits at the door of the Lodge.

"I'm so sorry, Julie. Your Dad was a favourite of mine." She has tears in her eyes.

"Thank you," I say.

"I..." she shifts uncomfortably. "I can take you to see your father."

"God, no," I blurt. I do NOT want to see my dead father.

Audrey explains that they can contact the local funeral parlour for me, and save me making that part of the arrangements. I agree and leave. I can get Dad's few things tomorrow. Roger can help me.

When Jeff wakes, I tell him his grandfather has died. He just nods, goes back to his room, and closes the door. Discordant guitars clash with wailing voices as he turns his music up.

"It's a fine day for a funeral," says Roger. The sun is bright and the sky a deep blue you only see before the first snowfall. A few high clouds make wispy trails overhead. I want to get it over with. Jeff joins us sullenly.

When you die an old man, there are no friends left to hon-

our you and fewer enemies. Dad's is a small, mercifully brief service.

On the way to the cemetery, Roger says, "He wasn't a bad old chap." High praise from my husband. Jeff sniffs as he scrolls through messages on his phone. No comment, otherwise.

Grass crunches underfoot. We approach the coffin poised over the grave ready to be lowered into the dark, prairie earth. When the little band of mourners has gathered, the scripture is read. I step forward to place a single red rose on the rich oak of the casket. As I turn away, my heel catches. I try to recover and see a huge buck in front of the trees at the graveyard's edge. His tail flashes white and I catch a glimpse of high, wide antlers. He's gone.

Roger takes my arm but for a moment, I resist. I can smell perfume. Crisp autumn air flavoured with Evening in Paris. My mother loved that scent. Then the breeze carries the smell off and we are done.



Free line by Henry Peters



Waiting for an answer

BY LINDA BIASOTTO

You wrote return to sender on my envelope:
a long distance dismissal without the static hum-m.

I didn't know your mind was lost in a labyrinth
of excessive language, apartment walls mouthing threats

paranoia pulsing the alarm throughout your shriek zone
fearful messages of hate and destruction.

Here I waited, mouth stuck to cast iron obligation,
believing you'd once again chosen to skip free

along the Sunshine Coast, warming yourself in mist
while I froze in the panic of imagined loss.

Now I know you were bound in schizophrenic throes,
seeking a way out like a bird pipping through a concrete shell.

Mrs. Ogilvy

BY CHIEN-SHUN CHEN

Author's Note:

My name is Chien-Shun Chen and I am currently a third year medical student at the University of Toronto. It is with much enthusiasm that I submit a poem, titled "Mrs. Ogilvy," to Transition.

"Mrs. Ogilvy," while inspired by one particular patient I encountered during my psychiatry clerkship rotation, represents the desperate helplessness in all manic patients. In assessing a patient with mania I catch myself often with two thoughts: first, of being the novice medical student drowning under a sea of checklists; second, of being inexperienced enough to make too quick conclusions about this person in front of me. Neither, however, tells me the story of who the patient is as a person.

As I wrote "Mrs. Ogilvy" I was compelled to tell the story from the perspective of one who desperately tries to connect with reality when given any slight and transient thread of insight but fails time and again. I also wanted to tell this story

from the perspective of a small, frail, elderly woman with mild baseline dementia. Compassion, as I have found, is often helpful in clearing up judgment-laden distractions to the observing eye.

Mrs. Ogilvy's frustration lies in her lose-lose situation: while manic, she is profoundly frustrated that her environment doesn't share her appreciation of reality. As her mania is resolving – or fluctuating to a slight depressive baseline – she is helplessly frustrated with what the little insight she retains reveals to her: a grandmother, a mother, a wife, a beloved member in the community now bed-ridden and alone among the sickest of the sickest in the psychiatric unit and treated as one. Her thoughts and wishes seem inconsequential to a swarm of doctors and nurses with their own agendas who take every word she utters and emotion she expresses with diagnostic skepticism. Normalcy is a laughable luxury – Mrs. Ogilvy's experience in life has been this: to the world, she is the crazy old lady when ill; when well, she is the crazy old lady on commercial break.

Oh, the commotion – it wakes me night and again!
What ungodly hour, those barbaric spanners:
Have you no decency, have you no manners?
In the darkness of night, they let them loose...
Murderers, killers, running around with a noose;
I can only imagine, angelic perfection that is me,
It is me that they seek – hurriedly, to come before my knees.

This hospital – as they call it – oh, what a dump!
"Mrs. Ogilvy", they tell me, "you are on the psychiatric floor."
A prison! More like it – I'm in a dreadful room behind a locked door!
"You have bipolar – an acute manic episode, that warrant your stay with us."
What nonsense! What rubbish! What f... Ooops – I'm not usually one to cuss.
I am important. I am intelligent. I am fit as a horse;
I may be 92, but I'm certainly not manic, nor do I need a lithium course.

continued . . .

Muffin, porridge, black coffee and apple juice –
And a side of those frightful spiders, crawling all over my breakfast food.
What do you mean you don't see them? They're on the walls and the ceiling, to boot!
Plump as a grape, red as an orange – those six-legged creatures, as real as they get.
Oh, you just missed it over there! Here, let me catch one for you with this net.
Is that line moving on the wallpaper? Oh, I must get home to paint the wall!
The Queen is coming to see me; I must pick out my finest gown for the ball!

Hello? Hello? Hello? HELLO?!

How dare you not attend to me – do you not know who I am?
I'm the top lady in Canada. I have tea with the Queen, with biscuits and jam.
I need to be changed, and while you're at it, undress me too.
See, isn't my body perfect – even more beautiful and glorious than in youth.
Don't touch my hair, or my thighs, and definitely don't touch my arms.
Now come wash me in the shower, and let me show you some of my charms.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Ogilvy, may I come in for a visit?”

The baby doctor is here. That handsome young man. He can stay for as long as he wishes.
But a wild imagination he must have – those silly questions, as relevant as my dirty dishes.
“How are you doing, Mrs. Ogilvy, and how is your mood today?”
I am on top of the world! I feel light, and pretty, and joyous and gay!
“Any thoughts of hurting yourself, in any way or shape or form?”
Ludicrous! Wouldn't that be a waste – a perfect specimen, to misshape or deform.

“Do you know why you are in the hospital, Mrs. Ogilvy?”

‘Be damned if I know! I want to go home. I want to get out of here!’
“We think you have a mental illness; we'd like to help you make the spiders disappear.”
There is nothing wrong with me! Why do you keep me against my will?
“Do you think you have bipolar?” “Do you think you're manic?” Just a few more questions, part of the drill.
“Do you think you need to be here?” “Do you think you need treatment?” “Do you...” “Do you...?”
Stop your trickery! No more, I cry. My words are twisted, to keep me in this indeterminate queue.

I am finally left alone.

It is nighttime now – those murderers and killers are soon to be roaming the hall.
I am helpless. I am lost. I am a 92-year-old frail woman; I am nothing but a thrall.
I need to pay my taxes. I need to paint the wall ... much to do to get ready for the Crown.
Perhaps I can escape. If I dig quickly, I can get through to the other side of town.
This Ecstasy that ravenously flirts over the precipice of my Emptiness: I cannot explain.
Would you come sit with me for a while? Just until I fall asleep...lest I do not wake again.

Just another manic Wednesday

BY MATT DRUMMOND

Three a.m. can't sleep.
There's nothing on TV.
Need to bake buns.
How much flour? How much yeast?
Could baking sooth the savage beast
One batch? Three?
Mixed-up mind, mixed up dough.
Life imploding;
Relapse.

Incoherent mumbling.
Sleep? Not tonight.
Blood flows through my veins.
Short circuit.
What the hell?
“Hi Matt.”
Heart attack!
Brick wall.



I fantasize about being in her head

BY CATHERINE R. FENWICK

(from report "Are All Poets Insane?"
The New York Times, July 18, 1889)

In the hearing in the contest over the will of Miss M. Louise Comstock before Surrogate Ransom: W. Bourke Cockran, counsel for the contestant, George W. Comstock, an uncle of Miss Comstock, put physicians on the stand, who, testifying as experts, declared that the actions of Miss Comstock, as told, were such as are characteristic of insane persons.

Her letters put in evidence showed the disease from which she died, paralysis of the brain. One based his opinion partly on the fact that Miss Comstock had occasionally written poetry.

One expert thought that all poets were insane more or less, he mentioned Milton and Walt Whitman in particular. From all he had heard of Shakespeare, however, he believed he was a man of considerable ability.

Just another day in the news

BY CATHERINE R. FENWICK

forty year old man
pleads guilty of possessing
child pornography

gunman opens fire
killing eight twenty wounded
kids attending school

peace talks may resume
palestine and israel
is there hint of hope

boy looks through a hole
fucking missile hit his home
who will talk of peace

child's birthday party
saturday at chuck e cheese
two moms duke it out

a man asks his friend
to shoot him in the shoulder
help him escape work

three teens have been charged
put pet cat in microwave
cruel animals

a man falls eight floors
trying to elude police
alcohol factor

abandoned baby
children's aid society
parents not around

New market trends

BY CATHERINE R. FENWICK

Aquarian fashion footwear,
water filled clear plastic heels,
with two goldfish, to keep each other company.
Dress up these teeny tanks
mini coral, air stones, coloured beads,
marine greenery. Screw top for feeding,
cleaning, replacing ones that die.

Pouch puppies, designer doggie carriers
with purse straps. Couture clothing, barktoria's secret,
mardiwoof mint, babywoof blue, woofle pink,
ruffington steele.

Poochie in your pocket, tiny terriers,
maltese, toy spaniels, havanese,
mini greyhounds, pekingese.

Insect jewellery, Madagascar Hissing Cockroach
on a brooch. Piece of gold leash, welded to its carapace,
other end attached to Swarovski crystal.

Wandering conversation starter.
When not worn, may be kept in a terrarium,
with a wet sponge and a vegan diet.

What next? Living ornaments
hung from body piercings.
How far will we go?



Duck Walk by Henry Peters

Exercise in infinitives

[The last 10 lines of this poem were omitted from its initial publication in TRANSITION Winter 2014. The Editor apologizes.]

BY KIM GOLDBERG

for Roy, 1952-2014

To frame a concept.
To pull back a curtain.
To reveal a narrow passage.
To allow a mind to roam beyond a boundary.
To deactivate a facebook account.
To know the meaning of emigration.
To leave a camera and laptop on a desk in a bedroom.
To recall the sound of waxwings feasting on scarlet hawthorn berries last winter.
To mutter 'bye' to a roommate passed in a hall.
To step into the anonymity of a city.
To feel the pulse drop, the blood settle.
To travel unrecognized.
To wander the streets and seawall for hours.
To weigh the density of matter in a black hole.
To ponder options.
To discover the presence of absence.
To reflect upon a journey.
To storyboard alternate endings.
To buy a ferry ticket to Vancouver.
To catch the last sailing.
To stand against the rail, wind buffeting face.
To permit this cleansing by salt spray and keen of gulls.
To watch the night rise.
To take the feeble light of a new moon as a sign.
To be thankful, in a way.
To wait until the vessel is in the middle of the Georgia Strait.
To realize that the quest for signs is bullshit—the answer lies within.
To tell oneself: If you are going to do something, do it for the right reason, or no reason, or even the wrong reason if that reason is honestly your own and not the product of some convenient cultural fairytale concocted to relieve the brutal tonnage of our universal randomness.
To inhale deeply.
To think of tidepools and suction cup feet and soft fleshy trunks swaying like palm trees.
To swell with cohesion.
To lean out over the deck rail.
To pivot on a rib cage.
To forgive all (and me too I hope, for I now realize in my selfishness, that is the reason for this poem).
To bear witness to Newtonian physics.
To fly with the night, invisible as the pigeon guillemots scuppering along on stubby wings.
To preconceive a hail of rhinestone bubbles ensleaving an immaculate being.
To review the etymology of cradle (from proto-Germanic kradulas: basket).
To reverse-engineer a placenta complete with amniotic fluid.
To turn back time's arrow.
To be a zygote again, embracing all potentialities.
To twist upon entry.
To kiss everything at once.



Love songs

BY AYAMI GREENWOOD

[Ayami's poem was omitted from the P.A WFYL Group's contribution to Newsletter #3, "a catalogue of love" (Spring 2015). The Editor apologizes.]

1.

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

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

2.

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

3.

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



Jules by Rolli

Sadness

BY SHIRLEY M. HAMILTON

Sadness creeps into my very soul
As the silent fog slips off the water.
I sit and wait for what I do not know.
The children come. They play around.
The children leave and silence reigns.
The fog creeps up again.
I sit and wait.

Ode to the mosquito

BY gillian harding-russell

From the kingdom Animalia (like me!)
phylum Anthropoda (like me!) class, Insecta
order diptera, you come from the family

Culcidae (not to be
confused with the less influential
imposter Crane Fly or Chironomid bearing false colours
and coat of arms, from egg to imago)

You are a powerful singer of Trance
and a dancer, too, coming at a low techno-buzz...
dive about ears as I tread through rain-drenched field,
your siren's intention to distract –

Or is that *bezerko* a battle cry? You land
like a ballet dancer

a pirouette on the back
of my wrist I hardly notice
a tickle...

until you lower military mouthparts
and bite down, prickle (aquiline proboscis not
a drill but pain-killing syringe and
blood-suctioning pipe), I flap, too late
you fly off

white mountain of sweet blood
filled with anti-clotting spit inwardly
explodes, an itch demands it be SCRATCHEDRIGHTNOW!

. . . but, not wishing
to satisfy, you, oh no! Lucifer 'little fly'
having lost the light in undistinguished
mucous-coloured wings eons since
creation...I make a fingernail cross, exacto
on your telltale insect marko,
just so...

Meditation on a compost beetle

BY gillian harding-russell

A beetle rises from under a stray cabbage leaf
grips pincers, pulls itself over orange peels
and coffee grit to reach the edge of moldy
wooden crate framing the compost heap
a walking saurian
battle-monger and scavenger among the microbes
carnivorous but able to put vegetarians
to shame as he cleans up the place
turns everything into fertile loam.
Magical mundane creature
I can only love remotely
creating itself out of dirt
and we created from like
recycled materials myriad slender
times removed from the earth (under the
microscope, a world of unrealized citizens
come alive in common dirt!)

Ode to a dandelion

BY gillian harding-russell

pis-en-lit or coeur-de-lion, that flower in front
of my foot at first warmth of summer
is you. While vexed ones contact Weed Man
tap out angry letters to the editor about your unsightly
self, I see a cheery cosmos light up the green
beside the grey road and elbow-slushy ditches that will
it's true, turn into old ladies with white-permed hair
on scrawny-collared calyx necks. (But do you remember
those seed-candles we blew out to make our childhood wishes
come true?) Look at that neon-striped city employee
who crouches over with spraying apparatus like an evolved bee!
The lesser species extinct with the arrival of this postmodern marvel
and the paper shadow of an orange butterfly, once monarch
of two continents, stuck to a broken tuft of straw.

envoi:

BY gillian harding-russell

Still, coming from ancient family
brought low, as I say, you cannot win
with chemicals city workers dump
seasonally into the ditch

to kill your seven-year spawn...But I sneeze
at the snuff of ubiquitous poisonous dust
that kills you off (at least before me)
and the next hatch of spawn.

Next day after the rain, a meaty snarl
of worms limp-floating in the pesticide puddle.
Do not eat Mimir's cancerous brains, I warn
the lusty impervious crow of poor recall
watched by his sharper black brethren.

Fly slaughter

BY gillian harding-russell

A fly in dirty armour sprung to fat life
after nine months winter (what food to
sustain such great blue-bottomed girth?)

more fantastic, burst from a dirt grain
of ovum, hatched between window panes
and seasons, so now I'm doomed to listen
to its drone, lazy or excited, up against

the interrupting glass until
I smudge out its operating
lights with wetted rag. (The fly-swatter
might crack the window with its whack
at an insect's evading sass).

Fly escaped—
with this pair of uncrumpled cellular wings
come alive, monster generations sprout out of the heat
...ach! black hairy legs in the kitchen, and

so I swat this forerunner again
on cupboard doors catching this vagabond
squatter at last in the curving
shadow of the pear bowl

existential in its leaning curves
as at a futuristic airport.



I was born of fire

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

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

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

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

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

sightless

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

she is a blind animal moving toward the sound
of a heartbeat scabbling weeping across the cold
linoleum begging and pleading she is a raw
and open wound unable to find healing only
pain/pain/pain throbbing in her red and bloodied
her screams echo in her own hearing like the call
down a bottomless well and there is no word
there is no word called love then she is sightless
as a nest of baby mice that pink and pale
and helpless let a foot slam down on her take her out
of all this let her go

taken away

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

through jackpine and tamarac
you climb the root knotted trail
to the head of the rapids
where you wade deep
push off and out
into the Churchill's foam and crash

the river owns you now

sealsleek you ride the dark center
through this howling white wound of water
beneath you gigantic heads of boulders
grazing your toe tips
as you are thundered along
the constant going under

your whole self just taken away

then sudden as that
you reach the eddy downstream
where you kick kick hard
toward the cat tails at the water's edge
heave yourself up on the stonecobbled shore
your heart's current dancing
to the way the water wants you

ready to give yourself
to this river all over again

shadow woman

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

last night you caught me
cast in darkness
this morning
a new beginning
your arms
have found me
in our bed
and I grieve
for all that my heart
won't stop wanting
for what's lost
to the shadow in me

unsent song for my sister

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

this is for the days
when all I can do
is listen to you cry
curled in confusion
so lost in your losses

for the days
when what is left broken
lies scattered all around us

those days
when all I can do
is take your hand
and lead you
like a small tired child to your bed

when I can't do anything to help you
for those days
when there is nothing
I can do either
for me

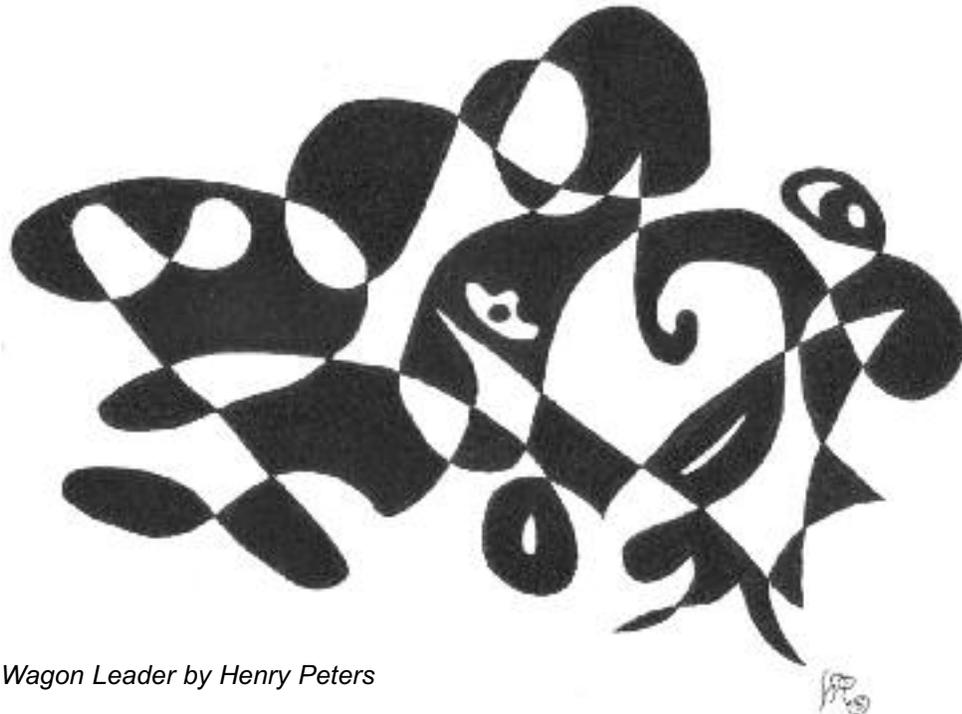
Fox poem

BY LYNDA MONAHAN

for months now
I've not seen you
and there you are again
a body of light
resplendent
a quick flicker
of copper/gold through the spruce grove
then gone again
leaving the space of you
shadows in the snow

come back come back
I want to call
wait for me my friend
let me run with you
through the murmur of wind
swift through the riot of trees
the dark green surge surrounding us

oh let me run with you
through the chilled air
the two of us
like flames
burning on the snow



Wagon Leader by Henry Peters



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

BY CHRISTINE WESSEL THOMPSON

the thrill of success inspires stress and the anxious response of “what if?” and the nagging worries deposit themselves in her brain like a freight train

chugging endlessly to the same destination

and then the intensity flows into her nerve endings curbing any joy that might sing praise and her days are filled with angst over friends, beauty ,school and

the overwhelming need to exceed to the point past perfection

even when she stares at her reflection she sees flaws staring back at her, she doesn't see herself as I see her

I'm not sure she ever will

as she drowns in the well of doubt, never figuring out that this obsessive compulsive behaviour won't save her from disappointment

it just infects her deeper

picking biting pulling at imperfections while she copes with habit and worry

I can't seem to keep her grounded in mediocrity where at least she can breathe for the time being where she can just be happy and free

where her mother can watch her sweet girl be weightless in happiness where I can watch her settle her mind in tranquility and bliss

instead I worry

is her fate depression and self-medicating turmoil trading one problem for another and several more years of strategies and therapy or

is this just my daughter being herself and come what may she is amazing and funny, intelligent and considerate

she is a gift

I just want her to believe it

Of these things I'm certain

BY MICHAEL TRUSSLER

Arthritis is having the dull teeth
of a vampire living inside. And mental

illness, as everyone knows, is endless and
rocking and the simple facts of many
disappearances. It's having to smoke
your fingers into the colour of cockroaches.
You can't quite picture the donut shop by yourself
someone needs to drive you there.
It's stop, and turn

toward yesterday's headlights. The sink, you can't
see yourself in the sink or any other surfaces.

It hurts to walk and the world's a space that finds you.
If it doesn't rain, if it doesn't rain. And THEN, just beyond

the gas station, it's truer than anything
that some
children
have chalked
some stars on the sidewalk, a moon no one could believe in,
a cardboard truck, and incredibly

these words floating over everything
in simplest, impossible
blue: *We Know*

Battleford

BY ROSE WILLOW

I catch acorns when I stick out
my tongue, some magic they drop
from the oak when I pass by
to wash my hair in the rain
barrel, for a rinse, I roll
around on the chamomile lawn.
Inside, I bite a balloon, view the
blow up on the wall, some chicken
plucks a guitar, one leg in a
silk stocking. Arm tracks
punctured, a cat's claw
scrapped down, swept by
broomsticks, the chokecherry
juice drips black red.
Breakdown, some kind of trip.

Electric shock,
"Smarten up," they say.
Well, you can't slice a raw egg
with a chain-saw, comb your
hair with an axe.
In the cocoon of isolation,
I see a tale grow long; it
refuses to hide under my
skirt. I can shrink as small
as a pea, hide under a mattress,
aggravate a foot in a shoe, know how
to avoid pea soup. I will again
grow tall, hiss fire, when next
the screw opens the door.

Conditional love

BY P. J. WORRELL

I could have said...

If your blankets don't smell of urine
and there are sheets on the beds,
If there's milk in the fridge
with the Kool-Aid and Pizza Pops,
If you move the mountain of dirty clothes
away from the furnace pilot light,
If the children don't have head lice,
and

If you go to AA meetings
and take your Bi-Polar meds
and have a vasectomy,
Then...

I'll come and take care of the children
while you're at the hospital
helping your wife give birth
to my grandchild.

But I didn't say it,
because conditional love is no love at all.

Wait

BY DENISE WILKINSON

quench my thirst with
laughter

lend me your warmth
melt the frost

empty cold like
forever

insulate me
smile your light

happiness fragile as
an icicle

pierced joy
pick up shatters

share
life giving water

wait
for my sun to return

I don't like how the frost comes



Hawk-ing for your life

BY TED DYCK

Macdonald, Helen. *H is for Hawk*. Penguin, 2014. 300 pp,

One might not have thought that the practice of *hawking* (an everyday version of the ancient and noble art of *falconry*) would have anything to do with mental health – but one would be wrong. For this is the subtext of Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk*. In dealing with her grief at the death of her father, Macdonald, an experienced falconer and research scientist at Cambridge University, becomes obsessed with training a goshawk, the most intractable of raptors, to hunt. This exercise leads her to identify first with the hawk, then with the hawk’s natural prey, and finally to confront her own depression and get professional help. Such a bare summary of the book’s *content* misses the equally important implication of the book’s existence: for the final step in Macdonald’s journey toward health, still ongoing, is, in Leonard Cohen’s words, to “write everything down.” Thus does *hawking* for your life morph into *writing* for your life.

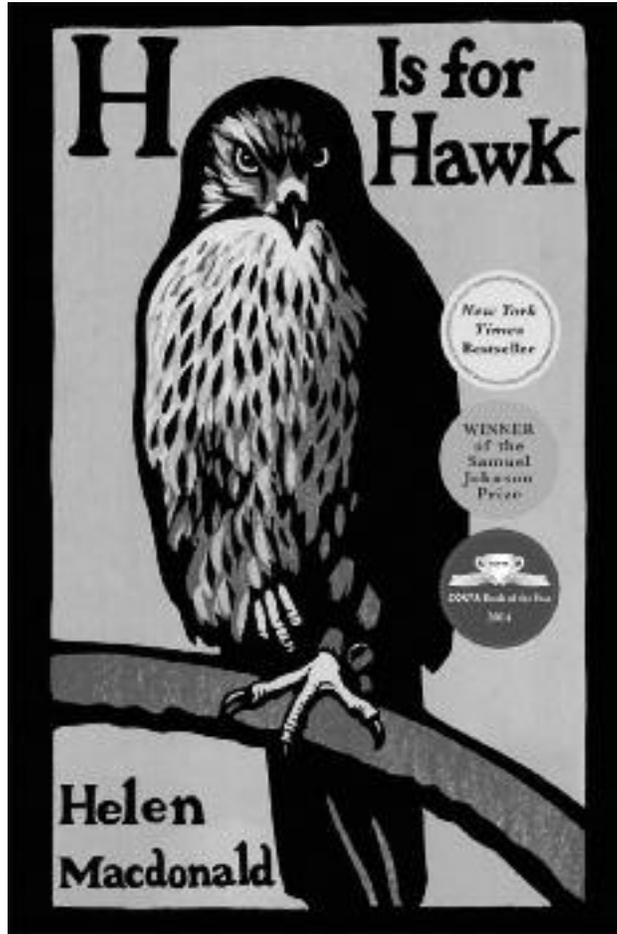
Macdonald traces her “pilgrim’s” progress in a supple and lucid prose that has won her the Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction (UK 2014). Her bereavement on the death of her father, for example, is palpable: “Robbed. Seized. It happens to everyone. But you feel it alone. Shocking loss isn’t to be shared ...” (Macdonald 13).

The hawk, Mabel (named after *amabilis*, loveable), too, is totally present: “Formidable talons, wicked, curved black beak, sleek café-au-lait front streaked thickly with cocoa-coloured teardrops” (65). Macdonald’s deepening despair is tracked by her relationship to the hawk she is training. Its first free flight – “I had taken flight [with it] to a place from which I didn’t

want to return” (177) – is an escape into an impossible freedom which is actually a trap – “I’d wanted fly with the hawk to find my father; find him and bring him home” (220). With the insight that she is more hunted than hunter – “I am more of a rabbit than a hawk” (223), Macdonald sinks inexorably toward a diagnosis of her depression. When her doctor says, simply, “Helen, we can help you” (224), she is astonished into the rising hope that these words might entail.

No doubt I’m influenced in my reading of *H is for Hawk* by my own experience, in which fishing the cutthroat led to writing the cutthroat led to an understanding that I was writing for my life. And my journey, if it mirrors Macdonald’s at all, is in turn mirrored in the paths of all those I have met along its way.

Note: I encourage readers to investigate both the companion book that Macdonald critiques in hers (T.H. White’s *The Goshawk* [1951]) and the BBC documentary based on it (<<http://www.careyblyton.com/??=Goshawk>>.



FitzGerald's search for answers

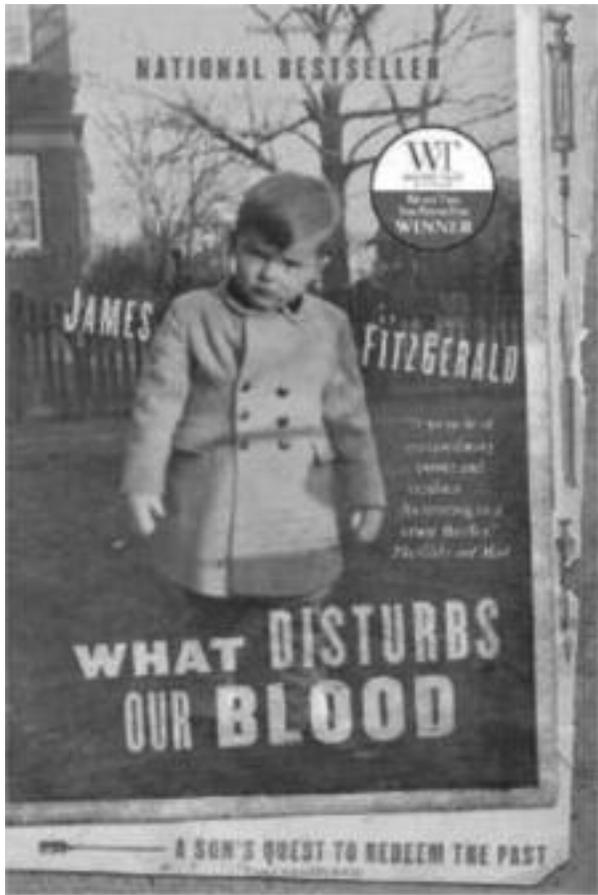
BY KEITH FOSTER

FitzGerald, James. *What Disturbs Our Blood: A Son's Quest to Redeem the Past*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2010. 497 pp.

Part detective story, part family history, part genealogical quest, *What Disturbs Our Blood* is a full-blown psychological thriller. Author James FitzGerald sets out to determine why his father, an eminent, highly successful doctor who appeared to have everything to live for, tried to end his life.

Right from the outset, FitzGerald leaves readers with a sense of impending doom. His numerous allusions to death – his “hated necktie feeling as tight as a noose” around his neck – build suspense. His creative non-fiction reads like a novel, its strong literary quality reflected in his powerful use of language. Yet he writes about so many suicides, especially the high rate in the medical profession, that if this were written as fiction, it would stretch credibility beyond belief.

The book comprises several stories in one. It's a family history set against the backdrop of world events. FitzGerald's detective work is all part of his obsessive quest to sleuth out the secret behind his grandfather's suicide and his father's attempted suicide.



Born in Toronto in 1950, FitzGerald is haunted by the past – his grandfather's, his father's, and his own. He himself suffered a devastating blow when Sally, the object of his “first rush of erotic longings,” was killed in a freak traffic accident. In tracing his family's blood lines in Ireland, he comes across a mouldy grave that bears his own name.

FitzGerald grew up in a dysfunctional family, saying he “could get more laughs in church” than at home. His father was domineering, almost dictatorial, like a “captain controlling the ship, indifferent to the preferences of the second-class passengers.” He was a hard man to know, as if wearing a permanent “Do Not Disturb” sign on his forehead, or a mask like the Lone Ranger or Montreal Canadiens goaltender Jacques Plante.

FitzGerald had a love-hate relationship with his father – desperately wanting to love and feel loved, but feeling ignored and, as a result, despising his father. His father showed an almost sadistic cruelty, sending the children upstairs just as the Toronto Maple Leafs were winning after the second period. Although his father “loved watching high-performance athletes,” it never occurred to him to “step outside and pass a puck or lob a ball” to his own children.

Even at college, FitzGerald could not escape his father's influence, finding himself sitting in the very desk where his father had long ago carved his initials. Upper Canada College set exceedingly high standards, training its students to become leaders, like “a superman who learns to fly before he learns to walk.” Boxing was compulsory. Students were required to punch each others' faces until they were bloody pulps.

Negativity and sarcastic volleys of verbal oppression by people around him suffocated FitzGerald. “Random acts of humiliation of students by teachers – and students by students – seemed a near-daily occurrence.” When he scored a perfect mark in English class, his teacher admonished him: “What happened? This is not down to your usual standard.”

FitzGerald's mother, a bombshell of a beauty, unleashed a bombshell of her own when she revealed that her husband was suicidal. She then left FitzGerald's highly emotional sister in charge of him, knowing full well he intended to take his own life.

In contrast, FitzGerald's grandfather had heroic qualities. Through the Connaught Laboratories which he established, he produced numerous vaccines that were free for the poor and saved millions of lives. To show there was no danger in taking the vaccine, Grandfather Gerry made a public display of vaccinating himself. He also worked closely with Frederick Banting and Charles Best to produce insulin. Best said that without FitzGerald's grandfather, “There would have been no insulin.”

In the course of his research, scouring medical archives, FitzGerald finds a cache of his grandfather's letters in which he repeatedly recites remorse for his “unforgiveable sin.” Pursuing them, FitzGerald discovers that his grandfather took his own life. What was this unforgiveable sin, and why the cover-up, the vast thundering silence by his family and colleagues? This is not a comfortable read, delving to the depths of



the tenderest parts of the human psyche. Like electroshock therapy, this powerfully written book shocks and jolts its readers. It will definitely leave an impression and is not recommended for hypochondriacs or the squeamish.

FitzGerald detests his family's symbols of success, describing his father as "slumped in his chair before the altar of the TV" screen "as if hooked up to an IV bag," and referring to an elegant liquor cabinet as a "high-end casket." Rather than

follow in his father's footsteps, he carves out his own path, following his heart's desire to become a writer.

With his harsh commentary on our way of life, FitzGerald strives to understand why his father was driven to suicide in spite of his outwardly successful life. We live in a society where success and status are idolized but weakness and failure are not tolerated. This needs to change. Surely living is more important than succeeding.

The broken word not so broken

BY IRENE GROBOWSKY

Hill, Alan. *The Broken Word*. New Westminster, BC: Silver Bow Publishing, 2013. 71 pp.

The Broken Word by Alan Hill is a poetical autobiographical journey dealing with despair, tumult, chaos within and without, hope and hard-earned inner calm. In a brief 71 pages, the author has dealt more meaningfully and effectively with the physiological and psychological effects of schizophrenia than any academic medical text ever could. John Donne's "No man is an island..." is challenged, for with broken words humans do become islanded beings. Hill makes this point when he describes "the dark wounds/of the communication lines/moving inwards/into places we could not see or comprehend" (20).

One of the saddest pieces is about the still-born, the words unspoken. In "Becoming Speechless" an entire lifetime is covered with "they mapped themselves to shape for unripe words/that never quite got spoken," leaving a relationship stranded "in the matrimony of a titanic quiet" (34).

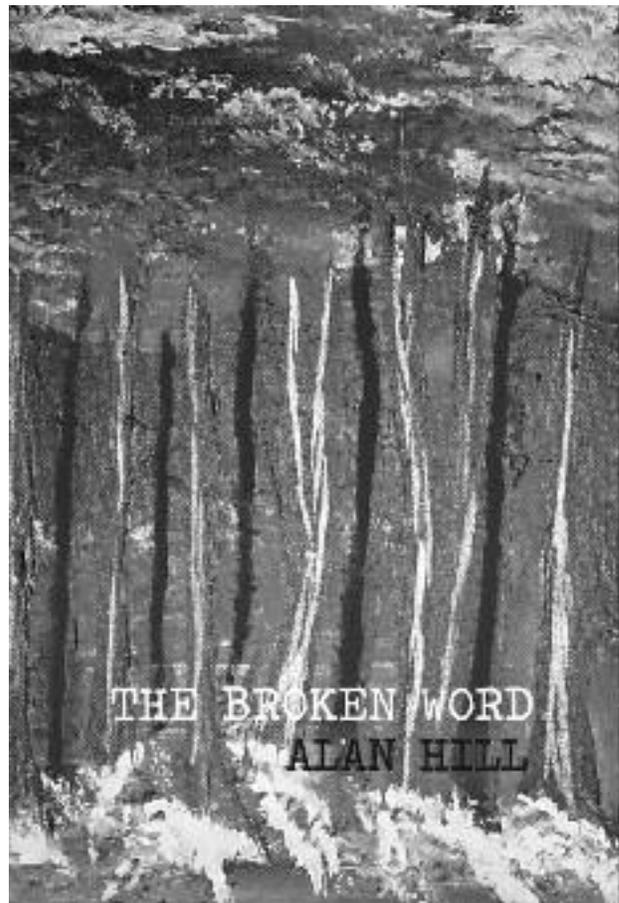
Adolescent hormones and schizophrenia are a potent mix, and Hill deals with it in "Centerfold" by taking an unexpected turn. He speaks of his brother's fascination with pornographic magazines, mentioning "paper batons of rolled flesh" (37), then goes on with well-chosen imagery to make the sexual links: "nipple ring stars/rising/themselves up hard against the dark/beneath a wide thigh of moon..." (37). Here his relationship with the brother is that of protector.

Woven throughout is the author's guilt that he was not the afflicted one and guilt that whatever help and comfort he offered within the family unit would never be enough.

Despite the title, the very fragmentation of language and its re-assembly from vowel to consonant, to word, phrase, sentence, and finally paragraph serve as metaphor for the fragmentation and re-integration of the individual personality. Some words will always remain broken, but hard-won objectivity can mean acceptance and healing. Words have enabled Hill to embrace the pain and guilt and move beyond to objectivity.

As the poet Jane Hirschfield says, a good poem should open a window, provide a wider vista, give us a new way of seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting. This collection of stripped-to-the-bone poetry certainly does that. Not only the reader gets this experience, for there is a sense that the author has also experienced a re-visioning of his own life so that he can say with wonder "where did it all go right?" (70).

Words may be broken, but they can save.



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Frequent Regina SK contributor. The Gazebo, second one-act comedy, performed by Regina Little Theatre spring 2015. Article on the Barr Colonists forthcoming in Canada's History.

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Small town AB retired teacher and writer. Enjoys reading, photography, walking her dogs, camping, gardening, and friends. Mystery novel in its third draft.

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WORRELL, P.J.

SK author of Proud flesh (2014), a collection of stories shortlisted for two Saskatchewan Book Awards 2015. One foot in Swift Current, the other in a cabin at a northern lake.



Art by Donald Bird



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

PRESENTATIONS and WORKSHOPS

Suicide

- u **Speaking of Suicide** - an introduction to the topic of suicide awareness
- u **safeTALK** - Suicide Alertness for Everyone
A half-day (3.5 hour) workshop
- u **ASIST** - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills - 2-day skills-building training to provide suicide first aid interventions
- u **Empowering Teens** to prevent suicide
- u **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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All materials can be borrowed directly through our web-site at

sk.cmha.ca

(Click on the Library button)
visit us in person or call

1-800-461-5483



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Mental health for all

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RURAL COMMITTEES:
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2014

Online Therapy USER Fact Sheet

Online Therapy USER

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

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ONLINE THERAPY IN SASKATCHEWAN:

Call:(306)337-3331
Email:
Online.Therapy.User@uregina.ca
Or
Visit: www.onlinetherapyuser.ca



University
of Regina



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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