

The Externalist:

A Journal of Perspectives



fiction by [Ace Boggess](#) and [Gavin S. Lambert](#)

nonfiction by [Lindsay Tang](#)

poetry by [Ed Zahniser](#), [Romy Piccolella](#), and [Jennifer Koiter](#)

and featured artist [Jim Fuess](#)

Issue 5, December 2007

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Featured Artist: Jim Fuess

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Cover Art *Mary #1* by Jim Fuess

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A Note from the Editor

As we prepare to close 2007, it seems that we're preparing to close an important moment in history. Americans have begun facing new challenges and ethical dilemmas in the past year. Some on our soil, some well beyond our borders, and others in the closer realm of our homes and workplaces. Against a backdrop of two wars, we find ourselves wondering about the state of our society. As a country, we are young, and I find myself asking how much we've grown. There is no single answer, but as humans have done since the invention of writing, we can turn to literature and art for clues to the perceptions changing our world.

In this longer-than-usual issue, themes are not as common as shared ideas and emotions. Our Editor's Choice feature, "First Date" by Ace Boggess, is a story about two people reaching out through less-than-desirable circumstances. With dogs as central characters, D.L. Luke ponders materialism in "Elmer's Gift" while Gavin S. Lambert confronts issues of masculinity in "Deek's Philosophies." Lindsay Tang bravely talks about her battle with bulimia in her essay "Epilogue."

The poetry in this issue is as varied as the prose—from Michael Shorb's narrative about the development of illegal aphrodisiacs in "Man Bites Tiger" to Deborah DeNicola's biting commentary on war in "Sestina in One Story." Two first-time-published poets, Cheryl Fruhling and O.P.W. Fredericks, look at people responding to change that seems to have occurred without them.

While a thematic presence in this issue seems lacking, all of the work herein is tied with a common thread: people adapting—or not adapting—to a world so full of change and confusion that every perspective, every perception, holds an answer of its own.

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Editors' Choice

Editor's Appreciation

In "First Date," Ace Boggess captures a subtle sense of humans in difficult circumstances - not the need to correct those circumstances or change events that are unchangeable, but the need to connect to others with shared experiences, the need to be near something familiar. The characters in Boggess's story aren't full of rage or self-pity, but rather a quiet acquiescence. That the reader wishes the characters were impassioned, but loves them more because they aren't, is a paradox unsettling in its subtle commentary on our society.

First Date

by Ace Boggess

His mittened hand slips out of a coat pocket. The pocket's warm—flannel sewn over double like a folded blanket—but the air's icy as a winter rain even through wool. It stings his bare fingertips most. But he knows now's the time. Reaching out, he locks an arm around hers, elbows hooking, the canvas of her top coat snuffling against him.

She turns to him and grins like she feels human, feels the moment, or just feels. She fakes a shiver, the real ones already frozen in her back and shoulders.

He doesn't try to kiss her. Not now. Not yet. He knows it's coming, though. He knows. She won't deny him that. More. Whatever.

They spent the evening together as if by fate. Neither asked and neither answered. They just showed up as they always did on a Friday night, standing near the confluence with their friends. But they weren't in the mood for a party. So, one of them walked off along the bank of the Ohio, and the other followed. Which did which, and which the other? It's not clear they knew.

The two walked in silence for a while, the Pittsburgh air so cold it turned the hair in their noses to crystal, and their words too when they tried to speak. Every now and then, one of them reached out a hand to point at a house

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across the river shining its goddamned festive Christmas lights. They both enjoyed the decorations, but they hated Christmas just like so many of the younger folks they knew. Sometimes they spotted a pigeon brazenly hunting scraps, or a seagull far from home, friends, comfort—birds as miserable as they were, or as they would've been if not for the company.



Crystalline Melody provided by O.P.W. Fredericks

They must have walked a mile before she said, "My daughter's been dead almost six years, and I still miss her." Her voice sounded grainy and hoarse as if from cigarettes she rarely smoked.

His was serene as the river as he said, "Life's a funny thing. It gives you the willies sometimes." But he shut up after that and listened. He was a good listener, and she liked that.

"It hurts me every day. Try to drown it some with Turkey, but it floats to the top and laughs." She told him about the car wreck, how she was talking on her cell phone and trying to listen to Rush Limbaugh on the radio and changing lanes to get around the milk truck with the driver inside singing Christmas carols and, and, and. . . . She told him she didn't even see the truck that hit her. She said she was in a coma for two weeks before she heard the news.

He didn't interrupt her. He said, "Uh huh," and "What then?" to keep her going, but he never threw out a pithy line or promised, It's all right, it's okay, it's. . . .

Several times, she gave a tired smile to say thanks. So many of the folks she knew just waited for their chance to speak, taking every opportunity to compare her story with theirs or offer solutions they couldn't use themselves but expected her to accept like miracles. He wasn't like that. He never offered his story, though she'd heard it already from the others: the credit card debts, the unemployment checks, the re-po men hauling off his pickup truck. She felt the two of them were the same, even without similar lives. Neither needed comparisons or kind words for feeling better. They never felt better, not even munching on dollar hamburgers at the Mickey D's.

She studies his hard, cracked face like bleached granite buried under leaves. His bushy brown beard would've been his greatest pride in another lifetime centuries ago. Now it just seems warm—something to nestle under on a cold night. "You want to go home with me?" she says.

"Would be magic," he tells her.

She lifts her hands and tugs the blue toboggan down around her weathered ears. "Your place or mine?" she jokes.

He doesn't laugh. The question needs an answer he doesn't have.

All he had was half a pint of Johnny Walker red label, but he shared it with her as they walked. It warmed them on the inside, though their skin felt colder through the heavy clothes. "Seems a shame to throw away the bottle," he said.

"Can't save it."

"Ever put a message in one?"

She shrugged. "Guess not," she said.

"Want to?" He eyed her cautiously, hoping she wouldn't laugh.

"Why not?"

They searched the bank for scraps of paper and a pen. They retrieved an empty cigarette pack that they tore apart and turned to the blank side, each taking half. They only found one pen. Just a half a pen, really. Frozen and shattered. He shook it until it started to write. Then he handed it to her. "Ladies first," he said.

She waited, staring at the blank page like a young writer searching for a poem. Then she scribbled large letters big enough for him to read:

nothing's as
bad as it feels
right now
hang in there
tomorrow's
coming, and
it's always new

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He took the pen and wrote a few words, but she couldn't see. "What's yours?" she asked.

He glanced at his page and read, "We the lost greet you warmly. Come and rescue us if you have the time."

She nodded.

"Should we sign them?" he said.

"No point. Not like anyone knows us anyway."

"Yuh," he groaned. "Guess so."

He sealed the two notes in the bottle, twisting the cap tightly. Then, hand in hand, they tossed the bottle out into the river. It didn't go high or far, landing a mere ten feet away with a plop like tiny fish would make. The current picked it up and carried it away.

He shuffles newspapers stacked on the bench, building her a pillow and blankets. "Not much," he says, "but it's in a nice spot. Heat from the vent in front blows over their skin, making them feel as if sitting in front of a Christmas fire.

"Perfect," she tells him.

He squeezes onto the bench beside her and lies down first. She leans over, practically on top of him, until they're all bunched together and looking like a bundle of dirty laundry. No one notices, just as no one sees her lean down to finally kiss him on the lips. His are as chapped as hers, hard and cracked like the pavement. Their mouths scrape together like sandpaper.

A bat flies in front of the moon. It vanishes quickly back into darkness. Alone. The same as every night. Usually the man sits there watching. This time, however, he doesn't see it. For a moment, he's safe at home with family and presents all around.

by Jenn Koiter

Verónicas

I

When your father built your home, Verónica,
poured the blood of the churro, spread it, pounded it into the dirt
to make the floor, you turned and ran and would not look again,
until the floor turned hard and blue, and you forgot
what you were walking on.

II

Verónica, you are named
for changes worked in blood.
Christ stumbled, blood-blinded, and Santa Verónica knelt
to clear his eyes, and when she looked again,
her veil was an echo of his face.
No, not blood, Verónica, an image, clear
and bloodless, as though the fabric could not bear the blood.

III

The earth can hold a lot of blood, Verónica.
Already in Spain men bait bulls before slaughter.
The bullfight comes later, lance severing tendons
so the bull cannot look up, daggers drawing
just enough blood to keep him alive but weak, weaker,
and through it all verónica, the flourish
named for your namesake, flick of the cape
over the face of the bull as he charges
into his slow bleeding out.

IV

And soon, Verónica, you will see
the missions burned, the priests hanged, hear latin mass
spat back at you by those who were forced to hear it.
Verónica, walk with me
through rows of retablos, carvings
culled from shrines and rebuilt churches.
It is finished – the blood cannot be caught.
We will call things by their right names, Verónica,
press our lips to the blood in the bloody veil,
smack the grail from the anxious hands in the retablo.
The thought of spilled blood spilled again
horrifies them, pity them, Verónica.
They are desperate not to see it
wasted on the ground.

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by Michael Lee Johnson

Bathroom Visitor

A horsefly
travels the world
of my bathroom.
Stops at the kitty litter box
on occasion for refueling.
One thousand round trips
including the bathtub area,
and buzzes past the toilet bowl.
Steady pilot, good mileage.
Frequent flier miles.
I swat his journey to an
abrupt end.

In This Place, Poverty Falls

In this place night falls with Linda.
Wrinkled life, wrinkled wishes
race across her face.
Torment bristles with each morning;
nailed to a cross within her house,
Linda lives.
Everything is a cycle,
a charity or gifts.
Poverty is an odor,
it is a smell her
nose itches with.
In the yard, poverty grass,
near the old car, poverty grass.
Poverty tastes like copper
metal on her tongue.
On her this journey with no applause,
no gas, Nicor shut that off.
No money honey, laziness shut that off.
Her house is full of bills & debris.

With no relief a few dollars
shrink in her hand harmlessly.
Rest, wait in welfare lines,
manipulate the coin machines
and the local pharmacy drug store.
Electric heaters keep the old house
warm and the multiple pets alive.
The microwave heats the plastic
salad bowl filled with water
for sponge baths.
The left over water mixes with hydrogen
peroxide that brushes her teeth.
Her body pale and spirits bail out with pills.
Groceries are checks
nourished by food stamps.
Walls come closer in at night.
The wind outside roars
with stolen property inside.
Dreary days, step
into depression's chamber;
a slice of her mourning
pronounces her dead.

Elmer's Gift

by D. L. Luke

For some, Christmas
conjures good
tidings to all, warm
memories of big
family get-togethers,
snow angels,
mistletoe, and roast
beast hot out of the
stove. For others,

**The burden of participating in
the conventions of holiday cheer
is forced when the fragilities of
the heart surface at this most
tender time of the year.**

them of their
disappointments
and failures:
divorce, broken
promises,
relationships that
end sour, the loss of
a close friend or
relative.

they buckle under the pressure of
picking out the right present to
please their loved ones. Those
prone to a more vulnerable side in
their nature thrash about in a
reoccurring nightmare that reminds

The burden of participating in the
conventions of holiday cheer is
forced when the fragilities of the
heart surface at this most tender
time of the year. Hopes that are
cradled prior to reality setting in,

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colliding with our make-believe worlds, where expectations are shattered, materialize out of the past like the balls and chains that clatter in vast empty corridors before the ghosts arrive at midnight to haunt Scrooge.

For me, the lasting impression I have of Christmas is of Wendy, my three and a half year old daughter. Milk chocolate dribbles out of the corners of her mouth. Her mouth is wide open as the small-mouth bass I caught at Good Luck Lake. Tears stream down her cheeks because I refused to give her any more candy.

Then there's Jennifer, the eldest. She's five. She's screaming her lungs out as if she'd just rose out of the dentist's chair and had all her baby teeth removed. The candy cane she holds on for dear life is stuck to Christmas wrap that wants a piece of the action.

Both girls are surrounded by a mountain of unwrapped presents. They sit next to the tree that looks old and haggard, leaning to one side. Our beagle puppy, Elmer, the runt of the litter that we adopted from Daisy Hill Puppy Farm wakes from a nap. He bounds across the room to join in the excitement.

If there really were a Santa Claus, the Old Jolly Fool would've vied against climbing down our chimney, (not that we had one for him to climb down anyway). He would've

said no to our naughty ones and gone to the next house where children were rewarded for being kind and obedient. "Do something, Matt," Barbara, my wife, said, holding a cup of coffee spiked with rum. "Make her stop crying."

"Whose idea was it to feed her chocolate Santa?" I asked.

At 5:30 in the morning, we mistakenly turned our backs to fix ourselves a cup of coffee in the kitchen. Our daughters had climbed the fake brick-faced chimney and dragged the stockings down from the mantle. Their ham-fisted fingers managed to empty the stocking's contents. They tore open the cellophane and shoved chocolate, caramel nuggets, and gobs of gooey marsh mellow down their mouths.

"She's got a buzz off of all the candy she ate, including her sister's," Barbara said, smoothing out the flat of her stomach underneath a high-collared black robe. She gathered Wendy up off the beige carpet and scooped her up in her arms. "You'll make yourself sick," Barbara said and wiped the melted chocolate off her face with a warm wet dishcloth. "Let's open the presents."

I pointed to the half bitten chocolate-chip cookie left on the plate on the coffee table eaten by Santa. They forgot about their cravings for fudge and turned their fickle attentions to the empty glass of milk. "Santa Claus came," announced the eldest.

We fell for the trap that everyone is encouraged to do – go out and spend, spend, spend – even if you can't afford to buy.

In her mother's arms, Wendy reached out to touch the fingerprints smudged on the glass, which was proof she and her sister needed to believe in his existence. (When the girls got older, we switched from cookies and milk to a ham sandwich and a cold glass of beer).

"You better not shout and you better not cry," I said, wagging my finger at them. "Santa Claus will exchange the presents for cash, and drive down to Tahiti."

"Matt," my wife said. "Don't say that."

My wife and I spent enough money to feed the malnourished orphans in Darfur. We fell for the trap that everyone is encouraged to do – go out and spend, spend, spend -- even if you can't afford to buy. We postponed paying the bills. We sacrificed the necessities – the bald tires turned my truck into a death trap -- to spoil and lavish our girls.

Old enough to walk, Wendy opted to crawl instead. She aimed for the biggest present that had her name on the gift tag. Wendy attacked the present, ignoring all social formalities taught to her, like asking for permission, saying

"please." It was if she held a grudge against it as she tore apart the wrap. Her sister, at least, showed some self-restraint. Jennifer sat on her hands, in her penguin-print pajamas, and asked if it was all right to open the presents.

"Go ahead, sweetie," my wife said. "Dig in."

The gold shiny paper, massacred by the hands of a child, lay strewn about on the carpet. Too young to read, Wendy couldn't open the box, which was bigger than her, without our help. "What is it?" she said. Her small voice sniffled with agitation from not getting the instant gratification she'd expected.

"Here," I said. "Let me open it for you."

I pulled out my Leather man from the front pocket of my jeans, a gift Barbara had given me last Christmas, and cut the seam where the tape ran across the top.

Minimum assembly was required for Dora's Pirate Adventure Playhouse. Both our daughters loved Dora, a cartoon that I saw no appeal in, but what did I know. I was spoon-fed Looney Tunes for breakfast as a boy. "Look Wendy," my wife said. "It comes with pirate costumes so you and Jennifer can play together."

Wendy stared at the playhouse as if watching an aging opera star singing her last performance. Children are bad actors and she was no

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exception. Instead of jumping for joy in receiving something she really wanted, she crept inside, gave it a perfunctory look, and gazed through the telescope. "I don't want to play with Jennifer," she said.

"Wow! Look what I got," the oldest opened up her first present in record speed. "An iDog that makes bow-wows sounds."

I must confess that I'd done very little shopping since Barbara managed the bulk of it for us; but I took particular pride in picking out that present from Radio Shack. When I saw how she never bothered taking the mechanical canine that also played tunes out of the box I wanted to pack up all the presents, return them to Wal-Marts, Toys-R-Us, and all the other places we had stood in line, and get our hard earned money back.

Jennifer wasted no time unwrapping the next present. She hoped to find the right item that could win her heart, captivate her interest, and satisfy her curiosity.

"Here," Barbara said, shoving a box with a big red ribbon in her lap. "Open this present."

Frustrated from the whole experience of watching the kids' growing dissatisfaction, I went into the kitchen to grab the beef-flavored rawhide bone I'd bought for Elmer, left on the windowsill.

Beagles have a dicey reputation as a breed for being obstinate and willful; I didn't care, I wanted one anyway. This being his first Christmas, I had gone through the trouble of wrapping the bone for him.

The outdoors looked uninviting like a snow globe that had been shaken by an angry hand. The cold wind whipped the thin layer of snow on the ground in cruel directions. Across the street, our next-door neighbor had a set of blue lights strung that were still lit on the front porch.

Howls and screams, sounds associated with a torture chamber, came from the depths of the living room. "Elmer," I said, ignoring the inappropriate outburst to find the only friend I had that morning, my dog. Scared of loud noises, Elmer hid in the corner as if he'd been punished for peeing on the carpet. His ears drooped. "Here you go boy," I said and patted him on the head. "Merry Christmas."

His tail wagged. An indication how grateful he was for the little attention he received. His nose inhaled the meaty smell; he licked his chops at the savory flavor of rawhide. Elmer gently took the bone in his mouth and walked off to a quiet spot in the house.

I returned to join the family. "No," Jennifer screamed, refusing to let go of a doll she held in her arms. "It's mine."

"No, it's not. That's what I wanted," Wendy cried, trying to rip it away from her. When she realized that she had no chance of winning, she stomped her feet and held her breathe until her face morphed into a mutant-looking beet. "Mommy," she yelled. "That's my Bratz doll."

"Santa might be confused," Barbara said. "I thought you said you wanted Cloe."

"No, I want sleepover Sasha," Wendy said. Her diction had the accuracy of a child much older than herself. "Jenny wants Cloe."

"No, I don't," Jennifer said, clutching her doll. "Sasha's mine. You can't have her."

Wendy launched into hysterics that made me wonder where we'd gone wrong as parents. Who kidnapped our beautiful girls and replaced them with these monsters?

"All the children Santa has to give presents to, he might've made a mistake," their mother explained. "We can fix it, don't worry."

This was the thanks we received for being selfless, spending all our money on the children. Afraid of ruining Christmas, how I thought that they deserved nothing more than a lump of coal I had to walk away and cool my temper.

The adjacent room, the den I fondly thought of as my "cave," I found Elmer had unwrapped the gift himself. He chewed on his bone, absorbed in the moment, stretched out on the couch, where he wasn't supposed to be. Elmer rolled onto his back, self-content and happy.

I sat down next to him and rested my hand on his white belly. "How's it going buddy?" I said. "I'm glad I made somebody happy."

His tail wagged so hard that his stout little body began to shake. Elmer stuck out his tongue to lick my face, my eyebrows, my moustache, my nose, and my mouth; at that moment, I realized something; aside from the birth of my daughters, that was the best present I could ever receive.

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by Deborah DeNicola

Sestina in One Story

We never really know what's real.
Hidden ourselves, we suspect the *real* is camouflaged
as well. But our senses are no proof of truth,
Impossible to follow the mind's serpentine lead.
Only by dismantling heart-walls do we touch the taproot.
Our neural passageways are clogged with ditches

we fall into. Ditches where hope dries up like mud, ditches
we can't climb out of since we think of them as real
diversions, "caminos erratas," those triple-canopy routes
where best we wander with open faith, uncamouflaged
by the rote of childhood prayers leading
us into fears, exiled from gardens, flailing at truth

or imaginary guilt. Looking for pain as if it were truth.
In blinders, we stumble head-first into ditches
a sure sign and signal to reroute
by, when the mere miracle of morning, the mere view of the sea leads
us to bathe our brains anew, wash out camouflaged
flotsam and jetsam. In shells and sand we ground our roots.

This earth has only one story, one love, one route
from you to me, from us to them, from false to true,
while those twin pits of sin and religion keep on camouflaging
this world as hell. But hell's not real,
not down there, if anything, anywhere, it's here, in these ditches
of black and white opinions which only lead

some into believing we need more ammunition, their leaden
position stockpiling more weapons, waging war en route
as they manufacture bunkers and tunnels to keep it real
true to patriotism's so-called admonitions—No true
believer in peace could camouflage
bodies in ditches

encamped where kindness is camouflaged
deeper in dark projections, leading
to refugees, their very humanity ditched,
connections severed, homes bombed, people uprooted
from their inherent power. Their truth,
a cloud, smoked black, surreal,

camouflaged only by fear's pistols and fists, rooted
in the gunmetal lead of erroneous truth.
Manipulative minds make the ditches real.

The Bacchanalia of Trash

after A.R. Ammons
(Garbage)...*is spiritual*

Let's worship the evolving cycles, the sweet and sour sediment scraped
from microwaveable take-out containers and tied into synch-sacs
with the morbid humors of our secret habits as well as inorganic
returnables, tuna-tins sharp enough to slit a vein, with an after-life
of their own via the ravaged curbside bin— Let's praise organic husks,
the hides of grapefruit to whom we entrust the waking enzymes of our bodies
every morning. Grapefruit breaks down something, works out wherever
it goes and beats the beejesus out of fat. I break down the Sunday classifieds
into dispensable paragraphs for the recyclable brown bag, the Arts Section
I won't give up to the trucks for a week or two after each new movie opens
and oh the scam of paper, the deadly sin of our worst addiction. At night
we hear junk mail grieving in the trees of our dreams.
This detritus all afternoon, this American frenzy for cleaning
as the sun shifts direction through burnished motes dancing
and the air wafts new odors, more expendable for being burnt
on manufactured woodchips, combustible faux-realite
as if our fantasies weren't hot enough now that the season of barbecue
closes-- We live in the city. We have no compost pile to turn and toss
with a fork like a nice salad of vermiculite and dirt. At least we no longer
heave our ashtrays out the fire-escapes at the moon. We've quit smoking;
We're utterly clean and yet we dream that garbage shoves back up
through the kitchen sink, the pipes collapse and the Age of Aquarius
is without drinking water. Lord, must we fall to our knees and pray
to the Alchemists of Garbage for a new infra-structure to renew ourselves
this late in the century? Kleenex, Tampax, hairspray, the whitened stems
of asparagus, used dental floss, pulp and pitted masses, we need some
homeopathic jacketto clothe the mercurial state of the soul, some crushed
dandelion oil, funereal bouquet made to remedy the fresh droppings in the park;
the world of the dump where the Lapis Lazuli is stuffed between mayo

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and crumpled foil at the bottom of the *Oatios* box, or stale salami slid into a baggy like a commercial for safe sex . . . Freud himself felt civilization reduced (or perhaps elevated) to Sex and Death and the ancients grew the Goddess of Love from an abusive Father's genitalia, polluting a whole ocean—*it all comes out in the wash*—so why not Garbage as the ultimate cure of itself, a huge festival every Spring, The Bacchanalia of Trash, with mites and maggots and mating toadstools, thread-bare shoes, violins and broomsticks, one big black Mass for the crack-smoked gasses loose in the universe, a sacrifice for landfill and the world made pure, made poetry, made pre-lapsarian enfin!

by Barbara Daniels

What War Was

Long, thin blade
of a battle axe, shield
weighted with bronze.
Its sweaty handgrip.
Invention: conical helmets,
catapults, spears. Fear,
moonshine, paths of blood.
Explosion of column
and line into chaos. Horses
screaming. Cropland
become a field of dying.
River thick with bodies.
Smashed war carts.
Hacked heads held up
for identification. Scribe
noting the fallen and fleeing.

Ambassadors wait
in a hallway reading reliefs—
walls carved with enemies
broken beneath charging horses.
They hacked off their
fingers, hands, burned them
alive, impaled them
on posts, cut out their
tongues, peeled skin
from their living bodies.
Captured: one ivory couch,
boxwood tables, chairs
inlaid with gold.

Soilman

by Matthew Longo

Monday, 7:30 A.M.-Recovery Ward

"I believe that we all have little pieces of God in our souls. It helps us understand that it's always okay to bleed, you know?"

I nodded as if I was truly processing what was coming out of his mouth.

"Are you Jesus?"

His eyes widened, and he gripped the sides of his bed, as if I might open the gates of hell beneath his electronically adjustable mattress. I remember thinking that if I was to continue working there, I should probably get rid of my beard. It was only my first week since transferring, and three patients had already experienced the Second Coming.

"No. It's Ben. I'm here to help you into your wheelchair. We're going to go for a walk, okay?" I said soothingly. Walter was quite possibly the best piano player that I had ever seen, and certainly the best musician at St. Francis. Not counting the woman who chose to warm up her voice whenever I tried to sneak into the break room for a nap. Walt would spend entire days weaving beautiful notes into the stale air of the asylum, although I believe the intricacy and nuance of his style may have been lost on his audience. If you watched him play,

you could actually see him transform into something brilliant and passionate, and it was so easy to forgive him at these moments. To forgive him for being in this place, and to forgive him for letting bits of his vision slip away from him, farther and farther into the corners of his mind.

"Walter, where did they find you, man?" I said with a laugh. He didn't even look up from his composition. "I bet they found you walking around in the park telling poor old ladies that you were Bach." A smile crept into the dark edges of his mouth.

"Bach wasn't a piano player," he muttered.

"Yeah, he didn't walk around naked either," I shot back. Finally! A real laugh escaped from my late night companion. Walt insisted on brushing his own teeth. I watched him fumble with the brush and practically empty out an entire tube of toothpaste into his mouth. I suppose he had a large dinner. He suddenly stopped and stared at himself. I wondered what this man saw when he looked into the mirror. I saw a waste of something wonderful, something that didn't belong there. Maybe he saw the cost of his genius. Maybe he completely accepted this. Maybe he saw himself as a being that

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unapologetically expressed itself.
"What do you see, Walt?"

"Benny," he replied, staring at my cold white apron and spitting into the air.

I don't really know what I expected him to say. I guess I just thought it was important that I ask him. Sometimes when you don't talk about the little revelations we have, they just melt away. I wanted to make sure I didn't let Walt lose one. It was already eight in the morning and my shift had ended two hours ago. "Sweet dreams, maestro," I whispered, but Walt was already stuck in his own head. I selfishly wished that he wouldn't be lost in himself for the whole week. I liked to hear a brisk waltz on Tuesday nights.

My favorite activity on those bus rides home was counting the churches. There were about eight of them in Bryton, including one that was right next to the hospital. It was funny to see that run down medical facility juxtaposed with glorious architecture. The town was scattered with slums, pornographic outlets, and psychiatric buildings and the churches were right in the middle of it all. You would think that God might come down and clean up a bit around His temples. As we passed number five, I saw the sun peek out from behind a spire. It was always blinding at first, but once I gave it a few seconds, I could relax. Working the nightshift does something to you, I

You would think that God might come down and clean up a bit around His temples.

mean besides the obvious physical torture. You're not on the same wavelength as the average human being, and you can't tell whether you're higher or lower.

Tuesday, 4:25 A.M.-Cafeteria

"So I'm trying to get with this chick, right? And she's got all these issues she's telling me about, like, her dad, her car, her childhood, and all I'm thinking about is what response I could give her that might elicit the fewest follow up topics." Will was scheduled on the Tuesday night shift this week, and even if I wasn't thrilled, I wasn't bored either. "What about you, man? It seems like you aren't even interested in girls," Will charged. To be honest, he was right.

"I feel like whenever I really get to know one, I end up changing my entire life around, and all I'm left with is less money and higher blood pressure," I complained.

"Walter, do you think this guy's a queer?" replied Will, who was obviously in rare form that night. Walt just continued his spitting rituals. The floor we oversaw was fairly quiet. There was usually no action that late at night, and if you did get a new one, chances are it

wasn't going to be your garden variety psychopath. Anyone that needs to be admitted in the middle of the night is clearly not in the best frame of mind.

"I had a date tonight. I didn't go to it, but it was there for me all the same," I said. "I wonder if any of these people have ever been in love," I mused, forgetting for a moment who my coworker was.

"Why the hell do you always say stuff like that, Ben? You're gonna scare the patients," Will scoffed. I pushed out the most plastic laugh I could, and I got a punch in the arm for it. "I'm gonna go catch a nap, Benny. Don't go crazy on me now!" he yelled about an inch from my ear. I hated it when he said that.

Wednesday, 2:00 A.M.-Reception

"We got a new one tonight. It's a suicide attempt. They caught him in the squad car trying to eat his gun." The nurse nervously shifted on the balls of her feet, which meant that I was in for an interesting evening.

"Great. Who else is on tonight?" I asked, half-expecting her to say no one.

"No one. Just you, Ben. Please be careful. He's a big guy. You need to make him take his medicine. If he doesn't, he'll be up all night." Wednesday night was off to a fantastic start, and I hadn't even taken off my coat yet. The room at the west end of our floor was

reserved for the new arrivals. Armed with my deadly flashlight and trusty keys, I trudged down the hall.

Alan Wendell was a 52 year old police officer who had clearly had a nervous breakdown. Talking to someone who just cracked up is like reading a book with your eyes closed. You tend to miss the point of what they're trying to say.

"Are you here to kill me?" Alan was a tall man who was fairly well-built, and I wasn't too comfortable with the way he kept massaging his knuckles.

"No, Alan. You're in a hospital now. You need to take your medicine or you'll be very sick." He didn't even blink.

"You're trying to poison me. You think you're gonna punish me for what I've done?" It seemed he was a wee bit paranoid at the moment, so I thought I'd lay off the pills.

"Do you enjoy being a police officer, Alan?" He just stared right through me. I always tried not to look directly into their eyes. I saw a movie when I was younger about a creep who could steal your soul if he looked you in the eye. Maybe it was this lingering memory, or the fact that I didn't have a second pair of pants in my locker that night, that kept me from making eye contact.

"Do you want to try and take your

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But little by little, as time sped up and money got tight, I found myself preparing for a life with no meaning.

medicine now?" I stupidly asked.

"You've got files upon files. I bet you've been following me for months now. You can't prove I have that money. Nobody knows what I've done." The scariest part about his rant was that his voice never changed pitch. It just stayed in a low rumbling monotone.

"Alan, I have no idea what you're talking about."

This exciting interaction went on for about another three hours before we had to sedate him manually with a syringe. And by "we", I mean me and two frail nurses. What I gathered from our chat was that he had been stealing money from his department for quite some time. Apparently his conscience caught up with him. It was either that or the dimebag of angel dust he had in his system. It was after incidents like these that I regretted dropping out of medical school. Originally, that was my excuse for working here. But little by little, as time sped up and money got tight, I found myself preparing for a life with no meaning. You know how you ready yourself for a punch? That was the last two years of my life. Coming to terms with my uselessness had been the hardest thing I ever had to do. Now it was easy. It was like I had just

sprung up out of the soil ready to scrub floors and clean sinks. I never had any dreams that haunted me. I never had parents that believed in me or lovers that depended on me. Being free comes at a high cost.

Thursday, 3:48 A.M.-Reception

Angel dust seemed to be the drug of choice for the dredges of my little society. "Three hopped up teens tonight, Benny. It's just you and Will," said a stone-faced nurse. It was good that Will was there. Now I could be scared for my life and also get made fun of as a bonus. For the second time that week, I made the long trek down to the west end of the corridor. I could hear the screams before I got my keys out.

"Let us out! We'll die in here, man! There's too much smoke!" A frightened girl cowered in the corner. Another one was completely catatonic in her chair. I could have set off a bottle rocket in front of her, and she wouldn't have raised an eyebrow. The boy was a much different story. He believed that the room was in flames. I got to be Satan for a change. I was getting tired of all that messiah stuff anyway.

"I'm gonna get those keys, man! I'm gonna let everybody out of this prison! You can't keep them in here! Everybody's gonna burn!" said the kid.

What I wanted to say was, "Yes, I, too, feel like we are in Hell right now. Thanks for pointing it out." But, instead, "Please sir, just sit down and relax. No one is going to hurt you."

Finally, Willy came strutting in. "I can hear these crazy sons of bitches from the can!" My hero. "Let's just tie 'em down," he openly suggested.

"Will, can you please not state our intent to the patients?" I calmly asked.

"You can't do that, man! We'll burn up!" cried the kid. No matter how bad a situation was, Will could always make it worse.

"Let's just tie them up and wait for the morning shift to take care of it," Will repeated.

I couldn't stop looking at this one girl's face. You could tell she was nearly gone, but there was something in her eyes that was still alive. "I don't think she took too much, Will. I think we can bring her back."

Will just waved his hand in disgust. By now, he had already begun restraining the angry young man who was awkwardly trying to kick him in the groin. Unfazed, Will merely guarded his crotch with one hand and secured the wrist straps on with the other.

"What a ridiculous place to be," I accidentally said out loud. As the

words left my mouth, the girl glanced up towards me. For the first time in my long, illustrious career as an orderly, a patient caught me. She got me completely off guard, and before I knew it, we were staring into each other's eyes.

Friday, 4:32 A.M.-Psychiatrist's Office

"We've got them all lined up for ECT tonight, Benjamin. They'll receive it on every other one of your shifts."

"Yes, sir. I'll prep them. Which one first?" I said in my most working class voice. My boss was the head psychiatrist of the funhouse. If you took every pretentious asshole you ever met in your life and added them all up, you would have a small idea of what it was like to speak to him. Dr. Jeffrey Wheeler was exactly what was wrong with modern medicine. If you asked the man about compassion, he would tell you about his favorite colognes.

"Do the semi-coherent girl first, okay? The littler one...so we don't risk burning the old fuse."

I had heard a rumor that one of his ECT victims had run into his perfectly leathered office in a state of confusion and urinated on the rug. Wheeler put the poor bastard through the most rigorous regimen of electro-shock therapy I have ever heard of. I guess those plaques on the wall gave him a license to dole out punishment.

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"C'mon, we have a lot to do tonight. She's up. Don't get reflective on me now," said Wheeler.

With the little ones, you have to hold their legs so they don't kick out of

the restraints. "Okay, here we go," said the technician. I got an image of Dr. Frankenstein every time I saw them flip that switch. But the thing about Frankenstein is that he was creating something. We were just tearing a human being down, brick by brick, cell by cell. She was unusually reactive to the treatment. I wondered if she noticed that she had wet herself. I think the only person who was bothered by it was me. When it was over, I lifted her writhing little body back onto the gurney.

Saturday, 2:34 A.M.-Reception

Nothing was the same. I cried that morning. "Good evening, sunshine!" shouted Willy.

"Eat it, Will. I mean that in the best possible way."

"Wheeler wants to see you. He says we've got some more to do tonight," Will said casually. This dirty work was taking its toll on me. I almost missed the days of talking down psychotic, convict police officers. "We're doing the other girl tonight. The boy was shipped off to prison. Apparently, he didn't have as much in his system. Maybe it was some

This dirty work was taking its toll on me. I almost missed the days of talking down psychotic, convict police officers.

kind of date rape thing," said Will with a shrug.

"I'll get right on it." I gently escorted our patient to the room that made me nauseous.

But as I was carefully strapping her tiny wrist in, I heard a commotion. Will ran in with a panicked look on his face.

"Benny, it's your boy, Walter! He's lost it!" he shouted.

Apparently, some jackass had told Walter that he couldn't play his piano if he didn't take his medication. Threats like that could only lead to big trouble. Walter broke free from his restraints and turned over a vending machine. He was huddled in a corner when I got there. I think he was humming something by Pachelbel.

"Walt, please come out of the corner. I promise you can play. I swear I wouldn't lie to you, Walt. C'mon, you can teach me chopsticks again."

Just as I was beginning to see his eyes shine, Wheeler interrupted my breakthrough. "This man needs to be transferred to a maximum security facility. We aren't equipped to deal with this kind of behavior," he muttered to me. The spitting rituals began again. Some of it hit Wheeler's jacket, and then it was all over. "How dare you, you animal!

Forget about the girl! This man begins his treatment tonight!" Willy ran up to the soda machine in an attack stance.

"Sir, he's only trying to comfort himself. It wasn't directed at you," I pleaded with my hands on his shoulders.

Wheeler had an expression on his face that froze my blood. It was a look of hatred. "Get him out!" he bellowed.

I don't know what happened inside me, but I didn't feel like I was made of dirt anymore. I was flesh and blood. With my right elbow, I swiped the back of Wheeler's skull, and as he stumbled forward, I turned to my left and gave a right

cross to Will. Willy fell back over the vending machine, while Wheeler merely dropped to his knees. I extended my hand and did the most useful thing I have ever done.

Saturday, 5:30 A.M.-Some Highway

I am currently up to church number seven. I entertained the idea of actually getting off the bus and looking inside one of those holy buildings, but I figured it couldn't possibly be as wonderful on the inside as it was on the outside. Maybe some other day I'll step through that arc. Now is a bad time, anyhow. At my side is the greatest composer I've ever known. And I'm not too sure where it is we're going, but we're sure as hell not turning back.



War #2 by Jim Fues

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by E. Laura Golberg

Visit to Kansas

Kansas, red grass in the rain
miles of prairie
rolling hills
a field of calves,
"Hope they have a barn"
you say "they will die
this winter in the wind,"
and I, seeing no barn,
worry, but we are gone
already flying past
and I am reassured only
by the certain business sense
of the rancher.

Kansas. The baby's being raised
in a double-wide
(the first thing to go
in a decent tornado)
and her blue eyes and solid stare
take us in, deeply,
as she crawls, then pancakes
then crawls again,
undeterred by the menace
I see around her.

Kansas. Same blue eyes,
round face, in old, old
uncle, one shoulder a good foot
lower than the other.
"Pus" he says "pus"
when we ask him what comes
out of his ear, what he coughs
up with huge throat-clearing
sounds that wake me at night,
and in the morning. We dutifully write
it down on a list for the third
doctor he's seen now, hoping she
won't prescribe yet more ear drops
that don't work.

Kansas, where they got up a
collection for the bell on the
clock in Towser that rings the hour
to the diminished population
most of whom are too old
to hear it anyway, and the
counties are consolidated,
so to get an ear treated
is like driving cattle in an ice storm
into the wind.

Christmas Tree Collection Day

Fir trees lie supine on the sidewalk,
grey-green branches no longer reaching upwards.
I walk past, smelling pine, sweet and raw.
Some sport residual tinsel,
others tossed casually onto roads
by the wind's indiscriminating force.

A battle field must look like this.
All mothers' sons once so sturdy, upright and so promising,
now wounded, dying, or useless corpses, littering the ground.

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by Michael Shorb

Man Bites Tiger

News item: elderly Chinese merchant
found dead from overdose of ground
tiger testicles.

Lacking a harem, he began
frequenting prostitutes
on the dong dock
side of Hangchow.

Each night, after a daily
bread of Japanese electronics he opens
the numbered bag of dried
loin from #808 (or was it #208?) among
defunct registered Siberian tigers
rare as blue snow lions in a pure land
Buddhist dream watching his ragged yellow
gunner surge and stiffen to a power stalk
too long for depths of wife or mistress.

Even the pros of Joy Street learned to shun him
seeking the rapid gold of accountants
lacking such a swelling jungle baggage
pacing swinging solitary side-to-side.

At some point, no partner needed
he began to sniff the vanished cat's
powdered crotch on lines across a shell-
backed mirror like grey cocaine.

It was in this respect they found him, empty
mirror old wife's tail and old man, hard,
member waved at morning like a flag
and no tigers anywhere.

Deek's Philosophies

by Gavin S. Lambert

That documentary made me feel like getting sick, but I couldn't stop watching it. I didn't like those cat hunters. They were sketchy guys.

Sometimes I hated Him so much that I could hardly stand it. I thought about "losing" Him. I thought about dropping Him off somewhere, out in the middle of nowhere, where things get lost. I thought about accidents. He could have an accident. He could get hit by a car. He could get into something, poison. He could "run away" and never come back. I let Him out three mornings ago, for some fresh air, and He never came back. Something could happen. Things happened all the time.

But when I think about our first week together it wasn't so bad. He didn't bother me so much yet. To be honest, I almost enjoyed His company at first. We ate together, and a couple times we walked to the grocery store together. I bought Him special things, things He could eat. We always ate dinner together, and I usually watched Him eat.

The first week wasn't so bad because it was a new situation, and, plus, I felt obligated. I felt like I had to do it, so I just went

with it, I guess. But I quickly stopped feeling that way.

Three months ago I saw this documentary about this midwestern town where they have so many stray and feral cats that they pay people to kill them. It's not like they have city employees, on the payroll, that go around killing baby kittens. It's not like that. But there are these people who go around, sort of like the people you see who collect cans on the side of the road, that casual, and look for areas where there are high concentrations of stray and feral cats and they do different things, like lay out poisons and traps. They go back later and see if they have killed or trapped any, and if they have, they bag them up, and take them to a certain location, just like with aluminum cans. They give them to the attendants and they get paid in cash, per cat, I forget how much. They never said what they do with the cats after they get them. I assume they just throw them away.

That documentary made me feel like getting sick, but I couldn't stop watching it. I didn't like those cat hunters. They were sketchy guys. (Of course they were all guys. You didn't see any girls doing it.) But they did interview the girlfriend of one of them. I guess you'd call this guy the leader. He was tall, and

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handsome in an I-kill-cats kind of way. Only about twenty-one. Stringy shoulder-length black hair, always wearing the same thing: white sleeveless t-shirt and black denim pants. His uniform, I guess.

They interviewed his girlfriend who was always chewing gum. She was pretty in a my-boyfriend-kills-cats kind of way. She was only sixteen and she said her daddy had moved them up from *Geawga* for work. She said her father had been transferred from a plastics plant in Georgia to one in the town (I forgot the name) they were in, in Ohio. He was an extrusion welder, she said.

She said that she didn't care what Deek (the name of her cat-killing boyfriend) did as long as he bought her "purty things". In front of her smacking lips, she held up a ring with a *tiny* sparkling thing on it, and then she kissed it and smiled. She had bad teeth.

The other two cat recyclers were only about eighteen or nineteen and they looked a lot like Deek, except smaller. They all dressed about the same and they shared the same kind of philosophies, Deek's philosophies, about what they did for a living. Stuff like: *These cats are suffering out here on the streets. We're just puttin' 'em out of their misery. And the people of this town. We're helpin' 'em. If it weren't for us these streets would be overrun with cats.*

And these cats are sick and dangerous. Some of 'em have rabies and other things. Would you want a little kid to get hurt because of one of these things? I wouldn't. They're like rats. Out here, in our town, these things are like rats, or roaches. They're everywhere. We're just doin' the right thing.

The right thing. It made me think. Was it the right thing? It didn't seem right. It didn't feel right. But maybe the right thing doesn't always feel right. Like when you're a kid, and you know you should tell the truth about something, you know it's the right thing to do, but you just can't bring yourself to do it, so you go ahead with the lie, and it feels good. It feels right. It feels right to do the wrong thing.

Before I was basically forced to take Him, I had loved thunderstorms. Now I can't stand them. From the first almost inaudible growl of thunder to the last, He howled. If the storm lasted fifteen minutes, He howled for fifteen minutes. If the storm lasted two hours, He howled for two hours. Before Him, during thunderstorms, I would drink coffee and read, or just lie on the couch and listen—relax and enjoy the storm. After He arrived, I spent the whole time during a thunderstorm, throwing things at Him. I would open the back door and stand there and throw things at Him as He howled at the weather: empty two liter bottles, pens, forks, spoons, a meat tenderizer once, a dustpan,

remote controls, books. It became a game, a sick game, and, honestly, I was above it.

The problem, really, was this: I couldn't get rid of Him, and I couldn't keep Him. Yes, I hated Him, but my girlfriend, my lovely girlfriend, loved Him. She loved Rex. That's what she called Him. Rex.

I never named Him. I refused to. I just called Him, Him. He, Him, His. If I had gotten rid of Him, I'd have been in serious trouble. My girlfriend

would have, well, I didn't want to find out what she'd do, but I knew it would have been something tragic, something resulting in me not being with her. And, you see, she was truly lovely. I felt lucky to have her, because, well, because I'm ugly, and fat, and fairly boring (I love board games. She called them "bored" games) so I needed to hold on to her. I needed to keep Rachel. I needed not to piss her off too much because, I thought, there wouldn't be another Rachel. There would be no more Rachels for me, I thought, or Sarahs, Julies, Marthas, Beatrices, Mollies, Sallies, Keris, none. This was it. My last chance at snagging an attractive young woman.

After that first week, when I started hating Him and she continued loving Him, I suggested to her that she take Him. "Why

don't you take Him home with you, since you love Him so much." She flipped out. She reminded me about her roommate's allergies and asthma, and she reminded me about their brand new carpet, and "we don't have a yard. You have a yard. I feel bad for dogs that are cooped up inside all the time. You need to keep Rex here. It's perfect for both of us: Rex gets a yard and I get to

I felt lucky to have her, because, well, because I'm ugly, and fat, and fairly boring (I love board games. She called them "bored" games) so I needed to hold on to her.

see him every day."

I told her that maybe since she loved Him so much, she could come over and feed Him and bathe Him

and play fetch with Him and take Him for walks. She wished she could, but she just didn't have the time. "Plus," she said, "I don't like walking around in your neighborhood. It's scary. There are too many slow-driving cars. I always think someone is going to jump out and grab me, or shoot me, or ask for directions." She had an excuse for everything. Here's what she was basically saying: I just want to come over here and play with Him. I don't ever want Him to live with me, and I want none of the responsibility of taking care of Him. I want you to be responsible for His well-being, and you can never get rid of Him.

You might be thinking, what was the big deal? The big deal was this: dog's are a serious pain in the ass and— this is the most important part—I hate dogs. I've always hated

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dogs. They're stupid. They're sloppy. They're too friendly: they jump on you and bring you sticks and chewed up, sloppy odd things, as gifts, as things for you to throw and for them to retrieve, bring back. Dogs bark. And howl. This dog, the one with whom I was stuck, was big, so when it jumped on you once, you had to go change your clothes and maybe take a shower. I don't know what kind of dog He was, but Rachel said He was a Lab-Doberman mix. I thought He looked like a giant Chihuahua.

I'd moved into a new house and the previous tenants had left behind all this junk.

They had seriously trashed the place. We had to haul out all the trash and take it to the dump. That was part of the deal. That was why the rent was so cheap.

That's where He was. It was our last trip of the day. We had finished unloading Greg's truck, and I was sweeping out the bed of the truck when up walks this dejected thing. I picked up a dead D battery from the bed of the truck and threw it at the horrible creature and yelled, "Git."

What are you doing? says Rachel. Poor thing, she says. We gotta do something. She looks at Greg. We gotta do something, right? Greg shrugs his shoulders and looks at me. I'm finishing

sweeping and pretending I'm not listening. Okay, I say, let's go. No, she says, we can't leave. Look at it. You can see its ribs. It's starving. No, I say. This is a dump. There is plenty of food here. There is food everywhere. You can see its ribs, sure, but that's only because that's the way the dog is supposed to look. That's a trait of the breed. (I, of course, knew nothing of dog breeds or their traits.) Greg says, no there isn't. You can't dump food waste here. There's nothing here for him to eat. It's not that kind of dump. I glance *shut up* at Greg. Look, I say, it'll be fine. He probably eats raccoons and rats and opossums. It's a dog, for Christ's sake. It can hunt. She walks toward it and it walks toward her. God, I say. This is disgusting. How do you know it doesn't have rabies, or heartworms? You know it has fleas. I guess it can ride in the back, says Greg. I give Greg another look. Are you going to take him? I say. No, he says. I can't. My wife hates dogs. Plus, he says, we've got enough animals as it is. We're taking him, says Rachel. He can stay at *your* house. Your new house. It has a fenced in yard and everything. It's perfect.

Six months went by and, believe me, things happened. It's really quite complicated and I did some things that I'm not proud of. I did things that have changed everything. I made some bad choices.

I knew right away that I couldn't

take Him to a shelter. There's only one in the tri-city area and Rachel's fat best friend, Tracy, worked there at the time, and you don't even want to know how much of a bitch she was. Whenever there was some kind of dispute, anything, she automatically sided with Rachel, no matter what. It's the way it'd always been. About three years ago, for instance, Rachel did something inexcusable. She cheated on me. Not once, either. Three times. With three different guys. Within a month's time. I was devastated, naturally. We kind of broke up for a couple months. But we ended up, obviously, getting back together. Rachel apologized, and I forgave her because, I thought, I was lucky to have her. But one time, after all of that, I was standing outside of Rachel's front door and Tracy was inside with Rachel and they were talking, and I overheard Tracy say that the whole thing had been "Richard's fault to begin with. It never would have happened if he'd been more of a man." I couldn't believe it. What did she know about being a *man*? Other than sort of looking like one, I didn't know.

Four months after I got Him. I took Him to this neighborhood on the other side of town, Springhaven. It was really uncomfortable for me because I'd never had Him in my car before, and I could feel its value plummeting. Not that it was a

great car. It was a piece. But dogs stink and I knew that my car would never smell right again. I took Him to Springhaven and I left Him there, on Springer Street. On the way back, I stopped at Bruno Burger and had a strawberry shake, and I stopped at a music store and bought a CD. I was feeling normal again. I felt good, and bad. When I pulled into my driveway an hour and a half later, there He was.

About three weeks later I saw that Documentary. I think it was called something like *Catatonia: A Midwestern Catastrophe*. Watching it made me feel a little ill. It made me think about what I'd tried to do to Him. How I tried to leave Him in Springhaven. It made me think harder. I needed to be more creative. What could I do to get rid of this poor creature, something that would cause neither of us any harm? Something that would provide Him with a new home and would allow me to keep my girlfriend. No suffering. I hated Him, but I didn't want to be unduly cruel to Him. I didn't want to be like Deek and his friends, the Little Deeks. And I didn't want Him to cause me to lose my woman. But then I thought about Deek's girlfriend. She didn't care what he did, as long as he bought her pretty things. This added a new dimension, possibly. I thought about Tracy at the animal shelter. I thought about Deek's black-toothed adolescent girlfriend kissing her cubit zirconium speck. I thought about how long Rachel and I'd been together. And I thought

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about how there is one thing that a man can do that will *always* bring women together in his favor.

The ATM would only let me take out three hundred and sixty dollars at a time, so I had to use it three times in a row, incurring a total of six dollars in transaction fees. I counted it: 1,080 dollars. Seeing the money made me second-guess myself. Was this going to work? If it did work, did I accept the consequences? I felt like it would, and I felt like I did.

"Seven. I'm pretty sure it's seven." The sales associate handed me the plush clamshell with the ring in it and I looked at it and I liked it. "Is this one a seven, or will you need to size it? I'm kind of pressed for time, so If it's not—"

"No. Thees wan ees a *sevon*," he assured me. I could tell I was boring him to death.

They, all the people in the jewelry store, were impressed by my paying in cash. I acted very nonchalant, like it was nothing for me to be spending a thou in one fell swoop. But I didn't feel nonchalant. I kind of felt like an ass, like an ass for letting things get this out of hand. After leaving the jewelry store I rushed straight home and put Him back in my car. One more ride for us.

It was two and the shelter closed at five so I had plenty of time. In

I kind of felt like an ass, like an ass for letting things get this out of hand.

my head I nervously went over the scenario. *Walk in with Him on leash. Go straight to front counter. If Tracy not there ask for her. If Tracy there say hi, and show her. Nothing about Him. She will most likely say wow it's beautiful. Is it for her? Yes. Doing it tonight? Yes. She will say wow again. Very casually, coolly, say about dog. She will understand. After all that she'll understand. Won't even have to explain. It's all there. There's no explaining something like that. People just understand. She'll take Him and smile. Good luck, she'll say. Easy. Over.*

We walked through the front door and there she was, hunch-backed over the front counter, writing.

"Hey."

"Hey. What are you doing here?"

Being a man. Doing the manly thing. "I've got something I need to show you, Tracy. I need to know what you think, I need your advice." It was smooth to throw in the I-need-your-advice bit.

"Oh, yeah?" she said. "It better not be what I think it is, though." She turned her big body and looked at me sideways and then at the dog.

"Well," I said, a little worried now.

What could she mean? I hoped she wasn't referring to Him.
"What do you think *it* is?"

"Never mind, Dick." I forgot to mention. She liked to call me "Dick." She got a kick out of it. It was a small form of verbal abuse that she delighted in. "What is it?"

I pulled out the box and sat it on the counter, and pointed to it. She picked it up and held it about breast-high and looked at me, as if to say "really?" and then she opened it. I smiled because, so far, my plan seemed to be working.

"Diiick," she said. "I don't know what to say. I didn't even realize we were friends. Well, I'll have to think about it, of course."

"Shut up. Quit playing. Do you think she'll like it?"

"Yeah. She will. It's beautiful, Dick. I wouldn't have thought you had such good taste."

"Thanks, sort of." Now for the tricky part. If things were going to unravel, this was where it would happen: "Anyway. One more thing. Uh. With things being the way they are...now, I'm going to have to get rid of Him...Rex. I obviously can't keep him around anymore. So that's why I brought him—"

"Wait a minute. You're trying to bring Rex to *my* shelter? You

know how much she loves that dog." She leaned her fat torso against the counter, and her fat tits were sitting on it like two large loaves of bread, and her fat head and fat eyes were about a foot away from my face. I could smell her breath, onions.

"Yeah. I know, but if things are going to happen then things will have to change. We can't have this dog around, stinking everything up." I was losing some ground here. I could feel it.

"What are you talking about? Rachel loves that fucking dog. Frankly, I'd be surprised if she didn't want it to be the ring bearer, or the flower girl. Look, you're crazy if you think you're going to unload it on me. You're not dragging me into this sick shit."

"Sick shit! There is something sick, but it isn't this. This is not sick. I just want to get rid of this dog. That's all. I don't want Him. I hate Him. Why can't I make a decision to get rid of Him? Why can't that be okay? He's *my* dog for Christ's sake! Why can't I get rid of my dog? Why do I have to sneak around and lie and make shit up and do morally reprehensible things, like drop Him off in other towns." I stopped and gripped the side of the counter so hard the skin under my fingernails turned white. "I hate this dog, and it's making me a bad person!"

Something happened to me there in the animal shelter. The plan had

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unraveled. I had unraveled.
Things had happened.

"Damn!" said Tracy. "You *are* fucked up. You and Rex need to leave. You're making a scene." And we left, together, He and I.

Back home, I wondered. How had all this happened? A total lapse in Judgment. Desperation. Sneakiness. Dishonesty. Tracy was right. I was not a man. To be truthful, I didn't know what it meant to be a man. Sitting in my chair, staring at the ring, cozy in its little velvety box on the ottoman, I knew that I didn't know what it meant to be a man. Poor stupid dog, I thought. It was outside on the front porch. A storm was approaching and I knew he would soon begin howling, and I knew that I needed to quit lying to myself. It was time to be honest, to sort out the truths from the lies. These were the only truths I knew: I hated him. And I hated her.

It was the first time I ever allowed myself to consciously think it. I'd felt it before, but I had never let

myself think it. It was the first time I truly knew it. It wasn't love that kept us together. It was fear. I was scared of being alone, and she was scared of being with someone who wasn't scared. I heard thunder, but I did not hear Him. I sat there, silent. More thunder. More silence. I got up and walked to the front door and opened it and there he was, curled up like a cinnamon roll. Asleep. I kicked him sharply on the spine. He didn't move. Not a twitch. It was raining hard. There was lots of thunder. Loud. Close lightning. I reached down and touched him. He felt warm. He felt soft. I tried to rouse him. No movement. Sideways rain was hitting us. I looked around. A car was coming. It was Tracy's car. It was Tracy. I bent over and picked Him up. I held him to my chest. I'd never held him before. He was not heavy. Tracy's car pulled into the driveway. Its headlights shined on us. The headlights did not go out. I kept waiting for the headlights to go out, but they didn't. They kept shining as I stood there, wet, on the porch, holding a dead dog I hated, and waiting for a woman I hated to turn off the lights and come toward me, through the rain.

by Cheryl Fruhling

The Waterman

On a good day, the red fox
saunters the marsh, a great
blue heron struts the distance,
and fishermen dot the water's surface.

Days end as bottoms are shuffled
and every net purged,
releasing Maryland's finest,
(like gold) from the Chesapeake Bay.

"I am a waterman".....
a fisherman's son mops his brow;
from Thursday's heat and labor,
the reward: a bucket of blue crabs.

A man drives down a narrow road
toward Smith Island.
Two gigglers clap in the back seat of the mini van,
anxious to see where daddy grew up.
Around the bend,
reduced to a clump of roofless paint chips,
he finds time has changed,
which he cannot understand.

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JUMP

Tears dry in empty sockets
Head so full of vacant screams
Lights flashing bright on high beams
Children are giggling..."JUMP JUMP".

Face is falling from the bridge
Onto cars, rooftops blinding
A treacherous road winding
Drivers are waving ..."JUMP JUMP".

Hands grasping onto guardrail
Gravity holds; air sucking
Heart hurts; memories plucking
Self is convincing..."JUMP, JUMP".

Twists like an acid junkie
Held by one dark endless thread
Bumper stickers warn..."God's dead"
Confusion pushing..."JUMP, JUMP".

Hooking one tube of lipstick
And one mismatched silk stocking
The world comes tumbling, rocking
No one to stop her..."JUMP, JUMP".

by Ed Zahniser

Climate Change

You ask me what
winter was like in
the old days but
I say ask the
chickadee whose
energy budget is
so tight—he told
me this himself—
if he even moves
overnight he may
starve to death
by morning

Intelligent Redesign

I know evolution might not find a reason to do so but I think God should put nipples on the rounds of women's knees & shoulders now that the emphasis is not so much survival but recreation, if only for this brief oil-driven blip on the total human sojourn. It's not like you really need your appendix—which it takes a surgeon & health insurance or HMO to get at— & who but male doctors & professors really need facial hair? But the nipple thing, it's all about what Ernesto Cardenal said: "The economy of the future will be to make things more beautiful."

Epilogue

by Lindsay Tang

I don't like losing anything except weight, twenty pounds of which disappears in a month and a half.

Being supervised by my thirteen-year old sister is weird because I'm one and a half times her age. It's more weird that she's supervising me going to the bathroom. Well, ok, she's actually just waiting outside the stall. But I knew she would follow me. I knew she would wash her hands, and I knew she would linger. So I use the bathroom, open the door, and she's just standing there casually. "What are you doing?" I ask even though I know.

"Just waiting for you."

"Oh. Ok." And I'm not supposed to be mad at all, even though the situation is awkward and I can't get any privacy when I'm just using the bathroom. It irritates me that this doesn't happen when I go before lunch.

Rewind to late May when I'm so near death I can brush it with my eyelashes. Jon and I are competing to lose weight and I can't shake off his "It's ok if you don't lose as much weight as me, Lindsay. After all, I'm a guy" statement. I don't like losing anything except weight, twenty pounds of which disappears in a month and a half. But ten pounds in, it's not about beating Jon's ass and winning the \$200 bet anymore. I stop wanting to look thinner. I start needing to look thinner.

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I could look so amazing if I keep this up. I'm convinced that it isn't enough to just keep exercising and scraping by on water, hard-boiled egg whites, and salad (which is actually just lettuce and tomatoes—no dressing, croutons, or even corn because there are too many carbs in that). If I want to be tinier with every glance in the mirror, I'll need a better strategy. So I become a double-barreled bulimic; I'm the purging type and the non-purging type. Purging is just a pleasant way of saying "self-induced vomiting." It isn't pleasant at all but people are convinced that I eat. Non-purging, also called exercise bulimia, is when I sweat off what little I've eaten and more. One website calls it "secretly vomiting," but I think of it as added insurance.

I recommend bulimia for anyone self-deluded enough to ignore feeling like shit all the time. *This bottle of aspirin must be full of placebos because my headaches won't go away. The doctor is insane. I'm not overrunning and my knee and hip pains can't be early signs of arthritis. My esophagus isn't corroded. My voice isn't raspy. I can keep getting away with this. It'll be worth it. I feel fine. I'm not bulimic.* And now I'm wailing my confession to Jon about having two types of bulimia and how much work it is to hide it and how I'm scared about not getting my

period this month and I hate myself for developing bulimia in the first place and I need to stop it and I know I cheated and I'm sorry but I need to back out. And he says that's fine. We'll fix it together. Plus, he misses pizza.

For the next month, I only eat with Jon so he can be sure I relearn to eat healthfully. At first I feel criminal for only exercising once a day and eating food that I can taste, but my complaints are short-lived.

It's the end of July and I'm driving with Kelli. Kelli knows I helped stuff Jesse McCreery's mailbox with defective donuts from the Krispy Kreme dumpster. I'm the only person she told when she backed into another car's side door. Secrets are only fun if you have a best friend to share them with.

There's a lull in the conversation before she says, "You never told me who won that thing between you and Jon."

The saltiness of my fingertips floods my tongue and tickles my throat. "I called it off."

"Really? Why?"

Shit. Lie, don't lie, lie, don't lie, lie, don't lie, lie, don't lie, don't lie, why would you lie to your best friend, lie, lie, don't lie, lie. "Because I became bulimic."

"Oh Lindsay." She turns her head

from the road and looks right at me.

I've never heard Kelli say my name in a disappointed tone

before. "But I'm ok now. Really! Jon and I worked through it and I'm fine."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Ok. I believe you."

Good. "Good."

There are times when you should be honest. That wasn't one of them.

Kelli calls the next afternoon and asks me to come outside because she's parked in my driveway. She starts sobbing when she sees me. *Crap.* She says that she cried all day yesterday while researching bulimia and calling eating disorder hotlines. She doesn't understand why I have a negative body image. She insists that I don't need to lose weight. She is scared for me.

I am beyond pissed. Didn't I tell her that I was fine? Why didn't she believe me?

"Lindsay, you have to tell your parents."

WHAT? "What? Why! It isn't

even a problem anymore. I don't want them to worry over something that's in the past."

"I know, but they need to know."

There are times when you should be honest. That wasn't one of them.

"No. No they don't, actually."

"Lindsay, if you don't tell them, I'm telling them." *Shit.* "If

something happens to you and they find out I knew, I won't be able to live with that. " *Since when was this about you, Kelli?* "I'll give you time to tell them. If you don't do it within that timeframe, I'll tell them. But don't worry, I'll warn you before I do it."

You'll warn me? Are you trying to strike a deal with me? I knew I should have lied.

"Fine."

"I'm doing this for your own good, Lindsay. You're my best friend and I care about you." I don't feel myself hug her back. *Fuck you. If you really cared, you'd let it go.*

Kelli never brings up the subject again. I forget about the incident and figure she has too. The "your-time-is-up-so-I'm-telling-on-you" ultimatum disintegrates into an empty threat. *See, Lindsay, you can trust your friends.*

I go back to school in September and don't come home until October ends.

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I lost a few pounds by eating healthier and my family is happy for me. On the way to the airport that Sunday afternoon, my dad says, "You look great, honey, really, you do."

That was random. "Thanks."

"Uh, ok. This probably isn't the best time to bring it up, but I need to ask. You didn't lose weight by being bulimic, did you?"

Oh my God. "She TOLD you?"

"Lindsay, don't be mad at her. She was really scared to tell me and your mom."

I'm not mad at her. I'm furious at her. "When was this?"

"Right before you guys left for school."

"And?"

"Well, she called and said she had something important to tell us. Your mom and I went to her house that night. I think you were out somewhere. Anyway, we went there and she was sitting in the living room with her parents. Kelli was crying because she wasn't sure if she was doing the right thing. She didn't want to lose your friendship. It took her ten minutes to finally tell us."

I'm crying too now, but not out of sympathy for Kelli. "What did you

guys do?"

My dad's tone of voice is still calm. "I didn't want to believe it. Your mom didn't say anything."

I'm thankful when they let me walk through security with sunglasses on. I'm not looking forward to Thanksgiving anymore.

My parents have stayed together for me and my sister, but they still act like they're divorced. They won't stand next to each other in the few pictures they both agree to be in. Conversations between them inevitably become arguments. The word "your" is always bitterly emphasized when they say "your mom" or "your dad." I don't remember the last time they kissed, hugged, or smiled at each other. I didn't want my parents to find out about my eating disorder and blame each other for it; they fight enough already.

"It's your fault that Lindsay turned bulimic! You always pushed her too hard!"

"I did NOT push her too hard! I just wanted my daughter to grow up strong!"

"It didn't matter if she was valedictorian or tennis team captain or a concert pianist or whatever! She was just never good enough for you."

"It didn't matter if she was valedictorian or tennis team captain

or a concert pianist or whatever! She was just never good enough for you."

"At least I wasn't babying her all the time like you were! It was your coddling that made her cave like that!"

Although I've accepted their chronically loveless marriage, it still hurts to hear my name involved in it. I doubt Kelli meant to give my parents another thing to argue about, but it's easy to blame her anyway.

Even though I'm finished with bulimia, it isn't finished with me. A common side effect that I suffer from is gastroesophageal reflux disease, where my gag-reflex fires involuntarily and my stomach contents come back up. This looks incredibly suspicious to people who know I have a history with bulimia.

I'm window-shopping with my mom after dinner one night when my stomach muscles tighten. *Oh shit, not now.* I squeeze my lips together right as liquefied pork loin and asparagus spill into my mouth. As she's pointing out some copper cookware, I snatch the two-second opportunity to spit while she's still distractedly eyeing that kettle. My mom is staring at me when I turn back around. "What was that?"

Damn. "Nothing." She's suddenly finished talking.

I imagine this is what it would be like to iron the inside of my throat with a pair of flaming soccer cleats.

I'm looking at Christmas ornaments with my dad and sister a few days later. I can't decide if this one is a gingerbread man or a really tan starfish when my stomach tightens again. This time is worse, though, because my stomach is empty of anything except acid. I imagine this is what it would be like to iron the inside of my throat with a pair of flaming soccer cleats.

I'm bent over like I'm trying to cough my throat out onto the floor (which I wouldn't have minded) as the scorching gets worse and I'm pretty sure everyone in the store is staring by now so I'm scrambling outside because I saw a water fountain on the way in. Of course, the fountain doesn't work. *Fuck.* I'm trying to calm down by taking deep breaths but the frozen air ironically makes the burning worse so I attempt to casually stroll into a nearby Johnny Rockets to ask in a horrifyingly raw voice for a glass of water. The girl smiles because she thinks I'm a chain smoker but fills a cup anyway and I thank her while trying to control myself because I'd gladly drink all 32 ounces in one gulp but I don't want to look like a nut so I take a sip and step outside before downing the whole thing. My throat cools but it's still itchy. My dad and sister are asking what happened and I say I coughed up acid, so we get ice cream

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to neutralize it. I claw maniacally at a frozen cylinder of Phish Food with a flimsy plastic spork the whole way home where I finally microwave the block into submission. I'm halfway done when my stomach protests the unexpected influx of food by sending the ice cream back up (at least it doesn't burn) and I'm running again, except this time to the nearest toilet.

Winter break becomes a laborious game of avoiding anything that could make me look like I'm still bulimic. I don't eat too much because I'll vomit. I don't eat too little because I'll seem anorexic. I'm afraid of soda because burping can trigger refluxes. I snack on Tums between meals. Nothing sharp comes near my hands because cuts can be misinterpreted as bite marks. My workouts are light so I won't lose weight. You may think that even if my parents didn't know I used to be bulimic, they would still notice my reflux disorder. This is true but having unexplained gastroesophageal reflux disease is less worrisome than having it because of bulimia.

Kelli and I exchange Christmas gifts one night. I haven't told her that I know she snitched on me, but she probably figured because I've barely spoken to her over the past two months. As she turns to leave, she asks, "Are we ok?"

No. "Yeah."

"Oh. Ok." She emails me the next day asking again and even though I know I should call, I just email her back. I insist it was unfair that she didn't warn me and, in spite of her good intentions, my parents deserved to hear it from me or at least with my consent. I tell her I've lost my parents' trust. I tell her she's lost mine. I tell her not to respond because I will never believe anything she says again.

Kelli's letter arrives at the end of January. The envelope reads "You don't have to read this right now. You can open it tomorrow, next year, or in ten years. Just please don't rip it up." The letter lives under a stack of notebooks for a month.

Jon is watching me tear it open because I don't want to be alone if I get upset. I don't need to read the letter to know what it says. She's sorry for lying from the start because she was never going to warn me. Her mom said I would understand if she told my parents. She's sorry her mom was wrong about that. She hopes I can get over my body image problems and live a healthy life. She wishes me the best.

I'm still mad when I finish reading. Jon asks if it's a good idea for me to end our friendship when she was just trying to help. I'm irked further and insist that I'm not going to talk to her for a while. Jon turns back to his laptop.

Brian makes the consensus official later that night. As my best guy friend, my boyfriend minus the romance, I call with the expectation that he'll side with me like always. But he doesn't respond when I finish. I'm afraid that I've created another Kelli situation. It's useless, but I tell him not to worry anyway.

"I can't help but worry, Lindsay."

Not again. "I know, but you have to trust me on this. Kelli didn't trust me and look how that turned out."

"Are you sure you're being fair? She was just trying to help."

How do I always end up being the bad guy? I have no comeback and I'm tempted to hang up. "I know, ok?! I know!! But I'm fine; I wouldn't be telling you this if I wasn't, right?"

"I guess." He's silent.

I decide to be silent from now on too.

The fear of alienating more people keeps me quiet. I can't talk about it without getting mad because everyone thinks I'm being irrational for resenting Kelli. No one ever fails to mention that she was "just doing the right thing." *Yes, I already know that so CAN YOU JUST LET ME BE MAD NOW??* I'm mad that everyone is

defending her. I'm madder that I'm not allowed to be mad.

I'm more frustrated than grateful that everyone is too concerned to trust me. I'm supposed to accept my regression to infancy. Babies wear diapers and require constant supervision because it's not Lindsay's fault that she can't control her bulimia. I ask my dad why no one believes me when I say I'm not bulimic. He says they do believe me; they're just making sure I'm ok. *So no one believes me.*

I despise the pity. I doubt that Kelli told anyone, but I flip through a mental yearbook anyway to vote for "Most Likely to Ask Me About It" at our high school reunion. I can already feel them placing their condescending hand on my shoulder as they whisper, "So I heard about your thing with bulimia," to me like I've already died. I hate that I only hear the word "weight" when it is spelled w-a-i-t because people think I'll relapse if the subject comes up. I'm even more insulted when I'm told that I "look fine" and that I'm "already beautiful just the way [I am]." *When did I say I was fat?* Bulimia didn't blind me from reality. I'm not delusional and I can make accurate judgments. No one understands that "bulimic" is not a synonym for "mentally unsound."

I'm reading the millionth "How I Overcame My Eating Disorder" story that I've read this year. Just like the others, it goes like this:

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1. I was the fat kid and everyone made fun of me
2. I developed a negative body image
3. I became anorexic/bulimic/both
4. I was hospitalized after letting it go too far
5. I love my body now and I don't own a scale and I eat whatever I want and life is **normal** again

It pisses me off that they all sound like that. It pisses me off that they all end like that. I hurl the magazine to the ground.

by Paul R. Davis

Outside the Realm of Beauty

It's enough to have some,
to not want more.
But we are sandwiches
of image and mortality,
a rock of dust that shatters
at a frown, a wrinkle.
I will be free of perceptions,
a road without curbs,
a meal never eaten.
Put me on that train
that has no destination,
filled with flowers yet to be named,
waterfalls hidden under thousand year glaciers,
let me be the horse unriden.
I will see the trees naked of description,
feel the animals without their voices,
be all people inside their bodies
and call all of it beautiful.

by O.P.W. Fredericks

Brown and White

Hurried footsteps stumble on hidden roots
along a dirt path, fingers lose their grip. Laced petticoats
wet from washing lie at brown feet
beneath an overturned basket - soiled.

~

Crimson trails on split mahogany flow,
an offering to the hallowed ground of ghosts,
while ivory marks an oak bit and hands
strain against tanned hide.
Tracks show on soiled faces as the innocent,
helpless, bear silent witness to justice
served for indiscretion as the cracker
meets its mark on the outskirts of Richmond.

A silhouette burns into the youngling's memory:
shimmering gold framed in starched lace. A ribbon
of robin's egg blue echoes the eyes
at the house of White,
where hatred is born this day.

A reflected glow pierces an ebony night
revealing a gathering, as cords of restraint are undone.
The punished falls into the arms of her beloved
while elders stoop to gather the fabrics of sin.
A form hurries beside a fieldstone wall - built
by once-free men, footsteps hidden by shadows
and katydids. A creak
of shanty floorboards, keening fades.

Concealed beneath a brocade cloak, ivory fingers grasp
a satchel at the doorway. A tallow candle reflects
pale blue framed in scarlet as shimmering trails bleed
into lace. The figure falters, muffling a cry.
Strong men, bearing the same scars as oxen,
hold no malice towards this visitor named for freedom,
approach and escort her to the small cot.
Frightened and confused, the youngling cowers.

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Astringent bottles, pulled from the satchel, tinkle.
With purpose, delicate hands tend to wounds.
Minutes pass as whiskey is put to lips.
Faint moans turn to heavy breaths.

Salve the scent of gunpowder and tallow
mixes with tears as an offering for redemption.
Bandages of petticoats cover the ooze as the visitor
presses cheek to work and hums an ancient tune.
Elders join in hushed chorus while oxen men sway.

Taking nothing, the visitor rises, returns
through shadows along a fieldstone wall,
footsteps concealed by katydids.

A silhouette burned into the youngling's memory:
shimmering gold framed in starched lace. A ribbon
of robin's egg blue echoed the eyes
at the house of White,
where love was born that night.

~ ~ ~

A figure lies in silence lost to dreams.
The face - mahogany, wrinkled with time, framed
by soft tufts of ash and smoke. Weathered fingers
rest on an ag'ed satchel.

A voice outside the door contrasts
to the baritone of oxen men
standing guard at this vigil. The figure stirs.
Paper crinkles as the first notes of an ancient tune pull
at a mind reluctant to release its illusions.

Eyes wise with the ages are met by a silhouette
long buried with ghosts and memories. Spun gold
frames ivory skin. A soul revealed
through a pale blue mirror to the past. *Miss
White, I'm your nurse, Charlotte
Brown. Your bandages need to be changed, but first
I'm going to give you something for the pain.*

Misery forgotten, the narcotic is metered in droplets.
With purpose, delicate hands tend to wounds.
Oozing scars - cast aside as salve
mixes with years, offering forgiveness.
Bandages tender time. Notes from an ancient tune linger,
oxen men sway.

Miss White searches - time.
Mahogany fingers reach for lace, ivory,
hands once tending wounds.

Your name - means free.

Notes fade.

*Yes it does. My great grandmother
named me.*

A silhouette burned in the youngling's memory: shimmering gold
framed in starched lace. A ribbon of robin's egg blue echoes:

Your eyes child, I remember - your eyes.

by Romy Shinn Piccolella

5 a.m.

A mosquito on the windowsill
struggles against glass rings of Coke and Kool
Aid clutching wings and back
as I sit on my grandmother's red sofa.
Thin legs fold, stretch, hooked
feet and fanged head arch
against the sticky white ledge.

I should help or end it,
crush, smack, drown
in Miracle Grow, Raid, or more juice.

Doesn't everything have a soul?

Movement joins the dry carcass
of a fly a few inches away,
preserved by fluid, sugar and heat.

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Hunting Season

Two bobcats stalk each other
Black outlines of fur and muscle

pace away from the house
through melting snow and orange

birch leaves that refuse to let go.
I can't imagine being pursued

by an animal twice my size.
I assume the larger cat

is the male. How could she
resist? Would she want to? The promise

of birth under shale
ledge and meandering roots,

prodding paws, hot milk.
If I were chased, would I resist?

The pair jog into the woods
out of range. My dog

and stomach still growling.
I begin fixing breakfast at dawn.

We Create So Much of Our Suffering – So What's All the Fuss About?

by Dr. Parker Wilson

As a psychotherapist, I have noticed that most of our minds are fundamentally out of control. For instance, have you ever gotten a song, or a thought stuck in your head? Have you ever needed to concentrate on something, and your mind just wouldn't focus? Have you ever lost sleep because you couldn't turn your

head off? Do you find yourself repeating unhealthy patterns over and over again, often in spite of the wise counsel of loved ones? We can not fix a problem until we know what the problem is, thus the first task of mental health is to help us recognize that our minds are a chaotic, storming, directionless sea of thought

and emotion.

Like an untamed horse, our minds often buck, and rebel; shifting direction and speed at a whim. Like a wild horse, the untrained mind will not submit to direction, it will not be subdued. Despite your command to "stay here and concentrate," or to "stop remembering that song," your mind, like that untamed horse, often pays no heed. As a doctor of clinical psychology and a psychotherapist, I can tell you that such an untrained, chaotic mind naturally produces stress, fear, and anxiety. How could it not? And this confused, untrained mind leads us into muddy, unwise, and even destructive thoughts, emotions, choices, behaviors, and relationships.

No one ever teaches us about our minds, let alone about how to work with them. As children we read fairy tales where the protagonist's suffering is horrible but ultimately bearable because the story always has a happy ending. But our lives contain many unhappy endings, don't they? None of us can escape some measure of pain, loss, grief, aging, sickness, and death. Did anyone really ever prepare you to meaningfully process and work with these uncomfortable experiences? Most of us experience the deadly emotions of envy, greed, anger, lust, pride, gluttony, and sloth (the seven deadliest emotions in human psychology), but has anyone ever showed you how to abide with, work with, and transform these afflictive emotions?

Like a soldier thrown into a raging battle without the proper discipline and training, our chaotic minds often become overwhelmed, terrified, and

exhausted. This is the very nature of stress and anxiety! But how did we get like this? What happened? In school we learned the three R's, but we learned nothing about the most powerful tool we will ever possess; the tool from which the entirety of our lives is created: we learned nothing about our own minds. And why is this so? Because the culture we live in simply does not make learning about and working with the mind a priority.

What is the meaning of life? Some say it is to create happiness and psychological flourishing. But what is happiness and what creates it? Most of us mistake happiness for the absence of suffering, and what if it is so much more than that? What is mental health? What is psychological flourishing? Moreover, what is consciousness? As a culture we dismiss (and always have dismissed) these questions as being relatively irrelevant when compared to what **really matters**. And what really matters is power grabbing, militarism, and materialism.

Our modern American culture is far more focused on worldly concerns. More specifically, on the left hand side of the divider we find what we really want, while on the right hand side of the divider we find what we really want to avoid:

1. Gaining Material / Avoiding Losing Material
2. Gaining Praise / Avoiding Blame
3. Gaining Acceptance / Avoiding Rejection
4. Gaining Pleasure / Avoiding Discomfort

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As the great American psychologist, William James, once said, "... for the moment, what we attend to becomes reality." This is true for a person, a community, and for a country as a whole. In essence, what we pay attention to becomes reinforced, identified with, and often reified. For example, if you pay a great deal of attention to gaining material, you will become increasingly concerned with material (and increasing fearful of losing the material you have gained). This will naturally lead you to cultivate greed. Everything becomes easier with repetition. You may become so consumed with greed and gaining material that you may even begin to see people as objects for your possession. Similarly, if you pay attention to gaining praise from society, you will become increasingly consumed by saying or doing whatever is necessary to gain that praise; you will also become increasingly anxious at the thought of losing that praise (or, God forbid, taking any criticism or blame). And again, quite naturally you will cultivate another deadly emotion: envy. Some have become so obsessed with gaining praise and avoiding blame that they have resorted to lying, cheating, stealing, and even killing. The same can be said for gaining acceptance and avoiding rejection, and for gaining pleasure and avoiding discomfort. How many lies, thefts, and murders have been committed to gain these things or to avoid losing them?

It is clear to see that paying an exaggerated amount of attention to the above worldly concerns (which seem to be such a solid foundation of our American culture) can only result

in mental disease, moral erosion, confusion, fear, and instability. Moreover, since it is impossible to truly feel better at the expense of another, the same can also be said for engaging with the destructive behaviors mentioned above (lying, stealing, cheating, killing): these behaviors usually produce more confusion, fear, mental disease, and suffering.

So what if we have unwisely chosen our priorities in life – so now what do we typically do with all this confusion, mental disease, stress, fear, moral decay, and instability we have created? Why, we exit our uncomfortable mental experiences of course!

We tend to exit our own experience of discomfort and suffering in at least one of the following three ways:

1. We Numb Out (drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, food, TV, romance novels, video games, etc)
2. We Get Angry and Aggressive (blaming, minimizing, denying, righteousness, condemning, passive-aggressive manipulating, assaulting, etc)
3. We Get Materialistic ("retail therapy," buying a handbag that costs more than most people's house payment, upgrading to the new spouse or lover, working 100 hours a week, moving to a new city or state, etc)

Which of the above exit doors is your favorite (or do you have

more than one)? As a culture, we are very adept at taking these unhealthy exits from our own mental discomfort – the discomfort that we have often created from our own misaligned priorities. But these unhealthy exits only create more disconnection, stress, confusion, dishonesty, compulsion, and suffering. And once this new layer of suffering has been added to the mix, how do we deal with that? Well, we usually assume that we just haven't acquired enough material, praise, acceptance or pleasure yet so we re-double our efforts in these areas– and so the cycle becomes deeper and more routinized... That is until we decide to wake up.

Waking up begins with recognizing that a mental problem (a misapprehension) exists. Waking up begins with recognizing that our priorities and concerns might need to be re-created or re-aligned. Waking up begins with noticing that our attitude towards our own discomfort (towards our own experience of suffering) is adversarial. Waking up begins with noticing how we pour fuel on the fire and make our suffering so much worse than it ever needed to be. Waking up begins with recognizing that if we are experiencing pain, confusion, grief, stress, or fear that doesn't necessarily mean that something is wrong! Nothing necessarily needs to be fixed! Aging, sickness, and death make us feel grief and stress and fear at times in life – this is totally natural.

Waking up begins with becoming more mindful. When I teach mindfulness seminars to new students or teach a new client how to begin a mindfulness practice, often times they feel as though they are in a boat trying to see the bottom of a beautiful lake while a

storm is raging on the surface. The furious waves disturb and distort their perspective and orientation. They are tossed about, disoriented, and they often feel like giving up. With this storm raging, it is impossible to see through the surface of this lake; in fact, all they can clearly experience is the intensity of the frenzied waves bashing them about! All these churning, intense waves represent your unhealthy priorities, your unhealthy concerns, your experience of suffering, and your inauthentic exiting of your own experience. All these chaotic waves smashing into you are nothing more than your untrained mind (your unwise thoughts, emotions, judgments, beliefs, opinions, memories, fantasies, desires, words, and actions).

Most of us are so used to this raging, internal storm (most of us have so few moments of mental peace, quiet, and clarity) that we simply believe that this storm is just the way we are. In other words, most of us believe that we ARE that raging storm inside our heads. We believe that we ARE the mental chaos we experience; we believe that we ARE all the disturbing things that we think, feel, say and do. We get hooked by and caught up in our disturbing thoughts and emotions. We identify with them. For example, when we feel angry, what do we say? We say "I AM angry." Basically, we are saying I AM anger! This is identification! We identify with the emotional experience of anger (when we invest it with tremendous reality), it becomes who we are. Do this over and over for years, use anger to exit your mental discomfort, and now you have a strong, well entrenched psychological habit; you have also created an entrenched

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bitterness and a chronic mental anguish.

And what if you could just stop? Would you even want to? Would you even think it possible? What if you didn't have to grasp onto anger; what if you didn't have to identify with it and become anger? What if you could learn to watch yourself experiencing anger? What if you could learn to stop reacting to the experience of anger and just stay with the mental energy of anger? Have you ever noticed yourself thinking or feeling something? Have you ever said to yourself, "Man, I am really feeling angry right now?" I call this "catching yourself in the act." This is basic introspection. This is basic waking up! These are the baby-steps of mindfulness. And furthermore, if you have ever noticed yourself thinking or feeling something (say fear, for instance), did you ever further notice that your awareness of your fear was itself not afraid? Did you ever notice yourself experiencing depression, and then notice that your awareness of your own depression was itself not depressed?

Now we are really waking up! When you learn to redefine your priorities and concerns in life (through introspection and meditation), that is the first step. When you learn to bring this undisturbed awareness (this mindfulness) to your everyday mental experience (even your uncomfortable experiences), then you are learning how stay and work with your mind. This undisturbed awareness (this mindfulness) brings clam, peace and clarity to the surface of the lake. And this mindfulness (this underlying awareness) is always available to you, always spacious, always clear, always

luminous, and it is never affected by or identified with your disturbing thoughts, emotions, unhealthy habits, or your destructive words or actions.

When you learn, through mindfulness practice and mindfulness based psychotherapy, to create some space between you and everything that you think and feel; when you learn to work with your disturbing thoughts, emotions and habits, then you just begin to psychologically and spiritually calm down. Now you create penetrative insight into your own condition and quality of life. Now you begin to clearly see your own mental confusion; all the fear, conflict, and chaos that has had you feeling stuck and tied up in knots for so many years. This will well motivate you to change some of your priorities and behaviors. These positive changes in behavior will produce less suffering and eventually they will produce happiness and meaning.

This is how one becomes mentally healthy: one becomes vividly aware of one's own disturbing thoughts and emotions, one learns to abide with them (to stop getting "all caught up with," and then exiting them), and then one learns to work with and transform those disturbing thoughts and emotions into meaning, inspiration, connection, compassion, purpose, and positive behavior.

To become mentally healthy is to transcend living simply (and futilely) to avoid pain and maximize mundane concerns. To become mentally healthy is to live deliberately and always in the present moment (the only true reality available to us). To become mentally healthy is to create meaning and

authenticity in our lives; it is to stop disconnecting by indulging our destructive and unhealthy habits, thoughts and emotions. Being mentally healthy is to move beyond "I like," and "I don't like" as the basis for every choice and action in our lives.

When we become mindful, we stop being so self-absorbed; we begin to live beyond just avoiding our own sense of fear and aversion; we begin to live beyond life and death. We psychologically and spiritually grow up. We have purpose and meaning. If

you learned these mental skills, if you learned how to slow down and work with your mind, what would happen? If you increased your mental balance, awareness, peace, stability, clarity, spaciousness, authenticity, calm, and penetrative insight, just imagine how this would affect your entire life. How would this new, trained mind affect your work, your home, and all of your relationships? Moreover, how would such a mind impact your involvement in your community, your culture, and your involvement in the politics of your nation?

by William L. Ramsey

New Orleans Rain

This is the weather
Bienville had in mind:
the Gallic overcast,
the soggy desuetude.

Tourists drink in
bars while residents
lean idly in doorways
and windows, watching

the place dissolve,
blur inward with ref-
lected light, fragments
of forgotten jazz.

The purpose of noise,
they know, is not
the splitting blunder
of the saxophone but

the pauses between
thunder, when puddles
focus briefly before
falling back to slivers.

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By Lake Pontchartrain

Inadequate meanders of preceding
quaintness stir the heart and sullenly
perform the soul's perceived dilution,
raising

and lowering the relevant national
flags in alternating flourishes, red,
yellow, red, white reticulations
plumping

the fall breeze with homely rage.
I have no idea that my shoe is untied,
but as I gaze toward the careless water
I pull

up my sock. A sudden swell of
querulous shadow quiets the sunlight
for an instant, then its brightness
crashes

along the rocky shore with added
force. I try to trace the tangents drawn
tight between all temporary meaning,
suspend

the disparate world's debris
a moment in the eye, to measure
the collective exhalation of the
tide, its

piecemeal ruin as it ravel
over the rocks. If I find you again,
I hope I will be adequately broken,
amiss,

tangled up at last in the incidental
tripe of things unspoken, to persuade
you to come wading with my impure
kiss.

by Tony Zurlo

Journey of Life

At seven the boy saw himself the hero
of the World Series and Super Bowl.

His dreams were adventure-filled at eleven
as captain of the Starship *Enterprise*.

Hormones declared at sixteen that the key
to popularity and success was sex.

He embarked on his journey at twenty one
with confidence and an attitude.

At thirty, overdosed on updates and upgrades,
his battery pack expired and he crashed.

By forty, he'd climbed the stairs and fallen
enough times to be wary of warranties.

When fifty hit, he inventoried and paused
while twenty-somethings scurried past.

Then a revelation of sorts at sixty five: happiness
and pleasure can be borrowed but never owned.

When he reached eighty, he began each day
anew entertained by paradox and irony.



Greetings by Jim Fues

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Contributor Notes

Ace Boggess is author of two novels, *Displaced Hours* and *Beautiful Ambivalence*, published by Gatto Publishing, a book of poems, *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled*, from Highwire Press, and, as editor, the anthology *Wild Sweet Notes II: More Great Poetry from West Virginia*. His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *Florida Review*, *Oregon Review* and many similar journals.

Paul R. Davis is a 59 year old human who is happily married and living in Central New York with its exquisite summers and damnable winters. He is currently employed by an obscure agency of the Federal government. In addition to writing, he is also a philatelist and model train enthusiast. He believes readers should take away something of value from poems, whether it is an idea, a phrase, or a tool to enrich their lives. A poem should be able to walk down the street, tip its hat, and shake hands with the people it meets. He writes about what springs to mind and takes his inspiration from what his eyes see and what his mind experiences in order to share those thoughts with others. His work has been previously published in *The Comstock Review*, *Poetpourri*, *Comrades*, *Latitudes*, *HotMetalPress*, *The Georgian Blue Poetry Anthology*, *The Poetry Peddler*, and *Crackerjack 2000*.

Barbara Daniels' book, *Rose Fever*, will be available in March 2008 from the Cherry Grove imprint of WordTech Press: <http://www.cherry-grove.com/>. She received two Individual Artist Fellowships from New Jersey, completed an MFA in poetry at Vermont College, and received a full fellowship from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation to the Vermont Studio Center.

Deborah DeNicola's 5th poetry collection *Inside Light* was recently published by Finishing Line Press in September 2007. Her spiritual memoir *The Alchemy of the Black Madonna & The Future That Brought Her Here* will be published in 2008 by Nicolas-Hays Press. She is the author of two other prize winning chapbooks, *Psyche Revisited* and *The Harmony of the Next*, as well as *Where Divinity Begins*. Deborah edited the anthology *Orpheus & Company; Contemporary Poems on Greek Mythology* and has been an NEA recipient. Her work has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *North American Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Green Mountain Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salamander & Orion* among other journals. Deborah does dream image work from her web site: www.intuitivegateways.com.

O.P.W. Fredericks is a retired Registered Nurse from Pennsylvania. His poetry reflects the human condition. He is writing a novel based on his philosophy of life. He serves as a moderator for the Academy of American Poets in the Poetry Forum. *Brown & White* is his first publication.

Cheryl ("Cherri") Fruhling, 57 years of age, is a native of Maryland, who is employed as a paralegal with a Baltimore law firm. Her ability to write legal motions and correspondence extends about thirty years, although her love for writing, especially poetry, spans far longer. She wrote her first poems in high school. Cherri has always written for the love of it and this is her publication debut. In fact, it wasn't until the summer of 2007, that she first submitted a few of her poems and thought, per chance, one or two might be worthy of publication.

Jim Fuess has had hundreds of group shows and over 40 solo shows over his 32 year artistic career. He is known for his vividly colored abstract paintings. He also has a series of black and white paintings which are an exercise in going back to the basics of form and structure. They deal with the relationship of shapes and figures to each other and to negative space. For more information about his work or to view more of his art, both in color and black and white, please visit his web site at www.jimfuessart.com

E. Laura Golberg's work has previously been published in *Genie*, *Mom's Literary Magazine* and *If Poetry Journal*. In 2006, she was selected to attend the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and in 2007, to read at the Joaquin Miller Cabin Poetry Series.

Mr. Michael Lee Johnson lives in Itasca, IL. after spending 10 years in Edmonton, Alberta Canada during the Vietnam War era. He is a freelance writer, and poet. He has been published in USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, Turkey, Fuji, Nigeria Africa, India, Republic of Sierra Leone, United Kingdom, Thailand, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He is the author of *The Lost American: From Exile to Freedom*. http://www.iuniverse.com/bookstore/book_detail.asp?isbn=0-595-46091-7. He is now the publisher, editor of *Poetic Legacy*: <http://www.poetriclegacy.mysite.com/> and *Birds By My Window: Willow Tree Poems*: <http://birdsbywindow.blogspot.com/>. Both are now open for submissions.

Jenn Koiter's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Grasslimb*, *Fickle Muses*, *Relief*, *Ruminate*, and *The Eleventh Muse*, and she was a winner of the 2006 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize.

Gavin S. Lambert lives in Northeast Florida with his wife and daughter. He works in a library. His work has appeared in *Segue*, *Poor Mojo's Almanac(k)*, *Orange Room Review*, *TorkStar*, *Thieves Jargon*, *Adirondack Review*, *Dead Mule*, *Fiction Fix*, and "remark." One of his short stories, "Can I Have One of Those?," was a top twenty-five winner in *Glimmer Train's* winter 06/07 Very Short Fiction Award.

Matthew Longo is a twenty-one year old student at Binghamton University. His work has appeared in *Dark Reveries*. He is currently being featured in *7th*

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Dimension Magazine and *Dogzplot: An Erratic Literary Montage*. He hopes you enjoy the story.

D.L. Luke graduated from The New School University in New York City in 1993 and received a bachelors in fiction writing. She has received several writing awards and has published both fiction and non-fiction including work online in *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Hot Metal Press*, and *Digital Pulp*.

Romy Shinn Piccolella received a BA in English writing and anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg and a MFA in poetry from Goddard College. She just published her first chapbook of poetry, *Tether*, with Pudding House Publications. She has published individual poems in several journals including *The Fourth River*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Miller's Pond*, and UCLA's *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, among others, and has poetry forthcoming in *The Cherry Blossom Review* and *languageandculture.net*. She lives in north central Pennsylvania with her husband, three year old son, and a baby that is due in April.

William L. Ramsey has taught at Tulane University, SUNY-Oswego, and the University of Idaho. His poems have appeared in such journals as *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Hellas*, *Lullwater Review*, etc. and are forthcoming in *The South Carolina Review* and *Blue Unicorn*. His first book is forthcoming from the University of Nebraska Press in May 2008.

Michael Shorb is a poet, technical writer, editor and children's book author who lives in San Francisco. He writes frequently about environmental issues and historical topics. His work has appeared in over one hundred publications, including *Michigan Quarterly*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Nation*, *Commonweal*, *Rattle*, *The Sun* and *The Shakespeare Newsletter*. He has also appeared in a number of anthologies including *Discover America*, *A Bell Ringing in the Empty Sky*, *The Dolphin's Arc: Poems on Endangered Creatures of the Sea* and *To Be A Man: In Search of the Deep Masculine*.

Lindsay Tang is studying sociology and journalism at the University of California, Los Angeles. "Epilogue" also appeared in *Toasted Cheese Literary Journal* at <http://www.toasted-cheese.com/ezine/7-3/tang.htm>. Her memoir has been published by the-vu.com.

Dr. Parker Wilson is a doctor of clinical psychology and the founder of the Awakened Mind Institute (AMI <http://www.amidenver.com>) in South Denver. AMI specializes in treating psychological trauma, addiction and compulsion, depression, and family and couple's issues. Over the years, Dr. Wilson currently teaches at the

University of Colorado at Denver and leads mindfulness retreats, workshops, and engages with all manner of public speaking. Dr. Wilson's first book, *Uncommon Wisdom*, is due to be published in early 2008.

Ed Zahniser's poems have appeared in over 60 literary magazines in the U.S. and U.K, a chapbook, three books, and several anthologies. Somondoco Press published his third book of poems *Mall-hopping with the Great I AM* (2006). His e-chapbook *Ransacking Desire for that Seed of Contemplation* is online at www.languageandculture.net. Ed is on the organizing committee of the annual Sotto Voce Poetry Festival in Shepherdstown, WV., and is poetry editor of the *Good News Paper*.

Tony Zurlo's poetry and fiction have appeared in approximately one hundred print and online journals, including *Red River Review*, *Long Story Short*, *Peace Corps Writers*, *Fickle Muses*, *Open Window*, *All Info About Poetry*, *VerbSap*, *Humdinger*, *Armageddon Buffet*, and *The Cynic*. He also has published books on Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Japanese Americans, West Africa, Algeria, and Syria. His Op-eds and reviews have appeared in many newspapers and journals.