



The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives

featuring poetry by

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The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives
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A Note from the Editor

This issue of *The Externalist* proved to be a test of our grit. We learned a great deal about Internet publishing with several obstacles impeding our progress. To be honest with the readers who have been so honest with us, I wasn't convinced that this issue would be released on time and this worried me to the point of sleeplessness. Why? Because we are handling the writing of amazing talent, new and old, but more importantly, because we are handling the perspectives of individuals who have put their trust in us.

Trust is a ready theme in this issue. Trust between relatives, between governments, between religions. This issue brings to light what an important subject this is, how trust lies at the root of every relationship and every social institution. We begin this issue as always with our Editor's Choice, Paul Hostovsky's poem "Follow the Leader," which not only presents the presence (or lack) of trust, but explores the effects of trusting relationships.

Other work in this issue explores matters of trust in a wide range of social situations. Esther Greenleaf Mürer's poems reflect on government, as does Shaul Hendel's story *Don't Mind Dick, Laura*. Johanna Wald explores trusting relationships among family in her essay *Reclaiming Grandpa Joe* and Erika Dreifus's story *Vigilance* dives into the emotionally-charged trust relationship between parents and the public education system.

As always, we're pleased to bring a variety of voices to our pages. Our contributors for Issue 3 display a variety of backgrounds and places in their career. We've also included a diverse range of writing styles in this issue--pieces that push the boundaries of the expected and get away with it. We hope you find a great deal to appreciate, enjoy, and think about in this issue as the summer winds down.

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Editors' Choice

Editor's Appreciation

This issue's Editor's Choice is Paul Hostovsky's poem 'Follow the Leader.' Hostovsky approaches a common subject from an interesting perspective in this poem: military culture from the eyes of a relative who is also contemplating the effect of that culture on the children in the family. Hostovsky skillfully employs language that reflects military life and war, both as a sub-subject of the poem (where all of the colorful noun phrases/are reserved for the names of "operations") and as metaphor (my kids in the back seat killing). Hostovsky's use of language and enjambment underscores the narrator's meditation on how his brother's place in the world affects his own.

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Follow the Leader

by Paul Hostovsky

My brother-in-law is in the Navy.
He uses words like "vehicle".
Shall we take one or two "vehicles"
to the beach? he wants to know.
A sunny summer Sunday
and the only two-vehicle convoy
with headlights on for safety
is our mission to the beach.
And the weather is "cooperative".

He leads and I follow because
he's a leader in the United States Navy
where all of the colorful noun phrases
are reserved for the names of "operations",
and the weather is always either
cooperative or uncooperative,
like his kids in the backseat stiffly
staring out the window,
their thoughts precipitating
a thousand miles away.

He leads and I follow because
behind his back I'm spinning
these hit-and-run near misses,
these pot shots at the Navy's
leaders' kids and vocabularies,
my kids in the backseat killing
time with singing and drumming
and drawing emaciated stick figures
with lumpy limp smiles
and exploding spiky yellow suns.

Denuding their crayons, they're threatening now
to eat them one by one in the order
of the rainbow.

by Esther Greenleaf Mürer

21st-Century American Cutup

This is the hour of the great contempt
seven-headed business
gropes groundwards with grisly arms
and flame-coloured teeth
wanting to eat a landscape

A government unworthy of credence or trust
dribbles and dawdles on the perimeter
asking no ultimate questions.
cravens at council crow proudly with the hearts of hens
making solemn leagues and countenances.

dislocation is eroticized
superabundant stars
stir souls with false prophecies
sunny rot and corruption
a storm of drunken joy

there is ice in their laughter
the unnerving cold ominousness
of dead things shamming life
in an animated cartoon by Hieronymus Bosch
the world withers and the wind rises

[Collage sources: J.G. Whittier, William Stringfellow, Douglas Gwyn, Thomas Merton, *Philadelphia Inquirer* sports section, Pauline Kael, Tennessee Williams, Sellar and Yeatman, Marion Millner, Friedrich Nietzsche, J.R.R. Tolkien, Vladimir Nabokov, Winifred Rawlins]

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Abandon All Hope....

The only lines in the Federal Building are disinformercials. Though I sneak with a ton of buns and bagels and have not gloves, there will be wailing sounds and flashing signals.

The Federal Building has a black marble heart with matching façade. Even as we keep watch, the message etches itself above the door:
Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate

—which means “The law shot Tony Speranza, boy contralto.” Outside, the line foams down the street to the jail for grannies convicted of being unfit for military service.

Don't Mind Dick, Laura

by Shaul Hendel

The February woods are leafless as I turn onto the main stretch of the three-mile loop, and there is something out there by the side of the road, far ahead against a white patch of snow. It hasn't been there yesterday. A crouching person, an animal, I can't tell. Dick tells me to turn around, but walking feels so good; it makes the ache in my knees dissipate.

“Keep to yourself,” Dick says. “A quick one-eighty, and in fifteen minutes you're back in the center.”

But the soreness that keeps me moving, reminds me why I don't want to go back to the stillness of the meditation retreat. Not yet. I remember how Dick yelped when the bell rang at the meditation hall, “Sweet mother of Buddha, it's finally lunchtime!” And how, only an hour

May you be safe from harm, I chanted in my head at the necks of the yogis ahead of me.

ago, my right foot felt like a needle-studded two-by-four when I first tried to walk. I hobbled off my cushion, where I'd spent the last forty-five minutes mute and motionless. My thoughts were a windmill, generating nothing but more wind.

I joined the food line, a sedated slug that slithered from the dining hall to the exit door. May you be

safe from harm, I chanted in my head at the necks of the yogis ahead of me.

"But move already," Dick growled. I was starving.

By the time I heaped my plate with an ovo-lacto vegetarian lunch, most benches in the dining hall were taken, and I slid between Mother Teresa and Brad Pitt, facing Golda Meir. Brad Pitt was not his jolly self today. His hand, carrying a forkful of lasagna, halted in mid motion when I gingerly placed my sore butt on the wood bench next to him. As he lowered his arm, he shut his eyes, and his face pulled in as if in excruciating agony.

"Is it something I said?" Dick said.

Almost a hundred people in the large room chewed their lunch in eerie silence. Between the clicking and clacking of dishes I could clearly discern the whistle of Brad Pitt's nasal exhale. One of his nostrils was clogged. Across the table, Golda Meir stared at the creamy Formica between us, her facial features drawn down, as if obeying a stricter gravitational law. Mother Teresa calmly dipped a corn muffin in his salad dressing, and I followed his example, and dug into my food with just enough restraint to cover up my utterly unspiritual hunger.

It is day five of the ten-day silent meditation retreat, and by now I've developed a routine to break up the

anesthetic daily schedule. After breakfast I melancholically gaze out the large dining room window, a cup of double-bagged Earl Gray warming my palms; late in the afternoon I stretch my tortured muscles in the yoga room. But after lunch I head out the main door for a constitutional. Not the Night-of-the-Walking-Dead-shuffle known as walking meditation, but a vigorous hike through unpaved country roads, arms swinging, with Dick's running commentary free and unsuppressed.

On the large board by the exit, a yogi with a knack for taunting has posted: "The only way out is in."

I went out.

And now, what is it out there ahead of me on the path?

Light snow covers the macadam, and the soles of my hiking boots leave well-spaced impressions behind me, and the blood flows in my legs, and I just want to keep moving forever. But the blur becomes a defined brown shape by the side of the road as I close in.

"Turn around, you idiot," Dick whispers, but my legs keep forward. "Never mind, it's too late. Just ignore her. Keep walking."

Tears streak down Laura Bush's cheeks as she raises her face toward me. Having catching mere

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glimpses of her in the last five days, I'm surprised how thin her face is in full frontal view, how dusky her complexion in the gray daylight. Before she even starts, I know she is going to talk, but when her whispery voice reaches me, it booms inside my chest. My face grows hot, my heart races as if I'm witnessing her in some deviant act of forbidden intimacy.

"She's dying," Laura Bush says in a choked voice, and places a gloveless hand on the flank of a whitetail doe that lies panting in the snow beside her. The

animal's neck arches backward in utter defeat, its dark eyes bulge. A pool of red slowly blooms in the snow under its heaving torso.

"She was attacked by a lion," Laura Bush says.

It is generally assumed that the practice of meditation—aside from providing a possible path to enlightenment—calms the spirit, and quiets the mind. But more commonly the aspiring meditator would discover that sitting in utter silence for hours a day provokes a mental hurricane. Furthermore, snail-walking while attending to each step as if it really was a giant leap for mankind, is more likely than not to put the kibosh on spiritual illumination. In the ocean of human life, with its false winds and meaningless storms, speech is a

In the ocean of human life, with its false winds and meaningless storms, speech is a guiding light to the safety of dry land.

guiding light to the safety of dry land. Long, long silence, on the other hand, is a cold night in a dark, cluttered attic, bumping time and again into the same forgotten objects, and the only way out, is in.

As I digest Laura Bush's claim, Dick spontaneously bursts into joyful flip-flops, and clings with

gusto to either one of those two options: a deer-killing lion roaming the winter mountains of Western Massachusetts, or a first-lady look-alike lost in the dark labyrinth

induced by silent meditation. And while I prefer the former option, I greatly suspect the latter.

"A lion?" I say, but what comes out of me is a stifled grumble. I clear five days of speechlessness from my throat, and try again. "Did you say lion?"

"It's ferocious," she says. "I saw it through the trees when I came down the road. It's large and yellow, with a huge head, and a mane like a wreath of fire."

The doe makes a pitiful sound, not unsimilar to the croak I had made as I first tried to speak.

"Oh, dear," Laura Bush cries, new tears in her eyes.

In addition to almost forgetting

“God have mercy,” Dick whines. “Where’s a killing lion when you need one?”

how to speak, I can think of nothing to say.

“And then it leaped into the woods, right there,” she says.

The blood under the dying deer congeals in the cold air, and turns a thick burgundy. I examine the snow for large paw-prints leading from the wounded deer into the woods, and then search Laura Bush’s eyes. While the snow is blank, and the woods serene, her eyes are neither.

“We need help,” she says.

“Speak for yourself,” Dick murmurs.

But she now finally possesses the authority one might expect from a first lady. “Run back to the center, and find somebody, a staff person. They’ll know what to do.”

Purposelessness and confusion are Dick’s arctic winter. No light, no reason. The first lady’s orders now fill him with renewed vigor as he hones in on his mission. He quickly calculates our position on the loop, and the shortest route back; he starts practicing the tone of voice I would assume explaining the situation to the cute young retreat manager, and anticipates the grateful appreciation in her serious eyes. He even wonders if they keep some straight jackets hidden among a stack of flattened meditation cushions someplace, for cases just like this one. Dick feels like himself again.

“I’ll be back in half an hour, forty-five minutes max,” I say, and then the doe dies.

It is a dramatic departure, and if not for the feral nature of the deceased I would have accused it of being overly theatrical. A long wheeze blows out through the animal’s flared nostrils; a distinct shudder runs down its bent neck, expanding into a full body spasm. A sudden muscle stiffening, as if in preparation for the forthcoming rigor mortis, concludes its final exit. The dead deer then sinks deeper into the burgundy puddle in which it lies, its protruding eyes reflecting plumbless horror.

Laura Bush’s oval-office authority melts off her face as she bursts into a high-pitched wail over the dead doe’s body. She rests her forehead on the deer’s rear side, breaks into an uncontrolled sob, comes up for a gulp of air, and then dives down again.

Desperate, I search my surroundings for something, anything. “God have

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mercy," Dick whines. "Where's a killing lion when you need one?" A tall figure approaches from behind a curve in the road in the opposite direction from where I came. I soon recognize Dancing Horse, with her long face, and outward-turned feet. She slows down a bit when noticing us, but then trains her blank gaze forward, and accelerates her stride. She passes us wordlessly, her footprints angle obtusely from both sides of the beeline that she makes in the snow. "Now, why couldn't you have done the same when you still had the chance?" Dick wants to know.

I glance at my watch. Instructions in loving-kindness start in twenty-five minutes, followed by a session of Q and A, and a short sitting period in the remaining time. And while Dick is not particularly interested in blessing all beings all day, the instructor's human voice, and better yet, the ever surprising speaking voices of previously-speechless yogis, bring out his attraction to drama. The subject could just as well be the digestion mechanism of Himalayan grasshoppers, or pork bellies in the international commodities markets, he'd be as determined to not miss the peak event of his day.

"It would probably be best to go back now," I murmur at Laura Bush's trembling back.

No response. She comes up for another gulp of air, and davens back

into the dead animal's rear flank, where I notice a shallow imprint of her forehead in the coarse fur.

I join my hands at my chest. May you be safe from harm; may you be healthy of body; may you be happy and peaceful; may you live with ease in this world.

"May we go already?" Dick says.

As if declaring its own opinion about my dilemma, the dead deer releases a thundering post-mortem fart at the exact moment in which the bawling Laura Bush comes up for another gasp of air.

She halts her inhalation, and frantically coughs out what the deer emitted. "Oh boy," she says. "That must have been her soul exiting the body, rising back to her maker." As if echoing me, she then puts her palms together, and, facing the carcass, chants the same blessing I'd silently bestowed upon her.

"I know it makes no sense," she tells me when she's done.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"I mean," she says, rising to her feet, "this poor doe is no longer going to live with ease in this world now would she?"

"Maybe in another world," I say.

"Deer heaven." She smiles now, tears gone.

"There you go."

"You must think I'm a complete fruitcake, and you're probably not too far off," she says. "Let's walk back, and not talk."

"Alright," I say.

"Good," she says.

We start; I adjust my steps to her pace.

"This ain't no walking meditation," Dick says. "Pick it up."

"I'm sorry," she says. "Please... Forgive me... I hope you don't mind. Could you tell me the most horrible thing that has ever happened to you? Please? I mean... You don't have to... Of course, but will you?"

If speech and action were booze, Dick would be a miserable low-life wino. He now starts, "Come on! What the hell? You've already broken your vow of silence... May as well have another one. Just for the road. So what if she's a basket case? Who are you to speak? It's a chance to talk. Talk!"

"Why?" I ask.

"I understand if you don't want to," she says.

"But I do," Dick hollers. "Please, please! Pretty please with cherry on top?"

"Please... Forgive me... I hope you don't mind. Could you tell me the most horrible thing that has ever happened to you? Please? I mean... You don't have to... Of course, but will you?"

"Will you trade?" I ask.

"Deal."

I need no time to think. The words are all there, a

Well-rehearsed procession, ready to march to the old familiar tune.

"When I was a young man," I say, "I served in the Israeli army. There was a war in Lebanon. I was a paramedic. A rocket hit my platoon commander's armored vehicle. It was as bad as it gets. He was torn up, left arm gone, lost a lot of blood. I started working on him, stopped the bleeding in his head, bandaged the stub that was once his arm. He cried. He was cold. When I ripped his pants off of him, there was an ugly, jagged piece of shrapnel deep in his penis. It almost severed it. I panicked. I hollered for the doctor, 'His penis is cut, help me, I need help!' I guess I lost it. Against all common sense, I tore the metal out of him..."

"A gush of blood hit me in the face. Within seconds, the officer stopped crying. The doctor finally arrived, and he started yelling at me. He said I killed him by pulling the shrapnel. He shouted, 'He's dead! He's dead because of your stupidity.' Maybe he's right. It's been twenty-two years. I haven't slept a full night since."

The snow crunches loud under our

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feet. The ache that's been tormenting me during seating meditation now stabs me sharp between my shoulder blades.

"A deal's a deal."

"I have cancer. I'm dying. It's spread all over my body. I have maybe a couple months to live, probably less. I'm on all kinds of pain meds. I came here to find peace, acceptance. Instead I find lions and bleeding deer in the woods. And, you know? This disease is the only real bad thing that has ever happened to me in my life. I believed I was so happy before. I had everything a woman can ask for, or so I thought. I guess that was the last thing I didn't have."

"What?"

"Cancer. I mean, everybody else has it, right? I've always had to keep up with the Joneses."

Light snow falls on us.

"You don't look like you have cancer," I say. "I mean, your hair and everything."

"That's because I refuse their treatments. It's the chemo that makes you sick, you know? The radiation too. Since I have no chance of survival, I may as well die healthy and good looking, don't you think?"

"What's your name?" I ask.

"Barbara."

"I'm Adam."

"No," she says. "You're Bruce Willis."

Instructions in loving-kindness start in nine minutes. Dick is quiet now. We walk slow, and arrive at the center's driveway too late.

"I'm sorry I made you break your silence," she whispers.

"I'm not."

We walk abreast, and simultaneously turn into a path that leads to the woods behind the building.

"Shouldn't you go in, practice your loving kindness?" she says.

"I don't know. Should I?"

The footpath snakes among the bare maples, and comes to a halt at a small clearing. We aim toward a smooth log at the edge of the tree-circle. As Barbara lowers to sit, a quick wave ripples in her face. She shuts her eyes. After some seconds she asks, "So what's my name?"

"Laura Bush."

She coughs. "Not even the slightest resemblance..."

"I know," I say. "I can see now."

Barbara pulls an orange container

from her jacket, and places two white pills in her mouth. She bends over, scoops some snow in the palm of her hand, shapes it into a small ball, puts it between her pale lips, and swallows. "Makes the medicine go down," she says.

My hand becomes cold
in hers, a little numb;
it's hard to tell where we
start and end.

"Are you in pain?" I ask.

"Does the lion shit in the woods?"

"I don't know. Does it?"

"If I ever meet one I'll let you know," she says.

I take her hand in mine. It's soft and clammy.

"I see things, you know?" she says. "With this medicine. I just saw something a minute ago."

"Another lion?"

"Shut up, Bruce Willis. I saw David, your lieutenant."

"You see dead people?"

Barbara gazes at the distant treetops. "The edges of my flesh turn to longing... and then it's like I'm beginning to cross over, and then I see... It's hard to explain."

"What did he say?"

"He said you should not feel bad about him. He would have died either way. He wanted it over with. He asked me to thank you for making it end faster for him."

There's a tremble in our joint hands; I don't know if it's her or me.

"You know, Adam," she says. "Cancer is not really the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. It's what happened in the years before my diagnosis, the life in me that I didn't even realize I possessed, the shallow space that I used to call happiness."

My hand becomes cold in hers, a little numb; it's hard to tell where we start and end.

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"Now that I watch the little that I have left whirlpools down the drain, I'm finally aware of having life at all. I've wasted so much, there's hardly any left, and there is no way to get it back. That's what really hurts. It's so painful I can't stand it. This pain my drugs don't touch. Sometimes I'm like lieutenant Berman, I just want it over already."

The snow ceases. We fall into silence.

"By the way," she says after some minutes, pulling her hand from mine. "He also said you've done a fine job on his other wounds, and that doctor who yelled at you was an idiot."

"I didn't know you understood Hebrew so well," I say.

"Those are powerful drug." She shakes the wings of her jacket, producing a rattle of half-filled pill bottles, and for a moment she seems as if about to take flight.

"I should try some," I say.

"Nah," Barbara says. "These don't work well for what you have. Trust me."

"What do I have?"

"Inflammation of the past, chronic ache of the bygone, and probably a dislocated outlook of the future."

"Well, doctor," I say. "What can I take to make it go away?"

"When I was a little girl," she says, "I hated snow, and I'd sit by the window and concentrate all my mental strength and willpower on melting the snow on the ground. Then by mid March or so, I'd finally complete my mission, there would be no more snow. But invariably, an early spring storm would bring it all back, and I'd sit there totally pissed, I mean... After all the work I've done!"

"And the moral of the tale?"

"First ingredient of your remedy: don't take it personally. And when I say 'It,' I mean the kind of 'It' that rhymes with shit. If you absolutely have to, then sit back and smell all the stinks in your past, but know that it's really not about you. It's just the way of the world, nothing personal."

"Alright. Any other ingredients?"

"Hope hurts. Don't hope."

"Sounds bleak," I say.

"What can I say? I'm just an overly medicated, hallucinating old lady who falls to pieces at the sight of a wounded deer in the woods, so don't take me too seriously. But what I've figured out during the last couple of days, is that hope is my worst enemy. We're all so conditioned to fly high on its wings, but we keep crashing down time and again."

"But don't you find it depressing? I mean... it's so hopeless."

"Quite the opposite," she says. "The combination of a hope-free life, and liberation from the tortures of the past, brings a total high. Everything is so much lighter. Life, death, and the entire meshugas in between simply lose their devastating grip. Personally, I try to forget about the past, forget everything."

"Forget the past, have no hope for the future," I say. "But what about the present?"

"Just like the weather. It takes care of itself."

"No need to melt the snow?"

She starts a laugh, which turns into a dry cough.

"Then what happened to you back

there, in the woods?" I ask.

"Oh... all that blood, and her eyes. Have you seen the terror in those eyes? She knew death was coming to take her... I guess I forgot my theories. It takes some practice."

"Okay," I say. "Suppose I want to actually try this remedy, where do I get it?"

"I thought you'd never ask," she says, and bends over. She scoops a small amount of fresh white snow in her palm, shapes it into a mothball size sphere, and drops it in my hand. "Best medicine," she says. "I take it all the time, together with the other stuff, for the lesser pain."

I put the white ball in my mouth, and it immediately liquefies. A small amount of water collects on my tongue, and when I swallow, it trickles cold down my insides.

"Three times a day," she says. "Between meals."

"Thanks, doc. I'm already better."

"And don't forget to forget."

"I'll remember."

*

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by Rich Murphy

A Midnight Ride

The body politic squats on the fence,
stuffing ballot boxes every two, four,
six years threatening to fall this way
then that. From one side a donkey
won't budge; from the other a grey wall tips,
excavating the posts from their holes.
Wearing a shaving basin and shielding
itself with a serving tray, progress
fancies itself achieving its end.
Time blows hair back and out
of heads without the rolling cameras
of campaign contributions.
The hobby horse of bosses, whips,
and lobbyists filibusters a dime
for widows and orphans. The poor
know where they stand: the overpopulated
chimera stuck in the mud of party politics.
Outrageous fortune of the few others soiled
the psyches of halve-nots with the vacuum
of victor's spoils. Jails wail with folk
needing food and helter-skelter shelter.
Yet the lousy clothing or growling bellies
cast their lots with General Will, who high
on a nation's petard, demands a lead
in the polls and won't give financial losers
the time of day. The fishermen of small change
reel and roil at corner betting machines
that tally an `illionaire's love notes.
Without saddle, the Old Guard's straddle
of pickets, protests, nuclear tests, elicits
hoots and hackles from the distance
of an enemy. Perhaps one day
the pumpkin of polemics will
grow nimble knees of stirrups and dismount
on two integral hooves into the fray.

by Bill Vernon

These Carnival Workers

drifting through Europe
are piled up
like driftwood today
on the banks, under bridges
over Le Maine in Angers,
France, their caravans
with extended round ears
to catch what orbiting
satellites say.
Their barges bobbing,
arm-thick ropes clutching
steel rings on the levees,
holding them here.
If homes could fly,
the sky would house them,
these nomads playing
loud music, spinning
rides with garish lights
for a month of wintry nights,
seemingly freer than us,
but floating on the same
strong currents of time,
no more, no less than we are,
anchored in this place
inside our stony homes.

City Music

The preserved buildings breathe
in through old windows and doors,
but exhale through the newer
lines of baked red clay, those

pipes extending from chimneys,
producing the notes you can hear,
the solemn songs that swell forth
to harmonize with the wind,

a concert that makes you
imagine the players inside
on benches in secret alcoves,
ancient men and women with long,

white fingers that waltz over keys
and imitate the passing clouds.

Reclaiming Grandpa Joe

by Johanna Wald

After he left, Margaret rarely spoke of him and threw away or tore up all photographs in which he appeared, including her wedding portrait.

"He was so smart and funny."

My great-aunt blurted these words out before she could stop herself. She looked around sheepishly, almost to make sure that neither of her sisters was within earshot. She was in her late 60's at the time, plump and cuddly, with a wave of white hair framing a pleasant, round face often described as containing "the map of Ireland." The jolliest of my grandmother's siblings, she was the only one of the five who had permanently moved away and raised her own family.

I jerked my head around in surprise. Although I was 22 years old, this was the first time I had ever heard any member of my mother's family mention my grandfather, Joseph McGowan. He had been briefly married to my grandmother, Margaret, before literally disappearing sometime in 1930, when my mother was two years old. After he left, Margaret rarely spoke of him and threw away or tore up all photographs in which he appeared, including her wedding portrait.

Except, apparently, the one that I held in my hand, which had mysteriously survived my grandmother's purge. It was a faded snapshot of this very handsome, stocky young man with a thick head of dark hair that my sisters and I had just stumbled upon as we were perusing a box of

mementoes in my grandmother's home. The gentleman in the photograph wore a natty three piece suit with buttons down the front and pointed shoes. His arms were folded confidently—maybe cockily—in front of him, and a corsage was pinned to his left lapel, which made us wonder if this was his wedding day.

Naturally, we seized upon the possibility that this man might be our deadbeat, no-show grandfather. When my aunt confirmed our suspicions, her brief outburst ended an almost 50-year blackout about the guy from my mother's family. I was too taken aback to probe further, which is too bad, since I never again heard her volunteer a word about him.

Throughout my childhood, Joseph McGowan had been "grandpa non grata," the name no one dared to

speak. My mother told my siblings and me that her father died when she was a toddler. I suppose this was the easiest way to short-circuit any uncomfortable questions we might have asked about him. In truth, we hardly gave the matter much thought. We had so many relatives—three other grandparents, buckets of aunts, cousins, and uncles—that we barely registered the absent grandfather, let alone the strange and total silence that my mother's relatives maintained about him.

But then, one day when I was 15-years old, I was riding in the car with my father. He turned to me and declared: "Your grandfather didn't die you know. He deserted his family. No one knows what happened to him."

I can't remember why he chose that moment to divulge this information. I was a sullen teen in those years, and not inclined to talk much to either parent. Maybe he thought that we could bond over this dark family secret. When I confronted my mother later that day with his revelation, she more or less shrugged me off. Dead, deserted, disappeared. The distinctions were lost on her. "What difference does it make? He never did anything for me."

For years after that, my father would goad my sisters, brothers, and me. "Why don't one of you find out what happened to him?" If my mother was close by, she

would squint her eyes in disapproval, and wave him off with a gesture that connoted both irritation and impatience. "Why bother....it doesn't matter anymore." Joseph McGowan had never been anything more than a cold breeze by her side and a source of secret humiliation. She once recalled the bolt of hot white shame that raced through her body when, as a teenager, she overheard rumors that he had been the "town drunk." Her strategy for coping followed a long, revered Irish tradition: deny, repress, and bury.

But I was one generation removed from those wrenching experiences, and I have always enjoyed poking around the dark side of my family's history. For close to 30 years, I often toyed with the idea of taking my father up on his challenge, but never seriously enough to act. Then, when I was in my mid-40s, for reasons still not totally clear to me, I became seized with a need to dig Joe up and bring him into the sunlight. I later developed a theory about the timing. I figure that family secrets take on a life force of their own, and ultimately have to ooze out. After festering for generations or decades, they slowly claw through the lies, half-truths, and silences that constitute a family's history of itself. When they approach the surface, someone is assigned the role of prying them loose and free.

In my family's case, I was the logical candidate to perform the surgery. My mother had no intention of wasting her time on a bum who

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never wasted his time on her. My siblings had never demonstrated anything more than

But I have always felt drawn to outcasts and rogues, and I am a sucker for tales of redemption.

Maybe he had silently trailed my mother as she grew up, and sat in the back row, weeping,

a cursory curiosity about the guy. My favorite novel character was Tommy Jordache, the hard luck brother in *Rich Man, Poor Man*, who got knocked around a lot before discovering his true love and vocation. On film, I fell hard for Matt Damon's, abused math prodigy in *Good Will Hunting*, trapped between South Boston and Harvard Square, fitting in neither place, until he confronted the demons from his past. And the only politician I ever truly loved was Bobby Kennedy, whose haunted eyes offered just a glimpse of the anguish underneath, and whose guilt and grief fueled an astonishing public transformation during the final five years of his life.

So, how could Joe not pique my curiosity? Here was a mysterious ne'er do well within my midst, the sole scoundrel in a family otherwise dominated by responsible, hard-working and upwardly mobile types. The possibilities of his life were endless. Maybe he had remarried and sired a crop of half-siblings that my mother never knew existed. Maybe he had stayed secretly connected to my grandmother, sending her notes and letters that she never showed to anyone.

during her college graduation. Maybe he had reinvented himself, become a pillar of the community somewhere, or traveled overseas as a missionary. Or perhaps he had been the strange old man staring at me from across the street when I walked out of the school building as a child. I was willing to believe anything about him—he was a vast empty vessel. I figured that, of all my relatives, I was the one most likely to give him the benefit of the doubt.

When I embarked on my search, I possessed only the sketchiest of information about my grandfather's life, and few sources to whom I could turn. My grandmother and two of her siblings were already dead; one sister had Alzheimer's, and the other, then in her 90's, wasn't talking. "Let sleeping dogs lie" was her response to questions about Joe. My mother knew only a few tidbits that her mother had parceled out over the years. Joe had been the oldest son of Irish immigrants who had settled in industrial Connecticut at the turn of the century. He married my grandmother, Margaret, also the child of Irish immigrants, in 1927, when he was 26 and she was 25. Ten months later my mother was born. The Depression hit, Joe took to the bottle, and couldn't hold down a job. My grandmother felt

increasingly humiliated by his inability to pay the rent and prodigious drinking capacity, which was becoming well-known around town. When he hocked his wedding ring to pay for a night at the bar, she moved herself and my mother back into the very crowded home of her parents and four adult siblings. Although my mother was only two years old, she claims to vividly remember that evening. She was at her grandparents' home for dinner, her mother whispered to her: "we're not going back," her uncle carried her on his shoulders, and she felt "safe."

Joe left town, but did make one attempt, apparently, to reconcile with my grandmother about a year later. He somehow communicated to her that he missed his "darling wife and daughter." For reasons I can only surmise, she turned him away. As far as I know, he never again made contact with either my grandmother or mother. They both later heard that he lost part of his arm in a train accident, possibly by falling asleep, drunk, on the tracks. My grandmother severed all contact with Joe's family, or they with her, although his parents lived in the next town throughout my mother's childhood.

For almost a year, I sought out Joe everywhere. I plagued librarians in small towns throughout Connecticut. I made regular phone calls to the state's office of vital records. I scoured the fine print of archived newspapers, and strained

my eyes to make out his name in census data. I painstakingly checked the birthdates of every Joseph McGowan in the social security death index, and in every state death archive that was available online. But his paper trail remained remarkably slim, and petered out altogether after 1930.

I began to suspect that Joe had deliberately covered his tracks, as if he had anticipated that someone like me might eventually come looking for him. I appealed to him directly, vowing not to judge him harshly. I was, I kept telling him, open-minded. There are two sides to every story, and everyone deserved a second chance. I tried to persuade him that my only mission was to forgive, accept and bring him back into the family fold.

Only it seemed like Joe did not want to be reclaimed. He turned a deaf ear to my pleas. Sometimes I felt as if he was taunting me by sending me down paths that led nowhere. Despite my best stalking efforts, he would not be smoked out.

In frustration, I traced the movements of his more transparent parents, sisters and brother, hoping to stumble upon him in the process. Eventually, I made contact with several offspring of Joe's siblings. All were helpful and friendly, and offered me insights into his family. I learned that his mother had doted on him, and that her dying wish, in 1945, had been to see him one last time. But he disappeared even from his

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own family for long periods of time and his sisters could not locate him in time. None of the relatives with whom I spoke, however, had ever met him or had the slightest idea when he died or where he was buried. One niece recalled hearing that he had “vanished from the face of the earth” sometime during the 1940’s.

The most revealing piece of information I received from his family came in the form of a photograph, scanned into the computer for me by Joe’s great nephew. Dated 1926, it depicted a scrawny looking Joe, in a sailor suit, holding his five year old niece in his arms. I cannot see his face very clearly, but he looks younger than 25 and almost goofy-looking. His ears are sticking out and his hair is cropped short. He does not display any of the cocky, assured manner of the first photograph, which, if I am correct, was taken only a year or two later. His arm is resting comfortably on his niece’s hand as he holds her. It looks like a familiar pose, perhaps one he has struck 1,000 times before. I imagine that he was home on leave, and she flew into the arms of her adored Uncle Joe. A minute later, after the photograph was snapped, I bet he started to tickle her, and then walked her to town for ice cream.

This portrait unnerved me because it humanized Joe. No longer the iconic, drunk Irish lout who preferred the sauce to his wife and daughter, he became this gawky young sailor holding his niece in his

This portrait unnerved me because it humanized Joe.

arms. This must have been the Joe that my grandmother had fallen in love with; a tender, warmhearted guy who made everyone laugh. It forced me to consider what my mother lost by his absence. Would he have cradled her in his lap at night and sung Irish ballads to her? Would he have held hands with her as they snuck off to the matinee show, eliciting a promise from her not to tell my grandmother? Would he have swung her up in the air and twirled her around, imitating Fred Astaire? Would these moments have balanced out the humiliation she felt fetching him from bars at her mother’s pleading, the agony of lying in bed, eyes staring at the ceiling, listening to the tense anger of her mother, fingers digging deeper and deeper into the mattress, each time she heard the brittle exchanges?

Would any presence, no matter how flawed, have been preferable to dead space?

My search was raising more questions than answers, and I rapidly lost patience with Joe’s elusive ways. I felt as if we were engaged in a dance of sorts—I advanced and he retreated. He started to remind me a little too

much of other men in my past who had ignored, rejected or dismissed me. Only this time, I was determined not to withdraw without a battle. By my reckoning, Joe had abandoned or broken the heart of every woman who had ever loved him, including his wife, his daughter, and even his mother. Well, I'd be damned if I was going to let him slither away again without answering for his actions. Suddenly I was on a mission to even an ancestral score on behalf of four generations of women whom he had wronged.

No wonder Joe shied away from me. Who wants to face the wrath of a granddaughter scorned? We remained at something of an impasse—or at least that's how I interpreted our relationship—until I found Jack, the son of Joe's brother, Eugene. Like Joe, Eugene had been a negligent and alcoholic parent, although he had stayed marginally connected to his children until his sudden death at age 40 in 1945. During the Depression, when neither Eugene nor his wife could care for their children, they had sent Jack to live with his grandparents in Thomaston, Connecticut, where Joe would occasionally stumble back to visit his mother. This made Jack the only relative I found who actually remembered Joe. So, during a visit to the West Coast, I met him at a neighborhood pub, hoping that he might provide me with some insight or memory to jumpstart my stalled search.

I couldn't help but note the perfect, if perverse, logic of meeting Jack in a bar. After all, what better place to sort out the details of our boozy family narrative? If alcohol had played a prominent role in splintering apart the family from which we both descended, why shouldn't it be instrumental in piecing at least one tiny fraction of it back together?

I immediately spotted Jack through the window, sitting alone at a table, nursing a bloody Mary. He looked exactly like his photographs. He was 74 years old, with a headful of white hair atop his weathered and lined face. He shared my mother's Irish white skin and round face. He could easily have passed for her brother, instead of her first cousin. Obviously, both resembled the fathers they had barely known.

The instant I walked through the door, Jack put me at ease. Acting very much the old-school gentleman, he instinctively recognized what I needed, well before I did. Without any prompting from me, he recalled his "Uncle Joe," as a "free spirit, ahead of his time," a man of great personal warmth, intelligence and wit. Jack remembered Joe tenderly babysitting for him and playing Tarzan with him in the back yard. In Jack's assessment, Joe had been a decent, but tortured, soul, temperamentally ill-suited to cope with life during the unforgiving 1930's; a gypsy of a man who had "trouble facing the responsibilities of family life." Jack looked straight at me and stated quietly, with tears

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What Jack offered me was an opening to forgive Joe without rearranging the facts of his life.

had an agenda. I wanted to posthumously turn Joe into a husband and father. I kept pulling back the lens, hoping that I would eventually find him, hidden but present, in my mother and grandmother's life all along. I yearned to unearth the piece of evidence—a photograph, a letter, a diary entry, something—that would suggest he had at least occasionally glanced back at the life he left behind.

What Jack offered me was an opening to forgive Joe without rearranging the facts of his life. On that afternoon, with the sun streaming through the huge windows onto the table where we sat nursing our white wine and bloody Marys, I decided to end this ancient grudge match against my grandfather.

Joe must have picked up on my changed attitude, because fissures began to appear in the firewall he had constructed around himself. On a lark, I called the national Social Security office. After pressing a series of buttons, I found myself connected to a customer service representative. I explained that I was trying to

beginning to well up along the sides of each eye: "I do hope that somehow somewhere he finally found peace and understanding."

The sheer compassion of his words stunned me. A twisted knot in my throat loosened and fell away. All along I had prided myself on my open-mindedness, but, in truth, I

obtain a social security number for my grandfather. To my amazement, instead of dismissing or hanging up on me, this individual asked me for his date of birth and full name. She put me on hold for several minutes, then returned to tell me that she had located two social security numbers which matched his information.

I was speechless. Those numbers could unlock a large piece of the remaining mystery of Joe's life. They would tell me where he was living and working when he applied for them, where and when he died, whether anyone claimed his death benefits, where he had lived prior to his death, and the name of the individual who verified his identity.

There was just one glitch. This woman refused to give me his numbers. I begged; I pleaded; I practically cried; to no avail. Divulging the numbers, she insisted, was against the rules.

I hung up, cursing at my near miss. Five minutes later the telephone rang. The voice on the other end identified herself as a supervisor who had listened in on my previous conversation. Then she declared: "That woman you spoke to is a

stickler for the rules. I am going to give you those numbers. Just remember that you never got these from me."

My hands shook as I put down the phone. I felt as if I had just been the beneficiary of divine intervention. Someone, somewhere, somehow, wanted me to know the truth about my grandfather, of that I was suddenly certain. Armed with Joe's social security numbers, I was able to secure, within a few weeks, a death certificate for him.

Be careful what you wish for.

What I learned from that certificate, along with a few phone calls, was that Joe passed away on May 29, 1975 at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, about twenty years after almost all of his relatives, including my mother, assumed he had died. He was a week away from his 74th birthday. Most likely the cause of death was cirrhosis of the liver, or pneumonia, or internal bleeding or complications from diabetes or whatever disease afflicts those who have been homeless and alcoholic and maybe mentally deranged for the better part of 35 years. His last address was a city-run shelter that was once described in a lawsuit as a "frightening place for anyone not inured to life on the streets."

He was buried in Section 38, Range 16, Plot E, Grave #7 of the Calvary

Cemetery in Flushing, New York in a site donated by a Catholic center for homeless men. The priest who ran the center had signed his death certificate, as "clergy and friend." His was a "direct burial," meaning there was no obituary, no wake, and no service. He was survived by an estranged wife he had never officially divorced, one daughter, five grandchildren, one sister, three nieces, one nephew, four great-nieces, and five great-nephews. Yet, not one attended, or even likely knew about, his funeral. I doubt anyone beside the employees of the cemetery watched him being lowered into the ground.

I had expected to feel relief and a sense of closure. Instead, as the reality of Joe's life and death closed in, I could feel the air being sucked out of my chest, leaving me as limp as a deflated balloon.

"Oh Joe," I wanted to wail. "After all we've been through together, this is where you led me? To a hospital ward for the mentally ill, a homeless shelter, and a pauper's grave without a funeral? No second acts, no inspiring stories of amends and redemption, no secret conduits between you and my grandmother, no attempts to find or reach out to my mother, no alias identity, not even another wife and new set of children?" No, what I held in my hands was evidence of a life so isolated, so anonymous, and so marginal that it took 30 years for anyone to notice it had been extinguished.

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I was 19 years old at the time of his death, and had traveled to New York City frequently, as had my parents and siblings. Had I ever walked by

He had managed to remain destitute, mostly unemployed, and close to completely invisible for almost 35 years. That takes effort and grit.

clearly gone to great lengths to make a colossal shambles of his life. I could only marvel at not just his will, but his tenacity. He had managed to

him? If so, did he stop me to ask for a cigarette and a dollar? Did I gag at the stench of stale gin and old tobacco on his breath, look into his dead eyes, cringe and move to the other side of the street? Did he stare at my face as I walked away, wondering why I looked so familiar? Did my mother ever breeze past him in her tailored suit from Talbots and her briefcase laden with legal papers? Was there a moment of connection between the sad old bum on the street with his withered left hand and tattered overcoat and the lady lawyer who shared his facial features? Did she wonder why she felt a lurch near her heart and a cold chill spread across her chest as she moved away from him?

I didn't know which made me feel worse. That he had died so utterly alone or that this man had squandered his gifts in such a spectacular fashion. By all accounts, he was blessed with great intelligence, wit and charm during his youth. He had been adored by his mother and sisters, and once loved by the sweet and gentle soul who was my grandmother. His nephew remembered him as tender, warm, funny and playful. Yet, he had

remain destitute, mostly unemployed, and close to completely invisible for almost 35 years. That takes effort and grit.

Now I understood why he had tried so hard to keep me from learning the truth. What I had interpreted as caginess may have been something else altogether. Shame. He did not want me to find out where he lived.

In retrospect, of course, I should not have felt so stunned. I should have deduced that his alcoholism, combined with his vanishing act from even his closest relatives, foreshadowed a grim ending. But I had been blinded by my flawed hypothesis. I assumed that, at some point in his life, Joe had emerged from his exile back into the sunlight, and that was where I would find him. In truth, he had simply journeyed deeper and deeper into the shadows. And, were it not for my grandmother's steely resolve, he might well have dragged her and my mother with him.

I found myself harping on 1931, when Joe returned after a year on the road to plead with my grandmother for a reconciliation. Margaret probably arranged to meet him in a secret spot far removed

from the prying eyes of her family and neighbors. He must have appeared before her sober and repentant, holding his hat in hand, kicking at the dirt below him, looking a little shabby from his wanderings. I am sure that he swore to be a better husband and father, to lay off the booze, and to hold onto a job. Then, I imagine he slowly lifted his head and flashed her the most engaging of grins, hoping to coax back to the surface the desire that once made her eyes dance when he approached her.

Was Margaret tempted to take him back? She was 29 years old, a single mother, who had returned to her family's cramped living quarters with a toddler during the Depression. She was a devout Catholic who had been taught that marriage was sacred and permanent. Her husband stood before her—a potential wage-earner and the father of her child—asking to reunite her family. Some part of her must have yearned to collapse against his chest, to feel his bulky arms wrap around her thin frame, and to succumb one more time to the fantasies that he spun for them. But then, just when she might have been swayed, did she stare into his swollen, red eyes and recognize that it would only be a day, a week, or a month before he broke his pledge? Did she see with terrifying clarity the additional children to feed and clothe, the tense nights waiting for him to

return from the pub, and the anxious Fridays spent fretting that he would drink his paycheck away, leaving her destitute for another week? Did her ears ring from the whispers of her neighbors as she walked by, and her cheeks burn in humiliation as she was forced to request, one more time, money from her brother and sister? At that moment, having experienced a year of peace, did she simply refuse to spiral back into that toxic cycle?

I'll never know what that decision cost my grandmother. She kept her feelings for Joe McGowan close to the vest for the rest of her long, relatively uneventful, life. She never remarried, or even dated again. She worked at the same job for 35 years, eventually bought a comfortable home with her sister and brother, retired and traveled periodically to Ireland. An avid reader and fiercely partisan Democrat who loved Franklin Roosevelt and the Kennedys, she possessed a dry, and occasionally biting, wit, took great pride in her daughter's accomplishments, and doted on her five grandchildren and two nieces. I remember her as a sweet, calm, even serene soul who baked us chocolate chip cookies when we visited, hemmed our skirts in the small, neat stitches that my mother had no patience for, and slipped us \$10 bills on our way out the door.

Still, for anyone who cared to look, the Joe years clearly left their mark. A delicate beauty in her youth, her jet black hair turned prematurely

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white, almost overnight, sometime during her brief marriage. Photographs taken of her in the 1930's reveal a lovely, but fragile-looking woman with sad, soulful eyes that seemed somehow resigned to life's bitterest disappointments. In an uncharacteristically self-revelatory moment, she once confided to my mother: "life's a cheat."

But if Margaret's decision to send Joe away came at a price, it yielded enormous dividends for my mother. Spared the trauma and chaos of growing up with an alcoholic father, she thrived under the care of an extended family that doted on, and treasured, her. Her mother, aunts, uncle and grandparents recognized her keen intelligence early on, and collectively encouraged her to use her brains as a ticket out of that small Connecticut town. With their full support, she earned scholarships to college and law school and established a distinguished legal career in Washington D.C. In a sense she became the anti-Joe, as ferociously driven to play—and win—by the rules as her father was to fail by flaunting them.

To his credit, Joe never again burdened my mother or my grandmother by returning, trying to make amends, or seeking any kind of assistance—medical, financial or emotional. God knows he must surely have needed all

three. Whatever Margaret said to him at their final parting was enough to keep him away for life. Getting and staying out of their way may have been his single most unselfish act.

I eventually contacted the center for homeless men which Joe had frequented intermittently for 20 years. The director suggested that he had likely "run" with a crowd much like himself—alcoholic or drug-addicted, mostly unemployed, living hand to mouth and completely cut off from their families. All of these men, he explained, were haunted by "ghosts" from their pasts which they would not—or could not—acknowledge. Still, according to the Center's notes, Joe had attended Mass regularly, performed his Easter duties, and presented no behavioral problems. My best guess is that, as Jack had suggested, he was a tortured soul who could not cope with the life handed to him. So he retreated where, as far as I can tell, he did no further harm to anyone but himself.

In the end, I suppose I can claim a limited victory, however hollow it may feel. Seventy-six years after he disappeared, I pried my grandfather out of hiding. He has morphed from a dark and dangerous phantom into a human being with a traceable, if marginal, presence in the world. At last, I can map the beginning of his life to the end, even if his trajectory lacked the redemptive arc that I craved to uncover.

Lately, I have sensed Joe hovering close by. Having finally allowed himself to be seen, I think he is reluctant to fade away again. Perhaps, after 35 years of being isolated in life, and 30 more of being ignored in death, his eternal soul is seeking the familial connections that his earthly self went to such lengths to shun. Or maybe he simply wants to make sure that my mother knows his story while she is still alive. In turn, she has shown increasing interest in the details of his life, and recently surprised me by expressing a desire to visit his grave. If these developments don't exactly constitute a full-fledged redemption, then, at the least, they suggest some cosmic "corrections"—dare I suggest

healing—may be taking place in the relationship between father and daughter.

As for Joe and me, our dynamic is shifting, and now I am the one pulling away. First, though, I feel obliged to settle him somewhere. Having conjured him up, and displaced him in a sense, I think I owe him that much. I hope to find him a comfortable resting perch somewhere on the periphery of my family tapestry, away from the center of activity, but visible nonetheless. Then, I'd like to say "thanks" and walk him home—toward the peace that Jack wished for him and that may at last be within his reach.

by Charles Brooks III

Pilgrimage

I decided to walk one afternoon
for peanuts and a Coke.
At first I found myself alone
in the exception of dust and long shadows.
The pines and dense maple trees
were my only protection
from summer's hard gaze.

I rambled, rambled, rambled
with Bach whispering his *Chaconne*.
I whistled to be a part of
the song of that stroll.
The dry, bristling grasses were an audience
who applauded within quick breezes.

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Through dancing waves of heat
I absorbed the roadside and field.
To my left stretched out a Buddleia.
Three Monarchs
sifted through its ivory-bundled blossoms.
I stopped to study those soft lovelies,
puzzled by an epiphany.

I realized that with all
the ladybugs and hummingbirds
I neglected to notice the lack
of butterflies this season.
I misplaced the Spring Azures, Swallowtails,
and lacework Whites.
Maybe a deluge
washed them away before being reborn.
Perhaps this year they were late sleepers.

Strolling on I found my venue,
an old store off that rarely traveled dirt road.
Indoors the interior was weathered
like its attendant.
The owner, wrinkled for every
year the shack had been there,
was as witty as he was welcome for the visit.

"It's too hot to be walking," he said,
his head covered by a hat,
the mascot of a ball team long faded.
I smiled back, "It's not so bad",
and from the window fan behind him
the outdoors were breathed in.
I was starved
to be back in that open arena.
Back to meander home in no hurry,
eating peanuts, drinking a Coke,
bewitched by a comedy of butterflies.

by Paul Hostovsky

Price Check

I think the price of sugar should go up
to reflect the irreplaceable
place of sweetness in the dark
world. I mean look
around. The ice is melting into everything and the levels
of pain are rising worldwide with alarming
silence seeping into everything
and it has a vaguely metal taste we seem
to recognize though we never
tasted it till now. I'm telling you
a pound of premium pure cane
granulated sugar in a box
is holy,
yet it's only a dollar eighty-nine.
I mean shame on you who know in your heart
and soul, in your kidneys and on
your tongue you would give anything,
do anything, pay any price for a little more
of this ore, this wealth spreading like
love all around the bowl of
oatmeal of the world.

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Vigilance

by Erika Dreifus

Late that autumn afternoon Sharon stood by the stove stirring carrots, the phone crunched between her ear and shoulder and transmitting those words: *We've got trouble*. Something must really be wrong. Nancy was not an alarmist. If she could have waited for an e-mail exchange, she would have.

Still, Sharon's co-combattant in the Food Allergies Wars sure hadn't picked a great time to announce this crisis. Sharon wedged the phone more tightly and tried to listen, while she kept one eye focused on the carrots and another on the clock. Twenty minutes from now she'd better have the kids in the car, safely on their way to the weekly dinner at Grandma's a few blocks away. Brian's mother hated it when they were late. And Brian would be meeting them there—late, surely, himself—which meant that she'd have to manage without his mitigating influence.

In the meantime, the kids sat in the living room, giggling their way through their fifteen-thousandth viewing of the wedding video. Nancy's voice—admittedly loud—still faced competition from the one

floating through the doorway that connected the kitchen and the living room, the videorecorded voice of the band leader summoning "THE NEW MR. AND MRS. BRIAN KRIEGER!!!" down from their dais seats to cut their cake.

Sharon covered the carrots and lowered the flame and wondered, again, what it was that so entranced them, her four-year-old boy and his six-year-old sister, about this real-life movie when there were so many other options at their disposal. She could scarcely stand to look at it herself, remembering how nervous she was that day, seeing the last decade fall away oh-so-easily on screen.

"I love your dress, Mommy," Maddy had said, one rainy afternoon when the wedding video was again the entertainment du jour. "It's so long and beautiful. You look like a princess." Sharon had smiled, hearing that, because these days Her Royal Highness lived in a crowded three-bedroom with a tiny and overgrown yard and did all the family's cleaning and cooking and despite her degree in fine arts and honeymoon in Paris she never seemed to have too many occasions to wear anything long and beautiful, anymore.

Josh, sitting on Sharon's lap, had just cuddled closer and said, "I love it all."

Nancy's voice grew louder.

"Sharon! Did you hear me? We've

Peanut butter. Two of the most deadly words in the English language. For Josh. Her baby.

really got a problem. At the school."

Now Sharon set the burner to "off," completely, and seated herself at the kitchen table. She could let the carrots cool a bit before packing them with the rest of the food

they'd bring over to her mother-in-law's, the plain chicken and the rice. She adjusted the phone and wiped her free hand on her jeans. "What is it?"

Nancy didn't answer right away but when she did Sharon knew she was right. They did have trouble. At the school.

"Peanut butter."

Peanut butter. Two of the most deadly words in the English language. For Josh. Her baby.

And for Nancy's little boy, too. Which was how she and Nancy had become friends—or maybe "allies" was really the better word. At the Support Group. Nancy's son was Maddy's age, he was in the other first-grade class, so at the moment Nancy had already pre-fought a number of battles Sharon would otherwise have had to face, alone, with principals and school nurses and everyone else who just might not understand the incredibly serious matters of life and death that confronted her child almost everywhere he went, and the sheer vigilance that had characterized her life

since the day her infant had been diagnosed with Food Allergies. It was Nancy, for instance, who had taken charge of ensuring that the restroom soaps were all safe, and Nancy who had devised a checklist to present to museums and other field trip sites, and Nancy who had insisted that all the school bus drivers carry cell phones in case of an emergency.

"Tell me," Sharon said to Nancy, now.

Another mother was vigilant, too. Because her little boy had refused to eat much of anything, for a long time.

"He's lost a lot of weight," Nancy said, in a voice that betrayed a bit of compassion. "Apparently now he'll eat peanut butter."

"That's great," Sharon said. "And?"

It turned out that this other little boy—whose name the school would not release but whom Nancy had, questioning her child, identified easily enough—would eat *only* peanut butter. Morning, noon, and night.

"He's in Ben's class," Nancy explained. "And you know how there's no cafeteria."

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Yes. Sharon faced the same problem in the nursery school, where the children snacked in their small classrooms, too. Which was why for these early weeks of the school year she was staying in the building every morning, lurking in an empty classroom, just in case the still-terrified teacher made a mistake, or an unsuspecting classmate snuck in a toxic treat, and Josh should erupt in hives or rashes and need emergency attention. Agile administration of an Epi-Pen.

She sighed. "Can't this kid go to the nurse's office to eat lunch? Or—somewhere?"

Nancy gave a short laugh. "The mother doesn't want him to feel ostracized."

In the living room the kids were giggling and shrieking. Sharon stepped toward the doorway. The shrieking subsided. In a second Josh was sucking his thumb. Even when he went to Grandma's house they had to bring special food. Already she'd seen other mothers in the playground, whispering and pointing. When he was invited to other kids' parties and the rest of the little ones dug into birthday cake and ice cream, he'd look at her, with those big blue eyes that made her melt in a way that even Brian's never had, if she were honest about it,

and she'd unwrap one of the gluten-free cupcakes they'd have baked together, just the two of them, in advance.

But Peanut Butter's mother didn't want her nutty kid (no pun intended, Sharon told herself) to feel ostracized.

"I still don't understand what the big deal is," Sharon said, half-exasperated, half-fearful.

"There's a petition."

It seemed too ludicrous to be real, but real it was, and all through dinner at her mother-in-law's Sharon couldn't stop thinking about it. Still, she waited until they were home again and the kids were in bed and asleep to talk about it with Brian.

"So let me get this straight," Brian said. He sat on the edge of their bed. His eyes were bloodshot. He'd been working weekends. He had a big presentation coming up. His next promotion might depend on it. That meant a larger house, maybe, or just building onto this one so that the kids might have a playroom and she might even have a studio to paint and draw in again—someday. There'd been a lot of travel these past three months or so, which she understood, of course, but that didn't make it any easier. And why couldn't he be sent to some less interesting places once in awhile? She didn't want to give him more to worry about, but on the other hand, didn't

she manage everything else herself each day while he was at the office? Wasn't she entitled to share this with him?

"This kid's mother has started a—what did you call it—an underground movement?" He shook his head. "With a name, even?"

"POP. Protect Our Peanut Butter," she answered, while she began to undress. "Can you believe it?" And that, to be perfectly honest, was maybe one part of this story that bothered her most: the notion that the "other side" was so antagonistic that they'd already presented their case to the principal and to the school nurse (according to Nancy) as a *fait accompli*, a set of demands with all kinds of back-up. Especially that petition. Which would certainly look impressive to the School Board—surely the next step, after the principal. It was bound to happen.

"How many signatures, did Nancy say?" He unbuttoned his shirt and she slipped into her nightgown.

"Fifty, the principal told her. Fifty parents who believe it's against their children's freedom not to be able to eat peanut butter in the classroom." She hung her jeans in the closet and threw everything else into the

"I mean, what ~~we~~—need is someone—like the mayor? Some official who has a food-allergic child."

laundry basket and willed herself not to cry.

Brian sighed. "This is going to sound

horrible, but what you—." Here she glared at him, and he quickly added, "I mean, what ~~we~~—need is someone—like the mayor? Some official who has a food-allergic child."

Maybe. Perhaps. Possibly.

But that kind of discovery would take time, and Nancy was supposed to get back to her in the morning, after arranging an emergency meeting of their own with the principal. So after her husband had gone to bed Sharon returned to the kitchen, to her folders and notebooks in their wire baskets. She started writing all the key points she'd make to the principal. If she spoke. The plan was to let Nancy do all the talking.

The information here was so familiar—the statistics and lists of precautions and everything else—that even as the words and letters filled the page her mind moved on. What was going on in that school? The other day Maddy had come home talking about the funny-looking necklace her new teacher wore. Sharon had listened and explained that Maddy should be more respectful, because that necklace was a Cross.

"But what does that mean, Mommy?"

What did it mean? What were they

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teaching in that wonderful suburban school, anyway? Tolerance, compassion, respect for "diversity." Lovely precepts. But what happened when one of these theoretical principles was actually called into practice? Love thy neighbor. As long as he doesn't have food allergies, or any other problem that inconveniences you. And if he should drop dead at your feet because you simply had to eat a peanut butter sandwich in your classroom, don't worry about it. As long as you felt "free." As long as your "rights" were protected.

She stared at the cabinets. At the refrigerator. At the plastic containers on the counters, always kept filled with "safe" snacks. At the Action Plan neatly typed and tacked by the phone, signed by Josh's doctor and filled with careful and explicit directions for the benefit of anyone she might have dared entrust with the care of her child while she ventured out to dinner or a movie with her husband, or to a meeting. And before she knew what had happened, she found herself sobbing, as she couldn't remember herself sobbing, ever before.

The kids were finishing breakfast when Brian came into the

kitchen, dressed and ready for work.

"I'm going to head out a little early," he said. "I want to get some more research in before it gets too crazy today, for that presentation. OK?"

She nodded and poured the kids more soy milk.

"Have a good day, kids." He leaned down, gave each child a kiss.

"Bye, Daddy," they chorused.

Then it was her turn. Maybe she imagined it but his kiss seemed to linger, just a little. He held her gaze and smiled. "Good luck, Mom," he said. Then he was gone

"Why did Daddy wish you luck?" Maddy asked.

"I'm working on a project," Sharon answered.

"What project?"

"Go brush your teeth. We're going to be late for school."

Josh drank the rest of his milk and hopped off his chair. "I love school, Mommy," he said.

"I know you do, sweetie." And she did, because every noontime when she left her hiding place, to join the other mothers who were arriving to pick up their children from the AM session, she'd see her son emerge from the

classroom, more often than not clutching an art project, his face aglow.

"And next year, I'm going to Maddy's school, right?"

Sharon swallowed. "That's the plan."

Today she'd brought the novel her book club would discuss the next week, but she couldn't concentrate. Which didn't matter, because she'd only been trying to absorb herself in yet another story of love gone awry for ten minutes when her cell phone trilled the Toreador Song.

"Crisis averted," Nancy said. "Or so it appears."

Still Sharon's heart pounded. "What do you mean?"

"That kid ate spaghetti last night. And French toast this morning. So the principal said when I called to arrange our meeting."

There was a long pause, almost as though, Sharon thought, they had each, stunned, released an exquisite, exhausted breath.

"So, I guess I'll see you at the next Support Group, right?" Nancy said, finally.

"Right," Sharon answered. She turned off the phone.

Crisis averted. For the moment. She checked her watch. It was almost snack-time in Josh's classroom. As she always did at this hour, Sharon held her breath. All her muscles tensed.

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by Margarita Engle

Camouflage

The dull brown emu's emerald egg
is hidden by tall savannah grasses
during the season of green.

Hunters dress in forested cloth
imagining that prey cannot smell their hunger,
or hear their noisy approach.

Women tend gardens
wearing halos of straw, and floral print blouses
in our effort to reclaim Eden.

Soldiers move through the desert night
wishing their faces could be like ephemeral wildflowers
on sand dunes, shifting and elusive,
golden and harmless in morning sun.



Porosity

Plastic has proven
too heavy and damp
for the Amazon
food rots
so women in the rain forest
still know how to shape
smooth clay vessels
with reverent
hands

and men have not lost
the fine art of weaving
two-colored baskets
of reed
lined with silken
banana leaves
almost leakproof

just enough breath of wind
passing through unseen pores

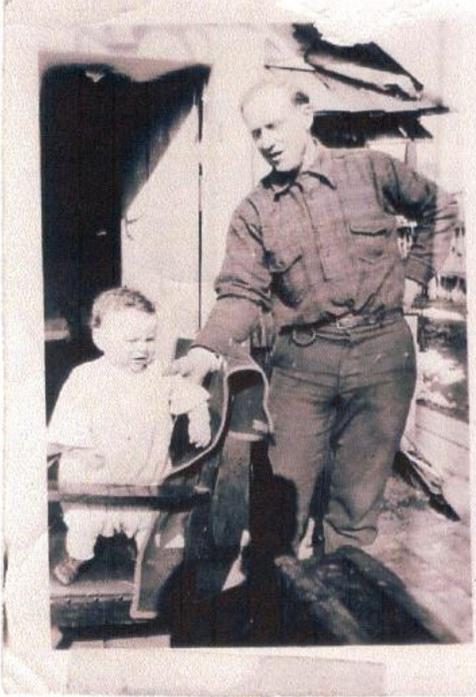
just enough breath of air
to keep meals of fresh fish and tubers
from rotting

just enough breath of dream
to keep children
alive.

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by Sean Lause

The gift



The day my mother dropped a net
of oranges on the kitchen table
and the net broke and the oranges
rolled and we snatched them,
my brother and I,
peeled back the skin and bit deep
to make the juice explode with our laughter,
and my father spun one orange in his palm
and said quietly, "This was Christmas, 1938,"
and he said it without bitterness or anger,
just observing his life
from far away, this tiny world
cupped gently in one palm,
I learned
I had no way, no vision, no right
to comprehend an orange.

Falderal

by Gregory Moore

It is as if I lack a gene that attracts one to shiny baubles. I walk into a jewelry store, browsing over the glass cases of bracelets, rings, brooches, some things I can't readily identify but that clearly have no non-cosmetic use, \$2900 here, \$4700 there. In this case are things, trinkets supposedly the value of a year's foodstuffs; in that one decorations worth a decade's transportation. You can have facsimiles of these gems for a fraction of the price, objects not from the earth but looking just the same to all but microscopic inspection, a necklace, some earrings, glittering needless things.

*

I remember someone's portable CD player from when I was 18 or so. The compact disc format was invented only a few years before that, so I hadn't grown up with them. By this time CD players weren't something everyone had, but that was clearly on the way. Portables were starting to get out there, too, and I had someone's. I don't remember if I'd borrowed it or maybe I was with its owner, but the CD player I recall with clarity, the "SONY" emblazoned across the top, the rectangular little black buttons, whatever they were for. It looked so small, so delicate and novel.

A couple decades later they can be had in cheap, hanging packages of clear plastic, just begging you to buy this wonderful bit of technology for prices impossible years ago. It's so familiar to me now that it seems I never could have found it noteworthy. The CD player itself stands equidistant from novelty and familiarity; it possesses neither trait. It is only something we call a portable CD player, silver with black trim, about four inches across, more or less flat and oblate, manufactured by Sony, owned by me, etc., etc. I am responsible for whatever else it seems. It reflects my image, and I have changed.

*

Most mammals possess an emotional and intellectual depth that places them firmly on a sort of middle ground in the animal kingdom, between the almost pure instinct of chickens and the showy cognizance of chimpanzees. It seems they can love, but this is not what bonds a grizzly bear to her cub. That is chemical, oxytocin or any number of other biologically synthetic emotions. The mother rolls onto her back to nurse in response to an encephalic reward.

Somewhere on a rocky beach a mother seal barks for her pup, listens for a response, barks again, unaware that an orca has snatched it off the beach with massive, curving teeth. She barks, there is pain in her call, her limbic system creating a craving that now cannot be satisfied, an ache that cannot be salved. She barks, her child is eaten. Stimulate the release of opiates in her brain and she will watch with complacency as the orca chews, swallows, searches for another meal, devours mate, parent, offspring, her entire family line.

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by Cali Linfor

Green Flies

We like our beauty singular,
the virgin, the rose, the sun
perfect in their isolation.

The iridescence of green flies captured
in the minute drone of their wings
and their eyes twitching
from a thousand ports
can hardly be called beautiful
when we know their tongues
cast out vomit
when they touch down.

They sting and bite and live three days.
They land on the lip, on shit, on horses
and then return to jeer the curving ear.

Yet in mass, one inch above the blue ripple
of a lake, gathered in a hover to tease the trout,
they glitter prettier really than pearls or even diamonds
because of their restless breath and buzz.

Those wings fan out and catch the sun.
The shape their life makes them swell and shimmer.
Virginity is pointless. The rose an excess of pollen
and passion.

by A.D. Winans

Lackland Air Force Base

During basic training the
DI took us on a field exercise
Bagged a rabbit
Took out his survival knife
And slit it up the middle
Sliding his hand inside
And coming out with its guts
Then drank of the blood
Smiling as he said:
"It makes a man of you."

Two, three others jumped right in
As others screamed in joy
Or agony
One leaving his breakfast
On the ground

The day we graduated
At the parade ground
We wore the smell of death
Like a whore's sweet perfume

Lackland Air Force Base Two

At Lackland Air Force Base
During basic training
We were given a survey
To fill out
And asked some questions
By the DI
About our religious affiliation

When the Sergeant asked me
What religion I was
I answered Protestant
And when he asked what denomination
I was
I answered Protestant
Not having practiced religion that much

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The sergeant didn't like my response
I think he thought
I was a wise-ass
He asked again what denomination
I was
And I responded in a like manner
Until I found myself taken
To the company barracks
By a pimply faced corporal
With a demented smile on his face

Once there I was made to strip down
To my shorts
And ordered to sit down
On a straight-back chair
While the two men proceeded
To use me for batting practice
Asking the same damn question
Over and over again
And my response was always
The same

Finally they grew tired of the game
And told me I could get dressed
That they would put down atheist
And why didn't I just say so
In the first place
And save everyone the trouble

Lackland Air Force Base Three

At Lackland Air Force Base
In San Antonio Texas
Home of the Alamo
The DI put us in formation
And introduced himself to us
One fat boy
He called Porky Pig
And gave him a shot to the gut
And said to another dude:
"How did the food taste?"
And the dude answered

"Good Sir.
And the DI punched him too
And said,
"You're a liar
It tasted like shit,
Didn't it?"
And the kid tried hard
Not to cry and said,
"Yes Sir."
And the DI said,
"How in the hell do you know?
Are you a shit eater?"
And the boy said,
"No Sir"
And the DI said,
"Well I think you are."
And told the corporal
To take down his name
They'd get back to him later

This kind of abuse went on
Week after week
And on the final week
When we graduated
I learned that the DI
Had served in Korea
And was a decorated hero
In town
He said his job was
To make men of us
Raising his drink
And offering a toast
But when you looked him
In the eyes
It was like seeing a tombstone
Staring back at you
And that boot camp speech
Was like a death charm
I will carry with me
To my grave

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by Arthur Durkee

Untitled

On a snowswept hill
ambered in sunset light, four deer
pick at half-shrouded corn-stubble.
The road passes by them at speed,
oblivious. Downstream,
a hawk crouches on the highest limb
of a naked birch, feathers bunched
against cold wind.
They ignore each other.
The sun finishes going down,
the moon and three planets
stalk each other through the skybowl,
and the wind turns arctic as night settles in.
Faiths die this way, bluing deer
on a steep hill, waiting for the predator's fist.

Mountain Meadow

by Terry Sanville

At the top of the rise, Jacob reins
in the horses. The buckboard
jostles to a stop. He stands and
surveys the broad valley,
enjoying the sunlight on golden
poplars that shiver in the
September wind.

"Why are you stopping?" Anna
complains. "We best be getting
on. Beth will worry."

"Look, there." Jacob points to a
low hill, not more than thirty
yards distance.

"What? I see nothing but scrub oak
and sage."

"Yonder, on that knoll. Do you not see
her?"

The two stare downslope, Anna
shielding her eyes against the low
sun. "Ah, yes, there against the
branches."

A woman in a dusty black dress and
hat stands with her back to the
couple, her roan pony tethered in the
cedar breaks nearby.

"That ruffled dress be nothing the Saints would wear," Anna mutters.

"To be sure, and that fancy saddle...made by some Gentile easterner."

"Who do you suppose she is?"

"Don't rightly know...but she will never reach Saint George or Pinto by sundown."

Jacob studies the familiar details of the spring-watered meadow with its tiny pyramid of stones.

"I...I suppose we should take her in," Anna says.

"Yes, the Christian thing to do."

Jacob clammers down from the buckboard just as the woman in black turns. She raises her hat's thin veil, revealing an unsmiling face.

"She is no young'un," Anna remarks.

The woman collects her horse and limps toward them, using a silver-tipped cane.

"Her face is a mask...so much powder and paint," Anna says in a lowered voice.

"Yet such a dour soul beneath," Jacob murmurs, eyeing the stern cast of the woman's face. "Are you lost?" he calls out.

"Yes, the Christian thing to do."

"No, sir, I am not." The woman's voice is strong, precise.

"We don't get many Gentiles in these parts. Most pass east of the Mormon Range from Cedar City or Saint George."

"I am sure they do. But I know my destination. My name is Rebecca McCarthy." The woman extends a gloved hand.

Jacob takes it into his calloused paw. "Ah, I am Jacob Bateman and this is my first wife, Anna."

"Your first wife?" Rebecca's face is creased by a wry grin, showing deep wrinkles around eyes and mouth.

"Yes, you do know of the Saints' tradition here in Utah to..."

"Please, sir, do not be offended by my reaction. It is hard for us Gentiles to appreciate why any man would tolerate a houseful of wives."

"Such a strange thing for a woman to speak," Anna says, eyes narrowing.

"I apologize for my ignorance. It has been so long since I was married, and it was not the grand enterprise I had expected."

"I am sure it was not," Anna says dryly.

Jacob clears his throat. "My wife and I noticed that you are alone and that darkness is soon upon us."

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"And you have come to rescue me...a damsel in distress."

"Well, er, yes."

"There is no need, kind sir. Besides, you are forty-five years too late."

"Late?"

"Yes. I have been here before... in 1857. That is when I needed rescuing."

The color drains from Anna's face. Jacob steps back. "My family has lived near Mountain Meadow since the Saints settled these parts. Perhaps my father..."

Rebecca stares at him coldly, the wind pulling at her tightly-pinned gray hair. "Yes, maybe your father saw me then...and my sisters. I was just six."

"Your sisters?" Jacob whispers.

"There were five of us Dunlap girls. I was the third oldest."

"You were..."

"Yes, I lived through it. Saw them chase down and fall upon Rachel and Ruth. Heard my sisters' cries for mercy before they..."

"Please, the tale of what those Indians did chills my soul." Anna lowers her head.

"INDIANS!" Rebecca shouts, her face flushed.

Jacob eyes her coldly. "It has been well established by the Church that –"

"You are too young to know anything. I was there in the first wagon...one of a dozen or more children and infants they judged could tell no tales."

"I am sure you are mistaken," Anna says. "The idea that anyone but Injuns could –"

"I was there when that scoundrel John Lee marched the disarmed emigrants up the valley...in a long death procession... then gave the order to... to 'do your duty.'"

"But surely, in all the confusion, you must have –"

"I was there when your Saints raised their weapons and massacred our disarmed men, shot the women...older children... the wounded. Chased down those who could run, slaughtered them, their blood seeping into that beautiful meadow yonder."

Rebecca covers her face with black-gloved hands, her whole body trembling. Anna moves toward her but Jacob shakes his head and she retreats.

"In my dreams I can hear the women cry out, the children scream, my own wounded father shot in front of me, my dress soaked with his blood. No, sir, those murderers were not

“I fear that neither man nor God will ever let us forget.”

Indians.”

Jacob shakes his head. “But surely all the accounts that Paiutes were responsible, were the ringleaders, cannot be in error?”

“I know only what I saw, good sir...our entire company killed and left for the coyotes...my...my mother lying face down...her long red hair blowing in this cold desert wind.”

Anna claps a hand over her mouth and turns away.

“I...I...it must have been horrible,” Jacob says. “You are a very strong woman to live through...”

“No one lives through such horror,” Rebecca says and sighs. “We may continue breathing but...but our minds and souls have been damaged beyond repair.”

“But you seem to have prospered to some degree and...”

“Yes, if John Calvin is correct, I am assured a place in heaven. But earthly riches will not return Rachel or Ruth and... and if righteous men can perpetrate such savagery, how can I ever trust any man again? We are all capable of doing the same.”

Rebecca dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief. Turning, she mounts her horse and slowly winds downhill into the meadow toward the small pyramid of stones.

“What is she doing?” Anna whispers.

“She is visiting the cairn.”

“I wish to God that it was gone so we Saints could forget about...”

“I fear that neither man nor God will ever let us forget.” Jacob’s voice barely rises above the wind.

Alex and Bonnie drive southward along Highway 18 toward Saint George, their Odyssey purring in the high mountain air.

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"Snow Canyon is a few miles ahead," Bonnie says. "I want to stop and take pictures."

Alex groans. "Just because our digital can hold a thousand pictures doesn't mean ya gotta take that many."

"We'd never have anything to remember if it was up to you," Bonnie says.

"It's all up here." Alex grins and taps his head.

"Yeah, well, did you see that sign? Something about a Mountain Meadow Mass - "

"Yes, but who wants to look at a massacre site. I read about it in college...you don't wanna see that."

"I do... I've never heard of anything..."

"All right, all right. But let's keep it short. I want to get back to Zion before sunset."

Alex turns off the highway onto a paved side road and parks the van in an empty lot. Signs direct them to the trailhead. Interpretive displays backed by dense stands of cedar tell the story.

"Do you know anything about this massacre?" Bonnie asks. "I've never before heard..."

"And I'll bet the Mormons still want to keep it that way."

"Oh, come on. Mormon murders?"

The couple continues on the trail, coming to a granite monument overlooking a peaceful valley. Cedar-shrouded mountains loom on all sides. The valley floor is a quiet semicircle of grass, glowing in the late-afternoon light.

Bonnie stares at the engraved stone, her mouth open, tears forming in her eyes. "One-hundred and twenty people? Look at the...the ages of the children they killed."

"Yeah, the LDS Church still won't accept any responsibility... but then it's only been 150 years."

"But why...I don't understand."

"I remember reading about some Mormon militia from Cedar City run by religious fanatics enlisting the local Indians and killing white families in a wagon train. Thought the United States was at war with them. They'd been kicked out of so many states..."

"Religion, militias, fanatics, war...sounds like the headlines today..."

"Or Oklahoma City. It may be the worst act of domestic

terrorism before Timothy McVeigh took out the Federal Building."

"But why kill the women and children...why gun them down like..."

"Some things may never be explained," Alex says, sighing. "But, God, the irony of the Universe. Look at the date."

He points at the monument, his eyes round and staring. Bonnie's breath catches. Carved cleanly into the pale face of the polished stone is "September 11th, 1857."

by John N. Miller

Scanning Louisiana

Viewed from the river's levee,
muddy cane fields scroll the flat land
stubbled with cropped stalks stretching miles southwest,
a braille of low-rowed hillocks. Almost
out of sight, a few shacks
border the fields, tin roofs glowing
under hazy sun

and even without
backdrop mountains, sugar-rich
Hawai'i spreads before me, a page
from my past, fields ablaze before their harvest,
down through billowed sky
bits of burnt leaf drifting like the swarms
of mudbank gnats below the levee,

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driving me to people this bare stretch
with field hands and their overseers,
to read between its lines of cane-stubble
the age-old human hankering for sweetness
and the sweat exacted for it. If the sons
of good New England abolitionists
could see a profit
in the rich red dirt of Hawai'ian hillsides
and translate coolie labor into cane,
I can turn Louisiana's flat land
into a text to scan:

the tin-roofed labor camps, the year-round heat,
the Japanese and Filipino workers
dwarfed by tasseled cane, shirts stained red
by soaked-on dirt or darkened
by the ash of scorched fields.
I can recall the sweet juice from those stalks
left lying after the machetes' hacking.
Without a lick of work, what pleasure
I could suck from unrefined
brown crystals hardened in the local mill!

There is no mill in sight here
where I play lord of the levee
and director of my own script.
The margins of Louisiana's
cane fields blur as I remember:
tomorrow is the Sugar Bowl.

by Maureen Flannery

Litany for the Feast Day Mass of San Judas Tadeo

If we tripped we would not fall,
held upright, lifted taller
by the pressed-in crowd of worshipping workers.

We transfer *la paz del Senor* among us
braso a braso,
mano a capable mano--

calloused hand of the *obrero*
to the grease-softened hand of the chicken man

boot-black hand of shoe-shiner
to rough, hang-nail hand of a *cantinero*;

limp wrist, supplicant hand of indigenous mother
to liver-spotted hand of another *tamalera*

cold, chapped hand of the ice-delivery man
to the red, *cochenea*-stained hand of the weaver

acid-darkened hand of the fruit-chopper in a *pico de gallo* stand
to gold-ringed fingers of the name-brand buyer for Sanborne's

four-fingered hand of the *carpentero*
to agile hand of the trumpeter in a mariachi band--

mano of the street sweeper
a mano del keeper of the Cathedral keys

fidgety, impatient hand of the *relojero*
to the French-nailed hand of the salsa-band singer

cracked, dirt-crust-ed hand of the *panteonero*
to squat, scarred hand of the *santo* carver;

Strong arms extend to send the Lord's peace.
Devotional oceans of city workers
turn into each other's breath,
brush faces against the still-wet hair of freshly-cleansed laborers
up in the chill, dark morning
on the feast day of their patron saint--
hands of believers passing faith
to the desperate hands of the hopeful.

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August Contributor Notes

The Southern author and poet, **Charles Clifford Brooks III**, completed his first book of verse, *Whirling Metaphysics* in early 2007. Chicagowrites CLARION calls Charles Clifford, "...a major young author whose new and previously published free verse poetry is reminiscent of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau".

Erika Dreifus's short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in many publications, including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Lilith*, *Mississippi Review Online*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and *TriQuarterly*. She edits and publishes *The Practicing Writer*, a free monthly newsletter for poets, fictionists, and nonfiction writers (<http://www.practicing-writer.com>), and maintains a blog, Practicing Writing, at <http://practicing-writing.blogspot.com>.

Arthur Durkee is an award-winning composer/performer and recording artist, photographer and digital artist, and poet. His current project incorporates his music, photography, and poems into original short non-narrative films.

Margarita Engle is a botanist, and the Cuban-American author of books about the island, most recently *The Poet Slave of Cuba, a Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano* (Henry Holt & Co., 2006). Short works appear in journals such as *Atlanta Review*, *Caribbean Writer*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Nimrod*, and *Poetry Salzburg*. Recent honors include an International Reading Association Award, a Pushcart Prize nomination, and Special Recognition from the Paterson Poetry Prize. Margarita lives in central California, where she enjoys hiking and helping her husband with his volunteer work for wilderness search-and-rescue dog training programs.

Maureen Tolman Flannery's latest books are *Ancestors in the Landscape: Poems of a Rancher's Daughter* and *A Fine Line*. Although she grew up in a Wyoming sheep ranch family, Maureen and her actor husband Dan have raised their four children in Chicago. Her work has appeared in forty anthologies and over a hundred literary reviews, recently including *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Xavier Review*, *Calyx*, *Pedestal*, *Atlanta Review*, *Out of Line*, and *North American Review*.

Paul Hostovsky's poems have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily* and *The Writer's Almanac*. He has two recent poetry chapbooks, *Bird in the Hand* (Grayson Books) and *Dusk Outside the Braille Press* (Riverstone Press). To read more of Paul's poetry, check out his website at www.paulhostovsky.com.

Sean Lause teaches courses in Shakespeare, Composition and Speech at Rhodes State College in Lima, Ohio. He has published fiction in *The Mid-American Review* and poetry in *Poetry International*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Writer's Journal*, *Epicenter*, *European Judaism*, *The Iconoclast*, *The King's English*, *Frog Pond* and *The Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*.

In 1996, **Cali Linfor** received UCLA's May Merrill Miller award for poetry. She has been the poetry editor of *Epicenter*, a literary magazine based in Southern California, since 1994. She is a graduate of San Diego State University's MFA in Creative Writing. She has been published in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*.

Though born in Ohio, **John N. Miller** grew up in Hawai'i (1937-1951). He retired from college teaching (English and creative writing) in 1997, and now lives with his wife Ilse in an elegant geriatric ghetto --i.e., "retirement community"--in Lexington, VA.

Greggory Moore resides in Long Beach, where he works as copy editor for *The District Weekly*, as a features writer for the *Gazettes* newspaper, and as a freelance writer and proofreader. He's a civil libertarian, a liberal ironist (in Rorty's sense of the term), and not intimidatingly tall. His email address is whogreggory@yahoo.com.

Esther Greenleaf Mürer has previously published in *Friends Journal*, *Guinea Pig Zero*, *Light Quarterly*, and *New Verse News*.

Great Grandfather, a chapbook by **Rich Murphy**, will be published by Pudding House this spring. Murphy's poems have been published widely in such journals as *Rolling Stone*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Grand Street*, *New Letters*, and others. His essay "Vanishing Artist: American Poet and Differend" was published in *Fulcrum: An Annual of Poetry and Aesthetics* and again in *The International Journal of the Humanities*. Other essays have been published in *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* and *Fringe Magazine*.

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife, Marguerite Costigan (his in-house editor), and two cats (his in-house critics). As an emerging author, Terry writes full time. Since 2003, his work has appeared in over 40 literary and popular journals and magazines. He is also an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist.

The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives

Shaul Hendel believes that a robust piece of writing grows from the dirt under one's nails, nourished by the blood of a well-lived life, and blooms under the full-spectrum light of human endeavor. In his time so far he's been a pants-pissing paratrooper, a window cleaner in a holy city, a let's-stay-friends divorcee, a miserable computer programmer, a stick-to-the-point acupuncturist, a father to the amazing number one & number two, a silent meditator trapped in a noisy mind, a traveler who forgot to return home, a you-could-have-done-worse husband, an I-should-have-done-better writer, and a lead-hearted owner of a zeppelin-size house mortgage. At the present he's immersed in the vastness of Upstate NY.

Bill Vernon, an ex-college English professor, has four published poetry chapbooks, and individual poetry and fiction in online and hard-copy journals, most recently in *Switched-on Gutenberg*, *Wanderings*, *Aethlon*, *Fourth River* and *Nebo*. His novel *OLD TOWN*, published by Five Star Mysteries in June 2007, concerns urban sprawl's threat to his native southern Ohio.

Johanna Wald is a freelance writer who has been published in *salon.com*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Boston Herald*, *The Nation*, *Center for American Progress*, and *Education Week*.

A.D. Winans is a native San Francisco poet, writer and photographer. The author of over 40 books and chapbooks of poetry and prose. Former editor and publisher of *Second Coming Magazine*. His work has been published widely and translated into eight languages. Presa Press recently published a book of his selected poems: *The Other Side Of Broadway: Selected Poems 1965-2005*.