

Connecticut Writing Project 2012

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT, STORRS

Celebrating 30 Years of Bringing Writing to Life

**“It Sounded
Like a Good
Idea in March ...”**

13

**WRITING
FELLOWS**

“Sometimes I would pull over and take in the calm, watching the fireflies slow-waltzing through the air.”

“Life is unpredictable, meant to be explored - I will embrace my life.”

“The veins look like thick vines holding the bones together.”

“If I were dying, so be it, but if this was just the budding of a heinous stomach bug, then wouldn't it be better to writhe in agony for a few hours covered in my own shit than to possibly ruin this nascent relationship?”

“In this moment, I find peace -- a wave of calm and wonder.”

“Only slight memories of pebbles breathe stories between your toes.”

“I ventured on this journey unarmed, and ill-equipped.”

“She would sit out there for hours, just watching the street, gently smiling, hearing aids turned down to enjoy the peace and quiet.”

“The moon made romantic by the twilight, and speckles of lightning bugs that float along in our backyard.”

“Next to the saddles, the four bridles hung ... one by one ... like leather skeletons dripping with steel bits.”

“But I was grabbing! I was spraying! I was racking! Come on people!”

“Share a cab?”

INQUIRY GROUPS

RESPONSE GROUPS

FRIDAY READ-A-ROUNDS

19 DAYS OF WRITING MADNESS

Teacher-Writer

Volume IV, Fall 2012



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Contents

Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest Winners, 2012

Poetry

Heavy Work Elizabeth Amburn 1

Prose Fiction

Not On Schedule Jane Cook 2

Prose Nonfiction

Top Ten Reasons for Not Writing Jane Cook 4

Poetry - Honorable Mentions

What I Do When Denise Abercrombie 7

Some General Advice That Could Go Either Way David Polochanin 10

Prose Fiction- Honorable Mention

Reaching Out Kisha G. Tracy 12

Prose Nonfiction- Honorable Mention

I Look Out the Window and I Don't Know Dan Blanchard 14

2012 Summer Institute Fellows

But He Was Not Elizabeth Amburn 16

Lessons from My Mother Katrina Bafumi 17

The News Michelle Blowers 18

Just Joshing Christine Briganti 20

Ode to Sand Shirley Cowles 22

The Board Cynthia Dee 23

Showdown at the Ground Round Ellen Devine 25

Savoring the Moment Helen Martin 28

The Attack Emily Hernberg 29

neitherherons... noregrets Sarah King 30

Saving the World One Tray at a Time Stephen Staysniak 32

14 Hours in the Lima Airport Ethan Warner 35

Bubby Cyd Weldon 40

Teacher as Writer & Writers Retreat Contributions

<i>Fireworks</i>	Nicole Waicunas	42
<i>Labyrinth</i>	Rosemary LoStocco	45
<i>Grieg</i>	Philippa Paquette	46

<i>Biographies</i>		47
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**2012 Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest
Winners**



Poetry Prize Winner



Heavy Work

By Elizabeth Amburn

Physicists say that our universe is riddled with black holes,
concentrations of gravity so great that nothing escapes them. Not even light.
These holes may provide passages through space-time,
making time travel possible.
The inescapable, allowing accessibility.

I sink into the black holes of my universe.
Gravity pulls me through layer after layer of evolving mess.
I come face to face with dramatic events and watershed moments.
I re-experience joy and pain. When I meet the 40 year old me,
I am 40 again. And then I am 30, and 20, and 10.

As I descend, the illumination of later experience dims.
Can the 10 year old understand the 50 year old?
I cannot bear the weight of memories easily.
This is heavy work.
The gravity of my history threatens to overwhelm me.

I emerge in a different space and time.
I have images, taken in near darkness, to mine for truths of my life.
Black and white, overexposed, stark and unforgiving.
The positive spaces blind.
The negative spaces distort.

They are a series of moments with only me as the focal point.
I need to broaden my field of vision.
I take one step back,
to deepen my perspective.
What are the truths of my parents' lives that shaped my own?

Children in the depression and young teenagers during World War Two,
raised in the frustration of limited resources and prospects, they experienced
the anger of diminished returns. From my new vantage point,
I see their disappointments. It is reflected in the spaces between moments.
It affected the growth of connective tissue between us.

It is made of scars. Theirs and mine. I see a new picture,
pieced together with fragments of their lives and mine.
My journey has been a form of weight training.
I cannot escape gravity, but it cannot restrict any longer.
I realize that I have become strong.

Prose Fiction Prize Winner



Not On Schedule

By Jane Cook

She awoke in the dark and threw on her long robe. She could see her breath as she watched the dogs circle over the frost-covered grass. She rubbed her basketball of a belly and felt strong kicks. At her most recent check-up, her doctor was pleased with her progress. “It won’t be too long now—just about a month—right on schedule.”

She walked inside and started her morning chores. Feed the cats and dogs. Give her blind dog his eye drops – first the left eye, then the right eye. Pick up the clutter from the night before, leaving each room a little cleaner than she found it.

As she started up the stairs she thought about the day ahead. It would be a routine day – drive to work, greet the children, teach all day, drive home, make supper, work on lesson plans, grade papers, take a shower, and go to bed.

She dressed in layers, knowing that the frost would burn off quickly into a warm Indian summer day. She gave out treats and pats, picked up her bag of schoolwork and headed to the car. By now the sun was up, confirming her prediction. As she breathed in the late fall air, she felt glad to be alive.

She drove her usual route to work. She knew her small town’s roads so well she could practically drive them blindfolded. As she rounded the last curve, just before the school’s driveway, she saw a large black SUV sliding onto her side of the road. There was no time or space to swerve. Her subcompact was no match for the black fiend that rammed her head on. As her air bag deployed, she lost consciousness.

In a haze, she heard the sirens blaring and listened to the EMTs discuss her condition and consider how to get her out of the car. She thought about the children and prayed that they had not heard the crash. She groaned involuntarily and struggled to feel her legs, her arms, anything.

Her mind raced through her morning rituals. Had she remembered to fill the dog’s water dish? Did the cats have enough crunchy food to keep them happy all day? Had she closed the garage door? She had always heard about the life review that precedes death. My life is not flashing before my eyes, she thought, so I cannot be dying. She moaned and passed back into a semi-conscious haze.

As they wheeled her into the Emergency Room, she felt the bright lights sear into her brain. Voices reverberated throughout the echo chamber of her body.

In her fog of shock and agonizing pain, she heard a voice in the distance crying, “The baby is coming right now. The trauma of the impact must have brought on premature labor. The heartbeat is weak but regular. A Caesarean is the best option for the baby.”

She tried to cry out, “No, this isn’t the right schedule. The baby’s not ready yet,” but no words came out.

A hushed voice whispered, “The mother will never survive a Caesarean in her condition. We need to treat her injuries first. If it’s a choice between the mother and the child, I choose the mother.”

“We don’t have time to wait. This baby will not last more than five minutes. There is no choice.”

She could hear the squeaking wheels of the gurney as they rolled her into the Operating Room. As she breathed her last breath, she heard her baby's first cry.



Prose Nonfiction Prize Winner



Top 10 Reasons for Not Writing

By Jane Cook

All writers have good reasons that get in the way and interfere with their ability to write. Not enough time is the most common reason but we all have the same amount of time – 24 hours in every day, 365 days in every year. So what are some of the time wasters that keep writers from writing?

Reason #10) Fall Yard Cleanup - Every year, we who live in New England experience the changing of the leaves. The deciduous trees give up the last of their chlorophyll to change the landscape from shades of green to brilliant reds, vibrant oranges, bright golds and subtle rusts. The trees are a sight to behold bringing leaf peepers from around the country to enjoy the beauty of New England's fall foliage display. Unfortunately, very shortly after this amazing fall spectacle comes the falling of the leaves - first in ones and twos and then in giant torrents until the ground is dull brown with dead leaves up to your ankles. Guess what you need to do with these leaves? Right - raking, the bane of every New Englander's existence. This never-ending chore leaves you begging for a good blizzard so feet of snow can cover up those dreaded leaves. The mammoth chore of raking leaves each fall cuts way down on writing time.

Reason #9) Winter Travails - Speaking of a good blizzard, if you live in New England you can expect a blizzard anytime between October and April. That's seven months. Granted, there's not a blizzard every day during those months, but what with the snow and the ice and then the mud when everything starts melting, New Englanders can spend much of their waking hours dealing with the aftermath of winter. Not to mention splitting and hauling wood, feeding the wood stove, and cleaning up the ashes. Who has time to write in the winter?

Reason #8) Spring Cleaning - During the winter, it gets dark very early in New England. This is a good thing because it hides a great many sins. However, after the snow melts and the mud dries, there's a layer of grime on everything that is particularly conspicuous with the sun now shining brightly for 14 hours a day. You notice that it's difficult to see out of the windows and the chimney is filled with soot. Out come the cleaners, sponges, rags, and squeegees; thus begins the annual ritual of spring cleaning. Did you know that it takes at least an hour and a half to wash one normal-sized window and a bay window can take all day? Multiply that by the 34 windows and doors that this writer has to clean and by then spring and summer are over and it's time to start working on the fall yard cleanup (see Reason #10 above). Thank God spring only comes once a year!

Reason #7) Vacuuming - If you don't want to live in a pig sty, you do need to vacuum fairly regularly. Some people vacuum every day but I believe that is excessive. However, once a week is not unreasonable. I thought getting a robotic vacuum cleaner would help so I finally

convinced my husband that we should buy one. He nicknamed her Hazel after the maid on the old TV show and I do love her. But she's not as good as Hazel, the human, who was a self-starter and who cooked, cleaned, and solved the Baxter family problem du jour all within a half hour. I still need to move the kitchen chairs out of the way and keep an eye on our Hazel so that she doesn't get stuck under the cedar chests or couches in the living room. I need to watch where she goes so I don't lose her under a piece of furniture when her battery runs down. Then there's deciphering the error messages, sometimes delivered in Greek if the wrong button has been pushed. And the cat hair (see Reason #3 below) gets so tangled in the brushes that I've gotten a spare set of brushes that I can swap in so as not to stand in the way of progress. What with getting Hazel back speaking English, retrieving her from under the furniture, and untangling the cat hair, the next thing you know the day is shot. It's next to impossible to do any writing on vacuuming days.

Reason #6) Eating – Then there's the daily task of eating. In order to stay healthy, you really should eat three meals a day. To digest your food properly, you should chew each bite at least 20 times; some people even say 32 times. That's 20 chews times each piece of food you put in your mouth times each of the different types of food on your plate times 3 meals a day. You do the math. It's a wonder I have time to do anything else.

Reason #5) Washing Dishes - Did you know that every time you eat, you generate dirty dishes? That's right. And those dishes need washing. Do you have any idea how long it takes to wash all of those dirty dishes? Even with the help of an automatic dishwasher, there's nothing automatic about carrying the dishes to the sink, rinsing the major food particles off so you don't need to call a repairman, and loading them into the dishwasher. After you run the wash cycle, then you need to unload and by that time you've created more dirty dishes that need to be reloaded into the dishwasher, thus starting this endless cycle once again. Washing dishes definitely cuts into my writing time.

Reason #4) Cooking - In order to eat, you need to cook. When you cook, you create at least some of the dirty dishes that you need to wash (see Reason #5 above); the rest are created by eating (see Reason #6 above). Between eating, cooking, and washing dirty dishes, there's not much time left in the day for writing. Of course I could go out to eat which would eliminate Reason #4 and Reason #5, but that would create its own set of time wasters. There's the driving to and from, the waiting for the restaurant to take your order, the waiting for the cook to make your meal, the eating (see Reason #6 above), the waiting for the bill, and the paying of the bill. Not much time saved, really.

Reason #3) Watching Cats - Have you ever heard author Dan Greenburg's quote about cats? "Cats are dangerous companions for writers because cat watching is a near-perfect method of writing avoidance." Only a writer would know. I have five cats that, if piled together, would be nearly as large as a small pony. All have unique personalities and peculiar habits. At times they hang out alone in varying poses. The rest of the time, they interact with each other creating an endless number of cat watching scenarios. Need I say more?

Reason #2) Petting Dogs - Then, of course, there are the dogs. Though I only have two very

small dogs whose combined weight is a total of 11 pounds soaking wet, they are a force to be reckoned with. They demand equal time and attention and take me away from cat watching on a regular basis. Since they've helped get me through some very difficult times in my life, I feel justified in, nay even compelled to, shower them with my undivided attention whenever I can. They deserve the same unconditional love that they deliver in enormous doses.

However, that does cut down on my writing; since if I pet one dog with each hand, I have no hands left to write.

Reason #1) Fear of Failure - Every writer suffers from the “fear of failure” syndrome or should I call it a malady? Writers are plagued by questions and doubts. Some of my favorites are: What happens if I sit down to write and no words come? What do I do with this blank page? Why aren't my fingers moving; why are no words appearing on my computer screen? What if I write and no one reads it? Will I really have written? What if I write and people do read my writing, will it be good enough? Or, even worse, what if they read it but they don't like it? How can I deal with the rejection? Generating and attempting to answer these questions usually results in writing paralysis and leads me to one final thought. Is it better to never have written than to have written and failed? That, dear reader, is the real question.



Poetry - Honorable Mention



What I Do When

By Denise Abercrombie

a student slides a poem across my desk—
thank him or her
praise whatever

is praiseworthy
know the attempt
the risk, the effort

is possibly more important
than anything
I'll read or have to say

remind myself
the gesture is sacred
a gift

this desire to have an audience
and maybe she really needs me
or maybe he really has no one else

surrender all institutional response
and responsibility
smile

dig in, give in to the request
despite the stacks
the bells

embrace it as a privilege
a way to understand this one
being human, find

a word, a single line
a stanza, a paragraph, a premise
anything at all

penmanship
the weight of the paper
the intention, the hot pink paper clip

as long as it's the truth
as real as their desire
to connect

and if it's derivative
give the kid a name
some author who's done it better

or better yet
hand the kid a blank book
encourage more good, bad, ugly writing

mention peer editors
clubs, contests, classes, readings
literary magazines

assure her she's not alone
in this wasteland
T.S. Eliot could not have imagined

don't recommend T.S. Eliot
to light the fuse—maybe Tillie Olsen
Langston Hughes

he just may love to read
or never reads
so recommend Rimbaud

take it from the shelf
hand over the hardcover
watch the softening

be amazed
and imagine him or her writing
instead of doing so many other things

(texting, tweeting, unfriending
ordering pajama jeans, gaming, watching reality TV
cutting, puking, slitting wrists, everything in between)

marvel at this
schlock
or that brilliance

(note to self:
we are all filled with schlock
and brilliance)

and it's good to find someone
anyone, especially
an English teacher

a person with degrees
and years of experience
in the humanities, in humanity's

inhumanity
who's willing to listen
and share in the struggle

to write
what Anne LaMott, in *Bird by Bird*,
calls "shitty first drafts"

if need be
bend head to paper—go ahead—
kiss it



Poetry - Honorable Mention



Some General Advice That Could Go Either Way

By David Polochanin

Go out into the world with your calluses,
bruises and soft spots, they will not
suddenly disappear. Have a sense
of pride in what you do. If you have
to manufacture this, people will understand.
Make as many friends as possible; good friends
are like water in a desert. You can never have
enough, and you usually won't. Don't spend
so much time looking back on what you could
have done with your life or you will find yourself
in a gray twilight that will suck away your marrow.
Spend time in thought every day, asking yourself
what you want to do in the present. Look for patterns
in the world and you will discover that everything
about the world is a pattern. When you learn some,
write these down. Know that life is full of accidents
and some will work out for you and some will not.
Avoid wondering why others have what they have
because they're not you. Treat time like a gift
because it is. Dress warmly. It is easier to shed
clothes than sit there freezing. Drink your milk
or find another way to get calcium. Be aware
of momentum and try to ride its wave.
Get enough sleep. Buy a reliable car. Don't drive
too fast. See a good doctor every few years. Make sure
he talks with you and he doesn't just write prescriptions
and send you on your way. Look up at the night sky
every once in a while to put your world in perspective.
Touch the running water of a stream. Make sure
you can tell a few good stories. Rehearse them regularly.
Attend concerts and feel the music wash over you.
Eat healthily but splurge on chocolate now and then.
Don't rely on someone else to do your laundry.
If you wash your own clothes, you'll feel better
about yourself. Call your parents once a week
and tell them what's going on in your life. If
you want to call more than that, talk exclusively
with your mother. Understand that a dog is a lot of work
but the joy of it will far outweigh the fact that
it will likely die before you do. Clear your life of toxic

people. Practice meditation. Don't slouch.
Build strong abs, they will strengthen
your back. Go back to college and take a class
when life settles down. Love unconditionally.
When you get hurt, love unconditionally again.
Have respect for life. Create peace. Read often.
Find work you love, and if you can, ride your bike there.
Don't wear a watch. You will look at it too much.
Mark on a world map all the places you have been and
want to go. Use a green pushpin for the places you've been
and blue for the places you want to go. Don't waste time
trying to grow immaculate grass. There are far more important
things to do. Be passionate. Follow baseball. Know that
the world is safe but that it's also an illusion. So is death.
Hurry up, take your time.



Prose Fiction- Honorable Mention



Reaching Out

By Kisha G. Tracy

“Let me get this straight, Mr. Highton,” Samantha Charles said from her seat at the head of the table of City Council members. “You are proposing that we spend half of our park art budget to build a giant stone hand statue?”

Samantha raised a skeptical eyebrow at Cody Highton and the simple, yet realistic sketch of a human hand projected on the screen behind him. Cody was a young man in his early twenties. Disturbingly pale and thin, his plain, black suit hung rather loosely on his lank frame, but, other than that, he looked quite professional. His blonde hair was neatly combed, and Samantha had noticed that his shoes were newly polished. Despite that, he wasn’t the kind of person that left a permanent impression. His hands shaking, it was obvious he didn’t like being the center of attention.

“Yes,” Cody replied, his voice so soft she could barely hear him from the opposite end of the table.

Darting a glance at the other Council members, who all sported matching uninterested expressions, Samantha, her tone dismissing, replied, “Well, we appreciate your proposal. We’ll take it into consideration with all of the others we’ve received.”

Cody nodded, and, gathering his things, he started to leave but then hesitated. “When...when will you decide?” he stuttered.

Her mind already on other, more important agenda items, Samantha gave him an impatient frown. “Probably several months. We’ll contact you.”

“Thank you,” he murmured.

Throwing the young man’s strange proposal in the pile of rejects for the park art project, she forgot about him as soon as he disappeared through the door.

Samantha didn’t immediately recognize Cody at the next month’s City Council meeting, but his quiet, respectful inquiry about the progress of their decision jogged her memory. Preoccupied with a city matter, she only informed him once again that they would get back to him when the winning sculpture was decided. He nodded his head and, with a grateful smile, slipped away.

But he came back the next month and the month after that. Samantha became accustomed to finding Cody sitting in the chair outside of the meeting room when she arrived. He would stand, step forward to shake her hand, and wait. Every time she gave him the same vague, indifferent response.

One evening, six months later, Samantha hurried inside the courthouse, her irritation at being late evident in her rapid steps as she climbed the stairs. Mentally reviewing the long list of everything the Council needed to do, she thought of Cody’s inevitable presence with exasperation and castigated him for taking up so much of her time. She told herself that, tonight, she would tell him with blunt frankness that his ridiculous giant hand didn’t stand a chance of being selected.

Determined to be rid of him once and for all, Samantha pushed through the door into the hallway, only to hesitate in confusion. Cody’s usual chair was empty. Unaccountably troubled, she paused next to it, wondering why she was disappointed at his absence when

she'd intended on discouraging him from returning again anyway. Shaking her head, she decided it was for the best and dismissed the young man from her thoughts.

As usual, Samantha was the last to leave when the meeting was over. Waving at the last Council member as he departed, she was surprised when a well-dressed, middle-aged woman entered the room.

"May I help you?" Samantha asked.

"Mrs. Charles?"

"Yes."

Stepping forward, the woman held out her hand. "My name is Tracy Highton."

Shaking her hand, Samantha frowned. "Highton?"

"I'm Cody's mother."

Her eyes widening in recognition, Samantha nodded. "Of course. What can I do for you?"

"I just..." Tracy began before hesitating. "I wondered if you could tell me the status of the park art project."

Samantha sighed. "Mrs. Highton, I don't want to insult you or your son, but I'm afraid there's no way the Council will choose to erect a stone hand in the park. It's just not the direction we're going. I planned to tell him tonight."

To Samantha's surprise, Tracy's face crumpled before she collected herself. Inclining her head, she seemed to straighten up with difficulty before murmuring, "Thank you."

As the woman turned away, Samantha heard herself asking, "Where is your son? He hasn't missed a meeting for six months."

Tracy took an audible breath, her shoulders rising and falling. "He's in the hospital," she whispered. "He has leukemia."

Her heart clenching at the tragic announcement, Samantha stared at Cody's mother. Feeling uncomfortable, she envisioned the young man. She didn't know him at all, had never attempted to talk to him. Guilt twisted in her stomach as she remembered how she'd been almost angry with him earlier for his persistence.

"Leukemia?" she murmured. Grimacing, she continued, "I'm so sorry. I had no idea."

Tracy's smile was weak but understanding. "It's all right. There's no reason you would know."

She turned once again, but Samantha stopped her. "Why...why is this statue so important to him?" She had never considered that before—why Cody was so determined to see his creation become a reality.

Grief stole across Tracy's face, aging her. "When Cody was little, my husband Cary used to tell him stories and draw pictures to go with them. Cody's favorite was about a giant who fell from the sky, creating such a big hole in the earth that only his hand was visible. It turned to stone and stayed there forever. Cary died two years ago in a car accident." She paused as if lost in her painful memories. "When Cody heard that the City Council was asking for ideas, the only thing he could talk about was the giant's hand. Silly, but it has made him so happy," she finished, choking back a sob at the words. "I'm sorry to bother you," she murmured. "Thank you again."

Samantha stood for a few moments after Tracy left. Then, she walked to her desk to unearth the stack of neglected proposals.

Prose Nonfiction – Honorable Mention



I Look Out the Window and I Don't Know What I See

By Daniel Blanchard

Am I illiterate? Everything is moving so fast from the moment I get up and dress in the dark, to the moment I get undressed in the dark. I rush and rush and I sometimes don't know why. Any unforeseen down time is quickly filled through multi-tasking and preparing. Once in a blue moon, I allow something that resembles tranquility. Sometimes this tranquility that I long for feels awkward to me. During these pauses in life I look out my window. I quickly notice my reflection as my focus is rapidly shifting to the kids' toys in the yard, and then onto the trees. I soon get lost in my thoughts and the trees blur as my mind goes to a place that is somewhere beyond my reach.

“Hey,” my wife interrupts. “What are you looking at?” she asks. I painfully answer back that I don't know what I'm looking at when I stare out the window. I know this response will confuse her. She'll wonder how I could be staring out the window and not know what I see.

Most of the time I try to avoid this awkward exchange by answering my wife with something trite like, “I'm just looking at our beautiful yard.” I know this is wrong. But somehow not knowing what I'm looking at seems wrong too. Could this pain I'm feeling be a form of meditation or is it one step closer to enlightenment?

In truth, when I look out the window, I'm only initially using my eyes. My mind's eye swiftly takes over. Through my mind's eye, I feel like I'm supposed to see the answers to life, sort of like some spirituality, or something like that. Unfortunately, I'm always disappointed because my mind's eye and language skills can't even formulate the World's questions, let alone the answers. I stare out that window, my focus fuzzy like a camera lens in between places. My thoughts are running, but not in a way that I can understand, and definitely not in a way that I can express. This seems like odd behavior to me. I feel like I'm missing something or like I have failed at something, even though I don't know what this something is. I can't see my wife's stare, but I feel her. She thinks I'm hiding something when I stare out the window; but I'm NOT! It's more like this world is hiding something from me or at least it's fleeting, beyond my reach, and out of my focus. What ever it is, it lacks literacy for me.







2012 Summer Institute Fellows



But He Was Not

By Elizabeth Amburn

It started with a whisper.

It grew to a rumor.

And then it became a dare that pushed the boy up the stairs and across the deck.

He took a deep breath and knocked on the door. YIP! Yip yip yip yipyipyip!

YIPYIPYIPYIPYIP! This went on so long he turned around and looked at the other boy by the gate, who just shook his head. Then the door opened and there, on the other side of the screen, was the man, holding a squirming little nothing of a dog.

“Hi, mister. Sorry to bother you but my dirt bike ... our bike here ... we were riding and we ran out of gas. Can I use your phone?”

The man looked at the boy by the door, slowly, up and down, and then he looked over at the other boy, then the dirt bike in the driveway.

“I got some gas, I’ll give you some.”

“Ah, uh, well... thanks...ah...could I use your bathroom too, please?”

Silence. Pause. More silence.

“Yeah.” The door swung open. “Through there, first door on the right.”

The boy stepped into the house, set his shoulders, and walked forward.

The man walked outside, toward the bike.

The boy went past the first door on the right. He kept going, past the family pictures on the wall. He saw the man with a family—a big family. He went past a bedroom. In the bedroom was a bed. One side was rumpled from sleep, the other was untouched. He kept going. Kept going, toward the door at the end of the hallway, at the back of the house. He stopped. On the door was a hand painted sign that said “The Queen’s Room”. He opened the door, and looked. A bathroom. Everything looked normal.

Suddenly he took a deep breath like he’d been punched in the gut. Everything looked normal, but not.

A tube of toothpaste, open, dried toothpaste on the sink. A dead spider in a glass. An open tube of lipstick. A basket with dust covered towels. A bottle of perfume.

The sound of the footsteps of the man coming down the hall behind him seemed to roar in the boy’s ears. He whirled around, not knowing what to expect.

“What are you doing in here? No one uses this bathroom. Use the other one.”

The boy didn’t say anything, didn’t even look at the man. Red faced, he ran out the door, and kept running.



Lessons from My Mother

By Katrina Bafumi

In her bedroom, my mother keeps a photo of the two of us. Captured in the parking garage just outside my freshman dorm, our profiles stand against the backdrop of cement and idle bumpers. Our old Dodge rests visible beyond her shoulders, doors open, revealing empty boxes in the place of seats, exposing the soiled floor—our smiles forced, our hands at our sides. My mother's lips have just released her parting words:

Don't forget what I *told you*.

I hadn't forgotten. Unconsciously, my back straightened until I stood tense beneath the overhead lights.

Across the table, over dinner:

Go wash that trash from your face, unless you want to look like you're asking for it.

In front of the sink, washing the dishes:

Look at you, just begging for any attention.

At the door, before my last night out:

Out on a date with some boy. A whore, in my own house.

My mother's words bred worms that would crawl across my stomach, dragging guilt, endlessly circling.

Her voice followed me far beyond the parking garage. In my room I lingered, safe and motionless among the cinder block. Outside the door, I imagined people gathering, in the hallway, eyes agape, lips moving in whispers, watching, waiting.

I was pulling my roommate's tattered mini skirt to my hip, hints of delight encased in shame. Leafing through her closet, my pulse beat faster. I ran my fingers down polyester, silk combinations, selecting the red. Standing before the floor length mirror, I could hear my mother's voice reminding me that people would gawk at my "dirty pillows." But I let my hand run down my side from shoulder to exposed thigh, absorbed in my skin, rich and unfamiliar in the new air. I let my hair down, and I left.

Hours away, my mother sat cross-legged at our kitchen table polishing the silver. The house spoke in the hum-drums of broken valves and leaks, the only voices remaining. She wore her hair tied tight, her hands engaged in the steady and consistent sweeping of the cloth. Abruptly, her face contorted to a rigid scowl as her limbs, in another tremor, knocked a spoon to the floor. Reaching over the unblemished metal, she saw her wrinkled eyes in the oval before her.

Years later, I rediscover the photo as I pass my mother's empty bedroom. I lift the frame from her bureau—leaving one hand to rest gently on my stomach—and I admire the woman who chose for herself.



The News

By Michelle Blowers

Sweaty, yet shivering, I dashed out to the Suburban that waited for me in front of the school. It was a Friday in early February and after –school sports had just ended. Sweaty from a very intense game of dodgeball, I was anxious to get home to begin the weekend. As I approached the vehicle, I noticed that my dad was sitting in the driver’s seat. *That’s weird*, I remembered thinking to myself; *mom usually picks me up*. An icy breeze blew in the wind and my body shuddered in response. I grabbed the handle, pushed the button with my thumb, and swung the door open as fast as I could. Whipping my bag off my shoulder, I tossed it onto the floor in the front seat and climbed into the car. As fast as I could, I grabbed the indoor handle and slammed the door shut.

“Where’s mom?” I asked, curious to the random change in routine.

“Home” he replied, with nothing more to say. I glanced up, completely caught off guard and studied my father. His posture read stiff, but solid; his face scrunched up as usual, but his eyes. His eyes read a message that I could not decipher. I looked down at my bag, my shoes, the floor. My stomach, twisted in uncertainty, drew me into a vast sea of confusion and concern.

I can’t say I remember the drive home that day, but I do recall it taking three times as long. At last, we pulled into the driveway, and he softly pressed the garage door button. Slowly, the door went up... up... up. Easing his foot off of the gas, we crept into the garage. I grabbed my things and managed to open the door just a smidge, careful not to bang the car door on the garage wall, knowing good and well that I’d be hollered at for any scratches put onto his precious baby. Breaking the silence, finally, I asked him, “Dad, is everybody else home already?” a question not unusual considering the size of our family. Unfortunately, silence filled the air; I felt irritated and left out, so I hung my head and followed my father inside. *Thud, thud, thud* – his footsteps definite and loud, as if drums were marking his every step up the stairs of our raised-ranch home. Practically tiptoeing right behind him, my feet scurried up the stairs, anxious to throw my backpack on my bedroom floor and discover what my older siblings were up to. 4 steps left to go, now 3, *come on daddd* I whined in my head. I was so close, 2 steps, finally, the last one! The fire red carpet, stained with the wear and tear of a seven-person household, burned my eyes as I finally reached the top.

The giant body in front of me turned to the right and marched into the living room, a move most unique for my father, who usually just sets up camp downstairs in the TV room, so I followed suit. There, I found my mother, sitting on the couch. Her face red with despair and dripping with tears, her body leaning hopelessly for support, and her eyes filled with desperation. *What had happened?! Why was she so upset?* My body completely froze, and my feet stopped moving. My father gently put his hand on my back and ushered me to the couch. I stood, in front of my mother, lost in a whirlwind of panic. My eyes, curious, searched hers for an answer, I looked back at my father – he said nothing, just sat down across from my mother in one of the floral chairs I’d never been too fond of.

“Michelle,” my mother started, her voice weak and small, “something happened to Uncle Ricky at work today.”

“Okay...” I began, trying to understand, thoughts racing through my head. *Did he get fired? Did he have an accident? What was it!?!*

“He was at work and passed out. The ambulance came. He went to the hospital but it was ..too...late...”

The words seeped into my ears, but my body refused to absorb them. My bag dropped to the floor. My mind, going a mile a minute, was unable to grasp what my mother had just told me. Without permission, my eyes flooded with tears. I sprinted to the bedroom, furious and upset. Away from my mother I ran, needing to escape the grief in her eyes and the reminder of the person I knew I'd never see again.



Just Josting

By Christine Briganti

The evening of November 13, 2010 was a rather brisk one. The crowd formed quickly on College Street as I rushed out of the Shubert Theater to secure my place in line. Surrounded by tens of pushy women, I was determined to stand my ground. I was not leaving until I achieved my goal. I would be face to face with Josh Groban.

Most young girls fawn over larger-than-life pop stars. But Justin Timberlake and John Mayer are not the subjects of my affection. My love was, and is, reserved for Josh Groban. I am not ashamed to admit that every clichéd vision of endearment fits my obsession. He is the apple of my eye. His beautiful, soothing voice is the sunlight that brightens my day.

Telling people that he is my favorite singer will undoubtedly elicit one of three reactions. The first is, “Who?” The second, “You seriously listen to that crap?” And the third, a response almost exclusively spoken by women over the age of 45 is, “Ohhhhh, he’s my favorite too!” But the disgust of my friends and most others my age does not deter me from unabashedly declaring my love for him and respect for his music. Naturally, my mother is the one at fault for all of this. Had she not purchased those three CDs by “the nice boy who sang on *Ally McBeal*,” it is unlikely that this craze would have surfaced. Though many peg him as “opera boy” and remember him for little besides the grossly overplayed “*You Raise Me Up*,” I can carry on a conversation with anyone regarding a range of topics, like his musical influences and favorite foods.

An avid follower of his fan page, I was usually up-to-date on his touring schedule, TV appearances, charity events, and the whereabouts of his Wheaton terrier Sweeney. Imagine my delight when I discovered that he would be performing in four cities as a prelude to his tour next spring. My eyes scanned the screen: Palm Desert, San Diego, Santa Barbara, New Haven. NEW HAVEN? What were the odds that there would be three shows in California and one in New Haven! Missing this concert was not an option. The site read that tickets would go on sale on October 22nd at 10am. The date was October 22nd. It was 11:45.

Panic surged through my veins. According to other distraught Grobanites who were posting on Josh’s fan page, the small theater sold out in twenty minutes flat. But serendipitously, after an hour of agonizing online searching, I got a hold of three tickets, third row mezzanine. I had been to his shows before and pretty much had established a routine: joy, laughter, tears. Enamored by his beautiful baritone, I waited in gleeful anticipation for the three weeks to pass that separated me from Josh.

Finally, the fated night had arrived. As I approached the entrance of the theater I caught a glimpse of a small sign that quickened my heartbeat. It read, “stage door.” My wheels started spinning. Could it be possible that Josh would greet fans after this show? Unsure of whether this thought would land me with a restraining order by night’s end, I decided to let the evening play out as it would. If the universe wanted me to meet Josh Groban, it would happen.

As the curtain closed post-encore, I left my parents in the dust as I maneuvered my way through the crowds, making a beeline for the exit. In those moments my heart raced with anticipation – were there other people at this concert who were as obsessive as I was? The answer: yes. A line had already formed about 50 people deep, so I eagerly assumed my place, zipped up my coat, and waited for my parents to catch up. All shame abandoned, we waited in line for 45 minutes. In front of me, an elderly woman stood with her son, her

wrinkled hand clutching a Sharpie and a picture of her and Josh from an earlier meeting. These were not amateurs.

Over and over the door opened and women rushed the barricades, only to find that a crewmember was leaving for the night. I had withstood my share of crowds before in attempts to get the autographs of my favorite Broadway performers. The New York security guards had perfected the art of crowd control and were quite good at preventing fans from sneaking into the middle of the pack. Their New Haven brethren, on the other hand, were not as skilled at tossing people from the line those who jumped ahead of everyone. I was growing doubtful, but with ticket in hand I was determined to meet the man I so admired.

Nearly an hour later the door opened, and standing feet away from me was Josh in the flesh as though he descended from the heavens. I hoped and prayed that he would stay to sign autographs rather than dashing off in the black town car awaiting him. I had not come this far for my dream to fall apart now. I had not spent days, nay years, imagining when our paths would cross, only to be denied the scribbled signature on my ticket. Camera flashes and muffled shrieks filled the air. The now 70 people in front of me worked their way toward the door. Josh charismatically signed autographs and shook the hands of fans as I worked to gain my composure, my heart ready to leap out of my chest.

In the seconds before I had his attention, my mind raced with thoughts for the future. Would I impress him with my charm and wit? Would he invite me back to his New York apartment? Would we fall madly and passionately in love? Would *I* be the muse for the next great love song? But what would I say? What would I *say*?? Years of scribbling Mrs. Groban in notebooks culminated in this instant. His gaze locked with mine. This was my moment. Looking into his chocolate eyes I told him how much I enjoyed the show and how happy I was that he sang my favorite song. He smiled politely, signed my ticket and thanked me for my kind words. Without warning, my mouth and vocal chords worked in tandem to form the words, “Would it be alright if I asked for a hug?” And with that, his strong arms, clad in blue cashmere, made their way around my shoulders.

A person with an ounce of dignity would have graciously smiled and walked away. I, however, practically ran away before tears could gush from my eyes. I am fortunate to say that this was not the last time that I was in close proximity to Josh. The next July I was in the front row for his concert at Mohegan Sun. Even though he was terribly distracted by all of the work he was doing on stage, I know he recognized me. We exchanged a few winks, as if to say, “Where have you been for the last eight months of my life?” Looking back on it, though, Uncasville isn’t exactly the most romantic place in the world, so I guess it’s cool that our big reunion didn’t happen there. But I’m not losing hope. After all, you can never start picking out baby names too early, right?



Ode to Sand*By Shirley Cowles*

I can still hold you
even if for a moment
but unlike a tangible object
cold to the touch
you slip through my fingers
leaving only a few grains
clinging to my palm
wedged under my fingernails
scratching my skin like a new kitty's tongue
brilliant sunshine embraces your back
finding strength in numbers
you delight in magical castles
constructed with pink plastic pails
you envelop human life forms
caricatures of bodies disguised
you transform into a dune
safeguarding tenuous beach grass
a bouquet for a lover
the waves wash over you
they cleanse your palette
footprints and paw prints
leave their fleeting impression
on your malleable face
driftwood makes its way into your open arms
charred remains of a campfire lie sprinkled about
remnants of paper flit and skip across your surface
tickling your back along the way
teasing the sandpipers hovering up above
like marionettes on strings
seaweed, seashells, and sea glass
tiny white pebbles
smooth as gemstones
dot your shoreline
creating a mosaic of thought
little pieces of you



The Board

By Cynthia Dee

During a visit with my dad several years ago, over morning coffee he announced, “Today is the day.” I looked confused; he repeated his proclamation as if I was the one who was slightly hard of hearing. “Today you are going to make the ravioli recipe by yourself.” I was stunned! I wanted him to demonstrate this recipe for years. I thought to myself why now?

My father was a pastry chef and an accomplished cook, prior to the Food Network’s glamorization of this occupation. He was up most days at one or two a.m., came home in the early afternoon, slept, spent some time with his family and repeated the process, usually 7 days a week. My siblings and I had a chance to work with him, however few survived the experience. I was the exception. The money was good; I worked in fancy restaurants, luxury hotels, numerous embassies, museums, and magnificent private homes. The work was both physically and emotionally demanding, and my father’s management style could best be described as dictatorial. This is a kind description and probably explains the rapid turnover with respect to my brothers.

When anyone in the family asked my father for a recipe he would say “no problem,” then he would embark on a series of technical questions about ingredients, equipment and techniques. This Q and A exchange usually extinguished recipe requests. Clever guy! I have acquired a few recipes only because I played by his rules. You get the recipe when you understand its value and make it with him. He determines who is worthy of his recipes. That’s just the way it works.

I head down to the beach, for a quick swim and a contemplative walk. When I return he hands me my apron and rolling pin. I’m a good cook and yet I am a little apprehensive. I know its show time when he takes out “the board.” The board has been in the family for generations. It’s essentially a large rectangle, three feet by four feet, comprised of various types of wood that have been glued together. The perimeter of the board retains a dark mahogany patina while the center has faded to a somewhat lighter shade. There are lines, nicks, and zip-zag patterns produced by the kitchen implements of past generations. The board is positioned on the large kitchen table and ingredients are assembled (flour, eggs just yolks, but save the whites). He reviews the steps of dough making and reminds me that each step has a purpose. “It should feel smooth, like silk,” he says. “Knead it in a circular motion using the base of your hand, but be careful not to overwork the dough, since this makes it tough.” He continues, “Give it some oomph but don’t futz with it.” He models this for me by placing his hands over mine. The grooves of his wrinkled hands are now filled with flour as we move our hands in unison. Years of repetitive motion have contributed to his wear and tear arthritis and yet I feel his strength and passion for his craft. When he stands beside me the softness of his white t-shirt tickles me as it brushes against my arms. The smell of his aftershave mingled with the sweetness of the dough permeates by nostrils and transports me back in time. While the dough rests I prepare the cheese mixture, which is essentially Ricotta with some specific seasonings. (I can’t disclose all of the details, I hope that you understand.) The dough must now be rolled into thin sheets, “NO pasta machine” he says almost yelling. This is done by hand until the dough is almost transparent. He instructs me “not to be cheap with the cheese” as we move onto the assembly phase of the process. Small rectangles of pasta filled with cheese now decorate the table. I finally take a deep breath, but of course he reminds me that I still must pass the taste test. At this point, I pour myself a well-deserved glass of wine.

Family members arrive in the kitchen as the sauce simmers and pots of boiling water are ready to receive the ravioli. The dish is plated and my father gives me the nod. I passed!!!! After that visit he mailed me the recipe and I began the tradition of making my fathers ravioli every New Years day. I would call him while I was making the dough, he would repeat” don’t futz with the dough and remember don’t be cheap with the cheese.” It was our standard routine.

Several years ago my dad passed away. About six months after his death I received a large package. I recall sitting on the porch, an October chill in the air, ripping the cardboard box open. I caught a glimpse of it through the bubble wrap. Tears ran down my cheeks as my hand ran up and down each seam of the board. I studied the marks that were lovingly made by my father and the generations before him. When my sobbing subsided I noticed another small package, my father’s recipe book. A short note from my mother simply stated “he would have wanted you to have this.”

I sat there for a long time, surrounded by cardboard and bubble wrap, as I gently placed the leather notebook on my lap. I carefully turned each of the yellowing pages attempting to decipher the faded ink, Polish text, and the metric measurements. It was then that I thanked my father for one of the best afternoons of my life.

One last thing: my siblings and their spouses are aware that I possess the recipe book. When recipes are requested I respond with lengthy descriptions about my father’s poor penmanship, faded ink, foreign language interpretation, and the conversion of metric measurements. Although my methods are different from that of my father they are equally effective in silencing requests. My father would be so proud.



Showdown at the Ground Round

By Ellen Devine

On a crisp February day in the 12th year of my life, the tasteless ancestor of TGIFriday's, Applebee's and Chili's cheerfully served up the secret of my weight to a dining room of frugal suburbanites with a side of popcorn and a clown sticker. In a single moment, the desperate, monthly gimmick of a failing restaurant chain gunned down seven years' worth of an elaborately choreographed, albeit unconvincing, deception.

I had been fat for the majority of my childhood and adolescence. I knew I was fat and so did everyone around me, but the world and I seemed to have a tacit agreement: I would work tirelessly to conceal, diminish and distract from my status as a fatty, and the world would remain politely silent on the topic. I would swath myself in over-sized poly-cotton blends and stretch pants, while engaging in traditional fat-girl-trying-to-make-everyone-laugh-to-divert-attention-from-her-fat-ass antics and the world would allow me to believe it was working. Until that day at the Ground Round, my pediatrician was the only other person in the world who knew how much I actually weighed, and she had gained that information only with the help of two burly nurses and a Snickers bar. I knew I was a hot mess; I had a husky build, bad hair and worse clothes, but as long as I kept the fact of my weight a secret, no one would know just how hot my mess really was.

What words can sufficiently describe the physical and emotional experience of doomed inevitability? As my friend's mother asked the hostess for a table for 3, I stood paralyzed in front of a faux-antique scale directly to the right of the hostess stand. The enormous sign above the scale read, "Kids Pay What They Weigh!" My eyes moved over the words, only partially comprehending their meaning. It couldn't be. Surely no organization or individual would be so cruel as to concoct such a heartlessly thrifty scheme. Before I could gain sufficient sense and courage to turn and run out the door, I heard Rebecca's mother confirm that the two of us were indeed under the age of 13, and most certainly eligible for the kids meal deal. Thus, my worst nightmare was manifest.

I was like a former gangster who had turned state's evidence against my mobster brethren in exchange for witness protection; no matter how well I thought I was hidden, I knew they would find me eventually. And so, in a cheap family restaurant with a terrifying clown-faced helium tank stationed at the front door, my desperate belief that everyone believed I was just "big boned" got whacked.

In retrospect, it's remarkable that the revelation didn't occur much earlier. Despite children's infamous capacity for cruelty, I rarely encountered hurtful epithets such as "beached whale" and "blubber", and when I did, I was easily soothed by the quaintly comforting sayings of adults like "sticks and stones will break your bones...", "I'm rubber you're glue," and the ultimate deception, "they're just jealous of you." From ages five to twelve, the world kept up its side of the bargain by maintaining its polite silence, and I protected my precious secret while determinedly ignoring all the implicit indications that the world was on to me. Surely my frizzy mullet and taut stirrup pants could not explain why the fifth grade girls preferred cherubic, pocket-sized kindergarteners named Madison and Bailey as their Reading Buddies over me. Nor could the sight of my crotch being forced out of the leg hole of my petite friend's leotard like an overstuffed sausage be the source of the mocking laughter that filled the hours of the play date when we played "gymnasts." And there simply must have been a logical, though elusive, reason why the handsome male camp counselors regularly suggested that I *help* them toss all the pretty little girls into the pool,

rather than get in the line of pretty little girls to be tossed. So long as the reality of my weight remained clandestine, I could ignore the signs and believe that no one else saw them.

Rebecca stood on the scale first. Rebecca was a willowy brunette who ran like a gazelle and who, despite having thick glasses and a bad haircut, managed to be perpetually pretty in a slightly nerdy way. She was intelligent, thoughtful, timid and shy. As the scale face and the hostess simultaneously declared that Rebecca weighed 90 pounds, I could see Rebecca's perfect life unfolding before her. She would grow into a taller and leaner teenager; she would replace her glasses with contacts; she would fix her hair cut; she would gain admittance to a small liberal arts college and major in art history; she would fall in love during her semester abroad in Florence with a man name Marcello; she and Marcello would split their time between Italy and the States with their four beautiful children. Her life would be perfect. She was 90 pounds.

I was next. I knew what the scale would say. The dreadful reality of my weight would be revealed and my sad, lonely life would unfold accordingly. I would stay home on prom night with only *The Golden Girls*, Ben and Jerry for company; I would attend an unremarkable college and spend four unremarkable years earning a pointless degree; I would graduate, find a job, exist in a cubicle plastered with photos of my cat, Buttons, who would have the unique honor of being the only creature with which I had a meaningful emotional relationship.

"One hundred and thirty-six," the hostess and scale faced pronounced. The Ground Round went silent as everyone stared. Families in the back of the restaurant craned their necks to get a better view of the impossibly fat girl on the scale. Rebecca looked at me quizzically, as though she were seeing me for the first time.

"Goodness, that is more than I weigh!" exclaimed Rebecca's mother.

Disoriented and unsure of how to proceed, I managed to stutter the lie, "I..I..don't think that can be right. That's not how much I weigh on my scale at home...there must be a mistake..." The hostess looked at me with pitiful compassion.

Just as I thought that she might utter a merciful phrase like, "You know, honey, you might just be right," Rebecca's mother chimed in, "No, I don't think so. The scale was right on the nose for Rebecca. It is definitely right." I had been weighed and I had been found wanting a waist. And so, with that, the hostess wrote my weight on a clown sticker and slapped it to my chest. I had been branded like the heifer I was.

We were lead to our table and everyone perused the menu while munching on complimentary popcorn. I stared down at my sticker. The same clown face that graced the helium balloon tank at the hostess station was looking back at me from that sticker, laughing. One hundred thirty-six. There were no stories to tell now, no lies, no excuses. I had been taken down with a single round.

I attempted emotional triage by reflecting on the fact that one hundred and thirty six pennies, or one dollar and thirty-six cents, was a considerable bargain for dinner. At least taking the fat kid out to dinner wouldn't break the bank for Rebecca's family, no matter how much I managed to eat. And how much more is one hundred and thirty six than ninety really? Forty-six cents. Forty-six cents couldn't even purchase a cup of coffee. Forty-six cents was hardly anything, right? I ate little of my dinner that night.

I wish that I could say that my experience at the Ground Round inspired an epiphany, that it allowed me to take control of my weight once and for all, or that it encouraged me to just accept myself for who I was and worry less about numbers or image,

but it didn't. Instead, that day brought me face to face with my greatest adolescent fear, and the experience as horrible as I had imagined it would be.

Of course, life went on, and eventually, I slimmed down. I did not stay at home alone on prom night, I had a number of boyfriends, and I never have, nor would I ever have, a cat named Buttons. Really the only element of my adult life that turned out as I foresaw it is my fondness for Ben & Jerry's and re-runs of *The Golden Girls*. I hardly resemble the terrified, ashamed adolescent who veiled herself in humor and poly-cotton blends. These days, I am so bold and confident that I openly and unabashedly tell my tale of humiliation at the hands of the Ground Round—mostly so my audience can declare shock and disbelief that such a gorgeous and svelte creature as me could have ever been overweight, of course. So, in the end, the manifestation of my worst nightmare did not determine my fate. If I were a different person, I might reflect on the fact that my experience at the Ground Round forced me to face a fear, take a hard look at myself and live more honestly. I might appreciate the value of learning the lesson that you can experience the worst-case scenario and still recover. I might even go so far as to thank the Ground Round for facilitating that essential learning experience. But, I'm not that kind of person. Instead, I like to focus on this story's happy ending: the Ground Round went bankrupt.



Savoring the Moment

By Helen Martin

Many moments of flash conversations with veteran parents all speak to the “enjoy it now, they grow up so fast.” Amazing how perfect strangers in the supermarket will suddenly feel obliged to talk to you because you have a toddler. She is cute, but still, even in our New-England culture, people in public places usually keep mostly to themselves. A whole other conversation could be had on that, but for now, the topic at hand is those fleeting moments of parenthood, and how to savor it when you’re in the thick of it all.

One of the most difficult moments lately has been the push-pull of my needs and her needs, these moments enhanced around bedtime. The last week bedtime involves the usual brushing of teeth, reading well-versed lines from *How Does a Dinosaur Say Good Night?*, and setting the butterflies above her crib so that they spin and dance above her, hopefully lulling her to a safe place of slumber, visions of our puppies playing whilst her mind rests and processes her many new discoveries from the day.

We sign “I love you,” stroke her forehead, and slink out of her room. Those first few moments Andrew and I don’t even speak to one another, an understanding that we both just need two minutes to let the swell of silence engulf us in its entirety. Most evenings are relatively the same, we go outside on our deck, and Andrew tosses the ball for our lemon-spotted beagle, Daisy, who eagerly clamors for the ball, her bark the only annoyance of the moment. I close the glass sliding door, just in case the sound carries down the hall, rousing an over-curious toddler. I sit, with my glass of wine, white, balancing the few cubes of frozen water, giving me the illusion that my moment of indulgence is grander.

These moments are blissful, nothing prolific transpires, we just enjoy one another’s company in the most pure way that we know how. The mood made romantic by the twilight, and speckles of lightening bugs that float along in our backyard. Once the insect-repellent candles fail to do their jobs, we head back inside, Andrew, me, and our two beagles, who also needed our presence. They are comforted by our shared space and we are grateful for their company, although at many times you might perceive otherwise.

Once inside, we exist in different worlds within the same shared space. I go for the laptop and Andrew goes for the remote. We negotiate the TV listings, and I’m always endeared to him for the simple things, such as his attention to recording comedy, something I always need more of in my life. The evening usually continues in this fashion, both of us able to dip in and out of conversation with one another, and sometimes, after the e-mail has been checked, work responsibilities tidied up and prepared for the next day, we will break out a game of trivial pursuit.

Lately, however, our “date nights” have been jarred by the shrill sound of our daughter rousing, always in tears, from her slumber. Lately, instead of being in a rush to go back to the status quo, I have been remembering those whispers from strangers, family friends, almost in-laws, to savor these moments. I don’t savor her tears, but rather that moment when we sit in the rocking chair, she immediately crumbles into my lap, blanket in at least one hand, and she feigns sleep. I have seen her checking to see if I’m still there, peeking with her eyes for a quick moment, before returning to her safe place against me. I remind myself in those moments that I won’t be able to do this with her once she’s eleven, or even in the same capacity in a year from now. I might be missing out on an exhilarating round of Scattergories, or falling behind on some work obligations, but I will never look back and think to myself, “I wished I had stayed a bit longer.”

The Attack

By Emily Hernberg

She was lovely, his little girl, standing before the floor-length mirror in her bedroom, admiring herself in her new blue dress and her dead mother's pearls, getting ready for her date. *Not so little anymore*, Bill thought as leaned his head against the doorway, arms firmly crossed.

"How do I look, Dad?" Katie asked, spinning around on her tip-toes, beaming her smile into his eyes.

Beautiful, he thought.

"You look fine, honey."

"He'll be here any minute. Do you think—"

Just then, right outside the window, a wild cacophony of barking, screeching, crashing.

"The chickens!" Bill bellowed, pulled suddenly out of his reverie. "Oh, my God, the chickens!"

Father and daughter sprang into action and dashed through the house and out the screen door, leaving it flapping idly behind them. The scene unfolded before them: the neighbor's rottweiler, merrily tearing after Bill's prize hens—the booted bantams, the lakenvelders, the New Hampshire reds—a cloud of dust and feathers and dung forming in its path.

"GOD DAMMIT! DAMMIT! GET OUT! I'LL KILL YOU! I'LL *KILL* YOU!"

Bill charged over the poultry netting, screaming obscenities so loudly his voice cracked. He snatched a rake that had been leaning against the coop, its metal tines twisted with time and firmly-lodged leaves, and shooed the chickens back in, watching possessively as each chicken waddled frantically into the dark opening. That accomplished, he turned back to the dog, its tail wagging hungrily, tongue sliding through the side of its mouth, a young hen squawking under its paw. A stand-off: man versus beast.

"Katie," Bill jerked his chin over his shoulder, "get my gun."

Obediently, Katie turned on her heels and hurried back into the house, latching the still flapping screen door behind her. She knew where his gun was. It was an old rifle from his hunting days, the trigger rusted but still maneuverable, the wooden stock polished to a high sheen. She remembered those nights, long past now, when her father held her on his knees and spoke of the woods, of the hushed sound of wind swirling gently through the canopy, of the gracefulness of a yellow mottled field spider weaving its web into his hiding place, of the sudden snap of a twig that signaled the end. Now, the gun was kept under the bed he used to share with Katie's mother, for "safe keeping," he said.

When she returned, her father was still standing there, one arm folded over the other, glaring at the dog. The hen fluttered her wings helplessly under the heavy foot of the beast. Katie handed the rifle to her father without a word, and he smoothed his hands lovingly over the wood, remembering the soft glint of the pearls against his daughter's neck. Slowly, calmly, almost casually, he lifted the barrel, squeezed the trigger, and—

"Damn thing's jammed."

As he fiddled with the bolt, a beat-up truck roared into the driveway. Katie gave her father a farewell kiss, and he glanced up at the intruder with furrowed brows—the date had arrived.

neitherherons...noregrets*By Sarah King*

It happened again today: a blue heron standing in a small swamp next to the busy industrial road I travel. I know it arrived recently because I have learned where to look, seeking the reward of the memories sparked by lanky legs holding up a bluish-gray arching body, curved neck, sleek head, piercing eyes, dagger beak. This time, my daughters are in the car, eager to meet a group of friends for a movie. They are used to my exclamations, “Look! There! A blue heron!” having grown up hearing my joy at the sight of birds; though the elusive herons and their egret cousins are most surprising, angelic.

I first noticed a blue heron standing in the salt marsh along the causeway that guides us to my grandparents’ cottage in Rhode Island. I don’t remember ever seeing one before, tall, regal, solitary. The heron made me think of an ancient oriental myth in which a maiden could disguise herself as a delicately feathered crane bringing good fortune to the virtuous. Our heron greeted us in this marsh each Memorial Day as we arrived, and each Labor Day, as we departed.

Colon cancer and dementia tightened their grip on my grandmother but she always had freshly painted nails. I sat on her pink bed through her last summer, turning the pages of *Town and Country* while telling stories of my bike rides and family walks to Fenway Beach. But Grampa was the first to go. His mornings began bringing coffee to the guys, including my Dad, at his father’s manufacturing company; answering the phone, taking machine part orders, encouraging his team to continue their engineering legacy into the 21st century. He went home to have lunch on a late April day vibrant with dogwood. He died near his fading high school sweetheart, thinking of weekend plans to fly fish or sit on the porch with my Dad. Granny kept calling for him, then joined Grampa six weeks later.

April is the cruelest month and by June, Dad was an orphan. That summer we packed a lifetime of possessions making our trips to the beach a necessary escape. My earliest memories, like my ancestors who spent summers at the *Port of Rest* since 1888, included the aroma of salt spray on the jetty swirled with beach-plum roses, assorted lilies, and Concord grapes. Generations passed until World War II horrors streamed in static trans-Atlantic reports over the Ham radio Dad built as a high school boy; the days when Coco Chanel introduced her No. 5. The ladies at the beach would sit in shaded clusters by brightly colored umbrellas, wearing black stockings and knee-length swim dresses. Granny would walk into the water up to her knees and take a bold forceful dive into the first wave that arched toward her. I, on the other hand, tip-toed through seaweed that coiled around my ankles like a sea monster; thick water crawling until my brother threw me on his back and carried me into the glistening waves. He splashed water at me, laughing, “It’s just seaweed,” while the silhouettes of my parents proceeded down the boardwalk until we all rolled in the waves.

Dad had taken the ranks of his father, and all the fathers before him, leading a new generation protecting time spent at the beach. His mechanical work showed on his worn oil-stained hands, the same hands that scrawled algorithms at MIT. “It is good to work *and* play,” he said out loud to anyone listening. He pointed to the rock where his father once stood on the jetty; Grampa’s rock, the only spot to catch flounder. Mom suggested dinner out: Spaghetti at *Snuffy’s* in Watch Hill, rides on the carousel, and ice cream at St. Clare’s.

After my wedding on the front lawn among gardens bursting with stargazer lilies, we drove away for the last time while our heron stood in the silent marsh. My parents retired

into nights knowing there were neither herons nor egrets, nor the sound of waves crashing under moonbeams. Their new yard skirted the edge of a small lake where neighbors boasted of its spring-fed thirty foot depth. Distant cousins, whose only communication came in the form of self-indulgent Christmas letters bragging about college reunion cruises to the Adriatic Sea, became critical, judgmental. “Families that *care* about their history never sell such houses.”

Stained with 19th-century mildew on wood that froze, the cottage braved each winter unprotected from the elements, then thawed each spring in a damp salty rot that had to be scraped, sanded, and scoured. Eventually weather worn wood had to be replaced: new shingles, boards and battens, sills and frames. What the weather did not damage, the powder post beetles would savor, leaving pinhole sized openings in wood furniture after larvae emerged into adult beetles. Dad spent humid July weekends under the front porch reinforcing the support beams so that those relaxing on white wicker chairs would not fall through sagging floorboards. Dad’s cousins sat on this porch once in my lifetime, never offering their help in exchange for coveted, deserved days at the beach.

Clinging to familiar rooms, roaming hallways, pushing ancient light switches embedded in wall plaster, doubt haunted us like some distant relative preserved in a silver frame on a bureau. Old furniture in new rooms cried for the past. Sparkling lake water beckoned my dad to build a small dock, a place to sit on the water and look a hundred feet into the oak forest. My brother, home from college, helped with the Thanksgiving project, the last nail hammered while turkey roasted.

Dad held my two year old daughter’s hand, taking a long look at the view from the new dock. I spooned thick potatoes into Granny’s oak leaf adorned Stoke-upon-Trent bowl as the sun lowered into a late autumn glow. Mom set the turkey on a matching platter, basting while gazing out to the lake with a gasp of hushed surprise. Deceiving shadows made her cautious before she quietly called us to gaze out the window over the sink, sharing her heart pounding victory. “Do you see it on the dock? Look! The legs, the arched back... our heron!” We stood there together just long enough to see her take off, gliding on dark wings across the lake.



Saving the World One Tray at a Time

By *Stephen Staysniak*

Grab tray.
Spray tray.
Rack tray.

Grab tray.
Spray tray.
Rack tray.

The emerging rhythm was similar to the dishwasher dance I performed as a bar-back during my night job. The only difference was these plastic trays and cups forgave my reckless pursuit of maximum efficiency.

Grab tray.
Spray tray.
Rack tray.

A smile.
I respond: “Have a good one!”

Grab tray.
Spray tray.
Rack tray.

I dexterously fed the full tray rack down the mini-assembly line into the hissing-humming steel washer. Only my second time in the dishwashing station and I was working like a pro! The volunteer supervisor had asked me several times if I was “sure” that I could keep up with the grabbing, spraying, racking, un racking, and stacking of approximately 240 trays per hour – “I’m sure,” I told him.

If I let the grabbing, spraying, and racking of trays during breakfast service slow down, there would be no trays. Without trays, food could not be served. And, according to the website for St. Francis House (which I had consulted prior to beginning my course-required, semester-long volunteer commitment) food service was the “first step towards nourishing the spirit” of the hundreds of poor and homeless served by the shelter. My job was important. I was important. *Ipsa facto* baby.

The crucial and immediate nature of my work towards solving Boston’s social malaises was complimented by the other-worldly setting for my task. The dishwashing station was a steamy 8ft. x 8ft. room, contained a fully mechanized stainless steel industrial dishwasher, smelled of sanitizing solution, and had a pretty loud soundtrack of swishes and hisses. Being charged with doing my part to save the world in this other-worldly setting put me in a sort of Wonka-esque trance. I focused on my task with the determination of a socially-justice minded Ompa-Loompa. As guests of the shelter passed by the window to drop off trays and the staff came in the back door pick up the trays, I tried to give off the cool air of an expert but secretly hoped for a verbal commendation or at least silent appreciation.

A small woman-guest was approaching—I gave her the “I’m in the zone but not too busy to give you a smile” smile.

She passed her tray calmly through the window and softly laid it upon the slick metal counter top. Grab tray. Instead of continuing past the window and out of the dining hall, she remained in front of the window and gave me an uninterrupted stare—a forthcoming

compliment? I paused before spraying down her tray to give her a chance to speak. The hissing of hot water and churning of the auto-feeding mechanism in the dishwasher prevented me from hearing anything more than “you” “don’t” and “here.” Spray tray.

I had learned, from other volunteers and staff, that whenever a guest said something I didn’t understand or something that sort of freaked me out, I should give a big smile, say something non-committal like “oh-kay!” and move on. I followed protocol. She returned my patronizing response with the same steady glare. I needed her to move on. I had a job to do here!

“A person like you doesn’t belong in this place.” She continued to stare at me for another second. Then she walked away, not waiting for me to respond.

A person *like* me?

Doesn’t belong?

In *this place*?

She had seen something in me which the previous hundred guests had either not seen, or saw and didn’t care to comment about. Were my dishwashing skills that poor? My inexperience that obvious? But I was grabbing! I was spraying! I was racking! Come on, people!

The even keel of my entire operation had been destroyed in six seconds.

I tried to regain my earlier form in the breakfast service time that remained. But thanks to the oracle lady, each grab, spray, and rack, was riddled with self-doubt. I felt like someone had told me my fly was down, my cowlick was sticking up, and I had a piece of sandwich on my face – and I couldn’t do anything about it. Damn you oracle woman!

Breakfast service ended, and on my elevator ride upstairs to the volunteer sign-out sheet, I concluded that there were three possible ways to interpret this woman’s haunting stare and mysterious words.

First: she saw me, innocent white college boy, as much too fragile to be spending time in a downtown homeless shelter. If this was her intent, she would not be the first to comment on my apparent lack of physical menace or outward aggression. Frequently when checking IDs and asking for cover charges at the door of my night job, people would laugh at my squirrely build and instead of producing their ID, say something like, “really?” The quickest fix was to scowl, which, with my thick eyebrows, came easily. Was that her lesson, scowl more?

The second translation of this woman’s words was to chalk it up to a case of mistaken identity. Maybe she was just crazy! Maybe instead of seeing me, Steve Staysniak, washing trays, she saw Mickey Mouse or President Roosevelt. If this was true, her telling me “people like you don’t belong here” made perfect sense!

The third and most troubling interpretation was not completely clear to me yet, but I knew it had to do with my Oompa-Loompa-ing. Sheepishly, I admitted to myself that washing trays was probably not the most important job at St. Francis House, it may not have even ranked in the top five. What if the “person like me” to whom she referred, was a person who had turned the chance to serve to many station into the service of one person? Saying that I “don’t belong in this place” may have meant that if the person I was most interested in serving was me, this was not the place to do it. This series of thoughts caused me to inadvertently check that my fly was pulled up.

Instead of going right to the volunteer sign out sheet after stepping off the elevator, I walked into the doorway of Br. Dan’s office.

“Hello Brother,” I said from the doorway.

The gentle and wise Benedictine Brother who coordinated all volunteer efforts at St. Francis looked up from his work, “Yes, Brother! Come in!” This was a developing routine between us, the Brother thing.

Thankful for the chance to share, I began. “Well, I was in the kitchen for breakfast this morning and Fran wanted me to wash the trays.” This was a little bit of a lie since I had begged, through the power of heavy suggestion, to be assigned to the dishwashing room. But Brother Dan’s warm smile validated this quasi-promotion and so I continued my story with a comfortable layer of embellishment.

“Well, I got the hang of it pretty quickly, Brother. I got through the first rush of people fine and was just finishing with the second rush from the group that comes from Deer Island, and this woman came to the window and said something really strange.”

“Who was it?” Brother Dan asked. There were some notable guests at St. Francis House, whose behavior could be easily explained or dismissed offhand.

“Um, she was small, long and straight grey hair. Very quiet voice.” was as specific as I could get.

“Hmm, I’m not sure I know her.” Br. Dan graciously responded.

“It doesn’t matter. Anyway. She told me, ‘a person like you doesn’t belong here.’” I was desperately searching his face for any signs for compassion, understanding—I didn’t see anything and threw him a little lifeline.

“Isn’t that weird?”

One more chance: “I didn’t know what to say.”

His face was blank.

Br. Dan did not know the answer, or was worried that he was going to lose a volunteer, or was a little freaked out. I knew how he felt. As he broke into the big-smile said before he could say his non-committal response, I had the urge to interrupt to tell him:

“Brother, I think your fly is down.”



14 Hours in the Lima Airport

By Ethan Warner

Begin: 7:30 am - End: 9:30 pm

Itinerary

I was sixteen when the tiny plane that carried us from Cusco to Lima touched down before the sun rose of Peru's capital city. My father and I, along with the seven other passengers on the overcrowded plane disembarked directly onto the tarmac, taking care to avoid the still spinning propellers of the antique aircraft. We were led by a small man of Quechuan descent across the tarmac and up a staircase into the nominally international hub of an airport, eager to begin our 14 hour layover, the result of a combination of my father's poor planning and the mountain conditions of Cusco.

Hour 1: *Examine airport end to end. Uncovered manifestation of Our Lady of Airport Terminals.*

We entered the main concourse of the airport and decided to familiarize ourselves with our surroundings. Backpacks hoisted high, we walked to the end of the long room. Then we turned and walked back. We climbed the staircase located midway down the corridor only to discover it led to a short balcony area smaller than the hall we had just left. That was it. That was the airport where we were to spend the next 14 hours: one long hall and a small balcony section. Intensely bright florescent lights illuminating the equally dirty linoleum floor. Our survey of the area had taken 5 minutes. If this was to entertain us for the remaining 835 minutes, we would have to start moving a lot slower. With this in mind, my father and I headed over to the far left hand side to see if there was anything of note we had failed to spot in our first, admittedly cursory, examination. Indeed there was! We had walked straight past a bona fide miracle. There by the window, overlooking the parking lot was a fountain in the exact form and appearance of the Virgin Mary. If people found oddly shaped grilled cheese sandwiches praise worthy, this miracle had to be worthy of the Vatican. Further inspection revealed, unfortunately that the Prima Donna form was due to human design, not divine. This, I believe, disqualifies it from canonization. She did, however, appear to be undergoing some strange form of stigmata. Water was flowing from her eyes and mouth. Surely, a weeping Mother of God necessitated papal notification. Upon close review of our Holy Relic-to-be, we were disappointed to discover that this too was part of the intentional design of the fountain. Oh well. Miracle or not, it was definitely art. I know because my dad's an art teacher, and he confirmed it.

Hour 2: *Breakfast standing up at concession stand. Forgo drinks to avoid dysentery.*

Hunger deterred us from our mission of exploring every square inch of the miniscule airport. A breakfast of rolls had been served on the airplane ride, but their tendency to jump with every bounce of the tiny plane made them difficult to catch and harder to eat. So off we went to the lone concession stand and examined their bill of fare. The selection offered was almost as expansive and nutritious as a cart at the county fair. After making our choices, we found ourselves with no place to sit, so we stood as we ate. The beverage selection at the food stand included no bottled beverages and, since we had so far managed to avoid dysentery, we decided not to press our luck and went without drink for this meal.

Hour 3: *Explore upstairs, note small restaurant where we could have eaten sitting down. Discover entrance to Delta VIP section. Attempt to gain access. Fail.*

We now found ourselves now standing near the staircase, not that we could ever be very far from it given the limited space. So we decided to continue our detailed exploration upstairs. Atop the stairs we determined the area above to be much the same as the area below, only smaller. At one end there was a small, sit down café, currently closed. Just as well, we had filled ourselves on stale Danishes already. Midway down the balcony, however, standing right near the stairs, was a doorway. A doorway which spoke of treasures as yet unimagined. A doorway full of mystery and wonder. A doorway to the Delta VIP section. There was of course the minor detail that my father and I are VIP's only in our own minds. Also, we weren't flying Delta. Still, we approached the door with all the confidence self-delusion can muster, insisted upon our right of access and were promptly turned away. We would have our revenge.

Hour 4: *Ponder last chance to dump it sign in men's room.*

In the airport bathroom was a large sign which read, in English, "Last Chance to Dump It." It took me a while to understand. Initially, I was under the impression that this was some sort of warning that the bathrooms on the plane were subpar, making this my last my last chance to comfortably "dump it." My father explained though, with a confusing amount of excitement, "No, no. They mean drugs. This is your last chance to dump any drugs you might be smuggling." He looked about expectantly, hoping to catch a repentant smuggler mid-dump. Baggies were provided to easy any drug dumping activities I or others might wish to engage in. Of course, I didn't have any drugs to dump, which seemed to disappoint my father as I was his one shot of seeing drug dumping in action.

Hour 5: *Find Taxi driver, attempt to negotiate tour of city.*

Cabin fever had begun to set in, so my father determined we should take a tour of the shining city of Lima. According to the guide book there were at least three things, if not more, to see in this lovely city. So my father went to the area where the taxi drivers were gathered, and, choosing one at random, attempted to negotiate a tour of the city. Unfortunately, the taxi driver selected oh so carefully by my father spoke no English. Never fear though. My father's Spanish consisted of both the phrases, "Cuidado no toce, es muy caliente" (Careful don't touch, it's very hot) and, "Dos cervezas por favor" (Two beers please) so naturally he was fairly confident regarding his ability to negotiate a tour. For some reason though, his efforts did not bear fruit. Fortunately, the taxi driver, sensing the conversation was not going altogether well, set off for the upstairs headquarters in search of help. He found it in the form of his boss, the vice president of the taxi company, who spoke considerably more English than my father did Spanish, as incredible as that sounds. Our executive translator came downstairs, accompanied by the driver, wearing a fitted charcoal business suit, complete with tie pin and pocket watch. Smiling, he greeted my father, who hadn't shaved in two weeks and was clad in muddy jeans and flannel, and, after the exchange of some Nueve Sols, agreed to be our guide through "our lovely Lima" while the driver escorted us to wherever our hearts desired. Providing, of course, that our hearts desired to be some place in Lima, Peru. Anyway, it would definitely kill a few hours.

Hour 6: Tour - Catacombs, or lack thereof.

It turned out that our impromptu guide didn't have any clearer an idea of where one would want to go in Lima than the tour books, so he told the driver to just begin the expedition by driving forward while he explained what we were viewing, beginning with the airport parking lot, and the adjacent McDonalds. Our first actual stop was a large church, which our guide told us excitedly, had catacombs below we could view. Now, I know what a catacomb is. It's a basement full of dead bodies. Maybe this is because of my Jewish background, but I will never understand why Catholics insist on keeping dead bodies in the basement. They're dead. Deceased. Gone. No More. They're not coming back to life. Put them away. Far away. You don't need them stored in the cellar in case of emergency. They are not Christmas decorations to be pulled out once a year and hung from a tree. Much to my guide's disappointment, I passed on exploring the basement o' corpse.

Hour 7: Tour - Mugging, President Clinton

After the catacombs, the driver steered us through the water front area. Lima, we were told, is quite the major South American port. What's more, here one can get a boat to the Galapagos Islands. As our executive escort told us about the port economy, I watched a man steal a woman's purse and make a run for it outside my car window. Perhaps as a distraction our escort began to ask us about politics, specifically President Clinton. "Why," he asked, "is everyone in your country so upset that he had a lady on the side? He's an important man, why shouldn't he have a lady; it means he is strong. Now if he had a boy, that I could understand getting upset about."

Hour 8: Tour - Machine gun holes, ostriches

Our chariot next led us through the downtown area of Lima, through the Plaza de Armas. The park there was quite lovely, with a beautiful Grecian fountain and a bullet-riddled Japanese car. The guide, apparently bored with Lima, continued his discussion of the United States, peppering my father and I with questions about how far we were from New York, what we thought of NAFTA, the US's chances in the World Cup, and a variety of other topics. Eventually, he got to the question that seemed to be of most importance to him.

"In your backyard, do you see any... I can't remember what they're called, big birds, very big?"

"Turkeys?" I suggested.

"Yes... no. Like big turkeys. You can ride them."

Ride them? "You can't ride birds. Do you mean they're pets?"

"No, no, you ride them. Like Cowboys."

This conversation continued for a while until I finally realized what he was referring to.

"Ostriches?"

"Yes! Do you ever see ostriches in your backyard?"

He was so excited, I felt terrible having to tell him that no, we don't ever get to see ostriches in our backyard.

Hour 9: *Tour - “nice area,” beers, return to airport*

For the last part of the tour we were taken through the wealthy area of Lima. It was easily recognizable because it had a Chili’s, a TGIFriday’s, and an Applebee’s. We also made a quick stop at a convenience store for beverages. The guide and my father went in and came out with three beers: one for my dad, one for the guide, and one for the driver.

Hour 10: *Meal at sit down restaurant upstairs, Cuban Rice*

Returning to the airport, our first stop was to check in with the Virgin Mary to make sure she was still crying. Assured that Madre de Dios hadn’t abandoned her post, we went upstairs to try out the restaurant. Turning down something called “sweated of trout” I end up ordering a dish called Cuban Rice. I was pleasantly surprised when it arrived containing only a small amount of rice, covered with a generous serving of sausage, fried eggs, and a banana. My father got a cheeseburger and milkshake. I think he was homesick.

Hour 11: *Gift store, figurines, public urination*

After our meal we continued our exploration, beginning with the gift shop. Less shop than kiosk. It sold the standard airport gift items: snowglobes, trashy Spanish-language magazines, t-shirts that translated to something like “I Heart Lima.” The kind of gifts you bring someone if you want to say, “I forgot all about you until I got to the airport.” The confusing part, though, was the figurines. The shelves of the kiosk were covered with a wide assortment of figurines depicting a man and a woman engaged in activities that would make a porn star blush... or take notes. May I add that the anatomy of said figurines was grossly disproportionate? Discovering these, my father and I walked away to find more appropriate viewing and were greeted by the sight of a man urinating into the pool at the Virgin Mary’s feet.

Hour 12: *Reattempt to gain access to VIP area. Fail again.*

We attempted again to gain access to the Delta VIP section, this time with less diplomacy. While my father distracted the woman at the entrance, I ducked low and bolted past her. Making it through the doors, I was stopped by the large, uniformed man waiting on the other side. I still count it as a win.

Hour 13: *Eat, standing up again. Forget to shun non-bottled beverages. Pay for this later.*

We return to the food stand for a quick bite. In a strange lapse of judgment, after a week of avoiding unfiltered water, I ordered a beverage not in a sealed container. My father and I would pay for this decision in New York.

Hour 14: *Enter international section of airport. Transcendence.*

After spending the majority of the past fourteen hours in the linoleum and florescent main concourse of the airport, my father and I went through customs, and into the international section of the airport. What we discovered was a carpeted, softly lit, air conditioned zone containing an expansive food court, duty free shop, an English-language newsstand devoid of pornographic statuary, and a bar. Light, inoffensive muzak played softly in the background. Cushioned chairs were dispersed throughout for general use. No one

was urinating. What was this strange utopia we had stumbled into? Had it always been here, just through the international doors? It had certainly not been sitting her for the last fourteen hours or more. Lame. So lame.



Bubby

By Cyd Weldon

Fanny Goldstein was her name, but I never heard anyone refer to her by any other name than Bubby. Even her daughter Marcia, my mom. (Who, by the way, was actually named Mildred, but went by the name Marcia because Bubby used to yell “Moshy” out the window when it was time for little Mildred to come in for dinner.)

I was about sixteen when Bubby died. By then I was way too self-involved to truly appreciate her, to ask her what her life had been like as a little girl in Minsk before the turn of the century. Or about what it was like to be a thirteen-year-old girl on a boat to America; to arrive at Ellis Island all alone, speaking only Yiddish; to find her way to Brownsville, Brooklyn and eventually marry her third cousin Samuel Goldstein.

All of my memories of Bubby go back to my pre-adolescent days, when she lived in the little upstairs “apartment” my dad had set up for her, complete with a little kitchen where she could keep kosher. Even though she was my mom’s mother, it was my dad who came to the sudden conclusion one night at the dinner table that Bubby simply could not remain alone in her apartment in Brooklyn for another minute. He left the dinner table, got his coat and his car keys, and immediately set off to retrieve Bubby.

From that day on, Bubby sitting in her lawn chair under the front yard apple tree became a fixture on Blacksmith Rd. She would sit out there for hours, just watching the street, gently smiling, hearing aids turned down to enjoy the peace and quiet. Sometimes her housedress hiked up a bit as she sat, and you could see the rolled-down support hose where she kept her money. She would often park Elise’s baby carriage next to her chair. The soft flap of skin that swung from the bottom of her arm as she vigorously rocked the carriage belied impressive upper arm strength. When rotten apples started falling from the tree, Bubby would hoist herself up from the plastic webbing of her seat, and scour the yard for applesauce ingredients.

Ah, Bubby’s cooking. She usually prepared and ate her meals upstairs. I actually don’t even remember her sitting at the family dinner table. But I’ll never forget those times when I was greeted by the smells of Bubby’s cooking as I walked in the door after school. Certain times of year, there were those batches of yummy applesauce. She’d make the most delicious chicken soup (yeah, yeah, stereotypes have to come from somewhere), and her chopped liver was to die for. But my absolute favorite Bubby cooking smell happened on the days she decided to make blintzes. I’d walk into the kitchen to find the entire table covered with circles of the most scrumptious smelling dough. I don’t even remember what she rolled up in those circles, or what the finished product tasted like. Just the smell of that dough.

Another vivid kitchen table memory: watching Bubby sign her Social Security check. With trembling hand, she’d carefully, painstakingly draw an X on the signature line. That’s all. She’d never learned to write, not even her own name. Other things she didn’t know were how old she was, or the date she was born. After much cajoling, she ended up picking Mother’s Day to be her birthday, so we’d have a date to declare her special day.

Oh wait, one more kitchen memory: On Friday nights, she’d come downstairs just as dinner was being put on the table. She’d unfold a paper napkin and plop it on top of her graying hair, always pulled back into a loose low bun. Loose frizzles of curly hair framed her face as she lit the shabbas candles. She would sweep her hands from the candle toward her face as she said the blessing. From lit candles toward a paper napkin! Oy.

Bubby loved her “stories.” Soap operas to you and me. Every afternoon was devoted to *The Edge of Night*, *Another World*, and *Guiding Light*. CBS was also her go to station on Sunday nights. That’s when Ed Solomon was on. I don’t really think that pronunciation stemmed from her being hard of hearing. My theory is that she liked him so much that she couldn’t imagine him not being Jewish.

Bubby and I shared the upstairs bathroom. If I had to pee in the middle of the night, I tried to hold it in as long as possible. Her dentures soaking in the glass by the side of the sink seemed to glow, even if I kept the light off. Probably my most vivid Bubby memory.

My most cherished Bubby memory also took place upstairs: New Year’s Eves spent together, sitting on her bed, leaning back on those huge overstuffed pillows, watching Guy Lombardo. That’s it. I don’t remember what we ate, or whether we even stayed up late enough to watch the ball drop. But those were my special times, just Bubby and me.





Teacher as Writer & Writers Retreat
Contributions



The following are submissions from teachers who are not Teacher-Consultants but participated in the Teacher as Writer series or Writers Retreats sponsored by the CWP.

Fireworks

By Nicole Waicunas

Azhar is beautiful, with enormous, dark, almond eyes, olive skin and a smile that permeates every molecule that surrounds her. She is fearless in the world that she lives in – fearless because she has seen more than any seventeen year old should ever have to see and fearless because she has survived what she has seen. She is electric when she walks, and, if this electricity that she holds could be seen by the naked eye, fireworks would surround her, and, without discrimination, embrace anyone and everyone lucky enough to step into her path.

Azhar wants to be a teacher. Children flock to her, and, despite her struggles with the English language, she communicates clearly with each of them as they rush to be the first to get to her – to be the first and the luckiest to get to sit next to her. The smile that she shares tells the children everything they could ever want to know and words are secondary to this effusive light that she unknowingly exudes.

“Ms. Waz, can I talk to you?”

Her face was apprehensive and the difference in her demeanor was palpable. Her fireworks were quiet, uncertain and dimmed. My room was empty, which was rare and I pulled her in, wrapped my arm around her and guided her to a seat.

“I didn’t know where else to go” she began, and her eyes were luminous with her unshed tears.

“You came to exactly the right place,” I soothed, holding her soft hand in mine, worried about what could possibly be creating this much pain for her. I recalled a story she had told me that past fall, as I sipped hot, sweet tea that she had made just for me. Her mother and I were sitting across from one another, and Azhar was sitting on the arm of her chair, her body pressed against her mother’s, who stroked Azhar’s chestnut colored hair, which, freed from her head covering, flowed in waves down the curve of her back to the tip of her tailbone. Fatimah, the mother of seven, speaks very little English and her life is centered solely on her family. The world in which she now lives must be translated for her, daily, moment by moment. Fatimah lives for her children and her husband, making *kubba*, lentil soup and *biryani* among countless other amazing dishes that express her love for her family. She strives to maintain her culture and instill the memories of her country into her children so that they will not forget the beauty of where they were born. Her children are the jewels of her life.

Azhar translated for her mother as she reminisced about an autumn day in Baghdad when she had taken her nine year old son, Abdul, on the two mile walk to the center of the city, in order to purchase what little food might be for sale in order to feed her family. Waleed, her husband, was on tour with the American and Iraqi forces, and she had no idea

when – or if – she would see him again. She had learned how precious each moment truly was. She held tightly to her ration card, hoping that it would enable her to get the basics to feed her family. Meanwhile, Waleed continued his daily mission to search for terrorists who were, in turn, eager to kill him and anyone else who stood in their way.

“When my mother got home, she was white as a ghost and she asked for water and a chair” Azhar explained as Fatimah smiled and continued to stroke her daughter’s hair. “She was so scared and Abdul would not speak – at all. He was, how do you say? Nervous and shaking. We had no idea what had happened but we were so happy that they were home, safe.”

After buying their supplies, Fatimah had taken Abdul’s hand and begun the journey back to their home. Even their home was not safe, however. Translators were a primary target for the terrorists and Waleed had been told not to return home on one of his scheduled visits to his family because the house directly behind theirs had been blown up. Fatimah and the children had not known that a fellow translator, like Waleed, lived so close to them. The translators wore bullet proof vests, hats, sunglasses and handkerchiefs over their faces to hide their identities from the terrorists. This camouflage was worn, not only for their own safety, but also for the safety of the families who waited for them. The best way for a terrorist to take revenge on an interpreter was to kill his family. Fatimah’s neighbors had been discovered to be related to a translator. There were no survivors.

Holding her precious purchases and the small hand of Abdul, Fatimah began her journey home. Before the war, the marketplace was boisterous and animated, filled with the sounds of laughing children, bartering vendors and adult voices, gossiping, telling stories and sharing the latest news. There was a quiet hush to the square now, and no one dared to stay a moment longer than necessary as they carried their precious cargo – supplies and children – back to the relative safety of their homes, grateful for the successful end of another life threatening day at the market. But on that day, Fatimah would not return with the food that her family so desperately needed. On that day, Fatimah would drop her precious purchases, grab her son’s hand and run for their lives.

“A man, with a bomb strapped to his chest, blew himself up in the center of the market.”

Azhar’s voice was quieter now, and, even though Fatimah continued to stroke her hair, she was no longer with us, in the room, as her daughter translated each word to recreate this painful memory.

“My mother ran. She ran for her life and she tried to stop Abdul from seeing what this man had done.”

The steam from the tea continued to rise from the delicate glass on the table, the leaves continued to fall from the trees, outside of the sliding glass doors and, at the same time, in a place so far away, people continued to blow themselves up in market squares while others grabbed their children’s hands and ran for their lives. Azhar seemed to read my mind as she said, “Some days, the sky would be perfect – so blue – and the chill in the air would make me smile.

And then I would remember to ask, ‘Who got killed today? Who lost their mother, father, child?’”

This was the young woman who sat with me now, in room 218, holding my hand, with tears in her eyes and fear in her soul. I could not imagine what could so sadden her, so frighten my strong fighter, my brave, beautiful warrior who sparkled when she walked. And

then she reminded me of just how similar we all are, regardless of where we come from, what we have seen and who we have lost.

“Ms. Waz, I get to take a class at UConn.” With a smile and a flicker of the light that I so loved, she handed me her new UConn I.D. card, with her luminous grin radiating off of the plastic.

“Azhar! How wonderful!” I exclaimed, ecstatic at this new path that had been presented to her.

“I can’t read the book. It is too hard.” Her face fell with the absolute truth of these two simple sentences and I watched her shatter into a million pieces. “I will not be able to take the class. I will not be able to be a teacher, like you.”

The enormity of her pain was razor sharp and absolutely true. She was so bright, so filled with potential but she could not transcend the barrier of language that stood in her way. I took a deep breath and realized just how important this moment was; she was at the crossroads of everything and nothing.

I smiled, moved closer and, never letting go of her hand, whispered, “We will find a way. You will teach. You will take this class. We will find a way.” A glimmer of her light slipped from her, in the form of a tear. I caught it and held it, like the diamond that it was. “We will find a way.”

The bell rang and chaos ensued. Within seconds the door was flung open, students tumbled into the room, calling out to me, to each other and already asking questions. I had five minutes before the bell would ring and my class would start. I asked Azhar if I could see her book. She held it out to me and I quickly understood the pain that she was in. The college textbook held all of the secrets that she wanted to know and she needed the key to open them. A former student, now at UConn, crossed my mind and as two of my current students entered the room I said, out loud, “I wish I had Brandi’s phone number so that I could see if she would be willing to help Azhar with this text book.”

Frankie, one of my 12th graders said, “I have her number at home” but Brianna one upped him and pulled her phone out of her purse saying, with a grin, “I can call her now.” I asked Bri to dial Brandi, and then I took the phone. To my joyful surprise, Brandi picked up on the first ring. When I told her of Azhar and her dilemma, Brandi’s response was immediate and beautiful. It was just before the December break and Brandi was excited to come to the school to meet Azhar and plan on when she could begin to tutor her. Brandi laughed and said, “Geez Ms. Waz, do you have any idea how difficult it is to get a hold of me on the phone? The chance that, at that particular moment, my phone would be on and that I would have a second to answer it was zero to none.”

I laughed and said, “There are no mistakes, Brandi – you know that.”

Azhar got an A+ in that class, by the way.



Labyrinth

By Rosemary LoStocco

I walked the Labyrinth today.
My journey was short,
My question long.
There *I* was.

My chaos,
My heartache,
My loss,
My people.
I held *them* up.

I walked the Labyrinth today.
My journey was short,
My question long.
There *You* were.

Your order,
Your beauty,
Your pain,
Your brilliance,
Your people
I held *them* up, too.

I walked the Labyrinth today.
My journey was short,
My question long.
There *We* were.

Our passion,
Our trials,
Our faith,
Our people.
And, there was power!
I devoured every drop.
Now they're mine.
Can you feel them?

Let's walk the Labyrinth.
You and I.
Our journey will be short,
Our questions long.
Together, we'll discover more.

Grieg

By Philippa Paquette

He huddled in his plaid chair tense with anticipation, waiting for the magic to begin. His unfocused gaze traveled through the white ceiling and unadorned walls. Perhaps she was out. She must have many friends. Of course that must be it! She was laughing with her friends in a wine bar while he sat alone in the dark like a toad in a hole.

She had moved into the top-floor apartment two weeks ago but all he had seen was the piano, wrapped in a black velvet shroud. It had been wrestled through the hall and later visited by a small man with a black bag. The piano doctor he supposed. The doorman said that she came from Paris, France: a French woman, petite, svelte and sophisticated. Then the music came and the notes trickled down his spine. He could breathe again. It was Grieg, bringing spring into his room. Buds swelled and burst, new leaves jeweled the bare bones of the trees and streamlets sparkled. He could see her hands, tiny and fine fingered, trailing from delicate, blue-veined wrists. They caressed and pressed the keys, hovering like dragonflies before the next trill and flight.

Pulsating shadows flitted through his mind: willowy and slim, silky dresses, long dark hair. Her face was always hidden and that secrecy delighted him. The music sang to his soul and he was young again. The agile, appealing youth he had never really been. He had always been as he was now, a study in mediocrity, not Adonis.

Night after night he listened enraptured as Grieg filled his veins. It gradually pumped up his courage to action. He would go to her door and welcome her to the building. So much to plan, rehearse and panic over. He never met her in the hall or on the stairs. He never saw her come and go. The invisibility and music strengthened the spell. He was trapped in the web of chords and arpeggios and knew that the meeting was inevitable. He would take gifts. Flowers she must have, not common roses, but delicately perfumed freesias. He remembered his mother taking cake to new neighbors. Cake was too worldly. He would bake florentines, macaroons, no, madeleines!

The web tightened and drew him thumping up the stairs; heart pounding, hands trembling. He knocked and the music stopped. There was a long silence and the world stood still. He knocked again. Footsteps approached and the door opened. He started to speak, then saw that this must be her maid. She was tall and sturdy, dressed in black wool with short blonde hair and her fingers were thick and strong. He peered behind her and saw the piano and the empty bench.

“The pianist...?”

“Yes, I play.”

She looked at the madeleines and freesias, delicate and desirable. Like Grieg, they thrilled her lonely soul. At last he had come to her. Waves of joy erupted from groin to eyes as she saw a friend with gifts to cherish her.

“I’m sorry. This is a mistake. I am in the wrong place.” He turned and stumbled away. The door closed.

Anticipation is everything.



Biographies



Teaching Consultants

Denise Abercrombie (SI '07) serves as English department chairperson at E.O. Smith High School, where she teaches American literature, creative writing, and theater. Her poems have appeared in *Minnesota Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Fireweed*, *Common Ground Review*, *Phoebe*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Kalliope*, *Poetic Journeys*, *Open Weave*, *Seeds of Fire: Contemporary Poetry from the Other U.S. A.*, *The Lumberyard*, *Radiance*, *Struggle*, *Politika*, and *Writing on the Edge*. She lives in Storrs with her husband and fellow writer, Jonathan Andersen, and their two sons, Kit and Miles.

Elizabeth Amburn (SI '12) teaches fourth grade at Killingly Memorial School. She has enjoyed implementing in her teaching practice this year many of the writing workshop ideas that resulted from her immersion in the writing process during the Summer Institute!

Katrina M. Bafumi (SI '12) is an 11th and 12th grade teacher in Berlin, CT, where she teaches Journalism, AP Language and Composition, and Writing Studies/Peer Tutoring, in addition to writing/reading seminars. Her teaching often extends beyond classroom hours into the BHS Writing Center and student newspaper, the Redcoat Review. She is a University of Connecticut alumnus and a graduate of the NEAG School of Education's IB/M program.

Daniel Blanchard (SI '10) is husband, and father of five children who presently teaches social studies at New Britain High School. He is presently writing his third teen leadership book for his Granddaddy's Secrets series, and writes a weekly newspaper column for *The New Britain Herald* and *The Bristol Press*.

Michelle Blowers (SI '12) has relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio, where she has begun her career in teaching after recently graduating from UConn's Neag School of Education IB/M program. She has found a position with a 4th grade team in an urban setting, where opportunities of literacy instruction, as well as her own journaling of the trials and tribulations of her transition into adulthood, have proven plentiful.

Christine Briganti (SI '12) is a graduate student in UConn's Neag School of Education. She is currently interning in the Reading and Writing Center at Glastonbury High School and serves as the Outreach Coordinator for the UConn Writing Center. She is grateful to have shared her summer with such knowledgeable and supportive individuals, and she looks forward to securing her first teaching position for the upcoming school year.

Jane Cook (SI '07) has been working as a Literacy and Technology Coach for over 30 years. Since 2007, Jane has served as the CWP Technology Program Leader, designing and helping maintain the CWP Web site and providing literacy and tech seminars. She loves providing

technology support to the Summer Institute participants. Jane began writing for her high school newspaper and has never stopped.

Shirley Cowles (SI '12) is the Language Arts Challenge Resource Teacher at Sage Park Middle School in Windsor, CT. She has spent nine years watching and observing in the Psychiatry Department at Newington Children's Hospital, seventeen years becoming creative at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, four years mastering the art of teaching at Irving Robbins Middle School in Farmington, and five years developing a gifted/talented program at Sage Park. Teacher by day and writer by night, she has found her writer's home.

Cynthia Dee (SI '12) was an SI fellow who was not an English teacher but who wanted to become better teacher of writing and a better writer herself. The SI helped her realize that she had a great deal to say about a variety of issues. Sadly, she missed four weeks of tending her garden during the summer; however, this fall she is reaping the rewards.

Ellen Devine (SI '12) is a writer and English teacher at Choate Rosemary Hall. Thanks to her participation in the CWP Summer Institute, she completed her MA in English at the University of Connecticut this year. Her fiction has been published in Long River Review and her personal essay, "Hot Dog on a String," was published in an anthology of essays titled My Little Red Book. Ellen lives in Wallingford, Connecticut with her soon-to-be husband, Michael, and her two golden doodles, Bra(h)n and Poggi.

Helen Martin (SI '12) is a third grade teacher in the dual-language program at North Windham Elementary School, where she teaches all of the subject areas in Spanish with her English counterpart; together they seek new and innovative ways to create authentic writing experiences in their classrooms. Helen was recently married and her recent pregnancy (with their second child) has provided many comical opportunities for writing her favorite genre, creative non-fiction.

Emily Hernberg (SI '12) recently completed the Integrated Bachelor's/ Master's (IB/M) program at UConn's Neag School of Education. She currently teaches English at New Canaan High School.

Sarah King (SI '12) is Director of Children's Ministries at Trinity United Methodist Church and substitute teacher at Trinity Christian School, Windsor and at West Hartford Public Schools. While Sarah continues her graduate studies in English at UConn, she praises the CWP for the opportunity to become a Teacher Consultant and is grateful for the privilege of working with such multi-talented teachers and writers.

David Polochanin (SI '99) has taught English at Gideon Welles School, a middle school in Glastonbury, for the last 12 years. A former journalist, his writing has appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *Providence Journal*, *Hartford Courant*, and *Education Week*; his poetry has been published in an anthology by Native West Press and will appear in the journal *Sentence*. He is currently on a sabbatical leave from teaching, in order to write poetry and fiction for young adults.

Stephen Staysniak (SI '12) has in taught in New York City, Litchfield County, Bridgeport, and is now happily teaching in an innovative, urban public high school in New Haven. Instructional focus areas in Steve's classroom include motivating reluctant readers, writing for authentic audiences, integrating technology with literacy development, and building collaborative community in the classroom. Steve feels a deep sense of gratitude to the SI 2012 cohort for teaching him that practicing writing makes a better teacher of writing.

Kisha Tracy (SI '10) graduated from the University of Connecticut with her Ph.D. in Medieval Studies in 2010. She is currently an Assistant Professor of English Studies at Fitchburg State University, where she teaches early British and world literatures.

Ethan Warner (SI '12) is a high school English teacher at O.H. Platt High School and a graduate of UConn's Neag School of Education. A member of his school's 9th Grade Team, he also directs the theatre program and coaches the debate team. In whatever free time he has, he enjoys comic books and traveling.

Cyd Weldon (SI '12) considers the midlife career change to teaching to be the best—and last—zag in a lengthy history of zigs. Since earning her Master's degree in 1998, she has taught elementary students ranging from first grade to sixth. For the past 7 years, Cyd has taught fifth grade in the Windham area, and she has happily transferred to her current position as a fifth-grade teacher at Sweeney Elementary School in Willimantic.

Teacher as Writer & Writers Retreat Participants

Rosemary M. LoStocco is a graduate of Eastern Connecticut State University, where she also taught College Writing as an adjunct professor. She studied at Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College; earned her MA at Wesleyan University; and, is currently completing her 6th Year Certificate of Advanced Study in Administration at Sacred Heart University. Rosemary teaches English at E.O. Smith High School in Mansfield, CT, where she and her husband of twenty-five years, Steve, are raising three wonderful daughters—Melissa, Lauren, and Angela.

Philippa Paquette has her MS, MA, and Sixth year in Clinical and School psychology and currently works in the Putnam school district as a school psychologist. She is a graduate of Yale and UConn.

Nicole Waicunas teaches 12th grade English at E.O. Smith High School in Storrs, CT. A graduate of Columbia University and Barnard College, she received her Master's degree in Gifted Education at the University of Connecticut. She is currently on sabbatical, writing her first novel and working as the Schoolwide Enrichment Model Outreach Coordinator for NRCGT at the University of Connecticut. She lives with her husband, Brian, her dog, Charlie, and her two kittens, Big Boy and Little Girl.

Writing Contest Judges

Christiana Pinkston Betts is a Ph.D. student at the University of Connecticut. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English Arts from Hampton University and her Master's degree in English from the University of Connecticut. Her research concentration is contemporary Asian American and African American literature and popular culture. In her "free time," she writes poetry and short fiction, and she also enjoys cooking and singing. She is the proud mother of a Yorkshire terrier named Sir Gawain.

Sean Frederick Forbes is an adjunct professor of English at UConn. His poems have been published in *Sargasso, A Journal of Caribbean Literature, Language, Culture; Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Long River Review*. Recently, his book of poems *Providencia* was a semi-finalist in the 2011 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award competition. He lives in Thompson, CT.

Miller Oberman was the recipient of *Poetry Magazine's* 2005 Ruth Lilly Fellowship and has recently had poems appear in the *Minnesota Review, Rattle* and *Lilith*. Miller has an MFA from Georgia College, a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Connecticut, studying poetry and poetics from Old English runes to the contemporary avant-garde. Miller's manuscript, *Useful* was a finalist for the 2012 National Poetry Series.

Cover Designer

Wes Cowles is currently completing his undergraduate degree at Emmanuel College in Boston, Massachusetts. During his tenure at Emmanuel as a Graphic Design & Technology major, he has held the positions of class president and Administrative Orientation Leader; he has interned at Hill Holliday Advertising Firm in Boston; and, he has made two trips to New Orleans, LA, to assist with home reconstruction following Hurricane Katrina. Wes is an avid runner, Red Sox fan, and a twin.





Colophon

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