SEGUES

CONNECTICUT WRITING PROJECT SUMMER FELLOWS

1991
SEGUES
An Anthology
by
The Connecticut Writing Project
1991 Summer Fellows
Fairfield County

Connecticut Writing Project
Stamford, Connecticut
1991
As we bumble through the current pre-election rhetoric, I am reminded of two pieces of writing. One was written by Vaclav Havel and published on the Op Ed page of The New York Times (March 1, 1992). Havel described the end of Communism as signifying the end of the modern age which believed in science, reason, and man's ability to "know" the universe and to fix anything wrong with it. Havel went on to wish for a world where people "try harder to understand than to explain," to "get to the heart of reality through personal experience," and to restore "an elementary sense of justice, the ability to see things as others do, a sense of transcendental responsibility, archetypal wisdom, good taste, courage, compassion and faith in the importance of particular measures that do not aspire to be a universal key to salvation." Havel wants us to acknowledge that the failure of communism was not brought about by armies, but by life, by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of Being and man to manipulation.

What, I wondered, would it be like if a U.S. presidential candidate were not an actor, a power broker, or a Brahmin -- but rather a poet, a dramatist, a thinker. How would Havel's level of literacy, of language, change our future? Could the citizenry enter the conversation or would they be so stunned by the lack of easy promises and facile blame that they would have to invent the candidate whose vision and language are as platitudinous as theirs?

The current political situation, among its other faults, is no respecter of language or of ideas. Ted Sizer says, "society has never respected hard thinking. Nobody's pushing for kids who say 'why.'" I am reminded of a second piece of writing, "Graffiti, a short story by Julio Cortazar, in which the writing of graffiti has been made illegal by a dictator who fears the exchange of words, pictures and ideas. When two young people defy the law and begin a predawn correspondence on garage doors, building walls, and concrete plazas, they are arrested and tortured, a situation that, in fact, echoes Juan Peron's treatment of graffiti artists in Argentina.

Paolo Freire and others have testified to the power of the word in the hands of the oppressed. Undoubtedly, although certainly to a different and lesser degree, we have all believed ourselves the objects of some injustice. Our schools and society are often not places where the free exchange of ideas is valued. A student of my acquaintance wrote a letter to the local paper which was met with three visits to the principal's office, long phone calls from board members, and other such forms of intimidation. The silence of the student body is ensured.

The Summer Institute invites teachers to write and virtually commands that they help students find their own voices, define their own styles, and make meaning of their personal and academic lives. These are worthy goals. But do we also demand writing that asks "why," that deals with the hard questions, that wants exploration of ideas at a level that goes beyond easy, glib answers. Are we, in fact, asking our students to do hard analytical thinking about issues that matter and to write their conclusions, tentative as they may be? Should we do so? Might more of such writing eventually provide an audience for the Havels? Might we then even hope for a thinker or a poet for president?

Faye
"Rehearsals of a lesser consequence on the Merritt Parkway"

by Annie Almore

How dare you come
In here under
my skin
where I am
the only one who
can know
you're there?

Little, little, quick, quick
I feel you
crawling where
no one's
ever been before

I listen for your
sound and you
are as silent
as the
night

Pick, pick little nerve
patterns
wiggle along
my face

In the mirror I
wait to
catch your
invasion

And one day
I'll catch
you
and take you out

---

Once my Muse spoke to me
I am sure that it was she
Who visited me through
The curtain of my pain

She led me through
The journey of my mind
With words in hand
And a thought upon her lips

Down through the pathways of time
across the rivers of hope
Around the corners of my imagination
Where I peeked into the closets of my mind

And pen in hand
I wrote of the things
Lurking in those recesses
Until we both lay spent
Among the metaphoric splendor of it all

I am visited by the Night Cloak
Enraptured, overcome
A moment in time

The colors matched so perfectly
Ochre, black
An undefined blue

I am hypnotized, blessed
Enthralled by your choice
Of landing places
I am frozen
You hardly move

My hand is not a lily
My shoulder, not a daisy

But my eyes
My soul
welcomes your visit

---
What do you want for Christmas?
he said to me one October morning

What do you want?
was my reply

There was such a silence.

When we could speak he said
the kids
I want all of my kids for Christmas

Did you hear him ask
how are my kids?
I heard him ask
how are my kids?

They came and went
So did he.

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Will you dance with me?

I dance in barefeet
about my carpeted house
and George Winston plays
"Thanksgiving" on my stero

I swirl and twist and
pounce on the sounds
as they swirl through
the unmoving air

My arms are outstretched in
an empty dancer's embrace
It occurs to me
I am dancing alone

Inside of me
I am ten
and twelve
and twenty-one

And I can ponder
speculatively
about the things
soon to be

My body does my bidding
my breath intact
as I leap
from log to log
freely

Inside of me I am
am ten and
twelve
twenty-one
and 53.
The Rubrums bloom once again
A mute testament
To the day of your birth

The Rubrums bloom once again
A fragrant addition
To the July air

The Rubrums bloom once again
suckling the Hummingbird
with their sweet nectar

The Rubrums bloom once again
Regal splendor
In our garden
Gladdening the hearts
Of summer’s people

They Asked Me That Question
by Susannah Barratt

I used to work for a man that was very superstitious. In fact, I’d even call him paranoid. He was terrified of the bad luck that goes with number thirteen, therefore, we never worked on that date. Then he travelled to China and found out that thirteen is bad luck, but fourteen means death. After that, we began taking two days off from work, every month. I thought this superstition to be nonsense, until something “deadly” happened to me on November 14th.

It is difficult to recall the fright or pain that I experienced on that day, because the symptoms fade over time. What I do remember clearly though, is that everyone asked me the same question, over and over again. For some, it was to justify what they already suspected; for others, it was a lesson.

The day was unusually warm for November. No jacket was necessary. The sun radiated through the windshield as I started for Stamford, via the Merritt Parkway. As I started up the steep hill, my car began slowing down. Even with the pedal to the floor, it barely crawled to the top of the slope. Soon enough, it edged over the top and began escalating downward, picking up momentum—forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, sixty... and then something snapped! All of a sudden, the car was completely out of control! The back wheels were hanging on by a thread, and jerking the car back and forth over the center median. I watched people swerve out of my way, in hopes of avoiding a collision with a white spinning object. Now I was in the fast lane, and could see the oncoming traffic only inches away from my spinning vehicle. I knew I was going to crash. I couldn’t watch anymore. The last thing I saw before clenching my eyes shut was the traffic coming down the steep hill headed right at me, as I continued to spin toward it. I tried to maintain my physical position in this fury, by stiffening my elbows and gripping the wheel tightly, with sweaty hands.

The wheels caught on something and the car began to roll forward. Within an instant, the windshield smashed toward me. With glass shattering onto my face, I heard myself scream. I felt as if I was completely upside down, when I heard the breaking of glass behind me. This time my scream was stifled, as I opened my mouth and had it filled with glass and dirt from the rear hatchback. The rolling motion seemed to continue, and I questioned my fate...

Am I going down the bank off the side of the road? Will I be knocked unconscious? Will they know that I loved them? Will this car
With that, the car rolled one last time before skidding to a stop. Chips of glass sprinkled free from my eyelids, yet I couldn't quite figure out my position. The force of gravity indicated that I was completely upsidedown. I was actually in a fetal position, with my chin pressed into my chest and knees curled up. I felt my head pressing against the roof. Was this my "new" life, or my old one? I wasn't quite sure. I listened carefully to my surroundings as my head cleared its questions. From a distance, I heard the sound of cars whizzing by. Unless they have a Merritt Parkway "up here" I think I'm alive. I began to panic about getting out before this pile of metal exploded. I reached down, next to me, to release the strap that saved my life. and it clicked right off. With adrenaline pumping, I managed to squish through the partial opening of my window. That was the only time in my life I felt "skinny." My eyes became focused and the sunlight shone on my face— I knew for sure that I was alive.

Bodies of people started coming at me, with looks of disbelief that I had gotten myself out. Some were screaming that I almost hit them with my car, and others shouted that they were sure I must have been having a heart attack, being so out of control. The sounds of sirens blared toward me, as the firetruck, ambulance and police were racing to the scene. One by one, people asked me the question. Out of the chaos stepped a paramedic. He examined the situation and was the only one not to ask me the question. Instead, he made a statement. "I've been to a lot of these, and you were lucky! By the looks of things, you wouldn't be sitting there if you DIDN'T have IT on."

Coming to America

by Ann Marie Carney

Anna Mary stood at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes, her eye on the clock. She was short and what they call "pleasingly plump." Her white hair was very curly and rimmed with a tasteful shade of blue. Eighty years of living had not dimmed her blue eyes.

"Grandma, come on, please help me out. It's for school," Maureen pleaded, knowing this ploy would command respect.

"Child, who could possibly be interested in my story? Sure, and there's thousands of others like myself who came to this country."

Anna Mary cast a skeptical eye on her teenaged granddaughter, noticing the jeans with the hole in the knee and the raggedy Keds.

"I know that, Grandma, but they're not my family, and they don't count for an assignment on my roots. We're studying the reasons for immigration, and you're a primary source."

Anna Mary wiped her hands on the dish towel, sighed, and sat down heavily at the kitchen table. "OK, Maureen, what do you want to know?"

"Well, for starters, when did you come to America and why? Just tell it like a story, and I'll take notes."

"Stories should start 'Once upon a time...,' and there's no fairy tale quality to this one. I was fourteen years old in 1922 when my father died from cancer of the liver. His pain was terrible, and we had nothing at all to give him. My brother John and I knelt on either side of the bed and said the Rosary aloud while he was dying. The night he died was the only time I ever saw my mother cry. After that she kept herself in rigid control. She told us that God's ways were not our ways, and that we had to accept his will.

"Our situation was bad. At fourteen, I was the oldest of nine. John left school that week to work on the farm, but he wasn't as experienced as my father. Also, he was too exhausted at night to go fishing with the men. so we missed that little extra income. My mother's brother Bill Gibbons wrote from America to say that if I wanted to come here to work, he would send the money for my passage. but I should wait until I was sixteen. My mother wrote back her thanks, and it was all arranged. Now will that be enough, do you think?"

Anna Mary half rose from her chair.

"Grandma, this is just getting started. I'll make us both a cup of tea, and we'll have some of your soda bread. This is amazing. How did you feel about coming to America? What did you say when they asked you?"

"Maureen, no one asked me about it at all. and it never occurred to me that they should. I was scared to death, but my feelings didn't matter. I did what I was told, something you could do more often."

"Don't change the subject, Grandma, this is fascinating. What happened next?"

"Well, two years later, after I had turned sixteen, we wrote to the American Consulate in Dublin for information and applications. We filled them out and set the day for my leaving. It was terrible. I knelt for my mother's blessing before I left our cottage, and I was
afraid that I might never see her again. I thought my heart would break, but I knew better than to cry in front of my stern mother. My grandfather went with me on the train to Dublin. I had never been on a train before, so that part seemed like a grown-up adventure."

"Well, did you?"

"Did I what?"

"See your mother again, Grandma!" Maureen brought the tea cups and soda bread to the table.

"Oh, I did surely, but that's going ahead of the story."

OK. Sorry I interrupted, but I had to know. Go ahead; you were on the train to Dublin." Maureen wrote and munched simultaneously.

"I was issued a visa at the Consulate and then we went to the steamship company to buy my ticket. My grandfather told me to say my prayers and be a good girl in America, and saw me off."

"Weren't you scared, Grandma? You were only sixteen! You and my parents would have a fit if I wanted to go to Europe by myself. It wouldn't even be open for discussion."

"Well now, you're right about that. But really it was different then. I had to come to make money for my family. There was nothing else to be done, Maureen. I know it's hard for you to understand that."

"Grandma, I can't even imagine this. If I had made up stuff for my report, it wouldn't have been this good. OK, so it's 1924, and you're on a ship coming to America. What was it like? How did you feel?"

"Part of it was awful. I shared a cabin with three other girls in the depths of the ship. There was hardly room to turn around, and the air was very stale. Part of it was fun, though. I'd never had any free time before in my life, so it was like a vacation. We walked around the decks feeling grown-up, trying to imagine what our lives in America would be like. At the beginning of the voyage, we were often frightened, but I remember that I was calm during our tenth night at sea, figuring that I could handle anything now that I'd been to Dublin on a train, and had been on this big ship." Anna Mary held her teacup and stared out the window.

There was a silence which made Maureen nervous. "Grandma, you've gotten very quiet. What are you thinking about now?"

"Something I haven't thought about in years, Maureen. The next morning when I saw New York for the first time, I was completely terrified. Fear hit me like a hammer. I had seen pictures, but they hadn't captured the mamsiveness and busy-ness of the place at all. As the ship pulled in to the pier, I looked at the hundreds, maybe thousands of people waiting, and I thought, 'Glory be to God, what will I ever do? What if there's no one to meet me?' I stood there on that ship, wishing more than anything that I was back home in my village of Carrowholly."

"At that moment one of the pursers asked me if I was Miss Anna Casey. I nodded yes, and he handed me a note. It was from my cousin Ann Gibbons. In it she told me to look on the dock for a girl waving a long green scarf. I spotted her and waved and cried with relief. I tell you, Maureen, that this happened over sixty years ago, but I can still see that green scarf in my mind as clearly as if it were in your hand."

Maureen reached for a tissue and quietly dabbed at her face. "Grandma, I know you hate it when we cry, but I think of you on that ship by yourself so far from home, and I just can't help it. I can't believe you never talked about this before. How did you ever survive this? What happened next?"

"They put us on tenders to go to Ellis Island. We were all perilished with fright, but it was really fairly simple. We sat in an enormous room for a long while, and then stood on endless lines to be asked questions and examined by the doctor. It was easier for us than for others because we read and spoke English."

"Were you homesick, Grandma?"

"At first I was, terribly. I checked the Times every day for ships arriving from Ireland, hoping they'd carry letters from home. But I had to make up my mind that this was going to be my home, and make the best of it. Now I have lived here much longer than I ever did in Ireland. Many times since that day I've been glad I came here, and I've been grateful to God. Now that's the story of my coming to America, Maureen. I hope you get a good grade out of it." Anna Mary moved purposely back to the sink.

"I'll probably get an A+, Grandma. But I learned much more than school stuff here. I'm going to tell this story to my children."

"Go on with you, child. Help me get this dinner together." Anna Mary accepted her granddaughter's hug with a pleased smile.
Julia
by Liz Comm

The small painting sits on her bureau, looking the same as it did 30 years ago, when I used to look at it as a kid. The Virgin Mary’s face is framed by a golden halo and her hands are raised in prayer. On either side of the Madonna are St. Anne and St. Catherine, glistening with blue robes. Some Renaissance artist froze the Virgin in this eternal moment of prayer, contemplating her divine fate. Her face is serene, smoothed of worldly cares.

I looked at this Icon for years, as it sat on my Aunt Julia’s polished end table. Her living room was in perfect order and perfect taste. Rich, dark green carpet, gold and green brocade sofa, elegantly striped chairs. The brass containers for her potted ferns gleamed. The pictures on the walls whispered of some mysterious realm of culture and art which I wanted to enter. The delicate china figurines spoke of order, of everything being in its place.

Every Sunday I went to mass with my Aunt Julia. My Protestant mother stayed at home. If my father wasn’t working day-turn, he went to mass as well. My brother and two sisters were invited home to my mother, but I was invited to my aunt’s house for Sunday dinner. Her white house was small, only two bedrooms and no bathroom downstairs, but it sat imposingly on the brow of a small hill. Anyone had to climb several flights of stone steps to reach her front door, which was properly framed by a well-tended shrubbery.

My Aunt Julia was a lady. She had grown up in the dirty steel mill town of Toronto, Ohio and left for college at St. Mary’s of the Springs, a Catholic women’s college in Columbus, Ohio. She returned after four years, with an elementary teaching degree, to begin her 35 year career of teaching third grade and to keep house for her father. Her mother had died when Julia was on a teenager. As a young teacher she had lived in the family home on Daniel Street, cooking and cleaning for her father and two unmarried brothers. Eventually the brothers married and moved out, the Daniel Street house was sold, and my aunt moved to her little house on the hill of Main Street. Her father moved with her and she tended him until he died, an old man of 81.

Julia never married. She became what was known in Toronto, Ohio in the 1950’s as an “old maid school teacher.” She earned this mocking epithet once she had passed the age of 30. Even though she was a beautiful woman, slender and blonde, looking a little like Ingrid Bergman, she was not popular among the steel mill workers and factory hands of Toronto. She was considered too “upplty”, too snobbish, too stiff, too cold. Her clothes were impeccable, her gloves white, her hats for Sunday mass elegant. Her carriage was imperial.

She read the newspapers and got new books from the Toronto Public Library. She belonged to card clubs made up of other “old maid school teachers.” She drank cocktails and smoked in private, with the blinds drawn, because if the Board of Education had discovered her habits, she could have been fired. She worked in her yard, grew raspberries and rhubarb, made mouth-watering pies. She roasted chicken and made perfect gravy without lumps for Sunday dinners. She shopped in the finest clothing stores, even traveling to Pittsburgh, an hour away, to visit Kaufman’s Department Store. Her clothes were simple but finely made. Her high heels were polished.

Sunday dinners were a learning experience for me. She was ever the school teacher. She taught me how to tell time when she discovered I had reached second grade with no knowledge of clocks. She taught me the proper way to set the table, which silverware to use, how to pat my mouth with a napkin (not wipe it), how to chew with my mouth closed. She taught me never to chew gum, how to sit like a lady, how to converse with older people who addressed me, how to walk with my shoulders straight. She never hugged me, never praised me. Emotion embarrassed her. She created order and rules and her own kind of perfection. She was trying to perfect me, to take the awkward school girl and polish her, show her how to be a lady.

I still visit my Aunt Julia, not every Sunday because I have moved far from Toronto, Ohio, both in terms of distance and experience. She lives near her two children when I go back to Toronto to see my mother. Julia sits in her bedroom now, still with the Virgin Mary flanked by St. Catherine and St. Anne. It is the only piece left to her from her elegant little house, which was sold to pay for the nursing home. The house on the hill is gone, along with its brocade sofa and gleaming brass and china figurines. Julia still sits like a lady, ankles crossed in a wheelchair. But she wears the polyester slacks, the sturdy shoes, the loose tops the nurse’s aide dresses her in each morning.

Julia has Alzheimer’s disease. She doesn’t recognize me now. A year ago I could still get her to speak a few sentences about the distant past, the house on Daniel Street, her brothers’ mischievous tricks as they grew up. Now even the past is lost to her. She tries to ask me who I am, what I do now. She loses the end of the sentence. I tell her I am Lisabeth Ann. I remind her of all the Sunday dinners, the lessons, the shopping trips. She looks at me blankly and pulls the threads in her blouse.

When I first visited her in the nursing home, I cried. I told her I had become a teacher because she was a teacher. She cried. It was the first time we had for Sunday dinners. It was perfectly acceptable because that patrician character had broken down as her mind disintegrated. Our only show of emotion occurred when part of her had been lost. Of course, five minutes later she had forgotten the moment, asking me again what I did. But I remember what I finally had the chance to tell her. I am teaching lessons now, in part because of the lessons she taught me.

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I think of that Renaissance Madonna on her bureau, in so many ways like her. Virginal. Severe. Devout. Julia accepted the homage of us lesser mortals who made the pilgrimage up her stone steps. The Madonna is frozen in time, immortalized in a timeless present. The Virgin Mary exists in a world without clocks, a world in which there is no change, no loss, no death. There she and my Aunt Julia differ. Time, which she taught me so well, is her enemy. I wish I could unlearn that lesson, forget how to "tell time," turn the clock back to a Sunday when the sun shone, her pies were in the oven, and she was giving me deportment lessons. But it's gone, all gone and the loss is enormous. Julie sits in her nursing home, left to her temporal fate, contemplating nothing, unaware of the Virgin beside her. Only the memories are left to me, framed, gilt-edged, the icons of my childhood.

The Aging Avenger
by Lynne Davenport

Signs! Signs! Signs! Big signs, little signs. Signs on trees, signs on lawns, signs on lights posts -- without realizing it, the residential areas of Greenwich have become inadvertent advertisers for a rising tide of commercial concerns. With little effort we discover that College Pro is painting houses, ADT is protecting houses, Terminex is debugging houses, and William Pitt is selling houses.

With the advent of regional estate firms, "For Sale" signs have proliferated. All of a sudden, homeowners see this as a marvelous way of advertising their houses. It doesn't matter that for the previous fifty years or more houses were bought and sold in town with nary a "For Sale" sign in sight. Five "Open House" signs located on neighboring streets attest to the fact that Mr. Smith's house is for sale, thus attracting hordes of curiosity seekers, especially if the house is one of Greenwich's "finest."

The character of the town has changed. The air rights over the Greenwich railroad station were sold, giving a local developer the right to build a huge office complex on the site and destroying the lovely view of Long Island Sound from the top of Greenwich Avenue. The old Pickwick Arms Hotel, once the site of many famous marriages, felt the wrecker's ball and now another office building occupies the oasis of green and gardens that once were. U.S. Tobacco built Its corporate headquarters in the center of town.

American Can Invaded the back country by building the single largest office complex in the community. The only thing that enabled it to rape the landscape was the fact that the property was so close to Interstate 684 that no one wanted to live there. Now American Can is no more, and the monolithic structure lies empty because the area is zoned for a single business, not a multi-use office.

Enter the aging avenger -- Mr. Rene Anselmo, the multi-millionaire owner of the estate known as Le Petit Trianon. Armed with a can of black spray paint, like a modern day Don Quixote, he attacks the rising tide of commercial signs in residential areas. Gone -- one William Ravels "For Sale" sign, obliterated by black paint. Anselmo admits his wrongdoing; the real estate firm presses charges; and he is arrested. However, the state refuses to prosecute him, believing the charges are too trivial to take up valuable court time. A year later, he takes up his crusade again, this time stealing two real estate "Open House" signs that he claims are on public property. Regarding the signs as litter, he believes they should be taken to the dump, just as one would take beer cans and bottles. For a second time Anselmo is arrested, but the State dismisses the charge of sixth-degree larceny. The real estate firms are up in arms.

Yearning for the Greenwich of yesteryear, Anselmo, no doubt, remembers the days when the only offices that existed belonged to local doctors, lawyers, and small business concerns. The street signs
were quaint wooden plagues or arrows with the street names printed in small black letters. Some streets didn't even have signs; people just knew that North Street was North Street. An occasional stop sign could be found at fairly busy intersections. Traffic lights controlled the activity on the Post Road while policemen in white pith helmets directed the flow of traffic on Greenwich Avenue.

Trying to counteract the encroaching commercial in neighborhoods all over town, Anselmo has planted thousands of daffodils along North Street between North Street School and the Merritt Parkway. He bought a white split rail fence to delineate the boundaries of North Street School and then planted rambling roses along the front of it. In addition, he is replacing the fencing and playground equipment at Hamilton Avenue School as well as landscaping the entire school grounds because the building reminds him of a ghetto school. Wanting to get rid of the green metal glow-in-the-dark street signs, he bought more than a dozen white wooden street signs and installed them in various locations around town. They lend an air of charm to the areas in which they are located.

Is this sixty-five year old millionaire a criminal or an eccentric? During the past year he has certainly drawn attention to the issue of signs, not just to commercial signs, but also signs the town has erected. Suddenly everything needs a sign. We have signs that indicate the presence of parking lots when all you have to do is turn your head and -- Voila -- there's a parking lot. Three different signs point the way to the Baptist church, but St Catherine's Roman Catholic Church needs no sign. One sign reads, "Caution: Senior Citizens." Should we fear them? Are they lurking in the bushes, ready to attack us with their canes? Is the sign really necessary, especially since it's attached to a fence and not out by the street where one would need to be cautious?

Even though he has committed two very minor offenses, Anselmo has used his money to correct some of the ills that he sees. He wants the town to be beautiful and free from commercial invasion. He's practiced civil disobedience and is willing to pay the price for his behavior. At the same time he is showing that he cares about the town and openly takes risks to preserve what he obviously loves. He deserves our support.

Every time I'm asked to be in a wedding party, I gladly accept, honored to be chosen. So when Tracy called, I willingly subjected myself to a year's tour of duty. And it's not that I don't love Tracy dearly. I'm so happy that she wants me to help her celebrate this very special day. I only want the best for her, and I'm eager to bend over backward to make her happy. I would never dream of complaining.

But it's about these gowns. I realize that wedgewood is the in color this season, but I don't think that anyone imagined that it would be combined with such a unique shade of cranberry. The dress really is nice; it reminds me of my favorite movie- Gone With the Wind. The way the three layers of ruffles fall to the floor truly flatters my figure. And the bow on my back makes me feel like a present waiting to be opened.

But really, it is beautiful. And a bargain at a mere two hundred and fifty dollars. I'm sure I'll wear it again. Often. Especially since I have those custom dyed cranberry shoes to match. It doesn't bother me that they stain my feet. It always fades in a few days anyway. But I could never dream of complaining, so I'll wear the ensemble.

Having the wedding on the Cape is so romantic! Provincetown is the picture of rustic. And any day now I'll zero in on a way to get out there in under six hours and under six hundred dollars. I think I can catch the train to the airport and then rent a car. Piece of cake. Really. I can leave right after school on Thursday.

I've arranged to take that Friday as a personal day. How original, having a rehearsal brunch. Followed by an afternoon's whale watch. Don't get me wrong, I love whales as much as the next bride's maid. It's the boat part that makes me nervous. I got sick on a docked boat once, never mind one that's chasing whales! But I'm sure the afternoon will be an adventure.

What I'm looking forward to the most, however, is being paired up with the groom's cousin Eugene from Arkansas. Imagine my astonishment when I learned that your fiancé had a cousin who was "Just the man for me." And a computer engineer. From Jersey. I'm sure he'll be a proverbial heap of fun at the reception. Surely Lady Luck is smiling on me.

All in all, the entire weekend promises to be an event that I will remember for a lifetime.
I watched Howdy Doody. Every now and then Eleanor, or Susan, or John would be in the Peanut Gallery. I'd wave at them excitedly, belatedly remembering they couldn't see me through the "boob tube," a condescending moniker my father-in-law gave the electronic device many years later. The early shows like "Lassie," "I Remember Mama," and "Our Miss Brooks" seemed pristine, wholesome. The values closely mirrored those I was being taught. The plots of such shows as "Bonanza" and "Dragnet" were based more on the premise of success being the result of solid and intelligent thinking rather than success being achieved through brute force and massive destruction. The language used by the characters was gentler and more polite.

I changed, and it changed. I became more involved with reading, social activities, talking on the telephone, and just plain growing up. Television became more controversial. I watched it less and less. A lot of people say they never watch TV, but then they'll admit to the occasional show or the daily zapping it on for the channel 7 or CNN news. When I say I never watch it, I mean never. I cannot sit passively subjecting myself to its mindless assaults beamed across the waves. I rejoice when a storm interrupts the cable transmission. I am forced to endure its noise when I walk through the family room to the laundry room. It's the only way to reach my destination otherwise I would rather not even hear the intrusive electronic thing.

In my brief sojourn, I'm accosted with gunshots, car crashes, screeching tires, abusive language, dialogue fraught with hurting comments in the guise of humor and inane commercials. All of which distress me. I worry about those who find entertainment in being confronted with the worst visual and verbal images of humanity.

One of my favorite pastimes traveling the Merritt Parkway is to read bumper stickers on cars and combination trucks. Unfortunately a lot of bumper stickers contain demeaning words and phrases. I try to imagine the type of people who would affix such brainless trivia to their vehicles. Every now and then I come upon a bumper sticker that reflects the nobler side of life. The last nourishing phrase reflects the nobler side of life. The last nourishing phrase reads "Image Peace." I have been reflecting on that concept, and I cannot fathom how the masses of human types in the United States of America can image peace when their worlds are so overrun with images of destruction, destruction within their families, within their communities, within schools and work places, and within themselves.

So many acts of violence per minute, so many words, and songs of violence are doubly reflected, reiterated, and reinforced on television and other visual media. It is no wonder there is a dearth of people who can image peace. How can we image peace if the very stuff of peace is hidden, not shown, considered boring or not a good commercial venture. How many commercial dollars support and perpetuate the Images of human destruction? Where is the support or the interest in presenting images of peaceful resolutions and harmony? I raise the question. I know the answers. I make people uncomfortable. I know the world is not supposed to be like this.


A bullet penetrated through the walls of two rooms and lodged itself in the outside wall. Police determined that the gun was discharged from the apartment across the street. An investigation revealed that a nine-year old boy had found the gun and fired it. By self-report the youngster knew how to fire the gun - all the steps involved from beginning to end-from watching various firearms being used on TV. End of report.

TV teaches them well. Imagine how different that nine-year old boy's activities could have been if he had watched nine years' worth of people being kind to and supportive of each other. I'm told those kindness images would be boring. It is the darker side of human nature that titillates, intrigues, and sells merchandise. Isn't it ironic that people are establishing an Earth Day to raise consciousness about the damage done to our globe by human debris. And very little to no attention is focused on removing the perhaps more damaging psychological debris emanating from the dot matrices of the television set now in supervision.
A Writing Teacher To Her Students
(with apologies to Dylan Thomas)
by Gwen Haley

Do not come frightened into this new place;
Freewriting comes quick as memory, lets thoughts flow,
Let words surprise, meets meaning face to face.
Damn the spelling! No need to neatly erase;
Messy's okay and failure a way to grow.
Do not come tightly into this free space.

Play at design; rehearse at your soul's own pace,
Composing it sharp, risking and focusing so
That your words surprise, trick meaning face to face.
Speak your own voice, the self we would not replace;
Affirm the authority you have permission to show.
Do not come meekly into this your place.

Listen Intently; share words you might replace;
Converse -- seek the message your words bestow;
Greet change as surprise, by reading face to face.
Tighten, polish, creating an intricate lace
Of memories, feelings, all of this world you know.
Do not come dreading into this safe place.
Write! Write surprise! Meet meaning face to face.

DID I "ASK FOR IT?"
by Sarah Herz

Did I "ask for it?" Asking for "it" means I, a young woman invited sexual assault or rape or whatever you want to call it. I was so damn naive, so innocent, so trusting. What is wrong with me? Am I living on another planet?

I don't remember a move, a gesture, a facial pose that invited what I got into with him. I sometimes go over every detail in my mind. I try to remember the details of our conversation, any moments of touching, whether we shared intimate thoughts, but I can't find a part of any scenario that makes sense to me. I become angry, then dispassionate, then angry. I fume. I want to confront him. Then I try and play out the scenario from his point of view and wonder if I can't forget. I want to, but I can't, because in my mind it was a close call, a real close call.

He was a psychology professor, one of those pleasant, tweedy-Jacket-with-elbow-patches types, late thirties or early forties, brown, curly hair framing a round face, straight dead-white teeth enclosed in a warm smile, with huge brown eyes that penetrated my very being. At 6'2" he was a handsome man. I can't remember his name: it's whited out for good.

I was working in the psych department office at the university -- I was broke and in need of quick cash. He had an office there and frequently passed my desk on his way in and out of his office. The developing familiarity went something like this: first he smiled on his way in and out, then he asked polite questions such as "how are you today? Nice weather we're having." Week by week the repartee changed, until we were on a first name basis: he knew my major, where I lived, where I was from, my age, the whole bit. I was flattered -- a professor was taking a personal interest in me, becoming my friend, advising me about courses and which of his colleagues knew their stuff.

I thought it was a friendship, a female/male friendship: he thought it was a relationship, a male/female relationship. We often had a cup of coffee at Kams, a campus/hangout, among a whole lot of students and professors. We shared a lot of laughs, talked about family life (he was married), and he discussed his serious interest in photography, mentioning Stieglitz, Steichen, Westin, Capa, Arbus, Bourke-White and other distinguished photographers. I was fascinated by his knowledge of photography as an art form. Sometimes he brought some of his photographs and discussed them with me. Though I was ignorant about photography, I thought they were impressive and I guess "artistic." I can't describe one of them now.
About a month later he asked me if I would pose for him. I came to his studio where he would like to work on some photographic compositions with me as a subject. Those were his exact words: in my mind those were his exact words. I questioned him closely and he was serious and intelligent about his studio work with me. He offered me a modeling fee of $20 an hour. I agreed on a date and time.

The following week I walked to his house as it wasn't far from my dorm. He was waiting as I walked up the front steps of an old massive three story house. We went inside and offered me a small glass of wine and then we climbed the steps to his third floor studio. He pulled out a lot of photographs. He was warm, lively, charming. I was relaxed and completely at ease. After a while he began to describe the composition of the photographs I would be in. I was impressed with his knowledge about photography. His artistic bent was evident in the variety of photographs displayed on the walls of the studio. Many were interesting landscapes and still lifes with people; there was a particular emphasis on texture. We were chatting, sitting on a comfortable leather couch. I listened to his words receptively "...still life flat on your back so that your breasts form a silhouette...lights above your forehead...background dim to emphasize shape...shoulder blade exposed...left side with front shot on left breast...right arm..." He was facing me on the couch; his eyes were serious. His hand moved to my left breast. I flicked it away, stood up.

"Surely you knew..." he said in a serious, direct voice.

"Knew what?" I demanded. "Why didn't you mention this before? There wasn't any indication that you expected me to pose nude. Why wait until now? What am I supposed to think?

My voice was rising. Did he hear the panic in my voice? I had to get out of there; I mentally counted the number of steps to his studio. But I couldn't make sense of anything. I knew I had to get out of there intact.

He stood in front of me; his eyes were angry as he looked down into my face. His pupils were dilated; his hands were gripping my shoulders fiercely. "What the hell are you up to?" he sniped at me.

"What the hell do you think I'm up to?" I yelled into his chest. "I'm up to nothing. Nothing. I trusted you." I realized my tone of voice, my assertiveness was placing me in a most vulnerable position.

I'll never know where my inner reserve came from, but I lowered my voice, smiled up at him, and shifted the conversation from an argument to a discussion.

In a somewhat confident, rational voice I asked. "Why not let me think your suggestion over? It's new to me and I'm not comfortable with it. I'm not as familiar photographic art as you know, and I'd like to think about it before I commit. I'm not prepared tonight though. I'll call you in a couple of days and let you know. I might enjoy working with you.

I waited for his answer.

Did I ask for it?
A Neo Progressive Dinner

by Judy Luster

James and I decided to organize an old fashioned progressive dinner in Berlin. The next thing we knew Peter had elbowed his way into our little peer response group. He had already been looping his way through Europe so our plan suited him fine.

In the finest Aristotelian tradition, we found an old world restaurant in East Berlin. The table setting was impeccable. The rosebuds in the center piece were so perfect that they looked as if they were frozen in time and not allowed to bloom beyond the prescribed measure. The food was tasty but it wasn't very imaginative. We were told by the stuffy head waiter to finish everything on our plates because it was good for us. He, not so casually, mentioned the group that had come before us had finished everything on their plates so it was something of a tradition.

Peter was especially glad that we were only staying long enough for a few appetizers, but we had to pull him away from the restaurant. He was reflecting in his journal and causing some heads to turn. One of the notes he recorded was how an appetizer should whet your appetite, not kill it. If we'd been forced to eat Aristotelian style all of our lives we concluded we might have starved to death.

Out on the street we ran into an ancient teacher of Peter's who insisted we come to his club for the next course. Not wanting to seem ungrateful we agreed, but we had to pull him away from the restaurant. He was reflecting in his journal and causing some heads to turn. One of the notes he recorded was how an appetizer should whet your appetite, not kill it. If we'd been forced to eat Aristotelian style all of our lives we concluded we might have starved to death.

As a private club they had a limited menu. Each day of the week they served only one entree and that never changed. It was Tuesday so we were treated to frozen fish sticks, boiled potatoes and canned peas. There were no à la carte offerings. Salt and pepper were the only condiments pre-set on the table. James was so upset that he wanted to tear up the menu but we knew Peter had elbowed his way into our little peer response group. He had already been looping his way through Europe so our plan suited him fine.

No one could have guessed what would happen next. The Platonists had actually semi planned a conference that could happen if people wanted it to and showed up to talk about it. Linda was there with all of her flower children. Nancy was drinking at the well with some of her followers and the Donald's were telling stories in front of the fireplace. Lucy had decided to stay home at the last minute and have another baby.

The fresh cut flowers and weeds found in every corner made us feel welcome. We knew these friendly folk would welcome us heartily. It was nice to be in such a non-judgmental environment. Here we were all equal and there would be no head waiter to snap at us.

Only desserts were served and they were fantasy concoctions that patrons put together themselves. Unlike the club, we were told that every night there was something new and wonderful from which to choose, and if you didn't find what you wanted you could always raid the pantry. The pastry chef made it her job to taste everyone's genius. Unfortunately she was always so involved in the moment that she never wrote any recipes down and neither did the guest. No one could ever repeat a sugary confection twice. This led to some disappointment because a lifetime full of surprises can get pretty tedious.

All three of us would have liked to try making some of the desserts we were exposed to once we got home, but we knew it would be impossible. The kindly chef gave us each a box filled with her favorite ingredients but without some guidance, some instruction, it was all going to be experimental. It worked for her but we couldn't count on the same human and aesthetic experiences for it to work for us.

While Peter was pretty content after feast ing on several deserts, James was literally fed up. He took charge and decided we needed some real food. We found a good dell that offered a wide variety of exotic as well as plain foods. After the perfect roses, the plastic flowers and the fresh cut bouquets, the sturdy potted plants in the restaurant comforted us. They were alive and they weren't going to die in a few days.

Everyone has a different method of preparing food. Bertoff, the delicatessen owner, let us build our own sandwiches but she wisely cautioned us. Her prompts enabled us to make strong choices without us ever feeling she'd interfered. In the end she concluded we always learned as much from her patrons about food as they did from her. It was like learning how to cook while watching your mother and then sitting down to a fine meal that you'd prepared yourself.

For the first time all day we felt satisfied. We ended up lingering in the dell over a specialty coffee called Moffatt's brew. With speed and intensity we each free wrote in our journals. Our reflections turned into stream of consciousness metaphors about the day. I'm fairly certain that James will eventually write an article about it someday. Most likely he'll feel he discovered a new rhetoric.
Peter will be content to read his entry over in days to come but he has an ability to learn something from everything he does. Me? I’ll probably just go home and go to bed. My proof will be in the pudding I make tomorrow.

Lock, Stock, and Barrel

by David McKinley

I’m so glad that it happened early enough in the evening. It wasn’t yet seven o’clock when I opened the boxes from my mother’s attic. She moved out of the house where we had lived for years while I was still vagabonding around with everything in storage in her attic. Now that I am finally settling into an apartment (for the first time in nearly six years) I have the task of collecting all the stuff I’d squirreled away for so long and in so many places.

Happily, when I moved to L.A. I’d cleaned out the basement in Iowa where I’d shipped much of my belongings when I moved back from Europe the year before. When I left L.A. I’d cleaned out the basement in Iowa where I’d shipped much of my belongings when I moved back from Europe the year before. When I left L.A. I’d taken what I could fit into the car (to put in Mom’s attic), shipped what I’d wanted put away to U-Haul storage, and thrown the rest away. So now everything that I owned was at least on this side of the Mississippi: in Mom’s attic, Grandmother’s garage, my cousin’s cellar, or my old place in New York State, to name a few.

And now the great unpacking. A friend had said that it was like shopping without money. Every time I opened a box dating anywhere from a year to ten years ago I found something I’d always wanted. “Oh look, a record collection... New clothes, I’ve always wanted a shirt like that... You mean it’s free? Oh boy! Real wine glasses like the ones I bought in France...” and so on.

Now, with the books on the shelves and alphabetized, as with the records, the CD’s, and the cassettes, the furniture assembled and in place (my Duvet, at last we’re re-united again), and the stereo hooked up (no-one’s going to change the stations but me now), I settled down to the boxes from the attic. The old brown ones with the brittle grey tape curling away from the edges. The ones that had been there before the ones I sent there from Maine, before the ones I sent when I left college.

I’m glad that it happened early enough in the evening. As it was, there was still time to walk to the corner liquor store (which, by the way, has a surprising wine selection) and look for a wine suitable for the task: A Morgan would be too heavy, instant sleep; and a Chablis would not be dry enough to match the mood of the collected dust. The bold taste of a Rioja would prove too distracting. Ahh, but a Graves now... icy, dry, strong bodied as only a white burgundy can be, and with the coloring, as the man said, of “Sunlight trapped in a glass” which promotes hope for the future.
Back at home, armed with an ice bucket emblazoned with the Iowa Hawkeyes, and a crystal goblet from France, I was able to continue unpacking — laying the partially forgotten past bare to the light for the first time in this geological age. Alternately pawing and carrying, my hands bringing out whatever they can find. In they go beneath the crumpled, yellowing newspapers and out comes Chocolate Bear who slept with me until his dusty old hide gave me a rash. Then came the diplomas:

My ninth grade diploma in its leatherette case. "...having satisfactorily completed the Ninth Grade...hereby awarded...Given this seventh day of June..." The Gothic script flowing along with the signatures bring it to a halt. Prep school over and done with. "...The FACULTY AND TRUSTEES...hereby Certify...award this diploma..." Nicely printed too, but mounted in construction paper. When my sister graduated I remember her diploma had been a scroll bound with a ribbon. I'd always thought this diploma was a rip-off. University. Now there was a diploma. "...Vobis notum est quod...deceivit...gradu Bacalaureato in Artibus..."

And then the ghulu came out of the box to play. Marie-France, my first true love, wooed in Paris during my semester abroad from high school. First-kissed and then kissed again in a cafe after the metro closed. There she is, looking up at me across nearly twenty years — first close up, then over the shoulder walking away, and finally laughing from behind a gardeyme. And there I am with her — posed against the statue of a lion in the Jardin des Tuileries. All too real. I used to be so continental.

I poured a little more of the excellent wine and put on a CD — Edith Piaf, a chanteuse from a time as seemingly distant exotic as the stuff in the boxes. The wind and Edith Piaf regretting nothing, living La Vie en Rose, carried me through into the next box.

The older boxes, the ones I packed and left in the attic in the early seventies, have only one set of labels on them. No cross-outs, no additions. The outsized, tall, rectangular one said only "fragile" and "this side up" and "photos."

Small photos. Large photos. Color photos. Photos turning colors. Just look at them all! Graduation again. My high school roommate, whatever happened to him? I think maybe he's in Jersey selling Masaaraitis? Oh no, the infamous feather partially crushed in a boot print in the sand. Late sixties deep-message photography. The hockey players I shot for HBO one summer. Here's the collection of children I submitted as a portfolio with my college application... Just look at the faces. I have much better equipment now but I haven't shot a real picture in — I just don't know...Boy, I was good in those days.

Last box. This is getting tougher. Change the music. Edith Piaf was getting too maudlin. C'mon rock 'n' roll — save my soul. "Traveling Wilburys" Yeah, that should do; old farts putting their past egos on hold and pretending to be someone else just to play music together.

Electric light shining through the wind isn't quite as hopeful as the daylight trapped in the glass, but it's reassuring enough to tackle the last box. Oh no, papers!

High school papers, College tracts, and, holy of holies, Journal books. Here's the tale I wrote for my fantasy literature elective in 12th grade. Transparent but bittersweet. Did Miss Neslage recognize that the sci-fi world was Paris? Here's "Oxnard the Great" Jamie's and my Russian history parody. I still can't believe that Mr. Hodgpin put Terri's name in for Olga the Horse. I mean sure it was funny; she was homely and made stupid comments in class, but he was the teacher for Pete's sake.

Here is the piece I wrote when I forgave my father and found I missed him. I doubt I'll ever send it to him. I copped out then, I'll probably do it again. And here's the one I wrote for my mom when Bob died. Maybe I'll give it to her again someday... Probably shouldn't have given it to her the first time, but dammit it's good. Dammit I was good then, too.

Well...time to turn out the lights and shoot the dog. The wine was done but if I am going to have a hangover, I might as well deserve it, so I take a snifter of Calvados to bed.

Traveller, lover, photographer, writer... all so long ago. What the hell have I done lately? Why are all these things so old, why don't I have anything new to unpack or put on the walls? Am I so alone that I am glad to sleep with a favorite duvet? Guess I'll have to work on it — once the hangover burns off.
ONE OF JOHNNY'S
by Margaret Shirley

He snuggled back down among the others inside the sun warmed canvas bag. He had tried to push his way up towards the top as he felt the gentle rocking motion stop, and he knew the hand was coming inside the bag. He tried to be in the group that was lifted out, but he slipped back just as the hand was pulling out of the bag into that great area of lightness. The gentle rocking motion started again and he felt drowsy and comfortable nestled among the crowd of his own kind. Someday he would try again to be lifted up to find out about that vast area he had heard of from the others... someday, but not now....

Then suddenly, without any warning, or the stopping of the familiar motion, he was scooped out of the bag and flung far out into space! He was aware of the lightness and warmth as he floated... then he felt himself land on a hard, dry gritty surface. There were others from the bag nearby.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"I heard Johnny say we were in Ohio territory!" one answered.

"I don't hear anyone around!" called another. "Usually we hear lots of voices, and children, too! They love to reach in and scatter a few of us near their houses."

"Well, maybe we're not near a house, and maybe that's good! Not so much chance of getting trampled on, or eaten by cows!"

"We'll have to worry about the deer, or at least we did back in Massachusetts, where Johnny gathered us!"

"Are we going to have to just lay here on this gritty stuff?" asked the first one.

"Wait and see... you're not going to be just lying there!!"

"What do you mean?"

"Wait until there's some rain... then you'll see!"

It began to get dark and the others were quiet, so he became quiet too. It wasn't warm now and he was glad his coat was snug to hold in what warmth he had. Then something began dripping onto him. It was cold and wet and it pushed him into the gritty stuff. He tried to push himself farther into the grit to get away from the cold drip, drip, drip! Finally the steadiness of it lulled him to sleep, as he huddled inside his coat.

All night the moisture continued pounding him further and further into the now slimy grit. By the next day he was too far into the gook to be aware of any lightness, or the whereabouts of the others. Besides he was feeling very strange. The wetness had softened his coat. His body was swollen to twice his normal size. He was very uncomfortable.

He wanted to get out of his too tight coat! He wiggled around and around until he could get one little sprout through a split in the coat. He pushed and pushed down into the soft oozey stuff. Gosh! That was better. Now he had more space for his body! At least he could rest more comfortably now.

Then he began to feel a warmth coming through the space above him. Ah, that was nice! There was a period without the warmth from above, and he rested. When he felt the warmth again, he pushed out his tiny sprout further down into his space. His little body gave him strength to add more parts to his first sprout and he felt happy being in his new space. When several more periods of warmth had helped him feel like growing more roots, he felt a strange new urge to push a stem upwards toward the warmth, and with that stem went the tiny little leaves that had been tucked inside his body all along.

In the next period of warmth he managed to push right through the warmest part of the now dry grit into brightness! Oh, that was lovely! The warmth and the clear light made him want to reach up and put out more and more leaves. And he did! Bit by bit, as the lovely warmth and light encouraged him, he pushed out to receive that light. Then strangely, just as he felt his body's strength being all used up, he began to feel new energy coming from his leaves. Sometimes there would be that strange dripping again, but now he enjoyed it and welcomed it, as it refreshed his leaves and softened the ground so that his roots received moisture and more energy from the goodness in the earth.

He continued to grow and develop until one day he was surprised to hear voices! He heard someone say,

"Well, look at that! Can you believe that... way out here?"

"It must be one of Johnny's!" said another voice.

Then he felt them gently pluck one of his bright red fruits and settle themselves on top of his roots to enjoy the refreshment in his shade.

And one of them said, "We'd better save these seeds so we can plant another one of Johnny's!"
Reminiscences of...

by Jonathan Spear

Kris and I left Chicago as early in the afternoon as we could, hoping to reach Williamstown before nightfall, but we were without luck: it began to rain as we hit the skyway, so hard that we practically had to stop. We drove through the rain for hours, taking turns till we were an hour or so outside of Albany. There we had to stop, and there we spent the night.

It was joyous to finally make it to Ingrid's the next day, to see Guy and Ingrid, the couple-to-be, Ingrid's parents, and Karen and Scott. I had recently seen Scott. Just before he left Chicago, Karen and I had met only once in Kennedy Airport the past summer, when she and Ingrid were returning from their trip backpacking in Europe. Since then, the Peace Corps had taken her to Guatemala or El Salvador. Ingrid had planned her wedding around Karen's schedule. Scott and I left Chicago as early in the afternoon as we could, after we had come back from Guatemala or El Salvador but once in two years. I introduced everyone to Kris, but we really didn't stay too long. After a quick hello we left the house so that they could all take care of last minute plans and get ready for the rehearsal dinner. Kris and I went to the Marsalls' house, a house full of antique charm, that of a house first built by a struggling farmer, a single room to which he added as he became more wealthy and his family grew.

That afternoon we left the farmhouse for a run together. Kris and I, through the beauty of the Berkshire's country side. Kris had never been in the Berkshires so we compared it to the hills of Kentucky which she did know well.

The festivities began the next day with a self-proclaimed "Hippy-Dippy" wedding, a morning hike up the Appalachian Trail. We wound our way through the trees up to a clearing and a bluff from which we could look out through the morning fog, over all of Williamstown below. Here Ingrid had come alone so many times since she was a little girl, and with Karen, her oldest friend. But today was not a day for Ingrid to sit alone or just with Karen, looking over the bluff. We had all come up that day to help Ingrid and Guy celebrate, with mimosa and fruit salad and bagels, a guitar, a flute, and even a violin. Now we all looked out over her model world. Slowly the fog receded down the mountain, revealing the play houses, pencil line roads, and the painted fields. We all understood why, from this vantage point, Ingrid had become an environmentalist.

Of course there was a true church service, too: indeed the most beautiful of services, in a white, spired church on the widest street in all of Williamstown, a groomed green lawn out front. Ingrid was the most beautiful of brides, her face aglow and framed wholesomebly by her short cropped blond hair, topped by a beautiful wreath. Guy's smile was a nervous one, as should have been expected, a devout Platonist in an Episcopalian church, a cowboy without his boots or his hat. Scott and Karen played their parts equally well. Scott looked just slightly uncomfortable as any best man should, but dapper in his dark suit. Karen cried.

Of course, I shared this day with Kris as much as I shared it with anyone else, despite the fact that, more than anyone else, she was an spectator that day. She had not become a friend of Guy or Ingrid's over the years: she had met them both only a day before. She hadn't come to know them first as separate people, as individuals, and therefore she was not as able to revel in the fact that today, that day, they were being joined together, being joined together forever to be one. To some extent she was there that weekend; but for me, and perhaps only for me. For she was there that day, in Williamstown for me that day, and as people would later remember, she was with me that day, with me alone, mine with which to enjoy and then remember the day. How lucky I was to have someone there to share the day so singularly with me. How lucky I was to have Kris there to share the day. How much I appreciated it. How I thrilled that we did share this together.

What's funny, of course, is that there are pieces of the weekend in which I don't remember Kris at all. I don't remember where Kris was after the "grownups" had left. After we all came back from changing, when we danced and drank and danced some more. Surely I danced with her most of the time, no? And where did Kris sleep at the Marsalls'? Surely I must have said good night to her a couple of times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights. Surely there were times when she was getting dressed or brushing her long blond hair. I must have knocked playfully at her door, expecting that she might—knowing that she would snap at me impatiently, telling me that I should just go away. I must also have thought about how comfortable it would have been to nestle together for the night. Instead, I slept upstairs and shared the master bedroom, and in the two times we stayed there at least two nights.
moments that we did spend together that I can't recall are only the understandably loose links in the chain of memories, each link of which has become excusably weaker with time.

I guess the thing that bothers me is that I can't just turn to Kris and ask her about these things. I had thought that I'd be able to, that we'd share these memories. But now in asking her about these things, too many other issues would arise. See, there's still so much that we haven't yet worked out, things that really came to issue after Kris came out to visit in September, and asking her about much details of our trip to Massachusetts? Perhaps she'll misunderstand my nostalgia, seeing it only as a sign of disappointment or frustration, the remains of expectations that distance and differences kept from being fulfilled, the melancholy of opportunities regrettably missed. Perhaps if I ask she'll only see my queries as an attempt on my part to grasp hopefully at moments from our shared past. We still have to work a lot of things out, learning to explain to each other how we're feeling, and what at times we mean. Asking all these questions...?

I don't know. Perhaps I'll ask her about these things next time I call her.

An Open Letter to American Husbands
by Carol Steinman

I want a wife. I want someone who will be responsible for the mountainous loads of laundry, the empty refrigerator, the dog's hairballs that float across the floor, the video tapes that have to be returned, the dishwasher that needs to be emptied and the washing machine that needs to be fixed. I want to not see these things until she asks me to please help her out by taking out the garbage or calling the insurance company to inquire about the check. Get me a wife and I swear I won't even say, "Did you see? I put the clothes in the dryer."

I want a wife who will plot out and prepare the children's schedules. She will know if Jon's soccer practice will interfere with Leigh's Hebrew School or if the baseball game is at the same time as the kid's swim lessons. She will remember to buy and wrap Jon's friend's birthday present, be organized enough to car pool to the party, and be quick enough to pick up Leigh at the YMCA. She will not only remember to fill out the children's field trip permission slips and send in the money, but she will also remember the day of the trip so she can prepare a bag lunch. She will be creative enough to take them to the library, health conscious enough to make and keep the doctor, dentist and orthodontist appointments, and concerned enough about their socialization skills to remember to include some play dates. I wouldn't mind helping her out. She would just have to write down what time and where she wanted me to pick up one of the children.

I want a wife who will take charge of our social obligations. I want her to invite our friends for dinner, plan the meals, shop for the butchery, RSVP to the parties, buy the gifts and send the cards. I wouldn't mind helping. She would just need to write down what we needed at the liquor store and what time and where the cake had to be picked up.

I want a wife who could earn money - not too much that it would make me feel inadequate but enough that would make me feel proud and that would enable us to vacate. The job, however, could not be too demanding. She should not have to lock herself in a room in order to do her work. That would be an imposition on me.

I want a wife to do all of these things. My brain is being cluttered and choked with all of these chores and an overwhelming sense of responsibility. Is it not our house? Our children? Our lives? Why then is it my responsibility to oversee, organize and delegate? I'm tired. I want a wife.

Sincerely yours,

Your overworked, underpaid American wife
I had never been to China before. I had no idea what to expect. In 9th grade, I once questioned why China, with such a huge population, was not a member of the United Nations. Sister Mary Gertrude told me I didn’t understand. Well, she was right — then. With one of my daughters I was on my way to the People’s Republic of China. It was 1978 and my daughter was in 6th grade and just beginning to be a social butterfly — silly and giddy, more concerned with whom she sat next to on the bus than where the bus was going. I almost don’t remember her that way anymore. This period in her life was short-lived. She has become so much like myself — serious, more articulate and singly focused, but not one for small talk. Did I do that to her? I never liked silly.

Anyway, this child, who is now such a kindred spirit, was part of the first school trip to China at the end of the Cultural Revolution. The impact of Maoism was everywhere evident, both in the abundance of posters and propaganda and in the absence of hunger. We were on a tea commune — very rural and very brown. I remember being lonely on this trip as a parent chaperone when not with Robin; not knowing anyone as she flitted about. My loneliness made me more aware and after all I was a history teacher experiencing history.

We were at a hospital on the commune; a hospital with no equipment, at least by my standards — windows without glass, just one incubator, a garden for medicinal purposes out back. I was busy looking for my images of what a hospital should include — clean trays, sheets, nurses in white. And they weren’t there.

The doctor recognized my bewilderment and knew I was puzzled. He questioned my thoughts and I smiled and said nothing. He asked me if I had ever been to Bangkok — figuring I had been. I felt he saw me so clearly as a fancy banker’s wife from Hong Kong. Although I wasn’t really fancy. He questioned me about the major hospitals there, with all the accoutrements modern technology had to offer. And they were large and up-to-date. The doctor, speaking through an interpreter, asked in a very proper voice, “who do they serve?” He answered his own question, as I remained speechless, “less than 5% of the population and all wealthy and many foreigners too. There is nothing for the people who live on the river, and worse no one cares.” He continued to explain that this small very non-descript hospital served everyone and people have less pain here.

This man gave me a gift. Sure you would die here if you needed a triple by-pass, but not from lack of an appendectomy or from infection. This barefoot doctor made sense — the care was less, but available to all. No wealth care here.
I think of the story, Charlie the Caterpillar, as I reflect on my emergence as a writer this summer. Starting out as a furry green creature, crawling along on all fours, asking everyone to play with me, unsure of myself, and nibbling at bits along the way to sustain my instinct that this thing called writing process held promise. Each teacher I came into contact with seemed to me so self-assured with their methods, philosophies and activities that I felt quite shaky out there on that limb.

My sense of my own writing was an enigma to me. I had always been told I was a good writer. I even accepted that fact, as I had heard this from the time I was a small child. But I never examined my own writing process as I did this summer, and so I remained much as Charlie, a butterfly in the making, but in the dark as to my theories I reflected both in the classroom and in my personal life. Although I berated myself for not keeping a professional or personal journal, I had no idea of its value to me either as a writer or a teacher. I went through the motions of writing in my journal at school, but literally felt I was wasting time. I could be doing more teacherly chores. Had Charlie known what freedom lay before him, perhaps he would not have felt so ugly or unwanted. Had I known what personal and professional liberation lay before me, perhaps I would not have felt so suspended in time; so impotent in my self worth as a writer and a teacher of writers.

When I curled up within the walls of CWP this summer and began to spin the cocoon which insulated me from the rest of the world, immersing myself in writing philosophy through reading and discussion of numerous theorists, research of my own, and participation in endless workshops, I nourished my emerging writer. This transformation process involved a constant dialogue through dialectical journals, peer conversations and reading responses. It was this active involvement in writing as a continual audit for meaning and discovery of the creative within me, that launched my career as a renewed and confident writer. It is also the experience of CWP which provided the foundation upon which I can always alight when my wings need rest and my soul needs nourishment. Gotta' go!