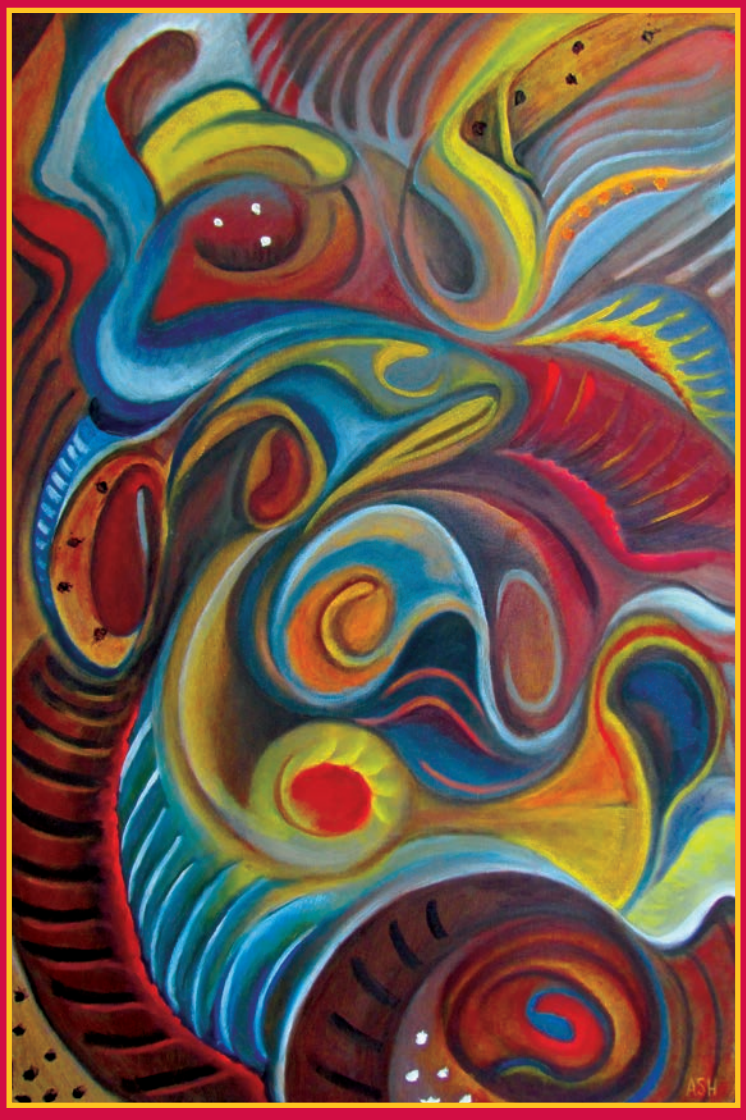
The Agora

Volume 1, 2011



PLATO
Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization

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The AGORA Mission

The AGORA is a juried publication of PLATO, the Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization associated with the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Division of Continuing Studies. The journal seeks to share the creative talents of its members by publishing their literary and artistic contributions in a periodic volume of original works, including poetry, short fiction, nonfiction, and pictorial and photographic art. Of particular interest is material that has a distinct point of view and is inspired by broadly humanistic values and the liberal arts tradition.

Acknowledgements

The Editorial Board of *The Agora* wishes to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of UW-Madison Continuing Studies, specifically, Wendy Kerr, Christina Finet and Professor Barry Orton. We wish also to acknowledge the support and cooperation of the PLATO Board of Directors. The Editorial Board also thanks the additional reviewers who assisted in the selection of the material for Volume 1.

The Agora

Volume 1, 2011

The Agora is a juried literary magazine published annually by PLATO, Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization, with funding and staff support from the University of Wisconsin–Madison Continuing Studies.

PLATO Mission

PLATO is a participatory, member-led, learning-in-retirement organization committed to continually developing and promoting intellectual and cultural enrichment opportunities for its members in association with University of Wisconsin–Madison.

How *The Agora* Came to Be

The first meeting of what would become *The Agora* Editorial Board met June 15, 2010 in answer to a call to PLATO's membership from Fred Ross and PLATO's Board of Directors. "PLATO needs a Few Good People" read the flyer. "PLATO's Board of Directors is seeking to launch a PLATO journal."

From the moment Fred convened that first meeting, interest was high and, more importantly, sustained. Sarah Schutt, PLATO's liaison in Continuing Studies, was instrumental in supporting the new project with budget information, printing parameters and enthusiasm. She, with the assistance of Wendy Kerr, also of Continuing Studies, sent an interest survey via email to the entire PLATO membership. Once it was determined that the membership was open to the launch of a literary journal, the project became a reality.

The Editorial Board chose Vaunceil Kruse as Editor-in-Chief and Edna Canfield, Managing Editor, with Winifred Batson, Marvin Beatty, Lauren Blough, Ellen Last, Claudia Melrose, and Fred Ross completing the group. Kruse presented the newly named *The Agora* at the September 15, 2010 PLATO Fall Preview. Email reminders, presentations to PLATO classes and pieces in *The Persimmon* resulted in over 100 submissions by the February 1, 2011 deadline.

Dedication

This inaugural edition of *The Agora* is dedicated to Sarah Schutt. As the UW-Madison Continuing Studies liaison to PLATO, Sarah was involved in the project when it was nothing but the germ of an idea, and her subsequent ideas, energy, encouragement and unrelenting bonhomie were essential for its successful launch. Though Sarah moved on from Continuing Studies midway in the editorial process, her spirit continued to serve as a polestar for the editorial board. All who read and enjoy this journal are mightily indebted to her.

Contents

Meditation 1, by Gail McCoy

A Tide of Green

by Ruth Calden

Every spring
Earth tilts down towards sun
And waxing light unleashes tints of green
Emerald jade and celadon
Displacing by kaleidoscopic shift
Winter's grey and sepia.

Rising from the Everglades
A tide of green surges north
Drawn by the enervating sun
Steadily engulfing a continent
Seeping into Wisconsin by April
When I stoop to poke dead leaves aside
And spy the green-lobed presence of hepatica.

Rampant here in May
The tide invades each dormant cell
Of fern and shrub of grass and tree
Inundating every blade and leaf
Staining hills and valleys green.
I stand spellbound beneath the hickory buds
Witness to the tidal wave of spring.

Know When to Hold, Know When to Fold

by Beverly Blahnik

This is not an informative treatise on gambling nor does it have anything to do with Kenny Rogers and the gambling song. It's about me and my never-ending search for the perfect fold.

Like every middle class family in the thirties my mother's job was to start me on my path to be a successful homemaker. One of these attempts was to teach me to iron. Every small girl began on handkerchiefs. A woman's handkerchief was to be ironed and then folded twice which kept it a square. A man's handkerchief was to be folded a third time and it became a rectangle. No wrinkles and catch the corners.

Pillowcases were next. They were to be ironed, folded into half, bring the bottom up and fold again, then fold from side to side into thirds. Thirds are hard to figure but it got easier. It was a good skill to have when I later learned, and taught, how to cut a paper snowflake.

My mother provided a dubious incentive. She insisted that I could not get married until I could iron a dampened starched white shirt perfectly. She said it enough times that I didn't know if it was some kind of joke or it was the awful truth. The idea of spending the rest of my life ironing and the dreaded canning every summer gave me a real uncertainty that marriage was a desirable goal in life. It seemed to me that my spinster aunts and Bertha Harper, who worked in the bank with my dad, had a far more exciting existence than did my poor mother.

As I approached teen age I learned that sweaters and shirts were to be folded bottom to top, then the sleeves across and then again in thirds, so that the collar would be at the top and the center with the buttons would be in the front.

As I went from department to department in T. S. Martin's department store executive training program in Sioux City, I learned to fold men's shirts, sweaters, ties, scarves, even shorts and undershirts. None of them came in plastic at that time. When a customer held them up to look at the size or to see if there was a flaw, they all had to be restored to pristine form to be held up by the next customer. In the drapery department fabric had to be folded by wrapping it around the cardboard holders. In the receiving room I learned how to fold the ends of a gift-wrap to make it attractive, and how to tie a

string around a box to keep it tight (wrap the first knot twice).

My days in the Martin's interior decorating department were taken up with folding. All of those fabrics that Mr. Fairweather pulled out to show a customer had to be folded and put back on shelves in the sample room, where they could be retrieved in a minimum amount of time for the next customer.

When I retired from the retail business to have our first child (In those days one could not work if one showed a pregnancy.), I was confronted with the unbelievable directions for folding a diaper. Diapers were all fabric in those days and washed and dried at home. Every person that you talked to had a different folding method: some better for girls, some better for boys, some diagonal, some straight, in thirds, in fourths, an infinite number of directions. I even heard new fathers arguing the merits of a certain kind of fold. That must have meant that they helped in the folding, in the constant attempt to supply clean fresh diapers for a child that was determined to defeat the endeavor.

When I returned to the work force, it was as an elementary art teacher and one of the basic skills that had to be taught was how to fold. To fold in half, "Make sure that the corners match and make the fold sharp with the back of your thumb or your clean fingers." To fold in thirds it was far more difficult. (None of these kids had ever had to fold a pillowcase for my mother.)

Now every time that I go to the box to retrieve my newspaper, I look at the fold and shudder. The corners never match. Finally when *Isthmus* got stapled they "got it": the only paper in town that has managed the fold.

A Satisfying Meal

by Jean Wilcox

Yesterday I made a reference
To my "salad days"
To which someone asked,
"Where in the meal are you today?"

You know, that time after an especially
Satisfying entrée
When you have to loosen your belt
Because you've seen the dessert;
You'd like a cigarette,
But you quit smoking long ago;
There are two swallows of wine
Left in your glass
Which you wish were six;
And the banal banter of hors d'oeuvres
Has turned philosophical?

That time—
That wistful, anticipatory,
Totally satisfying pause—
Is where I am
In my meal.

Ray Who?

A play in one act by David Berger

The Characters:

JUDGE CALVIN MULLER
KATHERINE, Assistant County Attorney
PATTY, Attorney for Raymond Nowske
RAYMOND NOWSKE, 60 years old

(Scene: A hearing room. The four people are seated. JUDGE, in the center, has a table; KATHERINE stage left; PATTY and RAYMOND stage right.)

JUDGE: This is a preliminary hearing.

(KATHERINE steps up to the table.)

KATHERINE: Yes, Your Honor. Game Warden Dawn Hanson saw Mr. Raymond Nowske (KATHERINE indicates RAYMOND.) tackle a deer. So she brought Mr. Nowske in.

JUDGE: Tackle a deer?

KATHERINE: Yes, Your Honor. (refers to the game warden's written report) The warden's watching two does and a buck on the trail by Clear Lake. She hears a smack and the buck goes down, kicking like mad. The does scatter. Something rolls off the buck and he's gone.

JUDGE: The something was Raymond Nowske?

KATHERINE: Yes, Your Honor. Warden Hanson spoke to Mr. Nowske. She said, "Did you knock that deer down?" And Mr. Nowske said, yes, he did.

JUDGE: (To PATTY) What can you tell me?

(PATTY stands.)

PATTY: Mr. Nowske thinks he's Ray Nitschke, Your Honor. He tackles deer to be ready for his comeback with the Green Bay Packers.

JUDGE: Middle linebacker.

PATTY: Sir?

JUDGE: Ray Nitschke played middle linebacker for the Pack. But he passed away, right?

PATTY: I don't know, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Patty, he's your client, isn't he?

PATTY: Raymond Nowske is my client, sir.

JUDGE: That's what I meant.

KATHERINE: They don't dispute the facts, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Mr. Nowske.

(KATHERINE and PATTY sit down.
RAYMOND NOWSKE doesn't answer or move.)

JUDGE (cont'd.): Mr. Nowske?

(No response from RAYMOND NOWSKE)

PATTY: Ray, the judge wants to talk to you.

(RAYMOND NOWSKE stands up.)

JUDGE: You are... Why don't you tell me your name?

RAY: Ray Nitschke.

JUDGE: Nowske?

RAY: Nitschke.

JUDGE: Which Ray Nitschke are you?

RAY: (Big smile) Aw, you know, Your Honor. I heard you say. Green Bay Packers' Ray Nitschke.

JUDGE: Uh-huh. Uhhh-huh. Mr. Now...Ray, did you tackle a deer by Clear Lake this morning?

RAY: Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE: You want to tell me why?

RAY: To stay sharp! It's not easy. I miss some.

(RAY adopts a linebacker's alert semi-crouch.)

RAY (cont'd.): But not if I'm close!

(RAY charges explosively—four or five steps—as if to tackle the seated KATHERINE who throws up her hands to protect herself and screams. RAY stops just short of KATHERINE.)

RAY (cont'd.): (To KATHERINE) Don't worry. I won't tackle you.

(RAY nonchalantly walks back to his place.)

JUDGE: (Approvingly to RAY) Good quick move. (JUDGE gives RAY a nod and a double thumbs up.) You knock the deer down. Then what?

RAY: Heck, when he's down, the play's over! I let 'm go.

JUDGE: You tackle deer all year long?

RAY: Oh, no. Mostly late summer and fall. (Big smile) Football season.

JUDGE: Through Thanksgiving or Christmas?

RAY: Oh, hell no! Not in gun-deer season. That'd be crazy, Your Honor. I could get shot.

JUDGE: Thank you, uh, Ray. You can take your seat again.

(RAY sits down. JUDGE beckons the two lawyers with his index fingers. KATHERINE and PATTY approach.)

JUDGE (cont'd.): Any priors?

PATTY: One. He painted the park benches green and gold. Your Honor, Ray helps out around the house and yard where he lives. Watches TV. Goes in the woods. No violations. He just tackles deer.

KATHERINE: What he's doing is harassment! Assault! He can't go on tackling deer, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Why not?

KATHERINE: 'Cause it's crazy.

JUDGE: Legally, why not?

KATHERINE: A, it's cruelty to animals. And B, it's not an authorized means of taking game.

PATTY: A, it's no different from calf roping in a rodeo, except Ray doesn't tie the deer's feet after he knocks 'em down. And B, he's not taking game.

JUDGE: Has Warden Hanson found deer hurt, around Ray's practice area?

KATHERINE: (Refers to the warden's report. Reluctant admission) Actually, uh, no. Only from gunshot wounds, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Ray, step up here one more time.

(KATHERINE and PATTY sit. RAY stands.)

JUDGE (cont'd.): You knew Vince Lombardi?

RAY: Knew him? I know him! And Coach Lombardi is tough, like they all say. But he's fair, real fair.

JUDGE: What does Coach Lombardi say about your workouts tackling deer?

RAY: Aw, Your Honor, Coach doesn't have time to come out in the woods and watch one guy. But I know what he'd say. (Gruff voice, and if possible, New York accent) "Run it again. And this time do it right!"

JUDGE: Are you Ray Nitschke all the time?

RAY: Yes I am. (A beat) You're Judge Calvin Muller all the time, aren't you?

JUDGE: Yes, I am.

(JUDGE leans back to think.)
(KATHERINE and PATTY jump up and wave their arms to get the JUDGE'S attention.)

KATHERINE and PATTY: Your Honor! Your Honor!

JUDGE: Hold it.

(JUDGE goes to RAY and puts a hand on his shoulder.)

JUDGE (cont'd.): Ray, what if I talk to Coach—

RAY: —You know Coach Lombardi?!

JUDGE: You bet! I've known Vince since he was Vinnie. Coach and I go way back.

RAY: Yeah!

JUDGE: Ray, if Coach says wear blaze orange—

RAY: —I'll do it!

JUDGE: —and only tackle deer when Warden Hanson says—

RAY: —Okay!

(RAY hoists JUDGE high in the air in a bear hug.)
(PATTY celebrates, pumping her fist across her body.)

PATTY: Yes!

KATHERINE: (Exasperated, arms flung wide) Your Honor!

JUDGE: (Still airborne in RAY'S bear hug) You gonna argue with Vince Lombardi?

END OF PLAY

On the Beach at Okinawa, April 1945

by Wil Selbrede

There he stood, a scrawny youth among men
Directing boat traffic on the beach, but when
That Kamikaze plane parted their hair
He sure got the hell out of there!

Dived in a foxhole, deep in the sand
Heart all pumping to beat the band.
Groveled and shook and tried hard to spit
Then grabbed an M-1 he found in the pit.

Stuck out the rifle, then a nose, then an ear,
Called to the Bosun's Mate, "Mike, we in the clear?"
"Hell yes," he replied, "Get your butt in gear,
Gotta unload them boats, ain't got us all year!"

That was as close as the kid got to the Japs,
For a moment there, he thought it was "taps."
And as the years go by, he still recalls it well
His own lucky brush with Okinawa hell.

Agnete

by Grethe Brix-J. Leer

Her name was Agnete. She must have had a last name, but that was not important. We only knew that all our lives she had lived in the small house next to the general store. Secretly and with hushed voices, we imagined that she might be a witch. Having been taught respect for the elderly, we knew better than to say such things out loud. But huddled together in our playhouse in the back of the garden, my friends and I were thinking and talking about things the grownups never got to know. With our imaginations easily blurring the lines between fiction and reality, we wondered if she hadn't jumped right out of a Grimm Brothers or Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale. The characters in these stories were as real to us as people in our daily lives. Didn't she look exactly like the illustrations in the books—the matted hair like black strings framing her face, which looked like a shriveled old apple someone had forgotten to throw out? And the clothes—black of course. A faded long coat covered her small body, except for her clunky wooden shoes, which stuck out and made her waddle from side to side. Once in a while, when a sudden wind almost blew her over, we caught a glimpse of layers of tattered black skirts that looked as if they'd never been washed.

A group of us five or six-year-old kids who played together spotted the bird-like figure as she came out of her half-timbered house. The old thatched roof had holes in it. To prevent all the straw from blowing off during the next storm, several rusty harrows—old farming implements—had been placed on top, their long iron teeth holding onto the straw. When it rained, water seeped from the dark roof and left gray streaks on the whitewashed squares between the tarred timbers. Outside the door, Agnete wiggled herself off the worn stone slab, avoiding stepping on the cats, who were comfortably sunning themselves in the warm hollows of the stone created by centuries of footsteps. A small clay path led through an overgrown garden where the stinging nettles grew as tall as a person. She slowly reached the decayed wooden gate, which was stuck forever in a half-open position. She fluttered onto the main road, beginning her daily walk half a mile up the hill to the cemetery. There she raked and smoothed the white pebbles, first into this kind of pattern; then she raked and smoothed the pebbles into that kind of pattern. Seemingly never satisfied, she continued the raking and smoothing of the small stones for hours, creating an endless soothing rhythm of caring or mourning. If you happened to walk by her, you could hear her constant

stream of low mutterings, a sound that kept anyone from entering her world during this daily ritual.

We never knew the whole story about her—a loner now, gone mad, who preferred the cemetery to other people's company: a love affair gone wrong a long time ago; a dead child under the gravel; even a husband—we didn't need to know more. From a safe distance we followed her. She was like an unkempt bird with long unruly feathers, using her old rake as a walking stick. In the small village where I grew up, adults were addressed as Mr. and Mrs. And we dutifully curtsied when meeting our teacher out in town. Our behavior was kept in line by any adult watching us through a window. All they needed to do was look at us in a certain way or possibly lift a reprimanding finger. So we didn't tease or taunt. We just followed Agnete, simply because she was there, in the middle of the road, at a time of the day when most villagers took a nap and not much else was happening.

If we got too close to her, she'd become aware of us, turn around, lift her head, tilt her rake and threaten us by shaking it from side to side. Nothing spectacular, but enough excitement to give us a thrill and make us run the other way, only to start following her again, ready once more to flee. By the time she reached the schoolmaster's large garden, turning right and starting the long climb up the hill to the churchyard, we'd lost interest and drifted back to our regular play. When she returned, we sat safely inside our houses, eating pork chops and boiled potatoes with parsley and melted butter and thinking about other things.

After dinner on summer evenings, we went outside again. Agnete was forgotten for now. Most often, we gathered in front of Mr. Hundeból's candy store, where, despite the strict closing law, you could buy ice cream, cigarettes and beer till midnight. All you needed to know was whether the lights were on in the back room and then knock on the right door. Either Mr. Hundeból, a tiny older man who moved swiftly like a mouse and who also repaired bikes during the day, or Mrs. Hundeból, who was extremely overweight, would open the door and get you what you wanted. If not by the door, both of them usually sat on a couch so broken and dilapidated that they covered it with a blanket full of red poppies and yellow sunflowers—a surprising splash of colors that enlivened the entire room if you could see it, which wasn't easy because Mrs. Hundeból's voluminous body easily spread over one-and-a-half seats, leaving Mr. Hundeból sitting on half a seat, snugly wedged between his wife and the armrest. They both looked content as they sat there enjoying a Tuborg and smoking away. Sometimes you'd get a glimpse of other people. Surprisingly, half the local government, seemingly forgetting about closing laws, sat in that smoke-filled backroom, enjoying a beer and a cigar, talking and telling stories well into the night.

Other times, on summer evenings when it never got dark, we sat in groups on the general store's steps. In the quiet night, we watched a thin gray line of smoke rising from the chimney of Agnete's house. If we stood up, we could see through the dusty darkness a shadowy figure moving around behind the small windows. With no electricity, she carried an oil lamp or a flickering candle which cast eerie shadows in the room. We imagined her cooking dinner for herself and her cats. All this was familiar and predictable.

One day she didn't come out and people wondered. The second day the general store owner's wife bravely investigated and walked into the house. She found Agnete dead in her bed, her cat still lying on her chest keeping her warm.

I don't remember the funeral. A sister we didn't know she had showed up, took a few of Agnete's possessions and left again. For awhile, the cats still lay on the front stone slab, but, since no one fed them, they began to wander toward the farms down the road, where they showed up for cow milking time and eventually just stayed, making themselves a new home.

Agnete's home was torn down. A bulldozer cleared the stinging nettles, a couple of blackberry bushes and the gnarled apple tree that grew apples so sour not even the birds wanted them. All were gone in a couple of weeks. Soon a modern savings and loan was built, forever erasing all signs of what had been. A sudden sadness hits me as I'm writing this, 60 years later. An aura of loneliness hangs in my memory. I'm thinking about the small shaggy bird woman who, for reasons I'll never know, preferred the company of the dead.

Genesis 1:20, by Gail McCoy

Migratory Birds

by Mariana Hewson

The woman waits on a park bench. Oblivious of the verdant green that surrounds her, she envisions a brown, stony countryside under a clear blue sky without a cloud to be seen. Her thick auburn hair hangs shoulder length in perfect waves. Her cream tailored suit is offset with the small black hat perched on the top of her head with just the right angle. Her skin is peach smooth, her eyes delicately lined in black and her cherry lips are ready for the picking. She sits very straight with her hands folded in her lap. Dreamy, relaxed, but alert at the same time—she is waiting.

The young woman saunters through London's park gently kicking last season's oak leaves that still linger on the grass. She knows that walking on the grass is forbidden, but that adds to her mood. Her threadbare blue jeans make an ambiguous fashion statement—could be cool or could be simply non-compliant. Her hair is wavy too, but it covers her face so that it is hard to see her eyes. How stressful it is to be meeting her mother after all this time, and after all that has happened.

The older woman now envisions the ocean, the thunderous waves that crash on pure white beaches, with lines of shells and seaweed debris left by the morning tide. She remembers the time when she was young and sailing away to the center of her world—the mother city of London. She had cruised on a floating heaven for two weeks. With everything she owned crammed into three suitcases, and a one-way ticket carefully stowed with her passport, she had left her family and home with abandon. Her sense of adventure far outweighed any feelings of sadness. When the brass band played and she waved goodbye to her family members standing forlornly on the Cape Town quay, no tears came.

Now Alice sits in Hyde Park under the shade of an old oak in its spring green foliage. All she can think of is the urge to go home, to the country of her birth, where oaks do not prosper, but the long grass whispers on the veld. In her mind she pictures the sakabula bird that flops above the tall brown grass, burdened by the weight of its festive long black tail feathers. Why is that beautiful bird also called the widow bird?

She can't fathom the suddenness of the change that has hit her. It has truncated her life as she knew it. Her emotions are suspended—not sadness, not grief, but the feeling of being adrift in a damp, dark fog. Her husband's life

ended when a drunk driver crashed into the barricade on the M1. On his way back from the conference in Birmingham, Colin's Jaguar piled into the back of the drunk man's car. It only took a second. At this most unexpected moment, her passionate life with the outwardly cool Englishman had ended. She can't bring herself to think of his body once so warm and vibrant, now totally inert. It's not fair that she has to be alone after the years of working so hard for their retirement together. What about the dream cruise in the Mediterranean, visiting Greek islands, Istanbul, Cypress? What about that romantic spin they were planning in Rome? What good is retirement without her partner of 30 years?

Alice pictures the dry African grass, the red earth, the prickly bushes and the copious thorns that penetrate even the most hardened feet. Why does she still love the country of her birth and youth? The spiky memories of a young girl growing up in a difficult social and political environment are not forgotten. She remembers the malnourished children in the countryside, always ready to open farm gates for a penny or a handful of toffees. She recalls the police who shouted at their African prisoners with the ugly language of abuse and wielded their knobkerries without provocation. Her own fear at the possibility of night intruders in the family home is still the stuff of her nightmares. It certainly wasn't a picnic living in Africa all those years ago. Yet the familiarity of the vegetation, the animals, the people, the weather, the smells, the air, in fact, of everything calls her clearly. Here she is, looking good yet feeling so unhappy it would make a widow bird weep to know her emptiness.

She is sick of gentle green countryside, the tended farmlands, well-manicured gardens, impeccable English manners and English diffidence. Worst of all, she feels inhibited by English stoicism that disallows free expression of uncontrolled grief. She feels that she managed her grief over Colin's death reasonably well, but the need for inhibition simply added resentment to the grief. Somehow the sharpness of Africa seems to be what she needs now—the roughness of the earth, the fear of political upheaval, the dread of hunger and the naked suffering of so many people. She wants to be where she is at home, where she can participate with and even help others. She wants to break out of the European mindset and lifestyle and shake off her own sadness.

Geraldine sees her mother sitting motionless on a park bench looking smart and controlled—the quintessential English lady. Her youthful figure and shining hair belie her age. In fact, she does not look like anybody's mother, let alone hers. She hesitates, not knowing what might take place when they meet.

She has not given her mother much time in recent weeks. The death of her father was a release for her. She loved him in a way, but only at a distance. His unrelenting strictness seemed to obliterate expressions of love between them. He would criticize how she looked, how she talked, her friends and the fact that she didn't have many friends. Their rows were unending. She could do nothing right and she was miserable.

She left home at 16 and, with her mother's help, set up her own small flat in High Street Kensington. The busy stores, the restaurants, the small alleys and mews with pretty flowers in window boxes delighted her. Each day she took the tube a short distance to her school. She did well enough in school to escape notice. Few of her teachers knew of her independence, nor of her orphan-like status.

Her mother could not, would not accept her daughter's estrangement from her father. They had tacitly agreed not to talk about it and had drifted slowly apart. The coldness in their relationship stings her still, like pellets of hail, leaving her frozen, alone and afraid.

She walks towards her mother wondering what she will say. "I must make an effort," she tells herself.

Being an English child, she is at home in the green sea of leaves and grass. The oaks encircle her, their protective arms wrap around her. She does not know the allure of the African veld, the dry warm air, the bird choruses at dawn and dusk, and the wonder of elephants munching whole bushes, knocking over trees for the pleasure of a neck rub.

"Hello, Mom! The tube from Kensington High Street took me a while. Good to see you!" She stands awkwardly in front of her mother, shielding her eyes from the weak sun.

"Geraldine, come sit beside me. How've you been?" Alice shifts on the bench to make room for her daughter. She pats the space next to her.

"Not too bad, not too good, and you?" Geraldine sits down, trying to hide the large oil mark on her pants leg. She's feeling uncomfortable sitting next to her mother.

Alice mumbles a half-hearted response. "Look at the Serpentine, Geraldine. The light is glinting off the water. I love it. It makes me think of Africa. Did you know that snakes are symbols of healing? They have healing power."

"Africa, Mom?" Geraldine looks at her mother with surprise. This is not what she is expecting. Her mother seldom mentions Africa. She seems to be such a natural English woman. She has the right accent—the Queen's English, she called it. Her fashion sense is perfectly upper class London. Her parents have the right address and the right car. No one could see through this exterior to the farmer's daughter from ex-colonial Africa.

"It's time to go home, Geraldine." She looks at her daughter, whose skin is pale after the long dreary winter. Yet her hair sparkles in the sun, like her own used to do when she was young and free, living on her parents' farm in the highveld, near the Magaliesberg mountains.

"I'm dying here. Shriveling might be the better word to describe how I feel. I long for saturating sunshine, the mountains, the wild coastline and the crackling winter air. I miss the people of all colors, their songs and their loud chatter. I know it is tough living in Africa, but tough is what I want. I need another adventure in my life. After all, we have lived in England almost 30 years. You are a child of this country and you probably feel differently about England and London than I do. But I am a child of Africa—it's time for me to go home." As she turns to her daughter, her face lights with intensity. "You have absolutely no idea how much I long for Africa."

Had she meant to say all this? Alice is surprised at her own speech. Her thoughts and feelings of urgency to return to Africa have bubbled like an unstoppable spring from deep down in the earth. Tears pool in the corners of her eyes. She has tried to be so strong and stoic over Colin's death, hiding her feelings quite well, she thought. And here she is crying in front of her daughter. She tries to wipe the tears without Geraldine noticing.

"Oh, Mom…" Geraldine had expected her mother to suggest that she should return to the family home in Knightsbridge. She had imagined her mother's pleas of loneliness in the big space, of the misery of cooking for one and then eating alone. Geraldine has prepared her arguments about why she will not acquiesce. She is so surprised at her mother's outburst that she is lost for words. Her feelings of anger and resentment melt when she sees Alice's tears. In a flash, everything changes. Like a breeze sweeping over the once still waters on the Serpentine, new possibilities are emerging for them both.

I Never Saw a Purple Frog

by Marjory McMickle

I never saw a purple frog.
I never thought I'd see one.
No chance encounter in a bog.
No creatures seemed to be one.

But Olbrich Gardens yesterday
Had frogs for all to view.
Amphibians in this array
were purple, yellow, blue.

With young and old I stood in line
For hours of slow velocity.
Or else I'd spend that day so fine
Consumed with curiosity.

These tiny dendrobates* are news,
Their toxic skins commodities.
Now science has a noble use
For striped and speckled oddities.

Endangered species—they are known
In forest canopies to perch.
But here in Madison they're grown
For neuromuscular research.

*tree dwellers

If Only

by Shirley Schildkraut

This night when sleep eludes me
memories are ghosting around my head

He enters with a grin,
a peeled orange in his hand
offering it to me.

Just a "naked orange."
I feel his warmth, his care, his love,
contentment flutters through my being.
He is with me.

And then abruptly, "if only,"
this idiom of introspection
stabs my musing
and I am once again alone.

Co' Boss

by Enid Simon

"Co' boss, co' boss."

The voice wafted softly across the green field dotted with black and white cows, all of them with their heads down deep into their morning grazing. At the far side of the field a differently colored animal raised her head, her ears spread to catch the sound, her eyes searching for the source of it.

"Co' boss, co' boss. Com'on, Floss. I've got somethin' for ya."

The grayish-brown cow zeroed in on the direction from which the call came and began to move toward it through the lush grass. Her steps were just a little uncertain, as if she weren't sure of what she'd heard. Then it came again.

"Co' Floss. I ain't got all day, ya know."

The cow's stride lengthened until she was almost running and when she saw the figure standing near the gate, she broke into a clumsy trot. The man who stood on the far side of the barbed-wire fence was, as always, amazed at how fast Flossie could cover ground when she wanted to. And he remembered, as well, how she could dawdle when she didn't want to be somewhere other than where she already was.

The story of the cow and the man had started about a year before that day, when the man's youngest son decided that he wanted to leave the farm and go to school to learn something beyond subsistence farming. His father, who was not a young man, had to make some hard decisions soon after that. He realized that by himself he could no longer manage the herd of milk cows that had always, in his memory, populated the barn and surrounding farmland. So, much as it hurt him to see the animals, all of them carrying names he'd chosen for them, leave his big red barn, he decided to sell them. But he simply couldn't part with every animal in the herd he had built up over the years. As usual, when he needed advice or input or ideas, he turned to his wife, Tillie.

"Whadda ya think, Til? Which critter should we keep? I'm thinkin' that we won't need a lot of milk, just the two of us left here. Even with you usin' the cream to make butter and all. Are you sure you know how to make butter?"

"Oh for goodness' sake, Harold! I've got an electric mixer, haven't I? That'll churn the cream into butter faster than anything they've got at the milk plant, and we won't have to pay for it."

Tillie rarely lost her cool, but it did tend to happen when her husband questioned her abilities in the kitchen and now she turned from the table where she had been kneading bread dough, to face him.

"It seems to me that it would make the most sense to keep Flossie. She's the only Jersey in the herd and you bought her mostly to up the butter-fat in the milk we shipped. So her milk should be good for making butter, right?"

Tillie stood with her flour-speckled arms and hands held akimbo, waiting for Harold's answer. He rubbed the gray-white stubble on his chin and agreed that probably such a choice would make good sense. Flossie was a fairly young cow, with a good milking record and a gentle disposition, and, as Tillie had pointed out, her milk was high in butter-fat content.

So the decision was made, the sale was completed, and Floss became the only bovine resident in the barn, which now echoed with emptiness, day and night. The barn cats were still there and Harold moved the few chickens they had left into a fenced corner near the south-facing windows, but to him and his cow, the barn remained lonesomely empty. The days and weeks went by and the cow and the man built a stronger bond of companionship than they'd ever had. With only one animal to care for, the man hung up the electric milking machine and reverted to milking Flossie by hand. But sometimes the sound of the milk pinging into the metal pail seemed to make him feel very alone and bereft. When that happened, he'd burrow his head deep into Flossie's warm flank and she'd curve her neck around to peer at him as if wondering what was wrong. Or perhaps, he thought, to remind him that she was still solidly there and was depending upon him.

"Oh, you're a good boss, Flossie. You're all I've got now, so you'll have to put up with me bein' silly, I guess. Do ya think ya can do that?" Flossie would toss her head and blow a soft puff of air from her nostrils. Was she agreeing with him or just telling him to hurry up with the milking? He never was quite sure which it was.

Not only did he milk the animal by hand, Harold often fed her by hand too, offering choice bits of hay or silage or anything he had that was fresh and appetizing, such as cut-up rutabagas. He stroked her nose and scratched behind her ears and Flossie responded like any lonesome animal would. If there were no other four-footed creatures of her own kind around, she would get what companionship she could from the two-legged one. If she were in the yard behind the barn while he cleaned the gutters and spread fresh straw for her bed, she would come when he sent his call of "Co' boss" in her direction. She would often lower her head and butt it against his chest, obviously asking for more attention and loving or maybe just more treats.

During the winter, with only one cow and a few cats and hens in the barn, it could get pretty cold at night, and Harold, somewhat reluctantly, installed an electric heater. He admitted that it was mostly for Flossie's benefit, but the cats soon moved into the comfort zone, often sleeping on top of the recumbent cow. Even the hens responded to the added warmth, clucking more contentedly and producing an additional egg or two every few days.

If anyone in his farming past had told Harold that he would make a pet out of a cow, he would have doubled over with loud guffaws. But he did come to love that animal, and because he did, he realized that Flossie, much as she responded to him, was a herd animal and would be happier with her own kind.

Once again he discussed the problem with Tillie. "What do ya think I should do, Tillie? Floss seems to be pretty lonesome, don't ya think? You're always full of ideas and ya keep telling me that every blessed problem has an answer, so what do ya say to this one?"

"Well, Harold, since you brought it up, it seems to me that Flossie might be happier and more contented if she was part of a herd again. Maybe you could talk with young John over on the old McPherson place and see if he'd be willing to add her to his herd.

"Why not," Tillie continued, "ask John if he'd buy Flossie and let us have the daily milk we need? That way she'd be part of a herd again; you could still see her every day and we'd have all the milk we can use. Maybe he'd even let you go over and milk her sometimes."

It was the last suggestion which sold Harold on the idea. He approached John the very next day and after thinking it over for a few minutes, his neighbor replied, "Sure. I reckon that she's a good milker and since she's been out on pasture this spring I've seen how lonesome she seems to be for her own kind. She can be part of my herd and you can collect whatever milk you want every morning. And if you really want to, you can come milk her any morning or evening. Besides, she'll probably give more milk if she knows you're still around. I tell you, that cow's downright besotted with you."

At that they both laughed and shook hands to seal the bargain. That very afternoon Flossie was moved to the other side of the fence and her two-legged friend made sure that she knew she was not being deserted or sold down the river. He explained everything to her and she nodded with agreement. When it was time for the evening milking, he went with Flossie to her new home barn and after the milking was done he bedded her down and left her contentedly chewing her cud, with similarly occupied cows on either side.

They soon settled into a routine which seemed to satisfy both of them, and if sometimes he didn't show up in time to milk her in the morning, Flossie would allow John to attach his electric milker to her udder and she did her best to fill the pail. But when her special friend showed up, she made sure he would know that she'd missed him.

So now she and her new four-legged pals were all in the pasture together and there was that familiar voice calling to her in the same old way. When she reached the fence, he offered her an apple that was just the slightest bit over-ripe and Floss daintily "tongued" the fruit from his palm, ever so gently brushing his hand with her lips.

He smiled and said "Good boss. Good old Flossie."

She lowered her head, butted his chest and they both purred with contentment like cats in a pool of sunshine.

My Son, by Ellen Maurer

Grandpa's Mine

by Gordon Cunningham

My Grandfather Cunningham was born in Ayr County, Scotland in 1870. At ten he began work in a coal mine. At 16 he emigrated to the United States. He and Grandma Cunningham raised ten children on a 20-acre farm in southeast Kansas. My father was their first-born. By the time I remember visiting in 1927, as a five-year-old, Grandpa had his own "one horse" coal mine, and one horse WAS his power. He would let me ride on the horse to the mine. At the mine he would hitch the horse to a turnstile next to the tipple. When he wanted to lower one of his hand-push coal cars down the shaft, he would adjust a cable and ring a bell. The horse would walk around the turnstile, lowering Grandpa and the car to the workings. He would push the car on tracks to the working face, and fill it with coal blasted from the face with a dynamite charge he had set when leaving the day before. Pushing the car back to the shaft, he would adjust the cable and ring the bell, and the horse would walk around the turnstile again, raising the car up to the car-dump from which he could load wagons via a chute. Grandpa made most of his tools. One time he was making a spike to start a hole for the charge to blast more coal. He would heat it to red hot in his forge, then pound it to make its sharp point. He set it aside to do some other task. As soon as it wasn't red I thought it was cool and picked it up. I screamed from the pain! Grandpa moved faster that I thought possible for an "old" man. He grabbed my hands and plunged them into a barrel of water. That quick cooling probably saved my hands from permanent injury!

In the Moment

by Myrna Williamson

It's easy to be in the moment
When a forkful of dark chocolate pie
With whipped cream slowly, softly,
Caresses my mouth like a cloud.
You are like that, too.
I love being in the moment with you.

Loaded for Bear!

By Ellen Maurer

When you live on a farm, you are always close to nature, and in the old days, country kids got lots of exercise trudging to and from their one-room school that was often a mile or so away. The Allbeck family had eleven living children, six sons and five daughters, so they spent a lot of time going to school.

The youngest, Millie, recalls, "We started first grade at the Spruce Hill School when we were six. So, in the spring of 1929 when I was five, Paul, fourteen, Lester, twelve, and June, eight, I asked mother if they could take me to school to visit so I could see what it would be like the next year.

"Walking home, we got to our mailbox at the end of the lane a half mile from home. Then we needed to go down a hill, cross the creek at the bottom and continue home. We were down the grade a little way when Lester said, 'Stop, look, and listen!' We looked up and there, right there in the edge of the woods, 15 feet away, standing up on his hind feet, was a bear!

"Paul grabbed hold of my hand, put it up on his neck, and hauled me up on his back. He yelled to Les, 'Grab June's hand and run!' Then they ran as fast as they could all the way home with me bouncing up and down on Paul's back and Les pulling June along behind. We ran gasping into the house. When Paul finally could get his breath, he panted, 'Mother, is my hair white??!' "

In part, because of experiences like this, hunting was always a big part of life on the farm. It was necessary to keep vermin under control. Coons feasted on hard-earned sweet corn or field corn. And ground hogs chomped young seedlings and dug big holes in the fields where a horse could step and injure a leg or a machine could drop in and damage a wheel or a part.

Hunting also produced meat for the table and for the family to can in quart jars. Boys were taught to shoot and hunt early, and they couldn't wait to come of age and add to the hunting stories the men told. Frank and his brothers were no different. They were quite the hunters.

One fall night, when Frank was sixteen and Lester was ten, they were coon hunting with a .22 rifle up in McMichael Hollow, when their dogs caught a scent and took off, yipping on a chase.

The boys ran after the dogs as fast as they could, stumbling through the woods in the dark carrying a dim lantern.

When they finally caught up, the dogs were yelping, baying and leaping against a big oak tree. Frank lifted the lantern up high so they could see, and there, out on a big limb, lay a bear.

The boys were wild with excitement! What stories they could tell now! "Let's shoot him! Let's shoot him!" was their first thought.

But after they calmed down a bit, Frank realized that their .22 rifle didn't stand much chance against a bear, except to make him mad! What they needed was a bigger gun. They tied the lantern to the tree so they could find it again, left the dogs, and took off for home.

They raced upstairs and woke up their dad, Francis, blurting out their excitement over treeing a bear and asking for his double-barreled shotgun.

"No," he said, "You can't take it alone."

"Then come with us, Dad!" they begged.

"No, I don't want to go out there in the woods with a bear at night!"

But finally he gave in, and off they went with Frank carrying the shotgun. When they got to the tree, and Francis saw the size of the bear, he said, "This shotgun is no match for that bear. We're not going to shoot him. It's too dangerous! If he comes out of the tree just injured, he could attack us. Let's go home."

But the boys couldn't give up their bear that easily. "Dad, let's go out to Art Love's place and ask to borrow his rifle. That would bring him down."

"No, we're going home now." Francis corralled the dogs and turned his back to start home. Sick with disappointment, Frank took a last look at the bear, pulled back the hammers, aimed at the bear's head, and let fly with both barrels. The bear started to snort and thrash around, but was able to climb to the top of the tree.

Frank wanted to stay, but his dad said absolutely not, and they lit out for home before the bear could climb down. On the way, though, knowing how important it was to his sons, Francis reconsidered, and they got out of the car, drove to Art Love's house, woke him up, borrowed his rifle, and went back up McMichael Hollow to the tree. The bear was gone. It was one of those hunting tales that gets told and retold.

Some 40 years later, Frank and a new friend, Bob Lawvere, were sitting around telling hunting stories. Then Bob told his own bear story from 40 years earlier. He was fox hunting in early March with the Stackhouse gang in Pine Township, near the Allbeck farm, when the hounds treed a bear, and the gang shot and killed the bear.

It was the oddest thing. All the skin was torn off the bear's head. It was healed over, but he was bald. They figured it out down to the year. It was the same bear Frank had shot with the shotgun!

If the bear had been looking down, the slugs would have hit him in the face and killed him. But he was looking up toward the top of the tree, and the slugs came up the back of his head, took all the skin off and scalped him.

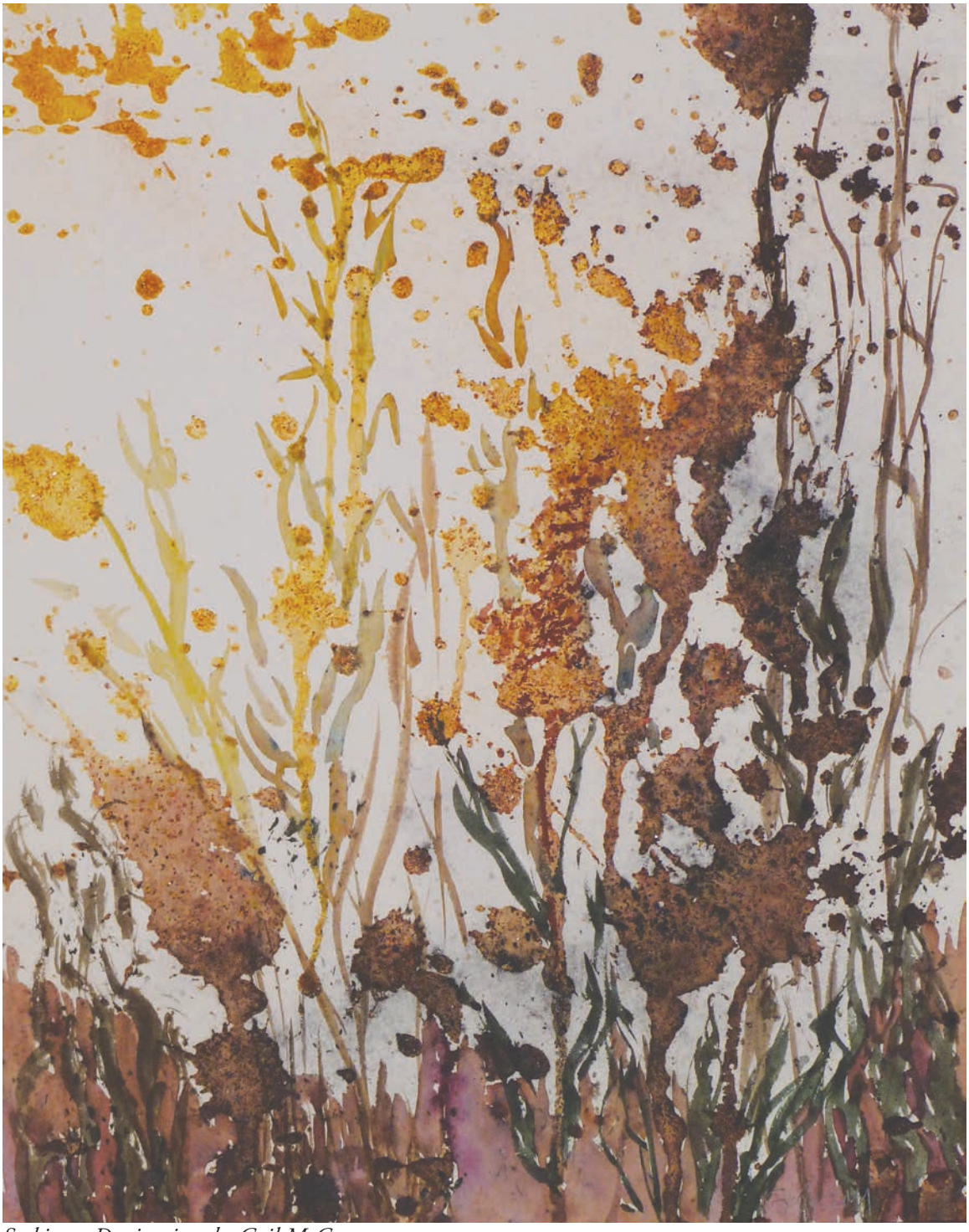
That was a bear story that took a long time to tell!

Texas Pantheon

by Mary Collet

In the heat of the Texas sun
the Ft. Davis mountain gods sleep
rounded bosoms and buttocks blanketed
in undulating folds of brown and green.

Toward evening they awaken
throw off the duff of day
and don purple and blue
to greet the goddess moon.



Seeking a Destination, by Gail McCoy

Giving and Receiving

by Barbara Taylor

I saw a leaf attached to a
spider thread
outside my window
it was spinning spinning
like a trapeze artist
it twirled and twirled
in the wind in the sun
but the thread could not nourish it
and the leaf became small and shriveled
but the smaller it became
the faster it would spin
gaily
at a dizzying speed
until one day I looked
and it was gone
blown away to another place
but the spider thread was still there
swaying in the wind
reaching out
for another leaf to catch and spin.

At Manumit: Apropos the Trains

by Norman Leer, October 10, 2001

It is only photographs of lost
places, a few unwritten poems,
memories imagined because

real, how I might have been
because I am. The trains
go back and forth like broken string.

I am fifteen; I am
sixty-four. Terrorists crash planes
into New York. Buildings disappear

like yesterday, like tomorrow.
Recovery necessary and impossible,
a few unfinished pieces, almost gone.

Dark trains blur like frozen
hands. There are unclear faces
in the whistle darkened hills

of Pennsylvania. The trains
go back and forth, shifting pieces
of loose string. In Chicago

after the divorce, my father
had no place for me, just his helpless loving
In a stingy room. Buildings disappeared.

Home slid past the moving
windows, ghostly farms in underwater
snow, embers of lost crossings.

That year Henry Wallace ran
for President and lost. Europe glowed
with ashes, death trains and dreams.

We sang of union maids
and a Lincoln Brigade
we had never known, chanted

"*Dona Nobis Pacem*" at the school
assemblies. Uncle Bill, the chunky
angular Director, led us, his arms

pumping lost truth, harvesting
the earth, friendly with cigar smell.
Uncle Ben, his brother, thin

and slightly bald, reading
The New Yorker, looking blown away
like one of its cartoons. We called

all the teachers by first names;
once a week we built the school with them,
making libraries from barns.

Potatoes and oranges floated
on the Hudson River,
during the Depression, clinging

to the ferry boats like drowning
hands. John taught us.
He had seen it; I never forgot.

I remember a giant rat
crawling past the wooden chicken coops
where we lived, one night

while a counselor told ghost stories.
That winter the outhouse froze over;
we had no water for a week.

Afternoons, after school, I lay
on my army cot, learning jazz
from a radio station in Camden, New Jersey:

"Jazz Unlimited," half an hour
of Louis, Bunk, Kid Ory; blues inside me
blizzard death and warm hands

at the same time. Jim, my roommate,
played guitar; his father, thick knit Irish
voice, Longshoreman's Union,

came with bread and wine
on weekends. From them I learned
Kevin Barry, brave and boozy, hanging.

Joe McCarthy from Wisconsin
crawled across the land, bloated,
smelling of dead fur.

English puzzled me. Poems could bloom;
grammar was my father's rooms,
full of business words. Peg

taught me Joseph Conrad, worn
seductive books and language
I could hold like light. I think

I love the touch and taste
of books because of her. I try
to find her every time I teach.

I failed Algebra; letters
as numbers made no sense.
I doodled railroad names

all across the book.
Astronomy was different. Uncle Bill
intoned Orion in the dark

behind the lost trees
of the baseball field, his voice
a cosmic locomotive wail. Now

I had geographies of God
that were not tight and did
not pinch like writing on the synagogue.

The nation froze toward Ike
and predatory underwater cars.
There was a formal garden

past the Main House, with mazes
of hedges, buzzing with slow fat
bees, and a dry unused pool.

The paths sang still as fragrant
heat. I could get lost there, learn to say
the summer smells and silences;

or I walked two miles, the tiny
foreign farm-lined road,
to the ice cream store, damp

shelter of chocolate and strawberry.
Thin Modigliani girls in gentle pony tails
sat soft and smoking in the Common Room,

and I would dream of smoking, laughing
with them, more comforting than ice cream
and as unapproachable as home.

Hearing folk songs, I imagine these girls
now, wonder how it would have been
if I had dared to be with them.

I am sixty-four. Terrorists crash planes
into New York. Pieces of string
burning, more fragile than trains.

I am fifteen. In the fifties
everybody wanted to go home.
I was no different.

My father found a boy's school,
cruel and closer to Chicago.
Unable to fight back,

I made one friend, another Jew
with Asthma. People snickered
in the James Dean slouching

movie house. Manumit
was gone. It shut down
like my father with his string,

only photographs imagined. Once,
teaching on Long Island, I visited a woman
living in the Village. We had only

dried up names and silences.
We were deep in Vietnam;
Kennedy was shot; before the hope,

before the unsung possibilities,
the music upside down,
before the other mad assassins.

After New York, people trace the sky
for faces, pray in different languages
together. I write this poem

I cannot end, memories
I need to find, photographs of dreams
that waking I already am.

Henry Levin@Eleven, by April Hoffman

Red Cross Face

by George Faunce

Maggie was staring at the TV. On the screen were bodies floating in dark, churning waters, an image that would be shown again and again during that fall of 2005, after Katrina.

"What is it, Hon?" I asked.

"We can't go."

By go she meant on vacation. We wouldn't be going on vacation now, because a hurricane had just devastated New Orleans. We had seats reserved on a tour bus scheduled to leave in two weeks from New Jersey to California. That was the event she was referring to: my promised retirement vacation. That was the thing that was now no longer going to happen.

In just five minutes my wife, Maggie, had decided that she and I would instead join the Red Cross and go south to help the people suffering from the storm. She said it would be obscene to be sitting on an air-conditioned bus visiting the Grand Canyon while people in New Orleans were drowning in the streets.

I cancelled our reservations (reluctantly) and followed her to the nearest Red Cross center in South Jersey. In two weeks we had finished training and were certified as freshly-minted volunteers. Anticipating what lay ahead, Maggie decided to wear no more makeup. In the bayou all she would need was a face that was red from scrubbing and eyes that were crossed from squinting at a blistering sun—a bona fide Red Cross Face, in all its sweaty splendor.

September 22 we got the call; we would be flown out of Philadelphia International through Atlanta to Baton Rouge on Tuesday morning.

"Do you think we're ready for this?" Maggie asked me that evening.

I shrugged and stared at her (a bit balefully, perhaps).

"I'll take that for a yes," she sighed.

***

We boarded our flight in Philadelphia at 5:00 a.m. After changing planes in Atlanta, we flew toward the Baton Rouge Airport. This second flight had us seated next to an elderly black woman who had been trapped in New Orleans the day the levees failed. She was writing about it in a notebook when we squeezed in beside her. She looked at our Red Cross vests and smiled. In minutes she and Maggie were huddled in conversation, while I put my head against the window and tried to sleep. She was telling Maggie her personal story.

"I'm a retired nurse, understand, not a novelist. I never had to write much of anything in my life, but now—just look at what I've written here.

"Each generation of my family has lived in the same house in New Orleans since my great grandmother. The house is mine and my husband's now, passed on to us by my mother. Since my husband's stroke—he's been in a nursing home not far from where we live—I've been staying there alone.

"When the floods came I had to leave everything and run. I had no idea where the nursing home had taken my husband. He'd been separated from the other patients because he suffered a stroke during the evacuation. They rushed him to the hospital in Baton Rouge and were able to bring his body back to life, but not him.

"Meanwhile I've been staying at my cousin's in Atlanta 'til I could get back here to find my husband. These clothes I'm wearing are my cousin's and they're pretty much all I have at this point. I don't think my husband will mind what I look like, though, will he," she smiled ruefully.

"My sister lived down the block from us—we were separated after the flood. She and her daughters, my nieces, were taken to a shelter in Texas. She said the way they feel now they won't ever be returning to New Orleans. I understand because I don't want to go back either. Most of the street surrounding my house was taken up by my relatives. We formed our own little community. With them gone, it seems like New Orleans has gone too.

"All that's in front of me now is to sit in a hospital room, by a man who will never again be able to tell me that he loves me. And will never again be able to hear me tell him that he is and has always been the love of my life. In my heart, though, I think he knows that."

***

In baggage claim at the Baton Rouge airport we joined volunteers arriving from other flights, every one of us wearing red and white vests. We helped each other lift bags and suitcases off the carousel as though we were old friends from a prior lifetime.

Red Cross vans were screeching to a halt outside. Through the plate glass windows we could see the drivers running toward the entrance doors. They shouted for us to grab our belongings and move outside; then they began shoving us into vans, their goal to squeeze as many bodies in as possible.

The vans rolled out as quickly as they arrived, volunteers' heads snapping back with each abrupt take off. Just as rapidly a new queue slid in behind to take their place. The second round of vans found room for Maggie and me, forcing an immediate intimacy between us and nine others, defying age, gender, and anatomy as we were all pressed together to get the last potential body through…the…Aggghhhh!

Ten minutes later we were deposited at a gerrymandered Red Cross headquarters located in a corporate park downtown. The headquarters had been set up hastily in an empty warehouse to handle the crowds of volunteers arriving daily in Baton Rouge. The entrance wall looked fittingly like a failed levee being sandbagged frantically with luggage. Each of us added our suitcases and duffel bags to the expanding pile as we were ushered inside to undergo processing.

Cafeteria tables linked across the building holding boxes, stacks of paper, coffee cups and computers whose wiring looped beneath the tables like black vines. Hordes of humanity milled about as though lost in a train terminal during war times. Maggie and I filled out forms, answered questions, had our pictures taken, sat through orientations, and then were told to wait. Those in charge needed time to determine each person's field assignment. We sat and pondered our fate, feeling a growing sense of unease.

An hour later there was just a dwindling group of twenty or so left. A worker came over to ask who needed to stay together, which in our group proved to be Maggie and me, and a mother and daughter, Gwen and Danielle, who had arrived that day from California. We were moved aside while the rest were sent on their way. Then the worker came back and asked who had a driver's license. Although four volunteers offered, she threw me the keys to a Dodge Caravan, and gave me MapQuest directions.

"You'll be the driver. The four of you will be heading south. The traffic here is horribly backed up with the population doubled since the storm. Every hotel room is occupied with misplaced people or emergency personnel. The traffic is so thick the roads are like parking lots. This will cause you a problem with time so you best hurry. If you don't get to the town of Gray, Louisiana before dark you'll have trouble finding the place. God knows the last group did."

"Where's the van?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Vehicles are coming in and going out every minute here. People find open spots wherever they can. It's a random process. I suggest you just venture down each lane and keep pressing the panic button on your car keys until you hear a car horn honking back. It'll be like finding that proverbial 'stranger across a crowded room' in *South Pacific*. I just loved that musical!"

"But there are acres of cars out there!"

"Well then, you best start looking. Sorry, I can't help you more. Like I said, we have no way of keeping track. Good luck. And remember, 'Once you have found her, never let her go. Once you have found her…ne…ver…let her…'" And on she sang as we hurried out the door.

Like contestants on that TV show, The Great Race, the four of us dug through the luggage levee for our gear, then scooted the suitcases toward the nearest parking lot. Shuttles continued to pull up, new volunteers stumbling out, blinking against the blindingly patient sun: disoriented strangers from states across the country, inhaling the Louisiana-steamed air for the first time, catching their randomly flung suitcases and sleeping bags or just stumbling back to avoid being hit by them.

Up and down the lanes we trotted, with me pressing the car's panic button. Finally, we heard the plaintive honk of a Dodge Caravan. We loaded her up and then my companions watched as I struggled with the front seat, trying to force it to slide back. Young Danielle, after a respectful

pause (God bless her.), showed me that the release was on the side of the seat, not underneath. She had to further explain that the next switch I was playing with was never going to turn on the headlights, no matter how many times I used it to start the wipers and spray the windshield with solution. My ignorance of any vehicle other than my old Honda was showcasing itself. With three capable female drivers available, they had thrown the keys instead to a man whose sole expertise was in pushing panic buttons.

I began our journey by going the wrong way. The street signs near the warehouse were missing, so I took a guess and (as it turns out) went north. Twenty minutes later we got back in the right direction and inched toward our destination south. The sun was setting as we finally wiggled free of the city traffic and onto the interstate, heading down into the belly of the beast—the Louisiana bayou.

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We drove for a quite a while, past isolated homes and shacks, through towns no more than a few blocks long before giving way again to the empty fields. The trees and dwellings looked compressed—as though constantly sat upon by the heat. The sun reddened down, breathing heavily. Road signs, few and far between, grew harder to see. Several signs had been twisted so violently by the storm that they pointed the wrong way, forming arabesques on a landscape from Oz.

We reached the town of Gray in darkness. There were more churches than we had anticipated, all of them in shadows except for one, with cars filling its lot. Danielle jumped out of the van, found a side door to the church and, with youthful bravado, went right in. A moment later she was trotting back out, hopping in the car quickly.

"Let's get a movin'," she said breathlessly.

"What did you find out?"

"They're having a service in there. The door opened onto a stage behind this minister. He had his arms stretched out and he was shouting, 'Jesus, send us an answer!' And there I was, as if on cue, right behind him at the podium, looking out at a sea of black faces. Things suddenly got very quiet, I swear!"

"And…?"

"I said, 'Sorry! Wrong church! Wrong Church! Wrong Church!'and backed out the door again. Wow, you know what? I just realized how that must have sounded. Do you think they thought I was, you know, like giving them a grade or something?"

Danielle sat silently pondering this as we drove through the streets, going back and forth over small planked bridges. The bayou ran right through the center of town, a mere ten to fifteen yards in width, its waters moving so slowly that you would need stop-action photography to prove that they moved at all.

At each church we came upon, we sent Danielle to read the sign, so dark were the streets and so twenty-twenty her youthful vision. One, indeed, was a Baptist church, but it appeared to be closed. Danielle had not lost her investigative spirit, however, and ran behind the church to discover, completely obscured from the road, an annex building. Lights from its windows illuminated a flurry of somersaulting bugs. We had, at last, found the Red Cross outpost.

It was now 8:30 p.m. Up since early that morning to get to the Philadelphia International Airport, having endured the traumas of three airports, two flights, hours of processing in Baton

Rouge, a mind-deadening drive through stalled city traffic, and the Stygian back waters of the bayou, we were ready at last to sleep.

But not so. For us, as Danielle would have put it, it was the "the wrong church, wrong church, wrong church."

The staff members told us the place where we were to report was yet farther south; this was only a way station. Our modest reenactment of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* was still unfolding. We had to continue our journey until we reached yet another Baptist church, in a town called Houma.

"Well, look what we have here," a staffer smirked. "A mom and daughter from California, and a retired couple of educators from *New Joisey* (he pronounced Jersey with relish, like someone auditioning for *The Sopranos*.) Welcome to bayou country. Down here people are pretty basic in giving directions. No matter what your destination, we'll tell you, you either need to go '*up* the bayou,' or go '*down* the bayou,' or go '*across* the bayou.' Right now you're going *down* the bayou. So if you want any sleep tonight at all, you'll get back in your vehicle and follow me."

We walked groggily back to the van. Thinking I was turning on the lights (as I would in my Honda) I once again got the wipers swinging and sprayed the windshield thoroughly, hearing at least one sigh of exasperation from the passengers (I hoped it was my wife.). I got the headlights on in time to see our guide's car disappear from the parking lot, and had to floor it to keep within sighting distance of his tail lights.

At 9:30 p.m., our runaway guide swung into the parking lot of a church annex in Houma. We careened in behind and dragged our gear inside the building's main entrance. The shelter manager, a lady named Jean, came down to greet us and led us upstairs to classrooms that had been converted into sleeping quarters for Red Cross volunteers. She opened a small storage closet and told Maggie and me we could sleep there in privacy, because we were married. "But no hot sex in there, you two bunnies!" she guffawed. "We can't have you waking up the younger folk and setting a bad example."

I wondered, stepping into the closet, why so many people found the tenuous love life of seniors like Maggie and me so amusing. It probably started with those TV commercials for erectile dysfunction, specifically the one where two aging adults are left sitting in adjoining bath tubs on a river bank, stark naked, looking straight ahead at nothing in particular and smiling vacantly.

I tripped over something on the floor. We switched on the ceiling light and saw that the room was filled with scattered toys and children's furniture. A subtle smell of urine permeated the air. We were in a diaper changing station and storage site. The linoleum floor was sticky, smooching the soles of our sneakers as we clacked about, clearing space to set up two cots left for us out in the hall.

There was no hot sex in the diaper closet that night; neither was there sleep. Our cots had obviously been manufactured by the Lollipop Guild. My feet dangled off one end if I didn't maintain the fetal position. Maggie's cot collapsed when she turned from side to side, dropping her buttocks-first onto the floor. We could hear people moving about in the hall throughout the night, doors banging shut, lights clicking on and off.

I got up every 20 minutes or so and wandered the halls. The bathroom had no door on the toilet stall, so if someone came in while I was

sitting, my best option, I determined, was to stare them down as though they were supplicants before a king. Constructed for toddler use, the stall had been made narrow, giving me the distinct pleasure of hitting my crazy bone on the toilet paper dispenser when I sat down. In the sink a tribe of orange-colored ants ran briskly to and fro, oblivious of the hour.

Having begun 24 hours earlier in our comfy bedroom in New Jersey, we stared now at a lime-green ceiling in a urine-stained closet in Houma, Louisiana, waiting for the dawn. This was day one; we had weeks yet to go. "So this is what retirement is going to be like," I mused to myself.

"Do you have your Red Cross Face on, Honey?" I whispered hoarsely to the love of my life.

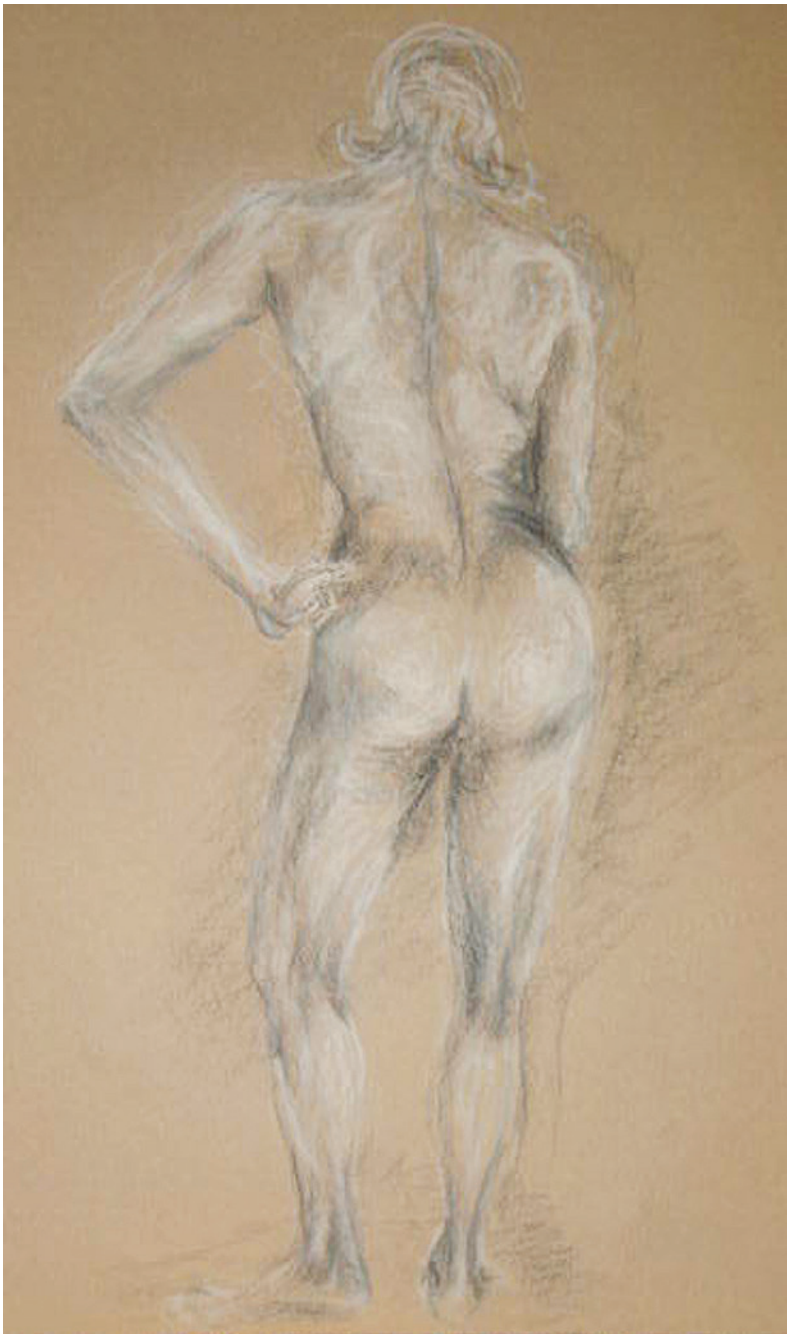
"Well…it's red on one side from pressing against something…I think a box of Pampers. And my eyes are crossed from sleep deprivation. I'd say I'm ready to take on the world."

Dialogues with Modernism: A Personal Response

by Anne Lundin

To Norm and Grethe

Your own love songs
your metamorphosis
your love supreme
came one snowy day,
January 8, 1975,
when two silhouettes
met over Miro
and found in his tiny forms
and huge empty spaces
the uncertain drama
of subjectivity
between work and self,
the loss and longing
driving the artist
toward a kind of peace
beyond boundaries
of art, architecture, landscape,
the sense, the very sense
of hands greeting,
one body.



Untitled, by Julie Pretell

Mother Said

by Joanne Lee Storlie

One day I thought I'd cast away
Passé restraints of Mother's day.
I found a man whose worldly ways
Would temper, "What would Mother say?"
His manner set me most at ease.
My hesitance he did decrease.
But when it came to full release
I couldn't.

The fault did not within him lie.
With all his charms he tried to ply
Me from my chaste and staid ways, shy,
Acceptable in my Mother's eye.
For my response he deftly pled,
And words of love he politely said,
But when he laid me on the bed
I wouldn't.

Now don't let sadness fill your heart
And think I wasted such a start.
I bravely strove to learn the art
To boldly all my love impart.
More ways of love to me he taught,
And soon we gained what I had sought,
Though when we did, I dutifully thought
I shouldn't.

The Anteater

by Ken Richardson

"Ants," he whispered to himself. "They move like ants."

He looked down on a large park from the tenth floor of a condominium he had lived in for several years. Dozens of people scurried through the park, many hurrying on their way home from work. Some seemed frenzied as they zigzagged across the narrow concrete pathways, emerged on the far side of the park and bolted across the street, dodging cars here and there. Others wandered aimlessly and slowly, lingering at a water fountain or straying from the pathways onto the grass. A few cradled babies in their arms as ants would carry larvae in their jaws.

From ten stories up the park seemed to be a huge ant colony inhabited by various members of the ant world—workers, soldiers, parasites and possibly a queen. He imagined predators slipping silently at night through the dark park ready to pounce on an unsuspecting victim in a modern-day survival of the fittest. He liked that image.

"Ants were made to step on," he muttered, "just like people," as he pressed his right foot into the rug, squashing hundreds of imaginary ants and people together until they became a formless mass of ant-people, who individually had been so numerous and so common that surely they were dispensable. Ant-people existed for one purpose—to be abused, and, in his profession, he did just that.

He was an Anteater with honeyed tongue that he uncoiled through jails, courts, tenements and posh suburbs, catching ant-people and money. Little ants, big ants, rich ants and even poor ants, especially poor ants when he was through with them. His name was Rex Gortha and he tore into a witness as an anteater would tear apart an anthill.

"I love to see people run and try to hide," he said once, when he was a public prosecutor. "Made no difference whether they were innocent or guilty; I just loved to see them run, knowing the guilty couldn't escape and seeing how many of the innocent got the shakes and the shits. Frightened, powerless people were like dumb, frantic ants."

Rex thought about a teenage, vehicular homicide case that ended in acquittal after four long years. "Sonofabitch, I lost it," he said to himself, after postponing it over and over and withholding information from the defense.

Delay was a favorite and frequent tactic of his, especially when trying common, ordinary working class people.

"This kid better think about pleading guilty or I'm going to financially ruin him and his family," he boasted, and later denied saying it, of course. The kid said he was not guilty, all evidence was finally produced and the jury acquitted him.

Despite this loss, Rex gloried in his power, even charging and arresting witnesses for failing to show up for a trial that he had postponed. Rex maintained that witnesses must appear, even if he postponed the hearing. The judge asked him, "What kind of a prosecutor would file contempt charges against witnesses for failing to attend a hearing that was not held? What kind of a dumb position is that?" The charges were dropped.

Boiling inside, Rex retreated from the courtroom and lashed out the next day by jailing a skinny, black teenager for more than a month, even though the local police insisted that he was the wrong person. They produced proof that Rex ignored for four weeks, until his supervisor ordered him to release the kid.

That was years ago. Although Rex was now in private practice, he remembered those losses which still made him angry, even tonight as he stared out of the window and watched the park get darker as the sun dipped lower behind the various city towers. He could feel himself stepping on ants, popping their hard little bodies, which had no inner skeleton but, instead, an outer armor made of a lightweight yet very firm substance called chitin. Chitin, ideal for the ant world, was of no defense against someone like Rex, who amused himself by stepping on ants when and where he found them.

He ground his other foot into the rug, this time crushing the skeletons of impotent people, who have no outer armor, no position, no political influence. Just ordinary folk. A few people stepped on today, several more this week, many during the past year, what does it matter, there are too many to keep track of. So many broken bones, so many bruised bodies, and, he smiled, so many purses to empty.

Rex was a financial predator. A very careful one who made sure that everything he did was legal. He merely used the law to legitimize his thievery, whether he was handling an estate or orchestrating a divorce settlement. Of course, he was wealthy and, of course, he was morally bankrupt.

He wasn't always immoral, but then, years ago, he was merely younger. During law school he pursued the truth, caught it often, and, in the catching, embraced concepts which seemed important, decent and honorable. Later, in legal practice, whenever he caught the truth, he imprisoned it because that was more lucrative.

"Tell me the truth and the truth shall set you free," he smiled at his victims, when he really meant, "so I can use it against you and in the process profit by it, handsomely."

Rex looked ten stories down on the ant-people and thought of the queen ant he was raping financially. She had an enormous seed bag which smelled sweet and dripped money. For months he had been figuratively licking and caressing her, just as the workers do with the queen ant in the colony, and getting her to the point of producing larvae and, in his case, largess.

The queen never suspected what was happening. She was old and tired, and seemingly carried millions of eggs in her bulging abdomen. She

was involved in a biological ritual that stretched forward from the very birth of the earth. And, Rex was engaged in a practice equally as old, as he plundered her estate, driving off her employees and handcuffing, legally, her daughters and sons.

"God, how I hate ants," he exclaimed to himself, "and ant-people." He turned from the window and sipped a brandy, secure in the knowledge that he was brilliant in his profession, adored by dozens of elitists and envied by scores of colleagues. However, Rex was completely unaware that he was despised by thousands, maybe millions, as word spread of his enmity toward ants and his abusive treatment of people.

As he readied himself for bed, ten stories up, Rex seemed safe from anything. Anything. Yet in the cool darkness of the park a stirring began. So silent that it was merely the suggestion of sound. So imperceptible that any motion seemed as still as a statue. And yet, they stirred. The ants. Some as small as one-twenty-fifth of an inch, others as large as a segment of your finger.

For months they had been gathering, converging quietly on The City. From town to town, they had moved unseen through the sewer system. Every living creature they encountered either fled or was consumed. Crickets, cockroaches, spiders, caterpillars, maggots. Dead rats were reduced to skeletons. A live caterpillar, overrun in an instant, was covered by dozens of ants, cut to pieces and fed to the marching hordes. There were wood ants, weaver ants, army ants, carpenter ants, meadow ants, even the fierce black ants of Brazil, the Azteca, which have been exported all over the world in the holds of ships and the luggage of tourists.

Many were natural enemies, yet they were now united in a common campaign. Imagine several million ants waiting patiently in the sewer system beneath the towers of The City and overflowing into the small ponds of its central park, filling them to the brim with black and brown and red bodies, stirring, breathing, waiting, until the townhouse had settled in sleep. Until the plumbing—showers, basins, toilets—no longer ran for the night. And then the ants moved. They surged through the sewer line to the plumbing stack and up the plumbing tree to the tenth floor where they exited, some surfacing through the toilet, others creeping up out of the drain into the basin or tub.

Noiselessly, a living wave of ants washed from the kitchen and bathroom into the hallway, filling it from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling. Their sheer mass quietly eased the bedroom door open and they slowly began to fill the room. Rex Gortha was sleeping the sleep of the just. Easy, untroubled breathing. Inhale, exhale. Not even a bit of a snore nor a soft sibilance escaped his lips. Inhale, exhale.

Hundreds of weaver ants had cut little sections of leaves from the trees in the park and had carried them through the piping, into the bedroom and onto the pillow. Now they were weaving them into plugs which would be inserted into the ears and nostrils of the Anteater. Quietly, ever so quietly, they gripped the edge of one leaf section with their jaws and hooked their legs onto the other. As soon as the leaves were brought together, workers came forward, each carrying larvae between its jaws. They started squeezing the larvae to stimulate the activity of large spinning glands located in the larvae's heads. A thin thread, stronger than spun steel, was forced out,

crisscrossed from one leaf to another and wound around and around the leaf sections until the plugs were formed.

While the weavers continued their plug-making on the pillow, millions of ants filled the room until they were level with the top of the mattress. Then, others built sixty degree ant walls from the edges of the bed to the upper corners of the room where the walls met the ceiling. By holding one another about the waist with their jaws, thousands of others created a blanket of ants which hung down and bellied out from the four corners. As yet not one ant had touched the Anteater. The room was becoming quite warm as the mass of ants not only restricted air circulation, but also provided an insulating effect. This close environment caused Rex to stir and his breathing became labored.

A chain of ants dangled from the ceiling blanket. The chain grew longer, ant by ant, as each climbed down into position, held by the ant above. Closer and closer the chain, swaying ever so slightly, approached the Anteater's face. The weaver ants on the pillow built a pyramid toward the chain and carried the plugs to the apex. The plugs were picked up by the swaying ant chain and gently positioned in the ears of the Anteater and inserted into his nostrils. Unable to breathe, the Anteater snorted and rolled onto his left side to turn on the night light. It clicked on as he struggled to rouse himself, propping himself up on one elbow. Rex opened his eyes and then he saw the ants—a surging sea of ants, surrounding his bed, extending up the walls and over the ceiling.

"Oh, my God," he exclaimed, "I must be dreaming." He sat upright, closed his eyes and shook his head for a few seconds as if to dismiss this frightful scene and then opened his eyes again. The ants were still there.

Disbelieving and yet believing at the same time, he sat in the center of the bed, as panic began to spread from his suddenly constricted throat, through his wildly beating heart and out into his extremities, which he pulled as close to him as possible. He wanted to run and hide. But how? Where? His eyes frantically searched the room for a door, a window, any way to escape. But, he could see none. There was no way out.

A great shudder passed through his body and the odor of feces and urine mingled with the formic acid which the ants had been excreting. The ants also started rubbing their legs together and a low moaning sound filled the room and penetrated the earplugs made by the weavers. Rex started moaning, too. Meaningless sounds issued from his huddled, pitiful form as he rocked back and forth on the bed. And the moaning of the ants grew louder as they became more active and began to climb over the foot and sides of the bed and move toward him. The Anteater clasped his arms about his drawn up legs ever more tightly than before and looked upward for help from his God, any god would do. He considered jumping off the bed, but realized he would sink in up to his knees in ants. "And, anyway, where is the door? If I tripped and fell they would be on me, filling my nostrils, clogging my ears, forcing their way into my mouth. Where is the door? The ants would bite and sting my face and crawl into my eyelashes and through my hair. They would cover me. Suffocate me. Where is the door?"

As Rex looked up again, the ceiling blanket of ants fell toward him. He screamed and died within seconds as an aneurysm burst in his brain with a palpable pop that sounded like the body of a chitin-encased creature being crushed. He fell backward onto the pillow, eyes and mouth wide open as some of the ants tumbled in and slid down his throat. Within several hours the

millions of ants had all disappeared except one who wandered around in the empty brandy glass on his nightstand.

The next day when Rex failed to show up in court, some co-workers went looking for him. They rounded up the landlord and together they found him dead. The police arrived and concluded he had died of natural causes, since there was no sign of foul play.

"Poor guy, living alone up here," one policeman said, "no one around when he suffered a stroke or heart attack. Well, at least, he had one last drink."

As they checked the room out, they noticed a solitary ant barely stirring in a brandy glass. "What do you know, here's a drinking buddy," the other cop said. "Look at that ant in the bottom of the glass. Staggering around from brandy fumes, I guess. Wonder how it got here. Don't see any others on the night table."

"It's odd," said the first policeman, bending down to get a closer look, "how ants seem to be everywhere, even way up here, ten floors above the ground."

"Well," said the other cop, with a chuckle, "maybe we should check Gortha out to see if he has ants in his pants."

"Ants in his pants?" remarked the first cop, "From the stink in this room he has more than ants in his pants. And I'm not checking that out. I'll leave that examination for the coroner, thank you."

As they turned to leave the room, the first policeman stuck his index finger into the glass, pulled out the ant and crushed it between his forefinger and thumb.

"Goodbye, dumb ant," he muttered, as he flicked it onto the floor.

A Child's View of F. Scott Fitzgerald

by Marjory McMickle

Dinner at Scottie's house! I could hardly contain my excitement. Our friendship proved the old adage, "Opposites attract." Classmates in the fifth grade at a staid private school for girls in Baltimore, Scottie and I had vastly different backgrounds. My parents were conservative. They insisted that I show respect for authority, and they frowned on any sort of impropriety. Scottie had been allowed to express herself freely, even to imitating coquettish starlets she had met in Hollywood. Who else in our class but Scottie could wink and bat her eyelashes at our young male instructor when asking for help with a math problem?

Our regular teacher had scant success in curbing the exuberant chatter of the impetuous girl who so fascinated the class the fall of 1932. As for me, I felt the magnetic effect of Scottie's audacity as much as the exotic content of her conversation. No wonder Mother at first vetoed the invitation. She had heard that this child even ate salad with her fingers. Suppose some of her wild ways rubbed off on me? Hastily, I brought up an ally, my teacher. In a conference earlier, she had suggested we "make allowances for the poor child," considering her parents, her father a writer and her mother—almost whispering—"under treatment for a nervous disorder." Persuaded by this more charitable view, Mother allowed me to accept the invitation.

So now at last I was on my way to the Fitzgeralds. Mother's motto had been, "Good blood always tells." Whatever her shortcomings, Scottie had the advantage of good breeding. Mr. Fitzgerald had come from an old Maryland family, though he was somewhat a Bohemian, not at all like my father, who was every inch a gentleman, never setting foot outside his bedroom door in less than full business attire. As we reached the house, Mother cautioned, "No matter how Scottie and her father behave, YOU must remember your manners."

The first shock came when Mr. Fitzgerald opened the door. He wore an old, partially buttoned shirt, slacks and no shoes. "On Sunday? To welcome company for dinner?" I wondered. "What next?" After yelling for his daughter, my host led me to the living room, sat down opposite me and asked about school. Scottie flounced in, plopped down on the sofa beside me, made a face at the word "school" and rolled her eyes to indicate boredom. Next, Mr. Fitzgerald wanted to know about my family. I mentioned my mother's interest in genealogy and her activities in the D.A.R. With a touch of self-

mockery, he offered comment on his family tree. Was I aware that his full name was Frances Scott Key Fitzgerald? Before I could reply, he suddenly barked at his daughter, "Sit up! Act like a lady! I can see your underpants and clear up to your navel."

I blushed. Scottie giggled. The housekeeper announced dinner. Mr. Fitzgerald abruptly disappeared, only to rejoin us in a clean shirt and shoes. He still wore no tie, but I barely noticed that. I was eating my soup slowly and carefully, as I had been taught, when my host jumped up and ran to the fireplace behind me. "Here, Mousie," he called, scooping an imaginary animal from the mantel and pretending to drop it into my soup. I flinched.

Scottie explained that her father often played practical jokes on her guests. "Sit down now, Daddy," she commanded and he obeyed. "Let's eat dinner like ladies and gentlemen." Obviously these words were another joke, because she took her roast chicken in both hands, licking the gravy off her fingers after every bite.

I longed to follow suit, but I didn't dare abandon my training. It was something to hang onto, in this unreal situation. I made an effort to find a topic that might interest my host. "They're going to make a movie of *The Little Colonel*, with Shirley Temple."

"When? Where did you hear that?" he demanded.

"I read it in the paper."

"DAMN!" he thundered, banging his fist on the table, making the dishes jump. "I wanted to write that picture!" He glared at us for a moment, then shrugged off his outburst, muttering about who cares who writes what in Hollywood, "that damn place."

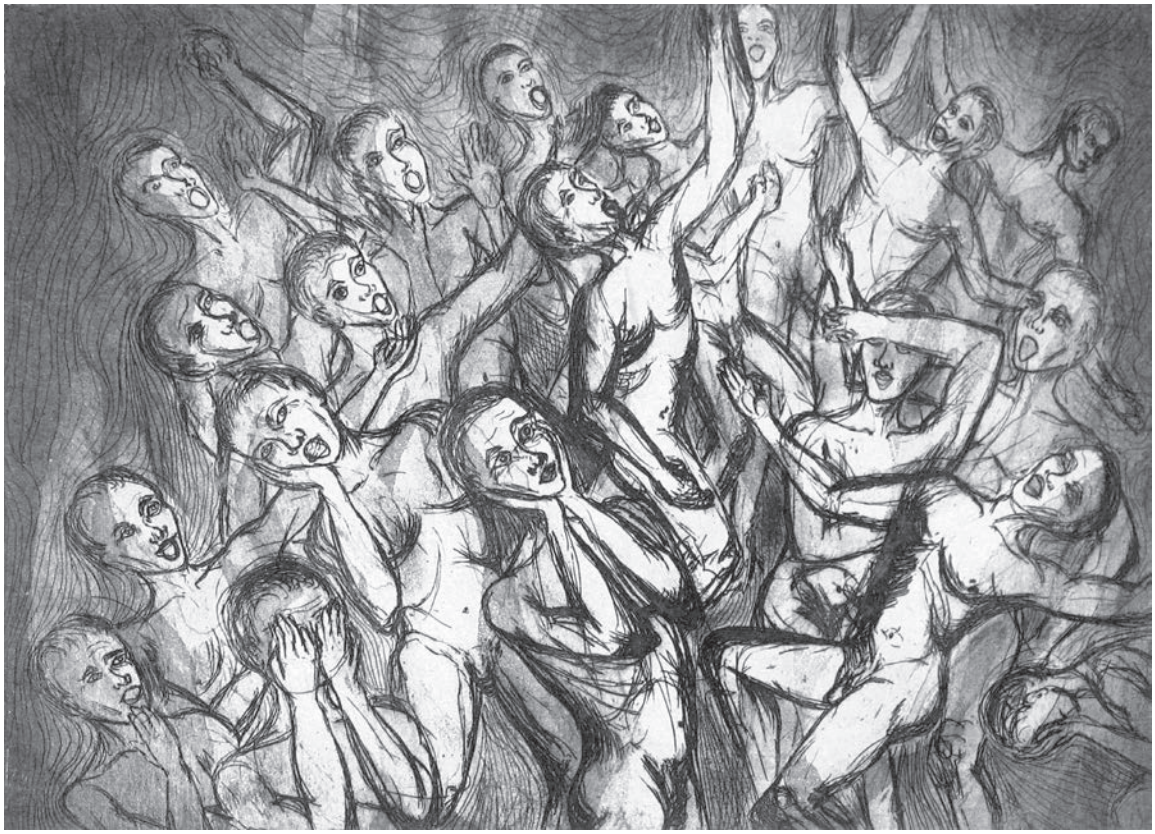
Though Scottie never batted an eye, I was shaken. I began gobbling my dessert, making no effort to be ladylike. Things were different here. In my world, fathers—my father—never swore. Well, certainly not in the dining room. This was another world altogether.

In her room, Scottie showed me scrapbooks of autographed photos from Hollywood, land of make-believe. A cab arrived to take me back to the real world. It was my first taxi ride, but it made no impression after the events of that memorable afternoon. I was under the spell of a uniquely colorful personality. I still felt the alien quality of life in the Fitzgerald household, so utterly different from my own.

As Winters Pass

by Tom Schlicht

One chill March night I muse on old December,
who longed to love a nubile nymph named May.
He hoped to turn dead ashes into embers
or cancel night and resurrect the day.
But from his lusty sighs May shrank. Though hot
with love, his touch was cold. When he caressed
her knolls and dales, her darling buds, the spot
of moss where limbs meet trunk—she fled, distressed.
Slowly, I rise to stoke the ash-filled grate.
A sudden flash—I hear the thunder boom
and wonder, Where is he now, old reprobate
December? I sense his presence in this room.
There! I see him in the falling rain,
in the window, in the window pane.



Force From Above, by Julie Pretell

Heroes

by Daryl Sherman

They were shining examples, heroes,
Warriors of wars gone by:
In their high glory as peerless leaders,
Neither ever fired a gun at another human,
But millions of soldiers did, and died, at their orders,
Fighting wars, "you politicians started,
"But we soldiers must finish," one said,
His armor burnished bright by fame,
Victorious in a bloody unCivil War,
An inspiration to lads awed by the glory,
The pageantry, the drama, the allure of war.
"Don't you believe it," he said.
"They say war is all glory,
"But I tell you war is all hell."

Wm. T. Sherman

Another, generations and wars later,
A leader of disparate allies,
Holding them to a common purpose,
As perhaps no one else could,
Leading to victory in the largest,
(I won't say greatest),
Bloodiest, most destructive war ever,
But not the most savage,
For who can judge savage, horrible, soul searing,
But those who pass through it?
Each savage and terrifying beyond measure to those in it.
How did this leader see it?
What inspiring tales did he tell?
"I hate war as only a soldier can,

"As one who has seen its Brutality,
"Its Stupidity,
"Its Futility."
Dwight David Eisenhower

BUT,
We have learned from neither.
Must we always fight another cruel and senseless war,
And another and another,
Because we will only learn
The wisdom they taught,
By experiencing it ourselves?
Experiencing it over and over and over?

The Awakening

by Joanne Lee Storlie

Casper Diehl was probably the worst thing that could happen to a girl, and there he was, grinning at her from across the gymnasium with those big lips and oversized teeth. Why Miss Dibbley, the gym teacher, had deemed it necessary to bring natural enemies together to "practice the social graces" was beyond Joanie, who never, ever, in her life intended to spend a minute more than she had to in the presence of boys, with their constant exhibitionism, appalling manners and childish behavior. Bad enough that the playground, the classroom and the lunchroom had to be shared with the likes of them. Now this intrusion on her gym period—the only respite she had from them during the day—was maddening.

Everything about him was embarrassing. Feet and hands too big; arms and legs too long; hair and pants too short. What's more, she positively hated his red hair, especially when it looked like it had been cut with a hedge trimmer at home, and those freckles! Maybe if he weren't taller than all the other boys in the fifth grade and so skinny—well, not skinny exactly but, how is it they describe Lincoln? Oh yes, gangly!—he wouldn't be so repulsive. Actually he wasn't that bad to talk to. She once worked on a school report with him and he didn't act smart alecky or pesky like most. It's just that the other girls made such fun of him and…

Please don't let him be my partner, she thought, as Miss Dibbley directed her charges to form two lines opposite each other, boys on one side, girls on the other. Immediately several of the boy crazy girls—those who were already wearing makeup and whose sweaters revealed a betrayal of childhood—vied for the attention of their favorite boys—recent conquests who had demonstrated by knowing remarks and roving eyes their willingness to substitute personality for proportion. Joanie, seeking to separate herself from such mammalian madness, slid unobtrusively to the end of the line with downcast eyes. When Miss Dibbley shouted over the disorganized movement, "Now turn and face your partners," Joanie looked up just in time to see Casper maneuvering himself into the line directly across from her.

The next few moments were misery beyond words. Faltering movements, fumbling grasps and fretful glances accompanied Miss Dibbley's instructions to get into position. Awkwardly they strove to assume the proper stance; instinctively they prepared for flight or fight. When at last they reached

haltingly for each other—he hunched, she heightened—they looked a little like reluctant contenders for some sort of gender title.

The touch of his hand was absolutely repugnant—dry, rough and scratchy like the sandpaper in her father's workshop. And the arm he placed awkwardly around her waist—awkwardly because he was so much taller than she—felt bony and out of place. Being shorter than he had its advantages, though. With her eyes level with his frayed shirt collar, she didn't have to meet his furtive glances of adoration and expectancy. Standing as far from him as she could, she prayed the next record would be mercifully short and retreated with practiced resistance to life's impositions behind closed eyes.

Static and the rasp of a phonograph needle seeking to gain a footing on a worn and slippery track accompanied Miss Dibbley's announcement that the next number would be a waltz. Then over her grating and repetitious one two three counting, the music began.

Joanie was instantly transported; music had always had a captivating effect on her. Maybe it was the result of the piano lessons she'd had since she was five which occasioned the closeness of her mother on the piano bench during daily practice. Maybe it was the family sing-alongs on holidays when she would sit as close to her father as she could after he would no longer hold her on his lap. Maybe it was the old tunes her mother sang while doing the household tasks or the songs from the musicals that she and her sister frequently saw at the movie theater and incorporated into their make-believe play. Whatever it was, music reached inside her and brought into consciousness yearnings she could never clearly identify.

They were vaguely familiar feelings, but different somehow. More. With the here and now denied entry by shuttered lids, scenes from her childhood slipped effortlessly into view. In each she was the recipient of something which she now yearned to give. She saw herself in her mother's arms—the time her world turned upside down because her best friend, Suzie, found another best friend—held tightly against her nurturing breasts, soothed, comforted, her sobs and tears smothered into oblivion. But now, strongly added to that, was a desire to sooth and comfort, to hold something against her own chest, to blend, to meld, to disappear.

She saw herself on her father's lap, rescued from a nightmare about having no legs with which to escape from threatening shadowy figures. Roused from his sleep by her intruding screams, he had jumped from his bed unclothed and taken her to their favorite chair in the living room where he whispered reassuring words in soft tones and stroked her hair—the warmth of his body and the touch of his skin dissipating her fears and dispelling all harm. She longed to recapture the rapture of that moment, to feel again the exquisite sense of exclusiveness, of specialness and utter completeness.

And now the vision before her did not include her; it incorporated her. Two young lovers from a war film she'd seen, dancing in a dimly lit pavilion the night before a ship would take him off to war, close, their bodies tight against each other, their arms enfolding one another, their lips touching softly, then fervently. She felt their longing for—what? She had no word for it. It felt like love, the love she felt for her parents, but it was different somehow. Compelling. Seeking. Touch me; enter me; know me; become me.

The record ended and opening her eyes, she found the distance between their bodies lessened. And for a moment, just one moment, she desired to remain, forever, Joanie in the fifth grade dancing with Casper Diehl. She felt no repugnance or embarrassment or shyness. Only a drawing to, an urging toward, an aching for.

Glancing up into his eyes, tenderness rushed from every pore of her body, making her feel momentarily dizzy and flushed. And when he released her, emptiness rushed in, sending a shiver of inconsolable loss over her. Just before the enchantment ended, she caught the scent of his freshly laundered shirt and noticed that his hand had softened in an emollient of empathy and emotion.

She never danced with Casper again, but for years, whenever she heard the "Blue Skirt Waltz," she remembered the heightened sense of awareness she experienced as she hurried home from school that day—the cold she felt on limbs and face and the warmth she felt in a softer place.

Winning Marshall Park, by Joan Mish

Re: Tired

by David Hyson

Finally, the vaunted laurel:
The smug-shock of sitting at home,
No place or time do we have to be.
These walls do need painting;
I wonder what color they should be?

Ennui soon drives us to
Sublimated actions of charity, or
Rationalized self-pampering:
Did not we earn this right
To a Senior's altruism and/or self-indulgence?

As the morning paper is
Glossed with our cataracts,
Do we espy a familiar name—
There, in the obituaries
Is our long time friend.

A nostalgic but dutiful task
Looms as we sort our photos—
Which ones reveal
What we best remember?
Hide that one, please.

While on geriatric peregrination
We feel some vague ache—
Physicians soon inquire,
"Surprised, who is your actuary?
Your mortality is assured."

To our somber mortician
We submit our plans—
"Would you like this casket?"
"I'd rather not."
(It costs a lot.)

At a Loss for Words

by April Hoffman

At 67 I'm aging fast. My joints ache; I regret some major life decisions and I envy people who believe in an afterlife. But most disturbing is the loss of my cognitive abilities. One by one, I'm losing words.

It is small words I can no longer remember. Words such as *track*, *oven* and *spade*. Where did they go? Does my brain absorb them the way my body absorbs bruises? And I'm terrified of what this means: that I am heading irrevocably into that dark night.

I denied my mortality for years. Turning 40 and needing reading glasses didn't faze me. A new career had tricked me into thinking that my life was just beginning. Ten years later, at 50, a cool tattoo encouraged me to believe that I could remain forever young—or at least in the ball park.

My moment of truth, the truth I believed I had outfoxed, occurred one morning at work. Typing up a book review, I forgot how to spell *achievement*. A champion speller, I hadn't misspelled a word since Dad told me that poor spellers were merely lazy readers; that any attentive reader could spell. In yet another effort to impress him, I had studied hard and was the last to sit down at every class spelling bee.

So on that morning I grabbed the dictionary, looked up *achievement* and assumed I had burned its spelling into my memory. A few weeks later, I forgot how to spell it again. That happened years ago and I still have to look it up every time I need it. And, alas, now other words are joining its ranks.

On car trips as a child, I sat in the backseat poring over the tiny print on state maps trying to discern how towns were christened. A triumphant day for me came a few weeks after starting high school Latin. We were driving through Indiana when I saw it. "Dad," I called to the front seat, "Is it called *Terre Haute* because it is on high land?" His nonchalant affirmation didn't fool me. I knew he was impressed. Dad loved words, too.

But he didn't love them the way Mom did. Mom's interaction with language resembled a romance. She once pulled open my bedroom curtains while reciting Robert Louis Stevenson's "Time to Rise," and she loved repeating phrases from the Little Golden Books she bought me on each trip to the grocery store. If I had misbehaved and was trying to hide, she would wink at me and quote Uncle Remus, "And B'rer Rabbit? He lay low." It got so I dreaded any mention of Edna Saint Vincent Millay if Mom was around.

Unfailingly, she would smile brightly, repeat the name in sing-song cadence and say, "Now isn't that a perfect name for a poet?"

Dad loved ferreting out the etymologies of words, but his vocabulary consisted mainly of profanities. If I was the champion speller, Dad was the champion cusser. He swore constantly. Hard as I tried, I could never match him, and I did try. Once when I was seven or eight, after letting loose with a whole fiery streak of *bad words*, I beamed at him expecting his approval. He merely shrugged and quoted Mark Twain, "You've got the right words but the wrong tune."

Dad's propensity for swear words, coupled with his disinterest in me, caused one instance of family hilarity. Whenever I asked him a word's meaning, he'd dismiss me by saying, "Figure it out." When I was about eight, one of these words was *obituary*.

A few years later, as Dad and I sat in the living room after dinner one evening, he called into the kitchen to tell Mom that someone they knew was in the obituaries. Confused, I asked him what he meant. When he explained, I felt both shocked and disconcerted to learn that Dad didn't know what the word *obituary* meant. I told him that an *obituary* was something else entirely.

This was against house rules. Neither Mom nor I ever questioned or contradicted Dad, but at thirteen I'd begun noticing that The Emperor sometimes wore no clothes. My disdainful tone startled him and brought Mom out of the kitchen, nervously twisting a dish towel in her hands.

"Well!" he retorted angrily, "Why don't YOU tell ME what an *obituary* is?"

"Fine!" I said, "An *oldbitchuary* is an old ladies' home." Following a short silence, Mom and Dad burst out laughing. They had to admit that it made perfect sense.

All of my life I've loved rubbing shoulders with words. When I became a librarian, I deliberately chose an environment swimming with them. It never occurred to me that words could get lost and that as an old lady I'd be spending my precious time searching for them.

Contributors

Dave Berger has been writing plays in Madison for a dozen years. In an earlier life, he was an ad agency research director. Dave is grateful to in-house critic Barbara and to writing buddies Frank, Jane, Kim, and George.

Beverly Blahnik states, "Nebraska is my lodestar, not Nebraska now, but in the thirties. The whole state is laid out on a grid, and they're proud that no road was paved until it could be paid for in cash. Iowa provided my enlightenment: education and employment. It all comes together here, in God's Country."

Grethe Brix-J. Leer, a native of Denmark, has exhibited her visual art in both Denmark and America. She has been writing memoirs and journals for most of her life. In America, she was an early childhood teacher and taught memoir writing to older adults in Chicago for several years.

Ruth Calden grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan and after graduating from the University of Michigan came to Madison where she taught in the public schools. A mother of four, a recorder and Inca flute player, she is a perennial student of Spanish and a lover of books and cats.

Mary Collet has found the written word to be a source of inspiration and enjoyment since childhood. "An English major who frequents the library more than the mall, I worked as a technical editor for the Forest Service and have edited several community newsletters. Experiences that touch my spirit call for poetry."

Gordon Cunningham served in WW II from 1942 through 1946 and married Vera Galli in 1946. He earned a BS from Michigan State in 1948 and a PhD in 1966. In 1950 he earned his MS at Penn State. Cunningham taught forestry, mostly to landowners, at the University of Illinois–Urbana from 1949 to 1954. He taught at Cornell University from 1954 to 1961 and at UW-Madison from 1963 through 1983, when he retired.

George Faunce and his wife Maggie are retired public school educators from New Jersey. After over 60 years on the east coast, they moved to Sun Prairie in 2008 to be near their son, Jason. (Jason moved to Wisconsin in 2000 to get away from his parents.)

Mariana Hewson is a retired medical educator interested in cultural differences between the west and Africa. She is particularly interested in both African traditional healing and science teaching. As a South African native, she lived and studied in England and eventually came to the United States 26 years ago. She is an author, researcher and teacher.

April Hoffman retired as Madison's Randall School librarian and began taking studio art classes at MATC as well as private memoir writing classes. Gardening, however, is her true calling. She also enjoys reading and discussing historical children's literature with a group of friends.

David Hyson has been a Madison resident for 42 years. Married with two daughters, he earned a BS from Marquette University and an MS from UW-Madison. He was a vocational rehabilitation counselor at nonprofit agencies and for the State of Wisconsin. He was a dance band musician from 1941 to 1955 and a tennis player from 1936 to 2009. "Retirement has been somewhat over-rated—but medical establishment is providing its best."

Norman Leer, a professor emeritus of English at Roosevelt University, Chicago, has published three books of poetry, a critical study of Ford Madox Ford and articles and poems in numerous magazines. In 1990, he received the Illinois Significant Poet's Award from state Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks.

Anne Lundin is professor emerita, University of Wisconsin–Madison, School of Library and Information Studies. Making Madison home since 1993, she is married to Tom Lovett and has two children, Emily and Karl Lundin, and one grandchild, Tallulah Lundin. "Life is grand, especially PLATO classes that inspire poems."

Ellen Maurer retired from the University of Wisconsin–Madison as Senior University Relations Specialist in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. She leads PLATO's morning reminiscence writing group. She and her husband, Ken Pippert, enjoy a little lake cottage in northern Wisconsin where they canoe, hike, bike and geocache.

Gail McCoy creates collages and watercolor paintings. Her work provides a means of introspection as well as a grounding in the powerful and universal experience of nature. She is represented at Grace Chosy Gallery, Madison, and High Street Gallery in Mineral Point. She is on the board of the Wisconsin Regional Artists Association and a member of Wisconsin Visual Artists.

Marjory McMickle worked on codes for army intelligence after graduation from Goucher College in 1942. A postwar vacation led her to Madison, where she eventually made her home. "I enjoy my volunteer job filing regional expressions for DARE, a job that is useful in my creating outlandish rhymes for friends' birthdays. I also enjoy nature walks with family around Madison."

Joan Mish is a former middle school librarian who has become passionate about photography in retirement. "I used to help the art teacher with a class in photography after school. I learned lots. I am a widow who likes to travel and have volunteered in seven different national parks around the United States."

Julie Pretell has maintained an interest in art throughout her career as an immunology researcher and practicing hematopathologist. Her early work was in life drawing and acrylic and oil painting, but after retirement she joined the digital revolution and has become more focused on digital imagery, animation and photography.

Ken Richardson worked in journalism, public relations, advertising, market research, marketing and product management for more than 40 years. Storytelling became an outlet for various frustrations. Along the way Ken picked up a BS from Boston University and an MBA from the University of Hartford.

Shirley Schildkraut was widowed at 61. "Testing the luxury of leisure left me thoughtless and empty. I attended a writing class and thanks to Jeri McCormick, my instructor, I was encouraged to verbalize my thoughts and emotions—sometimes an agonizingly slow process. The times when words flowed—I wrote poetry."

Tom Schlicht taught in the Azores for one year and in Germany for 29 years with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools and the University of Maryland. Retired since 1994, he now enjoys golf and leading PLATO classes on religion and mythology.

Wil Selbrede has been writing essays, memoirs, a few poems and a lot of short stories since his retirement in 1987, and has a very limited edition, 446-page hard cover book, *My Writing Journey*, to show for his long-continued interest in creative writing.

Daryl Sherman was educated in one-room schools where he was allowed the run of the school libraries. “I read literally everything. A biologist, I favor literature and history for leisure reading. A Green Beret in divided Berlin, I started thinking of the futility of conflict between peoples. I am active in Veterans for Peace.”

Enid Simon was born in Langlade County, grew up on a farm there and has lived in Wisconsin all of her life. “My degrees are from the UW in Madison and I worked for a number of years at the Engineering Library on campus. I firmly believe that if someone reads for pleasure she or he is capable of writing. At least it worked for me.”

Joanne Lee Storlie turned to writing at an early age, when spoken words failed her either because she dared not utter them or because no one was listening. Her propensity for protest led to prolific, passionate letters to editors, but finding they fail to prevent wars or ameliorate other obscene political situations, she often turns to gentler fare.

Barbara Taylor and her husband moved to Olympia, Washington, March 17th, to be clos**e**r to their children and grandson. “We are enjoying our times together. The PLATO classes in Madison were always an inspiration. What a great opportunity to learn among fellow enthusiasts. I continue to write, these magnificent evergreens my muse.”

Jean Wilcox retired and moved with her husband to Madison after raising three children and counseling university students in Eau Claire. “In Madison I am pursuing all of the things that I never had time for before—like writing poetry. I am in that totally satisfying pause.”

Myrna Williamson is a retired archivist. “I began writing poetry fifteen years ago when I couldn’t find an appropriate birthday card for my son. I delight in the joy and creative expression of finding words, rhymes, puns—whatever expresses most precisely my experience, thoughts and feelings.”

Ordering Information

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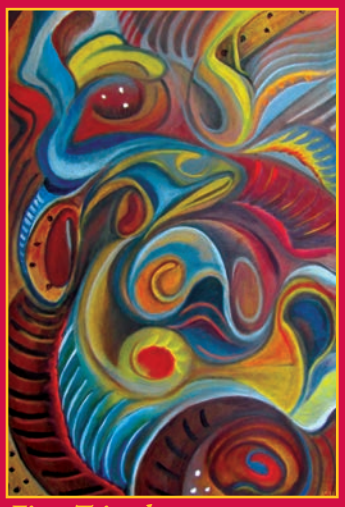

First Tricycle

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April Hoffman

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Ellen Maurer

Gail McCoy

Joan Mish

Julie Pretell

FICTION

David Berger

Mariana Hewson

Ken Richardson

Enid Simon

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NONFICTION

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