

Trestle | CREEK | Review

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CONTENTS

FICTION

<i>Chris Locke</i>	Monotony	9
<i>Dan Sinensky</i>	Interview from Federal Medical Center, Carswell, Fort Worth, Texas, federal civilian death row . . .	24
<i>Dot Dittman</i>	Garden Plots	41

POETRY

<i>Erin Davis</i>	Apology	5
	Found Out	6
	Garden Grove	7
<i>May Jordan</i>	Saint Agnes	12
	The Bag	14
<i>Jack Davis</i>	Artist Classification	21
<i>Aubrey Stribling</i>	Snow White	22
<i>Danielle Combs</i>	laundromat	26
	mac n cheese shells	27
	wait	28
<i>Ameerah Bader</i>	Cremation	30
	Every Fucking Day You Slaughter Me	31
<i>Lucas Brown</i>	Rain after the Storm	48
	Public Apology	49
<i>Elizabeth Dominique</i>	Two Haiku	43
<i>Claire Price</i>	To conquer the thorny life	44
<i>Timothy Pilgrim</i>	Reliving Vietnam at the Dillon, Montana, class reunion	46
<i>Stephen Sapp</i>	Autumn's Immanence	49

NONFICTION

<i>Bonnie Gilbert</i>	What Remains	16
<i>Claire Price</i>	Travel Notes: Saltillo, Mexico	32
<i>R. R.</i>	Suspended in One Place	50

OTHER PROSE

<i>Dan Sinensky</i>	Pedigree	35
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VISUAL

<i>Leo Schnepf</i>	Monica	8
	Cinematic	25
	GQ	36
	Vogue	37
<i>Josh Straub</i>	A Lone Soldier	15
<i>Joshua Blakley</i>	Car Spiral	29
	Glacier National Park	48
<i>Taylor Politte</i>	Solid	40

CONTRIBUTORS	52
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Note: An arrow (→) at the bottom of the page means no stanza break.

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APOLOGY

I'm sorry that
the meadow has not drained
and is flooded murky brown
I'm sorry that
the trees, still grey,
shake their skeletal arms in the wind—
that the buds on their skin
are still prepubescent
and unpromising
I'm sorry that
it snowed after spring break
that I wore wool socks
to Palm Sunday mass
and that the deer ate the tulip
next to the mailbox

But most of all
I'm sorry that
I asked you to define your terms
and provide examples—
that I asked you
to put shape to assumptions
and form to assertions
that you would prefer
to keep sleeping
and safe
from probing
under the thick
dense
April ground

FOUND OUT

I've got that fraudulent feeling,
Like my work is nothing more than gum
On the bottom of a real poet's shoe.

Like I've enrolled in a course
Without meeting the prerequisites.

Like the stanzas I send out into cyberspace
Have already been written,
Are in fact illegal adoptions,
Botched abortions,
Of select, sacred texts.

Like I've acquired my images by requisition,
Didn't even say please,
For ideas illegally confiscated

And soon
I will be found out, punished,

Sentenced to a life term
At open mic night
In a bookstore coffee shop

Where I am forced to read
My bastard verses
In an endless loop
To the English faculty from my alma mater
While I am naked
And they are clothed
In caps and gowns
And righteous disappointment.

GARDEN GROVE

My son says this place is ugly.
Everything is cement,
And there are hardly any trees.
It would be weird to live here, he says
of the place where he lived the first six years
of his fourteen-year-old life.
And it's true that there are no rivers here,
No towering pines, no wandering moose,
No rolling green hills,
No tulips,
No clean horizons.

But still, I want to say,

The tree that towered
over our tight little tract home
was majestic.
And your toddling bare feet tingled

with amazement
when they walked over our
working class
Saint Augustine grass.
And nothing was grander than the view from our porch
on the fourth of July,
the night no less magical
for being artificially lit
by fireworks
from Disneyland
in the warm, smoggy sky.



MONICA

MONOTONY

He took the pills for the pain. That is what he told himself, and he almost believed it too. Malcom had shaken out two of the purple pills into his palm. He took them without water. Then he set the bottle of Oxycontin down on the bathroom counter. Malcom straightened his tie in the mirror. He went to put the bottle back into the pocket of his dark suit jacket. He thought better, and shook out one more purple pill. He usually took three (he always took three), so why not? He felt he needed it this morning. His back had that twinge. He pulled his suit coat off its wooden hanger and he was ready to leave. He pulled his gas mask on while opening the front door.

The smog was bad today, he thought as he left the house. There was less than five feet of visibility. He had seen it worse. This wasn't right, he thought. This was normal. He put one foot in front of another. He found himself at his coffee shop.

He sat in his normal booth and drank his black coffee. He read the paper as usual. It was mostly a picture montage of destruction with small captions. Malcom loved those symbolic squiggles beneath the pictures. They convey thoughts. He treasured those bits of writing. One sequence of pictures included a map that showed the Zombie front lines. They were still held by the Rocky Mountains. There were pictures that he assumed were of the victors standing over the remains of putrefied corpses. This picture story took up all of page three. At the bottom it said, "Winning the war."

He suspected this was a war that would never be won. The onslaught of the zombies had been going on as long as he could remember. The Northwest was on its own, Seattle, the capital of the world. There were changes in the so-called boundary line, but never more than a few miles either way. Bored of death, he flipped to page four of the newspaper. There were four pictures and a caption. The first three were of gray skies. Nothing new to Malcom—it was the same sky he'd walked here under. There was a small speck in each of the first three pictures. The fourth was a close up of a ring-necked dove. The caption said, "Birds not extinct?" He couldn't believe it. He imagined the birds with their elongated fluffy feathers. There hadn't been a recorded bird sighting in over fifty years, not since the bombs

dropped. This was long before Malcom had come into the world. Through the high of painkillers, he felt he should feel something about this. Instead he folded his paper, finished his black coffee, and paid his bill with a generous tip. He headed to work.

As he exited the coffee shop, he pulled his gas mask back on. He put one foot in front of the other. The smog had lightened a bit, the gray was less encompassing. Or his Oxys were really kicking in. Lifting his gas mask, he popped another purple pill as he walked. The pain in his back was a steady throb, but he wasn't too worried. He didn't think he would need his second pill today. He usually did (he always did).

He popped his second purple pill (fifth). The stone building came into view soon after. He thought the smog might have receded enough to take his mask off. He didn't; the mask wasn't right, but it was normal. The hexagonal-windowed building loomed up ahead. Most of the buildings around it were nothing but rubble. The King County Courthouse was a monument to survival. Most of the windows were still intact.

He walked up the six flights of stairs to the floor where his office was located. He tried not to count the floors. He didn't need to. He knew what the door looked like, and it was labeled, *six*. He counted anyway.

Malcom wrote the newspaper. He was the lone writer because news was now mostly visual. Ads were entirely visual. They even hung from stop lights, not that people drove. The lights, green, yellow, and red, made no sense. They continued to blink through phases: yellow, red, and green. "Green meant go." Malcom wrote that line in a story. It was a paragraph summary of a picture monogram about the failing and unfaultable market. It showed a strange array of drunk clean and dirty sober. He found irony in that and wrote about the fiery explosion that burst out of the light-initiated collision.

In reality the lights had become unanimously green. Malcom wrote for hours on these events. He wrote commentary. He wrote apologies. He wrote poetry. He wrote his hopes. He wrote his dreams. He took many Oxys, probably twelve (nineteen) a day. He put one foot in front of another. This *was* normal. This *was right*.

They took it all away from him. The editing board took everything. "Three word maximum!" Rule number one. Everything he wrote was dismantled, demolished, and whittled to three words. He took his fourth (tenth) purple pill with

lunch. When he clocked out at five he was on his sixth (thirteenth). It looked very gray indeed, but also he felt good. Work was done. Good or bad, the end of the day was here. He took a purple pill while a tear ran from his eye.

Malcom counted *one* as he hit his last stair. The smog was coming back in. He pulled his gas mask over his face as he stepped outside. He put one foot in front of another. He had taken his fourteenth pill and was in need. He had taken it hours ago it seemed. He was ready for his usual five to lay him out. He would wake tomorrow. He would get up and take his two (three) pills. He would go drink his black coffee. He would read his paper. He would write his paper. He would see it destroyed. He thought tonight he just might take them all. He knew his government lied, but Malcom wanted nothing more than truth. He would throw himself off the Space Needle to know the truth of gravity. He understood the reality of gravity, his bones would break if he jumped from something more than, say, thirty feet.

This *was not* right, but it *was* normal. Malcom made his way home. He put one foot in front of another down the dingy street and looked up to see a newspaper flapping toward him. He ducked under it as it flapped over him. For just a moment he imagined it was a bird, a beautiful white dove with a black ring around its neck. He imagined that this bird soared above him and the white disappeared into the gray smog, that it flew high above the clouds of smog and into more natural water vapor. He imagined it flying away into the sunset. It was time to cut down on the Oxys, or take the whole bottle. He didn't really care which. He put one foot in front of another. It was time to go home.

SAINT AGNES

One slow night
 in the emergency room,
 after a few abrasions
 and a head laceration,
 the station clock smiles
 that I have one hour
 until I am off duty.
 I pull my last metal chart
 out of its rack,
 and cradle it like a baby,
 and walk into the waiting room.
 I pronounce a woman's name,
 we'll call her Agnes.
 A beautiful woman with
 long ash-brown hair stands.
 Her left hand is wrapped
 in a bulk of paper towels.
 I take her amputated fingers,
 iced in a baggie,
 from her husband.

In the room, as she's lying on the bed,
 she says, "I don't want to know
 what it looks like."
 I write down her last tetanus shot,
 and then peel back the paper towels.
 I see what she fears.
 It is not a clean cut.
 I've seen this kind of damage before.
 Her index, middle, and ring fingers
 were severed by a table saw.
 I have her dangle her hand
 into the stainless steel pan;
 as I start to scrub
 and sterilize her mangled fingers,
 they keep bleeding droplets
 and turning the water red.

→

Fatigue thoughts enter my head:
 Will he still think she's beautiful,
 now forever marred?
 I believe God will,
 she matters to Him.

Then I notice her husband standing still
 and fading into the wall.
 I say to him, "Move your legs,
 don't faint on me."
 She begins to laugh.
 And he laughs.
 The tense air becomes loose.
 The night surgeon walks in,
 and I am called
 to another room on a code blue.

THE BAG

By my husband's bed side,
 I turn the plastic ID bracelet
 on his warm wrist
 while I wait for him to wake.
 I am not ready yet.
 I touch his dark mustache,
 and remember how he strokes it
 in a particular rhythm
 on those simple, breezy days
 as we sit and watch
 the oat beards blow
 like silk, yellow scarves
 across the pastures.

I wander down to the cafeteria.
 I cannot eat.
 I climb the stairs back thinking
 of how he'll take the shock.
 Above his door the red light is on.
 He knows. Of course he knows.
 I walk in. The shadows are sharp.
 It's not good, but it's not evil either.
 He turns his head towards me,
 tightens his jaw bone, "Here," he says,
 tossing the colostomy bag,
 "I got to carry a damn shit bag."

Months later, in a private corner
 of our favorite restaurant,
 I run my fingers across the hem
 of the white table cloth,
 as I watch him feel
 the side of his shirt for leakage.
 He asks me,
 before the waitress approaches
 with her pen and pad,
 whether I notice any smell.
 I lie
 to the lips that kiss mine.



A LONE SOLDIER

WHAT REMAINS

I walked into the sunrise along the north beach of Wake Island one morning in November, 2011, scanning the shoreline for a sign: a disruption or disturbance, a marker, perhaps another bone. Each step of the way I thought of the long line of men who had faced the sea here seventy years earlier. My shoes left no imprint on the bleached coral: fifty yards, a hundred, and then I slowed, detecting a slight change in the slope of the beach. The coral appeared to be rearranged and scattered pieces bore streaks of red paint. Here the narrow beach backed to a stand of iron-wood trees, some also marked in red. This was the place.

Six months earlier beach erosion had exposed a cache of human remains in danger of being swept out to sea. The Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) dispatched a team of forensic anthropologists to recover the bones and excavate the site, after which they restored it to its natural state to protect the classified location. They removed the bones to the JPAC lab in Hawaii to process them for DNA identification and confirmed that the remains were Caucasian. The location of the site on the north beach of Wake Island connected the remains to the massacre of ninety-eight civilian contractors there in October, 1943. For several months I had been helping JPAC locate family members to provide DNA samples. Now I watched the sea lap quietly at the beach and a long white line of surf break a hundred yards offshore, and I realized that this was the very last sight for that line of men. I crouched down to pick up pieces of Wake coral and shells, filling my pockets with tiny mementoes to send to the few families I had found so far. I didn't think about the bleached bones or the long list of names; I thought of fathers and sons, brothers and friends, husbands and lovers found in the reawakening memories of their families.

I was on Wake Island that fall at the invitation of the U. S. Air Force to provide historical tour information and conduct field research for a book project. Wake Island, a small wishbone-shaped coral atoll, sits alone in the mid-Pacific, two thousand miles west of Hawaii. The Air Force administers Wake, and a small contingent of contractors maintains base operations. Bunkers, pillboxes, revetments, and other ruins of World War II remain scattered across the atoll. Four stone memorials on the east shore stand vigil for the war dead. Wake's human history spans little more than a handful of decades, but the violence, misery, and death of those four war years still lurks in the shadows.

Lacking any fresh water source but rain and encircled by a shallow reef that made landing impossible short of a shipwreck, Wake Island resisted human settlement for millennia. Whipped and washed by storms, Wake was home only to seabirds, rats, and a vibrant reef population. When a Navy commander claimed the isolated atoll for the United States in 1898, a journalist scoffed at the acquisition as a "mere dot on the waste of waters." In 1935 Pan American Airways obtained government permission to carve out a small station on Wake for its transpacific clipper route to China. This development caught the attention of war planners who recognized the strategic advantages of the atoll. By 1941 over a thousand civilian contractors—including my father and grandfather—were scrambling to build a naval air station on Wake as war clouds gathered over the Pacific. A detachment of marines arrived in late summer to fortify the now-valuable atoll.

Neither the air base nor the defenses were complete when Japan attacked Wake suddenly and without warning on December 8, 1941. Unlike the one-time attack on Pearl Harbor, Wake was subjected to daily bombing for over two weeks. As Japanese forces besieged the island, the Wake defenders, including many civilian volunteers, fought back, even repelling an attempted land invasion in the first week. Stories of Wake's fierce resistance captivated the nation in those early dark days of war. But on December 23 the Japanese mounted a massive amphibious assault and, after a punishing battle, finally captured Wake.

The Japanese took the surviving Americans as prisoners of war and within a few weeks shipped the majority to POW camps in occupied China and Japan for the duration of the war or their lives—whichever ended first. Slave labor, beatings, disease, and malnutrition took their toll. Back on occupied Wake the remaining civilian prisoners toiled for their captors. During the early months of captivity many bets had been lost on when the expected rescue or repatriation would occur. In late September, 1942, the Japanese command suddenly ordered the prisoners to prepare for departure: two-thirds of the Americans would be shipped to Japan; a hundred men would remain. The announcement stirred the American camp to a fever pitch. The prisoners had no reason to expect that their chances would be any better or worse on Wake or off of it, but some were eager for any change. Others balked at the impending separation from fathers, brothers, or friends. A few managed secret,

last-minute identity switches, but most remained locked in place on the lists. The last Americans to depart Wake alive boarded a Japanese transport ship the next day. The remainder returned to the drudgery of captivity on Wake Island.

The roster of the ninety-eight men who remained behind represents a fair cross-section of the thousand-plus civilian contractors at work when war descended on Wake. They included heavy equipment operators, carpenters, electricians, steel workers, tug and dredge captains and shore labor, engineers, clerks, cooks, and a cobbler. The civilian physician volunteered to remain behind with the Wake prisoners, as did the dentist and a surgical nurse. Many of the men were single college students or “construction gypsies,” but about half of the men had wives and children waiting for them at home. They ranged in age from twenty to fifty-four and came from twenty states, including thirty men from California and about ten each from Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. Some had set foot on Wake with the pioneer party in early 1941; others had arrived just a week before war broke out. Some had volunteered to aid the defense in the dark days of December; others had hidden in dugouts waiting for the Navy’s rescue that never came. Each prisoner had to call on his inner resources to endure captivity and finally to face his last day on Wake Island in 1943.

We know next to nothing about their final year on Wake. Doubtless many kept diaries, though none were found at war’s end. Indeed, very few personal effects remained as evidence that they had ever been there. A coral boulder on the lagoon shore bears the mark: “98 U.S. PW 5-10-43.” The Japanese bolstered their garrison strength to several thousand soldiers in the first two years of war and used the prisoners to build defensive installations around the atoll, anticipating that American forces would attempt to retake Wake any time. One of the American prisoners was beheaded in the summer of 1943 for stealing food. The U.S. Navy and Army Air Force bombed Wake with increasing frequency as the war wore on. A devastating raid occurred on October 6-7, 1943, causing massive damage across the atoll and killing several hundred Japanese defenders. Convinced that this extended attack was surely the prelude to the American invasion, Wake’s commander, Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, ordered the execution of the prisoners to prevent them from aiding their countrymen.

With the order to “shoot to death the prisoners of war on the northern shore” Japanese soldiers forced the Americans to the beach late in the afternoon of October 7, 1943, tied their hands, blindfolded them, and lined them up in a long single file facing the sea. A firing squad took position fifteen feet behind the bound prisoners as the sun set. On order, the riflemen opened fire and mowed the prisoners down. One American managed to escape the carnage and took cover in the brush in the deepening dusk.

The Japanese hurriedly buried the executed prisoners in a tank trap running a hundred yards along the north beach and prepared for the anticipated invasion. A week later the lone escapee was caught and personally beheaded by Admiral Sakaibara, who ordered the burial site reopened for a body count to ensure that there were no other survivors. The grisly job confirmed that all of the American prisoners were dead.

With mounting gains in the Pacific, American military forces never attempted to retake Wake. Instead they subjected the atoll to relentless bombing raids and frequent “drive-by” target practice, cutting the Japanese off from their lines of supply. By 1945 the garrison was severely depleted by disease and starvation. Finally, with news of Japan’s defeat and surrender in August, 1945, Admiral Sakaibara prepared to turn Wake over to the Americans. He and his officers fabricated a story to explain the American deaths and ordered soldiers to dig up the remains on the north beach and move them to a more respectable cemetery grave. In their haste, they missed some bones on what would have been the far right flank of the firing squad line. These remains, discovered on the north beach of Wake Island in 2011, are the subject of the JPAC mission.

When the Japanese surrendered Wake in September, 1945, the Americans questioned them about American graves on the atoll. The process of liberating the POW camps in Japan was underway and many Wake prisoners of war were still unaccounted for. Admiral Sakaibara and his officers pointed out the known burial sites of those who had fallen in the battle for Wake and then delivered nearly identical responses regarding the last American prisoners on the island: half had died in a direct hit on their bomb shelter; the others rose in rebellion, refused to surrender, and fought to their deaths. All were buried there, the officers said, bowing toward

the tidy cemetery. The story unraveled when the Japanese officers were shipped to Kwajalein for trial and the truth of the massacre was revealed. Two of the officers committed suicide; Admiral Sakaibara was tried, sentenced to death, and executed for his war crimes on Wake Island.

Army graves registration units disinterred the known graves after the war and removed the remains to Hawaii, where attempts to identify individuals were largely inconclusive. The Wake dead were reinterred together in 1953 in a mass grave in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. The granite plaque over the grave is dedicated to 178 Americans who died on Wake Island in World War II. These include the military and civilian defenders who died in the siege and battle for Wake in December, 1941, and the ninety-eight civilians who perished there in 1943.

Many of the families have paid their respects at the mass grave in Punchbowl Cemetery high over Honolulu and taken comfort in the knowledge that their loved ones are laid to rest there with honor. Visiting the cemetery is a deeply moving experience for all Americans, but none more so than those whose father, husband, brother, son, or uncle lies there. I open a long-closed book when I call out of the blue to suggest that his remains may not be there after all.

Off and on for three years I have been searching for the families of the Wake 98, combing old records for relatives, calling, writing, waiting, and trying again. Nearly half of the families have submitted DNA samples, though no matches have yet been found. Gradually the names on the list have taken on personalities as I learn details about them: a California father of five, a twice-divorced vagabond seeking a fresh start, a decorated World War I veteran, two brothers from rural Utah who made a pact to stick together, a favorite uncle, a dedicated doctor who was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross—the only civilian ever to receive this high award. They look out from faded photographs and speak through old letters. They remain in memory, not in the bones found on the lonely north shore of Wake Island.

ARTIST CLASSIFICATION

The flick of a knife
Slice, cut, rip
I fold you backwards and bend you away

Cramming, stuffing, packing
The force of my work
You submit to me

I am following orders, though
Is this an art?
Money by the hour

I make you what he and I want you to be
And when I'm done, I fold you back over
Force you to my will

I don't look with pride
I don't look with anger
I look with emptiness

I pack you away to never be seen again
Hauled away and destroyed in one way or another
You lose, I move on

I am the one that cuts
I am the one that bends, tweaks
I am the one that packs
I am the one that folds
I am the motherfucking Sandwich Artist

SNOW WHITE

Snow White despises
 apple pie.
 Call her un-American,
 if you will,
 or a Bad Homemaker—
 but
 the truth of the matter is:
 She despises apple pie.

It's possible she doesn't like
 the dwarves either.
 They—who readily assume
 she'll clean for them,
 They—who readily assume
 she'll cook for them
 dish atrocities
 like apple pie,

Nodding their bearded chins
 up and down—
 they are right:
 She does it.
 She isn't any kinder
 than you or I
 to do it,
 but
 a girl must have
 a place to live.

The witch, in old woman's disguise,
 offers White the red apple.
 "I'd be delighted
 to try a red apple,"
 →

she lies.
 She bites
 but doesn't swallow,

 and that is why
 she survives.

INTERVIEW FROM FEDERAL MEDICAL CENTER, CARSWELL,
FORT WORTH, TEXAS, FEDERAL CIVILIAN DEATH ROW

Solitary confinement suits me just fine, thank you. I've been around others for too long without others wanting to see me, and now that they finally want to see me, they can't. Serves them right. Even so, the only people who want to see me now are reporters, or maybe Eustace's assassins if he had the brains to hire any. Since that's as unlikely as I am old, it's just the reporters. You're the first one they let in here, so you'll have to do.

You reporters always wanted to talk to my twin sister, Gloria. She was older than me by seven minutes. At first, it wasn't so bad. Most people didn't think seven minutes was much of a difference. They were smart back then. Unlike now, the imbeciles.

Once Boris died, Gloria officially became the oldest person alive. I say officially because I was officially seven minutes shy of the title. What's seven minutes? Seven minutes is nothing. Seven minutes is an excuse to steal my chance at the spotlight. She was admitted into the world record book, and I was given an asterisk.

That was twenty-three years ago. Gloria was the oldest person alive from when she was 102 to when she turned 124, half of which she spent as a vegetable. "But hold on, Gertrude," you're about to say, "that's only twenty-two years." Of course it's only twenty two years, you nincompoop, why do you think I'm in here?

You know why I'm here? Right, of course, why else would you be here except to get my confession. Well, here it is: It fell to me to take care of Gloria, and I did it for eleven years. Each year officials from the world record society would come to make sure she was still alive, and each year they would ask me questions about her. I was an accessory to her greatness as a vegetable. I was vegetable dip. I was chopped liver and I was sick of it. So, I removed her IV. When she died, I became the record holder even if it's only until my sentence is carried out. Was it worth it? The officials from the world record society verified my age, so I'd say so. People finally notice me for me.



CINEMATIC

LAUNDROMAT

I hang out at the laundromat
glancing at dropped unmentionables
transferring from washer to dryer.
The pockmarked middle-aged lady
bending over to pick up her fallen period underwear,
I take a sweeping glance,
casually checking out her almost
perky ass.
Picturing it in the dirty jeans.

I stare at the waltzing dryers
picking out the specific outfit to make her wear.

MAC N CHEESE SHELLS

put my Sunday best on Wednesdays
high heels not meant for the Beacon.

the Kingdom Hall smells like diaper bags and Cool Waters
10 years past its prime.

after 105 minutes of shame in my fish bowl,
I headed home to make Western Family
Mac 'n Cheese shells. dinner of downtown queens.
we sat on the floor
watching animated shit on TV, sharing my shells and beer.
if I had known I'd later be plunging those things
out of the bathtub,
I would have picked soup.

WAIT

he is cross-legged on freshly washed sheets
perched on his right,
arm around his narrow blades.
maintaining constant pressure
a physical gesture to contain
intangible grief,
he is crying.

static radio
reflecting our position
unmoving,
string of saliva
slipping to the sheets
disregarded.
tightening my hold,
wait.



CAR SPIRAL

CREMATION

Soft rampant symphonies guide her through ominous alleyways, lifting fear with melodies of serenity and fragranciness. Apparitions fade as steps hasten. Darkness eludes as each note pounds against her eardrums. The dirge grows louder but not a muscle stiffens. She is free.

EVERY FUCKING DAY YOU SLAUGHTER ME

Good morning to you, good morning to you.
Good morning to you too.
And you. And you also, friend.

Kisses for everyone, even the fucking cats!
Why not? Who cares?
I will wear my smile for everyone.

There is nothing going on during this current instant
except for your greeting to me, and my greeting to you.

No one is breathing; time is still.
Time is a fucking mockery to this moment we share.
This moment, forever, greeting one another because we have to.

You and I.
Holding hands in hell.
Exchanging fractions of one another as silently as we can.
Fractions. One, one hundredth. Point five?
Nothing. Nothing at all.
Gibberish.
Until I move on to the next stranger to spit lies at.

Good morning.

TRAVEL NOTES: SALTILLO, MEXICO

It never rains, but it pours—I think someone from Parras must have written that. It's dumping now and has been raining a lot which is good because it gives us a chance to test our rainwater catchment project. We are using a rooftop at a nursery school/private residence for a catchment area and collecting the water as it comes out the drainpipe on the side of the roof. This sounds far simpler than it has proved to be, but one by one our problems are getting solved thanks to support and interest in the community. The owner is pretty laid back about the whole thing. He comes to check on us every now and then, and his only requirement is that we don't make the roof cave in. I have a great partner, who is good at math. She does the calculations, and then I explain to the bemused hardware store owners what we need. Once they caught on to what we were doing, they started throwing things in for free.

I just got back from Saltillo, having spent the night there with my sister. She and her team had to leave at 7:30A.M., which gave me a beautiful morning by myself in the city. A taxi left me at the Plaza de Armas, and looking for sustenance (which means coffee), I walked a bit before realizing that 8:15 is far too early for any self-respecting shopkeeper to be out of bed on a Saturday morning. The OXXO on the corner was my only option, but they have decent coffee. They also had whole grain amaranth cookies, which I carried to the plaza for a nice breakfast. Some pigeons came too, maybe fifty, all in a rush of wings.

The Plaza de Armas is the heart of the city. This morning's arterial flow crossed from the residential side towards the *centro*. Well-dressed men and women walk briskly on their way to mind their own business. This part of the city pulses with quiet confidence—everyone has something to do, from sweeping the sidewalk, to feeding the birds, to reading the paper, to walking quickly from point A to point B. They have benevolent smiles for the *gringa* on the bench.

Quarter-to-ten sounded from the cathedral when a polite older gentleman approached and greeted me warmly. He was a professor, and on his days off he liked to walk through the plaza and practice his English with the Canadians and Amer-

icans and Europeans that come through. After the typical where-are-you-from and what-are-you-doing-now exchange, he said goodbye and then came back. The papers in his hand turned out to be English quizzes. I read one and corrected a few of the phrases, and then was on my way.

No one seemed surprised to see me as I walked alone through the *mercado*. I didn't hear any whistles, *piropos*, or cat-calls. It was nice to be able to walk and not have my thoughts interrupted by the boys across the street, yet surprisingly I missed the attention.

I'm pretty sure I got ripped off in the market, at the first *tienda*, but I was not in a mood to haggle. At the second store the *señorita* cheerfully gave me a ten percent discount. Most of the stuff comes from Puebla, but the woven things like *sarapes* are local.

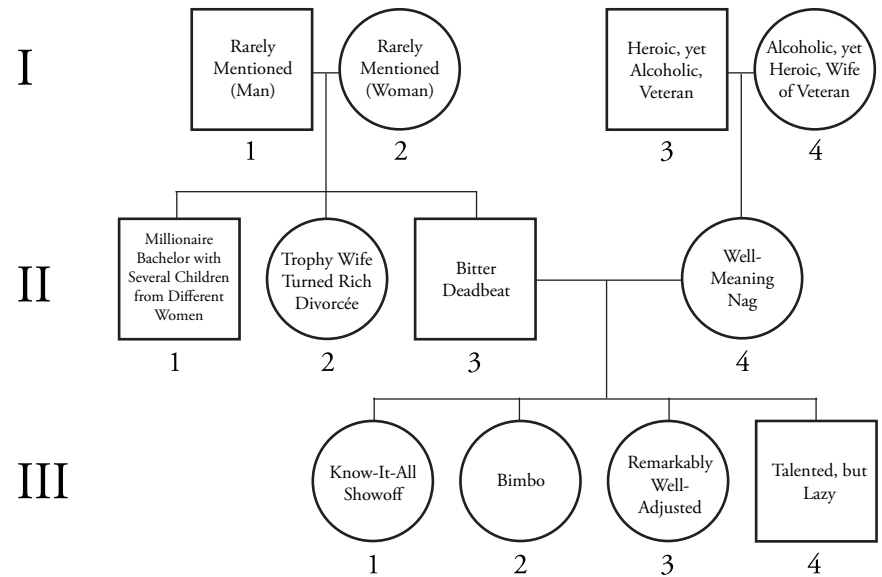
The noon bus left without me. I will blame the unscientific tourist map which showed the *centro de autobuses* far closer on paper than it was in footsteps. So I waited for the 1:40. I was having a great time with *Small is Beautiful* by E. F. Schumacher when the starry-eyed *joven* at the table next to me wanted to chat. I'm getting used to the routine. Within five minutes we had discussed my good looks, my age, my singleness, and my unwillingness to start a relationship. Undeterred, though somewhat dampened, he pleasantly divulged his occupation and the short version of his life's story, which ran right along until the bus showed up, at 2:00 more or less. He accompanied me outside, and with an *hasta luego* and a handshake I joined my fellow travelers in the bus.

I felt like writing on this rainy evening. Some things must be shared quickly or they are lost. Tomorrow's going to be full, as long as the rain lets up. We have a microhydro power class, and then we are going to look at the *fuques*, the water-mines behind the town that were dug some three hundred years ago. Water is life—I knew that of course before coming here, but in this desert you can really see it. All around is dehydrated ancient lakebed—deep, cracked, and very fertile if it stays watered. The

hills are shale and limestone, laden with aquatic fossils; a nearby ranch houses an active dinosaur dig. The landscape was shaped by water, and now in its absence you can read the story.

What will our story be when we are long gone? What clues of life will we leave behind in the ground, what signs of our presence here? Will it matter how we lived, that we tried to be conscious of how we passed over this piece of earth, that we tried to live with decency toward other living things and with an eye to the future? I don't know if it will matter to whatever race beholds our remains, but I know it matters now. So I'm off to bed, ready to learn tomorrow's lessons, full of today's little journey, grounded by a passage through this ancient ground.

PEDIGREE



Questions:

1. Why is I-3 so much more celebrated than I-4?
2. Out of I-1 and I-2's children, who was the most successful?
3. How do II-3 and II-4 put up with one another?
4. Who am I?



GQ



VOGUE

RAIN AFTER THE STORM

When the wind blows after the rain has stopped,
it still rains under the trees. I close her door and walk down
her steps beneath her pines, and every gust
sends dime-sized drops that smack on my jacket.

I've watched a squirrel
that, while the rain pounds,
scampers across the boughs, springing
out as soon as it stops. Seek shelter
for too long, he knows, and end up stung
by the wind-whipped downpour
after the clouds have cleared,
his shelter now a storm.

PUBLIC APOLOGY

I could not help
but notice, on the side
of the concrete staircase,
the powder-blue sidewalk
chalk, a feminine scrawl.

I love you,
I'm sorry,
please call.

He would see it, and think
of her.
Did she cheat? A mistake.
He would call.

When I say I'm sorry,
I want to be where apologies
belong—tight against your skin,
gasping for air. They
should be whispered, to mix
with salt and spit. Forgiveness should follow.
I pray
I never need the chalk.



SOLID

GARDEN PLOTS

She sat on a low wooden bench in the disheveled garden. It was mid-September, and outwardly the weather proclaimed that summer was still present. But a little inexpressible something hinted that autumn had come. She looked at the unkempt flowers and scolded herself for not tending the garden more carefully this past summer. The mums were badly in need of deadheading, and the violas were leggy and thrusting their heads from the midst of weeds—a sad tangle.

But the garden seemed a perfect parable of raising a family. The good and the bad, the glorious and the mundane had always had a way of snarling together. Back when her children were younger, this garden had not contained flowers. Every inch of it had been planted in vegetables, a practical garden to feed her growing family. Her husband had frowned on flower beds that served no purpose. Still, she had argued for the marigolds to help keep bugs off the tomatoes, and a few other flowers served as natural fences between the beans and cucumbers.

Something white caught her attention in the undergrowth. She smiled, her gray eyes crinkling in the corners as they always had. The object she had found was a bit of a sign she had painted long ago with the name of her oldest son on it. For several years, the garden had been portioned out to her children to grow whatever they liked. She had cut out little wooden signs and painted their names in green on white to designate their personal spaces.

Her oldest son, for his part, went to war with the weeds. He would not tolerate a single piece of grass or thistle or pigweed in his garden. The only problem was he kept the soil so stirred up that the tiny vegetable seedlings' roots were constantly disturbed and died right along with the weeds. What few plants survived were strong and produced well, though.

Her oldest daughter liked experiments. She was always changing things. One year, her garden was all raised beds; another year it was swathed in plastic like a miniature greenhouse. She would eventually get bored and neglect the garden shamefully.

Her second son thought it was all a game. One year, a bean teepee was the prominent structure in his plot. He never did weed his garden, but he drove his Tonka trucks all over and kept it tilled in spots. He used the inside of the teepee to

hide in and was unconcerned for the plants he uprooted. The pole beans that year were the best ever.

Her youngest daughter was all about design. Somehow, all the discarded bricks on the place would end up in her garden. Intricate brick walls around tomato plants, brick paths between rows of vegetables—this was where her interest was. Like her mother, she managed to sneak flowers into her space, quietly tucked in here and there.

There had been so much life lived in this garden. She looked again at the tangles of it, but this time did not feel regret. She felt only the sun on her face. Yes, summer was leaving, but autumn can be just as beautiful.

TWO HAIKU

MEETING AT THE COFFEE SHOP

The space between my
Dead sister, her killer, and
Me: Sticks like honey.

HONEY

Thick, sweet, compromised;
Produced by sugar water
And honey bee death.

TO CONQUER THE THORNY LIFE

Parras de la Fuente, Mexico

If you come to the desert, come softly.

Leave behind the egotistical desire
To merely cross it,
Seeking only a way through,
Fighting the hard, inhospitable,
Spiny life here.

The desert will not let you pass
Unless you take the time
To know it.
It will not open for you
Until you understand
The need for thorns.

Walk more softly.

If you come softly,
And notice the life before you,
A way will open.

If you walk slowly,
Eyes open,
You will learn the profound
Rhythm
Of silence and stillness:
Take one step.
Stop, look, notice the life around you.
Respect the space defended by the thorns.

You come near,
Not seeing the spines that defend my
Tender flesh.
Look, you are bleeding.
Sit down and wait with me—
Perhaps we can convince my spines
To release you.

If you come slowly,
If you come near gently,
Perhaps we can pull our spines
Out of each other's
Tender flesh.
While we bleed, we will notice the precious
Life
Flowing from our wounds.
With our eyes open
We can sit near each other,
Even touch,
And have no need for thorns.

We will heal each other,
And later
You can go on your way.
A path will open for you
When you have learned the rhythm of the
desert:

Step by step,
Stop and look,
Notice this life around you.

RELIVING VIETNAM AT THE DILLON, MONTANA, CLASS REUNION

Seniors of 1965 had dreams,
 professed faith in country,
 some in God, but we all prayed
 no draft, no war, no death.
 We believed choosing

made lives lived half-right, not worthless.
 I remember Gary Dumke, hulking, obese,
 Piggy in our small Montana town
 with flies, no Simon, no lord.
 Football coaches wanted Gary on the line,

lured, cajoled, made him turn out.
 I watched him practice in rain,
 weep alone after Saturday games.
 Gary found courage enough to say no—
 walked away, retired helmet, cleats,

ignored jeers, dressed in tie and suit,
 carried briefcase, joined debate.
 I recall senior government class,
 Mr. Claudius Ankeny, Army veteran,
 paddle-toter to the core,

saying, “Gary, you look nice today.”
 Gary ripped my breath away,
 responded in no-first-name taboo,
 “Why thank you, Claude.”
 Pure surprise made Claudius freeze,

spared Gary punishment, hands
 grabbing ankles as hickory board
 spat blisters on his three-piece behind.
 Graduation past, Gary stood tall again.
 Dillon’s draft board ordered him

to turn out, fight in Nam.
 He dressed in tuxedo, boarded train,
 then hanged himself,
 swinging free above dutiful draftees
 sweating their way to war.



GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

AUTUMN'S IMMANENCE

*Reds, yellows, the vibrant orange
trees all around me exploding
in colors of desperation.*

And there it stops. Nothing left
to move my pen across page.

This was supposed to be my
masterpiece. The autumn poem
that would leave reader

ruined, empty, incomplete, yet hopeful
winter would bring something of substance.

It's December now, I'll have to wait
nine months or beg for divine inspiration to finish
this off. I now often feel being a poet
was a poor choice. Every day I wake
with hopes of developing
alcoholism so my peers will take me
serious. Yet in that I fail as well.

I like to think I'd finish

*The fog now lays heavy and still, an incumbent
attack that cannot be lifted.*

SUSPENDED IN ONE PLACE

In my teen years, I found myself in a constant search. I was endlessly seeking a place where my oddball personality and appearance wouldn't be subject to scoffs or dirty looks. For a long time, I searched to no avail, until a classmate in my freshman Algebra class slipped me a burned copy of his band's studio recording across the desktop. This was my first exposure to hardcore. Growing up I had gained a great deal of perspective about various genres and artists from my father, but I was enticed by the allure of something new and fresh. I came home that day and listened to the album on repeat. It was a magical experience. I could feel every rhythm falling into sync with my heartbeat. That was the spark of my passion for the music, the shows, and the atmosphere that it created. Finding for the first time a safe place in the company of my fellow renegade souls.

That initial introduction to hardcore led to my becoming a regular fixture at venues catching the latest tour date as they passed through Spokane on their way to Seattle. I would attend shows on a near-weekly basis, and every week proved to be more invigorating than the last. In many ways, my experiences attending hardcore shows were comparable to my previous experiences attending church. Every week, sometimes twice, we would gather here within the walls of The Hop concert house in Spokane, Washington. A line of society's exiles, zigzagging outside the doors and excitedly waiting for entry into the concert hall just to spend a moment in harmony despite the conflict raging outside. One by one we would file into the venue as the bouncer marked a large black X on the backs of our hands with a massive Sharpie. The large room was filled with a warmth from all the bodies, and an aroma of permanent marker hung heavy in the air. The thump, thump, thump of the bass drum echoing through the building was the sign the band had taken the stage. The crowd was so large that I had to shoulder my way into sight of the stage like a football linebacker. The vocalist would pace in tight circular formations while shouting into the microphone, "Mic check. Check! CHECK!"

The gypsy musician on the microphone would introduce his band and take a moment to thank the other bands on the tour. I always found this to be a moment of serenity before the pure ferocity and intensity of the music overcame the crowd like a tidal wave, the calm before a storm. The music would sound, and the entire room would erupt into chaos. The crowd would separate, an eruption of bodies parting to form a circle in the

center of the venue. Men in windbreakers with lyrics printed in bold across their shoulder blades like triumphant banners would stand between the threshold of the pit and the surrounding crowd acting as barrier. Within the circle, I watched as the hardcore dancers emerged from the crowd with their fists windmilling, their feet stomping, and their lips moving in sync with the words reverberating through the sound system. Together the crowd chanted in unison, "Shine on, shine on, from the inside out! Shine on, shine on, don't ever dim!"

The dancers began to throw down even more intensely as the music began to drudge and grow heavier as it reached the crescendo of the breakdown. Every furious thrust of their fists fell in with the synchronized pulse of the rhythm. It's difficult for me to find words for the beauty of the moment when I heard my voice lost within the dull hum of the audience's community voice. Nights like these, when a society of people who find it difficult to find solace among the general public find a place of community and warmth. We gather here for moments when the music and the people all think, feel, and sing as one. I find myself suspended in time as I throw my head back and bellow out the words. My enthusiastic singing disappears amongst the roar of the crowd, the guitar, the bass, the manic beat of the drums, and the vocalist's powerful growl in the microphone. As the song reaches its climactic moment, we all yell at the highest volume our lungs can muster, "Lines frozen in time, suspended in one place. Bound, and held together. Forever."

My dedication to attending these hardcore shows served as my religion during my youth. The vocalist delivered his message to the congregation with such vigor and passion it was as if his lyrics were the product of the deepest insights of my mind. The hummingbird heartbeat pounding of the double bass pedal vibrated my soul and body alike. The combination of the guitar's intricate melody combined with the rhythmic thrum of the bass provided the tune for the crowd to sway to as a united front of pierced, tattooed, rainbow-haired outcasts. The moments I spent in the crowd singing along enthusiastically to the songs provided me with the some of the fondest memories of my youth. It was while attending those concerts that I discovered the most important thing: who I was. I came first for the music, and then I was comforted to also find acceptance, comradery, and beauty.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ameerah Bader is a philosophy student at North Idaho College. She passes the time by dreaming about running across the length of the West Coast or drinking black tea in Palestine.

Joshua Blakley is twenty-two years old, and is from Cincinnati, Ohio. He is currently attending North Idaho College in the Graphic Design program and is currently working at IEGA as a Parkour/Freerunning coach. He also works at the Circling Raven Golf Club, as a Guest Service Rep, where he met his lovely girlfriend of four years. He enjoys doing photography, backpacking, mountain biking, and videography in his free time. His goal is to travel to many different countries and get sick photos while doing so. Of course he would like to have a steady job doing what he loves to do, and that is to create and to move. So far, he is doing that.

Lucas Brown is an instructor of English at North Idaho College, who invites all of you to take his poetry class in the fall. He received his MA in English from the University of Idaho in 2008.

Danielle Combs is currently a student at NIC in her first semester of college. She works with troubled youth at a local boarding school, and she really likes to drink beer and listen to music. Previously, she has read at open mic nights in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, and she has been formally kicked out of the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Erin Davis is a full time English instructor at North Idaho College, where she teaches developmental writing, freshman composition, and literature. Because she is a bit of a grammar nerd, Erin also teaches a course on the structure and development of English at Whitworth University. Originally from Orange County, California, Erin has lived in the Inland Northwest for nine years. Erin was last featured in TCR in 2009. She will be reading her essay "Letting Go" in the 2014 *Listen to Your Mother* show at the Bing Crosby Theater.

Jack Davis is originally from Southern California but has been blessed to call the Inland Northwest his home for the last nine years of his life. He has thoroughly enjoyed his last two semesters at NIC and will continue his studies at Eastern Washington University in the fall where he wishes major in English, or film, or some crap like that. Jack enjoys reading and loves writing, playing the guitar, and eating pretty much anything that is covered in peanut butter. With the upcoming summer months, being between schools, he plans on spending a good chunk of his time waging his ongoing war against thousands upon thousands of unfinished writing projects.

Dot Dittman is a 2012 graduate of NIC with an associate's degree in English. She has been married nearly forty-two years—all to the same unfortunate man. Much to her surprise, she is mother to ten children, and grandmother to twenty-four grandchildren (another one is on the way)! She is still trying to figure out what she wants to be if she ever really grows up. Her activities, besides writing, include: reading anything she can even if she has to hide from her family (they never look in the laundry room), gardening even though her grandchildren pick all her flowers, being forced to cook for large get-togethers, and frequently running away from home.

Bonnie Gilbert has a master's degree in history from University of Oregon and teaches history at North Idaho College. Bonnie is the author of *Building for War: The Epic Saga of the Civilian Contractors and Marines of Wake Island in World War II* (Casemate Publishers, 2012). Her website is www.bonitagilbert.com.

Darcy Gross is a graphic and web design student at North Idaho College and a 2014 recipient of the Toni M. Robideaux Scholarship for excellence in the advertising arts. In her spare time she creates and markets beautiful origami and is a bird lover and poultry raiser. In summer of 2014, Darcy will intern at Lawton Printing Services in Spokane.

In 1969, **May Jordan** served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. She has a bachelor's degree in English from Fresno State University. She published her first poetry book, *Dreaming of Horses*, in 2006. It is about her brother's and her horrific experience of being abducted in the summer of '64. Her poetry book is in a few independent bookstores, Hasting's in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Auntie's in Spokane, Washington. Her poems have appeared in *Loss Journal*, Coeur d'Alene Memorial Gardens, *Clarkstreet Review*, *Plato's Tavern*, *Penwood Review*, and *Trestle Creek Review*. Her recent poem, "Exotic Angel," will come out in *Penwood Review* in the spring issue of 2014.

Chris Locke is a student at North Idaho College. Chris was born in Washington, and moved to Idaho in 1997. He enjoys the outdoor activities North Idaho provides. He enjoys reading and writing.

Timothy Pilgrim is a journalism professor at Western Washington University in Bellingham and former instructor at North Idaho College, is a Pacific Northwest poet who has published over 160 poems, mostly in literary journals and anthologies of poetry, such as *Idaho's poets: A Centennial Anthology* (University of Idaho Press) and *Weathered Pages: The Poetry Pole* (Blue Begonia Press).

Taylor Politte has lived in Idaho her entire life, playing with different arts from drawing to photomanipulation. She keeps music in her ears while creating, which helps inspire her work. Taylor's bike carries her around Post Falls where she take pictures of all the wonderful sights to see.

Claire Price loves the connections you can make with people when you are travelling—the community you can form with others who are far from home. What she loves more, though, is the joy that comes from creating that same kind of safety in our home communities, among the people we live with. Claire is blessed to live with her fiancé and his daughter in Sandpoint, Idaho.

Claire spent the summer of 2008 in northern Mexico, on an Appropriate Technologies course through Humboldt State University, living with a host family in Parras de la Fuente, a lovely green oasis supported by pecan export and viticulture. The team of students published their sustainable living projects on the how-to wiki site, Appropedia.org.

R.R. is a mother to a magnificent little princess who is very aware of the fact she is the center of her world. Her father is R.'s high school sweetheart, and they've been together since August of 2008. She is a busy bee, between keeping up with her wee one, being a full time student, and a variety of odd jobs. R. is an introverted homebody who may have the tendency to become overly attached to fictional characters.

Stephen Sapp is a North Idaho native. He lives for summer, spending time with his wife, and walks with their dog, Tucker. He has always enjoyed writing and sees it as one of the purest ways to express yourself.

Leo Schnepf is an English major at NIC who has lived in Coeur d'Alene his entire life. He enjoys filmmaking, painting, and creative journalism as his favorite media for self-expression.

Dan Sinensky is an NIC student from New Jersey, causing him to want to earn his living through game shows. If this is not possible, writing is not an awful alternative. He is not ashamed to admit he tries to evoke his hipster side, alternating between sincere and ironic attempts. Thankfully, he usually fails.

Aubrey Stribling makes money by counting money. She is highly suspicious of advertising, and likes movies. She also used to live as described by the old folk tune, "This Land is Your Land," except the part about the redwood forests, and the island in New York. *Habla español.*

The following contributors declined to provide a biographical statement: **Elizabeth Dominique** and **Josh Straub**.

T | C | R

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welcomes submissions of any genre of literary or creative work for its 2015 issue. Submissions of poetry (3-5 poems per submission), prose (5,000 words maximum) or black-and-white artwork (any style or medium) may be sent via email. We consider work by any member of the North Idaho College community—including students, faculty, staff and alumni—and by residents of Idaho's northern five counties.

No previously published work can be considered, but simultaneous submissions are welcome. Please include a brief bio with your submission. More information and complete submission guidelines are available at our website, www.nic.edu/tcr. Submission deadline is **January 31, 2015**, for May publication.

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