

Trestle | CREEK | Review

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Central Valley Strawberry Stand

Behind an old wire spool table,
overflowing with baskets of crimson berries,
stands an elderly woman from Houa Phan.

“Fresh Strawberries” painted in scarlet
on an old plywood board calls to passersby
from a dusty, rust colored dirt patch
across from Klein’s Truck Stop.

Sitting shaded from the scorching sun
next to a dry irrigation ditch
on a root cracked concrete slab
beneath a gnarled and ancient fig tree,
the only remnant of a thousand acre orchard,
she bites into a giant strawberry picked that morning.

Beauty as Being

This short piece—here in a journal devoted to creative work—is not a creative work, but merely an attempt to define what is basic to all creative work, namely, beauty. We need to know beauty better. I define beauty as a kind of unity, a unity of parts, and ‘parts’ here can be the tones in a symphony, the colors in a painting or the words in a poem. In every case, these parts form a unity that communicates. In every case, this unity is a sign representing something that is imparted to our hearts, and then perhaps to our minds and our wills as well. We feel something, and this can give rise to thought and action.

It is interesting to think about feeling. We feel first. I would contend that feeling is different from emotion. Emotions come second, in response to feeling, which is already present. Feeling is the condition that comes from participating in reality. It is continuous, as is our participation, and it is in continuous motion, as the basis of our experience. The essence of this participation and this motion is sign-making and sign-reading. Signs that have been read become new signs to be read, which, if read, become new signs to be read in turn, and so on. This process is called semiosis. It is the continuous business of signs begetting new signs which make new being come to be. If a composer writes a symphony or a poet writes a poem, the symphony and the poem are new beings, new unities that communicate, and promise to continuously communicate, if heard or read in the future.

The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce said that all reality works like this, not just art. I think he is correct. All reality runs on semiosis; it is all a semiotic system. If you apply this thought to life, or to whatever you think is ultimate, I think you will find that it fits. What is most interesting, then, is what exactly is it that we feel, in the midst of this semiotic process that is the whole world? I contend that it is responsibility, or its lack. When signs are rightly communicated and acted upon, we are being responsible. When they are ignored or abused, we are being irresponsible. Situations come under the same standard. A situation may be one of semiotic responsibility, where the signs are known and responded

to, or it can be one where they are not. Feeling is the feeling of this. Thus I can now add the last part of my definition of beauty, which is that this ‘unity of parts,’ as given above, is ‘integrated to such by the relationship of semiotic responsibility.’ Beauty is the unity that results from semiotic responsibility. Feeling is our participation in it, our ‘awareness’ of it, or its lack.

A very good example of this is in *Schindler’s List*. I assume most of us know the movie. Oskar Schindler has watched, with a growing sense of horror, the semiotic irresponsibility of the Nazis, as they have murdered more and more Jews. In a scene that completes his emotional development, Oskar sees the body of a little girl in a red coat go by on a cart. Earlier he had seen her walk unscathed through a massacre of her people. Seeing her now dead, he knows the situation fully and so, amidst soul-searching, decides to act. He makes the List. The lack of beauty motivates action to bring about beauty in some manner. Experience runs on beauty, and the response to its lack is some special kind of creativity. He makes something new, the community of Schindler’s Jews, which is exactly a new unity integrated to such by the relation of semiotic responsibility. It is a community, and it is alive, and it will communicate and spread its life to others as the movie progresses. This community is fully symbolized at the end of the movie, where Oskar is given a ring and he “marries” his people.

As a last point, consider the community’s structure. It is a matter of relating one part to a second part (and however many other parts) through a common, general third. Here the general reality of life, as something to be preserved, is the third, and it defines how the members of the community relate to one another and is the end for which they act. For these people, preservation of life comes first. This is the structure of their community and of any community. Good acts and art always seek to achieve it. Signs, when successful, always create it. And this gives us a norm or standard for what goals are worthy, and what actions are right. And it gives us a vision of what reality just might be like.

So in the midst of creative effort, remember semiosis. Remember semiosis as the process of the beautiful, wherein the unity of semiotic responsibility is in a continuous motion of expansion, and calls to each of us to make some unique contribution. As we are all part of this system, we are all called to express this process with our lives, which means that we are all called to a creative contribution. Art has a privileged position, but it is just the tip of the semiotic iceberg, and the universe itself is as Peirce described it, a “great poem.”

Mike McCall

High Elevation



Basic

The day after graduating from boot camp I arrived at David Burke's Pleasant Grove apartment at 10:00 AM. I was back in town and had promised David that we'd hang out. By 10:45, we had circled Melissa Johnson's Orem neighborhood for the fourth time. I'd had a crush on her in high school, and I wanted to see her. Halloween was only a few days away, and many of the brick and stucco mansions of her neighborhood had carved pumpkins on doorsteps and expensive lawn decorations on display.

David bit into a king-sized Snickers and wiped a hand on his torn jeans. "What's the score?" he said. From the passenger's seat, he lazily gestured toward Melissa's house with the candy bar.

"Do you think she's home?" I said.

He tossed the wrapper out the window. The first freeze of the season had arrived in Utah County the previous night, and a light frost had formed on the asphalt streets of Melissa's neighborhood.

"I heard she lives in the basement with her new husband," he said.

"You know him?" I let my mother's minivan coast down the long, steep stretch of road that passed in front of Melissa's house. In the rearview mirror I saw tire tracks in the frost.

"Heard he's a skinny guy, wears tight jeans. His name is Merrill."

At the bottom of the hill three arterials crossed each other. I turned right and coaxed the van's underpowered engine up the hill for another pass by her house.

"You shouldn't have joined the Army. That's when she went on a fuck spree," he said. "That's when she got pregnant."

"A fuck spree?"

"A fuck spree."

"No one says that," I said. "That's a made-up phrase."

"She went around sleeping with everybody," he said. "Heard she and Merrill fucked only once and she got pregnant. Her parents made her marry him."

"I want to see her one more time," I said. "Then we can go."

"What're you gonna say?"

"Maybe nothing," I said. "I just want to see her, see what she looks like pregnant."

“She’s only two months along.”
“Maybe she’s showing a little.”
“Maybe she’ll let you fuck her,” he said. “She’s already pregnant.”
“Fuck off.”

The previous spring, David and I had graduated from Pleasant Grove High School the same day Melissa graduated from Orem High School. I joined the Army and spent the summer at Fort McClellan’s boot camp in Anniston, Alabama. David stayed in Pleasant Grove, found an apartment near his mother’s place and worked at a local car wash for minimum wage. Melissa stayed in Orem. She wanted to get things figured out before starting college in the fall. She was either going to Utah Valley University or the University of Utah. She’d been accepted at both but wanted to attend UVU to remain close to her folks. Melissa was a Daddy’s girl.

Melissa and I were close friends and never physically intimate, even though I loved her, even though everyone around us thought we were dating. We had met through mutual friends. While the rest of the couples we knew spent their time doing drugs or fucking or going to church dances, Melissa and I talked. We spent hours alone in her parents’ basement. Even when we talked about other couples’ sex lives or her mom’s breast augmentation, I never touched her. When we were alone I wanted to devour her, to have the smell of her skin rest easy in the corners of my mind. I was afraid I’d ruin everything by touching her. The extent of our intimacy was one kiss on the morning I left for boot camp.

We made another pass by her house. I began to lose hope of catching a glimpse of her. The blinds to most of the windows were drawn and there were no cars in the driveway. David never looked as we drove by—he had finished a second candy bar and was now interested in the radio. The imitation leather of the steering wheel had become slick under my hands with sweat. My hands felt cold, clammy and uncomfortable. I coasted down the hill, readied my mind for another pass. I drove for a moment with my knees on the wheel while I wiped sweat on my jeans.



Before high school graduation, Melissa's parents wanted to know if I was going to college. The thought of more school made my stomach turn. I joined the Army mostly to prove to Melissa that I was serious about something. David's mother wrote often to me in boot camp. She's the one who told me about the pregnancy and wedding.

We circled Melissa's neighborhood for the sixth time, slowing to a creep as we passed her house. The van's brakes creaked and groaned against the pull of the street's steep grade.

Dark clouds drifted into the valley from the north, and it looked as if it might snow on the valley floor before nightfall. I said, "Do you think we'll see her?"

David shrugged and clicked his tongue. "Let this one go." He reached behind my seat for his blue daypack. "She's pregnant for fuck's sake."

"She was the one." I needed to know who the father was. "Find someone else."

After the seventh pass I parked on the street, a short distance uphill from her house. I had the sensation that no one was home. We waited with the engine idling, the radio turned low. David pulled two cans of Diet Coke from his blue daypack. We drank in silence. The caffeine from the soda put my mind at ease. I felt my anxiety about Melissa dampen a little. I drank from the can slowly, holding little sips in my mouth, pushing the fluid back and forth between my lower teeth before swallowing. The foothills of Mt. Timpanogos—Orem's east bench—are steep, and from Melissa's neighborhood we had a nice view of Utah Lake. Despite the cloudy weather, I could see the dry, straw-colored grass of the Lake Mountains on the west side of the lake near Saratoga Springs. I sipped my drink and studied the seemingly endless expanse of Geneva Steel, a smelter the size of a small city that assumed the entire space between I-15 and Utah Lake's muddy east shore.

The dark clouds we'd seen rolling in from the north started to scatter. Pockets of sunshine began to warm Orem's east foothills. The frost melted from the asphalt before I finished my Diet Coke. I slid the

empty can into the daypack and put the engine in gear. The van coasted past her house and I relaxed my foot on the accelerator. We sped down the hill while David flipped through the AM stations.

“Done?” David asked.

“Let’s get some food.”

“I want french fries,” he said. “Let’s go bowling.”

I eased off the accelerator. The van coasted westward down the steep grade of Orem’s east bench. Driving with my knees on the wheel, I found a pair of my mother’s sunglasses in the glove box, the big kind that fit over prescription glasses. I checked to see how they looked in the rear view mirror, then turned west on 800 North and headed toward Lindon’s stretch of State Street.

I couldn’t sleep that night. At 1:00 AM I got out of bed. By 1:25 I was sitting in my mother’s van a short distance uphill from Melissa’s house, the engine idling, the heater on full blast.

Except for a basement window on the east side of her house, all the windows were dark. The basement window was half underground and my view was partially obscured by a stainless steel window well.

I killed the engine and approached her house on foot. The cold air made my lungs feel brittle.

I eased myself into the window well. There were potted flowers down there and a gravel floor. I turned over a flowerpot and scattered some of the gravel. I began to worry that someone had heard me.

The window was sweaty with condensation. I wiped away the condensation with my coat sleeve and saw Melissa and Merrill sitting on an old leather sofa. They were watching TV and sitting close together, but not like lovers or newlyweds, more like parents enjoying a quiet, peaceful moment together. Her hand was innocently resting on his knee. On the coffee table were a board game and a mostly empty bowl of popcorn.

A commercial interrupted their program and she turned to the window. For a moment I was certain our eyes had locked. I burped and almost threw up.

If she saw me, she didn't seem disturbed at all. She kissed Merrill on the cheek and walked to an adjacent room that I knew was a bathroom. I kept watching. Merrill started to doze off.

A few minutes later she left the bathroom but didn't return to the sofa. I was thinking about leaving when I heard the light click and the suck of someone opening her front door. I eased myself from the basement window and peered around a hedge near the front door.

She stood on the front porch looking out toward Utah Lake. She was only wearing a T-shirt and hugged herself to keep warm. The porch light was on and I could see her breath form a light, wispy fog above her head. She looked as beautiful as ever and seemed deep in thought, looking out toward the dark expanse of Utah Lake as if searching for an answer to a secret question.

January

Grey light
washes through the wet window.
Desperate raindrops
fling themselves against the glass,
unaware they will not make it
where the heat shoots through the vent,
and wraps around my legs.

Still, I lie,
peering at my chubby thighs,
with a woman's arrow eye.
My big toe runs tracks through the quilt—
back and forth,
back and forth,
listening to the rhythm of my breath—
slow slow slower still.
Longing for summer's infinite dare—
sand in my hair,
cannonball plunge.

He turns the knob,
flinging himself between the flannel;
one hand on my hip,
my eyelids fold.
He pushes me against the wall,
gently,
like a dancer,
the hands of man,
and back and forth.
Listening to the fast beat
of our breath—
each an echo of the other
fighting being erased
by cloud cover.

He doesn't seem to notice
my imperfect thighs,
or the crack in the wall
my eyes fixate on
as his skin
sweats like summer.

Letter to Jacob

It could have been a fairy tale—
the doll house:
plastic mommy washing clothes,
daddy clutching tiny briefcase,
two kids—the matching set
dear Jacob,
but in my movie
someone is usually erased;
like a doll misplaced
forever
in a cardboard box.

Your baby blue outfit clings
to the hanger, tags attached,
in the room that would have been yours.
I was going to paint it light green,
but the sickly white remains like glue.
My daughter's old crib,
which would have been yours,
lies disassembled
in the garage
like bald sculpture
collecting dust.

Fifteen years of my journals
pile up in the garage,
dresser drawer,
under the bed
like spiders
who will not let me
forget their web.

Jacob (don't tell)
but several years
before you,
I broke down
like a car

→

no one has the money
to put oil in, but everyone thinks it can
just run and run.
I colored pictures in that big journal,
like a little girl,
and one was a woman
covering her face
while a little boy
bathed in light
stuck
to her leg
like a band-aid.

I get all the boys confused:
lost, dreamed, you.
I thought my picture was now for you.
I used to think lost souls
would return after
a somersault to heaven,
then the big trampoline
 and wheeeeeeeeeeeeeee!
 you come back to me.
Jacob, I don't believe
in recycled souls anymore.

It only takes seven or eight weeks
for me to feel someone take root.
As for your gender?
Some mothers just know.
The night you passed through
I was watching the cartoon *Ponyo*.
My daughter must have thought
I was moved to tears
by the story of a goldfish
who becomes a girl
who loves ham sandwiches,
and I swallowed two pain pills
with milk.

Jacob, the ladies at church smile
and say that it's okay.
Try again!
As if,
like a computer,
I can just reboot;
as if there are a million
hungry souls
swimming in my ovaries
desperate for escape,
none more unique
than the others.
Only Joanna says,
"Don't listen to anyone"
and reaches out her hand.

Jacob, I had a dream:
children of all colors
cried my name,
seeing the word "mother"
etched across my chest
like a stain I couldn't remove.
The children hold adoption papers,
and they're begging
for me to come through.
I mean, what can I do?
But none of them,
Jacob,
are you.

Mike McCall

Frozen Motion



Clover Creek

*Nature is not only all that is visible to the eye...
it also includes the inner pictures of the soul.*

Edvard Munch

Any man can walk by a forest of trees or a meadow of flowers and admire the scene before his eyes. In the forest, he would be able to instantly see how tall the trees are, not to mention their musky brown trunks and vivid green leaves. And in the meadow, the varying array of colors and sweet smell of pollen are sure to cast a glimmer in his eye and a tickle in his nose. But what if this particular man were to look closer at these trees and flowers? What would he see?

This man would discover that these trees and flowers have a story to tell. That there is more to them than what first caught his eye. Upon closer inspection of one of the trees or of a single flower, the man would unveil an amazing and unique story. A story of life. And later that evening, when he is looking back on the day's events, he begins to wonder about nature and its meaning. Soon he is toying with the idea that nature holds a sense of timelessness, and he begins to marvel at the fact that time may be nothing more than the creative workings of man's mind. And seeing how nature is a force which man cannot really predict or control, do the objects and laws formulated by man, such as time, apply in nature?

Now, one who has never encountered a moment where time wasn't ever present may feel compelled to argue that time does, in fact, exist. However, I offer an argument to the contrary, for I have experienced a moment in a special place where all sense of time and space seemed to vanish and be replaced by the extraordinary timelessness of childhood.

It was the summer of 1999, and my family and I had just moved to a ranch in Westfall, Oregon. Westfall was a ghost town with nothing to offer but a few ranches, an old stone jail house with a hole in the wall—clear evidence of a jailbreak—and a post office the size of an outhouse. This town was nothing more than a tiny speck of sand at the bottom of the sandbox, but I, being only nine years old and possessing an adventurer's heart, did not care that I would be living miles from civilization. All I cared about was the opportunity for a new and exciting adventure.

We had barely finished unpacking when my eleven-year-old sister and I snuck off to go explore this new place we now called home. Running down the dusty back road, the heat from the midday sun slowly baking our skin to a fiery red burn, we eagerly searched for the water we could hear in the distance.

It was my sister who found the path. Hidden behind tree branches, sage brush, and overgrown grass, this dirt trail was one of the most awe-inspiring things our childish eyes had ever perceived. Cautiously, and with the giddiness that lies within every young child, we followed the winding trail, anxious to see where it would lead us. To our great surprise, it led us straight to the water we had been searching for. The coolness of the water was inviting to our hot, sweaty bodies, and it wasn't long before we shed our cut-off jean shorts and dirty t-shirts and sprinted to it.

Diving in, I let out a shriek of surprise when my burning skin instantly turned to ice. My whole body broke out in goosebumps, and I stood in one place with my arms wrapped around me as my body convulsed in a fit of spasms that did nothing to warm me. Finally, as my body adjusted to the freezing temperature, I took off swimming after my sister who didn't seem fazed by the frigid cold of the water. We continued to swim, or float, downstream and soon we came upon a school of minnows—miniscule fish that are a strange color of brown and green—and tried, then failed, to catch them.

The day wore on, and my sister and I continued to explore and discover all the wonders of Clover Creek—which is what my father later told us was the name. We tried in vain to climb the miniature mountain that the creek twisted around, we founded our own countries on the little islands that protruded from the middle of the creek, and we tried to make a sail boat out of an old truck hood, but failed miserably. We encountered new smells from the unfamiliar plant life that surrounded the creek with the result that our noses were either wrinkling with disgust or smiling with satisfaction. I got a most unfortunate taste of the dirty creek water when my sister snuck up behind me and dunked me under. I never will forget the taste of dirt and fish that had me gagging for a good ten minutes. Nor will I forget the rock my sister found that was so silky smooth it felt like someone had sanded off all the rough spots and polished it.

As morning turned slowly to afternoon and afternoon faded into evening, my sister and I continued to play and explore in a world that was now entirely our own. Everything else that existed outside our world—parents, school, chores, rules, even time—was forgotten. It was like we were in another universe and we had forever to play and just be kids. When night finally fell and we were called back into the tainted world from which we had escaped, we returned home and retired graciously to our soft beds with a vow to go back to the creek in the morning.

That day began two summers worth of days spent at Clover Creek. Every chance we got, my sister and I were running off to the creek to continue our games and explore the areas we hadn't discovered yet. However, two summers is all we would ever have. We moved out of Westfall about two years later and left behind Clover Creek and our secret world. However, we did not leave empty handed—we had our memories.

Looking back now, I laugh at all the crazy things my sister and I did when we were at Clover Creek. And when I think about it, I realize the magic that the place held for me as a young child and that the connection that I had with the land was something so incredibly amazing, that it is hard to explain. From my experiences at Clover Creek, I know that nature can be something more than what one first perceives it to be. I know that it holds a deeper meaning, a kind of hidden truth, that every person has the power to discover; they just have to look deep within their own soul to find it.

Rage against the Red Machine

So yesterday I went into something called a “Video Rental Store.” It must be some new concept the whiz kids in Hollywood are trying out. Instead of a reddish box there are people. And instead of waiting for my slow Internet to buffer, I just drive there and come back. It’s crazy! I’m not sure if it will really work.

This whole movie rental business has changed so dramatically in just a couple years it’s sometimes hard to remember the way it used to be. All the name brands I’ve grown up with have practically disappeared or are on their way out. There really is no choice for the companies of old: either they change their whole business structure or retire to Florida and rent VHS to the elderly.

Of course time and convenience aren’t really the main issue; price is. This “rental store” that I went to was not only renting at a dollar, but a dollar for five nights. Beat that you Matrix robots! It really is quite the deal. When I went inside the local rental store, it occurred to me how long it’s been since I’ve ventured into one. It felt like walking through a time portal and coming out somewhere in my 1990s childhood. DVDs were lined up like a library for video entertainment junkies. The employees debated the quality of the movie I was renting, and to top it all off, they gave me free popcorn. I rather enjoyed the experience.

As I walked out with a DVD in one hand and popcorn in the other, I looked across the street and saw a red machine in front of a grocery store and a line of people in front of it. I couldn’t help but get that strange feeling that those ‘60s and ‘70s sci-fi short stories about robots taking over the earth and replacing humans are starting to come true. I thought about those self-checkout lanes in some stores (which I love) and other random kiosks that are making everything convenient but at the same time dehumanizing the way we humans live.

Today I went to the bank to withdraw some cash to pay a bill, and when I entered I saw a line of four people. I went back outside, used the ATM and left without speaking to anybody. Most people love this stuff, but I’m starting to wonder if:

1. Machines are starting to replace humans in an alarmingly fast rate. And if so, how should I prepare? Other than watching (or renting) *The Matrix*.

-
2. Human interaction is lost with each new kiosk placed, and if so, how much?
 3. If I got rid of Facebook, would I actually have to call my friends?

I don't really hate Netflix, and I'm not a Redbox protestor. I will probably still use one or the other from time to time. I think these businesses offer amazing services that were created at the right time and hugely benefit all who use them. I'm just starting to wonder what I'm missing out on bypassing people for convenience. What are we teaching future generations when we start to look at people as an inconvenience? What am I doing to my psyche when I start relying on metal over skin, blood, and bones?

[Small motes of dust drift]

Small motes of dust drift lazily down from the loft overhead and flit on some stray breath of wind through the fading light of the evening sun. A glance into some darkening corner frees the half-remembered sounds of laughter once shared with siblings at some game. In the only stall in the barn a horse whickers questioningly in the direction of a doorway now fated to never grant passage once more to those who are now gone. Sunlight fades into an eternal night, but no lamp will be lit to keep away the encroaching void.

Life and Death

Four years ago last October, an Iraqi National Guard soldier bled to death at my feet. He had a hole in his thigh and another in his chest; it didn't take a long time for him to die. I watched the life drain from his body as I lied to him and told him he was going to be okay. I walked away that day with my heart in a box and bloody handprints on my coveralls.

I still watch him die in my dreams. He dies, and I walk away; that's the way it always goes, but no matter how hard I try, I can't walk away.

I knew what to do when I saw him; he needed to stop bleeding. I tore an aid bag open, letting its contents fall to my feet. I knelt down and pushed everything away, looking for a bandage. I found one, ripped it open and tried to push it into his leg. Opening his jacket, I saw his side was soaked with blood. I looked him in the eyes and told him that I was sorry. I could feel his ribs, and the stain grew larger with every breath.

I've talked about it, written about it, cried about it. I've tried to crumple it up and push it away, but it's a part of me now. A man gave me his last minutes. Seconds. Breaths. They've stayed with me, and it's hard to forget.

I remember walking out of the chow hall after the explosions and seeing all the bodies. There were probably thirty, lying in the sand; most of them were bleeding to death. They were screaming, crying, and praying to Allah. If I close my eyes I can see Special Forces dudes running back and forth, bringing bloody bodies from their trucks.

I live with these snapshots of memory. They really fucked me up for a while. I'd drink to get drunk, but after the bottle was finished, I'd remember being told he was dead. I'd remember standing up, realizing I wasn't wearing gloves. I'd remember how I had to rub sand on my pants to get the blood off.

I've wondered and reasoned with why I was there; I've realized that I was the person he saw as he died. An American. The truth is he had no idea who I was. It wasn't about me; this was about him. He died and I was there.



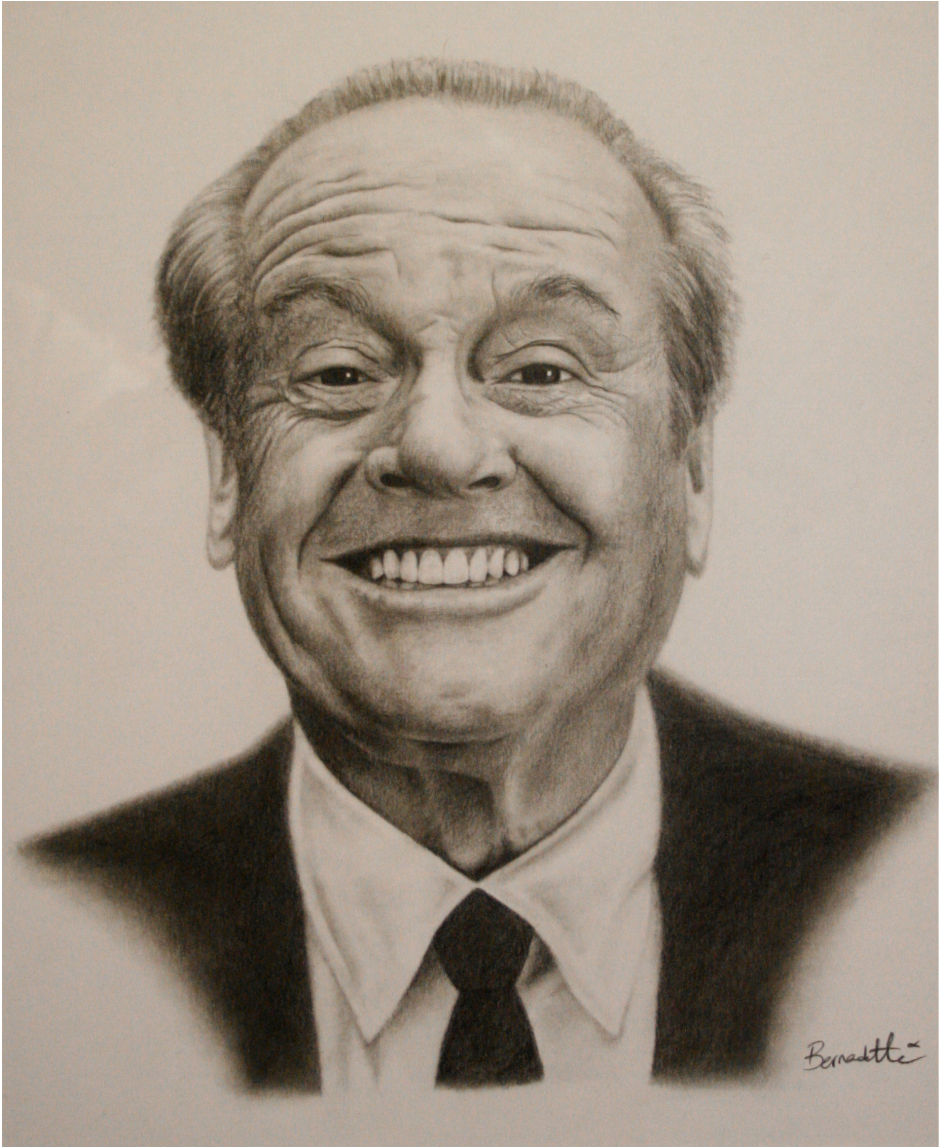
Ode to the Spider that Ran across My Foot in the Laundromat

A spider forges trail across the tile;
intrepid adventurer,
to brave the bright space between the shadows.
Is a life lived in dust and discards
a life worth saving from the
dread inevitability
of the bottom of my shoe?

Strange landscapes of places unknown.
With all my undeniable power of weight
over brittle carapace,
I am spurned
from the undersides of furniture,
repudiated from the slivers of space
between.

Tiny alien in multiples of two,
bold explorer.
You may go where I cannot.
For that, you are a wondrous thing.

Jack



pencil drawing

Seven Pieces

Today, I dropped a tea cup.
Seven pieces lay at my feet
like pointed fingers of blame,
but the dust of yesterday
covered my weeping, as I
dropped to my knees to recover
what was left of my
grandmother's memory.

Passegiata di Hermann

Sulle orme di Hermann [Postazione #1]

Hermann hangs a sign on his gate at the start of the path to his Red House: Do Not Disturb. Those people he wants to see (Thomas, for one; Ninon, for two) write him sweet notes: We did not want to disturb you, so we did not stop to talk. Those people Hermann does not want to see open the gate, march down the path. They see the massive chestnut tree there on the right, and they knock on his door. They expect so much more than the letters he has already written. The letters he no longer has time to write. And yet Hermann still feels the obligation to respond, to write back.

Following in the Footpath [Plaque #2]

She is learning to speak Italian, which means that things are mixed up. Fuzzy head. She is not that bad at producing an Italian accent, but she has very few words. Her teacher Gabriella (those knee-high green leather boots!) exclaims, “Brava!” It’s only because her husband doesn’t let her proceed with a fucked-up accent. No American bomb-before-you-think talkies for her. She will represent her country; jeans, sweatshirt, and smile. She will not respond when the ratty French man at the museum in Lausanne tells her she has no language: English is not a language; Americans do not speak a language; ha ha ha.

Sulle orme di Hermann [Postazione #3]

Hermann is very happy in his Red House. He finds the solitude of Ticino comforting. Hermann walks to the gate and sees Salsalto in the distance across Lake Lugano and there, farther on, Italy, the crazed country, and then swinging his eyes back he takes in Monte Lema. This is Monte Lema before they plop an architectural ball on its summit. As if, thinks Hermann, being a mountain is not enough. And he swears he will never see the lovely view again: not Monte Rosa there beyond Lema, not Santa Maria there at the start of the Malcantone. His neighbor is building a gate. A large fence that will block the view.

Following in the Footpath [Plaque #4]

Hermann ran to Switzerland during a war, so why can't she? It's all war this and war that over there, but not here. Not in a country that's found peace for over five hundred years. [Enjoyed peace? Practiced peace? Lived peace? Swears by peace? Has enough money for peace? When Herman ran here, he left behind his crazy wife, and he found peace and red and blue fingers. Matthew Shepard's parents sent him here, to the American School. He went back to that war over there; the war against happiness railed against a barbed wire fence. I have never seen a barbed wire fence in Switzerland. Cows respond to string. Those barren Wyoming hills. Did he think of these chestnut trees?—stately, gentle, not twisted around and around and around like over there.

Sulle orme di Hermann [Postazione #5]

Hermann has gone away, you see, much like the American Herman went away, too. So much passing. And now when they walk the walk suggested by Hermann's museum, his words here on a post, he comes to visit and to whisper: You do not see the chestnut trees; you do not see the pink against the sky, the orb of light setting; you do not see because you are unable to hear because you are unable to listen because you lack quiet, my friend. And we breathe with Hermann because we know that we have lost everything of ourselves because we are no longer sitting or looking or listening or hearing or touching. We are here with you, Hermann. What about those chestnuts you ate for years for dinner? Were they hard to chew?

Following in the Footpath [Plaque #6]

"But Hermann," I say, "if you had not written all those letters, we would have more books from you."

Sulle orme di Hermann [Postazione #7]

Yes, Hermann responds, but I wasn't up to it. The letters were just an excuse; the obligation not moral, but a failing. A real failing.

But I became happy when I started to paint the lake, the river, the particular pink grey of Ticino. Three wives in, and the place and Ninon have made me calm. For my after years, I bought myself a plot with a view of Monte Bar.

Following in the Footpath [Plaque #8]

Matthew visited that plot. He placed small round pebbles there, and we did, too. Around the west side of Collina d'Oro, we pull out our Tupperware and eat spaghetti from the night before. One night, it's pasta; the next, pizza. We are Italians with our feet warm: Ticinesi. Then pasta and some more pizza. It's enough to stuff your head. Ticino is lovely, we agree. We walk some more, twisting our ankles on those chestnuts Hermann picked. We speak of Matthew. Of passing. Pet the cows and look there, at the view. The baby donkey is born. We are more than the Matterhorn.

Cemetery Drive

I felt strange here. It was unnerving, the feeling of walking over hundreds of years of designated decay. The sun filtered through the blood and sap colored leaves, leaving a beautiful sight, strangely out of place in the eerie checkered field. Limestone, slab rock and granite all adjoined here like a chess board. But there were no players left; the knights would be bloody soldiers, the bishops just corpses with blessings and beads. The deeper I went into the checkered board, the more I felt like a trespasser. Why had I roamed here in the first place? I couldn't even remember. I shivered though there was no breeze; the goosebumps felt like strangers on my skin, like the strangers that slowly rotted beneath me. I came to the infant portion, or what must have once been designated so. Here, under my feet, parents lay their newborn or yearling children. Children were supposed to mash your potatoes once you got so old you could only gum your food. They were supposed to find the keys you left carelessly in the fridge while you were getting your prunes. Instead, all these children lay cold and unblanketed in the ground.

And that's when the crows found me.

They screeched and screamed, their black wings flapping against the bright afternoon sky. I could almost hear the word 'trespasser' in their haughty cackles and caws. My heart grew tight in my chest as they kept to the treetops, following me unless I stopped to observe another moss-covered stone, after which they would scream and caw until I moved on. They escorted me out, and as soon as I was once again outside the gate, all noise ceased. My feet were heavy as stones.

A Bird in the Hand Is Worth Two in the Bush



Dear Mr. Ginsberg

You reached me today,
voice, in my head.
Connor Ouroboros,
you jest, I am King
of all free people.

You saw me, through
glass sheets, long ago
when I still knew the light of day.

You heard me, howling
over brick wall,
screaming off the fence,
in concrete courtyards.

You waited for me, outside
steel double doors
with wine and poems,
with guitars and talk.

You slept on sidewalks,
curled beneath my tall window.
The wine, abused,
the poems, read and torn.

You climbed the wall, jumped
into oblivion, joining
who can't be saved.

You screamed at the hypocrites,
jumped at their faces. Sin suckers,
white and blue dressed
strict souls condemned.

You danced, jumping in hallways,
hooting at nurses,
gnashing at orderlies
avoiding the doctors.

You fought them, kicking,
on cots and cold floors,
on rooftops and gravel,
in cruisers and backseats.

You laughed at the needle,
grinned at the salient liquid,
winked at the prick in the skin.

II

Now you sit in that room, naked.
Play with your mind,
tap the wall a hundred times.

Now you stand at the porthole
knowing a world
half as bright and grand
as Ouroboros.

Now you see me, squatting
with no drink and no drug,
with no paper to remember
poems spilling from my mouth,
with no strings for my guitar,
not even shoelaces.

Now you can't breathe and walk
in subconscious union. Tongues
which know the world
and not-the-world.

III

I'm with you in hell!
Where we are,
there is only up from here.

I'm with you on earth!
Where the mind is real, and thought is real, and a cloud is really
there.

I'm with you in heaven!
Where all things go. To sing on a cloud, of all spiritual, ethereal,
lucid things.

I'm with you on a cloud in the sky!
Where the beat presses equally into an orb. O, cloud in the sky,
which is forced to dance into motions by unseen hands. O, cloud
in the sky, which seems so far away it might as well circle the
universe to come right back up behind me.

I'm with you in heart.
Where a cloud in the sky beats rhythm into every living thing.
Where, one day, we will all find Connor.



Kids, Goats, and Cigarettes

I looked down the barrel and smiled as I rested my finger on the trigger. Standing up, I pressed my shoulder into the plastic stock of my 249. I smiled again and aligned my front sight post with his little body. The hair on his head was brushed to the side, and his clothes were just rags that hung off his shoulders. The years of soldiers touring in his land forced the smile away from his face. His shoes had the miles of a wanderer, yet he stood and stared. My finger rested on the trigger.

We came to a stop at his feet, and I stood up to get a better look. I could see the wear of war on his face. This kid was only seven or eight, but he'd seen the entire war. The stone wall behind him was painted with unit insignia, marking it clear, but the bullet holes said it wasn't. He looked like he needed a cigarette.

I asked for a lit smoke over our comms and waved him over to me. The boy standing next to him warned him not to go and placed his hand on his shoulder. I swung my weapon towards his little friend and rested my sights on his belly, telling him to stay where he was, and motioned that it was okay to come to us. His friend's hand dropped off his shoulder, and the boy walked to our truck.

Joe held the cigarette up, and I took off my glove to take it from him. I took a drag, showing the small boy what to do; as he neared our truck, I leaned over the turret shield and handed it to him. He grabbed the lit cigarette from my hand and ran back to his friend. I asked for another cigarette and helped my new friend smoke his, and said over our net that I was going to kill 'em all.

Gifts made me feel like a humanitarian. Mostly, but not when we gave them pork MREs and cigarettes. I wonder if they ate the heater inside the MRE. The instructions are in English and pictures, showing water poured into the heater-bag, but I wonder if they thought it was food.

When we would roll through a city in the daytime, children lined the streets to watch us. I liked gunning during missions. My office had a 360-degree view of our patrol, and when we drove through a city, I felt like I was in a parade. It brought me back to Coeur d'Alene in the summer. I remember standing on the sidewalk on 10th Street, waiting for the parade on the 4th of July. I can see the Shriners on their funny bikes, the classic cars, the marching

bands, and the bags of candy thrown to the sidewalks as a river of Stars and Stripes files past.

From my office with a view, I'd wave to the kids and throw candy at them as we crept through their cities like a fire-breathing tan dragon. Little girls in their pretty flowered dresses got to me. To see the eyes of a little girl over the barrel of a machine gun made the war personal.

I wanted to be remembered by the kids as a friend, as a hero; when we gave them candy I felt like one. I once saw a man slap the shit out of a little boy who had taken an MRE and I almost pulled the trigger. I had found an AK-47, and kept it in the back of the truck just in case someone got shot that didn't have a weapon. It would have been easy to squeeze the trigger and cash in the insurance policy.

LT reported to our patrol that we were moving. I waved goodbye to my new friend, and we started to roll.

It wasn't long before we stopped again, this time in the middle of an open-air market. The hostile stares from the men tore through our patrol and burned us. A group of men were gathered around a bloodstained slab of concrete smoking cigarettes, watching our every move as we watched theirs.

To the side of the men was a goat tied to a pole cemented into the ground. One of the men took a drag off his cigarette and tossed it to the ground; his arm dropped to his side as he started walking towards the goat. He grabbed the leather strap tied around the goat's neck and led it to the bloodstained slab. He looked at me as he slit the animal's throat. Blood spurted out, staining the goat red.

He then took the goat by its back legs and hung it from the ceiling. Blood poured out from his neck as he cut off its head and hoofs and tossed them on the slab. The men gathered around again and watched the goat's blood drain onto the ground, and when it was finished, he skinned the animal. He started with its back legs, pulling its coat down and peeled the skin off its body like a prom dress, and dropped the dress onto the ground.

The goat hung naked by its legs, and he took it off the hanger. He laid it on its side, and slid his knife up its belly. Once its belly was open, it spilled its intestines onto the ground. I felt like

I was removed from my body, watching through the sights of my machine gun. The butcher cleaned the animal and hung it once again from the ceiling. Time slowed down as he split muscles apart from its body and quartered the animal.

Minutes had stopped for hours; hours became days. Missions started to blend together into a seamless Rolodex of memories. It seemed like every day was a rendition of the day before. The stop and go became predictable and monotonous. If we didn't stop for something every few kilometers, the hair on my neck would stand on end and my stomach would turn sour, bracing for the coming blast.

We hadn't found anything that day when the radio keyed and LT called everything all clear. Our patrol started moving like a slinky, and it took a few seconds, but we were all moving once again, and once again we were looking at a desert wasteland.

Suddenly I was far from home, in a strange and ancient land. The City of Coeur d'Alene was founded in 1887, but the stories beneath our feet started thousands of years ago. We were in the cradle of civilization, the Garden of Eden, but there were no gardens left. Nothing left but a desert wasteland.

It had been days if not weeks since we left Ramadi, and the sour taste of anticipation crept up my throat. I could taste that something bad was going to happen; it had been too long since we found something explosive.

Suddenly, a thin black mushroom cloud crept from the folds of the hills ahead. It was an ugly mushroom, bent in the middle and dirty. The sound of the explosion was delayed and sounded like the closing of an old book.

Our lead truck reported to the formation that the explosion was ahead of them, and that they were all okay. Those words of relief coaxed my stomach back down my throat, but my heart still raced knowing that there were friendly elements in the area.

There were pieces of metal scattered across the road and into a field, nearly 200 yards away from the explosion. I saw a heap

of skin, and then another, lying in the sand, not far from their truck. They were civilians. It looked as if they had been right on top of the explosion. The cab of the truck lay on the ground and was covered in blood and black soot; the front of the truck was gone.

There were pieces of flesh and skin in the road. Pieces of skull with hair still attached. Their toes were exposed and muscle was cut away. Frozen in time, they were disconnected and useless. I disconnected from the radio and got out of the truck. I mentally stepped away from myself, crouched down, and took pictures. My comms dangled from my helmet like an umbilical cord. Looking at the pictures I wondered to myself who these people were, and if they were the good guys.

I can only imagine who those men were and I'm glad they died. I'm glad they died because the screams of men in the waning moments of their lives pierce the soul I'm glad that, on top of all that happened, I don't have to think about their heaping folds of skin, moaning and groaning, begging for someone to take away their pain.

Parabolas in Everyday Use

Conic sections are very important. They play a large role in many aspects of our daily lives. From the telescopic lenses that enable space-satellites to clearly focus in on grapefruits, to calculating the orbits of planets, conic sections are an invaluable tool allowing heavily important activities to occur. Without these intangible wonders, we would not have eyeglasses, billiards tables, footballs, or cathode-ray tube television screens. Parabolas seem to dominate the field. Most uses for conic sections involve a parabola.

Parabolas, for instance, are used in the construction of half-circle driveways. Many houses in exclusive neighborhoods have beautiful driveways that are in the popular form of half-circles. These parabolic driveways look appealing and are often a top-selling feature for many potential homebuyers. Real estate gurus, such as Lisa Herbert, have even coined them “governor’s drives” due to their grandeur. The equations for these driveways are very versatile, as the driveway can be at a different location depending on the desires of the builder, the homebuyer, or both. It also depends on the location of the house. For example, if the house is located on a corner, it may be to the side of the house, utilizing a different equation than if it were located at the front of the house. Some people prefer to have the driveway located on the side, especially if the garage is not facing the front of the house and is instead facing toward the side. Generally, these driveways are not at the back of the house, which is convenient for homebuilders and architects because the equation $x^2=4ay$ is eliminated from use, leaving time-conscious individuals with less to worry about. The directrix is also not necessary when drawing designs for the home which is fantastic news for the homebuyer, as the time that is saved could mean a lower buying price of the home. This money could be used toward furniture, landscaping, upgraded carpets and cabinets, or perhaps placed in an interest-bearing savings account for future use.

Another amazing property of the parabolic driveway is that two, yes, two (2) separate equations must be used in the process of construction. Luckily, the equations are of the same format, further increasing the homebuilder’s productivity. For the purpose of this project, we will use the example of a house with the more exotic side-entry governor’s drive. Assuming that the house is facing

south and the garage is facing west, the equation would be in the general form of $y^2=-4ax$. This, of course, is only the starting point for architects. Let's say that the driveway needs to be 100 feet from the outermost entry pillar to the outermost exit pillar. This would be the latus rectum, which is $|-4a|$. The property measurements of the lot are 150'x150'. The homebuyers of this house are a fairly laid-back couple, so they don't mind if the driveway is centered on the property line. They also want the architect to make the origin of the driveway 25 feet from the center of the property and would like 25 feet of landscaping room left on either side of the driveway. The final equation would look like this:

$$y^2=-100(x+25)$$

The second equation that would be used would be from the inside entry pillar to the inside exit pillar. This equation is dependent upon how wide the homebuyer wants the driveway to be at the exit and entry. For this example, the couple purchasing the home would like the governor's drive to be 14 feet wide at both ends. Like I said before, they are a laid-back couple, so they do not mind having the driveway 14 feet wide the whole way through, making less work for the architect. The equation would look like this:

$$y^2=-72(x+39)$$

This is truly shaping up to be a most beautiful home. The couple will surely be the envy of the neighborhood and their kids will definitely be popular. The architect will receive a good chunk of change for his fabulous home design, and property values surrounding the home will skyrocket. These happy endings would not be possible without the help of conic sections. The parabolic equation has found a niche in the luxury home market, allowing homebuyers to experience a joy that they would otherwise be without. Truly, parabolas have made the world a better, happier place to live in. Thank you, conic sections. Thank you.

Drowning in Arrowrock Reservoir

Today I sold the boat
that I haven't touched
in fifteen years,
and when the young man
was looking at it, he
held up the life jacket
that belonged to her
and asked if it came
with the boat.

I saw it, and I looked away.
All of my muscles
tightened, including
my jaw, and it all came
flooding back.

Linda on her way
home from the conference
upstate. She got the promotion,
was driving nonstop,
sixteen hours, nonstop.

She always said,
"I could take these bends
in my sleep."
And as the rain fell,
the water fell from our Lincoln
being lifted from the lake.

Chase

The bruise on my left cheekbone
has faded and disappeared,
and though there was no break
in my skin, a piece of that
coffee cup has managed
to burrow through my skull
and now rents space in my brain.

When I changed my number
and left town, I thought
I was rid of you.
But you stalk me now
as you stalked me then.
Only now, you are much closer.

I see you push the carts
from the parking lot.
My muscles prevent
me from going farther
until you turn around
and I see it's not you.

You appear again at the end
of the hallway, just long enough
to trap me
before you disappear down the stairs.
I'm late, but I go down the stairs
to make sure you are gone.
You always disappear,
and I thank a God I don't believe in.

Since you,
I always check the backseat
before getting into my car,
but sometimes—
sometimes I still catch a glimpse
of you in the rear view mirror, smiling.

→

You disappear.
I shiver and roll down the window.

You follow me home,
and wait until I am asleep
to show your face.
I see you; I see your bared teeth;
I see your wrinkled nose; I see
your hands coming at me.
I wake up, and you follow me
everywhere
from hundreds of miles away.

For Your Convenience

Like a desert mirage, it quivers and dances atop the inky black asphalt as the afternoon sun reflects brilliantly off the white stone walls that fortify the squat building. Materializing into a beacon for all who see it, it is a place that promises relief and succor. I know that once I am through the front doors, I will want for nothing. The roaring jackhammer, shattering my moth-like trance just as mercilessly as the packed earth beneath it, rockets me back to reality.

While shielding my eyes from the sun's piercing afternoon rays, I crane my neck to better see my surroundings. Standing high above four rows of gas pumps is a sign. The dingy and faded letters spell out GTX Gas Station. The volatile stench of gasoline, sent by the current of a gentle September breeze, meanders across my nose and lingers sourly on my tongue. Not far in the distance, cars and trucks alike murmur as they leave the I-90 Barker Exit for home.

In the back eighteen-wheeled behemoths line the perimeter of the building, while most of their drivers stand leaning against the convenience store's walls. The others prefer to sip coffee in the nondescript, but perfectly comfortable, diner that makes up the other half of the GTX Truck Stop. A man reclined in a white plastic lawn chair near the entrance of the store acknowledges me with a short nod of his head, made visible only by the slight bobbing of the cigarette that hangs limply on his cracked and blistered lips. I interpret this as a smile and adjust the curvature of my mouth in accordance. With my notebook cradled in my arm, I push the door open, the tinkling of a bell announcing my presence, and step inside.

Immediately, I become engulfed by stale florescent light. Its inorganic glare leaves me momentarily bound and blinking. I survey the small shop once my eyes adjust, taking in the familiar surroundings. The layout shares an arrangement common to most convenience stores. Along the back wall, lustrous beverages peer out from behind glass doors, a tempting reminder to all passersby of just how parched their mouths have really become. Hot dogs and other cylindrically shaped edibles slowly roll on the rotating grill. One creeping revolution after another, they wait for some hungry soul to liberate them from their constant spiral.

The rows that make up the bulk of the store house everything from Pop Tarts to anti-freeze. One aisle consisting only of

candy demands the most attention; the multitude of brightly-colored packages contrast sharply with the pristine white-tiled floor. Walking through this aisle elicits a disorienting sensation; the scenery seems to repeat itself, and the sweet morsels form a sort of pattern, making the aisle appear endless.

Bob Marley's "Could You Be Loved" emanates from the check-out stand at the front of the store. A tall stool stands at the counter where customers can sit and talk with the employees or purchase a steady stream of scratch tickets. Harry, the owner of the GTX Truck Stop for the past seven years, chose this line of work because of his genuine interest in people and interacting with them.

"People stop here, at *my* store, from all over America, and they have so many stories to share," he excitedly remarks. His dark eyes seem so distant just then, only to return moments later even more luminous than before.

Harry has worked in the convenience store business for sixteen years. Before moving to America, he lived in London, where he opened his own newspaper store and drove a cab. When he was just seventeen years old, he migrated to London from New Delhi, a move that his parents forced upon him.

"I met my wife when I was just sixteen," he dutifully drones while looking on me intently with raised eyebrows, as if trying to gauge my reaction. "Our parents arranged the marriage, you know?"

Harry, feeling the weight of the silence, clears his throat and asks me if I would like something to drink. Before I answer, a patron of questionable sobriety ambles up to the check-out counter, a six-pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon dangling from his hand like cargo fastened to a loading crane, and asks for a pack of smokes. The man smiles and reveals a fleshy pink maw devoid of teeth. He exhales and an odor that smells like it could be set ablaze forces Harry to take a couple steps backward.

"You want Marlboro?" Harry's accent forms this query into something lyrical.

The man nods and pulls out his wallet as Harry rings up his beer and cigarettes. After he pays and drives off in his clamorous jalopy, Harry sighs and slumps on his stool.

"So many people come here to buy alcohol. It's a sad thing, isn't it?" Shaking his head in genuine solemnity, he sighs.

The sun has crept its way across the sky, though neither of us takes much notice. Fading, the soft light plays across Harry's tawny skin as it casts a shadow over his thick brows so that his eyes appear as two indistinct hollows. He turns toward the window and inhales deeply, as if breathing in the very sunshine, and runs his hands through the peppery hair that grows abundant on his crown. Looking my way, a wide, kind smile reaches up the sides of his stubbly cheeks.

"You know, I do not drink?" he tilts, his back becoming as straight as an arrow. "I do not smoke or eat meat either. You like curry, yes? I'll make you *real* Indian curry. Nothing like what we have around here." Harry begins to talk excitedly about plans to start incorporating Indian spices and food to the convenience store's inventory.

"I want my customers to have the best," he declares, wide-eyed and earnest. "My job, I like it very, very much, but my family, I love my family, you know? The customers that I see everyday, they are like my family."

Harry leans against the check-out counter and looks out at his store, quietly admiring all that he sees. He looks beyond the four walls and the shelves swollen with goods, contemplating something that I fail to recognize. But I see in his eyes a strong fondness, like that of looking at a close friend.

By now the sky is beginning to darken and the store becomes suddenly busy with people coming from work. Seeing this as a good time to conclude our conversation, I say my farewells and thank Harry for the time he has given me. As I open the glass door to leave, Harry suddenly stops me.

"Don't forget to tell your friends that we have the cheapest gas in Spokane!" he cheerfully hollers at me.

But to Harry, the GTX serves as more than just a gas station convenience store: it represents an outlet where people from all walks of life converge and cross paths. And if some lonely wandering truck driver decides he wants to sit and have a conversation with somebody, anybody, Harry wants nothing but to listen.

Four Dollar Copper

Here in rural Idaho, we have garbage and trash collection points that contain a large quantity of dumpsters maintained by our friends at Waste Management. Is Waste Management the child of mafia dons of yesterday? Those guys knew that, no matter what, we would keep on generating crap that had to be hauled away, the ultimate recession-proof industry.

Today I took the trash to the dumpsters and was surprised to find that there were three vehicles already parked in the area, one pulling in and one pulling out, and another behind me waiting for an open spot. Normally, I have the place to myself, so I am able to contemplate in solitude the ultimate resting place of my coffee grounds, pineapple rinds, crumpled paper towels, and solved jumble puzzles in the redundant local press.

Parked next to the first dumpster was a relatively new black Japanese sedan with the back door and trunk both standing open. It seemed a little incongruous; I didn't realize at first what was going on. When I jumped out of the Durango, I was face to face with a clean cut young fellow with a small goatee. He was dressed in a clean, dark brown set of Carhartt winter jacket and pants.

"The reason that I called you all here today," I jested as I walked toward the back of my vehicle.

He just nodded and smiled a little sheepishly, then he went back to what he was doing. I saw that he had a long, substantial wire twisted in the form of a corkscrew with a hook at the end. He was using it to rummage around in the dumpster. At his feet stood a tangle of smaller wires. One was attached to a small black metal box, another had a small, round, gray plastic thing attached to it. Some were black, some white, and others gray. As I was unloading my refuse, I noticed that the back seat of the sedan was filled with the same tangle of tentacles, and they were reaching out of the trunk of his car as well. All the while he continued to poke and pull at the contents of the dumpster next to mine.

As I drove away, I thought, now there is a great job opportunity. Copper is now over four dollars a pound. He must have collected a small fortune already. He can take the stuff to a recycle depot. They will send it to a refiner where it will be reinvented into wire and sheet. The wire and sheet will be sent to China, where it will be turned into all manner of junk. The new junk will be sold back to us, so that we can get another chance to take it back to the dumpster. That's the great American entrepreneurial spirit at work.

**Taphephobia:
Overwhelmed**

I

My heart beats
its repeating sound,
its hypnotic rhythm
always in time.
Tick-tock, tick-tock
it curses and pounds—
ringing out
its disquieting chime.

II

Above,
in the blinding light,
I see silhouettes
of shapes vaguely known.
The glow is closing,
still dreadfully bright—
slowly shrinking,
leaving me here alone.

III

My heart races
its pounding beat
as I am lowered under.
Tick-tock, tick-tock
it pounds in defeat,
drumming a dirge
of deadened thunder.

IV

It drums
into the dimming light,
beating and throbbing



to be heard,
but the silhouettes
are no longer in sight
and the chill of death
in me silently stirs.

V

I'm still alive!
my heartbeat cries,
my bones aching to survive.
So it pounds harder
and harder it tries
to make them hear
I am still alive.

VI

But lower I sink
into the ground
in the silence
of departed light.
No one hears
that thunderous sound:
tick-tock, tick-tock
into the night.

Ruby in the Rough

The patrons inside didn't notice Celeste as she waved goodbye to the man in the maroon Ford Escape Hybrid. She pushed her petite stature through the cumbersome redwood front door. Clicking on five inch heels across the uneven floorboards, she came to perch on a barstool next to Scurvy Ivan. She attempted a wink, but it still smarted. The plum-purple circle around her eye had faded to a greenish-yellow.

"Mind if I sit here?" said the slender Latina.

"I'd be delighted," said Scurvy Ivan, and patted the empty stool next to him.

"Aren't you kind. I'm Celeste," she said and turned his direction. His bulky body was covered in Levi's, from his jeans to his jacket over the faded red flannel. His rubber boots were crusted with dried bits of fish; the soles resembled dangerously bald tires. A navy blue beanie sat on a salt and pepper wad of sweat-matted curls. White whiskers of a five o'clock shadow dusted his face, sprinkled atop deeply tanned skin. She took a long look at his face, waiting to catch his eye. His gaze remained straight ahead, only darting in to catch snippets of her eyes scanning him.

She hooked her heels on the rung of the stool, anchoring herself in place and ordered a strawberry Pucker with milk.

"I'll get that, Jimmy," said Scurvy Ivan and pointed to a stack of cash lying on the bar.

"Do you make a good living crabbing?" said Celeste.

"It ebbs and flows," he said and laughed deep inside his barrel chest.

"You are funny," Celeste said and placed her hand on top of his catcher's mitt of a hand.

He smelled the same perfume on Celeste that he'd smelled on the most popular girl in high school. The olfactory memory took him back to the girl's long hair brushing across his flannel sleeve as she passed. He was bulky as a teenager, left to linger in the intoxicating aroma of strawberry shakes and lilac bushes. Now, sitting in Jimmy Dunn's bar, he was a helpless fish strung between two times in life; one thirty-some years ago, the other in the immediate soft glow of the sun's setting rays filtering through the stained glass window.

Hours slid by with flowing drinks and conversation turning from lighthearted to serious as closing time loomed.

“Do you ever think about falling in love and getting away from this lonely lifestyle?” he said.

“I would love nothing more than to go home to my family in Mexico. Do you think I like doing what I do to support my habit?” she said, tears welling up in her eyes. “Your lifestyle is just as lonely,” she said. She imagined him pulling in endless nets, devoid of fish. She imagined herself, pulling up endless pairs of fishnet stockings, devoid of connection to the men for whom she was wearing them.

“I don’t think I thought about it much until you and I started talking tonight.” Scurvy Ivan looked down into his drink and wondered how many he’d consumed on shore, more out of habit than enjoyment.

“Well, then let’s stop being lonely,” she said.

By the time last call was bellowed their way, ten hours had flown by, and Scurvy Ivan was no longer averting his eyes; he was staring intently at her. He borrowed Scotch tape from the bartender and wound it around the band of his ruby class ring, slipped it onto her finger. They’d head out to sea on his modest fishing boat to return to Celeste’s fishing village in the Gulf of Mexico. The night and the next morning would be the only thing between them and their future.

Scurvy Ivan returned to Jimmy Dunn’s at precisely three o’clock in the afternoon, the predetermined time. When four o’clock came and went he began to feel a bit queasy. Celeste had said she would need to gather up a suitcase of clothing and say good-bye to the other girls. She also wanted to score one last fix, to slowly wean herself on the boat ride to Mexico. She’d said she wasn’t strong enough to quit cold-turkey.

Habitually unsure where to rest his eyes, he turned to the five o’clock news. The top story was a gruesome find. An early morning jogger had seen an arm dangling from under a dumpster lid; the glint from a ruby ring had caught her eye. The news anchor noted the victim had a history of drug charges and was a known prostitute.

Scurvy Ivan numbly slid from his stool and turned toward the heavy front door.

“Where you going?” called Jimmy.

“To get my wife. I’m taking her home to her family in Mexico,” he said, pulling off his beanie and cramming it into his Levi’s back pocket.

Make-Believe

I meet a picture perfect Sunday morning the moment I step outside. The crisp air bites at my fingertips and hints at the arrival of fall. The chilly breeze brings a fresh burst of air off the lake. The air tastes like fresh cut grass and dew, mixed with the wonderful buttery smell of popcorn from the baseball field across the street. The surrounding trees soar up into the sky, creating a thick canopy impenetrable to the elements. The bustle of passing cars off of the nearby street, muffled by the awning of foliage, leaves the park in a peaceful, heavy quiet. Despite the coolness, the liquid yellow sun pours through the treetops in thick spotlights. The grass, luxuriant, creates a thick green carpet. The most enchanting place in the world, taken right from a fairy tale, lies beneath the trees.

The milk chocolate wood bound by thick steel bolts rises up into a castle-like structure, perfect for any adventure. The wood feels smooth and worn from the constant pounding of rubber-soled tennis shoes. A waist-high fence encases the entire playground, and, just inside, a world of dreams and imagination unfolds. The fence acts as a fortress inscrutable to mothers, gangly aliens, ancient dinosaurs, the FBI, and oversized spiders. Inside, the floor of cedar woodchips transform into a blazing, bubbling lava pit, ready to singe anyone that takes a careless step; or a cantankerous, thrashing sea only tamed by the most daring of sailors. The highest spire adapts into a plush room fit for a princess looking out over the far reaches of her land. The dungeon in the far corner stands guarded by a fierce dragon, his breaths of fire only matched by the bravest of knights. Just to your left and across the bridge, the space shuttle sits ready to blast off into the inky black space of the unknown. Wooden blockades rise and fall creating a mouthwatering obstacle course taunting all challengers. Red-seated swings hang by steel chains waiting, waiting to give their riders wings.

Just after eleven o'clock, the still quiet breaks with an eruption of giggles from two little girls tugging forcefully at their mother's hands. Carly's mess of windswept, caramel curls held loosely by a deep purple ribbon match the flowers on her dress, her peacock blue jacket zipped up to her chin. Mariah's jet-black ponytail and messy bangs perfectly frame her buttermilk face. Once their mothers give them a reassuring look, both girls take off at a

dead sprint to the playground leaving a blaze of energy in the air. As the minutes pass, more children arrive in the same fashion, tugging avidly at their parent's arms. Their eyes widen as their imaginations begin to soar. Each child bears a look of mischief, innocence, and wonder.

Thronged of bustling, lively, children find their way to the park by noon. Jonas, in his red turtleneck with a navy blue sweatshirt tied about his waist, crawls across the top of the monkey bars. He whispers behind him for Trevor to follow his lead. With his wingman at his side, he initiates the sneak attack on Jordan's stash of plastic frisbees and tennis balls. They haven't been spotted yet. Just then, Dallas comes barreling around the corner, Jordan at his heels. "Pirates!" he screams, forcing Jonas to retreat. Careful not to drop the newest addition, a brand new Wilson tennis ball, Dallas climbs back up to his post as watchman, panting to catch his breath. Brown dirt stains the kneecaps of Dallas's green corduroy pants, serving as visual evidence of previous tumbles. Now safely hidden behind the pickle-green slide, Trevor and Jonas regroup. Exchanging whispers so as not to be heard, they plan their next attack. The determination in Trevor's face, unmistakable as it sits on his furrowed brow, adorns his eyes sharp with alertness. "We're going to have to make a distraction," his comrade murmurs, quickly glancing up at Dallas guarding the loot, the evidence displayed clearly in front of them. They need backup. Each boy scatters in different directions to recruit.

"Please, Mom? Just a half hour!" Carmen whines. With her eyes pouting and lips quivering, Carmen's feet point in her desired direction. She pleads with her mom as they make their way down the winding sidewalk away from the baseball park. Her lips stained blue from a giant lollipop, reveal her sugary buzz. Carmen's mother gives her a hesitant gaze before letting her go. Carmen glances in each direction in a panic before she recognizes three of her friends in the highest tower of the north corner. Wasting no time, she takes off running, her sneaker laces flapping in the wind.

Outside the fence, in the world of responsibility, Susan keeps a watchful eye on her daughter, Rachel. A glittering tiara sits crooked on Rachel's head. The crown falls over her left eye as she pumps her legs on the swing. She soars higher and higher with every

pass, and she squeals with delight. Parallel to the joyous scream, a smile spreads across Susan's face. Her eyes crease with happiness as she gives an enthusiastic wave. An unmistakable twinkle in her eye, she watches Rachel climb higher. The power a laugh holds, uncanny; it brings joy to the world, it brings joy to others.

A constant thwarping sounds as dozens of miniature feet pound at the wooden boardwalk. Chains clank and rattle as kids run across the hanging bridge. The chorus of laughs and playful screams serves as a soundtrack to childhood. As I look at the playground, I want to be five years old again. I want to get lost in their world of magic and make-believe just inside the fence. Where good conquers evil, where I can travel to every corner of the forgotten world, limits set solely on the hours of daylight and mom's patience. Every young face bears a smile, some toothless. Genuine happiness. Genuine carelessness.

Cartwheels, pink rubber boots, ninja masks, popsicles, and giant crayons. Oversized mittens, caterpillars, and jump ropes. I can't shake the image of a magical forest from my mind. The clouds made of masses of helium balloons and Christmas-cookie trees shed sugar crystal sprinkles instead of needles amidst the smell of bubblegum. I sit at the playground and travel back into time. What started as a walk in the park transformed into a time warp. For hours I find myself caught in the limbo between childhood imagination and reality. The youthful atmosphere surrounding the playground intoxicates and inspires. In a childish trance, I leave the playground. I indulge in a red cherry Blow-Pop to enjoy on the walk back. Its tart, tangy sweetness made it my childhood favorite. I look back as I walk away. The image of the playground melts together: the bridges, spires, and tunnels keep their milk chocolate appeal, and each child adds a swirl of color. Anyone looking for a connection to childhood need not look any further than the playground.

On My Father's Boat: Being the Rosebud

*I am from the dangling bowline
and the captain extant in the breakwater
and the soft hush of the tide
and the boat slip—left vacant.*

I have heard many people say “Carpe Diem,” but my father is the only person I have known who lived by the phrase. Well, to be fair, his mantra was actually “Be here now,” but it meant basically the same thing. Dad lived hungrily, and sought out ways to make each day an adventure. He was always fun to be around, and he was the energy and the main source of light in any room he entered. My father was the best storyteller I’ve ever known. He could weave an intricate tapestry of words effortlessly and flawlessly, and when he chose to share an anecdote everyone in the room stopped what they were doing and listened, even if—especially if—they had heard it before.

All who knew my dad, myself included, wanted to be near him and count themselves among his friends and loved ones. He had a way of making people feel important, and while he was around it was nearly impossible not to be swept up into the “seize the day” feeling. He made people forget their troubles, dismiss their responsibilities, and live in the moment. I didn’t get to know my father until I was fourteen, when I traveled up to Vancouver, Canada, to visit. It was the first time I was able to spend more than a week with him since I was five or six, and the first time I would see my birthplace since I was a toddler. It was during this trip that I spent an afternoon aboard Dad’s fishing boat, and learned who he was. Up until then, my father was fable and fantasy. He was like a unicorn or a leprechaun, something I’d heard about but never really believed in. On that day, he turned out to be a real person, but he was luminescent, and I wanted nothing more than to be around him and feel whatever it was in his spirit—the glow that came from him—on my own skin. I wished that I could hang on to that radiance and take it home with me. While I was with him, nothing else existed. The weeks I spent with him, and specifically the time we spent on his boat together, revealed his tragic flaw to me, though I wasn’t able to

pinpoint exactly what it was until six years later—after his sudden death. My father’s “Be here now” lifestyle—part of what drew others to him—was heartbreaking for all those who loved him outside of the “now”: while the joyous, carefree gardener spends the day gathering rosebuds, the tulip and the daffodil weep.

I didn’t want to spend the day on a fishing boat; after all, I was fourteen and would much rather have been shopping, watching a movie, or lying on the beach. But when we drove down to the marina and I saw the look on my father’s bearded face, I had a change of heart. He was happy here, this was part of him, and I wanted to know more about it. The seabirds (he called them shit-hawks) screeched, dove, and darted in the air above our heads as we walked to the edge of the parking lot where the wooden planks formed a long slick ramp which led down to the boat slips. I couldn’t tell if the birds were albatross, but I remembered seeing a documentary about how they mate for life and travel long distances to return to their place of origin and lay their nests, so I decided that I would remember them that way, whether they were albatross or not. About thirty feet to the west of where we stood there was a harbor seal—a large bull—playing gracefully in the water. We stopped and watched him, and the seal seemed to be watching us too. His wet fur was dark and smooth, like licorice, and Dad explained that it was quite rare for one to come so close to the docks. I casually admired the seal as we approached the ramp. About eighty kilometers off shore was an island where the seals bred and nursed and rested; surely that was a more practical place for the seal to be. I wondered why he had ventured so far from his family, and if it was worth the risk, but I was happy to have gotten to see his friendly whiskered face nonetheless.

My father held my hand, as if I were still a little child, as we stepped onto the mucky ramp and made our descent to the boat slip. It was both awkward and lovely to feel my hand warm and safe, dwarfed in his massive grip. He had remarkably large hands, and since his death I’ve dreamt about them holding my own, and guiding me to safety. As we neared the boat the notion settled on me that this man, this ship, these moments were fleeting, and it would all be sucked up in the undertow. The concept of trying to seize the day, and the daunting task of trying to know and understand my father, a

near-stranger, left me overwhelmed and feeling rushed. It wasn't his fault; he was so laid back and relaxed. I just felt like I had to catalog everything I saw: each feeling, every smell, every texture, everything. I was frantically taking mental notes and pictures, incapable of being in the moment for fear that I might lose it forever. Whatever it was that made Dad so capable of "being here now," he certainly had not passed it on to me.

Finally we stood next to the boat. It was a massive seventy-five foot vessel with a pristine wooden hull the color of honey. It was built in Scotland in 1954 as a North Sea drifter, and it had been converted into a fish-packer sometime in the 1980s. My father had put nearly \$100,000 into restoring it to its original beauty. It was so lovely a sight, and so magical a moment, that I forgot to be resentful that he had spent all of his time and money working on the boat the last few years, while my mother put herself through school and raised my brother and me singlehanded. The boat was called the Salty Isle, and it was one of only two such boats on the West Coast. The dramatic sixty-foot mast pointed skyward like a steeple, and its sails—bound tightly to it—seemed to writhe and twist, as if they were struggling to break free and catch the wind. We stood together and silently marveled at the boat. It pulled eagerly at the slipknots and bowlines holding it to the dock, and swayed and jerked indignantly. The knots in the rope gripped tightly to the creaky dock, and though they held fast against the boat's rebellion, they could be loosened as quickly as they were tied. The Salty was dressed in a new coat of paint, and she was clean and proud-looking. She had the appearance of a spoiled princess, and anyone could see how loved and well taken care of she was.

Stepping from the wharf over the rail of the Salty Isle and onto the deck was tricky. The boat leaned into the dock, squeezing up against giant orange buoys, giving just enough clearance to step aboard. But if one slipped on the slimy dock, lost their grip on the wet railing, or simply timed the step incorrectly, it could be fatal. We watched for a moment, while the Salty swayed, so that I could get the timing down. It was a lot like gearing up to jump into a round of double-dutch, only substantially more terrifying. I pictured myself hanging from the boat rail or flailing in the water between the hull

and the dock, where the boat would rebound and crush my body before I drowned in the icy water. My father demonstrated how to properly board the ship a few times, and explained step-by-step how I might go about it. He was patient. He was a good teacher. He took one last gazelle-like step over the rail, and assured me that he would be ready to catch me if I should falter. I studied his face for a moment. His eyes, the color of coffee grounds, were fixed intently on me, and the deep lines in his browned skin and his easy comfortable smile spoke to me. I suddenly had absolutely no doubt that he would catch me if I blundered, and it was at this exact moment that I realized how focused he was on me. He was seizing this day, and living in this moment with me. We were, right then, in precisely the same place at the same time for what would be the only time in my life that I can recall. I took a deep, salty breath, and when the boat leaned into the dock again I snuck quickly over the railing and found my feet safely planted on the deck next to my dad's.

We entered the wheelhouse and were met with the smell of damp tobacco, coffee, diesel and stale upholstery. My father flipped a number of switches at the helm, and then started the huge engine. The whole boat shook and twitched, celebrating the return of its captain. Brass trinkets and gizmos dappled the interior of the wheelhouse, and surrounding the captain's chair there were glass screens and shiny buttons inviting me to touch them, but I didn't dare. My dad explained that there was "as much electronic equipment as a 747" onboard. The satellite navigation, depth sounders, and a number of radios greeted us with blipping, pinging and fuzzy murmurs. The steering wheel was massive, just like Steamboat Willie's, and it was worn in places on the spokes where my Father might have held it with his giant hands. He grasped one of the wheel spokes, and as we stood side by side at the helm of the Salty Isle and looked out at the beckoning sea, it felt briefly as though we might embark on a voyage together.

The grumbling engine grew louder as we entered the belly of the boat. The air down below was musty and dense, and smelled slightly of fish, as one might expect. My father instantly took on the role of a tour guide. He padded steadily around the living quarters describing the functions of this and that, and what a costly struggle it

was to restore something or other. I didn't care much about what he was saying, but I liked listening to the warmth of his voice. The walls in the living quarters had eight rectangular cutouts in them with neatly made beds inside—just big enough for an average-sized man to stretch out on. They looked like coffins to me, but I could picture my father's crew sleeping comfortably here, encased and secure in the boat's body like unborn babies in her womb. There was a large table with bench seating in the center of the living quarters, and a little galley kitchen to the aft. I sat down at the table, and the leather seat squawked quietly beneath me. It was soft and weathered, and looked and felt just like brown marshmallow skin. Above the small oven, there were rows and rows of shelves inset in the galley walls, holding a variety of spices and cooking necessities. Everything was bungeed or tethered neatly in its place—even the ashtray on the table was secured with Velcro—and as the impatient boat pulled incessantly against its mooring lines, so too did the salt and pepper against their tiny shackles. The boat and all of its contents were uneasy and restless, begging to be set free. The harbor is not a resting place for a boat, it is a prison. I sympathized with the Salty Isle. She had been docked for too long, while my father attended to business on land. The boat craved the sea, and her true home was the open water. The vessel was ready to go at a moment's notice; the cedar cupboards were stocked and latched shut, the engine and hydraulic system had recently been serviced, and the fancy equipment was still pinging and blipping happily above us in the wheelhouse.

We had spent barely thirty minutes together on the boat when I heard voices outside. My dad had invited some of his friends and crewmembers to come down to the marina and meet his daughter. They boarded the boat and came down into the living quarters. The guests greeted me warmly, and once everyone had settled in, my father told us a fishing story. We were all children sitting crisscross applesauce in the school library, and he was a prophet. I watched my father glow and share his spirit with the group, and I could feel the tide heading out again. The Salty Isle seemed to jerk a little harder now, and the swaying began to make me nauseous. My time was up. Through a porthole I could see that

the sky shone slightly red as the sun meandered down to meet the watery horizon.

The Salty Isle is gone now. She was completely destroyed in a dramatic wreck among twenty-foot waves and a craggy reef. None were hurt in the accident, none but the boat anyway. My father had lost a \$300,000 possession, and I had lost a kindred spirit, something like a sister, I suppose. Dad ended up getting another boat soon afterward, and it was that boat which carried us out of the harbor and toward the open sea to spread his ashes after his death. It felt like a betrayal, performing this task on a different boat, but the Salty was long gone and perhaps she was rejoicing. There was just a small group of us on the boat the morning we headed out to put my father's remains at sea. Our small, sad crew was made up of ragged souls. It was unlike the huge wake, which had hundreds of my father's friends and relatives and a few hundred acquaintances who all felt that they were especially close to him. Everyone who met him felt close to him—the waitress, the shoe salesman, the bellboy—they had each basked in his glow at one time or another; he hadn't been stingy with it. Puffy eyed and exhausted, we stood silently on the deck, bracing ourselves against the six degrees of freedom. Each of us had truly loved my father, and had been truly loved by him. And each of us, it dawned on me, had known what it was to lose him long before this day. We each knew what it was to be the rosebud, and each of us knew precisely how it felt not to be. After my father's ashes were released into the water we took turns standing at the boat's railing. We each attempted to say goodbye, and each of us dropped a rose into the water after him. The peach and pink blooms drifted alongside us briefly, and tumbled and trembled in the icy unforgiving water as they met the current and were swept together into the boat's wake. They glistened and twinkled in the water behind us. It was too beautiful, and I wanted to turn my face away. I didn't have any trouble being in the moment right then; in fact, it was horribly impossible to escape it. I was utterly deflated, and every part of me ached. What I wanted more than anything was for some distraction, for some prophet to tell me a story and sweep me away, back to my carefree youth, anywhere. I felt an emptiness in the wind, and it whipped at my tangled hair and wet face as we made our way

back to the marina. I stood alone at the starboard bow of the boat, and in desperation I made a silent plea. It echoed and reverberated in the hug of the surrounding mountains, “Be here now.”

Contributors

Ryan Barone is twenty-three years old and started his first semester at NIC in the fall of 2009. He is currently working toward his AS in General Studies. He would like to continue on at the College of Idaho in the fall of 2011. His favorite thing to do is watch cartoons of all sorts.

Jada Bellrose is studying education at NIC. She is a mother of two, and an avid loudmouth. She skates for the All-Star team in Coeur d'Alene's roller derby league, the Snake Pit Derby Dames, and is one of the league's founding members.

Kevin Carr loves chicken strips. He likes to write, although is not particularly good at it. He's trying to get better. He is a Christian seeking the true meaning of the term. He is a newlywed living in Coeur d'Alene, ID and is wondering why he moved from San Luis Obispo, CA. He is studying business at North Idaho College. He is a musician with a love for talking/sharing/arguing about music.

Born in Louisiana and having lived most of his life there, **Ted Crause** moved to Idaho in 2000 to start over and go to college. He is attending North Idaho College and University of Idaho to earn a degree in education so he can become a middle school science teacher.

Siobhan Curet is a second-year graphic design student at NIC. A native of Salmon, Idaho, Siobhan loves everything outdoors. She particularly enjoys watching waves, staring at the clouds, and of course, freaking people out.

Renée E. D'Aoust's narrative nonfiction book *Body of a Dancer* is forthcoming from Etruscan Press, fall 2011. Daniele Puccinelli is a Research Scientist at Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana (SUPSI). Hermann Hesse is Hermann Hesse.

Michael Doty grew up in Northern California. He moved from state to state. Observing people, places, and some of his favorite things, he has come to rest in Idaho for a brief landing before resuming his migrations.

Kyndall Elliott is a sophomore at North Idaho College, where she is majoring in English. She plans to transfer to University of Idaho in the fall to finish out her degree. Kyndall is an aspiring pro (photographer and writer!); she looks forward to someday moving back down near her hometown, Sugar Land, TX.

Patrick Lippert has been an Instructor in Philosophy at North Idaho College since 1990. He is a graduate of the University of Washington, St. Louis University, and the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. His philosophical interests are centered on semiotics and aesthetics. He is currently writing a paper on Evolutionary Love, as found in Charles Sanders Peirce; and also a theology paper on nature and grace.

Bernadette Loibl is in her second year getting her AA in Fine Art.

Tonya Manning is an education major and will be graduating from NIC in the spring of 2011. She has aspirations to teach both math and English at the college level. She is engaged and is the mother of two beautiful young girls. She loves to read everything, but is currently, although not necessarily by choice, memorizing Dr. Seuss books and various children's poems. Her hobbies include writing, reading, playing with her children, yoga, and basking in the sunshine. One day she aspires to be a novelist, but for now is trying to stay focused on getting a degree so she can stop eating Ramen.

Kenny McAnally was born and raised in beautiful Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and lives there now with his wife. He is a Combat Veteran of OIF 05-07. After surviving a crazy twelve-month deployment to Ramadi, Iraq, Kenny swore off anything that would kill him; he quit

smoking and refuses to wear combat boots, preferring flip-flops year-round. His life is much simpler now, and he enjoys long walks with his wife and philosophical conversations with his dog. If you wish to know more, buy the book *Confessions of a War Pimp*.

Mike McCall is a journalism major and the managing editor of *The Sentinel*. Mike hopes to eventually combine his experience in journalism with his deep interest in music to become a music journalist, photographing and reporting on concerts and musicians. He enjoys using his camera to document the places he goes. Mike grew up in Hamilton, Montana and has lived in Coeur d'Alene for almost four years. He aspires to continue journalism at a four-year university.

Lo Miles is a nineteen-year-old first year college student who is a theatre major, but who also aspires to make major archaeological discoveries in the Middle East.

Robens Napolitan writes poetry because she has to. It's not like having to brush one's teeth. It's more like smelling a beautiful flower and getting pollen on one's nose, or petting one's cat into a state of bliss—the have-tos of the heart and soul, the things that make us whole. Gardening does it for her, too, and the list could go on, but writing is one of her foundation blocks.

Patrick M. O'Connor was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1940. He has a degree in economics and psychology from Arizona State University and has done post graduate work in psychology at the University of Tennessee. His primary occupation during his lifetime was to create and manage a successful business marketing Native American art and jewelry in Germany where he lived for seventeen years. He moved to Careywood, ID from Germany in 1992 where he continued the business. It evolved into an art publishing company under the name of Hipart in Coeur d'Alene. He and his wife now raise warm-blood dressage horses in North Idaho. He has long wished to write, and enrolled at NIC in a creative writing course in order to pursue this new career.

Neal Peters received his MFA in creative writing from Eastern Washington University. His work has appeared in *SpokeWrite*, *Canteen Magazine*, *Pank*, and *Willow Springs*. He teaches writing at North Idaho College and Spokane Community College, and lives in Washington state with his wife and two children, where he keeps a fridge perpetually stocked with bottled Coke imported from Mexico.

Meagan Powell is a sophomore student athlete at NIC originally from Whitefish, Montana. Along with studying English at NIC, she was captain of her soccer team for the 2010 season as well as named Academic All American for the academic year.

Kalynn Rakes grew up in southern California until her parents moved her family up to North Idaho at age sixteen. She is currently enrolled at North Idaho College and University of Idaho as an education major and hopes to be a teacher someday. Married with two children, Kalynn still lives in North Idaho in the beautiful city of Coeur d'Alene. She has been published before in the literary journal, *Outrageous Fortune*.

David Alan Reece was born in Fresno, California, in 1983. He spent the first twenty-three years of his life in the San Joaquin Valley of California. He currently lives in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and attends North Idaho College, where he is studying for a degree in English.

Fawn Rich adds herself to a long line of hopeful published authors. She stays eternally busy raising a fine family, attending school, entering into wacky business endeavors and searching for the meaning of life. Her love of the arts is often impeded by an even larger battle with procrastination. Fawn loathes math and "social networking" and does, indeed, enjoy long walks on the beach.

Mary-Claire Roth is thirty-three years old and lives in Coeur d'Alene with her husband and daughter. She is an on again/off again NIC student who likes to study literature and the arts, among other things. She is a stay at home mom and a poet/photographer.

She has severe fibromyalgia, but is determined to embrace life in spite of this. She is convinced she is part mermaid as she feels uneasy when she travels anywhere there are no bodies of water. She loves the peace that nature brings whether she is swimming, camping, looking at wildflowers, or feeding birds in her backyard. She is very dedicated to her family and church. She suffers from obsessive bouts of rhyming, and is an unashamed romantic. In the past, she has read poetry at open mics and been a political protester/human rights activist. These days, she's been living more quietly, but deep down she is very dedicated to human rights and respecting the dignity inherent in all people.

Rachael Simon is currently a music major at NIC and next year will continue her education at SFCC and major in photography.

Randi Vaughn is an English instructor at NIC. She's originally from Illinois, where she received her BA and MA in English literature. She loves to write, everything from genre fiction and short stories to nonfiction and research papers. Randi reads any time she gets the chance, and her tastes run from the backs of cereal boxes to classical literature. Besides reading and writing, she enjoys fishing, hiking, camping, drawing, singing, playing the piano, and teaching. She pines for a dog, but has to content herself with her two cats, Bimbly and Fuzzy.

Maurissa N. Welsh is a third year English major at NIC. She chose English as a degree because she wants to become a writer—poetry, short stories, and novels. She has always loved reading and writing, and ever since she was little she has always wanted to write. Most of her spare time is spent reading novels (especially romance novels) and writing poetry. One of her greatest wishes is to see her work published.

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welcomes submissions of any genre of literary or creative work for its 2012 issue. Submissions of poetry (3-5 poems per submission), prose (5,000 words maximum) or black-and-white artwork (any style or media) may be sent via email attachment to tcr@nic.edu. We consider work by any member of the NIC 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 is available at our website, www.nic.edu/tcr. Submission deadline is January 31, 2012, for May publication.



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