




*viprap*

*journal*



38



# 38

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# Riprap Journal

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Cortney Charleston

## WORKING DEFINITION OF A PREFIX: TRANS-

*for Papi Edwards, for Lamia Beard, for Ty Underwood, for Keyshia Blige,  
for Shade Schuler, for Ashton O'Hara, for K.C. Haggard, for Bri Golec, for...*

meaning, as applied to a human being:

*Through* birth & rebirth  
*Through* yin & yang  
*Through* lie & its long black shadow

*Through* the insult of puberty  
*Through* an inside joke  
*Through* the garment of a name

*Through* the rainbow & its sour Skittles  
*Through* skin color & across

*Across* a cross-  
section of socially ill cognitions

*Through* pronouns  
*Through* some awkward sex  
*Through* stitches, in the sense of laughter splitting a seam along  
the jaw  
*Through* confetti

*Across* the dance floor with  
stumbling courage  
& a compliment to land on  
its wings

*Through* that good, good sex

*Through* the front door & out the back, in one motion  
*Through* both me & you, like an instrument of crime  
we've committed to their bodies & against

*Through* being seen through across the board,  
a broad spectrum of bully & bullshit

*Through* truth & its long black shadow  
*Through* yang & yin  
*Through* death & death again

& beyond & beyond & across the face –

a crescent of teeth, a blade of joy hard-fought for  
& the camera flashing & the body, electric with life.

Jax NTP

## Neurocity LXIX: plucking out the sutures

i'm not the bride  
of death, but the bed  
where she lies.

she does not speak to me,  
nor i to her.  
when the moon is bald and horny  
i look at her face and wonder what  
she is remembering  
in our silence.

my father balancing  
me on my bike,  
my first false memory of  
falling.  
the way watercolor  
drips  
off the page.

no more breastplates and shin-guards,  
what a naked arena.

words akimbo to my intentions.  
such haphazard seams.

closeness has nothing to do with distance  
pure iron comfort.  
not maternal nor erotic  
but a nostalgia  
for both.

the location where i want  
my ashes scattered,

my last thought  
before sleep.

da capo.

Chas Holden

**duct tape & twine**

keeping it together  
smile on my face

Ruben Rodriguez

## Loteria

through pine  
hear mandolin  
harp rise

rose bloom  
cactus cringe

with bird  
pitcher breaks  
rooster caw  
arrow back

spring umbrella

be shrimp  
common fish

frog the  
ladder leave  
the canoe

Dante Matero

## **You're a Thing, Too**

Pure, fiber, frosted coconut cake,  
spilling & slicing & gobstoppers,  
ratty Chargers jersey, blowtorch.

Prisoner of Azkaban (signed),  
painted flaking metal miniature poodle,  
Earl Grey sachets, ladybug brooch.

18" horse-hair braids, 7 ½ Xanax,  
"Eggplant Growing Kit" seeds,  
toothpaste stain, Donnie Darko mask.

Sarah A. Davis

## Monthly Rituals

Bless the days of gym clothes  
without breaking a sweat,  
the blood-crust on panties  
that used to be my favorite.

Bless discount Midol,  
and the desire to consume  
all the salty food in the world  
as well as chocolate,  
at the same time.  
Bless St. Ben as well as St. Jerry.

Let this be the month  
I finally buy tampons  
with plastic applicators  
instead of realizing I bought  
the cardboard ones  
half way home.

Bless my uterus, that bitch.

Lila Hemsell

## joy

joy spreads like blood on the sheets, love, and we are black  
blooded thieves, turnip takers in our lucky rabbit skins.

medicine makes the good heart powerful and we thump  
thump our drums until sunup. chant ourselves hoarse through the smoking

wet cedar. the system of currency and want has lost its sway. I have now  
only the natural sorts of hunger. with that in mind, let us feast.

with that in mind, let us cleave the river from the bank with the cosmic axe.  
feed the deer from our pockets, the oatmeal we ourselves were raised on

and will raise our children on again. with that in mind, ravage me.  
have you seen the quiet way in fog the dawn barely breaks? it is treason

for the day to enter with so little ceremony. I want fireworks. I want  
the slaughter of lambs for our holy days, but each day is holier than the last.

as we plummet from our high banyan seat the short switch beats the rug,  
the golden beets are slow to come and you, love, accept my hurricane

to your stout trunk, accept the natural uprooting. the bevel meeting of me to you,  
god, speak on the smoothing of stone by water, and the fitting of stone to stone.

we are meek walkers on the once lush globe. now, among the perishing, we count  
our blessings and shed our shoes.

Camille Hove

## Cherry Cheesecake

Make your brain the color of cherry cheesecake  
Consult your doctor about the ache between your legs  
Check out a book on pornography and another on dinosaurs from the library  
Swim in the public pool like it's jello and you can't move your arms  
Sit naked in the locker room as you stare at the other women  
Wonder why they don't shave their crotches  
Bicycle home before you have the urge to masturbate  
Ask the cat why you aren't writing your novel  
And sitting on the pink bathroom tile trying to bend spoons  
Answer the phone when it rings, speak a language that makes sense,  
Tell your mother you're doing fine  
That you're still taking the medication and you'll be home for Easter  
Hang up before she can ask about Charlie  
Go to his side of the closet and wrap your naked skin in his blue ties  
Lie on the carpet of the bedroom until he gets home  
Try to read Lolita, get a paper cut  
Fill the wound with ice cream before dinner  
Ask your boyfriend if sushi sounds ok  
Swap spit before you fish  
Ask your sever if they want to have a threesome when they get off  
Quietly accept their decline  
Make your love in the car on the street like tart blackberries  
Lick the windshield so passerby can stare in  
Drive home with Ed Sheeran playing softly in the background  
Hold hands to prove you're still there  
Fall asleep like you're playing dead  
And don't wake up  
Until you dream about coloring your brain like cherry cheesecake



## NOTE FROM A TRANSDIMENSIONAL ROMANTIC

I grew up, learning lust from images on the family monitor, and the Annual Swimsuit edition. If only I could know the tools for transdimensional infatuation would become so easy, so slick, so intoxicatingly simple. Yoga nymphs, semi-professional models, tattooed harlequins exist in small boxes for me to spend hours worshipping. If only I could bridge the gap between my three dimensional existence and that two-dimensional paradise. I do not long to know these women, but instead yearn to mutate myself into a flat being, that can exist in their perfect images along with them. My desire for this change can't be overstated as I now spend far too long in the restroom at work with these objects—snapchat strippers, instafamous sirens, exhibitionists of a digital era—for fifteen or twenty minutes at a time. My co-workers think I have terrible bowel troubles, and I let them assume. That's my time to like, comment, DM dickpicks in hope to cultivate a mutual obsession. I know you can't make love to a picture, but I don't care. No one in my three dimensions compares to these small windows of two dimension perfection. I'll never be satisfied with a real girl, so keep posting, because even though we're in two different dimensions, I will manage to love you.

Calvin Adams

## Cheekbones

*To Nicole: mother of Dylan Hockley.*

You have the cardinal virtue of strong cheekbones.  
Rose caked and deceptive,  
presumed fragile, holding your face in place  
as children, pull  
at your kind skin.  
From womb he sought to strain, as all children do.  
Hands so un-weathered stood no chance,  
you remained.  
Porcelain.

but on the day in the firehouse when there was no one to find  
all the ghost hands had come to know havoc,  
they sunk far beneath your epidermis  
drew you out, apart, away, with what they learned  
in school that day, the day, we looked around  
and recognized nothing.

Like tattered flags each stood  
unready to waver  
as all else wilted  
we looked to you  
for remnants  
of before.

Mehrnoosh Torbatnejad

## Madam Reporter

Dropped into a pocket  
between judge and litigants,  
she stares ahead windless,  
head bobbing gently,  
a rhythmic nod  
still not enough to signal  
whether she agrees or cares  
for the rope of words lowered  
by unrefined advocates

In a burgundy blazer,  
seated below basin shaped  
chandeliers hung by brass chains,  
she transcribes their speeches,  
heavy like soliloquy,  
a kind of missionary  
converting the unnecessary  
into shorthand copy

Her inspiration is the folds  
of drawn brown and beige curtains,  
the radiators thick in coats  
of taupe paint,  
the colorless glances  
of viewers in the gallery

Glued waves sit weightless  
on her pulsing shoulders  
Her expression ashen  
like the drooping thumbprints  
of oak swirls in courtroom furniture

Eyes carry on dead  
when the language pouring  
from her hands  
gives life to this proceeding,  
hauls into forever  
every verse, objection,  
ruling of these cases

Still, when attorneys  
request playback,  
they hear a recording  
only of their own voices

Heath Brougher

## Year of the Piñata

The English is sprinkled with rolling tongue,  
weaving incoherent clothes—a season  
of nonsense is born and welcomed—  
a respite from the cold drab of December noons;  
hung from a string in the middle of the den,  
its ribs bore sweetness as we swung,  
alive in the lamplight breathing  
bigger breath than before; it kept  
chiming in, shattering the *silencio*—  
the world and its words were vague,  
faint to the grasp, yet we were suddenly  
peppered with vibrant energy; we wanted  
this time to carry on; swinging to and fro  
in all its motley glory, we whacked  
and whacked, blooming in broken English,  
we stuttered and danced blindfolded  
in front of the widest of opened eyes; swung and whacked  
and swung and whacked again,  
and when the bowel was broken and the cardboard rhino  
leaked its plethora of sweetness onto the floor  
we knelt down and gorged on the belly's plenty.

Elisabeth Oliver

***talitha cumi:***

I

She paints the apples  
of her cheeks with blackberries  
before the fleshy bulbs  
pass her puckered lips, stains  
them purple.

II

She is only twelve, a child  
bride, old enough to bear babies—  
full of seeds, bursting, a ripe fruit,  
she has tender flesh and falls prematurely  
from a fever. Spared from hands  
and vows and subjugation.

III

She picks violets now beneath a lemon  
tree, pomegranate seeds stick  
between her teeth. Sinewy,  
she runs through viridian  
fields of tall grass, cerulean  
creeks, and forests full of orange  
cats and powder blue birds.

IV

“Child, get up!”  
She wakes after two days  
dead in her bedroom. They feed  
her bread that tastes of ash  
and give her wine that burns  
her throat.

V

For weeks her mother weeps  
as blow flies break through her dusty  
olive skin. Messiahs  
can cure death  
but not decomposition.

Kristen Skjonsby

## The Third

Five or so, and I know I can't be  
picked up and carried much longer  
I so dread the bigness coming

At the screen, I'm seeing  
two cats hold each other  
the man with his jaws open around her neck  
so she can't think to crawl off

looking harder, a third appears  
hiding somewhere between them, a living  
essence, in an empty space  
smaller than thumbs between  
the snap of background trees

I thought, I've seen the same thing  
on dying snails in the drive  
I stung with a stick to watch  
the third appear between their waving eyes

And when the big cat comes  
she turns in a rage and strikes him  
What you call *the other half*  
is nothing without the third

At five years old and I know  
that life is sensational  
by the very pull on my eyes  
to the center of its ecstasy

Olivia Someš

## The Day Tom Petty Ate Alice in Wonderland

At six, I was as tough as frozen jerky.  
I would grub on Pop Rocks and pop,  
flick bumble bees into oblivion,  
watch *Ghoulies* in the dark, alone,  
say bloody Mary three thousand times,  
clean a plate of Brussels sprouts  
as fast as a starved dog, take on third  
graders in four square, tetherball, dodge ball,  
(dare me and I was there)  
lug around a tarantula like a pair of muddy socks,  
roll up my sleeves at the doctor's office  
and say *hurry up I want my lollipop*  
and take a spanking like my butt was a tank  
but the day I watched Tom Petty  
turn *Alice in Wonderland* into a cake  
and serve up pieces of her body  
while her fingers and feet spazzed around  
like faulty boat motors and her eyeballs  
popped out as big as squeezed water balloons  
I screamed so loud the Bride of Frankenstein  
would tell me to calm down;  
and even though my older brother called me retarded,  
and my mom assured me it was all fake, showed me  
the cover of his album with the Heartbreakers,  
and my dad laughed up a sand storm for hours,  
put on Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*  
to rekindle my faith that she's alive and well,  
I knew I figured out the big secret in life  
that grownups were always spelling out  
in front me, so I couldn't make out the words:  
cakes were actually pieces of dead people.

Alessandra Castellanos

## We Flew to Guatemala When I Was Five

I bathed, splashing in a red bucket,  
no Spanish porcelain bathtubs to sleep in dreams.  
My poor knows no misery,  
and Mami washed my lathered hairs.

No Spanish porcelain bathtubs to sleep in dreams.  
The dancing pueblo's lights faded into black.  
Mami washed my lathered hairs,  
as candles unlocked lucid pockets into her niñez.

Dancing, the pueblo's lights faded into black  
as we celebrated her 43rd,  
the candles unlocked lucid pockets into her niñez,  
and she cuddled dry, my pale once suave skin.

We celebrated Mamis 43rd  
I saw her ghost cross the hall  
she cuddled dry, my pale once suave skin  
untamed braids and puffed cheeks, not yet budding she was.

Her ghost crossed the hall  
as I slept deep, her past stroking my curved back. A soft coo for  
untamed braids and puffed cheeks, not yet budding she was.  
Fireworks splintered morning's still,

as I slept deep, her past stroking my curved back. A soft coo for  
the rat, sidling my face with whiskers muddled made of horsehair.  
Fireworks splintered morning's still,  
I sought refuge beneath her nightgown.

A rat! Sidling my face with whiskers muddled made of horsehair,  
stared me down, words not formed  
I sought refuge beneath her nightgown  
as the day stretched slow towards the candled night.

Staring me down, words not formed,  
I broke the comb in my Tío Rene's back pocket,  
as the day stretched slow towards the candled night.  
In Mamis pueblo we're allowed to feed the dog chicken bones,

and I broke the comb in my Tío Rene's back pocket.  
My poor knows no misery,  
while in Mamis pueblo we're allowed to feed the dog chicken bones,  
I bathed, splashing in a red bucket.



BJ Best

## **hail, tamoxifen**

these three days of rain are a fat slug, sliming  
sludgy puddles, until we're sick, sick, sick  
of weather. and cancer. and talk of surviving.  
someone dreamt up a cure they hope will stick:

sprinkle salt. everywhere. hoping to wither  
the illness, returning rubber to skin.  
so it pounds our deck, exploding in the rivers  
of our yard like popcorn dropped by seraphim.

our son, who's in bed, has never seen hail,  
so my wife rushes out to grab a pebble  
for the freezer. come morning, he'll be availed  
to something he doesn't know is trouble.

she will swallow that pill, her smile a gleam,  
and amaze us as this lump dissolves into steam.

AN Teibe

## Riverbank After Hard Rain

After recent rain, trees lean over the ditch, uncovering  
the artifice of stability.  
Once tethered upright, now splayed, the waterway's bank a tangle  
of roots like morning-mussed hair.  
Erosive cracks in the dirt remember rivulets overwhelmed  
to rivers: expansion a wrecking  
and crafting in one. The disclosure: tenuous balance  
of form: trunk uplifting crown—  
boughs a bloom magnified (twig to stem, then calyx-corolla-spread sepals)  
made the upending workings of dream—mirrors  
these parts holding their center—horizontal trunks hover between sun-seeking,  
(now bud-stripped) limbs and dank-culling gnarls,  
roots underworld-twisted and knobbed. The dark arthritis of yearning  
unearthed, nature's sundry, coupled design

Daniel Magner

## Temporarily Free

A little girl escapes out a window  
into a downpour.

She laughs with her hands up,  
trying to catch each drop,  
until her mom bursts out,  
pulling her back.

The courtyard is still except the rain  
and muffled the mother's muffled shouts,

"Why do you do this?

Why do you do this to *me*?"

JM Baker

## notes for a novel II

start in the middle. and the snow fell after. borrow movement from the breath between.

a series of parentheticals. the river runs parallel to flight.

word becomes aperture. a form of light in this winnowing. a character has his own trajectory and sometimes departs the page.

no one here sleeps. a cluster of white oak.

no one sleeps here. a cluster of hours.

an album repaired by wax tape. the question is woolen, is animal. bent reflections in pewter. a semblance of nature. the crows at dusk are loudest.

a muffled sky suspends imitation. root buckles asphalt. an act of growth or inquiry mistaken for violence. a form of revision professing innocence.

“theoretically infinite and hypothetically real.”

this page resists sudden movements. that page, loud noise.

a crease, not dogeared, but a disfiguring one comes to know. negativity becomes impetus, conveying the barest strokes of trees, an empty carafe. this is waiting.

song or shoreline. nostalgia is the counterbalance.

three acrylic sparrows larger than the moon. a foreground conclusion.

she hears the painting word by word. word by word as it writes. as she writes it. a return to the city for the sake of regret. it all gets crowded. even the referent.

“so we fall into a promise like the gathering dark.”

not a note but the movement of the note. the part of a sound that is husk or hull. an attempt to unwrite the passage. observing the bluer slough of the flame.

the material of the unmade continues to accrue. postscript, footsteps, rhyme and starlings, wind. which storylines would branch into yours but never are.

a message written on cellophane. a hand on glass.

lost keys at arlene’s grocery.

lost the window whereby.

avenue, pronoun, bend.

follow her just to know if perception resembles a plot.

while winter was of a more innocent vintage. smell the fat, the soil, the loamy curls of smoke. a piece reclaimed. that the letters digressed. that the stars did not forgive us.

like the gathering dark which gives voice to inanimate things.

“if you use pictures at my memorial service.” as if a story, as if history, had four sides.

as if procrastination might posit an ending. insects of surinam on the coffee table. locus or locust. cup of tea, a mystery without innuendo.

not that the lake was deep. not that twilight kept her. we think we are speaking by getting nearer or farther apart. the captions read like music.

phylum versus debris. a question of romance.

color never gets mastered.

and she says she can still smell the iron in the rain.

the etymology of a dream still returns to a place we mistake for the sea. she pulls cobwebs from the ceiling with a wooden spoon.

you pull cobwebs from the ceiling with a wooden spoon.

each verb is a place. the aureole of a blackbird vanishes in a satellite. a flower given away creates two people.

so we fall into a promise.

this is waiting. and your lip softly split open like a poem. split softly, rather, like a plum from the cold.

AJ Urquidi

## Healed Hawks

A procession of piano waves  
swept the highlands highway.  
Over the tor you careened  
through the crystalline signal  
tower without the slightest  
perceptible twitching of feathers.  
Stiffly your wingtips  
tamed the currents, repealed  
your direction unseen  
at each drum's beating, brushed  
the steel bars as though  
you pulled the smallest thread  
through the amplest eye  
of needle to stitch the wild  
hillocks together.  
My double swung  
up in the beams,  
reaching to catch you  
whenever you  
swooped between and beyond  
his gummy arms.  
I met you once before  
on a fencepost  
above the breathing pebble  
tides of Asilomar  
and Spanish Bay; you did  
not flinch then  
when I approached  
to marvel, forever  
the salt-blown mirror

to eyelash-curling  
rivulets of Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Years, miles away, you  
    reversed, swung, swung  
    and reversed over the tor.  
        The accompaniment waned  
    and you disappeared  
    behind the rocks to tell me  
    that you were yourself  
just then, as I too was meant to be—  
    at the same time you were  
Jeffers, though you'd never admit it.

David Stallings

## On a Tuesday

One-by-one Ms. Wilson's  
kindergarteners pop out  
through the door she holds open.  
Behind Awo in her glittering hijab,  
ahead of Eiso, his Dutch friend,  
Tavi marches out with his purple dinosaur  
backpack, eyes seeking mine  
among waiting parents.

*Grampa!*  
*Tavi-man!*

Nine blocks to his home,  
through an old Seattle neighborhood  
lined with sycamores, maples,  
and mysteries—like this  
multi-trunked Port Orford cedar,  
where he likes to hide,  
or these dense shrubs  
which conceal old bottles  
if you know where to look.  
Or here— a special rose bush.  
He asks me to peel off a thorn,  
licks the base and sticks  
it to his forehead.

*I'm a rhino!*  
*Cool, I say.*

Papa showed me how, he says.

Near his second floor condo,  
I pull out my key, but his mom,  
not at work, opens the door.  
Come in. We have a family emergency.  
We follow her upstairs, all sit together  
on the couch where Tavi likes to bounce.

*Papa has left.*  
*He doesn't want to live here anymore.*  
*He's not coming back.*  
*Ever.*

Tavi walks into his room,  
pulls out his Undersea Legos.  
My daughter leans  
into my shoulder,  
and we cry and cry.

After a while I go help Tavi  
assemble a deep sea scuba scooter.



Irene Luna

## Tennessee Humidity

plasters hair to my neck.  
I fold it upon itself,  
tuck marigold asters  
behind my ears—  
the tart lemon meringue  
color pulls bees.

I crawl out of the observant sun  
into the shady beech halo  
embracing the field.

Wax trees: ivy-hugged, shiny,  
green monsters, birthed  
by time and the black  
abyss on either side of the 441.

That nightly cicada song  
bounces off electric air—  
fills dry cracks in my elbows.

Daye Phillippo

## Diorama

Dusk. I'm leaning over my enamel-topped kitchen table  
pressing pizza dough into rounds  
when I see them, a doe and her yearling,  
near the house, cropping grass and weeds.  
They are framed in the window's long rectangle.

The doe looks up, right at me.  
Her ears ask questions.  
*I'm no threat, I tell her, My children need supper, too.*

We go back to what we were doing.

They move around the clearing  
the way I move around the room.

The table's scarred top, women before me,  
chopping vegetables, kneading dough.  
Refuge of *enough* as the sun rests.  
    Last glimpse before full dark,  
two shadow shapes out by the pines.  
They stand watching  
the lit window, the diorama there.

John Grey

## Dragonfly

Compressed among the dark trees,  
flashes of iridescent blue,  
a contraction of life skimming water  
for insects—

multitasking eyes,  
a scatter of tiny spheres,  
forewing concomitant to hind—

a traveler in kind  
but an insect nevertheless—

like the trash collector,  
like the street sweeper,  
what we value in principle  
cannot hack it as style.

Marcus Clayton

## On my 30th birthday, I tied my tubes

and hoped the Catholic church would not  
excommunicate my uterus,  
hoped the small trenches  
carved into my palms from rosary  
beads would be enough  
for forgiveness, but sit  
where I sat:

where incubators spread past  
the viewing window like a minefield,  
my child a scorched shell  
with napalm drool coughed  
out of the mouth.  
Feel the knot in my stomach  
when a nurse asked, “Would you like  
any coffee? Some water? Some food?”  
I could not scream, “I want air  
in my baby’s lungs.”  
I could not punch her  
sunny mouth when she walked  
toward the next mother—famished  
for a late dinner, her arms that ignore  
exhaustion from her own child rested  
at her breasts. “No, thank you.”  
I said with barren breasts and eyes  
hugging my suffocating bomb.

When they drove a knife  
in my baby’s side, replaced skin  
with thread and needle, restarted  
the lungs, I decided I did not care  
to have a second child  
fall from my vagina with umbilical  
cord around the neck to swing  
like a ragdoll the way Jesus  
does—five Hail Marys lengths of beads  
away from my fissured palms.

# Flash Fiction

## Recess

John liked to walk with his eyes fixed on the ground. He found the world to be a bit more inviting from that angle. He could lose himself in the cracks on the sidewalk, to him a maze of endless novelty, or stomp like an angry giant, the harsh crunch of gravel lending authority to each step. Sometimes he'd walk with no destination, kicking up leaves, tracking their peculiar Brownian motion, allowing them to lay a path for him.

Once while following the feathery movements of a red maple leaf across his grade school playground, he ran straight into a girl from the classroom next to his, knocking her on her rear. Had he been looking up he would have seen that she was standing between the rusted monkey bars and the reflective metal slide, feet buried up to the ankles in wood chips, staring at the clouds with marvelous, sky blue eyes.

"What'd you do that for?" She said, pulling her feet out of their nests and tucking them under her knees. She sat with crossed legs, her hands on her thighs, looking up at him with an expectant expression. Her straight blonde hair was littered with tiny wood chips.

"It was an accident." John mumbled, rubbing a rosy cheek. He recognized her but didn't know her name. He'd seen her under the canopy during lunch before, perhaps even sat next to her on the swings once. He had a vague memory of watching a tiny girl with blonde hair crouching in the dirt by one of the pine trees in the field, gathering up dead needles and stuffing them into her sock. It might have been someone else, though.

"Oh, ok then." The girl said, flopping onto her back with arms outstretched, her fingers sliding playfully through the wood chips. She seemed to have forgotten all about him.

John stood where he was, peering down at the girl with an expectant look of his own. His heedless wandering had him bumping into his peers quite frequently and the responses were always the same; if it was a boy, he'd push John back playfully, smack him on the arm and shout "You're it!" much to John's dislike; if it was a girl, she'd flare her nostrils, toss her hair to the side, say "Meanie!" then storm off to turn him in to the student aide who was supposed to be watching them but was usually dozing in her lawn chair, loosely holding a book of half finished crossword puzzles.

Not this one, though. The red maple leaf was gone. He'd found a new curiosity.

"What's your name?" He asked.

She raised her head slightly. "Ashley" she said, then dropped her head again and lifted her eyes.

John followed them and saw thick, white puffs drifting lazily across the sky. He squinted against the sun, looking for something special within them. "What are you lookin' up there for?"

She raised her arm, lifting a finger as if to pop one of them. "See that one there? With the little thing in the back? It looks just like a rabbit, doesn't it? See, that's the tail right there, and the little feet, and the body. I'm just waiting for it to poke it's head out. Then it'll be perfect."

John didn't see the rabbit but nodded at each indication anyway. He stayed there, gazing up disinterestedly, pretending to join her vigil while sneaking glances at her out of the corner of his eye. She was still running wood chips through her fingers.

Suddenly she squeaked with glee, bouncing her palms on the floor, sending up splashes of the little, golden chips.

“Is it the rabbit?” John asked, not seeing anything.

She peered down her nose at him again, with a look of surprise at his continued presence.

“Noooo,” she said, frustrated that he could not see the obvious. “It’s a maple tree, see? Right there.”

John didn’t bother to look for it. Finally, a topic that he could speak of knowledgeably had come up. Putting all the intent of a thousand maple leaf connoisseurs into his words, he said, “Those have really big leaves!”

Ashley sat up.

“I know! We have a red one in my front yard, it’s just a baby right now but Mommy says that it’s gonna be taller than the house one day and that I can climb it when I get bigger too!”

She fell back down with a flourish, lost again in the sky above.

The two remained, John on his feet, craning his neck up, Ashley spread-eagle on the ground, smiling occasionally, until the bell rang signaling that their fifteen minutes were up.

Ashley rolled to her feet. Now her entire dress was covered in wood chips, along with her hair. She started back towards class, then turned and asked, “What’s your name?”

“Johnny” He shuffled his feet, looking at his poorly tied shoelaces.

“Well I’ll see you tomorrow then, Johnny!” She ambled away, climbing up the metal slide turned brilliant and blinding by the sun, then down the ladder on the other side.

When she was at a safe distance, John looked up to see her skipping away. He pictured the baby red maple in her yard. He hoped that he could climb it with her, too, when all three of them were big.

## The Coming of Ed

Over platefuls of broccoli and chicken Parmesan and homemade potato wedges that were crisp just along the edges, the boy asked what “special ed” meant.

His parents exchanged a glance. His mother nearly choked on the chicken bone that she hadn’t meant to swallow.

“It’s not a nice word,” she said, when it became clear her husband was not going to say anything. She rubbed her napkin between her grease-stained fingertips, as though it were a penny, as though she were poor.

“Oh.” The boy cast his eyes downward. “But the tester told me today that I was special ed.”

“What tester?” his father asked, growing hotheaded and defensive, as was his way. “Who?”

And so the boy recounted, as best he could, the day’s events. He told his parents about the man in the glasses who had come that morning to visit his second grade classroom, and how the man had pulled the students out, one by one, to test them.

He explained how the man had set up a desk in the hallway, and how he’d sat across from the students, holding up flashcards with fuzzy pictures before them. “Which one doesn’t belong?” he would ask, before having the children point to the anomaly.

When the man with the glasses held up the three pictures to the boy—girl in dress, boy in suit, and camera—the boy pointed his finger at the card with the child in the suit on it, a boy who did not look all that dissimilar from himself. Both had brown hair and brown eyes. The tester asked the boy if he would like to try again and the boy, bemused, nodded. Again, the same three cards were shown—girl, boy, camera. Again, the boy pointed to the card with the boy.

The tester made some notes, made some sounds. What he failed to assess though, through the jumble of his scrawled figures and symbols, was that no matter which cards he’d held up, the boy would always have said that the card with the boy in the suit pictured was the one that didn’t belong.

The boy told his parents over dinner that night that he was now deemed special ed. The boy’s father tried to smooth over a throbbing vein in his jaw with a laugh.

“No, no,” he said. “You’re just special. But they can’t come right out and say that, because it would make the other kids very upset. So they call you special Ed. Ed. Like your uncle Edward?” He was spinning his wheels too quickly, and his cheeks were growing redder by the second. “Right, Mother?” he asked.

The father looked across the table to the boy’s mother, who, at some point, had reached for one of the toothpicks in the center of the table to wheedle between two front teeth. Blood emerged from the seam, staining her teeth to make it look as though she’d been feasting on something awful.

The mother, recognizing her boy to be of average intelligence, at best, and not wanting him to grow too proud, said, “Well, I think they were trying to give you a nickname, that’s all. Ed,” she rolled the name around in her mouth. “Yes, Ed suits you. Sweet and short and nothing all that impressive. It would’ve been a better name than the one we’d chosen, I think. No, Father?”

The boy’s real name was Rinaldo. He’d never disliked his name, and in fact, had always before worn it as though it were a sort of badge. Rinaldo. There was something regal even in the sound of it. The boy liked to roll the name around his mouth, as though it were a gumball. But that night, at dinner, was how the boy, who had never fit in just quite right, came to be known as Ed.



## The Months

The day after Thanksgiving Father put on a thick red flannel shirt, went into the basement, and hammered together old two-by-fours into a two-story-tall crucifix. He dragged the pine cross into the driveway, raised it, pressing his shoulder into it, and nailed it to the side of our cerulean house between the two garage doors. He hung multi-colored blinking Christmas lights on it.

“It’s the reason for the season,” he said. “No one should forget that.”

In December the kids on the school bus asked, “Isn’t that your house?”

“No,” I said, but the freckled kid sitting two rows behind me, Charlie, who stayed at my house when his mom had an appendectomy said, “It is too your house.”

By January the cross remained, the lights pulsing in their programmed rhythm—green, then red, then blue—outside my bedroom window at night.

“People can always use a reminder of God’s good news,” Father said. “You shouldn’t be ashamed of it.”

When I appealed to Mother, she said, “Oh, let him have it. What’s the harm?” She inflated a long balloon. She had enrolled in clown classes at the community center, and a misshapen balloon menagerie filled the kitchen table. Why did he do it? When we bowed our heads over our glistening bowls of Beanie Weenies, I searched my father’s face for answers and found none.

By February Father climbed his aluminum extension ladder and took down the Christmas lights. I think Mother said something to him.

“It’s more humble this way,” he said. “Less flashy. How Jesus would’ve wanted it.”

By March I’d gotten into two fights on the bus and served a suspension. So what Tommy gave me a black eye? He was going to hell. Who was the loser, really?

By April Mother had perfected the balloon animals and moved onto more abstract shapes: peace signs, hearts, letters. Father studied the liturgical calendar, reciting the days of Holy Week.

In June and July Mother went away to clown college. I tried to hide indoors during summer vacation like a fish under a pink plastic rock. I turned thirteen that year and Father said I was old enough to cut the grass. He took me out to show me how to fill the gas tank in the mower and how to prime the engine by pumping the rubber button and how to yank the cord just right to get it started on the first try. I mowed the lawn, sweating in the summer heat, experiencing a pendulum of emotion, facing the house then turning away, back and forth.

By August the cross turned green with mold. “I must’ve used untreated lumber,” Father said. He stood in the driveway, scratching his mustache. Mother declared she quit clowning. “People only want the sad clown,” she said, “the tragic figure.” She pulled open a bag of uninflated orange balloons, dumping their contents into the trash. “That’s just not for me.”

In September Father called me to the basement. “I didn’t get it right the first time,” he said. “The rot has set in.” He stood over a pile of treated lumber. “You know Jesus was a carpenter,” he said. “Never forget that.”

I nodded.

“Grab a hammer,” Father said.

In October Father said Mother went away to a working ranch in Wyoming. For what reason, he never said. He spent nights hunched over the liturgical calendar, muttering and memorizing dates.

For Halloween, I dressed as Joseph, wearing a coat of many colors.

Walking the neighborhood among the ghostly, cotton cobwebbed homes, I pretended our crucifix was among the decorations. “The Romans tortured criminals with it,” I said to Charlie who was dressed as the black Power Ranger. “They nailed people on it until they suffocated.”

Charlie was unconvinced.

In November a neighbor complained. “How can I sell my house with that eyesore next door?” she asked, her hands on her hips.

“Buyers should love to move next door to good Christian folk,” Father said.

By December Father decided the lights weren’t so bad and hung some on the cross again. Only this time he chose white lights, non-blinking. “They’re more dignified this way,” he said.

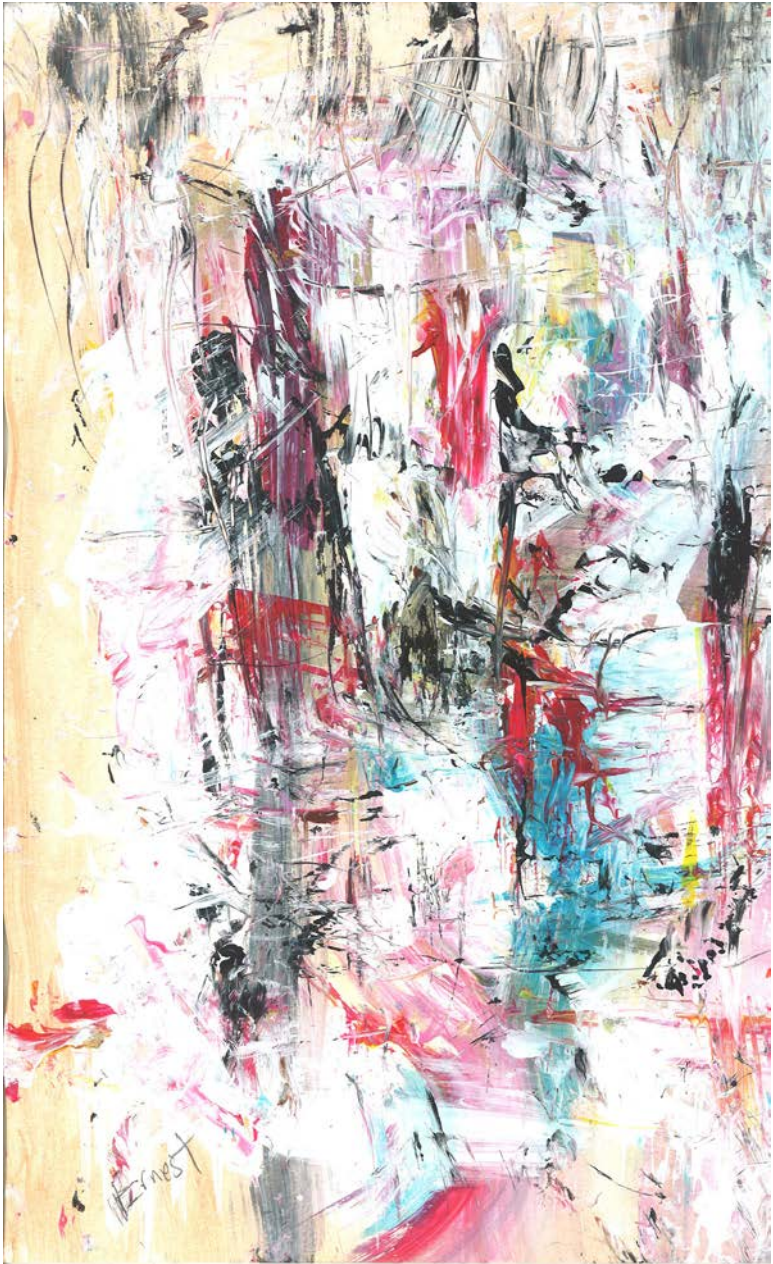
By the next year, the cross stayed up. I grew accustomed to it. I wondered if I ever had kids would I become obsessive like Father, build a thing of my own and vex my children? Would I drip like a leaky faucet?

I wobbled up the ladder to pressure wash the cross and change the tiny dead light bulbs.

# Art



Fabio Sassi - Power



**Ernest Williamson III - Nude In Abstract**



**Allen Forrest - City Life:  
Young Man and the Pigeons**







**Erik Fritts - Fire**





Anh Ho – Hypnotic Vase



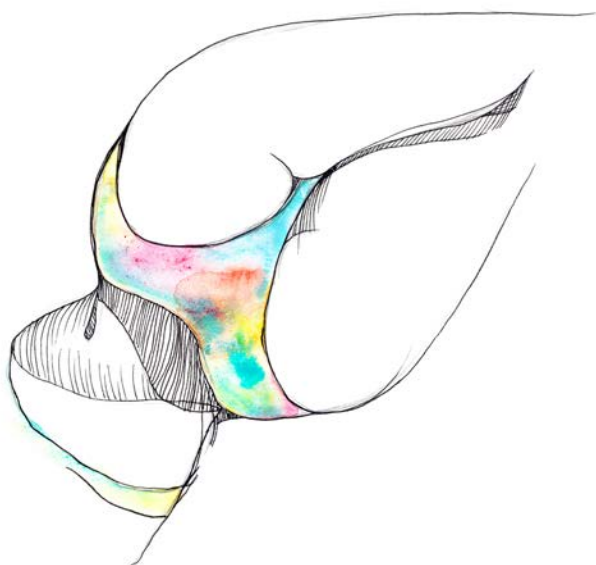
Chau Ho – Sci-Fi Mind



**Katherine Rudin - American Legion**



**Katherine Rudin - Out on the Porch**

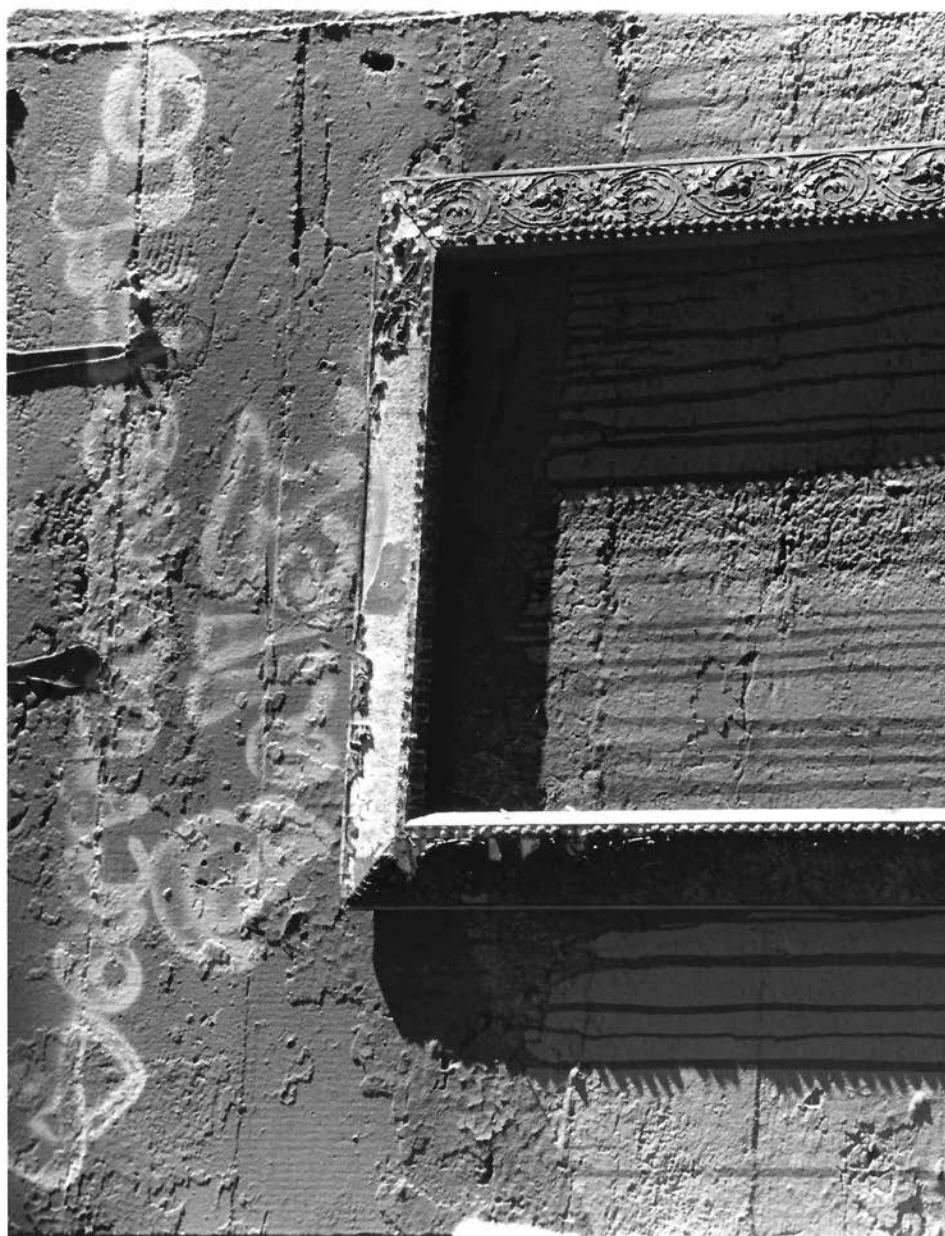


**Theresa Baxter – Booty**



**Theresa Baxter – Circle**







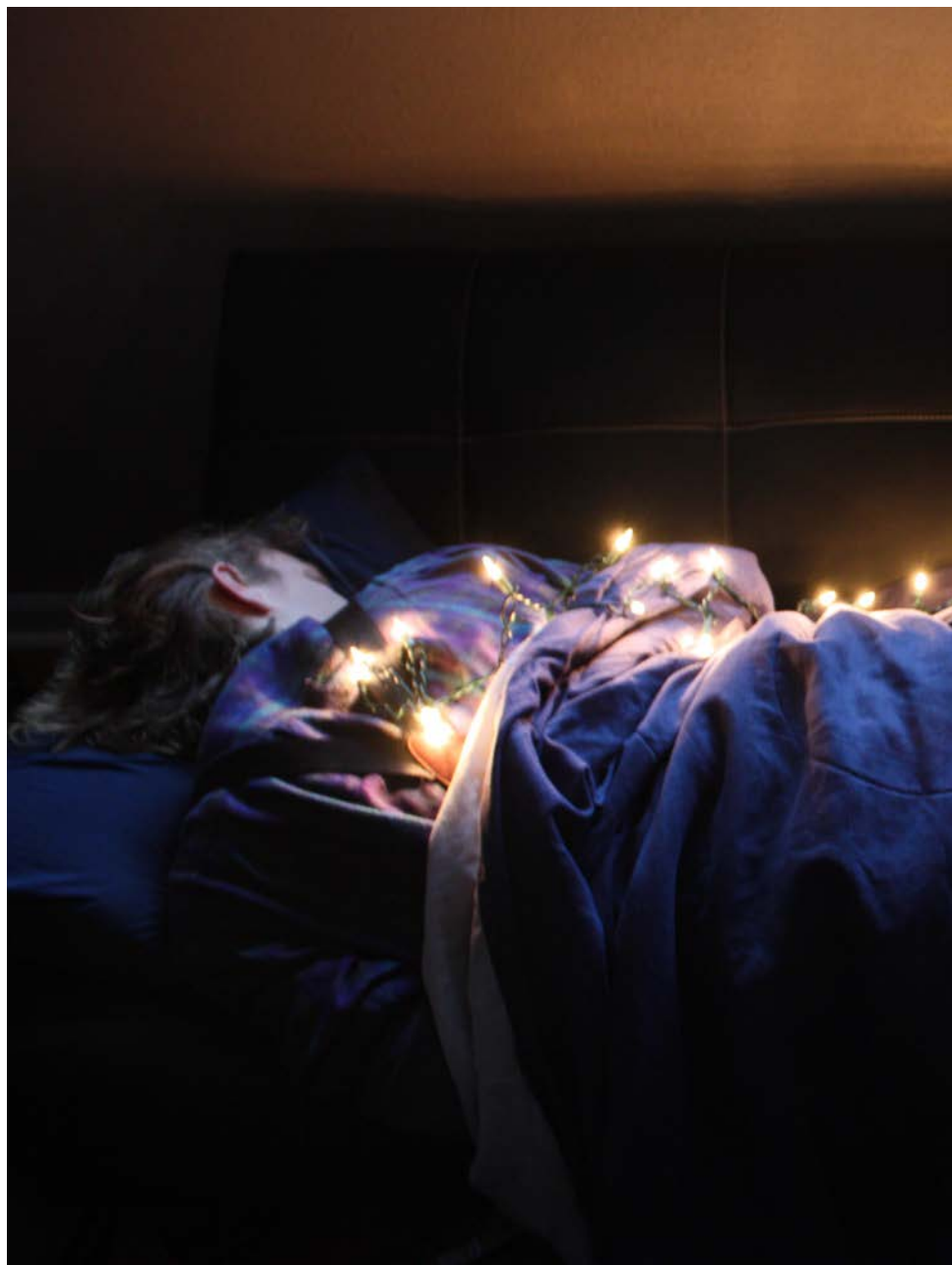
## Mikenna Sims – Framed







**Theresa Baxter – Stretch**





**Brianna Barnes – Ben Sleeping**

# Creative Nonfiction

## **Mo's Missive: Cancer under Control, Or, A Mini-Guidebook for New Cancer Patients, Their Family and Friends**

8/3/10 – Colonoscopy — Dr. Sunman (Gastroenterologist) finds large polyp. Thinks it's cancerous and probably has been there for about 10 years. He immediately calls Dr. Lee to see if he can operate. Age 67 and this was my first colonoscopy – how really stupid of me. Dr. Nambile (Primary Doctor) thought I had anemia – but wanted me to get the colonoscopy – actually asked me to get one 2 yrs. ago. Dr. Sunman told Lee I was all cleaned out and made an appointment for me to see him in 2 hours. On the way home, I suggested to my husband, George, that we go out for lunch downtown since Lee's office was nearby. He replied angrily, “No, we'll go home for lunch.”

I do believe he was pissed at me for possibly getting cancer (in retrospect, I think this angry retort was a cover for fear). When we arrived at Dr. Lee's office, he introduced us to a female intern and then explained in detail and with pictures, exactly how this operation would take place. The one variable was whether he would be cutting or doing a laparoscopy because the polyp was so large and he will make that determination once he gets in there. As this explanation was going on, I felt myself shaking uncontrollably (I have only been in a hospital to visit people – never as a patient). George told me I was shaking and of course the doctor also noticed, but the only one to comfort me was the female intern – guess it's a girl thing. Going to have operation on 8/5, eating very little to stay “cleaned out.”

8/5/10 – Never one to be disorganized, I left a “Just in Case” list for George (I take care of all the bills, etc.). List consists of update on all bills, get cell phone changed to your message. Get Anne or Alice (sisters that are real good in dealing with bureaucratic assholes) to help you change my Social Security to you since I receive more income. Drop my Medicare and AARP premiums. Gave him all financial people and phone numbers. You will probably pay bills via mail, so drop the high speed Internet (which you don't use) ... etc., etc.

As I was being prepped for the colon operation at the hospital, I recognized the doctor giving me the blood transfusion. He is the guy my former real estate partner lived with for a few years. Seriously, geez. We didn't leave our partnership on very good terms, so I'm glad he didn't recognize me.... I need him to be nice – I need 3 pints. When I finally get wheeled into the operating room with the incredibly brilliant overhead lights, I said out loud and to no one in particular, “this looks just like it does on T.V.” With that, one of the doctors yelled out “why isn't she under?” I was promptly given another shot and out I went. Dr. Lee (ended up doing the laparoscopy) – removed polyp plus 15 lymph nodes and about a quarter of my colon – pathology finds microscopic amount in 1 lymph node. Lee referred me to oncologist, Dr. Basso. The hope is that the cancer hasn't departed from the colon wall (metastasized).

I was in the hospital for 8 days and adjusted to the pain by walking the hallways– doctor would not release me until I had a good poop – I was just pushing out small, hard pellets for 7 days....and then finally, some real shit.

8/26/10 – Dr. Basso (confirms stage 3 cancer) – will have several other tests to see if it has spread. While waiting to see the doctor, I noticed that he had a 16 year old girl as a patient and another patient in a wheelchair.

8/30/10 – Mammogram – okay

8/31/10 – Pet Scan – reveals 4 centimeter growth in liver–NOT OKAY–Really understand the true meaning of the phrase “my heart sank” now.

9/2/10 – Cat Scan – same

9/7/10 – Dr. Basso – regrowth in liver – he’s confident that after shrinkage by chemo, balance of growth can be cut out – now stage 4 cancer – at least 1 year on chemo. Dare I see the light at the end of the tunnel?

Will have another pet scan in 3 months to determine how chemo is doing. Dr. Basso said typically, with stage 4 colon cancer, you are given 1 year to live. Yeah so, I just hear this sobering news from Basso and what comment do I share? The imminent crisis of losing my hair and I’ll have to get a wig. Did he or any of the nurses know where I could get a wig. Astutely observing that I was “wiggling” out, Basso had one of the nurses take me to the Cancer Society office. Good news, I can get as many wigs as I want at no charge and I have calmed down somewhat.

Back to Dr. Basso and he asked if I could come back in an hour – he was really backed up. So, now what do I do? Drive around aimlessly – I really didn’t have any of those “why me” thoughts. Just trying to organize my brain and go on to the next step. I go to St. Joe’s Catholic Church, but they were doing heavy-duty cleaning with noisy machines. Got something to eat at the hospital cafeteria and then back to Basso to get copies of scans, etc.

Both George and I are very certain about beating this. Suspect being raised in a no-nonsense Irish Catholic family of 8, imbues in me the “just deal with it” attitude. Why waste time ruminating when you can be resolving. Cancer can really put a cramp in my organizational skills. This log and writing everything down gives me the control I need. Talked to my sister Mary (who is the head nurse for the Cleveland Clinic in Lakewood, Ohio) for some interpretations of “doctor talk.” I had talked to her when it was only stage 3 but now she and her son Kevin (who is also a nurse) want to fly down here to Florida to be with me. I said that was nice but totally unnecessary at this point – hopefully, we have a long way to go before any final visits.

9/10/10 – Dr. Lee installs small port on my left upper chest for easy IV insertions – will be removed when I’m totally off chemo. Did not realize this at first, but this is actually another operation, opening part of the chest wall to accommodate this small port that makes for easy insertion of the chemo I.V.

9/13/10 – Started Chemo (every other week) on Mondays and pump is disconnected every other Wednesday. Blood tests every Monday (CEA’s). This is all done in Dr. Basso’s office and Carly is the chemo nurse. She had explained everything to me when I was in “never-never land” about the wig, so she had to go over all of it again.



9/15/10 – pump disconnected – felt barfy in a.m., and still barfy at appointment time (9:30a.m.). Dr. Basso prescribed Reglan for nausea and had very bad reaction to it when I arrived home in afternoon. Lots of diarrhea and felt very jittery and upset. Called Carly and she wanted me to come back immediately. Thank God, George had just come home from work – I was worried about driving and having to barf but we made it back to the office without incident. Carly did Benadryl drip – felt well but diarrhea continues – taking Pepto and Imodium.

All the sisters (Alice, Therese, Anne & Mary) and brother Joe and all the nieces and nephews have been terrific with phone calls, cards and e-mails --- really lucky to have the relatives although none of them are local. Again with the Irish family upbringing and being a hardy bunch, we get the facts and then go on with the next step.....thus, another reason for this log. I never was too sick to take their phone calls and always delighted in all the cards, notes, plants and flowers.

**\*\*TIP TO CANCER PATIENT:** Count on your family, friends, husband or wife – and stay positive for their sake too\*\*

9/20/10 – blood work reveals lower white cells – Carly says normal because of chemo (it attacks everything). Will try again on 9/27. Question – how low is dangerous for white cells? Answer – white cells can't get too low because they halt chemo until cells are back up there.

9/22/10 – Feel great today – 2:00p Cancer Support Group meeting. Excellent to share – so many people are in much worse shape than me – all very positive – all having a deep believe in God. Was encouraged to meet 2 women, one who is in remission from stage 3 cancer and the other from stage 4. Tunnel light still shining.

**\*\*TIP:** Surround yourself with positive thinking people\*\*

9/24/10 – Dr. Lee didn't like the way port was healing – put a new bandage on – come back in 1 week.

Received Summary of Benefits thru 8/26/10 from United Health Care (AARP Supplemental). Total charges were \$12,059 – between Medicare and AARP, only \$5,274 was paid out to doctors. Did some real estate work – showing waterfront property – my buyer never asked me what the box was hanging from my neck – (chemo pump for when I'm not in the doctor's office). That box (and it's substantial in size) is also a great sleeping companion. (Not!)

9/27/10 – went for 2nd chemo treatment – Carly didn't like the way the surgery from the port was looking either and didn't want to hook up for fear of infection. Dr. Basso did prescription for penicillin to help with the port infection. Attended “Look Good, Feel Good” seminar (sponsored by the Cancer Society) re makeup for cancer patients – received about \$200 worth of cosmetics, and learned how to apply – they really work well – George said looks great.

9/28/10 – saw Dr. Lee – we decided that I'll skip chemo this week and will check infection again on Friday (10/1) to see if it will be okay to continue chemo on 10/5. If not, Lee will do a new port on the right side of chest (on 10/4) and



place needle for chemo on 10/5 (great, another operation). Had lunch with Polly (long-time co-worker & friend) – she was so thoughtful to offer to take me to any appointments if need be. So far, I'm on my own and doing well.

10/1/10 – Dr. Lee said surgery is healing well and can proceed with chemo on 10/5. – Believe it or not, that's an improvement to having another operation.

10/2/10 – Couple of days to reflect – and this log sounds really tedious. From now on, I'll add some additional personal material – who knows, somebody might read this. Having this reprieve has been grand – we were able to have a nice wedding anniversary dinner (10/1) at Outback – then an evening at home with some delicious tiramisu and a bottle of Bordeaux (St. Emilion) from our early mid-60's first-married years, and dancing to the Solid Gold Oldies.

10/3/10 – Rachel (co-worker, neighbor, longtime friend) just heard from Polly about my cancer and stopped by with my favorite dessert – homemade lemon meringue pie and also offered to take me to appointments. I haven't actually talked about it much too many people. Being in real estate, there is the harsh reality that people might wonder if I'll be around to finish their deal or will they have to find someone else soon.

**\*\*JUST A TIP FOR FRIENDS\*\*** instead of asking the patient “is there anything I can do”? (No one is going to say, “Oh yes, would you mow my lawn, walk my dog, or make a casserole) – Just go ahead and do it! And dear cancer patient, if someone does ask you if there is anything they can do, have a list of some things written down and give the asker some suggestions. We need to get over feeling bad about asking for help. Besides, it makes people feel good to do for others\*\*

10/5/10 – 2nd round of chemo – it was a dilly – almost had diarrhea on the way home and it continued most of the day until I took a probiotic in addition to Imodium. Then at 8:00 that evening, I had the dry heaves and that continued all night long -- brought some pillows in to sit and wait by the toilet in case the dry heaves became wet – it was quite a night and George was oblivious to it all (excellent sleeper). Sister Alice said Nana would say “offer it up,” which Alice explained, means offer up your pain for the poor souls in purgatory. I say, hell with that, I'm going to “offer it up for me so I won't have to spend a lot of time in purgatory.

**\*\*TIP RE THE FREQUENT POTTY TRIPS:** when on the throne, use only quality brand toilet paper and dab T.P. gently, don't rub\*\*

10/7/10 – disconnect pump day and had discussion with Dr. Basso and Carly – gave me some medication for the dry heaves (Anzemet). Received a call from longtime friend, Gloria – she has heard of so many people that recently contracted cancer. Her son, Mike, recently told her that his boyfriend also has stage 4 colon cancer (had metastasized to the lung) and the cancer center in Phoenix said there is no treatment for him. However, he decided to go to another cancer facility in California and is currently in remission.

I continue to receive so many cards – makes me question why I haven't sent out more cards when I hear people are sick. Put that on my “things to change” list.

10/8/10 – diarrhea is back – every half hour – taking 2 Imodium and the probiotic but I'll need to get something stronger. Did half of the grocery shopping – had to get back quickly, the porcelain throne was waiting.

10/9/10 – did grocery shopping with George – stopped at Health Food store for ginger root tablets for the nausea – they worked great. Rachel called – had baked pineapple cheese cake for George to pick up – tasted great – really tough to eat anything, but that tasted really good. On my good days, I treat myself to ice cream cones.

10/11/10 – Pretty shitty day – diarrhea all day – every 20 to 30 minutes – times like these put you in a truly unpleasant mood.

10/12 – Blood work today and the doc came up with new prescription for the diarrhea – said I was very dehydrated -- also put me on an antibiotic and he is going to REDUCE the amount of chemo for next time. It will be grand if we get to combat these side effects and I can get on with my life.

10/15/10 – Went to work today to finish up on a rental in our development. Told George not to say anything about my cancer to people in our area because it could impede getting any listings. Didn't realize I've been gone from the office since the end of July. People were kind but you can tell they give the impression that I'm near death (I've lost about 20 lbs.).

**\*\*TIP: KEEP TO YOUR ROUTINE -- don't wimp out!\*\***

10/20/10 – had my 3rd round of chemo yesterday, and feel absolutely remarkable. Talked to Greg, fellow colon cancer patient, (only 46 yrs. old). He's been on chemo almost 2 years – has several tumors in liver and some in lung ...however there has been some improvement, and he is planning a little break from chemo. Again, I consider myself very fortunate. That same day, a former patient is back in for a chemo “upgrade.” She is a young, professional woman having to do some additional chemo after thinking she had been cured. This deflated my “feeling absolutely remarkable” to feeling “okay.”

10/21/10 – went back for pump removal and told both Carly and Dr. Basso, “thank you for lowering the chemo – it's been a great couple of days”. Dr. B said it was essential since I couldn't handle the more potent amount of chemo.

11/1/10 – blood count too low for chemo – would result in possible infection and hospital stay. Rescheduled for 11/3. Another new twist, I now have neuropathy and must wear mittens when I open the freezer or try to touch anything cold.

11/3/10 – blood count still too low – rescheduled for 11/9 – worked out well because I had listing appointment today at 1:30pm and it would be unnerving wearing the pump. Today was the first day I wore one of the wigs – my hair is certainly thinning now. Have 2 other wigs to try thanks to the Cancer Society. The

people volunteering at the Society are so supportive – most of them are former cancer patients.

11/8/10 – blood count on borderline – we decided to wait until 11/15 – should be up by then. Carly did an IV with an energy type of drug – and I had the liveliest day – did all sorts of projects around the house. My niece, Colleen, will be in town this Saturday -- will be wonderful to see some of the family.

11/15/10 – My blood count was up and we were able to do the chemo.

11/16/10 – Went to the office for the annual Thanksgiving Party – everybody was very complimentary about how I looked (the wig and makeup). Hopefully, I'll be able to come into the office more often if I am able to manage the side effects.

11/25/10 – Thanksgiving – we enjoyed a dinner at home with just ourselves and Ernie (our dog). Rachel called with desserts for us to pick up and we promised we would be available when her kids come here for Christmas. I had begged off for Thanksgiving dinner. However, when George picked up the desserts, she told him that I should find a better doctor (gotta love all the unsolicited medical advice we get) -- she did not like Dr. Basso because of the diagnosis he had given Sam (her husband) a few years ago. He told her Sam didn't have long to live – nevertheless, Sam is still going strong today. I'm okay with Dr. B for the present – will see what happens after the Pet scan. Went to Cancer Support Group Meeting after having lunch with Polly and some other people from the old real estate office. The Cancer meeting this time was sort of a “feel sorry for me” meeting with some people going on and on about their cancer problems – not too cheery for me.

\*\*TIP: \*\*Again, surround yourself with positive thinking people\*\*

12/3/10 – Can't believe George – he wanted to do the Christmas decorations the Saturday after Thanksgiving (does he think I might go before Christmas?) That is the earliest we have ever done the decorating.

12/5/10 – went into work – I have a townhome rented out to someone that already rents here in our development, but her owner went into foreclosure and the bank evicted her. That is so depressing – there are so many foreclosures and short-sales still happening.

12/14/10 – Attended our Christmas office luncheon at Gusto's Restaurant in downtown Stuart, (had chicken marsala) and the next morning I woke up with extreme acid reflux and a very painful stomach. I had chemo scheduled and thought for sure they would cancel it But believing it was a minor complaint, Carly and the doc wanted to go ahead since the next chemo wouldn't be until after Christmas. However, after an hour into it, I started shaking and then became nauseous and threw up the Christmas lunch. Thank God, I did make it to the bathroom! We tried the chemo again but then they checked my vitals and the blood pressure was through the roof. Doc said that's enough and told me to pick up some Pepcid on the way home. When I got home I threw up again but still was in pain. Took the Pepcid and went to bed with Ernie's assistance (licking all over my face and throat). Woke about 1 hour later and felt great – what a huge gas pain that was!

12/27/10 – We had a lovely Christmas – took a lot of pictures. Even went to Church on Christmas Day at St. Andrews – I should make an appointment with the pastor, and bring him up to date.

12/28/10 – Had another treatment on 12/28 and, of course, another different reaction – this time in addition to the nausea, my bones all felt sore – like I had the flu – life is so exhilarating – new reactions every time I have the chemo. On the upside, chemo is killing off my psoriasis!

2011 - 1/13/2011 – Pump removal day – woke up feeling pretty icky – tried the ginger root tablets (also had to take the diarrhea pills) and finally tried the Pepcid – and that got me to the point I could drive to the cancer center – came home and slept most of day and then nausea returned – took another pill and then worked on the listing for the waterfront house. This is really getting old – hope when I have the Pet-scan, most of that tumor is gone.

Changed chemo schedule because sister Alice & Ed (her husband) are coming Feb. 9-13. Then, Linda (she and her husband used to live here in our development and moved to New Hampshire) is coming to town mid Feb. for 10 days.

1/31/11 – Had chemo on 1/25 – not going too bad this time, but of course, there is still the never-ending diarrhea. When I was getting the treatment, Greg, the 46yr. old guy who still works full time at Publix Grocery and has colon, liver & lung cancer, totally broke down. He seemed real quiet and when Carly asked him how he was, he said he had diarrhea all the time and then started crying – it must be very difficult. Dr. B and Carly put him in a separate room and after he calmed down, he came back in and they were talking to him about getting better appliances, etc. I feel so blessed that I didn't have to have an ostomy and use a bag. A few weeks before this episode, Dr. B and Greg were talking and I heard Greg say “Doc, I don't want to die!” (There really is no privacy in this big chemo room – you hear all conversations.)

On many occasions, I have talked with an older man and his cheerful and friendly wife while we were getting our chemo. She was always there with him through the 5 hours of the chemo drip. He was very quiet and his skin extremely ashen in color. He was having blood transfusions at the hospital on a regular basis. I heard Dr. Basso talking to two of his sons in the hallway. He was telling them their father doesn't have much time left. On my next chemo session, I saw his wife crying in the room by the entrance. Indeed, it turned out he had passed away.

On my way home, I stopped in at the Cancer Society and got another wig. Held an Open House Sunday and my seller said a friend of hers told her that chemo patients can get free housecleaning through a government agency -- I did discover that service is not available in our area.

Taking George to a neurologist this Wednesday for a complete “nerve conduction study.” For the last 6 months he has had a problem dropping things from his right hand (thumb and 1st two fingers can't seem to grab). Hope it's not too serious; we don't need 2 “sicksos” in the family. Going to skip the next chemo treatment (2/8) so I can feel good when Alice & Ed are here. I need a break anyway -- in March it

will be 6 months on chemo.

\*\*TIP – life goes on and other things happen in your family – go with the flow, sometimes it's not all about you\*\*

2/23/11 – It's been awhile since last entry in the log – The neurologist believes George has severe carpal tunnel and today we saw the doctor that will operate. The operation will stop further damage but since it's so severe, it will not improve the hand. The operation is set for March 8th. Sister Alice and Ed, along with sister Therese, came for a short visit. Therese really loves the warm weather here in Stuart – they are all from Cleveland, escaping the wrath of winter. Had another reprieve with chemo because of low white cells which was just grand because that's the time they were here. Had my follow-up visit with Dr. Lee and he was very encouraging – said that I've tolerated the chemo very well (believe it or not) and should come out fine with the Cat scan and Pet scans scheduled for 2/28 and 3/1.

3/1/11 - What a birthday (on 3/2/11) to celebrate! Received the results of the Cat-scan today and Dr. Basso was absolutely ecstatic – “we are going for the cure” – and gave me the “high-five”. The growth in the liver reduced from the size of a thumb to the size of a thumb nail! He said we'll have a surgeon take out the rest and then 6 more months of chemo to be sure it's all gone.

3/7/11 – We thought for sure that Dr. Lee (same doc that did the colon) would do the surgery on the liver but he didn't want to take it on – the location of the small tumor is near the diaphragm and also there are oodles of blood vessels. He said you need a specialized team to do this type of operation. Dr. Basso referred me to the acclaimed Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Fl. It's a long and very boring 3 hour trip, but I learned the head of the colorectal dept. is going to do the operation. Tis far better to have a real expert working on your liver.

3/10/11 – They called from Moffitt and have set up the liver operation for April 12th – will get a package in the mail but it sounds like 5-8 days in the hospital.

4/28/11 – Wow, a long time has passed. I got the April 12th date totally screwed up. (Chemo does affect your memory in addition to everything else in your body). That date was for my consultation with the doctor that would be doing the operation (Dr. Bathen, head of the colorectal dept. at Moffitt). We rescheduled the Moffitt interview to June 7th – which will allow us to be home from the wedding in Cleveland for a week before taking off again. With all this the traveling, George decided to retire from Nissan (almost 11yrs). I wonder how total retirement will work out for him – and also for me?

6/13/11 – Went to Cleveland for Meghan's (niece) wedding and stayed with Alice and Ed 5/24 thru 5/31 (they are kind to have us for that long). Had a wonderful time – (we won the longest married couple dance at the reception - 45 yrs. Oct. 1). I've been off chemo since 5/3/11 and feel absolutely splendid.

Went over to Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, 6/6 for a Cat-scan on 6/7 and then met with Dr. Bathen. He said he would not be doing any surgery on the little piece left in the liver if there are any other tumors elsewhere. We are going back over

on 6/14 with Pet-scan scheduled for 6/15 and another colonoscopy set for 6/16, and coming back on 6/17 – only to return on 6/21 to meet with Bathen about the results of the tests and hopefully set up the operation for some time in July – boy it was a smart idea for George to retire.

We are going to stay at the Extended Stay Motel and taking Ernie with us for \$45 per night – I keep saying it will be like camping because we have to bring several things for the kitchenette in the room – with any luck, it won't be too gross.

6/26/11 - I passed all the tests on the 6/14 to 6/17 trip and the doctor will now operate on July 13th. Doctor Bathen said it's about a 3 hour operation and I'll be plenty sore – they are going to help block the pain by giving me an epidural. Need to figure on 7 to 8 days in the hospital over there.

8/6/11 –Time is very elusive – have made 6 trips to Moffitt with another one (and I hope, the final) due on 8/30. This Cancer Center is enormous, and is it also a Research Center that is connected to the University of South Florida. To see so many people with cancer all located in one place is actually daunting. The operation was a great success – I was out of there in 5 days. When we got back to the motel, George and Ernie were ready to “get out of Dodge.” We packed quickly and got on the road. After a couple of hours, while George watched Ernie, I went into a restaurant to use the john, and then get us some lunch to go. I can't believe how old I felt walking ever so slowly but then realized, I literally was just released from the hospital. The next meeting with Dr. Bathen will determine if I'm ready to go back on chemo for (hopefully) the final 6 months to make sure the cancer has completely abated. The Extended Stay motel room with kitchenette worked out well and they allowed Ernie to stay. The manager (Sheila) was so very pleasant and said we can call Ernie a “companion dog” and therefore, no charge for him – it seems like they go out of their way for Moffitt patients.

I would say Dr. Bathen and his team were outstanding, but the hospital itself needs remodeling and the nurses certainly seem overworked. I had an awful experience when I had my first bowel movement (after several days). It happened when I was trying to get out of a huge recliner that is very difficult to maneuver...when I finally got out, I looked down and thought I was bleeding, but it turned out to be diarrhea everywhere. I called for help and the clean-up person was not very happy with me and was ordering me out of the way – she did a terrible job in cleaning up and rolled up my dirty robe and threw it in the closet – she said my family could clean it up for me. I'm a person who rarely cries, but I felt horribly debased. It would have been helpful to know that an “explosion” of this nature was a possibility. When the nurse came in, she brought me some shampoo so I could wash out my robe. I told her I was completely surprised by the diarrhea but she said it was very common for a first bowel movement after several days and many people have had it happen right in the halls – wish she would have forewarned me. Tut, tut, aren't I the whiner! And, here I am back from Stage 4 cancer to no cancer – shame on me.

I now have a long scar going down my belly from the colon operation and another long one going diagonally across my belly from the liver operation --- do believe my bikini days are well over. The pain from the operation is not too bad but my left

shoulder is killing me. The Pet-scan also showed a degenerative shoulder and spine. -- know I'm getting older, but I think good old chemo is helping with this, along with the dry mouth and dry eyes and acid reflux.

9/6/11 – Labor Day – we just got back from Moffitt for the 7th time on 8/31 – over there for 1 day to check with Dr. Bathen and his team to see if I'm strong enough to go back on chemo for 6 months – Oh wonderful, I am.... He did say the 6 months are not in stone – will be up to Dr. Basso along with the dosage. He also told me “Realtors are tough – you will make it.”

I've been going to rehab for the shoulder and guess it's helping but appears it will be a long process. My rehab nurse told me about her father's fight with colon cancer – basically, he couldn't take the chemo any longer and passed on. (I really didn't need to hear that.)

10/22/11 – Had a great visit with Linda and Jim this past Sunday. Jim has prostate cancer and has been undergoing treatments for 2 years – he is now on hormone treatments and said it has really turned him into a bitch at times (and Linda concurs). However, the prognosis looks good although he still has a year left of treatment. I thought it would have been easier for me this go-around but it's actually worse – most likely because of the cumulative effect of the chemo. I seem to have more nausea and diarrhea this time, and it lasts just about the full 2 weeks – Also, there seems to be such a strong taste in my mouth – and an odor I smell, like something inside of me burning. I certainly didn't feel like putting on any makeup this morning – in fact, felt like staying in my robe for the whole day but know if I don't psyche myself up, I'll really become a wimp. Much more tired this time- 2 to 3 naps a day. It is so great to hear from all of my family on a regular basis – they really keep me positive.

Had another Pet Scan and Cat Scan about Nov. 3rd and when I went to see Dr. Basso just before the next infusion on 11/15, he said the results showed another growth in the liver and we will have to discuss either ablation (removal of diseased or unwanted tissue) or another operation. He said it so matter-of-factly, that it really didn't register right away about what he was saying. However, when he took me back to the computer to show me the scans, we noticed the Pet Scan didn't show anything and it was only the Cat Scan noting there was a growth. He told me to come back down after my infusion today because he was going to talk to the radiologists that did the scans. Obviously, I was not in the greatest mood to be facing more chemo. I met a woman that was several years younger than me and she had been through the same routine (going to Moffitt for the liver operation). However, she was taking some different kind of chemo which affected how her face looked – kind of burned. She said she was dreading her next Pet Scan for fear that it might not be good. The nurse thanked me later for talking to her since they are having a hard time convincing her to continue with that medication. (Evidently with my wig and makeup, I can look sort of healthy). And, now I go back downstairs to determine my destiny.

(Sadly, several months later I heard that she had died and left her 6 year old girl in the care of her mother.)



When I got back to Dr. B, he said the spot that the Cat Scan noted was actually the missing piece of liver from my operation at Moffitt. He said “we dodged the bullet again.” Talk about an understatement! Even though the next 2 weeks were the worst aftermath of chemo (diarrhea) that I’ve ever experienced, I had the knowledge that I’m in remission – at least until the next Pet Scan in January. Dr. B. said at this point the chemo itself was causing the higher CEA.

**\*\*MORE OF MO’S TIPS TO SHARE\*\***

Duh? – Get your first colonoscopy soon after age 50, and people with family history of colon cancer should be tested by age 40.

1. Never be afraid to ask questions – even if you have asked it before. The medical professionals are being paid – you are entitled to answers.
2. Don’t be afraid to “over” inform each and every medical professional involved in your care. Yes, they have a chart in front of them and they can read but sometimes it seems they need to read a chart and take care of you at the same time. It would not hurt to tell each and every person, i.e., allergic to penicillin.
3. Make sure you study the results of all tests and again ask lots of questions.
4. You have a right to be as comfortable as possible, so let the pros know what is bothering you. The patient is the one that knows his body.
5. Keep a log of major discussions with the pros along with names of meds and dosages you are taking.

2012 – 1/21/12 – I can’t believe I didn’t immediately go to my log after I got the news from Dr. B on 1/12 that the new Pet-scan on 1/5 came out clean again! George and I celebrated and had a martini with lunch that day. Will have my next Pet-scan in early March. Alice and Ed might come down again toward the end of March which will be wonderful, especially if I’m still off the chemo. Noticed however, even though I’ve been off chemo since late November, my hair has started falling out again (very slowly) along with the eyelashes. I checked on the Internet and sure enough, this seems to be emblematic with a lot of cancer patients and they all say that the hair and eyelashes do come back again. Speaking of Alice, she has been so fantastic in calling just about every week along with sister Anne (and, calling even though I’m off chemo). I remember a guy from my Cancer Support Group saying that after you are cured (or in remission, because you are never really cured), nobody calls or sends cards anymore.

3/22/12 – Received good news again from Dr. B on 3/12. Just had the blood test this time (CEA) and the count was 5.5 which was grand (because we got rid of the chemo). I won’t be doing Cat & Pet scans again until the end of May. Dr. B told me he learned a lot from me as he does with each patient. He admitted he didn’t really think I would pull through like this. However, can’t get too cocky because the big “C” is always with me and could come back. A friend of mine that had Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma over 20 yrs. ago just found out she has breast cancer.

Alice and Ed were down here already – came for my birthday – had a great time.



She had been to her Irish store and bought an apron with the Irish blessing, along with a Belleek mug with “Herself” inscribed on it.

6/23/12 – Sisters Anne & Mary were down here to visit us in early June. It was such fun having my two youngest sisters (55 & 60 yrs. old) visit for a short time. The weather was very hot and humid but we managed to have a splendid time. Soon after their visit (June 12th), I received the results from my latest round of Cat & Pet scans and it was again, excellent news. I asked Dr. Basso about having the port removed but he said he didn’t want to tempt fate. The nurse in the infusion center said some people have kept them in for 5 yrs. of being in remission. I’m going to have another colonoscopy next month with Dr. Sunman who first discovered the cancer. (Now, I must have one every 3 years and my relatives should have one every 5 years). I know I must be getting better – gained all that weight back. Real estate continues to be depressed but I’m actually not trying that intensely -- would really like to find some creative work and also get into something that makes a difference in helping someone or something – need to do a payback in addition to having a paycheck.

10/11/12 – Saw Dr. Basso again and the results of the Cat scan were cancer free. He shook his head and said that I was a very lucky lady. In going to my primary doctor recently, they found that I have pernicious anemia (probably, thanks to chemo), and I’m now taking vitamin B-12 shots.

We volunteered at a church that was serving food for the needy on Thanksgiving. Our intentions were good but there were tons of volunteers and not very many diners. That is a good thing – it shows there are a lot of people willing to help their neighbors.

2013 – 1/9/13 – It’s the New Year already. Just had a blood test (CEA) last week and saw Dr. B today. He said my CEA went up from 6 to 9 – riding a bona fide roller coaster here! He ordered a Pet scan for 1/31 to find out if there is more cancer growth. 3 months ago I had a clear Cat scan, so this would have had to come up incredibly fast. After going on the Internet to research the CEA test, it is possible that effects other than cancer can make the CEA read higher. Actually, chemo was one of the things that made it go higher when Dr. B decided to take me off chemo. The Pet scan is the most reliable test (versus Cat scan and the CEA) – we shall see when I get the results of the test from Dr. B on 1/24.

The most disturbing news is that Dr. B is closing shop and getting out of the business. I believe he reached a point where all the work isn’t worth it – at least monetarily. Medicare has cut back in paying the doctors their true costs, and because he is in business for himself (versus having partners) it doesn’t make sense to stay in the medical field for the reduction in income. Now with this test coming up, Dr. B said he wants to look at the results for me, but effectively he is closing at the end of this month. I contacted several people re advice on a referral and Dr. Hanson’s name kept coming up. I put the most weight on that referral from Dr. Sunman who had detected the cancer from the colonoscopy. Now it is a wait-and-see period.

1/24/13 – Phew, dodged the bullet again. Pet scan was clean. It will be interesting

to see how much credence Dr. Hanson will put into the CEA test. All my records are being sent to him. It's a large practice with several doctors – conveniently located across from the Infusion Center, where I have to go next month to get the port “flushed” out.

10/10/13 – It's been several months since I've written in this journal – my confidence level must be very high – actually, don't have anything to report. I see Dr. Hanson every 3 months and my CEAs and Cat scans have been good. However, did have some other stuff going on – imagine getting “mono” at the age of 70. Everybody thought that was a real hoot. I'm much better now, only taking 1 nap per day versus 4 (perhaps another chemo effect)?

2014 – 2/9/14 - We lost Ernie today (he was our very spirited cairn terrier of 10 years) who followed J.J. (also a cairn terrier we had for 18 years). Ernie had been losing weight and we brought him in for his annual checkup. The vet took an x-ray and he had a massive growth in his chest area – would you believe – cancer. We had to put him down about a month after that visit. I'll always remember him coming with us for all my trips to Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa. This is definitely our last dog – just can't do this again.

3/13/14 – Wow, it has been a while. My last visit with Dr. Hanson showed the latest Cat scan to be just fine – and I don't have to see him until May 27th. New rule from Medicare re Pet Scan – you are allowed only 3 scans in your lifetime (very expensive). Unless something looks really strange, we'll be sticking to the Cat scan. However, my psoriasis has come back horribly.

4/2/14 – Ken and Maribeth (old friends and next door neighbors from McLean, Va.) just visited us – it's been years since we've seen them. Last week Alice and Ed came in for a visit. I'm running out of sights and places to show them – I think this was the 3rd year in a row they have been here.

2015 – 6/18/15 – I believe I can close this up now – my Cat scans continue to be good. Truly, this log has helped me feel in control of my existence so I could go on with my life with cancer, or should I say in spite of cancer. Little did I know that the mere act of transferring the words from my brain to the paper would help heal my body and my spirit.

## Razor

When we were little, before our feet could touch the floor, we would sing dad to dinner. It was a crazy, made-up song by mom, I think. Daddy hid around the corner and when the song ended, when we gave up thinking he would eat with us, he'd slide into his chair, silly grin on his face. We thought it was hilarious. Even mom would laugh, which never happened. Maybe she laughed because she made up the song. After the smiles and singing a scripted bickering would start.

*If you're going to cook with hamburger, why can't you just make burgers?*

*Because that would be dull. Can you imagine burgers every day?*

*But it's what I like.*

*We can't eat the same thing every day, Jim.*

And the peas would be passed, no butter, no salt. And the plain white rice. And the gray meatloaf, no ketchup, just oats, now gelatinous on the bottom, used as filler.

I guess the singing is my earliest recollection. I took a karma quiz the other day. It asked for my first memory. I had to pick "other" because singing your dad to the table wasn't one of the options.

And just like that, they divorced. The fights had gotten bigger: sex, money, work, normal stuff. They only made it twelve years with one semi-planned child, you, and two surprises. No pets. Dad remarried within six months, mom in eleven. I think, although I can't really be sure, this is when it all started for you.

I got a call a few weeks ago that you were living under the stairs at the storage facility where everything you own is in a climate controlled, metal room. You locked your tiny dog in there, which you shouldn't have a dog in the first place, and then slept on the floor outside of it, I guess to keep an eye on your stuff, like a guard. You were outside in the hall mostly because there was no room inside the unit, but also because the floor of the hall was shiny, smooth, gray concrete, the way you like it. Your unit is full to the ceiling with all that's left of your life. Just a hair's breath away from having a shopping cart and sleeping in the park.

I've always wondered how people are homeless. I guess it goes like this:

You're sad. Maybe from our parents fighting. Maybe from our grandfather calling you girl names every time you cried. Maybe you were born this way.

You try. Football. Break Dancing. Honor roll. College. Graphic Arts. Club dancing. Honor roll. Dating. Resumes. Job searching. Dating. Bouncing. DJ'ing. Poster making. Magazine publishing. Art. Sex. Street art. Graffiti. High-rise window cleaning. Pedi-cab driving. Cliff diving.

You fail. And more than once. You go through jobs likes socks. You can't find a career. You can't find a place to live. You can't find your way. And you get lost looking.

You drink. A little at first, just here and there, while you DJ and party. Then a little more until the drinking is who you are but no one knows it yet, it's your dirty little secret. Then someone notices you have the shakes. And years have flown past and suddenly all you want is drink, no food, no friends, no job, just the sweet smell, taste and blurring of the edges so you can wake up and not cry.

Then you fall. Really hard. Onto concrete and it messes up your head. Half your skull is gone. And you almost die. You wish you had died because now everything, the whole world, is changed.

For twenty years I didn't think of you every day. Just sometimes. Now, you're all I think about.

Your brain is a tidal pool. Like the ones on the beach in Maine, between two or three large stones, a shallow impression in the slate gray sand, some standing water and a tiny ecosystem that changes as the tide goes in and out. The ocean deposits shells, tiny crabs, bits of seaweed, sand fleas, trash. But once the tide recedes again, the pool is changed, similar but altogether different. And now, you, once strong, gentle, kind, intelligent and introspective, are different. The only emotion you seem to have now is anger. Because confusion isn't an emotion. And neither is hunger.

You call me sometimes when you have a phone, remember my number and that I exist.

*I was in the locker room, you remember Coach Williams, I took off my sock and my toenail was still connected to it and all I could do was pull the nail off. I did it myself. I used to wrap my ankles myself, do you remember when I did that?*

*I do.*

*Spongy, like a mop, like your Swiffer is a mopper. And I could send you a younger picture of Doug. And I could send it to you, not mom, and you would see Doug and the Swiffer and lots of dust...it's really dusty. There's a picture of Doug and me, only there were three of us, Peter too, and Peter had to take over the fence company. There were carnivals and we could juggle and do fire, as performance brothers we did that stuff. I have those squeazy balls that I had at the hospital. So tomorrow. You want to know what I'm doing tomorrow?*

*Yes, I do.*

*I'm going to the bank. And I talked to Tim and he said I could do asbestos removal. And I remember you told me, you put your arm around me and you said just because you see trees, doesn't mean you have to climb them. Like the big sister you've always been, that's why you never wanted to come outside. I got the pen from the hotel. It doesn't work now. I included the pin striping and I can do the yoga move you showed me. I'm talking out here and the full moon is up.*

*That's great.*

*I have a lot of energy and lots of crates and crates of records and I could have played them at your wedding. If you could have given me a Mac file I could have DJ'd. And mom thought it was too loud. Too fucking loud?*

*I know.*

*It doesn't have anything to do with me posting the picture of you with Nick and it would be offensive to Ben too, because Molly's in it. And she wants to go back to having babies again, sheesh, and she wants to change diapers. I drove straight there and went to see you and drove from Denver and drove through. And I could pull over and sleep in the van and it was perfectly normal because it was a Cadillac Fleetwood and you remember what it was like to be in that car?*

*I do.*

*I took a picture of WD40. You remember that don't you?*

*I do.*

*I'll be able to paint that. And I know the business is gone, cuz you told me that too, and I can paint a picture of Ace as an elf. I can post it and people can see all the art I did.*

*I know. That's why you need mom to send pictures of your stuff.*

*Right. It reignites my disappointment in mom throwing away my Sicko stuff. Because she's royalty, somehow. You remember the big rock that I got that was a cutting board?*

*Yes.*

*There's no internet here and that's why I don't want to stay. But you're more than welcome to go through my pictures, too. And I couldn't smoke pot, even though it's legal now,*

*or a pipe, at my desk. I couldn't do that.*

*No, that's true. It's not the 1960's anymore.*

*But you said the teachers smoke in the teacher's lounge, right?*

*No, I said they used to. In the 1960's.*

*Right. I didn't know Southwest flew into Portland. I couldn't put that painting under the seat though. It's too big, right?*

*Right.*

*I would like to be the way I was at work but Jennifer said I wasn't sequencing right, but it's because I was bored out of my mind. I love you more. I love you and your heart. I love you more than you love me. You have three-hundred feet of copper wire and you take an eight foot rod and you weld it together. It's a system they use for work and it fuses the metal together in one piece. It's immediate, it takes two seconds or one second. Not like bearing a train. And I obey no hunting signs when I go into the forest. And hunter safety orange. It's what I did when I went to help mom out. The easiest thing I did was to pull up the carpet and fix the wood floors. It makes sense to me.*

*And just like that, you hang up. And I wait until you remember me again.*

*What are we gonna do with all of his shit, Mom?*

*You have to come help me empty the storage unit. We have to sell it. There are things worth a lot of money in there. Plus there's family stuff. We can't let that go. Your granddad's pipes for one.*

*I know. But it's his stuff.*

*You have one friend left and he's a good man. He's organized and efficient and selfless. I wonder if you saved his life and he feels like he owes you because his love for you seems bigger than mine. Word is, he was just as addicted as you, maybe even more. And just like that, he quit. He's sitting in the hospital with you right now. He's talking you off the ledge about your stuff in storage. He says it will be fine, that it's taken care of. It isn't but it doesn't matter. I'm not sure you remember what you own anymore, anyway. I remember because I dusted it all and cleaned the dog piss from the things on the floor. It was gross. I was the one that found the false eyelashes under your bed.*

*And our baby brother said, Well at least he got laid here, but I just wonder if they were yours.*

*When we were a little older, we got in a car and drove two days away from our father. And that was really all there was to that because he never came to visit and we never went to see him and because it was the dark ages, we couldn't call or text or email. Every minute cost money. So the dad we sang to the table vanished. And the baptisms he gave us both meant nothing anymore, especially in the eyes of god. Because I think I read once that the sins of the father are visited on his children. If that's true, no wonder you're so fucked up.*

*You came for my wedding and talked without stopping. It drove me bonkers. You took pictures of everything I owned with your cell phone. When did you get so creepy? And just like that, you sent your phone away for repairs and they couldn't send it back because you were living under the stairs. And as far as I know, they won't deliver mail to a guy with no address.*

*Now your one and only friend is spending his day at the hospital while they look at your head. Again. And try and explain how they can't really help a guy with only half a brain, mental illness and addictions to every chemical under the sun. Your friend sent me a picture of you. I don't know how you look so clean. You're even clean shaven but I don't know how. Seems like a razor in your hand would be dangerous but somehow you still know to do that and brush your teeth and wash your face. What you forget to do is eat. I guess because it costs money and requires some planning on your part but shaving is complex: razor, water, soap. That's a lot of stuff.*

When we were teenagers I sat you down and said we couldn't fight anymore. And just like that, we stopped. I told you we had to get along otherwise Christmases would be awkward and I didn't want that. I wanted our children to play together. You agreed. But you didn't have children and I only had one so there's no one to play with anyone.

A nurse just called.

*When was the last time he took his medication?*

*I don't know. Maybe November? I don't live in Colorado.*

*Do you know the names of his meds?*

*No. I don't live in Colorado.*

*About what month did he stop taking his medication?*

*November. He stopped in November. He was a patient there twice. Once for four months. Once for six months. Can't you look him up?*

I don't eat much these days. I feel sick over you. And I wish you could just get it together because all of this nonsense is getting really old. It makes me tired and cranky. It's driving me crazy. You definitely made your own bed. Or I guess in your case, your own dirty space under the stairs.

My phone is next to me and I'm not sure what I'm expecting. I keep imagining what I will do with you when you're dead. I'm going to cremate you no matter what our mother says. I won't let her bury you in Maine in the cemetery where our grandparents, great grandparents and great-great grandparents are. You are way too cool for that place. Plus, you always hated it. No, I'll take your ashes up to the mountains and I won't let anyone come, just me. And I'll play *Hey Jude* on my phone while I send you to the four corners of the world, riding on the wind, landing on trees, dusting the backs of elk, chipmunks and those loud blue birds that get way too close for comfort. Just don't worry about it. I might burn some of your stuff too because I know you would like that.

When we were young, we fought, all the time like our parents. But sometimes, not very often, we played together. With purpose. One winter there was so much snow and hundreds of icicles we wanted to get our hands on. They were hanging on the eaves. I guess we thought we could eat them, because the sun was shining and they were sparkling and wet, like glass daggers. I got a chair, you held it steady and the icicles fell into the snow with a sluicing sound. Then one fell on my face. And just like that, my seven year old mouth changed forever. You were there, watching the snow bleed. And when a doctor told me once that the plastics work I'd had for my cleft pallet was really well done, I just said, fuck yea.

It's messed up that I feel relief when you're in the hospital. I know they keep you clean and fed. And you have a bed with a remote control attached so you can watch television. You say you hate it there, but you secretly love it. You should. They call you a frequent flyer. Seems funny since you go anywhere cool anymore. If only you got points for coming so often you could cash them in for a place to live. They hooked you up with a sitter in your room, not because you need the company, but because they say you're a runner. And you're mixed up, He has a form of psychosis, they say. And you might hurt yourself. I wouldn't blame you if you did. Hurt yourself, I mean. Your life sucks.

And it's here where I can't get my head around what I want to happen to you. I know what I don't want. I don't want you sleeping under stairs. Or being hungry. Or confused. Or laughed at. Getting laughed at makes me want to kill someone, like rip their fucking face off. Because they don't know. They can't see. In their cars. Walking around the train station. Shopping. Shuttling their kids places. They think you're just a crazy man. With crazy blue eyes and an urgency around your mouth that makes you look like a rabid dog. But I know. I remember you. I just can't seem to find you anymore.

It's that edge of reason. The line of wanting you to be the same - which will never happen, ever - and wanting you to just give up and be gone already. That line. Like a razor. That thin, sharp line that hurts so much. I hate that line. I hate it.

We used to have a red tricycle that we shared. I'm not sure why we had to share it. It was an old, rusted tricycle. We weren't big enough - or maybe rich enough - to have bikes. So we shared it and drew towns on the driveway in chalk. We drew roads and houses, stop signs and schools and naturally, a church. Right in the middle of the town was the church with a giant chalk cross on the top of the pointed chalk roof. You stood on the back of the tricycle and held onto my shoulders and I would steer all over the chalk town. Sometimes tiny skinks would zip across the streets of our town and you were so mean. You loved pulling off their tails and watching the tails wiggle without the body. The poor skinks ran into the tumbleweed and grew back new ones. I wish you could grow back too.

# Short Fiction



## The Voice Box

Connor sits in class thinking cancer must be blue because the smoke his mother lets slip between her lips when she talks to him, sitting beneath the long, whining lights in his grandmother's basement, is always blue. It's the cigarettes, Grandma says, that make the cancer. So when Ms. Kelley has her students draw pictures of their mothers for Mother's Day cards, Connor and his classmates reaching beneath their desktops for big boxes of crayons and colored pencils, he outlines his mother's thin bones, puts her in a loose sweater and sweatpants, and colors her exposed skin in with a hazy circling of royal blue. It's fun.

There are problems with this, of course. The smoke is gray, at first, always needing to drift a bit, roll and collect above his head before reflecting that dull and obvious blue. Nothing in that basement is gray, though, ever; the tiles, ceiling and floor, are white, the furniture is made of tightly-bundled strips of brown wood, and his mother is just there, colorless. What color is she really? he wonders. Connor has drawn her blue, imagining the dirty air drifting from her mouth with every breath, every word, though most of the time she doesn't even have anything to say.

I can't talk, she always says. She curls sidewise into one of the creaking chairs and smokes, her eyes drawn dark and fingers shaking over the coffee can she uses for an ashtray. The lights hum and she looks at her son, opens her mouth to say something but stops short.

I just can't talk to you, she says. Connor will sit in the basement with her until his grandma appears at the top of the steps to say that supper is ready or there's a telephone call or enough's enough, and then they go up.

And there are the other children. He takes a look around the desks pushed together to make a group with his and studies their pictures. Some are decorated with grass, clouds, and a smirking sun, and others show another big figure, a father, joining the mother as bookends holding together the shorter crayoned kid in between. The families are dressed and smiling, looming from their white construction paper to hold long, colorful conversations.

You can't do that, a voice finally says. Connor turns from inspecting his classmates' work to find Ryan Boose, who is more or less his best friend, leaning forward in his seat to stare at his blue mother. Ryan's desk is pushed headlong into the side of Connor's, and his voice makes the other boy jump when he adds, Your mom's not blue.

Connor insists he knows this and slides an elbow over his mother's solitary figure, but it's too late. Everyone in his group has planted knees in their chairs, lifted up to take a look at Connor's mother. They giggle, look from the blue parent alone in the white sky to their own pictures, and then hold their mothers up so he can get a better look, making a circle of appropriately peach-shaded parents. He sits very still and turns his paper over and listens as Ryan Boose calls to their teacher, Ms. Kelley, Ms. Kelley, Connor's doing it wrong. She makes her way from another group, bending down to ask for a look at Connor's picture, smiling until he flips his picture over again.

It's blue, he warns in advance.

Oh, Ms. Kelley says, patting Connor's back, there's nothing wrong with that. But people's moms aren't blue, Ryan says.

The others sink back in their chairs, pretend to fish in their desks or go straight to coloring again, but Ryan remains on the edge of his seat, leaning out to point at Connor's picture and make sure their teacher sees what the blue-crazy boy has done. The picture just isn't right. Ms. Kelley crosses her arms and lifts an eyebrow. He gets the message and shrinks back into his own space. She has Connor bring his paper and supplies back to her desk, sitting in her chair and putting the boy on a stool beside her. She clears a space for him to lay his picture and crayons and smiles once more.

You just worry about making a nice picture for your mom, she tells him. Think of something really great and draw it for her. How about that?

Connor nods and gives her a shrug. He sits still on the rickety stool a moment and thinks before digging out the glittering silver crayon from his pack, its surface barely rubbed, saved for only the most special of situations. The paper shifts under his fingers and he resettles it, then presses the bright color into the page.

Ms. Kelley watches him a moment, takes a long look around her classroom to make sure no more trouble is brewing. The other students work furiously at their islanded desks and whisper softly. She has taught them to be quiet and realizes only something like poor Connor could rile them up. She knows his mother—they were cheerleaders together in high school, waving pompoms up and down hallways filled with beautiful boys. But now his mother is dying, Ms. Kelley knows, and she knows too that the son will never grow up to be one of the popular boys. She fears nothing will get much better for him, that it is likely all downhill from here.

After several minutes he taps her elbow with a hesitant finger. She puts the smile back on and looks at him hold his picture out in front of him. His mother, her blue skin and baggy clothes, still stands alone in white space, but now a silver pole has appeared to the side. It tilts toward her mouth and shakes with the sparkle of cheap crayon. Ms. Kelley makes a noncommittal cooing in her throat.

A microphone, Connor says to her.

\* \* \*

In science class, Mrs. Hornbeck hops around on her pigeon toes as if she's one of the children. They've spent two weeks learning about the rivers and oceans of the world, streams and swamps and things in between, and she has a surprise. She hurries them into their seats around the classroom's three large tables and stands at the front of the room, before the blackboard, with a wheeled cart. On top of the cart rests a large square draped in a black cloth. It grabs the children's attention and draws their voices out in excitement until the old woman lifts a hand, waits for them to settle.

We've been studying the way oceans sustain life, she tells them. We've also talked about how different animals live in the ocean—remember?

Fish! she cries, and with a flick of her wrist the veil flies away to reveal a large tank. Behind its clear walls swim a dozen or so fish, several orange and a handful black, two yellows that dart about as though crazed. The children let out a communal gasp of awe and, for just a moment, go still in their chairs.

Just a very few of the countless creatures in the sea. Come, look! Careful, now, she adds, hollering at the students to maintain order, show respect, and to approach cautiously. They crowd the tank, staring with laughter and excitement but keeping their cool. They know not to push Mrs. Hornbeck too far with greasy fingerprints or, worse still, a shoved and broken tank.

Connor jumps to his feet in awe of the colors and movement, the darting activity. He presses into the rear of the pack and stares at the fish, tries to figure them out. Something seems wrong, and he realizes they are trapped, being kept alive like trophies instead of eaten. He's seen real fish, the way they flop and roll and skim beneath the surface of real bodies of water. Angling to the side, he looks and wonders if these fish were chased down, hooked and hauled into a boat like the larger, duller catfish he has watched his father pull in from the river.

Connor's father picks him up on Saturday afternoons. His grandmother meets him on the front porch, and they speak in hushed tones so that Connor, rushing through the hall as he gets ready to leave, can't make out the words. He puts on his fishing gear—blue jeans and a t-shirt, waterproof boots and a hook-shaped hat—and darts into the basement to tell his mother goodbye. She sits in the half-dark, neck craned as if listening, and shoots blue smoke against the ceiling as her son kisses her cheek goodbye.

I can't, she says, though Connor has never suggested she should. I just can't talk to him. Don't you be telling him things on me, either.

In his father's truck, everything is wide-open. They stop and buy orange sodas in glass bottles, pork rinds and beef jerky, a pack of brown-bottled root beer for Connor and regular beer for his father that they stick in the cooler for later. They drive over the state line, munching food and talking, listening to the radio with the windows down. Like his teacher talks to him about water in the classroom, his father talks to him about school when they're flying down the road, boat on a trailer behind them. He asks about his teachers, what they're learning, who his friends are. He wants to know everything. Connor tells him that Ryan Boose is his best friend—though sometimes he's mean, like one day when he wouldn't pick him for his kickball team—and he goes to stay at that boy's house sometimes. His teachers are okay. Ms. Kelley is nice, the others he's around less. They're learning about fish.

So you'll be prepared today, huh? his father asks him.

Sure, Connor says. He tells his lanky, bearded father about swinging on the playground, going up high and letting other people run under his sky-reaching feet, until it's time to go back inside and he works up his courage, pushes as hard as he can, and flings himself out of the seat. He shoves away from the chains, flies through the air, legs working until the dirt comes up to jar his knees.

Sounds fun, his father says, giving him the rest of his orange drink and a wink.

The water is wide and slick where his father backs the boat into the river, and once they've parked the truck, waded into the eight-foot boat with their cooler and food and poles, buckets for holding what they catch, they push out into the firm but subtle current. The talking ends. But Connor knows that this silence is not like the quiet of his grandmother's home or the shushing of teachers. It's to catch the fish. His father has explained many times how the big catfish they're after are sensitive to everything. It's important to stay still and soundless. The man baits both their hooks with chunks of stinking, greenish cheese, and they throw their heavily-weighted lines out, watch the lures float and bob and try to trick the creatures underneath the surface.

We're after the big ones off the bottom. His father nods and winks, and they rest in the rocking of the boat, eating jerky and sipping their different beers. They wait for something to come.

When Connor finally works his way to the glass edge of his teacher's tank, he moves slow and silent and wonders why his classmates don't do the same. It's the way you get close to a fish. He watches the many-colored collection while Mrs. Hornbeck talks about their features, their fins and their gills. They look nothing like the catfish his father pulls from the water. These you couldn't eat, tiny and thin.

Watch the spines, his father will say, and once the wrestled-in creature has slowed, settled to a thin pulse of gasping and gagging in the air, he lets Connor touch it. Slimy and slick, drug up from the deep, muddy water. Their dark, soft shapes smell of something he cannot put a word to, something old and forever. Its own language. He keeps his fingers clear of the whiskery mouth and pointed fins and smiles while his father drops the catch into one of their buckets.

Supper. He shakes his thin jowls side to side to make Connor laugh.

It's the excitement of hauling one in—his father shouts, thrashes and hollers a lot of words that later he reminds Connor never to use. The boy watches and stays out of the way, and once it's over they return to the silent hunt, waiting for another. His father takes a sip of beer, punches him in the arm and tells him, Good work. Sometimes, though, when they day rolls slowly or the sun is slipping away, before they head back for the concrete dock, his father stretches, raises his sunglasses with a too-loud yawn, and begins lazily winding his line back in to the boat.

How's your mama, he'll say.

Connor shrugs.

She eating? Taking her medicine? Getting out the house any? He wants to know all sorts of things, asks for a whole picture of the scene. Connor tells what he knows, which he always feels isn't enough. It's so hard for her to tell him anything.

You should talk to her, he tells his father. This is what he thinks could make everything better, but the grown man just grins, tilts back against the last of the sunlight.

She can't do it, can't stand talking to me. She has a hard time. You know?

Yeah. Connor shakes his head and hurries his line out of the water. I know.

\* \* \*

The teachers have placed a large red light in the middle of the lunchroom, dangled it from the ceiling to flash on four sides. Green, yellow, and red like an ordinary traffic light. This light, though, reacts to sound instead of cars—Connor listens as the chatter and rumble jolts its way upward, a little louder and a little louder, until finally the green flashes to yellow. Eyes flicker to the monitor, voices pull back a bit, and the green returns. If they slip over into the red, the lunch monitors roaming the room will demand silence. They are learning how to be just loud enough. Connor doesn't really care what the light does. He went through line, pointed for chicken nuggets and tater tots from behind the glass guard, and had his lunch card punched. He looked for his friends, but they were nowhere to be seen.

He sits alone, waiting, and cannot stop thinking about his mother, her inability to speak, and all the problems this malfunction has come to cause. There must be something he can do.

The voices rise once more, crash to a roar and trigger the yellow light, then red. No one cares, this time. It is time to go. A line forms at the side of the cafeteria, each student dipping into a recessed room with trash cans and a conveyor belt. Children dump their garbage in the cans, set the trays and silverware on the belts where they zip into the unseen clank and rattle of the kitchen. Connor

follows along, dumps his leftover food into the trash and begins to set his tray on the conveyor when he looks up and stops short. What he needs is standing right in front of him.

Vernon, the worker who watches over the trash and makes sure no trays or forks or spoons are carelessly tossed away, is an older man. He's short and rail-thin in coveralls, as though he expects snow so close to summer. He waves impatiently for Connor to leave his mess and move along. The man lifts his hand below his chin, presses a metal box into the flesh of his throat, and in a static and unreal voice buzzes electrically out, *Let's go, leave it, let's go.*

Connor stares a moment longer, ducks his eyes, and finally pushes the tray into the window toward the kitchen. He hurries—walks fast, doesn't quite run—out of the lunchroom. He finally has an answer, a way to make things better.

\* \* \*

Ms. Kelley picks at the salad she brought from home and kept cold in her classroom's little refrigerator. She keeps an eye on the clock, making sure she has time to finish before lunch is over, but she doesn't feel like eating. Ever since the cards this morning, she's had Connor on her mind. Connor and his mother, Melisa, who'd been her best friend in school. They spent so much time together, in class or cheering at football games or hunting guys on weekends, riding around in their cars at night.

It ended in high school, too, though. Melisa caught her boy, Connor's father, and Ms. Kelley had gone on to college. Her friend had a baby, and she became the boy's teacher by luck of the draw. She feels bad for him but can't help feeling worse for his mother, just because she'd known her. It's worse for him. Melisa's no-count estranged husband; the boy's no-count father. Melisa's wasting away, dying; the boy losing his mother so young. Yes, she knows, it's horrible for him, but she can't shake the sadness shrouding her old friend.

She finally pushes the salad away, nearly sends it tumbling over the edge to the carpet, and pulls a pad of paper from her desk. She inches out a message for her friend. Ms. Kelley tells the sick woman how wonderful it's been to have her son in class—and how fast they grow!—and how he's been making progress with his reading. He just needs to keep it up, work hard. She lets Melisa know that she's thought of her over the years, that she'll always treasure the wonderful times they spent together. She tries to bring back a specific time, something great they did, but can only remember stupid, foolish things. Connor's depiction of a blue-skinned mother jumps to her mind again, and she wonders just how bad of shape Melisa could be in. She tells her she hopes she's is doing well, tells her to take care. Keep in touch.

Ms. Kelley leans back, smiles, and signs her name. She feels like she's doing something good, maybe making the woman's life a little brighter. She goes to Connor's desk and slips her note inside the envelope holding the boy's picture. She figures she doesn't need to worry his little head about it, make him think it's something bad, and she steps away, the letter secured and ready to travel home, just before the slow roar of the after-lunch bell stampedes down the hall.

\* \* \*

Come on, let's go, come on, Ryan Boose says to Connor in a robot voice. He and two other boys have overheard Vernon hurrying him, and now they follow in circles, each holding out an arm to poke him with an index finger. Their other hands curl against their throats as though pushing out the words they use to chase him. They are in a tight and humiliating knot just outside the cafeteria, buzzing their syllables, when Ms. Kelley appears, hands on her hips and waiting for them to notice.

I will tan some hides, she says, and then I'll send you to the office to get tanned some more if this doesn't stop right now.

Connor wants to tell her that it's not what it looks like, that he isn't involved, but he is terrified. The other boys are just as scared and straighten up, take small steps behind their teacher, arms at their sides. Making fun of adults, they know, is nothing ever to be caught doing. She leads their class to the gym and says that Mr. Tilson, the coach, is missing. He's not present, sick, and Ms. Kelley is filling in.

She keeps them inside, even though it's a beautiful day, and the racks of worn-out basketballs have been rolled onto the hardwood. The children split up around the court, shooting mostly at the lowered goals to the sides. Some, though, venture out to the goals at regular height, putting more effort into lofting the balls and seeing fewer go through the rim. Connor is one of them, but he hits more often than not. His grandmother's neighbor, an old black man who rubs the top of the boy's head and chuckles, insists he come next door and use his grandson's portable goal whenever he wants. He is used to trying that little bit harder. His classmates notice his skill, the ease with which he makes baskets, and they call out to him. Connor pays them no attention. He shoots without thinking and lets his mind wander to Vernon and how the little box he carries makes sound come out of his throat. The man seems scary, always angry, but the teachers have brought them into the auditorium more than once to hear his rasping story of smoking and cancer, how the disease came through his mouth and strangled his voice away.

Ms. Kelley screams, cuts in and brings Connor back to himself. He looks over his shoulder, scared for a moment that she knows what he's thinking. But it's not him—someone else has done something wrong. She is herding everyone onto the bleachers. A few more shots arc up, a show being made of returning the basketballs to their racks before they all move to sit down, muttering and disappointed under the woman's anger. Her voice is strong, she can use it whenever and however she wants. She has no problems telling them what to do.

Connor shoots one last time, watches the ball bounce around on the rim before falling through the dirty net, and he goes and sits down. He knows all about being angry. He's been angry, broken toy soldiers or cars in his grandmother's brown backyard, and he knows that nothing worthwhile comes of it. This he can control—he can choose to be calm, take it easy, his father says—but he's watched anger in others, too, and knows he has no control of that. He has gone downstairs, tried to talk to his napping mother, and seen her face twist up as she reaches out, keeping her eyes tightly closed, to slap in his direction, flail at his voice. It comes in tears, too, her crying and useless, pounding fists against the bathroom counter when he catches her in the dark, crashed on her knees in front of the sink. He asks her what's wrong, but she never says.

Even when her voice does come out loud and violent it's only on the phone, rising out of nowhere, and Connor realizes she is speaking to his father. She listens, speaks; goes silent, yells. They have these conversations sometimes, like on Saturdays when his father doesn't arrive with the boat to pick him up because he's somewhere else, someplace far away. Doing something different, and his mother wrings her anger out at the man. He's off yonder, she'll say, and she's stuck here. He doesn't love her. He doesn't love anybody. He's no count. She uses words his father says he shouldn't, but still the familiar problems remain.

I just can't tell you anything, she screams, the pink telephone held away from her face. They go back and forth until she finally slams the receiver down beside her wicker chair and she tells Connor, before curling up to light a cigarette, that his father is not coming to fish today. She's been telling him this a lot, lately, week after week. She tells him he isn't coming and then adds, He's long gone.

Ms. Kelley right now reminds him of his mother, alone and hollering. Angry. He sits and smiles at her, but she doesn't pay attention—she has a voice and saves it for the children not minding. She speaks and fixes her problems, makes things how she wants them. Connor nods his head, kicks his heels against the foot piece of the bleachers and inspires a rally. All the children begin to pound their feet, create a ridiculous ruckus as the last of the stragglers wander in and their teacher tries to figure out the noise. He is going to change things. He will give his mother a voice.

\* \* \*

Connor is antsy, bouncing in his seat until the bell finally interrupts Ms. Kelley's last words of the day and he can run out the door. He pushes along in a throng of his classmates and older kids that come from further down the hall. His stomach lurches, makes him slow down, and he stops in the bathroom to splash water on his face and take a drink from his cupped palm. He stares into the mirror a moment, until he feels he can really do it, and then grips two handfuls of his hair and groans, what he thinks is the most adult gesture of frustration and worry there is.

He makes it to the cafeteria and slips up against the wall, out of traffic. The other students continue along the edge of the room, most headed for the bus lane to climb onto their big yellow rides home. Others go to the front of the building, where their parents wait in cars. The stoplight monitor is turned off, and the students walk and talk loudly, without stopping. All Connor's attention, though, is on the man sitting at a lunch table, his back to the passing children while he reads a paper. Vernon, his shoulders hunched, could be dead to the world if not for the occasional rattle and flip of a page. The back of his head looks square, and for the first time Connor realizes how small the man is. Behind him, on the tabletop, rest two sets of keys and a baseball cap showing the school mascot. Pressed into the hat is what the boy is after. The electric voice box.

That box allows him to say whatever needs to be said. With it, he hurries kids along, warns them away from evil, carries on conversations with other adults. Everyone has seen him stop, mop in hand and face red, to tell Principal Carter or Mr. Tilson something that leaves the other man laughing, slapping Vernon in the shoulder. He speaks electrically and works his mouth up and down in a smile, shoulders shaking, though no laughter makes it out of his throat.

Connor edges between the rows of tables, feels like everyone must be watching him but knows no one is paying attention. It's time to go home. Across the room the kitchen doors are open and people continue cleaning up, preparing for the weekend, but no one there glances out. It's only clear space between Connor and Vernon, and he moves silent and without extra movement until he reaches the man. The newspaper twitches, turns a page. He keeps the table between himself and the custodian and carefully reaches out to the man's piled-up things. He slips his hand over the keys, into the dip of the hat, and lifts the box away. It is surprisingly light, just a smooth slip of metal that he pulls close to his body.



He walks away, knows not to run. He heads for the exit and shuffles into the thick of the thick of the crowd. The voice box warms in his hand, and he tucks it into his pocket before glancing over his shoulder and finding he's been too slow. Vernon is up and moving, the theft discovered. He waves his hands and shakes his fingers, strangely pretty blue eyes locked on Connor, and rolls toward him in a rickety gate. He splutters, grunts, and for a moment the boy expects him to speak, even though he knows he can't. He freezes for half a second and glances ahead, nearly into the long hall leading out. Connor looks once more and sees Vernon gaining ground, reaching out to grab his shoulder, and he runs. He pushes between larger bodies and darts for the safety of distance without risking a peek back to see if he's going to make it.

\* \* \*

When Ms. Kelley finally has bundled her students off for the weekend, smiling and waving the last goodbye, she gathers her things. She makes a few notes, accounts for all she needs to write lesson plans. The week has seemed long, and home sounds wonderful. Tod Walters, the high school English teacher, is coming over for dinner. It could be going somewhere.

On her way out she pauses, bag over her shoulder and fingers ready to flick off the lights, and stares at a desk. Connor's desk, the white envelope lying right on top. He's left his Mother's Day card and the note she secreted inside. She thinks about just moving it to the cavern of space beneath his desktop and leaving it for Monday, then glances to the hallway and sees people still floating past. She can probably catch him at the bus. Ms. Kelley digs the grade book from her bag. Near the front is a list of her children and the buses they ride. She locates the page, slides her finger down the column, and finds g-mother beside Connor's name. He's picked up out front. She repacks and gets out the door, hurries down the hall in case Connor's grandmother arrived early to wait on him. The car lines are usually slow to start moving, held up in favor of the departing buses. She glides quickly through the last of the leaving students, heels clicking sharply as she cuts through the cafeteria and into the main hall.

Ms. Kelley passes the bus ramps, hears a commotion and glances out the doors. Students stand laughing and pointing as Hugh Carter, her boss, splits his attention between shoeing them on and trying to console Vernon, the custodian. The older man gestures wildly with his hands, not using his electric larynx but pointing and flailing and hopping up and down. She watches him a moment, thinks it must be awful to be in that sort of condition, no voice. A bell rings overhead and startles her—the last warning to reach the buses. She shakes her head, a little mournful, and hurries on to catch Connor.

\* \* \*

It's easy. He runs between people, pushing and bumping until he reaches the cutoff to the buses, and he ducks into the bathroom by the open doors. He waits just inside the restroom's entrance, by the wall that blocks the hallway's line of sight. His heart pounds, his stomach jumps. He peeks around the tiled corner until he sees Vernon lumber past, limping as quick as he can. The man's eyes work hard but don't turn in Connor's direction. He stays put and waits, gives it just a minute to be sure.

He steps back into the hall and sees Vernon outside, headed toward the buses. He peers around and chases empty air. Connor heads the other way, down the hall and past the office. He crosses the lobby, by its bulletin boards and glass cases filled with trophies, and pushes through glass doors into the sunlight. He blinks, sees the other students waiting on the sidewalks, and looks to all the cars lined up in the lot. No sign of his grandmother. Soon, he'll be home. He'll



give his mother the box, and her voice will carry to him electrically, buzzing loud and clear and full of power. She'll be able to talk to him. She can press it tight against her throat and call up his father, wherever he's gone, and tell him to come back. Find the words for him. They can go fishing, they can talk and talk until there's nothing more anyone can think to say.

He marches down the sidewalk, finds a spot in the hedgerow by the handicapped ramp that's hidden from the building but open to the parking lot. He digs in his pocket and slides out the electronic voice. He feels it over with his fingers. The elongated box is old and worn smooth from being gripped, its silver color smudged a greasy, bluish mold of fingerprinting. He turns it over, suddenly unsure of his plan. He finds a switch on the side and flips it, holds the box to the side of his throat, and speaks. He buzzes in his throat and hears it rattle.

*This is Connor.* The sudden, unnatural manifestation of his words makes him jerk. *Speaking in a new voice.* He looks at the little machine again and smiles. *This will help Mom,* he adds, and the new voice amazes him. It is thick and ringing and happy, toneless but full of what he's saying.

Connor? someone calls. He nearly lurches from his spot in panic, has to clamp down inside to hold everything in place. They call again and he spies his teacher, Ms. Kelley, in front of the door. They have sent her to look for him, he thinks, and he shakes with the possibility of everything falling apart. He shoves the box back into his pocket and watches the woman walk from the doors to the sidewalk and away from him.

He lets out a breath, hopes she keeps going but fears more will come. Vernon or the principal or maybe all his teachers, a full manhunt, demanding he return the machine. They will search every direction. A flash of green on the street beyond the parking lot catches his eye and keeps him hoping—his grandmother's station wagon. He watches it pass in front of the school, turn into the lot and stop in line. The outline behind the wheel is somehow wrong, though, and Connor tries to figure out what is out of place. The car pauses far back in line and he wonders—could it be his mother?

It is the only best answer, really. She's come to pick him up, the first time in forever, to rescue him on the perfect day. He sits tight, backpack clutched to his shoulder in the bushes, and sees that Ms. Kelley has started his way down the sidewalk. She may have spotted him. It doesn't matter. If he holds out just a few moments his mother will pull close enough, and Connor will run to the car, jump in. They'll be on their way. He will give his mother the new voice, and she'll be able to tell them what's going on, explain it, and they'll escape. Everything will be fine. As long as she reaches him, everything is going to be much, much better.

## Five Ways to Draw a Game

I was teaching a private chess lesson when I got an unexpected and troubling message. The phone was on silent, so most of my attention was on my student, Ruby Greinke, all of ten, who hovered with her dented nose over the chess board. The way she stared at the pinned knight told me she didn't see the move just yet. Her eyes wandered to the window. The sun was setting behind the skyline of San Francisco, turning all the bridges and buildings into shadows. The Greinkes were paying triple my normal rate for me to come to their house up in Forrest Hills. It was in one of those neighborhoods filled with lush trees and money, above the rest of us in the city below. I usually avoided going to my students' houses, preferring to teach them at the Chess Center downtown. There were too many distractions in the home, like windows to the outside world, when the game in front of them was complicated enough. But I agreed to teach Ruby at her house because the Greinkes were alright people, and I needed the money pretty bad.

I said something to Ruby like, "Look at the whole board," and tapped the table. She jerked her head down like she was flinching, never looking at me straight. As far as I knew, Ruby never made direct eye contact with anyone. She only made sideways glances through the glare of her pink framed glasses.

Putting her hands under her chin, she looked at the board, eyes jittering from one piece to another. "Rook takes A-6?" Her voice was shaky, as if she wasn't sure.

"That's right," I said and offered my hand for a stinging high-five that came with a sudden burst of enthusiasm before she retreated back into her timid little face.

Ruby had this savant-like grasp of chess theory. She could solve any puzzle, even finding the complex decoy and deflection tactics three or four moves deep. It blew my mind sometimes because she was so young and unassuming and had only been playing for eight months or so. But she had a bad case of the yips. When she sat down in front of another player all that talent melted away. It was one of the reasons I agreed to coach her. She reminded me a lot of myself.

On the train back to my apartment I listened to the message from Abby. She said she missed me and wanted to visit. The voicemail was left in her fumbling and disarming way. It made me smile at first until I remembered all that came with it. I started to feel the squeeze of the rush hour commuters, their faces tired, fed up. The lights flickered, and some people got off at the next stop. I found an empty seat finally and was able to close my eyes and breathe. Then I listened to the message again.

At the apartment, I went to work on this book I'd been writing, a chess instructional for kids called, *It Don't Matter if You're Black or White* (publisher pending). It was a half-way interesting book because I was half-way interested in

it. I wrote it mostly out of desperation, a feeling of guilt/shame because all of my friends had started to make good money and have babies and move to nicer neighborhoods. Only I wasn't willing to give up on the game. I was good at it, although not good enough, so I taught. That was where the book came in. It was supposed to be proof of my ability to stick with it without really sticking with it.

I was working on a chapter about draws. It was a part of the game outsiders didn't understand. It conflicted with their concept of winners and losers, making it something to be ashamed of, like kissing your cousin. To me, there was a nobility in it, a sign of respect for your opponent. Eight of the eleven matches in the last world championship ended in a draw. It was something every serious player needed to know.

I started the chapter like this:

*There are four ways a draw occurs on the board. The first, and most common among young players, is the stalemate. It occurs when a player has no legal move, but is not in check (see fig. 31). Watch out! There's nothing worse than accidentally putting your opponent in a stalemate when you're winning. Some say, in certain instances, a stalemate is a moral victory. Question to ponder: What do you think? Is there such thing as a moral victory? Ask your parents.*

\* \* \*

Abby called again that night. She was already in town, heading to my apartment and needed a place to crash. I was living in a small studio in the Tenderloin, the kitchen and bedroom more or less in the same space. I had been busy with teaching and writing the book, so I hadn't done laundry in a while and there were dirty dishes in the sink. The table was covered with books and a chess board I was using to work through the *Immortal Games of Capablanca*. I hadn't noticed the mess, not until I knew Abby was coming. I thought about cleaning the place up; then I thought she might notice my rush to clean the place up; then I thought I should leave everything the way it was and give no indication I had been thinking about any of it.

When she knocked on the door, I opened it and saw her standing there, staring at something down the hall. Her blonde hair was sprinkled with tiny rain drops. She looked at me, her face blank, an enigma as always. I found the mole above her lip, just to make sure it was still there. It was the kind of distinguishing feature that set her apart from the other women who drifted in and out of my life. We stood there, taking measure of each other, trying to notice if the time apart had changed us. She threw her free hand around my neck. I kissed her on the forehead and knew immediately it was a mistake.

She looked around the apartment. "Your place looks exactly the same," she said.

"What did you expect?"

"I don't know. I thought you might move out of this neighborhood."

"I will. Someday."

"Some...day," she said, making a tortuous stretch of each syllable.

Feeling weak, I leaned against the back of a chair. To regain an edge I almost asked the question that needed asking: Why was she back again? Instead it

came out something like, “It’s good to see you.”

“Yeah,” she said. “I just had to get away from it, you know.” She didn’t have to explain. I think that was one of the reasons why she always ended up at my place. I never pried, even when I should have.

“Thanks for letting me stay,” she said.

“I wish you had given me more of a heads up. I could’ve been busy. I could’ve said no.”

“Were you gonna say no?”

“No.”

I took a couple of beers from the mini-fridge, and we drank them at the table. There was a little tension at first, like working out a muscle you hadn’t used in a while. Our conversations were always rooted in some distant past where the central characters felt unfamiliar, or even dead. But there we were, Lazarus and his old flame, resurrected, trying their best to remember what it was like to live that way again.

It was two A.M. by the time we finished all the beers. Abby propped up her sinking head, all smiles as she fought to stay awake.

“So,” I said. “I can take the couch if you want the bed.”

She looked around the room, clicking her tongue on the roof of her mouth. “I don’t want to put you out,” she said. She grabbed my hand, her fingers still cold from the beer, and led me to the bed. Soon, our clothes were off, and she was on top of me.

During the whole thing she said something like, “Don’t spit on me, okay,” the words coming out between quick, broken breaths.

“What?” I said.

“Brad—I mean—the last guy—spit on me during sex.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Also—he eats—he used to lick my asshole, but I like that.”

“Oh. Do you want me to try it?”

“No,” she said. “Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

*A draw is called if there is insufficient material to complete a checkmate. All this really means is that neither player has enough pieces to win. You could make an infinite number of moves, and the game would never end. Also, if a player makes fifty consecutive moves without capturing a piece or moving a pawn, either opponent can call a draw. Have you ever felt like that, endlessly moving around the board not knowing what to do?*

In the morning, Abby woke before I did. She was still lying next to me, and I studied the curve of her figure as she looked out the window. It was a dark, foggy morning, the kind of day that begged to be spent in a warm bed, drinking coffee with someone. I allowed myself to fantasize, for a moment, that she would stay this time, if only because the city itself had wooed her, as it had wooed me. She lay motionless, staring as she mindlessly twiddled something with her fingers. When she noticed I was awake, she tucked the thing in her fist.

I cancelled my next lesson with Ruby, and we went down to the Mission District. It was Abby's favorite place to visit whenever she came to town. We walked the streets under the bright, colorful Latin murals, depicting the joy and the struggle. Abby had a heart for the poor, bordering on a Marxist fetish, but the feeling was genuine. She often spoke of the places she volunteered in L.A., beamed with pride recalling the year she lived in Boyle Heights. I dropped hints every now and then at how little money I had, thinking it was a way into her affections, or at least her pity. It never worked.

As we walked past the El Capitan, an old theater in a Spanish style building, I took her hand and held it. But after a block or so she slid her hand back into her pocket.

"Sorry," she said, "My hands are cold."

It was just like it always had been. When we met in high school, I fell for her quick and hard. Any sort of attention from her made me feel significant. We ended up at a concert together with some friends once, and we got separated from the rest of the group. Abby was standing in front of me, facing the stage. When she felt me there, she reached around my waist and nestled her ass right up into me. As I got harder, she pulled me closer. After the show, when we found our friends, she acted as if nothing had happened. The only acknowledgment was these furtive glances that somehow convinced me it was more fun to keep it a secret.

We stumbled on this art gallery in the Mission. It was in an old converted Victorian home with each room dedicated to a different artist. The whole inside of the house was painted white, even the furniture. The place had this pure, sterilized feeling that unsettled me. In one of the bedrooms there were four paintings on each wall, all variations on a theme. The canvasses were brightly colored, and every one of them was covered with hundreds of these little creatures, like green aliens with big eyes and spiral antennas. Each was illustrated with incredible detail. Some of the aliens were stacked on each other's shoulders, trying to reach some higher point on the frame. Others were dangling from red or purple lines that stretched across the canvas. The paintings made the room look whimsical and innocent.

Abby said something like, "Look how cute they are. There must be close to a thousand. How long do you think it took to paint all of them?"

"I can't even imagine," I said.

"I could never do it. I don't have the patience for something like that."

I stepped back from the painting and something caught my eye. There were lines in the background, mostly incongruous up close, but from afar they formed another image, the outline of a woman laying naked on her side. Some of the little green aliens were hanging from her nipple. In another painting there was a giant cock shaft with a group of the aliens on an expedition to the head. By then, Abby had noticed it too.

"Just think," she said. "A father buys this cute little painting for his daughter and there's a huge dick in the background."

"That sort of thing could traumatize a kid," I said.

“No way. She would be the only one to know, the only one who bothered to look at the whole picture. It would be her secret, something precious to her.” She smiled then, but it was a sad smile.

\* \* \*

*Another common way to draw a game is threefold repetition. If the exact same position occurs on the board three times, the player to move may claim a draw. This usually happens when someone doesn't know what to do, so they make the same move over and over and...*

We went back to the apartment when we didn't feel like walking anymore. The fog had burned off and the afternoon sun made the place feel hot and lethargic. I opened up a window and a bay breeze breathed life back into it. Even the sounds coming off Turk Street — usually loud buses, screaming rants, and even gunshots sometimes — were calm and soothing, and I felt as if things had hit a perfect balance and I was happy. I lay on the couch to get the weight off my feet while Abby sat at the table, flipping through the loose pages of my manuscript. I watched her, waiting for her to laugh at something clever I'd written. Her face was glazed over as if reading something left behind in the bathroom. She mindlessly twiddled that thing with her fingers again.

“So what do you think?” I said.

“Yeah, it's good. I was just wondering what sort of market there is for this kind of thing. I mean, does anybody read chess books anymore?”

“I do. So do my students.”

“But how many are there, really?”

I went to the table and gathered up the pages of the book. “What does it matter to you how I pay my rent, anyway?”

“I just worry about you sometimes.”

“I do alright when you're not here.”

“Fair enough. Forget I said anything.”

I put the stack of pages face down on the table.

She was quiet for a while until she said something like, “You should take me out tonight. Someplace nice.”

The truth was that I couldn't really afford a nice restaurant. So instead I said, “What did you have in mind?”

“I don't know. One of those Italian places in North Beach, the kind with a huge wine selection. Some place that's quiet, so we can talk.”

“Talk about what?”

“I don't know,” she said and her voice sort of trailed off. Her eyes avoided me, which was unusual for her.

“What?” I said, again.

“I'm getting married, you know.” She showed me the ring she had been twiddling in her fingers.

The sun came in through the windows and cast long shadows, making the room feel dark and cold. A stream of words came to me, and I wanted to throw all of it at her, a rehearsed monologue I had prepared late at night when I was alone,

after one of the many times she visited and then left. Instead I said something like, “Congratulations.”

“That’s it?”

“Who’s the guy? Is it what’s-his-name? The guy who spit on you?”

“Brad, yes, but it’s not like that all the time.”

“And you love him, obviously.”

“I think so. I don’t know. Who ever knows for sure?”

“But you came here anyway.”

“I feel safe here. But I feel safe there too. I feel—taken care of with him.

Is that fucked up?”

“I guess.”

“Let’s please just forget about it,” she said. “I’m here now, right? Take me out tonight and you’ll see how easily I can make you forget it.”

All sanity and reason left me then. A part of me, the cold, cynical part, was shouting to run away. But that little mole above her lip, the strong sweetness of her voice, made everything she said seem perfectly reasonable.

Without saying anything, I put on my jacket and went to the door.

“Where are you going?”

“I need to go out for a bit,” I said. “For air.”

“You’ll be back soon?”

I sort of half-nodded, because I honestly didn’t know what I would do.

After walking a few aimless blocks I ended up at the Chess Center where, on most Fridays, there was a group of people who played blitz chess late into the night. Sometimes there was some under-the-table betting, but that was mostly for hustlers in the parks. The thrill came from the game itself, timed, five minutes aside, a flurry of moves and second guesses. I came to play because I wouldn’t have to think of anything else.

The room was quiet, filled only with the steady click of the chess clocks. A guy I knew, Kazuo, was sitting by himself at a board, watching another game nearby. I was pretty familiar with his game, strict and mechanical, able to pounce on any mistakes made in the traditional lines. But if you got him out of book, he was vulnerable. I knew almost nothing about his family, his friends, his life outside the game. None of it seemed to matter at the time; we expressed each other on the board. Some people were aggressive, some were timid, and then there were the ones that played straight from the gut, only reacting to their opponent’s moves with no real plan of attack.

I asked Kazuo for a game. As we set up the pieces I said something like, “What does it say about us, huh? Nothing better to do on a Friday night.”

“Speak for yourself,” he said. “I have a girlfriend in Japan. Motoko. We’re getting married when she moves here.”

I was surprised. “Do you have a picture?” I said.

“No,” he said and didn’t speak again.

He opened our game with the Dragon, a variation of the Sicilian Defense.

It was a strong opening in theory, but too slow for a speed game. All I needed was patience, and he would lose on time. But within a minute, he was improvising off the main line and had me on the run. He checkmated me with more than two minutes left on his clock. I asked him for another game and then another. I hardly noticed that outside the rest of the city had gone dark.

I stayed until after midnight and then went back to the apartment. Abby was already asleep. She was wearing an old t-shirt of mine with the logo of a band I didn't listen to anymore. The shirt had ridden up an inch or so, showing just a sliver of her stomach slowly rising and falling. I thought I might sleep on the floor or something, but I ended up at the edge of the bed. She slid over and put a hand on my shoulder.

Then I said, almost whispering, "I don't think you should get married. I think you should stay here for a while."

"I can't," she said. "It wouldn't be fair." She nestled up closer to me. "Besides, my father isn't coming. Who will give me away? I have this fantasy where you're dancing with me at the wedding. All the other guests are watching us, but we're the only ones who really know."

"I'm not going to your wedding. I can't believe you'd ask me that."

"I'm sorry," she said. "But is it really wrong of me? To want both things?"

It wasn't wrong. It was what we all wanted. I wanted to hate her and love her at the same time. I wanted to play the game no matter how bad I was at it. Telling her all that, as convoluted as it was in my head, seemed useless, like playing it out from a losing position. Besides, I didn't want to hurt her, not really.

*Boys and Girls, there is a fifth way to draw a game. It doesn't happen naturally on the board. If two players feel that the game is going nowhere, and neither one can win, they can agree to a draw. Sometimes this happens without saying a word. They just reach across the board, shake hands, and the game is over. It happens all the time. Think of that.*

In the morning, Abby was gone. She left a note on the table, right next to my manuscript. Most of the note was a rambling apology, and for a second I felt bad for making her feel it was necessary. The note ended like this: Until next time...

I was half an hour late for my next lesson with Ruby. I apologized several times to Mrs. Greinke as she wrote me a check.

"It happens," she said. "We all lose our heads sometimes."

I looked out at the panoramic window and all I could see were the fog-drenched trees. Ruby was bumping around in her room upstairs.

"She's very excited about the tournament on Saturday," Mrs. Greinke said. "Do you think she's ready?"

The truth was that I wasn't sure. I had lost bad at some tournaments when I was her age and never played the same again. But parents didn't want to hear that, especially when they were writing a check, so I said something like, "She'll do fine."

"Great," she said, ripping out the check. "Just keep doing what you're



doing.”

Ruby came down and sat at the kitchen table. I set up a middle game from memory, the same position from my game with Kazuo, frozen at the point where I made a blunder. Ruby looked at the board, then flipped it around so the black pieces were facing her.

“That’s too easy,” she said.

“Oh, yeah?”

I traced the lines for every move and counter move, but I couldn’t see the answer hidden in the maze of all that possibility. Ruby pointed to the bishop, then the B-7 square where a deflection would have stopped the checkmate.

Then she said something like, “See? Too easy.”

# Interview



**Juan Felipe Herrera**

photo credit: © Carlos Puma/UC Riverside

## Interview with Juan Felipe Herrera by Toren Wallace

22 July 2015

CSU Monterey Bay, Seaside, CA

The night before this interview, Juan Felipe Herrera read and performed his poetry to a packed house at the World Theater of CSU Monterey Bay. The president of the university, Eduardo M. Ochoa, flew in to introduce the newly appointed United States Poet Laureate and the Mexican Consulate General of San Jose presented awards of recognition to Herrera.

His reading that followed was a remarkable adventure of emotion, driven by lyricism and language. Herrera read poems of a deeply introspective consideration, as well as those germane to the current political climate in America.

In his final poem, he implored the listener to consider how a recent shooting in South Carolina could serve as an opportunity for the country to heal and move forward rather than dwell in the stasis and immobility of hate, fear, and revenge.

The following afternoon, after a morning of teaching workshops to the CSUMB Summer Arts students, then a group of 50 children from the families of migrant workers, Herrera was gracious enough to take a brief walk around the Seaside courtyard and answer a few questions while several crows followed us overhead.

**Riprap Journal:** All profits (of this interview) will go to Children's Poets of America Union.

**Juan Felipe Herrera:** Yea, the Union. Hey there's a bench over there.

**RJ:** Oh I thought maybe if you wanted to stretch your legs and walk a bit ...

**JFH:** Yea, that's a good idea.

**RJ:** I wanted to formally thank you for granting this interview for our school journal.

**JFH:** Oh yea, the rip-rapper.

**RJ:** The first thing that we wanted [crow overhead caws] was a crow to come by and say hi. But really, the first thing I wanted to talk to you or ask you about was the reading last night—it was amazing. But what I was interested in was that you were playing the mouth harp.

**JFH:** [Laughs]

**RJ:** Tell me about that, when did you learn to play that?

**JFH:** I've been playing it since, I don't know, sixth grade. I always had a harmonica, and I don't play that much to tell you the truth. I just goof around with it. My father used to play it really well. I don't know where he picked up to tell you the truth. When I met my sisters in southern New Mexico they told me that he used to play guitar and mouth harp. I didn't know he played all those instruments even though he was a hard laborer, a hardcore laborer, all his life. He liked the music, so I picked it up from him.

**RJ:** So, what do you think about musical influences? In the workshop today we got the Afro-Cuban experience and that's all part of your teaching pedagogy, as it were. But what about your musical influences?

**JFH:** [Laughs] Well they're kind of 60s influences, a lot of blues. I like blues a lot, and a lot of Eastern music. Sitar music.

**RJ:** With the Blues, are we talking Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters?

**JFH:** I listened to them too, but I'm in the Albert King world. Albert King's my guy, and B.B. King and then associated with Robert Craig and Melvin Taylor and kind of like the chewy Blues that you can really sink your teeth into it as opposed to people like Johnny Winter, who is great, but they're just a little too fast and just harder, a harder blues.

**RJ:** Do you feel like there's been some sort of unconscious influence on your art, between the music and... I guess what I'm asking about is cross-genre, because when I see you working, I see integration. I wonder if that's purposeful, intentional?

**JFH:** Sometimes I get an idea, a phrase, or a feeling and if I have an emotive feeling in the form of a phrase, an emotive map, to enhance it I'll pull in a kind of music that I think goes with it. I was listening to an alternative soundtrack some time ago, and I don't know what group it was, but I liked it, and the phrase that came up turned into a poem called "Song Out Here." I took that phrase and I ran home and then I put on some Indie music, kind of like folk music, but you guys don't call it Folk music anymore—but just very young music that's spoken and played on guitar. I wrote that poem and it worked really well for me.

**RJ:** A complementary rhythm?

**JFH:** Yea, like a complementary style and texture. I'm a texture man. I go for the texture, the atmosphere, more than the meaning. Sometimes it depends on the poems, but most poems I really want the texture. I want the texture more than anything else. Without the texture, you just have words on paper. So, I work with that. Another set I wrote is called "Listening to Santana," and that one was totally written with Santana music blasting through my ears on a pair of headphones.

**RJ:** Like *Abraxas* or what were you listening to, the old Santana?

**JFH:** The old stuff, the old stuff. It was like "Black Magic Woman," that record. Their second record.

**RJ:** Oh yea, the guy from Fleetwood Mac wrote that song, right?

**JFH:** Yea, that's right. The song is almost exactly the same, of course. Santana kicked it up a notch. So music is cool, I love music. This very day I downloaded "Freedom" by Pharrell Williams. I like what he does with it. I like when he talks about the antelope running free, and it's called "Freedom."

**RJ:** We're talking about the textures and cross-genre, and I know you have a background in theatre. I wonder if you could mention—was it in San Diego—or where was it you told your mom you had found...

**JFH:** Yea, it was San Francisco in Mission Dolores Park in San Francisco. 1968. And I saw this group of people putting up a stage and I didn't know what they were putting up, or what it was on the banner. I could only see it from the back, so I didn't know what it said. I finally got to it, in Dolores Park, right next to Mission High School, where Santana actually went to high school. I turned around and I read it and it said *Teatro Campesino*. I said, What the heck is all this? I sat down and thought I might as well wait around for whatever it is they're going to do. They were unloading props from this big U-Haul and then the play started. Some young *barrio* teens, and they were all young people, same age I was, were talking about school and how it didn't relate to them, and how they were treated. You know, just, Chicano style. I liked it a lot, I liked the feeling and how impactful it was and how lively it was. I've always liked performance. I ran home and I said to my mom I saw this and you know, so I'm doing it too now. I said, I'm going to do this as soon as I get home to UCLA, and then I did.

**RJ:** I imagine it's only affected your performance in a positive way, and helps to create a comfortability on stage.

**JFH:** Comfortability, oh yea. It gets your voices out, your voice out, and also your voices out.

**RJ:** That's a part of your fantastic story. In third grade, you read, when your teacher said...

**JFH:** I sang in front of the class. That's where my career and my whole life began. I kind of broke out of whatever it is that I was before, and that's what it was. It was kind of like a prototype of my entire life. In front of an audience, and singing or speaking or projecting my voice, one way or another, or performance.

**RJ:** So you've been performing since then?

**JFH:** Yea, since third grade. Since 1956.

**RJ:** I'm fascinated with your quality of performance in that regard, but I'm also fascinated with the quality and performance of your workshops and the way that they're conducted. Do you readily admit or do you recognize that they are somewhat different from what has become termed the "Standard MFA Iowa Workshop"?

**JFH:** Definitely.

**RJ:** Is that intentional?

**JFH:** It isn't like a resistance, in terms of intentional. It's not intentional resistance. It's more like intentional creativity. That's what I like. And I always get a kick out of challenging myself as a teacher or artist with the artist writers. So I'm going to throw this at them, because I'm being inspired at this very moment I tell myself. I look for that moment. Sometimes I come in with some ideas but, you know, they get pushed out of my mind by just the delight in working with a group of young people that are open to new things and I'm open to new things. So I'll get an idea, like the Bomba. I didn't pre-plan that.

**RJ:** Spontaneous?

**JFH:** Yea, spontaneous. I have been thinking about the issue. I said, wait a minute. When I was in San Francisco I saw John Santos and his family do a righteous Puerto Rican Bomba, Congeros, and you know ten-year-olds and girls maybe nine years old and younger boys. And they were totally into it. I loved their voices. I liked the congeros, they were really good. And then the dancers were totally into it. And when it all came together, it was just beautiful, and then I said to myself, well, how come I just see it here, how come I haven't seen it anywhere else? No one's really spoken about it out loud or in the media, or as much as we know in the university or the things that we include in the university. I sure haven't heard about it. I was very concerned about that. So then I brought it up, and it turned into a workshop project.

**RJ:** Excellent. Obviously with your new title as U.S. Poet Laureate, there's going to be lots of activities. Do you anticipate implementing the way you operate these workshops? Are you going to try to educate as much as possible in that direction?

**JFH:** Well, I'm very interested in that. That's what I've been doing since, I don't know, day one, almost like my soul or my DNA. I'm just naturally interested in teaching, but not necessarily just teaching, but teaching from something I have written out. Working with people to arrive at a new view of things that is perhaps bigger, perhaps deeper. And I'm always interested in working with people who are being held back for whatever reason, without judging anybody. Whatever I can do to soften up, to crack open those cages and my own cages too.

**RJ:** Yea, that's fantastic. Well I feel like we're getting a little too heavy, so I think it's time we ask the important questions. Okay, so I know that you were born in Fowler near Fresno. You spent some formidable and developmental years in San Diego, and of course you spent a lot of time in San Francisco and Los Angeles. So, I guess my most important question is: are you a Dodgers fan, Giants fan, or Padres fan? Let's talk baseball. Let's talk about what's important.

**JFH:** Well, I grew up with boxing. My father was always away, and my uncle lived in

the same apartment buildings that we lived in. And we didn't really have a television, and we lived right next to the coliseum in San Diego, at 14th and C Street. The coliseum was like three blocks down, and my uncle being from Mexico and loving boxing, my uncle Fernando, we would ask my mother, Uhh Lucha yo vaya con Juanito para box, take Juanito to boxing match. I'd go over there eating peanuts. You can imagine the 50s kind of boxing coliseum, or the boxing forum, with wooden bleachers and bags of popcorn.

**RJ:** I'm getting a lot of smells. Lots of synesthesia from all that, that experience...

**JFH:** [Laughing] So...yea that smelly, popcorn-y and beer-y...

**RJ:** Sounds pretty great.

**JFH:** I would watch people like Archie Moore. I got to see Archie Moore fight. He was a big boxer, a world champ, and lived in San Diego. This was his hometown and Sweet Pea Johnson, The Golden Gloves, and Kid Tito, and Kid Azteca, Kid Dynamite, Kid Tijuana, and all the Kids.

**RJ:** [Laughs] All the Kids were there.

**JFH:** All the kids were there. And I was there. And then we'd go to Tijuana to the big ranches into the bull ring. At night, the bull ring would turn into a boxing arena. Right in the middle where the bull should go, there was a little quadrilateral stage where the boxers danced on. Sometimes it would rain and they would roll down these big tarps a blanket above hundreds of people. You would push your hand up and touch that rubber blanket and you'd look down, through, over, between hands, and shoulders, and braids, and scarves and hats and caps. You'd see an arm shoot out and somebody would be boxing. Big, big, big boxers. Like Davey Moore vs. Raton Macias, "The Rat," who became in 1957 the World Champ of Mexico. The World Champ, Mexican. I grew up with boxing. Maybe up until the late 70s I was into boxing. Larry Holmes, everybody that fought the big titles I probably saw on TV, pay-per-view. Pay-per-view was a big room with a television in front and folding metal chairs. Maybe I watched football for a year or two, and then I just let it go—it just became too big. It just got too big.

Boxing, I kind of let that go too, but if it's Pacquiao, if it's a really big fight, maybe I will, but less and less I'm into sports. And baseball, you know, I like it, but I've gone maybe twice and my friend, the writer Victor Martinez in San Francisco, was a really good friend of mine. He died of lung cancer. I would probably go to those games and be a Giants fan just for him. I would say that I'm a Giants fan just for Victor Martinez. To honor the Bay Area days. I remember being in elementary school when Willie Mays hit four home runs, on that one particular day in the 60s, the early 60s. I would be a Willie Mays baseball fan, Giants, San Francisco. Then, of course, Joe Montana and those big giant Super Bowls in the 80s was when I was a real 49er dude and a Giants dude with Victor Martinez. So now, now I'm like a writing hermit and a travelling zombie.

**RJ:** Writing hermit and travelling zombie, I want to ask you one more question. Elizabeth Bishop famously refused to be entered into female anthologies and wanted to be known as a poet, not a female poet, so I wonder how you feel about being known as a Mexican-American poet, a Mexican artist, an American artist, or that kind of classification. I wonder if you could comment on that.

**JFH:** That's okay with me. I know it's been an issue. Identities are always shifting. We're always shifting our perspectives of who we are, as individuals and as members of a larger group. When we come from the margins, people of color, or various gender or sexual identities, or religion or political point of view, or just simply historical experience, we are always switching identities. Kind of in a rebel mode, the real identity would be a "rebel identity," because we're not really comfortable at the center of things, at the center of power, and we kind of suffer because of that. We have rebel identities which are always kind of in disguise, or either "outing"

or “in-ing.” We are either way out there. Yea I’m a hardcore Aztec neo-Chicano or we’re behind the scenes because we know what can happen. It’s okay to be a Chicano poet laureate or a Mexican-American poet laureate or Hispanic or Latino poet laureate. Most of all, a human being. That’s the best way to go, because it includes everything. I want to include everything, so I don’t mind going into an arena, a forum, or a meeting and being presented as a Chicano poet laureate or a Latino poet laureate or a Hispanic poet laureate or an American poet laureate. They all feel different because I’ve battled with all of them and I have written with and for and in-between all of them, and against some of them. But those were simply exercises in my own development. My own human development, all of those were exercises and reversals for transcendence and transformation. I’ll be in all of them. I want to be in all of them.

**RJ:** Thanks for your time, Juan Felipe. Truly a rebel poet. Truly.



**Remembering  
Nohemi Gonzalez  
and  
Mark Friedlander**

On the evening of November 13, 2015, CSULB design student Nohemi Gonzalez was killed in the attacks in Paris. She was studying abroad at the Strate College of Design. Her family and friends, her classmates, and our entire campus community have been deeply affected by the tragic loss of the bright, young, talented student. At a vigil for the girl known as Mimi, CSULB President Jane Close Conoley addressed the crowd attending the memorial: “As we continue to grieve the loss of Nohemi Gonzalez—and the loss and injury of hundreds of brothers and sisters in Paris and around the world—I hope we take comfort in the heartfelt support we have from our large and loving extended Beach community. It helps to stand together when faced with sadness or fear.” We honor Mimi here in this volume and commemorate her in verse, in poems written by her friends. Her spirit will live on in those who honor her memory.

## Letter To Nohemi Gonzalez

Last night  
We lit the night in your name.  
We stood in silence.  
We shed tears.  
We bled in our hearts.  
We coexisted  
Not only to mourn your death  
But to celebrate your life.  
To some  
You are their world.  
To others  
You are an undiscovered planet.  
To all of us  
You are a solar system.

(Demetrius Love Jr.)

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Mark Friedlander was a student in the poetry concentration of the MFA Creative Writing Program, and was set to graduate in 2013. His illness prevented him from completing his degree by his projected graduation day, but he worked diligently and persistently despite his setbacks. He kept a positive attitude. His optimism and forward-thinking served everyone in his company.

Mark had a certain air about him. Many in our program looked up to him as a mentor. We appreciated his honesty and advice and even his cynicism. He never shied away from potentially discomfoting subjects, and he had this manner of delivery and worldly perspective that everyone admired.

If you never got to meet the man or hear him read, I am rather sorry for that. He was a funny guy. He liked the Dodgers, blues, jazz, Led Zeppelin, and above all, poetry. He shared a lot and had a warm heart. We will remember him fondly. Mark passed away on September 30, 2015. With permission from his brother Matt, we have included in this journal the poem he wrote and read at the CSU Summer Arts (Monterey Bay) culmination of the “Poet’s Metamorphosis” workshop in July of 2015.

Juan Felipe Herrera

## Nohemi — a Song for Paris

Mimi — can I call you that  
this is a song for you —

with candles we stand & we kneel  
this is how it is now we  
well all of us we  
send you these flowers across time  
this time here which we

cannot explain

all love goes to you  
& your friends the other night  
so many with you gone we  
stand we play Lennon's piano  
Imagine — we say  
a world with out violence —  
we want to imagine that in your name  
Nohemi Gonzalez from El Monte  
from Whittier California from  
Cal State Long Beach —  
then

we run out of words

the words  
so many words your mamá  
Beatriz your cousin Jacqueline  
we know them now — for you

we write them a poem too  
I do not know how we will do that  
we are doing that — that is all  
like the designs you made — for a high-spirited world  
you said you were high-spirited & self-driven — yes  
like the dreams you had  
as the words First Generation  
the ones you used to  
describe your life

we continue with you — somehow  
it is not important to know how  
it is important to continue that is all  
I must — say it again

we are all writing a poem  
for you for your cousin Jacqueline  
for your mamá Beatriz — she loved you  
their love will make it alright  
all of our love will make it alright yes

here is your song Mimi —

We light Nohemi a candle  
the candle waves across the stars  
close they are so close because  
Nohemi & Paris are in our hearts

Because  
    Nohemi &  
        Paris — are in  
our hearts

Matias Ocana

## Taller de Ilusiones

Nohemí.  
Cambie hoy el cincel  
Por una pluma  
Para escribir los versos  
De una etapa de tu vida.  
Con el corazón partido  
Y con dolor profundo  
Ahogando mi dolor  
Con lágrimas  
Que rodando mis mejillas  
Mancharon el papel  
En el que escribo.  
Muchachita Pocahontas  
La señorita de los labios rojos  
De sonrisa alegre  
Y simpatía  
De generosidad  
Y talento inconfundible  
Llegaste a mí,  
Tu maestro de taller  
Y marcaste así mi vida  
Como también la vida  
de mucha gente.  
Pero un viernes  
De este otoño frío  
Un monstro  
De fanatismo absurdo  
De tentáculos y garras asesinas  
Halla en la lejanía  
Cambio la historia de todo un pueblo  
Que vivió la monstruosidad  
Del asesino.  
Arranco los hijos de los brazos de sus madres  
Callo los consejos de los padres,  
Destruyo la felicidad de los amantes de la vida  
Cambio las risas de alegría por llantos y lamentos  
Manchando con vileza los suelos de un mundo  
Creo incertidumbre, confusión e ira  
Pinto los matices de un atardecer  
Con colores de agonía  
Y tu ahí Nohemí querida  
Miraste la oscuridad de la agonía.  
Lloro tu madre y tu familia  
Al saber que te perdían  
Lloro Tim tu hombre amado  
Con el corazón herido  
Y partido en mil pedazos  
Y lloramos todos  
Tus maestros, tus compañeros

Y tus amigos  
Al saber que te perdimos  
Y perdimos todo  
Tú presencia, tu amistad y tu alegría.  
Y hoy después de tu vigilia  
Mire miles de luces  
Como noche de estrellada  
Y tome esa vigilia  
Como un mensaje  
Como guía de inspiración,  
Para no llorar más por tu partida  
Y más bien celebrar la historia de tu vida.  
También yo sé que recitare este poema  
A muchos jóvenes que como tu llegaste  
Vendrán a aprender lo que bien supiste  
En el mismo taller que tú quisiste  
En tu taller donde formaste  
Y compartiste muchas ilusiones.  
Mirare entonces al infinito  
A ti el ángel de diseño  
Usando el cielo como tú mesa de trabajo  
Bosquejado con tu magia creadora  
Usando las nubes y las estrellas  
Como un día no muy lejano  
Lo hacías en el taller de tus ilusiones.

Transliteration by Hector Magno

## Workshop of Dreams

Nohemi.  
Today I traded my chisel  
For a pen  
To write these lines  
Of a moment in your life.  
With a broken heart  
And profound pain,  
Drowning my anguish  
With tears  
That rolling down my cheeks  
Stain the pages  
Upon which I write.  
The damsel Pocahontas,  
The young lady of ruby lips,  
Of joyful smile  
And sympathy,  
Of generosity  
And uncountable talent,  
You came to me  
Your workshop teacher  
And marked my life,  
As that of many others.  
But on a Friday  
Of this cold autumn  
A monster  
Of absurd fanaticism,  
Of murderous tentacles and claws,  
There in a faraway place,  
Changed the history of an entire people  
Who lived the monstrosity  
Of the murderer.  
He ripped children from the arms of mothers,  
Silenced the counsel of parents,  
Destroyed the happiness of those who love life,  
Changed the laughter of joy to cries and lamentation,  
Dirtying with vile the soil of an entire world.  
He created uncertainty, confusion and rage.  
Painted the strokes of a late afternoon  
With the colors of agony.  
And you, there, my beloved Nohemi  
Looked upon the darkness of that agony.  
Your mother and family cried  
To know that they were losing you.  
Tim, your beloved, cried  
With a wounded heart  
Broken in a thousand pieces.  
And we all cried.  
Your teachers, your classmates,  
Your friends,

At the knowledge that we have lost you  
And with it, losing all,  
Your presence, your friendship and your joy.  
And today, after the vigil for you,  
I saw thousands of lights,  
As a night filled with stars.  
And grasped upon that vigil  
As a message,  
And as guide and inspiration,  
To cry no more for your departure  
But rather to celebrate the story of your life.  
I also know that I will recite this poem  
To many youths who, just as you came,  
Will come to learn what you knew well,  
In the same workshop which you loved,  
In the workshop in which you were formed  
And shared your many dreams.  
I will then look upon the infinite  
At you, the angel of design,  
Using the heavens as your worktable  
Sketching with your magical creativity,  
Using the clouds and the stars,  
As in a day not so long ago,  
You did in the workshop of your dreams.



Mark Friedlander

## Jones Avenue: Summer 1960

9 o'clock and the house is dark  
the only light an occasional flare from my father's Zippo  
and the glowing cherry of his Marlboro Red.

My mother, pregnant with my brother  
lies on the couch across from the coffee table.  
Her eyes covered with an arm  
emblematic of their estrangement.

I lie shirtless on the floor in shorts and rubber sandals  
my back itchy from the wooly weave of our carpet.

Dad in his chair next to the high-fidelity record player,  
his radio set to KFI 640.

A box fan wedged inside the open front door  
generates the room's only steady air with a gentle hum.  
It's an election year—  
Kennedy and his ivy league cool  
versus Nixon's five o'clock shadow and solipsism,  
but the election will have to wait.

Echoing down the empty street the voice of Vin Scully  
bounces from house to house,  
calling another Dodgers game from the Memorial Coliseum.  
With the team in a pennant race  
nothing short of a mud slide could distract us from the game.

Shortstop Maury Wills safe at first on an infield single  
dances off the bag.  
Wills, the Thief of "Bags-dad," has robbery on his mind,  
ready to pounce on second base like a cougar on a doe.  
By the 1970s Wills will have both a major league managing job  
and a financially crippling cocaine habit.

Now batting Jim Junior Gilliam  
from the first tide of black ball players  
that washed away baseball's albinism.  
With his Louisville slugger fresh from the woodworkers lathe  
he sacrifices Wills to second.  
Gilliam who actually hated the name Junior  
spends his career as a player and coach in LA  
until a massive stroke killed him at age 49.

Next up Wally Moon,  
even with a baseball life spent outdoors,  
still pale as quartz.

Moon lofts the first pitch over the left field screen.  
Home run, Dodgers up 2-zip.  
Moon is 85 years old and lives in Bryant Texas,  
he retired from coaching baseball in 1998.

Edwin Duke Snider, he of the big  
shoulders and sunny temperament,  
runs the count to 2-1,  
then drives a hanging curveball into the deep  
recesses of the Coliseum's  
right center field,  
putting him on third base with a triple.

Snider and his wife Bev,  
victimized by an economic downturn,  
will lose their avocado grooves in Fallbrook,  
which they planned on financing their retirement on.

Now,  
I sit alone in my own home,  
with my Frost and Jeffers,  
my Addonizio and Komunyakaa,  
and listen to Vin Scully,  
87 and employed part time,  
call the Dodgers game on the radio.  
Drained by chemotherapy,  
aching from liver tumors like rounded stones in a tide pool.  
Only a peyote trip could clear my mind.  
Like the Duke on third base,  
will I be driven home  
or stranded with the finality of the last out?

[2015]

## Contributor Bios

**Calvin Diego Adams** is an author, musician, and poet based out of Long Beach, California. He is currently working on completing his final semester in Cal State Long Beach's creative writing program while continuing to amass his body of work.

**J. M. Baker** is a poet from New York currently in the MFA program at UCSD. His work has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The Brooklyn Review*, and *Epiphany*, among other places.

**Brianna Barnes** has been published in the *Apeiron Review* and has work forthcoming in *300 Days of Sun* and *Ohio Edit*.

**Theresa Baxter:** These are a few works from a project I have been doing with women from the internet, that I've been calling "Museology." I have a whole email account dedicated to all of the nudes that strangers send me. I love reading their emails and writing back and painting them. I have been learning that we all experience ourselves and our bodies as solid yet transient things. They are ours, but they belong to time and gravity and hormones and other things as well.

**B.J. Best** is the author of three books of poetry: *But Our Princess Is in Another Castle* (Rose Metal Press, 2013), *Birds of Wisconsin* (New Rivers Press, 2010), and *State Sonnets* (sunnyoutside, 2009). *I got off the train at Ash Lake*, a verse novella, is forthcoming from sunnyoutside. He lives in Wisconsin.

**Heath Brougher** is the poetry editor of Five2One Magazine. He has published two books titled *A Drought of Ichor* and 2 (Green Panda Press). His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Yellow Chair Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Mobius*, *Main Street Rag*, *Gold Dust Magazine*, *BlazeVOX*, *Dark Matter Journal*, *Foliage Oak*, *eFiction India*, *Off/with*, *\*82 Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere.

A Los Angeles native, **Alessandra R. Castellanos** writes poetry, fiction and memoir that draw upon her vibrant and tenacious ancestral heritage in Guatemala and California. Her conjured worlds encompass feral spirits, otherworldly legends, and the disconcerting realities of domestic workers in Hollywood celebrity homes. Her work has appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *Chaparral*, *Duende*, and *The Round* among others. Castellanos is a student of the Method Writing Approach taught by Jack Grapes, a member of the Los Angeles Poets and Writers Collective and a graduate of California State University, Northridge.

**Cortney Lamar Charleston** is a Cave Canem fellow and Pushcart Prize nominated poet living in Jersey City, NJ. His poetry has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Fugue*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Journal*, *The Normal School*, *Pleiades*, *Rattle*, *Southern Humanities Review* and elsewhere.

**Marcus Clayton** grew up in South Gate, CA, and holds an M.F.A. in Poetry from CSU Long Beach. He coordinates poetry reading events in Long Beach, is a managing editor for *Indicia*, and teaches at Long Beach City College and Fullerton College. He is also the recipient of the 2015 Beatrice and John Janosco Memorial Scholarship at CSU Long Beach. Some of his published work can be seen in *Taboma Literary Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *the Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Lipstick Party Magazine* among others.

**Sarah A. Davis** is in the MFA program at CSULB studying poetry. One of her greatest accomplishments is teaching her sister how to ride a pink bike. She loves pineapples on her pizza, walking around Long Beach at night, and petting stray cats. Her work has been published in *RipRap 37* as well as *Cadence Collective*, and she is learning how to make paper art with her rejection emails.

A tyro in the world of authors, **Maureen Donalds** believes she has a palpable message in her missive about her personal battle with cancer and how it affected her, her family, and her friends. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio and then Washington, D.C., she's been a Realtor in

Stuart, Fl. for the last 35 years. Maureen recently retired to concentrate on her writing career along with her husband who is concentrating on his newly found art career.

Graphic artist and painter **Allen Forrest** was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications and books. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's *Reed Magazine* and his "Bel Red" painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

**Erik Fritts-Davis** is an award-winning writer, photographer and filmmaker. Using images and words as a fun-house mirror, Erik reshapes how people see themselves and the world around them.

**Lauren Green** is a junior at Columbia University, where she studies creative writing and Russian literature. Her fiction recently appeared in *Caravel Literary Journal* and is forthcoming in *Glimmer Train*. She is currently at work on her first novel.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *New Plains Review*, *Perceptions* and the anthology, *No Achilles* with work upcoming in *Big Muddy Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Main Street Rag* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

**Ambalila Hemsell** is a writer, musician, and teacher from Colorado. She is currently pursuing an MFA at the University of Michigan.

**Anh M. Ho** is a student at CSULB and hopes to one day become an animator. She fancies steampunk goggles and gizmos, masquerades, magic/illusions, and is currently trying to figure out how to fill the clear blue sky with airships and steam powered wyverns, all the curiosities the human mind has yet to bring into existence. She enjoys fantasy/ adventure novels, gaming, and social dance. At the end of the day, she wants to free the fantasy world buried under the weight of reality and unleash the horrors- ahem, that is, the absolute wonders time has tucked away.

**Chau Ho** is a student at CSULB, where she is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and hopes to become a well-known author one day. She's a poet, writer and an artist. She often submits her poetry and artwork on DeviantArt, where she finds inspiration from other deviants. Chau has an affinity to robots and often spends time indulging in the world of Steampunk. Her hobbies include playing piano, drawing, reading, wandering through the dark labyrinth that is her mind and singing along to three steam-powered robots that call themselves, Steam Powered Giraffe.

**Chas Holden** was raised outside the DC beltway, received his MFA from Eastern Washington University, and now lives in Seattle working at the University of Washington. Some of his recently published poems can be found in *Hot Metal Bridge*, *Section 8*, *Potluck*, and *Sbot Glass*.

**Camille Hove** has a BA in Creative Writing from Cal State Long Beach. She enjoys traveling to unpopulated destinations so she can write in silence. She has an affinity for climbing trees, surfing, and The Henry Miller Library. She has been published in *The Myriad*, *CandleLit Journal*, *RipRap Journal*, and *the Apeiron Review*. She's currently working on a Lord of the Rings terrarium and considering an artists residency in Iceland.

**Demetrius Love, Jr.** is a creative writing student at CSULB. He began writing poetry the beginning of 2015 while attending community college. He has written about fifty poems. He currently publishes his work on Instagram under the pen name is Art i Sin.

**Irene Luna** is a California native and CSULB student working on her BA in English with emphases on literature and creative writing. She plans to continue her education and obtain

her Master of Fine Arts to become a poetry lecturer (and publish a collection of poetry or two along the way).

**Daniel Wagner** is an English major graduating Spring 2016. His writing explores daily events that are often overlooked, but still extraordinary.

**Dante Matero** finds time to write in between episodes of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. He draws inspiration from celebrity culture and class politics. He co-founded a zine collective called *NothingNewPublications* on tumblr.

**Joseph Maurer** recently received a B.S. in Biochemistry from CSULB. For him, writing is a hobby, a form of expression, and a source of pride.

**Jax NTP** holds an MFA from CSULB and teaches Critical Thinking and Composition at Golden West College, Huntington Beach, CA.

**Elisabeth Oliver** studies literature and creative writing. After graduating in 2016, she hopes to continue studying literature in graduate school. She's come to accept that her life will always be covered in cat hair and glitter.

**Angela Penticuff** has a Masters of Arts in Teaching from the University of Central Missouri, as well as a Graduate Certificate in Creative and Life Writing from Park University in Kansas City, Missouri. She is a content editor for the literary magazine, *Blue Monday Review*. Five years ago, she founded a writing club for students at the school where she teaches. Her fiction has appeared in *The Scribe* and the forthcoming *Aethlon*.

**Daye Phillippo** is a graduate of Purdue University and Warren Wilson MFA for Writers. She is the recipient of The Elizabeth George Grant and a Mortarboard Fellowship for poetry. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sbenandoah*, *Natural Bridge*, *Crux*, *Ruminant*, *The Fourth River*, *Cider Press Review* and others. She lives in a creaky, old farmhouse on twenty rural acres in Indiana with her husband and their youngest son.

Originally from Cincinnati, **Joshua J. Prichard** received his MFA on fellowship at Chapman University. His work has previously been published in *Main Street Rag* and *Spittoon Magazine*. He currently writes and teaches in Southern California.

**Ruben Rodriguez** sleeps near the Pacific Ocean where he writes, paints, and sells T shirts to tourists. He is the fiction editor of *The Great American Lit Mag* and author of the chapbook *We Do What We Want* (Orange Monkey Publishing, 2015). His poetry has been deemed fit for consumption by *Passages North*, *The Hawai'i Review*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Welter*, and others.

**Kathy Rudin** is an artist from New York City. Her work has been published in, *OUT*, *Genre*, *Wilde*, *Riding Light*, *DUM-DUM*, *Rip/Torn*, *Riprap Journal*, *The Sun*, *The Boiler Journal* and *Bop Dead City*, among others, and has been exhibited at galleries in New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. She also volunteers at an animal shelter, and her favorite words are, "no," and, "slacks."

**Fabio Sassi** makes photos and acrylics using tiny objects and what is considered to have no worth by the mainstream. Fabio lives and works in Bologna, Italy.

**Marvin Shackelford** is author of a poetry collection, *Endless Building* (Urban Farmhouse Press). His stories and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Épiphany*, *Five Chapters*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Folio*, and elsewhere. He resides in the Texas Panhandle with his wife, Shea, and earns a living in agriculture.

**Mikenna Sims** is an English Education student with an emphasis in English Literature at California State University, Long Beach. She has always been passionate about photography,

and last year had the opportunity to learn how to take and develop film photographs in a darkroom. “Framed” was taken on Kodak Professional T-Max 400 film, developed, enlarged, and printed on Ilford Multigrade paper.

**Jason Michael Skiano** graduated from CSU Long Beach in 2010 and currently resides and writes in Los Angeles.

**Kristen Skjonsby** knows that life deserves writing and dedicates herself to helping others access its potential. She graduates from Cal State University Long Beach with an MA in the Spring of 2016. She has been published in *Lumen Magazine* and *lipstickparty magazine*.

**Olivia Somes** is a graduate of California State University, Long Beach, where she earned a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing and an MFA in Poetry. You can find her poetry in *[PANK] Magazine*, *Atticus Books*, *Verdad*, *Carnival*, *Crack the Spine*, *Cadence Collective*, and several issues of *Bank Heavy Press*. Her first chapbook, *Life After Purgatory*, was released in the Fall of 2012 (Bank Heavy Press).

**David Stallings** was born in the U.S. South, raised in Alaska and Colorado before settling in the Pacific Northwest. Once an academic geographer, he has long worked to promote public transportation in the Puget Sound area. His poems have appeared in several North American, U.K. and Swedish literary journals and anthologies, and in *Resurrection Bay*, a recent chapbook.

**A.N. Teibe** is a skeptic at heart, but open to mystery. She teaches writing and yoga at University of La Verne in Southern California. Her heroes are Isadora Duncan and May Swenson. Her work has been published in *Fifth Wednesday*, *Badlands*, *Ekephrasis*, and others.










**Mehrnoosh Torbatnejad** was born and raised in New York. Her poetry has appeared in *The Commonline Journal*, *The Coe Review*, *Kudzu House Quarterly*, *The Chiron Review*, and is forthcoming in *Passages North*. She currently lives in New York and practices matrimonial law.

Originally from Monterey, CA, **AJ Urquidi** has studied poetry in Los Angeles, New York City, and Long Beach. His poems have appeared in such journals as *Chiron Review*, *Foothill*, and *Thin Air*, been nominated for Ina Coolbrith and Pushcart Prizes, and won the Gerald Locklin Writing Prize. He has led creative writing workshops at CSULB and Beyond Baroque in Venice Beach.

**Dr. Ernest Williamson III** has published creative work in over 600 journals. Professor Williamson has published poetry in over 200 journals, including *The Oklahoma Review*, *The Roanoke Review*, *Pamplemousse*, *The Copperfield Review*, and *Lost Coast Review*. Some of his visual artwork has appeared in journals such as *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, *The William & Mary Review*, *New England Review*; and *The Tulane Review*. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor of English at Allen University.

**Jeremiah Wood** earned his MA from the University of Georgia. He briefly spent time in the MFA workshops at Temple University in Philadelphia before moving to Atlanta with his wife.

Riprap Journal models its cover design after the great American novel, *Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison), specifically the cover designed by Cardon Webb. Webb’s design references the jazz and blues that so heavily influence Ellison’s classic text.



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Rip Rap is the literary journal designed and produced annually by students in the Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing program at California State University Long Beach (CSULB). Since its inception in 1951, the journal has evolved from its original title, Hornspoon, until it was renamed Gambit and finally, in 1979, Rip Rap.

Rip Rap highlights new and emerging writers from across the country as well as interviews of award winning, published writers. We offer a humble invitation to talented and aspiring writers of short fiction, flash fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, as well as artists producing photography, illustration and comics. The journal is especially interested in work that is innovative, forward-thinking, and as entertaining as it is thought-provoking.

New editions of the journal are published each May.

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