



passager

Winter 2016

What we speak becomes the house we live in.

حافظ

HĀFEZ

Winter 2016

passenger

Dear Readers,

Passager Books is growing in leaps and bounds this year.

This season, we're celebrating the work of three members of one family. Within the next couple months, Passager Books will publish *The Three O'Clock Bird*, a collection of poems by the late Anne Frydman, whose poems appeared in Issue 58. Included in the current issue are a story by and an interview with Anne's husband, the award-winning writer Stephen Dixon. When we visited Steve this past November to talk about Anne's book, we saw marvelous paintings in his home by his daughters Sophia and Antonia. Sophia gave us permission to use two paintings for our front and back cover. Be sure to open the magazine with the covers spread like the wings of a butterfly so you can see them as a pair. And read Sophia's illuminating story behind the paintings at the end of the *Passager* Writers section.

Last summer, we published poetry collections by *Passager* authors Diana Anhalt (see her poem, p. 6), Maryhelen Snyder, Jennifer Wallace and James Zimmerman. Coming soon, *The Chugalug King & Other Stories* by Andrew Brown (his poem, p. 7), *Gathering the Soft*, poems by Becky Sakellariou, and *Finding Mr. Rightstein*, a memoir by Nancy Kelton.

We're honored that so many wonderful writers in this issue and over the past 25 years have allowed us to help them make their work public.

We thank you for being part of *Passager* and wish you a year of good health and happiness. Here's to writers and readers everywhere who share their worlds through words!

The Editors

CONTENTS

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 6 | When Our Shoes Take Us
DIANA ANHALT | 24 | Summer Morning, Insomnia, Yard Sale
GABRIEL ARQUILEVICH |
| 7 | My Hunkpapa Great Grandfather
Who as a Boy Rode Against Custer
ANDREW BROWN | 26 | The Marriage of Aunt Agnes
CHARLES HECKMAN |
| 8 | Final Syllables
JOHN DAVIS | 36 | She Stood on the Bank,
The Ferry Did Not Come
ALISON HICKS |
| 10 | An Interpretation of Dreams
STEPHEN DIXON | 37 | Face Cards
RICHARD KROHN |
| 15 | A Conversation with Stephen Dixon
AN INTERVIEW | 38 | Metta, Metta, Metta
HELEN MALLON |
| 20 | Mir dämmert es/It dawns on me
ELKE ERBE, TRANSLATED BY SARA EDINGER | 46 | End of Story
PETER MURPHY |
| 22 | Glass in a Hailstorm
RACHEL HEIMOWITZ | 47 | The Moment Before the Moment
JEFFREY MINCH |

56 Antioch Missionary Baptist
GAYLE NEWBY

58 What If You Lose Yourself
JUDITH OVERMEIER

59 This Poem Begins in a Bar
KELLY SIEVERS

60 The Two Armstrongs
CHARLES SPRINGER

62 Thaw
BARBARA STOUT

63 Sunday Afternoon Upstairs
HELEN WICKES

64 Uncle Louie and the Comic
MARTY WAXMAN

65 Triptych
ROSSME TAYLOR

WHEN OUR SHOES TAKE US

Jews should be born with the wind at their backs and
wheels on their heels like taxicabs.

My grandmother

If we fled Sevilla, Uzbekistan, Podolia, Kiev on a day of sun,
we'd sling our shoes around our necks by their laces, relish
the prickle of grass against our naked soles, let our feet scrawl
messages in the dust of left-behind lives.

We saved what shoes we had for snow, gravel, seamliness.
Our featherbeds, a Kiddush cup, a violin, perhaps, we strapped
to our backs and the stories of ancestors—their feet caked
in the clay of Judea, Canaan, Goshen, Galilee—rode

on our tongues. Our fate? To change nations more often
than shoes, store the past's crumbs in our pockets. To leave
our children small things that fit into suitcases: a menorah,
a teapot, a cameo brooch, photo of somebody's grave.

Look, a clutch of letters, the scent of memories. No pianos,
no grandfather clocks, no grandfathers. A pair of shoes.

Diana Anhalt

**MY HUNKPAPA GREAT GRANDFATHER WHO AS A BOY
RODE AGAINST CUSTER**

Young men came to visit him
in hope he'd tell them
of the horsemen at the river.
They'd sit in the sweat lodge,
or around the cottonwood log fire
when he'd chant the whirling sparks
to rise and become stars.

What was it like, Grandfather,
when the long knives came
falling like rain, and their blood
muddied the ground under the ponies?

He did not tell them what they wished,
but burned sweet-grass,
and opened his hand to show
a badger's claw, a blue stone,
a silver bead, and spoke of how
the kingfisher catches the sun,
and water wears away even the mountain.

Andrew Brown

FINAL SYLLABLES

Mrs. Johannes Livingston cannot touch her stiff toes
unless she kneels the way she kneeled
scrubbed toilets and tiles
scrubbed bathtubs
scrubbed wooden floors
scrubbed baseboard heaters for wealthy women
scrubbed until the phantom noises of her MIA husband disappeared
somewhere in the Mekong Delta
his bones in a ditch or a rice paddy or buried
in a shallow jungle grave
his dog-tags sluiced in muck and mud
Was or wasn't he MIA
What the Domino Theory
What the Gulf of Tonkin
Scrubbed and scrubbed What the
Somewhere the bullet that cracked his skull
or split his spleen
Somewhere covered in moss the bullet
 with his name on it
 with his blood on it
 with his adrenalin on it
 with his sweat on it

What if she could scrub it, shine it up
Would his face gleam in the copper sheen
Would she hear his final syllables
and remember the whispers
when they were married
when her knock-knees didn't ache
when the wind didn't slur
its consonants and vowels
and the language of winter wasn't punctuated
by rain

John Davis

AN INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS • *Stephen Dixon*

This is a dream. We made an agreement, my wife and I. We agreed to meet up in a dream of mine every night after she died. We agreed to this a few days before she died. More than a few. Twelve, maybe thirteen. We made the agreement the night before she went into the coma she never came out of. I didn't dream of her during those twelve to thirteen days. To get the exact number of days she was in a coma, I'd have to look in the notebook I have. It has all the dates of her final sickness. When the ambulance took her to the hospital. When the doctors there told me she'd have to be transferred to a hospice because there was no hope for her in the hospital. When she refused to eat and drink and take any medicine and oxygen and said she wanted to die at home. When the ambulance took her home. When we agreed to meet up in my dreams every night after she died. When she went into the coma and died. So this is the dream I had tonight. I've dreamed of her just about every night since she died. If I missed a night, then I dreamed of her in a nap the previous or following afternoon. So I've had at least one dream a day of her for the last four years. Four years and a month today, in fact. Sometimes I dreamed of her more than once a night. And

a couple of times I dreamed of her in my afternoon nap, which I take almost every day for about half an hour, and twice that night. And one time I had three dreams of her in a row at night before I woke up. I've never had more than one dream of her in my afternoon nap. Usually, though—almost always—if I had more than one dream of her at night, I'd wake up after the first dream, pee, write the dream down in my dreambook which I keep on the night table by my bed, maybe drink a little water from the bottle by my bed, and go back to sleep and have another dream of her and do the same thing after I wake up from it: pee, write down the dream, maybe drink some water. But tonight's dream. It's possible that after I write this dream down in my dreambook, I'll go back to sleep and have another dream of her. It's only three o'clock. That's something I also always do after I wake up from a dream and turn on the light: look at my watch, which is on the same night table the dreambook and bottle of water are on. But for some reason I don't think I'll ever dream of her again. I think that's what that last dream meant. I hate to say it, but I think that's what has happened. So, the dream. It starts off with Abby and me at a party. A large party, in the afternoon, in a very large

room with very high ceilings. Many people are there. I'd say about two hundred. I don't know anyone there but Abby and my sister, who came with me. Abby and I have split up. She split up with me, said she couldn't live with me anymore, and she filed for divorce. It's been a few months since I last saw her. It was at her lawyer's office, where I signed the final papers they wanted me to sign. "She can have everything," I said in the lawyer's office. "I don't want anything." "Now, now," the lawyer said. "That's very generous, but we don't want to be anything but fair." "Fifty-fifty, then," I said, "if that's okay with Abby. If it isn't, then sixty-forty, seventy-thirty, eighty-twenty, with me getting the lesser share." "Abby?" the lawyer said, and she said "Fifty-fifty is fine." So that was the last time I saw her before today. I came into the large room the party was being held in and saw Abby talking to a tall well-dressed man. He seemed ten years younger than I, maybe even younger, so around Abby's age. His hair was thick and dark, while mine is mostly bald and gray and some places white. Women go for guys with lots of hair on top, I thought, and being bald makes one look even ten years older. They seemed to be close, not just friends or acquaintances at a party, the way they were talking and smiling at each other. And one time, his hand brushed her hand that was at her side, as if he wanted

to hold it, but she pulled her hand away. She never liked to hold hands in public. No affectionate public displays, not even a quick goodbye kiss on the street. She didn't mind, though, when we were alone in a movie theater or at a play and no one could see us holding hands, or at a restaurant when it was just the two of us or we were with the kids and she'd let me hold her hand under the table for a while. I went over to them. "Hi, Abby, how you doing?" and she said "Fine, thanks. And how have you been?" "I'll be honest," I said. "I might not have another chance to, and I should have said it at your lawyer's office. Don't ask me what held me back. It could be I didn't feel it as much as I have since I saw you there and signed those documents and knew we were finished. And it might be the wrong thing to say, but I'm going to say it anyway, even in front of my sister and what appears to be your new close male friend." "You probably shouldn't say it then," she said. "I can't live without you," I said. "That's the truth, what I've found out, and what I should have said when you asked me how I am. I've tried to, I've said to myself 'Forget her, forget her,' but it's impossible to. Can't we do something about it?" "I don't see what," she said. "And while we're talking for what might be our last time together, although we'll probably have to talk on the phone about our daughters sometimes, but

maybe not. They're long out of college, in the work force, have steady beaus of their own, so out of our hands and no longer need our advice and help. So maybe this is our last chat. But I have to say what I have to say too. Our agreement? Remember that? About my appearing in a dream of yours every night after I die? I can't go through with it anymore, I'm afraid. I know how important it is to you and I hope what I said doesn't upset you too much. Now I think I better leave. We just got here, but I don't feel comfortable staying after what I said to you and what you said about not being able to live without me. Please don't be offended or take my leaving the wrong way. I've nothing but good feelings for you, now that we're no longer together. Goodbye, Margaret," she said to my sister. "Goodbye, Phil," she said to me. The man raised his shoulders and smiled as if he didn't understand what was going on, and waved goodbye to us. She started for the door with him, looked back at me once. I just stared at her. They left the room and the dream ended. I get out of bed, pee, check the time. It's quarter to three. I exercise, because I know, after that dream, if I get back in bed right away I won't be able to fall asleep for an hour or two. Exercising at this hour always helps me to get back to sleep faster. So I exercise. I stretch, work with the two ten-pound weights, which I keep on my night table; run

in place, hold on to the back of a chair and swing my right leg back and forth twenty times and then my left. Then I get in bed and soon fall asleep. I don't dream of her again that night. I don't dream of her the next night. The day after that I lie down for a nap, hoping I'll dream of her. I don't. I don't dream of her for weeks. I remember the dream I had of her right before the last one. It was a great dream. Maybe the best I've had of her since she died. In it, I come into the apartment we had on Riverside Drive in New York. It's light out, late afternoon, all the windows are open, so it must be late spring or early fall. We're to have two guests for dinner. Abby comes out of the kitchen. She's been cooking and is wearing an apron tied around her waist. The table's only set for two. It's perpendicular to the living room windows, not parallel to them, the way it's always been, and the two settings—place mats, plates, silver, cloth napkins and wine glasses—are at either end of the oblong table. She's smiling at me and she holds out her arms. I go into them and say "Oh, my God, it's so wonderful to see you, be with you, hug and kiss you," and we hug and then kiss several times. Deep kisses too. They felt real. Then I think: I'm now only as tall as she, when I used to be five to six inches taller. How can that be? and I try to stand taller while holding her. Right after I remembered

that, I woke up. What a strange dream I just had, I think. And complicated. I'm dreaming, I'm not dreaming, dream within a dream, I think one of them was, and also explanations of what the dreams mean? I don't know if I could ever figure it out. I turn on my bed lamp, get my dreambook off my night table and open it to the first blank page. I'm going to need a couple of pages for this one, I think. Pee? No, get this down before you lose it. I write: "March. I'm not sure of the day. 2013. I see Abby at a party. I didn't know she'd be there. The party's in a large spacious room, in the afternoon, lots of people at it. All the windows are open. They say you don't smell things in a dream, but it smells like spring. Abby's with a man. Good-looking guy, around ten to fifteen years younger than I, and full head of dark hair. Just by the way they're talking to each other, they seem to be close. For a few seconds they hold hands, their fingers curled around each other's, then let go. Bad sign, I think. Very bad sign. My stomach, as the saying goes, drops. It's been months since I last saw her. I could never have separated from her, so she must have separated from me. She looks so healthy and young, around the same age she was when we first met. There was no mention of kids, so maybe we didn't have any. I think we're even in the divorce stage. I go over to them. Try to be cheerful and polite, I tell myself.

She hates it when I'm morose and rude. If there's any chance of winning her back, I think, I have to stay calm and put on a happy face. 'Hiya, Abby,' I say. 'It's wonderful to see you again. How are you?' 'Not bad,' she says. 'And you?' 'What I really mean is how have you been without me?' 'Same answer,' she says. 'And how have you been? But first let me introduce you to my friend John. And hello, Margaret,' she says to my sister. For a moment I forgot Margaret was with me. Or else I didn't know she was. John puts out his hand for me to shake. 'Nice to meet you,' he says. I ignore his hand and say to Abby, 'I have to tell you something. You asked, so I'll tell.' 'What did I ask?' she says. 'How I've been. You're not going to like what I say. I could almost bet on it. I've been awful. Couldn't be worse. It's not any physical problem. Heart—well, yes, the heart—but lungs, liver, disease. Nothing like that. I can't live without you. I almost feel suicidal.' She says 'I'm so sorry for you, Philip,' and to John 'I think we better go.' She says goodbye to me and Margaret. John says to us 'Nice to meet you both. Sorry it was so quick,' and they head for the door. She turns back once to look at me. It couldn't have been to look at Margaret, I think in the dream. I watch John help her on with her coat. She then picks something off his shoulder and wiggles her fingers till whatever it is drops off,

probably a piece of thread. Then they're gone. I keep staring at the door they went through. 'You shouldn't have said what you said to Abby,' Margaret says. 'Why not?' I say. 'What's the harm? I can't live without her. It's the truth. So?' 'And if you hadn't seen her here?' 'I'd be even worse,' I say. The dream ended then. Or there were other things in it and then the dream ended, but I forget them."

A Conversation with Stephen Dixon

“An Interpretation of Dreams” feels like one image that keeps folding in on itself, changing and deepening as you stare into it. Do you remember the experience of writing it?

“An Interpretation of Dreams” is one of my oddest stories. I don’t know how I wrote it. I probably went into a lucid trance, and after I came out of it (I do all my first drafts in a single sitting, or 98% of them), I probably thought I had something but I’m not sure what.

After you have a first draft, then what? Are you working with language, or do you make more substantial rewrites?

After I finish a first draft of a short story or a section of a novel, I start rewriting it from page one. The first draft is easy: takes a half hour to an hour or two. The rewriting takes hours sometimes for each page. A story has to end right. It has to end perfectly. It has to end as if no other ending could be its ending. Once I have that ending, there’s no sense in having the story go on.

Did “An Interpretation of Dreams” come from a dream?

It might have. Most of the story, including the ending, came out of my imagination. I’ve dreamed of Anne almost every night since she died, and in a lot of those dreams she’s with another guy and there’s no chance of us getting back together again. Dreams can be painfully explicit and revealingly symbolic. And like most of the first drafts of my short stories, it started with a line in my head, and once I typed it on a page, it just took off.

I finished typing it in a single sitting (this one was easy and didn't take much time, since it's so short—the first draft must've been around five pages), I said to myself, "Do I have something? Yes, I think I have something," and put the dust cover on my typewriter, put the first draft under the dust cover so the cat wouldn't sit on it through most of the night or possibly even throw up on it, and started working on the final draft of the story the next morning.

It is well known that you write exclusively on the typewriter. Have you always typed on the same machine? Do you have a connection to it the way one might have to an instrument?

I've had several typewriters. One, a Royal Standard, which came in a case—I wrote on for about 20 years. Wrote hundreds of stories and several books on it. Then it died. Keys fell off and couldn't be replaced. So I bought a Hermes Standard and have used that one—I have two—for most of my writing since. It's a great machine; never seems to break. I take good care of them.

Typewriters are much less frustrating than computers. In fact, they're not frustrating at all. They're simple and reliable. They're also so physical and solid-looking, and I love the sound they make.

I am attached to my typewriter, but if anything ever happened to it I have its twin as a backup plus a standard Olympia and an Olivetti Lettera, though my fingertips are too fat for its keys and I make all sorts of mistakes because of it.

You've written over 600 short stories, and 15 novels, a distinctive achievement, plus a novel, a novella and a story collection coming out in the spring. When you first started writing, did you have any notion that you would write short stories throughout your life? Is it a calling of a sort?

I've never felt that writing is a calling; it just comes naturally to me. Opening lines just

appear and then turn fluidly into complete stories. After that it's mostly a matter of containing, shaping and refining. That's the way it's been for 55 years.

It's fortunate for you that the well does not run dry. What do you attribute this to?

What's mostly kept me writing is an anxiety that I won't have anything to write.

You said once that you would probably get ill if you didn't write. How do you connect using your imagination to good health?

Writing gives me something to do that I like doing. It's always been like that. I've never not liked writing. It's always been something I can do. And there have always been so many ways of doing it and an inexhaustible number of stories to write.

Do you share your work with anyone before sending it out now? Did you ever?

I don't share my work with anyone before I send it out. I feel I've been writing long enough to know what I'm doing. And I don't want to become dependent on people's opinions of my work. I want to rely on myself entirely. If you let three people see your work before you send it out, you'll get three different opinions. You have to learn to trust your writing. The last person to see my work before I sent it out was my brother Jimmy, in Washington DC, in 1959, when I was working as a reporter there and he was visiting me. His advice—he was three years older than I and a fiction writer—was that I have to end my stories. That what I had so far were unfinished stories or first drafts. I was just happy that he thought some of my stories were funny and that he saw potential in them and in my future writing.

As a teacher, how did you help students to write original and surprising stories?

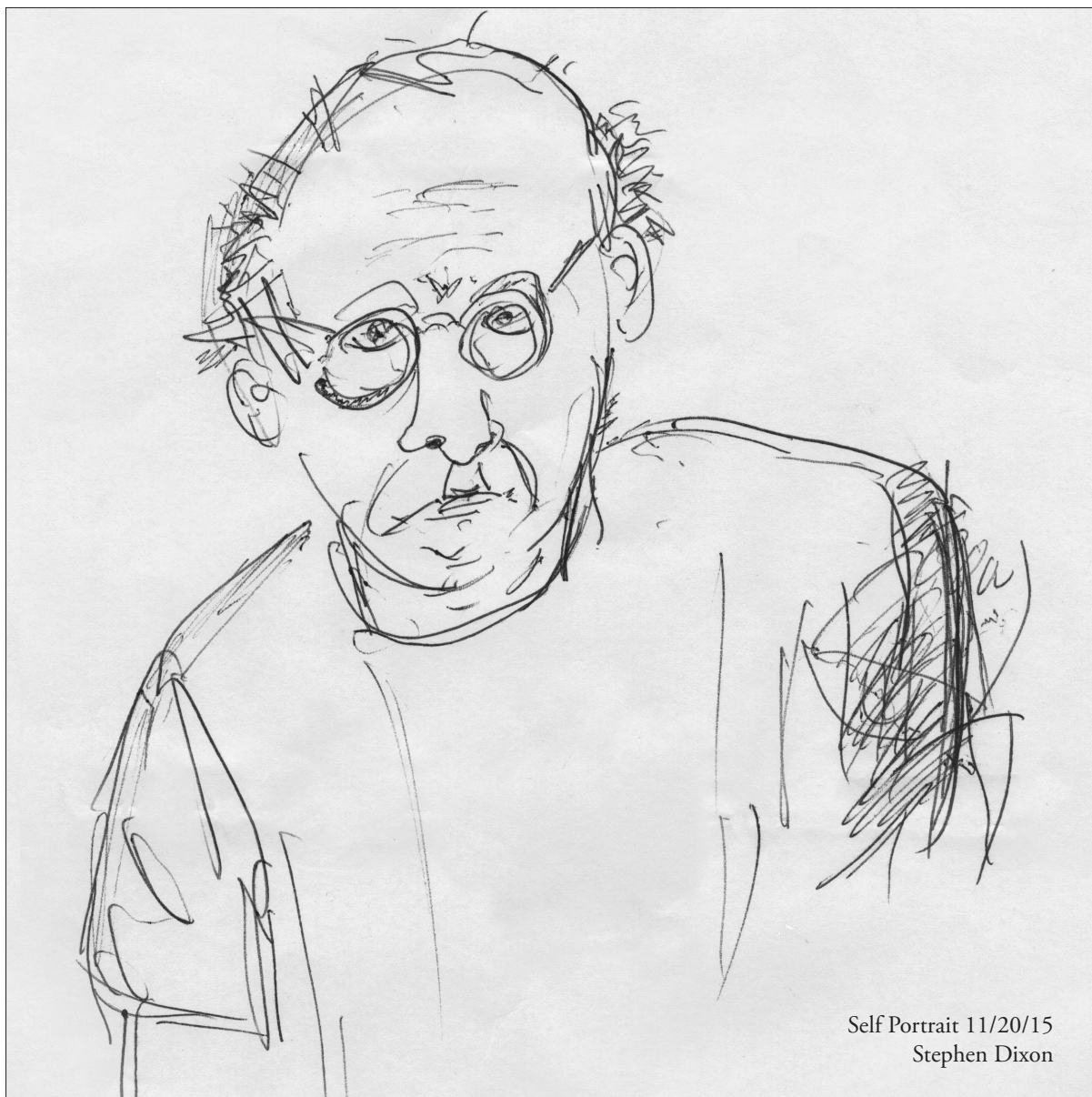
I just told them to write stories they liked. And I created a pleasant atmosphere in the class and pointed out in my extensive written comments of their work the things I thought worked and the things I thought could be worked on. I was always encouraging. I was never harsh. I treated them as fellow writers. I made it clear that I was once a young writer too.

Passager publishes many older writers, often newly retired, who are taking advantage of the time to do the work they have always wanted to do. Now you have more time to write than you even need, as you said in an interview. Has that changed your writing in unexpected ways?

Now that I'm retired, having more time hasn't increased my productivity in writing. It could be that if retirement had come in my 50s or 60s, I would have written more. But it came in my 70s, when I've slowed down a little physically and my lower back sometimes kills me, so it ended up being the same thing: about one finished manuscript page a day, amounting to about 300 written pages a year. And what is a page? 24 lines, 10-12 words to a line.

For the record, I have three books coming out in March and April of 2016: *Letters to Kevin* (a novel) from Fantagraphics Books, *Late Stories* (an interlinked collection of stories) from Trnsfr Books, and *Beatrice* (a novella), from Publishing Genius Books.

Best to you all and happy new year.



Self Portrait 11/20/15
Stephen Dixon

Mir dämmert es,

jemine! man muß
all das, das meiste,
was man liest, gehört sich vorstellen!

Jemand jeweils (!)
hat es beim Schreiben
gehört. Im Gehörgang. Arg,

das sich vorzustellen. Suchend
gehört, vorgehört, abgehört
jemand jeweils

während des Schreibens, hörend
es, all das,
was man liest, lautlos,

belauscht ist es worden
im Ohrlabyrinth. Oder wie
war es? Gar gesehen?

(Januar 1990)

Elke Erbe

It dawns on me,

my goodness! one must
imagine all or most
of what one reads, as heard.

Someone always (!)
has heard it during
the writing. In the ear canal. Weird

to imagine that. Searching
heard, pre-heard, tapped
someone always

during the writing, hearing
it, everything
that one reads, soundless,

it was overheard
in the ear's labyrinth. Or how
was it? Actually seen?

(January 1990)

Translated by Sara Edinger

GLASS IN A HAILSTORM

These days mercy
is all we can ask for—
a finger here, a finger
there—little fingers on my cheeks
waking me to the Sunday morning
nightmare, the 8 a.m. #18 bus explodes
—again.

Should I dress the girls?
Send them off to school?
These girls who taught themselves
to dance in gas masks,
jumping on the bed,
falling back into a jumble
of pillows and air filters,
the window behind them
buttoned in a masking tape cross.

We walk to *shul*
in the quiet of *shabbat*,
past the burned-out bus,
its battery acid smell
filling the atmosphere
and these girls, my girls,
their hands soft as the air at dawn,
my high heels clicking the pavement,
the morning chill fingering my hair.

Soon enough they too
will wake to the pop of a stun grenade,
learn to run long distances in mud,
make their way guided by stars,
their lives fragile
as glass in a hailstorm.

Rachel Heimowitz

SUMMER MORNING, INSOMNIA, YARD SALE

After last night and its network of thought,
the nervous display chugging like a train,
I sit by this window as fog carries light
through a settlement of pain, and when
the blackbirds land on the telephone lines
the lines don't sway. The trees ask me to stay,
the cows low, the roosters scream, and my son
walks in to show me his trophy. All this
was fifteen years ago, when he was three.

The windows now are double-paned, the house
quiet, the temperature steady. My son
smokes with his girlfriend after his tutor leaves
and before pricing the yard sale items,
money for their big move to the city.
She lives with us, another troubled kid.
She tore her skin and burned her arms like him,
sent away by her family like him,
kept alive in a school in Utah,

and here she is, drinking coffee and sleeping
till noon, waiting for him to graduate,
part of our family. Her dad dropped by
the other day, a pile of donations
in his truck. I asked him in. He wished us luck
and drove away, sorry to go but happy
to say she calls for no reason, the distance
between them closing. I feel the same
and that's what worries me: sleepless again,

my son and I meet by the window.
He asks for the change he needs for today,
the fog rolling in, the sun on its way,
the coffee already brewing. *I'll pay*
you back, he says. I tell him not to worry.
The tarp unfolds, the cars move in, but I'm still
here, still troubled by a question:
if I had known all this, could I have changed
him then? Could I have loved him any more?

The birds say no, the trees say no, the pain
asks me to stay. So I stay. What a joy
to join with it, to let it have its way.

Gabriel Arquilevich

THE MARRIAGE OF AUNT AGNES • *Charles Heckman*

It was about 7:30 p.m. on a hot day in August, 1945, in Pekin, an Illinois River town that really knows how to get hot, and where World War II had, so far, delayed the advent of air conditioning. My older sister Carol, age 15, and I, age 8, were on the porch swing at our grandparents' house with our Aunt Agnes. Our parents dragged us there monthly from our home in the suburbs of Chicago.

I knew what was happening in the living room behind us, but I was much more interested in the variety of cars passing on Broadway, all of them pre-war, and some of them really exotic to my six-year-old sensibilities. All the American cars made today went by, plus Packards, Hudsons, Nashes, and Studebakers, still in business then. I also saw, in addition, Grahams, Cords, Auburns, Hupmobiles, Reos, and even Pierces, roughly in ascending order of rarity, all of these out of business and nearly extinct even then, but still occasionally spotted by the alert connoisseur. They were similar, in those regards, to suitors for my Aunt Agnes's hand.

Poor Aunt Agnes was a sweet, intelligent person, but not rewarded for these traits

by nature or young men in Pekin. Her most distinguishing physical feature was the pitted complexion of the acute teenage acne sufferer. Today, a dermatologist might have dealt with her problem without much fuss, but there were no easy cures then; and, in fact Agnes would decades later be diagnosed with lupus, which causes acne-like symptoms in adolescence.

Every day, when Agnes was still in high school, my stern German grandmother would settle her in a chair under a good light with a box of tissues and start expelling pimples and blackheads while greasy German peasant food bubbled balefully on the kitchen stove to replenish the supply of zits on the morrow. Later I reflected on this procedure as somehow related to simian flea grooming rituals. Whatever its genesis, it did not do much for Agnes. Regardless of Grandma's efforts, Agnes was left with the same pitted face.

Agnes was otherwise simply plain. Her slightly askew nose and mildly receding chin wouldn't stop any clocks as she passed. Her voice was a little shrill and she walked with a slight trudge. Her figure was okay. But this description overlooks the inside. She was

intelligent and kind, and sufficiently athletic that she became the drum majorette of the high school band, flicking her baton into the air and (usually) catching it dexterously as she led the parade. She had just graduated from a two-year women's college in Missouri, and was working in a clerical position for an insurance company 10 miles north in Peoria.

But now was a momentous time. Mark Renard, a longtime suitor, had asked Agnes to marry him. She had agreed, but dutifully told him he would have to ask her father's permission. This ceremony, now going on behind us in the living room, lent drama to the moment. Mark was a handsome young man, in college training to be a school teacher; but a childhood attack of polio had left him with a withered leg and a bad limp. He could get around without crutches, but many strenuous activities were beyond him. Cynical observers, of which there were many among the town gossips, might say that they were both taking the best they could get given their respective disabilities.

At last, Mark came out the front door.

"Well," Agnes asked, "what did he say?"

"He said 'no,'" Mark responded, crestfallen. "He said that he didn't want his daughter dependent on a cripple for her livelihood."

Carol's mouth dropped open, and stayed there, because Agnes spoke first. Carol had expected Agnes to say, "Well, we'll just have

to elope, then," which Carol would have heartily seconded. Carol was only 15, but everyone knew already she would never discuss her own marriage with anyone in anything but declarative sentences, so her mouth stayed open in surprise as Agnes said, "Well, then, I can't marry you," and Mark, perhaps expecting the same response as Carol, limped silently down the steps to the street after a few words.

My grandfather, a tough old German who ran a sheet metal and heating business ("tough old German" describing three quarters of the population of Pekin over 50 in those days) was hardly in a position to raise such an objection. At the age of 65, his impressive girth, nourished all through Prohibition by a basement full of beer brewing equipment, certainly would not have permitted him to engage in heavy manual labor. And when my father asked for my mother's hand, albeit 17 years before, neither vision so bad that he later failed the draft physical, nor a lower jaw and teeth which had to be totally rebuilt after the originals had been destroyed by a tumor, made him unmarriageable so far as my grandfather was concerned.

Agnes never told anyone why she accepted her father's verdict so docilely. Perhaps she was not entirely sure of her feelings herself; but to give credit where it was due, Grandpa could conjure up some pretty dire threats if

it seemed you might cross him. When my mother was 12, he told her that if he ever caught her smoking, he would carry her down Court Street on the upturned tines of a pitchfork. She never smoked, nor did any other female blood relative except his mother, who was addicted to large black cigars.

At any rate, there was no competitor for Agnes's hand, nor for her society. Even with the flood of young single men liberated from the armed services by the end of the war, Agnes's weekends passed alarmingly and emptily for two years. At last, my mother and grandmother called a family conference.

"Agnes," my grandmother said, "you have just turned 22. You're not getting any younger, and no man here is interested in you. Every Saturday for the last 18 months you have gone to the movies with Iris Hall. If you're going to find a man, you've got to get out of here."

Agnes's back went up a bit at the suggestion, however true, of her lack of appeal for the opposite sex, but no one ever accused Germans of an excess of tact. Nearly all of our family picnics ended in pitched battles because someone called a spade a *gottverdammte* shovel. "Now, just a minute," she began.

My mother quickly intervened before the conversation could go down that track. "What we mean, Sis, is that you might enjoy

living with us up near Chicago for a while. There's so much more for single people to do in Chicago. It will be easy for you to commute to your company's Chicago office from our house." It wasn't hard to persuade Agnes. In her heart of hearts the thought of another 50 years of maidenhood in Pekin must have weighed heavily. The insurance company agreed to transfer her to Chicago, and the deal was done.

Her stay with us, which lasted about a year, was only a qualified success. She did meet a man, a very nice, quiet man named Jim, who had a respectable job at the insurance company. To my nine-year-old eyes, he was quite wonderful because he drove a 1928 Graham-Paige coupe; but Agnes did not view the matter from the same perspective.

One Sunday she came down to breakfast and announced, "Jim proposed last night."

"That's wonderful," Mom said. "He's such a quiet, gentle person, and he'll make a wonderful father. What's the date?" Jim had four apparently sound limbs, and besides, my grandfather was 150 miles away. No one would expect Jim to traipse down to Pekin to ask his permission.

"There isn't one," Agnes replied, perhaps a trifle annoyed that we applied the same criteria to her swains as we would to an ungelded riding horse. "I said 'no.'"

"Why on earth did you do that?" Mom

said more incredulously than was tactful. You could take the woman out of the German community, but you couldn't take the German out of the woman.

"Because he's the dullest man I ever met," Agnes replied. We were flummoxed. She had just changed the rules on us. Since when did she have to marry someone interesting?

Whatever the rules, after the refusal Jim stopped coming around, and Agnes seemed to wilt a little every time we discussed what we (including her) would watch on our black and white 12" TV on Saturday night. Then one day she announced she was going to Pekin for the next weekend. The Peoria office of her employer was having a party she wanted to attend.

She came back with more of a lilt in her steps. She went back to Pekin several more weekends for no apparent reason. Carol said, "She's not talking, but I think she met someone at that party." Sure enough, a month or two later Agnes announced she was transferring back to Peoria. After another month or two, my grandmother called and asked us to come for the next weekend. They were throwing a party to celebrate Agnes's acceptance of Bill Winton's proposal. The party would immediately follow Bill's formal request to my grandfather for Agnes's hand. Obviously, Grandpa was not disposed to see this one get away.

I don't know what we expected, but it would have been hard to conjure up Bill. He was of middling height and well enough proportioned, but his broad face was really homely. He showed ample evidence of adolescent acne, of which our family certainly could not complain; but his nose was a huge, bony, hooked beak jutting askew between his eyes, with a couple of bumps for good measure. He peered at the world through rimless glasses, which provided a note of incongruous delicacy to his weather-beaten face.

In personality, he was certainly more lively than Jim. He was intelligent, and could be funny at times, but most of his humor consisted of self-deprecating attempts at pretending to be Jewish. "Oy vey," he would say, grasping his nose to emphasize its size, "I bet you didn't know I was a sheenie." His Jewish shtick was based on the notion that all Jews had large, hooked noses, possessed the first name "Abie," and were avaricious. Even at the age of 10, I did not understand how Agnes put up with him, but Pekinites had very little experience with Jews, and I suppose we could charitably say she did not know how offensive he was. I wouldn't say Pekinites were anti-semitic, but they had strong suspicions about anyone of different religious belief. My grandfather knew for a fact that the Knights of Columbus were

storing arms in the basement of their hall in preparation for the Papal takeover. Perhaps he saw the arsenal when he was down there fixing their furnace.

There were, however, other aspects of Bill's personal life which should have given our family more pause. Bill claimed to have gone to Michigan State for a couple of years before getting drafted. It would have been logical, if that were the case, to finish his education to improve his job prospects. In that era veterans were certainly given every opportunity for education; but Bill was employed on the maintenance staff of a United States agricultural station in Peoria. As a member of their mop and bucket brigade, he earned a minimal salary, a situation that never changed nor seemed to bother him. One would have thought, however, that it would have bothered my grandfather, who had rejected Mark Renard because of doubts about his ability to support Agnes.

Bill also drove a dilapidated 1937 Chevrolet which, I thought, showed a remarkable lack of originality. There were still lots of interesting pre-war cars around at low prices, if one just bothered to look.

"Heh, heh, heh," my grandfather chuckled at dinner the following Sunday. "Ham what am!" As he made this stale joke, probably borrowed decades before from some minstrel act in a traveling vaudeville

show, his dentures had just finished the formidable task of grinding up some of my grandmother's boiled ham. He was lifting his table knife toward his mouth, and balanced on the blade was a single row of peas which would actually make it past his dentures in rigid linearity. I had tried this any number of times, the only result being peas on the tablecloth and parental rebuke.

Anyway, the "ham" line had lost its pungency, if it ever had any. He said it each time my grandmother served ham, which was five days a week. Every Saturday she bought a large "smoked pork butt," which was at least a distant relation to ham, at the Piggly-Wiggly. It was the cheapest piece of meat in the case, heavily striped with fat and gristle. On Sunday, she boiled it into submission, and then served it through Thursday. My grandfather didn't mind the dietary boredom, although his preferred food ran to pickled pig's feet and Limburger cheese. One learned early not to raid the refrigerator in that house. Because of both scrimping and incompetence, Grandma's cooking could make even homeless dumpster divers gag.

But here we were, chewing tirelessly away, at the dinner preceding Bill's request for Agnes's hand. Bill and his widowed mother, of course, were both dining with us, and I privately wondered at the wisdom of inviting them. What if Bill realized that Agnes had

learned everything she knew of cooking from Grandma? The menu that evening consisted of boiled butt, boiled potatoes, boiled peas, and boiled *rüben*. “Rüben” is merely the German word for rutabagas, but the English word was never used in my family, where the vegetable was treated with reverence and served on special occasions. The whole house, indeed the entire neighborhood if the windows were open, would stink of it, which by itself would make any occasion special. Bill must really have been a determined suitor, for he ate heartily. He even asked for seconds, which I thought was going a little far in the apple-polishing game.

The wedding went off without a hitch in the summer of 1949. Bill showed up in a brand new Chevy, which was rumored to be a present from his mother. A waste of money, I thought, since he could have had one of the new Studebakers designed by Raymond Loewy for the same price. After the ceremony, the happy couple drove off to the Ozarks—the nearest and cheapest resort area—for the honeymoon, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

A year later, my mother received a call from Agnes. “Dorothy,” she said, “Bill and I would like to come up and spend some vacation time with you folks. We’re a little low on cash, and we’d like to get away from Peoria for a while.”

“Of course, Sis,” my mother said. My parents were suckers for “family.” If they wanted to visit, of course they could come, even if you didn’t like them. My parents could both give and receive in the hospitality department. If they planned an auto trip across the country, the route always included stops at the homes of every relative within 200 miles of a direct line to the destination, whether or not we’d even exchanged Christmas cards with them for decades.

We learned, however, that giving shelter to the Wintons because they were broke was like giving The Old Man of the Mountain a ride because he limped. One of the few advantages of Bill’s minimum wage job was a true civil service vacation of a month’s duration. Once they arrived, it became apparent that they meant to spend the whole month with us, and “with” was literally true.

They almost never left the house unless we escorted them. The only place they went without us was Midway Airport (O’Hare had not yet opened to civilian use.) They enjoyed watching the planes land, but never more than one day per vacation. Otherwise, every time you turned around, there was a Winton behind you. The only way to get them out of the house before the civil service vacation was over was to have the utilities turned off. I, who had not grown up in Pekin

where family was omnipresent and every town block contained the home of at least one relative, protested in vain. My sister was no more enthralled. Our house contained a modest three bedrooms, and she was evicted to a friend's house for the duration.

Of course, the next year, 1950, was the same story, except this time they came with a new baby girl. My mother was enchanted, but I definitely was not. With my only sibling being nine years older, I had no experience of infants, and I didn't want any.

One might have expected Bill to have reveled in uxoriousness as a result of his new fatherhood, but instead, so far as Agnes was concerned, he seemed to be experiencing buyer's remorse. Anytime he was alone with my father and me, his conversation was nothing but a laundry list of complaints about Agnes. A view of any woman on the sidewalk would be the excuse for the beginning of a diatribe about Agnes. "My God, Harry, what a looker she is. That damn woman I married walks around looking like a scarecrow." It never occurred to him that if he ever managed to look like a scarecrow, it would be an improvement.

My father was an even-tempered man, but I wondered why he kept silent at the abuse heaped on his sister-in-law. I also wondered at Bill's lack of tact. He wasn't even German. After all, we were related to

her, not to him; but Dad let him get away with it, and it wasn't my place to correct him.

All of this was merely an introduction to what seemed like a campaign by Bill to prove that familiarity can breed contempt. By itself, his habit of strolling around in his underwear in houses where he was a guest tended to discourage subsequent invitations. But he was capable of much worse.

When I was about 12, he and I and my cousin, Karen, who was 14, were talking in my Uncle George's (Karen's father's) kitchen. Suddenly Bill focused his attention completely on Karen and ignored me. His attention to her was almost that of a cobra to its prey, and there was clearly something strange going on. I knew something was wrong and tried to intervene by getting back into the conversation. "Chuck," he said, "leave us alone." I tried again to make some playful remark to re-enter the conversation. He repeated, "Leave us alone."

"But . . ." I began. The blow was swift and unexpected. He hit me hard on the face with his open hand. It was not terribly painful, and left no marks, but it knocked me down. No adult had ever done such a thing to me before. I just lay there for a couple of minutes.

He said, but with less confidence, "I warned you to let us alone." But the incident had broken the spell, and he walked away. Karen also felt that she had been the object of

some peculiar attention, but neither she nor I could ever guess what he intended to do. We were in her house, and there were people in other rooms who might have walked in at any minute. Whatever his intent, he had ended his relationship with me.

I learned a lasting lesson from this brutality. I never told anyone about it, nor did Karen. I assumed that since I was the child and he was the adult, I had been out of line. I thought (wrongly, I am now sure) my parents would side with him. Only when I grew up and read stories of abused women and children did I realize what psychology was involved.

The incident with Bill made Pekin totally distasteful. Fortunately, my sister had a very active dating life at home, and did not mind if I stayed with her during my parents' frequent trips, as long as I didn't interfere with her parties and kept my mouth shut about things she didn't think parents needed to know.

I also raised hell about the Wintons' summer visits and managed to get most of them shortened or even canceled. The Winton family had expanded to three girls. Our three bedroom home was simply not large enough to accommodate that many. My sister had to move entirely out of her room when they came, but I not only refused to move out of mine, I refused to allow a single

Winton in. That meant that all five of them had to cram into my sister's room.

"Now, Chuck," Mom said, "you're just being selfish, keeping that room to yourself, with an empty twin bed next to yours."

"Call it whatever you want. It's bad enough to be stuck with them for weeks on end without having their puling brats invading my privacy."

"But she's my sister, and she never gets any other vacation. You can't choose your relations."

"I don't care. There's no reason the sins of the fathers have to visit the sons. They can be my relations in Peoria."

Someone tried to do an end run around me the next night. When I awoke in the morning, one of the children had been deposited in my empty twin bed while I was asleep. "Mother," I said, "if that happens again, I will put whichever child it is in the living room, under the grand piano."

"You can't do that. When she wakes up, she'll be disoriented and frightened."

"That's right, and she'll raise holy hell. My bedroom door will be locked and barricaded. You'll just have to wake up and deal with it."

My mother might have been able to overrule me in these matters if Dad had been firmly on her side, but he was beginning to have his own doubts about Bill. When visiting Bill and Agnes, he and I had frequently been

invited to Bill's basement workshop. We noticed that it was extremely well equipped.

"This is amazing," Dad would say to Bill, examining an 800-pound drill press that probably required a crane to displace it. "What do you use this for?"

"Oh, that? Well, you never know when you're gonna need something like that. They got a new one down at work, and they didn't need this one anymore." These statements were often accompanied by a wink to show we weren't expected to believe in the machine's expendability. Only a member of the maintenance staff could have engineered the removal of such an object, which may have been one reason for his lack of ambition to be anything else. A janitor can go anywhere and carry away anything without being noticed. Sometimes, in spite of their unwieldy nature, these dubiously acquired objects made a quick exit from his premises suggestive of an off-the-books sale.

If he expected my father to be complicit in his thievery, he should have known he was choosing the wrong man. My father began his working life as a Methodist minister. Although he was one of the most parsimonious people I have ever known, he was also the most honest, as well as one of the duller public speakers.

One day, a visit to Bill's garage revealed that his cars were parked on heavy gauge 8' by

12' sheets of stainless steel, just to catch any oil drips from his cars. Stainless steel was an expensive item, and Dad was outraged. Not only would some more mundane material have adequately protected the garage floor, but Bill must have rented a truck to drive this contraband past the security of the federal agricultural station. I don't know if Dad was more outraged by the thievery or the profligacy. Whichever it was, the stainless steel was the straw that broke the camel's back. There was no open breach between Dad and Bill, but it was clear to me from then on that he put up with Bill only for Agnes's sake.

Nevertheless, the birth of a son in 1956 made Bill's life complete. He was William, Jr. and Bill worshipped at his shrine. But what Fate bestows with one hand, it takes away with the other. At the age of four Billy fell ill with the chicken pox, and this disease, which passes innocently in the vast majority of cases, killed him in a few days.

The loss of Billy destroyed whatever semblance of happiness had existed in the marriage. Agnes tried to find refuge in marriage counseling, but the counselor merely remarked, "The man is mourning his child. You'll just have to wait it out."

Bill started to kick up his middle-aged heels. He began taking ballroom dancing lessons—without Agnes. Then he got a nose job. His nose had been large, hooked, bumpy,

and crooked. Now it was small, hooked, bumpy, and crooked. It sat pathetically in the middle of his broad face, a small, protruding landfill in the middle of a large island.

Apparently, however, it did not put off the pathetic middle-aged women who haunted dance studios in Peoria. My father had a small house in the country near Pekin that he used for vacations but was otherwise empty. Bill had had a key to the place for years, in case some emergency occurred while we were at home. Dad returned to the “cabin” one day and found evidence that Bill had used it for sexual liaisons. The discovery ended any pretense of amity with Bill. Dad’s Methodist minister’s sensibilities were outraged, and he had the locks changed immediately.

In the last 20 or 30 years of their lives, I saw the Wintons only once, and the rest of the family did not see them much more often. My grandparents and mother died, and Bill had managed to quarrel with the other members of Agnes’s family. He was at last exposed as a thief, but not because of his outrageous purloining of federal property. He was the only child of a widow who became incompetent in her eighties. A judge appointed Bill the guardian of his mother’s estate, setting the fox to watch the hen house. Bill wasted no time in helping himself to his mother’s money, so ineptly that he was promptly caught and deposed.

In her 60s, when Agnes was diagnosed with lupus, Bill seemed almost exultant over the misfortune. “Yessir,” he would say right in front of her, “she won’t make old bones. She’ll be gone long before I will.”

He chortled too soon. Not long after, he was diagnosed with bone cancer. He continued to proclaim his superior longevity as they progressed into old age and debility, but Agnes held on longer. After his death, her disease caused her to recede into dementia, and she had to live with her daughter, Doris.

One day, Doris brought Agnes to visit my cousin, Karen, in Pekin. They were going through some photo albums, trying to exercise Agnes’s failing memory by getting her to identify old pictures, when Doris saw a youthful photo of her mother with a strange man. “Who is that?” Doris asked in puzzlement.

Agnes lit up as her mind skipped lightly back over the decades to a hot day in 1945. “That’s Mark Renard,” she said.

A few pages later, after Agnes had failed to identify a number of old friends, they came to a photo of Agnes and Bill. “Who is that?” Doris asked, pointing to her own father and her mother’s late husband of some 50 years, thinking she was throwing her mother a nice, slow curve.

Agnes responded, “I have no idea.”

SHE STOOD ON THE BANK, THE FERRY DID NOT COME

Since her mother was sick
her father was the one who took her
to pick out a prom dress.

A strapless sheath,
blue as the Great Lakes,
that left exposed the scars on her arms

that reproach him every time he looks,
even as they fade,
her body drawing them back inside.

You found her?
A long time before I felt I could ask.
The scene I'd imagined.

No, she came to me to say good-bye.
We were sitting in his car. We'd had lunch.
It was time to go, he had somewhere to be.

That means she wanted to live, I said.
No, he said. *She wanted to die.*

Alison Hicks

FACE CARDS

How angry you've always been, you realize now
as you fan out your hand, all these years
of one-eyed Jacks, their up-turned moustaches
and down-turned mouths, the Spade brandishing
a scepter, the Heart a feather backed by ax.
Neither knight nor prince, even the baby-faced Club
seems forever lost in steeds and damsels.

The Kings? Crowned Jacks grown old,
square heads so long of hair and beard the curls
have come full-circle, surveying their fiefdoms,
future troops, the thatch huts of lesser cards,
strips of fields peasant-tilled or fallow.

Even the Queens gaze off, their youthful beauty
vacant and aloof, colorless hair peeking out
from golden bonnets, dainty flowers in hands
too smooth to mother knaves or comfort kingdoms.

You see now how distorted their torsos are,
symmetrical yet skewed, patchworked in yellow,
black and red, their royal faces so tranced by all
that's distant they don't count their winnings,
never stoop to looking you in the eye.

Richard Krohn

METTA, METTA, METTA • *Helen Mallon*

From now on, Callie can go anywhere she likes. Callie can do anything she wants. Life is a vast open field with no reference point.

She is driving away from a Buddhist center from which she just got kicked out. This morning, the kindly Buddhists very nicely asked Callie to leave because she had broken the Noble Silence of a meditation retreat. Twice.

She did it at the worst possible time: during the formal evening sit. Over a hundred people in the spacious, airy room had been sitting with their eyes closed in concentration for a good while when Callie raised her hand. Of course, no one saw her. The three meditation teachers sat on a low platform at the front of the room. "Excuse me," she said in a loud voice. The teachers' eyes popped open. "If your mother just died but you never knew her because she ran around with men even after you were born, is it okay to sit here and feel nothing? Does that make you a bad person?"

One of the teachers smiled. He was a handsome French Canadian with a lovely accent. "That is a very important question." He gazed at her attentively, as if he and

Callie were alone in a coffee shop. From the rows of cushions in front of her, one or two people turned to see who had created the scandalous noise. Most continued to meditate, unmoving. "But the appropriate thing is to put a note on the bulletin board requesting a private interview with me or another teacher. We can handle it with more sensitivity that way. For now, why don't you try saying Metta for yourself? Actually"—and he regarded the whole room—"if any of you feels a strong feeling right now, maybe some difficult energy, I would invite you to do Metta practice as well." He looked around. Nobody challenged him. "Okay," he said. "Let's gather ourselves and continue our sit."

The Metta phrases of loving-kindness. The teachers had explained that repeating the Metta phrases in a thoughtful way softens and opens the heart. Since we're stuck with ourselves all day long, we might as well show ourselves a little love.

Callie squeezed her eyes shut. She made the phrases stomp through her mind: *May I be happy. May I be well. May I be at ease . . . I wonder if Evelyn thought of me when she was dying in the ICU? Could she think at all?*

Callie didn't know how to behave at a

meditation retreat because she had never been to one before, although she had lied about that on the application. Callie hadn't read the paperwork when she first arrived. She'd just signed it. She had signed a lot of things since Evelyn's death two months ago, and none of the lawyers had asked her if she'd read anything. They explained, and Callie had pretended to listen. Callie didn't understand a lot of things. For one, she had no idea that she acted younger than she actually was. She had been in and out of college so many times that here she was, 24, and her life hadn't started yet. For another, she thought the Metta phrases were a kind of anesthesia. She didn't understand that meditation helps you to be okay with not being happy. She assumed the meditation teachers were the happiest people around, not knowing that the French Canadian man suffered from spinal cord pain, that the older teacher on his left was lonely after her husband's death, and that the male teacher on his right had a son who'd been in rehab six times and counting. Callie thought that saying Metta for a few days would make her happy, minus side effects. She'd had it with side effects: the highly recommended therapist who'd gotten her into bed, the date rape in college, the weight gain from Prozac, the blowjob nausea, the hangovers.

Above all, Callie had always believed in

one, big "if only." If only Evelyn had raised her, driven her to school, made lunches, and taken her to visit colleges. *Then* she'd be happy. But two months earlier, after failing to keep another lunch date with Callie, Evelyn had been texting some man and totaled her car, along with herself, on the scenic Merritt Parkway in Connecticut.

Callie had been raised by her grandmother. Evelyn's mother. Even Evelyn had had a mother.

The second night of the retreat, Callie tried saying the Metta phrases for dead Evelyn. Wherever she was. Maybe she had been reborn as a cockroach. *May no one step on her. May a little kid step on her and grind her into the pavement. No, I didn't mean that.* The effort to be nice to Evelyn, wherever she'd been reborn, made Callie's brain feel like a tennis ball. She kept trying, though, because the French guy had been so kind, and Callie didn't know what else to do. She wasn't planning to take him up on the offer to meet with any of the teachers. *I don't want special treatment*, she thought. *I have to figure this out myself.*

She sat for an eternity while pressure built up in her head. She wouldn't move a muscle, no, not until she felt some kindness. When the second question jumped out of her mouth, louder than the first one, it surprised Callie as much as anyone. "Hel-lo?" She discovered that her arms were waving around.

“Suppose you say Metta for someone, but you know the person was really selfish and you don’t actually want them to be happy. And suppose the person is dead. Could your hypocritical prayers make her come back as an insect?”

The handsome French Canadian still smiled in a kindly way, but Callie saw behind his eyes that she was beyond the container of a meditation retreat.

The next morning, the retreat manager invited Callie into the office and gave her a cup of mint tea and gently gave her the heave-ho. She thanked him politely, then packed up her stuff. She was bumping her suitcase down the front steps when she saw the French Canadian teacher coming toward her. Later, she could not recall his exact words, but he was so sweet (breaking his own Noble Silence) that he made it sound like getting kicked out was a wonderful idea Callie had dreamed up on her own. He was so sweet, she turned to ice.

He hugged her as she stood with her arms at her sides. “Come back when you’re ready,” he said.

What Callie couldn’t say was that the retreat felt like a total waste. Here she had to leave, and she hadn’t even asked the right question. Her real question. She could feel it crouching inside her chest with pointy elbows, but she didn’t know what

the question was. She couldn’t identify it. Nor, as she drove off in shame, could she remember the teacher’s name.

Callie drove to Worcester, Massachusetts, because she didn’t know where else to go and because her cousin Andi lived there with a husband and three little boys, and what was one more person in a house full of noise?

Andi and Craig talked late at night in bed, while Callie sat out in the hallway with her ear smushed against the closed door.

“Callie’s problem is she has too many advantages,” Craig said. “Too much freedom.”

Callie was pretty sure he meant *too much money*.

“She’s grieving,” Andi said. “I think she feels lost.”

Callie put her hand on her heart and felt its steady, liquid beat. *May I be happy*, she thought, *may I be at ease*. She was still trying the Metta phrases, first for herself, then for someone you didn’t know well—a neutral person, say, someone who cleaned up after you—then for the difficult person, your enemy. *May Evelyn be well, may Evelyn be happy, even if she is a cockroach*. At the retreat, Callie had gotten stuck on Evelyn. Her enemy. Or was she? *It’s not like she ever did anything to me. She just wasn’t there*. Whenever Callie tried to meditate, she found herself arguing. Now she argued inside herself with her

cousin's husband, Craig, who was saying that Callie and Andi's grandmother had ruined Callie by setting her up with a trust fund when it became obvious that Evelyn would never stop running around like a teenager.

May you mind your own business, she said to Craig in her heart. *May you stop being jealous.*

Callie lay awake in Andi's den wondering if she should feel grief for Evelyn. Or was the brittle residue of long-ago grief enough to make Callie a decent human being?

There was college; now there is no college. She could go back and finish, or not. Once, Callie lived in a big house with a sloping lawn where Grandma tended her peonies and got in the dirt with Callie and showed her how to make handprints in the cool moss without hurting it. After this, there was a funeral. Callie was 12 when Grandma died. A boarding school loomed up before her, and when she stepped inside, she found herself sitting like a mannequin among classmates who appeared more real and colorful than she'd ever be. Callie slipped her grief like a sheet of frozen paper under the mattress in her dorm room. She spent vacations with various relatives, some of whom she hadn't met before. Andi was the one who had declared, "We're as good as sisters!" "Sisters?"

Callie had said, blinking, the strange word like spikes in her mouth. At several points during boarding school and through Callie's various stabs at college, there was Evelyn in her red scarf, driving off in her Saab. A month ago, there was Evelyn's funeral (Callie chose not to go; Andi and Craig did.)

Callie and her unknown question got up early the next morning and left Andi's house before she could see Craig and read his mind.

She drove and drove until she was in Connecticut. She found a nice hotel near the water, unpacked her beautiful clothes, and slipped the frozen grief-paper beneath the mattress. She found a mall and bought Playmobil and Legos and books and wrapped them up and mailed them to Andi and Craig's boys. *May you have fun,* she said. She bought herself a Coach bag. *May I be happy.* She ran on the treadmill in the fitness center. *May I not be fat.*

Callie stayed in the hotel for three weeks. She made friends with the chambermaids, who always wanted to clean when she had just stripped to hop in the shower. She tried to learn Spanish from them, but they giggled so much she finally caught the message: her tin ear for languages made it hopeless.

May they laugh even when they don't have to be nice to people like me.

Callie called Andi and asked to speak to Craig. "Do you think I should give all my money away?"

On paper, Craig didn't know about the trust fund. On paper, Andi hadn't talked to him about it.

"Um!" he said. "I . . . You need a job, Callie. I think you need to do something with your life. Then you can worry about the money."

Callie decided that her unknown question was better left alone. She decided to meditate again, until she knew what to do with her life.

Every morning, she put the 'Shh . . . Resting' sign on her door handle and sat on a stack of pillows in her hotel room, the firm ones on the carpet and the soft ones on top. She imagined she was sitting on a fat anchor.

She visualized returning to college; imagined herself once again in Accounting. Even though Callie was good at math, she had failed the class because it put her to sleep.

Fifteen minutes later, Callie woke up on the hotel room carpet.

She made another attempt; she worked her way through many of the college courses she had tried. She had tried them because her family, such as it was, wanted her to obtain a degree. Callie didn't want to go back to college, and she wondered if she was starting

at the wrong end. She could do many things. If she could figure out something she liked, then she'd do what was necessary to get there.

Over the next several days, she visualized herself as a cosmetologist; a baker of gluten-free cookies that Andi's youngest son could eat; a zookeeper; a buyer for a high-end department store; a cashier at Target, with management potential; a high school guidance counselor. Everything felt fake. Then she was a kindergarten teacher reading to a class of five-year-olds who sat on a colorful rug, drinking in every word. Her heart began to race. In spite of herself, she switched to visualizing herself as a mother. Her body began to tremble. The baby she imagined to be hers was lying dead in a crib, and Callie didn't know if she had done something to hurt it. She stared into the crib. A pink fist was curled up like a tiny chrysanthemum.

Another thing Callie didn't know about herself: all the years of staring out at the world from the empty place inside had taught her a kind of concentration. The next day, she decided to take a break from figuring out the rest of her life. Now that she wasn't forcing it, meditation came easily to her. She discovered it was relaxing to follow her breath. It was like a stream going in and out of her nose. Her breath pushed

the little hairs one way, then the other, like minnows in a warm current. Her mind was quiet, and her body felt pleasant when she wasn't C-A-L-L-I-E anymore. She was a happy coincidence of molecules. Her breath flowed through walls that were porous as the night sky.

She went to a club and danced with a few men and slept with one of them, his name might have been Todd, in her hotel room. *May you have many orgasms.* Sure, I'll call you, she said. She threw Todd's number away.

"Grandma!" She said it out loud once while she meditated, startling herself.

Callie wondered why it was easier to believe that Evelyn had been reborn as a cockroach than to believe her grandmother had been reborn as anything. She kept forgetting what day it was. She put her hand to her face to make sure it was still there.

Andi called to check up on her. "I'm thinking of going back to school," Callie told her, because her cousin had enough to worry about, what with three boys and Craig's 60-hour weeks.

Andi told her that the boys wanted to see her again.

All her life, Callie had stayed still while other people ran around. "I'm like a virus," Callie said. "If I come back, one of them

might get sick." Andi's request made her feel like a giant in heavy leather boots about to enter a room full of extremely tiny people. "I'll think about it," she said.

"I love you," Andi said. "You're not a virus."

May you be happy with bells on.

Callie kept CNN on all the time, for company, even when she meditated.

Callie sat on her pillow anchor and hoped the minnows would swim in and out of the little cave at the back of her nose. But ISIS had cut someone's head off and posted a video of it on YouTube. Meditation wasn't relaxing anymore. She was nauseatingly herself again. Everything hurt. The whole room was a buzz of pain. She expected her mind to resume its familiar arguments: with her mother for blithe abandonment; with Craig because she feared that he was right, her advantages *had* ruined her; above all, with death, for crumpling her grandmother into a memory of walking hand-in-hand beneath a canopy of trees.

None of this came up. No mother argument, no disapproval from Craig, no death argument, any one of which would have felt better than this. The frozen grief-paper under the mattress began to thaw, leaching a wet spot onto the thick, white comforter. Everything in her body was poised to flee—from the yammering of CNN, from

Callie's own skin. But before she could move, the *real* question, the one she hadn't been able to identify at the retreat, sprang upright in her chest. It flung its arms out, spinning like a dervish: *What if you can't love anyone*, the dervish mocked, *and no one will ever love you?*

The question was a miniature version of Callie herself. It whirled around naked, raking manicured fingernails across the inside of her ribs. More questions shot from those tiny fingers.

Will I spend my life like Evelyn, always driving away from other people?

If I keep fighting with death, will I forget Grandma was alive?

She touched her eyes. The pads of her fingers glistened and shone. "Oh, right," she said. "Tears."

Callie didn't want to go crazy, so she glanced at the TV. The doll-sized Callie inside her dropped down and fell asleep, exhausted. Anderson Cooper suddenly realized who he'd spent the last half hour talking to: the parents of another unarmed black teenager shot by a cop. He looked at them. They looked at him. He couldn't speak. He began to shed small, crystalline tears. Callie saw him and she saw the eyes of that boy's mother, and then she really cried. She cried thimbles. She sobbed. She sobbed bucketsful, dredged up from her toes. Her neck got wet, then her T-shirt, then her lap.

May he come back to life. Callie knew it was futile, but she would give up on feeling love, forever, if only Metta-magic would turn reality upside down and give this one boy back to his mother.

The thick carpet became damp under her; the whole room was crying. She closed her eyes and listened. Out in the hall, the chambermaids were crying in Spanish. With new ears, Callie heard an eerie, metallic whine. The only cockroach in the hotel kitchen, it was crying as it stood atop a fallen dinner roll. *Well, if that's Evelyn*, Callie thought, *she's one lonely bug.* But instead of feeling satisfied, the thought of Evelyn furtively eating through stale baked goods made Callie cry harder. The clerk at the front desk, Virgil from St. Louis, he was crying from boredom. At the retreat center, the retreatants mindfully experienced each yogi tear running down their cheeks as they chopped onions and swept the floors. Andi and her boys cried while they put together the best Lego castle they'd ever seen. Craig cried family tears in his office at Bank of America because for two years he had been supporting a daughter he'd had by a woman he no longer saw, and he didn't know how to tell Andi about it, let alone ask for forgiveness.

Callie decided she was tired of crying alone in a hotel room, because if the whole

world was crying, she might as well go back to Andi's house so they could do it together. So she made a boat. She made a boat out of pages from *USA Today* and hotel stationery, lined it with tissues from the hotel bathroom, and glued the seams with hair gel. Into her suitcase she threw her clothes, her Coach bag, and the St. Jude medal one of the chambermaids had given Callie when she told the maid she was practicing gratitude. She wound Evelyn's red scarf around her neck. She needed a paddle, so she left a 20-dollar bill clipped to the light over her bed and took a dustpan from the cleaning cart in the hall.

She paddled outside to a gift shop down the street, with the red scarf flapping behind her. She bought comfy slippers for Craig, snow globes of the New York skyline for the boys, and a Louise Erdrich novel for Andi. She bought chocolates and arch supports for the chambermaids and a workout towel for Anderson Cooper. And even though she feared it was less than nothing, even an insult, it was what Callie knew how to do: she bought peonies for the teenage boy, gunned down, and a silver picture frame for his parents to put his photo in. She chose a new bracelet for herself, but then she didn't want it. She put it back on the display and got a pack of gum. Then she hesitated in front of a glass shelf. She shuddered once

and reached out her hand. Callie *bought* the bottle of perfume. She bought it to pour on the raw earth of Evelyn's grave.

The last thing Callie chose was for her grandmother, who would never see the gift. It was a small fern planted inside an antique Mason jar that was decorated with raffia, and that garden was bigger than the sky.

END OF STORY

I am walking my corgi on the beach.
She is in and out of the waves.
In and out. Enjoying herself.

When this young woman says, Mister,
if you didn't have that dog, would you be so lonely?

I'm not sure what's next.
The ocean takes away my dog.
The girl takes me home.

We are together so many years, so many years
I forget how we meet.

She tells the story like this.
I am drowning. She rescues me.
She says the barking I hear is thunder.

I want my dog, I tell her.
That's all I ever wanted.

Peter Murphy

THE MOMENT BEFORE THE MOMENT • *Jeffrey Minch*

*Republic of Vietnam, Ashau Valley
101st Airborne Division,
October 1968*

There is a moment—just before the world is going to change forever—in which you contemplate everything you know, everything you have planned, everything that can go wrong, and all of your fears. It is the moment before the moment when you take that final step, and nothing—*nothing* thereafter can be changed. You turn yourself over to your fate, your training, your limited experience, and your luck.

And you hope—you pray—you are lucky.

The lieutenant briefed the sergeants for what seemed like the 10th time that afternoon. Sitting under the shade of a tent in the still sweltering heat and the sticky humidity made them want to escape the briefings. Trying to stay awake during the briefings was almost as difficult as trying to stay alive would become. But they had to stay alert. The lieutenant required all the sergeants to “brief back” the plan and then the sergeants made the soldiers do the same.

They had reconned the location by air. The map was almost worn out by their hot, intent eyes and probing fingers. A sand table—a faithful replica of the site—was at

their feet. Nobody was going anywhere until they all got it perfect.

The raid plan had been memorized, and the frequencies for artillery support, medevac, ammunition resupply, and evacuation had, similarly, been committed to memory and written in hard-covered green notebooks. The same notebooks wherein they would write the names of the KIAs and WIAs if the plan didn’t work well.

The casualty collection point had been designated. The chain of command—who was in charge if the lieutenant got killed—was set.

There was nothing left to do.

The company commander and the battalion commander came by for a chat. It was a very important raid, and the orders had come down directly from division. Division intel had found a place that displeased it mightily and wanted whatever was there to be destroyed and all the occupants killed. The 101st Airborne Division, one of the Army’s most elite combat units, supervised its brigades, which in turn tended to their battalions, which mother-henned their

companies, which fought their platoons. When something came down from division—directly to a single platoon and its platoon leader—it was a big deal.

The death sentence had been pronounced after a high level of radio traffic was triangulated by two eavesdropping Mohawks. Mohawks flew around listening for NVA (North Vietnamese Army, hardened professional soldiers, not part-time guerrillas like the local Viet Cong cell) chatter and then shot an azimuth—a compass direction—from their known location in the direction of the source. They then flew to a spot about 90 degrees from their original known location and repeated the process. Where the two azimuths—now lines on a map—intersected was the source of the radio traffic.

There had been two such planes and four intercepts all indicating the same location. The evidence was overwhelming, and nobody doubted it. Even the normal skeptics nodded their heads. There was definitely something and someone there.

There were several recorded transmissions. When the division G-2—the colonel in charge of intelligence gathering and analysis—read the translated transcripts and studied the level of traffic, he said, “That’s got to be a corps or army headquarters. They have some powerful radios. They’re talking to Hanoi. Send someone in there to destroy

the headquarters, capture those radios, and kill everyone. We may be able to bag some generals, maybe a corps commander. Whoever we send, send the best we’ve got.”

That conversation set in motion the raid that was going to be launched today.

“Everything set, Lieutenant Collins?” the battalion commander asked, knowing it was.

Jack Collins was the best lieutenant in his battalion. Had a Ranger tab sewed on his left shoulder and had proven himself in some tough fights. Had been awarded a Silver Star. They were not giving Silver Stars out in Cracker Jack boxes. No accident he had gotten the assignment.

“Yes, sir.” The only possible answer given the situation. *Get the fuck out of here, sir! Leave me alone. Let me do my job* was not amongst the possible winners. Though it held first place in the lieutenant’s mind.

“You need anything?” asked the battalion commander because he couldn’t think of anything else even remotely intelligent to ask.

“No, sir. We’re ready to go.”

The lieutenant spoke with a confident, low voice. He had already been to the latrine four times in the last hour. That much purging is good for your confidence. At least he knew he wouldn’t shit in his pants.

The helicopters—their ride to destiny—were loudly winding up now and making their preflight checks. The raiders would

not move to load until they got the word the choppers were ready to go. Eight of them holding six men each. It was a big raid. Division said they would need that much bayonet strength to do it properly.

Everybody was looking in the direction of the choppers as they increased their revolutions. You could smell the exhaust, and it smelled like funeral incense. The air usually smelled like diesel and burning shit, so funeral incense was a decided improvement.

The assistant patrol leader, the next in command in the event the lieutenant got killed, came by for a nervous chat. Smacking his index finger into his hand, counting off each point, and hopping from foot to foot, he said, "Checked everything. Got plenty of ammo. Grenades. Explosives. Blasting caps. Water. Bandages. Spare batteries for the radios. Checked with intel—nothing new. Ready to rock and roll. Choppers are doing their thing. Anything I need to know?" He was pointing at the departing company and battalion commanders.

"Nah, just wanted to make sure we got a good eye fucking before we took off. Might have to ID the bodies." He stopped to see if the assistant patrol leader appreciated his morbid humor. "Everything is just as we planned. Feeling lucky?"

They both laughed. They had been on a number of similar raids together, but it never

changed. The torture of it. The lieutenant would have voluntarily endured a barbed-wire enema if he could have gotten a "get out of jail" card.

"Yeah. You?" The question went unanswered. "Couldn't pound a ten-penny nail up my asshole with a sledgehammer," the assistant patrol leader said when he'd gotten no answer. He tried to spit to add emphasis but couldn't find or summon the spit. His mouth was like the Sahara.

"Yeah, me too. Be ready to go in about five minutes."

The lieutenant's RTO (radio telephone operator, the guy with the radio that was the lifeline to assistance) said, "Time to saddle up, LT." RTOs called their lieutenants El Tee. The flight commander had called him on the radio saying it was time. No call from the governor offering a reprieve.

Without saying anything, the lieutenant circled his finger in what seemed like slow motion over his head several times. He didn't need to say anything because every member of the patrol was watching him and had been for the last five minutes. Nobody exclusively owned the moment before the moment—everybody was in it. Drowning, and trying to swim to shore. Heavy-laden with real and imagined concerns. Trying not to think about it. Hiding their apprehension with meaningless chatter. Trying to draw life out

of the last half inch of a cigarette and then crushing it and fieldstripping it, removing all evidence it had ever existed.

The patrol stood up—their gear silent, having been taped into submission—and began shuffling toward the concrete pad from which the choppers would take off. They looked lethal. Deadly. Expectant. Scared.

The lieutenant watched them, and they watched him back. The little white crows' feet at the edge of his eyes—the product of squinting into the sun, looking for who wanted to kill him that day, and the hard edge to what had been a boy's mouth a year ago—waited their turn. The lieutenant would be the last one to load. He liked watching them load, just like he liked knowing that mothers had entrusted their sons' lives to him. At the same time, he dreaded it and didn't want to have to write another letter to a kid's parents telling them how he, the lieutenant, had failed. Failed to keep their son alive.

It was why he was so diligent in his planning, so painstaking in his preparation, and why it was so suffocating—trying to find the one thing undone that would somehow tip the odds in their favor. The one thing that would diminish the number of dog tags in his hand when he returned. That was what was going on—staring down death and trying to make it blink.

He could feel it. He could taste it. He

could hear it. He could smell it. He hated it. He hated the sense of powerlessness that meant death won and he lost. And so he anguished and tormented himself, wanting to suffer now to avoid the penance of failure.

They formed up by chopper loads. It was an orderly march toward their fate.

A private first class, draftee with a degree in journalism from Yale and the old man in the platoon at 25, asked, "How's this turn out, Lieutenant?" His age made it easier for him to ask. He also knew the lieutenant would answer him. He was trying to assemble material for a book. This felt like "material" to him.

"Piece of cake. Walk in the park. Has to work out; I have a date tomorrow night."

This made the PFC laugh and others asked, "What did the lieutenant say?" It passed through the ranks like dysentery. Everybody laughed.

The lieutenant was good at his trade, and they had come to trust him. It was a hard-earned trust, and the thrifty way he wagered their lives was at the core of it. Would sit on the radio for an hour, calling in artillery, Cobras, fast movers, spending taxpayer money—like a Democratic congressman running for re-election—before committing a single soldier to see what was in that tree line he'd been shooting up. Never asked a man with a bayonet to do something that

could be done with an artillery round. Never asked a man to do something he himself hadn't done.

They had seen a lot of his back following him into combat.

He had bled along with them. He ate last and if there wasn't enough chow, he went hungry. Made sure the medics treated everyone and everything and made sure his men got the awards, R&R, promotions, correct pay they deserved. Almost went to fisticuffs with the battalion adjutant about some lost paperwork that meant nothing except to the man whose name was on it.

And so they trusted his judgment. He had earned that trust. They put their lives in his hands. Willingly. And he accepted them.

The Holy Ghost sends a sense of humor to some men for times like this. Not everyone, but some. The men with the best senses of humor seemed to handle life better. The ones who could laugh at themselves and not take themselves too seriously were the best of all.

The Holy Ghost had taken good care of this lieutenant, sending him a sense of humor to match his size. Maybe even one big enough to accommodate growth. It'd been worn smooth by use, and it was natural.

If the lieutenant had run the sums and been brutally honest, he would have said, "According to recent experience, we get into

a gunfight with some shitheads and lose two KIAs and four WIAs. Could get a lot worse."

But he did not say that because what the patrol really wanted to know was—was the lieutenant feeling lucky? They needed the lieutenant to feel that way because when he did, more of them lived to see the next dawn. And for many of them, the only real strategy was "Alive at dawn."

A long enough series of dawns and then you got to go home to the land of the big PX and round-eyed beauties who graced the pages of *Playboy* and told you this was what you were really fighting for. In the end, many of them were fighting their own little wars for big, firm, American breasts. Not a single one of them ever mentioned the Constitution. Not one.

Nobody ever said they were there "... to protect and defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic." They were there to kill gooks, burn shit, drink beer, smoke dope, endure jungle rot, get laid, humor their draft board, and try to get home in one piece. Most did not intend to join the VFW or the American Legion or run for office when they got home.

The rifleman from Yale had openly announced his intentions to write a book, but everyone else just wanted to get home in one piece. Most were looking forward to growing their hair long and forgetting about

Vietnam. They intended to continue the beer drinking, the dope smoking, and were looking forward to getting laid a lot more.

The lieutenant shook the assistant patrol leader's hand. "See you on the high ground."

The choppers lifted off. It felt majestic when they rose, leaned forward, felt the whip hand, and soared. It was the biggest thrill you could get in that place. At altitude, the air was cool. The roar of the engines made it impossible to talk, which condemned them to think. Sometimes thinking about what was going to happen next felt like punishment, being reminded that men would die and not wanting to think about being one of them. Too much thinking could get in the way of doing, and doing was what kept you alive.

The lieutenant had a headset on, his helmet in his lap, talking to the pilot, up front, who was telling him how far out they were from the landing zone. It was a 30-minute ride.

When they were five minutes out, the lieutenant doffed the headset, giving it back to the crew chief. He put his helmet back on, which told everyone in the chopper they were nearing the LZ. Theirs was the first one in. The lieutenant liked it that way—being the first ship onto the landing zone. Get on the ground, take charge, and sort it out. Sort it out before the enemy is able to react.

The choppers began a rapid descent

that felt like a ride at the county fair, roiling your guts and making you feel like you were falling. You were. You descended fast to cheat any angry lurkers of a chance to kill you. The crew chief and the door gunner were strapped in, hanging out the door, looking forward, riding their bullet-belted machine guns, and waiting for trouble. Their fingers were on the triggers, ready to twitch at the first sign of it.

The lieutenant slid into the door, hanging his feet over the edge and holding onto the seat behind him. With feet dangling, rifle in one hand, he was ready to jump. The butterflies had become condors. Condors with great big talons trying to rip their way out of his acid-filled guts.

The first chopper—the lieutenant's—hit the tall elephant grass. There was fire coming in from the same direction the choppers were facing. That was not bad. Fire from the flanks was much worse.

The lieutenant hopped out of the chopper when it was four feet off the ground. He landed on his feet, rolled away from the chopper like a parachute-landing fall. He was a paratrooper and had been taught how to do that safely. He waited for his RTO to catch up and then they lay down, full-length in the grass, facing where the fire had come.

On the way out, having deposited their almost 50 raiders, the door gunners worked

over the direction from whence the fire had come, spraying the edge of the landing zone with a steady stream of bullets, trying to buy the troopers enough time to get organized and off the LZ.

“Eagle 6, Eagle 36, we’re down. Hot LZ. Light fire coming from the north. Nothing we can’t handle. Over.” His calm, almost serene voice made it sound like a weather report—mostly sunny with light showers expected, wind from the north at three knots. A fine day, indeed.

He was actually reporting to the company commander that they had stumbled on some enemy soldiers who were likely in the area accidentally or as “trail watchers.” Trail watchers observed trails and likely landing spots, waiting for the Americans to show up, whereupon they would send out an alarm.

“Eagle 36, Eagle 6—let me know if we can help. If you need an extraction, let me know. Good hunting. Out.” The plan called for radio silence until the lieutenant called for an extraction.

The choppers—having delivered their cargo and tamped down the enemy’s interest—disappeared immediately, running like scalded dogs for the horizon and safety. In a minute, their chirpy, joyous noise was already missed and it got quiet. Very quiet. The quiet itself was disquieting.

The lieutenant sent the assistant patrol

leader and four men to run off the enemy to the north and to report back. They took off while the lieutenant checked with the sergeants to ensure nobody had been hurt getting out of the choppers or hit by gunfire.

Ten minutes later, the assistant patrol leader returned. There had been a quick exchange of gunfire and then silence.

“Killed two NVA,” the assistant patrol leader said between breaths, trying to recover from his exertions. “Look like trail watchers. Checked their AKs, and all the rounds came from them.” He had checked the ejected brass on the ground next to the bodies to ensure that they had, in fact, been the men firing at the choppers as they landed. He had also checked the magazines in the weapons. The casings on the grass and the voids in the magazines told him nobody else had been there, and hopefully nobody had been sent to alert another unit. This was the calculus the lieutenant needed to make a decision.

The lieutenant made the first big decision of the patrol, deciding to proceed with the mission and not calling for an immediate extraction because the enemy trail watchers had compromised the raid’s op sec (operational security).

Standing, the lieutenant wordlessly circled a hand and pointed to the south, the direction of their objective. They morphed into a single file and headed in that direction.

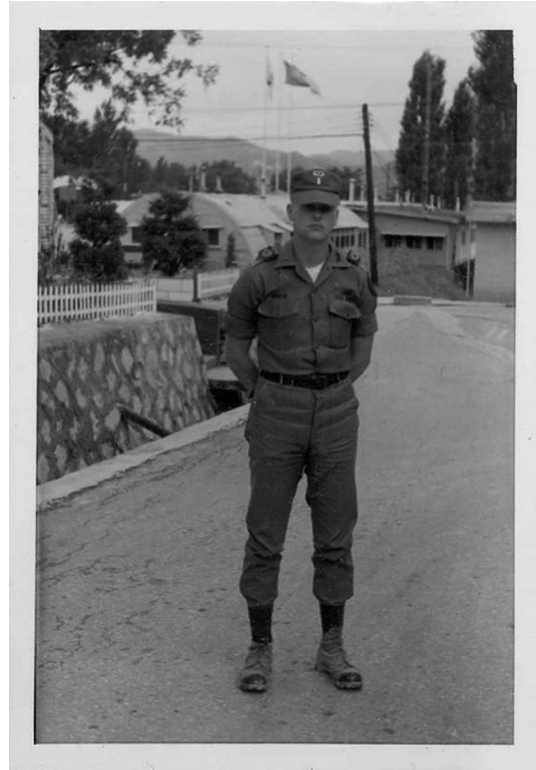
After five minutes, everyone was sweating like New Orleans stevedores in August.

The sweat relaxed the patrol—and the lieutenant—and they went about their business of finding, fixing, and killing the source of division intel's displeasure. They moved slowly and carefully through the tall grass, carrying death certificates for whomever awaited them.

The moment before the moment? It's a real thing. When you break a sweat, it passes and then it's just "Game on!" Time to keep that rendezvous with death. Time to see how lucky you really are.

JEFFREY MINCH

This was taken in the Republic of Korea in the early 1970s. I was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division, 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion. I had just parachuted into a rice paddy complex which was fertilized with “night soil.” It was a personal proficiency jump as I was not with an Airborne unit.



You will notice that my boots are very dirty, showing that I tried, successfully, to land standing up, which was a difficult thing to do. I was probably 23 years old and I had 48 men under my command. I look at my 20-something children and marvel that I had 250-400 men under my command when I was younger than them.

ANTIOCH MISSIONARY BAPTIST

Mrs. Hamer spoke at Antioch that night.
Beautiful in boldness, her words
bounced off that poor church
like diamonds in the sky.

Closing, we sang overcoming songs,
fear gathering in us,
rising like a starburst of pride.

Our fathers sat up all that dark time,
squirrel guns held tightly in their laps,
guarding us, saying,
“Sleep now, while you can.”

In the early dawn hours, All Hallows’ Eve,
they burned our church—
fire laying waste to those
brilliant diamond words,
callused hands, and
years of sad travail.

In December, when the still silver frost
gathered on our windowsills,
the students
came down from Oberlin.

Girls, who in the summer,
sat on the deck of
some lovely river house.
Boys, with crew cuts,

aspiring diplomats, and lawyers,
walked the worn cattle paths to help rebuild our church.

We worked together, black and white, young and old,
till Antioch MB stood once more
stalwart in that
wintry ruin of time.

Forty years later, our church sits in a rained-out cotton field,
quiet, unassuming,
no monument to mark
that treasured time of grace and brotherhood.

Gayle Newby

WHAT IF YOU LOSE YOURSELF

What if you look for yourself
everywhere,
and no one will help you?
The white starch just smiles when you look
under your bed and find blue leather slippers.
When you ask your daughter
for assistance,
she's no help at all.
She only cries blue tears.
The white starch just smiles when you open
the closet door onto a fuzzy blue bathrobe
and tells you, "The hall's out this way, dear."
When you ask your husband
for advice
on which map to use, Mercator, perhaps,
he chokes up, turns blue, and can't answer.
The white starch just smiles when you walk
up and down the hall
again and again all day long,
the soles of your blue slippers darkening.
Not to worry,
your frustration will fade when you find
yourself
and everyone else disappears.

Judith Overmeier

THIS POEM BEGINS IN A BAR

on a Friday. Our faces lift—
platters of golden perch
float by in women's arms. The light
is blue-tinted fluorescent. Neon Miller
and Schlitz burn in windows. Tables
are round and we are families of four,
six, or five. All daughters are named
Mary. Folded in each of us a lust,
not yet announced. Sons are creased
with wars-in-waiting. Frank or Peter
or John—we will remember them
later. To gain places at these tables
young women punched clocks,
typed hours of words until the word
bride reached them and became *mother*.
Fathers here stir gently in their chairs.
The bar noise makes a kind of silence
they longed for in the last war.

We all wave to the bartender as we leave,
palms open, tilted upward. On Sunday
our families press into pews. Palms meet,
and tomorrow idles.
Fathers and mothers, sons and
daughters, kneel and rise
kneel and rise.

Kelly Sievers

THE TWO ARMSTRONGS

Boy deep down inside the man
has Keds on. Springy
as a pogo stick.
Divides his day-to-day
among his pockets:
maps, collapsible telescope,
Mars bars, compass.
On his belt, canteen
full of life force:
Kool-Aid or Tang.

Boy's been rattling the man's
thorax. Man just calls it gas,
something he ate. Words come,
sound like *module*, *lunar*.
Doctor comes,
pulls a beanie, bent propeller
from the man's esophagus.

Boy launches
like a Saturn 5 rocket. Lands
in a silver-on-the-inside cape.
When he lifts his arms,
a thousand parakeets fall out.
Doctor falls down.
Man puts down

his instruments.
Throws his keys
into nearby weeds and woods.
Donates explorer/discoverer biographies.
Stops the mail.

Boy shows him
how to walk all over again,
leave prints
that make good pictures. How
not to kick up dust, jar rocks.

Eventfully they plant a flag
in the gray dust. Place hands
upon hearts.
Never before, stripes
wide as these. Never again,
stars this close.

Charles Springer

THAW

I have intruded into April,
season of uncertain promise,
and have brought Death with me
from January where he stole my husband,
froze me, even to the marrow of my love,
and fractured life with ice and loss,

then left me in this springtime warmth,
helpless, melting, not sure what to make
of the pink-frothed cherry, the dappled hellebore,
or green-gauze life pulsing everywhere.
But this morning, when I glanced
across a distant field,

lambs looked like dogwood blossoms,
and, in the warming woods nearby, wild dogwood
looked like flocks of lambs.

Barbara Stout

SUNDAY AFTERNOON UPSTAIRS

Rain zithering off the rooftops of cars,
azaleas ablaze on the porch are hot-pink zealots
against the leaden drear of March.

The five-year-old across the street is screaming
I'll kill you, waving a broom at a lumpish kid
on the sidewalk, her mother staring blankly.

I'll kill you, again, softly, diamond-clear, you can see
the fine mist on her skin. This kid leaks pure rage;
it slips out of her through the gloom

of this wet, no-birdsong day, unfathomable,
uncontrolled, but she well may lose it,
not wrangling her anger back until she's forty.

All day there's a table saw chewing wood next door
that occasionally grazes something metal and shrieks,

as if meeting its own demons face-to-face
and not prepared for them.

Helen Wickes

UNCLE LOUIE AND THE COMIC • *Marty Waxman*

My Uncle Louie was a table pad salesman eight months of the year and a personnel director during the summer season in my Zeida's small Borscht Belt hotel who always went for a cup of coffee to Field's drugstore in Loch Sheldrake when he had a problem as if they didn't have coffee at the hotel which served three multi-course, multi-choice meals a day plus an open tea room in the afternoon and evening, and Uncle Louie did have a problem on Labor Day 1955 when the comic he had booked for the traditional midnight supper got sick and the booking agent called saying he had no replacement so Uncle Louie called me over and said take a ride with me for a cup of coffee at Field's drugstore and I did and as he was telling his problem to the counterman in this almost empty drugstore, empty because everyone else was getting ready for the midnight supper about to happen at every Borscht Belt hotel, but there was one man sitting at the end of the long counter who overheard Uncle Louie and said "You need a comic? I'm a comic" and Uncle Louie used his highly sophisticated interview technique and said "Okay, make me laugh," and the comic did, so Uncle Louie offered him 20 bucks for the one night stand but the guy

held out for 25 and Uncle Louie, pressed against the wall, gave in and the three of us rushed back to the hotel, Waxman's Overlook, only a few minutes away and after the guests had their fill of corned beef, pastrami, potato salad, coleslaw, all strictly kosher, with plenty of cookies and rugelach, backed up by the four-piece band playing music of the big band era and, of course, klezmer, the comic gets up and knocks them dead, even Estelle and I are rolling in the aisle, but that's not the end of the story because now it's a few years later and Estelle and I are watching the Ed Sullivan show and it was a really big show when he introduces a new comedian who also knocks it out of the park and Estelle and I turn to each other and say "That's the guy," and who do you think it was? Jackie Mason.

TRIPTYCH

I.

The afternoon that comes after tomorrow,
when the clock has stretched its arms to five or so,
and the visitors have gotten up to go,
trailing good-byes across the hall and down
the steps and out into the snow,
will be the time I shall reserve for sorrow,
tuning in the weather on the radio
and listening for the traffic up from town—
That afternoon of early stars I'll borrow
to wait out your remembered comings-home.

2.

You can always tell when a cat's
looking for someone—
padding sapiently
behind a chair,
sniffing questions
at the ashtray stand,
checking out the news of some weeks back
in one dusty magazine
resting sideways on the lonely rack—
Five o'clock,
window vigil begun—
you can always tell when a cat's
looking for someone.

3.

One day when it's raining, spring
will come this year. One
day I'll notice how the rain's
grown small, and old elms
down the street march tall in grey.
I'll find I've changed the fire-place
logs, put in the brass
lace fan without thought other
than the season. That onion-
grass has risked its blush of green
will seem sufficient reason
to stand in rain at
five o'clock, and think of nothing
but spring coming home again.

Rossmé Taylor

The minute you or anybody else knows what you are you are not it, you are what you or anybody else knows you are and as everything in living is made up of finding out what you are it is extraordinarily difficult really not to know what you are and yet to be that thing.

GERTRUDE STEIN

Passager Writers

writers

DIANA ANHALT (GA)

About “When Our Shoes Take Us” (p. 6): When you’ve resided in the same country—in my case Mexico—for 60 years and then left, displacement becomes an overriding concern, and served to remind me of my Jewish heritage.

Much of my writing—*A Gathering of Fugitives: American Political Expatriates in Mexico 1947-1965* (Archer Books), three chapbooks, essays, short stories and book reviews, in both English and Spanish—deals with my longing for ‘home.’ My book of poems, *Because There Is No Return*, was released recently by Passager Books.



GABRIEL ARQUILEVICH (CA)

“Summer Morning, Insomnia, Yard Sale” (p. 24) was inspired by real-life events. The first four lines were written many years ago, when my son was a boy. I always loved them, but they never found a home until now.

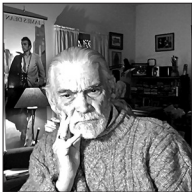
My work has appeared in *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Margie*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Poet Lore*, *RHINO*, *2River*, and other journals. I live in Meiners Oak with my wife and children.



ANDREW BROWN (MD)

About the poem “My Hunkpapa Great Grandfather Who as a Boy Rode Against Custer” (p. 7): I don’t remember him, but I’m told that my great grandfather lived long enough into the 1930s to hold me, pat my head, and declare I was “a fine fat fellow, with lusty lungs.” And I grew to become a storyteller, like my grandfathers.

In the Lakota tradition, being a storyteller is a moral responsibility. You can’t



do character or plot, because all the listeners already know the action and the outcome. So what does story mean—and yes, a poem is just another story to a Lakota. A story must be the truth that keeps life alive and helps the young to live.

There was no ending to the conflict that day on the battlefield. What the young must learn from Great Grandfather's answer to their question is, what do we need to win the fight with Custer, still going strong.

Now you can read like a Lakota Sioux.

JOHN DAVIS (WA)

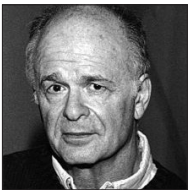
The tragedy of war never leaves, even years after the bullets have ceased flying. "Final Syllables" (p. 8) began with the daily actions of a widow. From there she became the widow of a Vietnam veteran. I am a veteran and, though I did not serve in Vietnam, I am sensitive to that time period and certainly know several people affected by the war. Unfortunately the occurrences of war have never left us.



I am the author of *Gigs* and *The Reservist*. My recent work appears in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The North American Review*, and *Rio Grande Review*. I live on an island near Seattle, teach high school and perform in rock 'n roll bands.

STEVE DIXON (MD)

"An Interpretation of Dreams" (p. 10) is one of my oddest stories. I don't know how I wrote it. I probably went into a lucid trance, and after I came out of it (I do all my first drafts in a single sitting, or 98% of them), I probably thought I had something but I'm not sure what.



writers

I have published 15 novels and 15 story collections. Altogether, I've published about 600 stories. I have three books coming out this spring: *Letters to Kevin*, a novel with my illustrations, from Fantagraphics Books; *Beatrice*, a novella, from Publishing Genuis Books; and *Late Stories*, an interlinked story collection from Trnsfr Books.

"An Interpretation of Dreams" is from my yet-to-be-submitted interlinked story collection *Dear Abigail and Other Stories*. I was born in NYC and live in Ruxton, Maryland.

ELKE ERBE, POET (BERLIN, GERMANY), AND SARA EDINGER, TRANSLATOR (MD)

Elke Erbe was born in Germany in 1938. In 1949, her parents, serious Marxists, moved the family to the GDR where she and her sisters lived for some time in an orphanage. She has had a varied career as a translator, essayist, critic and primarily poet.

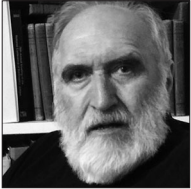
Her poem, "It dawns on me"/"Mir dämmert es" (p. 20) is dated 1990, around the time of the fall of the East German government. It can be read as a commentary on the activities of the Stasi, the secret police in the former East Germany.

Sarah Edinger became interested in German language and literature as a Stanford undergraduate. She obtained an M.A. (and ABD) in literature, but for practical reasons spent most of her working life in information technology. After retiring, she returned to the study of German and began translating, mostly poetry. Initially she saw her translations as a way of understanding the poems more completely; she has since become fascinated by the process of solving translation problems. Her English versions of three poems by Elke Erbe were published in the online journal *Asymptote* (April 2014).



CHARLES HECKMAN (CT)

About “The Marriage of Aunt Agnes” (p. 26) I could no less write about central Illinois Germans, with great affection, than my mother’s maiden name could not have been Splittgerber, than the members of my mother’s family could not have been terrible cooks, than any Illinois German could fail to own and play a piano (not necessarily, but usually, well), than any of the fathers in my family could have failed to educate his daughters to maintain their stations in life, or than I can untangle the syntax of this sentence.



I am a professor of law, Emeritus, at Quinnipiac University School of Law in North Haven. I have an A.B. from Brown University, a J.D. from the University of Chicago, and a strong belief in the value of the serial, or Oxford, comma. I taught law for over 40 years, specializing in legal history and international commercial law. I live with my wife Honor and have three grown children.

RACHEL HEIMOWITZ (ISRAEL)

“Glass in a Hail Storm” (p. 22) was inspired by Anne Marie Macari’s poem, “Mary’s Blood.” The poem triggered memories of raising my children through intifadas, terrorism and the first Gulf War. Motherhood, no matter the conditions, is challenging, but there are moments when the challenges become acute. I currently have a son and a future daughter-in-law in the army in Israel. My fifth child, a daughter, will be going in in March. My youngest son just arrived home from his high school, in the area where three were killed in a terrorist attack today. No matter what we do, what we write, or what we say, violence in the world continues. And meanwhile we just continue to nurture our children. We have no choice; it is the only way, as Macari wrote in her poem about Mary, the mother of Jesus:



everything open so her inside

writers

was now outside, cracked open, it means
mother to crack open, to be rent
by what comes to replace her. Such
is love—the only way.

I am the author of the chapbook, *What the Light Reveals* (Tebot Bach Press, 2014.) My work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Spillway*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Passager*. I'm currently the editor of *arc-24*, the literary journal of The Israel Association of Writers in English, and just received my MFA from Pacific University.

ALISON HICKS (PA)

“She Stood on the Bank, the Ferry Did Not Come” (p. 36) is one of several poems inspired by the experience of a friend’s daughter, a young woman whose mother was diagnosed with Early Onset Alzheimer’s when she was entering adolescence. That both she and her father went through a hard time is an understatement; I’m happy to report that she is now a healthy and accomplished college senior, majoring in anthropology.



My books include a collection of poems, *Kiss*; a chapbook, *Falling Dreams*; a novella, *Love: A Story of Images*; and an anthology, *Prompted*. My work has appeared in *Crack the Spine*, *Eclipse*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Gargoyle*, and *Permafrost*. I am the founder of Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio, which offers community-based writing workshops.

RICHARD KROHN (MD)

About “Face Cards”(p. 37): All of us have had face cards under our noses. Though they are colorfully odd, abstract and full of history and attitude, we never dwell on the “messages” they convey.



I’ve spent most of my life in the Mid-Atlantic, especially Baltimore, but also with multi-year periods in Central America. My recent work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poetica*, *Rattle*, among others, and in Baltimore’s now-defunct *Urbanite* (Iraq vet re-discovering Charm City.) My poems vary widely in form, but almost invariably include irony and semi-humorous teasing, including of the speaker.

HELEN MALLON (PA)

“Metta, Metta, Metta” (p. 38) began with loneliness. One summer at Cape Cod, I was missing a dear friend who struggled with poor health back in Philadelphia. I wondered how a character whose entire life had been isolated from other people might learn the essential—and magical—art of human connection. The fictional Callie became my companion in that quiet beach house. My Vermont College MFA had taught me technique, but I needed to break my heart open. As a writing coach, I keep Callie in mind when I work with clients.



I am the author of *The Beautiful Name: Four Short Stories*, released this June by Books To Go Now. I have published book reviews in *Fiction Writers Review* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and am a regular contributor of reviews to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

writers

JEFFREY MINCH (TX)

I was a real estate developer who built and renovated highrise office buildings and a CEO of public and private companies for 33 years. I was educated at Virginia Military Institute, where I learned the family business, soldiering, and was a professional soldier—combat engineer officer—for five years, during which I served with troops overseas and in the U.S. There is no greater honor than being trusted with the lives of the sons of America. During this time I acquired countless stories, which are now coming forth at the tips of my fingers.



I wrote “The Moment Before the Moment” (p. 47) to dramatize the unrealistic expectations we assume of young officers in times of peace and war. They issue forth from places like VMI (my alma mater) and the Army expects them to be able to instantly exercise good judgment over the lives of the mothers’ sons entrusted to them. Some of them—the young officers—learn their trade quickly. Some die in the process. Some get your kids killed as they learn. Soldiering is a dangerous business and war is an obscenity. The fighting and the dying, and even more important, the leadership, is forced upon young men, Lieutenants and Captains, who must rise to the occasion and use the friction of war to develop their expertise and discover their character.

PETER MURPHY (NJ)

I was born in Wales and grew up in New York City where I operated heavy equipment, managed a nightclub and drove a cab. I am the founder of Murphy Writing of Stockton University, which offers programs for poets, writers and teachers in the U.S. and abroad.



About “End of Story” (p. 46): It doesn’t make me popular, but because I have been bit six times, I don’t like dogs. That said, every now and then I challenge myself to write a poem about a dog I could like. I probably chose a Corgi because, like me, they originated in Wales.

GAYLE NEWBY (UT)

Much of my writing involves history, and almost all of it concerns subject matter that lies heavy on my heart. After living the first 63 years of my life in Mississippi, I now live in the mountain West. I had to distance myself from old ghosts in order to write. My poems are forthcoming in the *Hiram Poetry Review* in the spring.



About “Antioch Missionary Baptist” (p. 56): In 1964, I was 14 and living in the predominantly white, rural, northeastern corner of Mississippi. Although the African American population there was small, a vital dynamic cell of civil rights activity existed in Tippah County and in nearby Marshall County, the home of Rust College. Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer spoke at Antioch on October 30, 1964, inspiring the crowd and motivating people to register to vote. The next morning, the church building burned. Law enforcement officials blamed the fire on cotton stored in the backroom of the building. No one was arrested for the crime.

I had been rigorously schooled on the evils of integration, but in my heart I felt a great sadness for the members of Antioch Missionary Baptist. Many years later I felt that a memorial of some sort needed to be written to commemorate this time of brotherhood.

JUDITH OVERMEIER (CA)

My mother, an Alzheimer’s patient in a care facility for many years, was my inspiration for this poem, “What If You Lose Yourself.” (p. 58)



I’m 76 years old and had a 23-year career as curator of a medical rare book collection in Minnesota, followed by 12 years as a faculty member in a school of library and information studies in Oklahoma. I have nonfiction articles and books published in those fields. I have published poetry, short stories, and

writers

creative non-fiction. I travel whenever I can and my favorite places to write are on airplanes and in coffee shops around the world.

KELLY SIEVERS (OR)

About “This Poem Begins in a Bar” (p. 59): So much can begin, or end, in a bar. I grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Our corner bar was a gathering place nearly as integral to our lives as the parish church. Friday nights were fish fry socials. Terrance Hayes’s words, “The bar noise makes a kind of silence” from his poem, “Cocktails with Orpheus,” led me back to that place and my poem.



I began writing in the mid-80s in Portland, a supportive city for writers. My writing group, The Black Boughs, formed from poets I met in workshops. I have published in many journals, including, *Greensboro Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Rattle*. My latest publication is in *EKPHRASIS*.

CHARLES SPRINGER (PA)

Back in the 1970's, I'd often see Neil Armstrong on the University of Cincinnati campus when he was teaching there. Decades later in the middle of a moonlit night, I awoke and wondered who he was as a kid. The wonderment became “The Two Armstrongs.” (p. 60)



I have degrees in anthropology and am an award-winning painter. I began writing poems when I was suffering painter's block! I soon discovered that with words, I could go much farther beyond the horizons of primed white canvas.

Photo: Jeff Hofmann



BARBARA STOUT (VA)

I wrote the poem “Thaw” (p. 62) as I felt myself moving from a dark place in my grief for my dead husband to a brighter place. I expressed that process, that journey, in metaphors from nature, from the ‘process’ that the natural world goes through in early springtime, the season of renewal.

Before retiring, I taught English for 37 years at Kent School in Connecticut. The Last Automat Press published *The Kindness of Pines*. I have had numerous poems in magazines such as *Hellas*, *Snowy Egret*, *The Lyric*, *Passager*, and *Artemis*. I live with my rescued kitten, Katie.

ROSSME TAYLOR (MD)

In the 1970’s, when I also began to experiment with writing poetry, a Music Teachers Association friend who was going through a distressing divorce gave me the idea for “Triptych.” (p. 65)



Originally from Winnipeg, Canada, I now teach music, and yoga for seniors, in Silver Spring, Maryland. After I discovered The Writers’ Center in Bethesda and the University of Maryland’s Legacy College for Seniors, I published poetry in *Poet Lore*, *American Tanka*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Cats*, and now in *Passager*. In my writing style I am a “nature” poet with an interest in childrens’ poetry.

MARTY WAXMAN (MD)

After quitting my childhood dream job of sports writer on a New York daily due to the Hearst newspaper’s complicity in the Joe McCarthy-led witch hunt and employment blacklist in the early 1950s, I decided to spend my remaining working years on good causes—10 years in the labor movement and 25 in Jewish communal and charitable services, always with some writing. Fully



writers

retired, my wife and I enjoy our seven grandchildren, now grown, traveling the world and our beautiful country.

HELEN WICKES (CA)

I live in Oakland and worked as a psychotherapist for many years. I am a member of Sixteen Rivers Press—a collectively run press that has published 30 books of poetry over the years. I have published four books of poetry, most recently, *World as You Left It*. My work has appeared in *Agni*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Boulevard*, among many others.



About “Sunday Afternoon Upstairs” (p. 63): I was thinking about what it’s like to see a scene on your street and fast-forward it in time. I was also playing around a lot with sound—‘z’ and ‘s’ in particular.

Sophia Frydman (cover artist) lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she makes drawings and works towards becoming a psychologist. She writes:

I made this painting fourteen years ago, while studying art in Chicago. I had found a box of Polaroids taken by my parents at their house and smuggled a few with me to college. I think that I was trying to understand something about my family through making paintings from these pictures. And yet the particular flatness of flashed-out polaroids was a sparse field in which to look for clues. I've always liked art that lays out the terms of its own collapse. This painting is based on two of these photos, of a tug of war competition that was part of an annual Fourth of July celebration in the Maine town where my family used to spend the summer. The woman in white shirt and pants is my mother, her best friend is next to her, and I'm guessing that my father was behind the camera. The Polaroid sky had turned a heavy apocalyptic yellow green. I liked how with the two panels side by side, the tuggers pulled against themselves, while the bodies of the two people at the inner edges curved away and towards each other, forming an O. There's a spiral in the center drawn taut to the edges.



We're celebrating 25 years
with books from these Passager Authors:

Little Miracles by JAMES K. ZIMMERMAN

The Want Fire by JENNIFER WALLACE

Never the Loss of Wings by MARYHELEN SNYDER

Because There Is No Return by DIANA ANHALT

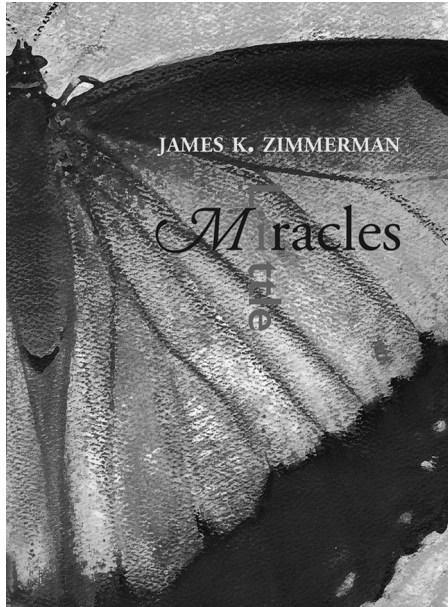
& coming in 2016:

The Chugalug King & Other Stories by ANDREW BROWN

Gathering the Soft, poems by BECKY SAKELLARIOU, paintings by TANDY ZORBA

Finding Mr. Rightstein, a memoir by NANCY KELTON

The Three O'Clock Bird, poems by ANNE FRYDMAN



Little Miracles

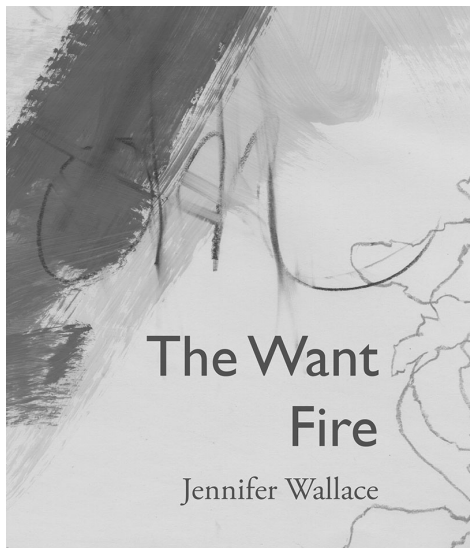
JAMES K. ZIMMERMAN

new

This collection of poems speaks of discomfort and unfamiliarity, of death and mourning, the disorientation they bring to life. Of the ultimate constraints of human existence. And finally, these poems sing in the voice of spiritual transcendence, acceptance, and the open door of inner peace.

Poetry, soft cover, 82 pages

Cover price: \$16



The Want Fire

JENNIFER WALLACE

new

In these poems, Wallace uses images in nature to voice the ethereal experience of being human. Thus *The Want Fire* paints moments—glimpses inside the spirit world—that reside in the physical world around us.

Poetry, soft cover, 64 pages

Cover price: \$16



Because There Is No Return

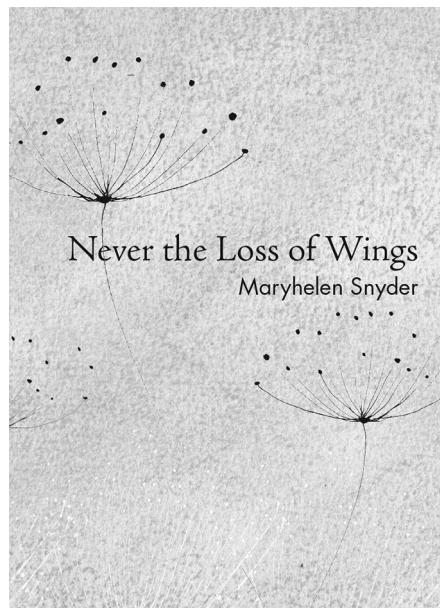
DIANA ANHALT

These fervid and lush poems hover between an expat life and sometimes a life close to exile—geographical as well as emotional. Therein lies the longing for, and the joy of, return. And then, too, the loss in returning. This is a powerful and unique collection made more powerful by the historical as well as its personal context.

THOMAS LUX

Poetry, soft cover, 68 pages

Cover price: \$16



Never the Loss of Wings

MARYHELEN SNYDER

This collection is grounded not only in those moments of loss that come with age, but also in those moments of realization that there is still a richness in what remains. The poems are interspersed with illustrations of dandelions, their fleeting delicacy a reminder that not everything worth appreciating is lasting. Snyder's poignant words are not so transient. Illustrations by *Passager* designer Pantea Amin Tofangchi.

Poetry, soft cover, 72 pages

Cover price: \$16

Submissions Guidelines

Passager publishes two issues a year, an Open Issue (fall/winter), and a Poetry Contest Issue (spring/summer).

Please include your name and contact information on every page.
No previously published work.

Notify us immediately if your work is accepted elsewhere!

No email entries.

Our Submittable page can be found at: <https://passagerbooks.submittable.com/submit>
Questions? editors@passagerbooks.com • www.passagerbooks.com

2016 Poetry Contest

Submit poems for the contest issue between **January 1 and April 15, 2016.**

Please send a hard copy or use Submittable. Send:

- Up to five poems (40-line maximum for each)
- An email address or a self-addressed stamped envelope (for notification)
- A cover letter and brief bio
- A \$20 reading fee includes a one-year subscription to *Passager*.

Winner receives \$500 and publication. Honorable mentions will be published.

2017 Open Issue

Submit work between **July 1 and September 15, 2016.** No reading fee.

Please send a hard copy or use Submittable. Send:

- Up to five poems (40-line max) and/or up to 4,000 words of fiction/nonfiction
- An email address or a self-addressed stamped envelope (for notification)
- A cover letter and brief bio

passager books

Little Miracles, \$16
poems by JAMES K. ZIMMERMAN

The Want Fire, \$16
poems by JENNIFER WALLACE

Because There Is No Return, \$16
poems by DIANA ANHALT

Never The Loss of Wings, \$16
poems by MARYHELEN SNYDER

A Cartography of Peace, \$13.95
poems by JEAN L. CONNOR

Improvise in the Amen Corner, \$14.95
poems & drawings by LARNELL CUSTIS BUTLER

A Little Breast Music, \$9
poems by SHIRLEY J. BREWER

Everything Is True at Once, \$9
poems by BART GALLE

Perris, California, \$9
poems by NORMA CHAPMAN

Nightbook, \$12
poems by STEVE MATANLE

Keeping Time: 150 Years of Journal Writing, \$24
edited by MARY AZRAEL & KENDRA KOPELKE

*Burning Bright:
Passager Celebrates 21 years*, \$18
edited by MARY AZRAEL & KENDRA KOPELKE

Beyond Lowu Bridge, \$20
memoir by ROY CHENG TSUNG

Hot Flash Sonnets, \$14
poems by MOIRA EGAN

Give yourself or a friend two years of *Passager*
\$30 per subscription (four issues)
\$35 outside the U.S.

Give your favorite library a gift subscription
\$45 for two years (four issues)

\$5 flat rate shipping on all mail-in orders.
Make checks payable to Passager/UB

Passager
1420 North Charles Street
Baltimore MD 21201-5779

Order online: www.passagerbooks.com

