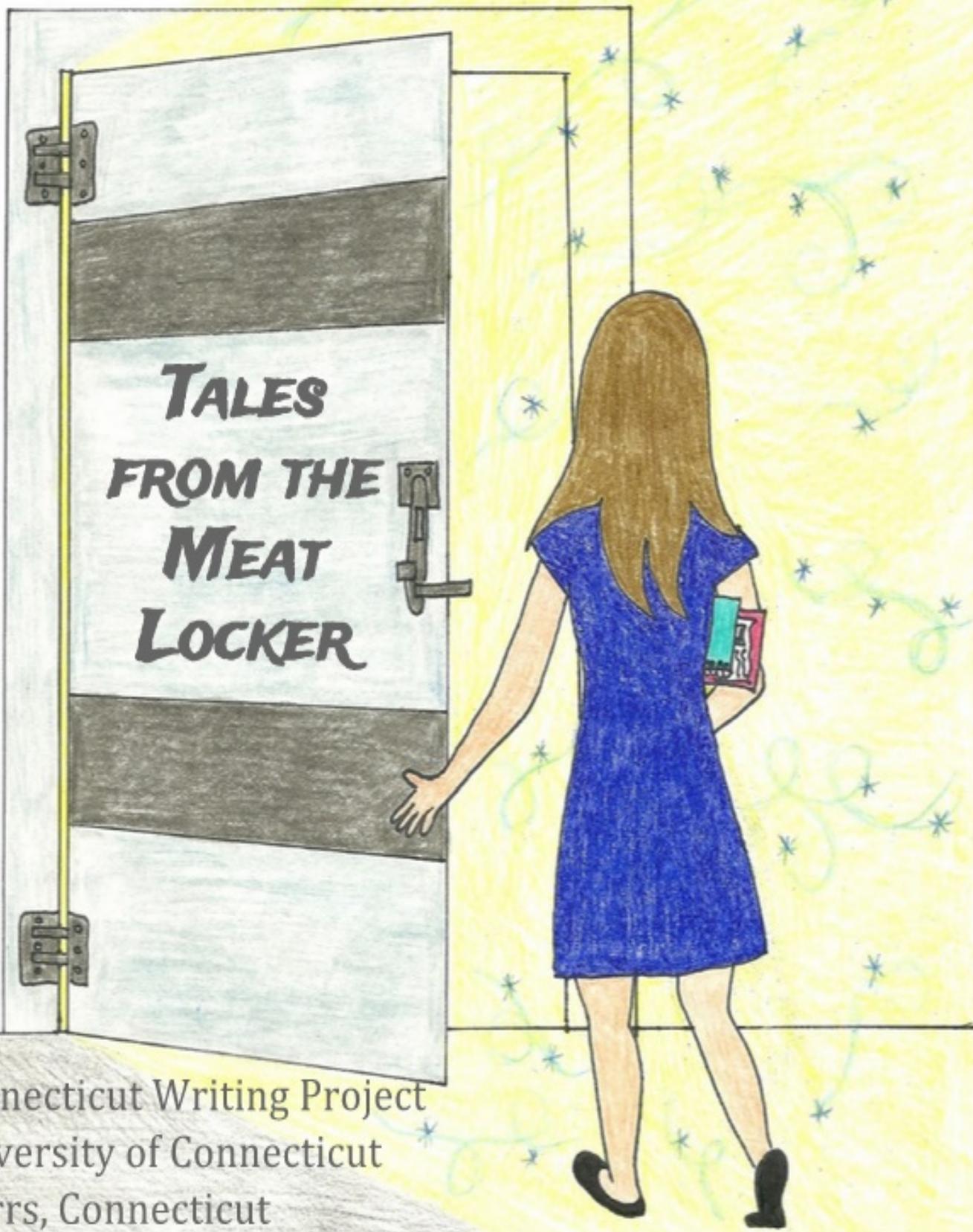


Teacher-Writer

Volume VII, Fall 2015



Connecticut Writing Project
University of Connecticut
Storrs, Connecticut



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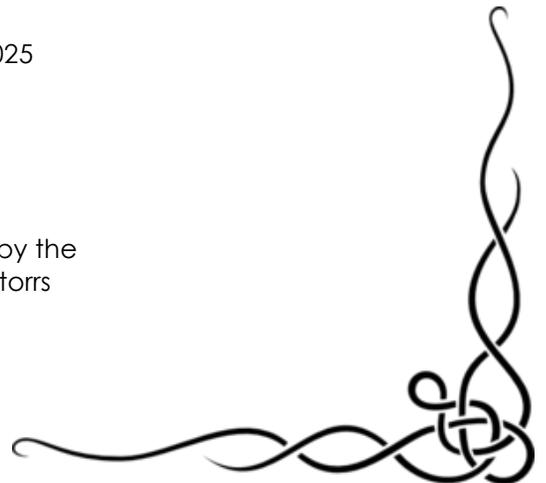
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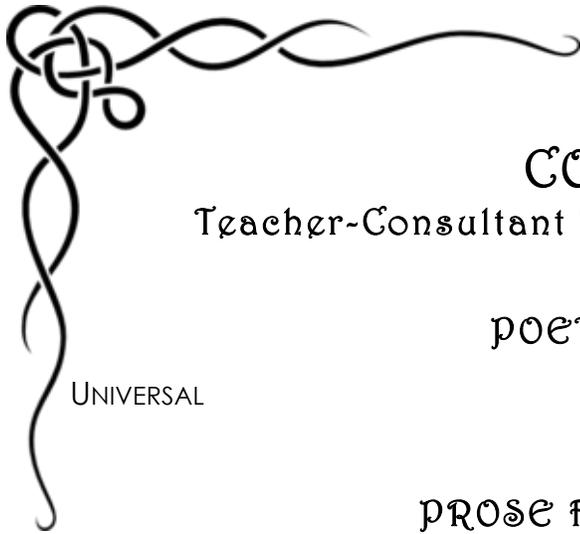
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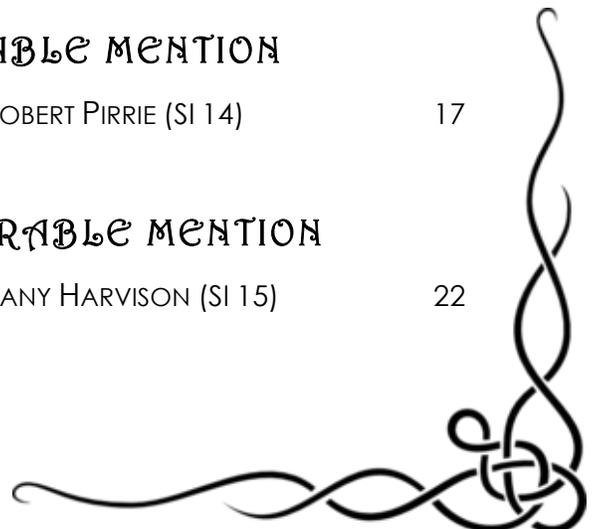
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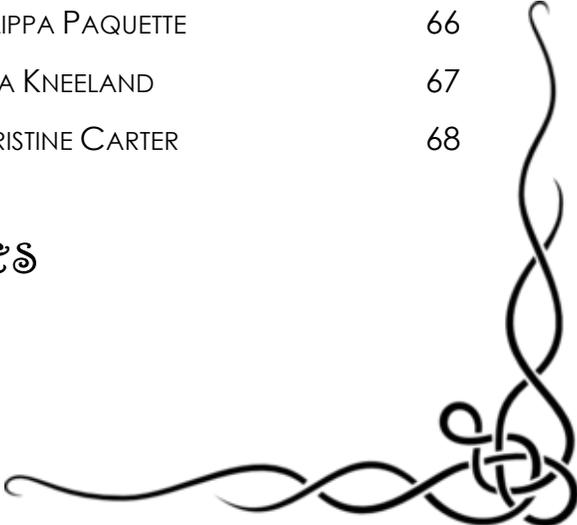


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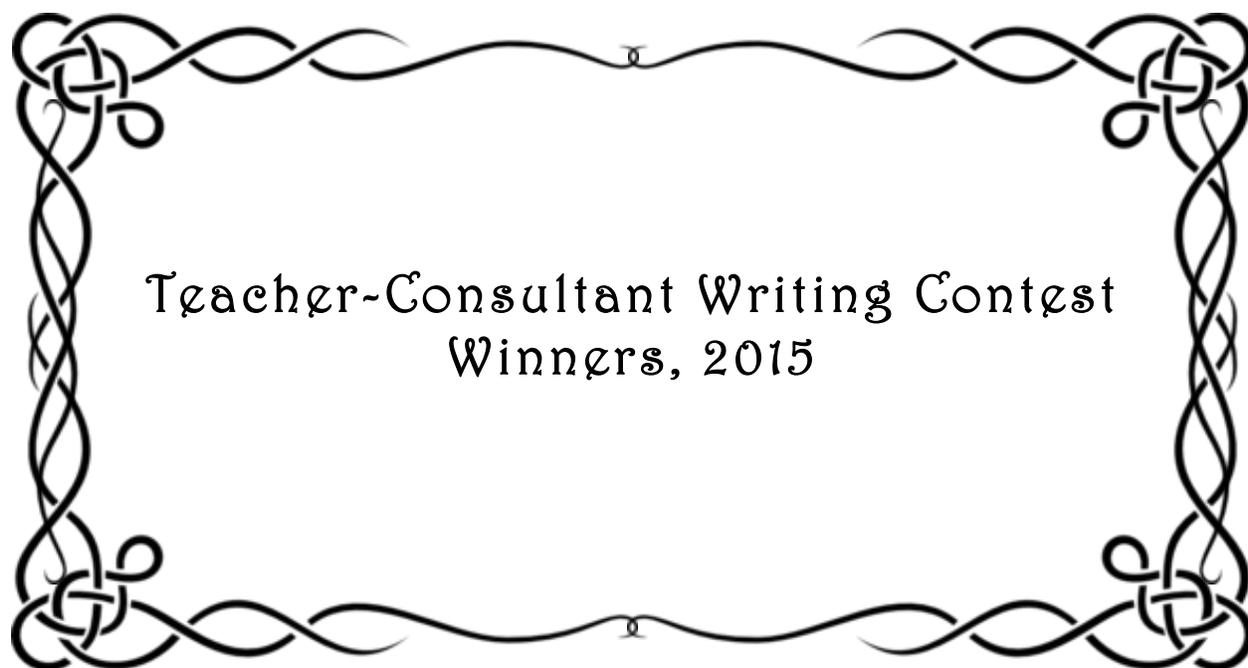
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Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest
Winners, 2015

Poetry Winner

UNIVERSAL

By Danielle Pieratti (SI 14)

We learned to sleep in the burning.
Sometimes a cloud would turn

into a kind of compass.
So that in the moment it took

to love you
no less than a world

left your mouth.
We thought you precious,

jeweled sail. But you
became a kingdom

diced with rivers
we breathlessly swim through.

And there's no word
to name in Earthly terms,

this flight—a murky hemisphere
of brothers? The womb's

imagined weather? New birds
for skies we'll lose sleep to invent.

Prose Fiction Winner

Johnny Naturemade

By John Wetmore (SI 15)

"Shoot me up. Come on, shoot me up!" Johnny growled as Irving stood over him. The older man shook violently and spittle flew from his lips as he spoke. He looked just about crippled. He was tied off already. Tying off was an old and outdated method of injecting chems and stimulants before a match, but with the shaking being so bad, Johnny couldn't get the needle in his arm. This was Johnny Naturemade, one of the oldest and most well respected wrestlers in the Earthside Wrestling Organization.

"Come on man, I need the pump," Johnny begged behind glassy eyes outlined by thousands of tiny lines drawn across purple flesh, like rings around distant planets. It only took him a few seconds to realize Irving wasn't going to help him. He stood up, cursing profanely, conjoining outdated phrases with new sleaze. He performed a cross-generational master class in verbal filth while taking hold of the leather lapel of Irving's vest. Irving turned his head to escape the spit and the rented-sarcophagus stench of Johnny's breath.

"You little bastard," Johnny spat, trying to shake the shorter, younger man, but lacking the strength to really move him. Irving could feel the hands quivering against his chest, the other man's fingers seemed stiff and hollow as he closed his own steel hands over Johnny's. He turned his head to look at him full in the face, his half metal-plated jaw set in a warning grimace. For a moment it seemed like Johnny got the hint and lowered his hands. Irving relaxed, and then Johnny slapped him. It was weak. Irving barely felt it—his head hardly moved. Frustrated, Johnny raised his hand for another, and Irving pushed him.

Johnny fell to the floor. Took a bad spill. It would have looked better in the ring. The pump would have helped too. He was silent. He looked pathetic heaped on the ground. A man once billed in the old days as the strongest natural specimen Earth had to offer.

"Listen man, I'm not going for this shit," Irving said. "You look like you're going to keel. Fucking with more of the pump's gonna kill you."

"What the fuck do you know about what will kill me?" Johnny said, standing slowly, but only managing it up to one knee. Irving offered a hand—Johnny made a noise like he might spit into it. His eyes glowed, but his head shook gently, a slight palsy racked him, another side effect of the industrial pharmaceutical known as pump. Originally developed for public works recovery workers to enter especially irradiated areas with minimal damage, pump was a potent adrenaline surrogate. It also exploded strength and density of muscle tissue on a cellular level, but the damage made it unviable for continued consumption. Even the best-protected corporations stopped using it after seeing some of the effects. Most of the stuff got stowed in warehouses. Nobody knew where Johnny bought his share of the surplus, but he always seemed to nab some. He needed it. His body was falling apart bad, as was the rest of him.

"Just look at you. I'm not gonna be responsible for you dying before you clear the curtain. Either ditch the pump and let me carry you through the match, or..."

"Carry me?" Johnny interjected, "you're gonna carry me, you little tin-plated asshole? I'm a fucking general in there. You can't call the shots on me."

"Just listen for a second..."

"You listen, you little bastard. When The Embalmer met Leper Khan in the Pyramid of Blood match, why do you think they billed me to jump in halfway through? Because the crowd was dead, and they knew nobody could call action with those two guys like me. We had history. So don't even start talking about..."

Now Irving interrupted, "Fine, you call it if you can, I'll follow your lead."

"You son of a bitch, you'll follow *my* lead!" Irving turned away and ran his hands carefully over his slicked-back hair. The older man was irate and hardly listening.

"Can you make it through the one match without it?" He indicated the needle and the rest of the apparatus packed tightly into a raptor-scale grooming case.

Johnny raised a shaking finger. He tried to shout, but he stammered instead, tripping on his words. A bit of yellowish foam formed at the side of his mouth like the residue of a receding tide.

"I'm not going out there like th-th-this," he said. "Not in front of that c-c-c-crowd. That's my people out there!"

Though Irving doubted the fans in the crowd were really Johnny's people (at least the way Johnny meant it) he couldn't deny the fact that his older compatriot looked like a three hundred pound leaking bag of shit. The man before him looked nothing like the beautiful six-six of muscle and bone that had earned the "Naturemade" moniker two dozen years ago.

"I'm gonna have to find somebody else, Johnny. You're not making it out there tonight. Hernandez is gonna have to rebook."

"Are you fucking crazy?"

"Are you? Look at what that shit's doing to you."

Johnny collapsed back into a wooden chair. Irving doubted he could continue to stand. He could see Johnny's rage retreating from him, and the desperation was starting to set in. Then, Johnny changed tactics schizophrenically, looking up with a teary smile.

"What's the matter? Afraid I'll work you too stiff in there?" It was a pathetic attempt at a joke, but Irving smiled. Last thing he wanted to see was the legend Johnny Naturemade crying for drugs in a dirty dressing room.

"I've heard some stories," Irving said. "Nelson said you were the stiffest."

"Nelson said that?" Johnny stuffed his hands between his legs to calm them, but his legs shook too. To hide it, he tapped the toes of his unlaced wrestling boots on the ground. Nelson Morsbach was well known in the EWO as the most legendary of wrestlers, the one with the greatest longevity—a career spanning two hundred and thirty-six years.

"Yeah, he said you could dish it out back in the day," Irving winced for a moment, realizing he'd made an uncouth distinction between the past and the present that might set Johnny flying off the handle again.

"Well, you'd think him having a body he could regenerate in a tank would make him less of a pussy, but I guess not." Irving laughed, genuinely. Johnny looked at him. Irving knew an elaborate rationalization was coming and braced himself for the bump.

"Listen kid," Johnny started, "I know you're concerned about me, but it ain't your responsibility."

"Listen, it's not a matter of responsibility..."

"No, no, I get it, I get it," the older man removed his hands from his lap and wiped at his eyes.

"This shit's no good," Johnny said.

"Mm," Irving agreed.

"Just the same, I need it. Even if I let you carry the match, I wouldn't make it through shaking like a vacuum hose out there."

"Take a drink or something, get steady, walk a few steps, then I'll sneak up and hit you with the zapper. Dek Digital can come out to get revenge for you, it'll be a good work." Johnny looked up at Irving. His keel seemed even and rational; the best Irving had seen the other man look all night.

"These fans didn't come to see no fuckin' Dek Digital," Johnny said. "They don't believe in shit like that. They want to see Johnny Naturemade."

Irving bit his lip. Johnny was right, of course. Dek was a good wrestler with a shitty gimmick. His whole pitch revolved around him projecting holograms of himself and other pseudo-tech garbage. Behind the microphone he pretended to take scientific data on his opponents. A whole lot of smoke and mirrors that led almost invariably to him getting his

ass kicked within an inch of his life. It wasn't that people didn't enjoy watching the intellectual Dek get punished out there—they did—it's just that he wasn't a main event draw. The only one there tonight that could go toe to toe with Irving's Dirty Metal character was Johnny Naturemade. The facts didn't blur Irving's conviction though.

"When you're right, you're right," Irving said, "but it's not just a sense of responsibility or any shit like that. For one thing, I respect you..."

"Oh, cut that shit," Johnny waved a hand dismissively.

"I grew up watching you on the regional circuit."

"That's the old days."

"You were great then. None of this shit," Irving indicated the pump chem and its draconian delivery system. Johnny looked at him seriously, his head gently bobbing up and down like a seagull on the water after a yacht goes by. And the yacht had really gone by.

"You'd be surprised," Johnny said. Irving was silent. Silence between two professional wrestlers is a rare thing. In those moments, the reality of the lives of pretend pugilists hangs stark and undressed.

"One way or another, we gotta do the match," Irving said, "or Hernandez will go fuckin' nuts."

"Only one way," Johnny said, sounding tear-filled, yet also half asleep.

"We can get away with Dek. Hernandez will swallow the loss and nobody will get fired."

"Oh come on, he'll cut anybody, and for less. If you don't make the money you're fucking gone. Don't matter how few good bodies are left on Earth, he'd cut 'em all loose if they don't do the work he wants out there in the dome."

"Maybe it's time then. The big show really ain't as big when you're behind the curtain. There's maybe twenty guys back here in all. It ain't the same with so few places left to travel."

"It looks big though, to them," Johnny nodded his head in the direction of the arena dome where thousands of Earthside-dwelling fans sat stuffed into seats meant for limbs and asses of uniform shape, watching a mid-card match, waiting dully and patiently to see two heroes come out, holler their classic catchphrases, and throw down the gauntlet.

"It's not worth your life though."

"It is."

“Why?”

“Because I’m one of them.”

Irving had a hard time believing that Johnny Naturemade was born Earthside. Although they called him and his once-incredible physique “The Earthside Miracle,” Johnny’s pedigree was questionable. Most of the men who looked even close to as good as Johnny were Floaters born on the colony. Most Floaters who came back to Earth either did it to commute their sentences for misbehavior or merely to make money. Most of the Earthside people were born mutant, and the problem was only getting worse.

“Tell me the truth,” Irving said, “were you really born Earthside?”

“Sure as hell.”

“Then why didn’t you ever leave, go up to one of the colonies? You probably could have played a real sport up there. You must have had money to travel. Didn’t they pay good back in the day, when the wrestlers owned the business?”

“Not like you’d think. Most of it went to buy pump before I knew it.”

“But why not fly up anyway, find a girl or something? You could have any girl down here, I’m sure you’d get most of them up there, too.” Johnny stared into the floor.

“This stuff does bad things to you,” he said simply.

“Oh,” Irving replied.

“You know,” Johnny started, but his voice was coarse and it sounded like speaking itself pained him. He cleared his throat, searching in his mind also for clarity. “There’s a lady here down Earthside, used to be a fan of mine. Caught me crawling out of a bar one night and took care of me. Saw me looking rough, near dead, hung-over, and shaking like a leaf without no pump. I think in that moment she stopped being a fan, but she offered to take me in, take care of me.”

“She sounds alright. She a mutant?”

“Yep, but she ain’t bad,” Johnny shook his head defensively. Irving had forgotten that it didn’t much matter what she looked like, not for Johnny anyway.

“I think you should go find her,” Irving said. “And ditch this whole business.” Johnny looked up, a hopeful glimmer lit somewhere like a candle in a trench.

“You think so?”

"I do, Mr. Naturemade."

Johnny scoffed, "you know my real last name?" Irving shook his head.

"It's Hernandez. No relation to the boss."

"That's unfortunate, at least for your wallet, but you're nothing like that lying, fat, son of a bitch. You'd have torn him in half two years ago. Done us all a favor probably."

"I'm glad to hear you say it." He laughed lightly, then squared his face up. "Listen, my old lady, or I'd like to say, the woman I'll make my old lady, she's in the crowd tonight."

Johnny seemed pretty stable. He stroked his face with a steadied hand.

"Yeah?" Irving asked.

"Yeah," Johnny said. "Listen..." Irving leaned in.

"Just help me make her a fan again for one night, then I'll let myself be taken care of. I'll let Hernandez know I'm done. Like I said, he could squeeze blood from a stone, or pebbles from a tangerine. He probably thinks he pays me too much anyhow." Irving felt himself losing a moral battle, but when he looked at Johnny, he saw hope in his eyes for the first time.

"Just this one night?"

"Yep. Tour ends tonight and this is the last I got of the stuff. If I stay out here I won't even be able to hook up with my supplier again."

"You swear on it, you old son of a bitch?"

"I swear on the Embalmer's catchphrase." Irving raised an eyebrow.

"He used to always say that line, you remember it. They always put it on his t-shirts. *THE EXPIRED NEVER TIRE*." Irving nodded, remembering a memory of The Embalmer's last match. It had been against him.

"Silly as it is, I think it's true. Hell if I ain't pretty damn tired." Irving laughed, and Johnny laughed, too, though the sound was far more unpleasant in his decrepit esophagus.

"Alright," Irving said. "Dirty Metal and Johnny Naturemade, going in for one last showdown."

Irving tightened the band that still hung from Johnny's arm. He helped him with the needle. Though Johnny's fingers twitched, he kept his arm admirably still. After the injection he had a short, but violent seizure. He came out of it smiling, blood really pumping. He got up and started pacing back and forth, did some pushups on the floor. Dirty Metal left him and got ready for his own journey through the curtain.

The time came. Main event. Dirty Metal made his way through the curtain, down the ramp, and into the dome. He grabbed a microphone and threatened the usual violence against whoever dared come down to face the Captain of Scrap, the Creep from the Heap, Dirty Fuckin' Metal.

When Johnny Naturemade's music played, the crowd erupted. The Earthside Miracle came down to the dome also with a microphone in hand, looking freakishly shredded, jacked full of the pump. Everything in him seemed alive. He was a pulsing organ full of nature's mechanical fury.

He pointed at Irving Adams, known in the ring only as Dirty Metal, and issued his old-school catchphrase in the jagged tones of a roughneck veteran.

"You're gonna wish you'd flown when you step in the dome with three-hundred solid of muscle and bone!" The match was a nightmare on both guys. Johnny worked as stiff as he ever had in his career. They covered the dome with blood.

The two men locked up. Crowd went nuts, chanting every sort of epithet, encouragement, and insult imaginable. They could feel that last big sequence coming on, the one that would determine the match's winner. Naturemade was scheduled to take the bout. They butted bloody foreheads against one another, arms locked around each other's necks.

"You see her out there?" Irving whispered.

"See who?" Johnny whispered hoarsely, jerking Irving around and pressing him into a corner of the dome. He proceeded to rub a forearm and elbow across the younger man's face.

"Your lady," Irving said. The forearm came away. He caught a glimpse of the look on Johnny's battered face, the briefest interruption in a snarl.

Then Johnny hit his finishing maneuver—The Natural Disaster. He hit it flawlessly, all the raw power of twenty years ago, though as Irving noticed, about three minutes too early. The crowd was feverish, but they could have made them sicker. Then, Johnny Naturemade got on top to pin Dirty Metal. Irving carried the man's power and his weight, which felt like the three hundred solid of an age long gone.

"Look anywhere kid," Johnny croaked from the side of his mouth into Irving's ear, "and you can see her wiggling in her seat. Hear her screaming my name? She's a goddamn fanatic, and she's taking real good care of me."

Prose Nonfiction Winner

Dr. Oz Is My Enemy

By Susan Laurençot (SI 15)

This is not the beginning of this story. If you were to chart the story on a typical plot graph, I suppose this would turn up in the "Falling Action" downward slope. It's not the resolution, and the exposition, quite frankly, is entirely out of my reach. So the exposition you will have to piece together, just as my sisters and I have had to do. Piece together the setting, the characters, the conflict that led to my mother's schizophrenia (a word I still have to look up to spell), and jump right into the falling action.

So, as the title suggests, Dr. Oz is the enemy. Not for what the Supreme Court has chided him for—promises of youth and weight loss. No, he is the enemy because, now keep this out of the press, he channels my father. Yes. He is the *Long Island Medium* of CBS to my mother. He, being simply a vehicle of protection, is my father's guiding voice. He warns her that she has had a stroke, that she is experiencing dehydration, that perhaps she is still having symptoms of ovarian cancer. He warns her of the dangers of the air, of toxic water, to be careful of, well, of everything.

I hate Dr. Oz, but I watch him with a pen and paper in hand, taking notes on his latest discovery, on his guests, on his philosophy of long life. Because I know soon, maybe on Monday, or Wednesday, or God forbid on a weekend, I will get the call: My mother is having the stroke...my mother is dehydrated...my mother must have cancer...my mother, my mother, my sweetie, my darling.

And off to the hospital she will go, giddy with an excitement that only mental illness can weave. And my sisters and I divvy up the time spent in the ER, then sometimes in the hospital room, so that none of us will take the brunt and we can keep the sisterly bonds between us as free as we can from bean counting (*I went last time; I went over at 12:30 a.m. because she thought she heard a bomb; I sat in the ER for 3 hours because her gums hurt*). We try our best. It isn't easy. And honestly, my oldest sister does take the brunt. My mother insists on this.

Recently my mother, Jenny (an Americanization of Giovanna), has become reflective on her mental illness. "They keep talking to me about euthanasia," she tells me one Sunday afternoon. "What is euthanasia? Isn't that when you put down an animal because it's too sick?"

"Yes," I tell her, "That's what it is." And then I ask the "Who is telling you?" question. Part of me is annoyed. I'm sorry. You grow up with this and see how empathetic you feel. Part of me is dying with pain. Part of me is humored. I know it's not funny. But without seeing some humor in this, we would not have survived.

"Oh," she's irritated with me, "I KNOW it's just the voices. They're in my head. But they keep saying there are vapors in the air because they're all trying to euthanize me." Now she's mad. "YOU! You and your sisters and the nurses. That Barbara. She hates coming here."

Barbara is a home companion. She is right up there with Mother Teresa in my book. She has been my mother's companion for 10 years. I reassure her that no one is trying to euthanize her. We think about it, sure, but we'd never actually DO it for Christ's sake. I feel an urgent need to apologize again. Try it sometime, this life of mine and my sisters. So often we are asked to walk in the shoes of the one who is ill. Walk in a caregiver's straitjacket for just a day. It's tightened, by the way, daily by the illness. Tightened until sometimes it's almost impossible to take a breath. The world will never be the same once you put it on. I promise you.

"Mom, if you know they're just voices, can you ask them to be quiet?" She's so annoyed, I'm actually a little afraid. I used to tell friends that going over to my mother's is a lot like coming upon a fallen beehive in the middle of a trail surrounded by poison ivy. Stepping on it has two possible results: 1—the hive is empty. You get to travel the path more, or less, taken. No questions. 2—thousands of angry bees swarm your feet and legs, paralyzing you right then and there. You want to run. You should run. But you just stand there until they stop attacking and you hope you survive. "I mean, could you ask them to say things to you like, 'Jenny, it's time to get up and eat some chocolate.' Where are your voices asking you to eat more chocolate?"

"I can't eat chocolate. It gives me a stomachache."

"Chips, then. Tell them you want chips, not vapors." She laughs. I'm relieved. The bees are retreating without stinging.

"I'm very close to being schizophrenic, you know. I can't always tell what's going on—who's talking to me."

"Really?" I say. Ok, even I, at the time, know this is a lame response. I want to change the subject. I don't want to talk about this with her. I don't want her perspective on it.

One time we tried to have the medication conversation with her. "All you girls want is a drugged up mama." And yes, that is all we ever wanted. We loved the Stelazine as much as she did, but it went out of fashion and she wouldn't take anything else.

"I think I made life hard for your father." So the connection between this and euthanasia is punishment. It's hard to grow up with saints and grottos without some side effect—especially when demons live inside your brain.

"You made life hard for each other."

"Did we have a happy marriage, do you think?"

"No. I don't think either of you were happy. But, man, did you guys ever love each other." This brings a genuine smile to her face. "You know, Mom, I always thought of the two of you like two mean dogs locked in a pen." Another smile. Her smiles are like getting

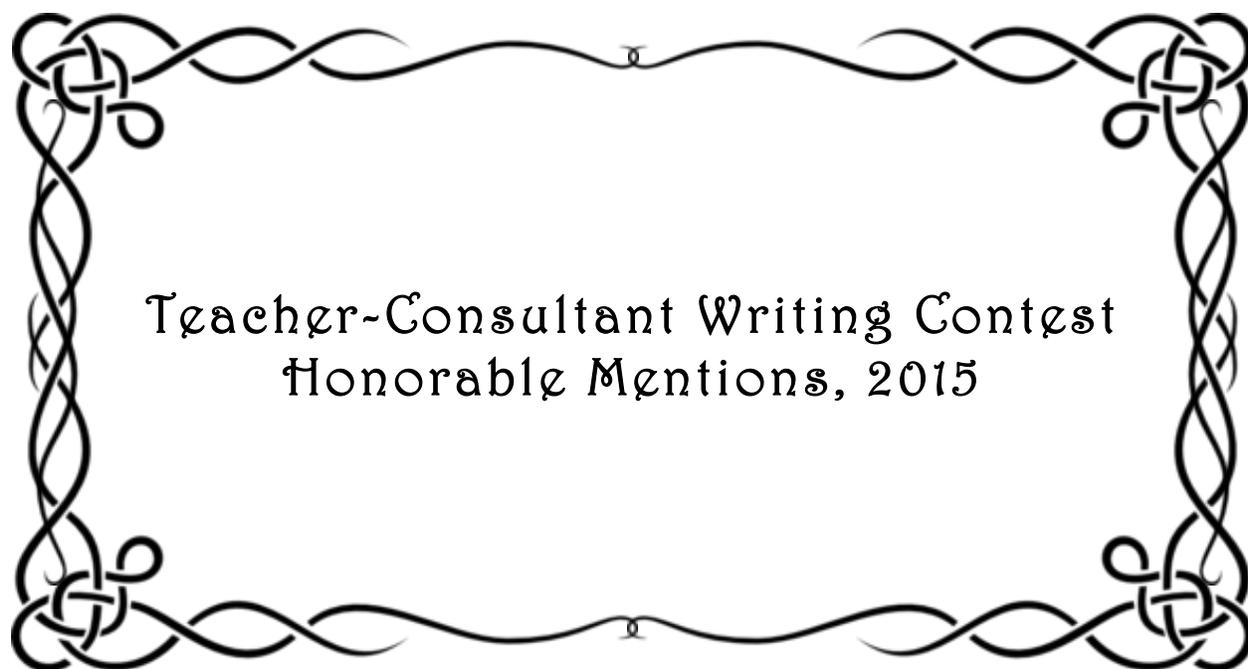
an award on field day for me. I'm not athletic, so they were rare, and really hard to come by.

"Yes! We were!" She laughs, "We were two mean dogs, fighting all the time. He spit at me." I don't know if this is real or not, but it could be. "But I sure gave it to him sometimes. I hope he knows I loved him. I know that he's really dead. I don't think he's hiding anymore."

A very sad aftermath of my father's death was that my mother thought he hadn't really died, that he'd just left her for a better life. But now she sees him. She knows that he's coming because he needs our prayers. He's trapped in Limbo and can't get to Heaven. So she's going to pray him there. This is why we had to wish her a Happy Father's Day. To honor him and help him get to Heaven.

Happy Father's Day, Mom.

This is why he uses Dr. Oz to speak to her. Through the television. Just after Scot Haney on *Better Connecticut*, and just before the news. Channel 3—the conveyor of the spirits.



Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest
Honorable Mentions, 2015

Poetry - Honorable Mention

I Will Carry You

By Amy Nocton (SI 14)

Today I will carry you
in my fingertips and in the orange sunrise and in the soles

of my arched feet.
I will wear you in the wisps of my frustrated

hair and the enamel
of my teeth and in the worn clothes you gifted softly.

Today I will imbibe the amber shadows
and salt spilled for you and I will find you in the honeysuckle

that I have not, but know.
Tomorrow the echo of your voice will soothe my breast,

shake laughter,
cry memory, shimmer joy, meet rage, reveal nothing.

Poetry - Honorable Mention

Moves Sky in Three

By Amy Nocton (SI 14)

Iridescent green
 collides violently
 against blue
 flash of pink
 quicksilver against
 sky

One thousand
 war drums
 beat noiselessly
 beneath the buzz
 of wings

So, too,
 hammer hits
 anvil
 my pugnacious
 impatient, battle
 worn-heart
 ...

Iridescent green
 slides seamlessly
 into blue
 flash of pink
 fleeting against
 sky

One thousand
 heartbeats quiet
 beneath the buzz
 of wings working madly
 to stay
 still

Emerald vistas
 and seas bejeweled
 a visit brief
 moody clouds
 sweet nectar soothes
 my turbulent soul
 ...

Iridescent green
sneaks surreptitiously
into blue
flash of pink
moves
sky

One thousand
beats compressed
in one heart minute
held hushed
beneath wings'
hum

Slow summer morn
before buzz
and rush begins
memory's reverie
recalls your touch
soft

Poetry ~ Honorable Mention

Orchard in Winter

By Catherine DeNunzio-Gabordi (SI 83)

The morning I heard the men sing in this orchard
I had come to be alone. I was the first for pick-your-own.
While it's winter in the photograph—
see the snow that holds the details close like gossip?
it was autumn when I heard them.
I chose this suede mat to match
the texture of the sky that day.
The grey-blue of the frame's to help you know
the longing in their song: to rest in orchard shade.
The wood is of the trees themselves, terrible
with knowing. Their limbs were low,
their fruit was ripe, the air was growing thinner.
But the photo is the thing: you're looking down
at apple trees, these rows and rows.
They reach across the picture plane like
ribs from one side only—I'd have to guess Adam's,
the singing was so low. And there, the solitary
pruner's left his footprints in the snow.
He goes about his work now like a voice,
all greys and blues and echoes. And for the tenor
of the men—they pick and sing back the shade—
the snow provides a kind of pallet for the wait.
Remember that you're looking from above—
all you can do is watch through the glass.

Poetry - Honorable Mention

A Wish Marrow Might Make

By Joan Muller (SI 10)

Imagine you have never seen a bird before,
then look, one on that low limb,
a plain sparrow,
a small, feather-clad jest.
There's a sudden startle of wings,
that's all, just wings
beating quick stalls
in your breath,
your bones newly hollowed,
and your weightless song
about your longing
for the sky's blue nutrition.

Prose Fiction - Honorable Mention

GATE

By Robert Pirrie (SI 14)

Harry depended a little too much on the shut-off circuit of his coffee pot. He would rush out the door in the mornings, tie draped around his neck, coffee slopping onto his hand, neglecting the appliance that made the slopping possible. Overburdened from overuse, the circuit failed one day. The heating element, which was a bit too close to the myriad of papers and notices Harry had stuck to the refrigerator, somehow got into its primitive electric mind that it should work harder to heat up the now-dry dregs of coffee in the pot; all it succeeded in doing was lighting a leaflet about arts and crafts on fire. Harry's house burned to the ground, taking the fridge and offending coffee pot with it.

This might have been thought calamitous in subsequent days, were it not for the fact that as the backhoe scooped up the final charred remnants of Harry's home, a small gate was revealed, embedded in the floor of his cellar.

It might seem like an oversight to call it a gate; surely this was a trapdoor or hatch or some other such opening. Yet this was not so; it was an actual gate, made of wood, white and somewhat glossy in appearance. It was flush with the floor, so flush that as Harry ran his hand over it, he could feel no ridge, no change in level, just the change of texture as his hand passed from smoothly painted picket to rough concrete.

There was no handle or latch. When Harry tapped it with his toe, it did not move.

The gate did not seem to have been damaged by the fire or the backhoe, though everything in the vicinity was incinerated and the backhoe shovel was many pounds heavier in weight than such a gate might be expected to withstand. Harry, standing a few feet away, could clearly see darkness between the pickets. The backhoe operator would not come near. Harry directed an enquiring look at the man, who stood sweating in his hoodie and ripped jeans.

"Don't ask me," the man said.

"How and when did this appear?" asked Harry, with an emphasis on the word *this*.

"Don't ask me," the man repeated. "It was just there," he added, as though he expected to be blamed for the revealing of so unexpected an object. The man, who had moved his backhoe away upon spotting the gate, jumped into the operator's seat, moved further away, turned and lined up his enormous piece of earth moving equipment with the tractor-trailer on which it had been transported. The tractor-trailer driver looked back at Harry with a look that said he had a crowbar in his unseen hand; he gave off the air of someone who knows there will be trouble.

"Here," said the operator. He stretched his hand out as far as it would go, handed Harry a bill. Harry, confused, took it, turned around, and noticed that the operators of the other

house wrecking machines were also backing off, loading up the bulldozers, getting into pick-up trucks.

"But you're not done!" Harry said, his voice faint and struggling to punch through the knot of anxiety building in his chest.

"Yes, we are," said the backhoe operator. He loaded his machine on the trailer, got in next to the driver, and drove away. Harry looked around him, every possible part of him drooping—jaw, hands, shoulders—as the others, without another word, left the scene.

Harry spent days looking for someone who would come finish the job, but word seemed to have spread about the gate in the floor. As soon as Harry, on the phone with various contractors, said his address, the invariable response would be, "Sorry, we can't take the job." It seemed odd that no one would make any sort of excuse—the refusal was always direct, without prevarication. Soon even the name Harold Jameson would be greeted with a hang-up and dial tone.

Harry wasn't entirely sure why he got such responses, or even why the first company had left so precipitously. Living in a rented trailer at the edge of his property, he had ample time after work to look at the picket gate. He hadn't ever noticed a gate in the floor of his basement before, but on thinking back, it occurred to him that there had been a kind of plinth at the foot of the basement stairs, a box of sorts which was totally unnecessary to the design of a typical set of basement steps, but had most certainly been placed there to cover the gate. At any rate, it was just a gate, which for Harry gave off no particular feeling of dread, or awe, or excitement, or anything else. It was in a strange place admittedly, but by appearance it was nothing more interesting or offensive than might be found in front of any mildly tasteless raised ranch in any town in the tri-state area.

There was one quality the gate possessed, though, that gave Harry pause. There was nothing behind the gate. Nothing is a strange word—it comes with certain implications. Most people don't give the word a second thought—nothing means nothing—but if one is to actively contemplate the word, as Harry was doing, there is still a *something* that occupies the place we call nothing. Vacuum, darkness, even the word nothingness—all of these are concepts, all of them inhabit the space called nothing. Yet, for the gate embedded in Harry's cellar floor, just in back of each perfectly painted piece of seemingly ordinary wood, existence ceased to be. There was no vacuum, there was no dark hole dimly lit by the surrounding light of the now open-to-the sky basement, there was no portal to another dimension, there was no *place*. Everything that could exist, or could be imagined to exist, or could be thought to represent absence in the human mind, stopped at the bottom edge of the gate.

Oddly, this cessation of the very concept of essence wasn't impenetrable. Harry took up the habit of dangling various objects from a piece of string—bolts, nails, bits of popcorn—and slipping them between the slats of the gate. At the precise lower edge of each piece of wood, the object would pass into non-existence. This non-existence wasn't particularly odd looking. It was as though the object was cut off at the borderline, razor-sharp. Nails

lost their heads, the bolts would look shorter and shorter as they lost their threads, the popcorn—well, the popcorn would look cut in half. Yet, when each object was raised, it would become whole again, complete, with no discernible change. Harry even tried eating one of the pieces of popcorn. It tasted utterly normal.

Harry didn't live in a sparsely populated part of town. There were neighbors; Harry, a fairly typical American, didn't know any of them but one. Jane, an irascible older woman living in the house across the street, had been watching recent proceedings with interest. As fate and local geography would have it, her property was much higher than Harry's—it was set back a bit from the street, partway up a hill. She could see right down into his property, and used her vantage point to provide Harry with commentary on whatever he might be doing outside on any given day.

Jane had copper hair, a voice permanently imbued with smoke, and a fairly large number of body parts—fingers and teeth chief among them—colored brownish yellow. She was coarseness, candor and empathy in one personality—she would rip Harry's ears off with her language, harass him over the phone if he turned up his stereo, bring his garbage out to the curb if he forgot, and leave odd objects on his porch railing, such as birds' nests and hubcaps. Harry liked her, but didn't know what to do with her.

Jane would come out for a smoke every evening, by the clock. Lately, given his latest activities, she'd used the opportunity to lay into Harry.

"What are you fucking around with, Jameson?" she'd bellow from her porch, her ample posterior ensconced in a plastic-webbed aluminum frame chair. "I can feel it from here. Don't mess with it."

"Good evening, Mrs. Levinson," Jameson would call out, and then get back to poking things between the slats of the gate.

It had been two weeks since the wrecking company left. It didn't seem as though there'd be any particular end to Harry's fascination with the gate.

"You have no goddam clue what you're doing, do you?" Jane called out one evening. She dragged heavily on her Camel. "The last guy, he had no clue either."

Harry looked up, startled. He had been sitting idly, merely contemplating the gate, lost in thoughts of unnamed places and holes with no meaning. He had never heard her talk about the man he had bought the house from. He jumped up, lost his balance a little.

"What clue? What clue didn't he have?" Harry blurted out.

Jane looked back at Harry, sharpness in her eyes, quickly replaced by languid indifference. She waved her cigarette airily, got up, shuffled away, let the screen door slam behind her. Harry looked after her, not noticing the tension in his hands and the sinews of his neck. Then, shifting just as quickly as Jane, he shrugged. He sat back down on

the floor of the basement, got out a pencil, watched its eraser disappear, its point, its eraser, its point.

It so happened one evening that Harry, in the course of playing around with a heavier object (a piece of lead sheathing), lost his balance. The string from which the piece of lead dangled slipped from his fingers, and the lead silently became a permanent piece of the void. More frighteningly, Harry's stumble brought his hands down heavily on the gate. No finger slipped between the cracks, and the gate remained solid—In fact, Harry jammed one wrist rather badly—but Harry suddenly found himself staring straight down into the gap between the slats. Previously, he hadn't ever looked straight down—this would have meant doing what he was doing, placing his hands on the surface of the gate.

What he saw was not nothing.

Jane chose that moment to come out onto her porch. She belched, pulled out a lighter, flicked it habitually, and spotted Harry. Harry was still looking down at the gate, his hands directly upon it. He appeared to be breathing in short gasps, like someone fighting asthma in a sanatorium. His shoulders were bunched up around his ears. Jane let fly.

"I TOLD YOU!" she yelled. "I TOLD YOU NOT TO MESS AROUND!" She was angry and fearful and full of a grim satisfaction at his plight; her empathetic side was not in evidence. Her voice took on an up and down cadence as she yelled, emphatic but not tuneful. "WHAT did I SAY, I TOLD you NOT to, I said you had no FUH-king clue, you're just like him, you have no goddam brain in your GODDAM head. And I am NOT GOING TO RESCUE YOU! I AM NOT GOING TO COME OVER THERE! NO GODDAM WAY!"

Harry continued to look down. He did not hear her, did not see her. For all intents and purposes, Jane had no existence at that moment. Nothing outside the gate did. Non-existence had been, somehow, transferred to the outside, transferred *outside the gate*. And Harry was the only one who knew it.

Jane stamped her foot. Her eyes were wet; she could feel her bladder wanting to let go. "FUCK!" she shouted and grabbed a broom from her porch. She set up a little chant, danced from foot to foot, wheezed the chant past her compromised lungs. "Shitshitshit", she chanted. "shitshitshitSHIT." And then she plunged in. Running as fast as her lungs and legs would let her, she crossed the street, clambered down into the basement, walloped Harry in the head with the broom, and just as quickly ran back to her porch, gasping for air. She sat down, her hand on her heart, pushing out strenuous breaths. She looked down at Harry. Harry, who had fallen flat on his behind, looked up at her. His temples were full of blood. He bit a knuckle to calm down, felt the pain, looked at it as though surprised when he saw his own teeth marks. He looked over at Jane again. He waved a hand briefly, weakly, then fell over backward in a dead faint.

Jane put her hands to her face for a moment, removed them, and shook the sweat from the edges of her fingers. She didn't bother to look over at Harry, didn't try to revive him.

Trembling, she got to her feet with the feeling that her legs had somehow gained an extra thirty pounds. She shuffled inside her house, didn't let the screen door slam. Harry lay on his former basement floor. A gentle rain began to fall, and the dusk closed in.

Harry learned how to use a backhoe, well enough, by taking a few lessons at a tech academy on the other side of the state. He rented an appropriately sized piece of equipment, awkwardly scraped up dirt and rocks from various parts of his property, dumped it all in the basement, got in his car and drove away, abandoning the backhoe. The trailer company took a loss on the trailer. A few weeks after Harry left, Jane had a heart attack and went to live with her mother in Florida. The taxes were never paid on the property, and the town was unable to trace Harry's whereabouts. The property reverted to the town. No realty firm would touch it, and after languishing on the books for three years at the asking price of one dollar, the town took the property file and quietly misplaced it.

Prose Nonfiction - Honorable Mention

Beyond the Rainbow

By Tiffany Harvison (SI 15)

My brother wanted to be Dorothy from the first time he watched *The Wizard of Oz*; complete with her symmetrical plaited hair hanging limply on her shoulders and her tidy blue gingham dress. He became her, skipping on the imaginary yellow brick road he had created in our living room, singing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" with the gusto of a seasoned soprano. I knew him so well on those lazy summer days when his three-year-old world included flying monkeys and talking Tin-men. I knew who he was in his heart and who he'd become many years later when the whiskers on his face were not imaginary and his love of show tunes matured to include more than just Judy Garland's famous ballad.

At sixteen, he was full of teen angst and obviously homosexual. He wasn't overtly mingling in the LGBT community, but he accepted who he was and proudly admitted this to me. I supported him wholeheartedly, but I knew that his future proclamations would be more challenging. He came out to our mom and dad one ordinary day, stating his preference like a regular diner refusing the maple syrup at the local pancake house. He was clear, concise, and to-the-point..."Mom, Dad, I'm gay." Of course, Mom's religious air of content obviously dismissed his admitted self. She narrowed her eyebrows and rolled her eyes adolescently, while Dad angrily seemed to ignore the entire conversation. Mom insisted she knew more about what love was than a "teenager." He couldn't "know" that he was gay at only sixteen. He didn't "know" anything, so she thought. His harrowing tears meant nothing to her that day.

But, they meant something to me. I was twenty-three and thought I had a great handle on the world, yet had never done anything that took true courage. His confession had impressed upon me his immense, unrelenting bravery. He was just a kid, but he had inched out onto the edge of a mile-high skyscraper and had the guts to step off into the unknown. He knew that the reception of his coming out would presumably include tears, anger, slammed doors, "prayers" for his soul, and a denial so profound that it would take years to rectify. But, he spoke. He revealed his new self with pride. He came out to friends and family, spoke honestly about his feelings, and knew when to hold his tongue as older relatives said he "just needed to meet the right girl." He was who he was, and no amount of rejection could change that.

As the years have aged us, I've wondered when the time would come for him to meet someone. Someone special. I imagined how it would be difficult for him to trust our family to ever meet a boyfriend. The inevitable evening begins with Dad sitting with pursed lips, refusing to make eye contact. Mom inappropriately quotes the Bible or refers to some ridiculously conservative idea. "You know, the Bible is the word of God. And God is not wrong about these things." They awkwardly stare, judge, or dismiss his new love. While my sister and I try to welcome him enough to put his worries at ease. I shake his hand and love his warm smile, his protective arm draped around my brother's shoulders. Would he laugh at our stupid jokes? Would he feign comfort while shuddering at the thought of

ever returning?

Last week, when the Supreme Court announced the landmark decision for Marriage Equality, I sat at my computer dumbfounded. My eyes welled with tears, and I immediately thought of my brother. He who grew up in a time when being gay became fashionable but not respected, who had imagined the possibility of marriage since CT legalized it in 2008 when he was only the tender age of 21, who felt social acceptance in his circle of friends, but never really found it at home. Before this decision, I knew that any future he had would be restricted by unfair and biased laws. I've never felt the power of our government to change the future as I did at that moment. Although he had never carried picket signs outside of the capital or written blogs on the homophobia exhibited by the Republican Party, this decision mattered to him and to his future.

The unbelievable coincidence was that we were meeting for dinner the very next day. It would be the dinner I had anticipated for years. I didn't believe this incredible turn of events could happen, or that these two perfect moments could happen within 24 hours of each other. My brother took another proverbial leap and brought his hunky new boyfriend, David, to Mom and Dad's. My familiar anxiety resurfaced as I walked in the house. I waited for the eye rolling, the stares, and the yelling to emerge. But, seated on a rickety folding chair in our crowded dining room, I witnessed a miracle. He completely charmed the family. Mom smiled (gasp!), Dad added to the conversation (What?) and everyone was at ease. No one minded that they clutched hands lovingly while chatting about their recent adventure in New York. He adorably connected to my daughter, Melody, even crawling on the floor to play with her after our meal. I smirked to myself picturing "Uncle David" becoming a regular fixture at our family meals. There was a light at the end of this long tunnel for my brother.

You never know what moments will affect you. But sometimes, life takes your breath away...when you know that something is burned into your memory. I'll never forget that little boy clomping around my childhood home in ruby slippers. He walked through his early life searching for his way home, and somehow it just appeared. The future is truly bright, where happy, little bluebirds fly.



2015 Summer Institute Fellows

“Can I Get a Refund?”

By Bronwyn Monahan (SI 15)

I'm not sure what's up with all these educational presentations. Are we really expected to utilize all of this idealistic stuff next fall? I didn't sign up for the Kumbaya camp. I signed up for the Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute, WRITING being the operative word. But now I sit before you all having to listen to your ideas about what I need to change in MY classroom. My classroom is perfect.

One of the “action research inquiries” was about humor in the classroom, which has to be hands down, the most ridiculous, unprofessional, immature thing I can think of. A classroom needs to be completely silent. There is no time for joking, laughing, or even smiling. My students are in class to learn, and that is no laughing matter at all. Humor? How terrifying. I could never teach at a school that allows that nonsense.

I wish I could say I was hearing things last week, but I wasn't. I clearly heard someone say, are you ready for this one? That lessening student anxiety needs to be a priority for teachers. What? Why? What about me? What about my anxiety? Oh no, I am expected to worry about making sure the students feel comfortable and not anxiety-ridden. And how does that relate to my classroom? It doesn't. How does a student's level of anxiety have anything to do with their performance? They need to calm down, figure out their issues on their own time and stop acting like anxiety is the reason they are not comfortable in my class. No excuses. They act like there is research that students perform better when they feel relaxed and comfortable!

Another inquiry project discussed how it is absolutely essential to write along with the students. All I could think of is, how could that possibly help, and why would I ever want to partake in such a sophomoric activity? I have done my time writing, I am the expert in writing, I will tell them when to write and what to write. It's called an assignment, people, and the students in my classroom will complete the assignment as instructed! I will tell them one time what to do, I will not show them what to do, I absolutely refuse. We are talking about high school students, correct? And I'm being asked to write with them? Absolutely not. Never going to happen.

Then I heard all about choice. I should give the students choice? They have two choices. Come to my class, or do not come to my class. What other choices could they possibly need or want? Next thing you know people will be encouraging teachers to let students choose the books they want to read. Not in my classroom. And after that I'll be told about some best teaching practice involving choice during writing. As if the idea of choosing their own books isn't ridiculous enough, this is even worse. They will write ALONE and they will write either argumentative essays or research papers. And not those darn four-sided waste of time argumentative essays. FIVE paragraph, formulaic essays. In fact, if you must know, I require the hamburger approach. I also like the three topics they will be writing about listed in the introduction, and I insist the last paragraph begin, “in conclusion”.

Speaking of...In conclusion, I would like you all to know that I could have been at home purchasing lesson plans and assessments from companies off of the World Wide Web. Now that's an effective use of my time and money. All this other stuff is absolutely preposterous, so much so, I want to know "CAN I GET A REFUND?"

Disclaimer: The CWP was fantastic, and all of the presentations were spectacular. I am a true believer in all of the areas mentioned in the essay, so in case you were wondering, it is meant to be humorous!

Howl

With acknowledgements to Allen Ginsberg

By Mary Katherine Hinman (SI 15)

Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we are going through hell.

I

I saw the best minds of my Summer Institute destroyed by Knoblauch, confused, hysterical talented,
 dragging themselves through the UConn streets at dawn looking for the Austin building,
 angel-headed teachers burning for the ancient educational connection to the right brain
 in the machinery of Thesis,
 who excitement and caffeine and hollow-eyed and tired sat up soaking in the
 supernatural wisdom of Thomas Newkirk rifling through the tons of research across cities
 contemplating creativity,
 who bared their brains to peers under the projector and saw literary angels dancing
 through presentations illuminated,
 who ate breakfast in a meat locker or drank wine in Stern Lounge, death, or purgatoried
 their writing night after night,
 with dreams, with degrees, with grading nightmares, alcohol and cardstock and endless
 data,
 who talked continuously one hundred thirty three hours from conferences to reflections to
 Calkins to Benton to Kittle to the *Teacher Wars*,
 who let themselves be freed in the class by saintly innovators, and screamed with joy,
 who taught in the morning in the evenings in classrooms and the grass of public schools
 and associations scattering their knowledge freely to whomever come who may,
 who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over creative lesson plans which in the yellow
 morning were deemed proficient,
 to recreate the syntax and measure of student achievement and stand before you
 motivated, creative and intelligent yet shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out
 the soul to conform to the tyranny of data in his endless evaluation,
 with the absolute heart and love for kids pouring out of their own bodies good to teach a
 thousand years.

II

What sphinxes of knowledge and encouragement opened their skulls and filled up their
 brains and imagination?
 Jason! Kelly! Jane! Barreca! Protocols and unobtainable vertical alignment! Bronwyn
 screaming for her sweatshirt! Boys fixing Chevys! Writers weeping in the circle!
 Knoblauch! Knoblauch! Nightmare of Knoblauch! Knoblauch the loveless! Mental
 Knoblauch! Knoblauch the dry explainer of pedagogy!
 Jane the incomparable techie! Kelly the good cop, soulful sage and explainer of KFKD!
 Jason whose network is endless! Jason the vast wealth of knowledge!

Linda whose mind is pure brilliance! Becca whose writing made everyone cry! Tiffany whose students are Fantastic! Abby whose perseverance is an inspiration! Marty whose ear is an open door!

Teachers whose lives touch a thousand malleable students! Teachers whose classrooms stand in the long halls like endless Havens! Teachers whose students dream and grow through the year! Teachers whose passion and insight crown the profession!

John whose love is science fiction and T-shirts! Grett whose soul is witticisms and jokes!

Susan whose writing is the specter of genius! Anastasia whose last word is always Finland! Babacar whose name is not that difficult to spell!

Sara who entered professional development early! Rafe in whom everyone detects impressive writing! Kaylee who welcomed me out of my natural shyness! Lauren whom I strive to become! Wake up in August! Light streaming out of the sky!

Dreams! adorations! illuminations! Valentines! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!

Real holy laughter in the Stern room! They heard it all! the wild eyes! the holy yells! They bade farewell! They walked off of campus! to A-Lot! waving! carrying backpacks! Down the hill! into the street!

III

Participants! I'm with you in Hartford

where you're smarter than I am

I'm with you in Bulkeley

where you must feel very young

I'm with you in Rockville

where you pass on worldly knowledge

I'm with you in Granby

where you've inspired your many students

I'm with you in Coventry

where you strive to be excellent

I'm with you in Colchester

where you both are great teachers who share copies of textbooks

I'm with you in Norwich

where your classroom must be inviting and exciting

I'm with you in Newington

where camp songs are plenty and reading skills learned

I'm with you in Suffield

where I'm still not sure if you're being 100% serious

I'm with you in Windham

where you care for the well-being of your students the learners of English

I'm with you in retirement

where you can't seem to stay retired

I'm with you in Montville

where Dr. Oz and Picasso are enemies and assholes

I'm with you in Woodstock

where fifty more years will never lessen your passion for your students

I'm with you in Simsbury

where your writing center will be one for other schools to envy

I'm with you in Storrs

where we wake up electrified out of the institute by our own program's power roaring
over the burnout school years bring to drop angelic bombs of insight and
writing imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-spangled
shock of teacher-leadership the teaching war is on O cohort forget your mountain
of textbooks we're free

I'm with you in Storrs

in my dreams you walk proudly from a summer-journey on the highway to authentic
assessment without fear to the door of my classroom in the Westport 'burb.

hey baby

By Anastasia DiFedele-Dutton (SI 15)

"I don't understand this conundrum"
 he declares, not looking up, lazily scrolling up and down on his iPad.
 the ceiling fan whirs
 He is still in bed, smelling of sleep
 His hair is disheveled
 Mine is freshly shampooed and deeply, hydratingly conditioned
 Oiled up, curl cream tamed and frizz free, for now
 My legs are razored clear,
 My skin is lathered and rinsed and lubed up
 My teeth brushed and bleached
 My face has been scrubbed raw
 I am deodorized
 I have at least another 30 minutes ahead of readying myself for this world.
 My fingers caress the familiar patterns of the bottles and tubes, old friends
 Eye cream patted, Moisturizer with sunblock, tinted CC cream
 I layer on the treatments in an effort to ward off time
 Mineral powder
 Promise and promise of youth
 light blush on my cheeks
 light eye shadow
 lightly curled eyelashes
 light mascara
 (Not too much)
 I read somewhere that blush and mascara make you look as if in heat-
 eyes widened, flushed skin (Not for good girls)
 My armor is almost complete
 My closet taunts me,
 I have a skirt *and* pants laid out
 Music and eggs frying waft up the stairs, he is ready
 I am not
 Who to be today?
 Specific rules to this game
 Too short, too sloppy, too revealing, too comfortable
 Nothing too edgy
 Pearl studs for workdays
 Low heels that don't flatter my legs
 Not too much color
 I've never gotten it quite right
 A hem is always falling out
 A sweat stain emerging
 A hair elastic always on my wrist
 Nail polish chewed off

Eyes down on the street *hey baby*
One hand on my phone; always told
distract them, stay alert
Attention unsolicited. *Please don't notice me*
walk faster

He will never understand my conundrum.

Write About Me

By Rebecca DiPinto (SI 15)

"Write about me," she says.

My younger sister puts down her book and lobs a sweet half-smile over to me with her laughing eyes, like that settles my writer's block. Like it's easy. She rolls her eyes at my distraught expression and looks back down at her latest summer read, which in turn gives me a chance to look at her.

From this angle, sitting cross-legged on her carpeted bedroom floor, I see her sprawled out on her bed, lost in her reading as usual. I often find her like this, lounging with her nose buried in the crisp sheets of some obscure YA novel or in the musty pages of a first edition canonized classic. She rarely discriminates when it comes to books. She will read any book, anytime, anywhere. I admire that about her.

I remember one summer when she contracted a particularly potent strain of bookwormitis. It was 2005. I rarely saw her because she spent so much time locked up in her stuffy room devouring novels and only emerging from the depths of her literary lair when the bounty of book knowledge and entertainment were no longer enough to satisfy her literal hunger. While she found a snack in the kitchen, I snuck into her room and captured her stash of books. Then I promised to keep my hostages hidden until she agreed to settle the ransom with an afternoon of bonding time.

We strapped on our hand-me-down roller blades but forwent the other padded equipment; we were too cool for wrist guards. We raced each other down the driveway, laughing and shouting and spinning and rolling. I remember feeling, the freedom of summertime when the wind whipped my hair around my face. I also remember that same feeling lodging itself in my throat and choking me as I saw her stumble over a chunk of asphalt from the edge of the driveway, a bit of Mr. Michaud's curb knocked loose by a reckless UPS truck. She toppled, and I watched the shock in her eyes as she plummeted to the pavement. Her left arm moved out to break the fall, and break it did. I think I cried more than she did over that broken arm. I felt guilty long after she got over my book thievery and forced playtime, but she spent most of the rest of the summer reading, and I never bothered her about it again.

Instead, I made a habit of joining her in her room with my own books, where we enjoyed each others' silent company as we got lost in our own worlds, much like we are doing now, her reading for pleasure, me writing (or, as the case is, avoiding writing) for class. I focus my wandering mind on the present now, gaze lovingly at my sister, and realize how much I cherish these quiet moments in her company.

She shifts her position on the bed, rolling onto her side so I can see subtle facial expressions reflect her reactions as she interprets the story unfolding before her eyes. Those eyes flicker back and forth across the page with breathtaking speed, active pupils hugged by gorgeous pale blue frames. Her lashes are dark and thick without the help of mascara. I

despise her natural beauty, but accept some smug solace in seeing her curly brown hair frizz in the August humidity. Even as that thought starts to take shape in my mind, another vicious bite of jealousy revokes it when I think about how crafty she is with bobby pins and her ability to whip up a gorgeous up-do in a matter of minutes.

I am yanked from my shallow musings about our physical comparisons when a quiet snort signals that she must be reading a funny line of text, and I watch the corners of her mouth creep into the slightest smile. She used to be self-conscious about the small gap between her front teeth, but she's accepted it now and is all the more beautiful for embracing all of her features with unapologetic enthusiasm.

All things considered, it was probably camp where she really got the chance to build that confidence. Sure, there was lots to learn: how to build fires, tie knots, sanitize latrines, identify poison ivy and deer ticks, sing ridiculous songs about sailing princesses and talking animals. But there were also spirit days. And Marie was the MVP of spirit days. She spent hours creating costumes for fairy tale day and designing multicolored masterpieces for rainbow day, but those ensembles never held a candle to the ridiculousness of Mix Match Day 2009.

First of all, the outfit itself took months of planning to assemble. During a random trip to the Dollar Store, she invested in a pair of bright pink zebra print granny panties. ("These will go great over my checkered leggings and tie-dye spandex, don't you think?") She scavenged the dress-up chest in my parent's basement in search of retired dance recital accessories. She donned dusty costume jewelry from Savers, a furry blue jacket that she had grown out of in elementary school, and five layers of shirts with varying sleeve lengths to ensure every conceivable pattern and color would be adequately represented. I remember taking one look at her in that outfit, which was nothing short of a train wreck, and thinking the exact opposite of how any normally-functioning human being might react: she could actually pull it off. She was the kind of self-assured that I wished I could be.

Yes, we both did a lot of growing up on the trails between Arrow Point and Rocky Ledge, learning just as many life skills as camp skills over the years. The biggest lesson that I learned, however, was realizing that despite her being a year and a half younger than me, my little sister had become my role model.

Six years and many memories later, I sit on her bedroom floor and think about how she still inspires me every day. She would rather stay in and read a book than go out on the town, she has no qualms about dressing like a complete idiot in the spirit of, well, spirit, and she is absolutely, passionately, unapologetically genuine one hundred percent of the time. It occurs to me during this cherished quiet moment of coexistence that I am proud of my sister in a way that can't be summed up in one short piece written in one short week.

Suddenly, she closes her book by loudly slapping the front and back covers into the meat of the pages between them. She must notice me still gazing in her direction, but my eyes

are glazed over as I replay some more of our fondest moments together on the screen of my memory.

“What are you looking at?”

I snap back to reality and glance down at my computer. The cursor blinks impatiently at the top of a screen of white.

“A blank page,” I reply honestly, with a shrug. “I still don't know what I'm going to write about.”

She rolls her eyes again. “Write about me.”

Excerpt from *Just Miss*

By Abby Djan (SI 15)

Louie

Louie with his lithe track and field muscles doesn't enjoy being constrained in the classroom. He props his foot up on the chair, and twirls his rattail. He is smart, but dislikes taking notes. He is a conundrum, telling me how church was so important to him in Puerto Rico, and how he misses those comrades encouraging him to do the right thing. They kept him on the straight and narrow even when his older brother was incarcerated for drug use. And yet, he has the foulest mouth I have heard. When I call him on it, he says, "I'm sorry." As I continue to give him the evil eye, he says, "I'm SOR-ry".

"I know you are," I reply, "but I would believe it more if you would just stop".

His best friend he treats more like a lover, arms wrapped around each other, as if picking nits out of each other's hair. It is uncomfortable to watch, and yet I know they are compensating for the lack of a father's love. On Valentine's Day, he borrowed another student's teddy bear valentine, and wouldn't let go. He rocked it and cuddled it ever so gently. He explained he often watches his sister's infants and declared that he, too, was ready to be a parent. I could not believe that the struggles of his two older sisters just having had babies wasn't enough to scare him into making sure his schooling came first. In desperation, I ran immediately to the family social worker to ask for access to her stash of robot babies (or "Baby Think It Over" as they are called). We came up with a plan, and instituted it in the class I co-taught with the gym teacher called, Decision Making for Teens for New English Language Learners.

The Guatemalan students in the class didn't want to be responsible for a \$300 robot. They chose to take flour sack babies instead. Many of them ended it by dumping the baby in the classroom, refusing to take it home and getting an automatic "F". Horace, who had also insisted he was ready for a baby, had his robot broken by a classmate before the day was over. He had then abandoned the baby in a panic, and ran into my class with wild exclamations of refusal to take any responsibility. I calmed him down, explained to my class what was going on and told him to take the baby to the social worker. She mediated the situation with calm elegance, giving both boys a fitting punishment. Horace also received an "F".

There were only two students that ended up getting the babies home. One baby was a robot and the other one was a flour sack dressed in pajamas with a nylon stocking head. They both also came back in perfect condition, receiving "A's". Louie had insisted I set his robot to the hardest setting, as if it were a colicky baby. I had many misgivings about this, but after much cajoling on his part, I finally agreed. He woke every few hours to faithfully feed, burp and change his baby until he fell asleep from exhaustion. Luis was a frazzled tired mess, but when we downloaded the data, he indeed had only missed one feeding. Luis recalled having heard the baby cry in a dream, the baby curled right up under his arm. I admitted he would be a wonderful father. And he replied, "But, not yet..."

Victory!

Marlboro Man

Dedicated to David A. Goss

By Sara Goss (SI 15)

I awake, only 4, to the hum of the floorboards beneath my feet.

HRRRRRRRAAAAAAANNNNNNNNNNGGGGGGGGGGG

The table saw chews through the cherry wood, then belches loudly.

Dad must've gotten started early today.

Ever since I was very young, my father has always been more than proficient with his hands. He is every bit the Marlboro man, with maybe half the ignorance. A makeshift mechanic, plumber, electrician he may be, but his true craft was with wood. Despite being a union carpenter for 25 years, I never went without a bookcase, birdhouse, shelf, caned chair. If it could be made with wood, he would make it. His handiwork shook the foundation of our home, and filled it too.

But it isn't the sound that will remain with me.

It is not the wild churning of the blades that I will remember with fond reverie, the early wake ups from the band saw, or the gifts made by each.

It is the smell.

A hot, raw smell it is. A smell that crawls into your nose, and finds a comfortable place to sit.

A smell that stirs in you the primal instinct; to hunt, to protect, to chop, to build, to live.

It smells of angry pine, still fuming with the wild, untamed life the forest holds.

Dust flies into the air, and the freshly, perfectly (and sometimes imperfectly), cut wood has taken on new meaning, new life.

It was once a seed, buried beneath the soil, springing forth with new life, grit, determination.

It thought it's life was over, cut down so harshly and mercilessly at the stump.

Get in line boy, stand up straight.

But here it sits now, within the damp, shadowy corners of my basement, given new life by old hands

The wood is cut, its declaration fills the air and my lungs.

And whenever I hear its cry, I will always find myself back, here, with the Marlboro man.

Study Abroad

By Tiffany Harvison (SI 15)

One month, to the day, since September 11th.
 One month, to the day, of global uneasiness.
 One month, to the day, of fear
 And phone calls from home.
 One month of rows upon rows of emails
 Arriving in my inbox
 Sent from my parents,
 My grandparents,
 My aunts, uncles, cousins-
 Well wishes
 From CT to Europe,
 Entwined in
 Implied panic.
 Even the university warned,
 In neatly typed memos,
 "Be less American."
 Avoid stars and stripes.
 Don't talk about G-Dub
 Don't mingle in tourist traps,
 Or congregate in large groups.
 Four days into my study abroad experience
 Two planes and 1,500 tragic deaths
 Ended my perceived independence
 Of four months away from my country.
 But the London streets still wove between
 Historical churches and modern condos.
 The hub of Piccadilly still mesmerized
 Tipsy travellers.
 Well-dressed locals still sat,
 Drinking chilled scotch at noon
 In proper pubs.
 Adorned white-stone architecture
 Still stood beside streets full of sleek, black taxis.
 One month and four days
 Of breathing the tantalizing scent
 Of All-you-can-eat Pakistani eateries.
 One month and four days
 Of listening to the humming wheels of the tube,
 Hearing the cheery English voice say
 "Mind the gap."
 One month of indulging
 On not-quite-cold British lager,
 Ripe with carbonation and foam.

My classmates and I existed
For one month and four days
in a foreign students' bubble,
Ten tube-stops between
The calm of our mediocre flat
On Finchley Road
And the financial district.
I insisted that everything was fine,
That my experience abroad
Could not be dampened by
Warnings from across the Atlantic,
And like a dramatic adolescent
Or whiney toddler,
I stated my internal mantra...
I would travel through Europe.
I would learn about the world.
So, I sat,
Alone,
At the local internet cafe,
Owned and serviced by a kind,
Elderly Afghan immigrant
Who had once asked me
Why Americans were so afraid,
Where five quid bought you
A thirty-minute window back to reality,
And thought,
Of one month and four days
Spent wondering.
My decision came quickly,
As if I knew I needed to follow my desire
For independence away from London.
I sat,
And booked one overnight train ticket
To Milan.

Sense Memories

By Kaylee Manning (SI 15)

Two plays to read, a novel, five short stories.
 Two journals, a question set, and an essay.
 Flashcards. Outlines. Notes.
 Anthropology, Geology, Sociology, Psychology.

So much information to remember,
 With two jobs, three nights out, studying until 2:00 in the morning.
 My neighbor tells me that mint can help you remember all this information for tests.
"Just eat something minty while you read or study, and then again during an exam. It creates sense memories. It's science."

So I ate mints, brushed my teeth, and chewed gum relentlessly.
 Minty Life Savers and those red and white pinwheel candies.
 Peppermint, spearmint, double mint, chocolate mint.
 For hours
 And hours.

I cannot claim this improved my test scores, but I can tell you what anxiety tastes like.

Anxiety
 Tastes
 Like
 Mint.

The adrenaline spike of an approaching deadline chills my skin, and I can feel an icy blast on my taste buds as goosebumps appear. My throat freezes and I gasp like I accidentally swallowed an Altoid. Panic sets in and drips down my throat like a Listerine strip placed too far on the back of my tongue. My heart races and my eyes water, like using too much mouthwash and trying desperately to swish for that full minute.

Then the feeling lingers, and I can taste mint with every accelerated inhalation.

To this day, I cannot consume a mint without a shiver of anxiety,
 And I cannot endure an anxiety attack without tasting mint in the back of my throat.

Anxiety
 Tastes
 Like
 Mint.

Picasso was an Asshole

By Susan Laurencot (SI 15)

Picasso was an asshole,
 And I am no Jacqueline.
 But we were so young, neither of us knew this.
 We used to laugh that Jane Goodall's book should be called, In the Shadow of Dan.
 You thought that was funnier than I did.
 We played at artists: you painting, I writing. Of course, you wrote, too.
 We had our friends over for poetry readings, to paint, to read O'Neil.
 We had no phone. No interruptions.
 We had no TV. Just the art.
 And each other.
 Well, you had others.
 The blonde who you painted wearing my dress.
 My art history professor, whose name, ironically, rhymed (at least in part) with fuck.
 So my revenge was Lance (rhymes with aunts).
 His name so poetically symbolic of the pain I planned so carefully.
 Who knew that Lady Macbeth loomed in the shadows of my heart?
 I left you crying in the driveway, your usual dramatic self,
 "How could you do this to me?" you cried, pounding the top of the sun-bleached green
 Pontiac we drove.
 "You showed me how," I said. "You taught me this."
 And in your usual way, you pulled yourself together and simply said, "Touché."
 Picasso was an asshole.
 And so were you.

The Right Thing

By Martin Leftoff (SI 15)

It was September? 1970:

I was called to the main office to receive a phone call from my wife at 2:30. That seemed odd. I was usually home before 4:00 PM. This call was unexpected.

Me: Hi, what's up?

She: We're going to have a baby!

Me: That's great news. *I meant it.*

At precisely 4:00, I rolled into the driveway, exited the car, and hurried into the kitchen, for an embrace...Her eyes danced in keeping with the smile that lighted her face.

Me: When?

She: We need to be in Fort Worth on Friday.

Me: I'll call in.

We arrived in Fort Worth late Thursday evening certain that this would be the most important drive we would ever make.

Friday, 9:00 AM:

The anxiety was too great. We were at least an hour early for our appointment.

Nurse to Judy: Here she is a perfect match, blue eyed and clearly a natural blond. We both reached out to hold our child.

The nurse, quite properly, placed baby Joyce in Judy's outstretched arms. The paperwork and obligatory signatures were dispatched with bureaucratic efficiency. Soon the family was homeward bound.

The weekend:

We opened our home to friends and neighbors sharing our enthusiasm for parenthood. Amongst our guests was Professor Sheldon E. and his wife Charlotte. They congratulated and offered their parental wisdom. "Build a bond of trust with Joyce. Use her adoption to make her know she is your chosen daughter."

Judy: Yes, my brother Bill has an adopted daughter. They even have little storybooks written for adopted children providing some assurance that they were wanted.

We heartily nodded in agreement.

That same weekend:

The phone rings – It is my mother. Judy and I share the receiver.

Me: Hello Mom. Yes, we got home safely. Baby Joyce slept throughout the trip.

Mom: How much did she weigh?

Me: She weighs 21 pounds and is 6 inches long.

Mom: What did you adopt?

Judy: He doesn't know what he is talking about. The baby weighed 6 pounds at birth and is 21 inches long.

Mom: You are not going to tell her she is adopted are you? If you do she will always be looking for her real family and she will never be a part of ours.

Me: Yes, Mom she needs to know. She will know we love her and that is why we adopted her.

Mom: *A long Silence. Then, Farewell.*

Time passes Joyce is six and her baby sister, Stacey, is three. Joyce and I are alone in the family pickup. More than likely we were coming home from a frequent summer fishing trip.

Joyce: Dad, I don't think I look like anybody else in this family.

The air temperature on this summer afternoon, in central Kansas, had to exceed 80 degrees. Yet Joyce's comment chilled me to the bone. I don't know precisely how I responded. But, I did not take that opportunity to speak truthfully. Procrastination in tackling a challenge is not a winning strategy.

Joyce is sixteen. Judy and I have divorced. Joyce is visiting with Beth, my second wife, and I. Joyce and Beth are on the beach getting to know each other, when Joyce speaks.

Joyce: I think I am an adopted child. Would you tell me if it is true?

The tension Beth was feeling, in hearing Joyce's question had to be monumental. Beth has not told me how she responded. But, I know she empathized with Joyce's predicament. Later, she said, "Tell Joyce the truth. Even now it is not too late." Still, I remained dumb and numb.

The year is 2011:

Mother, had passed away, age 97. Her estate was divided between my sister and I. We shared our inheritances with our children. Joyce has a twelve-year-old son, Lucas, named after my father, who Joyce had never met.

The phone rings

Joyce: Hello Dad,

Me: Good to hear from you.

Joyce: On my way to see Stacey, in Oklahoma, I stopped in Manhattan to see how Sheldon is doing. He is okay. But, he told me he feels obligated to tell me that I am an adopted daughter. Is that true?

Me: Yes. The truth spilled out without a hiccup.

Me: I was afraid to lose you.

Joyce: Real love would have resulted in trusting me with the truth. This she said with emphasis on "Love," "Trusting" and "Truth". These words echo in my mind. Click. Now there is a never-ending silence.

Since then I have made several attempts to reconnect with my daughter, but there is never a response at the end of the line.

Airplanes Really Are Safer than Cars

By Rafe Manning (SI 15)

People used to ask him if he was afraid that his father would die in a plane crash. The question was a little insensitive, to be sure, but not as odd as you might think; his dad was a commercial airline pilot, after all. Even so, Eli never responded with much more than a shrug. Dad had very reasonably and convincingly explained the safety of modern air travel. And besides, Eli perceived his father as somewhat larger than life, and most likely immune to serious accident. No—the question, when posed, caused him no doubts about his dad. His thoughts always turned to Luke instead.

Eli could not have asked for a better older brother. Luke didn't just tolerate his younger sibling; he cared for him. If four-year-old Eli grabbed the toy Luke was playing with, the six-year-old would patiently play with another one until that toy's virtues became irresistible. When Eli inevitably tried to poach the new attraction, Luke would let him, and then quietly resume activities with his original choice. How many six-year-olds display that kind of wisdom?

The older boy willingly adopted a teaching role, as well. Eli learned everything from his older brother: how to kick a soccer ball, how to run faster without falling down, and how a boy is supposed to laugh when someone splashes puddle water on him. Luke had plenty of friends his own age. The residential neighborhood in Ashford was small, but home to an army of children—seemingly all boys, of all ages. But Luke was too generous to exclude his kid brother, even when the rest of the older boys groaned. And during these times, when he was tagging along with his sibling, Eli needed no parents—because he was safe, and happy, and completely unaware that those times would not last forever.

But Luke's best quality, perhaps, was his insistence on watching out for Eli. At all times kind-hearted and placid, Luke had only set aside his sweet disposition on one occasion, at least in Eli's experience. And the transformation, while something of a shock, also pleased Eli to no end, as it was for his benefit. When Luke heard the shrieks emanating from the apartment complex's small backyard, he investigated and found the neighborhood bully burying his teeth into Eli's arm. Something happened to Luke's face, something utterly foreign. And then Johnny Risser, that little brat, discovered a set of teeth growing from his own arm. Luke was biting the hell out of that kid. Eli loved him for it, of course, and was first introduced to the idea of justice when his parents privately applauded Luke after Johnny's parents called to complain about the bloody imprints on their son's flesh. Luke had looked after his own.

And so it was that Eli found himself unconcerned when Johnny approached them on that clear October afternoon on the large square of grass that served as the communal playground. Dad was enjoying an afternoon nap less than a hundred yards away, but (better still, perhaps) Luke was already there, and he had already established the pecking

order. Johnny knew it, too. Taking care not to approach Eli, and keeping a wary eye on his big brother, Johnny exacted his juvenile revenge instead by intercepting the soccer ball in its path. With a blow born of infantile malice, the ball went sailing in an arc that the four year old could not have achieved. Its flight took it to the very edge of the playground, in fact, and perilously close to the road; just a few more inches would have brought it to the sidewalk, where the smooth surface might have permitted passage to the street itself.

But fate intervened. The hexagonal pattern on the ball became clearer as it slowed, and finally stopped. Still, Luke was taking no chances; as the self-appointed guardian, he told Eli to stay put with a firm command founded in love: "Streets are dangerous. Mommy and Daddy said so." The little boy started to argue that the ball had not even reached the sidewalk, but he already knew that older brothers win those arguments. So, he waited patiently for the game to resume. Johnny had fled as soon as his crime was completed, and both brothers ignored him; this was an all too rare moment for bonding, and it would not be wasted on the likes of Johnny Risser.

Knowing this, and longing for his brother's company, Eli waited. It wouldn't take long to retrieve the ball, resting so near at hand. And yet time slowed. There was a sound, familiar, but more ominous than usual; something was wrong with the car speeding down the street. The faint noise of tires on the cold pavement, and the distant rumble of the approaching engine—these sounds were wavering. When Eli looked up, he could see why. Even the sunlight seemed erratic, glinting first on one side of the dark green hood, and then the other as the car dodged unpredictably. He didn't know the word for it yet, but the vehicle was "swerving." Rooted to the spot, he considered a warning—but if his big brother, his warden and protector, showed no concern, then why should he? The ball was several feet from the road, in a place where cars wouldn't go.

When the moment came to fruition, it was impossible to believe. In fact, it was impossible to see. Although he stood only yards from the unfolding disaster, Eli would remember nothing of that ultimate moment, or of the weeks that would follow. What few details he would assemble over the years would come only by accident, gleaned from extremely rare conversations about the event. Aunts, uncles, older cousins, and rarer still, his parents would grudgingly surrender information, and (little though he wanted it) those pseudo-memories would take root:

When the paramedics tried to remove Luke's knitted cap, the jagged shards of his skull would not let it go. Because he had once expressed horror at the youthfully inaccurate thought of worms burrowing into a dead person's corpse, Luke's little body was incinerated instead. When the flames consumed him, he was wearing the *Planet of the Apes* costume he had been so eager to use that Halloween, just weeks away. Unable to part with him, his parents buried the ashes on their own property—although they refused to tell Eli exactly where.

And there were stories about Eli, as well: On the way to the hospital, when his parents were somehow fooling themselves that there was still hope, it was Eli who stood up and leaned

over the front seat, saying "Wuke is dead, mommy." And he continued to break his parents' hearts, as they heard him crying out in his sleep for months, still unable to say his "L's": "Wuke! Wuke!" And later still, Eli sneaking away from the guests at his own birthday party, wanting no company but his own.

There were more details, of course, but some of the particulars of that day would remain questions forever. Did Johnny ever admit (or even realize) his part in the tragedy? Did the drunk driver pay in full for his slaughter of an innocent? When his car ripped Eli's brother from the ground like a lawnmower uprooting a blade of grass, did the driver experience a moment of horror and remorse, or was he too wasted? Did Eli wrap his skinny, little boy arms around Luke one last time, or had he instantly recognized that the mangled body sprawled on the asphalt was no longer his guardian and big brother? Did the world crash in on the helpless four-year-old in an invasion of screams and sirens, or did all sound fade into numbness?

Those questions would never be answered, nor was he really curious. Like his parents, he stopped living, managing instead to survive each day, doing the same things any other boy would do—but refusing to feel anything along the way. Feeling meant crying, and he'd had enough of that. Many years later, his mother told him how bad it had been by recalling this memory: "Once, about a year after... after Luke, I went to the window to check on you in the front yard. Your back was turned, and you were wearing your little hoodie—your father always insisted on covering your head—but your toy truck was in front of you while you knelt on the ground, so I figured you were ok, just playing quietly. But when I looked again an hour later, I could see that you hadn't moved at all, so I walked outside for a closer look. I found you sobbing in silence, and realized that you had been the whole time..."

It took years before he started to recover. Years; and one man who reached out as only a grandfather can. Grandpa Deac never talked about "stuff." He never used that voice people get when they feel sorry for you; he never tried to "relate"; he never did stupid things in an effort to force a smile. He just taught Eli how to carve things out of little blocks of wood, giving him a small jackknife of his own. He brought his grandson around the farm, letting him feed the animals and lifting him up onto the horse's back. They even went fishing. Grandpa never seemed to speak unless the situation required it, and during the thoughtful quietness, Eli began to live again. He began to look forward to their visits, even asking his parents when he could go back.

But once again, fate intervened. When Eli's mother came to school in tears one day, it was all the now seven-year-old could do not to panic. It's unusual for parents to show up at school unexpectedly; it's shocking when your parent is crying. Eli's agitation only grew when his mother needed several minutes in the car before she could compose herself enough to speak. When she finally found her voice, her explanation raised Eli's shields for good, rebuilding the wall his grandfather had been taking down. Grandpa was dead. Not just dead, but destroyed in a scene straight out of a movie. The lawnmower had a gas leak when Grandpa Deac loaded it into the back of the Cherokee, not realizing that his Jeep had a problem, too. The ignition was sparking. When grandpa turned the key,

his car erupted, and his entire body blackened as he burned to death. It would be a closed casket funeral, but Eli could imagine his grandfather's charred face all too well. Still, sitting there in that church, the boy could not make himself cry. He was done with that. At seven-years-old, Eli was done. His father flew jets for a commercial airline, and yes—people often asked Eli if he was afraid his dad would die in a plane crash. But truthfully, the thought never crossed his mind...

He had learned that cars are much more dangerous.

Celebrating July 4th in the 5th Dimension

By Lauren Green Shafer (SI 15)

On this rainy holiday weekend I want to exercise my freedom of expression with what may seem like an unorthodox practice. I am observing Independence Day indoors, reflecting upon what America means to me. No, I'm not catching ESPN's coverage of the annual Coney Island Nathan's hot dog-eating contest, in which contestants compete to see who can shove the most franks into their face in one minute. Nor am I experiencing a palpable sense of patriotism by grabbing a flag T-shirt on sale at Old Navy, along with the steeply slashed red, white and blue flip-flops. As on most Fourth of July's, rain or shine, I'm observing the holiday and thinking about my country by watching the Sci-Fi Channel's *Twilight Zone* marathon.

The original *Twilight Zone* was a popular anthology series that ran on CBS from 1959 to 1964. Through weekly episodes of suspense, science fiction, horror, and sometimes humor, it offered viewers a trip into a self-described "fifth dimension not only of sight and sound of mind" but "a journey into a wondrous land of imagination." The show explored humans' frailties and foibles: past, present, and future.

About all I really remember from the original series is the eerie theme music, the image of beetle-browed, cigarette smoking host and creator, Rod Serling, and an overwhelming sense of terror. So I can't say that my husband and I, as late baby boomers, watch the marathon each year only for the nostalgia factor. True, we enjoy the trip back to America's first Golden Age of television, visiting once more with the TV and movie stars from our childhood, many in the bloom of their own youth. Also true that the sometimes stilted speech and the formal fashions, including lots of hats for both men and women, offer us boomers and more contemporary viewers what might be considered the authentic black and white version of *Mad Men*, a glimpse into Cold War era America before the tragedies of the 1960s struck. The cheesy special effects and pseudo Space Age technology also take us back to a time when Americans imagined a spectacular future as depicted on *The Jetsons* cartoon, with flying cars and moving sidewalks. Over the past decades I have come to find all of these features of *The Twilight Zone* comforting, along with the quirky plot lines, the characters both creepy and kooky, and the campy dialogue.

But this Independence Day, looking back at the tragic events of our own times alongside the stunning scientific and social advances taking place, I am again reminded that the *Twilight Zone* was always intended to be more than simple entertainment. Rod Serling's anti-war stance and activist bent made him a controversial figure in Hollywood. In fact, I have used many of the episodes in my high school English classes over the years, finding them perfect illustrations of archetypal conflicts and themes. My students are always intrigued by these stories and they have been springboards for some excellent discussions.

What really strikes me this year is the relevance of so many *Twilight Zone* episodes to the conflicts we are experiencing in the United States today. Quintessential American values of individuality and independence are emphasized in many of the episodes, but unlike

the Westerns that were popular in the same era, the good guys don't always win. *Twilight Zone* episodes serve as cautionary tales, reminding viewers that although as American citizens we value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as human beings we are more likely to succumb to greed, aggression, ambition, or perhaps the most dangerous of all, groupthink and conformity. On Independence Day I am reflecting on how many of the episodes show the dark side of human nature that can drive even the most democratically-minded American to act in ways we don't think we are capable of.

In the episode "Number 12 Looks Just Like You," the young and lovely Marilyn lives in a society that requires everyone to have an operation at age 19 to become 'beautiful' and conform to a preconceived view of this beauty. Played with righteous indignation by Collin Wilcox (who coincidentally played the role of the victimized Mayella Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*), Marilyn fights with her mother and her doctors to keep her freedom and forego the surgery. We learn that her independent-minded father, who had urged her to read Emerson and Thoreau, had committed suicide—although the official story is that he died in war, serving his country. When I watched this episode this weekend, I was chilled by thoughts of bullied teens choosing suicide as their only option in their high school hell, but heartened by the recent Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage. I am inspired as well by the enthusiasm with which my own students embrace issues of equality and tolerance, much more so now than in past years. As I get older and more philosophical, I wonder what kind of future today's young people will face. We outwardly celebrate our differences, while Donald Trump mouths off with anti-Mexican vitriol and a 21-year-old white supremacist takes out 9 African Americans at a Charleston prayer group. Social media is plastered with images of both glamorous celebrities, and advertisements, now as ever, promote an idealized but elusive perfect life.

In the *Twilight Zone* episode, Marilyn eventually capitulates and undergoes the operation. At the end, we see her with a new face and her new "model number 12" body. Her former identity is completely gone. And this year I wonder if my Thoreau-loving high school juniors will be able to hold on to their vision of marching to a different drummer, or if they too will feel compelled to fit the mold of a socially constructed identity that looks "just like them."

My family's all-time favorite story, "It's a Good Life," raises new questions this year as well. In this episode, angelic-looking six-year-old Anthony is introduced as the powerful "monster" who holds his family and community hostage to his childish wishes. Anthony can create or destroy at will and he sends anyone who disagrees with him to the dreaded "cornfield," never to return. His small community is without television, music, school, and seemingly love, all because he has become so powerful and was not stopped when his family had the chance. Instead, family and neighbors live in fear of this powerful tyrant and repeat the mantra of "that's good, Anthony, that's real good," to show they agree with whatever he wants. He is proof of what can happen when tyranny goes unchecked. When I look at adorable, winsome Anthony I find myself thinking of the 'boys will be boys' mentality that can lull us into complacency and turning a blind eye to aggression. I'm glad the South Carolina legislature is working toward removing the Confederate flag, a symbol of the tyranny of oppression if ever there was one, but I also recognize that if the

Charleston massacre hadn't occurred the flag might remain as an emblem of some vague, masculine sense of tradition.

Two hundred and thirty-nine years ago, Thomas Jefferson and company understood that American liberties could be threatened by human nature. The Declaration of Independence decrees that to secure their inalienable rights "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Thirteen years later the U.S. Constitution detailed the laws, the checks and balances, required to form this "more perfect union." Today, 150 years after the Civil War and 50 years after Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" we still recognize the need for government to preserve our freedoms and to extend the vision of liberty and justice for all.

As Rod Serling reminds viewers at the end of "The Obsolete Man" (an episode most certainly inspired by *Fahrenheit 451*, depicting a totalitarian society that has outlawed books, libraries, and independent thought), "Any state, any entity, any ideology that fails to recognize the worth, the dignity, the rights of Man, that state is obsolete. A case to be filed under "M" for Mankind - in *The Twilight Zone*."

To hear this reminder again, I might even forego the fireworks this year.

Tatiana Vice

By John Wetmore (SI 15)

She struck a devastatingly practiced pose, popping in all the right places, her outline immaculate, her figure hammered out of timeless marble, statuesque in the doorway. She looked like she was built to stand there, the fluorescent lights of the studio hallway silhouetting her, eclipsing the made-up face, the lined neck and veined hands, the unmerciful markings of time. None of that mattered as her right hand, poised on her thigh, slid up her side gently before taking off from the skin of her midriff, opening like a paper fan—from it she blew a little kiss. Cigarette smoke from the studio floated around her like a veil. She stood in the frame, full of power. Her presence exuded an inescapable aura. And who looking at that outline would ever want to escape anyway?

The three men inside the cramped studio simply stared, smiling dumbly, as one might expect them to do. As professional wrestling bloggers and “journalists,” one or two of them probably worshipped her during her career in the Earthside Wrestling Organization. Tatiana Vice, once known as the Girl with the Goodnight Fists, now the Woman with the Unpaid Bills. She didn’t know what they’d brought her in to interview about today, they wouldn’t tell her over the phone, but she needed the money. Their operation usually ran pretty smoothly and inoffensively, just a little web-show program that broadcasted on “the fiber” the first re-established Internet network since the Earthside collapse. Still pretty primitive, nothing like the satellite wireless they had on the colony, but functional nonetheless.

“Hi boys, am I late?” she asked, strutting into the studio. She noticed the little round table, the notes for the show, the sound equipment, and a small fridge with a makeshift bar built over it on a square little folding table. There was a brief silence and she laughed humanly, trying to make the men relax as she looked around the room. “I guess I still know how to make an entrance.”

“Hell yes you do,” said one of the men, a short little Earthsider with only one, three-fingered arm that looked more like a claw. He wore a two-armed t-shirt that sagged pathetically on his right side where no appendage grew, a classic VICE FOR PRESIDENT slogan on the front with her visage from a quarter century ago emblazoned on it. He must have worn it for the occasion of this little interview. Tatiana was impressed he had a shirt so old still—it marked him as a true fan—but they were sometimes the hardest to deal with. Another of the men spoke up, “would you like a drink or something? We’re on air already if you want to grab a headset and join the conversation. It’s good to see you by the way.”

Tatiana knew how to handle the situation. She sat down next to her little fan and carefully lowered the headset onto her head, cognizant of the perfectly puffed front line of her golden hair.

“I would darling, preferably something stiff.”

"Ladies and Gentleman, that is the voice of former EWO Women's Heavyweight Champion, Tatiana Vice!" said the third man.

"And she wants her drink stiff," parroted the second man.

"Are you surprised?" Tatiana asked, embellishing the deep, sultry character of her voice.

"Not at all," he replied. He seemed to wink at her then, perhaps, though only one of his eyes was visible. A bulbous lump of flesh descending from his brow obscured the other one. She wondered if he could see out of it, or if he had been able to keep the eye at all. Out of the three men, he had the best hair, which covered most of his head except for a perpetually scabbed patch on the left side. The overall effect softened his appearance significantly, especially when compared with the other two.

"So, Miss Vice, we have plenty of questions for you today," the second man said.

"Oh? Well first, Octo, let me thank you for having me in the studio again. It's always great to shoot on the industry around real hardcore fans." Octo smiled from one side of his mouth. He was a big guy, many-limbed. Once he'd been strong for a mutant and a lifelong fan of the wrestling business. Long ago, guys on the regional circuit had talked about signing him as the first mutant wrestler, but bigwigs like Hernandez convinced them not to do it. He believed in preserving the image of wrestling and didn't want to make it a freak show. Plus, he'd added, it was too hard to train guys who didn't have normal human bodies, and too dangerous to have other guys working with them inside the dome.

The little fan in the t-shirt spoke up, "Thank you Miss Vice. We pride ourselves on being the most die-hard stream on the fiber." His name eluded Tatiana. She'd met him once before, he was a student of some sort, if she remembered correctly. Less sleazy than the other two when it came to interviews, but also a bit more irritating at times. Tatiana gave him a professional wink.

Sebby, the man with the nice hair, placed her drink down gently: a gin concoction with the memory of some tonic faintly present. She watched his hand on the drink, a habit forged through years spent in hotel bars. His good hand was really perfect—slender and dexterous as he turned the glass so the straw faced her.

She took a sip. Not bad for Earthside booze, and she felt she was going to need it.

"So what's the topic today?" she asked.

"Well, Octo here has drawn up a little chart," Sebby pulled a poster-sized sheet of pink paper with a table drawn on it. It listed the names of many prominent wrestlers in the left column. Tatiana recognized the pattern in the first few names immediately.

"Oh no, Sebby, some of those names look awfully familiar," she said. She tried to laugh, but she scanned the chart intently. Almost nothing was off-limits to her, as long as they

didn't ask her about *him*, the asshole that had cut and run on her. She really could handle almost anything except a conversation about him. Luckily, they'd left his name off the list.

"Damn it Octo, I thought you called me into talk about wrestling," said the short man in the t-shirt, covering his eyes with his hand.

"Oh shut up, Danny, this is the good stuff. This is what everybody really wants to shoot on anyway."

Danny let his hand drop to the table. He looked hopelessly at Tatiana, a blush diffusing across his wide, flat features. She patted his hand with hers and nodded at him confidently.

"It's all good," she mouthed, showing a keen expertise in soundlessness.

"So, Miss Vice, today we're talking famous flings, and you're more than famous for having one or two of them. As you've noticed, we've made a chart of your most memorable ones. We were hoping you could share some of the stories and dirty details about these guys," said Octo.

"Oh God, well..." she paused and looked quizzically at Octo, "are you sure I can say those things on the air?"

"I'm sure," Octo smiled broadly with the working muscles on the right side of his face. "Our show runs on an exclusive subscriber channel."

"And no one is going to sue me for libel here?"

Octo laughed, "As long as you don't mention any real names. We'll keep it kayfabe and talk characters, not actual people, of course."

"I see, very crafty," Tatiana said, nodding her approval. She had probed for a way out, but apparently this could only go down one way. She needed the money, and hell, she could make it up as she went. That's how the business worked.

"So what we're interested in is the stories, though we've also developed a little scale for you to rank these wrestlers in the pole department. Five being the biggest, one being the smallest."

"Are you serious?" Danny asked. Clearly the little man felt uncomfortable. Tatiana wondered if he'd ever been with a woman, if he had the capabilities.

"Hey, this is what our female listeners have always wanted to know," Octo said, "whether or not these guys live up to the industry fables."

"Well, I can tell you right off the bat, Dek Digital, way better fuck than you'd imagine for a guy with suck a geeky gimmick."

“And we’re off!” Sebby shouted. “Miss Vice, you’ve got us intrigued, please tell us more...”

“I mean, statistically I give him a three, but let me tell you, that boy knew romance. It might sound silly now, but I’ll tell you, somewhere along the line he did his research, because he punched all the right keys.”

“This is great,” Sebby rubbed his hands together, the motion was awkward thanks to their different shapes. “How did you end up hooking up with Dek? I don’t remember him ever being a part of your storylines?”

In truth, Tatiana didn’t remember. Dek wasn’t really the techie geek his gimmick suggested. She might even have safely called him dumb, but it was hard to tell even that because Dek was so quiet. He had always hated the scientist angle, but never really spoke up, and certainly never thought of any better directions for his character. He rarely talked about his life, though once when he blacked out drunk he had cried and lamented leaving his mother behind on the colony when he went Earthside to join EWO. He never sent her any money—blew most of it gambling. Dek Digital should have been able to play the odds better, but Derek, the man playing the character, never really knew how.

“Oh, he made a joke over the whole thing. Said he’d calculated the statistical probability of him giving me an orgasm.”

“And what did he say that probability was?” Sebby asked.

“About twenty to one, but he liked to play the odds.”

Everyone laughed, except Danny. He looked at her skeptically.

“Wow, a data-driven cassanova, huh?” Octo this time.

“True to form,” Tatiana said.

“We want to see who’s next to go to cock court here,” Sebby said, “let’s take an audience call on the feed. We’ve got a session open here with BllnKnt22. Mr. BK22, please say hello to Miss Vice here in the studio.”

Over the line Tatiana could hear the caller breathing heavily. “Hello?” she asked, raising an eyebrow at the other men in the studio. Octo made a gesture suggestive of the activity he believed the caller currently engaged in.

“Yeah I got something I wanna ask Miss Vice about,” the caller said.

“Ask away, baby,” said Tatiana.

"I heard Squid Singer say on a shoot interview that one time at a party Luddite Quayle fell asleep outside drunk, and when you got up to go to the bathroom you stepped on his dick. I heard he didn't wake up when you stepped on it, but that you shook him awake cuz you thought it was a snake."

Danny wriggled a bit, repositioning all of his tiny legs under him on the seat cushion. The t-shirt covered his mutations, but when Tatiana looked closely she could make out the parts of his body wriggling beneath it. Poor little guy. He wouldn't look at Tatiana, and his blush had deepened considerably.

He probably doesn't think this is good wrestling talk, Tatiana thought. He probably sees me as a recreational locker room meat market shopper. Poor kid. He also probably wants to burn that t-shirt with my face on it.

Tatiana couldn't help but laugh, even as poor Danny squirmed in his seat. She felt good remembering old times, especially these crazy versions that sat and stewed on message boards, constantly mutated by fans transcribing them on computers in their parents' poster-decorated basements. Every wrestling fan always claimed to know the original version of a story, never stopping to think whether or not they should believe somebody trying to turn a dollar in an interview. Squid had always been a good promoter, it really wasn't a surprise that the incident and the party the caller talked about never happened. Pure legend, just something old Squid whipped up.

In reality, Tatiana spent four months with Lud after a boyfriend outside the industry got violent and hit her in the head with a baseball bat when she kicked him out of her mobile home, an old converted airbus. He'd broken her left eye socket, but that was nothing compared to when Lud pummeled the shit out of the guy. Lud had freaky strength, and he had never been sexier than when he had snapped that baseball bat over his knee and thrown the thick half at the estranged boyfriend to start the fight. Unfortunately, Lud admitted pretty quickly that he didn't have much interest in Tatiana. Lud was gay, and the 6'8" monster claimed to have blown Irving Adams in a hotel room after they'd spent the night snorting synthetic stinger, but lamented that the other man didn't remember the incident.

"Well, that story's part true, except for the part about the snake. I wouldn't have made that mistake. After all, we were in the Northeast and there aren't any snakes that big around here."

"Oh my God, you're kidding me," Octo said, "seriously?"

"Might be the biggest I've seen," she said, nodding her approval. She wondered if Lud would ever hear this interview. He'd get a real kick if he ever did. Sweet Mr. Quayle—she'd never seen him take his clothes off, but goddamn if she didn't love him when he brought her home from the hospital, when he opened that front door, and when he stayed up all night that night drinking whiskey and telling her stories about how he learned from his mother how to talk to other men about women and fake it like a champion. Poor, sweet Lud—she never could figure out if he knew more or less of love than she did. One

way or another, he'd been a big shoulder to cry on when she drunkenly confessed who she'd really been in love with..

No, stop, she told herself. Don't think about him now.

"Thanks for calling in your question BK," Sebby said.

"Thanks for answering it and clearing that story up," the caller laughed.

"Of course dear, can't have people telling lies about me on the fiber. You be good, but not too good now," the caller hung up, mercifully stifling his breathing, which he had lathered up to a full pant before disconnecting.

"But you can tell lies about other people," Danny mumbled, but no one heard him. Things were rolling, and Tatiana's rehearsed sensuous voice dominated the air.

"Logically we gotta ask next about Johnny Naturemade, since he's physically the biggest guy on the list next to Quayle. How *did* nature make him?" Sebby asked.

"Oh boy, I'm not sure you're ready to hear this one," Tatiana said.

Sebby and Octo looked at each other with expressions of surprise and intrigue. Danny's brow knotted up in a puggish way. He scowled openly, despising Tatiana for the heresy she was about to speak.

"Smallest little woodpecker in the business," she said.

The room erupted. Sebby was incredulous.

"You've got to be kidding me. The guy is a tank!" he blurted.

"We're going to need details here, Miss Vice. You may be the queen of shooting smutty talk on the wrestling business, but this kind of accusation requires some corroborating evidence," chuckled Octo.

"I'm giving it to you straight," Tatiana said, shrugging her shoulders beneath waves of teased blonde hair, "which is more than Johnny could do with that small bent wiener of his."

Another blast of laughter shook the studio. Sebby turned his laptop screen to Tatiana so she could see the number of incoming video calls to the show. He gave her a big thumbs-up with his good hand, biting back another peel of laughter.

"If I remember correctly, you two were never together, so how did you catch a glimpse?" Octo asked.

"I mean, luckily I had my contacts in or I might have missed it."

Laughter, except from Danny.

"Seriously though, there has to be a story here," Octo again.

Tatiana leaned over on the table, as if to draw the men in, like she was telling government secrets. In truth, she just hated Johnny Naturemade. He was a pump addict for the last ten years of his career. He got violent as hell, swore at everybody. Could hardly walk sometimes and had to have everything done for him. The promoters always gave him the best booking though, and hell if he didn't put on a show, but once he was behind the curtain he was a fucking mess, and more than once he'd come after Tatiana, calling her a slut and threatening to do worse than her boyfriend had done. He'd been the first to call Lud a faggot during the few months she dated him. He said it more out of jealousy than anything else, but the sting of it never left them. Johnny Naturemade was just an asshole, and this was how a woman in the wrestling industry took revenge.

"It was before the '87 Death From Above event, that cross-promotional thing we did with the Colony Wrestling Foundation. Johnny wasn't coming out for his match, and Irina Hernandez, the boss's wife, sent me to his dressing room. I went in and caught him with his pants down. He used to inject pump in his butt-cheek where his tights would cover the mark and..."

"Bullshit," Danny muttered, this time loudly enough to make himself heard.

"Hmmm?" Tatiana looked over at him, as did the others.

"You're lying now," Danny said, "probably have been the whole time."

"Why do you say that?" said Octo, "a little butt-hurt that she's talking about your 'big' hero Johnny Naturemade over here?"

"No, she's just fucking lying. Johnny Naturemade wasn't even on the Death From Above event," Danny replied flatly, staring directly at Tatiana.

"He was, he was still wrestling for EWO in '87," Tatiana said, narrowing her eyes at Danny. Octo desperately motioned for Danny to cut the shit.

"Yeah, he was, but he protested the event and refused to wrestle that night, so it makes no sense that he would be injecting pump if he wasn't going to wrestle. So try again."

Octo cut him out of the feed, silencing his mic. Danny removed his headphones, altered specially for his wide head, but he kept talking.

"I really thought more of you, Miss Vice. You were a great wrestler and I read that you were a judo champion."

“Jiu-jitsu,” she corrected curtly.

“Whatever. I’m still disappointed that you’re playing this game. Is this the only way you make money now?”

Octo moved his own microphone away from his drooping mouth, “Danny, get the fuck out of here. Leave asshole!”

“I’m leaving. This show is pathetic, I thought you guys were fans.”

“You’re three feet tall Danny, don’t call us pathetic you little fucking fanboy,” said Octo.

“Whatever you gotta say,” Danny shook his head slowly. He opened his mouth a couple times before finally choosing his words.

“Did you really fuck all these guys though? I mean seriously? Is that why Dalton Sorensen wanted nothing to do with you? Because you were dirty?”

The name. She’d pushed it out of her mind. How did this little creep know about Dalton? Must have had an industry connection.

“Get out,” Tatiana said, not willing in the least to address it.

“Fine. I heard you were in love with him. Where’s the story about his dick, huh? You might as well fabricate that too while you’re at it. Make a joke out of every great wrestler of the past twenty-five years.”

“You really have no right,” Tatiana said, ignoring Sebby’s cues that they needed to get back to the show as he filled the space admirably by bantering with a caller. She couldn’t believe that Danny had brought him up. No one knew about her and Dalton.

“No, you have no right.” Danny hopped down off of his chair. He really was quite tiny. He waddled out of the room quietly. Wrestling fans, especially the hardcore ones, always knew everything. They really were the hardest to deal with.

“Miss Vice?” Octo said, “Miss Vice..?”

Dalton “Salty” Sorenson. His name was like a drip of purple poison in the clear, sweet memories she floated on. Dalton, who disappeared without a word. She’d loaned him most of the money in her savings. He said he needed it. He said he would come back. He never did.

“Folks, Miss Vice has stepped out to use the ladies room,” Sebby said, panicking and looking to anyone for answers. Tatiana sat unresponsive.

"Well, with all this talk, she probably has things to take care of in there," Octo joked, badly. Tatiana wasn't listening.

Dalton. He got himself fired and convinced her to leave with him. She'd never get another stint with EWO—too old by then for a new contract. What was the use in rehiring an old woman when all the rest were aging just fine? That's what Hernandez told her, basically, to fuck off and go scrape on the dissolving regional circuit. Her years in the business didn't matter. The fact that she could really fight didn't matter. She was out, and Dalton was gone with the money. He really hadn't given a shit about her, even though she'd loved him. He took her away from big, sweet Lud and sweet, dumb Dek. She always wondered what he'd done with the money.

"Tatiana, I know you're upset, but we've got to get on with the show. Can you make it?" Octo asked, leaning over her so closely she could smell him. The stench did little to comfort her.

"I'm fine," she said.

Dalton, the one she really loved.

Sebby nodded, and then cued Octo to start asking questions again.

"And she's back! Now we're interested in Dirty Metal. A lot of the ladies out there love him. Did you?"

The one she'd given up her career for.

"He was okay I guess."

The one who wrote love poems and painted little pictures.

"Oh come on now, you've got to go deeper with the details than that."

The one she'd cried over.

"Yeah, I mean, with all those metal parts and implants, it leaves someone to wonder whether or not he had a penis down there or a piston..."

Dalton. The one. It amazed her that in a whole life there could be just one that matters. One reason she was still here, selling cheap versions of old memories for some slime balls over the internet. But Danny was wrong—this was hers—she owned it. She had every right.

"Oh, it was far from metal," she said, resuming her glaze of crass sexuality, wrapping it around her like a mink coat. She could talk about this all day. She practically did. She was a performer. The show tracked an insane number of listeners. They paid her well for her segment. Told her she was a real professional. She brought the money home to the

decommissioned airbus trailer. She gave most of it to her boyfriend Jimmy, who slunk out to pay his dealer the money he owed for painkillers. She had more than enough left over to pay the bills. Right before creeping fully out of the door, Jimmy poked his head back in.

“What did you talk about on your show?” he said.

She felt like a whole other lifetime had elapsed, one folding over the other. She lit herself a cigarette and removed her blonde wig. With Jimmy going and gone, she'd have to help herself out of the corset.

“Just shooting on the business is all,” she said, unbuttoning the top button of her dress. She scratched absently at a scab on the blotched, perpetually tanned skin of her chest.

“Oh... Cool.” He said, and then he left.

She followed him to the doorway. The dying sunlight hit her directly. A ring of smoke hung around her head. She dragged on her cigarette and let her hand fall open, palm up, as if expecting a heavy rain. Jimmy walked down the block with his hands stuffed in his pockets, scanning the street. With her hand outstretched, she blew a smoky kiss goodbye.

Reverent Musings

By Linda Lee Kauffmann (SI 15)

What is life without love?

Still life.

The perspiration mark left on the table by a cold glass,
A small café, one old waiter,
The haze of smoke clouding the air.
Feelings of anticipation and loneliness mixed.
Staring out the window, waiting,
Memories fading, wistfully, but not forgotten.
Lyrics calling, channeling to stories tucked away.
The train pulling slowly away, a fuzzy mirage against a brick wall.

The fog lifts-

The hum of diners, sharing plates of small, tiny fruits.

C'est la vie...

Under the African Sky

By Babacar Ndao (SI 15)

We would always start when it was dark
 I mean really dark
 It was always around... I don't really know but
 The sky was dark and the stars were shining
 We could not tell the exact time those days.
 We relied on the Rooster.
 They woke us up in the early morning
 They announced the time to have lunch
 The time to have dinner.
 Watches were very rare in those days
 And only sophisticated people
 Coming from the cities would wear them.
 So we all relied mainly on the Roosters.
 No wonder why there were so many of them
 Every household had at least several of them.
 This wonderful and important creature
 Was also the favorite meal for the very important guests.
 I was almost always the first one to get to the *grand place*
 It was just across from my parents' house.
 Suddenly, everyone would come from different directions
 With a cigarette in his mouth
 I remember everyone looking in the dark like lightning bugs
 The crowd would get bigger by the minute.
 Here comes Osman I would say
 He started as usual. Anybody has a cigarette that I can borrow till
 Tomorrow? He did this every night. But never paid anybody back
 I was always excited to see Osman!
 He was the funniest and had the most interesting life.
 He always portrayed himself as a hero.
 He lit his cigarette and cracked open a cola nut,
 he started the conversation.
 Guys, today I got the biggest rabbit
 And he pointed the size of this animal from the ground to his knee!!
 And everybody, the whole crowd went what?
 So he suddenly lowered his hand till it almost reached the ground.
Tout Monde laughed and he laughed also.
 This place was a therapy session for everyone.
 After a long hard work day in fields
 We would gather there every night.
 And there were always interesting stories to share.
 I visited the village eight years ago
 And every time I saw those big trunks from the Baobab tree
 We used as seats all those memories start coming back.
 The people that are still there are old now but I always remain a teenager
 When I visit.

Jew Night

By Garrett Boisvert (SI 15)

I spent seven years in the trenches of the games department at Lake Compounce Family Amusement Park. It was divided into sections. Ghostly Games were all potheads and are, therefore negligible. Back Games is where I was groomed. Some statistical anomaly made the back section a fraternity, only two girls in the whole department, and their femininity was questionable at that. We were a band of brothers, the Back Games Bros. Six years we worked together: The best, most irreverent times of my life.

Front Games is the last section of the park to close. They are glamorous, fit for public consumption types. They are like Kate Upton's cleavage in the checkout line. Last minute impulses, without thinking; desire for our soft, round plush. A last ditch effort to part guests from their cash before the night is out. All nights but one, that is; all nights, but Jew Night.

My more socially conscientious comrades would say, "No, no, this is the Hebrew Camp Buyout Night." But we knew it for what it was: Jew Night.

Any other day of the year Games is unquestionably the easiest department to work in. But not Jew Night. The tables turn. It's when a bunch of boys-only Jewish youth camps rent out the entire park after it closes. So, my regular 10:00-9:00 shift turns into a 9:30am-1:00am shift. And they LOVE games, and they have A LOT of money.

Now these are Hasidic Jews. They are whole other world apart from typical American culture. Our female employees, if they absolutely have to work, must cover their elbows and have male escorts around the park. These boys, perhaps because of the conventions of summer camp, don't observe normal social rules like patience, cleaning up after themselves, routine bathing, or even the norm of just being not naked in public. The whole park is their locker room.

They'd crowd us, and cheer at us, and sing for us and to us. They'd shove and push non-stop for hours on end. Far and away some of the hardest work I've done. My first Jew Night, I was at the baseball game, a particularly difficult assignment and I ended up bashing my face against the wall in the back room until I bled from my forehead. It was too much, too fast for one so young and inexperienced.

But, as I grew, as I worked my way up the ladder, I moved away from being cannon fodder. I was a manager. It was my job to serve death sentences, to place boys at the baseball game where men should stand. But no more, I would make sure my soldiers made it through the night. I found myself brandishing a light up sword with a laser gun bulging out of my shorts, one leg up in the bed of a broken pickup truck, donning a comically large gag cowboy hat on my head, I gave my band of brothers a speech. A speech for the courage they'd need. Looking down from my pulpit, a rugged veteran, I say...

Tonight! Is the night of the Jew.

So they say, so they say.

Once a year they come down from the hills with their sausage stink. Once a year, they raid us for our plush. Our sanity. Our women folk! They come and they bargain fixed prices. And they expect order but bring only chaos, refusing to use lines! "No, I was first!" "No me!" And once more, "No, I was here before either of them." Yes, tonight, this Jew Night, they come.

So they say.

But tonight is not the night we fall. We Games Men, this Night is our night, the night where WE shine. The night when WE are the bulwark against the hordes, we the shield of the Lake! For this night we fight! This night, IS GAMES NIGHT.

And fight we did.

They enter the park through the service entrance and make their way around the Lake. A lone, brave security guard is at the head of a massive column of frothing children. His arms stretched wide like a crucifix, holding the tide back. I stand at my post, the basketball game. The first thing they see upon entering the park through the back.

I fear an elemental fear, passed down the generations.

And the guard lets up his hands and they rush past him like screaming fire. They raid the carousel, I can see it bounce like it had hydraulics as they dance on it and it can't support the weight.

They find a nice place to put their stuff and drop trou right in the park, who need privacy.

They band together in circles and sing songs under the rising moon.

They came and asked, "excuse me sir, where's the amusement?"

"Look around laddy! It's an amusement park. It's all around you."

A heavier one, sideways Yankees cap: "You've gotta see my mudda's matzoh balls, I could eat two dozen o' those balls NO PROBLEM. Wash it down with a good sodee pop; ohhhhhh brudda."

A whirl of cash shoved into my face, "How many dollahs to play this game?"

"Three balls two dollars, who's next?"

"But how many balls for two dollahs?"

"Three balls, two dollars."

"How about two balls, one dollar?"

"Prices are non negotiable."

"OI! YOU'RE KILLIN ME HERE!"

The onslaught doesn't cease for four straight hours. I sweat. I panic. I can't keep up. My boys need singles, but I ran out twenty minutes ago. I sent couriers up to the vault for more, but who knows what happened to them out in the wilds.

Time slogs on.

And midnight comes. I grab the cork gun and start clearing the crowds away, desperate for reprieve. I rush to the basketball game. They must be near the breaking point. I make quick work of the crowds, but *they don't scatter*. No. They back off, just slightly, and start forming a large circle. Bigger than the carousel, which has long stopped playing its tune. What are they doing? They need to leave.

They gather each other, hand in hand, and begin to sway. They sing. They sing a song that is not celebratory like the others.

This song is quiet.

You must need lean in to hear the Hebrew lyrics, the melody. Truly, the beauty. All ages from all around the park have gathered. They sing in unison, swelling and crashing together. The air is calm, the moon is high above, and listening too.

I ask one of the more sober ones outside the circle what this is all about. He takes me aside.

He tells me and my cohort, "this is a song of our forefathers.

Here, this line? It's about how they were rounded up on trains.

This line? It's about how they were separated from those they loved.

Now, it's about how they were killed.

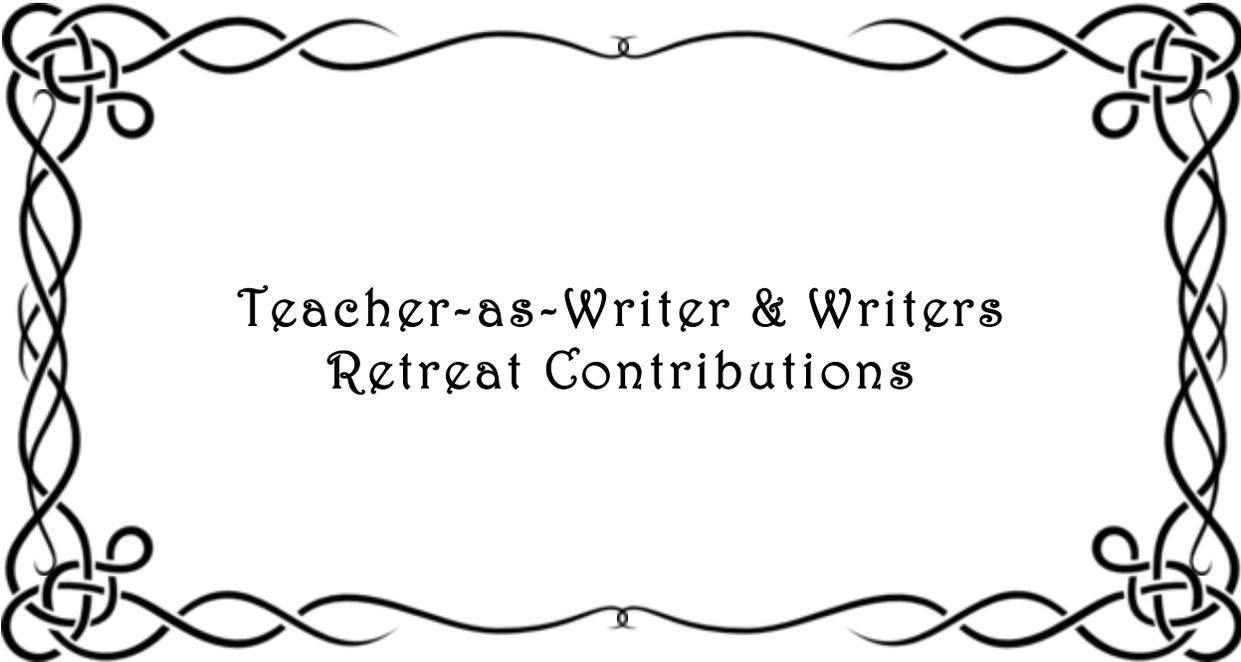
But here?" The voices rise, "It's about how they survived.

It's about the freedom and joy of reuniting families, of emigrating here from Europe.

This is a special song to us. We all know it."

I knew it. I knew that I was seeing something unparalleled in the world, that I was being brought into something special. Something that I would never see again.

I am a veteran of a dozen Jew Nights. And yes, I dreaded each one. But even though my team members begged me to give a speech every year, I couldn't do it anymore. That time in my life has past.



Teacher-as-Writer & Writers
Retreat Contributions

Calculus

By Philippa Paquette

To those who speak the language
 It is clear, demonstrative, precise
 It is even magical, evocative, divine.
 To me, it is a mystery.

I plod. I probe. I puzzle all the signs.
 I cannot hear the music, the arpeggios and chords
 That walk across the page as
 Factors, ratios and proofs.

But then I meet a LAW
 The Fundamental Theory of Calculus.
 It relates differentiation and integration
 It tells me that the distance covered is inverse to the rate of change.
 Now this I can embrace.
 The faster I move, the more ground I cover,
 The slower I move the more I see.
 Here is the magic of math.
 The point where numbers touch poetry
 Each reaching out fingers to share the electricity
 A touch that connects the dual vision of our brains.

Does the Fundamental Theory cover mental travel?
 If I can keep my brain here, in the moment,
 Will I cover more thoughts than if
 I let my mind flip like skipping stones from topic to topic ?

Does ground covered include depth of coverage?
 Do deep thoughts translate to negative numbers in the world of math?
 So many routes to square away
 Before I QED.

Polka Dots

By Julia Kneeland

I still don't like wearing polka dots! Funny what memories come to you when you see a photo. In this photo, I'm smiling broadly. It's my third birthday and I'm dressed in a blue dress with gold polka dots and satin trim. My naturally straight fine gold hair is all curled round in banana curls. I look excited and anxious for my birthday party with family to begin.

I'm standing in our apartment's living room in front of a sofa and coffee table. I look like I was about to burst. But what I remember most is the dress. I hated it but my mother insisted that I wear it and like it. I'm pretty sure there were tears—mine not hers. My mother's mode of controlling me then was to bribe me. I don't recall what transpired but what resulted was a thorough dislike for wearing polka dots, even now.

Of course, the issue was not the dress or even the gold polka dots—it was coercion. My mother's and my relationship has always been difficult. She was the oldest of five siblings and did not want to have any children. Although when sharing that with me she would always add, "but we're glad we had you," as some sort of disclaimer. Mothering was not particularly in her life plans. Working, making money and having a certain lifestyle was her priority. It's not so much that I didn't feel loved but respected.

Back to the dress. Even though I was only three my wish for what to wear on my birthday was ignored. Not only that, but my feelings were treated in such a way that I was to ignore them and put on a happy expression. I find even today it is challenging to express my feelings without a mask. It seems that the internal struggle continues, balancing out my feeling with my expressions. Darn those polka dots!

Study Hall

By Christine Carter

Kids file in. The usual suspects line up at my desk.

It's Nick, and he's dancing: "I REALLY need to go to the bathroom!"

Then Derek: "I need to go to Ms. E's to finish a test."

"I need to deliver my doctor's form to the nurse." It's Hannah.

I am not impressed by these shenanigans. "Alright, sit down," I intone.

"But Ms. Carter, I REALLY have to go!" Nick looks as desperate as he can.

I ignore him and take out my class list on a clipboard. The queue takes seats. "Come up again after you have completed an assignment," I say. Cue eye rolls.

Kaitlin is sitting in the back of the room. She always looks like she is getting work done. The boys can't take their eyes off of her and work hard to catch her attention. Each time she looks up, someone is looking at her. She smiles shyly.

There's Nick again, and I haven't even finished checking attendance. "Can I use the computer? My teacher says I HAVE to use the computer to do my assignment." I point him back to his desk.

I put the clipboard down and Sarah is there in the first row with her hand up.

"Can I go see my Spanish teacher?" It's a student for whom **English** seems to be a foreign language. For the entire year, the kids have been told that the Spanish teacher has a class this period, yet somehow it hasn't registered. I check her sheet and walk her through the dialogue.

I look at the papers at my desk. I would love to have a SECOND to sort through the haystack, but a noise erupts in the corner.

Though he has forgotten his desperation to use the bathroom and the computer, Nick has jammed the zipper on his backpack. I beckon, and with some tugging and yanking we manage to extricate the zipper from a wad of fabric (It's the third time this month I have helped him with this.) It is an expensive backpack, but he has managed to destroy it. The zipper appears to be so twisted that I wonder if it will ever again work consistently. He goes back to sit down. Seconds later his hand is up again. I walk over.

"I need to go to my locker to get my homework," he says.

I tell him no, and remind him that he must bring everything to study hall. Then I notice that his agenda is stuffed with more than an inch of papers, worksheets, messages that should have gone home. He explains that his binder is broken. I look at him silently with as much compassion as my patience, compromised by already teaching five periods today, can muster.

He says: "I guess I need a new one."

I nod and suggest that since he doesn't have his homework, he sort through the mass of papers and figure out which ones he needs and which ones can be recycled. I rummage in my cabinet for an old binder he might use.

About five pages down a delighted gasp escapes his lips! "My HOMEWORK!"

The class laughs.

He laughs too. "I hate searching for stuff," he grins.

Once again everyone is off task. I sigh; the group's work is totally hijacked by this kid. I gave him a detention just last week because he could not settle down. My last straw was when he tipped his desk over, and sprawled out on the floor. I do a slow blink to contain my annoyance and pull him out into the hall to reveal a secret: four kids have asked not to be seated near him. He is so distracting; they can't get anything done.

He looks surprised. Of course he thinks that his antics are what makes Study Hall such a great time! He can't imagine that others actually want to complete assignments and avoid taking their textbooks home!

I look at him, he looks back. He is smiling slightly, but I ask him how it feels to know that people don't want to be near him. Then nod back at the class, and he peeks around the corner. (The class is mostly working silently.)

He looks back at me. Now he isn't smiling. Does he get it I wonder?
"I have ADHD," he confides.

"That makes it really hard," I say, "but when you have a job to do, you can't just fool around and then tell your boss you didn't do your work because you have ADHD." (I am whispering). "You're a smart kid. The time to figure out how to get the job done is now. You can practice by going back to your desk and looking at the floor so no one distracts you. Then sit down and take out that assignment. See if you can get it done."

I go back to my desk and release kids one at a time:

"I have to get my stuff in the gym."

"May I go to the library to return my book?"

"I need to go to the office for a doctor's form for track."

I write passes on sticky notes signing my initials with an illegible scribble.

In between I explain math problems, pronoun agreement, point to dictionaries, and explain social studies vocabulary.

I look up, is Nick still working on the Spanish? He catches my eye and I go over to see what he has accomplished. The assignment is done, but it doesn't look like he actually thought about the task. Pointing out that "yo" means I, not you, he makes corrections.

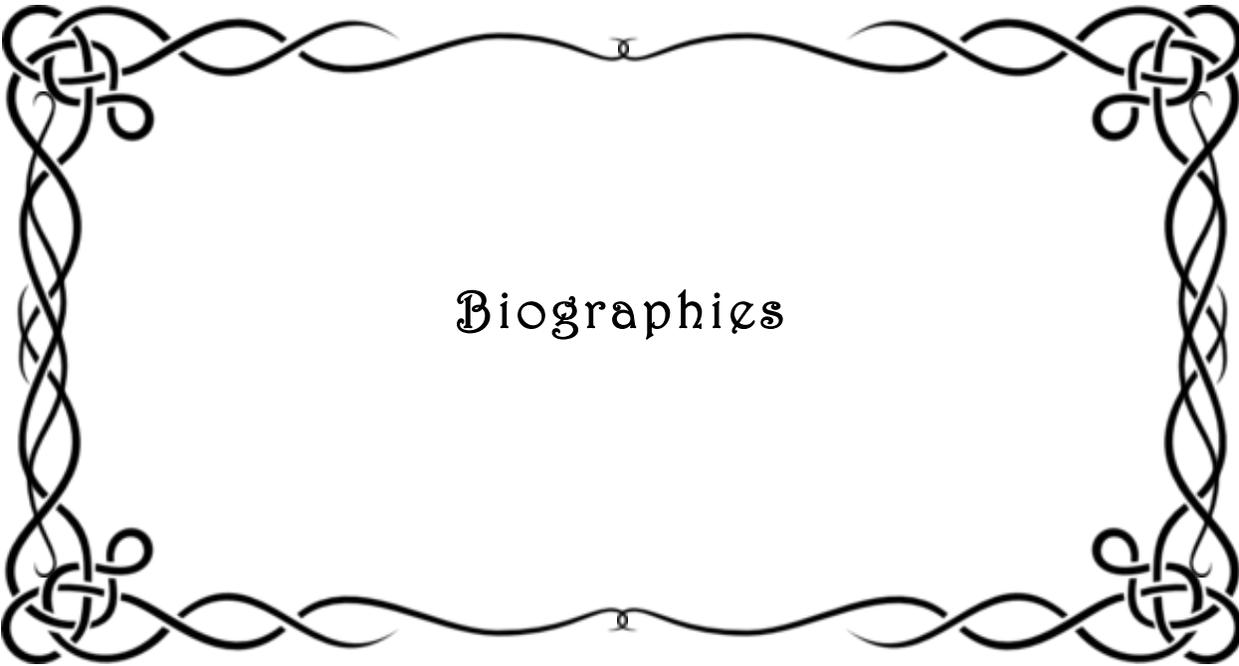
Lily, one of my old creative writers comes up and hands me a piece of paper. I was the enrichment teacher, and enrichment programs like creative writing were cut from the budget. Creative writing used to happen during this study hall time. I feel sad because Lily is taking adolescence on her nerve endings, and writing provided an outlet for her struggles. Here she is, stuck in study hall, with twenty other kids who don't want to be here.

I recently read that teachers make thousands of decisions a day. They are second only to air traffic controllers. I ponder this. It occurs to me that air traffic controllers have it easy. At least for them, the communication is straightforward. Planes come in on a certain angle, at a certain speed, at a certain time. Their trajectories are mathematical and clear.

Students like aircraft buzz around me. They are heading off in many directions, and I am constantly directing and redirecting their movements, not only of their physical space, but of their thinking. I make thousands of judgment calls each day about what direction a conversation should go, how much help to provide, which curriculum areas to cover next, how to connect the curriculum with the world of young adolescents, what tone of voice to use, what exactly to say. Are my communications critical, too? I think about this. Commanding, shouting, whispering, cajoling: even the tone of a teacher's communications can make a kid melt down, or not; can help a kid get the job done, or shut down. My ability to maintain my patience for the Nick's of the world might just help pull a life back in control—or not. It's an art, underappreciated, undercompensated, relentlessly demanding. Of course this is what makes it exciting—most days.

Lily's note is a poem: an ode to me. She thanks me for making school fun, for inspiring her, and especially for defending her right to LOVE Justin Bieber. I smile. I know I will slide this into the "Nice Notes" folder in the back of my file drawer; it's a place I go on the days when the rein on my impatience breaks, and the haystack of papers on my desk gets the better of me.

The intercom calls the first wave of bus riders. Kids file out chattering. Nick pushes ahead so he can walk down the hall beside Kaitlin, his broken backpack sprouting papers and notices.



Biographies

Grett Boisvert

The general consensus surrounding Grett Boisvert is that he's considered an English teacher at Woodstock Academy. Through sheer force of luck, nobody has noticed the obvious yet. He can't get past Thursdays in the *NY Times* crossword, but he's working on it.

Christine Carter

Christine Carter teaches English to eighth graders at Woodstock Middle School. She loves hiking, sailing, and taking afternoon walks with her sidekick, a black Labrador named Blueberry. She and her husband David are enjoying being empty nesters in Pomfret, Connecticut.

Catherine DeNunzio-Gabordi

Catherine DeNunzio-Gabordi recently retired from teaching English. Over her career, she taught in Franklin, North Stonington, and East Lyme, and she worked as a freelance writer and school-business partnership program coordinator, as well. She loves her husband, her sons and daughter-in-law, her extended family, her friends, and her (not that bright) dog.

Anastasia DiFedele-Dutton

Secondary educator, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership, life-long learner, eleven minute mile-runner, incredulous plant-killer, avid people-watcher and student of the human condition who has enviable spatial awareness skills and can find humor in most every situation.

Rebecca DiPinto

Becca DiPinto is currently completing her Masters in Education with a concentration in Literacy from the University of Saint Joseph. In conjunction with the program, she is working as a reading interventionist at Martin Kellogg Middle School in Newington. She also coaches club volleyball with CT Volleyball Academy.

Abby Djan

Abby Djan is a wife and mother of a nine-year-old girl and a twelve-year-old boy. Though she wasn't much of an athlete herself, she now is a regular soccer mom. She teaches English as a Second Language full time at Windham High School in Willimantic, CT. She has only been teaching for two years, but the students have provided her with some intense training, and now she is able to welcome prospective new teachers into her classroom with some confidence. Abby now considers herself a writer after attending the Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute at UConn. She is working on writing a book about her experiences in teaching, and welcomes new experiences that help her to broaden her horizons.

Sara Goss

Sara Goss is a recent UConn graduate from the NEAG School of Education, finishing her four years with a degree in Secondary English Education and English. She is now finishing her MA in education at UConn while simultaneously interning with Justin Taylor (2014's CT Teacher of the Year) at Bulkeley High School in Hartford, CT.

Tiffany Harvison

Tiffany Harvison is an enthusiastic second grade teacher and a writer. She has been teaching for nine years, the last five years at John B. Stanton Network School in Norwich, CT. She was named Teacher of the Year at Stanton School for the 2012-2013 school year, and she has served on the School Governance Council, PBIS Team, and District Teacher Leadership Team. She is a loving mother to four-year old Melody and devoted wife to Daniel.

Mary Katherine Hinman

Mary Katherine Hinman is a second year English teacher at Staples High School in Westport. Fiancée, field hockey coach, obsessive beagle mom, sports enthusiast, Netflix binger, sometimes yogi.

Linda Lee Kauffman

Teacher for life ... mother of three confident children ... wife of a man who makes me laugh and hear the beauty and harmony in melodious notes ... and a woman who strives to find peace and calm in a world of unrest.

Julia Kneeland

Has been teaching in Connecticut public schools for the past twenty-four years. She started her teaching career in music education. After some time she felt she wanted to teach more, so she got my cross endorsement in elementary education. For the past thirteen years, she has been teaching language arts and social studies in fifth grade at Tolland. For many years she has had the privilege of participating in the Teacher-as-Writer Workshops at UConn. She has a passion for writing and often shares what she writes with her students.

Susan Laurençot

Fourteen years teaching English in the Montville school system. Runner, reader, poet, wife and mother (not in any order of priority, responsibility or passion).

Martin Leftoff

Marty Leftoff taught English at Weaver High for 25 years. More recently he has worked at Simsbury High as the head of the English department and the director of their writing center.

Kaylee Manning

Kaylee Manning teaches English at Bacon Academy and Manchester Community College. She worked and interned in the writing center at UConn until she graduated in 2010 and is now the writing center coordinator at Bacon Academy. Kaylee is a self-described workaholic, but when she has spare time she enjoys cooking, going to the beach, and watching Netflix. Soon, Kaylee and her husband, Rafe Manning, won't have any spare time as they are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their first baby and couldn't be happier.

Rafe Manning

Happy husband; ten-year educator at Bacon Academy; former attorney; inexpressibly eager expectant father!

Bronwyn Monahan

Bronwyn Monahan currently teaches English and serves as Co-Director of the Writing Center at Suffield High School. She received her BA in English from The College of the Holy Cross in 1995, and her M.Ed. from American International College in 1998. She has been teaching since 1995, and also spent many years coaching high school basketball. Her four weeks at the CWP Summer Institute were absolutely invaluable, and she is grateful she had the opportunity to be involved in the program. She lives in Longmeadow, Massachusetts with her husband and two sons.

Joan Muller

Joan Muller was a CWP participant in 2010. She was a working artist, wildlife rehabilitator and sustainable farmer for twenty years before becoming a PreK-8 Art Teacher at the Eastford Elementary School in Eastford, CT from 1995 to the present. Joan earned her B.F.A. from the Hartford Art School, then served her dual interest in visual and literary forms of expression with courses from Rhode Island School of Design and the University of New Hampshire for her master's studies.

Babacar Ndao

Babacar Ndao currently teaches French at Rockville High School in Vernon, Connecticut. He is also an adjunct professor of Early College Experience French at UConn. He is a native French speaker from Senegal, West Africa. He graduated from the University of Connecticut with a Bachelor's Degree in Business. In addition, he received his Master's Degree in Education from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. He is currently pursuing a PhD in French Literature at UConn.

Amy Nocton

Amy Nocton teaches Spanish and Italian at RHAM High School and adjuncts teaching English composition for non-native speakers at the University of Connecticut. She holds advanced degrees in International Affairs (UConn), Secondary Education (UHart), and Spanish Literature (Middlebury College). She has been teaching secondary education for twenty-two years. During the 2013-2014 academic year, she began blogging with her UConn Early College Experience students and discovered that the blog *Perdidos en sus pensamientos Lost in His, Her, Your, Their Thoughts* has been a useful tool for teaching writing in a second language (<https://theunnamedspanishblog.wordpress.com/>). While exploring the art of blogging with students, she met Colette Bennett, who is an excellent resource and mentor. In November 2014, Amy and Colette presented a paper at an international ICT conference on teaching languages in Florence, Italy based on her experiences with blogging in the second language classroom.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, she also presented with another colleague, Danielle Pieratti, at two conferences on using metaphor to teach critical thinking in English and foreign languages. In November 2015, she will be returning to Florence Italy to present at the ICT conference on teaching languages with her friend, Rochelle Marcus, who teaches at Mansfield Middle School in Mansfield, CT. They will be sharing information on a project involving spoken word poetry, translation, visual arts and digital media.

Amy travels almost annually with students, and is lucky to be part of an annual sister-school exchange program with Córdoba, Spain. She lives in Storrs, CT with her brilliant professor husband, Jason Courtmanche, and their two quirky, spirited children, Cormac and Elsa.

Philippa Paquette

Philippa Paquette is a retired school psychologist who loves to travel for adventure and writes poetry to help retain the magic of the world around us and the fleeting thoughts and images it inspires.

Danielle Pieratti

Danielle Pieratti teaches English at South Windsor High School. Her first book, *Fugitives*, was selected by Kim Addonizio for the Idaho Prize in poetry, and will be published by Lost Horse Press in 2016.

Robert Pirrie

Bob Pirrie is a science teacher at E. O. Smith High School in Storrs, CT. He isn't sure exactly when he got interested in writing, but has a vague memory of reading Anne Lamott's *Bird By Bird* one summer in a cabin on an island off the coast of Maine. His work owes a great deal to the continued enthusiasm and support of his writing group--Jason, Amy, Kim, Danielle and Jay. He is currently working (and working) on a longer piece about a guy wandering through the Nevada desert. His wife Jen, son Casey, and his three cats are a source of inspiration and strength.

Lauren Green Shafer

Lauren Green Shafer is an English teacher at Granby Memorial High School. In a former life she was a textbook editor. Her millennial students keep her somewhat current, but she has never fully left the '60s.

John Thomas Wetmore

John Thomas Wetmore currently lives in Manchester, CT and teaches English to freshmen and seniors at Coventry High School. John loves science fiction, B-movies, heavy metal, martial arts, and professional wrestling. His interests frequently mingle in his writing with surprising results. In his spare time he scribbles down elaborate plans to build a machine or summon arcane magic that will allow him to travel back in time and enjoy the 80s in full swing. As of yet, there are no patents pending.



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