

And then the guy got up and left



Teacher-Writer

Volume V, Fall 2013

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2013 Summer Institute Fellows

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University of Connecticut
Storrs, CT

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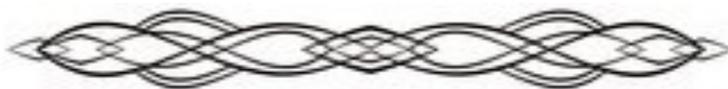
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This publication was produced by the
Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs

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**Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest
Winners, 2013**



Poetry Winner

1

La Sagrada Familia

By Victoria Nordlund

*El que estàs fent fes-ho de pressa
Whatever you are doing do it in a hurry*

Gaudi stepped out of his century
to return to the origin.
envisioning eighteen spires
in ascending order
towers of faith and transcendence.
Possessing no cranes
he began to build his piacular temple
For a client that was never in a hurry.
Broke arcs of water
full of curvaceous hope.
Cut columns of branches and bones
Tibiae of stone.
Chapels of angular restraint,
of balanced shadows.
And with monastic discipline
he planned the passion
and lost himself in the peaks
and portals of his creation.

Dreaming of Marian hymns
Gaudi, mistaken for a vagrant,
was killed on a street corner
in 1926 by a careless motorist
who broke his flesh into fragments
that no one could resurrect.

Buried in the crypt
to the left of the altar
his bones have become the foundation
for three generations of artists

who have followed his labyrinth of salvation.
His disciples devoted to the vision
never wavering, faithfully constructing
the caves and facades.
Content with the slow progression
They create the space.
They are the space.

As La Sagrada spirals
closer to Mt Montserrat
and as they carve and hew
and sculpt the Other
converting doubt into truth
offering their meager years on earth
for the promise of immortality.
They are in no hurry
for they have surrendered.
They are in no hurry
because to the client,
the cathedral is already complete.

Prose Fiction Winner

Cutting Stars

By Kerri Brown

You poked holes with a needle through a piece of cardboard ripped from a Costco box. When you shine a light through it, it'll look like stars.

It didn't. In the morning it was next to the trash, bent and worn. I condensed it, pressed it firm against my chest so it would shrink. I stepped on the garbage to push it down, and placed the cardboard on top.

I found you asleep on the chair, bent and worn, folded up and shrunken down so you fit, your head resting on the arm, your face smooth without the creased brow and bit lip. The window was open, pelting rain hit the sill, the curtains billowed like sails. I thought the noise would stir you awake.

It didn't. It wouldn't.

You always found peace among the chaos.

I found this out the night he left. I screamed. I begged. I prayed. I grabbed his arm, his leg, the door, the keys.

It didn't matter, you said, stroking my hair and pressing your palm on the back of my neck as I cried with my head in your lap.

You shined that night.

I found you writing the letter a week later and when you ripped it up I knew you'd write another one.

It didn't work, you said when you woke up in the ICU, your throat sore from tubes, your stomach muscles shot from pumping. I stroked your hair and pressed my palm into yours as I cried with my head on the bed.

You tried again two more times. Then I took the knife and slashed my hand, let the blood run to my wrist as I waited for you to do the same. You promised to never do it again.

I found this comforting. Our pact. Our way of making everything better when we couldn't better ourselves.

It didn't change everything but it changed enough.

You decided we needed to paint.

I found an old love seat and a canopy daybed from an estate sale to start our new lives.

It didn't matter if they were used. They were comfortable.

You laughed when the tire popped in the moving truck and we had to spend the night at the Seafarer Motel.

I found you a broken sand dollar and you kissed my hair.

It didn't mean much to anyone. But it meant everything to us.

You said this as you held my face in your hands.

I found you asleep on the chair this morning, bent and worn, folded up and shrunken down so you would fit. I thought my presence would wake you.

It didn't.

The Blink of an Eye

By Bernie Schreiber

Shades of metallic blue flutter by the hanging flowerpot outside my kitchen window. I see it as a shadow flitting before my eyes and think, “Wow, that’s a large flying bug!” My morning eyes have not fully opened and focused on the outside world, but as curiosity overwhelms me, I find my nose sticking to the windowpane and following the flight path of this small drone-like machine. It hovers by each flower before it flits like Tinker Bell to another and another in its staccato pattern. It’s a hummingbird! And it looks like the same one that has come in numerous previous springs. I view it as a sign of rebirth, of the wonder of nature, and of occasions that are fleeting, momentary, and serendipitous. For several years my timing has been perfect. The hummingbird hovers for two more seconds and is gone. It will not return until next year when I hope to see it again. That’s the stuff of life and how things just happen. You’re either in the right place at the right time or you’re not. You just don’t know until the time comes.

Some things are certain, like the rising sun, or the waning and waxing moon, or the tides, or birth and eventual death. Everything in between is uncertain and unpredictable. Oh sure, you can plan, you can guard against ill winds, but in the end, we’re all just a breath, a heartbeat away from a life-changing, uncontrollable event. I’m not a pessimist, but I see enough around me to know that shit happens.

Let me give you one example that occurred recently. On this cool September evening, I had just finished my violin lesson at the Community School of the Arts. It was my first lesson of the new semester and I was excited about tackling some old music with a new approach. I was going to explore the intricate soul of a violin concerto that I had played thirteen years earlier and play it with a closer understanding of each measure of music.

When I came home, I told my wife Jane about my new challenge along with the Mozart quartet I was working on as well. She was excited to hear this news, especially when I explained that my teacher Ruth told me what a great idea that was. Ruth, who has been my teacher for nearly 15 years, would not have been my teacher had I called for lessons a day earlier when another teacher still had an opening. Timing is everything. So here I am now taking my music to another level. That’s what I had been working for all these years. I wasn’t expecting to play at Carnegie Hall, but I wanted to get better each year.

So this is where life takes us on an unexpected journey; let’s call it a detour. A few days earlier, there was a wasp in the house. We eliminated it and disposed of it in the garbage can. Now Jane had just noticed another wasp on the curtain in the dining room and pointed it out to me. Maybe it was a cousin of the dead one coming for revenge. It was perched on the curtain about half way up from the floor. It wasn’t moving. Since I am the man of the house, it’s my job, my duty, to eliminate any threat to our wellbeing. So I grabbed a paper towel and proceeded to move to the dining room curtains. I walked quietly, so as not

to disturb the wasp or give away my intention. When I got close enough to touch it, I opened the paper towel preparing to trap the wasp and squeeze it to its death. Just as I moved my arm in that direction, Jane cautioned me. "Don't mess up the white curtain."

Why did she have to say those words at that precise moment? I stopped for an instant. That could be a problem if I trap the wasp between the paper towel and the curtain. Decisions! It's like the light that just turned orange and I have to make that split-second decision to brake and let the light turn red or gun it through the intersection. Either way has unknown consequences. That one moment of hesitation became our butterfly effect. As I moved the paper towel within an inch of the wasp and wavered, it left its perch on the curtain, flew up over my hand and directly at Jane who was standing three feet behind me and to my right between the end of the dining room table and the marble-topped hutch. As I turned to follow the wasp moving in a straight line at Jane's head, I also saw her reaction. Slow motion.

Jane's eyes opened wide, her face an image of shock. Her head and torso moved back while her feet remained planted on the floor. I think I heard a muffled scream. Her sneakers didn't allow her to shuffle at least one foot back to maintain balance and she began to fall. In a movie, I could have been the superhero who dives across the table and saves her from harm. But this real-life stuff kept me frozen as I watched Jane descend. So here's the good news. Going down, her head missed the marble-topped hutch, the edge of the dining room table, and the armrest of the chair in the corner beside the hutch. A serious head injury was avoided.

The bad news? As she hit the floor on mostly her left side, she winced, her head recoiled down into the hard oak floorboards, and the wasp disappeared. The really bad news? She felt dizzy and nauseous. These are not good symptoms after a fall. It only took a moment's hesitation. Brake for the light and get rear-ended or gun it through the intersection and get sideswiped or hear a cruiser's familiar siren. Every choice comes with its own reaction. "Don't mess up the white curtain!"

I kept her down for a couple of minutes until she felt ready to get up. But her left hip area hurt sharply. Not a good sign. She wanted to try to stand. I supported her and got her up, but she could not put any weight on her left foot without a great deal of pain in her hip. And the really, really, bad news? I had to call an ambulance to get her to the emergency room because she couldn't even make it to the door without excruciating pain.

So here she is, lying in bed in a rehab facility after surgery. She didn't need to have a complete hip replacement. She fractured her left femoral neck and had two screws inserted to stabilize the fracture. She will be coming home in a few more days and will continue physical therapy for a while longer. Complete recovery is expected in about eight to ten weeks. In the process, I'll be driving Miss Jane to her appointed rounds. How quickly life can turn.

It's only the blink of an eye. I expect the hummingbird to return in the spring. I just don't know if I'll be lucky enough to catch a glimpse. I do know what to do with the wasp, should it ever decide to make an encore appearance. Regardless of the consequence, I'll be messing up the curtain next time.

Poetry Honorable Mention

Something I Should Say About Why I Stopped Listening to Country Music

By David Polochanin

You may recall holding hands
at the fair that autumn of our senior year,
a local band playing a country song
about finding a lost love filling the air
around us. I didn't realize it at the time
but everything about our lives was
becoming a country song, from my pickup
truck I used to drive to the boots you used
to wear. We thought of staying put in our
small town forever, having kids young,
taking a job at a factory, walking around
this fair every year and feeling complete.
We dreamed our small dreams. But the band's
next song revealed an inconvenient truth,
mentioning something about regrets,
and, briefly, I felt a regret that day,
that I could not stay in town for good,
and then certain features of your personality
started to bother me, including your boots.
I felt this sudden need to drive my pickup
truck off a cliff and everything at the fair
lacked appeal, even the food. All I could
think of was my future self dressed in a suit
and tie, accompanied by this remarkable
woman, listening to a symphony in some
foreign city play Brahms or Handel, two
composers I hadn't ever heard of, but
beautiful sounds that I knew existed,
in a world without regret, or pickup trucks,
a world without a trace of our plans
of misdirected youth.

Poetry Honorable Mention

Before Detox

By Victoria Nordlund

Remember that year
the snow kept accumulating
kept falling long
into April.
Remember when we just stopped
shoveling because we were
in denial.
Left with no energy
to dig out of another Nor'easter.
We watched it paralyze
the tender perennials.
Our mailbox disappearing
under the sludge
with letters we had no intention
of reading because we had no more
answers.

Remember when we let ourselves be stranded?
Accepting the drifts
over our heads
enduring our loss of power
resisting the pull of action.
The lies covering us
but no longer keeping us warm.
We waited for absolute zero
and watched the tops of
our wounded oaks tired
of holding the weight of winter
left erect by tangled roots
frozen in tolerance and withdrawal
and no longer craving the promise of spring.

Poetry Honorable Mention

Out Running

By David Polochanin

When I turned right onto Meadow Lane,
I expected to see what the street sign
implied, replete with wildflowers

and perhaps a deer or two grazing
in the evening's shadows. Instead
I was greeted by a German shepherd

in full attack mode, barking fiercely
beside a little white flag ensuring me
that an invisible fence was on the property.

But today, the police dog watched my legs
jogging by and could not resist, shocking
itself across the electric boundary before

running at me, baring its teeth and barking
and all I could see, in my effort to avoid eye
contact, was the conglomerate mix of the road,

and after a few steps, I stepped across the Eight
of Clubs lying there face up, which reminded me
of Carl Yastrzemski, the Red Sox outfielder,

and the dog was suddenly silenced. In my mind
I recalled the afternoons of my youth which I spent
in front of a television watching Yaz patrol

left field, playing balls off the Green Monster.
I imagined the shadows of the wall cast over
the outfield grass, my favorite time at Fenway,

as the dog bit me once, a hard pinch, and then again,
clearly breaking the skin beneath my running pants
but the pain was negligible. It was Number Eight vivid

that day, throwing a strike to a young Jerry Remy
at second base, where he dropped his glove
on the runner's foot in plenty of time, leather on leather,

an easy call for the umpire, the type of play you'd like to see end an inning, or at least kill any gathering momentum by the visiting team.

Prose Fiction Honorable Mention

Snow Angels

By Denise Abercrombie

One January, a week before midyear exams, a beautiful snow hit. The perfect snow covered the football field, and then developed an icy crust from a glazing of freezing rain. As I looked out onto the field, I mused aloud, "Someone should write something in that snow." My B period class looked at me with half-awake faces.

Kevin broke through the morning stupor: "Field trip!"

"Snow angels," Tiffany smiled.

"We can't. We're not dressed for the elements," I reminded myself.

"Oh, come on Ms. A," Kevin urged.

"No. We really need to finish up this Poe unit before the exam. It was just a momentary thought."

The next morning, I looked out, and there were large scripted letters in the field. I tried to figure out what the imprint said. I had a perfect aerial view, but I could not decipher the word. *Balgoc* was all I could make out. I called my B period students to the window, and they took their best guesses, but everything we came up with didn't make sense.

Shauna rolled her eyes, "It's gibberish."

"No," refuted Kevin. "It's an alien life force trying to communicate with us."

"It's someone's name or a group's initials," added Tiffany.

"*Balgoc*? It seems like one word," I added.

We gave up trying, and returned to our study of Poe's "Cask of Amontillado." The next morning, Shauna observed, "I think the *g* is really a *z*. At least, it looks like a *z* from Dr. Gray's room."

"*Balzoc*? *Bolzoc*?" I said half to myself.

All day I tried to figure out the scripted word in the snow. It wasn't until F period that I spied a much smaller word above *Balg/zoc*. At the right angle from my podium, I could make out the less visible word in caps farther north in the field. If I stood in just the right place, the word could be deciphered: *READ*. My interest was piqued. *READ Balgoc*.

"I know what it says," Tiffany announced as she entered class. "Read Balzac."

"What the hell is Balzac?" asked Kevin.

"That's a who question," I responded. "Balzac, a French writer from the, uh, from another century."

"I thought you lived in France for a year, Ms. A. Shouldn't you know that?" Shauna chided.

"Yes. But I never read much Balzac. Baudelaire, Pascal, Molière, but not much Balzac."

"Well, maybe it's time," said Brian.

"It's never too late," I admitted as I stared out at the snow-filled football field.

READ

Balzac

"It's some A level kids," said Kevin with a snarl.

"Either that or it's the French department," added Tiffany.

"Teachers wouldn't do that," Brian chimed in. "Maybe the librarians."

Three days after snowfall another image emerged in the field. This time the message was unmistakable.

"Ms. A, look out the window," commanded Kevin as he strode into the room.

Expecting a big "Don't" above "*READ Balzac*," I focused my attention just above the word *READ*.

Tiffany redirected me, "No, Ms. A. It's just to the right of *Balzac*."

"It's a penis," Kevin remarked with cool scientific detachment.

I confirmed Kevin's observation with a simple, "Yes." It was the largest image of a penis I'd ever seen.

Brian and Kevin laughed uproariously as the rest of the class gravitated to the bank of windows.

"Look how perfectly round the balls are!" chuckled Ben.

"It must be a sign!" added Zach.

"*READ Balzac* with a penis?" Shauna asked.

"Who did it?" Tiffany turned to the boys.

"Maybe the health teachers," Ben smiled.

"Okay, okay, let's get seated," I said, trying to redirect the class back to Poe's unity of effect. "What a phallogocentric culture we live in," I observed, trying to put a theoretical spin on the found lesson that confronted us. "I mean nobody would dream of drawing."

"I can do that," said Kevin.

"No, Kevin. It was just a cultural observation."

When they got settled, I looked up from my Poe packet when Shauna said half to herself and half out loud, "I thought things were supposed to shrink in the cold."

Everyone laughed over my, "Enough, enough!" We somehow went on with the walling up of Fortunato.

"Montessor believed he had planned the perfect crime, and yet he finds himself growing 'sick on account of the catacombs.' What do you make of that?"

"Mold allergy. My cousin has one," said Brian matter of factly.

"Guilt," Tiffany remarked. "He hears the scream for mercy, and then the jingle of the bells, and, well, it gets to him."

"Why would the jingling of the bells get to him?" I asked.

“The dude’s a psycho,” Kevin declares. “Poe’s a psycho. We should be reading Balzac.”

“Well, Kevin. Poe was quite popular with the French.”

“The French are psychos,” Kevin tossed back.

“Let’s return to the story. Many people have attempted the perfect crime. For example, the woodchipper guy right here in Connecticut.”

“Oh, yeah, the guy who chipped up his wife,” Ben confirmed.

“Right. He thought he could get away with this killing because in Connecticut you have to have proof of a body to hold someone guilty of murder. He thought he’d accomplished that, and do you know what caused him to be convicted?”

“The woodchipper came back too clean,” said Shauna.

“Well, yes, that was one clue,” I paused, “but something else. Something he hadn’t planned on.”

“Give up?” They’re heads turned toward the field.

“They found a tooth. They could match the tooth to her dental records, and that did it.”

“They convicted him on a tooth?” asked Kevin.

“Yes, and a strand of hair or two. He thought he’d planned the perfect crime.” I trailed off and looked out the window, “much like the kids who created that drawing out there. It’s the perfect little crime—no evidence except footprints. No spray paint, no physical damage, but definitely a message.”

And on that, the bell rang, and they left me to my cinderblock classroom.

It wasn’t until day four that Mother Nature wiped out the penis. A dusting of snow erased any sign of the literary commandment and its accompanying graphic. By this time, however, snow writing had caught on. Evidently another group of boys had attempted to outsize the previous penis by marching out the entire length of the football field.

Their plan was foiled. A teacher must have reported them mid-shaft because the only part visible was the tip and then some. One could make out random footprints that looked a bit like electrons encircling the tip. From what the kids reported, an administrator made the boys run around the image in an attempt to erase the phallus from the field. Instead, the footprints meant to obscure the erection looked more like a veritable fountain of sperm. The two boys involved got lots of exercise and two detentions.

What the students thought was a perfect crime, one in which nothing was vandalized— became a punishable offense. I pictured the vice-principal at his computer revising the school handbook’s grid of infractions: Offensive Snow Graffiti—*one detention to expulsion (depending on degree of offensiveness)*.

That night, just for kicks, I googled Balzac. Ends up he was a true believer in aristocracy and monarchy.

Red Riding Hood

By Kerri Brown

I'm sure you've heard the story: a young girl travels through the woods to visit her grandmother. Along the way a wolf finds her and coaxes the girl into telling him where she is going. The wolf beats her there, eats her grandmother, and then eats the girl. A woodsman discovers the wolf, cuts him open and finds the two safe in the belly, scared but alive.

So the story goes.

But you haven't heard my story: a tale woven with the fibers of lust and the threads of hate.

I am the girl whose crimson cloak shadowed her face, hiding her grin. I am the girl who chose to walk in the wood, off the path, away from the town. I am the girl blessed with Eve's hips and Mary's eyes, a wicked innocence. I am the girl who found the wolf.

What big eyes he had.

The better to see me. They were dark with experience, like obsidian ore left by the fire. I wanted him to look at me. I needed to feel the tickle run down my spine as his eyes searched my body, exploring my shape, seeing every curve, watching the steady rise and fall of my chest.

What big hands he had.

The better to feel me. I loosened the ribbon of my bonnet and shook out the curls. I arched my neck, wanting my head to fall in his hands so he could hold me close and I could feel his warmth on my cheeks as he drew me closer.

What a big mouth he had.

The better to swallow my cherry-stained lips, to feel the hot wet of his tongue against the pink roof of my mouth.

But he didn't even look at me.

I batted my lashes and gave a whimper. I sniffled my nose and cast my eyes to the ground. He stopped in his tracks.

"Are you ok, miss?" He looked in my eyes, concern in his voice.

I let the tears run down my rosy cheeks, "No." I didn't make eye contact.

“What is the matter? Can I help you?”

“It’s my grandmother. I am forced to visit her, and she’s a witch. She’ll hurt me.”

“That’s horrible.”

“Can you save me?” I met his eyes with my tears.

He nodded. “Yes. Yes, of course.”

“Can you kill her?”

He looked down and shook his head. I reached out my hand and touched him.

“Please, only it’s the only way.” My voice shook.

He agreed.

I led him to the house and told him I’d wait outside, I just couldn’t bear the sight.

“Don’t let her say a word to you. She’ll try and trick you.”

I knocked on the door for him, with my candy sweet voice. “Grandmother, please, let me in!”

I heard a shuffle and kissed the wolf’s hand. “Bless you,” I whispered as I hurried away.

He did it. He did it for me.

When I went inside, there was not even a body. He ate her whole. I smiled my sweet smile and looked in his eyes.

“However should I thank you?” He didn’t look at me.

“You don’t have to. It’s not necessary. I’m just happy you are safe. But I should go—“

“So soon?”

“I have a wife and child to get home to.”

I could not believe his words. "But you saved me. You love me."

The wolf looked with scorn. "No. My wife, I love my wife. You said you needed me, I've done all I could."

I shook with anger and screamed. "But you love me. You do. You want me." He kept shaking his head and he moved to the door.

I saw a woodsman near the lawn's fringe. I screeched a scream of pure terror and flung open the door.

"Help me, please! Help me. This wolf, this big bad wolf, has murdered my grandmother." I cried a real cry and the man came running, axe in hand.

"Please, no, don't listen to her."

"Sir, he's going to kill me! Save me, sir, please, only you can save me. Please, quick!" I screamed.

With a swing of the axe, he chopped the wolf in half.

He did it for me.

Prose Fiction Honorable Mention

The Anatomy of Sound

By Kristina Zdravič Reardon

It was not, in the end, the sound of bombs that woke Danijela from sleep. She understood, at this point, the anatomy of sound. There were the things she had learned in school: that sound is a mechanical wave; that it is an oscillation of pressure; that the human ear adjusted its perception of sound based on whether it was transmitted through a solid, liquid, or gas; that a sound was merely a frequency that vibrated loud enough to be heard. These were the things Danijela read, copied into small square notebooks held together by a staple in the middle.

But it was not the sound of bombs that woke her from sleep that night. Rather, it was the stillness. Stillness, after months—or had it been more than a year already?—felt eerie and somehow more dangerous than the steady shouts of guns she that had punctuated her sleep, given it rhythm. It was, she later reflected, akin to the profound realization that the absence of color was black when at first, you thought absence should have been white: clean, empty, pristine, as of yet untouched. Black was more than that, somehow. It was the night sky, the ink with which she wrote; the color of the mascara she yearned to buy.

The thought of doing something as ordinary as walking into a drugstore and running her hand down the aisle of paper-packaged make-up creams made Danijela's heart beat irregularly. For once, there had been enough heat in the basement room where she and her 4-year-old sister, Linika, slept. Danijela reached to feel her sister's flushed cheeks, and gently pressed back the hair that had fallen over her closed eyes. In the midst of the Domovinski rat, the Croatian War for Independence, her father had been unceremoniously drafted to fight, which left her stepmother working even longer days to earn enough money to buy bread at increased prices. (Never mind that Danijela could bake bread much more cheaply, if they would just let her stay home from school. There was a war going on. What good were derivatives during a war?) Bread was becoming harder and harder to find. Every previous year, Danijela summered in Piran, a small seaside city in neighboring Slovenia, with her mother's sister. She and her cousins stayed out, walking along the stones of the Adriatic until 2 a.m., when the bakers finished with their next-day baking, and begged to buy hot loaves. In her dreams, she could see this, feel it: she could transform the sound of a gunshot to that of a slamming door as the baker walked to the counter, balancing a long tin tray of steaming croissants.

But not tonight. The stillness was eerie, and Danijela knew there was something wrong. Should she leave the confines of the second, hidden room in the basement, which was equipped with water, a battery-powered lamp, and as much food as they could afford not to eat? And why, in the midst of January, was it as warm as a Piran summer? She lifted the down comforter from her body and tucked it over Linika before stepping into her boots, discarded left-overs from her Slovenian cousins.

"Hello?" she called out softly as she pushed open the door, and surveyed her surroundings.

The vegetable garden was overgrown, and frozen, but still intact. She could see her breath in front of her, the warmth of the underground leaving her, first through her fingers, and then escaping through the hole in her left boot. Under the starlight, she walked up the four cement steps to ground level. Still no sound, aside from the too-loud crunching of her boots against pebbles that had settled on the grain of the cement.

“Damir?” she said, this time loudly. “Damir, are you there?”

The Horvat family house—a one-story, three-room cement structure with a red-tile roof that was identical to ours—did not answer her call. Damir was not there.

The rest of the country rejoiced that day, the newspapers splashing words of a temporary reprieve: “U.N.-SPONSORED CEASEFIRE: ONE YEAR LATER, IS THE WAR OVER?”

It was not, of course. The battles would continue for three more years; this, in 1992, was only the very beginning.

For most, it was the beginning.

“Damir?” Danijela called, over and over. “Damir, Damir?”

And then: “Ata?”

The final call: “Mama?”

She stayed on the stoop all day, pushing Linika back down into the cellar every time she rose from the ground, crying for water. She stayed there though she well understood the anatomy of sound. It is, she agreed, a mechanical wave, an oscillation of pressure. She was no longer sure, however, that the human ear could adjust to its perception.

Prose Nonfiction Honorable Mention

Matilda in Ljubljana

By Kristina Zdravič Reardon

I step into the book store on Slovenska Cesta, the street that cuts through Ljubljana's city center. Upstairs, in a series of rooms off the left of the staircase, is a children's book section that looks like any American equivalent. The drawings jump off the pages, forming a broken rainbow of color, fractured into many pieces. I'm greeted by regional classics like *Maček Muri*, the story of a small black cat with green eyes with long, white whiskers. There is also a hard-cover featuring a bunny on tiptoes, tugging on the ears of a much larger brown hare. Without taking time to decipher the Slovenian, I know the title of this book: "Guess How Much I Love You?" I remember reading it when I was younger, but after checking its publication date, I realize that it was published in 1995, when I was far too old for picture books. There must be a gap in my memory somewhere, a space that I can no longer reach, where this book lives. I decide that it must have belonged to my younger brother, or maybe to my sister.

I am browsing the shop for a thicker volume. I am in Ljubljana, but I don't know what to buy for my grandmother. As I walk around the city center each day, I try to trace my grandmother's footsteps over jagged stone and through the maze of 19th century Western structures juxtaposed against squat Communist blok buildings painted bright colors post-1991. Is this where, in the 1950s, she walked to work? The bookstore is only a few yards from Kongresni Trg, which she has asked me about on the phone: a government protest square in her time, a parking lot in my mother's, and a university park in mine.

Here, in this city, the streets are curving, colored Cyrillics. My grandmother's English, a string of unordered words even after forty years, is akin to my Slovenian. In each other's native language, we can get along in everyday life, say: *kako si?* what you do? We can ask for directions, and read simple things in the newspaper-but stumble when we speak to each other in our non-native tongues. She fled her homeland for the U.S., and I've temporarily fled my birthplace to escape to hers. We've walked along the same streets now, at nearly the same age, and yet, I do not feel her presence.

Relics of the past survive in Ljubljana in the way they do in any city: buildings, statues, stones along the river, have existed for longer than either of us have been alive. I am half hoping to find a patch of cement with an imprint of small footprints, name and date drawn in underneath them. I want to find something tangible that tells me my grandmother has been here, but no such affirmation exists. I am left to study generic landmarks, things that both our eyes have taken in.

As I trace the lines of the shelves with my eyes, I come across young adult fantasy novels, translated from English to Slovenian. I remember the point at which my reading level met my grandmother's English reading level: late in elementary school, when I pulled book after book off my shelf, carrying stacks at a time to her house, insisting she read them: every single *Little House on the Prairie*, all my historical fiction, everything I could find. A few years later, I quit bringing her books, as she either lost interest or couldn't keep up, when I started with Dickens and cheap series aimed at teenage girls.

Suddenly, I see a book that looks exactly like its English equivalent, since the title requires no translation: *Matilda*, by Roald Dahl. It was my grandmother's favorite hand-me-down book from my shelf, so much so that I'd given her my copy permanently. I remembered the way that my grandmother would always give me five dollars at the book counter, back when children's paperbacks were only \$4.95. This time, I pay for the book and cross Slovenska Cesta, entering the post office.

A few weeks later, my mother will report that Grandma loved the gift, stayed awake all night reading to finish it. There was more that happened in the Slovenian original, she claimed, and no amount of talking could convince her that the original was written in English, and that the translation was as close to a duplicate of the English version as a translation can possibly be.

I, still, linger in Ljubljana, as I try to find my way through the space that exists between us, my grandmother and me, that space which, dark as the spots that are beginning to appear in my still-young memory, seems impossible to traverse, here in Ljubljana or there in Massachusetts, in any language.



2013 Summer Institute Fellows



People are Funny

By Jillian Barry

My Uncle Marty has always said that everyone should work in the food service industry at least once in their lives. After two years as a waitress, a job I would only ever return to for the money and only under the condition that there would be no customers, I began to understand what he was talking about. What I didn't realize was that being a waitress was setting me up to deal with people for the rest of my life. I didn't realize at the time that I would meet the same characters over and over again throughout my life, resurfacing like the unfortunate yearbook photo or pesky rash. These people are unavoidable; they are inconsiderate and annoying; they can shake you to your very core. Unless, of course, you remember the mantra *people are funny*. Don't try to explain these people or understand their motives. Just understand that *people are funny*. This brilliantly simple philosophy of living can change your life if you let it. Just repeat, *people are funny. People are funny. People are funny.*

Character #1: The Higher Up on a Power Trip

One of the owners of the restaurant where I worked was probably the penny pinching man I have ever met in my life. Allow me to put this in perspective for you. On several occasions, I watched him wipe excess sprinkles off the counter and deposit them back into the sprinkle container with a wink. (On those nights, I wouldn't push the rainbow sprinkles too hard.) Most nights, when I came in for a shift, he would pull me aside and teach me how to make a milkshake. You should know that I can make a mean milkshake. Customers would point to me from across the restaurant and specially request my thick and creamy chocolate malts. I was the queen of that milkshake machine. And yet, every time I came in for work, Rodney would show me again, how to make a milkshake. His tutorials always included way too much milk and not enough ice cream, half a scoop of malt instead of the two heaping tablespoons I provided. I would always nod and smile, knowing that if he saw me make one of *my* delicious shakes, he would surely reprimand me for ruining his business model of trying to pass off chocolate milk as a shake. Deep down I knew that Rodney was just a cheap sonofabitch with a penchant for lecturing his employees on the various ways to make money. You know that phrase, why buy the cow if the milk is free? This is not the scenario this idiom was written for but it fits, because Rodney was literally trying to sell milk products. He needed to sell some cows, and here I was practically giving milkshakes away for free.

One winter evening, I learned just how much Rodney loved to make money. I was wearing my usual pink t-shirt with the restaurant logo stamped on the front, bustling around during the short amount of time before my shift began. Rodney looked at me and said, "You look cold. You should buy a sweatshirt from the rack."

I tried to tell him that I didn't need a sweatshirt. I knew that grey sweatshirt, embroidered with a small ice cream cone over the right breast, would cost me. My tip jar would be in the negatives before I even waited on my first table. I tried to tell him I was fine.

"It's the middle of winter and you're wearing a short sleeve shirt. The sweatshirts are usually \$25 dollars, but tonight I'll give it to you for \$23," he offered.

Oh, how kind! A whole two dollars off for his favorite employee.

I had no choice but to accept his offer and watch helplessly as he deposited my \$23 into the register. For the rest of the night, I was trapped in that thick, cotton sweatshirt, my face turning red as I refused to remove the metaphoric straitjacket that Rodney was making me wear. I had paid \$23 to spend my night in a sauna. At least it hadn't cost me \$25.

Rodney taught me that when you care about your job and take pride in your lifestyle, you look to save money any way you can. You make sure that no milkshake is too thick and no kiddie size scoop is too large. You make sure no sprinkle is wasted and no employee is cold. But most of all, you make sure that your cash register balances at the end of a hard night at work.

Years later, I would find myself sharing an office with a woman who hid the stapler in her desk drawer. I was convinced she would purposely assign me tasks that would force me to get on my knees in front of her desk and beg her for that precious resource. I realized then that no matter where you are, someone higher up is drunk with power. These figures come in various forms: a restaurant owner with a vengeance and a sweatshirt rack, the office worker with an unnatural attachment to office supplies, or the new administrator in your building. Don't get caught up in these power trips. Just remember, these people enjoy power because *people are funny*.

Character #2: The Unreasonable Naysayer

The story of the tuna melt will forever serve as a reminder of the many ways that one woman can piss off one waitress before her food is even delivered. I tell the story often because it is humorous, but also because it helps me remember that there is a fine line between money conscious and cheap. There is a fine line between a person who speaks their mind with reason and a person who unreasonably demands answers and change. Coincidentally, there is also a fine line between a waitress who is willing to answer your annoying questions and a waitress who would like to punch you in the nose.

It was a Sunday afternoon, during that 3 p.m. lull between lunch and dinner when she sat down at my B6 booth. After perusing the menu, she called me over to her table with a look of disdain.

"A grilled cheese costs \$4.25? That's outrageous! I could buy a loaf of bread and a pound of cheese for that price!"

What I wanted to say was, *YOU are the one who came out to a restaurant for a grilled cheese. If it was so damn cheap and easy to buy a loaf of bread and a pound of cheese, why didn't you just do that?*

Instead, I replied that I was sorry, I didn't make the prices, but, really, the grilled cheese was very good.

"And it doesn't even come with fries! I have to pay extra for fries! \$2.99 for fries!"

"Again, I'm sorry. I believe our prices are pretty standard for covering food and restau-

rant costs. And you won't be disappointed."

"The tuna melt comes with fries. Where's the logic in that?"

"Well, again, I didn't *write* the menu, but I believe it's because the tuna melt is considered a meal. A lot of times, people just want a grilled cheese by itself."

She took turns looking down at the menu with disgust and up at me with annoyance. Maybe she was hoping that if she waited long enough, I would give her a discount just for being so damn annoying. But, I was patient. At least outwardly.

Finally, she caved. "You know what, I'll take a tuna melt then." She paused as I wrote her order down on my pad, "But without the tuna."

I wanted to grab her by the shirt collar and shake her while yelling, "*You're not fooling anyone, lady! That's a grilled cheese!*" Instead, I calmly accepted her order and walked away. This woman had just managed to order a grilled cheese and fries in the most ridiculous way just so she could save a quarter. Literally twenty-five cents. And I was pretty certain that twenty-five cents would not end up back on my table as a tip.

I shouldn't have gone back. I shouldn't have checked to see if she wanted something to drink. She ordered a glass of milk and asked how much it would cost her.

"\$2.25," I replied hesitantly.

As she stormed out of the restaurant, complaining loudly that she could buy a whole gallon of milk for that price, the kitchen bell dinged. Her tuna melt, minus the tuna, was up.

With no tip, and little patience left for the remaining eight hours of the shift, I ate her grilled cheese while I thought about how freaking crazy she was. I quietly vowed to never complain about paying for something that I could do myself for free. I learned that the value of a dollar is different for everyone. But most importantly, I learned that people often don't know how to speak their minds. Years later, in another job, I would find myself in tears on the phone as another unreasonable naysayer reprimanded me for being "dense" and "frustrating" as I tried to explain to her how a federal work study operated. I explained over and over, trying to be friendly as she sarcastically and negatively undermined my every statement. Now, I can't believe I cried over it.

The unreasonable naysayers complain about one issue when, really, they are upset about something entirely different. We encounter these people rarely if we are lucky, but when we do, we never forget it. They are the woman who hates paying for sandwiches and fries separately; the woman on the other end of the phone who you picture wearing a housecoat sitting in a recliner in a yellowed, smoky room as she makes endless snarky phone calls; they are the parents who shoot off angry emails before they have the whole story. These people are nearsighted and they lack perspective. They demand that more reasonable people, like ourselves, take a deep breath, remain calm, and remember that *people are funny*.

Character #3: The Everyday Curmudgeon

John was a regular at our restaurant. He was a scruffy, retired mailman who drove a

worn out blue pickup truck. He would visit multiple times a day. He spotted me on my first day and recognized immediately that he could use my lack of knowledge to his advantage. I arrived at his table, happily arranging his fork and knife, asking how his day was, and attempting to be as friendly as I had been trained to be. He said nothing in response to my greetings, but instead, grunted before looking up at me and saying, "I had a coffee with breakfast this morning. Can I get a free refill on that with my lunch?"

It was my first day on my own. I didn't know John and I certainly didn't know the policy on free refills over a twenty-four hour period. At the moment, it seemed like a valid question, and I quietly excused myself so I could go get an answer.

"Let me guess. John is here," was the response I got from Deb, the waitress who we in the business would classify as a "lifer," "Don't let him mess with you. Charge him for a coffee, put in an order for a burger with no tomato, and don't expect a tip."

This was my introduction to John. For the next two years, I waited on him every day that I worked. I would try regularly to make conversation. "Great weather, huh?" "So, the mail..." "How's life, big guy?" He never responded. I don't think I ever even saw him smile. And only once did he leave a tip. He may not have even realized that he dropped a dime on the table, but I savored that tiny coin, proudly displaying it, taped to my tip jar with the label, "Tip from John." I like to pretend that he had looked up from his coffee and burger that day and saw me running from table to table. I like to think he thought to himself, "*What a hard-working girl. I think I might actually respect her. Today, I will leave her a dime.*"

John taught me that no matter how regularly you attend a restaurant, you are never excused from leaving a tip. Even if all you order is a free refill on your morning coffee. He taught me that grumpy people suck a lot of the time. But he taught me patience, too. He taught me that if I wait long enough, life might just throw me a dime every once in a while. Later, I would work next door to a math teacher who called my classroom to reprimand me anytime the sounds of active learning echoed through the wall we shared. Instead of being upset, I realized that these phone calls marked some of the greatest days in my classroom, when students were most excited about learning. The grumpy curmudgeons can get in the way of our happiness, but only if we let them.

You know these people well. They are the regulars who never leave tips, they are the math teacher who locks the door of the teacher's lounge and scolds you for interrupting his lunch to make copies. We pour their free refills with a smile, close the door quietly behind us after we finish running off handouts in complete silence, and hope, that one day, we might even get a small token of appreciation. And if that appreciation never comes, just remember, *people are funny.*

People are funny.

Being a waitress taught me that no matter what field I am in, I will most likely have to deal with someone on a power trip. I will occasionally have to interact with people who are

bursting with anger and frustration and lack the skills to have calm conversations. I will have daily run-ins with people are aren't living as fully or happily as I am. But sometimes, the best thing we can do is shake our heads, shrug our shoulders, and admit, *people are funny*.

Red and White

By Kerri Brown

Red wine on white down.
So much for a glass before bed.
I wash the sheets in the sink.
Let the threads bare the water
pressing fabrics together
rubbing, rubbing,
burning
my fingers in the bleach.
The glass breaks, plucked from its stem
and your shattered self stares back
a million broken memories spiraling toward the drain.
I put a piece of the glass in my mouth.
Bite the sharpness
Feel you press against my tongue.
Nothing.
I wanted to feel that fire so I put my hand
on the rings of the stove, letting the scream quake
and pulse—metastasize through the room,
hitting your window with my pain—cracking through the pane
just enough to let one sigh through.
A build up of the tension between my touch and your shrugs...
Now, all I'm left with is this blistered skin-
wasted and peeling like
the lead paint that chips away on the ceiling
above our bed
where you lie reading
and I lie watching
a glass of red wine in hand
trying not to spill.

Wrestling

(The first chapter in a fantasy series about dragons)

By Jessica Cullen

The smack of hands trying to grip bare skin and the thud of bodies on loose dirt echoed across the field where the two boys fought. High overhead, the sun burned in a cloudless sky, causing a mixture of sweat and dirt to stream down their foreheads and arms. From all appearances, the boys were exactly the same height and build, even their faces showed remarkable resemblance. So much so that it seemed as though it was the same boy fighting himself.

One of the boys, with slightly blonder, longer hair wrestled the second into a patch of high grass, frightening a resting bird into the sky with furious flapping.

“Tired, Alexander?” smirked the boy now pinned to the ground.

“Give up, Dante,” growled Alexander, his sinewy muscles straining to keep his brother on the ground. “I’ve won again.” He grinned widely, sure that his brother was too tired to free himself.

Dante let out a short exhale of laughter and continued to rock his shoulders and maneuver his knees to shake his brother’s hold. His bare skin scraped against the dirt as he struggled determinedly.

“It’s over!” Alexander grunted through gritted teeth, shoving Dante’s shoulders into the ground with the full force of his weight, “Give up!” There was a slightly more vicious tone in his voice that wasn’t there a few seconds ago. But Alexander could be like that; what started as good-natured competition often quickly and jarringly switched into a savage desire to not only best his opponent, but break him.

Dante purposefully ignored his brother. He was used to Alexander’s primal, angry desire to beat him at everything. He remembered their mother’s words to him after he broke his arm falling out of a tree. He and Alexander had been racing to see who could climb to the top the fastest, and Alexander had side-checked him so hard he had fallen. “You know how competitive he is,” his mother had gently chided as a servant bandaged his arm, “Just walk away when he gets like that. What is there to prove?” Despite his mother’s advice, he could never quite back down from his brother’s challenges. Alexander had never apologized after that incident, never shown one bit of remorse. Somehow Dante felt that to walk away from him would be to admit to some inadequacy in himself.

Yet maybe there was something to her advice after all, because Alexander’s knees were pressing so hard into his stomach he couldn’t take a full breath. He tried to remain focused on twisting his body back and forth to build up some momentum. Back and forth, left to right, each time trying to put every last ounce of energy he had into each push. He felt like he was being ground into the dirt, and the muscles in his arms and legs burned with his last desperate dregs of strength. Just when it seemed as though his muscles would not contract another time, something strange happened to his sight.

It lasted only for a second, and Dante’s first thought was that his head had sustained one too many blows to the ground. He rocked hard against Alexander’s unyielding body. But a few moments later, his sight changed again. It was as if someone held a powerful magnifying

glass in front of his eyes. His brother's pounding chest seemed to move in and out more slowly. Dante could see the particles of dirt in each drop of sweat from Alexander's brow. He could see something ruthless in the way his brother ground his teeth, in the way his pupils looked wild and unfocused.

Everything around him seemed closer and more defined. With great shock, Dante felt an unprecedented infusion of strength. He knew he should stop, concede the fight to his brother, but some deeper instinctual urge to test this new sense of power took over. Dante leaned to the left.

The force of the resulting rock sent both boys rolling one over the other thirty feet across the field. Loose stones and sticks tore at their faces and chests. The tall grass and blue sky whipped by their faces in a blur as they rolled. Finally, the boys separated, landing sprawled upon the ground a few feet apart. Dante pushed himself up quickly and painfully to his feet in anticipation of his brother's next strike. But when he got to his feet, Alexander was already standing, staring at him with a confused and slightly incredulous expression.

"Your arms, Dante," said Alexander, pointing at his brother's torso. Dante looked down at his right arm, his sight still magnified. A large swath of shiny black scales cut a gash across his forearm where skin should have been. He looked back up at his brother, his mouth open in shock. A sharp pain ripped like lightening across his forehead. His vision began to alternate rapidly between normal and magnified, and he held his head as his legs gave out and he fell to the ground.

Alexander hesitated for a moment. He ran his hand through his hair in confusion, glancing wildly across the empty field. In one swift movement, he kicked hard at the dirt at his feet in anger before stooping down and lifting his incapacitated brother over his shoulder, stumbling as fast as he could through the dried brush in the direction of their home.

Alexander took the shortcut across the field, stumbling to support his brother's weight. The patches of dirt and tall grass started to give way to shrubs and small trees. In a matter of minutes, he could see the spires of the houses that made up the village of Daksha in the distance. The homes were built like miniature cathedrals. Made of brownish red stone, each one had a large square base that supported two or three smaller tiers, topped by a large dome. Smaller spires adorned each tier, as well as the entrance ways, giving the homes a spiky, fortified appearance.

Alexander knelt down in front of the open entryway to his house, sliding his brother's body onto the ground next to him. A servant girl named Chakori was pumping water from a well along the side of the house. She saw Alexander arrive carrying Dante and came running towards them, holding her light yellow skirts in her hands. In a matter of seconds, she was on her knees beside Dante, frantically checking his pulse.

"Alexander, what happened to him?" she shot him a chastising look.

"Look at his arm." Alexander leaned back on the ground, catching his breath. Chakori

raised Dante's arm from his side. Seeing the black scales, she gasped and dropped his arm, pressing her knuckle into her forehead in a gesture of respect and mumbling a prayer with closed eyes.

"Euan born of fire no one could withstand your mighty—"

"Chakori," Alexander interrupted firmly. She glared at him but stopped praying and stood up. "Get mother," he directed, much calmer now that they were home, "We're also going to need Kurik, by the looks of him." Chakori nodded her head and took off running towards the house, the bracelets on her bare feet jangling like little alarm bells.

Alexander looked closely at his twin. The black scales had appeared on his shins and the soles of his feet. He even had a speck of black under the corner of his left eye. Alexander examined his own arms and legs, finding nothing but dirt. Why just him? He wondered to himself. He dug his heel angrily into the dirt.

"Alexander!" His mother's figure appeared in the entryway, her voice full of concern. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a bun. She wore a floor length black gown that was completely formless, the top of which was embroidered gold fabric that wound round her neck. She ran towards the boys, the train of her dress flowing out behind her, three more servants and Chakori in toe. She stood over the boys, catching her breath.

"The scales mother," Alexander pointed.

"Carry him to his bedroom," she stated, and two male servants behind her lifted the boy carefully back into the building. His mother looked worried, but Alexander detected a slight smile on her face as she turned to Chakori.

"Chakori, we're going to need Kurik."

"Yes m'am, what should I say?"

"Tell him Dante is beginning to phase. He is breathing, but unconscious. We need him to come immediately." At that, Chakori took off down a dirt path that led into the heart of the village as fast as her feet would carry her. Her yellow skirts disappeared around a patch of small trees.

Alexander rose and began to walk with his mother and the last servant into their home.

"What does this mean?" Alexander asked. He meant for himself; the recognition of what was happening to his brother was starting to sink in. His mother raised her eyebrows and looked down at her son. He could tell her mind was racing behind her calm exterior.

"Well," she stated simply, "If your brother survives the night, it means we have a dragon in the family."

His Name Was Tyler

By Julie Day

On August 4th 1993, I was supposed to call in sick again that day. Two days prior, I had gone to the emergency room at 3:00A.M. with stabbing stomach pains. My husband of two years drove me there after I began throwing up. After we arrived at the Manchester Memorial Hospital, I passed what seemed to be a small translucent grape amidst a torrent of blood into the standardized toilet. I notified the E.R. nurse, who notified the doctor, who notified my heart, that I had just miscarried my first child. I mourned the loss I never knew I was carrying, was given a sedative and sent home with Tom. The next morning, Tom went to work at the Connecticut Business & Industry like nothing unusual had happened. But I stayed home for another day, calling in sick at the Dattco Bus Company where I worked as a full time secretary to pay for my part time education at Central Connecticut State University. The bus executives were sympathetic to my situation and told me to take as long as I needed, but in the world of unpredictable and profound loss, I needed the mindless and familiar. I went to work the next day.

At 10:30 the receptionist called my extension to report some news. One of the female bus drivers with three small kids of her own, had apparently adopted a yellow Labrador retriever puppy but evidently, it wasn't the right time for their family. Among some of the offenses that the puppy had committed were chewing on the kids toys, defecating in the house and nipping at the baby's heels as he tried to crawl. The receptionist knew that we had just bought a house, and she thought we might be in the market for a dog. I was skeptical. For all I knew, this was a bad game of hot potato and I would get stuck with an unstable mutt. But I agreed to take a look anyway, and when I reached the parking lot of the bus company, I could not believe my eyes; he was a purebred yellow lab with no markings or faults to be seen. The only red flag was the gigantic size of his paws, but with little dog experience, it seemed normal. I called Tom out of a meeting at work, informed him that I was adopting this dog and brought my new baby home to our spread of nine acres of forest and fields for him to roam free and swim in our pond. I named him Tyler.

One year to the day after we adopted Tyler, our first child, Samantha was born. As instructed in the baby books, Tom brought home a baby blanket of Sam's for him to smell and he immediately took her to be his own baby. Once when I ran to the bathroom, I put Sam in her excersaucer and give her a hard Zwiebak biscuit to teethe on, Tyler simultaneously gave Sam his rawhide and when I came back into the room, he was chewing on the Zwieback, she on the rawhide. Apparently, neither one saw much difference in texture or in flavor.

When I became pregnant with Joseph a year later, Tyler once again sniffed the blanket and accepted Joe for his own. And after another miscarriage, I gave birth to my youngest child, Erica and once again, he sniffed and declared her part of our pack. He was their favorite piece of furniture, their favorite toy as they grabbed large handfuls of fur with their hands. And this is important because as the children came, Tyler grew and grew.

At three years old, he weighed 130 lbs and was tall enough to put his entire head on

the kitchen counter without jumping. We later learned he was half Irish wolfhound. Without even trying, he was my protector and workout partner as I took him for walks on the Manchester Bike Path with the kids in the double stroller. If any adult male came near us and asked if they could pet him, I would respond with "I wouldn't recommend it." And the hackles would go up on Tyler's massive neck and he would emit a low growl just to back up the lie. It worked every time.

Over the years as a lonely stay at home mother with three small children in a rural area; Tyler became almost everything to me. He was my marital counselor when my husband wouldn't come home from work. My therapy dog when the school psychologist told me that Samantha had something incurable called "Asperger's Syndrome." My best friend when uninformed family members blamed me for Sam's uncontrollable tantrums and outbursts. Each time, I would bury my head in his fur and cry and he would accept me and love me as I was. It was Milan Kundera who said "Dogs are our link to paradise. They don't know evil or jealousy or discontent. To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring—it was peace."

Years passed and each day moved into the next. One particular January day in 2002, the weather had just turned bitterly cold. I had just returned from my weekly grocery shopping trip and as expected, little Erica was sound asleep in her car seat. As I pulled the mini-van into the garage, I reasoned that the van was still warm from the car ride and Erica was bundled up tight in her little pink snowsuit complete with delicate pink mittens and a little pink hat with a pink pouf on top that was tied snugly under her chin. As I opened the door to the house, Tyler came out as usual and watched me bring in load after load into the house. After I was done, I opened the door to the minivan to get Erica out and much to my surprise; she wasn't in the car seat. I hadn't known that she knew how to unbuckle the seatbelt, much less press the button inside the van to open the door, nor had I heard it from the house.

Immediately, I ran back into the house and frantically searched from room to room looking for the baby. She was nowhere to be found. I ran back outside again, screaming her name but there was no answer. It was then that I noticed Tyler, now an old dog, trudging up the half mile long driveway with something in his mouth. It was little pink hat with a pink pouf on top. I ran faster than I ever have down to the almost frozen pond. Erica was just standing at the edge of the water when I screamed her name again. She calmly turned and looked at me. Tyler had taken the snugly tied hat right off her head to show me what danger she was in. That day he saved her life.

On August 4th, 2004, one day after our thirteenth wedding anniversary celebratory dinner, Tyler was lying on the front step as always, but this time he couldn't get up. I stayed on the floor all night with him downstairs and in the early hours of the morning, Tom lifted him into the minivan and took him to Bolton Veterinary Hospital. We went to visit him as a family that evening and he couldn't even lift his head off the table. At 11:00 P.M. the vet called to

say that Tyler had just had a cardiac arrest and he said that it looked like cancer and that his organs had just shut down. Outsiders expressed their sympathy to me for losing my dog with as much expression as they could. But I knew on that day I lost more than a canine. I lost the baby I brought home so many years ago. His name was Tyler.

Travelers

By Suzanne DesJarlais

A vacationing family of four—mom, dad, tween girl, little boy with a Sponge Bob Square Pants backpack, filled to capacity, the zipper about to burst.

Two women, who resemble each other, their eyes swollen with sadness, dark circles, weary looks on their faces.

Young man, college-aged, faded army fatigue jacket, ratty sneakers, mussed up curly brown hair, ear buds in, playing with iPhone. He has no baggage.

Senior couple, meds and 3 ounce liquids packed nicely in the regulation zip lock bags, purses open, shoes off ready to go.

Middle aged man, tall and lean, wearing shorts, a Life is Good T-shirt and a fanny pack, playing intently with electronic translator. *Hola, bonjour, buongiorno, ete-sen, komon ou ye, ni hao.* Wife standing next to man with duffle bag open showing an array of cords, adaptors, and carabiners. Travel guides, water purification tablets, zone bars, and Sharper Image travel pillow, all stored neatly in their own compartments

Over-dressed, overly made-up woman with big hair, talking on cell phone, balancing oversized designer purse, Starbucks drink, carry on luggage and shopping bag containing newly purchased novel, crossword puzzle book, overpriced trail mix and breath mints.

Beep, beep, beep, kid with Sponge Bob bag holds up the line, contents poured onto conveyor belt. Silly putty, several action figures, coloring books, Elmo toothbrush, change of clothes, and wet wipes. Mother frantically shoves everything back in, trying to re-zip after careful examination from TSA official.

Two swollen eyed women stare forward, seemingly unaware of holdup. They are there, but not there.

College student guy starts to tap foot, looks around anxiously, fidgets with smart phone, texting, checking time, whatever it is he is doing, it's important.

Senior couple, man smacks his lips and sighs loudly, clearly annoyed with Sponge Bob kid. Senior woman rolls eyes at husband and calmly strokes his arm.

Fanny pack man takes new unidentifiable gadget from open duffle bag, starts to play with that. Wife carefully places translator back into designated compartment.

Overly done up woman spills half of her coffee, swears into cell phone, hangs up, takes napkin from bag, drops it over the spill, taps it with her stacked wedge shoe, leaves it and moves up in line.

Two women move through the metal detector with ease, walk past family of four tying their shoes, and head on down the gate.

Young college man gets pulled out of line to curtained area off to the side.

Senior couple moves up. Man methodically places shoes, wallet, and keys in bin, passes right on through. Woman sets beeper off, gets wanded as she shows the card from her doctor, explaining the titanium rod in her hip.

Fanny pack is removed, goes through x-ray camera, while security guard rifles through

duffle bag, over-prepared couple eventually gets through, pull on their techwick socks, and readjust the straps on their Texas.

Cell phone lady places half empty coffee drink with straw covered in lipstick, phone, and shopping bag on the counter, opens up bottomless purse, searches frantically for her id.

Vacationing family mom and tween daughter head to the bathroom while dad and Sponge Bob boy stand off to the side to watch the carry-ons.

College guy is released from questioning area, glides on down to the gate, totally unruffled, using big strides.

Senior couple settles into their seats in coach in front of vacationing family.

Fanny pack couple holds up line in the aisle, looking for space in overhead compartments for their gadget bag.

Cell phone woman, accidentally hits senior woman in head with big purse while climbing over her to get to the window seat.

Tween daughter and vacationing mom start to argue, Sponge Bob boy immediately plays with airline tray table to the annoyance of senior man.

Two women, exhausted, ask for blankets and quickly situate themselves to sleep.

Senior man, reclines his chair and starts to nod off. Senior woman quietly reads in flight magazine.

Fanny pack man gets out of seat, stands on the side of senior man and opens overhead compartment to retrieve laptop. Adaptor falls out and hits senior man on head. Senior man huffs loudly. Fanny pack man says nothing.

Cell phone woman, headphones on, watches in flight sit coms, laughing loudly, mouth open while eating trail mix.

Sponge Bob boy's father asks senior man to put his chair back up, so son could have more leg room. Tween girl sings Nicki Minaj song that she listens to on her iPod. Mother elbows tween girl to shush her, and shoving match ensues.

Two women continue to sleep through it all.

College guy heads to the back of the plane, casually taking notice of shoving match between tween girl and her mother.

Fanny pack man takes duffle bag from overhead and stands in aisle, blocking senior man from getting out.

Cell phone woman gets out phone, makes several phone calls, and talks loudly to let everyone she knows that she has arrived.

Sponge Bob boy begins to wail and cry, kicking the back of senior man's seat, mom tries to console him, nothing works, tween girl and dad ignore them.

Two women are finally awake, they look rested and patiently wait to exit the plane.

College guy sits and stares out the window.

Senior man lets out a roar, screams at Sponge Bob's mom to get the kid to shut up.

Cell phone woman walks outside the terminal to catch the shuttle for long-term parking. Still on the phone, this time gabbing about obnoxious elderly couple seated next to her with the miserable old man and snotty wife.

Sponge Bob boy's mother, complains to husband, as they wait for next flight, how some people just don't have patience with children. Tween daughter sulks as she picks at her Fresh City salad.

The two women, now rested, calmly approach senior man, one chastises him for being rude and inappropriate to Sponge Bob boy and his mom.

College guy walks past them and shakes his head.

Fanny pack guy, duffle bag hanging off shoulder, turns around quickly, knocking senior guy off his balance, says nothing. He and his wife trudge towards tram to another terminal. The senior woman turns and looks lovingly into the eyes of her husband and exclaims, "What a bunch of assholes."

This One

By Kerri Fenton

The tobacco leaf began unraveling as the smoke from the blunt billowed into my mouth. By the time we arrived at the party, Joey and my red, spider-webbed eyes were thirsty for Visine. *This must be why they put those tiny mirrors on the visors. Even though there are rearview and side-view mirrors, the visor mirror allows me to look backwards, sideways, and drop Visine in my eyes all at the same time. Genius.*

"I have to admit, that was quality dude," I halfheartedly remarked.

"Thanks Mike," he replied.

"You think Amy's gonna be pissed we're crashing?"

"Maybe."

"Whatever. She's so uptight. She needs to chill," I trailed off.

Joey and I had become inseparable. My mom had passed away, and his dad left them after the divorce a few months back. We mostly rode around in the new BMW I bought with my part of the inheritance. We had a strict don't ask don't tell policy. We were upside-down on top of the glass ceiling, and the last thing either of us wanted to do was to try and explain what exactly that feels like.

Walking up the driveway, I noticed Amy squinting into the darkness, sending a dirty stare our way through the windows of her garage. The sound of ping-pong balls bouncing and bottles clanking escaped through the space in the bottom of the door. Between her mother's pile of books for a tag sale, her father's toolbox, and her sister's scooter, about forty people stood around two beer pong tables playing, flirting, bragging, gossiping, and drinking while I watched.

"I'm gonna sign us up for pong," decided Joey as he walked into the group.

"Kay," I replied as Emily Jensen strutted up.

"Hey, Mike! That was an awesome basket the other night!" she casually noted, batting her eyelashes.

"Thanks," I replied, unamused. Basketball is the only thing people want to talk to me about lately. They don't want to ask me how I am because they're afraid I'll bring up Mom, and they feel bad boasting or complaining out their own lives. Basketball is the safe conversation these superficial friends were willing to have.

Joey walked back over. "We're third on the table. Hey, Emily." He kissed her on the cheek like they were old family, but I've rarely seen them talk.

"Hi, Joey. Lame party, huh?"

"Yeah, tell me about it."

"I have something that could spice it up a bit," she said making prolonged eye contact with me.

"Oh yeah?" Joey questioned. Emily reached into the pocket of her Northface and slid out cocaine to show us.

"You guys in?"

"Yeah," Joey coolly answered.

"Sure," I plainly replied.

"Let's go to her bathroom now."

We walked inside and into the hydrangea decorated bathroom. Joey began rolling a dollar bill as Emily fashioned the line on the pink marble.

"Mikey, you're up." I strained for some semblance of grieving, but I couldn't feel her. *This one's for you, Mom.*

"You know the rest," I tell Dr. Johnson avoiding eye contact. Looking around his office, I notice the deep greens and browns in the duck painting hanging from a mahogany frame on his wall. *Do doctors choose the weird shit on their walls? Is this Dr. Johnson's indirect way of telling me I'm a quack?*

"Tell me about the fire."

"I don't remember a lot. I remember smoke from the fire billowing into my mouth. Then nothing." I wipe my damp palms against my thighs. *It's all my fault.*

"Do you remember what happened to Amy?"

"No. Joey let it slip in the hospital before running to the bathroom for another fix." *I wish I could remember. I wish my not remembering meant it didn't happen. It did happen. I feel my eyes welling with tears. I open them wide to dry, but the tears float down like dying leaves in autumn. I, too, changed color that night, and the old me died. Now I'm handling this in a harder, stronger way. This one's for you, Mom, and this one's for me, too.*

The Art of Bartending Weddings: A Primer for New Bar Staff

By Amy Golas

As anyone new to the industry must understand, bartenders serve many roles in our society today. We are at once procurers of rum punches and recipients of rumors and unabashed lies. But as varied as the types of customers are, so too are bartenders ourselves a varied group. The young woman tending bar in a trendy nightclub with the bass booming in the background is much different than the older man slinging beer at the local neighborhood tavern. A small portion of our bartending community selects to surrender their weekends from April through October, forfeiting family time for hours spend listening to what can only possibly be the same DJ spinning stale party music, night after night and weekend after weekend. We spend absurd amounts of hours on our feet, setting up and breaking down, and watch the same plates of food being delivered to atrociously decorated tables that are filled with people unconcerned with our presence. We are the wedding bartenders.

Bartenders are, by nature, social creatures. Even if you are normally the most introverted person, you will find yourself standing behind the bar, ready to sling innumerable. Seven and sevens and jokes to the guests. We can be the best buddy, the gorgeous gal, the fun family member, or any number of other roles. Though unconcerned with our presence, the majority of guests actually rely on us as the backbone of the party. In order to be a successful bartender, you must be aware of several guiding principles. While knowledge of these guidelines will not ensure success, it will provide you with a base from which to grow and become the most successful bartender you can be.

1. Ads calling for “hard workers” are not, in fact, bullshit.

No one likes a complainer, and there is no place this is more true than a catering hall. From the preparation to the final clean up, you are looking at a minimum of ten hours actively on your feet. If you are especially lucky, you will work for a caterer that does weddings on location. You may be daydreaming of mansions and exotic locations, but be warned: if you hear this statement from your event manager, know that when she says “on location” what she really means is “not air-conditioned.” You will spend many shifts “on location” wondering how much Gatorade you need to drink to avoid heat stroke. Learn this amount quickly.

You will be expected to be a furniture mover, ice hauler and box-lugger all within the same shift. You will know precisely how many cases of wine or beer that you can safely carry, or how well you can navigate stairs when you cannot, in fact, see your feet or what is in front of you. You will become glad that you began doing overhead presses at the gym this past winter when you are asked to move a chest of ice up two flights of stairs. Your work partner will not take “I’m not strong enough” as an excuse on these occasions. He will expect you to pull your weight, and pull it you will. You will not stop working when you feel that twinge in your back halfway through cocktail hour. You will spend ten minutes in your driveway later contemplating how you’re getting out of the car without inducing back spasms.

2. *Buy cheap shoes...if you want your feet, legs and back to hate you.*

Comfortable shoes, comfortable shoes, COMFORTABLE SHOES! Happy feet will equal happy night. Payless Shoesource, while providing the newest and trendiest styles on the cheap is a wonderful establishment, but it is not where you want to buy your shoes for this type of work. Style will cease to be important to you, and you will buy the ugliest pair of orthopedic shoes you can find.

You will become very good friends with Dr. Scholls and the variety of inserts he can provide for your feet. You will shake your head in disappointment when a new server starts work with a pair of shoes that will clearly be substandard. You will try not to smirk when you hear her say *"They're totally cute, right? And they were SO cheap!"* You will give her a knowing look of commiseration and pity when you leave later and walk past her leaning against her Jetta, delicately removing her shoes before driving home because she just can't take it anymore. After you climb into your car, you will silently laugh at her.

3. *Develop thick skin, asshole.*

Clearly, this is an element that is needed in many professions, but in direct service positions it is even more important. You will deal with people who, on the best day of their lives have turned into the worst people on earth. You will have people tell you that you made the margarita wrong, despite the fact the previous 738 you have made have received compliments (or, at the very least, no complaints).

You will have guests that will assume your brain function is limited to knowing only how to fill a glass with ice, pour in a shot, and top it with the required mixer. On bad nights, you will be told exactly how to make a gin and tonic, exotic drink that it is. Some guests will treat you like a moron, and your possession of a graduate degree will be unfathomable to them. They will not understand that you are actually at your second job of the day, and have already put in nine hours elsewhere. They will be unkind.

You, however, will have thick skin. You will invite them to enjoy the dinner and dancing that is coming up later in the evening, while secretly hoping they get the random piece of overdone chicken and twist their ankle on the dance floor. In the worst of times, when reports of a horrendous guest circulate early in the evening among the staff, you will cut off the criticisms by complimenting the beastly attendee on her shoes (which will be hideous, by the way). You will explain and serve every stupid signature drink with a smile.

4. *Learn forgiveness. It's cheaper than paying a therapist for chronic anger issues.*

Even with the thick skin, you will possess forgiveness. You will want to swear a blue streak of cuss words not yet heard on this earth. You will want to hate everyone, ever, in existence. You will consider anger management classes, but rather than spend your hard-earned tips, you will learn forgiveness instead.

Forgiveness for the bride that insisted that all her signature drinks must contain six ingredients and be served in mason jars with individually wrapped paper straws and a full round pineapple slice. These mason jars will be physically incapable of accepting ice from any standard ice-scooper, the pineapples will be impossible to slice (and you will instead end up slicing yourself) and each drink will take twice as long to make as it should. You will forgive her.

Forgiveness for the three hundred pound gentleman that just cha-cha-slided into you and your tray of wine glasses. He will slide to the left while you attempt to steady your precious cargo. Your guests will be rude, and they will be forgetful. You will forgive them. If you're lucky, they'll spout "I'm sorry!" (or slur, depending on the time of night and post-reception travel arrangements). "It's okay," you'll smile back at them through clenched teeth. You will forgive them.

You will wish good night and safe travels to the best man who spent the night assuring you, "I promise I'll take care of you. My wallet is at the table in my jacket. Don't worry, though, I'll take care of you." He will prove forgetful and will depart for home or hotel after making you pour any number and variety of obscure drinks, without having tipped you a dime. You will forgive him.

You will forgive the chef that barked at you for sneaking bits of hors d'oeuvres every time you walked through the kitchen. You will forgive your bartending partner for taking a half hour to sneak off to eat during dinner service, coming back just in time for dancing to begin and the line at the bar to reform. This will eliminate your chance to eat and will secure your spot in the McDonald's drive through after your shift is over at one a.m. You will forgive the drive-thru girl for forgetting your sweet and sour sauce.

5. Never underestimate the importance of your pre- and post-shift drink (and, maybe, your mid-shift drinks).

The pre-shift drink will relax you and allow you to shift gears and leave the stress of job number one behind. The post-shift one will relax you and allow you to shift gears and leave the stress of job number two behind. You are slinging the social lubricant for the wedding guests, and you should not underestimate the effects for yourself as well. Always take your employer up on these, if offered. If not, have necessary supplies at home that enable you to pour something tall and strong while you sit in the late night darkness and quiet of your home. If the wedding party insists you join them for a round of shots, do so. After all, accepting their request is the only polite thing to do, really. It may also help you ignore the fact that best man *still* hasn't tipped you.

6. Eat. Eat whenever and whatever you can.

Don't listen to the chef when he barks at you. He's just a big softy trying to make sure the servers don't screw up (or at least screw up less than they usually do). There are plenty of

garlic croutons available for the sirloin appetizers; he won't miss the three you just pilfered from the rack. Or the seasoned home-made pita chips you are currently shoving into your mouth. Or the handful of crudité that is now in the pocket of your apron. Or the random left over slices of cheese from the harvest display. Or the sleeve of crackers, also meant for the harvest display, that are now sitting behind your bar station, next to a cup holding several scoopfuls of ranch dressing.

You will have been on your feet for approximately four hours before the wedding even began, and once cocktail hours commences, your ability to move anywhere outside of the six by two feet area behind your counter will disappear. Snag what you can, when you can. If you do not, please learn the names of your local late night drive-thru employees. Please reference Guideline 4: forgiveness for dipping sauces.

7. Hating small children does not make you a bad person.

You will see the cutest flower girls and ring bearers during your time with the catering company, and these children will be precious and adorable. However, by the third time these darling cherubs have nearly caused you to take a digger while holding a full tray of cocktails glasses, you will want to dangle them by their ankles from the patio deck until they promise to behave. You will hate their parents by association and wish you could also dangle them over the patio railing. Spend the rest of the evening watering down their drinks as punishment.

8. DJs cannot be held responsible for their behavior and/or taste in music.

You will consider homicide when your DJ kicks things off by playing the Cha-Cha Slide, the Cupid Shuffle or (God help him) Cotton Eyed Joe. You will hate him because these songs are awful, and so he must also be awful to insist on playing them. You must refer to Guideline 4 (Forgiveness) in these circumstances. DJ's are unfortunate souls, stuck in the mold created for them by the generations that have come before. "Play a line dance! It will get people out of their seats" those generations will whisper in the DJ's ear, and a line dance he will play. And then play one more. And then another.

Curiously, DJ's possess no sense of sight during wedding receptions. Peaches and Herb's attempt to get you to shake your groove thing will go unheeded by the guests, and yet the DJ will be unable to see the empty dance floor in front of him as he mixes (badly) into KC and the Sunshine Band. This must be the only explanation, otherwise the scathing looks the staff is sending him throughout the evening would surely be noticed. Try your very hardest to not hold this against him, and definitely do not withhold hydrating liquids from that DJ, especially on hot evenings. This is too mean, even for you.

9. Never forget how good you have it.

Just remember, you could be a server. There is not enough money in the world to

tempt you into that fresh Hell.

In conclusion, remember that choosing a job in the food service industry should not be made lightly. Expectations and demands will be placed on you that would challenge the graces of even the sweetest, most gentle person on this green earth. While the guidelines above are simply that, guidelines and not hard and fast rules, they are recommendations that will help you retain your sanity for as long as possible. You will encounter some of the nicest, most genuine people you have ever met, and have nights that are memorable and fun to work. Other nights, you will be forced to make drinks in mason jars and deal with jackholes that have forgotten how to interact with common civility. Each night will have its own distinctive elements and personality, and as such each night will be new and original and possess infinite possibilities. Except for the DJ. The DJ will always suck.

Balancing Act

By Erica Gonsalves

She emerged in her own time, two weeks later than expected. She was the firstborn. I was the second. I came two weeks early. She was the well-behaved infant. I was the monster. She was the initiation into parenthood. I was the pleasant surprise. She was quietly complicated, filled with internal challenges the doctors did not initially see. I was healthy. She was the one operated on at four to fix her malfunctioning kidney. I was the smile she woke up to. She was the child in the wheelchair during her recovery. I was the child getting piggyback rides. She was the one who reached for my hand. I was the one who held onto it as my lifeline. We are Irish Twins.

He was the baby boy. I was the big sister. He was tiny and wrinkly, eyes closed, and mouth open and wailing. I was the toddler with the goofy grin plastered to her face. He was fragile. I was the protector. He had straw-colored hair with ringlets of curls. I had the rosy cheeks and the sparkle in my eye of delight when I held him. He is the one who could not pronounce my name, and donned me with the hideous nickname of 'Caca,' which began my family nickname of Doodles. Yes, it's a long story. We have the same hazel eyes.

We wore white shirts with a brown teddy bear holding a balloon and blue shirt of his own that claimed, "I'm a big sister!" We pinched his cheeks, and squeezed him endlessly with too-tight hugs, and wet, sloppy kisses. We made a game of trying to wake him as he instantaneously dozed off to sleep snuggling in between us in his car seat. We tortured him by having him be the doll in our dress-up games. He giggled, too young to understand the blackmail pictures that would later taunt him.

Life moves quickly. It becomes a balancing act. There came a moment when our height no longer dictated our age and I became the shortest of the three. They would gang up on me and tease me, call me the bookworm. They would say I'm loyal and kind. I would say she is a drama queen. I would say he is an adrenaline junkie. They would say that I'm a goody-two-shoes. I would say they are brave and admirable. We say how much we love each other.

We both fell in love with the stage, her for singing and acting, me for dancing. He fell in love with the earth: wakeboarding, dirtbike riding, snowboarding. We call each other talented.

She was the one whose eyes lost their light. I was the one who tried to find it for her. She refused to wake up in the morning and go to school. I was the one who shared her bedroom. She was the one who claimed she did not want to exist anymore. I was the one who stood helplessly by, as my mother cried and my father yelled, both confused with how to help their child. She was the one who felt lost because she had lost herself. I felt lost because I was trying to find her and felt like I was failing.

He was the one who lived with reckless abandonment of caution. He was the one who drove his motorcycle into the woods that day, speeding over rocks and tree limbs. He was the fourteen year old who neglected to put on his riding boots before leaving the house. He was the one who crashed. He was the one who shattered the bone in his calf. He was the one who was alone. He was the one who crawled for a mile out of the woods. He was the one

who climbed into the house of his friend and called my mother instead of 9-1-1. He was the one who almost died of blood loss. He was the one in the hospital for a month, pins holding the separated pieces of bone together, and eventually a bone graft after countless surgeries. He is the one with the long scars on his hip and leg. I am the one with a scar on my heart.

Life moves quickly. I became the balancing act. I refuse to create chaos, and I find myself hiding away in the moment of the storm. If there's any situation that needs diffusion, I'm the one to call. My level head outweighs my heavy heart. I am the middle, the balance, the peacekeeper, the negotiator, the calm. I am the nurturer, the comforter, the shoulder to lean on. I am the center of gravity, the base of the see-saw, trying to level the tipping forces around me. I am careful and calculated in my actions, afraid of consequences and negative judgments of my character. But I am the worrier. I was the one who is cautious, but I do not let my caution create fear. I am the one who fears my caution makes me boring, yet they say I am goofy, and together we are ridiculous and bizarre.

She was the one who moved to Boston. I am the one who lets her make the effort to call. She calls every day, texts about fifty times. She is the one who I become short-tempered with; I am the one who abuses the privilege because I know she's forced to love me at the end of the day. I call her needy because she wants my advice on everything. She says that it's because she respects and values my opinion. We aggravate each other, but it's because we love each other. We are loyal. We are sisters.

He is the one who pushes his limits. I am the one who lets him. He is the one who can easily lift me up and throw me around, laughing that I'm become, only literally, his 'little sister.' I am the one who used to hold him. He is the one who makes me so incredibly proud and nervous at the same time.

Life moves quickly. I have found myself in the middle of a tremendous balancing act. They are the ones who have made me understand that the roles we hold in our lives shape us, but they are not the definition of our character.

We may be miles apart, months apart, brainwaves apart, but our blood remains the same, flowing endlessly, like soothing, rhythmic waves to create heartbeats drumming to the same melody. They are the missing puzzle pieces to my frantic energy. They are my anchor in the moments where waves threaten to carry me away. They are my safety net and my security. Their arms wrap tight around me, creating comfort and trust. They are home.

My Loves

(to Julia, Samuel, and Claire)

By Katy Parkin

O YOU whom I often and silently come where you are, that I may be with you;
As I walk by your side, or sit near, or remain in the same room with you,
Little you know the subtle electric fire that for your sake is playing within me.

Walt Whitman

Oh, to be with you again,
like when you were new.
To be your mother, a real mother
who will be present and patient and kind.
It will be me
who makes you pancakes,
brushes your hair,
packs your bag,
and sends you on your way.
There will be no more
forgotten library books,
tears while hugging goodbye,
unfinished homework,
or wishes for more time together.
You will have all of me
and I will have all of you,
every minute and no less.
And we will dance,
laugh,
play,
and do
all of the things we missed,
especially nothing at all.

You and I

By Anisha Patel

You woke up that morning
and I did not.
You struggled to sleep that night,
but I did not.

I stayed in my dream whilst you awoke
to a nightmare.

I left you stranded in the vastness of isolation,
because I stayed asleep.

I will not wake up. But
you will. You will
continue to rise every morning until you decide,
like me,
that it is time
to sleep.

You remember my laugh and my mischief.
I remember your love and your heart.
You remember my protection and fears.
I remember your pain and your worry.

You remember us.

I remember you.

I remain asleep, two years, later,
whilst you
remember my last resting place.

You remember writing to me
but I don't remember reading it.

You told me you'd call
but you never did.

You said you'd visit

but you never did.

Now, I am asleep.

I won't pick up.

I won't be awake
when you come over.

I should have woken up for you,
at least to say goodnight one more time.

I will wait
until you fall asleep too.

The Last Will and Testament of Alen Kopitar

By Kristina Zdravič Reardon

The last will and testament of Alen Kopitar, family patriarch reads as follows: *I, Alen Kopitar, hereby write that this document is my last will and testament, and that Joško, my most trusted confidant, is the executor of said will.*

It continues:

I entrust to Joško's benefactors the division of the 37,000 square meters of land, obtained twice over by funds forwarded from New York when Grandmother Marija traveled to America by ship in first in 1894 and then in 1911 to work as a seamstress for a period of two years. The land shall be divided as I would have seen fit; that is, into nine parcels, one for each of my heirs, enumerated as follows: four sons, Damir, Edvard, Darko, and Miroslav; two daughters, Ivana and Katarina; one mother, Mama; and, of course, Joško, who shall receive the choicest parcel for grazing—the one with the patch of sun, the steady stream of water, the shade from the linden tree. The remaining parcel shall be relegated for my grave, as I refuse burial in the family plot.

I entrust that, saving a portion for Joško, my heirs will sell the remaining bales of hay and the imported Renault tractor as I would have seen fit. That is, not as my grandfather did in 1905, trading in farm equipment for a standing agreement of a lifetime's worth of Laško homebrew from the *gostilna* down the road, but for actual, paper and metal money—preferably the lasting kind; that is to say, not for Yugoslav *dinars* or Slovene *tolars* or failing Euros but for Latvian *lats*, or the slightly lower-ranking British pounds.

I entrust that Stara Mama's efforts to buy the plot of land back from the *gostilna* owner in 1912 will be remembered properly with a Sunday-afternoon lit candle and a large lantern placed on her grave on the first of November. I entrust that said candles will be placed firmly on her side of the family plot and that a single, empty can of Laško shall be placed on Grandfather's.

I entrust that Miroslav, in cultivating his portion of land, shall dig no further than 1.2 meters in harvesting crops, should he ever manage to fasten his suspenders and pull himself away from Euro Cup coverage. I likewise entrust that neither shall Damir, Edvard, nor Darko dig deeper than the same, though I suspect they, owning many pairs of well-worn suspenders, will have sold their plots before they consider this option. I likewise entrust that Joško shall be kept from such activity by his benefactors until his death, at a natural time and from natural causes. I entrust to Ivana and Katarina the reason for doing so, contained in a sealed envelope under the linden tree; I request from the network of women to whom they will tell this secret the good sense not to spread any more rumors of buried Nazi gold.

I entrust that Joško shall be given adequate rocks to climb, concentrated oats, bran, and barley to eat, which shall be kept in a trough, not on the ground, to prevent mold and insects from eating or infesting. I likewise entrust that Joško shall be given a salt-lick and shall be given a long bath and a thorough brushing no less than once per week, and that his hooves shall be trimmed once per month, and that he shall be given a well-ventilated large doghouse or small shed with a concrete floor and that his access to lush greens shall be limited to prevent bloating.

This document, consisting of two pages typed on a standard-issue Adler Portable typewriter, is the last will and testament of Alen Kopitar, hereafter signed.

14 January 1985.

Alen Kopitar

Addendum:

I entrust to the owner of the *gostilna* my 1978 subcompact Yugo.

Undersigned:

Alen Kopitar

19 March 1985

Addendum:

Should any beneficiaries deviate from the entrusted understandings in this document, his or her inheritance shall be distributed to Joško and his descendants in equal shares.

Undersigned:

Alen Kopitar

20 March 1985

The Launch

By Kate Schneider

As the old grandfather clock in the Schrodgers' Victorian living room struck 9, my friends and I snuck from the house. The August nights were getting shorter, so we could still shroud ourselves in darkness without breaking our 9:30 curfew. To escape, we'd told our parents that we were playing "combat manhunt," our inexplicably vicious version of hide-and-seek. They bought our excuse. Ha! Manhunt. Manhunt was child's play compared to what we were about to attempt.

As we crept over the backyard deck in our black clothing (because that's what ninja spies wore when they were about to embark a top-secret launch into outer space), I reverently carried our launch craft- the bright orange tennis ball that my friend, Adam, and younger brother, Daniel, had just spent ten minutes decorating with Pokémon stickers in the corner of the basement while Adam's younger brother, Charlie, and I kept lookout. The house beyond us was imposing. It seemed to disapprove of our actions—the striking Victorian windows and wrought iron door turned into a frown that seemed to say *I know you're up to no good*. I just shuddered and hurried along. As the practical, somewhat neurotic, member of our group, I was more interested in just getting to the park and back home without being caught than I was with the actual mission at hand.

Stealthily, we snuck behind the old swing-set and carefully navigated our way around bicycles and dog poop. There was a *woosh* followed by a groan as Daniel slipped on the still-wet mass of taped together trash bags that composed our homemade slip-n-slide. I turned to glare at him, giving him my well-practiced look that said, *Stupid younger brother*. Squirming, he hastily righted himself, and we ducked behind the bushes to the street.

Free from view, we were able to race the two streets down to the park behind the middle school. Reaching our predetermined location—the pitcher's mound of the unlit school baseball field- we dropped our things. I held our old camp lantern as Adam produced a long mass of taped together PVC pipe from his father's old exterior frame hiking pack.

"It's the launcher!" Daniel cried, leaning in to get a closer look. I gave him my *stupid younger brother* look again, and he fell silent.

Fascinated but hushed, the three of us watched as Adam popped the tennis ball into the end of the launcher. He turned it towards the baseball field on the side of the school. A spritz of hairspray, the flash of a lighter, that sweet, sweet anticipation, and then...nothing.

Any second now, I thought, just waiting for that sweet moment when our champion tennis ball would explode into space, inevitably leading us to fame, fortune, and super ninja-spy status.

But as the seconds ticked by, we all grew impatient.

"It doesn't work," whined Charlie, peering into the barrel of the launcher.

Frustrated, Adam shoved his brother away, then peered into the barrel himself. "Must need more hairspray," he determined.

In our haste to be as ninja spy-like as possible, we had left the directions for our home-

made “rocket launcher” at home. If one of us had remembered to bring them, however, we would have been able to read the warnings about the volatility of hairspray. Namely, not to use more than the three required spritzes or risk some serious damage.

But, of course, we didn’t have the directions, and I was in the company of three boys with a lighter and very little common sense, so what happened next was probably inevitable.

With the stupid self-assurance that only a twelve-year-old boy with a lighter could muster, Adam started to spray the hairspray into the barrel. As he emptied the entire can, a lovely flowery fragrance began to fill the air around us. Carelessly tossing the can aside, Adam held the lighter to the igniter and lit it.

WOOSH! Flames shot out the end of the would-be tennis ball launcher and ignited the air just above us. “DOWN!” I screamed, adrenalin coursing through my veins. Adam dropped the launcher, and we all hit the grass, stunned and amazed. From our vantage point on the ground, we watched as our champion tennis ball, now a pathetic mass of burned rubber six feet in the air above us, dropped despondently back to earth.

“Well shit.” Adam mumbled, sitting up and thrusting the failed launcher away from him. The four of us sat under the stars, quiet for once. Eventually, we gathered our things and headed home in dejected silence.

Adam sulked for the rest of the evening. The next morning, as we went to grab ice cream from the local RiteAid, I caught a glimpse of the miserable wreck of PVC pipe poking out the top of the garage dumpster.

That was the effective end of our attempt at tennis ball related rockets. But this failed launch was only the very beginning of a series of occasionally unfortunate aerospace-related incidents.

Houses

By Gillian Zieger

The cast of afternoon sun through a dirty window.
 The house on the edge of town is old. The curtains musty and coarse.
 Dust mites hang in the still afternoon air.
 Empty school buses pass outside.
 As I watch from my sagging window seat, an overweight mother appears down the street
 Pushing a stroller, blanket draped over.
 I imagine within, where a baby otherwise would indolently lie, a
 Cantaloupe hides.
 I put off the moment when I must drag myself from this scene to wash the cracked tea pot
 In the rust-stained sink.
 The grandfather clock stands stiff and undisturbed in the hall, frozen at 4:23.
 I consider the journey of a block to purchase a half gallon of milk,
 Though in the past three days I have learned powdered is not a poor substitute for fresh.

I wake to the solitary hum of the air conditioning, the security system, the pacifying dishwasher.
 Here the baking heat reflects off the pavement
 And the new-planted trees are barely saplings.
 They are supported by wires on all sides, their tender roots protected by the bright red mulch.
 The days are a long, boring, delightful stretch of sanitized, purified time.
 I find refuge in the clean, efficient laundry room.
 Work boots never touched these pale yellow grosgrain floors.
 A playroom, replete with plastics and smiling characters. The television hums
 Unobtrusively in the background. Inside the stainless steel fridge is a large packet of ice-cold
 baby carrots.
 I am open to the empty delights of the hours.

An apartment building, a beehive of interconnected catacombs
 Each one a mirror of the others.
 From this floor the street sounds are muffled, far away.
 There is sanity in the smallness: small stove, small desk, small life.
 When a new magazine arrives, the old is thrown out.
 Here one may, without apologies, order Moo Shoo pancakes for five days
 And so be fed.
 Should I choose, at 10 pm, I will descend with a rush of air to ground level,
 Momentarily choked by the sickening humidity, walk one block, and find refuge
 In the CVS. Those blindingly ordered red and white isles.
 A whole unit of time may be passed in the selection of a hand-cream.

Then to return, up up up, to find the clock display a satisfying 10:25.

These women in these houses in these cities and towns.

In all of them myself: their privation, their excess, their drudgery, and their lassitude.

A hungry voyeur, I live in each one,

And in each one, times stands still.



Teacher as Writer and Writers
Retreat Contributions



An excerpt from my memoir *Through the Cut*

By Ginny Bitting

In the first year of my relationship with Ken, my husband, we escaped to the city on a crisp day in October. We drove through the flickering trees to Cambridge. At the Harvard Co-op, he wandered down the stairs, while I rummaged through the second hand books. After a few minutes, he pulled me away, clutching my hand, kneading the tendons with his thumb as he led me through the stacks. I had not thought I would be in love with an engineer, but his methodical ways were nearly always inspired.

“You have to see this.” He stopped me at the top of the stairs and put his hands on my shoulders, squaring me with the slanted ceiling in front of us.

It was a large poster-sized black and white photograph. A woman stared at us. A dancer, I guessed from the sculpted muscles and intense gaze. She was naked, suspended in mid air, her knees tucked up to her chest, hair spread out in a halo around her face.

I murmured. “It’s beautiful. So full of life.” My eyes fell on hers and they warped me out of the present and into a pocket of the past.

Four years previously, I arrived in Austria—to study music education at the Mozarteum. I had graduated from college the previous spring, knowing I was too weak and stubborn to work full time. In early October a taxi deposited me at the house in Anif, a small village to the south of Salzburg where I had rented a room. Frau Auer, my landlady, greeted me warmly and gave me a small dinner.

The next morning, she took me out the front door and pointed up and behind me. I turned. Rising from the Salzburg plain like an advance guard for the Alps to the south, the Untersberg towered over the house, backlit by a rising sun. Clad in a simple house dress and full length apron, she exclaimed proudly, “Es hat geschneit.”

I gasped. It had snowed over night, dusting the peak. The white stripes on black wet stone brought it close, almost overhead.

An hour later with the Untersberg at my back, I rode my bike north for the start of classes. About thirty of us, all Americans, gathered in a large room with a resilient green floor. A wall of mirrors with a barre on one side faced full-length windows that ran the length of the opposite wall, looking out to the Untersberg and the expanse over which I had ridden that morning. It was a dance class. Dance so modern I couldn’t possibly fail.

We ran in chaos to the beat of a drum and herded ourselves into a clockwise circle. My feet pounded into the floor. It sprang back throwing me out across the river and up into the mountains. Afterward, we lay on our backs, spent, chests heaving with exertion.

Our teacher exhorted us. ‘Feel your bones sink into the ground. Become a spine. Stretch, lengthen. Press your spine to the floor.’ And then we rose to leap and spin again.

As the weeks went by, I danced my way out of seclusion and into my foreign body, daring to look in the mirror where bodies floated and twirled. I couldn’t yet look at the faces. After a month, someone in flight caught my eye. Calf muscles taut, legs outstretched, arms forward in a half circle, reaching out to embrace the air. Together we spun in pirouettes, but I

pretended it wasn't me.

We again lay on our backs to rest. My chest rose and fell. A whisper rippled up from the ground and through my spine.

"You might be real."

I quivered and I sat up.

Child Trafficking

By Philippa Paquette

I am a girl and the world is my oyster.

I am a girl and I am the world's oyster.

I can be forced open, traded and paraded
caressed, sucked on, stolen and cut open.

I am the oyster with the virgin pearl,
that is the target of men's greed.

They do not see the rainbows of my soul.
I'm just some breasts, some buttocks and a hole,
A honey pot a money pot's their goal.

My parents feed me to the dream machine
that promises a future they can't give.
I am born away from safety nets and lifelines
taken to a place where I'm alone.

The lying rosy scrimms are torn away
I'm forced to lose my rainbows and my pearl.
The shell is left but all the heart has gone.
I am a girl and I am the world's oyster.

Buffalo

By Susan Powers

The children watch as the ice breaks
and the little black dog
plunges into icy depths.
They scream, run to the pond's edge
where caution holds them back.
Suspended above I look down
into the dark water wondering
just how much life has
disappeared into this abyss.
The children cry and pray.
I feel their despair seep into my bones
thinking this must not be.
Then the water's surface breaks as
the small dog emerges.
His black ears fan out next
to his shiny head, and the children
shriek with pleasure.
I hold my breath, water sprays, forms erupt,
and out come all of the lost animals:
bedraggled cats, dogs, horses:
then the buffalo.
Large as mountains, huge surfaces
glisten wet with water,
and I know the children's prayers
have brought their monstrous forms up
into the air, the sun.
My husband's arms circle me,
"Wake up," his voice soft.
But I know I must not
open my eyes, break that spell.
With closed eyes,
I watch the animals
come into the light.

And Now, For My Next Trick

By Neil Silberblatt

When the rabbit ears and Zenith allowed,
I would watch in 15" black and white awe
as Elizabeth Montgomery and Barbara Eden
 possessed of powers beyond my
 pre-adolescent comprehension
used their god-like skills
to vacuum their respective living rooms
effortlessly.

Later, on the rare Saturday morning,
 when I was allowed through feigned illness
 to dodge temple,
I would watch as Clark
still in mortal garb
removed his hat and horn-rimmed glasses
 but never his tie or smirk
and trained his laser vision
 capable of burning holes through mountains
on pancakes.

As I hear the tale
of the transformation of water into wine
and the extraction of water from a rock,
I wonder how it is that such divine skills are used
for such parlor tricks.

As though Moses sought to persuade Pharaoh to release
his enslaved people
by asking him to pick a card
any card
and Pharaoh would be left slack-jawed in wonder
as Moses, with a biblical flourish,
produced the four of spades from his robe
and yes, that was the card he had chosen
how did he know?
He must be god's true messenger and,
of course, the children of Israel would be set free.
But first, do one more.

Yes, very impressive.
Nice trick with the wine.
How about, next time,
ending thirst.



Biographies



Denise Abercrombie's (SI '07) writing has appeared in *Blue Collar Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Common Ground Review*, *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly*, *Instead of A Magazine*, *Kalliope*, *Minnesota Review*, *Open Weave*, *Phoebe: Journal of Feminist Aesthetics and Scholarship*, *Radiance*, *Seeds of Fire: Poetry from the Other U.S.A.*, *Struggle*, *Poetic Journeys*, *The Lumberyard: A Radio Magazine of Poetry, Prose & Music*, and *Writing on the Edge*. Denise chairs the English department at E.O. Smith High School, and lives in Storrs with her husband, fellow teacher and writer, Jon Andersen, and their two sons, Kit and Miles.

Jillian Barry (SI '13) is a new teacher at Rocky Hill High School. She graduated from the University of Saint Joseph in May and was hired as an English teacher for grades 9 and 11.

Ginny Bitting (SI '07) lives in Mystic, CT, a block from the house where she grew up. She has always loved to write and enjoyed her time at the CWP Summer Institute in 2005. Her academic career crisscrossed the Atlantic—from local schools, to an English boarding school, Clark University in Massachusetts, the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria, finishing in Boston at the New England Conservatory. Wanderlust never left her. She sang with her husband, Ken, in a chorus that toured Italy and England. Later, with daughter Adrienne, and one cat or another, they sailed from Maine to Florida and then spent a year to voyaging to the Bahamas and back. In June 2012, she retired from Stonington Public Schools after teaching for thirty-four years and is now at work on her memoir, *Through the Cut*.

Kerri Brown (SI '13) teaches high school English and Creative Writing in Sandwich, Massachusetts. When she's not writing (or teaching about writing), you can find her running after her border collie on the beach or experimenting with soup recipes in her crockpot. She is currently working towards her Masters in English.

Lori Carriere is a graduate student at the University of Connecticut. She is currently working on a creative dissertation.

Jessica Cullen (SI '13) currently teaches English at New Canaan High School. She graduated from UConn's Neag School of Education in 2011 and is immensely grateful for the resources and opportunities the Connecticut Writing Project has provided her for professional development.

Julie Day (SI '13) is a 7th grade English teacher at RHAM Middle School in Hebron, CT. A recent graduate of the Connecticut Writing Project (2013), Julie graduated from the University of Hartford and University of St. Joseph with degrees in English and Secondary English Education. She resides in Andover, CT with her husband and three children.

Suzanne DesJarlais (SI '13) is in her 16th year of teaching Social Studies at E. O. Smith High School in Storrs, CT. She currently teaches Politics, Non-Western History, and Latin American Studies ECE. She has also taught Western Civilizations and Geography. Suzanne reports, "It was a great experience to collaborate with other teachers in the Summer Institute, where I gained a lot of insight into the writing process."

Kerri Fenton (SI '13) spends her days full of laughter and learning with the 8th graders at DePaolo Middle School. Some of her best memories include her undergraduate and graduate years at the University of Connecticut (go huskies!) and her travels on Semester at Sea. She enjoys spending time with her family over a meal cooked by her chef-to-be sister Katie.

Sean Frederick Forbes teaches creative writing and poetry at the University of Connecticut. His poems have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *Sargasso: A Journal of Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture*. *Providencia* is his first book of poetry.

Amy Golas (SI '13) is in her fifth year of teaching at RHAM Middle School instructing seventh and eighth grade students on the finer points of grammar, thesis statements, and the importance of elaboration. She lives in Canterbury, and when she's not entertaining adolescents, she is the assistant coach of women's swimming at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Erica Gonsalves (SI '13) attended the CWP SI this past summer. As a Central Connecticut State University graduate, Erica loved having the opportunity this summer to immerse herself in a new university experience at UConn and fell in love with the campus. She is currently in her third year of teaching English at Manchester High School, where she teaches four sophomore English classes and one sophomore interdisciplinary class. She reports, "We have had a few changes at MHS this year, one of the most significant being a Google Chromebook for every student, and I am grateful for the instruction on technology that I received this summer because it has helped me open my eyes to the creative ways in which I can use this tool."

Victoria Nordlund (SI '93) is the department head of English at Rockville High School in Vernon, CT where she has been teaching English for twenty-three years. In addition, Victoria has developed the creative writing program at RHS and teaches the English methods course for UConn's Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates department. Many of her students have won prestigious national and state poetry and prose competitions. She received her BS in Education from the University of Connecticut in 1990, and in 1999 received her MALS from Wesleyan University. She was a finalist for New England Association of Teachers of English Poetry Competition and her work has been published in the *Connecticut English Journal* and *The Leaflet*.

Miller Oberman is pursuing doctoral studies in poetry and poetics at the University of Connecticut, and has published poems in *Lilith*, *the minnesota review*, and *Rattle*. Miller's poetry collection, *Useful*, was a finalist for the 2012 National Poetry Series and Miller's translation of the Old English "Rune Poem" was awarded *Poetry Magazine's* 2013 John Frederick Nims Memorial Prize for translation.

Philippa Paquette came to the United States from England on a Harkness Fellowship and studied at Yale University Graduate School in the Clinical Psychology Program. She worked in her private practice for 13 years, during which time she married and had three children. She attended UConn's Graduate School in School Psychology and has worked as a school psychologist for the last 24 years. She has attended the workshops for Teachers as Writers at UConn for three years. Last summer, she was a writer in residence for a week at Trail Wood, Edwin Teale's home (which is run by the Audubon Center). She also climbed Mount Kilimanjaro!

Katy Parkin (SI '13) has taught first and second grade in South Windsor for twenty years. She is currently on a year-long leave of absence while pursuing her sixth year degree in reading at UConn. She has three of her own children, ages 9, 7, and 5.

Anisha Patel (SI '13) is a second year English teacher at Manchester High School. She attended the CWP this past summer in order to gain some experience for her writing and for the writing of her students. She is currently teach 9th grade Language Arts and 11th grade American Literature and has used several strategies and activities that she learned while attending the CWP.

David Polochanin (SI '99) began his career as a journalist in Boston and Providence. He teaches English at Gideon Welles School in Glastonbury. His writing has recently been published or will appear in *The Hartford Courant*, *Education Week*, and in the literary magazines *Albatross*, *Gadfly Online*, *Negative Suck*, *Toasted Cheese*, and *Sentence*.

Susan Marie Powers lives in the Connecticut woods with her husband and son. She teaches psychology and English at Woodstock Academy in northeastern Connecticut where her students make her smile every day.

Kristina Reardon (SI '13) is a PhD student in Literatures, Cultures, and Languages at the University of Connecticut, where she works as assistant director of the Writing Center. She holds an MFA in fiction writing (UNH, 2010) and an MA in comparative literature (UConn, 2013). Her fiction, non-fiction, and translations have been published in journals and magazines such as *World Literature Today*, *Words Without Borders*, *Slovene Studies*, and others.

Milanka Reardon (milankareardon.com) holds natural science and children's book illustration certificates from the Rhode Island School of Design. Her scratchboard depiction of a dragon under Stari Most, a bridge in Bosnia, won first place in the 2012 New England Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators poster showcase. Her work has been displayed at the Warwick Museum of Art in Rhode Island and published in literary journals, such as *The Alembic* and *HOOT*.

Kate Schneider (SI '13) is a graduate student studying Elementary Education at UConn's Neag School of Education. She is currently interning at Naubuc School in Glastonbury and works as Co-Coordinator of Outreach at the UConn Writing Center. In the coming year, Kate looks forward to completing her master's degree and finding her first teaching position, where she hopes to share many of the writing workshop ideas that she learned in the Summer Institute with her students.

Bernie Schreiber's (SI '11) early life can be summed up this way: Germany, Israel, Germany, Sweden, Germany, USA. He received his bachelor's degree from UConn with an English major and Theater minor, and later earned his masters in language arts education at Eastern Connecticut State University. After teaching at the Ashford School for 32 years, he retired to focus on family, violin playing, and writing.

Neil Silberblatt has been writing poetry since his college days at Cornell, inspired by his English teacher at Stuyvesant High School (Frank McCourt). A collection of Neil's poems titled *So Far, So Good* has been published by www.lulu.com and two of his poems were included in the October 2012 "It's Political" issue of *Verse Wisconsin*, an online and print literary journal. One of Neil's poems, "Madison Avenue," part of his *New York Suite*, was selected as the Grand Prize Winner by *Hennen's Observer* for its Open Community Poetry Contest. Neil was also recently nominated by *Hennen's Observer* for a Pushcart Prize. A second collection of Neil's poems, tentatively titled *Present Tense*, will be published later this year. Neil has organized a series of Voices of Poetry events featuring a distinguished and diverse array of poets (and musicians) at venues throughout Connecticut, including The Sherman Playhouse; Minor Memorial Library in Roxbury; Gunn Memorial Library in Washington; The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield; Hartford Public Library; and New Britain Museum of American Art.

Gillian Zieger (SI '13) is in her eighth year at Woodstock Academy where she teaches English and theater. She attended the University of Connecticut for her M.A. in English and Skidmore College as an undergraduate. She is currently working to establish a peer-run writing center at her high school in partnership with the UConn Writing Center. In her spare time, Gillian loves reading (no surprise), horses, cooking, and the outdoors.

Special Thanks to



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