

El Portal

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EL PORTAL

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**Eastern New Mexico University's
Literature and Arts Journal**

About El Portal

Since its inception in 1939, Eastern New Mexico University's literary magazine *El Portal* has offered a unique venue for the work of writers, artists, and photographers both on campus and off. It is published each fall and spring semester thanks to a grant courtesy of Dr. Jack Williamson, a world-renowned science fiction writer and professor emeritus at ENMU who underwrote the publication during his time on campus.

Each semester *El Portal* encourages previously unpublished short story, poetry, non-fiction, flash fiction, photography, and art submissions from ENMU students and faculty, as well as national and international writers and artists. *El Portal* does not charge a submission fee. Submissions from ENMU students receive the special opportunity to win a first-, second-, or third-place cash prize in their respective categories.

For additional information about El Portal, please visit our website:
<http://elportaljournal.com>

Submissions

El Portal is open to submissions from all artists and writers; however, its awards are intended solely for the benefit of ENMU students. Submissions are published on the basis of talent, content, and editorial needs.

El Portal serves as a creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) as well as artists, writers, and photographers worldwide. Consequently, the views expressed in El Portal do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of ENMU as a whole.

Guidelines

Please submit all written work in .doc, .docx, or .pdf formats. With the exception of poetry and art/photography, please limit entries to one story or essay. Simultaneous submissions are welcome; we ask only that you notify *El Portal* in the event your work is accepted elsewhere so that we may remove it from consideration. When entering a submission, please include a biography of no more than 50 words to be printed alongside your piece in the event that it is accepted for publication.

- Fiction (up to 4,000 words)
- Creative Nonfiction (up to 4,000 words)
- Flash Fiction (up to 500 words)
- Poetry (up to 5 poems)
- Art & Photography (up to 5 pieces)

Deadlines

Spring 2017: Please submit by October 31st, 2016.

Fall 2017: Please submit by March 31st, 2017.

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An Interview with Joseph Somoza

Joseph Somoza was born in Asturias, Spain in 1940, and grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey; and Chicago. After studying pre-med and English and teaching college in Texas and Puerto Rico, he received an MFA in poetry from the University of Iowa in 1973 and moved to New Mexico the same year. He taught creative writing and literature at New Mexico State University for twenty-two years, and was poetry editor of *Puerto del Sol* and a founder and poetry editor of *Sin Fronteras Journal*. He has published five pamphlets and five full books of poetry, most recently, *As Far As I Know* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2015) and he has an online chapbook (www.SFPoetry.org, Broadside #38, with paintings by Jill Somoza). He has done readings of his poetry in venues throughout the United States and in Mexico, and has had poems in over 200 hard-copy and online magazines, journals, and anthologies. He took early retirement from teaching and editing to have more time for writing mornings in his back yard and taking part in the poetry community in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where he lives with his wife Jill, a painter. They have three children and six grandchildren.

El Portal recently had the chance to sit down with Mr. Somoza and ask him a few questions about his most recent book, *As Far As I Know*.

EP Your book *As Far As I Know* dabbles in many themes and subjects, but the topics of time, death, nature, and memory seemed to emerge most prominently. In what way did you see these topics converging while writing your book? Did any of the connections take you by surprise?

JS The topics my poems in *As Far As I Know* deal with (time, death, nature, memory) are topics that naturally occur to a person my age. When I go outside to the back yard to write in the mornings, I never have any plan in mind. I want to use the writing to find out where my mind is at that particular point in my life. Now that I'm old, it's not unexpected that I would think about death and time and that I'd be swamped by memories.

EP *Your book is divided into three parts: “Say Something,” “April Flowers,” and “From the Dark.” Can you discuss the significance of the section titles and why you chose to divide the book up in this way?*

JS When I have enough poems that I consider good enough to make a book (in this case, poems covering the 7 years up to 2015), I lay them on the living room floor to see how they go together, how one might lead to the next, etc. It’s at this time that I also determine the sections of the book. The poems from this 7-year period, it seemed to me, focused on three areas: the writing process itself (part 1), dying and death (part 3), and memories and other things (part 2). I chose titles of specific poems from each section as titles for the sections, choosing titles that resonate appropriately with the main thrust of that section.

EP *You note in your biography that you most often write in your back yard and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it seems a great number of your poems take place in that location. What sort of importance do you find yourself bestowing on your back yard in your writing?*

JS I want my poems to represent where I am (literally and figuratively) at the moment of the writing. Since I write mostly in my back yard, it’s not surprising that so many images from my yard reappear in the poems. I think I like the back yard as a place to write because, first of all, I feel totally secure and free there, free to let my mind take me wherever it wants to. It’s also stimulating to be outside, where my senses can be stimulated by sounds, images, and occurrences in the physical world that might set off ideas or memories that might lead to a poem. My wife and I are immigrants (from Germany and Spain) who have lived in many places, mostly rented city apartments. Our home in Las Cruces is the first home we’ve ever owned. For this reason, too, my back yard is a most precious place to be and to write from.

EP *In your essay “Freight Car” you mention that you most often like to write quickly and in a burst of inspiration, letting the poem build itself*

and maintain its energy. Were any of the poems in your book the products of an unlikely source of inspiration? If so, what was it?

JS Various sources have inspired some of these poems: a movie I recently saw, a vivid dream, something I was reading at the time, sounds or images from the world around me in the back yard or elsewhere, my mother's dying and death, a strong memory. One poem that surprised me when it occurred is "Out of Order." I was surprised that a late-night visit to an I-HOP would have a strong enough effect to lead to a poem.

EP *El Portal* is home to many experienced writers, but we also see our fair share of first-time publications. Do you have any advice for aspiring poets who may be hesitant about seeking publication?

JS Publication is good for a writer because it can boost his/her morale. If you send a poem out to a magazine, it may or may not be chosen. If not, you haven't lost anything. But if it's chosen, you feel good knowing that someone else in the world was moved enough by your poem to want to print it. A writer, though, needs to write, first of all, for him/her self. He/she needs to write from the most authentic core of him/her self regardless of how he/she feels others might respond to the writing. Writing is, I think, primarily a contemplation, an investigation of the self. It has to be totally honest. And especially if it's a poem, it has to use language in a way that is somehow striking.

Certain Things Are Likely

Juan Carlos Pérez-Duthie

You know this is your last chance. You take a quick look in the mirror before heading out. You make sure that you're not missing anything. You're set. Go.

With the Psychedelic Furs cassingle tucked inside one of your front pockets—that gray keffiyeh, the one you bought for almost nothing down in Greenwich Village, around your neck and black leg warmers to (what else?) warm up your Jordache jean-covered legs right above your Doc Martens—you leave the dorm to wait for Thomas.

He should be here any moment now, his smokin' 1976 Dodge Dart—his pride muscle car, albeit one in a rather unfortunate chicken manure color—unmistakable among all the other students' vehicles.

No matter. That baby has an engine that won't quit and, to traverse the streets of Mayor Koch's Bronx, you need a mean machine like that. Of course, you won't be going to any of the movie theaters on Grand Concourse. Hell no. Care to see *A Night in Heaven*, with *The Blue Lagoon's* Christopher Atkins? No? Didn't think so.

The last movie you saw at the Fordham Palace was *Body Double*, also the only flick you remember with Melanie Griffith that you liked. De Palma sure knew how to showcase her talents: he had her play a porn star. She never takes her clothes off and still manages to be sexy in this funky mystery (with that super-cool L.A. mansion that overlooks a canyon) that, for whatever reason, has Frankie Goes to Hollywood performing *Relax*.

Then it hits you: “Shit, where *is* my *Relax* shirt, the all-white one with the word RELAX in big, badass, bold letters?” Thomas had the one that read “FRANKIE SAY.” Obviously, neither you, nor Thomas, nor anyone else for that matter, (except perhaps Frankie) knew what the heck Frankie was going to say.

Now that song pops into your head and, like an alien bug, gets embedded deep inside your brain. Sort of what Wham! also used to do to you, but in a bad way, when George Michael and his buddy Andrew sang *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go!* and you wanted to puke.

Yet with Frankie it was different, right. You actually liked their sound. But you change your train of thought and try to get back on track. There's something else that you must not forget. Something you need to discuss with Tom/Thomas/Tomás or any of the other names you call him.

You check your watch and notice it's been 15 minutes since you left the dorm room. Your ears are cold in spite of your long Bon Jovi *Living on a Prayer*-type-hair covering them; you exhale and it's like you're becoming *Batman's* Mr. Freeze. You should be wearing one of your hats. Maybe the faux-fur one you bought in Chinatown when you first moved to New York: the one that reads "Made in Russia" and makes you look like Raisa Gorbachev. But no, no, no you are not wearing it, no way. Not today. People sometimes look at you funny if you wear hats. Or maybe it's because you've bleached, dyed, or tinted your hair again, and in a Catholic school, that is not exactly kosher. One week, you're channeling Robert Smith from *The Cure*, with hair so black it's like a crow landed on your head to rest; another week, you pay homage to Duran Duran and become one of their *Wild Boys*. You feel tempted to go the Boy George route, but you don't push it. You don't want any negative *Karma Chamaleon* striking you. But getting back to the hats... What is it with your classmates that they don't wear hats other than maybe a Yankees or Mets cap, or perhaps some ugly, generic winter *chapeau* got for half-price at Macy's discount bins? How can they not looove the hats down on Canal Street?! "They live in New York, and they don't wear hats?" you catch yourself saying again disapprovingly, realizing that now, ahem, you could be wearing something to keep your head warm, but you're not.

Finally, you see Thomas. The Dodge Dart makes its entrance. There's a slight coating of ice on the hood and you realize that he's left the car outside again during the night. You hope the heater is working; otherwise, it's gonna be a cold 30-minute ride all the way to the Whitestone Cinemas in Westchester.

"*Hola*, what's up?" says your friend in his usual cheerful voice, stepping out of the car and removing a glove to shake your hand. You can't help but stare. His blond hair is cropped short yet spiked, à la Billy Idol in *Rebel Yell*. His skin is so white it's almost vampiric; his face veins are as blue as his eyes. And he is wearing his favorite coat,

the brown bomber jacket he bought with you at The Cockpit, as well as his perennial favorites, Levis with Reeboks. You recall quite clearly when you went along with him to buy those Reeboks and he correctly stated that this brand would be the next big thing. The jeans fit him nicely, snugly, and his feet point inward a bit, so he walks in the sneakers like taking little jumps. It makes you happy in an innocent, childish way.

“Cold, isn’t it?” you reply, holding his hand tightly, glad to have him there. You both get into the car and soon it screeches in the snow, leaving behind a snake of mud and dirty ice. Ummhumm, the heater is broken.

“Hungry?” he asks, and you nod.

He pulls out some gum from inside his jacket and shares with you.

“Starving,” you add.

“We can either wait till we get to the theaters or...”

All right, you know what’s next. That there are not too many options, but the closest one, the cheapest one, and the yummiest one (at least when you’re recuperating from a hangover), is White Castle. The mini burgers of White Castle, 39 cents a piece (!), with those tiny pieces of chopped onion that remind you of dinner at Barbie’s house and a patty that tastes so inexplicably good that you wonder if it’s Soylent Green.

In the end, though, you decide against the delectable mysteries of White Castle and its Lilliputian meals. Your stomach can’t take all that grease today (and probably neither can Tom’s, for that matter), especially since you did not hit the clubs last night.

You did go clubbing last weekend, though.

“I missed you,” you say.

Thomas couldn’t accompany you; he had a family gathering in Yonkers, so you went with some of your girlfriends. You did the whole tour, bopping around town like Cyndi Lauper in that strange World War II-like scooter she sits in while Captain Lou Albano drives her around in the video for *She Bops*.

“We hit the The Cat Club, The Limelight, The Tunnel, and a few more. But after The Tunnel, man, everything sort of becomes a blur haha,” you tell Tom, checking yourself in the wide rearview

mirror in front of you, fluffing your hair as if you were ready for your close-up in a John Hughes flick.

Thomas takes a quick glance at you, chuckles at your comment, and says he's sorry he missed it. He likes dancing with you and with the girls. You add that you saw Paul Lekakis lip-synch *Boom Boom Boom (Let's Go Back To My Room)* at Studio 54. Yeah, that Studio 54, now only a memory.

"Too bad Studio closed down," Thomas continues, focusing on the road ahead. There's snow on each side, small mounds that cover trash and make everything seem fairytale clean and pretty. There are trees behind, like a forest on a diet, all arthritic and scraggly looking. And the sky is gray with no clouds, as if about to weep.

There's a lull in the air. You then remember that you have the cassage in your pocket and that the song on the tape makes you wanna dance with somebody. Thomas enjoys your music as well, even though he's more of a superfreak of Bruce and his *Born in the U.S.A.* album.

"Hey," you say, holding up the cassette. "*Heartbreak Beat*. It's not Springsteen but... Wanna play it?"

Sure, Thomas wants to play it; he loves the Furs' music too. He digs all the *Pretty in Pink* selections. Like you, he thought Molly Ringwald was the bomb. You both bought the movie's soundtrack at Tower Records one night after dinner at Caliente Cab. You also fell in love with (and feared) another one the movie's songs, *If You Leave*, but this you keep to yourself. You even thought the name of the band that sang that track, Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark, was just sublime. But the *Heartbreak Beat* tape has a remix on the other side, a maxi single of the song, and Thomas hasn't heard it yet. When the chorus comes on, your heart races; you get goose bumps. You know why it always makes your spirit soar.

*There's a heartbreak beat
Playing all night long
Down on my street
And it feels like love...*

Because it *does* feel like love, though you are not sure. You can't

explain it. Actually, you don't *dare* explain it, not even mention it. And Thomas? Forget about it. What would Helen think if he started spilling out all these strange ideas? Buh-bye engagement. But you sorta, kinda wanna say something. And one time, this day, you will actually have to open your mouth. Quickly, spontaneously. Over without even getting started. You realize you are running out of time. Soon you will be leaving the city and he may be staying behind. You don't know where you're headed, but you can't stay here. And so your chances diminish with each passing moment. This will be your last winter together and the movie you're going to see may be *it*.

The song ends and Thomas pulls over. You look at him, wondering what's going on. He tells you he's taken the wrong exit, and now he has to turn back and you may not make it in time. You don't know what prompted this confusion. Was it the chat about the clubs? Did you distract him? Maybe the song had this effect on him? He then adds an "Uh oh." Silence. Then, "What?" "We're also running low on gas." Hell no, you don't see yourself pushing that tank in the snowy cold, with an empty stomach and a dour, lead-like sky above you that may drop buckets at any moment. He apologizes, smiles, and shrugs innocently, not irking you. He has that about him. Sometimes you just want to hate him, smack him, but you can't. How can you, after that smile and that shrug have come your way? You are not aware of what you say next and he doesn't react, either. It's like your words fly out into the ice and just levitate. "If I didn't love you so much, I would take a cab home," you remember saying. But you don't mean it. The cab part, that is.

Yes, yes, yes, you make it to the movies.

The cinemaplex is not too crowded: only a few kids who have left school, still wearing their uniforms, and a couple of senior citizens. You look at these folks and feel warm with nostalgia. They remind you of the women whose businesses you frequented in Little Italy for the past four years, the Italian matrons with cheeks like beets and chestnut hair, dressed in graveyard colors with tiny red horns dangling from their necks to protect them from the evil eye, selling you their mozzarella or those cannolis or that salami. Or making pizzas, and that pasta, at Amici's! And so now you are really hungry and you could go for Italian food, but they only have pretzels and

nachos and things like Jujubes that make you cringe and Jesus Christ *no*, you don't want that much sugar or you'll fall into a coma and what in the world is a Jujube anyway?

It's a matinée and there's no one else in the particular movie theater where they're showing *Black Widow*. You like Theresa Russell; Thomas is hot for Debra Winger. Standing side-by-side, you both stare at the flick's poster. You savor the silence and then offer to bring something from the concession area. Gosh, you've been to that theater so many times. You started going to Whitestone with *Beverly Hills Cop* and you never stopped. Today you will.

Popcorn litters the floor and you make a beeline for the Coke Icee. It has to be Coke. Not white cherry or blue strawberry (gross) but plain old Coke. Thomas will have some of yours, just a sip. And maybe some of your popcorn, as long as you don't butter it. He's into all that macrobiotic stuff, Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps and so on, and he reminds you of that. You roll your eyes a bit. One day, just wait, he vows, he will be like Arnold in *The Terminator*. You're pleased when he drinks from your cup. Perhaps his will is less strong than he thinks.

You finally sit down and the movie starts. At some point, sitting side-by-side, you realize there is no else around. You haven't taken off your jackets. You still have that Palestinian scarf on. He stares intently at the screen. So do you. In a way, it's like you're back inside the Dodge Dart, traveling to the theaters. Except that now you're not moving. You're just there, waiting for the movie to catch some speed, holding a bucket of popcorn for the two of you. You don't look at him, but your right leg touches his left leg and that's how you both stay for a long time. You slurp your Icee.

The film ends. You head back. He drops you off. He hugs you goodbye. That night, he leaves Fordham's Rose Hill campus to go to his house in New Rochelle. You already miss him.

Your dorm room is warm, cozy, as if it had a fireplace, but it does not. You're hoping your roommate Kai is not there. Thank you, Lord, he's not. You sit in silence. The TV is off, the phone doesn't ring, the neighbors are not blasting Shannon's *Let the Music Play*. You love Shannon, but no, not tonight.

You take off your jacket, remove the scarf and put it all away. Kick off your shoes and go to the red plastic milk crate that holds

your record collection. You flip through the album covers that you have covered in plastic. You pull out *The Hunter* because you—and Thomas—both love Blondie. You never got to see them in concert; he did. You thought one day you would bump into Debbie Harry in Chelsea, where someone had told you she lived, but you never did. You went to Patricia Field's boutique because you read in *The Village Voice* that she was friends with Debbie. Yet you can't even meet Patricia.

Every time you're in the neighborhood and stop by the store, a basement flooded with black club clothes on one side and a rainbow of colors on the other, there's a different attendant that toys with your senses: a beautiful, tall as a palm tree, slinky, sexy black girl with tons of eyeliner and a cone of hair manicured as if it were a perfectly laid out garden. She is wearing black from head to toe. *Ladies and gentlemen, Ms. Grace Jones*. But you realize she is a he when she opens her mouth. You ask her a question, but you can barely hear the answer. She's blasting her boombox, and you're competing with Eurhythmics' *Missionary Man* when you try to speak. You both move to the groove, smile, nod.

You walk out.

Other times when you've gone to the store, it's the Asian girl with the Astro Boy hair and the Hello Kitty ensemble that greets you. You giggle in joy as you talk to her. She is so cute she looks made out of cookie dough. Is she Korean? Chinese? Japanese? No, she's from Utah, she says; her name is Liz, she was raised a Mormon, and is now in Manhattan studying at Parsons and trying to become a designer. She carries a fluorescent backpack that could guide airplanes on the tarmac and does not remove it even while in the shop. It's like her parasitic twin, an inseparable creature that springs to life from her back. A tiny, wild lilac orchid peeks from under a lock of hair. You wonder if it's fake. The flower, not the hair.

You walk out. Again.

You go home. Alone.

You knock on the door. Silence.

From your closet, this time you retrieve a Florsheim shoebox with cassettes, and look for another one of your favorites, *Certain Things Are Likely*. You don't understand that song, not even the band's name, Kissing the Pink, but you dance to the beat, which lifts up

your melancholy considerably, even if the tune reminds you perhaps of what could have been. Or not.

*Certain things are likely
Certain things I blame
Certain things are likely
They hypnotize me, hypnotize me
Like falling in love...*

You take a nap.



You hear the door open and someone comes into your store. You stop daydreaming. She's been in the record shop, many times. She is so petite that she seems to only come up to your waist. Around 18 or 19, you think, young enough to be your daughter. You feel protective of her. She's pretty in a *Sixteen Candles* kind-of-way, not arrogant; impetuous and inquisitive, yes, but hardly rude. She wears Fruit Loops-like jelly bracelets—she reminds you every once in a while, in case you've forgotten, that she bought them from you—and Doc Martens, just like the ones you used to wear. They look a bit too big for her feet, but she carries them well. Her T-shirt is vintage Madonna, circa *Into the Groove* time. She wears a tartan skirt with white stockings. Her name is Eileen.

You remember her type. They were everywhere in the clubs in New York. You don't know if they were ever in Seattle. You never visited Seattle, until many years later. Now you live there, now she's in your store, and like others, she's a clone of the real thing. She frequents your business for all that 80s stuff.

"Come on, Eileen," you say, waving her in and leading the way. "I've got new vintage music in."

Today she wants a very limited edition of a Siouxsie & the Banshees vinyl set released only in Japan. You know the records she's talking about and you feel small because you don't have them. They're a rarity. You're in awe that she knows about them. You would have to order them. In the meantime, you tell her you have Siouxsie's latest, *Mantaray*.

“Oh, and it’s signed,” you say.

“Nah,” is her answer. “But thanks.”

You tell her you will place her order right now.

As you fill out a form online, she points to and asks about a small black picture frame behind you, on the counter where you keep collectors’ items for sale. It’s an old photo of Thomas from your college days. She asks you who he is. You say a friend. An old friend. She nods. You wonder why she’s decided to ask now, today, about him, after visiting your store frequently. But you don’t put your curiosity on display. It’s like with Thomas; you never asked the why of certain things.

She gives you her credit card. While you process it, she flips through some of the cassettes you have in a case next to the counter. She pulls out the one by Kissing the Pink. She reads the name of their song: “Certain Things Are Likely.”

Then a “hmm” is all you hear. She puts the tape back in the box.

“You should check them out,” you say.

She tilts her head.

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course, what is it?”

“Why do you sell so much 80s stuff? I mean, why do you like those years? Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to have lived then.”

The question takes your breath away, like that subway in The Bronx that once scraped your back because you stood too close to the edge of the platform and a sudden rush of wind hit you.

Bananarama’s *I Can’t Help It* is on now. Your eyes smile at her tenderly with the shadow of a tear. You face up to the answer. You don’t want her to see you cry, but you sigh a little bit and compose yourself. And you tell her.

“Because that was the first time I was really in love, the last time I was young, and the last time my parents were alive.” You smile at her. “After you’ve experienced that first true love, once it’s gone, you never get it back. As you look in the mirror and you see that you’ve aged, it’s hard to recognize yourself. And when you lose your folks, your childhood is over.”

She looks at you with what seems a certain delicacy. You

haven't noticed this before. She thanks you, says goodbye, and heads towards the door. You mean what you have said and it's shaken you. But you feel somewhat relieved.

You then see that she stops, turns back, and addresses you in a kind tone.

“Yes, Eileen?”

She puts her hands on the counter.

“I will take the *Mantaray* album after all. And that cassingle as well.”

The Art of the Blackout

Gaylord Brewer

Late morning. Awaking to silence
and shadow. First, a careful navigation
of the area: eyeglasses, slippers,
perhaps a bloodstain on a collar,
a bruise on the wrist, but no

broken glass, nothing torn. Phrases
written out as a map to the night?
Monkey scrawl, ugly and disturbing.
Silence now keenly important,
cards close, body contained and quiet.

A nebulous world's practiced steps.
Did scandal erupt? Did dinner?
Were names named? Actions
promised or accused? Circumspection
is key in the excised moment

of First Encounter, when even the dog
turns her head away. Admit nothing.
Ask nothing. Breathe and enter.
Good morning, you offer, slurring the *good*
in preemptive defense. What a blessing,

tabula rasa! Acolyte become master.
To be reborn cleansed of the past,
each day a fresh slate of what wasn't
and what's to come, next round
of scripture likewise soon erased.

To live like this, a lost and martyred god.

Living Crèche

Gaylord Brewer

In the seedy public square
of Puriscal, beneath the prohibited
church where trees root
in broken stained glass,

one Wise Man and two Wise Women
look uneasy in paper crowns.
How to bestow their boxes of riches?
A tanned Joseph, Pharaoh-like

in headdress, smiles ruefully.
Mary, bland in white, plastic
infant, a small straw reindeer
complete the dreary, touching scene.

It is Sunday, three o'clock,
drowsily hot, and the vans boom
their promotions to a disco blare
as two thousand miles north

my elderly parents open the doors
to their last family Christmas,
thus announced. Certainly the last
for my feeble grandmother

and their suffering, diabetic pug.
But a grandchild this year,
a newly added wife, neither of whom
I've met. Full menu of corn beef

and chowder and apple cake,
all good, fatty things. In Puriscal,
among dogs and handshakes,
skateboards, juice carts, and taxis,

I alone seem to be the watching
the Nativity. I cannot tell
if it's a still event, if some performance
is about to begin, or already has.

The players shuffle, glance away.
I'm thirsty, hungry, tired,
certainly live too much
in private debate. When the bus

appears that will wind through
the valley to my village, I jog after it,
counting out dull gold coins.
Climb on and pay the man the fare.

The Last Guardian

Mary Murphy

“The time has come for me to die.”

The Ancient One stood as proud and tall as he ever had, but knew that his time had come.

“But why?” asked the younger. “You are strong, with many years yet to come.”

There was a deep groan that rumbled through his weathered limbs and an overwhelming sadness that saturated the very air that they breathed. “It is the way of Man, my son.”

The Young One knew that this time would come. He had watched as every other of their kind had been cut down, most before their prime. It was only by fate’s design (or perhaps simply by chance) that the Ancient One had survived this long.

He had spent his entire life by the Ancient One’s side and couldn’t imagine what his world would possibly be like without him. He had been there from the first moment he awoke and had guided him through his life as any father would. He was more than a father to him, more than a teacher, more than a friend. There were times in the spring where their arms reached out so wide that they became entwined. As the youth grew, he could hardly see where one of them began and the other ended.

“I am not ready.”

He looked over at the Ancient One and then across the vast land that had once been a dense forest. It didn’t seem so long ago that it was lush and green, full of life and song. It had been a joyful place to spend their time together. There had always been birds that perched and squirrels that tickled the weathered bark of sturdy trees. The sun would shine through a thick canopy of branches, causing the light and shadow to dance along the leafy ground. It had been glorious.

“I can’t do it alone,” the Young One insisted.

“You must.” There was a hint of weariness in his voice, yet the strength and conviction of all his years remained. “We are the Watchers, the Keepers, and the Guardians of this place. If there is not at least one of us to remind them, then all is lost. “

There was a long silence between them, which wasn't unusual. There was rarely a need for words with the connection they shared. The youth, who wasn't really a youth at all by this point, thought long and hard about the responsibilities which would become his own when the Ancient One was gone. His whole life had been in preparation for the possibility. But now that it was here, he wondered if he would shoulder the burden with even half as much grace and courage as the Ancient One had shown. He had never known another such as, nor did he think he ever would again. The previous generation was stronger and more steadfast than his own and even with the Ancient One's guidance, he wondered if it would be enough.

With one last act of defiance (or maybe it was denial) the Young One spoke again. "You don't know. It could be years yet, you old codger. You can't know the future. Besides, you don't know everything. You just think you do!"

There was a time when such behavior would have angered the Ancient One, but now was not the time for that. In fact, there was precious little time left at all and he knew the Young One was speaking with anger, not with his heart.

"Today is the day, my son. This I know!" his voice bellowed out, shaking the ground beneath their feet.

"You can't make me do this. It's not fair. I never chose this. This is your fight, not mine!" the Young One cried out. He looked to the Ancient One and his stoic grace just made him angrier. Yet he found himself memorizing every deep line on the Ancient One's face and wondered why he had never noticed until this very moment how fragile he had become, as if one harsh wind would shatter him completely.

"Be strong, my son. You must convince them. You are the last." There was a deep resounding sigh.

"Tell me how? How do I convince them? How can one soldier stand against the enemy and have any hope at all of winning the battle?"

"I love you, my son, and I have taught you everything I know. Have courage. Be the Guardian you were meant to be; the one that I know you are."

The Ancient One's words seeped into his soul, but before he

could say anything, he heard the Man sounds. First there was the rumble of tires as they trampled the twigs and leaves on the ground. Then there were the voices which spoiled the peaceful sounds of the forest. Finally, there was the cry of the machines, with teeth intent on devouring and the smell of the vapors that could choke the life out of every living thing.

“No,” the Young One cried. “Don’t go. Please... Please, don’t leave me all alone.”

He watched in horror as the Men placed the instrument of death upon the Ancient One’s body. He heard the loud buzzing noise as those dreadful teeth ate away at his trunk, pieces of him flying in every direction as the old man’s blood pooled in the dirt. The last thing the Young One wanted was to watch the Ancient One die, but he couldn’t seem to tear his eyes away.

Deeper and deeper the Men cut, until so little was left that the Ancient One started to slip away. All it took then was one powerful kick from a leather boot, a shrill cry of “TIMBER,” and the Ancient One’s body slowly started to fall. The Young One closed his eyes for those last few seconds, but when he opened them again he could see his beloved Ancient One laying on the ground. There had been no protestations. There had been no exclamations of the agony he most assuredly must have felt. There had been only the stalwart courage and dignity that the Ancient One possessed until the bitter end.

The Young One knew what would happen next for it had been going on since he could remember. Man would take the Ancient One away, leaving nothing behind but a tombstone jutting up from the ground: just as they had with all the others. The forest was littered with tombstones now. There was nothing for the birds to rejoice in song about, nothing for the squirrels to tickle, nothing to tease the sun into wild displays of shadow and light.

There was only the nothing...

The Young One wept silently, the grief overwhelming him. He felt defeated, empty and alone. All he could do now was await his own fate. His body slumped, his limbs drooped. What good was the Sentinel of a graveyard? The dead needed no Guardian. He had been vanquished and he allowed the darkness to consume him.

The days turned into weeks, the weeks into months. Season

after season the Young One stood alone, his vision dimmed and his existence bleak. One day, in early spring, he heard a sound, a distant melody of days long gone. A songbird had perched upon his shoulder. Much to his surprise, he then felt the tickle of a squirrel scampering along his trunk. He straightened himself up, spreading his branches wide, and finally allowed himself to see what had been there all along.

Life.

Burn Holes in My Favorite Sweater

Nicole Ferraro

This room,
To the eyes of some:
A firework rupturing retinas
To others:
A still-picture of falling sparks

But the camera often dies
Uncovering burn holes
In silk sheets

That lay,
Next to cancer-covered ash trays

That touch,
Dirty Clothes left astray

Hanging from a mahogany headboard,
That collects filthy dream bouquets

Some may say,
This room is chaotic
But how would a messy mind
Operate any other way

Charlemagne Killabrew, Civil War Veteran

Tom Sheehan

“I shoulda been dead a hundred times, all them minie balls and slugs plowin’ through the air from them damned Yankee Bluebellies, them wild horses that threw me off like I was a cow fly, them rustlers runnin’ them cows through our camp a lot of times out on the grass. I tell ya, a hundred times I shoulda been dead.”

Charlemagne "Charlie" Killabrew knew he was getting seriously drunk in a Kansas saloon; his eyes told him, his legs, something in one ear and not in the other, and the bar of the saloon tipping one way and then the other way. He had come away from the Great War in his ragged gray outfit, without a weapon, a saddle, or a horse.

In the morning he realized he should have kept his mouth shut. He had nothing but memories, and they’d best be served by keeping them for his own.



In the morning he remembered the parts of his journey after the war:

He had walked westward until he found a job to get enough money for a second- or third-hand outfit of clothes, a horse, a saddle and an old gun belt, which he admitted at first felt as clumsy on his waist as the wrap of a trick rope. When all debts for these new possessions were paid, Killabrew headed west out of Virginia, bound for more work, better chances, and a grasp on his personal destiny. Travel didn’t take days to accomplish; it took a couple of seasons and their abundant changes. He went through the Blue Ridge Mountains and a piece of the Allegheny Mountains, through towns and cities en route like Palmer and Kitchener Grove and Tucker’s Mound and Fredericksburg and Waynesboro and Roanoke, and finally crossed the Powell River into Kentucky.

“West-borne,” he might have said. “West-borne.”

As he progressed across the country, sometimes in the fold of odd companionship of other veterans of the war, now and then as a trail worker on a wagon train, as a shotgun rider on several stagecoach runs or as a railroad train guard, he learned what had to be learned to stay alive in the dynamic alterations which were evident to some men as the country spread westward.

Not everybody learned the way Killabrew did.

The views expressed about those “westward” shifts in the character of the land and the people could be summed up in different ways by those people who took a special look around them. It was as one station manager said when the horses on a stagecoach were being changed and a hardy meal was tendered to crew and passengers; “It might take more than two saddle bums to do the work of one man,” or, as was heard in a similar conversation, “That tramp’s only as good as the meal he next gets fed so he can get on to wherever his dream lies.” One man offered another view of the argument; “I offered one saddle bum six days of work and was lucky to get two out of him, which was partly my fault ‘cause them two days was the first one and the last one and I can’t remember where I was in between them days.” And he laughed and added, “Or him either.”

These castigations were prevalent from men who had already made their way to some kind of success in the hard life of heading westward, all of which came as boasts in Killabrew’s mind. He’d say nothing about anybody to anyone, no matter where he was ... making conversation, with too many hits on the bottle in a bar, beside a trail campfire before sleep came and tales were the medicine for dozing off. There was a line he couldn’t and wouldn’t cross concerning matters that were private, that counted when loyalty counted. There were recurring times he remembered, with stunning clarity, comrades who died near him, beside him, in a hole or trench with him. The bear trap came down on his tongue whenever a tale or two only he knew would truly clarify a discussion, or move the discussion into oblivion. He’d never use anybody’s woes or wiles to bring color or gravity to a discussion. There was nothing in his saddle bags or in his heart that he’d use for that intention.

Thus it was, nearly two years of travel since he’d been

discharged from the army and set out for new promise, he came to a grass town called Nestling in the Wyoming Territory. The name Wyoming had already grasped at him with a kind of built-up reverence, for he heard it came from a Delaware Indian word meaning large plains, “Maughwauwama,” and he had also learned to admire the Indians he met or was engaged with in the contest of life.

Into Nestling he rode, comfortable on a big red stallion he simply called McCaffery, (the name of a comrade who had died on a hill with no name because it was not a mountain). No story ever followed any question about the horse’s name. His saddle was won in a poker game when he tossed in another horse. And he was fairly well-dressed in a new shirt and vest, second-hand pants, and a rugged pair of boots made by a man in Kansas who had fought in his Confederate outfit and who declared, “These boots will last for many years on your feet providin’ you take care of the rest of yourself.”

The words of the friendly boot maker, of course, stuck in Killabrew’s mind as he tied McCaffery to a saloon hitch rail and noted the name on a sign that said, “The Grassy Knoll.”

From long habit, Killabrew went to the far end of a long bar and stood at a corner, facing most of the room. He noted several tables where about a dozen men were spread out, some at cards, some at talking, all at drinking as the serving girls, two of them, kept up a good run. One gent in a half-destroyed Stetson, including a prominent bullet hole near the top, kept looking up at him, marking him up and down, speaking some finding to table partners, and generally being a nosy pest to a man wanting only a quiet drink.

His type was known by Killabrew, telling him he was going to make a move on the new arrival in the saloon. The move would be more to maintain some influence over his table companions than to satisfy his own curiosity.

The move was a direct one, up from his seat at the table and striding to the bar like he was the commander of present forces, and was due particular attention. It couldn’t be any clearer if he was wearing a smash of gold braid.

“Say, fella,” he said, his voice thick and demonstrative, “I think I remember you from the war. Were you in the war?”

Killabrew said a simple, “Yup,” and took another sip of his drink.

“Did you wear Blue or Gray?”

“It don’t matter none now,” Killabrew said, and took another sip.

“Well, I think it does. How does that sound to you?”

“That don’t matter none neither.”

“I like to know what kind of man I’m talking to,” the man with a bullet hole in his hat said, his weight being shifted on his feet.

Killabrew offered a simple piece of advice, “It don’t matter ‘cause I ain’t telling you. I come in here for a drink and that’s all I’m at.”

“That sure ain’t friendly.”

“I came in for a drink, not for a friend.”

The mouthy man said, as his weight shifted again and his right hand showed a change, “I sure don’t like your attitude.”

“If you’re plannin’ to go for that gun,” Killabrew offered, “then I’ll be bound to shoot you near the crotch of your pants, and that’s sure shootin’ from a man who’s real thirsty and wants to finish this drink.”

The Grassy Knoll Saloon was really at command attention and the bartender said, “I got two more drinks comin’ to you gents and I’d like to see you drink ‘em and not shoot up my place.” He picked up two glasses and put them on the bar.

The mouthy one, seeing the light in two directions, said, “Hell, yes, Jesse, that’s a damned good idea.”

When Killabrew finished his second drink, asked the barkeep where he could find a place for the night and walked out, he heard the mouthy gent say to his pals, “He don’t seem like a real bad fella, just kind of private I guess.”



Two days later, Killabrew had a job with a ranch owner he met at the Grassy Knoll: Parkie Daniels of the Broken Arrow spread. When the ranch owner asked him what kind of work he’d done, Killabrew said, “All of it. You name it and I done it and I don’t owe anybody nothin’ and they don’t owe me nothin’ neither.”

No more than two weeks later, on night watch of the owner’s

herd of cattle soon ready for a drive, he spotted a thin, tiny flare of light in the far darkness. Already familiar with the terrain, and figuring where the flare had originated, he adapted his old military habits; they had gotten him through the rough times and might well do it again. He had estimated that his line of sight on the flare was to the southwest, down in a gully only visible elsewhere from a look coming back to the northeast.

He got McCaffery close to the area, tied him off, grabbed his rifle, and set out on foot. After a cautious approach, he was able to see six men sitting about a small fire, as though they were sure nobody in the whole world could see them down in the gully.

He crept close enough to hear them talking and one man saying, "We hit them just before dawn. Scatter the crew and the herd. Packy and Jonesie are back on the trail, heading back to the Broken Arrow so's nobody from the herd watch can get back there to warn folks. We can move them cows from here to tomorrow and be clear onto the tracks. They'll be waiting on us."

Another voice said, "Who done all this plannin', Chris? Looks like everythin's locked up nice, with a train and all. Might be like eatin' piece of apple pie for us."

"Carter ain't no dummy. I've been tellin' you that for weeks. He's just been waitin' for the herd to get built up, and that don't cost us nothin'."

Killabrew marked his situation, knew roughly the time it would take to get help, and decided he had to make a move.

He crept closer, found a small rise that offered protection, leveled his rifle, and said loudly and with great conviction, "Don't move, none of you, or you're dead. Carter's already in jail from shootin' off his mouth last night when he got drunk, and he ain't goin' to bring you gents any help at all. We got you covered from all over. I want Chris and another gent to stay and you others can walk away if you want, or get dead otherwise."

He slammed a round into the midst of the group. "Drop your weapons or we all fire."

He raised his voice loudly and yelled, "Put them rifle shots right down where it's gonna hurt 'em, Bucko." Bucko was the ramrod

of the herd, a well-known figure in the area.

Two men dropped their weapons.

Killabrew said, "Go git your horses and get outta here."

The men moved off, and Killabrew added, "Them's the smart ones so far. Any more, not includin' Chris and one other?"

Two more men moved to their horses and rode off in the darkness.

"Chris," Killabrew said, "you can scramble or drop your guns now. You ain't done no rustlin' yet, so it'll be easier on you, but scramble and one of you gets killed and the other we save for court, 'cause them fellas that've gone sure won't want to be around for court."

He paused in his threat, then said, "Bucko, you and the boys shoot at Chris's legs. Don't kill him, just hurt him so he ain't goin' anyplace on us."

A pair of gun belts dropped to the ground. A few sparks flew up from the small fire. A shooting star flew across the dark sky. The dawn flash promised to arrive in minutes.

Killabrew made another demand. "That other fella who's not named Chris, take off your pants belt and tie Chris's hands behind him and tie 'em good.

When that was done and Chris was immobile, Killabrew said, "Back away from the fire toward your horses. I'll send down one man to tie you up, fella. Chris, you just stay where you are or we shoot you in the legs."

He paused again, and said, "Hear me, Bucko? Get him in the legs. We don't care 'bout that other gent."

Killabrew walked down, rifle in hand, and roped the other gent onto his horse, and then assisted Chris onto his horse. Walking both prisoners to his own horse, he headed back to the herd and then to the ranch.

The false dawn flash came with a brittle gray sense settling on the land, and then, in a few minutes, a slice of red-orange came over the eastern hills back in the eastern part of the Wyoming territory.

In that new light, the new hand at the Broken Arrow Ranch rode into the ranch yard with two visitors.

When Killabrew told Parkie Daniels about Carter, Daniels flew into a rage. “That rotten bastard is sleeping now in my guest room. Mary-Beth’s making him breakfast right now. I’ll shoot him soon as he wakes up.”

“We got witnesses, boss, both these two, and me who heard the whole thing bein’ planned as Chris hear told it, and four others you can catch if you send some boys after them, headin’ south I’ll bet, but I gave ‘em my word on no court for them if they bailed out right away. They walked off and it was easy for me to corral these two.

Killabrew, of course, was made top hand of the Broken Arrow right there, even as Carter, roused from sleep by the commotion, busted out the door of the ranch house demanding to know, “What’s going on out here?”

He found out in a hurry.

The Hand

Laura Coe Moore

We have an understanding, this barn and I.
Its silvered body of old-growth timbers
stands pre-eminent over the land.
Don't under-estimate the power of will
within depths of spider-webs in hay
dreaming of animals, red stick-horse
longing for its boy, California license plate
out of place, jars of tiny shells
collected by departed hands,
unknown liquid in cob-webbed bottles,
loom pondering the warp and woof of dust.

I've been schooled in ancient etiquette
to know that everything is in its place here.
This barn has grown fond of its companions,
the machinery of abandoned things.
I feel a kinship here, indulged in exploration
and pruning branches to reveal the silvered planks.
I erred in thinking this indulgence to include
pulling weeds along the boarded hem.
There-in was revealed the error in my judgement
thinking it was I who could remove
what I thought out of place.

The first grasp and pull of weedy growth
made known to me in whose domain I live,
a visitor unfamiliar with ancient things.
A hand made of bees reached up
tapping me on the face,
not hard enough to cause harm
but filled with buzz and whir
and power contained in little things.

Back in 2003 When Watching Four TV Shows in a Row Was Considered an Insane Amount of TV-Watching by an Individual

Jack Buck

On Saturday afternoons I would go with him to the empty office downtown; I asked him what an employee time punch clock was. He had an unlimited supply of legal pads, which he took from the office storage room. The yellow paper gave whatever I listed a sense of officialness. I would list my friends in the 3rd grade, my top 3 favorite numbers, songs I liked on the radio, and fun things to do. Dad sold property insurance to farmers. At the office he set out Payday and Mars candy bars in an old card box on the counter in the employee lunchroom and charged 50 cents. At the end of the week, he would give me what little money was collected from the honor system.

Dad went to a sporting goods store to buy a baseball tee and instead got pissed off about the price. He rigged up a PVC pipe in the yard for the neighborhood boys and me to whack at with the designated metal bat one of us kept in the garage.

Dad and I went to the grocery store only at night. How wise. I used to think the families that had more money shopped in the afternoon, giving them first pick. Dad and I were a different breed: we bought the leftover bruised fruit and knew the meat would go on discount 20 minutes before closing time.

Dad had an old 1950's bomb cellar, when bomb shelters were all the rage. The cold brick was covered in late 1960's Playboy nudes after everyone realized the Russians weren't coming - my first lesson in sex.

Arriving home from school one day, I asked Dad, *Why home so early?* It was just after three in the afternoon and he had already put on his green bathrobe he bought for himself as a Christmas present a couple years back. He watched a lot of television in those two years. Spaghetti with Wonder Bread that acted as garlic bread was a frequent family dinner while Mom worked till midnight managing Hudson's department store. It was made a lot and was easy to make. I had learned the world wasn't always fair for the good guys. My dad was no

longer just a dad. I felt his vulnerability. He needed my help.

Waiting out in the van, stretched out in the backseat, Dad told me to stay put, that he wouldn't be gone long.

Dad's friend built a cabinet for him as his final project before he died of cancer.

Dad took me to my first baseball game: 1993, 2121 Trumbull Ave, Detroit, Michigan—52,436 fans chanting a player's name in the streets in the heat of summer while we all filed out to head on home.

The Getaway

J. Tarwood

Real men guard the gate.

Failed recruit, what you've got now is the wait
for papers stamped black
as parade dress shoes
in a mirroring mood.

You type for women
pretending to be girls
despite stripes stacked
like poker chips.

At night, there's a cot
and a window.
There's almost a view of the bay.
Your face is a dented cage.

In years to follow
clipped as the tail of a Doberman,
not a shadow will flicker back:
when failure's not an option,
denial always is

until one morning you wake up
remembering a stolen smoke
with Joseph in the shower room,
a manchild with no future
and just one sliver of past:

a runway, he had grappled
up the water tower
and parked his beaten bones
above a yellow *Go Tigers Go*

to watch laughing his boozed up Dad
scramble bamboozled in a whirlpool of tracks.

The Nothing You Left Behind

Katelyn Ross

Before

You and I are the epitome of heat—we scorch each other until the other is unrecognizable, black and charred like soot. But we can't calm down the flames. They itch and dance along our bodies, engulfing us until we are no longer people. We are orange and yellow and red and blue and white. There's no thinking when we're together. Only heat. We burn so brightly the sky is no longer blue, the clouds no longer white; the sun no longer shines because we are the sun. We've become the center of everything.

After

Your absence affirmed my disgust for all things arctic. As the trees shed their secrets in the frigid air, my body shrivels and shakes from the unfamiliar cold. Where flames once danced now rests a layer of ice, freezing my body in place, locking me in myself. I'm trapped and I wish you were here to melt the ice. Our temperature was too high to measure, but now I'm below zero. You were the oxygen to my flame. Without you, I just dim and dim and dim until there's nothing left.

A Scream! Somewhere in the Nebula

Iris Esquivel

You find yourself in a desert
under a sheet of sky so white and dry that you cling to the sand for
comfort and
texture.

Only a moment ago you were there,
in front of a familiar crowd.

In the middle of a sentence –
you bit the tip of your finger to make sure it was real.
You told them you liked standing in the wind to feel where your body
starts and ends.

And then suddenly you forgot what you were saying, how to speak.
Under the spell of the explosion in your mind you began to weep.

You dried your eyes,
salty moisture you miss now,
under the desert's eternal sun.

There is no use avoiding it: you will spend the next few years of your
life alone in a
desolate place, desperately searching for answers in cacti and
memories,
and warmth in the sand at night.

What Are They Saying?

Robert Joe Stout

“Compa! Ayúdame pushar la pinche carumfla!”

A swarthy young fellow swiping at his face with his chambray shirtsleeve emerged from a cluster of men kneeling in front of a dented pickup on the Tijuana street corner as he cursed the man who'd called for help.

“Por que no robas battery que trabaja?” he demanded. With the help of several others he got the old car that the first speaker had been trying to start spluttering down the rutted, once-paved street.

“Dumb pendejo!” He swiped at his sweaty face as he jogged back towards the group around the pickup. *“Stupid sonabeech no know not’ing de Chevies.”*

Spanish is not the only language spoken on the United States-Mexico frontier. (Visitors from other parts of Mexico often argue that Spanish isn't spoken there at all.) The frontier's history as a source of vice and lawlessness has given it a language that fits its personality: a chaotic clashing of sounds and rhythms, vulgar, opportunistic, and original.

This “Spanglish” (or “*espanglès*” or “Tex-Mex”) is more than an overlapping of expressions from two different cultures. It is a pounding of classic Spanish word flow into direct subject-verb-object immediacy. Reflexive verbs like the Spanish “*se me olvidò*” (“it got itself lost to me”) or “*a mi me gustan*” (“those things are liking to me”) give way to cause and effect grammar with the English direct action verb substituted for the reflexive Spanish impersonal: “I want *tacos con mucha chile*” or “I don't forget *mis amigos, mano!*” In similar fashion, possession often hardens into the American form of identity with an implied apostrophe instead of the classical Spanish *de*: “*Traigo Mario's pistola...*” or “*Comí Maria Isabel's hambourger...*”

Because it is a hybrid border, Spanish varies from one speaker to another depending upon their backgrounds or the situations encountered. (Cuban-dominated Spanglish spoken in Miami, for example, and Puerto Rican Spanglish in the northeastern United States have their own vocabularies and phrasings.)

Some critics have argued that Spanglish confirms that Latinos don't assimilate to the U.S. culture in the same way that previous immigrant groups have done by learning correct English and discarding their native languages. This criticism discounts the geographical differences between Europe or Asia and Latin America. The proximity of Mexico and the Caribbean countries to the United States has enabled immigrants to go back and forth, carrying cultural patterns and language with them and creating a constant exchange of values, descriptions, and lifestyles.

Ilan Stavans, professor of Latin American culture at Amherst University, points out that a language or dialect being "different" does not mean it is "deficient." He insists that "from a purely linguistic point of view ... [Spanglish] covers all the necessities of its speakers and changes as it adjusts to these necessities. It is a complete linguistic system, perfectly structured (and consequently valid) and if it's called 'inadequate' it's because of social connotations rather than for some type of inherent inferiority."

Stavans contends that Spanglish provides its speakers with a way to show creative individuality, a vehicle by which Latinos assimilate on their own terms, and enables native Spanish speakers to communicate in a language with a different grammatical structure than their own. Alberto Juárez, a young immigrant from Oaxaca describing an early experience in California's San Joaquin Valley, told me, "My friend goes to a bar, wants to say 'me gusta una cerveza' in English and says 'a beer it likes me' and everybody makes fun of him, says 'Hey! The beer likes me too!' 'So does the whiskey!' He feels bad. Stupid. I say, 'Pleez, drinqueo a cerveza' (I drink a beer), they understand, I speak bad English but I get the beer."

He added that in that particular rural bar "drinqueo" became a word that many of the Anglos began using. The owner even put a sign in his window announcing *Happy Hour 4-6. Drinkeos 2x1*.

In similar fashion a Chula Vista, California teenager describing her boyfriend's car breaking down while they were driving through "a bad neighborhood," exclaimed, "*Estaba friquiando!*" ("I was freaking out"), there being no way to adequately translate "freaking out" except by converting the English verb into Spanglish.

While Spanish is a Romance language that traces its roots

directly to Latin, English in both grammar and vocabulary has multiple origins. No “Royal Academy of the English Language” exists (unlike the dictatorial Real Academia de la Lengua Española).

Stavans defines English as much more flexible and innovative than Castillian Spanish. Spanglish speakers use this flexibility to simplify translation, instinctively selecting the most dynamic words and phrases to express what they feel or want to describe. Farm supervisors shout words like *jojean* (“hoe”) and *uátearlo* (“water it”) because it’s easier to invent or amend words than rely on *adonazar* or *ponte agua* despite the grammatical corruptions involved. *Yo tengo el* look! as a fashion statement utilizes English advertising slang in a youthfully evocative manner that can’t be said with the same intensity in Spanish.

Although Spanglish is recognized as a valid means of communication by many Mexican (as well as U.S.) academicians, the president of Spain’s Real Academia de la Lengua disparaged it as “a laboratory invention” in a discourse during a Mexico City conference on the Spanish language. Eduardo Márceles Daconte, who attended the conference, quoted him insisting that it cannot be considered “a language, a dialect, or even jargon.” Márceles Daconte insists that Spanish, like English, is acquiring elements from other languages that “enrich and fortify” it. To assert that segments of the population are creating a hybrid, he contends, is a “sociological falsehood.”

Yale professor of Spanish literature Roberto González Echeverría is equally critical, calling Spanglish a language of “many of whom are almost illiterate ... [It] prejudices the people who use it and is a danger to the Hispanic culture ... It is a capitulation that indicates marginalization, not liberation, and treats the Spanish of Cervantes, Lorca and García Márquez as though it lacks proper essence and dignity.”

“Whether the Spanish philologist likes it or not,” Márceles Daconte counters, “Spanglish is here to stay even though it commits idiomatic transgressions” like *vacumear carpetas* (vacuum carpets) or *no janguear aquí* (don’t hang out here).

Despite the assertions of some learned educators, Spanglish is no longer solely a language of the rude and uneducated. In its efforts to break down barriers to merchandising and trade globalization,

it is also breaking down barriers between languages, including Spanish and English. Words and phrases like “offshorización,” “defaulteando,” and “operaciones de trading” pop up in newspapers, on the internet, and on TV throughout Latin America.

Stavans counters academic preoccupations that this new language or dialect has a corruptive influence on Spanish or English by asserting that it is no more corruptive than adolescent slang or sports jargon. González Echeverría is correct in asserting that Spanglish does not derive from the Spanish of writers, teachers, and politicians, but instead comes directly from the language used by workers and *campesinos*. Their Spanish is not the flowery extravagance of page-long paragraphs laden with superlatives, but is vulgar, direct, and laced with profanity (much like the language used by farm and factory workers throughout the world): short sentences, cryptic descriptions, vivid imagery.

This non-scholarly grammar merges into the English spoken by people from similar economic and social strata without a great deal of difficulty. It is more correct to define the vulgar “street Spanish” used by rural and urban working class residents in Latin American countries as “corrupt” than to lay that label on its Spanglish derivative.

Many Spanglish expressions derive from the childhood and adolescent experiences of youngsters snagged between two cultures—and consequently two languages: “*fouárdame un email*” (“forward me an e-mail”); “*tomamos un breik*” (“let’s take a break”); “*el bil parece muy jai*” (“the bill seems very high”).

“Immigrants who’ve grown up in homes where they speak and hear Spanish and at the same time use English in school and with their friends at times have difficulty conversing in one single language uncontaminated by the other,” asserts Márceles Daconte. Often these youngsters acted as interpreters for their parents in dealing with the English-speaking world. They were learning the new language at the same time that their vocabularies in the old one were expanding; consequently, they used words from one culture in the language they spoke from the other.

As a result, inaccuracies and discrepancies often occur. An Austin, Texas mother related this account to me:

“Berto, the seven-year-old son of my neighbor, was home alone when a man came to the door. He was from the utility company and said, ‘I’m going to regulate the meter.’ Berto didn’t understand. The man kept trying to explain and finally blurted, ‘Fix, I fix the meter.’

“As-fix-i-ar el meeter?”

“Yeah, yeah, asfixiar!”

“Since his parents weren’t home, Berto came to me and told me ‘*Está asfixiando*’—which in Spanish means asphyxiating, suffocating. I rushed over and there was the meter man, quite unsuffocated. Proud of the new word he’d learned in Spanish, he told us, ‘All done. It’s *asfixiado*.’”

I have heard Spanglish speakers use the verb *fixiar*, or *afixiar*, in relation to repairing everything from toasters to immigration documents.

To speak Spanglish in Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Nogales, or other frontier cities is to be hip, sharp, savvy, on the make. Command of that language with its mix of Spanish, English, and jive gives a border resident a sense of power, of superiority, over those who speak “old fashioned” Spanish and immigrants who haven’t caught on to this new way of conversing.

“Like sex, drugs, and rock and roll in the Sixties,” insists retired Los Angeles law enforcement supervisor Humberto Jaimes, “young residents of areas where both English and Spanish is spoken have adopted Spanglish as an “in” way of communicating and a rebellion against conservative rules and values.” (Those of us who were college students in the Sixties recall how hip and chic using African-American ghetto slang was considered on and off campus during the battles over integration and the Vietnam War.)

Unhampered by rules, Spanglish can alter meanings, invent definitions, and bend grammar. It modifies English nouns that are difficult for the Spanish-trained tongue: “wheels” into “*huilas*” instead of the Spanish *ruedas*, “truck” into “*troca*,” in place of the Spanish “*camión*” and the Sunday comic strips into the “*fonis*” (funnies) instead if *cariacaturas*.

Many of these transmutations and challenges derive from television, radio, billboards, employers, pop music, and movies.

Xosé Castro Roig notes, “The young people of all the Spanish-speaking countries live immersed in an audiovisual culture ... that is principally a translation of English, different from the culture of their parents and grandparents which, although not immune to foreign expressions, did not provide nearly as many openings for the entrance of new words.”

Some years ago, a Tijuana security guard told me about a *pandillero's* attempt to mug him:

“*Ese pinche pendejo, zsst!* Switchblade, *aquí in la cara*, you know?” Forefinger at his Adam’s apple, indicating the mugger’s knife, he slid his other hand towards his belt and extracted a make-believe pistol. His thick, neatly trimmed mustache twitched as he leaned towards me, his trigger finger testing the non-existent gun.

“*Oye!*” he grinned, obviously enjoying his retelling of the experience. “‘Make my day!’ I tells him. ‘*Ay, hombre!* ‘Make my day!’”

Language, after all, is a tool by which people communicate and they do so in a manner that is most adaptable to the circumstances. The cumulative effect of the migration of workers and their families back and forth (including schooling in a different language than spoken at home or in the neighborhood) “explains why Spanish has not disappeared, as other immigrant languages have,” Stavans insists. “Quite to the contrary, its presence in the United States is more and more evident. Nonetheless, it doesn’t exist in a pure state, free from adulteration. It suffers continuous transmutations and adapts to new challenges.”

José Moreno de Alba, president of the Mexican Academy of Language, denies that Spanglish is on its way to becoming a new and separate language. Moreno de Alba affirms that dialects do not alter the languages from which they derive but remain apart, a specialty of those who speak it. That Spanglish is not confined to a particular population in an isolated environment, such as Quebecois or Cajun French or Boer Dutch in southern Africa, gives it a dynamism that “far from provoking a rupture or creating an obstacle for the root languages, it enriches them.”

“Every language resolves the necessities that its speakers have for communication in an entirely adequate manner,” Stavans explains. “If the necessities change, the language also changes.”

Some of the processes attributed to Spanglish are commonplace in other languages. I often hear tourists invent words or try to jam Mexican conjugation onto English verbs: “puede helpear me?”; “necesito un hat.” But these improvisations, although they are attempts to communicate, do not change the basic language that the speaker uses.

Spanglish, on the other hand, has a “feel,” a “ritmo” that makes it distinctive. “I can go through bus station, an airport, a shopping center, and identify Spanglish speakers without hearing a word they’re saying,” retired Mexican Army publicist Dagoberto Martell told me. Spanglish, he claimed, “throbs. It has its own staccato, its own beat, its own music. English is more of a monotone, Spanish more lilting, the vowel sounds all alike. But not Spanglish. Listening to it, speaking it, makes my heart beat faster, my nerves jump more quickly.”

A Texas lay minister described her advice to parents who wanted their children to stop speaking Spanglish:

“Tie their hands behind their backs. With their hands tied, they can’t speak Spanglish.”

She was joking, of course, but the mix of languages that has become Spanglish includes a multitude of gestures, many of which substitute for spoken words. “I felt so...” a teenager grabs her throat and sticks out her tongue to indicate revulsion. “*Rapidito* we’s...” a woman’s fingers prance through the air to pantomime running, “...to *catchear el tren*.” “The school me...” a youngster’s flops to one side as though he’s fallen asleep to indicate boredom.

Such gestures are common to many languages, but Martell insists that Spanglish has made them integral communication substitutions for verbs or descriptions that are difficult to translate or pronounce.

Languages are not invented by academicians or politicians but “emerge from the psychological predisposition of a people,” insists linguist Alfonso Castelao. In less academic terms, a young California farm worker described Spanglish as, “You know, like weeds. They come up everywhere, you can’t chop ‘em all out. You don’t hoe, pretty soon weeds is all you’ve got.” Neither laws about “official state languages” or lamentations about corruption of a mother tongue

can prevent those “weeds” from proliferating: They propagate and cultivate themselves in the environment in which they find themselves.

A young teacher who works in a bilingual program in Texas told me that she often slips into using Spanglish when she’s in a hurry or responding to some immediacy. “*Abren los books!*” she remembers telling her class after rushing into the classroom after a playground emergency. And, “*Malos, malos grades, hijo!*” she scolded a recalcitrant student who did poorly on an exam.

Other examples: “*Hay que kick ass!*” a coach shouted at his players because all of them understood what “kicking ass” meant and Spanish equivalents didn’t occur to him. “*Me dió un pinche shock!*” a mother described the news about her son’s car accident, the Spanish words “*golpe*” and “*susto*” lacking the impact of the English noun. Alfredo Ochoa of BBC Mundo in Miami described an overjoyed mother enthusing, “*Me llego mi grincar* (green card) *y estoy super happy!*”

Spanglish is not the only language blended from two separate cultures. Yiddish, a merging of Jewish and German, attained status as a recognized language after hundreds of years of existence. Other combined languages, or dialects, include the melding of Spanish and Portuguese on the border area between those countries, French and English in some areas, Israeli and Arabian in the Near East.

However, contiguous borders do not necessarily create merged languages. In Mexico, many individual *indigena* tongues retain their original vocabularies and structure without absorbing or mixing with Spanish. Zapotecs, for example, often become bilingual and speak both Zapotec and Spanish without mixing one language with the other. Residents of many European countries speak two or more separate languages but not as a *guisado*, a stew, that hodgepodes them together.

In classes he taught at Mexico City College, Mexican philosopher Ramón Xirau described “the use of language to determine and maintain class structure.” As examples, he cited Castillian Spanish speakers ridiculing country accents like those of Galicia, Spain and English prejudice against so-called “Cockney.” As a teenager, I encountered this class prejudice when I was reprimanded

for using “Okie” expressions in high school in California. Similarly, as a college student in Mexico City, I was told to stop using vernacular that I’d picked up from maids and construction workers because they made me sound like an “uneducated street urchin.”

If language expresses environment and like a living organism revises and keeps reinventing itself in order to respond to its environment, then the “Spanglish” of the Mexico-U.S. border can be understood as an accurate reflection of the lives of the people who speak it. Thus defined, it becomes “right” as a language rather than “bad Spanish” or a corrupt combination of two languages.

As a language it has power—the power of the environment that it represents, an environment that is constantly shifting, constantly struggling, constantly being pushed by outside forces. It is vital and alive, forms of it are spoken by over 30 million border residents and over half that many American residents of Mexican descent. Not only that, but Spanglish usage rapidly is spreading southward as immigrants and the children of immigrants return, temporarily or permanently, to their places of origin in Mexico.

Stavans terms Spanglish “the perfect metaphor for an America that is a hybrid, a sum of parts.” Like the languages and dialects it uses, the country constantly is changing. Spanglish is one of those changes. How permanent it will become is anybody’s guess.

But one thing for sure: It’s not soon going to go away.

Boots

David White



Train Station

David White



Grulla I

Don Mitchell



Arches National Park

Kaitlyn Roberts



Into the Abyss

Kaitlyn Roberts



Untitled

Michaela Browder



The Astronaut's Rainbow

Haley Madden

Breathe in.
Silver light gleams,
No wind to stir the dust;
Silence is the language
In my crater on the moon.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
My visor fogs,
My view blocked with each breath
Stealing away some
Peace of here.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Heart beats steady.
Beep-Beep, Beep-Beep—Beep-Beep
Or not steady Beep Beep
I have lost track.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Earth is setting.
I have not seen the Sun.
Night is eternal here,
Yet colors still dance.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
The rainbow ends
Where my ship landed.
It begins at my feet,

Arching over the surface.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
The colors sway
In the non-atmosphere,
So many more than
Earth's eyes have seen.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
The reflection,
The surface of the moon,
Is in negative.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Speckled in black.
My eyes blink back sleep.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Fighting to see
Breathe in.

The rainbow.
Breathe out.

There is a Machine

Aaron Pappalardo

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Compensation Provided

If interested, come to Rm 204 (Anderson Building) at 7:00 PM, 10/30.

All persons welcome!

This was the flyer that ended my life: an innocuous flyer posted just outside of my statistics class. Statistics. Probabilities. And what were the odds of what happened next? 1:0

No other information was given. No indication of why or what or for whom. I should've known straightaway to avoid it, but *I needed the money*. I was a college student, after all. Six figures of debt hung over my head like a guillotine. I needed the money. Why else would I have gone? I tore the flyer off and shoved it in my pocket in the hopes of keeping others away from my reward. I shouldn't have kept it a secret. I had to keep it a secret. Hindsight is 20/20.

Sure enough, I was the only person to arrive in Room 204 at the appointed time. I was greeted by a tallish man in an un-ironed shirt. He had glasses that magnified the craters under his eyes.

"Francis, good of you to make it," he said.

Something wrong immediately. How did he know my name? I asked but he refused to answer. His only response was this: "If you wish to know more, you must sign the requisite forms."

That word: *REQUISITE*. I should have known what I was dealing with when I heard that word. No trustworthy man says *requisite*. That was one of the many signs I was destined to miss. A flyer with no details, all secrecy. A tallish man who knew my name and smiled when I squirmed. But I soldiered on, confident that the money would be worth it. That was the one thing the man allowed himself to talk about before I signed the *requisite forms*.

"It will be a long study, but almost completely unobtrusive. No medications or physically strenuous tests. You'll receive \$40,000 dollars for every year you participate, should you choose to do so."

Should I *choose* to do so? But he knew I couldn't say no. I was a poor college student... I'm telling you, I needed the money. So I signed my name four or five times and was led out into the parking lot. An unmarked white van was waiting for me. Why didn't I turn away? But I had to get into the van. Ever since the flyer, ever since my birth, ever since... And how bad could it possibly be? He had managed to get into the school after all. He seemed legitimate.

The tallish man and I sat alone in the back of the windowless van. A small interior light cast a dramatic silhouette of him cleaning his glasses onto the back of the cabin. Cleaning his already meticulously clean glasses, over and over and over and over. I tried to count the number of lefts and rights as we moved, in the ridiculous hope that I could figure out where we were going. He spoke as we were making a right:

"What do you know about choice, Francis?"

I didn't understand. We made a left.

"Choice. The ability to consider and decide between options. The ability to arrive at a fork in the road and choose left or right." Left. Then right. Then another right.

"Our research is primarily concerned with choice. Or, to be more precise, the *illusion* of choice... Do you believe in God, Francis?" I shrugged. My palms began to sweat. Right. *Or was it left?*

I began to panic. My breath floundered as he continued. He talked about God and souls and the supernatural. He said that without these things there could be no such thing as free-will. He told me that if the universe was governed by an immutable set of laws, then there was no room for choice. He told me that the Earth was simply another equation destined to result in a particular answer. He told me that my life was a part of that equation. If you added it all up, every atomic collision and electromagnetic interaction, I always got into the van. I always ripped the flyer from the board. And he told me that disproving free-will had been impossible. "Until now." I counted two rights and four lefts. But in what order? How far had we driven? All I could think of was *UNTIL NOW*.

"You'll understand soon enough," he said. But I didn't want to understand. I don't want to understand. ***I don't want to understand.***

I stopped counting turns. All that mattered to me was **UNTIL NOW** and **SOON ENOUGH**. My mouth dried completely, but even if it hadn't I wouldn't have been able to speak. You have to believe me. I'm not crazy. I'm not making this up. There was a flyer and a van and a facility. And there was a machine.

The van finally came to a stop and the doors were opened. It was an enormous warehouse, almost entirely empty except for a massive web of cables and wires stretched across a latticework near the ceiling. I was escorted to an elevator by the tallish man and our hulking driver. The tallish man bristled with subdued excitement as the elevator lurched downward:

“This facility is the hub of the largest and most powerful supercomputer in the world. Most of the computing happens in server farms around the world, but here... here is where the magic really happens. I'd like you to meet Pythia.”

The doors opened. I saw hundreds of monitors. Code and video interspersed across a seemingly endless wall of light. Videos of cities, jungles, streets, schools. So many wires you couldn't see the ceiling or walls. An inaudible electric hum made me aware of every hair on the back of my neck. Several men and women sat in front of portions of the wall, taking notes. None of them turned to look at me. To my right, there was a one-way mirror looking into a stark white room with a single door and a table containing two red buttons. I was told to take a seat in front of the window.

“Pythia runs what we call a finely approximated, self-correcting algorithmic simulation. It takes data from everywhere, from devices used all over the globe—everything from cell phones to satellites to Google— in order to stitch together a working simulation of the Earth. The more data it receives, the finer the approximation. The closer it gets to reality, in layman's terms. But unlike reality, we aren't entirely constrained by time within the simulation, which means... well, perhaps it would be better to show you. Do you see that monitor?” He pointed at a screen that showed a stark white room with a table inside of it, identical to the one in front of us. “That monitor is currently displaying that room, twenty seconds in the future. Watch this.”

A woman entered through the door on the screen just before the tallish man pressed the nearby intercom button. "Send her in," he said. The woman on the screen waked up to the table, scratched her left arm, and looked toward the mirror before finally pressing the left button. I looked into the actual room and saw the door open. I saw the scratch and look and press. It was uncannily similar. The woman on the screen exited. The woman in the room exited. My chest tightened.

There is a machine that can tell the future. There is a machine and it is everywhere. It's watching you now.

"The buttons don't actually do anything, of course, but this is an easy way of collecting data and corroborating findings. We've found that in her current state, Pythia can predict events within a year with nearly perfect accuracy. After that, the algorithms begin to deteriorate... But that's how I knew your name. That's how I knew you'd come here. More tests are always needed, of course. That's where you come in."

That's where I come in. A guinea pig for a nameless man in an un-ironed shirt. He knew who I was and what I wanted. He knew I'd leave my statistics class and see the flyer. But why me? Luck of the draw. No luck, though. It always happened this way. Foresight is 20/20.

"No one can see their own future, you see, because to do so Pythia would need to simulate itself within itself, thus starting an infinite regress. But what we can do is check in with you once a year to see if her predictions were correct. This is all we're asking you to do. \$40,000 for every year you corroborate our data. There is a strict non-interaction clause put in place, meaning that at no point will we interfere with your life. Nor will we disclose data to anyone outside of the agency. Is it a deal?"

Is it a deal? How bad could it be, I thought. Answering questions one day every year... It was always a deal. **I needed the money.** I signed my name one final time and exited the facility. I cannot remember what was said after that point. The van turned left right leftleftrightright. I was left in the parking lot right next to my car. I cried for an hour.

There is a machine that watches you cry at night. There are men who watch the machine watching you.

The next day I received a check in the mail for \$40,000. Was it really supposed to happen this way? Were my parents right when they consoled me at my brother's funeral when I was thirteen, saying "there's nothing you could have done"? Was I fated to lose the tip of my left thumb during woodshop in 8th grade? Did it all have to happen? And **why me?**

The paranoia and despair began to fade when the winter was over. I graduated with honors and immediately received a comfortable accounting position in town. I started dating the love of my life. Everything was going so well, in fact, that by the time fall rolled back around, I half-convincing myself that there wasn't a machine at all. But what did it matter? It was Halloween again and I had just finished giving the last of my candy to a child in a Darth Vader costume when I heard a knock at the door. There he was. Wrinkled shirt. Cratered eyes. *REQUISITE.*

He came in and asked a series of questions about the past year. Did I actually graduate with a 3.94 GPA? Did I begin to date a girl by the name of Tracy Statesman? Did I recently accept a position at Schultz & Associates, LLC? Yes, yes, yes. I relaxed a little bit. Anyone could have figured these things out through social media or otherwise. But he went on.

Did I try to kiss Tracy too soon on our first date, leading to an awkward conversation about elbow-placement? Did I recently arrange my kung fu movie collection chronologically rather than alphabetically? Did I change my morning alarm from 6:30 to 6:45 because I thought I could use an extra fifteen minutes of sleep? And did that alarm lead to my lateness on more than one occasion?

I answered his questions and stared a hole through the ceiling until he left. I received a check in the mail the next day. There is a machine that watches you set alarms. There is a machine that watches your struggles and does nothing. It does not care.

Another winter of discontent passed, but this one didn't last long either. Tracy and I got engaged, married, and moved in with each other. I was happy for the first time in my life. I told her about

the yearly interviews, but I never told her what they were about. I didn't tell her about the machine. She didn't need to know.

Sure enough, autumn came and just after all the Halloween candy had been handed out there was a knock at the door. The craters had darkened since I had last seen him. We moved into my office but instead of reading questions, the tallish man produced a tablet and began to play videos for me. *Of me*. There I was, getting married in a vineyard, shuffling my feet awkwardly as I read my vows. There I was, moving boxes in and out of our house. There I was, finding a stray kitten in our yard... naming him Charles... losing him. There I was, finding Charles' mangled body in the road on a cloudless day. There I was, stubbing my toe against the new nightstand Tracy had bought, cursing Ikea. There I was.

He left. I cried. Tracy wanted to know what was wrong, what kind of questions the man was asking. I never told her. She begged me to open up. I said it was confidential. I told her she wouldn't care anyway. I realized something on that second visit that I still can't come to terms with.

I loved her because I had to. Even that—the best thing that had happened in my life—was out of my control. Late nights watching the stars. Skiing in the winter. Building pillow forts and laughing about what children we were. I was destined to do all of it. I couldn't have said no. Our relationship was just as necessary as Charles' death. I didn't choose to love her. There was no choice.

What does it mean to live without choice? Where can joy exist without pain? Without regret? When every moment of my life was meant to lead to this letter, what does this letter mean? Nothing. Everything. It means as much as one thing hitting another. As much as the sun exploding. Every small and large thing becomes equal in meaning without choice. I had to I had to I had to I had to I had to

Tracy died that winter in a skiing accident. She had to collide with that tree. It was set in stone before the tree and mountain even existed. There's nothing you could have done, I heard again. And it's true. I couldn't have done a thing. I never knew that that December day would be her last. I never saw it coming. But someone did.

Someone cleaning his glasses, wiping them on an un-ironed

shirt. Someone slightly taller than me. Someone watched my life fall apart and did nothing. **HE KNEW**. He could have called me. He could have broken the contract for one day to tell us to stay home. And now, it's Halloween again. He'll be knocking at any moment to ask his questions. But he'll get no answers this time.

This is a letter to anyone. Everyone. There is a machine that knows everything but cannot know itself. There is a machine that watches your loved ones die. There is a machine that watches you load a bullet into the chamber. And there are men who watch the machine watching you.

There is only one escape from this. Anywhere I went, he would find me. Even if I broke the contract, never saw him again... he'd still be there. Taking notes. Watching me. Wiping his glasses over and over and over and over and

There is a God. We created it. And it does not care.

There is a knock at my door now. One final test. One final bullet. For him? For me? For him? For me? For him? For me? For

Subject 7's life was terminated on 10/31/17 at 10:37 as predicted. This note was confiscated as per protocol and all potentially harmful files were removed from his computer. Any remaining funds have been reclaimed from his accounts as stipulated by Clause 2 of HK-13. Dr. R--- is hereby appointed to aggregate Subject 7's case study for presentation later this year.

Note: While the death of Subject 7 is lamentable, we must remember that Pythia is the potential savior of the human race. One must only look as far as the recent negotiations in Moscow for an example. The death of one man, while tragic, must not hinder us from perfecting and utilizing this tool in the future. The era of conflict is coming quickly to an end. We will be the ones to sound its death knell.

Dusting Life

Carol Oberg

The weight is believable
The shiny golden brown loaf
Fake bread, decorous inside the black
Oval pan atop the stove
Now
Never used, or misused
Save some dust
Same as the Bible
Standing quiet alongside her bed
Blending color with these
Everlasting long nights

We Are All Refugees

Glen Sorestad

What to do when there are
more people dispossessed
than will of the majority
to accommodate them?

Build a high wall
of complacence enough
to outreach our fears –
and pray it holds?

Or prepare a place
among us, welcome them,
to become the neighbours
we always wanted?

Please, Tyler, Please!

Glen Sorestad

An unfamiliar woman's voice trespasses on my dream and it makes no sense because the voice, increasing in loudness escalating towards hysteria, doesn't fit.

The voice becomes real, close, outside our hotel room, perhaps a mere door or two from where we lie in bed, now fully awakened, no doubt along with other guests.

Tyler appears to be the problem for the frantic woman outside a door she cannot open -- and Tyler, whom we cannot hear, though she clearly does, is inside.

Tyler holds the cards and the woman, whom we do not know, is reduced to abject pleas to her tormentor to please, please, open the door and let her back inside.

How she came to be locked out – accidentally, of her own volition, or whether she was forced out, we can only guess. Whatever she may have done or said, if anything, she

deserves better. On her knees or standing, she is now subject to the whims of a man she may have believed she knew. She was wrong.

It is a warm summer evening, so she is in no danger of freezing, though she could be nude, and dangers for lone women always lurk.

Tyler is in control, something we assume he finds satisfying, as the woman – wife, girlfriend, mistress – wails how sorry she is, begs *please, please,*

promises and declares undying love for this crass manipulator who will not be satisfied with tears, who offers no forgiveness, no love.

Before the police arrive, the sordid drama blows over when Tyler opens the door. A heavy silence gathers, picks up and secrets away all the angry shards.

Eyes Open

Julia Simmons

It's like a ghost town now. I guess it kind of always was. I stand on the main, dusty road and stare at the abandoned buildings. The sun sets behind them, creating a golden glow that reminds me of the life I once lead here, reminds me of the place that came the closest to something I could call home. Silence rings like an echo and Misty stands stock still beside me, as if she doesn't want to break the scene. I don't mind; it is my scene. I slowly start forward, wrinkled, calloused hands held out to touch anything and everything. Death seems to be knocking on my door. The memories flash, just like they say they do, like chapters of a book, as my fingers touch the railing of a porch. I shut my eyes.



“Ricky!”

Everyone choruses as I saunter into the bar, straight through the black swinging doors. They all hold up a hand, or a drink, in greeting. The air around me smells of tobacco smoke and sweat, and I love it. A dart whizzes by my head, looking for the yellow photograph of the sheriff on the wall behind me. Before I can think to call back, my men come on all sides. One hands me my usual, whiskey, and another offers me a cigar. I light up immediately. They lead me over to our booth in the dark corner and they sit me smack in the middle of everyone. Bessy is already there, ready to take our food orders, and gives me a wink as she swishes away. The feather in her hair bounces as she walks and I watch her with interest until my boys break the trance.

“Y'all best 'fess up,” Merrill shouts. His dark hair is back in a tail. His hat lies on the table and he fingers it in excitement. He leans over and spits into the jug, the sound bringing a round of cheers from other drinkers.

“C'mon, now, Rick, you're holdin' out on us!” Johnny gives me an evil look as he takes a long gulp of whatever the hell he's drinking.

Bessy comes back with a load of food. I don't really care what it is, as long as I can eat it. I take a handful of chips and quickly down them as the crew stares at me expectantly. Bessy is still close by, cleaning the next table over for the fifth time. I realize that the whole saloon has become quiet, waiting patiently. I sigh and lean back in my seat. They won't be settled for long. I shut my eyes.

"Aw, alright, you dogs. There I was, tied up to one-a those in-jun poles, my gun aaaalllll the way on the other side uh-the camp..."



Bang! Run, Misty, run! That's all I can think: get the hell out of there. I don't really want to take this shit through town, but sometimes things have to get broken for a man to survive. Misty gallops as hard as her heart can, but those damn officers won't give it up. I turn around to see them, trusting my horse, and shoot. The backfire nearly forces me onto the ground, a goner, but I do hit the man following me. The old gal whinnies beneath me.

One down, three to go.

All in a day's work for a thief like me.

BANG!

I shut my eyes.



"You're neva home!" Ginny wails, pacing back and forth before me, her hands in her gorgeous blond hair. "All you care about is that damn gold!"

I calmly light a match and put it back out. A serene process for me. "That damn gold is what buys you those pretty peenk dresses."

"We've got enuff to last our whole lives!" She has the decency to look ashamed as she plays with the hem of her sleeve. "Stay home." She climbs right up into my easy chair with me, her bare feet curling up. She grips my unshaven face. "Stay right here with me, baby." She starts to kiss my neck, trying to get to me, trying to chain me here. A knock sounds on the door.

I stand and she falls to the hard floor ass-first. Tears swell down her cute cheeks as I place my black hat on my head.

“I’ll see ya later, Cotton Gin.”

And I leave her.

“I love you, Ricky! And so will our son!” Her voice cracks as she shouts out the door behind me. I falter for a second, but Merrill is looking at me, and I just know I’m at a crossroad in my life. He waits, Misty waits, and Ginny waits inside, peering out the window at me. I walk down the steps and Misty whinnies.

I shut my eyes.



Old, weary, tired. I sit on the steps of the old saloon, a broken door supporting my rickety bones. My hat sits next to me, just as worn-out as I am, ripped and loved. Misty watches me from her place by a rusted water trough. She drinks some murky rainwater and I don’t have the voice to reprimand her. I wonder idly whatever happened to those show girls like Bessy, who would bring me food and stroke my ego. I wonder what happened to my boys; just boys, no wisdom, no idea what they should do with their short lives. Just like I was. I wonder where my Ginny ended up, ignored by the man she loved, perhaps left alone while pregnant. Did she find someone else to adore? Where had my kids gone to, if I had a kid? Do they think of their outlaw of a father often? Does anyone? Do they remember Ricky the Rebel, the Man with the Golden Bullets, the best criminal around? I guess I’ll never know, because they’re all gone now. The sun sets on my book now and I slump over, smiling, and shut my eyes.

They don’t open again.

The Town and the City

D. Shawn Hunton

The hue of the Sangre de' Christo's
floods in pools around I-25.
The eventual trek home looms long
On a steady decline...
The radio stations change from world/jazz
to country/western...
So do the mindsets.

The junipers roll by only to be replaced
by Russian thistle.
A grasp of green growth
To be replaced by
browns and tans,
lonely, dead towns,
and the despair and joy I grew up with.

The land levels out,
Mountains turn to plains.

Branch by branch
I labor all of my life's loft
One foot after the other...
Hang, drop, repeat
Until I reach the lowest branch
Extend my body
And place my feet
Solidly
On the roots.

Don't Forget the Lemmies

Dane Cobain

I'm at that age
where rock stars fade
and burn away,
all sorts of cancer
eating their insides
from long lifetimes;

I read an article
on some website
about how heaven
has a new supergroup,
but that's not true –
it's not like John Lennon
whiles away eternity
singing "Give Peace a Chance"
and playing harps
on little clouds,
he's beneath the ground
or more likely nothing,
just carbon particles
waiting to be re-energised.

People stay alive forever
now;
their words are heard
by the new generation,
stored on servers
and indexed in half a second,
no use to anyone
when the connection goes down.

We won't forget the Lemmies
or the Bowies,
or the drummers from The Specials
whose names I've already forgotten.

The Cost of a Mule

Lonnie Berry

Jim McDowell was a really likable guy. You never saw him unless he had a big smile on his face and was ready to visit. Jim lived right on Highway 18 between Dora and Milnesand. Highway 18 was not much more than a wide, single-lane dirt road. It was pretty straight; the boys working for the WPA made sure of that. There were a few cars, a lot of wagons, and even more horses that made the trip down the highway. Most of them were from the ranches in southern Roosevelt County, some heading into Dora and some on into Portales. It was not unusual for a car to need water, gasoline, or even major repairs while driving down the bumpy old road. Jim McDowell was always willing to lend a hand. He mostly just seemed to like the company. Jim would tell stories, share his whiskey, and give whatever a broken down traveler needed. The folks that knew Jim always figured strangers stopping in were the only friendly people Jim ever saw. If you stood out talking to Jim long enough, you would understand why they thought that.

Jim did not live alone in his little place. Lena McDowell was Jim's wife. They had been married for more than ten years and no one could remember a civil word coming out of her mouth. As good as old Jim was, Lena was a mean woman. If it rained, Lena complained it was too wet; if it didn't, Lena said it was too dry. If the wind blew, Lena complained. If crops were good, Lena thought they could be better. Nothing seemed to please her. Jim didn't seem to really try. He just seemed to accept his lot in life. I guess the whiskey helped. Jim really liked his whiskey. Wherever he was, whatever he was doing, his jug of whiskey was not too far away. Jim had a couple of neighbors who always made sure Jim had a jug. They probably figured he needed it. On a good night, you could hear Lena complain from a mile away.

Most folks in the little community knew how Lena was. If they did happen to come around, you could bet she would cut loose on someone and tell them why she didn't like them. There was not one person in that part of the county that called her their friend. Jim and Lena didn't have any kids. Lena did have some cousins who lived

nearby, but that was the only family that anyone knew of.

Everyone always thought the biggest trouble for old Jim started after he bought that old mule. Jim didn't really need a mule—most people thought he bought it because Lena's cousin needed to sell it. Jim bought it and turned it out in his pasture. The neighbors said Lena gave him a tongue lashing. Most of them agreed it lasted for several days. Lena's cousin was G.L. Corder. G.L. heard about the trouble old Jim was in because of the mule, so he went over to see if he could buy it back. G.L. saw that Jim had really been hitting the whiskey. Jim would not have G.L. buying back that mule. Jim told G.L. he would just last it out. Jim had an extra bottle of whiskey and had been sleeping out in the barn. This had happened before, but G.L. still felt kind of bad about it, since it had been his mule. By all accounts, G.L. was the last person to ever see Jim alive.

The neighbors reported hearing Lena most of the night, giving it to Jim over and over again about that mule. The next day, Lena took that mule to G.L. and demanded her money back. G.L. gave it to her—he just didn't want to have any trouble from her. Later that day, G.L.'s brother Frank came over and noticed right away that G.L. had that mule back. They both agreed that it was just too much trouble to fight with her about. Frank said he would go by the next day and check on Jim.

Bright and early the next day, Frank had to go to Dora to check on some feed. He stopped by to see how Jim was getting along. Frank was stopped at the gate by Lena. Lena didn't want Frank anywhere around. Lena said that Jim had gone to town and she had no idea when he would be back. Frank just figured he would see Jim when he got to Dora, so he went on his way.

When Frank got to Dora, he went straight to Davis' store. Everyone who went to Dora went to Davis'. Some of them bought supplies, some of them played dominoes, and some of them just sat around talking. When Frank got there, he asked if anyone had seen Jim. Several of the neighbors laughed about the chewing that Lena had given Jim, but none of them had seen him. Frank did his business and headed home. Frank stopped again to check on Jim, thinking he might have just missed him. Lena once again met him at the gate. She made it pretty clear that Frank was not coming in. Lena said Jim was

still in town. Frank told Lena he had just come from there and he did not see Jim. Lena told Frank that it would be a good idea for him to mind his own business.

Frank went on down the road, but he was uneasy about it. He stopped at G.L.'s place and told him what had happened. They both talked about it for a while and decided they needed to go back and check on Jim. They got into G.L.'s old truck and drove up to Jim's place. Lena seemed to be waiting for them and met them at the gate. This time she told them that Jim had gone to Milnesand and would be back later. Frank and G.L. looked around and saw that Jim's old truck was parked out by the barn. His two old horses were in the corral. Nothing about this looked good. Frank and G.L. went back home to try to figure out what was going on.

The next day, G.L. saw Pete Munoz coming up the road. Pete worked for the Parkers, who owned a well service in Milnesand. G.L. asked Pete if he had seen Jim in Milnesand. Pete told G.L. he had not seen Jim, but was on his way to take him a jug of whiskey. G.L. thought maybe Jim had gone looking for whiskey and Pete was delivering. He felt a little better, but did ask Pete to stop back by on his way home.

It was almost sundown when Pete came back by. G.L. saw right away: he still had that jug of whiskey. Pete said that Lena stopped him at the gate and told him Jim was not there. Lena told Pete that Jim had gone to Portales and would not be back for a couple of days.

G.L. knew something was not right. The next morning, he picked up Frank and they went to their brother Ted's place. Ted only lived a mile from Jim and Lena's place and he had a pasture that was on the back side of theirs. Ted was out in that pasture when they got there and they went out to tell him of their concerns. Ted told them he thought Jim must be home, because he thought they had butchered a pig a couple of days ago. Ted said he heard a commotion and then he heard their pigs squealing. Ted said it looked like they had burned off some of the fat; he had seen a lot of smoke and it smelled pretty strong.

G.L. didn't like the sound of that at all. He told Frank it was time to get the Sheriff. Frank and G.L. drove into Dora and sent

a message to the Sheriff. Chok Foster was the Sheriff of Roosevelt County. He knew G.L. and Frank, so he came out as soon as he got the message. G.L. told him about looking for Jim and Lena, telling them he had gone to Portales. Chok knew Jim had not gone to Portales. When Jim was in Portales, he spent all of his time at Belle's place: a local saloon. Chok and Belle were good friends and he was also there every night. Chok went on over to see Lena. Lena met Chok at the gate like she had everyone else. Chok told Lena he needed to see Jim. Lena told Chok that Jim had left three days ago and said he told her he was going to California. Chok asked Lena how he had gone, since his truck and horses were still there. Lena said that Jim hitchhiked and caught a ride that first night. Chok asked Lena if she had butchered any pigs lately and she said no. Chok told Lena he needed to come in and look around. Lena told him that there was no way he was coming on her property and no one else was, either.

Chok left and went back to meet up with G.L. and Frank. By now both of them were pretty concerned about Jim. Chok went back to Portales to get an order from a judge to look around Jim's place. Chok also planned to bring a couple of deputies back, as he did not want to do battle with Lena by himself.

When Chok and two of his deputies walked up to the gate, Lena was right there. Chok started to tell her he had an order from the judge, but Lena told them come on in. Now Chok had known Lena for many years and knew how she was, but this was just not her. She offered them a cold drink and told them to look anywhere they wanted. Chok went into the house with Lena while the deputies went to the barn. Those deputies could tell right away that Jim had been living in that barn. All of his clothes were there, as well as a couple of empty whiskey jugs. There was also one whiskey jug that was not empty, but about half full. No one could ever remember Jim leaving behind a half of a jug of whiskey. It looked to the deputies like a pretty good row had taken place in that barn. There were clothes scattered, feed sacks knocked over, and even a broken top board on one of the stalls. There was also what looked like blood stains on the door.

Chok met up with the deputies out behind the house by the pig pen. They told Chok what they had seen and said that they

suspected something bad had happened to Jim in there. There was an old burn barrel out by the pig pen. It looked like it had been recently used and still smelled pretty strong. Lena came out and told Chok that one of the pigs had died and she had to burn it in the barrel. She said it smelled pretty bad because it had rotted a little before she burned it.

Chok was now pretty sure that old Jim had been burned in that old barrel. Chok was also pretty sure that Lena had done it, and he told her so. Lena started to cry and make a big commotion. She swore up and down she had not done anything to Jim. Lena told him how she loved Jim and she would never hurt him—he had gone to California and she didn't know if he would ever come back. Chok really wanted to arrest Lena, but he knew he could not prove she had done anything. Chok told G.L. what he thought and that he wanted to take Lena in, but he could never get her convicted without Jim's body. G.L. and Frank vowed to do everything they could to help prove Lena killed Jim.

G.L. and Frank watched everything Lena did for the next few years, but nothing ever came of it. Lena hired a couple of hands at different times, but she would run them off as fast as she could hire them. It was not long until no one would work for her and she could not get anything done.

Over the next ten years, Lena sold off her cows, horses, and eventually her pigs. Her old farm land lay barren and dry. Lena made a trip into town every couple of months and bought what supplies she needed. There was never any sign of Jim and, after a while, no one even asked about him anymore.

Eventually there came a pretty big range fire which burned a lot of her pasture and most of her fence. The fence was all that separated Lena's place from Ted's right behind her. Lena would not pay to replace the fence and Ted had to do it all himself.

One afternoon, Ted saw her out working in a garden and stopped in to talk to her. Ted asked if she would sell him her pasture. Lena told Ted she would sell him the whole place—just give her a few days to get packed up and out.

Ted went over and told G.L. what Lena said and that he was going to buy her out. G.L. went with Ted to help her load all of her

stuff into her old truck. Lena was in a pretty good mood and pretty talkative. She seemed excited about leaving, although she would not tell them where she was going. G.L. could not stand it. He demanded Lena tell him what had happened to Jim. Lena told G.L. that Jim just could not hold his liquor. G.L. demanded to know what she had done. Did she burn him or bury him? He knew Jim did not leave. Lena looked at G.L. and he saw her smile for the first time since he had known her. Lena said she did not know what happened to Jim, but asked if he knew that a pig can eat a man's bones. G.L. stopped in his tracks. She had fed him to the pigs.

Lena climbed up in that truck, and they never saw her again. It was years before G.L. could eat bacon again.

Another Poem of the American Road: A Song Against Forgetting

Marc Cioffi

Rush Creek runs hard for home
in some northern California valley. New York burns
in the zenith of night beside this neon bar that kicked me out,
too drunk to stay—and still too drunk to drive away

although instinct orders me to leave. Two weeks
I've bridged the coasts through long State-Routes. Strange plates
announced an alien at every crossing. I watched the local birds
retreat when storms unrolled and slept alone when bars went dark.

Meet a girl in every state who knows what warm and wooden bars
still hang their painted signs. Do not forget their names.
Keep all directions drawn for you. Play the regular patron:
tip; listen; and drink until the place seems right for love.

But don't forget some bars contain a bare, American granule:
the laborer caressing polished wood with calloused thumb,
the husband buying drinks for anyone who listens,
the beer abandoned by the spinster watching news.

Don't forget the silent farmer in the corner. His father carved
the trails they later traced for roads, so they called him Pioneer Lou
but, in truth, that deed was a neighborly boon to mete bounds
and allot acreage, all to settle a polyp-grudge that mocked

his true tumor. His cancer ensured the land was held—his sole
inheritance. He vowed that, seized by Corporate growth, his ghost
would imbue his family's pestilence. But that was Lou. There's his
son.

Quiet since he heard a Corporate offer. He'll dwell on costs and
fidelity

but you, here, you cannot forget what is America. Yeah, here,
on this ramshackle back-road. And there, where a water-line

and hunter's trail were riven by the Interstate. Highway planners
might have watched the local birds. Or, better, stopped

in to ask the daytime bartendress, *Whose fence? What well-line?*
Drink until you fall in love but don't forget the American grain.
It's West. It's where we've always gone to flee this moment.
Yes, to stay the height of noon in Western skies.

Where we've fled commitment and crime.
Where many rushed when one man wailed,
Thar's gold in them thar hills—that old
and weird America, all gone.

It's where you'll go when INBOX declares,
All has been discovered.
Fall in love with the westward ember
but don't forget New York

is warm before California
breaks its morning light. It's home and, still,
it's West. It's very hard to remember
what induced last night's exile.

Did a man mistake my gaze?
Did I mistake a stranger's
drink for mine? Whose daughter
shared my smile? I've exhausted every westward option

so I depart the lot in the first dim light
(not lit but it's still a neon bar) amid truckers'
fearless pace while boxed in lanes—bold
acceleration conceives a helix of dust

in the acute height of dawn.
Returning east, committing to America,
committing my words to the scattering leaves
and the wind that blows hard for home.

The Logger

Jay Frankston

Snap! It breaks.
The ice melts.
Five golden-haired ladies
dancing in a liquid cloud
of bourbon on ice
repeated many times
in a glass in a bar
where loggers jostle each other
with chain saws
whose teeth are filled
with the flesh of trees
now lying lifeless and still
in the mill yard.
Toothpicks on the counter
of the all-night diner
where the waitress with the big boobs
leans over and pours you
another cup of coffee
hinting that she gets off at midnight
when the streets are empty
and there's room for dancing.
But you can't make it tonight
and she looks disappointed
and her hair curls deeper
into her head
as you zip up your pants
bring your belly over your belt
lift the chain saw off the counter
and go home.

Someone I Know

Enzo Scavone

He says he's big-boned, that he has problems with his glands, that he eats nothing, but still gains weight. Whatever the explanation is, there remains one undeniable truth: he's morbidly obese. From inside my third-floor apartment I can hear when he enters our 6-unit building through the front door. He has to squeeze his way through it, watching out not to bump into things--but of course he does. He bumps into the mailboxes, the entrance door frame, the hallway wall, into other people's apartment doors, and into the stairs' handrail. Inertia turns every attempt at guided movement of his enormous limbs into a high energy impact.

He also pulls a shy little Dachshund mutt behind him. The dog seems very skittish and afraid of the 350 pounds of Brooklyn beef wavering above it. He attached a bell to the dog's neck. Nobody knows why. He probably thinks it's cute. We think that he has to attach a bell to the dog because he can't see it when it scurries on its leash in the shade of his planetary girth--like a little satellite trapped in orbit. Anxiously, it tries to avoid the heavy impact of his feet or that of his behind threatening to crash down on it. He had a young dog before this one. We don't know what happened to it. One day it was simply gone and replaced by this new one. He tells the dog every step of the way what to do. *Walk, Hershey!*—its name is Hershey—*Sit Hershey. Stop. Go up the stairs, Hershey. Come here. Hershey, go in. Come on. Jump. Sit.* The dog never does anything he says.

He has to climb one flight of stairs to get to his apartment on the second floor. After he takes the first step, he starts panting. I can hear it two floors up in my apartment through the flimsy and ill-fit front door. Our apartment building is built very shoddy, overall. New York developers of the Golden Years made their profit by saving on the quality of the materials and selling the facades they constructed to hard-working Greek and Irish immigrants. In turn, they were hoping for a go at leftover profits by rearing tenants and ignoring upkeep. Along with the buildings decayed anybody's feeling of responsibility for them.

After he takes the next seven stairs, halfway up, panting like a pair of bellows, he has to rest. He tells his dog to sit and there he stands, leaning his weight against the drywall coated by several layers of lead paint. Moist, heavy panting. Heaving lungs under a sweaty layer of pale Irish skin and fat, working hard to get up the stairs—harder than he ever worked in his life. Rumor has it that he used to be a dispatcher at a car service. Then he got injured. Now he doesn't work anymore and is on disability. Rumor also has it that he sued the car service for his injury and got some money from that. But, you know, people who don't like him say that. After he stopped working, he sold his mother's house in Astoria and moved to Bay Ridge with his wife into the apartment below mine. His wife is bigger than him. She must have exceeded 375 pounds. Sometimes, when the first of the month approaches, I can hear them yelling at each other. He calls her a fat piece of shit, she calls him a deadbeat and tells him to get out of the apartment. She doesn't work either. She used to be a teacher, but she has been mostly home for the last one-and-a-half years.

A handful of times during the three years they have lived below me, I have heard him fall out of his bed at night. It's a loud thump and then a long pitiful scream, unnecessarily long and pitiful. It sounds like an infant screaming for its mother, just a few registers lower and louder. After a few initial screams he calls for his wife, who sleeps on the couch. It took me a while to figure out that the wife doesn't sleep in bed with him. She doesn't stand up to help him and so he has to get on his feet by himself. Somehow. Faintly, out of the twilight of sleep, I'm following what's going on, but the exhaustion of the prior day and the impending exhaustion of the next force me sternly back to sleep. The next morning, I pick up parts of a conversation from the apartment below through his ceiling, my floor—not the words, but the cadence of their speech. He fills his voice with accusation and sorrow. It seems he is telling her something like, "You didn't help me up when I fell out of the bed last night. You don't love me." And she answers something like, "We are not in this for love. Being unable to function in society, we have embarked on a self-destructive journey and become unbearable. We're together because we have between us enough fat to buffer our egos."—but, you know, that might all be in my head.

After the quick break in the middle of the flight of stairs, he tells his dog to keep moving and hoists his weight up further. I hear every thump of his feet in the staircase and the wood of the shoddy stairs groaning. When he reaches his door, he slams it open and steps through into his apartment. Since my apartment is above his, they have the same layout. I can tell where in his apartment he is moving. I hear him bumping into the narrow walls of his entrance-hallway. He bumps into the furniture he took with him from the house he sold in Queens; too much furniture for the space of a one-bedroom. He bumps through to the back section that is supposed to be the bedroom. He, however, uses it as a pen for their 5 rabbits. 5 rabbits in a 12-by-10 foot room. He talks to his rabbits for a while in a high-pitched, childlike voice. He tries to be nice to them by rattling their cages, tries to sooth them by knocking on their cage walls. Then he dials a number on his phone on speaker. I can hear him dial. He does it at a slow speed. Half-a-number per second. Ringing, then, somebody picks up on the other end and he spills out all that he has been eating into himself. He starts talking. Without interruption. Sometimes louder, sometimes quieter, sometimes more frantic, sometimes calmly, arrogantly, plaintively, never stopping. The person on the other end can hardly get a “yes” or a “hm” in. If he stands in the right spot, I can hear what he is saying. He speaks about the doctor’s appointment he has for his diabetes. His voice gets more angry as he speaks about “bama.” Then, he gets a little quieter and speaks about his past and his alcoholic father. Eventually, he breaks into tears and the person on the other end tries to cheer him up, hoping to end the conversation with a good conscience. After the phone call has ended, he sits there crying. He howls like a little girl. I don’t mean that judgmentally. That is really how it sounds. A 350-pound Brooklyn man whose crying sounds like that of a little girl.

You are right. One can’t write that without sounding judgmental.

Constantly witnessing his dysfunction, I got pulled along myself once and one time when he wouldn’t stop screaming at his wife, I banged on the floor with a baseball bat. He eagerly picked up the challenge and banged back on his ceiling. I stood there yelling at my parquet, telling him that we need to settle this in front of our landlord. His answer was that I’m a motherfucker and he would break my knees. I wondered if I would cry like a little girl if he broke my knees.

Substitutes in the Case of Necessity *(How to go around)*

Emmy McCray

I. Dry sherry for vermouth

Rough tangle with a rattlesnake
under the squat rock tower.

Intentions and preparations
roll away like bone-dirt weeds.

Logic's road-weary knots;
nails hammered aslant.

Fences spreading around the new world
with the prickly barbs of doubt.

Hindrance for the vehicle.

II. Honey for sugar

Start a fire for your supper.
Boil the very last water.

Calculate every bean to be eaten.
Stir with a clear mind.

Taste without the cyclone
of hope and verdict.

Wash the tin cup with no handle
to wash the handle.

Spread a cloth over the earth.
Listen for the dusty old bell of a hawk.

Bring the world to your mouth,
one spoon of prosperity at a time.

The land is in your belly.
Instead of all of it,

just enough.

III. Screw for a nail

The dogs in practice,
circling to sit.

Balance comes and goes with the wind;
practice catching it.

Breathe into the soles of many feet.
Bustle in the calm.

In the morning
fold the blanket carefully.

Osmosis for independence.

IV. Baking Soda for Epsom Salts

Cloud boats sailing to the day moon,
raven sewn into the fabric of the air.

Sit where you are in surprise

when the search party arrives
like the answer to a lost idea.

Sit in the manner of the majestic
open frontier,

mountain in the chest cavity,
immovable and eroding.

In the looking glass,
creation for ghosts.

First Aid (How to mend wounds)

Emmy McCray

Start with the silver box
with its metal latch—
scissors, salt, spoons
resting on a bed of gauze,
a triangular bandage,
safety-pins, lint and oiled paper,
vials of sodium chloride,
a small tin of cotton at the bottom
next to the wooden tourniquet.

A bible full of maladies
you take everywhere
wanting to be safe.

For spotted, mountain, yellow fevers,
for the typhoid—a small box of pills.

For the rash, fire burns, blisters—
a glass jar of salve.

For rattlesnake, scorpion bites—
remove all rings, cut and suck
the venom. Spit.

For hard breaks, riding accidents,
arrow wounds, bullets, falling down
a well—stabilize the bone with wood,
remove bullets with knives.

For fear of death—
the death of reason—
locoweed, vague bilious fevers,

shipwrecks, sanitariums—
try cryptic mantras.

For dirt in the eye,
embers in the hair—
baptism in the river.

When the bandage spools out,
surviving is always clutching
at roots and leaves.

Extract the holes of bullets.
Save them like buttons.
Nothing but earth wants your bones.

Grubber Ludwig

Wesley Martin

The violin was broken beyond repair. She couldn't even gather all the pieces. But still, Roslin grabbed the two halves of the body and what was left of the neck, and ran away crying while the other children laughed.

She ran to the barn and climbed the ladder to the upper loft where they kept the apple baskets in the off season. She wound through the towers of baskets and hid inside her private wicker cave. Roslin held the remains of her violin close to her chest and took deep sniveling breaths.

Those kids didn't know how much they had taken from her. Music camp was in a week. She had to bring your own instrument to music camp. It said so in the pamphlet. There was no way Mom and Dad could get her a new one before then. If she didn't go to music camp, she would be behind everyone else, and she'd never catch up, and she'd never go to Juilliard.

Roslin slowed her sobbing. She clenched the fragments hard, and then chucked them against the wall near the loft window. The noise rattled the sheep below. She heard them baa and some move around. She listened closely to make sure they calmed back down. Uncle Tony hated it when they upset the sheep. The baa-ing only lasted a minute.

Roslin rummaged through the basket she kept her entertainment in and pulled out her battered copy of *Orlando*. She plopped down on the old futon seat and flipped open to her bookmark. Maybe Virginia Woolf could make her forget her losses for a few chapters.

Before she had even finished a paragraph, the sheep started baaing again. They were louder and moving around.

Roslin crawled out of her basket cave. She needed to calm the sheep before Uncle Tony came down from the house and yelled at her. She climbed down the ladder and saw all the sheep had moved to one corner of their pen. In the poor lighting under the loft, they looked like one fluffy many-headed lump.

"Hey. Hey. Calm down. Shhhh," she said in a gentle voice

as she entered the pen. “There. There. Don’t worry now.” She petted them, but still the baaing continued. “What has you all so—”

“Baa! Baa! Baa!” A deeper croakier voice bellowed from the opposite corner of the pen.

Roslin spun around. On the ledge of the feed trough sat a shriveled bony creature with pointy ears and a hooked nose.

Roslin shrieked.

“Baa! Baa! Bwahaha!”

The creature laughed and kicked its feet while Roslin backed up into the sheep lump.

The creature scooped up a handful of feed and hopped off the trough. He gobbled down the feed as he approached her.

“There. There. Calm down. Don’t you worry,” he said with his mouth full.

The lump of sheep disassembled and fled from one corner to the other, leaving Roslin alone with the creature. She trembled backward until she hit the barn wall.

“Who-Who are you?” she spouted when he was only a foot in front of her. At this distance she realized the creature wasn’t much bigger than she was.

He swallowed the last of the feed.

“Mmm. I got a lot of names. But, for you, I’ll go with Grubber Ludwig.”

“Gr-Gr-Grubber Ludwig?”

“Ya-Ya-Yeah. That’s right. And, you, Roslin, have a problem I think I can help with.”

Grubber Ludwig smiled, revealing his sparse set of yellow teeth. He clacked together his overgrown fingernails.

The sheep were still causing a ruckus on the other side of the pen.

“I’m fine. I don’t need any help,” Roslin said, her heart pounding.

“Oh, I think you do,” Grubber Ludwig said, then pulled a dark red violin bow from inside his coat.

The sleek shine of the bow mesmerized Roslin, and she forgot she was afraid. The baaing of the sheep faded away. The shriveled old creature faded away. She simply wondered at the bow, its length, its shape, its curves... It all seemed so perfect.

Grubber Ludwig held out the bow so she could admire it. She raised her hand to touch it, and then stopped herself.

“I don’t have a violin anymore.”

“Yes, you do.”

He handed her the bow and pointed to the loft above.

Roslin’s fear returned, but with equal parts curiosity. Grubber stepped aside so she could exit the sheep pen. As she climbed the ladder, each step seemed to intensify the pull of the object awaiting her. By the time her head poked above the loft floor her heartbeat was fueled by excitement rather than fear.

The dark red bow’s counterpart rested underneath the window where she had thrown her old violin fragments.

She hurried up the ladder and approached the most beautiful violin she had ever seen. Dark cherry wood cut and polished in such a way the wood grain swirled. She picked it up. It was lighter than her last violin, better for her since she likes to move as she plays. She held the violin in position under her chin. It fit her perfectly. It felt perfect for her. Roslin raised the violin bow over the strings.

“Ah, ah, ah.”

She turned to see Grubber Ludwig sitting in her basket cave wagging his finger with one hand. He held Orlando open with the other.

“Not so fast. We need to talk terms first.”

Grubber flipped the book to the next page.

“How old are you?” he asked without looking up from the book.

“Twelve.”

“You’re much too young to be reading this.”

He tossed the book aside and stood up.

“How old are you?” Roslin asked.

“I stopped counting around the time you things started launching junk into space.”

“How old were you then?”

Grubber tapped his chin with an elongated nail.

“Hmm. Three hundred and three, I think.”

Grubber Ludwig circled around Roslin.

“Do you like it? It’s special. Just for you. With this you can make gold. Piles and piles of gold.”

“So, you want me to make gold for you?”

“No. I want something much more precious than gold.”

Grubber wringed his bony hands together.

“I want you to promise me your first born child.”

Roslin raised an eyebrow.

“My child?”

“Just your first born, that’s all. It’s really a bargain if you ask me. That violin is easily worth three, maybe four children.”

Roslin had never really thought about having children. Sure, she had played house with other kids, but that was just play. Most people seemed to enjoy having children. Could she give one away? For an instrument?

But, not just any instrument. This violin was meant *just for her*. The feel of it seemed to give her a balance she didn’t have before. With this violin she could go to Juilliard.

The violin was here, now, in her hands. Having children was so far away.

“If you find it agreeable, go ahead and play.”

Grubber Ludwig leered at her still wringing his hands.

The sun was setting. Golden bronze sunlight passed through the window making the cherry wood more vibrant and the creature’s skin more shriveled.

She closed her eyes. The sheep were still upset and making noise.

Music camp. Juilliard. First borns. Gold. Baa. Baa.

Roslin strummed the bow across the strings, filling the barn with a deep resounding note, followed by another higher pitched note, the start of Bartok’s No. 2. The piece had always given her trouble, but not now, the music coursed through her. She burst into a frenzy of strumming and emotion. The difference between her and the violin melted away.

“Roslin, what’s going on?” Uncle Tony shouted. “Are you bothering the sheep?”

She stopped playing and opened her eyes. Grubber Ludwig was gone.

“Nothing! Sorry, Uncle Tony!” she shouted back.



The creature with the pointy ears and the hooked nose picked up the latest issue of *People* and flipped through it while waiting in the lobby. He was tired of looking at the poster on the wall across from him. It read “Orlando Image Marketing. Meet our award-winning team.” Below the text was a diverse group of professionals smiling their best fake smiles.

The articles in *People* were only slightly more interesting than the poster. He skimmed over the trending miracle diets and sex positions while trying to tune out the Top 40 garbage playing on the overhead speakers.

He sighed and tossed the magazine aside.

“I’m much too young to be reading this,” he mumbled to himself.

The creature slumped in his seat and clacked his nails together, then returned to staring at the fake smiles poster.

“Grubber Ludwig, Roslin will see you now,” the receptionist said, her voice remaining professional, but her expression revealed her surprise at having such a creature in the building.

She awkwardly led him to a mid size office with a view of downtown below.

“Roslin will be in momentarily.”

The receptionist left. Grubber Ludwig picked up a framed photo off the desk. It showed Roslin beaming in her university graduation gown with her parents on both sides of her.

“Oh. My. Gosh! Grubber Ludwig! I was wondering if I was ever going to see you again!” Roslin said standing in the doorway.

She wore a smart blazer and matching skirt. Expensive looking shoes.

“I was supposed to see you again, when you had your first born child. Which, um, hasn’t happened yet? We had a deal, remember?”

He set the photo back down.

“I know. I know,” Roslin said as she sat at her desk. “I’ve just been so busy with school, and then my job. I haven’t really had time to think about starting a family.”

Grubber sat down on the opposite side of the desk and clasped his hands together.

“You see though, you wouldn’t be starting a family. You would give the child to me. That was the deal.”

“You’re right. You’re right. That was the deal.” Roslin picked up a pen and started twisting it in her hands. “It’s just, I want it to be with the right guy, you know?”

Grubber leaned forward and tapped his bony finger on the desk.

“No, Roslin, you’re not getting it. It doesn’t matter who the guy is. It can be any guy, because you’re not starting anything. You’re settling your debt.”

“Yes. I know. I owe you a baby.” Roslin threw her hands up in the air. “You don’t have to throw it in my face!”

Grubber pinched the bridge of his nose.

“You’re not a violinist. What did you even do with the violin?” he asked.

“That old thing? In a storage unit somewhere. I gave up music ages ago.”

Roslin waved her hand in dismissal.

“Seriously? That was a magic violin, you know?”

“Magic how?”

“It stores the memory of everything played on it to help you later.”

“Well, I really wish you had told me that when we first met,” Roslin said.

Grubber crossed his arms. “I thought you would figure it out. It was supposed to help you make gold.” He shook his head and turned away from her. “Never mind. It doesn’t matter now.”

“So, do you want it back?” Roslin asked.

“No. That’s not what I came for. I need a first born.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t have one.”

They both sighed and leaned back in their chairs. Grubber looked around. Roslin had her degree and numerous awards from Orlando Image Marketing hanging on the wall, along with an oil painting of an apple orchard. Folders and notes cluttered her desk. A mini-fridge in the corner doubled as a shelf for self-help books. Her waste basket was full of take-out trays.

“Three hundred and sixty-two,” Roslin said.

“What?”

“You said you were three hundred and three when people started launching stuff into space. The first satellite was launched in 1957, that was fifty-nine years ago, which makes you at least three hundred and sixty-two years old.”

“Uh, yeah, I suppose you’re right,” Grubber said, not having thought of his age since he last saw her.

He looked into her eyes for the first time since entering the office. Her face had aged, even shriveled a little in some places. Not her eyes though, those were still the eyes of a girl whose whole world could be shattered by a broken violin.

“Roslin, what happened? This isn’t you. Why are you in this fake place? The girl I remember had passion, was going to go to Juilliard, escaped into Virginia Woolf novels.” Grubber gestured around the whole office. “What is all this?”

“Well, what do you know? You were only around for like two minutes.”

Roslin spun her chair away from him.

“You don’t know how competitive the music world is. How much pressure you’re under. How cruel people can be. And besides, I wasn’t making any gold doing that. I make gold here though.”

“Sure, fine. I get that,” Grubber said. “But, it looks like you spend a lot of time here. What about your love life? Are you seeing anyone?”

Roslin primed her hair.

“No. Not anybody that’s worked out. But, like I said, I’m too busy for that anyways.”

“But, you do date, right?”

“Not in a while, no.”

“Well, are you on Tinder or OKCupid or something? There’s lots of great ways to meet people nowadays.”

Roslin picked the pen up and twisted it again.

“Look, Grubber, I’m focusing on my career right now.”

“But, Roslin, are you really happy spending all your time here?” She slammed the pen back down on the desk.

“What do you even care if I’m happy? You don’t. You just want a stupid first born. Lots of other people are having first borns, go bother them.”

Grubber folded his hands into his lap.

“It’s not just that Roslin. I’m worried about you. Let me set you up with someone.”

Roslin held her hand out like a halt sign and shook her head.

“Oh, no, no. I don’t do blind dates.”

“Humor me, please.” Grubber clasped his hands. “I know a guy. He makes lots of gold and, uh, he likes apples, I think.”

“Apples?” Roslin said dryly.

“Or, whatever,” Grubber said. “he likes what you like, I’m sure.”

“I don’t know.” Roslin fiddled with her hair. “Is he cute?”

“I mean,” Grubber shrugged, “he is a demon.”

“No! I’m not dating a demon. I’m not that desperate,” Roslin said, and then tapped her chin. “Well, is he a cute demon?” Then she shook her head. “No. No demons. No dates. I don’t need this right now. There’s already enough pressure for a woman my age to start settling down, then you come in here telling me I need to pop out a baby. I’m just not ready for all of it.”

Grubber placed his hands on the desk, palms upward.

“Here,” he said. “Take my hands.”

Roslin remained still.

“Come on.”

He beckoned her with his fingers.

Roslin sighed and flopped her limp hands into his wrinkled leathery grasp.

“Now, Roslin, you’re a woman now. A strong confident beautiful woman. And, you deserve to be happy. You need to leave this place full of fakeness and be you. Pick up the violin again or whatever brings you joy. But, most importantly, you need to get out there... and get impregnated.”

“Grubber Ludwig, you make it all sound so simple. But, it’s not.”

“It really is. I know I don’t have to explain to you how it works.”

“Not that!” Roslin pulled her hands away from him. “It’s all the other stuff. It’ll affect my job. What if I want to see the guy again? People are going to ask questions, you know?”

“Well, yeah, but a deal is a deal, Roslin,” Grubber said, then he scratched under his chin. “I may be off-base here, but it seems to me like you’re avoiding love.”

“Stop acting like you know me because you don’t,” Roslin said with a scoff. “What do you even want a first born for? That’s such a weird thing to want.”

“It involves a bet. I got a lot of gold on the line.” Grubber rubbed the back of his head. “I got messed up with the wrong people, alright. But, that’s not what’s important here. You still owe me.”

“Gah!” Roslin pulled at her hair. “What do you want me to do? Go bang the next guy I see and hope I’m ovulating?”

“If you wouldn’t mind?”

Roslin crossed her arms and furrowed her brow.

“I would mind that, Grubber. And now, I think it’s time for you to leave.”

Grubber hopped up from his seat.

“No, no. Listen, Roslin, this is what we’ll do. After work you’ll get all dolled up in your best outfit and I’m gonna take you out for a night on the town. We’ll hit the clubs, have a few drinks, party until we find a guy you wanna-”

“We’re done here, Grubber. I’m sorry I can’t give you what you need. You can have the violin back, but that’s all.”

Grubber Ludwig clenched his hands into fists and fumed at the nostrils. Then, he took deep breaths and let his hands drop.

“Alright, Roslin. I’ll go.”

Roslin watched him move with an impassive face. He stopped in the doorway and turned back towards her.

“You know, whether you end up having a first born or not, you still deserve to be happy.”

Then, the creature left the offices of Orlando Image Marketing.



Roslin felt compelled to pick up the cherry wood violin on her way back home. Upon entering her empty apartment, she placed the violin case on the sofa, then started running the shower. She walked back to the kitchen and poured herself a glass of wine. She drank half the glass, then took off her blazer and threw it on the couch next to the case.

She stared at the case, sipping her wine, wondering if anything Grubber Ludwig had said about her was true. Was she really unhappy? Was she avoiding love?

Roslin finished her glass and moved closer to the case. The same pull that had drawn her up the loft overtook her again. She was vaguely aware of the shower running and that it was probably hot by now, but instead she opened the case. The violin looked just as it did when she first received it. Shiny dark red that seemed to swirl. The violin had never once been scratched, chipped, or needed a string replaced in twenty years.

She picked it up and immediately felt comforted by its perfect familiar weight. She looked out her balcony doors. The sunset cast golden bronze rays. Roslin grabbed the bow too and walked outside onto the balcony. She placed the base of the violin in position under her neck, raised the bow, and closed her eyes.

Then, she strummed a deep resounding note, followed by an endearing rendition of Bartok's No. 2. The violin seemed to remember the song better than she did, just as Grubber Ludwig had said. Roslin played as if not a day had gone by that she hadn't practiced.

"That was amazing," a voice from below said when she finished.

Roslin looked down. On the balcony a room over and one story down, a tanned man wearing sunglasses and holding a beer waved to her.

"I've never heard you play before."

"Uh, it's been a while," she said, surprised.

"That's hard to believe."

The man leaned against the railing and sipped his beer.

"Really, I'm not that talented," Roslin told him and set the instrument down.

"So, you're not a professional?" he asked.

"No." She shook her head. "I'm in marketing."

"Well, you must be a genius at marketing if you're doing that instead of playing concert halls."

Roslin laughed and brushed her hair back.

"I should use you as a reference."

He smiled revealing his perfect teeth.

“I’ll need to see your work first,” he said. “Good thing I’m throwing a fancy formal party later. A real tuxedo-type affair. You could advertise it and provide the entertainment.”

“I can cook too. You haven’t hired a caterer yet, have you?”

“Well, I can let him go now that I know you’re available.”

Roslin laughed and talked like she wasn’t at all concerned about her career, or love, or first borns. The golden bronze rays made the cherry red violin more vibrant and the man’s tan more stunning.

“Who was it you were just playing?” he asked.

“Bartok.”

“Alright. So, we’re going to do a Bruce Wayne-esque party, with a Bartok playlist, and lamb cutlets. You think you can pull that off?”

Roslin waved her hand.

“Yeah, in my sleep.”

They laughed.



Laughter floated inside the apartment one room over and a story below, where Grubber Ludwig watched the balcony from the man’s living room chair. A fat sack of gold lay on the coffee table made of cinderblocks and plywood.

“Seriously though, I’m not much of a party guy,” the man said. “I’m more of a beer and old movies kind of guy.”

“That actually sounds a lot better than a tuxedo-type affair,” Roslin’s voice replied.

“Well, if you wanted to do that sometime, you know where to find me,” the man said.

“Um... I, uh...” Roslin stammered.

Grubber anxiously clacked his nails together. *Dang it, Todd, you’re moving too fast. You said you got this.* Grubber knew he shouldn’t have been so hasty to make a deal with someone who used patio furniture in their living room, but he was in a bind.

“Not now, of course. You know, sometime you’re not playing the violin on the balcony at sunset,” Todd said, recovering.

A few seconds passed before Roslin responded, “I don’t know.”

I don't know if I'm looking for anything like that right now."

"You don't have to answer now," Todd said, briefly glancing back into his apartment at Grubber and the sack of gold, then turning back to Roslin. "I'd like to hear you play more, if that's agreeable." He said with his perfect smile.

A moment later the endearing sound of the violin resonated down through the man's balcony to the creature's pointy ears.

Contributor Biographies

In Alphabetical Order

Lonnie Berry is a resident of Portales, NM and is a full time student of ENMU. Lonnie is a broadcast journalism major with a minor in creative writing. Lonnie writes a weekly column for the local newspapers and is a co-anchor for the student-run television news.

Gaylord Brewer is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and for more than 20 years edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. His most recent books are a ninth collection of poetry, *Country of Ghost* (Red Hen), and the cookbook-memoir *The Poet's Guide to Food, Drink, & Desire* (Stephen F. Austin), both in 2015.

Michaela Browder grew up in Iowa. Before attending ENMU she went to cosmetology school in Utah; however, she decided that she still wanted to continue her education after she finished. She is currently majoring in Mathematics, but that could change as she is very indecisive. In her free time, she enjoys working on her dancing and photography.

Jack C. Buck, originally from Michigan, lives and teaches in Denver, Colorado. He thanks you for reading his work.

Marc Cioffi grew up in the Hudson Valley of New York. In recent years he has lived and taught in several different states, exploring and experiencing many new places across the U.S.A. His poetry has appeared in the *Chronogram* and *The Shawangunk Review*, and is forthcoming in other publications.

Dane Cobain (High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, UK) is an independent poet, musician, and storyteller with a passion for language and learning. His debut collection of poetry, *Eyes Like Lighthouses When the Boats Come Home*, was released by Booktrope in March 2016.

Iris Esquivel is a Montreal artist, writer, teacher, and McGill University student. When she's not working at one of her twenty-seven odd jobs or capriciously traveling the world, she writes and illustrates for several publications including *Decompoz Magazine*, *The F-Word*, *Radix*, *L'Organe*, and *Paper's Edge*. She can't cook, but prides herself greatly on her ability to listen and make puns—sometimes good ones. One day she'll change her name and start a revolution. She hasn't yet decided what kind. You can visit her works at www.irisesquivel.com.

Jay Frankston was raised in Paris, France. Narrowly escaping the Holocaust, he came to the U.S. in 1942, became a lawyer, and practiced on his own in New York for nearly twenty years, reaching the top of his profession, sculpting, and writing at the same time. In 1972 he gave up law and New York and moved himself and his family to Northern California where he became a teacher and continued to sculpt and write. He is the author of several books and of a true tale entitled "A Christmas Story" which was published in New York, condensed in *Reader's Digest*, translated into 15 languages, and called a Christmas Classic by many reviewers.

Nicole Ferraro was born in Albany, NY. Now she lives in San Diego, CA.

D. Shawn Hunton writes fiction and teaches English in northern New Mexico. He is an alumnus of NMSU, ENMU, and he is currently attending the school of hard knocks.

Haley Madden is currently studying English at Eastern New Mexico University. She enjoys reading and writing as well as art, going to church, practicing Tae Kwon-Do, and learning how to play the guitar. She hopes to someday be a novelist and screenwriter.

Wesley Martin is an aspiring novelist currently attending Eastern New Mexico University. He enjoys writing speculative fiction, often times of a comedic nature.

Emmy McCray works in the marketing and web strategy department at Central New Mexico Community College and has previously published poems and reviews in journals, zines, and DIY projects. She blogs about the poetry lifestyle at BigBangPoetry.com.

Don Mitchell is an anthropologist who lives in Hilo, Hawai'i where he makes images and writes fiction. He was one of the 2013 City of Portales Artists in Residence. He posts a new image every day at www.hilodailyimage.com.

Laura Coe Moore lives on Whidbey Island in Washington and is inspired by the isolated rural nature of life. Her poetry and visual art make connections between the individual human interior and the wild external world. Her work has recently appeared in *Blast Furnace* and she currently has work in *The Coe Review*.

Mary K. Murphy is currently a student at ENMU, studying English and History with an emphasis on creative writing and medieval studies. She currently works at Plateau Telecommunications and has three grown children and one adorable grandchild.

Carol Oberg began her writing career with *Blue Mountain Arts, Inc.*, publishing her poetry on greeting cards for many years. She was one of three featured poets in *Ancient Paths*, issue 16 (ten works, one of which was nominated for a Pushcart award). She has also published with *The Avocet*, *Extract(s)*, *Burningword*, *First Literary Review-East* online, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Garbanzo*, *The Fourth River* (Chatham University), *New Plains Review*, and a few others, along with poetry in an upcoming issue of *Lost Coast Review*. She and her husband are semi-retired on a small inland lake in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Aaron Pappalardo is a writer, student, and actor living in the quaint village of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. Some day in the distant future he hopes to become a professor of literature and/or gain a vague sense of purpose.

Juan Carlos Pérez-Duthie has called home several cities: San Juan, New York, Buenos Aires, Miami. And hopes to call home a few more.

An adjunct college professor, writer, and journalist, he has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of California Riverside/Palm Desert. Reading and writing keep him sane.

Kaitlyn Roberts, a New Jersey native, is a recent graduate of ENMU's Fine Arts program. She cherishes the opportunity she was given to be the photographer and graphic designer for the university. Kait thanks all of her family, friends, Scott Kendall, Mr. Deal, and Mr. Hamann for their endless support.

Katelyn "Katy" Ross is a senior at ENMU majoring in Communications with an emphasis in Journalism and minoring in Creative Writing. Her hobbies include reading, writing, taking pictures, and spending time with her friends and family. After she graduates in December, she plans to study Creative Writing in graduate school.

Enzo Scavone is a writer of Italian descent. He has lived in Germany, Switzerland, and recently settled in New York City where he studies Creative Writing at Hunter College. He has been published in *The Opiate* and *Forge Journal*.

Tom Sheehan has published 22 books, work in many publications, and has 30 Pushcart nominations, five Best of the Net nominations (and one winner), and short story awards from *Nazar Look* for 2012-2015.

Julia Simmons is a freshman at ENMU, going for her Associate's in General Studies. She hopes to go into Technical Writing and work on her novels on the side. She writes all different genres, her favorite being fantasy.

Glen Sorestad is a Canadian poet who lives in Saskatoon on the western plains. A frequent traveler to the Southwest, his latest book of poems is *Hazards of Eden: Poems from the Southwest* (2015).

Robert Joe Stout grew up as an independently-minded Wyoming animal lover and carp fisher. He now lives in Oaxaca, Mexico, writes

about politics, people, and the environment, and celebrates the diversions that baseball, calendas, and sunsets offer. His most recent books are *Where Gringos Don't Belong*, *Monkey Screams*, and *Hidden Dangers*.

J. Tarwood has been a dishwasher, a community organizer, a medical archivist, a documentary film producer, an oral historian, and a teacher. Much of his life has been spent in East Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. He has published three books, *And For The Mouth A Flower*, *Grand Detour*, and *The Cats In Zanzibar*, and his poems have appeared in magazines ranging from *American Poetry Review* to *Visions*. He has always been an unlikely man in unlikely places.

David White is a retired geologist and currently teaches at ENMU-Ruidoso.



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