



PORTER GULCH REVIEW, 2004—THE ONLINE VERSION

Porter Gulch Review Spring 2004

Published by:
Cabrillo College
6500 Soquel Drive
Aptos, CA 95003

www.cabrillo.edu

The online version of PGR 2004 can be found through
Cabrillo's English Department homepage.
It includes submission critiques and book reviews.

Printed in the United States of America

Cover Design by Sandra Taylor, *The Graphic Page*

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004105175

ISBN 0-9753796-0-7

The publication of this book was generously supported by
Cabrillo College and the Cabrillo College Foundation.

PORTER GULCH REVIEW



Noelle Correia

SPRING 2004

Introduction

Welcome to the 2004 edition of *The Porter Gulch Review*. This annual project was established nineteen years ago with the purpose of showcasing novice and experienced writers from Santa Cruz County and beyond. The students of David Sullivan's English 1B class at Cabrillo College edited this year's edition of the PGR. The staff would like to give a thanks to all of those who submitted to the Review, in addition to everyone else who has contributed to making this edition of the PGR, a diverse, thought-provoking collaboration of literary and artistic works. A huge thanks goes to Sandra Taylor, who designed the front and back cover layouts as a gift to PGR.

Friends of the S.C. Libraries Prose Award: Neale Jones

Frances Hedgpeth Memorial Poetry Award: Barbara Leon

Graphic Arts Award, on behalf of George Ow Family Properties:

Lucien Kubo

Pajaro Valley Arts Council Visual Arts Award:

Alissa Goldring, Kelly M. Woods

Submission Guidelines for PGR 2005

We invite submissions of short stories, poetry, excerpts from novels, screenplays, plays, photography, and artwork for the 2005 issue by December 1. All prose (two maximum per writer, 5,000 words), and poetry (four maximum per writer), must be single sided, typed, single spaced, in triplicate, in 9x12 envelope with your name, address, e-mail address and telephone number on a cover page only. Also include the titles of submissions in the cover letter. Do not staple or use paper clips on any pages. Please put your name and contact information on the back of each piece of artwork. Original artwork can be retrieved at the PGR public reading. All written entries must include a computer disk, which exactly duplicates the hard copies, but includes your name. We are requesting a \$5.00 reader fee donation. Make checks payable to PGR/Cabrillo College Foundation. Send to: Porter Gulch Review, Cabrillo College, 6500 Soquel Dr., Aptos, CA, 95003.

PGR 2004 Staff Members

Miguel Acosta, Matthew Alvarez, Mike Baldwin, Davis Banta, Lana Beardslee, Stephanie Blake, Troy Bookout, Kyra Brown, Elizabeth Crawford, Lauren Cyr, Guiangelo Famalaro, Tarynn Hicks, Dana Keating, Jordan Kreyche, Hillary Lee, Adam Long, Eugenia Magana, Matthew Maurer, Joe Mornard, Shawn Osborn, Jeremi Plazas, Alyson Provax, Julie Rast, Chris Sentieri, David Stearns, Janet Thelen, Gretchen Thesman, Sara Twitty. Special Thanks to the production team: Lana Beardslee, Shawn Osborn, Chris Sentieri, Alyson Provax, Matthew Alvarez, and Sara Twitty. Tony Torres was invaluable in solving technical difficulties. Janet Thelen was – once again – our guiding angel, assisting in organization, layout, publicity, and moral.

Artist

Page

Kelly M. Woods	Front, Back Cover, 13, 25, 45, 47, 79, 100, 127
Noelle Correia	3, 97
Sara Friedlander	5, 99
Angela Gibson	7, 73, 144
Silvio Correia	8
Alissa Goldring	11, 23, 90, 126, 137
Sandra Taylor	15
Jaimie S. Uyematsu	17, 122, 128
Lucien Kubo	27, 93, 94, 96, 103, 105
Bob Newick	28, 91, 118
Dana Keating	31, 48, 71, 95, 111
Abe Holston	33
Diane Patracuola	38, 56, 115
Ina Celaya	39
Jana Marcus	40
KOAK	49, 58-69, 80, 119
Michael Reynolds	50
T. Mike Walker	74
Michael Allison	77, 143
Maureen Quinn	107
Katie Holman	108
Adam Long	117
MJA Chancy	121
Sara Twitty	125
Daniella Irish	129, 136
Paul Morris	139
Janet Thelen	140



Sara Friedlander

Title, Author	Page
I Used to Look for Your Face , Evie Fingerman Alloy	8
Killer , Susan Allison	10
God and the Machines , Barbara Leon	12
Your California , Ken Weisner	14
Next Door , Patricia Zylius	16
A Desert Tale , Vivian Vargas	18
Day of the Dead/Ciudad Juárez , Barbara Leon	24
Arnold Schwarzenegger; An Epic Tale of Heroism , Davis Banta	26
From the Back Row of Jazzercise I Can See , Molly B. Tierney	29
Interlude Without Music , Kim Nelson	30
Lead , Ian Kleinfeld	32
The Stories I'm Not supposed To Tell , Neale Jones	34
The Four Noble Truths , Wilma Marcus Chandler	40
Jungle Love , Jalene Otto	42
The smells of mmmm and Dixie , Jamie S. Uyematsu	46
Pears , Barbara Leon	48
A Crack Between Two Worlds , Dane Cervine	50
Pastiche de Belem , Carol See-Wood	51
The Next Ride , Sandy Raney	52
Little Rich White Girl , Chloe LaFortune	57
Missing Kisses , KOAK	58
My Last Pair of High Heeled Shoes , Evie Fingerman Alloy	70
Autumn Offering , Julia Alter	72
Chibi , Barbara Angell Fuller	74
Pilgrimage , Elaine G. Schwartz	77
What She Doesn't Know , Geneffa Popatia Jonker	78

Lost in the Department Store , Jamie S. Uyematsu	81
Lists , J. D. Hagaer	82
How I Spent my Summer Vacation , Bill Milestone	90
The Hug , Helene Simkin Jara	91
Intimacy's Ghost , Katrina Marvin-Travis	92
Not an Aspiring Gymnast Among Us , Katrina Marvin-Travis	94
First Decade , Debra Spencer	95
Yellow , Lan Tran	96
From the Balcony , Shannon Givan	98
Deflected Miracle , Tom McKoy	100
Stone , Rebecca Chourre	101
Dust Art , Patricia Zylius	104
Talking Southern , Lisa Simon	106
A Sign , Nathan Leslie	108
Hamster Babies , Molly B. Tierney	118
Monkey Box , Debra Spencer	120
The Poetics of Unworthiness , Wilma Marcus Chandler	123
Grateful Deadheads Talk Trash at the Café , Dane Cervine	124
Childhood Dream , Elaine G. Schwartz	126
The Brand , Ann Keniston	127
Untitled (I asked Hillary...) , Jessica Rumwell	128
Beanpole , Mark J. Bradlyn	129
Ponte de Barca, Portugal, 2000 , Carol See-Wood	137
The Importance of Hunger , Susan Allison	138
Between Lake and Pasture , Travis Upright	139
Safe , Julia Alter	140
A Love Dog Afternoon , Sara Friedlander	141



Angela Gibson



Silvio Correia

I Used To Look For Your Face

Evie Fingerman Alloy

I used to look for your face
In the photographs of Holocaust survivors
In museums, books and on the TV
Until I got older
And I stopped looking
Because it didn't matter anymore
I no longer needed the proof
No longer wondered if it was true.

But just the other day
I opened a book about Anne Frank
And there were those photographs again
The shaved heads
Emaciated bodies
The vacant stares
And I found myself looking again
Out of habit.

The anger rose inside
As I became aware of this old behavior
And I was reminded once again
Of how you spent a year of your life
Against your will
Forced to see and do things
That continued to haunt you
Every day of your life.

What was it all for?
This surviving with your life
You ask yourself every night
As you lie awake in your bed
Unable to sleep
But if you can
Only to find the nightmares
Are waiting for you.

I ask myself this question too
What was it all for – this surviving
Am I doing something
To make a difference in the world
So it won't happen again
To never let people forget
Man's inhumanity to man
Woman's inhumanity to woman?
Maybe these poems, this writing,
Is what can make a difference
My tiny contribution
To awake the world
To the evil inside
That still lurks in our bodies
Unharnessed and ready to charge forward
At the slightest encouragement.

I used to look for your face,
In the photographs of Holocaust survivors
In the museums, books and on the TV
Until I realized I need look no further
Outside myself
Because I found
That your face, dear mother,
Resides inside of me.

Killer

Susan Allison

My father may be ash
but still struts across my chest
in his weed-oiling boots, steel-plated
and thick as elephant hide, with soles
like corrugated tin, slicing open
old oozing wounds;

when I was ten, shaking my shoulders, shoving
me against cold plaster, shouting
I wish you'd never been born; then
marching through avocado groves
in his combat boots, his weapon
a weed-oiling can and spray-arm
blasting yellow poison, smiling as he shoots
at wild roses and poppies, dandelions
and oats, stray cats
and me.

He points the nozzle at my face
and pretends to squeeze the trigger, laughing
as I scream and run. I wait
till his back is turned
then climb to the top of an avocado tree
and watch my father kill, exulting in green
wilting to brown.

From my perch
camouflaged by glossy, veined leaves
and dangling fruit, I don't want to wait forty years
for him to shrivel; I want to rip
green grenades from their stems
and heave them at my father, imagine
his skull breaking, blood coursing
from his ears and nose.

So far from the house, no one
would hear him cry out; no one
would ever find him, decaying
under dead leaves
buried by rotten fruit.



Alissa Goldring

God and the Machines

Barbara Leon

“Gaudiani’s operating? Hey –
we call him God for short.”
The admitting clerk grinned
peered over her eyeglass rims
then swiveled back to her terminal.
“Religious belief?” she continued.
My husband said none
and I wondered where
I might find faith.

He’d never call himself God
this tall guy with classic Roman nose
and bedside manner so casual
you could see him stretching dough
at the corner pizzeria.

And they’d never call themselves angels.
The orderly in blue scrubs
who fussed over us in Spanglish
pulling offerings from the tiny hallway fridge.
The 6-foot blonde nurse, gold earrings in his left lobe
bearing potions for the cleaning bath.
The masked attendant in the floor-length gown
who wheeled my mate off
into the ether.

And after they’d split his breastbone
and bared his heart
I caught myself praying.

Praised be
the mind that guides the hands
their artful splicing, painstaking stitching
altering lifelines.

Hallowed the machines
the monitors humming hymns
blinking eyes that keep vigil.
The cold steel box, its cannulae
become his breath and blood.

Bless the body

new cells that multiply from first insult
the fractured bone ends
reaching for one another.

Sacred the consciousness, suspended,
that stirs, flows into his opened eyes
while his fingers tap reassurance
on mine. Thank you
for the morning.
Amen.



Kelly M. Woods

Your California

Ken Weisner

For S., 1957-2001

Twinge of bay laurel, savor of madrone, manzanita pasture,
horses still as stumps across the dry hills....

Once you were the glitter-eyed stranger
who stopped here just to point out to hikers
where the red tails were nesting, the robin eggs were hidden,
or to make sure they'd see the King snake skin around the bend.
With the squint of an old-timer you'd confess where the ripest
blackberries were,
or warn of nettles, poison oak, a rocky slope – easy to fall a long
way there.

I can never quite remember how to get to those places
where at night the stars are wild as the blackberries, and you are naming
them.

Memorializing you in any very conventional way
is like hunting without knowing the meaning of hunting,
or confusing some example of a principle with the principle itself;
all impulses to remember you – seem partial, untapped,
like the bees that chased you as a child returning to their ruined hive.

The storage locker you left behind was one huge library –
two-thousand books.... You were a connoisseur
of all knowledge and esoteric colloquy. Nevertheless,
homeless, destitute, you died by your own hand one winter night
in the groomed shrubbery behind a Las Vegas strip hotel.
Two years gone since you pulled the trigger:
love gone awry, your past like a choke-leash on your living
even though you had healed and served your time. America
made sure you would serve that time forever, unforgiven,
in a Puritan odor almost as terrible as your crime,

unforgiven for the unforgiveable – rape –
You were nineteen, a boy, wiped out on dope,
idiotically trapped and misunderstood, self-hating...
needing power and control, angry beyond words
although twenty-five years later, it is clear

that you might have been just fine – you served your time –
had you not been hounded unceasingly for what you'd done. You
registered
as an offender. But that made it hard to keep the kinds of jobs you
wanted –
or to ever break through the chrysalis of your past.
And now I can't seem to put you in one honored or dishonored place.
And you don't want a bench, a mass, a stone,
a plaque, a memorial grove: like taking the pulsing flash,
ever-shifting fingerprint, of a waterfall, and framing it behind ropes....
another little cage of human commentary on your knotted life.
You had your share of that. Instead, on any journey,

there are anonymous wild raspberries, mint, purple blossomed thistle,
honeysuckle, fragrant mugwort, or against the dank path:
solomon seal, licorice fern, medicinal oak. I find you there
where I'm most struck by nature's unfolding breeze or alphabet:
its runic stillness – each animal, each place.



Sandra Taylor

Next Door

Patricia Zylius

The poor house sits surrounded by sad bare dirt.
Boards cover the windows like eye patches,
the siding is naked, every flake of paint
diligently scraped away, everything stripped
to elemental wood.
It sulks, year after year,
in a dreary convalescence.

The only visible signs of life are one man,
one old skinny cat, and a crusty orange
fungal growth on the rocky hardpan.
An assortment of pickup trucks and vans
rearranges itself in the concrete driveway
every few days. A semi cab hulks
in the back yard, a monster toy
he keeps only for the blast of its air horn
and the sternum-pounding rumble of its engine.

Some dormant cellular life persists
in the dirt – a feeble green breaks the surface
again and again, each year
when the rains come to encourage.
But even this innocent fuzz falls victim
to human assault. He does not simply let all plant life
die of neglect but kills deliberately,
poisons yearly the stubborn grass.

Unruly greenery looms over my fence into his yard.
He lops with vicious thoroughness
any invading branches, like a bald, mad barber
who sneaks up on strangers in the subway
snipping errant locks on every disorderly head.

If he is my life's lesson in compassion,
then I'm flunking, season after season.
I cannot bear to speak to him,
avoid even a neighborly hello,

afraid venom will spout from my mouth
like a banned insecticide
if I so much as open it in his presence.

My weedy heart cannot admit him
to the community of the living.



Jaimie S. Uyematsu

A Desert Tale

Vivian Vargas

They found her sitting in the living room of the mobile home with the lights off and the television on. A Kung Fu movie was on the screen. The dials of the old TV had been turned so that blurred images in shades of gray, black, and white merged amoeba-like into one another.

“Are you all right, Mrs. Holmes?” Standing next to the television, the manager of Happy Wanderer Trailer Homes spoke to her, raising the volume of his voice a notch above the frenzied music of ninja combat. There was no reaction from her, so he moved in front of the television set and bellowed, “Are you all right, Mrs. Holmes!” Her eyes blinked once, as if the channel had changed, and she adjusted her focus to the apparition that had moved in closer to her.

The two boys were no longer yelling. They were inside now, staring at the strange calmness of their mother. For the last half hour they had been outside, kicking the door and banging the window with their fists, at first patiently, then louder and louder until they were screaming at the top of their lungs. They were on overload when the manager arrived.

In the trailer across from them, the neighbors who had just returned from a trip to Las Vegas watched, half-drunk, from their kitchen window. They had phoned the office and complained about the noise

“Mrs. Holmes, yah can’t lock your kids outta the house. It’s almost midnight and they’re waking everybody up trying to get yah to open the door.” The children, standing behind him, could see the crack of his buttocks slipping out of his tight jeans, his sweatshirt barely covering his lower back. “Now why don’tcha put these kids to bed. Don’t they have school tomorrow?”

As they waited for her answer, they held their pose. They were timeless figures on a dark Caravaggian canvas, their faces painted in the soft, gray light of the television set. In this portrait, the wrinkles of Mrs. Holmes’ skinny face were smoothed. Her thin, uncombed hair was darker and fuller in the shadows. Her bare legs were long and regal. The manager’s skin glowed, the hairs on his back shimmered. The details of the room were lost in the solid black curtains of the night.

She did not move. She was waiting for this unpleasantness to be over, to be rid of his presence, so she could go to sleep. She knew he had to do this, give her a lecture, and she was patiently waiting for him to finish so that she could turn the television off. Once the boys were inside she knew they’d be able to take care of themselves. Why, she thought, hadn’t they come home sooner?

“Mrs. Holmes, you’re not retarded,” the manager said, “you know you can’t let your kids go roaming around alone at night. They haven’t even got sweaters on.” Giggles escaped Gregory’s pressed lips. He was the oldest. He had black curly hair and a wide, flat nose. Broad stretches of his skin were nearly Anglo white. It was at the hairline that the skin pigmentations returned to their African ancestry. Simon, the younger boy, had oval eyes that were pinched at both ends. His hair was very black and straight. His mother told him that his father

was a dentist who had given Simon his passion for insects.

The manager lowered the volume of the television set. "They're gonna take your kids away from yah if yah don't watch out. Now why don'tcha get them in bed. They hav'ta get up early tomorrow." Then turning and finding the boys standing behind him, he said in his best managerial voice, "Get your pajamas on and go to bed. Your mom's tired." He didn't wait to see if they would move, but walked to the door with his overloaded key ring. "I hope this is it for the rest of the night," he said as he locked the door behind him.

Sociology, she thought to herself. I have a bachelor's in sociology and I'm taking time off to write my master's thesis. She turned to look at the boys. I'm not very good at this, she said to herself, feeling the pull of the ebb over the dry seabeds of the desert, something always happens. She sighed, stood up and staggered to the small bedroom. She locked the door and fell asleep.

Gregory slept on the couch and Simon fell asleep on the floor just beneath him. The television set was still on when they woke up the next morning. Their mother was gone and there was nothing edible for breakfast. She'd left a disposable cigarette lighter on the kitchen table and Gregory pocketed it. "Let me have it," Simon yelled. "Naw, you're still little enough to get food from just looking sad. I'm trading this for a baloney sandwich when I get to school." Simon protested. Gregory brushed him off. They went to the bathroom for a pee, put their shoes on and left.

Just before noon their mother woke up. She showered, dressed and walked to the liquor store to buy cornflakes, milk and a cigarette lighter. "Gawd I hate walking around here," she said out loud to herself. "Most houses here don't have a second coat of paint or green lawns. This town doesn't even have any freakin' sidewalks. Just some sad, sorry stores for sad, sorry people who have jobs at the edge of the freeway." At the far end of town there was an island of corporate civilization—a new supermarket, price gorging gas stations, and a couple of chain hotels with potted cacti inside their walled parking lots.

Back inside the trailer, she took off her dusty shoes, and washed a dirty bowl, the soapy water splattering on the heap of dirty dishes in the sink. She ate some cornflakes in silence, smoked a cigarette and flicked the ashes into the puddle of milk left in the bowl. It's a place to stop, rest, and then continue on to the big cities. Only they took the wheels off this trailer. So how am I going to get home? She thought as she went to the couch, lay down, and fell asleep.

Around 3 o'clock the boys returned from school. They walked in noisily and let the door slam shut. They woke their mother up. Without a word, she turned her face to the back of the couch and went to sleep. The boys found the cornflakes on the kitchen table and ate them out of the box, drinking milk out of the carton to chase them down. Then they collected some toys and took them into the bedroom.

"Get out of the bedroom. I have to get dressed now." She stood in the doorway dominating the space. "Go watch some cartoons."

Gregory continued moving the toy figures in the paths he had set out for them to follow. Simon jumped on the mattress shouting, "Cartoons, cartoons."

"Gregory, didn't you hear me? I have to get ready for work."

"Cartoons, cartoons," Simon called out louder.

"Greg, get your sorry butt out of here."

This is how it started last night, she thought. I finally get a day off and Simon needs help with his homework. "Greg, did you hear what I said!" Last night, she thought.

"One times one is two. GET IT! Two times two is four. GET IT! Four times four is eight. GET IT! Eight times eight is sixty-four. HAVE YOU GOT IT?" With each equation she yelled louder. "I asked you this afternoon if you had any homework. Now it's ten at night and you say you have to memorize this math!"

"You don't understand," Gregory said, "Simon has to do this homework or he'll get into trouble."

"I'm tired and I want to watch TV. You two should be asleep by now. One times one is one. Two times two is four. Four time four is...."

"Forty-four," Simon yelled out, laughing, and ran as fast as he could out the front door to escape his mother's wrath.

"That's not it. You don't get it! YOU DON'T GET IT!" she screamed at the open empty door. She turned to Gregory. "Go get your brother," she yelled at Gregory.

"Why do I have to? That's your job."

"I said, 'Go get him!' I'm not walking out there in my robe."

"You're the Mom."

"Then do as I say!"

"No!"

She grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him with all her strength. She shook him roughly. "I said, 'Go get him!'" She couldn't get pass the detached look in his eyes. It was as if she wasn't there. He didn't react.

"Get out!" She stopped shaking him and grabbed him by the arm. She pushed him out the door. "When I say go get your brother, I mean, go get your brother." When they returned an hour later, the front door was locked and their mother did not leave the couch or seem to hear them banging on the door.

"Cartoons, cartoons!" Simon leaped from the mattress and darted past his mother to the living room. His mother grabbed one of the toys Gregory was playing with and threw it out of the room. It landed in the sink, breaking a plate with ketchup on it. Gregory quickly gathered the rest of the toys and shot past her.

Mrs. Holmes brushed her teeth, ran a comb through her hair and told them not open the door to anyone while she was gone. They were watching television and gave no sign of having heard her. She stared at them for a moment and

gritted her teeth as hard as she could, clamping the anger inside until the adrenalin in her body made her feel too large for the room she was standing in. She left, opening her fist to lock the door behind her. Last night... she thought.

"Is it always this slow at night?" He was watching her ring up the beer and pretzel sticks. She didn't answer. She was making a mental note of the type of beer and the brand of pretzels he was purchasing. She had a little notebook where she wrote down what she felt was important. In the notebook there were lists of categories. In the margins were matrices, graphs, and correlation equations. Some pages had little stick figures with academic jargon written next to them.

"Have you lived here long?" he asked as he paid her.

"I moved in last November," she answered truthfully. She was concentrating on giving him the correct amount of change.

"They've got a nice bar at the Traveler's Inn. Ever been there?" He took his change and put it neatly into his wallet.

"Nope," she lied.

"How about meeting me there for a drink after you get off work?"

"Can't. I'm writing a paper. Have to get it done before the weather gets really hot and the grant money runs out."

"What're you working on?" He stared at her face as he leaned against the adjacent checkout station. No one else was waiting in line and the other cashier was busy reading a tabloid.

"It's about the impact of environmental factors on peripheral societies like this one – ugly barren mountains, thorny cacti, god-awful dust storms and cheap motels. Societies either adapt or disappear." She was pleased with herself. The words came out without much effort.

"Sounds interesting. I'd like to hear more about it."

Probably two years of community college and he's selling timeshares to the army bases out here, she thought.

"I'll pick you up after work."

"I'm off at midnight."

He smiled and nodded his head. She bagged his purchases and handed them to him. Then she watched as he swaggered out and slipped into a sedan parked illegally in front of the store.

He's a little too young, she thought. An eager beaver. At the end of her shift she went to the bathroom, combed her hair and said out loud to the mirror, "He's just goddamn horny."

The next morning he dropped her off at the mobile park gate and headed down the road to somewhere. "He's going to order a big breakfast, flirt with the waitress, and leave a small tip," she said as she watched him drive off. As she walked towards her trailer, where her children inside were sleeping, she

thought. Three men in nine weeks. She stopped to take out her notebook from her purse and counted the days of the month.

Gregory and Simon looked up at her with accusing eyes when she entered the room. She met them with her own accusation. "Why aren't you dressed? You're going to be late for school, again!"

"It's Lincoln's birthday. There isn't any school today," Gregory answered in his "stupid mom" voice.

"Then go outside and play. Both of you. I have to get some sleep."

The boys put on their jeans and shoes. They grabbed their jackets from the heap of discarded clothes next to the couch and went outside. Simon had a glass jar with holes punched into the lid. He kept it in a shady spot underneath the trailer's stairs. It was filled with different bugs. He held it in his hands and took careful note of the survivors. Gregory set up two camps of toy warriors in the dirt, decided which side would win the war and pelted the loser with stones.

They waited until she fell asleep. Then the boys silently entered the trailer and quietly looked through her purse for some money and – this time – for the door key. There was enough for a pizza and a soda.

Gregory and Simon walked down the road to the pizza parlor kicking up dust as they made a game of trying to trip each other. A small mutt tied to the porch of a dehydrated house barked at the noise they were making. Between barks, his tongue hung out of his mouth, as he pulled at the rope, eager to join in the boys' game.

They walked on and passed the roadside park with benches and tables where travelers used to stop in the pre-freeway days. The back of the benches and the tops of the tables were splintered and carved with the initials of lovers who didn't come here anymore. Looming over the trash and broken glass were three eucalyptus trees – planted during the Great Depression – now brown and brittle poles.

"We have enough for a pineapple ham pizza," Gregory said. Simon smiled. Then Gregory tripped him. Simon fell and got some dust in his nose. He brushed it off and raced after his brother to the pizza parlor.

The boys ordered their pizza at the counter and sat down to wait. The tables at the restaurant smelled like an old dishrag. The posters were faded photos of the coliseum and olive trees. When their order was ready, they ate quickly. After the food was gone, they looked over the pinball machines until it was time to meet their friends.

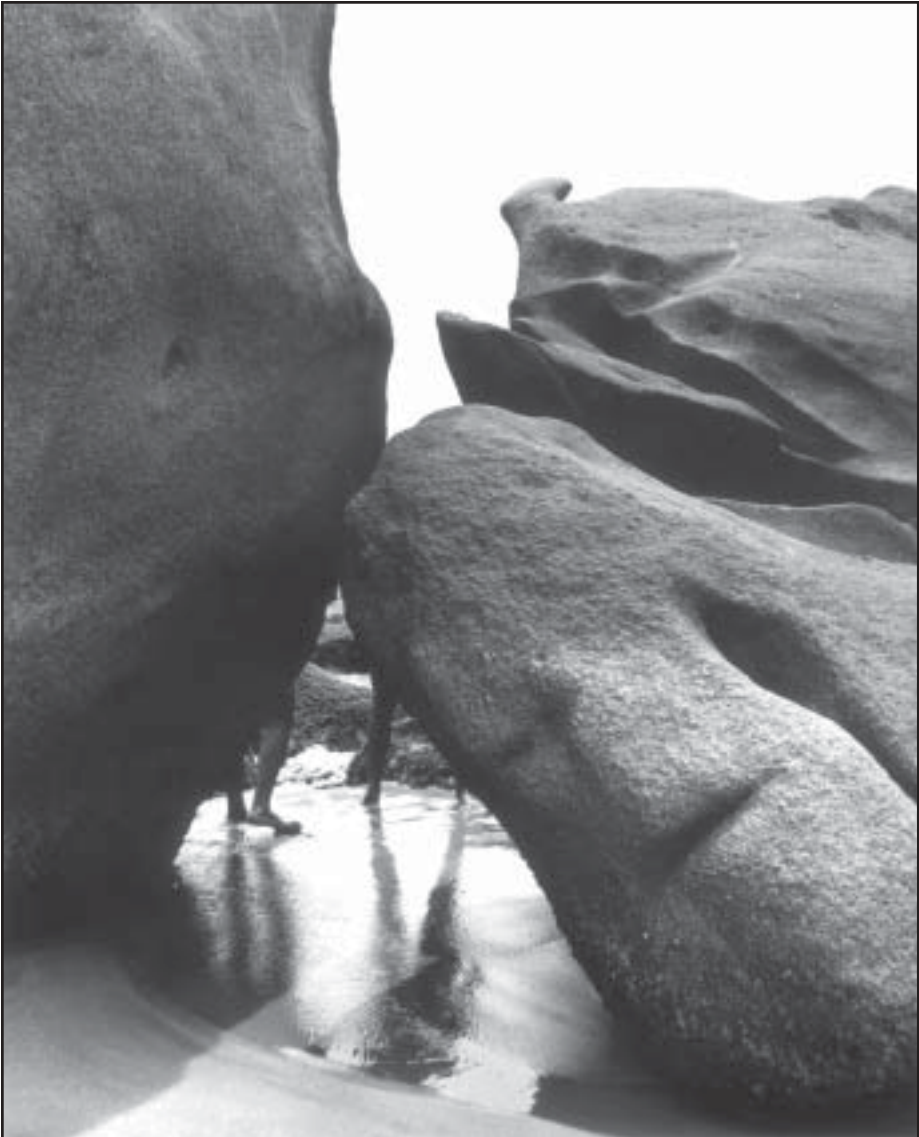
They were going into the desert with some of the boys from school to trap jackrabbits. They'd get a ride on the backs of their friends' bikes. They'd sit on the rack, trying not to come down hard when they went over a bad bump. Gregory and Simon would spread their legs out and lift them above the scrub brush.

Their friends were boys who had been born and raised in the desert. Boys who knew where to find the jackrabbits and their burrows, and where the poisonous snakes sunned themselves. They knew the stories of the murderers and murdered, and where the bodies had been found. And they let Gregory and

Simon tag along because they were eager, and they knew things, too.

They knew where the hidden cameras and two-way mirrors were hung in the supermarket, and when the store manager took his breaks. They knew about social deviants and the dangers of poor neighborhoods in the city. They had seen a teacher who didn't wear a bra and a drowned man floating in a city park lake. And they knew that nothing ever stayed the same — that life was change.

Simon and Gregory rode on the back of their friends' bikes through the desert, holding on to the bicycle seat with one hand, laughing, sometimes kicking at a sagebrush — and they felt free. They nearly always felt free. It was their life. They did not feel the regret of adults. They felt the freedom. And in their freedom was their glory.



Alissa Goldring

Day of the Dead/Ciudad Juárez

Barbara Leon

For the murdered women
of the maquiladora zone – 370 and still counting.

Entice them back this festive day.
Lay a lush carpet of marigold petals
that they may follow the fragrance home.

Celebrate them with ofrendas.
On Claudia's altar, a packet of letters home
her childish scrawl on lined blue paper. Mama, Papi
I found a job in the maquila – \$4.65 a day.
And all night in the city, lights like you've never seen!

For Irma, craft a calavera, dress her bones
in style. Let her kick her feet
in platform shoes
swing her hips in designer jeans
like the ones she stitched for 20 cents each
the same new-denim smell
steamed, pressed, trucked away
to fill the stores up north.

For Paloma, fastest hands in the auto parts assembly,
a red toy convertible. Let her clutch
the steering wheel in her skeleton fingers
black hair lifted by the breeze, as she speeds
miles from the factory, the colonia's
leaked sewage streets
the dreaded path to the midnight bus
last place she was seen.

For all the slimwaisted, longhaired girls,
display photographs
edged in ribbons and lace.
Show the stuff of their working lives -
sewing needles, coated wire, laser disks
factory sirens, bathroom passes, inspectors'
roving hands, doctors' notes and dead fetuses.

Burn copal to ward off evil. Let candles flame
everywhere, to chase away the night demons.
Prepare soft cloths and pots of rose water

to mop the sweaty brows, bathe rope burns
and bite marks.

Gather families at the gravesites.
Let them scrub the stones clean, sweep away
jagged amber glass, crushed cigarette butts
dried semen and rusty knives, then
lay picnics on bright spreads.
Let the living and dead feast together
on their favorite molés, anise-scented bread
tamarind drinks to refresh
parched throats and swollen tongues.

And for the ones still wandering, body parts
strewn through the desert, decomposed in plastic
carried on coyotes' teeth, give them sweets.
Mortal bones exchanged for sugar skulls
marzipan coffins where they may sleep.



Kelly M. Woods

Arnold Schwarzenegger; An Epic Tale of Heroism

Davis Banta

Sing to me, O Muse
Of that lusty wanderer,
Skilled at contending and the manly arts
Of wielding arms and making bad guys boom

Brought to this Earth in lands afar,
Wearing lederhosen and lunching strudel.
Raised in a land of craggy mountains
And genocidal murderers, but that's ok
They were just following orders.

Hard were times, indeed
In that hilly land,
Austria they call it
(We know it's really Germany but
Sssh, it'll be our little secret)

His early life held grim poverty,
And even worse, they had no money!
Bereft and lonesome, the hero sat
On Then-skinny haunches,
Held his head in hands,
Weeping like a wimpy little girly-man.

Now Muse, golden-haired prophet,
Tell of how courageous
Arnold, when his tears did dry, leaving
Scars of salty tear-juice crystals
Hard upon his cheeks,
Summoned inner strength,
Lifting his head high, screaming to the
Heavens,
"As God is my witness, I shall never go hungry again!"
Only, you know, in
German.

Firm and hard,
Did Arnold forge his body
Made to face mighty tasks,
Valorous and pure in nature,

With one or two
Gropings in-between
All work and,
No play, as they say.

O Muse, all-knowing and of radiant beauty,
(Or can I call you Barbara?)
Belt out like you're feelin' it,
How from great drums across the seas
Hollow beats rang out like thunder,
Casting calls for those
"Talkies"
Everyone's so wild about.

Heeding its call,
Hoisting mainsails and swabbing
Poop decks,
Seaman Schwarzenegger set out
Sailing for the wondrous land,
Written of in the ancient tongues,
Where he would find his
Destiny: Ellaye
(L.A.)

Many titles did the warrior bear,
True: he became known more for them than as
Himself. Title bore he such as
"Mr. Universe", "Conan", "Terminator" and
"Kindergarten Cop".
Hollywood was his
Hall of Glories; Dreamsville, Tinseltown
A land where stars shone
Brightly through the smog
And he was their Sun.

O, fairest Muse (Barbara),
Venus-visaged,
And what a pair of
...Fortunes,
Sing of that ink-black shadow
That fell across the Golden Kingdom:
Fiscal deficit, a first showing for that term in a poem,
Incited growing unrest among its fickle
Citizenry.



Lucien Kubo

A frenzied race for power followed
To oust the aged king
Davis, Gray in both name and years.
Rival bands scrambled fast
To suck at Power's bloated teat.

Exceeding six score and ten in number,
(A slender list it was not)
Among the rabble were
Assembled many once-famed faces;
Leaders, merchants, jesters,
Gary Coleman.

Brave Arnold, who rose from
Humble poverty, combating
Dragons, monsters, liquid-metal cops,
Looked upon the spectacle with
Wizened eyes and thought:
"Vat de Hell."
(Not in German this time, just an accent).

Hat in ring, blade in hand,
Our hero slew all contenders
In his sight.
A million votes ahead, his victory
Undisputed, he sits now at the precipice of power.

That, O Muse is the tale
Of mighty Arnold, a robust hero
Of rich box-office grosses
And dubious political experience.
May the tale grow on, and
Barbara, how about a cup of
Coffee?



Bob Newick

From the Back Row of Jazzercise I Can See

Molly B. Tierney

that very tall woman with the muscles across her shoulders
her biceps, triceps, as firm as new soap,
the short haircut.

Today she wore tiny tight pink shorts
over her black spandex leotard.

I couldn't stop myself from watching her,
those long hard legs in lunge after lunge
that made lunges look easy,
long strong legs that bolster
the two bowling balls of her backside

I want that butt,
maybe grab onto it and feel
what it would be like if it were my own.
I'd like muscles like hers
but not enough to have someone like me
watching from the back row
and then writing a poem about it.

Or maybe I would – a body worthy of a poem

Oh, but I've already got that. My husband said as much,
just the other day, the kids at camp, the baby napping.
He came home for a bike ride, then a shower
and when I saw his naked butt walk by my door
I chased him down, and we ended up in bed

Looking up from kissing my breast
he leaned back, ran his hand along my hip
and looked at all of me, in full daylight.
Nice body you've got there
Then he reached behind me, pulling me to him,
his hand full of my soft bottom.
Yes, I thought,
yes, it is, isn't it?

Interlude Without Music

Kim Nelson

“Don’t talk to me about suburbia,” she said,
“Stress for nothing real, traffic. I would
move to Africa, live differently.”

But it wouldn’t change the ghetto
or bring suburbanites safely tucked behind
strings of careful Christmas lights out –
toward each other, willing to share or learn.
They would still think everything is okay.

“I’m afraid of total separation
our inability to reach for each other.
I’m not afraid on the street.”

I stay out of the way
don’t measure us and them
as they rage around me. Caught up.
There is no interaction.

I need a magic we can believe in
like a pair of glasses you could wear
to fail openly, and still have courage
to invite again. Over and over
as if blundering on your way out
of the shiny party is so endearing
the very person you need joins you. Something
so beautiful it’s sad, like Tchaikovsky
for everyone, even animals. As if
they’d play his music for the bored gorillas
caught inside afternoon after afternoon.

She wanted to insist on their behalf
bring a damn boom box if necessary,
be arrested and finally be with them
not for them, in silence.

Oh giraffes do care, would care
if they knew. They just are tall,
have the run of the land.

It is not their fault, or cause, or responsibility.
But of course it was,
and in the grand scheme of things
she was still afraid of bees.

“We find the oddest ways to be together,”
she said aloud. “You,” he laughed,
“are between things, an island

in everything you love.”
She winced, sinking. “A rowboat,”
she said, “With, for, against.
Rowing back and forth again.”

They heard the thump
of her son’s waking upstairs.
She pulled on her pajamas.
“Mommy,” he called from the landing,
“I can’t even remember who loves me.”

*I am indebted to my student Ricardo Orellana for the last line of this poem.
I began this poem as an exercise in which I was to use a quote. I pulled this
quote from one of his poems.



“Mystery Spot” Dana Keating

Lead

Ian Kleinfeld

(For Bill Milestone, 1958-2003)

\led\ n. 1:A dense, malleable, soft, bluish-white metallic element used in industry with an atomic symbol of Pb, and an atomic number of 82.

Sweet lead paint tempts ghetto children,
its cracked bark
flaking off walls
in bite-sized pieces.

It calls like a pied piper candy store
full of poison.
The brain filters
thick atoms,
they settle in its flesh,
stealing intelligence,
memory,
and eventually,
life.

Paint.
Solder.
Batteries.
Fishing weights.
Radiation shielding.
Ballast.
Pipes.
Bullets.

Was it sweet as paint,
that bullet,
as it passed through my friend's mouth
to his brain?
Since she left,
he was desperate
to taste anything sweet at all.
In this case, it was revenge.



Abe Holston

The Stories I'm Not Supposed To Tell

Neale Jones

I don't think about my friend.

I have other things to think about. The wife and kids. My teaching gig in the Lit. department at the University. All the term papers that come with it. The mortgage. Mowing the lawn and picking up dog crap, which my sixteen-year-old refuses to do. The bad dreams I have.

I think about politics, because I want my vote to count, and I don't want the losers to win. I think about poetry, though I don't talk about it with anyone aside from my students, who are all extremely dull and still need highchairs. I think about writing a book, about when I'll get around to writing it, and what it will be about when I do. I think about whether my children are getting enough iron, and whether the computer is taking away their ability to think.

I have to admit though, I have my vices too. I think about sports when I can't think about all those other things anymore. Football and hockey for the most part. Only a few people in my department understand this particular preoccupation. The rest consider it akin to spectating at Roman gladiator matches. I have chosen some of the more violent sports, I suppose, but it's not as if I watch boxing. That's not to say I haven't seen my share of awful sights. Once I watched as a receiver was tackled from behind, his cleat still firmly planted in the grass, and his leg bent completely backwards at the knee. They replayed it over and over on the television, in close up and slow motion, until I could pick out the jerks of muscle as each tendon snapped. As the guitarist Leo Kottke once said, "It's like looking at pornography. You get sicker as you go along but you can't stop." Of course, he was referring to a book of jungle diseases, but it all relates. My preference happens to be football. I don't think much about diseases.

I don't talk about my friend with anyone, and I don't think about him much anymore either. There was a time when I did, but then I started thinking less and less about him. Now I hardly give any thought to him at all. I really have too much to think about. I worry a lot. I worry about my children.

My oldest, Rachel, is going to be seventeen in three months. Four months ago she walked through the front door with a motorcycle helmet under her arm and riding goggles resting like eye spots on the top of her head. She walked right through the living room as though I were another piece of furniture, a permanent fixture there on the couch with carpet coasters under the Converse All-Stars I wear when I'm at home. Sunlight reflected onto my face and my attention immediately shifted from my football game to the helmet, glinting like an eight-ball, as it disappeared up the stairs after my daughter. It had begun to dawn on me that the sound which had interrupted the voices of the announcers might not have been caused by the biker gang that uses our residential street as a thoroughfare. I jumped up to look out the window and

there at the curb sat an old Honda Nighthawk with a scratched tank and no headlight.

At first we hoped she'd stolen the thing, which would have given us an excuse to take it away, but we soon found out that she'd bought it from a friend's father for six hundred dollars. She'd earned the money from working her summers away for a landscaping business. I didn't think she'd saved that much. I thought she would do something exciting, like going to summer blockbusters with older boys, later to become warm fuzzy memories when she reminisced about how crazy she was in her youth. Even blowing it on a pyramid scheme would have been something. I never thought she'd have that much money. Children with that much money are dangerous. They buy things like motorcycles. My wife Judy and I tried to dissuade her from riding the Death Machine, but she remained obstinate as ever, a disheartening trait I cannot trace to either myself or my spouse. We thought about threatening to kick her out of the house, but found we were too deathly afraid that she would take us up on the offer.

These days I make Judy answer the phone. I can't be the one to hear whatever doctors say when something awful happens.

And Rachel's not the only one I worry about.

A few months ago my wife came into my study without knocking, eyes wide and blue and wet, shoulders hunched, carrying some pieces of glossy paper held out in front of her as though they were either sacred or profane.

"Michael," she said, "I found these in Jason's room—look at this." She said the last part as though I had not been paying attention and missed something I shouldn't have. I stood up from where I'd been sitting at my desk and went to her. Resting on her upturned hands was a loose stack of magazine pages torn on the edges. On the top was a photograph of a man wearing nothing but cowboy boots putting his penis into another man's anus. My wife began to slowly spread pages out over her palms, giving glimpses of the other pictures beneath. One of the pages had a large stain on one side where the paper had rippled.

"Put them back," I said, turning my head. I held my hands out in front of me and closed my eyes.

"But—"

I shook my head. "Make sure he doesn't know you found them."

"Michael," she persisted. A rising quaver in her voice conveyed a surprised outrage to me. I wondered where it had hidden before emerging suddenly now, like magazine pages from between mattress and box frame. I wondered what she had been doing in our son's room that she would have found these things, and why she had to bring them in to show me. I wondered why she hadn't disappeared from the room even though I still had my eyes closed.

"We have to talk to him about this."

I let out a hissing breath, and turned back to my desk.

“What’s there to talk about?”

“What do you —” I didn’t have to look to feel her eyes sharpen on me. “How can you say that? We can’t simply not talk about this. We can’t just pretend it didn’t happen.”

I leaned on my desk until it creaked. It felt hard to stand.

“Some things you can’t talk about,” I replied with a weary surety. “Some things you just let slide by and you don’t think about them. That’s the way it has to be.” A heat had begun to build in my face. “You can’t go around thinking about everything!” My voice rose like a Doppler effect, as though I were approaching an intersection of feeling, after which I would fade into the distance. “There’s just too much to think about. My brain would explode. And thinking and talking go hand in hand. I’d never have a second of peace if we always talked about everything.”

“Michael, we have to. We can’t let it go. We’re his parents. We’re responsible.”

“No I’m not!” Something like bile flooded into my muscles, tensing them all at once, hardening them in a brown, bitter plaster. I spun around and stabbed a finger at my own chest. “I’m not responsible. I do my job. I pay the bills. I throw a ball around with him sometimes. That’s what I’m here for. That’s what I do. I’m not supposed to have to deal with. . . with . . .” My hand had begun to shake. I suppose I wanted to say it. I wanted to say everything I never said out loud. I wanted to let go and allow my mouth to puke it out. I wanted to tell her that it wasn’t my fault, but her hardness was still there, a quartz mirror over her eyes, and I just stood there like a mummified Neanderthal, as yet undiscovered beneath the ice.

“God damn it,” she said finally in a near whisper, staring into my eyes. Then she went out of my study without closing the door, leaving me to think about all the things I’m not supposed to think about, and to run over and over the stories I’m not supposed to tell.

As her red hair glided down the stairwell it passed over the pictures hanging there for a moment, and when I looked again I saw the gray sky from my office window reflected there. I couldn’t help but to keep on thinking back. Thinking how those two gray squares of glass seemed so deep and yet they obscured the pictures beneath. Thinking about the tiny black shadow that floated in the center of each frame that was myself. Thinking that they were eyes in a face on a body, staring back at me with a piercing opacity. My nostrils flooded with a fetid, human smell that I didn’t want to recognize, and I thought that my throat wouldn’t contain whatever was climbing up my esophagus, whether it be vomit or words.

“Is that what the doctors told you?” I said. My friend’s eyes were very still, holding my small form. Grey eyes set deep in pockets of grey skin. Behind him a medical monitor flashed periodically. The sheet that covered his lower half was very white, his grey hand lying disguised in the shadows of its folds. A tube ran from a hanging bag to his arm.

My friend shook his head very slowly. “No,” he replied in a near whisper.

His lips seemed to move as little as possible.

"Then why are you saying that? You can't know that."

"I know."

"How can you? You can't. It's impossible."

"I know."

"Stop saying that!"

I bent over my knees with my face in my hands. I felt the silence of the hospital room churn around me. I was a child on the edge of his bed, trying to survive the wait in the ugly quiet.

"Mike," my friend finally said, but I couldn't move. "I want to see you more, Mike. You don't come up here much. There isn't a lot of time left."

"Why?" I brought my head up, the palms of my hands suddenly feeling wet. The room had blurred around my friend. "Why isn't there more time? It's your fault. You gave up."

Suddenly he looked very sad. He had not been before. But now his brow furrowed. My throat ached.

"Someday, you'll go too," he said quietly. "You're going to have to think about that. Someday, everyone's going to go. But the thing is, you're alone, when you do. No one's there, really right there with you. No one can experience what you're experiencing." He took his eyes from me and leaned back on his pillows with a sigh. "No one can know. Except you. Only you know what you know. You're not innocent anymore." My friend looked out the window for a moment, the spring fog reflecting in his irises. Then his gaze settled into mine again. "In a way, its very sad and very beautiful," he said, his voice moist, "how long we believe that we can change things."

I looked down at the floor between my feet. "I have to get going," I said. "I've got — somewhere to be."

I saw him nod slowly in my peripheral vision, and I stood, feeling like a crane whose fragile legs jerkily wade through the murky water. As I moved by his bed, my fingertips brushed the back of his hand, his skin cool but still human, still alive. It didn't make sense that he could see his future when his blood still warmed his extremities, when his chest rose and fell, when his eyes stared into mine, gray and still. I lingered with the touch momentarily, and in that second his hand caught mine. His weight pulled me down until our chests nearly met, face to face, and his eyes held a plea that his lips would not shape. Asking for an embrace. But I broke away from him and nearly ran from the room, all the way to the elevator, rushing through the halls until I could pound the elevator button, still feeling the weight of his hands in mine.

There are too many things I know that I shouldn't. Too many things I can't think about. My youngest, Brian, just six now, beautiful little towhead that he is, doesn't know what that is like yet. That is why today he remarked to me that Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood seemed much shorter than before. I was about to abuse him of the notion when a weighty thought settled onto my chest, pressing like a hand into the spaces between my ribs. A child first

awakening to consciousness sees only a tiny moment of experience as the entire breadth of his life. As he amasses more and more moments, each must necessarily become more condensed in his memory, squeezing into the narrow space of his perception. An old man may look back on his life as a collage of the briefest instants, reduced to insignificance. Where once one second stretched to infinity, now only a sea of minute, meaningless instances remain. Utter impermanence.

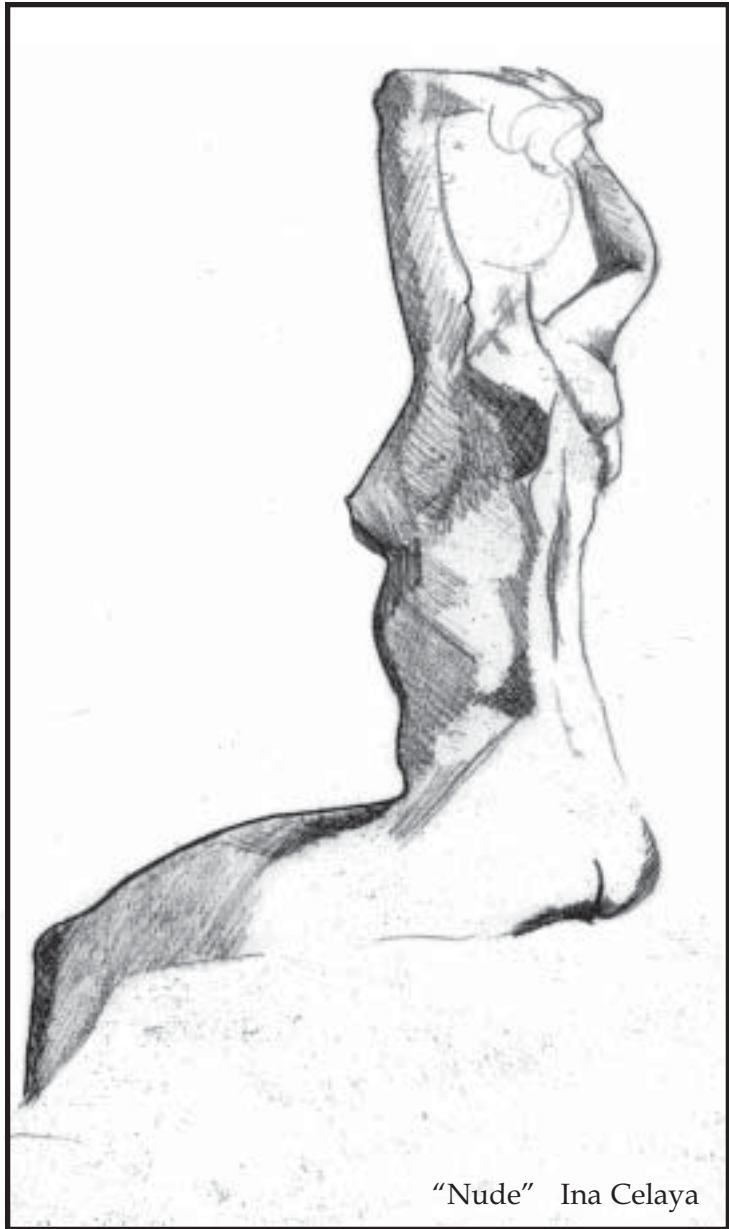
I could have vocalized this to my son, told him what happened in my brain when my eyes looked far away into the corner of the ceiling. I could have told him that as time goes on, each experience will be worth less and less until he doesn't know why he lived at all. I could have told him that when he grows up and has children they will probably be nothing like him and he won't understand them. That when one of them is about, oh say about 19, his child may develop a dis-ease, one they can't cure, and he'll just get sicker; they won't be able to help him. That they'll call it cancer, a wasting disease, because he'll waste away until he's nothing but a wet bone. That when he finally leaves the pain behind his friends will think about him and not be able to stop, not for the rest of their lives.

I could have told my son that, tiny gorgeous naive child, but I didn't. Just shook my head and said, "Maybe you're right."

I don't think about my friend anymore. It's been twenty years. I have other things to think about.



Diane Patracuola



Jana Marcus "76th Street"



The Four Noble Truths

Wilma Marcus Chandler
(For Jana)

1.

Suffering

In the first photo
The young men play basketball at midnight
In the schoolyard,
Their bodies haloed by streetlamps
In the summer heat.

She had watched them from her window
Ten flights up,
Took photos of their game.
The night was close, the city restless and sweating.
And now, twenty years have passed,
The negatives found
Stored in old plastic bins.
She works by the dim red bulb
To reconstruct what was then
Nothing more than idleness.

2.

The Origin of Suffering is Desire

In the second photo
The boys are all spin and elbow
Seeming to hunch toward the ball and each other
Faces in shadow and fingers spread.
The one with "14" on his shirt
Has gone to stand away from the group,
Back turned.
He covers his face.
He is either in dismay or in the midst
Of some physical regrouping
That demands he be alone and apart.

3.

Letting Go

In the third photo the boys circle
One young man who has been thrown
Down onto the ground.
Shadows from the lamps arch around them.
Two boys hold his arms above his head.
She cannot see the expression on his face, or theirs,
But two more hold his legs and one bends over him
Pulling his pants down around his shoes.
The darkness arches
Their bodies all lean toward him like a cave.

It was then she called the police.

4.

The Path To the End of Suffering

There is one more photo.
It is overexposed.
Nothing but white light.

She had watched through the lens
Until the sirens screamed,
Then closed the window and went to bed.
It was late and all this was ten stories away.
The camera did the work.
Now she recalls that she had let it go.
The years have passed.
Old negatives stored.
The boy either grew up or died.

Jungle Love

Jalene Otto

We're all grown up now. At least that's the theory we operate on. All of us. The escape artists. I'm looking at all my friends wondering how we got here, wondering how many rivers we could have filled with the amount of alcohol we've collectively consumed. Most of all I'm wondering what the point of all this is. I know that is not very descriptive, but in my alcoholic haze, that's about all I can grasp. So now I've got you here and you're listening, but I still haven't told you anything, except for that I'm a drunk. But that's the problem with telling people things.

Humans are such liars. That is the beauty of the plants and animals. They don't cheat or lie. A lion is honest about taking down a zebra. There is no reform school or rehabilitation center for the king of the jungle. A lion knows his place, his job, his mission. Plants don't complicate their lives with desires like ascension of the corporate ladder, or the acquisition of stuff that is useless but nice to look at. You never see a dogwood tree driving a brand new BMW off the lot, or a rosebush comparison-shopping for a big screen TV.

Humans on the other hand; constantly buying, constantly wanting, constantly selling. We bury ourselves in a million different tasks, all with one goal, escape. You can argue with me if you want. Draw me out. Prove me wrong. Just blame it on my cynicism, and tell yourself I'm a bitter soul. Tell yourself your life is full of meaning and I just didn't reach out in time to catch the brass ring. Tell yourself you have nothing to do with me. We are separate autonomous entities. Excuse yourself from caring about what I have to say, simply because we've never met, and we probably never will.

Escape.

* * *

Hannah is giving me one of those looks again. I'm tired. She keeps sidling over, interrupting my game of pool. Her boyfriend is ignoring her, she says. But he's not. I can see him watching her. Watching this sultry gypsy goddess control the crowd. There isn't a man in here who doesn't want her, doesn't want to read their fortune in her brilliant green eyes. She knows it. I know she does. They know she does, too. But it doesn't stop her from pouting and she passes all of them by, her long brown curls caressing the small of her thin back. I think about telling her she probably drools with a glamorous flair while she sleeps, but I don't say anything. It would be rude, even if was sort of a compliment.

Instead we stare at each other, and I read my future. I see us, older, still playing this stupid game. Still coming to this same worthless bar, only now our kids are older, so we can get out whenever we want. I see TV dinners and keys on necklace chains so they don't get lost. I see wrinkles and lines that should have been caused by laughter, but they weren't. I break up the

balls on the pool table and they scatter like my hopes, my fears. I pretend I'm happy. I tell her it will all be fine. We both know I'm lying. We both see how we gave up on ourselves a long time ago. There is no point in being sad about it now, after the fact. This is the life we chose, after all, after various rehabilitative choices didn't stick.

In fifteen minutes her boyfriend will go outside to get high. In a half an hour he'll come back inside and she'll kiss me in an attempt to get his attention, or mine, or someone's, and her and I will pretend like this is the stuff that matters, these moments. It will be in our kiss, the honesty, as for one brief moment we devour each other like mirror images released into physical form, but not quite sure how to proceed. First she'll look at him to make sure he's noticing, and I'll pretend like I'm not a voyeur in this process. Like I'm not watching myself, watching her, watching him, watch her. It's ridiculous, but it's my reality, and hers and his, mostly. It's the game we play, at least.

Next weekend I'll hear from my latest acquisition how her and I made out again. Some guy I bring home, he'll tell me about how her and I always make out. And the following weekend some guy at the bar, someone else, will make some lurid remark about Hannah and I. That is when I'll get honest. I'll fall into a blank stare about how it's a process of using each other. How we are simply practicing a rebellion of Kantian theory, a denial of motherhood. I'll break into a song and dance into the momentum that carries me through my charade, as I tell my secrets. A lyric here about how we use each other as a means to an end. A tender twist to convey no harm, no foul. And this guy, pretending to grasp some greater truth, will lean forward and whisper in my ear about how he wants to take me to the movies.

I'll say yes, I'd like that. But we both know I'm going nowhere. Not with him, not with her, not with anyone. And I'll dance away as vocals from the jukebox pine loudly over some lost beauty, some praise for the serenity of unrequited love. And he won't follow me. And the bartender will watch me and think impure thoughts, and I'll pretend to ignore him, because we both know we should have never crossed any lines between friends and other than that which is friendship, even though I'm dancing for him, and even though he knows that. Even though I have a rule about bartenders, even if he was my friend before he got the job, I'll pretend like it's fine that we can't look each other in the eyes anymore. I'll pretend like it's fine he pretends not to understand me.

I'll gracefully walk up to him, my place in front of the bar, and graciously accept the poison he offers me. I'll pay for the elixir of denial, gratefully, not thinking about how I'll pay my rent, or get the things done that I should be doing instead of being here, drinking, dancing, playing pool, every weekend. I'll try to find him through his thick glasses, either the ones over his eyes or the ones he's washing from behind the bar,

so he can fill them again for all the kids who come here, pushing through the cigarette smoke and clamoring for liquid liberation. But he'll slip away. It's how things go sometimes.

I'll say over the din of inebriation how being thirty in this town is the same thing as being eighteen and he'll cock one eyebrow up and laugh with his mouth closed as he walks away telling himself he's not in love with me, that he never was, and never will be. And then Sarah will walk in fat and draped in black clothes almost too small for her. She'll tell me about her week and I'll be too tired, too weak, too drunk, to tell her I hate her. Instead I'll listen and then I'll tell her about my week. I'll tell her how mediation was fine, and my son's father is fine, and my life is fine. And we'll clink our glasses together, her gin spilling into my vodka, our limes communing for a moment, and we'll drink to our *friendship*. And she'll go home with the bartender, and I'll go home...

I'll wake up in the morning, or the afternoon, thanking God for grandparents, and that I get to be a *kid* on the weekends, and I'll pretend not to mind when the guy I woke up next to turns down the TV I just turned up. I'll pretend it's not a warning sign, a red flag. I'll wipe it away because he looked nice against the white pillowcase and the backdrop of the crisp white sheets, or because he sounded good singing opera earlier from the bathroom. Mostly, I'll pretend like all of this is fiction. I'll make believe that you don't know me, or judge me, or try to figure out who these people are.

I'll escape into these words, a lion taking down a zebra, and I'll look you in the eyes as I tell you I love my life. I'll tell my son's father I'm the best mother that ever lived. I'll tell him how I always put our son first, but I'll leave out the part about going out to the bar. Instead I'll focus on the ladybugs crawling across my walls. I'll search for deeper meaning in the swarm that parades outside my door, asking my neighbor about her take on the symbolism of thirty red and black winged creatures lining my porch, telling her I've heard that when one lands on you it's supposed to mean you are lucky. And she'll turn real on me, and say maybe it's because I left my porch light on – all day.

Just when I've convinced myself there is no meaning to anything anymore, I'll hear my son wake up, dazed from that bit of sleep that takes a while to shake off. I'll hear him pawing at the blinds that look out onto the porch where I go to hide from him, while he rests. I'll hear him say my name, *mommie*, and all of it will mean something. All of the lying, the pretending, will culminate into truth as I step inside and he hugs me and my heart fills, and I hope. Together we'll do the simple things that make life what it is. He'll cling to me as I try to make dinner, but when the dishes are cleared he'll run through the apartment to find the Rubbermaid container I turned into a bathtub, as he enjoys his time in the shower stall he used to hate. And I'll look at him and laugh, and mean it, because he is the most beautiful sight I've ever seen, wet, and splashing about in a storage crate. I'll breathe a sigh of relief and contentment because I want to learn all he

has to teach me about the subtle art of transformation.

I'll tell myself that thirty and eighteen really are different ages, and that all of the pretending I do, all of the escaping is fine, because I really *do* love my life. And so what if some guy ignores me, and some guy turns down the TV, and some girl kisses me with no real desire, because my son just woke up and I need him as much as he needs me. Mostly, I'll feel full because I know all of that stuff that happens on the weekends is just killing time, letting my parents be grandparents, so everyone is happy. And I escape, a zebra bending to the will of the lion, and I hear my son roar. And everyone is happy as I turn on cartoons for him, so he can escape, and I can do my homework, because this is how the rent gets paid. This is the job that never ends. This is the moment I know who I am, and I know where I'm going.



Kelly M. Woods