

Bear River Review

Inaugural Issue

The reason the Bear River Writers' Conference exists is to encourage new writing. It only makes sense that we do what we can to help some of that work find an audience. Here we've created a space for people who have been a part of the conference to share their writing with their colleagues and with any other reader who may stumble across it. We hope people enjoy the work and find it helpful with their own projects. Enter and have some fun!!

~Keith Taylor, Director

The Bear River Review stems from the Grand Finale on the last night of the Bear River Writers' Conference, where those who wish to read the work they have just created are invited to do so. The work inspires, rouses the audience, leaves us wanting more. While listening to the writers, I am reminded age and gender are irrelevant; consciousness is neither old nor new; the subconscious is indiscriminately and deliciously

sensual; the process of putting ourselves into words exhausts and exhilarates; we learn from one another through our writing, and there is always much to learn. I wanted to see the work sown and the work seeded at the conference, and my desire was shared by others—we wanted a Bear River Review. For now we'll use this on-line format as a way of getting the work around to its readers, but perhaps at some point we may have an actual as well as a virtual journal. I hope the writings help you connect the spaces in this life. Welcome to the BRR inaugural issue. Enjoy!

~Chris Lord, Editor

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Table of Contents

Ellen Baker	Peggy Midener
Lee Warner Brooks	Cathy Nikola
Sue Budin	Anne-Marie Oomen
Peter J. Caulfield	Peg Padnos
Marilyn E. Churchill	Cyn
Colette Volkema DeNooyer	Michael Reade
Nancy Devine	Nancy Ross-Flanigan
Cindy Glovinsky	Lisa Rye
Don Hewlett	Veronica Sanitate
John Hildebidle	Melissa Seitz
Brian A. Hoey	Elizabeth Solsburg
Leonard Kress	Peter Sparling
Michael Latza	Jessie Stern
Carolyn Lewis	David Stringer
Mardi Link	Pia Taavila
Chris Lord	Cristina Trapani-Scott
Donald Maxwell	Greg Wright
Bill McDonald	Thomas Zimmerman
John McNamara	

Ellen Baker

Ellen Baker lives in Superior, Wisconsin, where she is an event coordinator at an independent bookstore. She wrote “Smoke Break” during the Bear River Writers’ Conference 2005, when she was in Laura Kasischke’s workshop. Ellen also attended Bear River in 2004.

~ Smoke Break ~

My hand trembled as I pulled out a cigarette and lit it. The first drag calmed my nerves and jazzed me up in that way where you feel like your shoes are too heavy but all you want to do is run.

Everything looked clearer to me than usual. The ants busy on the pockmarked cement stoop under my feet; the tread on the Goodyear that swung by a rope from the big white oak; the scrubby grass growing up through the carcasses of his dead cars. I could even make out the blue sky, hanging around up there like hope, just behind a thin layer of scuttling clouds in kitten shades of gray and white, those clouds like telling you

everything can change, in less than one blink of an eye.

I blinked, and took another puff of my cigarette. Through the screen I heard him moan, but I knew he wasn’t conscious. He wasn’t feeling a thing.

Thirty miles from town like we are, even if I’d called an ambulance the minute the gun went off, there wouldn’t have been time, and I knew it. He’d never worried a bit about living all the way out here. When I had my kids I told him I wanted to be nearer town, nearer the hospital. For me and for them. He’d just rolled his eyes and turned back to the TV, a black and white Zenith in those days, with a round dial to change the channel. We still had the same

orange shag carpet in the living room that we'd had back then, but now we had one of those godawful TVs that takes up one whole wall of the living room and makes you feel like you're running around in a cartoon yourself. He'd put it on the credit card.

It's funny what you can see if you really look. The clouds puffing themselves up until they look soft as pillows, and then they're on their way again, stretching themselves out to a mattress, a jetstream, or maybe the image of heaven itself. On our old oak, the different shades of green and the clear points on each leaf, and the leaves dancing together but each with its own moves, too, like you'd just turned off the sound to "Saturday Night Fever."

He never believed there were shades to things – funny, you'd think he could have seen them on that big TV – but when the blood spurted and then began to pour from the place in his leg the bullet had hit, it came out bright as barn paint on the white kitchen linoleum. He sank down in it.

It soaked his jeans black, and smeared his white shirt a kind of maroon, a smear that turned to brown as I stood there. There was disbelief on his face; his ice blue eyes had melted to a kind of perplexity I'd never seen in them, not once in 27 years. He had never been the type of man to ask you "why?" And I wasn't about to give him an answer now, not when it was the first time he'd ever bothered to ask.

All those ads on TV say you shouldn't smoke, but I always said I'd be damned if I ever quit. Now, though, I was thinking this might be my last one. It just didn't taste the same, somehow.

I blew out a puff and looked through the shifting smoke at the clouds, thinking how sometimes the pain of an old pair of shoes was too much to bear for even one more second. How you can deep-down know something for years before you ever see it.

I wondered how I could move his body, once he died, so it would look like he'd done it to himself. An accident cleaning his gun. But

it would take some kind of miracle to get even our stupid county cops to believe that a man could shoot himself in the upper thigh with a thirty-ought-six. I did think they might believe that I was the one cleaning the gun when it went off. A case of “wrong place, wrong time.”

Some stories were better than the truth.

I would finish my cigarette. I would go inside, and step over him to the

phone. I would pick it up, dial 911.

I would see each petal of the daisies on the kitchen wallpaper like all the remaining days of my life. In a hysterical voice, I would say, “There’s been a terrible accident!”

Lee Warner Brooks

Lee Warner Brooks is a: Sonneteer (including a sonnet forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*); the working title of his sonnet collection is *Charms Against the Dark*. Novelist, including: *Greensward* – Love across the race/money line on Detroit's east side; *Dana's Rules* – Real life and unlove at a corporate law firm in Detroit; *Xuliss* – Love in the land of sea monsters. Teacher of writing at University of Michigan – Dearborn. Father of three teenagers. Lawyer, former litigation partner at Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn, Detroit. Journal-keeper since May 1977. Bear River '03, '04, and '05. He wrote "Mary" at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, when he was in a workshop with Thomas Lynch.

~ Mary ~

She feels his eye upon her in the dances,
Heavy in a way she doesn't like;
She knows his name is Johnnie – Johnnie Francis –
And his older brother they call Mike.

It's Mike who is the fiddler in the band;
This Johnnie only plays a silly drum,
A calfskin on a hoop. She holds her hand
Along her throat – his glances seem to come

And tug upon the row of buttons there
From far across the room; it makes her feet
Go quicker in the dance; it makes her stare
Ahead at nothing, feeling incomplete.

But later, when he asks her if she'll go,
She cannot find the word to tell him No.

Sue Budin

Sue Budin's poetry has been published in a women's literary journal and two of her poems are included in a book by a Buddhist writer on her journey to Korea. She was the second place winner in the Current Magazine fiction and poetry contest several years ago. She has reviewed poetry for a library journal and has also led writing workshops for youth. Sue's poem "August, before the storm" was begun when she attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2001 with Robert Hass as her workshop leader.

~ August, before the storm ~

The boy drops his glass and water
forms a small pond on the kitchen floor.
Outside, purple finches perch
on an empty birdfeeder
forgotten like the withered plants in pots.

She's overtaken by a wordless dark
inhabiting the oval of her mouth,
the oval of smoke rings where
years before in a red chair
she let herself indulge in poetry.

She irons the shirt's creases
sharp as knives, polishes floors
till they shine, and the mouth, her mouth-
straight, pursed, holding in
the scream until
in front of frightened children

the voice comes traveling like a vortex
up and through her.

“What have you done?” she cries over
and over, her body hunched, stiffened as she wipes,
the scream opening her mouth and
rushing out till the air in her is gone,
let loose, coloring the walls and floor,
all that passion stored like
jars of grain to mold.

She must air everything out-
the bedsheets spread on grass
and the windows open so wide
nothing is hidden.

In the folds of afternoon
there are shadows where the children cower.
She is moving toward them, making
sounds she doesn't understand. Is this longing?
She holds it, like seed in the palm of her hand.

Birds come.

Peter Caulfield

Peter Caulfield was born and raised in the rust-belt town of Saginaw, Michigan, a smaller version of Detroit. He has taught in the Literature and Language Department at UNC Asheville for the last eighteen years. A short story of his, "Dancing into the Bright Moonlight," set in Vietnam during the war, will appear in the *Connecticut Review* in 2006. His first book, *Hear the Voices Calling*, traces the intellectual and emotional development of a contemporary working-class female through her college career. His recently completed work, tentatively titled *Frail Spells*, from a poem by Shelley, is his second novel. Set entirely in the 1920's in England and America, it is the tale of a young man, Andrew Kelly--fettered by both class and a strictly religious, Roman Catholic mother--trying to find his way into a life he can only faintly sense is possible for him. His journey takes him from the moors of Bronte country to the ancient city of York and, eventually, to the Chicago of the twenties. Peter attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 and was in Elizabeth Cox's workshop where he wrote the scene from "People of the Book," the excerpt published here. He has since completed the story.

Excerpt

~ **People of the Book** ~

Mark had counted the Islamic prayers, five times a day, so he knew how long he'd been held--almost a month. His wrists and arms, bound behind his back, throbbed. He worked them often, as much as he could, to keep the blood circulating. A voice.

"There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet."

He snapped his head erect. English! Unmistakably, despite the muffled, accented quality of the voice. The cloth from the blindfold also covered his ears, but he could still hear. Thick eye pads under the blindfold ensured that he could see nothing, not even

light, yet sounds still drifted in. It hadn't mattered much, though, as the others always spoke a strange foreign tongue. No exceptions. This voice was new.

He drew hope, and some comfort, from the fact he was still in Oxford, still in England. They hadn't moved him since the night they'd grabbed him. He had judged then that he'd traveled only a few miles in the trunk of the car. Later, they dragged him, bound, gagged, and blindfolded, to this room, this chair. One of them finally removed the gag the next night to feed him—a thin, bitter soup. They'd fed him the same thing, twice each day, since his capture—just enough to keep him alive.

He heard a chair move, shoes click across the wood floor. He sensed a presence in front of him. “I notice you wear a crucifix. I assume you are a follower of the prophet Jesus. May peace and blessings be upon him.”

Mark wondered if he had been asked a question, but dared not answer until he was sure. He waited. The voice

continued. “At least you are not a complete infidel.”

Mark's left ear itched, as if a mosquito crawled along its edge, near the top. He moved his head from left to right slowly, hoping to dislodge the insect. He smelled something. Cooked meat? Garlic? A hand touched his shoulder. “Open your mouth.”

He parted dry lips. A piece of food, warm, but not hot, touched his tongue. He closed his mouth over it gratefully. Lamb? He held it and felt a tug as the wooden skewer slid from its center. Mark chewed carefully, savoring the taste and texture, then swallowed, garlic flavor lingering.

“Again.”

Mark opened his mouth and received another chunk. The skewer slid back through his lips, the smooth wood grazing his teeth. As he chewed, he heard wood tapping wood. Stick against table, or chair? “I'm going to untie your arms and then retie them to the arms of your chair, one on each side. I do this because we are both

People of the Book. But if you move suddenly, try to escape, I will shoot you. You will die.”

Mark felt the ropes on his arms, then hands, loosening. His limbs numb, he almost cried out when first one, then the other, was pulled forward and retied to a chair arm. The pain subsided quickly, though, and his arms felt almost free in their new positions. The man tapped one of them, with the stick, Mark thought. “Open your mouth again.”

Chewing a third piece of moist meat, Mark felt better than he had since the night they took him, grabbing him as he passed an alley in the large Pakistani area in the city of Oxford, knife at his throat. He had gone into the neighborhood for dinner, to a particular restaurant, on the recommendation of a fellow student. His tongue toyed with the

lamb as he pondered the phrase the man had used, “People of the Book,” and wondered what it might mean for him.

After he swallowed, Mark waited for another command, more meat. He listened. Soft splashing. “Do you want to drink?”

Mark nodded once, then again. He parted his lips slightly, then closed them over a curved, rounded edge. He tasted metal, then water as the vessel tilted slowly toward him. The man lifted it away, and a drop trickled down Mark’s chin. He swallowed audibly—waited.

“More?”

Mark shook his head from left to right, hoping for more food. Instead, he heard the man’s footsteps retreating for a few moments. Silence

Marilyn E. Churchill

Marilyn E. Churchill lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has worked as a bookseller and a college instructor. Her writing has been published in *The University of Windsor Review* and other little magazines and has won poetry and fiction prizes in Current Magazine's Poetry and Fiction Contest (2000 and 2002). Marilyn took workshops at the Bear River Writers' Conference with Keith Taylor (2001) and Elizabeth Cox (2002). She wrote "The Ease of Water" in 2002 in her workshop with Elizabeth Cox.

~ The Ease of Water ~

I come to the wooden bench to find the copper-colored dog
who lives at Walloon Lake, to finish a sketch of him, head down,
wading at water's edge, minnow-watching. Instead,
I see an ant crawling on driftwood, I slip into
sandy footprints as if into
other writers' shoes.

The breeze isn't talking business.
Trees whisper, waves hush.
The old silk of memory murmurs.
I cry over messy lines, bad endings.
The lake says, Listen.
Wade in the muddy bottom of things.

The ease of water enters the ear canals.
Waves quicken like a heartbeat,
then return to a quiet licking of the shore,
a dog lapping water.

Colette Volkema DeNooyer

Colette Volkema DeNooyer earned her B.A. from the University of Michigan. Once a teacher, later an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ (UCC), Colette now devotes her time to writing and leading writing groups as a certified Amherst Artists and Writers affiliate. Last year she began her own website www.forwritersandreaders.com to share information about her writing groups and retreats as well as book reviews and musings. *Trillium* evolved from a piece she began in her first Bear River Writers' Conference in 2003. Jerry Dennis was her session leader. In 2004 she worked with Thomas Lynch.

~ Trillium ~

These days I walk the Indian Trail alone. When the children were young and we walked this trail together, "Indian Trail" was the name we gave it. In the thick of the woods, along the crest of a hill, it was easy to imagine the Indians, who in an earlier time, might have walked these same paths. Easy too for the children to imagine that *they* were Indians in stealthy pursuit of wild prey – though the *stealthy* part almost always eluded them. After all these years, the name has stuck.

I live on the shore of Lake Michigan, and this Indian Trail meanders

through woods behind the house.

Once sandy, windblown ridges, these back dunes are now covered with evergreens, maples, silver beeches and lush woodland fauna. There isn't a season that these woods aren't full of the miracles of life and the mysteries of death. We tracked the passage of time in the turning of seasons.

Each spring the buds open in fresh yellow green leaf and then, sun drenched, turn the darker hue of summer shade. Another turn of the earth and the leaves gleamed yellow, this time with only a vestige of green, first sign that the dying had begun. Though there would still be one last hurrah of

shocking autumn color, we knew that winter could not be far behind.

They were rich, those days of woods walking and raising children. Exhausting too. My mother told me, as once her mother had told her, that the solitude I craved in those years when the children were young and omnipresent, would arrive on my doorstep, crook its beckoning finger and invite me to more peaceful walks in the woods.

Now, having arrived and survived, I see another time ahead, just around the corner really. The crook of that next finger will not be as welcome. I glimpse a time when there may be more solitude than I need – as there is for my mother, now entering her eighties, alone in a life too quiet without my father. I don't need my mother to caution me to savor this meantime in between.

As winter turns to spring along the lakeshore, I walk the Indian Trail in search of trillium. I make pilgrimage to honor what I know is fleeting, for like most woodland flowers, the

trillium's blossoms make the briefest of appearances in the scheme of green seasons. That is, unless the spring is longer and cooler than usual. Then the blooms might linger nearly a month as opposed to a mere week or two. But inevitably the blossoms wither, leaving behind only tri-part leafy foliage for the duration of summer.

Usually trillium are scattered about the woods in small clusters of three or four, nestled near a fallen tree, sprouting where others grew the year before, multiplying slowly by ones and twos. It is rare to find them, as I do along our Indian Trail, cascading down the hillside by the thousands, so close together that they appear like a layer of white icing, with the rare pink trillium blossoms dotted here and there like decorative roses on a bakery birthday cake.

Christianity has claimed the trillium as religious symbol of the Trinity's three-in-oneness. With three broad green leaves below, three pristine petals above, it offers a reflection of a

divine mystery – God as Creator, Son and Spirit.

I claim the trillium as religious symbol too, but as a reminder of resurrection for where they bloom in rare profusion, these trillium resurrect an innocent wonder. I can't get enough of looking at them. I memorize details, gather colors, textures and words like Leo Lionni's Frederick, the young mouse in one of my children's favorite picture books.

In that story, as I remember it, all the other mice were busy gathering corn and nuts for the winter, while Frederick sat nearby watching. When asked why he wasn't working, Frederick answered, "I *do* work . . . I gather sun rays for cold winter days, colors because winter will be gray." Though they thought little of Frederick's "work" at the time, later in mid-winter, when the stores had been depleted and the days were dark, the other mice turned and asked, "So Frederick, what about your supplies?" To which Frederick responded by climbing atop a small rock and

painting a picture with his eloquent words of times past, times to come. In the dark cave of winter he brought them the beauty of spring, the warmth of summer, a recollection of hope.

Like Frederick I gather images because I fear the trillium will not always be here in such rich abundance. The invasive garlic mustard weeds that make their way from the east threaten to choke out most natural woodland flora and fauna. And deer, if they locate this delicious field of trillium will graze them down to a few overlooked remnants.

Fearing words alone might not be adequate preservation, I've tried taking pictures of these hillsides blanketed in white, but only a photograph enlarged to the size of a grand canvas could capture the breadth of their tremendum.

Perhaps the deer know best. Perhaps I should gather instead a taste of trillium, chew sacred petals, and ingest them like the bread of communion – becoming one with what I've loved.

Nancy Devine

Nancy Devine teaches English at Grand Forks Central High School in Grand Forks, North Dakota, where she lives with her husband, Chuck, and their two dogs, Whitey and Yo-yo. She co-directs the Red River Valley Writing Project, a local site on the National Writing Project. She is shocked to discover that her newest interest is NHL hockey and Russian phenom Alexander Ovechkin. At the Bear River Writers' Conference in the summer of 2005 Nancy worked with Bob Hicok on her poem "Calculating."

~ Calculating ~

As they drank 3.2 beer from waxy Dixie cups,
Nixon and McNamera unwound
a calendar from its spiral and put up every month
in the Oval Office:
October propped on a swivel chair;
March masking taped to the front of a desk.
They got out darts they'd number 1 to 366; then
they squinted, and they aimed
and chomped on rippled chips from a scalloped bowl.
They shot:
silver tips sliced seven's, fractures five's until
a whole year flew out of their hands...
beyond reach.

Combinations, one hundred eighty eight for June 5,
September 14 one, were reported in the Minot Daily News, right side, below
the fold
where my parents read as they creased their brows.

They pointed out printed there
my brother's birthday to him as he leaned over,
afraid he'd have to do a math he hadn't learned:
two twenty two forty nine equals what x?

Not long after, I did my own calculating:
Danny my brother in the Navy,
each of his four years a band of color in my sky,
a hokey flag I could carry.
When my mother grew thin after he left
for Boot Camp, wherever she stood was a drain
sucking so much of her down into it, I thought
she'd collapse in wind. Still,
I couldn't figure it out; he would be
back soon I bet.

Cindy Glovinsky

Cindy Glovinsky has published poems and stories in *Ploughshares*, *Aries*, *The Chaffin Journal*, and *Barbaric Yawp* and two non-fiction books with St. Martin's Press. She wrote this poem on a cold, rainy afternoon while lying on the top bunk in one of the big common sleeping rooms in the basement of the lodge at Camp Daggett the summer of 2003, the last year before Bear River moved to Michiganiana. Her workshop leader that year was Betsy Cox.

~ Upper Bunk ~

Nothing can harm me up here on this narrow raft floating
flashlight perched just so atop my midriff
white lighthouse bull's eye spreading
across the text as rain taps out morse from
the other side of a ceiling slanted
near enough to write on

Secure in elbow's crook my black velveteen puppy
sole companion on this voyage
sniffs with its leather nose
at the moist air as I savor slowly
the last drops from a bluish plastic bottle

Later in dreams I glide from room to room
paddling idly
stuff a note into the empty
vial and toss it overboard into rising waters

Don Hewlett

Don Hewlett's poetry has been published in the *Wayne Literary Review*, *Poetry in Performance*, and the *Poetry Tribe Review Anthology*. Don has been monitor of the poetry circle "Your Poetry Group" at the Plymouth, Michigan Library for six years. He attended the 2002 Heartlande Playwright retreat and had a play in the 2004 12-hour play marathon held at Oakland University and a staged reading at the "Village Players Theater" in Birmingham, Michigan. He also paints and his art has appeared in the *MacGuffin Literary Magazine*. He attended three Bear River Writers' Conferences; 2001 with Richard Tillinghast, 2002 with Keith Taylor, and 2005 with Barry Wallenstein. The poem "Actospeare" was started during his workshop with Barry.

~ Actospeare ~

Actospeare! Actospeare!
Masterful Genie of my pen
Purveyor of my thoughts
Appear onto this page.
Write me a play
Of a man and a woman
And a woman and a man.
Losers and lovers with
Conflict and noise
Filled with music
That shakes the heart
Words that...
.... But, No...

Genie Actospeare,
Write a poem
Of me and only one other.
Use the quiet words of love
Floating on garden fragrances
Swirling in paintings to
Quicken the heartbeat
Warming the breast
To see her joy
Troweling a hole in
Aromatic black earth
Inserting life giving
Water and food
Laying in a rounded bulb
Gently returning the fill
Giving it a love pat
And a smile.
The poem must end with
Thank you my love.

Then place this poem
In the garden
Among the new flowers
For my love to find
While tending her Dahlias.

John Hildebidle

John Hildebidle spent a wandering childhood before arriving in the Boston, Massachusetts area for college, where he settled for good, it seems. He has taught social studies at a suburban public Junior High, and English at both Harvard and MIT, where he is now. John lives in Cambridge. He has published two “scholarly” (i.e., highly soporific) books, a collection of stories, and three volumes of poetry. A fourth is currently in process. John attended the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005 where Tom Lynch was his mentor.

~ Matthew ~

It’s been nearly forty years, so of course it’s a different world. In those days, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts still ran “reform schools” – an especially cruel piece of ironic misnaming. Serious felons – muggers, arsonists, defacers of public property, pickpockets, hot-wire specialists – spent some time in a facility near the sweetly named town of Shirley. “Stubborn children” were the specialty of the Lyman School for Boys. If you didn’t know any better, you could imagine it was a prestigious prep school.

The “Stubborn Child Law” dated back to the seventeenth century. Any parent

could go to court and prove a son was incorrigible, and off he would be sent to Lyman. There was of course a comparable scheme for girls.

At Lyman the boy would be housed in a “cottage” and cared for (probably abused, as well) by a set of “Cottage Parents.” No fixed terms were assessed – instead the boys were assigned a point total. Points were distributed by the Cottage Parents, for helpful deeds (painting the cottages was a big-ticket item) and for waiting hand and foot on the Parents. Lyman looked downright bucolic, rather like one of the New Age communes that were coming into vogue. Two rows of frame farmhouse-

style structures were arrayed on a hillside, with a main road (*the* main east-west road, until the Massachusetts Turnpike was built) running at a discreet distance away.

Occasionally someone ran off. One boy, who seemed to prefer a more straightforward style of incarceration, stole a car and drove it to the nearest State Police barracks, where he parked and waited for arrest. “Shirley, Here I Come.” Another lad, resourceful in the extreme, made it as far as Cleveland, hitchhiking, before he was nabbed.

In retrospect, I suppose I was trying to come to grips with the awkwardness of life as a Harvard student – a generic middle class guy surrounded by the sons of the privileged classes. I signed up for “public service” and one night a week I’d drive out to Lyman in a van to hang out with the guys. We could have used a distinctly unappealing swimming pool, a gym roughly the size of a closet, or games (all missing essential pieces) from a cupboard. Just about every boy had his own deck of cards and was eager to play poker, but

we were strictly forbidden to gamble. We were called “tutors” (Lyman, as its name implies, did operate as a school, and we were encouraged to offer academic support). Matthew, as it happens, was especially backward at math. So was I, but I was miles ahead of him.

In fact, during my tactless childhood I’d have called him a “retard.” “Slow” is a more acceptable term. Before long we developed an actual friendship, which was, on his side (this is awkward to say) something very like love. At first that fed my ego – to be idolized can do that to you. But then the charm wore off.

Assuming he got out (he was sure to – maniacal as he was about scrubbing floors, he accrued points with the speed of Rickey Henderson stealing bases), what would he do? Where was the sort of protective, even cynical independence he would need? I decided that – “for his own good,” as I told myself – it was time to break things off. Anyway, I was getting more and more swamped with schoolwork.

So I dropped out of the program, and never saw him again.

In fact, I never thought about him, until about a week ago. It dawned on me then he'd be in his mid-fifties now. I wonder what would happen if we bumped into each other. I can't quite escape the sense that *breaking things off* had a large element of self-protection; in the end, I couldn't stand the pressure of adoration.

John Hildebidle

Brian A. Hoey is a University of Michigan alum (Ph.D., 2002) and currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life, a Sloan Center for the Study of Working Families, in Ann Arbor. Through two years of ethnographic fieldwork in the rapidly growing lakeside communities of Northwest Lower Michigan, his dissertation research explores non-economic migration where the downsized and downshifting relocate as a means of starting over in geographic places they believe provide necessary refuge to rethink work, family and personal obligations. As a past Fulbright Scholar to Indonesia, Brian studied community building in far-flung agrarian settlements built from the ground up as part of a government-sponsored migration program. A continuing interest in career change, personal identity and the moral meanings of work informs his current research on *New Work*, unconventional arrangements of work, family and community life explored by so-called free-agents of the post-industrial economy. These projects together address a number of topics including migration, narrative identity and life-transition, personhood and place, community building, and negotiations between work, family, and self in different social, historical and environmental contexts. His work appears primarily in academic publications. Brian wrote "Remember the Fish?" at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005 in Jerry Dennis's A Sense of Place workshop.

~ Remember the Fish? ~

I run on soft moss at the stream's bank. Edges strewn with stones scrubbed clean in periodic floods. The water meanders among them making small channels and eddies where leaves circle whirlpools, drawn in, cast out

again. Where close together, larger stones force the stream into waterfalls that gush noisily in the green hush of the woods.

A thick canopy of tulip trees opens from time to time bathing basins of water in light, warming rocks and

bringing colorful features of submerged debris into sharp focus. Running from short patches of sunlight to longer stretches of shade gives an accentuated sense of speed. Urged forward over the ground to reach the next column of light, I go faster.

I was six years old and this place seemed a world away from my parent's house not more than a mile through the unnamed woods. Kenny was with me as usual. A neighbor from across the street, we spent summer days together in the marginal lands of our suburban development. We caught crayfish with our hands from dark places under rocks. You need to feel them there unseen and grab behind the head out of reach of lobster-like claws. Sometimes we didn't get the right spot or their bodies twisted unexpectedly to clamp down on fingers. Here in the woods by ourselves, we swore as best we knew how, shaking violently to release their painful grip. Often we made small dams from rock and mud. As we waited the water would carry away our simple mortar, sending carefully placed stones tumbling.

To make boats to carry our imagination downstream to places we could not yet go, we pried chunks of foam blocks from clumps of deadwood hung in bushes. Caught by receding waters, the yellowed foam sat above ground as if sprouted out of wood. Discarded from the construction of a new subdivision beyond the woods, it was blown by strong winds over open fields where the ruins of an old farm stood. By cracking the irregular shapes against sharp rocks, we gradually fashioned crude wedges. Masts from sticks poked in the foam were outfitted with sails of bags found amongst the flotsam. Over the course of long hours we would coax our boats downstream, sometimes jabbing at them from shore with branches, other times wading in to rescue them when capsized.

On this day we spot a fish large for this neighborhood stream. Accustomed to crayfish, water bugs and minnows, this was something else. Rainbow sided and quick, we follow its darting through sun-splashed water. Its foot long body gleams. Chasing the fish downstream with the self-assurance

of boys on familiar terrain, Kenny and I leap over rocks. We owned these woods, this stream.

Our boats run aground unattended. Later father would tell me that the fish had escaped the pond where my brother played ice hockey with big kids from up the road. Now Kenny and I chase it, forgetting about boats. Perhaps we hoped to catch it, imagined bringing it home on a pointed stick. More than likely it was enough to see this big fish in our little stream and wonder at its wildness.

Where the path rose above a large pool, I stumble on loose stones and unable to regain my footing on moist earth, I fall. Tumbling toward the stream, I catch myself before plunging in. It was too late to avoid mashing my leg against a boulder. A large gash opens on my calf. I lay scattered in disbelief. The wound is startlingly open, white skin in a rumpled tear that immediately wells deeply with blood. I look at the thick red as it gathers to run down my leg. Drops spatter into water. After the torrent of sharp pain subsides, I realize that I

am far from home and hurt. It was the first time. Blood continues to pool. I look at this with some fascination as if from high above. The wound is not serious in any clinical sense, but like the big fish in our stream, this is beyond normal experience. Drawing on some yet unused knowledge unconsciously gleaned from school day afternoons in front of the TV, Kenny pulls off his shoes and makes a bandage of socks. Blood soaks the white cotton but the flow slows from the pressure. A field dressing. Somehow we had become more grown-up in the world.

Getting up, I look again into the pool below where swirls of my warm blood still mix with the cool stream. The fish is there too in the bright light, suspended in water as clear as morning air. In that moment it is the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

Leonard Kress

Leonard Kress lives in Perrysburg, Ohio and teaches art history, philosophy, and religion at Owens College. He has three published collections of poetry, *The Centralia Mine Fire*, *Sappho's Apples*, and most recently, *Orphics*, from Kent St. U Press. Leonard's poem "Exiles" was written during the 2005 Bear River Writers' Conference in Sidney Lea's workshop.

~ Exiles ~

Newly wed, my father, the upper Westside, a scratch
at the door—not a cat—but a pinky, persisting
as he unlatches it, cautious because his next door
neighbors turn him in weekly for not fighting the War,
working instead in a lab, losing sight in one eye
still patched, prognosis poor, when things--that shouldn't--explode.
He's heard from the doorman about the former Finance
Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Empire,
small and vain, heel-click, head-bow, clearing his throat in lieu
of greeting. My father enters the hall, my mother
hugs the door, causing a blade of light to cut both ways,
dulled as the man speaks, sharpened again, until it's sheathed,
as he begs for the pardon of a subway token.

Michael Latza

Michael Latza currently teaches writing and literature at the College of Lake County, Grayslake, Illinois, after 25 years as a mailman. He is also the editor of *Willow Review*. His poem “July Gambol” was written at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005 under the tutelage of Bob Hicok.

~ July Gambol ~

It was all play to Chicago kids and Dakota cousins
The week at Grandma and Grandpa’s farm
A vacation at the trough with the cows
Or in the barn jumping into the grain
Or best, driving the tractor around the gravel yard
With Dad, farm boy again, balancing behind the wide metal seat.

In the morning we’d help Grandma collect the eggs,
And in the evening surprise the chickens
Out of their perches with the bamboo pole
And yells of, “Shoo-ahhh, shoo!”
Laughing at the tumbled white and red indignation.

Grandma would choose a couple of old hens
Quickly pushing them into a cracked five-gallon crock
Which sat just outside the grassy fenced-in front yard,
A stone weighing down the black slate covering the top.
“Why do you put them in there?” We’d ask.
“Oh, I’ll need them in the morning. That’s just
So they won’t bother the rest of the hens.”
And by the time we were up and out, the crock was always empty.

One day, after lunch, the drop-down heat of the noon sun
Was rolled from the sky by a black coolness.
Someone said, “Storm,” and we all ran outside
Until the, “Tick, tick” up on the roof gathered intensity,
And the striking sharp surprise of hail
Beat us back onto the covered porch.

Heaven’s profusion poured down in front of us—
Hail the size of eggs bounced and danced in the yard,
White smothering green;
In thirty seconds, it was done.
We kids sucked and tossed the melting ice
Not noticing how quiet the adults had become
Looking down at nothing in front of them.
Then Grandpa said, “We’d better check the corn.”
And the men silently put on their hats and filed into the black Oldsmobile.

Carolyn Lewis

Carolyn J. Lewis's short stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize by Maxine Kumin, Poet Laureate of New Hampshire, and selected for an anthology on rural writing by Fred Chappell, Poet Laureate of North Carolina. Her stories have appeared in *South Dakota Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Kalliope*, *A Journal of Women's Art*, and more. She lives and works on a 98-year-old farm on Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan, where two foxes have graced her 5-acre woods with a den. "The Wolfkeeper" was begun in Peter Ho Davies' workshop at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005.

(Excerpt)

~ The Wolfkeeper ~

Through the opening mouth of dusk, a cabin appeared, the glow from a wood fire flickering in its window.

A wolf curled her paw around the rough rim of the door, nudged it open with her black nose. Stood. Looking in.

Arms dangling to the floor, mouth open, wisps of hair rising from his head, an old man sat with his head thrown back. A blanket lay partially on his knees. A small fire danced on the hearth. From a hook, a vine basket swayed above the fire's heat, five loaves of bread warming.

She pawed the floor, and turning, lifted her muzzle and sniffed the wind, picking up a human scent on the road. One not known to her. Up the cliff three young pups yapped and sputtered, their distant cries floating down.

"Is that you, old friend?" His voice rose drowsy from sleep. "One today, for them?" He sat forward, "or two? Come, come. Don't be hesitant. What keeps you?"

She swung her head back toward the door. Whined. The white of her fur was evanescent as moonlight rising into the window.

“Here, I won’t hold you. The wind’s been out of the west since morning. I can hear your young ones fussing all the way down here. Come. Take.” Holding tightly to the chair’s sides, he rose slowly. Slipping his fingers into the vine basket, turning, he cranked his arm like a baseball pitcher winding up, and let fly. He heard her jaws creak open, felt the tension in the air as the loaf of bread arced up, the slight scraping sounds her front paws made as they left the dirt floor, her slight *harumph* and an intake of air. With the sudden crunch of teeth on bread, her paws thumped down with a slight *whump!* on the dirt floor. An expression he thought of as a chortle issued from the back of her throat. A blow of air. Hearing her paw scraping the dirt floor, he imagined a slight bow, by the sounds, but could not see. A slightly bent front leg, a paw scraping, and then . . . ah! . . . She walked a few paces forward and lowered her chin to his knee. One pat, two. He stroked her ears with his fingers. Smoothed the fur down over the hard bone at the top of her head.

He sighed. The little knot behind her right cheek he rubbed softly, and her throat where the hair grew soft and the skin was somewhat loose.

“Yes !” he whispered softly. “Some day you’ll bring your children to see me.” These things he heard: the brush of her tail on the half-open door. The slight intake of air as she paused, looking back. How the wind whistling in changed tones as she trotted out.

He had once seen her habits, her movements, how she crouched before she leapt for the bread; but now, he just heard her front legs come up, the “harumph!” of her catch, the shift of the bread into her mouth, the snap of jaws. Her quick trot to the front door, the stop, the look back, the slight padding sounds her paws made on the earth and then, just the wind: a long howl and moan through the grass. When it whistled into the cabin, he walked forward and leaned on the door, which creaked slightly on its leather hinges, for winter had not yet invited spring in.

Clenching the loaf in her teeth, she trotted across the meadow, winding up the cliffs that looked west over the harbor. Once he could see that harbor, and though it had faded from his vision, he still envisioned it: pines of enormous height covering her, trees so old their bark resembled the cracked clay of dried riverbeds. Even the wind went around those trees, their pine needles too dense to maneuver through.

Mardi Link

Mardi Link is a co-founder of *ForeWord Magazine*, a national trade review journal for independent presses. She is currently an editor with Utopia Press in Traverse City. She wrote “In the Event of a Poem Emergency” at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005. Her workshop leader for the poem was Richard McCann. She also attended Bear River in 2004.

~ In the Event of a Poem Emergency ~

Be vigilant because poems can now be found just about anywhere,
according to *The New York Times*.

When you least expect it, there one is.

In an advertisement for discounted airline fares.

Buried in a passport application.

On the ingredient list of a package of falafel.

The most dangerous of these is of course the sleeper poem.

Leaning casually on the page, trying to act natural by smoking a cigarette,
or claiming to be a student of form, hoping to fit in with the Romantics,
Realists, or Regionalists.

Until someone cunning shakes it awake.

Do not act suspicious if you see your teacher, neighbor, or butcher find a poem.
They cannot help themselves, and it could be risky for you to call attention to
their momentary lapse in soldiering on.

Even those who act like Patriots are not immune to being recruited by poems.
The vortex of the Pentagon is not an unlikely place to look. As evidence,
consider the cautionary lyricism of the Secretary of Defense: “As we know,

there are known knowns.

There are things we know we know. We also know, there are known unknowns.”

We think it’s better you know that this thing goes all the way to the top.

You may think that urban areas are the most treacherous.

You would be wrong.

Rural poems can kill and like nothing better than to hide in plain sight.

Behind a cherry blossom, in the shadowed eddies of rivers, or clutched inside the osprey’s talon.

And don’t forget to conduct a check of your root cellar.

Everything someone would need to build a poem can be found there.

Dirt, dusty jars, ancient tin appliances, insects native to Hell, and clues.

Scary, isn’t it? The masses spend every damn day one story above

the only equipment they would need

to just blow up our words.

Chris Lord

Chris Lord's poems have appeared in the *Ann Arbor Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Black Moon*, *Bonfire Review*, *Lucid Stone*, an *Audubon Society Newsletter*, a *Cranbrook Writer's Anthology*, and the *Wayne Literary Review*, and her poetry has placed in several competitions. In a previous incarnation, she was an Associate Editor and a poet in the schools. Chris is delighted to be editing the first *Bear River Review*. At the Bear River Writers' Conference, she was in workshops with Richard Tillinghast in 2001, Keith Taylor in 2002, and Bob Hicok in 2005. Her poem "Jeanne at Water's Edge" came from her workshop with Keith. An earlier version titled "Waterborne" was previously published in the *Wayne Literary Review*, Fall 2004.

~ In the Event of a Poem Emergency ~

Rain autographs the shoreline on Walloon Lake,
drips through a hole in the roof on the lodge porch
at Camp Daggett, forms a reflecting pool at my feet.

I see my daughter as an infant lifting her eyes
to the water that drips from a monogrammed cloth
onto her forehead - see her at four months, raising
her head by herself, putting her face in bath water -
at eight months, lying on her stomach face down
in a wading pool, face down in the shallow beginnings
of inland lakes, frightening strangers. "The baby -
is she drowning?" then later, "Does she have gills?"
I say, "No," lift her kicking, sputtering into airy light,

just as she was lifted against her will into the harsh
delivery room glare after a long and hesitant birth
on the morning I first wrote her name in rain.

I wade through muddy years, cross over a bridge
of stones, lie down in clear water - soothed, slapped
by contracting waves, see at long last what she

must have seen as sensations washed over her skin:
the souls of infants gathering like minnows at the
edge of the shore, the soul searching for a being

able to accept and nurse all creatures, writing her fate in
the log of innocence, slipping into her small body,
filling her with the white light morning brings to water.

Donald Maxwell

Donald R. Maxwell was born and raised in Paris. He holds two PhD degrees - one from the University of Cambridge (Faculty of Medicine) and more recently from the University of Michigan (French Literature) where he was Visiting Assistant Professor and Lecturer in French. Before retirement from his scientific career, he was Senior Vice-President for R & D of a major US corporation. In addition to numerous scientific publications, Don is the author of: *The Abacus and the Rainbow: Bergson, Proust and the Digital-Analogic Opposition*; and *Science and Literature: the Divergent Cultures of Discovery and Creation*, as well as two memoirs: *A Journey from Wartime Europe to Self-Discovery* and *Cambridge to Paris and America: A Second Journey of Discovery* (Edwin Mellen Press). Don wrote "The Kitchen Table" at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005 where he worked with session leader Richard McCann.

~ The Kitchen Table ~

Hot Buttered Toast

I was ten, and had dressed hurriedly in my Brentwood School uniform. I put on my white shirt with the wide, stiffly-starched Eton collar held to the shirt with a back stud and managed to wiggle my rather creased and dirty black tie up into the starched collar, and then find the front stud to close the collar. I didn't have my shoes on, because they made

too much noise and in any case they were already downstairs in the pantry. My feet were cold.

The kitchen was warm, always warm and friendly. In the center was a large rustic wooden table: a table that came from a farm in Normandy and on which Maman had done her homework when she was a schoolgirl in Versailles. It was of light brown oak, unpolished and bare, with a large ink spot in the center and names and dates scribbled in ink into the

wood. It was a table with a history and I often wished the table could tell me tales of what she (*une table*) had witnessed at Versailles when Maman and her sisters wrote letters, did their homework and perhaps squabbled. It would have been interesting if the table had told me, because Maman never did, and I never had the courage to ask.

In the corner of the kitchen, on the right as I came in by the pantry door, was the stove that provided heat – tepid heat – to the house, although it very effectively warmed the large kitchen. The stove was warm but never hot. It had a nicely rounded front coated with glazed pink and white earthenware – the image, perhaps, of a pregnant girl – a tummy that held warmth, nourishment and above all life for both body and soul. Without that pregnant tummy, the house would have been dead.

“Good morning, master Donald,” said Cook.

“Good morning, Cook,” I replied with an expectant air.

“Would you like a piece of toast, master Donald?”

“Oh, yes please, Cook.”

Cook, who was pleasingly plump, dressed in a long blue dress and white apron, then cut a thick slice of fresh bread. She put the bread under the red-hot grill that was just under the gas ring. I gazed silently down at the glowing red grill and inhaled the aroma of the toasting bread. When it was brown, Cook placed a large slab of butter onto the hot fragrant toast and handed it to me through the half-open door.

“Oh, thank-you, Cook,” I said as I juggled the hot toast from hand to hand. I retreated into the kitchen with my face bent down over the toasted bread, by now impregnated with molten butter. I sat down at the kitchen table and the melted butter dripped onto the bare wooden tabletop.

Elsie

A few months later, we were at war. I knew we were at war by the feeling in

my stomach when the air-raid sirens wailed – a sort of aching feeling – like waiting to go into the dentist’s chair.

I went down to the kitchen – that wonderful always-warm, always-welcoming kitchen. My friend, the wooden kitchen table was still there in the middle of the room; but now, on the table, there was something new. Something very different and very strange – something I had never seen before – at least not close up and in real life – but I had seen them in the flicks.

It was a rifle; a long brown rifle; a long brown army rifle of polished wood with a gleaming metal barrel and bolt. It looked calm, quiet and deceitfully harmless, laying on its side on my friend the wooden kitchen table. It frightened me a little, because I knew what it’s function was – it was for shooting the Bosch, killing Nazis. I looked up, and saw, seated behind the table a soldier in rough khaki flannel uniform.

“Come in, master Donald,” said Elsie.

Elsie, the pretty, sixteen-year-old parlor maid, was standing between the door and the table.

“This ‘ere is moy friend, William,” she said proudly in her broad cockney accent. “William is a proivate in the Essex Regimen, ‘e is.”

William picked up his rifle and rubbed the sleeve of his khaki uniform over the stock to polish it.

“We ‘ave to carry ‘em all the taime, in caise of an eemergencie,” he explained, also in a cockney accent. “We’re supposed to practice sliding this bolt thing in and out, real quick laike,” he continued, as he skillfully and rapidly slid the rifle’s bolt in and out.

He proudly told me that his regiment would soon go to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. The ache in my stomach increased for I felt sure he would be killed.

Then, Elsie moved and I turned towards the sound of her rustling dress. I liked Elsie. She was young, pretty and smiled often. She had black

hair that was tightly held behind her head, and she was wearing her smart afternoon uniform of a dark green dress, a small white lace apron and matching white coif in her hair.

Her dress had short sleeves and I glimpsed the white skin of her slim arms. She came close to me. Her face was slightly flushed from the excitement and the warmth of the kitchen. I saw the skin of her face, a glowing pink as it absorbed and reflected the rosy light of the evening sun. I smelled the fragrance of her warm body, and near her, I felt the overwhelming desire for life. I liked Elsie.

I looked at William who was still polishing his weapon of death.

I didn't know what love was, but I wished I were in William's place and could be very close to Elsie.

The Fall of France

“Come here, Donald,” said Maman, “turn on the wireless and bring it next to my bed. It's almost time for the eight o'clock news.”

Those weren't the words that Maman actually used, for Maman usually spoke to me in French. However, it was not until six years later, after my American journey, that I realized that Maman usually spoke to me in French and that when she spoke in English it was with a strong French accent that she never lost in spite of living in England for many years. The 'wireless' was a large portable radio, usually kept on the kitchen table and powered by a liquid battery that I recharged weekly in the garage.

“This is the BBC Home Service – Here is the news,” came a voice in the grave and traditional BBC accent.

“In an announcement from Ten Downing Street, earlier this morning, the Prime Minister, Mister Neville Chamberlain announced – that France had capitulated to the German

invader and that early tomorrow
the German forces are expected to
be marching victoriously down the
Champs-Élysées in Paris.”

There was a pause and then from
the radio came the martial strains of
La Marseillaise.

“The dirty Boche,” groaned Maman
as she started to cry.

At the sound of the French national
anthem, I tried to come to attention
by her bedside to show my defiance of
the Nazi invader. Maman grabbed me
and pulled me over to her bed.

“There’s a lad who loves his country,”
she sobbed.

Bill McDonald

Bill McDonald lives in Fenton, Michigan, where for 30 years he has maintained a private social work practice of individual and marital counseling. He is also an Episcopal clergyman, now retired. Bill wrote "Underneath the Moon's Reflection" at the 2004 Bear River Writers' Conference in Bob Hicok's workshop.

~ Underneath the Moon's Reflection ~

Lets begin *here*, with the rising moon, reflecting
low upon the lake. Look with me beneath its image,
under the surface, into the shadow of the water. Easier yes
not to do this alone. Consider a tourist at Loch Ness, gazing out,
maybe ten whole minutes. What if the monster did emerge,
at that very moment! As if the deep-hidden within
us each could emerge at the very instant we look for it.
How awesome, how very frightening! There are things
I'm glad I didn't know, at least till I was forty, and still slowly
learning - like how to swim in non-transparent water, and how
to face our many layered phobic lies. So answer me sweet friend,
and I'll tell no one else - when you look at this moon,
still near its reflection on the water, do your eyes
want to move up or farther down? What do you feel, the bright beauty
or the enshrouded deep? Later when it's safely higher in the sky,

we can see it as the color of sex, and touch with lover's hands.

I'm glad I'm over sixty now, more aware I'm facing death,
not drowning in sex, but rather *under* it, less afraid

of the blood or smell of women, or the water monster, less captive
to the fears of my parents or some women or my Junior High VD lecture.
More willing to swim blind-honest beneath the moon's consuming

reflection. Now, holding your hand - you the mirror
that dares in love reflect myself and that force in the shadow
below *my* image - I'll take you yet again to my room, my bed,

and pray the secret underneath the moon's reflection
protects us one more night,
one more lovely night.

John McNamara

John M. McNamara is a three-time Bear River Writers' Conference attendee. His short stories have appeared in *Crosscurrents*, *Old Hickory Review*, the *Piedmont Literary Review*, the *Minotaur*, *Snapdragon*, *Four Quarters*, *Inside Running*, *Quick Fiction*, and *FlashFiction*. In the summer of 1999 he was selected to receive a professional artist residency at the Ox Bow Summer Arts Program for the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Saugatuck, Michigan. "Koi Pond" was written at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 in Laura Kasischke's workshop and was originally published in the October 2004 issue of *Quick Fiction*.

~ Koi Pond ~

(Originally published in the October 2004 issue of *Quick Fiction*)

I draped my suit coat on a fence post and retrieved a short-handled fish net and a five-gallon plastic bucket from the garage. Sitting on the capstones of the pond wall, I stared at the four koi languidly swimming. The fountain bubbled in the center of the pond, the water splashing back down like frenzied percussion.

Our house sets across a tree-lined street from a public park dominated by a shaded lagoon, which freezes

in winter, hosting hockey games and neighborhood skating; during the summer children and adults fish for bass and bream beneath its gentle willows. When we bought our two-story Victorian, we installed a modest pond in the tiny backyard and stocked it with three-inch-long butterfly koi. They are beautiful, graceful fish, their silky scales patterned in splotches of glittering orange, luminous ebony and creamy white, their fanlike tails swiftly propelling them with an elegance attainable only in water. Having grown plump on twice-daily feedings, they now measure nearly eighteen inches in length. My wife

read that their life expectancies could exceed fifty, even seventy years.

On the patio beside the pond, dark emerald moss thrived between the slabs of New York bluestone. Several times over the years, when I wearied of the persistent maintenance and care of the pond and the measures I undertook to protect the fish from marauding raccoons, I threatened to dump the koi into the lagoon in the park across the street, but my wife consistently forbade it. She named each of the fish, assuming I could never countenance watching a named fish hooked and snatched from the pond by some eager angler.

I dipped the bucket into the pond, filling it with murky water. The smell was pungent and primal, evidence that I've been neglecting the pond. Many of the water hyacinths and lilies have browned and need pruning. Tracking Smudge, the fish with the brilliant orange blemish behind its head, I whisked it with a swooshing motion from the pond and released its squirming form into the bucket.

My body leaned from the weight as I lurched down the driveway, straining to keep the water from sloshing over the edge of the bucket. The oak beside the house had shed its leaves and last night's rain plastered them to the concrete like an autumnal quilt.

At the lagoon's edge I lowered the bucket into the shallow water, tipping it until Smudge slithered away in a flash of iridescence and disappeared into the deeper water. Three times I repeated this trip, turned off the fountain, and then returned the bucket and the net to the garage, pausing before closing the door to dry my hands on a golf towel.

Back in the house, I removed my shoes and slumped onto one of the two matching leather armchairs in the living room and listened to the imperfect silence of an empty house.

Peggy Midener

Peggy Midener is an artist and teacher. She paints and draws, has specialized in creating fantasy boxes, and has released a limited edition of collage prints and poems entitled *A Child's Book of Admonitions*. She has exhibited her work in numerous galleries; in 1950-1970 she exhibited frequently at the Detroit Institute of Arts. She has won many prizes. Her Retrospective Exhibition at the Jordan River Arts Center, East Jordan, Michigan was held in March 2005. She wrote "The Importance of Weeding the Garden" during the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004, when she was in Sydney Lea's workshop. Peggy also attended Bear River in 2002 and worked with Tom Lynch. She found both experiences wonderful and inspiring.

~ The Importance of Weeding The Garden ~

The gas meter was at the corner of the house
Where the garden ended. (But it's not important, I'm only using it for shadow.)
I was on my knees dispatching the last few inches of
Creeping Charley, hidden in the meter's shadow.
A piece of fine, white mesh was there as well.
I reached for it.
It resisted my effort.
I gave little tug.
It moved away from me.
I paid attention.
Looking around the corner I saw a snake.
We startled each other -
Neither of us fled.
The snake was casting its skin.

It wasn't mesh at all,
It was wondrous skin, semi opaque with
Patterns, intricate and imprinted with secrets.
I realized I had intruded upon a private procedure.
I gently held the sloughed end while the snake muscled ahead.
Speaking words of encouragement I took it upon myself
To pull - just a little, and very carefully.
Progress was easier this way, and I could tell
That it pleased the snake who made greater haste
With each push.
Finally, Victory!
A new suit for the snake and a
Magnificent Trophy for the Mid-Wife.
There was no Thank You, just departure.

I keep my treasure in a small glass box,
A visible reminder of my conversation with the snake.
Would you perhaps be interested in hearing about
The spider who spoke to me as I sat
And cried beneath her web?

Cathy Nickola

Cathy Nickola lives in Grand Blanc, Michigan, and spends summers with her family on Manitoulin Island, Canada. She writes poetry, and meets monthly with a brilliant writing group which formed as a result of Bear River. Cathy attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2003 with Laura Kasischke and in 2005 with Sidney Lea.

~ Coda ~

What was the tempo?
Grave? Legato?

(I hadn't been riding in years)
Northern Highway-
Seemed it would lead somewhere new...

Let's go
With metaphor:
A humid summer day awakes (too late) from a nap,
She stretches her arms-

Seems we're in the middle of something now-

Drapes her night cape across her shoulders:

Let me shake out my hair, prepare for a long night.

Snaps her fingers: Lightening in the distance.

Pulls out her glow-in-the-dark pen: Scribbles,

whitecaps across the big lake...

The laden smell of trees (before heavy
Rain) & Private Property.

Waves push against the waterlogged stairs.

Aside (irreverent): *She can't get her helmet off.*

Longhair summer, bare legs dangling from a bough-

Splits acorns with her teeth-

Tosses bolts of electricity at the duo, & jots a possible ending,

He kissed the alien, her giant plastic bead...

A pounding downpour. Tremolo.

Anne-Marie Oomen

Anne-Marie Oomen is the author of *Pulling Down the Barn*, a Michigan Notable Book; and the forthcoming *House of Fields* (Wayne State University Press); two chapbooks of poetry, *Seasons of the Sleeping Bear*, and *Moniker* with Ray Nargis; and the forthcoming *Uncoded Woman*, (Milkweed Press). She is represented in *New Poems of the Third Coast: Contemporary Michigan Poetry*. She edited *Looking Over My Shoulder: Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, an anthology of seniors' essays funded by Michigan Humanities Council; has written and produced several plays including the award-winning *Northern Belles*, as well as *Wives of An American King* based on the James Jesse Strang story. She serves as Chair of Creative Writing at Interlochen Arts Academy where she is faculty editor for the *Interlochen Review*. She and her husband have built their own home in Empire, Michigan where they live with a large cat named Walt Whitman.

~ Night Fire ~

After the benediction that closes
Forty Hours services my mother
drives the long miles over St. Joseph's
Road quiet from her prayers as I am
quiet from kneeling which seems
hard business. We begin, idly at first,
to watch the far eastern sky where
light flickers. She says, Heat lightning,
but as we pass the night-laden
acres, we know it is not. The heavy
flashes are from fire, larger than the

bird of lightning. Another kind of
destruction raising its young in the
night sky. My mother takes a breath,
Oh god no, accelerates the old Nash.
There is a stone egg in the air in front
of me. I watch the sky fill with light
the color of the Angeles rose, and she
begins to pray, Oh god, keep us safe.
Don't let it be—don't let it be! There
is nothing now but a panicked union
as we speed over the rolling hills,
nothing but the distance of this light
that whispers, Your life, your life.

After a mile or two, the fire leans to the south, and then finally, because the map of our township lives embedded in our brains even in darkness, we know the fire is too near to be our farm. Our farm is beyond this fire, and as we cross another mile we wonder, Weaver's? Vander Zan's? Zilenski's? And over-taking us, the shrill heartbeat of fire trucks. Then, the last low hill and there, Zilenski's cow barn, skeletal in flames. In bright silhouette, men run, pull calves from the burning and in the light that always flickers in memory, my mother pulls over into the ditch, lays her head against the steering wheel and moans. Oh, I thought it was us. I am, she raises her head, face twisted, I am so glad. She pounds the steering wheel with such ferocity that the next day the soft outside part of her fists are bruised the color of ash.

~ The Shaping Stone ~

From my bedroom window, I could see a stone wall to the south which was beautiful and implacable and shaped some boundary we had forgotten. It stretched all the way to the road, another country. Despite its beauty, the wall was in disrepair and sometimes the men who worked for my father cemented into place the stones that had fallen out. It never worked for long.

At night I couldn't see the wall. I looked out the windows toward the western horizon and watched the distant yard lights of other farms and the low planes floating north to south over the lake.

By that time we had practiced hiding under desks at school.

By then I had seen the films of the mushroom cloud.

I will try not to give over to melodrama, but there are no words for how afraid I became. Something in me had loosened like a stone

coming out of its place. There it came—tumbling into the bed with me. I believed the low flying planes grew bellies with bombs. The distant yard light signaled that the next war had begun. All the black and white photographs burst to life in my dreams and I twisted in the pleated sheets. I could not even run to my mother's bed, not make my unhinged mouth tell her or anyone. Sometimes melodrama is required.

I waited for the world to explode and die.

In daylight, planes never came to drop their bombs, their low sound never did signal an end, but the stone that divides one land from another began to belly itself into other things: school, deep water, certain foods, backs of closets. I came to depend on its weight to tell me where to go, what to eat, who to be. It was my first secret thing, stone from a boundary I carry now and to the end of the story.

~ His Workshop ~

I didn't understand why my mother made me wait in the car while she talked to Grandma in short sentences next to the trumpet vine dripping orange fire, or why, when she finally went into Grandpa's workshop where he made wooden weather vanes, the kind you stuck in the ground, she said Stay there, as though I was the beagle.

I grew tired, sneaked out, followed her.

On the dirt floor, my feet raise mushrooms of dust. Rows of vanes, flying ducks painted green with ragged tar paper wings, lean against the slatted walls, all the same as everyday. He leans into the workbench, holds onto it, rocks forward and back, and a brown bottle rocks too, and the light is filled with Camel smoke, butts everywhere in the dust. She stands near him, in tears I think, though it may be her face in rage, and his back is to me and a large wet spot trails down his pants. I must have made a sound for she turns, says, Get out of here. I am so stunned that

she would speak this way to me, I stand still. She looks back at him, her hands raised, palms up, and then he throws a misshapen weather vane, not toward her but away, as though hating it for its uselessness. I know this gesture, the same one she uses when she's mad but can't say anything. She throws a bowl of beans, torn shirt, dirty cutlery. But she's not doing it now, he is, and it cracks against the wall and he turns and says something that has slipped away, small blue egg lost in the grasses. She drops her hands, and her face in the light coming from the high dirty window is filled with the look of broken shells.

How does that happen to my mother's face?

And the other thing: how the dust and smoke of that terrible air make them look as though they are standing in holy light, like in those old paintings where everything is calm and learned and sacred while a persimmon glows in the cupboard.

~ Nine ~

By the time I get to the nines, I am plain tired. It is the annual family corn roast at the Pentwater Beach and the whole family flocks around the huge glovebox grill set at the back of the Ford pick-up where the tank of corn is soaking in sugar water. People are clustered in small groups that form and reshape like interlocking whirlpools. They line up picnic tables in a sloppy row, uneven in sand. My aunts and in-laws arrange the food tables, anchoring tattered sheets with clothespins or flat stones from beach. I am wandering among the arms and legs of relatives, reciting my times tables to myself. I have had such trouble with numbers that I am in a summer program. To catch up on basics, my teachers say. I have a test tomorrow. Seven times six is 42? Maybe 48? No, something else equals 48. Lake Michigan's slow roar holds the tiredness I feel about those numbers. On the page, the eights, marked off in columns—four times eight is thirty two—feel like the table tops, cluttered and disorderly.

At one lone table, three aunts and my mother have come to rest around Barbara. She is hiding her eyes. She has said so little for days that her husband, my mother's brother has come to talk to my mother about it. My mother looks at me warningly but Aunt Stelle, sitting across from her, the one with the big breasts, grabs my arm and pulls me under hers so that I am nested beneath the large warmth of her full fleshed arm. "There's nothing here we can't say in front of her." My mother goes quiet. Great Aunt Mary pulls out her handkerchief and spreads and folds and spreads and folds. Aunt Evelyn studies her hands and twists the ring with the semi-precious jewels, one for each kid. They talk while I mutter numbers and half listen. I hear words about birth and "born blue." They are talking about Barbara's lost baby. The one who died just three weeks ago after what my mother had calls "killer labor." Their voices are water: resonant and constant, with surges of slow waves. Their voices hold the world and all the food.

I am working on the nines. They are hard. Big numbers. The last ones I have to learn. I confuse them with sixes. I look at the folded paper in my sleeve and start over.

Barbara looks up as though she would like to hurt me.

Her face.

The surface of the lake on a windy day. Rough. Held in place only by flat stones.

Coal and water mix in her eyes. Even I can tell she knows too much. Her skin has that funny coloration my mother tells me some women get during and after pregnancy. Tan gone spotted. Her voice cracks. "Don't you know the trick about the nines?" I shake my head. Table goes quiet. "You add ten and subtract one." I mull. My toes, worming in sand under the table wrap around a cool stone. She speaks again, tearing a dinner napkin into little pieces. A gull comes squawking, thinking bread, struts near, thinking wherever so many women are gathered, it will be fed.

“Start,” Barbara says. My mother nods. This is the most Barbara has spoken since they have joined her.

“Nine times one is nine. Nine times two is-”

“Stop.” Voice edged with foam. “Start with the nine and add ten. What is it?” The water in her eyes spills over but she’s looking at me clean through it.

“Nineteen.” The stone in my toes is now warm. All the stones on this beach are secretly warm at this time of the summer. The men in the distance pour charcoal, unload beer.

“Now take one away. What is it?” This time her voice cracks but there is no backing out of this. Inevitable is the way family works.

“Eighteen.”

“That’s the answer to two times nine.”

My mom watches, her head tipped downward. The gulls croak overhead. This is the year Uncle John died of a heart attack coming back from

Christmas Eve Communion. She has cared for Aunt Mary since then. It is also the year Uncle Butler, who lives up the road, died of pancreatic cancer and my mother learned how to inject morphine and gave it to him all through the winter, walking the quarter mile three, four times a day through the cold to make sure he died more or less without pain.

“I don’t get it.”

“What’s next? Her fingers are rolling the pieces into small gray coils.

“Nine times three.”

“Take the eighteen and add ten.” She’s nodding through breaths in little spurts. Trout whooshing in bugs.

“Twenty-eight.”

“Now subtract one.”

“Twenty-seven.”

“Bingo. Now nine times four. What do you do?”

She says it with such need in her eyes, I know if I don’t get this right it will

be like losing the baby all over again. I say, "I add ten. That's thirty seven. " "And..." She draws out the and, a soft fog horn. She has always been my favorite because she wouldn't let us call her aunt.

"I take one away. And that makes thirty-six."

"Keep going." Aunt Janet and Aunt Ella join us from the potato salad, watchful, as though this were something holy and fragile. As though this were a pure white clam shell we had all found. And now Barbara is staring out at the lake, not looking at any of us, and she is reviewing the pattern, her voice soft as in lullaby. I say nine times five and she says toward the drift of cirrus over a lake so wide we brag we can't see the other side, "Now add ten." And then more softly through the ragged breath of the lake and her own body, "And minus one." And I say forty-five. And nine times six, and add ten, and the gulls scream overhead, and subtract one. Over and over we run the nines until I don't need the pattern. The

numbers enter my head and I say them, letting them coach me until we are all quiet. And the aunts sit in the long moments. They have called out the pattern, and the waves ache against the shore as though it were new skin.

Peg Padnos

Peg Padnos is a registered nurse and writer of poetry and essays. Her poems have appeared in *The American Journal of Nursing*, *Mediphors*, and *Poetry in Performance*. She wrote the first draft of “Paranormal” in Thomas Lynch’s creative non-fiction workshop in 2004.

~ Paranormal ~

Nothing could be less normal than a neonatal intensive care unit, often called the N-I-C-U or nick-yoo or neo or sometimes just “the unit,” with its population of infants so scrawny that they seem barely human, even barely alive, and beeping alarms and whooshing ventilators in place of baby cries, and babies too weak to cry if they are off their vents, or mewling so softly that you can hardly hear them.

Then there’s the alien lingo that grafts itself onto the tongues of those who work there or who have children there. Just a few examples: ABG’s (arterial blood gases), RDS (respiratory distress syndrome, one of the usual suspects of prematurity), A’s and B’s (apneas and bradycardias,

which translate into “baby forgot to breathe” and “his heart slowed down a bit”).

In short, neo is about as weird as the bar scene in *Star Wars I* or your first glimpse of ET.

Yet the NICU and similar places in the hospital teach volumes about finding the normal. How paradoxical for places that owe their very life to events and occurrences that are anything but-shipwrecked pregnancies, births occurring months and weeks ahead of schedule, term arrivals accompanied by life-threatening complications, and very sick babies who blossom into sicker toddlers and sickly school-age kids.

The other day I went up to the pediatric intensive care unit to visit

Annie, the daughter of a friend. Peds ICU becomes a familiar stomping ground for many neo “graduates” – note the term, please – who have chronic conditions – respiratory, neurological, cardiac, and so forth.

Now ten years old, Annie was born with a malformation that involves the regulation of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles, or small chambers, of her brain. As an infant in NICU she had gotten a VP, or ventriculoperitoneal, shunt surgically implanted. This is a device that helps move excess fluid out of the brain and into the abdominal cavity. Like so many medical solutions, the shunt traded one set of problems – damaging pressure on the brain – for another—a site where microorganisms can set up shop. So Annie was back for surgery to clean out the infection and retool the shunt to make it work properly again.

As a nurse as well as a veteran neo parent (my preemie twins are teenagers now), I long ago learned to look past hospital room props such

as tubes and wires and monitors and the cosmetically off-putting – the body bloated from steroids, the faded shapeless gown, the sour smell of vomit. My eyes lit on Annie’s socks. The brightest pink in the world. Pink as Pepto Bismol. The deep, deep pink of Bazooka bubble gum. Happy as rosy cheeks or a jar of bubble bath. For her daughter’s pageboy bob, Annie’s mother had found a ribbon in a similar shade. So that’s what I talked about. I praised her socks. I commented on the perfect match with the ribbon. I told her how pretty she looked. She smiled. She giggled. Just a regular little girl.

Last week I was at the unit again, leaving my cards and pamphlets about the post-discharge follow-up that I now do as a registered nurse. One mother was at her baby’s bedside. She was sitting on a stool, wearing that familiar worried look that we parents know so well. Her son had been born at term many weeks ago. By NICU standards he was gigantic, maybe eight or nine pounds, with a striking head of hair. He was so mature that

he didn't even need an incubator and was sleeping soundly on his belly in an open crib. Like Annie, he had a shunt, but his was a fresh one and I could see it snaking along his skull and I could also see two stubbly wedges where his bounty of black hair had been shaved and was just starting to grow back. The attending doctor was writing his notes and looked up to say that he wasn't sure when, if ever, this baby would go home. The mother spoke a little English, he said softly, but still he did not know how well she understood the gravity of things.

Gravity. It keeps us tethered to the planet, weighs our problems upon our shoulders, endows our brows with worry posed as dignity. So I pulled out my sparse Spanish: "Hola! Como esta?" Then, "Your baby is beautiful. And his hair. It's so beautiful." And we smiled on him together, I and this stocky young mother, her long black hair drawn back into a braid, her body bent over her baby's bed.

I would like to think of such moments as the patina of "normal"

dabbed onto difficult days. Still, I am not sure. Perhaps paranormal is the better word. Not in a Twilight Zone sense. But, rather, as a possibility that hovers above or sits near the bedside as a presence against the strangeness and stress of high-tech medicine.

Neo parents often speak of reaching a "new normal." Yes, life has seen a seismic shift, expectations have been dashed to splinters, visions of the dream baby are scuttled. But part of the wonder of our human nature lies in its amazing resiliency – finding a sense of normal at unexpected times in unexpected places, not the least of which can be an NICU.

Fortunately, this sugar-coated view has science on its side. Most of these children, sick and fragile as they are now, will likely grow up and go to school, even if it's special ed. It's easy to forget: every one of them is an incipient kid. And aren't all babies works in progress?

Cyn

Cyn is a poet and a short story writer. Her work has appeared in several magazines and newspapers throughout the United States and Latin America, most recently in *Sos Voz*, *Poetry in Performance*, and *The Campus*. She is a scholarship recipient and participant of the Bear River Writers Conference. She is the receiver of the Dominican American National Roundtable youth award. She has been given the STOCS scholarship her Latin American education in an Argentinean Study Abroad Program at the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata. Cyn is presently studying Latino literature and Latin American literature. She is a reporter and copyeditor for her school newspaper *The Campus*. She is currently a college student living in New York City, where she continues to write, study, and dream her favorite Caribbean summers. Cyn wrote “Silent Steam” in a workshop with Elizabeth Cox at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005.

~ Silient Steam ~

The steam engulfed Mami’s face, and the knots of her spine seemed to loosen with the familiar smells and heat of her island cooking. Her hand skillfully mixed the sauces and meat together in the hot pot that was heated by the flames of the stove. The pot was as old as my twenty-year-old self. Its sides were scratched and striped with rust from each day of boiling seasoning and sizzling meat.

Mami held the lid of the pot. The metal surrounding the handle and Mami’s face sweated within the steam. I sat on a stool, drinking a glass of water. Its ice cubes already melted with the heat of the kitchen.

“Well Said’s birthday is coming up,” I said above the sizzle of the vegetables she began to fry. “That’s pretty much all that’s happening.”

She covered the sizzling food with a pot lid and wiped her brow. “That’s

twenty-five I guess.”

“No. Twenty-seven on Wednesday.”

“That’s a good age. Mature. Thinking of the future. Considering options.”

Ahh. The option. My mother’s neurotic and discussion-exhausting option, which was well-talked of with the knowledge of Said’s non-Christian faith.

I filled my mouth with water and moved these thoughts down my throat. “Yeah, I guess.”

“I’m happy that his birthday is coming up.” She lowered the heat of the sizzling vegetables. “It gives me a chance to buy him a gift. By the way, I will be expecting an invitation soon.”

“There won’t be a party and you don’t have to bother with a present.” I filled my mouth again and let the water roll around my tongue.

“And why not?”

I swallowed the pool. “Because Said can’t celebrate birthdays and holidays. Islam doesn’t allow it.”

“So what does he do for those days?”

“Nothing.”

My mother’s eyes slowly shrunk. “So no parties?”

“Not for birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays.”

“No gift-giving?”

“Not even a Hallmark card.”

“So what’s going to happen on your birthday? Is he getting you anything?”

“The same thing I’m getting him.” My glass rose to my lips.

“Which is?”

“Nothing.” I took another sip.

Her eyes crunched to a pair of pea-sized spheres of light. She wiped her hands again on her waist towel and turned to the stove. She increased the heat of the rusty pot. The sauces soon boiled in this aged rust of a pot. Its scratches trailed its sides with the same depth of Mami’s deep facial wrinkles.

I sipped my water as a sudden heat filled my arms, chest, armpits, and hair. I looked at Mami. Her posture held the rigid form of habitual silence as her hand returned to the large cooking spoon in the pot. It mixed the already blended ingredients.

Among the sizzling, I barely heard a Spanish murmur: "*Que gente tan rara.*"

What weird people.

Michael Reade

Michael Reade graduated from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Business Marketing. He started writing for fun going on three years ago and recently finished his first book tentatively entitled, *A Little Kid with Nystagmus*, a memoir about growing up and being legally blind during the 1960s and 70s. He currently resides in Erie, Pennsylvania with his dog Luke. He has two daughters, Stacy, 18 and Jessica, 12. Mike attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 and 2005, and looks forward to coming again this June.

~ Dawn with Luke ~

When blinding sunlight hits frozen crystals
at the lake's edge, I see kaleidoscopes
spinning within the icy splinters.

At my back, nature's leafy pallet remains
unshed in the oaks, in my nose and mouth,
sweet puffs of cold morning air, at my feet

the slippery stony beach.

My mind's camera captures all this
with digital clarity before steam from coffee

in my thermos clouds my glasses.

I am as cold and as warm
as my dog's black nose.

Staring into his deep brown eyes, and
at his tail wagging in great circles,
this moment leaves me awestruck

like when I gaze upon my love,
smell her scent and nuzzle for her touch.

The sun overwhelms the horizon

just as passion for her overwhelms my heart,
yesterday's capacity to love is surmounted.
Seeing her soon is my greatest hope and I cling to that

like zebra mussels on the old wharf.
Coffee gone, I turn west, toward her,
so many miles away.

the lone tear freezes and falls, I choose
to be grateful she exists somewhere.
Life, imperfect as can be, is still good.

Nancy Ross-Flanigan

Nancy Ross-Flanigan was a journalist for a long time. Some days she still is. In her newspaper days she was officially a science writer, but liked writing about other things: motorcycles, heartbreak, the swarms of greedy carp in the lake behind her house. Nowadays she writes mostly about the other things. Motorcycles and heartbreak keep finding their way into her stories, along with mango rash, Tangee lipstick and the occasional doodlebug. No more carp, though. Nancy wrote “Nexus” in Richard McCann’s workshop at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005 when the final assignment was to write an essay about a body part. Nancy also attended Bear River in 2004 and was in Jerry Dennis’s workshop.

~ Nexus ~

Twining like vines up a tree trunk, two scars decorate my neck from collarbone to jaw. Twins, but not identical. One – the older – is uglier and more reclusive, spreading at its base and clinging to the hollows where muscle was stripped away. The other is a neat, narrow seam. I thought it almost beautiful when I first saw it, before it became blotched with radiation burns.

My sister scars formed where the surgeons cut, nearly forty years ago

the first time. Seven hours of surgery. Radical neck dissection, my medical chart said. Cancer, the doctors said, hiding there inside my lymph nodes, those soft, subversive spheres. Scoop them out, the surgeon said, scoop them out like roe, before they hatch their ugly spawn. What did I need them for, these nodes I never knew I had? I looked them up in a medical text. They looked like peas – colored green in the illustration and laid out in rows, the way I arranged distasteful vegetables on my dinner plate when I was bored. Once the nodes were

gone, there'd be no place left for the cancer to hide, I imagined. But my neck, the scar, ragged and red like something a child would scrawl in a drawing of ghouls and monsters with bloody knives, maybe that's what should be hidden.

My surgeon made the suggestion as I lay, still bandaged, in my hospital bed. "The scar will fade – eventually," he told me. "Until then, a nice chiffon scarf around your neck can be very stylish."

I was eighteen. I wore poorboy sweaters and miniskirts. Chiffon was not an option.

Maybe when I'm fifty, I thought. If I'm still alive.

I'm fifty-seven now and haven't yet resorted to scarves, but I own 28 black turtlenecks and 17 more in assorted colors. In the top drawer of my bathroom vanity is a jar of Dermablend Cover Crème, Natural Beige. Natural is not the word for how my neck looks when I apply the crème, my fingertips hating the

assignment, the feel of tendons too close to the surface and skin half-dead from nerve damage. I dust on setting powder with a fluffy brush and survey the result. Not natural. Cadaverous is a better description.

"Leave the makeup off," my husband says. He tells me the radiation burns are a turn-on, "like permanent hickeys." He's picturing slutty girls back in high school. I'm picturing myself back in high school, on prom night, two months after the first operation. I'm wearing a strapless, floor length gown of moiré taffeta, a fabric with wavy patterns that look like water stains or wood grains, patterns that shift, disappear and reappear, mirage-like, as light moves across them. My hair is piled up high, and I've pinned a wide, flat bow made from the same pink taffeta just behind my bangs. With my elbow-length gloves, I could be Audrey Hepburn, I'm thinking as I cross the dance floor with my date.

My girlfriends, gathered in a knot of satin and crepe, rush over to inspect

my ensemble. The mingled aromas of L'Air du Temps, Chantilly and Miss Dior move with them, the colors of their auras translated into scent. Judy, flawless except for a chipped front tooth I know is concealed beneath a porcelain cap, takes my gloved hands in hers.

“Boy, you’ve got guts,” she says. I laugh. I think she’s talking about the challenge of my flat chest holding up a strapless dress. “No. Not that. I mean wearing your hair up, with nothing covering your neck – you know, with your scar and all.”

I wrest my hands from Judy’s grip and head for the bathroom where a wide mirror hangs over a bank of washbasins. The overhead fixtures cast a sterile light, as in a surgical suite. Leaning across a sink, I lift my chin and turn my head to get a better look at my neck. I stare, as if seeing the scar for the first time – not through my eyes, but through hundreds, thousands of other pairs of eyes. Eyes of my classmates circling the dance floor, eyes of strangers I

might pass on the street tomorrow or next week or forty years in the future, eyes of someone, somewhere, destined to be my husband someday.

How, I wondered, had I seen Audrey Hepburn – and not the Bride of Frankenstein – when earlier that evening I glanced in the hallway mirror as I waited for my date to pick me up? I wonder still. Was I brave, or had I already trained my eyes to skip over that part of my body, as if blinding myself to its existence would render it invisible to everyone else?

I still practice that deceit – and the reverse, ignoring other people’s necks as I hope they’ll overlook mine. As a test, I try to picture my husband’s. I visualize his face – down to the last errant eyebrow hair – the tattoos on his upper arms, even the peculiar pit just below his right shoulder blade, but the region between head and shoulders is fuzzy.

Curious now, I spend a day studying other people’s necks.

I am quickly bored.

Some are plumper than others, some draped with silver chains or strings of beads, but mostly what I see are unremarkable, fleshy tubes holding up heads. The woman with sunsets painted on her fingernails has a neck not so different from that of the street person squatting in a doorway. The man sitting lotus fashion in a corner of the bookstore, eyes closed and ears stoppered with yellow plugs – his neck is indistinguishable from the neck of the fellow who’s squeegeeing the windows outside. What I begin to notice is, each person has some feature or quality far more interesting than that segment of skin, muscle and vertebrae I’m fixated on.

Me, too, I suppose. I’ve been told my eyes are mysterious, my smile engaging, my silver hair striking, and I appreciate those features. But it’s hard to love the whole of me without accepting all the parts, so I try to make peace with my neck. I order my fingers not to flinch as they trace the scalpel’s path. I allow them to pause in the caved-in spot near my collarbone where my pulse

beats strong. I ponder the irony that this very locus, this daily reminder of my imperfections, is also the place I touch for assurance that I’m still alive.

I realize, too, it’s where my voice lives.

Lisa Rye

Lisa Rye was born in Northville, Michigan in 1957, raised in Livonia, Michigan and now resides in Bloomfield Hills and Harbor Springs, Michigan. She completed her BFA degree at The University of Michigan in 1979 and her MFA degree at the low residency creative writing program of Vermont College in January 2004. She has published poems in the literary journals and magazines, *Artful Dodge*, *California Quarterly*, *English Journal*, *Penumbra*, *Permafrost*, *Rattle*, *REAL*, *Riversedge*, *The MacGuffin*, and *The Paterson Literary Review* and has a poem in Roger Weingarten's upcoming anthology, *Manthology*. Lisa has been nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes. She is married to Jonathan and has two sons, Benjamin and Calvin. Lisa also paints, creates collages on canvas and small collage boxes, and exhibits her work in local and national shows. Her first book of poems is titled, *Blood Sisters*.

~ At Chandler's Tavern ~

"I'm Buzz," flirts the man
on the bar stool next to me,
before "Are you married?" and explaining,

"Basalt can neutralize bacteria,
same way white grows on dog crap
in the woods. You've seen it, right?" I nod.

Suzanne, Buzz's neighbor, slurs
how her marine son calls and only says "hello,"
and that is plenty. I understand.

My son was on a similar razor edge
for two years, a sharp walk
adjacent to the dying drop-off.

The bartender's brother, Tom was dying
and we all knew it. Clueless how to help,
we blamed it first on Italy; Tuscany's beauty

decided Tom's headaches wouldn't ruin
his family vacation, then
the first doctor's misdiagnosis, "an infectious disease"

and the slow ER staff, like the Saturday Night Live skit,
"Simmer down now," humor
not funny to a tumor. Gray matter,

embedded in optic nerves, finally excised, Tom awoke to
a pinhole, one tiny dot of light, one letter at a time.
Blame is buried with the body.

Who is this God to whom I pray and thank
that my son is healing, and that Tom's mother isn't alive
to see what no parent should have to?

When Buzz shakes my gold-banded hand, I offer,
"Clean water is important. You deserve to make millions.
Good luck." He smiles and turns away,

distracted by another blonde. When I slip
the bill across the counter,
and my fingers touch the bartender's, I turn away

and hug Suzanne, forcing
some laughter and common tears.
We hang on to each other, braced

between what is easily explained and understood
and what is incomprehensible.

Tonight that is plenty.

Veronica Sanitate

Poet, writer, editor Veronica Sanitate is a Michigan native. She is co-owner and Vice President of Ocean Organics, manufacturers of the Emerald Isle and MaineStream Organics lines of seaweed-based fertilizers. As School Improvement Team Co-Chair at Michigan's largest high school (where her son is a Varsity lacrosse player) she introduces programs to build self esteem and awareness. She is a Reiki Master and a member of the University of Michigan's Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies. She holds a Masters Degree in Liberal Studies from the University of Detroit. Veronica attended the initial Bear River Writers' Conferences at Camp Daggett, studying with Robert Hass, Betsy Cox, and Barry Wallenstein; at Camp Michiganiana she worked with Lorna Goodison.

~ Hiking the Trail ~

It begins easily enough. The road along
the sea is paved and wide; the houses
are discreet. Beyond ascends the wooded
path, all bramble, rock and root. Still, it's
easy enough. We're eager and new,
scrambling across fissured stone where
dappled light reflects our chiaroscuro.
We never question our decisions--happy
just to witness bluebells amid the ferns
and waxwings in slim birches. Midway,
the path grows steep. We climb blocking
boulders and vine our way through poison

ivy. Noon descends. No longer newly wed to each other's vision, we quicken through a deepened woods, arguing first where blue flares mark the side trail one prefers, while the other wants us faithful. Together, and separate, after kilometers of unknown growth, wind-sown mosquitoes, moss and burrs and spreading junipers, we cross a massasauga sleeping. We're lost, I say, the terrain has changed, leading us to a bluff: Did we ask too much of us or not enough? Past a ledge, the trail descends, difficult now but the views are gorgeous at the edge. Back again at our cabin, things seem comfortable and flat, and I watch from windows waves crest and break and crest and break upon the rocks—a matter of release and trust.

Melissa Seitz

Melissa Seitz teaches creative writing at Saginaw Valley State University and is the faculty advisor for its literary magazine, *Cardinal Sins*. She plays electric guitar and runs half marathons. Her poetry and fiction have been published in *Paradidomi*, *Cardinal Sins*, *Cardinalis*, and *43 Negative 83*. She would like to thank Laura Kasischke (Bear River 2001 and 2005) for being such a great workshop leader and source of inspiration.

~ Hiking the Trail ~

Frigid winds smote tremors through our woods
where branches, heavy with ice, hang like overturned chandeliers.
The sound within the woods: a dangerous internal thunder.
Then: rumble/snap.

We stop breathing long enough for gravity to do its work.
We rush outside, examine the fallen branch.
I say: It looks like a dead man, already outlined for the investigation.
You say: Nothing.
I say: Let's cut the tree down before the rest of it falls.
You say: No, we'll wait and see what happens.

Later, inside, we are cold, the power still out,
our diversions unavailable.
You build a fire, suggest making love.
I say: No.
The roar of internal thunder
grows achingly louder.
I imagine gravity, like two hands, waiting.
Then: rumble/snap.

Elizabeth Solsburg

Elizabeth Martin Solsburg attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 and 2005, working with Betsy Cox and Laura Kasischke. "First Supper" is the result of a five-minute exercise in Laura's fiction workshop, in which participants remembered a significant life event and wrote brief descriptions of the first meal eaten after it occurred. This short poem is part of a trilogy that arose from the same exercise.

~ First Supper ~

Burgers glistening in grease
cheap fry – no steak
Table not set for four, but three
 three forks
 three plates
 three milks, no scotch
at the table or sipped
surreptitiously at sink
We eat – our first words
clumsy
mouths lumbering
We'd forgotten how
 not to sit in silence
 not prompting rage

We'd forgotten how
to pass salt without
waiting for head to fall to plate

In this new empty space,
our bruised voices
swell to chatter, staccato laughter
raucous peace.

Peter Sparling

Peter Sparling is a Thurnau Professor and former chair of the University of Michigan Department of Dance and Artistic Director of the Ann Arbor-based Peter Sparling Dance Company. He recently opened a new space for his company and studio in a renovated ball bearing factory along Ann Arbor's North Main St. corridor. A native Detroit and graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy and The Juilliard School, he danced with the companies of Jose Limon and Martha Graham before leaving New York for Ann Arbor in 1987. Since then, he has staged Graham's works on his own company and on companies all over the world. A prolific choreographer, Sparling is a recipient of the 1998 Governor's Michigan Artist Award and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and Arts Foundation of Michigan. He is on the roster of the Fulbright Senior Specialists Program. He has toured the region with his video/performance work, Peninsula, which celebrates the cultural history, geography and urban landscapes of his home state of Michigan. Peter wrote "Three Nightmares" at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2001 "sitting at the feet of Robert Hass."

~ Three Nightmares ~

1. Before the Dawn of Movies

Around the time I run screaming down Longacre
from a Saturday matinee of "The Ten Commandments",
I'm sitting bolt upright in my bed, awake within a dream.
An anvil sounds on my brain as the figure of a naked giant

rears in silhouette on the bare white wall before me.
He totters from the weight of steel girders
balanced precariously on his mammoth shoulders.

His profile looms facing the bedroom window's eerie light:
a magnificent hourglass of stupefying brawn.
And as he hovers, he looks down to see
a little girl as small as a doll kneeling at his feet and
picking flowers in the shadow of the huge steel beam.

As the anvil pounds louder and louder and the air
around the vision on the wall begins to palpitate,
my throat seizes up trying to scream out.
But what is worst is when the giant bends
to pluck a flower for the little girl. Then I think
my head will rip from its wiry little socket to see
his throbbing chest brush lightly against her blond bangs
as he reaches to gently seize the flower's stem,
then smiles and offers it to her, delicately,
with a terrifying kindness.

2. The Rehearsal

I'm fully clothed, the barefoot dancers assembled,
ready for their steps. A Bach sonata unfurls
like sad fragrance into the studio's porous air.
I know that for the Adagio, a group emerges
from the upstage darkness, pacing simply, haltingly,
to the music's first measured beats. And at the first eruption,
when the violin breaks from its reins and utters
a plaintive plea to the absent powers, the dancers

furtively shift, peer back over their shoulders,
then whiplash together in a corkscrew turn
to the floor, push up on their hands
as if their chests are imploding from the force field below,
then scramble to their feet, dazed.

A slightly puzzled look crosses their faces
as they scan an imaginary horizon,
awaiting the next unbidden turbulence.

The music continues. The dancers pause,
then look to me, not knowing what comes next.
I motion for the music to stop,
then shift to stand and jerk back in my seat,
locked in position, breathless, unable to rise.

3. The Death of Rudolph Nureyev

The flesh is so fair, a rose-tinted cream,
radiant in the dream. He lies in my arms, dying
I know from what because I try to remember
if his sweat will infect me. But I'm too caught up
easing him down. He moans, afraid of his own fading.
I comfort him, as if he knows I understand
his desire to rise in time for his next entrance
and impose his exquisite form onto the thickening light.

I peer down at his bare side, a milky slab:
watch it quake in slow motion, a dying faun.
Later, as the thunder barks its brute fanfare

and the rain crashes down around my darkened room,
I wonder how the mind begets its own brilliant tributaries
despite the absence of true lightning,
why something in me has now settled—
why the body dreams its own dazzling end.

Jessica Stern

Jessie Stern attended her first Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, and plans to return in 2006. She wrote "A Little Relief" in Richard McCann's workshop. Jessie has been in Florida on vacation but looks forward to experiencing the Bear River Review when she returns home. She thinks it is a wonderfully creative idea.

~ A Little Relief ~

I grew up scared. Don't ask me why. I just did.

Death, parades, steamboat whistles, getting lost. Terror and fear surrounded and followed me everywhere. After my father died of a sudden heart attack one week before my fifteenth birthday, I stopped being scared. I guess I lost my ability to feel anything.

Two years later my mother died of breast cancer. Certain that I was doomed to die young, my old companion, Fear, returned. Somehow her presence made me feel whole again. Fifty years passed when I found myself waiting for a breast biopsy report.

It was a beautiful spring day in late May, 1998, when my husband casually announced that he had to run an errand. Instead of waiting until the next day for my surgeon to call with the news, Shelly, a retired doctor, not surprisingly, took matters into his own hands. Without telling me where he was going, he went to the laboratory to get the report from the pathologist.

I was restlessly trying to relax on the couch in the living room when he returned less than an hour later. As soon as I saw his face, I knew. A huge wave of relief engulfed me as I blurted out, "Now I don't have to be scared anymore."

David Stringer

David Stringer retired from teaching in Ann Arbor to work as a writer and a barista. A Hopwood winner, he has published a book of poetry, *The Beast Speaks*, and has recently completed a chapbook of poems, *Inhale/Exhale*. With Robert Pasick and others he co-authored *Pet Loss: A Death in the Family*. His book about the murder of his brother is seeking a publisher. “Doubles” is a product of the 2002 Bear River Writers’ Conference. David and Kim divide their time between Michigan and Florida.

~ Doubles ~

I.

Limp dick.

The plane was taking my brother from Boston to Phoenix. Next week would bring his 60th birthday. He was going to her wedding—the woman he always referred to as Phoenix because her name was the same as his wife’s.

Next week he would be 60. The stewardess brought him a glass of chardonnay with his vegetarian plate—he was flying first class—and he tried to put some flirtation into his thank you, but he lost it. Phoenix

was marrying her psychiatrist. Could have been him. If he weren’t already married. If their affair hadn’t fizzled that weekend in Monterey. His marriage saved by his limp dick.

Fucking Prozac. He glanced out the window toward the Rockies below, but all he could see through the thick window was a barrier of clouds. He admired the hip-curve of the stewardess as it disappeared through the curtain.

The Prozac helps him at the office. At least, that’s what his secretary says. Why would Phoenix invite him to her wedding? Why would he go? It was so easy to lie again to his wife

about the trip. She was playing golf now with the girls. My brother was soon going to be 60, he was 30,000 feet above the surface of the planet, he was sipping chardonnay with his fucking vegetarian plate, and he had a limp dick.

II.

Having recently moved into town, we would lie awake and listen—not to the calls from the woods of crickets and frogs or the hissed clashes of raccoons, or some thrilling voice we thought might be a bird but could have been anything—but instead to the guy across the street: his motorcycle snarls at midnight when he got home from work, his dogs joining in, and his calling them in a thug voice that bruised their delicate names with impossible commands: “Emily! Patty! Put that down and go inside. And don’t have any more to drink.” Maybe one of them was his wife.

Weekends I’d observe him sitting on his front porch: sleeveless wife-beater

t-shirt, bleached buzz cut, tattoos snaking down his muscular arms. Saturdays he’d mow the lawn and work on his bike, Sundays barbecue and play catch with his son, easy and powerful, sometimes football, some times baseball, always burning them in. I’d study him while taking a break from my desk or while pulling out of the driveway to run errands with my wife—grocery shopping, the post office, the car wash, or just to the antique shop in town.

After two months I’ve learned to wave to him on my way by. He’ll sometimes acknowledge me with a nod. I’ve learned to nod the way he does—eyes locked on mine, a hint of a sneer. I’ve resisted my wife’s request to call the cops about the dogs and the bike. It’s me over there.

III.

I’ve heard my friend Keith read his piece “The Customer” maybe half a dozen times, and each time he brackets his reading with protestations

and denials. “It’s not me,” he says, his arms raised in defense, his face reddening, his whiskey-gravel voice rising. “It’s a story. Just a story.” He said so again yesterday.

Right.

It’s just a story about a guy who, like Keith, worked in a bookstore. The guy in the just-a-story spotted a woman in the store with quote-spectacular hair-unquote scrutinized her shopping patterns, and ended up following her to her home on a regular basis, spying through her window until she saw him and screamed. A stalker, and Keith clearly denounces him as evil. He then makes a point about the 20th century tradition of unreliable first person narrators, an example of which I believe I am witnessing.

The Catholic Church teaches—or used to teach—that it is just as wrong to contemplate a sin as to actually do it. This may explain why writers drink so much. My good friend Keith certainly imagined himself doing it. He apparently enjoys the guilt.

And I of course have imagined Keith imagining stalking that woman with spectacular dark hair, never quite under control. And I confess that I’ve enjoyed imagining Keith’s stalking—real or imagined, what difference does it make?—and I appreciate his publicly allowing the stalker’s “S” to be sewn into the front of his blue denim work shirt as I button another button on my own.

Meanwhile, I’ll continue to attend these conferences, to hang out with Keith and to hear him read. Beautiful women abound at such places—young ones whose dark hair is still damp from her shower as she emerges for breakfast, women with red hair in a long thick braid, profusions of blonde curls, women my age who sit next to me at dinner, their hair neatly cut and mussed charmingly by the wind off the lake. We discuss the writer’s life. We discuss narrative technique.

IV.

He awakens confused. His bladder tells him he will soon have to get out of bed. Crows quarrel outside his window. His feet are cold.

Mother stares stroke-sagged from the hospital bed.

Her lights are on.

*Her three children gather, wait,
and fail to talk.*

Snores from another bed. Dim light—must be around six. Warm here under the blanket—cold everywhere else. Stay where it's warm.

*Her left hand beckons to her
youngest son,
her right one dead.
He's old enough to know
just how too late.*

He gropes toward his watch and glasses, knocking his pillow to the floor. It seems to fall a long way. Knowing the concrete will be cold, he retreats between coarse blankets. The crows have departed.

He crosses the room to take her hand.

It's cool and smooth.

He bends, kisses her forehead:

Sweat smell, lotion, wax.

Sits up in bed, swings his legs down. Pulls on his jeans, reassured by the weight of wallet, belt, keys, coins, and knife.

"I'm here," he says to his mother.

"Here."

Her reply a grunt.

*Keeps holding her fingers, wondering
how long is enough.*

Dressed in yesterday's clothes, he plans a trip to the shower. Soap. Towel. Shampoo. Razor. An alarm clock sounds. Buzzing more frantically as he steals out into the cold air.

Pia Taavila

Pia Taavila attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 and 2005, working with Syd Lea both times. Her poem "Hats" is from a first collection, book-length, forthcoming from the Gallaudet University Press (2007), which asked her to include about 25 poems (out of a total of one hundred) about being raised by deaf parents. Pia lives in Virginia and teaches English at Gallaudet University.

~ Hats ~

Every evening we kids would gather
on the front porch steps, an assembled,
motley menagerie of stripes and polka dots,
shorts and t-shirts, torn denim,
hugging our scabby knees, waiting
for the '57 baby blue Buick to pull
into the driveway. We'd run to the door,
pulling at the handle like mad while our
tired, deaf father leaned against collective weight
to barrel his way through the horde of grubby
fingers, smeared faces, our insistence that he
hand over that day's goods: newspaper hats.

Designed and folded during mid-day breaks as
the linotypes hummed and clattered away
the hats held the daily comics, the editorials page,

headlines from distant lands, ads from Hudson's
where our deaf mother sewed drapes for the rich.

No two hats were ever the same.

Mine was like Napoleon's, with wings enough
to lift me from drudgery straight to my father's shoulders.
My brothers got Navy sailors' hats, or those like Robin Hood's,
or a Greek boat captain's, or the tam of Robbie Burns,
or like an officer from the French Foreign Legion.

Off we'd run to new adventures, wild conquests,
while our father sagged in the easy chair,
watching the news without sound.

Cristina Trapani-Scott

Cristina Trapani-Scott lives with her husband and two children in Ypsilanti, Michigan. She currently works as a staff writer for a weekly newspaper in Tecumseh and has had poems published in *Hip Mama Magazine*. She will begin MFA studies in poetry and fiction at Spalding University in Kentucky in May. Cristina attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2002, 2004, and 2005. In 2002, she worked with Betsy Cox, in 2004, with Bob Hicok, and in 2005 with Peter Ho Davies. Her submission "Gaudi's Eyes" came from Peter's workshop. He had asked the group to take a figure from history and write a piece of fiction using that person as a character. Cristina chose the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi and came up with this short piece.

~ Gaudi's Eyes ~

What do you see? He held the small leaf before me, its edges perfect and clean.

I see a leaf, Uncle. I could hear disappointment in his silence, loneliness even, because I refused to see, was too tired to look anymore at the spectacular in something so seemingly ordinary.

What do you see now? He asked again and he waved the leaf above his head as if he was drawing an arc in the sky.

I saw them, the veins and the face, but I still said nothing.

Don't you see, nephew? This is it. Nothing I can build will ever match this, this leaf, this intricate system that takes the Barcelona sun as its food, but sits so plain and beautiful as if it takes nothing. This is what I want, he said. I want to get as close to this as I can, make it bigger so others can see it like this, like this leaf in the sun.

Uncle Antoni's eyes focused on the most intricate of details, the grains of sand like colorful beads, the pattern on

a single flower petal, even each color in my own eyes that one would ordinarily call brown. *No, no, he said, there are other colors in there that make them brown. There is amber, even some orange, and the lines are like inverted rays from the sun, pointed in toward the pupil instead of out toward the universe. Or was it the other way around? I see the universe in there somewhere, in your eyes, young man.* And he'd laugh, a deep resonant laugh.

He laughed because he knew I understood him at some level, more so than anyone else anyway. Even my mother, his sister, would dismiss him with a wave of a hand. He knew that I could really see what he was seeing, see the liquid lines of the world around us, the actual vibrations and movement in things that to the average eye seemed stagnant and still.

That's why I snuck away from my mother when I should have stayed home. I should have been the man of the house when father left, helped my mother tend the garden or at least fix the cracks in the plaster walls.

Instead, I'd leave and walk, almost run to Uncle Antoni's home in the wooded Barcelona hills where he lived in a pink house and he'd crafted his own furniture bringing the patterns of the outside world indoors--leaves carved into the table legs, layered with the lines and textures he could see, curving and curling as if they were blowing in the wind.

There were people who listened to what he had to say. When I was there, he'd listen to what I said. That's why I'd leave my mother and go. And, when I came home in the evenings exhausted from the walks and all of the seeing, really seeing on a cellular level, seeing each speck of color in a stone or looking at the map of crevices in tree bark, mother would scold me and say, *All you'll get from Antoni is crazy.*

She'd say it like the men I heard sitting outside in the evenings, eating tapas and drinking *cerveza*. All of them blending into the stone streets of Barcelona, blending into the vibrations of the city, except for their voices, a

chorus of sad remarks and laughter backed up by clinking glass. Remarks meant for me to hear in order to relay back to Uncle.

I didn't look at the men. I wondered what Uncle would see in them. If he'd see the lines going in all directions, twisting back on themselves, under and over until they were in indecipherable knots. I knew that what they felt wasn't disdain, but jealousy, because Uncle was all over Barcelona. His buildings were anyway and his designs were made to show the world that he saw vibrations in everything. His buildings, like waves caught between rocks, were flashes of motion between adjacent structures.

Eventually Uncle showed me a drawing of another building that seemed filled with all he'd seen in Barcelona, in the world, in places I'd never dreamed of. He planned like God, like it was the world and Uncle was responsible for even the last bit of mortar that would seal the last bit of stone. I saw a change in him as if the weight

of the impending project already was laid on him, and he stooped more than he ever had, like an old man, though he wasn't old yet. Eventually, he walked with a cane.

I don't know why he showed the drawings to me, a boy on the verge of becoming a man, on the verge of losing sight of the lines that connected us. More and more I felt anxious and wanted to run with the other boys in Barcelona, look at girls, whistle and see if they'd turn their heads and smile. I wondered then if Uncle had ever felt that way, had ever wanted to just live in the landscape of Barcelona, try to be part of the world instead of constantly wanting to reconstruct it.

He showed me many drawings from many angles of the cathedral in full, with spires building up like layers of caked mud gradually thinning into needlelike points in the sky. The *Sagrada Famiglia*, he called it. Even the name sounded heavy and big. There were drawings, too, of leaves and honeycombs and trees with light

coming through the canopy of leaves like stars and drawings of scenes that would be carved in the outer walls of the building, an infant being stabbed with a sword by a helmeted soldier and Christ's crucifixion.

Is this what you see in the leaf, Uncle?

I asked after trying to fathom the enormity of it. I realized then that I didn't see what Uncle thought I saw and maybe he knew that already.

I knew what his answer would be. I knew the cathedral would kill him, not directly, but indirectly and when he was struck in the Barcelona street not far from where the spires were already going up with rickety scaffolding framing them, I knew. I just knew.

Greg Wright

Greg Wright lives in East Lansing, Michigan, with his beautiful wife, Amy Anderson, and their five lovely plants. His debut novel, *Jerusalem's Remains*, currently awaits publication, though you can read sample chapters on his website (www.gregwright.info), along with his award-winning short fiction, nonfiction, and humor writing. Greg teaches at Michigan State University, where he's developed and taught such classes as creative writing, literature courses, writing workshops for law students, film courses, and integrative humanities courses. He has attended and presented at over a dozen conferences in the United States and Canada on film, literature, and creative writing. Greg wrote "Falling in the Afternoon" at Peter Ho Davies' workshop at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005.

~ Falling in the Afternoon ~

As a track star, you should be able to handle yourself. But you're falling a long way, dizzy-drunk from an afternoon filled with friends and dares—pick up that dead carp, you told Randy Sanders, known as Ydnar Srednas in a backward nickname that turns him into a fake foreign exchange student so he can talk to women if only through playacting, but Randy, called Ydnar, grabbed the dead fat fish and splattered it against a log, fish guts flying—and the dares

have gotten bolder. Now, out of a dare and a lack of seats, you're on an Oldsmobile's roof with Ydnar, whizzing through the country.

You've been elbowing Ydnar, and he's had enough. He slugs your shoulder hard, and you spill over the edge. All the straight A's won't matter now. They'll collect your brains later, scooping you into a closed casket before the black flies come. You hear Ydnar's laugh turn to a gasp, and the faces in the window are open-mouthed as you fall.

All that youth wasted, in one afternoon, too, where you dared the guys to sneak into the movies while you snagged popcorn, the biggest size they sell so those pigs could all fit at the trough, and they did, grabbing thick, greedy handfuls, everybody enjoying the salty, buttery mess as it slathered their faces, hands, and innards. That is, until somebody realized Ydnar never washed his hands after touching that damn dead carp.

After this epiphany, everybody shouted, swore, and spat. Ydnar dared you to pitch the popcorn off the balcony and make vomit noises, the warm, greasy flecks raining on the audience below. Well, of course you did just that. You had to. It was a dare.

And now this gawky kid, who can pass as a foreigner only because nobody popular remembers him, Ydnar Srednas is sending you to an early grave. You breathe in. As if it were a new event—The Speeding Automobile Rooftop Long Jump—you stretch your legs in an attempt not to kill yourself. And it

works: you half-run, half-leap, bounding like an astronaut to the delight of your friends, who're laughing at your stupidity in obeying gravity. Eventually, your pumping legs come to rest.

Your friends spin the Oldsmobile toward you and gun the engine, your second death threat today. You dive into the ditch, rolling before realizing there's swampwater at the bottom. Sopping and slimy, you emerge to your whooping buddies. The near-death element is soon forgotten.

You start a sludge fight, managing a few direct hits. Soon everyone's in the ditch, rolling, wrestling, and laughing as your daring, death-defying fall-slash-leap-slash-flight-slash-self-salvation fades into a legend you'll retell many times. In exhaustion, you all decide to head back. Everyone clambers into the Oldsmobile, filthy and stinking. Ydnar smiles down at you as his grimy hand hoists you to the roof. You look at him, and you have to smile back at this doofussy daredevil you call friend. You have to.

Thomas Zimmerman

Thomas Zimmerman teaches English and directs the Writing Center at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, MI. More than 300 of his poems have appeared in small magazines over the years. He has recent work in *The Shantytown Anomaly*, *Wanderings*, and *Triptych Haiku*. Tom wrote “Grief and Joy” at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005 in a workshop with Sydney Lea.

~ Grief and Joy ~

An American flag
drapes my father’s casket.

My girlfriend’s been on the Pill
and off again.

Legion guys fire their rifles;
one guy plays taps.

She crawls on top of me in bed,
and I enter her.

People sob
and sniff.

“Let me pull out and put on
a rubber before it’s too late.”

My tall niece
cries quietly.

“You don’t have to.
Everything’s OK.”

I reach over
and rub circles on her back.

When I come,
I gasp, then laugh.

She doesn’t look
at me.

She smiles down
on me.

I almost cry.

