



## Kaleidoscope Art & Excerpts Issue 64 – Perspectives on Loss

Cover art: Catherine Bennett,  
*Wash Italian Style*, 2010,  
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### **Biographical Notes**

## Featured Essay

### ***Outroll, Outmaneuver, Outlast***

Peg Daniels

“Sorry, pookie, I wet the bed.”

Gary’s voice rips me from sleep. Nauseous and disoriented, I grope for the walkie-talkie on the night table and press the talk button. “Can a person die from being woken up at the wrong part of the sleep cycle?”

Gary’s laugh crackles through the walkie-talkie. He doesn’t realize that, at the moment, I hope the answer is yes—or that someone would go ahead and shoot me. I’ve heard it said that a person’s capacity to handle stress can be likened to a rain barrel. Well, Gary’s been peeing into my barrel all day, and I’ve reached overflow.

I haul my fifty-year-old body out of bed. In the dark, I slide my hand along the walls and stumble out of the unfamiliar bedroom and into the unfamiliar living room, to the hospital bed placed in the apartment by the Outpatient Day Program staff. A table lamp is on, and Gary, his arms no longer bone-thin but not yet of his normal musculature, is pulling on the far bed rail to haul himself upright. Naked except for a yellow T-shirt reading “Outroll, Outmaneuver, Outlast,” he pushes down on the bed with his hands and hops his forevermore numb butt sideways to a dry spot. A urine-blot is revealed. A big sopping Rorschach test. What do I see in it? Myself, drowning in urine. Gary was supposed to thread a catheter into his penis at midnight, only minutes away, but his bladder wasn’t able to wait. Again.

I trudge to the bathroom to get Gary a wet washcloth and a towel so he can clean himself.

“Maybe you’ve got an infection,” I say.

“We’ll call the hospital in the morning.”

“I’d like to throw you right back into the hospital.”

Gary laughs, and because he thinks that’s funny, because it’ll only add more drops to both our barrels if I stay a crab-ass, I chuckle, though I sorely wish tossing him back into the hospital was possible. This day, the day of his discharge, fifteen weeks after his car accident, started off on the wrong foot—I suppose that should be “wheel”—and we’ve been spinning in circles ever since.

Shortly before nine a.m., I’d walked into Gary’s room at the spinal cord injury rehab hospital, only to find him on his back in bed instead of his usual up-and-at-’em self.

“When Karen turned me this morning,” he says, “she found a red spot on my thigh. She thought it might be a first-stage pressure ulcer.”

I drop my rolling portfolio and rush over, get my nose down and peer at a three-inch-diameter pale pink area. “It’s a lump.”

“Yeah, now Karen thinks it’s a bug bite. She put in a call to Dr. Shen.”

I bat Gary’s shoulder. “Cripes, give me a heart attack, why don’t you?”

At the hospital Gary was first helicoptered to, the nurses were remiss in turning him. I didn't even know Gary should be turned. By the time I was told that he had an ulcer on his sacrum—God knows how long after he got it—it was so severe that this second hospital performed surgery. Now we have to pay for it, and I'm not only talking about the \$130,000 bill or the extra hospitalization. I'm talking the yearlong post-surgery restrictions. They impede Gary's progress toward developing the skills for independent living, while I'm the one who shoulders the extra labor—and these shoulders ain't what they used to be.

I prod the smooth pink spot. "I dunno, Gary. My guess is, you tore a muscle." I don't ask Gary to speculate how that could've happened, he being unable to move or feel anything below nipple level.

Dr. Shen wheels in, his injury one level worse than Gary's. He feels the lump, says to put ice on it and stay put, spins a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree wheelie, and races away. I can't move fast enough to throw myself in front of his chair and ask him what the deal is.

No point packing up until we know Gary will be discharged, so I take my laptop from my rolling portfolio and set it on Gary's bedside table. I blog the previous day's activities: Gary and I together got officially checked off to do transfers between wheelchair and car. Gary didn't get checked off to do any kind of transfer entirely on his own. Gary went on a baseball outing with fellow patients and embarked on a solo, perilous journey through the crowds to the concession stand and returned triumphant with a hotdog.

"Won't be long now until you can continue writing your novel," Gary calls to me, lying in bed viewing his laptop.

Hard to imagine taking up fiction again. When I got the call about Gary's accident and was running around throwing things in the car for an extended stay away from home, I threw in a boxful of notes for my novel. I've never looked at them. Writing a mystery, once my greatest passion, seemed a trifling pursuit, selfish, with Gary lying with his spine cut in half.

"I'm glad you've been able to continue some sort of writing during this time," Gary adds.

Those first days, my biggest fear was that Gary could still die. My second biggest fear—well, other than the stress causing me to relapse into illness—was that the accident would break his spirit. Perhaps I was projecting. Fourteen years ago, I came down with severe chronic fatigue syndrome. The first, worst years, I'd essentially been bedridden, life passing me by. I didn't want Gary to experience such loneliness. So, I emailed: family, close friends, math department colleagues, then, hell, I hijacked the entire email list of the annual math conference Gary attends—and I used to attend before my illness forced me to take disability retirement. I began the blog as an efficient way to respond to everyone's emails and to apprise them of Gary's condition.

I soon discovered I feed on blogging. It gets me out of my head, keeps my courage up. Because my audience includes my and Gary's mothers and siblings, the blog disciplines me to seek out silver linings, and to polish tarnish with humor.

Not that I ignore the clouds. To keep those cards and letters coming—ostensibly for Gary—I open up on the blog. I shared my blackest moment: three days after the accident, Easter, a day whose message of hope I found meaningless, cruel. I took my readers on an emotional roller coaster of Gary's medical progress and setbacks of the first month. And since rehab began, they've seen us lay, brick by brick, the foundation for our new lives—resurrection, after all.

"Hey, look at this, pookie, we're famous," Gary calls. He nods at his laptop.

We're front page news on the electronic version of our hometown paper.

"How do you like the last quote of mine?" Gary says.

I read: "I was never depressed," Professor Gruenhagen said, attributing much of that to his wife. "It's much, much harder to go through this alone."

I blot my eyes on my sleeve. "I like it very much, pookie. But I'm not sure it's true. I don't think you're the type to get depressed."

"It is true, I *would* be depressed." Gary reaches out an arm, and we hug, both with the waterworks going.

A couple weeks back, the assistant chaplain told me it says a lot I'm here with Gary, that many people can't handle dealing with a family member who's suffered this kind of accident. The chaplain's words reminded me of when I'd joined an internet chronic fatigue syndrome support group and found out that spouses were leaving their ill partners right and left. Gary stuck by me, with no guarantee I'd recover; it was years before things stopped getting worse and more years before things started to turn around.

Gary gives me another squeeze. "I especially love your last quote," he says.

I read: "I have always thought of him as the most wonderful person in the world, so it's not like I feel burdened helping him."

My guts roil. Certainly, the "most wonderful" part is true. And, I've enjoyed rehab, learning right along with Gary, helping him develop his skills—and turning into a harder taskmaster than anyone on staff, Gary jokes. He's imitated me talking to the therapists and nurses. "Are you sure he doesn't need more weight on the rickshaw machine?" "Yes, he can do another hour of therapy without a break."

So "not feeling burdened" *has* been true. Which I'm thankful for, since then I didn't have to lie to the Mikette Wallace interviewer—I couldn't believe the wet-behind-the-ears twerp asked me if I found dealing with my husband a burden.

But the test is to come. I thought Gary would be much further along at discharge.

"You *are* the most wonderful person in the world," I say.

"No, you are," he says.

"Okay, I am," I say, knowing he will laugh.

A couple hours later, Gary's doctor agrees with my diagnosis of a torn muscle and says to ignore it and that Gary is good to go. I wish he would've told us that earlier. For the next two weeks Gary and I are participating in the hospital's Day Program, which we hope will ease our transition to operating independently of hospital care; I'd wanted to get settled into the Day Program apartment as soon as possible. I console myself with the reminder that the time didn't go totally down the tubes: I used every minute to craft my blog post. I've uploaded all the pictures from yesterday's graduation ceremony, where I cried as Gary wheeled in to *Chariots of Fire*. From the Skin Care Team, Gary received a "Shiny Hiny" award—a certificate in the shape of a butt and covered with aluminum foil; I feel this award is partly mine, since early on in the post-op stage I took over dressing his wound and was always fussing at his nurses over whether they'd positioned him far enough over on his side. From the OTs and PTs he got a "Most Likely To Need A Helmet While

Doing Wheelies” certificate, this for falling over backwards while practicing unsupervised and smacking his head on the floor and nearly causing me to have a heart attack.

I roll Gary’s wheelchair to the bed, angle it, and lock the wheel locks. Gary hops his butt to the edge of the bed and uses his hands to lower his legs over the side and position his feet: left one on the chair’s foot plate, right one on the floor. I stand behind Gary and wedge my hands under his sit bones. Thank goodness Gary has progressed to the point where I’m not providing the majority of the lift. Gary is down to one-twenty-six from a pre-accident one-forty-five, but I weigh only a hundred. Not to mention my bad back and my chronic fatigue syndrome, which, while having moderated, is still hovering over my head.

One hand on the bed, the other on the wheelchair, Gary uses his arms to swing his upper body from side to side in the way he’s been taught and, on the count of three, he pushes off the bed with his hand. With my support, he makes a controlled landing onto the chair.

Karen, Gary’s head nurse, totters in with a mountain of empty boxes. I begin packing Gary’s belongings. *Hanes* men’s lounge pants, easier for us to get Gary into; t-shirts and sweatshirts, easier than button-downs; DVDs and tapes and players and books, all having gathered dust since rehab began ten weeks ago—though they saw plenty of use the month prior, when Gary was flat on his back hooked to a ventilator; a drawer chock-full of chocolate bars, I having mentioned on my blog that Gary is a chocoholic.

And I pack Gary’s medical supplies. Tons and tons of medical supplies. Bowel program, bladder program, skin care program, reacher tools, etcetera. No more will Gary simply sit on a toilet and do his thing, no more will he naturally wiggle around to relieve the pressure on various parts of his skin, no more will he stand and grab for something he wants.

I glance at him, then stare. “Your crotch is wet.”

Gary looks down at himself. “I can’t believe this.”

Gary is peeing into his wheelchair, his first ever bladder accident. I cover his bed with towels, and we transfer him back into it. Because of his sacral surgery, he isn’t allowed to have his legs bent past a certain angle, so instead of his going through the rigamarole of pulling and sliding one leg, then the other, onto the bed, I have to—careful of my back—pick up his legs for him and then help him get his pants off. He lies on his right side and I lower the pants on the left side a few inches until they won’t go any farther. He swings his arms up and over a few times until he’s built the momentum to flop onto his back. Then, instead of doing a similar arm routine, he reaches around and grabs my butt to help roll himself onto his left side.

“That’s an illegal move,” I say.

He waggles his eyebrows. “Whatever works.”

## Personal Essay

### *A Hierarchy of Grief*

Carolyn Roy-Bornstein

Mary was the first one to tell me that our children had been in an accident.

“Where are Neil and Trista?”

“They should have gotten to your house by now.”

“Two kids were hit on Ferry Road.”

I ran all the way to the crash scene through the snow. My feet were freezing; no time to don socks. The ambulances had left by the time I got there. Someone took me to the hospital where I gave my name to a nurse behind the glass of a triage booth.

“My boy was hit on Ferry Road,” I told her. She looked awkwardly down at her feet. “Wait right there,” she said and disappeared. That’s when Mary blew in. Mary did not stop at the little glass window. She did not give her name to the nurse. She did not wait right there. She just plowed on by.

“Where’s my daughter?” she screamed and barreled her way into the ER. I followed her, feeling like a bad mother for following the rules.

A nurse came and led us to our children. Their cubicles were side by side. Trista’s cubicle was filled with sound: doctors barking orders, monitors beeping, Mary crying. Neil’s was silent. I pulled aside his curtain and stepped in. He was all alone, lying on a stretcher with a sheet pulled up to his neck. His clothes lay in piles around him on the floor, cut from his body in haste. I moved to his side and touched his forehead. His eyes flew open.

“Hi, Mom,” he said, before drifting back into unconsciousness. I was filled with relief. He knew me. I looked at his perfect face and ran my hand gingerly along his skull, feeling for blood or pieces of glass. But there was none. Later, when they told me about his CAT scan results—a fractured skull, a bleeding brain—I would remember thinking: *But how can he have brain damage when he doesn’t even have dirt in his hair?*

The activity in Trista’s cubicle next door was increasing. They were strapping her to a stretcher, tucking her equipment alongside her, readying her for the helicopter transfer into town. She was on a ventilator. Mary was wailing in a puddle on the floor. Trista’s brother Bud was pounding his fist into the palm of his hand saying over and over, “I’ll kill him. I’ll kill him.” (I still did not know that the kids had been hit by a drunk driver: a hit and run.) I bent over Trista’s stretcher and looked into her eyes. There was ointment in them keeping them moist. Her pupils yawned widely despite the ER’s fluorescent glare. I tried not to register what that meant, but I knew she was not going to make it. (Her parents would take her off life support the next day.) I kissed her goodbye and went back to my son.

He was now grimacing in pain from an open leg fracture and fighting the collar on his neck. His head was taped to two big blocks of foam, restricting his movements. He shivered, naked under a skimpy sheet. I was getting mixed messages from the local doctors. One minute they were telling me his only injury was a broken leg. The next, his brain was bleeding and he, too, would be transferred into town. I was scared. He was making less sense by the minute. He thought he was in a gym. I worried about things like his personality, his IQ. But when I shared my fears with my husband, he stated the obvious.

“But honey, he’s alive.”

I took off my coat and draped it over his thin shoulders and laid my body on top of his. I wanted to free him, to warm him, to take away his pain. I was already grieving for everything Neil would go through and everything he would lose.

But loss is relative and even in those early hours, I felt my grief being tempered with thoughts of Trista. How Mary would give anything to listen to her voice, even if she were complaining. How she would rather feel her daughter cold and shivering than just plain cold. My grief felt constricted in comparison to hers. How dare I grieve at all. How fraudulent it felt. Like I was hijacking the very word from someone who knew true loss.

*But honey, he's alive.*

I had never met Mary before our children started dating. I was a relative newcomer to Newburyport, having moved there just eight years before. Newburyport is the sort of town where you're an outsider if you weren't born there, even if you'd lived there thirty years. Mary had lived there all her life.

I don't remember the first time I met her. Maybe at a soccer game. Or at her house. Or mine. Dropping Neil off or picking him up. Or maybe it was before the semi-formal, snapping pictures together of our kids. In any case, you couldn't call us friends. We only had our children in common.

Then the accident happened and it forced our families into the spotlight together. It gave us common enemies: the drunk driver, the procurer of alcohol, the liquor store. It sent us on dates through the courts. The same reporters hounded us. The same detectives questioned us. The same lawyers called us.

But while the accident forced us into a certain kind of intimacy, the very different fates of our children sat between us like a crowbar, ready to pry us apart—to widen a potential space into an uncrossable gulf. Trista was gone. Nothing could bring her back, but nothing will bring back the Neil I used to know either. His personality has changed. He doesn't laugh as much or tell jokes. His friends from high school sensed it right away. They didn't know how to relate to him anymore. The ones from his theater group, who once gathered around his makeshift bed in the living room, entertaining him with dances and songs, started coming around less often. Eventually they stopped coming by at all.

Five years after the accident, Neil still suffers from depression, takes medication daily, and sees a therapist every week. Neil tries to visit Mary whenever he's in town. I've never asked Mary directly, but I imagine when she looks at Neil, she sees the kid who went to the prom, the high school graduate, the college student—all the things that Trista will never be. Her husband David even once said to me, "Aside from setting off a few metal detectors at the airport, Neil's all set." No meanness of spirit. No acrimony. Just telling it like he sees it. Neil caught a break.

And he is lucky. I'll grant David that, and so are we. Lucky and grateful. But even gratitude is not without some measure of guilt. I was raised a Catholic. I was raised never to say, "Thank God that wasn't me. Or thank God that wasn't my child." I was taught that being grateful that something hadn't happened to you essentially amounted to being glad that it had happened to someone else. Concrete, naïve thinking, no doubt. Somewhere on a par with, "Don't step on the crack or you'll break your mother's back." But religious dogma runs deep and trumps common sense on many levels. So here I am, stuck in the middle, Mary on one shoulder telling me I should be grateful, God on the other saying, "Don't you dare."

## Poetry

### ***But My Legs Remember that Road***

Cort Bledsoe

After Huntington's Disease settled in  
like an uninvited guest, my mother started  
her walks. Back and forth, down the gravel road  
from our house to the cattle gap, from the gap  
to my Aunt's house, from my Aunt's, back.  
It wasn't so much that she was trying to outpace the disease;  
she was trying to remember the way home,  
grinding each step into the gravel,  
working it into her legs until they could remember for her.

I was young when this all started.  
I knew only that her father died with his fist print  
still buried in the metal of a car door,  
so deep and perfect you could see the outline  
of his wedding ring,  
though he could not recall his wife's name.

She wrote, as well. Every evening, after dinner,  
she copied one line after another on college ruled paper:  
her name, her birth-date, her children's names, her husband's;  
things she could remember. We kept  
these pages in her old hope chest  
with her wedding gown, her photos.

But my legs also learned that road, tagging  
behind her like a stray calf, the dust  
that tasted like unsweetened chocolate,  
the jerk of her stops and starts, the *chorea*  
of her path, crisscrossing the gravel like a dance floor  
as she fought her way back into control.

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## Poetry

### *Madison Pub*

Michael Northen

Ed and I shake the water from our hats  
As record rain follows us through the restaurant door.  
We hang Mom's jacket and cane on a coat hook  
And hoist her to the bar stool  
At a table in the Madison Pub,  
our ark against these times.  
Two Yuengling drafts and a hot tea fortify us  
And for a while the water drowns  
The iniquities in Iraq, the genocide in Sudan  
The sexual prejudice in our own land  
As through the window we watch the deluge descend  
Over the track of the train that brought us here.

Ed and I talk of smaller things:  
His last shift fighting fires  
My work with disabilities  
The distance between California and the east,  
Thatching together our thoughts after so many years.  
Mom looks on, the half-blind, half-deaf prophet  
With a French dip sandwich  
Repeating between bites the same old tales  
As though each time they were new.

As we step out the rain still falls as obstinately  
As bullets and body parts fall over Baghdad  
But in the water our feet touch ground  
And somewhere in the wind, we hear a raven's caw  
And smell the scent of olive leaves  
Blowing in from Ararat.

## Fiction

### *Dadalus*

Franz Knupfer

A strange old man stood by the road with his hand over his heart, his lips moving, as if he was reciting the *Pledge of Allegiance*. A little girl in a stroller watched him. So did her mother and a group of people going the other way. When they asked me what he was doing, I didn't understand them at first, and when I did, I told them that the old man was my father. He wasn't even old, only in his mid-fifties. He wore a thick overcoat. A woolen skullcap kept his head warm and covered the hook-shaped scar that wrapped from his temple to the back of his head.

When he did these things, I felt him slipping away from me, and I no longer really knew who he was. Maybe he didn't either. He'd changed in ways I couldn't understand, much as I wanted to. So much for mind-body dualism. Descartes never had a chunk of his brain carved out and put under a microscope. The biopsy had told us what we all feared: this moon rock was teeming and alive with strangers.

I held his hand, took him home. We'd gotten enough gifts for my little boy, Logan, and I knew I'd kept Dad out too long. Plus we had special plans. We knew we shouldn't drink, but we planned to anyway. It was the holidays. Dad's seventh Christmas post-diagnosis. In Dad's cedarwood liquor cabinet there was a bottle of dark green absinthe that I'd shipped from Prague during a summer trip there, before I met Mara, before we had Logan. That fall, after returning from my travels, Dad and I drank half the bottle. I was in my early twenties then and we were brimming with good health, just learning to be friends. Then Dad was diagnosed with a malignant ependymoma. I had my surgery a year later, when I lost the last of my natural hearing. Nothing really sounded natural with the cochlear implant, but at least I could understand what people said to me.

My father still wrote poetry, or tried to. He sat at his laptop at the dining room table as he tried to round up herds of letters. I thought he was hard at work but then he gave me a questioning look.

"This thing was just turned on a week ago," he said. His laptop had turned itself off and he was trying to turn it back on. The screen lit up, gray like purgatory. His features softened and glowed in the light of the screen. Then he spelled words in the air with his finger. He seemed to be reading the invisible imprints he'd left behind. He showed me nuggets like *belk*, *crup*, and *mot*, his hand trembling as he held up the paper.

"What do they mean?" he asked.

"Those aren't words, Dad."

He seemed incredulous that they didn't mean anything, so we looked at his edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, two thick editions with words so tiny we needed to use the magnifying glass that came with the books. There was a button in the handle of the glass so that a square of light shone on the miniature words, magnifying and illuminating them.

"I can't believe this. *Crup*. The rump of a horse."

"What?"

"It means a horse's butt." I smiled and gave him a bug-eyed look. *Look Dad, this is supposed to be funny*. He laughed soundlessly, as if trying to whisper with his mouth hanging open.

We discovered that *belk* meant vomit. And *mot*—a witty, incisive remark. These were our daily revelations when we spent the winter holidays together. These revelations usually involved finding something—words, lost pills, an old record, the source of a draft of cold air. They were tiny things but they provided my father tremendous relief.

“That can’t be it.” He was spelling something in the air again. “Nope, not it.”

Though Dad was twice my age, we didn’t look that different. He had less hair than me but I was already almost bald. He had a scar above his left ear, I had one above my right. His head was mottled with scars as if the radiation had been applied with a meat tenderizer. My scar was neat and tidy. When I rubbed my fingers over it, I could feel where the computer chip was nestled into my skull.

Both my beautiful wife and my beautiful mother thought we were a charming pair, further proof that women are forgiving of such oddities. I was a healthier, more robotic version of Dad. Sometimes Mara called me R2Dad2. Logan liked to attach fridge magnets to my head. I often prayed, to no particular god, that Logan would live out his life with his head still in one piece. Mara was so worried before he was born—would he be deaf like me? Would his little head get sawed open and implanted, like mine? I had this glorious vision of having a sign language partner, a partner in crime. But Logan was a normal, healthy child. Nothing wrong with him! Part of me remained afraid for him, because of what had happened to Dad, what had happened to me.

\* \* \*

That night we planned to drink the rest of the absinthe, but we ended up rupturing a *cassoulet*. It was the day after the winter solstice. Mara and my mother took Logan for a night of pizza and pounding plastic gophers with plastic hammers, which, at Logan’s age, were still transcendental experiences.

As soon as I’d given Logan a goodbye kiss and explained, as best as I could to a three-year-old, my absence from a night of delirious fun, I realized that Dad had disappeared. Through the picture window in the living room, I watched Mara pulling out of the driveway. The snow had drifted up against the pines in the yard. We’d gotten six inches the day before, and were due for another six that night. A Christmas tree was wedged between the couch and the window. Beneath it were large, hollow-sounding gifts, mostly for Logan.

I found Dad in the garage with a green pot in his hands. “I have a surprise for you,” he said. The pot was full of white beans soaked in water.

“What’s the surprise?” I asked.

“They’re huh-huh-hari. . .” He set the pot on the kitchen counter and tried to spell the word with his finger.

I tapped on the magnet behind my ear, as if that might help me understand him. I wore what looked like a hearing aid, a tiny computer attached with a braided wire to a magnetic transmitter that clung to the side of my head. The other magnet was on the inside, a fact that gave Logan no end of joy. My cochlear implant.

“Helicons. Helicopters. Helios.” I had no idea what he was getting at.

“*Haricots*. That’s it. *Haricots*.”

“*Haricots*?” Why these words? Why did he insist on pursuing the outer fringes of his once vast vocabulary? We consulted his file folder of mystery words, pictures, poems. The page he showed

me was old and yellowed, splotted with food. The date in the upper corner was October 19, 1998, before our surgeries. It was a recipe for *cassoulet*, written in my father's cramped handwriting. *Haricots*. He meant beans.

It was more than a recipe. There were notes on what had happened later that night, and I remembered everything. We'd listened to the mysterious aleatoric music of the Estonian composer Arvo Part. We drank absinthe while I regaled him with stories of Budapest, Prague, and Tallinn. Dad's tumor must've been growing even then, and there was an unsettling fact I hadn't admitted to myself: my hearing had gotten worse while I was in Europe. Later, drunk on absinthe and wine, he'd turned out the lights and we lay shoulder to shoulder in the dark as the music swelled over us. He'd cried, as he sometimes did when he listened to beautiful music, and he'd written, in the margins of his recipe, "William couldn't hear the bells." He was talking about me. The music was *tintinnabula*, triads of notes that sounded like bells. I couldn't hear the bells then, but I could now. With the implant, they sounded like raccoons in a garbage can.

I looked at the pot of beans and realized the arc that the evening must take. Dad had planned the *cassoulet*, but we'd also drink the absinthe and listen to *Spiegel im Spiegel*. We'd make the best of the time we still had together.

\* \* \*

While Dad pored over his recipes, I went to the specialty butcher just down the road and picked up the duck fat that my mother had specially ordered a few days before. Large snowflakes were falling on the windshield and melting. I hoped the weather wouldn't get worse. I didn't want Mara driving home in a storm. The radio was on and I tried to make sense of the commentator. It was something about Afghanistan.

When I got back, Dad was sitting at the dining room table, taking notes on the *cassoulet*. Cookbooks covered the table, all opened to the correct page. I was proud of him for getting this far on his own.

"Did you get lamb sausages?"

"No," I said. "You didn't ask for them."

"I wanted to make *Cassoulet de Toulouse*." When Dad talked about food or wine, he sounded like his old self, before he had aphasia and lost the words.

We began a variation on the *Cassoulet de Castelnaudary* instead. Dad turned on the radio so we could listen to Christmas music. It sounded like the chorus was singing: *Dad is dying, let's drive that far away!*

It was a miracle he'd lived so long, that he'd made it seven years. He was too anemic for more radiation, too weak for more surgery. What was growing in his brain was resistant to chemo. We hadn't gotten an updated prognosis yet, and I didn't really want one. *Dad is dying, let's drive that far away!* It was like a refrain to a jolly carol.

I browned the meats in a saucepan while Dad explained how to prepare the beans. Mostly I just followed the recipe.

"Just take the huh-huh—"

"*Haricots*."

“And put them on top of that. Yes, like that. No, not like that.”

I cut the onions, carrots, and garlic. Dad looked into the pot as if trying to divine his future. He was lost in thought, lost in *something*. After his first surgery, he'd been like that for a long time. It was six months before he could even put together a sentence.

## Personal Essay

### ***Blind Man Sees Art***

David Kingsbury

“What is this? Some sort of sick joke?” I snorted when I first heard we were scheduled for an outing to the Museum of Fine Arts. “Maybe they’ll take us to Logan too so we can try flying the planes!” I was a couple of months into a three month rehab program for the blind a few miles outside Boston. Anyhow, I told myself, I guess I should keep an open mind. Besides, it probably beats working my fingers numb in Braille class.

The exhibit was on the bas-reliefs of Donatello, a 15th century Italian sculptor. We were given flimsy cloth gloves a couple of sizes too small, and asked to put them on so we could feel some of the sculptures. This blind guy isn’t very good at figuring out thumbs from pinky fingers, so I had to have somebody put the gloves on my hands for me.

Donatello’s main gig is Madonna and Child. As far as I am concerned, if you’ve seen one Madonna and Child, you’ve seen ’em all. Back when I had sight, I’d seen plenty; moon-faced Renaissance Madonna’s, gaunt-faced medieval ones, gilded, glowing Byzantine ones. Hinted slivers of haloes, Frisbee haloes. Not to mention fleshy, Baroque Baby Jesus’ and laconic, bolt upright, mini-adult Jesus’ with two digits solemnly raised just like when I was reciting my Cub Scout oath years ago. So Madonna and Child scenes leave me a little nonplussed.

We entered the gallery. The docent guided my hand to Mary’s nose, then one of her ears. I was told that some other thing I was touching was hair. A slight swell indicated a breast. I pulled back my hand with a start, repelled at the notion of publicly groping the Mother of God. Then the toes of Baby Jesus. Other than the Madonna’s nose and the baby toes, I was taking all the rest on faith. I knew what Madonna and Child scenes looked like, but this one felt like a Picasso cubist mess, with toes where ears should be and eyes where mouths should be, and boobs I wanted nothing to do with. Scrambled eggs.

There I was—standing in front of the work of an Italian master, more frustrated than inspired. Never liked cubism much. And even less if it was supposed to be Renaissance. Beyond a few little baby toes and a nubby nose, I couldn’t get a handle on anything.

On the way back to blind school in a game effort to appear upbeat, I told a new friend, DeAnn, that the experience was passable, and at least, it was a good thing to know that this program for blind people existed. Maybe I’d go back some time. I sensed her nodding agreement, always the sunny optimist.

Before I became blind, living in Italy, I had come to love visits to art museums and exploring the countless churches scattered throughout the cities and small towns. The principal church in any Italian city or village is called a *duomo*. The *duomo* can be an imposing world famous cathedral such as those of Florence or Milan. Or it can be a postage stamp dimensioned edifice in a tiny hamlet, just so long as it’s the biggest church in town. I loved to explore the Roman hinterlands with my children on weekends, stopping at every *duomo* I could find. After a while, my kids grew exasperated, and upon entering a town, would moan, “No Dad, not another *duomo*! Can’t we find a McDonald’s instead?”

I would walk into the majestic Baroque churches of Rome, trying to put myself in the head of a 17th century peasant pilgrim visiting the big city for the first time. If all I knew was my smoky thatched roof hovel that I shared with my chickens and pigs, how would I react to the ceiling of the *Chiesa di Jesu*’s ornate vision of sky and heaven? I would try to rid myself of my jaded 21st century media

saturated experiences, try to forget MTV videos, slick Benetton ads, and the magic of instant replay. And even as a non-believer, I couldn't help but sense the power and glory of God.

When I became blind, I willed myself to forget my museum and church visits. My oversized art books were removed from my coffee table and returned to a bookcase, where they collected dust alongside my other orphaned books.

When DeAnn and I learned an Edward Hopper exhibit was coming to town, we decided to give the museum another chance. Sighted, I had liked Hopper. His bleak urban landscapes and ghostlike characters appealed to my longstanding sense of rootlessness—as well as to my more recent despair. I remembered scenes of sturdy but still seemingly fragile women, sitting forlornly at nondescript tenement facades or grimy factory blocks. Also, blank-faced waiters and diners and sidewalk sitters, weighed down by the grinding pressure of unbearably ordinary lives. This beat Baby Jesus' toes by a wide margin.

Besides, with DeAnn I would try just about anything. Before meeting her, Blind World was bleak and threatening. Now with her, it was becoming an adventure. Inhabiting this dark world is like a treadmill. You have to keep moving to stand still. You have to move even faster to advance. And standing still means quickly slipping backwards. For both of us, moving forward was sometimes frightening. Yet returning to where we had been just a few short months before was scarier still. Trying for trying's sake was the best way to beat the treadmill.

We met our docent, Phyllis, at a side entrance of the museum. She was calm, friendly, and knowledgeable. DeAnn and I each took an elbow as Phyllis guided us through the bustling galleries. The heavy double doors were a challenge. Sometimes she would pass us through one at a time, other times we would form a soul train, my hand on her shoulder, and DeAnn in turn with her hand on mine. Stairs were easier. Phyllis only had to let us loose at the bottom and we would tappy-tap our canes up until the stairs ran out.

Phyllis began the tour by planting us in front of a series of Gloucester farm and lighthouse scenes. Hopper had lived a tranquil and pleasant life, she explained, dividing his time between Greenwich Village in the winters and Gloucester and later Cape Cod in the summers. He had been happily married. This surprised me. I wasn't familiar with his sunny land and seascapes. I had imagined him as an unkempt middle-aged man, clad in wife beater T-shirt and boxer shorts, with the neon light of a greasy spoon diner blink-blinking through the window of his cramped rented room. Perhaps a milder version of Stanley Kowalski. Not the fiery Brando, staggering through the dark urban wasteland wailing "Stella! Stella!" but quietly sullen and cynical instead. None of that, I was told. Just a happily married man who seemed to glide through the turbulence of the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and the Second World War unscathed by it all. Odd indeed, considering the subject matter that had made him one of the preeminent American painters of the twentieth century.

While unfamiliar with his summer motifs, the image of *Nighthawks* was burned indelibly onto my mind. Not all the details, but enough to remind me how the painting stirred emotions when I could see it. I remembered that the diner resembled a fish aquarium in a dark room. This because the diner was seen through a long picture window, brilliantly lit and starkly contrasted against a late night city street backdrop. I could remember the white-shirted waiter, but not the placement of the seated customers. But I recollected the waiter's lack of expression as he approached them. So when you remember that much, and the mood is set, it is not so hard to fill in the other details. With a little imagination, I was able to feel the same feelings blind that I had when I was sighted. And after all, art is ultimately about feeling, not just seeing.

There was also a painting I think was called *Brooklyn*. The observer looks in at a married couple through an apartment window. One feels like a Peeping Tom, a voyeur. It moved me in a different

way than *Nighthawks*. Without any prior memory of it, I visualized the tension and despair in the painting and wove together a story about the couple, who they were and what they were feeling. Phyllis had said that Hopper dealt in ambiguity. Nothing was clear. Everything was left to the observer to fill in. Of course, the sighted observer sees the painting and has the job of coming up with a story. DeAnn and I had to paint the painting too.

So how does a sighted person temporarily lend his eyes to a blind one to “see” art? It’s about explicitly voicing what you see but rarely consciously thinking it through, and more or less in the sequence that you follow as you unpeel layer after layer of visual information. It’s less about being able to marshal historical and technical facts, or highbrow notions of this or that intellectual school, and more about conveying your passion for the art to others. And above all, it’s about permitting yourself sufficient time to share and savor the artistic wine with friends, rather than hurriedly gulping it down alone.

My imagination told me that the woman was elegantly dressed, perhaps in a red dress, anticipating a night on the town. She was sitting at a baby grand piano incongruously placed in a drab apartment. All dressed up and no place to go. I sensed that she had hoped for more in her life and marriage. Otherwise, why would she have had such a fancy piano in such a plain setting? She wanted more excitement, as well as more appreciation from her husband for her aspirations.

The husband made a modest but respectable living. He felt harried and pestered by his wife. He would come home from work exhausted, and had few diversions. Reading the paper was one of them, and he was not going to let his nagging wife get in the way. If she had taken the trouble to get all dressed up, he knew he would have to take her out. He would eventually do so, but grudgingly. It would undoubtedly cost him some money he didn’t have. This only made him bury himself in the paper with more determination. He worked and worked; she spent and spent. His efforts were taken for granted. After all, he bought her the dumb piano and she hardly ever played it. So they would go out that evening, but, dammit, she would bide her time until he was good and ready!

Perhaps they had once been in love; maybe they still were. But things were changing, and they were in the process of becoming strangers in this suffocating cage of an apartment. When he got a raise, they would start having children. In part, because that is just what people did. But also to escape into separate lives by pouring their emotions into the children, rather than facing each other.

## Poetry

### ***Interpretation of Edward Hopper's Painting Night Hawks***

Hillary Bartholomew

Desolation  
in an all night café  
empty,  
but for the night man,  
insipid  
as the coffee he pours  
the simulacrum of the lonely  
where lost lives watch their failures  
eddy within the confines  
of chipped enamel cups.

The could haves, should haves  
never realized,  
stillborn,  
unable to matriculate to reality.  
Inadequacies painted in bygone beige and  
midnight despair  
forked from white plates  
on a formica counter,  
in an all night diner  
in a forgotten city  
where the sun never rises  
and only the ghosts of vanished dreams reside.

## Fiction

### ***Going Home Again***

Delores Noe Lunceford

Dr. Penelope DeLore woke to the wretched realization that she had not, after all, died in the night, the only escape, she figured, from a stroke. Same white nursing home room, same narrow white bed, same squeaky cartwheels from the hall. Her own spit bitter in her throat, she looked from under her lashes. There was the Girl-ghost. For a startled second, she thought it was Debbie, but no, Debbie had never dressed like that. Nobody had since the forties. Of course, the Girl was always there, somewhere, but Penelope had never been able to see her before.

Young, even pretty. Why hadn't she known she was pretty back when she was the Girl?

Dr. DeLore was an educated woman—didn't believe in ghosts, certainly not ghosts of herself when she hadn't even had the grace to die yet. Yes, she was old, but not dead yet.

"Hallucination," she said aloud.

"Still tryin' to talk yourself out of remembering?" the Girl asked.

"Certainly. Why would I want to remember the past? It was not a happy time."

"I ain't going to let you forget. I reckon what you used to be makes you what you are today."

"Old with a half-brain and entombed in a nursing home?"

"Stroke done that." The Girl grinned, strong white teeth revealed behind generous red lips. "But Dr. DeLore," her voice was mocking, "has got to remember little Penlope Preston and get over being so stuck-up."

"Just disappear by the time I wake up. You're a split-brain image. Dreary enough remembering that slovenly voice all my life without looking at my awkward young self."

"Okey, dokey. I'll be gone. But you know you kind of like the way you used to look."

"I concede it. Now shut up."

She slept.

\* \* \*

*"Penlope, get out of that bed. Going to miss that school bus again." Mama's voice. Had to get out of bed. But her left leg didn't want to move.*

*"Mama, please, please, please, cain't you just call me Penny? Everone makes fun of the way you say my name."*

*"I named you; say it any way I want to. Grits on the back eye of the stove."*

*The school bus would be full of kids shoving and hollering, crammed in like pork-and-beans, and no room even in the aisles. The grits would rise sour in her throat by the time they'd rocked that yellow tin can to school.*

*Then she'd have to go in and sit at that ink-stained wooden desk on the third-grade side of the classroom. They'd put her back a grade. She didn't care. She didn't. She'd just show them. She'd never learn their old times tables—not if it hare-lipped the whole Sinking Creek Grade School.*

*She'd found a literature book some high school kid had abandoned on the bus. Backwards and forwards she took it everyday, hid it on her lap, read it during school—better than that Elson Gray Reader she'd practically memorized. Better than the babyish Peter and Peggy stories they'd stuck her in the year before. Hard to understand this one in places, especially the MACBETH, but she got most of it. Loved the poetry.*

“My hair is white but not with years, / Nor grew it white in a single night, / As men's have grown with sudden fears. . .” Her lips moved in a hoarse whisper.

\* \* \*

“Are you awake, Dr. DeLore?”

It was one of the male nurses. Not supposed to say that. Attendants. Only one real RN in a nursing home. The attendants called the women patients by their first names. She hadn't liked hearing a pinky-faced boy first-naming her. Probably had lifted an eyebrow or something, because the young man had been Dr.-De-Loring her ever since. Well, maybe she hadn't lifted an eyebrow. Didn't know if she could.

Couldn't lift her left leg. They'd told her she had to exercise the whole left side: leg and arm and eye. Said she suffered from left-side neglect. The brain had simply forgotten there was a left side.

“Yes, I'm awake.”

“Social Services lady says you haven't had any visitors—not one. Is there some family member I could call for you?”

“No.”

Debbie didn't need to know her mother was half a woman now. Maybe wouldn't care.

“Is it time for something? Therapy, medicine?”

“Sort of. Doctor wants you to be out of this room every day for a while. I'm going to wheel you out to the lobby with the other ladies.”

She gave a quick look around. The Girl wasn't in sight now. What had she meant calling her stuck-up?

The lobby was mauve and blue with sunshine reddening the carpet, and little bubbles of light dancing in the air. French doors opened out on an emerald lawn bordered with begonias—bronze and scarlet.

Visually lovely, but a cacophony of misery came from the circle of wheelchair-caged women.

“Help me. Help me. Help me.”

The shriveled lady listed to the left and her litany continued hour after hour. Another called out a telephone number to anyone who passed by. Seemed to think someone had only to dial it and she'd be returned to life and health.

"Dial 111-3792 for a resurrection," Penny said.

"What's that, Doc?"

Doc. Better than Penlope.

In fact, she'd had a visitor yesterday. Another Doc. Dr. Cliff Watkins from the University. Her chief. Head of her department. Made small talk, finally remembered his name. His visit had made her remember. Going to have to retire now. She'd taught English literature. Probably learned it all from that school bus book.

"One-one-one, three-seven-nine-two!" The telephone woman cawed it at her as she was being wheeled back to her room.

And the Girl's voice whispered, "Telephone."

They'd gotten a telephone just as she entered high school.

\* \* \*

*"You back on that phone, girl? It's a four-party line; you cain't tie it up all night."*

*"Sue-Ellen and me doin' our English homework. Gotta write a composition on EVANGELINE."*

*"I don't know Evangeline, but Sue-Ellen and Penlope need to do their own work. Pure-dee selfish to stay on that phone when other folks might need it. You been on that line way yonder too long. Hang up, and I mean now."*

\* \* \*

"All right. I remember. Satisfied? I remember I talked like an ignorant hillbilly. I embarrassed myself in college with my language. Is that what you're so eager to have me remember?"

She hadn't known how she and her friends pronounced *can't* as *cain't*. Once in the crowded little dorm room, suffering over a verb conjugation test, she had moaned, "*I cain't do this.*"

And her Michigan roommate had said, "*Yes, you cain.*"

And she'd heard it. She talked like Daisy Mae from Dogpatch, and she hadn't even known it. Her face burned remembering the rest of the conversation—

## Poetry

### *Easter Dinner*

Nathalie Ketterer

Their mother coughs her  
correcting-manners cough.  
And it's back to  
"Please pass the potatoes."  
I take the shrieking teapot  
from the stove and pour tea.

We sit in sorrow  
for a few moments.  
I miss you, Jim, especially  
on a major holiday.  
Yes, I can move your picture  
behind another, when my heart  
ignites, but I know  
it's hiding there.  
Then I feel guilty for  
displacing it. Not only did  
this family lose a son, a husband,  
and a father with your death,  
but the family design is ripped apart,  
its wholeness shattered,  
and because of that each  
of the members feels diminished.

Everything's out of tune  
because there is white on the ground.  
A bird calls, but its sound falls  
into the snow.

## Fiction

### *Hope*

William Cass

I'd been the assistant principal at that elementary school for almost a year before I met Mrs. Olson. I'd talked with her on the phone a few times when her grandson, Timmy, had gotten in trouble and had been sent to me for discipline. He was in second grade, a tough little guy who came to school clean but left dirty and had a tendency to stick his nose where it didn't belong. I liked him, though, because he never made any excuses or tried to pass blame for whatever he was sent to see me about. "Yup," he'd say, "I done it. It was wrong, and I'm sorry about it, too. Go ahead and punish me. I know I got it coming." And his grandma's response when I called her was usually pretty similar. "Do whatever you like with him," she'd say. "Keep him after school, if you want. I'd appreciate it. He needs to learn. Maybe just so he's home for supper."

I finally asked her to come in for what we called a Student Study Team meeting one afternoon after school in the spring. These were meetings we had with the school psychologist, counselor, teacher, and various specialists to brainstorm interventions for kids who were struggling academically or socially. Timmy's teacher had been to see me recently because he'd fallen behind in reading and had gotten into a couple of pretty good fights on the playground. Mrs. Olson came to the conference room door holding Timmy's hand—a small, bent woman with short white hair, a firm jaw, and kind, weary eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses. She asked, "I hope it's okay for him to wait outside here. I'm afraid I have no sitter."

The counselor led our meeting while I recorded ideas on a chart we used on an overhead projector. She started with the usual information-gathering segment, which, she pointed out, could include anything of significance regarding Timmy, going as far back as pregnancy or birth.

Mrs. Olson shrugged and said, "Well, not much to tell. His mom run off when he wasn't yet a year. Haven't heard from her since. And his dad—that's my son—he's been in and out of jail his whole life. He's in a halfway house now somewhere up the coast. I've tried to get him to take a hand with Tim, but you know." She shrugged again. "So, it's just really been him and me."

"Hmm," the counselor said. "Do you think there was any substance abuse with his mother?"

Mrs. Olson snorted a little laugh. "Pretty near nothing but."

"Physical abuse or neglect?"

She looked hard at the counselor for a moment, then said, "No. Didn't I just tell you he's been with me his whole life?"

We moved on to academic information and school concerns, modifications that had already been tried, and determined some new action steps to implement. These included a before school reading program, participation in a friendship group with the counselor, and a behavior incentive chart that would be used in the classroom and at home. Afterwards, we brought Timmy in and explained these things to him. When we'd finished, he squinted up his eyes at us and said, "Okay." Then he jumped down from the chair, tugged at his grandma's elbow, and asked, "Can we go now? I'm hungry." I smiled at them both.

My son's home nurse was waiting with him for me when I got back to my office. It was already a few minutes past the end of her shift, but she'd gone ahead and gotten his extension tube

connected and started his 4:00 p.m. feeding. She adjusted the connection at the trach ring from his portable oxygen tank and reduced the volume to two liters.

I said, "Sorry I'm late."

"No worries." She ruffled Charlie's hair. "He's doing okay. Secretions haven't been too thick, pale yellow. I've only had to suction him five or six times since this morning."

"Been on O2 most of the day?"

She shook her head. "On and off. Never more than three liters, and mostly when he's been sleeping."

He was sleeping then, with both his eyes and mouth half open. I stroked the flat back of his head and bent down to kiss his cheek.

I asked, "Sats been okay?"

"Mid to low 90s with the oxygen. Heart rate and resps a little elevated, but nothing serious."

"Seizures?"

"Two small ones. Upon waking, like always. Minute or so each."

"He cry?"

She looked at me. "A little, you know. I just held him and he was fine pretty quickly. And the weather is changing, so that's probably involved. He might be okay."

"I'll call you if we end up in the ER again."

"Not before 5:00 a.m., please." She smiled. "Well, I gotta go make the gang jambalaya. They got a hankering for Cajun."

"Thanks, Cathy."

"You bet." She ruffled Charlie's hair again and said, "You be good for your old man tonight. Let him get some sleep."

She left, and I wheeled him over next to my desk and went back to work. The front office had closed, and it was the quiet time of day when I could get the most done. I started in on the school safety plan that had been due the week before when Charlie had last been admitted to the hospital for his most recent pneumonia. His release had been a reluctant one for the staff there, but his doctor knew that I had Cathy's help and all the equipment they had there except IV meds. And Charlie had run the course on those and had made it through the requisite one night without requiring oxygen. But now with the occasional O2 need and increased secretions, we were afraid that he was knocking on the door of something again. It was the same old story of not being sure if he was completely over the last infection or perhaps into something new.

We'd been admitted for something every two or three months since he was born. That had been nine years earlier, and he'd already almost doubled the life expectancy they'd predicted for him in the NICU. But as his pulmonologist had explained early on, it was almost always a pneumonia that was the final straw for kids like Charlie—the accumulated cruel geometry of an ever-weakening immune system coupled with increased susceptibility to infection. He'd pretty much run the gamut

on available meds, and although the tracheotomy had helped a great deal, there were no longer too many care alternatives left.

I finished the disaster plan, filled out some maintenance requests, returned a few phone messages, and then pushed Charlie across the street to our home shortly after six. I changed his diaper, suctioned him well, and put him on the mister while he finished his last feeding. I heated a can of soup and ate it from the pot at the kitchen counter while I flipped through the morning's newspaper. Then I sat on the couch and snuggled Charlie in my lap while I watched a basketball game on TV until it was time to start his bedtime routine: bath, diaper change, pajamas, suction, nebulizer, vibrating vest, suction, trach care, anti-seizure meds, brush teeth, suction, rock and sing, then bolster him in place in bed, attach the continuous sat monitor and adjust the alarms, attach the mister, and kiss him goodnight. His numbers were okay, so I got in bed myself in the next room with the doors open between us and tried to read. Really all I did, like usual, was listen to the beep of the sat monitor and wait for the alarm to sound.

Finally, I turned the light off and looked out through the opening in the curtain at the starless night sky. For a while, I thought of my wife, wondered where she was, if she was still with the man she'd left with, what she was doing. Then I heard the whimper from Charlie that meant the onset of a seizure and went in to hold him until it passed. The monitor only sounded a handful of times the rest of the night, and I was able to reposition him to get his numbers back on two of those occasions without suctioning. So, all in all, it was a pretty good night, nothing to complain about.

Aside from a few minor referrals in the cafeteria, the interventions seemed to help with Timmy, and I didn't see him or his grandma again until a month later. The office was already closed after school and it was almost time for Cathy to bring Charlie over, when the night custodian came to my door to tell me that a student had gotten hurt on the playground. "I'd already locked the gate," he said, "so the kid must have snuck in. Says he smacked his head trying to skateboard down the slide. I think he's okay, though."

I left a scribbled note for Cathy on my office door, grabbed an icepack and ace bandage from the health office, and jogged out to the playground. Timmy was sitting in the woodchips next to the slide rubbing the back of his head. He looked up at me when he heard me coming and tried to wipe away his tears with the back of his free hand.

I knelt next to him and asked, "You all right?"

He nodded and sniffed loudly.

"Let me see your head." I lifted his hand away and touched the bump. It wasn't too bad. I smacked the icepack against my thigh to start it getting cold, then set it gently over the lump. Timmy winced and tried to turn his head away.

"Stay still," I told him, "and leave that on there. It'll help keep the swelling down."

"Do what he tells you, Timmy, and no fussing."

I looked up to see the tiny figure of Mrs. Olson standing next to us with her hands on her hips and a scowl across her face. Timmy looked up, too, and sheepishly reached back to hold the icepack in place.

"He was late to come on home," she said, "and his skateboard was gone, so I went out looking for him. Found the opening in the fence over there where he got through. I can put together the rest of it. Thanks."

I said, "Maybe you should take him to the doctor to have him checked out."

She shook her head. "Nope, ain't got insurance for that."

I heard the clack of Charlie's wheelchair coming across the playground and watched Cathy push him up to the edge of the woodchips. She knelt down next to us and asked, "He okay?"

"This is my son and his nurse, Cathy," I told them. "Timmy, let Cathy look at your head."

She checked his lump, replaced the icepack, then secured it carefully with the ace bandage. "I think you'll be all right. Can you stand up?"

"Do as you're told, Timmy," his grandma said. "And do it now."

He averted his eyes as he climbed slowly to his feet and let Cathy check over the rest of him.

"Well," she said to Mrs. Olson. "All his limbs seem to be attached, but you should be careful with a head injury, you know. Keep the ice on and check him every couple of hours overnight."

"I'll set a clock."

"That's a good idea," Cathy told her. "And be careful driving him home."

Mrs. Olson shook her head. "Actually, I got no car neither. But we'll be careful walking."

"How far?"

"Only over next to the post office."

Cathy took a turn shaking her head. "That won't do." She looked at me. "Why don't you run them home, and I'll wait with Charlie. I can stay."

Mrs. Olson began to complain, but I'd already started back across the playground. When I pulled up in front of the school, they were all waiting there on the sidewalk. Cathy helped Timmy into the back and then his grandma got in the front holding the skateboard. She closed the door, turned to look at me, and said, "I really appreciate this."

I turned the car towards the post office and she told me their address. Then she said quietly, "My husband was named Charlie. That's a nice name. Your son has your eyes."

We made the short drive and I pulled into the alley where she directed. I helped Timmy out of the car and held his hand as we followed her through a back gate and into a room attached to the side of a garage. It may have been twelve feet square with a tiny bathroom to the side. I could see some plates and glasses stacked in the bathroom sink. There was a microwave on a tray table with a hot plate on top of it and a little refrigerator underneath. Two more tray tables sat in front of folding patio chairs facing a small TV. An unmade Murphy bed was already pulled down and filled most of the rest of the room. She fussed with the covers and pillows on one side of it and we settled Timmy into it. He closed his eyes and seemed to be asleep immediately.

She smoothed the hair across his forehead tenderly, and adjusted the pillows behind his head. "You won't need to worry about no punishment for him," she told me. "I'll take care of that. This was after school hours and on my watch. Won't be no skateboard until at least summer and he'll be grounded for starters. No TV neither."

I nodded and said, "He can read instead."

"You bet he can." She smiled. "You get out of here and get back to your own boy and his mama."

"Just him," I told her. "He and I."

She nodded slowly. "No other children?"

I shook my head. We looked at each other. Timmy had begun to snore.

"Remember to check on him," I said and stepped out the door.

She followed me and said, "Wait." She bent over and pulled some short plants from a big clay pot outside the door. She shook the dirt off the ends of them and handed them to me. "This here is rosemary and that's basil. My son planted them before he went away last. He's got a green thumb." She smiled. "Suppose you recognize the parsley."

"That's very nice of you," I said.

She stepped back into the doorway. "I appreciate your help. We do."

## Featured Art

### ***Adapt and Overcome***

Sandy Palmer

*“Once we accept life isn’t always perfect we can get on with living it.”*

~Steven Harrison

The intriguing and powerful art of Steven Harrison offers a glimpse into the fear, confusion, pain, and disbelief he experienced following a traumatic injury on July 4, 1998. A day of celebrating independence was turned upside-down for the British 31-year-old who was spending his third summer in the United States with friends. Enjoying a day of boating, he checked out some “attractive girls in bikinis” and then checked the depth gauge, which read 14.2 feet, before diving off the side of the boat. Expecting a splash followed by a rush of cool water on his body, he was confused when everything felt “blank.” Opening his eyes, he saw an arm floating in the murky yellow-green water. *I must have broken it*, he thought. Attempting to swim to the surface he realized he couldn’t move. “Somehow I knew I had broken my neck.” He held his breath and waited for someone to pull him from the water. He fractured the fourth and sixth cervical vertebrae in his neck and he’d completely shattered the fifth.

In the days following Harrison’s injury, he was filled with angst and frustration at his inability to articulate what he was experiencing. A common misconception is that people with spinal cord injuries are completely numb below the point of injury. To the contrary, Harrison was filled with unpleasant sensations and he struggled to process what was going on and to explain it to those around him. With a background in art he decided that one day he would paint the experience and visually communicate what words could not.

In rehab, thirteen days after the injury, he was encouraged to draw. The halo screwed into his head limited his movement and it was hard to see. He couldn’t grasp the pencil so they taped it to his hand and he was only able to scratch a few marks onto the paper (actual image shown on his website). Fatigued by the energy it took and disheartened by the result, it would be months before he attempted to draw again, but eventually he did.

On August 28, with the halo still screwed into his head, he was flown back to the UK. One year after his injury he went back to school to pursue art and was given a creative outlet for self-expression. Prior to his accident he was right-handed. After his accident he became ambidextrous—sketching loosely with his right hand and painting with his left. With greater dexterity and control in his left hand he is now able to hold the paintbrush in his hand without the use of a splint. He had natural talent and was a perfectionist who, prior to his injury, had mastered techniques but had never used art as a way to express his feelings or emotions. Now he was fueled by a desire to portray his traumatic experience through art.

While studying the work of Frida Kahlo, who struggled with physical and emotional pain, he was particularly intrigued by her painting, *Broken Column*. Reproducing the image was therapeutic for him. He would later paint *Feeling, Sensation* as his response to her painting—exposing his body, revealing the effects of his spinal cord injury, visually depicting the impact it had on each area and what he was experiencing. He used art as a tool to communicate what he was feeling. It also gave him the opportunity to face the trauma, creatively reproduce it, and move beyond it. Physicians had done what they could to mend his broken body and now he was healing himself from within, restoring a sense of well-being. Adapting. Overcoming.

One piece led to another and he created a powerful body of work that takes the viewer on a chronological journey that begins the day of his accident and reveals the intricacies of life after a spinal cord injury. Harrison's fear, agony, and shock are alarmingly evident in *Awakening*. Overexaggerated screws are driven into a head that appears to be severed from its body. His agony and fear are evident and, in turn, the image is distressing. *Feeling is Believing* is a life-size representation of Harrison suspended in midair, lying on an invisible hospital bed that he cannot feel, jagged thorns descend from his neck, representing the area of intense pain and unrelenting spasms. *28 Days preservation* is a boxed collection of various medical items and medications that are resupplied every 28 days to sustain his life. *The Answer* provides a response to the question that seems to be on the minds of everyone: Can you have sex? Each piece of work allowed the artist to sort through the raw emotions and desensitize himself to the trauma he endured.

Hoping to stimulate conversations about paralysis, connect with others who have similar injuries, dispel misconceptions, and provide answers to nagging questions, his work represents paralysis through art. The collection has been presented in two solo exhibitions (2007 and 2008) sponsored by the Arts Council of England.

After completing his bachelor's degree he completed a course in counseling and then pursued a master's degree in art psychotherapy. After surviving a life-altering accident and experiencing the benefit of art as therapy in his own life he knew he would have a lot to offer patients and he completed his master's degree in July, 2010.



**The shape of the canvas symbolizes physical transformation. The greater width at the top represents life, able-bodied, unrestricted with infinite possibilities. The canvas tapers down throughout the traumatic event as ability diminishes down to the preservation of life itself.**

**My preconceived life is suddenly ripped apart, like pages torn from a book. The first image represents photos taken just moments before the accident. I dive into the water and a page is ripped away. I see an arm, still, motionless. I recognize it as my own. Is it broken? Why can't I move it? Why can't I move anything? Another tear. Two figures stand above me, faces filled with worry. Tiredness overcomes me as I drift in and out of consciousness (represented by black). Amidst the darkness, I glimpse a paramedic sign and an inquisitive green light shines bright above my head like an alien abduction. Later I realize it was one of the scanners that revealed the extent of my damaged bones and tissue.**

**Steven Harrison, *Transition*, 2001, oil on canvas, 138 x 60 cm**



This piece shows my initial shock when I regained consciousness after surgery. I have attempted to convey severe pain and anxiety—to capture a moment when the mind is unable to comprehend logical thought. The portrait is of the head and neck as it was the extent of my sensation at the time. The neck muscles are straining against a heavy void while reaching out for the body from which it has been separated. I am screaming with pain and distress. My eyes look upwards, examining the frame above my head. Most prominent are the three oversized screws. There were four surgical screws that held the halo frame in place, yet my morphine-clouded mind could not comprehend or process the thought of anything other than the over-exaggerated screws and the extreme pain they created.

Steven Harrison, *Awakening*, 2001, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm.



In the waking moments I try to make sense of what is real. Shoulders shudder violently with jabbing pains beneath my taut, stretched neck, beyond which I feel nothing, only slight tingling around my feet. This is a visible representation of the sensations I felt as my nervous system attempted to repair itself. The sculpture is suspended within an installation which consists of a head and incomplete lower legs. The head is attached to a halo frame showing what could either be seen or felt at that time. Muscles in the neck are tensed and ripped. The jagged thorn structure symbolizes the intense pain of muscle spasms. Knees to feet are in flesh tones, as seen from my restricted viewpoint. Beneath they are hollow and black, suggesting being void of sensation and colored to symbolize pins and needles or burning sensations.

Steven Harrison, *Feeling is Believing*, 2007 multi-media installation with plaster cast, life size



Steven Harrison, *On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Day*, 2002, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm

Three days post-injury, I am in the Intensive Care Unit. Screws driven into my head are attached to a scaffold, my only comfort is the soft wool vest felt around my neck. Eyes closed my mind reaches out – feeling for my body. My body is static in the center of the room, levitating at bed height. Twinkling colored lights ripple amidst a deep, dark blood red body that adopts a pose my mind perceives it to be in. With eyes closed the bed cannot be seen, nothing could be felt other than an estranged body. In my mind the bed does not exist because I cannot feel it. Head movement is restrained by the halo, morphine blurred my vision and I was only able to focus on the drip bag beside my head, unsure of where its line went. The room is blurred, grey and bleak even though I am engulfed in the painfully bright light from overhead.



Steven Harrison, *Feeling, Sensation*, 2000, oil on canvas, 50 x 80 cm

Behind me is Clifton Lake, the place where my transformation occurred. Skin dictates sense of touch. Muscles are visible indicating greater movement than sensation however incomplete and restricted. The remainder of my arms and hands are a cold blue, void of any movement or feeling. My hardened chest balances precariously on a swiveling spinal tower. No longer worn, the halo is a reminder of the torturous restraint that maintained life and promoted recovery, with it the pins that were screwed into my skull, leaving physical and psychological scarring. Broken terra cotta forms the shape of my legs, communicating a hardened sensation, though at times it feels like they are being fired in a kiln. Fine wires connect from chest to groin to hard, hollow legs, symbolic of unpredictable muscle spasms that jerk violently every minute of every hour of every day. My hardened face shows no emotion as I stare back at the viewer, an expression I have mastered knowing I am being judged upon being seated in my wheelchair. The composition is surreal as are the feelings and sensations I experience.



Steven Harrison, *28 Days preservation*, 2005 installation with 14 boxes of medical paraphernalia

A collection of 14 boxes containing medical items. My home environment betrays the influence of my injury with associated equipment and supplies hidden from sight. A life dictated by the dependence on medication and medical consumables that are resupplied every 28 days. The items have been mounted and displayed as precious objects—a visual evaluation of the magnitude of the paraphernalia I ingest, consume, or use on a daily basis to sustain life.



Steven Harrison, *Balance*, 2006, installation with acrylic and resin, 8.5 cm<sup>3</sup>

Goose pimples cover my arms accompanied by the stench of toxic sweat. My heartbeat slows and begins to pound and my throat pulses heavily. It's coming... I take the orange capsule and burst it between my teeth. I taste the sickeningly sweet juice under my tongue knowing it will ease the imminent, horrifying pain I am about to endure. Take two capsules and my heart will slow further until it beats no more. Do nothing, the terrifying nightmare continues until the blood vessels rupture and explode.

*Balance refers to a life-threatening condition called autonomic dysreflexia that can occur in people with spinal cord injuries at T5 and above. It can occur when an irritating stimulus is introduced to the body below the level of injury, such as an overfull bladder. Failure to alleviate the irritation and reduce blood pressure may lead to cerebral hemorrhage, stroke, or death.*

## Fiction

### *The Vision*

Edward McDermott

When his hands betrayed him, Thomas stepped back and waited for the attack to pass. Instead, the weakness became stronger and the charcoal stick fell from his fingers to smash on the floor.

The naked young woman who lay back on the couch did not move. She lay with her hands behind her head, the pose lifting her nipples high in the air. She lay there, motionless in the clear, cold, northern light, a creature of warmth, gazing at the ceiling.

Thomas had studied her with detached interest, probing beyond reality for the vision that lay within his soul. On the easel, he had started the outline with sharp strokes of the charcoal, glancing at her more to renew his vision than to drink in her beauty, although she was indeed beautiful. Then the first tremors began.

"That will be all for now, Maria," Thomas said, hiding from the model as he swept up the charcoal shards.

Maria slipped into a terrycloth robe that she pulled from behind the couch. Once clothed, she burst into the youthful, innocent energy that had been absent as she posed. "It's almost lunch. I'm hungry. I don't know why, but posing makes me famished. I'm glad you called a stop. I was beginning to cramp up. Would you like to continue after lunch?"

"No, you can go," Thomas replied, "but I'll want you back tomorrow morning. The light is better in the morning."

"Great. I'll be here by seven o'clock. Bye," she said as she left, and took the springtime with her.

Thomas didn't watch her leave but turned back to the canvas. He felt strange, working with a new model. Claudia had modeled for him so often that they had become simpatico. She would notice the little differences, and then his secret would be no more.

The canvas showed some promise. The harsh strokes mirrored his internal vision. If the hands behaved, he could complete the rough work, and begin to paint tomorrow at first light. Usually, his hands behaved better in the mornings.

Claudia must have seen the model leave for she stood just outside the door, afraid to enter what had once been their private bower. When he caught her eye, Claudia reluctantly stepped into the studio, carrying a tray.

"I brought you lunch, just soup and sandwiches." After a moment, she said, "I made enough for two."

Thomas knew she wanted him to ask her in, to talk with her about the work and to eat with her, but he was afraid she would notice the tremors. Ashamed of himself and his fear, he walked over to her, put his arms around her, and softly nibbled at her ear. "Do you know how much I love you?" he asked.

"No," she said, pulling back. "I have grown old. No more foolishness. Eat your lunch and paint some more. She is very beautiful."

"She is a child. You are beautiful, and it's a gorgeous day. I've an appointment with Dr. Meinter. After that, we could go for a picnic in the country. Painting is boring. Maybe I'll give it up."

"Hush. You could no more give up painting than I could stop loving you. Now, eat your lunch. When you come home, we'll go on a picnic, if you really want. Do you talk to her? No, don't tell me."

Thomas turned back to the canvas where the figure floated with upswept arms. He could imagine the paint flowing onto the form; first, the broad strokes for the body and its background, then the fine work on the face. He played with it as he ate the soup and sandwich, not noticing that Claudia had selected his favorite bread and cheese.

With his inner eye, he saw two images. One showed a naked angel with magnificent feather wings in righteous anger, holding a spear in one hand, against dark thunderclouds. The other showed a mahogany figure with bat wings holding up an offering, on a background of blue sky and puffy white clouds. Which should he choose? Would his failing hands let him create the image?

After lunch, Thomas drove to the specialist's office, where he was ushered into the inner sanctum with the discreet haste due to a person of his standing.

"Thomas, so good of you to come," the doctor said, as if this were a part of his house. Thomas had never mastered words. Language was not his medium so he remained silent.

"I have the results of your tests. It is, I am afraid, much as I suspected. We have discovered the condition in its earliest stage, and with treatment we can control the degeneration, somewhat. With care, you can live a normal life for many years."

"The hands? The tremors, the weakness?"

"Alas, there is nothing I can do. We can slow the progress, but not reverse it."

"How will it progress?"

"In the more benign form the tremors will become acute and more pervasive over time. The other form progresses much more rapidly. It begins with the tremors, but quickly replaces them with numbness and weakness, first of the hands, then gradually the rest of the body."

"Nothing can halt it?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Then I am dead."

"Don't say that. True, you cannot paint as you have, but you can do many other things. You can tour or teach."

"Twenty years ago, when I couldn't sell a canvas for enough to cover the cost of the paint I'd splashed on it, I wouldn't sell my soul to teaching. Do you expect me to do so now? No."

"You are distraught. Let me suggest a colleague who can counsel you and your wife."

"No. She must not know."

"Why the silence?"

“At first my paintings brought in little. Now their value is fair, but I have never been one to save. I don’t want my Claudia working as a waitress to make ends meet, or living out her retirement on the government’s pittance. I must provide for her.”

“And you?”

“Once my hands are dead, I do not matter,” Thomas said.

## Personal Essay

### *My Secret Brother*

Christopher Bahnsen

We're in mid set, occupying the Tuesday evening slot at Rusty's, a semi-legendary jazz café cordoned by railroad tracks and a woodsy backstreet in Toledo's south end. It's nearly a full house, crowd halfway receptive, not too liquored up, and my Telecaster feels easy in my hands for a change as I blend with my quartet onstage, chunking to a Miles Davis classic, *Solar*. Yeah, things feel right in the pocket tonight.

That all changes when the exit doors open wide, stage left, and a daisy chain of four wheelchairs files in, the first one occupied by my little brother Ben. He is trailed by fellow residents from his direct care center. I recognize the three caregivers, women who have nurtured and doted on Ben for many years. They position the wheelchairs on the tiny dance floor between the stage and the café tables, facing the bandstand. Somehow the women have found out about my steady gig and made it an excuse for a group outing. But I had no warning of this and I forget how to play guitar for long moments. One of the caregivers waves at me; I pretend not to notice.

It had been a chilled scene before, heads bobbing over candlelit tabletops. But now, the audience is an attentive multi-eyed monster boring its gaze forward. Our playing becomes self-conscious, or maybe it's only mine. I'm parked on a stool, stage right, my amp elevated on a milk crate between me and the wall. I try to lose myself in the hard bop groove, chording syncopated rhythms over which our alto saxist can shred. My eyes stay locked on my fret hand, denying Ben's presence like I have for so long. It has always been easier that way.

\* \* \*

Sixth grade. I was on the mound in a Little League game at Friendship Park. It was my first start, and I was vexing batters with a wicked forkball that Dad had shown me during one of our catch sessions. Strikeouts were accumulating nicely. I was in mid windup when I heard my brother's lyrical yelp from the sidelines. Mom had materialized with Ben who was buckled in a stroller, sitting in the grass off third baseline with other lawn-chaired spectators. It was a chilling surprise.

I had told her to never bring Ben to any of my games because I didn't want the attention by association with him. But Mom insisted on witnessing my big day and bringing Ben was the only way she could attend.

My brother's hiccupped joy yips interrupted game flow with a heckler's persistence, making me walk batters until I got pulled and sent out to center field.

Two kids sat behind Ben, mimicking the way he purred nonsensical words. His ticks, screeches, and effusive laughter were a clown act for them. I was at bat when I heard Mom's raised voice. "Do you think cerebral palsy is funny?!" The game went into suspension. I saw her standing over the two kids who shrank from her Hispanic ire, sedate mutes now. My brother's blipped expulsions pierced the silence and the game forged on. I never acknowledged Mom and Ben that day, staying close to my team. Mom hung back, allowing me to be a Judas harboring inconsolable embarrassment. When the game was over she and Ben were gone.

My brother was delivered at St. Vincent's Hospital, three years behind me. Mom was told by the doctor that it might be better to institutionalize him and warned her that kids like Ben usually didn't live very long. Giving a son away wasn't a thought for Mom and Dad: cerebral palsy, a missing left eye, and profound mental retardation mattered not.

Ben has almost no use of his right half—the side where his leg and arm always stay bent, closed for business, atrophied and stiff compared to his virile left limbs that are supra-strengthened from being taxed with double duty. He can't walk but has no trouble scooting on his butt, pulling himself forward with his good leg.

My brother easily wins out as the ornerier sibling. If he could talk maybe he'd tell you different. Growing up in our childhood two-story, Ben liked to storm the kitchen where he could scoot more easily in his rubber pants over the vinyl floor. Opening the lower cupboards, he'd yank out all the pots and pans and sling them helter-skelter over his shoulder. Cookware tantrums were his idea of fun.

Early on we played like ordinary brothers in our own way. I'd lay out my sleeping bag at the top of the second-story stairs, sit on it with Ben in my lap, curl the end of it over us and we'd toboggan down at dangersome speeds. Or I'd turn the piano bench upside down, put Ben inside and whisk him around on the carpet in a makeshift go-cart. Or I'd pretend to be in agony, making loud moaning noises to make him shriek with laughter—he loved it if he thought I was in pain. If I did something he didn't like, which was often, he scratched me with the talon-sharp fingernails of his left hand, or he bit into my arm like it was a BBQ rib. He did it with such explosive puma speed you never saw it coming.

Ben initially had some vision in his only eye but it developed a cataract, and so my parents arranged for an operation. He was up in the surgery room when the doctor came down and told them he wouldn't be able to proceed; Ben's eye was too "mushy" to withstand the operation.

As the cataract stole his sight, my bother's eye started to rove, in constant motion like one of those swiveling spotlights atop a Vegas casino. In blindness, he gained extreme auditory sensitivity, spending much of his downstairs time on the floor in the dining room, absorbing Top 40 through the sound system. He took on a hunched pose, his spine malformed from double scoliosis, head balanced over crossed legs, left side of his face pressed into the spongy cover of a tall stereo speaker. This is how he sat for hours, rapt, mainlining harmonic vibrations, sometimes breaking pose to rock his upper body in time.

I'd step in and DJ when the mood struck, spinning vinyl on the turntable for him. If he didn't like a song he'd tilt his head up and caterwaul and I'd move the stylus over until he started giggling and cooing with approval. Over the years he was at home I exposed him to The Beatles, Boston, Queen, Led Zeppelin, The Jackson 5, Bread, Eric Clapton, Elton John, The Commodores, and some of Dad's jazz albums like Dave Brubeck's *Take Five*, and Ramsey Lewis' *The In Crowd*.

My parent's never asked me to take care of Ben. Even when I was old enough to babysit they didn't shoulder me with the responsibility, instead hiring a trusted high school girl from the neighborhood. I never fed him, or bathed him. I never helped him in or out of his clothes, changed his diapers, or gave him his meds.

I never gave him anything for Christmas or his birthday.

There was one thing though. I always made an effort to pick up his spoon.

## Personal Essay

### *My Son, My Son*

Jill Sadowsky

This is the story of one family, my family, the story of a million families.

For almost eighteen years, people thought of him as normal. For the next sixteen years, they called him mentally ill. We always called our son David. He was ill, vulnerable, and scared. He lost his sanity and grieved for that loss. He lost confidence, suffered harassment, and discrimination. When someone agreed to hire him, they offered such a low salary that it was insulting.

David came to us full of promise, gurgled and flailed his strong arms and legs, grew into a happy child, and honest young man. He received his school-leaving certificate and entered *Zahal*, the Israeli armed forces, with a profile of 97—the highest one can score.

I do not understand what happened, what went wrong, when it started to go wrong. Somewhere in his late teens? 'Classic,' the psychiatrists said. Classic? What did we know of schizophrenia, classic or not? We barely knew the word. In the town in South Africa where I was born, schizophrenia hadn't come to my notice. In Israel where David grew up, mental illness was what the shell-shocked of the Holocaust and our various wars had to deal with. It certainly conjured up no images that we could remotely associate with our strapping, good-looking, six-foot, twenty-two-year-old, first-born.

But, in a strange way, having no preconceptions and having lots of faith in modern medicine, we understood that, like appendicitis, with the proper treatment, he would get better. We understood that this was a medical condition and that, just as many cancers are resistant to some kinds of treatments and responsive to others from the army of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists—clearly, there would be a treatment for David. And, mostly, we understood that just as we could not cause appendicitis or cancer, we could not cause schizophrenia.

But, maybe David's problems had begun much earlier. In the middle of his third year of high school, his grades had started falling and he dropped out of regular school to attend night classes. His explanation: "I need the days for myself." His teacher's explanation: "He's distracted and not living up to his potential." In any event, he passed his examinations and received his school-leaving certificate at the same time as his former classmates. So who knew?

After his discharge from the army, David started and stopped various ventures. That didn't seem unusual. The transition to civilian life often takes time. And when he began studying at the Tel Aviv University and requested earplugs, we were impressed that he was so intent on blocking out noise to concentrate on his studies. How could we know he was trying to still the voices within his head? I only know that within two years of his discharge, David was diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

Our family was in shock. He was in and out of the psychiatric hospital for a year before we heard that diagnosis. The psychiatrist was shocked that we didn't know—not that we'd had much explanation of what we were up against. We believed that although David had entered the hospital sick, he would emerge healthy. At first I kept my thoughts on this subject to myself, touching them like smooth stones in a deep pocket. Later, I spoke out.

The medication regimen began. David tried Thorazine, Haldol, Mellaril. He tried psychotherapy, occupational therapy, dance therapy, group therapy. Yet, he continued to be out of focus, angry,

hostile, then suddenly apathetic and listless. He stopped worrying about his appearance until he looked on the outside like the wild man clawing at him from within.

We tried to understand and cope as best we could. Our two young daughters began to shy away from their older brother. They stopped bringing friends home. They no longer took cookies to him on visiting days at the hospital. They were afraid. We were afraid. We began family therapy at the psychiatric hospital.

“What can we do to help David?” we asked.

*“What do you think you should do?”*

“We don’t know what to do when David becomes violent and abusive.”

*“Well, what do you do?”*

“The girls are afraid to have friends over. They never know when David will start ranting. They never know how he will react to their friends.”

*“Just act normally.”*

And this was what they spent ten years on in graduate school? The silence, thick as wool, wrapped itself about me.

David tried new medications. He took Clozapine and Risperidal. We tried living with him at home, then allowed him to “get on with his life” as one psychiatrist put it and found an apartment for him. I watched him throw out food before it had the chance to cool, convinced that I was trying to poison him. And sometimes he stayed in his bedroom for days, filling me with dread, making me wonder what he was up to. Nightmares galloped into my bed, thundered across my mind.

Meanwhile, the girls did without—without enough time and energy from us. Without vacations, without frills and extras because every available shekel was poured into another prescription, another treatment, another psychiatrist. My husband and I did without too. We minded less.

We tried private, out-of-hospital psychiatrists. We turned to friends and family for support. It turned out that although we knew that David was ill, to most of the world, he was simply crazy and therefore not deserving of much attention. My thirteen-year-old daughter summed it up: “If David’s body were hurting, people would send gifts, but because it is his mind that’s hurting, they throw bricks.”

## Art

### ***Pouring a Different Path***

Sandy Palmer

Closing her eyes, Catherine Bennett visualizes the image she wants to create. Instead of meticulously plotting out each detail with a pencil as she once did, she now maps it out in her mind. Colors splash and swirl around in her head. She envisions each layer, defines every shape, and pours each color. Layer by layer the image becomes clearer and then she begins to execute the plan. She wets the watercolor paper, pours the paint, tilts, spatters, sprays and watches as the colors meld together, revealing the image. Given the choice, Bennett would probably still be creating the realistic images with intricate detail that she used to paint. She wasn't given much of a choice. Despite that, she has decided to embrace some new watercolor techniques and has found that they are less stressful than the focused, detail-oriented method she once relied upon.

The artist was born in Syracuse, New York and notes that in elementary school her illustrations received higher marks than her written reports. She excelled in art throughout high school, received a scholarship, and studied at Syracuse University's School of Art for one year before transferring to Maria Regina College. It was there that she studied a much broader scope of fine art. She wasn't sure what medium she preferred so she explored acrylics, pen and ink, and watercolors, among others, and was considering teaching as a profession. It was a tumultuous time in her life. In need of direction, she sought the advice of a respected Hawaiian professor. "I remember her saying, 'Catherine, you cannot be a master of many things but you can be great in one.' With that hopeful confidence branded in my brain, I continued to trust in my artistic expression."

Bennett married young, withdrew from college before obtaining her degree, and had her first child, Christina. Three more children followed—Maria, Rosario "Roy," and Pasquale "Pat." The importance of faith in her life is evidenced by the meaning behind the naming of each child in honor of Christ, His Mother, the Rosary and Paschal Easter. Valuing family, she feels very fortunate that she was able to stay at home to raise them. While caring for them she somehow found the time to continue expressing her creativity, sometimes using them as the subject of her drawings and paintings. "My four children have always been an inspiration to my art." Once her youngest son, Pat, started school she began to hone her watercolor skills.

She participated in workshops presented by respected watercolor artists like Tom Lynch and Fred Graff, two artists with very different styles. She intently copied every stroke in hopes that she could "mimic greatness." Her skill increased, but she became restless and knew deep down inside that the work wasn't a reflection of her essence. She was replicating their work instead of expressing her own unique style. The artist wanted somehow to communicate the message, "God's spirit remains among us always . . . we are never alone." When she saw the camouflage works of Eli Thomas and Beverly Doolittle, she felt she had found the element she'd been searching for. She began to photograph portraits of people and incorporate an elusive face within a still life or landscape painting. *Spirit of the Grapes* was one of her first camouflage paintings and she says, "it's symbolic of reaching a goal, of expressing a spiritual presence as a statement in my artwork." The image depicts the soft representation of a spirit within the vines. She continued to paint more images with the technique of melding a presence within paintings.

By the time she was in her mid-forties, she had already navigated the challenges of raising four children while completing a degree in graphic design and starting her own art business. Divorced and working full time, she wasn't too concerned when she started experiencing an annoying twitch in her right pinky finger. Then, her right foot began to drag and she started to stumble. She wasn't satisfied with the diagnosis of the first neurologist so she sought the opinion of another, and another. In 2005 she received the same diagnosis three times—Parkinson's disease.



**Catherine Bennett, spirit of the Grapes, 1997 watercolor, 16" x 20"**



**Catherine Bennett, Grace to Go On, 1997, watercolor, 14" x 16"**



**Catherine Bennett, Streets of Abruzzo, 2010, watercolor, 22" x 30"**

## Poetry

### *The Pinochle Players*

Leo Dangle

After supper my sisters and I played  
four-handed pinochle with our parents  
around the kitchen table. We enjoyed  
the variety of changing partners,  
taking turns as players or spectators,  
sitting in for someone who decided  
to go and make popcorn.

The youngest and last to leave home,  
I played three-handed with my mother  
and father, still a good game, one settled  
into an established trio but changing  
with every hand, when two players  
found it in their own interests  
to team up against the third.

In their last years, alone on many nights,  
they discovered they still could play.  
Pinochle was certainly never intended  
for two-handed play, with more cards  
in the deck than two people can hold,  
but they designed their own rules  
using a large kitty or blind and discards.  
I didn't see how it could be much fun,  
always a routine one-on-one competition  
and no mystery, once play started,  
about what cards the other player held.

It had to be more than liking the game  
or keeping a tradition. I know that finding  
they could play two-handed pleased them,  
and maybe they'd found a way to forestall  
thinking about the time when one of them  
would be alone with the unthinkable,  
the game of pinochle as solitaire.

## Poetry

### *Elegy for My Daughter*

Barbara Kussow

Golden retriever,  
the last autumn's gold.  
She and her dog  
covered with leaves.

Her discarding the wig:  
"This thing is too hot."  
Her beautiful baldness,  
and her friends' reverence.

A phantom child I see  
running in the wind  
with grandchildren.  
Another could have been.

A florist in another city,  
another state  
close to a cemetery  
where there are deer

that eat chrysanthemums  
left in a vase.  
My bleeding images.  
My helplessness.

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(now defunct), Fall 2006.  
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## Poetry

### *Caregiver*

Jeff Worley

My mother is melting away,  
a raft of bones.

For a decade, her brittle  
scaffolding has supported

my father's weight, too.  
Now, in the nursing home,

the little left of him is tended  
by hefty women in white. Constant

upheaval of his neural trace,  
behind his eyes all the names

slipping away. My mother goes to him  
every day to ensure his small comforts.

*That's so cold*, he says, of the ice water,  
so she dumps the cubes in a wastebasket

and offers the cold chalice  
again. *Better*, he says, his tongue

telling him all he can know.  
My mother tugs up his blankets

when he gives in again to sleep.  
Then she returns home, the refrigerator

humming its cool song of ham and cheese,  
asparagus, a take-home box of Chinese.

She feeds her cat extravagantly  
and treats herself to all she wants—

two purple grapes. She chews  
slowly and without conviction.

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*Reprinted with permission from the author.*

## Poetry

### ***Mother***

Barbara Crooker

Mid-October, and the sky is a heartless, relentless blue.  
Every day, the sycamores turn a little more golden,  
as if the sky is a celestial toaster turned up high,  
and we are all waiting for it to ding. I am waiting  
for you to come back, to send me a sign. Are you  
the goldfinch at the thistle feeder, shrugged into  
an olive drab cardigan? Or the monarch

hinging and unhinging her stained-glass wings  
as she lights on the chrysanthemums one more time  
before she leaves for Mexico? Are there birds  
where you are? Do you miss the sun?  
You have been gone three months now,  
a quarter of a year. It feels like three minutes;  
it feels like forever. You have missed

this fall, this blaze of glory. Yesterday, I made  
that chicken dish you loved, the one with olives  
and garlic bobbing like small boats  
in the wine-dark sea. I fried up polenta,  
sliced it in golden circles. The woven picnic  
basket where I'd put your foil-covered plate  
is empty. So is my heart.

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