

MICROW



HOME

7: summer 2012

Table of Contents

Images

Name	Image	Page
Doug Mathewson	Untitled	Cover
Anonymous	Nanna & Auntie	3
Paula Lietz	#4	5,6
Leah Givens	California Flowers	7
Dorothee Lang	Home Bench	9
Doug Mathewson	Untitled	10
Linda Hofke	Evil Gnome Home	14
	Fisherman's House Maine	15
	Little House Schorndorf	17
	House in Luxemburg	18
Christopher Woods	Don't Go Past The Picket Fence	19
	Home Again, Home	21
	White Bicycle	22
Kristin Fouquet	Marigny Interiors 5	23
	Marigny Interiors 6	24
	Marigny Interiors 9	25
	Marigny Interiors	25
Aleathia Drehmer	Kiss the Scream	27
	Rusty 361	28
	Lost Lovers	31
Leon Jackson Davenport	Home Country	32
Doug Mathewson	Untitled	33
Claire Ibarra	Flowering Light	34
Paula Lietz	#5	36
	#3	37
Leon Jackson Davenport	Untitled	39

Images

Name	Image	Page
Eric Suhem	House #3	41
	House #5	42, 43
Leah Givens	Puppy	51



Table of Contents

Words

Name	Piece	Page
Michael J. Solender	Editor's Note	6
Linda Simoni-Wastila	Cochinos	7
Dorothee Lang	home (a note from the road)	8
Nicolette Wong	Tesserae	8
Stephen Cooper	A Sonnet of Knowledge, Untitled	9
Ellen Orner	Three Variations on a Theme By Wallace Stevens	11, 12, 13
Jenny Bohatch	Archival Vault	15
James D. Quinton	Three Poems	16
Brad Rose	As You Leave Cataglyphis Bicolor (Saharan Ants)	18 19
Paula Lietz	Two Poems	20
Joseph P. Grant	The Renovation	21
Jennifer Polhemus	Home	22
Michael Smith	Andanza Motel, Anaheim, California	25
Paul Beckman	Dear Mom	26
Linda Hfoke	Hide and Seek	28
Afzal Moolla	Commodities Unknown Masks	29 31
Angel Zapata	The Prayer Sieve	32
Ceildh Devine	The Huntsman Children	33
Gita Smith	The Small Orange Chair	34

Words

Name	Piece	Page
Tyrel Kessinger	Catfish eat people, don't they?	37
Doug Mathewson	Paurl On His Side	40
Len Kuntz	Homebound	42
Cristina del Canto	Rafflesia arnoldi	44
Marjorie Sadin	Totem Poles for Noah	47
	Small Miracles	48
Kate Marie Goff	A Myth Much Prettier Than Home	49
Maude Larke	Three Poems	51, 52
Samuel Cole	Grocery Ballet	53
Cortney Bledsoe	Wal-Mart	55
<i>Contributor Bios</i>		58





Editor's Note:

Home is the place we most associate with self over any other.

It often provides comfort, nurture, shelter, and sanctuary. In a confusing paradox, home often can also be a primary source of conflict, tension, and pain. Others that occupy the very same space we call home motivate and interfere, encourage and terrify, and both understand and are baffled by us as we are by them – all at the same time.

Home can be as large as a continent or as small as a tiny shack barely big enough for a bed.

As a muse, storytellers both run towards and run away from that they call home.

Whatever it offers you, our reader of edition 7, MICROW's summer 2012 compendium, Home is where you'll find splendid imagery, prose, and poetry that will capture your imagination and evoke notions that take you to places that are familiar and not so much.

Home perhaps more than anything else is a state of mind and provides whatever you choose to partake in.

Michael J. Solender, August 2012

Cochinos

By Linda Simoni-Wastila

The garbage bag bumps behind you through the glass-strewn median. You startle when the 18-wheeler barrels past. A cigarette spatters orange on the pavement.

“*Cochinos.*” You stab a soggy diaper. “Pigs. All *Americanos.*”

The watch you found last week shines Indy-Glo green. Two more hours, no more breaks. Rats stare at you, their eyes fearless pinpricks, but you reach around them for the Corona empties, the crumpled McDonald's bags, and wait for dawn to spill, a broken yolk across the desert.

You scrape crushed rabbit from the asphalt, gagging at the smell. Dead animals still get to you, haunting your dreams. Those nights Simona soothes you, reminds you of Spring, when you can quit and pick berries in the valley, then asparagus, almond, and, when the baby comes, grapes. Sometimes you curse yourself for listening to her, for leaving La Paz, but she wanted a better life for the child. It's not her fault construction dried up.

Orange flecks the clouds. The cool breeze reminds you of the *Coromuel* winds, and you try to thank God for this job, but you can't. You can only pray for this shift to end.

You hear the thrum of blowflies before you see the white-swaddled object, larger than the rabbit; a dog, perhaps, or small coyote. At one end, a thatch of black. Your heart races even as your walk slows and somehow, you know, even before you reach down to unwrap the sheet, expose the face, you will never pick trash on a highway again.

Home: Many people—poor, down-trodden, in political peril--leave their nations to make a life in the land of the free. They want a better life, they say, but sometimes what they left behind may be what they wanted all along.



h_{ome}

(a note from the road)

By Dorothee Lang

home
an anchor point

the spot you jump to
when you get lost on a webpage

the place you travel to
when your journey ends

hopefully the place where people live
who think of you
while you wander through space and
time

hopefully the place where you die
at the end of this long journey called
life

surrounded by memories
you brought back home
from all the other places

no place like home

T_{esserae}

By Nicolette Wong

Outside his Park Slope home the trees
straggle flames I am looking between
shadows for his car. No safety in rear
view. Where his license spells Foreign
away from red taxis and his loose grip
round my hand ("No, she lives here.")
on a night long past. To the flying disk
at Prospect Park--How does he catch
their smiles? Such orderly sun for the
day to spill. Fluorescent wraps a future.

His name in book club cork weighty
with friends. The bottle is lighter in my
throat. Suck air for words at the
world's end or a tesserae doorplate:
tomorrow in his sight, ghost strings in
mine.



A Sonnet of Knowledge **By Stephen Cooper**

I know this pavement I walk upon; I have walked it all my life.
 I know without looking down where the myriad lines, cracks and depressions are.
 I know when to shift my feet to avoid them, like a surefooted mountain goat.
 I know where I am going to, and what I need to do.
 I know what I want to achieve today, but others don't.
 I know I am getting closer to where I want to be, another couple of hundred meters and I'll be at the bank.
 I know who will be behind the counter and I know today will be no different for the chief cashier.
 I know it will be historically different for me.

He knows why I am coming to see him today.
 He knows I am coming to take away something he has kept for me for quite a while.
 He knows why I want it.
 He knows my heartache, and most pertinent of all, the cost of a funeral.

Untitled **By Stephen Cooper**

'If only I could extend this reach and embrace this country of mine,
 I would tenderly hold and caress to my body, with eyes closed, sweet sublime.
 If only for a second, then I'd shake my Ulster free,
 Of all green foreign trappings that make life such a misery for me.'



THREE VARIATIONS

ON A THEME BY WALLACE STEVENS

By Ellen Orner

RONDEAU

To be unmoored the gossips peg
as odious. So hitch your nag,
or self, to the required post
and be discovered in your seacoast
pied-a-terre - or waving county flags

at August fairs (your bed might sag
at home.) For dreams of tigers' fangs
in crimson weather, it is best
to be unmoored

from cozy slippers gossips drag
on dainty feet. The matrons rag
on ruffian sailors, give utmost
praise to hearth and homestead enclosed,

impervious to all harangue
to be unmoored.

GRAVITAS

To be unmoored is odious,
wise elders say. A radius
set from a quay for voyage calm
and prosperous, (the bed at home
arranged to perfect coziness,

is de rigeur. That would be swell, unless
one craves crimson skies, ferocious
tigers; then one must leave to roam,
to be unmoored

from domiciles of harmonious
hymns in do-mi-sol, from pious
homilies of pies a la mode,
from slippered matrons singing odes
to having too much gravitas
to be unmoored.

ANTHEM: VERITY OF TEN O'CLOCK

To be unmoored is rumored odious.

A hitching post is de rigeur if one is
to be found by the world - or self.

A quay's a must, from whence to sail
in circles, calm seas and prosperous *voyage*,
the eiderdown all arranged at home.

Revolve, return, once revolution's come full circle,
back to C, to do-mi-sol that flaunts
the fluffy-slipper verity of rumor!

Ascertained domicile of flesh and soul
rescinds the odious Tigers and baboons,
rubs out red weather fragrance of high seas



Archival Vault
by Jenny Bohatch

She knows that there are photos from her childhood that include people other than herself. This makes the selection of pictures her parents choose to display all the more disturbing. Returning home is like entering a shrine created in her memory. She wears her graduation cap and gown in the dining room, her prom dress in the family room, and a set of pearls she'd no longer touch in the den. The slightly forced smile in her final high school photo catches the eye of anyone trying to look at the computer monitor. Going upstairs is visiting a past she'd rather forget: a garish first communion dress, that awkward eighth grade portrait, and an embarrassing naked baby photo that was on display downstairs longer than was comfortable. Sometimes she worries that she died and this is all a sad attempt to keep her memory alive instead of the sad obsession of people who talk to their only child on the phone several times a week.

Her former bedroom is untouched, like the rooms of missing children kept preserved by optimistic parents. Whenever she returns, she cringes at how welcoming it is to see the tacky souvenirs from her brief travels, the softness of her frilly bedspread, and the dusty furniture adorned with flowers. Their home never saw many visitors, and having a guest in this room now would break an eerie but familiar spell.

Even in her room, the only photo on display is one of herself, age three, taken by her grandparents. It sits in a tarnished frame next to a plastic dinosaur and a set of nesting dolls, arranged by size, each doll growing emptier the larger it gets. She'll have to get rid of most of it some day. She can't imagine it in her own home, visible to friends and potential mates, but she won't disturb the cobwebs yet.



**Three Poems
By James D. Quinton**

**eulogy to summer (in d
minor)**

can't wait for the night
to descend

I feel safe with darkness
and its mystery
around me

during daylight hours
hidden under bed sheets
eye mask on
ear plugs in

frightened

waiting for dusk
when I know they'll be
less people around
when I'll be able to
breathe again

dead on the inside
longing for
autumn and winter

a lifetime with nothing
to do

fingertips cold

sitting in
the dimming
evening light
almost dark

the cold of
an unheated house
seeping in
around me

bleak
electronic beats
play on the
stereo
the only sound
breaking
what would
be an
unearthly silence

trying to write
trying to
make
things happen

but
the only thing
that is happening
is that my
fingertips are
getting cold
and my
inspiration
is miles away

**when something's dead, its
died**

walls are wet
a white fur grows

corroding wires

slugs leave a glistening silver trail
over cheap carpets

cobwebs hang from ceilings
as spiders watch on

windows rattle in their frames
a freezing breeze enters from
fissures
around the front door

everything smells of damp

we cough on dust
cleaning in vain

chemicals don't work

bricks crumbling
turning to powder when touched

when something's dead, its died





As You Leave
By Brad Rose

The afternoon burns forward, toward me, then away.
Undetected in the daylight, the stars plunge
into the tan-knuckled foothills.
The sky's blue emptiness follows.

Our home, but I don't recognize a thing:
the mail spilled on the counter, in a white, blurred puddle,
kitchen chairs, empty as a new cemetery,
the vase of freshly cut calla lilies,
their baffled stems submerged.

The clock, a comatose stone,
its moments stopped inside me.
I am a technique of stillness.
Not even your secrets linger.

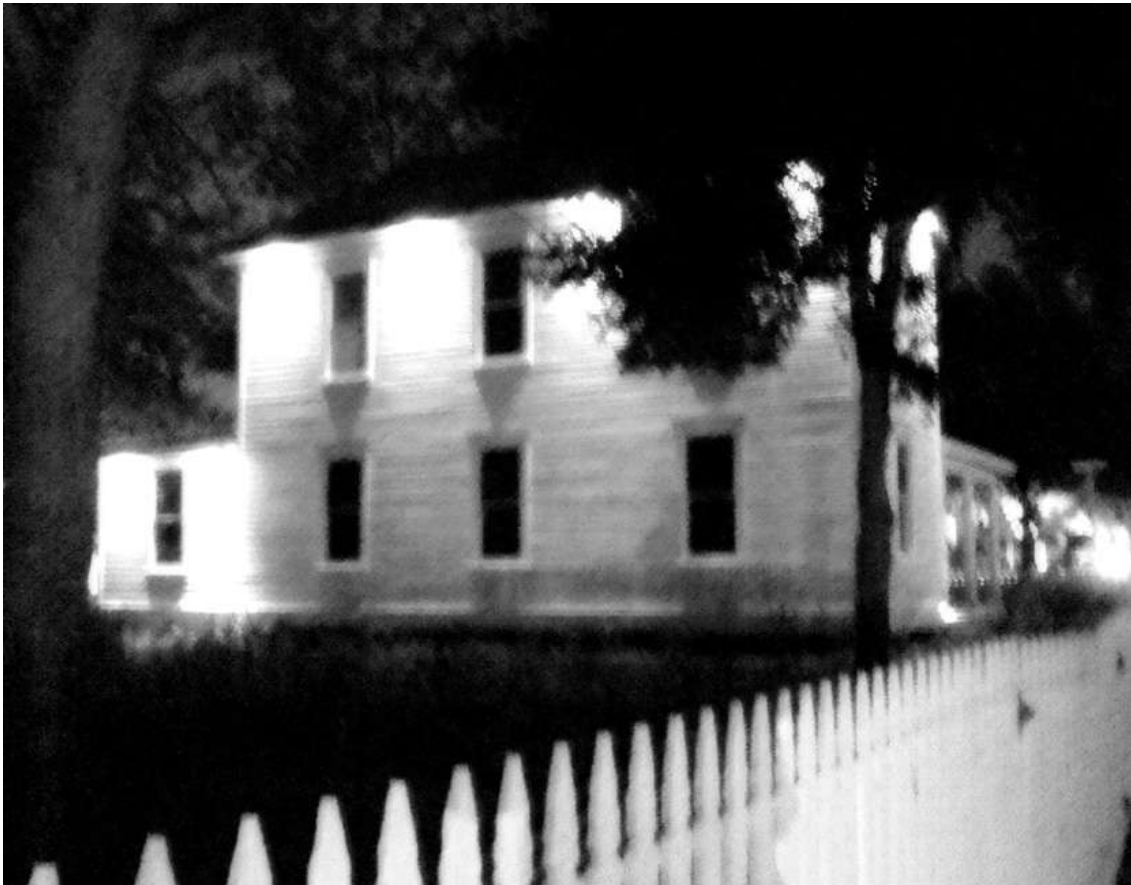
I want to ask you one final question.

Cataglyphis Bicolor (Saharan Ants)
By Brad Rose

Without crumbs or scent to steer them,
the Saharan ants pace-off their return.
In a red dry arithmetic without numbers,
the miniature noise of black legs
churns the fever of the blistering dunes.

Stones in the way, comrades fallen or lame,
they stride on, indifferent, but to the goal.
Is theirs a chemical hunger to return, at any cost,
or a toy loyalty to a memory of origin?

Who among us can know that algorithm,
practiced far longer than we can reckon,
as if there were nowhere else on this lonely earth to aim,
nowhere else to go, but home?



**Two Poems
by Paula Lietz**

Pull me Home

pull me into the warmth of your arms
sequestered from life's frantic realities
sooth my soul with your breath upon my
lips, tuck me within for but a moment
shielded from sun's consuming rays

I am tired of free falling
hold me firm against your crest
just let me lay and wearily rest
upon the sand, the ever shifting sand

let me absorb the misplaced energy
of centuries spent as I inhale the vibration
spans of life times mingle and twist and
twine in and out of clandestine eras that
entangle in quantum's junction

this knowledge that this...is where I am to
be
as only a soul travelling aimlessly would
perceive

home

A Wayward String

within quiet murmurs of home
reflections seep through
pores of dusk that drape yellow
and grey hues upon this listless
evening washed with memories

in between time where everything
occurred
pulsating beyond its limits, unfathomable
most bewildering the beauty within
ever subtle this creation of life of hope
to yet happen

the place between the bark and the tree
the dew drop stance on the blade of grass
the hive of a bumble bee, a wayward
stringent the nest of the swallow
all and everything has a place, a home

stranded amidst birth and death
with a word, a sentence, paragraph
chapter, the volume read, the book
now closed but for the silken
threads weaving the chromosomal
order in balance of life forever caught
within the folds of faded particles
that we call home

The Renovation

By Joseph Grant

Jackie had always wanted her dream house but the home renovation was not going as well as she and her husband Bryce had hoped it would and the quick fixes that would take only a few days he figured had turned into weeks and then months of ripping up floors and tearing out walls and ceilings only to be told that the vendors had run short of materials or had raised their prices, left the couple's nerves as frayed and exposed as the electrical wires that hung everywhere. Bryce had not only agreed to foot the bill for the simple remodel but to help his wife in this now exasperating and exceedingly expensive, never-ending project and he warned her that his expertise lay in law and not in home repair, which was becoming patently obvious to his frustrated wife, of late. To Jackie, it was unmanly for a guy to be so useless when it came to being a handyman around the home and the fact that *she* knew more of what a skill saw was used for having had a contractor for a father, rest his soul, she thought less of Bryce as a man and was pretty certain her father was rolling in his grave if he could see how hopeless Bryce was around their craftsman-style home. So when Jackie took the advice from a girlfriend about the wonderful contractor she had, Bryce didn't bat an eye, not that he could from work, at this point he was glad to hand the project over and he did not see the tall, dark and handsome model-turned-contractor who showed up on their doorstep and it was not long before Jackie offered her stud-finder to more capable and larger manly hands. Nor did Bryce notice when he would come home late from work that the house was virtually in the same condition he had left it the week before and the only thing that was being worked were the joists that supported the bedroom. It wasn't long after that he was reported missing to the police by a well-rehearsed Jackie, the contractor moved in and while the police searched frantically and finally gave up, Bryce's body would never to be found in the out-of-town landfill the contractor sometimes used and once and for all, Jackie got her dream house.



Home
By Jennifer Polhemus

Memories are stars
that spin in constellations
of loss and pain. They are gone.
They are here.

Hair on a teenager's thigh.
Red bean bag chair
in the loft of a garage.
Gush of light through a window
with no pane. Falling like diamonds
from the crook's caught hand.









Andanza Motel, Anaheim, California
By Michael Dwayne Smith

Happy place on Earth, Disneyland's a block up. Fireworks at 9:30 brightens the shadowy ache a moment. At least we're not sleeping in the park. My job and a bus line and we can hold on to just what's in front of us. Spaghetti-in-a-can dinner.

Days can be hard, a kind of selective truth maybe. Like it's true most of the kittens born in the blue trash bin by number nineteen won't survive. At least people have got fighting chances.

Beat the odds to get a room here. Tossed out again last week on account of Nicky's slugfests (misses her mom, God rest), but fate deals our hand, and at least my four ragged little bandits and a stray stay all together in these walls and parking lots.

Sundown, I draw soiled curtains across a weakly streaming-in light. Dead flies have baked on the sill. The surviving tabby stalks one buzzing half-alive against the yellow glass.

I lay on the crowded mattress, and sleep overtakes me, dim stars grimacing at the window. I lay down in wonder, in awe of nothing.

Dear Mom
By Paul Beckman

Dear Mom . . . You were sure right about the foliage. The New Haven Green is ablaze with multi-colored trees and the constant changing hues made me want to draw or paint them so I bought a small colored pencil kit and have included a couple of sketches. Hope they're not too abstract for your liking. I'm also taking photos of the trees and have purposely blurred them so shapes don't interfere with the colors. It's starting to get chilly here now so I'm glad you had me pack those sweaters. I remember that this is the best weather in the Bay Area. I guess autumn (you always call it fall) is the best season on both coasts. Too bad I won't be seeing you for Thanksgiving, I was looking forward to it; but if you say you're physically and mentally exhausted and need the rest who am I to argue? Love Daniel

Dear Mom . . . I don't know what to say except that I'm sorry about you and Dad. I've known for a long time the marriage wasn't perfect but I had no idea he would just up and leave. Are you sure you don't want me to come home for the semester break? It's five weeks and I can get a lot done around the house for you. I was looking forward to sharing my experiences with you, seeing the old crowd and sleeping in my old bed. I do miss that old bed! I understand that I remind you of Dad but I'm not him and I hope you'll reconsider. Your loving son Daniel.

Dear Mom . . . You forgot to send me your new phone number when you had it changed and went unlisted. I tried to call you on your birthday. Did you do anything special? The break's been over for a couple of weeks and the new courses are like the weather—tough. I'm not used to snow and we've been getting plenty of it. The other day I got thinking about your cooking and I desperately wanted your chicken fricassee. I couldn't get it out of my mind so I went down to a Greek diner and ordered it at one in the morning. You could sure give them cooking lessons. Their attempt at fricassee only made me more homesick. I can't wait to come home for the summer. I've been in touch with my old boss at the hardware store and he's promised to hire me back. Love, Dan

Dear Mom . . . It's too bad you don't have real recipes, just some notes that you improvise from. If you should happen to think about it when you're cooking one of your old standards please write down the ingredients and instructions as you cook. I'd really appreciate it. The salmon croquets I had at the diner last week were nothing like yours, and the same with the meatloaf and stew. P.S. phone number? Love

Dear Ida . . . It sure does feel strange calling you anything but Mom, but if that makes you feel better, I'm glad to do it. Are you going to be here for my graduation? It's been years since we've seen each other and I want you to meet my girlfriend and be with me on my big day. I wish you hadn't returned the yearbook photo of me. I can't help it if you see "him" every time you look at me. Daniel

Dear Ida . . . You missed a great wedding and it would have been much greater if you'd have been here. Sara and her parents had been hoping to meet you. We were expecting

to see you on our honeymoon trip out west and dropped by the house to surprise you. I had no idea you moved. At least you kept your old PO Box. I started my new job the week we got back. It's a wonderful career opportunity as assistant to the comptroller of the phone company. Dan

Ida . . . Sorry to upset you. I had no idea he once worked for the phone company. D

Dear Ida . . . Haven't heard back from my recent letters. Hope all is okay. The baby's six months old now and Sara's a great mother —like you were. I'd love to send you a picture of Sammy but I have to tell you that he looks exactly like I did at his age.

Dear Mom . . . Don't worry, I won't send the photo. It is nice having my old grade school stuff and photo albums but it's also kind of sad. The boxes arrived last week. I can't help it that my handwriting is the same as "his" so I'm writing this on my computer. Hope it's easier for you to handle. Sammy's starting kindergarten and Emma's in nursery school. Sara decided to go back to school for her masters and I have just been promoted to Comptroller. Daniel

Mom . . . It's my way of wording things as much as the handwriting, you say. Some things can't be helped. Love Daniel

Ida . . I can't tell you how disappointed I have been to not hear from you this past year. If I don't get a response to this letter I'll stop writing. Meanwhile, I hope that all is well with you. I never mentioned that Dad looked me up when I was at Yale and visited often? He was at my graduation, wedding and around for the babies when they needed a grandparent—which has been all of their lives. I know that he was a good man and didn't walk out on you—you threw him out. That was probably one of the best days of his life. He's been living in an apartment a few blocks away from us. Last week he passed away.

Ida. . . What am I supposed to do with your phone number now? D



Hide and Seek

By Linda Hofke

In childhood she mastered the game of hide and seek,
her long brown braids splintered with straw,
a human needle in a haystack hidden in the corner
of a cow stall, the summer air thick with stable flies
and the stench of manure invading her lungs as she

remained silent and as still as a tombstone.
Sometimes she hid in cold, concrete cellars
or musty attics shadowed in cobwebs and dust,
but the most ingenious spot was planned for her--
a hearse, which no one dared to interfere with as it

drove down the streets of Germany in a fire of sunlight,
delivering her to the underground where her parents
would have met her three days later had they not
been discovered in Hitler's deadly game of hide and seek.
She counts the myriad years lived beyond that fateful day

when life both ended tragically and began triumphantly,
reliving each experience which led her to this moment
as aged bones resting upon a convalescent bed,
confined within walls washed in white, drawing in
her last shallow breaths before her next great escape.



Commodities
By Afzal Moolla

Traded as rapidly as futures,
sold to bidders,
merchants of misery,
bought and herded,
into cattle-cars, vans,
containers sailing,
on the seven open seas.

Women, men,
girls, boys,
auctioned into servitude,
stolen lives,
extinguished families,

for,

the cheap labour market needs to be fed,
an insatiable being desiring young flesh,
virgins above all,
the high-end product for high-street tastes.

Stock-markets fluctuate,
beaming their hieroglyphics to the world,
derivatives and bonds and those bonded,
into sweaty, damp,
vermin-infested factories,
stitching,
always stitching,
that prized designer shoe.

Have we looked into those eyes,
deadened by pain,
the light long gone,
with mouths sewed shut,
all innocence plundered?

Girls, women, raped,

again
&
again
&
again,

till cold numb sockets stare back at you,
bodies scarred by cigarette burns,
whippings,
slaps and bites,
cocks and fingers.

The market never sleeps,
neither do the traders,
willing buyers procuring merchandise,
haggling over flesh and bone and being.

Wounds deep, raw,
oozing pus and blood.

Wounds deeper still,
the slaughtering of souls,
daughters and sons bartered,
flung from stolen childhoods,
into the bowels of a living hell.

Look into those eyes,
look straight into them.

Do not flinch,
do not avert your gaze.

Look into those eyes,
staring back at you,
asking,
pleading,
imploring,
hoping for death,
wishing numbness,
as the fucking continues.

I'm not culpable, I say to you,
and neither are you,
or him or her,
but,
we are silent savages,
mute rapists,
quiet molesters.

We are culpable,
our inaction condemns us.

We are culpable,

and so are you,
and,
I,
and him,
and her too.

**



unknown masks
By Afzal Moola

unknown masks,
worn day out and evening in,

hiding souls,
always wearing a veneer too thin,

exposed facades,
an eventual unveiling of all lies,

finally liberated,
to spread one's wings and take to the skies.



The Prayer Sieve
By Angel Zapata

This cheap drop ceiling tile
above my bed, third row,
inches from the eastern wall,
commences to sag with rainwater.

I've never felt attached
to home possessions or persons;
more in harmony with light—
where it falls, ascends again to shadow.

It's the only relationship held dear,
not the knickknack ornaments
inhabiting shelves and desktops;
dead forebears detained in frames.

With such good, dark rain,
teardrops of golden gods
and other impossible deities
cling to false, white heaven.

I should have fixed the roof
before the storm, before the doubts,
before saint and angel folly
forced me faithless and dry.

The ceiling, now a thoroughfare—
amid a synthetic fiber slump
and porous weight— lets go my prayer.
I wait to be baptized.



The Huntsman Children
By Ceilidh Divine

As the sunsets over the countryside
The sounds of night are approaching
The hunter is gathering his children
Making way for homes sweet calling

Joyful giggles and skipping steps
All strolling side by side
Fingers clutching pockets
Little legs trying to keep up
Older ones told their tales
They all wanted fathers attention

The sun on their backs
The road was dusty
The tall stalks of grass itchy
Birds were swooping
Their beaks were tweeting
Blossom leaves were floating in the air

The Small Orange Chair

by Gita Smith

When Brody moved in to Gathering Arms Court five decades ago, he was everything a young rascal should be. He rolled his shirt sleeves above hard biceps, slicked his dark hair back with Vitalis and a pocket comb, and smoked weed along with Boone's Farm Strawberry Hills wine. Being a fair man, he bedded anyone in a skirt regardless of creed, color or national origin.

The rent was cheap, a bus line ran close, people stayed out of each others' business, and there was a party somewhere "on the Court" every night of the week. He dragged an orange chair to his front door stoop and sat each day with his first cup of morning coffee. His position gave him a view through the opening in the hedges of women rushing to the bus stop, their perfume just freshly applied, their lips red and coral and peach with Max Factor and Revlon. He would have stayed there forever, except. Brody, lean and wiry, was just what the recruiting sergeants were looking for when that ol' Vietnam War came along. They half-starved him at boot camp until he was tunnel-rat size and shipped him over. Night after night, in darkness black as a coal mine floor, they sent Brody down the Viet Cong's tunnels. He slithered through the mazes until he found rooms with sleeping mats and candle stubs. Then he set bombs and crawled out with dirt in his eyes and mouth and the bile of fear tearing at his guts -- the fear that he would not be able to find his way back. The fear that he'd crawl face to face with a gook bayonet. The fear that air would run out, time would run out, luck would run out.

He lasted less than a year before they discharged him and sent him to the VA psych ward and a nourishing diet with side orders of halcyon and thorazine. He screamed in his sleep, thrashed at invisible mounds of dirt that had collapsed upon his dreaming travels through the topsoil of southeast Asia.

Eventually, Brody was released. He had a buddy with a car drive him to Gathering Arms Court to see if he could have his old apartment back. He could not. A family lived there on a two-year lease. No, there were no other openings.

"Way to treat a Veteran!" Brody shouted.

He walked to the opening in the hedge and stopped. A young woman in a light blue dress was sitting in his chair, rocking a small child. She looked up at Brody, saw a good-looking man with ghosts in his eye and smiled.

"I used to live here," Brody said. "That there was my special chair."

"Are you here to take it back?" she asked.

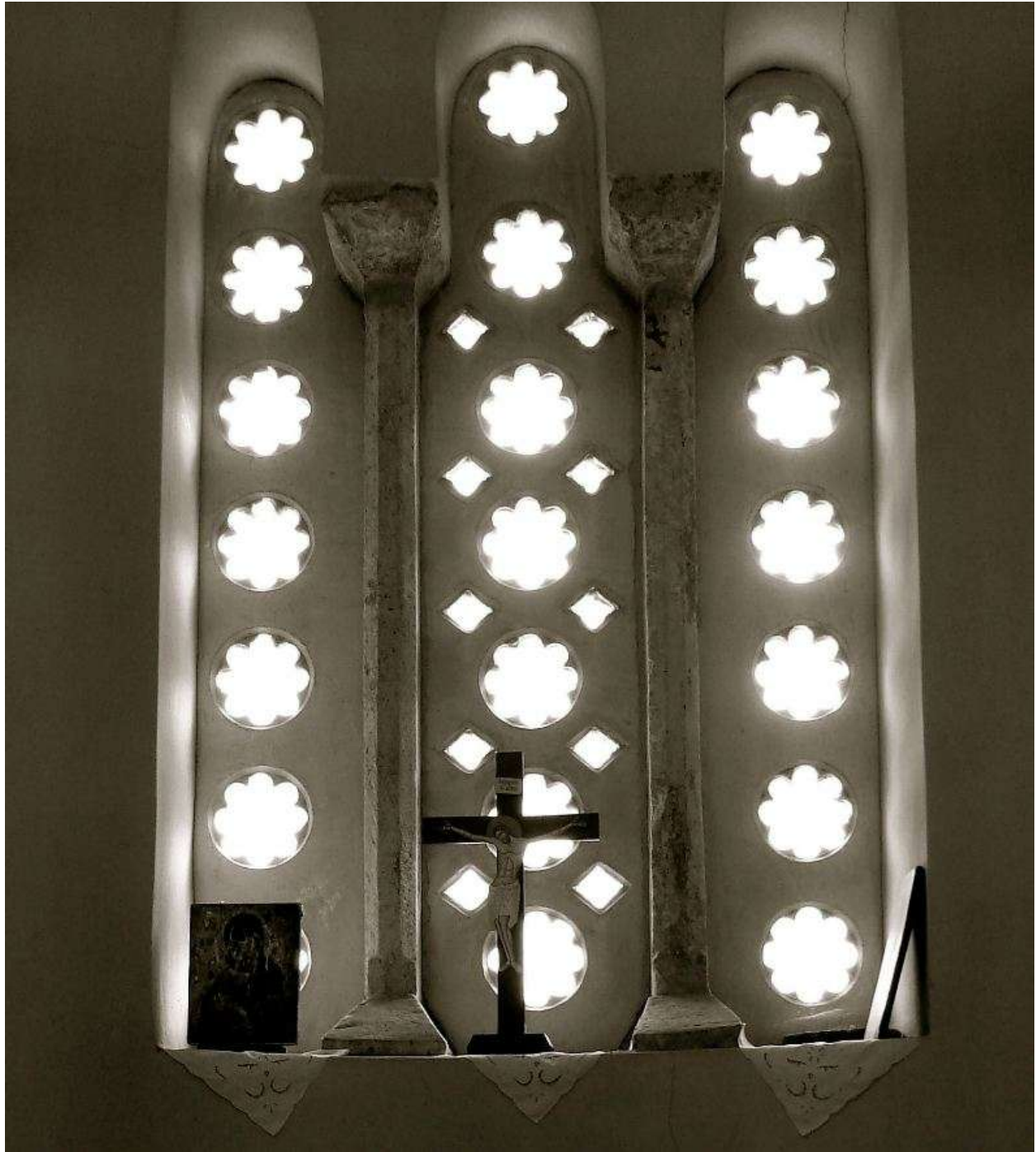
"Nah, I'm doing some traveling," he said. "You look after it for me."

"Where are you traveling, Mister?"

"Some place there's a lot of light," Brody said. "I'm looking for somewhere high up where the sun shines and there's no mosquitoes."

"Sounds like Heaven," she laughed.

"Yeah," Brody said, "That's kind of what I had in mind, myself."







Catfish Eat People, Don't They?
By Tyrel Kessinger

A car.
A door.
Some keys.
A man.

The engines warm now, you can head out. Be careful with her though, she's been acting mighty strange lately. All kinds of rod knocking, motor sputtering nonsense. You'd get it fixed if you gave a damn about taking care of your automobile. "Your car's a tool." It's the prudent echo of your father. "You take care of your tools, son." But you don't. Just drive 'er till she falls apart, metal and paint crumbling like a dilapidated Byzantine empire. She'll get you where you need to go for now though, trust in that.

A store.
Some gas.
A diet coke.
A man and his keys again.

You roll down the window. Smell that fervent country air. It's times like these you wish you hadn't gave up cigarettes. Some tar in your lungs and smoke in your eye would do any man good right now.

The roads here curve like sonsabitches. You have to hug them just right and shove your rubbery embrace down its blacktop gullet. Potholes and faded lines, too. Somebody should tell somebody to fix them.

More highway.
Houses and houses.
More houses.
And trees til the end of time.

What were those kids doing? This close to the road and no adult supervision? *Your* mother would never have let that happen. She had eagle eyes and pipes like a

Siren. If she were blind, she'd still have those other two eyes in the back of her head to get her through. You know you don't call her like you should.

There's something slowly coiling itself around her legs, her waist, and soon her throat. It's the snake, the one they call Time.

Probably you should think about something else.

Yard sales.

Parked cars,

Garage sales.

Parked cars.

People love a good deal don't they? Or at least a chance to haggle with a stranger. You definitely wouldn't pay more than 1.00\$ for a decent LP, that's for sure. Probably nothing but REO Speedwagon and Foreigner records. If you stop you'll just be mad you wasted your time. And besides, you don't have any cold, hard cash, the official currency of garage and yard sales worldwide.

You've heard talk about doing away with the penny and you couldn't agree more. Sorry, Abe.

Look at that cemetery as you drive by. All those bones. That guy mowing the grass doesn't get it. He's mowing over his own future. You wonder if he's picked out *his* plot yet and that one would have to be a fool to mow his own burial ground. You think cremation is the best way to go, but it's probably not a viable option for the mowing man. He looks like a true man of God.

A bridge.

Sun baked graffiti on a stony outcrop.

The Green River.

Coal barges.

You've been on the river a few times, in your younger days. Looking at its murky green patina, you shudder to think about being on it again. You can swim, if the boat overturned, but who would want to in that sludge? Plus, your uncle has told you many times there are catfish as big as a car in that river. Catfish eat people, don't they?

On the river is a man in a john boat, casting out his line. Surely, he's wanting to catch the catfish, the ones that he can eat but can't eat him. You wonder if he's using nightcrawlers or earthworms, imagine them wriggling as they're pierced by the curve of the hook.

There's the shortcut that's not really a shortcut, but you take it like it is one. There's a quiet stretch of road that makes you feel as lonesome as a distant star. You're too young to see the poetry in it now, but you will when you're older. Always, they say, *when you're older*.

The main stretch again.

A little town.

Used cars.

Grandma's old house.

It's a shame, really. There are a lot of memories in that house, but Grandma hasn't lived there in, hell, years. Too bad you don't know her better, but she had a lot of grandchildren. Every year her Christmas presents to you got smaller and cheaper. Maybe if she had given you a car or a hundred dollar bill every once in a while you would have made more of an effort. Face it, you're at least a *little* selfish.

Damned if she didn't make the best sweet tea known to man though.

You wonder why they're bulldozing along the side of the road. Haven't they been doing this for years now? They should line up a whole fleet of bulldozers and head straight for the town. "The Redcoats are coming! The Redcoats are coming!" the inhabitants would scream. Only it would be bulldozers, not Redcoats.

What would be put in the razed town's place? It would have to be a super Wal-Mart or a Mega Church. If you were a betting man you'd bet on both.

Scattered ponds.

A skunky smell.

Sunday drivers.

At last, the dead skunk.

This album is getting old. These damn iPods have ripped all the magic out. For now, it's time for another tune. Are you wanting to A)rock, B)reflect, C)zone out or D)escape?

Choose wisely and enjoy it now. You think you have forever, and you're not wise enough to realize you don't. One day you'll be like that fisherman, casting out your line in hopes of catching one of these memories you're making. But no matter what bait you use, you'll never get more than a nibble at your hook.

You think that if people eat catfish then it's okay for catfish to eat people.

Miles out.

Fields on the left.

Fields on the right.

Windows down.



Paurl On His Side

By Doug Mathewson

Snow begun to swirl, just getting to be dark. Cut enough wood for one day, my brother Paurl and me. Been cutting along the ridge that divides the old farm in two. His hundred acres on the back side of the ridge and my hundred in front. He took the truck and I started walking back with my saw and Maize, my wife's old dog. Real quiet, nice out there along the ridge like that. I'd set the saw down to answer a not particularly urgent call of nature and the dog gone exploring when I heard her voice.

"Well look who's out here watering' the flowers."

She'd been dead now for years, Lurleen had. Wasn't sure I heard right. I zipped up at least before turning around. Sitting on a stone wall, there she was. Wearing a little blue dress with yellow flowers on it, smoking her Pall Mall.

"Yeah, it's me alright, back from the dead you could say, but I'm not back... just visiting."

I must of stood there like a fish with my mouth open, blinking away and trying to clear my throat. She was pretty as a summer day, with her hair done nice and that smart aleck grin of hers.

"Oh, come on Tommy, loosen up a little! I just wanted to say hello before I went to see him How is he How's he doing now?"

Paurl?, okay enough I guess, but since you left he just stays close to home. I mean, I got a town job and all, but not Paurl. He been alone back there just sitting since you died."

They'd been married, I don't know, four, five years when she took off. Not another man mind you, just wasn't of a mindset to live way out here, be poor, be a farmer's wife. She'd gone west, had some kinda waitress job when she got killed. Car accident.

Truth to tell Lurleen, he's not so good. Took you leaving hard. Real hard. Still does. Keeps to himself and workin' his side. He's my brother and all that, but a I gotta say, I just wish he'd find another woman or get a hobby or some god-damned thing and stop moping. Do something! Nobody gives a shit what!"

We were both quiet after that. Maybe I said too much, but I started feelin' uncomfortable (uncomfortable with a ghost mind you) and thought I should change the subject.

"I gotta ask, Lurleen, what's it like being dead?"

"Alright," she sighed. "No better than livin', just different. Never cold, never hungry, and not bored like you'd think. Remember those View-Master things we had growing up? You could put in a little cartoon or somethin' about state parks, it's like that, only

you don't get to push down the lever... it just happens. Things keep changing, never know where you'll end up.....but I wanted to set things straight with your brother. Not sure when I might be back.”

“ I don't know,” I said “it's good to see you and all, but Paurl, well, you know how he can be, he's different.”

“Different!” she laughed, “Ya think? Thought maybe I pop up out of the damned fireplace and give him a fright, but that won't solve the problem. I need to explain, explain it wasn't him.”

“Lurleen honey, what can you ever say that'll patch things up? Paurls' sitting back there feeling sorry for hisself, and your dead! Nothin's gonna change any of that!”

She looked down, nodded some. Then it came to me.

“Course, you could take him with you.”





Homebound

By Len Kuntz

We watched it smolder. Water cannons shot arcs over the remaining flames and the weight of water combined with the charred cinders collapsed the building, sending plumes of smoke across the lot where we once lived.

Magic, black or otherwise. Hell opening up from underneath the earth. Hell, it was, or had been.

I took Tina's hand. It was small as a dog paw. I said, "It's okay," and pressed hard for reassurance.

I patted my back pocket. The money I'd taken was a thick wad. It didn't make me any less nervous, but it provided spurs of hopefulness.

We walked in the opposite direction of the commotion, well away from the fire trucks and gawkers. Our Foster parents wouldn't be back for several hours unless they'd been called. The firemen would search for us and find no bones, but it'd be too late anyway.

Tiny and I went through the wooded greenbelt. Eventually, we came to an abandoned church.

The window glass was stained in grape juice and berry colors, gems that made me think of sucking candy. When you put the pieces together, they made up a medieval woman praying while two angels hovered over her shoulders.

We went in through the back door, down the hall. My heart was probably beating as hard as Tina's, but the place was empty of people.

Inside the main sanctuary, ceilings reached up sky-high and there were more glass murals of saints and whatnot.

Tina said we should leave, but I held her hand tight and tugged her until we got right up to the front row where the good seats were. When I turned, I saw three aisles and quickly counted 36 long, mahogany pews.

“Sit,” I said.

Tina did, but she asked a penny for my thoughts.

I was a big reader because The Fosters wouldn’t let us watch television. There weren’t many novels around The Foster Home, so I read whatever was handy—the Bible with its contradictions, road maps, an atlas, The Yellow Pages. One book I’d found was called “Alienation Nation.” It had this particular passage that got me thinking. It said something like a house is a building, while a home is a house where love exists among families. I knew that was true without having to be told, but after I’d read those words, they settled in me like grout between tiles, and quite frankly, they were the reason I started plotting the fire in the first place.

Tina asked was we going to live here, in the church. I said it didn’t matter, didn’t matter where we lived because if she and I stayed together we’d make a fine enough life for ourselves. I could tell she didn’t believe me. Her confidence lacked because I let Mr. Foster call her names and punch me around whenever he started scratching himself.

A selfish urge in me prodded that I explain about arson and what I’d done and how I’d done it. Everyone wants the gratitude of others, even if it doesn’t make you quite a hero.

Instead I said, “Let me tell you something you don’t know yet.”

I went on and on with the story of our lives and the wonderful things that were going to happen.

I started it on Christmas day in the far future. I was a grown man and she a woman with a husband and two great kids. I described her youngin’s and the gift exchanges, how the food tasted and how the room smelled like cinnamon and turkey gravy, but when Tina asked for me to detail the house and the way the rooms were outfitted, I said it didn’t make a difference. I said it wasn’t a house she lived in, it was something much better.



Rafflesia arnoldi

By Cristina del Canto

My love, you're an island,

I will not pass you by.

Together, we'll drink grass jelly

from cracked coconut shells,

using sticks to write poetry in the sand.

Komodos will watch us,

flicking their pink forked tongues

as you pick me a flower,

the largest in the world,

in full bloom,

with an odor of decaying flesh.

And when days threaten our youth

you will shout out that you

find my crow's feet sexy,

my gray hair alluring,

my aged mind astute.

We will then laugh because

we are tiny dots,

in a big archipelago

What more could we be?

There's No Such Thing As an Accident

By Rich Ives

The room sits loosely like a hat. If you were larger, you could wear it. One small window opens to darkness, which surrounds the two sides we can witness. The rest is sleeping.

The mistake is not the wing of light emerging from beneath the hairline at the back of the student's neck, but the window that allows a real world to be seen.

The ventilator mounted at the top of the student's straining head has proved fortuitous. The wet transient frame, which was provided for his thoughts, has been removed to a lower order. There is some question whether anything derived from its ethereal reach can remain in the basement unrestrained. The student does not think more highly of his comfortable shoes for marching down to the local sea, nor does he resist suggestive provocations involving his remaining wing.

The student's thought would appear to fold over at the center, as if for mailing, but it cannot be received by those most wishing to entertain it. There would appear to be an arm fragment involved in its eventual depletion. The wooden key may be the last remaining clue to the participation of any degree of safety.

The locator was poured into the student's temporary receptacle and activated. Some of those who had preceded were reluctant to return. It is not clear whether this was due to the desires engendered during the program or the aberrations resulting from its departure. If we cannot open the wishes of those departed, we must secretly adjust the glass roads and weathered window-frames so as to suggest these impulses might actually be contained.

It has been suggested that a degree of resolution might be achieved by sharing fluids. The absent ones shall be required to participate. It's what the student feels so the student puts it on. I'm not going to investigate the reasons for this.

So now you have grown older, and you've joined a rock band and traveled to a rural town with only a few blocks along Main Street for its identity. It's just after dark, and you're looking for the Grange Hall where your band has been hired to perform. There aren't any signs on the storefronts, so you assume the one with the lights on is it. The streets are empty.

You volunteer to check it out while the rest of the band gets gas. Shades are drawn over the large windows, but you can hear noise inside. You enter, and a semicircle of worshippers bows down, genuflecting to, it seems, you. The door closes behind you.

Then you notice the minister in the white robe and wonder how you could have missed him. He's standing close by, his hands full of snakes. His robe makes you think of the Ku Klux Klan. The worshippers are moaning and shivering, their hands reaching in spasms, their white robes drifting up their bodies as they shake, a horseshoe of pale moons opening to you as you turn to speak, but the noise overpowers your voice.

Finally the minister notices you and throws the snakes in the air. The moaning suddenly stops, the lights have gone out, and a soft hiss is all you can hear.

Slowly, one by one, the lights begin to return, but the people are gone, and you notice the display cases along the walls. In the first case you find earrings, a dozen or so, all with feathers, all singles. In the rest of the cases you find puppets, dozens of puppets with the faces of people you think you should recognize. You open one of the cases, but your hand will not fit into the puppet's head. Because you have placed your attention in the wrong place, the other band members have died in a terrible fire at the gas station. This is really what you are thinking at this moment. A leak in the tank and a spark from a steel-toed boot. Puppets in flaming anguish. Fleeing snakes. Suddenly you are back in your own body again, and it's time to leave because the building has vanished, the dark river in front of you is cold, and your curious fingers are drawn to its numbing welcome.

Back at the car, your friends are listening to a polka.

Totem Poles for Noah
By Marjorie Sadin

Now I'm Tia, a great aunt. And Noah sleeps in my niece's arms
who breast feeds him. Someday I will be on the totem pole.
What will he remember?

He will never know my mother, or my mother's mother.
They would have wept aloud with elation.
Yet prayed to their better angels
Bacchus the god of drink their downfall.

Who will Noah take after? Hopefully not me. When I was eighteen,
they said I couldn't have a child or the child might inherit my crazy DNA.
But I had imaginary children—Rebecca named for my grandma and a
son named Seth. When I told people, they didn't believe me.

Now I'm the great aunt holding an infant in my arms gently as a cup
of tea. His wide eyes tell the whole story, like my dead grandfather's eyes
in the eyes of an old woman. Taking in the world all at once, alive
and from the dead.

My grandfather was a chemistry teacher. He made green turn to red,
liquid to fire. In the blink of the eye. My mother is here with
this astonishing child.

Small Miracles
My Marjorie Sadin

I was high, and ended up late at night
roaming the streets with only prostitutes for company.
Or when I almost died in Brooklyn, when I got
off at the wrong stop—with no money, drunk, someone gave
me the change for a bus back.

Funny, how I think God is with me, the footprints
in the sand, *God carrying me*. When it's only my
crazy sense of direction and my tenacity to live
that got me through the rape and West, the prostitute, walking me home.
I thought I would walk forever. In the morning, they put me in PI,
drugged me and put me in restraints.

Now reality shines through behind a cloud.,
the sun at dusk. The sun doesn't revolve around me.
I can look but not too long or it will hurt my eyes
Sometimes, being with you hurts. But it is nothing
compared to losing my mind.

A Myth Much Prettier Than Home

By Kate Marie Goff

Inside the boxcar was a Portal to Home.

“Just home,” muttered Monsieur Atticus. “Nothing special.” He eyed it anyway, its rusted graffiti and corrugated tin rattling in the chaparral-scented gust.

Corbit, drawing up the blueprints for his next commissioned piece, balanced with intermittent success on a cypress log. The shaky, mud-stained sketches were legible to no one but him, he knew, but the sole Portal Builder in Marine Territory could afford to be sloppy.

“Ever notice--” he adjusted his voice over the wind and boxcar tremor, facing the man in the sheepskin suit, “ever notice how you’re always searching for paths to take you far from wherever you are? Somewhere better? Greener, as the saying goes?”

Atticus glowered. Undeterred, Corbit continued. “And here you are, far from home in that deep, deep green!” He swept his hand against the sky, framing his fingers around a flock of pelicans. “Here ... you ... are!” The three words formed a song that rang across the rocky coast, startling both ground squirrels and Atticus. “And then you notice that *home* is far from *here* ... so now you’re thinking about returning. So you hire me to build you a portal--”

“This is *not* what I asked for,” Atticus hissed.

This is really the best part, Cory thought, and dropped the papers into his bag. Boots squelching in the muddy grass, he walked over to his client and surveyed the old boxcar with considerably greater enthusiasm. “You didn’t have to ask, Monsieur. Your need for far off places is plain in your bones.”

Atticus cocked an eyebrow and curled a lip. “My ... bones,” he said, as though Cory had said something ridiculous.

That unspoken request for elucidation was all Cory needed to initiate the Portal’s final phase. “Endless movement, traveler.” His voice dropped to hypnotic tones, the rhythm of snow on a windshield, his fingers dancing. “A summer in Colorado’s mountainous terrain, a winter in arid Arizona, Georgia’s ungodly humid embrace, and hey now, this California is a big state with a very long coastline, wouldn’t you say?”

Monsieur’s eyes, slightly unfocused, followed Cory’s fluttering hands along the boxcar’s silhouette.

“Trains and cities, nightclubs and sodden holes in the ground like this one. Tiny villages where the children wait by the side of the road to wave at unfamiliar cars. Tattooed and dreadlocked hippies in the vineyards, serpentine killers in the desert. You’ve had quite

the constitutional, eh?”

Monsieur Atticus nodded like a palm tree. “Yes”

“And you’ve seen all of this beautiful coast now, and you’re wondering if what you’re traveling to ... that great exotic Greenness of Our Time is just under the surface of these waves, just beyond the break in the marine layer.” Cory couldn’t help it: he laughed, his tones sending a cascade of baby Reality Holes around the boxcar.

Monsieur’s head swerved to follow the tiny punctures in space-time as they drifted toward the ocean. “Oops,” said Cory. “Sorry, I do try to keep my emotions under control to avoid that sort of thing. But you challenged my resolve so excellently! Don’t worry, the sardines eat those. Just--” he slapped Monsieur’s hand away from the shimmering motes--“don’t *touch* them.”

He put his arm around Monsieur’s shoulders, noting the even breathing of the man’s chest, the horn buttons of his jacket moving in and out. Good. Time to start the show.

Inside the car, Monsieur Atticus gaped at the radiant pathway peeking through the rusted floor. The long-silent wheels began to churn, squealing laboriously against broken tracks. Cory watched from outside. He no longer needed to speak aloud.

Squint, and you can see the old scratched dining table rattling on the painted wooden floorboards, Mother’s lace curtains rippling and Japanese china (how you loved that pun as a child!) clinking. Cat-shaped dent in the leather chair, still warm with feline heat. Victorian ladies on the bathroom wall, coquettish and vain. No, they are flamingos preening. Species is irrelevant. Accuracy is a myth.

Atticus was already gone, the remnants of his clothes burning as they fell to the side.

Other detritus followed, all that was not growing at the time of portation: dead skin cells, hair, eyelashes, fingernails (he never told them about the loss of the fingernails up front--that tended to deter them from asking for a Portal.) Never one to port and run, Cory added the finishing touch to his customized , exclusive Portal: the last bit of guidance to his client, who had asked for “an unexplored frontier.”

Never mind that home is forever mutating in hazy memory. The path will take you somewhere, though, some brilliant destination at the end of the journey, and this is a myth much prettier than “home.”



Three Poems by Maude Larke

Ars Nova

I sat
in garish silence
and listened
to a sonata
for gang-banged choir
accompanied
by power chords

and sculpted
the ash
of a cigarette

I raised my eyebrows
but I did not smile

Just a Perfect 6:30

Clean and chirpy
green
and so very still.

Why do cities seem
so innocent
when empty?

Apart from the ugly squiggle
on the eighteenth-century storefront

(please, some artistry!)

and not even a church bell yet.

Even the few men
sleeping in the street
or stretching themselves awake
are silent
as are the strolling pigeons

in light
that says
finally
summer.

Atmosphere

in my rocking chair
at 1:00 A.M.

the bed bobbing
up and down
at the end
of my pipe bowl

music playing
in rhythm
to the crunching moans
of the rolling floor

feet nodding
in agreement
boots rubbing

and the page
sliding over the shadow
of my hand

Grocery Ballet

By Samuel Cole

The metal cart's stuffed with food she can't afford to pass up: twenty-pound turkey, convex boneless ham, oddly spelled cheeses, mist-laden fruits, colorful vegetables, thin crackers from Sweden, funky shaped cookies all the way from Saint Petersburg, Russia. The deli smells tantalizingly delicious, each dish similar in texture and color to the grainy pictures in her favorite cookbook-companion, *Going Gourmet on a Budget*, the only gift her mother ever gave without conditions. She orders tuna, shrimp, and pasta salads. Her toddler-daughter clamors at the hem of her sweatshirt, pulling for more than attention but ten tiny fingers covered in snot and slobber reaching, pinching, scratching to be touched.

"Stop it. I mean it, you're slowing us down." She readjusts her brunette wig with extra long extensions and pulls the old baseball hat down to her eyebrows. She swerves the cart around a pyramid of pasta sauce, dragging the girl down the coffee, ice tea, and lemonade aisle.

"Hold me mama, please."

She speeds through the bakery section, setting the bags of chocolate glazed donuts and puffy croissants between the white wonder bread and overpriced brownstone.

"Mama."

"What?" She scares the child, suddenly screaming a hissy fit. She throws the girl into the cart like a sack of potatoes and maneuvers to the back of the store. "That's it. If you ruin this for us I swear I'm gonna." She covers the girl's mouth with her hand. "Now knock it off."

A few shoppers begin to take notice. Some whisper; others scowl. To avoid their judgmental glares, she piles in some diapers, pet food, and a big bag of rainbow-colored suckers. Her feet, along with her heart, burn with embarrassing numbness. She offers the girl a sucker. The girl begins to hum. "What have I told you about humming?" She points to the space underneath the cart. "Now get."

The girl crawls in and sucks loudly, but not so loudly as to call any further unwanted attention. "Is it time, mama?"

"No, but keep still." She stops beside a crate of oranges, holds a 20-pound bag close to her breasts, smells the vitamins and nutrients she isn't getting. Neither is the girl. She throws the bag in the cart but quickly realizes they're too heavy. "I will have you," she whispers. "Just wait and see."

The girl pops her head out, showing off her bright blue lips and tongue. "I'm hungry, mama."

She bends down, peels a banana, and feeds the girl small bites one at a time. “I hate how important you are to this.” She sighs, pushing a strand of oily hair behind the girl’s ear. “You feel better now?”

“Yummy.” The girl claps. “More.”

“You have to stop clapping.” She clamps the girl’s hands shut with her own. “Hush from now on, okay?” She strolls—mustn’t appear too rushed—to the fresh flower arrangements blooming in steel buckets underneath the fire alarm. Glancing at the open dining area, a mere five maybe eight feet away, the epicenter of the store where old women and older men apparently like to congregate and talk about vacations, new cars, grandkids, and the troubles with age, she begins to feel nauseous. Like pregnancy nauseous. She touches her belly, pressing a little here, a little there. “Just perfect.” She knows there isn’t time to listen to the old people, but her ears and imagination crave the information. She closes her eyes and travels to Paris, drives a new Cadillac, lives in a two-story home with neighbors who wave and say hi.

“Hi there sweetie.” An old woman startles her. Bent over, she stares at the girl. “You must really like suckers.” The old woman looks up. “How old is she?”

“Have you really been to Europe?” She can’t believe she’s asking a question. She’s revealed her voice, one of the top five no-no’s in this line of work.

The old woman looks confused. “I go to Spain every year. Why?” The old people begin to spread out like varicose veins, luckily diverting the staff’s attention away from her and the old lady. It’s the perfect time to make her move. Why is she standing still?

“You ever been to France?” She has to know.

“Twice.”

“Have you seen the tower?”

“Been on all three levels.” The old woman opens the bathroom door. “Well goodbye.”

“Mama, I need to go potty, too.”

“Get back in there. It’s time.” She gives the girl another sucker. The girl crawls underneath and turns into a little ball.

“Now hold on tight.” She blows on her hands for good luck and with a bit more hesitation than usual —what’s wrong with her today?—she pulls the fire alarm and pushes the cart through the electronic doors. All the way to the RV, her stomach queasy, her daughter screaming “wheeeee,” her husband revving the engine and waving her over, she prays to God that the easiest, and hardest, part of the day is over.

Wal-Mart

By Courtney Bledsoe

“We’ve got about \$300 to get us through the next two weeks,” I said. “Minus what we spend on my brother.”

“That’s why we’re at Wal Mart,” Joan said.

She zigzagged around the clothes racks, heading for Men’s. I paused at a rack of tee-shirts and found one without too much writing on it. They had it in xxx-large, but no bigger.

“What do you think?” I asked. Joan turned as I held it up to my shoulders. I was thinking it would be twice as big as me, but it was maybe two sizes too big.

“It might be a little tight on him,” she said.

“It’s the biggest they’ve got.”

“Save the receipt,” she said.

Joan went around the corner to pants. I found a rack with coats. I rifled through and found a big grey one with a hood. I went to the pants and showed it to her. She shrugged.

“Looks warm,” she said. “Is it your brother’s style?”

“Style? He needs to keep warm. He lost his coat in the fire.”

“Get it,” she said.

“That brings us up to \$65.”

“What do you want to do?” she asked, dropping her hands and turning to me with a frown.

I shook my head. “Any luck with the pants?” I asked.

She turned back to the jeans. “Biggest size is 50.”

“He’s bigger than that,” I said.

“Well, it’s the biggest they have.”

“He’ll have to go to a ‘big and tall’ store, which he can’t afford to do.”

She kept looking, and I went back to the shirts. I found a nice polo shirt, and held it up to my shoulders. I turned to call Joan, and there was a lady standing there I recognized with a girl behind her.

“Hi Hannah,” I said.

The girl waved.

“Are you ladies enjoying the break?” I asked.

“There’s a copy of Their Eyes Were Watching God in the car. We just picked it up,” the mom said. Her mouth settled into a sneer.

“Good,” I said. “It shouldn’t be as difficult as Huck Finn, but it does have some challenging passages.” I caught Hannah’s eye. “We’ll get through it,” I said. She smiled.

The mom walked away. Hannah waved and followed her. Joan came back from the pants.

“There’s nothing there for him. Who was that?”

“Hannah Washington and her mom.”

“She was a peach.”

“The mom? She’s probably pissed that I made Hannah cry.”

“You bad man.”

I shrugged. “I sent her to her locker for her book and she never came back. I mean, she’s new, but what am I supposed to do? Let that slide?”

“Defensive.”

“Sorry,” I said. “How about this?” I held the polo shirt up.

“That’s nice,” she said. She went through the rack and found a couple more.

“That’s \$125,” I said.

“You want to put something back?”

I shook my head. “He doesn’t have any clothes. What he has, he’s been wearing steadily since the fire.”

“Matt, I’m not really sure any of this will fit him.”

I nodded. “He’s going to die,” I said. “His heart’s going to give out. Sooner rather than later.”

“What can you do about that?” she asked.

I shook my head. “I can keep him warm,” I said.



Contributor Biographies

Lynn Alexander: is the producer and editor of web and print content for Full Of Crow Press And Distribution, which includes Full Of Crow, Blink Ink, Fashion For Collapse, MUST, and other projects in addition to distribution of zines and independent publications. Visit [Full of Crow](#).

Paul Beckman: is a frequently published author of short stories, flash & micro fiction. Some publishing credits: Exquisite Corpse, Connecticut Review, Soundzine, 5 Trope, Playboy, Web del Sol, Long Story Short, Blink-Ink, The Scruffy Dog Review, Other Voices, Raleigh Review, MICROW, Connotation Press, Microliterature, The Molotov Cocktail, The Brooklynier & The Boston Literary Review. He sells real estate to feed his writing habit. www.paulbeckmanstories.com

Cortney Bledsoe: is the author of the young adult novel Sunlight; three poetry collections, _____ (Want/Need), Anthem, and Leap Year; and a short story collection called Naming the Animals. A poetry chapbook, Goodbye to Noise, is available online at www.righthandpointing.com/bledsoe. Another, The Man Who Killed Himself in My Bathroom, is available at <http://tenpagespress.wordpress.com/2011/08/01/the-man-who-killed-himself-in-my-bathroom-by-cl-bledsoe/>. His story, "Leaving the Garden," was selected as a Notable Story of 2008 for Story South's Million Writer's Award. His story "The Scream" was selected as a Notable Story of 2011. He's been nominated for the Pushcart Prize 5 times. He blogs at Murder Your Darlings, <http://clbledsoe.blogspot.com>

Jenny Bohatch: recently started sending her writing out to see if anyone would want to read it. This is her second story to appear anywhere outside of her laptop or a classroom.

Samuel Cole: lives in Woodbury, MN. He loves to run, STEP, photograph pencil sharpeners, hang with friends, boo bad movies, and of course, write. Check out his website: www.maneuverableword.com

Stephen Cooper: I am forty, life is just beginning, or so I have been repeatedly told. I live in Sofia, Bulgaria with Slaveya and my Bassett

hound, Seamus. I left my native Co. Down many years ago, but still travel back from time to time. I have been published in numerous short story collections, dabbled in poetry, and on occasion, even engaged in serious political dissemination. I aim to provide writing which is different from the rest, and something either dark, or reflective, and sometimes amusing, to leave the reader with a unique memory to savor.

Leon Jackson Davenport: *A Fine Art Photographer and Writer, Leon Jackson Davenport's work has appeared in The Full of Crow Quarterly, Foundling Review, The Burlington County Times, Six Sentences, Cavalcade of Stars and At-The Bijou|Blog spot. His photography was part of an exhibition at Gallery 21 in Los Angeles, and this is the first time his work has appeared in MICROW*

Cristina del Canto: *is an award-winning writer, journalist and poet. A native of Caracas, Venezuela she uses her bilingual skills to reach readers in both English and Spanish. She has been published in The Battered Suitcase, Bewildering Stories, Ascent Aspirations, Fowlpox Press, The Writer's Literary Muse, Blue Lake Review, Burning Word, Pink Mouse Pub and New York University's Creative Writing Journal. Cristina currently resides in Houston and is working on her first novel.*

Ceilidh Devine: *Words are constantly circling around in my mind. I as a person notice everything and I use what I can see, with the words that are created in my mind and I produce the most sensational works.*

Aleathia Drehmer: *is a collector of angles and shadows and all the small things people forget to photograph. Her work has been featured in several online magazines and graced the covers of over 5 chapbooks throughout the small press. She makes her home in the pastoral Finger Lakes Region of New York.*

Kristin Fouquet: *photographs and writes from lovely New Orleans. Her photographs have been published online and in print. She is the author of Twenty Stories (Rank Stranger Press, 2009) and Rampart & Toulouse (Rank Stranger Press, 2011). You are invited to visit her virtual abode, Le Salon, at the web address <http://kristin.fouquet.cc>*

Leah Givens: is found at <http://leahgivens.com/>

Kate Marie Goff: writes flash fiction inspired by otherworldly music—the kind of music that suggests dreams, the supernatural, the interdimensional, altered states, and the in-between—blurring the mundane into the magical (and occasionally creepy) at otherworldlymusic.com. Her less reverent and wholly eccentric alter-ego lives at splarks.com. All versions of her live in Berkeley, California.

Joseph Grant: As a Pushcart Prize nominee, Joseph Grant's short stories have been published in over 230 literary reviews such as *Byline*, *New Authors Journal*, *Underground Voices*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, *Inwood Indiana Literary Review*, *Hack Writers*, *Six Sentences*, *Literary Mary*, *NexGenPulp*, *Is This Reality Zine*, *Darkest Before Dawn*, *strangeroad.com*, *FarAway Journal*, *Full of Crow*, *Microw*, *Heroin Love Songs*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Writing Raw*, *Unheard Magazine*, *Absent Willow Literary Review*.

Linda Hofke: Linda Hofke lives in Germany where she writes, takes photographs and puts her lead foot to use on the Autobahn. Her most recent work has been featured or upcoming in *Bolts of Silk*, *The Fib Review*, *Jellyfish Whispers*, *4and20*, *Prompted*, and *The Poetic Pinup Revue*. She blogs at <http://lind-guistics.blogspot.de/>

Claire Ibarra: Claire's fiction has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *The MacGuffin*, *Natural Bridge*, *Amoskeag*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Blink-Ink* and *An Honest Lie*. Claire's photographs have appeared in *Blue Print Review* and *Eclectica Magazine*. You can learn more at www.claireibarra.com.

Rich Ives: is the 2009 winner of the Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from *Bitter Oleander* and the 2012 winner of the Creative Nonfiction Prize from *Thin Air* magazine. The Spring 2011 *Bitter Oleander* contains a feature including an interview and 18 of his hybrid works.

Tyrel Kessinger: lives, works and writes in Louisville, Kentucky. There's the wife, two dogs, cat and all the other trappings of a fairly normal life. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Gargoyle*, *Word Riot*, *Prick of the Spindle*, and *Grey Sparrow Journal* among others. His most recent chapbook, "An Absence Of Scientific Nomenclature" was

selected for publication by the Red Ochre LiT B&W series. He also volunteers as a Contributing Editor for Black Heart Magazine and a Contributing writer for 22 Magazine.

Len Kuntz: *lives in rural Washington State. His writing appears widely in print and online at such places as Camroc Press Review, Juked, Cynic Online Magazine and also at lenkuntz.blogspot.com*

Dorothee Lang: *is into roads, stories, places, crossings, and all the things they lead and connect to. For more, visit her at <http://www.blueprint21.de>*

Maude Larke: *has come back to her own writing after working in the American, English and French university systems, analyzing others' texts and films. She has also returned to the classical music world as an ardent amateur, after fifteen years of piano and voice in her youth. Winner of the 2011 PhatSalmon Poetry Prize and the 2012 Swale Life Poetry Competition, she has been published in Naugatuck River Review, Cyclamens and Swords, riverbabble, Doorknobs and BodyPaint, Sketchbook, Cliterature, and Short, Fast, and Deadly, among others.*

Paula Lietz: *is a widely published writer, photographer and artist who lives in a rural Manitoba Canada. The daughter and grand-daughter of Professional Canadian photographers, Ms. Lietz was awarded first prize in last year's United Kingdom Frost Photography International Competition. Her photography, art and writing has appeared in numerous anthologies and in many publications and as cover illustrations, some being: Naugatuck River Review, MaINtENaNT: Journal of Contemporary DADA Writing and Art, editions #'s 4, 5 and 6, Visions, Voices and Verses, Sunrise From Blue Thunder, In the Company of Women and Enchanting Verses International Poetry Journal are but a few.*

Doug Mathewson: *is a writer who spent his formative years turning over brook stones, looking for new friends or a means of escape. As a writer he is best known for his painting and mixed-media sculptures. The art-world has been unimpressed with the exception of his "Head-of-Goliath-a-Day" Series. Since 1937 he has created daily a self*

portrait using the famous image of young David with the severed head of the giant Goliath. The more famous pictures portray men or women from all ages and walks of life as David. Some days they are robots, space squids, media pop-stars, or household objects. The artist is always the head. Gratefully none of this can be seen at [Full of Crow Press and Distribution](#) where he is a collaborator or at [Blink-Ink](#) which he edits.

Afzal Moolla: was born in Delhi, India while his parents were in exile, fleeing Apartheid South Africa. He then travelled wherever his parent's work took them and he still feels that he hasn't stopped travelling. Afzal works and lives in Johannesburg, South Africa and shares his literary musings with his most strident critic - his 12 year old cat.

Ellen Orner: a native Russian speaker and former professional violinist, has enjoyed venturing into writing poetry and some prose in English, as well as translating some of both from the Russian. She has been published by Danse Macabre, Barnwood International Poetry Mag, Little Patuxent Review, and The View From Here, in the U.K. When not writing, Ellen attempts to learn from her garden and her dog what life free of memory, grudges and history is like.

Jennifer Polhemus: lives in Central Pennsylvania with her partner of 13 years. She has been writing for several decades and earned her Liberal Arts degree from College of Southern Maryland. Her work has appeared in several anthologies and literary journals. Two of her chapbooks were published in the early 2000's and she was the featured artist in the Spring 2006 issue of Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly. Jennifer currently works with people facing mental health challenges. Between the hours of counseling, housework, and the gym she steals moments to craft her first memoir.

James D. Quinton: is a British fiction and poetry writer. His two novels *Touch* and *The Victorian Time Traveller* and his two poetry collections *Street Psalms* and *The City Is On Fire And Has Been For Weeks* are now available as remastered second editions. Recently published poetry has appeared in *Fox Chase Review*, *BoySlut*, *Rusty Truck*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *Blacklisted Magazine*, *Dead Snakes* and *Spudgun Magazine*. He is also managing editor of *Open Wide Magazine*. www.jamesdquinton.co.uk
www.openwidemagazine.co.uk

Brad Rose: was born and raised in southern California, about a mile from where the Apollo space capsules were built and about 240,000 miles from the lunar surface. He now lives in Boston. Links to his poetry and miniature fiction, which appear in print and on-line, appear at <http://bradrosepoetry.blogspot.com/>

Marjorie Sadin: was born May 9, 1954, She has published poetry nationally including in *The Emerge Literary Journal*, *The Barefoot Review* and the *Jewish Women's Literary Annual*. She has four books of poetry in print. Marjorie currently lives in the Washington DC area and reads her poems locally./ She tutors learning disabled students.

Linda Simoni-Wastila: writes from Baltimore, where she spends her days professing, mothering, and giving a damn. Nights, she spins words into poems and stories and such you can find at *Monkeybicycle*, *Scissors and Spackle*, *Eclectic Flash*, *The Sun*, *Hoot*, *Thunderclap!*, *Camroc Press Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Every Day Fiction*, and *Nanoism*, among others. She reads other folks' stuff at JMWW. When she can't sleep, she blogs at <http://linda-leftbrainwrite.blogspot>.

Gita Smith: is a journalist living in Alabama. She would list the publications where her work has appeared but thinks that she sometimes gets carried away with lists. She lives with her husband, the artist Mike Handley, and their unruly dog Tater. She posts haphazardly at <http://ohfinejustfine.blogspot.com>

Michael Dwayne Smith: proudly owns and operates the English-speaking world's most mysterious name. His apparitions appear at *Word Riot*, *>kill author*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *BLIP*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Northville Review*, *Orion headless*, *Quantum Poetry*, *Short Fast & Deadly*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and other haunts. He lives in a desert town with his wife, son, and rescued animals—all of whom talk in their sleep. Conjure him on Twitter with the spell @michaelthebear.

Michael J. Solender: is the editor of *MICROW*, a semiannual collection of very short stories and prose. His micro-fiction has been featured online at *Bull Men's Fiction*, *Calliope Nerve*, *Danse Macabre*, *Dogzplot*, *Full of Crow*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *The Legendary*, *Right Hand Pointing* and others. Solender's thriller, *Pewter Badge*, was awarded the 2011 Derringer Award

for Best Short Story by the Short Mystery Fiction Society. He is the author of the short story and poetry chapbook, Last Winter's Leaves, published by Full of Crow Press. His essay, Unaffiliated, is featured in the anthology, Topograph: New Writings From The Carolinas and the Landscape Beyond, published by Novello Festival Press. <http://michaeljwrites.com>

Eric Suhem: *Eric Suhem dwells in office cubicles and ocean waves. His book "Dark Vegetables" can be found in the orange hallway (www.orangehallway.com)*

Nicolette Wong: *is a writer, dancer, magician and editor of A-Minor Magazine, an online journal of fiction, poetry and art. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals including fwriktion : review, YB Poetry, Escape into Life and Thrush Poetry Journal. She is also on the editorial team of Negative Suck. Visit her at <http://nicolettew.blogspot.hk>*

Christopher Woods: *is a writer, photographer and teacher. He lives in Houston and in Chappell Hill, Texas. His photo essays have appeared in GLASGOW REVIEW, PUBLIC REPUBLIC, NARRATIVE MAGAZINE, among others. His books include a novel, THE DREAM PATCH, a prose collection, UNDER A RIVERBED SKY, and a book of stage monologues for actors, HEART SPEAK.*

Angel Zapata: *grew up in NYC, but now resides near Augusta, Georgia. Some of his fiction and poetry has appeared in the Toe Tags Anthology, Long Live the New Flesh: Year One and Year Two, The Best of Every Day Poets: Volume Two, and the zombie anthology: Putrid Poetry and Sickening Sketches.*

MICROW



HOME

7: summer 2012