



# MICROW

4: *void*

Winter 2010

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# MiCrow Winter 2010 VOID



Mike Handley: *Louisiana Church 10*

*Editor's Note*

*Void as a literary theme opens up an entire world of possibilities for both the reader and the writer. Absence can be hurtful, playful, scary, hopeful, or crushing. Emptiness and vagaries may inspire or go unnoticed. Vacating or cancellation might offer relief or distress all at the same moment.*

*Like all themes, it all depends upon the point of reference. The works that you'll find in this Winter, 2010 issue of MICROW approach the concept of Void from many varied and curious angles. Some subtle, others overt, the writing and images on the pages that follow will do everything but leave you with an empty and hollow feeling.*

*It is truly my pleasure to share with you the very best in microfiction, short prose and fabulous imagery.*

*Welcome into the VOID.*

*Michael J. Solender, Editor  
MICROW Winter, 2010*



Mike Handley: *Louisiana Church 11*

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## Contributor Bios

## **The Influence of Peripheral Vision on Focus**

**By Susan Gibb**

“Focus, focus,” said the voice behind the fat finger moving in front of my eyes. “Focus,” my mother repeated, warning no boy would ever look at a girl with an eyepatch the doctor said would cure lazy-eye. I was thinking, *cool, pirate*, but I went home and exercised my eye back into obedience.

“Reach, reach!” for the brass ring, my father called out to me. But I feared I’d fall off the standing-still horse on the moving merry-go-round. Later, sent to summer camp where I tried to fit in, the instructor told me to “Aim, aim!” for the bullseye. I stared at the kill zone, the tiny black dot on the target with mind, eye, and fingers all working together, sending arrows to slice open the heart.

“Concentrate,” the algebra teacher reminded, breaking the silence of a room full of brains working through formulas plus one left hand seeking answers through pages of a book concealed on his seat. I concentrated, avoiding the left and right angles that whispered I’d never need this to survive and I got an A minus in Algebra. I’ve never needed it since and that’s good since I don’t remember it now.

“Take this,” said a handful of colorful pills. “Hold it in,” said a curl of blue smoke. And I did and I did and the world still whirled around me just out of reach while I wandered and let it then stumbled back to the trail, damaged somehow in the trials.

There were lovers and moments of love though nothing would last. Like words spoken in passion, rage or exquisite delight, everything blew by, caught on a fencepost, flew on when hit with a storm.

Still watching ahead and avoiding the edges where a hundred feet dance and tambourines jingle and drums beat to rhythms I could never quite catch, I moved through it. Life passed in kaleidoscope patterns and the pieces fell into place and were repeated, repeated in shattering colors, but now...

In the quiet white space transected by beeping lines and monitor blips that are just out of view, I focus. My hands are weighted like stones on the sheets. My legs are so distant they don’t feel a part of me. My feet are shrouded in white and so far away I don’t think they can hear me. I give up making them move. I focus on the space that as always, seems just out of my grasp, that gaping void beyond life. Something is there, I can see it. I hear it. A tinkle of glass like a wind chime whispering in summer, an arc of white light, teasing and taunting. Yet somehow I understand I will reach this. I focus. I focus and wait.

**Somewhere in Eureka**  
**by Jeffrey S. Callico**

I was reading something written by a dead man. It was something good to read so I read it all. The dead man was a good writer, I thought as I read what he wrote.

I would tell you that the phone rang while I was reading but that would be a lie. The phone didn't ring. I kept reading uninterrupted.

I was in the kitchen, reading the dead man at the table.

Then I would tell you that some neighbor knocked at the door but that wouldn't be true either. No one came to visit. I kept reading.

Trust me here, I'm on to something.



Steve Wing: *shorelight*



Steve Wing: *light industry*

## **Depression** **By Chris Deal**

Stumbling to regain my footing, there was a cold, wet current of air oozing from the hole where the light of the sun refused to go, leaving but a gaping nothing in the ground. It had to be gold, an old mine. This area, the stuff's all over, least it was. Up in Concord, a few hundred years back they found the country's first strike, the first hint an ancient chunk of quartz molded smooth and round in a creek.

Around the mouth, scattered among the rotten leaves, were numerous broken chunks, some no more than pebbles, others virtual boulders. This far out from the trail there's no sign of other life save the distant plainsong of the birds. A tree stood tall and wide two feet from the hole, shrub and wild rose a natural border.

Idly scratching the growth along my jaw, with my boot I pushed a hunk of quartz over the edge, down into the dark. Subtle noise of impact along the wall, but no splash or echo from the bottom. I sat with my feet swinging freely inside and smoked a cigarette, ashing into the deep. Were it a sinkhole it could go down near half a mile. Probably not gold. Lot of rain of late, could have loosened the dirt enough to fall into the remnants of a forgotten mine. Wouldn't be gold. I'm not that lucky. There was probably more gold in my toenails than in that hole. I let the still lit cherry fall and the darkness choked it out within seconds. Wish I could tell Lori. Wonder what's down there?

It took twenty minutes to walk back to my car parked at the clearing off of McCoy road. I went past the monument, stone and concrete put up in honor of the slaves who worked the land in previous centuries, before anything recognizable.

I came back as the sun was on the final minutes of its descent. I wondered as I found my way through the trees if it were really possible to know if someone was watching you, if that feeling somewhere at the edge of your vision that you were being observed was real. It was the emptiness of home, the bar, or the hole. There was no one to tell about the find, no one who would care. It was a diversion, that was all. The momentary flutter of hope, the fleeting idea that there was gold down there, it was all gone.

The only purpose was to see what was down there.

Having marked the path earlier, I found my way back after just a few false trails. I took the rope from my bag and tied it around the base of the tree multiple times, testing the strength until I was sure it would hold, then attached the rope to the harness around my waist. I attached two smaller ropes to the first, each in a Klemheist knot, then secured them to the harness. Should be able to go control the trip down and be able to make it back up. I had a few glowsticks and a flashlight for illumination. Once the sun was down, I was ready.

I broke a glowstick and it shined a sickly green. It fell deep into the pit and after a few moments got no smaller. There was a bottom. I estimated I had enough rope and stood at the edge. There was a hurricane in my stomach and I swallowed it down to nothing. The forest was quiet, not even the sound of wind in the leaves.

I was weightless and then the rope found its tension, grew taut with my weight. Five feet down from the surface nothing was visible but the speck of light below me. The clay was smooth, slightly moist along the wall. I started downward, going slowly, shifting my weight from one knot to the other. Going back up would be a mirror of my motion.

The glowstick went out at the bottom after a few minutes, and I wanted to conserve the battery on my flashlight, so I went down in darkness. The sky above was a shade lighter than the darkness that surrounded me. Every few feet I'd stretch out my arms to see if the hole shrank in diameter but it showed no sign. It was a consistent five feet across.

When I estimated I was halfway down, I broke another glowstick and dropped it. I paused for a few minutes to catch my breath and I felt a prickling on the back of my neck. There was a soft vibration in the rope. I couldn't make anything out above me. I started back up but only got a foot when the rope gave.

As soon as I knew I was falling I hit the bottom, muscle memory immediately bring back above the air with a deep, rasping breath. There was a few feet of water that broke my fall but with the bright sparks behind my eyes and the hard snap that echoed up, the soundwaves escaping to the surface, that told me I was hurt. I'd bounced from side to side in the fall. With a finger, I felt where a rib bone had broken the skin on my right side.

The flashlight still worked, sputtering out a soft stream of light that showed me the rope that had given way. Clean and smooth, it had been cut with a blade.

I screamed until my lungs burned and my muscles ached with acid, then I screamed some more.

The subtle difference in black that should have showed me the sky was gone. The hole was all there was. No mine. No gold. Just the darkness, the nothing.



**Sequenced Dreams**  
**By Doug Mathewson**

Years ago my mother and I stood side by side watching my newborn son sleep. He startled. She smiled and said “Look... He’s like Cassie,” referring to our family dog, “Thinking about chasing rabbits.”

She squeezed my hand and we were blissfully content in the moment.

At Hospice today I sat with my mother, retelling our family stories. She was wrapped in blue blankets, unconscious in her bed by the sunny windows. Her hand fluttered for a moment within mine and I thought “Mom’s dreaming of bunnies.”



Lily Mullholland: *Into The Woods*

**THE YELLOW PENCIL**  
**by Howie Good**

No matter how loud I shout, my voice doesn't carry. Only in old movies do the lovers escape on an ice floe. The night supervisor, his face curiously flushed, whispers something I can't hear to the new girl working the line in the family pencil factory. Later, the worn rubber nub of a no. 2 pencil erases what has just been written.



Dorothee Lang: *Nightwood*

**NOW THAT THE BUFFALO ARE GONE**  
**by Howie Good**

We were fighting the Indians in Florida. You said a joke without a punchline isn't a real joke. Why I always carry an arrowhead in my pocket, I said. Children passed over the hill, a coffin covered with wildflowers, but Thoreau only came out when there was a fire downtown. The tall ships of the China trade returned empty. It was a sign of something, like a face shaded by a wide hat.

**Je T' Adore**  
**By Michael Webb**

The quality of the phone call wasn't perfect-you could hear hums, and pops, and sometimes the ghostly echo of someone else's call. Chantal, my roommate, was calling from the chaotic scene where her group was trying to help patch a society back together.

"How's Sherry?" Her Pekinese, Sherry, that she kept despite all the complications of owning a pet in the city, eyed me warily from across the room. "You walking her?"

"Yes, yes. We go out twice a day, sometimes three times." Of course I walk her-what else was I going to do? Toilet train her?

"Does she miss me?" That seemed impossible to answer, so I didn't. Chantal, a thin, bony grad student with brown curly hair, a warm smile and piles of craft projects, art books, and pet supplies, had moved in with me when she suddenly became homeless after a romance gone sour just before Christmas.

The silence popped and crackled. I missed her voice, her sound, her insistent needs- "Can you walk the dog for me, I have to make an 8:00 class?" I missed her reckless hopefulness, the cockeyed optimism that sent her 12 blocks in search of a poetry reading, with me sitting in the back, trying to grade quietly while her friend's verse complains about the burdens of woman.

"What have you been doing without me?," she asked. Precious little, I thought. I graded enough papers to keep from getting fired, walked the dog, then sat and smoked and listened to Steely Dan CDs and wondered why, with all this extra room since she left, I still felt trapped.

"The usual," I lied calmly. If it wasn't for the dog and trips to the college, I'd probably never leave the room. Her life here, full of art shows and papers and lectures to attend, became my life, too-she wanted a companion, so she wheedled me into being her second. We had agreed to be friends at the outset, but over time, as our habits and rules and plans became intertwined, we grew together, like roots on adjoining trees. As the old song goes, I had grown accustomed to her face.

"Do you miss me?"

"Of course," I said. I had been a man too long to not know the answer to that one. "How much longer, do you think?"

There was a burst of interference, then her voice continuing, "-send me home about a week from now. There's so much to do, but he knows I have work to do back there, too-and he doesn't want me to flunk every time there's a natural disaster."

"I can't wait to see you again." My heart leapt at the thought of her-her chaos, and emotional outbursts, and missing earrings, and the noise she made when she slept-coming back.

"Me too-" she said, followed by more interference. "-better go" -buzz, pop- "-another plane coming in."

"OK, C. Be careful."

"I will. You too! Je-" The line died. We spoke French to one another-both of us recalling scraps of our high school learning. The last word I heard was "Je"-the French pronoun "I". She-what? She missed me? She loved me? She was miserable?

"Je t'adore," I said to the dead line, then punched "End" on the phone. It wasn't a lie, and it wasn't totally the truth. It was somewhere in the middle, hiding in those silences. I meant it, but it still sounded fake as I said it. Her dog looked at me accusingly.

"I know," I said to her.

**In Between**  
**By Jason Warden**

...Then the first of the black spots appeared. They flew toward her at amazing speed, doubling, tripling, quadrupling in size exponentially until she could only see light peripherally at the edge of vision, then that was gone as well. As the claustrophobic blackness encroached, the pressure around her ceased. No longer could she feel the ground beneath her, or the restricting power of gravity above and around her. She was nothing within nothing.

A sound, low and hypnotic pulsed from far away. She held her breath trying to hear it more clearly, but soon realized, she had none to hold.



Dorothee Lang: *Still*

**Bipolar**  
**by Timothy Gager**

The moon is full, as the magnet pulls iron-filings from the beach where my boy threw it into the sand. "I'd like to pull Mama through the keyhole," he says, "but Mama's sick."

"Mama is sick," I say, "and you don't have a big enough magnet."

"Some days she's just a bed," he says. "And other days she's running around like a fucking cartoon."

"Shhhhh," I say. "Watch your mouth." The boy is only nine.

"Mama says it's ok to curse if you have something worth cursing about."

"There's always something worth cursing about."

"Look!" he says. "at them waves." The moonlight dances on the crests, but a million flashlights can't fill a black hole. "I'd like to lay on 'em and ride to heaven," he says.

He pulls the fine black sediment off the magnet with his fingers, then drops the magnet, cleans it then drops it again. "It's like growing hair," he says. "Hair that's tough to take care."

"Tough to take care of..."

She's taking her medicine, right?" he says.

"Yeah...so that she won't see heaven in some people, hell in others....we were lucky, we were only the earth last time."

"I hate when the ambulance comes for her." He tosses the magnet into the ocean.

"It's ok...." Suddenly I forget his name. "Shit," I say

**MIND YOUR STEP**  
**by Nigel Bird**

“Mind your step.” Dr Chrome held open the door.

“The basement, huh?” Jess walked in anyway. Caught a look at Chrome’s shoes. Polished to perfection. “That’s unusual.”

“Rooms are hard to come by.”

“Least you don’t have any distractions.”

“There’s plenty to catch the eye.” Chrome did some checking out of his own. Didn’t stop at the shoes, either.

“Bet you say that to all your guinea-pigs.”

“Only the gorgeous ones,” he lied. “Take the blue seat and I’ll tell you all you need to know.”

“Thanks.”

“Coffee?”

“White, one sugar.”

He patted the side of the machine as if it were an old friend and pressed a button. “It’s not bad for what it is.”

“You don’t even get *that* over at Sleep Studies.”

“It’s how I paid my way, too.”

“Easiest money I ever made.”

“Doc Morton still there?”

“Alive and kicking.”

“Used to give me nightmares.” He passed over the coffee managing to avoid spilling any froth. “Here you go.”

“Thanks.”

“Just make sure you don’t put it near the controls.”

The desk in front of her had two large lights, a dial and a button. There wasn’t much room for her plastic cup. “I’ll keep it in my hand?”

“Do any other work?”

“A couple of medical trials. So far, so good.”

“We’re glad you thought of us.”

“I’ll get involved in any experiment as long as the pay’s right.”

“Nice. Ready for the drill?”

“When you are.”

Chrome took a seat. “Behind the screen there’s another volunteer and one of my operatives.”

“OK.”

“I’m going to ask the volunteer a series of questions.”

“Got you.”

“They get it right, the green light flashes.”

“They get it wrong it’s the red one?”

“Exactly. Smart and beautiful. I may just have to buy you lunch.”

“I’m vegetarian.” She ran strands of her hair through her mouth after she spoke.

“There’s a great Chinese five minutes from here.”

“It’s a date,” she said, fixing said hair back into place.

“Now, where were we? If the light flashes red, we give them a little electric shock. You press that button right there.”

“Yikes.”

“We do it again. Next red’s an extra fifteen volts, and so on. Highest we go is 450.”

“Jesus.”

“Might not even get there. Soon as we get green, we’re done.”

“I don’t do military stuff,” Jess said with little conviction.

“We read that. This is for the psychology department only.”

“Cool.”

“And the sooner we start, the sooner we eat.”

“Then let’s go.”

Chrome put on headphones and talked into the microphone at his desk. "OK. Can you hear me back there?"

Good.

First question. Do you remember where you were night of July 4<sup>th</sup>?"

"Press the button, right?"

"Right."

"That was easy." And it was. Could have done it with her pinky.

"Do you remember where you were night of July 4<sup>th</sup>?"

Turn the dial a notch.

Press."

"He sounds funny."

"We insert a tongue guard to prevent them from choking."  
He didn't look at her as he answered, just sat forward in his chair.

"Very considerate of you."

"Last thing we want is to get sued, believe me."

"But how can he answer?"

"It's a nod or a shake.

Let's try something different.

Have you ever met one Randy Pole?"

"That's a real name?"

"Sh. Yes it is. Now keep it down."

"It's red."

"Up."

"Whoah. He didn't sound too good. Like he was going to puke."

"Never mind. Randy Pole, sir. Ever met the man?"

"Red."

"You know what to do."



“But it’s hurting him.”

“Please continue.”

“My coffee, shit. I’m sorry. It’s just that when he...”

“Never mind. The cleaners’ll get it. I’ll get another if you’d like.”

“No need. Tasted of ground badger anyway.”

“So we’ll move on.

Next question.

What do the letters U.V.P. mean to you?”

“Not very bright, is he?”

“Up the dial.”

“He *really* didn’t like that one.”

“U.V.P.?”

“Come on you idiot, answer the darned question.”

“You need to up the voltage.”

“But he’s getting hurt.”

“The experiment requires that you continue.”

“And if I don’t?”

“It is absolutely essential that you continue.”

“Fuck. That was a biggie.”

“Sorry?”

“The shock. The light even flickered.”

“Didn’t notice.

There’s plenty more room on the dial.

Ready?

Where did the cash come from?”

“Maybe they didn’t hear you.”

“Where did the money come from?”

“Ah, shit.”

“Another notch, please.”

“But...”

“You have no other choice, you must go on.”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

“Good work.”

“It’s green. Thank goodness. Guess he knew the answer to that one.”

“Looks that way.”

“And we’re done?”

“Wrapped up like a birthday present.”

“You know, I think I’ve lost my appetite. It’s the smell. Kind of like when I use my hair-straighteners.”

“They usually say barbeques. Is that date over?”

“I could murder a beer.”

“Then what are we waiting for? Mind your step.”



Steve Wing: *sub(merging)*



Steve wing: *loitering*

## **Spaces**

**By R. S. Bohn**

The glass was old. When you looked through it, it was like looking through water. Everything in the house was old, and none of it could be replaced. Some things could be repaired, and some couldn't. Those that couldn't turned to dust that we breathed in, or made spots on the floor that we stepped over. I opened the attic window to let the heat out, and dead flies fell from the sill. The outside world clarified, brightened. As if I'd just put my contacts in. I turned away and started peeking into boxes under the rafters.

I found a box of old sewing patterns, but May refused to wear old clothes. I went down into the cellar anyway, put my foot on the treadle of an ancient Singer. The sewing machine hummed up and down, the needle splotchy but still sharp. All night I sewed, sitting there on a polished wood stool. In the morning, sun came in through the cellar windows and I lifted my head and saw that I'd only dreamed of sewing. Cobwebs hung, droopy with accumulated dust, all over the black machine. Up above, I could hear May's little feet, light as a cat's, crossing the kitchen. I heard the refrigerator door open and shut, the clink of a mug being removed from its hook and knocking against the others.

I thought about crawling into one of the spaces, one of the many spaces that are dark and filled with sacs of spider eggs. I could've dreamed myself into one of those sacs, been reborn as something tiny, something that would live in one of the other twelve mugs that May never used. Something that would catch other things, and eventually, would crawl out, fat and fast, and bite May on the hand, or maybe the face.

The cellar door opened. She called my name. The dark spaces beckoned, musty pockets between old boxes. I could feel the hairs extending along my arms and legs, my vision breaking into honeycombed shards. I thought of running up there, fast. Catching her.

Instead, I gathered up the tissue-paper patterns and an armful of the dream clothes, and I headed up the stairs. And in the night, in the dark, she wears them as she presses me into the spaces we've created between us. I pretend to bite her, and she pretends that I am still her husband, and we wake each morning hoping to see we are repaired.

## **Morning Accident**

**by Mike Robertson**

Moments after the bullet struck him, he woke from what seemed an odd sort of sleep, confused and a little alarmed. He sat up and looked around. His surroundings were familiar but ... different. Something about the colors. And contrast. Perspective seemed sharper, deeper, everything more immediate.

He didn't know what had happened. He just knew he had blacked out and now he was awake and things were ...different. "What happened?" This to himself, as there was nobody else around at the moment.

His shirt collar felt wet. He touched it with his hand and brought his fingers up to his eyes. Bright red. Very bright, very wet. He felt his neck: there it was, flowing. Bleeding. He knew he should be alarmed. Or something. It seemed like it must be serious, must be a problem. He was hurt. Bleeding. But there was no pain. He swallowed, to test his throat. No pain, no constriction. He checked his breathing: normal. Heart? He felt the pulse in his wrist. That seemed okay too. Maybe ninety or a hundred beats per minute. That didn't seem so wrong either. What had happened to him? He stood up.

He was where he expected himself to be: on the sidewalk in front of the little indie coffee shop he favored, about a block away from where he worked. Morning. He was dressed for work but he was pretty sure he hadn't gone there yet. He always stopped at this shop on his way in the morning.

He heard a series of gunshots come from an alley across the street. Very quickly the street seemed filled with police cars, lights flashing, stopped with police jumping out, guns drawn and held low, all heading to the alley. A woman, dressed for a desk job, as he was, stepped out from the coffee shop door and looked at the police, then looked at him. "You're bleeding!" she said, starting toward him.

"I know. I don't know what happened. Maybe a stray bullet?" He held his hand over the pulsing hole in his neck.

"Shouldn't you be laying down? You know, shock..." she seemed to run out of words. "I'll call an ambulance for you, okay?"

It didn't seem like something he needed to respond to, so he turned back to watch what was going on in the alley. He heard shouting, then another shot. Then silence.

When he turned back, the woman was gone. A man stood in the doorway, body shielded by the door frame, watching the police. "Did she ..." he started to ask, but the man ignored him. Whatever he was going to ask seemed unimportant at that moment, so he sat down on the curb, still holding his neck. His hand felt very wet. He was doing the best he could do. The best thing seemed to be to just stay quiet and wait. He settled down, facing the street, butt on the curb, legs crossed under him. He shifted his back until his spine felt straighter and just waited.

The sounds of things became very interesting. Every sound had some kind of after effect, a faint repeat or echo. Not so faint, he decided. Very clear. "Reverb." The word came to him from a manual that he'd read recently that came with a new home stereo he had purchased. It had a control that allowed him to select how much and what kind of reverb he wanted to hear. A smaller room might need a bit of it, it had said, and a larger room less, since it would have its own natural reverb or sound reflections. This street, the buildings on both sides, and cars, orders being barked, sirens, all had powerful echos here. Deep reverb. He hadn't noticed that before. He loved it. The more he heard, the more of it he wanted to hear.

He had a thought: "I should get help. I may be dying." He tried to hold the thought but it passed, the way trivial comments by his fellow office workers often passed, through him and gone, not worth the effort to hold on to. Then another: "What if I'm already dead? I don't feel pain though I'm obviously injured, and I don't seem to be taking all this very seriously." This thought, too, passed through him gently, easily, followed by its corollary: "If I'm dead, wouldn't I know it? Wouldn't I float away or see myself lying on the sidewalk, or something?" But he had to admit to himself that he really had no idea what it might be like to be dead.

He watched what was going on in the street and what he could see of the alley for what seemed a long time. Finally the police returned to their cars and shut off their lights and pulled away, after taping off the alley entrance. Normal traffic resumed. He had taken his hand away from his neck long ago, and wiped his hand and neck the best he could with his handkerchief. The bleeding had stopped. He knew he'd lost a lot of blood, he could see it on the sidewalk behind him. But he didn't feel weak or in pain or even uncomfortable, except for his butt, which ached a bit from the long sit on concrete. Finally, not knowing what else to do, he decided to walk back home so he could clean up and check himself in a mirror and change clothes. He might even take today off. He was already so late for work that he might as well just call in sick and relax the rest of the day. After all, the sky was bright, the colors of the sky and clouds brilliant and beautiful, the sounds of the city like music to him today. He deserved to celebrate these feelings. Dead or alive, he didn't know (and didn't much care really) but he felt good, better by the minute, and he deserved this, whatever it might be.

## **Afterwards**

**By Dorothee Lang**

The smoke, like low tide. Abandoned things, packets of life, staring up with you at a roofless sky. Then, two birds, crossing high above. Then nothing.

## **Dream**

**By Laura Cummins**

I lay in the comfort of your arms, slowing my breathing to match yours, willing my heart to beat in time with the rhythm of yours. The worries and fears of the day, of my life, disappear as my senses are filled by your presence. There is only us, isolated from the world by nothing but the weight of the quilt and it is enough. It is everything.

The buzzing alarm jerks me awake, and I feel tears prick my eyes. Who would have thought good dreams could make you weep.

## **I Look It Up**

**by Randall Brown**

The examples: (1) betray one's country; (2) betrayed Christ to the Romans; (3) betray one's better nature; (4) betray a secret. From Sara's note, "That is why I felt so betrayed, but as my friend says, 'Those biscuits are burnt.'"

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I ask Lucy, "Has anyone ever betrayed you?"

She's by the pool, surrounded by dogs. "Nope."

I ask her if she's ever betrayed anyone and she asks if I'm feeling guilty. The dogs are fluffy white Bichons, like clouds. Didn't Robert Frost come upon such a scene, the whiteness betrayed by something, or was it someone? Was it the design or the designer? Focus.

\*\*\*

My mom drank. No matter what I did, she drank. I came to think she was making a choice, between me and Schaeffer's, the one beer to have when you're having more than one. I began to think that nothing I did—not the As, the football trophies, the baseball All-Star jerseys, the beer can collection—could make her love me enough to choose me. I began to think I was unlovable. It took hold, this idea, stuck there, like a kid to his mother's leg the first day of school.

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I delete Sara's note so I can't keep reading it. *Betrayed*. What must one feel for someone to feel betrayed? That of course is the question. At the root of *betrayed* is the Latin word *tradere*, the same root as *tradition*. The difference is the preposition, a handing *down* instead of *over*.

Twenty-five years ago, I'd sent this note. "I'm marrying Lucy. I think this is my chance to be happy." I did so with the absolute certainty that Sara would never love me, that she would always choose someone else. It seemed to be the pattern. The tradition.

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"You freaked me out a bit yesterday," Lucy says at dinner, the dogs under the table, waiting for corn kernels to drop. "What's the obsession with betrayal?"

"I don't know. My mind betrays me. It doesn't quite grasp the world as it is."

"And what is the world as it is?"

"Oh. I don't know. Do you?"

She rubs my head as she gets up. "You're an odd little creature," she says. "It's a good thing I love odd little creatures."

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I write back to Sara, "You said betrayed. Why betrayed? I'm sorry if I'm supposed to get this and don't." Sara had a similar past. I wonder now, surely not then, if she thought of me as I had her: that if she, who knew me best and to whom I revealed my truest self to, couldn't love me, then I was so doomed to unhappiness. In my deepest of wishes was that thought, that I was really the one for her, the one who knew her best and loved her the truest, and that one day she'd realize it. But my father had waited for such a moment with my mother who left him and he was still waiting, fifty years later. And I'd said, a hundred million times, that I'd never be him. And there I'd been, you see, waiting for that moment with Sara, only it had been five years, not fifty. But imagine if it were true, if deep down she loved me also. Imagine if I'd actually betrayed her.

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It's the Road Not Taken, of course, that haunts. And the Road Not Taken, in Frost's poem, might be the decision to tell the truth about how, that day in the past, both paths equally lay. It's the OCD, the

wondering that becomes fixation that becomes anxiety and then panic in the face of the uncertainty of not knowing.

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"You look like you're ready to molt," Lucy says.

"I wrote Sara," I say. "On Facebook."

"Okay. And?"

I tell Lucy everything, Just like it is up above. We can get our email on the TV. It's a wonder, isn't it? I wonder if that's betrayal, having Lucy there, or oh, I don't know, and Lucy says, "Don't look up. That's your penitence. You can't look up until the email beeps."

"Penance," I say. "Not penitence."

I look at the brown of the brown leather couch. I think of Mr. Brown who went to town with Mr. Black. Of Green Eggs and Ham. Sam I Am. Sam I Am. Was Sam I Am the one bringing him green eggs and ham? Did he betray his friend? Not if his friend ended up loving green eggs and ham.

Don't look up, Lucy repeats. I think of Sara on the library roof, her breast falling out of the gold dress she'd made for the final formal. The sky like Lite-Brite and I wondered why all things led me back to something in childhood. And she'd said, "My brother says that I love you." And I'd already begun to resent Sara's unlove of me, already had twisted her into my mother and me into my father, and I said, "My sister says that I love you. Maybe we should get the two of them together." And we talked about that until morning, the two of them together, what a match.

Don't look up. Not yet. At her door, on that first day, before she let me in, Lucy said, "Don't disappear." I promised her I wouldn't. It's a joke now. How literal I can be.

It beeps.

Sara's response flickers into life in my family room.

"Oh honey," Lucy says.

I look up and there it is. An answer. Why betrayed?

"You really don't know, Sam? You were my best friend."



# SKETCH POEMS BY NABINA DAS



## A Face Like Ours

Poetry is a face inviting a peek  
a thought that carves the Ajanta grace-  
a smile, a pause.  
Do be poetry's guest, you liberated words!

## Utterance From The Tongue Of An Urn

Only when we look around we see  
a subliminal longing, in an unaccustomed mouth  
Perhaps you call it the birth of lettered rhymes



## Airborne, Words Can Sing

Our times is a kite for our hands  
to say nothing of the birds. Alphabetic. Soaring:  
the face, this poetry, defy the disbelief of metaphors

**Ravens Are Not Ravenous**  
**By Sean Ulman**

Sunrays swaddled by snow flurry, belted bolts upon a patch of gray bay. The reigning chief raven rifted the light blip, tilted, flicked oily feathers, gleamed like black bear fur, barrel-rolled, elevator'd up, sunk, arrowed shoreward and perched atop the cairn tower Founder's monument, its claws clacking on the weather vane's black-metal model locomotive. The raven leapt, swept seaward and called as it twirled loopy hoops.

"Ponk ponk conk."

A murder of forty Northwestern crows pecking gravel paused to heed their clever counterpart's advancing entrancing calls.

That moonless night, eight ravens huddled on the snow-banked gutter. Each glossily plumed bird's hunched carriage carried the mark of grief. A ceremony of mournful 'clucks' throttled forth in honor of the expired raven that had broken a wing winging in wicked wind. The reigning chief raven hammered its beak into the fallen's bushy neck thrice. Beak blotted with black blood, it plucked two sinewy strings and toddled from the flock. And the next in the pecking order pecked purposefully within the pack of statuette birds. After it had taken its humble portion and hobbled into the street, the next crept forward. One at a time, each patient bird took its turn.

**Another Final Straw**  
**By Paul Beckman**

There are three sides to every story, my father said, mine, your mother's and the real one. I was six years old and he was packing his suitcases into a borrowed car. They'd been sitting on the back stoop for all to see for three days before he showed up to get them. He must've known they'd be there waiting because he didn't seem surprised and never went into the house to talk to my mother. I guess their talking days were over.

I ran over and hugged him when I saw him walking from the parking lot to our apartment. Why do you have to go I asked?

It's what your mother wants, he said and I said that mom said it was what he wanted. That's when he told me the three sides bit so I asked him what the real reason he was leaving was and he flashed angry and said I just told you that your mother wants me out. I asked him who will tell me the real reason and he told me I'm just like my mother—calling him a liar and that I should go take a six-year old powder and someday I'll understand.

I can understand today, Daddy, I said, but first I'll have to be told the real reason. He shot me his mean look, stuck a cigar in the corner of his mouth, waved me away with the back of his hand and walked back to the car with the last suitcase—the one I'd taken his matching set of hairbrushes from and hidden them in my bedroom. They were called military brushes—kind of oval with silver backs and no handles and you used one in each hand at the same time.

He never came back for them as I'd hoped he would and when my mother saw me using them and asked me why I had the brushes I told her he gave them to me. It figures, she said bitterly, they were my wedding gift to him.

## **The Dress**

**by Ron Koppelberger**

The circumstances were conducive to the labors of love, passion and wont. Her perseverance was in pregnant contemplation of the result, the present she was fixing herself. Vive Tranquil was an array of skill and craft, a hocus-pocus of sorts. She thought about the wisdom of her peers and the custom of those she held in dearest regard. She saw sidewise saffron blossom and revolving clusters of blushing fertile farmland and she craved more, the telltale design on need and poverty in her motivation. Vive endured the temptation to slow her desires, to reconvene at another time, the fear of discovery was a strong one nevertheless she persisted in her pursuits.

She looked out the sweatshop window and worked faster, dreaming of home and the design of her daydream.

Sunshine flew in mooted tempests and currents near the chipped tile floor, spotlight sun rays highlighted the dirty linoleum surface. She pressed the pedal on the Singer and stitched another seam. The design was nearly perfect and she caressed the secret dress, alabaster and pearl, scarlet and cream. Her dream was to give respite to her dull existence, the poverty of a seamstress, a sweatshop slave, her short straw in society. Vive appraised the other laborers; tentatively, she ventured a look toward the front office. She shielded her eyes and squinted through the haze of sewing machines.

She surrendered to her inspiration a moment later, dressing herself and waving farewell to the sweatshop in a flourishing curtsey. Her dress unsullied and magically attuned, transported her to a grand ballroom in regal surety. She danced and laughed, mystifying the crowd of noble onlookers with her evanescent frill.

When she was finished and the clock rang its call, eight times exactly, a note in pronounced exclamation, she exhaled and turned off the singer. Another day for a pennies worth she thought as she put her dress away.



Lily Mulholland: *Fogbound*

## **What's in a Name?**

**By Jeffery Miller**

As soon I arrived at the station in the morning, my deputy filled me in on the man in one of the holding cells. Brought in last night for breaking and entering and aggravated assault. Calvin Cusick. His last name sounded familiar; knew a kid back in grade school named Cusick.

My deputy handed me a cup of coffee and the prisoner's rap sheet which read like a résumé for a two-bit crook—breaking and entering, drunk and disorderly conduct, possession of a firearm, discharging a firearm within the city limits, narcotics, assault—strictly small time, but he had done the time: a couple years in juvie and some longer stretches at the Sheridan Correctional Facility and Vandalia.

The kid's name I knew back in school was on the tip of my tongue. I looked at his mug shot again. I shuddered.

Cue ball Cusick.

Back in the fifth grade, we were having our biannual head lice check by the school nurse. Lined up outside the nurse's office, we were called in one at a time into a darkened examination room, where the portly nurse in a heavily starched white uniform (with matching hose and shoes) that crackled when she walked, checked for head lice with a handheld black light lamp that gave off this eerie blue light when shone on our heads.

Before we entered that room, there was a fair amount of jostling and joking among us waiting in line, about who was going to be caught with “cooties” or not. Poor Calvin had the distinct misfortune of being the only kid with head lice that day; the rest of us knew immediately as soon as he was whisked away by the principal. Two days later, he was back in school and doomed forever as soon as he walked into Mrs. Sawyer’s class and we saw his white, shaved head; “Cue ball,” Glenn Black snickered.

The name stuck and the seeds for a life of crime were planted. He got expelled for bringing a hunting knife to school not long after that. Told everyone it was for show and tell, but we knew it was to scare the kids who laughed at him. Not long after that, his family moved away to Missouri or Arkansas. What the hell was he doing back here? Then I saw the address on the police report of the home he broke into—Glenn Black’s.

The county sheriff showed up at 10:00 to transport him to the county lock up for arraignment later that day. Cusick would be out of my hair and jurisdiction.

“Hey Calvin,” I shouted, standing in front of the cell. “Sheriff’s here to take you to the courthouse.”

Calvin slowly lifted his shaved, scarred head—the result of countless bar fights and brawls—from the cot and stared at me with hooded, bloodshot eyes. If looks could kill, I would have been dead on the spot, but damn, if his shaved head still didn’t look like a cue ball.

## **Silence**

**By Carol Maginn**

I suppose I was always a particularly quiet person. As a child I was easy to overlook, and I was always glad of that. My parents were elderly, and I think were surprised when I, their first and only son, came along. When I think back over the years of my childhood, I realise that my parents and I never had very much to say to each other. I liked it that way. I liked peace.

The only person who ever really noticed me was Ludmilla, who married me. We were fifteen when we met at the midwinter fair, and from then on I was, quite simply, hers. This meant that for quite a long time we were able to get on with our lives, and not have to pay each other too much attention. But that time came to an end. My parents died, and it was felt that it was time for us to marry. And so we did, and then we moved into my parents' cottage. It wasn't a large cottage. As Ludmilla bustled round, singing and decorating, I realised what a very loud voice she had. In fact, she did everything loudly, and at close quarters. We had two children in swift succession – a boy, Otto, and a girl, Helga. The cottage was now crowded, and full of voices – voices singing, crying, talking, shouting, laughing. It was very difficult.

The first time I went outside, Ludmilla came out after a while to find me. She looked puzzled. 'What are you doing, just standing here?' she asked. I shrugged, unable to explain that this was exactly what I was doing – just standing. After that, by degrees, I started to spend more and more time outside, in the same spot in the shady garden. Ludmilla gradually stopped coming out to see me, which was good. Finally I no longer went in to the cottage at all. The place where I stood in the garden was my place. All I had to do was remain there, relaxed and upright. The hubbub of the world receded, blown away on the breezes that drifted down from the hills. Otto would play in the garden as if I wasn't there, but Helga would still come out sometimes to tell me things. If Ludmilla called her, she would shout back, 'I'm talking to Daddy!'

By now I had begun to be insulated by a thin layer of soft velvet green, with a smell of sweet resin. I had also begun to be aware of a slow, warming, powerful pulse which rose from the cold ground beneath me up through my frame and out into the sky somewhere above me. I was alone with the deep midnight skies and grey misty dawns. And the seasons slowly passed. For some time Helga continued to come outside, but she would just scuff me absently with her foot, as if she was trying to remember what significance I could have had for her. Finally my family moved away.

I have come to know the seasons very well. In spring there is a cacophony of noise, as birds nest and quarrel and mate in my branches. In summer there is the buzz of insects, and the sounds of cars as visitors descend on our countryside with picnic baskets and dogs. But autumn slowly dampens the din. It ushers in the start of winter, of short, pale days which slowly become colder until finally the snow, falling for weeks, is a blanket many feet deep, and in the long icy nights I stretch out my bare branches in the ecstasy of pure, pure silence.

It doesn't last. The ice melts like tears, the sun returns. My roots grow deeper and stronger. I haven't forgotten everything. I sometimes hope that in the summer Helga will come back to see me, or perhaps her children will, or their children.

I hope they will be quiet.

## **Night**

**By James Tallett**

It was the end of an age, and the coming of the night. A new dawn had been promised, and for one shining day, it had stood out proud and bright, the hopes and dreams of the mortal world enshrined in the brightness that had followed the night. And there it had stayed, one shining moment to hold against a thousand black ages, the hope of man compressed into a single, fallen star, streaking across the heavens and then disappearing, bringing man ever downward into the despair and the hatred, left only with a single memory, a day that made the night seem all the darker and all the more cruel for the mirror to which it had been held.

Love, purity, valor, these things had been made manifest, a flare of all that was worthy, reduced only to a sliver that could be hidden at the bottom of a heart, buried beneath the layers of oppression and brutality that deadened the senses of all those who now lived. Each who held that sliver felt it dig and grind and gouge away, each painful stab a reminder of what could have, what might have, what may yet still be.

Yet none dared to lift their heads high, to look full into the dawn and to see the light as it might yet be, for in their souls they feared the unknown, the change, more than they feared death, or the thousand tortures of the dying. For now they grasped certainty within their hands, a grubby, small, and sickened certainty, and yet they caressed it and kissed it as if it was the most precious gift in all the land, a boon from the angels who flitted above them in a world they could not comprehend.

Within that certainty they held their whole lives, each step placed as that of the day before, and as that of the day after. A life lived in the crushing grip of routine had stunted them, fitting their growth into a box already provided, men's souls pruned like so many shrubs, dancing to the biting sheers of the gardener. Aye, they all had souls, but they were shriveled things, dying of ill-use and mutilation. Only that one, little, sliver kept the soul alive, and in some men even that died out, and they were lost from the realm of the living, their bodies moving in determined pace, but with no spark, no fire, no inspiration. They reveled in nothing, took joy from no act. Grey, emotionless, stripped of all passion, each of these sought to batter down, to crush and to rend all acts of selflessness, of pity, of piety, even of spite, for to them, to feel was an abomination beyond all others.

And so they above all others had become the heralds of the new night, ushering in blackness not with trumpets and fanfare, but with quiet words and bowed head, so many downtrodden and beaten men, devoid of will and of feeling. There had remained some few dim glows, the after-images of that one pure moment, but like the last rays of the sunset, caught high on a peak above, they had been unattainable, and soon vanished, and the light of knowledge and of wisdom had become stilled, sucked down into a mire filled with the hatred, ignorance and bigotry of the men who stood forth most proudly, morals corrupted and twisted into a perversion of what was right. And it was here, within the hearts of men, that blame lay forth, and so it always shall be, for when truth was offered, and the light shined free, men shielded their eyes, and ran to caverns of certainty and caves of routine, preferring ever more the dark of night to the light of day. And so it was that light passed over man, and left him laid low.



## Waiting in Novgorod

By Susan May

As she walks along the street towards her small one bedroom apartment, her feet grow numb and her legs feel heavy. The snow is thick and she is almost too tired to go on. Her work day over, she looks forward to getting home and going straight to bed; the sun has set and won't be seen again until almost ten o'clock the next day, by which time she'll have been at work for two hours. The days blur together and there is no reason for her to do anything but sleep when she gets in. She should eat but doing so would take more energy than she has to give. As she trudges along a residential street, more snow begins to fall and the air is so cold she fears her lungs will freeze with each breath. Her small frame bends into the wind and she pulls her scarf tight around her face. Staring at the ground the woman walks with a determined step. She doesn't need to look up; she knows the route well and she follows in the steps of a man who shares her bus stop. She waits next to him in the morning and at night she lets him off the bus first. He moves with a slight limp, his head bowed. They never speak; two forlorn figures under a grey Novgorod sky.

It takes her ten minutes to walk to her apartment block. Pausing under the dim streetlight she finds her key and hesitates for a moment before going inside. The hallway is dark. A single bare bulb flickers and her shadow is cast on a wall mottled with peeling green paint. The stairwell is damp and covered with litter; the banister wobbles as she climbs up to the fourth floor.

When she gets inside she unwinds her scarf but leaves on her thick winter coat. Closing her eyes she sinks to the floor and leans against the wall. Tears trickle down her face as she faces the hardest part of her day; returning to an empty home. She is unaware of how long she sits, remembering a different time. Not too long ago she had both a son and a husband, now she has neither; one had been taken while the other claimed to have been driven away.

The woman inhales and exhales in measured breaths, willing her hands to stop shaking. Standing up she places her palms on her head and bends forward; a soft groan escapes her lips. As she walks to the bedroom her clothes drip from melted snow and she is heedless of her wet boots. She reaches under the bed and removes a small brown suitcase. A soft sweet scent strikes her as she opens it, causing fresh pain to course through her as she lifts out a blue jersey knit sweater. It smells of her son and so she holds it to her face and remembers summer holidays in St. Petersburg; White Nights and eating oranges while laughing and strolling along the Palace Embankment.

'Alexei,' she whispers as she collapses onto the bed. She draws her legs up and buries her face in the sweater; suffocating her sobs. Guilt ridden, she recalls the day she was late picking him up from school and he wasn't there. There was a search; someone had seen him get into a car. Eventually the police dropped the case. An image of a razor now flits into her head. Her throat constricts, a dull knot burns in her stomach.

'No,' she says to the empty room, banishing the nearly unthinkable from her mind. Yearning for her son, she tries to remain hopeful. He could still be alive. However, her husband had not shared her optimism, her *obsession* as he had called it. He thought she needed to let go, to move on, but she couldn't and so he had left without her. Instead of returning to London she stayed in Novgorod where, devoid of all past associations, she ekes out a solitary existence. At weekends she walks along the banks of the Volkhov River and dreams of washing away the pain. If only she knew for certain that Alexei was not coming back, she would succumb to its icy caress.

At length, she stands up and refolds her son's sweater. With gentle hands, she places it in the suitcase which she puts back under the bed. Exhausted, she takes off her boots and stretches out fully clothed. Huddling under the blankets she stares out into the darkness and, overwhelmed by a now familiar sense of loss, she prays for the safe return of her son.

## **BROKEN STEM**

**By Richard Godwin**

She craved this pain, this needle in the vein.

Its searing cauterised her wound.

For years she goaded him and entered his flesh and feasted there with a hungry tongue.

She sought his troubles and dug deep into the roots of his scars and coaxed him with her poisoned love.

As a child her parents left her at the school that first bleak winter.

She recalled how someone had snapped the stems of all the flowers in the garden and how they hung their heads as if in shame at what had been done to them. Perhaps the perpetrator of this act held the key to something in her soul she told herself.

She recalled standing at the steps waiting for her father's car and the whiff of his tobacco, neatly wrapped gift in hand.

The air was full of ice and seemed to assault her flesh, and she stood straining to every sound.

The other children were all leaving with their parents, and she stood and watched this picture she had no relation to.

When no car came she went back inside and walked with great dignity to her bare room.

She stood at the window staring down at the darkness tapping a small fist on the pane blinded by a child's tears, as if by tapping she could summon her father from the empty drive.

And she tasted something new and unfamiliar and wondered what she had eaten. Years later she realised it was the bitter root of grief that lay embedded in her palate as if she had chewed on bark and all she had left was her own bile and helplessness.

She felt the loss of a security she had touched for the briefest of moments.

The alteration came with the waiting, the days like years for the young mind.

And so she grew into the beauty men sought and she felt inside her the deep pit into which her aspirations fell like broken promises.

She saw it in the eyes of lovers, a knowing and a desire to leave her, for beneath their words of reassurance was the trick, the game they would play.

She told herself the script was written, whispered these words to herself in the hushed darkness beside the shadows of these men who entered her without understanding. She sought out her own image in the tarnished mirrors of their sleazy flats and reminded herself they would leave her.

She sought solace in the nights of flesh, slow seductions by candlelight with words which fell like exotic feathers, hushing her feverish mind. And it was desire she needed like an anaesthetic, the slow seeping warmth of knowing she was wanted.

She sought oblivion in the bleeding of their bank accounts, with mad shopping spree that ended with the old hollowness returning.

And she abandoned herself into their arms and let their faces merge on the faded pillows as she spoke their names in a tired voice so full of monotony it told her how little these men meant to her.

She abandoned herself to the necessary cruelty she inflicted on her flesh, puckering and piercing it until some blood was let as if a leech were housed there and attended her resident malady.

The day he left she beseeched him, her knees bleeding on the gravel.

She returned to the house alone with the pain and opened her wound further in the knowledge of all she was.

Deserted now she knew this place better than any other, alone, frozen, bereft as a grieving mother.

For that child she was so many years ago stood waiting on the darkened driveway.

She pulled a fragment of gravel from her knee and held it in her hand as if it had the power to transport her back to where she had been lost and wandered all these years.

Her exile and rejection were like some omnipresence that nature used to mock her.

Even the birds knew how lost she was and told it in their song.

But for her there was no song.

Only the vacuum of human desertion.

And she knew she echoed to the sound of this hollow cleft within her soul.

This forsakenness was all she had.

Outside the window the earth darkened, telling her she was unwanted.

She tore at her heart and watched her isolation grow on the moon's surface.



Lily Mulholland: *Into the Woods*

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**Carol Maginn** currently works and lives in Liverpool, England. She has published short stories and non-fiction in the UK and is working on her first novel, "Ruin". She likes trees, and suspects they generally have a more interesting past than they pretend.

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**Dorothee Lang** is practicing the art of writing shorter bios, and just learned that "void" also is the name for a datatype that doesn't store data. She is the editor of [\*The Blue Print Review\*](#).

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**Howie Good** is the author of a full-length poetry collection, *Lovesick*, and 21 print and digital poetry chapbooks. With Dale Wisely, he is the co-founder of White Knuckle Press, <http://www.whiteknucklepress.com>

**James Tallett** is the soon to be published author of a series of fantasy novels set in *The Four Part Land*. Aside from writing, he loves skiing and the outdoors, and often combines the two by putting places he loves into his novels. <http://www.thefourpartland.com>

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**Lily Mulholland** is an Australian writer of flash fiction and short stories who likes to dabble in photography and the odd spot of drawing. Lily lives and works in Canberra, Australia, although her soul resides just outside of Hobart in Tasmania, the most beautiful place in the universe. Look for her at <http://lilymulholland.com>

**Michael J. Solender** 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 newly released anthology, *Topograph: New Writings From The Carolinas and the Landscape Beyond*, published by Novello Festival Press. He is the editor of the online magazine, [\*On The Wing\*](#). Solender's work is found at [michaeltjwrites.com](http://michaeltjwrites.com) and his blog, [\*NOT FROM HERE, ARE YOU?\*](#)

**Michael Webb** was born and bred in Boston, but now makes his home near Philadelphia. He makes his living with chemicals, but words are his one true love. He blogs at [innocentsaccidentshints.blogspot.com](http://innocentsaccidentshints.blogspot.com)

**Mike Handley** – Cowboy, Artist, Writer, Editor, Mike is one talented hombre.

**Mike Robertson** writes from the bank of the muddy Missouri River. An all too urban river hillbilly, he struggles to find ways to express the odd and mostly hidden truths of being human in what appears to be a mostly mad world. His greatest inspiration comes from the periodic floods that wash away the detritus of our over-proud existence, replacing it with groin-deep mud. You can find his droppings at [missouririverwriter.blogspot.com](http://missouririverwriter.blogspot.com).

**Nabina Das'** first novel "**Footprints in the Bajra**" is available from Cedar Books, India, while her poetry, short stories and essays have been published in a variety of literary journals and anthologies in North America, Asia and Australia. A former journalist, she has also won prizes in significant poetry contests. As an Associate Fellow for the prestigious **Sarai-CSDS "City as Studio" Fellowship 2010** (New Delhi, India), she worked on "The Migrant City", a collection of short poems and prose poems inspired by visual artists. An MA in Linguistics (JNU), Nabina writes in three languages and is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Rutgers University (Camden, USA). <http://fleuve-souterrain.blogspot.com/>

**Nigel Bird** is a Support For Learning teacher in a primary school near Edinburgh. Co-Producer of the Rue Bella magazine between 1998 and 2003, he has recently had work published by 'The Reader', 'Crimespree' and 'Needle'. He was interviewed by Spinetinger for their 'Conversations With The Bookless' series earlier this year, won the 'Watery Grave Invitational 2010' contest over at 'The Drowning Machine', has recently made debuts at 'A Twist Of Noir', 'Pulp Metal Magazine' and 'Dark Valentine Magazine'. His story 'An Arm And A Leg' will appear in the 'Best Of British Crime' anthology (edited by Maxim Jakubowski) in 2011 and 'No Pain No Gain' has just been accepted by Crimefactory. His blog 'Sea Minor' is currently running the 'Dancing With Myself' series of interviews. He hopes to complete a draft of his novel by the end of 2010.

**Paul Beckman** is a real estate salesman, a writer, snorkeler, traveler and photographer. He specializes in the short story, flash fiction & briefs (stories under 50 words). Paul prints stories on postcard stock and mails them anonymously to friends of friends. His publishing credits include : THE CONNECTICUT REVIEW, THE NEW HAVEN REVIEW, ONTHEBUS, SHORT STORY LIBRARY, THE WRITER'S VOICE, PLAYBOY, 5 TROPE, OTHER VOICES, THE SCRUFFY DOG REVIEW, FICTION WAREHOUSE, WEB DEL SOL, JEWISH CURRENTS, LONG STORY SHORT, PITTSBURGH FLASH FICTION GAZETTE, RIVERBABBLE, EXQUISITE CORPSE, COLLECTEDSTORIES.COM, OPIUM, CLEAN SHEETS, THUG LIT & THE VIEW FROM HERE.

**R.S. Bohn** lives with hungry mutts and devilish cats, and one sweet man. She is in pursuit of deadliness here: <http://www.deadlychaps.com/>

**Randall Brown** is the author of the award-winning flash fiction collection *Mad to Live* (Flume Press 2008). He teaches at and directs Rosemont College's MFA in Creative Writing Program. His short and very short fiction has been published widely, and his essay "Making Flash Count" appears in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction: Tips from Editors, Teachers, and Writers in the Field* (Rose Metal Press 2009). He appears in the Norton Anthology of Hint Fiction and blogs regularly at [FlashFiction.Net](http://FlashFiction.Net).

**Richard Godwin** writes dark crime fiction and he lets it slip the net like wash into horror. His work has appeared in many publications, places like *A Twist Of Noir* and *Pulp Metal Magazine*, as well as in two anthologies. His story 'Pike N Flytrap' is in this Fall's issue of *Needle Magazine*. His play 'The Cure-All' has been produced on the London stage. All his stories and poetry can be found at his blog here <http://www.richardgodwin.net/>. His first crime novel 'Apostle Rising' is about to be published and will be released for sale onto the market on March 10th 2011.

**Ron Koppleberger** is aspiring to become established as a poet and a short story writer. He has been submitting his work for the past year and a half. He is thrilled by acceptance. He is always looking for an audience. He has published 369 poems, 209 short stories and 48 pieces of art in over 96 periodicals, books and anthologies. He has been accepted in England, Australia, Canada and Thailand. He loves to write and offer an experience to the reader. He is a member of The American Poet's Society as well as The Isles Poetry Association. His art is viewable on Facebook under [will806095@bellsouth.net](mailto:will806095@bellsouth.net)

**Sean Ulman** works summers in Alaska as a technician for a shorebird study. In the winter he lives in Delaware where he writes about Alaska. His work has recently been featured in *Emprise Review*, *Kill Author* and *Short, Fast & Deadly*.

**Steve Wing** is one cool photographer.

**Susan Gibb** is a writer of prose and poetry in traditional and hypertext form. She has participated in arts projects and presentations such as Hypertext '08 Workshop. She has been or will be published in *Blue Print Review*, *elimae*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The New River Journal*, *metazen*, *Istanbul Literary Review*, *Divine Dirt Quarterly*, *Camroc Press Review*, *Bartleby Snopes*, *Microw*, *The Fox Chase Review*, and others. She blogs at <http://susangibb.net/blog2>

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