

**DELTA EPSILON SIGMA**  
**ALPHA**  
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Bill Pauly, our *Alpha* haikin, conducts Haiku Seminars. Most of the haiku in this 2005 *Alpha* are creations of that group. These writings are not part of the DES Writing Contest, just Basho’s frog-relatives for our “old pond.”

Special thanks to Helen Kennedy and Mary Kay Mueller, institutional marketing-graphic arts, our special helpers “to put things in order.”

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## **Where I'm From**

(after George Ella Lyons' poem "Where I'm From")

### *Amber Gille*

I'm from a tan house on Iowa Street,  
where the sidewalks are swept every morning,  
the grass is mowed on Thursday afternoons,  
and on some summer Saturday evenings,  
wiffleball games are played with a plastic red bat.

I'm from Shepard's Pie,  
hamburgers on the grill,  
warm banana cake,  
meat, potato, vegetable and  
saying grace before we eat and  
'if you don't finish your milk  
you'll sit at the table until you do.'

I'm from playing basketball  
in Badger Park until the street lights came on,  
with cussing boys and scraped knees,  
and '20 pushups for every missed lay-up,'  
from my last basketball game  
to a wall full of plaques that

collect the dust of my memories.

I'm from being the only child,  
the good life,  
to being the older sister  
the better life,  
from 'I hate you's and I told you so's'  
to calling home and not recognizing one brother's voice  
because puberty stole it while I was away in college,  
and being the little brother's favorite valentine  
*only* this year because next year he might have a new one.

I am from family get togethers,  
back road drives to our place on Lake Wisconsin,  
scorching like lobsters inside an old tractor tire frying pan,  
spreads of food that stretch for tables on end and  
'there's more in the house if you're hungry' and  
'no one's even touched my seven-layer salad yet,'  
and outdoor fireworks on the end of the dock that  
always get someone's finger burned but  
after they eat a s'more by the fire they're ok.

I'm from parents with goals,  
dreams of an Alaskan cruise and a two car garage,  
though health insurance premiums and mortgage payments  
hold them back from going out to dinner on Friday nights,  
and vacations farther than South Dakota,  
they build their dreams for their kids on a solid meal at night  
and college degrees that they never had,  
although they harbor more knowledge and skills  
than my expensive education could ever buy.

I'm from their dreams.

## **A Simple Assignment, a Complicated Life**

***Cheri Strutt***

*As I entered the fourth floor television studio in Hoffman Hall, I realized it was going to be a long night. I had spent many hours in the studio before, editing together one thing or another, but this assignment seemed different from all the rest. I was given several old film rolls of an interview with Edith Wharton, and I was to compile a ten-minute video of her life. With this assignment came numerous problems: one, I had no idea who Edith Wharton was aside from that she was an author; two, it was quite difficult to put together a ten-minute video when I had about three hours of footage to choose from; three, it was already ten o'clock in the evening, and I was just about to start. So as I said before, this was going to be a long night.*

*I slipped into the chair at the editing bay and placed the first film into the machine. I fast forwarded through the countdown and got to the first scene. I saw on the monitor a living room. It was a beautifully furnished room with natural lighting coming from large windows on the left wall. Outside the window I could see a colorful garden<sup>1</sup> and past that a gorgeous sky that reminded me of Paris<sup>2</sup> in the summertime.<sup>3</sup> As I was taking all this in, I noticed an elderly woman walk slowly into the shot. I guessed it to be Edith Wharton because she was elegantly dressed and seemed to fit the character of the house.<sup>4</sup> She took a seat and her mouth started moving. Then I noticed I didn't have my audio turned on so I quickly reached over and flipped the switch.*

**Wharton.** ...a glass of water, thank you. Mr. Johnson, I understand you are here from a film company in New York?

**Johnson.** Actually, Mrs. Wharton, you may call me Malcolm. I am a reporter for the *New York Sun*. The camera is owned by Twentieth Century Fox and they have asked me to record our interview on film. Is this alright with you?

**Wharton.** That is quite alright, Mr. Johnson. Although, I don't see how exciting a picture will be of an old woman like me jabbering away for hours and hours. Now tell me, Mr. Johnson, what do you think of New York City?

*I was bothered already that I could not see Malcolm Johnson. In the 1930's it was uncommon for the interviewer to be filmed with the interviewee. Mrs. Wharton was correct. It was going to be awfully boring just watching her talk all night long. But there was nothing I could do about it, so I watched as they continued.*

**Johnson.** I think it's a wonderful city. I've lived there all my life and the opportunities have never seemed to disappoint me. What about you? You were raised in New York City also.

**Wharton.** As a child I was never impressed. In fact, one of the most depressing impressions of my childhood is my recollection of the intolerable ugliness of New York.<sup>5</sup> At that time it was a city populated largely by scheming, domineering women and wimpy, ineffectual men. There were so many rules in society with which I disagreed. Luckily, at that point in my life I didn't live there long<sup>6</sup> because of my father's love for travel.

*I leaned over to hit pause on the video tape. I noticed an expression of complete disgust on Mrs. Wharton's face. I wondered why she had so much dislike for this city. It was obvious to me that she must not have had a happy childhood because of the slight break she took after she said the word "childhood." This made me more curious and I was hopeful that Mr. Johnson would question her on this subject.*

**Johnson.** But, Mrs. Wharton, I have noticed that most of your writings take place in the city. Why is it that you write about a place that holds such drab memories?

**Wharton.** I'll admit the city grew on me. It had an incredible transformation that started even before I was born.<sup>7</sup> The society of New York never ceased to amaze me in both good ways and bad.

**Johnson.** You've even been called a historian of New York society.<sup>8</sup> Do you agree with this statement?

**Wharton.** I think it was as the historian of the society of the nineties that I first achieved character and eminence as a novelist. It was a field as yet unexploited by any novelist who had grown up in that little hot-house of traditions and conventions. Before me this field had been tacitly regarded as unassailable.<sup>9</sup> It was then that I moved from historic fiction to become a serious novelist.<sup>10</sup>

**Johnson.** Before we get into Edith Wharton, the novelist, let's talk a bit about your life as a child. Can you tell me about your family?

**Wharton.** You're asking a very broad question, Mr. Johnson. How should I know where to start?

*I noticed that Mrs. Wharton paused as though she was waiting for a better question from Mr. Johnson. But nothing came. She gave a big sigh and then began talking about the topic I had wanted to hear about earlier.*

**Wharton.** I suppose I will start with my birth which leads to my mother. Everyone always told me that Lucrecia Jones had such feminist tastes that she rejoiced in having a girl.<sup>11</sup> But from my personal experience with her, I never remember seeing her overjoyed by my presence. She and my father had come from English and Dutch families and were...

*As Mrs. Wharton started to carry on and on about her childhood, I realized it was getting late. I had been in the studio for twenty minutes and still had to find my focus for the ten minute video I was to create. Nothing had really struck me as interesting yet so I fast forwarded through the film. At one point I noticed Mrs. Wharton take a long slow drink of water from the glass sitting beside her. I began watching again.*

**Wharton.** Teddy. Knowing who he was just before his death clouds my memory and makes it sometimes difficult to remember the Teddy I met as a very young woman. His sweetness of temper and boyish enjoyment of life struggled long against the creeping darkness, late in his life.<sup>12</sup> Even though I am glad that we did divorce, it will always sadden me thinking of the end of his life.

**Johnson.** Do you have any regrets about leaving him while he was ill?

*I could tell Wharton was insulted by this comment.<sup>13</sup> She frowned at Mr. Johnson and then seemed to calm herself and continued.*

**Wharton.** Teddy was a charming companion and the kindest and most sympathetic of beings. When he became ill I tried my hardest to get the best medical help possible. I pleaded with him to submit to a regular course of treatment, but he refused. Because of his personality, it was hopeless.<sup>14</sup> Yes, I regret how ignorant I was when it came to dealing with his mental illness.<sup>15</sup> But there is nothing that can be done now.

**Johnson.** Why did you marry Edward Wharton?

**Wharton.** I suppose it was because we came from the same backgrounds, and it was what one did at that time—marry only within the correct social groups. Things have changed slightly since then. He was attractive and kindly, although our marriage was very unhappy from the start. We had our differences.<sup>16</sup> But every couple does.

**Johnson.** What else did you love about your husband?

**Wharton.** There were many things. He was popular and gregarious when I met him. He let me go where I wanted and do what I wanted most of the time. He used to say, “Whatever Pussy wants.”<sup>17</sup> That was my nickname when I was younger, Pussy.<sup>18</sup> Anyway, Teddy and I both loved to travel.<sup>19</sup>

**Johnson.** What happened to your relationship that caused you to separate?

**Wharton.** I blame my ignorance concerning marriage. I did not know the facts of life when I married Teddy.<sup>20</sup> Had I known what real love was when I was twenty-three,<sup>21</sup> I probably would not have married him. But it was not his fault nor mine that I did not have this information.<sup>22</sup> Besides, it was almost necessary for me to marry because, at that time, a woman without the protection of marriage was quite helpless in society.<sup>23</sup>

*Edith's face was showing signs of anger. I could tell she was upset about her childhood again. I made a mental note to go back later and watch that portion of the interview, once I'd finished the assignment of course.*

**Wharton.** We divorced simply because we were two different people. We had grown apart over the years as both of us had changed quite a lot. I had become a successful writer and Teddy was starting to slip away.<sup>24</sup> I was 51 years old and decided it was time for me to do something about my love life. I remember moving to Paris<sup>25</sup> directly after the divorce to get away from American society and the memories it held for me.<sup>26</sup>

**Johnson.** Now before you married Teddy, weren't you engaged to a Harry...

**Wharton.** Harry Stevens.<sup>27</sup> Yes.

**Johnson.** Could you tell me a little about that relationship?

**Wharton.** Not much to say, I guess. He was a kind and generous man. The problem was I was not only engaged to Harry, but to Mrs. Stevens as well.<sup>28</sup> And let's just say that she wasn't as happy about the proposal as Harry. The engagement ended quickly.<sup>29</sup>

**Johnson.** This doesn't seem to bother you much. Were you in love with Mr. Stevens?

**Wharton.** As I mentioned early, I didn't know what love was at that time. I wasn't at all heartbroken; it was simply a bump in the road of my young life.<sup>30</sup> I seemed to have lots of those.

**Johnson.** Let's talk about your early works. You spoke of your enthusiasm for storytelling as a child previously. Did writing always come naturally to you?

**Wharton.** I did enjoy telling stories when I was a child,<sup>31</sup> but I actually had much difficulty when I began to write. In fact, there was a period of time when I got physically ill because of my inability to produce good work.<sup>32</sup> I think a lot of this....

*I pressed pause. I knew Edith Wharton was a famous writer. This was obviously the reason my professor wanted me to make a short video about her. But I found her love life so much more interesting than the information about when she wrote what story and why. I wondered if I could possibly get by making a video and not including anything specific about her works. I realized this might not be what my professor wanted, but I made the decision right then and there. This video would be about the men in Wharton's life. I began to fast forward through the film yet again.*

**Wharton.** ...Anerton had a passive need to have an affair in the forlorn hope that someone may respond to her as a real person.<sup>33</sup> I wrote The Greater Inclination because...

*Still nothing yet and I had come to the end of the first film roll. I slowly loaded in the next roll, wondering how I was going to get this assignment done if I had to continue guessing what Edith was talking about. I started to fast forward and then noticed that familiar look on her face. She took a drink of her water and I began to watch.*

**Wharton.** I believe I was 21 when we first met.<sup>34</sup> He took me on a long canoe ride until it became dark.

*Edith let out a chuckle and looked genuinely happy for the first time in the entire film. Who was this man she was talking about?*

**Wharton.** Excuse me. It's just that he once wrote me a letter telling me he hardly had enough money to pay for the canoe at the time.<sup>35</sup> We didn't know each other long when chance tossed us in different directions.<sup>36</sup> It was just weeks later that I met Teddy.<sup>37</sup>

**Johnson.** After you were married and started writing you became close to Berry. Is this correct?

**Wharton.** Oh yes. He was undoubtedly my closest and most beloved friend.<sup>38</sup> He nurtured me spiritually and intellectually. He was like my savior who found me when my mind and soul were hungry and thirsty, and he fed them until our last hour together.<sup>39</sup> He was the love of my life.<sup>40</sup>

*Edith seemed to go from happy to sad in a second. She stared at the floor and I wondered if she was going to cry. It was not hard to figure out that this friend of hers had passed. Without shedding a tear, she continued.*<sup>41</sup>

**Wharton.** Walter and I did many things together. We read the same books and would often travel.<sup>42</sup> He even critiqued my writings before I turned them into my publisher. He was a very big help in my being a success<sup>43</sup> because he taught me about the art of writing.<sup>44</sup>

**Johnson.** What drew you to Walter Berry? What kind of a person was he?

**Wharton.** Not everyone appreciated Walter as much as I. In fact, I believe most of my other male friends had quite a dislike for him.<sup>45</sup> Only Henry James and Bernard Berenson seemed to value his friendship as much as I. He preferred to stand aside from groups, observing human follies with a cool regard. Most women found him debonair.<sup>46</sup>

**Johnson.** Did you ever become jealous of other women, even though Mr. Berry and you were only friends?

**Wharton.** I did not say we were ‘only friends.’ I would never have called us ‘only friends.’ The stone closed over all my life when he died.<sup>47</sup> I was not jealous because I had nothing to be jealous of. We helped each other enjoy life. No words can say, because such things are unsayable, how the influence of his thought, his character, his deepest personality, were interwoven with mine.<sup>48</sup>

**Johnson.** If you don’t mind my asking, how did Mr. Berry die?

**Wharton.** It was a horrible year.

*Wharton paused and took a deep breath. The intense look on her face made me realize how genuinely important this man must have been to her. I wondered why they never married after she was divorced.*

**Wharton.** It all started when he suffered a mild stroke in 1927. Soon after, while we were both in Paris, he suffered another stroke. When I found out he was ill I rushed to his side and stayed with him as long as the doctors would allow.<sup>49</sup> He died ten days later. I truly believe all my life went with him.<sup>50</sup> I suppose there is one friend in the life of each of us who seems not a separate person, however dear and beloved, but an expansion, an interpretation, of one’s self, the very meaning of one’s soul. Such a friend I found in Walter Berry.<sup>51</sup> No one will ever be able to realize the depth of our friendship.<sup>52</sup>

**Johnson.** Many have suggested that your works contain characters based on Mr. Berry. Is this true?

**Wharton.** Yes, I suppose I have often written about Walter because he was who showed me what a man should be. Although I will admit there are no first-rate men in my novels such as him.<sup>53</sup>

**Johnson.** Could you describe a few of these stories of yours?

**Wharton.** Well, I don't like getting into too much detail. I did write a story called The Children during the period Walter was ill. I believe my writing style in this novel was affected because of his illness.<sup>54</sup>

**Johnson.** I read "Souls Belated" last week. I'm just curious as to where the plot came from. Did you relate with the main character, Lydia? Was the character of Garrett based on a man in your life?

**Wharton.** Yes, that was a satisfying short story. I believe I wrote it in 1899. Many people have told me they are not satisfied with its ending.<sup>55</sup> But I write life, and in life we often don't know what will happen next.<sup>56</sup>

*The way Mrs. Wharton ignored the questions Mr. Johnson asked impressed me. Obviously she wasn't too excited talking about her writings in regards to Walter Berry. Mr. Johnson took the hint and moved on to another subject.*

**Johnson.** Could you tell me a little about your life during the war?

**Wharton.** Yes. I suppose you want to hear about the American Hostels for Refugees and all that. It is something that makes me very proud.<sup>57</sup>

*I began to fast forward the film again to try and catch some more information about the men in Wharton's life. After waiting about thirty seconds I pressed play.*

**Johnson.** Could you tell me a bit about your relationship with Mr. Fullerton?

*Lucky guess.*

**Wharton.** Our relationship was a unique one. Even the few times I became angry with him, I still yearned to be with him.<sup>58</sup> He had many friends and they were all different types of people.<sup>59</sup> When I met him he gave me a sort of happiness I had yet to encounter. For the first time in my life I couldn't read.<sup>60</sup> We met in 1908 because my friend Henry and Morton were very close.<sup>61</sup> Morton was a journalist so we talked for hours.<sup>62</sup> I remember one night when we drove through the countryside discussing literature in the early winter.<sup>63</sup>

*Mrs. Wharton had a smile on her face. It wasn't the usual type of smile, though. I sensed she was hiding some information about this man. I wondered how far Mr. Johnson would pry.*

**Wharton.** Morton was an attractive man. He was short and compact. He took exquisite pains with his appearance and was a man of intelligence and intellectual promise.<sup>64</sup> However, the most distinctive thing about him was the intensity of his personal presence.<sup>65</sup> He and I were not as close as Walter and I. But he will never be forgotten.

*I could tell Mrs. Wharton was ready to be finished with the conversation about Mr. Fullerton. She said her last sentence as if she had said all she had to say. Mr. Johnson continued.*

**Johnson.** You were very close for about three years and then drifted apart. Why?

**Wharton.** I suppose our lives took us separate ways. We always remained friends even though we no longer spent much time together.<sup>66</sup>

**Johnson.** I noticed you wrote a story called The Choice during the same time you were close with Mr. Fullerton. But you waited to publish the story until many years later. Is there a reason for this?

**Wharton.** Sometimes I feel that my work is not yet ready to be read. That is all the explanation needed for that story and many others where I postponed publishing.<sup>67</sup>

**Johnson.** I also found another work of yours interesting that was written at that same time. Could you tell me where you got the inspiration for The Letters?<sup>68</sup>

**Wharton.** I've written about many young women and marriage. It was not a topic new to my style. It is true that good art must grow organically out of the deepest fathoms of the artist's own experience.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, each one of my stories has a little bit of my life included.<sup>70</sup>

*Mr. Johnson seemed to take the hint. Mrs. Wharton was not going to budge . . .*

**Johnson.** Before we get off the subject of men in your life, I'd like to ask about the friend you mentioned earlier, Henry James. How did this relationship start?

**Wharton.** I almost hate to think about how my relationship with Henry began. He was an author of whom I was quite fond. A mutual friend invited us to dine with them. I could hardly believe that such a privilege could befall me, and I could think of only one way of deserving it – to put on my newest Doucet dress and try to look my prettiest. I was probably not more than twenty-five. Those were the principles in which I had been brought up. It would never have occurred to me that I had anything but my youth and my pretty frock to commend me to the man whose shoe-strings I thought myself unworthy to unloose. The dress was tea-rose pink. But when the night came, it ended up I didn't have the courage to speak to him at the table. The evening was a failure. A year or two later I had another chance to meet with him so I bought a new hat. Let's

just say the second of our meetings fell as flat as the first.<sup>71</sup> But soon after I started becoming successful, we grew to know each other better and became good friends.<sup>72</sup> He was my mentor, even though he sometimes had problems helping me with my work.<sup>73</sup> We shared the writing of fiction and had countless hours of fun.<sup>74</sup>

**Johnson.** What was your favorite of his writings?

**Wharton.** The Portrait of a Lady is actually on my list of my favorite books of all time.<sup>75</sup> I read it whenever I miss Henry. He died almost twenty years ago and I never did get a chance to say goodbye.<sup>76</sup>

*As Mr. Johnson allowed Mrs. Wharton a moment of silence, I started thinking I had just about enough to complete my ten-minute video. Then I realized Johnson was closing up the interview, so I thought I might as well watch the rest.*

**Johnson.** Thank you for your time, Mrs. Wharton. You have led an incredible life and I am assured you will never cease to impress.

**Wharton.** Thank you, Mr. Johnson, for traveling all the way to Paris just to talk to an old woman about her life. It was a pleasure meeting you.

*As the video turned to black, I realized much time had passed and I hadn't even noticed. This woman's life was quite amazing. It's no wonder that her life is studied just as much as her books. I'd never read anything written by Wharton before, but now I was determined to find some of the hidden stories that Johnson was hinting about all night.*

*I began to rewind the film so I could start my editing. Late as it was, I wasn't as tired as I had been when I walked into the studio. It's amazing how much more fun an assignment can be when I am actually interested in the topic. I leaned back in my chair for a second and looked at the image of Edith Wharton on the screen. I was given the simple assignment of creating a video on Edith Wharton, a woman with a very complicated life.*

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In her last years, Edith enjoyed having friends over, writing daily, and she became increasingly attached to her gardens. "Edith."

<sup>2</sup> I was fortunate enough to spend a month in Europe in the summer of 2002 with two friends. I particularly remember the gorgeous countryside of France as we traveled through it by train.

<sup>3</sup> The last few years of her life, Edith spent most of her time in two houses in France. She would spend her summers in the Pavillon Colombe, just north of Paris. "Edith."

<sup>4</sup> Wharton thought architecturally. In an early story she says "a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms." And to visit her houses is also to understand her character and her way of life. Lee.

<sup>5</sup> New York City was very different when Edith was a child than it was when Edith was a full-grown woman. The city seemed to have changed right along with Edith. McGrat.

<sup>6</sup>Edith's father's fortune was considerably contracted. It had become evident that he could no longer go on living in his accustomed style. Her family moved to Europe because it was cheaper to live there than New York. Coolidge 24-25.

<sup>7</sup>Wharton's New York fiction spans the years from, roughly, 1840 through the turn of the century—from before her birth, in other words, through the Civil War and beyond into the Gilded Age, an era of tremendous transformation in American society, when social and economic power began to pass from people like her parents to the robber barons, the speculators, the entrepreneurs. McGrat.

<sup>8</sup>Leavis 73.

<sup>9</sup>Leavis 73.

<sup>10</sup>Leavis 74.

<sup>11</sup>Coolidge 23.

<sup>12</sup>McDowell 326.

<sup>13</sup>Wharton was reluctant and painfully sensitive to criticism. McDowell 20.

<sup>14</sup>Teddy was always extremely self-willed. He had done exactly what he chose all his life. Edith found it hopeless to try and direct him when he was ill. Wolff 222.

<sup>15</sup>McDowell 27.

<sup>16</sup>Edward Wharton was a man of leisure from a similar social background and a good sportsman. However, he had none of Edith's artistic or intellectual interests and their marriage was very unhappy. "Edith."

<sup>17</sup>Teddy followed Edith in her wake to all the shrines of France and Italy, meticulous about timetables and accommodation, and always keeping a thousand-dollar bill in his wallet "in case Pussy wanted something." Wolff 50.

<sup>18</sup>The name of Edith was not thought appropriate for the pet of so many elders. She was called Pussy from the first. Coolidge 23.

<sup>19</sup>Wolff 4.

<sup>20</sup>McGrat.

<sup>21</sup>Wolff 3.

<sup>22</sup>Edith's mother refused to tell Edith anything about marriage. When Edith approached her mother on the eve of her wedding and asked if there was anything she should know, the imperious Mrs. Jones impatiently remarked that surely she had noticed the difference between male and female statues. McGrat.

<sup>23</sup>Lawson 312.

<sup>24</sup>Teddy had become an alcoholic and had several affairs while recklessly spending Edith's money. McDowell 26.

<sup>25</sup>Edith loved Paris: "the tranquil majesty of the architectural lines, the wonderful blurred winter lights, the long lines of lamps garlanding the quays—je l'ai dans mon sang [it is in my blood!]." "Edith."

<sup>26</sup>McGrat.

<sup>27</sup>Wolff 49.

28 The most significant thing about Harry Stevens was that he had a mother, a most formidable and undaunted mother. Anyone who married Harry Stevens would most surely be marrying his mother as well. Wolff 49.

29 In the face of Mrs. Stevens's unrelenting opposition the couple became, almost immediately, disengaged. Wolff 49.

30 There was no sign that Edith was in the least grieved. Wolff 49.

31 Wolff 28.

32 Edith had a twelve year black period of lassitude, nausea, and anxiety. Wolff 75.

33 Lawson 314.

34 Wolff 50.<sup>35</sup> "And I, a \$-less lawyer (not even that, yet) with just about enough cash for the canoe..." Benstock 52.

36 Edith described the meeting of her and Berry as a "communion of kindred intelligences" cut short when "chance separated us." Benstock 50.

37 Wolff 50.

38 Wolff 3.

39 Benstock 50.

40 Benstock 49.

41 Edith was tough-minded, robust artist. Howe 85.

42 McDowell 22.

43 One can hardly overestimate the influence of his meticulous criticism since it pervaded her books over a thirty-year span. McDowell 23.

44 Berry taught Edith that literary art resulted from an organized process in the writer's mind and that one need not follow slavishly any set rules or artificially preconceived plan. McDowell 23.

45 Percy Lubbock would later characterize Berry as a 'dry shadow' over Edith's life, a shell of a man she took for the 'flower of manhood.' Benstock 50.

46 Benstock 50.

47 McDowell 23.

48 McDowell 22.

49 Wolff 382.

50 Wolff 383.

51 Wolff 382.

52 Edith burned all the letters Berry had kept from her when he died. McDowell 23.

53 Pierpont 50.

54 The Children is the saddest novel that Wharton ever wrote. Neither tragic nor terrible like the great works of her earlier periods. It is impossible to suppose that the novel was unaffected by Berry's sickness. Wolff 383.

55 In "Souls Belated," the ending leaves readers guessing whether or not Lydia will eventually get up the strength to leave Garrett.

56 Wharton was always acutely aware of her art as art. She forced herself to be bluntly honest; there were no contrived happy endings in her work. Wolff 110.

- 57 Wolff 260.
- 58 When Fullerton angered Wharton, she found that her love increased. McDowell 24.
- 59 Fullerton seems to have known how to make himself irresistible to everyone, male or female. Pierpont 51.
- 60 Pierpont 52.
- 61 James was writing Wharton calming letters about Fullerton's tendency to disappear without explanation and assuring her of his own "aboundingly tender friendship." Pierpont 52.
- 62 "Edith."
- 63 Wolff 146.
- 64 Wolff 193.
- 65 Wolff 194.
- 66 They remained lovers for three years and then drifted apart, remaining on very good terms for the rest of their lives. Not one of their friends except Henry James knew of the affair. Wolff 148. Morton Fullerton was known to always be on good terms with the women whom he had affairs with even after the affairs ended. Wolff 145.
- 67 In May of 1908 Wharton wrote a story called The Choice about a woman who is having an affair on a boat trip home from Europe. It was released in 1916. Wolff 151.
- 68 The Letters is about a rich young woman who marries an amoral but extremely sexy dilettante and lives happily ever after with her eyes determinedly half shut. It is the portrait of Fullerton in all his dreamy golden lassitude which seems historically exact, as does the state of continual emotional turmoil into which he had plunged Wharton. Pierpont 52.
- 69 Wolff 9.
- 70 Like many female characters in her novels and stories, she never found in one man the love that included physical, mental, and esthetic elements. McDowell 25.
- 71 Wolff 42.
- 72 James actually knew a lot about Edith's personal life. McDowell 34.
- 73 James evidentially felt frustration in attempting to be Wharton's mentor, not merely because he understood her imaginative independence and energetic confidence, but because he could never properly suggest specific changes in any finished work. He always had to go back to the initial kernel of a story and let it grow in his mind to see how it should go; then the story would become his own—a new work of fiction, not that of the author he wished to help. McDowell 34.
- 74 Wolff 311.
- 75 Wolff 312.
- 76 Henry James died in 1916 and Wharton didn't even get a chance to say goodbye. Wolff 311.

## **Haiku**

*Amber Gille*

gripping the rosary  
my grandmother  
rubs out her fears

## **a red dart**

*Tom McNamara*

screeches toward the moon  
and penetrating thunder rattles  
in the bodies of onlookers.  
bright blue bursts forth,  
straining to a blue-black  
starless sky, moments later  
flickering and falling—  
a black ash drops  
on the shiny tops  
of parked cars and gazers  
spread on stoops and small  
green square front lawns,  
all with their dark  
faces fixing upwards, predicting  
the next bright blast.

## **The Liars**

*Alison Brogan*

Maybe he would tell her today. John Carroll thought over the matter as he brushed his teeth above the porcelain sink. Yes, today he would make her breakfast, get her smiling, then tell her. Maybe then things could go back to normal. His wife, Margaret Carroll, was still asleep in their king sized bed, her left leg reaching out from beneath their beige and white sheets. She would not get out of bed for another hour.

John was not usually home on a Saturday. Since his children left the house, he had begun working through the weekend, but today he did not go in to the office. He was to have lunch with a friend of his youngest son Steven, whom he had met recently at Steven's college graduation. Although he could not offer the boy a job with his own company, he could give him some advice for interviews, as well as names of other investment bankers in the city. Because he didn't have to meet the young man until the afternoon, John decided today would be a good day to talk to his wife.

Would he shower first? Yes, he would be clean for breakfast. Margaret would really like to be served breakfast. Before showering, though, John would shave. He always liked to shave before his shower, because he liked the feeling of warm water on his new stinging skin. Margaret liked John with a clean shave. John lathered above his lip then along his jaw line and down his neck. He turned the faucet with his left hand, then attached a new blade to his razor. He would definitely tell her today. Then things could go back to normal.

It hadn't been normal for quite some time, but then it got much worse. Eleven days before this Saturday, John came home from work to an empty house. Margaret was out shopping with Julia Larson, the Carroll's next door neighbor. It didn't feel much emptier then it usually did

when Margaret was home, but her physical absence was different for John. Feeling the emptiness of the rooms, he had to try to remember what it was like to have Margaret there. What he remembered was the old Margaret, dancing in the bathroom, singing into her toothbrush. Making the bed at night right before they got in it. Chasing their sons through the living room trying to tame their hair. That Margaret had not been around for a long time. John moved through the house trying to collect those good memories of his wife. Normally, he would never have thought to go into his wife's closet. In fact he had never been inside it. But on that day it seemed necessary to go into the little closed off room and reunite with his wife. He can't remember how long he stayed encamped there, but he was so entranced that he didn't hear Margaret come into the house, up the stairs, or into their bedroom. It was complete horror he saw in her eyes. The sight of him, pressing his body against her hanging clothing. She just stood staring at him, violated and disgusted. John just couldn't explain to her what he was doing inside of her closet with his face so close to her blue silk robe. He wanted to tell her that being in there, with the smell and the feel of her, helped him to remember her before everything. He wanted so badly to tell her what he had been trying to tell her for months. He couldn't. He only held on tighter and closer to the smooth material in his hands. As she backed away from the doors of the closet, Margaret's eyes told John that it was only going to get worse.

When they had started telling the lies it was exciting for John. It was a secret game they would play at dinner parties. A few years before at an office Christmas party when Margaret still worked, they told the first lie. John was standing with Margaret and her secretary drinking a rum and coke, when she recounted a visit their family had taken to a zoo a few weeks before. John initially thought he had misheard his wife, because John, Margaret, and their three sons had not been to a zoo together in fourteen years. She talked about their youngest son being afraid to see the guerillas, as if he was still a little boy. Laughing, she turned to John and asked "Remember John?" John didn't expect it, but hearing his wife create such a magnificent lie made everything in their relationship new. John's desire for his wife in that moment overtook him. He looked into her gleaming eyes and said with a smile "How could I forget?" During the party, they told four more lies to Margaret's coworkers. Afterwards, they made love in the car.

From then on they told the lies everywhere. They were usually about their children. They never planned or recited. It was the spontaneity that turned them on. Margaret would tell their friends a story and John would nod and smile, occasionally adding details. Occasionally John told the lie, but more often than not, it was Margaret. They'd lie. Then they'd fuck. A new place. A new way.

Then Margaret stopped working. She wasn't fired, she just accepted the early retirement package they offered when they brought in the 24-year-old first-time ad exec to replace her. Something changed in her, and then the lying changed too. It was constant and elaborate. Maybe because she wasn't working, she needed the excitement. But that neediness started to annoy John. He stopped nodding his head when she'd talk. It was no longer the foreplay it once was for him. That's when her lies moved past dinner parties into their own home, at their own dinner table. During dinner or before they went to sleep, she would tell him stories about her day that contradicted things she had told him over the phone when he was still at work. The more Margaret lied, she became more and more private about the real things in her life. She made no reference to the lies, and John didn't know how to address them, because he had been a part of it for so long. They never touched each other.

But John would talk to his wife today. He had to. That night, after Margaret had found him in her closet and she left the room, John went down to the living room and she acted as if nothing

happened. She was all smiles and lies. Then later, as he sat on the couch reading an article about the soldiers that were to be court marshalled for abandoning their mission because they lacked supplies, he overheard Margaret on the phone with their oldest son. She was telling him lies now too. So, yes. He would tell her today. He would make her breakfast, get her smiling, and tell her. Then things could possibly go back to normal.

In the shower he took extra care to clean his feet. Margaret hated when his feet weren't clean. In the kitchen he prepared eggs Benedict, Margaret's favorite. It had been years since he cooked it for her, but it all came back to him slowly. John used a double boiler for his hollandaise sauce, and watched to make sure the below water didn't boil, that it just stayed hot and lightly simmering. The perfect hollandaise was the key to perfect eggs Benedict. If it was perfect then he could tell her all the things he needed to tell her. While stirring the sauce he hadn't made in years, John heard footsteps above him. He stopped moving the spoon. Margaret was awake. Should he go up to greet her or surprise her when she comes down? She would probably think it was romantic if he came and got her like a date. If he was only up for a minute the sauce would be fine. John brought the burner down a bit, then made his way upstairs to their bedroom. Margaret was sitting in their large bay window, peering out between the slots of the blinds.

"Good morning," John said trying to sound flirtatious. Maybe that would get her to smile. He sat behind her on the edge of their bed.

"Hi." Margaret still stared out the window, apparently searching for something. No smile.

"Margaret, smell that? I decided to surprise you with breakfast this morning. Why don't you come down to the kitchen with me while I finish cooking, and I'll serve you orange juice? Or coffee if you'd like?" John asked as he reached his hand out and touched her shoulder.

Margaret ignored him. "That woman across the street still hasn't come outside since her husband left. Look at her mail piling up. Think she's dead?"

"Maybe she left too," he said while Margaret continued to squint out the window. John was used to Margaret's morning routine of looking and commenting on the state of their new neighbor. Today, though, he was a little disappointed. He thought the surprise breakfast would get her excited. He thought she would smile. They sat in silence for a minute then, trying once more, he said, "It's eggs Benedict." John watched the back of his wife's neck as she shrugged. He really needed her to eat the breakfast so he could talk to her.

Margaret pulled the blinds up a bit, paused, then said, "No she's still in there. She's in hiding because she's embarrassed that everyone saw. What kind of people get in a fight like that, throwing rocks at each other like children, right on their front lawn? James and Elizabeth Malloy do."

"You know their names?"

Margaret turned finally to look at him. She did smile. But it was a small one that said she was proud of herself, not of John for making breakfast. "Took some of their mail. James and Elizabeth Malloy. 635 Cherryhill Road."

"Oh, that's very illegal of you Margaret."

"What? She wasn't reading it. It was practically in the middle of her yard."

"Hardly." John was frustrated that she was more interested in the neighbors than his breakfast. She just needed to come downstairs and eat. He could smell the hollandaise on the stove—he hoped it wouldn't boil. If she didn't eat, she wouldn't be happy enough for him to tell her. If he could tell her this one thing, maybe it could all go back to normal. "Margaret—"

“You know, I bet they were swingers or something. Maybe into that sick stuff with whips and everything. Perverts. Come on! Throwing rocks at each other? It’s such a big scene.” Margaret turned back to the window, and peered out again. “She’s an exhibitionist. I know it. So why is she all locked up now in that house? She should go outside and cry on the front lawn. They’ve given us half the show, she needs to finish it.”

“Well maybe one of these days while you are watching she’ll come outside and end it for you,” John said as he lay back on the bed and stared at the ceiling fan. “I made breakfast. If you want it.” He wanted so badly for her to eat his breakfast, and all she could think about were the fucking neighbors. If the sauce started separating now, he could still add some cream to save it.

“Are you still meeting Steven’s friend today about getting him a job? Do you have time for breakfast? Don’t you still have to shower?”

It took a moment for John to answer his wife. “I showered already this morning, before I started the eggs. The sauce is probably done now.” He sat up and looked at her again. “And I shaved.”

She glanced back at him with her head, but she left her body facing the window. “Oh, I didn’t hear you in the bathroom. That’s funny.” Margaret turned her face back to the window. “I’m not sure if I’ll eat. I have a dentist’s appointment today because I might need a root canal on one of my molars.” That was a lie. John took a deep breath and almost told her. He almost told her everything he had been wanting to say, but she spoke first.

“John, do you think they fought a lot?” She was squinting. Again she moved her face closer to the window. She must have needed her glasses. Her neck seemed longer than John remembered. It had been a while since he really looked at her. She had some new lines near her eyes.

“I don’t know. Maybe. Probably just as much as everyone else fights.”

“Well, we don’t fight.” Margaret said it straight, as she found the pulley of the blinds with her left hand. She didn’t open them. She just held onto the pulley with her left hand, and stared through the slots she held open with her right hand.

John knew they didn’t fight. They may have gotten frustrated with one another, but they never got angry enough to tell each other. It was just easier to forget, or at least just not say. It had always seemed to be a good thing about their marriage. John was only four feet from his wife, but she seemed farther the closer she moved towards the glass. Her skin looked so pale in the shadow lines of the blinds. Beautiful.

“That’s true. We don’t fight.” John knew the hollandaise sauce was ruined. The smell was not right. John watched Margaret press her fingers against the glass between the blinds. She wasn’t going to eat.

## **The Journal**

### ***Piper Potthoff***

The sun was just beginning to peek through the clouds and the rain was now just a drizzle. The storm had passed and people began to come out into the streets once again. Most of the merchants had closed for that hour but were once again opening their stands. I had been sheltered by a large tree, not sure what type of tree though. I was standing in an open air market on one of the side streets of Knez Mihailvoa Street in downtown Belgrade. It was a lazy Sunday afternoon and with sun drying the streets up, the bustle of the city was heard once again.

Yes, here I am in Belgrade, Yugoslavia,<sup>1</sup> and I've taken in all the sites that the gorgeous city has to offer. But today I was on a mission to find a new journal since I had filled the old one completely. I wanted to find something unique, something that would always remind me of Belgrade. And now that the merchants had reopened I had rediscovered my excitement and strolled past all the different stalls. I love open air markets; there is always something to see—the people, the products, the merchants. The bartering for prices always interested me, especially as I watched the natives work their art form.

Finally a little stall caught my attention. Rainwater was still dripping from the sides of the plastic roof and walls, the area was dark inside but it looked as though it could contain the treasure that I sought. Inside were tables of books and papers and other odds and ends. I began browsing through all the items on the tables not knowing what I was looking for but yet intent on finding it. Then out of the corner of my eye, I caught the sight of a book. It was reddish brown, with a unique design on the front of the cover, and inside it was blank! Just my luck! The pages were yellowing and there was a ribbon to tie the book shut. It was perfect. The little old merchant and I began bartering for the price but I wasn't too good at it. I paid him the 300 New Dinars which is approximately \$5.00. I left contented with my purchase and he was happy as well.

I began to find my way around the city again with nothing in mind to do for the rest of the day. In the distance I could see the Princess Ljubica's Residence that used to be the site of the National Library before the bombing of World War II;<sup>2</sup> and beyond that were the two rivers of Belgrade, the Sava and the Danube. I made the decision to climb to the top of the hill where the fortress Kalmegadan existed, which boasted a gorgeous view of the two rivers and some solitude.<sup>3</sup>

After I was seated, with the rivers in front of me, and the fortress with all its history behind me, I pulled out my new journal that I had carelessly stuffed it in my bag for the hike. After gazing at the view for a while, I began to write.

*“Traveling is such a revitalizing experience. It has allowed me to rediscover myself. I see a whole new world through my same eyes. Today I am in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. I have been here for a couple of days, but the newness that surrounds me is so exciting. Even the little things, the daily life that surrounds me here, is so interesting and exciting. The people are different but yet in essence the same—the way they sell, the way they chat, and eat, and talk, and party. But that is what traveling does. It teaches us new ways to look at old things. Just as I look at the old journal, I see it in a new light as my views and thoughts are written in it. I can't believe I am here, and seeing all of these things. It seems like a dream.”*

I paused for a moment to gather my thoughts, to try and express what I was feeling, the overwhelming feeling of being a stranger in a new world and the excitement of the knowledge I was gaining. All of a sudden I looked down at the page I had just written and on the following page was a different handwriting. They were not my words, not my handwriting. How did they get there? I didn't notice it before. Then I began to read the words.

No sooner had I left A.  
Than I started doubting its existence:  
Its streets and noisy crowd;  
Its famous all-night cafes and prisons.

It was dinnertime. The bakeries were closing.  
Their shelves empty and white with flour.  
The grocers were lowering their iron grilles.  
A lovely young woman was buying the last casaba melon. <sup>4</sup>

I turned to a new page quickly and although I was still in shock, my hand began to write for me. It wrote: “*Who are you?*” And a response, to my amazement appeared below my handwriting.

Charles Simic is a sentence.  
A sentence has a beginning and an end.  
Is he a simple or compound sentence?  
It depends on the weather,  
It depends on the stars above.  
What is the subject of the sentence?  
The subject is your beloved Charles Simic. <sup>5</sup>

Charles Simic, Charles Simic. Who is he? That name sounded so familiar, but yet I couldn't grasp it. The responses that he had been giving were so out of the ordinary. But one thing I knew, I had discovered a journal that was worth more than \$5.00. I didn't know what was going on but I needed to find out more information. I wanted to know more of who this person was and why he was writing to me. But I didn't know what to write to him, so I decided to continue with my journal entry and see how or if he would respond.

*My trip to Belgrade has opened my eyes to many different views. I am sitting on a hill with a fortress of great history. My view is the Danube and the Sava; these rivers have transported so much history, so many wars, and pain, and hurt. They flow always but their current has been slowed through the passing of time and of change. How our world changes!*

Sure enough, after a moment's pause during which I stared intently at the page, words began to appear. These words were not as gentle as the ones before. This person must have gone through some pain or hardship.

They were talking about the war,  
The table still uncleared in front of them.  
Across the way, the first window  
Of the evening was already lit.  
He sat, hunched over, quiet,  
The old fear coming over him...  
It grew darker. She got up to take the plate—  
Now unpleasantly white— to the kitchen.  
Outside in the fields, in the woods,  
A bird spoke in proverbs,  
A Pope went out to meet Attila,  
The ditch was ready for its squad. <sup>6</sup>

Slowly I began to realize who this was writing to me. He was a poet. A poet who had lived through a war. This Charles Simic expressed himself through poetry, it was his life and how he viewed the world. Just as I was viewing the world through the eyes of traveling, he wrote about the world and his experiences through poetry. This darker side of him was interesting to me. I wanted to see what else he would reply to me. So I wrote:

*It saddens me to see so much suffering in the world. I see children without food or loving homes. There are countries all over the world that suffer through famine, through drought, war, or unstable governments. The world is diverse in color and nationalities but also in richness and poverty.*

As soon as I had written the word suffering, Charles Simic, my new friend, began writing furiously. I finished my entry and watched intently as the words began to appear. They were more scribbled than before, more rushed, and more precise it seemed. Though through it all, the point was clear.

Together in the pot  
With our lives  
Chopped like onions.  
Let it rain, let it snow.  
Dead people's wedding pictures  
Make a hearty soup.  
The soup of strays  
Roaming the world  
In search of their master.  
The soup of orphans  
Wiping their red noses  
On the black armband on their sleeves.  
The soup loved by flies.  
On what shall we cook it?  
On the mustache of Joseph Stalin.  
The fires of Treblinka.  
The fires of Hiroshima.  
The head of the one about to be shot.  
The head swarming with memories.  
Let's cook it until we see in its steam  
Our sweethearts' white bodies.  
They are huge, they are voluptuous,  
They are offering their breasts to us  
As if we were suckling infants.  
What do you think it will taste like?  
Like spit on a pair of dice.  
Like prison barbed wire.

Like white panties of Veronica Lake.  
 Like her toes painted red.  
 Like tallow on death's wheelbarrow.  
 At the end of an evil century,  
 We arouse the devil's curiosity  
 By spooning the soup of angels  
 Into our toothless mouths.  
 What shall we eat it with?  
 With an old shoe left in the rain.  
 With two eyes quarreling in the same head.  
 With a bent and rusty nail.  
 And a trembling hand.  
 We'll sit slurping  
 With our hats on:  
 A soup like knives being sharpened.  
 A thick slaughterhouse soup.  
 And this is what we'll have on the side:  
 The bread of remembrance, a black bread.  
 Blood sausages of yes and no.  
 Scallions grown on our mothers' graves.  
 Black olives from our father's eyes.  
 The immigrants in the middle of the Atlantic,  
 Pissing in the sea with a sense of eternity.  
 The wine of that clear night,  
 A dark wine sparkling with stars.<sup>7</sup>

Wow! These words stunned me and slow and steady the tears began to fall. This poem by this man was deeply descriptive and eerily passionate. I became more acutely aware of this man. He was a survivor in many ways. This Charles Simic lived during World War II. He lived through the regimes of Stalin and Hitler.<sup>8</sup> He was probably just a child, but his memories are still there. So I began to write and so did he; he wrote of memories and I wrote of the little I knew.

*“How afraid you must have been?”*

Fear passes from man to man  
 Unknowing,  
 As one leaf passes its shudder  
 To another.  
 All at once the whole world is trembling.  
 And there is no sign of the wind.<sup>9</sup>

*But you were just a child! It must have affected you in so many ways! How did you go on?*

The little pigs go to market.  
Historical necessity. I like to recite  
While you prefer to write on the blackboard.  
Leap frogs and marbles.  
Their heads are big and their noses are short.  
Lovely afternoon. The firing squad.  
A street maimed so it can go on begging.  
Eternal recurrence and its trash heap.  
Follow your calling, we follow ours.  
The soldier's hand is gentle. The green meadow.  
People who snore have happy dreams.  
Our father in heaven loves us all.  
A pig with gold teeth, says the barber.  
Banks of a river lines with willows.  
Now someone's kicking him to hurry up.  
Rope, give a drink of milk to the rope.  
I need another cigarette quickly.  
An execution. The old wedding photograph.  
I see a blur, a speck, meager, receding,  
Our lives trailing in its wake.<sup>10</sup>

*“Ah, I see. These memories were all you knew. They were part of your life. Your childhood; that is what you thought childhood was about nursery rhymes and war,<sup>11</sup>” I wrote, “But weren’t you afraid of death? Although you were surrounded by it, weren’t you afraid to be the next one to die?”*

Is our Charles Simic afraid of death?  
Yes, Charles Simic is afraid of death.  
Does he kneel and pray for eternal life?  
No, he's busy drawing a valentine with a crayon.  
Pale as a freshly chopped onion,  
He goes over the wrongs he committed.  
His conscience, does it bother him much?  
Only when he lies down to get a night's rest.  
The hellfires, does he feel them closing in?  
No, but he hears the hounds barking.  
Does he lift his eyes humbly in forgiveness?  
Her love was his judge, her wrath the jury.  
Some dark night, praying to the Lord above,  
His own tongue will slash his throat. <sup>12</sup>

Reading these words, I realized what an amazing poet Charles Simic was.<sup>13</sup> He could write about his life, about his fears, his nightmares, his childhood, reality, all with the gracefulness of

poetry. His pen was his sword against his fears and his memories, a sword he drew against the world his security and his defense. His pen and his words were for his own protection. He did not write for others but he wrote what he saw. Others may see it as well; others may not, but all read his poetry and understand something.<sup>14</sup> They understand the feelings and the thoughts that this man, this poet, created. They understand his nightmares and his daydreams. He wrote for humanity.<sup>15</sup>

I have been connected to this man for a reason. My journal was made visible to me for a reason. I have created a relationship with this man and his words. He draws me in; I have seen his darker side and wish to see all sides of him. But now it is getting late, and I am still on a hill in Belgrade. I must close this conversation before I can begin a new one. I write my final thought for the moment,

*Charles, it has been so wonderful to get to know you. You have opened up your soul to me through your poems. I have learned about you and about humanity. I have learned about the fears we all face, and I look forward to learning about our dreams and hopes. About the goodness in the world. But now it is getting late, the stars are coming out and I need to find my way home. I look forward to talking with you again, for I feel that you have been at my side, rather than through my journal. You have been at my side for the entire day, and I know that your words will be at my side for eternity.*

And the final words of the night were his.

Of neighbors' voices and dishes  
Being cleared away  
On long summer evenings  
With the windows open  
As we sat on the back stairs,  
Smoking and sipping beer.  
The memory of that moment,  
So sweet at first,  
The two of us chatting away,  
Till the stars made us quiet.  
We drew close  
And held fast to each other  
As if in sudden danger.  
That one time, I didn't recognize  
Your voice, or dare turn  
To look at your face  
As you spoke of us being born  
With so little apparent cause.  
I could think of nothing to say.  
The music was over, the night cold.<sup>16</sup>

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Charles Simic was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, on May 9, 1938. His parents were George and Helen Simic. His family eventually was reunited in the United States in 1954. He married and had two children. "While Simic's poems are often fantastic, they are not technically Surrealist. Surrealist poetry makes no room for the ordinary; but in Simic's poetry, the situation is frequently ordinary, though altered through the poet's mode of perception." He is a unique poet and writer who will continue to be discussed. *Henry* 269.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Simic lived through World War II in Belgrade. In an interview with Sherod Santos he describes his experiences. He talked about when he was three years old and the Germans were bombing Belgrade. He remembers the house across the street getting bombed and destroyed, while he was knocked out of his bed. He remembers the poverty and the chaos after the war, of almost being considered homeless because his father had gone abroad and his mother was working. He was starving but his mother couldn't provide enough food for him. *Simic, "With Sherod Santos," Uncertain* 68-69.

<sup>3</sup> “Poetry is the orphan of silence. We are always at the beginning, eternal apprentices, thrown back again and again into that condition. There is a complexity which demands its equivalent in words. Of course, it is impossible to do it justice. I say Yes to the impossible—therefore poetry. . . . Occasionally people think of silence as something negative, passive. For me silence is the spiritual energy. Of course, the paradox is that neither is there such a thing as silence nor is one ever alone. *Simic, “With Crazy Horse,” Uncertain 5-6.*

<sup>4</sup> This poem is just a selection but exemplifies how once we leave a place, it no longer seems real. We only have memories of it, and not tangible items. My trip to Spain does not seem like a reality anymore, I sometimes question whether I was really there because all I have to hold onto are the memories of my time there. *Simic, “Midpoint,” Selected 253.*

<sup>5</sup> In this poem, “Charles Simic” treats the poet’s own name as though it were a complete sentence with a subject and several verbs but no object, or at least no object that can be seen. *Kirby 219.* Simic wrote this poem about himself, it is a very abstract poem that compares a person to a sentence but yet we are a beginning and an end. We are simple in many ways, but very complex and compound in others. We change as time changes, but the subject always remains the same . . . . *Simic, “Charles Simic,” Selected 73.*

<sup>6</sup> This poem is very dark; it brings back memories of the war for Simic. I understand the man and woman are his parents, and it is Charles’ memory of the coming war and his parents’ reaction. There weren’t words but the actions of his parents were different, the quietness, the fear, the whiteness, the darkness all set the tone for the poem and the emotions. The reference to the pope going out to Attila when in 400’s Pope Leo had gone out and persuaded Attila the Hun not to attack. *Simic, “The Place,” Selected 69.*

<sup>7</sup> The poem contains many enjambments throughout for emphasis. It is a poem that contains a lot of imagery. There are references to history through Treblinka and Hiroshima and Stalin. The poem creates an image of a soup filled with all of the memories of World War II, of revenge and hatred. This is a poem about revenge. *Simic, “The Soup,” Selected 81.*

<sup>8</sup> He grew up with an “a typical East European education” which means being taught the political basics by Hitler and Stalin. *Simic, “An Interview with Sherod Santos,” Uncertain 68-69.*

<sup>9</sup> This poem is entitled “Fear.” He describes the mortal man as being unconscious to feelings by saying that fear is a tremulous emotion that causes one after another person to shake like leaves on a tree. That tremulous emotion causes one after another person to shake like leaves on a tree until “all at once the whole tree is trembling/and there is no sign of the wind.” *Kirby 218.* It is interesting to see the emphasis he places on different words by creating a new line. The words unknowing and to another have more emphasis which changes the tone of the poem. *Simic, “Fear,” Selected 19.*

<sup>10</sup> This poem intertwines the nursery rhymes of children and the memories of a child during war. The nursery rhymes are fiction and the war is real. The thoughts of a child are a mixture of these concepts, of games and war, of fiction and reality, of happiness and fear. This is probably how Simic was able to make it though the war, but sometimes not being able to identify which was which. *Simic, “Nursery Rhyme,” Selected 110.*

<sup>11</sup> Charles Simic remembers the time between the summer of 1944 to mid-1945, he “ran around the streets of Belgrade with other half-abandoned kids.” Simic’s critics have believed that the unique mixture of horror and whimsy in Simic’s work can be traced to those days. Simic admits to still being “haunted by images” of the war. *Allison 1851.*

12 This poem has Charles answering questions that he has raised himself. He answers his own fears about death and dying and eternity. There is a connection here between Charles and the reader because we all have fears about death but yet it usually does not consume us until the dark of the night, when our sins and our wrongs surround us. Our words and actions are our enemies and will someday condemn us. *Simic, "Further Adventures of Charles Simic," Selected 195.*

13 Charles Simic has been awarded many different honors, including the Edgar Allan Poe Award in 1975 and the Pulitzer Prize in 1990. These examples show that Charles Simic truly is a recognized worldwide as an amazing and gifted poet. "*Charles,*" *Contemporary 411.*

14 Childhood experiences of war, poverty and hunger lie behind a number of Simic's poems. *Georgia Review* correspondent Peter Stitt claims that the poet's most persistent concern "is with the effect of cruel political structures upon ordinary human life... The world of Simic's poems is frightening, mysterious, hostile, dangerous." Thurley also declares that Simic "creates a world of silence, waiting for the unspeakable to happen, or subsisting in the limbo left afterwards... The dimension of menace in Simic becomes metaphysics in itself." Simic tempers this perception of horror with gallows humor and an ironic self-awareness. Stitt claims: "Even the most somber poems...exhibit a liveliness of style and imagination that seems to re-create, before our eyes, the possibility of light upon the earth. Perhaps a better way of expressing this would be to say that Simic counters the darkness of political structures with the sanctifying light of art." I found this paragraph to describe Simic's works very well. Thurley refers to Geoffrey Thurley who wrote a book about American poetry. "*Charles,*" *Contemporary 414.*

15 Simic draws upon his own experiences of war-torn Belgrade to compose poems about the physical and spiritual poverty of modern life. "*Charles*" *Contemporary 413*

16 This poem starts out in a happy noisy environment, where the characters are finding each other, a sense of love or affection is felt. But the poem ends on a different note, of a cold night and unfound words. *Simic, "Little Night Music," Voice 163*

## **Haiku**

*Amber Gille*

months after,  
your empty shaving cabinet  
still smelling of aftershave

the autumn leaves  
melting orange  
into my hair

## **To My Birthday**

*Barbara Simon*

Birthday, here you are again.  
How quickly you arrive these days!

Not like when I was a kid,  
And you hid far out of sight,  
And dragged your heels in the earth  
And harnessed the sun.

You watched me through Woolworth's window  
Wearing a child-size path in the toy aisle  
In search of a perfect doll.

I waited for you to bring  
A lopsided cherry chip cake  
Iced in pink swirls  
With our names spelled out in hard candies.

Back then, you winked down at me  
From the Farmers' State Bank calendar on the kitchen wall.  
I discarded the other days like chewed gum.

But today, you tap me on the shoulder again  
Before I finish saying goodbye.

## **The Little Dolly**

*Linda Torres*

I spent every weekend sleeping at my grandparent's house, which occupied the back half of a long, narrow city lot. My parent's house claimed the front half of the lot, but to me, the house in back seemed a world away. My grandmother doted on me. My brother, a year older than me, held title as the first grandchild, but I remained my grandmother's favorite. She loved to indulge me every chance she got.

Every Saturday evening, while my grandparents watched TV, I watched the clock, wondering when the time would arrive for my grandmother and me to walk to the cigar store to purchase the Sunday papers: the Chicago Tribune and the Daily News. Knowing the treats that awaited me, I cheerily skipped along the sidewalk and obediently held hands with grandma as we crossed the street. Although the shop sold much more than just newspapers, cigars and candy, my sights were set on the sweets. Cigar smoking identical twin brothers owned the establishment, whose interior never seemed to change. Enormous, shelved oak units dominated the back wall. Counter-high display cases cut the room in half and held many heavenly treasures. Brightly printed paper boxes of penny candy, their top flaps folded and tucked into themselves, neatly lined the bottom shelves of the cases. The top shelf was reserved for the high-end merchandise: full size chocolate bars costing fifteen cents each. As I peered through the cases at the candy and pointed to my choices, one of the twins would dutifully fill a small paper sack with my favorites.

Although I had met them many times before, my grandmother reintroduced me to the twin owners every Saturday evening when we entered the store. The same occurred at every store we frequented. Grandma would seek out her old friends and colleagues and reintroduce me again and again. I thought, "She must be very forgetful," but I played along and smiled and nodded at every old face. I enjoyed the walk to the corner store to purchase the paper and candy, but the trips we took downtown really made me happy.

Marshall Field's, the piece de resistance, the king of department stores on State Street, epitomized shopping. My grandmother worked there, but not at the main store. She worked at the warehouse and proudly talked of her work in the shipping department. She could wrap a package like no one else. A less proud subject, her inability to hear, never crossed her lips. Grandma's hearing, deficient at an early age because of a birth defect, was problematic. She stubbornly refused to acknowledge her loss, which also affected her speech. She uttered loud, broken sentences. Her Chicago dialect and outspoken nature placed a comical spin on it all. I compensated by using exaggerated facial expressions and wild gestures.

\* \* \*

Our pre-arranged jaunts downtown enliven the otherwise uneventful days we spent together. On Sunday morning, grandma wakes early and rouses me from my peaceful slumber. We quietly tiptoe around, careful not to awaken grandpa, and dress quickly. A steaming bowl of farina topped by a pool of liquefied butter waits on the table for me. The familiarity of the hot cereal warms my stomach as my grandmother sips a cup of hot coffee and munches buttered white toast. While I finish, grandma pats a layer of pressed powder over her face, pencils on high arched eyebrows through her horned-rimmed glasses and punctuates her lips in bright scarlet. We quickly exit before grandpa stirs, and hurry to catch the bus.

We always take the same route on our trip downtown, Halsted Street bus to Cermak Road and Cermak Road to the el. The el, or elevated train, belies the route it takes. Although most of the cars lumber and rock along above ground tracks, the Green Line twists through a subterranean passage. The labyrinth of darkened tunnels, stairs, escalators and platforms snakes under popular stores and streets. The rhythmic rocking of the cars and exaggerated motions of the passengers as we wheel through the turns pull at the anticipation growing in my stomach. The blue-and-white-tiled stations flashing before me resemble images in a dream.

The conductor's penetrating voice crackles over the speaker, "Next stop, Randolph."

"Nex one," whispers my grandmother.

"Now?" I ask, ready to bound from my seat and take my queue at the doors.

"No, nod yed."

The el screeches and shakes at every turn. The brakes squeal. We lurch forward as the lights on the Randolph Street station appear in the distance.

"OK," prods my grandmother.

We stand up and brace ourselves with the shiny steel poles. We steady our legs and make our way to the doors. An elongated green sign, with short blocky letters spelling Randolph Street stares at us.

"Randolph Street! Randolph!" bellows the conductor.

The doors pop open and we step across the threshold.

"Dis way."

Like a carriage delivering a princess to her castle, the el carries us directly to the portal of our beloved Marshall Field's. A grandiose placard of gold letters on a dimpled black background

resides to the right of revolving doors. Our feet shuffle on the terrazzo floor as the leaves of the door propel us forward.

The entrance from the subway opens into the basement: the bargain basement. Wooden tables piled high with ladies hosiery, linens, and remnants of recent holidays intersperse with racks of last season's fashions. Bargain hunters pluck at the wares, tuck an occasional item under their arms, and toss the unwanted back. The orderly assemblage quickly turns into a disorderly confusion.

My grandmother knows every turn in the store. We ride the escalator to the first floor, cautiously timing our steps as the moving stairway emerges rapidly in front of us. The grandeur slowly appears as we ascend. Octagonal showcases encompass the main level and flaunt the finery within them. Exquisite jewels, gold and diamonds glitter in their well-guarded cabinets. Fine millinery, leather goods, and silk and cashmere scarves beg to be fingered. Bouquets of floral notes tickle our noses as we stroll past curvaceous decanters of amber colored delights. All of these tease us with the pleasures to come.

A row of art deco-influenced golden doors line one wall and wait to shuttle us to our next destination. As one of the doors glide open, a little woman with white-gloved hands beckons us forth. She looks like a magician as she manipulates the security gates. Like magic, a new scene appears each time she opens the elevator doors.

My grandmother sounds off, "Nine, please."

"Ninth floor," the little magician chirps.

The ninth floor is reserved for employees only. The large room consists of a marble wall and counter, topped by fancy ironwork. Three tellers man the space. My grandmother directs me to a large chair as she bellies up to the counter. She deposits her paycheck into the employee credit union and quickly completes her transaction. With her business taken care of, we hurry toward our main objective.

We step onto the elevator containing the little lady with the magic hands. The doors spring open at the fifth floor and we step out into the world of my dreams: the toy department. The click-click-click of my patent leather shoes on the floor breaks the eerie silence. An unnatural absence of customers and sales people intensify the aura surrounding everything. Click-click-click. We don't dally in the outer rooms on this floor. Click-click-click. I advance toward my destination with tenacity until the lights in the showcase cast a blue beam at my feet. I kneel in front of the captives encased in the glass.

"Beautiefoe dows, beautiefoe," my grandmother recites.

My trance intensifies. I pay homage to each heavenly idol standing before me. The self-talk in my head swirls around like a whirlpool. *Oh, you are so pretty. I love your dress. Look at those curls. I would take such good care of you. You have blue eyes like me. That one is a baby. I like the big girls. Oh, I'd take you all home with me if I could.*

A saleslady mysteriously appears.

"Can I help you with something?"

"My grandauda likes lookin ad da priddy dows."

I shuffle my knees sideways and press closer to the glass to examine a divine young lady dressed in a white fur jacket and hat and white leather go-go boots. Blonde ringlets embrace her rouged and dimpled cheeks. Her dowry, displayed in a shiny red steamer trunk, is exhibited behind her. Glorious taffeta party dresses, and lacey silk unmentionables crowd each other. Leather shoes and a pair of feathered slippers line the bottom.

"I dink da liddle girl likes dat one," my grandmother boasts.

“That one is very nice,” admits the finely suited saleslady.

*Nice?* my head screams. *She’s the one!* This is the quintessential doll: a lonely little rich girl begging for adoption by a well-mannered child like myself.

“How mush?”

*She’s asking the price. That’s a good sign,* I think to myself.

I hold my breath. The door rolls open on ball bearings. A slender manicured hand swoops in and fumbles at the string tag attached to the white, plastic handle on the steamer trunk.

“This doll is nine-hundred and ninety-nine dollars.”

Stunned, I look up at my grandmother. Her mouth is agape and her eyes bulge out. Her lips and tongue form the numbers in an exaggerated fashion but she emits no sounds. Frightened to say the words, she only pantomimes the numbers.

“Well, her coat and hat are ermine and she wears a diamond ring on her hand,” the saleslady assures us.

“Oh, a reo diamon,” my grandmother reflects, as if that makes all the difference. “Dank you,” she tones graciously.

The seasoned saleslady dismisses herself from the failed transaction.

My grandmother shakes her head and apologetically declares, “Dat dolly cost too mush money.”

“I know,” I happily agree, trying not to let my disappointment show. That doll might as well of cost a million dollars.

“I wanna gid some ham an coeslaw. We betta hurry up or grampa is gunna wonda where we went.”

“OK,” I humbly reply.

“You like dat dow?” Grandmother implores, half question, half statement.

I wrinkle my nose and shrug one shoulder. “She’s OK.”

The little doll’s smile turns to one of sadness as her arm reaches out to me longingly. I telepathically send her an “I really do like you, but I can’t take you home” and stand up and dust the knees of my white tights. My grandmother takes my hand and we turn and walk away. My stomach wrenches as I am overcome with a deep mourning for my little blonde dolly.

“Wave bye-bye to da dows,” my grandmother insists.

I turn my head and innocently wave. I keep waving until the dolls are out of sight.

“Can you belief dat a dow can cost nine hunred and ninedy-nine dollar?” my grandmother asks astonishingly.

“No.” I shake my head and muster all the amazement I can. We leave the deserted place and ride the elevator to the seventh floor.

Our mood enlivens as we step onto seven, heaven on seven. The place is alive with happy chatter and the bustle of determined shoppers. The seventh floor comprises everything edible: the esteemed Walnut Room, the Cafeteria, the Bakery, the Winery, the Deli, and the Confectionery. My grandmother stretches her arm through the people three deep at the deli counter and returns with a paper number clutched in her fingers.

“Dirty-five,” grandma affirms.

We watch the numbers overhead as they flip, 28, 29. We squeeze in close to the case and my grandmother excitedly points to the imported baked ham and looks for my approval. I rub my stomach and smile and nod.

“Thirty-five,” a hair-netted lady calls.

“OK,” my grandmother yells, waving the number above her head.

“What can I get for you today?”

“Two poun bake ham please.”

“Anything else?”

“One bick coeslaw.”

“This one?” The lady holds a clear plastic container up in the air.

“Bicker, bicker.”

“This one?” Now a container twice the size is hoisted in the air.

“Dat’s it! Can you gif me a choppin back?”

“Sure,” the hair-netted lady happily grins.

She packages our perishables in an insulated emerald green shopping bag for the trip home.

“Now we git da onion bread an go home.”

“OK.”

We descend back to the first floor and exit the doors introducing Washington Street. We zig-zag through the hoards of people pounding the pavement. Across the street, Davidson’s Bakery’s neon sign glows orange and pink. We enter the small storefront and our senses are bombarded with tempting sweet and yeasty delicacies. Glazed and fruited danish, salted and seeded rolls, and strudels and tortes pile the shelves.

“What would you like ma’am?” spouts a large, aproned woman.

“One roun onion bread. Slize id please,” requests my grandmother.

I linger over the whipped cream birthday cakes in the cooler. The transaction completed, my grandmother opens the door.

“Les go.”

The el and bus ride home go by in a flash. Before long, I am racing down the gangway to my grandparent’s house. I pound the brown wooden storm door, eternally latched at the top with a hook, until my grandfather’s tall, lean figure appears at the door.

“Open up!” I yell impatiently.

“Hold on, hold on,” my grandfather calls from behind the locked door.

I plop into an orange and chrome chair that surrounds the kitchen table as my grandmother unloads the bounty.

“Where did *you* go?” my grandfather asks sternly.

“Da liddle girl wanded to go downtown Grampa.”

“That’s right,” I grin matter-of-factly.

My grandmother unwraps the ham, opens the bag of bread, and plunks a large spoon into the container of coleslaw. My grandfather sets three small plates around the table and retrieves the jars of mayonnaise and mustard from the refrigerator. I obtain my china mug from the pantry and fill it with milk. At my grandmother’s urging, we helped ourselves to the impromptu picnic.

“Ead, ead,” my grandmother demands.

“I’m full,” I groan.

“Wassa madda, you don’d like my food?”

“I like it.”

“Id’s good, huh?”

It is good. The sweetness of the onions in the bread and the honeyed baked ham are the perfect counterpart to the tangy coleslaw.

With a melodic ringing my grandmother chimes, “Grampa, the liddle girl saw a dow ad Marshall Field’s dat she wands.”

“Oh, yeah,” my grandfather eyes me suspiciously.

I sit there motionless.

“You know how mush?” she questions him.

“Twenty-five dollars,” he guesses.

“No higha.” My grandmother eggs him on.

“Fifty dollars?” he looks at me puzzled.

I slowly shake my head.

“No, higha, higha,” she urges him.

“More?”

My grandmother cocks her thumb and points upward. I mimic her. Then she lets out the secret in the same way she pantomimed in the store.

“Nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars, one thousand dollars for a doll! What are you, crazy?” grandpa shouts.

My grandmother throws her head back, laughs, and snorts. She enjoys getting a rise out of my grandfather with nonsensical talk. I play along.

“But Grampa, you should have seen her,” I insist. “She had a fur coat and a diamond ring, and everything.”

“For a doll?” He shakes his head in disbelief.

I let out a giggle and then a roar of laughter. My grandfather laughs too.

My grandmother gazes at me wistfully and admits quietly, “Dat was a nice dow.”

I nod my head in agreement and smile. “Yes she was,” I reminisce.

\* \* \*

We continued to visit the exquisite little doll, dressed in fur, until about six months after we first laid eyes on her. One sad day, the place where she stood was empty. Some unfortunate young girl, I pondered, probably received her as a gift.

## **Haiku**

*Kathleen Volk*

cemented between the lines  
a life story  
and morning coffee

sweet moonlight blossoms  
dance as I drink  
early June magic

## **Bill Versus Ted**

*Barbara Simon*

When I was thirteen years old, I lived with Ted Nugent. No, not the “Wang Tang Sweet Poontang,” “Cat Scratch Fever” Ted Nugent, rocking guitarist of the ’70s and ’80s, but the “Great White....” *German Shepherd*.

My cousin Lori’s boyfriend, John, gave him to her as a puppy, which grew into a large, beautiful golden-white furred dog—and a dog was not needed in a chaotic household of thirteen people. My uncle Bill and aunt Mary, with their three daughters, took in the seven kids in my family after our mom died. My mom’s family removed us from our home with our Dad, a violent alcoholic, who could not be trusted with our safety. Bill and Mary also took in another girl from the neighborhood whose mother had kicked her out. The ages of the “children” who lived there ranged between three and seventeen—eight of them were teenagers. All of this on the heels of losing their youngest daughter, then eight, to a sudden, acute, and unknown illness just a few years earlier. Maybe they were numb to the chaos.

Ted soon became the neighborhood dog. He went everywhere. He went to the local Oky-Doky store whenever one of the eleven kids of the house wanted pop, gum, candy, or cigarettes. He hung out with the neighborhood senior and junior high schoolers as we congregated at each other’s houses or grouped together on the street corners. He would ride along in the car to pick up friends or to take them home.

Everybody loved Ted. Well, not everybody. Bill hated Ted. I’m pretty sure I am safe using that word—hated. We lived in a small three-bedroom house and a large dog certainly was noticeable. Especially a dog that dug holes in the postage-stamp yard and under the redwood fence surrounding it. A dog that nobody picked up after, which caused the grass to grow in very green tufts where it hadn’t been ruined by his digging or peeing. A dog that was afflicted with room-clearing, bring-tears-to-your-eyes flatulence. A dog that was prone to carsickness that everyone assumed he would outgrow. Bill would have loved to get rid of Ted, but he was outnumbered. Mary liked the dog and we would have made life hell for him if he made Lori get rid of him. The battles he picked were few and he knew which ones were futile.

Yes, Bill hated him. Although he spoke to him at times, Bill never called Ted by his proper name. He would say, “Get the hell out of my way, you dumb son-of-a-bitch,” or “I hope you choke on that bone, you dumb son-of-a-bitch,” or even, “Go lick your balls somewhere else, you dumb son-of-a-bitch.” Technically, Bill calling Ted a son-of-a-bitch was proper, but I don’t think semantics had anything to do with his ‘pet name’ for the dog.

Ted could never do anything right when Bill was around. If he wasn’t lying in the wrong spot, he was shedding too much, barking too much, or smelling too much. I remember one particular time that Ted *really* displeased Bill.

The thirteen members of the household, John, and Ted piled into Bill’s fifteen-passenger mid-seventies Ford van. The van had originally been a two-tone white over green, but a bad paint job transformed it into a color somewhere between yellow-green and olive-green. It was the only one of its kind, I’m sure.

Anyway, we were going to my grandparent’s house for the day. Bill was tired so he had Lori drive, since my aunt, Mary, didn’t like to drive the van. Bill sat on the second bench seat next to the sliding door and fell asleep shortly after we left Dubuque. It was only a forty-minute trip to Grandma and Grandpa’s near Worthington, Iowa, about thirty-five miles from Dubuque. The ride was uneventful until we were about a mile from their farm.

I was sitting in the back bench seat of the van between John and my younger sister, Jodi. John was sitting to my right on the aisle side of the seat. Ted laid on the floor next to the sliding door, just behind Bill. The swaying of the van had finally gotten to be too much for Ted. He sat

up, which got our attention. With his back to John and me, he stared at the floor in front of him. “Oh no!” I thought. This looked familiar. The golden white fur on Ted’s spine raised away from his body and we could see the muscles on his sides and back contract and roll their way up to his neck. In one large “bleckh,” Ted threw up a gooey pile of orangish-pink vomit, resembling a rather large scoop of Ambrosia dessert, on the floor of the van—right next to Bill. John and I gasped and Ted turned his head toward us, looking as guilty as Judas. John and I, the only ones aware of this, began to laugh uncontrollably. We did all that we could to muffle our guffaws because we didn’t want Bill to wake up. The others in the van noticed our commotion and several asked, “What’s so funny?” Still in fits of side-splitting laughter, I mouthed, “Ted threw-up!” Looks of horror spread across their faces and they sniffed the air, their noses confirming what I had just told them.

It was at this point that Bill snorted himself awake. His chin had been resting on his chest and I saw his head bob back and shake off the nap he had just taken. The van was just about to turn into my grandparents’ driveway when Bill glanced down to his right, and noticed the clump of goo on the floor.

“What the hell is this?” he said, still trying to wake up. As if he was in slow motion, I watched as he leaned to his right, pointed his right index finger, and poked it into the quivering warm mass of vomit.

At this point, John and I were leaning on each other, helplessly laughing, tears streaming down our faces. Others in the van, laughing as well, were trying to get Bill’s attention away from Ted’s accident, but to no avail. Bill pulled his finger out of the pile and the light bulb appeared above his head. “Aaaahhhhh – that son-of-a-bitch threw up!” he screamed in a high-pitched tone. “I’m gonna puke! Get me out of this van! I’m gonna puke! Stop this van! Let me out!”

Having reached Grandma and Grandpa’s, Lori brought the van to rest in the driveway. Bill threw the sliding door back on its track, jumped from the van, stood along the edge of the driveway, leaned over, made gagging sounds, and wiped his finger in the grass.

Knowing that this could get ugly, it took all that I had in me to squelch my hysterics. My sides ached, my cheeks hurt, and I was quite thankful that I hadn’t peed my pants.

“I’m gonna shoot that son-of-a-bitch!” Bill yelled, holding his index finger like the Statue of Liberty holds her torch.

“Oh you are not,” his daughter, Karen yelled back. “He can’t help it. It’s not like he did it on purpose, ya know.”

“Lori, get that van cleaned out—he’s your goddamned dog!”

Bill walked to the house, his hand in the air, and all of us kids stood around the van. Lori and Karen were consoling Ted. We heard the kitchen door slam behind him, looked at one another, and collapsed into fits of laughter once again.

Bill seemed to hate Ted even more after that incident. Their relationship developed into a ‘get out of my way’ and ‘get me out of here’ living arrangement that went on until Ted disappeared a year or so later. He was gone one day when we came home from school, and all of our calls for him were left unanswered. We looked for him everywhere, put up signs, and placed an ad in the lost and found section of the newspaper. He was a beautiful, friendly dog and we finally concluded that someone must have taken him. Everyone in the household, except for Bill, was very upset that he was gone. We missed our companion.

Three or four months following Ted’s disappearance, Lori and John were driving west of town on Highway 20. Looking out the window and watching the countryside roll by, John

spotted a dog in the field running along the fence line next to the highway. “Stop! Stop!” he yelled at Lori, who was driving. “I think I saw Ted! Turn around” Lori pulled a U-turn on the highway and sped back in the direction from which they came. They saw the dog again and yelled out the windows, “Ted! Ted!” Lori pulled over to the shoulder and parked the car. She and John jumped out of the car and ran across the highway. By this time the big white dog was jumping in the air and barking, obviously excited to see them. It was Ted! What were the odds of finding him?

About three years ago at our annual family canoe trip/camping weekend in Missouri, some of my brothers and sisters, in-laws, cousins, and aunts and uncles were sitting around on picnic tables and lawn chairs, drinking some beer and reminiscing about old times. We never seemed to run out of stories. After having a good laugh over the ‘remember when Ted threw-up in the van’ story, we found out what had really happened to Ted, twenty-two years earlier.

“I was sick of that son-of-a-bitch,” Bill began. “I borrowed Pat’s (his brother) shot gun and took a day off of work. It wasn’t easy getting him into my car, but I finally managed to do so. I drove out to the farm to take care of him. I got out of the car and got the gun out of the trunk. I opened the car door to let the son-of-a-bitch out and he took off like a bat out of hell. I’m sure he knew I planned to hurt him. I was so damned pissed he got away but then figured that at least I was rid of him.”

“So you were going to shoot him! Oh my God!” my brother, Ben laughed. “I’ll bet you were surprised when you came home and found Ted there a few months later.”

“I was dumbfounded when I saw Ted at the house. I could have just crapped—I couldn’t believe the dumb son-of-a-bitch was back. He really steered clear of me after that.” Bill shook his head and chuckled a bit himself. “Jesus, I was pissed.”

After all this time, it was difficult to be angry with Bill for what he wanted to do. Being adults with families of our own, we recognized the insanity that existed in the make up of that home, and how his wanting to ‘eliminate’ Ted from the equation, may have just been his way of gaining some control of an uncontrollable situation. Ted ended up living a good life of seven or eight years. He eventually had to be put down because, later in life, he began to suffer from frequent and severe epileptic seizures. He’d had a good life... and the last laugh, more or less.

The rest of us were laughing too, at the irony of it all.

## **Haiku**

### ***Francine Banwarth***

holding my thoughts  
in moonlight  
his point of view

*Mayfly*, Issue 38, Winter 2004

thin snow over ice  
half a heart  
in her question mark

*Frogpond* XXVII:3 Autumn 2004

after the yard sale  
the widow's broom  
shadow sweeping

*Modern Haiku* Volume 35:3 Autumn 2004

## **Beans**

*Amy Hall*

Yesterday  
I was walking  
down loras boulevard  
when this little old man  
just appeared  
right in my way  
startled I said  
whaddya want  
his hand holding  
five black beans  
shot up beside my nose  
overnight they'll grow  
and lead you to more riches  
than you've ever known  
beans  
beans will lead me to riches  
right well that's too bad  
I hate beans besides  
my life is filled  
with enough riches already  
go find someone  
who likes beans  
please

## **Another Man's Treasure**

*Whitney Calvert*

I have always been fascinated with the interesting and sometimes valuable knick-knacks that one can find at roadside garage sales and resale shops. I guess one could say, as many of my friends have, that I am obsessed with collecting useless treasures and the constant possibility of a magical discovery that is just one box of "junk" away. It is because of this fixation that I could not possibly prevent myself from hurriedly parking my car, jumping out, and rummaging through the boxes and piles of unwanted items at a garage sale in Hartford, Connecticut.<sup>1</sup>

I was digging through an old cardboard box when I came across an item that struck my interest, a tattered group of papers resembling a notebook, bound together by a string. I carefully untied the string, curious as to what the pages of this notebook might contain. I turned to the

first page of text, seeing now that what I was holding was an old journal of some sort, and I began to read.

*April 20, 1882<sup>2</sup>*

*I departed with my traveling partners, James R. Osgood and Roswell Phelps,<sup>3</sup> today from St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>4</sup> The town has grown greatly since I last saw it,<sup>5</sup> but now that I am older it has lost much of the mystery and grandeur that I associated with it as a young child.<sup>6</sup> Throughout my adult life, I have always felt a longing for the blissful innocence of childhood that I was never able to keep a firm grasp on as an adult. The city, though, as well as Hannibal and Florida, will always hold a warm spot in my heart, the spot that one saves for special memories and childhood dreams. I suppose, though, that this trip will bring out many of those memories as I travel down the river that engulfed the thoughts of my youth<sup>7</sup> and to which I devoted several years of my life.<sup>8</sup>*

S.L.C.

After reading the first entry, I greatly understood the incredible find that I had just made. I wondered how much the family wanted for this journal. Did they even realize what they had in their possession? I looked at the sides of this cardboard treasure chest, searching for some hint of a price among the clutter. Seeing none, I carefully placed the journal at the bottom of the box and carried it to the card table where a younger woman was seated.

“How much for the box?” I asked nonchalantly. I was an expert at this by now and I made sure that she couldn’t tell how much I desired the object that lay in dust at the bottom of it.

“Um...how does \$5 sound?” she asked.

“I’ll take it!” came rushing out of my mouth before I even had the chance to think and I hoped silently that I didn’t come off as over anxious. I didn’t want her to become suspicious of her hidden treasure.

She smiled as I handed her the five dollar bill and “have a wonderful day” came out from behind her unsuspecting lips.

“I most definitely will,” I said as I walked back to my ’98 Ford Contour and placed the box in the trunk, removing my one valuable possession and placing it on my passenger’s seat.

I couldn’t wait to get to my cousin’s home, the destination of my travels and the whole reason I was in Hartford, so that I could read more of this journal. By now I was almost positive that I had in my possession a journal of Mark Twain,<sup>9</sup> but only further readings and research would tell me for sure since I was obviously no expert in authenticity. I decided to stop in the local park and read a few more pages of the journal, since I wouldn’t want to make a big deal out of my discovery if I hadn’t done a little more looking into it.

I pulled my car over to the side of the road, picked up the journal off of the seat next to me and headed toward the nearest park bench. On this beautiful fall day the leaves fell around me and I began to fall into the world of Mark Twain.

*April 21, 1882*

*A day on the river has already passed and I find myself surprised at how much the Mississippi has changed over the years.<sup>10</sup> I used to know every turn in the river, but that was*

long ago. I should have suspected that it would have changed greatly in my absence, as many things do.

*I have seen few steamboats in the last twenty-four hours.<sup>11</sup> I shouldn't let this depress me though, since it is only my second day on the river. Despite my continued efforts throughout the day to forget about these many changes, I still can't help but think about how things used to be. The river I dreamed of as a boy is changing, but it still holds many mysteries. I should imagine that this book, if I ever do finish it, will be a success since "the Mississippi is well worth reading about. It is not a commonplace river, but on the contrary is in all ways remarkable."<sup>12</sup>*

S.L.C

April 22, 1882

*I have been traveling under the false identity of C.L. Samuels for the purpose of my research,<sup>13</sup> but today, much to my disappointment, I was unmasked by the pilot, who I must have worked with in my younger days. However, much to his disappointment, I have no recollection of him ( if only he had written a book or two about the Mississippi he might have been a memorable opponent).<sup>14</sup>*

*Now seems like a decent enough time to make a note about my other pseudonym: Mark Twain. This name, although not my first penname,<sup>15</sup> is the one that I have written under most often and the one that most still uses. **Mark twain** is actually "the cry of the boatman to the helmsman that the water ahead is just barely safe"<sup>16</sup> and was one of my favorite terms on the river because it represented safety. Well, I should hope that would be enough to jog my memory!*

S.L.C

After reading this entry I could hardly contain my elation. In the lonely park, I jumped up from my seat and shouted with joy. I may not be an expert in Mark Twain history, but it said within the pages whose journal this was. It was Samuel Clemens' journal, or shall I say Mark Twain's, and no one could deny that!

On a slightly different note, I remember studying about Mark Twain in school, and the one of the few things I remember is that Twain included hidden meanings in many of his stories. I only remember this now because, in my opinion, there is also a hidden meaning in Clemens' pseudonym. *Mark twain*, in many cases meant safety, but if a boat was moving into more shallow water, this term could also be a warning of the danger that lies ahead. I am sure that Clemens was aware of this fact since he was often aware of the duality he included in his stories. Maybe he will mention more about this "twinship" later in his journal.

I decided to read a few more pages of the journal even though my newfound reassurance told me that it would now be okay to share my discovery with others. I made myself comfortable on the park bench once again and began to discover even more about the author that I was beginning to feel very close to.

April 23, 1882

*We stopped in Memphis today<sup>17</sup> and it still very much reminds me of Henry and the guilt that I feel about what happened to him. I have always blamed myself and still do,<sup>18</sup> even though nearly a quarter of a century<sup>19</sup> has passed since he died. Henry never would have been on that*

*blasted steamboat if it wasn't for me arranging for him to have a job.<sup>20</sup> I left the boat for another job. He stayed. He died.*

*Henry was always a great inspiration for me.<sup>21</sup> I will never forget when we were fighting once, as young brothers often do, and I got so red-faced with anger and frustration that I made the way to the second floor of our home, the anger in me seeming to rise the higher and higher I climbed. Henry, unsuspectingly thinking that I had abandoned the argument, was sitting directly underneath one of the second-story windows in our home. I reached out the already open window, a watermelon rind from our kitchen between my small devilish hands. There was neither a thought nor a care in my mind as I dropped that watermelon on Henry's head.<sup>22</sup>*

*This somewhat humorous story would be a good one to tell in one of my lectures, as I can see a great place for a dramatic pause.<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that this could be a useful tool to me today, I still feel guilt about it, although not as much guilt as I do over other events in Henry's life and my own. I suspect things could be worse, though, and so I will end this entry on that thought.*

S.L.C.

April 27, 1882

*I am ashamed that I have not recorded my observations for several days because collecting notes about the river is the sole purpose of this journey. I have been reluctant to write, however, because I do not know what will be valuable information to me and what will simply be a waste of my time.<sup>24</sup> I have had it in mind to write a book about the powerful Mississippi River for some time now,<sup>25</sup> but I have never actually laid out a plan. That might have been an intelligent thing to do before I started. Well, hindsight is 20/20, I guess.*

*On a completely different note, I was sitting on the deck of the Charles Morgan<sup>26</sup> this afternoon looking out at the beautiful reflective mirror that is the Mississippi and I noticed, in the distance, another steamboat. The boat soon passed by and I became aware that the name on the side of the boat was "Mark Twain."<sup>27</sup> It's a weird feeling to know that there is a boat out there named after me. It makes me happy to know that I have had such a great effect on the world of the Mississippi River that a steamboat, the same boat that I once dreamed about working on as a boy, is named after me!*

S.L.C

April 28, 1882

*Our boat arrived in New Orleans today.<sup>28</sup> No time to write, however, because several people have been very adamant about showing the city to Osgood and me. Phelps is choosing to stay in for the night and get a tour later. There is no harm in that, though, since we will be staying here for several days. I will take notes of my adventures tomorrow perhaps.*

S.L.C.

April 30, 1882

*I missed another day of note taking yesterday but, as always, I have an acceptable excuse. I have been terribly busy in this city and have been attempting to see many of the sights during my short stay.*

*I do have an exciting story, though, and one that I wish to remember. I met a man in town as I was walking by one of the churches. His demeanor and appearance grabbed my attention immediately although he didn't waste much time addressing me in a verbal manner either. This man began to preach rapidly about the holiness of his church. He claimed that the very spot where he stood was had been blessed by God himself and that the church happened to be the most sacred church all along the great Mississippi River simply because of it. I wondered if the man had recognized me because this story of his sounded vaguely familiar, much like one I had written several years ago. Did this man know of my writings? I doubt, judging souly from his appearance, that he had any knowledge of who I was, but his story made me chuckle a little just the same. This world is made up of such interesting people!*

*S.L.C.*

I believe I know what story Mark Twain is talking about in this entry and that excites me to no end. I remember reading a story in my college days called "The Tomb of Adam" in which Twain wrote of a man who believed that a spot in his church was the exact center of the earth. This man at the church also believed that the dirt outside was the same dirt that God used to create Adam, and, therefore, there was no greater church to be found. Some members of my class were fooled by this story and they believed this overly romantic view, but I knew better. I knew that Twain was using the wonderful tactic of duality that I spoke of earlier. Twain, whose persona is present in the story as an observer, did not believe a word that the other man was saying.

The believers in my class were not reading the story with Twain's cynical views of religion in mind, and I, feeling a great bond with Twain in this regard, connected greatly with Twain's thoughts. I knew that he was commenting on the ability of people in society to believe the things they are told and not question the world around them. Twain could have easily been sucked in to the misconceptions that the eccentric man in New Orleans had but Twain did not. He was always great at questioning the world around him, I remember that fact from the stories I have read.

"Should I read a few more entries?" I questioned under my breath. As I looked around trying to answer my own question, I realized that not only was it becoming dark outside, but my cousin must be wondering what has happened to me. I regretfully tied the string back around the journal and headed toward my car.

I meandered my way through the town until I found my cousin's two-story light blue Victorian house that I loved so much. I, once again, removed the journal from the passenger's seat and headed inside to share my discovery with someone else.

"I'm here," I said as I walked through the door.

"Where have you been?" he hollered in a worried voice from another room.

"I stopped at a garage sale," I yelled, feeling a little guilty for making him worry.

"I shouldn't be surprised I guess," he said as he walked in from the kitchen. "Find anything good?"

"You have no idea!" I said, inviting him to sit down next to me on the coach so I could share it with him. He would never believe what I had found, but I shared what I had already read with him and then we read further.

May 1, 1882

*A whole new month has begun but I have been so busy that I almost let the day slip by without noticing. The people of New Orleans are wonderful and “we are in a midst of a whirlpool of hospitality-breakfast, dinners, lunches, cockfights, Sunday schools, muleraces, lake-exercises, social gatherings and all sorts of things.”<sup>29</sup> I can hardly believe that people would be so excited to show around and mingle with a man such as myself who “was born poor out in the prairie country.”<sup>30</sup> Maybe they will tire of my company as well as that of my traveling companions soon so that we might get some rest. Highly doubtful, though.*

S.L.C.

May 2, 1882

*Today has been no different from the days before and so “we have been reduced to lying, at last. We pretend to have engagements which we have not, in order to escape others which we want to avoid.”<sup>31</sup> It is quite a nice system, if I do say so myself, and it allows me the time I need to devote to my research of the river.*

*I have looked back at my notes and decided that I need to describe more of the scenery as I travel back up the river. I have always been mesmerized by how magically beautiful the River is and I believe that I shall want to include some aspect of that in my book when it comes time to write it.<sup>32</sup> It is time to go avoid a few more people and try to have some time to enjoy the simple things in life.*

S.L.C.

May 3, 1882

*Phelps, Osgood and I have had a very relaxing day of billiards. I have missed that game immensely since I began my journey on the River, and I was glad when we stumbled upon a bar with a billiard table.*

*Later on in the evening, I traveled out to the shore of the Mississippi and enjoyed a cigar with one of the friends I have made in town. It was quite an enjoyable day and much less hectic. Good times were had by all! <sup>33</sup>*

S.L.C.

My cousin was excited by the cigar comment since he had always loved a good cigar as well. “You know what?” he asked. Then, answering his own question, he replied, “I have a few cigars in one of the desk drawers in my study. Don’t you think it would be fun to smoke cigars while we read Mark Twain?”

I am by no means a smoker, and I have never even had a cigar, but I thought if there was a more appropriate time to start I wouldn’t find it. “That sounds wonderful,” I said. “How about we turn on the porch light and continue our reading and smoking outside?”

My cousin agreed and, as he went to find the cigars, I turned on the light outside and made myself comfortable in one of the two white rocking chairs on his wrap-around porch. My cousin soon came outside, already puffing on his cigar, and offered me the other one which he then took the liberty of lighting. He sat down in the other rocker, saying “shall we continue?”

I took a long puff on the cigar, as he had showed me how to do, and responded with a “yes, we shall.” I spoke this in a deep voice, trying to mimic the great writer and we both laughed a little. I then continued to read, sometimes jokingly, in that same deep voice.

May 4, 1882

*I heard some dreadfully sad news today that ruined the elated mood I was in at the close of yesterday. I read in a newspaper this morning at breakfast that John Brown’s father died recently.<sup>34</sup> What horrible news to hear in the middle of what has been a wonderful trip. Dr. Brown was a talented man, and I hate to think that he has passed before I was able to travel to Europe and see him again. I think that I shall write to John and send my deepest sympathies for his loss.<sup>35</sup> I know what it is like to lose a family member and I do not wish it on anyone.*

S.L.C.

This entry made me sad. It seemed as though Twain’s life was surrounded by death and, even though we had just begun to read again, I decided to hand the journal to my cousin; after all, why shouldn’t he have the chance to read it as well? As I passed the journal, an old tattered envelope dropped out onto the porch between us. “Oh” I gasped, “what’s this?”

I picked up the letter as my cousin took the journal. We decided to continue reading the journal since we were already on a roll and read the letter a little later.

May 6, 1882

*We departed from New Orleans today on The City of Baton Rouge.<sup>36</sup> To both my surprise and excitement, I learned that my old mentor, Horace Bixby, would be piloting the ship. This is the same “Horace Bixby who taught me the river, and to whom I owed and paid absolute obedience during a year and a half.”<sup>37</sup> I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to Bixby for all the he taught me throughout the time that I worked by his side.*

*This should prove to be a very enjoyable trip up the river. I had hoped to relive and become reacquainted with much of the river life during my trip, but I never expected to able to work with many of the same people that I shared my initial experience with. I am off to catch up with Bixby!*

S.L.C.

May 7, 1882

*I said that I should add more details to my story about the river and Mother Nature supplied me with some wonderful inspiration today. There is a horrible storm outside and so I must spend my time in the pilot’s cabin or in my room writing. I have passed several hours with Mr. Bixby again, but I felt the need to write a few lines about the storm while it was so vivid in my memory.*

*The whole day our boat has been surrounded by “strong wind, blue-black sky, crawly white waves, vast sheets of driving rain, superb bursts of lightening, and a most inspiring cannonade of big thunder.”<sup>38</sup>I can hardly see the landscape that surrounds the river because of the curtain of rain that has enveloped our boat throughout the entire afternoon. I wish I could describe the way the branches of the trees look. I am sure they are weighted down by the heaviness of the water. All I can see, if I dare step outside, are the dimples in the water from the fat, piercing droplets of*

*rain and the white blanket that lay above us in the form of clouds. I hope it clears up soon so that I can enjoy the sun's reflection on the water.*

*S.L.C.*

*May 9, 1882*

*I failed to write yesterday because I was writing a letter back to Suzy. I received a letter from her while in New Orleans, and I hope to be able to send one back to her and the family when we reach Cairo, Illinois.<sup>39</sup> We are scheduled to arrive there on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and with Bixby piloting the boat I have no doubt that we will stay on schedule since we are making wonderful time thus far.*

*Susy knows me well and I often think that "if I am as transparent to other people as I was to Susy I have wasted much effort in this life."<sup>40</sup> I remember a time when "both of us broke into convulsions and went on laughing until we were physically exhausted and spiritually reconciled."<sup>41</sup> She is a wonderful young girl and has always been a favorite of mine. I miss her dearly and I often tell her so. Well, it's back to watching my life, as well as the river (although I often find them to be quite similar, both ever changing and mysterious) roll by.*

The letter Twain spoke of receiving was, no doubt, the letter that I now held in my hand. I decided that we should read it now and then continue with the journal.

*Papa,*

*I miss you greatly and wish that you would come home soon for life here just isn't the same without you. I can tell that Mother misses you as well, but hopefully we will get a letter from you soon and that will hold us over till we see you again.*

*I was thinking the other day about a story you told me when I was younger about how just before you started your first trip down the Mississippi your mother asked you "not to touch intoxicating liquors or swear"<sup>42</sup> and you agreed to it because you loved her dearly and would never want to hurt her. My point of bring up this story is to ask if you would ever do such a thing for me. I would never ask you to do this, for I know how much you love a drink. It is merely the thought that you would which satisfies me.*

*Please write Mother a letter soon. I believe she is beginning to miss those many love letters you used to write her and is longing for your love once again.<sup>43</sup> I miss you, as well, and can't wait for another letter about your adventures!*

*Love always  
Susy*

*May 12, 1882*

*We arrived back in St Louis once again and Osgood departed for Chicago.<sup>44</sup> I don't believe the rest of the trip will be quite the same without him since he has been a great traveling partner for me although he has probably kept me from writing down many of the things I should.<sup>45</sup> It might be better off, though, that he has left since I will be visiting Hannibal soon and should like to be alone for that part of my journey since it is the most personal.*

*S.L.C.*

May 13, 1882

*We departed from St. Louis today, heading next to Hannibal.<sup>46</sup> I have enjoyed socializing with new members of our party throughout the trip and I met a very interesting one today. I met Writer Levering's sister and her husband today. Levering was a boy who died on the river many years ago, I believe it was in August of 1847,<sup>47</sup> if my memory serves me well. This River takes many lives. I have realized that on my journey, and it is one thing about my trip that I would soon like to forget.*

*Many people say "how hard it is that we have to die" - a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have to live."<sup>48</sup> I am beginning more and more to believe myself when I say things like that. This trip has been wonderful, but I hate the death and tragedy that seem to surround us at every turn of the river.*

S.L.C.

May 15, 1882

*We arrived in Hannibal yesterday,<sup>49</sup> and I have been busy almost nonstop since then. I have searched around the town for old acquaintances or people I might remember from my youth but I have found few. "Many of the people I once knew in Hannibal are now in heaven. Some, I trust, are in the other place."<sup>50</sup>*

*Despite the lack of old friends, I still can't help but remember all of the great times I had here in my youth. It really was a "heavenly place for a boy."<sup>51</sup> Well, I am off to discover how more things may have changed.*

S.L.C.

May 16, 1882

*We are leaving Hannibal tomorrow,<sup>52</sup> and I am beginning to wonder if I ever should have come. My memories of boyhood are "crowded with guilt and terror, oppressed by a naïve belief that the course of one's life was determined not by logical laws, but by 'special orders...partly punitive...partly admonitory.'"<sup>53</sup>*

*I saw a great range of things during my younger years in Hannibal, but I can not decide which has had more of an effect on me, the good or the bad.<sup>54</sup> I suppose it is the bad since that is the part that always seems to stick with people no matter how optimistic they are. I hope this book will bring out more of the good parts of the River than the bad since it has always been a dream world for me.*

S.L.C.

May 19, 1882

*This is likely my final entry since our trip will end tomorrow, and I will head back to my loving family and the place that I now call home, Hartford, Connecticut. We passed by a city called Dubuque today, "the water above [this town] is olive green-rich and beautiful and semi-*

transparent with the sun on it.”<sup>55</sup>It was extremely exquisite, as many of the landscapes here are. The bluffs all along this area are amazing, and I wish that I could stay longer and venture a little closer.<sup>56</sup> I have noticed in the past few days that the “upper Mississippi is the home of superb sunsets.”<sup>57</sup> It must be an enchanting place to live, but I doubt that I will ever make it back or settle down here.

*It has been an amazing trip, filled with many people I am sure will forever affect my life and my writings. I hope that I have collected enough to write my book about the Mississippi. I am sure that my memory will serve me well, and that this journal will help to remind me of the great adventures I have had.*

*Until my next adventure.*

S.L.C.

As I took the near final puff on my disappearing cigar, my cousin and I sat in silence. I didn't want to think about tomorrow and what I must do with this journal. I didn't want to think about having it auctioned off to the highest bidder, even if this would earn me a much greater sum than the \$5 I had spent. All I wanted to do was the exact thing that I imagine Mark Twain would have been doing at night on the Mississippi. I wanted to sit in silence, enjoying a good cigar, a good friend, and an amazing journey.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mark 544. Twain resided in Hartford, Connecticut at a place called Nook Farm from 1871-1890. Since he traveled on the Mississippi in 1882 and published *Life on the Mississippi* in 1883, I placed this town as the logical resting place for the journal of his experience.

<sup>2</sup> Twain, Mark Notebooks 246. Twain departed from St. Louis.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 466. These two men were Twain's actual travel partners on his trip down the Mississippi.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 466. This source states that Twain traveled from St. Louis to New Orleans and then traveled back to St. Louis and Hannibal.

<sup>5</sup> Rasmussen 413. The population of St. Louis in Twain's youth was a meager 10,000 but "the population quadrupled over the next decade."

<sup>6</sup> Rasmussen 413. "Any neighbor boy who had been there was regarded as a person of consideration"

<sup>7</sup> Twain, Life 64. The opening lines of this source say "When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman."

<sup>8</sup> Klise 6. Part 39 on this page tells us "But the print shop life began to pall on him in his 22<sup>nd</sup> year and so in April of 1857, he signed on as an apprentice river pilot. Thus began the four years on the Mississippi that became the germinal experience for his first work."

<sup>9</sup> Mark 547. "Sometimes [Twain] consciously prepared to write using journals, as when he recorded the details of a Mississippi cruise just prior to writing Life on the Mississippi."

- 10 Rasmussen 287. This book includes a summary of the chapter of Life on the Mississippi, in which Twain discusses how much the river has changed shape.
- 11 Rasmussen 287. This is a reference to the summary of Chapter 22 of Life on the Mississippi where Twain mentions that he sees few steamboats on the river.
- 12 Twain, qtd in Melton 75.
- 13 Love 207. “To protect his role of observer and private citizen, [Clemens] assumed the name of C.L. Samuels...”
- 14 Love 208. Mark Twain tells his wife in a letter that he has been found out by saying, “He had recognized my voice, after 21 years, though I did not remember him or his name either.”
- 15 Klise. Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass was the name that Clemens originally used when writing his first articles about his pilot experience for the newspaper in Keokuk.
- 16 Klise.
- 17 Twain, Mark Notebooks 436.
- 18 Rasmussen 77.
- 19 Mark 151. Henry died in June of 1858 which is just a little over 24 years at the point when Twain is traveling down the Mississippi.
- 20 Mark 151. “It was Samuel Clemens who got Henry a position as a cleark on the ill-fated steamboat...”
- 21 Mark 151. “Henry was inspiration for Sid in the Adventures of Tom Sawyer.”
- 22 Rasmussen 77. “Mark Twain tells an often repeated anecdote about a feud he had with Henry, culminating in his dropping a watermelon rind on Henry’s head from a second story window.”
- 23 Twain, “How.” In “How to Tell a Story,” Twain discusses the effect of a dramatic pause and its importance in the telling of a humorous story.
- 24 Rasmussen 283. “If the book lacks flow, it is because Mark Twain himself was unsure what it was he was assembling.”
- 25 Mark 466. “The notion of writing about Mississippi River piloting came to Clemens while walking with Joseph Twichell, though the writer had intended as early as 1866 to write a book on the great river.”
- 26 Twain, Mark Notebooks 436.
- 27 Mark 303. Mark Twain mentions in Life on the Mississippi that he saw a boat with his name on it.
- 28 Twain, Mark Notebooks 436.
- 29 Mark Twain, qtd in Love 211.
- 30 Klise.
- 31 Mark Twain qtd in Love 212.
- 32 Mark 465. According to LeMaster, Life on the Mississippi is a combination of his works from “Old Times on the Mississippi” as well as “a description of the great river as [Twain] found it during the month long trip.”
- 33 Clemens 89. “His favorite game is billiards, and when he is tired and wishes to rest himself he stays up all night and plays billiards.”

- 34 Twain, Letters 420. “I was 3,000 miles from home, at breakfast in New Orleans, when the damp morning paper revealed the sorrowful news among the cable dispatches.”
- 35 Twain, Letters 420. This information for this section was taken from a letter that Twain wrote to John Brown on June 1, 1882 on his return from this trip.
- 36 Twain, Mark Notebooks 437.
- 37 Mark Twain qtd in Love 210.
- 38 Mark Twain qtd in Love 213.
- 39 Love 207-217. Mark Twain received many letters from his wife Olivia as well as from his daughter Susy while taking his trip along the Mississippi River.
- 40 Mark Twain, qtd. in Clemens 111.
- 41 Mark Twain, qtd in Clemens 105.
- 42 Clemens 112.
- 43 Clemens 114. “Papa wrote mama a great many beautiful love letters when they were engaged.”
- 44 Twain, Mark Notebooks 437.
- 45 Mark 466. He expected to interview a steamboatman during the voyage but was distracted by socializing.
- 46 Twain, Mark Notebooks 437.
- 47 Twain, Mark Notebooks 477. “A sister of Writer Levering on board with husband.” This note was taken in one of Mark Twain’s journals followed by an added explanation by the editor of who Writer Levering was.
- 48 Quotable 75. This quote is from Pudd’head Wilson and is featured in this book of quotations.
- 49 Twain, Mark Notebooks 437.
- 50 Mark Twain qtd in Twain, Mark Notebooks 478.
- 51 Klise.
- 52 Twain, Mark Notebooks 437.
- 53 Mark Twain qtd in Mark 398.
- 54 Klise. “In Hannibal, he saw men killed in water front fights, he saw black men, in chains, shipped like animals down the river to the prosperous plantations of the South. Here, too, he saw the great river boats, the wonderful steamers that plied up and down the deep and magic river.”
- 55 Twain, Mark Notebooks 479.
- 56 Twain, Mark Notebooks 479. Twain mentions in his journal notes that “The bluffs all along above St. Paul are exquisitely beautiful.”
- 57 Mark Twain qtd in Twain, Mark Notebooks 479.

## **Haiku**

*Becky Barnhart*

finding words  
of love not meant  
for me    winter moon

borrowed book . . .  
the smell of her home  
pressed between the pages

## **February**

*Barbara Simon*

Like children's scribbles in black crayon  
on canvas,  
the trees rise from the snow,  
and lean against the white morning sky,  
to rest their heads on the clouds  
like pillows.

The sun, too sleepy to muster much color,  
throws only a faint glow  
morning's way.

Tired of itself, Winter hangs in the air  
and discards days until spring.

## **Indian Summer**

*Barbara Simon*

Burnt by sun and stung by frost,  
the summer trees exchange their faded clothes  
for blazing cloaks of gold and crimson,  
and nameless colors so striking  
they aren't seen so much as inhaled,  
and settled in my memory with the smell of leaves aging to soil  
kicked up by my feet; my soul drowned in their crackle,  
their raspy music of autumn  
carried through the air on the Indian Summer breeze,  
against a sky that summons all the blue it possesses  
to revel in itself while it can.

## Images

### *Jody Iler*

All of us will experience death someday – our own, of course – and often the death of someone else during our lifetime. Maybe a stranger, or more likely, someone we love. Yet death, despite its certainty, often remains an abstract concept – something to be dealt with *later*. Someday, yes, but not *now*.

*Unless you happen to see someone die.* To watch life depart – there one moment, gone the next – a surreal, albeit concrete, moment. Perhaps the most powerful image in life.

“But stubbornly, taking no direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on, with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back” (*Sula* 8). Upon reading these words, I immediately wished, too late, that the image they evoked could be erased. Instead, the old saying came to mind – “running around like a chicken with its head cut off” – a disturbing scene that I actually witnessed years ago. The jump from chicken to man is incomprehensible.

Early on in her novel *Sula* Toni Morrison imprints this indelible image of war upon the reader. I understood then why Shadrack, the main character in this electrifying scene, experienced a disintegration of life as he knew it before the war. I saw why “His glance was cautious at first, for he had to be very careful – anything could be anywhere”(8). And though he tried desperately throughout his life to control the unexpectedness of death by devoting one day each year exclusively to it, in the end he could only watch as many of the Bottom’s community perished in the tunnel. “And all the while Shadrack stood there. Having forgotten his song and his rope, he just stood there high up on the bank ringing, ringing his bell” (162).

Unlike Shadrack, whose shattered mind was reassured to see his own face reflected in the water of the toilet in his jail cell (*Sula* 13) – Kabuo, in David Guterson’s novel *Snow Falling on Cedars*, was at first surprised at the “face of his war years. He had come home from the war and seen in his own eyes the disturbed empty reaches he’d seen in the eyes of other soldiers he’d known” (*Snow* 153). He thought, then, of the German boy that he had shot in Italy during the war – his first “murder.” “Kabuo remembered how under the helmet of the soldier on the wooded hillside, underneath the steady droning of the bees, it had turned out to be a very young boy he had shot directly through the groin (153). Kabuo shot him again, in the heart, when he assumed that the boy was reaching for his gun. The boy begged Kabuo to save him and “when the boy stopped talking his chest twitched a half-dozen times and blood ran from his mouth and down his cheeks” and with “his hand on Kabuo’s boot” the boy “shut his eyes and gave out”(154). For Kabuo, then, after the war, “The world was unreal, a nuisance that prevented him from focusing on his memory of that boy, on the flies in a cloud over his astonished face, the pool of blood filtering out of his shirt and into the forest floor...he’d left there, and then hadn’t left” (154).

The same powerful images – life one moment – death the next. Images that forever change those who witness this passage. Shadrack and Kabuo experienced life-altering wounds to the soul. They are left to grapple with their fears – of both death *and* life – in a new and irrevocable reality.

Nearly ten years ago, on a cold night in early December, I heard my first husband call out to me from our living room. I hurried into the room, and listened to him describe the intense pressure he felt – “*like a tight fist in my chest*” – the last words he spoke as I ran for the phone.

Sirens screaming, dogs barking in confusion, paramedics working feverishly – this image is forever etched in my memory. I *knew* the moment when he left me – I *saw* him go – filled with the sinking certainty that they wouldn't be able to bring him back. Two hours later I was home again, sitting in the silent living room, clutching a plastic hospital bag marked *Personal Belongings*.

The darkest winter of my life slowly faded into spring, then summer. As each season announced itself, a new memory would devastate me, a new *never-again*. I drove along the same roads in the same familiar town – but as I gazed distantly about me I could see nothing that eased the hollow emptiness inside. My reality had changed – I was in new, uncharted territory and I was lost.

Though I had not been to war, I was, like Shadrack and Kabuo, injured deep within. Guilt over my own survival and my inability to save my husband overwhelmed me at times, but I could not go back. Fear gripped me like a vise – if death can come that quickly, that unexpectedly, that violently – could we ever be prepared?

Slowly, I picked up the thread of my life again – the path of survival travels in only one direction – *forward*. I have a “new” husband now, a soulmate who has known the same loss that I have experienced. Together, we understand that this day is all that we have. My image of that long-ago December night is like a photograph – slipped carefully into the pages of my life's album – tucked deep within my heart.

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### Haiku

*Becky Barnhart*

after the funeral  
whiskers still  
in his razor

This haiku was the second place winner in the 2004 H. G. Henderson Haiku Contest. It was also published in *Frogpond XXVIII*, Winter 2005.

### A New Beginning to an Old Man's Ending

*Abby Quint*

The moon was full, a gold coin in a purple-black sky, illuminating my childhood home of Hannibal, Missouri.<sup>1</sup> It had always been a river-oriented town, where the river not only supplied jobs but also stole your heart in one swift movement, leaving you forever bonded to it. I walked

along this mighty Mississippi when suddenly a wave of nostalgia and longing for the past rushed over me, and I felt myself drowning in the memories of years formerly forgotten and pushed aside.

I stopped abruptly and chanced a look into the river and positively *grimaced*— the reflection was not kind to me. I looked in expecting to see a lively, young boy with adventure in his eyes and a cocky smile upon his lips, but instead saw an old man ravaged by time. His skin was pale from long days shut inside away from the sun, and wrinkles hung loosely across his haggard face. A white caterpillar of a mustache barely concealed a mouth permanently etched in a frown, where that cocky smile had long ago died. The only flattering thing about this old man was his elegant three-piece white suit from which he had once taken much pride, but even that looked old and faded now, the epitome of the old man himself. <sup>2</sup>

I don't know how long I stood there, lost in my own guilt, but the distinct crunch of footsteps snapped me out of the river's trance. With every effort, I dragged myself away from those harsh truths and fixed my eyes upon the most beautiful man I had ever seen. He was youthful and had this distinct *energy* about him. As he approached me, a shocking sense of familiarity struck me deep in my stomach, making me feel as if I'd swallowed a lead weight, and I had to take several deep breaths to keep from doubling over. "It cannot be," I choked out, rubbing my eyes in disbelief. "You're dreaming old man, or you've hit the bottle too hard!" But looking at this man before me, I knew it was none other than Satan, my beautiful creation. <sup>3</sup>

A sense of absolute horror swept through my body, and I urged my old muscles to get as far away from this nightmare as possible. I ran no further than fifty feet when Satan's satiny voice stopped me dead in my tracks.

"Mark, don't run away from me, you need to hear what I have to say."

With my heart still beating brutally against my ribs, I took a deep breath to steady my nerves and slowly turned around, fear still very much my companion. Satan casually beckoned me over with a wave of his hand and a smile, as if he only wanted to converse about some mundane thing like the weather. But alas, I knew better! I refused to get sucked into this delusional fantasy! However, having no other options available to me, I cautiously approached the fictitious character.

Now it was my turn to address him, to learn why he was here, or why I was for that matter. "Satan," I pleaded, "I beg of you, tell me why you and I are here this night!"

This question elicited a smile from the immortal creature, and I was drawn in by his beauty yet again. "Mark, I am here solely as your guide. Follow me." With his mission stated, Satan once again beckoned me to follow him and I, forever entranced with his mystery and aura, obediently followed.

As I used Satan as my guide, Satan used the Mississippi as his, following the bends and curves for what seemed like endless miles. At my age, this was not an enjoyable journey—my days of walking four miles daily were behind me—but Satan kept up this brisk speed, as if he were in a hurry, and I struggled to keep pace. My stomach did a series of flip-flops as my mind was continually fogged by unsettling thoughts.

"Oh the devil went down to Georgia, he was lookin' for a soul to steal!" Satan suddenly belted out at the top of his lungs. <sup>4</sup> What a queer song and sight, I thought, as I watched Satan continue to sing and then dance around, wildly playing a fiddle that wasn't there. I would have found this very amusing if I didn't think it had deeper intentions for me, although I had never been to Georgia. I dropped back a bit, more afraid of this crazy, dancing Satan than ever before

and after what seemed like an eternity, Satan stopped. I anxiously looked around, fearing the worst; Satan had brought me to the mouth of a cave.

“You asked why I was here, and I answered you,” Satan began, “Now it’s time to answer why you are here.”

“Alright then, go ahead and tell me and I’ll happily be on my way.”

“Your answer lies in the cave.”

“I was afraid you’d say that.”

Satan smiled and pushed me toward the ominous cave of truth.

The candle flickered and sputtered as I made my way down the dark, frightening passage of the cave. “How kind of Satan to provide me with such an astute guide,” I thought aloud, as I eyed the skinny stick of wax which was steadily melting away. I didn’t have long to marvel at my situation, however, for the passage ended abruptly at a natural rock stairway.

“Well, candle,” I inquired, “What do you think, should we climb these stairs into the unknown or turn back?” I studied the candle for a response—it continued to glitter in the darkness. “Alright then, we’ll continue,” I agreed with a nod and slight smile, though a tremble upon my lips betrayed truer emotions.

The ascent proved to be quite short; before long, I had reached the top of the stairway which opened up into a cavernous room. The room was lit faintly, and the irregular flickering of the light was similar to that of a dying man’s pulse. Eerie shadows danced upon the walls, but that wasn’t what caught my attention: the *people* filling the room did. After meeting Satan earlier tonight, I don’t know why I was surprised to see Theodor, Seppi, and Nikolaus huddled in a corner of the cave, their excited whispers sneaking across the cave to my ears. <sup>5</sup> I crept in closer, remaining in the shadows to keep my presence unknown.

“He’ll be here soon.”

“How do you know?”

“Satan told me and he doesn’t lie, you know that.”

“Well, he better get here soon, I bet Jim a dollar that he’d be here within the half hour.”

I leaned in closer—who’s Jim? But even as I pondered this, I heard a cocky voice over by the stairs. I turned my attention back to the stairs and saw yet another familiar character—the infamous Jim Smiley of Calaveras County. <sup>6</sup>

“You see those two bats over yonder?” Jim’s overly confident voice boomed, “Well, I betcha that the one on the right takes off first, whaddaya say? I’ll risk thirty dollars he does!”

“As much as I’d like to take you up on that bet,” I heard Satan say with a hint of amusement in his voice, “We’re here for a different purpose, Jim.” It seemed that Satan didn’t abandon me after all and had entered the room while I was eavesdropping on the boys.

Satan turned from Jim toward me as if he could feel my eyes on him and said quite amiably, “Mark, I think it’s time we all had a little chat,” as the boys looked up with interest at the new arrival. “Come, come, we don’t have much time.”

The boys eagerly came forward to form a semi-circle around me, and Satan and Jim stepped back to join them. “Okay, will somebody *please* tell me what’s going on before I lose what little bit of sanity I have left?!” I implored exasperatedly, looking from one face to the next.

Satan opened his mouth but Theodor blurted out, “We don’t like what you’ve become!” and then looked sheepishly at Satan, embarrassed for cutting him off.

Though the statement was quite straightforward, it confused me nonetheless. “How...I mean...what do you mean by that exactly? I’m afraid I uh, don’t follow,” I finished lamely as Jim fixed me with such a pained look of impatience I was jolted back to my school days where I

found myself in that predicament often.<sup>7</sup> Instead of feeling stupid, however, I looked levelly back at Jim, my eyes burning into his.

“Well, it’s like this Mark,” Jim began, “When you were a youngin’, you were, well, *happier* and more um, optimistic about the world. Life was just one big adventure, filled with crazy characters and experiences which you reflected in your writing. I mean, look at ‘The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County’ for Pete’s sake!” Jim said with a kind of fierce pride. “Back then, you still found the *humor* in life, still had hope in your fellow man.”

I listened intently to what Jim was saying, but refused to let it sink in. It was ludicrous! “Mr. Smiley,” I said in a polite yet firm kind of voice, “Let me remind you that I was a young, fool-hardy sort of man when I wrote your story. My eyes were closed to the real world, where people are corrupt and only look out for themselves!” I spat out, bitterness heavy in my voice. “In the real world, you don’t get to play along the river, or take adventures in steamboats, or even...even get to live long lives with the ones you love,” my voice broke as I mumbled that last part, mostly to myself.<sup>8</sup>

I felt a small hand slip into mine, and I looked down to see the small boy Seppi staring back at me, his eyes filled with concern. “Mr. Twain, sir, you just *can’t* give way to cynicism. What kind of example are you setting for the world? Do you want everyone to give up hope and lead lives of corruption, or are you going to fight back and reclaim the romanticism you long ago knew?!”

I continued to stand there with a hard look on my face, uncaring. Nikolaus, looking clearly upset, took his turn. “You decided I should die as a boy in your story, claiming death was a better alternative than any life I could have led...you had given up on me. But I like to think I would have had some freewill in my life—that I could have indeed led a great, prosperous life full of integrity. You forgot what it was to be a boy with hopes and dreams. You killed him long ago as you have killed me...” Nikolaus finished sadly.<sup>9</sup>

Before I could let Nikolaus’s words sink in, Satan put in the final punch of the argument. “The constant scorn and utter lack of faith in your story about us really made me think about your race as a whole. Yes, you are a selfish, violent, corrupted race, but I still have hope for your kind.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but Satan wasn’t finished and continued: “I know how you increasingly muse about the nasty underside of human life and I do too, but I also remember your honorable traits which frees me from the character you made me, letting me choose the romanticized world over your cynical one. My faith provides me with the courage to believe in and trust in the goodness of humanity, for it’s in your darkest hour that you most need that glimmer of hope to light the way to understanding and, ultimately, change.”

That last statement penetrated my hardened heart like the others had failed to do, and I felt something I hadn’t felt in many, many years—*hope had reentered my life*.<sup>10</sup> What Satan had said was so simple, yet so powerful. I had indeed forgotten what it was like to have hopes and dreams, what it was like to truly *live*. My desire for life had died right along with my loved ones, which wasn’t at all fair to me. I couldn’t just give up on the human race because life had taken a bad turn; I had to surge ahead and leave all that guilt behind me.

Suddenly I felt years younger, like a deadweight was lifted off my chest and I could breathe again; breathe in the hope for a new life and breathe out the bitter cynicism that had recently ruled my life. The boys could sense the change in me immediately and began to yell and cheer and even jump on me! It was like I was a kid again, horsing around with my friends. The boys

ran out of the room and down the stairs, and I ran after them. The funny thing was I didn't feel the aches and pains I had felt earlier when running, but felt energized, like I could run all day!

I followed the boys out of the cave and down to the river where they proceeded to jump in and splash about. I came right up to the edge of the water, intent on watching what I truly loved about this world, but was completely distracted by what I saw reflected in the water. Where a 74 year-old man should have been standing stood a ten year-old boy...a ten year-old *me*. My once pale skin now shown a healthy pink, and there was no longer a bushy mustache to conceal a now wide, mischievous grin upon my face. <sup>11</sup>

"Can this be?" I thought wildly to myself. "Am I really ten-years-old again, playing along the river without a care in the world?"

"Yes, Samuel, you have found your inner-child and have released him for the world to see," Satan's voice called out from behind me.

Instead of challenging him like I would have a mere ten minutes ago, I just laughed and prepared to jump in the river to join the boys when a steamboat whistle sounded from down the river. I stopped myself and peered into the darkness. A steamboat at this hour, how can that be? I continued to stare as the large, elegant steamboat came into clear view, filled with passengers waving jovially to me.

I immediately started to wave back in a daze but upon recognition of the passengers, I froze in mid-wave and let my mouth drop open, dumbfounded. Livy blew me a kiss with a free hand as she held Langdon with the other, and Susy and Jean waved emphatically from her side.<sup>12</sup> As the steamboat docked, I left my childhood back on shore and boarded the ship back into adulthood, ready for the reunion of my dear family.

I embraced Susy and Jean first, telling them both how much I missed them, and then turned to Livy and Langdon, embracing them too in a bear of a hug. "Livy, I love you so, so much, you are the life of my life," I murmured into her ear, smelling her sweet fragrance, taking in all of her. How young, how beautiful, how like her dear girlish self of thirty years ago, not a gray hair showing. <sup>13</sup>

Oh, how funny life can be! I may never completely understand how I got to Hannibal, or how my story characters came to life, or even how I came to be reunited with my loving family, I'm just thankful it happened. The steamboat set sail, and my family and I were off, looking for that next adventure. I turned back and saw Satan, Theodor, Seppi, Nikolaus, and Jim Smiley waving us goodbye, but now they were accompanied by many others, others I knew only too well.<sup>14</sup> I smiled and saluted my ever faithful characters and watched as they faded into nothingness, gone forever...

"He's gone," Dr. Quintard informed the room, removing his stethoscope from Mark Twain's chest. <sup>15</sup> Clara gasped and buried her face into her husband's chest, not wanting to let her father go.<sup>16</sup> The feeling of mourning among the others in the room was so thick it was palpable. "Time of death, 6:30 p.m., cause of death, angina pectoris," the doctor said softly, recording these notes on his clipboard. "I'm very sorry for your loss Mrs. Gabrilowitsch, he was a fine man and will be greatly missed." And with those parting words, Dr. Quintard and his staff cleared the room, leaving only Clara, her husband, and a Mr. Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark's biographer.

"I'll uh, leave you two alone, to say your final goodbyes," Mr. Paine said somewhat awkwardly as he shifted out through the door.

Clara turned to her husband and said gently, "Honey, I think I need a moment alone with him, to...to say my goodbye." Her husband gave only a nod and left the room. The room now

empty, Clara slowly made her way to her father's bed. "Pa, I just wanted you to know that I love you and have always loved you and don't blame you for anything...I just wish you could have been happier. May your soul rest in peace." With her peace being said, Clara, her heart heavy with sorrow, bent over and kissed her father on the cheek. Then as she lifted her head, she noticed something about her father that made her heart lighter, for playing on the old man's lips was a young boy's smile.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> All footnotes will be in the voice of Mark Twain unless noted otherwise. I grew up in the small town of Hannibal, Missouri. Most of my childhood was spent there, jumping from one adventure to the next. When I hit my 20's, I left to explore the possibilities West, then East. Leaving Hannibal was easy, though I can't explain why I'm here at the present moment. Paine.

<sup>2</sup> I had taken to wearing white suits after 1906. To me, they symbolized an inner purity, an answer to a lifetime hunger for love and expiation. Kaplan 187-188.

<sup>3</sup> Satan was one of my cleverer characters, taken from my short story “The Mysterious Stranger.” I took everyone’s idea of a “loving angel” and turned it into an apathetic, seemingly evil character. But even though he was uncaring, everyone still loved him for his winning face, pleasant voice, and gracefulness that was unusual for young boys. No matter what harm Satan did, no one could truly hate him. Twain 311.

<sup>4</sup> (Satan’s comment) I see the troubled look on Mark’s face and I can’t help but be amused. He has no knowledge of the song I sing, for it’s ahead of his time. I’m not trying to scare him either, I just enjoy a good fiddlin’ song. Well, maybe I want to scare him a little, but it’s mostly for the entertainment value.

<sup>5</sup> Theodor, Seppi, and Nikolaus are also characters from my story “The Mysterious Stranger.” Theodor was the main character who came to realize that there was no other world and he was nothing but a vagrant, useless, homeless thought, wandering forlorn among empty eternities. An appalling thought, I know, but it evoked the shock I wanted to get from people...Twain 388.

<sup>6</sup> Now there’s a character, that Jim Smiley! Damn, I thought I had long ago buried that man! That story’s popularity annoyed me greatly. I had thought very little of it at the time and had been wondering why some of my more highly regarded work had not found fuller recognition. But it did help in my rise to fame, so I can’t condemn it completely. Mark Twain Biography.

<sup>7</sup> My schooling was brief and of a desultory kind. It ended one day in 1847, when my Pa died and it became necessary that I should help somewhat in the domestic crisis. Mark Twain Biography.

<sup>8</sup> Oh, cursed be this world! I cannot love a world full of corrupt individuals who get to have it all including their loved ones while I, a Christian and morally sound man, get my loved ones taken away?! Tueber.

<sup>9</sup> More guilt on my conscious...yes, I did indeed have Satan change Nikolaus’s life so he would die young, but it was so he could avoid a more horrible life. If I had given the boy freewill over his life, it would have completely undermined the theme of the story. Twain 355.

<sup>10</sup> Satan has once again worked his magic, but this time, on me. He’s right, so very right about the world—yes, it has its ugliness, but there is also a lot of beauty too! I’ve been so busy dwelling on the negatives that I haven’t been able to witness the positives in this life. Oh, what a fool I’ve been! Forgive me for my wasted years!

<sup>11</sup> As hard as it is to believe, I have actually regressed into my childhood, where I now stand as a ten year-old boy! I did not only undergo an emotional transformation, but a physical one as well.

<sup>12</sup> My dear, dear family has returned to me. I can’t explain how they are here, alive, but I feel great joy, excitement, and love. I hope they will accept me back into their lives and can forgive me for my foolish ways. Tueber.

<sup>13</sup> (My voice) This is a direct quote from Mark Twain upon seeing his deceased wife. Paine 1218.

<sup>14</sup> It seems all of my past characters have come to see me off, a proper goodbye and sendoff for an old man.

<sup>15</sup> (My voice from here on out) Mark Twain is now dead. Everything before this point was just a hallucination, the result of his being in a coma.

<sup>16</sup> Clara Gabrilowitsch was the only living family member at the time of Mark's death. Associated Press.

## **Just Call Me Chef Boyardee or Should I Call Chef Boyardee?**

*Amber Gille*

While I was sitting in class the other day, one of my writing professors handed out a list of journal prompts. One of the questions asked was what one room in the house would “speak” to you when everything else is quiet? One might think that the bedroom holds some sentimental or intimate value. Or maybe it's the sunroom in their parent's house where as a child they would curl up on the couch and sleep in the sun like their cat taught them. Not me though. I immediately think of the last place that holds sentimental value to me; the last place I would find myself in my house – the place where I'm deemed a failure. It taunts me in a wicked way and that's why it speaks to me the loudest.

The kitchen – the place to cook, eat, wash dishes, and the place where I spend the least amount of time and the least amount of energy. I wish that this would change though. One time I forgot to add flour to my chocolate chip cookies and the first batch came out like thin, brown pancakes. I could hardly scrape them off of the cookie sheet into the garbage. They were so thin; they were almost liquefied mulch. This type of screw-up is standard for most of my disasters in the kitchen. I just wasn't born with the genes. Since I was a kid, my mom could always make these wonderful, tasty delicacies, no wait, delicacies sounds too fancy—how about wonderful, tasty *everything*s from a pinch of this and a dash of that. The same held true for her sisters, her mother and her mother's mother before, all the way through to the beginning of time. And then there's me.

I burn my grilled cheeses and have trouble making boxed brownies when all you have to do is add water to the pre-assembled mix and bake. Something always happens after I pour in the milk, or is it supposed to be vegetable oil? My cooking “problem” didn't bother me so much when I was younger because I didn't have to cook. I relied on everyone else in my family to do that for me. I just indulged in their craftsmanship.

But when I went to college, things became a little different. I was forced to fend for myself. My first two years weren't so bad; I went to the cafeteria to eat and in my room, I could only make small, microwavable entrees. My crutches were that my dorm didn't come equipped with a kitchen, and my refrigerator was only big enough to hold the basic necessities: milk, frozen foods, and beer.

This year, I moved into an apartment, complete with my own little sunflower- decorated kitchen. I relished in finding all of the necessities that I would need to fill up my little kitchen – muffin tins, measuring cups, silverware, even a potato masher. I don't know when I would use a potato masher, because that would constitute buying a bag of potatoes and that was something I had never done before. But of course I would need it all. I was going to cook, and cook a lot! I had a new apartment, a new kitchen, and a hungry boyfriend who laughed when I said I was going to cook dinner. I envisioned lemon-herbed pork chops with twice-baked potatoes. Kris envisioned smoke in my kitchen and driving to my parents' house for an edible meal. Who was I kidding? I was the black sheep of a family of Emeril Lagasses.

I don't think that my cousin Heather's cooking success helped my cuisine creating mentality. She was in her second year of school at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in the Hudson

River Valley. Oh yes, she started off once like me – a small town girl who played Ghosts in the Graveyard and grass-stained her jeans. I can't remember when she stopped coming outside, but before I knew it she was cooking with my grandmother, preparing huge spreads of food for Christmas dinner. Next thing I know she's living in New York City as the youngest member in her class at the CIA.

Heather would come home with asparagus tar tarts topped with small bits of unique herbs only found in Malaysia. She was a wine connoisseur and as I sipped on my Coca-Cola, I couldn't help but feel a little inadequate. I'd tell her stories of my all-night college weekends with my friends, and she'd tell me how last weekend she stayed up all night making "Artichoke Bottoms with Foie Gras and Truffle" over and over again because she couldn't get it right.

So as my mother, aunts, grandmother, and female cousins sit in the kitchen and rave with pride over Heather's latest gastronomical achievement, I sit quietly in a living room lined with the testosterone, lazily watching the Sunday game and reading People Magazine in the recliner as the afternoon sun peels away at my feminine energy. When my mother calls, I slowly rise in systematic fashion to do my normal meal chore – setting the table. At least I could handle that.

Last January, Heather was in France at the Bocuse d'Or World Cuisine Contest. I can't say it either, so don't even bother trying to pronounce it. She spent three weeks in France with Chef Hartmut Handke (I can't say his name either) competing against other international chefs and their apprentices. Basically, it's the World Cup of Cooking. They ended up placing 6<sup>th</sup> in the world after they made many meals, one of which being "Braised Oxtail with Kentucky Bourbon BBQ Sauce." I can't even imagine what that would look like, let alone how you would make it.

Heather ended up experiencing the chance of a lifetime. Besides being one of the youngest in her class at the CIA and one of the few women on campus, she ended up working with Chef Handke during an internship experience and cooked so well, she ended up in France. She even had a feature spot on the Food Network with the Chef. One night while she was in France and I was in Iowa eating Papa John's pepperoni pizza on the floor of my dorm room, she called and told me about the "Timbale of Tomato Confit" they were going to practice preparing for the competition the following week. I couldn't help but laugh at the sheer irony of the moment as I wiped the tomato sauce from the pizza off of my face.

I think my cynicism comes off the wrong way sometimes. I am proud of Heather for her accomplishments and all of her travels. She has done more at the age of 21 than I'll do in a lifetime. Plus, she's opened my taste buds up to a world beyond soft shell tacos and stir fry. Please pass me another one of those asparagus tar things.

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Birthday cakes – who makes them? Who buys them? My mom always made mine. Who made hers? Certainly not me. I can remember one birthday when she made her own and my grandma yelled at me for not making her one. I was 16; I didn't give a crap about baking. All I cared about was my friend Spalding. This year, though, I made her one. Thanks to Duncan Hines and their team of exquisite chefs, I made a confetti cake with confetti frosting, and I even bought the birthday candles. I took it home in my cake pan, complete with lid.

By now, you're probably wondering (I'm also wondering) what will happen when I get married. I'm going to need to become domesticated, especially if I become a mother some day. My family is going to need to eat, and someone will have to provide solid, healthy meals for us to live on. Because I'm sure if I ask my future husband what he wants for dinner, he certainly won't say Easy Mac. Quite honestly, I can't exactly say what will happen; I'm hoping that domestication automatically comes with the wedding ring. One morning I'll be eating Frosted

Flakes out of a plastic bowl. Bam! Next morning, it will be eggs Benedict with a side of smoked Canadian bacon and a crystal flute filled with mimosa.

Society isn't making it any easier for me to learn how to cook either. I'm not the only one to blame. They have pre-made meals for everything now— stir fry, lasagna, rack of lamb – and they even have sandwiches called Uncrustables that are filled with peanut butter and jelly and are predisposed of their crusts. There's a saying about taking things one step at a time. So that's what I'm doing. These types of pre-made processed foods are equivalent to my baby steps. I buy them, make them, and they taste pretty good for the most part. My confidence boosts a little bit when I'm through; a small battle won but not the war. I recommend Chef Boyardee's Deep Dish Meals; the Cheese Lover's Lasagna is to die for.

I'm not expecting to blow people's minds with tricky and fabulous foods in my lifetime. I'll leave that to the rest of my family, especially Heather. She can bring the pork tenderloin braised in herbed sweelee sauce to the family get-togethers. I'll bring the swirly cheesecake ala cherry and if someone happens to compliment me on it, I'll smile and silently thank JELL-O for creating the boxed cheesecake that I whipped together real quick that morning. Maybe someday my genes will shine through and I'll be able to follow in the footsteps of the women before me in my family. My kitchen will stop taunting me, and I can finally rest. Until then, I'll just keep yelling back as I fan the smoke out the open windows.

## **Oh, And By The Way....**

### *Quentin Smith*

#### *This Is Just To Say*

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast.

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold.

—William Carlos Williams

#### *Oh, And By The Way....*

I have devoured  
the flower  
that was in  
your vase

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for marriage.

Forgive me  
you were delicious  
so tempting  
and so final.

—Quentin Michael Smith

## Lady in the Mirror

*Liz Elsbernd*

“BEEEP. BEEEP. BEEEP. BEEEP.”

The nasal shriek of my alarm clock pierced the depths of my subconscious and deflated my dreams, puncturing that feeling of sleepy pleasure in the process. I reached over to swat the snooze button but ended up sending the hand mirror lying innocently on my bed stand crashing to the floor. So much for that extra nine minutes of sleep.

The blood that had been flowing so leisurely through my veins for the past eight hours was now gushing rapidly to my cheeks. Nothing makes me angrier than when the day greets me with a slap in the face. What could I have possibly done to deserve such a hassle so early in the morning?

I snatched the snarled bed sheets in an angry fist and flung them off me. Instead of sleeping in, I now had to sweep up shards of glass that were probably scattered all over my floor like salt on an icy highway. A great way to start the day.

Well, maybe it wasn't so bad. As I scanned the floor before gingerly planting my feet on the ground, I discovered that there were no shiny slices of silver strewn all over. My eyes lingered on the sight of the mirror lying face down on the floor, sulking over its injury. I hauled myself off of my bed and sluggishly dragged my stocking feet across the cold floor to inspect the extent of the damage. I tentatively turned the mirror over, afraid of what I might see.

Nothing prepared me for what happened next. Somehow the worst possible start to my morning had led to the fulfillment of a life-long dream. You see, as soon as my eyes settled on the shattered glass of the mirror, a blinding ray of light had burned my eyes and faded into a soft glow, revealing the reflection of an angelic face. Considering the time of day, I knew the image in the mirror was definitely not one of my likeness.

My assumption proved to be correct as the angel-like creature uttered a few quiet statements that turned out to be the most beautiful words I had ever heard in my life.

“This is your lucky day,” she declared gently. “I am here to grant you one wish, but this wish will be somewhat limited. I will reflect the image of any person, dead or alive, in this mirror, and he or she will be able to speak with you for thirty minutes.” Her voice was nearly as translucent as her image in the mirror. “You may ask any questions you please, so long as they are not offensive in any way to this person. Have you anyone in mind?”

“Yes,” I answered excitedly, “I know exactly whose reflection I will request.” I paused for dramatic effect as I inhaled a large lungful of air. “Sylvia Plath,” I exhaled the name, breathless with admiration.

I had been fascinated with Sylvia Plath's poetry ever since I read her poem “Mirror” for the first time. I am in awe of her talent as a writer but saddened that such potential was severed prematurely at the blade of suicide.<sup>1</sup> I have read and reread so many of her poems that I subconsciously quote her. Whenever I see a pregnant woman, an image of “a melon strolling on two tendrils” from Plath's “Metaphors” inevitably saunters through my train of thought. I guess you could call me a Sylvia Superfan. So I was ecstatic when I found myself face to face with the reflection of Sylvia Plath.

Although I was eager to begin the conversation, I must admit that her intent stare was a bit intimidating. With a serious expression etched on her face, Sylvia maintained such a tremendous stillness that I had to wonder if the angel thingy in the mirror had screwed something up.

Then she *spoke!*

“I must say, you are the first person in twenty-seven years that has requested to speak with me. Most people are far more interested in meeting Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe than they are in chatting with a suicidal woman poet from the 1950’s.” Her voice was raspy and quiet, and I detected a hint of a British accent in her slightly drawn out words. I guess that made sense, since she lived in England during the last four years of her life.<sup>2</sup>

“Oh, Sylvia, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you! I mean, I don’t know what to say. I’m just so happy that this is happening to *me*, of all people!”

What was I saying? I was speaking with Sylvia Plath, and all I could do was babble like a little kid who just figured out how to flush the toilet all by himself. I was about to make an attempt to say something intelligent, but I was interrupted before I had the chance.

“So what is it that you so desperately wanted to discuss with me?” Sylvia inquired, a deliberate distance apparent in her manner.

“Well, actually, I would love to get your input on “Spinster” and “Daddy,”<sup>3</sup> I gushed, still astonished that I was being given such an amazing opportunity. “I compared and contrasted the journey motifs<sup>4</sup> of these two poems earlier in the year, and I want to see if I was anywhere close to interpreting them correctly.”

“Before I divulge my personal insights, first I’d like to hear the comparisons and contrasts you made on your own,” Sylvia instructed.

“All right,” I agreed reluctantly. I wasn’t sure how accurate I was in my analysis of these two poems, but I knew I’d have to make an attempt if I wanted to get Sylvia’s perspective. “First of all, the main comparison I made was that both travelers were trapped, looking for a way out of the bottomless dungeon into which they’d hurled themselves.” I paused. I was a bit uncomfortable discussing these two poems because I knew they were both intensely autobiographical of Sylvia’s life. “Consumed by rage and passion, the traveler in *Daddy* led a life that was dominated by the memory of her father.”<sup>5</sup> I quoted the opening lines:

*“You do not do, you do not do  
Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot  
For thirty years, poor and white  
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.”*

“I make it pretty obvious, don’t I,” Sylvia commented dryly. “I always struggled with the fact that my father maintained more control over my life when he was dead than he ever did while he was alive. And it wasn’t just him. I felt victimized by my father earlier in life, and then by my husband later on.<sup>6</sup> I never could escape the prison that men in society imposed upon women.”<sup>7</sup>

I was slightly confused. I didn’t know whether she was still talking about the poem or whether she was speaking of her own life. Oh well; it didn’t really matter. I knew the events and feelings in “Daddy” and the events and feelings of Sylvia’s own life were essentially interchangeable. It wasn’t too hard to figure out that “*the vampire who said he was you [daddy]*” was referring to her husband.<sup>8</sup>

I swung the chair out from under my desk and took a seat as I continued with my analysis. “Searching for an escape from the social norm of marriage, the traveler in “Spinster” also struggled with the role male figures played in women’s lives.”<sup>9</sup> I went on to quote:

*“By this tumult afflicted, she  
Observed her lover’s gestures unbalance the air,  
His gait stray uneven  
Through a rank wilderness of fern and flower.  
She judged petals in disarray,  
The whole season, sloven.”*

I briefly searched Sylvia’s face for signs of emotion. “Instead of enjoying a ‘ceremonious April walk’ with her ‘latest suitor,’ she wished to build a wall around herself ‘as no mere insurgent man could hope to break.’”

“You have pointed out many similarities between the two poems, but don’t neglect to mention the rather significant differences,” Sylvia said thoughtfully, taming a stray hair by tucking it precisely behind her left ear. “For example, while the passion and hatred of the traveler in “Daddy” is detectable in the caustic connotations of her words, the speaker in “Spinster” approaches her situation with severe indifference.”

I pulled my legs to my chest, resting my chin on my knees as I pondered Sylvia’s words for a second. Then, struck with sudden insight, I blurted out: “Neither the traveler in ‘Daddy’ nor the one in ‘Spinster’ has discovered a healthy way of loving. Their attitudes toward men as being devils and vampires, or just plain ‘idiots’ who ‘reel giddy in bedlam spring,’ obscure their ability to approach any sort of male-female relationship without the acrid taint of bitterness.” I concluded by saying, “The passionate tone, biting accusations, and dynamic use of the first person make ‘Daddy’ a far more powerful poem than ‘Spinster’ could ever be.”<sup>10</sup>

“Your claim is indisputable,” Sylvia agreed. “I simply did not bombard the reader with the same intensity in ‘Spinster’ as I did in ‘Daddy.’ But I must say that the powerfully negative connotations in nearly every line of Spinster spew contempt for men and the restrictions that society imposes upon women.”

“Speaking of spewing contempt for restrictions that society imposes upon women, I was also wondering if you could read your poems ‘Mirror’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’ to me. If I hear them read the way you intended them to be read, I think I would get a better feeling of their respective tones.” I set the mirror on my dresser and propped it up against the wall. I watched as it slid back down, cringing at the clamor of wood meeting the cheap plastic backing of the mirror. I quickly propped it back up, but Sylvia’s reflection had vanished.

I spun to look behind me as I heard Sylvia’s voice. She had somehow transcended the confines of the mirror and had proceeded to make herself at home on my pink velvet sofa. “I have no objections to reading these poems to you, but I want you to be aware that the tone of a poem lies not only within the way it is read aloud, but also within the variety and combination of poetic devices used. I’ll read these poems to you, but I want you to then tell me what precisely it is about them that gives them their particular tones.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a second. How did you get from here—” I gestured to the mirror—“to there?” I waved my hand toward Sylvia.

“The same way I got into the mirror,” she replied. “Magic.” Not pausing for further explanation, Sylvia began to recite “Mirror”:

*"I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever you see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike. . .*

*In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish."*

As Sylvia read through "Mirror," I had perceived a definite tone of despair. The choppy, matter-of-fact diction of the poem left no room for emotion, only a machine-like indifference. I pictured the words of the *mirror* and the *lake* being splattered on a paper by a noisy, insensitive typewriter.

"So what creates the solemn tone of despair in this poem?" Sylvia asked me, her searing gaze scalding my comfort level. Her presence was even more intensely dominating in person than it had been in the mirror.<sup>11</sup>

"Well, obviously the personification of the mirror and the lake is a big part of it," I replied, slowly lowering myself onto the loveseat next to Sylvia. "Since it's from the perspective of inanimate objects, it makes sense that there's sort of a distant tone. You don't really expect a mirror or a lake to get too excited about anything."

"While this is true, there is another reason that I personified these two objects," Sylvia responded, her posture perfect despite the cushiness of the couch. "The lack of emotion expressed by the mirror and the lake is representative of the expectation of women in my time. We were to go about our duties and not question anything; we could not share our true feelings. If we were unhappy, we were to—in modern terms—suck it up."

"You also use tremendous imagery to portray how women worship beauty, or rather, how women are forced into roles that require beauty but little intelligence or opinion," I remarked, recalling the words, "*She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.*"

"Yes, that definitely contributes to the despairing tone," Sylvia agreed. "Since beauty was essential to a woman's self-worth back then, getting old resulted in the loss of a woman's physical beauty, and, hence, the loss of a sense of her own value."

"That's still somewhat true today," I commented, running my fingers through my snarly morning hairdo. "The message of this poem speaks to a very large audience. Nearly every woman and young girl in this world can relate to the importance of looks in today's society. At least once in a lifetime, most girls have looked into a mirror '*searching my [the mirror's] reaches for what she really is.*'"

"I love how you switched from a mirror's perspective to a lake's," I continued, pleased that I was beginning to sound half-way intelligent. "The word *lake* itself produces a series of powerful images to enhance the tone. Unlike mirrors, lakes are usually not 'silver and exact';<sup>12</sup> they're usually fluid and slightly murky—an image of impermanence. Did you mean for the lake to symbolize vanishing youth?"

"You're very perceptive. Yes, that's exactly what I meant," Sylvia replied. A quizzical expression came over her face as she thought for a second, and then said, "But there's another more powerful image that you missed. What about the simile comparing the old woman to a '*terrible fish*'?"

“How could I have forgotten?” I clunked my forehead with the heel of my hand, displaying my frustration. “Obviously a ‘*terrible fish*’ has a negative tone to it, but I never have really understood what that fish meant.”

“I used the image of a fish because it suggests the disturbance of the lake water,” Sylvia explained, an electrifying intensity still lingering about her presence. “Fish are also slippery; therefore, the fish could be considered a metaphor for youth slipping through one’s fingers.”<sup>13</sup>

“Hmmm. I never thought about that,” I responded. “I can’t think of any more poetic devices in this poem that would contribute to the tone. Can you?”

Sylvia paused. “Well, there is one more obvious one. It has to do with the ambiguity of words.”

“Denotation and Connotation?” I guessed.

“Precisely. In line two, ‘*Whatever you see I swallow immediately,*’ the word *swallow* can mean either ‘to accept without question’ or ‘to consume or devour.’ As there are two denotations, there are also two connotations: the inability to think for oneself and the sense of destruction.”

“So, uh,” I hesitated, but I just had to ask. “Isn’t it kind of ironic that you wrote a poem from a mirror’s perspective, and now you’re sitting there looking at me from a mirror’s perspective?”

Sylvia’s eyes burned through me as I searched her expressionless face for the slightest trace of a smile. Mission not accomplished. Obviously she still didn’t have much of a sense of humor. You’d think death would have loosened her up a bit; what could you possibly have to worry about if you’re already dead?

“Okay, stupid question. Let’s forget I said that.” I glanced at my watch. I wanted to be able to talk with Sylvia about another poem of hers that had deeply intrigued me before my thirty minutes was up.

“Since we were talking about tone, let’s discuss ‘Lady Lazarus,’” I suggested.

“Yes, the intensely bitter tone in ‘Lady Lazarus’ is without question much more potent than the simple tone of despair in ‘Mirror,’” Sylvia affirmed.<sup>14</sup> “This poem, like many of my later ones, came ‘out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I had.’”

*I have done it again.  
One year in every ten  
I manage it—*<sup>15</sup>

*A sort of walking miracle, my skin  
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,  
My right foot*

*A paperweight  
My face featureless, fine  
Jew linen.*

*Peel off the napkin  
O my enemy.  
Do I terrify—?*

“One of the reasons I agree with you that this poem has a stronger tone is because of the abundance and combination of poetic devices used,” I stated. “Besides the simile,

personification, connotation, and imagery that were used in ‘Mirror,’ you also used”— big breath— “alliteration, allusion, direct address, rhyme, overstatement, metaphor, assonance, consonance, and repetition.” I exhaled. “Just to name a few.”

Sylvia still didn’t crack a smile; she got right down to business. “Repetition of key words and phrases gives enormous power to the plain style of this poem,” she agreed. “‘*I do it so it feels like hell./I do it so it feels real,*’” she quoted. “‘*Ash, ash—/You poke and stir.*’”

Those words send chills down my spine,” I commented, shivering, “especially when *you* read them. You know what other lines stand out in my mind as being chilling?” I quickly answered my own question: “‘The grave cave ate will be’ and ‘I rise with my red hair/And I eat men like air.’”

“Yes,” Sylvia asserted, “the assonance in the first line you quoted contributes greatly to the tone because the long drawn out ‘a’ is a bit mournful sounding. Of course, the content and the rhyme of the last two lines seem to snarl in and of themselves.”

“Even the structure of the poem fits with your overall theme,” I pointed out. “You squeezed in words to conform within the three-lines-per-stanza form, which emanate a rather tense feeling.”<sup>16</sup>

“Yes, the rigid structure was meant to represent the inflexible gender roles of my time period.”<sup>17</sup> Sylvia cleared her throat. “I hated men because they didn’t have to suffer like a woman did . . . They could have fun while another woman had birth pangs . . . Men, nasty, lousy men.”<sup>18</sup>

Sylvia’s perfect composure had finally been cracked. I could see a resentful fire burning in her eyes that was almost as bitter as the tone of “Lady Lazarus.” I decided to pose a question that had been hanging in the back of my mind.

“Do you think you would have been happier with your life if you had been born fifty years later? I mean, women are treated more equally now than they were in the 1950’s.”

“It’s hard to say.” She tilted her head slightly to the side. “I think I would have felt held back even in today’s society. I never could come to grips with the fact that ‘it is impossible for me to be God—or the universal woman—and man—or anything much.’”<sup>19</sup>

“Personally, I think your use of holocaust imagery is extremely powerful, but some critics say that you used it ‘as a means by which [you] enlarge [your] own emotions and sensationalize [your] own biography.’”<sup>20</sup> I tried not to cower as Sylvia cast a glance of disgust.

“That’s ludicrous. The use of holocaust imagery was meant to strengthen the construction of women as victims, not to ‘sensationalize’ my own biography!”

I nodded, demonstrating my agreement. I had one more question. “If you could sum up in one sentence why ‘Lady Lazarus’ has a stronger and more powerful tone than ‘Mirror,’ what would it be?”

“That’s tough.” She thought a second before responding. “I think you would find more sound evidence of why ‘Lady Lazarus’ is stronger than ‘Mirror’ if you simply go through each poem and circle all the words that affect the tone. These words will speak for themselves, and will clearly indicate which poem has the stronger tone.”

I jumped up and took a giant step towards my bed. I lifted up the bed skirt and reached under my bed for my copy of Sylvia’s *The Collected Poems*. “So, what do—?”

I gaped at the empty spot on the sofa where Sylvia had been sitting. I rushed to my dresser where the hand mirror was still propped up against the wall. No Sylvia. The thirty minutes must be up.

I lost no time doing as she had suggested and recognized what it was that she wanted me to see. “Lady Lazarus” was jam-packed with emotion—feelings of resent, guilt, anguish, bitterness, self-mockery, and intensity. A certain sense of power is radiated from lines rich in consonance such as “*The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?*” In “Mirror,” while the tone is effective in portraying the main idea, there are really no words or phrases that really knock the air out of me as they do in “Lady Lazarus.”

As I set my mirror back on my bed stand where it belonged, I suddenly realized that it was 8:00, and I was supposed to be in class. Great. Back to the same old bad luck. How was I going to explain this one to my professor?

My eyes darted back to the mirror. Hmm. Maybe if I could get the mirror to give me one more chance, I could request to talk to my professor. Then she’d know I wasn’t making this up! So I turned around, dashed back to my bed stand, and knocked the mirror on the floor.

It broke.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> On February 11, 1963, Sylvia succeeded at her third attempted suicide at the age of thirty, and is buried in the small village of Heptonstall, West Yorkshire. The inscription on her tombstone reads: "Even amidst fierce flames the Golden Lotus can be planted." Connell.

<sup>2</sup> Wagner-Martin xii.

<sup>3</sup> "Spinster" and "Daddy" appear in Appendices A and B, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Also known as the cosmogonic cycle, a journey motif consists of a traveler encountering one or more crisis points, going through a series of tests, and hopefully emerging from his or her "journey" as a better or more knowledgeable person. Oftentimes the traveler is assisted by a guide, which can take the form of either another person, an ideal, or an alter ego.

<sup>5</sup> Plath's own father died due to complications of diabetes when she was eight years old, leaving Sylvia feeling as though he had abandoned her. Because she was so good at hiding her feelings, Sylvia's family didn't realize that she need much more comfort and a greater understanding about what had happened, leaving her with immense, often unreasonable fears after her father's death. Wagner-Martin 7.

<sup>6</sup> Plath secretly married Ted Hughes, a British poet, on June 16, 1956. Wagner-Martin ix.

<sup>7</sup> In Plath's time, during the 1940's and 1950's, girls rarely went to college and were trained only to marry well and to help mates to their husbands. Plath, determined, overcame this obstacle and attended Smith College from 1950-1955 as a scholarship student. Wagner-Martin 6.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia killed herself in 1963 shortly after Ted Hughes left her for another woman. Pollitt 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ironically, “Spinster” was written in 1956, the same year she met and married her husband, Ted Hughes. Wagner-Martin ix.

<sup>10</sup> While “Spinster” was written in 1956, “Daddy” was written in 1962, shortly before Plath committed suicide the following year. These factors contribute greatly to the difference in imagery and potency present in “Spinster” and “Daddy.” Connell.

<sup>11</sup> Although Sylvia was oftentimes an intense, humorless, and rather distant person, as I am portraying her, some recall her as “vivacious” and “stimulating,” a girl “whose brilliance, like her ‘harsh wit’ was uniquely exciting.” Stevenson xi-xii.

<sup>12</sup> Connell.

<sup>13</sup> Connell.

<sup>14</sup> Sylvia Plath had long been interested in the story of Lazarus. In a journal entry dated February 19, 1956, she wrote: “I feel like Lazarus: that story has such a fascination. Being dead, I rose up again, and even resort to the mere sensation value of being suicidal, of getting so close, of coming out of the grave. . .” Plath, Sylvia. *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* 199.

<sup>15</sup> These lines could be in reference to the multiple suicide attempts Sylvia made throughout her lifetime, and possibly a prophecy for her final and successful attempt. On August 23, 1953, Plath swallowed a large quantity of prescription sleeping pills and retreated to the basement where she was discovered only by accident; after a lengthy search of the neighborhood, a groan from the basement revealed her presence. She was taken to the hospital where she recovered. Stevenson 43-44.

<sup>16</sup> Sanazaro 90.

<sup>17</sup> Sanazaro 90.

<sup>18</sup> Plath, Sylvia. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* 268.

<sup>19</sup> Plath, Sylvia. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* 23.

<sup>20</sup> Plath, qtd. in Sanazaro 90.

## **In Memory of Apollo**

*Alison Brogan*

Coming down the carpeted stairs from her bedroom to the kitchen  
her hands tighten around the stiffness of her empty plate  
and the glass she doesn't want to break.

She remembers then a cold hard thing.

A different stairway, tiled floors and lockers,  
a strange boy's face, and rough hard hands  
against her.

Standing now on the padded step,  
she digs her toes into the fibers

searching for the wood beneath.

She remembers how she had welcomed it.

## **“she watched the days bundle into thousands”<sup>1</sup>**

*Tom McNamara*

My trip to Maryland with my grandparents had proved rewarding. As an Irish immigrant, my grandmother has always longed to experience all of America, a yearning like the hatred she once felt for America during her first years here, when she felt distant from her family in a far away place. Not until my great-grandmother told my Papa to ship her back to Ireland because she'd done nothing but complain did she begin to love America—but only because my great-grandmother said that their children would not go with her. She has become quite the patriot since then and says she could not imagine where she would be if she had not married my grandfather, who was born in America but raised in Ireland. He is also, as she says, the only man who would put up with her. She asked me to come with them to the East Coast, and I reluctantly agreed. Now I am thankful that I went, as I was able to sit in on a lecture at St. Mary's College and listen to Lucille Clifton, my favorite poet, lecture and share her poetry.<sup>2</sup>

“Mrs. Clifton,” a voice called out from the back of the large lecture hall like a bullet ricocheting off of the empty and tall white walls.

“Yes?” she asked, obviously happy to be speaking to an audience attentive enough to question her.

“Could you explain your language choice? What attracted me to your poetry was that your language is simple, but your poems do not lack power,” the inquiring voice questioned.

“Poetry does not need to be complex in order to have strong meaning. I have been asked before when I will try to write something difficult, as if I were ignorant. I want to be understood through my poetry, not admired, even though being admired a bit can be fun.”<sup>3</sup>

The audience chuckled at Mrs. Clifton's remark. Another hand shot into the air, and Mrs. Clifton nodded in the direction of the student.

“When did you know that you were meant to be a poet?” The girl's red hair shone in the light that flooded through the stained glass window behind her. The light seemed to shine only on her, reminding me of the light metaphors often present in a great deal of Clifton's poetry.<sup>4</sup>

Mrs. Clifton paused for a moment and looked into her audience in a way which allowed her to personally connect with each of us, even though she was not making eye contact with a single one of us. “What I knew was true about me was that I could breathe and I made poems.<sup>5</sup> I always wrote, but never thought that I could make a living of it. I suppose I thought this way because there were always so few opportunities for African-American writers during the earlier years of my life.”<sup>6</sup>

As usual, I found myself too nervous to speak in front of a group of people, but I put my fears behind me and slowly raised my hand into the air. Mrs. Clifton gently nodded her head in my direction as if to encourage me, and I spoke timidly.

“Your mother was also a poet, but your father wouldn't allow her to publish her poetry.<sup>7</sup> Did this affect your longing to write?”

“My mother wanted to publish her poetry more than anything, and I think to see her not be able to fulfill her dreams motivated me more than anything else,” Clifton replied wisely.

I found myself speaking again, this time without raising my hand. Surprised that I was speaking freely after I had remained quiet throughout most of the lecture, Mrs. Clifton looked at me, pleasantly surprised that I’d taken an interest in the discussion.

“You wrote a poem about seeing your mother burning her poems in anger towards your father. Would you care to share it with us?”

“Ah, yes. The poem is called ‘fury.’ I’d love to share it.

remember this.  
she is standing by  
the furnace.  
the coals  
glisten like rubies.  
her hand is crying.  
her hand is clutching  
a sheaf of papers.  
poems.  
she gives them up.  
they burn jewels into jewels.  
her eyes are animals.  
each hank of her hair  
is a serpent’s obedient  
wife.  
she will never recover.  
remember. there is nothing  
you will not bear  
for this woman’s sake.”<sup>8</sup>

Awestruck by Clifton’s reading, we sat in dead silence. She read slowly and deliberately, as if she were in her childhood basement again with her mother as she burned her dear poems.<sup>9</sup>

“The line ‘there is nothing you will not bear for this woman’s sake’<sup>10</sup> shows my absolute dedication to my mother. The mother is often the most important figure of the African American family, and I had formed a close bond with mine,” Clifton said, reflecting on her poem.

A voice sang from the furthest edge of the room, and as I turned to face her, I realized that the room had once been used as a chapel. The speaker sat under a choir loft, seeming almost suspended in the still, humid August air our voices cut through. “Many critics say that most of the poems in your collection *Next: New Poems* are constructed as sorrow songs. Would you agree with this interpretation?”<sup>11</sup>

“I did not plan for that specific collection of poetry to be sorrowful. During the time I composed a bulk of that collection, I experienced a great deal of difficulties. One of my friends, for whom the poems “the message of joy”<sup>12</sup> and “the death of joanne c”<sup>13</sup> are composed, died during this period. My husband also died during this period, at only forty-nine. I never expected him to die so young; I was completely shocked, and I still am.”<sup>14</sup>

My hand hung heavily in the air until Mrs. Clifton called on me, and when she did, I asked, "Could you please share with us one of the poems you had written at the time of your husband's death?"

"I'd love to. I will share with you my poem titled 'my wife.'  
wakes up, having forgotten.  
my closet door gapes wide,  
an idiot mouth, and inside  
all of the teeth are missing.  
she closes her eyes and weeps  
toward my space in the bed, "Darling,  
something has stolen your wonderful  
shirts and ties."<sup>15</sup>

Pleased that she had read that poem, I sat with everyone else again in silence as Clifton seemed to be taken back to those first few nights she spent alone without her husband. She then spoke.

"You see, I had a difficult time adjusting to my husband's death. I'd wake up in the middle of the night and I'd be shocked at my husband's absence."

Pausing and looking at the clock in the back of the room, her chest rose and she took in a large gulp of air and then sighed. "I hate to say this now, since this is a wonderful group, but our time is up. I will be meeting with the public again tomorrow, however, if anyone cares to join in another discussion."

The audience clapped and began to disperse, but I sat for a few moments, trying to muster the courage to approach Mrs. Clifton. Stiffly arising from the uncomfortable brown chair I had sat upon for the past hour, I approached her as she made her way toward the exit in the back, hoping she could take a few minutes out of her busy schedule to speak to me.

"Excuse me, ma'am," I nervously said. "Is there any chance I could speak to you for a few moments? I've just a few questions to ask you."

"Oh, I do apologize, but I'm in a hurry now. I have to teach a class. However, I do have office hours if you'd care to make an appointment. Usually my office hours are reserved for my students, but I could tell from your questions that you really love poetry, and I'd love to speak with you," she replied in the same patient voice she had spoken in throughout the discussion.

"When would I be able to stop by?"

"Tomorrow around 10 A.M. I am not teaching until noon and I don't have any appointments in the morning, so that will leave us plenty of time to talk."

"Thank you very much. I'll see you tomorrow," I said. She stuck out her hand and I nervously shook it, not wanting to seem as if I hadn't a strong handshake, but also not wanting to be too assertive.

She nodded her head and turned to walk to her class, moving as softly as she had spoken down the far reaching hall with the gentle sunlight cutting through the windows and surrounding her.

Turning and departing in the opposite direction, I left to go meet my grandparents and tell them my exciting news.

The next morning my grandparents dropped me off at St. Mary's campus, and I walked to Montgomery Hall, where Mrs. Clifton's office was located. The building looked almost too modern to be part of St. Mary's College, where most of the buildings were built in the Colonial

style. Upon entering the brown building, I began to search for room 126, where I knew she would be waiting.<sup>16</sup>

The door was closed, so I lightly knocked on the door and waited for it to creak open or for a muffled voice to call out “come in” from the other side. Instead, I heard silence. I knocked again, and the sound echoed down the white, bright hall, lined with large windows with green plants in front of each. Still no answer.

“O.K.” I said to myself, confused as to where she could be. As I lowered myself to sit on the floor directly across from her office, she turned down the hall and met me with a happy wave. I rose from my spot on the floor as she began speaking.

“I’m glad to see you,” she said, smiling, as she fumbled for her keys and unlocked the door. As we entered her office, which was painted white and had dark, wooden furniture, she pointed to one of the two chairs that sat on the opposite side of her desk and bade me to take a seat. I sat down as she had told me to, with my back straight as is usual when I am nervous. “I am prepared for any questions you may have of me.” She paused awkwardly at the end of the sentence. “I’m sorry, but I don’t believe I’ve caught your name yet.”

“Oh, I’m sorry about that!” I responded, embarrassed that I had forgotten to properly introduce myself. “I’m Tom.”

“Wonderful to meet you,” she smiled at me. “Where are you from?”

“Well, I’m from Chicago, but I go to Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. I study English there.”

“I figured as much with all of those questions about poetry you had asked me yesterday,” she chuckled back at me.

I smiled and nodded my head in compliance, but said nothing. She looked at me for a moment and began to speak, feeling that she needed to fill the dead silence.

“So, which of my poems is your favorite?”

I felt horrible. I had asked the woman if I could speak to her privately and here I sat, stupid as ever, frozen, with nothing to say. She now resorted to asking me questions that would simply just fill a dead silence.

“I love the poem ‘how great thou art,’<sup>17</sup> but its meaning is vague to me. Within the poem I see a great deal of Biblical allusions, but I am always unsure as to whether or not the poem is about God or about one’s self.”

Embarrassed that I had choked out a question that was much too long, I looked to her for an answer.

“Well, this poem is about God and all of us. We are, after all, created in God’s image, are we not? He is perfect, but completely alone. In Gwendolyn Brooks’ poem ‘the preacher: ruminates behind the sermon,’ she writes that God has no one to share a Coke or a beer with.<sup>18</sup> Similar to Brooks, it is my belief that when we are lonely, we are like God.”<sup>19</sup>

“I’ve never thought about that before,” I responded in a thoughtful manner. “The depth of your poems, like ‘how great thou art,’ is amazing, and I think that is what attracts many readers to your poetry, but I also enjoy the style and sound of your poems.”

She sat in her wooden desk chair with her back to the office window, searching for the perfect response to my statement. The sound of singing birds floated through the open window and she began to open her mouth to respond, but closed it as if her thoughts were not yet complete. Perhaps this was why Clifton seemed to be such a wise woman; she thought all that she was going to say through before the words actually left her mouth. I realized that I could learn a great deal from her.

“Well, when writing, I respond to the sound and the tone of words. Some words simply sound beautiful when put together.”

“A great example of that is your poem ‘Incandescence’<sup>20</sup> in *The Book of Light*,”<sup>21</sup> I interrupted, without even thinking. She seemed not offended, but pleased that we could converse rather than partake in a question and answer session.

“Yes! The constant ‘s’ sound gives the poem a very distinct and memorable sound. I always keep in mind that our bodies respond to sound and that some words are simply more powerful than others. ‘Jesus cried’ is less powerful than ‘Jesus wept,’ and as a poet I must choose words that convey powerful meanings.”<sup>22</sup>

I nodded my head the whole while, perhaps seeming too eager, but I did not know what else to do. Surely I didn’t want to give her the false impression that I was bored, because I was most interested in all she was saying.

“Here,” she said, pulling a bag of M&Ms from her desk. “Have some of these. The mother and grandmother in me forces me to keep candy around, and I usually share it with my students.”<sup>23</sup>

We ate, and I began to relax, finally seeing that there was more to Mrs. Clifton than her poetry. She had a family and a history.

“So, what would you like to talk about now? We still have plenty of time,” she said, eager to continue our discussion.

“Mrs. Clifton,” I said, pausing, wondering how I could pose my next question. “Your poem ‘leda 1’<sup>24</sup> alludes to the character Leda of Greek mythology. Yeats also wrote a poem that alluded to that particular myth.<sup>25</sup> How do you think that your poem differs from his?”

“I’ve never heard that question before, but I am familiar with Yeats’ poem,” she said, her brown eyes softly staring ahead of her. “I think that my poem looks at Leda rather than the outcome of the ordeal. Yeats also, sort of, well, I believe, glorifies Leda’s rape the way the actual myth did. If you look at that poem he says things like ‘the great wings beating still’<sup>26</sup> and he talks about Zeus ‘caressing’ her thigh and about their breasts being pushed together. Those words all have positive connotations that remind someone of sex, not rape. If you ask me, the whole poem is a rage! Poor Leda probably was scorned by everyone because she had children before she was married, and I’m sure that the girl suffered much anguish after being raped by a bird! Imagine that! I bet she never thought that would happen!”

Mrs. Clifton laughed to herself, amused at the thought of being raped by a bird. Her laughter flowed out of her office and echoed fully down the empty hall, and I chuckled too; her laugh was the contagious kind.

Her laughter slowed and then stopped, leaving us in an unmistakable silence, a silence that seemed to last forever, but it was only for seconds, just enough time for her to draw in a breath of air, fill her lungs, and begin to speak again.

“Now my poem looks at poor Leda. I’m not concerned with the glory of Zeus or how the children produced from the rape changed Greek history. ‘leda 1’ is in Leda’s voice and the reader sees how miserable her life is, and I convey this, bring us back to the topic of word choice, by the words that I used. We talked before about how I choose my words carefully, and this poem is another example. The words in ‘leda 1’ all have strong negative connotations, opposed to the positive, almost glorious connotations in Yeats’ ‘Leda and the Swan.’ I also use alliteration when I say ‘father follows,’ and that harsh ‘f’ sound is repeated much throughout the

poem, giving the poem a dark and angry tone. Oh, you were so right when you said that my poem is different from Yeats'."

I had been spellbound as she spoke, and as she stopped I realized that I must say something, or else she would shake my hand to end an awkward silence and usher me out of her office as we exchanged typical goodbyes. I quickly thought of a simple question, not one of the questions that I had prepared, because I had forgotten them in my earlier nervousness.

"You just mentioned how the alliteration in "leda 1" lends to the overall tone of that poem. Well, all while I researched your poetry, I became obsessed with the way that the tone of your poetry is reflected through the poetic devices that you use. Can we talk a bit about those?" I quickly asked.

"Well, I believe that a poet has the talent for poetic devices to occur in poetry without thinking on it.<sup>27</sup> For example, while I was writing my poem 'chemotherapy,'<sup>28</sup> I did not plan the metaphors, similes, and symbols that are in the poem. They appeared, rather, while I wrote," she said.

"Can you talk specifically about those?"

"Well, I say that 'my room is filled with white coats/ shaped like God,' and I am referring to the doctors, through an imagistic simile filled with symbolism, that were all around me while I was hospitalized for breast cancer. Some actually seemed to believe that they were God. In a way, I think, doctors do play God. Day in and out they tell us how long we will live, how we will die, how we will live. You see, living is very important to me. I've had a few close calls!

"We all want to live! God put us on earth to live! And that is just what I have done. I have lived my life, I believe, fully, even though it has been filled with disappointments, but all too often I think that is what we focus on. I have had a wonderful life. I have six children and wonderful grandchildren and was blessed with a wonderful husband. I believe that I have become successful, not to sound pompous or anything, but a woman of my background during my childhood becoming a distinguished author and professor was unheard of.<sup>29</sup> And I am proud."

"You have every reason to be," I said while nodding my head in agreement.

"I also believe that my past is an essential part of my poetry, especially the past of my ancestors. I have written extensively on what it's like to be black in America, but I do not focus only on that, because I believe that I am more than just an African American woman. To consider that as my sole identifying factor would be to limit myself. And I do hope that those who read my poetry keep in mind more than just my sociological background, for while that is important to me, there is so much more to my poems," she said.

"And I think that is what drew me to your poetry. I love your poetry that deals with your African American background, but I find it equally interesting to learn about the other aspects of your life. I have encountered many African American writers who write largely about the African American experience, and although this writing is moving and powerful, I cannot identify with it strongly because I have not experienced it," I replied, hoping that she would understand my view.

"I understand completely. I feel the same way toward many writers myself. Literature can give us wonderful insight into the experiences of everyone else and can expand our understanding of the world, but at the same time, it can be difficult to identify with a background starkly different than our own," she responded.

My eyes darted up to the clock hanging next to her window. Having seen the movement of my eyes, she turned around in her chair to see that our time was running out.

“I’m sorry to say that we’ve no more time to chat today,” Mrs. Clifton said to me with an air of disappointment in her voice. She handed me an autographed copy of her upcoming publication, *Mercy*, and on the inside cover was written her email address underneath her signature.

“This one hasn’t been published yet, so all of the poems will be new to you! We must keep in contact. Email me and let me know how your studies are going,” she said. I could tell that she really meant for me to keep in contact—that she wasn’t saying it merely as some formality or habit.

“I will make sure to do that, but one last thing,” I pleaded.

Her eyes seemed to question me. “Yes?”

“Could you read me a poem from this collection before I begin reading it? Just so I can experience it first coming from you.”

“Why, that’s a wonderful idea. I’ve talked a bit about my relationship with my mother, so why don’t I share with you a poem about her. This one has no title.”

Pausing, Mrs. Clifton drew in a large breath of air, seeming to compose herself before reciting her poem. She then began:

“oh antic God  
return to me  
my mother in her thirties  
leaned across the front porch  
the huge pillow of her breasts  
pressing against the rail  
summoning me in for bed.

I am almost the dead woman’s age times two.

I can barely recall her song  
the scent of her hands  
though her wild hair scratches my dreams  
at night. return to me, oh Lord of then  
and now, my mother’s calling,  
her young voice humming my name.”<sup>30</sup>

The unmistakable beauty and agony presented in the poem she had read stunned me, and I knew not what to say, except to tell her that the poem was quite beautiful.

“I think you’ll like the collection,” she says. “There is a sequence of poetry in there that I wrote for a week beginning on September 11, 2001. Also, there are a few poems in there that reflect my beliefs as to what my purpose as a writer is.”

“Really? Both of those sound very interesting, but I’m especially looking forward to seeing those poems that look at yourself as a writer,” I eagerly respond, thinking to myself that I cannot wait to delve into the new collection.

“Yes, well, every writer has some reason to write, but I think that you’ll find all of mine to be quite different. I’ll share just one with you, and then we really need to part. This one has no title:

you

are not chosen

any stone  
can sing

we come  
to languages  
not lives

your tongue  
is useful  
not unique.”<sup>31</sup>

“I like that,” I respond. “You were right when you said that it would be quite different from what I expected.”

“Yes, that is the response I usually get about that one. But, you are right, let us go,” she said as she raised herself from the chair behind her desk. We began to move toward the door and then continued down the hall, chatting as if old friends.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "she lived."
- <sup>2</sup> Clifton is a "Distinguished Professor of Humanities at St. Mary's College" in St. Mary's City, Maryland. Johnson 132.
- <sup>3</sup> Johnson 132.
- <sup>4</sup> Clifton, especially in her collection *The Book of Light*, often uses a light metaphor in reference to the legacy of her ancestors. She also speaks of darkness and the dark side of oneself, saying that we are "to control it. To work against it. To be the master of it. To balance oneself." Clifton, "I'd" 146.
- <sup>5</sup> This is a direct quote from Clifton which, I believe, shows her immense wisdom. Bauer 217.
- <sup>6</sup> Clifton did not come from a background of opportunity. She was born in 1936 in DePew, New York to working class African American parents.
- <sup>7</sup> Clifton, "I'd" 142.
- <sup>8</sup> Clifton, *The Book of Light* 45.

- <sup>9</sup> Clifton's parents were both interested in enlightening their children in the arts. I cannot understand why her father, a "griot by avocation," would not allow his wife to publish her poetry, especially since her parents encouraged her to whatever she wished with her life. Hatch 60.
- <sup>10</sup> Clifton, *The Book of Light* 45.
- <sup>11</sup> Moody 158.
- <sup>12</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "the message of jo."
- <sup>13</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "the death of joanne c."
- <sup>14</sup> Moody 158.
- <sup>15</sup> Clifton, *Next* 66.
- <sup>16</sup> By looking at St. Mary's College's website, I was able to take a "Virtual Tour" of the school and have a basic idea of what the school looked like. The descriptions in my paper echo the pictures on the website.
- <sup>17</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "how great thou art."
- <sup>18</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "the preacher: ruminates behind the sermon."
- <sup>19</sup> Clifton, "I'd" 147.
- <sup>20</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "incandescence."
- <sup>21</sup> "incandescence" is one of the many poems of Clifton's that uses a light metaphor "for a spiritual presence of ancestors." White 119.
- <sup>22</sup> Clifton, "I'd" 146.
- <sup>23</sup> Clifton and her husband, Fred, raised six children during their marriage. Hatch 61.
- <sup>24</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "leda 1."
- <sup>25</sup> Taken from Yeat's poem "Leda and the Swan."
- <sup>26</sup> Line 1, "Leda and the Swan."
- <sup>27</sup> In Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*, she examines Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," saying that "I don't mean to suggest that Frost sad down and counted out the mutes, aspirates, etc., while writing the poem. Or that any poet does anything like this. I mean to suggest that poets select words for their sound as well as their meaning—and that good poets make good initial selections" (27-28). The idea of this quote can also be applied to Clifton and her poetry.
- <sup>28</sup> Taken from Clifton's poem "chemotherapy."
- <sup>29</sup> Lucille Clifton has won many awards, including the Shelley Memorial Prize from the Poetry Society of America, an Emmy Award from the American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and was recently appointed chancellor of the American Academy of American Poets. She is also a Distinguished Professor of Humanities at St. Mary's College.
- <sup>30</sup> Clifton, *Mercy* 15.
- <sup>31</sup> Clifton, *Mercy* 55.

## Snake Skin

*Quentin Smith*

My old man was a truck driver, and he was our hero. He brought in a decent 20 G a year and we never had to want for anything. When me and my younger brothers Jack and Roman were the ages 6, 5, 4, my dad would take us on cross country trips to Texas and Florida. We would be in our pajamas and sit in the sleeper, and poke our little peanut heads out and pretend that we were driving. We had transcended what it meant to be 4. When our dad would get out of the truck to unload his shipment, we would sit in the back and cry, asking each other where he went even though he probably just told us he would be back in a second. There was Jesus who was our model for a moral life, and our old man who was our model for everything else.

My old man never sat us around a campfire and imparted wisdom upon us like a boy-scout dad would. The only thing of meaning we were told were stories of his youthful collision with authority, which were frequent. Stories of burning things down and beating kids up. He painted himself as the Huckleberry Finn of the 1970's, which we had no doubt he was. We would convene in one of the brother's rooms before bed. We would climb on him and ask questions. Different questions every time, trying to get different angles on his stories. His expression was alive and adventurous, but with a tone of, "You know, no big deal." He only told us because of our reactions. We would giggle with apprehension when he described driving a dirt bike from the police, and give high fives when he took down the school bully. We would exclaim in defiance when his principal whooped him with a yard stick in the janitor's closet. He would put us to bed, but we would continue talking about it. We would finish painting the picture of his stories.

Even George Washington had slaves, but no one ever talks about that. Martin Luther King, Jr. fooled around on his wife, but that is left unsaid. No hero but Jesus can say they did nothing wrong. Our old man was our hero, but we sure found out he had his faults through the years. This harsh reality was as profound as a window blown open in a silent room. Zeus occasionally went crazy on the mortals. When a hero shows his human side, things change for those who are closest to them. The reaction to mortals, as I call them, is a shedding of an old skin, like a snake. The new skin can get stronger, weaker, more sensitive, or rough like leather. That new skin is never the same as the old.

I could not wait to get home from school that day. My brothers and I had watched *Braveheart* the night before, and we planned a reenactment in the basement. I walked out of school and my favorite teacher was loading kids in the cars. I walked up to her.

"Mrs. Martin, have you ever seen *Braveheart*?" I asked with excitement.

"Why, yes, I have. It was very powerful," she said as she loaded a second grader into a car.

"Me and my brothers are going to play it when we get home. I'm William Wallace." I was excited. I liked telling Mrs. Martin things. She always showed interest.

"Ooo, he's the best isn't he?" She asked rhetorically.

"I'm him because he's just like my dad. My dad has courage."

"Yes, he does, Max." I was satisfied with this answer, and waved goodbye to get on the bus.

The bus ride home had different kids than on the bus to school. These kids were older and meaner. There was hierarchy on the bus home. The older and tougher kids sat in the back, who I sat near most of the days so I could hear the action. Derek Wright was the ring leader. He never sat, he stood. There was a seat all the way in the back that was shorter than the rest, that

he sat in alone, to show his independence, his dominance. He was only in sixth grade, but the older kids respected him because he was already 6'2 and he understood how to throw around power. He was respectful to the older ones who gave him power, but the younger he had no mercy.

He hated me the most. I played football, and he thought that I thought I was tough. He was nice to me before I signed up in fourth grade. One day I wore a yellow striped shirt to school on a day we didn't have to wear uniforms. My mom bought it for me, and to be nice to her I wore it. Derek and his friends called me faggot whenever they saw me in the halls. My classmates only looked on my embarrassment with sympathy, but no one said anything. I never wore the shirt again. I did whatever I could to stay out of his way. I wanted him to like me. I wanted him to respect me. But any day I could get through the bus ride without him making fun of my shoes, clothes, or mom I thought was a good day. That day he did not seem to notice me, which gave me false hopes that maybe he would start liking me.

We did our homework after school and ate dinner. We went downstairs in the unfinished basement to set up the battle sight. Dad was not home yet, or we would have showed him everything. We loved to make him proud. Almost everything was broken. Jack and I broke our toys, not because we were destructive but because we forced them to function as things they were not. The shelves that stocked toys were on their sides covered in bed sheets. They were across from each other, each representing a fort. The shelves were the foundation, while kitchen sets and toy garages served as turrets and towers, wobbling awkwardly awaiting a devastating fall. Cardboard building blocks were used for ammo but they were not the only form of artillery. We threw basket balls and bowling pins and chairs. We threw odd cowboy boots and xylophones, couch cushions and firewood. It was a war. I commanded one base with Roman on my side. We were the Scottish rebels. Jack commanded the other side. He was England. Jack preferred to work alone as the bad guy. He was always the Indians. He was always the Yankees. Roman and I liked it better that way, since Roman and I both fought with Jack and did not fight with each other. It made the battle more authentic.

Roman and I picked our uniforms to be a Darth Vader helmet and Davy Crockett coon cap, and our backs draped in blankets, with no shirts. Green war paint striped our faces. No shirts were allowed. We had to show scrapes and scars like William Wallace. Jack wore safety glasses, a Bears helmet, and wielded a medieval plastic shield. Before we began the battle, the opposite sides ducked down in their holes to put the final touches on the base and discuss battle plans.

Roman and I hushed as we heard Jack talking like there was someone in his base, as if he had secret team members we didn't know about. We knew he was alone but Jack knew we would listen and be intimidated by his imagination, and we were, so we decided to cut him short.

"One!.....Two!....." We got blocks in our hands and crouched, ready to fire... "Three!" Blocks were thrown first. We aimed for the turrets and towers and knocked them down. The horrible plastic booms echoed the basement. To make the battle more authentic we made mock screams and yelled with extra urgency. When the turrets and towers were down and the cardboard blocks tired, we selected other objects. Bigger and more dangerous balls were thrown next. The objects conglomerated in the middle of the floors, no man's land. We got desperate and started throwing anything. Jack picked apart his fort and heaved the kitchen set. Roman threw the Light Brite. We prepared for the hand to hand combat in the middle, then we set up and began the battle again.

Jack had other plans that would seal our fate for life. Jack picked up an object that was known not to be thrown. It was Odysseus' bow, not to be fired. He had the black Louisville Slugger and was poised ready to throw. "Jack, no! Put it down!" I yelled not looking as I covered myself. Roman had already taken cover on the shelf. Our helmets were no match for the bat, neither were our teeth. But we all knew he would throw it. Not because he wanted to hit us, but because he was curious. He wanted to see what we would do. He had the power to make us surrender. It was his nuclear bomb. The basement was silent like the heart of a hurricane, and in a moment the light shattered with a pop and Roman and I were covered in glass.

It was not the light that gave me the suffocating feeling that seized my whole head. I didn't care about the light, or the glass. It was the noise that was so profound it awoke the gods. I felt an angry force somewhere in the house. He was coming. It was not a she, it was he. I felt the physical power of the being come near with His anger awoken.

We watched through the cracks of the stairs as the angry god walked down. We all sensed something unusual about the walk of this frequently benevolent god. It was faster. The stairs rattled as he rumbled down in his jeans and his white undershirt that emphasized his muscular physique. He walked with a purpose, a purpose to divvy his wrath on the young mortals.

The god's teeth were grinding together which were causing his temples to pulsate like a V-8 engine. He put out his finger quick and with aggravation, like he was trying to stop his arm from pointing at us.

It was Dad. There were a stack of bills in his hands. His anger caused him to forget to unclutch his prior work, which we knew made him stressed. Our father was a silent grumpy grizzly bear when he sat at the kitchen table to pay the bills. The young cubs knew the danger of this mood. He spoke with a low, dangerous growl like a dog, and pointed to the missing light. "Who broke this?"

Roman was not perceptive of the god's anger, so he spoke in honest truth. "Jack threw bat when Max told him not to!" It was the wrong thing to say. The god grew angrier with the fact that Roman snitched on his brother. The god hated snitches. I tried to put a band-aid on the situation.

"Dad, we'll clean it up, I know where the light bulbs are..." But he didn't hear me. As I spoke he advanced over to Jack. His body was rigid like the stance of a middle linebacker, creeping toward Jack like he was going to stunt fire blitz. If there were no walls, we would have run. But we were bleeding fish in a piranha tank.

The god grabbed the young mortal by his face and latched on at the indents of his cheeks. Jack let out kind of a low whine, but did not complain. Complaining angered the gods.

"When...are you... going to start paying attention!? All you two do is destroy my shit! When are you going to learn? Huh? HUH?" It stung our growing male pride. We did not mean to wreck our dad's shit, we wanted to show him our respect for it, that we were men, too. And right when he said "you two" he remembered I was there. He walked over to me, the rabid dog look never leaving his eyes. He looked me right in the eye for three seconds and yelled, "HUH!?" Reemphasizing what he had said to Jack. He pushed me to the floor, and I did not fight it. He was my dad. He was a god. If he wanted to push me on the ground, he could if he wanted to.

He picked up the bowling pins that amassed in the middle of the two forts with the rest of our artillery. I looked at Jack, and he was staring at the god the same way I was. He was crying. I was crying. Roman was crying. We were all thinking, "O.K. the worst possible situation here is if he throws each of those twelve pins at us."

“When are you gonna start having respect! Stop your damn cryin’! Stop it!” That is when he fired pin #1 at me, and missed wide right. He fired pin #2 at Jack and connected with his raised forearm in defense, and deflected off his Bears helmet. He did as best he could not to cry, trying to stifle every sound that wanted to come out. He fired pin #3 at me and it skipped off the floor and went through my legs. I almost wanted to get in the way of the pin so it would hit me. The smart thing would have been to let the pin hit me, to ease his anger. Now he was even madder that he was a horrible shot.

None of us had seen this from the often benevolent god. He was not just “spanking” us like other gods. He was not just “grounding” us like the other gods. He was preparing to flat out kick the shit out of us. Even more than it hurt our tiny bodies, it hurt our feelings that the god who we wanted to please more than anything in the world was so displeased with us that he was throwing bowling pins to kill.

After the god was done with the bowling pins, he pointed once again, and he pointed to the chair. “What is he going to do with the chair?” We both thought through our tears. Roman was hiding in a shelf.

“I’m tired of fffffartin’ around with you two!” He studded over Jack, who was cowering by the pole for protection.

“Father, I’m sorry!” he said ridiculously in an attempt to use formalities of respect to try to ease my dad.

“No! No! Do....not.... say you are sorry to me!”

He turned to me and said, “Are you sorry too?”

“Yes, Dad.” I hoped that it was over. I didn’t understand.

Still in a voice of frustration and anger, “You know what? No. Sit in the chair.”

“W-What?” I really didn’t understand. Was he going to serve me some tea?

“Sit in the damn chair!” So I sat in the damn chair that sat alone on the 8x8 white carpet. It was underneath a light. It looked like an electric chair; waiting for someone to sit in it so he could do the devil’s work.

Right when I sat down, with no time to make myself comfortable, he pushed the chair with me in it completely over. My body went hurtling across the carpet and rolled up onto the overturned shelf. I was not hurt. I was humiliated. I was shamed in front of my little brothers. It was like I was his jester or his little midget slave whose purpose was to be the object of sick jokes. Even worse, is that He was my own father. I was out of myself. I watched from somewhere else. I watched myself stand up and prepare for the next torture.

“Get up.....get up!” The god came after me and grabbed my by shirt. “Pick up the chair! Pick it up!” I picked up the chair. “Sit down!” I sat. He picked up the chair as if I were a princess in my litter. He suspended the chair in the air, and slammed it down, breaking the back leg. I fell to the floor, and could not breathe. I choked for breath as I scrambled to my feet.

The god got down and lifted me up by my face so I was looking him in the eyes once again. I barely recognized him. This benevolent god was now a monster. He shook me back and forth as hard as he could while saying, “When are you going to have respect?” I didn’t answer. The question was rhetorical. Harmful rhetoric was a weapon of the gods. He shook me even harder so my head was flopping around like doll in a dog’s mouth. He stopped and looked at me, peering through my soul. “When are you going...” He started shaking me more violent, “...to start having respect for my shit!!”

Throwing my head to the floor, he turned to Jack who stood by in anxiety. “Sit on the chair!” He sat on the three-legged chair, and let the chair fall with him in it as if to show the god

their were only three legs, that this chair was no longer useful for torture. “NO! Sit in the chair and balance it! Balance the god damn chair!” Jack reseated and balanced, leaning forward to keep the chair in place. The god took Jack by the shoulders and threw him back into the chair, and let the chair fall. The god picked up the empty chair and heaved it against the wall, where the chair ceased to exist except for random missing parts.

He knelt on one knee over Jack and picked him up by his face. “HUH! HUHHH!” This is all he said, as he shook Jack by his face as if trying to shake loose change from his ears. “Some god damn respect!”

“DAD! STOP!” I did it. I did it out of fear. I could handle the pain myself but I could not watch Jack go through something worse. The god had only just started the torture. So I played bait for the big dog. I gave him a new target, to give Jack a break before round three started.

“What? What did you just say to me?” He was pointing again and hooked his hands in my mouth like I was a prize Walleye.

That is when my mom came down. Athena, the god who sometimes took mercy on the mortals.

I breathed a sigh of relief, but I did not see why her feminine presence would stop the almighty god. I could tell she was scared, too. Something in her eyes showed that she had once been subjected to this terror. She knew what was happening. She had the blueprints of the torture in her heart.

Athena had the phone in her hand. “John, stop it. I am going to call the police,” she said in the calmest voice she could manage. Now I was really scared, as much as I wanted this to stop, I did not want the god to go to jail. I just wanted to say, “Lord Almighty! We are sorry! Just stop so you don’t go to jail!”

Now he was pointing to her with a bowling pin. “Get the hell out of here. Do not tell me how to handle this!” She made a motion like she was going to dial.

“You know what? Go to your rooms!” And before I could take off, he grabbed me by my face one more time, and said, “Have some god damned respect!”

I ran upstairs past mom who did not look at me, probably keeping a close eye on my dad, so he did not do anything to Jack. I went to my room which I shared with no one at the time, and sat in my closet, huddled close to the bag of catcher’s gear and board games. I wanted to hide. I wanted to get as far away from dad as could. I wanted to just sit and cry in the safety and comfort of my closet.

I tried to go to sleep. Instantly my closet door flung open and there was the god, still like a rabid dog, with my mom standing behind him, still with the phone ready to dial for backup. It was like a horror movie. The viewers think the monster is dead, but he keeps coming back. He pointed to me one last time. He said nothing. His words were nothing. He had no use for talk. He wanted to act; to act and destroy. I stared at him to show he had my complete attention. I was trying to show the god my respect. He held back, and I don’t know why. He walked out, and I curled up on my closet floor and went to sleep, feeling too ashamed to sleep in a bed.

I woke up the next morning, and stayed in my closet till minutes before the bus came. My defenses stayed vigilant the whole night, telling me to get dressed and simply walk outside so I did not come in contact with any other part of the house. I felt like a soldier running out of the bunker into no man’s land. I knew there was something to fear, but I did not allow my body to fully process the danger. I just ran out the door, and on to the bus.

I sat through classes in a daze. I would usually laugh at something stupid with my friends or tease the girls. I would draw attention to myself in class by farting or purposely falling out of my

chair. That day was different. I sat half asleep as internally watching myself transform out of some old skin. I felt the metamorphosis make me something strange. With the old skin shed, I was exposed somehow in this new skin. It was ready to establish itself but didn't know how.

Mrs. Martin approached me at lunch, "Max, you don't look well. Is everything alright? Are you feeling ok?"

"Yeah," I said not looking her in the eye.

"Well, you don't look well. Do you think you're sick?" The munificence of the woman could not crack my new skin. She was simply not there to me.

"Don't worry about it," I said, and I walked toward the playground.

She seemed offended by the rude remark, but did not pursue it any more. I sat on the bench where kids in trouble sat. I had never sat there before. I didn't feel like playing. I didn't feel like talking. I just wanted to take my mind into a room where there was only a bed with white sheets. I would lie in this bed and no one would disturb me. I would lie here and the only thing I knew was the white sheets and the walls around me.

When it was time to go home, I walked behind Jack to the bus. I wondered what he was thinking. He usually had a mass of friends at his side, but not today. We were the last ones to walk to the bus. He caught sight of me once, but only a glance. The sight of me only brought pain. He was trying to forget, trying to figure out this new skin we shared.

I walked to my seat on the bus. Usually I sat with a girl in my class but she was not there. I sat and stared out the window. I studied the stained glass window on the Church. It was the picture of the flood, when the mortals crossed the path of God, and he sent destruction. I could hear Derek's banter in the back where he sat in the short seat of dominance. He was making fun of someone, I could tell from the familiar tone. I could hear he was talking about me. He was making fun of my haircut, which he had made fun of for the past two weeks. Mrs. Sobey my barber cropped it a bit short.

"He looks like a fucking injun!" The three eighth graders sitting around him laughed. "Hey Barry, are you a queer?" I didn't know what a queer was. It was bad, I perceived, from the laughter. They laughed at his creativity, his sheer wit.

He paused to think and then said, "Hey, get me his backpack. Let me see if he carries any tampons in it. That fucking queer." One of the eighth graders grabbed for my bag, but I tugged back with silent strength. I looked like a slave oarsman on a Roman ship, silently getting flogged, knowing there was no way out.

Jack watched all of this. His body faced the front, but his head faced me. He eyes were battling whether he should be concerned for me or concerned for his own feelings. He watched as they made fun of me and the fat eighth grader yanked at the bag like a lawn mower. Jack turned around, and looked at the floor.

I stood up as the fat eighth grader yanked and fell back into his seat, letting loose of the bag. I watched my body walk to the back of the bus. Derek was smiling menacingly at me, and said something and I didn't know what. The eighth graders mock gasped. "What the hell is he doing back here?" One of them said.

My body took the bag I was dragging behind and threw it in Derek's face. He caught it like he didn't know what to do. My fists punched him in the stomach and he doubled over, and my body mechanically kneed him in the face. He flung back up and yelled. My body lunged at him again, and my body planted my forehead on his nose, causing a fierce crack that I had never heard before. My hands slammed his body into the emergency exit and he collapsed to the ground in a daze. My fists punched his head that were pressed into the base of the seat, where he

sat trying to protect his face, with blood running from various sources. "HUH! HUHHHH!" I screamed close to his ear, so everyone could hear, but so he could hear me the loudest.

The bus driver who normally had an expressionless face now had my body by the back of the collar. I watched his livid face as he dragged my body off the bus. Mrs. Grey was running down the walk, with a few parents getting out of their cars. The bus driver stood with me on the grass in front of our church, clutching my collar, holding me up as if his prize hound just found the fox. He told Mrs. Grey what happened, as some eighth graders came helping Derek off the bus. The fat one had his shirt off which was pressed against Derek's face. Mrs. Grey and a few parents ran to assist him. I stood and watched my body that I no longer occupied.

Mrs. Grey came over from Derek and the mothers who were cooing over his wounds. She started to scream in my face that was staring at my brother Jack, who stared back at me in tears. I was not paying attention to her.

"Do you understand me?" She concluded, with her beaver teeth bared, and her face ridiculously close to mine.

I stood silent. She looked deep in my eyes with her head cocked to the side, "You are in detention for the rest of the week."

"Good," I heard myself say.

"What did you just say to me?"

"I said good."

"I'm going to call your father." She turned around and walked towards the building. My face just stared at the blubbering Jack.

My new body sat in the grass. I looked at Jack, listening to the moms give Derek help. I watched my skin sit there and wait.

## **day off at mount greenwood park**

*Tom McNamara*

our skates sliced through  
thin layers of white  
on the clear ice

and scores of laughing  
catholic schoolchildren  
flooded the rink gate  
at three o'clock

mothers smelling of coffee steaming  
from cups clasped in their hands  
chased children with mittens and hats  
and warnings to keep warm

the sun whelmed in the west  
and the grey clouds  
quickly filled with black  
and the tall-standing lights

flickered on around the rink  
and the cars on 111<sup>th</sup> street  
whisked past in black slush

and we still are slicing through  
thin layers of white  
on the clear ice

## **Lyrics of the Land**

### **A Nature Essay on the Mines of Spain**

*Liz Elsbernd*

I close my eyes, waiting for my body to adjust to the change in tempo. My mind, weary from a long day of classes, eagerly guzzles the initial silence surrounding Catfish Creek, until the stillness is swallowed by a more perceptive ear. The faint euphony of chirping crickets, flipping fish, and scrambling squirrels is complimented by the harmony of a blue jay's improvised solo. While the trees wave their limbs as expressively as those belonging to a conductor of a renowned orchestra, the sibilant whisper of the leaves accompanies the ever-changing melody of nature's song.

I cringe. The hum of a lawnmower and the distant murmur of traffic join the symphony of subtle sounds, terribly out of tune. As I walk from my car toward the canoe landing on the creek, it becomes obvious to me that the rhythm of this place has not been left undisturbed.

\* \* \* \*

Catfish Creek, now located within the Mines of Spain region in Dubuque, Iowa, has witnessed dynamic changes throughout its existence. Catfish Creek itself deviated from its original path into the Mississippi River due to the erosion of surrounding bluffs. Because what is now Eastern Iowa was not glaciated along with the other areas in the state, regions in the vicinity of Catfish Creek are composed of a medley of geological features, including both high bluffs and entrenched valleys. Seventy percent of Iowa was originally covered by prairies. However, as Ben Horstmann, a DNR employee of the Mines of Spain Recreational Area, pointed out, "the Mines of Spain region naturally had a slightly smaller percentage of prairies than the rest of the state due to this area's varied geography. There was a greater fraction of forests here—oak, hickory, and shagbark—than in other areas of what is now Iowa." Much of the original timber in the Catfish Creek area was logged off between 1865 and 1880 due to steamboat travel along the Mississippi River, but several areas were left unscathed by the double-edged sword of industrial progress. Today, the leaves of two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old burr oak trees still bustle in the breeze, singing their familiar refrain.

Although the Paleo-Indians were in this vicinity around 12,000 years ago, evidence attesting to the existence of prehistoric Native Americans in the Catfish Creek area, such as stone scrapers, village sites, and rock shelters dates back only about 8,000 years. The Woodland Indians, present here around 3,000 years ago, left behind pottery, cultivated plants, and burial mounds. Fur-trading with the Sauk and Fox (Mesquakie) Indians was the primary reason behind the arrival of Europeans to this territory, but it was the region's abundant lead deposits that drew international attention. Mines of this area appeared on maps in France and Britain as early as 1697, but the Mesquakie worked the mines for their own profit and refused to let European-

Americans access the mines until the early nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1830, the Mesquakie encountered a significant transformation of culture as European miners and farmers began to inhabit the region.

In 1788, the lead was what eventually lured Julien Dubuque to settle and live among the Mesquakie on the banks of Catfish Creek for twenty-two years. After holding a council with the Fox chiefs in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, Dubuque made a treaty with the Indians which allowed him to lease the lead-rich land. A typical white, exploring pioneer, Dubuque felt the need to know who “owned” the land; certainly it couldn’t belong to the Native Americans who had lived there for years! So he requested and received a land grant in 1797 from the Governor-General of Spain, Baron de Carondelet. The grant authorized Dubuque to work an area of land twenty-one miles along the Mississippi River and nine miles inland, west of the river. It was to be called the “Mines of Spain.”

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As I near the canoe landing, I notice that the creek, too, has changed tempo since Saturday when I’d been here last. A few days ago, the water had been stagnant, held under the fermata of dense duckweed. As smooth and still as a giant pool table, a velvety green carpet had covered the majority of the wedge of creek within my line of vision, causing me to question whether or not there really *was* water underneath the lush swathe of moss-like muck. I had slung my backpack off my shoulder, hunkered down with my toes sticking over the edge of the landing, and peered intensely into the green thickness. I had been amazed to see that the luscious rug I was examining was actually made up of tiny bead-like plants. They had circled in perpetual orbit about one another, continuously conforming, fitting together perfectly like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Each miniscule plant was instrumental in the arrangement of the others, much like the small, seemingly insignificant happenings in history made this place what it is today. Trying to maintain my balance as I had leaned even further over the wobbly dock, I finally saw an indication of the water moving sluggishly beneath the duckweed.

Sometime between Saturday and now, a significant *accelerando* had taken place. Today the creek is clear of anything that could impede its motion, and the wind now blows at a *forte*, consistent with the increase in tempo. The random cadence of the leaves drumming the water now seems more pronounced than before; autumn, too, has picked up the pace.

As I scan the sky, noting the monotonous expanse of gray, my eyes linger on the sun shrouded in a veil of lacy haze. While nearly everything else around me has transposed with time, the sun is one of the only things that has remained a constant throughout history. Not even the shape of the land, edited by erosion, escaped revision. The sun, though only a fair-weather fan member of the earth’s audience, observed as wilderness in this area disappeared with the inhabitation of Native Americans and Europeans. He also watched as lumbering altered the natural system of plant succession and as farming generated permanent changes in native vegetation and wildlife.

I push myself up out of my squatting position along the landing’s ledge, and watch as a million tiny insects skate in different directions across the surface of the water. Seeing the frantic flight of these frightened creatures reminds me of how other native animals of this area must have felt when they experienced the reverberation of human footsteps. After all, the buffalo was nonexistent in this region after 1838, and the elk was gone by 1855. Even animals still found in this area, such as deer, beavers, and otters, were severely endangered by the late nineteenth century, until the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge Act was passed by

Congress in 1924. While many species recovered, some, like the wolf, elk, and buffalo, never returned to the region.

The fiery torches of the trees setting the bleak sky ablaze burn a gorgeous image in my mind, but it is the ground covered in leaf potpourri that kindles a sensation of awe within me. I was traipsing through the same land that had harbored the Mesquakie village more than a hundred and fifty years ago. This was the general area that French fur traders had lived in close proximity with the Indians, creating a substantial half-breed population. And before that, thousands of years ago, this was the region on which the nomadic Woodland Indians had roamed. Thinking about the millions of years that this place was not even occupied by human inhabitants baffles me; my mind cannot even come close to grasping the rich history woven into this soil.

Tottering along the bank of the creek, I can't help but notice how my footsteps seem terribly out of rhythm with the sounds around me. I feel like a child clapping along to a song, always a split second off the beat. I gingerly step over a tree stooped precariously in a deep bow to the water, its finger-like roots desperately clutching the soil. As I glance back at the water, I remember the story I heard about how Julien Dubuque solved the problem of the Indians' occasional disobedience. He ordered one of his men to pour oil upstream in Catfish Creek and proceeded to light the creek on fire, threatening to dry up all the creeks and rivers, even the Mississippi, if the Mesquakie didn't obey him. Except for this atypical occurrence, Dubuque and the Native Americans lived in harmony and mutual dependence with each other.

The wind crescendos as I begin to plod up the path leading to the Julien Dubuque Monument. I spot a massive, uprooted tree whose roots still clasped a heap of soil, leaving a gaping hole in the earth. Then I stop. The vibrato of a train's whistle sounds shrill to my ears, shattering the relative stillness . . . reminding me of the fast tempo that awaits me when I leave this place.

Entering the finale of my visit, I finally find myself at the Julien Dubuque Monument, located on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. The Mesquakie, demonstrating their profound respect for Dubuque, had buried him here in 1810 with tribal honors and marked his grave with a wooden structure. Dedicated in 1897, the stone monument that stands here now was built as part of a movement that was meant to attract newcomers by celebrating the past of the area's people.

Turning south to gaze down the Mississippi, I soak in the vibrant colors exuding from the trees on the surrounding bluffs. As I stand there motionless, listening to the dissonance of a squirrel gnawing on an acorn, I finally feel like I'm not in constant syncopation with the world. Time, although it had sung the lyrics of this land, seemed so insignificant here. Then I pivot northward to study the buildings lining the shore of the Mississippi and the steady flow of traffic crossing the bridge. Soon I would enter the *accelerando* that would get me back into the rhythm of such a fast tempo, but for now I am content to listen to the lullaby of leaves whispering in the wind.

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## **Floating Downriver or Swimming Upstream?**

*Excerpt from “Floating Downriver or Swimming Upstream?: An Examination of the 1964 Waveland Conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)”*

***Kathleen Volk***

Someone has written that we are a boat which is afloat and that the boat has to be changed in order to stay afloat, and that it must stay afloat in order to be changed. Well, let me further confuse the picture by saying that we are on a river of no return. We do have an organization...it becomes imperative that we ask ourselves why do we exist? Spend some time on that, but not too much, because we only have 4 days, and then we must examine what is the structure that can help do whatever we exist for? Put another way, what are our goals? And what is the structure that we want to implement those goals?<sup>1</sup>

As stated above by James Forman, the November 1964 Waveland staff retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) provided members of the civil rights organization with the opportunity to look in retrospect at their past attempts at activism and plan for the future. SNCC had typically been considered an organization characterized by dynamism which was fueled by the ideological motivations of members, grass-roots leadership, and the willingness of leaders to formulate new resistance techniques as the focus of the civil rights movement shifted in tandem with the group. Staff meetings conventionally had served as the impetus for ideological expression and were one of the avenues through which tensions and debates within the organization were sorted out. The November 1964 Waveland retreat, consequently, was designed as a means by which the raising of decisive questions about SNCC's successes and failures as a civil rights organization was promoted through the authoring of position papers by members of SNCC. The genesis of discussion about programming and organizational structure at Waveland was spurred by the writing of the position papers, and significant issues relating to the future of SNCC surfaced at the retreat.

SNCC scholar Clayborne Carson discusses the Waveland retreat in his historiographical text on the evolution of the civil rights organization and forges a complex argument about the impact of the retreat on SNCC. Carson implicitly states that the retreat occurred at a time when SNCC needed to adapt to changes in the movement in order to combat racial injustice effectively.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Carson posits that “the retreat was an important step in SNCC's transformation from being a simply militant civil rights organization to becoming a major source of radical ideas and strategies. The retreat was a valiant attempt to begin a difficult process to self-criticism and self-education in the midst of social struggle.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, Carson argues that select events and debates that ensued at Waveland were “signs at the retreat that the emotional bonds which held

the staff together had already been broken.”<sup>4</sup> Carson’s analysis of the retreat and his claims about the importance of the internal criticism promoted at the conference stand as significant points in his history of the organization, and they imply the possibility of the death of the Beloved Community within SNCC.

Historian Emily Stoper also writes about the broad organizational changes affecting the composition of SNCC during the summer and fall of 1964. She argues that problems inherent within SNCC relating to the presence of white staff members and the structure debate “debilitated SNCC by preventing it from developing new program and strategies to replace those that had been exhausted or discredited by the events of the summer.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Stoper states that contention over such issues interfered with the ability of the organization to wade through the turmoil and effectively move forward. She writes, “The problems were never really resolved and eventually helped to destroy SNCC.”<sup>6</sup>

Aside from Carson and Stoper’s conclusions, however, a broader range of historiography focused on the retreat does not exist. This lack of historiography dealing with a period in SNCC history that was admittedly short yet decisive raises questions not only about the implications of the retreat but about greater structural issues within the organization as well. The gathering of staff at the retreat primarily served as a means through which SNCC members were able to evaluate the programming and staff of the organization on a variety of levels, and the existing Waveland documents and position papers serve as a lens through which several facets of the structure debate can be examined. The encouraged criticism of SNCC at Waveland shaped debates over staff behavior and involvement, SNCC programs, and the successes and cohesion of the community. The Waveland retreat ultimately signified the death of the Beloved Community within SNCC because the climax of existing factional debates which ensued at the retreat caused an organizational rift which SNCC was unable to mend.

SNCC’s activism in the larger scope of the civil rights movement leading up to 1964 was demarcated by group-centered decision-making and the promotion of a strong community of organizers within SNCC. Stoper wrote that in its formative years, “SNCC was always highly decentralized, relying on initiatives from its workers in the field. It had an ideological aversion to leadership, viewing it as a form of manipulation.”<sup>7</sup> Because of the emphasis upon the individual staff member as an active participant in the decision-making structure of SNCC, organizational decisions primarily were conceived at staff meetings.<sup>8</sup> In the meetings, members openly dialogued about issues faced by SNCC and came to conclusions after issues were reasoned through by staffers based upon their experiences and relationships to the movement and to each other.<sup>9</sup> The pervasive sense of independent action, group unity, and acceptance of others regardless of creed shared amongst SNCC staff was known as the Beloved Community.<sup>10</sup> SNCC historian Kristin Anderson-Bricker defined the Beloved Community as “a multifaceted belief system characterized by nonhierarchical leadership, community-centered organizing, and ideological openness” prevalent up to the period of contention encountered during the 1964 Waveland retreat.<sup>11</sup>

The Waveland staff retreat was held at Gulfside Methodist Church in Waveland, Mississippi.<sup>12</sup> Formally, the retreat sessions stretched from November 6 to November 12, 1964, and the retreat commenced with the aforementioned speech given by SNCC Executive Secretary James Forman on the status of the organization and his hopes for the outcome of the retreat discussions.<sup>13</sup> Mainly, staffers who were paid activists for SNCC were invited to participate in

the retreat and dialogue about issues relating to their experiences in the group.<sup>14</sup> Staffer Ivanhoe Donaldson stated that the retreat was held because “it was felt that the entire staff should meet, sit down, and deeply analyze the essence of the organization and its relationship to the communities in which we work. [sic]”<sup>15</sup> Approximately one month previous to the Waveland retreat, however, SNCC leaders had held a staff meeting at Gammon Theological Seminary at which participants discussed issues relating to SNCC programs and staff organization.<sup>16</sup> Although many valid issues were raised at Gammon, SNCC leaders felt as though another retreat was needed to continue the evaluation of SNCC’s successes and encourage further dialogue about the status of the civil rights organization by a large cross-section of the staff.<sup>17</sup>

The issues discussed at the Waveland retreat primarily originated from the generation of position papers by staffers on a wide range of topics relating to the status of SNCC in November of 1964. Papers were written by staffers who attempted to answer questions posed in a memo circulated to the organization as the planning for Waveland ensued. The memo, sent out by the Atlanta office, stated that the participants “should be encouraged to write papers on any of the questions in this memo or on any question or problem about SNCC they want to write about. [sic]”<sup>18</sup> The memo did indeed provide staffers with a bevy of topics to analyze when considering the current status of SNCC. Questions such as “What do we organize? When do we organize? Where do we organize?...How are decisions made?...What is the structure of SNCC?...Where and why have we failed in certain projects?...How do we build leadership in local communities?...What is SNCC? Is it a group of organizers?” were posed in the memo, and answers to such questions occur frequently throughout the existing Waveland position papers.<sup>19</sup> Thirty-seven position papers were written for the staff retreat, and they provide an invaluable lens for the examination of the organizational changes fomenting within SNCC.<sup>20</sup>

Executive Secretary Jim Forman played a pivotal role in the orchestrating the changes born at the Waveland retreat, and his goals for the organization centered upon not only defining structure but encouraging the criticism and evaluation of SNCC as a civil rights organization in flux during November 1964. During the session which commenced the retreat, Forman openly acknowledged the changes in the composition of the SNCC staff and also pointed out that there were indeed issues within the organization deserving of further deliberation at Waveland. In his speech, Forman stated that “there are many strong points about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. One of those strong points is our ability to look inwardly at ourselves, at our organization, and to criticize it honestly and openly.”<sup>21</sup> Forman also poignantly asserted that he hoped for an environment of constructive criticism at Waveland through his opening plea for self-examination and reevaluation of SNCC and its programs.<sup>22</sup> His memoir contained a description of the apparent staff reluctance to assess the organization during the retreat, despite his encouragement. Forman commented, “I felt that everyone must acquire the strength to stand up, present their own ideas, fight for them if necessary, criticize the ideas of others, and recognize their own weaknesses.”<sup>23</sup> Forman saw the push for staffers to analyze the successes and weaknesses of SNCC as a necessary step in organizational development, but some members remained reluctant to wholeheartedly accept the criticisms and help analyze the organization’s internal issues.

Forman’s goals for the Waveland retreat called not only for organizational criticism but also emphasized his consistent argument for maintaining the unification associated with the Beloved Community within SNCC. His focus on SNCC unity and a prevailing sense of community

within the organization supported Forman's move to tighten the structure of SNCC in hopes of fostering an environment from which staffers were able to emerge and effectively complete programs. Forman's opening speech at the conference denoted what he demanded from the participants of the retreat in terms of unification. He stated, "I call for internal cohesion. We can withstand the external pressures if we are together. I call for unity. I call for a consensus around the proposition that the staff and those present consider themselves the Coordinating Committee and elect at some point in this meeting an Executive Committee."<sup>24</sup> His statement outlined not only the objectives of holding the staff retreat but also emphasized the necessity for members to remain bound together in order to reach a common goal and shape the structure of SNCC. Forman's position paper offered not only a basic history of SNCC's development but also set forth his argument about the importance of unification within the group.<sup>25</sup>

Forman's speech and position paper directly reference the importance of the Beloved Community in SNCC activism, and his artful emphasis on staff cohesion through working towards a common goal was stated succinctly. Forman wrote, "We are organizing because we ourselves have within us so many drives to end racial segregation that we feel that the best expression of these drives is to get other people to act in accordance with what we believe."<sup>26</sup> Through explaining that SNCC members were connected by a common desire to work against social problems such as segregation, Forman posited that staffers were thus united by their desire to act on shared ideological motivations. At the end of his speech delivered at Waveland, Forman offered his viewpoint on the composition of the SNCC staff as a tight-knit group of reformers depended upon as devoted actors in the struggle for racial equality throughout the South.

But rather you should take into account what it is that's best for all of us, for there are people who are waiting on us right now to return to our respective projects to begin work and to continue the work we started. People do see us as a band of brothers. We must decide if the circle will be unbroken. If we remain a band of brothers, a circle of trust, We Shall Overcome!<sup>27</sup>

Forman's closing statement implies that he believed in both the existence of the Beloved Community within SNCC and the importance of the community in accomplishing organizational goals. His notion of a "band of brothers" was evocative of past characterizations of SNCC as a close-knit group of reformers, but Forman's statements further connected the necessity of staff unity in the successful criticism and reformation of SNCC structure.

A position paper by Reverend Tom Brown circulated during the Waveland retreat called for critiques and reevaluations of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee through his questioning of staff motivations and the pervasion of unity within SNCC. Whereas Forman believed that the Beloved Community had the strength to survive the period of organizational criticism at the conference, Brown questioned whether the Beloved Community actually existed in SNCC. Brown initially posited that one of the major issues within the group was connected with whether SNCC's past programs and actions in the movement were truly representative of Beloved Community-tinged feelings of "our true dedication, seriousness, honesty, and moral and responsibility to the cause of Freedom and to every human being. [sic]"<sup>28</sup> His opening analysis of the organization's motivation in the struggle for civil rights provided a segue into the claim of his position paper in which he queried, "With odds as great as they are we have shocked the world with our success, but I asked, have we been successful?"<sup>29</sup> Brown's outright

interrogation of whether SNCC had been successful as a civil rights organization characterized by unity, driven by ideology, and mobilized through grass-roots leadership was a pointed critique of SNCC which focused on the nucleus of the discussion of structure and staff roles at Waveland.

Debate over structure in SNCC was a prominent issue raised at Waveland because of changing attitudes relating to membership, organization, and motivation to participate in SNCC. Before Freedom Summer, SNCC had primarily been populated by young African American and white students who held positions as field workers, office staff, or administrators. After the summer project, however, the staff composition of SNCC was radically different from its previous status during earlier years of activism.<sup>30</sup> SNCC's size increased to approximately 200 staffers, and almost half of them were of white descent.<sup>31</sup> These changes in the staff composition caused changes in the orchestration of meetings and the process of making decisions, and SNCC was left after Freedom Summer with the task of finding new ways to organize staff, volunteers, and programs effectively.<sup>32</sup> The divergence among SNCC members representative of factions described as "hardliners" and "floaters" represented some of the most emotionally-charged issues present at the Waveland conference in the context of the structure debate.<sup>33</sup>

The staffers characterized as floaters represented ideologies prevalent in SNCC which related to greater personal independence and idealism within the organization.<sup>34</sup> Scholar Doug McAdam stated that floaters (or "Freedom High" staff) typically embraced the idea of the "individual as organizer" and also promoted SNCC's hallmark activism which supported nonviolent direct action and equality among the races.<sup>35</sup> McAdam also commented that staffers within the floater faction tended to harbor "distrust of centralized organization and top-down leadership" within SNCC's administrative structure.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, floaters were known to pursue complex ideological and intellectual debates, especially during meetings which concerned staff and policy-making issues: "...They were great talkers...one of them might get the floor and begin to hold forth on the true meaning of the word *leader*."<sup>37</sup> Floaters generally were white activists or Northern African American men who traveled South to work with SNCC.<sup>38</sup> In addition, floaters were associated with the leadership style and attitudes held by Bob Moses, a SNCC activist whose dedication to reform in Mississippi was instrumental in the creation of the Freedom Summer project.<sup>39</sup> Moses' adherence to ideology-driven leadership attracted many staffers seeking their own niche within SNCC.<sup>40</sup>

The beliefs held by floaters were related to the desire to work within the civil rights movement while pursuing their independent ideologies and goals. Clayborne Carson stated that the primary goal for SNCC held by Bob Moses and the floater group rested in their wish for SNCC "to remain an informal community of organizers whose task was first to identify local leadership, foster its development, and then step aside, allowing that leadership to define its own direction."<sup>41</sup> Staffer Mary King wrote of her embracing of floater ideals while working in SNCC: "I was convinced I was making a lifelong commitment based on the ideals of popular democracy and self-determination. But slowly, and perhaps inevitably, self-determination was coming to mean not only politics but also literally self."<sup>42</sup> At the Waveland retreat, adherents to the floater faction did indeed have a stake in many of the discussions about the structure and successes of the organization to which they belonged. The deep-seated search for independence, the guidance by one's own ideals, and attraction to ideological debate brought floaters into

conflict with the hardliner faction as discussion about the heart of the organization ensued at Waveland.

Hardliners were members of SNCC who pushed for order and focus in the organization as staff struggled to analyze SNCC during a period of great change and planning for the future. The hardliners generally supported the call for a clearer definition of the administrative structure within the civil rights organization.<sup>43</sup> Generally, hardliners were primarily African American SNCC staffers, several of whom were leaders such as Cleveland Sellers and James Forman.<sup>44</sup> Forman, in fact, came to represent the hardliner ideology and the movement for a more solidified structure which countered Moses' aforementioned perspective on organizational leadership and a more loosely-based structure. Carson wrote that "both [men] accepted the need for a new orientation in SNCC, but Forman was prepared to abandon a large measure of SNCC's freewheeling style in order to achieve political power, whereas Moses believed that SNCC should encourage individuals to break free from all centralized structures of power rather than build new ones."<sup>45</sup>

Members who aligned with the hardliner faction were some of the staunchest proponents of redefining and utilizing the administrative structure of the organization. Jim Forman wrote that hardliners who evaluated SNCC raised the important question of "whether SNCC should be a strong, centralized organization expanding its power and moving toward becoming a mass organization."<sup>46</sup> Hardliners generally supported the redefinition of the decision-making structure within SNCC and saw increased structure as a necessity for SNCC to plan future activism in the struggle for civil rights.<sup>47</sup> McAdam wrote that hardliners "felt that SNCC needed to move beyond the improvisational politics of moral suasion to mobilize political power through an increasingly structured organizational program."<sup>48</sup> Frequently, hardliners also sought to find ways to advance SNCC and prepare the organization for future activism through planning and new projects. Cleveland Sellers commented that during the Gammon retreat, he witnessed the hardliner and floater groups clash and said that "the only thing that kept us Hardliners in the running was our 'guarantee' that we could move SNCC beyond the morass in which it was stuck."<sup>49</sup>

Ultimately, the divisions represented by the hardliners and the floaters deeply related to the push for debating structure and critiquing the organization at the Waveland retreat. As Carson noted, Forman's wish to move SNCC away from its previously less-defined structural base fueled ideological tension between members who either supported a more solid structure and leadership hierarchy or advocated the self-determination of staffers as they worked independently to achieve the goals of the group. The Beloved Community was affected by the growing disparity between the hardliner and floater factions, however, because of the changing attitudes of SNCC members towards each other. Maintaining Forman's "band of brothers" grew increasingly difficult as hardliners reacted to floater behavior and called into question their motivations for membership in the organization. Critiques of the activists who populated SNCC related directly to the structure debate and involved direct analysis of the SNCC staff, their behaviors, and ways to improve not only staff effectiveness. Most importantly, the hardliner and floater factional debates which prompted such critiques demonstrated the divergent desires for determining the structure of SNCC and help explain why the structure debate came to a head at the retreat.

Discussion of the composition of the SNCC staff and the definition of their respective roles arose during the Waveland retreat through the response by select hardliners to floater behavior

and ideologies. Jim Forman described the characteristics of a new group of staffers who exhibited behavior fitting with that of floaters during the Freedom Summer and Waveland periods. He said that they “went about ‘doing their thing,’ often floating from project to project, responsible to no one but themselves. If workers were needed to help on a voter registration drive but they felt like writing poetry, they would write poetry.”<sup>50</sup> Forman’s description of “Freedom High” staff members stands as a fairly accurate representation of the changing attitudes evolving among the old and new members of SNCC at the Waveland retreat.<sup>51</sup> Project Director Cleveland Sellers offered his views on the floater faction as well: “The most flamboyant faction was composed of a group of ‘stars,’ who at various times were referred to as ‘philosophers, existentialists, anarchists, floaters...’ They were ‘high’ on Freedom, against all forms of organization and regimentation.”<sup>52</sup> SNCC Chairman John Lewis, who admittedly denied aligning completely with either faction, stated that in the context of the floater faction, “personal instincts and the right to follow them were sacrosanct” and rose above organizational duties and commitment to projects.<sup>53</sup> In the eyes of hardliner SNCC leaders such as Forman and Sellers, the new members of the organization displayed behaviors uncharacteristic of the majority of traditional staff. Although one of the hallmarks of SNCC was the openness to contention of ideologies, the examples of the floater behaviors construed as negative contributed to the call for more structure and tighter constraints on the independence of the group.

Reverend Tom Brown’s position paper struck a decidedly hefty blow to Jim Forman’s assertion that SNCC was a “band of brothers” because of his questioning of the deepening sense of individualism among staffers who apparently adhered to the ideologies of the floater faction. He stated that he had observed staff members who chose to “immorally use each other for self-gratification. I have seen us disregard respect to each other as well as to the female element in our organization. I have been seated in meetings and have listened to us ridicule our white brothers due to our own petty prejudices.”<sup>54</sup> In essence, Brown asserted that his observations of the more individually-centered behaviors and actions of staff members were not positive and may very well have signified the movement away from the community formed by the tight-knit group of activists who had previously staffed SNCC. Additionally, Brown also posed the question of whether the very inherent desires for reform and equality within SNCC shifted away from making sacrifices to benefit the greater good to more personally-charged motivations instead. He wrote, “Are we fighting to bring a social change to have people living in harmony and to bring about a just and honest government, or are we fighting to bring about a change in folkways, mores, and morals for our own self-gratification.”<sup>55</sup> Brown’s hardliner critique of individualistic and self-serving sentiment within the organization served as a pointed example of the expression of strains within the Beloved Community during the Waveland retreat.

Floaters responded to the criticisms leveled by hardliners by defending their ideological motivations and reaffirming the need for unity and self-determination within the group. An anonymous position paper described one SNCC activist’s goals and vision for the organization. In the section of the paper entitled “Why do we organize?”, the author outlined his or her belief in the requisite promotion of staff unity over differences in organizing style and opinion. The writer stated, “And even though we and our programs are sometimes dull, or ugly, or too impatient, the hope is beautiful. Maybe we would be more patient with each other—and our organization would there fore become more democratic—if we remember that while we are all very different, we are joined together by a hope that is very beautiful. [sic]”<sup>56</sup> The author of the position paper described not only the need for organizational flexibility concerning project

performance but also promoted the maintenance of the Beloved Community in SNCC. Most importantly, the author's comments implied that acknowledging the differences of members allowed SNCC staffers to transcend conflicting approaches to organizing present in the structure debate. During the Waveland meetings, Dorie Ladner proffered her view on the necessity of maintaining staff unity and working through conflict to maintain the Beloved Community based upon common ideals and unity. She stated, "Why should we be afraid to discuss it here...we are brothers and sisters. And if we can't trust each other, want [what] then. We have got to trust each other. If it takes all night, we should discuss it, to impress upon us all to be honest, a band of brothers we must be. [sic]"<sup>57</sup> Ladner's statement related to not only the ongoing debate over staff actions within SNCC but also attempted to reaffirm the importance of the Beloved Community-related desire for shared experiences and ideologies.

At a June staff meeting held at the commencement of the 1964 Freedom Summer project, several concerns were raised about the tenuousness of the once-strong community shared amongst SNCC members. Sam Shirah stated, "SNCC lacks a feeling of community. The essence of the movement lies in soul, which comes from the spirit among those fighting to change the world. We have lost the doctrine of importance of the individual. Mass programs are viewed as the only important thing. This has happened because of the SNCC explosion [sic]."<sup>58</sup> Shirah's comments not only pointedly assessed the diminishment of the strong cohesion previously shared by staffers under the umbrella of the Beloved Community but also posed the question of whether SNCC's evolving structure and programming interests affected the cohesion of the community. During the same meeting, Marion Barry also offered his feelings on SNCC's departure from the dictums of the Beloved community. Barry declared, "Historically there used to be a bond amongst members of SNCC. This no longer exists. We need to redevelop kinship and community."<sup>59</sup> The statements made at the June staff meeting hinted at the loss of Forman's feeling of a "band of brothers" amongst SNCC members which had been exacerbated by the growth and change within the organization during the past months. Most importantly, their comments implied that staff-related fractures may very well have run deeper than previously construed as the Waveland retreat opened.

The death of the Beloved Community was directly discussed at the Waveland conference through the mediums of position papers and commentary at the meetings. Statements made by SNCC staffers indicated the close-knit community of members no longer existed within the organization. During one of the retreat sessions, prominent SNCC leader Ruby Doris Smith Robinson offered her impressions of the current status of the SNCC community. She commented, "I am concerned that the band of brotherhood has not been expanded. We don't really make people feel a part of that band. We aren't concerned enough with expanding that respect within ourselves. And this relates to other personnel problems we have."<sup>60</sup> Smith Robinson's statements echo not only changes in the unification of staff but also a growing exclusiveness which affected who indeed was allowed to become a member of the SNCC staff community. Additionally, a document prepared for the retreat offered the author's similar sentiments on growing contention and distance amongst the staff as a whole. The author urged members to engage fully in the arguments made in the position papers also move past "petty infighting" and concentrate on moving the organization forward rather than quibbling over personal conflicts.<sup>61</sup>

The telling position paper entitled "Introduction: Semi-Introspective" also offers the author's anonymous viewpoints on the diminishing presence of the Beloved Community within SNCC.

Although the author is unknown, he or she appears to be an experienced staffer reluctant to embrace new members of SNCC and has grown increasingly removed from other new members in terms of both personal and professional development. The author stated,

The distance between me and the others increases. The new people are naïve. I need them, as long as I continue to do my job, but I cannot really be honest with them as people. I wait for them to learn what I know, and then I still don't talk to them. The ones who were here before me and don't see or those who will never see or those who are here for other reasons than me annoy me, irritate me, but I say nothing to them either. I keep on doing my job, and then this becomes destructive in itself...The abstract ideal does not generate the warmth and love necessary for the organizationally minded to love the people with whom he works.<sup>62</sup>

The lack of bonding and mutual respect described by the author of the "Introduction: Semi-Introspective" position paper clearly affected his or her performance as a staffer and also distanced the author from the rest of the newer members, thus indicating the weakening influence of the Beloved Community. The prevalence of infighting, discontent, and distrust described by Waveland participants signifies that all was not well within the organization. SNCC had previously been characterized by a staff bound together by the common goals of brotherhood and fighting for equality. Instead, members openly admitted problems related to personality conflicts, aversion to new members, and also a general lack of togetherness and understanding that had once made the SNCC staff inviting to staffers.

The diminishing presence of the Beloved Community was expressed clearly by both members who spoke out during the factional debates and also by individual members who were concerned about the prevailing loss of unity within SNCC. Although the evidence for the weakening of the Beloved Community existed before the Waveland conference, members wrote of the loss of community in their respective position papers and chose to dialogue about whether SNCC remained a "band of brothers" while together at the retreat. The discussion of the presence of the Beloved Community took several forms, including position papers dealing with the issue directly and through the lens of gender and also commentary at the retreat meetings as well. The references to SNCC unity pointedly questioned whether the prevailing ideology was still present in the organization as it had been in the past years of SNCC's existence. Both members of the hardliner and floater factions acknowledged that the link amongst staffers was not as strong as it had been previously, and retreat participants expressed their divergent views on the status of the community through the papers and other commentary at the retreat. The acknowledgement of inherent deficiencies in the status of the Beloved Community called for reevaluation by SNCC members, however, and a noteworthy suggestion for the salvaging of the community was proffered at Waveland.

Ultimately, Reverend Tom Brown's paper demanded a rigorous examination of the behavior of SNCC members and the consequent need to redefine SNCC's identity and structure or risk organizational breakdown and the eventual failure to execute programs. Brown's position paper called for revisions within SNCC which were far different from the criticisms posed by other members because they combated what Brown believed were changes within the organization that were detrimental, such as the aforementioned discussion of his comments dealing with staff individualism. Brown stated that "today, before SNCC can move any farther, we must change our attitudes, we must bring dedication, honesty and set ourselves on some first principles, for if

not, we will crumble as great countries did and as organizations are doing.”<sup>63</sup> His declaration of the need for a more solid organizational foundation through sweeping changes in SNCC clearly related to his aforementioned questioning of whether SNCC was truly a successful organization after all. At the end of his paper, Brown posited that in order to survive as a civil rights organization, SNCC needed to not only reevaluate its identity but forge a new belief system with the potential to restrict members who, as he noted previously, increasingly were motivated by self interest. Reverend Brown declared,

We can complain about decision making, programs, affiliations, position holdings, and the Black and White issue, but until we know what we are as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and dedicate ourselves to that cause and give due respect, we will never be able to lead, program, and make decisions for people. We will never be able to lead people who have beliefs in something besides themselves when we yet have no beliefs. For when times come that we are not able in our own great selves to solve a problem (and that day will come) we will lose because we have nothing to lean on and in that time the people whom we are fighting with and mocking will see us as we are, a bunch of radical, frustrated, scared, immoral, and selfish individuals.<sup>64</sup>

Reverend Brown’s statement described what he deemed to be a necessary but radical revision of the inherent values and behaviors of staff members in order to ensure the resiliency of the organization. His rather prophetic position paper not only unearthed flaws within SNCC but also demanded that the very attitudes and beliefs of the staffers must be changed or the organization would have had to risk failure from within.

Despite attempts to salvage the Beloved Community, the organizational conflicts and dialogue about the restructuring of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee prevalent at the November 1964 Waveland staff retreat represented a breaking point within the civil rights organization. Although SNCC had been characterized by unity and a close-knit staff comprised of grass-roots reformers leading up to the fall of 1964, personal and administrative issues were present within the group and needed to be rectified. The Waveland retreat, consequently, served as a means through which the SNCC staff attempted to analyze their organization and plan for future activism. Despite the fact that the Waveland retreat served as a medium through which such criticisms were raised about SNCC, the tensions which came to a head at the conference ultimately demonstrated that the element of the Beloved Community once-prevalent within the group died. Jim Forman’s aforementioned desire to maintain unity and foster constructive criticism at the retreat was not satisfied because the Beloved Community was further fractured at the retreat. The hardliner and floater factional debates helped shape the structure debate because of the ideological contention which arose between the two very disparate factions whose ideas about the future organizational and administrative goals of SNCC differed greatly. In addition, clashes between the hardliners and floaters demonstrated that members within Forman’s previously strong “band of brothers” did not uniformly accept one another as activists making a contribution to the goals of the group.

The far-reaching implications of the Waveland staff retreat raised implicit problems and questions dealing with the facets of the structure debate and the ultimate death of the Beloved Community within the organization. When examining the floater and hardliner debate and the ideologies which represented the respective factions, Jim Forman’s supposedly stolid promotion of hardliner sentiment became somewhat precarious. Rather than solely pushing for structure

and outwardly criticizing the floaters from the outset of Waveland in characteristic hardliner fashion, Forman chose instead to promote the maintenance of the Beloved Community for the betterment of the organization. In addition, the actual death of the Beloved Community at Waveland, although clearly evident in primary source material, may very well have been influenced by the artificial nature of the conference itself. Rather than gathering informally and dialoguing about issues within SNCC as staffers had done previously, the Waveland retreat brought together a rather disparate group of participants who voiced their concerns through the written word rather than in a forum conducive to the openness of the Beloved Community. Interestingly, the anonymity of the position papers allowed authors to place their arguments within the context of the structure debate without fear of personal criticism in a gathering of members supposedly unified in the struggle for equality.

Ultimately, the Waveland retreat ended without meeting the initial goal of redefining the structure of SNCC during the course of the conference.<sup>65</sup> SNCC members left Waveland considerably changed by the short retreat because of the intensity and depth of the structural and personal issues which were raised, and it was decided that the organization needed additional future meetings to determine structure.<sup>66</sup> When reflecting on the Waveland retreat, hardliner Cleveland Sellers considered the retreat a success and commented that the Waveland meetings gave staffers a clearer sense of direction in terms of SNCC activism.<sup>67</sup> The Waveland retreat, however, was not a successful attempt at setting forth a new structure upon which SNCC was able to organize successfully. Rather, the conference signified the death of the Beloved Community within SNCC and brought to light the intense personal conflicts within the group which overshadowed any attempts made to become a more efficient group of activists. The fracturing of SNCC at Waveland in terms of disagreement over motivation to participate in the movement, style of activism, and administrative issues left the organization unable to recover and move forward as a cohesive unit in the struggle for civil rights. SNCC, indeed, was altered permanently by the Waveland conference because of the loss of the Beloved Community in an organization once considered a “band of brothers” fighting racial inequality. An anonymous position paper presented at the conference foreshadowed the ultimate death of the Beloved Community within the paper’s discussion of the necessity to examine SNCC’s past programs. The author tellingly stated, “It would be ironic and tragic is [if] SNCC were able to survive outside pressures—beatings, killings terrorism—and choke and strangle on its own size and affluence. [sic]”<sup>68</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> James Forman, “Text of speech delivered at the Waveland staff retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,” 6 November 1964, 3, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, Microfilm Edition (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1982), A:V:19, 0984. [Hereafter cited *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, subgroup:series:file, frame.]

<sup>2</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 141.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-147.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>5</sup> Emily Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989), 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>10</sup> For an introduction to the term “Beloved community,” see Kristin Anderson-Bricker, “‘Triple Jeopardy’: Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975” in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women’s Contemporary Activism*, ed. Kimberly Springer (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 50 and Stoper, 106-107.
- <sup>11</sup> Anderson-Bricker, 50.
- <sup>12</sup> “Staff Meeting,” [1964], 1, *Charles M. Sherrod, Papers 1964-1967*, Microfilm Edition (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, n.d.), Folder 24. [Hereafter cited *Charles Sherrod Papers*, Folder.]
- <sup>13</sup> “Minutes Opening Session” retreat transcripts, 6 November 1964, 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0935. The transcripts of the retreat are an invaluable source of information concerning who participated in the retreat and what issues were discussed in the formal meetings. The transcripts are organized by date order and mostly contained paraphrased dialogue between members at Waveland.
- <sup>14</sup> Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987), 442.
- <sup>15</sup> Ivanhoe Donaldson, “Minutes Opening Session” retreat transcripts, 6 November 1964, 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0935.
- <sup>16</sup> James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1972), 415-416.
- <sup>17</sup> Carson, 140.
- <sup>18</sup> “Memo To All SNCC Staff,” [October 1964], 2, *Charles Sherrod Papers*, Folder 24.
- <sup>19</sup> “Memo To All SNCC Staff,” [October 1964], 1-2, *Charles Sherrod Papers*, Folder 24.
- <sup>20</sup> Carson, 140.
- <sup>21</sup> James Forman, “Text of speech delivered at the staff retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at Waveland, Mississippi,” 6 November 1964, 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0983. Forman’s speech, which was delivered on the opening day of the conference, outlined many of his personal and professional goals for the organization.
- <sup>22</sup> James Forman, “Text of speech delivered at the staff retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at Waveland, Mississippi,” 6 November 1964, 2, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0983.
- <sup>23</sup> Forman, 434.
- <sup>24</sup> James Forman, “Text of speech delivered at the staff retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at Waveland, Mississippi,” 6 November 1964, 2, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0983.
- <sup>25</sup> James Forman, “What is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: ‘A Band of Brothers, A Circle of Trust,’” November 1964, 1-2, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:VIII:282, 0970. This document is Forman’s formal position paper offered at Waveland, and it contains not only a comprehensive history of SNCC but his answers to the questions raised by the October staff memo.
- <sup>26</sup> James Forman, “What is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: ‘A Band of Brothers, A Circle of Trust,’” November 1964, 22, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:VIII:282, 0981.

- 27 James Forman, "Text of speech delivered at the staff retreat of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at Waveland, Mississippi," 6 November 1964, 5, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0985.
- 28 Reverend Tom Brown, "Position Paper," [1964], 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 29 Reverend Tom Brown, "Position Paper," [1964], 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 30 Carson, 137.
- 31 Stoper, 76.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 The terms "hardliner" and "floater" are SNCC jargon defined in Cleveland Sellers with Robert Terrell, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1990), 131-132. They are also described in Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 125.
- 34 Because of the previously stated fact that primarily paid staff members were invited to attend the Waveland retreat, large numbers of floaters were not present at Waveland and consequently generated fewer documents.
- 35 "Freedom High," which is a synonym for "floater," is found in Forman, 422; McAdam, 125.
- 36 McAdam, 125.
- 37 Sellers, 131.
- 38 Stoper, 78-79.
- 39 King, 447.
- 40 John Lewis with Michael D'Oro, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 294.
- 41 Carson, 139.
- 42 King, 442-443.
- 43 Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 204.
- 44 Sellers, 132. In this section of Sellers' autobiography, he describes the conflicts between floaters and hardliners between late 1964-early 1965 and how the two factions became increasingly disparate.
- 45 Carson, 138.
- 46 Forman, 425.
- 47 [Position paper about the goals for Waveland], 2, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 48 McAdam, 125.
- 49 Sellers, 134.
- 50 Forman, 422.

- 51 As mentioned previously, the term “Freedom High,” which is a descriptor of staffers who displayed floater-like behavior, is found in several primary source documents written by SNCC members. One such credible reference is from Forman, 422.
- 52 Sellers, 131.
- 53 Lewis, 294.
- 54 Reverend Tom Brown, “Position Paper,” [1964], 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 55 Reverend Tom Brown, “Position Paper,” [1964], 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 56 “SNCC is a group of organizers,” [1964], 2, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:VIII:282, 1014.
- 57 “Minutes Opening Session” retreat transcripts, 9 November 1964, 26, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0951.
- 58 Sam Shirah, “Staff Meeting Minutes,” 9-11 June 1964, 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:III:I, 0975.
- 59 Marion Barry, “Staff Meeting Minutes,” 9-11 June 1964, 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:III:I, 0975.
- 60 Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, “Minutes Opening Session” retreat transcripts, 9 November 1964, 27, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0951. Smith Robinson’s comments allude to the aforementioned issues with dishonesty and theft among staff members, but her overall message hearkens to the disintegration of trust and unity in SNCC that she had previously experienced.
- 61 [Position paper about the goals for Waveland], [1964], 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 62 “Introduction: Semi-Introspective,” [1964], 2, *Charles Sherrod Papers*, Folder 23.
- 63 Reverend Tom Brown, “Position Paper,” n.d., 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959.
- 64 Reverend Tom Brown, “Position Paper,” [1964], 1-2, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0959-0960.
- 65 “Minutes Opening Session” retreat transcripts, 12 November 1964, 39, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0957.
- 66 “Minutes Opening Session” retreat transcripts, 12 November 1964, 39, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:V:19, 0957.
- 67 Sellers, 115.
- 68 “Some Basic Considerations for the Staff Retreat,” [1964], 1, *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers*, A:III:II, 0062.

## **Haiku**

*Bill Pauly*

the Santa Fe desert

cold after sundown . . .  
mourning Elizabeth

## **Haiku**

*Donna Bauerly*

acequia, acequia  
keening  
for Elizabeth today

Note: Elizabeth lived in Santa Fe near Acequia Madre (Big Ditch). Pronounced *ah-say'-kee-ah*.

Elizabeth Searle Lamb (b. January 22, 1917; d. February 16, 2005, in Santa Fe, NM.) Rev. Raymond Roseliep, Professor Emeritus of Loras College, an outstanding poet from his youth until his death in 1983, called Elizabeth Searle Lamb “The First Lady of American Haiku.” They corresponded and shared poetry for many years.

## **The Seed Took Root**

*Francis C. Lehner, Ph.D.*

In October 1938, Rev. E. A. Fitzgerald, then Dean of Studies at Loras, prepared the soil for a national Catholic academic honor society when he sent a questionnaire on the issue to one hundred and twenty Catholic colleges and universities. Encouraged by the strongly favorable response to his poll, Father Fitzgerald was ready to plant the seed; in April 1939, in an address to the National Catholic Education Association, he reported the results of his probe and talked up the idea of an honor society. The seed took root quickly. A Committee of Founders, consisting of thirty-two prominent educators, was formed, and Father Fitzgerald, elected chairman, appointed three committees: one on constitution, one on name and motto, and one on insignia. In March 1940, a constitutional convention convened in Kansas City. There a provisional one-year constitution was adopted, to be followed by a permanent one, and chapters were granted to 32 schools that had previously applied for membership. Delta Epsilon Sigma had blossomed into being. In recognition of Father Fitzgerald’s generative efforts, Loras College was designated Alpha Chapter.

In the half century since that time, Alpha Chapter has been a vital unit in the society. Over the years several Loras educators have filled national offices. Rev. E. A. Fitzgerald, Rev. F. J. Houlahan, Rev. Norbert C. Barrett, Rev. Clarence W. Friedman, Rev. Robert L. Ferring and Rev. Neil W. Tobin all served as National Secretary-Treasurer. Father Friedman, after he had left Loras to take a position with the NCEA, served as a member of the Executive Committee. After he had left Loras to become pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Dubuque, Rev. Neil Tobin was elected National Vice President in 1982 and President in 1984. From 1963 to 1978 Dr. Frank Lehner edited the *DES Bulletin*. Dr. Donna Bauerly was a member of the Executive Committee from 1995 to 2000.

On the local level, the record is equally impressive. There can be no doubt that over the years members of Alpha Chapter have contributed considerable intellectual and cultural leaven to life

at Loras. More specifically, one can point to the annual DES seminars and to the tutoring service provided by the chapter for students needing academic assistance. In 1985, under the leadership of moderator Dr. Donna Bauerly, the chapter preceded (one would like to say anticipated) the national officers by some five years when it launched a college-wide writing competition in four areas—fiction, essay, non-fiction, and poetry. Each year winners’ works are printed in a journal. **Last year, 2004, students again won two prizes in this National Undergraduate Writing Contest: second place in fiction went to Ryan Lubben for “Movieland,” and Honorable Mention went to Emily Griskavich for her poems, “Matthew in the Kitchen” and “Joseph.”** Last year’s National Student Award medal winner was Rachel Rickertsen. This year’s Delta Epsilon Sigma National Student Award nominee is Kathleen Volk, the 2004-2005 Alpha Chapter President. Only one award is given per Chapter, based on an overall grade point average of 3.9-4.0 and other outstanding achievements. In 2003-2004, Nathan Bahr was the recipient of the National Scholarship and Rachel Rickertsen the recipient of the National Fellowship. Winner of the 2004-2005 Fellowship is Kathleen Volk and for the 2004-2005 Scholarship is Stephanie Theisen. This year’s awards are truly outstanding. Loras College students won the top prizes in the National Delta Epsilon Sigma Writing Contest for both fiction and poetry. They also won an Honorable Mention in non-fiction, the only award given for that category. Jody Iler won first place in fiction for “The Gray Ghost” and Alison Brogan won first place in poetry for “To China,” “My dirty laundry,” and “In the window at the northshore country club.” Amber Gille won Honorable Mention in non-fiction for “For Our Memories’ Sake.” First place winners each receive a prize of \$500. The annual chapter dinner, long a tradition here, not only serves as a function for the induction of new members but in a sense honors all chapter members who attend. Father Fitzgerald’s idea of an honor society to foster intellectual and academic achievement is alive and well at Loras College.

In a composition class many years ago, during a digression on, as I recall, overemphasis on high school sports, a student remarked on the great thrill of winning an important football or basketball game. I asked if it had ever occurred to him that other people might get a similar thrill of achievement from composing a sonnet or writing a short story. He just looked at me. But the entrants in this year’s writing competition, and especially the winners whose work appears in this publication, surely know whereof I speak. Samuel Johnson was wrong when he said, in what must have been a cynical moment, that only a blockhead ever wrote for anything but money. For writers, seeing one’s work in print ranks high among the pleasures of life.

*(Alpha will continue to include Dr. Lehner’s ever-timely article as a tribute to this dedicated DES member who was Editor of the Society’s Journal for 15 years. Each year’s update of winners will be **boldfaced** within the article.)*

## Contest Winners

### LORAS COLLEGE ALPHA CHAPTER WINNERS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL WRITING CONTEST (National Catholic Honor Society)

Year	Contestant	Entry	Category
1992	Emily Meixner	“Remembering Childhood”	Poetry
1993	(no entries this year)		

1994	Anne Finnerty	“Without You”	Poetry
		“At the Kitchen Table”	Informal Prose
1995	Matthew Russell	“Learning to Pray”	
	Mark Evans	“The Last Few Vanishing Inches Between Us”	Poetry
1996	John Ham III	“Age”	Fiction
	Jaci Dunne	“Lessons”	
		“My Vietnam”	
		“This Is Supposed to Be”	Poetry
	Lina Vitkauskas	“Self-Preservation”	Fiction
1997	Lisa Higgs	“When an Angel Smiles”	Informal Prose
	Lisa Higgs	“The Ninth Month”	Poetry
	Robert Kelly	“The Transfiguration of our Savior”	Fiction
1998	Amy Fabricius	“Where Are You Going?”	
		“Where Water Slowly Carves”	
		“Divorce”	Poetry
	Melanie Mausser	“Downtown” (2nd place)	Fiction
	Tricia Behnke	“Your Father Looked Hot In Roller Skates”	Informal Prose
1999	Lora Krogman	“My Juliet”	Poetry
	Catherine Wegman	“Dorothy’s Lake District”	Non-Fiction
	Melanie Mausser	“Unborn Sleep”	Fiction
2000	Kristyn Kuennen	“The life you create on the front lawn”	
		“Office Visit”	Poetry
	Melanie Mausser	“Reveille”	Fiction
	Elizabeth Loebach	“Broken America” (Honorable Mention)	Informal Prose
2001	Katherine Levantahl	“Saturday”	Non-Fiction
	Cressant Swarts	“Grass Fires”	Poetry
	Melanie Mausser	“The Crate” (Honorable Mention)	Fiction
2002	Erich Haught	“Pressures”	Fiction
	Celia Venhuizen	“Mute”	Poetry
	Lacianne Schmidt	“Climbing Out” (Honorable Mention)	Non-Fiction
2003	Rosette Golpashin	“The Night of the Falling Stars”	Non-Fiction
	Ryan Lubben	“The Janitor” (2nd place)	Fiction
	Peggy Lucas	“America’s Bleeding Pilgrim”	
		“In the Land of Blue and Red Doors” (2nd place)	Poetry
2004	Ryan Lubben	“Movieland” (2nd place)	Fiction
	Emily Griskavich	“Matthew in the Kitchen”	
		“Joseph” (Honorable Mention)	Poetry
2005	Jody Iler	“The Gray Ghost”	Fiction
	Alison Brogan	“To China” et. al.	Poetry

\*unless indicated, all winners were 1st place.

**LORAS COLLEGE ALPHA CHAPTER WINNERS OF THE  
UNDERGRADUATE DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS (National Catholic Honor Society)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Fellowship/Scholarship</b>
1992	Matthew Guzzo	Fellowship
1994	Kyle Murray	Scholarship
1995	Kristin Duppong	Fellowship
1996	Rosalyn Juergens	Fellowship
1997	Jennifer Peters	Fellowship
1998	Michelle Ruggaber	Fellowship
1999	Jennifer Gerlach	Fellowship
2000	Scott LeGrand	Fellowship
2000	Elizabeth Rogers	Scholarship
2001	Celia Venhuizen	Fellowship
2002	Maria Alarcon	Scholarship
2003	Tim Cundiff	Scholarship
2003	Laura Becker	Fellowship
2004	Rachel Rickertsen	Fellowship
2004	Nathan Bahr	Scholarship
2005	Kathleen Volk	Fellowship
2005	Stephanie Theisen	Scholarship

**DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL STUDENT AWARD**

(3.9/4.0 GPA and evidence of scholarly research. In the year 1998, the Executive Board decided to award only **one** per institution.)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Winner</b>
1994	Susan Liddiard
	Charles Longo
1995	Regina Doering
	Kristin Duppong
	Doug Fischels
	Patrick Green
	Beth Hill
1996	Karla Manternach
	Kyle Murrary
	Rosalyn Juergens
1997	Matthew Roeckers
	Lisa Gerlach

	Jennifer Peters
	Laura Rusch
1998	Carissa McDonald
1999	Jennifer Gerlach
2000	Teresa Duppong
2001	Elizabeth Rogers
2002	Karen Kuhle
2003	Sara Wieland
2004	Rachel Rickertsen

## Rules for the Contest

1. One submission per person per category.
2. Open to all students attending Loras College.
3. Manuscripts may be submitted in any of four categories: for creative writing (a) poetry, or (b) prose fiction or drama; for expository writing, either (a) informal, personal essays, or (b) scholarly, research-type work. Prose manuscripts: 1,500-5000 words acceptable. Scholarly papers should attach an abstract, include primary sources, and aim at the achievement of some fresh understanding or original insight. Emphasis placed on the quality of writing. Documentation should follow one of the established scholarly methods such as MLA or APA. A long poem should be submitted singly; shorter lyrics may be submitted singly or in groups of two or three.
4. Proposed length: 1-10 pages for prose; 1-3 pages for poems (50-150 lines total).
5. Audience: the paper should be directed toward an educated audience—not one, necessarily, completely knowledgeable in the subject area, but one interested in discovering new ideas.
6. Verification: the paper's facts must be verified by a faculty member of the concerned department (only needed for research abstract). Faculty signature: required on the cover sheet after facts are verified. No signatures needed for other categories.

The annual deadline is February 14. You must submit 1) two typed copies AND 2) a copy of the document in Microsoft Word on either a 3.5-inch IBM formatted disk, CD-ROM, or e-mail attachment. Send to the DES Vice President, designated each year. Direct any questions to Dr. Donna Bauerly, *Alpha* Moderator, donna.bauerly@loras.edu.

## Contributors

Brogan, Alison	Lemont, IL	English: Literature English: Writing
Calvert, Whitney	Pekin, IL	Psychology

Elsbernd, Elizabeth	Postville, IA	English: Literature English: Writing Spanish
Gille, Amber	Shullsburg, WI	English: Writing
Iler, Jody	Dubuque, IA	English: Writing
McNamara, Tom	Evergreen Park, IL	English: Literature English: Writing
Potthoff, Piper	Carroll, IA	Public Relations Spanish
Quint, Abby	Dubuque, IA	Psychology English: Writing
Simon, Barbara	Dubuque, IA	English: Writing
Smith, Quentin	Geneva, IL	English: Literature English: Writing Religious Studies
Strutt, Cheri	McGregor, IA	Media
Torres, Linda	Dubuque, IA	Criminal Justice
Volk, Kathleen	Cascade, IA	English: Literature History
Haiku Francine Banwarth	Dubuque, IA	
Becky Barnhart	Dubuque, IA	
Donna Bauerly	Dubuque, IA	
Bill Pauly	Dubuque, IA	

***Delta Epsilon Sigma*** “It is the mission of a wise person to put things in order.”