Stratus

Journal of Arts and Writing

University of Washington
Professional & Continuing Education
Summer 2014
Edited and with an Introduction by Roxanne Ray

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Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing 2014 University of Washington Professional & Continuing Education

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Journal of Arts and Writing

University of Washington
Professional & Continuing Education

2014

Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing
University of Washington
Professional & Continuing Education

Published by UW Professional & Continuing Education
Box 359485
Seattle, WA 98195-9485
www.pce.uw.edu/art-write-culture.html

Manufactured in the United States
First edition: 2014

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American literature. 2. American photography. 3. Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing. 4. Family – Literature. 5. Nature – Literature. 6. Death – Literature. 7. Nature – images. I. Title: Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing.

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Introduction

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing!*

University of Washington Educational Outreach recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, and in our second century, we continue to celebrate the art and writing of our students. *Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing* promotes the visibility of the talent and efforts of our students, instructors, advisory board members, and staff.

At UW Educational Outreach and Professional & Continuing Education, we offer a wide range of courses and programs in the visual, performing, media, and literary arts, and we add new creative programs every year. New programs are developed in collaboration with our advisory board members, and often arise from suggestions from our students or from the general public. We are always interested in new ways to serve artists and to spur the creativity that is vital to success in today's technology-driven world. We invite your ideas for the future.

As part of our focus on the future, a key element of the Certificate Programs in Arts and Writing at UWEO and PCE is an emphasis on the student's success *after* the completion of our program. We strive to develop self-sufficient artists who can create and market artistic work for years and decades following graduation.

As in the first three volumes of *Stratus*, top graduates from a range of our programs are represented here in word and image. In this fourth edition, these visual and written works are connected by the theme of family and the challenges of endurance. How do we connect in the face of overwhelming force and grief?

Our graduates' work is presented in two sections. First, we creatively explore the challenges of encountering power. Then, we discover strength and tenacity as we struggle to survive and to heal.

We publish *Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing* on an annual basis, and would very much like to hear your thoughts.

—Roxanne Ray, Ph.D.
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A Good Question

By Lyn Coffin
Instructor, Certificate Program in Literary Fiction

When she was 6, a girl asked her mother "Mom, what is poetry?" Her mom smiled and said, "Please eat your breakfast." At 12, on the playground, the girls asked again, and a 10-year-old bully pushed her face in the sand. At 18, she asked a distinguished church elder: He shoved a Bible at her and replied- "Do better, my child, at avoiding damnation." The last time she asked, she was 24: she asked her husband the night they were wed—and when she asked, her husband sighed. He embraced her gently and after

a moment said, "I'll try to say what cannot
be said. I love you so much I don't mind
being foolish... You ask what poetry is—
it is this. It is now. It is us. This warm
night, that moon, this balcony, the scent of
flowers and us in our nakedness-
especially our nakedness... All I
say is old news, though, and I long to make love,
to be deep within you, quiet and moving."
He fell silent and she stood on tiptoe to
kiss him and together they left words
behind them like abandoned rafts. Day followed
day in slow, bright parade and the answer to
her questions rooted itself and grew
within her. Nine months later, she delivered
a son... When her son was 6, he ran downstairs
one morning and asked while he waited at
the table for breakfast, "Mom, what's poetry?"
She smiled and when he was eating, she told him,
"My son, the slide of milk on your tongue and
the warm crumbling of just-baked bread in your mouth,
that is the taste of poetry. The drumming
of your feet as you run down the stairs, that
is the beat of poetry, and there, outside,
that bird in our garden who coasts over grass,
casting a shadow—she and her twin below—
the two together are poetic thought."
Her son raised his head in the middle of
eating. "But mommy, teacher said poetry
rhymes. Is she wrong?" His mother smiled and told him,
"Keep asking good questions. Know that I love you.
And please don't talk when your mouth is full."

Encountering Power

Little Runaway

By Amie Wall
Certificate Program in Photography, 2014


ATLAS

Exposure

By Sandra Guth
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

Since death is certain, but the time of death is uncertain,
what is the most important thing?
—Pema Chodron

In July of 1999, in an isolated community in Yosemite National Park, a young woman named Joie Armstrong was packing for a trip to the Bay Area. She was ferrying luggage from her cabin to her pick-up when she noticed a man standing around outside her house, tossing stones into nearby Crane Creek. She must have first spotted his blue and white International Scout parked by the house, since it didn't belong there and there were no other houses within view.

Joie was an environmental educator in the park and she shared the house with her boyfriend and a colleague, but they weren't home. The stranger approached her and began a brief conversation.

* * *

There is a photo of me, in 1989, sitting on the front steps of the same house—a leaf-green ramshackle affair with a rusty metal roof that everyone called the Greenhouse. My friend Carrie and I lean into each other and smile—two women in our mid-twenties feeling immune to hardship as we faced our first winter without potable water, indoor plumbing or central heat at 4,400 feet in the Sierra Nevada mountains. We worked for the same outdoor school that Joie would work for a decade later, which provided the house. Like Joie, we both had red hair.

The house sat at the edge a secluded meadow filled with daisies and sunlight and fringed with pines. The border between house and meadow was casual. Daylight trickled in the gaps around the window frames and mice stole food from the counter in plain view, despite a rattlesnake that some said lived under the house.

But it didn't matter. This was Yosemite National Park and we lived here. Ours was a home on one of the most revered pieces of earth in North America, and we were just a bunch of kids, ragtag hippies many of us, with no special connections and little money. It was dizzying. Even a billionaire couldn't buy what we had, because it would never be for sale. And it was private. Completely private - you could sunbathe naked outside your house and no one would see you. We felt like gods.

Monday through Friday we led groups of school kids through the forest and up trails that climbed alongside waterfalls, teaching science. On weekends, friends dropped in for brunch in the meadow, which sometimes lasted until dinner or turned into climbing trips or hikes or bike rides. We danced in the meadow, and our exuberance destroyed the grass, which we tried to revive by pouring water on the dust.

When Joie lived there, she was more ambitious; She hauled water from the creek and grew a garden. "I love my garden and living in Yosemite," she wrote a friend. "One of the most beautiful places in the whole wide world." Watering her garden was one of the last things she did before encountering the stranger.

During my summer at the Greenhouse, I rock climbed up Unicorn Peak in a harness and some old Tretorn sneakers with a guy who lived in the campground and whose life's purpose was rock climbing. His hands were wrought hard and brown by sun and granite. I badly wanted hands like that, and the toughness they represented, so I climbed up beside him in his van and headed for the high country.

"How do you feel about exposure?" he asked, glancing up at the spire of Unicorn Peak before we started. I looked at him. Fine? I was more than fine. I was ready for anything, open wide as a poppy ready to drop its petals. I climbed the peak with everything I had and never looked back or down.

Later that summer, I walked ten miles into a canyon of oaks and pictographs, and slept there alone. I followed the courses of Tenaya and Cathedral Creeks over granite bowls and down waterfalls even though there were no trails, and cumulus clouds amassed in towers overhead. Three yellow jackets stung me one afternoon as I slid

down a hillside of Jeffrey pines. I savored the pain. It woke me up, made me feel like the hind leg of a deer – all dense fur, tight skin, strong as a piston – the powerful part of something even bigger.

During Joie's time, she climbed a third of the way up the nearly 3,000 foot vertical wall of El Capitan, spending a night in a hammock suspended by webbing and hardware from the granite. It was only her fifth time climbing. By one account, she practiced beforehand by dangling from a sling attached to a tree. Her mother asked her before she went if she was scared. "Oh yeah!" she is reported to have said. It may have been why she went.

I do know this: Before Joie's boyfriend and housemate left the Greenhouse for a few nights, Joie mentioned to a friend that she was afraid to stay alone. The friend invited Joie to stay at her house, but Joie declined, saying that she wanted to face her fears.

* * *

The stranger asked Joie if she knew that Bigfoot was real. He told her he was going to rob her and showed her a .22. He used it to lead her into the back bedroom—the one that had been mine—and bound her arms and mouth with duct tape. He brought her back outside, forced her into the back seat of his truck and began to drive up the dirt road.

Joie tried to escape. She threw herself out the passenger-side window, scrambled to her feet and bolted through the forest. It was July and the air she breathed surely smelled of dry grass and the leaves of a wild rose called mountain misery. The man got out of the truck, ran after her and caught her. She fought him wildly. But later, the rangers found her body partly submerged in the creek. They found her head 40 feet away.

* * *

Carrie called me with the news. When I hung up the phone in the bright office of my house in Seattle, I tried to feel something other than fear. Anger, grief, sympathy, anything. But my reaction was entirely self-centered. I was paralyzed by anxiety. She could have been me; she even looked like me.

I swiveled my chair to the window. Images came in shards, like footage taken by a camera in the hands of someone falling. A piece of ponderosa pine, a piece of sky, the concrete steps of the house. I could see them all, as if I were Joie. I could feel the stranger's breath on my neck. I felt more and more as though it were I who had rolled out of the car window, yet somehow I had survived. I was still here. But what about the next time. Or the next?

When Carrie called, I had been planning a solo trek to a wild and lonely pass in the North Cascades. I had done many such adventures in the past. But now I changed my trek to a trip through the most popular park service campgrounds in Olympic National Park, where I had worked and knew rangers. I hiked the dense forest, cloaked

by ancient spruce trees that blocked out the sky. I stayed surrounded by families and within earshot of campfire talks by uniformed park personnel.

I lost much of the feeling that the woods and mountains were a refuge for me. The ground had always been holy, and I had stood, not just barefoot, but naked, and trusting of all its magnificence.

When I returned, Carrie told me that she had suspended her opposition to the death penalty. The killer ought to die, she told me, so he couldn't hurt anyone else. To me, the death penalty felt irrelevant. The underlying reality would remain. Joie could be me, someone else could still be him. I could not shake the sense that we are somehow interchangeable.

After the murder, newspapers focused on the background of the killer and the details of the crime. They grasped at the unanswerable "why?", as if that could prevent it from happening again. But that's the wrong question. It keeps us stalled at the moment of death. It keeps us in fear.

The more important question is how to go on living, fully, a without being controlled by fear. We will die, regardless of how we try to manipulate the details.

Early in the summer after Joie died, I went backpacking on Mt. Hood with my boyfriend. The last of the season's snow still covered parts of the trail, and we had to cross creek thundered against its banks. The only way across was over a natural bridge formed by old, crusty snow. As we crept across on it, we could see the water foaming under us through holes in the bridge.

Once on the other side, I lay in my sleeping bag and worried about the return trip. If it stayed warm or if it rained at night, the snow bridge would weaken, and collapse under our weight in the morning. We'd go slamming down the mountain with the spring runoff. My heart beat fast as I looked up at the sky, which seemed to promise rain.

But..it wasn't raining. It occurred to me that in that moment, I was simply lying in a sleeping bag under a still, grey sky. I was not drowning in a creek. That moment offered complete safety. It was the only thing that existed and it held my entire life.

That single, real, moment was more trustworthy than the fear generated by my imagination. My job now was to stop living an imaginary death, and stay connected to what was alive in me. We don't get to control the sky. We don't have to understand it. We either get to live, or not. We either get to live, or to live in fear.

In my Yosemite days, I lived rapturously. Poppies opened again every morning with no possibility that order could become chaos or the sky might close in. In those days, there was no stranger in the meadow. I couldn't see the shadows.

That outlook might seem naive now, something we outgrow, but it doesn't have to be. Yes, as we grow older we can better see the shadows. They've always been there. But even in the shadows, our full vitality is available to us every single moment, if we

don't compromise it by imagining a blade against our neck, or a snow bridge collapsing.

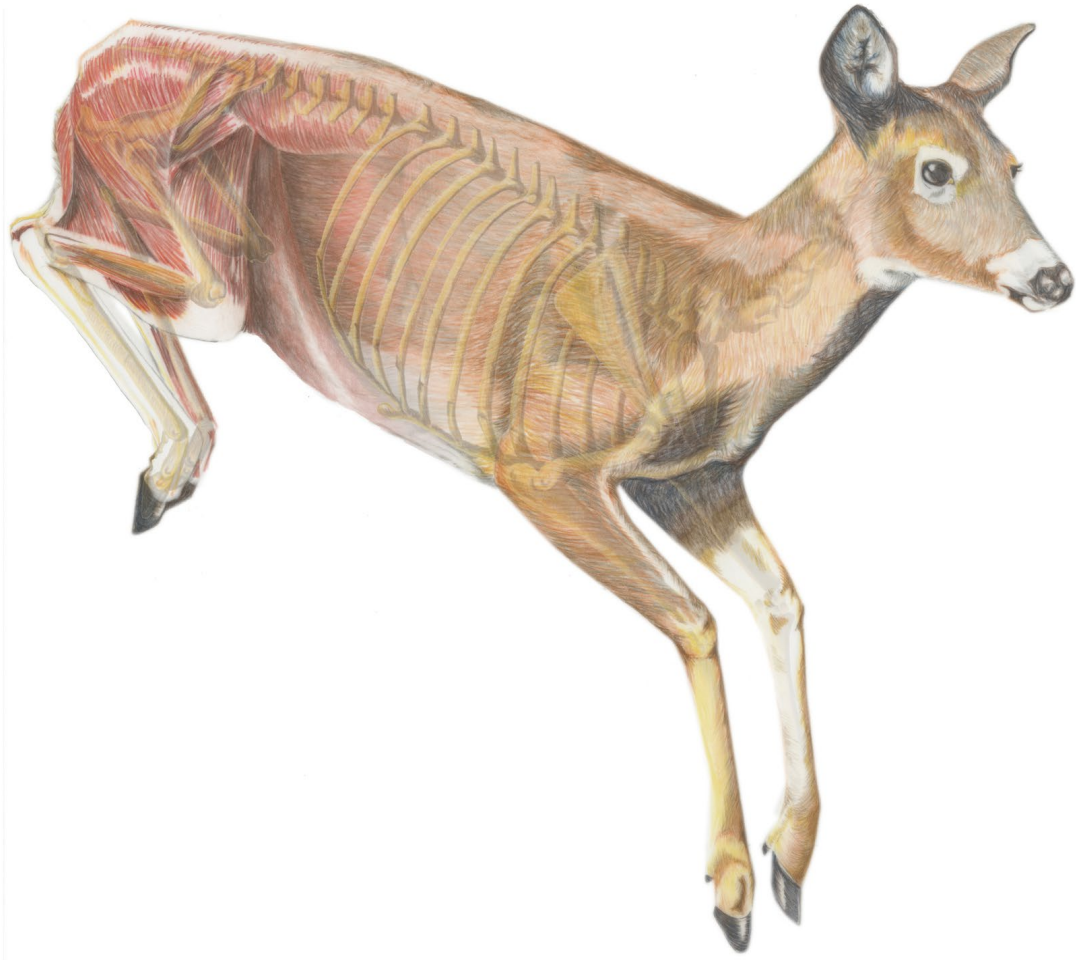
* * *

Shortly after Joie's killer was caught, we found out that he killed three other women near Yosemite five months before Joie. And we learned that the ferocity of her fight caught him off-guard. Police said that he was captured as a direct result of her strength and persistence. In his confession, he stated that she was tough and it surprised him. He panicked and left evidence everywhere. Then he ran, failing for the first time in a year-and-a-half to show up for his job at a park motel. He is now in San Quentin. Joie ensured that she was his last victim.

It is our job to live fully right up until the moment of death. Even in our final moments, we can't know what might be accomplished through our vitality.

Deer

By Katherine Moes
Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2014



Lies

By Laura Linnea Lee
Certificate Program in Popular Fiction, 2012
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction II, 2014

I'm sitting by the river pool with a tabletful of algebra, while the whole freakin' pool area reverbs with the music theme I picked: angry songs. "Hello to Hell / Where I'm all alone today / Hurray for Hell / Perfect place to hide away ..."

I'm scrolling through my contacts list, looking for someone who gives a rip how I feel, who I can call to sound off about what a rat Naomi is. My friends have all turned against me as the lies came out about my father, the claims that he bribed FDA staff to overlook safety issues with Intellaboost. If I call Mother she'll give me a lecture about how yelling at Naomi made things worse. Here at home the servants act all nice to me to my face, but if my father asks them questions, they'll tell him anything he wants to know. I can't think of anyone I'd want to call except...well, Naomi.

Without warning the sound system changes to a minor-key classical thing. I look up fast. There's only one person in the house anymore whose enviro preferences stomp mine.

Sure enough, there's Father coming toward me. I can't read his expression at this

distance. He's way across the natatorium on the far side of the little training pool, where the nanny taught me and George to swim. He has to be looking for me, and I've no clue why. The March evening murk creeps in from the garden through the glass walls and closes around me. I reflexively power down my tablet, even though it has nothing on it but algebra homework.

He's wearing a navy blue pinstripe bespoke suit, which looks really out of place among the pools and potted palm trees. He's carrying a plate, but I can't make out whether it has the crème brulee the butler was supposed to bring me, or a pile of carrots in its place.

I was looking for someone I could talk to, who cares how I feel, and he is the furthest person from that. The only thing I want him to do is go away before he finds anything to be mad at me about, and let me go back to looking for someone who'll listen. He's not my friend and I don't care what he thinks of me.

I glance around for anything I need to hide, but all I brought out here was my tablet. I set it down on the natural stone deck, and hastily fasten a couple buttons of my chiffon blouse. Father likes me to dress right even here inside the house. But this early in spring we still have the pool area roof closed, and it's hotter and moister than even in July. The Madagascar palms love it, but I don't.

"Enviro – use Alice's music preferences," my father says. "No matter how tasteless." There's no hostility in his voice, and my shoulders relax just a little.

Ding! The music changes back to my chosen theme. "The warden's come to welcome me / He's happy that I'm here / And the killers and the cheaters / Are all giving me a glare…."

My father's head jerks toward the speaker cabinet, and then he turns toward me. He's close enough now that I can see his eyes gone wide and a hint of a quiver in his chin.

"Enviro – upbeat station," I yelp. And to my father, "I didn't pick that—it just happened to be playing."

Ding—the music switches to the bouncy strains of Naomi's favorite dance tune. She's the last person I want to think about. "Enviro – electronica station!"

Ding—the sound system cuts to a wistful melody.

My father just stands there looking at the floor, and he never does that. His face doesn't tell me anything at all. I have no clue what to say. I didn't mean to make him more stressed out than he already is. And if he thinks I picked that song on purpose to freak him out…well, one time he threatened to remove the whole river pool, my favorite, if he caught me wearing a too-skimpy one-piece again. This would be way worse.

I think he has more grey hairs than last time I talked to him, a week or so ago. There've been streaks of grey here and there among the brown for a few years, but it

seems like the light patch on the left has gotten bigger, and I don't remember there being one on the right.

He looks at me and nods once. Whew.

The bowl in his hands does have my crème brulee. Whew again. I so do not want to hear a lecture today about how boys would like me better if I weren't so plump. He thinks those three button suits hide his pot belly. And the boys liked me just fine back when the news reports about him were all about his "extraordinary entrepreneurial success" and "the blockbuster IQ enhancement drug Intellaboost." They sure backed away quick, though, when the stories changed to "an expanding criminal investigation."

He hands me the dish of warm custard and sits down on the lounge chair next to mine, sideways, facing me. "How was your day?" He sounds real gentle, like he really wants to know.

"Fine." I set the custard down on the poolside table, trying to guess why he's playing Mr. Nice Guy.

"Don said this evening you were pretty upset."

I look up real fast. "I *wasn't* rude. I just told him—"

He holds up his hand, and I stop. If he knew what I'd like to say to the cook about ratting me out, he'd rinse my mouth with ultra concentrated detergent.

"Take it easy," Father says. "I just want to know what happened to you today."

Well, duh, it's that the entire gossip chain of the school's been totally abuzz over whether Intellaboost really causes increased aggression, what my father knew about it and when, and whether I'm a liar for insisting he didn't do anything wrong. And now even my supposed best friend Naomi's gotten into it.

But I just say, "I'm over it."

"Tell me what the problem was."

"Kids being jerks."

He puts a hand on the arm of my lounge chair. "Was it something to do with me?"

I look at the stone deck, and finger my locket. The round emerald is smooth and cold against my fingers. If I say what happened with Naomi, he's liable to start in telling me how I shoulda handled things differently. And it hurts enough already. But there's another problem…but I shouldn't tell him… but I sorta need to know what he thinks.

"Ms. Davis said I should stop taking Intellaboost." I swallow hard. "She said I was the only one of her students still on it."

He kind of freezes. His eyes narrow and he stares at me, while the river pool keeps babbling behind him.

"I know she's lying," I almost whisper. "But it creeps me out that she can tell I'm taking it."

"As far as I know," Father says very slowly, "you're *not* taking it. Did Ms. Davis say why she thought it was any of her business?"

It takes me a moment to sort out what he's saying. He must know I'm on Intellaboost. He made sure George and I both knew where he kept his supply. And made sure we knew how pleased he was when our grades went up. But he never told me to take it, and he made a point of underlining that it wouldn't actually be legal for me until I was fifteen.

"She just repeated the same B.S. as everybody else." I wish I could take back the word B.S. But his expression doesn't change. His eyes stay wide and his lips tight. I keep talking. "She claimed there's some sort of amorphous connection between Intellaboost and everything from increased hostile takeovers to the awfulness in Pakistan and India. She said because teenagers change so fast, nobody can know what my personality would be like without Intellaboost, but I ought to try going off it and see if I found it easier to be patient." My voice shakes. "And she said because it hasn't been specifically tested on every possible age group, it might not be safe for people who haven't had their fifteenth birthday party."

He pulls a pen from his pocket, glares at it, and wrenches it like he wants to break it in two. "She had no business making insinuations about you." His voice sounds like Venitia growling at someone who's gotten too close to her puppies. He puts the pen back in his pocket, and takes a deep breath. "I've told the staff to alert me if there's anything wrong with your behavior. Just to be sure. They all agree—you act like a 14-year-old. Cranky sometimes and delightful others. Believe me, if there were any signs of something wrong, it wouldn't be your teachers asking about Intellaboost, it would be me."

Tears sting my eyes.

"There's a lot of nonsense going around." He scowls. "There've been paranoid stories about Intellaboost for years. Just because more people are repeating them now doesn't make them any more true."

My shoulders feel just a little lighter. I mean, I knew that already, but it makes me feel better to hear him confirm it.

Only it doesn't tell me what I should do. "But...if she can tell...I mean, if she thinks I'm taking it, could you get in trouble?"

His eyes narrow. And then they soften just a little bit. He's pleased with me for thinking of that.

His gaze goes off into the distance. I wait while he thinks. The river pool burbles its soothing burble. I love that pool—swimming in it, letting it carry me, listening to it gurgle, dipping my fingers in its warm currents, tasting its clean, ionized water. Father had it installed specially for me, a few years ago, just because I asked for it.

"I don't know if you're taking Intellaboost," he says. "I do know I've been very pleased with how well you've done in school. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that your teachers assume you've had help from medication."

I catch my breath. Was that a compliment?

"Your teachers' opinions aren't evidence. And neither are the speculations of the technophobes out there who worry that Intellaboost is going to turn us all into zombies. The only serious side effects are for pregnant women and people with seizure disorders. You don't need to worry about that." He rubs his nose. "You're doing a great job in school and there's nothing you need to change."

Good, 'cause I really don't wanna see what would happen to my grades without the drug. I'm glad I don't have to worry about that. Only...I get this unsettled feeling in my stomach.

I try to form that unease into a question, but he's talking again. "I'm glad you told me what was bothering you so we could get that cleared up. You don't need to worry about all those rumored side effects—they're just rumors."

"Yeah." I'm not sure what to say. In the stone deck there's a pattern that looks like a snake. I stroke its back with my foot.

He puts his hand on the arm of the lounge chair again. "If you have any questions, ask."

"I know all those stories are lies." My voice shakes a bit. "Only...there's so many reports about people who were on it who did bad stuff..."

His lips tighten. "There are a lot of stories." He takes a breath, and continues in a reassuring tone. "I know people keep saying there are some sort of nebulous side effects. But MindCorp studied it more extensively than anybody, and we didn't find anything like that." His voice rises. "Of *course* people who do bad things want someone else to blame."

I lean back, away from him.

"It's okay. It's not you I'm mad at. It's the people who malign Intellaboost, and who slander all my hardworking researchers who developed it and tested its safety."

"But..." I kinda hate to ask, but here he is flat out inviting me to. "...is it okay that it hasn't been studied in people under fifteen?"

"That's just a paperwork issue. It hasn't been specifically tested in people with red hair, either. Our tests showed it was safe. Period."

"But the other studies, the ones that thought they found problems...."

"Were by researchers with an ax to grind." He folds his arms. "Some people resent MindCorp, people who are disappointed with their own achievements and see anyone else's success as a reminder of their shortcomings. They point to every ill-designed study that found some statistically insignificant correlation with aggression or acne or awkwardness. But none of MindCorp's tests found serious problems."

I nod.

"So you understand that it's safe?"

I nod.

"Good." He leans forward. "I need to tell you about something. I have intelligence that *Lurk Magazine* is writing a smear piece about me. And they're plotting to send reporters to your school events, young men posing as visitors from another school, to talk to you and try to get dirt on me."

Oh. So that's what all this niceness is about.

My foot is touching that snake pattern in the deck, right by the wide indentation that looks like a head. I suddenly feel uncomfortable being so close to it, and pull my foot away.

"You need to be very careful what you say to people," Father says. "Especially anyone who you just met, anyone who you don't know well enough to be certain who they are."

The waterfall cascading into the main pool sounds like a distant avalanche, endlessly running towards us.

Father says, "If you say anything about me that sounds bad, it could be taken out of context and used to whip up even more resentment. And that would give the FBI all the more incentive to trump up charges against me."

"I *don't,"* I mutter. I keep my eyes on the deck. "That's *exactly* what everyone's hassling me for. A bunch of kids asked me today about all those stories. I said you were telling the truth. I said all those claims were lies. That's why Naomi is mad at me."

He draws a sharp breath. "Bob's daughter?"

Naomi's father works for him. Chief of Technology, or something like that.

"What happened?" The ice in Father's eyes could freeze every pool we have.

"Naomi went and sided with the jerks that are talking about me." My voice shakes.

"Go on." He puts a hand on the side of the chair back, almost touching me.

"At lunch today there was a group of like ten people who came up to us to tell me off. Said their parents were in trouble for stuff they'd done because of Intellaboost. Fights at home or trouble at work or beating somebody up on the street. I told them blaming Intellaboost was just an excuse." My voice gets louder and quiverier as I speak. "I thought I could count on Naomi to defend me. But instead she said too many people had come forward saying you'd offered them bribes, that they couldn't all be making it up. She said I should admit you were a liar. She said it in front of *everybody."*

His face turns red and he turns and stalks across the pool area. He punches a bougainvillea as he brushes past it, sending a branch full of pink blossoms crashing onto the pool deck. Even though I'm pretty sure it's not me he's mad at, I still feel like running to hide behind the speaker cabinets. Like that would help. If he wanted to punish me for something, I'd have to hide my phone and the crème brulee and my favorite clothes. And tomorrow's dinner. And my calendar with the coolest dances marked in green. And anything else he could take away or change for the worse.

He goes around the diving area, past the waterfall, to the glass wall at the far end

of the room. He stands there looking out at the shadows in the garden. Beyond the arcs of light near the building, it's all dark shapes and looming bushes. Naomi and I used to pretend we could see monsters out there.

Last time I visited my mother I asked her if she thought his personality changed when he started taking Intellaboost. She said, "No, he's always been a jerk."

Which was pretty much how I felt that day. But at the same time I kinda didn't like hearing it from anybody but me or my brother. And besides..."So why did you marry him?"

She got real quiet. And finally said, "He's not a jerk all the time."

When Father turns around and comes back, his face is calm again. He crouches down next to me and puts a hand on the edge of the chair. "Naomi has no right to speak to you like that." His jaw tightens, just for a moment. "I'll call her father."

I want to believe he can fix it for me. That he can make Naomi go back to being my friend.

"I hate hearing that people are giving you a hard time." His voice is even. "It's bad enough that anybody who beats up his wife or torpedoes a negotiation or starts a war thinks he can get a free pass by saying 'Intellaboost made me do it,' and I get the blame. But there's no excuse for taking it out on you."

I nod, and blink real hard.

"And you're absolutely right." His voice rises. "It's all just excuses." He glares at a lounge chair like it had challenged him.

My shoulders tense up like they're trying to turn into armor.

"Everybody knows *I* take it. Your teachers can tell you're taking it. So can George's professors. It's ridiculous for anybody to question that I trust Intellaboost when I let my own children use it."

I nod. And don't move a muscle otherwise.

In the quiet while he lets the air flow out of his indignation, the radio comes to the end of a song, and starts a new one. "Don't tell me where to go / Don't tell me what to know...." Naomi loves this song.

"I'll tell Bob that Naomi's behavior is unacceptable." His voice is quiet again.

"Yeah." Tears fill my eyes. "Tell him to force her to be friends with me. That should work just great."

"If you want me to help you...." He looks down at the floor and bites his lip. "I may be only the *fourth* richest man in the world now, but I'm still her father's boss."

I try to imagine what order he could give Naomi's father that would help. We look at each other, and his shoulders slump. "There must be *something* I can do."

I put my hand on the chair next to his. He wraps his hand around mine, enclosing it in warmth.

I say, "That's what I want."

Little Genius

By Stephani Hemness
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid."—unknown.

Carrying his backpack and a small toy car, Cody* gets off the bus and is excited to be at school. When he arrives in his preschool class, already chatting, he puts his backpack in his cubby and finds his shape—a blue triangle with his picture on it—and Velcros it to the board. He then sits down at the table where he practices writing his name, mainly scribbles, before his teacher hands him scissors and paper to practice cutting. A foam alligator head is taped to the handle of the kid-safe scissors, to help them know which way to hold them. Gradually, more of Cody's classmates arrive, and just like their multi-colored shape board, each child is different from the other. One girl has leg braces and another boy has an electric wheelchair. Each child has some type of developmental delay. They are all students at one of Seattle Public School's developmental preschools.

Had he been born before 1971, Cody's experience would be very different. Before

then, children with special needs were placed into institutions, even as early as age 5. Often parents had no other choice. But there were many parents, like Janet Taggart, who didn't want to send their child away. Parents who wanted their child to have a normal life, in their home with their family. "We had difficulty understanding why they would want their children in an institution." Janet says, "so we were very much anti-institution."

Though some children with disabilities were admitted to the public school system in the 50's and 60's, often that decision was up to the discretion of the principal or the special education director. But for many parents, the answer was no.

"'She can't sit in a chair' was the assessment given to five-year-old Naida Taggart when her mother Janet brought her to school in 1962. 'Yes, I know,' Janet said, 'I want you to teach her.' Even though she knew Naida had a severe form of epilepsy, Janet hoped her slow but growing abilities might be improved in school. Janet and Naida were sent home that day and told not to return."1

So Janet put an ad in the paper. She was contacted by a mother of a daughter with Down Syndrome who was forming a playgroup; which led to the forming of Central School—one of the many church basement schools started in Seattle by families with special needs.

"There was such a long history of institutionalization that parents never had to think about programs. Now we had to start them, find teachers, and money. I just suddenly saw that it wasn't Naida alone any more, that all these kids had to go to school." Said Taggart, "This was a movement. We had it in our minds to go out in the world and create a space for these kids."

Eventually, the basement schools combined in 1965 to form Northwest Center School, a parent run organization for disabled children and adults. The Mother's Guild had over 80 members. "It was the 60's and women started speaking out. Women in those days were treated like they were "mentally retarded." Said mother Katie Dolan.

"But mothers across the country who didn't have programs for their children with disabilities were starting their own." She adds. "They ran them, furnished them, and they found volunteers to teach. I mean these mothers were tough and they got organized. Rather than struggle every day to keep our children in programs we began to look at legislation that could help."

Dolan, along with Taggart and two other mothers, Cecile Lindquist and Evelyn Chapman, took the issue to the state capitol. "We began the process of writing the legislation. It went through many drafts." Said Lindquist. After recruiting two University of Washington law students for research, the mothers started meeting

1 Schwartzenberg, S. (2005). About Schools. *Becoming Citizens: Family Life and the Politics of Disability* (). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

regularly. "We met every week for two years. We named our committee Education for All."

The state constitution guarantees all children the right to a public education. "You cannot be denied the right to something that someone else has." Lindquist says, "So in essence it was a civil rights issue."

"What we now know as a civil right, or the right to an education really means that no child will be rejected, as ours had." Says Chapman.

The Education for All Act passed in 1971. The mothers were invited to D.C. to help in the drafting of the federal law of the same name. By the time the state law reached implementation in 1973, many of their children were too old to benefit from a public education. But these mothers did this not just for their own children, but for the greater good of everyone. "Because we had the children who had no other place to go." Said Taggart.

Now, children born with special needs not only have access to school at an early age, they have a swarm of professional adults to aid and support them with speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy, to name a few. Thanks to Taggart and the other mothers, children with disabilities have so much more opportunity than their own children ever had.

As I sat with the Seattle preschoolers during circle time, I was blown away by their abilities. Not only were these students able to sit through a half-hour circle, but they were actually participating with enthusiasm. The teacher went around the circle and asked each child what they thought the weather was like that day, cloudy or sunny? Each kid would use words and sign language for their answer, and the teacher would tally the answers with little toy bears. Without being asked, a girl got up to count each bear. Rather than interrupt her or ask her to sit back down, her teacher allowed her the freedom to count the dozen bears. I was impressed not because my expectations were low, but because what I saw in those kids behavior was even more impressive than a lot of "typical" kids I had ever worked with.

I had worked with Cody for two years, as a teacher at Northwest Center Kids, where he spent his afternoons in what is called an "inclusive" school, where typically developed children and special needs children were together in the same room doing the same things. This takes Education for All to a whole new level. If special needs children are going to grow up to participate in society, then that practice must start in the classroom, as with any child.

As a teacher, you're not supposed to have favorites, but sometimes you'll find that there are kids you have a stronger bond with. For me, that was Cody. He had a soft, high-pitched voice and big brown eyes even more accentuated by his glasses. When Cody first enrolled as a toddler, he could not walk or even lift his head from the floor. Now he loves to run, play with cars, and read books. It was amazing to watch him

grow and learn.

I will never forget when he first said my name. Cody has a strong speech impediment. He loved to talk, but it was very difficult to understand what he was saying. But after two years, his speech gradually got better. Then one day, rather than coming up to me to get my attention, he yelled in his high voice "Ste-pha-ni! Ste-pha-ni!" I remember it not just as a milestone for him, but for me. I realized that Cody is a lot like a typical five-year-old. He just wanted to build a sandcastle with me, and he was able, like his peers, to ask me with his words.

It's hard to imagine that children were once labeled "mongoloid," "spastic" or even "infantile schizophrenic." The term "retarded" is no longer politically correct. The focus has shifted from "handicap" and disability towards ability and "neurodiversity." I wonder what people will be labeled in another fifty years, if anything?

The more I worked in an inclusive environment, the more "special needs" became blurred. It was not always clear which children were "special needs" and which were "typical." They all have unique needs, but they also share many of the same behaviors and abilities. I see so many different kinds of intelligence: The kids who can run and climb, the kids who can draw, the kids who can count, the kids who can speak, and the kids who are kind. There are sensitive boys, and determined girls. They all have abilities. They are all special.

I'm Busy

By Machell Collier
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

"If you're bored, I'll give you something to do." My mom used to say this when I was a kid. Her threat of chores silenced my whines of boredom and I found anything to keep myself busy.

Ah, to have the chance to be bored again; to lie in a hammock and listen to a breeze flutter through tree leaves on a warm afternoon. Would I only twiddle my thumbs?

Maybe it's simply normal human behavior to do. But when did to-do lists, time management and waves of guilt for non-productivity harness so much of my attention and energy? When I ask my friends, "How's it going?," common responses are "Great, I'm really busy, crazy busy; I'm stressed out, saturated; It's too much." I wonder if the meaning of productivity has somehow stumbled onto a fatal racetrack, where it loops around to a dizzy velocity while reaching frantic for giant carrots and teetering toward a crash and burn.

I have an insatiable drive to be productive. Balancing 'busy' with concentration

and efficiency is my method and even a minimal level of output is my goal. At the end of a day, however, if my to-dos have not diminished, I feel stressed/unaccomplished, angry/wasteful, worthless/lazy and definitely don't want to share any of my 'not doing' with my busy and producing friends, peers and family.

But maybe they would understand. Maybe we are all caught in an unfocused culture struggling toward the salvation of productivity.

Inattention is one of the primary symptoms of a chronic mental health condition that affects millions of children and adults in the United States, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). And those diagnoses have been on the rise. According to prescription provider, Express Scripts, studies showed a 36 percent increase between 2008 and 2012 in the number of Americans using medication to treat ADHD. But, beyond legal prescriptions, the 'medication' is also widespread on college campuses and in the professional workplace. The trafficked ADHD drugs are not a treatment for a diagnosed disorder, but a resource for enhanced performance, productivity and focus.

Maybe I just need to focus, too.

A quick search for 'productivity' at the digital bookstore, Amazon.com, gave me some non-medicated direction with up to 100 pages of results. The titles from the first 10 pages were mostly 'How To' e-books published in 2014, all under the umbrella of productivity; how to: get more done in less time, achieve success, master time management, take action, end laziness, outperform the norm, supercharge-maximize-boost, overcome burn out and work faster.

Surfacing from the flood of sub-titles, I felt that I had a serious problem. If I could not overcome procrastination, concentrate harder and become a 'Productivity Ninja,' I would never be a successful person and would simply flounder in my own wasted space.

With an e-stack of self-help books to improve productivity, an increase of diagnoses and legal medications for a disorder that includes inattentiveness, and a thriving black market for the 'focus' drugs to give people the concentration and performance edge at school and the workplace, I have to wonder what generates this pressure to focus in order to produce at a greater, faster speed. Achievement, recognition, and wealth are some probable motivators.

I hope that in the U.S., it is still okay just to be human instead of 'hyper-focused super-juiced' human. Is our culture perpetuating the mounting speeds, standards and expectations?

I recently worked and lived in Belgium for a few years. In downtown Brussels, I would have to walk for 20 minutes from my office to get to a coffee shop that made steamed lattes 'to-go' (or 'take-away' if you want to be European about it). Coffee shops were called cafes, where people would sit down and stay awhile to have their espresso or cafe au lait. Coffee time appeared to be social time, a break from work or

the day's activities. For me, this was culture shock.

I had arrived in Brussels from Seattle, Washington where I had lived for the morning or afternoon latte that I would order 'to-go,' speed walk back to my desk, chug half of the nectar, then type furiously as I rode the caffeine wave determined to finish just one more report.

Since my time in Belgium, I have made my way back to Seattle and the coffee shops on every corner. This past Friday morning, in fact, I stopped by a local coffee shop. It buzzed with people taking cups to go and others who stayed and sat, fused to digital devices. No illegal focus meds for sale over-the-counter here, but the standby triple shots were in high demand. Coffee caffeine, not to just wake up, but to wake up and get to doing, making the most of precious time. After the barrels of espresso and drip I washed through my system daily for too many years, I can't drink caffeinated coffee anymore. My heart palpitates just thinking about those shots that always helped me beat deadlines and pound out page after page. So, now I settle for a weak tea, or three.

But maybe productivity is not just about an American's relationship with coffee and caffeine. Recently, I hopped on the morning commuter bus to downtown Seattle, every seat occupied with Androids ThinkPads tablets iPads iPhones gizmos gadgets, and earbuds; bowed heads, glazed eyes, scrolling reading playing posting, and plugged in.

Apps manage a person's day; electronic appointment books schedule tasks to the minute; programs organize time and information; electronic cigarettes even improve the bottom line. The continuing surge of technology cleans up the wastes of time, streamlines effort and smooths any wrinkles of inefficiency. But distraction can remain. When I lose focus of the carrot, the output line graph takes a nose dive.

So I get distracted. Doesn't that keep me human?

I attempt to stretch most moments, packing them in with multiple projects, to be productive, to earn money. But to participate and keep up with the current flow of our culture, is it imperative to enhance myself with meds or extra doses of the latest natural stimulant? From my office work experience, once elevated productivity levels (for an individual as well as a group) becomes normal, it becomes expected and the new standard. Then, more has to be done to surpass the now 'minimum' standard to achieve recognition and success.

What is the culture cost of this building block approach to productivity measurement? Is it an unavoidable evolution to machine behavior, sacrificing health and human interaction to produce to the capacity of a digital chip?

Maybe we're running out of time as a species and fear of the wasteland-apocalypse and extinction propels us to move faster and do more. Maybe productivity is a learned behavior and a fed addiction exploited and manipulated by a profit driven system. Maybe on some subconscious level we remember that if we are not busy, we might be bored.

On a Tuesday evening, a birthday gift card brings me to a Seattle spa that offers hour sessions in sensory deprivation tanks, otherwise known as isolation or float tanks. Bright orange earplugs fit snug in my ears. And I float in 10 inches of skin temperature salt water. Sight, sound and smell have been turned off as I hover weightless and disconnected from the physical world. But my mind continues.

One hour to float, to not do. And I am not bored.

Grass Between the Stones

By Mariana Jasso
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2014

Grandma says an eleven-year-old should know better.

Her voice is getting louder again. Why do old people think they need to shout through the telephone? She says kids are growing up at a younger age now. And that's the problem with Caty. "Agrandados" It's the third time she says that. The more I think about it, the more I think she is wrong.

The wallpaper color on these living room walls looks different. So does the sofa. They look colder. No, greener. I wonder if Grandma has been remodeling again or if it's just that I've never been here at 4pm on a Wednesday.

She says she didn't even know what sex was until she was eighteen and about to get married. Eighteen. I'm almost fourteen. I don't feel grown up. What does Grandma think growing up means?

My throat is parched but I shouldn't risk walking to the kitchen. Grandma will hang up the phone if I do. She'll sigh and squeeze my arm thinking that she's being gentle, soothing. She'll leave before I get a chance to see her cry. I really should drink

something, though.

I just don't think Grandma's ever really talked to an eleven-year-old. Not the way you're supposed to. Caty doesn't even realize what she did. I know she doesn't. I can tell.

A while ago a boy in my class, Lucas, got up from his desk and walked to the chalkboard. The teacher didn't even say anything because Lucas was so quiet about it. He picked up an eraser and threw it straight at Pablo. Hit him between the eyes and left a giant chalky square in the middle of his face. Everyone laughed. We all made fun of Pablo and the yellow powder covering his eyebrows and eyelashes.

I wish I'd brought my pink thermos. I left it right there on the kitchen counter. It has three-day-old tamarind water in it.

I can imagine how Caty's classmates reacted to what she did. Even though I never imagined this coming from my sister.

I know what they say about kids like that after stuff like this happens. I know that much.

Everyone laughs at first. We laugh at the chalk. I did.

But after the laughter is over we don't want to admit that we are mean, too.

There's got to be something wrong with Lucas, right? With Caty? I guess that's what her classmates think.

It's funny but it's not normal-funny. It's strange, they probably say. She's very, very strange.

It's not normal, especially for a girl, to cut another girl's braid and then dip it in strawberry yogurt. She said she did that because Mom never braided her hair and she was jealous. But I'm sure that's not what the other kids think it was.

It's not normal, especially for an eleven-year-old girl to take a boy's wet underpants from out of his backpack and hold them up while standing on her desk yelling "He peed his pants! He peed his pants!"

This last thing, though, that was definitely not normal. The lies she told and the words she used, I bet that wasn't funny anymore. If Grandma didn't need to know about it until she was eighteen why would an eleven-year-old? That's why Grandma is concerned.

They don't tell me what they say about Caty, I might get hurt. Or I could just discredit their rumors. Give them nothing more to talk about.

I know what the gossip is anyway. I can imagine it. The kids probably repeat their parent's words. She's "acting up". They have "family issues". Poor family. Poor kids. She's been exposed to too much. R-rated movies and The Simpsons.

They probably say there's no discipline at home or that parents are rarely around. Children need parents. They probably say that my parents don't go to church. That they must be separated or getting divorced or going through a rough patch. Except

rough patches aren't normal and they probably mean your parents are too distracted and they don't care about you anymore.

They'll say my mother is absent. She never helps out with bake sales. She's always late for carpool and she sends us to school with our lunch in plastic grocery bags.

They'll say my father spends too much time at work. And there's probably a *reason* for that if you know what I'm saying. I know kids understand more than their parents think they do.

Maybe they'll say something about me.

"No, no, no, no! What will become of this girl? I don't even want to think about it. A psychiatrist?" She's talking about Caty as if she weren't her granddaughter. Because how would she know what goes on in our house. Because there's only so much she can control.

She worries and she prays and she worries and she prays and she lights candles at the church every Monday morning.

I can't feel my tongue anymore I'm so thirsty. My thermos tamarind water is probably sour and Grandma never has any lemonade. All there ever is, is water that tastes like old tree leaves and iron, coffee and diet coke. It's all corrosive like waterfalls on dry sand. And it hurts your throat.

Grandma says we're being raised too quickly with too much freedom and not enough rules. Even the way my parents are handling it now. Whatever happened to a good old-fashioned spanking or soap scrub to the mouth? After what Caty said?

Her kids never did anything like this, she says, even though I know, because my father once told me, that Uncle Ale would steal his friend's land turtles. He had them living in a wide mop bucket in his closet until they grew too big and then he'd set them free in the empty lot beside their house. Every time his friend would get a new one he'd steal it again.

Next Wednesday I'll be back here again so I must make a note about not forgetting to bring headphones and a book.

Grandma's voice is getting louder. Angrier.

"She's insane! Insane! And she's driving those kids insane too." A frustrated yell. Stifled but high-pitched.

She quiets down again.

I hate it when she talks about my mother. Is it wrong to be out while your children are eating prepackaged sandwiches for dinner by themselves? Maybe it is, I don't know. I mostly just want some silence so I can listen to the TV.

The kids in my class complain about how much their parents intrude. How they're forced to go to the movies on Sunday nights and to keep the doors to their rooms open always. They pick them up from every single birthday party and videotape the awards ceremony at the end of the school year. It's *so* annoying.

Wednesdays will be when Caty sees her doctor and Dad thinks it might be hard for me, so I should be with family. At Grandma's.

Mom said I should try to talk to Caty. Caty might need me.

Caty says she doesn't know what's supposed to happen because all she and this guy they call a doctor do is solve puzzles and quizzes and just talk. There are no shots or stethoscopes or lollipops. She says his office looks like an indoor playground and that she is way too old for playgrounds. She says it is ruining her week off from school. She thinks she's on vacation. I hope the doctor can help her, change, or something.

It's fifteen minutes past five so it must be our minivan that I hear coming down the street It slows down. Stops on the curb in front of the house. It honks a couple of times. Grandma whispers a few more words and then "Let us pray that that be the case." She hangs up the phone.

I walk up to the front window. I can only see the right half of my mother's face in the passenger seat. I see my father's hand come up to my mother's shoulder. His head comes into view as he leans forward to look at the house. His lips are tightened.

I turn back to grab my things. My grandmother comes out of the kitchen to say goodbye. Her hands are trembling and her lips are tightened in the exact same way as my father's.

She grabs me. Hugs me into her chest. She is crying again. I hate it when she does this. She plants a big kiss on my forehead and pushes my shoulders away. She won't look me in the eye. She has red nail polish.

"Okay, sweetheart. Perfect. Off you go. You'll be fine. I love you." She squeezes my arm a couple of more times. It hurts a little. She goes back into the kitchen.

I grab my backpack by one of its straps.

I open and close the door, softly, so I don't make a sound.

I take the old stone path through the front garden and back to the minivan.

On my tiptoes.

Careful not to step on the wide patches of grass between the stones.

The Phone Call

By Peter Wise
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2013
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2014

The phone rang early in the morning while we were still asleep at the beach house. The sound of the phone at that hour made me nostalgic for my parents. They always called before the sun was up, eager to share news or some plan for the future, forgetting the three-hour time difference between us.

My wife picked up the phone this time and it was our daughter, saying in a rush, "Don't worry Mom, I'm okay." I'd had a bad night because of a lingering cold so my wife took the call out to the living room, but I couldn't fall back to sleep. The silence from the other room meant our daughter was doing all the talking. The bad calls are always the ones where my wife is silent.

I pulled on my pants and joined her. The cat was already asleep on her lap. Outside, a flock of sharp-faced mergansers landed on the water with discrete splashes. The tinny voice of our daughter came out of the phone as it rested against my wife's ear. I silently asked a question by making a thumb's up sign, but she responded

ambivalently, dropping one shoulder and then the next. She gestured for me to bring her a pencil and a piece of paper, and I did. I got the coffee started.

My wife waved a piece of white paper in the air. I walked over and read what she'd written. Car accident. Our daughter kept talking and my wife listened. Last night we watched a medical drama on television, and at the end, the villain hung on to life in the ICU with tubes up his nose and his limbs cantilevered in odd directions. Using just his eyes, he tried to reveal his secret to the show's hero.

Outside, the mergansers all at once dove underwater. The wind-blown surface quickly repaired itself, removing all evidence of the birds. My wife began to talk, calmly uttering words of solace and reassurance, giving our daughter a chance to catch her breath. The ducks popped out of the water, one after the other, until 20 or more floated together.

My wife said a few parting words and hung up the phone. She summarized the call. Our daughter had pulled out of a parking lot after a late dinner. The young man was going too fast. She never saw his headlights and thinks he may have forgotten to turn them on. She was hit from behind. Her rear bumper is hanging down and a few taillights are broken. Yes, he stopped, and he has insurance. Just a kid. She was able to drive her car home.

But, said my wife, our daughter turned her head when she heard his car skid. The impact snapped her head forward at an odd angle. A young kid, racing along a city street, recklessly plants a seed of pain. I wonder if years from now she'll feel the pain growing, when she twists her neck to answer the bedside phone, when it's us making the early-morning calls, bringing fresh news from far away.

The Sex Was Pretty Good, Too

By Christopher Ray
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2013

There is a science to the song of the Cicada. Two ribbed tymbals, drum-like membranes, expand and contract, creating a pop. Multiplied 400 times a second and amplified in a hollow abdomen, this popping can soar to 100 decibels, as loud as a gas mower, which Cicadas occasionally attack, mistaking it for a rival. Only males, searching for a mate, create this sound; females respond with a more demure flicking of their wings.

Athens spreads out from horizon to horizon like a panoramic model at the National Museum. A gauzy haze of smog softens the edges. Beyond the city tiny ships sail in and out of the Port of Piraeus. From here you can easily trace your path up the mountain. Starting in the Plaka, through the National Garden, past the Parliament, across the busy Vassilissis Sofias Avenue, catching the funicular at the end of Ploutarchou Street for the final, steep climb to the top of Lycabettus Hill.

The height creates an illusion of looking into the past. The same feeling you get looking at the stars and realizing the light you see left millions of years ago from

worlds long dead.

A grassy, lemony smell drifts up from the trees on the hillside. A small plate of color sits on the table untouched: red tomatoes, black olives, white feta, green cucumbers, apple wedges browning from the warm air. The Ouzo turns a milky white when you add cold water. The strange first licorice taste is sharp enough you stretch your jaw wide as it slides down your throat. From the trees below the incessant staccato clacking of a cicada drowns out everything but the pure ache of longing.

According to the Greeks, the cicada did not always sing a melancholy song. It all started when Eos met Tithonus and they fell in love.

* * *

Eos, Goddess of Dawn, held a high profile position in the Olympian administration, not one of the 12, but still, an immortal Titan. She rose early every morning, dressed in a saffron robe woven from fresh flowers and mounted her chariot. She thrilled at the raw energy of her powerful horses, Lampus and Phaeton, as they flew to Olympia where she flung open the gates of heaven and announced the coming of Helios, the sun--a new day.

The rosy colored light emanating from her fingertips blinded all in her presence. Her white-feathered wings drove men crazy with desire. For a few moments every day the universe celebrated her beauty. Worshipped her, wrote poems about her, sang about her. Loved her.

The job was demanding, but it suited her.

But when Helios arrived it all changed. With his magnificent four-horse chariot, powerful shoulders and radiant blond hair he brought daylight and energy for the work of the world. Everyone forgot the dawn.

In the beginning she travelled dutifully alongside Helios with practiced wave, wearing her best parade smile. But it was boring. Worse, no one paid any attention to her, could no longer even see her!

She began to explore her options.

Eos roamed the earth searching for a diversion to fill the time between dawns. She discovered what other gods already knew: mortals were better lovers. More grateful; more attentive. She searched the cities and towns for men, her beauty disguised by a simple chiton and veil, looking for someone to worship her, someone beautiful enough to deserve her, grateful enough to ceaselessly praise her.

* * *

Tithonus was born a PRINCE—son of Laomedon, King of Troy. His mother was Strymo, a water nymph. The city of Troy was one of those places where a man (if he were king) could sleep with a water nymph. Apparently water nymphs make better

lovers than they do mothers and so Tithonus grew up motherless, nurtured by his father's stories and haunted by dreams of endless pools of crystal water.

Tithonus attended to his duties of state with a patient intensity. He listened closely; decided carefully. The palace loved him, but even those closest to him could not long hold the gaze of his gray eyes, flecked with gold, peering from drooping lids and turning every expression sad. There were times when the dreams of wandering endlessly through the land of water pools grew too intense. He would set aside his royal robes, retrieve the lyre resting by the entrance and head to where philosophers and poets gathered. He spent those nights, dusk to dawn, singing and drinking and dancing.

He became known as the song-stitcher, a poet-king. When he sang it felt as if he stood somewhere on an edge and blind, feeling for something out of reach. The songs flowed like a river and like a river, never returned. After such nights his wife sent a servant to bring him home, where he slept the day away dreaming of a conversation as deep as the pools of water.

* * *

Eos was walking Troy's steep, narrow, stone alleys, her search for an acolyte lover taking her deep into the heart of the city, when she heard a voice so beautiful she collapsed against the wall. Frozen in space and time, unable to move or think, she could only listen.

That night the song-stitcher wove a song about the dawn and Dawn wept.

She stumbled around the corner, using the wall for balance until she reached an open door. Low platforms, covered with thick, colorful carpets lined the walls of a square room. Men propped up against one another or lying face down, sleeping or unconscious, covered the carpets. A servant stretched across the doorway stole sleep from his drunken master. In the corner a charcoal brazier, stirred by a breeze from the window, glowed red. Tithonus sat against the far wall, playing the lyre. Eos crawled onto the platform and hugged her knees to her chest like a little girl. When the song ended she slid a foot forward until it rested next to his, just touching, an exchange of energy visible in the faint light. He set the lyre aside. They talked. Beneath the simple gown her bound wings struggled to free themselves. Tithonus felt like he had fallen headfirst into his dream.

A lot was said later about Eos being a vain nymphomaniac who kidnapped Tithonus and spirited him away to her palace where she ravished him. No question Eos was capable of violence to get what she wanted, but the truth is more complicated: it started with a foot sliding a few inches and a long talk in a room full of drunks.

She closed the deal with a promise. She promised to freeze the moment of their meeting forever. Youth, beauty, conversation, love. Forever.

Tithonus gave up everything he knew for everything he wanted. A glimpse of eternity, impossible to know how it would turn out. Like a road briefly running alongside a river while unseen around the bend the two diverge, never to meet again. Sometimes we decide, sometimes it is decided for us. There is very little difference; we live the consequences. Would Tithonus have chosen a different path if he could have seen his life spread before him like a map from high atop Lycabettus Hill? Would he have said no? Retreated to the comfort of his wife and family--to sing, to grow old among friends?

And what about Eos--how did she view it? How do the gods view anything? They certainly seem to have a great capacity to complicate. If they know more than mortals it is hard to explain their ceaseless experimentation.

* * *

In the end, Tithonus willingly joined Eos in her palace by the river Oceanus. During the afternoons they lounged in the garden shaded beneath cool trees or walked among terraced reflecting pools. Always they talked. About lightness. How it felt to dance between night and day. About heaviness. How it felt to walk the ground held by a force you cannot see. Intoxicated by words. They found something modern Greeks call kefi. A slow, dreamy state brought on by drinking, eating, singing, dancing with those you love. For these two kefi was a dance of words. The sex was pretty good, too.

Despite being more tired than usual, the light that shone from her fingertips each morning was the brightest it had ever been. She no longer wandered the earth after announcing the day. She rushed home to spend the days talking and the long, liquid nights making love.

On one occasion when Eos returned from a trip to Olympus, Tithonus sensed something was off. She refused to talk about it. He pressed. They argued. The truth came out: all-powerful Zeus had terminated her ability to turn men into gods. Tithonus would age, would die--like all mortals.

But Eos was nothing if not persistent. She made trip after humiliating trip to beg Zeus to grant eternal life for her lover. She hounded until he relented. By divine decree Tithonus would live forever.

Balance was restored--wholeness and peace in the palace. But it didn't last long. What does? Something unexpected happened.

Tithonus began to age.

Eos had missed a key clause in her petition to Zeus. She asked for eternal life--not eternal youth. Tithonus would never die, but would never stop aging. Zeus answered the prayer, but not the desire. These Greek gods specialized in granting everything but what you actually wanted.

At first it was only a slight decline in energy and small wrinkles around the eyes

that made them droop even more. Eos didn't mind because they could still talk. But it got worse. As time passed, Tithonus began to dry out. His body turned into a fragile shell of desiccated skin. He lost the use of his legs and had to drag his dried husk of a body around by his arms.

His voice changed; the honey smoothness turned raspy. The beautiful words gone. The only thing left was a pleading insistence. During the day, Tithonus made the palace almost uninhabitable with loud moaning as he begged for death.

This life was intolerable, but Eos could not let him go. Zeus may have limited her options, but she was still a goddess. She built a special room next to her bedchamber with a huge open window facing east. She transformed Tihtonus into a cicada and locked him inside behind silver doors.

* * *

It is difficult to locate the particular cicada on the hill because the low pitch sound carries so well. Despite the energetic singing the one you hear will die within weeks. He has spent years underground surviving on sap from tree roots before tunneling to the surface for a short, noisy life. When he emerges he is soft and green, but soon sheds his outer skin leaving behind a brown shell like a snakeskin. In the summer you see the fragile, hollow husks discarded on the ground. Freed from his cocoon, with four delicate wings held tent-like above his darkened body, he surveys the world through prominent red eyes. He starts singing immediately, desperate to find a mate.

* * *

The palace was now a prison with an open window. Tithonus had wings. He vowed to leave, to fly to the life he had before. But there was no life to return to; everything he knew was gone. Like the stars, burnt out long ago.

Eos began to wander again collecting lovers like seashells. Clitus, Kephalos, Hyginus, and Ganymede. Young men all, and beautiful. This was the beginning of the legend. Some say Aphrodite cursed Eos because of an affair with Ares, but for whatever reason she could not live without a lover.

The nights were brutal. Eos brought men to her bed knowing Tithonus, locked behind the silver doors, could hear sounds of their lovemaking. He wanted to drown the noise with a song, but he could only sit and listen. Every night he vowed would be his last in the palace, but every morning found him at the window watching for dawn. In the afternoons his singing voice returned. And every afternoon Eos sat alone in the garden and listened.

Cotton Tail

By Nora Sherwood

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2014

Confession

By Susan Summers
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2014

I'm sitting in the waiting room leafing through the newspaper, and I glance over at this woman in the next chair, kind of slumped over, staring at her purse in her lap. And I'm thinking, Jeez, she looks familiar. And then it's like when you notice your reflection in a plate glass window. All of a sudden you recognize, that poor son-of-a-bitch with the stomach and his hands in his pockets walking down the street, is you. And you don't like what you see necessarily. And this woman who looks familiar to me? Christ Almighty. It's Rosalind. It's my wife.

Rosalind hasn't been out of the state hospital that long, and it's the first time out of the house. Jesus, it's hard. I mean my mom helps out with the meals and the kids. And she wasn't crazy about Rosalind to begin with.

It's like Rosalind isn't all there. I don't mean to speak poorly of her, but she's been gone a year, and she's diminished. Like a twig. Like she'll snap. The kids steer clear. I mean a year is a long time for kids to be without their mother. I don't mean to criticize her.

Dr. Steele attends the same Mass at Saint Anthony's as we do, so I've seen him from the church. Dr. Steele is one of those gentlemen looking guys. Tall, kind of stately with that kind of wavy hair that turns silver. More Episcopalian looking than Catholic, but he seems okay to me.

* * *

They call our names, and take us to his office. The office with his desk and the bookshelves. Dr. Steele comes right in and shakes my hand. He smiles at Rosalind and tells her they're getting to be old friends. She sits clutching her purse and staring down at her cigarette. It embarrasses me that she won't look up at him.

Dr. Steele sits across from us at his big desk and looks over the report from the hospital. Tells us the details.

Modified electroshock, he says. Electroshock. Fifteen or twenty, he tells us. No. Twenty-two treatments. Twenty-two. That's almost two per month. A thought keeps coming into my mind of how the kids creep up behind each other and yell, "Boo!" real loud to shock the hiccups away. But would someone still be surprised after fifteen or twenty times? Wouldn't they see what's coming?

He tells us it's going well. She's less melancholy, he says. Less withdrawn.

She did come out of the bedroom at lunch yesterday and had some soup at the kitchen table, after the kids had finished.

"Some memory loss is normal," he tells us. "Some confusion."

Normal. Yeah, okay. I've seen that. She seems to forget the kids' names. She comes in the living room sometimes and just stands there, staring. It seems like she forgets where she is maybe. Then she goes back to the bedroom. It's kind of strange, but I never let on with the kids. I act like everything is normal.

"How has her first week home been?" Dr. Steele asks me. Jesus. How do you answer that one?

"The issue at hand is getting on with life," he tells us. Asked about Rosalind's appetite. Was she cooking yet.

"Not yet," I tell him. She seems a little tired," I say. "My mother comes over to fix dinner." Everything I say seems like a betrayal somehow. Of Rosalind. Of the way my mother is.

"Good. So you have help."

Dr. Steele is one of those guys who nods his head up-and-down while he's talking to you, and I feel my head nodding right back.

"She sleeps a lot," I think to tell him.

"Sleeping at night?"

Rosalind lifts her head and stares up at Dr. Steele, but she doesn't say anything.

"Are you sleeping at night, Rosalind?" Dr. Steele asks her again.

"I can't sleep at night," she says. She's barely said anything in a week, so I feel, good, she's talking. Telling Dr. Steele.

"She seems restless at night," I stick up for her. "She's up and down."

"Don't those kids keep you busy, Rosalind? Laurie, is it?"

Jesus, it feels bad that he doesn't remember the kids' names. I shouldn't feel bad though. You can't expect him to remember the kids' names, even if he delivered them. He's got a lot of patients.

"No more naps during the day," he tells Rosalind. "Don't let her nap during the day," he tells me. "She'll sleep better at night."

All I can think is, how can I be at the A&P all day and at the same time making sure she's not napping at home? Maybe my mom can help. But my mom and her cut a wide swathe even before everything happened. I can't make it work out in my mind.

"Get her some paints," he tells me. "That was a hit at the hospital. Some paints and paper. She can draw with the kids."

I try picturing Rosalind sitting with the remaining two and drawing pictures, but all I can see is her folded up in the corner with a cigarette, and the kids creeping around the edges of the room until they find a doorway. I don't mean to criticize her.

Still looking down at his papers, he asks me, have we started having relations.

And Jesus. In my mind I'm entering Rosalind. Not a whole romantic scene. Just entering her. Her hair isn't matted, and she is—the way she was before. I don't mean to think this, and in the doctor's office. I feel a wave of heat in my belly, up to my face. Disgraceful rings of sweat growing on my shirt.

"It's not too early," Dr. Steele reassures me. "You're still a young man, Francis. You're a young woman, Rosalind. There's nothing wrong with this."

"We haven't yet—" I tell him. "I've—I'm not sure Rosalind is ready—" Jesus. My foot is rattling a mile a minute.

"It's time," he says again. "What's past is past. We must go on. This will help fill the gap. You must think of your family now." Then he says that the union of man and wife is what the Creator intended. "This is a commandment," he says. "Be fruitful and multiply," he says. He smiles at me. Like everything is going to be all right.

I take Rosalind's arm, and I lead her out of the office. Her arm feels so thin in my hand, it's like her body has no substance. Like she came back with only part of herself.

It's hard to picture, the marital relations thing. But I know Dr. Steele is right. It is a commandment. I know what the church teaches. Maybe it will make things back to normal. Jesus, I miss doing it. I get that betrayal feeling every time I think of it. But I have to get past it. Father Dolan says so. Dr. Steele says so. My mother says you never get past it. But Christ, you have to try, don't you?

When we're leaving, I hear Dr. Steele tell his receptionist, "Make an appointment for Mr. and Mrs. LaChance in a month." Then the receptionist, she asks Dr. Steele,

"That's her? That's the same woman?" Then she says, "She used to be so attractive."

* * *

We've been married—let's see. Lizzie just turned five, so Paul's almost six. Almost seven years. And three kids, if you count Andy. I know Rosalind's body. It changed after the kids. I mean her breasts were kind of different after, and the stretch marks, and so on. She used to have a shape on her. But things change. It doesn't bother me. I'm getting a little thick around the middle myself. Like I always tell her, Roz, you're beautiful to me. And she didn't let me look at her so much after the kids, but I remember how she looked.

She had these big green eyes. And her skin was pale and kind of see-through. Translucent is what they say. Smooth and pale. When she was warm, like in the summers when we were dancing, at the beginning, her cheeks would get damp and her hair would curl around her face, from the humidity, and she would blush and her skin looked flushed, on her checks and above her breasts. With those big green eyes? And that kind of auburn hair curling down her shoulders? Jesus, she was beautiful. My Rosalind. My girl.

So I'm unprepared for how different she is. The day I picked her up from the hospital, I looked across the room, and there's Rosalind, but at first I don't recognize her. She's wearing this dress she used to wear, and I didn't mean to think it, but the dress hung on her like it was hanging on a wire coat hanger.

So to help her out with having relations and such, I think, I just won't look at her. So she won't be self-conscious. I send the kids off to my mom's, so we can have a little privacy. We're at home, just the two of us, and I try to make things nice for her. I ask her, would she like a drink, and she nods yes. I go inside to make double Whiskey Sours, and I bring one outside to her where she's sitting in the back yard, and I bring her a blanket and wrap it around her shoulders because those metal chairs can feel cold. I put her cigarettes and lighter and an ashtray next to her drink. So she's situated. While I'm putting clean sheets on the bed, I keep peeking out the window to see that's she's all right. She's looking off at that tall elm at the corner of the yard, which is just starting to leaf out, which makes you feel kind of hopeful. So I go out and join her, and bring a couple more Sours, and we sit outside in the mild evening with the shadows getting long, looking at that tree. It's majestic, that elm.

We're just quiet together. I feel the knot in my stomach—that I'd been carrying around so long I forgot I could feel any other way—relax. We're just sitting there, and I let out a sigh exactly the same time Rosalind exhales some smoke from her cigarette. And I don't know. Just making those sounds together at exactly the same time, and being outdoors together in the evening with the stars coming out in the sky. It makes me feel close to her.

It's starting to really get dark, and I can feel the cold metal from the lawn chairs through my pants. I just stand up and take Rosalind's hand, and I take her with me inside.

She doesn't say anything, but she lets me remove her clothes, and she lets me put her into bed and lay next to her. I'd been sleeping with my back to her, because I can't help it. When she's near, I want to. But I turn toward her, and once you're in that state, it's hard to stop. I kiss her mouth, and it tastes good like the whiskey. And I hold her close so the length of our bodies are touching, and I want her so bad by then I feel like I will explode. I kiss her hands and guide them down to touch me and help me come inside her. And she lets me, but I know she isn't all there with me when her hand falls away. I know it. But we're close together, and I'm hard and can't keep it from touching her, and I just come into her, and I guess because it had been a year, it's over fast. When I finish and pull out, she turns away, turns her back toward me. I don't know what to do then, so I curl behind her, so she'll know I love her. And I get hard again, lying behind her, so I turn away.

* * *

And maybe it isn't exactly sacrilegious, but I don't feel totally good about it. In hindsight, maybe I wouldn't have done it. Maybe I would have abstained. Or maybe the rhythm method. I mean Pope Pius said there's nothing wrong with pleasure of the body if you're trying to procreate. But he also said you can use the rhythm method in the context of the family. God's truth, I wasn't thinking about it either way. It had been a long time, and we had been drinking. Maybe the booze and the medications she was taking.

And if you really want the God's awful truth, it wasn't that pleasurable. You want it to be like it was, and you don't want to admit it, but those days are gone.

She shut down after that. Maybe she was kind of shut down before, but my fear is that it made it worse. And I don't know if it was that, or if it was the mood changes that came from being pregnant that set her off, but she was back in the hospital by summer. I've thought back on it a lot, and I know what Dr. Steele said, and I know that it's all right to have pleasure if you're trying to have a child, but I don't feel one hundred percent good about it. It may have contributed. I thought I should confess it.

Surviving and Healing

Regent Parrot

By Susan Pope
Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2013
Certificate Program in Writing for Children, 2011

Unlovable

By Suezy Proctor
Certificate Program in Memoir, 2014

Discovering my husband had been involved with another woman the entire time we were married, I was stunned silent. On our seventh anniversary, Ron came to me and confessed. He married the other woman as soon as our divorce was final. How could I have been so blind? Did I see signs of an affair but subconsciously ignore them?

"You're too nice; too good; too self-sufficient; you don't really need me," he told me. Most of it was true – I did more than I needed to, but I thought I was working hard to be a good wife for a good life.

I saw a shrink. She told me Ron had a Madonna / Prostitute complex. He sought me out, looking for the exact attributes he left me for, but in the end preferred someone to get raunchy with...as in sex, drinking and recreational drugs, and the other woman provided all that and more. I was unlovable because I was a Madonna? I was so confused.

I took a year in exile at a hot springs resort, high in the Sawtooth Mountains in

Southwest Montana. The owners were friends. In the spring of 1988 they shut it down, later turning it into a private retreat. During this time, I had it all to myself.

While there, I focused on planning my life going forward. Where would I live? Who would I let in? Who would I block out? What was important? What about love? Would I be able to love again? Would I be able to trust again? I was thirty-seven and had not been lucky in love. I worked too hard at it and didn't know how to be comfortable about love. I wanted it so bad I couldn't relax enough to let it take its natural course.

I made a choice to live in Winthrop, Washington, in the beautiful Methow Valley. If love was not to be, then the embrace and beauty of the valley gave me a feeling of nature and nurture, and it was enough. It didn't take long for me to establish a happy life.

I busied myself with things like planting a big garden and took up canning in the fall. I fished almost every day – something I loved doing whether I caught fish or not. I renovated an old chicken coup and turned it into a gallery from which to sell my art in the evenings and weekends. I joined the local chorus and theater groups and over time, built a surrogate family from a wonderful assortment of musicians, singers, artists and of course, gardeners.

"*Let us be grateful to people who make us happy,*
they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom."—Proust

When I felt the happiest I've ever been, a dark cloud rolled in. Thoughts of love and desire flashed like lightning, and the self-talk rolled like thunder in my brain. I retreated back to the decisions I'd made about how I was going to live and remembered I vowed I wouldn't go looking for love, it would have to find me. The internal storm lasted weeks, but subsided when spring came and life took on a rhythm that kept my mind busy. Love would have to wait.

A year later, I was introduced to the notion of a loving Christian God. Well, all three of them actually – The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost. It was confusing. Still, when I heard the pastor's sermon that morning, I thought the words were divinely inspired expressly for me, like many sinners do.

"Do you feel alone in the world?" the pastor asked. "Do you lack love in your life?" he said, as his voice rose higher. "Did you know that you have access to a Holy Father who not only loves *every fiber in your body,* but who you have access to any minute of the day?" he sang out! "Have your own people failed you? Have you given up on yourself? Do you want a real love? An everlasting love? One that will never let you down?" he provoked, as he wiped sweat from upper lip.

I had no idea what made me rise from the pew, where I sat nervously inconspicuous. I walked from the center of the sanctuary, passing rows of loyal followers, and found

myself on my knees sobbing unconsciously at the altar. It was as if I was somehow airlifted to this place—it was surreal. I felt euphoric and completely overwhelmed. I imagined this god wrapping his heavenly arms around me; letting his love flow, sweet as nectar from a flower. I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but I knew I wanted this love.

I established routines and habits essential to Christian life. I bought a bible; joined a weekly women's bible study; prayed constantly; asked for forgiveness for my sins. I signed up for volunteer work. In all of this, my new baby Christian brain told me that I needed to work on effective prayer and forgiveness if I was to be forgiven; the kind of forgiveness that requires you to not only forgive, but to forget. "Good Gravy!" I said, realizing I could not say *Good God* any more, lest I'd be using *His* name in vain.

The women in my bible study group were long-standing, long-suffering, and God fearing. They were what others in the church called, *Hard Core Prayer Warriors.* I had a difficult time understanding them. Their language was foreign. It sounded rehearsed, disingenuous, so incongruent to whom they were outside the prayer room door. Inside, I was a sweet sister in Christ. Outside, I was the retched sinner who got up at the wrong time in my dazed state of new birth and stopped the sermon.

I realized if I was going to get anywhere with this Christ, I was going to have to learn how to talk to him, hear him, and practice forgiveness constantly.

"Dear heavenly father, creator of the heavens and the earth, please forgive me for my ungodly thoughts about the prayer warriors. Please rain down your love on me so I can love them like you love them; like you love me. You do still love me, don't you?" Hmm. He felt so elusive.

Without authentic love from people, I floundered in Christianity for years. The sound of His voice grew fainter each passing year. Eventually, I chalked this experience up to the fact that *even God* could not really love me –although I was His creation, I was too flawed and he sealed my ears to His voice and my heart to His love.

Looking back, the worst thing anyone ever said to me was something my father said, at a time when I was trying to reconnect and eek out a relationship and found it was nothing he wanted. I was thirty years old at the time. I had enrolled in an Optician's licensing program at Seattle Community College while working for an optometrist in Ballard. My dad, I found out when I saw his name on the appointment calendar, was one of Dr. Kimpton's patients.

During his annual checkup, when unhappy with the frames I selected for him, he said, "Suezy, you will never measure up to your contemporaries – you are deficient in every way." That was all he said. Not, good to see you; I missed you. Not, I love you.

I found this statement so obtuse. He had been out of my life after he divorced my mother when I was two. He contributed nothing to my welfare. Instead, he remarried

and began accumulating wealth and things – things like a big mansion in Magnolia, a Bentley, Philippe Patek watches and exotic antiques. Everything meaningful to him equated to dollars. *Things* in his life were precious, valued treasures. I wanted to be one of his treasures.

His statement crept inside my psyche and took residence. Anything I attempted was held up to an imaginary yardstick – one that always had me on the short end. I avoided situations I might have taken on, only because I felt too stupid and believed no matter what I did, it wouldn't be good enough.

I don't know why his words stung so much or why, all of the sudden, I felt so incapable to do anything of significance. Where once I was capable to manage a life on my own and felt proud of my accomplishments, I took on his vision, after all, he was my father, and father's know best...right?

I began to notice how right he was. Because I didn't go to college, I wasn't getting the promotions like my co-workers with degrees. I moved around a lot, taking work here and there; trying to find something and someplace to own. Identifying people I wanted to emulate, I began involving my spare time in self-help and community projects.

I took up Toastmasters to help me become a better communicator and grew to be a recognized leader. I volunteered at Cancer Relay for Life events in honor of my mother's death from lung cancer. I developed a mentor program for at-risk-youth at Harry S. Truman Alternative High School in Federal Way. I realized others had helped me along the way; I could make a difference to someone else. Through those efforts, other prospects came. I pounced on them. I was habitually on alert for ways to learn and grow.

About the time I started becoming successful, my father's Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and dementia kicked in full-force. He was 77, I was 44. I felt I was strong enough to expose myself to him and visited him a couple of hours each week. After all, he didn't seem to have a clue who I was or why I was there.

By this time, my stepmother had moved him to the care facility in their retirement community, south of Seattle. When I arrived, he was lying prone. As I stood there watching him, his body violently shook. He clenched his teeth and drew his hands into a tight fist. The nurse said he was on the highest dose of morphine they could give him for pain.

"Your father is seeing his life played fast forward in his mind and doesn't like what he sees," she said as she left us alone in his room. All of a sudden, he sat up and looked me straight in the eyes.

"Suezy, I don't think I've been a very good dad," he said. I waited to hear him say, *I love you honey,* but he didn't. He resumed his prone position. An hour later, while I was at lunch with my stepmother, he passed.

Sledge Hammer

By David Snider
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2014

Oh yes, I'm dying for real this time. I'm ready to step out of this withered husk, believe me. But you're right. I been here before. Fifty years back. Give or take.

Things was different then, as you know. Maybe a little better here in the Shoals, because of whatever it is we got here that makes you more of what you already are for better or worse, or it takes whatever you focus on, and turns you into that. I got no idea how else to explain it, how this little backwater become world famous for all that music, so that folks from halfway around the globe would pick up and shamble on down, so they could sound better than the best way they already knew how to do. It makes no sense, until you listen to all them recordings. Then you hear it. Like once they got themselves here they was halfway crossed over to the spirit world, which is why they could sing like angels.

But I didn't know a damn thing about all that, back when I got sick. Guess I had a bad attitude. That and my four-pack-a-day habit. I know good old boys who smoked like chimneys since they was ten and never croaked till they was eighty-five, but God

help me I was twenty-eight and nine toes in the grave when they brought me to the hospital in Sheffield. Nobody give me much of a shot. Worst case of pneumonia they ever did saw. Pull the sheet over that boy and hand out shovels, by God.

I was a goner for sure, except, now and again, one little thing can make all the difference. In my case it came in the form of music.

I remember hearing it for a long time before I knew what it was. I must have thought I was already gone over and getting serenaded by the heavenly host. Just imagine my surprise when my eyes fly open and I'm laid out in this white room and see the orderly changing out my bedpan and singing, filling the room and my head and the sky with his songs. And he's black as night and smiling. And everything I've heard and thought and felt about black folk all my life is flowing through me, slow and deep and tangled as the Tennessee River going over a waterfall and filling the sky with spray. I must have gaped at that old boy, unable to make a sound.

Then he sees I'm awake. "Glad to see you feeling better this morning, Mr. Woods," he says. "They told us you didn't have the chance of a mud castle in a thunderstorm, but like I say, they ain't always right."

I have to work my mouth for a time, dried out as it is. "That was you, then?"

His eyebrows rise up. "What was me, sir?"

"Singing." I swallow, or try to. "Singing, singing, singing, day and night."

He grins. "Oh, right, that. Yes, sir, that was me."

"You must be in a good mood," I say. "Singing like that."

"Oh, no, sir," he says. "I don't need to be in any kind of mood to sing. I just think it might help people out. Sick people, well people, happy and sad. I was raised up with songs, that's all."

That's all.

Well, that was enough.

They discharged me from the hospital the next day. The minute old Freddie Coombs dropped me at the house I went for my smokes. My hands was shaking so much I could barely poke the damned cigarette in my mouth. I struck the match. But then I heard that voice again, singing me back into the world. I stood trembling, staring at the flame. That match burnt all the way down to where it begun to char my fingers. The whole time I'm feeling exactly what it would be like to light up, better than any feeling in the world. But I couldn't do it. Instead I blew that fire out and threw the match to the floor. Then I collapsed onto the sofa and cried like a baby. I ain't ashamed to say it. The whole while, that music played in my head.

You know the rest of it. Six months later I married your mother, God rest her soul. Not long after that we had you.

Those was some crazy years right then, to say the least. Seemed like the whole country, maybe the whole world, was coming apart.

Change don't never come easy.

But at least here in Muscle Shoals we had the music to get us through it. Hell, we made the music that got everybody through it. No accounting for that kind of luck, or for any other kind. But you and your brother would never have been anything more than two twinkling reflections of stars in a cow pond, had I not been lucky enough to have had Percy Sledge for an orderly, right before he got himself discovered and then belonged to everybody.

Just remember, honey, when a man loves a woman, anything's possible.

Or when anyone loves anyone.

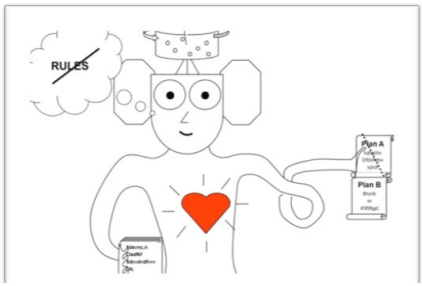
Heron

By Susan Pope

Of Trails and Trials

By S. Reji Kumar
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

"Lastly, a leader has a big heart." Says Gary Peniston, and scrawls a large, leaf like representation into the chest cavity of the line diagram he calls 'What an ideal Leader actually looks like'.



Actually, his leader looks more like a six-year-old's attempt at drawing the upper half of a person: with large round eyes and ears; small V of a nose and curve of a mouth; a level crown of a head with a radar on it; and loopy, flexible arms like an octopus, holding a book and a scroll. Each feature makes a point.

The Outdoor Leadership Seminar participants at Tacoma Mountaineers stare at the flip chart, amused and transfixed.

That's how Peniston often gets his poignant points across. In vivid, bite sized chunks, dunked in an ounce of wit.

Peniston, 66, has a lot of heart himself. It's evident in most everything he does. From ignoring a geology degree from Princeton to meander into a life of construction and "crawl spaces that Indiana Jones wouldn't dare go into", to an almost iconic pursuit of kayaking, backcountry skiing, mountain biking, in-line skating and photography, to caring for his girlfriend of 17 years, who has been a stroke survivor for the last four.

"I met Ruth at our singles dinner", he says, referring to one of those rare indoor activities that is part of the menu at The Mountaineers. "She was the organizer. I signed up for it, showed up, and nobody else did. I was the only one."

So they hung out, realized they liked each other's company, started doing activities together and have been together ever since. It's not like they were a perfect match – Ruth wasn't a hardcore outdoors person like him. But she eventually took his kayaking class and also expanded her repertoire into cross country skiing.

During her stroke, the hemorrhage flooded Ruth's entire left brain. Peniston remembers coming to the hospital, into the room from her right side and calling her name. She heard him and recognized the voice, but turned her head searchingly to the left. Her entire perception of right field of vision was gone.

People would send her cards and he'd hold them up for her to see. "She'd reach for it. But she wouldn't know how far away it was. No depth perception." It wasn't the eyes, it was the brain.

"It's ironic," Peniston says in his characteristic drawl. "'Cause you know, the brain needs all that blood to keep goin'. But once the blood gets out of the arteries, it kills the cells – away, pretty much... She lost a huge part of her brain."

Ruth was in a coma for three days; and in Harborview for a total of seventy four. Peniston would drive up from Gig Harbor almost every night. "That, and the stress, was just killing me. I was literally unable to function a few times."

It didn't get any easier. "They read me the riot act the first day I was in there," he explains. "They wouldn't talk to me because I wasn't her legal guardian... it was four months going through all that."

The doctors did not tell him that his girlfriend had a 40% chance of dying within 30 days. He found that out later. But they did tell him she'd never recover fully – that at best "she had a 5 to 10% chance of meaningful recovery."

"Whatever that means," Peniston shrugs. "But I said OK, that's better than nothing."

His dad, Hugh Peniston, had had a stroke six years prior. Only, his was an ischemia – a blockage. But the effect was very similar. Loss of speech, incontinence, and it affected the right side. A Princeton alumnus himself, and a graduate of the Union Theological Seminary, Hugh was well known and respected as a scholar in his professional and personal community – an articulate preacher. With him unable to speak, the family was crushed. Dealing with that would prove valuable experience

when Ruth's time came.

Peniston reminisces his dad didn't improve that much. Hugh's second wife was resigned to "well, this is the way it is", and so she wasn't aggressive about helping him. But with Ruth, Peniston was very aggressive. He knew what to do, and that she had to keep her range of motion going.

"Right away," he says. "When she's in her bed and didn't even know who I was, I'm grabbin' her arm and I'm movin' it around. Till she starts to complain. I knew that the fine motor control on your fingers is controlled by a really similar place in your brain as speech. So if you can improve your digital dexterity, your speech will come too."

So he'd work with Ruth on that, and her speech. He'd get her doctors to listen, and try not to let them leave the room until they answered all the questions on his list.

"I've this with me at all times." He says, pulling out a small, green spiral notebook from his pocket. "I'm having to write stuff down at the job, you know – I've got to get some screws, get some 2x6s..." He laughs. "Or I've a wild idea for the kayak class, or something."

Peniston feels he's similar to his dad. "Not too forceful; but if you scratch the surface a little bit, it's there."

He says wryly, "I certainly learned more Latin than I knew before."

It was a Category 5 subarachnoid hemorrhage – the worst. Certain things haven't changed much, but Ruth can now move about in her wheelchair and walk with a cane; even climb stairs under supervision. She struggles with nouns and short term memory, but can hold a slow conversation. Peniston says Ruth doesn't remember how bad it was, and she doesn't think she's doing all that well now. But her doctors have said, "She's a miracle."

Her primary care physician added "And you're the reason." Peniston chuckles with relief and apparent humility.

After a lot of legal loops, Peniston is now her legal guardian. Ruth is at a family care home three blocks from his house, and he sees her every day. Amidst the five sessions per week of speech and physical therapies she's driven to, he sometimes sneaks her out to gatherings with their Mountaineers friends. Or kayaking. He eases her into a kayak and tows it with a line. It's a good workout that way, he says. She still can't use her right hand to paddle.

Has he thought of walking away? "No." Peniston says without hesitation. "People do. Lots of people do. It's too much to handle. And I can certainly understand that." He has heard tales of relationships unraveling, at their stroke-survivors support group.

If things had gone differently, would they have gotten married? "I think she probably would've wanted to get married," he says. "She probably still would."

Would he? "Right now, I can't," he says. "I'm her legal guardian." Guardians can't

marry their ward. The system is setup to protect the vulnerable.

Peniston would like to petition the court to get rid of the guardianship, and just have him be the power of attorney. For that, the law has to establish Ruth understands what that means and express her consent. It's getting closer to being viable – one step, one day at a time.

All this hasn't been easy, he admits. "I've certainly been kicked back with Ruth's stroke."

"She was so vulnerable. And so I was there... And helped her through that..." His blue eyes flit faraway, then back.

He adds with a small smile. "Still here."

Hospitals

By Mariana Jasso
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2014

Her pink skirt is splayed out on the white bedspread next to me. I'm careful not to touch it. It's been there for almost four days and I wouldn't want to change that.

It doesn't suit her. Which is probably why she never wore it. She knew it was too pink and too short and that it didn't suit her at all. Maybe that was the whole point of it. Of just having it in her closet.

"We're probably going to be late."

The water doesn't stop running. It's been over twenty minutes.

"We're really going to be late." I hate repeating myself.

My black dress is freshly ironed and hanging on a plastic hanger. Thank God. Before last night it had been bunched up in the far corner of my bottom dresser drawer since December. It still smells like tequila and cigarettes.

I should stop and buy a pack on the way home. What's the use in quitting now?

"You remember this trip to the zoo." The wooden frame that holds the picture is new and doesn't match the nightstand that separates our old twin beds. "You

dislocated your shoulder on that trip. Mom made me believe it was my fault."

When I hold the picture close to my face I notice the dimple in her right six-year old cheek and it looks deeper and bigger than ever before. So does her smile.

"She swears, now, that she never said that. But she did. I'd ruined our vacation. And I worried for the longest time about what would happen if you could never move your left arm again. I remember sitting in the waiting room with Dad. He was reading the newspaper and I was crying and I couldn't believe he wasn't crying with me. I wondered for hours how he could just sit there and read the news. Like there wasn't anything more important than your left shoulder and the fact that I had been the one to pull it out of its socket.Then you came out from the ER hospital door as if nothing had ever happened. I gave you a stuffed panda bear I bought for you at the hospital gift store. I felt guilty and you never said Thank You."

It's quarter past four already. The windows aren't letting much light in. The sky outside is darker than it was yesterday. I used to like clouds and overcast days. I hope it clears.

"We have to be there by five. Please don't wear this thing. It doesn't suit you."

Not that anyone will care if I'm late. I'll just say I hadn't finished writing what I promised to write. And that part's actually true.

"Do you think you might have a notebook lying around here?" Her stuff is thrown on the ground like it always is. Her clothes erupting from her suitcase like a volcano. "What should I say, anyway? That you're messy. That you probably haven't washed this pair of jeans in months. You probably like it that way. Like with your skirt. It must keep things interesting. Dirty laundry that you carry around with you even though you can't wear it because it smells."

The water in the shower is pounding loudly. The sound won't stop and I don't want it to.

"You were in the hospital all the time after that trip. The time the garage door closed on your thumb. I remember your thumbnail being black for years. Then you broke your ankle chasing golfballs. And your right arm when you swung out from the tree and landed hand first on the dirt behind our house. When I broke mine on my bike you helped me do my writing homework even though your cursive was way worse than mine."

Maybe I should wear her black patent leather heels because they go well with my dress and they are beautiful and expensive and I have always wanted to wear them. Anything other than black will look strange.

The shoes fit but they're uncomfortable. They're tight around my toes.

"I'm going to wear your shoes, okay? And maybe that turquoise necklace Grandma gave me for my birthday."

I hang the necklace on the hanger over the dress and it looks good. A gold chain

a turquoise rock pick it up a little, keep it from looking too dark. Unless it's supposed to look dark.

"Is this what people do as they pick out what clothes to wear for funerals? Do they go out to stores and buy the things they'll wear to funerals?"

The bed feels soft and I want to sleep again but it's not time yet.

"Maybe I'll talk about your month of fascination with with Orca whales in the fourth grade. Or your fascination with gaudy eighties' rock bands in ninth. What was that song you'd always play? I said I never really liked it but it was stuck on repeat in my brain for ages."

My toenails need clipping. Maybe that's why the shoes didn't fit very well. I might as well cut them now.

"Mom will call any second now. You can bet on that. We'll see how angry she can make her voice sound through the sobs. It's a good thing they left early or else she'd be rushing me right now."

The desk on her side of the room still smells like she did in high school. It still has the same pictures stuck to the cork board behind it.

"There are no pens here. Only colored markers and stubby, unsharpened pencils. I finally found a piece of paper and now I have nothing to right with. Maybe I'll just wing it then. I'll talk about your love of literature and your love of friendship and your love for life. Something like that. Maybe I'll say something about your love for unattainable bearded men and flour tortillas topped with nutella and apricot jam."

I should really get in the shower. The water is running cold again. Maybe I should wait for it to warm up.

Daffodil

By Jessica Lynne Olson

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2014

1964

By Mary Lawrence
Certificate Program in Popular Fiction, 2010
Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2012
Certificate Program in Popular Fiction II, 2013
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

The years 1963 and 1964 were tumultuous years for many Americans and especially for me and my family. The Beatles were popular, Martin Luther King gave his I Have a Dream speech, John F. Kennedy was murdered, my cousin was sent to Da Nang, Viet Nam, and my father was so sick with a puzzling illness that wouldn't go away and prevented him from working as a pharmacist.

I was eleven and my brother nine. My father was irritable and short tempered and my parents argued over money. There was tremendous tension in our family. To top it off, my best friend had moved away during the summer, and I missed her. I felt lonely and vulnerable.

One day I came home from school to find my mother sobbing. She told me an ambulance had taken my father to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, about an hour from our home in Austin.

"I don't know what to do. Your father is so sick and we don't have insurance."

"Maybe grandma could help."

"No, she can't help. She's got her special-education, retarded students to worry about. And don't tell anyone what happened to your father." She looked at me sternly.

"Why?"

"Someday we plan to own our own pharmacy. Very few people would trust a pharmacist that is mentally ill. Your father is on the psych unit."

I was overwhelmed. Our family was in a life and death struggle and I couldn't tell anyone. I alternated between anger and sympathy for both of my parents.

My brother and I coped as best we could. My brother looked to me for support, and I pretended to know what was going on. I escaped the tension by retreating to my bedroom and reading all kinds of books for hours at a time. My grandmother visited, bringing frozen chickens and fresh eggs. My brother developed stomach aches. I chewed my fingernails till they bled.

Mother visited dad regularly, but we weren't allowed. It was hospital rules that no one under the age of fourteen could visit. After one visit, mother told me dad was getting electroshock therapy. She explained the procedure a little. It sounded like torture.

"There is something else going on with your father and it's not depression." Mother cried in frustration. "He's had pneumonia three times in the last year. His doctors at the Mayo Clinic won't listen to me."

"Mom, call our doctor here. Maybe he could help us. At least see what he says."

My mother called our family doctor, and he contacted first the Mayo Clinic and then the University of Minnesota. An up and coming cardiologist and surgeon, Dr. Lillehei, agreed to see my dad. He called the Mayo Clinic psychiatrists and they discharged my father, reluctantly. We saw him for a few hours before mom drove him to Minneapolis. He was so happy to see us, but was very pale, weak and unsteady.

The cardiologist at the University of Minnesota determined my dad had aortic valve stenosis, with only weeks to live. He told my father that he was a candidate for experimental surgery to replace his aorta valve with a Teflon valve. Dad decided on surgery, even though there was only a 50/50 chance of survival.

The surgery was successful, and because it was experimental, there was no charge. My dad felt and looked like a new man. Our family got back to normal, and eventually my dad bought his own pharmacy. But I never forgot his experience on the psychiatric unit.

Eventually I got a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing and my registered nurse license. My first job was at the Mayo Clinic on the psychiatric unit my dad had stayed on fifteen years earlier. I advocated for each patient in my care as if they were my father. I encouraged the doctors to give each of my patients a complete physical, and I

took their physical complaints as seriously as their mental problems. In several instances, a patient in my care was found to have an underlying physical problem; one woman had cancer and a young man had a benign brain tumor. They were transferred to medical units once diagnosed. Today the policy at the Mayo Clinic is that each patient receives a complete physical upon arrival, no matter what unit they are admitted to.

Those years growing up were very stressful for all of us, but through the experience I developed empathy and compassion for others. I also learned to question, to not always accept things at face value, but to dig deeper to find the truth. Our family treasured every moment we had with my dad who ended up passing away five years after the surgery when the Teflon valve dislodged from his aorta after a strenuous bike ride with my brother.

His cardiac surgeon, Dr. C. Walton Lillehei, apologized to my mother and said that the valve in my dad's aorta had been too small. After my father's death, Dr. Lillehei never used such a small valve in an adult patient. Later, he became famous as a pioneer of cardiac surgery and often performed surgery free of charge for those who didn't have insurance or couldn't pay. Eventually he trained the South African surgeon, Dr. Christiian Barnard, who performed the first human to human heart transplant in 1967. Now, aortic valve surgery and even heart transplants are quite common. It makes me proud to think that my father's experience somehow contributed to the knowledge of the heart and modern cardiac surgery which has helped millions of people with heart problems throughout the world.

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Train

By Melinda Van Wingen
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

It's 8 pm and James is still awake. I hear the distinctive clanking of metal and magnets from his room 30 minutes after we finished our elaborate bedtime ritual. Fearing a tantrum, I made a desperate conciliatory gesture. But it was a mistake to let him take trains to bed.

I steel myself for battle and go in. "Jamesy, it's nighttime. The trains have to go to sleep. They are tired and they want to be Really Useful Engines in the morning."

James protests but follows me to the hall. We lay the trains on their sides. "Goodnight, Thomas. Goodnight, Stanley. Goodnight, Whiff. See you in the morning!"

I tuck James back into bed with his bedraggled Minnie Mouse. He falls asleep. I hate myself for joining the cult of Thomas the Tank Engine, a toy that is loved and reviled in equal measures by toddler parents everywhere.

* * *

It's 5:53 on a Saturday morning and James is wide awake. "Can we give him the I-P-A-D?" Jake groans.

"Yes," I grunt.

I fall asleep as the Thomas theme song rolls on. "They're two, they're four, they're six, they're eight..." By now I've developed a knack for sleeping through Thomas and Friends. The bonus—aside from the precious extra sleep—is that Alec Baldwin and Ringo Starr occasionally narrate my lucid early morning dreams.

When the Reverend W. Awdry carved a toy train from a broomstick in 1940, did he have any idea what kind of conundrum he'd be creating for future parents of little boys? Awdry called the blue train Thomas and made up stories to entertain his son. He soon published Thomas the Tank Engine books.

By 1979, Thomas was picked up for a television series. With children's television comes merchandise. We have accumulated heaps of it: toys, books, dishes, and even tiny underpants. James adores the strange world of the Island of Sodor, a British Isle crisscrossed by rails, dotted with stations, and populated by a vast ensemble of anthropomorphic trains. Sir Topham Hatt, a portly man sporting tails and top hat, directs the crew and maintains social order. Each sentient train aspires to be a "really useful engine." They are peaceful, industrious, and obedient. My son could have worse role models, like that mischievous monkey Curious George or that whiny do-gooder Caillou.

Still, Thomas is a daily reminder of the ways in which my parenting falls short of my ideals. When I was newly pregnant, we bought an orange stuffed aardvark for the baby-to-be. It was soft, nameless, and gender neutral. The aardvark was the whimsical, commercial-free childhood we had long envisioned for our children, although he bears an uncanny resemblance to ALF.

When James was one, we still prided ourselves on our simple, generic toys. But when he was 18 months old, I slipped up. I brought home a bag of used Thomas trains from a consignment sale. James began memorizing their names, stashing them in pockets, and refusing to leave home without them. That three dollar baggie was his gateway drug into the seedy underworld of a Thomas addiction.

It's been more than three years since we brought the aardvark home. Disney and Sesame Street stuffed animals and Thomas trains now litter the rugs and lurk under chairs and beds. I worry about my son, an avid consumer who always knows whether a particular toy comes from Target or Fred Meyer. Are his imagination and childhood being hijacked by Disney and Fisher-Price?

Despite my concerns, Thomas and friends are Really Useful Engines. They entertain James from dawn til dusk. "Hi, Sir Handel. Hi, Porter. I just had a snack. Do

you like snacks?" I hear James chat with his creepy, gray-faced companions while I clean the kitchen.

We have an entire family economy based on Thomas. James will work for stickers, so long as those stickers eventually turn into trains. Peeing in the potty, sleeping through the night, being gentle with the dog. When our son is fully potty-trained, we will have Thomas to thank. I had hoped for an easy and compliant child. I settle instead for one who is easily bribed and singularly motivated.

* * *

It's 8:45 pm and James may or may not be asleep. We're staked out in front of his bedroom door, ready to nudge him back and resist demands for more water or stuffed animals. We are not going to answer when he runs to the door and asks "Who's your favorite train?"

I'm skimming the Facebook feed on my iPhone when I hear the clinking of metal. "Stop it!" I hiss at Jake. He's started lining up the confiscated trains, mindlessly hooking magnet to magnet as we wait to declare victory in the sleep battle for the night. "He'll hear you!"

If James heard us, the temptation would be too great, as if we were hosting an AA meeting at a bar. "Sorry," Jake whispers. I take a deep breath and check the baby monitor. He's asleep. We slink away.

It took a second for Jake to realize what he was doing: playing with Thomas trains. Thomas is a member of the family now.

Matschiestreeroo

By Susan Pope
Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2013
Certificate Program in Writing for Children, 2011

The Little Tomato That Could

By Cheryl Sizov
Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2014

My dad had a soft spot for plants, and they seemed to love him, too. He couldn't bear the thought of anything dying, so I wasn't surprised that spring day to see him come over carrying what looked like a pot of soil with a green stick in it. Closer inspection revealed a few limp leaves. It was a tomato plant, barely hanging on.

He had called earlier asking if he could plant something in our yard that wasn't doing well on the north-facing patio of his small apartment. Dad lived in senior housing now, a move he fought mightily two years earlier. Although serviceable, it was worlds away from the setting of his childhood home next to a woodlot in Rocky River, Ohio, or the vast seascape of Lake Superior where he had sailed freighters as a youth. It wasn't the forests of Mt. St. Helen's either, which he had fallen in love with as a college intern working for Weyerhaeuser; forests which affected him so profoundly that he moved to Washington state just a few years later with a wife and child just to be near them. From all these places, Dad's life had now constricted to about 600 square feet of living space. How could we not share some of our garden with him?

Selecting a spot sure to receive ample amounts of sun each day, Dad tenderly

removed the plant from the confines of its pot, and replanted it in the rich and moist soil we had been enriching for our own plants. We let him be, and continued to do our own yard work around him. He fussed over the plant far longer than seemed warranted for something so unlikely to live, but at last he was satisfied and sat back to admire his work. Knowing I could be unreliable about watering, Dad asked if he could come over each week to look after it. I said sure, knowing he would show up whether I said yes or not. Since I had gotten married, Dad was more careful about respecting my privacy, but he still tended to view my home as his.

I forgot about the tomato plant until one Saturday when Dad was over and he pointed out its progress to us. Beaming, he showed off his once dying plant. My husband and I exchanged glances. We couldn't believe the lush and sturdy plant sprawling before us was the same one he had brought over mere weeks earlier. I was touched and humbled at my Dad's faith and commitment to something I would have thrown in the trash. Child of the Depression, he couldn't see wasting anything. Or was it that he saw the potential in that little tomato that no one else would have noticed or taken time to nurture? Maybe he just wanted a reason to get up each day; to feel needed by something and to be useful. To make a difference. With so many of his larger ambitions no longer in reach, Dad found dignity and pride where he could these days.

Thanks to an unusually hot and sunny summer that year, the tomato did what tomatoes do best in the right conditions: it produced crop after crop of plump, juicy, cherry-sized tomatoes: enough for Dad, for us, and even enough to share with friends. The little tomato plant spread a lot of joy that year.

A few years later, Dad had a stroke late on a Sunday evening, and wasn't discovered until Wednesday morning when the old ladies at his apartment building—the "hen party" as he called them—noticed that his morning papers hadn't been picked up for three days. I got the call at the office. An EMT quickly explained what had happened and I rushed to meet the ambulance at Northwest Hospital. By the time I got there, Dad was already in the emergency room. I rushed in and saw him lying on the gurney; the most shriveled up, wizened figure I had ever seen. My Dad, yes, but a shadow of himself. As I came around the end of the gurney, Dad's eyes looked up and caught mine. Clear, shimmering blue as always, they lit up with recognition when he saw me, and he managed a feeble smile. Just like the little tomato plant, it didn't look like there was much to work with, but I knew I was going to try.

Dad never fully recovered from his stroke, but we did have another two and a half years together, time all the sweeter for being so improbable--the last fruiting of a man who came back for one more season of splendor.

Pretty Pixie

By Amie Wall

Certificate Program in Photography, 2014

Stratus

Journal of Arts and Writing
2014

University of Washington

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