



*Kelsey*

REVIEW

2011

# Kelsey REVIEW



Fall 2011

Volume XXX

**MERCER**  
County Community College  
[www.mccc.edu](http://www.mccc.edu)

.....

Scan this QR code with  
your Smartphone App



Upon request, the *Kelsey Review* is available in  
alternative format for the visually impaired.

Kelsey Review 2011

Copyright © 2011

It is illegal to reproduce any part of this publication unless written permission  
is obtained from the individual author.

ISSN 0451-6338

---

The *Kelsey Review* is published annually by Mercer County Community College,  
1200 Old Trenton Road, Trenton, New Jersey 08690. Manuscripts for the  
*Kelsey Review* are solicited exclusively from people living and  
working in Mercer County, New Jersey.

E-mail: [Kelsey.Review@mccc.edu](mailto:Kelsey.Review@mccc.edu)



*The Kelsey Review is published by Mercer County Community College with the financial support of that institution and the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission, through funding from the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment of the Arts.*

As a community-based publication we welcome sponsors and supporters interested  
in joining the Kelsey Review and other MCCC endeavors.

.....

This year's *Kelsey Review* marks 30 years of publication for the literary journal of Mercer County. These years are not contiguous, and they do not include years of another publication by the same name that ceased in the 1960s, but three decades is a respectable age. The *Review* is a venue for the talents of Mercer County residents. Many writers and artists shared their work with the editor and his assistants, who carefully selected poems, short stories, a few non-fiction pieces, and art for publication in the 2011 issue. I know readers will enjoy the results.

A dynamic part of the county's higher education world, Mercer County Community College maintains strong ties to the community. County residents listen to WWFM, attend events at Kelsey Theater, visit the Art Gallery, take classes at the college, root for nationally-ranked MCCC athletic teams, and read the contributions of those who live and / or work in the county as published in the *Kelsey Review*. I invite you to learn more about the college by visiting our website: [www.mccc.edu](http://www.mccc.edu).

Today it is important to renew, reuse, recycle: after enjoying your copy of the *Review*, please take a moment to share it with others, perhaps a neighbor or friend who might not yet know about the publication.

The *Kelsey Review* is distributed in part through the Mercer County public library system and is partially supported by funds from the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Each edition of the *Review* presents professional quality poems, fiction, non-fiction and art that provokes thought and with luck, inspiration. Enjoy what you find here.

Sincerely,



Patricia C. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President  
Mercer County Community College

---

# *From the Editors...*

After five years of excellent work as co-editor of the *Kelsey Review*, my friend and colleague Holly-Katharine Johnson has stepped down from her post to better focus on other aspects of her work here at the college. Thanks, Holly, for all those years of collegial effort, for hosting top-notch editorial meetings, and for a range of contacts that led, among other sundry excellent places, to the wonderful covers the *Review* has enjoyed over the past five years.

Non-fiction, after years of encouragement in our submission guidelines, begins to trickle in, and we include some fascinating work in this area as a result, including more non-fiction from Linda Artzenius, this time a collection of reviews spotlighting three Mercer County poets. The fiction is as strong as ever: we see veteran Janet Kirk in our pages again, and Yonming Chang makes a second appearance as well. Poetry this year benefits from a small change in editorial policy: now readers can enjoy more than one poem by the same author in the same issue. See veterans Vida Chu, D. E. Steward, Carolina Morales and others. New faces appear in the crowd. See Ken Jawowski, among others, for their first *Review* appearances.

As promised last year, the *Kelsey Review* has taken a step into social networking, and is now available to be “liked” in Facebook. I hope you will express your interest in the publication and join the conversation. The 2010 issue of the *Review* is available online, too, and this year’s issue will be available in the spring of 2012...just in time to help encourage submissions for that year’s issue.

Art for this issue is still coming together as I write this editorial letter. The *Kelsey Review* has looked for – but not yet found – a volunteer art editor who can do for the visual art we publish what the words-on-a-page folks (everyone but our graphic designer) do for words: help select and place submissions, with an eye for the best. Our ideal person would represent a different educational or county institution than we have on board already, be able to put in perhaps eight hours a year, and work well with our existing editorial team.

My thanks go to the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission, who provide a slice of our funding. I also recognize and thank Mercer County Community College, which provides the rest of the pie. In addition, fine MCCC employees such as Edyta Kuciapa, Kami Abdala, Saveria Symons, and Wendy Humphrey do their part to make the *Kelsey Review* a reality. Of course, editorial board volunteers Luray Gross, Ellen Jacko, and Roberta Clipper deserve thanks, too: Thanks! They are all a joy to work with, and the wondrous *Review* you now hold is possible thanks to excellent common effort.

I know there is enjoyment to be found in these pages – read, and enjoy the work of colleagues, friends, acquaintances, those who live and / or work in Mercer County, the state’s capital county, those who have taken the time to sharpen their art and share it with us.

Edward Carmien  
*Editor*

---

# *Table of Contents*

“ <b>Late Night</b> ” Carolina Morales.....	2
“ <b>We Cared</b> ” Ken Jaworowski.....	4
“ <b>These Swallowed Keys Unlock My Heart</b> ” Lois Marie Harrod.....	12
“ <b>A Package from Hufei</b> ” Vida Chu.....	13
“ <b>The Sepulcher Has Been Filled</b> ” Janet Kirk.....	14
“ <b>Delos</b> ” Wanda S. Praisner.....	18
“ <b>Invitation</b> ” Wanda S. Praisner.....	19
“ <b>Novembaar</b> ” D.E. Steward.....	21
“ <b>Not Quite Rosa Parks</b> ” Irene R. Granderson.....	25
“ <b>New Collections from Members of U.S. 1 Poets’ Cooperative</b> ” Linda Arntzenius.....	31
“ <b>Moment</b> ” Gilbert Honigfeld.....	38
“ <b>Through a Window</b> ” Gilbert Honigfeld.....	39
“ <b>Untitled</b> ” Damon Williams.....	41
“ <b>Irish Farmer</b> ” Lavinia Kumar.....	42
“ <b>The Salted</b> ” Lavinia Kumar.....	43
“ <b>Homeless</b> ” Joseph Preneta.....	44
“ <b>Changing</b> ” Peter Brav.....	46
“ <b>The Bottom Line</b> ” Yongming Wang.....	51
Contributors.....	60
Submission Guidelines.....	63

## *Illustrations*

Cover: <b>Ball Park</b> by Matthew Blair	
Various by Ruth Olinsky.....	3, 10, 20, 24, 50
<b>The Magician’s Assistant, Forest Deer</b> by Anne Karetnikov.....	40, 45

**Graphic Design:** Edyta Kuciapa

## *Editorial Board*

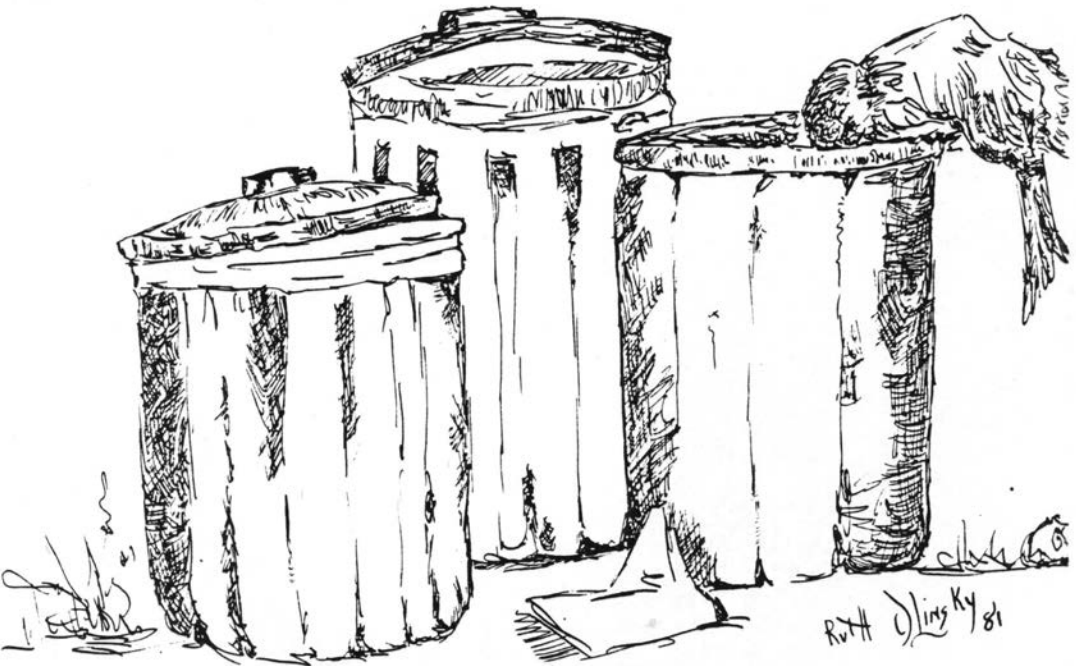
Edward Carmien, Editor  
Luray Gross, Poetry Editor  
Ellen Jacko, Poetry Editor  
Roberta Clipper, Fiction Editor

# *Late Night*

For Tor Johanson who saved my life at eleven o'clock  
each Friday night, holy host of the folk show on local  
radio's public station transmitted each week from  
Bensalem, PA, sacred DJ of secular chant – lilting  
blue grass, lovesick blues, Spanish boleros, Irish ballads,  
folkies strumming chords of woe, rosining my heart strings,  
priming my soul while I mopped the floor in the mid  
night hours, kitchen walls haunted with lamplight.  
I opened the door, emptied my bucket into the black yard.

And to Ralph Litwin, who showed me the light every  
Sunday morning at 2:00 a.m. on cable TV's public  
access broadcast weekly from Morristown, NJ, blessed  
MC of the singer/songwriter sect, melodic confessions  
waxing my spirit, stripping me bare as I wiped  
and polished the living-room panels, dust motes stirred  
from shadowy corners, TV's glow fringed like a halo  
around each head – husband and wife on dueling banjos,  
Cajun summoning bayou spirits, gypsy singer  
with a clipped Ole. Sunken-eyed men and sad-eyed  
women alone with their guitars. Outside my window,  
late night revelers stumbling their way home.

Again to the men who manned the stations in the off,  
off hours of the late, late nights through to the wee minutes  
of the morning while casting their doubts into the vast  
beyond. *Is anyone out there listening? Anyone out there  
watching at all?* Whereas I, their adoring, devoted apostle,  
answered with the silence of a Judas.



- Ruth Olinsky





# *We Cared*

We saw Laura walk in at 9:34. Some of us noted the time by glancing down at the corners of our computer screens, others at the digital displays on our phones. Yet no matter where we looked, we knew she was late. We knew what would happen.

Ted Mertz was on a conference call when Laura arrived. He caught sight of her and hung up after a mumbled something. Then he made way across the rows of cubicles to cut her off. He wasn't fast enough. She got to her desk before him, like some animal seeking the safety of its den. As if a desk could save her.

"Laura, can I see you," Ted said without a question in his voice.

"Good morning," she said from her chair where she'd just plopped down.

"In the office, please," he said and turned.

"Well, good morning to you, too," she said, loud enough for everyone to hear.

We held our breath. No one talked back to Ted like that, and we waited to see how he'd respond. But he kept walking, corporate-calm as always.

A few of us, when we were new and didn't yet know Ted, had tried to draw him into conversations. Denise sometimes tells of how, in her third week here, she asked Ted if he had any children. He replied "We can chat later" in a tone that meant they never would.

There was a chance we overestimated Ted when we credited him with consciously maintaining a distance. Some of us believed he was as banal as he sounded. One or two even suggested he had a mental defect. Most, though, decided that his detachment was a calculated move, deviously designed to keep us off guard while freeing him of personal involvement. Nevertheless, it didn't matter what we thought. He was in charge.

Laura stood and exhaled. We kept our eyes on our work, pretending not to notice what was going on. We needed to watch, but we didn't want her to catch us looking. After all, she was on her way to be fired, an event sure to become office lore. We had to see.

Still wearing her jacket, still clutching her purse, she walked toward the office. "This oughta be fun," she muttered to no one in particular.

\*

"BBG Corp.: We're All In This Together!" was our internal corporate motto, complete with exclamation point, as if the idea was something to be excited about. The phrase was coined five years ago when some fresh-faced dingbat at Home Office decided the corporate culture needed an overhaul. Private offices were turned into glass-walled conference rooms, and all of us, even Ted, were moved into identical cubicles in the name of efficiency and a false sense of equality. Our floor, smaller than a basketball court, was reorganized to an open layout where all could see everything, the 30 of us like naked mole rats stripped of every hiding spot. Most absurd, the open-door policy was taken literally. Except for the entrance and the restrooms, every threshold was bare.

Memos declaring 'We Are Open for Success!' were sent out by management, while magazine articles titled 'The Office of the Future!' were written by fools. Later on, the mastermind of these slap-happy ideas was fired in one restructuring or

.....

another, but the design remained. Perhaps it would have been too costly to change.

Laura stepped into the see-through room located at the front of the floor. Those of us in the first few rows would hear everything. The rest would have to find other ways: fake trips to the supply closet or the copy machine, taken only to pass by and listen in.

“It’s after 9:30,” Ted said.

“I was running a little behind,” Laura said. “I called you but only got your...”

“You are scheduled to start at 9 o’clock. You know what we agreed upon.”

“I do, but listen...”

“Let me speak here, Laura. We had an agreement.”

“I’ve told you that I...”

“Could you let me speak, please?”

Laura folded her hands and stared at Ted in silence. His dark eyes looked at you – well, ‘like a shark’ would be the easy phrase, apt though not entirely accurate. His expression was rarely aggressive and his teeth never showed. So perhaps it’s better to say his eyes were like those of some robot, one whose creators had given him the best of everything except for a soul.

“We had an agreement, and you broke it. And you know the consequences.” A few weeks ago she’d been 51 minutes late after calling out sick the day before, the most recent in a long string of absences. An HR specialist arrived from Home Office the next morning for a sit-down with Laura and Ted. Later, Justin, who sits six feet from the office, filled us in on what he heard – Laura was put on a strict 60-day probation. When Justin told us, we guffawed. She wouldn’t make it three days, not with her record over the past few months. Yet she’d gone eleven, surpassing even the most optimistic of us.

But it wasn’t enough, of course.

\*

At one time we loved Laura. She had a splendid blend of smart-ass and good heart. She organized a bridal shower for Margaret when no one else would, and had a few words to say about Jacob’s bachelor party, warning the older guys in the office that she’d cut their nuts off if they got that innocent kid into any trouble. When we saw her and smiled it wasn’t that pressed-lip puss we gave Ted or the other honchos who peek their pointed heads into our cubicles from time to time. It was genuine, as was the one she offered in return.

We were all in the office eight months ago when Ted announced that we had won the Lyncorp contract. Any other manager would have sprung for pizzas or, god forbid, a few bottles of cheap champagne. If nothing else, another manager would have stood in front of the room and yelled “Listen up!” giving us at least the stimulation that comes with an unscheduled announcement. But Ted sent word via email, writing only that the company had gotten the deal and that more work would be expected of us in the coming months. Overtime was available. Submit the form to him as instructed.

Laura was asked to stay late that night. She’d been here 19 years and knew how to get things rolling. She’d set up a new phone system for the extra calls that would come in, schedule the weekly reports for the next six months, create a spreadsheet to track our progress. After a few hours of that she called her daughter at college in Florida, gabbing away in the silent office until she realized it was after nine.

She left and began the two-block walk to the train. She made it less than thirty yards. A set of hands grabbed her arm and pulled. Before she could scream a

.....

fist smashed into her mouth, knocking out two teeth, and cracking two more when it punched again a split second later. Laura was dragged deep into an alley and thrown into a wall, then to the ground, where a kick to the stomach took the wind from her lungs.

The two young guys were vicious and cursing and ready to run with her purse before one stopped and said to the other: “Look ‘round. Anybody comin’?” Then he unzipped his jeans.

\*

Hank was the first of us to visit Laura in the hospital. He brought a bouquet and a card signed by everyone in the office. He told Laura she was looking better than he expected, then told us she was worse than he imagined. It wasn't the lost teeth or the stitches that had shaken him, he said. Rather, it was the way she struggled to smile through her split, swollen lips, a heartbreaking mixture of agony and optimism that had him ending eye contact to stare out the window and comment on the weather, twice, before checking his watch, Oh!, and hurrying out while babbling get-well wishes.

Laura returned to the office on a Monday, six weeks later. We approached her desk with a low “Heyyyy, how are youuu?” and left with “Just ask if you need anything. Anything at all.” Throughout the day we peeked over, searching her for signs of change. She typed away as usual, entering orders and answering calls. Barry walked her to the train that night. He told us that she mostly hummed to herself, tightly clutching her new purse. She's a trooper, he said.

In the next few days Carol would sometimes bring her a free cup of coffee. George almost got caught doing his impression of Zombie Ted to make her laugh. We did these things and more because we cared. We wanted her to know that.

Laura called out sick that Thursday and arrived at 10:19 on Friday, breathing quiet apologies. We told her it was no problem, of course. All snide jokes made to latecomers, like “Banker's hours?” or “Nice of you to join us!” were suspended for her. A month later, Lyncorp increased their order. Ted informed us via email, adding a note at the bottom saying Laura would not be in that day.

Early on, we worried about Laura when she was absent. But after her third or fourth time out, we thought of ourselves instead. Someone would have to fill in for her, leaving his or her own job to be covered by another, all the way down the line. We were already short-staffed, and any broken cog could very nearly stop the machinery. We groaned but soldiered on. We'd been through worse.

Lyncorp's demands multiplied. Laura's absences continued. Soon other customers were making noise, and new contracts were coming into the pipeline. During a meeting one of us suggested hiring a temp or two to help, a request immediately denied. We were already over budget, Ted said, and Home Office had laid down a hiring freeze. We were to make due with what we had.

Things grew worse with Laura, and, by default, for us. As we approached our busy season we could no longer plan a dinner or schedule an appointment after work without adding a caveat that the plans might change. We began to watch for Laura's entrance, exhaling with some relief if she walked through the door, agonizing in silence if she did not. And heaven help us if someone else called out sick—our day would be in chaos, our evening would be ruined.

In her fourth month back, Ted brought Laura into a conference room to talk about her attendance. A few weeks passed and nothing changed, and he sat her down again. She was late the following Friday, then called out on Wednesday the next week. That's when we began to openly grumble.

.....

We liked Laura. We did. And we felt for her. Truly. But how much longer would we have to cover for her? How many more times would we be late when picking up our kids, or going on a date, or visiting an elderly parent? Roberta flunked her night class final exam, the result of all those extra hours at the office, she said. Tommy gave up coaching his son's basketball team. Someone had to do something, we muttered amongst ourselves, not mentioning Laura by name. Not that we needed to – we knew what we thought.

We wanted Ted to lead. We developed a new boldness when dealing with him. They were little things – a loud exhale, a terse answer – but they were rebellions nonetheless. The more pressure we came under, the easier it became.

We sometimes think that Ted wouldn't have made a move had he not known we were behind him. And as loath as we are to admit it, we were. When the Decker deal – and that was a hell of a contract for our company – was four days behind schedule, that settled it. Ted called Home Office and the HR person arrived. We weren't happy that she was in trouble. But something had to happen, we reasoned.

We had lives too, we told ourselves.

\*

"I went eleven days on time, Ted," Laura said. She sat across from him in the conference room. Outside, we lowered the ringers on our phones and slowed the pace of our typing, making it easier to eavesdrop. "I finished all the H-14 files, I..."

"We had an agreement. You signed it."

"I *signed* it because that *flake* from HR..." Laura knocked her knuckles on the table, stopping herself when her voice began to rise. She sighed and started over, working to keep her anger in check. "Ted. Let's just...let's just...me and you, talk, O.K.?"

She looked to him for an answer, got none, then swallowed and said: "I...I wake up in the morning and I think about what happened to me that night. I step in the shower and sometimes I get so scared, thinking, they have my driver's license, my address. Are they gonna come over? Because things like that happen, Ted. They do, in this world."

"This isn't about your assault, Laura. It's about your job."

"Then I get on the train and anyone who even looks like those two. I...I can't explain it. My mind races and I *know* the logic and I *know* you need me here and I *know* I'm on a crowded train but...I have to get off. I don't...I..."

"I said, this isn't about your assault..."

"Assault? They beat the shit out of me, then one of them raped me. Let's call it like it is, O.K.? And I'm sorry that it happened, and I'm sorry that it's affecting my work, but all I need is another chance."

"This is the third time you've asked for one more chance. The third time. Your contract with the company states that you are employed 'at will.' That means we can..."

"I know what it means. I also know if I hadn't stayed late for the company this wouldn't have happened. What's the contract say about that?"

"If you're having personal problems, maybe you need to take some time..."

"What I need is my job. I came back. Everyone said: 'Anything you need. Anything.' Well, now I need something. I need a break. Look, don't pay me for the days I'm not here. But I will be here. I'm getting better, even my therapist says so. Jesus Christ, what do you think I'm doing, sitting in a bar all day? I'm either at home having a panic attack or walking three blocks out of my way to avoid that alley out there."

.....

“I’m sorry,” Ted said. “We agreed there would be no more warnings. Home Office has requested a daily report, so it’s all on file. My hands are tied.”

“Home Office? C’mon. They’re here once a month.” She hitched a thumb and motioned toward the office, toward *us*. “We talk about being in this together, right? They understand. Hell, take a vote, Ted. Everyone here is O.K. with my work.”

Laura must have detected something in Ted’s poker face, a tell that warned her to think again, because she went silent, then turned to look out over the floor. Our heads snapped down, and we feigned like we hadn’t been hanging on every word. But she caught enough of us watching, and in that quiet moment she learned the awful truth.

The fight left her then. “Oh,” Laura said almost inaudibly, and Ted made no attempt to dispel what she now knew.

“I’m sorry,” he offered, to break the silence.

Some of us felt shame, especially those who couldn’t hear most of what was being said and had to rely on her body language. Seeing Laura’s shoulders slump and her hand reach up to rub her brow was all we needed. Marianne broke into tears. Brian mumbled “Oh, Christ.” The word *betrayal* flittered through our minds, and we fought it because this wasn’t a betrayal. No, it couldn’t be. We kept telling ourselves that this had to happen. We thought of our own kids, our spouses, our lives. We thought of anything but Laura.

“God, Ted,” Laura whispered. “Haven’t you ever been afraid? Answer me that.”

He didn’t reply, of course. He stared instead, and when it became apparent she wasn’t going to move first, he began to gather his notebook, a pen, her file.

“Ted? Haven’t you ever felt afraid in your life?”

“We’re not getting into this game, Laura.”

“It’s not a game. It’s a question. Have you ever felt...”

“You need to go.”

Laura seemed to gain some inner strength then. Her hands gripped the side of the table. Ted glanced at that before regaining eye contact.

“Don’t tell me what I need. Just answer. Haven’t you ever been afraid?”

“Laura, I am asking you to go. If you don’t, I’ll call security.”

“We don’t have security. This shit building has a guy at the front desk and a janitor. Believe me, I’ve checked.”

“Then I’ll call the police.”

More of her energy returned and the edge in her voice sharpened. She flashed a smile that held no joy, and half-coughed a laugh that had no humor.

“Be my guest! But instead of all that, how about you just answer the question, Ted, and stop being a corporate *tool*. Have you ever been afraid in your life? In your fucking life have you ever had fear so bad that you...”

Ted reached for the receiver.

Laura’s hand slid across and slapped the phone off the table. Ted started to make a motion – maybe he was going to try to stop her – but he abandoned it halfway through. Perhaps he didn’t feel it would be dignified to enter into a physical contest. Indeed, she was working her way into a fury, and it looked as if a challenge might only spur her on. Ted folded his arms across his chest and stared at her, expressionless. Those who thought him genuinely cold may have been onto something.

“Are you happy now?” he asked.

“A little, yeah.”

.....

“Good,” Ted said, then stood and walked out of the room. Our heads bobbed again, the great pretenders, obeying some unwritten code of courtesy that said we should act as if we were oblivious to what was happening.

Laura followed Ted to his cubicle. He turned and saw her behind him and said: “This is your last chance to go. Then I’m calling the police.”

“I’ll leave, Ted. Right after you answer my question: Haven’t you ever been scared?”

We were all looking at them now. This had moved into the public realm, and our need to seem ignorant of the conflict was voided by the open-air spectacle.

“You can clean out your desk or I’ll have your things sent to you.”

“Just *answer* me!” Laura yelled.

Ted said, “I’m calling the police.”

“Do you want to know how scared I am?” Laura yelled. “Do you have any *idea?*”

His hand was almost on his phone when Laura reached into her pocketbook and pulled out a gun. It was some snubnose thing, chrome, and the florescent lights winked at the metal when she held it out. A few of us gasped, and when she heard that, she dropped her hand to her side, as if to end any threat. No matter. Ted stopped going for the phone the second he saw what she held.

“I’m so scared that I have to carry this. You think that’s the kind of person I want to be? It’s not! This is what they made me. Do you understand Ted? Do you *care?*”

The gun shook in her hand as she shouted.

Ted remained mute. In our heads we pleaded with him to say something, to calm this situation before it could grow worse. Yet he only stared into her eyes with the same lifeless look he always had.

“Jesus Christ Ted, can’t you say anything at all? Can’t you understand me?”

In the pause that followed Ted stayed silent. Laura seemed to regain control of her anger. Her voice lowered a notch and became steadier when she said: “Seriously, haven’t you ever been scared?”

She looked down at the gun, surprised, as if it had magically appeared in her hand. Then she raised it, like that was the most natural thing to do.

We went into gopher-mode, popping up from our chairs (though, we would later say, the smarter move would have been to hide under them). “Whoa whoa whoa, Laura, Laura, Laura, wait, wait, wait!” some of us cried.

“Well?” Laura said to Ted.

Afterward, when we’d tell the tale, our descriptions would differ on some points but never on this – she pointed the gun at his face. Not at his head or his chest or “at him,” we’d say, but at his *face*.

“What do you want?” Ted said with a barely audible tremor.

“I want to know if you’ve ever been scared like me.”

He breathed and we hung on the sound, waiting to hear what words he’d offer. His mouth opened a crack, then shut.

“Well, Ted, have you?”

Her grip tightened.

“What do you...?” he trailed off.

“Do you understand the question?”

He stared ahead without an answer.

“Have you ever been that afraid?” she asked. Then she pulled back the hammer. “*Have you?!*”

.....

.....

Ted said nothing.  
So Laura pulled the trigger.  
Ted let out a cry and collapsed. On the way down he lost control of his bladder and his bowels, both at once, in fear.

He was still moaning when Laura shoved the unloaded gun – or was it a fake gun? We never did know – back into her purse.

Ted looked up at her, then to us, pupils darting side to side as if a spring that had held his eyeballs in place had snapped.

“Well, you have now,” Laura said without pleasure.

Then she walked past us and out of our office. KR





– Ruth Olinsky





LOIS MARIE HARROD

---

# *These Swallowed Keys Unlock My Heart*

*after Monet*

At the bridge, we talk water lilies—  
how a man threw one root into the pond  
and now there are many

like the multiplication of fishes—  
imagine the cats ringing that multitude,  
did the lions get any?

And I am eating the bread you brought  
as if it were that old brown jacket  
I found in your trunk.

Eating, I say, is  
the only way I know of getting rid  
of something I do not want.

Which explains why Christ  
had to feed the five thousand,  
he wanted them to leave.

Compassion has a yeasty taste  
and when you begin kissing me on the neck  
I taste the sleeve.

There are so many fish below,  
I give in and throw a cuff to the carp,  
and then the yoke.

I imagine another pond,  
goldfish swarming on the glass ceiling  
while I play Chopin.

It is how I wanted life,  
bread that I can wear like parchment,  
music and carp splashing in the chandelier,

the tinkle of a rainbow jingle  
and down below the floating keys,  
you humming softly in my hands.

# *A Package From Hufei*

Father's brown shoes came wrapped  
in an old copy of *The People's Daily*  
together with ID papers, two renminbi, and a bicycle key.

I touched the holes in the sole  
and stared at the grimy string-shoelaces,  
the taped-up tongue, and the missing right heel.

I clutched the shoes in my hands  
heard the shouts of Red Guards.  
*Down with filthy rich landlord*

*who can afford leather shoes!*

# *The Sepulcher Has Been Filled*

Avalon Stromberg had returned to Eldon Haas' house this afternoon. She had called to Eldon through the screen door, then walked into the kitchen where she took a box of Twinings raspberry tea bags from a brown bag she had brought with her. She moved some Froot Loops and a bottle of cider vinegar to make space in the cupboard for the tea bags. Then she took two decks of cards from her purse.

Now Avalon was playing solitaire at Eldon's dining room table. She shoved the cards about like shuttles across a loom. Eldon could hear Avalon slapping her cards down from where he sat in the living room.

Eldon was reading the *National Geographic*. He liked the *Geographic's* stories about shipwrecks. This particular issue didn't have any shipwreck articles, but it did have interesting pictures of objects found by archaeologists in an Egyptian tomb. Eldon sometimes thought about being an archaeologist if he stopped being a preacher. But he considered himself to be such a good preacher that it would be a shame to stop doing it.

"Why don't you bring up some pears," Avalon said.

Eldon put down the *Geographic* and went into the kitchen where there was a square door cut into the floor. The door had an iron ring in the center. Eldon pulled on the ring and tipped the door back.

The cat, Pooky, bounced against Eldon's legs as he descended the stairs. Pooky was hugely pregnant. At the bottom of the stairs Eldon yanked on a length of twine. A sixty-watt bulb flickered.

The cellar was dug out under most of the house. Jars of canned fruit – pears, peaches, plums and ground cherries – sat on warped shelves along the south and east walls. A few potatoes and onions were piled in a root cellar. The root cellar had a six inch thick oak door that stood propped open with bricks.

Eldon brought a quart jar of sliced pears up to the kitchen. He took two sauce dishes from a cabinet and two spoons from a drawer. He broke the seal on the Kerr lid and spooned pears into the dishes.

"I been thinking," said Avalon as Eldon set the dishes on the table and sat down. "You're entitled to more than half of the Wednesday night offering."

Eldon preached Wednesday evenings at the Tabernacle of Heavenly Light in Tulip River for fifty percent of the offering plate donations. He skimmed another twenty percent off the top of the offering.

"I'm doing OK," Eldon said.

Columns of cards grew in length, diminished, then lengthened again in front of Avalon. "You should tell Reverend Palmer you want all of the offering plate. You could fix up this house."

Eldon had inherited the house under the terms of Georgine Stromberg's will. Eldon had drafted the will and presented it to Georgine for her signature four months ago during an evening of rhubarb wine drinking.

.....

Georgine had died of natural causes three months later at age eighty four. Eldon had moved into Georgine's house the week following her death. Eldon had not filed the will with the Benton County, Minnesota Clerk of Court.

Avalon stopped playing cards and ate a spoonful of pears. Avalon was short and squat. Her black hair sat on top of her head like a fountain held together with a rubber band. Her face was as powdered as a donut. She looked out the window.

"Look at those birds."

Eldon looked out at a flock of crows perched on the utility wires.

"Yeah?"

"Do you know why birds don't fall off wires when they sleep?"

"No."

"Their brains send a message to their claws to tighten a certain muscle to cling to the wire."

"So?"

"Just observing. That's one of your troubles, Eldon. You don't observe enough."

"I observe plenty."

Avalon had appeared in Eldon's congregation the evening before last. She had smirked at Eldon all through his sermon about the sins most likely being committed by roller skaters at the rink north of town.

Yesterday Eldon was sitting on his porch glider eating peaches when a blue Dodge Montego came up the drive and parked under the box elder.

"Mr. Haas. I'm Avalon Stromberg, Georgine's second cousin. Once or twice removed."

Eldon didn't correct the "Mr." to "Reverend."

"Good to meet you."

"Your house?"

The sun was in Eldon's eyes and he squinted. "Yes."

Avalon sat with Eldon on the glider for the better part of an hour. She wore a bright print dress and some noisy jewelry. She reminded Eldon of a loose chandelier. Avalon's legs were short and Eldon had to push the glider by himself. The glider twisted on every push. Avalon said she was staying at the Sunnyside Motel in town. She asked Eldon how much he got paid for preaching. He told her about his arrangement with Reverend Palmer. Avalon asked to see the inside of the house and Eldon showed it to her, basement to upstairs.

"How did you know Cousin Georgine?" Avalon asked Eldon.

"From the Tabernacle."

"I see. Where were you ordained?"

Eldon wasn't sure he was actually ordained according to the law — if there was a law. Reverend Palmer had put his hand on Eldon's head, read some Scripture, and pronounced him ordained. Eldon told Avalon this.

Eldon had become a preacher by default. He had played Mr. Antrobus in his senior high school class production of "The Skin of Our Teeth" and had felt the thrill of talking to an auditorium of upturned (somewhat) rapt faces. His first plan was to be a Broadway star, but New York was a long way from Minnesota and he didn't know how to become a star.

He had considered becoming a politician and giving speeches. But politics seemed like a lot of work. Constituencies expect results. Plus the American voting system makes politicians' jobs insecure. And politicians have to live clean lives — not that Eldon had plans to do otherwise, but things come along.

.....

Eldon's Uncle Quentin had suggested Eldon become a preacher. "Only thing preachers have to do is remind their flock every Sunday that a faraway god is looking after their interests," said Uncle Quentin. On the rare occasions that Eldon had gone to church (Methodist) he had noticed a lectern far above the congregation so the preacher could be gazed upon by the congregation.

Eldon had been too lazy to enroll in Bible college. He had gone to the Tabernacle of Heavenly Light and talked to Reverend Palmer. Reverend Palmer told Eldon he could preach the Wednesday evening service where the congregation was "small and smug; people who liked to have their self-righteousness tickled." It was at the Tabernacle that Eldon had become friendly with Georgine Stromberg, a childless widow.

Avalon ate another slice of pear, then put the three of clubs on the four of diamonds. She pursed her lips and shunted her mouth to the side, then moved it back. "You should be using your noggin about religion, Eldon. If you believe the devil brings bad stuff you should be praying to the devil not to bring the bad stuff. Forget about praying to God. You could market a revolutionary religion. Like Joseph Smith or Mary Baker Eddy." She frowned at Eldon. "And you need new eyeglass frames. You should get square frames to offset your Humpty Dumpty look."

Avalon came to Eldon's house every day for the next two weeks. She played solitaire and drank raspberry tea and told Eldon how he should change his life.

Pooky gave birth to two kittens – one orange and one grey. Eldon named them Marmalade and Dusty.

At the end of the two weeks, Avalon told Eldon she was going to Minneapolis for a few days. She left her tea bags in Eldon's cupboard and her cards on the dining room table.

A week later Avalon returned. She sat on the living room sofa and told Eldon she had been to see a private detective in Minneapolis.

"He says Georgine's will is illegal up and down, sideways, and through the middle. The police are going to put you away for a very long time in a very small space, Eldon. I'm Georgine's only living relative and I'm going to get this house."

Eldon went into the kitchen. Pooky and her kittens were lapping milk from a pie plate. Eldon opened the cellar door. He picked up Dusty and carried him down the cellar stairs and into the root cellar. Dusty purred until Eldon stuffed him in a gunny sack and walked away. Dusty began to squawk.

Avalon shouted, "What're you doing to that cat?"

"I can't find him," Eldon called up the stairs.

Eldon went back to the root cellar. He touched the rough cold stone. He smelled mold and mouse droppings and rot. Cobwebs sagged with dead flies. He stepped on an onion that squashed to dust under his heel. He nudged the gunny sack and Dusty meowed. Avalon's feet sounded on the stairs. Eldon went to meet her.

"The cat's in that root cellar," said Avalon.

Avalon walked into the root cellar. Eldon hit her on the back of the head with a brick. She fell and he hit her a few more times. When she was still, he took Dusty out of the gunny sack and put him in his pocket. Then he pushed the door shut and piled bricks against it.

Summer turned into fall. Marmalade and Dusty grew bold. They wandered into the farm next door and joined the commotion of animal activity.

Early one morning Marmalade fell asleep in the stall of a Holstein cow that was waiting to be milked. The cow lay down, squashing Marmalade and the three kittens that were budded inside her.

.....

Two days later Dusty climbed into the left rear wheel well of the farmer's car. The farmer started to drive to St. Cloud. Dusty stayed put for a mile, then fell off in front of a semi. The semi squashed Dusty with four tires. Dusty was one eighth of an inch thick when the crows began to peck at him.

On a beautiful May morning of the following year, as Eldon sat on his glider eating a dish of plum sauce, he choked on a pit. He was found by the postman.

The postman and his wife adopted Pooky. Pooky and the postman's wife listened to hymns on the radio every day. Pooky died at age sixteen as the Anonymous Four sang "The Sweet Bye and Bye." **KR**

# *Delos*

*for my father*

No one's born or buried here.  
Scientists dig, Greeks supervise,  
tourists visit. Guides describe  
a mosaic floor on a museum wall:  
"Athena in a helmet – masks decorate  
the border." One intact and realistic face  
smiles out, haunts me – but how to recall a past  
I cannot reconstruct.

Fig trees rise from empty cisterns,  
stairs lead down to a fountain  
green with algae and croaking frogs.  
Once, ten thousand slaves changed hands  
daily in the agora. The sacred lake drained  
for fear of malaria, overgrown with tamarind.  
A tall palm marks the site where Apollo was born  
to shiver in island wind.

Purple, parchment-like statice covers hillsides.  
I pick a sprig, pocket a white stone  
and suddenly realize you'd been here,  
fifty years ago, and done the same –  
later asking me to print *DELOS, 600 BC*  
on your souvenir, glue on the purple flower.  
I did. I'd forgotten.  
You, unearthed – we, for a moment, restored.

# *Invitation*

*Winter, 1986*

Once I avoided thoughts of Death  
to keep him from my life,  
pictured him dark-eyed, dark-haired,  
a cunning plunderer between jobs,

sharpening his scythe in a backroom  
somewhere, but he came,  
found my son swimming  
in his college pool and took him.

Now I tempt his return by driving  
icy roads over the Bernardsville Hills  
instead of using Route 202,  
salted and sanded. But he's busy  
elsewhere, inventing guises.

My son's face and smile begin to fade –  
why Rembrandt painted his wife  
as the funeral bells tolled,  
while he still could see her,

stroking her in brocade, rubies  
around her white throat – before  
she would be lost and beyond him  
as her body in the grave.  
Come, the door's open, the light's out.





– Ruth Olinsky

D. E. STEWARD

---

# *Novembaar*

Sail through a flock of crested auklets, all of them in closely swimming pairs

Glance out at them repeatedly while working on a solenoid problem in the bow locker

All these birds

Red phalaropes come here to nest in high arctic tundra ponds through the earlier months of the year from bobbing in the swells off the California and Baja California coast

As the sandhill cranes in great numbers from New Mexico, Texas and Chihuahua to nest in twenty-four-hour daylight on the Kamchatka and Chukotka tundra thatch

So much lifts across this part of the world

They trekked from here east into the Americas

On the land bridge that's now the shallow Bering Sea

First into the Americas from the Aldan River Valley in Yakutiya, from Southern Primorie, across Chukotka over onto the Seward Peninsula and on into the Tanana River Valley, the Nenana and Teklanika Valleys, on down through the Kuskokwim River Country

Left only hunting pits and fire rings

As all humans do, the whole way they understood well where they were

The only thing about who and where they were unfathomable to them was toward what, past their next horizon, they were bound

On our starboard bow a compact raft of buffleheads, spirit ducks, a few more females than males, swim buoyantly in the cold wind, take off together

We're off the last Russian cape now, the last waypoint before the headlands of the Seward Peninsula by Nome

Into the Americas now ourselves

.....  
Where these days we're Gringostroika through Spanglish to, "incredible mixtures... chulo-punks, pachucokrishnas, Irish concheros, butch rappers, cyber-Aztecs, Gringofarians, Hopi rockers" – Guillermo Gómez-Peña

Although perhaps in the Atlantic world we are all, except for the coastal Berbers and Arabs, and the proto-Iberians – of whom Pablo Picasso was one – at best only denizens of the littoral of the shining middle sea

Without the fish-wine-olive-flowers-and-sunlight savvy to completely understand

"Just as he appropriated the sacred fire, first of Christian then of tribal art, Picasso would now set about appropriating not merely the trappings of classicism but their numinous power... would evoke that animal mix of lethargy and ferocity, priapism and tenderness, that still characterizes life on the shores of the Mediterranean" – John Richardson

As on Villa Lante's tender tufa-terraced green water gardens in Italian air soft as fluffy clouds

To ferocious Parco dei Mostri in Bomarzo, bizarrely carved – as though quarried – gigantic rock outcrops artfully and capriciously designed to the ideal of the monstrous

Flaunting the haunches of humanism at the piety of the earlier Renaissance

Hard by Viterbo's clustered hills, worn, crowded as Rome's

Rapidly southward into an autostrada night flanking Capua, where Spartacus's slave revolt began in 73BC

Gladiators probably vaulted into the tribune to attack the guards that Sunday afternoon when they rose against the state

The arena's throngs may have immediately joined the mayhem

Any record of what happened then in Capua, within the profoundly ancient sources of what is Mediterranean, is gone, buried in the patria

All of us, all time, either wanting out of what we are and what we have, or yearning for outright identity with it all

While France collaborated, Teilhard de Chardin worked in New York from St. Ignatius Loyola at 85th and Park

The fascist pope, Pius XII, was relieved to have him out of Europe fearing that Chardin's giving materialism respectability from Darwinian ideas would lead to communism

"We now know that materialism leads to shopping malls" – Georg Brandes

.....

The Egyptians, frequently unable to grow full beards, tied a wooden substitute onto the chin of their Pharaoh to enhance his dignity, little boards that eventually assumed a role like eighteenth-century powdered wigs

The daimon that keeps pace directly behind us throughout our life is always looking over our shoulder from behind

Encountered only by those we engage face to face

And in a few years ships will pass regularly into the extreme North Pacific from the Arctic Ocean via the new Eastern Passage from Europe as arctic ice continues to disappear

.....



– Ruth Olinsky

.....

# *Not Quite Rosa Parks*

In the summer of 1945 just before World War II ended, my younger sister, Theresa (nicknamed Pete), and I, teenagers from Harlem, had an unforgettable and painful experience while journeying in the South. At the ages of 13 and 15, respectively, we traveled by ourselves from one part of West Virginia to another. We were visiting our two grandmothers in that state. The plan was to spend two weeks with both relatives.

We stayed with our paternal Grandmother, Martha East, for the first two weeks in the town of Wolf. We then caught a bus to be with our maternal grandmother, Georgia Tiffany. Since there hadn't been much previous contact with grandmother Martha in West Virginia, our mother felt it was important for us to know each side of our family equally well. Regretfully, the first part of our vacation was not altogether pleasant.

Martha was in her sixties and was beautiful. At the time, I thought our grandmother was odd-looking because of her unusual monochromatic coloring. Now I realize that she was quite striking. Martha, who was small in stature, had golden brown skin and light brown eyes. Her hair was a mass of tight tawny curls pulled back from her face. Martha had been widowed twice and lived alone in a small house in the town's valley area.

Martha seemed unhappy and was often impatient and critical of these teenage girls from New York City. Pete and I didn't have a relationship with Grandmother Martha and we were unaware of her ways. We didn't know how to handle her angry reactions towards us. Her expectations were unclear and we were unsure as how to please her. We were fortunate enough to find ways to have a good time. We fell in love with our little cousins Rudy and Jackie and made friends with the other young people in the town. Even so, there was a great deal of tension in Martha's house.

Looking at this memory from my present perspective, and to be fair to Martha, I believe that there was a lack of planning and preparation for our trip. People didn't do a lot of organizing for these kinds of events. Things were expected to fall in place. Unfortunately, it was a situation that was ripe for failure.

On the other hand, Georgia was a known factor. She regularly visited our family in New York and when we vacationed in West Virginia, we stayed at Georgia's house in the town of Beckley. Georgia, also in her sixties, was tall, a rich dark brown in color and regal in her bearing. Her smile was wide and her eyes sparkled when she laughed. Georgia was an intellectual who enjoyed reading and writing. There were shelves of novels in her attic and Georgia corresponded regularly with long letters to her children. Georgia studiously maintained a diary, noting her daily thoughts. She resided in a small house, alone, on top of a mountain.

.....

Georgia had a wonderful way of walking. She moved with an imposing majesty. Yet, she could dispense with her dignity in a minute to express her sense of humor. This grandmother was fun to be with at any time. She was like a stand-up comedian. Georgia rendered her grandchildren helpless with laughter, cracking one joke after another. Pete and I were vastly relieved to move on to our next destination, Georgia's place, where laughter abounded and the atmosphere was more relaxed. We were also eager to be reunited with our mother, Wyona, whom we hadn't seen for two weeks. Pete and I were really excited about a plan for meeting up with the rest of our maternal family. Part of our two weeks with Georgia included a weekend celebration of my mother's heritage through a family reunion.

From Beckley, in a day or so, Pete, myself, and other family members would be traveling to Dublin, Virginia, a town located in the western part of Virginia. This is the place where our folks emerged as free people after slavery ended. There was going to be a large gathering of the clan, with lots of feasting, story-telling and games. We would see many aunts, uncles, and cousins. Pete and I eagerly anticipated the fun we would have.

To provide a framework for understanding our experience on the bus to Beckley, I'd like to share some beliefs that my family had about their state. They loved that beautiful mountainous land. West Virginia was considered by them to be a better place for blacks to reside. They believed that this state had a kinder attitude towards persons of color. After all, my folks reasoned, during the Civil War, West Virginia remained with the Union. They also seemed particularly proud of their freedom to sit in any area of a bus they chose. This was a major point for them. I recalled from previous visits to West Virginia that there were other restraints for black people.

When we attended the movies, we had to sit in the balcony while whites were in the main auditorium. I also remember my mother dragging me, protesting, out of a grocery store when I began to eat an ice cream cone that we had just bought. My mother explained to me that "colored" people were not allowed to eat inside the store. Our money was acceptable, but our presence was not.

However, in spite of all of those "little nuisances," because we could sit where we wanted to on a bus, my relatives felt that West Virginia was not as racist as Virginia and all of the other Southern states. Well, our experience on the bus that my sister and I boarded that day belied those notions.

Pete and I found seats together, which were the last ones in the bus. We felt very lucky. The bus was an ordinary vehicle, hot and dusty, since there was no air conditioning in those days. Most of the windows were open for some ventilation. I noticed that all the passengers were white. Many pairs of eyes followed us as my sister and I got on the bus. I felt a little shiver go down my spine. I tried to reject that anxiety as I told myself that I was probably imagining the cool atmosphere in the middle of that hot day.

Pete and I sat back and relaxed, glad to be starting on this part of our journey. I could just imagine a nice meal our grandmother would be preparing for us. I was hoping that it would be fried chicken. I could almost taste the crisp, delicious hot meat. I was jolted out of my pleasant reverie, when the bus stopped at a little town. A young

.....

white serviceman got on. There were no seats and he had to stand. The bus driver called out, "Hey you there, get up and give one of our boys a seat." He sounded sharp and nasal, with a strong West Virginia twang. After a while, he repeated his orders in a loud and irritated voice. Pete looked at me and whispered, "I think he's talking to you." I was surprised.

"What? He is?"

"Yes, he's looking at you through his mirror." I looked up and met his angry gaze. I could see that he was furious because now he thought that I was ignoring him.

He added, "If you don't get up, I will put you out of this bus." My heart sank. I glanced at some of the other people on the bus. They appeared curious and distant. I felt very lonely. I was also frightened. I didn't have enough money to catch another bus and even if I did, I didn't know where a bus stop was located. I continued thinking. If the driver forced me to leave the bus, should I take Pete with me or would she be better off remaining in the vehicle and getting safely to our grandmother's? Would she be safe? She would be all by herself. She was only thirteen years old.

I could not leave her. I began to feel very upset. I looked around. Now, the faces seemed hostile. I wondered why one of the men didn't give this soldier a seat. "Oh God," I thought, "help me to do the right thing."

Pete mouthed, "What are you going to do?" I glanced at the bus driver. By this time his face was turning a bright red. The other passengers began to look at me and murmur. I thought to myself, "I am only fifteen years old, I am from New York City, I am not familiar with the customs here and I am definitely not among friends. I have to do something and do it quickly." I whispered to Pete, "Just stay in your seat and don't move."

With a deep shame, I stood up feeling humiliated and angry. This was not right. I decided to hold my head up high and stand as straight as I could. With as much dignity as I could muster, I stood and stepped aside so that the soldier could sit in my seat. The man didn't even glance at me or say thank you. He took the seat as if it was his due. He didn't show any embarrassment about being the cause of such disrespectful treatment. He sat there next to Pete as if it was his God-given right to have that place. I had become a non-person. I had met the sense of entitlement that whites often felt around blacks, particularly during those days.

I stood almost frozen in my fragile dignity. I kept my mind focused on an imaginary distant world within myself. I am a passionate reader and had much to draw on. My imagination was active and I went into world after world, escaping from my present circumstances. I drew on science fiction stories which I had devoured since I was twelve years old. I remembered a world, in particular, that was so far away that it was in another galaxy. The planet was peopled by beautiful creatures that were diverse in appearance and in culture. They were able to live amicably as kin. My heart delighted in this fair, lovely planet which only existed in a place beyond my dreams.

I was so deep in thought that I didn't even notice that the soldier was getting up to get off at one of the little towns along the road. I heard Pete say, "He's gone. You



.....

can sit down now.” I sat down and found myself shaking. Tears coursed down my cheeks. Pete leaned towards me and compassionately took my hands. We held hands until we got off at Beckley. I loved my sister for her encouragement. She was a very brave person, and I always admired her for that characteristic which she owned in abundance. Pete appeared strong and seemed unfazed during this incident. I believe that she was holding up to support me during this stressful time.

In my later years when I read about Rosa Parks, I was thrilled at her bravery. She had worked very hard that day and was tired. She just wouldn't get up when the bus driver had insisted that she should give a white person her seat. I read that the same driver had made her get off the bus when she entered in the front and forced her to reenter in the back after she paid her fare. I suppose Rosa felt that she had suffered enough with that man.

Whenever I thought of Mrs. Parks, I felt some guilt and shame. I compared myself to her and felt chagrined that I had not been as strong. Rosa was adamant about remaining in her seat. For her refusal to obey this unjust law, she was dragged off to prison. A famous photo of Mrs. Parks having her fingerprints taken at the Police Department has been displayed in many articles and materials written about this incident. This photo is not a badge of shame but a matter of pride, like a banner, paying homage to a very strong woman who fought for her right to dignity.

One day I decided to have a good talk with myself. I spoke to the fifteen year old within. “Look, it is ok. You were only fifteen years old. The situation would have worsened if you had insisted on staying in your seat. You did well. You protected your own life and probably your sister's life. Let's put this matter to rest and think of the positives. How wise you were in avoiding trouble that could have accelerated to a horrifying degree.” I hugged that fifteen year-old and I told her that I was proud of her. Afterwards, I felt an inward sense of relief and justification. I had really done the best that I could.

I continued to meditate upon the comparison of Mrs. Parks' experience and mine. I felt the saga remained somehow incomplete. True, I was not Mrs. Rosa Parks, but perhaps Rosa wouldn't have been as courageous if she were in my situation. Mrs. Parks had advantages that I didn't possess at that time. Rosa was mature and experienced when she was harassed by the driver. She was not a stranger in the town and according to written history, she even knew the man.

Rosa was well known in the community and when it was apparent to her people in the town that she was in jail, a leader of one of the black organizations came to pay her bail and had her released from prison. Another point was that Rosa was only responsible for herself. She didn't have a “Pete” with her. When Mrs. Parks remained stubbornly seated, she was ready for the consequences of her actions. She was aware of what would happen.

History was on Mrs. Parks' side. She was in the vanguard of the great Civil Rights struggle which changed our country for the better. A thrilling aspect of this story is that the black community, angered and energized by the incident, began a boycott of the bus company. Under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, their efforts to desegregate the buses were successful and black folks were free to sit where they wanted.

.....

In conclusion, I realized that there was more work to be done with myself. I needed to celebrate my role in this story. It dawned on me that I, too, played a part in that exciting time in history. I could envision long lines of people relinquishing their seats simply because they had no other choice. There were probably many young Irene's who gave up their seats. How many were there? We will never know, but I can now say with pride, "I have been one among many who paved the way for Mrs. Rosa Parks' history-making act."

I began to feel surprised and uplifted. "Rosa was standing on my shoulders," I thought. Then I gave a shout out to Mrs. Rosa Parks. "Thank God for you, Rosa, for having the courage to fight that degrading practice. I love you Rosa. Way to go!" **KR**



## **U.S. 1 WORKSHEETS**

U.S. 1 Poets' Cooperative  
Princeton, New Jersey

Volume 56

## *New Collections from Members of U.S. 1 Poets' Cooperative*

As evidenced by several new collections of poems, the Princeton-based U.S.1 Poets' Cooperative has some very talented members. Since its founding in 1973 – inspired by the West Coast poets' collaboratives of the 1960s - scores of area poets have found their literary footing through its weekly critique sessions, annual poetry journal, and in recent years, a poetry reading series at the Princeton Public Library.

This year, U.S.1 Poets' Cooperative joined with the Delaware Valley Poets and the Princeton Public Library to broaden an earlier poetry reading series at the Library into a new "Poets in the Library" with featured readers and an open mic session on the second Monday of each month.

U.S.1 Poets' Cooperative has spawned other groups, notably the Ragged Sky poets, published by Ellen Foos, founder and publisher of Ragged Sky Press. Several of its members, including Lies and Harrod, are also members of Cool Women. Members' poems have been picked up by Garrison Keillor's Writers Almanac and selected as Poems of the Day on various websites. Those with recently published fully-fledged collections (the subject of mini-reviews below) include: Lies, Harrod and Jane McKinley. Others with recent chapbooks include Harrod (*Cosmogony*), Hollander (*Counterpoint*) and Wanda Praisner (Cavankerry Press) to mention just a handful among many.

Besides these, other members of U.S. 1 Poets' Cooperative (too many to fully acknowledge here) have produced fine works in book form recently. For more on U.S.1 Poets' Cooperative, visit: [www.us1poets.com](http://www.us1poets.com).

### REVIEWS

In the midst of loss and longing, many of us turn to cliché. Not so with Betty Lies, Jane McKinley and, Lois Marie Harrod (though the latter's *Brief Term* deals less with these subjects than the two others featured below). Death is a universal and perennial subject. Poet Donald Hall, who has written about the death of his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, describes the process as beginning with a scream that becomes something outside of himself that he works as a sculptor works a piece of clay until it becomes art that can give solace, even pleasure and joy to others.

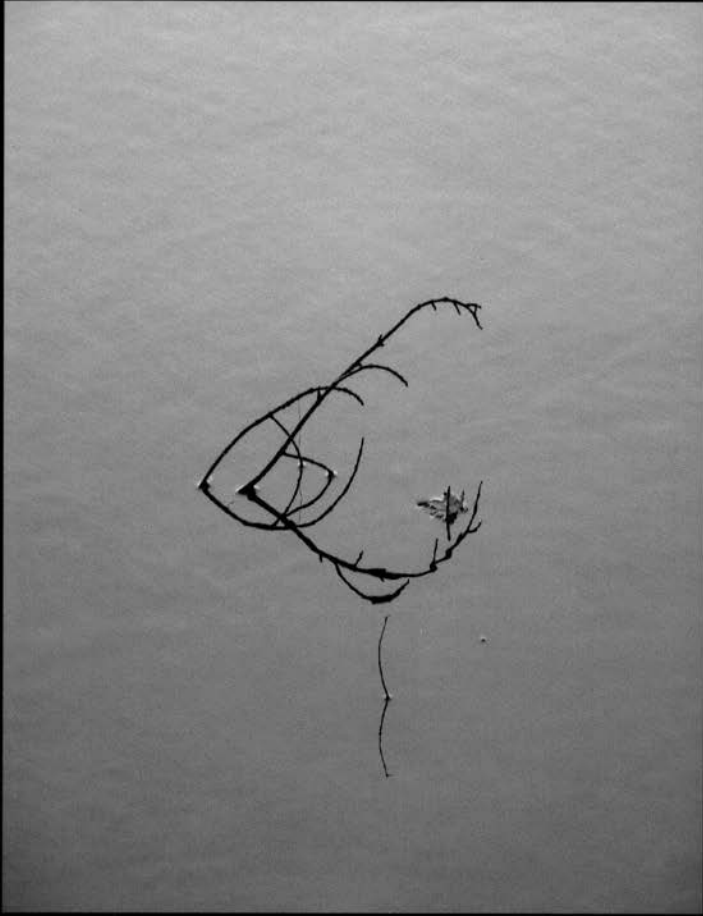
In *The Day After I Drowned* (Cherry Grove Collections, 113 pages, [www.cherry-grove.com](http://www.cherry-grove.com)), Lies achieves the "Hall effect," with poems about her husband's dying and death. Death is also a prominent presence in Jane McKinley's *Vanitas* (Texas Tech University Press, 96 pages, [www.janemckinley.com](http://www.janemckinley.com)). In Lois Harrod's *Brief Term* (Black Buzzard Press, 94 pages [www.loismarieharrod.com](http://www.loismarieharrod.com)), loss is also part of life. In each case, melancholia is tempered with a celebration of living by poets of clear-eyed honesty.

---

***The Day After I Drowned, Betty Lies***

The cover of Betty Lies's newest collection bears a stark image, a beguilingly ambiguous photograph of a branch and its reflection in smooth blue water. Or is it trapped in ice? In the title poem, "The Day After I Drowned," the poet gets up, gets dressed and goes off to school. Nothing and everything has changed. Subtlety and intelligence are the hallmark of this poet's work. In *The Day After I Drowned*, Lies presents us with an intimate portrait of a relationship forced to reckon with illness and death. Poems such as "Rehearsing Hell," and "Waiting for you to die: a cento," take us with heartbreaking clarity from diagnosis through waiting rooms into the "ravined maw of modern medicine" toward a Surrealist's silence. With "Elevator Number Two in Rahway Hospital," comes the absurd final free fall that follows death's announcement. In "Split Open," a shopping bag releases oranges and eggs in the parking lot along with the recognition of being alone and unprepared. Lies's details can jolt as when "Cleaning a closet yesterday,/I found a bag of batteries,/labeled in his slant hand:/Not Dead." When ironing her husband's shirts to give away, she mesmerizes meaning with repetition. "Now" is the collection's penultimate poem and the poet's negotiation with the language of widowhood. As Penelope Scambly Scott comments on the book's back page: "Apt images and craft can't make loss less painful."

Lies has leavened this collection by including poems of childhood play, first encounters, and love. The opening line of the first poem is a hilarious reminiscence, "The first bad thing I did with a boy," celebrates the sensuality of words in the mouth. Lies allows herself some fun. "That's Mine" is a teasing fantasy of a hot red Porsche, its body low and sleek. "Rejection" playfully applies publishers' stock rejection slip phrases to a relationship: "doesn't meet current needs," "not what I'm looking for," "do try again." *The Day After I Drowned* is a moving and beautiful collection of image-rich poems that invite the reader to return.



The Day After  
I Drowned

*Poems by Betty Lies*



.....

***Vanitas*, Jane McKinley**

Unlike established poets Lies and Harrod who have been writing for decades, Jane McKinley came recently to the artform after two decades as a professional oboist. She is the artistic director of the Baroque chamber music group, the Dryden Ensemble, and her musical training shines in her poems; her finely tuned ear informing her sense of line, form, rhythm, and meter. As Robert A. Fink writes in the book's introduction: "the oboe's voice is the voice of Jane McKinley's melodic and melancholic book of poetry." Fink likens the book's six sections to musical movements in a journey to assuage grief over the loss of a sister, the end of innocence, and the abrupt termination of a pastoral childhood.

In *Vanitas*, music and poetry are counterweights to grief. McKinley moves sure-footedly along the mossy paths of her own life bearing gifts for all to share. Given the depth of skill and artistry here, it is astonishing that McKinley began writing poetry as recently as 2003. Writing recently in *The Georgia Review*, McKinley described her first steps toward poetry when, driving through the rain, these lines came to her: "Pallid profile in alabaster/but for the dark hair,/perfectly coiffed,/redder than I remember./Is it blood-stained? ..." The lines acknowledged an image that had haunted McKinley for decades: the silhouette of her eldest sister lying in a casket when she was twelve. A week later, McKinley joined Jean Hollander's poetry workshop at the Princeton YWCA and, after receiving encouraging responses, she was hooked.

In 2008, her poem "Mud Season," won the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award from Carlow University. Included in this collection, "Mud Season" is a gem in sonnet form, a vignette of farm country, dependence on neighbors, the thoughtlessness of children, the kindness of strangers who recognize their own need in yours. In 2009, when "Vanitas," the title and defining poem of this collection, appeared in *The Georgia Review*, Robert A. Fink invited McKinley to enter her collection in the Walt McDonald First Book of Poetry competition. It won, and deservedly so.

*Vanitas* opens with its title poem, which takes its name from a type of still-life painting incorporating symbols of mortality of the Dutch School of the 17th century. The poem is the perfect introduction to the collection, containing the elements of art, beauty, family, music, and nature that are woven throughout. "Vanitas" is a still-life portrait of McKinley's Iowa childhood: when her mother whipped up waffles by the dozen - "as we ate in shifts. We didn't know then/how perfect it was, like a drop of water/before it plummets-poised, still whole."

Here is humor and a gentle nostalgia, with poems about father, mother, siblings, with family scenes as in "The Balloon," where the poet's brother receives a mail-order Weather Service balloon and attempts to set it up by attaching the vacuum cleaner hose "to the exhaust, the way he sometimes did/when it was his turn to dry the silverware." It's a prank gone wrong. When the vacuum cleaner isn't turned off, the balloon continues to expand until it bursts on contact with the living room's chandelier just at the moment (wouldn't you know) when mother arrives home. With "The Passing" and "The Fixer," we move closer to the present and the poet's life with children of her own.

These are poems to read again and again, to savor the richness of McKinley's language. One of my favorites is "Moss," in which the poet dreams up her own names for those springy green velvet living things (are they plants or creatures?) that favor the shadowy northern exposure. *Vanitas* is a remarkable collection of accessible poems, clear as crystal and as sharp as suggested by the stunning cover image of a shattering light bulb.

.....







# Brief Term

Lois Marie Harrod

.....

***Brief Term*, Lois Marie Harrod**

The cover of *Brief Term*, Lois Marie Harrod's collection of narrative poems about teachers and students, is worth pausing over. It shows pupils, including Harrod's mother at age 7, at the Rock Valley School, New Bedford, Ohio in 1921. The 13 boys and 13 girls wear laced and buttoned boots, homemade dresses of gingham and plaid, handknit sweaters, ties for the boys, bows for the girls. Their unsmiling faces make them look older than they are and contrast starkly with the characters who inhabit this book. By shared experience, it's a cast of characters we all recognize (or think we do) from the "quintessential American experience," as Kurt Vonnegut has described high school. "People often say: 'I know who you are talking about,' especially with the poem 'This Is a Story You Already Know.' Of course, they don't, and of course, they do," says Harrod.

The first poem of the book, "The Erotics of Teaching," includes an epigraph by Albert Einstein: "Love is a better teacher than duty," and describes the all-too-brief interlude between teacher and students. Poignant and funny, Harrod's poems are full of wisdom and kindness - for students who have ways of disappearing, with earrings and nose-rings, who giggle at *double entendres*, who go and are lost, or return like homing pigeons. In "Bread," the poet wonders "...what crust/you could have thrown him/ that made him come back to you today." *Brief Term* also has its fair share of death, by car crash, by suicide, by war, or as in the touching "Elegy for Kevin," who slip out too soon.

There's disappointment (at not being able to turn a life around) and there's optimism. In the wry "I Have No Life," an overly anxious teacher, in an effort to make the best of things, mistakes comment for an attempt at poetry with hilarious results. "Pink," is a rumination on the color of hair and of peonies, of ball-point marking pens and healthy babies. Here are a myriad of voices: of teachers at their most candid, of teenage students grappling with Sisyphus and Shakespeare, Leda and the Swan, syntax and cigarettes. There is also the voice of the imagined teacher Alice Ann, whose pronouncements, gossips, decisions and explanations fill the book's second section. Alice Ann's titles speak volumes: "Alice Ann Explains How to Write Your Poem on the Run during Summer Vacation When Teachers Don't Do Anything," "Ms. Finicky's Grammar Lessons," and "Homer Holds Down a Job in the Bureau of Blind Statistics."

One favorite has to be "Alice Ann Recounts the End of Another Year" in which inappropriate behavior on the part of two teachers shocks the head of the PTA: "Imagine, she said, ... acting like that when they have the whole/summer off and get paid so much/and then they have the gall to tell our kids/not to dress provocatively./ What's the world slumming to?/It's the pot calling the kettle back/to settle a score." Funny stuff. It's no wonder that the New York City Department of Education has chosen the book for its city-wide Mentoring Program.

*Brief Term* is a timely reminder of the dedication and influence of teachers from a perceptive poet who, after two decades in high school classrooms, remains committed to an undervalued profession that she believes is "well worth the doing." Harrod, who teaches creative writing at The College of New Jersey, has over 400 poems in literary journals and several award-winning chapbooks to her credit. Her *Cosmogony* won the Hazel Lip Chapbook Contest of Iowa State University. Her *Brief Term* is a great read: funny, at times heart-wrenching and full of wordplay.

.....

# *Moment*

This is a testimonial, pure and simple,  
to perfection crafted in a woman's face,  
its vellum confected of café au laits,  
the topography of eyes to nose to lips  
geometrically correct, no, precise  
is closer to it, not a flaw, blem,  
ding or irregularity, her message,  
totally unworded, a fleshed-out  
honest-to-god da Vinci expression,  
a kind of take-it-or-leave-it smile,  
the object of that face, if object exists,  
internal, enigmatic, invisible as pulse,  
an unsung chorus of Amazing Grace.

GILBERT HONIGFELD

---

# *Through a Window*

It is a neighborhood  
shorn of pretense,  
where cheap asphalt shingles  
are allowed to dry out and curl,  
where second floor extensions  
fit like hand-me-downs,  
where lean-to sheds brace  
themselves against their walls  
one-handedly, in the manner  
of a drunken mailman  
staggering homeward on a  
Friday night, and nearly there.



– **The Magician's Assistant**  
Anne Karetnikov

*(untitled)*

Girls with sweat beads  
Shoulder straps and sandals sit on a stoop.  
Ants saunter along the sidewalk.  
A tongue-wagging bulldog turns the corner.  
The neighbor's cat  
Flips its tail.  
Leaves on the sycamore  
Have no reason to move.  
Basketball rhythms get louder  
As shirtless boys burst in view.  
Near the curb, a sharp piece of glass  
Winks the sun.  
Ricocheted ball finds itself between  
The girls' laughter  
Mingles with the heat.  
Boys grip their pants  
Pull dangling T-shirts from rear pockets.  
Girls adjust their sassy.  
One spouts, "What ya'll doin'?"  
A muscular youth with braided swagger zips,  
"We're gonna' play ball. Wanna' come?"

LAVINIA KUMAR

---

## *Irish Farmer*

He was washed and in his best suit,  
but there was a worry if his wellies should  
keep the mud from the field or be cleaned,  
as his wife drank cups of tea in silence,

someone making pots hot and strong,  
neighbors swirling around the kitchen  
table talking over her about him,  
and when Aunt Mary was coming in.

She banged a florin on the table,  
horse side up, *that's for luck* she said  
into sudden silence, *for the races,*  
*and he'd taken it out of my bag.*

So they'd lost all the races, lost  
their last cow, and come the long way  
back to their house and a last drink,  
till the knock on the door came hard.

LAVINIA KUMAR

---

# *The Salted*

*Rhythmical, Paul Klee*

The slim black trunk sticks out  
of the white snow bank,  
the feet of the tree smothered,  
the chessboard carpet covered, too,  
its black and white squares over  
the grey ashes of our black cat,  
and now they cannot blow away –  
the rug squares wrinkled  
its weave loose, with holes,  
and frayed ends, the white  
stained with old salt –

Grandpa Joe shakes salt on eggs  
in the morning, his soup at noon,  
and his plain pasta at night,  
he even throws it over  
his left shoulder  
when a black cat crosses his path.



JOSEPH PRENETA

---

# *Homeless*

as always  
my address tonight

is on the street –  
the moon

the only obliging light –  
death admires me

from near and afar  
it is a matter of aesthetics

death laughs  
and turns a corner

for an aftermath –  
i eventually reach that corner

and turn it...  
nothing left

but the afterglow  
of the moon

the only obliging light  
for the living –



– Forest Deer  
Anne Karetnikov

# Changing

Andy Powell thought things might have to change after the big argument at the library. He had misplaced the DVD of Richard Linklater's 1991 classic *Slacker* for over a year – *how fitting* he swore he heard the library clerk with the lisp mutter – and he expressed shock, outrage and disappointment, in that order and all to no avail, at the woman's insistence in keeping the forty-dollar lost fee on his account. Misplaced for more than one year is deemed *lost not late*, she told him, in his view with all the icy certitude of a serial killer passing judgment on his hundredth victim.

He was not oblivious to the unfortunate reality that costs were accelerating at an insane pace (all costs, for everything, even free samples of bourbon chicken at the mall food court growing smaller and with decidedly less alcohol). His income of course had remained stable: near zero. And he was aware from years of watching Meathead's wife that forty dollars could still feed someone somewhere for a year. Yet every simple matter of money was always at its heart a matter of principle and he was never shy about principle.

*How incredibly arbitrary! What if the Mormons in Salt Lake City who got their daughter back from that lunatic after all those years took that position?*

*If you're referring to Elizabeth Smart, I believe she was missing for only nine months.*

*Only nine months?! And I suppose she was merely late to you?! I additionally suppose that if Jim Morrison were to show up here today and request your permission to play an acoustic *Light My Fire* on the library's front steps that you would casually inform him, sorry, you're lost?*

*Respectfully, Mr. Powell, this is the library's policy.*

*Well, it is just such a discriminatory policy that fails to distinguish lost for more than a year from lost for more than five years, perhaps even lost forever!*

He hated that word *forever*. It was scary and inevitably started him on the rather difficult task of deciding if there was a god and whether time travel would be available to the average American in the thirty years he figured he had left without it. He regretted even mouthing the word now and was determined to fight back thoughts of Mayan gods and Nietzsche while the lisp lady tapped her fingers on the checkout desk. He wanted to ask for a supervisor – in similar stands by telephone he had learned to keep hitting 0 and to immediately ask for the grand supervisor of all supervisors – but a prior supervisory encounter over his ill-fated attempt to scalp a library-validated parking pass made him nervous.

.....

What the hell was a library anyway other than a giant book club without coffee, middle-aged women and four or five people who hadn't had time to read the book but came anyway? They should thank him for all the books and movies he *did* return on time, even *early* on occasion, rather than nail him for some twenty-year-old film that had found its way to the sixth dimension between his mattress and his box-spring. Didn't they realize that anyone interested in seeing Linklater's masterpiece was perfectly content to wait till *whenever* came around?

Fifty-five years of this. More than five decades of logic, of earnest effort and good intentions, and yet there she was, tapping her fingers impatiently like there were more than seven people on the line behind him. Sorry Obama, this world is never going to change. They sang songs about it, wrote poetry and long and short stories, all about the world's inability to change. Enough was enough. Andy would have to take matters into his own hands. He said *good-bye*, and added *good luck* and *have a nice day* for emphasis, and headed for the door. He tried whistling on his way out, but he had never tried before and the Kander and Ebb song quickly morphed into a silent trickle of saliva that ran down his shirt. No matter, change wasn't going to be easy, and he would not be easily deterred.

He blamed whatever problems he had on the fact that he was an only child. If only he had been blessed with a younger brother to beat up, or an older brother to be beaten up by, he was sure things would have been different. Loneliness did things to people. In his youth, he always believed that his parents had engaged in detailed nightly discussions for years about a second child but had been disheartened, something that didn't do much for his confidence. Both of his parents worked long hours, so he was raised by Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas and Dinah Shore. He was the first and only kid who knew to shout *What's Your Point?* at *What's My Line?* He always wished he knew a language so he could talk trash about people without anyone knowing. And when he had discussed this with Sara Goldfarb, his first almost girlfriend, and even tried to teach her part of a language he himself created, she stopped taking his calls, had her younger sister tell him she was in the shower which seemed plausible the first sixty calls but a bit strained after that.

He saw the FOR RENT sign above the coffee shop and wondered if moving out of the house he had inherited from his folks would be necessary for real change. Living above a successful coffee shop – with hundreds of people grabbing a cup of joe on their way to inventing new devices to transmit *OMG the older guy from the health club with the four-pack who looks like a cross between Ashton and the guy who won Idol last year is sitting right next to me...five feet away...should I invite him to senior prom????* – that had to be the closest thing to working other than actually working. He would revisit the idea later; change was good, too much change all at once probably not so good.

There was a HELP WANTED sign in the front window of the coffee shop. He remembered how his father had brought him into the New Brunswick office one entire week that 1969 summer, showing him off to the folks in short-sleeved white dress shirts and awesomely wide ties, in those halcyon days before yet another idea was ruined by institutionalizing it for one April day every year. 1969, *that* was the year for change. Men walking on the moon in July had been impressive enough but so was a half million young people at Max Yasgur's farm in August, gathering for nothing but

.....

three days of peace and music. And in the fall, when Tom Seaver and Tommie Agee took it from worst to first, shocking the Baltimore Orioles, the ticker tape parade through Manhattan on Channel 9 that followed seemed to make all change and all dreams possible. Somehow, some way, body counts from Asia on the seven o'clock news would cease, black and white men would learn how to get along, The Man would grow old and die off. And the eighth grader then experiencing a different kind of change would have another ten years to figure out how to avoid the 7 to 7 soul-sucking ambush his father had wandered into.

That August, like always, his father had been unmoved and not the kind of guy that the man on his left and the man on his right were, the kind who paid fifteen cents for a black coffee and a quarter for a buttered roll and got to hear *how 'bout those Mets?* at the cash register. His father warned him to keep up from the moment they exited the warehouse parking lot until he found his place at the extra desk in his father's small office, the one Andy never thought of as a desk, covered as it was with rolled-up plans and papers marked Inter-Office Memo and blue mimeograph paper with ink that took three days to fade from your fingers. By the end of that week of show and tell for his father – *this is my son, Marvin, he might be replacing you next week* – he was anxious to return to the relative tranquility and hopefulness of middle school, despite the gift of a slide rule he never did learn to use from the big boss Schwinger – *I should have told Schwinger to screw off when I had the chance* (which along with *your mother and I used to cut quite the rug at Roseland back in the forties before you were born* were his father's two most commonly stated memories later in life).

He stared back at the coffee shop sign, thinking that maybe everyone should wear a HELP WANTED sign as a necklace or maybe some fancy t-shirt design. Coffee shop worker was a real possibility, but he worried that any job which involved interfacing with the public would inevitably involve interfacing with the public. He knew he could never tap his fingers with an air of false patience like the lady at the library or even more basically ask *how can I help you?* when a customer arrived. Just who would he have to be to think that he could help *anyone*, whether to a spinach and egg croissant and coffee from Sumatra or with larger, more complicated issues? There was too much arrogance to the question and any of the other substitutes (*welcome...are you a member of our consistent customer club?...who's next on line?*) that his new employer might encourage.

He turned to walk back up the boulevard, lost in thought. The best job he ever had, not even close, was his few years as a professional line sitter. He had always loved lines, loved the feeling that he was ahead of somebody. And to actually be paid for it, well, that was almost too much good fortune. Back in the nineties, he'd made pretty good money at motor vehicles, at the bank, at the unemployment line (where he could pick up his own check), but technology had come along and his gravy train of sturdy legs and extreme patience was gone.

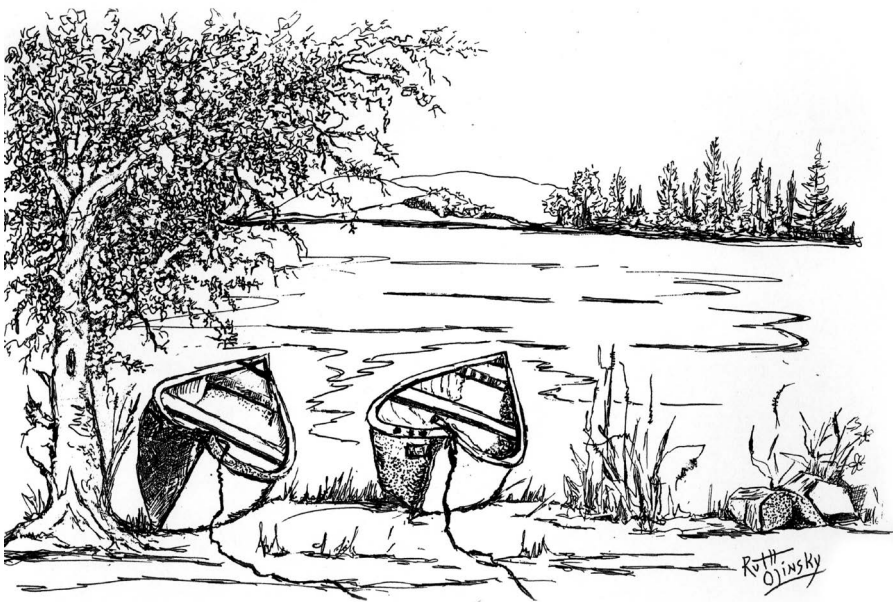
Thinking about *jobs* was almost as depressing as all of those thoughts he had about *careers* decades ago. Talk about being trapped. He was an *idea man*, after all, still spitting them out at quite a rapid pace even as his body aged and he found himself spending more time than ever staring at birds and children in the park. Andy was one guy who didn't see the big deal about *executing* the ideas. *Anybody* could do that.

.....

Lately he had been giving some serious thought to *Andy's List*, a website where people could go to muse. The world needed more musing, that much he knew.

It had been a rich life and he liked to tell himself as often as he would listen that he was still young and his best days lay ahead. He wrote graphic novels for awhile that nobody read, thus missing out on his superhero creation, *Afterthought*, a young man bitten by his wife on his honeymoon under a full moon who became invisible most nights and weekends. He created an adjustable bra that nobody bought, thus missing out on the possibility of going from B cup to D cup and back again, all at the same social function. And after studying religions, all of them, one by one, one year fasting on every religion's day of fast and losing twenty unwanted pounds, he had created his own religion that nobody believed in, thus missing out on the possibility of eternal bliss and eternal damnation on alternating days of the week.

Changing was as tiring as ever. He hurried past the coffee shop towards the library. With any luck, it would be back out on the shelf. There it was, Linklater's *Slacker*. He eagerly cradled the DVD in his hands and spotted the lisp lady back at her perch. He smiled and took his place on the line. He would show her the true meaning of lost this time. **KR**



– Ruth Olinsky

# *The Bottom Line*

“You know, I have my own bottom line,” the girl sitting next to me said to me, in Chinese. Then she looked at me, waiting for the inevitable question from me.

“What is that?” asked I.

“I never touch certain parts of my client’s body,” she said slowly, emphasizing “certain parts.”

Her name was Hong Zhang, a girl about twenty five. It was the first time I met her. I sat next to her for the rest of the night. She was by no means beautiful. You could say she was not even pretty. However, under the warm soothing yellow lights of the house, she was serene, mystic, and somehow attractive. She was small in size, with a slim waist and black long hair in a ponytail style. She sat there with her back straight, feet on the ground next to each other, and hands on her lap. Whenever she looked away from me, my eyes could not help but stray to her hands. I felt like a pervert peeking through a window into a bedroom. I told myself several times: stop looking at her hands. It’s improper to stare at a lady’s hands. But I could not control myself.

Such a pair of hands!

Small and delicate, with fairly long fingers and tiny round knuckles. The skin was milky white, like the surface of white jade. I could clearly see one thin blue vein running under the half-transparent creamy skin. Any man who sees such a pair of hands wants to touch them; I was no exception. But I knew that was next to impossible. I envied those who were lucky to be touched by such beautiful hands. And I knew there were a lot of lucky guys out there, so long as they are willing to pay....

Next day at the lab, I called Ping Zhang, Hong’s cousin. Ping was a graduate student in the math department. I studied chemistry. I asked Ping if he wanted to go hiking this weekend. It was October; it was the time for foliage watching; it was beautiful in Boston in October. He said yes and we started chatting away. At the end of our conversation, I casually mentioned that he could bring his cousin along. He immediately said that was not possible because Hong had to work weekends, every weekend. I was disappointed but showed no sign of it.

Back from the outing, I put all my heart into my lab job, forgetting anything else.

Christmas was drawing close. I decided to throw a Christmas party in our dorm. I told Michael, my roommate, about my plan. He was all for it. Michael loved Chinese food, and I was a decent cook. So we started to act. I called and invited people, including Ping. “How about your cousin? Can she come this time? I don’t think she has to work on Christmas Eve,” I asked him.



.....

“I don’t know. Let me ask her,” answered Ping.  
Two days later, Ping called me back.  
“Hong can’t come,” he said.  
“Why?” I asked.  
“Well, I’m not quite sure this time. All I know is that she won’t work that day. It seems that she has to go to someplace else.”  
“Who else does she know except you?” I did not believe this.  
“Believe it or not, she told me she had some American friends who invited her over.”

After putting down the phone, I told Michael I wanted to cancel the party. Michael strongly disagreed. He did not know the reason for my sudden mood change, but he tried hard to persuade me and to cheer me up. Finally I caved in. We busied ourselves with food shopping and preparation. On Christmas Eve, I spent a whole day cooking. Our small kitchen became a big happy mess: pots, bowls, dishes, foods, all spreading out; noises of cutting, cooking; and the delicious mixture of scents. I came from Sichuan, the central part of China, famous for its hot and spicy food. Michael was constantly coughing, but he was in high spirits the whole time, poking around, asking what he could do to help. I told him to stay away from the food. The only thing he could do was to peel garlic and scallions. I didn’t even trust him washing the vegetables. This was my own battlefield, my home lab. I didn’t like other people to mess with it.

While I was cooking the beer duck at five o’clock, people started to arrive. At six, almost everyone was here. We started our party. Tonight’s food was a big success. I could see that from the way people ate. Michael kept praising me and the food, and at the same time describing to everyone what he found during my cooking. I talked rarely. That wasn’t the usual me. Ping sat next to me. I wanted to talk to him about Hong but I didn’t know what to talk about, or what to ask. Think of it: a girl I only met once. What could I say?

Ping seemed to understand me. After a while he started talking about Hong. He told me Hong was two years younger than him. They grew up together in the same city in China, went to the same school from elementary to high school. Hong was a good student in school, even better than him, he told me, ranking higher in her class than he did in his. But she couldn’t go to college because she was three points short after taking the national college entrance exam. Just three points! Ping went to college and after graduating came to the U.S. as a graduate student, pursuing his Ph.D. I listened attentively. Finally I sighed, “Just three points, can you imagine, she and you are now on such different paths.”

One month after the New Year came another new year, the Chinese New Year. The College Chinese Student Association, of which I was a committee member, planned a big party in the campus student center. Everybody was invited. Even though this year it fell on a Tuesday, even though there was no parade on the streets, no fireworks in the sky, no day-off for us, it did not matter. At seven o’clock sharp the party started. About a couple of hundred people attended. Most were graduate students. We chatted; sang Karaoke; and some people danced on the floor to the karaoke songs.

But the most exciting thing was the food. The food was fantastic! We asked everybody to bring at least one dish of their specialty to the party. The result? A banquet of all kinds of traditional, authentic, delicious Chinese food, from the hot

.....

and spicy Sichuan food, to delicious Cantonese seafood, to northern Chinese Beijing style, to southern sweet Shanghai style. As one of the party organizers, my role was to arrange all the dishes on the big table. So even before the party started I had already had a visual feast: the golden-colored sliced double-cooked pork with red pepper source, which was one of the typical traditional Sichuan foods and also one of my favorites; hot and spicy tofu; a famous Shanghai dish called shrimp dumplings, with its half transparent wrapping one could almost see through; steamed buns stuffed with roast pork which were still warm with white steam rising into the air, I could smell the roast pork; the fried sesame balls, shaped like baseballs, only in brown and the surface full of white sesame seeds; someone even brought the famous Beijing duck. My mouth started watering. Of course, as an old Chinese saying says: no fish, no feast, we had all kinds of fish tonight: fish in hot and spicy source, sweet and sour fish, steamed fish, fried fish with flour paste, and fish balls. The list went on.

When the party was half way through, I grew thirsty. I walked over to where the drinks were and reached for a bottle of water when suddenly I saw a small, white, jade-like hand reaching for another bottle next to it. So familiar! I looked up. Right in front of me stood no one but Hong, smiling and waving at me. She obviously remembered who I was. She was wearing a long blue skirt with a red belt around her waist.

“I didn’t know you would be here tonight,” I said.

She smiled again. “My cousin told me about this party and I asked my boss to give me half day off. So here I am.” She paused a little and continued, “I want to thank you for inviting me for your Christmas party, even though I couldn’t come.”

“Let’s find a place and sit down.”

We walked over to the corner and sat down.

“How long have you been here, six months?” I started.

“Yes. I can’t believe it’s been six months, seems to me both a blink and an endless period,” Hong’s mood changed a bit, as if remembering something unpleasant.

“Is it hard, your work?” I asked.

“I don’t want to talk about my work,” she said, moving a little away.

“How did you come to the United States?” I changed the topic.

“Didn’t my cousin tell you already?” she asked back, looking straight into my face.

“Eh...” I stammered, “he told me a few things about you.”

“What about me?” she asked, part nervously and part coyly.

“That you broke up with your boyfriend in China; that you had a license in massage in China; and that you applied and got a working permit from Canada Embassy. When you stopped in New York to change the plane, you decided to stay in U.S., instead of going to Canada. Is that so?” I asked.

“That’s mostly right,” she answered. “Two things need to be corrected, though. One is that it is not that I broke up with my boyfriend. It’s the other way around; second: when I stopped at New York, my cousin came from Boston to New York to meet me. He told me I can stay in U.S. if I want; and he also said that U.S. has more opportunity than Canada. So I stayed.”

“So your status is ‘black’ now?” I knew I was a little too direct but I just wanted to prove my long-time suspicion.

“Yes. I’m “black.” I can’t go to school here; I can’t find a decent job; I can’t even get a driver’s license. Anyway, my English is so bad that I don’t think I will ever learn to drive.” I could see that she had slipped into the bad mood again.

We stopped talking. We looked over the crowded hall. People were talking,

.....

laughing, and dancing. The music changed to a fast and loud piece. It was hot, and suddenly I felt a slight ache in both temples. “Would you like to go out to have a walk?” I asked her.

“Sure, let me get my coat,” she said.

We went outside. Nobody in the party noticed our departure. It was a clear and starry night, chilly but no wind. We walked along the campus walkway. The cold air refreshed me. I breathed deeply. We walked slowly. For about five minutes we said nothing. Then Hong broke the silence. “Oh, it’s such a beautiful night. Look at the sparkling stars, and the white snow around us. It looks yellow under the lights but I know it’s white.”

We walked aimlessly. Stepping on the snow under such a beautiful sky made me feel lightheaded. But my headache was gone.

Hong quivered a bit. She must be cold. I took off my jacket and gave it to her. She refused.

I suddenly realized that we were in front of my dormitory building. I did not know how we ended up there. I looked at my watch, and realized that we had walked for two hours in the snow. I suddenly got an idea. I said to Hong, “Here is where I live. You look tired and cold. Would you like to go up to take a rest and warm up a little?” She hesitated a couple seconds and said okay.

My building was a seven-story, red-brick building. My room was on the third floor. I looked at my watch. It was almost eleven. The whole building was very quiet. We did not take the elevator. We walked up the stairs. All the way we did not see a single soul. We did not talk. The only sound was Hong’s high heel shoes knocking the concrete floor with a clear and crispy rhythm: tar, tar, tar....

We entered the room. It was empty. Michael must still be at the party. I asked her to take off her coat and sit down at the sofa in the corner of the living room. I walked over to the refrigerator, and found some oranges inside. Without asking her, I took out two oranges, cut them into pieces, and put them in a plate. I walked over to the sofa, gave the plate to her, sat down next to her. It was a small, purple, two-person love-set. Our bodies were close to each other. She smiled at me, and gave me a piece of orange. When I reached out to receive the orange from her right hand, my hand somehow touched her finger. Even though it was a very slight touch, my heart trembled violently, as if electrified. We started eating orange slices.

I said, “Your skirt matches the sofa so perfectly. I don’t have a camera. Otherwise I’d like to take a picture of you.”

She just sat there, smiling.

I continued, “You know, I have been thinking of that night when we first met.”

“Really? I don’t believe it. My cousin said you are a Ph.D. student, and going to graduate soon. You must be occupied with your study and research stuff. I don’t think you still have time to think other things.” She was a little serious now, but still with that smile lingering on her face. She spoke slowly, as if every word was a jewel, or bead, rolling out from her small and delicate mouth.

“I’m also a human,” I half-joked. At this moment I noticed that both our hands were on the sofa. My left hand was just less than one inch away from her right hand. As if attracted by a magnet, my hand started moving, slowly. First the skin heat, then the electricity. I could feel it now. But suddenly her hand withdrew.

The room became silent again. Hong stood up and said she had to go. I nodded and we walked back to the party and found it was almost over. Ping stood there, obviously a little worried. When he saw both of us walked into the hall, he

.....

squinted his eyes, as if he knew some secret. I didn't say anything to him. We walked out of the building. I accompanied them to the parking lot. Ping had to drive Hong back to her place. I said good-bye, extending my right hand. Hong reached out her right hand. We shook hands, just a little bit longer than usual, and parted.

It was my last year of my Ph.D. study. I was in the final stage, writing my dissertation. There were only three months left. I decided to put away everything unrelated to my writing, including Hong. I buried myself in my research and writing, juggling the lab and the library, only going back to my dorm to sleep. Then finally the day to defend my dissertation arrived. I passed without much hassle. I was happy to tell the news to Michael. He was thrilled. He insisted a party was needed.

"Of course the usual," he pronounced, "I buy all the things, you cook!"

"No, No, I shouldn't cook this time." I protested. Now that my degree was finished, I felt drained, empty.

"OK, then, I'll order out. Wait, I'll gather a few people and we chip in. Let's have a party right here."

A party. Suddenly something filled me. A figure materialized slowly in front of me. For three months I hadn't thought of her. But now her image stubbornly reappeared. I shook my head, trying to get rid of that image. "Ask Ping to come." I said to Michael.

It was a nice gathering. All my close friends came. Everyone called me Doctor Zhang. After dinner, I found a chance to talk with Ping. In the middle of our conversation I casually asked how Hong was doing. She is doing all right, he said. He sensed something in my voice because he said to me, "You guys didn't see each other since the Chinese New Year?"

"No, why did you ask that?"

"Because that night I saw you two came back together from outside. I thought you two..." He squinted, didn't finish.

"No, we just took a walk. That's all. We talked. She told me her story, briefly."

Ping sighed a little. "You know, her life at that massage place is difficult. Especially for the first six months, she often called me and complained to me. You know how hard it is for a young girl at that kind of place. Plus there is the language barrier. She told me she doesn't understand much what her clients say to her. But she knows what they want."

"Last Christmas you told me she found some American friends." I said.

"Yes. Things got much better since then. I think. You saw her at the Chinese New Year party. Wasn't she OK?"

"Do you know anything about her American friends?"

"No, I'm curious myself. I asked her several times but she dodges the question."

I was at a loss, and didn't know what to say. But suddenly Hong's image appeared again in my head. And my right hand seemed still to have the delicate warmth of her hand from that Christmas party.

"Give me her phone number," I heard myself saying.

Ping was obviously taken back by my bold request. "I can give you her phone number. But it's not easy to make the call. Even I seldom call her unless absolutely necessary."

"Why is that?"

"Because she has an odd working schedule. She works late, and gets up late. It's definitely not a good idea to call when she is working."

.....

.....

I'll call her tomorrow, I said to myself silently. But I was struggling that night after the party.

Next day I got up, still thought of last night's talk with Ping. I couldn't make up my mind to call or not call. Ping was not in favor of it. I could see that. What did I have to talk about with Hong? I felt close to her and distant from her at the same time. I looked at that onerous phone in the corner whenever I passed by that day.

It turned out that I didn't pick up that phone. I let the whole business of calling drop. I had to admit that I was a person of more thinking than action.

A new chapter began in my life. I found a job after graduation. It was at a pharmaceutical company not far from the school. I rented a small apartment. Michael was sad to see me leave the dorm. He complained that nobody would cook good Chinese foods for him. The first few months of my new work gave me a heck of hard time. I was so used to college life that I found it hard to work nine to five, every day. Then one Saturday night, I was alone at my apartment, reading, when the telephone rang. It was Ping. I hadn't talked to him for several months. I was a little surprised and suddenly I felt uneasy in the pit of my stomach. I had a foreboding about what he was going to tell me. I was right. The first sentence he said to me after greeting was: "Do you know that Hong is getting married?"

I was utterly shocked by his question, as if a knife stabbing at my heart. "What? What did you say?" I heard myself repeat the question.

"So you don't know," Ping said. I could hear a slight sigh in his voice. "I didn't expect, but I thought you guys may be in touch somehow. So you two didn't... she is going to marry an American."

"Why didn't you tell me this earlier? What the heck this is? You must tell me everything!" I shouted to the phone.

"I just got the news myself this morning." Ping paused a little then continued, "I didn't hear from Hong for a while. Then she called me this morning and told me the shocking news. I was pressing her to tell me more, especially about the person who she is going to marry. She didn't say much. Only that he is a white American, retired from a government job, about sixty years old. I thought I should let you know." He paused for several seconds. I said nothing. Then he continued, "I have her address here. In case you need it. Now find a pen and paper, and write it down." His voice was full of concern.

That night I was sleepless. In front of my eyes was Hong's slim body, her smile, her hands. I remembered last Christmas party: our unexpected encounter, our conversation, the walk around the campus, and every detail of what happened in my dorm room. I admitted to myself that I never really forgot about her. I finally made a decision before falling into sleep. I had to go to see her tomorrow, no matter what. I had to dissuade her from making such a huge mistake, marrying a sixty-year-old old man. In return for what? Legal status? A right to live?

Next morning I got up with a headache from last night's lack of sleeping. I didn't have any appetite for breakfast. I set off immediately.

My apartment was in the north part of the city. I looked up the address on the map: 425 Lincoln Avenue, which is located in the downtown business area. I knew I needed to take the subway to get there. One hour later I arrived at the place and found that Dynasty Massage was on the second floor of a tall building. The first floor was a pizza restaurant. It was Sunday. I looked at my watch. It was only ten in the morning. The streets were empty. Not like the usual busy weekdays. No cars. No pedestrians. Only the summer breeze playing with papers and plastic bags. Both the

.....

restaurant and the massage place were not open yet. I stood across the street, thinking that if I just wait here maybe I would meet Hong on the street. That would be better than going up there.

So I just stood there, looking in turn at the streets, the pizza restaurant, and the second floor room which was hidden behind a black curtain. At eleven thirty, the restaurant opened, and I smelled pizzas baking. The second floor lights and the signs were still dark. I felt a little hungry. I went into the restaurant and ordered a plain slice. While I was eating I asked the person working behind the counter if he knew when the place on the second floor would open for business.

He gave me a furtive look and answered me shortly, "Sunday, those people never wake up before noon on Sundays. Not many *customers*." He emphasized the word purposely, and looked at me again. I felt my face became hot and red. I didn't say anything, just finished the pizza and walked out of there as soon as possible, back to the other side of street, and stood there.

The sun was now high above my head. It was a hot August sun. I was sweating, standing there looking and watching. At the same time I was debating with myself. Is it a good idea to come here? What am I going to say to her? How much has she changed from last time I saw her?

Finally the lights and signs were on. The curtain was still closed. They might never open that, I thought. I looked at my watch. It was almost one o'clock. My feet were tired and sore from standing. But now I forgot all that. I opened the silver-grey aluminum door and started climbing the stairs. It was dark inside. I felt a little chilly. As I climbed I tried not to make any noise. I slowly ascended, listening for sounds from above. Nothing. Total silence. Like the dead. The wooden stair suddenly creaked loudly under my feet. I heard footsteps.

At last I came to the door. It was half open. I stopped, listened. There were two women inside talking in Chinese in whispers. I heard one say, "This early, who could that be?" It was not Hong's voice. I knocked on the door lightly. One person appeared, not Hong, but about the same age, even prettier than Hong. She was obviously taken aback by seeing me, a young, male Chinese standing there.

"...Sir?" She stumbled.

"Oh, sorry, I'm here to look for Hong Zhang. I'm her friend. Is she here?"

"Hong Zhang? No such name here."

Hearing that, I was disappointed. But at the same time I also felt somehow relieved from some responsibility.

Now I heard another girl in the room. "That is me. Who is it?" She passed through a curtain. I saw her; and she saw me. It was her; it was Hong. For five seconds, we were speechless, just looking at each other. Then the other girl broke the silence and the awkwardness. "Hey, Linda, I didn't know your Chinese name is Hong. Come in, come in." She talked to me now. Her voice was very loud.

I stepped toward Hong. She didn't say anything, but lowered her head, looking at the floor. The other girl said something, but I didn't hear her, could not understand. Instead of looking at Hong, I glanced around the room.

It was a very simple room. In two corners massage beds were screened by blue curtains. A big sofa waited near a door. I wondered what was behind that door.

We stood there, silent. The other girl finally stopped talking and sensed that she was not wanted. She told Hong, "You two go to that room. I'll be outside here. Don't worry; I'll take care of the business." Hong stood up, walked over, and pushed open the closed door. I followed her. Inside was a bedroom, with two beds against the walls. Hong sat down at one bed. I decided to sit down on another, facing her.

.....

.....

“This is where you two live and sleep?” I asked. She nodded.

Now I had time to look at her closely. She was paler than she had been eight months ago. But her eyes emitted a kind of spark I had not seen before. Again I inspected that pair of hands of hers. They hadn’t changed at all, still half-transparent, milky white jade. We started chatting. I told her I graduated, found a job. She congratulated me. I asked her how she was doing recently and she said she was fine.

“I heard from your cousin that you are getting married. Is that true?”

I finally revealed the purpose of my visiting.

“Yes. How much did he tell you?”

“Not much. I only know that he is an American, retired, and sixty years old.” I emphasized the number sixty.

“That’s right.”

“Can I ask how did you get to know this man?”

“He is a client of mine.”

“I see. How about your bottom line? I still remember when we first met at that party. You said your bottom line is never to touch your client’s sensitive parts. But now one of your clients is to become your husband.” My voice became a little sarcastic, out of my control.

“Yes, I remember I said that. But Charlie, by the way, his name is Charlie, Charlie is one of few clients who never asks me to touch more than the massage should touch.” Maybe my sarcastic voice provoked her somehow. She couldn’t stop now and her head tilted up at me. Hong looked me in the eye. “Do you know how hard and difficult it is to work here? I guess you would never know. We had to look out for each other constantly. Almost all those clients, all are men, men with desires. They come here seeking something more than massage. They looked down upon us. I can feel it when they pay the money. But Charlie, he is the first American who respects me. Really respects me. He, until now, even we are going to marry soon, only kissed me. And also, he teaches me English, shows me around the town, and helps me in everything that I, a foreign girl, might encounter in this foreign place...”

“But you can ask your cousin, or me, for help,” I interrupted.

“My cousin? First of all we were never that close. He looks down on me, too. He thinks my job somehow disgraces him, or our family back in China.

“But you got your massage certificate before you came here. Your parents and relatives know that massage is your career.” I tried to be fair.

“My cousin obviously doesn’t think so. He must have thought my job is equivalent to that of the prostitute. But No! That’s not the case! Not everyone working at such place is a prostitute.” She almost shouted at this moment. I was stunned by her reaction. I didn’t know what to say. The room became extremely quiet. Even the girl outside the room sensed that something unpleasant happened and made no sound at all. The silence went on.

“Do you believe what I just said?”

“I do,” I answered quickly. “But I can help you if you need. I still don’t understand why you have to marry that American.”

“As for you, I never thought of asking for your help. Last time when we met at the Chinese New Year party, I could feel your good intentions. But I also felt that you acted as if you were trying to save me. Even today, aren’t you thinking that you come here to rescue me from falling into the abyss? I don’t want to be saved. I don’t need to. Charlie is the only person who helps me unconditionally. He is old. Yes. And he had high blood pressure and diabetes too. But I don’t care. I owe him. I also need legal status to stay here. After we get married, I’m going to continue working

.....

here, become the owner of this place. I'll own it, expand it, and make it the biggest massage place in town. That," she paused again, "is my new bottom line, to survive, to be rich and prosper. And I swear to God, I'll never let my children, if I will ever have children, to suffer what I suffered. That is my bottom line."

It was time to leave. I stood up. Hong rose also. We stood there, face to face. Hong extended her right hand. I grasped it. I touched her hand, which appeared in my dream so many times, for the second time. It might be the last time I held it. I tried to find something to say, but the only thing I could think of was two words: "Take care." Then I turned away, and left. **KR**



# Contributors

---

**Linda Arntzenius** is a freelance writer and U.S.1 Poets' Cooperative member who writes on topics of local interest for *The Princeton Packet*, *Princeton Magazine*, *U.S. 1 Weekly*, *AllPrinceton.com*, and other media. Her pictorial history *Images of America: Institute for Advanced Study* was published in February, 2011. Her poetry has been published in *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, *Slant*, *Paterson Literary Review*, and *Kelsey Review*, among other literary journals. She is a member of the group for independent scholars, the Princeton Research Forum.

**Peter Brav** is the author of *Sneaking In*, a young adult novel about the 1999 Yankees championship season, and his newest, *The Other Side of Losing*, a novel of friendship and drama set during the next Chicago Cubs championship season. To order the books, go to Amazon or [www.peterbrav.com](http://www.peterbrav.com). His play *South Beach* was performed in a staged reading in Manhattan in 2003 and at the Peddie School's CAPPs Program in 2005. His play *African Violet* was performed in a staged reading at Villagers Theatre in 2003.

**Vida Chu** grew up in Hong Kong, came to America for college, and stayed. She has lived in Princeton for over forty years. Her poems have appeared in *Kelsey Review*, *Princeton Arts Review*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets* and *The Literary Review*. Her children's stories have appeared in *Cricket Magazine* and *Fire and Wings*.

**Irene R. Granderson** is a retired social worker. In 2004, she relocated with her husband, Henry, from Jamaica, New York to Lawrenceville, New Jersey. About two years ago, she discovered a new passion when she joined a Memoir-Writing group in the town. She realized that there were many stories simmering inside, just waiting to be written. She is now in the process of writing her memoir to be shared with her five children.

**Lois Marie Harrod's** 11<sup>th</sup> book *Brief Term*, poems about teaching, was published by Black Buzzard Press (2011), and her chapbook *Cosmogony* won the 2010 Hazel Lipa Chapbook contest (Iowa State University). Her chapbook *Furniture* won the 2008 Grayson Press Poetry Prize. Previous publications include the chapbook *Firmament* (2007); the chapbook *Put your Sorry Side Out* (2005); *Spelling the World Backward* (2000); the chapbook *This is a Story You Already Know* (1999); *Part of the Deeper Sea* (1997); the chapbook *Green Snake Riding* (1994), *Crazy Alice* (1991), *Every Twinge A Verdict* (1987). She won her third poetry fellowship from the New Jersey Council on the Arts in 2003. Over 400 of her poems have been published online and in print journals including *American Poetry Review*, *Blueline*, *The MacGuffin*, *Salt*, *The Literary Review*, *Versé Daily*, and *Zone 3*. A Geraldine R. Dodge poet and former high school teacher, she teaches Creative Writing at The College of New Jersey.

**Gil Honigfeld** was a double-major: English and Psychology as a Rutgers undergraduate many years ago. He went on to make Psychology his vocation and English his avocation, contributing poems to small literary journals including *Poet Lore*, *Slipstream*, *Waterways*, *Aura* and others. Now a professor for William Paterson University he has again found a way to combine his major interests – students in all his Psychology classes are required to write, write and write some more until they get it as close to perfect as possible.

.....

**Ken Jaworowski** is a staff editor for *The New York Times*. His most recent play, “Interchange,” had a sold-out run at the WorkShop Theater in Manhattan in 2010. His fiction has been published in *A Cappella Zoo*, *Quay Journal*, *The Angler* and elsewhere.

**Anne Karetnikov** is a New Jersey resident who recently graduated from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia’s illustration program. She remembers going to day camp at the campus many years ago. Anne works primarily in ink and watercolor, reads voraciously when she has time and has many hobbies and far too many obscure interests.

**Janet Kirk** grew up in rural Minnesota. She graduated from the University of Minnesota. Her stories have appeared in the *Kelsey Review* and *U.S. 1*. She lives in Princeton.

**Lavinia Kumar’s** poetry has appeared in *Waterways*, *Thatchwork* (Delaware Valley Poets), *Orbis*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, *Caper*, *Pemmican*, *Ascent Aspirations*, and *U.S. 1*.

**Carolina Morales** has lived and worked in Trenton, NJ for over 30 years. She attended MCCC and Thomas Edison State College. Her poems have appeared in the *Journal of NJ Poets*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, *Poet Lore*, *Spoon River Poetry Review* and other journals. She is the author of two chapbooks from Finishing Line Press, *Bride of Frankenstein & other poems*, 2008 and *In Nancy Drew’s Shadow*, 2010.

**Wanda S. Praisner**, a recipient of fellowships from the NJ State Council on the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, is the author of *A Fine and Bitter Snow* (Palanquin Press, USCA, 2003), *On the Bittersweet Avenues of Pomona* (winner of the Spire Press Poetry Chapbook Competition, 2005), and *Where the Dead Are*, forthcoming from CavanKerry Press. A four-time Pushcart nominee, her work has appeared in *Lullwater Review*, *New York Magazine*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She is a resident poet for the State Council on the Arts.

**Joseph Preneta** was born on a farm but soon moved to the suburbs. He began writing at age 9, and was eventually published in small out-of-print literary journals on the West Coast. This is the fourth time he has been published in the *Kelsey Review*. He is submitting all over now.

**D. E. Steward’s** poem in this issue is the third to appear in *Kelsey Review*, others have come out in *Conjunctions* and *Denver Quarterly* (a dozen in each), as well as many in other literary magazines like *Massachusetts Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Chelsea*, *Grain*, *Seneca Review*, *Central Park*, *Agni*, *Harpur Palate*, *Antioch Review*.

**Yongming Wang** came to the United States in 1989 as a graduate student at Rutgers University. He got his Master’s degree in Library and Information Science in 1992. Right now he works at The College of New Jersey as a librarian.

**Damon Williams** was born in Atlantic City, NJ and raised in Emanuel County, Georgia. He graduated from Rutgers University, worked as a broadcast producer for PBS, now works distributing food to food banks on behalf of the NJ Department of Agriculture, and continues to cultivate his poetic skills daily.

.....

# Editors & Staff

---

**Edward Carmien** is the editor of the *Kelsey Review*, a writer, and professor of English at Mercer County Community College. He recalls with wide-eyed wonder that his first exposure to the world of the literary journal occurred thirty years ago, when he served as first reader for *The Antioch Review* under the tolerant tutelage of novelist and educator Nolan Miller.

**Roberta Clipper** is a fiction editor of the *Kelsey Review*. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley and is a full Professor at Rider University. A fiction writer and poet, she has published many stories and two novels, including *The Bride Wore Red* and *Fifty Fifty*. On a Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship, she served as a visiting professor at the International Institute of Information Technology in Hyderabad, India during the Monsoon Semester (fall), 2009.

**Luray Gross** is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and is the author of three collections of poetry: *Forenoon* was published in 1990 by The Attic Press in Westfield, NJ, and *Elegant Reprieve* won the 1995-96 Still Waters Press Poetry Chapbook Competition. *The Perfection of Zeros* was published by WordTech in 2004. A storyteller as well as a writer, she works extensively throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania as an Artist in Residence. She was the recipient of a Fellowship in Poetry from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. In 2000, she was named a Distinguished Teaching Artist by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and was the recipient of the Robert Fraser Open Poetry Competition Award from Bucks County (PA) Community College. She was the 2002 Poet Laureate of Bucks County and resident faculty at the 2006 Frost Place Festival and Conference on Poetry in Franconia, NH. Her poem “The Perfection of Zero” was featured by the Pennsylvania Center for the Book’s Public Poetry Project in 2008.

**Ellen Jacko** is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and earned a BA in English Literature at Rutgers University and an MAT in English Education at Trenton State College. She has had a variety of post-graduate experiences including the study of twentieth century British poets at Exeter College, Oxford University, England. For more than thirty years she has worked at Allentown High School in Allentown, New Jersey where she currently teaches AP Literature and Composition and creative writing. Throughout her career she has worked with students as writers. This includes working for the institution of the writing center and acting as faculty advisor of the yearbook, the student newspaper, and the student literary magazine, and helping her students prepare their work for publication. Additionally for fifteen years she was a member of the adjunct faculty at Mercer County Community College. Through all these endeavors her focus is on helping her students understand the beauty, joy, and power of the written word.

**Edyta Kuciapa** enters her sophomore year as Graphic Designer in the Publications department at Mercer County Community College. With a dual degree in Graphic Design and Animation from Rutgers University, she’s also a lover of photography and sappy romance novels. She would like to one day write her own novel, but for now will let her ideas simmer and focus on designing publications such as this literary *Kelsey Review*.

# Submission Guidelines

---

The *Kelsey Review* is published once each September. The deadline for each year's issue is May 1<sup>st</sup>. We respond no later than August 15<sup>th</sup>. The *Review* solicits contributions from those who live and/or work in Mercer County. Send us your:

## **Short Fiction**

Length: 4,000 words maximum

## **Poetry**

Send no more than six pages

## **Essays**

Length: 2,500 words maximum

**Black & White Art** (suitable for digital scanning)

See Below

Writers and artists who appear at Mercer County events such as poetry readings are also eligible. Organizers of such events should encourage those who work and/or live in the county to submit a short non-fiction critically informed review of the event; the editors will contact the writer/artist to extend an invitation to appear in the *Review*. We see this as an opportunity to promote such literary and artistic occasions and venues within the county.

We invite *proposals* for non-fiction articles on any topic relevant to the people, history, businesses, educational institutions, artistic traditions and/or government of Mercer County. What has come to be called "creative non-fiction" also falls into this category.

Except for art and poetry, the *Review* generally only accepts one item per author.

Electronic Submissions: QUERY BY E-MAIL FIRST! [Kelsey.Review@mccc.edu](mailto:Kelsey.Review@mccc.edu)

Submissions by Mail: Send *disposable* manuscripts (NOT the only copy, DO include your name on each page of your submission) of poetry and prose and legible copies of art to:

**The Kelsey Review**

**Liberal Arts Division**

**Mercer County Community College**

**PO Box B, Trenton, NJ 08690**

more »

.....

Include a stamped, self-addressed #10 envelope (regular business size) with first-class postage with your submission. Your cover letter should include all contact information including email address and a short biography that begins with your name (see the contributor's biographies in this issue for examples of what we're looking for).

- We require an electronic version (MS Word or .RTF file) of *accepted* prose and poetry and original art for scanning (*only* send original art upon acceptance; we return originals after scanning).
- Send your work to us electronically only when requested to do so. All rights are retained by the author.
- Payment is in copies (4).
- Each year we nominate up to six published items for the Pushcart Prize. See [www.pushcartprize.com](http://www.pushcartprize.com) for more information.
- **Art:** The *Kelsey Review* uses art in the following sizes: half page, full page, and cover/centerfold (double page size).

Send questions via email to [Kelsey.review@mccc.edu](mailto:Kelsey.review@mccc.edu). We are on Facebook.

Edward Carmien  
*Editor*



The logo for Mercer County Community College, featuring the word "MERCER" in a large, serif font with a stylized graphic element to the left. Below it, "County Community College" is written in a smaller, sans-serif font, and the website address "www.mccc.edu" is at the bottom.

**MERCER**  
County Community College  
[www.mccc.edu](http://www.mccc.edu)