# Front Porch Review

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All Love Is Propaganda
- Peycho Kanev

It always comes unexpected –
truck in the rearview mirror on the highway;
the killer in a jump scare horror flick.
It is a block of concrete, a piece of mountain,
weighing on your shoulders,
moving slowly as a glacier in any direction it
chooses;
it never cuts like a knife deep in your gut
but more like a paper on your finger tips
so you can suck on them in order to stop the flow,
it smiles at you through the distorted image
of thousands of opposite mirrors, faces.
Whenever you turn on the TV, the politician is there, selling it –
lies about the present turning into lies about the future;
snapshots from an exotic place and your chances
to win a trip.
When you look up at the night sky and
all its majestic beauty at least you know
that all these stars have been dead for millions of years;
But I can say that sometimes there is a little bit
of truth in it,
like it was given to you by a dog, yes,
only the dog gives it
unconditionally,
unreservedly,
unquestioningly,
what it offers is for you forever,
and I guess this is a wonderful reassurance.

At the Beach
- Joe Glaser

Hot sand
pushes up between my toes
as I zig-zag through a million bared bodies
scattered helter-skelter on blankets and under umbrellas.

I envy those who can suck up the sun
and produce a glorious golden tan,
while I am fated to burn, with
peeling patches of skin
and a sea of freckles.

But tan or no, it's the ocean that beckons me.

I charge into the waves,
then race them back to shore,
over and over and over again,
pumping up enough courage
to swim out to the rope marker,
and hang there in deep water,
bobbing among lazy surface swells.

Cool and salty, the vast Atlantic caresses my suspended body,
ruminating on the great journey from Old World to New.

The Words Washed Away Everything
- Julie Wakeman-Linn

In the Irish Inn pub, Sam sees her. She leans forward, only her head and neck, her blunt cut straight hair falls forward, like a curtain, blocking out anybody else. She listens like a priest in a confessional, cutting out the world, her gaze on the guy's face, or his chin. She nods, and her few audible sounds only encourage, never demur, deflect, or disagree. She smiles as the speaker takes a breath. She seems thrilled by his story, tale, episode.

Watching her across the room, Sam remembers when it was him. Her gaze, her total attention, was intoxicating. He realizes she never said much of anything but gave the impression that her conversation partner knew everything as a Plato-form of essence. None of this was true, but he wishes he could return to that state of ignorant bliss.

In her regular work, her hair is confined to a tight low bun, smoothed back with some hair miracle. She carries off the look of JFK Jr's bride, Caroline Bessette, dead these many years. She handles numbers, quotes, and intermeshing, huge, impersonal data sets. She never inclines her head and neck — but she will purse out her lips at a problem. She wears small black eye glasses when in the accounting office but of course never in a bar. Sam used to pick her up at the end of the work day, and her transformation, releasing her hair, changing her shoes, pocketing the glasses, never failed to amaze him.

The poor guy talks with his hands. He's excited and nearly brushes against her small breasts. She hesitates and slides back on her bar stool. The slight motion startles him, and he flags down the bartender for another round.

She's wearing one of her silk collared blouses, a pink or rose shade. Sam remembers she called it blush. Her skirt ends above her knees. Her shoes are those spikey stilettos that she favors. She holds her wine glass with fingers cupped around the bowl. She always does that — warming her white wine. She selects a single cashew and nibbles it, all the while drinking in his words.

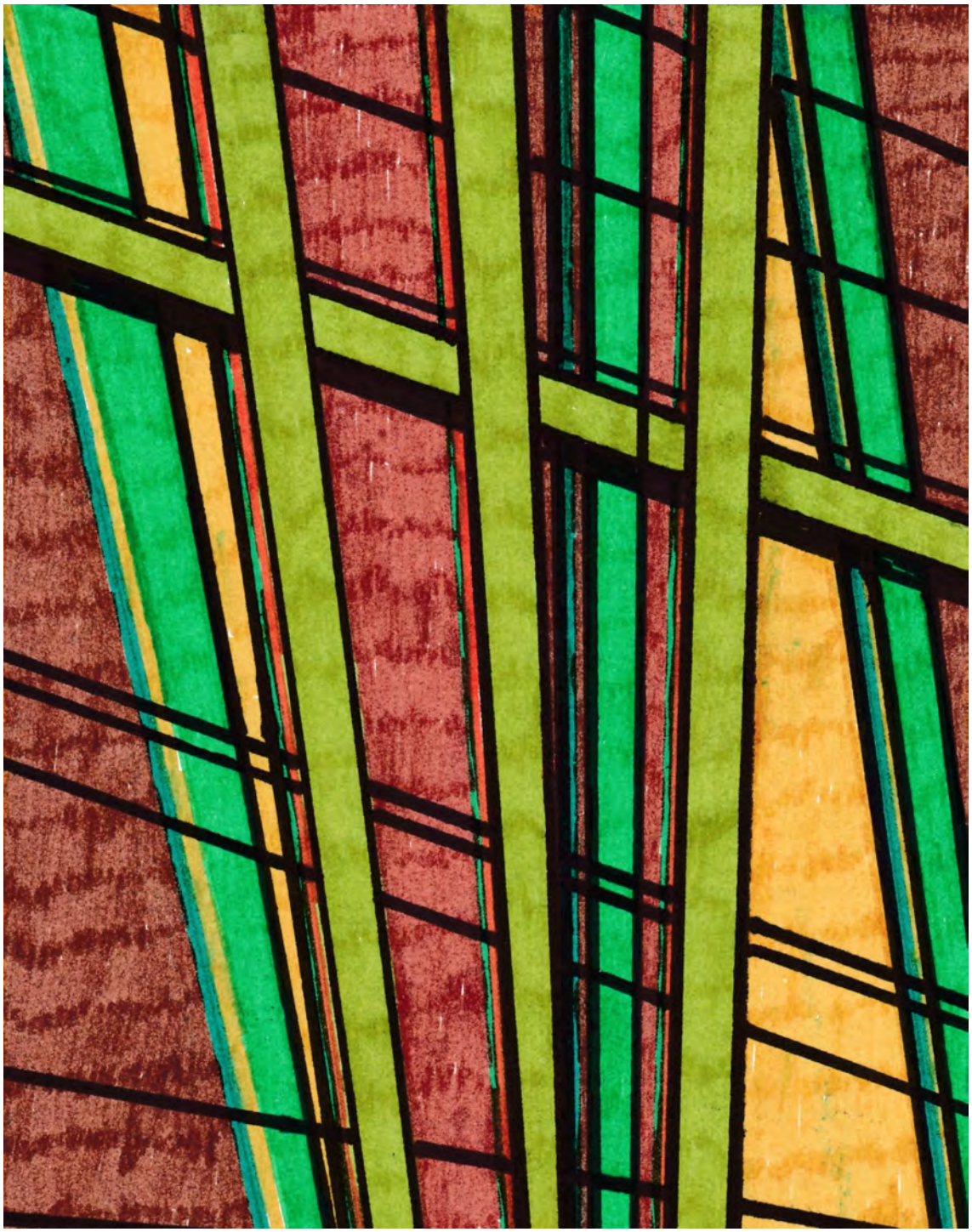
Sam closes his eyes — he seems to hear better — to pick up what the guy is blathering about. Sam hears Kalahari. That's why she's targeted him. She loves dry desert, nearly lifeless places. Their best trip was to the White Sands of New Mexico. He'd laid next to her on the sand, letting the sun scorch his closed eyelids. The wind whispered of wolf spiders. He'd drizzled grains of sand on her open hand, like he was making a promise without saying anything.

That day, unlike now, she did the talking, telling him of eco-systems, sand dune formations and how long a seed could wait for the seasonal inches of rain. The flow of words washed away everything he'd felt.

They'd returned home, and he broken up with her in the airport at the baggage carousel. He put her into a taxi, sending her ahead to clear out of his place. He'd trudged to the airport bar for a vodka tonic or two, grieving the lost magic. Now, he wonders if it was the wrong choice.

Don't Fence Me In

- Denny Marshall



Japanese Contemplatives

- Joe Glaser

Blonde Jokes ÷ The Dark-Side of Being Blonde

Not another blonde joke, please! From my visible porcelain skin to my hidden DNA, I'm blonde...but that doesn't make me a ditz, does it?

An outcast? Well, in some places I'm a misfit, like at the naming of my older son's third child; people pointed to me as responsible for his other two green-eyed, blonde haired offspring, as well as the blonde infant undergoing a ritual. Even at a happy occasion, I'm defensive.

Sure, 'blondes have more fun,' whatever fun is supposed to mean. Heck, society is trying to make learning fun, and exercise fun, and marriage fun, and housework fun, and teaching fun, and driving fun, and so on and on. So, what's this fun deal?

The word blonde is often preceded with dumb. Well, if I've succeeded in making learning fun, so I've learned, then how can I also be dumb? Having taught college English for years, I know the adjective 'dumb' is vague and non-descriptive.

Yes. I've heard the joke about the blonde secretary who tried to use white-out to erase a mistake on her computer's screen. Told by a man who has no secretarial skills, why would that kind of gal be hired unless the man wanted...well that's another topic.

So I'm dumb-and-having-fun, the brunt of jokes, and the envy of many brown-heads who opt for a bottle to look like me. And even aged, I'm pointed at, noticed, stand out, because DNA has kept my blonde hair from turning grey. Great. Hair of youth on a raisin face. How can I grow old gracefully when my hair looks like an infant and my face has pleats?

But, sure there's a 'but': my silky strands of light-throwing hair are also limp and straight. This porcelain skin gets sunburned and blotchy and blistery just from short-term outdoors exposure. Few nubs are under my arms, and my bikini line is not too visible so I can don those thongy bathing suits men adore in the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition (which they buy for the literature like they keep telling me they do with *Playboy*) but what's the use when the sun goes yuk with my skin?

Real blondes have blue or grey or green eyes, or a mixture of those. Nice? An eye doctor knows these non-universal color hues are more light-sensitive. Maybe blondes walk around with sunglasses not to be 'cool' but because the light hurts their eyes. 'Course few think about that. Ah, dahling...the movie star image.

Being blonde has an aura, so my small frame has stayed small in order to live up to my 'image'. When I toss my head, it's considered 'cute' or 'wholesome' but ... there is another but... skinny blonde women are more prone to osteoarthritis. That toss is actually a pain in the neck; pun intended. Those Harlow bombshells are generally peroxided and toss 'sultry' not 'wholesome'. The stereotyped California girl... now there's another thing: I've seen more real blondes in the state of Connecticut than in California, so where'd the notion of the west coast look come from anyway?

So blonde women are too airheaded to balance a checkbook but not to keep a budget; too light in the cerebral matter to comprehend tax matters but not to play out multiple roles daily; too dense to understand why men accelerate cars zero to forty in six seconds from a stop sign but not why their laundry must be folded a certain way; too stupid to solve the up/down toilet seat dilemma but not to repair the housing on inoperable plumbing. And these are just starters.... But, maybe next time all natural fair-heads are criticized for inefficiency or any of its synonyms, we can widen our light eyes, raise our fair eyebrows, gently shake our thin tresses, and respond: what'd you expect; I'm blonde.

Books +
- Bruce Harris

There is no place like home. There is also no place like the local public library. Have you ever tried to borrow something from a friend or family member? You're lucky if you get a reluctant, okay. The library encourages it! Who else offers six or seven day a week access to classic literature and today's bestsellers, not to mention magazines and newspapers? And, at no cost! Unless, of course you consider that your tax dollars help support public libraries. I guess the old saying, "There are no free lunches" applies. But, a library is the next best thing. You've already paid your taxes, so you might as well get something for your money. Even the library's late fee fines are a bargain. Fines vary. My local library charges ten cents a day for overdue books. Compare that to the $32.00 average fine for a one minute expired parking meter! If you're intent on paying a lot and adding your name to the Guinness World Records, research shows the world's largest paid fine for an overdue library book is $345.14. Borrowed in 1955, *Days and Deeds* was returned to the Kewanee Public Library in Illinois forty-seven years overdue.

Hate to read? (I doubt it, considering you found *Front Porch Review*). Many libraries have movies to rent or, better yet, offer free in-house movies several times a month. There's often coffee and snacks and the opportunity to socialize. That's right, talking is (sometimes) permitted in the library! Most local libraries have seminars and speakers on subjects from self-help to current events. And, programs are geared toward all age groups. Topics may include tips for keeping up with technology changes, gardening, career advice, social networking, or book discussions. Every Monday afternoon a group of men meet at my local library and play chess.

Don't let your body get jealous because you're exercising your brain. If you live close enough, why not walk to the library and benefit physically as well? That's an added bonus. No library in walking distance? No problem. If you live in a city, take mass transit and get off a stop or two prior to the library's stop and walk those extra feet. If you live in a suburb or out in the country, park your car a few blocks from the library and walk it.

Libraries reflect their neighborhoods. Each has its own individuality. When travelling, make it a point to stop into one of the over 9,000 public libraries in the United States and walk around, look at the displays, admire the architecture. Some are housed in remarkably interesting and historically significant buildings. The public library located in Darby, PA has been lending books since 1743.

Computers have replaced the once ubiquitous and charming card catalogs. OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), the library cooperative that printed and distributed catalog cards ceased the practice in 2015.

The late author Anne Herbert said, "Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries." Your local public library beckons with books and so much more. Take advantage it.

Last Virgin Pine
- George Payne

Solitary and heavy
under the unseated saddle
of an infinite sky,

Immortality is a ruthless
harvester of data: an endless
string of half breaths from the
last remaining virgin pine.

Covered in a bright burst of
December snowfall, the sun
struck diamonds smile back.

Musical Chairs
- Anne Higgins

Musical Chairs:
the first unfairness of the world,
the first game of unfairness.
Not a chair for everyone,
not a beautiful body or face
for everyone,
not a quick brain
for everyone,
not a finger for the keys,
a mouth for the reed,
an eye for the form,
a hand for the brush.

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Picture Day
- Mike Todd

On the last day of ninth grade, we finally received our school pictures. Ashley Hilton, Professional Photographer (schools, weddings, civic organizations, single and group portraits), had taken them in September, but had since served stints as the assistant manager of a grocery store, and as the full-fledged manager of a rock band that never made it out of the lead singer's parents' garage, and was at that time right in the middle of his latest career as a pretend real estate agent/developer/mogul when someone on our school's faculty convinced him he needed to deliver those long-promised and prepaid portraits or face legal action. So, he did.

Our teachers distributed them during first period. On any other day this might have been a mistake, virtually guaranteeing the entire school day would revolve around students trading photographs. The last day of school, however, was the ultimate "goof-off" day; there were few serious tasks to interrupt. Furthermore, everybody was looking forward to summer but also feeling just a little bit nostalgic and already missing some of their fellow classmates, so the mood was perfect for these sentimental exchanges.

By the end of the day, I had collected about two dozen photos of my schoolmates. On the back of each was a personal message. Actually, most of the boys simply signed their names or maybe wrote something short and meaningless like Keep up the good work or Take it easy. Others wrote something short and obnoxious that was meant to be funny like Remember everybody must get stoned or I don't have time to write you a note because I have to go take a leak. Inevitably, every boy who wrote a message did so in big letters so the short note would fill the entire back of the picture and, thus, appear to be more substantial. Not that I, or any other male recipient, cared. We just did this on all the photos because we were in the habit of doing so on the ones we gave the girls so we would not have to hear, "Is that all you could say?"

They (the girls) took the opposite approach, squeezing as many words as possible onto the back of these miniature photos. The pictures were only about half as big as a regular wallet-sized photo, but somehow the girls managed to fit about five times as much on the back of each as the boys did. Of course this did not make their messages any more relevant but it seemed like it did with their tiny little letters forming words separated by less than normal spacing flowing uninterrupted by punctuation unnecessary or otherwise until stopping exactly at the bottom right hand corner except sometimes needing even a little more space and looping back around the outside margins framing what they had already written and faithfully transmitting no real thought or sentiment other than they cared enough to write so much. Their creed seemed to be "quantity over quality," whereas ours was "size matters."

I was rereading the back of Elizabeth's photo as I sat on the bus waiting for it to take me home one final time that year. Elizabeth's message was a little more substantial than most I had received because she and I were going steady. It was also more substantial because she had more space on which to write. She had given me a full wallet-sized photo, putting me above the level of mere friend and on par with family - not, of course, with parents or grandparents who were in the eight-by-ten and five-by-seven tier, but more along the lines of a cousin. She did not actually think of me as a cousin, but that, I hope, goes without saying.

Elizabeth's message was more personal and more than a little exciting because between the lines she might have been hinting she was ready to take our relationship to the level all teenaged boys wished all teenaged girls would, or at least beyond where we were, which was right at home plate, not meaning I had belted a home run and rounded all the bases, but that I had

not even taken a swing yet, or more precisely, had taken a couple that had entered the stat book as strikes. To the most special guy in the world, it began, which both thrilled me and irked me because I indeed yearned to be the most special guy in the world to her, but suspected her father already filled the position. I'm going to miss you so much this summer, but at least you don't live too far away. I know I'm not going to get to see you every day, but we'll have to see each other as much as we can, okay? Then we'll have to make up for lost time. Please don't--

"Can I sit here?" asked Pills Carkix, interrupting both my reading and the agreeable fantasy it was beginning to evoke. I jerked the photo to my chest reflexively.

"Of course you can, Pills," I said in the overly polite way I always had of addressing her. As I nonchalantly placed Elizabeth's photograph in one of my notebooks, I scooted over.

She sat beside me as she usually did when she was one of the last people to get on the bus; she knew nobody else wanted her to sit beside them. When she was one of the first to board, she would take an empty seat and would usually get to sit alone all the way home because nobody wanted to sit by her even if the alternative was standing. At the beginning of the school year, the bus routes had been redrawn and Pills and I rode together for the first time. I do not know who might have been civil to her on those long trips to and from school before, but I suspect it was nobody.

As she sat down, I once again noticed how she took up more of the seat each time. Before long she would be carbon copy of her fat, sloppy mother. I often thought it was a shame, a real pity. Even though Pills was no beauty and was completely lacking in social graces, she had, at one time, had a very nice figure. She might have had a happier life if she would have maintained her better attributes while working to improve or eliminate her lesser ones. Instead, she seemed to be going down the road everybody, including herself, thought she was supposed to take.

Most of the way home, I did not speak to Pills. Just because I was nicer to her than everybody else did not mean I really liked her. I had once had feelings for her, though they were comprised more of lust than love, and still felt protective of her. I could defend her, I could be friendly, but I could not honestly like her. So I did not speak to her most of the way home that day. I found it a lot more comfortable to lean toward my open bus window; facing her direction and engaging in conversation meant suffering the body odor an unkept and overweight person could produce in the ever-increasing heat of May mixed with the stale tobacco smell of her breath (she chewed). I preferred instead the fragrance of honeysuckle tainted by the dust and exhaust produced by the bus as it traveled along the gravel roads. This was the scent of spring. Tomorrow there would be no school bus kicking up dust and belching exhaust, only the honeysuckle's perfume, the splendid aroma of summer. Elizabeth and I once took a guided walking tour at Crowley's Ridge State Park to look at all the flora. The guide, coming upon some honeysuckles, told us, "That smell always meant summer to me when I was a kid, of fun, of freedom."

We sat staring out the dingy bus window in silence until we rounded the corner that put us on the gravel stretch leading by her house. Then she asked, "Can I have a picture?"

I turned and smiled at her as I pulled out a photograph I had already prepared in the event she requested one. I had written something short and meaningless in big letters on the back. Then to complete the transaction, I asked the obligatory, "Can I have one of yours?"

She pulled out her sheet of thirty miniature photos. It was obvious she had not yet given a single one away. I saw her small house approaching the front of the bus. I began to get a little nervous, fearing she would not be able to cut a picture out fast enough. Everybody would have to sit and wait and watch me finish my business with Pills, exchange photos with Pills, be friendly

once again with the most disliked person in school. However, as the bus slowed to a stop, she handed me the entire sheet and said, "These are all for you. I didn't really want to give any to nobody else. I wrote you a note on the back, too."

I sat speechless for a moment not knowing how to respond. I had expected to receive the usual small keepsake, but was presented with this instead. "Thanks," was all I could muster.

As the driver opened the door, Pills stood into the aisle. She looked down at me, smiled a little smile, and said, "Well, I guess this is goodbye."

"Yeah," I said, still surprised. "I'll see ya 'round," I said, which sounded to me like, "I see you're round." I blushed and prayed she hadn't heard me say what I thought I'd heard me say. I was relieved to see that she hadn't seemed to hear me at all; she had already turned and walked to the front.

She stepped off the bus, pausing just a moment to smile another goodbye at me. I raised my hand slightly and hoped nobody else noticed this final exchange. The bus moved forward again, and I watched her walk toward her rickety front porch, slowly fall away behind us, then fade out of sight. Still baffled, I turned over her sheet of photos and began reading her message.

*To my best friend ever.* The opening compounded my confusion. We were not best friends. I kept reading.

*I know I wasn't really your best friend because you had lots of friends but you were mine. You were my only friend and I will always remember you.* I felt sorry for her and proud of myself. I would, I decided, redouble my friendly efforts next school year.

*I know that most people didn't like me or didn't even bother to feel one way or another about me so having you as my one true friend and best friend ever will always make me happy.* My sorrow for her increased, but my pride in myself did not. She seemed to give me a little more credit than comfort allowed. I began to feel guilty and embarrassed. I would never let another person read this; that would be unbearable.

*I no it wasn't ever easy because I'm not popular and so being my friend was not popular. A lot of people always put me down and I know that they did the same to you for being nice to me but you did it any way because that's what you are, A NICE GUY.* Was I such a nice guy? I wondered. Everything she had written so far seemed to be true enough. I was undoubtedly nicer to her than anybody else, but did I really do enough to deserve her proclaiming me a nice guy in capital letters? It seemed to me that much of what she thought was niceness was just not being mean.

*Your better than nice. Your the best person I have ever known and I'm glad that I did know you.* I almost stopped reading. I knew it was not her intention, but the words were making me feel I was being exposed--if only to myself--as a fraud, the byproduct of undeserved praise. I was about halfway done, though, and my curiosity was even more aroused than my feelings of inadequacy. I continued.

*I guess I'm getting all funny because I no I'll never see you again. See we are moving back to Mississippi in a few days.* Another surprise and bigger than the preceding ones. For a moment, I was glad she was moving because it meant we would never have to speak of this note. Not having to associate with her would also make daily life at school easier in general. Then, almost instantly, the guilt increased; A NICE GUY like me was glad the one who called him her best friend ever was moving away. I began to feel I deserved some sort of self-inflicted punishment, so I read on with the sweet misery that sometimes accompanies one's just deserts.

*That's where we came from. You remember when I came here in second grade?*

I did.

*Nobody wanted to have anything to do with me.*

This was true.

*You didn't either really--*

This was also true, I confessed to myself.

*--but you were a lot nicer about it than everybody else. You were always a lot nicer to me than everybody else all through school and somewhere along the way all that paid off because we became friends.*

Yes, this, too, was true. I was nicer to her than everybody else. And if I had not been nice enough to now satisfy my own conscience, then I would have to take consolation in knowing at least I gave more than all the others. I could not help it if I had not done all I could have, should have. That was in the past and now she was moving away. There was no way to do better by her now, so there was no need to worry myself about it. Even if I knew I had not been all I could have been, I had still been her best friend ever and she appreciated it.

I'll always be proud for that. Yes, she was proud, and so I, too, should be proud. It was an almost-convincing argument I was putting forth to myself.

*I'll specially always be proud that you took me to the Sweethearts Dance last year. I wish you could be proud for that (HA HA!) but I guess that's not really possible*. No, it was not, I agreed. That one date had been disastrous, and my social standing among my classmates suffered tremendously. It had been more than a year before, but the effects on my popularity still lingered. It was not yet possible for me to be proud of that, but, like her, I wished it was.

*Any way I'm running out of space so I guess I should just say thank you very much for being my best friend ever and for always being nice and for always taking up for me and for always treating me like a lady. Even though we all no I'm really not (HA HA!), thanks any way. Goodbye. I'll miss you. Your best friend, Pillsbury.*

Her signature was the capstone, the final and biggest surprise. I had almost let her convince me I really was as wonderful as she seemed to think. Just as she had written, I had been her best friend ever, her only friend throughout the years. Yet I never even knew her real name until that moment, until after she had left my life.

I had always assumed she had a foolish name because she and her parents were foolish people. Pillsbury, though by no means common, was not nearly as ridiculous as Pills. It might have been a traditional family name, her mother's maiden name, anything. Pillsbury was different, maybe a little eccentric, sure, but not silly, not absurd like Pills. If anything, it had a dignified ring to it, a solid Anglo-Saxon-noble-sounding-surname kind of ring.

To us she had always been just Pills, a foolish girl with a foolish name. I tried to remember which came first, our low opinion of her or of her name. If we had known earlier what her real name was, would it have made any difference? Would we have thought more of a girl named Pillsbury than we did the girl we knew as Pills? Would we have treated her the same? Would she have evolved into this slob, this trashy girl that had just left our lives? Or might that have been the untried key to bringing forth the fine person I had always suspected hid within?

In second grade a strange girl with a stranger name showed up at our school. We told her that her name was stupid, that it was not really even a name at all. We decided to hate her. So she hated us, the world and herself. But what if...?

I would never know. I could now only wish I had known her just a little better, just simply known her real name. After all, I was her best friend ever.

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# Mexico on My Mind

- Itala Lamgmar and James Merriner

# When Strands Grow Grey

- Lois Greene Stone

How can women solve a problem called menopause? I considered what it had in common with puberty: both just opposite ends of the same pole called reproduction. Puberty, however, is a welcoming into womanhood while end-of-cycle means aging.

I remember pre-puberty. My mother gave me pamphlets to prove that her information could be substantiated as I was at an age where I doubted her intelligence. Her words worked at my value system, and I was convinced being a girl was superior. Becoming and living as a woman would then be superior-plus. The age of reproduction was anticipated with excitement, wonder, welcome. Why should a change in attitude, with negative thinking, happen when hormones re-shape decades later?

Exiting girlhood, adolescents are given doses of good feelings and minimal sympathy. Just tolerate and live with it. But at menopause's onset, the message is reversed. Oh dear, there'll be muscle pains, nervousness, sweating, palpitation, loss of elasticity of the skin, re-disposition of fat, osteoporosis. How can one tolerate it? Herald a beginning; hate an ending. We're conditioned.

Adolescents have frail egos and uncertain futures. Their anxieties are appreciated. Middle-aged women, called matrons, face decreasing vigor and uncertain futures. Their anxieties are neurotic. What makes the latter so in need of reassurance, sedation, psychiatric adjustment?

With maturity comes confidence, outspoken assertiveness, enthusiasm for living, appreciation for health and relationships, contentment, continuing awareness of what there is yet to learn, understanding and acceptance of one's body. I've skills and knowledge that took decades to develop.

Buck Rogers came true when Americans landed on the moon. And the 21st century smartwatches are reminders of the 1940's decoder items; Mickey Mouse may even be on a dial face. Who hasn't yelled at Artificial Intelligence machines when they fail to play the requested music, or didn't make lights turn on? Did I find such frustration with my radium jewelry during World War II when it didn't glow in a dark closet? When my 1949 Remington Rand typewriter's ribbon ran dry, and I didn't have an extra roll on-hand, is that different from my failure to notice the cartridges for my 2018 printer need replacing, and I've no spare sitting under my desk?

Time passes... only now I'm less ahead than what has already been. Change of life is an ongoing process, and being a 'matron' merely another aspect of womanhood. Herald a beginning; hate an ending Really? Why? Growing has little to do with hormones. With or without Estrogen I enjoy texting, taking photos in color with the same device I use to make a telephone call, read the Internet, play games while I'm waiting to see someone in an office. With or without testosterone, my mate prefers the garage door to go up by pressing a button in his car, using a hands-free device to call me as he steers the wheel, not having 78rpm records to confine to a cabinet when he can have any song of his choice by asking Alexa or Echo. Would I really prefer a washboard, as I did long ago, to a washing machine? Would I ever want to be without a frost-free refrigerator, a freezer, an appliance that cleans my dirty dishes? Proclaim the present! I'm for that.

How I Didn’t Meet Stephen King
- Ricki Aiello

Though I haven't read anything by Stephen King, I have written to him. Years ago, my oldest son David, then a pre-teen pimply-faced boy with a strong aversion to reading was in danger of failing English. I've always excelled in English, loved to read and write and couldn't understand how a kid of mine wouldn't follow my example. But David didn't. He had no interest in reading or writing. It was a matter of some seriousness when the end of eighth grade was looming, and David could barely put two words together in a sentence, didn't know a noun from a verb, and couldn't read well enough to make sense of anything on the page.

We had one of our uncomfortable mom-to-son talks. To the question, "What do you like to read?" David responded with typical teenage surliness, "Stephen King. I'm reading his book, *The Stand*.” It took all my willpower not to erupt in horrified anguish at David’s choice of reading material – a response Stephen King might have been inclined to use in one of his infamous novels were he to have witnessed it.

I've never liked Stephen King. Well, to be more accurate, I don't like his kind of writing: horror, science fiction, and fantasy. These are not the sort of books I would choose. They’re designed to scare the reader, and I don't like anything that scares me. But, after my initial suppressed reaction, I took a philosophical approach and decided, a book is a book. Rather than worrying about *what* David chose to read, I would just be grateful he was reading. He liked the book, so what could I say?

With freshman year approaching, I wondered if David would be joining his eighth-grade classmates as they graduated middle school. *The Stand* sat prominently on David's little-used bookshelf. I knew he was pulling it off the shelf to read, because over the two years he had owned the book, the cover had ripped, the pages had yellowed, and there was a bookmark, which had moved from one point to another. Occasionally, I noticed one of these place markers - tattered and soiled - being exchanged for another, newer one. And, surprisingly, his reading skills had improved. David would move on to high school with his classmates.

I wanted to get my son a special graduation gift, and I couldn't think of anything more fitting than to give him a signed copy of *The Stand*. So, I wrote to Stephen King. I thanked him for inspiring my child to read. I told him how challenging it had been to get David to bring his English grade up and the role King had played in inspiring my son so he could move on to high school. I shared how reading *The Stand* was a turning point in David's life, and for that, I was grateful to its author. Then, I got to the real reason for my letter. Would King please send a signed copy of *The Stand* with a personal note to David?

I never heard back.

The lack of response increased my dislike for Stephen King. Not only was I disappointed; I was angry. True, King couldn't know how much a signed book would have meant to me, but I knew it could go a long way in healing my connection with my oldest son. And, it would help to ease some of my own guilt over the broken relationship I had with my children, especially David.

At the time, I was attending Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine. I was thirty-seven, divorced, separated from my boys by a five and a half hour, nearly 300-hundred-mile car ride, and seeking a Master’s degree in an unfamiliar state. I saw my sons when they were on school vacations, on holidays, and when there was a “boys will be boys" crisis of some kind. It was never enough for them or me. In more ways than I care to mention, I was far more disappointed

in myself than with the author of my son's beloved book, but I had hoped King's response would help mend our parent/child relationship strained due to a divorce and a long-distance separation. Once again, I felt like I had somehow failed my son who, by the way, knew nothing about my letter to his favorite writer.

Time passed. David living with his dad in Connecticut was doing well in high school and I, living in the very same town as the Kings, worked to earn my degree, which would lead to a viable job. The irony of where I'd end up didn't escape my notice. I walked my dog past the Kings' large Gothic house with its spider web fencing. I read the local papers and knew the Kings were extremely generous to the town of Bangor and its children. They funded school improvements, the fire department, and helped build more than one athletic field. Though I knew all this, I still nursed my very unchristian grudge, yet another incongruity given the vocation I was seeking.

One day, between classes, I stopped at a 7-Eleven. With a quart of milk in hand, I walked to the register to pay. There was a short line. As I waited, my thoughts drifted to the paper I was writing for my New Testament class. In front of me stood a tall man waiting in line. I didn't pay much attention other than to note the black Fedora-on his head. *Probably bald* I thought returning to my own inner reflections. But, something about the man made me look more closely. When he turned to leave the store, I realized what had caught my attention. I was standing behind – you guessed it - Stephen King. There was no mistaking his identity. He was wearing a casual pair of pants with a light jacket, the dark hat on his head, and a pair of dark-framed glasses. When he turned toward me and the others waiting in the line, he didn't acknowledge anyone. Surprisingly, no one reacted to his presence either.

A surge of anger swept through me. Here was the man who had ignored a mother's plea, the very man I had held in contempt for so many years, and he was standing right in front of me. Maybe I should follow him out of the store and lay into him, tell him how much receiving a signed copy of his book would have meant to my son and to me. I had wanted my oldest son, whose life had been disrupted by divorce and my decision to return to school, to approve of something, just one thing I'd done for him. Maybe if King knew how much *I* had needed him to send that copy, then perhaps he would have mailed something, anything, but he didn't. I had this one chance to face King and tell him how he had disappointed me. To make him take responsibility for his failure to respond. But, I didn't. I watched Stephen King walk out, get into his car, and drive off.

"You're next, lady," the clerk said, looking annoyed.

"Huh? Oh, yes, sorry," I said as I put the milk on the counter. "That was Stephen King, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," the clerk responded not feeling any need to expand on his one-word answer.

"Does he come in here often?"

The clerk was looking at me with a *why do you want to know* expression. "A fan?" he asked.

"No, not a fan," I responded. "I've never read him."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "Me neither. My kid likes him."

"Mine too," I thanked him and left the store.

Heading back to my apartment, I thought about the missed opportunity to face King and say out loud what I had been saying in my head for two years. I thought about the conversation David and I had had when he was in danger of failing middle school. I thought about the divorce, the pain of separation David must have felt when I'd left and traveled 300 miles north, the

confrontation, which might someday come when he was old enough and felt strong enough to voice his disappointment in me, in his dad, in us as a family.

I was glad I hadn't voiced my anger to Mr. King. Maybe he did or didn't deserve my ire, and maybe, I didn't deserve David's. I did what I had to do to provide for my family in the best way I knew how. One thing was sure though; I had wanted Stephen King to fix my relationship with my son, but I was the only one who could or should work at that. Not a signed copy of a book my son had read or the contrived words of its author. That wouldn’t have helped any more than yelling at King in a parking lot in Bangor Maine could achieve healing.

I had work to do and, for the first time, I was grateful Stephen King hadn't written back. I still didn't want to read his books, but now I could let him off the hook. It wasn't his job to work out my relationship with my children or fix my family or me. It was mine, and that was scary. Perhaps it was more terrifying than the plot of one of Stephen King's books. I don’t know, but what I did know was it would take time, patience, and above all, love to piece together a relationship torn apart by divorce and hundreds of miles. I knew I would have to face my guilt and learn to forgive myself if I ever expected my son to forgive me. The progress toward healing might be slow, but in time, it would be worth the effort.

Otherwise
- M.J. Iuppa

Beneath Ontario's glassy surface, small
waves comb its sandy bottom, leaving
behind a sandbar, lined like blank
sheet music, waiting for its measure.

Too early to tell what this day will compose,
I am there, standing on the jetty, listening
to you – to wind whisking your thoughts
over a stretch of calm water …

I am still part of this conversation – you
can see my feet are wet – coming away
with a few new phrases that startle both
of us – like the lake shifting its weight

to overcome us when we need to think
before we speak.

Pill Bugs
- Alicia Hoffman

As a child, I called them roly-polies,
but now, understanding the importance

of names, I kneel like an old prayer
in the dirt, watch them curl small

bodies into concentric and coiled
balls. Their shell: mostly armadillo.

Genetically, though, they are shrimp.
Fascinated by the sea creatures attempt

to survive the banality of a land-locked
garden I google *what do they see*

*when they look at me*? *Can they fail*
*to express in some leviathan way*

*the sorrow that comes from love?*
Since observing exposes more

about the viewer than the subject
I swell into it, the knowledge

of my own loneliness, aloof
with a rabid desire to connect

with a presence other than myself,
an outside observer cataloguing

idiosyncrasies, watching the wind pick up,
moving the leaves of the trees to sway

and rustle as branches bend low and bow,
noting how the world ripples through me.

The Precisionist
- Richard Risenberg

He was the kind of older man who washed his dishes as soon as he finished each meal. In fact, he had been that way since he had moved out of his parents' house so many years ago. He could have stayed; his parents were old-country, lovers of family. He chose to throw himself out. He loved them fine, and he took care of them when they were old, but he wanted to live alone, so that things could be done right. His parents loved sentiment. He loved orderliness.

Not "order;" perhaps the word he meant was "organization." He liked things shipshape, that was how he preferred to say it to himself. A sense that you would not be caught by surprise, blindsided by life's unpredictability. He had never been a boating person, but he had read about life on sailing craft, and how everything had to be in its place so that it fell to hand naturally when an emergency presented itself. He should have gotten a boat, he told himself, but he could never figure out a good reason to spend so much money on something he didn't need. He didn't even keep a car anymore, renting one if he had need. He found an apartment he liked, a second-story one-bedroom with plenty of windows and a glimpse of the sea, and he worked at an engineering office close enough that he could walk there.

As always, he went back to his bedroom to finish dressing for the day. As always, he mechanically checked the row of shoes lined up at the foot of the bed: toes out, laces coiled lightly and tucked inside. Ghosts of himself standing at attention: it made him smile. Perhaps that was a bit excessive, but it harmed no one, and it pleased him just enough to be worth the trouble. And were there to come another earthquake, he could dress quickly in the dark and rush outside wearing the proper shoes for stumbling over rubble. Such an earthquake had happened not twenty years before, though there had been no rubble to stumble over in his neighborhood that time. There had been a chaos of broken glass in the bathroom and kitchen, but he had bought new latches for the cabinets afterwards and installed them himself. It was then that the idea had grown in his mind to buy his own building. Without a car or a family, he had saved a great deal of money without even trying very hard, and it was a small enough apartment building that his nest egg hatched a considerable down payment. The previous owner, whom he considered a friend, had two other older buildings and wished to buy a more prestigious one nearer the beach. The deal was made. He kept the long-time manager, despite the expense, so that the other tenants wouldn't change their friendly attitude towards him. That was as close as he had come to family, until now.

Now, to his surprise, it appeared he might have a girlfriend, something he thought he had given up on years before, after several upsetting experiences.

He often walked to the nearby marina to look at the boats and enjoy the sea air and the brilliant light. Some of the boats were slovenly, but most were kept "shipshape," and the neat coils of rope, the folded white sails ready to be raised, the shining woodwork pleased him as much as the graceful curves of the hulls. Sometimes someone pottering about fixing things would give him a smile and a wave. Carolyn went farther, and shouted a cheery greeting. He returned a smile and a shy wave and said, "Beautiful boat."

They began to talk as he leaned on the fence rail above the floating docks. She was a little younger than himself, sturdily built as seemed so often the case among boating women, and not

too weathered by the sun. Eventually she invited him over for a closer look, bustling easily up the slanted gangway to unlock the gate. She showed him around, he duly asked questions that he hoped were not too ignorant, and he felt even more relaxed than he usually did during his boat walks, as he thought of them. He asked her if she was getting ready for a sailing trip.

"Nothing heroic. Just going out to the island next week. Three or four hours if the wind is good. Want to come along? She's got four bunks — I always stay overnight on the boat. You don't get seasick, do you?"

"Why, I don't know," he said.

"Well, I've got Dramamine aboard. And if that fails, there's always the sailor's traditional remedy."

"What's that?" he asked innocently.

"'Go and sit under an apple tree.'"

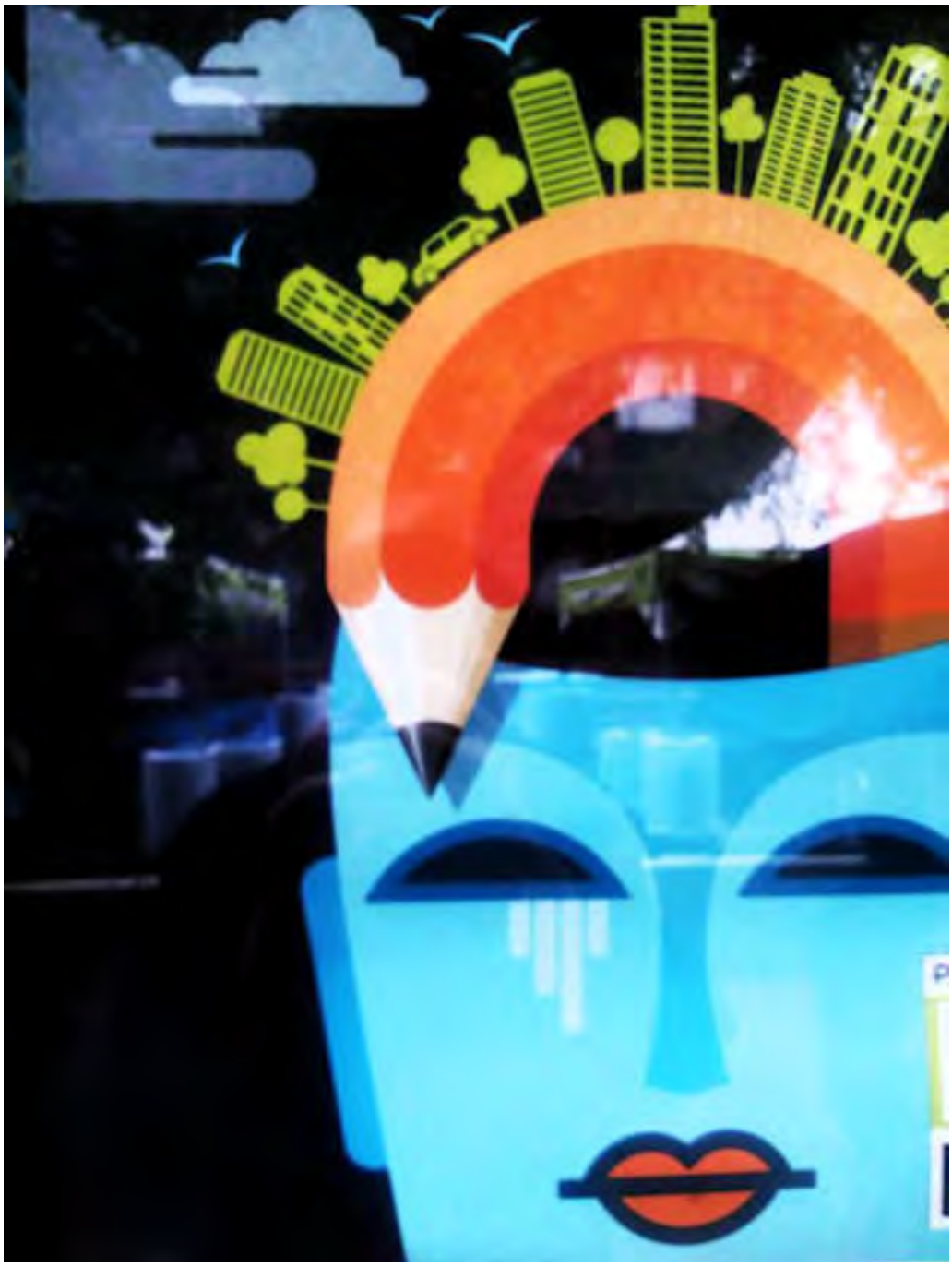
He felt puzzled for a moment, then broke into hearty laughter. They kept talking, and soon it was time for lunch. They walked together to the fish shack overlooking the water and laughed a good deal over lunch.

In truth, he was a little frightened. Relationships, even just friendships, could be complicated, and the sea, with its waves and winds and hidden monsters, was an untidy place — a realm of imprecision, to be sure. He went into the bathroom to give his moustache a final trim, and made jaunty, squinting faces at himself in the mirror. Would his glasses get wet? Would he get seasick? She had said, "If you turn green, we'll turn back." But he wouldn't want to ruin her trip. Or their trip, as they had begun to speak of it. Maybe it's time to change my ways a little anyhow. Tidy solitude was wearing thin.

He picked up his knapsack, with all its little compartments. Just before stepping out to walk to the marina, he looked around the bedroom. Nothing out of place. He frowned. He went to the foot of the bed and carefully, precisely, upended one of the shoes and left it lying there, with its laces sprawled on the carpet.

Express Yourself

- J.R. Paradiso



A would-be New York novelist saddened by rejection slips

left the city in disgust and in style

and drove her technicolor car to New Orleaans where she was appreciated.

# They're Playing Our Song

- Jen Richards

Weathervane
- AnnMarie Roselli

Eyes pointed at the sky. A voice
most clear and perfect settled up
there on the roof. Tiny voice
filling the air. Frail hollow bones balancing on the weathervane. Seems light years ago we found the wrought iron vane at the flea market. A creaky place with discarded toys, post-Depression tools and miles of missing teeth. We placed the glorious wind reader with its patina trotter on our roof. The equine galloped against the blue until she could no longer outrun the hard-hitting winds.

This morning I listen to the delicate trilling float down to the driveway, while assigning new meaning to each letter. On the backdrop of another overcast morning, my little friend has chosen one black metal branch above the rest. **S** for **S**un. For you. The comforting sun in our lives. A bright light endlessly burning no matter how hard unforgiving winds hit.

What in God's Name?
- J.T. Knoll

No matter how hard I try to let it go, there are days that I still get jammed up by the concept of God as 'the big guy in the sky.' You know the one. He's on a throne in heaven surrounded by soft, puffy, cumulus clouds, dressed in a long, flowing robe and has long white hair and a beard. Like an all-knowing Santa Claus in a toga, *"He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake."*

But, to my knowledge, the Bible doesn't mention what God looks like. So why don't I imagine him as a majestic mountain? Or a catalpa tree in full, fragrant bloom? Or a Labrador retriever walking happily by my side?

According to researcher Adrien Chopin, "It (the representation of God this way) may be a literal interpretation of the Genesis fragment in which God creates humans in His image, and a literal interpretation of the concept of Father. If we are an image of God, then God might look like a human, not a holy Cow. If He is a father, He looks like a male human older than Christ."

This concept guided early artists in their first representations of the Supreme Being and carried forth over the centuries to my Catholic grade school Baltimore Catechism from which 'the big guy in the sky' was imprinted on my psyche in the 1950s and 60s.

The reason the image bothers me is that it calls up God as my father rather than God as my friend and co-creator, which I find to be a more mature, responsible relationship. One which suggests that, rather than act like a child, I am called to behave like a problem-solving adult. To grow. To grow up and take responsibility for myself. Behave more like Jesus.

I also believe that my concept of God does not have to be rigid, unchanging. So, some days my God is mystery. Others love. Others nature. Others grandma Mary. This goes along with Alcoholics Anonymous, which uses "higher power" and "God of your understanding" instead of "God" or "Jesus Christ" in their writings, therefore adopting a more inclusive tone accessible to the non-religious and non-Christian.

Nevertheless, I'm convinced that the Genesis passage is intended to be read as metaphorical, not literal. We are created in the essence of God, not in the exact appearance of Him.

I do agree with the old Baltimore Catechism that "God is everywhere," which says to me that there is no place that God is not. Trouble is, back in parochial school, I was taught this in the sense that God was always keeping an eye on me, lest I sin by messing up and breaking a commandment, rather than loving and blessing me, my dog and my bike.

I don't get jammed up when I call Jesus to mind. I easily identify with His image and call to grow in love, compassion and forgiveness. I also like that He used parables and metaphors to tease people into spiritual awareness. I like to think of them as good stories and Jesus as an excellent storyteller; one who left His listeners wondering, in sufficient doubt, about their lives and relationships to cause them to do a little healthy self-examination and continue to grow.

Getting back to what God looks like, there's a story I found about a kindergarten teacher who walks up behind a little girl intently drawing a picture on construction paper with her crayons.

"That's and interesting drawing," the teacher remarks. "What is it?"

“It’s a picture of God,” the little girl replies without looking up.
“Well, you know, nobody really knows what God looks like.”
“Oh don’t worry about that, teacher, they will when I get finished.”

Predator vs. Prey

- Len Kazmer

Seeing Differently

- James Zola

# Biographies

**Ricki Aiello**, retired from full time church ministry, is a New England writer who pens personal essays and short stories. At present, she is working on a memoir. Ricki frequently writes about her dachshund, Grace, her family, and the art of finding humor in aging. A lifelong Connecticut resident with work-related sojourns in Kittery, Maine, East Longmeadow, Massachusetts and the Town of Chatham on Cape Cod, she holds a doctorate in theology and church ministry from Andover Newton Theological School. Ricki enjoys living near her family, cheering her grandsons as they play soccer, and the joys and frustrations of being a first-time homeowner. Her memoir is a collection of essays describing her relationship with her 92-year-old mother, the good, the bad and, yes, the ugly moments. She may be reached at revricki3@gmail.com**.**

**Joseph ("Joe") Glaser,** originally educated in science and technology, spent most of his career in computer-related activities. In retirement, he immersed himself in liberal arts and began writing poetry in 2008. Some of his poems have appeared in *The Journal*, published by Northwestern University's OLLI program, the online journal *Front Porch Review*, the online *Decades Review*, the online *Muses' Gallery* of Highland Park Poetry, the published *Journal of Modern Poetr*y (JOMP-16 best modern poem prize), and *Distilled Voices* published by the Illinois State Poetry Society. Joe is also a candid photographer, especially when traveling, and his photos have been published in some of the same media as his poems.

**Bruce Harris** is retired. He spends his time reading, writing, and walking.

**Anne Higgins** teaches English at Mount Saint Mary's University in Emmitsburg Maryland. She is a member of the Daughters of Charity. She has had over one hundred poems published in a variety of print and online magazines. She has published eight books of poetry: *At the Year's Elbow*, Mellen Poetry Press 2000; *Scattered Showers in a Clear Sky,* Plain View Press 2007; *Pick It Up and Read*, Finishing Line Press 2008; How *the Hand Behaves,* Finishing Line Press 2009; Digging *for God*, Wipf and Stock 2010; *Vexed Questions,* Aldrich Press 2013; *Reconnaissance*, Texture Press 2014; and *Life List*, Finishing Line Press 2016. Her poems were featured several times on *The Writer's Almanac.*

**Alicia Hoffman** lives, writes and teaches English in Rochester, New York. Her poems have been published in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Redactions*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Poets/Artists*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Oak Bend Review*, *Writer's Bloc*, *Orange Room Review*, etc. She writes because, as Wislawa Szymborska once said, "I prefer the absurdity of writing poems to the absurdity of not writing poems."

**M.J. Iuppa** lives on a small farm near the shores of Lake Ontario. For the past eight years, she and her husband Peter Tonery have been committed to food sustainability. She has numerous publications (poetry, fiction, nonfiction and plays) in national and international journals as well as two full-length poetry collections *Night Traveler* (Foothills, 2003) and *Within Reach* (Cherry Grove Collection, 2010) and five chapbooks; her latest prose chapbook is *Between Worlds* Foothills, 2013. She served as the poetry adviser (2007-2012) for the New York Foundation for the Arts, and since 1986, has worked as a teaching artist in the schools, K-12 for a variety of

agencies (RCSD, BOCES 2, Young Audiences, Genesee Valley BOCES, Project U.N.I.Q.U.E. and V.I.T.A.L. Writers & Books, and others) Currently she is Writer-in-Residence and Director of Arts Minor Program at St. John Fisher College.

**Peycho Kanev** is the Editor-in-Chief of *Kanev Books*. His poems have appeared in more than 500 literary magazines, such as: *Poetry Quarterly, Evergreen Review, Front Porch Review, The Monarch Review, The Coachella Review, Third Wednesday, The Cleveland Review, Loch Raven Review, In Posse Review, Mascara Literary Review* and many others. He was nominated for the Pushcart Award and Best of the Net and lives in Chicago. His poetry collection *Bone Silence* was released in September, 2010, by Desperanto Publishing Group. A new collection of his poetry, *Requiem for One Night*, was published by Desperanto Publishing Group in 2012.

**Len Kazmer**, born and raised in Chicago by parents of modest means, was blessed with gifts that have served him well. The first is curiosity, initially about how things worked; this led to his teaching himself about electronics, astronomy, and physics. The second, related to the first, is the strong desire to pass on his knowledge, however limited, to others. These efforts caused the development of a number of demonstrations along with a variety of slide and tape presentations on scientific subjects which he presented at local schools, libraries, and astronomy clubs. An offshoot of this work was the need to generate a number of pictures, thus came an interest in photography. The third gift is his love of music. As he often says, "A day without music is like a day without love."

**J. T. Knoll**, a native of the Republic of Frontenac, Kansas, is a counselor, prize-winning newspaper columnist, poet and speaker. *Ghost Sign*, his recent collaboration with three other Southeast Kansas poets, was selected as a 2017 Kansas Notable Book. He lives in Pittsburg on Euclid's Curve, with his wife, Linda, and dog, Arlo the Labradorian.

**Itala Langmar**, an art therapist, born in Venice, Italy, began writing poetry at the age of ten. It was not until 1995 that she felt she had sufficient command of English to create poetry in that language. In 1996 she placed third in the National Library of Poetry contest with *Midnight Gladiolus*. A finalist in the 1999 Gwendolyn Brooks' poetry competition, she writes poems depicting talented but flawed personalities. She takes pride in her twenty-four Odyssey poems and accompanying abstract paintings, each pair inspired by a chapter in the Homeric epic. In this work she highlighted the tensions within and among the characters, their mental landscapes, and their attitudes, regrets, strengths, and weaknesses. Itala is now working on a series of poems as homages to famous women in the arts, such as Georgia O'Keefe, Louise Nevelson, and China Pattway, a quilter in Gee's Bend, Alabama.

**Julie Wakeman-Linn** edited the *Potomac Review* from 2005 to 2017. Her short stories have appeared in over two dozen literary magazines. Her most recent publication is "Shading A Line Gone Wrong" in Oakwood Literary Review. Her novel, *Chasing the Leopard, Finding the Lion*, a finalist for Barbara Kingsolver's Bellwether Prize, was published by Mkuki Na Nyota in 2012. Her short story collection, *The Challenge of Non-native Species*, was a finalist for the WWPH 2014 Fiction prize.

She taught creative writing for fifteen years at Montgomery College. Recently she has taught at The John Hopkins University Osher Program for Lifelong Learning and the Writer's Center in Bethesda. She has given panel presentations at the national Associated Writing Program's conference multiple times and at The Yale Conference for Writers. She regularly consults with the New Directions Writing program. She has studied at Breadloaf, Sewanee, and other writing conferences.

**Denny E. Marshall** has done art and poetry for many years, yet the last couple of years have brought a lot of firsts. In 2010 he wrote his first haiku, in 2011 first fiction, and 2012 first article. The article "Rejection Is A Good Thing, Stop Whining" appears online at the *Eclectic Eel* website on the *All About Art* page. Denny has had art, poetry, and fiction recently published and rejected. Denny does not have a Facebook page or Twitter account but does have a website with previously published works.

**James L. Merriner**, an award-winning journalist and author, has written five books about politics and history. He served as political editor of two major newspapers, the Chicago Sun-Times and the Atlanta Constitution. A resident of the North Shore, Merriner also is an arts photographer who often displays his work with those of his partner, the artist Itala Langmar.

**J. R. Paradiso** is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as a photographer and writer. A recipient of the Freedoms Foundation's Leavey Award for Excellence in Private Enterprise Education and a retired Professor at an Illinois' college, he holds graduate degrees in both Business Administration and Philosophy. To visit his online gallery, please go to www.jamesparadiso.com.

**George Cassidy Payne** is an essayist and poet from Rochester, New York. His work has been included in such publications as the *Hazmat Review, MORIA Poetry Journal, Chronogram Magazine, Ampersand Literary Review, Allegro, Red Porch Review, Tea House, The Angle* at St. John Fisher College and *3:16 Journal*. George's blogs, essays and letters have appeared in *USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic*, the *Havana Times*, the *South China Morning Post, The Buffalo News, Syracuse Post Standard, and Rochester City Newspaper.*

**Jen "Pen" Richards** loves to take digital photos with her iPhone. She uses them in texts, social media posts, email updates, handmade photo cards sent to family and friends, and within her "dog's" photo journal type blog, "PAWS Moments by Magnus Pym."

She self-published a book of essays, illustrated with her own photos, about the resale shop/art gallery she created and managed in Ohio called, "On Second Thought" which she uses as inspiration when facilitating creative writing workshops.

Jen also loves giving creative writing talks and has presented within church retreats, to M.O.P.s (Mothers of Preschoolers) groups, Rotary clubs, and to other organizations.

Jen and her husband Randy recently moved to the Chicago area. They love being able to walk to Ravinia Festival concerts and the Botanic Gardens.

Jen is honored to be featured in this month's issue of *Front Porch Review*.

**Richard Risemberg** was dragged to Los Angeles from Argentina as a child, and has been working there in a number of vernacular occupations since his teens while writing poetry, articles, essays, and fiction, editing online 'zines, sneaking around with a camera trying to steal people's souls, and making a general nuisance of himself, which is his forte. He's survived long enough to become either a respected elder or a tedious old fart, depending on your point of view, and is still at it. It hasn't been easy for any of us.He has published stories, poems, and essays over the years in journals as diverse as *Snowy Egret, Juxta, Terrain, Empty Mirror, Switchblade, Ginsoko, Mystery Tribune*, and *Scarlet Leaf*, and has two "literary mystery" novels out there somewhere.

**AM Roselli** is a writer and artist living in Hudson Valley, New York. Her collection of illustrated poetry, *Love of the Monster*, was published in 2016. Her writing has appeared in *Red Fez, Panoplyzine, The Paragon Journal, Firefly Magazine, Free Lit Magazine, The Avocet, Miracles Magazine, Chicago Literati, The Absurdist, From Whispers to Roars, Now Then Magazine*, and *Into the Void Magazine*. Her art has been featured in the *A3 Review* and Emerge Gallery, Saugerties, NY. AM Roselli's art & writing site: anntogether.com

**Lois Greene Stone**, writer and poet, has been syndicated worldwide. Poetry and personal essays have been included in hard and softcover anthologies. Collections of her personal items/ photos/ memorabilia are in major museums including twelve different divisions of The Smithsonian.

**Lee Todd Lacks**, a mixed-media artist and music therapist, seeks to blur the distinctions between rants, chants, anthems, and anecdotes. Whether relating to a broad social concern, or responding to a transformative life event, Lee Todd tends to be informed by his experience of living with significant vision and hearing deficits. He is preoccupied with counting syllables, managing stresses, and selecting consonants that seem less likely to drag in the muck. He holds an M.A. in Ethnomusicology from Tufts University, and an M.A. in Expressive Therapies from Lesley University. His writing has been published in *Bop Dead City, Tincture Journal, Liquid Imagination, Breath and Shadow, Latchkey Tales,* and *Clockwise Cat*. Lee Todd currently resides in South Portland, Maine, where he lives with his wife and young son.

**Jim Zola** has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children's librarian. Published in many journals through the years, his publications include a chapbook – *The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press) – and a full-length poetry collection –*What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He currently lives in Greensboro, NC

**Submission Guidelines**

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.
· If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
· Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
· If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
· Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
· If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
· No erotica or works which rely on explicit language or gratuitous violence.
· All work must be original and in English.

· Fiction and essays can be up to 5000 words.
· No novel excerpts
· No memoirs
· No genre fiction; e.g., horror, science fiction, mysteries
· Fiction should deal with critical, universal aspects of human behavior.
· Essays can be on any topic but must express a reasoned opinion.
· Poems should have strong images and concise, evocative language.
· Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired.
· Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files.
· Accepted visual arts may be reduced to fit the available space.
· Prose and poetry may be accompanied by one or more relevant photos.

· Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.
· This magazine does not currently pay upon publication.

Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to gphillips938@comcast,net Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message. We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to gphillips938@comcast.net.

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