

Front Porch Review



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Engines of Longing
- Bill Abbott

Imagine yourself as a train, a couple of engines up front, a bunch of cars, maybe a caboose if you're feeling fancy. You fly down the rails, rainy days and snowy days, days where the weather doesn't care about you. You slow down for towns, stop here and there for a few moments, attacked by spray cans proclaiming things in swirling letters. You are canvas, then moving artwork. You ride the rails literally, gliding your way through the dark and the light, leaving lonely whines in small towns that teens will think is a beckoning call to travel. Your trainship, your trainliness, is the romantic freedom, the quiet and lonely freedom, the way of the world until life derails you, spills your cargo across the fields, or the towns. Spills you across the roadways of life. Reminds you that your freedom only extends where there are rails. Reminds you there are limits, but aren't they scenic?

How I See It
- Austin Hehir

Beauty

Is something that I constantly, agonizingly
desire.

Rummaging across streaks of slumbering sky hanging
gently across the wind.

In rainbows,

dissected and bare like a cleaned fish.

Their colors fiction to light,

Distilled into deception.

A piano man rattling the marrow of the
keys until his soul is
silent.

How I see it,

beauty isn't what it is,

But it is how you see it.

Cairo Has What You Need

- Ivan Berk







A Typical Night at Walgreens - Rebecca Rhodes

Walgreens always seemed to exist in a world of its own, but when Drew was assigned as assistant manager for the late shift, he was exposed to the unique peculiarities of the town's population. Typically, he worked from morning to four, and though he hated his job, life was tolerable. He got used to watching fifty-year-old-men with graying hair and swim trunks scouring dusty shelves for last-minute travel shampoo, Little Debbie's mini donuts, or bottles of ibuprofen for the back pain they consistently complained about. But now, five shifts a week from four to eleven, Drew fought off boredom and exhaustion, faked a friendly smile and sorted packages of off-brand diapers for proper advertisement. The number of even remotely respectable customers slowly dwindled as it grew later. Those few who came through the door seemed to belong to another species. As far as Drew was concerned, these people's weird tendencies, like stroking all the travel washcloths one by one or silently sniffing every brand of hand sanitizer, deemed them unworthy of being considered human.

Once, while Drew was at the register late at night, a man tried to buy six containers of diced pepper jack cheese. However, the man had no money, so he offered to pay Drew with a pack of cigarettes, explaining they were more valuable because he'd acquired them in prison. Another time, a nine-year-old boy strolled into the store unattended at 10:30 at night, pulled a single Red Bull off the shelf, and chugged it all in less than a minute. While Drew was too mystified to do anything about it, the kid swiftly crushed the can under his foot, left it in the aisle, then walked out of the store as casually as he'd come in.

Drew's personal favorite was the woman who entered ten minutes before closing with her "emotional support animal," a four-foot-long monitor lizard named Henry, which she guided on a too-flimsy leash attached to a pink studded collar. When asked to take her pet outside, she refused, explaining that Henry needed to come on walks with her to get his exercise, and that he was now banned from the public park for some reason she refused to elaborate on. She then asked to buy meat for Henry. When Drew quickly said they didn't have enough in stock, the woman left with a sigh of disgust.

Such events weren't too out of the ordinary for a typical night at Walgreens. The so-called people at least kept it interesting, which temporarily distracted Drew from the fact his life revolved around scanning the same toiletry items over and over again, taking inventory of shelves of petroleum jelly, or occasionally performing janitorial duties in the most unsalvageable bathrooms he'd ever seen. But on this particular night, Drew's patience for the job, as well as the customers, was already gone, as three different people had come in to ask for directions to the nearest CVS.

The shift dragged on with three people slipping over the wet floor sign, two teenage shoplifting attempts, and one overflowing toilet. At eleven o'clock, it was time for the misery to end, so Drew turned the sign on the locked front door from "Open" to "Sorry, we're closed." The other employees clocked out and fled out the back before they were stuck doing any leftover work. Drew watched them pack into their cars and speed away before the clock hit a minute past eleven. He was, predictably, left to do the daily janitorial duties on his own; he never had the heart to tell the others to stay behind after their day in paradise had come to an end.

Drew looked between the candy-crowded sales counter and the seventeen aisles where all sorts of items on the lower shelves overflowed onto the yellowed tile floor. He shook his head and held in a sigh. It looked like he'd be busy tonight.

Drew tried to spin around and head for the supply closet but his right foot stuck in place for a second. He looked down and slowly tugged it back to reveal the cause – he'd stepped on a wad of gum no less than six inches in diameter, and the wet, sticky substance clung to the sole of his shoe in strings as he pulled his foot away.

Drew sighed. This was the third time this week. He was becoming far too familiar with how the customers marked their territory. So familiar, in fact, that he could now identify seven different brands of gum just by the sight of their chewed remains. Judging by the sickly gray color and the slimy consistency, this was, unfortunately, grape Hubba Bubba. Drew shook his head; this would require much more damage repair than a gum deposit usually warranted. It would take at least another ten minutes to get it all up, and if any sort of mess was left behind, his manager, Greg, would likely attempt to cut his hourly pay – again – to punish Drew for showing a lack of commitment to his duties. And so, now that the store was empty, silent except for the sound of Celine Dion's voice moaning "The Power of Love" through the static-filled radio, Drew rolled out the cart of cleaning supplies and got to work.

Covering his mouth from the fumes, Drew coated the gum and a two-foot radius around it with enough disinfectant spray to cure a moderate plague. He grabbed the scraper and knelt, but before he started to diligently scrape the mess apart, Drew began to zone out. He did this every time he had to engage in menial labor, which often resulted in him being mentally absent from the moment he clocked in to the moment he left the store. His favorite distraction was imagining how much better his life would be if he'd just gone to college. There'd be no more late shifts, no more disorderly customers, no more Walgreens. But just like when he'd graduated high school six years ago, he couldn't afford it.

Drew would often fantasize about ending up in some sort of bizarre accident that would result in a payoff – only then would he be able to get tuition money through the power of a good lawyer. Hit by a city bus that ran a red light? Sure, he'd get \$50,000 at least. Struck by a speeding ice cream truck while crossing the street? Less effective, maybe around \$20,000. Getting into a life-threatening accident at work? It depends on whether or not Greg was doing his job right, which he never did. Survive a plane crash? That's it, he'd be rich enough for four years.

Drew was about five minutes into scraping the illogically large pile of gum off the floor – thankfully, the gooey mass didn't have a tooth lodged inside of it this time – when the phone rang. Interrupted from his morbidly joyful thoughts, he rose from his painful crouch and stretched his legs before going behind the checkout counter to answer it. "Hello, Walgreens, how can I assist?"

On the other end, Greg, cleared his throat and announced, "Drew, the ointment's being shipped in late tonight."

Drew rolled his eyes and thought, *The ointment! Finally! I guess I'll just drop everything and celebrate, that's fantastic news!*

"I left some crates out, so go clean off the loading dock. I'll be over in ten minutes for closing, and it better be finished by then," he added.

"Gotcha," Drew said flatly. He hung up and wondered how likely it was to survive a plane crash.

Forgetting the pile of gum, he made his way to the back door of the building and out to the loading dock, a concrete storage unit closed off by what looked like a flimsy metal garage door leading to the parking lot. He pressed a button to raise the door, and a waft of freezing air came in. Like every winter night in Michigan, it was around seventeen degrees and windy, cold

enough to make his face sting and the exposed skin of his arms swell with goosebumps.

Drew spotted seven wooden crates on the black tar of the dock. Taking a breath, Drew hurried outside and shakily picked one up with both hands. He rushed it back inside the storage unit, then returned for another, taking trip after trip for heavy white boxes which he dropped into the corners of the unit without thinking, ignoring the word “fragile” printed on each one – there was no reason to care what was inside, especially since the ointment was somehow deemed more pressing.

As Drew picked up the last box and faced towards the unit, he heard the sound of footsteps over the noise of the wind. They stopped directly behind him only seconds later. Drew sat the box down and turned to face the newcomer, seeing only the shape of a tall man silhouetted against the faint streetlights.

Not again, Drew thought, shaking his head. “Can I help you?”

There was a pause before the stranger responded. “Let me in,” he said at last.

“I can’t. We’re closed.”

“That doesn’t matter. I wasn’t asking.”

“That’s too bad. Go get your Pepto-Bismol somewhere else. I hear there’s a CVS around here somewhere.”

The man didn’t reply but instead took a couple steps closer to the building. He came into the light now, and Drew could see the stranger had the collar of a black turtleneck pulled up over his nose and mouth. His head was covered with a wide-brimmed felt hat, and he wore a long, bulky coat. Drew thought he was an idiotic knock-off of a 90s action movie villain.

“We’re closed. Understand? Closed.”

The man reached into his unzipped coat and shifted it slightly, revealing the contents of the inner pocket. The handle of a gun reflected back in the white light. “I wasn’t asking,” the stranger repeated.

Drew looked at the gun and took a deep breath. He told himself the man obviously wasn’t going to use it; it was just an empty threat. Judging by the outfit, Drew assumed this was not the brightest robber in the world. Perhaps he was one of the more intelligent ones Drew had encountered this month but still not any sort of threat. At least he was being cinematic about it.

“We’re closed,” Drew said again.

“I said let me in. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll listen.”

“I don’t think so, buddy.” Drew looked down at his watch, thought of Greg, who, he realized, was already late in relieving him of his shift. If Greg showed up, maybe this guy would be a little more eager to leave.

The man pulled out the gun, raised it and pointed it at Drew’s chest. Drew took another breath and attempted to stay unfazed; in situations such as these, he never expected much harm to come to him or the establishment in which he served his late-night prison sentence. The people in the area didn’t seem to know how to properly use debit cards to buy Nutter Butters, let alone commit successful armed robberies. Drew assumed this man was not right in the head and was mistakenly in the wrong place; after all, he expected nothing more from people who shop at Walgreens. “Get lost,” he said.

“This is your last chance to cooperate.” he said, still aiming the weapon, his arm unwavering.

“I said get outta here,” Drew muttered. “Why would you want to rob a Walgreens in the first place? What, you want sixty bucks in change and a coupon for antifungal cream? Trust me, there’s nothing in there worth the jail time.”

“I’m the one with the gun, and I don’t like your attitude.”

“That’s okay. My customer service hours are over. Now get lost, or I’ll call the cops.” He began shooing the robber away as if he were trying to get rid of a deer standing in the road, with little shouts of “Get out,” and “Go on, I don’t have all night.”

In a move Drew hadn’t anticipated, the robber moved forward, grabbed him by the shoulder and then twisted Drew’s arm behind his back so it could be broken at a moment’s notice. Drew was even more taken aback when the man pressed the barrel of the gun against his head and said, “You’re letting me inside. And you’re giving me what you got. Understand?”

Drew took a breath yet again. He told himself the gun probably wasn’t loaded. A customer once employed this same scare tactic on him in an attempt to get a 90% discount on a bulk package of Slim Jims. It’s not like Drew knew how to handle an armed robbery anyway – Greg never went over that in training like he was supposed to – and it was too late at night to care about following the rules anyway.

“Whatever. Have it your way,” he said. “We’ll go inside so the security cameras can get a better look at you.” Drew began to lead the way back into the store, his arm still twisted behind his back, and the gun still pressed against his temple, leaving the door open as he crossed the threshold despite the cold air flooding inside.

Drew noticed the aisle directly in front of them happened to contain laxatives. He tipped his head towards the racks and said, “Well go on, then. Take your pick.”

The robber sighed with exasperation, his voice sounding like a hiss. “Look, smartass, just go empty the register.”

Straight to the point, at least. This shouldn’t have to hold me up for too long after closing, Drew thought. “I hope you’re okay with nickels,” he said as he continued towards the front of the store. The robber let go of him once they’d reached the checkout counter, but kept the gun trained on Drew’s head from a distance.

Drew pressed a few buttons, and the register drawer slid open. He set a few twenties, two rolls of quarters, and the other miscellaneous coins on the countertop.

The robber, who Drew could now see had blue eyes and darkly freckled skin, pocketed the money with his free hand, then said, “Shit. That’s it?”

“Consider yourself lucky. I make thirteen dollars an hour, for God’s sake.”

“Where’s the safe?”

“Just take your money and go, pal. I’ve got closing up to do, and a large pile of Hubba Bubba that’s not going to get scraped up on its own.”

“I’m not going anywhere until you empty the safe.”

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen.”

“Again. I’m the one with the gun. Do you think this is funny?”

Drew shook his head. “Look, I don’t know the safe’s combination.”

“Lie.”

Drew laughed. He was telling the truth – Greg never let anyone else handle the profits, not even his cashiers or assistant managers. That’s why he always came in for closing; only he could put away the petty cash of the day, since only he knew the combination to the safe. “If you want to file a complaint about my poor service, take it up with the manager.”

At this, the robber lost his patience. With one swift motion, he pointed the gun at Drew’s left leg and pulled the trigger.

Drew was bewildered. No words could match the pain. The blood dripping from his lower leg was a new form of reality. Suddenly, the gravity of the situation sunk in. This guy

wasn't your average Walgreens shopper.

Drew felt dizzy, his vision blurred and he collapsed, unable to control his body. Nerve and muscle damage radiated through his body; he hugged his knee close to his chest and gritted his teeth.

He couldn't understand the moment. A minute ago, it was a typical night at Walgreens, but now he was alone on the cold Hubba Bubba-scented floor, bleeding, wishing he'd gone to college, having his ears violated by the slow pop music from the radio, and hoping for Greg to come save him.

The robber yelled a few more things. Drew couldn't quite register his words, distracted by his misery. When Drew didn't respond, the robber searched behind the counter until he found the safe. He aimed his gun at the lock and pulled the trigger. Two more shots split through the air, bullets ricocheting, until the gun was empty. The bell on the entrance door chimed, and the robber quickly backed off, hurrying toward the loading dock.

Drew's ears rung even louder from the noise. He groaned, unable to move, as he saw a short, bald man run behind the counter and frantically place his hands on the safe – Greg.

Just then Drew realized how completely and utterly blessed he was. Sure, his leg was bleeding, and, sure, he was about to faint from the pain, but this was truly the best thing to ever happen to him.

Greg spun around and looked at Drew, not concerned by a minor gunshot wound. "What happened?"

Drew choked out, "I quit."

Greg blinked, dumbfounded. "You what?"

Drew smiled slightly and got his voice back. "I quit. I'm going to college." He felt dizziness consume him, and the room swirled to the black of unconsciousness as he added, "Thanks for the tuition money, Greg. I'll see you in court."

Alien Life in the Heart of Suburbia
- John Grey

Despite our names on the deed of the house,
it was never quite suburbia.
Yes, we fitted in succinctly
with the neat gardens and white picket fences,
but no one else danced on the roof as we did,
or made a game of laying stone
or shoveled snow like digging for gold
or sang "Do Re Mi" when replacing shingles.
The neighborhood was master of all
but it could never quite bring us to heel.
We loved the work too much.
The sweat, the chill, all came as natural
as sudden breaks for kisses.
The old woman next door had been in her house
since the surrounds were farmland.
The couple out back only ever had
their house painted that one shade of brown.
There was a family on the other side
who never gave us a moment of grief
except, that is, for their strained politeness.
I'm sure they all thought us too bohemian.
Who else would celebrate the pebbles
that decorated our yard after every frost heave?
Or hang a swallow hotel? Or grow wild plum?
Or sip wine on the porch while attending to the sunset?
We knew the rules well enough.
We'd both been raised on them.
But here was our opportunity
to break every married couple suburban commandment
from "Thou Shalt Not Play Led Zeppelin Loudly"
to "Thou Shalt Not Have A Russian Wolfhound For A Pet."
If the neighbors had only known
how passionate the sex,
how loving the conversation,
how honey locust blossom sweet
the atmosphere from room to room,
they would have got up a petition,
signed by all, and tacked it to our front door -
either asking us to leave

or asking us to show them how it's done.

Remembrance of Things Past

- J. R. Paradiso







Sunrise So Like an Un-Peeled Orange
- Katherine Fallon

it's hard not to be hungry. The ice fields
shatter rough as faces within a carnival

mirror as I enter the coppice, walk
the fire-blighted mountain. Mark

of the hoof of a horse along the footpath.
Scent of predators. Fog of some other

mammal's open-mouthed breathing.
I knew the minute each one crowned

that they were here to break my mold:
my daughter, married and missing,

an unbeliever; my son a quiet man,
born in snow. I hold the fir to fling

myself down the incline, sure-footed.
Pinecones skitter behind me as though

I were partnered, as if I were a leader.

Zithers Unstrung
- Hibah Shabkhez

The fog is densest upslope where
It is dazing, clouding, skying
Making all the world a thick cloud;

Zephyros and Euros war here
High winds battling, wailing, scrying
Send death to the stars for a shroud

But the winds will all die, and your zithers
Will find strings for wood that never withers

People Watching in Barcelona

- Joseph Glaser







Artificial Yet Intelligent
- Lois Greene Stone

Artificial intelligence. Intelligence is a genetic gift. “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” ... would you want to be smart only to have it taken away? Will stem cell from research become real-life? Is manipulation or experimentation ‘artificial’?

“Alexa, turn on the light.” My husband raises his voice, and a cylinder in the family room reacts. It is dusk. She answers, “okay,” and a floor lamp’s bulb responds. I ask ‘her’ about the forecast, to set a timer as I prepare to make dinner; my mate wants the score of the football game currently being played in another state.

Do I want to upgrade to the new blob that can make phone calls and have video chats? I wonder about this. I can Skype on my computer, and Face Time on my digital phone. Do I want the competing device that allows multiple speakers offering surround sound, yet has the same basic function as Alexa?

I read *1984* with the same attitude as comics that had decoder rings, or a camera hidden in a tie tack. There were no tie tacks then, only tie bars, and rings were just that, rings. The idea that someone could watch whatever I was doing was absurd; I closed my bedroom door, and the outside vanished. MY things, my room, my privacy surrounded me. I listened to the radio programs I wanted; my parents and sisters could do the same in their private spaces. Television altered that – we grouped around a tiny screen seeing only ‘test patterns’ for most of the time as programs were infrequent.

Recording devices were fat reels with thin magnetic tape housed in a suitcase-like box. They could capture songs coming from the radio, the family singing or any one of us playing the piano, the audio of a special event as a wedding. We controlled what they did. WE turned on a light, oven, raised furnace’s temperature, used a paper dictionary, put a 78 rpm on a spindle and had brief minutes of recorded music before having to turn the shellacked disk over to the other side, dialed a telephone. How much was a recipe’s measurements if cut in half? Calculations were done with pencil and paper.

“Echo, play Frank Sinatra music.” The hockey-puck sized Echo lights up when my husband enters his office room. Her circular colors indicate her obedience. She doesn’t require food, or sleep, or positive strokes to get through the day. She doesn’t need a flu shot, or shingles vaccine, or to bathe. She’s an object. Or is she? We have to be careful with our words else either of the devices will ‘hear’ and start. I’ve begun a sentence with ‘the economy,’ and she turns on just hearing the ‘eco’. And when my neighbor, Alex, calls, I hesitate to say his name or AI lights up happily thinking ‘she’ has been invited to talk. Is both our ‘cylinder’ and the ‘dot’ intelligent for real?

Are we being secretly recorded and the information stored on a ‘cloud’ as are items from our computers? Do you think *1984* has still avoided our homes? Are we safe to have heated discussions about news items, politics, religion, culture or is this seemingly-silent-until-we-activate-her blob really a listening device? Just in case we really are not alone, when we are near one of our AI machines, and are having a debate or serious conversation, we whisper.

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Of a Donkey and an Elephant
- Lois Greene Stone

When I reached voting age in New York State, I had to be twenty-one and bring proof. Clutching my birth certificate in one hand, Bachelor of Arts in the other, I faced a wooden table in the Long Island elementary school I'd once attended. I glanced at metal steps remembering my demerits when the stair-monitor caught me climbing two at a time.

Being a 'legal' adult was liberating. I was attending an Ivy League graduate school, but looked so young that the election-volunteer questioned both my age and proof-certificates. I felt as if I were going to get a demerit again.

My grandfather, a political photographer who photographed every President from Taft through Truman, was naturalized in December 1917. He carried his citizenship as if it were a prize... as my grandmother had felt about registering her children's births when such certificates were not mandatory. Voting was an honor as well as a right. Though they'd married in New York, the gift of vote happened with the swearing-in to be an official American.

It was my turn. I lowered my eyes and stared briefly at the concrete floor. Then I suddenly remembered being in high school, seeing a donkey and an elephant on the Social Studies standardized Regents Exam, given only in New York State. But I couldn't recall which meant Republican and which meant Democrat. I was asked about affiliation as I slowly raised my head. I then recalled high school's Up and also Down staircases and how one could get a demerit for going 'up' a flight marked 'down', but not the animal's symbol and which party was which. How did my parents vote? Why hadn't I asked? In college, I did have to take courses such as International Law, but no one ever lectured about the United States party-system and what each was supposed to represent to the public.

Affiliation? I decided to check one box before I left, and, for the last time ever, exited the basement level of the elementary school where I'd spent eight childhood years. It was a comfort to know that I might have little awareness of candidates when I'd finally entered a voting booth for the first time, but next time I'd know which lever to pull.

Could I call myself 'unaffiliated' during the Korean War while I was in college and classmates wondered why Stevenson, a divorced man, could not win an election? My voting savvy hadn't progressed much, and I didn't know too many divorced people but wondered what that had to do with being a good President. Well, more people had heard of Dwight D. Eisenhower, and his feats, so I assumed Stevenson's divorce might not have mattered. So why were my peers making such an issue about that? I had already learned of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's affair and was more bewildered why he did that when his wife was a true humanitarian. What could he have been looking for in someone else?

I used an Absentee Ballot in 1960 as my due-date for giving birth and getting out to vote were not compatible. Being still somewhat naive and not liking all the insincere dialogue from candidates, I don't even remember which 'x' box I used. I respected words, having been an English teacher, and politicians were using them for 'gain' and not values. I'd known about little-lies as a child, but these potential victors were definitely saying what others expected to hear and not what they'd actually do as promised in their platforms. I began to loathe politics for the phony speeches and the special lighting/make-up to enhance physical appearance now that TV was a vehicle.

Often the lever I've pulled is more 'against' a candidate than 'for' another! And name-calling seems to start before whomever wins gets sworn in! Voting age is now eighteen, and

many have had licenses to drive since sixteen. Those documents which state I was officially age twenty-one and able to cast a ballot sit with personal papers turning slightly yellow with time. The Internet has made campaigns social and an open arena for a type of bullying. Acquaintances can't really discuss politics for fear of intimidation if a disagreement happens.

Alone in the woods, what are the sounds made by donkeys and elephants?

QWERTY

- Lois Greene Stone

How could I explain 'typewriter' to young grandson Kevin in this 21st century? I rolled an 8½ x 11" paper onto a rubber platen, manually adjusted left/right margins, then firmly depressed keys which struck against inked ribbon. Mistakes meant hand-rolling the platen high enough to dab white-out on the mark. Since I couldn't rollback to the exact place to type over the error, I had re-do the page. Made no sense since Kevin didn't know what platen or inked ribbon meant.

I remembered being ready to convert hand-written notes to type. My eyes transcribed but my moving fingers generally forgot the typing paper's lower margin needed an inch left blank. I completely re-did the entire page mindful of the needed last inch. Each page required inserting a new sheet of paper and trying to cease typing before the same running-off-the-paper happened again. Kevin didn't comprehend running-completely-off-the- page and ending up typing on that rubber cylinder.

Each time I came to the end of a line, I shifted to the next by pulling a metal lever. No word-wrap. He was clueless as to shift-lever.

I used carbon paper to make duplicate copies. If I needed a form letter to, say, apply for a summer job, I'd have to completely re-type the letter, as many times as I'd potential employers, so as to change the person's name after writing 'Dear'. Kevin didn't know what carbon paper was either. I was living the Abbott and Costello skit 'who's on first'; I knew who was on first but he was bewildered by my explanation.

With a word processor, I just type and copy wraps around the screen separating itself so I can forget the shift to a new line each time one ends. My form letters can be stored with names changed in seconds but text staying the same. It can be saved for re-use. I can't run to the bottom of the page where the paper ends as the program simply makes a new page for me. No more "oops" problems as I just delete the mistake and substitute the correction, and the word processor moves the paragraph around to make room for it. Nope, this is automatic for it. I can't even use the analogy of the electric garage-door opener that uses an unseen 'radio wave' rather than hoisting a door, or the television's remote control, or having to once manually address the buttons on the TV set itself to change channels. No one in Kevin's life comprehends that any more than I understood my mother talking about street lamps with gaslights, or horses and buggies that still existed during her childhood.

My heavily-used dictionary is also 'old'. The word hardware, today, is no longer a nut, bolt, screwdriver, or hammer. There's no listing on any worn page for the current usage of keyboard, monitor, disk drives, modems, chips, floppies, flash drives, or even smart phones.

Composer Leroy Anderson's song "The Typewriter" calls for an orchestra's percussionist to actually 'play' the theme by depressing the metal keys on a cumbersome black Remington-Rand. Many audiences don't recognize that 'instrument'.

In future decades, which, to this young boy, sounds like a zillion at this point in time, I think he'll wonder why his offspring can't comprehend what his old-fashioned computer did in the early part of the 21st century.

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She's Peeling

- Bruce Harris



Faces of Posterity
- Darrell Petska

Kith and kin. Hearth and home.
On such sweet milk we are reared,

then we leave, confident of the world,
forswearing old ways and plain spaces,
heaping miles on the past's fresh grave.

Yet memory stands against the wind,
storied names still knee-deep with intention,
occupied endlessly by yesterday,
forever calling you to dinner,
dishes steaming on the sideboard—

loved faces chiseled by acceptance
smiling from your mantel, your eyes tearing
at hindsight's forays into lives nudged
kicking and screaming toward light.

Soon your children will have borne their own.
Ought you air their rooms? Dust the dishes?
Locate the boxes of baby clothes?

Each has a key, a place reserved at table.
You remind yourself to accept, wait, smile –
growing all the while into your larger life

as do infants into the next size up,
as will your children, slowly but certainly,
into the fullness of their hearts.

Hercules Without Muscles
- George Payne

I am Hercules without muscles.
Zeus without thunder. Hades
without an underworld. Drifting,
like a show out of Nashville
without a guitar. Pure country
and dirty to the core. I am a Pollock
without dripping a single droplet of
paint. Brooklyn without a bridge.
People cross over me without
anywhere to go and no reason
to go there. I am a tape cassette.
The magic is in my obsolescence,
and I feel lowest when I am on top
of a mountain in the Adirondacks,
and quietest when I am in a bar
drinking shots of grenadine listening
to the Grateful Dead. A lost civilization
hidden on my forehead like a tattoo.

Butterflies Are Free

- Len Kazmer







Holidays with the Folks
- Emily-Sue Sloane

Ghosts of family members passed return
dab invisible tears
mend crevices in fragile hearts
Twenty-year-old memories still fresh

Again we watch each other for cracks
as another fades into the shadows

I look at my cousins' faces
recall them small
We talk of this and that or not at all
yet know each other well

I used to wonder how
aunts and uncles could boldly say they knew me

I see now we're of one fabric
a pat on the head
a peck beyond a cheek
a familiar sense of humor
Through boisterous years
awkward
rebellious
ambitious
peaceful years

A living history inescapable
like cookie-cutter faces
Love whispered in the winter breeze
pulls us together
Separate busy lives drop away

In the Past of My Future
- Claire Scott

In the past of my future, I move at the speed of panic.
Spend time with friends, read Moby Dick,
learn Spanish, see the Galapagos, study Shakespeare.
Above all try to outsmart Atropos with her eager shears.
Sweat miserably on a stair master, jog (sort of) a mile a day.
Gallons of fish oil and flavonoids.
Just now a moment for my granddaughter
curled in my lap, sucking a strand of hair.
Her face beaming as she “reads” with me:
*You are my Mother Bear
and I am your Little Bear
and we are on Earth and you know it.*
A moment that lasts an hour.
May my feet stay planted firmly on this earth
as long as the future lasts.

Sacred Smoke

- Wally P.



The Circle of Sacred Smoke was created by Japanese artist Junkyu Muto in 2008. It is one of three sculptures of Muto's International Peace Project. Muto's sculptures are at significantly spiritual places around the world. They are also at Vatican City, Rome, and Bodh Gaya, India, where the Buddha reached enlightenment.

The stone used in the sculpture and the black granite base come from Italy's Fantiscritti Quarry, the source of Michelangelo's marble. The sculpture's stone base comes from the Crazy Horse memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Over 20 tribes consider the Tower to be a sacred place. This was the location where White Buffalo Calf Woman delivered the first sacred pipe to the Lakota people. The Circle of Sacred Smoke represents a puff of smoke from a ceremonial pipe used by Native American people.

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.
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- 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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