

# INCLINATIONS



Keepsake Edition  
July 1, 2007 – July 1, 2008

Selected Works  
from  
**Word Catalyst  
Magazine**

[www.wordcatalystmagazine.com](http://www.wordcatalystmagazine.com)

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from Word Catalyst Magazine

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A Selection of Works  
from Word Catalyst Magazine

Volume One July, 2007 – June, 2008

Word Catalyst  
is an online literary magazine published monthly at  
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~ Credits ~

Design, Production and Editing by Shirley Allard

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“The Rose” by John D Moulton

“My art has become my life. It hasn’t always been that way and maybe things will change, who knows. I can say though, without question, that my art has been at my heart since I was about seven years old, and I hope ever more shall remain so - please.”

– John D Moulton

You can view John’s work in the April issue of Word Catalyst  
or on his site located at [www.johndmoulton.com](http://www.johndmoulton.com)

A Special thanks to Billy Jones aka Billy The Blogging Poet  
for helping to get Word Catalyst off the ground and running.  
Without his help I wouldn’t have known where to start.

Also, to Harry Furness for his invaluable technical assistance.



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# Dedication

*For Harry*

## **A Song For Your Soul**

Day after day you struggle to be positive  
I admire you, my friend  
You have given your all  
and never once asked  
what might be in it for you.  
You have consoled me  
assured me  
encouraged me to continue  
when I felt like giving up.  
You have shown such faith  
in the abilities of others  
overcoming so many obstacles  
on their behalf.  
I only wish that everyone knew  
how much you have done for them  
and what a special person you are.  
In the face of adversity  
there is always a song in your heart  
and that song will linger forever  
in my heart.

*I thank you for your patience, your devotion, your optimism  
and most of all for your friendship.*

– Shirley Allard, Publisher/Editor

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~ **Editor's Choice Awards** ~  
Volume One • July, 2007 – July 2008

## **Overall Excellence**

*Briar's Patch*

by Robert Cameron Hazelton

## **Poetry**

*The Six Pathways*

by Harry Furness

## **Short Stories**

*One-tenth of a Dollar*

by Bob Church

## **Creative Non-Fiction**

*Pain Series*

by Jon Norland

## **Monthly Columns/Prose**

*The Great Outdoors*

by Dan Beams

# INCLINATIONS

## The Authors

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Olivia Mountain  
Robert Cameron Hazelton  
Jo Janoski  
Michael Dunn  
Kienseng NG  
Harry Furness  
Dan Beams  
Michelle Angelini  
Jodi Herman  
Shirley Whiting Allard  
James Spoonmore  
Bob Church  
Katy Acheson  
Terry McDermott  
Gregory O'Neill  
T Owen Stark  
Ritwik Banerjee  
Rusty Arquette  
Karen Heywood  
Noah Champoux  
Sharmagne Leland-St. John  
Ayesha Susan Thomas  
Abhay Kumar  
Ernest Williamson III  
Becky Dennison Sakellariou  
Mara Meade  
Jadi Clay  
Maria Massarella  
Billy Jones

## *Our Youngest Poet*

### **Thanksgiving**

Carnations are pink  
And violets are blue  
It's almost Thanksgiving.

Morning Glories are blue  
And roses are red  
It's almost Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a holiday  
That celebrates the Pilgrims  
It's almost Thanksgiving.

— *Olivia Mountain, Age 7, New Hampshire*



~ *The Catalyst for Word Catalyst* ~

### **The Poet**

The Poet's goal: to fan the famished flame  
A catalyst to boost immortal fame  
One glowing ember separate from the rest  
One proof you have not exhaled idle breath  
Your words left on their lips beyond your death.  
The Poet's aim: to pierce one reader's heart  
One glimpse, one touch, one passion to impart  
The dream escapes from peaceful soothing sleep  
As painful tears write volumes on your cheek  
The Poet seeks a soul with which to speak.  
Bare abstract thoughts as plain as day to eyes  
Which read between the lines and scrutinize  
As heaven's inspiration comes to dwell  
The poets dream: reverse The Poet's hell.

— *Shirley Whiting Allard*

The poem above was the inspiration for the name *Word Catalyst*. I truly believe that the magazine has provided a place where artists are not merely exaling idle breath. They are being read and recognized for their talents all over the world.

Although we all dream of seeing our name in print, I doubt that most of us could reach all corners of the world with a book as we are doing with *Word Catalyst*. It is indeed a new century of publishing and we're very much a part of it!

— *Shirley Allard, Publisher*

*For Christine*

### **Moons**

As full moons orbit starless skies,  
each one a separate entity,  
the radiance distorts my eyes,  
no longer one, there now are three,  
I may not see what's really there,  
now, loneliness leaves me alone,  
and through my sight I see your eyes,  
the only luminescence known.

– *Noah Champoux, New Jersey*



### **Renaissance**

I long to see the hyacinth anon  
imparting salutations breezily  
and breathe the sweet cologne that wafts upon  
invigorating gusts that easily  
dispel the winter doldrums dragging on,  
accumulating drifts inside of me.  
I pull my collar up to warm my chin  
in lieu of golden kisses on my skin.

As angles change, the chance to see protracts  
but only if a pupil seeks the truth,  
hallucinations often pose as facts  
when altered by the heady state of youth  
and even sully patronizing pacts  
of those a little longer in the tooth  
that hide behind their overweening grin  
denial of the emptiness within.

We all require temperate climes to bloom  
and solid clay to hold us tenderly  
when certain days of unexpected gloom  
precipitate their misty misery,  
and if tomorrow brings my final doom  
I'll face the end with much felicity  
unburdened by my mitigated sin,  
as haunting hints of hyacinth begin

– *Robert Cameron Hazelton, New York*

## Adam Speaks His Mind

*The vast part (95%) of our minds is the “unconscious”; that which we have little awareness of. The unconscious knows things we have not learnt. Jung believes that in our unconscious is stored the collective wisdom we inherit from our ancestors. This is the knowledge we gained from lives we never lived, from the experiences we never experienced. This knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next through the genes. One of the ways we know of the existence of the unconscious is through our dreams*

It is like the Tree  
In Eden, this arabesque  
Of my mind.

Herein, leaves of variegated  
Thoughts jump synapses from twig  
To twig at the speed  
Of a photo-synthetic adultery.

Herein also the often sudden  
Flowering of things I do  
Not know and things I did  
Not learn, things the Original  
Apple promised the Digital Apple  
Would deliver.

And herein also the dreams,  
The cloning of Eve  
From the marrow of my rib,  
The fig leaf shame  
Of an exile, Eden now  
The room next to my  
Nursery rhymes, the serpent  
In the tree moults to become  
The dragon in the dungeon  
Of Harry Potter minds.

And I, a latter day Adam  
Know that the flaming unsheathed  
Sword is the belief  
That good and evil  
Is learned, not inherited  
From the First Adam

– Kienseng NG, Malaysia

## The Six Pathways

An adult daughter brings her failing father to the doctor  
The news is not good  
He's losing his nervous system to disease  
He soon will lose his sight and hearing  
Then his sense of smell and taste  
And his sense of touch will falter and he'll lapse into a coma  
Tears run down her cheeks as she weeps for him  
The man comforts her and says:  
"Dry your tears and don't weep for me  
I've seen the most marvelous of sights  
The golden sunsets over the ocean  
Where the clouds are painted in colors that stay painted on  
The inside of your eyes  
I watched your mother, pure beauty in motion  
As she danced with abandon and joy in her existence  
I've seen mathematical equations come true  
And watched man walk on the moon  
But I've seen the horrors of our science unchecked  
Destroying forests and melting human endeavors as well  
I've heard the music of the quiet star filled night  
Standing outside of a field and hearing corn grow  
As the cicadas serenaded, calling to mate  
I've listened to the rain as it's made the grass sing  
And I've marveled at operas and heard the soaring 'I've got a dream'  
I was there when you sang in grade school and  
Heard the joy of you as a child singing because you could  
And we laughed together – and there is no better sound  
Than the laughter of joy from a child  
I've heard the cries of the oppressed and growl of hungry bellies  
The wailing of a mother who's lost her child  
I've smelled the deep musk of the garden and the earth in spring  
When all is renewed  
The scent of your mother as she readied for her day  
The early morning flowers sending their aromas to the wind  
Calling for the bees to come  
I've been on the field of battle when the corpses are lined up  
Sending one last message to the world of how we're all corruptible  
That scent of decay  
I've worked the garbage dumps and smelled the wastes of man  
I've tasted the fine meals made with your mother's best ingredient  
Love  
I've had chocolate melt on my tongue and swilled fine wines in  
My mouth  
I've tasted victory and defeat  
And dined on crow because of the evil that flowed from me  
I've felt the touch of your mother  
And walked hand in hand with you

Feeling your small hand hold on to me as we walked on our way  
I've touched silk and wood feeling their beauty and strength  
I've felt the richness of the soil  
And the parchment skin of a fallen friend  
I've touched death and now it's death's turn to touch me  
So don't weep, dry your tears  
I live on in the songs of your daughter  
In the coded messages she sings about her experiences  
Five of six paths may fade but I still have one  
This full contact sport we call life  
Can have my senses but it shall not take my memories  
Or what lies beneath  
It can not recall where I've been and what  
I am"

– *Harry Furness, Delaware*

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### The Boy Within

Oh, for simple pleasures of boyhood days.  
Toy soldiers, worn and tattered from the frays,  
Painted expressions long since rubbed from view,  
Vicious battles had whittled my troops to two.  
The faceless duo still stands staunch in place,  
Awaiting commands and fierceness of my battle face.

Train cars line a rickety old track;  
White hot smoke pouring from her stack.  
The multicolored cars swirling, merely now a blur,  
My urgent need for speed, the engineer could not concur.  
I backed the throttle down a bit, atop the track she'd stay;  
The engineer tipped his hat, and flashed a smile my way.

I summoned outlaws and cattle thieves, oh so rough and tough.  
My sheriff's badge and lawman eyes always called their bluff.  
Slick Sam had robbed the coach, left three passengers for dead;  
Left a bloody trail to follow, two women full of lead.  
In the street he made his fatal choice, deciding he should draw;  
My .45 barked twice, reminding him you can't outrun the law.

I quickly survey the area, making certain I'm alone;  
Not a little boy on the floor, but a man who's fully grown.  
Even my blind soldiers without their painted eyes,  
Have no trouble seeing through my manly-like disguise.  
The engineer welcomes me with his wry and gnarly grin,  
He also can see past the man I am, to the boy within.

– *Dan Beams, Illinois*

## Too Many Sunrises

I blend among the street's detritus.

My heart long ago  
found foul among life flowing  
around me, pretending not to see,  
hoping not to smell, separating  
from uncleanliness they would  
turn away from if I met their eyes.

They step to the side, not wanting  
their misplaced wealth to be soiled.

No, I won't ask for what I need,  
but if they look, they will not imagine  
how close they are to sharing my space.

So, I hide beneath this hat, these clothes,  
this beard. All have seen too many sunrises,  
but not enough water.

— *Michelle Angelini, California*

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### miss masie

she outlived all her husbands  
and suiters weren't many now  
so miss masie took to making friends  
the best way she knew how

she bought a ball of worsted yarn  
and let her needles fly  
she fashioned them after men she'd known  
all quite pleasing to the eye

her favorite was a gent called mort  
who came out pretty well endowed  
and the liberties he took with her  
were more than should have been allowed

all was well till the neighbors caught  
a glimpse of her and mort  
lip locked on the sofa  
swigging snifters of cheap port

the law was called and in a jiff  
her entire entourage was shred  
so now behind drawn blinds she sits  
and cross stitches them instead!!!!

— *Jodi Herman, California*

## **I, The One**

Old maid at the Bentham Mill  
Just outside of town  
Waits to print a lovely bill  
To compliment her gown

The nouveau riche of culture war  
Catches up the fish  
Lets the net down once again  
To satisfy a wish

Sheepish in a tailored garment  
Emperor the wolf  
Writes to pass the voices out  
Of horses under hoof

A poet seer for the age  
Caustic in philosophy  
Laureate inside the cage  
Shows you an atrocity

In other silent room he waits  
Ever for the freedom  
To share a gift of give and take  
And turn you to a heathen

Closely guarded by the doors  
A keeper lets you in  
Only if you show them more  
Than back where it begins

I correct my own mathematics  
Reckon with the science  
Buy and sell to stay alive  
Much to my defiance

Ever to be special for you  
Share this golden gift  
Of finding out that you are not  
As humble as you wish

I live the resonance of all  
Proteus in good form  
Mytheme of the Ion talk  
True inspired art storm

You may ask me who I am  
And I will answer jest  
The lamp I have inside my hand  
Will answer all the rest

Once we reach an understanding  
I will say it all  
In time I have the choir standing  
Waiting for the fall

*—James Spoonmore, USA*

## Ode To A Buddhist Robe

Too softly carry me, not for want of billowed mist,  
nor lack of compromise to set upon our buttressed plane,  
and lay me on sweet saffron yet to rest again,  
midst season's petals spread with enterprise to resist.

– *Bob Church, Missouri*



## at our future table

you walked in on our conversation  
over tea and berries and leonard cohen dreams

overly, you stalked the subject  
demanding the dream to shift keys

a hand on my lap revoked sensitivity  
to harsh piano-ed callouses on soft skin

to win me you whispered softly  
and asked me softer, to spend the night in my bed

a denial or a hope or a simple fantasy  
played out for an unpopulated audience of three

the tremor rose in my affection  
and a breakthrough at our table

a toast to the near future  
and the songs of weathered men

– *Katy Acheson, Massachusetts*



## Spring Graces

Spring graces the land with soft whispers  
Spraying gentle blossoms and sweet scents  
Birds and animals snuggle close to her breast  
As life is reborn in the forest.  
Birds and animals snuggle close to her breast  
Spraying gentle blossoms and sweet scents  
Spring graces the land with soft whispers

– *Jo Janoski, Pennsylvania*

## The Art of Humanity

Upon a plinth of alabaster  
Sat a painted figurine  
Crafted by some unknown master  
Sparkling as though pristine  
Graceful splendor their intent  
Such tender care most evident

In dazzled awe my eyes beheld  
Beauty never seen before  
Gifted hands did surely meld  
Lifeless clay with something more  
The vision of an artist's dream  
Passion to the nth extreme

Within the collage of humanity  
Vibrant colors glow sublime  
But also streaks of insanity  
Violent shades of hate and crime  
Cursed by destructive imaginations  
We must always temper our aspirations

How can a race that creates such art  
Hold so much darkness in its heart?

– Robert Cameron Hazelton, *New York*

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## The Blueprint

always existed, that it did was most always above  
speculation or doubt. In years unseen,  
and as of yet unwritten, poets now  
in diapers will ignore it, same as  
we have. Specters tripping along notional paths,  
furthering the cause of the mercurial on such moonless  
nights. It's here this group of pals and lads  
would gather, reminiscing in a pose prosaic. Much like  
the unending tundra, but grander were that place  
to assume more hospitable tendencies.

Later, as the words of many flew far  
upon the worldly wind, a certain likening, one  
to another, proved all the hubbub relevant:  
If any were in concert, it brought a smile,  
that it should never be two poets. If it were,  
much gritty haze may have remained untested.

– Gregory O'Neill, *Washington*

## Origin

And should this night find you alone  
Staring into the abyss  
Shivering in the chill of hopelessness  
Fire the candle  
Dip the quill  
And speak to me  
For I await your solitary tear  
Your desperate moment  
Giving rise to  
The beauty that lay  
Deep within the soul of the poet

– *T Owen Stark, Virginia*

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## Fall

The second day of equal measure  
passed quite nondescript,  
although a subtle change was in the air.  
The angle of our golden treasure  
dipped as terra flipped,  
and hints of urgency were everywhere.  
I stood beneath inviting globes  
of crunchy-tart delight  
where yesterday the blossom lured the bee—  
behind those vibrant autumn robes  
awaits the slip of night,  
which all too soon will come to cover me.

– *Robert Cameron Hazelton, New York*

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## I Think, Therefore I Am in Trouble

As nature rages, they thumb through the pages  
For a prophecy written in stone  
But nature engages, as she has through the ages  
In unforeseen rants of her own.

It comforts the soul, and enforces the goal  
To portray it as something divine  
As the century grows old, the truth will unfold  
And me thinks in the end we will find

The destruction of us, will be not by command  
But the result of our own misguided hand.

– *Shirley Whiting Allard, New Hampshire*

## Clear Night Crescent

Silently rumbling, darkness floats.  
Empty waves thrashing on shores beyond horizon.  
Black and dense the night rolls on.

Vague and hazy and immensely sharp,  
emptiness transcends all and asserts itself.  
Ecstatic sensual ripples merge

into the lonely luminescence.  
Like a brimming cup holding dormant beauty  
I see you lying in that sea.

Drunken in the night's nectar,  
swaying to the rhythm of the waves,  
like the bright face of a mother to be

ever aware of the child in her womb.  
To that serene smile of a distant peaceful joy  
I offer silent awe and worship.

– *Ritwik Banerjee, India*



## A Dream of You

I walk beside a dream of you  
A dream of love I never knew  
I wonder if you're dreaming too  
Wherever you may be

I run along a golden stream  
Chasing whispers in my dream  
Each ripple holds a dancing beam  
A glimpse into your smile

Let me catch you if I may  
Before I wake to face the day  
Would you let me if I say  
I'm yours forevermore

Should this hope forever end  
Each night just a dream again  
Night remain my only friend  
I will see you in my dream

– *T Owen Stark, Virginia*

## Arrangements and Distractions

I balanced my checkbook...  
    paid some bills...  
tossed out the short pencils  
    in the coffee cup...  
    put all the paper clips  
in the shot glass next to it...  
loaded paper in the printer...

arranged the six Happy Buddhas  
    below the computer screen...  
    dusted it while I was at it...  
put the note pads in order by size...  
    cleaned up the address book  
    getting rid bits of paper  
    with clipped addresses...

put the scotch tape back...  
    wipe down the desktop...  
slipped the phone back in its spot...  
    straightened the papers  
    left needing attention...  
put the keyboard and mouse  
    back in their right spots...

sat back and in my chair...  
    thinking of you...  
    yet again...

– *Rusty Arquette, Florida*



# Word Catalyst Magazine

a monthly magazine for creative expression

Featuring

Poetry • Prose • Photography • Art • Fiction

All categories, with the exception of art, are open to submission.

For more great reading visit us the first of each month at

[www.wordcatalystmagazine.com](http://www.wordcatalystmagazine.com)

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## Restaurant Matters

“Just try it,” he’d say, arm stretched  
across the table, fork patiently poised  
in front of her protest.

“It’s a snail, Dad! I’m not eating  
a snail.”

“It’s escargot. Try it.”

He should have been a chef,  
with his food fetish,  
his insistence for perfection on the plate.

When her salad contained too much  
purple cabbage, or her eggs were too runny,  
he would send them back—  
and leave a penny tip.

She often wonders what he had for lunch  
that hot July day,  
when he walked out of the restaurant,  
and his heart stopped.

And she wonders,  
Did he leave a penny tip?

— *Karen Heywood, Missouri*

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## Piano Man

Pencil fingers stretch across a keyboard ocean  
to tickle obstinate rough edges  
of this earthly spinning globe  
while his melodies all chip-chopped  
with words gasp for breath  
in a moody cigarette fog  
as his determined digits pound  
his misery  
and piano man’s dagger eyes  
slice through his attending adoring fans  
who cling to still softness on his worn cap  
or black fuzzy beard for comfort  
where, alas, none can be found  
since piano man never apologizes.

— *Jo Janoski, Pennsylvania*

*For Jim*  
**My Love**

There are places in my heart  
where only you can go.  
Places in my mind,  
that only you can know.  
Places in my soul,  
that you alone can share.  
Places in my dreams,  
that are, because you're there.

– Shirley Whiting Allard, *New Hampshire*

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**The Last Day**

I hear the howling wind  
As the stately maples bend  
And sweep the ground.  
As the unrelenting ire  
Of a cyclone laced with fire  
Touches down.  
Where storms have raged before  
I fear that something more  
Is in the making.  
There's an urgency that's sensed  
In this summer storm pretense  
That leaves one shaking.  
Off to rescue sleeping babies  
As new certainties quite vaguely  
Settle in.  
And to watch as nature's fury  
The appointed Judge and Jury  
Charges in.  
While praying for salvation  
Impending devastation  
Takes its course.  
But little hearts know not of fate  
So I smile and underrate  
This deadly force.  
With equal lack of warning  
The sun returns  
Adoring hearts are mended.  
And no one anywhere  
Was the slightest bit aware  
The world had ended.

– Shirley Whiting Allard, *New Hampshire*

## Seasoning

The August moon is waning,  
a somber silver glow  
that softens the remaining  
moments ere you go.

I see the solstice in your eyes  
a subject beyond broaching,  
and whisper bittersweet goodbyes  
with autumn fast approaching.

– *Robert Cameron Hazelton, New York*

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## Sunrise

Two people looking at the same eastern spot  
Triangulating on the mauve underside of the cloud  
Holding, long-range, hands  
Feeling each other's warmth on a cold New Year's day  
Bouncing from person to cloud to person and back  
She's focused on the same cloud  
He's seeing the same color  
It may well be the only time they know each other  
But once is better than never  
Shared viewing is a tangible that becomes a single part of each  
They feel each other inside each other  
And for now that's the best it can be  
He feels better just knowing that she's looking up  
Just knowing that she's thinking about him  
Makes him feel better about himself  
And that he's as important as the color on the underside of the cloud  
He wants her to know that she is the center of the universe  
And all of his thoughts revolve around her  
The memory of her soft, hungry mouth  
And the star-bright shine in her clear eyes  
Reflect on the underside of the cloud at sunrise  
This is what he wants to put into his pocket  
And carry around, always  
He puts the memory away and associates it with the color  
And whenever he sees or recalls that color  
He'll feel her at the other end of the sunrise  
And, if sunrise is this exciting, he can hardly wait until sunset

– *Harry Furness, Delaware*

## **The Valley is Snow White**

The valley is snow white  
Trees covered with crystal ice  
Everything is blinding bright  
The valley is snow white  
A season that celebrates Christ  
Winds blow with great might  
The valley is snow white  
Trees covered with crystal ice

– *Terry McDermott, Arkansas*

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### **Illusion**

focused on the hourglass  
we lose sight of the sand  
distorted views have come to pass  
as fingers stroke the hand  
of time, kept in a bottle  
sealed, to foster our delusions  
reality, so well concealed  
competes with grand illusions.

–*Shirley Whiting Allard, New Hampshire*

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### **Rocking**

On one auspicious evening, while staring at my Chair,  
A circumstance of heaving grace quite quietly appeared.  
From some lucky gambler's fortune to me did this arise  
In no borrowed form of accident and much to my surprise.  
In all the days of walking ground I have friended chance  
Enough to see me as a spark up from the fire's dance.  
Like a snowflake falling upwards with Pythagorean pride,  
An anomaly to all uniques, a twin upon its side.  
I had expected to forego reward to my escape  
From Earthly realms for any moment brave enough to take.  
So imagine my reaction to the lifting of the soul  
Past the limits of the possible I thought I could not know.  
I stared at grain and lacquer base upon a formless form  
Whose purpose knew of nothing, save the coming of a storm.  
What value in the blissful death of symbols in my mind!  
What radiance of energy in meeting the divine!  
Ergo, I became a spirit, timeless in my toil,  
To plant the seeds of reason's bind firmly in the soil.  
I dare not try to seat myself upon the holy stone,  
For I am not yet worthy of the towering unknown

– *James Spoonmore, USA*

## The Mystery of You

When the first snows came  
I stacked more pine logs onto the hearth,  
Extra down comforters on the beds,  
And I slept in the crook of your arm.  
The warmth of you radiating,  
Eradicating the icy breath of winter,  
My lips searching for your mouth,  
Your tender kisses.

In the cold mornings,  
No bird song,  
They'd all flown south  
Their silence echoing,  
In the frigid wind.  
The whiteness like a shroud  
Encompassing the pasture.

With the world still asleep,  
I tried to decipher  
The mystery of you,  
Etched in your eyes.  
We shared intimate moments  
Beneath flannel sheets,  
Posing questions  
That had no answers.  
We no longer speak of the past,  
Instead  
We leave it where it belongs,

And our hearts swell  
With feelings  
We cannot comprehend.  
We can only  
Enjoy  
The economy of lines  
You trace with fingertips,  
Picasso-like on my  
Breasts, round belly,  
And thighs.

– *Sharmagne Leland-St. John, Washington*

## **God is a Man**

I pray  
Every night before going to bed.  
Before and after  
Every meal.

No man  
Has seen my face  
Since the day I turned 13  
Except my husband.

My daughters  
Are good  
I teach them well  
But take no praise  
Upon myself.

The Holy Book  
I know by heart  
Recite it in my sleep.

Cut my flesh  
To show my pledge  
Devotion eternal  
I said.

But...

Last night  
They came and took my child  
Flesh from my womb  
Blood of my blood  
Killed her  
Threw  
Her remains into the dustbin  
With flies, wrappers  
Banana peels

Then I know  
Within my heart  
You God  
Are not a woman.

– *Ayesha Susan Thomas, India*

### **I saw leaves dancing...**

I looked out of the window  
Taking a break from the cyber world  
And my eyes fell on the dancing leaves  
Under the blue sky  
Dancing with abandon  
With the music of the wind  
And I thought of freedom  
And what it meant to be free!  
Locked in the cubes  
Surrounded by the uninspiring and arcane  
Burdened with files  
I had stopped living  
And then I could bear no more  
I put aside all  
And looked out of the window  
And I saw leaves dancing with joy  
And I thought of freedom  
And what it meant to be free!

— *Abhay Kumar, Russia*

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### **The Symbol of Abiotic Needs**

the cedar leaves danced in the ovum  
crossing barriers leading to open spaces  
vaulting corridors of sorts whistling loudly  
to the winds of Apache's voice  
in the dance of the silver flames strolling upwardly  
from the caverns of subdued ground  
pulsating with effort and soundless song  
heard but only in the quietude  
of pleasant loneliness  
so as the nature of all things  
plays along the clefs of good harmony  
I stare into the mists of fervid expectancy  
with a charging patience gone awry  
while the grinding wind brushes  
without relent  
against my truest face  
which is a shadow in all places  
starving flesh for the symbol of abiotic needs

—*Ernest Williamson III, New Jersey*

## **Briar's Patch**

I

While walking through the woods one day  
I heard a rustling sound,  
by peeking through the leafy splay  
a brand new world was found—  
quite startled, I beheld an elf  
who smirked then introduced himself.

“Be steady man, I mean no ill  
consider me a friend,  
my name is Briar from yon hill  
an onus to expend,  
so listen now as I regale  
a strange and tragic sylvan tale.”

Intrigued by this impromptu plea  
I swallowed down my shock  
meandered to the nearest tree  
and sat upon a rock  
“Okay” I said, intent on him,  
“and by the way, my name is Jim.”

He gave me an appraising glance  
then let a chuckle slip,  
assumed a most dramatic stance  
one hand upon his hip  
a scripted pause, then he began  
the saga of his troubled clan.

“For eons we have roamed this place  
at peace with all around  
avoiding those who sought our race  
by living underground  
the shield of nature's verdant arm  
has kept us safe from any harm.

But one day not too long ago  
a strangely shriveled sprite  
found the place where we lay low  
and told us of her plight  
a necromancer very grim  
pursued a sly malicious whim.”

Once more he paused and slowly cast  
a most discerning stare,

some kind of test I must have passed  
for he said, "Now prepare  
yourself to hear some gruesome facts  
which just may drive you from these tracts."

My interest piqued, I merely shrugged  
allowing him to speak  
apparently the dam unplugged  
and then in one long streak  
he blurted out the ugly truth  
his knuckle gnawed by nervous tooth.

"It seems this cur, by name of Zack  
has somehow found a way  
to siphon off what he should lack,  
his power grows each day  
but also warps his addled mind  
which rots inside a fragile rind.

He seeks all creatures who possess  
the mystic eldritch spark  
to feed on them with eagerness  
while welcoming the dark  
that shrouds his heart with blackest silk  
the foulest foe of fiendish ilk."

I cleared my throat respectfully  
to interrupt his spiel  
"So what's this got to do with me?  
Divulge the real deal."  
Once more he chortled, eyes aslant  
"My, my you are impertinent,

all right, here goes, I need your aid  
our nemesis is strong  
'tis fate that led you to this glade  
my instinct's never wrong  
so please come with me to our cave  
we'll sup, then plan to beat this knave."

I gauged his twinkling impish eyes  
uncertain of this quest  
but much to his unmasked surprise  
benignly acquiesced,  
"We'll make an effort not to flub  
now let's go get some elfin grub."

## II

And thus the human Jim  
along with valiant Briar elf  
would take a chance, though slim,  
to reach beyond the centered self  
to face a grueling test  
defending those innately meek;  
we bow at Fate's behest  
or scale the highest snowy peak.  
So Briar led this gangly  
man to chambers down below  
where whispered spurts of slang  
revealed how little humans know  
his clan distrusted those  
that weren't conceived in open fields  
they'd witnessed jealous throes  
with all the horror hatred wilds,  
but kindly showed the hand  
of truce proffering a repast  
"Eat all that you can stand,  
for this could surely be your last."  
The food was truly strange  
but still the best he'd ever had  
amazed at such a range  
of tastes Jim gorged himself like mad  
from ant-encrusted cakes  
composed of sticky honeyed grain  
to frothy fruity shakes  
which made him numb with frozen brain;  
he sampled all the treats  
he could, his gusto quite intense  
apparently the threat  
of death enlivened every sense  
but once he felt his hunger  
fade his fear began to grow  
he knew the evil monger  
would be ready for a show.  
"So Briar, tell me what  
the heck are we supposed to do?  
This Zack sounds like a butt  
head who will strike if we pursue;  
perhaps a trap would be  
the best, but who would be the bait?"  
and gasping Jim could see  
that this was sadly Briar's fate.

### III

A tempest came unleashing shrieks of doom  
with sheets of rain that draped the brave in cold  
together we advanced into the gloom  
convinced our sense of right would make us bold  
but fearsome shades of doubt began to loom  
behind the landscape evil sought to mold  
as fractured flora warped beyond belief  
shook twisted limbs in pantomimes of grief.

We found a safe retreat not far from where  
the darkest forces seemed to emanate  
while Briar took a moment to prepare  
my anxious mind began to calculate  
the odds of beating Zack within his lair  
and knew we'd make a bookie salivate  
an underdog whose future looked quite grim  
the perfect lure to snag a bettor's whim.

"Ahem" I heard behind me so I turned  
to see the elf adorned with fancy mail  
he stared at me with eyes that fiercely burned  
then said "I shall endeavor not to fail  
but just remember" (as my stomach churned)  
"to intercede the second that I hail  
and strike with all the fury you can aim—  
don't hesitate to end this madman's game."

I sensed that he knew more than he would say  
but simply said "OK, I'll do my best"  
he grunted saying "Follow me this way  
it's time to face the viper in his nest!"  
Then grimly marched to join the coming fray  
a soldier's heartbeat drumming in his chest  
reluctantly I trailed my little chum  
unease increasing over things to come.

Remaining out of sight but very near  
to Briar, I controlled an urge to run  
I strove to keep my jaded conscience clear  
intent on seeing this injustice done  
but still felt gnawed by feral fangs of fear  
whose nasty nips I couldn't seem to shun  
when suddenly a ruckus up ahead  
engulfed my mind in drooling jaws of dread.

From where I hid (behind a tree) I saw  
a strange and truly scary thing unfold:  
this foul behemoth with a gaping maw  
made hungry gurgling sounds that turned me cold  
and hanging there within its mottled claw  
was Briar trying hard to break the hold  
one hand enveloped a peculiar blade  
which pulsed with yellow light when thrusts were made.

But Zack was ready, parrying with ease  
then knocking Briar's dagger to the ground,  
his tactics were devoid of subtleties  
he knew that there was no one else around  
to challenge his unsavory decrees  
his power had indeed made him unsound  
in mind as well as form; a sad disgrace  
that meant to dominate the human race.

I cowered there embracing prickly pine  
uncertain how to prudently proceed  
aware that soon the duty would be mine  
to somehow make this fearsome creature bleed  
and then I saw the weapon sleekly shine  
with steely strength I knew that I would need  
amazingly enough it seemed to call  
"Come forward man it's time to stand or fall."

I shook my head but stood as though controlled  
exhaled a prayer for guidance from on high  
I darted for the dagger, dropped then rolled  
and neatly snagged its hilt while on the fly  
then Briar screamed with agony untold  
and in my head that voice said "You must try  
to stab the brute in his tormented heart  
my magic will make his evil depart."

As Briar writhed within its foul embrace  
I looked to see a sight I'll not forget;  
all impish charm was gone without a trace  
his tortured features glistening with sweat,  
he groaned, then looked me squarely in the face  
and said with labored breath "I'm not dead yet  
so grow a set and strike you human shmuk!"  
Without a thought I grit my teeth... and struck.

#### IV

A perfect sun began another less than stellar day but momentarily managed to eliminate the gray, amidst a cloud of thistledown a silent figure stood remembering his moment as the champion for good when harried elves triumphantly extolled his fearsome strength then eulogized their ancient texts which prophesied at length about a human warrior who'd deal the fatal blow to save their humble habitat and everything they know. Engrossed in thought the troubled man was blind to all around except for that one darkened spot reserved as hollowed ground when suddenly a voice said, "Don't succumb to your regret, we knew the outcome ere the time that you and Briar met." "But why did you neglect to tell me? Somehow we could have planned..." "You know that knowledge would have stayed your less than steady hand, besides your mind was on the edge, we feared that you may snap thus ruining our one small chance to spring the fatal trap." This prompted Jim to spin around, his features skewed by pain "Tell that to your friend!" he screamed while pointing at the stain. For moments, only silence met his unrelenting glare then Bramble (Briar's cousin) spoke, selecting words with care "We never wished to cause you any unresolved distress you must remember — Briar chose the path of selflessness, he knew that in the greater scheme his life meant next to naught and this is why he sought you out, then bravely stood and fought." Once more the only sound was when the gentle wind blew by as long restrained frustration leaked from Jim's determined eye which never left poor Bramble's face until he said at last "We humbly ask forgiveness for transgressions of the past." These simple words expressed undid the stifling chains of rage which held Jim's heart a prisoner within a shrinking cage; he stared at Bramble sheepishly, observing his attire and noticed something weird so he said, "May I please inquire why you have that crimson spot upon your tunic sleeve?" Without a pause Bramble said, "Of course, it's how we grieve, commemorating the glory of our comrade's final fight by wearing badges colored like the blood he shed that night, and now if you'll excuse me Jim, I must get back to our cave, stay well, we'll always be here for you and lastly — behave!" Jim watched his little figure disappear into the brush then waited till the forest slowly settled to a hush, he stayed there for a long time thinking hard on what was said then sauntered home to find a piece of fabric that was red.

## For Abby

I don't know what enabled fates had you enter through my doorway  
You were wanted and wished for  
Dragged into existence  
Kicking and screaming, colicky, jaundiced, days and nights mixed up  
Setting you on the window ledge  
Watching you sleep, just to check  
Only nursing, fearing that whole summer because I could not  
Your young lungs true tested all of those long days  
Then  
Clear big pale green eyes, always watching  
Your fear or hatred of water  
Bath time battles, like trying to wash a cat  
Screams rushing through open windows  
Hoping that the neighbors wouldn't call authorities  
Then  
Sandy hair soaking in the sunshine, glowing  
Stroller walking for hours  
Parenting by diversion, hoping beyond hope that I'd open your mind  
Reading you just one more story  
Somewhere-time musical notes entwined with out shared DNA  
Bonded us together, a life long love  
Holding your hand the first day of kindergarten  
No hesitation as you let go to walk in through that door  
That screaming past seemed so long ago  
Then  
Skipping around the country, you were willing to travel on  
Even as your mother and brother weren't  
Social, open to new friends, who were always your best ones  
Long haired little girls, smiling as though the sun lived in your teeth  
Dancing, swimming, gymnastics, the beginning of a full-contact life  
Good-byes and hello's  
Then  
You shot the basketball into the hoop  
You made all of the stars in school  
Your open acceptance of me when your friends asked you why  
I was not like the other daddies  
You scored all of the firsts from grade school  
And this was just the first of firsts  
Repeated in high school, repeated in college  
Then  
It all seems fast-forwarded, your beaming open acceptance  
Continue on large pale-eyed traveler  
Seeking, searching, questing, learning,  
We're all a better people because of your existence

—Harry Furness, Delaware

## Somewhere in New Hampshire

The blue heron standing stone  
still on the top

of a gray ringed rock, a gang  
of tiny green frogs

murmuring like women  
in bath houses,

a lone butterfly sweeping  
through tall stalks of grass,

they do not hear my heart  
nor see my shadow.

None of this  
is for me,

and turning  
to go, I see

a very old man  
standing at the end

of the sloping  
gray pier, wishing

he were young again—  
sand down

the rougher boards, saw  
and set new logs

for pilings, repair  
the unhinged

ladder and once  
again stand back

to admire his love  
of bringing order

to the wild.

## **A Footnote to Our Youth**

We were impulsive then  
with no want of being locked indoors  
while coached in some boring subject  
bound by books

we skipped school  
on the first warm day of spring  
Pam and David, steadies  
and he that best friend we all had  
Cindy and I, flirts and lovers  
a couple clowns lusting after life  
four teens out to explore ourselves  
to explore our world  
to reclaim a long stretch  
of empty beach

still a coolness to the breeze  
left a fine moist blue haze  
that clung to our skin  
as we left our clothes in piles  
laughing, to run naked in the sand  
our senses alive with the sensation  
passed from skin and eye to mind  
facing sun and sky and pounding surf  
alive with the tactile feel of nature  
sharing these passing moments  
strung together like pearls  
worn with youthful abandon

hand in hand we ran the beach  
childlike laughter rolling  
above the noise of the breakers

we slowed to walk warm sands  
our voices fell quiet  
finally bringing us pause  
as Cindy tugged at our hands  
and turned to face the small circle  
a tear tracing a path upon her cheek

uncharacteristically profound  
for the silly blonde we loved  
doe eyed, she said,  
'We'll never see these days again'

we four stood in an embrace  
pressed flesh to flesh  
comforting our sweet Cindy  
comforting ourselves

days short of graduation  
knowing the truth in those words  
we reluctantly were pushed  
into unwanted tomorrows  
leaving the simple circle of friends  
as a footnote to our youth

not too many years later  
I received word  
Cindy lost a battle with cancer  
gone too young  
it reminded me of her words  
and all I could think of  
was that long afternoon on the beach  
and how important  
it was to count our youth filled days

— *Rusty Arquette, Florida*



### **Blink**

While walking near the shore one eve  
of an isle fabled lost,  
A fledgling sprite appeared to me,  
on wings still wet with frost.

Stricken by the fascination,  
I wondered if some witch  
had placed the little apparition  
in my way to twitch.

I stared on for a moment long  
as rites of passage came.  
A little voice inside me said  
To tell the thing my name.

Not within a moment more  
Than I could find the word  
The little creature leapt away  
before my voice was heard.

— *James Spoonmore, USA*

**Janis Lives  
in Golden Gate Park**

I took a melancholy ride again  
back through the missing people  
and lost places in my memory  
those real and those imagined  
    I moved among fuzzy ghosts  
    kept frozen through the years  
    wondering just who I'd find  
    the cruel or well intentioned

This time it was mama Pearl  
no mistaking the hat and shades,  
and feather boa; still looked fine  
dressed for minimal fan attention  
    She was there in the aisle at City Lights  
    searching the biographies on the shelf  
    as I grinned, sneaking up from behind,  
    looking like the quintessential pervert

I reached quickly with a free hand  
and squeezed her unsuspecting ass  
she laughed that laugh so fine  
the sound ran chills up my spine  
    She spun around and hugged me  
    smiling, "Daddy, you still got it"  
    a line I'd heard a thousand times  
    now all but faded and forgotten

She found a bio there on Bessie  
and of course mama had no cash,  
she didn't need it then, why start now  
so I got that baby-can-ya-help-me look  
    I paid the clerk and Pearl took my arm  
    she hummed a broken hearted blues  
    and we set off together toward the bay  
    as the day began to slowly disappear  
Music came from apartments and cars  
as we walked the rolling city streets  
noting, none with a melody or soul  
she groaned, "The life's gone, man"  
    I couldn't argue the lady's point  
    we'd held the funeral years before  
    but I said the blues were still alive  
    moving quietly through small towns

She snuggled close to avoid the chill  
I told her of the Shepherds and Laings  
that had listened and shaped it all anew  
and the passing of the old blues masters  
    Lightnin', Wolf and Waters, all the best  
    Told her of players come and gone as well  
    Bloomfield, Hendrix, Vaughn, Big Mama  
    now all a part of "D'em Old Kozmic Blues"

We didn't stop walking till after dark  
talked out, legs aching, we counted stars  
watched the city flick on its mantle of lights  
held hands beneath a San Franciscan night  
    The sound of distant church bells  
    chimed the approach of a new day  
    One that I would soon awake to  
    One that Pearl could never see

She pulled a bottle of Southern Comfort  
from nowhere and took a long slow drink  
then kissed my mouth both hard and hungry  
I tasted comfort in the kiss and on her tongue  
    I whispered that I've always wondered  
    what if I'd been there when she'd fallen  
    to hold her and love her and keep her safe  
    another drink, another kiss, and that grin

It's a gnawing craziness, I know, I carried it since '68  
but I just had to let ya' know I've loved you, Pearl...  
"Darlin' I know you love me; hell, it's why I'm here  
but my time has gone and this isn't me anymore"  
    She stroked my face, laughed that heady laugh,  
    and Comfort in hand, turned and sauntered away  
    her voice was there, as she became vapor in the dark  
    "Tell'em Janis is alive and lives in Golden Gate Park"

— *Rusty Arquette, Florida*

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**Red-Tailed Hawk**

fledglings,  
young, dependent,  
learning, swooping, feeding  
parents teach me to catch my food—  
watching, diving, killing  
kinetic, swift  
adults

— *Michelle Angelini, California*

## That You Could Be With Me In Winter

Oh that you could be with me,  
see with me  
in winter!

We'd whisper-walk the piney woods  
to find the sheltered pond.

There, lichen-covered granite juts  
into the ice-paned hollow  
as the frosted, swirl'd opaque design  
veils worlds of deep beyond.

Oh that you could sing with me,  
wing with me  
in winter!

We'd rise the northern winds and soar  
above the snow-soft earth;  
paint brittle blue with feathers dipped  
in clouds from the horizon  
and tumble softly back to gentle promise  
of re-birth.

Oh that you would turn with me,  
burn with me,  
in winter!

— *Mara Meade, USA*

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### Temporality

I painted you today  
Alfresco lush with  
Emerald eyes and flaxen hair  
Your sophic smile a  
Mockery of time

I painted you  
a Seraphim  
Prancing on the courtyard mist  
Your vaguery  
A stroke of Byzantine

Appliqué corporeal  
Amethyst topaz and pearl  
Diamond skies  
The crowning shade I  
Painted you today

— *Jadi Falqua, California*

## Trapped

Which way to go to find the end  
Where strands of gold lie waiting  
So many tangled threads to tend  
The spider squirms, imprisoned within  
The fortress of its own fabrication.

– *Shirley Whiting Allard, New Hampshire*



## poesia d'amore

Tonight  
my chalice is empty.  
Withered  
the ruby petals  
silent fall from this rose

Yet, your fingers  
need not trace kisses  
nor pencil reddenings  
to lips aflame with desire  
when moist my tongue  
still savours liquid fire  
in ambrosias of longago

Your hands  
need not spread oils  
perfumes nor feather  
silken caresses to skin  
when the fragrance  
of forevers linger  
pervade the now

Tonight love  
I have come robed  
in Time's dress  
to be light in your eyes  
adorned in memories  
to love you.

– *Maria Massarella, Italy*

## My First Car

Do you remember your first car? Of course you do— no one could ever forget their first car—I just needed a lead-in to this story.

I was fourteen years old when I bought my first car. The year was 1969. Just like most teenage boys I thought my sixteenth birthday would never come so I went to my mother and asked, “Momma, when do you think I’ll be able to get a car?”

“Billy,” my mother replied, “you’ll get a car when you earn enough money to buy a car and not a minute before.”

That was all the motivation I needed. One block from our home in front of a house that now belongs to my younger brother, Donny, was parked a 1962 Fiat 600 Suicide Coupe with a “For Sale \$25.00” sign on the windshield. The man who owned it said it wouldn’t run because he had mistakenly adjusted the rocker arms too tightly. He said he could easily fix it if I wanted to wait a few days until his next day-off or I could buy it “as-is” and adjust them myself. I didn’t know what rocker arms were but he made it sound pretty easy so I gave him fifteen bucks and talked my brother, Bobby, into coughing up the other ten as a loan. The money had come from a summer of mowing lawns and selling greeting cards along with my daily routes delivering papers for the Greensboro Daily News and Greensboro Record which have since been combined to form the Greensboro News And Record

Minutes later, Bobby rode and I drove the car home. Well, the fact of the matter is, we coasted the car down the hill until it stopped right in front of our house. Minutes later— after hearing half the boys in the neighborhood laughing and shouting— my mother looked out to see them pushing my newly acquired Fiat up the driveway and across the back yard with me seated proudly at the wheel.

She really didn’t know what to say.

My dad was certain I’d been hoodwinked and while Momma thought I should go ask the man for my money back, Daddy said, “No, he bought a piece of junk and he’ll just have to learn to live with himself.”

I asked several men who were said to be knowledgeable about cars if they would help me fix the car and a couple of them even paused to glance under the hood (It was in the back) but even after having me turn over the engine and listen to it backfire, they all pronounced my green Fiat 600 with the suicide doors to be DOA. Finally, I got Robbie Flores’ dad— who happened to be a fork-lift mechanic— to point out the valve cover under which the rocker arms could be found. He told me to loosen each one until a match book could be pulled in-between the rocker arm and the push rod beneath it and if it wouldn’t start after that then it was something far-worse than overly tightened rockers.

Using an adjustable wrench— no one I knew owned any metric tools— and a flat screw-driver, I adjusted all eight rockers and decided to give it a spin. Seconds later the homemade exhaust headers built of threaded pipe and a tin can roared to life bringing everyone out of their houses to see. In front of several other men from around the neighborhood, Daddy proudly proclaimed his young son to be a genius saying, “I knew Billy could fix anything if he just gave it some thought.” I was just happy to show everyone that I hadn’t been taken for a ride as most of the neighborhood including my family had been

quick to point out.

Of course, while the seller had told the truth about the engine, he had failed to inform me that my beloved Fiat 600 had no brakes. Minutes later, on my inaugural lap around Mother's backyard and just as I shifted into third gear, I would discover that very fact just seconds before skidding through a flower bed and crashing into one of her beloved pine trees. Ouch!

New rule: no driving faster than second gear in the back yard.

The various men from all over the neighborhood all looked at the green Fiat with the crumpled front bumper, bashed out headlight, and crushed fender that prevented the right front wheel from rolling and again pronounced it DOA. "I guess we'll have to call the junk man," my daddy said, "car's not worth fixing."

I was crushed worse than the car.

Days passed before I finally figured out that with the aid of my three younger brothers, Bobby, Donny, and Ronny, and an assortment of hammers, pry bars, and 2x4s, that I would be able to pound and pry the crumpled parts far enough away from the wheel and tire to drive my Fiat around the back yard. I decided it would be best if I topped-off the master cylinder and bled the brakes before making a second lap around the yard. Two years and thousands of laps later (and an occasional trip around the block when my parents were out of the house) I turned sixteen, bought a 1956 Ford F-100 Pick-up with a supercharged 312 Mercury V/8 engine, and sold my Fiat to Hank Thompson (who had just turned fourteen) for \$25.00—the same price I paid for it – so that Hank could go wreck it in his mother's backyard that very same day.

Hank sold the now twice wrecked 600 for 25 bucks to some guy who said he was going to build a dune buggy out of it. I wonder if he ever did.

The Fiat 600 D was what was known as a Micro car. Smaller than a Volkswagen Beetle, it seated 4 little people and went almost forever on a gallon of gas. It's the kind of car I wish I could buy today— light, simple, easy to work on, and cheap on gasoline. The Micro car most notable in the United States was the Austin-Healey powered, Nash Metropolitan. but in Europe millions of people drove Micro cars as evidenced by the hundreds of Micro cars in the Bruce Weiner Micro Car Museum.

– *Billy Jones, North Carolina*

### **Define Victory...**

Is it the death of an opponent,  
the mounting of the summit  
escaping from the crushing weight  
of the boulders falling from it?

Is it leading men to battle  
to lead them back again  
or living to remember  
every loss you had back then?

– *Billy Jones, North Carolina*

## The Great Outdoors

Warming breezes remind me it's time to replace the old rotten line on my favorite fishing reel and knock the dust off the pop-up camper. My memories of childhood camping trips are as plentiful as the handfuls of permanently-kinked line I strip from the reel.

Camping served as the primary form of vacation during my formative years. Back then of course there were no modern facilities, i.e. campers, restrooms and showers. My father insisted on "rouging it". Our family of four would arrive at the campsite a couple of hours before sunset on a Friday evening and promptly tend to the first order of business; set-up of the tent. I'm not sure if "eight-man" referred to the number of people it would sleep or the number of men required for proper set up. If the latter was true that would explain the trouble we had. To this very day I've never heard my father curse, but the erection of said tent left him teetering on the brink. It never occurred to me that his fervent mumbling combined with the slamming of aluminum tent poles was anything other than standard procedure when it came to setting up a tent.

"Roughing it" included the restroom facilities. I still recall the horror in my sister's eyes as my father explained that a dilapidated old outhouse would serve our 'needs'. As a young boy, there was little need for facilities; any old tree would do. The old outhouse and I had only one brief but memorable encounter. One morning just before sunrise nature came calling. I stumbled towards the leaning structure armed with a small flashlight. While unlatching the hook that secured the door my flashlight beam reached the back of the structure. From within the tiny structure came a disturbing noise, like nothing I had encountered in all of my ten years. In my altered, groggy state the only thing that is ingrained firmly in my mind is a menacing set of glowing eyes. Obviously I'd interrupted a raccoon and unfortunately, before he had time to finish his business. Perhaps I missed the occupied sign and should have knocked. Needless to say by the time I made it back to the tent in high-gear I had forgotten my business. My mother quickly reminded me as I hand-washed my soiled superman underwear and hung them on the clothesline to dry. For me that was the first and last trip to the outhouse, at least under the cover of darkness.

Even as a young boy I felt the need to lay low, if for no other reason to lick my wounds and caress my bruised ego. Gathering my tackle box and fishing rod I set out down the dusty path hoping that the fishing gods would treat me with more respect than the masked bandit had. About every ten feet or so my head would whirl around quickly to inspect my back-trail, there was no doubt in my young mind that there were 'people' who would give anything to know the exact location of my 'honey hole'. Even at that tender young age, things that a forty-year old man still can't fully explain, stirred within me. There is a certain undeniable connection with nature that floods my soul when I find myself at a prized fishin' hole or in the woods hunting.

My mind swirled as I took a seat on the bare ground which overlooked the familiar drainage pipe. The water hurriedly emptied into a serene pool. A shiny new hook begged for fresh night-crawler and quickly I obliged, casting my line out as far as I could reach.

The swarming mosquitoes buzzing around my head did little to deter me once I had my first fish on the line.

Several hours passed as I continued to wage epic battles one at a time. Finally my good judgment told me my mother would be worried regarding my whereabouts. With my stringer full of a dozen good sized fish, I headed back to camp. My pace was hurried as I struggled to keep the fish from touching the dirt. My father was the first to see the wide grin that accompanied the stringer of fish, and rightly so, since I didn't know if my sister or mother could appreciate such a manly accomplishment. With great certainty I anticipated my hearty congratulations. I cried out, "Look Dad, look at all of the fish I caught for our supper!"

To my dismay he shook his head from side to side. I still don't recall the exact explanation, but apparently I possessed a stringer full of disappointment. The fish had too many bones and couldn't be eaten. I was crushed. First the raccoon had gotten the best of me and now this. How much disappointment could a young lad handle in one day?

Only one event occurred during that camping trip that overshadowed my miserable failure of 'man-tests'. After lunch we all went to a small pond back in the woods, one that had been given birth to during the flooding of the river. It was very small, probably no more than thirty feet across and a thick green, smelly moss covered the first three or four feet of water all the way around the perimeter. As I recall, my mother looked forward to fishing with about as much enthusiasm as a root canal, but she had come along anyhow. She looked quite silly and I doubted she would catch anything employing her unusual technique. She cast her line out, apparently with no perquisites other than the bait lying somewhere near the water. The current book she held in her hand seemed to take priority. She would set the pole in a holder and hurry back to the saga.

Her line had been out quite some time and she sat quietly in a lawn chair on the bank. My keen eye noticed the slight bounce in her rod tip. With an over-eager voice I alerted her to the fact she had a fish nibbling on her bait. To this day I'm not sure if my yelling startled her, but she tossed the book aside and immediately reached for the pole. The bank was fairly steep and as she shifted her weight forward to reach the pole the lawn-chair developed a mind of its own and began sliding towards that awful, green moss. Before she could regain control of the chair she found herself waist deep in the muck with the chair folded up on her behind making it difficult to climb ashore. My father, sister, and I couldn't help but laugh and it was several moments before we regained our composure enough to hoist her from the murky water. Some thirty years later my mother still frowns when that story is told.

Looking back makes me wonder how much that old Sears-Roebuck tent cost. In my mind it surely was worth every penny. Although the green and yellow canvas faded over the years it provided shelter for our family, keeping the swarms of mosquitoes at bay and the wildlife in check. Many memories were formed during those camping trips, but I feel the most important aspect that remains with me today is the sense of family. Those long weekends were merely a snapshot in time, but this particular trip and many others helped to shape and mold me into the person I am today.

Money was hard to come by back then and while many of my classmates looked forward to their yearly Florida summer vacations, never did I feel slighted. There would always be a cleared spot near the water for that worn and cantankerous Coleman tent, and if the fishing gods held up their end of the deal, no one will have discovered my secret fishin' hole. – The End.

## One-Tenth Of A Dollar

It was the best of dimes... it was the worst of dimes. Wilfred Baldano stared at the coin, a smile creeping from his reserve. With help of the governor's tax on food, the meager breakfast sandwich consumed all his money, save one silver-colored coin he held in his palm. Practically weightless and nearly valueless, it was nevertheless meaningful as it represented excess, at least to Wilfred. It was the difference between rich and poor.

Waxing philosophic was part and parcel of Wilfred's activities these days. Whenever possible, he sneaked into the public library in quest of Bartlett's Familiar Quotations or some other useful tome. Early on, Wilfred discovered the value of research during his matriculation at Brown. Co-eds from Coe College or Vassar were more likely to spend time with a man of letters. A glib retort or well-timed rejoinder could make all the difference. Wilfred learned his lessons well.

Exposure to the world of business marked the completion of Wilfred's formal education. His career as a fund-raiser started innocently enough, altruism his hallmark as he climbed the corporate ladder; first to the office with a window, then into the executive suites... where was the harm in living well while helping those unable or unwilling to help themselves? Sure, he allowed himself a few trinkets along the way, an accepted practice common to executives accomplished in the mores of the Financial District.

Unfortunately, Wilfred also realized that rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, also cemented the hypocrisy of society. Stealing for a noble cause, was, for all its crimson-robed glory, nonetheless felonious; the primary difference being the accommodations allowed the perpetrator. One thief inhabits an eight-room loft just off Wall Street, whereas another occupies a one-room cell just off "B" Block inside the walls of Attica. Wilfred's chosen domicile currently included a cardboard box located in a subway tunnel somewhere beneath 5th Avenue and the irony did not escape him. He lived in the penthouse of all outhouses... even this characterized the bounty of his excess.

At some point, Wilfred Baldano could no longer bring himself to ride the A-train, take a cab or even walk to his office; the building itself became repugnant to him. Wilfred saw himself as a symbol, an artifact dedicated to duplicity.

His values leaked into the very structure as he replaced them with the alchemy of larceny upon the rich. And he became good at it... too good. No Robin Hood he, Wilfred learned to morph his work into his life until it all but consumed him. In fact, towards the end, he justified his actions by casting himself in the role of benevolent therapist/priest, divesting those privileged few of a considerable portion of their ill-garnered booty, thereby assuaging their conscience and providing absolution for their avaricious sins. His entire life was reduced to a shell-game; Mr. Getty, you pitch a few farthings into my basket, and despite the fact that you know little (if any) of the money will ever grace the coffers of any charity, so what? I tell you what a saint you truly are, and you believe it.

It's all tax-deductible, so who's the poorer for it? These days, Wilfred recalled that he'd never once stepped foot inside a seminary and his one semester in behavioral science hardly qualified him as a clinical psychologist.

One cold day in October, Wilfred Baldano simply walked away from all the trappings, leaving the keys in the ignition of his Mercedes. Cold turkey. Even then, he became successful. So well honed were his skills, before winter gave way to spring, Wilfred claimed the crown as prince of the pavement. Any panhandler could look pitiful... this took no particular skill or art. The delivery made all the difference. It separated Nolan Ryan from Juan Calderon, Robin Williams from Bobcat Goldthwait, The Beatles from Strawberry Alarm Clock. The really successful artisans involved themselves in their art, becoming a compelling force for the retrieval of errant funds.

Success at any level comes at a price, however. So pleasing was his repertoire, Wilfred Baldano, the current street-Midas of Manhattan, through no fault of his own, became the subject of every photographer and free-lance journalist with his eye on a Pulitzer. Even in obscurity, he could not escape a society bent on exploitation. His every step, every action required him to run from Twenty-Twenty or Sixty Minutes crews.

Burger Basket makes one fine breakfast sandwich, especially the croissant version with grease dripping off the sausage, egg and cheese- even if the flavor does improve with a liberal blanketing of salt and pepper. Today, Wilbert Baldano would once again entertain the photographer dogging him. The subway tunnel provided the perfect backdrop as Wilbert stood on the concrete escarpment above the tracks, placidly munching his 3000-calorie widow-maker. Hearing the on-rushing train, he held one finger in the air (cueing the pursuant shutterbug) and timing it perfectly, pirouetted gracefully onto the tracks, the middle finger of his left hand saluting the camera.

The New York City Coroner's office worker inventoried the remains. As the TV in the background told the story of the itinerant subway fatality, he checked the pockets of the filthy blue jeans and found one Denver-minted 1942 Mercury dime. Glancing around the office to see if anyone was watching, the clerk/numismatist deftly employed a little sleight-of-hand and the \$35,000 coin disappeared into his pocket. Somewhere, Wilfred Baldano chuckled— the baton had been passed.

— *Bob Church, Missouri*

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**It Is**

"It's not who I am, it's what I am," I say aloud  
(or, at least, I think I said it aloud)  
somewhat toward the rising smoke filling the air,  
at the face of the bartender who smiles each time she lifts the dollars off the bar,  
at the semi-observed face that leers from behind the piano,  
at the familiar twinkly faces of two beauties who stand beside the music men,  
at the two drunks I know whose posture even now  
threatens to collapse against the bar.  
I'd nearly forgotten the beauty of the yellow dress,  
the young girl carrying the notebook,  
and the mysterious package left under the chair,  
"and it's enough... at least for now... at least, for you."

— *Bob Church, Missouri*

## Have You Seen Me?

I disappeared in the summer of 1969. It was a sunny day in August, and Los Angeles International Airport became the perfect venue. The Continental Airlines flight from Danang offered hours to reflect on my experiences since I'd last departed U.S. shores almost nineteen months previous. I suppose I did reflect some, but mostly I just drank. Some Marines opted for flights to Sydney or Honolulu, choosing to spend a little time in paradise, a buffer zone between the horrors of combat and the rigors of trying to explain the unexplainable to family and friends. I'd heard the stories of vets who'd gone to Australia on R&R and never returned. I think I chose to go home because I knew that if I didn't go home now, I might find an excuse not to ever return. I wanted to see my family, but Lord knows I didn't look forward to the questions I knew would come. People don't seem to understand that each inquiry about the war is a wire brush digging scabs off wounds that are only now beginning to heal.

I'll never forget the anticipation I felt as I waited for the Captain to attain the proper altitude and assigned flight coordinates for the trip. I sat in the crew cabin of my first Boeing 707. I say 'mine' because I honestly felt I was a part of this glorious bird, not that I'd have had any idea how to start it up, much less fly it. I'm convinced that 123 other passengers also felt the same way. I was allowed to sit in the crew cabin because I was a transport pilot, holding the rank of captain. What's the old saying? Rank hath its privileges? Truthfully, the invitation came as a result of a camaraderie extended one pilot by another, not because of any particular rank or career status I held. I was twenty-seven days short of my twenty-second birthday and because of the kindness offered me by these guys, the war suddenly became a little less of a reality. Anything short of being shot down because the crew got drunk and flew us into Russian air space, in a few short hours I would be home.

Home... the very word carried a heavy burden. The concept, until the last few hours when I picked up my orders, seemed unattainable. If they'd have given me a set of orders to Mars I wouldn't have been any more dumbfounded. After awhile, it become cliché to even suggest it, as if by uttering the word, you would jinx your chances. Short-timers refused to speak of it, lest disaster should befall them. How many times had I heard the word in the last nineteen months? Certainly it had to be thousands. Every crewman, every squad leader, every artilleryman, every corpsman, every grunt carried the word as a holy grail. Home... that magical place that existed as nowhere else. For fifty-eight thousand Americans, it took on entirely different meaning as it existed only in the religious sense of being 'carried home' to meet with departed loved ones. Even so, I doubt there was a single man killed there who didn't have home on his mind as he took his last breath.

Listen, I don't mean to make my job sound like drudgery... far from it. Every mission I ever made promised a high unlike anything ever experienced on any drug. Moving the collective and feeling the pure power jerk us off the ground, listening to the radio crackle into my headphones, feeling the inverters turn electricity into power enough to launch a strange green capsule (complete with door gunner) skyward, and realizing I held the future of at least four other Marines in my hand, was a thrill unlike anything else I'd ever experienced. And that was just the start. Depending on whether we were flying into an unsecured landing zone or not, my adrenalin levels went off the charts, especially if the accompanying zing of enemy rounds trying to pierce my aircraft's shell added to the commotion in the cockpit.

But mostly, it was the satisfaction derived from returning safely, knowing that someone might have gotten to go home because we were able to get him to a field hospital, or that a few grunts would live to fight another day because we got them the extra ordinance they needed to do their jobs. No, it wasn't the danger that made me love it, it was the expectation that I could do it that made me love it.

But, there I was, strapped into a leather-detailed crew seat, a set of headphones over my ears, listening to the ICS as three veteran jet jockeys monitored instruments, scanned gauges and set course headings for a voyage I honestly didn't think I'd ever get to take. Something would go wrong, inevitably. Nervously I ticked off the seconds in my mind, counting 'wheels-up' time, the amount of 'roll' an aircraft requires to lift off the runway. Twenty-one seconds... I had no idea if that was the correct amount of time or not and it mattered little, but I filed it away for extraction at some future take-off when I was so nervous that if I didn't count seconds, I'd pass out from the sheer terror of anticipation. As many take-offs and landings as I'd completed, I never got used to it. Giving control to another pilot seemed foreign... and dangerous. Even as I felt the thrust of the four huge Boeing turbines force me back into my seat, I suspected that we'd lose two engines on takeoff and fall into the ocean in a spectacular orange fireball or blow a tire upon landing, causing us to skid off the end of the runway at LAX and drown in the shallow waters off Hermosa Beach, scant yards from home— fulfilling life's ultimate irony.

Once we attained our 30,000 feet of elevation over the South China Sea, the bar would be open, the smoking lamp would be lit and so would every passenger on that aircraft. It had been a long time since most of us had experienced American liquor... too long, in our estimation. Even a guy who received the occasional warm San Miguel beer while 'in country' could build up a thirst for decent booze. I didn't drink too much in Vietnam, not because I felt any sort of moral restriction against it, but because I simply couldn't afford to take the chance. Many of my missions were unscheduled, and I needed to be as alert as possible. It was easy enough to die under the best of combat conditions without adding insobriety to the equation. Too many Marines counted on us for rations, medical assistance and close air support. A drunk pilot was a stupid pilot and if I was going to die in that God-forsaken rice-pattied cesspool, it was damn sure not going to be because I didn't have command of my faculties. In fact, if I suspected one of my crew was under the influence of alcohol or drugs, I'd have grounded him in a heartbeat. They all knew how I felt and, as far as I know, always respected my wishes. Esprit de corps has long been talked about in reference to Marines. I like to think that it went deeper than a few recruiting poster slogans. I always considered it to be the simple respect and care offered a family member. To me, it was esprit de crew. Yes, we're Marines, and that's interesting... but we're also a team, and that's important.

By the time the stewardess (the young ladies were still light years away from flight attendant status) poured me off the airplane, I imagine I probably drank a case of Budweiser... cold Budweiser. The brew took on epic proportions as it slid down. Seldom stopping to swallow, I just opened up my throat and poured. No Viking ever drank better mead after battle. After two or three bottles, I felt warmth in the pit of my stomach and a feeling I can only describe as glorious.

In hindsight, perhaps the warmth I experienced was my body's mechanism for applying a salve to my mind, a mysterious balm that allowed me to lick my wounds away from prying eyes; altering my reality slightly and forcing the demons temporarily back into the Hades of my sober mind. They'd return, of course, but for now, Anheuser Busch and an army of brewers in St. Louis had kicked their ass and I found the peace of oblivion. – The End.

– Bob Church, Missouri

## Sunflower Fields

From tiny seeds for planting  
Little voices soon to scream  
With rugged green stalks touching  
Sunflower faces beam.

Sunflower fields are chattering  
in the middle of the day  
while the sun is shining  
and the flowers have their way.

Heads turned to face each other  
petals waving greetings yellow  
A warm sunflower convention  
Once a year to say hello.

— *Jo Janoski, Pennsylvania*

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### the gardener

awakening  
before the dawn

an octogenarian  
eagerly rises, prepared

by small prayer  
he departs from his cell—

some weeding, some pruning  
soon will follow—

chapel, light breakfast  
the order of day.

outside sacred walls,  
under straw hat shade

he toils, he tends  
to God's garden—

the greatest of care  
for detail, does he pay—

not a chore  
but a labor of love.

— *Michael Dunn, Maryland*

*You are not here merely to make a living.  
You are here to enable the world to live more amply,  
with greater vision, and with a finer spirit of hope and achievement.  
You are here to enrich the world.  
You impoverish yourself if you forget this errand.*

*- Woodrow Wilson*