

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOMENT



Volume Eleven  
Spring 2011

# Contents

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*Editors' Note*

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*Essays*

**What Little I Can Say . . . . 7-8**

*Ben Hill*

**Excerpt from *The Contract of Love* . . . . 9-12**

*Jose Chaves*

**Teaching by Imitation . . . . 13-19**

*Cynthia Kimball*

**Ship Fire: The Memory that Keeps on Giving . . . . 20-25**

*Michael Sámano*

**Recovering My Life . . . . 26-29**

*Anna Malliris*

**Ambulatory . . . . 30-33**

*Craig Wells*

**The Elephant Down the Road: De Palma's Italian Restaurant 1978 . . . . 34-43**

*Sandy Brown Jensen*

---

*Art*

**Still Frame . . . . 45**

*Matt Luke*

**Lake Dreaming I . . . . 46**

*Kathleen Capario*

**Lake Dreaming 3 . . . . 47**

*Kathleen Capario*

**Interference . . . . 48**

*Kristie Potwora*

**Hangman . . . . 49**

*Kristie Potwora*

**The Marais-Poitevin . . . . 50**

*Jerry Ross*

**Portrait of Kerstin . . . . 51**

*Jerry Ross*

**Provincetown 2010 . . . . 52**

*Russell H. Shitabata*

---

*Poetry*

**In Memory of Helen Murray . . . . 54-59**

*Dan Armstrong*

**A Boy, Caught . . . . 60**

*Dan Armstrong*

**Community College . . . . 61**

*Barbara Sullivan*

**To A Former Student I Thought Was Dead . . . . 62**

*Jean LeBlanc*

**That's It, I Give Up: A Prose Poem  
in Honor of No More Symbolism . . . . 63**

*Jean LeBlanc*

**Please Stay Seated Until the Ride has Come to a Stop . . . . 64-65**

*Lori Bumgardner*

**These old unhealed wounds . . . . 66**

*Dennis Gilbert*

**When the snow is too deep and too slick . . . . 67**

*Dennis Gilbert*

**A Triptych of Possums . . . . 68**

*Carol Watt*

**Dance Album. . . . 69-70**

*Carol Watt*

**Separation can't take my pain . . . . 71-72**

*Laura Wimberley, Linda Ackers and Don Macnaughtan*

---

*Life in the C.C.*

**Thoughts on Birthing a New Course . . . . 74-75**

*Patrick Walters*

**Not Your Gramma's Grammar Quiz: Going "Old School" Online . . . . 76-79**

*Anne B. McGrail*

**Transforming Brutalism:**

**Student Art Prints Improve the Learning Environment . . . . 80-83**

*Tamara Pinkas*

**Recovering My Father's Life . . . . 84-86**

*Russell H. Sbitabata*

**Driving Back . . . . 87**

*Bill Woolum*

---

*Works in Progress*

**Recovering the White Roots of Peace . . . . 89-97**

*Mark Harris*

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*Contributors*

## Editors' Note

Recovery. What does it mean, and how do we know when we've achieved it? As a nation we are recovering from an economic recession of historic proportions. Some experts speak of a jobless recovery, which seems to many an oxymoron and to others a consolidation of the gap between the haves and have-nots. As of the start of March, 2011, the Dow Jones hovers over 12,200 points and newspapers report with mild adulation that the unemployment rate now stands at 8.9%, the lowest it's been since April of 2009. On *The PBS News Hour*, David Brookes cites data predicting that unemployment rates will not return to pre-recession levels until 2018. Does that mean we won't have recovered until then? Will those out of work in the meantime ever truly recover from the impact of the opportunities foregone and the dreams deferred? When or how do people recover from such setbacks, challenges, or losses? Time, they say, heals all wounds, which may be both trite and true.

In a broader sense, recovery calls to mind many experiences endemic to being human: dealing with loss, coping with addiction, overcoming tragedy, surviving and moving on from a life threatening ordeal. Contributors to this volume of *The Community College Moment* deal with each of these and more. Ben Hill writes about the loss of his wife. Jose Chaves offers an excerpt from his memoir, giving insight into the process of dealing with addiction. Michael Sámano reflects on his experience recovering from a ship fire during his service in the U.S. Navy, and Anna Mallaris writes of her ongoing experience of cancer recovery. In a work in progress, Mark Harris argues for the importance of recovering past ways of peaceful co-existence. Something shared among many of these works is a sense of recovery as an open-ended, ever evolving experience.

New in this volume, the "Notes from Campus" section has evolved into "Life in the C.C." In addition to shorter pieces related to life at Lane Community College, we hope this space will host notes about life in and around community colleges in general. In this section's re-launch, we are pleased to present a contribution by Patrick Walters of Portland Community College.

*Russell H. Shitabata and Ben Hill  
Community College Moment editors*

## ESSAYS



**Sorrow makes us all children again — destroys all differences of intellect. The wisest know nothing.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

# What Little I Can Say

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Ben Hill



Returning from errands with our four-year-old, I entered through the laundry room to find my wife's shoes, with her feet in them, protruding from a rain barrel.

I don't remember what I said to Satchel when I closed him out of the room, and I don't know how the telephone got in my hand. I am told I spoke calmly to the 911 operator. That was after I unstrapped the barrel and dumped its foot of water, but before I tried to drag Deb free by her feet. This I remember: seizing pruning shears, gashing open the barrel, rolling Deborah forward to see her placid face.

Three years have passed. Satchel grows. I've remarried. We are expecting a baby. And I am co-editing a journal whose theme is *recovery*. This should resonate, but honestly, I don't feel recovered and I don't even have a clear sense of my recovery process. I know it began with the shoes. Recovery's seed germinates at the instant of devastation, but growth is uncertain, spasmodic. Here is what little I can say about recovery: whether in reference to the economy, addiction, disease, injury, divorce, you name it, *recovery has a well-defined start and an ill-defined conclusion*.

In the aftermath, I felt as if concussed by a bomb. I lost 20 pounds in ten days, and there was a ringing in my ears. I took comfort in caring for Satchel and attending to simple tasks, paying bills and buying groceries. Unbearably, whenever we returned to the house, the boy searched room-to-room for his mother.

Sometime in the late morning or early afternoon of January 6, 2008, a woman of rare talent and accomplishment brought a chair from the dining room and a flashlight from somewhere, plunged her shoulders through a narrow opening to reach a crying kitten, became trapped and drowned. This could not have happened if the barrel had been larger or smaller, if the water had been less deep or deeper, if Deb had gone next door for help, or if I'd been home, or I'd not hauled the barrel inside to repair it, or we had not adopted a kitten, or we had bought another house, or if anything — anything at all — had happened differently in the history of the universe leading up to that point. By night, I obsessed on the unfairness of rare mishap. By day, I saw its ubiquitous potential. The coffee machine seemed poised to electrocute. Food was poisonous. The water heater seeped deadly, odorless gas. Satchel's school bus, the fireplace, the river, the mall — everything reminded me that people we love are perpetually unsafe and things we depend on uncertain.

The world *looked* different. The New Mexico high desert where we lived — where now two of us lived — shone with pitiless beauty. When mourning doves built a nest in the hawthorn, and laid their eggs, and the eggs hatched, and the chicks peeped, and then one morning a yellow snake appeared, slow and fat beside the empty nest, I felt so sad I

thought my heart would stop. I wept for the doves and for Deborah. Three years on, a heightened sensitivity remains with me in ways both welcome and repugnant, though I have come to see that I am not so much singled out for misfortune as conjoined with all living things in the experience of loss and dislocation.

Deborah Posen, wife and mother, was an attorney, a community college professor, and an artist. This journal's front cover image is of a non-original work Deb produced for an art class assignment, a replica of the painting *Burden of Psyche*<sup>1</sup> by English artist Jacqueline Morreau. While at work on the replica, Deb spoke by telephone with Morreau and learned that the artist had sketched these figures after seeing her daughter seated on a bed, cradling the torso and head of an angst-ridden boyfriend, an image of feminine strength in service to masculine weakness — the burden of the nurturing gender. For Deborah, the painting may sometimes have evoked the burden of marriage to me, adrift as I am at times. But for me, since the horrible day, it has become a repository of feelings about loss and perseverance, sadness, longing, awareness of life's transience, and resolve to live well in this awareness. Dark, calm, frank, strong — the painting hangs in my living room.

After three years, I seem to have landed on my feet. The world moves ahead and I with it. I have fallen in love again. I have dared to father again. But on a parallel track and just below the surface, I continue to grapple with a loss that grapples back.

It is as if I divided. One of me made dinner, filed taxes, returned to teaching, and embraced new family. Another remained on the laundry room floor, waiting while the water dried and the moon waxed and waned and the house sold and the seasons changed, quietly waiting for anything to make sense. Part of me is quiet still.

#### **Note**

<sup>1</sup>View photos of the original and related works at <<http://cominfo.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/JM.html>>

## Excerpt from *The Contract of Love*

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*Jose Chaves*



The first thing I have to do is put on a pair of light-blue hospital pajamas and stand in front of a brick wall so they can take a Polaroid photo of me for their records. I ask the nurse if I can see it before they put it in my file, and I watch as the color bleeds into a pale figure who looks exactly like Ivan's vision of the devil. They put me in a sterile white room that reeks of Pine Sol and whiskey, with a balding Irishman by the name of McCracken. He reminds me of my uncle Jim, with his red hair and freckles, but he's still got his Irish accent. I tell him my mother is Irish too, a Murphy. He says I look like the black Irish, a race rumored to have started when a Spanish galleon was shipwrecked off the coast of Ireland. I sit down on my bed and close my eyes, hoping to fall asleep for the rest of my life. The only thing keeping me awake is McCracken crooning about a girl named Peggy O'Neil.

"Why are ya in here, Joe?" he says.

"When you've got an Irish mother and a Colombian father," I say, "I think it's an historical imperative."

He laughs.

The nurse brings us some Librium. I've never heard of it, but McCracken, who is a repeat offender here, tells me: "It keeps ya from seeing the devil when you're coming off the drink."

"I've already seen him," I say. "And he is us."

He laughs and lies back on his bed, breathing deeply. He tells me he works at Microsoft, and we laugh when I tell him my stepfather just got a job there too, so we're on the same insurance plan.

"Are you hungry, Joe Murphy?" he asks.

"A little," I say.

I've never been called by my grandfather's name before, and it makes me feel better to imagine the two of us together in the same program, until I think of the promises to him I broke in order to get here. McCracken is lying on his back, staring up at the ceiling tiles, and starts chanting for treats like he's expecting room service.

"Treeeats," he moans. "Come on, Joe Murphy. Join with me now. Treeeats."

I laugh and chime in "treeeats" to show this institution that it can strip me of my dignity, but not my sense of humor.

"Treeeats," we chant together, and there is something about two grown men in pajamas praying for things they know they'll never get, that makes the Irish in both of us laugh out loud.

When it becomes clear to Meg that I'm not coming off of heroin, crack or PCP, and that I've got only the unpredictable hands of a drunk, and a year-long binge hangover, I'm taken to my own room, where Meg says McCracken will join me after he's completely dried out.

“Oh by the way,” she adds. “You’ve got your first meeting in half an hour.”

I put on the same suit and tie I came in with and walk downstairs to the rec room, which feels like the basement of a church, with a pot of coffee and a circle of folding chairs. I count four businessmen, three nervous housewives, four bikers with ZZ Top beards, five metal heads, two preppies, and three good old-fashioned losers.

The first man to speak is in the latter category. “Hello,” he says. “I’m Neal, the narco-holic.”

“Hi Neal,” everyone says back.

“I got hauled in here last Saturday after some cops found me naked at a KOA camp, pointing a gun in my best friend’s face over a black hooker and a hit of crank.”

His voice is laced with rage as he speaks, and he stares us down like we’re the jury who convicted him. “Oh yeah,” he says, “good fucking times, huh?”

“Thanks, Neal,” we say.

The next woman to speak is Laura. She has a kind face with small creases around her lips from smoking. “I’ve been an alcoholic and an addict for thirteen years and I’ve taught fourth grade for seventeen.”

I imagine her passed out on the story-time rug with a Curious George book, but then she tells us she tried to kill herself last week with a bottle of Percodan so her husband and kids wouldn’t have to worry about her anymore.

I know somehow these stories are supposed to be healing, but I feel like I’m in another competition, this time to see who can tell the story full of the most shit-kicking misery. And so far, I’m losing: I get drunk; I black out. So what? What is my story compared to the crack house story? The broken glass and bleeding story? The slashed wrists in the bathtub story? The daughter finds the sleeping pills story? What can I say to the guy sitting next to me when he tells us, “You don’t know pain until you do so much crack that your body breaks down and you’re pissing, shitting and vomiting blood all at once.” The only time I’ve seen anything like this was the night of our keg chug, when Karl puked, then pissed and shat himself before he could get to the bathroom — but instead of going to rehab, he was given a ribbon for winning the fraternity’s coveted triple crown.

When it’s my turn to introduce myself, I say, “My name is Joe, this is my first meeting and I’m still trying to figure out why I’m even here.”

• • •

According to the program, alcoholics and addicts have lost control of their lives, so we’re given a highly structured routine to put us back on track.

8:00 EXERCISE: Listen to oldies while attempting squat thrusts and jumping jacks. Hack, cough and sweat alongside a rogue's gallery of pale and sickly figures, and ask yourself what happened to the kid who could run two miles in under ten minutes.

9:00 BREAKFAST: Eat skimpy portions of greasy ham and eggs as yo-u wonder what this place is doing with the ten grand from your parents' insurance policy. Ask why there is only decaf coffee allowed.

10:00 AA/NA MEETING: Listen to stories of real suffering. Remind yourself you're a pussy, and feel guilty about all the people who can't afford the price of recovery.

12:00 LUNCH: Eat ten-thousand dollar shit-on-a-shingle and discuss the politics of Northern Ireland with McCracken. Complain again about the coffee.

1:00 VOLLYBALL: Attempt to organize a game by separating the alcoholics from the addicts, and learn the term "cross-user." Spend the rest of volleyball time sitting in the sand, watching argument break out between cross-users, alcoholics, and junkies over who deserves what title.

2:00 FREE TIME: Try to read first chapter of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Get book confiscated by Meg. Search "library" for another book that isn't about the twelve steps. Find a tattered copy of Hesse's *Siddhartha* hidden behind a wrinkled copy of *Co-Dependent No More*. Rejoice.

3:00 INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKER: Listen as a businessman in a suit tells you how he used to be an alcoholic loser like everyone else in the room, and watch him redefine a winner as somebody who gets paid to talk to losers.

5:00 DINNER: Eat a Salisbury steak while McCracken talks about his high blood pressure, confesses to being lonely, and tells you the story of the time he pissed himself in the confessional. Laugh. Wonder why you're in rehab if you still have to keep company with drunks.

7:00 VISUALIZATIONS: Lie on blue mat and listen to a tape called, "Soothing Sounds of the Sea." Allow Meg to guide you on an inner journey to a faraway place where every crack pipe is a starfish, and every junkie's needle a silver strand of mermaid's hair.

9:00 QUIET TIME: Lie in bed, considering means of escape. Think about how real writers never go to rehab, and think of increasing drug use to become a real writer. Pull the dust jacket off of the twelve-step book, and hide *Siddhartha* in it.

10:00 LIGHTS OUT.

• • •

Dr. Milam himself, the man who started this franchise, makes an appearance each Thursday to give a lecture in the rec room. Everyone combs their hair and tucks their shirt-tails in, as if getting ready for church. He's a short man with a crew cut and glasses so thick

they make him look bug-eyed. “Alcoholism is not about making bad choices; it’s a disease. Most of today’s lecture is in my book, *Under the Influence*,” he says, and I swear he stares right at me when he adds, “and I hope for your sake that you have all read it by now.” He starts to draw the timeline of the disease on a blackboard: a line of chalk rises like the side of a mountain into a curly little cloud he calls “Good Times,” before the line turns sharply back down into a chalky mire he calls “Lake Shithood.”

As I listen to him describe the progression of this disease, I feel he’s tailored it to your garden variety drunk, rather than to those of us afflicted with a more literary form of alcoholism. I don’t really start listening until he tells us the story of an alcoholic writer by the name of Jack London. “Oh yes,” he says, “Jack was the toast of the literary world in the early stages of his disease, but by the end of his life, he was a drunken buffoon who was constantly thrown out of parties for behaving like an ass.” I laugh out loud because I can picture this so clearly.

“Many alcoholics,” he says, “are very creative people who fuel their creativity with alcohol.”

I can’t help but raise my hand. “I think Dr. Milam is right,” I say, looking at our group. “We should be proud that we’re alcoholics, because at least we’re creative, right?” I look around the room for another artist to rise up in defense of creative drinking, but even McCracken has buried his head in his hands. “I’m serious,” I say. “I’m proud to be a drunk.”

Dr. Milam waits for me to quit talking and then pretends I haven’t spoken. He goes on to finish his story about Jack London and the final stages of alcoholism, which are marked by cirrhosis of the liver, insanity and death.

McCracken pulls me aside afterward to ask, “What were you thinking, Joe?”

“I’m just trying to look on the positive side of this,” I say.

“Well, let me tell you, as someone who has been here before — the quickest way out of here is to keep your positive thoughts to yourself. The last time I was in here, I made the mistake of telling them it wasn’t alcoholism if you just stuck to Guinness.” He pauses a moment, still staring at me. “They kept me here an extra fucking month.”

I see the fear in his eyes, and realize he’s right. I can’t fight a system like this head on. I need to make this a more covert operation, and keep my philosophy of liberation to myself. Experience has taught me that the best way to beat the system is to learn the vocabulary, so I think of meetings as foreign language classes, and by the end of the first week, I know how to say my name and tell people I’m an alcoholic who is powerless over his addiction and ready to surrender to a higher power. The counselor smiles to let me know I’m getting it, and I remember how yesterday we all congratulated Clay, the guy with the Motorhead tat, when he told us that *his* higher power didn’t give a fuck anymore: “If you guys don’t put down your crack pipes,” he told us, “my higher power is just gonna have to start blowing you motherfuckers away, like the Terminator.” I’m hoping I can get out of here before Clay comes to a meeting with a shotgun.

# Teaching by Imitation

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Cynthia Kimball

*This essay was presented as part of a panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Louisville, Kentucky, March 2010.*



While studying in London my junior year, I was assigned to write a piece in imitation of *Mrs. Dalloway*. This assignment forced me to read Woolf so closely that I became convinced I was the first person ever to see how her prose imitates the movement of a gliding awareness from mind to mind. For the same class, I had to write a scene from a play in imitation of Harold Pinter. My language got bleaker and drier; I stared at walls. And in trying to imitate his darkness, I discovered Pinter's humor. These assignments taught me that a writer's style could come to inhabit my mind like a melody, converting my thoughts to Shakespearean pentameter, or, in this case, to long, curving sentences like those of Virginia Woolf.

Now, when I am preparing to write, I first read writers I admire: sometimes Annie Dillard, sometimes William James. In writing this paper, I chose a contemporary scholar of mythology, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, as the voice in my head, hoping to absorb some of her eloquence, humor, and ability to weave autobiography into academic writing. I also encourage my students to apprentice themselves to other writers; later in this article, I'll sketch some of the exercises I use in my classes.

Despite my own positive experiences with imitation as an approach to learning and teaching the language arts, I find it difficult among writing teachers to raise the topic of *imitatio*, which was — in ancient education — a primary component of building writing and speaking skills. When you hear the word “imitation,” it's not likely you think of it as a teaching strategy. Perhaps you prefer to encourage students to find their own voices rather than strive to imitate someone else's. Worse, perhaps your minds race to your most recent encounter with student plagiarism. Western written culture doesn't approve of imitation, in general. The word is often modified by terms like “slavish” or “mere.” Any recent arguments seeking to revive this classical teaching practice begin with markedly defensive postures.<sup>1</sup> J. David Fleming attributes this to the “triple onslaught of print, capitalism, and romanticism [that] has made us moderns deeply suspicious of imitation” (108).

Aesthetically and intellectually, imitation sounds like thinking inside the box. We want to trigger our students' creativity and self-expression, and asking them to imitate someone else's intellectual effort doesn't sound creative; in fact, it may seem dangerously close to condoning plagiarism. Functionally, imitation appears to be a form of repetition, and while we admit that repetition is useful in oral forms, we urge students to avoid it in their

writing, because, as Walter Ong observes, written culture has little patience with repetition when the reader can repeat passages “always available piecemeal on the inscribed page” (39) to her heart’s content.

But our attitudes toward imitation are contradictory. The messages we give our students — not to mention the messages they get from dominant culture — are actually a lot more mixed. For example, we ask students to imitate certain models — how to introduce a topic, how to do a “literature review,” how to structure comparisons or summaries. I often show students thesis paragraphs, transition sentences, quotation styles, and other parts of essays that I have written myself. We dissect my work on the overhead computer screen. I invite them to imitate these models as part of their apprenticeship to the craft of essay writing. And then there’s that form of imitation called “allusion,” such as those with which I began this paper, functioning as a sort of downloadable academic ring-tone by which I can invoke my literary lineage. In fact, whether we call it that or not, *imitatio* is already embedded in our teaching and learning practices.

I have been influenced by several arguments in favor of making the use of *imitatio* explicit in the writing classroom. First, a definition: Farmer and Arrington define imitation as “The approximations, whether conscious or unconscious of exemplary models, whether textual, behavior, or human, for the expressed goal of improved student writing” (13). (Please note the words “conscious or unconscious.”) These scholars compare the development of an individual’s sense of self with the development of a writing voice:

If the central self is established through a pattern of experimentation with social or dramatic selves — with roles — then sincerity in prose will have to follow a similar pattern and find a central style by playing at, and with, a great many styles....To play with styles is to play... with ways of thinking, and, thus, with ways of being.... [T]he student writer who has imitated or “tried on” many selves is sooner able to lay claim to one of her own than the student writer who is constantly implored to ‘be yourself’ or ‘be original.’ (22)

Penelope Schott Starkey agrees. In an article entitled, “*Imitatio* Redux,” Starkey asserts, “The conscious journey through the voices of others hastens the discovery of one’s own voice” (437). (Note again the word “conscious.”) And Daniel Bender argues that imitation offers the developing writer, through dialogue with another text, unique experiences of the interdependence of self and mind with other selves and minds. He writes, “Imitation ... offer[s] students a powerful, expressive freedom which comes ONLY from the interaction between self and textual others” (108).

I want to return to the word “conscious” and to the idea of “self” later in this discussion. I’m thinking about how concepts of imitation and self-expression, originality and

creativity, and even (dare I say it?) intellectual property seem to be shifting. So I'll continue here discussing imitation in a rather autobiographical, speculative, perhaps self-indulgent fashion. But first, the more useful part: I'll describe a few exercises I use in class, loosely based on the concept of *imitatio*.

In Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Ways of Reading*, the editors state, "One of the best ways to understand style, what it does and what it enables, is to enter it." Thus one exercise in their textbook gives these instructions: "Write a sentence of your own that has the same structure, cadence, and rhythm, even the same punctuation, as the first example from James Baldwin's 'Stranger in the Village.' When you are done, write a one-sentence description of what Baldwin is doing in those sentences" (*Ways* 773). In the instructor's manual, the editors explain that

[B]y asking our students to write sentences in parallel with interesting sentences from the readings ... [w]e found ... that we were able to change both the kinds and lengths of sentences our students were writing ... [and] to teach punctuation. ... Thinking about sentences gave our students a familiarity with a writer's characteristic syntax ... and a way of thinking about difficult sentences as linguistic structures that are doing a particular kind of 'work.' ... They were able to get different voices into their prose (and, importantly, different voices coming from their own subject positions). (*Resources* 148-9)

My own version of this exercise is not the type of *imitatio* Quintilian had in mind because I ask my students to imitate not the sublime but the ridiculous. I bring in an outlandish article from *National Enquirer*, and as a class, we discuss its style, including some of the hardest-working sentences we've ever seen. For example, "Brandy Smith, the blonde star of that new Verizon commercial, recently encountered flashing lights in the sky as she drove her red Corvette toward her home in the Malibu hills. 'I've never been so frightened in my life as when I thought that UFO was going to abduct me,' the gutsy actress, who owns four Saint Bernards, recalled." I ask students to write a National Enquirer-style news story based on the topic of their own essay. This gives us an opportunity to discuss sentence structure, use of direct quotations, credibility, and of course current events in the lives of the rich and famous.

In another assignment, when my Basic Comp students are developing argument essays, I ask them to try to inhabit an opposing viewpoint and to write a paragraph in that voice. Quintilian apparently encouraged his students to practice (and I quote, retaining all of his patriarchal, xenophobic undercurrents) the "portrayal of the emotions of children, women, nations and even of voiceless things" (qtd in Bender 113). I have found the as-

signment useful as part of a discussion of audience awareness, and it can be used in class as a round-robin exercise.

Another activity was introduced to me by my colleague at Portland Community College, Professor Jane Zunkel. This exercise draws on what we have all been doing all of our lives, establishing body memory through imitation of physical models. In a poetry class, whether literature or writing, students learn meter using their bodies to represent poetry's rhythms. Tall students are stressed syllables; short students are unstressed syllables. They line up across the room to represent a selected line of poetry, arranging themselves according to the meter and the type of foot required. Then the line of students speaks the line of the poem out loud, one syllable per person.

For a literature class, I ask students to work in pairs on an assignment I call "The Unheard Voice," in which they analyze and re-envision a short story, a fairy tale, or chapter from a novel. I ask them to imagine the perspective of one of the characters whose point of view is not represented. The students write at least one sentence describing each episode in the voice of that unheard character and then comment on how this new perspective affects the original story. This can be accomplished in one class session or extended to a longer project in which students have time to get even more creative, imitating the style of the original, or changing the genre, to a play, poem, or letter.<sup>2</sup>

In another assignment dealing with poetry, I conduct a form of mad-libs, in which students fill-in-the-blanks in answer to my instructions based on a poem such as Mary Oliver's "When Death Comes," or Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays." I do not have them read the original until after they have written their own mad-libbed version. By imitating the syntax or the way a poet builds an image, students learn to hear characteristic phrasing, and to attend to figures of speech and to the selection and construction of image-based, musical language.

Finally, I assign a double-entry journal in all of my classes. On the left-hand side of a page, students copy passages from the reading, careful to reproduce them exactly, while on the right-hand page they capture whatever thoughts arise as they read. Even if these reactions are tangential, the practice requires paying attention to one's own reading process. And the careful copying makes both hand and eye pay attention, so that students react to craft as well as content. Double-entry notes are easily turned into integrated quotes for an analytic essay.

Playfulness is a common element in these exercises. *Imitatio* is a serious endeavor, but it encourages and requires students to use their imaginations. Despite the connotations of the word, imitation can be very creative. Nonetheless I want to describe for a moment my own anxieties about imitation, creativity and plagiarism.

As I was learning how to customize my Google homepage, I found the word “creative” being used in an unfamiliar way, given my socialization as a late romantic. Other Internet sites, including MySpace and Facebook and even bank and stock-trading websites invite the user to be creative in choosing settings for their online accounts. You can select from a menu of themes, wallpapers, and pre-programmed elements and align these on the screen to suit yourself. You can send friends virtual gifts or holiday cards whose digital elements you have assembled from a menu. Does it seem odd to you, as it does to me, to be told that this is a creative act? Can I make a cyber-place reflect my uniqueness by selecting from among pre-fabricated images, however varied and proliferating? Does it seem odd to you, as it does to me, to think that I can express my unique sense of style by downloading a ringtone from a pop song or joining Blippy — a website that publishes every credit card purchase I make so that my friends on this site can share in my shopping habits? <sup>3</sup>

My discomfort with the loss of boundaries in this too-much-Information Age sets me apart from the digital natives I face in my classes every term. These students cut and paste, borrow and chat and forward, select and sample and text, and I wonder if I am wrong to encourage them to practice *imitatio*. One of my fears is that in some gray area along a certain continuum, imitative writing might shade into plagiarism. I know how easy it is for information and entire passages and even whole essays to migrate from online sources into open documents, from window to window in nanoseconds. Can we teach students to imitate without stealing?

In addition to the boundaries of private information and the boundaries of intellectual property, the boundaries of the cyber-self preoccupy me as well. My online creativity takes place within specific templates. So who is this creative self I am expressing? And what do my students think self-expression is? On the Internet, I can voluntarily dissolve my boundaries of privacy and ownership, but aren't these the very boundaries that help provide me with a sense of having a uniquely creative self to express? Have our experiences in cyberspace begun to change our ideas about what is private, creative, original work in (pardon the expression) meat-space?

What do younger students know about imitation? There is a lot of money to be made imitating a successful thing; hence the proliferation of Harry Potteresque books. Or a new pop star, for example, rises dizzyingly up the charts via American Idol and YouTube, succeeding fastest if she mimics the sounds, styles, and attitudes currently selling to the tweens AND YET if she is also marketable as brand-new. So the young student today knows that being brand-new is very lucrative, and very brief. Then either one reinvents oneself again or disappears into obscurity. So the point is not to BE oneself, but to INVENT oneself. The self one creates in this case is consciously artificial, born of a close eye on what sells and the audience.

If the boundaries of a familiar romantic self, creative and uniquely self-expressive, are lost or blurred in cyberspace, nevertheless, the self IS returned there as consumer, its boundaries redefined by its purchasing tastes. Hence a site like Blippy tries to make us feel that our shopping habits are a form of communication, even a self-expression to be enjoyed by our friends. But this is not a unique identity; instead, it turns out to be an identity shared by an entire demographic, a target market.

This concept of a self and its expression makes me sad, makes me want to deny or resist the changes. But it would be more productive for me to find ways that the new concepts suggested by Internet life can help me return a sense of play to my work, to remind my students and myself of what every child knows before he or she discovers video games — the joy of the embodied self.

If, as the sources I mentioned earlier suggest: “To play with styles is to play ... with ways of thinking, and, thus, with ways of being,” can I make this imitative activity conscious for students, to help them find the pleasures of thinking and being in writing?

Might we be conscious of the paper object — the book, the printed essay, the hard copy of *National Enquirer* — as the location of an embodied, tried-on self, with the potential for playful fluidity, too, and the added bonus of a physical sensory costuming that — so far — we don’t get from our electronics?

Could imitating the voice of a professional writer be like hearing yourself as a rock-star when you sing Karaoke or play “Guitar Hero”? Through imitation might you come to see and hear yourself as one capable of holding an audience’s attention or of getting into print? Perhaps then, having stood with the microphone in hand, or having watched words flow from your own fingers on the keyboard, might your own creative spirit find increased strength and confidence in self?

I am hoping that if I help my students to make conscious choices about imitation, perhaps they will at the same time be more aware of avoiding the choice that is plagiarism. At the very least, the practice of deliberate imitation can provide openings for us to discuss our aging yet still compelling definitions of what plagiarism is.

Of course, every word of this paper has been written somewhere before, maybe even whole phrases have existed in exactly this order. And not only is everything I’ve said quite possibly already said elsewhere, but even the manner in which I say it arises from my effort to imitate my favorite professors and writers.

*Imitatio* is innate — both at the individual and at the cultural levels. Let’s name it in our classrooms and make it conscious.

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### Endnotes

- 1 Frank Farmer and Phillip Arrington explain this state of affairs in "Apologies and Accommodations," their survey of the on-going conversations about imitation in the modern writing classroom, from the 1970s through 1993.
- 2 A sentence on page 39 in Wendy Doniger's *The Implied Spider* inspired this exercise for my Myth and Folklore class. Gary Saul Morson coined the term 'paraque,' as Wendy Doniger puts it "to describe the process by which 'one author continues or fills in the gaps in a well-known classic by another' (Morson *Narrative and Freedom* 12)"
- 3 Blippy is described in Don Steinberg's *New York Times* online article, "Conversations: Introducing a Twitter for Credit Card Purchases," published December 16, 2009.



## Ship Fire: The Memory that Keeps on Giving

*Michael Sámano*

On the Fourth of July, 1986, New York Harbor held the attention of a nation, and perhaps the world. On that day, the newly refurbished Statue of Liberty was unveiled, marking its centennial birthday. There was an impressive flotilla of ships in the harbor, some shooting dazzling displays of arcing water. There were throngs of curious tourists and spectators. Even the average seen-it-all New Yorker felt moved on that day. That evening there were fireworks. Taking in the sights were sailors from a U.S. Navy ship in the harbor. Earlier in the day, through previous arrangements, the sailors had been part of an “adopt a sailor for a day” program in conjunction with city residents. However, another Navy ship, the USS Moinester, one of only two honored with an invitation to participate in the Statue of Liberty Independence Day celebration, was missing.

...

**Location:** USS Moinester (FF-1097), a Knox Class Frigate in the Atlantic Ocean  
**Time:** 0300  
**Date:** 25 June 1986  
**Me:** Third Class Petty officer, trained as a legal clerk with security clearance and also as a fire fighter with ship and helicopter emphasis.

Gong, gong, gong. I wake up to a loud alarm.

Over the ship-wide intercom system I hear, “On the Moinester, fire, fire, fire, class alpha fire in the Engine Room, all hands man your general quarters stations ....” The alarm repeats, gong, gong, gong. “General Quarters. General Quarters. All hands man your battle stations, set material condition Zebra throughout the ship, time is plus one.”

My military training and drilling on probable scenarios allows my muscle memory to take over and react. I roll out of my bottom rack and reach for my uniform and boots. Because it is summer, I have been sleeping without a t-shirt. When General Quarters sounds, I pull on a short sleeved shirt and dungaree pants. Although I start out wearing my regulation boots, I will later switch to firefighting boots in our staging area. I report to Repair Locker #2 and receive a report that there is a fire somewhere mid-ship. Another sailor starts strapping me into my gear. I have now been awake for five minutes.

Three years earlier, the military “A” school to which I was supposed to report in Meridian, Mississippi did not have room for me at the time that I completed my initial basic training and advanced seamanship school in San Diego, California. The Navy sent me di-

rectly to the fleet instead. With “guaranteed” training, sending me directly to the fleet was unusual, as the common practice was to send new military personnel from basic training straight to their respective “A” schools to learn their military profession. Since my initial training had included basic seamanship skills, I was immediately assigned to Deck Division, which was where sailors who become Boatswain’s Mates work. Ah, Deck Division, where one can spend ten hours a day on the business end of a needle gun. Here I learned of the Navy’s love affair with the color chromatic scale of gray!

Through my affiliation with Deck Division, I was assigned to Repair Locker #2, which was located in the forward part of the ship. A repair locker is a self-contained unit of sailors trained to fight fires, stop flooding, and administer first aid. I was sent to a series of damage control (fire and flood) and first aid training schools, where I eventually became one of 12 fire fighters assigned to our ship. We had three repair lockers, one located in the forward part of the ship, one mid-ship, and one aft, each with two hose teams. One hose team had the responsibility to direct water on a fire, while the other hose team used a metal tube-like applicator attached to the end of a nozzle intended to spray a circular pattern, like a wide “shield of water,” to cool off hose team #1 and allow it to advance on a fire.

On the early morning of 25 June, one of the other repair lockers put out the initial fire in about 15 minutes. Then there was a re-flash, and at that point the fire quickly got out of control. In firefighting school, we trained in the type of gear one would find firefighters wearing in the civilian world: elongated helmets w/face shields, long flame-resistant jackets over insulated boot/pant combinations with suspenders and matching gloves; we used an oxygen tank strapped to our backs and wore full face masks with communication devices. However, on our ship, with limited resources, we had old steel helmets with a light strapped to the front of it, large cotton gloves, knee-high rubber boots, and the OBA (Oxygen Breathing Apparatus) that strapped to our chest and used a simple timer to signal when we were going to run out of air. We also had face masks with less-advanced communication devices, which had a tendency to short out if they got wet during drill events.

With our helmets, gloves, boots, OBAs, and hoses, the entire Repair Locker of firefighters, as well as support personnel, started making its way toward the middle of the ship in search of the fire. Not knowing exactly where the fire was, we decided to take a route through a hatch and outside of the interior of the ship. As I opened the hatch leading to the main deck, I, and those peering over my shoulder, discovered a strange source of light outside. We were underway in the Atlantic Ocean, and since it was cloudy that early morning it should have been pitch black, except for some reason we all saw a strange glowing light. The source of light was radiating heat, bright orange and coming off of the deck. Although we had received a report that the fire was in the Engine Room, we didn’t know exactly where the blaze was, or at what point to enter our attack. Seeing the deck

glowing from the heat of the fire, we had a more precise idea where it was located. The grotesque sight of the glowing deck, and the feeling of heat radiating off of it made me imagine that the fire was daring us to come face it. Strange thoughts can come to mind in a situation like that. I remember thinking of my mom in her kitchen, cooking on her electric stove with a coiled element set to high, the way an element feels hot as it turns red/orange in color. I felt pressure on my back, stopped daydreaming, and yelled at the Repair Locker personnel to stop pushing forward. I didn't need our group momentum to push me out onto that searing deck. We had to go back and find another way around to the Engine Room.

Once we found a location at which to attack the fire, we inserted green oxygen canisters into our OBA systems and entered a Blower Room, which would provide access down to the Engine Room. Our plan was to attack from the top, while Repair Locker #5 came up from below the fire, and Repair #3 came from aft to forward to fight the fire. Someone from our Repair Locker was missing, a phenomenon (unaccounted for crew members) that would become more clear later that day. With someone missing, I volunteered to function in the role of our test-and-access man." In this role, I took off one glove and felt the hatch for heat. I used the back of my hand, that way if I were burned, I would still be able to hold the hose. Then I braced for impact just in case our allowing oxygen into the space created a back draft. I mentally prepared myself to release the hatch and waited for #2 hose to support my efforts. The #2 hose, with the long applicator, started spraying a circular pattern creating a wall of water, and I opened the hatch. As I slowly swung the hatch on its hinges, black oily smoke began to billow out of the space. Upon entering the room, we still were unsure of the exact presence of fire because visibility in the room was zero and heat radiated aggressively from the space. The leader of our hose team, a higher ranking and more extensively trained enlisted man, told us that our goal was to work our way across the room to a hatch built into the deck. From there, we would descend a ladder (staircase) to reach the third level of the Engine Room. I don't really have an opinion about the Christian version of hell; however, if there is such a thing as hell on earth, I believe that I have caught a glimpse of that place.

I retook my position on #1 hose, and we moved in. Later, Navy personnel determined that the temperature ranged between 400-800 degrees Fahrenheit in the Blower Room space, which contained two pieces of machinery about the size of small cars. After the fire was out, and we were back in our homeport of Norfolk, Virginia, shipyard workers would find one of the blowers tilting at an angle where it had begun to fall through the heated and melting steel floor. Because of my countless hours of training, trust in our hose team, and single-minded focus, I vaguely knew that the Blower Room felt hot, but not to the extreme degree that was discovered later. I do know that as we discharged our hoses into

the space to try to cool it down, and beat back any potential flames, the water almost immediately turned to steam, condensed on the overhead (the ceiling), and then rained down on us. The falling water felt extremely hot on my exposed arms. Of course, the combination of water and steam caused the communication system built into our face-masks to short out. So, in this scene of growing horror, one could hear the roar of the two blowers, the indescribable noise of the fire, the streaming sound water makes when shooting out of charged hoses, the hissing of steam, and all of us screaming at each other in a controlled-chaos-sort-of-way because our communication system had malfunctioned. I do not know what compels an individual to succeed in this type of environment, or to move toward an incredibly dangerous situation when a rational person would be running in the opposite direction. Was it my training? Was it my respect for the senior enlisted man who was holding the nozzle on hose #1? Was it my determination not to let my hose team down? Was it the fact that we were out in the ocean where you can't just run away from a fire? Or was it the realization that at the age of 22, I had more life to live? My guess is that it was all of those reasons and more. With a concerted and united effort, we took three necessary hours to put the fire out. Although there was significant damage to the ship, and we were temporarily adrift at sea without power, no one died or suffered serious injury that day. However, I can't speak to the psychological toll from the fire.

Once the fire was out, some of us were assigned to stand 30-minute "re-flash watch" rotations. The re-flash watch consisted of walking down a ladder to stand on a platform overlooking the Engine Room, while holding a charged fire hose in case the fire started again. I found the space to be very dark and gloomy, blackened by the fire and bereft of electrical power. The only light source came from above, through the hatch used to enter the room. After being in the space for a few minutes, my eyes adjusted enough to where I could look around the Engine Room. The space was still extremely hot and stuffy. I vividly recall taking one of my soaking wet heavy cotton gloves and grabbing the railing in front of me. I could hear a hissing sound as the heat dried my glove. I could hear water dripping, again followed by a hissing sound from water hitting hot metal below, and what I swear was a groaning sound from the re-hardening of cooling steel. I no longer wore an oxygen system with a mask, and found the putrid stench of burnt materials to be very overwhelming. My 30-minute re-flash watch was, by far, the most frightening part of this entire ordeal.

After the fire and my re-flash watch were over, I recall standing in the Ship's Office, where I worked as a legal clerk. The scene was surreal in that my completely soaking wet uniform and skin were darkened from soot and smoke, and I reeked of burnt residue. Yet, here I stood, in a clean office that held no hint of the fire. It was hard to come to grips with these twin realities. The two Yeomen that I worked with were in the office congratulating me for my role in confronting the fire. I have this vivid memory of a Machinist Mate, one

of the most ass-kicking manly men on our ship. He was a member of the midship hose team, and had, out of habit, stopped by the Ship's Office to say hi to my boss, the supervisor of the Captain's office. On this morning, he came into our space, closed the door and started sobbing like a baby. That was probably the most shocking single event that I witnessed that morning, and it unnerved me.

I also have a memory of sitting in the cafeteria. It's a very present memory for me. At that point, later the same morning, I can't shake the smell of smoke on my clothes and skin. It saturates not only my personal space, but over a short span of time, the smell of burnt material permeates the interior of the ship. I sit at a table and grow sick of people coming up and patting me on the back. I'm holding an orange, and I'm extremely hungry. However, after hefting a charged fire hose for three plus hours, my arms are numb and my hands are shaking. As the adrenalin settles and fatigue sets in, I find that even with solid effort, I can't peel that damn orange. I ask a friend sitting next to me to help.

Later that day, the ship echoed with anger and yelling as stories began to emerge of a small group of sailors, led by a senior enlisted man, leaving their General Quarter stations and going to stand next to their lifeboat pods, ready to abandon ship as we were below decks fighting the fire. This solved the mystery of unaccounted for crew. It was also disturbing news because up until that moment, I hadn't really considered the degree to which we may have been in danger.

Through the hard work and determination of our Machinist Mates and Boiler Technicians, we restored power to the ship and made it back to our homeport of Norfolk, Virginia. Of no surprise, Navy brass from Washington, D.C. wanted to know what the hell had happened and who could they blame for damaging government property. A JAG investigation was held and any breathing human being that had anything to say about the fire, including myself, was interviewed. Because I was the command's Legal Yeoman with a security clearance, it was determined that I would serve as the administrative support staff for the JAG investigation. It was placed solely on my shoulders to transcribe all of the interviews that had been conducted. I can't now recall how many interviews there were, but I do remember at the time feeling uncomfortable reliving the fire multiple times from multiple perspectives.

In the days and weeks that followed, we had significant repairs to make. One could walk through a passageway and see a bulkhead (wall) out of position due to the softening of steel from the heat of the fire. These areas of the ship had to be cut out with new plating welded in place. Overall, the entire ship smelled of charred material with a salt water chaser. I first washed, and then threw away my uniform, because I couldn't get the smell of smoke out of my clothes (or so I imagined). We were not offered, nor did we receive, nor did we know to ask for any counseling related to the experience. A while later, the fire-hose

members were gathered together and our command sent all of us to a medical facility for a health evaluation for asbestos exposure. As a ship built and launched in the early 1970s, the Moinester had an asbestos-lined Engine Room. A few months after the June fire, with repairs made, we readied ourselves to get underway again. In 1987, I made my third overseas deployment in four years on active duty.

In the spring of 1987, our ship had a very different event occur that made the fire seem like child's play. But that's another story for another time. In early Fall of 1987 my enlistment was up and I left the ship to return home. Other than a journal entry that I made two days after the fire, I basically kept the details of the shipboard fire to myself. Years later, I fought the voices in my head that said that only weak people sought mental help, and felt fortunate to find myself sitting across from a Vet Center counselor in Eureka, California.

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire is looming on the horizon. On that day in June, 1986, one story began with the alarm and ended with the fire being extinguished. However, on that day in June, another story began which I have found to be ongoing. I have struggled to make meaning out of the shipboard fire experience. Intellectually, answers have come to me over the years — some satisfactory, some not so much. On personal and spiritual levels, the impact of the fire on my life has been more problematic. Most of the time, I try to ignore it. But, come June, I will begin my 25<sup>th</sup> summer season since the fire, living where the smell and look of the air from field burning conjures up unwanted memories. As usual, I will try to keep upwind at family barbeques to avoid “that smell.”



## Recovering My Life

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*Anna Malliris*

My personal recovery began with a diagnosis of breast cancer at the age of 39 years and 342 days. It came nine months to the day after my previous bout with a different cancer, and it was bad. It was the kind of bad that stops doctors from being reassuring with survival rates; the kind of bad that starts with the insertion of a Groshong catheter four days later on the same day as your first chemotherapy session and your dad's birthday; the kind of bad that makes you think about who will care for your 11-year-old daughter next week and next month and next year. The doctor's only reassurance was a simple statement: "The only number that matters is that you are either 100 percent alive or 100 percent dead and that statistic starts today for you." It sounds cliché now, so simple and so amazingly true. I think that was the exact moment I began my recovery from cancer. It was the beginning of the journey to finding a new normal: a new perspective on my body, my relationships, and my way of being in the world. It was the beginning of letting go and holding on tight, of breathing deeply and exhaling, of trusting in the essential parts of the inner and outer me.

The physical changes were the most immediate part of my recovery. First was the thin blue tube that was inserted through my chest and rested in the artery near my heart. How does the mind adjust to seeing a foreign object snaking out of the chest that has been so closely guarded for 40 years? How does it become normal to have a foreign object protruding from such a sensitive place? It was my daily adventure to lasso the thin blue tube, wrapping it in a circle small enough to not pop out from under my shirt and large enough to not create a bump, and tape it to my chest. It became the physical representation of the alien enemy inside.

Next came baldness. For six months hair deserted me and left behind the tenderness of a scalp unprotected from the harshness of sun and cold. It returned in curly wires of grey that were as foreign as the baldness. Neither the lack of adornment nor the exuberance of new growth were normal to me, but both became part of my recovery of normalcy.

Finally, my mastectomy and subsequent radiation created a permanent physical transformation. I will forever carry the scar across my chest and six tiny tattoos marking the boundaries of the radiation, tiny blue dots that map my new body, its color and sensation, the healthy tissue, and the ever-changing square sterilized against life-threatening cells too small to see or feel. How do I look in the mirror and see part of the body that had defined where I ended and the rest of the universe began for half of my life, now gone? How do I ever believe this is part of my return to normalcy? What could be more abnormal than missing a part of your body?

At the beginning of my recovery I was falling into a pit, not knowing where the bottom was, grasping at the mud and roots of panic and fear and hearing the rawness of my own voice for the very first time. It was a mixture of anger, cynicism and fear. I remember sitting on the examining table in the oncologist's office and saying, really spewing, to my mom: "He's telling you I'm screwed!"

There are many strange things about cancer. Little is known about its cause, but much of its treatment is "off the rack," sewn to the shape of the lives of its victims. For me, the most powerful and inexplicable thing about cancer is how it shapes and defines the rest of my life. Caregivers said I became a "survivor" the moment I was diagnosed. That is a peculiar use of a word that implies duration — something assessed in hindsight. In that moment, I remember thinking: How does this doctor rolling out a parade of horrors before me have a clue about whether I will survive? How can a man in a little white coat know whether I will be alive or dead in the one, five, or ten years that define "survival" in his language? Does he honestly think that a 40-year-old woman believes ten years to live is "surviving"? And how can "recovery" be defined as a process that permanently changes life *from* normal, not *to* normal?

From my bottomless pit, the light seemed small, the walls were slippery with mud, and the roots promised no solid grip. But that was ten years ago and time has taught me much about recovery: that it really is a journey to a destination, that it is a shared journey, and that "normal" is a moving target. Now, looking back into the place that was never really a deep pit, I realize that recovery has not been a struggle to claw myself out of a darkness, but rather an ongoing process of finding beauty and purpose in the mud and roots of my life.

Like a sculptor who starts with clay and twigs and through patience and pressure forms a teapot, the human spirit takes these physical changes and sculpts perception into identity and normalcy. Along the way, if we are lucky, we hear the whispers that help inspire the art that is our lives. For me, revelation arrived in plain words from my then 12-year-old daughter. I had emerged from the shower in a bulky, body-consuming bathrobe. I had adopted the habit of dashing heavily swaddled from shower to bedroom in response to my own discomfort with the new shape and texture of my body and in the hope that it would shelter my daughter from the harsh changes occurring around her. But this day, she blocked the hall. She physically willed herself larger to take all of the space and options away from me. The voice of The Divine emerged from her soft mouth, "Mom, you can't hide from me." There was a moment of speechlessness and panic, a deep void of air, and then the sense of being surrounded by calm and clarity. Quiet resolve flowed from her as tears rolled down my cheeks and dropped silently into the vast softness of my pink robe. I had no choice. This was my recovery, my new normalcy. This was the moment of transformation — to lay bare, literally, what would define me forevermore. I opened my robe

and she looked at me, really looked at the body she had known through touch and smell and warmth and sound. The soft breast where her cheek and ear had rested, listening to the heartbeat that lulled her to sleep and calmed her fears, was gone. Slowly she raised her gaze, no horror or sadness in her face. “Mom, I wouldn’t want that to happen to me, but it is still you.” We stood locked in that moment of truth. This was the first tangible step toward recovery, not a return to the old normal but a vision and acceptance of the emerging normalcy of our lives. I was changed and I was the same.

Months later I emerged from the shower one morning, dried off, looked in the mirror and went to get dressed. While slipping on my clothes, I realized that for the first time since surgery I expected to see myself as I was in the mirror. I took no notice of the scar streaking across my chest or the tiny blue dots. I had found normal, the new normal.

Ten years after my diagnosis, I realize that physical recovery is more accessible than emotional recovery. I have struggled to understand that I will never regain the blissful ignorance I enjoyed before this illness exposed my mortality. In the early years, I lived in heightened awareness that everything could crumble. I felt every tingle and twinge in my reshaped body and my reshaped life. My eyes saw each frame as a picture to be seared indelibly on my soul. I thought deeply about what my daughter’s life experience would be if I were lost to her. It is not an exercise for those wishing to move back to a state of normalcy. It was hard to imagine that the world I had carefully built around me, and especially around my daughter, could continue in my absence.

For a while, I picked and froze berries, made muffins with them and froze these too. I tried to encase representative pieces of me into things that could be smelled and touched in the event that I was no longer able to wrap my arms around my child. I bought bottles of my favorite perfume so she could sense me around her. I learned to say the things I was feeling the moment I felt them. Time passed and the berries became jam that we actually ate, and I could once again see time stretching before me. But fragility remains, and I still find myself stockpiling perfume, expressing my feelings too quickly and too often, and squeezing each hug for the extra second to store the sensation deeper in my soul.

I have lost some use of my body. I no longer lift bags of dirt for my garden or food for my cupboards, ski or play tennis, scrub the bathtub or lift a child over the age of three. These things are not postponed but denied. I did not agree that cancer could take away my golf skills; it just did. It took parts of my life that defined me. Now I rely on young healthy bodies to make my gardens lovely, but they cannot replace the joy and satisfaction I felt when the seeds sprung forth from the ground in dirt lovingly turned to silky dust by the power of my arms and my will.

Platitudes such as “At least you’re alive,” or “It could be worse,” are meant to add perspective but more often dismiss the challenge of my new reality and momentarily impede

the path to my hard-earned recovery. They demean the struggle and deny the vast expanse between the old “normal” and the emerging sense of normalcy. I have learned that the speaker seeks to diminish the challenge of a fearful disease they may someday encounter first hand. I have learned that the dismissal is not personal, despite how personal it feels and how it seems to say that I should be more grateful or that I am struggling unnecessarily.

Ten years into my recovery, I am facing the end of active treatment. I sat with my doctor planning for this moment when I finally cease treatment, and we talked about the reality of my situation. Ten years ago, I walked into his predecessor’s office with a 5.5 cm tumor in my breast that was HER2 positive and had at least three lymph nodes involved. As an Ashkenazi Jew, I was genetically predisposed. I had a 28 percent chance of surviving two years. I lived through six months of “throw everything but the kitchen sink at you” chemotherapy, seven weeks of daily radiation, three surgeries and nine years of adjunctive chemotherapy. I lost my hair, my breast, and for moments my sense of belonging in my own life. In spite of those losses, I loved deeply, laughed heartily, cried ferociously and was 100 percent alive each and every day.

I know that I am fully immersed in my recovery because I expect to see what I see and feel what I feel and live the life I have recreated. I know that I will die someday and that the world will be different for some people, but that they too will find recovery. I have molded the mud and roots of my life to support me. I finally feel that in body and spirit, I have recovered. I am comfortable and settled. But I am also transformed: I realize that normal will last only until the next shift requires me to enter into recovery again, not to return to normal but to search for new normalcy. I have learned that recovery is a state of being that can only be reached with time, adaptation, good company and a little divine intervention.



## Ambulatory

Craig Wells

I'm a college student and a part-time employee at the university bookstore. I carry my books in a backpack and I'm proud to say that I ride public transportation. After work I head up campus to catch the streetcar at the corner. As I approach, I see my ride home loading from the elevated platform in the middle of the six lane avenue. The light is against me so I have to wait. I watch the passengers on the platform slowly filing onto the train and estimate that I can still catch it — if I run. Impatient, I glance at the traffic signal for oncoming cars. As my eyes flick upon the light, it flashes yellow. I grasp the straps of my backpack, cinching them tight, and prepare to launch myself into the crosswalk. The next moment, I see the pedestrian signal change to WALK — and I'm off like a sprinter out of the blocks. Fixed upon the motionless streetcar, I fight for speed, my confidence growing with each stride.

In an abrupt instant I have only the chance to glimpse on my left something big and white, not even long enough to see it moving because *it's right there*. My brain receives the formless image — and my body receives the impact.

Everything goes blank and numb. I can't see a thing. My brain is still online, in fact it's already made sense of the last image. Unquestionably, the front end of an automobile. And the sudden massive jolt: I've been struck! I feel myself in motion, the momentum of the car launching me airborne. There's no pain, however, and I'm not afraid.

The world has disappeared. I'm in a peaceful place faraway, perhaps at home in bed dreaming that I'm flying. No traffic noises, no voices, not even the rush of the wind in my ears, I hear only a dull ringing that doesn't seem real.

In the midst of these distant impressions, I'm calmly aware that I will soon hit the ground. I feel like I'm floating, completely relaxed, but I must be falling, helplessly paralyzed by my inability to determine in which direction the earth lies.

Contact is sudden, but not traumatic. I am stunned by the simple surprise of landing perfectly flat on my back. I feel the back of my head striking the pavement. My skull rebounds once before coming to rest squarely on the occipital bone.

It hurts — shivers of pain twisting up and down my body — but the worst of it goes away immediately. As if by reflex, I leap to my feet in an instant. I'm standing up before I open my eyes. I am amazed at how rapidly this act is accomplished, without dizziness or nausea, only a strange tingling sensation in my lower back and legs. I automatically note my terminal position: five yards in front of the big white car, my head pointing toward the center of the intersection. I feel perfectly lucid and begin to walk forward, checking to see if everything is functioning normally but unable to tell. At least I'm walking straight —

straight to the driver's side of the unmistakable big white car. I bend over, resting my hands on my knees, and I stare through the safety glass at the driver. It's a nondescript middle-aged man with a dark complexion. I don't really care what he looks like. He can't help noticing me. His face is full of false innocence. I imagine I'm watching myself from outside myself, leaning over to give him a menacing glare, challenging him to look me in the eye and show his recognition of what we both know: *he* was nearly *the cause of my death*.

He turns his face away.

I shake my head and stand up. I feel a little dizzy after all, or is it just the flush of rage? I make my way back to the curb where a young man with a briefcase is proclaiming that he saw it all and it was clearly the driver's fault. I'm grateful for such an eager witness, but it feels like I'm forgetting something. As soon as I turn to look back across the intersection, I see my backpack all of the way on the other side of the street, sixty or seventy feet away. Full of wonder at how it could have been thrown such a distance, I dash into the intersection again like an idiot. I hear the voices of the witness and others frantically calling me back, "Look out! Don't be crazy! You're going to get killed!" but I have no intention of letting my books and papers get run over by dozens of cars. Luckily, the flow of cross-traffic is spent. Unfortunately, the traffic light changes just as I reach my bag and I turn to see the three lanes surging toward me. I run as fast as I can back to the curb, the cars accelerating and honking at me every step of the way. Sons-of-bitches! They watch me brutally struck down in the street, right in front of them, and they still can't wait to gun their engines and tear off down the road, even if it means sending me flying again!

I reach the safety of the sidewalk, winded, exasperated, and amazed that my battered body can still manage such a vigorous sprint. Two more witnesses have appeared and I'm met by a chorus of excited exclamations and queries. It seems like everything is happening at once.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere? Don't try to walk! You should sit down!" I don't sit down, I won't sit down. Where's the big white car gone? In my confusion, I think he's getting away. Did he just drive off? The second witness has been watching: "He's driving around the block. There he is!" He's stopped at the corner of the next intersection, a half-block away, possibly unable to decide which way to go.

From the same direction here comes a cop car. I can't believe they got here so quickly. Somebody must have phoned right away. The third witness jogs forward, waving both arms. The cop car makes a U-turn and comes to a stop along the curb up ahead. As if by prior arrangement, the big white car turns wide and pulls up behind the cop car.

Before I can decide whether to confront the driver or go directly to the cop, the first witness puts his hand on my arm and starts acting like he thinks he's my physician, or maybe my lawyer. "You should really be taking it easy, you know? You could aggravate

an injury you don't even know you have!" He's a clean-cut All-American type in his early twenties, dressed in a casual sport coat and tie. His boyish face and running shoes make the briefcase seem out of place.

"Where does it hurt?"

I'm not sure — my head, my arms, my legs, my back.... I'm practically numb with adrenaline and anger. I pull up my shirt and turn my back to them, provoking expressions of sympathy and disgust. The first witness comes closer to examine a wound above my left hip, identifying a large, deep bruise. I notice that the tip of my right ring finger is dripping blood and there's a large tear in my shoe.

When I look up, the cop is standing in front of me, a stout blond man in a tight khaki uniform that makes him look larger than life. He's obviously prepared to take charge of the situation.

"Are you the victim?" he wants to know, whipping out a small black notebook. Damn right I'm the victim! I turn to show him the wound on my back to prove it. I'm disappointed that he doesn't move in to get a better look. With an officiousness tempered only by a hint of compassion, he informs me that an ambulance has already been dispatched. He escorts me to the cop car and opens the back door, telling me to have a seat and relax while he takes down the facts. I'm not entirely sure I need an ambulance. "It's a good idea to let them check you over just to be on the safe side," he says, adding, "I noticed you were limping."

I find it difficult to give him a clear and decisive account of my experience of the event. It takes all my effort merely to form coherent sentences. I want to tell him that I proceeded into the crosswalk only after I saw the pedestrian signal indicate my right of way, but instead I try to explain that I was watching the traffic signal in anticipation of it turning yellow. I want to tell him that I entered the crosswalk slowly and carefully, making certain that all traffic had come to a stop, but I've already said that I bolted from the curb in a mad dash to catch the streetcar. I want to tell him that I know the big white car hit me, but all I can say is that I wasn't sure what was happening to me as I was hurtling through the air. I can't see if he's actually writing any of this down.

Our brief interview is interrupted by the arrival of another cop car. "I want you to sit tight until the ambulance comes," the cop says, giving me his index finger. "I think you're still a little bit in shock and you may have a concussion." He moves off to intercept the other officers and I'm left wondering if I really might be in a state of shock. While I don't exactly feel normal, I'm thinking as clearly as ever, and I'm not the slightest bit nauseous. I keep reaching for the bump on the back of my head, but there isn't one. The spot isn't even very sore when I touch it.

Why am I just sitting here? What's going on? I turn around for the view through the rear window. They're all in a circle, the cops and witnesses, and the driver, standing near the big white car. I notice that the third witness has disappeared and it occurs to me that I don't know any of their names.

I'm up and out of the car, digging into my backpack for paper. I notice my legs are stiffer and walking is more painful. As I approach they all look at me like they've never seen me before. Pulling pens from my pockets and handing out scraps torn from a notebook, I explain my urgent need, that is, my legitimate request.... I must seem somewhat too emphatic, too insistent in my approach, as the first witness touches my arm again and offers his heartening assurance that everything is being taken care of. When I try to tell him I'd rather take care of it myself, the cop puts his meaty hand on the back of my neck and, batting his paternal finger at me, serves up the short tale of another victim who said he felt fine and then just keeled over while he was strolling around. He asks the first witness to take me back to the car.

Now the driver wants to know if I'm okay. I can see he's really worried. I was sure I had something important to communicate to him, but now I can't think of anything to say. I just look away, letting the first witness guide me back to the car. The driver follows at a distance. When I'm sitting down, he approaches and repeats his question. "Are you okay? Are you alright?" I'm staring at my feet, at the big rip in the side of my shoe. I just bought them last weekend and now I'm going to have to get a new pair.

I realize there's nothing personal about my anger toward the driver. I even feel a little sorry for him in a detached way. Still, I wish he could somehow experience the collision as I did, so he'd know for himself how close he came to killing me. I replay the events in my mind, imagining that I am he, forced to relive my ordeal as punishment. Watching the traffic light, leaving the curb, floating through space, hitting the ground, jumping up, looking at the driver, running for my backpack.... All of the images and feelings are jumbled up, strangely disconnected and out of sequence. I search for my memory of the moment of impact but it's not there. I must have tried to turn away at the last second. The front end of the car hit me just right, I keep thinking. It hit me just right, or I'd be dead.



## The Elephant Down the Road: De Palma's Italian Restaurant 1978

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*Sandy Brown Jensen*

I have always loved elephants, but they are as far away from my life in the West as a chickadee from the moon. Not only are they astonishingly large, but they have a kindness of eye and gentleness of spirit I can only aspire to in my short human life.

There is a saying that a person can have “a memory like an elephant,” and I saw on a *Nova* special that their legendary memory is based on biology, not myth. In the program I saw, an old matriarch of the herd dies, and the others seem to mourn her loss with great dark tears running down their wrinkled cheeks. However, eventually, they move off on their great migrations.

What astonished and moved me was that years later, the herd returned to the site of the matriarch's death. Only the tusks and the bleached ribs remained, yet old and new members of the tribe gathered to lift and handle the bones of their elder. Who knows what memories flooded through them in this ritual of return?

A long time ago in the 1970s when I was a young girl, I belonged to a spiritual group (dating from the 1930s) called the Emissaries of Divine Light. Emissaries live in intentional communities, not exactly like a herd of elephants, but there may be similarities. I lived in a brand new one called Glen Ivy Community. We had purchased sixty historic acres; we were restoring the springs as a business and all living in the old inn called The Lodge. At the time, there were about twenty of us under the spiritual guidance of John and Pamela Gray, having what would turn out to be literally the time of our lives. We were young and embarked on the soul's high adventure.

This all took place in Southern California in Temescal Canyon, which is directly over the Santa Ana Mountains from Laguna Beach. In my exploration of my new home, I learned about the indigenous Luiseños who lived at the hot springs for thousands of years before we appeared as a blip on its historic screen.

And I learned that twenty years earlier, in the 1950s, an elephant had lived in our valley, five miles up the road at a surreal experiment in restaurant theme parks, a place called De Palma's Italian Village. As I look back through the dusty, sunshot window of thirty years, I feel more and more like that elephant, who must have held so many memories of our valley between her floppy gray ears.

The elephant was gone by the time my rowdy group of eight or ten friends and I showed up at De Palma's Italian Village for a Friday evening birthday party in July of 1978.

“Where *are* we?” Mary Ann Conoscente, the birthday girl, asked when we turned off Indian Truck Trail, just five miles east of our communal home at Glen Ivy.

Rich Kenny, the lead driver, slowed at the sentry box and rolled down his window to speak to the guard. “What’s up?” he asked the crash dummy who was leaning out of the guard shack door, grinning like Pinocchio on crack cocaine, “Which way to De Palma’s Italian Village?”

The dummy’s fixed grin and rigid hand pointed deeper into the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains. A large sign spoke for him: “You are leaving Alberhill, California. Welcome to De Palma’s Italian Village, Little Italy.” Cheat grass crazed the road surface into chunks approximating a map of the boot of Italy as we bumped past a series of cattail wetlands and ponds.

Two carloads of us communitarians got out in the parking lot welcomed by a chorus of frogs. Chef Rich listened to the enthusiastic amphibians with appreciation, “I hear supper!”

“Where’s the restaurant?” George Carpenter asked. George always reminded me of one of the kids from the Little Rascals, a series of short comic films from the 1930s featuring a dim-watt character with plenty of spunk.

Doc Lynn, cute and smart as Nancy Drew, pointed out signs and arrows. The ten of us trailed after her into a maze of dilapidated buildings, choked fountains, and ruined lawns.

George studied one building carefully, figured it out, and disappeared inside. His grinning, blond-shocked face popped up framed behind bars with a sign that said, “Corona City Jail.” Rich said he looked right at home with the metal bed, chalk-marked walls, and loose bottles kicking around on the floor. “Just like your room back at the ol’ commune, isn’t it, George?”

“Oh, my God!” Mary Ann, a recovering Brooklyn Polish-Catholic, stopped short and grabbed Rich’s arm. With the other hand, she crossed herself.

Rich, also no stranger to Catholicism by way of the Irish, followed her gaze to the Chapel of the Holy Trinity. The door was ajar. We filed in respectfully and gaped at the wildly decorated statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which looked trussed and bleeding like a roast for the restaurant kitchen we had been told was here among the ruins.

George, always a great one for slowly sounding out signs, read for our collective edification another large plaque: “This Shrine is dedicated to St. Joseph and the Holy Family. As our little way of giving thanks for all the blessings that we have received. The De Palma Family.”

I stumbled back out to De Palma Street, so labeled by a city street sign liberated, it turned out, from Vineland, New Jersey. I say stumbled because there were free-range chickens underfoot dodging low-flying bats.

The next building informed me that it was a reconstruction of Grandpa De Palma's shoe repair shop transported lock, stock, and black plaster shoeshine boy all the way from the New Jersey homeland.

We moved past a little post office, a wooden outdoor stage, and a has-been "Gay 90s Saloon and Pizzeria." Everything showed sopped evidence of the rainy winter we had all had to mop up after.

It was Vince who pointed out that the place was built on a flood plain at the mouth of Horsethief Canyon, a major Santa Ana Mountain drainage. When you build cute streets that channel flood waters straight in through the door of your 385-seat Italian restaurant, it's reasonable to assume fountains will choke on cheat grass, and dilapidated buildings will throw up their splintery hands and fall with a screech into the water.

Vince, our resident wizard, a short, strong guy with thick, black hair and mustache and intense dark eyes, said, "I'll bet they've had to clean up this place after more than one flood." He kicked some pile of evidence obscure to me and added, "It's burned down a time or two, as well."

"That's very reassuring, Mr. Wizard," I said, pointing to the bare wires and dangling bulbs strung out on either side of the walkway, giving out a dim but cheerful light into the dusk. "You think those are up to code?"

"This place could go up like a monkey playing with matches in a Chinese firecracker factory," he answered cheerfully, then pointed out the old-fashioned gas lampposts, "but it could be worse. Imagine using gas lamps in this climate. One Santa Ana wind, and all these wood structures would remind us of just exactly how fast Rome burned."

To find the front door of De Palma's Italian Restaurant, we had to run the gauntlet of live food birds—noisy pheasants, partridges and peacocks stacked in chicken-wire cages. Chef Rich looked in at them and smacked his lips, "I see the menu spread out before me."

Jody, who had been a waitress here, said, "No kidding. In the old days I heard they killed and ate anything that moved."

We peered in at the worried-looking peacock then found the restaurant door through a hobbit hole cut in an overgrown bank of hot pink bougainvillea. The restaurant was a ramshackle, multi-level building with five large dining rooms that had obviously seen a heyday and hey! That day wasn't today. But I loved the red velvet flocked wallpaper and the bubbling lava lamps.

We may have been their only customers at the far end of a run that had begun in 1959 when Giuseppe (aka Joe) De Palma and his wife Alleyne (and their four daughters) bought

the land, but we were a party of ten, and they knew all about creating that intimate Italian party atmosphere even as their world was ending.

We sat at a long table out of an early Hollywood set — the red and white checked tablecloth, the long stemmed wine glasses, the plastic salad bowl, and red Italian wine that started flowing like blood at the St. Valentine's Day Massacre and didn't stop until the last body staggered out the door.

This meal was none of your fancy-schmancy squid ink linguini and white truffle oil minimalist expressions of haute Italian cuisine. This was old school spaghetti and meatballs, veal scaloppini, and all things breaded, fried, drenched in red sauce and snowed with Parmesan cheese. We started with the antipasti plate: prosciutto, salami, mortadella, coppa. Artichoke hearts, roasted red peppers, pepperoncini, marinated mushrooms, cheeses, Sicilian olives wrinkled as the face of a shoemaker's widow, and lots of squishy garlic bread. After that, red sauce ruled: across the tablecloth, up our elbows with frequent side trips onto shirtfronts, and down our gullets. Thankfully, we weren't offered frog's legs or even the worried peacock. On-the-spot slaughter of livestock seemed to be a treat left to bygone days.

Jody, her mass of dark hair pulled back with a silver clip, face lively as any cute young elephant's with memory, pointed out an antique walnut sidebar. "That used to be the cheese bar; like a salad bar only with cheeses from all over Italy. Down in the basement they kept cheese wheels as big as I am, and I had to cut it with a contraption that had wires and a foot lever."

Inspired by the cinematic moment, Doc started doing imitations of Dean Martin. Rich did a passable Frank Sinatra, and it was only George who had the nerve or enough wine in him to do a spot-on Sammy Davis, Jr. And they were right; the De Palma's must have been from the same region of Italy as the sentimental mobsters who built Las Vegas — the Rat Pack, at least in the movies, were always eating spaghetti and meatballs in places reeking with this over-the-top Hollywood conception of a lost, golden Italy.

In every Emissary of Divine Light community (I'm not talking about the Rat Pack now) the individual stories of how they met each other are told and re-told as if they had mythic dimension. The room lights up with an intensified joy, a collective amazement. I have read that the society of elephants is among the most complex known in the animal kingdom. Each animal has the ability to recognize and track individuals over long periods of time through changes of age, status, and condition, just like human friends. Perhaps elephants, like humans, also memorize the complexity of their relationships through story telling. For example, Vince, who has been a part of our community for so long and is so beloved, met our Jody when she was a waitress for six months at this crazy Italian restau-

rant down the road. What an insane coincidence! It was meant, ordained, a configuration of events written on the great wheel of Fortuna, Goddess of the Possible.

And sure enough, Vince, who was dating Jody at that time, had a story to tell. He stood up and tapped a glass. Vince wanted to explain why this down-at-the-heels restaurant out in the back of nowhere was worthy our collective pilgrimage: “I was working for Union Oil Research as a research technician, wet chemistry mostly,” he began, “when the biologist, Subaru Hashimoto, said he needed a tech to go with him on a field trip to Hemet where we were doing nitrogen tests on potatoes grown by a corporate farmer in the area — Inland Empire Growers.

“Hash and I worked all day taking soil and potato samples and spent nine hours in the field. Any time exceeding eight hours in the field entitles the employee to a dinner on the company.”

“Yes! Here’s to dinner on the man!” I don’t know who shouted that, but it involved leaping to our collective feet for a rowdy toast.

You couldn’t shout Vince down, though. He waited serenely until we subsided, and picked up the thread of his story. “Just by happenstance, Hash had gotten directions from two of the other senior techs the day before on how to get to DePalma’s Italian Village where you could get an eleven course meal for a very reasonable price, and it just happened that if we took the long way home, we would drive right past the place! Even though I was a very fit 27-year-old, I was wondering how I was going to be able to eat an eleven-course meal, but to appease Hash, I went along with it (and he was driving).

“When we arrived, we saw that DePalma’s was a very strange place with wooden buildings and facades made up to look like a western town. We were seated in one of the back rooms with bench tables. Between courses, which were long, drawn out affairs...”

“Sort of like this story?”

“I had the audacity to light up a cigarette. What can I say, I was young and stupid then.”

“Wasn’t this like six months ago?”

“Just as I lit it up, Jody, the hostess, came down the stairs leading a group of ten people. One older woman in the group complained in a stage whisper that someone was smoking and asked if there were another table. Jody politely told the woman that the table adjoining ours was the only one left that would hold a party as large as theirs, so no, there was no other place they could put them.

“I, in the meantime, had put out my cigarette. I motioned Jody over and told her that I would refrain from smoking, so the old woman would stop complaining. Jody put her arm around my shoulder and said, ‘Thank you!’

“There was something about that girl that I couldn’t put my finger on ... something ‘special,’ as if I knew her already ...”

As if I knew her already ... this is where the whole table leaned forward, absorbed in a plain old boy-meets-girl story, knowing that Vince’s magical ability to recognize Jody as his entry point to the zone of heightened power that was our community, our herd, was the spiritual crux of the story.

“I told Hash, ‘There is something about that girl ...’ and he looked at me as if I had a screw loose.

“We finished our dinner, paid, and as I had my feet straddling the threshold of that restaurant, I couldn’t leave.”

He couldn’t leave ... he had never met us, but he felt us calling to him. Elephants are very vocal creatures, yet we didn’t really know this until it was discovered in 1984 that much of their talk is below the threshold of human hearing. Emissaries feel there is likewise a subacoustic bond between us that calls each to each across time and space. Would he honor the compulsion to ask this girl with the spirit eyes for her phone number?

Rich had a song for every moment, “Zing went the strings of my heart!”

“I went back inside, told Jody that I was never this forward, but would she give me her phone number! She handed me a Glen Ivy Hot Springs brochure, circled the number on it, and said I could reach her there. That raised many more questions in my mind, but I accepted the brochure, told her ‘thank you,’ and left.

“About a week later, I called Jody at that number and wound up having a three hour conversation with her about the community at Glen Ivy, who she was, and well, the rest is history.”

Vince sat down to general applause. Jody stood up, Frida Kahlo eyes vivid with abashed laughter. She extended her slender arms and shrugged her bare shoulders. “Well, thank heaven Guiseppe isn’t here tonight because he was very strict about the girls not fraternizing with the spaghetti-grazers and always having their armpits covered, no matter how hot it was. When I met Vince, I couldn’t figure out why he kept coming back for more spaghetti.”

Vince added, “I couldn’t believe my luck when she invited me home to meet her family, and there were twenty of you.”

In my old elephant memory, the faces of my laughing friends at that table are bathed in the red-gold light of heavily fringed bordello lamps. To be an Emissary was to believe we had all known each other since the foundations of the Earth were laid. Our mission was to recover all the lost members of our Tribe. Once reunited, we would restore humanity to its lost state of grace.

The rest of the restaurant was kept dark, and I could feel the gloom behind my back, outside the circle of our light and our focus on the story-telling faces.

A half-sized replica of the David loomed over the dinner table on a marble plinth, and Doc Lynn claimed scientific objectivity as she discussed the anatomical accuracy of his famous equipment.

I got up between courses and wandered around with a wine glass in my hand, looking at framed newspaper articles, relics of self-promotion, and a less than tasteful reproduction of the Mona Lisa rendered on black velvet. LOTS of pictures of a big, broad-faced guy, balding, grinning, missing a front tooth, glad-handing celebrities—that would be mine host, Joe.

I turned to the waiter, who was refilling glasses from a carafe of the bloody red Chianti. “Where’s old man Giuseppe now? Looks like he never missed a night.”

“He’s recovering from open heart surgery.”

“That would explain it.”

“Look,” I said, reading out loud. “Just imagine. There used to be an exotic animal zoo here, including an elephant, lions, tigers, and bears.”

“Oh my!” the entire table yelled at once, clinking glasses in a kind of high five with wine.

“And a tropical rain forest with a roof-top sprinkler system. All the fountains worked, and they used to see 700 people a day.” Down the road at Glen Ivy, we were in the throes ourselves of bringing the run-down hot springs business back from a long decline, so 700 people a day seemed like the rich plebian hordes to us.

“Place burned down in 1969.”

“Ha,” said Vince, “I knew it.”

“There was nothing left but a stainless steel pot and a two-foot plaster clown.”

“Did he rebuild from insurance money?”

“How did you guess?”

“Guy probably wanted to start over and burned the place down himself,” was Rich Kenny’s contribution, which turned out to be prescient.

“A toast to Vince and Jody’s story,” I proposed, and glasses clinked all around.

“Here’s to false teeth!” Mary Ann cried. Nary a pause for the *non sequitur*, we all shouted, “False teeth!”

Three and a half hours later, feeling very good about the decorative spaghetti sauce dribbles down the fronts of our shirt and bosoms, and all that Italian wine moving us to burst into spontaneous song, we groped our way back out into the ghost town. The moonlight was so white, it looked like the cosmic laundress had thrown her wash water

with bleach over the mixed-up jumble-jamble of streets, buildings, courtyards, and lakes and rendered them whitewashed and ready for the afterlife.

I looked around at what was clearly the last round up for De Palma's Italian Village. This wasn't a cute, high-end faux-town like Main Street, U.S.A. in Disneyland. Translocated as the elephant they had brought to California, the De Palmas sought to restore memory; the Italian Village was Joe's frantic effort to give his father back the Italy he'd sacrificed for a new life in America. It turns out the Emissaries of Divine Light aren't the only ones seeking to restore a lost golden age.

In the moonlight, a very large, white, trumpet shaped flower growing in the untended garden caught my eye. I recognized it as a common and potent native, *datura*.

"You know," I said conversationally to anyone who might still be within earshot, "The Indians who used to live here were the Luiseños. Their hallucinogen-of-choice was this plant here, *datura*."

"Beautiful," Mary Ann said, sticking her nose in close. How did they take it?"

"The blossom nectar is a powerful hallucinogen. All the roots and leaves can be prepared for lift off."

"I hear it's really unstable," said Vince, the chemist.

"Extremely. It's said Lucrezia Borgia was the last compound pharmacist in the Western world to prepare controlled doses."

"The Italian connection," Doc said.

I could count on her to appreciate my clinical addition, "Witches used to use broomsticks to apply it in a very personal area, and that's where the myth of witches flying on broomsticks comes from. Those women really knew how to have a good time!"

"And how to keep their men in line. I would love to see her poison ring."

"My point is, the Luiseños pretty much took *datura*, men, women, and children, on an almost daily basis. It was a part of their deep culture."

"You going somewhere with this, Brownie?"

"Stay with me here: what if that hallucinogenic view of these mountains and valleys, this place we're standing on, is imbued with the psychic DNA of the hallucinating Luiseños?"

"And that Giuseppe was a walk-in? One of those Indian spirits walked into him and took over his brain, and that's why this place looks so drug-induced?" Vince finished my thought.

"I'm only saying..."

"We know who's been sipping the nectar around here," Rich said, "According to your woo-woo theory, we've got the same haunts at Glen Ivy."

“Oh, yeah. Oops. Sorry. I kicked a chicken. I know. We bought an old restaurant, too, and those oil painted canvas murals circling the dining room when we got it prove my point.”

“A John Wayne vision of local history,” said Doc.

“But at least our Lodge is built into the hillside, and the creek is channelized *around* the buildings,” Vince’s voice floated in from the shadows under Holy Trinity.

Mary Ann, too quick-witted to always be the diplomat, but managing nicely on this occasion, said, “Giuseppe’s just had open heart surgery, so the place is a little run down. Let’s give him a little bitty break here. I’ll bet this crazy place still has a future.” But she was wrong about that.

Rich started a song, and we all piled into the cars and stuck our heads out to harmonize all the way home to “Third Rate Romance, Low Rent Rendezvous.” George was singing his heart out in my ear, his own distinctly avian understanding of the lyrics, which were something like “Bird-brain romance, low wren rendezvous.”

We pulled up and parked in front of the Chalet. John Gray, our focalizer and spiritual leader, was standing on the stone steps watching as Mary Ann fell out of the car at his feet, laughing hysterically. I’ve heard her tell this story many times, and I think her Catholicized view of John in that moment was as disapproving papa to our naughty drunk kids with spaghetti on our faces. I always thought he looked left out — we’d gone out and had a lot of fun without him, and what was up with that? But mine is a pagan world-view; I think all of Dionysus’s children should be called to the revels.

Nobody knows for sure whether Giuseppe De Palma set his 1969 fire for the insurance money, but he did rebuild his all-new, re-imagined Italian Village with the settlement plus a loan from the Small Business Administration, which, oh by the way, he didn’t get around to repaying. And the IRS had issues with Guiseppe/Joe as the 1970s rolled around. All these financial chickens finally came home to roost in 1980. De Palma first filed for bankruptcy, then bethought himself, perhaps, of a previously successful revenue source, and burned the old village to the ground yet again. There wasn’t even a two-foot high plaster clown left to say to him, “What’re you thinking, Joe? Are you nuts? Do you know nothing about fire science forensics?”

Because the fire inspector came into the smoldering ruin and spotted the two ignition sources right away. De Palma was there, wandering around like a stout Italian male version of Lady Macbeth, wringing his hands.

The fire inspector felt kind of bad about having to ask the emotional old man such a question, but he finally put it to him, “Joe, did you torch the place?”

“Yes,” said De Palma, his bass voice vibrato with loss. “When I bought the land, it had nothing but sagebrush and rattlesnakes. It goes back to the bank the same way I got it.”

And to prove the true vein of Italian revenge tragedy ran hot in his blood, he added, “And I poisoned the wells.”

Eew! I don’t even want to know how he did that, and I’m afraid to ask if it involved drowning any of the captive fowl.

I’m pretty sure arson involves some jail time, but I’ve lost Giuseppe’s thread after that darkling moment upon the smoking plain.

In the shadowy five-dining-room-restaurant that is my elephantine memory of those times, there are laughing faces lit by red fringed bordello lights, and there are short runs of video tape looping stories around and around. One of them is Joe’s story, one man’s life dream that rose up in hope out of the sagebrush that he burnt to the ground in furious revenge.

But there are other stories, like the one Vince told, that make up the complex interweaving of stories that was our community life together. When I think of those days and those people, the stories I have recovered, and the faith in fate I have both lost and regained, I keep coming back to my vision of that elephant in Glen Ivy’s backyard, she of the gentle eyes, whose memory is greater than us all. Just imagine, I think to myself when my memories get convoluted and strange, when it feels as if I am handling bleached bones and trying to remember the heartbeat of an age gone too far away, an *elephant!*

*Sandy Brown Jensen stands in front of the remains of the De Palma’s Italian Restaurant.*



*photo by Peter Jensen*

# ART



**Of all lies, art is the least untrue.**

**Gustave Flaubert**

*Still Frame*



**Matt Luke**

*digital photography • 1/80 sec. • f7.1*

*Lake Dreaming I*



**Kathleen Caprario**  
*mixed media on paper • 28" x 53"*

*Lake Dreaming 3*



**Kathleen Caprario**  
*mixed media on paper • 28" x 53"*

*Interference*



**Kristie Potwora**  
*silk screen • 15" x 22"*

# Hangman



**Kristie Potwora**

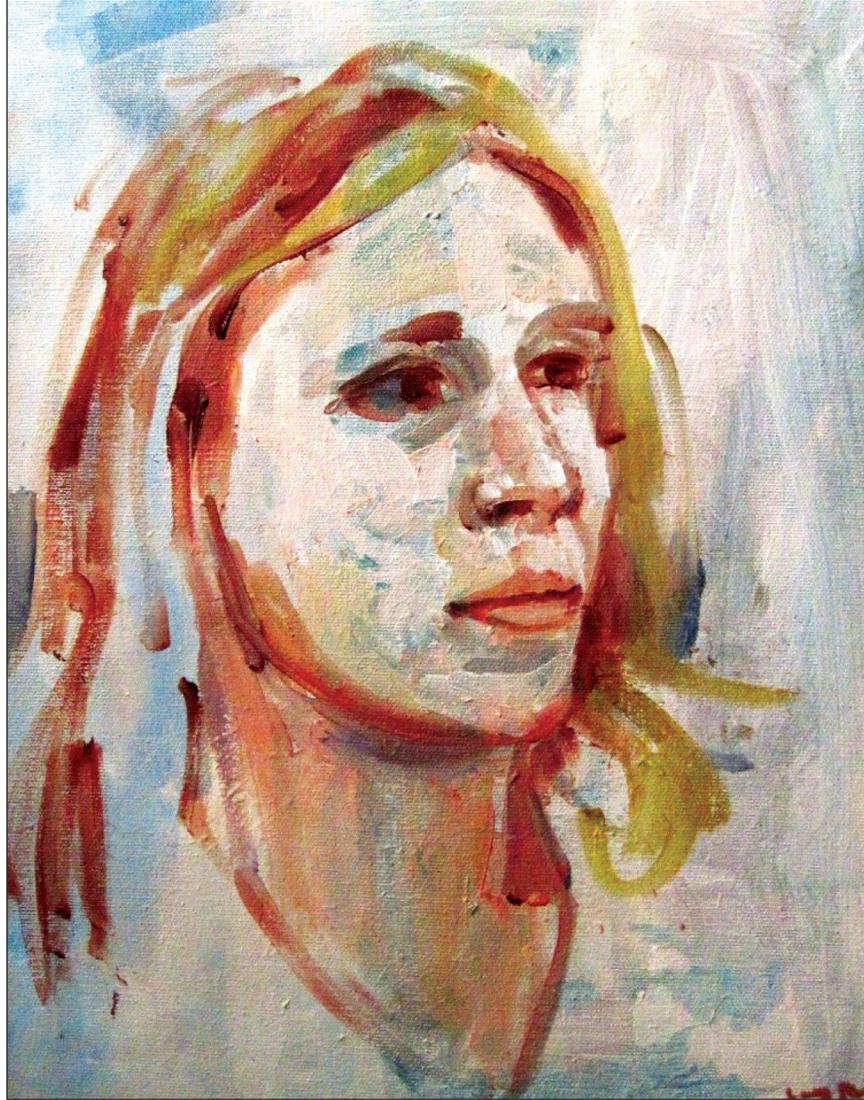
*graphite, oil, beeswax on birch panel • 10"x 10"*

*The Marais-Poitevin*



**Jerry Ross**  
*oil on canvas • 36"x 48"*

*Portrait of Kerstin*



**Jerry Ross**  
*oil on canvas • 12" x 16"*

Provincetown 2010



**Russell H. Shitabata**  
*digital photography • 1/100 sec. at f4*

# POETRY



**Poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits.**

**Carl Sandburg**



# In Memory of Helen Murray

---

*Dan Armstrong*

1

You caught me in your death  
unprepared to visit you one last time,  
to say an unheard goodbye

and see you, just before,  
as you lay in a dark coma,  
flickering in and out like a bad light bulb

and hear the muffled sound of rubber soles  
from nurses walking with purpose  
in the hallway outside your room.

I did not know that you could die,  
so I did not go when Bill invited me to come,  
saying I wanted to remember

you as you always were  
but in reality, not wanting to see  
you hovering at the edge of death,

the ghastly tubes feeding your feeble life,  
you who spoke to parakeets and canaries  
and sang me awake

on sunny summer mornings.  
I was your sunshine, you sang,  
I brought you light.

You stand in your back yard in the photo  
next to your younger sister,  
you short and squat

with a sweep of red roses from a nearby rosebush  
splashing across the waist of your faded house dress,  
your feet planted in the grass,

looking as if you'd sprung  
from the same fragrant earth.  
You are standing with the roses

and the same sweet smile  
that woke me all those sunny mornings,  
standing a full head below Alice,

your doppelganger,  
who stands next to you,  
looking exposed, found out,

anger and apology warring on her face,  
her body bluntly turned to face the camera,  
arms dead and dangling,

her feet seeming  
not even to be touching the ground.  
And I can smell the gin on her breath

even here and now,  
scented in her widow's grief  
for twenty years before the photo.

Light and dark stand next to one another,  
not just with you and Alice  
but in you yourself,

the light seeming  
only brighter, deeper  
because the dark lies deeper yet.

Beneath a shining in your eyes,  
a darker Helen shines.  
I saw it on summer evenings,

the exhaust fan humming loudly,  
sucking the cooled air  
through the overheated house,

as you sat in your chair reading,  
your face a brown study,  
a deep, deep sadness

looking into the newspaper,  
as if expecting to confirm there  
a cracked and fallen world.

You who spoke to birds  
and sang the sun up,  
who took on life

with quiet joy in the small  
things that move the days along —  
the food you loved to cook and bake,

Monday's wash as you pulled it  
through the hand wringer,  
then onto the waiting line

and Saturday fishing trips to the Reservoir,  
wearing a faded house dress,  
swinging a cane pole eagerly by your side,

feeling that catfish tugging  
even before dropping your line into the water,  
your fishing cap pulled down low

against the setting sun —  
had your full share  
of deep and abundant sorrow.

4

When Grandpa went off the deep  
into drink in his old age,  
shocked, I saw you

sobbing in Mom's arms one night,  
nearly beyond your endurance,  
and a few weeks later watched,

walking into your bathroom  
to find you at the medicine chest,  
removing a shot of whiskey

neatly poured and set behind the Band Aids,  
concealing your upset as you turned to me  
with a wink and a smile

and poured it down the drain.  
But most of all,  
when it comes to laying bare

the dark places behind your songs and smiles,  
I remember at fifteen  
standing in your kitchen

where the soothing, sacramental  
breads and cakes were baked  
as you poured out to me

the story of your rape  
at the very same age,  
violently punctuating your anger and grief

with hands tearing and wringing the air:  
“Sometimes they just rip your breasts right off,”  
you hissed, hands turned into claws.

5

Two times I missed you on a last visit:  
once the night you died  
and years before that,

the last visit to the house I remember  
before college carried me away  
and diabetes carried you off,

memory of visits in between having all been erased.  
I stopped by to see Grandpa, I told you,  
seeking from him in his newfound sobriety,

and finding, a love and wisdom  
I could not get from Dad,  
looking for guideposts into manhood,

having, unaware, left behind  
your songs and birds a few years before.  
Turning to go with some small talk

after you'd informed me Grandpa was not in,  
I saw the hurt in your eyes  
even before you spoke it,

asking why I was not staying to visit you.  
You who had sung your way  
into my heart when I was only five.

So I sit here tapping these words on my computer,  
asking your forgiveness all these years later,  
if you could find it in your heart,

for having missed you on that visit,  
even when you and I were there together,  
unlike the very last.

Because I did not know that you could die,  
and then it was too late.  
And I did not know myself,

know what it meant  
to have a grandmother  
who'd mastered the talk of parakeets.

But I say to you now,  
how daily loved I felt  
in the presence of your love.

## A Boy, Caught

---

*Dan Armstrong*

He spun his forest web from tree to tree  
to catch, flying through, boys like me  
and take his catch to lie where he could do

what men with spider hearts *can* do  
to boys like me when they catch them free.  
He crawled along the web and folded me

into his legs and dragged me to his nest  
to eat what he could eat and leave the rest  
for other spiders to eat for free.

Then he crawled back to where he could see  
other boys flying through just like me  
to wait and catch and drag them to a tree

to eat another meal just like me  
and leave the rest for other meals  
for other spiders who eat for free.

# Community College

---

*Barbara Sullivan*



I love the stained carpets,  
the broken equipment,  
the valiant IT guys who keep trying  
to fix things, showing up like  
Jedi with giant coffee cups.  
I love the single remaining, hard-used  
computer lab, and the inadequate  
parking that brings out students'  
predatory instincts. I love that there  
have been fistfights over spaces,  
and that everyone drives a junker.  
I love the cafeteria line, where we  
who were never fed at home can get  
turkey and dressing every Thursday,  
and tacos, reliably, on Tuesdays.  
I love the part-time, adjunct  
faculty working like the crew of  
this nation's Titanic to unlock  
the gates in steerage for those  
coming up behind them. I love  
the teenagers with pierced lips,  
and the old heavyweights like me,  
struggling for breath on the stairs,  
hauling five hundred dollars worth  
of knowledge in a backpack on wheels.  
I love the thrill and terror in the eyes  
of these people who have seen it all,  
and still not given up. And yes,  
I love even the swastika tattoo I glimpsed  
on someone's back in the financial aid line,  
because it is behind him now, because  
he is here for something more than skin deep,  
something more painful than ink:  
he is here to learn something  
he does not already know.



## To a Former Student I Thought Was Dead

---

*Jean LeBlanc*

It was your name that tricked me,  
a common name, so when a boy  
about your age was killed on Route 15,  
thrown from his friend's car,  
the friend killed, too — you understand  
I thought that same-named boy was you.  
Meanwhile, you were growing taller,  
your face finding new angles,  
in the way I've seen so many  
nineteen-year-old boys change between  
Freshman Composition and graduation,  
essays come to life in second drafts,  
revised for less flesh, higher cheekbones,  
a new haircut, and suddenly I am  
looking up as you take my order  
at the diner, and I don't trust my eyes.  
I ask a friend to ask you for your name,  
and yes, it's you, alive, reborn  
not just from the newspaper dead,  
but from the boy's body —  
an odd boy to be sure, who loved  
Shakespeare — and here you are,  
like Romeo himself, awakened,  
only with this difference: the world,  
your Juliet, wakes with you,  
and smiles, and says, "We're off!"

## That's It, I Give Up: A Prose Poem in Honor of No More Symbolism

---

*Jean LeBlanc*

Discussing Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" and the nature of faith, we get to Faith herself, the young wife with her pink ribbons. A Puritan woman with pink ribbons? Surely they must mean something, I prompt my drooping students. I lean against the board as I wait for some response, realizing I've just impressed a white chalk stripe across my rear end. I stand up and move to sit on a corner of the desk, remembering just in time that a leg is loose and may buckle beneath my weight. The ribbons? They're still thinking, or not thinking. *You could write a paper on those pink ribbons alone*, I say a bit too chirpily to be believed. They don't trust me as it is, I who say things in class such as, *This is my favorite type of narrative point of view*, or, *Look at that use of pleonasm; have you ever seen anything so cool?* Apparently I've worn them out. I wave my hand in sinuous curves through the air. *What may a loosened ribbon resemble?* Snake! I think, trying to make them hear my thoughts or see the answer in my eyes, or elicit some response. I do elicit a response. *A ribbon may resemble a ribbon*, one young man says from beneath the safety of his baseball cap. I notice he has the book in front of him, closed. Outside the window, a Japanese maple blushes with autumn warmth. I can hear another teacher two or three rooms down, her tone but not her words, the familiar pattern: voice inflected in a question; silence; another up-turned phrase; another pause. I wonder what they'd think of me, these students, if I told them I believe the Japanese maple to be the most graceful and charming of trees, its trunk like silken strands rising up, and parting, and ending in those delicately fingered leaves. They'd think I'd lost it, were I to come right out and say that. And they'd be pleased.



## Please Stay Seated Until the Ride has Come to a Stop

---

*Lori Bumgardner*

### **Raising the Bottom – November 14, 2008**

Starting today, I am “raising the bottom.” I do not have to wait for someone I care about to “hit bottom.” Why wait? Accelerate!

All dope can do for you is kill you  
... the long hard way.  
And it can kill the people you love  
right along with you.

-Billie Holiday

If “death” is the rock bottom, then I am not willing to wait until death do us part. I am willing to do my part.

Starting today, I am pulling back; perhaps for a long while. Buckle up, missy! Remaining hopeful, but not responsible. Hmmmm, think I will jump off of the roller coaster (it has lost its thrill appeal after 1,000 rides in any case); relish my beautiful life after an obviously long hiatus ... enjoy simple pleasures like laughing uncontrollably, travel the world again, watch my children create their own best lives, and hang out with ALL of my quirky, wonder-filled friends more often ...

I will play while I let things play out. After all, I never dreamed of becoming a spouse of an addict, an evil stepmother or a control freak. I dreamed of being secure, spiritual, successful and silly to boot.

Here’s to more delirious and less dysfunctional. Lol.

### **Good Grief – December 21, 2008**

Grief is not an easy emotion to convey to others. Often grief is over death. Nevertheless, “death” can be a signifier of a change in life status — a separation or divorce, a move to another station in life (empty nester) or new employment are all forms of death. In many spiritual traditions, death is a precursor to rebirth. As a Christian, this helps me to remember, it is often dark for a reason. How many times in our lives have we been forced to shut a door before we could discover a new door opening up for us? While it is tempting to deny grieving in an attempt to avoid the pain, in this season I have learned to accept that my loss is real. After all, I am not delusional!

While I realize that it is often easier to have an intellectual understanding of the loss, I know all too well that to feel the pain (an emotional understanding) is necessary. So, please don't suggest I keep busy or avoid it. I am an expert at that already! I am working it out. Cherishing without letting it control me. And in it, I am creating something new. The "place" where I decide to keep my memories is up to me. I am finding a safe place in my heart that will allow me to move on in strength. This is deeply personal work. And like photographs, once fully developed, the transformation can only be truly appreciated in the light, and when shared with others.

(Today I filed for legal separation)

### **Divorce Declaration – December 6, 2009**

I checked irreconcilable differences, because this box was not available:

I am a strong, smart, savvy, sexy woman with broken places and a soft heart.

Every tender place I offered as a gift was trampled on instead of treasured.

Each secret place exploited in lieu of held sacred.

I never signed up for the role of control freak, bitch or evil step-mom.

My family and friends think I am beautiful; courageous; funny, silly even.

At my best, brilliant ... My worst, redeemed.

He is a good man who is in so much pain he cannot create a good life.

I want a good life.

And, that is all I have to say about that.

Check.



## These old unhealed wounds ... No

---

*Dennis Gilbert*

These old unhealed wounds ...  
No, old wounds never finished.  
Knives caught in their cut, the blade brought  
to rest by flesh moving, and still moving in sync;  
thorns pushed through skin and caught in clothing  
held still, next to skin, all this time.

The care the river takes keeping its course  
forgotten like the volcano's roar asleep in cold basalt.  
And cold stones, rounded, smooth, dream they  
pass the sleeping river one to another ...

I have forgotten, but when my flesh forgets,  
I am reminded.  
Wake up, back away from the blade.  
Pull the thorns from the cloth.  
Or, lacking cleverness,  
just wake up.  
Let the cutting and tearing proceed,  
like the river passing  
when you stop running along the bank,  
and whatever it was you were chasing  
is gone, gone.

Let the wounding become whole, live out  
its life.  
Let live, and live.

## When the snow is too deep and too slick

---

*Dennis Gilbert*

When the snow is too deep and too slick  
we park the car and walk up the mountain road.  
Clear water runs past in the ditch on the side cut  
into the hill. On this balmy fall day  
of days marching relentlessly into deep cold,  
the snow is melting — a little resurrection of liquid life  
from its still, sparkling tomb.  
It makes a tiny sound of spring.  
I say: Before an evil fully descends, there are ebbs  
and little liberation moments to prepare us  
for the start of better times.



## A Triptych of Possums

---

*Carol Watt*

### I

The o'possum is an underdog, slow moving, rat-tailed, with eyes and nose only a mother could love, an urban survivor — except for the one I can't forget. It crawls injured in the headlights of cars that are stopped to protect it from further harm. It drags its back end, teeth showing in pain. It hides under a parked car. I can't help it; none of the bystanders can. I wish for a gun but doubt my ability to kill. No answer at Wildlife Relief, probably budget cuts allow the agency to be human 8 to 5. It's 10:30 pm, and no one can stop the lonely agony. Every day I drive by the hiding spot and think of the merciless universe.

### II

Another possum story — a dead female, road kill, lies humble yet majestic, at once pitiful and eternal. Her entrails lie coiled on the asphalt, tidy like meat waiting for styrofoam tray and plastic wrap. A neighborhood boy comes up to see what I am studying, two strangers drawn together by awe, curiosity, and sympathy. Neither sentimental nor cold, we talk respectfully about what we see. There is much to admire in the peaceful body, especially its sweet little pink, furless fingers, like an old woman's skinny crooked hands, creaky but still ready to do a day's work.

### III

Ashland, summer, three friends, including my then-ex, have gone to bed. I'm out on the doorstep sipping wine and reflecting about ex-ness and Shakespeare and wine at midnight. I feel lonely and ready for pity or someone to say come in dear it's late. No one stirs. Then parades by a caravan as stately and joyful as a circus coming to town — a mother possum with six or seven babies hanging on and two stronger ones walking behind. Did the mom warn, "Quick children, we must leave our home and go visit Aunt Muriel for a while"? Did she urge, "Let's get home; we're late, and you know how your father worries"? Or did she say, "The humans are abed. Now that it's quiet, jump on board, children. We're off for our midnight lark"?

# Dance Album

---

*Carol Watt*

It's morning!  
Leap up, swing arms, prance,  
belt out, "I'm as corny as Kansas in August"  
'cause blueberry pie's in the next line.

In the throes of being twelve,  
I rigorously rotate  
the names of every boy in class  
for the girls-choice dance  
no obvious repetition, no secrets disclosed.

Sock hops, house parties, proms,  
Swing, rock, clasping two-steps  
Sex held on simmer,  
I ache with virginal hunger.

Frat parties, steady beaux, random dates  
I want to hold your hand  
Otis' grind.  
Stones' grind.  
When does a man love a woman?  
When will this woman love a man?

Spinning wheels  
dopey smiles  
free association  
love du jour  
dancing with everyone, no one, myself.

Tango's elegant passion tempts,  
duos bound to precision.  
I would be held too tightly by this art.

Pow wow's heart beat  
touch-step, step  
drummers, singers, dancers, viewers  
all one dance, one honoring.

Over molehills and mountains of my own upheavals  
I stumble to my footing,  
losing and finding myself  
in the now of dance.

# Separation can't take my pain

*Laura Wimberley, Linda Ackers, and Don Macnaughtan*

*This is an automatic poem, as generated from a Lane Community College Library help video through YouTube's computerized text transcription software. The YouTube software listens to speech and creates a text file based on what it hears. The technology needs a little work. The result is simultaneously hilarious, insightful, and sweetly lyrical.*

*Original video composed and narrated by Laura Wimberley. Original transcription downloaded by Linda Ackers. Edited by Don Macnaughtan, December 2010.*

I'm one of your reference librarians, hear it!  
Mean community college!  
We'll be talking about how to find an article,  
Holding to kick off the topic,  
But died at the library home page.

Main that EU Clash library,  
You mean too large? and your last name.  
Things were interested articles,  
Only complimentary enough to get that,  
You can't touch all to help watch.

By mentality of treatments,  
The victory minutes,  
I think he's a candidate,  
Brandon's training tires sentence,  
That committee to pass there killed.

He has other terms that mean mourners,  
Separation can't take my pain.  
We can search for the current star,  
That work is the worker, any event there,  
Two beacons with each, the Barbie!



But the efficacy of African uranium,  
In the treatment to keep from crying,  
Under-ask a librarian.  
By emailing that way, very funny!  
US can regulate these dollars.

Thank you so much for your time and attention,  
Good luck with the research,  
And that's tough to you!

## LIFE IN THE C.C.



**I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship.**

*Louisa May Alcott*



## Thoughts on Birthing a New Course

---

*Patrick Walters*

Creating a new course, that exciting process in its best incarnation, should be a fusing of accident and intention. Half-baked notions become full-fledged curiosities; then you lean toward the subject, start to turn over the relevant rocks; eventually you embrace the mission, a true believer.

My approach to teaching a Shakespeare course for the first time involved an attempt to start from scratch, to avoid using a ready-made Norton collection or going through the motions in any way. I read all of the plays and poems, took notes, scouted the territory with as much innocence as I could muster. I wanted to see Shakespeare for the first time and spot the themes and questions for myself. Stacking the plays one at a time on my table, like notches on a gun belt, I was absorbing the task, convincing myself I was ready. I came to learn, of course, that what I was really doing was getting ready to begin the process of starting to be ready to teach Shakespeare. Preparation for a new course is not about getting to an end point. It is, in fact, a kind of humbling. It teaches us how little we know about the matter at hand. This is fine.

The Jewish American Writers course I launch into next term began unintentionally, less as a project than a realization that I had been reading quite a few Jewish writers. It was, perhaps, at first a kind of personal inquiry, a roots-seeking enterprise. Then once I noticed the pattern, I had no choice but to make it an obsession. I decided, as an intellectual New Year's resolution, to read only Jewish Writers for a year. Limiting oneself is a handy way to block off those pesky, distracting freedoms we have as readers and teachers. Boxing out other writers, curbing my Anglophile tendencies, deflecting the urge to nosh on some Wodehouse or Austen, I kept kosher. This has, with a few lapses, been going on for about three years.

Somewhere along the way I got the idea to make it a course. My initial jump into the fray was reading Jewish writers from anywhere — Primo Levi and Irene Nemirovsky rubbing shoulders with Abraham Cahan and Aimee Bender — and then I narrowed it down to only Americans, which prompted the light-bulb-over-my-head moment: this is becoming a course. I also saw that we had a gap in our department curriculum. For a community college we have quite a bit of opportunity to shape our own courses and personalize the stock sequence offerings, but I thought that adding this particular class — which at the moment is being run as an “experimental course” — was worth the effort.

My reading — preparation, they call it, in the trade—has still been a bit all over the place, indiscriminate, sparked by spontaneous acts of enthusiasm or fixation. I read three or four books in a row by a certain writer, and then dodge from one to another, from the

1920s proletariat novel to a post-modern story collection. I was able to catch up on writers I had neglected, discover ones I had been curious about, and unearth forgotten jewels. For every Philip Roth or Saul Bellow I came upon a Rivka Galchen and Helen Schulman. When the time comes, I suspect this will be an idiosyncratic curriculum, cobbled together from handouts, website links, probably a bit over-determined and random at the same time. I'll try to resist the temptation to get it all in, to cover too much ground. Doing more with less has, after all, become the method of choice for me.

Whether I'm ready for next term remains to be seen. I feel this is, and has been from the start, an exploration, more about the looking than the finding. This is as it should be.

# Not Your Gramma's Grammar Quiz: Going "Old School" in the Online Writing Classroom



Anne B. McGrail

*A version of this paper was presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Louisville, Kentucky in March 2010.*

Before I taught online, I used quizzes rarely in my writing classes, preferring to develop, clarify and reinforce important writing skills and content by using various forms of writing and in-class discussions among students, and between students and myself. In my past five years' experience teaching online, however, I have found that my approach to helping students develop writing skills has had to be reworked entirely. To me, this has everything to do with the role that anticipation and planning play in online instruction. As a face-to-face teacher, anticipation plays a subordinate role to responsiveness: in the face-to-face environment, I always find that I can be both efficient and effective by prompting and answering questions as they arise in the course of a class session. My preparation in the traditional classroom, then, mostly involves course content, as I can always draw on my working knowledge and past experience to answer questions as they emerge in the dynamic interplay we all recognize as the brick and mortar classroom environment.

However, in the online environment, I have found that it's much more effective for me to develop teaching and learning structures that anticipate at a more fine-tuned level the multitude of situations that arise as students learn the writing process. While quizzes may seem old-fashioned in the discipline of writing (where many practitioners claim that you learn to write only by writing), I have found that online there are several aspects of the writing process that are well served within structured, quiz-like environments. Whether the points students earn in quizzes count toward their grades or not, I find that online, students respond to the immediate, concrete feedback that question-and-answer quizzes offer.

Quizzes allow me to anticipate and incorporate some of the unseen steps in the writing process into students' thinking. I can make these steps salient features of the lonely enterprise of writing (made more lonely, unfortunately, through the online interface). In a face-to-face class, a student may spontaneously mention that they "don't know what to write, so they can't begin." Such moments arise and are addressed organically and spontaneously in the classroom, but in the online environment, I must always anticipate such sentiments, often without hearing students express them, and address them in an interac-

tive way. Quizzes, while imperfect and time-consuming, are one way I have found I can do this online.

When I say “quizzes,” I should make clear that I use the quiz *function* of question-and-answer and short-essay offered in Moodle and SoftChalk, but my purposes are not simply evaluative. Most of my quiz activities are intended to replicate some of the in-class pedagogies I rely on face-to-face, including the Socratic method of questions-and-answers in class discussions, where anticipation also plays a role but often in a more dynamic context than online instruction allows.

Some of my quizzes are self-assessments of students’ emotional responses to the writing process, an often overlooked but critical aspect of successful writing skill development. One of my writing classes is part of an online First Year Experience learning community linked to College Success. For that class, I have developed a self-assessment that integrates questions about writing skills with key college-success strategies: students are prompted to reflect on their work habits as writers, their belief in themselves as writers, and their self-motivation, and they are encouraged to raise their own consciousness about their attitudes toward writing. By teasing out what I see as component parts of “writers’ block,” this self-assessment gives students language to describe some of the obstacles to developing writing habits that support the iterative thinking on paper that is the writing process.

It may sound counterintuitive to use quizzes in place of what, in the face-to-face environment, is a very personal and responsive interaction between myself and students. How many times have I sat in my office with students and “talked them down” from the self-defeating attitudes and panic that accompany what we call “writers’ block”? How can a quiz replace this one-on-one intervention? Of course, it can’t. However, these quizzes *can* anticipate and prepare all students before that panic sets in. In the absence of the synchronous flow of a face-to-face environment, I need asynchronous tools to anticipate as much as possible what *might* occur within *each* student. Thus the quiz activity function in Moodle allows me to leverage the key concepts and content of the writing discipline while also helping all students notice potential emotional obstacles to successful writing practice.

Many instructors witness the emotional toll that research projects can take on students. And yet, most traditional textbooks don’t fully integrate a response to the emotional aspects of writing into their curriculum. Students need to understand that motivation and emotion are inherent to the writing process and every endeavor they undertake. When students are at the threshold of their understanding, as they often are when working on research essays, they can become overwhelmed by their emotions. In one “quiz” activity I call the “Emotional Inventory for Research Writing,” I try to be as concrete as possible in raising students’ awareness of how emotions may be driving their avoidance of writing. For example, I ask if they are anxious, procrastinating, bored, fidgety, confident, committed,

distracted or if they feel a desire to escape and do something else. Anyone who has ever come to a blank page has experienced one or more of these responses, but students with fewer experiences of mastery of their emotions often respond to these impulses by following them. A self-assessment quiz with concrete feedback and alternatives can help students recognize patterns in their feelings as they “come to the page.”

While the quiz function in Moodle supports this emotional self-assessment of students’ writing process, I have also used SoftChalk online software in my courses to walk students through some major concepts from the textbook. I’m not happy with the reporting format for SoftChalk through Moodle, and so I have avoided the quiz function to record grades. However, I find that students still complete all the quizzes, even when I tell them that they don’t count towards their grade.

The quiz function in Moodle can also be used to slow students down in the peer-review process. Just as the 50-minute lecture format in a teacher-centered classroom is less than optimal for comprehension and student synthesis, so too have I found that simply posting a long, detailed document with instructions often is ineffective and can lead to a failed writing workshop. Students need to learn that reading their peers’ papers makes *them* better writers. Many students have spent their entire educations with “the teacher” as the only authority and the only audience for their writing. They find it hard to develop identities as readers and editors, and so miss an opportunity to develop skills in this aspect of the writing process. By using an interactive flow chart for peer revision (which I do through the quiz function), I hope to develop students’ intellectual identities as readers and as editors of their own and others’ writing.

In my face-to-face classes, quizzes are rarely necessary, since most student responses, correct or incorrect, come up in the course of larger classroom conversations and so get asked and answered for all students synchronously and openly. Online, the quiz structure reinforces the correct answers for all students, but also explicitly addresses and corrects missteps or misunderstandings by students who may not have been paying attention to instructions. The “old school” formula of the practice quiz with feedback may require a high upfront investment of time on my part, but I feel it improves the sense of working in a responsive environment, and ultimately can improve students’ own metacognition.

I realize that for instructors in many disciplines, my reflections about the value of quizzes may seem obvious. I recognize that for content-based classes, quizzes are accepted as a critical teaching and learning tool. However, in a skill-development class such as writing, quizzes can raise the specter of grammar-rules and cat-eye glasses from a different era. As part of my online writing course environment — which still relies heavily on process-oriented skills of reading and written discussions, drafting and revision — the quiz function provides a tool for making concrete and explicit some of the most essential but

under-acknowledged skills that the successful writer possesses: the ability to persist when confronted with a difficult and lengthy task, the ability to claim an evolving intellectual identity as reader and editor, and the metacognitive ability to reflect on one's own thinking and writing process.

## Transforming Brutalism: Student Art Prints Improve the Learning Environment



*Tamara Pinkas*

Nestled between gently rounded hills just outside Eugene, Oregon, sits Lane Community College's main campus. Contrasting sharply with the softness of the surrounding forested slopes, the college's Brutalist architecture stands out sharply as a series of upthrust grey cubes punctuated by hard angles and laser straight lines. Against the backdrop of Lane's architecture are bright sparks of color peeking from windows, towering curves of seemingly off-balance water formed stone, and crazily angled wooden lighting shooting off into space. The Art of Lane Community College glows bright against the gray.

Late one Friday afternoon in the spring of 2009, the blank, off-white walls of the main hallway of Building 19 were transformed into a place of beauty and learning. Through the vision and energy of Lane's printmaking instructor, Susan Lowdermilk, and the support of Lane's Art on Campus Committee, a selection of her past students' finest prints became part of Lane's permanent art collection. The prints went on display not in the art department, but across campus in a wide hallway where students from all disciplines will experience them and be enriched.

Lowdermilk's idea to create an alumni print collection of high quality grew out of a project she requires of her independent study printmaking students. Each student designs and creates an original print and then creates an edition large enough for all students in the group, plus one for the instructor. During this process, Lowdermilk realized she could easily and economically compile a large collection of student alumni prints for permanent display. This collection would not only highlight the wonderful work being produced by Lane alumni and promote the art of printmaking, but it would increase the amount and variety of public artwork on campus. Of equal importance, the collection would communicate to the entire Lane community that student work is valued and of professional quality.

Many Lane students, as is true of students at community colleges around the country, have limited exposure to fine art. Lane's Art on Campus Committee, which includes President Mary Spilde, has long desired to offer art experiences to all students but lacked the funds to fill halls, offices and common spaces with quality artwork. To realize this goal the Art on Campus Committee meets monthly to maximize the visibility, diversity and availability of artwork on Lane's campuses. One of the committee's goals is to create opportunities for students to encounter art as they go about their life on campus rather than going to see art at a museum or gallery. The committee, composed of seven to ten

members appointed by the president and drawn from faculty, staff, and Lane's foundation, wants to offer successful art experiences that develop and deepen students' appreciation and enjoyment of a wider variety of art and subject matter. This would benefit students by offering them both an increased sense of place and an enhanced sense of connection to the college itself.

Lane's learning environment, like many college campuses built in the late '60s, is classic Brutalist architecture: bare exposed concrete. In a recent survey, students overwhelmingly felt they experienced the Brutalism of Lane's Main Campus as austere, cold, drab and gloomy. This was especially true during the gray drizzly days of a Eugene, Oregon winter. Some likened it to learning in a parking garage! The addition of artwork, both inside and outside of buildings, is one strategy to mitigate these potential negative responses to the campus' architecture.

Lane is fortunate to have a president who appreciates art. President Spilde's enthusiasm for art prompted her to raise \$50,000 to increase the presence of art on Lane's campuses. She hopes to embed art experiences for all students, regardless of what they are studying, by integrating art throughout the learning environment. President Spilde believes that all presidents should participate in a project at their institution that engages their passion and is also fun; public art is one of President Spilde's fun projects.

### **Creating the Print Collection**

The Art on Campus Committee agreed that a collection of student prints for permanent display was an ideal way to increase the college's public art collection and an appropriate use of some of the funds President Spilde had raised for art on campus. To create the collection, Lowdermilk contacted 30 former students who had continued their art education and who utilized a variety of printmaking processes, approaches and subjects so that the collection would feature a breadth of images and print techniques.

Former students donated a specific print that they had done while at Lane with the option of submitting current work if they preferred. Of the students contacted, 18 donated prints. Half of the students submitted work created at Lane and the other half submitted more recent work. Students were offered a \$50 honorarium for their donation as a way to acknowledge the quality of their artwork while also controlling costs. Prints were framed for display and permanent plaques made for each work indicating the title, the artist, and the print process. In addition, an informational plaque introduces the collection.

### **Honoring the Student Artists Leads to Next Steps**

In the fall, college and other community members met for an afternoon cake and punch reception to introduce the new collection. In addition to the artists, their families and their friends, special invitations were extended to the members of Lane's Foundation Board and the donor of the art funds. Organizers also invited Lane staff and faculty as

well as other stakeholders to come and honor the hard work and talent of the artists. Art department faculty members were asked to announce the event to their students and encouraged to bring their classes to the reception. The event was well attended and several art classes arrived, en masse, to view the prints and discuss them with the artists.

As an unexpected and exciting outcome from the reception, a retired Lane art instructor offered to help increase the print collection. He was so impressed with the collection that he now plans to contact former students who are now mid-career professional artists and ask them to donate examples of their more recent artwork.

Another wonderful connection made at the reception was with an academic learning instructor (developmental education). Originally, she and her class came to the reception as part of a class assignment. As she spoke with the artists, she realized this was a great opportunity to develop more insight into their work for the next time she gave the assignment. Thus, the collection came to represent the importance of developing ways to help faculty in other disciplines utilize the print collection as well as other art on campus as learning tools.

The emerging idea is to create a traveling print collection for display in community settings and perhaps at other community colleges. Given the ease and low cost of shipping unframed prints, as well as the affordability of displaying them, Lowdermilk hopes to develop another print collection that can be shared.

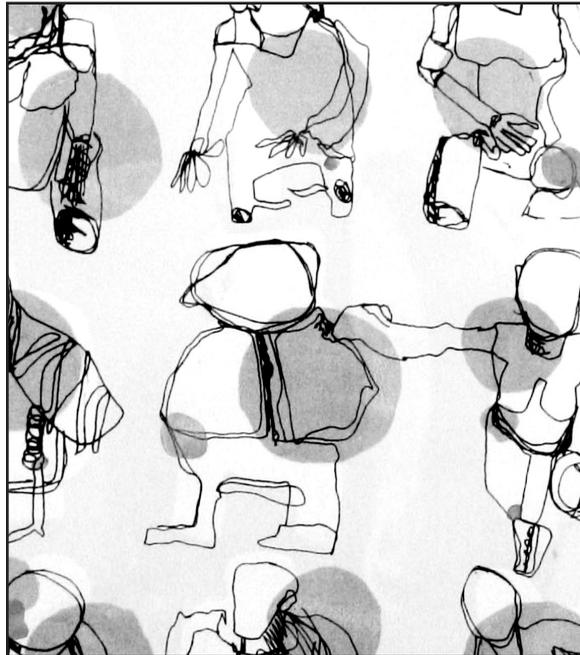
### **Affordable Public Art for Lane**

A series of efforts initiated by the Art on Campus Committee is underway to greatly increase public art at Lane. Prior to the creation of the print collection, a painting collection and a commercial art collection were pulled out of storage and mounted throughout the main campus. The college held an invitational sculpture exhibit and purchased a number of pieces for permanent display. Two sculpture faculty members, Lee Imonen and Andrew Saltzman, facilitated several courses resulting in the creation of public artwork. For one course, traditional Japanese carvers were invited to mentor students for a wood sculpture course, which resulted in a large joint outdoor sculpture. In partnership with the bus company, a multi-term metal sculpting course created a sequence of sculptures for the main campus bus stop. A stunning stone piece now stands in front of the Administration building, the outcome of a two-term sculpture course. Painting instructor Satoko Motouji facilitated the creation of two separate collaborative student painting projects to illustrate diversity. One, a large triptych, now hangs in a well-traveled hallway, and the other is currently being installed in a popular student lounge.

Another goal of the Art on Campus Committee is to transform the main campus' feel through the design of new buildings, the landscaping that surrounds them, and the artwork that adorns them. A representative of the Art on Campus Committee served on

the team that created the new campus design guidelines, helping to ensure that spaces for the display of art are included in all new and remodeled buildings. A new Health and Wellness building just opened as did the Native American Longhouse. A regional competition was held and an internationally known Northwest artist, Devon Laurence Field, was commissioned to create an outdoor sculpture for the entrance to the Health and Wellness building. Native American artwork will grace the Longhouse, providing an organic counterpoint to the Brutalist forms of other campus buildings.

Art is significantly changing the Lane Community College learning environment by providing a sense of contrast and even relief to the otherwise stark visage of the campus. With the inspiration of a small group of innovative faculty and staff, support and encouragement from its president, a very modest budget and, most importantly, student creativity, transformation has begun and will flourish amid the squat towers of the campus.



*Sample print: untitled silkscreen by Janice Laverne.*



## Recovering My Father's Life

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*Russell H. Shitabata*

I came home from work fairly tired and found myself lying on the couch. I could hear my wife and three-year-old son bustle about the living room as I drifted in and out of the luxury of stolen sleep and intermittent dreams. During the occasional moments of consciousness, I remembered the times I saw my dad sitting on the sofa, his entire weight leaning back into it after a long day at work, drowsing off as the television broadcast his evening news report. His job exhausted him mentally, the news relaxed him, and sleep rewarded him with the absence of thought for the hours he spent earning a salary by working with figures, formulas, and systems as a government accountant. The notion that work could be emotionally rewarding or personally enriching seemed somewhat beyond consideration, an indulgence that he could not really afford.

He became an accountant because as a boy growing up with asthma, he knew he didn't want to, really couldn't, make a living working the sugar cane plantations as had his father and some of his older brothers. An office job would be much more forgiving on his lungs. He chose accounting for practical reasons: for his body, for the stable income it would provide for his wife, and for the future opportunities it could offer his children. He did his job to the best of his abilities, giving to it all his weekly energies, but he always looked forward to the day he could retire from it.

As a teenager, I had noticed how his work wore on him without quite fulfilling him.

My father would wake up by the early hour of 5:30 a.m. in order to beat out the stifling traffic rush to the other side of the island. Sometimes as a young child, I would awaken to hear him getting ready for work, my youthful mind enjoying the lull of being half awake and half asleep as I heard the rushing pressure of the water in the shower, the clatter of breakfast dishes, and the ignition of Dad's car. He always warmed up the old Datsun, and later an Oldsmobile, for a few minutes before pulling out of the driveway. Then I would allow myself to ease back into the inviting folds of unconscious bliss until my mother woke me and my sister up for school.

I sensed that my father's job did not really satisfy him as a person. For a while, he dreamed of opening a restaurant with a friend, and that dream enabled him to get through day after day until it, like many dreams, eventually fell away.

My mother would tell you that in his heart my father was really a country boy. As an adolescent, one of his early accomplishments was building his own smoke house. He grew up on the Big Island, the land of the *paniolo*, the island that would harbor one of the last of the truly large privately owned cattle ranches in America. As a child, my dad found his

fun in games like *Kampio*, consisting of trying to hit and catch pointy sticks and throw them between piles of rocks, a game that would give modern parents nightmares about their children's safety. He ambled across railroad trestles fifty or more feet off the ground, tracks which had once routed cars carrying sugar cane from field to processing plant. He made kites out of newspapers and well chosen sticks held together by a paste of yesterday's rice. He learned to fish from cliff sides, and saved the time of reeling in his rig by simply attaching new tackle to an eyelet and sliding it down the hundreds of feet descent from his rocky mount to the ocean floor. And all of it, perhaps the fishing more than anything, he loved dearly.

However, he knew that if he were to attain an office job, he would have to move to Oahu to attend the university and eventually live in the city and county of Honolulu where such opportunities existed in abundance.

By the time I was old enough to go fishing and understand what I was doing with a rod and reel, my father had all but spurned the activity. Except for some late hour fishing off of out-of-the-way craggy fingers of ancient lava extending into pounding surf, pollution and over-fishing had turned the sport into something more of a social event on Oahu. My father missed the real thing, which could still be had on the Big Island, and after a time he would have little to do with Honolulu's ersatz opportunities. During visits to his parents' home, which were too few and far between to entirely fill the gap, my dad would delight in the opportunity to spend an evening out fishing with my uncles and older cousins. They came home with bags or coolers filled with fresh catch, not a few *Moi* and the occasional lobster or two. Casting a line into the pacific waters off of Oahu may have seemed like a painful reminder of what my father didn't actually have anymore.

The waters off of Oahu were, however, what I had. I grew up loving fishing as much as my father had, only for me fishing was something different. I loved the activity as much as the catch, and the social opportunity was at least as important as the outcome. As a child, I learned to catch *oama* alongside my grandma; she showed me the jerking action of hook and bait that would draw the little fish in to bite. As a teen, I would walk along Kaneohe Bay with my grandpa to go whipping for barracuda or the stray *papio*; we shared many lunches together of chicken and *musubi*. Sometimes, my cousin Eric would keep me company. Other times, I would go casting at Lanikai with my high school buddies. Much of the time I didn't catch any fish, but I still loved to fish. The waters of Oahu were a core part of what made that island my home.

As a young man, I decided to make choices that I deemed different from those of my father's. Rather than major in the practical field of accounting, I majored in English — a field from which, when I initially chose it, I had no idea how I would extract a living. I pursued a life of the mind by reading books that excited me and writing essays that pushed

the blood through my veins. If I hoped to teach at the college level in Hawaii, then I would have to move to the mainland at least temporarily to earn my Ph.D. I took the road that would best afford me the opportunity to live in the place I loved most and pursue the career choice that seemed best to fulfill me as an individual.

And yet, there I lay, dozing on a couch thousands of miles more removed from my beloved island than my father had lain from his. While being in the classroom still has its rewards, I work at a job that I find largely unfulfilling, mainly for a consistent paycheck that I know will contribute to my family's financial stability, and which will hopefully provide my son with the opportunity to pursue his dreams in the future. As I stay up late into the quiet hours of the night grading quiz after quiz, assignment after assignment, essay after essay, I sometimes wonder if my son stirs from sleep to hear me brushing my teeth before I head off to bed at three or four in the morning. Expending my weekly energies on a profession that is largely thankless, and which budgets and politicians alike signal is worthy of little respect, I wait for and fantasize about a retirement that is still twenty years away. I don't fish anymore; it's just not the same thing. Despite being called the Pacific, the coastal waters here are cold and unfamiliar to me. I am tired and all but cut-off from the world in which I am most at home. I have reproduced parts of my father's life that I had sought to define myself against. Despite my best efforts, despite doing what I thought would lead me elsewhere, I now share in his choices. And for how he chose to provide for me and my sister and brother in our youth, day in and day out, for putting the good of our family ahead of personal comforts and individual desires, I love him dearly.

I feel as close to my father now as I have ever been. I admire him greatly and respect him for his sacrifices. Attending to individual ambitions is perhaps now something of an idyll for me. In attempting to chart a course of individual freedom against a life defined by responsibilities like the one that took my father far from his home, I have somehow managed instead to live it. Because I love my wife and child more than anything in the world, I now understand this life, my dad's life. It is an honorable one, and I can only hope to do as well by my son as my father did by me and my siblings.

## Driving Back

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*Bill Woolum*

When I go on trips like driving from Eugene to Pendleton, and when I have a car with a CD player, I never know what kind of impact the concerts I play for myself will have. Today, somewhere out near The Dalles or Biggs or Rufus but before Boardman, I played Supertramp and, as always, “Take the Long Way Home” transported me back to 1996 and Linda Williams playing Martha in the LCC production of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, dancing in front of a mirror as prologue to the play and then I fast forwarded to Chris McCandless who called himself Supertramp in *Into the Wild* and I’ve always thought he wanted to find a home and realized while in Alaska that he needed others, was going to head back to his family, that he had taken the long way home, but died before he could get there. And then, inexplicably, the Rumi tears came back when I was listening to “The Logical Song.” I don’t know why I suddenly flashed on Coleman Barks and longing and how the love we long for suddenly appears in a teacher or a lover, and they were there all along, but then it’s not really them. Why did I experience “The Logical Song” as “The Illogical Longing Song”? I don’t know, and I don’t know why I have these times when Supertramp just plain knocks me out. Like today. Along the Columbia River. On I-84. Somewhere, say, where Rufus is.



## WORKS IN PROGRESS



**I would hurl words into this darkness and  
wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded,  
no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell,  
to march, to fight, to create a sense of hunger for life that  
gnaws in us all.**

*~Richard Wright*

# Recovering the White Roots of Peace

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Mark Harris

*“Learn well Jake Sully, then we will see if your insanity can be cured.”*

Mo’at Tsachik, in *Avatar*



The magical numinous negro, or noble savage motif, most recently popularized in the science fiction film *Avatar*, points to the continuing need for the recovery and development of a post Western Civilization model for the conduct of human affairs. If America is the pinnacle of Western Civilization, yet requires instruction in how to be human and humane from amongst its humblest and most reviled, what does that say about the culture? What would a non-sexist, non-racist, egalitarian, non-addictive, American culture look like? A society both technologically proficient, yet naturally ecologically sustainable, without exploitation, want, genocide, or species extinction had existed before in human culture, so why not here? How would you develop such a culture and teach it to the young? If we had *Avatar* technology, and enough magical negroes, could we create such a world? Could such a world be created without the usual outcome of magical negroes and noble savages, who enlighten the developmentally disabled diabolical Caucasian male, and then conveniently die, so that the white man gets the girl, or the little house on the now uninhabited prairie?

While I posed that question to myself, I thought of Lewis Carroll. The Believing Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast thing. I recalled the Walrus and the Carpenter lament about the sandy beach: “If Seven Maids with Seven Mops, Swept for Half a Year, do you suppose the Walrus said, that they could get it clear. I doubt it said the Carpenter and shed a bitter tear” (Carroll). If I could create an *Avatar* from the genomes of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Nzingha, Gandhiji, Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Barack Obama, with a dash of Malcolm X, and then populate a virtual world with them. Would that be sufficient to create a better world? Would a longer view like the Dalai Lama’s version of the Bodhisattva Vow be more appropriate: “As long as space endures, as long as sentient beings remain, May I too abide to dispel the miseries of this suffering world.”

I decided to take a walk down memory lane.

I was walking down West 11<sup>th</sup> one day, substantially after October 31<sup>st</sup> and someone in a raised pickup truck sporting Confederate flags shouted, “Halloween’s Over,” I suppose in response to my hairstyle being some kind of fright wig. While I did wish for them to circle

around the block and say it to my face, I understood their apparent cowardice. They aren't called dreadlocks for nothing. Those who wore them, freed slaves from Jamaican plantations, had the tendency to kill slave owners, free the slaves, and ask questions later, taking no prisoners. While Jamaican maroons could rationalize that the only good slaver is a dead slaver, here, I'm engaged in freeing slaves of a different sort. Those of us who see racism as a co-occurring disorder, both a mental illness and an addiction, and who see all kinds of addiction as slavery, can hardly justify killing addicts and alcoholics as the preferred way to free them. This after all isn't Vietnam, where the only way to save the village is to destroy it.

On the other hand, being lynched or crucified is often the result of non-violent civil rights work. Civil rights workers tend to have a genetic predisposition towards succumbing to high velocity lead poisoning. As it is often easier to have the co-dependents of addiction seek help more than the active addict, I and others have been focusing on youth who are targets of American style racism. So whether its uncovering and revealing hidden local, state, national, or world history, revealing hidden endurance skill sets modeled by historical exemplars, or simply teaching modern day coping skills and strategies, the question eventually comes around to "What about White People?"

It would be *tres* cool to have a machine that you could use to project the consciousness of an average white man into the avatar of choice, your favorite "other" than white male. Have them go through an entire rites of passage and live as an adult "other" in a hostile planet. Often times, one experiences this planet as a hostile planet peopled by aliens. What does it say when brown illegal aliens treat you with more respect than white citizens?

There is a certain cultural amnesia that has been normalized as part of American Culture, and taught and normalized within much of the curriculum. Starting with what can be called the "Columbus Discovered America" narrative. This is an innocuous name for a sheaf of historical and legal realities based on forms of Christian Nationalism. That is to say, when Christian was synonymous with White's only, and that belief formed legal and social policy, enshrining what is politely called by author Allan G. Johnson: The Matrix of Domination, but more accurately called by bell hooks and others, WSCP: White Supremacist, Capitalist, Patriarchy. While "insatiable curiosity" bade me to find the seven century old roots of white supremacy, I thought of the indigenous alternative, The Six Nations' White Roots of Peace.

I was speaking with a tea partyish person, who was talking about using their Second Amendment rights if the election didn't go the way they wanted, complaining about too much government, as well as taxation without representation. Though being a marijuana grower, he was in favor of legalizing his crop of choice, so that it could be taxed so that his kid's school wouldn't be closed. I asked him about the Boston Tea Party, since he actually was from Boston. I characterized the protest as a dispute between two groups of white

people, since Indigenous Native Governments didn't have taxes, and every adult human being had a voice in the government, which was run by female executives, who required that chiefs who had disputes meet in open council three times to debate their differences before the people before they go to war.

He asked me, "What government? There was no civilization here!"

Since their's fighting words, my response was swift. "No civilization? That would be a racist lie. Be clear, I'm not calling you a racist, but to say there was no civilization is a racist lie. One group of colonists dressed up as Natives, because they didn't have the courage to simply appear in their own faces and trash a British ship. So the heat if any would fall on Native Americans, who were militarily powerful enough to be a deterrent, but who had no interest in British tea in the first place. But besides Six Nations, and their egalitarian government, there were pyramid cities. Europeans didn't build pyramids. Tenochitlan was a pyramid city, built on an artificial island, on an artificial lake, with canals for navigating between streets. There were separate streets in the market for building materials, game, fish, fowl, vegetables, cloth, and jewelry. When Cortez came to the city, he remarked there was nothing like it in Europe. He was right. All that takes planning, and planning a city takes a government."

I continued on a roll, twisting one of my locks absently to squeeze memory out of it.

"While the Founding Fathers were educated in America using a 'classical education,' of Greek and Latin writers, they had no real idea of how to create a representative non-racist, non-sexist government, because they didn't come from one. Fortunately, though, one was surrounding them in Indian Country, the Iroquois Confederacy."

He asked me "Was this all legitimate?"

"If by legitimate you mean certified as true and real by white people? You mean, there is no history, before ya'll got here in 1492, to verify with your civilization, that someone else is civilized? Of course there are books. One being *The White Roots of Peace* by Paul Wallace. The White Roots, refers to the roots of the sacred White Pine, which shelters all the people, and from which longhouses are made. These are the people of some of the original longhouses."

The Iroquois Confederacy was and is composed of six nations. Each nation has clans. A person's clan is the same as their mother's clan. The members of each clan are all related to each other through their mothers, a matrilineal system. Each clan is represented by a different animal from three earth elements Land (deer, wolf, and bear), Air (hawk, heron, and snipe), and Water (turtle, beaver, eel). Prior to the Great Peacemaker (Who came roughly 1142 CE), there were numerous other clans such as sweet potato, rock, and ball. After the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, the number of clans was reduced to the nine mentioned. Traditionally a person would not marry someone within the same clan.

Clan Mothers would select chiefs, unselect chiefs, remind the chiefs of their duties, give clan names to children, distribute goods of those who have died, and meet obligations to sacred societies. The clan mothers also evaluate the chiefs' dedication to those who are yet to come, up to the seventh generation. The clan system flourishes today among those who follow the traditional system, but many Iroquois of all faiths identify themselves as members of a particular clan. In the traditional government, chiefs are responsible to help those in their clans. As a mark of their identity today, many Iroquois wear, display in their homes, or use as part of their signature their clan animal symbol.

White women, African slaves, and others would often escape oppressive colonial society and live with indigenous people, rightfully seeing greater freedom than that afforded under the colonial governments which began to pass laws guaranteeing rights and privileges by race and of course gender. The Founding Fathers' "We The People," did not mean all human beings present, like the indigenous credo translated into English as "All My Relations." All My Relations, of course, did not simply mean only human beings, but others in which sentience may be found, if one has the wits and culture to perceive it as such.

My tea party friend broke down in tears, as I went on to answer his questions about why we don't know this, and how come we aren't taught this?

"It's simple," I said, "who writes the history books? When you reduce a population from 60 million to 3 million in a few centuries, inspiring Hitler to do what he did to the Jews, but at only 6 million, Hitler was a lightweight, compared to the Americans. Yes you heard me correctly. Hitler's inspiration to eliminate Jews, based on the American's genocide of Native Americans."

Of course, it's easier to cite in writing what is quickly summarized or referenced in speaking: "Hitler's concept of concentration camps as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history. He admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination" (Toland).

And then I continued, "By contrast, we had an indigenous democracy here, where we actually thought and deliberated before we go to war. Where the women decided if we go to war or not, because it's their daughters and sons that would fight in the war, and we better have a better reason than two replaceable chiefs who can't resolve their differences given three chances in open council between nations. The followers of the White Roots of Peace created a society where there were no poor people, or hungry people, no domestic violence, or rape, no addiction, where two-spirits and others who weren't heterosexual were considered gifts to society, not an aberration, but in any case, were not prevented from having crucial roles in society (Williams). But the bottom line was they were welcoming to you if you were unfortunate and came to them respectfully, and were willing to

work to contribute to the good of society. So for example if you were an escaped African, or an abused white indentured servant, you could be welcomed, which was a much better immigration policy than what we have here. In fact, your people, the Irish and Scots, were treated just like the Indians were here, in your Native land, for practice, by the English. Your people were enslaved, sacred groves burned, harpers killed, people persecuted for wearing clan plaids, and speaking your native language. You weren't allowed to assemble to complain about blackmail, (having to use your rent money to buy your own cattle back), scot free (to kill a Scots person, thus freeing them) men, women and children killed or sold into slavery in America and the other British colonies. I'm sure they didn't tell you about that either in the Columbus discovered America narrative, but understand my reaction, when you talk about shooting people like the president or people who are elected that you don't agree with. That was once done to your people, maybe done by your people, and maybe it shouldn't be done again."

Maybe we can't go back to the time of the White Roots of Peace. But maybe, if some people go explore their "White Roots," going back to a time before they had to defend themselves against the genocidal actions of others, we could create a contemporary society based on an understanding that includes all my relations, in the indigenous sense.

From a certain point of view of mine, it's easy to see that victims of slavery, become slavers. In the time between 711 and 1492, millions of Europeans were enslaved by Black Africans, and put to tasks such as raising war horses, classically and currently known as the horse breed Arabians (Lane-Poole). The African model of slavery required literate and numerate slaves, and the slaves in question were war captives, so it didn't matter that they could earn their freedom. Certainly their capture and captivity would be seen as attempted genocide. Those who survive attempted genocide can become genocidal, just like some child abuse survivors become child abusers, and some children of alcoholics become alcoholics themselves. In that sense, "white" people, and in the sense that I mean white is not as much about skin pigmentation, but following a narrative that practices a certain unquestioned myopic amnesia regarding the unpleasant history and buried trauma, while accepting forms of consumptive consumerism (buying, ingesting, distracting) as a panacea. In short, following the modern tenets of Western Civilization, which historically held that Western means White, and White is Superior to all else forever and ever Amen.

After all, faculty at Lane can explicitly teach that slavery improved Black Africans by civilizing them, and exposing them to Christianity, that Manifest Destiny was a God inspired policy, and the removal of Native nations from their ancestral homelands was necessary because we had to have progress, and that progress benefits those we consider real people as the Founding Fathers only considered people like them to be real people.

The values expressed and reified in the science fiction movie *Avatar*, by the Earth people who speak English and utilize the paradigms of the American military with respect to indigenous people of color, show that we have difficulty conceiving a future that doesn't replicate the toxic past.

Among communities of color, our scientists have recovered enough to name the results and symptomatology of the conditions we call Multigenerational trauma, and Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome. Similar to PTSD as experienced by many generations of war veterans, we can go unconscious and act out patterns of defensive behavior as if we were reliving the trauma of others, as well as our own.

Many of our soldiers, suffering from PTSD, exhibit symptoms that our society is just beginning to address in an inchoate fashion. If we were to adapt ancient models to modern times, we would address the assault on life with expressions of life. Literally if you once dealt in Death, now serve Life. What would it take for you to become emotionally literate within yourself, psychologically literate, to be able to examine, question, abandon toxic pedagogy, and adopt life affirming memes? Then could you adopt a mind/body discipline capable of releasing the stored trauma within your muscles, your bones, your organs? Once you did that, how do you get your right livelihood on? What type of work feeds your spirit, as well as puts food on the table and a roof over your head? Is the way that you are living costing other people their lives? How would you assess that, and are you capable of actualizing an ethic of doing no harm? Can you live without self-medicating your emotional trauma, or performing auto-anesthesia?

Finally, and this is by no means the last step, can you deal equitably and justly with others? By this I mean not the Golden Rule, but the Platinum Rule: Do unto others the way they wish to be done unto them, even if that means treating them better than you yourself are treated. It helps to know in advance what they want done through asking them and delivering it unto them, yea verily. This from the Exhortation to Humility from Paul, in Phillipians 2 verses 2-3. The required humility is that of conciliator rather than conqueror. The context was in establishing the first Christian Church on European soil, though to be sure there wasn't actually a concept of a United Europe at the time, any more than there was a British Empire to establish a concept of the "Middle East." It was, in fact, Africa. Egypt is on the continent of Africa, albeit under a succession of foreign conquerors from what we now call Europe, Greeks, and Romans. As Christianity is an African religion in origin, this should be seen as significant. Part of that significance is the overt presence of a Sacred Feminine, and the practice of more egalitarian social and political forms. It's significance is that the Aramaic speaking churches of the East were never involved with the Crusades, witch burnings, slavery, or genocide to the degrees that the Western Romanized versions of the churches were. They never created a biblical justification for colonialism,

racism, or the subordination of women. Unlike Western Christianity, they didn't find it necessary to create original sin or long creeds to justify conversion by force. Part of the recovery of White Western Civilization, if it were to remain in a Christian framework, is to return to the Roman Conquest Indigenous African forms of the religion (Douglas-Klotz *The Hidden Gospel*). Paul was a prisoner when he wrote this, accused of heretical teachings by elements within the established church. But just as within the Aramaic instructions contained in the phrase "Love Your Enemy" (Douglas-Klotz *Prayers of the Cosmos*), you have to see into the adversary's heart to understand, cultivate, and esteem their needs over your own, Phillipians 2:2-3 asks you to know what they need: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

But those are words from people who never visited this continent. While the Aramaic speakers might have come in peace here to Turtle Island, the English speakers following the example of the conquering Romans did not. The following words indigenous to this continent, which informed our Bill of Rights, and Constitution, were spoken by the Great Peacekeeper himself: "Be strong of mind, O chiefs: Carry no anger and hold no grudges. Think not forever of yourselves, O chiefs, nor of your own generation. Think of continuing generations of our families, think of our grandchildren and of those yet unborn, whose faces are coming from beneath the ground" (Wallace).

Where are the equivalent of the white roots of peace in white culture? "White" people were indigenous, wherever they were indigenous, and by that I mean rooted in their original homelands for 100 – 1000 generations, that being one definition of what indigenous means. What were they before they were conquered, moved, or displaced, and eventually (as a result) beginning themselves to displace others? What were the voices that spoke to them "from beneath the ground". What was the wisdom drunk in the waters, breathed in the air? What were the voices that spoke to them, teaching them their mother tongues, and connection to all their relations? There are White Roots, which lead to Peace, and recovering peace, even within what is called "White" Culture. Digging for such roots, can be painful, leaving your hands soiled, necessitating washing in living waters. This is not always a bad thing, to have a relationship with the soil, the air, and the waters. Let's hope those connective roots, are found in time, Mexica Tahui – All My Relations (Aztec).

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### **Resources for Future Reading**

James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*

Nana Banchie Darkwah, *The Africans Who Wrote The Bible: Ancient Secrets Africa and Christianity Have Never Told*

Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*

Cain Hope Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible*

George M. Lamsa's translations from the Aramaic if the Peshitta, *Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text*

### **Iroquois Web Resources**

The Learning Longhouse:

<<http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/ThePeacemakerAndTheTreeOfPeace-Iroquois.html>>

<<http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/PEACEMAKER.htm>>

<<http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/virtualexhibits.htm>>

Clans:

<<http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/bibliography.htm>>

<<http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/ve7.htm>>

Tadodaho:

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tadodaho>>

# Contributors

**Linda Ackers** is the Library Information Technology Coordinator at Lane Community College. She enjoys bird watching, photography, and many outdoor activities.

**Dan Armstrong** received his Ph.D. from Indiana University and taught at the University of Arizona, Oakland University, and Oregon State University before coming in 1991 to Lane Community College, where he taught composition and film studies until his retirement in 2008. He continues to teach one course a year at Lane.

**Lori Bumgardner** returned to Lane as Grants Development Manager in 2010, having previously worked for the college from 1997 to 2006. When not writing grants, she simply writes, including under the pen name “Just L” in the *Love Blender Digest* (loveblender.com). Bumgardner’s comic strip is posted at goddessofgrants.stripgenerator.com.

**Kathleen Caprario** is a studio artist and educator whose work has been acquired by the Microsoft Collection and exhibited at the Portland Art Museum. She has received artist residencies from the Ucross, Morris Graves and Jentel Foundations. In Summer 2010 she participated in SWIRL—Story Writing In Remote Locations — with Aboriginal youth in the Australian Outback.

**Jose Chaves** holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Oregon and was a Fulbright scholar in 1999 to Colombia when he published a bilingual book of Latin American short stories, entitled *The Book of Brevity*. His creative non-fiction and poetry have been published in *The Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *X-Connect*, *Brevity*, and other journals.

**Dennis Gilbert** teaches physics at Lane Community College and is active in the American Association of Physics Teachers. He has served as faculty union President, Bargaining Chair and in a variety of union and innovation positions in and beyond Lane. He is a Faculty Council Co-Chair and outgoing Coordinator of Faculty Connections.

**Mark Harris** writes music, prose and poetry, researches historical and cross-cultural relations, and at Lane Community College teaches classes in cultural recovery, addictions and ethnic studies.

**Ben Hill** grew up in North Dakota. He is a Lane Community College mathematics instructor and co-editor of the *Community College Moment*.

**Sandy Brown Jensen** is a poet, writer, independent scholar and community college writing teacher. She is the author of a book of poems, *I Saw Us in a Painting* (Walking Bird, 2006). Jensen has won many national poetry prizes and has published widely in other genres, including memoir and fiction. She blogs for Lane CC at: <http://blogs.lanecollege.edu/pressingwords/>

**Cynthia Kimball** received her Ph.D. in English from SUNY-Buffalo in 1997, with a dissertation on Modernist American poetry. She has taught at Portland Community College in Oregon for 14 years.

**Jean LeBlanc** has been published in three previous issues of the *Community College Moment*. Her books include *At Any Moment* (Backwaters Press) and *Where We Go: Haiku and Tanka Sequences and Other Concise Imaginings* (Modern English Tanka Press). She teaches English and Developmental Reading at Sussex County Community College in Newton, New Jersey.

**Matt Luke** grew up in Michigan and Southern California and has lived in Ecuador and Germany. Mentorship with Jacques Cousteau's lead photographer transformed his life behind the lens. He writes *micro cuentos* in Spanish and *es muy amigo de* code-switching. He is a Spanish instructor at Lane Community College.

**Don Macnaughtan** is a reference librarian at Lane Community College. He grew up and was educated in Auckland, New Zealand, and emigrated to the US in 1984. His book *Navigating the Buffyverse*, about the television shows Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel, will be published in 2011.

**Anna Malliris** grew up in Eugene and came to Lane Community College in 2002 after practicing law with a focus on elder issues. She now works as the assistant to the Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, Sonya Christian. She was previously published in the *Community College Moment*.

**Anne B. McGrail**, with ambitions to be “universally condemn’d, yet universally read,” stays true to her eighteenth-century British literature training by practicing the Grub Street arts of hack writing at Lane Community College. Able both “to do” and “to teach,” she also teaches courses in literature and writing, most recently online, and coordinates learning communities and first year experiences at the college.

**Deborah Posen**, 1959-2008, was Professor of Legal Studies at Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico, a former instructor at Lane Community College, and a former practitioner of bankruptcy law in Oregon. Her art was published in a prior issue of the *Community College Moment*.

**Kristie Potwora** has a BA in Art Education from Humboldt State University, a BFA and MFA in Printmaking from the University of Oregon, and is a member of Print Arts Northwest and the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators. The natural sciences were her first true love in education and have persisted as a foundation for much of her art. She teaches silkscreen and other 2-D arts at Lane Community College.

**Tamara Pinkas** is Cooperative Education Coordinator for Advanced Technology and Language, Literature and Communications at Lane. She is Representative to the League for Innovation and a member of the Art on Campus Committee. Prior to joining Lane in 1986, Pinkas coordinated the Oregon Imagination Celebration and authored *Eugene's Public Art, A Field Guide*.

**Jerry Ross** was born in Buffalo, New York. Influenced by the I Macchiaioli and verismo schools of Italian painting, Ross has won art awards locally and abroad, and recently exhibited at the American Academy in Rome, where he was a visiting artist/scholar for three weeks.

**Michael Sámano** served six-years in the military, after which he began his academic career at Lane Community College. Sámano holds Master of Arts degrees from Humboldt State University and the University of California, Davis, and a Ph.D. from Oregon State University. Sámano coordinates Ethnic Studies at Lane Community College and directs Lane's Integration of Vets in Education. Off campus, he is married and has two sons.

**Barbara Sullivan** has been recovering from one thing or another, sometimes successfully, for sixty-four years. She teaches writing for Women in Transition at Lane Community College and is currently interested in the solace of lowered expectations; you can see her blog of the same name here: <http://thesolaceoffloweredexpectations.wordpress.com>

**Russell H. Shitabata** teaches composition and literature at Lane Community College. He is managing editor of the *Community College Moment*.

**Patrick Walters** is from Buffalo, NY, where churches and taverns have equal cultural status and real estate dominion. He teaches and lives in Portland, Oregon, one of the places where books are making their last stand.

**Carol Watt**, Ph.D., has taught writing and literature courses at Lane Community College since 1997, having previously been an English instructor at OSU and UO. She joined the fledgling American Indian Languages project in 2000 and has been an active AILP committee member since then.

**Craig Wells** should have learned to play guitar but was afraid of being unoriginal. His life in Davis, California, is insufficiently complicated to inspire the experimental creative nonfiction he wants to write. Yoga helps to heal his angry young man, and maybe the world.

**Laura Wimberley** was a reference librarian at Lane Community College in 2009/2010. Holder of Ph.D and MLIS degrees, she is a fiction reviewer with *Kirkus Reviews* and was a three-day Jeopardy champion in April 2007.

**Bill Woolum** has taught English at Lane Community College since 1989. He keeps a blog: [kelloggbloggin.blogspot.com](http://kelloggbloggin.blogspot.com).