The New Orphic Review

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The Farewell Issue of The New Orphic Review
is dedicated to my late father,
Toivo Ernest Hekkanen
(1916 - 1995)

Nelson
Canada
Contents

Volume 20    Number 2    Fall 2017

Ernest Hekkanen  4  *Farewell Issue*

Michael Washburn  6  *Night Visitor*

Marte Stuart  28  *Three Poems*

Susan Andrews Grace  38  *Poetry and Political Freedom*

Joan M. Baril  50  *Generosity*

Michael Hetherington  58  *Three Poems*

Vera Maloff  61  *Let Them Go Their Way*

Jill Mandrake  68  *A Midnight Clear, 2016*

Jude Schmitz  69  *Keep Moving*

Hillel Wright  75  *Scotsmen*

Jay Hamburger  80  *Who Speaks for Turtles*

Barbara Curry Mulcahy  83  *The Road to Jerusalem*

Ernest Hekkanen  92  *Of All Men: A Short Memoir*

Margrith Schraner  107  *Endpiece, or the Fallacy of Chronology*
ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of 47 books. The most recent are *False Memories and Other Likely Tales* and *I'm Not You*. His novel, *Of a Fire Beyond the Hills*, was a finalist for the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness. He is listed in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* and *Contemporary Authors* in the United States. He is the subject of Margrith Schraner’s critical study, *The Reluctant Author: The Life and Literature of Ernest Hekkanen* (New Orphic Publishers, 2006).

**Farewell Issue**

**Ernest Hekkanen**

Upon learning that Margrith and I will cease publication of *The New Orphic Review* after this issue has been put to bed, a number of people have asked us how we intend to fill our time. “Won’t you get bored? Aren’t you going to feel lost? What will you do to entertain yourselves?” The underlying assumption seems to be that the NOR is such a large part of our lives, it will be difficult for us to fill the void.

There *is* some truth to this claim.

Right now, in real time, it is 5:15 in the morning. Today, thirty-degree Celsius temperatures are supposed to assail us here in Nelson. Earlier on, at 4:30, I raised the lower sash of my office window as high as it would go, in hopes of cooling off the interior before the sun rises above the mountain peaks and starts to bake the house. A large hornet has managed to get itself trapped between the panes and is furiously buzzing against the glass, making it difficult to concentrate. I’ll have to resort to the usual solution: lowering the bottom sash and using a thin piece of cardboard to guide the hornet down between the panes to freedom. It takes several minutes to accomplish this feat, and by then the hornet is mad with annoyance—in defense of its life, I presume.

Now where was I? Any thoughts I might have had about the
The New Orphic Review

overriding theme of this issue—namely, that of captivity and escape—have since flown off on the wings of the hornet. Perhaps I should confine my farewell remarks to what I have already said in this editorial. It seems to encapsulate everything I know about literature, and those of us who devote so much of our lives to the creation of it. We are here and then we are gone, with or without a buzz. However, before I completely wander off the page, I would like to thank our contributors, subscribers and readers for the invaluable role they have played in making The New Orphic Review a viable cultural artifact. You have fed our delusions of relevance for twenty years, and we can’t praise you highly enough for that.
The New Orphic Review


Night Visitor

Michael Washburn

Natalie may have been the oddest creature ever to enter the house on Titus Avenue, which is really saying something. The residence was a dive for grad students, transients, deadbeats, and other miscreants too poor to live in one of the nicer parts of Ithaca, New York. Mary Watkins had agreed to look after Natalie when the cat’s owner, Liz Jones, went off to Italy. Natalie was, her owner claimed, a mature well-behaved cat. Mary had never owned a cat, but she had no wish to antagonize her landlord. Even so, Mary resented Liz’s imposition a bit, for Mary was entering one of the toughest phases of her candidacy for a Ph.D. at Cornell University.

Mary was in the midst of a conversation with her new boyfriend, Jonah Ford, a handsome guy with literary aspirations, when they first laid eyes on Natalie, a four-year-old tiger cat. Before going away, Liz had kept the cat somewhere else.

“You could have told Liz to go to hell,” Jonah was saying.

“I have a good relationship with Liz. I couldn’t stand to ruin it, especially now,” Mary replied.

Jonah’s eyes narrowed just a bit.

“I sense that there may be another reason.”

Having stayed up late into the night, reading about Florence under
The New Orphic Review

the Medicis, Mary felt way too tired to argue.

“Maybe there is . . . call it compassion.”

“You’re thinking about that story Liz gave you to read,” said Jonah. It felt more like an accusation than a question.

“I do think about it sometimes, when I’m not thinking about the Renaissance.”

The story in question, “Putting Daisy Down” by Jay McInerney, was, in Mary’s reading, a sad, searing indictment of moral obtuseness. The owner of Daisy the cat is an unfaithful husband. In an effort to placate his cheated-on wife, he complies with her demand to have Daisy, an arthritic cat that could nevertheless go on living for years, put to sleep. After having the cat killed, in a passage Mary could not think about without getting upset, the husband decides he doesn’t want to be married to his wife after all. He could have made that decision earlier, and the outcome would have been the same, except that Daisy would have lived. Until she read “Putting Daisy Down,” Mary had never really thought about our moral obligations to the animals we bring into our lives.

“It’s a heartbreaking story, Jonah.”

“It’s downright revolting. I wanted to throw up when I got to the part where they ‘euthanize’ Daisy.”

As if on cue, Natalie poked her head into the room. She was a six-pound, matted dark brown creature with patches of white on her chin and neck. Her eyes were a luminous amber.

“Hello, little puss,” Jonah said, extending a hand toward the visitor.

Natalie moved past the foot of the bed, nuzzled and licked his fingers, then turned her eyes toward Mary inquisitively.

“I’ll look out for you, defenseless little thing!”

Jonah asked Mary to walk him through the motions of caring for Natalie, since the cat was likely to get ravenous while Mary was at the library or facing a trio of professors bent on wrecking her sanity. They moved down the hall, past the room where Bryce Allen had lived until recently, past the room of the two music majors who made noise
without instruments late into the night, until they stood at the entrance
to the room at the front of the house where Liz had slept. Mary
showed Jonah the litter, the dry food, the tuna that Natalie loved but
could not have too often on account of her stomach.

Jonah had to take off for his creative writing seminar, so he gave
Mary a peck on the cheek, then left her standing there in the hall on
the second floor of a lonely house. Slowly she moved back up the hall
toward her room, not pausing at the door of the couple who’d barely
looked at Mary in five weeks of living in cramped quarters. But she
paused, for a moment, at the entrance to the room where Bryce Allen
had stayed. Here was a rectangle of dusty space with an ashtray on the
window sill, and a bookcase with twelve-inch shelves. On the dresser
were copies of literary magazines where Bryce had published his
fiction. It was Bryce who had inspired Mary by demonstrating what
an unknown, but determined writer could accomplish, Bryce who had
shared with her Stephen King’s notion of a short story as “a kiss in the
dark from a stranger,” Bryce who had shown her what the work of that
popular author had in common with the psychological explorations of
E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Tobias Wolff, and
Raymond Carver. Besides those authors, the shelves held volumes by
authors whose names piqued Mary’s curiosity: William Gerhardie,
Ödön von Horvath, Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nizan, John Fante, Anaïs
Nin, James Purdy, Weldon Kees. Mary did not know where Bryce had
gone, or whether he was alive. For a moment she stood looking out at
the bare white branches, the empty roads beyond the lonely room.

Back in Mary and Jonah’s room, Natalie was chewing the strings of
one of Mary’s sneakers, raking them with her paws when her mouth
couldn’t close tightly enough. When Mary reached down to move the
string out of the creature’s grasp, Natalie spun around, snapping at
Mary’s fingers, before beating a retreat down the hall.

The next night, Mary was sitting in the Cornell University Library,
concentrating on a volume of Burckhardt’s, when the cell phone in her
pocket began to vibrate. At once she rose, moved off into a remote
part of the stacks, and took the call at a point between volumes
dealing with the Russian state under Nicholas I and the exploration of
Australia, respectively. It was Jonah. He’d called to let her know that
the couple down the hall—the music majors—were planning to leave
at the end of the week. It was typical of Liz’s way of doing things that
she’d never bothered to get them to sign a lease. In the transient
house, people were free to do as they pleased, to stay until they ran
out of money or found bohemian dives elsewhere. Much as Bryce had
done, Jonah added.

“So we’re going to have to start putting up notices for new tenants.
We should have done it already. We’ve now got three rooms for rent.”
“I’ll e-mail Liz about it tonight.”

Just as she was about to hang up, Jonah pressed her unexpectedly.

“Mary. Why don’t you come down to Langan’s Pub and have a cold
one with me and the guys?”

Mary wanted to say yes. God knew she did. She’d passed so many
weeks buried so deeply in her studies. But her oral exams loomed.

“Sorry, Jonah. I’m trying hard to master some complicated stuff. I’m
going to have to pass.”

“All right.”

Mary felt as if she’d swallowed insect repellent. Jonah was such a
sweet guy, and he’d been trying, in his gentle way, to lift her out of
her social rut. Jonah knew that in a way, the situation on the second
floor of the house was a microcosm of Mary’s life: people living and
eating within yards of each other without ever getting acquainted.

Mary tried to focus on Burckhardt once again. Here was an author
who knew something about culture, about civilization, so far removed
from the gropings of strangers whom chance had thrust into intimacy.

The next day, Mary had an exchange with Liz via e-mail. Liz was
happy to put Mary and Jonah in charge of finding and collecting rent
from new tenants. Liz had pursued that goal without success until her
trip.

Later Mary was back in the library, taking advantage of the
resources that made her proud to attend Cornell rather than Ithaca College or some other dump. She knew that Bryce Allen had admired and respected this library, which made his disappearance all the more puzzling. But now, once again, she felt the Samsung unit in her pocket begin to vibrate. She returned to the stacks, talked to Jonah. He said that Natalie had thrown up in the upper floor hallway, and it was lucky he’d noticed it because he had four people coming over in the morning to look at the rooms.

“Tell me you didn’t give her tuna fish.”
“No, just the dry stuff.”
“I know you’re a patient man.”

“Hey, don’t worry, cats’ll be cats. So, Mary, do you want to come down to the pub and have one on me?”

He’s such a sweet guy, Mary thought. Always thinking about what will make me feel better. But she knew she must decline. When she got home and slid into bed next to Jonah, she’d do all the things he loved. But her date this evening was with Burckhardt. Her scholarship held out the prospect of real rewards. She’d find a publishing house that would disseminate her thesis as a monograph. The research grants would come rolling in, the trips to Europe, the associate professorships, the book deals.

“No, Jonah.”

He accepted her answer with grace.

In the morning, Mary lay in bed, the space next to her empty. When she tried to move her feet, she felt a weight down at that end, barring movement. Groggily she lifted her head up off the pillow, saw Natalie lying between her ankles, tail twitching, making eye contact. Mary sneezed, loudly, violently. Natalie started, but kept her place. Then Jonah appeared in the doorway, clutching a steaming cup of hazelnut coffee. Mary looked at her boyfriend, framed in the doorway, as handsome as Robert Lowell, if not quite as prolific. He strode to the space between the bed and the window, handed her the cup, placed a kiss on her dry lips. Through the covers, Mary felt Natalie’s claws
tighten ever so lightly, then ease up.

As she showered, Mary thought she owed it to Jonah to show how much she wanted to be with him, to remind him of what things would be like as soon as she’d taken her orals and her workload had eased. But as she was toweling off and dressing, Mary heard her boyfriend talking with a couple of people in the living room.

Mary went downstairs. On the couch across from Jonah was a guy with shoulder-length blond hair, wearing a black leather trench coat. On the coat was a pin that read, “Normal People Make Good Pets.” Beside him sat a girl who, Mary noticed, had a spare tire spilling over the top of her jeans. The girl had straight black hair and an ingenuous smile. Jonah was going over the terms of tenancy at this house, the blond guy nodding. He liked to listen to his stereo, he said.

“You have headphones, don’t you?” Jonah asked.

“I’m gonna buy a pair when my check comes.”

This led to the next point—they wanted to move in right away, but could do so only if Jonah came down a bit on the first month’s rent.

“Or at least break it up into two payments,” the blond guy, whose name was Andrew, added.

Mary looked at her boyfriend, meaning to send him a signal conveying her reservations, but Jonah wasn’t paying attention. As she stepped out of the house onto the sidewalk where patches of grass poked through the snow, and turned north to the library, Mary felt a bit ashamed of herself for making assumptions about two kids who were probably quite nice.

Hours later, at the house, before the afternoon light had begun to wane, Mary strove to be bright and positive when talking to Jonah about the newest tenants, Andrew and Cheryl. Jonah’s mind wasn’t there. He sat at the table in the dining room, licking envelopes addressed to literary journals in six states. He asked her to mail the envelopes on her way back to the library that evening. Though part of her felt tempted to rip open one of the envelopes, to survey her boyfriend’s unmediated thoughts, she did as Jonah had asked. Her cell
phone did not ring that night in the library, but one distraction replaced another: Mary found herself rubbing her eyes as if she were five years old again, a girl on Cape Cod who’d ambled through poison ivy. With an effort, she focused her mind on the cathedrals of Florence.

In bed that night, something about Jonah seemed more relaxed, more welcoming than before. They did not passionately engage, but nor did they ignore each other. They lay there, content in the intimacy, until they drifted off.

In the morning, Jonah was interviewing another prospective tenant on the ground floor. His name was Jeremy Stern, he had trim black hair and spectacles, and it was easy to guess that he was a graduate teaching assistant. If Allen Ginsberg had remained a clean-cut intellectual, without going bohemian, this was what he would have grown into. Around Jeremy, Mary felt not exactly comfortable, but confident on one level. She had no doubt Jeremy would be quiet and considerate. After Jeremy left, Jonah welcomed a rather different type into the house. Scott Rutledge seemed to have passed via a time machine from the ’50s to the present. He was a gorgeous, strapping guy in a fraternity jacket with patches at the elbows, and his waistline hadn’t thickened over the years. His father was an investment banker. There was little question about whether Scott would pay the rent on time. Tenants with money usually didn’t come here, but if you’d had a horrible spat with your girlfriend and she kicked you out and said she never wanted to see your face again, then immediate availability trumped other criteria.

After the interviews, Jonah followed Mary into the kitchen and placed a kiss on her lips.

“T’ve have a little something for Natalie.”

He produced a toy that would keep the creature busy for hours—a catnip mouse.

Mary went upstairs, searched for a while, found the cat curled up under the bed in her room. Upon sniffing the catnip, Natalie went
berserk. Lying on her side, she caught the toy between her front paws, and her hind paws raked it faster than two drums in the hands of a metalhead on speed. In her luminous eyes was something at once feral and playful. Natalie rolled over on her back, flipped back toward Mary, then rolled the other way again, never ceasing to rip at the toy with glee.

In the library, the irritation in Mary’s eyes returned with renewed force, leading her to the awful thought: *I’ve never had a cat before. Am I allergic?* She didn’t want to broach the issue with the man who’d gone out of his way to be kind to her as well as Natalie. For the time being, it proved an academic point. The redness died down, and Mary thought about Burckhardt.

* * *

Saying he wished to foster a spirit of harmony among the housemates, Jonah proposed that they gather on the ground floor in the evening to watch a movie he’d ordered through Netflix. The movie was *Identity*, a thriller about a group of strangers stuck at a motel in the desert, during a storm. They have to figure out who has begun picking them off one by one, and needless to say the killer isn’t whom you’d suspect. Everyone watched the film with interest. Mary saw Cheryl’s hand creep up her boyfriend’s leg, as Andrew smoked and flicked ash into a cup. Midway through the film, Andrew said he knew who the killer was. Before long it began to feel as if the young men and women sitting in the room on Titus Avenue weren’t strangers any more. But before the end of the film, Scott got up, saying he had a test to cram for. When Cheryl urged him to stay, Scott made an odd remark.

“My spent days are like men in chains walking to a charnel house.”

Mary, Jonah, Andrew, and Cheryl went on trying to enjoy the movie. Jeremy’s air suggested that he didn’t mind the film, but it was somewhat beneath him. Only now did Mary notice Natalie, curled up on the couch between Jeremy and the other couple, looking alert with her ears out and arched back.
The New Orphic Review

Later, when she and Jonah were getting ready for bed, Mary went into the bathroom between their room and the broom closet. She flicked on the light, saw in her eyes what she’d tried to avoid thinking about all night.

“Jonah, did I tell you I’ve never owned a cat before?” she asked on returning to the room.

“You mentioned it.”

“I think I’m allergic. We’re going to have to figure out some kind of arrangement. Natalie can’t be in here tonight.”

Jonah’s reply was uncharacteristically curt.

“Hell of a time to figure this out.”

The young writer went downstairs, found Natalie sprawled out on the couch, made a little shrine for her there using her catnip toy and a fresh can of tuna fish. When he was back upstairs with Mary, they shut the door all the way to keep the little creature out.

They were lying on the bed, Mary’s arm stretching across Jonah’s bare torso, when they heard some kind of fight down the hall, in Andrew and Cheryl’s room. They didn’t make out many words, but the tone of it was awful. Andrew yelling that no one wanted something something, and Cheryl should know something something.

Then all was quiet.

Mary wanted to remove her arm from Jonah’s torso and rub her eyes. Instead she asked, “Jonah, what exactly does Andrew do?”

For a moment, Jonah didn’t answer. But she knew he wasn’t asleep.

“Honestly, Mary, I don’t know. I walked by there earlier, and he was playing Playstation or something.”

“Playstation? He’s twenty-two.”

“Please don’t shoot the messenger.”

“I’ve got a feeling he sells drugs to teenagers from the high school up the road.”

Soon they were both asleep. But before that, Mary thought she heard a faint sound, a scratching, at the door.

When Jonah went downstairs just before 8:00 a.m., he discovered an
empty can of tuna and the partially shredded toy on the couch. Mary didn’t linger in the house. She really had to buckle down today. She didn’t expect to see any housemates until she came home exhausted from the library.

Two days later, she walked into the kitchen as Jeremy was pouring coffee into a blue mug. He offered her some. She thankfully accepted. They stood there sipping the black coffee, Mary experiencing a sensation—though she could scarcely name it, let alone admit to it—of intellectual inferiority in Jeremy’s presence. Well, just suppose that Jeremy got into an argument with Bryce. Bryce Allen might never return. These thoughts abruptly ceased when she realized she was staring at the fellow in a plaid yellow shirt, and he said:

“Are you sure you want that jock Scott Rutledge living here?”

“Er . . . Jonah liked him.” She made a gesture with her eyes to indicate that Scott might very well be on the stairs a few feet away, listening. But Jeremy plowed ahead:

“He embodies what is worst about rich people. You can see it in everything he says and does.”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“Have you ever talked to him, Mary?”

“No. How many conversations have you had with him in the past few days?”

She began to feel anger rise within her at the thought that this man of unassuming appearance was the real snob here.

“Look at this,” Jeremy said, indicating a comic strip Scott had taped to the door of the fridge. The cartoon featured a caricature of a politically correct professor, berating a student for daring to speak honestly in class.

“I hardly think that’s a reason to dislike him.”

“Scott comes across as so friendly, but in the end, nobody’s right for him. Nobody’s good enough. He’s a spoiled child. If he were in a room with two starving men and two pieces of bread, he’d eat both pieces,” Jeremy said.
“You know him awfully well after spending a few hours around him!”

Mary wanted to add, *Maybe it was a mistake to take you on as a tenant, Jeremy*. Instead, she made an excuse to grab her bags from the couch and head out to the campus. On her way out, she noticed that the mailman had made his rounds a bit early today. Among the envelopes she scooped off the floor and dropped on the night table were a couple postmarked in other college towns.

As Mary sat in the library, she thought of the conversation she’d had with her advisor the other day. The advisor had voiced nothing but glowing support for what he saw as Mary’s potential in the field of Renaissance studies. Here was someone who could help effect a change in the status of Burckhardt from an interpreter to someone with a clearly defined agenda. A topic Mary would be better able to explicate when she went off to Florence with a grant at her disposal. Inspiring words, indeed.

Suddenly, Mary did something without precedent in her months of coming to the library. She got up, moved to an area of the stacks as intriguing to her as the Congo to a turn-of-the-century Briton, and lingered there exultantly. She’d wanted to stay focused on her studies, but something kept nagging at her. It wasn’t just the thought that in order to survive, to thrive, in a world filled with incomparably larger and more powerful creatures, to manipulate the larger world, a little animal must develop charms almost beyond description. It was a deeper curiosity.

In this area of the stacks, she found a book entitled *The Personality of Animals*. The author was H. Munro Fox. Mary thought, *A book about animal psychology written by Professor Fox, ha ha.* She opened the book at random, took in a few of the professor’s observations. Certain animals—here the professor referred to dogs—will respond well to vicious comments made in a nice tone, and respond badly to sweet comments uttered harshly. But some of them are intelligent enough to cross the cognitive divide, so that tone becomes irrelevant,
the author noted. They reach an understanding more nuanced. Some of them even have a sense of time—inners clocks which humans can alter through the use of chemical agents. Professor Fox compared animals’ sense of time favorably to the way humans experience time, which he described as follows: “At first, in youth, the trains are running at equal speeds. Then, as age advances, one of the trains (mental time) slows down. The other train (real time) goes on at a uniform pace, but to passengers in the train which is slowing down it appears to accelerate.”

All right. Enough of this. Mary tore herself away, marched back to where she’d spread her books about the Renaissance all over the long table near the center of the library. She managed to re-focus on the subject of her thesis, barely distracted by the chatter of undergraduates. She studied for a few more hours. Rather than go home for dinner, Mary walked to an undergrad hangout nearby, had a bowl of tomato soup, and returned to her task.

Around 9:00 p.m., her cell phone rang. This time, Jonah was as genial as ever, but something in his tone sounded a bit forced, as if he’d just stubbed his toe. She wanted to tell Jonah about Professor Fox’s little book.

“Hey, Mary. I’m at the pub now with this guy Charley. He used to do stand-up on the Strip in L.A. He just might do something here tonight.”

“Jonah, you know I’d love to—”

“There are some other people I wanted you to meet, Mary. A couple of people from my writers’ group are here tonight. I’ve told them about you and they’re dying to meet Mary Watkins, budding Renaissance scholar and amazing gal.”

“Maybe in a couple of weekends, I’ll have time to come down. Tonight—”

“In a couple of weekends, you’ll tell me the same thing! You know, Mary, I look at you and I see someone who has so much to give, and it’s just so fucking unhealthy for you to stay holed up all the time. I try
to help you, and you slam the door in my face like I’m a shoe polish salesman. Damn it. Fuck you. Bitch.”

Jonah hung up.

He’d never cursed at Mary before.

When the phone rang again, a couple of minutes later, Mary did not answer it. But she read the text message sent to it immediately afterward:

“Mary so sorry it’s a lot of things please don’t be mad you know I love you. Humbly Jonah.”

When Mary finally got home, Jonah was not there. Andrew sat in the living room, on the couch beside Cheryl. Once again Cheryl’s hand was working its way toward his groin, slowly but with purpose, like a tarantula. Mary was about to say something, but proceeded toward the stairs.

“Where did you find this guy Jeremy?” asked Andrew, with something between a grin and a smirk.

“Are you not getting along?” she managed to say.

This time, Andrew’s expression was closer to a grin.

“He’s cool. He really is. The guy is a fucking Maoist, you know.”

A Maoist? Was this Nepal or upstate New York?

“How do you know this?”

“We were arguing today. I told him, Man, if you have shit, no one has a right to take it away for any reason. He called me an unlettered stooge of the elite classes. Let’s just say we didn’t get very far in the argument,” Andrew said with a caustic laugh.

Mary changed the subject.

“We have a bit of a problem with the cat. I never thought I might be allergic, but that’s the case. Natalie seems to get anxious when she’s alone at night. She wants to be around people.”

“She can sleep in our room!” Cheryl said.

Mary thanked the two kids and continued up to the second floor. After climbing into bed, she lay there, looking out the window to her right, at the sliver of moon like a luminous scepter.
Mary felt that she’d given so little to Jonah lately, yet now she dared resent his not being here, in the manner of the beggar in the play *Fiddler On the Roof* who asks a villager for a handout, then reacts with indignation at the latter’s refusal: “Why should I suffer when you have a bad day?” Still she lay there, wondering what Andrew and Cheryl must be doing now, and the intellectual, Jeremy, and the jock, Scott, and whether the writer Bryce Allen would ever grace the house with his presence again. Mary drifted off. She woke when she felt a shape glide under the comforter next to her. She had no idea what to say, but it proved an academic point since Jonah quickly fell asleep.

Around 2:00 a.m., there came scratching at the door.

“Jonah, do you hear that?”

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

The scratching continued. Mary repeated her question.

Still Jonah slept.

“*Jonah!*”

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

Mary reached over, shook her boyfriend’s shoulder.

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

The cat must have slipped out of Andrew and Cheryl’s room as one of them returned from the bathroom. Or maybe they never shut their door.

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

“God damn it, stop it Natalie!” Mary hissed in the direction of the door.

Or what? she imagined Natalie thinking. *Or you’ll have me put to sleep?*  

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

Mary’s muscles tensed even more. Suddenly, Jonah was sitting on the edge of the bed, pulling on a pair of jeans. He got up, strode over to the door, opened it an inch so that Natalie’s nose and the inverted Y of her mouth pressed eagerly into the room.

“Hush, little girl!” Jonah urged. Now he couldn’t close the door
without hurting her. Natalie began to wail. The only time Mary remembered seeing Jonah so irritated was once when he’d opened an envelope and found a rejection slip from *Ploughshares*.

“Heh. Heh!” the young man repeated, to no avail. Natalie didn’t want to be anywhere else in the world than with her surrogate master, Mary. The cries continued, higher in pitch. Jonah turned to Mary. Part of her was almost willing to get sick in order to soothe the cat, but she shook her head. Jonah opened the door, reached under Natalie’s belly, picked her up, carried her down the stairs and to the back door. Through the wall Mary heard the cat land on the ground behind the house, heard the door close before Natalie’s cries could resume. Having rarely been outside, the cat needed to orient herself. When she did, she began to wail querulously. At length the cries came only at intervals, then ceased. When Mary woke up, Jonah served her hot chocolate in bed. Neither of them mentioned the cat.

She didn’t get home until well after 7:00 p.m., so she missed the drama. When Mary walked in, Scott was sitting on the couch with a dour look. He told her that Andrew and Cheryl had gotten into a screaming match. What began as a quarrel over $20 grew almost to the point of violence as the two of them ticked off everything they couldn’t stand about each other. At the climax, Andrew shoved and pushed Cheryl out the door, tossing a few of her CDs, clothes, and toiletries to the ground from the window of the room they’d shared. Cheryl fled in tears to her mom’s house.

Already Mary had forgotten about the cat. She wanted to have words with Andrew, but the bohemian with the pin reading “Normal People Make Good Pets” had holed up behind a locked door. Anyone who approached it and tried to converse with Andrew drew a handful of barely audible words in his nasal, epicene voice.

Mary sat down on the wicker chair across from Scott. He looked at her as if he longed to say something, but would feel awkward expressing it in his jock’s vocabulary. At length Jeremy came home. They explained matters to him. He gave a grunt to the effect of, “That
figures.” Mary tried to brighten the mood by making popcorn for everyone.

When Jonah came home, the housemates sat around the living room looking glum. Now Andrew came down the stairs.

“Hey, everybody.”

They stared at their feet. He studied their faces, waited for words. Finally he said:

“You want to know why I fought with Cheryl? Because she kicked the cat!”

He walked out of the house, then they heard his car pull out of the driveway.

Nobody believed him.

Though they didn’t try to make any sort of arrangement, Mary and Jonah assumed Natalie was welcome to sleep in Andrew’s room again. It was the least he could do, as his place at the house hung by a thread.

Around midnight, Mary and Jonah heard it again.

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

Jonah rolled over toward Mary, rolled back again, shuffled the sheets impatiently.

“I thought that little thief down the hall had Natalie tonight,” he muttered.

“Well he didn’t want her,” Mary said.

*Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch.*

Jonah got up, naked, went out of the room, picked up the cat and carried her outside, ignoring her protests. They didn’t hear her again that night.

The next time Mary saw Andrew, the kid sat in the living room staring at the front door, smoking. Once again Mary fought off the temptation to scream *What a selfish little child we’ve allowed to take up residence here!* Instead, she tried her hardest to smile, and said:

“Natalie wanted to be a surrogate girlfriend last night. You didn’t want her?”

“Come again?” Andrew said through a cloud of smoke.
“Natalie got out and wandered. We can’t have her in my room because of the state of my health,” Mary said, hoping he might pick up on other factors affecting her health.

“She was never in my room last night,” Andrew corrected Mary, then resumed staring at the door.

Then where had the cat been until the latest disturbance—Jeremy’s room?

When Mary came home from the library that afternoon, she meant to have words with Jeremy about the cat. But Jeremy was in the kitchen with a young man Mary had never seen before. They were having an argument about gender, its relevance or irrelevance to the dynamics of the contemporary world as Jeremy understood them.

“You’re telling me there’s no difference between men and women,” Jeremy said.

“Anatomical differences, sure. But everything else is a social construct,” the guest replied.

“That makes about as much sense as saying that horses run faster than giraffes because we encourage them to,” Jeremy retorted.

“Not all horses run faster than giraffes, for your information. I thought you cared about the oppressed,” the other said.

“William, I don’t necessarily have a use for you just because you consider yourself a ‘revolutionary’ on some level,” Jeremy retorted.

Mary went upstairs. The door to her room was ajar. When she pushed it open, she made eye contact with the soft brown quadruped spread out on the bed.

“Natalie! God damn you!” Though she couldn’t bear to bludgeon the little creature with her tone, Mary knew that the redness would return to her eyes, blotting out thoughts of Florentine statues. She scooped the cat off the bed, then moved downstairs and pitched Natalie out the back door. When Jonah came home a bit after 9:00 p.m., Mary demanded to know why he’d left the door ajar. He hung his head, said he’d had a lot on his mind.

“That’s not an answer!” Mary said.
“If it’s the truth, why isn’t it an answer?”

“Jonah . . . did you get yet another rejection slip from a literary journal today? Is that it?”

“Mary, Mary, please come here.”

She complied.

Jonah told her he knew how upset she was about the scene Andrew had made in the house. Andrew had been late again with the rent. Jonah had decided he was going to give Andrew notice the following day. Mary felt considerable relief. Then Jonah reminded her that it was in the nature of writers, neurotic and passionate folk, to get so obsessive about their craft that at times they just weren’t all there. That was why he forgot to keep the cat out of the bedroom. Surely if anyone could understand this obsessiveness, it was Mary, who threw her social life out the window for the sake of her thesis. But Mary was Beatrice to his Dante, she guided and brought out the noblest in him. Mary slid closer to the man who had been so unstinting in his kindness, his patience, who never lost sight of her other persona no matter how deeply it hid. Tonight it would not hide. Mary gave herself to Jonah, did everything she’d planned to do as her sense developed of the most sensitive points along the six feet two inches of his body.

Later, moonlight filtered through the window on an untroubled scene. Mary’s right leg shifted upward toward Jonah’s knee ever so slightly, then sank again until her toes brushed his.

Mary began to dream. There came the image of an intersection in a city Mary didn’t recognize. People ran every which way, like in a B-movie when a dragon or monster is approaching. Instead of any such bogey, her mind alighted on a cluster of people near the center of the intersection. One of them was kneeling, hands bound behind his back. This captive looked around angrily. Then one of the people in the crowd around the kneeling man spoke:

“I told you what I thought of him, I told you what he’s worth.”

Someone else spoke up: “You want to blow his brains all over the street. I don’t see your humanity manifested here.”
The New Orphic Review

The other retorted: “I suppose you see humanity manifested in the murder of trees to publish garbage, the exploitation of the poor and unlettered.”

Now Mary recognized the aggressive speaker as Jeremy Stern. In contrast to other people in the frantic scene, he did not look flustered, but blasé about the melodrama, and certain as to its outcome.

“Mercy!” cried the captive.

Jeremy laughed.

“I’ll let you do the honors,” someone said to Jeremy. He laughed again, raised a pistol, and shot the captive through the back of the head.

Mary’s vision shifted, so that now she regarded a scene on a different street. Here people buried their faces in the flaps of their coats, trying to stay warm. They ignored the cage mounted on the flat bed of a truck in the middle of the street. Inside the cage, a man cringed and slobbered, begged for someone to let him out. Whenever her gaze began to hone in on the fellow whirling madly on his bare feet, in a cage reeking of straw and piss, his face rotated away from her. Why did he keep doing that? God knew she might be more sympathetic to him than to the masses beating a tattoo on the ground in every direction outside the cell.

Then a couple of men stepped out of the crowd and opened the door of the cage, allowing the prisoner to walk out onto the grimy pavement. But instead of thanking them or bending down in joy to kiss the pavement, the released man stood there with a look of contempt for the world that had roiled so busily around him while he cried out for his freedom. She scrutinized the features of the angry fellow, thinking perhaps it was someone she knew, after all. Yes, maybe the blond fellow with his toned biceps and 30” waist was Scott Rutledge, a man who, in “real life,” doubtless had his enemies. Mary recognized him. But off in yet another direction, there was only a blank barrenness. Mary turned and looked up the street in the direction of a white glare that dared her to explore its depths, to guess
who might lurk there. Who, indeed? Off in that distance there, Mary felt, a malevolent presence mocked Mary for thinking she had two rather marginal people in her life figured out, while lacking a clue about the nature of someone much closer.

Mary woke up in the moonlight pouring through the window.

There came no scratches now.

She could hardly guess Natalie’s whereabouts. Say what you like about that little troublemaker, but she was not bothering Mary or anyone else in the house right now. She must be curled up someplace, fast asleep.

No, there was no scratching . . . but as Mary strained her eyes in the moonlight, she could have sworn—no, it was quite impossible.

Mary realized she was sweating. Really hard.
She feared she might piss herself.

Her eyes strained in the moonlight.

She could have sworn that she saw the doorknob rotating in one direction, then the other, then in the former direction, then back again.

Mary sat bolt upright, and screamed, and screamed, and screamed, until Jonah cupped his hand over her mouth.

When she woke in the morning, Jonah had already gone downstairs. Once again, he came up to serve her hot chocolate, without mentioning the night before. She accepted the cup. Just as she was about to say something, Jonah vanished from the room. She wasn’t quite sure what she wanted to say, though she had little doubt any more about the propensity of intelligent animals of all kinds to warn others through their presence or absence, their flight to or away from another being.

After showering and dressing, Mary went downstairs and faced her housemates, seated around the living room like children in a third-grade classroom awaiting a tardy teacher.

“Who turned the knob of my door last night?” Mary asked, amazed at the calmness of her voice.

“Hey. At some point in the night, you must have been dreaming,”
Jeremy said.

Obviously, she’d blurted out words during her mind’s wanderings, a fact Jonah had happily shared with the others.

“And at some point I wasn’t,” Mary replied.

Jeremy and Scott sat on the couch staring at her. Andrew was smoking again, his mind probably somewhere between here and a squalid one-bedroom apartment somewhere in Ithaca where kids laid down money for weed. Mary sensed that whatever had happened, she wasn’t going to get a straight answer.

“Does anyone happen to know where the cat went?” Mary asked.

“Before you start in about the cat, you should know that I’m the one who’s been feeding her and changing her litter these past months. You’ve never been around for the cat,” Jonah said.

“I’m allergic and there are limits to what I can do for her.”

“Oh, of course,” he scoffed, as Jeremy and Scott looked on with looks suggesting they wouldn’t mind if Mary had a heart attack.

“Was Natalie with you?” Mary demanded of Jeremy.

The Maoist graduate TA shook his head.

She had a growing sense that Natalie had gone where Natalie thought Mary should go. The next question seemed a logical one.

“Did she come and visit you, Scott?”

The athlete shook his head.

Mary knew where Natalie had gone. Bryce Allen’s room. The only place in the house it made sense for her to be.

“Are you suggesting that we haven’t been generous enough with our time toward that stupid little fucking cat?” Jonah said.

Mary locked eyes with the man she’d lived with and trusted all these weeks.

“You’re the one who can’t tear yourself away from your studies—”

Jonah continued.

“Oh, Jonah. You should know. You’re insane with jealousy.”

“What?”

“You heard me. You’ve been doing your absolute damnedest to
sabotage my studies for weeks now! ‘Mary, come have a drink. Forget your studies.’ You can’t bear to see me doing so well, Jonah. You can’t! You took on these people as lodgers because you knew they’d make me deeply uneasy, in their respective ways. Natalie is the only creature here that ever had a right to bother me. She’s been trying to warn me, don’t you see?’

“That’s bullshit!” Jonah said, clearly humiliated that others were hearing this.

Mary went on:

“You’re the coward who put up one of these guys to try to give me a nervous breakdown. Because Jonah Ford is a failure! A writer who can’t get any work published because your intellect is as stunted as any other part of yourself. In the final analysis, you’re not a very intelligent animal,” Mary said.

She didn’t want it to be the cheap kind of insult that people hurl and then run away. So she stood there, waiting for an answer, but her words had fallen on stillness and silence.

Mary went upstairs to pack.
MARTE STUART writes mostly sitting on the floor with her back to the fire. Drawn to people especially when their paddings have been stripped away, she has glimpsed glimmering cores at births, deaths and various times of upheaval. So far, Marte has learned the only thing for certain is change itself. She lives in the fresh, fluid West Kootenays and hopes to stay.

Three Poems

Marte Stuart

Comes Wisdom

There is a poem I am always writing for you
even in my sleep, it’s drawn up, heaved
from the weary wells of leftover memory
held back in dark reservoirs.

Pain not yet forgotten, borne with fresh tears,
drop by drop made precious with your absence.
I am drawn toward the past’s thrumming,
lured by those elusive deeper truths.

I stir down beyond the murky surface
into the heart, seeking clarity,
the resumed quest for your driver
that last day, week, year.

Despairing, I note how momentary
history, at once shape-shifting,
is grasped like water through my fingertips;
each drip a story drowned, lost to small rivulets.

Until against my will, the horrible truth floods in.
A deluge of the whole sorry waste of it,  
torrent of torment  
at once impossible to bear.

Delivering such regret, I cast it away  
immediately without spillage,  
flung far to the open sea in its entirety  
where secrets can remain under, lost for good.

Now, glancing back at this strenuous subduction,  
I allow only an oblique eye to the bottom,  
where wisdom can be found yet glinting  
luminous as coin wishes, by the awful grace of God.

Note: Credit to Aeschylus (523-456 BC) for forming this poem’s structure: And even in our sleep / Pain we cannot forget / Falls drop by drop / Upon the heart / Until in our own despair / Against our will / Comes wisdom / By the awful grace of God.
Negative Imprint

I notice the shape
of what something isn’t:
what fills inverse form between,
and mostly I don’t understand why.
Like, why the stooped-low attic
with its single bare bulb,
on that old foam mattress
which once protected our little heads
from falls on the cement floor
under the rings, under the swing?
The age-crumpled mattress,
edges yellowed, holding her weighty form
of all she was and wasn’t, surrounded
by forgotten boxes and dust. Why there?
Shame, the saddest part.

She, the saddest parting.
Only a scrawled note after all?
Dried blood encrusted brown
over the old green sleeping bag
that once tucked tight around us
in the back-seat-down station wagon
while she drove and we all slept,
slapping her face awake,
to the promise of the coast,
where now her ashes float away or sink.
That slippery green sleeping bag
with her spilled insides over it
which I tossed, and now miss too.

Imprinted, I drag along that still attic
of negative space housing untold anguish
with the boxes and dust, and her lying there.
The inverse moulding me,
my skin filling in the gaps of her,
my heart more her lack.
Now, I study my reflection for those dents
to heave them off me, finally,
up into the light.
Foothills ICU

I

I did not hear
your unspoken words in my ear
echoing against the confines of selfishness;
deaf by choice.

Yet,
why now when I lean close
can I distinctly hear
your silence saying:

“The whole world flows out of me
like blood from a vein,
I see a wound,
the wound is the world,
is my life,
from which I die bleeding.”

I am listening.
Tell me more.

II

I accept how you look now with tubes everywhere.
I can read the monitors.
I know the sound of the alarms.
I understand the statistics.

You pee in a tube. You eat through the one in your nose. Two tubes drain your lungs. Your legs and arms are strapped down, with little screens implanted to spare clots to your brain. There’s a line entering your neck, ending at your heart, monitoring the pressures there. A respirator breathes for you through a hole drilled in your throat. You have I.V. lines: Have a drink! Have some drugs! Your finger clip tracks oxygen levels and heart beats all day long. Your kidneys are on dialysis. Your left arm is lame and casted. You can’t regulate, so one drug makes you large; one makes you small; one makes you hot; one cools you down; one thins your blood; one kills your pain; one paralyses you. And one, thankfully, makes you sleep.

But now, right now,
your mind is alert.
You’re trapped in a body you can’t move.
There’s wild desperation behind your eyes begging: “Pull the plug!”

Pump her more drugs.
Let the respirator breathe for her.
I need more time to think.

I signed the Do Not Resuscitate order
but can I really let you die?
Suffer for me please,
'cause I can’t let you go.
Live longer —
live for me.
Just live.

III

I have her cold hand in mine.
She’s staring at me, but
out-of-focus, far away.
Her body stiffens then, trembles,
face transformed into some monster;
a hideous grin, body convulsing.
She’s pained and contorted,
every muscle stretched to its limit
quaking. This face —
etched into memory.

The monitors go ballistic,
nurses and doctors everywhere.
Someone pulls me back, away.
I’m certain she’s dying.
This is it, right here, right now.
I push my way back to her, but
I’m not allowed.
They say over and over:
“It’s just a seizure. It’s just a seizure.”
Just.
Just?
This just happens to be my mother.
IV

This is not what she’s like.

She’s a romantic,
an artist,
a dreamer.
She’s practical
and a poet.
She’s intuitive and insightful.
She’s sensitive and insecure.
She’s an athlete.
She’s a star!
She has an iron will,
and she has opinions.
She has lots of them.
She can accomplish anything,
and she has.
She is bright and loveable,
and terrible and horrible.
She’s all the extremes put together.

Lying limp on this hospital bed here,
this is NOT what she’s like.

V

Go away hateful time,
of hurt, disillusionment, despair.
How can one person hold so much pain?
Why me?
Why her?
Why her.

VI

Mom wants the pool.
She spells out big letters P.O.O.L. on the page.
I tell her it’s impossible right now,
but soon, if she keeps getting better.

She can get so crabby
if she doesn’t get her way.
It makes me laugh that she can be so helpless,
speechless and yet so powerful.

I smile.
I am so happy!
So glad she can boss me around, when
last week she couldn’t even move.

She’ll get me rushing about,
left and right,
with only a slight glance.
She’s the queen bee.

But, why then
can I not look
at her emaciated body,
naked there at the pool’s edge?
VII

Thank you for giving me time
to understand what you mean to me.
For letting me reflect
on your life and mine,
as we are,
together and apart.

For opening up
your inside,
exposing all that weakness
for me to prod and poke.
Self-analysis on another
is less painful.

Thanks for opening my eyes and my heart;
for opening my eyes into my heart;
for filling my eyes with my heart.
For teaching me to love,
and hate,
myself and you.

For showing me you do
have will to live,
and love for life.
Hear this,
your soul morphine:
\textit{your suffering has great worth}.

May it ease your pain.
SUSAN ANDREWS GRACE is the author of five books of poetry, *Philosopher at the Skin Edge of Being, Love & Tribal Baseball, Flesh, a Naked Dress, Ferry Woman's History of the World*, and *Water is the First World*. She is also an artist who has exhibited her work in numerous galleries. Her work echoes and honours textile traditions as it engages historical and theoretical concerns about human, and more specifically, feminine existence.

**Poetry and Political Freedom**

Susan Andrews Grace

Where I live in the West Kootenay of British Columbia, poet is a designation that comes with a whiff of pot-smoke and an open-mic reading, or so goes the local stereotype. Hardly anyone here takes poetry seriously because every other person claims to be one. The only hope for a poet is to also write fiction, preferably novels. And above all a poet must write accessible poetry, accessible being a term that makes poets everywhere shudder.

Who knows what accessible means? But it implies something about others who write; accessible is somehow opposite to profound. Who’s in and who’s out we don’t know, but it can be safely assumed that there’s a right place to be in the cultural hierarchy of public popularity. That holy order is enhanced by media coverage. My guess is that poetry would be at the bottom of such a hierarchical list in Canada. The indication of this status I take from facts like this: the Governor General’s award for Poetry isn’t announced in the news along with the winners of fiction and non-fiction. It’s as if it didn’t exist. This dismissal of poetry is an indication of the health of what I will call ‘artist hatred’ for the purposes of this essay. To call it hatred is probably a bit strong for something that is really more like indifference. However, the historical longevity of such indifference
has hardened into something significant that is a hatred for cultural workers, which seems well established in stereotypes and doesn’t go away.

Artist hatred might be one of the last socially accepted prejudices against a group, tucked in there with the scorn heaped on overweight people. In this best little art town in North America, there is enough artist hatred to sink a ship, as my father used to say, and in places you might be surprised to find it. This town’s economy is shored up by the marijuana industry and there is an automatic assumption by many that artists are the main imbibers, and yet among my artist/writer colleagues I know of very few who do. As a practicing poet, however, I think this mindset is a good sign.

For many years I’ve entertained the notion that a society that does not value poetry is one with its political freedoms still intact. As poetry, in North America at any rate, has the lowest status of art forms its importance as a barometer is key. Although it’s not exactly exhilarating to be a practicing poet in such a society, the alternative of not writing poetry is much worse. In fact, poets throughout the world still act as if the practice of poetry is a profession; they pour what money they have into their education; they maintain disciplined practices of reading and writing. They engage in conversation with the great poetry and poets in their language and culture and those of others. In some countries, such as France and the Netherlands, poets and other artists receive stipends once they have achieved something like mid-career Canada Council grant status. Often those nations have once experienced political oppression. One of the first things a dictator does is get rid of the poets, then the playwrights and then other cultural practitioners. Hitler, for instance, had a hit list that included artists considered difficult or avant garde; that is, art not to his tastes, which ran to the conventional.

In North America the university system provides some protection of poetry as our barometer of political freedom. Poetry production in universities means that some poets and some poetries do survive
through the auspices of the institution, deeply rooted in a status quo. Luckily, we don’t have to worry about those poets being persecuted for their work. Nor will they suffer from lack of attention. Some of them may be considered unconventional outside of their own institution but the rule of “birds of a feather” often applies at universities. Hiring one’s friends is a class-honoured tradition anywhere. Thanks to ever-increasing corporate sponsorship, the university is less about intellectual freedom than ever before, particularly in the sciences. Freedom of speech may be going the same way. We can only hope that is not so. Poets outside academe are the most obscure and impoverished. They may also have the most moral and artistic authority because they are not part of a coterie, which depends on a status quo. In other words, they have nothing to lose and as the song goes, that’s freedom.

This connection between freedom and poetry first occurred to me in the 1980s when I was a member of Amnesty International’s letter-writing network. I was a beginning poet, and knew that freedom of expression was a precious commodity. But I was surprised to see how often Amnesty International’s Appeal list included poets, who were sometimes also journalists. But “pure” poets appeared on the list with a frequency that was curious; poets who had no political agenda in their writing, who were not propagandists and who were not allied with a political entity. This connection between poetry and political freedom was completely surprising to me. Almost as surprising as the fact that I ended up a poet.

Since I was a kid I’d wanted to be a writer and assumed I’d write something useful and important. Nevertheless, as an adult, there I was, a poet. There was something about the distillation of thought in poetry that I loved to read. The more I practiced the art of poetry the more exciting it became. In a way that only Western Canada is capable of being pioneer in terms of culture, I had the received impression that poetry was pretty useless and was only published in the weekly country papers as filler. I was surprised to hear that poets were well-
respected in some quarters and in some times and was prepared to accept that it was true, although I had serious doubts. I hoped to produce some half-decent poetry, although I kept writing about my kids and the garden and things that were definitely not leading-edge or sexy. I also wanted to make things fair, somehow, balance the ledger in favour of invisible people, the ones I never read about in books. I wanted to write the way Adrienne Rich had in *Of Woman Born*: emotional honesty about the facts of living a woman’s life, the roles of mother and wife while entertaining a life of the intellect and creative endeavour. Her poems were in fierce allegiance with women. Despite my own lack of education, wealth, and social status, Adrienne Rich’s writing spoke with intelligence to my own intelligence. I was touched and deeply affected by that and I was grateful that such a poet and such a body of work existed. It encouraged me to forge my own way. I hoped that with my own reading and native ability I could find a way to be like Adrienne Rich, to provide other readers, like me, with visibility. I decided to follow the desire and seek teachers and found them.

My poet teachers told me to write what I knew, to find my voice. As I wrote what I knew I did find my voice: it was a magical and powerful process. My voice had been with me since I was a small child, I realized. Writing poetry made sudden sense of everything that I had lived in my family of origin and the new little family to which I was mother and wife. To write a poem made a present moment crystalline. I didn’t understand then that the institution of the family had made me the poet I was, just as the institution of the nation, church, and university make other poets who they are. If I’d been a man writing about kids or a woman writing about “the land” at that time I’d have been much better off. I could see that was so, even then. My poems were what anyone would expect a woman to write about—children and domestic life, albeit in a time when women were finally being released from domestic duty, at least in theory. So I paid for my sins of not doing something useful like journalism, by writing
letters for Amnesty International while I worked at improving myself as a poet. Amnesty letter writing was something I could do for the world in spite of being a poet and raising three small children.

Poetry may have worth, in an ideal sort of way. Since Plato, the poet has been a *persona non grata*. Plato declared that poets would be banned from the ideal society in his *Republic*. Platonic society would be well educated and its citizens virtuous through training. In order to assure that the society was ideal there would be a Philosopher King to rule. (Or Philosopher Queen, although Platonic scholars have assiduously ignored the Queen idea.) The Philosopher King ruled a benevolent dictatorship. For Plato, democracy was mob rule.

The poet would not be allowed in the city and if one was accidentally spawned despite a proper education in something like nursing (the education I had), steps would be taken to get rid of that person. Plato’s reasoning appears to be that the poet represents reality with something that is not real. The poet lies, which is exactly what my brother told my mother as an excuse for why he should not have to study English. It seems Plato denies that the poet will have authority to produce the poem, by virtue of existence alone, and that the poet will have written what she or he knows. Presumably, from Plato’s point of view, that would be the danger to the state; an individual who knows and expresses some opinion that may not be shared by the ruler. There’s no way to control how a person thinks. The Greek word *poiesis*, from which we get poet and poetry, is a "making." It makes something unreal, poetry, from something real, experience. The meaning, sound, and rhythm of poetry evokes an emotional response in the reader who shares the existential reality, humanity, from which the poet writes. Sometimes the symbol of the experience is too much for a despot to bear. It has too much meaning to the reader. Every art form is in some way making something that did not exist before, which makes all artists suspect. Poets are most suspect because of the distillation and use of metaphor which render their work as portable, easily remembered emblems of an idea.
Think of William Carolos William’s “The Red Wheelbarrow” as a badge of the American Modernist’s project of “No ideas but in things.” Anyone could remember that poem. It’s a simple sentence: “so much depends/ upon/ a red wheel/barrow/ glazed with rain/ water/ beside the white/ chickens.” Anyone could remember what it meant, after one explanation, that the wheelbarrow is a symbol for what Williams spent his whole life as poet to evoke, as well as it being a hardworking tool of farm life. Anyone who has read Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s didactic lyric poems, such as “Evangeline,” and then reads Williams’s simple wheelbarrow poem will be aware of change afoot in the land of poetry in William’s time. The change will reflect both the land and the poet. Williams (1883-1963) was born the year after Longfellow (1807-1882) died.

As an Amnesty writer I became curious about what the listed poets were writing and read some of the works in translation. There was a poet from Ukraine who had been imprisoned for a long time. His poems were included in translation in the Bulletins. The poems were romantic and seemed to only be about the river Dnieper. I couldn’t understand why he’d be imprisoned for writing those poems, unless it was because of how bad they were but that may have been the fault of the translation. He was later released after many years, (over twenty I think), and he moved to Kelowna, BC to be with relatives where he apparently also caused trouble. The nature of the trouble I can’t remember but found that quite humourous. Although I don’t know for sure, I imagine that the river was a powerful metaphor for Ukrainian sovereignty. Both the Russian Empire and the Soviet government had appropriated the Dnieper, Ukraine’s largest river, for transportation and hydroelectric energy. By writing about the Dnieper as if he was a Ukrainian Wordsworth this poet enraged the Soviet government so much so that they imprisoned him indefinitely. Other poets had already died for their writing. This man’s life was spared, perhaps because he was only writing about a river in a romantic, old-fashioned way. The power of his writing must have been to recall a time when
every Ukrainian owned the Dnieper. He owned the experience by writing about it.

According to many literary critics, the poetry-reading portion of the population of any society at any time in history is unchanging and at about six percent of the total population. How amazing then that the poets should be the first to have their heads chopped off, literally or figuratively. There must be a reason. I suspect it has to do with the distillation of thought in poetry, the ability to convey powerful emotion with the use of metaphor, to allude to what every citizen “owns,” such as the rivers and streams by right of existence.

One poet for whom I wrote was Irina Ratushinskaya. She was born in 1954 and like me had the wrong education to be a poet. She’d studied at Odessa University where she received a Masters in Physics and became a schoolteacher. She wrote poetry not unlike what I was writing—poems about love, theology, and artistic creation. Nevertheless she was charged with anti-Soviet agitation for “the dissemination of slanderous documentation in poetic form” and sentenced to a labour camp for seven years. She was released three years prematurely in 1986, partly due to the publicity she received in the rest of the world. During her prison years she wrote constantly, with soap, until she memorized each of her 250 poems composed since coming to the camp. Incarceration seemed only to intensify her production of poetry and sense of purpose, to which the publication of her memoir Grey is the Colour of Hope testified. Poets around the world share such dedication. Pablo Neruda was exiled from his beloved Chile a great deal of his life and wrote constantly about his love for his country, its people, and their culture. They couldn’t shut him up.

Poets in our country enjoy great freedom. We can write what we like. Some of us go to conferences in which the currently-cool people tell some of us that we are not, well, cool. Poets enter contests that bilk the majority to give one person a prize because poets are aware that winning prizes is the only way their neighbours might know what
they do. (And I suspect that is wishful thinking.) One of the biggest
literary prizes in Canada is the Griffin Prize for Poetry and most
people have never heard of it. Also, book publishers pay a great deal
of attention to the winners of important literary competitions because
winning is supposed to sell more books, but it usually doesn’t. Poets
in our country are only too aware of how little poetry matters.

The state of poetry in North America is a modestly sorry one and not
a cause for great concern by would-be dictators. Literary periodicals
that publish poetry are starved for funds and the only way they can
continue publication is to have these contests. Or so they claim. The
contests offer a subscription in return for the entry fee and that seems
a fair exchange, in most cases. However, it’s entirely feasible that
literary contest organizers have decided who the winner will be before
they announce the contest. The entries are screened so that the expert
judge, a writer who has won contests and has a reputation, reads a
screened selection of the entries, which can be in the thousands. The
website, Foetry.com, which operated from 2004 to 2007, exposed the
vagaries of what it called PoBiz: the contests, periodicals, workshops,
and universities that take advantage of those foolish enough to write
poetry.

Foetry.com aimed for fact-based and even-handed journalism,
according to founder Alan Cordle. As a reader of the website I was
impressed with its restraint. Foetry’s greatest legacy is arguably the
“Jorie Graham Rule,” which makes entries by the students of and
close relations to the judge of a contest, ineligible. Its existence is due
to facts uncovered by Foetry.com regarding the winners of contests
judged by prominent American poet Jorie Graham, in particular. The
most hilarious example was the case of Peter Sacks who was the
winner of the 1999 University of Georgia’s manuscript competition,
which Graham judged, although he had not entered a manuscript.
Jorie later married Peter and received a teaching position alongside
him at Harvard University. Nothing quite as juicy occurred after that
on Foetry.com. But contests now publish the Jorie Graham Rule,
although they don’t call it that, with contest guidelines: no former or present students, friends, or relatives of the judge can apply. With such practices apparently rampant in the world of PoBiz, it seems that poetry is its own best enemy and needs no others. It certainly makes being a poet cringe-worthy to read of these exploits by the luminaries in one’s field.

The contest is a lottery system; just as regional, provincial and national granting systems are lotteries. By entering a submission a poet is “buying” a ticket, although grant competitions do not charge entry fees, yet. Grants might keep a mouse alive but they don’t keep artists in food and lodging for long. Most North American, non-academic poets have other jobs, or depend on family for support. Throughout the world, most artists are self-employed without any of the income or benefits that other workers, such as their editors, agents, and publishers enjoy. The companies, institutions, publications and agencies that act as culture’s middlemen depend on the work of artists for their existence. Artists, like farmers, are primary producers, and like farmers, most have a hard time to stay afloat, financially, professionally, and emotionally. It’s a rare artist who is able to spend his or her whole life practicing his or her art and also able to earn a living from it. It’s assumed that poets have no hope to earn a living from their work. Most artists participate in one or more of the lottery systems available to them in the hopes of winning some freedom to work. And most poets do what they do for nothing. There is no value in poetry to these poets, other than the reward of doing it. There is only its worth, which is what the despots seem to understand very well.

Regardless, I am a grateful poet to live in such a place and time. I would not want to be a poet in Stalinist Russia where Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938), poet and founder of the Acmeist movement in poetry, said: "Only in Russia is poetry respected—it gets people killed. Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?” That kind of respect we can do without. Mandelstam died in
a transit camp in Vladivostok after repeated sentencing and imprisonments for the poetry he wrote, some of which even praised Stalin.

As a woman poet I have freedom to write about my life as a woman, and be ignored, unlike poet Anna Akmatova (1889–1966) who paid a great price for freedom of expression. Her influence upon women caused great suffering to her and to the women who read her. "I taught our women how to speak, but don't know how to make them silent." Once you know something you can’t un-know it. The truth sits there like an elephant, trumpeting in the living room. I appreciated the heroic aspect of Akmatova’s poetry and life and was inspired by her writing about the fate of creative women. Akmatova’s work was circulated among Russians by word of mouth and in samizdat form, although her poetry was officially suppressed and banned from 1925 to 1952. Samizdat is self-publication with a dangerous twist.

Poets in my town self-publish too: they produce chapbooks of their work without the sanction of the state (under 48 pages and therefore not considered a real book) and without the approval of the usual gatekeepers, publishers, and editors. Self-publishing is not dangerous to the writer or the reader in my town. Vladimir Bukovsky, Russian dissident author, described samizdat: "I myself create it, edit it, censor it, publish it, distribute it, and get imprisoned for it.” In my town, we don’t think of the latter outcome as a possibility. Although the hatred or indifference toward the poet may be ever present, it is not lethal here. Perhaps the conversation that good poetry ought to have with the poetries of the past while it forges new expressions for a new time is too demanding for most readers, if not for most poets. Especially when often there is no material value and little worth to the practice and the very real possibility of failing miserably. With a job description like that, it can be assumed that those who do apply cannot help themselves; they were born that way.

And perhaps that is the real reason for the danger of poetry to a despot. No matter what you do to a poet, the poet will still produce
poetry. If the poetry is true to the vision of the poet, there will be consequences, like a readership. And then maybe trouble. There’s no reason not to be truthful when poetry’s value, in terms of material return, is nil and its worth to the world is in the writing. In 1963, Joseph Brodsky, to become a Nobel laureate in 1987, was considered a social parasite and convicted for being nothing but a poet. This is a perfect example of the real nature of artist hatred.

Dictators have a habit of cleaning up their nations very quickly. Universities are cleansed of untidy thinkers and poets who do not suit the ruler are expunged. Chilean Pablo Neruda, considered the greatest poet of the twentieth century, was exiled because of the danger of his thought, (communist in flavour), to successive despots. In his Nobel Acceptance speech Neruda said the best poet is one who bakes bread, providing fellow citizens with the simplest and most delicious food. This poet understands the culture in which he or she lives and knows what the people are hungry for and will not write poetry that is merely sweet but the poetry that will give strength in its understanding of what matters. In this analogy, Neruda alludes to the necessity of poetry to the people in its essential life-giving quality. It is the life of the spirit we are talking about here. Neruda nourished Chile and Chileans with his poems and they loved him well for it. He understood the nature of PoBiz in every era and what the poet must do.

Only in this indispensable way of being ordinary people shall we give back to poetry the mighty breadth which has been pared away from it little by little in every epoch, just as we ourselves have been whittled down in every epoch.

When Pablo Neruda heard the news of Pinochet’s military coup of Chile’s Allende government, on September 11, 1973, he said, “This is the end.” Neruda had spent his life writing and working to achieve the freedom from poverty and inequality for Chileans that the Allende government delivered. Neruda refused to leave again to save his life.
By September 23, 1973 he was dead, apparently from a broken heart. Chileans learned about his death by word of mouth, despite the fact that Santiago was under curfew and was decimated by the coup. Chileans marched in the thousands to follow his funeral cortege. They knew poetry’s power and worth, and had the courage to show it, in spite of machine guns trained on them as they walked.

In South America, I am told people are willing to sit for several hours to listen to their poets read poetry; they’ve had that many years of oppression. I’m grateful that many people in my town can only last twenty minutes at a reading before getting antsy. And as for me, I will continue what I cannot stop myself from doing. I understand the danger of poetry to the state in terms of ideological differences. When poetry, like the cattle of India, roams territories as if it owned them, there will be untidy and smelly consequences, as ornery and savvy poets write what some people do not like to read. Plato’s ordinance against the poets is one that many rulers have enforced over the years. The poet has probably always been a symbol of the bridge between thought and existence that poetry provides civilizations. And this symbolic status could be the reason for the “big bucks” paid to poets.

If poetry bakes bread, then freedom pours wine; necessity and luxury joined in promiscuous communion. Poetry and freedom are the witty lovers who laugh at tyranny as if it were a joke and continue their irreverent behaviours that annoy the many and please a few. I’m happy to report that in the West Kootenay, poetry is alive and yet willfully snivels at its status.
The New Orphic Review

JOAN M. BARIL, a Thunder Bay native, has had over fifty-three stories published in Canadian literary magazines, including Prairie Fire, Room, Northword, The Antigonish Review and many others. For several years her columns on women's and immigrant issues appeared in the Thunder Bay Post and Northern Woman's Journal. She has won many awards for her writing, including first prize three years in a row in the Northwestern Ontario Writers' Workshop annual contest.

Generosity

Joan M. Baril

Ethel Kowalchuk holds both her son’s hands in hers. The loudspeaker announces the first call for Air Canada, flight 405 to Toronto. “All passengers should now board at Gate Two.”

“Don’t cry, Ma,” Ken says. “I’ll be back at Christmas.” He bends and kisses her on the cheek. “When you have time, send me some of those sesame cookies, okay?” His beautiful smile, high beam and happy, always twists her heart.

Rudy Kowalchuk, in plaid shirt and work boots, shakes his son’s hand and then envelops him in a giant hug, pounding him on the back. “Stay warm,” he says. “Take care. God bless you. Be careful with your money. Study hard. Your mom and I are proud of you.”

Ethel takes her husband’s arm as they watch their only child disappear through the departure doors. One day he’ll come back as a lawyer, she thinks. It seems impossible but then, as her parents often said, in Canada everything is possible.

In the truck, she mentally goes over all the items she packed into Ken’s suitcase. “I wonder if he has enough warm socks,” she says to her husband. “I hear the winters are damp in Toronto.”

“Don’t worry about it. You can send him some.” Rudy guns the Dodge Ram along the Expressway, passing the turn-off into Westfort
and home. “I have to pick up a few things at Canadian Tire,” he says. Ethel knows her husband can’t go home just yet. The sight of Ken’s room, the printer, the books, the oversized speakers, the Lakehead University diploma on the wall, the hockey trophies and the fishing stuff in the garage will be too much for him. Poor old husband, she thinks. He’ll probably cry, and he won’t like that. She’ll cry too, of course, but that’s different.

In Canadian Tire, she spots the very thing at once and on sale too! Nipigon nylons, the best wool socks made. She puts two pair in her cart. Her eye is drawn to a display of small, flat boxes each holding an array of tiny screwdrivers. By some miracle, a Canadian Tire salesperson is at hand.

“What are these for?” she asks.

“Small machines, like sewing machines or computers. Very handy.”

Yes! Ken has a new laptop. She’ll slip these into the box with the socks. And over there, a display of toothpaste at a good price. He has a new tube with him but how long will that last? Better send two. Now to find some plastic containers for the cookies.

* * *

Three months before graduation from Osgood Law School, Ken phones. He’s snagged a great articling placement with a prestigious Toronto firm. Ethel tries to sound happy for him even though her voice falters. Then he says, “I met a girl, Ma. Her name is Spicer Bonycastle. I know you’ll love her. She’s in my law class and she’ll be articling with me at the same firm.”

“What the hell name is Spicer for a girl,” Rudy says at supper. “Sounds like a grocery store.”

“Yes, but maybe it was the Toronto fashion at one time. You never know.” Ethel is thinking of many things at once, a possible wedding and then grandchildren but also she is considering what to get for Spicer to put into the latest box. Perhaps some lipstick from Shoppers or would fancy knit gloves be better? She saw some on sale at Wal-Mart when she dropped in to pick up the peppermints Ken liked.
At Christmas, Spicer and Ken arrive with strange presents: a salad spinner, a set of champagne glasses and something called a mandoline to slice tomatoes. Spicer, thin and tall with glossy, black hair to her shoulders, has a short-stepping, snappy walk. She wears her heels in the house. Ethel can barely see the outline of a breast under her silk shirt. Spicer eats hardly anything, smilingly turning down Ethel’s pickles, her perogies and Rudy’s homemade moose sausage. She picks at her potato salad and has an apple for desert. She and Ken generally don’t show up for supper and Ethel knows from certain overheard remarks that the young couple go to the gluten-free restaurant on Cumberland Street.

In bed, Rudy says, “How the hell can she bear a child with hips like a snake. Her behind would fit into a teacup.”

“Two teacups,” says Ethel.

“Now your behind,” he says, giving it a little slap. “Now that’s a behind.”

Ethel laughs, wiggles against him. “Sh, sh,” she says. Such a small house with Spicer next door in the spare room and Ken on the couch in the front room. “We have to be quiet,” she says.

“Sure thing,” says Rudy.

* * *

For Spicer and Ken, the expected sequence. First, graduation, then the call to the bar, followed by a fancy wedding in Rosedale, a two-million-dollar high-rise Toronto condo and a Porsche in the garage below. A hefty line of credit at the bank. Ken sticks to real estate and makes money in a hot market. Spicer specializes in criminal law and, besides making money, garners a bit of fame. After one high-profile trial, the Toronto Sun pictures her in black gown, tabs, and four-inch heels with the caption, The Hottest Hot Shot in Law.

But no children, Ethel thinks, as she packs the box she sends every three months. Luckily, she cannot see Spicer pick it up in the condo mail room a few days later, nor hear her daughter-in-law’s deep sigh, nor see the angry woman slam the package on the kitchen counter.
“Another goddamn box of junk,” Spicer yells at Ken. “Every three months. Every three goddamn months. You have to phone her, Ken. Tell her to get a life. Stop sending us this crap.”

“I like the cookies,” Ken says, trying for a light tone. He takes out the Henkel scissors and slices open the heavy layer of mailing tape. He smiles at Spicer who does not respond.

“I don’t want to look at the stuff,” says Spicer, fiddling with the stainless steel espresso machine. “Remember those wooly gloves, every finger a different colour. What was that? And the wedding present. A table painted with flowers and hearts.”

“Ukrainian design,” Ken says, trying another useless smile. He lifts the lid off the shoebox and sees the familiar plastic tub of cookies. Mmm. His favourite. “Sesame! Hot damn!”

But Spicer is not finished. “I told her our décor was minimalist. I said, very clearly, ‘our colours are black and white.’ How do you put a blue painted table with goddamn hearts on it into a minimalist décor?”

“I don’t think Ma understands the concept of minimalist,” Ken says.

“No kidding,” Spicer reaches into the shoebox, grabs a couple of objects and tosses them into the air. Two packages of toothpaste hit the floor. “A book about the fucking Sleeping Giant.” She flings it against the wall. “A deck of cards.” The little box hits the side of the fridge. “A his-and-hers razor set. Jesus. Ear muffs. Who the hell wears ear muffs?” She pitches each item hard against the cupboards on the far side of the room.

“How does she cram so much junk into one shoebox? Does she think we’re poor and might run out of toothpaste? We must have forty tubes in the cupboard in the den. And what’s this?” Spicer pulls out a small envelope and opens it. “A recipe. She sent me a recipe. I can’t believe it. Borscht. Fucking borscht. Does your mother think I actually cook?” She balls the recipe up and lobs it into the sink where it lands in a dish full of water. “Phone her, for God’s sake. Either you do it or I will.” She stalks out of the room toward the den, carrying the espresso.
The New Orphic Review

Ken reaches across and retrieves the recipe, spreading it out on the counter. The blue ink runs off the paper and he brushes the drops into the sink. The top of the page is dry and readable but the rest is water sodden. He reads. *Dear Spicer, This is my mother’s borscht recipe that she brought from the Ukraine. Maybe you would like to try it. Love, Ethel.*

Ken puts the soggy paper in the trash and takes out a cloth to wipe the blue stains from the stainless steel counter. He remembers his grandmother well. The old lady spoke a mangled English, but he had no trouble understanding her. He sees her in her backyard putting ripe tomatoes in a basket and then holding out the biggest to him, a child, who had to use two hands to take it. He remembers her red bauble hat, easily visible from the ice as he skated by. She came to every one of his hockey games. Every one.

Ken stands very still watching a blue water drop slide down the side of the stainless steel sink, head slowly to the drain and disappear.

* * *

After Ethel gets the call about the divorce, she can hardly bear to tell Rudy at supper.

"So what are you crying about?” her husband says.

“The church does not approve of divorce.”

“Who the hell cares?” says Rudy. “No more hot stuff the lawyer. Did you really think Miss Minimalist would ever give you grandchildren? Pfff,” he says, helping himself to more potato pancakes.

* * *

The next summer, Ken has four weeks’ vacation and plans to drive up to Thunder Bay. “And I have a surprise for you,” he says on the phone.

The surprise is Marcie O’Hare. “She’s from Newfoundland,” Ken says when he introduces her as she steps out of the Toyota Rav. “She’s a nurse, head of the children’s ward.” Ethel can barely keep the pleased look off her face. Marcie is plump, with short blond hair and
bright blue eyes. She wears tight capris that cling to her heavy thighs. She lifts a suitcase out of the trunk as if it were made of cobwebs.

“Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Kowalchuk,” she says, shaking Ethel’s hand. It is then Ethel notices the wedding ring beside the engagement ring.

“That’s the other part of the surprise,” Ken says quickly. “We, uh, we married a month ago. Just a small ceremony with friends. Justice of the Peace.” He’s talking fast, getting it all out at once. He knows his parents will be upset at not being included. And the non-church wedding would be doubly upsetting, especially for his mom. “But, you see,” he stammers, “we were living together anyway. so we thought it was the right time.”

Living together? Ethel opens her mouth but stops. Marcie has turned sideways to hand the suitcase to Rudy and what’s that? A baby bump? Such a big girl, on the plump side, not easy to tell. Another quick peek and she’s still unsure. “Come on inside,” she says. “Supper’s on the stove. I’ve got borscht. Holuptsi and perogies. Cake and cookies for dessert.”

“Isn’t that grand now,” says Marcie, following her mother-in-law into the kitchen. “I was hoping for cookies. If it’s not too much bother, Mrs. Kowalchuk, could you find a bit of time to show me how to make those wonderful cookies you send to Ken. They’re the best ever.”

“Call me Ma,” says Ethel.

* * *

Many years later, seven-year-old Owen is walking home from school when he spies the box on the ledge beside the front door. A Gramma box! It’s the right size and all covered with clear tape as usual. He hasn’t seen one for so long, months and months. He snatches it up and runs back half a block where his twelve-year-old sister is walking with her friends.

“Kayla. Kayla,” he screams, leaping up and down. “Look what came! A Gramma box! A Gramma box!” He capers about, waving the
box in the air with both hands.

Kayla grabs hold of him. “Stop it,” she says. She kneels down on the slushy sidewalk and puts her arms tight around him. She takes the box from his hands. “Stop it, Owen. Stop it. It can’t be a Gramma box. Don’t your remember? Gramma died just after Christmas. Dad and Mom went to the funeral and left us with Auntie Rea. Remember? And we’re all going up to Thunder Bay at Easter to clean out the house and help Grampy move into this special home because now, he’s all alone.”

Owen stares at the box, confused. He feels dizzy like when he fell off the swing and hit his head. Like when he climbed on the garage and couldn’t get back down. But maybe an angel…. He stops the thought, hangs his head. He wipes the snot from his nose with his mitt. He takes a big sniffle. He will not, will not, cry.

Kayla studies the box. No return address. Under the black lettering and the heavy criss-cross of tape, she makes out the shape of an envelope. She takes Owen by the hand and leads him to the house. They put the box in the middle of the kitchen table just as if it were a real Gramma box. When her parents come home, they’ll open it all together after dinner as usual. Maybe there’ll be cookies. Then she shakes her head to clear it. No more cookies. Never any more cookies.

“I can’t believe it,” her mother says to her dad at dinner. “All our married life we’ve had these wonderful, crazy, surprise boxes. Every three months. The kids grew up on them. And now, out of the blue….” She stops. Sighs.

Owen stares at the box as he eats his ice cream dessert. At last his mom stands and reaches in the drawer for the Henkel scissors. But she only cuts down to the envelope under the tape.

*Dear Ken and Marcie, Owen and Kayla. I am slowly cleaning out the house and so I found a few things that Ma put away for her next grandmother box and I thought I would send them on. I am feeling pretty good in spite of everything. Love to all. Take care. See you all at Easter, Grampy.*
Kayla watches as Mom lifts the lid and brings out the first item and holds it up. A box of toothpaste. Kayla joins the collective groan. Then they all laugh. There’s always toothpaste. The mood lightens. To Kayla it feels like old times. Next come two small teddy bears. Mom hands one to Owen and one to her. Kayla frowns. She’s too old for stuffed toys. But, on the other hand, it’s so cute. She tucks it into the pocket of her hoodie. A whistle on a lanyard. Owen holds up his hand and Mom passes it over. A pair of pantyhose for Mom follows. Then horrible pink socks for her. They’ll go into the Diabetes Clothes Line bag where many of Gramma’s gifts end up. A set of razors for Dad is followed by a bar of soap, and a bottle of perfume wrapped in a tea towel with a picture of the Sleeping Giant on it. A wooden box containing a Ukrainian Easter egg wrapped in straw causes Mom to give a little cry of pleasure. “Oh, how lovely,” she says, carefully lifting it out so they all can see. Lastly, Mom brings out a little carved stand to hold the egg. The end. All in all, Kayla thinks, it’s been a pretty good Gramma box.

At the bottom is a second envelope. “Your name’s on it,” says Mom, handing it over. Inside Kayla finds a piece of paper. “A recipe,” she says in surprise. She reads. Dear Kayla, This is the old Ukrainian recipe for sesame cookies. They are easy to make. I hope you will try. Love, Gramma.

“Oh boy,” cries Kayla, delighted.

The late winter dark invades the kitchen. Ken stands to switch on the overhead light. He turns and looks at his family. Hyper Owen, working on the new whistle. He’ll have to take it off him in a minute. Kayla, that solemn worrier, is reading out loud the ingredient list on her recipe. His wife, larger than ever, is cleaning up the table, directing the children, and getting out more ice cream. Add in himself, a little out of shape from too much sitting and not enough gym.

Noise, chatter, clutter, the usual. So why is he suddenly so happy? Gratitude perhaps. A feeling of good luck? It’s as if they’re all caught in a vortex, spinning together. He cannot say why.
The New Orphic Review

MICHAEL HETHERINGTON lives in North Vancouver and two of his stories appeared in the first issue of The New Orphic Review in 1998. Since then he has published two collections of short stories and three novels, one of which, The Playing Card (Passfield Press, 2013), was awarded a gold Independent Publisher Book Award. His next book will be a book of poems.

Three Poems

Michael Hetherington

The Boats

There was a time when the boats went out in the morning
In the afternoon they returned empty
Where were the men we wondered but would not say
The sun came out at the end of the day
Girls played on the beach where clams lay open
Each day they buried the shells in a different place—
On the other side of the bay where I had not been
Since Alex saw the bird in the tree with the leaves that resembled

Laura

The sky objected and the shale shook and the shallows intervened
I finally understood, and that was when the boats began to return

with the men again.
At the Potter’s House

I walked down the path to the potter’s house
He was working at his wheel
And I watched all day
Toward dusk he completed a pot that was flawed
Still soft, he held it up
Then slowly, with reverence, flattened it
I watched all night as he crafted the clay
Into another pot.

In the morning I opened the door to a pluperfect dawn
The potter stood up from his wheel with a tiny pot
He placed it in my hands unfired
And said, “Go into the world with it.”

He died that night
The back room crammed
With compromised pots
Three days later
I walked down again
Cradling my tiny pot
Now with a wound in its side.
The Signing

He stood in the presence of his enemies
And was told to sign
On the Labatt’s Blue line.
First he asked for bread
And they consented
Next for water to drink
And they gave it.
Finally, to step out in the night
To count the stars
They agreed and gave him a scribe and a guard.
He returned to their room
And the table and chair
The paper laid out before him.
He set on the surface a bottle of ink
Untwisted the top
Dipped in his thumb nail
And signed the paper
On the Labatt’s Blue line
In the presence of his enemies.
VERA MALOFF’s writing springs from an exploration of her Doukhobor family history. She won the Kootenay Literary Competition for her creative non-fiction story, *Porto Rico*, about her family’s internment in the mountains of British Columbia in 1929. Her grandfather Pete Maloff was a passionate pacifist and a writer. Vera is now writing about the Maloff family’s involvement in the peace movement, starting in the 1920s.

**Let Them Go Their Way**

**Vera Maloff**

This rainy March evening I’ve driven the winding road to Nelson to hear Professor Kathleen Rodgers launch her new book, *Welcome to Resisterville: American Dissidents in British Columbia*. Others have braved the downpour and the public library is noisy with folk greeting each other with handclasps and hugs. It is mostly an older Kootenay crowd, several women wearing woollen shawls, men in checkered shirts. Many are draft resisters who have come to hear how Dr. Rodgers has told their stories. I see fellow Doukhobors and recognize Quaker friends. The musty scent of damp clothing, wood burning fires, and coffee fills the air.

Rodgers’ treatise on the influence of the American war resisters on British Columbia is not an outsider’s view. She grew up in the Slocan Valley where her father was a teacher in the local high school and where many draft dodgers settled. They were her neighbours and parents of her friends. She chuckles as she says that it was not unusual for her to look over her backyard fence and see the neighbours gardening and building in the nude. As we watch a slide show of pictures donated by people she has interviewed, we laugh at the long hair, bell bottoms, idealistic communal living, and the ‘toking up of weed’.
“Yep, that was us,” many in the crowd say.

Rodgers nods to the handful of Doukhobor and Quaker folk sitting on library stools and says their support of the war resisters was invaluable. Many families provided shelter, food, employment and comfort for fellow pacifists. I purchase her book and, at home, scan the pages to see if Rodgers mentions my grandparents, Pete and Lusha Maloff. In the chapter, "Brokering Friends and Allies," Pat Forsythe, an American expat, says:

In Vancouver in the circle of draft dodger friends there was a man who had gotten his master’s degree working with Doukhobors in the Slocan Valley…. He arranged with them that they would look after us, and so we were sent to the Maloff household in Thrums, and those people had it all sorted out—where we were going to live and who was going to feed us.

Further, on the next page, Rodgers quotes a resident Doukhobor:

The Maloff family was heavily connected with the draft movement and would have incredible exchanges on the social level and the cultural level with the Americans.

I think back to my grandparents’ market garden farm in Thrums in the 1960s. When the young Americans started to arrive, Pete and Lusha Maloff welcomed them as kindred spirits in the fight against militarism. For me, a teenager at the time, this stream of refugees arriving on our doorstep was exciting. I felt connected to the anti-Vietnam war protest movement. Draft dodgers often pulled up to my grandparents’ farmhouse, their possessions tied to the roof top and back of a vehicle. They looked weary, in need of a bath, rest and food. Grandfather stoked up the banya—bath house—and Mother and Grandmother put on a pot of soup, potatoes, or whatever was available. The stories they shared around the kitchen table were intriguing and distressing: receiving induction letters for the draft, their turmoil in deciding to leave their homes, fear of the FBI and their escape across the border into Canada. Some stayed for a month or
two, others found shelter with Doukhobor families in the Slocan Valley or with Quaker friends in Argenta.

The morning after the book launch I drive to Mother’s; as I enter her kitchen, the aroma of baking bread fills my nostrils. Although it’s early, seven loaves are in the oven, and mother is shaping the second batch. She beams a smile and, with her hand sticky with dough, waves me over to her counter. Mother learned to make bread from her Grandmother Maloff and, even though she is in her nineties, once a month she still gets up at three o’clock in the morning to make bread for the family.

As she divides the dough I tell her about the book launch. She says, “Grandfather felt those draft dodgers were the conscience of America. And when they showed up here, well, he did all he could to help them.” She slaps the dough into the bread pans. “I wish I could remember the names of that couple who stayed with us one summer. Didn’t know a thing, but wanted to learn. They helped in the greenhouse, canned tomatoes, made sauerkraut. Even helped make a wool-filled quilt.”

Mother places the loaves by the oven to rise. We sit down and I mention that American expat Ross Klatte described *Living the Good Life* by Helen and Scott Nearing as his bible. Mother says, “Your grandfather corresponded with Scott Nearing. He and his wife visited us here in Thrums. The Nearings lived a simple life and his ideas and your grandfather’s were alike.” She laughs, “They ate a sack of sunflower seeds as they sat talking on our porch. There was a huge heap of shells beside their bench. Scott Nearing insisted the shells go in the garden for compost.”

The first loaves come out of the oven, and mother places the second batch in. I slice the hot crusty bread and slather it with butter. “Remember Len Walker?” I ask. He arrived on a motorcycle, his blond hair tousled, his face tanned, speaking with a southern California accent. I’d spent many Saturday afternoons after market in the Nelson Civic Theatre and he was like a figure out of the beach.
party movies I’d watched.

My grandparents gave him a home in a cabin behind our house. Grandmother and Mother fed him, Grandfather counselled him. He stayed for four months, helping with the winter wood supply and working in the garden. He cooked for himself, but whenever mother or grandmother made bread, borscht or soup, I’d take him some. He’d come to the door, give me a wide smile, a thank you, and my fourteen-year-old self would grin and blush. He left before winter but came back the next spring looking more ragged, his hair longer, with fellow draft resisters and a series of girlfriends.

“When he showed up with his first girlfriend, the grandparents welcomed her, didn’t they?”

“Yes, but by the second or third girlfriend, your grandfather had a talk with him. There were many good things about those draft dodgers, but Grandfather was not happy with their free love lifestyle.”

In this grandfather was a traditional family man. But not all Doukhobors were. His friend, Vanya Perepolkin, lived in a community that experimented with free love. They believed wives and husbands shouldn’t own each other and they decided that with mutual consent there could be an exchange. Grandfather counselled Vanya against this, saying sexual freedom courted trouble.

“Len was handsome.” I glance at mother. “Even I had a crush on him.”

Mother grins. “Len had his eyes on you, too. Told me you were very good-looking. Took a picture of you by that old apple tree.”

Twenty-something, a ‘nee nash’. Mother would not have encouraged any connection there. But when my Uncle Walter, mother’s youngest brother, came back to Thrums, he and Len developed a friendship. They travelled to California where they visited Len’s parents. The meeting did not go well. Walter introduced Len to Dr. Jensen and Jensen’s Hidden Valley Health Ranch became a haven for Len. For a time, he worked and hid from the US military in the hills surrounding Escondido.
Professor Rodgers describes how American immigrants in the sixties came from various backgrounds—some had parents who were supportive of their choices. Others did not. Len’s father was a colonel in the US Army, and his first reaction to Len’s refusal to serve in the Vietnam War was condemnation; his son was a coward for running away from his duty. Len was distraught about this denunciation and torn about leaving his home in America.

Len used our Thrums address for his mail, and Grandfather began to correspond with his parents. After learning that our family was making a trip to southern California, the Walkers invited us to visit their home in San Diego.

In the fall of 1966 my grandparents, my mother, brother, sister and I piled into the blue Mercedes that Walter had brought home from Germany. After a three-day drive through the western states we reached the suburbs of San Diego and turned into a gated community. Homes behind pebbled courtyards planted with cactus climbed the dry hillside. The Walkers were waiting by their front door and welcomed us with handshakes. We shook off our long drive and traipsed into their home. In the entrance vestibule, Colonel Walker showed us his prized collection of samurai armour. Low Japanese sofas and tables furnished the living room. Everything was gleaming. Mrs. Walker served tea while my grandfather, a fervent pacifist, and Colonel Walker, a career warrior, seemed to get along splendidly, talking animatedly about Len and about Asia. We kids sat on the edge of their sofas and gawked at the elegance of their home.

When I ask mother about that visit, she says, “The Walkers were hospitable, but nervous. Our car had Canadian license plates. Their neighbours, mostly military, would have wondered if Len was hiding in Canada. They loved their son and were concerned about him. Colonel Walker told your grandfather, ‘However you help my son, I’ll be very thankful.’ That’s something to think about. He knew we were against war.”

Len moved on to coastal towns in British Columbia, and Grand-
father forwarded his mail to Vancouver, Victoria, Ucluelet and then Metchosin. Len returned to the United States several times, for a while avoiding the FBI, but eventually was caught and ended up in the “nut hospital” as he called it. Upon his release he lived with his parents. As I read letters that Len wrote to Grandfather, I can hear the agony and disillusionment in his voice:

I don’t know what will become of me—I haven’t the faintest idea what is going to happen about this draft situation—and I don’t really give a damn. If they want me—let them come and get me. (Just see if it does them any good!) My future is no further away than one hour. I am afraid to think any further ahead right now….I am a free man the FBI told me—all I have to do—is phone them every time I make a move—They call that freedom—to hell with them.

Len decided to move to Canada to avoid a jail term. In another letter he wrote:

Almost 2 years ago I met a Doukhobor and thought I knew him. But I had deceived myself. I did not know the Doukhobors from just meeting them and listening to their philosophy. It took time—much time to learn what a real Doukhobor is. I hope someday I might unsurface the “Doukhobor” that is within me. I know what it would take—I know how to do it—but Peter, I am NOT DOUKHOBOR ENOUGH TO MAKE myself search within for the ultimate truth. I am afraid to face myself—I am afraid to go to prison. I am not Doukhobor enough. I have convinced myself to stay here in Canada—and Fight this horrible war in the best way I know—by encouraging other young men like myself to leave America and come to Canada. God be with you.

Love Len

In March of 1971, Len’s wife Arlene sent my grandparents a letter. She introduced herself and told them about their new life. She was
born in New York twenty-five years ago. After studying seven years to become a psychologist, she decided to give up her studies. She and Len met in Vancouver and soon after moved to Metchosin where they camped close to an old Indian burial ground. In the fall they found a cabin on a farm where they lived for a couple of years. There they grew a garden and she gave birth to a daughter… “by the warmth of a fire, without a doctor. It was the best night of my life!” Arlene wrote. Now they planned to live on a boat, but needed to learn “about the capabilities of our boat and about navigation.”

Fearlessness, the willingness to try new adventures radiate from the pages of Arlene’s letter. I tell mother, “Their daughter would be forty-five now, Arlene seventy. It would be wonderful to meet them. Len was close—Grandfather was like a father to him.”

Mother swallows, “He was, except for the drugs. Len tried to explain how smoking marijuana opened his mind… to love… to other ways of living. In this Grandfather was disappointed in Len. He said, ‘Sometimes people wake up, but they may wake up still groggy’.”

My Uncle Walter stayed in contact with Len while they both lived in Vancouver. Eventually Walter moved to Hawaii, where he worked as a carpenter, and asked Len to send his tools to him. A day after receiving his toolbox, a stranger knocked on Walter’s door and asked for his packages. Under his carpentry tools, Walter found five large bundles of marijuana. Even years later, Uncle Walter said it gave him the shivers to think that he may have ended up in an American jail for this shipment of pot.

Grandfather’s response was, “Well, we have our own children and grandchildren to raise. Let them go their way.”
The New Orphic Review

Over the past two decades, JILL MANDRAKE has been writing a series of one-page memoirs. “A Midnight Clear, 2016” is a companion piece to “Silent Night, 2001”, which appeared in The New Orphic Review (Vol. 6, No.2). She is also a lifetime member of Vancouver Cooperative Radio, where she used to host “Sister DJ’s Platter Party”.

A Midnight Clear, 2016

Jill Mandrake

A snowman stood on the grounds of the Rehab House. If you looked closely, you could see its head was actually a skull that was carved out of packed ice.

*

On the street corner, a man was trying to play "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear", on his harmonica. From where I stood, it sounded more like "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance".

*

On Christmas Day, I didn’t see a partridge in a pear tree, but I had a good view of a chickadee, on a twisted pine.
JUDE SCHMITZ spent much of her technical training career writing manuals. In retirement, though, it was time to write something with a storyline, particularly non-fiction memoirs. This piece is from a recent creative writing class. Brought up in Alberta, she now gardens, quilts and writes at her home near Nelson, British Columbia.

Keep Moving
Jude Schmitz

You know one thing about getting older? You become sort of invisible. You’re less likely to be considered a possible threat. You wouldn’t have a plan! And if you did have one, would you even remember it? That’s probably why books like Jonas Jonasson’s The Hundred Year Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared, and movies such as Clint Eastwood’s Space Cowboys, are funny. Older folks taking control? It’s ridiculous. It just doesn’t happen.

As sad as all that may sound, one day at the Calgary airport in 2007 it all worked in my favour. Not so for Robert Dziekański, a construction worker who was a brand new immigrant when he arrived at the Vancouver airport on October 13th that same year. We both encountered a somewhat similar situation, but many influences contributed to mine de-escalating, whereas Robert’s escalated out of control.

To begin with, I was a born and bred Canadian. I was living in Calgary, and I’d flown in and out of that airport numerous times.

Robert was quite likely not a seasoned airplane traveller. The 40 year-old had arrived from Poland and was finally being introduced to Canada that day. He did not speak English.
My flight had taken just under an hour, arriving on time from Castlegar.

Robert’s flights from Warsaw had lasted upwards of thirteen hours, and had likely involved at least one connection at another airport. He was undoubtedly jet-lagged when his flight finally got in two hours late at 3:15 that afternoon.

Because we had arrived in a small Dash 8 prop, passengers exited the airplane onto the tarmac. We climbed down the stairs and were herded into the outskirts of the terminal. This is where my adventure began to go sideways.

I was one of the last ones off. Was it a washroom break that somehow got me separated from the pack? Most likely. So … which way to go? I assumed the folks running the airport must have had some foolproof way of making sure passengers on the tarmac were all safely shuffled along toward the main terminal, and then in due course to the luggage carousel or some appropriate exit. I knew the routine. So I wasn’t worried—I just had to get going.

Robert’s exit from his international flight would have put him into one of those ‘jet way’ bridges that are fitted right up against the exit door. This may have been the only part of his arrival that went without a hitch. Robert did not get separated from his fellow passengers since he successfully made it to the customs area.

As I walked along the hallway, I was expecting to continue through open doors leading to the main terminal. In hindsight, was there a door that may have been closed by an employee who wrongly assumed all the passengers from the flight had gone through? Perhaps. Instead, I shortly came to my first closed door. I looked around for any signs warning me that going through the door would set off alarm bells. Not finding any, I tried the horizontal crash bar—yup, no problem. Through I went. Because I was fluent in English, I was not the least bit concerned about being able to talk my way out of any trouble I might have been walking myself into.

It took Robert the better part of an hour to make it through the
serpentine lineup at passport control, and predictably he needed language assistance during the process. He may have encountered an indifferent official who typically, without a word of explanation, dismisses passengers as soon as the passport is handed back through the glass barrier. In any case, it was not made clear to him that, after picking up his luggage, he still would have to go through a customs procedure before his entry was complete.

Aha, I came to another door—yup, it opened too. Funny that there was no signage, no windows. Not very welcoming. And it sure was quiet. But if I kept moving, my husband, who I was confident would have known exactly which arrival gate to go to, wouldn’t have to wait too much longer for me.

Strange that nothing looked familiar from any of my previous arrivals at that airport. I wasn’t encountering any other passengers. There weren’t even any staff in sight. But I was still optimistic that my journey would soon end.

Robert navigated his way to the luggage carousel area. Unfortunately, it was here that his story took a calamitous turn. His mother, Zofia Cisowski, had said that he was to wait for her there. However, she had not been aware that, unlike domestic flights, international passengers picked up their luggage in an area into which the public was not allowed.

Robert was left in limbo. For almost seven interminable hours, he didn’t know what to do next nor where to go. He paced back and forth in the hallways between the luggage carousel and customs, waiting for his mother. He must have watched as other travellers paraded by. The international arrivals staff must have either lost track of him or ignored him.

Yet another door. But when I opened that one, I finally found people! They were sitting around a table in a small room. Given their uniforms, they were obviously airport staff.

When I greeted them with a friendly “Hello!” they all stopped talking at the same time. Their jaws visibly dropped and they just
stared. They didn’t return my smile. “What?!” I had obviously invaded a private, behind-the-scenes area. I was now extremely glad that they clearly weren’t armed security guards.

“Who are you?”

“Oh, I was a passenger on that plane from Castlegar that’s out on the tarmac.”

“How did you get here?”

“Well, I got separated from the other passengers, so I just kept opening doors, and here I am!”

When Robert finally tried to move along, the staff discovered that he hadn’t completed the customs procedure. He was not released from that area for another two hours.

It was after midnight when Robert was finally free to leave customs and immigration. When he came to the reception area for international arrivals, his anxiety heightened. He could see through the wall of windows that his mother was not there, either. Zofia had actually waited since early afternoon for him, and had repeatedly made inquiries of the staff who gave her no helpful information. So, after having gone through the undoubtedly arduous and lengthy immigration process for her son, she concluded that he had missed his flight. He still hadn’t made it to Canada. She left the airport at 10 pm and drove the 4 hours back home to Kamloops.

The woman who’d been asking me the questions stood up. The other staff members didn’t move but continued to gawk. She slowly looked me up and down. “You’re in a high security area. Passengers aren’t allowed to be here.”

“Oh.”

She gave me another long, critical look. I was being assessed. Then she shook her head and sighed deeply. I was prepared to cooperate and show her my ID or at least my boarding pass. Nope, she grabbed her security pass and used it to open the door through which I’d just entered. “Come.” And with that one word, my situation began to de-escalate.
Robert had by now been in the airport terminal for about 9 hours. He may not have eaten anything during that whole time. He was reasonably well dressed but somewhat dishevelled by now, and had what some would consider a menacing 5 o’clock shadow. His journey so far had taken about 24 hours. He had reached his breaking point so he was agitated and starting to hyperventilate. He started obstructing the final exit doors to the area where people were awaiting the next arrivals. He must have felt that if he stepped through the automatic doors into the reception area, the doors would close behind him, thereby barring his way back to the luggage carousel. His behaviour had become bizarre and threatening, and in his frustration he began tossing a laptop computer and a TV table around. Suddenly the security staff were very aware of this large and intimidating foreigner who was shouting and mumbling in what bystanders presumed was Russian. Then his situation escalated further. Security called in the RCMP.

Using her security pass each time, the impatient staff member took me through several doors. Even though I’d earlier somehow breached security barriers, she asked me no questions about my earlier path. She just confidently strode on.

Then she opened one final door and ta-da—noisy people! It was like deactivating the mute button on a TV remote. There were passengers and relatives and friends, and my husband was mixed in among them. He did look relieved since all the other passengers who were obviously from my flight had paraded through that arrivals gate and dispersed at least ten minutes earlier.

Four RCMP officers arrived. They approached Robert through the exit doors that he had earlier obstructed. On seeing them come closer, he momentarily picked up a stapler, perhaps to defend himself, but then placed it back down. The two sides tried in vain to communicate, but the police clearly didn’t appreciate the yelling nor the agitated behaviour. He was unarmed, but they spread out around him and, within twenty-five seconds of arriving, had their Taser weapons
When the first Taser struck him, Robert began to shriek in agony. The second Taser floored him as he continued to shriek and writhe. Even after they had him handcuffed, he apparently was still not sufficiently subdued because the officers hit him with a third and a fourth Taser—50,000 volts each. After the fifth Taser, he finally lay still and quiet. He was dead.

I can’t remember thanking the employee who had helped me. But she was probably long gone, glad to be rid of the nuisance who had taken up her break time. On the twenty-minute ride home I chattered away about my little adventure, and how it could easily have turned out much worse. I didn’t realize until months later, when Robert’s story hit the news, how very badly it could have gone.

Since then I’ve occasionally seen warning signs along lengthy, blank airport corridors: DO NOT STOP. KEEP MOVING THROUGH THIS AREA. The trouble is they still wouldn’t have helped Robert Dziekański. The ones I’ve seen were written just in English.
The New Orphic Review

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Scotsmen

Hillel Wright

“'In this most Christian of worlds/All poets are Jews.’” Marina Tsvetayeva, quoted in The Invention of Solitude by Paul Auster.

Perhaps it’s not so strange that reading Paul Auster’s memoir, “The Book of Memory” in The Invention of Solitude, would evoke some memories and provoke a memoir of my own. It began with the quote above: “All poets are Jews.” I immediately thought to email or facebook this to my friend and fellow baseball fan, the poet Frank Spignese, who has often emailed me links to online items concerning Jewish baseball players—Hank Greenberg, Sandy Koufax, Kevin Youkilis, to name a few.

Actually, it’s not so hard to think of Frank, Boston Catholic that he is, as being a Jew—not, of course, ethnically or religiously a Jew, but symbolically—the way that Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva had in mind when she penned the quote above.

The first memory the quote provoked was an event that took place back around 1979. At the time I was owner/operator of a 40 foot, 10 ton shellfish-packing vessel called Ancestor V, out of Comox, on the east coast of Vancouver Island. 1979 had been a tough year for me and
my boat financially. It started with the engine, a four cylinder Mercedes-Benz diesel which the fisherman I purchased the vessel from had scavenged out of a car, seizing up right after I had run the boat from Vancouver up to my home on Denman Island. So before I had a chance to do any collecting and delivering of clams and oysters, I was forced to install a new engine—a three cylinder Isuzu diesel which was an excellent piece of machinery, but rather expensive for a virtually unemployed fisherman.

The next order of business was to haul the boat out of the water and do all the necessary maintenance and repairs, such as painting the bottom with anti-fouling paint to protect against teredos (saltwater worms that bore into wooden hulls) and growths of seaweed, fastening sacrificial zinc bars to protect the bronze propeller against electrolytic corrosion, and caulking the seams between the planks with oakum or caulking cotton. There were two ways that the hauling out could be done.

The cheapest—actually free—way was to use a tidal grid, of which there were several in the waters of the Gulf of Georgia where I was operating. Tidal grids are sets of large wooden beams fastened to the sea bottom alongside a wharf or pier. The fisherman simply maneuvers his boat over the grid at high tide, ties up with loops to the wharf or pier structure, and waits for the tide to go out and the boat to settle on the grid.

There were a couple of disadvantages to this method, the first being that after six hours the tide comes back in, so if you have a lot of work to do, it can take more than one change of tides to finish, and this puts pressure on you not to leave any open seams or through-holes exposed to the rising tide—not always possible during a major refit.

The other disadvantage was that in winter on Vancouver Island, the lowest tides always occur at night, adding cold and darkness to the already existing pressure of time. Also, most of the free tidal grids were at wharves or piers which lacked electrical outlets.

The other way was to hire the services of a boatways, properly
called a marine railway. The typical marine railway consists of a set of parallel steel rails set into a concrete ramp sloping down below the high tideline, a wooden “cradle”—a construct of V-shaped timbers and vertical posts designed to support a fishing boat or similar vessel—and a diesel-powered winch for hauling the cradle up the ramp by the rails, above the high tideline.

In the winter of 1979 there were two boatways in my neighborhood. The most convenient one, located near the mouth of the Courtenay River, which flows into the Gulf of Georgia, was owned by a local Comox Indian called Sonny Billy. (West Coast Canadian Natives often have English first names as last names, for example the actor Chief Dan George and the activist Chief Beau Dick). But since the boatways was not only convenient, but also well appointed, it was by far the more expensive of the two.

The other marine railway was located further upriver, and since the river was tidal, convoluted and contained several hazardous shoals and bars, not to mention treacherous currents, Floyd Curly’s boatways was very cheap. While at the time I was unlucky enough to be nearly broke, I was fortunate in that I knew the river, having been guided up and down by a local river pilot seven years earlier and having made several trips either piloting or towing boats and barges. So the confluence of these two conditions made Floyd Curly’s modest facility the natural choice.

Floyd Curly was an old Scot, with roots in the Orkney Islands to the north of Scotland, as were many of the early settlers of Vancouver Island’s Comox Valley, including Denman Island and other northern Gulf Islands. As the examples below will explain, the Scots, in the latter half of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries were stereotyped as thrifty at best and more commonly as cheap. Likewise the Jews. In fact, I had an eerie premonition that my first marriage—to an Irish-Canadian girl from the prairies—was well-nigh doomed after I overheard her father, a successful road construction contractor, telling one of his business partners on the phone his strategy toward a

A variety of products from the 1950s still played on the stereotype of the cheap Scot. MD Toilet Paper, for example, had a Tartan tam-wearing, Tartan purse-carrying housewife laud their products, while Studebaker advertised its Scotsman model as a “low-cost, minimal-options car”, and Safeway’s store brand, which naturally sold for less than other brands, was called “Scotch Buy”. Even today we have an on-line hardware “mcfugal.com” with a Tartan tam-wearing bagpiper as their logo. And lest we forget Scotch Tape & its cartoon Scotsman, Scotty McTape: “Hoot Mon—I’ve got the very thing to help you out…Look here!”

The stereotype of the cheap Jew was less public, which really made it more insidious. We have no example of “The Studebaker Jewboy”, “Jew Buy” cigarettes, “frugalstein.com” with a Hasidic Rabbi logo, or Izzie Tapeberg hucking Yid Tape: “Oy gevalt—with mine tape you should fix…”

But back to the boatways. Floyd Curly, with a bemused, rather than a dour expression on his weather-creased features, watched the Jewish greenhorn carefully maneuver his unwieldy vessel—a Caribbean sailing cutter converted to a Canadian fish packer—up the river along with the rising tide and even displayed a tight-lipped smile as the Ancestor V settled comfortably over the scarred and barnacled cradle. Together we tied the boat to the supporting uprights and waited out the turn of the tide for her to settle onto the V. Then the old Caterpillar diesel grumbled to life and the cradle and its 10 ton burden were soon high and dry. Then the real work could begin.

I don’t remember exactly how long Ancestor V stayed on the ways, but I’m sure it was two or three days. I had just turned thirty-five and was in prime working shape and, of necessity, highly motivated. I scraped and painted with great vigor and Floyd Curly, an expert caulketer, pitched in with his own mallet and caulking iron. Finally, we fastened on the zinscs and the ship was ready to float off on the next
high tide, four or five hours away. As was customary in those days, the boatways owner would invite the boat owner to celebrate the completion of work with a drink and Floyd Curly was by no means too cheap to neglect this practice. In fact, as we sat around my galley table, he produced a bottle of fine old single malt Scotch whisky and poured me a generous draught, likewise himself. Raising his glass and clinking it soundly against my own he smiled broadly, winked avuncularly and proclaimed, “It’s not so often us Jews get together, eh!”
The New Orphic Review

JAY HAMBURGER is the Artistic Director of Theatre in the Raw, which has been putting on award-winning performances for over twenty years. Some of his poems appeared in the first issue of The New Orphic Review.

Homage to a Poet
Who Speaks for Turtles
for Homero Aridjis
and the Group of 100 Artists for the Environment, Mexico

Jay Hamburger

quiet green turtles roam the vast ocean waters
off of Mexican coastal beaches, they do
those old reptiles. and the females come to dig
holes in the sands, lay their vulnerable
lopsided eggs—then leave, back to sea.

who knows this? who wants to harm
a hard shell creature's breath?

the tanned beach hunters who show off
their muscle bound chests
"I can kill better than anyone!
including what I'll do when
I get my hands on one of those
outspoken environmental animal lovers;
try a number on him too!"

the tide comes in and covers
what movements, in the sand,
the ocean swimmers have made to survive.
they have gone back to live, endure
in the green blue calling salt waters

    can they withstand an invasion,
    a tampering by two-leggeds, onto their heavenly zone?

flip a turtle over on its back
    watch it quickly move its front flippers
as it vainly struggles to get away.
    hack it up for soup or into objects
like a comb, eyeglass rim or souvenirs;
    remember a grand creature perished
    for a toothpick's whisper.

what did you say?
I can't hear you, I've greed in my ears!

speaks sands! speak, wavebacked rolling waters
    that aid in the birth
of the grey whale, seaweed and oysters
    that helps feed the gliding gull, wandering crab;
tell a mute one what it is you know
    perhaps an active, "busy" hour will pause
    for damage to heal.

    does the day pass in sunken darkness?
will Mexico's wildlife live to a morrow?

an artist with words at the tip
    of his Spanish pen, moves with great speed;
there is no time to lose:
    butterflies' habitat logged, turtles' eggs dug up
stacked and sold in open air markets
    consumed and digested by creatures
The New Orphic Review

who have forgotten what time it is...

Mexico City's air is thick
with belched out poisons; all all is encroaching
faster faster into waiting nostrils
vanishing into flakes of memory
speak Homero poeta activista ¡ahora!

aren't we talking about ourselves?
is the canary bird you? me? him? her?
BARBARA CURRY MULCAHY was born in Trinidad and raised in India, Greece, the US, and Israel. She lives in Slocan, B.C., where she is revising a manuscript of poetry with the help of editor Ron Smith. Her work has previously appeared in *The New Orphic Review*.

**The Road to Jerusalem**  
*An excerpt from* *The Drawing of Maria*  

Barbara Curry Mulcahy

The road wound through the Judean hills and rose through pine forests. The air flushing through their open windows, the steady thrum of the Valiant’s engine, the rhythm of the gears shifting, and the occasional whoosh of a vehicle passing in the other direction or overtaking and speeding by was all that she now heard. The hills and trees absorbed other sounds, if there were any, in this empty landscape. Here the driving was calmer; she hadn’t heard a horn honk for many miles. There was a pleasant cooler temperature, even, Maria could see, a late afternoon breeze moving the needles tufting the pines.

Still, Maria was on edge. It had taken twenty minutes for her to start the car and so she and Constance were twenty minutes late in picking up Richard. Richard had emphasized when they were planning this weekend getaway to Jordan that it was imperative to get through the Israeli part of Jerusalem before sunset, the start of Shabbat. They would drive through the Hasidic stronghold, Mea Shearim, and the Hasidic community didn’t allow driving on Shabbat.

When the car wouldn’t start, and the sun poured in on her while she sat, one hand on the wheel, the other on the key, it was hard to keep calm. She kept asking herself what she was doing wrong, was it the
way she turned the key? did she need to jerk the wheel sharply (that
had been the magic touch her friend Pat in Saigon had used to start her
car)? Did she need to pump the clutch? What was it? She turned the
key again and again, the grating sound grating on her. She paused at
times, afraid the battery would run down.

During one pause Constance had said from the backseat, “Exodus
31:14-15, Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to
death.”

“What?” Maria said.

“The Hasidim consider driving a form of work, did you know that?
Daddy says they have stoned cars driving through their neighborhood
on Shabbat.”

Maria hadn’t replied. She thought, “The Bible? Since when have you
started reading the Bible? Where did you even find a Bible? And why
are you memorizing the Bible?” She thought these things but only
turned the key. Again, a grating noise.

Maria remembered how the few times Richard had been at the
wheel, the car always started on the first try. And the few times that he
had been with her when it wouldn’t start, he had immediately coached
her, saying “Relax, honey. It’ll start.” And, with his words, it always
had started. But driving without him, the Valiant was a malevolent
beast.

She remembered, too, how Richard had been so pleased when they
had bought the car two months earlier, just after their September
arrival in Tel Aviv. He had said, “Valiants have a great reputation.”
(Who had told him that? Someone in the motor pool? One of the men
he golfed with? Or had he read it somewhere? Time magazine? The
International Herald Tribune? She doubted he had heard it on the
BBC…) Afterward when the car had gotten balky, no matter how
many times she told him of its recalcitrance, he answered that the
problem lay in her technique. “Farm girl,” he’d joked once. “Just used
to horses and Model Ts.” These were the thoughts that came to mind
as she sat there in the full glare of the afternoon sun, sweating in her
simple cotton dress.

After twenty minutes of trying and trying, the beast tired of toying with her and it allowed some mysterious inner part of itself to engage, and the engine purred into existence. Maria looked in the rearview mirror and saw Constance staring evenly back at her. Constance said only, “Finally.” Maria nodded and backed out the driveway.

When Maria and Constance got to the embassy, Richard interrupted Maria’s explanation of the delay. “I’ll drive,” he said. Maria bit her tongue, shifted into park, turned off the engine, and slid over on the seat. Richard got behind the wheel. The car started when he turned the key. Then Richard said, “Valiants have a great reputation. You just need to get the hang of driving them.” His tone, expansive and genial, grated.

She would have defended herself but she didn’t want to fight in front of Constance. The feeling of being helpless merged into the more familiar feeling of being unable to trust her own judgement, her own experience. She knew that sometimes it took months, sometimes years, to adjust to a new post. She had been through this upheaval five times. Things would even out eventually. She knew that. As for the car, either she would learn how to start the Valiant or it would start revealing its true nature to Richard and then they would get it fixed or sell it.

Or, if its true nature was not revealed to him, at some point they would get posted somewhere else, to some new unsettling reality but one minus a Valiant.

* * *

Even though the traffic was calmer and the dry mountains (hills really) peaceful, the scene around them jarred. Many times, rounding a corner, they were confronted with the sight of a rusting hulk, a remnant of an ancient truck, armour-plated, battered, half-blown up, sometimes rolled over on one side.

Constance said, “I thought this was a national forest—what’s all this garbage?”
“The Jews paid a heavy price,” Richard said, “in the fight for Jerusalem during the War of Independence. The Arabs blockaded the city. It wasn’t just ammunition, medicine, but also food and water, that needed to be brought in. For four months, this was the only road west to the territory the Jews held. The Arabs controlled the heights overlooking the road and they shelled the armoured convoys that the Jews used to break the blockade.”

“That was in 1948,” Constance said. She had an authoritative tone. Dismissive, lacking respect. “They’ve had 18 years to clean up.”

Maria had to try hard not to smile. She thought of the uproar of Constance’s bedroom, the territory she insisted was hers to control. If Constance had been a tidy person, the tone might have been understandable though certainly uncompromising, but Constance wasn’t the least bit tidy. Clothes, books, plates of half-eaten snacks, and school papers littered her bedroom. How she passed her course work, much less got the high marks she got on every report card, was a mystery.

Maria waited to see how Richard would respond to Constance.

“The Israelis don’t consider these vehicles garbage,” Richard said. “They are the remains of a famous siege. A lot of people died. The Israelis have left these vehicles where they were shelled...as a memorial.”

They passed a bus blasted onto its side, a rusted brown and red, stark against the soft green of the forest.

“You can see, they didn’t even have proper armoured vehicles. They had to improvise, cover the vehicles with steel then wood then another layer of steel.” He paused, then said, “The Israelis call them ‘sandwich trucks’.” He paused again. “They’ve left them here instead of erecting a monument.”

“Well, I guess it’s pretty much the same thing,” Constance said. “Modern art looks like garbage, too. But of course, this is cheaper.” Her tone indicated she thought she was being agreeable. Again, Maria waited for Richard’s answer.
“I guess that’s one way of looking at it,” he said. His voice was even.

The road was full of shadows. Between the hills, down in the ravine through which they now traveled, it felt as if dusk were approaching except that occasionally the road would turn and there was the sun, low in the sky but bright.

Maria glanced at her watch. “At what point aren’t we allowed to drive through that religious section?” she asked.

“When three stars are visible,” Richard said.

“No,” Constance said, “that’s when Shabbat ends. Shabbat begins at sunset.”

Maria pressed her lips together and then spoke. “We shouldn’t have cut it so close,” she said.

“And whose fault is that?” Richard asked.

“It’s not my fault when the car won’t start,” Maria said.

“I never have any trouble—”

“Don’t lecture me,” Maria said. She crossed her arms.

Richard glanced over at her.

Maria looked past him, at the remains of an old truck. “I think it’s ghoulish, the way they’ve left all these wrecks.”

“I find it moving,” Richard said. “A lot of people died, and they want to remember them. You can get a feeling for the battle—the losses at every turn.”

They passed the old truck and drove by a bare area, scrabbly with stones and large rocks and the occasional stunted bush.

“I thought we were going to get away from all this picking at old wounds,” Maria said.

Richard sighed and pushed his glasses up to the bridge of his nose.

“You only adjust your glasses,” Maria said, “when you’re holding your tongue.”

Richard shook his head. “Oh Maria, don’t be difficult.”

“You’ll find me very pleasant if you stop acting as if I can’t be told certain things.”
“That’s not what I was doing,” he said. “I was holding my tongue out of deference.”
“To what?”
“To you.”
“Don’t be so patronizing,” Maria said.
Richard sighed again and adjusted his glasses again. Then, realizing what he’d done, he bit his lip. Finally, he spoke. “Maria, people have different ways of responding to pain. We need to respect that.”
Maria said, “There comes a time, when it’s important to forget.”
“Some wounds are too deep or too recent. Acknowledgment is a first step.”
“The first step in what?”
“In tending them.”
“The Israelis are prying their wounds open,” Maria said. “It’s better to sew wounds shut, let them scab, heal over… get on with living.”
“The Israelis think the Holocaust was the result of that kind of thinking,” Richard said. “They think if the Jews had dealt with the infection of anti-Semitism there never would have been a Holocaust.”
Maria looked out at the trees, at the steep slope beside her.
“Remembering is a way of acknowledging, of honoring,” Richard said. He took his foot off the accelerator as they approached a curve.
The engine ticked, an almost imperceptible sound. When Richard pressed on the pedal to resume speed, the ticking stopped.
“Don’t side with them,” Maria said.
“I’m not,” Richard protested. “I’m appreciating their experience and their point of view.”
“How very diplomatic of you,” Maria said. Then, because her remark sounded sarcastic, she explained, “I wish you would extend me the same courtesy.”
They drove on in silence. For a moment, the forest was like all temperate forests, massive and overpowering. Coming as they did from the coast—their neighborhood in the midst of sand dunes—and traveling through the orange groves and then by the hillsides of
delicate almond trees, this forest, European in height, was unexpected, an anomaly.

Maria said, “Have you noticed that slight ticking sound when you take your foot off the gas?”

Richard took his foot off the accelerator and the car slowed down. There was no sound this time. He kept his foot off the pedal. “There’s no ticking,” he said.

A horn honked behind them, and then, although they were just approaching a curve, the car, still honking, veered out. Maria gripped the car door. There was no shoulder to the road, just a drop down into a ravine where more old vehicles were rusting. The car shot past them with a final jeering blast.

“Maybe you’d feel more secure if you took some driving lessons,” Richard said.

“Driving lessons!” Maria snorted. “Israel has the highest rate of traffic accidents in the entire world! What do you think these maniacs could teach me?”

“Well, it might be good to get professional advice on how to start the car, for one.” Richard smiled broadly. “Impartial advice….I know you don’t like my tips.”

“Maybe you should just admit you made a mistake in buying the Valiant,” Maria said.

Richard did not answer which meant, Maria knew, that she was being touchy and he was going to keep his distance until she calmed down.

Every time he took his foot off the pedal to change gears, Maria heard, almost imperceptibly, the ticking.

Richard transferred his attention. “Constance, did you think it would be like this when we first heard we were assigned to Tel Aviv?”

“Like what?” Constance said.

“So varied. I thought we were going to a desert.”

“A desert can be rocks and scrub. It doesn’t have to be sand dunes.”

“What is this forest doing here, then?”
The New Orphic Review

“I thought you read the post report. Did you forget? It was planted in memory of the Holocaust.”

Maria kept her silence. At every jog in the road an old wreck asserted itself as if to contradict everything she had struggled to believe, to base her life on.

At last she spoke. If they wanted memories, she would give them one. “When I was a child, our dog used to fight with the beavers in the creek behind our house. It was amazing that they never killed Sam—beavers are vicious when they’re attacked. Their jaws are so powerful.”

Neither Richard nor Constance responded. Maria persisted. “One day Sam came home with a deep slash in his hind leg. Of course, there was no vet to take him to—not that, if there had been one, we would have been able to afford vet fees or thought it right to spend the money on a dog.”

“Get to the point, Mom,” Constance piped up from the back seat and Maria paused, waiting for Richard to come to her defence. When he didn’t, Maria said, “Sam licked his wound constantly, cleaned it, and after a long time it closed up.”

There was another silence and then Constance said, “Was there a point to that story?”

Maria turned to look at her daughter. Now Constance was sprawled in the back seat, intently pushing the cuticles of her left fingers back with the nail of her right thumb.

“Or was it just an anecdote?” Constance said without looking up. “A colorful incident from your wholesome Canadian upbringing that I will be able to repeat to my children and grandchildren.”

“I was trying to show how if one withdraws and tends to a wound, it will heal.”

Constance said, “That attitude is pretty un-American, you know.”

Maria could think of no reply. She looked over at Richard who glanced at her and raised his eyebrows. Constance who was stretched out on the seat behind them did not see the interchange. This secret
camaraderie eased Maria’s spirit and she turned back to Constance, saying, “If that was meant as a compliment, thank you.”

Richard, who had resumed looking at the road, smiled at her heresy. “I would be out of a job,” he said, “if people just went home and licked their wounds till they healed.”

“I wish you were out of this job,” Constance said. “Then I never would have been dragged here.”

They would have answered her except that, just then, the road turned and they saw, in the distance, the outskirts of Jerusalem. Farther back, atop the highest hill, buildings gleamed in bright light. At this altitude, sunset was still to come. The light though had diffused. What, under the directness of midday, had been bleached white or a washed-out ocher, now glowed. Jerusalem’s buildings were revealed as the softest shades of yellow and pinky cream, the bare Judean hills as leonine, tawny and amber, and, above, the great bowl of the sky gathered, azure and with roseate edges.

The air so impossibly clear made the city seem, in the distance, like a vision. In this austere beauty was something deeply, strangely familiar to Maria. Not the altitude, the terrain, or the charged glow of the limestone buildings and their colours so soft against the scrub, the brush, of these heights. No, that beauty was not familiar… it was this sky that resonated within her, this infinity, so close, a presence as it had been a presence all the years of Maria’s childhood, a great bowl that cupped the earth, a membrane that held everything in.
ERNEST HEKKANEN is the founder of *The New Orphic Review*.

Of All Men: A Short Memoir

Ernest Hekkanen

I’m not sure how accurate the following impression is, but the older I get the more I seem to recognize my father in myself. This has little to do with our actual features; indeed, in the looks department, I favor my late mother more than I do my late father. Dark, curly hair—anyway, until I started going bald—and an upturned, Irish nose, unlike my father, who had a fairly considerable schnozz and the “corn-silk” hair typical of many Finns. Although dissimilar in our looks, there is an inscrutable quality to our faces, a kind of stoniness, as though our faces have been shot through with novocaine. I think, after seventy years, I finally know what causes that impassive look.

My father arrived in the United States, in utero, early in 1916, and was issued forth into the world in late July of the same year, in Southwest Wyoming, a terrain so dry and seemingly inhospitable, his brother, sister and parents must have felt newly terrestrial, for they hailed from Lohtaja, a farming and fishing community on the Central Bothnia Coast, where they had been members of the landed peasantry. My grandfather, Enst Kaarle Hekkanen, worked in a succession of coal mining towns, mainly as a blacksmith—that is, a man with a trade—when he wasn’t helping to forge passageways deep underground, with immigrants from other parts of the globe.

Cumberland No. 1 and No. 2 were company towns that briefly flourished on the sagebrush steppes, where they were built to serve the needs of the Union Pacific Railway. When the coal ran out in one
location, the towns were moved a little further down the line, to a new site. Later, in the 1960s, the Wyoming plains became pockmarked with sinkholes, where mines had collapsed and the resulting craters had filled with sulfurous-looking water. My father, Toivo Ernest, the first of the Hekkanens to be born in the New World, displayed a curious desire to acquaint us children with the early years of his life.

“This is where we started out,” he’d tell us. “Right here.” Other than for a railroad bed, there wasn’t much to see. The sagebrush-strewn plains extended in every direction, no houses in sight, nothing except a small cemetery much further off, where my father had acquainted us with the graves of men who had died while working underground. It made me wonder why he had driven us so many hundreds of miles from Edmonds, Washington to the vicinity of Kemmerer, Wyoming. Was it simply so we could climb out of our 1950 Dodge and tramp around the plains, in the seething heat? At eleven years old, I couldn’t fathom what the purpose of the trip was, although it became more obvious over the years, after several such journeys.

Dad’s favorite song, which he would sing off-key in a monotone voice as we approached his old stomping grounds, had something to do with a buffalo who spots the sun-bleached skull of his brother lying on the plains, and then laments, “It’s so sad to see you this way.”

“This is where we lived, right here,” Dad told us, pointing to a large, box-like depression in the earth. “A dirt street went by us, right here, and another one ran perpendicular to it, right over there. The holes you see on either side of our hole, that’s where our neighbors lived. Slovaks on this side, Portuguese on the other. Cumberland was quite international in that regard. It attracted immigrants from all over. They fought like mad above ground, but then they worked together underground.”

“Why did they fight?” my sister Patty asked him. She was two years older than me.

“Differences. Because we had differences. People always do, when they come from so many different places.”

93
I had trouble visualizing what Dad was seeing in his mind: streets and houses cluttered with coalminers and their families, flourishing in nearly barren terrain. For many years, I labored under the mistaken impression that Dad lived with his immediate family in a square depression dug into the ground, about four feet deep, with a tarpaulin flung over a clothesline to keep out the elements, and an open-air fire kept burning with errant chunks of coal gathered alongside the railroad tracks—amidst sagebrush, greasewood and tumbleweed, with jackrabbits and coyotes bounding about. It gave new meaning to what he rather nostalgically referred to as the Great Depression and the Dirty Thirties. Only later, during yet another trip to Southwest Wyoming, when I was fourteen years old, did I come to realize that the depressions in the earth had in fact been root cellars. The company houses had been jacked up and moved some distance down the line, to the next townsite. The miners paid their rent to the Union Pacific, they bought their food and dry goods from the Union Pacific grocery store and they timed their lives according to the Union Pacific clock. No wonder my grandfather joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and later, when that union was outlawed, the United Mine Workers. It was to gain some economic autonomy in life.

“You see, the houses in Cumberland weren’t all that substantial,” Dad explained. “When your neighbor broke wind in his home, you’d feel the breeze pass through yours.”

“Ernie,” my mother, Edna, protested. “You shouldn’t tell them such things. They’ll come to believe it.”

“That’s just my way of saying we were crammed in here cheek by jowl, with the plains all around us, in every direction. Who wouldn’t prefer the great outdoors to being penned up in a company shack?” Then he added, “Aren’t you glad you weren’t born here? It’s so much nicer where we live in Edmonds. For one thing, it isn’t as dry. Nor is it as cold as it is here during the winter. Here, it gets so cold your drinking water stands up in your glass and says hello to you.”

“Did you have to go to school, back then?” Steve, my little brother,
asked.
“Of course, we did. That’s where we learned to speak English.”
“What did you speak before you went to school?”
“They didn’t speak anything,” I interjected. “They just barked at each other, like dogs.”
“No, we didn’t. In our family, we spoke Finnish. Our neighbors spoke Slovak and Portugese. Others spoke Italian. Also, Greek. And German. And Hungarian. And Ukrainian. That’s why there were so many fights. We couldn’t understand each other all that well.”
Like most boys in his community, Dad became a sagebrush brat, wise to the ways of the plains. He trapped muskrats, coyotes, wolves and cougars, and sold the pelts to government agents. “You know the best way to trap a wolf or a cougar?”
Our role was to ask, “No, what’s the best way, Dad?”
“First you set up a bunch of leghold traps around a dead horse. There were lots of wild horses around here, back then. You’d shoot one, then you’d slit open its belly. You laid your traps all around it—camouflaged, of course. The next day when you came back, if you were lucky, of course, there’d be a wolf or a cougar with its paw caught in one of your traps. Not always, though. Sometimes they’d gnaw off their paws in order to escape. When you caught one, though, you shot it through the head, then you’d skin it, then the government agent would give you some money for the pelt.”
“Why would the agent do that?”
“Because the government was trying to make the plains safe for raising cattle. And because it was the Great Depression. Things were pretty rough, back then. No one had any money. Very little, anyway. You had to meet the challenge, or you went hungry. Plain as that.”
“Why didn’t you just eat the dead horses?” I said.
“Some of us did.”
Despite how rough it had been growing up during the Great Depression, Dad made it sound as though he enjoyed living in Southwest Wyoming. He took us around to all of the places he and his
friends had frequented in their youth. I couldn’t help thinking, from
the way he described them, that the landscape must have verged on
being a kind of Eden, back then.

“This is the Little Muddy. We used to swim here as kids.” We looked
at him with disbelief. The Little Muddy was a mere rivulet. It
glistened like a thick, wet snake at the bottom of a deep gulch worn
into the crust of the earth, strewn with sagebrush and greasewood.

“It looks more like a freshet to me,” I remarked.

“They dammed it upstream,” Dad said. “For the ranchers and the
farmers, so they could make use of it. Back when I was a kid, though,
one about your age, this gulch was full to the brim with water.”

“Sure, it was,” we teased him.

“It was. I swear it on my mother’s grave. In fact, we used to dive off
that big boulder, right over there.”

The boulder was about the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. It wasn’t
made of sandstone, but something more like granite, shot through with
glimmering minerals.

I chuckled. “Did you knock yourself silly when you hit your head on
the bottom of the river?”

“No, there was plenty of water, back in those days. It came right up
to the top of this riverbed. Nearly so, anyway. I kid you not.”

The era he spoke of seemed mythical. In the telling, Dad seemed an
ancient patriarch bent upon conveying what the early days on earth
had been like, although, in actual fact, he was only one year older than
President John F. Kennedy, as I came to discover later on, much to my
surprise, because I thought my dad a relic of the old Wild West era.
This misconception was, in part, due to all the ghost towns we were
obliged to visit, such as Glencoe, my father’s actual birthplace, as well
as Blazon, both of which revealed clumps of concrete and twisted
metal strewn on the plains.

Down near the Cumberland Gap, after a day spent tramping around
the windswept plains looking for arrowheads in the scorching heat,
Dad decided to stop at a junction where the dirt road to Carter
diverged at a place called Nick Ziller’s. There, a one-storey tavern squatted in the desert in the middle of nowhere. It bore a sign that said Rock Saloon, although the paint had flaked so badly it was difficult to read. A wooden rail stood out front where you could tie up your horse. Three horses were standing there, fanning themselves with their long tails to drive off flies. Inside, the saloon was dark compared to the blinding outdoor light. A wooden bar ran the length of the place, the surface as shiny as glass. We sat down at one of eight tables scarred by decades of use.

“What’ll you have?” the bartender hollered from behind the bar. He had a thick, dark mustache that turned up at the tips.

“Coke for the wife and kids. A beer for me,” Dad shouted back.

Two men sitting at the bar turned around to scrutinize us. Four other men sat playing poker at a nearby table. They looked like the movie version of cowboys: chaparajos covering their jeans, ten-gallon hats deposited on an adjacent table, and six-shooters stuck in holsters on their belts.

“Where are we?” I whispered.

“Back in the long-ago past,” Dad said with deadpan humor, “and the people you see here, they’re ghosts.”

“No, they’re not. I can hear them talking. Breathing. They’re turning around to look at us, too.”

Dad pointed toward the bar. “See that photograph on the wall over there, surrounded by those liquor bottles? That’s Teddy Roosevelt, a former U.S. President. You’ve probably read about him in your history books. He received the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating an end to the Russo-Japanese War. That war was the reason why your granddad left Finland—the first time, I mean—back in 1902. Finland was a Russian Duchy, and the Russians wanted to send him off to fight the Japanese. Teddy Roosevelt died in 1919, three years after I was born. So, the past isn’t that far off. Never is.”

The bartender brought us our drinks on a tray. Set them down on the table. “I’m curious,” he said. “Did you folks get lost out here on the
plains? Is that how you ended up stopping at the Rock?”

“No,” Dad told him. “I was raised in these parts. Cumberland No. 2.”

“A sentimental journey, then?”

“Something like that, yeah.”

“What’s your last name?”

“Hekkanen.”

“Hekkanen, Hekkanen. I knew a couple of boys named Hekkanen. From school. A girl, too. You didn’t run booze made by that illegal moonshine operation out behind Ridge No. 1?”

“No, we ran milk. My father had a couple of dairy cows. We ran milk door to door each morning before going to school.”

“I think I remember you. Your name’s Eric, ain’t it?”

“No, Ernie.”

“Right, and you had an older brother named Ed. Tall, lanky fellow. Last I heard, he was shipped off to the war. North African Corps, I think it was.”

My father nodded. “You’ve got a good memory.”

The bartender tapped his right temple. “I’m known for that. Around here, they call me the Living Archive. So, did your brother make it back alive from the war?”

“He lives in the Seattle area now. We both do. We work in different departments, but we both get paid by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.”

“Does that mean you have to wear an army uniform to work?”

“No, I go to work in my civvies.”

“By the way, my name’s Bill. Bill Plutodakis.” He stuck out his hand for Dad to shake. “I’m a contemporary of your brother’s. Went to school with him. Tell him I said hello, the next time you see him.”

“I will.”

The Rock Saloon was located not far from the Nick Ziller ranch. Once upon a time, the Oregon Trail had passed through those parts, back when prairie schooners had sailed the plains, on wagon wheels
made of wood and steel rims. The trail passed through the Cumberland Gap where three sandstone ridges jutted up from the plains. The ridges looked like craggy waves of earth about to collapse in upon themselves.

“A shift in the tectonic plates gave rise to those,” Dad told us, relishing the opportunity to teach us a little something. “When the earth buckles, and one slab pushes itself up over the other, like this,” he said, sliding his right hand up over his left fist, “that’s what you get—ridges like the ones you see, right here.”

I was the smart alec of the family. “Did you have to run around dodging dinosaurs, back then?”

“Not exactly, no. However, I can show you a place, further out in the plains, where you’ll be able to pick up some fossils—tomorrow, perhaps.”

That summer, the plains happened to be overrun by rabbits. Nearly every bush or boulder seemed to have one hiding behind it. No matter where you went, rabbits would scatter in every direction. “Right now, the rabbit population is at a high point in its cycle, but next year, or the year after that, you’ll be hard-pressed to see any hopping around the plains. Do you happen to know why?” Dad asked us.

“No, why?” we promptly replied.

“There are a couple of reasons. The coyote population increases, too, and of course coyotes love to eat rabbits. That’s one reason. Also, the rabbits get a kind of fungus, a kind of disease, on their pelts. They communicate that to each other down in their burrows, and that in turn decimates their numbers. When that happens, you’ll find dead rabbits all over the plains. You see, nature likes everything to be in balance. Any species that gets out of control—population-wise, that is—will have its numbers reduced by nature. The same thing will happen to us, too, if we don’t come to grips with our breeding habits.”

“Are you sure you should be telling them such things?” my mother told him.

Nearly a decade later, the day before I left the U.S. for Canada, in
the spring of 1969, during the Vietnam War, I would discover that my sister had been adopted by my father, and that my mother, who had been married once before, had two further children who lived with their father, down in San Diego. Her first husband had been a Navy man, with a woman in every port, apparently.

“So how did you learn all this stuff about rabbits?” I asked Dad.

“During the Dirty Thirties. I had a job working for a naturalist, who was conducting a field study for the federal government. About prairie dogs, for the most part, although we shot more prairie dogs than we studied, if you ask me. I was going to university, back then. On a scholarship. Working with him was my summer job, funded by the Civilian Conservation Corps. That was a make-work program, back in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s time. You see, a lot of people had lost their jobs. Many of the miners in this area were laid off. I was one of the lucky ones who got out of here, back when it was still possible to do such things.”

Dad and his older brother, Ed, had been blessed with near-preternatural mathematical abilities, which had allowed them to attend the University of Cheyenne, mainly on scholarships. That had enabled them to leave the mining communities of Southwest Wyoming. Both of them ended up working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Pacific Northwest, in Seattle, down on Pier 54.

Our last family trip to Wyoming was in 1967. By then, my grandfather had been pensioned off as a miner and was about to leave Superior, Wyoming for Lake Worth, Florida. When we pulled up at his house in our brand new Dodge station wagon, we found him out in the backyard, not far from a gulch, burning memorabilia in a sixty-five-gallon metal drum. Mainly, he was burning photographs. My father had phoned ahead to ask him not to burn them, but Granddad had gone ahead and done it, anyway.

“What do you want with so many useless, old memories?” Ensti snarled at him in heavily accented English. “Everything is gone now. Soon my life will be gone, too, just like your mother’s.”
My grandmother, Lena, had died shortly after my birth in April of 1947. My grandfather had lived as a widower for nearly twenty years, in a clapboard house that resembled the dried-out hulk of a giant insect, with two sunlit windows for eyes. Although coal was still being mined in Superior, Wyoming, the Union Pacific Coal Company had downsized its operations to one shift and one shaft. Very few students attended the high school on the hill, from which my father had graduated with honors. The place had turned into a living ghost town, on the verge of extinction.

* * *

Not long ago, a friend and I were sitting at the Oso Negro coffee shop in Nelson, B.C., comparing our early lives. We are both grandfathers, now. We were discussing how we had been raised, in particular how much grief we had caused our fathers. My friend made the remark: “It sounds to me as though our fathers deserved to have much better sons than they got.” I had to agree.

Throughout grade school I had been a miserable student, partly because I was dyslexic and partly because I had been raised as a bush brat. I preferred gallivanting about in the forest—it was extensive in the Edmonds area, back in 1960—to cracking open a text book, with the result that I was a rather poor student. In seventh grade, at Lynnwood Junior High School, I found myself in a block class full of misfits, underachievers and emotionally disturbed children. When I surveyed my fellow classmates, I couldn’t fathom what I was doing among them. Our teacher, Tiny Thorton, ruled the class with an iron fist. He began the school year with an illustrated lecture. That year the role of “guinea pig” fell to me. He strapped me into a straitjacket and lectured the class on how our bad attitudes had come to straitjacket our lives. Most of us would end up failures of one kind or another, he warned us, unless we succeeded in shirking the attitudes that had come to confine us. My role was to demonstrate how difficult it would be to get out of that straitjacket. If I succeeded I would be allowed to smoke in class for the rest of the school year, but if I failed, my
classmates would be given permission to pummel me with spitwads and crumpled balls of paper.

Needless to say, I didn’t get out of the straitjacket, and needless to say, I swore I’d never be put in one ever again.

As I have already mentioned, I was the smart alec of the family. I compensated for my learning disabilities with flippant remarks and defiant posturing. One Saturday morning I made a wisecrack that tested my father’s patience one too many times. Oddly enough, I can’t remember the remark now. Dad spun me around, threw several punches at me, body blows that really stung, and the next thing I knew I was flat-out on my back on the floor. Dad had done some boxing at the University of Cheyenne and knew how to handle himself. Looking up at him, I could see by the cranky look on his face that he was truly very angry.

“Now listen up,” he told me. “I’m giving you an ultimatum. Improve your attitude and improve your grades, or head down the road, right now, with the shirt you’ve got on your back. What will it be? You’ve got thirty seconds to make your decision.”

It took me less time than that to make my decision, but I drew things out as long as I could. I wasn’t a dumb kid. I was just rebellious. I knew, at the age of thirteen, that it would be difficult to forge my path through life. I either had to slip on the straitjacket of good behavior and also improve my grades, or ship off down the road—to be straitjacketed in some other manner, by something else. Being in Tiny Thorton’s block class had taught me that much. Life wasn’t a matter of escaping straitjackets; it was a matter of selecting a straitjacket that was more or less comfortable to wear.

“Well,” Dad said, glowering at me, “what will it be?”

“I’ll improve my attitude and my grades.”

He reached down his hand for me to take. “I was hoping you’d say that.”

What Dad didn’t realize was that I had made a secret pact with myself while lying on the floor, staring up at him. I was not only
going to improve my attitude and my grades, I was going to best him at his own game, by becoming smarter and more accomplished than he could imagine. Mine wasn’t a well reasoned-out plan. It had to do with something more like revenge—paying him back for roughing me up, for humiliating me. I came to hold a simmering grudge. To hide my true feelings, I learned to wear a mask. I learned to go around with a poker face.

My grades did improve—dramatically. To achieve this, I had to stay up late every night of the week. By dint of sheer effort, I overcame my dyslexia. The gap I perceived running down the the middle of the page narrowed by small degrees, and I no longer had to take a running leap to get over it—visually, I mean.

“So, your father’s ultimatum worked the sort of magic it was intended to work,” my friend at the Oso Negro coffee shop commented.

“Yes. By eleventh grade I was on the honor roll, and by my final year in high school, my grade point average was so high, I was excused from having to take final exams.”

“And what about the grudge you held?”

“When I was in twelfth grade, I had an argument with my father at the dinner table. I ridiculed him, saying how little he had managed to achieve in life; however, I did it with a great deal of sophistication, by using logic I had learned in school. ‘Everything you’ve accomplished in life might as well be thrown in a burn barrel and set on fire,’ I told him, knowing the allusion to Ensti Kaarle would resonate with him, ‘because, in the end, it’s all going to perish. Nothing will remain. There won’t be any sign of you left on earth. Your life will have amounted to nothing. Absolutely nothing.’

“You see,” I told my friend at the Oso Negro Coffee Shop, “by the time I was eighteen, I had become a nihilist. I knew from cracking open so many text books that the only people who leave any trace of themselves are those that history can’t ignore. The rest of us end up in anonymous graves, unrecognized and unacknowledged. My
indictment ended up reducing my father to tears. His face quaked. His stony demeanor crumbled like so much badly cast sand. After that, I no longer felt the need to hurt him.”

“Why do you think we need to hurt our fathers?” my friend asked me.

“I think it’s got to do with something as basic as young stags needing to knock old stags off mountaintops. Each new generation sweeps aside the former generation—often rather ruthlessly.”

* * *

There is something else I must add to this story, if you are going to fully fathom its meaning. Each trip we took with my father to Southwest Wyoming included a hike through the sagebrush—to a nondescript spot out on the plains where it was necessary for us to admire an abandoned sleigh that Dad and his brother had constructed out of wood and salvaged sheet metal, back when they were kids. The dryness of the plains had kept it from rotting and falling apart. He would locate the sleigh out on the sagebrush steppes, by using several landmarks to guide him: 1) a craggy island of sandstone in the middle of the plains, where, as a boy, he and his pals had discovered some burial sites replete with ceremonial tomahawk heads, spears and other paraphernalia; 2) the cemetery where Cumberland’s dead lay buried; and 3) an abandoned farmhouse that had collapsed in upon itself.

Later, when I saw the film, Citizen Kane, I was reminded of my father’s attachment to the sleigh, abandoned so many decades earlier, during a snowstorm, when he had become disoriented amidst the swirling snowflakes while dragging the carcass of a coyote home to Cumberland No. 2. Something always drew him back to the site of the sleigh—unerringly, like salmon heading upstream in order to mate before dying.

My mother died in the early 1980s, from complications connected to Parkinson’s disease. A year later, my father started attending a widows-and-widowers support group, and there he met the woman who was to become his second wife. For a honeymoon destination,
they chose Southwest Wyoming. Upon returning to Edmonds, Washington, they proudly showed us the weather-beaten sleigh they had brought home with them. Dad hung it on the outer wall of the house. Whenever they hosted outdoor dinner parties during the summer, the sleigh became a conversation piece.

“We visited every single one of those ghost towns your father grew up in,” Linda told me. “Blazon, Cumberland One and Two, and even Superior. You know, Superior hasn’t died yet. It’s still sitting up that gorge known as Horse Thief Canyon, where those outlaws held off the law for so many years. You should write about things like that, before they’re lost to time.”

By then, I had come to know what she meant by becoming lost to time. In the intervening years, in Canada, I have become lost in my own particular fashion. My achievements are insignificant. I have tried to preserve something of myself by writing books, knowing, of course, that they aren’t going to ensure my survival. A couple of winters ago, I burned several boxes of unsold books in the fireplace of our house, which has since been declared a Literary Landmark by Alan Twigg of BC BookWorld. While I was burning the books, along with some woodblock prints of mine, I recalled my grandfather, Ensti Kaarle Hekkanen, burning photographs in the metal barrel out behind his soon-to-be-vacated home in Superior, Wyoming. I think now, at age seventy, I am beginning to understand what drove him to try to erase his past.

After suffering several strokes, my father began to lose his moorings, due to Alzheimer’s disease. He would succumb to anxiety and start yelling, “There’s a little boy out on the plains. He’s hurt. We have to go save him. Now! We have to go save him—before it’s too late.”

His second wife would take him for a drive around the block and then deposit him in his armchair at home, and by that time, the perceived emergency would be forgotten. I have come to believe that his periodic outbursts of anxiety had something to do with the sleigh
he had abandoned during the snowstorm so many decades before. You see, he had stumbled and broken his arm while wandering around the plains, disoriented by the deluge of snowflakes. The fear of dying alone on the steppes had acquainted him with the unbearable thinness of existence, and he lived with that knowledge to the end of his days.

Of all men, I couldn’t have had a better father.
MARGRITH SCHRANER has enjoyed every moment of her life as the Associate Editor of the NOR. Her work, which includes 9 stories and 14 chapters of a novel, To Travel the Distance, explores the emotional, mental and physical places inhabited by memory, and has been featured in 28 issues of The New Orphic Review. She is the author of The Reluctant Author: The Life and Literature of Ernest Hekkanen (2006).

Endpiece, or the Fallacy of Chronology

Margrith Schraner

Locate the present: Here, the Old Man’s rock face is veiled in smoky haze from forest fires. The constant noise of trucks backing up; roofers with nail guns sit astride roof gables, hastily pounding shingles in place. The lawn maintenance truck has long stopped coming ’round. Arid gardens are on a watering schedule. The few straggling blooms among the matted, yellow grass offer up scant nectar to searching bees.

In the West Kootenay, we’ve been holding our breath for weeks now. We wake up sneezing, suck in air laden with smoke, our vision blurred. Hot winds tear at majestic maple trees. Small airplanes now unable to take off or land due to particulate matter in the air. Limited visibility; temperatures rising above 35 degrees Celsius. Helicopters trailing buckets through the air, skirting the flank of Elephant Mountain, carrying gallons of water to douse flames old and new. Fire updates; fire risks; fire reports. The sun a tomato red safari disc afloat in a sky of dusky grey. Kootenay Lake cast in bronze, surrounding hills flattened, a two-dimensional moonscape of ghostly yellow mottled with bleach. Staccato voices of crows calling out to each other across the refracted light; a raucous cry, amplified: an
angry cough, a harsh complaint.

Locate the past: “Look back twenty years,” you say to encourage me. “Write a nostalgic piece; go back to The New Orphic Review in its infancy.” My nostrils sniff the air in hopes of catching a whiff of memory: Incredibly soft, the mossy green of woodsly enclaves, of shady coves bordering the Pacific. 1996 was the year New Orphic Publishers released my first book, Black Snow: an imaginative memoir (co-authored with Ernest Hekkanen). Recalling 1997; the year we both turned fifty, the year we both called Vancouver ‘home’, the year we crossed the Atlantic and Ernest met my Swiss family. The year Ernest presented a paper at the North American Studies Conference in Tampere, Finland. A fertile time—The New Orphic Review, our love child, then still a twinkle in his eye. By spring of the following year, the first issue of our literary magazine was born.

Start with where you are: I am reluctant to reckon with the past, to detail events related to our publishing lives, afraid that if I start looking back twenty years, I’ll get sucked under, pulled down into a mire of murky detail, or worse get caught in the proverbial brambles of nostalgia, blinding me to what is of relevance. Moreover, I’m troubled by the thought that something significant—something that has influenced our lives to such a large degree—will reach a terminus, a final point. Gate closed.

The year so far has taken endurance, tenacity. Health issues have zapped our élan vital, set us back. We’ve both come away from various medical tests unscathed; emerged from the acute stages of whatever it was that assailed us this spring. The fire season appears to have laid much of our enterprising spirit to rest. Whatever happened to our creative engagement? Where is the spark we have come to expect that used to drive us on?

“How do I prepare for where the path leads next?” The question, selected at random from No Baggage: A Minimalist Tale of Love and Wandering, by Clara Bensen, found on a library shelf recently, led me to envision a new direction, a possible way of moving forward, even if
to do so might necessitate going back—after breakwater a new wave, a process of divination, seeking the sort of guidance offered by a Tarot card. Where to begin, if not with a question: Aren’t my fundamental passions editing, proofreading? My present writing—isn’t it connected to the writing I have done over the past twenty years—and therefore, am I not grateful to the Editor—In-Chief of The New Orphic Review for his encouragement?

I can see it now from where I stand: A nod of acknowledgement to Pythagoras, and a generous thank-you wave to Ernest, the founder of New Orphic Publishers; a gesture of gratitude from the bottom of my heart. He gave me a chance to develop as a reader, but also as a writer—the kind of writer I imagined I could be. He stood by my side, encouraged me—employed what he jokingly referred to as the carrot-and-stick method—writing in red ink the words, ‘Keep going’ at the top of the single-spaced draft I would write, followed by numerous re-writes, which I would diligently type out on his I.B.M. Selectric, while he went out to earn a living as a self-employed renovator. And when I was ready to handle more feedback, he offered it gently—saying that what my work lacked primarily was something called architecture, before going on to suggest how I might shape the body of my inchoate material (possibly in the manner of Maxwell Perkins, whose suggestions had helped shape the unwieldy outpourings of many a famous writer, Thomas Wolfe among them, although I’m fully aware that a Thomas Wolfe I’ll never be).

Next to his typewriter, each workday morning, I would find a couple of newly-produced pages of his writing, read them over with interest, marvel at his prodigious talent, catch misspellings, and pencil in some suggestions or corrections of my own. I was starting to harbor jealousy toward his Muse, who seemed to demand an inordinate amount of his time, when one fine morning, months later, when I sat down to do some typing of my own, I found a yellow rose that he had left for me.

Decisive moments, utter beginnings, pivotal events: An inkling,
The New Orphic Review

from the time I was twelve years old—a Swiss girl reading teen novels borrowed from the village school library, and a born romantic from the start—that what I wanted more than anything was to meet a real-life writer in the flesh. I was forty-one when it happened: Here, in my lap had landed the work of the published writer, Ernest Hekkanen. I loved the quality of his imagination, his quirky humor. I recall the day I rode the city bus from Horseshoe Bay back to Vancouver with my teenage daughter, laughing tears while reading a passage to her from his short story collection, *The Violent Lavender Beast*.

At the funeral of a playwright we had both known, listening to Ernest read a selected passage from the playwright’s work, I instantly fell in love, was smitten with the timbre of his voice. “It’s dangerous,” one of my girlfriends cautioned me. “A man is not his work, you ought to know that.” And when I continued to sing Ernest’s praises, she sighed dramatically and pleaded, “Tone it down.”

Ernest took me along to the launch of his second book in Burnaby, offered me a ride in his yellow truck. I put my Swiss embroidery skills to work; decorated the front of my long-sleeved tank top with what I then conceived of as a daring slogan: “Sleep with an author—Buy a book,” inspired by utter *coup de foudre*.

A few weeks later, he invited me to accompany him to a Writers Union of Canada meeting, followed by a potluck, held at the home of Jan Drábek. “Hi, I’m Ernest,” he said, heading for the kitchen with his frying pan, “but I’m not earnest all the time.” He garnered a few knowing smiles, set the squid he had prepared, afloat in a tomato sauce and spiced with caraway seeds, down on the stove for later reheating. He wore shorts and sandals then, black polyester dress socks that reached up to mid-calf. “I’m not kosher—I’m even *gaucher* than I was before,” he remarked upon hearing me read this passage. He introduced me to the cadre of published writers that were present. Assuming that I was a writer, they proceeded to question me about the subject of my book. I fibbed, and when they inquired whether I was receiving PLR payments I replied in the affirmative, although I had no
idea what PLR referred to. Ernest, who had two books to his name, came to my rescue. “We’re a couple of retreads making a new run at it,” he said. I liked his self-effacing humor; it seemed indicative of a certain flexibility of mind. He was comfortable, unapologetic. His outspokenness and devil-may-care attitude were some of the qualities I felt had been trained out of me by my Swiss upbringing. They were a welcome antidote to the repressive climate, which I would describe as a kind of inbred seriousness. People were hard-working yet humorless. Entrenched attitudes, unspoken assumptions and parameters kept everyone in line—restrictions against which I instinctively rebelled, and which may have contributed to my desire to leave Switzerland. Ernest, having grown up in North America, knew no such constraints. I found his authenticity inspiring, started to give myself permission to explore, experiment. I started writing. My valiant attempt to get even, to level the playing field with my internal censor and my internal critic, is evident in Black Snow: an imaginative memoir.

On our third get-together, I shared with him my long-held wish to come face to face with a rare creature. I had never seen a rhinoceros. I envisioned a treasure hunt of sorts; hoped to come away from it with a sense of awe. To facilitate my meeting with the near-miraculous, he agreed to drive me in his quarter-ton pickup truck to a game farm near Abbotsford, where I stood, saddened by the sight of two rhinoceroses, a mother and baby held in captivity, huddled together on a patch of dirt. We ended the day with a burger at the Red Robin on Broadway. After many years of vegetarianism, I was starting to crave meat. More accurately, I was possessed by a desire to sink my teeth into more than literature.

One of our first squabbles was about literature—less a debate and more like a passionate exchange of views—mine, an argument informed by years of academic training; his, stemming from decades of writing, a vocation grounded in the writer’s craft. “I’m not doing too badly for an incompetent,” he would often assert. And while I felt
The New Orphic Review

competitive, bent on winning the argument with him, his view was disarming. In the end, neither of us won; we both recognized that we would need one another, resolved to pull together for better or for worse. We began to share our limited resources, moved into a townhouse on Victoria Drive; saw ourselves obliged to sublet two of the bedrooms in order to come up with the monthly rent. Among our friends in Vancouver’s East End were many artists whose passionate pursuits were in theatre, art and literature. The nineteen-nineties were a helter-skelter time. We were getting used to taking risks: Our house became an informal venue for poets, writers and sometimes musicians to come and present their work. The ‘Living Room Series’ was an idea hatched by poets Chad Norman and Catherine Owen, who organized these monthly gatherings. Ernest, who was also a visual artist, and whose paintings and woodblock prints hung on our walls, carved and painted a wooden shingle that announced the New Orphic Gallery, which would hang from the portico of our townhouse on such nights. Our circle of literary acquaintances kept expanding. Ernest continued painting. I took courses in darkroom and photography. Featured among the contributors to the inaugural issue of The New Orphic Review were many who had taken part in our monthly soirées. Although our abode was a far cry from Gertrude Stein’s salons, the company of gifted writers inspired us, kept us busy, buoyant.

Submissions to The New Orphic Review began to arrive. We made room; managed to fit a bi-annual publishing schedule into our busy lives. Ernest took care of all the facets of publishing: he typed and photocopied, then collated individual pages; he did lay-out and designed the magazine covers; hand-bound each copy using glue and thread; took care of all correspondence with the authors, took care of distribution and accounting, too. The noble tasks of copy-editing and proofreading fell to me.

The selection of contributors for each issue of the NOR was not an arbitrary process; it evolved over time in an intuitive and organic fashion. The content was relevant and fresh, reflective of the varying
influences of the times, the multitude of concerns, pursuits and intellectual preoccupations of the Editor-in-Chief, and to a lesser extent, mine. We pushed to meet the publication deadline every Spring and every Fall, the fury of production year after year usurping all our attention. Forty issues will soon be arrayed on the bookshelf in his upstairs office. Twenty years: Three in Vancouver, the rest in Nelson, B.C.

Many other interests in our messy lives have vied for our attention, but New Orphic Publishers has maintained a central place. Ernest to date is the author of forty-seven books. Hanging on our walls are paintings and photographs, salon-style. Our home, the abode of New Orphic Publishers and the New Orphic Gallery, is a Literary Landmark, due to the efforts of BC Bookworld’s Alan Twigg. We can be located: We have internet presence; we are # 123 on the Literary Map of B.C.

Now that we are in the throes of readying the final issue for publication, I realize that what I have written is a far cry from the chronology I had once envisioned. It is a sketch, not a tidy, little history of The New Orphic Review. It is not a linear account, based on entries in my numerous notebooks, and neither is it a matter of sorting out cause and effect. From the moment I began to write this article, it changed—clearly a matter of observer affecting that which is observed. On any given day, I would recall new facets of the NOR’s history. The manner of my recounting changed along with it. What I have written is impressionistic, mirroring the unique way in which memory works.

In view of the fact that the vast NOR chapter of our lives will soon reach a conclusion, I have discovered that significant moments are not unlike the luminous dots that speak of the presence of stars in a night sky. As such, they share a momentary connection, some relatedness only we can see. It is neither the result of linearity nor logic. These, the highlights in our shared publishing history, belong to a different order. They may speak of the contributors to our literary journal as
The New Orphic Review

affinities, as echoes, fractals in a Fibonacci spiral, even. The creative work that has filled the pages of *The New Orphic Review* over the past twenty years testifies to our interdependence: Our literary magazine is the physical manifestation of what Ernest sees as his ephemeral community. The community has essence; it endures, cannot be lost. The tongue-in-cheek summation of our mandate, I would say, is that *New Orphic* is the cornerstone of co-dependent publishing.

We find ourselves at a juncture—but we are not at the end. The adventure and the risks we take will continue in other ways. I now conceive of “Endpiece” as a caboose—a railway wagon attached to the end of a train. The lights at the back of the caboose may point to the existence of the wagon, but they do not indicate the destination of the train.

Locate the future: What matters now is that the wind will shift and rain will come. The fire season will soon be over. And, yes—we all know the signal lantern will be raised. There will be waves good-bye; the train is bound for places yet unknown. New and exciting narratives will soon consume us, and as per usual, the train moves on.