The Cosumnes River Journal is published annually by the English Department of Cosumnes River College, Los Rios Community College District, 8401 Center Parkway Sacramento, CA 95823.

To contribute poetry, short stories, essays, interviews (or other creative writing), black and white photography, and other visual art, please send electronic submissions or inquiries to Heather Hutcheson at hutcheh@crc.losrios.edu between October 2010 and March 2011.

Send three to five poems and up to three stories or other manuscripts (up to 2,500 words, MS Word). Artwork should be high resolution jpeg format of at least 300 dpi. Reporting time is up to six months.
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tribute

We humbly dedicate the 2010 Cosumnes River Journal to Dennis Hock, the visionary who inspired our publication. An exceptional colleague and educator, Dennis embodies our campus mission.

He has served CRC with excellence, holding students accountable for outstanding academic achievement, and he has inspired all of us to be good, kind, and thoughtful citizens of our democracy by modeling the way. A champion of social justice and environmental stewardship, a leader and inspiration to his colleagues and friends, as well as a trusted confidant, he practices what he preaches by sharing his writing and thinking with the world through public readings and workshops and national literary journals. This journal is one of the countless monuments to his brilliance, vision, and commitment to others.

As Dennis Hock—our teacher, our mentor, and our friend—retires, we celebrate him.

graphic design

Amber Foreman

acknowledgements

We are sincerely grateful to our donors and supporters and for the many writers and artists who submitted their work for consideration. Thank you.
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Those eyes… watching me, following me, judging me, condemning me. It was undetectable, slithering like a furtive serpent; a slow loss of innocence befell as my mind began to take over. I watched it all as though through glass doors: helpless and without control. The doctor called it an eating disorder, but to me it was a door to a mysterious, magnetic new world. Ensorcelled, I cruised into the vast landscape that is nutrition. My experience of a confusing illness that was once nightmarish became a chance to learn and grow. It was through my eating disorder I gained the knowledge of nutrition that taught me the significance of taking care of my own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs as well as true empathy, rather than simple sympathy for another’s insecurities.

“So tell me, Stephanie, how do you think you got to this place?” the belittling therapist Mark cross-examined while stroking his comical goatee. “What? In this place or in life?” “In both,” he said, annoyed. How did I end up in the Intensive Outpatient Program at Summit Eating Disorders Clinic? Well to be honest, it was a volcano biding its time to erupt, culminating inside me for years until it finally did. I started to feel “different,” inadequate, at about age thirteen. I fixated on the other girls’ creamy skin, brilliant white teeth, and silky hair. I wanted that but better. I yearned to not only meet my competition, but exceed them because that was the only way a “size 2” beached whale like myself was going to survive.

There comes a time in a woman’s life when she realizes whether her looks will hinder or help her reach her aspirations. My original ambition to be a prima ballerina with the Boston Ballet, dancing my way into the cultured hearts of the East coast, persisted for many years until I recognized the signs of hindrance; my body wasn’t going to help me attain my dream. I trained everyday for hours, reeking of Bengay cream as my legs trembled in a state of debility. Yet, my silhouette remained the same: a fat dancer who everyone stared at in the hallway. Humiliated, I fought on. I spent hours making spreadsheets on Excel of calorie based meal plans. “Good” or “Bad” was the word. I can remember surreptitiously gorging my chubby cheeks with “forbidden foods” like chocolate cake in the miniature bathroom of my humble dance studio in fear. Terrified of my peers’ condemnation, I could not see it was my mind inventing the whole scenario.

As my mind fabricated this grand story of rejection, I dove deeper into my disease. Lost in a distorted world, I felt left without any alternative, but to give up my dancing, the one thing I loved most. After that day, I dieted every morning, every morning being “the first day of healthy eating.” Of course I would fail, leaving myself so ashamed that I would binge in the silence of the night from the time my family went to sleep until around 4:00 am when even my cats were through prowling in the dark. I shoveled in massive quantities of food, unequivocal of someone my stature as I hastily glanced around, paranoid of other’s watchful eyes. Indeed, they did notice when even my cats were through prowling in the dark. I shoveled in massive quantities of food, unequivocal of someone my stature as I hastily glanced around, paranoid of other’s watchful eyes. Indeed, they did notice.

My mother was the one who made the frantic call for help to Summit. Soon, I was sticking to that leather chair, talking with Mark about why I do what I do. Perturbed, I set my mind on making the best of the situation despite my feelings of being unjustly accused. They had a different philosophy at the clinic including meal plans that contrasted with the ones I made at home. They were exchange meal plans based on eating balanced, regular meals. No calorie counting was involved. With my heart palpitating loudly and salty sweat rolling down my cheeks into my mouth, I prayed for the honey-haired Registered Dietician to ease my towering concerns. “If all you can do is eat two tablespoons of frosting eight times a day, that is fine, but don’t let yourself eat sixteen tablespoons in one sitting and get so depressed that you eat nothing else the rest of the day,” the kind-hearted Shelly revealed sensing my apprehension. The key was to override the ingrained social stigmas of food and let oneself eat what one wants; so that he or she doesn’t binge out of duress. Diets always eventually fail because one feels trapped. I listened to the preaching of Summit and I embraced the doctrine of moderate diet, exercise, and overall lifestyle. Things didn’t have to be so extreme, so black or white.

I grew to fancy the idea of eating for one’s health rather than one’s weight. I viewed food in terms of “nutrient-dense” or “energy-dense,” but no longer “good” or “bad.” I researched alternative, sustainable solutions for my constant malaise in books, magazines, internet articles, and Nutrition and Psychology classes at CRC. I learned facts like belly fat is directly related to intake of monounsaturated fatty acids such as safflower oil in cooking and how edema is caused by inadequate consumption of protein leading to improper fluid balance. It fascinated me to think of all the harm I had been doing to my body for so long and I wanted a permanent change. Balance was the key.

To start, I began to rethink the purpose of exercise. I decided working out could be as much of a spiritual and emotional release as a physical one. Eating could also be for enjoyment. The important thing was to
balance core food groups with minor food groups. Lastly, the way I perceived life had to change. Made complicated by the way the media portrays a person with a simple, non-hectic lifestyle, I had a difficult time learning to become content just being. I determined to love myself for who I am at this moment in time and not who I can be if I succeed in making myself thinner, prettier, smarter, or wealthier. The media combined with peer pressure can be all-consuming for a woman of any age, so I must constantly reevaluate if I am approaching my goals in the correct manner.

One thing I have reevaluated is my level of compassion for another’s insecurities. When I was younger, I would assume any overweight girl or guy I saw did not have respect for themselves as an individual. Through my own experience, I can testify to the fallacy of this. I know it can be a very painful, isolating ordeal and I am determined to help others find the light at the end of their tunnel. This is why I would like to get my degree and work as a Registered Dietician at an eating disorder clinic. Shelly was such a relief to me and I hope every ill patient can receive that same type of treatment. I thirst to return the empathy I was shown to another young girl who needs to know her own value as much as I once did. Maybe she can learn through her nightmare the true gravity of balance in life.

"Windows Into the Darkness"
KRYSLE CASARINO   »   »   » PHOTOGRAPH

THERE COMES A TIME IN A WOMAN’S LIFE WHEN SHE REALIZES WHETHER HER LOOKS WILL HINDER OR HELP HER REACH HER ASPIRATIONS.
The difference between a Mexican chicken and a US chicken is not just their nationality, but their flavor. I learned this after I tried the first piece of poultry in Sacramento. The poultry I tried did not have any distinctive odor or flavor other than those of the condiments added to the rest of the food in my plate. Since that moment I missed the food’s characteristic flavor of my hometown in Mexico. There, a simple meal made of boiled chicken with a clove of garlic, a slice of onion and a bit of salt, smells delicious. Neither the onion, garlic, nor salt supersedes the poultry flavor. This hot smelly chicken broth tastes like heaven, especially if it’s given to help you cure a cold. Here, I discovered, poultry as almost any other meat, has to be very well seasoned in order to gain some attractiveness for the palate. It has to be marinated, served with dressings, dipping sauces, deep fried, or masked with bread crumbs.

To tell the truth, flavor is just one difference between the food found in one country or the other one, but for my taste it is the most relevant feature. Because, despite some other factors like the way the food is produced or raised and how fresh it is when it gets to the consumer’s plate, there are also important differences about the food of both countries, these are ultimately what affects the food’s freshness and its flavor.

In the particular case of chickens, those living (and dying) in the south side of the border, specially those raised in small cities and rural areas, are still fed with alfalfa, grass, rice, corn, vegetable left-overs and worms which have to be got by scratching the soil and then running to avoid other chickens from stealing the meat of the day. They definitely exercise more than their counter parts in the United States, where most are kept in big crowded cages unable to move and, as a result, avoiding any unnecessary loss of weight. Furthermore, here, chickens are fed with almost the same food the Mexican chickens eat, but in “pills,” and they enjoy the benefit of having a good portion of hormones to make them reach maturity in half of the time a naturally fed chicken does it, and some antibiotics that make them less prone to get sick.

Certainly there are the organic ones, which besides their high prices, an average 20 to 25% (Haumann 1) more expensive that the non organics, they are not very different. According to Michael Pollan (Downing 1) organic chickens, except for the organic feed and that animals are not given antibiotics, they “lived very much like conventional mass produced chickens.”

In terms of freshness I am almost sure, since I know how fresh poultry look, that the chicken sold in the Sacramento supermarkets has been waiting at least one week before they get to the consumer’s kitchen. Back home, poultry is always fresh. Chickens are sacrificed every day to be sold. In some places the poultry is so fresh that it is still warm when you buy it. But this freshness is not always good.

While in California safety regulations for the food to be edible are enforced tightly, in Mexico they are not. For instance, here,
when raw meat is being handled, especially in supermarkets, some utensils, such as the cut board, have to be washed every two hours to avoid bacteria from growing on them. Chickens in Mexico lack this kind of safety practice while being handled. There, safety regulations are mainly enforced in the capital cities and occasionally in some urban settlements. In localities that are not considered urban or that are under traditional municipal governments, sanitary regulation enforcement is a joke. Consequently you are not always sure if the chicken that kindly provided the poultry for your dinner was healthy before being sacrificed, or it wasn’t sacrificed at all, and it actually died of a cold, unless you know the seller and his/her reputation.

Another difference between the two countries is the way people shop for food. Here, I quickly learned I needed to have a car in order to purchase my food. For some kind of strange urban development strategy (I still don’t understand whether its purpose is to veer people from buying too much or to encourage them to walk long distances and keep them fit and slim), businesses are separated from the dwelling areas, and the producers are much further away. Back home many products can be found around the corner or, something better, at the door of your home, like milk.

Down there, milk was delivered still foamy and warm, at 7:00 am sharp at my door. Another new funny thing was that here my refrigerator is stuffed every weekend with gallons of milk already pasteurized which has traveled hundreds, if not thousands, of miles before it arrives in my glass.

Here most of the cows are raised with the bovine growth hormone, somatotropin (BST) whose “major side effect is an increase in mastitis…. In order to treat mastitis, farmers have to purchase antibiotics, which accelerate the spread of antibiotic resistance among bacteria in humans (Milk).” The milk of the few cows raised organically costs almost double that of the non organic milk. In Mexico it is possible to get the equivalent of a gallon of organic milk at the door of your house for $3.6 dollars. Here the cost is $5 dollars plus the cost of using your car to go and get it. Nevertheless, there are some areas where you can still enjoy the home delivered organic milk, but there are few.

In any case, on both sides of the border, consumers are left with the heavier burden of the food cost. Thus, in the United States, the richest country, with its mass production and transnational companies, the vast majority of its citizens is being fed with food that is not fresh, much less produced in a sustainable fashion, but the U.S. is looking desperately to increase the organic production and to return to the locally produced food offered through certified Farmers Markets. Here many can find not too expensive food, but the quality is not the best and freshness is null, and when the food is fresh and of high quality, the price might make it out of reach for ordinary citizens, thus making it accessible just to certain elite groups.

On the other hand, Mexico is eager and working hard to reach the highest point of capitalism by letting transnational companies establish in places unimaginable some years ago by locals, like WalMart in the surroundings of the Teotihuacán pyramids in Mexico State. Consequently, they are destroying the local and family production that has provided good quality and fresh food to its people for centuries. The majority still can find fresh food but with the disadvantages of lacking strict safety regulations and enforcement.

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**Works Cited**


Six of us sat crammed in the spiffy old Lincoln Mercury rental car parked outside the hotel. We were headed to my brother’s wedding. Running late as always, we waited anxiously for Aunt Mimi and Uncle Damon, who were still inside the hotel getting ready. Directly across from us, my mother’s parents sat in their car, idle also.

I pulled down the mirror on the passenger side of the car just to confirm I hadn’t formed any new zits since the last time I looked in the mirror, ten minutes ago. Yep, I had. I needed a serious eye shadow touch up too. I sighed and grabbed my makeup bag out of my purse.

I turned my head every which angle, careful not to miss anywhere. I closed my left eye and brushed my eyelid with eye shadow several times.

In deep concentration, I was perturbed when my mother, sitting directly to the left of me, asked if she could have some eye shadow.

“I just don’t know how to look young and hip anymore, I guess,” she said, giggling. I rolled my eyes and told her to close her eyes.

Right as I lifted my hand to apply the eye shadow, she said jokingly, “Don’t let my parents see, I wouldn’t want to get in trouble.”

The words left my mouth before I could even process them, “It’s okay, mom, you’ve done a lot worse in your life.”
I don’t often walk my kids to school. I should. We bought our house because of its proximity to their elementary school. But the reality of our morning routine seldom allows time for walking.

This morning is an exception. Teeth are brushed, faces are washed, and shoelaces are tied well in advance of our regular departure time. So we use our feet instead of our Ford and start off for school.

I walk beside Grace, holding her plump, soft hand in mine. My son’s Nikes slap the sidewalk behind us. Grace, all of 7 years old, is talking on and on, our never-ending source of sound. She’s complaining, as tends to be her habit now. Her subject this morning is our last name: Lemire

“Why do we have to have a last name that starts with L? I never get to be first because L is in the middle of the alphabet. A’s get to go first. Even Z’s sometime get to go first when the teacher starts from the end. But forwards or backwards, I’m always stuck in the middle. The teacher never lets the middle kids go first.”

As she goes on she doesn’t notice when I let her hand slip from mine. I slow my pace to fall back closer to my silent one, 9 year-old Andrew.

“So, how do you feel about our name starting with L?” I’m fishing. He shrugs, focused on a pebble he’s kicking along. It seems as if I’m always trying to pry some words from this child who led me into parenthood.

“Well,” I say, “at least your first name starts with an A. Maybe that puts you at the front of the line sometimes.”

Andrew smiles his blue eyes up at me but adds nothing to the conversation.

I can see that Andrew’s listening, but can’t detect his level of interest. I’ve wondered many times if being first is ever important to him. I remember a friend’s party over the past weekend when the children lined up for cupcakes. Andrew stood about midline. Once the kids spied the treats set on a table, they crushed forward and Andrew was squeezed to the back. When he finally reached the table, the cupcakes were gone. He returned to playing with his friends, apparently unfazed.

I see this happen often with my son. At school, at church, at friends’ houses and family events, he’s well-mannered, and doesn’t complain if he gets crowded out. Friends, family and even strangers point out how polite Andrew is, this child who never puts himself first.

I fear that he won’t edge forward when it’s his time to shine. I don’t want him to miss something as bold as grabbing the brass ring or as simple as being the first one to come in out of the rain. How are we preparing him to deal with a class bully, compete for limited seating in a college lecture, or lead a meeting?

Andrew steps aside as kids with a basketball pound by us. We come to the corner and wait for the crossing guard to motion us across.

Grace leads the way. We pass the playground and head to Grace’s classroom. She’s still complaining about our last name when friends run up to greet her. I walk with Andrew to where kids are lining up by his classroom. He falls in with his friends in the middle of the line. When the teacher approaches, the kids press forward to file into the classroom. I see Andrew jostled to the back.

** * **

Twenty-one people were crushed to death at the E2 nightclub in Chicago. They were trampled when a blast of pepper spray caused hundreds of patrons to stampede towards the exit. The survivors said that they felt victims beneath them grabbing at their ankles for help. Twenty-one souls perished beneath the soles of others.

Where would my son be?
Finding David

Why hadn’t I paid more attention to my instincts? I’ll tell you why. I was afraid of being labeled as an extremist. I have never been one to follow the popular path. I prefer to satiate my analytical mind with in-depth research that goes beyond the readily accepted. My husband tolerated my avant-garde ways, but being a conservative Christian, he didn’t share in this desire and preferred for me to keep my opinions to myself. So, when I suggested that our youngest son’s sporadically unusual behavior might be associated with a food reaction, he summarily informed me that there was nothing wrong with David. He accused me of being a fearmonger and told me that I needed to believe God better. Consequently, I put my theory on a shelf. I allowed fear and uncertainty to come before David’s health. I can declare, with a sarcastic grin on my face, that I must not believe God at all because later that year David was diagnosed with Autism. Once more I focused my attention on his diet, but this time I was determined not to allow the opinions of others to keep me from at least trying to help my son. The next few years taught me that despite popular belief to the contrary, a strict diet free of gluten and casein is the single most effective intervention for Autism.

I was so tired of seeing my son grow quiet and withdrawn after eating. His eyes appeared to be made of glass. They reminded me of my girlfriend when she began taking the prescription drug Lithium. So, despite my fear of looking like a desperate, misguided mother I put my already thought out plan into action. I would have it all done before my husband came home from work. I began by calling my girlfriend Deborah. “I’m going to be throwing away pretty much my whole kitchen. Spices, oils, cereals, flour, the canned foods; everything that was not a whole food went out the door. As I worked my two little boys followed me around the kitchen and we talked about food, about change, and about how this new food will help us to be healthy. Like Superman. Well, David didn’t talk, he had quit talking when he was two years old, but he was keenly interested in what was happening. Jacob, at six years old had the gift of gab and was educating David and me about the kinds of food Superman ate. “He eats this kind of yogurt too David, but its purple, not red.” By six o’clock our kitchen became allergy free. The boys liked to look at it all and they were taken in by my enthusiasm, but I knew the real challenge would be getting them to eat it.

My goal for that day was to replace everything in my kitchen with food that was free of the proteins Gluten and Casein. Simply put that means no breads and no milk. Bread would have to be made from scratch, with rice flour and a plethora of other types of flours that I had previously not known existed. Gluten is found in wheat, rye, barley, and oats. Surprisingly wheat is also found in many other products. For instance, it is used as filler in spices, and as a non-caking agent in those big boxes of raisins. Casein is the emulsifying protein in milk. That was easier to deal with. I would just replace my milk products with rice and soy products.

By four o’clock that afternoon I had given away pretty much my whole kitchen. My husband came home from work and I proudly displayed for him our sparkling clean refrigerator stocked with fresh whole foods, rice milk, soy milk, soy yogurt, soy cheese, soy everything. I remained animated and excited about this change even when his face fell in horror. I wasn’t going to give in to him, not this time. Let’s give it six months, I told him, if there isn’t any real change in David then we’ll go back to eating ‘real’ food. I did gladly agree to his suggestion of wheat-ridden hamburgers and milk filled milk shakes at Red Robin as our final ‘horrah!’ to good food.
That night David had a night terror. Night terrors were a common occurrence in our household. Several times a week, with his eyes wide open, David would start screaming and point at some unknown threat that stood just in front of him. My baby did everything he could to get away. He’d run through the house on his little legs looking over his shoulder and scream at what was following him, or he’d back up against the wall kicking his legs and flailing his arms in a desperate fight to be free. These dreams were always violent and terrible. Because of this David slept wrapped in my arms every night.

The next morning started as good as could be expected. Okay, no, it was hell. If you’ve ever tried to make pancakes with rice flour and soymilk you know what I didn’t know then. It’s not easy. Rice flour does not act like wheat flour. In order to make it even close, xantham gum and tapioca starch must be added in perfect measure to the rice flour.

I called everyone to a breakfast of scrambled antibiotic free eggs, nitrate free bacon, and gluten free pancakes. Nobody ate the pancakes. They tasted like, as Jacob put it, the wet sand at the beach. Later that day as I pulling the doughy gooey mess that was suppose to be bread from the oven, I decided that for now, we would go ahead and use wheat bread, but just until I learned how to cook with gluten free grains. We would continue to keep milk products out.

No night terrors that night, or the next night. David seemed to be paying more attention to his surroundings. Both my husband and myself noticed this and thought that David was much less introverted than he had been before, but we both agreed that we weren’t going to make any fast and sure decisions just yet.

On the third morning of our dairy free diet David jumped out of bed, went into the kitchen, grabbed a kitchen chair with his chubby little fists and pulled it into the bathroom. I watched all of this from the hallway with quiet interest. He carefully maneuvered the chair in front of the toilet, climbed up on it, got back down, lifted the lid and took his diaper off. He then climbed back on the chair, took aim, and peed in the potty. My mouth fell open. I was stunned. We talked to David about using the potty but didn’t push it because he wasn’t interested. I clapped my hands and loudly sang the pee-pee in the potty song; he did his little bouncy dance. By that time I had practiced enough with rice flour to make somewhat of a less gritty textured bread so we were in full gluten and casein free mode.

Today David is twelve years old. The only night terrors he has is when he inadvertently gets milk in his diet. We know today that he gets insomnia and wets the bed when he eats too many bananas. Artificial colors of blue lake and red cause him to have stomach upset. Gluten certainly makes a difference in his awareness. He never has the glassy eyed look. Sometimes manufactures will change their recipe for a product, like cereal for instance. They may start putting barley malt in it, which contains gluten. I try to be very careful to read every label, but sometimes I don’t have the time or I tell myself that surely they wouldn’t have changed recipes this week. When that happens and David eats that product he gets spacey. It’s like he’s stoned. David will not purposefully touch any of the allergen foods he is restricted from simply because he does not like the reactions he has. He is one of the very few autistic children that are not medicated. David is mainstreamed into a typical sixth grade class, and he is yet again on the district honor roll. His teachers and his Doctors have stopped giving me the sympathetic looks, and they have stopped feeling sorry for David because he cannot eat what his peers are eating. They are unbiased witnesses to the success of dietary change to control autistic behaviors.

This diet does not work for every autistic child out there, but it works for David, and millions of other autistic people. If I had followed the path of the majority my son would not be the content, good-natured child he is today. He is still autistic, as of yet there is no cure. Nevertheless, David is living proof that you just never know what works and what doesn’t until you give it a try.
Day five now
his breath guttering around
in the chamber of his throat
his neck artery a delicate pulse
beneath his slackened jaw.

I’m bedside
poised in a doorway
one foot into a liminal space
I don’t want to step through.

I recall our childhood games.
When one of us pleaded with the other
the advantaged one always shouted
“No do-overs!”

How foolish we were—but also right.
Tomorrow morning this hospital bed
will be stripped, its mortal sheets
headed for the laundry chute.

And I will be consoling his wife,
wondering why the entire world hasn’t stopped.
Someone right now is buying a loaf of bread
and there’s a guy at a breakfast table
consulting the Dow-Jones on his iPad.

What do they think they’re doing!
Simon says, “Take two steps forward.”
Simon says, “Look at the hospital bed.”
Simon says, “Now lie down on it.”
Adam's Deal

The flag rests
Over a poplar casket

Not so much to say
We hold you in the highest regard

But more to say
Adam we get it
How they commandeered your young mind

You were wound up and turned in the direction of
Vietnamese smokers, gamblers and drunks
Vietnamese painters, poets, and opium addicts
Carpenters and sure shots

And a child

In a rush of addition and subtraction
You understood it was no game the boy carried

And someone might still make it home
There was gunfire and pray for us sinners

And you saw the next sunup

The boy came frequently to visit
In your fathers house

Nights when Olympia beer and mota merged
To hit you just right

When something about the summer sky at dusk
Took you back
You would share with your young nephews

Lay down the old truth for the boys
Two directions you could have gone
Twenty years ago

The 70s and 80s were a tortured migration
Ending with fingers finding your revolver

Christ had at last come to understand
Your life long search for communion
Kept you awake nights

Under the gaze of the Blessed Mother
We stood at St. Mary’s cemetery
Three guns blasted three times into the air

Three guns held by three men in civilian clothes
Wearing the caps, pins and patches of brothers

These men stepped in
Where officials dared not

As it was by your own hand
You surrendered
This void in me
depens with lost unanswered curiosity
questions about
where I’m from
who I am
what I could of been
is an absent knowledge I live with
everyday

d this void in me
soccer ball bounce back walls
the sometimes “how you doing” phonecalls
depens with missing parent teacher meetings
and child can’t support you checks in the mail
this void in me
grew deeper
every single day
till the moment that I was asked
“What does your father do for a living?”
I grow hollow
inside out
until the only thing that existed
were my words
“um…I don’t really have a father”
“don’t really” meant
the smoking alcoholic man that
gave birth to me
gave birth to me but
abandoned my Vietnam refugee family
left this California
went to all the way over there Florida
for his other there wife and kids
took our business/money/ and sanity
for his new family future
and never looked back again
“don’t really” meant
never had
never needed

Needing fathers became absolute
as I bury this void
with older sister advice wisdom
beautiful mother hard work love
Full House would never make sense to me
because I didn’t have no Danny Tanner
or uncle jessie looking after me
it was the Womyn in my life
that made this young warrior

I cement it down
with report card celebration dinners
tense passenger seats licenses
and hot prepared Tupperware
for cold college refrigerators

I cover it
with certificate award walls
medal dangling ribbons off
trophy shining pedestals
so I can never be an outcome
of an abandoned father

the void you put in me
would become the will
the strength
the armor
in me
and for that
you at least deserve this
“This was your ticket for my college graduation”
“Where the Wild Things Are”
KRYSLE CASARINO »»» PHOTOGRAPH
Historical Land Colonist
Under White Supremacist
Cover Texas Republican:
Betty Brown states—

"Would it behoove you and your citizens to adopt a name that we could deal with more readily here?"
And history of oppression and suppression repeats itself
Tiếng Việt
an oral tradition shared by smooth S indigenous lips
hard sharp T tongues
exchanged/felted/passed on by heart and mind connections
was colonized by French imperialist letters
and accent marks
—and it would never be the same

the same colonists
constrain my name from its original form and life
my name was Phong
Phong: P-H-O-N-G
my name meant wind
I was the feng in shui
like wind-water breeze through lush open field
during the currents of may
Phong ripped from my chest
scratch off my back
scribe out
written in as Fong: F-O-N-G
like product of a disenfranchising hegemony
like a broken record fading in and out
the national anthem
My mother
my mother gave birth to my name on this manifested 13 colony soil
she bent letters on bent knees
to serve this white majority culture

and cater ignorant American tongues
American tongues that couldn’t comprehend
the beauty behind Fong
the beauty behind Mai
Huyen
Erica

It wouldn’t understand how vowel sounds could rise up in crescendo
and topple over like worlds never existed
It wouldn’t know how dẫu năng are so heavy
that it brought us down to earth
to show us how deep
we can really be
Betty Brown words are the words of conquerors
who dictated Vietnamese people for far too long
from the Chams to the Chinese
from the French to the Americans after the Southeast Asian war
Vietnamese people came to America not as wanting economic immigrants out of financial opportunity but needing political refugees out of pure instinctive survival
we did not come here for Betty Browns to change our names
our culture
our identities
remove your short colony take-over mindset
of my “rather difficult language”
So please Betty Brown
I maintain what’s mine
and you can have what’s yours and
Since “Fong” is construction made under you

What the Fong does your name mean?
A handgun in a holster over his kidney signifies the fact—more than the five Coke and vodkas slung back—that he'll likely blow his hand off in Bea's Pancake House in Texarkana, tonight. Now, imagine yourself as that man.
Is there a law against going through the motions? And who's to say the motions aren't the thing itself? Skillet specials of steak-and-eggs zoom through air, land with a greasy whunk in front of startled retirees. Like an undertaker, you walk up to a table, get nowhere trying a pickup line on a woman.
A bell rings off stage. In this glinting light your eyeteeth become fangs, desire and fear mushroom inside your heart; an actual week could pass as you clear your throat.
You try a different line and get brushed off again, are left standing in the middle of the room, and just won't sit, can't sit.
You tug once too often at your awkward-fitting clothes.
Life isn't one paragraph long, my friend.
Daily life's petty divisions sweep us into epiphany: one naked moment can last a lifetime.
So let's say you met her in the first, married her in the last paragraph; imagine yourself happy with that woman perhaps feeling loving, and loved, at last.

A large pallid fish hovers mid-level in the aquarium. Whatever species of fish, it must have a Latin name like so many points of law.
It appears to be alive – notice the vacuous fanning of pectoral and dorsal fins that propels the fish nowhere. In a lawyer's waiting room, a fish has little to consider but its flat reflection in glass, its pink mouth in reverse, and the bubbles from an apparatus attached to its tank. I expect the fish neither understands nor likes the law. It doesn't dislike the law, either. The bubbles make water-Muzak not quite drowned by the girl behind the desk typing terms in Latin which she may or may not understand. She's pale and pink too. Presumably she goes home at 5, while the fish remains. Most likely she'll come again tomorrow to spend her day, whether or not such likes the law.
In July She Comes to Herself

She hikes her short skirt up two inches past her knees, releasing millions of pheromones across the surface of the lake water. Somewhere a stallion whinnies; the man looks back to where the lake is the color of coal, to the purple shadows under the hedge. Tonight, she’s as pretty as she’ll ever be in this short lifetime, her eyes wild with thoughts of ripping nylons and loosening hair. She contemplates the options, and her chair scrapes on concrete, a finger crushes lips. She knows she should forget these foolish men who bring her to these sacred places, only to die inside her as the sound of night takes over while the stars and planets appear in the clear sky, and fireflies do a slow dance in and out of the yew hedge. She could sit here until dawn listening for coyotes, while a flock of mallards skims low and the first bats flutter broadly out with the sound of children keening softly across the twilight air. She releases her tight hair, swallows yawns, and nods politely, oblivious to his talk of bright razor wire curled like Christmas tinsel along the fencing, up the power poles; the desire for standards of safety grows sweetly eccentric like the soft belch and slap of the beer can against his thigh. Just then she thinks she’ll dump him, and wear cowboy boots with long skirts, get a large, scary dog, and talk mostly to herself all the time.

Sunday on the Banks of the Marne

A warm summer—fishing poles rest, the pontoon boat anchored.

It’s all mellow with good bread, yellow pears, and blackberry pie.

One bottle of wine empty, another half gone. The husbands drink, wives eat the last chicken pieces. Plates lie strewn on the grass.

Tomorrow, it’s back to work—the factory and pensions to come.

One woman, the last to finish, removes a blouse, sits in her slip. The others doze, but she wants to talk about holidays, trips to Paris. No one listens. She stretches, walks barefoot down the slick bank.

The Marne glares like a silver medallion in the bright afternoon sun.

The surface is calm, except for a splotched oak cluster bobbing, holding like a fist.
Salt Lick

Two Black Angus live
in our almond orchard,
get supplements, but still bury
thick heads in heaps of nuts and hulls.
On moonless evenings, eyes roll
upward, reflecting white
beside the glistening
salt block, not recognizing
night or day. Light comes
from somewhere, maybe body heat
stamping shapes in darkness.
The butcher comes. They trot over,
swipe my bare legs with rough
pink tongues I will later prepare
for the dogs. Our meat will be
tough... and taste like almonds.

Gestures

have a louder voice than
words.
dialogue is the charm
for unsaid words.
let us talk
to rescue
our feelings
lost
in the
mist
in the sacred mountain
depth in the jungle of our hearts.
I know something’s up
I always do.
Like how quiet he gets when he drives me back home
So I stick my head out the window
and watch the white lines on the street turn into a long stream of paint
Nothing but the rum of his engine stickshift.

He pulls up and quickly brushes my thigh
I grab my bag slam the door and I promise myself
The next time he calls I’ll be asleep
or in the shower
Anything that isn’t too obvious
But anything
that keeps me from being one of those girls

You know
ones like America Ferrera
in a movie about losing your virginity to the wrong guy
the same summer that your grandma gets some too
Because I see myself on screen
Letting late night intellectual conversations
turn into his observations
about the curves of my body
Believing his words
and not his hands
when I ask him what he really wants from me

He tells me
He’s for the people! La Raza!
Know your history!
Know your rights!
Know yourself!

You want to know your history?
Go to your father
Tell him what your true intentions are with me
and he’ll tell you what our history says a man should be.
In the Garden

In the garden this morning
an albino praying mantis
tractored his blind way
up the stalk of a lily.

His forelegs reached out,
grasped, then towed the rest
of his body up like a cable
hauling a bundle up a mountain.
I could nearly hear the ratcheting
of some wheelhouse hidden
in the cup of the lily above him.

His progress was segmented
by stops of utter stillness,
during which he waited patiently
for me to give back his privacy.

What was his prayer?
Spindly and fragile,
mostly appendages,
he had no room in his thorax
for a self-feeding ego
that might swallow a deity
then grow complacent.

I left him soon enough
so I never did see whether
he gained the cup, the cup
which all the while had been
tilting and spilling
its pool of morning light
down the stem of his inclined path.

I did not see it, but I believe
the mantis got there.
Call that faith if you like.

Like the March of the Second Hand

I walk the yard
poppin’ chambray blue collars
in stiff blue denim.

I walk the yard
in the lethal electric heat.
My hard leather boot
places foot to stone
on the warning track.

I walk the yard
carefree,
in circles,
under the gun
that kills

I walk the yard for
five,
ten,
twenty-five years
while the white
collar dreams.

I walk the yard with a piece of steel
in my ass
under cruel lead rain.
Life (if you can call it that)
on the warning track.

The bullets fall still
in November
as in April.

I walk the yard for
twenty-five,
ten,
two,
five

years,
until the rain blots out even the sun,
I walk the yard.
I prefer my back to the fence of this new construction over the bright blue benches and rigid facades that prop up the student body.

The fence gives easily, its loose jointed breadth a compliment to my curved back. Stacked re-bar and floor joists sit behind me, where scaffolding holds tiers of workers who break halfway through the day as pretty young girls pass, leaving behind wisps of shampoo and soap, hair teasing wind like yellow tape.

I wonder how old it is—this chain link—wonder how many pupils have passed it and never even wondered for what purpose it bends the way it does—what it’s keeping in or out.

How much it must have seen, this cagey ribbon that twists in westerly wind.
Lorena Mercott stood in line at the bank, on one of those cold days when being inside a building, any building, made life just a tiny bit more pleasant. Rifling through her purse for her checkbook, she noticed a large dark shape pass by. Looking up, her face soon folded into into a blank mask, the corners of her mouth pursing in the slightest frown. A large homeless man of indeterminate age had wandered in, seemingly oblivious to the well-ordered lines and clumps of people going about their business. She watched as bank employees intercepted the man and began ushering him out, his garbled mumblings falling on deaf ears. They looked like sheep dogs, sheep dogs in hunter green shirts ushering an old bull out to the pasture.

Lorena sighed. Who knows, that might be me in a week or two she thought. Finally finding her checkbook, she smoothed out the cracked, faded leather and pushed escaping receipts and slips of paper back in. Seeing her hands next to the old, battered checkbook she was struck at how similar they looked. Years of housekeeping, laundering, and taking care of other people's homes and children had left their mark. Head shaking, pushing thoughts of vanity aside, she squared her shoulders and thought of the task before her. The loan. The money that would let her stay in her one-bedroom apartment above the New Age Yoga shop, the money that would let her keep the one space that belonged only to her in the whole world, the money that would keep her off the streets and out of the cold. The person ahead of her moved and she could see the glowing window that held her future. One more person to go and it was her turn.

Her worn-out, markdown shoes squeaked against the floor as she stirred nervously. "Oh Lord, please let this work," she breathed softly, her hands folding over each other as she rubbed nervously at the ring on her right index finger. Looking down, looking for courage, she caressed the ring tenderly, it's surface polished and worn from years of such treatment. Lorena had never been a brave woman. Never a brave girl, never a brave child. Born on a dreary, boring Tuesday at the Danville Rescue Mission, surrounded by the homeless and transient, she had grown up living with her mother. Grown up in so many different places and with so many different people that the memories blurred together until she couldn't tell them apart. Her ring was the one valuable she owned, the one thing she treasured. "Here, Bright Eyes, this is for you." The words echoed in her head, the beloved nickname uttered in the tender voice of the one person she knew did love her. In one of her more calm, lucid moments, her mother had given her a shining bauble, topped with a stone of the brightest blue. Lorena smiled, recalling as a child that she had never seen a color so bright, so vivid in her entire life. Everything had always been dark, grey, and worn. The sky, her clothes, even her mother. It was a piece of heaven, Mama said, saved by an angel just for her. A bright light caught her attention as the person before her left. Willing her hands to stop trembling, she stepped forward.

"Hello there, I was hop-"

"I'm sorry Ma'm, but we're closing. All business is done for the day. Tomorrow is a federal holiday, so please come back on the following. Thank you."

The light flickered out leaving Lorena standing in silence. The teller was gone in a matter of moments, and she found herself being ushered out the doors with the other customers. Hunter green shirts weaved in and out, coaxing and cajoling, catching stragglers with alert eyes and practiced motions. Outside the cold air struck her body, the thin layers of her cheap sweaters doing little to keep out the cold. As the crowd around her dispersed, Lorena stood alone in front of the bank. She closed her eyes and bowed her head. I'm so tired, she thought softly, afraid to voice the words, afraid even now that the wolves of the world, those beings who prowled the alleys and rundown buildings like hers, preying on the innocent and alone, would hear.

Her hands slipped back together as she sought the soothing comfort of her ring. Lorena's eyes snapped open. The pale flesh against the leather of her hand betrayed the absence of her beloved treasure. What? No, no! It's gone, it's gone, it's gone! The phrase echoed in her head, faster and faster, the panicked sound growing to a deafening cacophony of noise that blocked out the world. Frantically she looked around, shuffling across the ground like an agitated crab. Ignoring the stares, whispers and laughs of passersby, she scrabbled in the dirt and muck on the steps of the bank. Something cold hit her neck and soon the gentle plop of raindrops began a staccato on her back. Covered in dirt and mud, clothes caked brown, Lorena slumped on her knees, defeated, dirty hands squeezing mud, she choked on her sobs. The falling rain left the streets desolate, removing even the warmth of humanity. Once
again, everything was dark, grey, and worn. Without warning, a heavy hand fell on her shoulder, leading up to the weathered face of the homeless man. Starting, she began to pull away.

"Don't be afraid, I-I-I found this."

A gnarled hand slowly opened before her, the bright blue of the stone cutting through the haze of despair.

Lorena felt the world rushing back. She couldn't believe it. Never before had it shined so bright. Her mouth opened and closed silently, unable to give voice to the rush of relief and elation filling her heart.

"My ring...thank you."

The man gave a slow smile, the warm smile of a child who, instead of being struck, is given a loving embrace. Mumbling, he turned around and began to shuffle away. Slipping her ring into the one pocket she knew had no holes, Lorena rifled through her purse once more. Finding the checkbook she grabbed her last five dollar bill and rushed to the man. She pressed the soaking bill into his palm with a grateful smile.

His eyes focused on her, "Heaven. It's a piece of heaven."

Lorena's eyes widened. "Why yes, yes it is."

Smiling wistfully, the man's gaze slipped past her, focusing on something only he could see and walked out into the night. Clutching her purse, Lorena began walking through the pour. She didn't want to miss the last train.
Somehow, I feel like it's really my fault. People would think I'm crazy if I told them that though. They would say, of course it doesn't have anything to do with you, that's crazy! But things like this push you past logic. It makes you ask questions, all of them, even the ones that don't make sense. And I still wonder.

"What's wrong?" She asked, again. I knew I was being too quiet that night. I should have hidden it better. "Nothing," I assured her. "Just tired. I'm fine."

She huffed in frustration and disbelief, and a strand of hair blew away from her face for a moment. I watched it float up and twist around. Her hair had always seemed plain to me before, just an average brown. I wouldn't miss running my fingers through it, I had already made my decision. Now all I had to do was tell her.

I couldn't that night, though. There was never a good time, it seemed. She was constantly talking, telling me about her day. I couldn't find the right crack in the night to wedge into. The break in her rambling where I would clear my throat and say, "We need to talk." It would have to wait until morning.

She finally gave up trying to figure out the reason for my silence. "Alright, if you say so," I could see the distrust in her eyes. "Well, I need to get back to my dorm. I have to get up so early tomorrow." She cocked her head to one side and let her tongue hang out, miming a noose with her hand. She laughed at her own joke when I didn't, and her keys clicked as they swung from her hand. I couldn't remember why she had to get up early. She had explained it to me at some point, earlier that night, but I'd forgotten. It didn't really matter.

I think she asked me to walk outside with her to her car, but I didn't. Something about it being too cold outside, and I didn't have shoes on. I remember hating the sound of her whining. I wanted to yell at her, to tell her not to criticize my actions. Instead I kissed her on the cheek, but not her lips, and sent her out.

My cell phone's battery was almost dead. I plugged it into the wall, and settled into bed. I wasn't really tired, but there wasn't any point in being awake. I felt anxious and empty. I was ready to surrender to unconsciousness.

My dream was unusual. My nights were always black and dreamless, but I dreamed that night. I was walking down a path, lined on both sides by trees. Where I stood, the trees were covered in healthy green leaves and blossoms. I thought later that that didn't make sense. Trees didn't have leaves and blossoms at the same time, but like many things in dreams, I didn't analyze it.

But further down the path, the trees were dark, and their branches were bare. And someone was running towards me. It was her. She was jogging down the path in my direction, her arms bent and swinging. But she never got any closer. I could see her feet hitting the ground, one in front of the other, but she stayed in place. Her hair fanned out behind her, dancing in the wind. I kept walking, and the distance between us was forever the same.

A noise broke through the dream, and I blinked in the darkness, trying to get my bearings. The noise was my cell phone, I realized. I wrestled my arm out from under the blanket, and reached to check the screen. I expected her name and picture, but it didn't recognize the number. "Caller unknown" it said. I flipped it open, and grunted an answer.

It was a man's voice, deep and monotone. He asked about my name, wanted me to identify myself. I told him, and I heard him clear his throat. He asked about my relation to her, and I felt my stomach twist. Why did he know her name? Who was he?

"There's been an accident," He said. The room dissolved around me, and sweat beaded on the palm against the phone, making it slippery. He explained that another car had crossed the divider and hit hers, head-on. A drunk driver, most likely, but he had fled the scene. Someone had seen the accident and called the police...

I didn't hear much of what he said after that. Suddenly everything was too still, too silent. I used to always feel that the house was too noisy. The hum of the air conditioner, or the fridge downstairs always kept me awake. But now I couldn't hear any of that. The world was silent, listening with me to this strange voice on the phone.

I think I asked him some questions, like how they found my number. Why didn't they call her family? I think I was shouting at him. I found myself sitting up, leaning forward with one hand...
on my stomach. He said something about emergency numbers in her phone. I-C-E contacts in her phone. I didn't know what he was talking about. "I'm so sorry," He said, "She was killed instantly. She was pronounced dead at ten forty three p.m."

My throat felt dry. I couldn't speak. My hands shook. There was a long, long pause while I absorbed this. I kept hearing him say my name, asking if I was still on the line, but I couldn't answer. My mouth opened and closed, but it was as if my voice simply wasn't there. My eyes had adjusted to the dark, and I couldn't tear my eyes from the stripes on my sheets. My entire body felt heavy. Finally I answered him. He wanted me to come to the hospital to see her.

She didn't look like herself. That was the first thing I thought. It wasn't like seeing her when she was asleep, it was like she was a different person. There was a long, dark gash across her forehead. A striking contrast against her skin, pale under the florescent lights. Her hair was frizzy and matted. Most of it was pulled into a ponytail, but a few strands were loose. Her makeup was still almost perfect, and I remember thinking it was strange. Being dead with makeup on.

I think I stood there for almost an hour. A nurse came in and asked if I wanted to sit down. I kept saying I was leaving really soon, so it was fine. "I'll just be here a few more minutes," I kept saying. "I'm leaving soon." But I didn't leave. I couldn't. I didn't sit down, either. I didn't want to just sit and stare at her. It felt disrespectful for some reason. But I kept thinking to myself, what if this was the last time I would ever see her? After a while I realized there would be a funeral, obviously. Somehow that justified me leaving. I considered touching her hand or something, like I had seen in movies, but I didn't. I just looked at her for another second, turned around, and walked out the door.

The scene of the accident was a long detour from the way to my house, but I was there before I realized where I was going. I pulled to the side of the road and parked. I wasn't sure what had brought me here, or what I expected to see. I looked up and down the street, imaging the scene. There was still glass everywhere, and it sparkled in the moonlight. After a while, I don't know how long, I turned the car back on, and drove home.

The funeral was "well attended," at least that's what people said. All of our friends from church and the university were there. A lot of them came up to me to hug me and apologize. I thought that was strange, that they all said sorry. But what was stranger were the things I responded with. I told them things like, "I loved her so much," or "she was taken too soon."

But the weirdest conversation was the one I had with her mother. She came over to me toward the end of the service. "I really liked you for her," She said. "You really treated her so well, the way she deserved." She paused to dab a tear from her cheek and sniffed. "I saw you two having a real future together."

I couldn't figure out why I answered with this, but I did; "I know," I said, nodding slowly, "I did, too."

"Oh!" She cried, and flung her arms around me. I hugged her back, as hard as I could. I hadn't cried at all until then, and suddenly I was sobbing. I cried and hugged her for the longest time, but she never loosened her grip, like she was uncomfortable. She held me back the whole time, and cried with me.

I didn't go with everyone to the dinner afterwards. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I was afraid I would accidently tell someone the truth. I couldn't say it today. I couldn't say it ever, really. I didn't know what people would think, and I was afraid. I was terrified that someone would blame me. Someone would say it was karma, or something.

So instead of following everyone to her parents house, I stayed behind at the cemetery. Her gravestone was a statue of an angel, carved from white marble. Its wings drooped, and its arms curled toward the sky. I couldn't decide whether it was supposed to represent her ascending to heaven, or crying out in grief.

I stood there, looking at her angel statue, with my hands in my pockets. I read her name on the placard underneath. I had looked at that name so many times, in different places. On the screen of my cell phone, printed on her driver's license, and in her own handwriting. I remembered it now, how she used to write her own name. She made the capital letters extra large, and the tails of her Y's and G's swung low, below the lines.

I looked at her birthday, carved forever into the stone. I'd forgotten about her birthday. She showed up one day expecting cake and presents, and I was empty handed. I felt absolutely horrible about it now, ten times worse than the way I'd felt that day. Suddenly I wanted to start arranging a party right that second, to go buy a bouquet of her favorite flowers, and pick out some kind of jewelry for her. But I couldn't now. It was too late. I felt a tear on my cheek and wiped it away. I cleared my throat.

"We need to talk," I said, just the way I had played it over and over in my head. "I'm just not happy anymore. Things have changed. I think it's really my fault. I shouldn't have taken you for granted. But now everything has changed, and there's no going back to the way things were. I miss those days, I really do. But there's no going back. This is hard, I know. It's so hard. But we just have to accept it. We have to understand that things change, and we have to just move on. I'm sorry."

I looked around to see if anyone was around, listening. But I was alone. I heard the screech of some crow in the distance. The rest of the world was silent. I looked back at her grave one last time, turned around, and walked away.
HALLEY MIGLIETTA

Ophelia

The day that Leo’s life changed seemed to be just like all the others. He sat, contentedly perched at the coffee shop, a block away from his house, and drank the same cup of coffee that he had been drinking, every morning, in that very coffee shop, for twenty-seven years. Leo would tell you that he wasn’t terrifically fond of that cup of coffee; in fact, he thought it to be almost unpalatable—too acidic, too sour. But Leo sat there every day for twenty-seven years and drank the cup of coffee that he abhorred.

The thing was, he deeply appreciated the constant variable that came from his daily routine. He understood that the nature of life was one of persistent mutation. Sometimes this occurred at such a subtle pace that he barely recognized the change until he reflected on how things “used to be.” Other times, the change was caused by a force so powerful that after the initial shock wore off, he couldn’t seem to remember what life was possibly like prior to that point in time. His coffee shop and his crummy cup of coffee were the only things that Leo felt he could depend on. To reconcile the evolution within his perpetual routine, Leo took to putting words on paper, developing an intricate record of the mutations within his constant. Leo considered his book of words his most valuable device. The words were his, and within them, a detailed account of the ever-changing culture of his sacred place.

What Leo wrote about was a mystery to those around him. Everyone had an idea about what the book contained. No one dared to ask. Leo was well-known by name, but no one knew much else. He harbored an air of privacy; not the kind that aroused fear, but rather, one that gave way to an elemental respect. The regulars and employees became used to Leo’s presence. No one felt the need to interrupt his curious existence in their world. By no means cantankerous, Leo was not jolly either. And yet his demeanor expressed a certain level of contentment that people trusted.

Leo never had to approach the counter to order his coffee. He would arrive at 8:00am (almost always on the dot), make himself comfortable at his favorite corner table, with confidence that his terrible cup of coffee would arrive shortly. Promptly, Leo would slip 6 quarters into the palm of the deliverer, five for the coffee, and the sixth for the pocket of whomever was on “Leo duty” on that particular day. It was always quarters too. There were many speculations as to why Leo had an endless supply of quarters. Theories ran rampant, for the topic of Leo’s quarters never ceased to be quizzical. One imagined entering Leo’s dwelling with quarters, instead of carpet, lining each and every square foot of the floor. Another believed that Leo had a change machine in his home. This was a favored theory because many could relate to the thrill of depositing a $20 dollar bill into a change machine; the clinking sensation of the quarters pouring out in mass was reminiscent of hitting the jackpot at a slot machine.

A rite of passage at the coffee shop for a new employee was to ask Leo his age. This could almost have been interpreted as an initiation into the work-place family. Some were more ambitious than others to ask this seemingly private question. Eventually though, they all would, for they were reassured by the others that the answer would be fully satisfying.

This year, Leo was “god-damn eighty-six years old.” That was always how he presented his answer. Leo did not respond this way to be a source of amusement, yet he wasn’t offended either. Rather, he appreciated the question because it contributed to his habitual experience, giving him another occurrence to depend on. The moment he saw a new face in the shop, he knew it would only be a matter of days before the question was asked. It wasn’t that Leo felt “god-damned” by his ever-increasing age. In fact, he was floored to be eighty-six. Leo instead offered his age in this way because it was evidence of his liberation. He no longer felt obliged to abide by the social mores that one feels bound to in their youth.

It was in his seventh decade that Leo added the prefix “god-damn” to his age. This is when it hit him that he could stop concealing his innocent pleasures. For example, Leo loved to study human behavior. For the majority of his life, he would hide behind the same pair of dark shaded glasses as a means to intently watch people without being designated a “creep” or a “predator.” On Leo’s “god-damn seventieth” birthday, he left his dark shades at home. He sat at his coffee shop, and started staring at people without his protective shield. Initially, he could only stare for a few seconds at a time. When someone tuned into the fact that he/she was being watched, he would quickly glance down, pretending to be deeply engaged in his writing. By the time he was “god-damn seventy-three,” Leo realized that when he was caught staring, the reactions were reversed; the natural inclination of the victim of his gazes would be to look down, trying to appear aloof to the fact that they knew they were being watched. It was the very fact that Leo appeared a harmless grey-haired old man (with bushy eyebrows and a mustache to match) that allowed him the ability to innocently
partake in his most favored activity.

Leo had only one prerequisite for those he studied: they had to be human. But his favorite subjects were the employees of the shop. Not because of any biases he held, but because he saw them continuously, providing him plentiful amounts of data to fill his book of words.

In his writings, Leo reported both factual information as well as fictional elaborations. He described the basics of the individual: physical traits, body language, sound of voice, choice of words. But he would also draw conclusions about them, things he didn’t know to be necessarily true, but that he suspected could be based on his observations. He would also ascribe them fictional names. He rarely knew the true names of his subjects, and would make a conscious effort to never learn them. He liked to grant them a personalized identity based exclusively on what he thought fitting. If he ever happened to hear their actual name, he would stop writing their story. It was a polluting factor and would spoil the very person that Leo imagined them to be. In a way, Leo felt almost god-like through this process of renaming.

This was the entry in Leo’s book of words, the day his life changed in the most miraculous of ways:

**Ophelia**

Ophelia is a young, whimsical woman. Her skin is light and glows. She wears knit caps and plaid shirts. She has a slight gap between her front teeth, which gives her face an “imperfect” loveliness that far surpasses that sort of refined, symmetrical beauty. Appolonia, (whose employment ran from March 13th 2003 -August 28th of the same year) possessed the latter. Ophelia speaks kindly and has an abundance of cordial relationships among the customer base. Today she spoke with a customer about allergies. Yesterday, she told a young woman who was sitting alone and reading a book that the young man who had just left was asking about her. I believe he was trying to acquire the courage to approach her. The man left without doing so, and I felt a pang of anguish at this. Today, I imagine that Ophelia will ride her bike home, light a candle, and strum her guitar. She will write a new song, and play it for the first time for her male roommate. He will sincerely admire it, but will make a subtle suggestion about the last lyric. She will change it; she will be pleased with the change.

Leo had been writing logs just like this one, day after day for thousands of days past. But for some unbeknownst reason, after recording this one, he entered a thought process that he was used to avoiding. He began to seriously ponder, what would happen to him if the coffee shop closed down? In reality, it most certainly was a possibility, for the economic climate was desperate, giving way to a domino effect of vanishing businesses in the surrounding area. With this sudden realization, Leo firmly decided that he hoped to perish before the coffee shop ever did. His routine experience meant everything to him. Sure, if it closed, he could find another, start a new book of words even, and maybe take pleasure in fresh scenery. Yet somewhere deep within, Leo knew that this would not be the case. If the coffee shop died, his survival would be utterly fruitless.

Leo began to weep. He wept and wept and wept, tears pouring into his coffee and onto the latest entry in his book of words. When the other customers and employees caught sight of Leo in this seemingly desperate state, their initial reactions were to try and console the sobbing man. This was until they realized that as he was weeping uncontrollably, he was smiling. His smile was so radiant that they decided to leave the old man be. This was a relief for the people around, for it eased the discomfort associated with public grieving. Leo flipped to the last page of his book of words, and on it, inscribed the following:

“I am no longer afraid to die.” –Leo
While sorting through my cedar hope chest recently, I discovered my wedding gown and honeymoon nightie. A few shreds of rice still clung to the folded honeymoon finery. I remembered those precious days as I folded and smoothed the purple nightie and thought about our unusual honeymoon.

Our wedding was on a perfect June day in 1962. The sun shone through the stained glass windows and the church was filled with flowers and music.

“With this ring, I thee wed,” and we were man and wife, 20 years and 18 years old respectively.

Following the wedding reception, we raced through torrents of rice, eager to begin our trip to a secret honeymoon site. When we arrived at our motel in the little resort town, we planned to go “out to dinner.”

While dating we had eaten at hotdog stands, drive-in movie snack shacks and BBQ’s with family, but we had never eaten at a real restaurant. For me, going “out to dinner” symbolized a rite of passage as adults. A candlelight dinner would be a cherished memory, a perfect beginning to our wedding night.

The sun shone hot on our heads as we drove with the top down on our 1958 MGA. The excitement of the day took a toll on my young husband. His head began to throb and maybe “nerves” played a role as well. In our day, “the wedding night” created some anxieties that many young grooms don’t experience today. Several hours later, we reached our honeymoon cottage on the shores of a sparkling lake. My young husband threw himself on the bed, head pounding, eyes aching, as I folded and smoothed the purple nightie and thought about our unusual honeymoon.

My young husband moved slowly as we walked toward our car, each painful step tugging at his sunburned legs. He tried to pull on his trousers but the effort was too painful. My young husband lay on the cool asbestos tile floor (who knew?) of our honeymoon cottage, begging to be allowed to die in peace. He wasn’t up to dinner at a fancy restaurant.

“Tomorrow, honey,” he promised, “just let me go to bed.”

A brand new blushing bride, I pushed a grocery cart through a tiny grocery store in the resort town on my wedding eve, and selected spaghetti, hamburger, tomato sauce, lettuce, and salad dressing. I soon found myself in front of a tiny stove in our honeymoon cottage, cooking spaghetti on my wedding night while my husband groaned on the bed.

“I hope this isn’t a sign of what’s ahead,” I thought, as I added a pinch of salt to the boiling water. “This is NOT how I planned my wedding night.”

Monday dawned bright and clear, a hot and perfect June day and we slept late, lulled by the lapping waves on the nearby shore, headaches and anxieties of the day before a forgotten memory. We spent the afternoon in the park in the shade of a willow tree, watching the squirrels. We kissed and spoke of where we would have our special dinner that night, a celebration of our one-day anniversary. We swam and frolicked in the lake. My new lord and master climbed a nearby diving board.

“Hey, Hon, look at me,” he shouted, spreading his arms and launching himself in a perfect swan dive into the sparkling water below.

Somewhere between “Look at me” and the sparkling water below, something went dreadfully wrong with his perfect dive. He hit the water with a resounding “kersplash.” Breaking the surface of the water, he held his hand to his left ear.

“I think I broke something.” The local emergency room confirmed, indeed, a broken eardrum. The doctor advised bed rest and a quiet night…

As a recently married woman, I pushed a grocery cart through a tiny grocery store in the resort town and selected hamburger, tomato sauce and French bread. On my one-day anniversary, I stood in front of the tiny stove, my young husband sleeping off the effects of pain medications. The water lapped onto the shore next to our honeymoon cottage as I sighed and heated spaghetti sauce.

Tuesday dawned bright and clear, and we slept late, being lulled by the lapping waves on the nearby shore. We spent the afternoon in a rented speedboat, streaking across the beautiful waves, churning up the water and talked of where we would have our romantic dinner to celebrate our two–day anniversary. The sun shone deceivingly on my young husband’s bare legs and they changed from white, to pink, to bright red.

My young husband moved slowly as we walked toward our car, each painful step tugging at his sunburned legs. He tried to pull on his trousers but the effort was too painful. My young husband lay on the cool asbestos tile floor (who knew?) of our honeymoon cottage, moaning.

“I don’t think I can put my pants on. Sorry, Hon. No fancy dinner. Maybe tomorrow.”

A fairly jaded wife, I pushed a grocery cart through the tiny grocery store in the resort town and selected hamburger, tomato sauce and cookies. The storeowner smiled. After all, I had shopped there three days in a row and was his newest valued customer. I vowed to speak to mother about marriage. If this was what I must expect, I would need to learn to cook something besides spaghetti.

Wednesday dawned bright and clear, we slept late… We spent the afternoon driving around the lake. By late afternoon, we were 30 miles from our cottage and found a nice restaurant before any further calamity. We celebrated our three-day anniversary. It was as romantic as I had imagined. My husband’s head didn’t ache, his ear didn’t throb, his sunburn had faded to a dull pink, pants were possible, we didn’t eat spaghetti and I didn’t have to cook.
After dinner, at a drive-in theater, the movie somehow didn’t have its previous pre-marriage appeal. We became inspired to leave when the movie was half over. It was getting very late, nearly 9:30 after all, and we were anxious to return to our honeymoon cottage.

Thursday dawned bright and clear, and we slept late, lulled by the waves…

By late afternoon, we reviewed the progress of our honeymoon. A migraine, a broken eardrum, a sunburn, and it became clear that we should cut our week short and return home before any further disaster occurred. I felt the need to speak to mother about marriage in general and recipes in particular. By early evening, we bid the honeymoon cottage farewell and started back to Santa Rosa.

A crooked road down the mountain would take 30 minutes off our travel time. We were both eager to reach home and resume…what honeymooners resume. The air was warm and balmy as we left the resort town. Driving the mountain road was difficult, with switchbacks and no roadside safety rails. Slowly maneuvering hairpin curves, eyes wide, we saw broken, twisted cars in the canyons below. At the bottom of the mountain, the valley stretched before us, and the terrible ordeal was finally over.

My young husband shifted gears and revved the engine. Nothing happened. He shifted to another gear and stepped on the gas. Nothing happened. The car coasted into a nearby gas station. He crawled under the car, and found…a broken axle. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he thought about what might have happened if the axle had broken at the top of the mountain on the winding road. We were safe, thank God, but how would we get home, 80 miles away?

As a mature, experienced wife of four days, able to handle any emergency, I dropped coins into the telephone. Daddy answered, and I said, “Daddy, come get me…” whereupon, Daddy exploded, “What’s wrong? Where are you? What has that horrid beast done to my baby girl?” I explained that the beast had done nothing that I didn’t want done, but, nevertheless, the axle on the MG was broken and we needed a tow.

Daddy drove for an hour an a half, rescued his baby girl and towed us 80 miles unceremoniously at the end of a rope—a discouraged young bride and disgruntled half-frozen groom.

If we had seriously analyzed the events of the week, and felt them to be prophetic of our future life together, we might have applied for an annulment the next morning. Perhaps we were too naïve, too inexperienced, or too much in love to realize the pitfalls that lay ahead. Forty-seven years have passed and my husband’s hair is gray and my face is wrinkled. Our life together has included sickness and health, successes and failures, joy and sorrow, but we continue to face life’s challenges together.

I placed the nightie into the hope chest. The pungent aroma of cedar clung in the air as I closed the lid. I closed my eyes, thinking for a moment of those exciting, wonderful days and relived the thrill, frustration and romance.

Returning to the kitchen, I put a pinch of salt into the spaghetti bubbling on the stove. Like a pinch of salt, it takes a touch of adversity to enhance the flavor and appreciate the fullness of life. I smiled at the memory of a honeymoon cottage by the shores of a sky-blue lake, and a tiny stove, where another pot of spaghetti bubbled three nights in a row. Despite the unusual circumstance we shared that week, it was the most wonderful, exciting, perfect honeymoon a woman could ever experience, because I was with the man I love.
A metal gate opened with a buzz and a black limo slid calmly through a curtain of rainfall, disappearing inside a garage beneath a square jawed concrete office building. R.L. Reynolds emerged as in most days with slow deliberation and proceeded with a laborious gait towards the basement elevator. He was a large man, fleshy and red in the face, with salt and pepper hair just beginning to thin. The yellow lights on the gray ceiling covered him like a cheap tan. His breath sounded like static from a television at low volume. It had an effect on people that they seemed to become distracted by its raspy cadence and his words would slip by without clear understanding of the meaning. He consistently wore a blue suit with a campy red and blue tie, he had six replicates and a few black suits and tuxes should the occasion for diversity arise. “Good Morning Karen,” he glanced at his secretary, always pausing briefly upon the curve of her hips, where his eyes found some peculiar asymmetry that puzzled and delighted him. She straightened up and her real estate agent countenance blossomed, “Good morning Mr. Reynolds, David Akin had to cancel his appointment.” He took in the words without reaction, punched in a security code and closed his door. Karen clicked her mouse and returned to formatting a stock letter addressed in generic text to those individuals volunteering to attend the next tea party in South Carolina. It was signed as most political letters with a copied signature extending the pretense of familiarity. She looked like a cross between a Stepford wife and a Fox News analyst, sexual but reined in provincial bonds.

R.L.’s office was not extraordinary save for the collection of photographs of prominent and well known executives, athletes and politicians—including a portrait of Ronald Reagan and Charles Schultz standing in conference in front of a portrait of an angular Andrew Jackson peering out with loosely restrained temper. On the desk was a little American flag lying still at the end of a cheap stick leaning against the inner brim of a bronze cup. His desk had the appearance of mass-produced elegance, with no external deviance from rectangular geometry and a burnt cherry top with chemical sheen. Picking up the phone he paused for a moment, dialed and slowly thumbed the ridge along his sparsely freckled brow while settling his eyes upon a document highlighting press releases from the previous day.

“Jeffrey, this is what you’re going to do. Or better yet, this is what we’re not going to do, we’re not going to publish essays, just headlines. That convention in Florida yesterday was a travesty. Every paper in the country had a different message, and they weren’t extraordinarily flattering to our people. They took photos of the wrong signs and the wrong people. We need to control what comes out of their mouths—I’m paying people to say specific things, a controlled mob pays off more than a mob, it got a little ugly yesterday, and that’s good, we just need to focus on the Big Gov, not so much the corporate. Half of those quotes are railing our friends. You remember our friends, the market, they pay us to redirect. Why are we talking about derivatives? Nobody understands that crap, and if they did, our people would get dirty.” R.L. got out of his chair and stood up, his face quivered with indignant reproach. “You remember when we worked under Casey. We painted with heavy brushstrokes in red fear, now we’re painting in black. Tap into that well and rile up our sheep. I’m sending you a list for this weekend rally, there’s five things on there. That’s all I want to see in the paper, on the news, and on the net, if you see those RNC flunkies from last week, edit their shit.”

He hung up the phone and gave a little shiver that he usually got when he felt righteous. A few weeks earlier he had spoken at a town hall meeting in Reno and a small man wearing a John Deere hat and a thick thistled gray mustache asked him what the founding fathers would think of the government messing with his health care. R.L. loved questions like this, and he tapped into his mother’s America and wrote history anew without reason or inquest but with dogma and libertarian hatred. He pointed to the federalist papers he’d brought in copy and spoke of the truth you’d find there about the people of America. It didn’t matter that Alexander Hamilton believed in a strong central government. Nobody on his side of the ring cared what old texts meant in their context, just that those venerated saints hated what they hated—taxes and a black president, overpaid intellectual academics and charity, polar bears and illegal immigrants, Nancy Pelosi, Muslims, Jews and atheists, and anything that washed into their American towns with anything critical to say about old glory. He spoke with the fervor of a revival preacher. Bill Casey had taught him that protecting your own meant projecting the apparition of fear. “Describe with fantastic horror the silhouettes of Communist insurrection and our CIA will never lack support.”

R.L. thought of his speech and reveled as an actor does in the company of adulation. The game had changed, the enemy was within, but the rules were the same. Sarah Palin said it, “reload and take aim.” The dirty word had changed from communist to socialist. He was a middle man between business and politics, like a launderer of money who vetted campaign finance from the corporate by orchestrating “populist” movements. He thought it
funny that some coined their tour as the conservative Woodstock. Guns instead of flowers, he thought smiling. He had grown fond of his niche, though he always sought it out. His demeanor was crafted through the affirmation of his supporters. His face was not always so arrogant and his lines were not always etched in politics. But, as is often the case, our physical appearance exudes the choices and tempers we seek with our lives. He was not a Buddha.

He had been having recurring dreams of his ninth grade teacher Mrs. Elliot. He would be climbing a snow covered mountain on a little bike he’d had as a kid. His thoughts would be clouded by fear as if someone were following him. It began to snow, and feeling cold and fearful of his pursuer, he dragged his bike into a small cave hidden by adjoined granite boulders. He was very still but felt increasingly panicked as his raspy breath seemed to get louder and louder. He knew someone was outside now, circling his nook. He began to feel as if it was Mrs. Elliot, and soon he would hear her faintly calling his name. Her voice drew from a slight whisper to a deafening crescendo of desperation as if she were trying to save him from something terrible. His heart pounded in his chest and his thoughts spun wildly with panic until, suddenly, without preamble, everything went quiet. He found himself disoriented and distressed upon waking, he would lie under his amber sheets and stare at his textured ceiling, listening to the slow procession of a nearly silent fan blending its blades into a circle. He thought it funny, those tricks of the eye—they were like a small forgotten part of him that labored under restraint as long as he was awake, emerging under the night’s mysterious veil and lingering in the dim cold before the day began.

R.L. felt his face warm with joy and shame from his thoughts of her. His parents had all but ripped him out of school after he came home with questions unsettling to a Midwestern mother and father from Omaha, questions about God and morality, about Vietnam and Buddhist monks lighting themselves on fire, about yippies and hippies and Richard Nixon and the CIA. He’d asked his mother if Sarah Goins was really going to hell, like they told him in church, because she was Jewish. He remembered his mother admonishing his father—“if R.L. wants to know about God he should be talking to the pastor, that woman has no business filling my son’s head with her communist witchery.” His mother never ceased disparaging her, as if her cause in life were to banish any trace of her salvation. This was the teacher he remembered when he was awake, a portrait of her painted by his mother, but in his dreams

"Drawing in the Sand"

BAILEY HEGNAUER » » » PHOTOGRAPH
she was someone else. His mother was of that particular mindset that the bible was the only reference for any fortune or calamity that presented itself. She was like a flagellant reading damnation in the buboes of modern life.

He had a particular memory of Mrs. Elliot on a day when she kept him after class for manipulating a boy by threatening to tell the class about his father's dishonorable discharge. He had found a clipping about his father in an issue of the register saying that he'd had relations with a soldier serving in his battalion and that a journalist had found out and taken the liberty of publishing the photo in the town's paper. R.L. told the boy that he wanted the 22. rifle he'd seen in the closet, and some bullets, and if he told anyone he'd tell everyone his father's story. Sometimes he'd operate in this way with no direct outcomes in mind except in what he'd find in the unveiling of his advantage. And what doubts come to mind in the hands of extortionists with quixotic objectives. This tendency was a shadow of what he would become, someone versed in the usury of individuals and masses alike.

R.L. had few friends in school, but he had learned to understand their fears. His face was pockmarked and lumpy and his belly pushed his starched white shirts too far out for his skinny frame, it made him look painfully awkward. He'd often stare in the mirror pondering his unfortunate appearance and wonder how he'd ever been loved by one of the popular girls he'd see at the high school. He'd shown an aptitude for understanding a path to acceptance, or better, respect amongst his peers. He didn't even really know what he wanted, just that he wanted something that others seemed to have. And he learned that fear was something that everyone had, just like his own, terrible and sad, waiting for someone to release it and guide its ugly fumes. If you just took the time to watch and understand, you could make people do what you wanted. In that early time when children are cooperating and manipulating with the same plastic voracity, he was understanding propaganda like a savant. His skill was an esoteric bargain, for the rest of his potential was neglected and so his love and compassion withered under the heat of ambition and control.

And yet Mrs. Elliot had not forgotten that portion of his self, which he had already begun to forget. She seemed keenly aware of his relationships with his classmates. He sensed this—that she knew him better than anyone, better than his parents who only saw what they wanted, better than other teachers or friends. He felt ashamed under her gaze, like she could see through him and reach into his room and touch his mind. And, yet, she didn't hurt him there, she held his fear to her and warmed its cold clammy hand. She spoke to him that day, and he felt that she loved him in spite of his shallow heart. In his waking moments he felt she was adopting concern for the sake of professional perception. When he woke from his dream he remembered that she'd really cared for him. "Ryan," she said, calling him by his first name with an intimacy that never touched his parents' lips, "do you know what it feels like to be a human being? That part in our minds where we try to make sense of the world. When you look at a stream in the mountains draining from a lake and you watch its cold blue water pouring downhill, do you wonder why it always cuts through the same rocky valley? Don't you think that we are like the water, always moving through the easiest path? Or do our minds allow us to navigate upwards?" She got this way sometimes; she'd talk to him without restraint, with poetics and parables that leaked into his thoughts, loosening his calcifying perceptions of the world. He felt like he was listening to her inner voice, openly laid before him for the purpose of showing him something he couldn't quite understand. He sought these places in order to manipulate others, but he felt no need to hurt someone who gave her doubts so readily, it felt like communion was supposed to feel. "Why did you try to hurt Kevin today?" She so often understood the score and it made him feel obvious. "I don't know," he replied, and perhaps this was true. "I guess, when I find what hurts in him, I don't have to worry that I'm the only one who's like that, I forget myself." He didn't tell her that, but that's what he thought.

She took him by his hand and pulled out something from her bag and placed it in the palm of his left hand. "It's a Peridot," she said, as he looked with a puzzled expression at the little green stone. "You were born in August, right?" he nodded as she grabbed the little olive pea and gave it to him, "this is your birth stone." He looked at it and noticed its color was not beautiful; it was like his eyes, off colored, dimmed and bridled by small uneven cuts. He looked up at her wondering what she meant, and saw her deep brown eyes were not pitying. His face flushed as she smiled and he walked out feeling strangely angry, as if she'd distracted him and exposed something. He'd often wonder what the meaning of the little stone was, in fact he'd often sought out literature relating to the character of its ideology, looking to see himself in something she saw. As fear was familiar to him, love was unsettling. He'd forgotten much about his youth; it was prior to his ascension, a reminder of his impotent beginning. And yet, as he lay still in the morning, he'd wonder what he'd think of as he lay dying, thinking that it might be her.
Every cop has stories to tell and every cop loves to tell stories. Through their careers they gather them like anniversary pins, frequently measuring them against the tales of other collectors. Officer Bruce Dixon listened quietly to the tales of bar brawls and car chases echoing through the Veteran’s Memorial Hall. Like addicts scraping tar off a scorched spoon for a leftover hit of heroin, the men gathered around the white linen tables were telling their stories to relive the adrenaline rush. Officer Bernie Capp recounted his six month narcotics investigation that wiped out an entire street gang. Dixon smiled, knowing Capp would not mention that the methamphetamine void was immediately filled by a rival gang. Across the table, Dixon’s police academy roommate, Sergeant Larry Townes, began his favorite story about the time he rode a big-rig running board thirty miles to Sacramento because the wife-beater trucker didn’t want to go to jail. These were stories Officer Bruce Dixon knew well.

Thirty years in Tuleburg provided Dixon and the others with many stories – rape, robbery, murder, and everything in between. When Dixon was a kid, he asked a big city cop if he had ever seen a dead body. The old sergeant just scoffed at him – too many to count. And so had Dixon within the first few years on the force. Car wrecks, suicides, and violence; dead bodies were common. One hoodlum was shot thirty-six times in Diablo Heights, most of them after he was already dead. Dixon didn’t find him until long after the last breath because a few dozen gun shots at 1:00 AM don’t mean much in that neighborhood. But he was just a dope dealer, so maybe he got what was coming.

The murder of that field worker down at Madison and Hunter was different. Dixon wasn’t much more than a rookie when he found the old man face up on the sidewalk. His head was lying in a thick pool of blood and his hands were alongside his head, just like they were when some kid shoved a gun in his mouth, took his wallet, and shot him.

Dixon learned early that dope was the common theme for most of their stories. Welcome signs proclaim Tuleburg as “An All-American City,” but in a town where heroin, crank, and cocaine can be bought any time of day, the neon sign over the Day & Night Pharmacy on Center Street is a more accurate civic slogan – “Drugs. We never close.”

Townes rolled up the left sleeve of his shirt to display the thin faded scar, evidence that he smashed his gun through the side window and threatened the trucker. As his old roommate embellished his tale, Dixon knew the time had come for these storytellers to surrender their badges and leave the car chases and street brawls to the new centurions. Dixon thought about his own collection of stories. Some are amusing, like the night he and his partner captured the little man living inside crazy Sylvia Rollers’ Hunter Street apartment with a plastic GroceryMart bag. Others—that morning an ex-con tried to run him over in a stolen Chevy—were too private to share. Dixon contemplated telling the story of the night he chased a car burglar.

It was early morning, between the return of last call alcoholics and the rise of first light field workers, when Dixon discovered the thief on Sierra Street. In that neighborhood the roads were permanently narrowed by rows of cars whose tires were anchored to the curb by cobwebs. In the afternoons, a dozen vans loaded with pickers crowded onto narrow plank seats returned from the fields south of town and filled the few empty spots in front of mismatched houses and apartment.

Dixon was driving with the windows rolled down to the lingering summer heat when he saw the door of a Ford standing open into the street. Two legs were splayed out beneath the door. Meth and all night auto repair go hand in hand, but crack and Budweiser were the preferred drugs in that neighborhood, so Dixon stopped his car short of the Ford.

The owner of the legs abruptly stood up at the approach of Dixon’s squawking radio. He gave the officer his best I’m-supposed-to-be-removing-this-car-stereo-at-3:00-AM look. Dixon ordered him to stand in the beam of the headlights and he stepped in front of the patrol car. Dixon scanned both sides of the street and noticed the man was either alone or had been abandoned by his associate.

“One-adam-four,” Dixon said into his portable radio, identifying himself to the police dispatcher as the Beat Four cop. “Adam” meant he worked alone. The other officers on the graveyard shift who partnered up for safety were tired of hearing about his ex-wife and her phlebotomist lawyer so they left him alone.

“One-adam-four?” the dispatcher inquired, but before Dixon could give his location, the man suddenly turned and took off down Sierra. Dixon immediately gave chase. The would-be thief darted between two cars onto the sidewalk and was nearing the corner when Dixon responded to the dispatcher.

“Foot pursuit. West bound Sierra towards American.”
The thief was a dozen strides ahead of Dixon when he slipped around the corner, once a nightly gathering place for dealers and whores. The year before, Dixon made nightly stops at the corner to roust the sellers, nuggers, and hangers-on until they took their traveling circus to someone else’s beat. Dixon turned the corner and halfway up the block the radio in his hand began barking out the replies of other officers rushing to help him.


After the thief’s initial gain, adrenalin flooded Dixon’s body and he began keeping pace. The burglar was slowed by years of drug abuse; Dixon by twenty pounds of leather, gun, and vest. Mid block the man ducked through the gate of a stucco covered Victorian house. Dixon noted the address above the porch and relayed it to the other officers. He chased the thief around the house, past the acrid stench of overflowing garbage cans on one side and a discarded refrigerator on the other.

The thief ran back across the yard toward the street. He passed through to the sidewalk and flung the gate closed on Dixon; the early morning stillness was shattered by the clanging metal. The meager attempt to slow the officer’s pursuit gained a step or two, but it didn’t slow Dixon’s determination. He shoved the gate open and told the dispatcher they were running back west on Rosemont.

The two men ran down the side of the tall apartment house on the corner of Rosemont and American. Dixon had driven past the three storey clap-board building countless times, but in a district where most apartments, duplexes, and converted mid-century houses received monthly, if not weekly, visits by the beat cop, Dixon had never been inside. He was passing beneath a row of heavily barred windows when the thief crossed slammed through the front doors.

Dixon looked up for the address above the tall plywood paneled doors before rushing into the apartment house, but it was hidden under decades of brown paint. He was unfamiliar with the inside of the Louis Apartments, but Dixon immediately recognized the odor of stale urine and fried pork rind hanging in the shuttered hall. Inside, Dixon heard carpet-muffled steps rising before him. His flashlight spotted the man running up a wide stairway. Dixon stumbled on the first steps before finding a steady cadence of pumping arms and legs. The thief ran up the steps without looking back, but couldn’t match the officer’s rhythm. The gap between them narrowed as they crossed the first floor landing and within the first few steps of the second flight, Dixon was on the man’s heels.

Despite the 3:00 AM darkness, Dixon saw the crook’s shoes three steps ahead and decided that was his chance to grab the thief. Dixon tossed his light and radio aside and lunged forward. Wrapping his arms around the man’s skinny legs, Dixon clasped them to his chest and fell forward, forcing the thief down onto the steps. Having conceived no plan beyond holding on until the man yielded to his higher conviction, Dixon clenched his ankles. The thief’s plan was simpler – escape – and the thief immediately began jerking his legs to break free.

The man freed himself and left the officer empty handed and face down on the grease stained stairs. Dixon scrambled to his feet and reached out in the darkness for his light and radio. His link to the other officers immediately came to hand, but the flashlight was lost somewhere in the darkness. Dixon abandoned his search and ran up the remaining steps, reaching the top just as the man dashed down a dark hallway.

What happened next, Dixon would later recall, was one of those moments in a cop’s career that occur in a flash of instinct but replay in their minds like a slow procession of information and choices. The burglar and the cop covered the length of that hall quickly, but Dixon remembers every step, every detail, and the culminating decision. The man was four steps ahead as Dixon rushed past apartment 3A on the right: I haven’t given my location since before entering the building. Three-B flashed by on his left: he’s running to an apartment full of thugs. The thief slammed into the door at the end of the hall: chasing him in there just because he tried to steal a car stereo is foolish. The thief slipped through the door, thrusting it closed at Dixon: I’m not giving up.

Dixon drew his gun against the inevitable and caught the door with his shoulder before it latched. With the giddiness of a teenager on a dark roller coaster ride, Dixon burst through the door ready and unprepared for what was on the other side. But before completely crossing the threshold, he was hit with a rush of cool evening air. Instead of an apartment filled with vengeful felons, Dixon found himself atop a rear fire escape. Momentum carried him across the small landing and into the stereo thief whose own impetus had flung him half over the railing.

Dixon grabbed at the man’s nylon jacket with one hand while blindly jabbing his gun back in the holster with the other. But his left hand couldn’t find a hold on the thick jacket as the thief spun and twisted toward the flight of steps leading to the pavement forty feet below. Frustration flooded through Dixon’s body, filling the void of spent adrenaline, as he felt the thief slipping away. His mind raged and he impulsively vented his anger with a sharp forceful thrust to the thief’s back, forcing him headlong down the stairs. The man tumbled head over heels several times and crashed on to the pavement.

Dixon’s chest heaved violently and he suddenly became aware that his legs would no longer support him. He grasped the railing and lowered himself to the upper step. Dixon doesn’t remember if he hoped the crook was dead, but the thought crossed his mind. Certainly a leg or arm was broken by the half dozen rolls down the stairs that left him motionless. Relief swept over the officer.

But the thief wasn’t unconscious. Dixon watched the car burglar slowly drag himself from the pavement. And just as quickly as Dixon expelled it, the anger and frustration came rushing back to him. He pulled himself to his feet and stumbled down the steps, experiencing a level of exhaustion never known before or since.
When Dixon reached the ground, the burglar was walking towards the sidewalk.

“Adam-four,” Dixon exhaled into the radio. “South on American.”

In their shared fatigue, neither the thief nor the officer could manage swiftness beyond a dragging walk. There was no response from the radio and no response from the thief when Dixon ordered him to stop. He just kept looking back at the officer as they moved slowly down the sidewalk. Dixon could nearly reach out and touch him but didn’t have the energy to close the gap.

Half way down the block, the thief turned into a parking lot that ran back from the street along a low apartment building. Sirens wailed nearby as Dixon followed him into the lot. Near the far end, the man slipped into the inky blackness of an unlit carport. Dixon stopped short of the vague line separating the parking lot glow of orange vapor lights and the dark parking stall: no body knows where we are. He peered into the darkness but could make out nothing beyond the Pontiac emblem on the trunk of a car: he might have picked up a tire iron or something. The car thief was cornered: he isn’t worth risking my safety.

No one was startled when Sergeant Townes suddenly slammed his hand on the round table to emphasize the impact of the truck against a freeway barrier. He clutched an imaginary climbing rail and described how the truck nearly overturned before skidding to a stop down an embankment. A moment later he single-handedly arrested the driver. Someone asked if the trucker went to prison, but it was a rhetorical question. Everyone knew the bloody-lipped wife recanted her story hours later. Dixon decided not to tell his story.

The would-be burglar was eventually captured. Dixon stood at the line of darkness with a broken radio in his hand until a passing officer spotted him and soon cops swarmed into the apartment lot. A flood of flashlights showed the would-be thief hiding beneath the Pontiac. Still, the man ignored the shouted demands of surrender, so a police dog was used to convince him to give up.

Perhaps Dixon would have told his story had it ended differently. He didn’t rid the streets of a dangerous street gang; nor did he capture a violent husband. A few hours after his capture, while nursing numerous dog bites in the hospital, the thief remarked that the pain inflicted by the dog was nothing compared to his tumble down the stairs. It was a small victory for Dixon, knowing he left a few marks and bruises.

Officer Dixon doesn’t know what became of the thief after he was booked into jail. He was never called to testify in court, so the man probably pled guilty in exchange for a minimal sentence. The Louis Apartments were eventually torn down. The Victorian stucco house is gone, too. The entire block, along with a few others, were razed to make way for low-income senior housing. That was a dozen years ago and the neighborhood, now a row of weedy fields accumulating bald tires and unwanted baby strollers, is still waiting for an investor to re-develop it. The dope slingers, muggers, and hangers-on are still around, periodically moving from one corner to another but never disappearing.
Barbara Ware

Bent Luck

Shit! I can’t believe I got all the way to the bank and forgot to bring my title. Now I have to go back home and I’ll be even later than I told my supervisor. OK, now where did I put my keys? Oh, yeah, they’re in one of my pockets—ooh, here they are. God, I’m really turning into my mother. When did that happen? Oh, well, let’s just do this; it shouldn’t take more than an extra fifteen minutes. There are no other customers here, so I probably won’t have to wait long once I get back.

Oh, bigger shit—that guy looks like trouble.

That’s what I was thinking at the time.

I had gone through my bills the night before and was beginning to panic about my money situation. A year of furloughs had definitely taken its toll. Not to mention the housing market that left me no equity in my house. The only equity I had left was my car—hence my trip to the bank. I’d like to tell you that I realized there were people much worse off than I was and that I was thankful for what I had, but the fact is I was in me-me mode. The only other person I was thinking about was our Governor whose pledge of no new taxes resulted in a de facto increase of 15% in my taxes. I was so concentrated on myself that I didn’t notice anything going on around me until it was too late.

He looked desperate. When he got closer to me, he smelled desperate, just like the guy from before. To make matters worse, he wasn’t wearing a mask, which, if all the crime shows are true, is always a bad sign.

I froze—no fast-thinking hero type here. What should I do?

***

My mind went back thirty-five years. I was in my early twenties and living in a borderline part of Detroit called Palmer Park. A short distance in one direction, there were mansions (someone told me Barry Gordy had lived there at one time). A shorter distance in the other direction was Six Mile and Woodward with girls standing around and a pay-by-the-hour hotel on the corner. It was my laundry that I was thinking about on that night. I’d been working long hours for several weeks and this was the first time I had some time to get to the Laundromat. I really didn’t feel like going: I was so tired and it was so cold outside. If I didn’t go, I’d have nothing to wear to work the next day, though. I carried my stuffed laundry bag out to my car that was parked in the alley behind my apartment. Almost immediately the inside of my nostrils froze and I wished I could stay inside under several heavy blankets. I had parked my car under one of the two dim lights. It was a little farther away, but it felt safer. The problem is that once I was inside the small circle of light, I couldn’t see into the surrounding darkness. As I was loading the bag of laundry into my car, a man suddenly appeared and asked if I could spare some change. I had almost nothing back in those days, but I figured I could spare a little bit of money I had and a book of stamps. He handed the wallet back to me. He didn’t even take my brand new credit card. If I had thought about it, that was my first hint of his character. I didn’t think about it though; I just hoped that would be the end of the transaction. No such luck.

I didn’t do any fast thinking that night, either. There were probably at least a dozen things I could have done to get away, but I didn’t do any of them. I didn’t scream. I didn’t fight. I just did what he told me to do. That was to get in the car and start driving. I had a small sports car at the time and I found out later that he didn’t take the car because he didn’t know how to drive a stick.

One thing working for me was that I was young and it was the early seventies when flower power ruled and everything was beautiful in its own way. The fear was overwhelming and I asked what most victims ask, “Why are you doing this?” He looked directly into my eyes and said “I need the money.”

“Why?”

“I’m a junkie. When I need a fix, I’ll do anything to get it. My mother tried to help me, but she kicked me out when I kept stealing from her and my sisters.”

It seemed strange to me that he was articulate. I didn’t expect that. I relaxed a little and we actually started to have a conversation. I’d never known a junkie, so I asked him what it felt like when he was high.

“It’s everything and it’s nothing. I mean it’s like you’re floating away and completely wrapped up in the experience. There is...
nothing else. No pain, no thoughts, no feeling. You don’t know where you are or if anyone else is there. You don’t even know if it’s light or dark.”

“Have you ever tried to stop? What does that feel like? Why is it so hard to do?”

“At first, you just want it. It’s all you can think about. It’s not long before you start throwing up and cramping. I’ve told myself I would quit a lot of times, but I’ve never gotten past a day or two without going back to it.”

He looked at me again. He looked as surprised as I felt that we were talking so openly. He surprised me even more when he asked, “What’s your name?”

“Susan. What’s yours?”

After a long pause, he said “Larry.” I was pretty sure that wasn’t true, but who knows… We kept talking. I don’t remember much, but I do remember that he told me I should be more careful. After what seemed like a long time (but was probably about ten minutes), he told me to park the car. The knife was threatening again and he pushed me into an abandoned house. The fear kicked into high gear again and I began to think my life might be over. I finally started to think about fighting. He had on heavy shoes, a long heavy coat, a knit cap and a wool scarf around his neck. Only his mouth, nose and eyes showed. He slapped me when I tried to resist and I tried to visualize ramming my fingers into his eyes. I couldn’t do it and maybe he sensed that, because he told me that he wasn’t going to hurt me. He then said that he was going to rape me because I was less likely to report a rape than a plain old mugging. As scared as I was, it struck me that he thought raping me was not hurting me. He took me to a room at the top of the house where there was a rattty old mattress on the floor. He pushed me onto the mattress and leaned over me. Then he hesitated, looked at me and said, “You look pitiful.”

He actually held out his hand to help me up. He walked me to my car, kissed me on the cheek and said “I’m sorry we had to meet this was.” I went home with only a couple of minor bruises and two frostbitten toes.

The other thing going for me was that my abductor was really not such a bad guy. Maybe he was a rookie at violent crime. I knew I had been lucky, though, and I was really relieved that things had turned out so well.

I’ve since heard that one of the best things to do in a situation like that is to get the attacker to see you as a person. It’s probably good that I didn’t know that sooner because I doubt if I could have pulled it off convincingly if I knew what I was doing. Even so, I like to think I had a hand in making my luck.

He looked at me and his eyes weren’t dead and they weren’t fanatic, so I began to feel like maybe this one could end well, too. He didn’t want to talk, though, and he pushed me to the side. That was when the gunshots rang in my ears. I felt a stickiness on my face and I wondered if there would be pain.

When I realized there wasn’t any pain, I looked around and discovered the blood was his. Thanks to the distraction I provided, the bank guard was prepared when the stranger reached under his coat. The guard’s hands were shaking so much that I don’t know how he could have aimed. Maybe he couldn’t, but the bullets did their job and the stranger was dead. Everyone else was fine.

We’ll never know what would have happened if the guard hadn’t shot him. The stranger had a medium-sized gun under his coat, but he didn’t have a criminal record. Only a foreclosed house and a pending divorce.

I hear the guard quit a week later. I don’t know what happened to him after that. I just went on with my life. I knew I had been lucky again, and again I had a hand in my luck, but there was no feeling of relief this time. I never stopped wondering if things could have ended less tragically for the stranger. Then again, maybe we were all lucky and he got what he really wanted when he walked into the bank that day.

As the stranger in the black trench coat walked toward me and the memory of that night flooded my brain, I tried to figure out how to use what I learned. I was pretty sure that looking pitiful at fifty-eight wouldn’t be nearly as effective as looking pitiful at twenty-three. My best hope was that this guy wasn’t really such a bad guy, either.

I took a deep breath, walked up to him and said, “Do you need help with something?”
When I think about luck, I think about the traffic light incident which took place last year. It had just begun to rain lightly that night when I got off from work so I drove slowly. It was close to midnight so there were not a lot of people driving so the road was pretty clear. I had to make a left turn on Franklin Blvd. The light was green when I started my left turn but while in the middle of my turn, the light had turned yellow and red before I successfully had made my turn. I saw a flash and I knew a picture of me was taken because no other driver was at that intersection. I could not believe what had happened. It was ridiculous that a picture of me was taken and I did not do anything wrong.

Later the next day, I started thinking about the financial difficulties I was about to face; because I was going to have to pay for the traffic ticket that I was going to get in the next two weeks or so. I had to cut back on some spending for that month because a part-time worker like me could not easily afford to pay a traffic ticket. Then I thought about my insurance and what was going to happen with that. I figured our payment was going to go up because of me. I decided not to tell my dad about the ticket because he pays for our insurance. He would eventually find out so I left it to be a surprise because I was too busy to go through his lectures and all that good stuff.

It was finals time and I already had so much going on and then on top of all that traffic school got added to my long list. When I got home that day, I started planning on my cut-backs. First, I had to cut back on my gas. I had to stop the unimportant usage of my car. For example, I would strictly use it for school and work only. I would not take it to stores or friends’ houses. Second, I decided to cut back on my grocery spending. Once every month, I buy groceries for my house, but I also buy junk food that I do not need. I decided to not buy that for a month. Lastly, I decided to cut back on my amount of eating out. Once or twice a week, I eat subway for lunch. I decided to go home and eat for a month rather than spending the money.

I had everything planned out. I knew that I sacrificed a lot of things but that was because I had to. I told myself that when I got the ticket, I could go to court and explain to them what happened; I believed that I had a very good chance of persuading everyone because it really was not my fault. Two weeks passed by and I had saved up almost enough to pay for the ticket, but I would not know the exact amount till I actually got it in the mail. I had cut back on plenty of things for those two and a half weeks. Surprisingly for me, I realized that I did not miss those things that I would spend money on every month.

It was almost a month and I did not receive anything in the mail. I now knew that I was not going to get a ticket because if I had, it would have come by now. I can just remember how stressed out I was during that time. I was feeling lucky because the Franklin Blvd. intersection is known for its relentless cameras. I know so many people that had received a ticket because of minor mistakes and they paid a lot for it. I am so relieved to know that because of one little traffic ticket so many things could have happened such as I could have been behind in a lot of important payments such as my car payment and my cell phone bill. And I do not know how many months it would have taken me to catch up on my payments and have everything back to normal. This situation got me started to think about how I needed to get really strict on how much money I would put in my savings from my paycheck. Before I used to put about twenty dollars or a little bit more in there, but later I started putting at least fifty to sixty bucks from each paycheck. Because of this, I really understood the meaning and importance of savings; savings is important because you never know what you might need money for and when you will need it. This is something I learned through a very hard lesson. I believe luck comes in many various ways and that in some situations, we learn some sort of lesson from it. I am glad that luck was on my side and I learned something valuable from it.
When you were little and you had a baseball game you were scared of going up to bat for the first time. When you finally got to bat, you hit that ball like you’ve never hit anything else in your life. You got to second base and you got two runners home. Almost a homerun for you, and you say, boy, was I lucky! Luck is what we substitute for courage; luck is what we substitute for taking risks and chances. Luck is what we trade for opportunity.
Americans have no idea how lucky they are to be legal in the United States. It is a horrible feeling to know you are considered an alien in a country where you feel you belong. I am Mexican, and I am lucky because I was brought to the United States illegally when I was very young.

I was lucky enough to have wonderful American teachers when I was growing up, lucky to have gone to school in the U.S., and lucky to have learned the history of the U.S. I am Mexican and don’t know much about Mexico’s history, but I feel Mexican. I feel American.

I am so lucky to live in the U.S., like many Mexicans wish they could, and pretend I am an American. I pretend I can drive legally when I can’t. I pretend I can earn a living legally when I can’t. Americans are lucky because they don’t have to pretend.

I am lucky I have so many friends that are from different nationalities. I am lucky that I can speak and write in two languages and still feel like an American because Americans are different.

I am not lucky because I am not legally an American. I am lucky though because something happened that I thought would never happen, the opportunity to leave the United States and, with luck, re-enter as a legal American. I will go to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico and ask forgiveness for entering illegally, even though I was only two years old and had no choice. With luck, the U.S. Embassy staff will pity me and let me be a legal American. Luck is all I have to look forward to.

It was a Thursday night. I checked my refrigerator and saw I was running out of groceries. I decided to go to Foods Co. where I spotted my friend Marissa. I haven’t seen her since middle school, so I decided to walk up to her and ask about what’s been going on in her life. After a good hour, she told me that she had to go, but I left her my phone number to talk some more.

Two days later, she called me at around 2:00pm, and she invited me to dinner. I was thinking, “Does she like me? Is she going to ask me out or should I ask?” She told me to come over to her apartment on Monday. The whole time I thought, “She’s my new girlfriend.” When I arrived at her apartment, we were eating a home-cooked meal until an hour passed and some guy came over and said, “Hey, babe.” I was like, “Babe? Who is this guy?” She responded, “My husband.” I thought she was single, but all this was for nothing from the start.

Ever since this experience, every single time I meet a girl, the very first thing I say is, “Hi, my name is Cesar. Are you married?” They might think I’m just weird, but I do not want to go through that again. That was the worst luck I have had so far.
The Jersey Devil is a creature that lives on a bridge in New Jersey—allegedly. In the Southwest, hordes of people are obsessed with hunting aliens. The Pacific Northwest is the home of scores of Bigfoot hunters and, so far, not one Bigfoot. But there’s a mythical creature more absurdly fantastic than any of these. Adherents, fanatics and cultists are in her thrall from the Brooklyn Bridge to the Golden Gate.

Her name is Luck, and she rides horses made from the wishes of beggars, her visage beautiful and shimmering.

Luck is a persistent product of the human psyche. She’s a result of our tendency to perceive order in chaos. We can find her temples in Las Vegas, chapels in every fluorescent-lit bingo hall, shrines in every corner gas station that sells lottery tickets. She’s a seductress who whispers hollow promises in the ears of dreamers. She blinds them to the wealth and avarice of the casinos and makes them think that she’ll protect them from the clutches of thieves who watch you pick your own pocket, hiding their grins behind a poker face.

Luck, whether we like it or not, is no more substantial than a house of cards. There are no hot streaks, cold streaks, lucky charms, or roulette strategies. There’s only Probability. She’s homely and not that exciting, but she’s real, a lot lower maintenance, and best of all, if you spend an evening with her, she and your wallet will still be there in the morning.

Finally, after a full 365 days in the sandbox, the name we Army soldiers nicknamed the Middle East, I got orders from my Commander that it was time for me to go home. I convoyed from downtown Baghdad to the nearest Army airfield. Of course, we were fired upon while in route to the airfield, but this was no big deal; it was already the norm for us soldiers. I then boarded the large cargo plane, racing with anticipation to hurry and get in the air. We were off the ground and, of course, received more small arms fire. You could hear the bullets stream by or hit the hull of the plane.

Then, a sad announcement came from the flight crew: “The Baghdad green zone was just mortared twenty-two times.” The green zone is where I patrolled, worked, and lived while I was in Baghdad. The fatalities were massive; many friends and fellow soldiers I knew were dead. I cried heavily, like I have never cried before. I cried for my fallen friends and soldiers, and I cried tears of joy that I was still alive. The attack happened twenty minutes after I left the green zone.
There is a song by my favorite band that always cheers me up. It’s called “Better Luck Next Time, Prince Charming,” and it is by Alesana.

Last year, I met the sweetest boy on earth. He gave me two goldfish the night we started dating, one named after him, the other after his little brother. I promise you, there was no nicer guy on the planet, as far as I was concerned. I brought him home to meet my parents. He was the first guy that I’d ever dated that my parents met. My mom soon found out that he was a total sweetheart as well. My dad wasn’t too convinced, but I am his only daughter.

After a couple of weeks one of the goldfish died. “It’s okay, bebé,” he said in his Italian accent, “at least it was my brother and not me.” But I knew there was a reason the fish had died. Once I found out what was wrong, the other fish died too.

As it turns out, the sweetest boy on earth was getting engaged. To this day, I don’t know which one of us he cheated on. But I guess it doesn’t matter because I am not the one with him. Like the boys from Alesana say:

“Not all knights in shining armor can make your dreams come true.
He’s not as charming as he may seem.”

For the longest time, I believed I was the girl with the worst luck in the world. Then I realized I didn’t lose anything.

Better luck next time, “prince affasciante.”
Better an ounce of luck than a pound of gold.

—YIDDISH PROVERB

I think we consider too much the good luck of the early bird and not enough the bad luck of the early worm.

—FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

I have always believed, and I still believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value.

—HERMANN HESSE

I have always believed, and I still believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value.

—Thomas Hardy

Throw a lucky man into the sea, and he will come up with a fish in his mouth.

—ARAB PROVERB

Depend on the rabbit’s foot if you will, but remember it didn’t work for the rabbit.

—R.E. SHAY

I busted a mirror and got seven years bad luck, but my lawyer thinks he can get me five.

—STEPHEN WRIGHT

Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck.

—DALAI LAMA

Luck is not chance, it's toil; fortune's expensive smile is earned.

—EMILY DICKINSON

Some folk want their luck buttered.

—THOMAS HARDY

People always call it luck when you've acted more sensibly than they have.

—ANNE TYLER

.Name the greatest of all inventors. Accident.

—MARK TWAIN

I believe in luck: how else can you explain the success of those you dislike?

—JEAN COCTEAU

It's hard to detect good luck—it looks so much like something you've earned.

—FRANK A. CLARK

I resolved to take Fate by the throat and shake the living out of her.

—LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Luck never made a man wise.

—SENECA, LETTERS TO LUCILIUS

If fate means you to lose, give him a good fight anyhow.

—WILLIAM MCFEE

Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

At the age of eleven or thereabouts women acquire a poise and an ability to handle difficult situations which a man, if he is lucky, manages to achieve somewhere in the later seventies.

—P.G. WODEHOUSE
**Audrey Allen**, age twenty, has been drawing throughout her life. After winning a handful of ribbons for various paintings, she left for BYU-Idaho to major in art. Two years later, she discovered that oil paints and canvases are actually pretty expensive and decided to try something new.

A graduate of Cal-Poly, San Luis Obispo, **S. Eliot Chandler** attends CRC part-time for personal enrichment. He draws upon his travel adventures (and often misadventures) and seventeen years as a law enforcement officer for writing inspiration.

**Krystle Casarino**, an archaeology major, captures images to tell a story. She believes every detail works together to convey a story, from lighting to focus and angle to color. Having taken one formal photography class, Krystle looks forward to learning more about it.

**Cheyene Cowgill** is twenty-one years old and currently attends CRC. She loves to take pictures, mostly of nature, to show off God’s beautiful world. She takes most of her pictures while going on walks and listening to music.

**Jessica Damian** is a sophomore at CRC interested in Latin American and ethnic studies. She feels fortunate to attend CRC and be encouraged by her professors to write. She is her mother’s daughter, and she dedicates her poem to all women whose intuitions never fail them (most of the time).

**Erika Duran** was born in Northern California and grew up with a deep reverence for various forms of art, such as drawing, music, and photography. Neil Gaiman, Tori Amos, and Morrissey influence her particularly. She currently lives in downtown Sacramento with her cat, Duma.

**Mayra Duran** is a nineteen-year-old student at CRC. She considers herself more of a storyteller than a writer because she likes to write about events that have occurred in her life. That being said, her piece on luck is a true story.

**Brandon Ellis** has a bachelor’s degree in English from Humboldt State University. He has been an avid reader from a young age. Brandon plays the guitar, often composing his own music and lyrics. He lives in an active household with two large exuberant dogs and one adaptable cat.

Born and raised in Sacramento, **Johnny Facio** currently attends CRC with plans to transfer to Sacramento State where he will continue to pursue his bachelor’s degree in business. He has worked for the government for nearly ten years, including his service in the military, and hopes to continue expanding his career.

**Sandy Follett** captures the magic found in our great California wilderness. When not attending class, Sandy can be found camping and hiking with her family. Her photographs represent her vision of and faith in our beloved outdoor world.


**Bailey Hegnauer** moved from Scottsdale, Arizona to Sacramento, California last fall and has taken up photography gradually over the last year. She is majoring in humanities with a minor in English and hopes to work as a social worker after receiving her master’s at a UC.
Elvira R. Daza Hernandez was born in Mexico City and raised in the state of Oaxaca. The state government of Oaxaca has published two of her essays on emigration, and several articles on the same topic were published in the Chicago-based monthly magazine *Sin Fronteras*. Despite being trained in law in Oaxaca, she is a freethinker when beyond the border. Since 2003, Elvira has lived in Sacramento with her husband and two daughters.

Since first finding a place to rage in the pages of the *Cosumnes River Journal*, John Hesselbein’s work has been featured on the pages of *Poetry Now* and *Rattlesnake Review*. No matter how cold the winters become, he is often startled by the warmth of family.

Dennis Hock is an English Professor at CRC. Instrumental in helping to develop Sutterwriters in 2003, he continues to work in hospitals and retreat centers with groups that use expressive writing as a healing process. Dennis is the author of *The Secret Cup: Poems of Grief and Healing*.

Amanda Klinkenberg likes to relax and enjoy nice days with blue skies, eating fried chicken and David Sunflower Seeds, although a good pizza, taco, or cheeseburger is always up for consideration. Delicious cookies, bars, brownies, melon pan, scones, pancakes, and waffles, especially belgian waffles, are consumed with gusto, with beautiful strawberries holding the blue ribbon among the pantheon of delicious and healthy delectables.

MJ Lemire is a writer living in the Central Valley. She has a business degree from the University of Texas and is studying creative writing. MJ enjoys writing poetry, short stories, and essays and has had essays about family life appear in regional newspapers. She takes fitness classes at CRC.

Liqun (Janice) Liang came to America in May of 2008. Currently, she is a freshman at CRC. Her major is Nursing, and photography is one of her hobbies. While wandering around CRC, she enjoys capturing the fascinating moments of life and nature with her camera.

A Renaissance man, Art Luna is a photographer and an entrepreneur. The owner of the landmark known as Luna’s Café on 16th Street in Sacramento, he has even been known to write an annual poem.

Halley Miglietta has spent her life asking questions, big questions that were often left unanswered. She majored in religious studies at UC Davis and has found solace in literature and creative writing. Halley’s passions for the arts and adventure guided her to Chicago, where she will undergo a graduate program in English Literature at DePaul University.

Jessica Monasterio is earning an AA in English between work and the rest of life. Jessica has chosen a major that allows her to practice the things she loves: writing poetry inspired by everyday experiences and reading the works of established writers and her fellow classmates.

Tinashe Muchuri is a writer, poet, performer, and actor. His poetry has appeared in *Illuminations*, *Rattlesnake Review*, *State of the Nation: Contemporary Zimbabwean Poetry*, and *Jakwara reNhetembo*. He is a Story Time author and has performed his poetry at festivals locally and regionally.

Leonardo Ramirez Gallegos (Leo) is a psychology major who actively participates in his church. Leo coordinates a church youth group in Elk Grove and is part of a Sacramento diocesan youth movement, “SEARCH,” which helps the youth get closer to their faith. He agrees that writing is an art and he simply writes to communicate.
Aleigh Sampson is fresh out of high school. This is her first year in the wondrous world of higher education and she loves it... sometimes. She loves writing, but her passion is design. Do you want to be her best friend? Put some sushi in front of her.

Cesar Servin was born and raised in Sacramento. He is currently nineteen years old and is enrolled in his first semester at CRC. He was inspired to compose his short essay on luck because he says he rarely has good luck, but hopefully in the future, his luck will change.

Jeannie Simmerer grew up in the tiny Northern California logging town of Feather Falls and settled in Sacramento in the summer of 1998. She is the proud mother of three boys. Currently enrolled in her third semester at CRC, she plans to pursue a bachelor’s degree in business.

Salvesh Singh was born in Fiji on April 25, 1990. He has two older sisters and is the youngest sibling. He graduated from Luther Burbank High School and has been in the Los Rios District, attending Sacramento City College before transferring to CRC, for almost two and a half years.

N. A’Yara Stein is a Romani-American poet and writer living near Chicago with her husband and sons. She is a grant recipient of the Michigan Art Council and the Arkansas Arts Council and was the editor of Gypsy Blood Review. She’s published in places such as America, The New Orleans Review, The Oxford American, and California Quarterly, among others.

Formally an instructor in the behavioral sciences at American River College, Jeanine Stevens also taught women’s studies and anthropology at CRC. When she isn’t writing, she spends her time Balkan folk dancing and practicing Tai Chi. Her poems have appeared in The Sacramento Anthology: 100 Poems, Tule Review, Poetry Now, and Sacramento News and Review, among others.

Stephanie Teuber grew up in Elk Grove. She is currently majoring in English at CRC with hopes of becoming a librarian and a writer. She adores her three cats and enjoys spending time with family, reading, and shopping.

The reincarnation of Batman, Sacramento-raised, second-generation Vietnamese, American-raised, and judo-trained by a single mother and four ANH CHI EMs, Fong Tran is a social worker/community organizer/youth mentor by day. By nightfall, he is a poet/triathlete/social butterfly all over this city. His Bat-mobile is driven by community/social justice and his MAMA!

Kelli Trapani was born in Sacramento, California and began painting in January 2007. She attended CRC before transferring to California State University, Fresno. Trapani received her BA in communication studies and currently works as a communications marketing assistant and a program coordinator for special events in the community.

Dino Vajraca was born in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Shortly after his birth, his family left Bosnia and has lived in France, Germany, and now, the United States. His constant travel between countries is a significant inspiration and motivation to photograph and aid others in need around the world.

Barbara Ware graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in mathematics and has worked as an actuary for over twenty-five years. This is her first effort at writing fiction.

Evan Gervas Watson is a twenty-year-old Eagle Scout, beekeeper, and geography major who lives under a hat north of Lodi. He enjoys photography, poetry, citrus fruit, and unusual maps and fears neither death nor spiders nor gloom of night. His hobbies include backpacking, trying the patience of his girlfriend, and fire.