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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 CRC-LJSubmit@crc.losrios.edu between October 2011 & March 2012.

Send three to five poems and up to three stories or other manuscripts (up to 2,500 words, MS Word or jpeg formats) per year. Artwork can be submitted in three formats: original prints; high-resolution digital images (>300dpi at the scale of journal); or professional high-resolution scans (>300dpi at the scale of journal). Signed photo releases may be required with photos for submission. Reporting time is up to six months.
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president's message
It is my pleasure to share the Spring 2011 Cosumnes River Journal with you.

As you are aware, Cosumnes River College celebrated its 40th year as an institution of exemplary learning and accessible higher education in 2010. Over the years we have grown from a small, rural college to a large dynamic and diverse campus in a rapidly changing community. And, through all our growth and expansion, we continue to remain committed to teaching excellence, student success and educational leadership. I believe exemplary publications like the Cosumnes River Journal reflect this ongoing commitment.

This unique collection of works is published by our English Department and highlights the academic, artistic and literary talents of our own poets, photographers, and creative writers. I encourage you to take a few minutes to peruse and reflect on these works of art—they are truly amazing!

Deborah J. Travis
President

40 Years of Service, 40 Years of Excellence

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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tribute
We humbly dedicate the 2011 Cosumnes River Journal to William V. Karns. The Def Jam poets have nothing on Bill. He is a master craftsman of language, both spoken and written. Even casual conversations with him are peppered with riffs on $100 words, on slang and jargon and the latest doublespeak. His official memos and administrative letters are witty, sharp and to-the-point. His own creative writing is insightful and beautifully crafted.

Compassionate and supportive of everyone around him, Bill has graced the Los Rios district with his expansive, poetic heart and quick mind for many years. Those of us lucky enough to work with him are better teachers and better writers for having known him. We wish him an adventurous, fulfilling retirement. Please see Bill’s reflection on page 14 of this issue.

CRC President Deborah Travis
Dean of Humanities and Social Science
Ginny McReynolds
CRC English Department

40 Years of Service, 40 Years of Excellence

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Collage » Joaquin Jimenez
You’re at a friend’s party and you notice a beautiful young woman across the room. Now, you want her to notice you but you have no idea how to go about doing this. You run countless scenarios in your head, but can’t come out with a positive outcome. You want to be confident, funny, clever, and smooth. First impressions are everything, and if you follow these steps, you’ll be on your way to being “The Hottest Player in The Game.”

1 Setup

Before you even think about going from “Zero” to “Hero,” you have to make sure you set yourself up for positive outcomes. The key thing that a “Player” must do before he is able to present himself in any situation involving a woman is to have a plan. This is essential because it prepares you for the majority of the situations you will encounter while “in the field.” You can prepare for this by adding terms and phrases from the “Player Dictionary” like “f’sho,” and “holla at me.” You never want to show that you’re not confident, so becoming accustomed to the language is necessary. Once you’ve mastered that art, you can move on to your “swagger,” or the way that you present yourself. This will provide you with the look of confidence and authority and will get you noticed in the crowd. Dress appropriately. This cannot be stressed enough. Improper attire will definitely make you stand out in the crowd, but not in a good way. Wear button downs and slacks for clubs/nightlife v-neck and nice jeans for everything else. Another essential skill that will most likely be needed is the ability to dance. Brush up on the latest moves before you head out.

2 Approach

From the moment of your approach, you must have a few lines handy to help break the ice. The best way to achieve this is to observe her from head to toe and say, “Damn, girl. You lookin’ FINE!” This nearly ensures your control in the situation and it will automatically force her to respond. Before she can answer, introduce yourself. The use of another phrase from the dictionary will help to send a message along with your name. “Yo, girl. My name is [insert name here] but you can call me tonight.” This intelligent (and rather smooth) phrase imprints your name along with a hopeful scenario in the future.

3 Chase

At this point, you’ve caught their attention and they are showing you a little attention of their own. Here is where you begin the chase. You start a little small talk and playful banter. Build up her interest in you by telling her your good qualities. Talk about how you just put new rims on your brand new car. Tell her that you can “make it rain.” They are usually enticed by this and it helps to build some more interest in you. Talk of your achievements and how so many people look up to you. When the moment is right and you know you have her in your grasp, attempt to leave. Create a fictional story that will carefully allow you to exit. Don’t go into a lot of detail, but don’t make it extremely simple at the same time. This will cause her to abruptly make a decision about you. This ensures that you will receive her number. [Optional: You may also use another line here, such as “If I could rearrange the alphabet, I’d put you and I together.”]

Warnings:
- Keep small talk small and keep playful banter playful. Extending the situation any longer than it should be will render your abrupt leaving useless. Make sure you keep it short, because there are many potential women out in the field.
- Make sure your reasons/alibi for your exit are believable. Women have a keen eye for liars. However, don’t exaggerate the reason for your exit too much in case they want you to stay.
Follow Through

If you’ve made your exit already, make sure to call her and set up another date. If they’ve asked you to stay, you put up a small fight and delightfully agree. You are likely to have a few drinks here to lighten the mood and encourage dancing. Once you are asked to dance, you must utterly and completely outshine everyone, including her. A good starting move is the “Fist Pump.” Start slowly thrusting your fist in the air near your midsection. While gradually raising your hand, increase the intensity of your thrusting to complete the move. This causes other women to notice you and piques interest in them. This causes your newly found date to become more aggressive and protective of you. This benefits you because not only is your date becoming more into you, but you’ve gained the attention of other women. This allows you to further branch out your “game,” create opportunities, and build your “cred” as a player.

Warnings:
- If you are required to schedule a date, make sure it’s in a comfortable, romantic place like McDonalds or any similar fast food chain. These are usually the most economic choices because every player has a budget.
- There is no such thing as too much dancing. This is your ultimate time to shine. Take full advantage and make sure everyone knows you can move. Youtube provides many video tutorials.
- If other women happen to interrupt your date because of your awesome dancing skill, smoothly let them know that you will talk to them later.

If you can follow these easy steps, I can guarantee that you will earn some credibility as a “player” amongst your friends. After they’ve seen all the numbers in your phone, as well as seeing you in action, they will want to know your secret. These secrets can only be given to those who you think can meet the criteria. If followed correctly, it will nearly be impossible to have a bad first impression. You’ll seem like a god among men. These steps are nearly foolproof and give you the control at all times. These steps are the best things to do to ensure that the first impression is one that she’ll never forget. You’ll never have to struggle with talking to women any longer, and it will seem like there are not enough days in the year to accommodate every woman that comes your way!
Medical patients of the Hematology Oncology Center at Sutter Memorial Hospital, victimized by cancer experiences, belong to a culture that indeed exists. A very popular culture, we all say. For me, it's been an ongoing seven years of chemotherapy, radiation, oral therapy, x-rays, CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans, MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scans, blood withdrawals, biopsies, and surgeries since the age of twelve. Due to the nature of this culture, beliefs begin to change and a new world view is born. Beliefs we take to heart, such as the ability to empathize with others due to the pain we succumbed to, to have forgiveness, to erase regrets, to appreciate the value of life, and to live life to your dreams' extent, are strongly encouraged. Anyone that has endured emotional or physical pain concludes you're stronger than before with a mentality comparable to the resistance of a mountain during a harsh winter storm. This mentality is bliss. It surfaces from the hope we find in ourselves and in others. Before being admitted into the hospital, I took life for granted and waited for a miracle that would give me a life without worries; however, in my darkest hour of chemotherapy, blood withdrawals, and surgery, my health taking a turn for the worse helped me realize that life is precious and that I make my own miracles every day by living a new life with purpose.

Is this morning Déjà vu? “Osias, wake up, your appointment is at nine o’clock; we have to leave at eight-thirty and the time shows eight-twenty!” my mother belted. The warm embrace of the sunlight gleamed through my window. Opening one eyelid, I check the time.
OUT OF ALL THE DAYS OF UNDERGOING CHEMOTHERAPY, TODAY, THE LAST DAY OF TREATMENT WAS THE FIRST DAY I HAD A CLEAR MIND TO REVISIT THE OVERALL MISTAKES I MADE BEFORE TREATMENT BEGAN.

“Just great, another exhausting day awaits me.” Up in a jiffy, I scurry to the bathroom. Staring at my sickly reflection in the mirror, it’s crystal clear to me. I remember how I always thought I had all the time in the world to do martial arts and ditch classes whenever I wanted and yet still succeed. It was all a lie, a deceitful purpose I lived. Very visible in the mirror, I see the dark spots that shutter my eyes, and the sinkholes that make my eye sockets fall into an abyss. To think my body could have given up at any moment during the past two years. Why did I live a life that I took for granted without appreciating any of it; what miracle was I waiting for? “Ugh, oh well,” I thought. “Today is the last day of chemotherapy.” With not a moment to lose, I throw on the ragged sweats I regularly use during treatment.

Standing outside in front of the Hematology Oncology Center, my mood instantly shifted. The building’s aura is rather ominous. Anxious, my heart feels light and thumps a fast rhythm as if my breath has been robbed from me. I’ve been waiting almost two years for this moment; shouldn’t I be happy? Surprisingly, I trudge my way through the entrance. Waiting to be seen, I gaze into the timeless maze of the clock. Truly appalling, time itself is causing my heart to wander around in an hourglass. “Osias, we’re ready to see you now,” the nurse blurted. Standard procedure, I stepped onto the weight scale and got my height checked accordingly. After my lungs were examined with a scope, I take in a deep breath calmly. “Are you excited today is your last day?” the nurse questioned happily. “Yeah, but I’m anxious because it’s the same day,” I jokingly exclaimed. Sitting back up, I nodded with an unsure yes. “Okay, here we go, one…two…three,” she slowly mumbled.

Getting ready for the insertion of the needle through my portacath (a medical appliance that lies beneath the skin where it connects to my vein), I take off my shirt. My once fit body has been reduced to flabby excess weight due to depression and poor diet. As I lay down, my shivering legs twitched from the abrupt behavior of the tumor. “I’ll count to three and insert it. Are you ready, Osias?” she asked. Once round one was over, round two quickly began. Constantly vomiting into a twelve by twelve inch bucket filled with already a half inch of my own disgust, a stench compared to spoiled onions brought excruciating pain to my stomach coinciding with my left chest, feels bruised and sore. On a scale from one to ten, the pain was a solid eight.

The nurse asked, “Are you okay?” “No, not really,” I jokingly exclaimed. While reminiscing, I vomited out saliva infused with fluid from the two Aquafina water beverages that I drank previously.

Once round one was over, round two quickly began. Constantly vomiting into a twelve by twelve inch bucket filled with already a half inch of my own disgust, a stench compared to spoiled onions brought excruciating pain to my stomach coinciding with my tumor vigorously adding burning shocking sensations to my legs and back. All that remained was greenish, yellow, and bitter tasting bile in my throw up. Feeling flushed and drained, I suddenly collapsed. PLOP!

Laying on the medical bed with the ceiling lights glaring at me left me feeling like a lab rat. As the three long lasting hours passed, the nurse and my mother slowly brought me up while patting me on the back for self-assurance. “One…two…three,” the nurse said in relief. With the needle now out of my portacath, I carefully gained balance and stood up. I always wondered if just being alive after experiencing this is a miracle.

Using a cane and clinging onto my mother’s arm I slowly walked out of the Center. “You did it, Osias. I’m so proud of you for enduring this. I love you,” my mother sobbed. Tears of sorrow no longer clouded her eyes; she wept for hope. The hope that I saw in that first glance of my mother’s face brings me hope for a brighter tomorrow. Even though my body felt weak, I felt refreshed at the same time. Out of all the days of undergoing chemotherapy, today, the last day of treatment was the first day I had a clear mind to revisit the overall mistakes I made before treatment began. Before the year 2006, I walked a path of purposelessness without valuing every moment of life and defined myself as a carefree person. I felt obligated to attend school, martial arts class, and go out because I thought I had to. I used to think time waits for me. Every week for almost two years of chemotherapy, I felt my body deteriorating. During treatment, I hoped for a miracle that would grant me a life of happiness. While reminiscing, I remembered my grandma telling me a story about the phoenix in mythology, where at the end of the phoenix’s life, it is reborn from the ashes. With a grin on my face, I proudly stared up at the bright blue sky containing the milky clouds that no longer shadowed my regrets. A last, given a second chance, there’s a new journey I shall take. Once again feeling the warmth of the sun’s embrace, my life’s essence has risen from the ashes like the phoenix of folklore. I have been reborn.
“Không phải chuyện của mình, thì mình dùng lo.” I’ve heard this saying many, many times in my life from many, many people. Name any of the people in my family that were born in Vietnam, and I can guarantee it’s a phrase they’ve used at least five times. It translates roughly to, “If not our business, [we] don’t worry.” It means if something doesn’t directly involve you, stay out of it. Many times this saying proved to be good advice and would help me in the more minor situations life threw at me, but many more times it was a rule reminding me to give the respect demanded by those in my family simply based on the blood ties that bind me to them, not earned by just actions, regardless of the situation at hand.

I used to believe that this rule my relatives placed so highly in their lives was the source of my torment, but as time passed and my family dissipated, life has shown me that the ties that bind me to them, not earned by just actions, regardless of the situation at hand.

In western cultures, you may hear this being said as a sexist joke towards a woman; in my case, it is a rule regarding respect and dictated by age. This rule was most likely from Confucianism, a religion present among almost all Asian cultures today but more socially than religiously. In Vietnam it is known as the “Mother-Father Religion,” because it stresses the importance of respecting those older than you, especially the people who brought you to life. Confucius was not a stupid man and said that only parents who do a good job get respect from their children, but most people, regardless of culture, have selective hearing, especially those in my family. In my family, hypothetically, my mother could abandon me for a new life with a new husband. I could later on give her and my other struggling family members thousands upon thousands of dollars after the small business my husband and I started became successful. I could be the perfect daughter, and when I heard that my mother gave my younger sister a vase with a just-blooming red rosebud as a symbol of support for the affair my sister is having with my husband, it would be considered disrespectful if I expressed how angry it makes me. That would be the hypothetical outcome in my family, but in reality my mother didn’t even do that at first.

All she could do was cry to herself about the fact that she was born to a greed-driven woman who betrayed her yet again, and all I could do was pretend not to hear because by then I had learned that it was not my place. For the three years leading to that incident, I had constantly tried to assert that my father’s actions with my aunt were a problem that had a direct impact on my life, and each time I was met with strong opposition, especially from my mother. Whether it was because of that rule being deeply instilled in her as well or from the guilt of allowing me to suffer because she was too afraid to face the reality that she had failed to keep our family strong and would not leave immoral father, I’ll never know; but it was what prompted me to use the first of many keys I would use to unlock the gates holding back my “disrespectful tongue,” as the women in my family would come to call it.

Hearing how my grandma treated my mother, you wouldn’t expect for her to do even worse to her daughter, but as they say, “In similar waters, similar fish are found.” I’m not saying that I was the perfect daughter, but compared to my siblings and the crappy job my parents were doing raising us, I’d say I was awesome. Unlike my siblings I did not do drugs, steal, run away with older men, fail in school, cost money, break things out of anger, or ask to go to therapy. I was the daughter that my parents had hoped would be a son when she was born, who did good well in school, who returned lost money, who never tried drugs, who kept boys separate from my life at home, and who bottled up my emotions. Even though I was constantly being praised by other parents as a good child, I began to do something that made my mother and father treat me worse than my delinquent siblings; I criticized their performance as parents. This went against the rule that they held to so strictly. It was challenging their skills as parents and their competence as people. By saying they were doing something wrong, I was saying that they were failing at what is considered the highest responsibility of humans and all other animals and fundamental to the continuance of life and lineage: effectively rearing offspring. With the view that I owed them everything for giving birth to me and raising me, this was seen as the highest form of disrespect, especially when what I’d say was true.

If you hadn’t noticed, I disagree that children are entitled to owe their parents just because THEY chose to take on the responsibility of having children. It isn’t like a child has a choice of whom they are born and the way some people perform as parents. I’m sure some would rather have never been born. (If that were the case, I would have chosen Apple CEO Steve Jobs.) By the time I was thirteen, I was very vocal about my opinion, and as time went on and they, who later became her, were unable to provide clothes, shelter, food, and other basic necessities, my voice grew in confidence and volume. “Get out of my house!” my mother would yell. Glaring and sure I would reply, “This is not your house. You do not pay the rent; you do not buy the food, and you do not live here. This mobile home was paid off by dad and signed to you when he left.” The fury in her face would be more than evident after hearing such disrespect. “So what?!” she’d exclaim, “It’s in my name, I don’t care who pays what!”

Don’t talk to me like you my mother.” “And don’t think that blood makes you mine,” I’d calmly claim. This was an argument frequently fought whenever our paths would cross between her shopping, partying, and her boyfriend. As
This is not your house. You do not pay the rent; you do not buy the food, and you do not live here. This mobile home was paid off by dad and signed to you when he left.

My backtalk grew, so did the severity of my punishments, but that did little to stop me. Why would I comply with being grounded for telling my mom to learn to control my sister who would terrorize me when bored or high, when my younger brother could call her a bitch for telling him that he shouldn’t ditch school and have nothing at all happen to him? Why should I respect the father who lost all our money on gambling and cocaine, had a thousand and one affairs, abandoned my family, and can never remember my name? Why should I care for the woman who tried to kick me out because I said it was her fault for never disciplining her son about anything after he punched me to the ground because I told him to stop cursing at the computer? Being told to ignore these aspects and continue to show my parents nothing but the utmost respect was ludicrous to me, so I continued to disobey.

My grandmother, my mother’s younger sister, and her older sister all saw their daughters in me; they knew that they were far from perfect and had many scars on timelines of their lives to prove it. Worrying that their children would become inspired by my antics, they often scolded me and still do even though they themselves constantly denounce my parents as being failures as if they were not all divorced and unhappy with their own lives. How hard it is trying to fight back the immense urges I have to yell in response at their useless lectures. It’s always the same bullshit being spat out at me. “You never know what can happen. Your mom could die tomorrow and you can never say sorry. Don’t be bad like your siblings who blame their bad habits on your parents. Did your mom ever point the gun at their head and say take drugs, run away, or have bad boyfriends? You guys think you depressed, but it’s just being dramatic. There are many more kids who have it worse, getting beaten and raped every day! You have to love and respect your parents regardless of what happens; they are still your parents. Without them you would not be here.” This argument only made things worse for my parents’ case, like fuel to a fire that represented the feelings of hatred towards my family I harbored inside me. It’s not like I want this fire whose smoke constantly fills my lungs and whose ash constantly leaves a bitter taste in the back of my throat. And what exactly is so great about my life or my siblings’ lives that we should be grateful? Constant screaming and beatings as children? Award ceremonies I had to take buses to and awkward pictures with friends and their parents? Letters of acceptance from universities I can’t go to because I have to look after my great-grandparents while my parents start new and wealthy lives? Working for a boss who took advantage of my hard work ethic and push-over nature because he knows I need the money? My life that I should be so grateful for is a shell only containing my ambitions; my parents made sure to rid it of things I found happiness from before they left, and they created obstacles for me even after. How hard I tried to look strong, trying to cry only when alone in my room.

Even though the people in my family have taken this rule out of context, I myself integrate it into my everyday actions. You may think, “How could you use a rule that has caused you so much strife?” But as the artist T.I. said in his song “Live Your Life,” “It ain’t that black and white; it has an area that’s shaded grey.” To me, knowing your place does not mean respect those that are older than you in your family, regardless of their morals; I see it as advice to think before acting and analyzing where I stand in a situation so that I make sure not to tread where I should not. Whether the situation is as simple as knowing not to bash your friends’ relatives just because they are angry about them at the moment or as complicated as a close family friend suddenly dying, being there to support his family that cared for him so strongly, regardless of how much you’ve grown apart. Even the stricter application of this rule has proved useful multiple times when used outside the confines of my family tree when interacting with those who also have backgrounds in traditional Asian cultures. Unlike my family members, they expect a “Western attitude” when being addressed and are often shocked to see that I am literate in the ways of an obedient and respectful Asian girl, despite my age and “white people” features. And I actually enjoy acting this way towards such people because, unlike my family, they reward my knowledge of proper action with words of praise, sweets, and often money to “spend on fun activities with friends like eating out.” The only negative result is anger from children who are lectured for being too “western” and are told to be good at both, like me. The advice they lecture about to their children or grandchildren makes me smile because of the thought that these children have jealousy towards someone with so many imperfections, and such a “disrespectful tongue” is a very funny thought.

These are many of the things my family would never let me say, the things I only told close friends, the things I wouldn’t tell worried teachers no matter how often they asked, things that used to bring dark clouds to my mind. I used to think that this rule was inane and vile and would tell myself to forget it, but as I’ve grown, I’ve learned that it doesn’t have to be what my family made it. I have learned “know your place” is not a rule, but wisdom that allows one to gain insight into where she stands in a situation and in life. It doesn’t limit me; I can limit it. I can take what I like and kill what I don’t. I am the one who will decide what gets passed on from my family and, unlike my feelings towards my parents, it will not be my family’s place to tell me what I should or should not teach to my children.
A Descriptive Essay of My Home Town

I was born and raised in my hometown of Stockton, California. Unfortunately the memories of my hometown seem to be a distant fading memory of what it was when I was a child compared to now. Growing up as a child, I could be found running around carefree on the streets without the sense of fear, sadness, or intimidation, only feelings of trust in the world and everyone in it. I remember block parties with families coming together, BBQ’s, fireworks and sparklers in the night. Today “Stockton ranks number 5 in the Nation as the most violent city per capita. Population: 684,406, Violent Crimes per 100,000: 885” (Greenburg) Not a day goes by that there is not a robbery, assault, stabbing or shooting. The looks, smells, sounds and feel of the city have changed over the decades, and that is really sad.

I currently work as a paramedic in the city where I was raised, but I chose to move away from Stockton long ago. The sounds of the city have changed so much from what I remember as a small child. I now hear loud ear piercing, heart stopping and thunderous gunfire making me duck for cover, never really knowing who the intended target may be. I hear the loud thumping and bumping, almost pounding sounds of rap music littered with foul language coming from cars going down the road. It is so loud that the music rumbles and rattles the windows of the place that we rely on for protection, our ambulance. I hear the constant tones of disrespect in the loud voices of strangers that echo through the aisles of stores, down the streets, or even in the homes of the emergency calls that hailed us. I hear the harsh snapping of foul language that erupts out of their mouths not even considering who is around them. As I sit in my ambulance, I hear in the far off distance the sad songs of sirens. It seems as if the wailing will never stop, like a perpetual game of cat and mouse chasing each other throughout the city as they rush to the next emergency call.

When I look around the neighborhoods, I see sadness, filth, and graffiti that look like scars in what was once a beautiful city. Sadly it seems to be decaying from the inside out like a spreading cancer destroying and spreading its poison throughout the city. As I drive down the street, I see the neglected homes and yards. Paint chipping off the homes, broken doors and windows, or the roofs falling apart covered with blue tarp. I see trash littered throughout the yards, broken down cars in the driveway with cobwebs and layers of dirt on them appearing to be there for years. The lawns are yellow, hard, and dead. When I walk on them I hear the lawns cracking under my feet as if the lawns are screaming for water. The weeds have overgrown what used to be beautiful landscape. I see unsafe homes housing the adorable children playing in the yard. When I walk into these homes, I get overwhelmed with the filthy cluttered mess of dirty clothes and garbage scattered throughout. I see and smell the putrid odors of animal feces all over the house. Saddened, I notice the exposed wiring sticking out of the walls appearing ready to spark, taunting the children to come play, peering through what once housed the sheet rock that separated the inside from the outside. The electrical cords are stapled to the walls like slippery slimy snakes leading from one room to another. I see half-empty alcohol bottles sitting on the messy tables that also hold old food and garbage. I see dirty spoons that were used to warm the heroin that was injected into the veins of their parents. I see empty medication bottles with the pills spilled out on the floor, heartbreaking knowing that just one pill can kill a child if consumed. As I look over to see the darkened kitchen, I see the table appearing to move. As I focus on what is happening, I realize that it is cockroaches consuming what looked like last night’s dinner. I continue to observe cockroaches climbing on the ceilings, walls and floor as well as the children as they sleep innocently on the floor.

As I look around the city, the homes, businesses, and freeway overpasses are tagged with spray paint marking gang territory, and I never know what streets are safe or not because the tagging seems to be everywhere. Two shoes are tied together, thrown over the tall electrical wires, just dangling in the wind like a balloon dancing in the sky, marking where to buy the drugs from the neighborhood drug dealers. Hundreds of homeless people are scattered throughout the city, appearing with long straggly uncombed hair and beards, clothes disheveled and tousled, appearing to be covered in dirt and grease, unwashed. They usually are pushing shopping carts down the roads with all of their personal belongings inside garbage bags to keep them dry. The homeless look so isolated within themselves; however, they seem content with that. I see the numerous homeless camps scattered throughout the city with cardboard boxes the homeless sleep in, garbage scattered all over the ground, along with used heroin needles. I see the empty bottles of White Wolf vodka sitting next to the homeless man who is passed out, not appearing to have a care in the world. I see a homeless female who overdosed on heroin lying face down in the rocks next to the railroad tracks with innocent bystanders frantically trying to revive her. Why can’t it still look like it did when I was a child?

The smells can be so nauseating and overpowering at times. As I walk down the street, I get overwhelmed with the smells of urine or feces that someone so nicely left next to a building instead of using a public restroom. I smell the spoiled and rotting trash
along with what seems to be the pungent aroma of the sewer drains. The homes I enter are filled with overwhelming odors and filth that makes my skin crawl. I smell the filth and animal waste on the floors with dirty cats and dogs running freely inside and outside of the houses. The musty cigarette smell gags me when I walk in to the smoke-filled room and it looks like fog in the night. I feel the smells of the smoky fires that the teenagers set in the dumpsters because they say it is fun. I can feel the negativity, sadness, and fear when I touch my patients. I am afraid to touch anything without using a bottle of sanitizer that I keep in my pocket. These people seem so content with this lifestyle, no urgency to change, and that puzzles me as to why. The overall feel of the city I once knew is filed away in the back of the file cabinet overtaken by the new files in my brain.

With the city constantly evolving and changing, so have the people that live within it. We have gone from cookies and sparklers to heroin, knives, and guns. Today people are so disrespectful, self-centered, and unfriendly. There is no understanding of the definition of chivalry; sadly there is no respect for women or for the elderly. People do not visit with their neighbors; they just seem to isolate themselves in their own homes. There are no more block parties with families coming together, BBQ’s, fireworks and sparklers. When cars pass by me, it seems that I get more explicit hand gestures than smiles. I was allowed to run around carefree on the streets without fear, sadness, intimidation, only feelings of trust in the world and everyone who is in it. So as you see, Stockton is nothing like it was when I was a child. Why does it have to be a distant fading memory?
One day while leaving my grandma’s ranch I got my first scar; it cuts down into my left eyebrow. My mom tried to squeeze me under the rusty barbed wire fence, a shortcut to get back to our tiny house next door, and I did not fit.

I was kind of a wussy child, but my grandma Jeanie was tough like rawhide. I had an aversion to filth, which my grandma thought was queer behavior for a boy, and she would have none of it. So one day she got a hose and found a loose patch of earth which she transformed into sludge. She grabbed me by the arm and tossed me in, ordering me to play. I never had so much fun in my life. I still prefer to play dirty.

Once while gliding down the hallway of my Uncle Tom’s house in my socks I slipped and knocked out my right front tooth. As a result I sometimes whistled when I talked. It took two years for my adult tooth to come in…crooked.

My first ‘date’ was with a girl from class named Waleska. I asked her to come to my little league game at the park, and she agreed. I missed several plays while I was busy scanning the sidelines for her. I found out later that she got cold feet and never showed. That was also the first time I got stood up.

My older sister and her boyfriend got me drunk when I was eleven. If I had not caught them drinking, maybe I wouldn’t have had to as well. I never told on them out of sheer embarrassment. You can imagine why.

One time I walked away from a fight as my mother had previously instructed. I went home and proudly told my dad. He drove me back to finish what got started. His son would not be soft.

I moved to L.A. when I was in junior high. I had decided to go live with my dad, who had recently moved there. I told my mom the news, and she cried all night while cursing and hugging me. I remember a midnight mockingbird was in a weeping willow out back singing a lonesome song. It was the first of many journeys I would undertake alone. The first thing my father said when I walked through the door to his house was, “Do the dishes.” It wasn’t a joke.

Freshman year I lost my virginity to a German girl with blonde hair and a small mole on her left breast. Her father offered me a condom, but I had brought my own. My friend Lumberto was very jealous. She had been his girlfriend the week before, but I ended up being her first. I dumped her for a buxom brunette two weeks later after the blonde returned from a vacation. She hates even the memory of me now. Despite all my trouble I never even got past first base with that brunette.

I smoked pot for the first time one night with my former best friend at our former elementary school. We made a pipe out of a pen and some tinfoil and smoked something harsh and dark brown. I remember that my knees felt wobbly and weak as we shambled home. I hoped my mom and step-dad would not notice. A couple years later I got kicked out of rehab… not for pot.

When I was fifteen, I managed to get booted out of the house for wanting an eyebrow piercing. I had gone ahead and done the deed myself with a sewing needle in the upstairs bathroom. I stuck one of my sister’s studs in the hole I had made in my brow. I tried to cover it with a band-aid, but somehow my mom found out. I refused to remove it after several passionate arguments with my parents. It was their way or the highway, so I took the road less traveled. I was too proud to beg, but quick enough to steal, which is how I survived in the streets.

I broke into a church one night just to get in out of the rain. I was feverish and freezing and desperate for sanctuary. The side door had been locked up tight, but it magically popped right open. I was grateful to be in God’s house, but acutely aware of my sins. I prayed for nothing, and I took nothing just the same. My fever broke the next morning. I’ve often wondered if it was dumb luck or if God really let me in…I guess I’ll never know.

I once carried a gun when I was wild and young; it was a snub-nosed Smith and Wesson .38 special. It appeared black, but on closer inspection it was a dark steely blue. The .38 stained my wife-beater with brown residue where I used to keep it in my beltline. It made me feel like a god must when passing down judgments. Russian roulette was my favorite game, which scared most of my friends away. I finally got up to three bullets in the five round revolver (all the bullets I had), but I still could not win for losing. That was a dark blue day, dark as the cold steel in my hand. The gun was as worthless to me as I was to myself. Now, moldering, it lies abandoned on the banks of a remote lakeshore.
13. I stole a car in Nor Cal, but wound up in the Hall in L.A. I had thought the car would take me places I wanted to go, but I ended up there instead. The Hall, called Los Padrinos, had once been a school of higher learning where students aspired to achieve. What had once been dorms and classrooms were converted into cells of confinement and misery. There was even still a swimming pool in the center of the facility that remained mockingly dry all year round. It was as empty as we all were. I figured I’d rather visit than stay. The guards said I would be back, and I confidently assured them, “Not me.” The next time I visited the L.P. I was frying high on acid. I simply stared at the peeling layers of paint that coated the imposing cinderblock walls of my cell. I sat transfixed while trying to absorb the gravity of my imprisonment. It was not a conventional trip by a long shot. My dad, a lawyer, got me out of there and promptly billed me twenty-two grand.

14. I broke my first bone taking a swing at my dad in the kitchen. After the yelling subsided and the door had slammed behind him, I looked down to find a teepee of bone was trying to poke through the skin on the back of my hand. A big burly nurse popped the pitched metacarpals back into place. I got one cast and was supposed to receive follow up care, but never did. It still hurts when it’s cold.

15. I got my first tattoo from an ex-con with a bad back. To sterilize the needle he dipped it in vodka and then burned the tip with a Bic. When the vodka ran out, we drank homemade wine distilled from orange peels he had fermented in classic jailhouse fashion. The tattoo came out crooked. My dad was pissed. I was victorious.

16. One time I got caught dealing in someone else’s territory. I had a meeting to make a deal with a two strike vato named Rooster. As it turned out, he wasn’t interested in buying. A junkie I had once called “friend” had set me up. I was dragged into a garage where Rooster threatened to take me for a “ride.” Stammering, I politely declined, and he spared my life in exchange for my drugs instead. I quit my day job and moved back to Sacramento two weeks later. It was no longer the life for me. I heard sometime after from somewhere that Rooster had kept at it and finally got that third strike. Rumor was he had robbed my old friend the junkie.

17. I met a girl at a party not long after I returned to the Sacred City. We talked all night and ended up shackled up a few months later. As things turned out she was pathologically jealous, wildly insecure, and completely justified. One night she was frantic to slash her own wrist to get my attention. Intervening, I got stabbed with a serrated steak knife in the web of my left hand. I recall thinking I should have left well enough alone.

18. The first time I met my wife I was hanging out with my good friend One Eyed Dan. He had been her roommate for several months, but he was leaving for Iowa that day. I stopped by to see him, but I only noticed her. She was his landlord at all of twenty-one years old, impressive to say the least. She was also a bombshell librarian type that I could not resist. I desperately wanted to say something, but couldn’t find an angle. As Dan and I got up to say our final farewells, I could sense my destiny was slipping through my fingers like a fluttering silken ribbon. If it were not for her initiative, I would have left unfulfilled that day. At the last possible moment she invited me to return for a counter culture Easter party. She lowered her playful blue eyes at me when she said it. I knew I already loved her. It would be the first, but not the last, time she saved me. 😊
In the meeting room, the gentle attenuated click of the snap on someone’s briefcase—the sound so much like that of my mother’s purse when she would come into my room, after cocktails at the Blue Room in Chico, getting at a cigarette, the tip flashing and spiraling in the darkness where before her arrival my fear plunged and whooped, smelling of perfume and mothballs and the maraschino cherries of old-fashioneds—that click always reminds me of the life I thought I would have. Later, having read and reread the Golden Book Crispin’s Crispin, The Little Dog Who Owned Himself: I am a sort of a village smith, and people motoring up the hill to go to Lawson’s will see the sparks from my tightly-clamped work and will taste that hot-iron blood-smell from my new welds. Every night I will go to sleep and wake up hungry for my coffee and a look at the Chronicle and for my short stool by the dip-tank in my workshop, and I will be like my father in his gas station, with his own set of smells—oils and grease and tires. Like my father, standing grey-haired in his tiny office, with a calendar that said Rancher’s Petroleum, under a bower of fan belts and a display case of greasy peanuts, with spiders in the windows and oily work orders just off to the left; like my father I will be pleased to see what I see out of the window, beyond the pumps that say Conoco Sky Chief Supreme, beyond the highway, beyond the town I chose.
This morning I have come to deliver
A definition of wakefulness

On the counter the olives lie dreaming
In their old habits

Rolling about in winter muck
I think,

Wake up you lazy hogs
You lazy, intoxicated mollusks

The vodka is a subdued ripple
Is a pool rising at your ankles

Like a pair of rumpled trousers
What mischief you’ve gotten yourselves into –

What crimes went on while I was asleep?
The bathwater has overflowed to the kitchen

The cat has killed all the chickens in the yard
The ones that did not transform into angels

And fly away

Each smell of every bite prepares us for the pain.
A whip of chile on the tongue wakes our senses alive.
Quick inhales and pants,
As if sipping on oxygen will relieve the burn.
We wipe our foreheads, grunt and ay ourselves through each bite.
Born to inherit the desire for the taste of fire.

The light was never bright,
but it flickered.
I knew it was in there.

The candleholder just sits there,
eye level tempting me
with its dance of light.
Inside the scarred glass exterior,

I know the fire is there.
If I lifted my head high enough
I could see the flame.
But that was never my mission,

far from my intent. Hope,
curiosity, loss, pretension
made me look.

The battery was simply going dead.
Maybe, I should have done that
with you. Kept my head down
and imagined that the fire was there.
DIANNA HENNING

For the Love of Door Knobs

There’s the beveled glass kind with rosettes or sunbursts
that massage your hand
as you saunter into another room,
and white porcelain ones that remind you of bathrooms,
their spotless marble
lavatories that belie bodily functions,
as well as antique brass openers
that slip like wet lollipops
from your hand,
the fancy Brittany or Flanders kind—more ostentatious
than usual,
black Georgian knob sets
sedate as nuns,
and you marvel that your hand holds
all other hands that have opened doors,
but finally the very best openers
are wooden knobs
that tell stories of the wind
laving their trunks before they were chopped

MARY ZEPPO

Peepster,
My Sister's One-Winged Goose

lifts up his raggedy voice. He is adolescent but joyous:
he balances, one-legged, right. His curly feathers
were never of use to vault him toward Heaven’s blue
dome. When, slimy with egg-to-breath struggle,
he pecked his way free of his shell, the first
thing he saw was a long, blue-eyed face:
my sister, his mother-in-lieu. It was
Peepster’s two-winged bravado

that riled up their feisty old mutt. In the melee,
a paw snapped the left wing. They left it
behind at the vet’s. But he’s learning now not
to miss it. Find the balance point in his firm spine, to spin
out from it turning quite slowly, to settle, like any good
dancer: making the body’s best choice.
My aunts and I dress quickly and quietly to not wake the others. We step out into the dark, drizzling morning. I am lifted onto my aunt’s back, carried across the flooding, cobblestone street. We hurry to the small tortilleria. I wait for the metallic door to noisily fold up. One aunt loads the machine with dried maiz, the flat kernels pounding against the metal walls in protest. I only need to remove the enormous mounds of soft maza, but I am slow to move the massive mounds, feeling heavier and heavier. The smell of maza becomes overwhelming. My empty stomach clenches. One of my aunts sets her task aside. She helps me move the maza before they collide and plop onto the cold floor. The cold, the smell and an aching head send me to a bench, on which I lie, feeling utterly useless and burdensome. I can only wait until we can finally return home to sleep.

in the soft wreckage, in our bodies bruised and drenched in pleasure,

I enter sleep the way a cliff diver enters his own reflection.

Out of the depths the sound of your voice; each syllable fans across the surface of a vast, becalmed ocean like a drop of rose oil.

Your hand sinks through the mirror’s silver and pulls me out.
La Migra

You say it like a joke
But if you were brown
It would not be so funny

You call us illegals
Yet our ancestors were born here
Your white man was alien then

I am nameless to you
A number
Out of millions

We fight for our rights
You say we have none
America and her justice

The crime I committed
Was an opportunity
One you would take too

Though this side of the fence
I feel no freedom
Living in a country so free

Working every day for so little
Hoping it is enough
Just to pay the bills

I had dreams of college
A house and a car
A future for my son

To him I am a hero
His heart knows no laws
It knows no colors

I had the American dream
Only nightmares now
Of a knock on the door
“Music Sex Love”

TODD WALTON » » » DRAWING
C. L. QUIGLEY

My Mother in a Washing Machine

Trying to lift the pain with a stain fighter,
Cold Cold or Warm Cold but not Hot Cold.
Hot—burns the tender flesh fighting so hard.
But will a Gentle Cycle wash away
The Scream and bring back her smart smile?

Gently, with care, I lift her bones and skin
into the wash bin. Her eyes reply.
I know this will work, mom.
The broken ratchet sound, I spin the knob.
It’s time to wash clean the pain, bleach
the invader and arm the fighters.
I pass Normal Soil, Light, Gentle Speed
and pull the knob at Heavy.

Mom spins, silently enduring—
Is she okay? Can she breathe?
Her night gown—wet and soapy,
clings to her brown legs.
The knob spins slowly, like a clock.
Heels over head, she (Permanent) presses on with belief.
The arrow passes Rinse, and the Spin Cycle begins.
F a s t e r
F a s t e r
Faster the machine dances across the linoleum CLICK!

The violence slows to a hiss.

A stopwatch,
ticking, wondering.

Off.
JENNIFER O'NEILL PICKERING

A Lucky Girl

She is the daughter, the good listener
the last born not often giving advice.
People tell her their secrets.
She places them in a box
lined with a velvet silence
sharing their secrets with those
older than hope.

Before their Dad ran off to Mexico,
with the waitress in town,
the older sister never had
much to say about life at Farmlands;
the high-water bungalow,
twenty-acres of tomatoes,
stewing in summer’s kettle.
How she skips right through his warnings
Don’t go down to the river.

Never speaks of the whippings,
behind the barn,
except to the middle sister,
the good listener.
How it takes forever to unhook his belt,
the one with the horseshoe buckle.

How she braces for the sting
against the planks of peeling paint.
Leather to bare skin
tattooed in welts
as if she just stepped on a wasp’s nest,
ot out of line.
If they disagree with us
Set them on fire
If they argue with us
Set them alight
If they oppose our ideas
Set them on fire
Burn their limbs
Burn their buttocks
Burn their huts
Set them
Set them
Set them on fire
I stand 150-ft below to look up
into the arches and soffit of the bridge
as they catch the late afternoon sunlight,
the concrete almost as white
as the mid-winter snow.

Dark granites are nearly hidden
by airy drifts – slight echoes
of the smothering glacier
that notched the summit, ground
the rock out from the ridgeline to the bottom
of the ice crusted lake, a thousand feet
down and three miles east.

I borrow a silence from phantom ice
that can blot speech,
erase an abandoned landscape,
bury the bony remains.
I shrink into its weight of indifference.

It is not the tongue tangled
fifty-year search for the first word,
or the second, not
the clumsy silence of loss or shame.
It admits only absence.

The trees at the far end of the valley
conceal a monument erected
to mis-calculation and bad luck,
arrogance and desperation, to hunger,
to history, to a mournful abandon
and rescue – faint and colored by silence.

To a small extent, the bridge
is a result of my hand, a piece
of my day-to-day working, a fraction
from a half-forgotten year.

And I have photographs, shuffled
to the back of a drawer that prove,
to me anyway, that I passed here
with a woman I loved.

But perhaps the reason
I will not accept the icy conversion
of nostalgia and regret into mere history
is that I was once a boy
rowing across the lake's green water
early on a summer morning
when it was still and I
was the only ripple.
It was the last day of the summer vacation. Jack was eager to embark on a new adventure, but Dustin only shrugged.

"Come on, we can do it," said Jack. "I bet there is a reward, if we bring him back alive."

"Yeah, maybe," said Dustin. He pressed the tip of his thumb against his teeth and, when Jack was not looking, sucked it slightly.

The boys stood at the corner of Parkoak Drive. Jack studied the flier tacked to a sign post. It showed a jowly old man wearing a bow tie and holding a glass of wine. He wasn’t smiling, and Jack assumed he was feeling impatient for the photographer to press the shutter button, so that he could move away from the ivy clad wall and get on with his life. Below the photograph, boldfaced letters begged, "PLEASE HELP US FIND OUR FATHER." The flier explained that the man suffered from dementia and had wandered away from a nearby hospital. The words “God bless” and a phone number were written across the bottom of the page.

"All right," Jack said. "If you're going to be a baby about it, we'll go to the fort first."

The boys had worked on the fort all summer. Built from plywood and two-by-fours they had salvaged from the private junkyard that had been accumulating from time immemorial in Jack’s grandparents’ backyard, the fort was hidden in a place few people in the Parkoak neighborhood even knew existed. The boys both thought of the neighborhood as nicer than their own. Mostly, retirees inhabited it. All of the front lawns were immaculate. Jack thought they looked like freshly vacuumed carpets. The boys understood that their noisy voices were not welcome there. The neighborhood had more cats than kids. They reclined on their owners’ doorsteps and surveyed the empty sidewalks for hours on end. The boys, giddy with panic, had hauled the wood for their fort through the neighborhood like looters.

They came to what they called the bridge. Technically, it was a culvert. Highway guard rails ran along each side of the street to keep pedestrians from falling into the storm-water canal below. Jack peered down into the pool of black water. Because of the abundance of trees, the water in the canal never reflected the sky. He smelled the catty odor of a stink tree.

The boys hopped over the rail and went down the canal’s muddy bank, skiing part of the way down on the soles of their sneakers. Jumping from stone to stone, they crossed the pool of back water and climbed up the other side of the bank. Hidden in the trees was a trail that led into the jungle. That was what the boys called the riparian strip that cut through the middle of the grid of suburban homes. Backyard fences, most of them warped and keeling, hemmed it in. Dustin followed Jack into the jungle. They went slow. Exposed roots, snaking beneath the ivy that covered the ground and the trunks of trees, were easily tripped over. As they went along, the boys could smell the water in the canal getting deeper. It picked up speed and cascaded down a small waterfall. A hundred yards beyond the waterfall, they came to the house with cyclone fence. Its backyard was completely naked to their eyes, and they always stopped to gawk at it.

"Do you smell smoke?" said Dustin.

Jack sniffed the air.

"No."

"You sure?"

"There's no smoke. You're just imagining it."

"Yeah, maybe."

Taller and lankier than his friend, Dustin was succumbing to the first effects of puberty. This was not a milestone he bragged about reaching. Over the last year, his face had grown long, and its ugliness made him avoid mirrors. It would have been easy to dress him up as the first half of the comedy duo Laurel and Hardy. He had the same heavily-lidded eyes, the same rubbery, wry mouth. He felt especially ugly next to Jack, whose boyish perfection was still intact, and he found it difficult to contradict his friend as a result.

Without giving it much thought, Jack took full advantage of his friend’s submissiveness. He liked being in charge. As the youngest of three brothers, he never was at home. If he got his way at all, it was because his mother took pity on him. His father, who was a sheriff’s deputy, often warned his wife not to baby him. A few days before, Jack had been watching TV when he overheard his father explain his theory that indulgent mothers were at the root of most criminal activity.

"Oh sure, blame it on the women when it's the men who do all the crimes," Jack's mother had said. Being the only woman in a house full of males, she had no other choice but to challenge their opinions and prerogatives head-on.

"Not all of them, but most," said his father. "But you're right, you can't blame it all on bad mothers. Fathers play a role, too."

Jack had never liked that his mother always seemed to win the arguments she had with his father. When he was younger, he
had rooted for his father as if he were the underdog in a football game, but now he felt contempt for him. He might look strong and muscular on the outside, but inside he was weak and flabby.

"Maybe it's the grandma's fault," said Jack.

His mother rewarded his joke with a little laugh, and his father frowned.

"Sometimes nobody's to blame," said his father. "There's at least one bad seed in every family."

The boys came out of the thicket and into a long meadow that curved in the middle like a boomerang. The meadow was bounded by a stand of twenty-foot tall live oaks. A half century before, oaks like these had dotted the landscape for miles around, but all but a few of them had been cut down to make room for houses.

"I do smell smoke," said Jack.

The boys reached the bend in the meadow and saw the man. He was toddling around his campfire with his arms outstretched in a Y. The boys darted to the edge of the thicket and got down on their bellies. Crawling like grunts in a black and white war movie, they inched forward until the man was in sight again.

"What you think he's doing?" whispered Jack.

"Looks like he's praying to the smoke."

"Not so loud, he'll hear you."

"Let's go get your dad."

"No way. He'll arrest him. For nothing."

"What do you mean? He's stole our fort, didn't he?"

Jack couldn't deny that the man had moved in. It was obvious he had. For one, he had built the fire ring. And all of his stuff was probably stowed inside the fort, though all Jack could see for sure was that he had spread a tarp outside its crookedly sawed doorway.

"I bet he's using our candles at night," said Jack.

"See? Let's go get your dad."

"No."

Jack got to his feet and walked out into the open. The man's back was towards him, so he yelled "hey." The man wheeled around. He was middle-aged and wore a camouflage cap with side poppers, a khaki green field jacket and faded blue jeans. His beard was as full as Karl Marx's, though not nearly as grizzled.

"Yeah? What you want?"

"That's our fort."

The man wiped his mouth and sized Jack up.

"Say again."

"You're living in our fort."

Dustin came out of the thicket and took his place a few steps behind Jack.

The man nodded and said, "So you boys built this shelter with your own hands?"

"Yeah."

"Didn't have any help?"

"No."

The man nodded again.

"You did a fine job, boys. The door is a little roughly cut, but hell that's no big deal. You two must be sabertoothers like myself."

Jack gave the man an unblinking, tight-lipped cop stare.

"What's that?"

"A rare beast nowadays. The main thing, I'd say, is a sabertooth can get along in the world just fine and dandy without any help from them."

The man swept his arm in the direction of the houses beyond the meadow.

"Actually," he continued. "I've only met one true blue sabertooth. He was a nigger. Yep, not a speck of white on that boy. Lived in a swamp back in Mississippi. Called civilization a big zoo. Swore he'd never let the zoo keepers put him in a cage, but goddammit they did."

It awed Jack that the man used the n-word so blithely. He had heard his uncle say the word a few times, but always in a jokey tone and never in mixed company.

"How'd they get him?"

"Aw, I shouldn't be telling children these sorts of tales."

"We're not children."

"You sure about that?"

"Tell us."

"Okay, okay. No need to bark at me, Sergeant Snorkel. I'll tell you. You see, this boy liked to beat on his old lady. I don't condone violence in the domicile. Never have, even if the woman deserves it. And most do. I told him, you keep beating on that woman and she's gonna pay a visit to the sheriff. He said: Nah, I knows my business. Slow and sure, like they got the whole world figured out. Nah, I knows my business. But I knew that one day that woman would have enough, and sure as shit she did. They rode out and took him away. But he wasn't lying. He lasted only two days in their cage."

"He broke out of jail?"

"Nope. He hung himself with his bunk sheet."

The boys were hooked. The man reeled them in with a joke about a salesman who goes into a bar and accidentally has sex with an alligator. The boys laughed at the punchline, though neither of them understood why the whore upstairs had a toothache.

The man invited them to have a seat on his tarp. For the next hour, he chain-smoked rollies that he stored inside a sky blue packet of tobacco. Using first his right hand then his left, like an ambidexter who can't make up his mind, he plucked the butts from his lips to take swigs of whiskey out of the pint bottle he kept in his breast pocket. He told them he was passing through their town on his way to meet up with a woman in Reno. Her name was Charlotte, and she got him talking about women in general.

"I'll tell you what the best thing about women is. It's their perfumey sweetness."

The man took a deep breath and savored it. "But be careful now, things don't always taste as sweet as they smell."
The man cackled and sang the opening verses of the theme song for the sitcom *Three's Company*. After a while, he got up to collect more firewood. The boys tailed him and gathered sticks. Jack wanted to ask the man many things, but he couldn't think of the right words with which to frame his questions. He especially wanted to know what it took to become a sabertooth. The man had been flattering them when he called the boys fellow sabertoothers, but Jack assumed he didn't really mean it.

Did you have to live in a swamp or tramp from town to town? Jack liked the idea of being free as a wild animal, but he remembered how cold it got outdoors and how, under the summer sun, the sweat soaked through your shirt and matted your hair. On the road, there wasn't a hot shower waiting for you every morning. Or even a toilet. Where did the man go number two? He decided not to ponder it. Anyway, the man didn't smell too bad, and the idea of being unwashed didn't bother him as much as he knew it would someone like Dustin. Dustin washed his hands before and after he went pee. To tease him, Jack said his dick must be really filthy.

The boys tossed the sticks into the fire until it was time to leave. Jack promised that they would return the next day, and the man suggested that they check their pantries for any non-perishables their mothers might be planning to throw away.

Jack was always a little breathless on the first day of school, but this year he couldn't decide if he felt that way because he was excited about seeing the kids he hadn't seen all summer, most especially the girls, or worried that the man living in his fort would be gone before the school day ended. By ten o'clock, he was in agony. He didn't recall back-to-school formalities ever being so boring. He couldn't talk to anyone about the man at the fort, not even Dustin. This was the sixth grade, and any kid who admitted he played in forts would be openly mocked.

What's more, his homeroom teacher, Mrs. Combes ("Mrs. Honeycombs" he had already nicknamed her to himself), was strict and weird. She made the students play a game she called an icebreaker. She put a couple of chairs in front of the class. She called the names of two students and told them to pretend that the chairs were a bench in a park. They were also to pretend that they were grown-ups with families and jobs. They didn't necessarily have to be themselves. They could make up a character, but they had to introduce and reveal something important about themselves.

The first pair of students didn't know what to say, so Mrs. Combes took the place of the girl. She put out her hand to the dainty girl beside her and introduced herself as Laura Combes. Wanly, he shook her hand. She mimed taking a wallet out of her purse and showing him a photograph of her husband Luke and daughter Sarah.

"I teach the sixth grade," she said. "I wanted to be teacher since I was a little girl. What about you?"

The boy muttered that he was an airline pilot, and Mrs. Combes called up the next pair of strangers. Jack tried think of what he was going to say, but his mind went blank as soon as he sat down in the chair next to Christie Stanton. Her headband sparkled, and her lips were moist and shiny. He couldn't smell the scent of her lip gloss—strawberries? —but he would have liked to.

"Hi, I'm Christie. I got two kids. Here look at them. I'm a real estate agent. So what's your name?"

Startled by how quickly the spotlight had shifted to him, Jack turned towards the class. There were no smiles in the crowd. He assumed that everybody was frightened for him—or maybe just for themselves.

"Don't break the fourth wall," said Mrs. Combes. "Look at Christie."

Jack turned and offered his hand to the dainty girl.

"Hi. I'm Jack and I work at the rubber factory."

The dirty joke had come out of his mouth spontaneously, and he wasn't even sure he had intended to say it. But the response to it was immediate and powerful. Mrs. Combes had to come out from behind her desk to restore order. She took Jack outside and told him to wait on the green bench until she could speak to him about his behavior. Sitting on the bench, he listened to the sparrows cheeping and, through the row of windows, watched the icebreakers go on without him. When one of his classmates craned his neck to catch a peek at him, he stuck out his tongue or crossed his eyes.

After school, Jack met up with Dustin where all the kids gathered to board the school buses. Teachers blew whistles and waved their arms to maintain some semblance of order, while the crowd of kids shouted and laughed, all but oblivious to them. When the coast was clear, Jack yanked on Dustin's backpack.

"Let's go," he said.

"I can't."

"Why?"

"My mom said."

"You told your mom about the man?"

"No, she just said I had to come home right after school."

"No she didn't."

"She did. I swear."

"When?"

"This morning."

Jack gave Dustin the cop stare, and Dustin put the tip of his thumb in his mouth.

"Don't be a pussy," he said before slipping away from the crowd. Dustin hesitated but followed. Together, they crossed the blacktop and the soccer field. They came to a chain-link fence. They jumped it and followed the canal that ran behind the school. Its cement bed was dry for long stretches. They followed it all the way to Parkoak Drive.

Dustin hadn't remembered to raid his pantry, but Jack produced a can of beef barley soup and another of sliced bamboo shoots from
his backpack. The man examined the pull-top on the soup can.

"What will they think of next?" he said.

Jack sat down on the tarp without waiting for an invitation, and Dustin followed his example. The man lit a fresh rollie and patted his breast pocket for his pint bottle, which wasn't there. He wiped his mouth and nodded.

"So what's the score, boys?"

Jack told the man about his rubber factory joke and how kids were falling out of their seats because they were laughing so hard.

"Ha! Kid, you remind me a little too much of myself. Getting kicked out of class on the first day. But don't forget, it's a long haul to summer. You better take her easy. How about you? You meet any pretty girls today?"

Dustin shrugged.

"They're all ugly," said Jack.

"Beggars can't be choosers, young man. How many sweethearts do you have?"

"I don't want any."

"Famous last words, but don't worry; boys will come around."

Jack rolled the can of bamboo shoots in his palms. Dustin poked at the cold ashes in the fire pit with a stick. The man located his bottle in his back pocket. He sloshed around its last swallow of whiskey.

"Trust me, boys, poontang will rule your life. You can't do anything to stop that. It's out of our hands. So here's to hard dicks and shaving nicks."

The man emptied the bottle and said, "Shit, who's fooling who? I was a boy once. I know you've both made the acquaintance of Rosy Palm and her five sisters."

Jack rolled the can towards the man and took a deep breath.

"So how did you become a sabertoother anyway?"

The man stared at the empty bottle in his hand. For the first time that Jack could remember, the man looked serious. He chucked the bottle into the thicket, snatched up the can, scrutinized it and sent it sailing after the bottle.

"A what? Oh yeah, that. It's a long story. Maybe I'll tell it to you someday."

"Why not now?"

"I haven't even recorded your names in the Captain's log. How can I tell you all my secrets? Go in the shelter and fetch me my backpack."

Jack did as he was told. The man unzipped the pack and took out a ball point and a spiral notebook. The notebook was folded lengthwise, so before opening it, the man laid it on his lap and smoothed it flat.

"Okey-dokey. Let's have those names."

Jack said his name, and the man repeated it as he wrote it down.

"What do you want our names for?" Dustin asked.

"For posterity," the man said.

"His name is Dustin," said Jack. "But just call him the thumbsucker."

"Screw you," said Dustin.

Jack put his fist up to his mouth and made a sucking noise. Dustin socked him in the shoulder and scrambled off the tarp, so Jack could not hit him back. Jack's arm throbbed, but he grinned through the pain.

"All right, that's enough of that," said the man. "No more fighting in camp. Apologize to your friend for teasing him. Go on now."

Jack said he was sorry.

"All right. Now you apologize to your friend for socking him."

Dustin wouldn't apologize, but Jack said it was okay because the punch hadn't even hurt.

"Why don't you two go gather some wood, and I'll teach you how to start a fire when one match is everything you own."

Dustin refused to gather wood. He stood aloof, but once the fire was going, he came back and fed it twigs. Eventually, the man persuaded the boys to shake hands.

On the way out of the jungle, Dustin spotted a toad and pounced on it. The boys took turns holding it and looking into its eyes. Except for the pulse in its throat, the toad remained motionless. When they reached the bridge, Dustin tossed it into the black pool.

"You live in a real sewer, frog."

"It's a toad actually."

"It's a toad. Actually," said Jack, lisping the adverb.

"I'm never coming back here," Dustin said. His voice trembled, but he steadied it. "I'm not going to hang around with some stinking bum."

Jack looked past Dustin's head at the graffiti on the cement wings of the culvert. He read, "fag," "cunt" and "just me and my shadow." The latter seemed out of place, and that irritated him.

"I thought you had to hurry home to mommy," he said.

He picked up a rock with both hands and lobbed it into the water. Dustin leaped out of the way of the splash but wasn't quick enough. He wiped at the sprinkles on his pant leg. Jack picked up another rock. Dustin readied himself, but Jack turned his back on him and tossed the rock downstream. Dustin trudged up the muddy bank.

"Where you going, pussy?"

Dustin didn't answer. Once he reached the top, he looked over the guard rail.

"I knew you'd never make it as a sabertoother," Jack shouted up at him.

"Just thought you might want to know," said Dustin. "There is no such thing as a sabertoother."

The next day during lunch break, Jack knelt on the floor of the boys bathroom and took the twigs out his backpack. The other boys hovered over him in a semi-circle. Jack arranged the twigs into a little tepee, just as the man had taught him.
"The thing is," he said to the group of grinning boys, who were too busy glancing at the bathroom door to pay attention. "Sometimes you only got one match to see you through, and if it goes out on you, you're SOL. That's shit out of luck, for those of you who don't know."

"I'd use a lighter," said Brett Bierce.

"Lighters fail," he shot back. "You can't depend on lighters. You can't depend on anything, except yourself."

"Just hurry up before someone comes in," said Dustin.

Jack thought about calling Dustin a pussy in front of the other boys, but he thought better of it. He didn't want to provoke Dustin into spilling the beans about the man at the fort. Instead, he stuck the match on the floor tile and touched the flame to a shred of toilet paper. The combustion gobbled up the smallest twigs first, and a few seconds later the shadows of five boys danced on the wall.

The bathroom filled with smoke. All the boys, except Jack, ran out. He stomped out the fire and kicked the charred sticks behind the garbage can. Coughing, he wet a paper towel in the sink and scrubbed at the black marks on the tile.

When Jack emerged from the bathroom, none of the boys were waiting for him outside. He went around the building and scanned the playground. A couple of the boys were watching some girls skipping rope. Before he could call out to them, a shrill noise grabbed his attention. He turned to see Mr. Wells running towards him, blowing the silver whistle that always hung by a cord around his neck.

The rest of the afternoon, Jack sat outside the vice principal's office. He tried to start a conversation with the office aides, but the VP came out and told him he had to sit there silently until his parents came to pick him up. After that, Jack confined himself to waving and making funny faces at the people walking by the windows.

But when he heard the squawk of his father's walkie-talkie, he got somber. Jack had been given two days suspension. The punishment made Jack angry rather than ashamed. He hadn't caused any damage. The fire might have left a scorched mark or two on the tile, but boys spit and pissed on the floor every day. Nobody would have even noticed if Dustin hadn't ratted him out. He didn't have proof that Dustin was the rat, but Jack knew it was him. He was the only one with a reason to do it.

Jack's father was in uniform. He glanced at his son only once before he went to speak with the vice principal. For a few minutes, Jack thought his father might escort him off campus in handcuffs and take him to jail. He wondered how long he would last in the office. He tried to start a conversation with the office aides, but they were so busy glancing at the bathroom door to pay attention.

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Dustin's father kept a small wet bar in his house, and the boys had once sampled a few of the bottles, giggling at the funny faces the liquor caused them to make.

"You're out kinda late tonight, aren't you?"
Jack twisted back the cap and tossed the bottle to the man.
"My dad whooped me."
The man laughed and took a swig that was at least three times the size of Jack's.

"I swear, boy, you remind me more of myself by the hour."
"Was your dad a —"
"What? A mean old son-of-a-bitch?"
"Yeah. I hate my dad."
"Nah, a good father doesn't spare the rod. It's good for you. It toughens the hide."
"Yeah, maybe."

They sat a while in silence, listening to the fire crackle and the crickets chirp. A faint moon hung above the oaks. The man closed his eyes. For a while, Jack thought he was asleep. He felt a little lightheaded from the whiskey on his empty stomach. It felt good. He wished the man had offered him a cigarette, too. He didn't like cigarettes. He and Dustin had tried smoking one once in Jack's backyard. They had been friends a long time, but he didn't care. He'd learn to like cigarettes and forget all about Dustin. Maybe he would even sleep here tonight. Maybe he would never go home again.

"You got a girlfriend, Dusty?"
"I'm Jack."
"Oh, that's right. I wrote you down in the log." The man took another swig and raised a finger in the air. "Jack and Jill went up the hill to drink a pail of whiskey. Jack got high, pulled down his fly, and Jill got really frisky."

Cackling, the man unzipped his fly and took out his dick. He wiggled it until it got erect. Jack thought it was a very ugly looking dick: an uncircumcised, liver-colored worm.

"It gets lonely out here, Jack. Come over here and let me take a whiff of that pretty head of yours."

Jack got up and walked away from the fire. He told himself to leave, but something held him there. His own dick had gotten a little hard. It was not that he liked the man in that way. Probably the horror of seeing the man's private parts was what had done it. It wasn't even the same kind of feeling that you got when you looked at a sex magazine. It was like when he was a really small boy and his dick had gotten hard for no reason at all. Sometimes he would stand up in the bathtub and watch it do its thing. He wasn't in command of it. It moved completely on its own.

The man put away his dick and rolled over. All was still again, and Jack shivered. He rubbed his bare arms to warm them. He wanted to go back to the fire, but he didn't dare to. Not yet.

When the man began to snore, the boy came back and stood over him. The man's outstretched hand clutched the pint bottle. Jack pried it out and looked around for its cap, but it was too dark to find it. Carefully, he wedged the bottle between a pair of rocks and crawled inside the fort. He brought out the man's backpack and slowly unzipped it. It exhaled the smell of dirty socks. He took out the spiral notebook and smoothed it flat in front of the fire.

The man's scrawl was nearly illegible, but he was just looking for his name. Once he found that, he would go. He flipped through the pages, but he didn't spot it. He needed more light. He held the notebook directly over the fire with one hand and used his other to support himself. The flames scorched his knuckles. It was almost unbearable.

The man made a hoot, and his arm bumped the back of Jack's shoe. The notebook slipped from his hand. He tried to snatch it out of the fire, but the flames engulfed it in an instant. Jack stood stock-still as the pages peeled away and turned to ashes.

Jack had trouble finding the trail in the dark, and once inside the forest he walked as fast as he could and tried not to imagine things slithering through the ivy. He was almost blind in the darkness when he heard the rushing of the little waterfall.

The trail narrowed, and he had to slow down. Something big slammed against one of the sagging fences and made it sway. It was only a dog, but its bark was a great roar and full of sharp teeth. Jack ran for his life.

He tripped three times, skinning both of his knees, and his foot slipped into the water as he crossed the back pool. But he didn't care. He just wanted to be back on the sidewalk, where he could follow the trail of porch lights back home. A world of trouble was waiting for him there, but he had nowhere else to go.

On the way, he saw the fler with the old man on it. All of its corners were curling. It was too dark to read any of the words, and the picture of the man was just an indistinct shape, but he stood looking at it for a long time anyway. Finally, making up his mind what to do, he ripped it off the post, crumpled it into his fist and tossed it down the next storm drain he came to.
Drip. Drip. Drip. The heavy droplets of water were persistent, endlessly falling into the great abyss of the kitchen sink. The sound was pure to Mildred. To some, the noise would have been maddening, annoying at best. To her, though, the sound was perfection: orderly, consistent, precisely-timed, like a metronome. It was predictable and simple, and it reminded her of the ticking of a clock. The sound of the dripping faucet was flawless to the young girl, a representation of everything the world should be, but was not. It gave her no joy though. Mildred knew that joy was a frivolous thing, wasteful. In fact, the absence of joy the absence of anything as idle and inconsequential as joy, is what pleased her most. No—though she prized the sound of the dripping faucet—it gave her no joy. What it gave her was a feeling of tightly-wound security, of superiority. What it gave her was the desire to straighten her posture, straighten the line of her mouth until it was as featureless as the line of the horizon on a still ocean. This desire pleased Mildred as well, and, as she sat listening in the dim evening light, she silently thanked the dripping water by trying to mimic its neat and tidy logic.

Her mother and father were the opposite of the dripping water. They were the opposite of order, and they were the opposites of one another. Rachael was the broken faucet, and Alfred was the absentee plumber. Mildred loved the broken faucet for what it gave her, for the comfort she took in its consistency. It was not right that the leaky faucet stayed in its unnatural state of disarray, day after day. But even in its broken-down wretchedness, it offered something to Mildred—a tuneless and steady song. For that, she loved her mother. Mildred despised the plumber. He completely lacked the fortitude it took to fix the sink; he didn’t even have the stomach to listen to it, let alone repair it. She wanted to plug up the drain of the great sink and plunge his idiot head down into the water; hold it there so he could experience the fruits of his shortcomings; hold it there and watch his insignificant life rising to the surface in so many tiny bubbles, bursting soundlessly into nothing.

The birthday cake sat smugly in front of Mildred, untouched and mocking. Twelve stupid little candles lay beside it on the tattered tablecloth. She knew she had earned more than twelve, hell, more than twenty. She didn’t even like cake. The plumber had bought the candles at the corner store and insisted that she make for herself a little celebratory treat. After all, he’d implied, she deserved it. She knew he meant it, and she hated him anyway. He’d promised with Oscar-worthy enthusiasm that he and Mother would be sure to join her for a nice dinner. Dinner. Hah. Lonely tomato soup. Lonely birthday girl. Good. She would rather be alone. That would be her little celebratory treat. After all, she deserved it.

The sun was setting lazily outside the kitchen window. It was one of those gray, bleak winter sunsets. It was one of those gray, bleak winters. The natural light coming in cast an unnatural and eerie illumination throughout the kitchen. Mildred thought for just a moment about lighting some of those birthday candles to lend some warm light to the room, but she decided against it. She didn’t want to give the cake the satisfaction.

The smell was awful. Even with the scent of birthday cake wafting in the air, the smell was hideous. The house didn’t always smell like that. Usually it had a grainy, damp, lived-in and comfortable aroma to it, like a musty old farmhouse. But when Mother had one of her spells, the odor seemed to lie in invisible sheets on the air. Oh, no, she didn’t defecate on herself or anything crazy like that. It was just the distinct smell of the ammonia cocktail she always used to wash her stockings with. That and the smell of Father’s whiskey, and blood.

Mother was in the upstairs bathroom again. She had finished scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing. She had to do what needed to be done. Stockings needed cleaning, and that was that. How could one expect the civilized world to be accepting of filthy stockings? It was unheard of. We were civilized people living in a civilized world, and we would behave as such. We would keep our shoulders back, chins up, our faces tidy, and our hands and stockings clean. That
was that. And now the stockings hung by the shower rail, drip, drip, dripping into the tub.

Father had gone into the bathroom earlier in the evening, with his slumped shoulders and his weak, downcast eyes. He always did that, always started what Mildred would inevitably have to finish. It was time for Millie’s birthday dinner, he had told her. Then, of course, Mother had to start all over again. Scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing. Interrupting was rude and uncivilized. Now he had interrupted her and she would have to start all over again. Foolish man. Worthless. He had sulked away, tearful and pouting as usual. But the scrubbing had to be done, and that was that.

Now, as Mildred entered the upstairs hallway, the smell became even stronger. It made her want to vomit. She could hear the drip, drip, drip as she approached the bathroom. There stood Mother, in her usual position: perched delicately on the edge of the bathtub with her back to the door, hands resting neatly on her bent knees, bloodied and raw from the ammonia cocktail. Mother’s posture was perfect, and in this moment that played out again and again, the same each time, Mildred was always a bit jealous of her graceful presence. The blood forged trails along the tub’s surface on its way to the drain.

After helping Mother clean her wounded hands and helping her to bed, Mildred made her way downstairs to put her fucking birthday cake away. Each time this scenario played out it was the same. The plumber would be lying in a pathetic heap at the bottom of the stairs, booze drip, drip, dripping from his weak chin onto the floor. She always wanted to step on him. But she was certain that, though his form resembled that of a man, she would step into a spineless, gutless pile of mush. So she always just stepped over him. She had to be civilized, after all.
“Paul, right?”
“That’s right.”
He remembered my name. I’m glad for my beautiful, monosyllabic name.
“You’re Tim.”
He nodded.

Tim rents a one-bedroom studio in Midtown. He works at Starbucks; he lives in the clubs on 21st Street and knows all the drag queens. He drinks too much. I know him, but I’ve never met him until right now. Tim looks gentler in person.

I lean into the wall. I’m trying to look sexy; I’m also trying to stay out of the middle of the hall so some drunk twink doesn’t puke on me for blocking the bathroom route.

He’s looking at me with nothing to say. No, he’s gazing into me. I glance over to my buddy Candace, mumble the slightest introduction, and acknowledge her presence by staring awkwardly at my shoes. She’s smiling at me, not because she thinks it’s cute that Tim and I are flirting, but because it looks like I’m picking up a john.

Shit! Tim’s been talking! What did he say? How have I been?

“Good, yourself?” I say. I’m tensing like an acrobat; for my next trick, I will juggle my surroundings.

My right side is freezing because the unending line of patrons keeps the door open. The security guard is checking I.D.s and stamping hands with as much enthusiasm for his job as I have for my inability to socially function.

To my left, Candace is still staring at Tim and me, wearing that bitchy smile. Behind her, a sea of backlight and house music wriggles with countless hotties having a good time.

Of course he’s been talking again. My luck really is this bad. Can’t bluff this time; I didn’t hear a damn thing. I smile at him instead.

He smiles back. Maybe he doesn’t care that I’m distracted. Maybe he got his answer.

There’s Ripper walking by, the patron drag queen of this club. She’s a garish puff of flamingos and tropical fruit in platform heels. We love her.

Tim suddenly slides into the crowd. He’s had about enough of me. I push off in the opposite direction with Candace.

Something in my stomach stops me dead in my tracks. I feel five distinct fingertips press in gently and turn right in unison, converging in a fist full of my blue shirt. It pulls me from behind, grasps under my skin for whatever hodgepodge of emotions is boiling within me at this moment—some quieting stew of disappointment, fear, and exhilaration. I pivot towards him, ready for an imminent kiss, but it’s too late. He lets go, and disappears before I’ve even turned.

I see fleeting hints of Tim for the rest of the night: his eyes, his smile…

Ripper starts her show. I finally find all of Tim in one place again. We stand beside each other and watch without speaking, and once the show’s over, we drift apart. There’s no hand to stop me this time.
“Baby, it’s a long way to South America,” his hollow voice told her over the phone.

“I know... I just want to see you,” his wife replied, “It’s been so long.”

“I’ll be back in two months, don’t worry about me. Just take care of John,” he instructed.

The man on the phone was Peter Coniglio, husband, father, and photographer. One month prior to that phone call Peter had been commissioned by an independent magazine chain to do a series of exposé’s on the hardships of life faced in and around the Río Negro waterway in Southern Argentina. He had never done any photography work outside of his local surroundings in Los Angeles proper, so naturally he jumped at the idea of snapping off some shots in what he believed was paradise. He was to be stationed there for three months, much to the disapproval of his wife Beatrix. Though he didn’t really care what she thought anymore.

Peter was living in a twenty-four hundred square-foot house before he came to Argentina. He drove a Porsche 911 with heated seats and an in-dash video monitor. He came home every day and had dinner with his wife and son. On Saturday nights, Beatrix and Peter usually had sex, but neither felt satisfied. They would wake up and go to church for an hour on Sunday and repeat the process. This was their routine. Though some of these circumstances paint a bright picture for the life of Peter Coniglio, he hated the dreary, boring course it had taken.

Then he came to Argentina.

From the moment Peter stepped off the Jeep that took him from the chaotic airport terminals to the rural town where he’d be staying, he knew that he was in a special place.

“Ay! Coniglio, right?” a man shouted as he ran toward Peter.

“Yeah, nice to meet you,” Peter told the man as he shook his hand, “Are you Rafael? The linguist?”

“Sí, that’s me.”

Rafael showed Peter around the town. They went to the markets, where every vendor was seated right next to one another, their produce carts popping up out of the ground like brightly colored flowers. All of the shades were dazzling – colors that stain your eyes when you stare into the sun for too long. Men, women, and children alike were scattered everywhere, which made it almost impossible to tell who was actually selling anything. Spices that hung from racks above vendors’ carts stung Peter’s nostrils, their sharp, searing scents wedging themselves up into his nasal cavities. Everywhere around him was life, abundant life.

After their trek through the marketplace, Rafael took Peter down a seemingly-endless dirt path which eventually led to what appeared to be the remnants of an old, derelict home. There was a broken-down buggy in front of the abode, which had seen so little use that it had become overtaken by shrubby foliage and weeds. The paint was chipping off of the house, but that must have been the least of the inhabitants’ worries. The structural integrity of the building was a much larger concern.

“This is where you will stay,” Rafael informed Peter.

“You’ve got to be kidding...this place?”

“Hey!” Rafael shouted, “this is my house. It's much nicer inside.”

Rafael was right. The shoddy exterior was a perfect facade for what lay contained within his humble dwelling. The inside consisted of three perfectly cared-for rooms. One for Rafael, one as a general living space, and another for Rafael’s daughter, who had just emerged in a grey dress and hoop earrings.

“Peter, I want you to meet my daughter, Marianella,” Rafael chimed.

“Nice to meet you,” Peter told her.

“Hello,” she replied through a half-open smile.

There was a long pause that followed this exchange. Peter was expecting a more formal greeting from her, but was also surprised at his sudden drought of words.

“She doesn’t speak much English,” Rafael informed Peter.

“Actually, I am one of the only persons in this town that speaks it. Come on, I’ll show you your bedroom.”

Rafael insisted that Peter sleep in his bedroom for the remainder of his stay, even though Peter had offered numerous times to sleep on the couch in the front room. Everyone is so nice here, so hospitable, Peter thought. He couldn’t help but make comparisons to the people native to Southern California, who would just as easily have you sleep in the gutter if it kept their chesterfields clean.

Marianella prepared dinner that night. She had chosen to make a dish called “matambre,” which, as Rafael explained, is a meat roll stuffed with eggs, herbs, and vegetables which is then oven-roasted for several hours. The name literally means “hunger-killer.” Soon enough, Peter caught the scent of rosemary brooding within the roll, flavoring the meat, and went to have a peek into the kitchen. He
stood in the doorway and watched as Marianella prepared various other side dishes, but remained out of sight. She was an ace with a blade, chopping and dicing with remarkable accuracy and speed. Her entire body moved as she worked, like cooking dinner was a secret dance that only she knew. Occasionally, her dress shook as she stirred, exposing her bare feet and legs. The shape of her breasts could be seen shifting underneath the dress, giving contour to the soft fabric.

“Ready to eat?” Rafael asked Peter, startling him.

“Yeah, I’m starving.”

They all sat down to eat. Rafael began the meal as is customary in all South American countries – with a prayer. The three joined hands to pay tribute to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As Marianella slipped her hand into Peter’s, he felt her smooth, warm skin and the faint flutter of her pulse. Rafael then began the prayer, which was in Spanish. Peter didn’t know what the words meant, but still considered them beautiful and perfectly suited for such a meal.

“So what do you think?” Rafael asked Peter after the prayer.

“What do I think?”

“Of this place, of Argentina, of us,” Rafael explained. “Do you like it here? It’s a lot different than what you are used to I expect.”

“I love it here,” Peter began. “Everything is so beautiful, the scenery, the people, and the food.” Peter shot a look at Marianella, “Delicioso!”

“Oh, he’s good!” Rafael said with a laugh.

“Thank you,” Marianella said after giving a quick smile.

After dinner, Rafael told Peter that he had a surprise for him. He said they were going to a place where few outsiders had ever been, which instilled a sense of trust and gratitude in Peter. In a little under an hour they came to an old factory. It was a little disconcerting to Peter that most of the buildings he had seen in the town looked as if they had been abandoned years prior. Nevertheless, Rafael assured Peter that this, in fact, was their destination.

As they drew closer to the building, Peter could distinguish loud shouts and heavy commotion. When they walked through the door, the smell of old feces and burnt hair suddenly infiltrated Peter’s senses. Normally this would have bothered him, but tonight, he didn’t mind.

At the core of the building was a large group of men gathered
around something, which remained concealed to Peter's vision by the thick throng. Rafael lead them to the front of the crowd, and showed Peter the spectacle to behold. Two adult roosters, cocks, were poised against one another. One had already lost an eye, and the other had blood pouring down from a slice to its neck. The cock with the neck wound was clearly at a disadvantage and was only minutes from death. All the other one had to do was wait out the match, which would be easy since it kept trying to turn away from the dying cock to protect its other eye. In a couple of minutes the cock with the wound in its neck was dead, and the cyclopean rooster had taken the win. As soon as the bout ended, a bunch of the men shouted in glory. The other half wore solemn faces and stood in silence.

It was then that Peter realized Rafael had left his side. He looked around to see if he was close by and found that he was already returning with a couple of beverages in his hands.

"Drink this," Rafael ordered Peter.

Peter took a sip and gagged.

"What is this?" he asked. "It's really strong."

"It's an Argentine liquor, made from the bark of the Mariposa tree. It's good, drink it."

Rafael placed a bet on the next round. He put fifty pesos down on a known champion. His opponent was an adolescent male rooster, who didn't seem aware that the stakes of his next battle royale would be his own life.

The money was on the table and the fight began. Rafael's cock was used to this situation, and instantly shot forward to strike his younger adversary. His first blow fell, and the fight was officially underway. The young cock now fully understood his purpose in the ring. He began to peek back at Rafael's rooster, who had resorted to using his legs to kick at the young cock's head. Kick after kick landed, which sent the young cock into a dizzying spin. When he regained his composure, the experienced rooster was right back on him, kicking and pecking incessantly. Then, in an instant, the young cock's spine finally broke, causing him to drop, lifeless, onto the solid stone floor. An old man climbed into the ring to retrieve his cock's corpse finally broke, causing him to drop, lifeless, onto the solid stone floor. An old man climbed into the ring to retrieve his cock's corpse.

The next thing Peter could remember was seeing Marianna's plump cheeks and ripe red lips giving shape to a beautiful smile. She was standing over him, and she looked happy to see him awake.

"Él está despierto!" She shouted to Rafael, who emerged seconds later.

"Dios mio! Are you okay?" Rafael asked Peter.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Peter said, "What happened?"

"You threw up on my friend Ramón," Rafael explained. "It's okay I've worked everything out with them. Just rest, okay? Mari will check on you."

Rafael walked out of the room, leaving Peter alone with Marianna. His pulse escalated slightly. He smiled at her and tried to straighten himself out, but realized that his head was throbbing as he did so, and he lay back down. She had beautiful light brown eyes, and long, flowing hair. Peter couldn't help but stare at her, immersed in her beauty. She met his gaze. He summoned the strength to sit up and beckoned for her to sit down next to him on the bed. She did.

"You're really pretty," Peter told her.

She sat there, smiling at Peter, silent as a stone. Peter grabbed her hand and played with her fingers. Her skin was warm; the sultry scent of her lavender perfume intrigued his nose. He moved closer to her. He could almost taste her lips meshed against his. There was no turning back; he wanted this girl. She looked down, and in a moment his hand was on her thigh. She looked back up, staring straight into Peter's eyes. He let his hand drop slowly down her leg until it lay nestled between her thighs. Peter inched closer to kiss her. Before he could lay his lips across her, she shot up off the bed, drew up her dress, and staggered backwards towards the door.

"I'm sorry," Peter uttered.

But it was too late; she turned and left the room hurriedly. Peter fell back into the pillows on his bed. He felt ashamed. His face felt blistering-hot. A thick sense of guilt rushed over him once more, and, for a second time that night, he felt as if he might purge himself of whatever remained deep within his insides. Like clockwork, Peter's feelings turned to reality, and soon enough he was vomiting into the trashcan next to his bed. Although this time there was no beautiful Argentine girl to clean up the mess.

Peter was exhausted from all of the puking he had done that day, but still found it impossible to sleep that night. The next morning he said nothing to Rafael or Marianna. He instead packed his suitcase in silence and arranged for a jeep to pick him up and take him to the Buenos Aires International Airport. Eighteen hours later Peter was back in Los Angeles, walking into his twenty-four hundred square-foot house, his arms wrapped around his son, his lips wrapped around his wife's.
Through the reflection of the bedroom mirror, I could see Kendra practicing the moves of her new dance routine. It was great watching her do all the bends and twists; she was nailing every step. As I made my way down the hall, I watched her drop into the fetal position. Coming through the door, I noticed tears running down her cheeks. That’s when I asked her, “What’s wrong? Why are you crying?” Kendra didn’t even have to say a word; I could see the devastated look in her eyes. As I followed her gaze to her ankle, I noticed it was swollen. I realized then that all of her dreams had just been shattered.
My Carpe Diem

“Ayer ya paso mi Cristo. Mañana quisas no vendra, ayudame hoy yo quiero vivir un dia a la vez” (Los).

In English this translates as, “Yesterday has passed, my Christ. Tomorrow, perhaps, may never come. Help me today; I want to live one day at a time.” This is a chorus from my grandfather’s favorite song entitled Un Dia a La Vez (One Day at a Time). My grandfather recently passed away in spring 2008, and I have to honestly admit that when he passed he took a big part of me with him.

My grandparents were seasonal migrant farm workers, meaning they worked through all four seasons and traveled to and from different states to wherever work could be found. My grandpa had ten children to provide for as well as his wife. Being in their situation of traveling with the entire family to and from different states every season, the stress of worrying about where and what his family would become could ultimately end a person’s well being. But not for my grandfather. He knew the past stayed in the past, and worrying about the future or tomorrow could only bring more worry. In reality it did not matter because no one is promised tomorrow, and tomorrow may never come. The only thing that was important was the day right in front of him. It was the only thing that mattered and also what he was able to do in that one day. He lived his life by trying to take advantage of every minute of that day. In a happy ending, my grandfather was finally able to settle his family home in Northern California.

My carpe diem is to live one day at a time—living life for today, appreciating it, being grateful for it, and taking advantage of living.

Work Cited

Carpe Diem

Remember what it was like when you were a child? Back when there were no stressors in your life. Before the emails, texts and instant messaging. Before the nine to five, the car notes and the mortgage payments. Take a moment and close your eyes and recall those moments when you felt free, careless and innocent. Remember the thrill of riding on the swings at the playground, your hair whipping in the wind, the feeling of your stomach dropping as you accelerated forward reaching to the highest point, the sun gleaming over your face causing you to squint just before the earth quickly pulled you back into the opposite direction. Doesn’t it make you feel good thinking about it? Don’t you want to feel that again?

We are living in a fast paced society—fast food, fast cars, fast everything. It is important we step out of the fast lane and readjust our priorities. We are not getting any younger. Life is passing us by and we need to break from our routine robotic lives we’re currently living in and live for ourselves! Inhale that cool crisp winter air! Take the day off and do what YOU enjoy doing! Gather your friends and take a road trip, buy that new book everyone has been talking about, take up that class at the gym you have been wanting to sign up for, catch an early matinee movie when no one else is there so you can have the theater all to yourself and if you dare—grab your passport and explore a foreign country. I hear it’s snowing in Paris this time of the year.

So what are you waiting for? Seize the day! Get out there and take it, it’s yours.
Seize the Run

How many miles will my feet take me today? A lot of it depends on how far I need them to. Many people wake in the morning not wanting to face the day. They roll over in bed, and think about all the obstacles before them. The day is just another in a stream of many, not much different than the last. The only thing many people look forward to is the relief found at the end of the work day on a barstool. Running is my happy hour.

I started this addiction about a year and a half ago. When I joined the gym for the first time a month before my 36th birthday, the treadmill pulled me like a magnet to it. When I first got on I was winded after half a mile. I started setting running goals. Could I run one whole mile without stopping? After a month I was up to three miles and really started to love it. After a few months, I started running outside and that is where something clicked in me. As my feet hit the pavement and there was no one but me, and my thoughts I began to change my life. After only four months of running I ran my first half marathon. When I crossed the finish line I was completely overcome with emotion. For the first time in my life I set my mind to finish something, and I actually did.

Running is now a part of my life. It’s what motivates me. It heals me. It gets me out into the world. While running I realized I wanted to go back to school and have a career. I spent many years having panic attacks; I didn’t drive or do much of anything else outside of my home. I thought my story was written.

Running has helped clear my head and see that there is so much left to accomplish. I’m no longer just a spectator on the sidelines, I’m a runner!

Carpe Nocturne... Seize the Night

Many people have either heard the saying or have used the saying “Carpe Diem,” which means to seize the day. Yet there is another saying that is just as strong and it is starting to make itself known, Carpe Nocturne, which means “to seize the night.” Those who are familiar with the saying will joke, saying that they can get more done after dark than most people can get done all day long.

Even though this saying is not well known, there are more and more people starting to take the night more seriously than before, especially for those that are either going to school or are working more than one job. For the students, they find that it is easier for them to get their studying done in the evening, after the dinner is over and a lot of people are either gone to bed or have found other things to do. The quietness of the night allows them the ability to get their homework done or to get some of the housework completed that was not finished during the day.

With the peace of the night, comes the ability to concentrate and complete goals that were set during the light of day. As others turn in for the night, those that embrace ‘Carpe Nocturne’ will venture out and complete the unfinished work that needs to be done. From road work to traveling, more and more people are using the night to its best advantage. Think about what you can do after the sun goes down.
I used to wake up at seven in the morning to meditate. During my junior year in high school, I wanted to calm down my anger problem and love life. Others might see it as weird, but it is beautiful. I love sitting on my mat calmly breathing the fresh morning air, while the summer sun rises. I learn to appreciate and see life in a different way. I am not a tree hugger, but I do love going green and helping out in ways I can. When I am meditating, everything I want out is blocked out. I believe the mind is strong. One time I was sick and felt like I caught the flu, so I started meditating. I imagined I was in Thailand walking around the wilderness exploring. At one point I was bungee jumping. I even added the sunny weather with a cool, warm breeze. I also added my relatives and their laughter; I was happy. After I meditated, the pain in my head disappeared and my body temperature went down. I thought it was weird; it was my first time trying to meditate during a headache. It was nice how I blocked out all the pain. If only everyone can see and feel what I did when I meditated. I became more creative and appreciative. One day when my schedule is more settled, I will go back to meditating, maybe during spring.
It is another early morning. Earl wakes up, wipes the sleep from his eyes, sad that his world of dreams disappeared with the sound of the alarm clock. He showers quickly, puts on his shirt (he always has a problem buttoning the sleeves) and a plain tie. His boss hates anything out of the ordinary. Finally, he ties up his uncomfortable dress shoes, which don’t matter much when a desk in a cubicle is your daily destination. His breakfast consists of cold cereal, instant coffee, and a look at the front page of the paper. Before his daughter wakes up, he is out the door. A kiss and warming smile from his soon to be wife is the only thing that keeps him going. Next Earl commutes three hours to San Francisco, battling traffic, tolls, and the occasional urge to drive himself off the bridge and finally be free.

Earl arrives at the office with five minutes to spare, but the only parking is at the top of the garage. He is ten minutes late. A stack of papers awaits him on his cubicle desk. Unlike a corner office job, he has no secretary to help with petty letters from angry customers wanting refunds on things that cost less than the stamps used to send the letter. His boss walks by laughing and smiling with the new intern, and he gives Earl a nod. He would say hi but doesn’t know Earl’s name. Today is Earl’s daughter’s first basketball game, but he is stuck working toward a perpetual future.

A smile that matches his fiancée’s in-the-morning-goodbye comes over his face. He types a quick letter, walks to his boss’s office, and leaves it on the desk. He then goes back to the top of the parking garage, using only the stairs to give him time to think. He gets to the car, puts the key in the ignition, and finally becomes a father.
Be wise, strain the wine, and scale back your long hopes to a short period. While we speak, envious time will have {already} fled. Seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the future.

—HORACE.

Enjoy yourself. It's later than you think.

—CHINESE PROVERB

We cannot waste time. We can only waste ourselves.

—GEORGE M. ADAMS

Most of us spend our lives as if we had another one in the bank.

—BEN IRWIN

Use your health, even to the point of wearing it out. That is what it is for. Spend all you have before you die; do not outlive yourself.

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

If I could only remember that the days were, not bricks to be laid row on row, to be built into a solid house, where one might dwell in safety and peace, but only food for the fires of the heart.

—EDMUND WILSON

What would be the use of immortality to a person who cannot use well a half an hour.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Let us endeavor to live so that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.

—MARK TWAIN

Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop to look around once in a while you could miss it.

—FROM THE MOVIE FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF

Why must conversions always come so late? Why do people always apologize to corpses?

—DAVID BRIN

How did it get so late so soon?
It's night before it's afternoon.
December is here before it's June.
My goodness how the time has flown.
How did it get so late so soon?

—DR. SEUSS

The word "now" is like a bomb through the window, and it ticks.

—ARTHUR MILLER, AFTER THE FALL, 1964

I would I could stand on a busy corner, hat in hand, and beg people to throw me all their wasted hours.

—BERNARD BERENSON
Artist Bios

Umar Abdullah is a traveler, thinker, comedian, writer, and social commentator. He was recently crowned the world's most interesting mind by Fool's Collective. Upon graduation from Southern New Hampshire University in May 2011, the former CRC English student intends to embark on a quest to define "Winning!"

Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi is a graduate student of creative writing at the University of California, Davis. He is a former editor of The Santa Clara Review and Greenbelt Review. The poem "Morning Song of Cocktails" was written for Terrance Hayes.

Erynn Burkhalter is a full-time working mom who would rather be at home reading children's books. Her childhood ambition was to be a writer and Spanish teacher, and that dream was rekindled in a CRC creative writing class. Erynn's writing is mostly inspired by mundane things in everyday life.

Jon R. Conibear I is a single forty-seven-year-old father of two with great aspirations of becoming an environmentalist and a sincere desire to save the world. He is earning his AS in both Geography and Environmental Studies and Sustainability. He is also a US Army Veteran with intentions of continuing his education at a four-year school.

Julie Cosgrove is a CRC student.

Lisa Curlee is a fun-loving mother of four wonderful children, and a brand new granddaughter. She always carries a positive outlook on life, saying "life's too short not to." She has dedicated fourteen years to emergency medicine, tending to the sick and injured within the local communities. Her motto is: when life knocks you down, just roll over and look at the stars.

Kimberly Guerrero, who was born and raised in San Diego, moved to Sacramento only a few years ago. She will be receiving her AA in English this spring and will be transferring from CRC to Sacramento State this fall. This is the first time she has dared to share her poems and is more than thrilled that her poems will be printed in the Cosumnes River Journal.


Andrew Hooper is a controversial, award-winning writer and filmmaker based in Sacramento, CA, with over twelve years of experience inking stories, shooting movies, composing music, and taking still photography. See more of his work at: www.andrewhooper.net

Joaquin R. Jimenez Jr., born and educated in Sacramento, is a self-taught artist with the touch of his father's perfection. He furthered his education by taking several art classes to master multiple media. He served CRC for eleven years as a proud and dedicated employee. Now he ventures beyond the campus grounds to further his education.

William V. Karns was an adjunct at CRC from 1975 to 1981, when Bill became a full-time English instructor, later serving as English Department chair, CRC Senate President, and District Senate President. In 1992 he became the Dean of Humanities and Social Science, and in 1996, the Vice President for Instruction and Student Learning. In 2007 he left CRC to be the LRCCD Vice Chancellor of Education and Technology.

Ludchalina Ketkhenesa is a part-time student majoring in Human Services at CRC. She also works full time as a home visitor for the Sacramento Children’s Home Birth and Beyond Program. Ludchalina’s main interests are social services, history, art and traveling. She lives in Sacramento with her two daughters.
Jameson Magdaleno is a native son of Sacramento, but he also resided for seven years in a south Los Angeles suburb called Norwalk. A self-taught writer, his narrative is gritty and unapologetic, reflecting the reality of the streets and the experiences that molded him. This is his first published work.

Osias Magaoay was born in 1991 and raised in Sacramento, California. His ethnic background is Filipino, Guamanian, and Chinese. Inspired by his General Practitioners, he plans to transfer to UC Berkeley under the study of Molecular and Cellular Biology to one day become an anesthesiologist.

Michelle Martinez has been doing photography for five years. She says: “I inherited an eye for photography from my grandfather and this led me to pursue a career in photography. I started my training through classes at CRC photography department. Since then, I have been published in Sacramento Magazine and my love of traveling has giving me many opportunities to shoot different locations around the world.”

Paul McCormick is a student at CRC. He will be attending Sacramento State University next Fall. He has grown up in Wilton, CA, with the exception of living in New Zealand for one and a half years as a child. He enjoys drawing, reading, and writing short stories.

Jeff McCrory spends his free time writing fiction and blogging under the pseudonym Mr. Knowcebo. If he were independently wealthy, he would spend his days identifying flowers and composing haiku, but as it is he has a day job as a social worker. He lives in Carmichael with his family.

Martin W. McIlroy is a California Certified Engineering Geologist who pursues photography and ice hockey as hobbies. When not behind the camera or on the ice, Martin is helping counties and local agencies with their bridge and transportation projects. He also volunteers in his local community with neighborhood non-profit organizations.

Mark McMillen, twenty, is a political science major at CRC. He has adamantly pursued writing as a creative outlet since his early teens and is currently writing his second novel. He plans on transferring to UC Berkeley in the next few semesters to earn his BA in Political Science.

Alexis Mendoza has been attending CRC for two years. She plans on transferring to UC Davis fall 2012. She possibly wants to major in Chicano Studies but is still undecided. She enjoys swimming, cooking, and spending time with her family.

Tinashe Muchuri works and lives in Harare and has performed at festivals in Zimbabwe and in the Southern Africa region. His poetry appears in magazines like Illuminations, Rattlesnake Review, Warwick Review, and last issue of this magazine. He also appears in anthologies like War against War, Defiled Sacredness, Daybreak, State of the Nation: Zimbabwe contemporary poetry and Jakwara reNhetembo. He is a regular writer with Win-Zimbabwe.blogspot.

Brenda Nguyen is a happily married, mother of three who lives in Elk Grove. She attends CRC and plans to transfer to the RN program at Sacramento City College.

Julia Nguyen is a current CRC student studying to transfer to UC Davis where she will major in Animal Science and minor in Anthropology & International Agricultural Development. She enjoys baking, sleeping, surfing the internet, and spending time with awesome people. She asks that you please don’t pity her for her past; other than a few things, life is pretty good!

Alexander Noble, aged twenty-two years, is an aspiring young writer currently in attendance at California State University of Long Beach. His work is inspired by a diverse assortment of authors including Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, Denis Johnson, and many others.

Meg Peter received her degree in Visual Arts from University of San Diego in 2008. Currently she teaches art at Public School 7 in Oak Park. Her photography has been on display at the Sacramento City Hall, as part of A Day in the Life Project 2009.

Jennifer O’Neill Pickering is an award winning artist, a poet and teacher living in Sacramento. She has two books of poetry: Poems with the Element of Water and Mandalas: A Personal Journey. Jennifer studied art and writing at the State University of New York at Buffalo and has an MA in Studio Art from California State University, Sacramento. She’s taught art and or poetry workshops at St. John’s Shelter for Women and Children, CRC, the Crocker Art Gallery, and in the Sacramento Public Libraries. Her poem, “I Am the Creek,” is included in the Sacramento site-specific sculpture, Open Circle.
Danyen Powell, Davis, CA has had poems in Brevities, Pudding Magazine, The Poets’ Guild, Poetry Depth Quarterly, Chysanthemum, Rattlesnake Review, The Sacramento Anthology: One Hundred Poems and elsewhere. His chapbooks are: Anvil (Rattle Snake Press, 2004) and Blue Sky Flies Out (Rattlesnake Press, 2008). He is also the facilitator for The Sacramento Poetry Center’s weekly Tuesday night workshop (for over eleven years) and is an active docent for Sacramento’s Crocker Art Museum.

C.L. Quigley grew up in the capital of Nevada, where she began writing in the sagebrush at a very young age. She now rides her bicycle through tiny Northern California towns, making her abode near Lassen Volcanic National Park, and she spends summers working as a professional fire lookout.

Dianne Rose, of Dianne Kay Photography, resides in Sacramento and is currently attending CRC. After seeing one of her photos as a mural on the wall at a local golf course Dianne decided it was time to pursue photography which has always been a love of hers. Dianne is inspired by other great photographers like Henry Cartier-Bresson and Alfred Eisenstaedt in capturing the decisive moment in creating a great photo.

Chai Saetern is twenty years old and came to America from Thailand when she was a few months old. She always has been interested in culture. CRC has helped her a lot in discovering what she wants to do. Being a business major, she hopes one day she can have a business that can help bring people together to learn.

Jennifer Springman was born in Idaho, has lived in North Carolina, Colorado, Utah, and has lived in California for about seven years. She loves literature in all its forms. Some of her favorite books include The Divine Comedy, Lord of the Flies, Lolita, and anything by Ray Bradbury. She hopes to pursue a career in copy editing or technical writing and to write a novel someday.

Kelsey Stegner is a full time mom, wife, student, and employee. She is majoring in English and hopes to become a professor someday. She would like to thank her mom and dad, her husband Eric and their six children for all the support she has gotten to pursue her dreams.

Sometime in the 1990s Frank Taber began writing poetry. Although some of his poems have been published and some have won (small) prizes, most of them sit on his desk and gather dust. On several occasions he has read poetry in public and he has helped judge a few poetry contests. Under pressure he may also admit to playing the saxophone and that he lives in Sacramento. Frank had a stroke on September 5, 2006.

Peter Tunison describes himself:
“old man, architects degree, two years of photography, former Peace Corps volunteer and USAID contractor, present husband, father, etc. US Air Force officer in a desk job, gets out to take pictures frequently, just carries a camera everywhere.”

Ray Weisberg is a business major who recently got accepted to UC Davis after two years at CRC. Throughout high school he played basketball, and pretended every day was one Ferris Bueller would be proud to recall. After graduating he became a formal dining server and perfected his prosthetic tone and white collar demeanor. Other than that he is a typical twenty-one-year-old who recently discovered a passion for writing.

Jack Vu is a CRC student.

Mary Zeppa’s poems have appeared in a variety of print and on-line journals, including Perihelion, Switched-on Gutenberg, Zone 3, The New York Quarterly and Permafrost, and in several anthologies. She is the author of two chapbooks, Little Ship of Blessing and The Battered Bride Overture. Zeppa, also a singer and lyricist, is a twenty-year veteran of the a cappella quintet Cherry Fizz.