

FUGUE



Michael Tsai

Priscilla Long

and Lisa Roullard



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Greg Ames

Curtis Bauer

Steve Dunn

Alice Fogel

Susan Lewis

Priscilla Long

Lisa Roullard

Pat Temple

Michael Tsai

Rosebud Tsvi

Winter 2002

FUGUE

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FUGUE

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Letter from the Editor Winter 2002

Whew. This fall has been a whirlwind, and I'm happy just to be into the spring unscathed and intact. What with working the tough corners of our theses, sprinting across campus to class in the cold frost of a Moscow morning, or sitting with our peers poring over a possible manuscript, this fall turned out hectic. But nonetheless, rewarding.

Reflecting a bit on the fall semester, I find myself more and more convinced that the system we've put in place for *Fugue* will carry us into the future. More on the future later. For now, acknowledgements for the hard work put into the Winter Issue #24 are in order. First, the design of the University's Printing and Design was invaluable, and Stuart Hierschbiel has proved to be an incredibly organized resource. Secondly, the editors helped create a sense of involvement with the members of their respective jury boards, something I'm proud of. Jessamyn, our poetry editor, has an unflagging sense of craft—it is due to her guidance that the poems in this issue are of such high quality, even in light of reduced submissions. I don't blush when I say that I trust her decisions completely. The new genre editor in non-fiction, a position created this fall, is Taya Noland. Despite a small (but growing) pool of work to choose from, she and the non-fiction board have picked what I believe to be an important and original piece of personal essay. Again, I have complete trust in Taya and the non-fiction board. Finally, but certainly not to be forgotten, comes the fiction board. Paul has done a remarkable job of nurturing a board that had an influx of many new members. The board, of which I'm also a part, has grown remarkably in maturity over the last five months, and for that I'm excited about what comes in the years to come. Thirdly, Ron McFarland, our faculty advisor, has had the trust in us to leave much of the decision-making to us, and I personally am in his debt because of the invaluable experience I've gained as part of *Fugue*.

Now, the future of *Fugue*. The Spring issue will be my last as Managing Editor, as I will graduate in May. While in the past, the continuity, at the very least, of the journal has been in some question, this year I'm sure there won't be a lack of interest in the jury boards. Enrollment in the *Fugue* class associated with the journal has risen to include most of the MFA students here and quite a few of the Master's in Arts students. The most exciting thing, in my view, is the extraordinary interest exhibited from the first year students—a trend I can only hope will continue in the future. This mixing of fresh faces and seasoned veterans can only enhance the flavor of *Fugue*.

To end, I am excited to work with everyone and am nothing but hopeful about *Fugue* for the years to come.

Scott McEachern
Managing Editor

Alice Fogel

Starting Small

Amidst such violence as the sky's
with its unshielding cracks, its unwieldy enormity crashing through and
lighting up our bones

amidst its steady, ongoing, thrumming, unrelenting
forever

drumming rain, its laughing erosion of skin and lash, of wooden deck of
river bank or garden edge, of tact

how do the lilies

even the little alyssum
remain sloping upright

neither cowed nor overturned

by such a tumbling downward

of whipping water and wind?

Or the birds unquestioning under their wings
or the squirrels merely paused between two seeds — everything standing
to meet the outcome, the downpour, unrepentant, unafraid?

The rains rope downward

the rains all swing

on the guffaws of air. Alight with random flashings of fire, the raining air
explodes, abstract element

transforming into sound and sense beyond
magnetic fields, electric forces, the friction of heat on frost, of clouds on
high.

In the doorway, envious at the threshold, I will myself
to lean upward into it, like a stem to enter up

into its need to plunge on down

its utter love of release and repeat.

In fact the wild frightens me, although I choose it
although, wet, I step onto the floating grass, catch

my hair on the darkened
bark

of trees that at any second

could split at the seams. I am only human
and falling hard from heaven to earth

the teeming sky

is too much air for me.

I want to start again, small. Tonight

after this storm passes over

let's heave open all the sodden windows and doors

let's switch on the electric lights

one for each room at least, and host

the afternoon's damp aftermath of moths and gnats,

the siren song of mosquitoes wanting only a taste

of what we hold inside, the silent tune of bat food

in search of warmth and salt: their simple greed so pure,

their fragmented plenitude like rain's abundance scattering;

let's listen to their ping and preen breezing in the halls

and pattering on lamps, the din of insects negotiating

the plausible distance from ceiling to floor — so little

they ask of us really, so little we're willing to take.

We Might Be Late

I waited for Hara to head out for his three o'clock before I packed up my things and left the office. I didn't have to. Hara isn't my boss, he's just the guy who sits in the next cubicle. And it's not like he would have said anything, or even thought anything. It was just one of those days when I felt like leaving without anybody noticing.

I smoked a whole cigarette walking from the office to the shuttle stop two blocks away. I walk slowly now, even when I feel like I'm rushing. The shuttle was parked at the stop when I got there. The driver had run inside the McDonald's to use the bathroom. I sat down on one of those sideways seats near the front and I smiled at the young woman sitting across from me. We sat there awkwardly facing each other for several minutes while the bus driver did his thing in the McDonald's. I had a newspaper in my briefcase.

It was a quarter to four when I got home and for a good five-some minutes I stood at the dining room table trying to decide what to do next. Laura would be home in an hour or so. That's why I took off early. To have an hour or so. But I wasn't sure what to do with it. I took a beer from the fridge and started a bath.

I was still in a towel, shaving, when Laura came home. I heard her call my name down the hallway. She was winded. I heard packages. "I'm in here," I said. My voice sounded funny, high. I drew the razor up toward my chin.

"Are we late?" she asked. "I had to stop at the supermarket first. I got us a cake to bring."

"Renee said not to bring anything."

She walked into the bedroom, struggling to undo her top.

“Are we late? I didn’t even see what time it is.”

“What kind of cake?” I asked.

“Did she call? I left a message on her machine. I said we might be late.”

“We’re fine,” I said.

I rinsed my face and leaned in close to the mirror to see if I’d missed anything. I couldn’t remember if I’d brushed my teeth. Laura walked up behind me. She reached around and pinched one of my nipples. “Hello, you,” she said. I was still examining my face for strays. I reached back and squeezed her hip.

“I got you a shirt,” Laura said. She stepped out of her panties and got into the shower. “You don’t have to wear it tonight, but I thought just in case you wanted something. You don’t have to wear it if you don’t want to.” She drew the curtain.

“What kind of cake did you get?” I asked.

I was wearing the shirt when she got out. It was blue and green with tiny square patterns that made my eyes boggle when I stared at them. It looked like it fit, though I was used to a little more breathing room. “Should I tuck this?”

“No need,” Laura said. She opened her towel and flashed me her tits. “It’s just Renee.”

“Renee and *Doug*,” I said, doomsday.

“Yes officer, Renee and Doug. I don’t dress you up just for Renee.”

I suppose we were nervous. It had been some time since the last time, since before they got the new place even. It was silly. We were actually very happy to be going. We loved Renee, and Renee loved us. And we loved each other. We all loved each other. Except Doug, but Doug came later. Doug is what Renee brought back from L.A. Before that it was me and Laura and Renee, the three to be.

On the drive over we passed the mall and we both all of a

sudden remembered Geoffrey. We'd forgotten *leeto Jeffwee*. Laura turned to me and asked if we should pick up a present or something. "Probably," I said, and kept driving.

I kept driving. Laura was somewhere else. She sat quietly in her seat and looked out the window for a long time. Then she was back. "The mirrors were foggy," she said. "In the bathroom. They were all hot and foggy."

"The mirrors were foggy," I said.

Laura turned and looked out the window again, her forehead pressed up hard against the glass.

"One hot bath isn't going to change anything at this point," I said. "I was in and out. It was a hard day. I wanted to relax."

"It's okay," she said.

"I'm wearing the boxers," I said.

"One hot bath isn't going to change anything." I couldn't tell what her tone was. I put my right hand on her lap. We took the correct off-ramp.

"Hey," I said, sounding obvious. "What do you think Renee had to offer up for us to come over?"

Laura straightened herself. "You mean with Doug? I don't know. Maybe a big thing of Black Label and a back rub."

"For starters at least," I said. "And I bet she doesn't even see the remote for a week." We laughed because we wanted to.

The house was just as Renee described: three-bedroom duplex, two-car garage, huge front yard, fruit trees, floodlights, silent alarm, intercom. Through the picture window we could see high ceilings and wood floors. Laura took my arm and we walked to the front door. If either of us had made the slightest move to turn back, the other would have followed, no question. I rang the buzzer.

Renee, Doug and Geoffrey came to the door together. They looked like they'd been waiting. Doug and I shook hands and he slapped my shoulder. He gave me a smile that made

me happy to see him. Renee and Laura hugged. "Oh my God, you guys!" Renee said. Then Renee and I hugged. Strange, I'd forgotten what she felt like.

Laura followed Renee to the deck and Geoffrey watched them from behind the sliding glass door. I wanted to watch, too. Renee had a new hairstyle, stylishly short and swept to one side. Perhaps she'd had it the last time we got together; I couldn't remember. She wore black leggings and a long-sleeved white shirt with wide lapels. It seemed unlikely, looking at her, that she had ever given birth to Geoffrey. The size of the head alone.

I thought Laura looked different standing next to Renee. The way the two of them talked, their movements, it was the same as always. But Laura wasn't the same, and standing there against the railing next to Renee she looked like she was teetering.

"The lot itself was what we cared about," Doug said. "White or red?"

"Red," I said.

"The original structure was shit, but the lot was what mattered." He walked around the bar and bent down. "No shifting, good drainage, the grass had taken. We got an unbelievable rate on the construction loan."

"Kick ass," I said. He stood up, looked at me for a second, then chuckled.

Doug and I sat down at the dining table with two bottles of wine. Doug poured from one and handed me the glass. "Here," he said. "Tell me what you think."

I sipped. What did I know? It tasted like wine. I looked him in the eye and nodded slowly.

"Now this." He handed me a second glass. Different. I could tell that much. I nodded again, quicker this time. I didn't know if I was supposed to sniff it first.

"A good Burgundy is a strange thing," he said. He lifted

his glass at an angle and considered it against the light. "It works every part of your nose and tongue. Just one small sip and you can taste apples, ammonia, currant, licorice, grass, shit, what have you. Can you taste that?"

I sniffed. I sipped and swished. It tasted like wine.

Doug looked suddenly disinterested. He swiveled away from me and crossed his arms across his chest. "Aw, I'm just foolin' with you," he said. "The first one's a cab. The second one's a pinot. Not even the same ballpark as burgundy. I'm only fooling."

Laura and Geoffrey joined us at the table while Renee went to the kitchen to check on dinner. I handed Laura the glass I was drinking from and stood up. "It's not burgundy," I said. I poured two more glasses and went into the kitchen.

Renee was in the middle of a salad. There were walnuts and oranges and some kind of crumbly cheese. I handed her a glass.

Renee took a sip and continued chopping or crumbling or whatever she was doing. I wondered where the awkwardness was coming from. Had it been that long? What did we used to talk about? Nothing. And now we had to talk about something. How?

"It's not Burgundy," I said.

"So," she said. "No luck yet." She and Laura had gotten right to the point.

"No, no luck," I said. "We're still trying. If it happens, it happens. We're prepared either way."

Renee took another sip. Then another. "Well," she said, "we know it's not you, at least?" She smiled. "Does Laura know?"

"Of course not," I said, lowering my voice. "It could still be me. You never know. I take hot baths."

Renee turned away from the sink and put her head against my chest. She hugged me with one arm. "I'm shutting up

now.”

I took the wooden bowl with the salad outside to the dining table. We all stood up while Geoffrey decided where he was going to sit. It was surreal. The dinner and the child and the house. Since when did Renee put oranges in salad?

“Hey, is this where the soundtrack kicks in?” Laura was on her second glass. She picked up a salad spoon and started grooving side to side. “Is this where we dance around the table and sing ‘Ain’t No Mountain?’” She cackled and danced. She and Renee bumped hips.

“God,” Renee said, laughing. “I fucking hate Motown.”

We picked at the salad and finished a bottle of white. It wasn’t Chardonnay. “ABC,” Doug said flatly. “Anything But fucking Chardonnay.” Then Renee came out with the game hens. She’d stuffed them with apricot and wild rice and tied the stubby little legs with string. Geoffrey screamed.

“They’re like chicken,” Renee said. “Just like little chickens.”

“I don’t want a little chicken,” Geoffrey whined.

Renee leaned over and whispered something in his ear. His face crumpled. “No, I don’t want to.” Tears streamed. “No, I don’t like them.” Doug lifted Geoffrey onto his lap.

“Trust me,” Renee told Laura. “You aren’t missing a thing.” Doug made a noise with his nose but Renee didn’t respond. We finished a bottle of Gewürztraminer and picked at the hens for an hour.

“Renee says you’ve got yourself an office job now.”

“Insurance,” I said. “One year next month.”

“No more playing at the club,” he said.

“Not at the moment.” I always hated Doug.

“Not going to be the next Grant Greene.”

“Doesn’t look like it,” I said.

After dinner, we moved to the living room. Renee opened a bottle of port and Doug took Geoffrey upstairs for his bath. They were gone for almost an hour.

"I think he's waiting for us to leave," Laura said. Then she whispered in my ear, "New lawnmower." I didn't get it. "Doug gets a new lawnmower," she whispered, louder. "That's what he gets for tonight. Big old Lawn Master." Her head rolled on my shoulder as she laughed.

"What's so funny?" Renee asked. She stretched herself alongside the leather sofa and propped her head up on one hand.

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing's funny." I felt bad all of a sudden. Renee was out of the joke. Somewhere along the line we three had become two. Maybe this had happened a long time ago and I only now realized it. We were two and they were two.

"You got any smokes?" I asked.

Upstairs we could hear the bath water draining. Renee put on a Joao Gilberto CD, then later an old one from Tom Waits. *Said roar, roar, the thunder and the roar.* I rolled onto my back and tapped out the beat on my chest. *Son of a bitch is never coming back here no more.*

"You guys," Renee said. "Oh my God, you guys. You know it's been, like, forever. I miss you guys so much. You wouldn't believe how fast time goes once you have...."

Laura and I were lying perpendicular across the rug, her head just above my waist. I looked over at Renee. She was pressing her empty glass to her cheek.

"Oh you guys," she said. "I'm so sorry. I'm babbling. I have kids on the brain. My God, the kids you're going to have. God, I totally hope you guys have kids. It would be just so, like, *so*, y'know. You guys love Geoffrey, don't you? Oh my God, I love him so much, you can't imagine. But, sometimes, oh my God, sometimes he's just such a little fucker."

Doug came down the stairwell. Loudly. Laura reached over and clutched Renee's shoulder. Shut up now. I got up to pour Doug a glass but he waved me off. "That's enough for tonight," he said. "It's late."

"Whips and chains," I whispered to Laura. Loudly.

"Anal sex," she answered. We laughed.

"You guys," Renee said, irritated now. Sitting up now. "What's up? What's the joke?"

"No joke," I said. "No joke at all."

We sat there quiet for a while. Laura refilled our glasses. "Hey," she said. "Hey, we have cake. I brought a cake."

"Cake!" I said.

"What kind of cake?" Doug asked.

"Supermarket cake," Renee said. She went to the kitchen.

The cake was bad. It was bad supermarket cake and Laura was very quiet. Doug left his plate untouched on his lap; he looked at it from a distance. He looked at his watch.

"So Laura," Renee said. She leaned forward and smiled sweetly. "What happens next. If you start running out of time, I mean. If nothing happens naturally."

Laura turned her earring.

"There's medication that we can try if we want to go that route," I said, finally. "If not, our insurance covers us for one go at in vitro. But that's all down the line yet. Right now..." I heard my voice turning and it felt good. "Right now I think we'll just keep fucking in vain, see how that goes."

Doug shook his head and we all sat there quiet again. Renee scratched at her arm. I looked in my glass but it was empty. We all rose.

On the drive home, Laura took off her seatbelt and laid her head on my lap. I turned the radio up and concentrated on the lights and the lines. At home, we stumbled through the door, shedding clothes on the way to the bedroom. I fell onto the bed and closed my eyes. Laura went to the bathroom and

I heard the faucet in the tub turn on. A minute later, she came to the room dragging a towel beneath her feet. She turned off the light and got into bed. "Clean feet," she said.

My skin was hot, so I reached up and opened the jalousies. A light breeze lifted the curtains and we watched them flap slowly above us. Laura nestled against my neck and rubbed the tops of her feet against my legs. I reached over and pulled her closer, and closer still. "I liked the cake," I said. And we lay there in the darkness holding tightly to each other, to this love that bears us nothing.

Priscilla Long

Banjo: Six Tunes for Old Time's Sake

Note: Traditional old-time banjo tunes have two parts: a low part (a) and a high part (b). All song lines quoted are traditional except “You had some but you ain’t getting no more” (T’en a eu, mais T’e n’auras plus) which is a Dewey Balfa tune published by Balfa-Flat Town Music/Swallow Records, and reprinted by kind permission.

Shady Grove

*Once I had an old banjo.
The strings were made of twine.*

a.

My banjo had gut strings. A skin head. Danny, you may remember it. Not a crass, high-wired chrome-plated amphetamine-pumped flashy bad-ass bluegrass banjo. Once I had an *old banjo*, a clawhammer banjo with a skin head the size of a shoofly pie. *The only tune that it could play was trouble on my mind.* Oh — and *Cripple Creek*. It was a plunk and knock banjo, a clucker that played *Cluck Ole Hen* pretty good. It sounded more like a branch tapping a window in a storm than any more downtown sort of sound. It could be, Danny, that you will remember a different banjo. It could be that this banjo I am remembering is a cross between the banjo I once had and the banjo I once wanted. Keep in mind, old friend, that memoir is suspect. Memoir is stories patched together like a patchwork quilt. Memory stitched with artistry. We like it to look pretty good — wherever we get our scraps from.

b.

The banjo I am thinking of stands for an era — 1973 or 1974, Somerville, Massachusetts. You and I were both hangers-on or hangers-in at Rounder Records, me packing records in Somerville and selling records at music festivals for 25-dollars-a-week-plus-peanut butter sandwiches, and you doing I don't remember what. We were lovers, but friends more than lovers. You were a lot younger than me, easygoing and easy, in so many ways. Still, there were things we never spoke about.

Childhood, for one. On the Eastern Shore of Maryland there's an old slave town on the old Chester River where in the 1950's you could stand outside the brick jail house and hear black men pluck banjo tunes.

Let that piece of American history be part of this tune.

Those days, it was my job to iron the school clothes, which I did listening to hillbilly radio. The aspiring longhairs in the Long family would poke fun at me listening to *Your Cheatin' Heart* and *Lovesick Blues* while I ironed sleeves and cuffs and ruffles. Looking back on it, figuring out the dates, it's very likely I was listening to Hank Williams himself, live on the Grand Old Opry, at the height of his fame just before he died in a car crash on New Year's Day, 1953. I was ten years old. You, Danny, were just a newborn. Hank Williams was 29 years old. We were all pretty young at the time.

Hank Williams learned his music from a black street musician named Rufus Payne, known as "Tee-Tot." On the street in Georgiana, Alabama, Hank Williams learned to sing and he learned to drink whiskey.

Drunken Hiccups

*If the ocean was whiskey and I was a duck,
I'd sink to the bottom and never come up.*

a.

Whiskey turns the world to gold. Whiskey puts a glow on the polished wood of the bar, on dim bar lights and glinting bottles, soft-focused like memory or like sepia-toned nineteenth-century photographs. Whiskey turns the world into an old movie, nostalgic and mildly romantic. The band is setting up to play. The bar room is crowded, glowing with good cheer. Mildly inebriated now. Pleasantly drunk now. No one yet barfing at the curb. No one yet spinning down like a top to break a tooth on the broken pavement. The band starts pouring bluegrass into the barroom like an intoxicating wine and they lift the acolytes, groupies, wannabes, and drunks into a swoon. Tonight even the band gets drunk and the lead singer croaks.

The morning after, the bar is barren, crude, stale, dingy-walled. Beer pools in little puddles on the floor. Bar stools barf stuffing. The transported, transfixed, cheering audience in all its various parts is waking up hung over, a few with some man or woman whose name has slipped away in the night, and there is a Sunday to get through and a Monday to get through, and music is a thing of the past, like happiness.

b.

One Sunday evening in the early 1970's, I take the night off and walk to Harvard Square to browse in a bookstore and go to a movie. I love going to the movies by myself. I sit up front, place myself directly within that bright altered world, not a spectator, not a voyeur, but a participant. I stay until the last credit rolls.

On this evening, I get to Harvard Square and run into a friend, a pal younger than myself, really the friend of a friend though we've been in each other's company many times. This person — we might as well call him Tobias since I don't remember his name — confides that he is in possession of some excellent weed. He wonders if I would like to partake.

Yes I would. We withdraw to a park bench secluded by a grove of rhododendrons provided by Harvard University. Tobias gets out his tobacco pouch, removes from it a plastic baggie of dried leaves and stems, and a package of cigarette papers. He rolls a fat marijuana cigarette, takes a deep toke, and hands it to me. I take my toke and we pass it back and forth, meanwhile chatting about his business buying and selling sundries and antiques, working out of a cloth spread on the pavement of various parks and public places. When it's time for the movie to start, Tobias walks me to the Harvard Square Theater and we cheerfully say goodbye.

I pay for my ticket and enter the dark theater and take a seat second row from the front, three seats in from the aisle. The previews run and then the movie begins. I sit in the dark, gradually feeling heavier and heavier, as if my body had surreptitiously gained 300 pounds or had become, at some point when I was not paying attention, a building. I am completely immobilized by my new bulk and weight. I cannot move a finger or a toe.

At the same time I float to the ceiling. I understand distinctly, but as if observing someone else, that this is a social emergency. If I wait until the end of the movie to get up, the chances are excellent that I will be unable to move, followed by an embarrassing scene with an usher or janitor, as it were.

I begin inserting the phrase *as it were* into each of my thoughts. It is necessary, *as it were*, to rise and leave the theater at once, because if not now, *as it were*, never. I may be stoned ("turned to stone") but I do not like to lose face. I gather my

shoulder bag.

This is an entirely mental action, as it were, because I am clutching the leather strap in my hand, which has not moved. With a violent effort I stand up, move out to the aisle, and float quietly, as it were, out of the theater, looking straight ahead and not minding the stares of the popcorn persons.

Out on the street I can walk pretty good, as it were, but my already weak ability to gauge distance has vacated. I float to the curb with the Sunday night crowd and wait with them for the light to change. I cannot tell which lights attach to which cars, so I am grateful, as it were, for the unwitting assistance of the crowd crossing the street. I cross with them and float along in the direction of my house, about a mile away, as it were.

I cannot ever tell which lights are with which cars, but all the lights are pretty. I develop the excellent, as it were, technique of crossing streets by keeping to the ranks of the other street crossers. I float along flapping my feet. But then I start getting to street corners with no crossers. I wait there for a companion of the crossover to arrive, then I cross with the person crossing. To appear to have a reason to be just standing there, I fumble in my shoulder bag for something. This works very well, as it were, but the closer I get to home, the longer I have to fumble in my bag until somebody appears. Finally I arrive at the busy street — Somerville Avenue — right across from my house. Cars are whizzing by. I wait there for what may be an hour. I am just very patient. I just know somebody will come. Finally somebody does come. Together we cross the street.

I am home. I let myself in, mount the stairs to my second floor apartment. There is my kitchen with its table and yellow tablecloth, with its cast iron skillet hanging on its own nail, with its wooden cupboards and spices and coffee percolator. There is my banjo listing seductively in its kitchen corner. I

pick it up and I play: *Jack o Diamonds, Jack o Diamonds, I know you of old. You robbed all my pockets of silver and gold.*

Sweet Sunny South

*Take me home to the place where I first saw the light.
Take me home to the sweet sunny South.*

a.

The Eastern Shore of Maryland is not the South of course, unless you live there. If you live there, you cannot tell it from the South. Danny, I have no memory of where you were from. Thirty years ago, when we knew each other, I probably never asked you. Now I want to know. Someday I expect we will meet again. When we do I will ask you where you are from and where you went and what your life has been.

I am from the Eastern Shore of Maryland. My best friend Gay lived down on Quaker Neck Landing Road in a renovated chicken coop with tiny rooms built onto it by her father, a carpenter. In the woods not far from the little whitewashed house stood an outhouse with a pond of ordure oozing out the back. Gay had lived in that little house for as long as I had lived down the road, but perhaps the Browns were not natives of the Eastern Shore but had come from some other place, just as we Longs had come from the Pennsylvania Dutch country of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The Browns were Catholics, but not Irish Catholics nor Italian Catholics. That's all I know.

They were the warmest, kindest people I ever knew. Mrs. Brown, round and soft in her apron and warm brown eyes. Barbara, the big sister, was married and lived down the road. She and her sweetheart husband would come to visit, always holding hands. Little Annie was fat. Gay was thin and pretty

with thick curly black hair. Her brother Carl was black-haired and thin and handsome — I had a crush on him. Summer days, Gay and I would walk down Quaker Neck Road through the woods to Quaker Neck Landing and go swimming beside the old wharf. We would saunter back to the house in the late afternoon. Gay's father — lanky and bony — would be sitting in the kitchen, playing his banjo.

Gay died of leukemia when we were 18 and I have never been back. Sometimes I think I made up the part about Mr. Brown playing the banjo. But I don't think so.

b.

Music makes a good home when you can't go home. Music makes a good home when your father is too angry to go near and your husband is busy, preoccupied or else watching the game. Music makes a good religion when the church you grew up in turns out to be more bigoted than faithful and when in any case you are in your raging atheist phase. Music surrounds you and fills you with happiness. Old-time music slakes the thirst of your soul. In those years, Danny, I had a thirsty soul. Odd that old-time fiddle tunes were called the devil's Music. The devil's music makes a good home and a good family with a long genealogy to go with it. We have Doc Boggs and Fred Cockerham and Tommy Jarrell for grandpas. We have Aunt Molly Jackson and Sarah Ogun Gunning and Ola Belle Reed for grandmas. Hazel Dickens is our sister, Joe Val our brother.

A family reunion takes place ever year at the Brandywine Old Time Music Festival at Brandywine, Pennsylvania, not far from where I was born. Every July at Brandywine, banjo pickers and fiddlers and guitar pickers jam on the meadow, jam in the woods, jam beside their tents, jam in the road.

Jam in the parking lot, beside their cars and pickup trucks. Play *Cripple Creek* and *Sally Ann* and *Sally in the Garden* and *Sally Goodin* and *Sandy River Belles* and *Sugar Hill*. Pluck *Cluck Ole Hen*

with the fiddle clucking and the banjo plunking. Jam all day under the trees, jam all night under the stars.

The house of music stands and it rings with an old-time tune. To jam is to enter the house of music, to be at one with the universe. To jam is to return to absolute symbiosis, to a pre-natal state of communion, to be at one with the other pickers behind this hot picker's pickup truck. Jamming, you play tune after tune, the banjo clucking to the sweet plaintive voice of the fiddle. A tune lasts a long time and in the pause between tunes there is an exchange of satisfied grunts and small comments as if we had just shared a huge meal, and then on to the next tune. Whenever you want, you retire to your pup tent and crawl into your sleeping bag and let the all night jammers lull you to sleep like a Mama.

You are home and this is an American home. You can march against the war in Vietnam, you can rail against the government, you can petition, and sit down, and get arrested. The instrument you hold is an American instrument. The banjo is the only indigenous American instrument, a fusion of African drum and Scottish drone. The thumb string rings its one high note—the drone—among the showers and sprinkles of other notes. The African drum is played, not only by rapping the knuckles on the skin head, but in the very syncopation of the clawhammer manner of strumming an old-timey banjo.

Down In the Valley

*If you don't love me, love whom you please.
Throw your arms round me, give my heart ease.*

a.

There is a painting hanging in the kitchen of the American

house of old-time music. The painting shows an older black man sitting on a straight back chair with a barefoot boy on his knee. The boy is holding the banjo, and the man is chording for him, high on the neck. It's a simple kitchen, a downhome kitchen. There's a tin coffee pot on the floor, a jug. The colors are umbers and burnt siennas, the warm yellows of evening lamp light. The boy, who has golden brown skin, is strumming—his hand distinctly shows he is playing clawhammer style—and his face holds an expression of utter concentration. The musician's blacker-toned face is different. There is concentration—he is studying the boy's strumming hand—but also tenderness. This is *The Banjo Lesson*. Henry Ossawa Tanner painted it in 1893. A reproduction of *The Banjo Lesson* hung on my kitchen wall for all the years I lived in Somerville, Massachusetts. My kitchen always had two banjos, Tanner's old banjo and my own.

b.

In this scene we are sitting on the steep meadow of a mountain in southern Virginia. You are not here, Danny. I am sitting on a picnic blanket with two of my good-old old-time music friends who have moved from Boston down into Ralph Stanley country. Roads curving through mountains crawling with kudzu, roads twisting through hollows, twisting through coal towns.

We are sitting on our meadow grandstand along with hundreds of others. Whiskey is part of it, beer is part of it, the crowd is growing happier. On the stage set up at the foot of the long slope, bluegrass bands and country bands have been playing since morning.

Now it is dusk, nearly time for the Tom T. Hall band to come on. The sun is dipping behind the mountains. Suddenly we are in dark shadows and the sky behind the mountains is rosy red. Suddenly the crowd stands up and looks up. A black

speck appears high in the sky. Slowly, but very slowly, it gets larger and larger, mutates into an enormous red-winged angel descending with grace and majesty as if at the Second Coming. It is an extravagantly beautiful sight. The skydiver lands with exquisite grace and the crowd sighs with rapture.

Now it is time for the Tom T. Hall band to come on. The band is got up in red suits. They are setting up on the stage, and people start lighting bonfires on the mountain. This is a down home Dickenson County festival, no outsiders here, no water truck, no fire regulations.

Bonfires flare on the mountain. The band begins to play. Night falls black and eerie to the slide of a Nashville guitar. Firelight lights the faces. The twang and yodel mix with the hiss of burning logs. The band plays on and on. They sound exactly like themselves on the radio. They must have played these songs a thousand times.

Late late at night the bonfires are still roaring on the mountain. I leave my friends and wander down to the stage. The band is absolutely drunk, barely standing. Yet the songs continue to sound like country music radio. Groupies are there, pretty girls, young pretty girls and they are going right up onto the stage making dates with the guitar player, the bass player, the banjo.

These boys can play these stale old songs falling down drunk but something tells me these girls will get a piss-poor night of love. Why do they do this to themselves? Why are groupies groupies? There's a story there, but it's not mine to tell.

You Had Some, But You Ain't Getting No More

a.

Back in Cambridge, Mass., we play one old-time tune after

another. Tune after tune after tune. No deviation. We play every Sunday afternoon on Cambridge Common, play like a stuck record. Week follows week. I'm going deaf running a printing press eight hours a day. I'm losing my low notes. Everything gets quieter. I am pissed. I am bored. But I do nothing. I show up at Old Time Music on Cambridge Common every Sunday afternoon.

I make a pretty good sound, but I'm no musician. Why didn't I put on my walking shoes? Why didn't I take piano lessons, or voice, or learn to play the drum? I did nothing. I was loyal, loyal to my roots, loyal to my friends, loyal to nothing. I was stuck and I stayed stuck. Three years went by. Then I quit.

b.

Thirty years later I tune in to the old-time radio station. The same pickers are picking the same old tunes. I am tuning in to 1973. Nothing has changed. I like it. I pick up my old banjo and I play the only tune that it can play: *Ain't nobody's business but my own.*

I'll Fly Away

I'm a free a little bird as I can be.

a.

One night remains in mind. On this night, Danny, we Rounders and Rounder hangers-on are staying at the home of some record company just outside Washington, D.C. — Was it County Records? Rebel Records? During the hot July days we sold traditional-music records on the mall at the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival. Selling records under our concession tent, we soaked up the music of Africa, Louisiana,

Trinidad, Rio, southern Virginia, Harlan County, Lubbock.... At night we returned to this house — Philo Records? — exhausted, but pleased with ourselves. We ate our peanut butter sandwiches, drank our beer.

On the night I am remembering, you and I took our sleeping bags out through a set of French doors into a small walled garden. It was night and the stars were bright and the grass was dark and soft. We could see the constellations through the branches of a crab apple tree. We unrolled our sleeping bags and crawled in and talked a while and then fell to sleep.

b.

A mockingbird woke us from our dreams. Moonlight flooded the garden. The mockingbird was loud! He whistled, clicked, called, warbled, trilled. His set was lengthy, piercing, shrill. He was raucous as a mean ole fiddle, and devilish, blatantly stealing every other bird's tune with an extravagant flourish. The mockingbird may be a thief but there's no mistaking a mockingbird. This one-mockingbird string band vibrated so loud and so long that night itself became a mockingbird. Our dreams careened and rollicked along on that crazy old fiddler's tune. I wonder, Danny, if you remember that mockingbird. I will always remember it, and I will always remember your face.

Lisa Roullard

1912, Trakl by the Circus

The fir trees lift their dark boughs in the wind.
Half-dressed clowns smoke cigars
and take off makeup by the red tent.

An owl shifts his grip on a branch.
The sister runs down the slender path
to the wild river,

her blond hair collecting moon. Barefoot
she wades forward against the fresh current.
Uphill, in the dirt, elephants sleep standing up.

Nearby train tracks disappear, lonely twins.
Reclining on his bedroll, the ringmaster
removes his eye patch.

Lisa Roullard

Night Unhinges Day

so why can't I enter the grit

and not-so-green: storm drains, fog's filigree,
the pointy face of a possum eyeing me

as I stroll the street's black middle?

To simply turn out of myself
isn't something I've ever wished for, but

in the next rush of wind, quick

as fear, it's what I want. See the possum's whiskers
shake? His tail pulse and curl

by the church hedge? Now, to dissolve and be

just this: the tallest tree
in the forest, one wiry hair in a woven

foraging heart.

Here Go Yusef

Here go Yusef. He 14, still believe in Santa Claus. Take choppy little steps when he walk, stumble almost. Scare you when he try to run. His eyeglasses so thick he can almost read the newspaper somebody got opened across the room. Doctor say one day he'll be completely blind. Kids at his school tease him, say he look like one them little flying monkeys on the Wizard of Oz, but since none the monkeys got a name they call Yusef "Toto." He aim the remote control at the tv. Channels rush past so fast they give you a headache. He looking for "Wishbone." Wishbone this little smart-ass terrier dog go back in time to help teach kids history lessons. "Come on, Yusef," I say. "Keep it on one station."

"Be quiet!" he say. He pointing dead at me. Kill-l-l me.

"I'm not playing, Yusef. I'm gonna take that damn remote away from you."

He start changing stations again. He looking dead at me. I reach for the remote, but he fling it across the room. Never even look where he throw it. He too busy smiling at me. Yusef's top front teeth stopped growing about halfway in — look like he still teething. Look like he happy and in pain at the same time.

"That gonna cost you," I tell him.

"Be quiet!" he say. Louder. He point at me again. "You, you" He about to call me a name — soon as he can think of one. "You big kachoo," he finally say. Kachoo. Kill-l-l me. He don't stop. He show me his tongue. Only thing worse than somebody spitting on you is them showing you the spit they gonna use. "Don't do it, Yusef," I warn him. He spit at me anyway. He ain't good at it; most the spit hang from his mouth like a yo-yo string. "How you gonna ever be on 'Wishbone'

acting like that?" I ask him. Yusef dying to be on 'Wishbone.' "Take you back in time to meet some famous people and all you can do is spit on them. I should call him up right now — Wishbone — let him know how you acting."

I pick up the telephone.

"No-o-o!" say Yusef. He get down on his knees, start wiping up spit that ain't even there, squinting around the room like Wishbone watching. When he finished he jump up and try to touch the ceiling with his hand. This Yusef's way of trying to change the subject. He ain't even close, but he act like he touched it. "Your turn, Dad."

"I got a pizza ordered, Yusef," I tell him. I'm lying, but Yusef drive you crazy turning everything into a competition. Who can eat the fastest. Drink the fastest. Walk to the car, get inside the car, put on a seat belt the fastest. Me and Margarite shoulda named him Mattel.

"Double cheese?" he ask.

"Hell, yeah, double cheese," I say, like it something he can always count on.

He squint at the ceiling through his fat glasses. "Just try before you go, Dad. One time."

"I got to go get the pizza, Yusef."

"You never play with me!" he scream. He come at me, clippety clop, act like he trying to bite me, but I keep him away by putting my hand on his head. I call Margarite; she doing Willamena's hair in another room. Here go Margarite. She wear her hair to show all her forehead. I like that in a woman. When she walk it look like she moving into a gentle wind. If she coming toward me it make me feel worthy of something even if I ain't feeling that way. She holding a big comb with some of Willamena's hair sticking out of it.

"Stop, Yusef," she say. Yusef stop. "I'll call the pizza shop, Eddie Lee," she say to me. "Double-cheese?" She must've heard me.

“Hell, yeah, double cheese,” I say, and we both laugh. She kiss me on the cheek while I put on my jacket.

“Don’t be in such a hurry, Eddie Lee,” she tell me. She put her arms around my waist. She hold on me a little longer than she should for this moment and kiss me, like there’s a chance I might not come back.

Me and Margarite’s fault about Yusef, me really, cuz it was me got Margarite started. There, I said it—just like they had me say it. I never minded saying it. I just ain’t the kind of person need a dress rehearsal for blame. Ain’t no need to say it to a room full of strangers before you say it to the person you hurt enough to have to be in that room in the first place. Every time I say I’m sorry or I’m responsible, no matter how much I mean it, it lose a little more genuineness far as I’m concerned — even if I don’t mean it to.

Out on the street I’m a calmer Eddie Lee. I snort, strike snot in the well of my throat and swallow. Nasty, I know, but the taste ground me like it have since the day I give up them rocks. I light a cigarette (Margarite don’t let me smoke in the house). I decide to walk. I ain’t but two blocks off the main street. Driving, you can’t see the jaywalkers stepping in front of your car. Be safer driving on the damn sidewalk sometimes. I turn the corner at the traffic light. Sidewalks crowded with business types, college kids, they hair dyed more colors than a box of crayons, wearing clothes from the Goodwill Store, earrings in their lips, eyebrows, noses and they tongues. They going in and out the new stores and restaurants, replacing each other — like being “kinged” in checkers. In the morning they lined up outside the coffee shops with they own mugs. They ain’t worried about nothing. It ain’t like they know things will turn out okay. It’s like things *have* turned out okay.

Mr. Jenkins, our landlord (he sold us our house) say that during the 40’s, 50’s and early 60’s you hardly saw nothing but black people on these streets. “You walk inside a store,”

he said, "be black people on both sides of the counter. At night, you could crisscross the street going in and out of clubs and not hit them all." Here go Mr. Jenkins. He a short, thick-chested man, a retired longshoreman. He made a killing buying up some houses back during what he call the "Fire Sale." Mr. Jenkins wear gold rimmed eyeglasses, keep a toothpick in his mouth. "You didn't feel like going out," he said. "You could just raise up your window. Same people playing on your records, playing in the clubs. Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday. Didn't make no difference. You could see them on the street during the day. This was the only place they was allowed to stay when they come to town. You didn't think it was nothing special to see them."

Mr. Jenkins slide his toothpick between his teeth like a pool cue and he lining up a shot inside his mouth. "I told everybody I knew, 'Don't take that money,'" he said. "If Mr. Bub Bub (Mr. Jenkins called the white man Mr. Bub Bub) willing to give you that much money, how much do you think these homes really worth?"

"Why didn't you sell?" I asked him.

He take his toothpick out his mouth and grin. "Hell, I was too busy buying up houses myself, Eddie Lee." Kill-l-l me.

I hear Leon call me out before I see him. He sitting on an old sofa out on the sidewalk with some of his friends. It's like they practicing for the day they get pushed out the neighborhood too. "If it's your house!" That's all Leon say to me. That's all he need to say. Here go Leon. Leon the Jenkins' son. Dope fiend. He break both their hearts. Seem like every time I see Leon another one of his teeth missing. Probably confused them for rocks and smoked them. Like I say, Mr. Jenkins sell me and Margarite this house. We couldn't afford it, but he say he want to do something nice for my family. "Have my own fire sale," he say. One morning, Leon catch

me on my way to work, point me out to them same fiends he sitting with now. "There's the nigga stole my house!" he tell them. I look around, pretend I don't know who he talking about. "You, nigga," he say.

"You getting kind of brave, Leon," I say. "You mixing gunpowder with that shit now?"

"My house," say Leon. He point to the house.

"If it's your house," I tell him, "how come I got the keys to the motherfuckah?" I hold up the house keys. I'm half hoping he try to take them. I'm a big man. Take Leon and every dope fiend on the block to move me. For some reason the other fiends start laughing. Leon get upset, start yelling at them. They move on. A few weeks later I see Leon working a county jail street cleaning detail. He stop sweeping, call me out. "If it's your house...." he say, mimicking me. That's all he say. "If it's your house" This is a blank that only us two, me and Leon, can ever fill in — our secret handshake. This the way Leon greet me until the day he die. This also Leon's way of saying he was wrong. My way of saying, when I smile back at him and shake my head, before I say "How it go, Leon?" of saying, no big thing, Leon. From that day on I can see past the dope fiend in Leon. He look too bad, I buy him a cup of coffee, something to eat. He look too cold, I give him one of my old coats. I don't preach to him, but I talk to him just long enough to tell him it ain't too late for him. He thank me, and he mean it, even if he never take my advice. But in those moments, I can see that Leon's the Jenkins' son, that smiling kid in all they picture frames.

Sometime I wish I had the keys to some other house.

One my counselors used to say: "Sobriety is just like war. Except in war you get a day off." He right. That stuff done worse damage than any war. Me and Margarite both working at the bakery when we started. Had a big, red brick house, three stories high, front and backyard. Two cars. Didn't have

no kids — but we having fun trying. We used to laugh at the neighborhood dope fiends, not at they situation, but they comical fiend ways. Grown men and women riding up and down the street all day and night on little bicycles, they knees hitting against the handlebars. Peeking around the street corners and giving hand signs, mumbling, cussing, laughing to theyself. Never catch our stuff that ragged. We was gonna work hard, make something for ourself and our kids.

People think you start because you can't look at yourself. They don't know. You start because you *do* look at yourself. But you keep doing it to *keep* from looking at yourself. I was close to 30 when I started. I was working, since I got out of high school, at the same bakery my daddy and my two brothers, Robert and Carlton, worked. I was a baker, like I am now. Me and this white boy Tommy Bannister work side by side at a big-timer oven. We stick our thumbs inside pie tins crimped with fresh pie dough and deal them into the oven like playing cards. Six rows of three. Tommy do eighteen, I do eighteen. By the time all the oven shelves loaded the first shelf come back baked. We take out the baked piecrusts with three-prong forks. You only got so much time to get them out, the fresh ones in, or you have to push stop the oven. Me and Tommy's personal challenge was to work a whole shift without being the one to stop the oven. Margarite work at the bakery too. I known Margarite ever since kindergarten. I knew I wanted to marry her then, but I waited a year to propose to her. It was fun at first, trying to make a baby, but it was starting to be like work when didn't no baby come. We both wondering what's wrong, then when we find out we don't talk about it enough. Margarite say she want to adopt. I tell her that's like buying a used car. Hurt her feelings, and us, and everybody know us, drop the subject. It's like a bad part of town we don't get caught walking in after dark. One day I stop worrying about the timer button on the oven at work. If I want to slow

it down, I slow it down. Tommy Bannister laugh at first. The next time, he ask me if I'm feeling ok. I feel fine, I tell him. I just don't feel like working so fast no more. We ain't getting paid piecework. I'm feeling sorry for myself, thinking how I'll be pushing timer buttons for 30 more years, and I tell myself I'm glad I don't have a child to tell this to. I decide I need a time-out my own damn self. First hit I knew it was too damn good. But I couldn't wait to hit it again. You give the devil a hit and I swear, he'd recite the Lord's prayer, sell bibles door to door for another one. One hit, I was an instant genius. But it was like doing a calculus test with a magic calculator; then you get the test back and you find out you flunked because wasn't no calculator you was using but a goddamn compass. But you steady arguing with the teacher over your grade. Matter of fact, *you* should be teaching the goddamn class. I talk Margarite into trying. She like being a genius too. Two people never fall so far so fast, not know how they got there, and not care. In a hurry to go nowhere and can't get there fast enough. Everybody see what happening but us. Everybody talk to us. We don't listen. We ain't trying to hide nothing. We go through our savings. We go through loans. We go through friends and family. We don't go to work. We lose everything. We got new friends. The same dope fiends we used to laugh at.

We sitting in our place in the housing projects when Margarite tell me she pregnant. She so skinny you can't even tell. All the time we *trying* to have a baby, nothing happen. Kill-l-l me. I don't know if I'm the father. Sometimes when we short money she get tossed by whoever does. Long as she get paid, I don't care. There, I said it. But any fiend'll tell you that a woman's body instant bank. That's why she can stay out there so long, and if she got a man, him, too. To be honest, I wasn't interested in putting it nowhere. To be honest, I wouldn't even take it out my pants to pee sometime. Say I

was fien'in' and on my way to or from some rocks, I'd just go all down my legs. I don't care. I walk myself dry.

We sitting on the couch, our only furniture. I light two cigarettes (one for Margarite, one for me) on one of the candles we got lit. The power turned off when we don't pay the bill. Crazy shadows on the wall. Those days, everything I look at, I'm thinking one thing: how much it change to cash or rocks. This is how I want Margarite to think too.

"Some people pay good money for a baby, Margarite," I say to her.

"I'm not trying to hear you, Eddie Lee," she say. She know where I'm going but she still take a hit off the pipe.

"You hear what I said, Margarite?"

"I heard you, Eddie Lee, but I swear to God, I'm not trying to hear you."

"Then I'll say it again."

She put her hands over her ears. I burn my hand on her cigarette taking them off. Her fingers bony as pencils. "You gonna listen to me, Margarite."

"No, Eddie Lee," she say. "I'm not listening to no talk about selling my baby."

"Then you a fool," I say.

"For not selling my baby?" she say. Her mouth wide open.

"Hell, yeah, you a fool," I tell her. "I seen people on television pay thousands a dollars for a goddamn doll. Think what they pay for a real baby. They ain't got to push on no belly button to make it talk or make it cry. It can do all that on its own. If it a girl we name it Barbie," I say. "If it a boy, we call that nigga Ken or Kenyatta. That'll help jack the price up."

"You turn into a monster, Eddie Lee!" she scream. "You turn into a monster!"

And she right. But I'm chasing that rock. And I need her to chase it with me. I show her my behind and smack it. "Then

just color my black ass Godzilla, Margarite,” I tell her.

“I will not turn into a monster, Eddie Lee,” she say. She shaking her head like she trying to convince herself.

“That already done,” I tell her. “You Mrs. Godzilla.” I laugh. It seem pretty funny to me. Mr. and Mrs. Godzilla.

Maybe that the start of it: the end. Even though she ball up on the couch, close her eyes and hold her cigarette away from herself. Even though she take the pipe when I fill it up, she keep on saying, “I will not let you turn me into a monster, Eddie Lee. I will not let you turn me into a monster, Eddie Lee.”

We name the baby Yusef. He got our rock in him. It don't bother me. That's the way that rock make you feel. Like it your first and only child, and it want you to give it, and nothing else, all your attention. The county send Yusef to live in a foster home. Later a judge send him to live with Margarite's people. Me and Margarite not welcome there except to visit Yusef twice a month if we give 24 hour notice. Doctors say Yusef slow. Slow to crawl. Slow to hold his head up. Slow to talk. Slow to smile. Never laugh. He took at you like he wonder why you woke him up. He want to go back to sleep — like he wonder where he at, who we are — like this ain't no place, we ain't nobody, he remember. He sure ain't slow to cry. Cry when you pick him up. Do the same thing when you put him down. Margarite don't want to put him down. Sometime I want to throw him against the wall. I can't wait to leave.

Fender Margarite's dad. Here go Fender. He look like Wimpy — from the Popeye cartoon — only he black. For years he used to get rolls of dimes, buy ice cream cones for the neighborhood kids. Two kids he buy ice cream for (two kids Margarite used to babysit) come into the house and kill him for a roll of them dimes. They chasing that rock too. Yusef in the house but they don't bother him. Here go Margarite: her Daddy dead and she not allowed in the family

home. I feed the pipe and hand it to her. “Get that away from me!” she say, like she ain’t ever try it before. She smack the pipe out my hand. I ain’t never hit Margarite in my life but I don’t know what stopped me then, yes I do, I was on my knees trying to find every flake. “Why you do that, Margarite!” I say.

“Keep it away from me, Eddie Lee, and I will keep myself away from it.”

“How you expect to get through this funeral? You need to get what’s yours, girl.” When I go to pick up the pipe she kick it away.

“The only thing I wanted from Fender was for him to be alive and see me doing what I’m doing now,” she say. She standing over me hating on me.

“And that’s important, Margarite,” I said. “But this is business. This is about keeping it all in the family. Maybe get some furniture for the place.”

“And sell it again?”

“What you gonna do?” I say. “Get straight? Then you better get a hit of this now. They don’t allow no rocks in rehab.”

She step on the pipe.

“I swear for God, Margarite, I’m about to knock you the fuck out.”

“I am going to do whatever I have to do to get my baby — our baby — back, and when I do,” she say, “I’m going to go someplace, and except to visit, I don’t want to come back here for a long long time. If you coming with us, you need to stop, too. Or we leaving without you, Eddie Lee. I swear on Fender’s grave, we leaving without you.”

“How you gonna do all that?”

“You’re gonna keep it away from me and I’m gonna stay away from it,” she say nodding to the pipe under her foot. She take her foot off the pipe. I try to light it — like I ain’t heard a word she say. She push it away.

“Bitch, I will knock you out!” I will hit her. Plus she scaring me.

“You losing me, Eddie Lee,” she say.

“Why you acting like this, Margarite?”

“Because if we don’t stop now, Eddie Lee we ain’t never gonna stop. And because my Daddy, Fender, is dead, Eddie Lee. Dead. My baby, our baby, was in that house. And because I am still crazy enough, smart enough to love you and because I love our baby, Yusef, and because I love what our life used to be before all of this. What it still can be.” She pointing at the candles flickering for they life.

“And because I never thought I would have to be afraid of children that I helped raise to manhood.”

“Happen all over, Margarite. Anywhere you go.” I’m trying to keep from sounding pitiful.

“I was taught to love people in this town, Eddie Lee. So were you. Don’t you remember? And for the most part, we got it back, Eddie Lee. Until we started with that,” she say, pointing to my pipe. Then she kiss me on my forehead. “I’ll be at my mama’s,” she say.

“You not allowed inside,” I tell her.

“I’ll sleep on the porch,” she say.

I sit in the middle of the floor. We down to no furniture. I light my pipe and blow the smoke to the ceiling. Do it again. But this shit ain’t working. Margarite’s damn fault. I can’t forget, ignore what she say. I think she left me. Now it hit me like a head-on crash. Feel like my chest is crushed against the steering wheel. I can hardly breathe. All I know is I don’t want to be chasing it alone. I’m alone, I got nobody else to blame. There, I said it — just like they made me say it. I never minded saying it. I don’t need a dress rehearsal for admissions either. No need saying it to a room full of strangers before you say it to the person you hurt enough to have to be in that room in the first place. No matter how many times

you admit it, it loses a little more genuineness. Your actions, after you say it, say it all.

All of a sudden I'm too hot for any human being, sweating, sick to my stomach at the same time. Vomit surprise me. It splash on my socks, soak through, squish between my toes. I never felt so useless, so disgusted with myself. What I become? I keep asking myself. What I become? What I make Margarite become? Yusef. How do I tell him what his Daddy did? I start crying and I can't help from crying and I don't want to help it. I cry so hard the room start to shake. I can't stop, I swear, I can't stop for a long time. You think I'd throw that pipe across the room. But I'm still holding on to it. I lay it down on the floor like it too precious for hands. I got that much respect, fear for it. I snort through my nose and I strike a well of snot. When you a little kid and somebody tell you not to eat your snot, you stop — at least when they around — it seem a shame to spit out something that don't taste half bad and you can make it on your own for free. Somehow the taste of my own snot calm me. It really do. Got a glue aftertaste, like after your throat been sprayed with chloroseptic. Cool and numb, like some it got a trace of rock. To this day, I can manufacture that taste on my own. This the taste that remind me for the rest of my life that rock, that glass pipe, masquerading as my friends, and I can't ever visit them or let them visit me, no more. If I stop for a minute I can stop for another minute and if I can stop for a hour, I tell myself, I can stop for another hour. Twenty four times that mean a whole day, and if I can stop for a day I know I can stop the next day, for a week, a month, a year ... forever.... Maybe Margarite should have left a long time ago. Save all this mad drama. Funny, I'm more afraid of leaving our hometown than stopping. Seem like the only time people leave is if they got ordered to (the military or jail), but I rake up all the leaves of doubt into a pile and let the winds of a last chance blow them away. I'm

about to kick this car door open, free myself from this wreck ... But it already opening. Margarite letting me out. She ain't never left. She crouch in front of me in the vomit. I feel her hand in mine. "You keep it away from me, Eddie Lee and I'll keep it away from you. You hear me, Eddie Lee?" Did I hear her? She just don't know. Once I can get out of it, I'm junking this car for good. "I hear you, Margarite."

Seem like nobody out here *from* here. Seem like everybody get here get set down in a cold drafty room, and even when they move to the fireplace to get warm, don't but a couple tell you they name and where they from, why they here. I wonder how many got stories like me, Margarite and Yusef. Omar one of the friendly ones. Here go Omar. He a baker, like me. Palestinian. Hair as nappy as mine. He greet me above all the noise in his pizza shop. "My friend (Omar roll his r's), Eddie Lee," he say. Kill-l-l me. He look for Yusef. "And my friend, Yusef?" he ask me.

"He at home," I say. "Waiting for 'Wishbone' to come on."

"Ah, 'Wishbone.'" Omar nod. Omar's little boy watch it too, and sometime Omar and Yusef get to talking about Wishbone so long he have to re-heat the pizza. "You will say hello to Yusef for me," Omar tell me. He sprinkle some extra cheese on the pizza for Yusef, box it, slice it, ring me up.

I measure my faith, my trust in the people I see on the street by imagining how they treat Yusef if something happen to me or Margarite. Some black kids — not much older than Yusef — standing outside the record store selling weed. They fly-fishing for customers with they eyes and nods. They know me. They know I know what they doing. They don't try to sell me anything. They call me "Mr. Eddie Lee." They ask about Yusef. I tell them. Somehow I feel Yusef in better hands with the weed sellers than these new people. Own everything, but

dressed all in black like they depressed about it. Run you over with they skateboard for a cup of coffee.

I finish my cigarette and go inside the house. Margarite call from the other room where she finishing Willamena's hair, ask if it's me. I say yeah, but she still come kiss me on the cheek, like she glad I decided to come home. "Pizza here, Yusef," I say. Here go Yusef. He don't even hear me. "Wishbone" on. He sitting too close to the tv, squinting through his thick glasses that one day won't help him. He smiling. His hands folded, like he watching the lottery and need one more number to win. Kill-l-l me. I snort and strike snot. I swallow my past and future all at the same time. I make sure he hear me this time. "Hey, Yusef."

When he look, I jump up and touch the ceiling.

Flesh

I spoke exactly one thousand words
in my life, and worked
the jobs no one wanted
until I died. That day
the cattle were bigger
and rowdier and I
was slower and shrinking
and walked
among them until
the steers crushed my pelvis,
my legs and my chest.

I watched a boy like me,
done with his chores,
sit in the clover and suck
sweet from the stems
and watch dusk fall,
the corn leaves parting
our hair. I see the tan hands
and back, the dropped pants,
the colorless flesh of the man
I would later become
against the cloud white
chest of our neighbor's wife.
The tractor's idle changed
voices to sounds that trickled
into a slump and then shade
which comes back in the seething
onion I press the blade into,
the white makes me weep
like those white breasts
as I stood in the rustling corn.

Cuban Cigars

My husband and I have pulled out all the stops for our daughter's wedding tomorrow. We wanted it to be the most perfect day in her life. We have twenty-two rooms reserved at the Holiday Inn for out-of-town guests. I should be at home getting ready for the rehearsal dinner and checking in with the photographer and the florist. Instead here I sit in a police car filled with cigar smoke waiting for I don't know what, but it can't be good. Flashes of sunlight bounce off my handcuffs and onto the seat in front of me. Just to amuse myself I move them at different angles and watch them change shapes as the cigar smoke swirls through them. If I hold my wrists just so, I can place them on the shoulder of the officer in front of me. Due to the angle of the late afternoon sun's rays, that's as high as they'll go.

It's doubtful that I'll be at the wedding, and it's clear to me now why my mother always called me a drip. I am a drip. I've wasted years trying to change myself to prove her wrong, and it can't be done. I'm like the donkey in the fable who made a fool of himself dressing up and pretending to be a lion. It's a relief to just accept it and give up the fight. So what if I messed up again? What else would you expect from a donkey?

Sitting beside me is someone the policemen refer to as Cigar Man. He's also in handcuffs. The officer who's watching us thinks we're friends, but I've never seen him before in my life.

The cop is a drip too. I bet he got called a few good names by his mother himself, and one of them was busybody. I bet when he got too nosy, she told him to just butt out. He keeps

asking me where I'm from, and I've seen enough TV to know it's none of his business. No one has even read me my Miranda rights. He's hoping I'll say somewhere south of the border so he can get me deported. Maybe I'll hint that I'm from Guatemala next time he asks just to watch him get all happy. Then it'll be my turn to laugh when he finds out I'm from St. Louis.

I told him I'm a teacher, but he doesn't believe me. "I shouldn't even be here," I said. "It's all a mistake."

"Tell it to the judge," he answered. Then he and Cigar Man laughed.

"Mind if I light up?" Cigar Man asked him. At the same time he pulled two Cohibas out of his breast pocket.

"No, I just might do the same, I just might do the same," the policeman repeated. He reached back for one of the cigars and then they settled in.

I asked them not to. "Cigar smoke makes me sick," I said.

"Cheap cigars make you sick," the cop corrected. "Nobody gets sick from a cigar that costs \$200." Then they laughed again.

It's true I'm a teacher. I teach fifth grade at Brady School. I was buying cigars on my way home from work when I got arrested. Now they'll have to get by without the Cuban cigars and me, the mother of the bride, tomorrow at the wedding. Perfect day won't be happening tomorrow.

When we get to the station I'll be allowed to make one phone call, another piece of valuable information I've gleaned from television. I don't know if I should call the groom to tell him that I won't be able to get him the cigars, or my daughter to tell her that I won't be there for my part of the ceremony tomorrow, in which I'm to sit very still while my new son-in-law kisses me on the cheek and hands me a perfect rose. Then my daughter is supposed to kiss his mother and present her with a rose too. I hope they just leave out the mother-in-law

kissing altogether since it's not quite fair if I won't be there for my part.

If this were a TV show, I'd use the call to contact my lawyer, but I don't even know a lawyer, so there you go. Also I need to let Mary Lou know I won't be there for my hair appointment. She gets all bent out of shape when her customers don't show up.

I have this student, Felicia, who wants to be a cheerleader. The whole thing is her fault. If she'd done her homework and turned it in on time, none of this would have happened. There's a cheerleading camp she wants to go to this summer at the middle school, but in order to be eligible to attend a girl has to have at least a C average. When I gave Felicia D's, her father came to school to sweet-talk me into raising them. I had to agree with him, she is capable of doing much better.

"So, Felicia tells me your daughter is about to tie the knot," he suddenly said. "Good cigars are a nice thing to have at a wedding." I was somewhat taken aback. I laughed at him, what did Felicia's D's have to do with cigars or my daughter's wedding?

"Cuban cigars," he said, "can lift that wedding out of the ordinary and change it into something special."

"A cigar's a cigar," I pooh-poohed him.

"Cohibas aren't just cigars," he said. "Fidel Castro smokes Cohibas."

"So?" I knew what he was trying to say. Castro, leader of Cuba, cigar capital of the world, can no doubt smoke whatever he wants to, so Cohibas have to be pretty darned good.

"So, you talk to the groom and watch his reaction when you say Cohibas. I can help you get them at a very good price."

I laughed at him again. It was the first time anyone ever tried to bribe me. It gave me a heady feeling, though I did feel a little hard-nosed. He wasn't asking for much, only C's.

"Well, do yourself a favor, ask him. I'll be back. You have

an opportunity here to be a hero. You don't want to pass it up," he said, and then he winked at me.

He was quite astute to have spotted my vulnerability so quickly. At the moment I was in need of something that would lift me up in the eyes of my daughter and her fiancé. At the family wedding shower I let it slip that the two of them were already cohabiting while I was sitting at the table with the paternal grandmother who gasped and placed her tiny liver-spotted hands on her ample bosom. Everyone was furious with me.

Maybe I made the decision to buy the cigars right away when Felicia's dad said the word hero, though I can't remember because he changed the subject again and asked me if I would sign a petition to protest the new city ordinance outlawing the paleteros with their ice cream pushcarts on our city streets. Maybe it was later when I looked into my son-in-law's brown eyes that have a rim of pale blue circling the irises. My daughter told me that when he's excited the brown sparkles so brightly that you can't even see the blue rims, but it was the first time I'd ever actually seen the blue disappear myself. I wondered how many women had fallen in love with him.

When Felicia's father showed up in the morning, I was ready to talk business.

"I've been thinking," I said. "If I give proper weight to Felicia's fine contributions to our class discussions, I just might be able to give her C's. Can you tell me a little more about the Cohibas?"

To his credit, he kept a straight face. "Of course, I'll give you the address, and you can pick them up after school, and do you have one of those registration slips for cheerleading camp? You and I could just sign it right now, and I'll turn it in at the office on my way out."

I wondered for an instant if I might be making a mistake,

but I had seen the redemption in my son-in-law's eyes. There was no stopping me now. Besides, what was it to me if Felicia went to cheerleading camp? Probably half the girls on the squad didn't deserve to be there anymore than she did.

I decided on three boxes at \$450 cash per box. What's \$1350? Mere peanuts when added to the price of a suburban wedding. We're already in debt up to our ears, so what's another thousand dollars or so?

The address for the cigars, as it turned out, was on Liberty Street, an ordinary appearing house. I drive past it on my way to and from work every day. After school I pulled up at the curb. There was no sign of life. There was an eviction notice posted on the door that said all city services had been cut off and the house was unfit for human habitation. I knocked several times before a wrinkled old lady finally appeared. She was toothless and tiny with a dowager's hump that seemed to double her size.

She escorted me into what must have once been a living room but now had been converted into some kind of a factory or an assembly plant. Cartons were stacked along the walls nearly to the ceiling, and thousands of plastic handles were piled on a huge old dining table where two ancient men continued their work of counting them into bundles without even looking up to see who had come in the door.

The old woman took my money and trudged up the stairs. After several minutes she returned carrying a shabby grocery bag. I peered inside at what seemed to be about three boxes worth of cellophane-wrapped cigars. Along with it, she handed me an envelope of shiny Cohiba bands.

Immediately I became suspicious. "Wait a minute! How do I know these are Cohibas? How do I know they're not some Dominican cigar with Cohiba bands?"

The old woman's body crumpled as if I had punched her, making her hump even more pronounced. Then I realized

she was not looking at me at all, but behind me. I turned to see two policemen walking up the steps with their guns drawn.

"Oh, they're Cohibas all right," one of them said. "Put your hands out. You're under arrest for trafficking in illegal Cuban contraband." He slapped the cuffs on me while his partner proceeded into the house. He said I should turn around and move slowly down the steps and then to his squad car without making trouble. I fought to control my panic. "I'm a teacher," I pleaded. "My daughter is getting married tomorrow. The rehearsal starts in three hours."

"How many cigars did you buy?" he asked.

"Not very many," I lied. "They're only for the wedding party."

He looked inside the grocery bag. "There must be \$1000 worth of cigars in here," he said. "A very big wedding party."

I hated him for his sarcasm.

It didn't take long for the other policeman to exit the house pushing a small wiry man, maybe in his thirties, in front of him. "Meet Cigar Man," the cop announced. "Final distribution point for a million dollar smuggling operation stretching all the way from Havana to Aurora." He nudged his revolver into Cigar Man's side to convince him to get in the car with us and sit down.

Cigar Man was definitely not impressive. He must have been sleeping when they arrested him. His hair looked like turkey feathers. His shirt was unbuttoned, and he was carrying his shoes. He had a tattoo on his left bicep with a Bible resting on a cross. A pair of praying hands holding a rosary were at rest on the Bible.

By then a crowd had gathered in the yard and was spilling over into the street. I saw two girls from my class. Their astonished fingers were pointing at me. I gave them just a tiny wave so as not to show the handcuffs and smiled like it was no big deal.

The crowd continues to grow the longer we sit here. Cops are everywhere. The circling red and blue lights on their squad cars make the people closest to them look like patriotic chameleons.

My girls have a short attention span; a couple of their friends have arrived, and now they're off together doing their cute rhythmic clapping. *Kee, Kee, Kee*, they chant, and their hands move so fast, they're like hummingbird wings.

A narrow clearing is opening in the crowd as if some giant were parting his hair. It appears that the people are separating to let someone through. It's a group of swaggering boys in hooded black sweatshirts. There's Alfredo, he was in my class four years ago. He used to poke pins through the calluses on his hands at reading time. I gave him D's and F's. He and his friends are beginning to chant. "Lock her up! Lock her up!" They want me to go to jail. I should have expected it. Their black sleeves bob up and down, leading the crowd around them. Maybe people are afraid they'll hurt them if they don't join in.

Now my girls have stopped their hand clapping to cheer for me. "Set her free," they counter. "Set her free." Felicia's with them. She looks so cute bouncing around in her blue and white school uniform. No doubt about it, she'll make a fine cheerleader. Now other people are joining them. The innocence of the girls has made them brave. It's like the whole neighborhood has become a giant stadium, and the fans are cheering for me. "They like me," I announce to the car. I wave to the girls again, but this time with enthusiasm. I can't help it; tears ooze from my eyes as if they were melting. No one ever cheered for me before. I have never won a trophy or even a ribbon. There weren't any sports for girls when I was young. I went around wishing I could be a boy just so I could be on a team, any team. I do have my green sash with my Girl Scout badges, but no one cheers when you earn a merit badge.

Who cares if you're good at darning socks?

The cop and Cigar Man sneer; they think I'm crying because I'm sad. I bet no one ever cheered for them either. Someday if they do, then they'll understand.

I hear "La Cucaracha" playing in the distance. Now that the paleteros are gone, an ice cream truck has been showing up in the neighborhood. Its pace is slow and steady, an oversized music box on an asphalt conveyor belt.

It brings me back to reality.

Policemen are coming out of the house now, along with the old people. They're handcuffed just like Cigar Man and me, but their faces remain as indifferent as they were when they sat at the table inside. The police are putting them in squad cars too. Then we begin pulling out. We're like a parade: a paddy wagon, the fire chief's van, an ambulance and six squad cars, including mine. I ask the policeman if he'll roll down the window so I can call out a thank you to my girls. He mutters "Jesus!" under his breath. It doesn't matter. The ice cream truck now has their attention. I watch them running toward it until we turn the corner and they're out of sight.

I sit straight and prideful in the back.

Susan Lewis

Animal Husbandry

consider *intercourse*,

consider *stable*.

Compare and contrast:

— a matter of *course* —

well, come

not *don't stray off*,

a matter of babble,

entendre, entendre —

(don't quack me up.)

The state of everybody's neigh(bores)

(we *must* be more interesting.)

Try your hand in these eddies,

wash me up,

or go with the flow.

Have we differentiated too much

to converse without strain

and commonplace?

Once words rushed the gate,

smiles shaped out to intersect.

All these facts boxing us into these snug cells,

all this too much we know now,

all this becoming not so becoming,

accumulation, accumulation

blocking the current,

a matter of cleansing,
a shock to the systemic,
— unreason the needless

(vernacular vessel):
a matter of keep or shed
(don't try to curry favor with this old mare.)

Is this true or isn't it?
Stalled in this stable, ability.
Nay. Offer not your warm muzzle

unless you mean to
nuzzle me for something buried
in these clogged layers

(contact, contact.)
That's hot stuff coursing there
because you still mooove me.

That we can always change
or ex-, *inter alia*.
One swift kick could

shatter these divisions,
unbar the bruising gamble
of our wonder paths.

Susan Lewis

Picking up the House

Sacrificial litter,
vested laundry in a glass *menage*,

crumbs, crumbs,
a mother simulacrum.

Did you see her house of mirrors?
Did you taste her crunchy blood?

Not another overdose,
not another guise *reflet* to death,

scratched by *blades* of grass, not *leaves*,
barefoot in the

shards of glass, not sheaves,
is that hummingbirds I hear

or only jackhammers,
(a matter of scale or a

smatter of kale, dig re:?)
No poet, what?

Collect my spew
to indigest what I suggest.

You righter, write or wrong —
have you seam my orgasm?

This skin, this soil,
this manic cellular divide;

I've watched you in your window,
I've licked your mannequin,

it's still too stiff.

These colors starve me,

I need you to *amuses my bouche*.
Your *delices* barely out of diapers

and the rest of us drooling in dignity.
Only a child fills us.

A fine, meted-out predicament
to be gorged.

The body, the body must rush
to catch those notes,

they're not connected.
Tell us again how some cells eat music?

Don't pale, scientist,
don't try to leave us now —

you haven't really staid so much
as made us weight.

This music is allusive,
like sand between the toes:

fine stuff even you, illustrative one,
can't hold.

Playing Ping-Pong with Pontius Pilate

In the YMCA sauna, Bill Drucker, a pharmacist, was holding forth on the subject of mutual funds, pros and cons, when the door banged open and an icy blast of air slapped everybody's cheeks. Pontius Pilate strode in, his wool robes shushing against his naked hairy ankles. Father Delmont, who was seated next to me, cinched his soggy white towel at his waist and scurried out of the sauna. Two other guys ran out, too. Pilate insinuated himself between Drucker and me on the wooden bench, and tapped my knee with dirty, callused fingers. "I have been looking for you," he said. "We are on at three, my friend."

He was referring to the YMCA table tennis tournament. Earlier in the day, I had been standing at the bulletin board, anxious to see who I would play in the third round of the tourney. When the results were posted, I shuddered at the name of my opponent.

Pontius Pilate.

"Tough draw," said Brad Thomas, reading the results over my shoulder.

In the tiny, cramped sauna, it was hard to ignore Pilate's presence. He shook his thin body out of his robe and cozied up next to me. The stale stench of athlete's foot and musty wool assaulted my nostrils. Humming what sounded like "Good Day Sunshine," Pilate ladled water over the hot steaming rocks. "Warm enough, friend?" he asked, smiling. Greasy mustache hairs curled down into his mouth. His face was sharp and narrow, like an ax blade covered in moss. Grinning, he uncovered a row of terra cotta stumps for teeth, like broken pottery shards wedged into his gums.

I ignored him. Sweat poured down my cheeks in the

diabolical heat. "Talk to Ed Ramos about those mutual funds, Bill," I said to Bill Drucker over Pilate's head. "He'll tell you what's what. He's a - a financial advisor."

Pilate nodded. "That," he said, "is an important job. I was once the procurator of Judea. It was pretty thankless work, all in all. But like most jobs it had its perks." He smiled. His gaunt face was dry as a parchment scroll. "I sentenced people to death on a whim, things like that. But I find ping-pong a much more soothing activity, don't you? Of course, one must retain something of the executioner's calm concentration, to be truly effective See you at three!" And with that, he strolled out of the sauna, whistling a dirge.

"Don't worry, I'll beat Pilate," I told Bill Drucker.

As the reigning tournament champion, I felt pretty good about my chances. I was the number one seed in the tournament and the best ping-pong player at the Delaware Ave. Y. But the crafty veteran Pilate, mounting a comeback after a layoff of many years, clearly had his sights set on me. He was a darkhorse challenger. Nobody really knew what he was capable of. After all, he had sent Christ to the cross, so he wouldn't hesitate to humiliate me.

I was drenched in sweat. It was twenty minutes to three. I had to admit: I was worried about facing him.

We were scheduled for Table Two in the Tony Carlucci Memorial Room on the second floor. Waiting for Pilate, I mentally reviewed all that I knew about his style. Before each encounter in a round robin, I try to imagine the entire match before I play it. My technique is to think about an opponent's weaknesses, isolate each one, and then figure out how to exploit them. It's called "creative visualization," and it's supposed to translate to success at game time.

This is what I knew. Pilate used an unorthodox variation of a Korean penhold grip. His forehand was crisp and accurate; his backhand confident, reliably defensive. He would

commit very few unforced errors.

By most accounts, Pilate breezed into the third round of the tourney. He was scarcely challenged in his first two matches, although his now-famous rally with Chuckie Smoltz in the second round of the tournament proved that he had astonishing degrees of patience and endurance. Pilate hit seventy-eight consecutive counterdrives to the exact same spot on the table. Expertly snapping his wrist, yawning, he returned everything Chuckie shot at him. Pilate sang a few verses of "Sympathy for the Devil," mimicking Mick Jagger's rooster strut at his end of the table. Chuckie finally snapped and blasted the ball against the wall. "Is there a problem?" Pilate asked, lifting his eyebrows innocently. "Do you have a pie baking in the oven, Chuckie? Is that why you are in such a great hurry to go home?"

Chuckie quickly lost the next three points and the match.

Pilate laughed and ran his hand through his snarled, shoulder-length brown hair and strolled to his chair. "I refuse to make a mistake," he announced, toweling off his unshaved neck and face. "I will keep returning the ball until somebody, not me, makes an unforced error. Eventually, everyone makes a mistake. And I have the patience to wait. Do you, Chuckie?"

Chuckie Smoltz stomped out of the room.

"I guess not. See you next year, my friend!" Pilate called to him.

What can be said about Pilate's footwork? Occasionally, in a tough match, he used a lateral crossover technique that seemed all but impossible in his heavy robes. When performed properly, the crossover is the most graceful way to cover four feet of floor-space quickly. Crossing one dusty sandal quickly behind the other, Pilate could move from the backhand corner to the forehand corner in the blink of an eye.

In short, he had an all-around game, no weaknesses.

Most of the guys at the Y wore lightweight shorts and T-

shirts, sneakers and athletic socks. It can get awfully hot during the summer and there is no AC in the main building. But Pilate didn't seem to notice the heat. He was always dressed in flowing wool robes and sandals. His dirt-crusted toes (black nails jagged, never clipped) poked out beneath the frayed hem of his skirts. An adversary could not monitor Pilate's legs for clues as to which direction he might lean on his returns; therefore, he often baffled his opponents with cross-table winners. There had been a rumor that a dress code would be instituted, banning robes and sandals from match play, but I doubted anything would come of it. If anything, Pilate's attire put him at a disadvantage. No matter how you sliced it, though, he was a formidable opponent.

I sat by my locker and tried to pray, but I felt foolish and hypocritical. I was not a spiritual person. In junior high school, I had scorned all religions. I mocked anyone who pretended to be in contact with God. I told people that I worshipped Satan, although I just wore black T-shirts and quoted Aleister Crowley to my classmates. It gave me an identity. Between 1984 and 1989, I was expelled from three Catholic schools in Buffalo. To me, it was a confirmation. While my buddies were smoking hash behind the Highland plaza, or hanging out with horny girls in the Sheridan projects, I was adding to my record-setting detention record. As an apostle of Lucifer, it was my duty to break down the system from within. I was a loser. Sometimes I snuck a quart of malt liquor into the detention room and drank it while the proctor wasn't looking, hoping to impress my classmates who only thought I was a creep.

One night, after the principal of St. Anthony's told me not to return after Christmas break, the third school to have done so, my father sat on the edge of my bed. He woke me up by pressing his thumb into my neck under my Adam's apple. I felt my windpipe constrict. Frantically I tried to peel his hands off me. "You're a bad kid," he said. "Why can't you stay out

of trouble?" My hands flapped wildly at his wrists. I was lightheaded, terrified. The Scotch on his breath filled my small room like a detonated biological weapon. "You have had everything, so many advantages."

High school blurred by. I isolated. Alone in my bedroom I drank Popov vodka by the fifth. I smoked and snorted whatever at suburban house parties. My parents were fools, I thought. They did not have my best interests in mind. Yet I implicitly trusted every glue sniffer and half-retarded pill popper in Buffalo. One night I swallowed a handful of what somebody said was a kid's mother's Valiums. They were prescription strength anti-diarrheals. I didn't crap for five days. Whatever there was, I put it in my mouth. "Let Nick test it first." But all I really wanted was to drink every day. Eventually, I stopped coming home a few nights a week, or I banged through the back door to find them showered and seated at the breakfast table, staring angrily at me. My father left for work every morning. My mother yelled and threatened and begged me to turn my life around. Did I want to be a bum living on the street? Did I want to throw my life away? But she had her own problems, and she needed me for emotional support, so she refused to recognize who I was becoming. When I was seventeen, I moved out for good.

I got a GED and went to Buff State, where I wore a Slayer T-shirt and doodled pentagrams in the margins of my notebooks. I stomped around campus, highly recognizable with my long unwashed hair, my tattered jean jacket and engineer boots. I was not anti-intellectual. I loved reading. My tiny apartment was filled with books. I devoured Russian novels, essay collections, Nietzsche, anarchist tracts. I wanted to be the smartest drunk in the bar. And once I was able to dictate my own learning, I was much happier. But when I started feeling good, I always sabotaged myself. I got arrested or beaten up. Drinking was no longer a recreation. Every

morning, I drank a shot and a beer. That was breakfast. I hated the happy people anyway. They weren't being honest with themselves, I thought.

Working a dead-end job was for frauds and losers. Every other week, I called in sick at the video store, the bookstore, the liquor store, wherever I was punching the clock, and was indignant each time a boss told me that I was fired. Somehow it always came as a surprise, like emerging from a blackout to find yourself in the emergency room, receiving thirty-nine stitches in your forehead. When they fired me, I pretended that I didn't care. They needed me more than I needed them.

One winter, I rode around in a guy's van delivering books to elementary schools. I humped heavy boxes up icy sidewalks, sweating an awful alcohol stink into my thermal underwear. Thirty bucks a day, under the table. One morning I staggered into the boy's bathroom and violently puked. Nauseous Gulliver down on his knees, hugging the tiny bowl. Two little boys came in and started giggling, pointing at me. The stall had no door. When I turned and glared at them, they got scared and hurried out. Peter never fired me, I suspect, because he couldn't find anyone else to do the job. But he knew I was a drunk. Some mornings I showed up, other mornings I didn't. It was pitiful. I couldn't even ride around Buffalo with some dude in a customized van and deliver boxes. And yet I had this exalted opinion of myself if they only knew what I was capable of.... Nobody knows how talented I am.

Towards the end I slept in cold basements, on floors, and in stairwells. For six weeks I crashed on my friend Mike's dorm room floor, until I pissed on his stereo. He punched me and told me to fuck off. I was a blackout drinker. Open your eyes and look around, hope you're still wearing clothes. I terrorized myself.

In rehab, they told us to get involved with activities, to stay busy, and to say a prayer when we felt squirrely. Go to

meetings. Make phone calls. Say a prayer. Stay busy. Don't sit around and waste time. I joined the YMCA after I got out of the halfway house. The Y was perfect for me. It was a place I could go during the day, a place to hide. Within a year I had mastered most of the group activities. I've always been good at games. Ping-pong pleased me in a way that not many other things did. I enjoyed the repetition of it, and I could get lost in its rhythms. I stopped obsessing about drinking. I made some friends. I even started to look people in the eye. I got a job as a janitor at a junior high school in Kenmore. Every night after work, I took the 25 bus to the Y and played against anyone who was there.

Ping-pong, in some ways, became a religion to me.

At one minute before three, Pontius Pilate bustled into the Carlucci Room with his duffel bag slung over his shoulder. The pungent smell of chlorine mingled with cherry cough drops wafted behind him. "I need to stretch first," he said and dropped his duffel bag by the humming Coke machine in the corner. "Okay? Or are you in some big hurry to begin?"

He knew the match was scheduled to begin precisely at three. He was attempting to determine my threshold for frustration. The mind games had already begun. "Fine," I sighed. "Stretch. Whatever. Do what you gotta do."

He winked at me. "Thanks, babe." And he launched into a ferocious display of violent kickboxing and Tae Kwon Do maneuvers, grunting savagely. "Ya! ya!" he breathed, thrusting his fists forward. Then he segued into light aerobic exercises. "One, two, one, two," twisting his torso from side to side. "Busy day in the pool," he said and dropped to the floor. "Newborn babies and their dads." Supine, Pilate performed a complex series of groin and abdominal stretches. He pulled each thigh to his chest, counted to seven, then released. "Kids should not be allowed in the pool. They urinate," he grunted. Hands on hips, Pilate scissored his slender hairy legs above him. "A

little chilly outdoors, eh? Supposed to be sun today. High of seventy, afternoon showers a possibility.” He leapt to his feet and turned his back to me. As he bent over to tap his toes, he flipped aside his robes and addressed me with his head down between his legs. “Ever read the book of John? The one in the Bible?” he asked. “It’s quite good, I think.”

“Hey *dude*,” I said, tired of his antics. “We gonna start soon or what?”

He held up his index finger. “Please,” he said and bowed his head. “Let us pray.” After what appeared to be some form of silent meditation, his lips moving very quickly, he unlidded his left eye and gazed at me, grinning. “Ready then?” he said.

I nodded, stonefaced.

We volleyed for serve. Pilate won. He held the ball up for me to see. “Pontius Pilate to serve,” he announced.

I nodded again.

The match was finally under way.

Pilate generated remarkable power with his serves. I noticed that he varied his grips on almost every serve. He flung his robes up behind him and sometimes grunted exclamations that were maddeningly intrusive. “Christ!” He lurched his entire upper body into the serve and the ball came fast and high, taking me by surprise. Serves blew by me. “That ball is gone!” he crowed as I chased the rolling ball halfway across the room. “It was banished, driven away from the table. Gone. Like religious faith, like romantic love, like an unattended plate in a Chinese buffet!”

Once he got rolling it was hard to shut him up. Pilate was a master shit-talker.

“Under certain circumstances,” he said, blinking innocently at me, “can a rock be both igneous and sedimentary?”

I said nothing.

“I think it can,” he said.

Still I said nothing.

"I'm sorry," Pilate sighed, lowering his eyelids. "It keeps me from getting lonely, I suppose, my mouth."

Actually I was still haunted by Pilate's earlier comment about the executioner's calm concentration. His words had a way of resonating long after he'd spoken them. Then we played without speaking for six or eight points. Pilate calmly flicked his wrist at my serves, humming quietly. The ball kept coming back at me. No matter what I threw at him, whether hard or soft, he returned it. Pilate was "a reactor." He rarely went for winners, and he returned my shots with ease. He recognized all variations of spin. He was savage with my short serves, merciless with side topspins. With one flick of his wrist, he could drop a short underspin return just over the net, where it would die quivering like a single drop of mercury. If I then crowded the table, he bounced a high smoker into my sternum.

The score was 12-8, Pilate. Ball in hand, he swayed over the table, taunting me. "I am going to serve now. But where will it go? Nobody knows. Look out! Could be hard, could be soft." He leaped up, grunted and served up a short sidespin that slid off my side of the table like a cube of Jell-O.

"Thirteen for me," he sang, "but only nine for you."

"Eight," I said quietly.

"Oh, right. *Eight.*"

"Just serve the ball and stop yapping, old man."

"Goodness, am I bothering you? Terribly sorry." And he rifled a quick serve into my abdomen. "Fourteen!" he sang.

Then I battled back, fiercely, winning seven consecutive points. The ball streaked over the net, a flash of white. He was on his heels. I had him on the ropes. He committed his first unforced error. At 17-16, my lead, with momentum clearly in my favor, Pilate said: "Ow, wait, I stubbed my toe. Time out," and hobbled over to a nearby chair.

He sipped a plastic cup of water and fanned a towel in

front of his face. Grimacing, he twisted his foot up and closely inspected his filthy, wrinkled arch. A minute passed. I refused to show any reaction. He smiled at me and, rubbing his toes in his lap, said: "Let's get to know each other a little better. Okay? These tournaments are always so impersonal. I'm Pontius. And what's your name again?"

"Nick."

He squeezed his big toe. "Pleased to know you, Nick. Are you Catholic by any chance?"

I know I shouldn't have answered, but I did. "My father was," I said.

He nodded. "Funny how Catholics have such a great desire to embrace Rome, although Romans were their greatest persecutors for centuries." He kneaded his toes. "Curious, isn't it? But the Romans persecuted Jews too, of course. So rather than finding themselves on the side of the Jews, Christians preferred to embrace Rome and all its hatred for them. Don't you find that odd? Self-defeating, even?"

One thing was clear: he would stop at nothing to defeat me. He hoped to make me question my faith right there in the Tony Carlucci Memorial Room so that I would doubt the very foundation of my existence, and therefore lose this pivotal third round match. But I didn't have any faith—none that I was consciously aware of, anyway.

"No more talk," I said and stalked back to my side of the table. "Time's up!"

"Okay, okay," he sighed. "If that's how you play the game, Nick." He winced.

"My foot really hurts, I think it is swollen, but if you cannot allow me another minute of rest, I understand. I shall limp over and try to compete."

I didn't reply. Pilate remained seated. He rubbed the sole of his foot.

"Theologians like to portray me as reluctant and weak,

easily bullied.” He looked up at me. “Do you know why? ... No? By vilifying me they neutralized the conflict between the Christian movement and Roman authority. They knew they would have to iron out their differences eventually, and they needed a scapegoat for historical purposes. *Et voila. C’est moi.*”

It made sense, but I didn’t want to think about it. I wanted to win the match and continue on to the quarterfinals.

He smiled and lowered his eyes. “You know, I am a person too, Nick. And I have made some mistakes, of course I have, but...” He waved his hand. He turned his head and sniffled. “Sorry,” he said, standing uneasily. “I just get emotional.” He took a step, then stopped. He came over to my side of the table. “My family has been dead for centuries,” he murmured. “And I have not a single friend in this country. Do you know what that feels like, Nick, to be so incredibly alone in the world?”

For a moment I was tempted to console him, but I remained silent because I had heard that Pilate would do or say anything to win at ping-pong. I was on my guard.

“What was your childhood like, Nick?”

He had not yet picked up his paddle. He leaned his right hip casually against the side of the table. “I’m interested,” he said and placed his hand gently on his chest. “You can tell me. I promise, I won’t tell a soul.”

I said nothing.

“Let me guess, then. That will be fun.” He closed his eyes. “You have a few older siblings, I think. You have the look of the youngest child, Nick.” He opened one eye, the left one, and glanced at me, then quickly shut it. “Your parents did not divorce, but perhaps should have?” He nodded and scrutinized my face for a reaction. “Yes, that is rather common. But there is still more. Deeper pain. What is it, Nick? ... Your mother? ... Your father? ... Yes, tell me about him. Time for you to get rigorously honest, my friend.”

I looked down and examined the paddle in my hand.

Pilate touched his fingertips to the table. "Did he touch you, Nick? ... Did daddy climb into bed with you and ... Did you awake, terrified?"

"No!" There was nothing like that in my childhood.

"But he *was* a violent man, Nick. Prone to sudden bursts of fury. He dragged your mother up the stairs by her hair one Saturday night. She screamed. And you were sent to Sunday school the next morning, as if nothing had changed in your life. He sat next to your mother in church, receiving the priest's benediction. And you saw religion as a lie, a mask you would never wear. You channeled your hatred into the church. Is that accurate?"

"You don't know everything," I shot back lamely.

"I know just enough," he said. "And I would like to help you."

In rehab, they told us to seek a Higher Power — meaning: something higher than ourselves. We could live a rich spiritual life, they said, one beyond anything we'd imagined before, without pledging allegiance to any particular organized religion. This appealed to me. Until then, I had not recognized a difference between a religious and a spiritual life. There was so much to learn. But no growth would come, they told me, if I hid in a bar or a crackhouse or jail. It all had to begin with not picking up the first drink or using a drug, and living life on life's terms. At first, it sounded like a load of hot steaming crap, but what were the options? My best thinking usually landed me in jail.

Pilate's chapped lips parted to reveal a warm, generous smile, the smile of a kind uncle, say, or an old friend. It confused and frightened and intrigued me, but I knew the ways of manipulative men. They had been my teachers and I had become one of them. I recognized Pilate as easily as an addict recognizes a dealer on a foreign, unfamiliar street.

Pilate shook his head. "It's a terrible thing for a young boy to be treated that way by his father, Nick. You were only a child, how could you defend her? How could you defend yourself? I am sorry you had to go through that." He spun the paddle in his hand. "Did you learn my name in Sunday school? Did they talk about me quite a bit?" Tilting his head to the side, Pilate appraised me. "How old are you?"

I glared at him. "It's none of your business." Then I said: "I'm twenty-nine."

"Twenty-nine," he repeated softly. "You want to be a more spiritual person, Nick. A responsible, caring, *sober* adult. Not like him." He paused. "It's part of your recovery, this spiritual awakening. Is that not what you were told?" He paused. "I know you better than you think, Nick. Listen to me. They are lying to you. Deep down you know they are lying. They tell you to find a God of your own understanding. But how can you have a religion, or a God of any shape, along with this burning anger? This anger that seethes in you and makes you blind. You want to let it out and it must come out."

"Enough," I said, scraping my paddle on the edge of the table. "Let's play."

My heart was thumping hard in my chest. My heart seemed to be *rising* in my chest. Breathing heavily, I reached out and steadied myself against the table.

"Having a little problem?" Pilate asked.

"This is delay of game," I gasped.

Pilate stroked his beard with his filthy thumb and forefinger. "And the funeral. Your father dies before you can reconcile with him. So much unfinished between you two. How can you make amends with a dead man? It is too late, Nick, you missed your chance."

"It's my serve," I said.

"No," he said and waved his hand, flourishing the white ball. "It is not."

A warm morning in April. Sunny, wet streets. A church full of family, neighbors, friends. I didn't cry. I sat in the pew listening to the organ, next to my sister. Shouldn't I have been crying?

He bounced the ball once, twice on the table. His hand closed over the white ball. "The death of a father is traumatic, Nick," he said. "You have never really addressed it. Perhaps a drink would take the sting away. You pass a dozen bars every night after work. Who would know? No harm in one cold beer. Is there?"

And he served.

We battled back and forth. Winners, volleys and unforced errors. We were tied at twenty-one, tied at twenty-seven. My wristbands were drenched with sweat. My thin T-shirt clung to my back. I lunged and skidded around the table, grunting with effort. The soles of my Adidas squeaked on the polished hardwood floor. *Tok, tok, tok*, the ball flew over the net. The ferocity of our play drew attention from other men. Eight or nine guys caravanned in from the racquetball courts. They gathered around the perimeter of the table to watch us. I was terrified to make a mistake, yet I knew that climbing into a defensive shell at this stage of the game would be disaster. I needed to remain on the offensive, pressing forward.

Without warning, memories of my father filled my head, they swirled and knotted with memories of my own blackouts, broken bones, random nights in jail. I dropped my paddle and brought my hand to my face. "Time out," I murmured.

Grinning, Pilate said, "Whenever you're ready to resume."

I saw my parents standing together in front of our old house, posing for a photograph. My mother is squinting into the sun and my father has one arm looped around her waist. A brown bottle of beer (Genesee?) sits on the top step, next to stiff leather garden gloves. My mother stands rigid, unsmiling.

All my life I resented Mom because her love for me

endured no matter what I did or said to her. The ease of its attainment tainted it. My father was angry, impatient, drunk much of the time, and I sought his approval that much more because of its unavailability. I only wanted what I couldn't have. In my mother I saw myself. I could've joined forces with her in solidarity against our common foe, but I was cowardly. Dad ignored her, so I did too. I tried to secede, to push away, to punch away from her and what she represented. Because I knew the secret of his fury: it was not personal. It simply alighted on whoever was closest. And if you didn't have enough sense to escape, you deserved what you got. Unconditional love, like a limp or blindness, was the impediment that would strand Mom with him. And it did. But this is how she learned to love from her own unhappy mother.

When my father died, Mom couldn't sit still and flew about the house like a deflating balloon. Drunk, I visited her every afternoon. I rifled through her fridge and cupboards. Sitting next to her on her couch, munching miniature Halloween Snickers bars or marshmallows or a cheese sandwich, while afternoon talk shows blared from her TV, I watched her fidget with her glasses or the hem of her blouse. All my words meant nothing. "I love you, Mom. I'm here for you." She nodded and nodded her head, pretending to listen, but her eyes were blank. Every fifteen minutes she would lurch up from the couch and wander through the kitchen, mumbling softly to herself.

Pilate stood there, watching me. "Nick," he said at last. "Nick, I do want to help you. I'm *here* for you."

Swiping the front of my sweat-sopped shirt across my eyes, I bent down to grab my paddle. "No," I said, "let's finish this right now."

He smiled at me, shrugged, and sent a spinning corkscrew serve into my abdomen. "Heads up," he giggled. "Stay alert."

There had to be a way to beat him! If only I could hold him off long enough, I knew I could find the key. I bounced

the ball on the table, stalling for time as I worked out my strategy.

“Tired?” Pilate said, smirking. He looked dry, rested, self-assured. Barely winded.

“No,” I said. But I was. I had never felt so drained.

Before Pilate arrived, during my “creative visualization” session, I looked for some crucial aspect of his personality, a weakness that might precipitate his downfall. He was especially susceptible to the noise of a crowd. I noticed that when a few guys clapped and cheered after a particularly aggressive point, Pilate begged them to stop. “Please. You are distracting me,” he said to them.

“Oh *sorry*, Pilate,” said Chuckie Smoltz. “Don’t mind me, man.”

The others laughed and nodded at Chuckie. He held up his hands in mock submission. “I’m tremblin’ over here,” he said. “I’m shakin’ in my sandals, Pontius!”

Pilate didn’t have any close friends among the Y regulars. But his robe and sandals were so weird and his skinny face so fierce and forbidding, how could he expect anyone to accept him? The guys at the Delaware Ave. Y were uniformly slow to accept racial and historical diversity. That *was* changing, but it was a slow transition. Pilate didn’t help his cause, though. He never seemed to let his hair down and relax. He never attended our “Til Dawn” mixers with the wild ladies at the downtown YWCA. He didn’t show up at our summer barbecues and softball games. And Pilate didn’t seem to know anything at all about cars, ice hockey, or politics. It didn’t matter who played ping-pong against him, Pilate was never supported. Nobody ever cheered for him.

The score reached 31-30, my lead. Chuckie clapped loudly. “Finish him off, Nick!” he shouted. “Down with Pilate!” The others joined him. They started chanting. “Nick, Nick, Nick!”

“I cannot bear the taunting of an ignorant crowd!” Pilate

whirled around to face them. "You people understand nothing," he cried. "I find no case against Nick." He held open his hands. "Can't you be more kind?"

"Oh, piss off," said Chuckie Smoltz.

Pilate looked at me with sad eyes. He lowered his voice. "God doomed me to walk the earth for eternity, Nick, engaged in mindless activities with fools. Mornings I watch soap operas and game shows on the motel TV." He frowned. "And I get only rock-n-roll on the little clock radio in my room. I would like a little jazz." He gazed across the table at me. "Afternoons I come here, only to be ridiculed and ... Don't you see? I did all I could for Christ. I did not want him to die ... Read the Book of John, you'll see."

Chuckie Smoltz let loose a Bronx cheer of monumental proportions. Spit spattered from his flapping lips. His face turned crimson. Everybody laughed.

"Look at me, babe," Pilate moaned. "I'm a mess over here." He cupped his hands before his chest. "Have mercy on me."

As he reached to pick up his paddle, though, I noticed something in his downcast eyes I didn't like. Pilate was not to be trusted. He would do anything to get ahead, to defeat others and protect himself, regardless, of its negative effect on people. I had once been like that, too. I knew a lot about casting blame and laying guilt trips. I recognized self seeking, asshole behavior. But I couldn't live my life that way anymore.

"Here comes!" I said and served up a nasty slice. Pilate lunged for it and missed. He slipped. The ball trickled to the floor and rolled away.

The guys cheered and laughed, hooting and pointing at Pilate, who was doing an awkward split beside the table.

Relieved, I laughed too. No need to hang around and gloat, though. That wasn't my style. I packed up my gear, zipped my duffel and hustled out of the Carlucci Room.

I descended the stairs. The harsh aroma of chlorine slapped my face as I jogged past the swimming pool entrance. I turned the next corner and started to run. There was no time to waste. I wanted to be in the lobby, near the bulletin board, where I'd be the first to see who in God's name I would have to face next.

Córdoba

At the quoin of the hostel, she awoke in binding cloth
bleating like the goat-head before bucking a victim.

Ruins are fertile, changeable — the stucco pyramid
and jaguar sandal dress in noxious plants and hornets.

Jade stolen in the bulb above her head. Colonial boots
crush her replicated bust and hands in the flea market.

She sneaks in the earflare lounge. What's left of her lover
fills the watercooler, scarabs crawling along the bottom.

Box-cutters drink to their siren. A plank is nothing
on a frieze and she walks it. Saffron gulls leap onto

a candelabra and bum. Her ashes scatter in a mallard swarm,
her legend carried to a banquet where they eat the bull

as prize. *Ci urban* meant "so they say," renamed Yucatán,
the stelae and pesticide eroding in the nape of vines.

Xochimilco

rising, the last *chinampas* city
leveled and burned, the canals
hesitating

my return to México as miasma, as a spear
gun, as a colonial fixture of calash and blade,
as prisoner as beaten gold as

the last cypress falling down
to mislead the boodle-insatiable,
spit curls and Christ

María Mother of Jesus Christ up their sleeves.
Each stronghold knitted from brushwood
and mineral beds and shade of natives collaborating

with themselves like later Egypt and Nasser's lake
as suspect as contemptible nature as a guide
steers boatfuls of the best each nation

can send. A foreman and his asphalt
portal want to supplant the sky. Already
the underground and close-order drill,
ensigns that fall apart in a cheaper suitcase.

Resistance dies a bit with each generation
as tolerating the lines of vault and cabaret
enlisting their own as charging a boat as
submerging a few on the house.

Author Biographies

Priscilla Long grew up on a dairy farm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. She is author of *Where the Sun Never Shines: a History of America's Bloody Coal Industry* (Paragon House, 1989). Her work "Archeology of Childhood" won *The Journal's* Creative Nonfiction Prize for 2001. Her poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction appear in *The Southern Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Seattle Review*, and *Passages North*, among others. She has awards from the Seattle Arts Commission and the Los Angeles Arts Commission, etc. She holds an M.F. A. from the University of Washington, teaches writing at UW Extension and privately, and serves as senior editor of the pioneering online history encyclopedia, \t "_blank" www.historylink.org. She lives in Seattle.

Educated at New York University as a Leopold Schepp Scholar and University of Michigan as a Rackham Merit Fellow, **Rosebud Tsvi** is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on The Horace Goldsmith Scholarship and a grant from the AJLI to finish her first novel *The Annex Jew*. Rosebud is also working for the Domari: Society for the Gypsies in Israel. In Spring 2003, she has a forthcoming poem, "Scenes from a Nocturnal Return" in *The Iconoclast*.

Pat Temple was a bilingual fifth grade teacher in Aurora, IL until her retirement in 2001. Her students were recent arrivals from Mexico who knew no, or very little, English. She hopes she helped make their lives a little easier. She now lives in rural Michigan where her closest neighbors are

deer, foxes and turkeys. Pat's fiction has appeared in *Whiskey Island Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *The Heartlands Today* and others.

Michael Tsai is a reporter for The Honolulu Advertiser in Hawaii. In his free time, he has completed a dozen marathons but only a handful of short stories, an indication, he says, of which process he considers more grueling. His stories have nonetheless limped their way onto the pages of *Washington Square*, *Zaum*, *Hawaii Review* and *Living Waters*.

Lisa Roullard recently relocated to Moses Lake, Washington, to teach at Big Bend Community College. Her work is forthcoming in *New Orleans Review*, *Crab Creek Review* and *Talking River Review*.

Alice B. Fogel is the author of *Elemental* and *I Love This Dark World*, and several other books of poetry (and fiction) that live anonymously in her desk, which she got for \$15 at a yard sale in Portsmouth, NH in 1984, when she was running the costume shop at a theatre there while getting her graduate degree in poetry. Besides costuming, writing, and teaching various arts, she designs and constructs one-of-a-kind clothing (currently specializing in Cinderella-meets-Gwen-Stefani prom/ball gowns), plays Bach, and is president of the PTO as well as the mother in a family of five.

Curtis Bauer lives in the Midwest and teaches writing in a Quaker University. His poems have appeared in *The North American Review*, *Rattapallax*, *The Cortland Review* and *Rhino*, among others.

Susan Lewis received her M.F.A. in Fiction from Sarah Lawrence College, as well as a J.D. and a B.A. from UC Berkeley. She taught fiction writing at SUNY, Purchase for several years, and was an editor of *Global City Review*. She has been invited to be the featured poet of an upcoming issue of *Sulphur River Literary Review*, which will showcase a group of six of her poems. Other poetry and fiction of hers has been published in *The Sycamore Review*, *Phoebe*, *So To Speak*, *Global City Review*, *Quantum Tao*, and *The New Press Literary Quarterly*. Her work has also appeared in an anthology called *Breaking Up Is Hard To Do*, was a finalist in the *Boston Review* short story contest, and has twice been a finalist in the *Discovery/The Nation* poetry contest. The Maelstrom Percussion Ensemble has recorded her *Speech Quartet* (music by Jonathan Golove), which they frequently perform in the US and Canada, most recently at the Kennedy Center in Washington.

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