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WINDY HILL

REVIEW

1994

The sixteenth edition of Windy Hill Review is dedicated to the professors, who make our experience here worthwhile, fellow students, who make our time enjoyable, and the administrative staff, who keeps the whole thing running.

The Windy Hill Review 1994

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A very special thank you to Mary Beth Eckels.

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The following story, "Sharing," won the 1993 University of Wisconsin Centers August Derleth Prize (\$250.00) for creative writing. This contest, open to any UW Centers student enrolled for six or more credits, is judged by members of the UW Centers English Department who teach or engage in creative writing. The editors of The Windy Hill Review wish to thank the author of "Sharing," Mary Beth Eckels, a former UWC-Waukesha student, for graciously allowing us to publish this prize-winning work of short fiction.

Sharing

The parents' meeting had run long, as usual. Karen cared about Outcome Based Education, but two hours of hearing horror stories about what might happen was wearing. She dragged herself up the stairs, past her husband Rick in the computer room. The kids were in their rooms, lights still on.

I'll just change before I make the good-night rounds, she thought.

Her sweats were lying on the floor, right where she had dropped them in her haste to get to the meeting on time. But where were her slippers? What had happened to all her footwear? Unpaired, her shoes were a jumble around and under the bed. Oh, well, she thought, socks will do for now.

"Mom, is that you? Will you come tuck me in?"

"I'll be there soon, Danny! Just let me finish changing!"

Karen went over to the dresser to drop her keys. To her dismay, the dresser top was no longer

visible. It was covered with a tangle of earrings.

"All right, who has been messing with my stuff?" Karen yelled out the bedroom door.

No answer.

"No one is supposed to be in my room without permission. Who was trespassing? And why?"

Susanna, Karen's twelve-year-old daughter, eased her head out of her bedroom door.

"I guess it was me, Mom. Sorry. I was looking for something to wear to Beach Day. Remember? I told you about it."

Later that night, as Karen was trying to drop off to sleep, she thought back to Susanna's explanation. My daughter, wanting to look cool. Hey, I guess that means I can't be too far out of fashion! But is that good or bad, if my stuff is junior-high-cool? When did this happen? It seems like just yesterday I was reminding her to brush her hair at least once a day. But then, last week, I did run into a cloud of hair spray outside her homeroom. And twice in the last few days, Susanna had pounced on the ringing phone like a cheetah going in for the kill. Seventh grade--oh, yeah. I'm not ready for this...

The next morning, Thursday, the day before Beach Day, after the rush of the kids leaving for school, Karen met Gail, mother of Susanna's friend Shelly, for a walk. The azure blue sky, a few golden leaves floating down, and just enough breeze to evaporate the sweat--what a glorious day!

"Have you noticed any changes lately in

Shelley?" Karen ventured as they chugged up Hill Street.

"What isn't changing? At least I got her to wash off most of the make-up before school today. And yesterday she asked me about joining a diet club."

"Oh."

Karen and Gail sped past a young mother pushing a stroller while being pulled by a massive Golden Retriever. No time to talk any more, just try to get the old heart rate up.

Karen and Susanna sometimes took walks together, when Susanna wasn't too busy babysitting or reading or creating something out of odds and ends. Their talk had been of teachers and assignments and maybe where to shop. They were buddies, right? The "girls" of the house. Rick and their sons, Danny and Bob, were often combing the stores for the newest computer software or bonding over some sporting event on television. Bob, at fifteen, was an expert in both areas, and little Danny tried.

It was time to cross Capitol Drive, and both women were slowing the pace.

"Is Susanna as hyped for Beach Day as Shelley is? I think I've talked her out of wearing a bikini."

Karen burst out laughing and turned into her yard.

"Karen, wait a minute. Have you and Rick made any decisions about Susanna and dating? Shelley's

been talking about a movie or something with Jeff and Brian."

Karen stopped short. "Susanna and Jeff-- dating?"

"No silly. Susanna and Brian. I guess you haven't decided yet. Call me later, and we'll unite on this."

Back in the house alone, Karen remembered the last walk she and Susanna had taken together. It had been warm, so they were in shorts and T-shirts. A car full of young males slowed down near them, but did not stop. One threw a kiss. Susanna blushed. Karen had been slightly embarrassed and moderately irritated, but somewhat pleased that she could still draw looks. Maybe I was just the old lady with the young chick, she thought. but my little Susanna-- dating? She knew Jeff, everybody's pal from across the street, but who was this Brian person?

Later, as Karen carried clean laundry upstairs, she tripped over something--Susanna's shoes, again! The Eastlands, with curled shoelaces--how Susanna had campaigned for them! Before, she'd always been satisfied with whatever was on sale. Karen's memory of buying the shoes was clear because it was the first time that Susanna had taken a bigger size than Karen's own. Only half a size, but it had been a shock. I've still got a few inches in height on her, Karen sighed. Oh, well, I might as well toss her Eastlands in her bedroom. As she pushed open Susanna's door, Karen steeled herself for the mess

she knew she would encounter. Wait, Karen thought. Isn't that my green turtleneck on the floor? Susanna could have at least sent it down the laundry chute.

As Karen bent over to lift her turtleneck from the maze of discarded clothes on the floor, she noticed a folded piece of notebook paper with Susanna's name on it. Did she dare open it? She's always going in my stuff, Karen muttered.

Dropping her armful of clean laundry on Susanna's cluttered floor, Karen gingerly picked up the piece of paper. It's probably nothing, she thought. Cautiously, like a SWAT member disarming a potential bomb, Karen unfolded the paper.

"To Hot Lips! See you 2-night! Brian."

Karen's world stood still. Was her heart even beating? Only a screech from Honeydew, Susanna's parakeet, brought her back to life.

After school, Susanna raced into the house, pulling her school bag and clarinet with her.

"I'm home! And I'm starving!"

Susanna pulled crackers, cheese spread, and juice out of hiding.

"What's new? School go okay?"

"Oh, yeah, the usual. Fred got into trouble in art, Ashley talked back to Miss Lyons, and Mr. A. Got mad at the trumpets in band. Before you ask, all I have for homework is a little math."

"Is everybody excited about Beach Day tomorrow?"

"Not exactly. But we started to decorate for the

dance. You know, it's a Beach Dance, too."

Next Susanna went for the ice cream.

"What's for dinner, by the way?"

"Will you have room for dinner? It's lasagna."

"Awesome. Any mail?"

"Nothing interesting. Let's talk about sharing my clothes."

"Great idea. Some of your stuff is okay."

"Maybe you should ask before you borrow or browse? And make sure everything gets back in good condition?"

"Sure. Do we have any cookies?"

"How about an apple instead?"

"Okay."

And then Susanna was off to the family room. The television was blaring, so Karen knew Susanna was probably doing her homework. A dance, she thought. I wonder if Susanna will dance with Brian. Bob had attended every junior high dance and never done the two-step, the twist or anything else, at least by his report. I need to know about Brian and this "Hot Lips" business. But how, without letting Susanna know I've snooped?

The next day, Beach Day, dawned bright and warm, for early October. The smell of slightly burnt toast greeted Karen as she descended the stairs. She followed the beeps into the computer room. Danny was at play on *Civilization*, the latest addition to their computer library.

"Hi, Mom! I already had breakfast. I just

discovered navigation! Have Dad and Bob left yet?"

"Yes. You can play now, but be ready to leave for school when I call you." Karen shouted up the stairs, "Susanna, I want some clarinet music before school. You need to get moving."

Karen was emptying the dishwasher when Susanna sauntered into the kitchen, brandishing her hairbrush.

"Mom, how do you like my outfit?"

Karen fearfully looked toward her daughter. She was wearing a big Summerfest T-shirt, loose knit shorts, sandals, and hoop earrings. Whew!

"You look great, but why not wear your own stuff?" Karen asked.

"Well, for one thing, nothing fits right anymore. For another, I like your stuff better. Do you think I look okay? I'm going to put my hair in a ponytail. Do you know where that neon visor is? Now *that's* really mine."

"I'll help you look. Are you sure you want to go to the dance?"

"Sure, Mom. It's going to be really cool. Everybody's going, you know. Besides, I'm on the clean-up committee, so I *have* to go. Oh, I don't think I'll have time to practice before school. I'll do it later. I promise."

That evening, as Danny finished cleaning up the dinner dishes, Susanna rushed through "Splish, Splash" on her clarinet. Karen stared at the clock. Before she knew it, the chime of the back doorbell

had Susanna running through the house, her purple jacket trailing.

"It must be Shelley. I'm going now, Mom. Could you *please* let us walk home alone? It's *only* two blocks."

"But, Susanna, it will be dark, and you might get cold, and..."

"Mom, we'll be careful. And I can warm up when I get home."

"Okay, okay. When will you be home?"

"Clean-up should be done by 9:40 or so. See you later."

Karen took a deep breath. I need to know now, she thought.

"Wait, Susanna. Tell Shelley to go ahead."

Susanna muttered something to her friend and then closed the back door. Mother and daughter faced each other in the shadowy hallway.

"What is it now, Mom? I really need to leave." Susanna twisted the doorknob, her right foot tapping in Karen's sandal.

"I-I-I have to ask you something."

"Okay."

"Who is Brian?"

"Mom, you know Brian, our paper boy!"

"You mean that skinny kid on the skateboard? The one with the hair and the gum?"

"Yeah." Susanna nodded her head and set Karen's earrings swinging. "Why do you want to know? Is he in trouble?"

"Why? Does he get into a lot of trouble at school?"

"I only see him in band. He and Jeff--all the trumpets really--say weird things to the girls."

"Like what?"

"Oh, like 'wild fingers' or 'good blowing' or..."

"Hot Lips?"

Karen could feel her ears and cheeks turning red. Her throat tightened.

"I-I-I read a note in your room."

"Mom! How could you?" Now Susanna's arms were crossed over Karen's T-shirt.

"I'm really sorry."

"What if it was something important? Brian's such a dork. I don't know why Shelly likes him." Susanna slipped on her jacket and opened the door.

"Oh." Karen exhaled.

"Good-bye. I suppose I'll see you later."

And Susanna was gone, door slamming behind her. Karen eased into the living room sofa and opened her Anne Tyler book, but it was no use. She couldn't concentrate. She remembered going to dances, in early high school. No junior high dances for me, she mused. My father wouldn't even think of letting me go. That first one, in the fall of freshman year, I went with Linda and Shirley. The girls on one side of the dimly lit gym, and the boys on the other. The slight smell of stale sweat. A few lucky couples bridged the gap--Jennifer and Eddie, Sheila and Dick, Patty and Jim, maybe more. They had seemed so

self-assured! Mr. Powers and Miss Beacon prowled around, checking for smoking or smooching. Would teachers still check like that? We'd had live music, somebody's older brother's group, playing "My Girl," "Proud Mary," and some other not-so-memorable songs. The musicians had looked so fabulous under the basketball hoop. We girls were all trying to look approachable and like we were having fun, but not too much. The boys alternated between ignoring us, and staring at us. Steve--did I have a crush on him!--smiled and waved once. I nearly swooned, but was it from embarrassment, joy, or fear? Could my little girl be ready for this? Why would anyone want to go through that?

After an eternity, well after 9:47, Susanna quietly walked in the door.

"Oh, sweetie, you're home! How was it?"

"It was okay, Mom."

Karen and Susanna walked up the stairs, side by side, not touching each other. By the time they had reached the bedrooms, Susanna was holding the borrowed earrings. She slipped off Karen's sandals.

"Here, thanks. I'll tell you about the dance tomorrow. I promise."

Susanna closed her door. Karen stood alone in the darkened hallway, holding the earrings and the sandals. In due time, Karen put away the things Susanna had borrowed and went to join her husband in front of the television.

Mary Beth Eckels

WATER
WET, CLEAR
DRIPPING, MOVING, FLOWING
RIVERS, STREAMS, MARSHES, GRASSES
SUPPORTING, GROWING, MOVING
FIRM, DRY
LAND

Horicon Marsh

From the highway
We see tall grasses.
Only when we park
And walk the trails
Do we see the marshy wetlands,
Hear frogs, and see ducklings
Following their mothers.

We talk. You dream of a place
To ride bareback, wide
Open spaces, the prairie.
I dream of unreachable islands.

I can hardly remember
When you struggled to keep
Up with me. Your long-legged
Stride, in the hot sun
Penetrating even this thick
Growth, now tires me.

When will you begin to thirst?
And what moats will you dig
Before you are my age?

Margaret Rozga

Earth Quest

**What was it like to rejoice in the land
because it was so sacred?
What was it like to know the stars
were bound with your existence?
What could the wind have been telling you
when it spoke with such insistence?
How did it feel to walk the earth
and be humbled in her greatness?**

**You never tamed the wilderness-- nor ever wanted to
You never marred your Mother's skin
You never sought her blood to win
Her bounty shared by everyone.**

**Once magic coursed through your veins
Once you lived more fully free
Once you knew her more than we
Revelled and celebrated her life.**

**Perhaps you wait and bide your time
Perhaps you lost desire
Perhaps you just did tire
But can't you hear your Mother's screams
and the death cries of your brothers?**

**Step forth, your path is there to find
Step forth, the earth quest calls to you
Step forth to teach your lore anew
to show the way to us.**

For Mother Earth cries not alone
Our souls cry out for what is lost
The gains we made not worth the cost
It is too late for us to learn?

Speak! We need your wisdom
Speak! We shed our tears
Speak! Becalm our fears
We no longer know our Mother.

Listen! The wind calls to us
Listen! Soft cries from birds and fish
Listen! They whisper of things that they wish
But we no longer stop to hear.

It's to you I speak, who feel inside her heartbeat
You know what's right, don't push away.
All our tomorrows stem from today
We need to find what we've been missing.

Embrace and love our Mother again
Cherish the world as sacred
Find the lost path to tread
Attend and listen to the wind.

Will our children join and listen to
the songs the world does sing?
Will they walk in humbleness amidst
the stars and sun?
Will they find tranquility when
the earth and they are one?
Will the earth still nurture our children
in the days to come?

Gloria Forthun

Summer Dawn

**The short night is through:
On the hairy caterpillar,
Little beads of dew**

Julie Foat

Good Morning

**After I blink,
like a toad,
out of bed
I jump.**

Kent Brown

INTRUDER

**AFTER THE DAWN
WITH THE DEW ON THE
GROUND
UNDER A NEWBORN SUN
THROUGH THE GREENEST
TREES
IN THE DARK CABIN
INSIDE MY BEDROOM
ON MY BED I FEEL YOU
INSIDE OF ME.**

Mike Retherford

Control

**I'm in control
in control
in total control.
I sit here
and laugh
to myself
and drink my coffee.
Me and my coffee,
oh yeah.
In control.
Scully on one finger
Jesus Christ wrapped around
the other.
Oh yeah
it just don't get
any better than this.**

Marc Bonkoski

Jungle Night

Glowing eyes peer out from blackness
Jungle Night has come at last.
The heavy dampness of the air
Reminds us all of eons past.

The chirp and click
Of insect music
Punctuate the tension rife.
We hear rhythms
Long forgotten,
We dance to
The drums of life.

Life here is fear,
Fear of nightfall.
What may be lurking underneath?
Instincts strengthen,
Senses sharpen.
Fight of flight?
Use the legs or teeth?

The hunters now become the hunted.
Our kind is the prey of all.
Helpless, unarmed, weak and clumsy
No stealth, no speed, no will to maul.

But, come, live in the jungle with us.
Live here and you'll feel the bite
Of terror, hunger, thirst and panic
You'll feel the heat of Jungle night.

Julie Foat

The Land Speaks

SUNRISE:

A steep ravine, steps of rocks and boulders,
adorned
with broken rays of sunlight
tinted
through the trees,
graced
by a diamond-studded waterfall.
The land is speaking.

SUNSET:

A steep ravine, rocks and boulders
scarred
from chiseled steps, trees neatly
slaughtered
along twine-trapped edges,
robbed
of its crown jewels by spatial sunlight,
The land is silent.

For many years, our family went camping at Gov. Dodge State Park in Wisconsin. One summer, as we went exploring, we cautiously ventured off the beaten path deeper into the forest. We discovered a small natural wonder, a ravine or mini-canyon. As we stood at the top, gazing below, we saw huge rocks and boulders, various sized crevices, a sparkling waterfall emptying into a small stream, and massive trees with sunlight shimmering through. We never expected to see an area such as this in the forest. Our family heard the land call out, "Come down and play." After a heart-racing climb down, we were relieved to reach the bottom. Throughout the afternoon, we played with our kids and the land. We took turns running

under, and through the waterfall, screaming as we were pounded with icy, hard stings of water. We jumped around splashing each other in the stream. We walked in mud up to our knees and had a grand mud-ball fight. We were surrounded by sunlight glittering through the trees. We were ageless here.

We returned to this land for three more years. And each year the land called out as before, "Come down and play." But on our fifth visit to the land, our playmate did not call out. There was silence. From the top we saw man-made steps carved from the rocks. Trees were chopped down to widen the path. Ropes were hung from wooden poles along the steps. More ropes were strung, restricting some areas. A small bridge was constructed across the small stream and a ramp was laid for viewing the waterfall. We were profoundly shaken by the sight. We were as silent as our playmate.

This little piece of land had become sacred to us. As I reflect back, I feel that this experience gave me just a glimpse of what a traditional Indian may have felt when the land he held sacred was taken from him. I truly doubt that I will ever chance upon an experience like this again.

Carol Sadler

Where?

**Beneath the (heavenly) skies
Within the (earthly) world
Above the (crackling) earth**

**Beneath a (leafy) tree
Within the (glowing) sunset
Above the (waving) grasses**

**Beneath the (lustrous) hair
Within the (glistening) skull
Above the (stately) neck**

**Beneath the facts
Within the heart
Above the fears**

lies the hidden spark of life.

Sherry Ryan

High as a Kite

**During the day,
Among the winds,
Outside the City Limits,
Beneath the sky,
Under the clouds,
Above the tall trees,
Past the Century fence,
Over my house,
On a string...
Until it snaps.**

DEPRESSION

**I
see

no
need

in
desires.**

-Brian Munte-

Ken Kaminski

ANCIENT SPRING

Grow and learn to love again
Pistils wait for amorous bees
Ancient spring's cycle of life begins,

The planet tips an entire span
North-bound fowl seek woodland and sea
Grow and learn to love again,

Rose vines embrace a budding birch stand
And flower brightly to our eyes please
Ancient spring's cycle of life begins,

Pollinating all blooms in the land
Berry bush and fruiting trees
Grow and learn to love again,

Not far from root the berries land
Fruit, nourished, swells on limbs bending in breeze
Ancient spring's cycle of life begins,

Germinate, blossom, be held in hand
When beauty sets one's heart free
Grow and learn to love again
When ancient spring's cycle of life begins.

Kent Brown

For Alice Walker and Her Daughter

**After conceiving her characters
And suffering a long period of gestation,
She feared they would never be born.**

**Awaiting the visit of her daughter,
She also feared sibling rivalry
What room was there after the first born?**

**It turned out not to be that way at all.
The eldest called forth the others
And brought them to an easy birth,**

**Entertained them after school,
Saw to it their story was told with
Child like clarity and Celie's purple.
Here's to a daughter who did not
Contest her mother's tone--**

**When we hide out in the woods
Of our northern californias,
We need not fear our daughters.
If we give them room, they
Will bear what colors we will.**

Margaret Rozga

teacher
patient, educated
fulfilling, trying, working
lectures, quizzes, discussions, exams,
working, trying, fulfilling
excited, learned
student

Julie D'Amico-Beres

Reach
Us
Some
How

10-29

Marc Bonkoski

Lightbulbs
In
Many
Brains
Are
Unscrewed

The phone has stopped ringing
After three years
silence
I have not heard your voice
for five long days
and even longer nights
I have more
to say
But I'm afraid
that you don't care
I'm too scared to call
Even more scared that I will.

Get
Here

Mike Retherford

Women's Weight Training

Traditionally we have grown flabby
As we waited, waited for men to love us
And to marry us, waited for children
To be born, for them to return from school,
Waited sleepless for one to return
From the road, not being travelers ourselves.
Then when our turn came still we waited,

After all practice makes perfect.

This will not do, you say, and add
another five pounds to a carefully
Machined load. You, trim and already
On the move, condition us to lift
Up and away, off of our chests and
Shoulders, an iron tradition as well.

Margaret Rozga

Wind and waves smash shore --
defenseless rocks stand passive,
showing no weakness

Marc Bonkoski

Wow, I Coulda Had a Habit!

**Jesus doesn't wash the silverware,
but he doesn't pretend not to know where the spoons go.**

**He doesn't light my fire,
but he doesn't whine when I'd rather read.**

**He doesn't work on my car with me,
but he doesn't grab the wrench out of my hand without reading
the shop manual.**

**He doesn't tell me when I'm working too hard,
but he doesn't complain that he's doing all the important stuff.**

Maybe the guy *is* only half man.

Lorelei Kring

< GOOD FRIENDS >

and WE were GOOD FRIENDS
Then WE really enjoyed each other.
that SHE seemed to be hinting
and WE could be more than GOOD FRIENDS,
ME well I thought O.K.

So WE tried.
WE tried to be more than GOOD FRIENDS.
and WE were, more than GOOD FRIENDS.
Then SHE or maybe it was
ME began to drift away.
Soon, no longer
were WE more than GOOD FRIENDS,
were WE even GOOD FRIENDS,
were WE even
WE.

Now WE were just a separate
SHE and a separate
ME. How I wish
WE

were WE GOOD FRIENDS again.

James Kaczmarek (c) 1993

< < PRISM > >

You're my prism.

All that's light for me
passes thru you;
red of passion,
green of growth,
blue of sadness
that we share.
All that we share.
And me? Why,
I'm your prismer.

James Kaczmarek

U.S. Men Becoming Pets

**I want me a woman who's a C.E.O.
(Who will show me off wherever we go.)**

**She needs to be a woman who don't mind spoil'n me bad.
(Who will give me fancy gifts when I fake being sad.)**

**I need a woman who's look'n for a stud for sale.
(I keep myself tanned so I don't look pale.)**

**I need me a woman with some real deep pockets to treat me the best.
(She can't become bored with me or make me feel like a pest.)**

**I ain't got no cash flow and I ain't got no learn'n neither.
(But in her stable I'm sure I can please'r.)**

**When this woman moves up she can't put me on the market, or even
sublet.
(If she buys my ass, it's for good with this U.S. male pet.)**

Kent Brown

BETRAYAL

AROUND MY BODY
UNDER MY SKIN
IN MY BLOOD
THROUGH MY BONES
BETWEEN MY EARS
INSIDE MY BRAIN I HEAR YOU SCREAM
BEYOND YOUR WILDEST DREAMS
I LEAVE YOU TO DIE.

Mike Retherford

TEARS OF PAIN WASH OVER MY FACE
DEATH COULD NEVER BE SO DEVASTATING
THE RAIN AND MY HEARTBEAT ARE KEEPING PACE

THE SALT OF MY TEARS I TASTE
THERE ARE MANY EMOTIONS THROUGH WHICH I AM WADING
TEARS OF PAIN WASH OVER MY FACE

IN MY HEART ARE THE MEMORIES I TRACE
I REMEMBER WHEN WE STARTED DATING
THE RAIN AND MY HEARTBEAT ARE KEEPING PACE

THE LOSS OF YOU LEAVES ME WITH AN EMPTY SPACE
THE EXTENT OF MY SORROW HAS NO RATING
TEARS OF PAIN WASH OVER MY FACE

YOUR DREAMS YOU CAN NO LONGER CHASE
OUR DAYS ARE NO LONGER WAITING
THE RAIN AND MY HEARTBEAT ARE KEEPING PACE

YOU ARE NOW IN A HOLIER PLACE
I PRAY MY MEMORIES WILL NEVER START FADING
TEARS OF PAIN WASH OVER MY FACE
THE RAIN AND MY HEARTBEAT ARE KEEPING PACE

Kyra Volovsek

WHEN YOU TOUCH ME

I love it when you touch me.

Your hand in mine,

Your arm on my shoulder.

I've waited years for you;

I've prayed and dreamed of you;

I come near to you and

I love it when you touch me.

I snuggle you in the middle of the night.

Your arms fold around me, holding me tight.

I've waited years for you;

I've prayed and dreamed of you;

I come near to you and

I love it when you touch me.

Lee Olsen-White (1982)

A Word from the Cliffhanger

Lorelei Kring

I know you want me to explain why I was doing what I was doing when you got to the church on Sunday morning, but I'm not quite sure why you want to know. You won't be preaching my point of view to your congregation, so what will you get out of it? You want to know how a tortured mind works? Or you couldn't get the devil out through my mouth, so you think he might come out through my hand? Or you can't decide whether to be a shrink or just a preacher? Well, maybe you have to be both to be either in that neighborhood. Evil and insanity thrive on each other there.

I guess if I'm going along with the idea of writing things down, your motives shouldn't matter to me. You said this notebook would be a safe place to speak my mind, and I could use one of those (a safe place and maybe a new mind, too, because I know too much too young). I'm not gullible enough to think I could write anything I wanted in here--just lucky enough to have nothing to hide. I do have something to say, but you won't hear it. No matter what I say, you and the cops and the psychiatrist will only look for answers to the questions *you* ask: "What's your name? Have you hurt somebody? Is this the first time you've been hospitalized with a mental illness?" If I don't provide your answers, you'll just analyze my clues until you find something you can use. And if you find something in here that isn't in here, you'd have found it someplace else anyway. So this notebook is probably as safe a place as any (safer than your church, at least).

But I don't see much reason to speak my mind anymore, except that you must be hurting for something to read (I could tell by your sermon at the funeral that you must have lost your Bible). I won't tell you which school I dropped out of in which pompous suburb of which city, but they told me I could be a good writer if I'd "apply" myself (whatever that means), so I'll oblige.

Speaking my mind was what I was doing when you found us in the church on Sunday morning. That's *all* I was doing, and Cliff would tell you the same thing, but I'm sure his parents told you something else. They never liked me from the start because I knew that Cliff wasn't the little problem child they needed so they could feel like somebody needed them.

What Cliff was, was a guy who wasn't afraid to drive into the "wrong" part of town to see what work needed doing in case he decided to major in social work instead of business. That's where he met me, downtown, where you and your white sheep would never stoop to going at night. His parents thought if they could keep him away from my kind, then maybe he would never find out that people liked him as he was. God forbid that anybody would like a guy who wanted to find something more useful to do than to run a corporation.

My ma would have liked Cliff. Maybe she's liking him right now, even if you say he didn't go to heaven because he took his own life.

Thanks for videotaping the funeral, by the way. You spared me the sight of his mother's horror at the sight of me. You really should have left the cross standing behind the altar, though; if you want to inspire guilt in your sheep, then maybe you should let them look at a cross with some real blood on it for once. They were the ones who really killed Cliff, just like they killed Jesus, and just like they're killing the kids downtown.

Your sheep are always complaining about "gang violence" as if they weren't a gang themselves. They just rob and judge and ignore people to death instead of using a gun. Somebody should have let them face the truth.

Cliff tried to let them face it. When he collected donations for the food pantry, half the food those people brought in was crap like five-year-old canned green beans from the back of the cupboard. And when he pointed it out, they got all indignant, like hungry people should be grateful for food they can't eat. The truth isn't pretty enough for your part of town.

People there don't mind if you give them lies; they prefer lies. If the wrapping paper is folded and tied on just right, they have an excuse not to rip it apart and see what's inside.

You wrapped up the lie about their sin tight and smooth when you told them that Cliff's death was a sign that they should be better parents. You were right about that, and they knew it, and that's why they were ripe for hearing the truth about the right way to raise their kids. You could have told them to set an example--to think about what they can do for somebody other than themselves--but you blew it. You let them think that all they had to do was to go home and warn their kids that you go to hell if you shoot yourself.

That's the same thing the preacher did at my ma's funeral when I was fifteen--same pretty wrapping, same ugly lie inside. Nobody let Daddy learn. He slipped the poison into Ma's soup, but nobody would believe me. No, they'd say, you're just not thinking straight because you're grieving. Oh, no, not upstanding, long-suffering Daddy who had put up with that crazy woman for all those years. Never mind that putting up with Daddy was what had made her crazy in the first place.

Ma *was* crazy, but only as crazy as anybody would go from seeing how crazy everybody else is. She couldn't kill herself on purpose. She once told me not to worry about her because whenever she got so depressed that she wanted to die, she hated herself so much that she wanted to make herself live and suffer. That made sense to me, but nobody else ever listened to her hard enough to understand. Like she told me, once people know you've been in the loony bin, they don't think they have to hear a word you say. (That's one reason why I didn't bother speaking to you when you dragged me in here.)

Everybody said it was *just like* Ma, the compulsive housekeeper, to sit on a sheet of plastic to die so she wouldn't soil Daddy's carpet. But if Ma had killed herself, she would have done it right. She would have splattered her guts all over the inside of Daddy's precious velvet-lined gun cabinet. All that extra cleaning she did, she did just to keep busy and keep him off her back. *Daddy* was the clean freak, and both of Cliff's parents are the same way. (That's how I knew right away, when I found him in their garage, that they hadn't killed him. They wouldn't want to get blood all over a perfectly salable car any more than they wanted my dirt all over their bathtub when he tried to give me a place to stay.)

Daddy was the one who got the plastic out of the garage. He said he was going to get somebody to paint the kitchen, so I took off on my bike before he could put me to work. When I got back, he was away and she was dead.

I stuck around for her funeral, but I wasn't about to be alone with Daddy in that house after all the relatives left.

That was two or three years ago, and that's as specific as I'll get about how old I am. If you think I'll tell you whether I'm seventeen or eighteen just so you chumps can think you're closer to knowing whether I belong back in Daddy's house or back on the street when I leave this hospital, you're wrong. This is the first real bed I've slept in since March. Let the cops figure out who I am. They will.

But they couldn't get my name from Cliff's parents, could they? I knew he could be trusted not to tell them. See? That's what pissed them off about me. I knew he could be trusted, and they didn't. Maybe they'll know it someday when they're done feeling sorry for themselves, but no thanks to you if they ever do.

You wanted me to speak my mind, so this is what you get. I know you'll just get out the colored paper and ribbons and wrap up another lie. You'll just tell all the sheep that I was insane with grief (which I was) so they'll be all set to understand why I did what I did, and then you'll blow it again. You'll let them think *my* insanity is the only explanation they need.

Go ahead and pretend you know I'm nuts just because I won't talk to you, or just because I drove a corpse to your church to hang it on your giant wannabe-virgin crucifix. Tell them I thought Cliff was the messiah. But I knew Cliff was no god. He tried, but he couldn't carry the whole congregation's shame all by himself.

<< NESTIN' ABED >>

Old woman gets up long afore me,
and I, I lie there abed, dozin'.

I'm sorta three-quarter belly like,
and I pull up them blankets well
over my back, neck high minimum,
and I gather them front edges,
in a clump to my chest. I, like,
then rock left and right, left and
right a few times to better nest into
that bed, and then I doze some.

But I got to thinkin' this mornin'
that that nestin' activity was likely
right out of my old brainstem; likely
begun by some proto-hominid, long time
before the Flood; maybe pre-bipedal.

And as I lay there, nested abed,
cozy-like, on this crisp, cold winter's
morn, I gave thanks for that old time
pre-bipedal proto-hominid, and his fine
idea of long ago.

James Kaczmarek

CUSTOMER COMPLAINT

**a man walks into a bar
shoots everyone in the head
sits down
at the counter
orders a whiskey
in a dirty glass
complains
about slow service**

MARC BONKOSKI

GUILT

**is a razor blade that
Slashes the wrist of innocence.**

Ken Kaminski

Work

**Past the time
Across the ages
During the millennium
Between the wars
Above the righteous
With great indignation
In accord with tradition
Out of necessity
But with responsibility
Into the day
Beside all the others
Like ants to the hill
Under the thumb of a boss
Into work
We go.**

Kent Brown

Successful Employment Interview

**"I want to work for change,"
she said,
"for life's too quickly spent.
Though fate is clad in steel,
I would be
pleased to make one dent."**

**"We'll let you work for change,"
he said,
impressed by her intent.
Now change is
all that's left for food
when she has paid the rent.**

Lorelei Kring

Dakota Nightfall

**Coyote howls
Moonbeams strike rocky hills--
Dakota nightfall**

Julie Foat

Old Blue Jeans

**old blue jeans and flannel shirt
out on my knees diggin' in the dirt
dream of a girl who's runnin' free
cross the hills and through the trees
hair streams out -- wind in her face
she knows the woods are her special place.**

**old blue jeans and flannel shirt
plantin' seeds in the good sweet dirt
dream of a girl with the dandelion crown
animals join her from miles around
she sings with the birds
and romps with the bear
she lives her life without a care.**

**old blue jeans and flannel shirt
watchin' the seed sproutin' from the dirt
dream of a girl lyin' on her back
watchin' the stars -- light on the black
night owl -- crickets lull her to sleep
tonight in her dreams she will not weep.**

**old blue jeans and flannel shirt
lovin' the flower that sprang from the dirt
dream of a girl whose soul's open wide
her life to the wild world is tied
she's lovin' a flower that sprang from the dirt
wearin' old blue jeans and flannel shirt.**

Gloria Forthun

11/14/90

I'm hiding from you
and me
and the paperboy
in a box
where I sleep
and write
all my thoughts.

The box won't open --
I've tried a million times.
I'm trapped inside
and that's o.k.

Nobody will come for me,
They all said their "good byes."
I'll spend eternity here
in my dark,
air-tight, locked box.

I faked my death
to get away
from you,
and me,
and the paperboy.

Marc Bonkoski

GMC PICK-UP TRUCK

THE '39 GMC pick-up truck

IS ROTTING IN THE YARD.

THE TRUCK I TAKE TO WORK NEEDS WORK

AND I REALLY DON'T GIVE A DARN.

MY HOUSE HAS A ROOF THAT LEAKS

ONLY IN THE RAIN.

THE RUSTY-HANDLED WATER PUMP

NEEDS REPAIR, BUT WHO CARES?

THE PIANO IN THE PARLOR

IS A LITTLE OUT OF TUNE,

BUT IT BRINGS A LITTLE SUNSHINE

TO A LONELY AFTERNOON.

LEE OLSEN-WHITE

6/2/93

Life

Pious, humbled on bended knees

in churches

I searched for You

Proud and isolated on two

feet

I denied You

I found You when I realized

I feared not death

but the loss of

life.

Gloria Forthun

HAIKU

Crisp October Day--
a leaf falls into a puddle
a child giggles.

Jessica Wandsneider

Raisins

**An old man's worn face
Fingers, after spending hours in the water
A leg just after the cast is removed
The bark of an old dead tree
The crumpled shirt thrown on the floor ten days ago
A piece of chewing gum left underneath a desk
Globs of liquid paper left to dry on the table
Hardened, dried-out toothpaste still left on the tube
My screwed-up face after eating a lemon
The worn-out soles of your favorite shoes**

Jessica Wandsneider

A GOOD BOOK

**In the chair
on my lap
within the book
under the cover
among the pages
between the lines
lies the story.**

Julie D'Amico-Beres

ONE

**It's a chemical attraction
a chemical reaction I feel near you.
Feel the sparks flying
so hot, I'm molten.
I want to surround you, engulf you in me.
until we're nothing but a liquid pool
of flesh and soul.**

Joanne Carlson

**Passion soars on silken wings...
I sail in your love's light
Our first forbidden feather kiss
has stolen sense and sight**

**Were I a witch to cast a spell
a web of moon and night...
Enchantment for a thousand years
to dance in your delight**

E. Ellen Hoppe

CHAMELEON

I've been trying so hard to let my feelings out
rid myself of confusion and doubt
but if I expose what's hidden inside,
would you want to run and hide
from me?

Call me chameleon, changing color, changing hue.
Doing my best, trying to please all of you.
Letting out only what you want to see
but would you stay if you knew
the real me?

Sometimes I wonder, do I really know you,
are you hiding like me, a chameleon too?
Why is it so hard, are you afraid to be just you,
I know that I'm afraid to be
simply me.

Call me chameleon changing color, changing hue.
Doing my best to please all of you.
Letting out only what you want to see
but would you stay if you knew
the real me?

One of these days I'm going to open up.
I'm going to let you in.

Shed my chameleon skin!
Shed my chameleon skin!

Joanne Carlson

IS IT HALLOWEEN?

**I'm hearing sounds I haven't heard before
Seeing shadows creep behind my door
It's that time of year, everyone would agree
But is it Halloween, or is it just me?**

**Nobody talks when I pick up the phone
What was that? A groan?
I feel like I'm losing my sanity
Is it Halloween, or it is just me?**

**Screams awaken me from my dreams
Sounds make me turn around
On my neck are a couple of zits
Or perhaps it's the place a vampire bit?**

**Can anyone tell me what's going on here?
Why am I filled with such dread and such fear?
Maybe it's something I just can't see
Is it Halloween, or is it just me?**

Ken Kaminski

Jellybeans

**Jellybeans in a jar on the kitchen counter.
The black ones are still here but the red ones
are gone.**

Every time the dream is the same.

The pain cannot be described.

**The cold sweat and intense fear grip me as I
clutch the sheets and shut my eyes so tight
I see spots.**

**The spots are jellybeans, the red ones scattered
on the floor.**

**Amid broken glass I sit in a ball underneath the
table
in the darkness.**

**Rocking back and forth afraid to move too much.
He might know I'm awake. He always comes back
to check and gives me a smile that makes me want
to crawl right out of my skin.**

**It's the jellybeans I tell myself. But we both know
it is not.**

-Liz Bartram

INTERNAL CHAOS

I am so in control
That I'm out of control;
Exterior facade
Conceals interior mayhem.
Can save others
Not myself:
Nobody knows
Even me.
Hot, salty liquid
Spills down my face
I taste the sting
And the bitterness
Is familiar
Like an old pair of shoes
That pinch with each step
Yet to throw them away
Would be saying
Goodbye to old friends.
Comfort in familiar
No matter the pain.
Could anyone realize
Strength is masquerade?
Carrying others
As my weight bears down
Crushing my heart.
Yet I smile
When I cry
To calm personal riot
And silently scream
Until I deafen
The noise
That rages within
And severs my being.
No one can know
Of my fear or torment
For then I will lose
All that I am
And my existence
Shall cease.

Cindy Hellen

BENEATH IT ALL

In the air
hang our words
from the fight.

From our minds
moves the pain
into our hearts.

Beyond the anger
lies the love
through it all.

Julie D'Amico-Beres

SO MUCH

SO MUCH OUT THERE
YET TO DO
BUT I'M STUCK HERE
STILL THINKING OF YOU

TIME TO LET GO
TO RELEASE THE DREAM

...

LET'S HOLD OUR
MEMORIES
CLOSE TO HEART
AS LOVERS
WE NOW PART.

JAMIE BUCHHOLZ

THE ICE RINK

Carol Niessen

This Christmas the ice is everywhere. Gazing through our old farmhouse picture window, I see the evergreen branches droop from their thick coating of ice. The plowed fields shimmer from the mid-morning's sun. Nature is beautiful this time of year, but her sleet and snow storms can become dangerous for John and me.

Even though the ice hasn't melted, a foot of snow blankets the earth from last night's blizzard. The radio warns us to stay indoors today if possible. The road conditions remain hazardous.

"John, Loner and Herbie are bouncing off the walls. These horses need to go outside before they hurt themselves. Two weeks stuck inside their stalls is long enough."

As John and I drudge through the snow, the ice underneath the new white covering causes unsteadiness as we make our way to the barn. Arriving at the slightly frozen barn door, John opens the barrier with difficulty. Once inside, we find Loner and Herbie prancing back and forth in their stalls while the whole barn echoes with their bellowing.

"The horses are definitely going out!" I scream.

Loner is led out of her stall first. As she anxiously pulls me toward the familiar pasture door, I calmly whisper in her ear.

"Easy girl, the ice is still under this new snow."

Being timid, Loner cautiously steps outside as I tighten my grip on her halter. Her nostrils enlarge as she sniffs the brisk winter air. Gently making hoof prints in the snow, she snorts softly. Reassuring her every step, I walk beside the huge mare.

I call out to John, "I'm letting her loose.

Loner's smart. She'll be okay. But keep a close eye on her, I'll get Herbie."

As I head toward Herbie's stall, a feeling of horror hits my stomach. Herbie is swaying from right to left, bellowing louder than before. He wants out! Nervously I grab for his halter at the same time opening his stall door. Instantly, Herbie bolts and races for the pasture door, dragging me with him. I strengthen my hold, yanking on his halter, informing the excited gelding who's boss.

In seconds we are outside. Herbie gazes in Loner's direction. His eyes widen so that the whites are visible. Focusing his attention back on me, Herbie starts to calm down. He begins to respond to the soft, stern tone in my commands.

"Take it easy, boy! Watch Loner. Easy, boy, easy!" Thinking to myself that Herbie will be all right, I let him loose. He takes off clumsily.

John and I stand as though paralyzed, watching Herbie slipping and sliding as if the pasture were a gigantic ice-skating rink. I'm holding my breath in fear. Suddenly, half-way across the pasture, Herbie falls. He tries to stand, but fails. The awkward horse tries again with his front legs stretched out as he pulls his weight forward. He fails a second time.

Our worst fear has come true. After a period of time, Herbie could possibly go into shock and even die if he doesn't get up on his feet.

"John, Herbie's not getting up! We have to help him! Get the blankets from the barn, and I'll bring Loner back inside. Hurry!"

I spot Loner, gracefully and carefully gliding on the ice like a ballerina in her first performance. Although Loner moves smoothly and easily, I realize she could also go down at any moment. I approach with caution so as not to frighten her. Reaching for her halter, I guide her back to the safety of her stall.

Back in the pasture, Herbie continues struggling to obtain his stance. John is already at his side, positioning the blankets under him for better traction. I arrive, checking Herbie's condition thoroughly. Nothing seems broken, but suddenly Herbie's eyes roll back in his head. He is in shock!

"John, Herbie has to get up! Now!" Knowing that Herbie can die, I am frantic. Our timing is crucial.

With blankets securely in position, John pushes Herbie's hind quarters as I grab hold of his halter, pulling him up. Herbie gathers enough strength to stand with our assistance.

"Good boy! Good boy!"

He takes a step and falls.

"We gotta try something else! Quick!"

John races back to the barn for a bale of hay. While I wait for his return, Herbie's breathing becomes erratic. Tears begin to form icicles on my cheeks as I plead with Herbie not to die.

"Don't you die! You can't die! I won't let you!"

Returning with the bale, John spreads the loose hay around and underneath Herbie, hoping this will help him to regain his footing. But luck is not on our side.

An hour has passed, we are wet with snow and perspiration. We are exhausted. The feeling begins to drift away from our feet; our fingers are numb. While holding Herbie's head on my lap, crying softly, John nudges me. I slowly look toward the road at the blurred cars parked along the fence line. Emerging from their vehicles, the drivers cry out to us.

"Need our help?"

Overwhelming fear spurts through me, and an immense lump in my throat muffles my reply. John signals frantically for the men to come to our aid.

One by one, the volunteers jump the fence, skidding across the snow-covered ice. Not a word is spoken as we try again to bring Herbie to his feet. Our efforts are futile.

Encouraging Herbie not to give in, I feel increased despair. Surprisingly, after almost giving up hope, our luck changes. Joe, our neighbor, appears at the pasture gate with his four-by-four truck. Hastily, John runs to meet him. The strangers and I continue with our efforts as Joe's blue-gray pick-up creeps along the ice. The truck eases to a sliding halt directly in front of Herbie. By this time, Herbie is too weak to be frightened by the rattling pick-up or the confusion.

John opens the truck's tailgate and reaches for a thick, braided rope. Without hesitation, I seize the rope from John, threading the brawny cord through Herbie's halter. I instruct our crew to lift Herbie up a bit so I can lay the rope under his limp body. Once the rope is around his rump, John grabs for the cord and fastens both ends to the truck's hitch. Joe jumps into the driver's seat, starts the truck, and pulls forward slowly. He pauses, moves carefully forward until the rope is taut.

"Okay, Joe. Everything looks good. Now take off slow." John hollers.

As the truck drags Herbie across the icy pasture, the rescuers and I walk along side to assure his safety. Up ahead John spots a batch of high grass. Directing Joe to the left, John guides him outside the pasture to the grassy terrain. We position Herbie onto the grass, freeing him from the rope. Again we try to bring him to his feet. The men push from the rear as I straighten his front legs.

By some miracle, Herbie is standing! The panic vanishes. Everyone cheers! Thank God Herbie is all right. As fast as the volunteers appeared, they disappear, before John and I can thank them.

<< SONNET #9: RURAL SMELLS >>
(c) 1993 James Kaczmarek

I'm minded often of those rural smells
that I remember from when I was young,
a city lad with uncles' farms far flung,
whose visitations now ring mem'rys bells,
and I record before my memory gels.
Especially pungent various forms of dung,
caused bells in sensor cells to be well rung;
my personal order mem'ry Book of Kells.

Alas, I also recall new cut hay,
and sour smell of corn in silo tall,
and musty smell of new plowed earth fresh turned,
and other smells of youth. That was the Day.
That was the day when new smells came to call.
Alas, 'tis but in mem'ry youth's returned.

PRAYER TO THE STORM GOD

Julie Foat

**I feel your presence, Storm-God.
I hear distant rumbles of your thunder,
See the zigzag arcs of light.
I hear the wailing wraiths of wind,
See the trees tossed left and right.**

**Storm-God, you are welcome here
From the southwest whence you came.
Let your rains pour from the darkness
of your clouds too wild to tame.**

**I beg your presence, Storm-God.
Wash and blow away the evil
done upon the Earth today.
Create beauty through your chaos;
Storm-God, please ... blow me away.**

The Courtship

Will ye always be with me, laddie?

Aye, lass. I will.

Will ye play for me upon the sweet harp and pipes?

Aye, lass. Till we're both set to dancing.

Will ye keep me a flock of purest white sheep?

Aye, lass. A thousand, and more if we need 'em.

Will ye build me a castle of rose-colored granite?

Aye, lass. With crystal towers and golden-edged glass.

Will ye always love me, laddie?

Aye, lass. I will.

Will ye always lie so, laddie?

Aye, lass. I will.

Julie Foat

hues of vision

emerging from blackness
blinded by brightness
progressing to color
never fully sighted.
aging toward blackness
squinting for brightness
oblivious to color
shades of gray.
entering eternity
finally beholding
Light.

cindy hellen

Sensational

One sails
on a sea
to sensation.
No ails.
No state.
No nation.
None.
Salt stains no
senses.

--Jessica Wandsneider

Grandma's Trip to the Spa

Ah, bentonite, and lemongrass extract!
When slathered on my face they feel so nice.
Allantoin and peppermint attract,
And aloe, too. They cool my skin like ice.

When steamed, massaged, and pampered, pores contract.
(It costs a lot to have this done, you know.)
I'd pay much more to have my years subtract,
To give me such a youthful spark and glow.

The loofah rubs and scrapes my wrinkles off
With lotion scented like a cedar chest.
(Sometimes the fumes from this do make me cough.
But hey, these white-clad ladies all know best.)

When I return, my husband thinks I'm cute.
(But doesn't know how much I spent his loot!)

Julie Foat

< ALICE IN WACOLAND >

The Queen said,
"First the sentence,
and then the evidence,"
and Wonderland Alice
shouted, "NONSENSE!"
"The evidence must come first!"

And in Waco they are
searching the ashes
for the evidence.

James Kaczmarek

Hate

Hate is a sharp stick in the eye,
blinding those who have no
constitution to confront it.

Hate is a venomous bite from a cobra,
paralyzing the unwary, striking
when least expected.

Hate is a river smashing a dam,
drowning those who live
in false security.

Hate is a forest fire, raging out of control,
consuming indiscriminately, swept by the prevailing winds
of morality, religion, and politics.

Hate is a seductive whore,
willing and able and ready to lie with anyone
who is just as willing to pay the price.

Kent Brown

OLD DEFENSES

**Let down your defenses, I'll let mine down,
too.**

**You're running me senseless, I'm a
runaway, too.**

**You're looking for misery, I'm looking
away.**

**We had eternal love, but you had to play.
I put up defenses, my love went away.**

**Let down your defenses, I'll let mine down ,
too.**

**You're running me senseless, I'm a
runaway, too.**

**You're looking for trouble, we both
disagree.**

**My life and your life have got to be free.
'Cause those old defenses are looking at
me.**

**Yeah, those old defenses are looking at
me.**

Lee Olsen-White

Roan Mare

The horse I rode as a child
Was a blaze-faced mare
I rode her naked and wild
Galloping without a care.

She was a blaze-faced roan mare
Spirited, with legs that were swift
Galloping without a care
Carrying me on her back like a gift.

Her spirited legs were swift
I rode her smoothly, holding her mane
Her back carried me like a gift
Her heart pounded like a steam-powered train.

I rode her smoothly, holding her mane
I rode her naked and wild
Her heart pounded like a steam-powered train
The mare I rode as a child.

Kent Brown

Seeds

The world is filled with smaller worlds
that grow within the realms of feeling
As the seeds become the seedlings
so the children become one world
And all the feelings in it
soon become their own

And could it be the weeping willow thought it was an oak?

Gloria Forthun

One Small Request

When my rent is two weeks late
and I'm ten years late for school
and I've just carried my car battery
and the battery charger
(which was less expensive than fixing a short)
and my books
all the way from the only parking lot
that wasn't already full of younger people's
younger cars
or full of empty spaces reserved for people
who are where I might have been
has I not done what I'd been taught
that a woman was supposed to do,

Please don't say you're proud of me
for staying off welfare.

Lorelei Kring

from "The Cottage"

Sue Ellen Williams

The familiar creak of the floorboards greeted her as she crossed the porch to remove the power re-connection notice from the screen door. Memories of other arrivals, other summers gone by filled her mind. But this time it will be different, she thought sadly as she turned the key in the front door. Mother is not here. She will never be here or anywhere else ever again. A lump rose in her throat and tears stung her eyes. Instantly, she remembered her brother's impatient words to her as they rode to the cemetery. "Christ Almighty, control yourself! What's the point of being miserable? You can't do anything about it. Death is final, you can't argue with it. Just accept it, will you?"

After months of probate, the estate was finally settled. Charlotte inherited the cottage and everything in it, yet she took no comfort in the ownership. There were too many memories here, too many ties to the past. Her plan was to spend the rest of the summer readying the place for sale. It was time to get on with life.

A rush of dry air swept past her as she opened the front door and stepped across the threshold. Making her way through the darkened rooms, she systematically raised

shades and opened windows. A gentle breeze began to flow through the house, filtering the air with clouds of fine dust. Charlotte longed for something to drink. Let's hope the well isn't as dry as I am, she thought, as she headed for the kitchen.

The pipes rattled as she opened the tap. Letting the water run, she rummaged through a multitude of coffee cans and old glass jars in the pantry, until she found the tea caddy which still held her favorite blend. The kettle was on the top shelf, and as she reached for it she stubbed her toe on a wooden strongbox tucked beneath the bottom shelf. What is this damn thing doing in here anyway? she complained as she bent over to rub her foot. She pulled the heavy box from its hiding place and dragged it into the kitchen. The box was covered with cobwebs, and little spiders ran up its sides, fleeing the sudden sunlight. Charlotte washed her hands at the sink, and after putting the kettle on to boil, she opened the box to see what was inside.

She removed an old family Bible from the box. The names recorded in the book were penned by several different hands: old-fashioned script, sophisticated scrawls, and even a few child-like printings in crayon. The first entry was dated September 21, 1875 - "Elizabeth Anne Harris. Born to Jacob and Mary Harris, a strong child and fine daughter, whose eyes shall see far beyond this world..." The names and entries stretched on and on, one generation after another. It was amazing to think that so much of her family's history should be contained in this book which now seemed on the verge of becoming dust itself.

Charlotte laid out all the contents of the box upon the kitchen table. Hundreds of photographs, scrapbooks filled with yellowed newspaper clippings, and a leather-bound diary, which was locked, all vibrated with a life of their own. As she looked things over, she began to remember what she had been told about the family and the place that had once been their home, the cottage which she now owned.

The old homestead originally belonged to her grandmother's grandfather, Jacob Harris, who emigrated from New York state with his young bride, Mary Bunde, in the late 1840's. They began their married life six miles east of an obscure and swampy outpost that later became known as the Village of Long Lake.

To Jacob, his land held great promise, although much of it needed to be cleared and readied for planting. Mary was anxious to set up housekeeping but was dismayed with the primitive accommodations that awaited them. Jacob arranged for Mary to stay with a neighboring family while he busied himself preparing a home that would please his wife. He chose a high spot on the property that overlooked Long Lake and employed a team of men to build a small but comfortable house, similar to those seen in the Yankee villages that he and Mary had passed through on their way west. An old settler's shanty served as a shelter for a team of oxen, a cow, one brood sow, and four laying hens.

Some months after getting settled in their new home, Mary gave birth to her first child, Elizabeth. It was a difficult birth and somewhat early, but Mary was heartened by the fact that the child had been born with a caul over her face. In Mary's family it meant the child would have "the knowing" as they called it, enabling one to see and speak with spirits and to foretell future events. This certainly seemed to be true, for Elizabeth displayed a somewhat uncanny nature throughout her long life.

Jacob Harris himself was known for his uncommon foresight and good sense; he had anticipated Lake County's transition from wheat growing to dairying long before crop prices started to drop. Few farmers kept enough cows with which to make and sell dairy products at a profit, yet these commodities were growing in demand. His wife made excellent cheeses and rich butter, which were sold to the inn and hotel along the path of the plank road. The new railroad that passed through Lochmond would make it easy to ship these products to larger cities as well. With this in mind, Jacob began to develop a dairy herd and devoted more and more of his energies to dairying. By the mid-1870's, with the help of his eldest son, Douglas, Jacob was able to open one of the first creameries in the area.

The Harris family continued to grow and prosper. To keep a better eye on operations and because it was in a more prominent location, a new family home was built nearer to the creamery and its outbuildings, which stood on the corner of what later became Lake Road and Highway 22. Across the fields, the old homestead lay abandoned.

Its grassy crest above the lake became a favorite family picnic spot, and the little frame house that had been the family's first home was lovingly referred to for many years afterwards as "the cottage."

Jacob died in 1911. Mary died two years later. The estate was divided equally among their living children, each having several children themselves, except Elizabeth. Perhaps owing to her strange and reclusive ways, Elizabeth never married. She lived alone at the cottage until her death in the early 1920's.

The cottage and six acres on Long Lake passed from Elizabeth Harris to her grandniece, Agnes Sheldon, Charlotte's grandmother. Agnes' husband, John, had served in the Great War and suffered recurrent bouts of neuralgia which made it very difficult for him to keep up with a heavy workload at the Lochmond foundry. With his wife's inheritance, the pressure to stay solvent lessened and his health improved. John later went on to become county coroner, and always remarked that it was the move to Long Lake which helped him turn the corner toward better health and employment. Over the years, the Sheldons renovated the cottage into a fine home and happily raised their two children there. Grandpa Sheldon died in the 50's, and Grandma couldn't adjust to being alone. Her daughter, Lizbeth Talbot, a widow, came to live at the cottage and brought up her three children there: Allen, Bruce and Charlotte. Somehow the cottage always served those who needed it most.

Charlotte sat back in the willow chair that her grandmother had always favored and felt a soft breeze coming through the open screen door. It cooled her damp skin, and the scent of willow carried up to her nostrils. For a moment she remembered climbing into her grandmother's lap on a day much like today. Get down, girl, it's much too hot to be sitting on me. Charlotte automatically rose from the chair. Maybe I'll go for a swim.

She was glad she had chosen to arrive on a weekday, for the lake was quiet and undisturbed, free of the mad tangle of weekend boaters. The water swirled sensuously around her breasts and across her thighs as she floated on her back and gazed up at the clear blue sky. She was very tempted to remove her swimsuit altogether, but changed her mind at the arrival of surface-skimming dragonflies looking for a place to land. She paddled over to the stone pier and climbed its slippery green steps.

The water cascaded off her swimsuit and drizzled into a warm puddle all around her as she lay down and stretched out on the deck. She rolled over and turned her back to the sun, lowering the top of her swimsuit to guard against tan lines. Gentle waves lapped against the pilings in a rhythmic motion, and the worn wood of the deck cradled Charlotte in a warm embrace. She settled into a comfortable position and let the elements take her in like a long-lost child.

She closed her eyes and prayed. Please, God, let me do the right thing. Help me find peace. She emptied her mind of all negative thoughts and concentrated on what she called the "life light," a beacon of love of life and hope. Her body relaxed as her thoughts carried her along. Floating in and out of sleep, she passed through a grove of willow trees and stopped at a garden gate over-hung with roses. An old woman appeared in the center of a flower bed and beckoned Charlotte to enter the garden. And then the image faded into darkness.

Charlotte opened her eyes and sat up. The sun was lower in the sky and clouds were moving in from the east. Fishermen could now be seen in the small bay across the lake, the first to await a late afternoon rising of the fish. Gee, what a tourist, she thought as she looked down at her sunburned shoulders and quickly pulled the top of her suit back into position. Too much sun the first day I'm here. She stood and walked the length of the pier, feeling a little light-headed. The sun peeked out from behind a cloud, casting a golden glow across the shallow water at the end of the pier. Minnows darted near the water's edge and sought refuge beneath the hanging tendrils of an old willow tree as Charlotte stepped onto the sand. Wanting nothing but a cool shower, she hurried toward the cottage, mindlessly avoiding the thorny wild roses that spilled across the hillside path.

After a refreshing shower, she slopped into a cotton jumper and towel-dried her hair on her way into the kitchen. She was in a relaxed state of mind as she stood next to the stove and waited for the kettle to boil. The late afternoon sunlight streamed through the kitchen window and warmed the wooden floor beneath her bare feet. Looking down, her eyes traced across the worn boards to a concentrated pool of light in the center of the floor, broken suddenly by a moving shadow. Following its path along the floor and up the wall, she glanced out the window to see an outline of a figure as it retreated beyond the back steps of the house. Charlotte went to investigate.

She stepped onto the open porch, quickly scanning the area. There was no one there. Crossing to the opposite end of the porch, an odd sensation ran through her body, a disconcerting bristling of skin and hair. I guess I've forgotten how chilling lake air can be, she thought, as she continued her survey of the backyard lawn. No unexpected visitor came into view, yet something out of the ordinary, something which she could sense but not truly accept, lagged at the edge of her consciousness. In this peculiar state of half-sight, she observed a disembodied pair of trouser-clad legs, tucked inside heavy work boots, moving across the yard toward the old shed. It was only a fleeting impression. In fact, as soon as this strange notion had entered her mind, it was gone again, instantly dismissed as a meaningless daydream. The kettle's whistle broke the spell. Charlotte ran back inside.

Throughout the remaining daylight hours and into the early evening, she busied herself with clearing away the cobwebs that clung to the ceilings and walls in each room of the cottage. She opened up the second-story rooms, and removed the rest of the dust covers, which she took outside and hung on the clothesline to air.

Familiar objects came to life as she worked. She felt like an archeologist unearthing buried treasures, and it was fun to come upon things that she had long ago forgotten. The old keys that mother collected were found in the pigeon-holed desk; Grandma Sheldon's collection of fancy cups and assorted knick knacks filled the corner cabinets in the dining room, and with each pass of the dust cloth, a remembered instance or conversation brought to mind a bittersweet connection with the past.

The wind picked up, and a loud crash of thunder finally brought Charlotte out of her reverie. She jumped up and ran outside to get the last of the dust covers off the line, making it back to the porch just as the rain began to fall. Inside the cottage once more, she switched on the radio and listened for the weather report. She realized that there was no food in the house and suddenly felt quite hungry. Perhaps she would go into town for something to eat as soon as the storm passed.

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<< BEIN' DIRTY >>

Standin' in the shower this A.M.,
old geezer me got to thinkin',
thinkin' that I aint been dirty,
really dirty, for a very long time.
Oh, I gon't mean a little greasy
fingers that need washin' after a
bout with some fried chicked dirty,
nor do I mean a few black charcoal
smudges from fillin' the bar-b-q
dirty, nor somethin' like that.
No, I mean real dirt; dirt like
the dirty feet I got after a full
day walkin' in a hay field, a pitchin'
hay up on a wagon looked like I was
wearin' black stockin's. Or the kind
a dirt that covered me when I was the
grain bagger tender, ridin' a combine
all day, harvestin' oats; fine dust
dirt permeated all, so skin was dirty
all over; bare arms, face covered with
a quarter inch of combined chaff, dust
and steat; good old fashioned
friendly farm dirt. No, I aint been
dirty, that kind of dirty, for a long
time.

Come this summer, prob'bly late, after
some dry spell, if you see some old
geezer a rollin' in the dust of some
corn field, a gettin' hissself full
head to toe dirty, that'll prob'bly
be me, or some guy like me, celebratin'
the glorious cleanliness a good old
fashioned dirt. Yeah, good old dirt.
Should prob'bly get dirty least one
more time, huh?

James Kaczmarek

WHERE DO I STAND?

Do you go through life doing as you please

Thinking, "Oh, she'll go along, don't speak with her,"

Just make a choice with ease?

**Where do I stand with you? Know where you
stand with me?**

Inside my soul.

**You stand with me, informed, enjoined,
entwined;**

Like hands folded, intermingled lives

And souls aligned.

**Where do I stand with you? Know where you
stand with me?**

Right by my side.

Where must I be? Behind you catching up.

**Always outside looking in or standing blythely
by,**

Letting you fly?

**where do I stand with you? Know where you
stand with me?**

Inside my life.

Am I in your shadow,

On the edge...

is there a place for me somewhere?

Tell me where.

**Where do I stand with you? Know where you
stand with me?**

Inside my love.

Lee Olsen-White

Sestina

It's always dark
out and a ragged
killer is on the loose and the girls never
seem to get away. They run screaming,
right into the line of fire
of the killer. These girls can kiss

their life good-bye. They'll never kiss
their boyfriends again. And their life will be eternally
dark.

Someone starts a fire
hoping that it will encompass the ragged
killer and he runs away screaming
in agony. But it just happens that he never,

never,
dies. he's always going to be right behind you, kissing
his sterling silver knife. He loves it when you run
screaming
away from him and into the dark
night. You could run yourself ragged,
and never run far enough away from the fire

in the killer's eyes. Trying to run from his fire
would only make things worse for you. Never
close your eyes or you'll run right into his ragged
grip. And then you, like the others can kiss
his sterling silver knife. It would be so dark
and deserted that no one would hear your screams

except for the killer. Your screams
would forever be etched in his twisted mind while the fire
in his eyes would grow and he would thrive on the
darkness

of the night. And knowing you'd never
see the light again, he kisses
you lightly on the forehead, while his ragged

grip tightens around your neck. But that would never
happen. The ragged killer would never get me because I
won't run screaming
away from him. I'll face him and kiss him on the cheek,
and his fire

would never reach me because I'd never
get stuck in a situation like that, and go into the dark

ragged unknown where the fire
screams and can't kill the evil, and where fire never kisses
the light through the darkness.

Jessica Wandsneider

SWEAT AND GO TO BED

by Lee Olsen-White

I wrote to Kris Kristofferson and said,

Help me make a million from my song;

It's about booze & sweat & beer,

So I know I can't go wrong.

I was sitting in my recliner on the front porch one day,

Dreamin' 'bout the money gonna come my way

When my song hits the charts at number one

With a big name like Kristofferson.

My dog Dixie came and looked me in the eye

Like she knew my money-makin' scheme

Was just pie in the sky.

And my man he's always shakin' his head

'Cause all I do is drink beer, sweat and go to bed.

Well, I'll prove 'em wrong

And I'll show 'em all someday

When I find a stamp and send my letter on its way

Askin' ol' Kris to sing my song

And make me famous.

After I bought all his albums.

It's the least he could do for me.



