
Shoreline

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SHORELINE

Fall 1989

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Apples

You're eight years old and you're walking to school with your lunch in a little brown bag that your mother buys in packs of one hundred. She keeps them in the bread drawer. It's a hometown that could be anywhere but it's right here where you are. All the people who are just what they're supposed to be think they know all about those who aren't. You're just a kid so you aren't either yet but you will be before you leave. You're walking and it starts to rain. The bag gets wet. You're walking and the bag is ripping. You don't know about the bag so you just keep walking until all of a sudden your carrot sticks are laying on the ground inside their plastic baggy looking just like the goldfish Tommy Garringer won during last summer's carnival. They look like the goldfish after he first got them and not after he carried them around until their bodies and the water inside the baggy matched colors. Tommy's mom made him throw them away and Tommy cried.

You pick up your carrot sticks while you think about the goldfish and put them in the pocket of your navy blue raincoat. Alan Routhier has the very same raincoat only his is bigger because he is bigger than you are. You know that Alan doesn't wear a girl's coat

because boys don't do that so you think that maybe some things aren't just for boys or just for girls. You wonder if you're wearing a boy's coat. You hope it is because maybe then you don't really have to be a girl but you feel some black question mark inside your chest that you can't erase and sometimes, for the rest of your life, it hurts.

After you pick up your carrots, you put your sandwich in your other pocket and then crunch the wet remains of your lunch bag on top of it. You don't find out until later that you crunched the sandwich too. There is no room

Since you're not a Catholic kid, you don't even once think about Adam and Eve.

for the apple so you just carry it in your hand. Being only eight years old, you are not in such a big rush to get to school even if it is raining and maybe even less so because of it. You like rain. You walk very slowly instead of running and look at the apple you're holding in your hand. Since you're not a Catholic kid, you don't even once think about Adam and Eve. You just know that this is an apple and you like apples and that is the whole story.

You finally arrive at school with your apple in hand and your

pockets bulging like frogs. You leave the twenty minutes behind you and you know you won't get them again until three o'clock. Miss Beardsley looks at you and says, "You're late" as if a whole room full of people sitting in Dick and Jane lines and staring at you didn't already give you that information. It never really looks like Dick and Jane though. Dick and Jane have faces like soap bubbles popping instead of looking like a counter full of loose groceries after shopping in the way everybody here does. You can feel your cheeks turn red from the staring and you know they look like enough apples to bake a pie. You say "It's raining" as if that explains everything, which it seems to do; but you know it explains a different everything than the everything you meant. You bite your lip as Miss Beardsley grabs her most important green book. She marks you up in that book and steals something invisible from you to write a story that you don't understand. The people who read the story are afraid of wrinkled clothes and you are afraid of them. You wonder why anyone would want to give Miss Beardsley an apple.

David Suda knows Miss Beardsley isn't looking. He punches you in the arm when you walk past him. You keep walking. Laura Delan says David likes you. You know that angry people are like thunderstorms rumbling all of a sudden to shake the whole grocery store and making everyone stop to look into the air before they look at each other and forget all about the price of

apples. All the shopping carts stop as if hiding in silence for the storm to pass by. When it doesn't pass, everything moves too fast. You have to behave and you have to run to the car. If you play in a thunderstorm you will get hurt. Thunderstorms just hit like angry people.

People who like you are more confusing. Some people who like you are nice to you and some, like David, hit you and some like you one way around everybody else and another way when you're by yourself, but you're not allowed to talk about it. Sometimes you don't want people to like you but you don't want them to be angry either. You think about your doll. She wears real baby clothes, and you tuck her into bed every night and wake her every morning. You say "Pleasant dreams" and "Rise and shine" and you've never asked Santa Claus for another one. You share your apples with her. You are too stupid to know why you would want to be mean. You know you're stupid because your dad says so and he is never wrong.

Miss Beardsley passes out yellow lined paper. You know that means pencils. Pencils are for yellow paper and pens are for white paper. You like to use them the other way around but you're not allowed. Pencils and pens smell different and yellow paper doesn't feel good.

After lunch, your apple is piled inside your stomach like sand on the beach. You can't look at it anymore but you can't lose it either and you can

remember eating it on the playground beside the chain link fence that keeps everyone from falling into the river. You remember watching the river through chain links with the taste of apple in your mouth and the smell of the morning's rain hanging around like the lunch lady who wears a whistle. After Miss Beardsley reads a story, everyone draws a picture, including you. There is the sound of crayons, and high heels clicking up and down the rows. Miss Beardsley comes down your row. Just when you think she is passing and you will be able to breathe again, she screams. Your body tenses and your eyes don't even look all the way up yet before she rips your drawing away from you and, still screaming, runs into the next classroom. You start shaking an earthquake and your sandpile apple starts tumbling. You try to keep it inside of you by swallowing the foul taste that is creeping into your throat. The taste is a monster who ate your apple and wants to come out of your throat and eat the river and the fence and the rain and then run away with your apple like a teacher with your drawing.

Miss Beardsley and the other teacher are cackling witches in the doorway. They stare at you and discuss the ways they can boil you up because they know about special potions that need bad girls who draw evil pictures. They will grab you and lock you up with groping witch hands and let the monsters crawl onto you. The new witch holds your drawing like a fresh heart for the last

ingredient. You wait for the hot liquid brew to sizzle with your final dissolve. You don't look at anyone but you know they are all looking at you.

There is silence inside of you like shopping carts stopping all at once but there is no thunder.

When Miss Beardsley returns your drawing, she says that it's very good. She tells everyone to go back to work. Terry and Victor and Suzanne and Celeste and Madeline and Eric all want to see your picture. You don't want to show it to them, but you show it. They all like it. There is silence inside of you like shopping carts stopping all at once but there is no thunder. You are happy for a minute. You look at the drawing and you can't finish it because it isn't yours. You can finish apples but not someone else's good drawing. You want to cry because you can't find your picture and your stomach ripples like a lake when kind words are dropped like stones.

Since you don't know yet that you can't ever stop having been eight, you listen for the dismissal bell because you've learned that everything ends if you wait long enough. You think about the walk home when you'll be able to collect the soft aluminum milk bottle caps from the street. The milkman drives a big truck early in the morning. The truck probably comes from a farm with cows like the one you go to for ice-cream with Grandma. Sometimes the milkman is late and

you see him in his uniform as he carries milk. He says hello and you say hello back. He puts the bottles in the grey metal milk boxes that sit beside the back doors. You're not supposed to play with the milk boxes but you do anyway. You want to take the caps right off the bottles but you don't. You're sure it is magic that makes the caps settle by the curbside all along the streets between school and home.

Some caps are red like apples and some are hot pink like nothing you've ever seen before and some are silver and some are blue and they all sparkle in the dirt by the grey curb like carnivals sparkling in July nights. Carnivals have ferris wheels and candy apples.

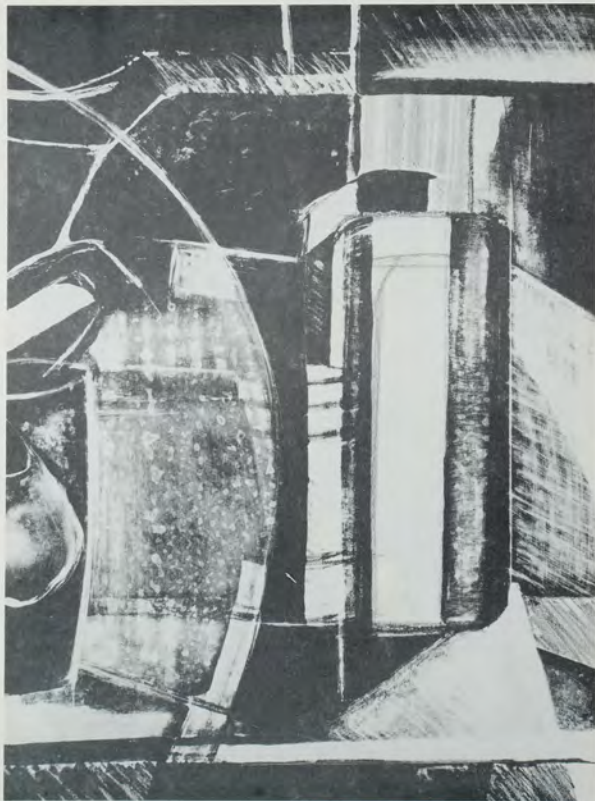
--Jill Jann

Take

Wolfsbane
of a dark purple
Pick me.
Milk
white blood
washes down
your blue wrist
cools your pulse.
I wilt, you die.

--Patricia Wolf





Twisting the Flowers

I walked down to the park when lunch ended and Danny went back to sleep. Everything looks so good when the sun is out, God's bright candle. Carpenter Road was quiet. Unsurprisingly. Sunday afternoons are meant for family, rides in the country admiring foliage, visiting Mother at the home. Still, the emptiness of the streets and sidewalks did not inspire a sad or morose response in my heart. I was merely passing through, going to the park.

I thrust my hands into my pocket and started whistling. "Barnyards of Delgaty" and any other sprite tune that wandered into my head. Sang a few lines of "Dark Streets of London" and decided it was too sad a song for such a sweet Sunday despite its light melody. Move along to another song, another street.

Arriving at the park I found that I was not the only one to whom this day was meant for wandering. A few families meandered here and there stopping by the fish pond and gazebo. I saw two would-be lovers walking along the garden path dressed in their Sunday best. "Sir may I ask your daughter to join me for a walk in the park after Sunday morning services?" Clean trim fingernails and a job at the new law offices have her home for afternoon tea and oh please do

join us please. Old men with their shirts untucked smoked short cigars from foreign countries. One old woman with a dark blue dress and white white hair walked with purpose in some meaningless direction with a loaf of bread under her arm. Some boys were uselessly trying to convince a duck that their fishhook was a bug.

I strayed off the path towards a tree I used to climb when I was much much younger. Stay off the trees. But today's Sunday and the caretaker is still talking to the pastor on the steps of the church. Yes Father Amen To That Father God Bless You Father and you should see how the tree You planted last spring has grown FATHER. An older man now with a white shirt I should not climb the tree.

When I find a good branch to sit on, high enough to feel guiltily giddy I...

*"When I was a little boy,
So my mother told me, to me!
Way haul away, we'll haul
away Joe..."*

Not as loud as it should be sung, but one does not want to attract attention to one's self. Especially on a quiet Sunday afternoon. Particularly in a tree.

*"That if I did not kiss the
girls,
My lips would all grow
moldy, to me!
Way haul away, we'll haul
away Joe..."*

"What are you doing up there mister?"

A little boy and his sister, little too. If only Norman Rockwell were here!

"Why, I'm sitting in this here tree singing. Would you like to hear a song? For you and your sister?"

"Okay."

I stand as best I can on the branch and then bend over to look at the little guy, stare at him right in the eye...

"Oh, I'll be there when you wake from dreaming,

I'll be there when you wake up screaming,

Cause I am Death and I won't rest,

Till your murderous heathen soul is cursed!"

Poor little guy. Doesn't know what to do. His sister's smarter and hides behind him.

"Watch the maggots crawl out of them,

Fear the angels calling above them,

Watch them as the cold wind sucks them,

Down that auld goodnight

Forever!"

They ran. I laughed and boomed out in a large bassy voice after them...

"And we'll haul away Joe!"

It was probably a rather mean thing to do oh come on now you know you aren't a bad person I can't believe you did that sort of thing. I jumped out of the tree and discovered that not only had the two children disappeared but nearly everyone else as well. That old caretaker thought he saw me come out of the tree but wasn't sure. I shoved my hands

in my pockets and walked by him Good Afternoon Sir.

I crouched by a patch of wild flowers, weeds actually with pure white petals and a solar yellow middle and a scent that reminded me of someone far away, stubbornly growing in the middle of what should have been pure manicured grass. I picked out five or six of them and continued walking while twisting the pale green stems into a crude chain. I bent the flowers into a circle forming a delicate bracelet.

She was spanked hard and locked in her room for a very long time.

Maybe. Maybe a crown for some little girl who is frightened by a stupid man, or maybe. Maybe just a little something. I carefully put the flowers into my jacket pocket and continued along the way thinking of that someone a far way away and how much I'd like to smell her again and how much I smell her now.

Walking up the street chattering and holding happy hands; fingers entwined like vines and friendly, intimate squeezes and a chronic brushing of shoulders up the stairs we go and fumble for her keys. A pale blue carpet, won't you come in? Warm, with a nice smell of wildflowers. The apartment is one room made up of a collage of chairs, bookcases, small tables, and a fold-out bed all comfortably mismatched. The curtains and carpet match. The couch is still folded out. The sheets and blankets are all

twisted into a large ribbon strewn across the bed showing that she sleeps on the left. A wooden box reveals stacks of folded socks and panties. The wardrobe, half-open, lets out the fact that she hangs all her clothes (pants, shirts, sweaters) neatly but owns only one dress. Three pairs of shoes on the floor. Do you want a drink? Yes. Please. Thank you. There is a candle stuck into the top of an old looking wine bottle. The wax drips running lewdly down the side. The bath is around the corner. That's where I like to lay and laze in warm soapy water. Oh do you now? Her books are a potpourri. Literature's finest potlatch intermingled. Little books of poems. Big books of paintings.

She has one book of obscene Japanese cartoons. *Konban wa, Mishima-san, hochihodo omeni kakarimasu.* Classics and classics depending what kind one prefers. Little knick-knack statues and where did you get this one. Oh, a boy who had a crush on me bought it and left it at my doorstep anonymously.

I am lost in love with this room. A Haven for hiding. The walls are sound and solid and make one feel safe. It is good to have a strong wall at one's back. One would not want it to fall down. I tell her how much I like the place. Oh but how I hate it she says. Why? I've always wanted a big house in the country with lots of room and lots of empty space for absolutely nothing. That's nice I say. I myself could spend hours alone just discovering delightful details.

She tells me as I gaze at a book title, Yes, I went to the community college for a while and took some literature and writing courses. I want to be a writer so bad but my money ran out and rent went up and I was getting so frustrated. Right now I'm just working in this bistro where the most wonderful people come in. I could write about them forever. Why don't you? Oh I don't know. I'm just trying to get my act together so I can apply to school again I really did love school, especially my modern literature class.

"Modern Literature" he announced in his teaching voice, "is fragmented as it reflects the fragmentation of the modern world since World War One, Darwinism, the decay of religion, and the loss of faith in the all important classical 'worldview.'"

A Quiet Moment for the class to scribble cipherous notes in case of an improbable pop quiz or whatever. She never took notes but always took these moments to stare at him. He would shift uncomfortably at first but eventually be drawn into the game. Throughout the class this would be peppered with friendly smiles and salted with the old "well-we-know-what's-really-going-on" looks. Sweet God's gold teeth! I need a drink, he thought. Actually, I want to sit and drink with her and stare at those eyes unafraid and find out if she's anybody at all. I'm sure of it. "Joyce's *Dubliners*," he continued, "takes the reader on a voyage through that shattered world..." Are you into jazz, he wondered, or will you

climb onto my back and kiss the back of my neck? Will you flash your eyes at me in my office? Will you scream?

In three days she'll be writing about dead caterpillars again run over by bikes when she was a little girl and hurt a lot. When she was a little girl she felt all alone. Mom and Dad were never home and Andy and Jimmy said they never wanted her in the first place. No one seemed to love her. Oh Tom said he loved her behind the barn but when he was done he left. The only one who really loved her was Sarah who lived all alone across the street and was having a baby. They would play games and have milk and Sarah would lift her smock and let her hear the baby kick. It was the first time she ever saw another woman naked. One day when she was helping Sarah scrub her back, her father came in and dragged her out. Funny she didn't recognize him at first. She was spanked hard and locked in her room for a very long time. Sarah never answered the door after that and she soon moved away. Later she would get a letter from her and a picture of the baby and her mother would take them away. Sarah named the baby after her and said they were all one family in spirit. Sarah also said she loved her.

She looked at me suddenly with very serious eyes. It is a very nice place. It's getting late you know. You can stay here. Thank you. No, I must go. I have a lecture in the morning. My professor is a real bastard. Okay. If you have to. Let me walk you down to the door. I work tomorrow all day. Will you drop by? I can usually take a break whenever I want. Maybe. I tell her about the museum exhibit I want to see will you go with me. Okay. Sunday? Then maybe we can have lunch in the park. We walk down the steps again and she wants to kiss me good night and I want to kiss her. Thank you for a wonderful evening. I'm sorry you have to go out on a night like this. I appreciate the offer. I'll drop by this week, I promise. We scrape our teeth together, unintentionally I'm sure and I am embarrassed at my reaction and thank the sweet heavens that I'm wearing a long coat. I am almost tempted to stay. No, I can't. I leave with the smell of wildflowers. I...I just leave.

-- John D. Teehan

The Photograph

My mother hugs a cowboy,
against a huge uncluttered sky.
A cactus and a horse, stand by.

When I discovered that secret twenty-five years ago,
hidden in a shoe box of beach scenes and piles of snow,
I searched that picture like tumbleweed,
for something familiar,
and thrilled,
did not even recognize the smile on her face.

Then the small Rhode Island sky,
which would never be enough,
crowded with roof lines and telephone wires,
finally murdered every cowboy in her dreams.
Just a lone gunfighter, dressed in black,
poised against a pink sky, and faintly singing of El Paso
and a hundred and sixty million stars,
haunted her now and then.

As my memories sharpen in the settling dust,
I begin to see...
my mother slips a black disc onto the old record player,
and teaches me the words to songs, through a sly smile.
The words come clear and loud.

"Now the stranger started talkin'
made it plain to folks around,
was an Arizona ranger,
wouldn't be too long in town."

And I slip on the Navajo, silver and turquoise ring,
that came straight out of that dust bowl dream,
fifty years ago, thinking of my mother,
who recently travelled out west on a senior citizens' tour,
staring out the bus window at the painted desert
lost in a dust cloud.

As I look over maps of Colorado, Texas and Arizona,
I hear the lone voice,

"Out in the West Texas town of El Paso,
I fell in love..."

--Cynthia Perkins Danyluk

Your Good Friend Dream

Green with steel posts the merry-go-round spins,
 Turns. Ken goes by and hits you with a stick.
 He does it again. Stop, you say, Stop. He won't.
 Gray bricks fall around you. The red one hits you
 And you scream. Ken throws more. You run yelling
 Stop. At Main Street your Father drives past, then Mother.
 The road is clear and you get to the yellow lines.
 Ken stands across on the ladder waving traffic
 Forward. You turn around. He stands there too.
 You're stranded. At the end of the yellow lines you're
 In the classroom. Conlin laughs. You knew it was four.
 Ken said it was two, so you said it. He pokes
 You with the ruler. Conlin laughs louder filling
 The small round cell. Ken is throwing wood and
 Yellow straw down from the blue tower. You duck
 In the niche and yell up, Why? Running down
 After you Ken throws baseballs past you to himself.
 You bounce the bowling ball down the alley at white
 Pins. Ken falls as it hits him. He looks up to you
 And you ask, and he asks, Why?

--Brian Laferte

Confessions of an LD Kid

I was the kid who taught her friends math and while they got A's, I flunked. I was the kid who knew the right answer, until I was called on, and blurted out the wrong one instead. I was the kid who understood so fast that I was bored in class, but when taking a test, couldn't remember a thing. I was the "bee in the field" and the child who "was not living up to her potential."

The high point of school life for me came in the third grade when I wrote a poem which rhymed. The pride flowed inside me as I felt a real sense of my own worth. I could create pictures with words. This "picture" was of a girl standing on a hilltop looking down on a sailboat moving across the water. A few minutes later, the teacher, who I "should have been attending" pointed out that it was a dirty poem, for the last, and rhyming line had been about the wind blowing up the girl's skirt. She then informed me that I was expelled. From then on, high points were something other people had. I was seven.

Lethargic, I found my life inside books. It was thirty years before I wrote another poem. I looked bright and felt dumb. Moping around repeating to myself "I DON'T CARE," it became my motto, but the more I said it, the more I DID care, and the more I cared the worse I did.

My post-school life followed

the familiar pattern for girls who don't make it academically--early marriage, part time/full time jobs which paid much less than their worth. I raised two bright and lovely kids but was a failure myself.

I always knew that there was something wrong with me, but I also felt I should have been able to control myself to avoid those failures. Somehow, I felt, I had missed some key information other people had about control. It was that lack which made the blame so heavy.

Then, two years ago, my father told me about a book called Smart but Feeling Dumb--I knew it was for me. The book taught me about learning disability and changed the way I looked at myself and the past. Making a list of all the symptoms I had suffered as a child, then crossing out the ones I no longer had, gave me a chance to realize how much progress I had made, rather than how dumb or clumsy I was. I began to allow myself a banded knee or a twisted phrase, as I would allow a stranger one, or a friend.

I was in therapy then with a very skilled psychologist. She had "never thought of me as having a learning disorder," but when I told her about Smart... and my reaction to it, she immediately gave me the name of a psychologist who did that kind of testing.

A year later the doctor's name still hung on my refrigerator. One Sunday in October I picked up the New York Times Magazine and

in an article called "Out of a Darkness," I read a story about me. A successful freelance photographer was writing about his treatment for severe depression and the testing he received for Attention Deficit Disorder and how it had changed his life. The symptoms were so similar to my own that I called for an appointment for testing the next morning.

One of the first questions the psychologist asked was, what was I hoping to do with the results? It was a valid question but it surprised me, since an answer was enough for me--at least for a moment. I simply had a need to verify that an answer could be given.

Sitting through the barrage of tests, I felt as if I had gone back to being seven or eight again. Repeating to myself that I had asked for this, I still felt like running. The worst test was the last one, geared to evaluate my attention span, it brought back, as none of the others had, the same sense of helplessness and lack of control which enveloped me as I had grown up. It was even more devastating than I had remembered.

What was it like to be me? I was always missing doorways, bumping into walls, and tripping over doorjamb. Sidewalks jumped up to meet me. I couldn't skip rope or catch and hit a ball. Afraid of the dark, terrified of heights and escalators, trains and subways rushing out of tunnels petrified me.

I had trouble learning to read and tell time. I took ballet lessons and couldn't follow. At the piano, my fingers betrayed me

over the same passages time after time. My room was a "pig sty" no matter how much I wanted to keep order. Starting something, I would get distracted and start something else; I couldn't put anything away since I was never FINISHED with it. I had trouble learning left and right and following directions.

I had trouble beginning my homework and completing it. I got frustrated easily and the anger went back inside me. In class, the wrong answer would fly out of my mouth but I never learned to sit there and say nothing. I wanted to learn and do well, but I wound up sitting in the back of the class becoming a clown and mutating into the canon in the *1812 Overture* when I got bored. The lesson I learned at school was that the more I tried the worse I did. So I stopped trying.

There is still much debate about the cause or causes of learning disability, but what is agreed upon is that it is the input/output processing and transmission of information to and from the brain which is affected.

As Dr. Harold Levinson, the author of Smart but Feeling Dumb describes it, the brain is like a television set with millions of channels. In a person with a learning disability the fine tuner goes on the blink--not necessarily all channels or the same channels all the time--but when it does happen, the feedback is fuzzy. In some people it is the input and in some, like me, it is the output which is affected. In other words, I DID understand what was taught in the classroom, but I

couldn't recreate it because there were too many distractions and the environment was too threatening for me to concentrate. I learned to read because my mother taught me phonetically, and alone.

In LD kids, coordination is often affected--not only coordination of motor skills, but of the thought processes as well. Therefore, when I knew the right answer and said the wrong one, it was caused by the same problem as when I headed for the door and bumped into the wall. Poor coordination may also have been the reason why the more I tried the more I failed.

These are the explanations I had been looking for. I found them through my readings, but could not feel sure that I was not just neurotic until the test results were in. A week later, I went back to discuss those results. The tests confirmed everyone else's view of me--I was bright, but I also had Attention Deficit Disorder. They explained how it interfered with my intelligence. I was now truly able to accept that intelligence for the first time.

I am back in school now and I love it. I'm doing well because I understand, for the first time, how to work around my disability. I choose classes with professors who are encouraging and who appreciate interaction from students because I learn better that way. If I run into a problem with someone demanding an answer, I demand time to think before responding. Even though my room and desk are still piled high with papers, books and paraphernalia, I have

found myself and it feels good.

It is no coincidence that both the photographer, whose article stirred me to action, and I feel the need to write our stories. We both are compelled to awaken those adults who have suffered in darkness for so long and those adults who hold the fate of children like us in their hands. And so we say, with the Foundation for Children with Learning Disabilities:

Let no child be demeaned
nor have his wonder diminished
because of our ignorance or
inactivity

Let no child be deprived of
discovery
because we lack the resources
to discover his problem

Let no child--ever--doubt
himself or his mind
because we are unsure of our
commitment.

LD kids are showing this society that they CAN learn, they just learn in different ways. They ARE smart and just need the chance to prove it. Leonardo da Vinci wrote his notebooks backwards, Thomas A. Edison read the same way. Albert Einstein's parents had the foresight to send him to a special school; he wrote his theory of relativity like this:

E = MCS S

They never would have imagined the things they did if they had seen the world as others saw it. Creativity is the art of seeing, thinking and fitting ideas together in a new way--kids with

learning disabilities are a treasure we cannot afford to throw away.

SIDEBAR

THINGS TO LOOK FOR--Parents know their own children--TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS!

USUALLY:

- * An intelligent child who fails at school
- * A child who loses her homework, misplaces his book, doesn't know what day it is, what year or what season
- * A child who calls breakfast "lunch"... who is confused by "yesterday," "today," and "tomorrow," the child whose timing is off
- * A child who gets frustrated at repeating the same mistakes over and over, who cannot appreciate himself, and who has no sense of herself

FREQUENTLY:

- * A child who reverses letters, words like "saw" and "was," and numbers
- * A child who can't picture things in his mind, visualize or remembers what he sees
- * The quiet child who bothers nobody in the classroom but doesn't learn
- * The hyperactive or underactive child
- * A child who is lost in time and space; has trouble telling time, or left and right
- * A child who gets car sick, is frightened of the dark, closed or open spaces, elevators, escalators, or crowds.
- * A child who needs constant attention

SOMETIMES:

- * A child who can add and multiply but cannot subtract or divide...who can do math in her head but cannot write it down
- * A child who skips, omits or adds words when reading or writing
- * A child who is clumsy. Clumsiness is: MISJUDGING...overdoing, underdoing, off balance
- POOR TIMING...too fast, too slow
- NOT LOOKING
- NOT LISTENING
- NOT BEING ABLE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS
- NOT BEING ABLE TO COORDINATE SEVERAL THINGS AT ONCE

The above is from a highly recommended booklet of the US Department of Health and Human Services called: PLAIN TALK ABOUT CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES and can be ordered from them at 5600 Fishers Landing, Rockville, MD 20857 and Smart But Feeling Dumb by Harold N. Levinson, 1984, New York.

Other resources are:

THE ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
THE ORTON DYSLIXIC SOCIETY
THE FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
The magazine of the FCID has a wonderful section called the "Resourceful Parents List" of resources.

All of these groups are for parents and professionals. They all have state and regional chapters.

-- Lisa R. Beade

Night Mares

I stand in a descending halo:
hot water
runs down the otter slide
of my back,
off the crooked branch of elbow
through the scrap of beard
below my knobbed belly, in rivulets
down thighs, forelegs
to scald my flat feet red.

Here within frosted glass and white tile
I think of horses
mares who stand in shadowy stalls
on winter nights and breathe out
patient streams of fog.
Horses never need to sleep.
They stand enclosed, silent
in their box stalls,
through the longest nights
and their dreams
never dissolve into darkness.
Each keeps alight
some larger shape, outlining
a nimbus curling like a wave.

I would stand all night amid mares
to see this slightest glimmer.
They are pregnant with an inner light:
animal souls radiating, the excess flowing
off the anchored bodies like heat
swirled away by flickering grey tails.

-- Gretchen Robinson

Agnes After the Rain

Agnes stands on one foot
in the wet morning street
nowhere near New Jersey,
biting her left thumbnail.
Her head tilts to the breeze
and makes a lopsided smile.
She brings ears
to the Erie-Lackawanna,
boarding the sound
of some other train to cross
graffitied suburban bridges
over years abandoned
like wild Volkswagens in fields
of Queen Anne's Lace
and Black-Eyed Susans.
"It began in somebody else's
hometown," she says,
"And passes through someplace
in New Jersey, infesting a girl
with visions
of yellow reflected faces
against sleeping windows,
newspapers oblivious to days,
and one fat man snoring
like a bad saxophonist.
She walks her dog
in the embracing night
and pretends the Erie
doesn't end in Hoboken."
Agnes puts her suspended foot
into a puddle
and laughs.

-- Jill Jann







Rachel

"Frank used to bring home animals...large and small," Rachel says in an eerily distant voice. "The large ones, he would hang upside-down in the garage...the small ones, he would bring right into the kitchen. Dilsey and I would hide in the attic. I'd sit in an old rocker...Dilsey in my lap...I'd read *Jane Eyre*...over...and over. I wouldn't eat any of it. Oh...he was damn proud of that stew, but I wouldn't eat it...silly I guess."

Rachel stares at the small corpse she has laid out on the kitchen table without so much as a newspaper underneath it. She pets the soft fur with her free hand, from the head to the tail, over and over.

"One life Rachel. That's all we get. That's all a cat gets. Skinning her won't bring her back, Rachel. Just think about it. Dignity, that's what it's all about. The cat deserves that."

"Dilsey," Rachel says. "Her name is Dilsey."

"Okay Rachel. Listen, Dilsey, all the more reason. She has a name, she should have a marker. We'll make a ceremony of it. I'll get a box from the liquor store. I'll pick you up a bottle of Canadian Mist. You could use a drink, I could use a drink. We'll bury her in the wooded lot next door. Okay?"

Rachel's eyes sag red and watery. She searches through the kitchen drawers. She holds the boning knife in one hand and pinking shears in the other. She stares at the cat. "It wouldn't be so bad..."

Rachel and Carl have been lovers for a year and a half. He wanted to move in with her but Rachel said she wasn't ready. "You know I love you...but I'm comfortable the way things are. Let's not screw it up."

... he likes to cook, he reads novels, he doesn't show up with dead animals strapped to the roof of his car, ...

The truth is, she doesn't know whether or not she loves him. At first, he seemed so different from Frank--he likes to cook, he reads novels, he doesn't show up with dead animals strapped to the roof of his car, he isn't bossy. But lately, she's been noticing vague resemblances, like the way he tunes her out at times, and how he's become awfully tight with money.

Rachel was divorced five years ago. When her house was all cleared out of guns and antlers and *Field and Stream* magazines, and books on fishing and trapping, Rachel started looking for a new place to live. The condo is just the right size for herself and Dilsey, and her possessions which looked sparse

in the newly uncluttered house. And it is clean and plain. There isn't the character of old woodwork to contend with, or a backyard full of leaves to rake, or memories.

Until she met Carl at the bar of a small restaurant where she waited for her friend from work, Rachel kept mostly to herself. "Life's just simpler this way," she would tell her friend.

The stiff animal lays on its side. The back is slightly curved and the head bent inward. The front legs are stretched out straight, the paws curled in slightly and crossed. The tail hangs limp.

"Oh Dilsey," Rachel cries. The fur is still soft, but the body as stiff as new leather boots. Just that morning Rachel tried to stand her up in the window, but the legs crossed that way...

Rachel found her lying on the alpaca rug in front of a cold fireplace when she returned from Mexico two days earlier. It was Rachel's first trip out of the country, her first real vacation with Carl. He didn't want to go, but she managed to talk him into it by explaining that she would pay for at least half of the expenses, and conceding to stay in one of the cheaper hotels. Carl was rigid with nerves for most of the trip. Rachel drank tequila and tried not to notice. Then he wanted to go to the bull fights. Thinking of Jake Barnes, he said to Rachel, "It's artistry. The bull fight is a dance." He urged her to come along.

Between the hot sun, and the fire of the crowd when the band

stopped playing, and the Corona beer that young boys peddled,

... the bull was stabbed between the shoulder blades ...

Rachel felt caught in some bad dream. She looked to Carl to steady herself, but he was smiling for the first time since they had arrived. When the bull was stabbed between the shoulder blades, before he was even let out of the pen, Rachel clapped her hands over her eyes. When she looked up again, Carl was holding his stomach and looking for a way out... but the crowd was packed tightly into the stands and they could not move. The bull was loose in the ring, antagonized by four brightly colored spears that stuck out of his thick hide. Carl said, "Rachel, I'm sorry. I'm going to be sick."

It was something of a relief to see Carl doubled over in the stands; to know that he didn't like the bull fights after all. The incident seemed to bring them closer together for a time.

Rachel has not slept. She pets the soft fur over and over and cries. Even when Carl stayed with her, Dilsey always leapt purring onto the bed and Rachel would eventually roll away from Carl to wrap an arm around the soft mound. Carl sleeps hard, but Dilsey always responded to Rachel's slightest stirring. When Rachel woke up at night, Dilsey's opened eyes had always met hers, and the close sound of Dilsey's purring had often

quieted Rachel's racing heart after a bad dream. For fifteen years, Dilsey occupied a space in Rachel's life. Rachel thinks of her, sitting on the window sill in the pantry while she washed two sets of dishes, the television murmuring in the other room, how she cried to be picked up and carried around. She was just the size and weight of a newborn baby.

Dilsey's yellow eyes are frozen open.

"I knew I shouldn't have left her. I knew something was wrong, the way she looked at me when I left. Oh God, it's my fault."

Carl stands facing the kitchen window, his hands sunk into the back pockets of his jeans. "As if Mexico wasn't bad enough," he mutters.

Rachel stops crying. She stares at the cat. She picks up the boning knife from the table; she puts it down. "How to do it? How to do it?"

"Rachel, Rachel, listen." Carl lays his hands on her shoulders. "Rachel, it's a sad thing. But you're tired Rachel. You need to sleep. We'll make a ceremony of it Rachel." He looks pleadingly at her. "You'll feel better in the morning. I'm going out for a while. I need a drink. You get some rest."

The condo door clicks shut. "But..." Rachel's eyes brim.

She snuffles and turns back to the corpse. "How to do it?" She turns the body round and round. Dilsey's yellow eyes are frozen open. The thin slits of pupils dissect them. She must have died

in daylight, Rachel thinks. "Oh, I wish I'd been here...to hold her."

"From the chin to the...no, no...from the nose back to the tail..." Rachel digs around in the liquor cabinet and pulls out a bottle of Kahlua and a shot glass. She fills the glass and downs the thick liquid three times. She fills it again and sets the glass on the table next to Dilsey. "He'll be back," she tells herself. "He said he'd be back, he'll be back."

She looks for help from a variety of sources. Several cook books, a hippie survival book, and an encyclopedia lay strewn and opened on the floor. No answers. Rachel wishes she had kept just one of her ex-husband's hunting books. And then something hits her. She pulls a box from the back of a closet. She digs through it frantically and pulls out one called *The Foxfire Book*. She opens it and reads:

"DEER SKINNING AND DRESSING:

After killing...Cut down the inside of the back legs to the crotch, cut down the belly to the center of the chest...Cut down the inside of the front legs to meet the cut in the chest. Peel the hide off the back legs, down the body, and off the front legs up the neck to the ears. Cut off the head right behind the ears with an axe."

Rachel stares at Dilsey. "It wouldn't be so bad...if I could just save the fur." She breaks down.

Rachel grabs the blurry shot glass and snaps her head back.

She picks up Dilsey and maneuvers her face around the stiff legs until her nose rests against Dilsey's own, dry as a stone. "Oh Dilsey, who'll always be there for me now?" She makes a purring sound and hugs the stiff cat.

Rachel lays the cat back down and picks up the boning knife. She aims it at the top of the head. "Oh God!" She drops her arm. She feels a stabbing pain in her leg. As she drops to the floor in a faint, she thinks...he will come back...he will move in...and take care of everything.

-- Cynthia Perkins Danyluk

Killing

Wood chips fly
Like sparks as
Tender wood
Bleeds sap
Because the shiny
New axe
Feels good
In your hands

-- Janice Carlson

Please Don't Ask Me

to fill your empty spaces
dot your i's
or cross your t's

we write with a different hand

-- Carole Monteiro

On The Roadside

When the Labrador was struck
by the Mercedes-Benz
I did not have to check my watch
to know the time of day
One owner ran to an old friend
entrails strewn across the road
The other surveyed his grill
and took out his insurance agent's card

-- Richard A. Serpa

Child Gardener

Things grow in my garden.

With visions of vast and various shades of green tempting me, I expand my garden plot to hold tomatoes, sweet peppers, bush beans, zucchini, potatoes, basil and parsley. The rich, dark soil in my yard regularly provides a comfortable home for my flowers and vegetables. In the summer, I kneel in the garden, pull out weeds, dig deep into the earth and rediscover peace.

My assistant gardener is Steven, a five-year-old cousin who lives next door. His intelligence, curiosity, blue corduroys and baseball cap hint of his potential of growing up sensitive to Nature. I don't know where his interest comes from. I know mine was nurtured as a child on my grandparents' farm. Clear memories of planting their huge garden, walking under canopies of pole beans, and wading through carpets of zucchini return to me as I work with Steven in my own garden, a miniature of theirs. Thoughts of my grandparents' garden linger and perpetuate, make me want to recreate the past in each flower and vegetable I choose to include in my piece of earth.

At age nine or ten, I worked together in the garden with my grandmother and grandfather. Mostly silent, at least verbally silent, we spoke only of the gardening at hand of past

gardens. They set the plan, unknowingly, for vegetables which I would later choose for my garden: thick, dark red tomatoes, light green crisp peppers, smooth, solid zucchini. Because their land was so generous, sweet sweet corn and pole beans were allowed in, too. These were constants. Sometimes, for variety, eggplant and broccoli and cauliflower worked their way into their soil. Predominantly red, green, and brown, the garden never lacked color. We, however, broke the color scheme. Blue jeans, white T-shirts, blue and white bandannas: somehow, we still fit in.

But Steven doesn't have these memories to spur his interest. I'd like to think a love of Nature is inherent in this family. One person per generation is tied to the earth, tied closely and unable to live without it, unable to survive without hands working out pain and working in peace. My grandparents need the nourishment of the land, as do I. Maybe Steven does too.

When I'm planting, or just walking around being quiet and melancholy, or purposefully digging a shovel in, Steven runs through his yard to join me in mine. Respectful, he asks "Can I help you in your garden?" Yes. His little boy hands, quick and sometimes rough at play with our other cousins, quiet now, and he moves gently and curiously. I watch him look at the green

plants, the tiny brown seeds, and see his eyes open wide, his thoughts skipping ahead in wonder; these things will soon be beautiful and edible. We wait together.

In my grandparents' garden, flowers did not have a place. Instead, their roses and dahlias gained their own spot along a wall of the cow barn. I prefer to mix flowers and vegetables in the

One person per generation is tied to the earth, tied closely and unable to live without it ...

same place. Steven is drawn to the delicate light blue morning glories. He touches them and sniffs them, and as the summer goes on, his garden knowledge increases. He asks why some of the morning glories stay open until late afternoon. I don't have any explanation, and I also don't tell him that the beauty of the flowers is sometimes overshadowed by their tendency to reach out their tendrils and strangle any other plants within reach. I am hesitant to ruin his perception of beauty.

Together we watch the flowers and vegetables flourish and fade. We pick basil, and inhale its strong sharp scent. When I explain that he can cook some of the leaves in macaroni sauce, he is amazed that the smell could become a taste. And as we pick the leaves, Steven tells me that he has bad news. Hesitantly, he reveals that his barber, a friend of his, died that week. But he relates this story interspersed with gardening questions and

other observations. He says that he had been eating his favorite breakfast when his father told him: "Can you believe that I was eating french toast when I found out?" I want to tell him yes, I can understand this. But standing in the garden, in the midst of growing things, I have no explanation of death. I can only hope to foster a greater love of life in him through my small garden's colors and scents and textures. I understand that already he is familiar with the value of life, and I also understand that I can tell him about the morning glories.

Before he leaves, he asks for two dahlias, one for each of his sisters, and I wish for a society that consists of the goodness in children. I teach Steven the differences in vegetables, and he teaches me honesty and the value of time. From him I realize that little people are tiny adults, but better. They worry and feel responsible. They make connections and are acute observers.

In the garden with Steven, I live again what I learned with and from my grandmother and grandfather. Kneeling together, covered in dirt, digging, watering, nurturing living things, I am hopeful.

Things grow in my garden.

-- Denise M. DiMarzio

Watching a Little League Game

I lean against the short iron fence
in deep grass behind center field,
my light shirt hanging drifting.
Five feet behind, the glassy blue pond
waits motionless for the pitch.
Dry summer grass stands silent at my
feet in autumn's wailing currents.
Left, then right, a larch circles
the valley where the field lies.
The score is three two, bottom of
the sixth. Man on first, two outs.
The pitcher looks in, shakes his head.

The old Motorola crackles hums.
The sounds come up; a passing
black and white. Hours before the color
bleeds into a picture. A doctor show.
I get up and take my leather
mitt and ball from my dark room.
Something falls. What did mom yell?
I'm down the block. I don't care.

A practice swing. Then two. The white
ball hovers above the plate.
I swing. Long fly into left.
It hits the tree, and I round second;
The grass slows me. I start to think:
The coach is standing on the bag,
his belly full from Stroh's. He waves
his burnt out arm. He wants me to go
head first. I don't. He screams.
The ball bounces to the ground
followed by a shower of glass
from his window, each piece stabbing
cutting the Earth like the first shovel
in a ground breaking.

Lying on my back, the guys' shadows
a movie on my wall, I cry. They're
the ones who threw the ball. Now
they're in my yard running, yelling
laughing. Laughing at me.
I hear the front door slam. They
are running away. Father is home.
I hope they left my ball.

His broad shoulders fill the doorway.
I can see the rim of his baseball hat
rising above his head, a crimson halo.

Tears freeze in my eyes. My sniffing
stops. In his hand is my leather mitt.
He raises his arm and throws it
under-hand into my hands.
"Get ready," he says. "It's time."

The pitch is outside. A single trout
jumps for a fly in the pond.
At the plate the batter waits
kicks dirt, wiggles the bat
not knowing why; Only knowing that
the pros do that. A small white comet
drops into right field. Behind the plate
mother's are still talking, they don't notice.
The men jump and scream; Some in spite,
others, rapture. I smile. I knew someday
we would win, my team: the same coach,
same rivals.

-- Brian Laferte

Coming Alive

Up from the ashy flour
when yeast and water are mixed in
a living creature emerges,
a warm lump that wears the wrinkles of an elephant.
My roughest pounding soon
teases this living, shaggy mass
to grow as smooth and soft
as the softest buns
it soon will be.
When I knead, turn, knead again,
it squirms where I press
and rolls beneath the heals
of my hands,
this pallid pupa, disgusting slug
encased in flour dust
eyeless, mouthless
tumescent it
rises well this steamy day
left to rest, hidden beneath a damp sheet.
Larval stage on the way
to metamorphosis in my oven,
only then will I put you in my mouth.

-- Gretchen Robinson

Water in the Basement

Water buffaloes who have majestically brought their tired winter bodies here to slay their offspring sit amidst endless piles of magazines that promise a better floor wax or the latest banana bread recipe. The buffaloes are disinterested in no-wax floors as they fix their gaze upon a chattering black and white television broadcast. The light patterns from the program wrap themselves over the transparent skin of their faces. They feed each other.

I remain in a thin white medical cloak. The nurses have prepared my mortal body with the necessary foul smelling accoutrements. They told me that there are several other women who must enter the small room at the end of the hall with the highly polished floor before I do. I am dying of thirst, but they won't let me drink; that is, not until I have been led to their special place with cold metal tables.

As I try to become comfortable in one of several hard green chairs placed on a black and white linoleum floor, I remember my life plan that I made up when I was seven along with my truest best friend, a salt and pepper colored Pekinese with the largest brown eyes and the most crooked teeth that I had ever seen. Betsy and I spent many afternoons hanging out

together in my playhouse, pretending that no-one else mattered but the two of us. We agreed that I should marry a tall handsome man, live in a beautiful house and have four children.

The most fun we ever had was when we would play combat. I would dress up in my battle fatigues that Mother reluctantly bought for me in Schwartz's Five and Dime. I put Mother's pink hair net right across the top of my green Army helmet, ready to do battle with the territory. Betsy and I pretended that our trenches were beneath my mother's Danish chairs. As I fired with my black automatic plastic machine gun, Betsy would bare her teeth in anger and disgust to the best machine gun sound ever heard. Finally, when Mother had enough of the growling, barking and machine gun running, she would separate us for the afternoon. It didn't matter though because we always got together anyway.

Six more buffaloes have gone down the highly polished corridor to the room. Each time several women left the room, the static interference on the television set usually followed approximately twenty minutes later. It was bad enough to watch one game show after another, but the static just reminded me of where I was.

A large round woman wearing a starched white uniform pressed her freckled face and curly red hair into the room to announce

that I was to be one of six buffalo to venture down the long hallway. At this moment I feel like I should guess the million dollar question or estimate product prices to win something to justify my good fortune.

Poor Betsy, she became arthritic and then, partially paralyzed because of her ripe old age, she had ripe old problems. Mother and I cried all the way to the veterinarian's office as labored with our heavy hearts and we lifted Betsy out of the car and into the office where we met the receptionist sitting in front of a rate chart advertising euthanasia. For a small fee, they would gladly take a life, forever. I looked into her large brown eyes, her record discs, and realized that she knew exactly what was going to happen to her.

My chest seems to explode with the heavy pressure of my frightened heartbeat.

She almost sadly welcomed this moment as my heart sprang up into a large, hard lump in the center of my throat; I relinquished my dear friend to them.

The antiseptic smell of the vet's office permeated my clothes. I could smell death all the way home. I couldn't even look at Mother. I thought about my second grade Christian Education Class at St. Theresa's. We would meet every Wednesday after school to discuss the miracles of life, what God wanted us to believe; and if we didn't do what we were told, we would all go straight to Hell.

"Sister, what is a soul?" I asked, turning my face to that of Sister Margaret. She replied, "A soul is not something that we can see, only something that we can feel." In wonder I asked, "Then, how do you know that everyone has the same feeling? Suppose we don't have the same feeling, then what?" Her face twisted and her voice became harsh. "Everyone has a soul, Jenny," Sister Margaret retorted. "You know you have a soul when you have done something good or bad because it gives you a special feeling." She became thin-lipped and refused to answer any more of my ridiculous questions as she turned her back to me. I thought of good and bad feelings floating magically up to heaven. Didn't animals have feelings too? But animals didn't go to heaven. Sister Margaret said so.

It is my turn to take the long walk to the room with the metal carts. My chest seems to explode with the heavy pressure of my frightened heartbeat. I swear that the nurse can see this happening. I check my hospital Johnny just to make sure. The nurse guides me into a room that contains one small metal table covered with crisp white sheets with "Havelon Hospital" imprinted on each. Steel lamps boast bright warm bulbs, but I feel so cold.

I feel the poison they feed me, but still I see the doctor. He enters like a thief, masked with a strange instrument on his head. A small light shines upon my lower body so that he can see exactly where the life remains within my womb.

As I begin to float away from

this special place I wonder how
many small innocent lives there

are in the basement, the lives of
the water buffaloes lie in
fragmented pieces in cold, gray
garbage cans in the dark abyss.

-- Jackie Kuhn

Fixing the Sky in Providence

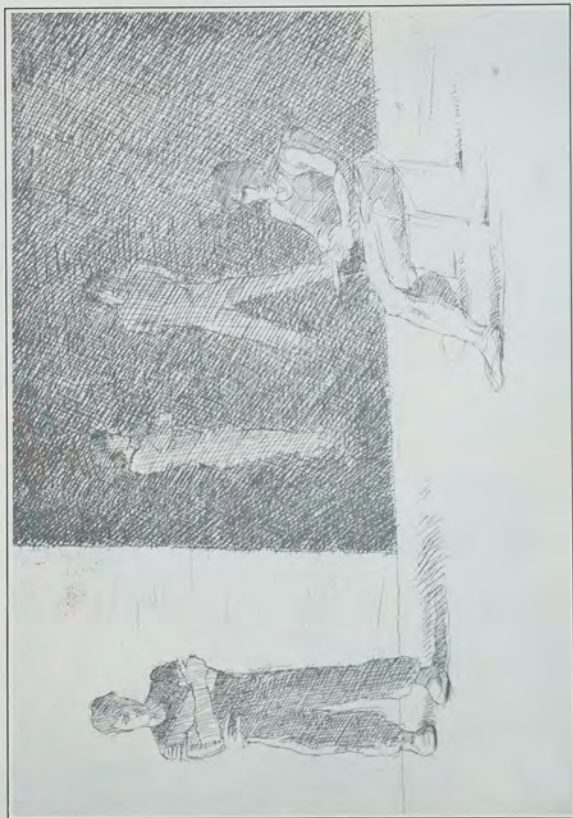
The men remove the gray,
block by block.
The last block dangles
from the long arm of a yellow crane,
gray, against the worshipped morning blue.

A day's work to place the blocks
atop the thickening outline.


The growing lines of gray,
poke the worshipped blue,
harder and harder till black,
then blue behind the gray.

The men remove the gray,
block by block.

--Cynthia Perkins Danyluk



Gray Water



Henry Lee came to visit me yesterday. Walked right up the shady road and sat on my front steps. My eyes stayed on my work, sewing beads on a wedding dress.

These were our words, still sharp and clear in my mind.

"Cam, I'm leaving her." All the while his eyes were examining his hands like he never before realized they belonged to him.

"Where's your car?"

"She's got it. Gone shopping."

"Your truck?"

That brought his eyes up. They were hard and bright. "Her god-damn brother's got it. She let him take it. He says 'she' like it was the devil himself dressed in women's clothes.

"That what's got you hot?"

"No. I'm getting out I tell ya."

I rocked and sewed. Meanwhile, Henry Lee discovered his shoes.

After awhile I said: "Not many places for a seventy year old man to go."

"I got places I can go."

"Where?"

"Cam, you got to understand, I can't stay with her another day."

My eyes came off my work and bored into the back of his head.

"I do understand Henry Lee.

I understood when you said the same thing twenty years ago. And sixteen years ago, and...."

"O.K., O.K., that's past."

I got up and went into the house. The coolness inside as I passed through the parlor, clean and neat, into the pantry took some of the heat from my thoughts. I looked out the small window over the sink at the splash of color my garden made in the rocky plain land. The sight of the tall red tulips, yellow marigolds and big balls of allium surrounding rich green herbs soothed my heart. It reminded me of the day Henry Lee fixed it so the gray water from my washer would irrigate the plot.

"Ain't supposed to do this, against the law."

"Then don't. I can't have my land in jeopardy."

"Won't be. Look here, this shut off will let you use it when nature don't provide enough rain. Your well can't take the need for a flower garden."

I use it when I have to. My garden yields flowers that win prizes and praise. I never believed laundry water had value. I never believed a lot before Henry Lee.

He was still there, examining his hands when I came out with sandwiches, lemonade and cookies.

"You gonna stay on the steps like the family dog, or sit on one of these here chairs like a man?"

I saw a small curl come to his mouth. He knew, once on the porch, the next step might be into the house. But I wasn't



falling for it this trip.

He ate like a teenager who hadn't eaten in a couple of hours.

"Best damn cook in the county. What's that ya sewing on?"

"Bride's dress."

"Thought you quit that work?"

"I did, but a skinny little town girl came out here and asked me to fashion one for her. I did her mamma's."

"You hurtin' for money?"

"Never said that. Just doin' that girl a favor."

"You're a damn stubborn woman Cam. Why don't you cash those checks I send?"

"I ain't no kept woman."

"Got nothin' to do with keepin', I sent those for your birthday and Christmas. Can't a friend do that?"

"Henry Lee you ain't been here in over three years. What kind of friend is that?"

"I didn't come because you told me not to come back lest I planned on stayin'."

I laughed. "You ain't stayin' this time. Where's your suitcase?"

"I got to go home and settle a few things, but I'm comin' back."

He looked shy and young. "If that's O.K. with you."

"Uh, huh."

"Cam, I should have stayed fifteen years ago. Wasn't for the kids I would have." His voice was soft, the words hard for him to push out.

"Uh, huh."

Rocking a bit faster I looked out past the porch to the bird bath. Two birds, a yellow finch and a sparrow, splashed and

preened. The lilac bushes behind them were just opening their flowers, the smell, strong and clean, came to me over the grass.

"Henry Lee, it's too late. I'm happy here alone."

"Cam, please listen to me. I want to stay this time." His eyes were warm now, big and brown behind his spectacles. The birds sang sweet and clear, spring songs of mating. We sat with our thoughts locked inside, mine of the garden outside my kitchen window.

After awhile, I sighed and reached out my hand. He took it without looking at me, then stood and gently tugged me out of my seat.

He admired my new tee vee as we passed through to the bedroom. In the doorway, he kissed me, just as he did all the many times we had entered it before. Slowly we undressed. Wordlessly, I hung up his shirt and pants then removed my nice embroidered pillows and turned back the covers.

Henry Lee sat on the edge of the bed and pulled me to him.

The feel of his face between my breasts made silent tears come. We stayed that way a few minutes. I looked down at his dick laying quietly and mouse-like on the cushion of his balls and prayed as I had done a few times before: "God let us glory this one last time." God didn't always answer.

We laid down on the cool sheets that smelled faintly of lavender and did many of the comfortable and happy things we had done so many times before that, in later years, had prodded him to full attention. Slowly and carefully we loved until blood

flowed through all Henry Lee's veins.

After, while he slept, I looked at his old hide, scarred here and there with having survived seventy years on this earth. My leg ached and I wanted to clean myself, but seeing him quiet in my bed again made me calm. I smiled as I spied the faint scar on his rump, perfect teeth marks, put there by a she-devil when he was seventeen and a Navy veteran of two whole months. Scared him half to death.

When the sun left the bedroom side of the house I woke him in time to get home to his supper.

"I'm coming back Cam, I swear, and this time I'm stayin'." He was in a hurry now and only stopped in time to give me half a kiss.

"I'll be here old man."

The Gathor twins got hold of some fire crackers, scared my old cat Mantha near to her death. I ran after them as fast as I could but they took off like snakes, slippery and quick. Later, I went to the Fourth of July parade in town, it wasn't much more than the high school band, fire trucks and town officials shaking everyone's hand. Henry Lee was there, marched past with the V.F.W. crowd. I think he saw me because he looked like he was trying to hide. The whole town turned out, even the Gathor twins, looking like saints.

I didn't go to the picnic over at the park, too hot, and too many memories of James haunted the benches and fireplaces and pines where we first kissed. We met there in the days when my hair flamed red

and my breasts rode high on my chest. His proposal a year later surprised me into saying yes and his integrity kept me by his side until he was killed at the lumber mill. When he died, two years after I was touched by Henry Lee, I thought I might die with guilt and shame at wanting another man. After a time the feelings faded but never disappeared.

So, I stayed home this July fourth, sat on my porch sipping lemonade and finished sewing on that skinny girl's dress. The wedding is next week. Poor thing.

Cassie Lewis was at the general store today, nattering away as usual. That woman would gossip to a chicken, running after it up and down the hen yard to do so. She caught me mulling over some thread for a dress I'm making for the mayor's wife.

"Why Cam, you look so tired. Poor dear, don't you feel well?"

"I'm fine Cassie. Happy and fat."

"You ain't so fat. Fanny Bowers went to one of them saloons and lost fifteen pounds. Cost her plenty."

"I guess Mrs. Bowers would like that kept quiet."

"Well, she told me herself."

"Then I guess she don't care who knows."

"What ugly thread. Who's that for?" She never waited for an answer and I wondered how she got her information.

"You sure look peaked. Better take care of yourself or you'll end up like that poor Henry Lee, the one with the plumbing business. He married the uppity woman from Providence, you know, his Ma was a southern lady who

never took to our ways. You must know him."

"Lovely family. Excuse me Cassie, I'm late for an appointment."

"I hope it's with the doctor Cam, you just look so tired. You never know...like poor Henry Lee."

I was down the aisle by then, my heart skipping and clunking in my chest. I wished I had stayed so I could have heard the rest of the gossip, but I was afraid I might show myself if the news about Henry Lee was bad. There was no one I could ask about him.

Later in the afternoon the doctor disproved Cassie's claim about my health.

"You're fit as a fiddle Cam. Solid as a post."

"Thank you." I mumbled, uncomfortable in the paper gown the nurse put on me for the examination. I tucked it tight around my legs, afraid it might rip if I sneezed. I wanted to get out of there more than anything but instead I said: "You lookin' after Henry Lee?"

"Yes Cam, I am." His face changed, got worried.

"How is he?"

"Not good."

"What's wrong?" My voice quivered. I had never said more than fifteen words to him in the five years I had been seeing him.

"Can't talk about other patients Cam."

"Uh, huh, sorry."

Maybe he saw the tears I was pushing back, maybe he knew what it had cost me to ask.

"He had a stroke Cam, pretty bad one I'm afraid."

I said a quiet thank you and got out of that paper dress just

as fast as I could when he left the little room. As I hurried I remembered today was Henry Lee's birthday, September 5th.

Yesterday I heard that Laura Green, a member of my quilting club, was a patient over at the hospital so I thought I would do my duty and go over to visit. She was kind of surprised to see me being as we never talked much. I was glad when her family came and I could leave. On the way out I found Henry Lee's room two floors away. I had found out where he was from my sister's boy who worked in the housekeeping service at the hospital. It's been over a week since I heard the news.

The door to his room stood open. On the bed lay a shriveled old man with tubes in his nose, his face lopsided, his eyes bright. Sitting next to the bed was a woman dressed in a blue dress and matching shoes. I tried not to stare, but the dress looked silk and well made. Her fingernails and hair seemed like they were kept neat and stylish by professionals. Fine looking in a packaged sort of way I thought. She was reading the paper to Henry Lee.

I pulled myself up to my full measure, patted my home done hair, wished I had worn my best church dress and walked in before I fully knew what I was doing. My heart flopped like a caught fish but I smiled.

The woman in the blue dress asked: "Yes, may I help you?"

"I'm Cam Holt. Mr. Jackson did some work for me, brought my plumbing indoors. How is he?" I wanted to run out, but my legs

and feet took root.

"Better. He needs his rest, but he'll be just fine. He can't talk yet but he'll be up and around soon." Her smile was no more than a habit.

"Well, I just wanted to give my well wishes while I was here visiting Laura Green." Henry Lee looked straight at me, his left eye blinking fast, his right, half closed in the melted side of his face.

"I know Laura, fine quilter." The mouth in the powdered face said.

"Yes, I won't bother you anymore." My stiff body was hard to move, it didn't want to do what I told it to, but I managed to get out of the room. As I left I heard her say to Henry Lee: "I hope all your customers don't come to visit or you'll never get any rest."

The winter was a hard one, long and cold with snow coming every day it seemed. Just yesterday I saw a robin and the sprouts of new flowers pushing through the earth but it still seems like winter to me.

Henry Lee died in February while I had a bad case of the flu. I never went to his funeral. I'll find his grave and bring him some of my flowers when I thaw. Sometimes, after I heard, I would just pretend Henry Lee's not showing up because he's not ready to stay yet. Pretend he's taking care of business before he comes to stay for good. But after yesterday I can't pretend anymore.

A car came, a big one, maybe a Buick. The man driving was dressed in a suit with a vest. I

figured they came to say my deed was no good. The deed was in my family since the Revolutionary War. I was always afraid they wouldn't let me keep my land. Scared they would say I had no rights. My grandfather's words that a woman had no right to hold property always dangled at the back of my mind, never taking root and yet never buried, always threatening. I was the first woman to hold the deed.

"Camomile Frances Holt?"

"Yes sir, I am."

"I'm from Watson and Duberry in New York. Attorneys."

"Yes." My breath was trapped in my chest and wouldn't come out. I prayed that when Henry Lee told me he had made sure my land was free and clear, checked by his lawyers, that he was right. I would die without my land.

"Our client, Henry Lee Jackson, wanted this delivered to you on his death." This legal man from New York sitting in my parlor talking about Henry Lee was like a dream, beyond my imagination.

"Henry Lee died in February." I don't know why I said that, but it was the first time I ever said the words. They hurt. I held the air tighter in my chest so they wouldn't come out again.

"Yes, well, his will was handled in Providence by another law firm. We only recently heard from his lawyers. He left this package for you three years ago. This is exactly how he gave it to us to keep in our vault until his death."

I looked at the box wrapped in thick brown paper and tied with strong twine. Maybe I looked worried or maybe the lawyer was

a smart man because he said: "No one knows of this except you and myself. I dealt directly with Mr. Jackson and those were his instructions."

I offered him tea, but he had to catch the plane back to New York. He left me in my parlor looking at the box, sent by Henry Lee, who I had never known to go beyond the next town after he got home from the Navy. It seemed part of a dream. I have had many about Henry Lee in the past few months. Just last week I dreamed about the first time he touched me.

We were sitting on the couch, my old brown one, and he was explaining a reverse pipe joint to me. His arm was over the back. When I understood what he was saying his hand fell to my shoulder in praise. As my feelings colored my face he moved his arm, but it was too late, I felt baptized in a pool of love. That feeling never left me.

In my dream I never felt the shame or guilt, just the feeling of finding something I never knew existed. James' touch had been needy and respectful, never reaching beyond his body into his being.

Happy as my dreams are they never left a package.

It's warm now. No one remembers the winter but me. My days are full of quilt work, church and my garden. Henry Lee is often in my thoughts. It took me two weeks to open that package and I only did it after two glasses of grape wine.

A letter was taped to the top of the box when I took off the outer wrapping. I know it by

heart.

"My Cam,
You told me last month never to come back lest I planned to stay. I will come, I promise. This is just in case I kick before I get there.

My love,
Henry Lee

P.S. I'm writing this part on the plane to New York ten months after the first letter. I hope this plane makes it, seems to shudder every time the wind blows. The wife went to the bathroom three times already, guess she's scared too. She needs to have an operation in a couple of weeks, nothing big according to the Doc, but she's nervous as a cat in a dog's house. I'm coming as soon as she's better. Promise.

We never talked much of it but I love you and could never have kept breathing these past twenty years without your comfort and strength.

H.L.J."

Inside the box was a lilac colored silk nightgown, two sizes too small and a velvet ring box. The ring was a plain gold wedding band. Something told me to get my magnifying glass. Engraved inside the ring in flowing script was "I'm stayin'" H.L.J..

The old fool hadn't picked the right size for the ring either but I wouldn't change it for my land. I wear it on a long golden chain around my neck, it falls just between my breasts.

-- Janice Carlson

Sitting On The Railing Of A Second Story Porch Near Atwells Ave.

Over the edge
voices rise from lit streetlights,
fluttering like the nearby laundry,
between the telephone lines crossing my eyes.
The hoarse screams of parents drop
into the halo of emptiness
where two hundred fifty three uses
of the word FUCK creep
like English ivy digging
into the wall of open windows.
Down below, I see souped up bodies
idling in desperate anticipation.
I gaze across as the moon
still bothers to rise
between triple decker houses.
I soften in the tides.

-- Jill Jann

Island

Eva says the saltwater
ocean is good for aching
feet, as she mixed a potion for
the girl's aching body.
No solution for an aching
mind. A tormented, aging
young mind with a live,
growing little problem
in her child's belly.

-- Patricia Wolf



RHODE ISLAND
COLLEGE