the rhode island college
magazine of the arts
fall 1998
$4.00

shoreline

Acknowledgements

Shoreline thanks PFAC for their continued support, the faculty of the Arts and Sciences, and Natalie, for the last time, and to Robbie Fulks for *South Mouth*.

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Artwork

Haiku for Taking

I pull dreams from your
tongue and poems from your hair
to keep like secrets

–Kristen Williams

Victoria

Past the spotted seal,
your oar dips with even strokes
in the winter water,
so different from turning the wheel
of a car while driving to treatments
with Beethoven and fear.
You steer away from the
boat men who toss leftovers
to the fat-necked swimmers,
and create feeding frenzies of
fierce, mammoth bodies.
A head could knock you from
your frail kayak,
so you steer away to find
your only, easy sleep–
the paddle silently slicing water,
your prayer and cure.

Already they removed
parts of you,
chunks of wounded woman lie
in stainless steel basins that do not
reflect or shine like water,
poisoned you with cures to stop
the cactus of death,
but you're laughing when you tell me
you wore tie-dyed panties to the treatments,
surprising technicians with my luck gift,
and refusing to join the disease.

Motionless, a humpback whale
sings love songs for hours without
visiting the surface.
And you lie while they probe
with sterling instruments and monitor
the milky drip of fluids for sleep
that only ruin your rest.
In my own sleep I see you and know
you wonder through dreams of easy water
if you will wake
and if you will wake without a breast,
and how it will feel to move the paddle
past the empty space.

Jessica Scarlett Clark

The Manuscript

She watches the straight lines of the editor's trousers as he walks down the hall. The manuscript falls apart in her hands. The floor is covered in white paper. The pages spread out like leaves collecting at her feet. An elderly couple stands in the orchard, sifting early olives in the sun. Fruit from branch. Kostia and her brother run past them, barefoot through the grass, down to the hard-packed dirt of the village square, past the man selling vegetables from his pick-up truck and the old men gathered outside the *kafenion*, through the village walkways that turn to rubble and lead to ancient, crumbling terraces and cliffs that hang over the sea. They're looking for their father.

They find him down by the water, nailing a frame to fit the new steel doors he has just made for the village church. The old doors, heavy and ornate with carvings of olive trees, lie in the dusty road. He squints at the children through sweat and sun, the eyes in his red face no larger than slits. "What is it?"

Kostia drags her foot in the sand. "Yourgos and his wife are picking olives already."

"I told them they could start early this year."

"Why?"

"None of your business."

"Mom wants to know."

"He's too old to fish, so they need the money. And all the olives haven't been picked in time for years anyway."

"Those olives aren't worth anything yet," Kostia says.

"Early olives are worth more than no olives. Now go away so I can finish."

"What are you doing?"

"Go away." He turns back to the door, looks at the jamb, frowns, and takes a nail from his pocket.

~ ❀ ~

The manuscript. Black out each word with a sharpie. Let the mind play with itself. Like an identical twin living in your body. Half of your mind pays close attention. The manuscript is on the floor in pieces and parts. Each page is a tile on the floor of the *kafenion*. Kostia stands outside on tiptoe, her nose pressed to the window screen. Behind the counter she sees a coffee pot, a rack of mugs and a small refrigerator. A photograph of some old men sitting on a bench hangs above a shelf of cigarettes and wine. The blind proprietor stands behind the counter, rocking back and forth on his feet, listening. Five men sit in front of a television, watching the Italian television station and smoking themselves into a thin fog. She sees Yourgos and three other old men sitting in a corner, playing *pastra* with a deck of slick, greasy cards, making obvious gestures to their partners with their hands and arms.

They are all men who are too old or injured to take out their fishing boats or tend the plots of land on the village periphery. Their main income now comes from the olive harvest, which lasts only from August to December. Every person in the village who can walk helps harvest the olives on Kostia's father's land. Kostia remembers her first harvest. She was still too short to reach even the lowest branches, so she gathered the shrunken, purple olives which had already fallen on the ground.

Behind her, two women call to each other from across the square. She turns to look. One of the women points to Yourgos's wife, a thin old lady with long, gray hair tied up in cloth. She carries a bottle of olive oil to the man selling vegetables. He shakes his head at her. "Money," he says. She wants tomatoes. Kostia knows the old lady does this every week, during the hottest part of the day. The hard-packed dirt reflects the sun into their faces. She waves the bottle at him. "Your father would trade," she says. He leans against the truck, squinting at the ground, mumbling. He doesn't need oil. Everyone has oil. He waits for her to leave. Kostia stands in the doorway of the café, watching the woman wave her bottle and curse and it reminds her of the way she felt at her grandmother's funeral. Then she sees her father walking home with a great wooden door in his hands.

~ ❀ ~

She is embarrassed when she realizes what she's done. The manuscript is a wreck, and it smells like turpentine. His footsteps in the hall. She drops to the floor, crawls under the couch. The couch is crawling with insects. They skid across the water like tiny boats. Kostia and Georgios splash, catching them. Kostia's grandfather had started to dig a well in the middle of the orchard where a gypsy with a divining rod had knelt, the twig in his hands sinking into the ground. The well never amounted to much. He had given up after one day of digging because his neighbors wouldn't stop laughing at him for trusting a gypsy. All that remains is a pile of dirt and a shallow depression where a puddle of rainwater collects. The children kneel there in the mud, catching the water bugs that scratch the cool surface of the water with their long black legs, waiting for their mother to call them in for dinner.

Their father has placed the door on the ground behind the kitchen. He lifts an ax into the air and when it swings down, chips of wood jump and fall around his feet. Kostia crushes a water bug in one hand, then opens her fingers slowly to see. Her brother squats with his hands in the mud.

When their father is finished, he lifts the pieces with one arm and carries them into the house. The children wander over and pick up some wood chips, the remains of the two olive trees carved into the doors. Kostia finds a whole leaf intact. She feels the smooth edges of it with her fingers, then slides it into the pocket of her dress. Her brother scoops a handful of chips and throws them over his head. They fall to the hard dirt like dead grasshoppers.

~ ❀ ~

Grasping the manuscript to her chest, barely breathing, she watches his feet, the smart click of shoes on the tiled floor. He walks in, stops, turns on his heel. She rests her head on the carpet and exhales softly. He walks out the door, clicking down the hall, as Kostia's mother puts a plate of fried cheese soaked in *ouzo* on the table. She wipes the mud off of Kostia's hands and face with a cold, wet cloth as Kostia watches her father shove hunks of wood into the hot stove. She remembers the great heavy doors opening to the cool inside of the church, to the silent rustle of hats and dresses, the scrape of children's shoes scuffing the floor as they swing their legs. She sees the water bug crushed in her hand. She spits a mouthful of food onto her plate, filled suddenly with a child's overwhelming remorse, for the church door which is turning to ash and smoke in her house and for the waywardness of her parents, who seem in that instant grotesque. Her little brother chews and stares at her from the other side of the table. After dinner, she takes a knife from the table and carves her initials into the back of the piece of wood in her pocket, then buries it in the mud of the backyard, never showing it to anyone.

~ ❀ ~

The window is open. On every page the words are blacked out, black pages falling like dead birds into the street.

Kathryn Duhamel

On Writing Fiction for the First Time

The lines lay so long
and awkward,
the characters cardboard
and bored.
The writer yawns.
So late, the rain'll wait
to snuff out the dawn.
Great —sad enough
without weather's conspiracy
against me,
nature's shoulders shove from above.

Look at this mess,
the dialogue shifty, the
Graphs of Para solid rock
and total shit.

I should quit,
too late to learn
how it all fits.
The ghosts of the 19th
float around me and laugh,
spilling their beer.
Technique is the breath
that revives
after the pressing hand, long dead—

the voice, (listen)
survives

Benjamin Goulet

Black + White Photo

Paul Moore

Pantomime

A month after your death,
I caught my fingers walking
over pages of your old poetry.
I watched them talk to the print,
foolish fingers,
trying to find meaning in your mapped out words.
I have woken up on rainy nights
and found them trembling on your empty pillowcase,
searching desperately,
a loose eyelash
a grained palm
a crooked part.
These small explorers
hold back such cradled memories,
wishing they could grasp thumbs,
fly away,
or rather mask my eyes blind,
forgetting their tasks,
these useless appendages.
These fingers that mangled your ties,
loosened your belt buckle,
squeezed splinters from your toes.
Forgetful things
still dial your phone number,
where no one will be home.

Jennifer O'Donnell

Black + White Photo

Paul Moore

Easter Day

Every Easter now my sister and I
go for an afternoon drive, just the two
of us on the back roads.
We are making a tour
of the waterfalls (after the rabbit
and the candy and the meal).
My sister is eight.
This year it was a buffet dinner.
We didn't say grace.
We toasted instead, despite
the traditions of the older generation.
My grandfather specifically.
I was reading Greek myths when he
arrived, and had to admit it.
Skirting the edges of paganism
all morning while they counted money
and kissed me, the relatives.
We are watching my grandmother die.
I don't know much, I guess, but
I can find water and always
the small, crouching, historical
cemeteries.
We drive and keep driving, so fast
that the force of the car against
the air turns the April wind cold.
We see snow.
Only the young have enough energy
to speak my grandmother's volume,
but to her they have nothing to say.
I line up words and phrases in my
head all day like heads and stones
collected randomly.
My hands are shaped by the things
I have not yet done, while hers
fumble under the clutter of 80 years'
activity. Her gaze drifts, her senses
cheat her of the world.
We drive past groves of tall pines,
beeches still clutching crisp leaves,
and ranks of stones with their harsh,
warm integrity. Which I like.
My grandfather has vowed not to die
until his children return to the church.
I myself have never been baptized.
Coming home I count sycamores
on our road, 12, even though I'm
driving.

Jane Monaghan

Sofa

"Lie to me," she said. "Tell me something that could not possibly be true." She did not lift her face up from the box she was packing.

"I was born without a septum. My nostrils were just one big hole. They asked for a separation, thank God." He drank his scotch with ice instead of water. He shook the melting cubes around in his glass.

"Funny," she said. She walked into another room. She came back with some wooden wall hangings. "What else?"

"The account was just a joke. A bad joke." He leaned against the kitchen counter and watched her close the box flaps and tear a piece of tape across the top. She pushed it into an empty corner.

She stood up and walked over to the counter. She lifted her hand a little, then let it fall. He pulled his drink out of reach.

~•~

She packed the bathroom while he sat on the floor in the kitchen, his glass beside him. He leaned back on his hands and stretched his legs out in front of him. He couldn't see her from where he sat.

"You know," he said, "I don't even like this place. I never said anything when you picked it out, but I hated it. I couldn't stand the stain on the wood in the bathroom. I hated the driveway. Too steep." He looked around at the kitchen from where he sat on the floor. "Look at the paint on the ceiling. Christ, you really know how to pick a shitty house, Carolyn."

She emptied the medicine cabinet into a Captain Morgan's Rum box that was packed with bath towels on the bottom.

"Leave a couple towels for me, will you? And some toilet paper," he said. She packed the toilet paper on top of the pills and vitamins and Q-tips. He got off the floor and walked into the bathroom. She tried to get the bathroom spray from on top of the toilet. He stood in front of the toilet and leaned his arm against the wall. She tried pushing him back into the kitchen.

"I am going to need some toilet paper," he said.

"I bought that last week. It's mine. It's coming with me."

"You're getting the goddamn furniture! Leave me something to wipe my ass with!"

"Get the hell out," she said and pushed the box against him.

"This is my bathroom," he said. "I have to take a piss. You get the hell out of my bathroom."

She moved him out of her way and carried the box out into the kitchen. He left the door open while he urinated. "I had the water turned off this morning," she said.

~•~

He lay on the sofa in the living room and watched television while she walked in and out of the bedroom carrying armfuls of clothes from the closet. He rested his drink on his chest with one hand while the other arm stretched over the end of the sofa and hung limp behind his head. He fell asleep to a nature show about ice formation and dropped his empty glass on the floor. The ice cubes melted into the carpet. She brought the last load of clothes from the closet and as she walked by she kicked his foot to wake him. "Get up," she said, "I'm taking the sofa, too."

He didn't get up right away, but not because he wanted to keep the sofa. He didn't want to argue with her again. He was feeling drunk. He looked hard at the television to focus his eyes, but he couldn't bring the two images on the screen together. His eyes wanted to close and go in different directions.

He got off the sofa and steadied himself against the wall. He walked into the kitchen and looked out the window at her loading her clothes into the back of her car. She struggled with the car door. She tried to stuff the clothes into the backseat, but the door kept swinging back towards her.

"Fucking driveway," he said. He looked for his glass and saw it laying on the floor by the sofa. He took another glass out of the sink and rinsed it. He poured himself another drink and watched her struggle some more with the armful of clothes and the car door. She slammed it and came back inside.

"That's everything," she said. "The movers will be back tomorrow to get the rest of the furniture. I'm leaving you the glasses. My mother gave me a set so I won't need them. I thanked her for you." She threw her purse over one shoulder and held a screwdriver, hammer, and pliers in her other hand.

He stood in front of the window while she talked and he looked out at the Herskovits' house across the

street. He remembered last summer the Herskovits threw a Fourth of July party that he and Carolyn didn't go to. Around two in the morning, Mel Herskovits dragged his wife out onto the lawn and kicked her in front of some of his friends from the office. The party ended soon after that.

Carolyn left and closed the door behind her. He was still looking out at the Herskovits' house while she got into her car and rolled down the driveway and drove away.

~●~

He was laying on his back in the middle of the kitchen floor when someone knocked at the front door. He pushed himself up, grabbed his glass of scotch and ice, and made his way to the door.

"You the movers?" he asked the wiry man who stood in the hallway. He looked hard at the man but couldn't focus him. "The sofa's right there," he said and backed away from the door to show the man the empty room with a sofa along one wall.

"The sofa. . . . I'm sorry. My name is Edward. I live about two blocks down or so. I was just driving by outside when I saw this in your trash," he said. He held out a lamp of yellow glass and fake bronze metalwork. An eagle perched at the very top, its wings spread. "I thought I might use it myself if you didn't want it anymore, but are you sure you want to throw it away? I might buy it from you."

He looked at the thin fingers grasping his lamp. He walked back into the kitchen and left Edward standing at the door. "Take it. Take it and get the hell out of here." He filled his glass again and looked back at Edward. "She took that, you know. Out of the bedroom. She insisted on keeping it."

Edward looked around the living room and down at the lamp in his hand. "You probably didn't even want it, did you? I wouldn't have let her have it. I would've thrown it against the wall first." Edward looked at him stand in the middle of his empty kitchen. "She's having the movers come for the sofa, isn't she?"

He shook the ice around in his glass. "Everything," he said.

"What did you do?" Edward asked. He put the lamp down by the door and wiped his hands on his shirt.

He looked hard at Edward. "I kept a bank account from her. She found the statement on the floor. I was drinking the interest every month. Serves me right. I did it for years."

"What else were you supposed to do with it? She wondered where you were getting the money.

"She didn't know I was drinking it."

"She never knew you had it."

"Never knew."

"She just found out one day and that was it, wasn't it. Gone the next."

He looked in his drink and then at the bottle on the counter. He took down another glass from over the sink. "She left me these," he said. He poured Edward's drink.

"No ice for me," Edward said. "I'll take it with water."

~●~

They sat on the floor of the kitchen leaning back on their arms and sipping from their glasses. He got up to fill his glass and looked out at the Herskovits' house. Mel was in the driveway, taking his golf clubs out of the trunk.

"See that guy across the street?" He motioned to the window with his glass.

Edward pushed himself to his knees. "Tall guy. Looks like he'd have a strong follow-through," he said. He took a long drink.

"A couple years ago I started screwing his wife."

"The least a neighbor could do."

"He found out at a party they threw last summer. It was pretty ugly. Carolyn had no idea for a long time.

"Carolyn's your wife." He sat back down. "I'm sure throwing your lamp in the trash made her feel much better. It was probably all she could do, the poor thing." Edward put his glass down and wiped his hands on his shirt again. "Would you mind if I used your bathroom?"

"She took the toilet paper."

"The bitch," Edward said, crossing the kitchen. He stuck his head out of the bathroom door and poked the air in front of him with two fingers together. "I would have stuffed it in her mouth." He shut the door.

~●~

"Take the lamp," he said. "She would want me to see it in the trash tomorrow. Take it, and I'll act like I never knew it was gone."

"Break it," Edward said. "Smash it against the wall and send her the pieces."

He looked across the rooms at the lamp standing next to the front door. He pushed himself up and grabbed it by the eagle. He carried it into the kitchen and swung it around above his head. Edward yelled with delight and got out of the way, careful not to spill his drink. The lamp flew through the kitchen and shattered against the wall. It was heavy enough to dent the plaster. They both howled with laughter.

Edward saw the empty glass laying on its side by the sofa, a dark patch spread where the ice had melted into the carpet. "You dropped something," Edward said, picking it up and giving it to him. "At least she left you the glasses." He looked at Edward, then into his drink in one hand, then at the empty glass in the other hand. He hurled the empty glass. It soared through the kitchen and crashed against the far wall of the living room. Edward squealed and they both downed their drinks. Edward staggered back a little and threw his own glass, shattering the kitchen window.

He said, "Fucking driveway!" to Edward, and he hurtled his other glass out the broken window and it crashed on the black driveway. Edward seconded, "Fucking driveway!" They screamed with pleasure.

Edward said, "Hey, give me the sofa. My truck is right outside. Give it to me before her movers get here."

They staggered over to the sofa and fell over it laughing. They laughed as they tried to lift it, and eventually they pushed it out the door. They let it fall down the stairs, and it tumbled down onto the lawn, knocking them both onto the grass. They sat laughing in the front yard while the sofa laid on its side. Edward opened the gate to his pickup, and they heaved it onto the bed.

"This is brilliant," he said. "You're fucking brilliant." He gave Edward's truck a push as it pulled away from the curb and drove off.

Jay Peters

Black + White Photo

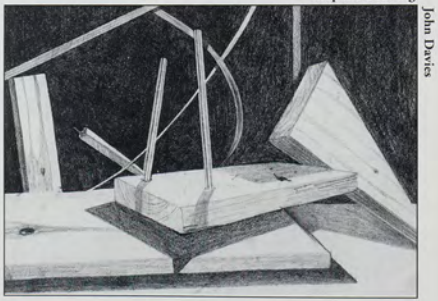
Paul Moore

Pool: A Man's Game

I shoot well for a
chick, at least that's
what I'm told, when
testosterone is so thick
in the air I'm afraid
I will choke. My simple
reply is "Stroke It,
Don't Poke It," spelled
out in cursive on
the bowling shirt that
I wear to play pool.
We could never
decide on a name
for our team and I
liked "Ball Busters,"
but the men call us
"Chicks With Sticks"
because we're an all-
women's team. They
get less creative when
we sink the eight, and
"Dyke" is hurled out
like a net to protect
their fragile egos.
I'm told I got lucky
whenever I manage to
win, and it feels so
good to beat them
at their own game.

Leigh Matheu

Graphite Drawing



John Davies

Child like

I believe it was 1990 when I wrote my first poem.
It was about an alarm clock,
and it was very good.
Then,
The following week I was inspired by the refrigerator,
and the folding closet door,
near the refrigerator.
Eventually I covered light fixtures, portable heaters, blank audio cassette tapes, a dusty and
dented can of corn from the back of the cupboard—
which I ate on completion of the poem—
and later threw up—
but the poem was very good.
Then a piece for my alarm clock again,
there's just something about those red digital numbers, those buttons...
snooze ... radio ... am/pm

1990 was an odd year.

Eventually my teachers became concerned when they discovered that while not listening to
them,
I wasn't writing notes to Susan, or Janet.
I wasn't doodling doodly spirals or cubes.
I was writing poetry about the legs,
of my desk.
One teacher kept me after school to have a chat.
She was kind and understanding.
The next day when she asked me if I were feeling better,
I handed her an ode, to her pencil holder.
She put the pencil holder in the closet.
So I wrote another poem, which said,
"You can ravage my body!
You can hide the pencil holder!
...but you can't take away all inanimate objects, what are you, stupid?"
The rest of the poem had this great tie-in to the chalkboard...
actually I just sort of switched to the chalkboard.
I was sent to the school psychologist, Dr. ... uh...
who became really frustrated, or something,
he has the coolest grandfather clock I had ever seen!
I wrote it an epic, in three parts,
which by the way is still a very good poem,
but I lost it,
yeah.

A slew of doctors came and went and had teleconferences with specialists from Sweden.
A guy who specialized in inanimate objects was called in, from Cleveland.
I remember that day,
looking away from a rather inspirational paperweight, I said,
"There's a guy who specializes in inanimate objects...
from Cleveland?"
Then I went back to my sonnet,
or tried to...
mention of Cleveland has a way of ruining poetic rhythm.

I had to do all this weird stuff,
like look at pictures and match words with words,
and talk about my childhood...
finally,
one guy ran out of things to do, and asked me a question—
"Why do you write about inanimate objects?"

I looked from the oak desk to the window pane,
not through the window,
but at the glass...
the glass ... my head ticked
and I wasn't in the room anymore,
I hear a voice behind a door
You Stupid Whore glass breaking
Look Who's Talking, You Walking Hard-on lamps crashing nightstand falling
Slap and *Slap*
and somehow
the alarm clock triggers—
the buzz of a constant wrong answer
...I said to the doctor...
"I understand inanimate objects."

Craig Nelson

Silver Light

We travel around it.
The lake path is twisted
with fallen leaves and
frosted blues and patchy whites.
Too late for yellow
or red, winter has swept them away.
Cleansed the world of warm colors
and filled it with flinty gray and
bright, arctic blue.
Filled it with strong visions before death
and clarity and the new obvious
leaking in from the next frame,
which is all white fire and
azure and midnight transparency,
the whole of it
clear to see through
to the before and after.
To see ourselves
stretched out in time,
tinged pink and warm at our root
then getting lighter and sharper,
refined till our silver ends
stretch beyond the there and then
of our first moments.

Tim Grace

Black + White Photo

Cherie Jocelyn

Brother

I imagine myself thirty years from now,
buying you a cup of coffee,
spending all my change on gumballs for your kids,
introducing you to the husband I haven't met yet,
listening to you say, "he's weird looking,"
in that tone of voice that meant you liked him.

I remember the last day I saw you,
your eyes as stormy as the sky's reflection in a river.
You put on a new shirt,
the gray fleece pullover,
the first time you changed all week.
You stumbled out the back door,
leaving it open,
and the shipwrecked air carried the sound
of your vomiting car through the entry,
where no one could stop you from leaving.
Not the mother who loved you,
or the father who left you,
or the sister who was too small to understand.

I imagine the last thing your brain was holding,
because I already know the last thing your hand held was a beer bottle,
and the last thing your heart held was the pain of Allisa.
Were you thinking about pulling over,
because the world was spinning too fast?
Were you thinking about the autumn wind semi-circling the leaves across the highway,
or the pounding of rain on the windshield,
or how sorry everyone would be if you weren't there?
What was the last song you heard on the radio?
I bet it was on that Lou Reed tape you got on your birthday,
the one where the colored girls sing "do- do do- do do."
I wonder if they're still singing in your ear.

Jennifer O'Donnell

Everywhere in America

Warm October sun pushed through the windshield to sit on my lap. I folded my legs up under me and sat up straight. Made myself taller, bigger, wanting to fill the air with myself. That would force you to see much more of me than the occasional glance and smile afforded. Or you could breathe me in, let me sit in the curve of your lung. You'd have to acknowledge the weight of your breath.

The silence was so ugly you almost broke the speakers trying to drown it out. That way you could pretend I didn't understand anyway. It is easier when you can pretend. Under the blackness of my closed lids I escaped the deafening lack of conversation and your make-believe contentedness. You could finally breathe loudly when I slept.

pine needles covered bridges sweaters pumpkins mountain trails eggs served to us cheerfully carefully selected items paid for sometime after tomorrow dying flowers thumping speakers love hard and fast upstairs movies that make me sleepy (anything to not have to think)

You raced for hours trying to get us there. We pretended it was exactly what we needed; looked forward to it so as to avoid having to look at each other. Finding enough to distract us a little longer. Living just to escape for a shallow breath before going under, weighing us down, drowning, dying to be like everyone, not to be alone any longer, to mask our tears and pretend it's laughter.

Crowd our days (fill them up, one after this and then two more ...) with all the shit we tenderly hate until we don't care that we can't see any longer. The lines are shaky. But I have enough of myself left to realize I won't make it to next time. And it amazes me you never get tired of driving us there.

Amy Kiely Elliot

For John Berryman

often, often before
I've made this pilgrimage to one
who cannot visit me, who tore his page
out: I come back for more...

After I learned his pilgrimage erased
A life spent listening quietly for joy.
His words at once took a helpless shape,
Revealing naked bodies seen in cold
Mirrors, harsh lights, imperfect and frustrated.
Leaving me with the silent stare of his *Dream*–,
His pilgrimage at last tore out his song.

I searched in drawers and boxes for his face,
His poems, bold relief in black and white.
I noticed first (I hadn't noticed before)
The pale and modest stripes that lined his shirt.
The precise trails his comb left in his hair.
The heavy greyness in his beard and eyes.
The longing for a silence that comes
When feet leave pavement.

Jay Peters

Black + White Photo

Cherie Jocelyn

In a Bar with Lawrence Ferlinghetti

He sits on an old wood chair,
overcasting his shadow
on a window
watching the city.
the lights crawl
through the smoky half-lit room,
washing over
cramped hands and tangled remnants of hair
still left on his head.
he is wearing a gray flannel sweater,
San Francisco is cool this time of year,
but he takes his glasses off slowly,
saying nothing,
he is the man I want him to be,
silent
beautiful.
lips stained red with burgundy,
he'll lean half over my scribbled poetry
he has clenched against his chest,
saying love:
"I was once this good, too."
he'll begin to cry.

Jennifer O'Donnell

Red Daffodil

Once upon a time, there was a mare with a magic womb.

~●~

Elias had just been reminded of her magic womb, but he knew that was not what made her special. It was not her magic womb but rather the part of her that allowed it to be magic that made her special. Elias thought of this as he noticed how strange her open eye looked, like a punctuation mark at the end of her life.

The beginning of her life had not been marked. Her birth was like flow, part of springtime at the farm. As the ice lurched into streams, the barn echoed the broodmares' groans and whispered with twiney legs. Nobody knew that one of the fillies would grow up to be an arthritic mare. Nor did they know that she would grow up to be magic.

She already had problems in the bones of her legs by the time she was old enough to be useful. The Wealthy Owner shook his head. "I don't know what I'm going to do with her."

Elias knew this meant that the Wealthy Owner was upset about feeding a useless horse. "Well, maybe you could have her bred. Maybe it's not hereditary." Elias shrugged as he said this to make it seem as if the whole thing was unimportant to him.

"And if it is hereditary, I'll have another lame horse on my hands. It's not as though I enjoy selling them to Roger Barron over there."

Elias nodded. Roger Barron owned a slaughterhouse four towns away.

The Wealthy Owner watched the slight nod of Elias's dusty head and looked at the subtle, gentle stoop of his dusty shoulders, backed by his straight spine. Then the Wealthy Owner flicked a clump of hayseed off the sleeve of his shirt and said, "But she can stay for now—she's pretty anyway." He began to walk away, then paused and half-turned. "Oh, Elias, I'm going to have you wean the foals tomorrow instead of next week. I'm sending Lydia away so she won't have to hear all that racket—she really hates it."

Elias nodded again. Lydia was the Wealthy Owner's wife. Elias didn't know what she really looked like because she only came out to the barn with the Wealthy Owner. Elias was afraid to look at her with the Wealthy Owner standing there. She was afraid of the horses, but he liked her anyway. He knew she couldn't sleep during weaning time.

There was another useless animal on the farm other than the Mare. His name was Shian. He was a spunky, misbehaving, overeating, thigh-high pony stallion. He had escaped from his isolated paddock before, but had failed to get at the tall and disapproving thoroughbred mares. So Elias assumed Shian had failed again when he dragged the pony out of another mare pasture he had clevered his way into.

Eleven months after Shian's break-in, the Mare bent her arthritic knees to the straw along with the mares who'd been bred to blueprint plans for the perfect racehorse. The Wealthy Owner shook his head at the Arthritic Mare's new colt. "Goddamned pony! What the hell am I gonna do with another goddamned pony?" Then the Wealthy Owner forgot about the colt until he saw it play-race with one of the thoroughbred foals.

The Arthritic Mare's colt grew up as tall and leggy as a pure thoroughbred. He was the fastest colt on the farm. Then he was the fastest colt in the county, and then the country. The Wealthy Owner was glad he'd never sent the Mare to Roger Barron.

All of the Mare's foals were the fastest ever born. The Mare made the Wealthy Owner famous. People jabbed at each other between races. "That's the man who owns the Mare with the magic womb!" they said.

The Wealthy Owner had the Mare's stall lined with purple velvet, and he bought many fancy pairs of shoes to wear in photographs of himself with his "Magic Mare."

The truth is that the Mare was not magic, not in the way that the Wealthy Owner and the newspaper reporters thought she was.

The real truth is that the Mare was simply a horse with a highly evolved heart. She knew life like a tree knows the dirt it holds down, the dirt that holds it up.

She could smell the sunlight captured within each blond grass-blade, even on dark days. She knew the dry, brown leaves were happy to have fallen, to be able to clatter and cartwheel with ghostly freedom, and she understood the brook, even when it pulled its sleeve of ice over itself in December. The Mare would breathe in all of the good things in her pasture and send them to the full moon of her belly. She wished strength and speed onto her foals so they would never be useless. Then she wished a highly evolved heart onto each of her foals because she knew that was what was truly important. That is the reason the Mare's foals were so strong and fast. It wasn't the kind of magic the Wealthy Owner understood. It also wasn't the kind of magic the Wealthy Owner understood when the Mare stopped having her foals.

It was always in August, when the flies stuck themselves knee-deep in horse sweat, that the Wealthy Owner had Elias separate the mares and their foals for weaning.

The first time it happened to the Mare, she learned how to scream. She slammed around her stall, reared, flung her head back and broke her nose on the beam above her. She looked through the bars of her stall and attempted strange whinnies between slurpy breaths as blood poured from her nostrils. Elias said, "I'm sorry," and watched her heavily.

Every August after that, the Mare would stand still, stuck on her rage. She stared quietly every year until she was an Old Mare. "Look at that," said the Wealthy Owner one year, "She's an old hat at this—she doesn't even care."

That was the year the Old Mare did not get pregnant. The Veterinarian, who was plump and pink from living on good steak, came in and felt her ovaries, massaged her uterus, gave her hormones, and shook his head. The Wealthy Owner waited three years, and the Veterinarian shook his head again.

One cool September, when two young racehorses were declared officially useless by the Veterinarian, the Wealthy Owner said to Elias, "Roger Barron is coming by tomorrow for the two colts—you might as well have him take the Barren Mare—she's getting mighty old anyway."

On his walk home that night, Elias thought about how he hadn't looked at the Mare that day. On his walk home the next night, the Old Mare shuffled beside him, stopping once to pick up a half-eaten apple from the roadside with her loose, gray lips.

Elias knew about loneliness. He knew it was one of the things that made horses scream. The saggy toolshed in his scraggy backyard was too small for another horse, so he bought the Old Mare a goat named Matilda instead.

When Elias took the Old Mare home, he let her out of the blurry casing he'd kept her in at the big farm. He kept all his charges at the big farm in a blurry casing; he never really looked at them with the Wealthy Owner's decisions standing there. Now, Elias watched the Old Mare's back sway to her knobby hips. He saw how her knotted legs were too swollen to bend. So every night, he wrapped them to support the locked joints. In the morning he would spend fifteen minutes on each leg, rubbing medicine into the fists of lumpy bone and tendon. He noticed that her teeth were so ground down that she could chew only a few spears of hay at a time. So, Elias made her a warm bran-mash every night, adding to it the carrots that he grew in his window. The Old Mare looked at Elias and "Thank You" inked through her eyes the way a shadow moves through a brook.

The Old Mare felt that it was a good thing to be living in Elias's toolshed and backyard. She didn't run a lot or graze so hungrily anymore. She did not need a big green pasture. The toolshed seemed familiar to the Old Mare, as if she had been shown it at birth and was told, "This is where you will wind up in the end." Had she been looking forward to it? The brush breathed under Elias's hand as the Old Mare sighed. Elias thought about how horses sigh, the way people do after a deep and inconclusive thought.

The winter froze. Elias made his kitchen table into a garden, building up walls to hold the soil in. He planted daffodils and tulips between the carrots and lima beans, and he liked himself for doing this strange thing.

Three days into February, there was no wind. The snow was so still and dry, Elias could imagine it wasn't there against his fingers. The sudden red and yellow of the tulips and daffodils astonished the weather. When

Elias looked up from planting, he saw that a cirrus cloud had smudged a stem against the horizon to hold the heavy white flower of his backyard.

Elias slept well that night. The next morning, he saw a pink lump in front of the toolshed. It was the size of a pillow. Close up, he saw that the rats had already ripped into the placenta. The Old Mare was not in the toolshed. The goat stood concentrating, while a new white filly let some milk escape along with the overeager suckling sounds she made as she nursed from the goat.

Elias felt too heavy to move, but he went out to the backyard. He looked down hard as he walked until he saw a tulip. No, it was a red daffodil. Elias saw that the flowers curled around the Old Mare like a red and yellow womb, and the snow where she had died was melted, and he sighed.

Kira Trainor

Graphite Drawing

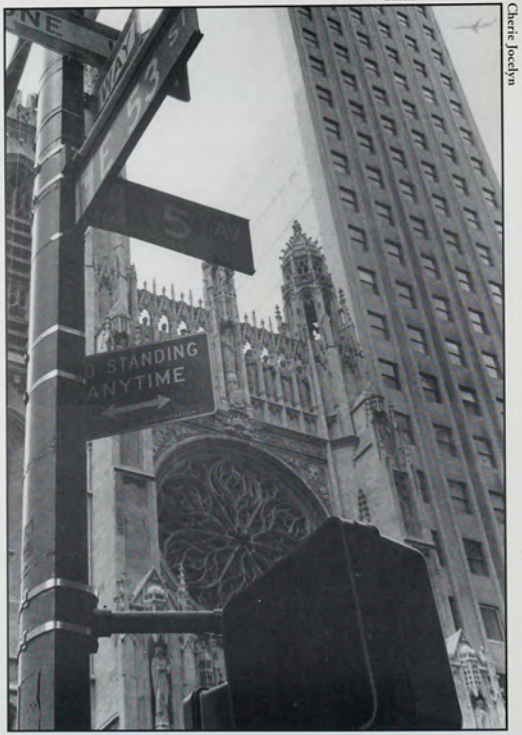
Jason Audet

Summer Drives

I thought about our summer drives yesterday,
how we would take off early in
the morning,
in a rush to get nowhere in particular.
You always drove,
and I would sit with my legs curled
up underneath me until they
were nothing but pins and needles.
We would sing Creedence songs and
name our unborn children,
and sometimes just stay quiet and hear
each other breathe.
I wore the days like silken robes
that summer,
and we felt with our fingers every curve of the
season as it laid itself out
before us.
I never loved you more than in those
moments when a deep sigh
almost caught in your throat,
and I could tell it was because of the day, the
air, the time with me.
I thought of all this yesterday, after
my born children
were sleeping and the man I married,
with whom I dance to the
sound of crickets
at midnight,
who holds my heart with forever fingers
but gets carsick on the way to the market,
had settled into his attic office.
I thought of all this and
reached
somewhere beneath my life, into
an old and deep love that
found me in a car
almost every summer weekend, but took
me nowhere in particular.
A long, slow love that
led me down the highway, pins
and needles in my legs from
never stopping.
A great, young love
that echoed in deep sighs and
almost bore children with beautiful names.

Derrith Schwarz

Black + White Photo



Cherie Jocelyn

Grave Robbing

In Borneo they bury
the unweaned infant in a tree,
where milky sap nurses her
until she is strong enough to continue
the journey.
I think I have buried you like this:
in my hollow trunk where it is dark,
but I can't ignore reflections
of twenty-four crimson moons,
of lightning storms and the elaborate fall
of an overripe peach,
drunk in a cradle of waves.

Eating raspberries and lonely while
memories nest in me like swollen ovum.
Is there solitude somewhere past
the chalky moth-carcass emptiness,
past the dream ghosts I talk to for comfort?
I hold righteous indignation like a spoon
with which I may feed or merely gauge
at the lies, the indifference, the way
we've become strangers.
The pleasure of eating red fruit sours,
and pleas fill my mouth like sand while
I watch for you with grief eyes
the color of whales.

Womb-like slits heal around the baby grave,
but I excavate you every day,
loving silently as the tree,
painting in rainlight as loss runs
through my heart like a starving beast,
grown wild in ravaged race towards sustenance.
I would wear your teeth
in a velvet pouch around my neck.

Sunday morning and we should
be by the water, but I am here
turning like an avalanche in bed,
ignoring the sun and searching your arms.

Jessica Scarlett Clark

the stitches are coming loose

frosty window nights
when the livid house
comes to terms with age
the clang clickety click
of the pipes as the heat flows through
blue Christmas lights dangling above
light the floor
the single blemish
of the cerulean mindscape
yawning in the seams of the door
a flaxen light from the hallway beyond
and on a chair
taken from the living room
rests a pair of familiar blue jeans
faded outline where wallet sits
knees worn thin and frayed
left one covered by a
tan corduroy patch
sewn by my mother
years before

Erik Wohlgemuth

Black + White Photo

Joe Burke

Mud Lake

On my thirteenth birthday, June 22, 1941, I swam across Mud Lake. It was a four-and-a-half mile swim—I looked it up in May, while I was planning it, on the map in my father's bottom drawer—and it took me seven hours and twenty minutes to reach the other side. I did it because they told me I couldn't.

It was Sammy, my friend, who put the idea in my head. In May, he said that he had done it in three hours on his thirteenth birthday. Nobody believed him, including me, and Sammy knew that. Still, he told everyone at the lunch table his story for the sake of telling a good story. The other kids were laughing and playing along.

"In the middle, God, it's lonely. There's just water and the water is cold. I went under looking for fish, but there weren't even any fish out there. Nothing around and both banks a blur. I almost thought I wasn't going to make it because of loneliness," said Sammy.

"I'm going to do it," I said.

"You'll try," said Sammy, "but you won't make it." His tone was still light.

"No. I'm really going to do it."

"Frank, what are you talking about."

"In June. When I turn thirteen."

"Of course you are," said another kid, and he changed the subject.

Nobody worried except Sammy. They all said it was impossible, and everyone knew it was impossible, and anyone who said they were going to try was telling a story. But Sammy knew me. I didn't tell stories. He changed every conversation we had, from the day he told his yarn until my birthday, into a sermon on the dangers of trying to cross the lake. He told me about people who had died of exhaustion. He told me about a man who got chopped to pieces by a boat's propellers. On June 21, when he still hadn't talked me out of it, he told my father.

My father was a very large man. He was five feet and eleven inches tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular. He was enraged. He said I was to stay in my room, birthday or no birthday, until he got home from work. He asked why I was doing this to him. He told me I was a fool. He wrapped his hands around my neck so I couldn't breathe and held them there until I squirmed and said that my choking was not even close to drowning. First you go down and think you can make it back up, but your arms aren't taking you up even though you're giving it all you've got, everything in you, and you look for something to grab onto—a rope or a boat or a friend—but nobody's around for miles and you try to scream but the water rushes in and it gets worse, so you cough but that makes it even worse, and so finally you're in the muck on the bottom, and you decide this is where you will stay forever, forever, forever, and the feeling of slime and mud on your legs and chest and face is the last feeling you'll ever know, besides the choking and the failure. Then he described what a drowned body looks like, the puffy fingers, the fat, bloated stomach, and the bruise-blue skin. But I wasn't planning to drown.

My father left for work at seven the next morning. I began walking to the lake at ten past eight, after a breakfast of toast and fried eggs. I was wearing khaki slacks and a dirty, white shirt I had dug out of the laundry. My father had hidden my bathing costume. My light brown hair—not blond yet because it was still early in the summer—was in my eyes. I didn't wear a hat. When I got to Mud Lake Road, I walked along the bank of the lake until I came to where I wanted to cross, at about the middle. It was quarter past nine. I stripped down to my underwear, made the sign of the cross, and set out.

I wasn't afraid. I did not bless myself out of fear for my safety. It was more a sense of duty. I thought God might be offended if I hadn't included him in this. Maybe he would try to get back at me. I was covering my bases, just to be sure, but I did not shake or cry, and I was not scared. I never doubted my ability to cross the lake.

The water was warm—at least it felt warm compared to the morning air, which was still in the high sixties. I dipped underwater to get my hair wet. And I swam. And I swam. After about an hour there was not much around. I rested by floating on my back. I studied the clouds and tried to make shapes. I kicked with my feet sometimes to keep on the move. I swam again after a short rest on my back. I could see the far bank, still a blur and miles away. There were no boats on the lake that day. The only noise was an occasional bird. If I could make this swim—and I was sure I could—I could do anything. I was the one who could swim across Mud Lake, and I would be the one to get out of Minnesota and make something of myself. I wasn't going to chop down trees like my father. I was going to New York City to wear pin stripes and play the stocks. When I got to the other bank, I would just keep on swimming across the Chippewa Reservation—across Red Lake, across Lake Superior and down Lake Huron, without stopping, up Erie to Lake

Ontario and right across New York State—until I reached Lady Liberty. I was unstoppable. I would be the pride of my family because I left Minnesota and swam to Manhattan and amassed a fortune. I'd buy a house for my brother and father in Connecticut, and they would never have to work because I would provide for them. That couldn't happen in Minnesota. It was my responsibility to swim out of here and make Lloyd family history. Only I could do that because only I could swim Mud Lake.

The canoe was still quite far away when I heard the oars splashing. I looked back, but couldn't tell who was in the boat. So I kept swimming, hoping it wasn't my father. I knew he would find out eventually—probably today—but if he were here now, he would jump in and force me into the boat, and this would all be a waste.

The boat got closer. "Frank!" It was Sammy's voice. I stayed on course and didn't look at the boat until he pulled alongside me.

"Frank, you crazy bastard."

"I'm not getting in that boat."

"I didn't think you would. I'm just going to ride beside you, okay?"

"No," I said between strokes. "Go back."

"You should float on your back if you get tired."

"I know. Go back."

"I'm not going back."

I swam for a while without looking at the boat. It wasn't as fun with the boat on the side of me. There was no sense of danger. Hell, anybody could swim for a few hours if a boat was right beside them, just in case. And I told Sammy that. "C'mon. Go back."

"No."

"What in Hell's the point, then?"

"To make sure you don't end up dead."

"No. I mean the point of the swim."

"What? You can still swim the lake. Just I'm going to be here."

I tried to think of different things I could say to get Sammy to go away. I couldn't explain how this was less spectacular because he was there. And I don't think he would have cared even if he understood. He was there to save me. In his mind, that made him a good friend and a good person. A savior. A christ. There was nothing I could say to get him to give this up and be a hard, uncaring person. I just asked where he got the canoe.

"Had to steal it from Fieldman's yard."

"He's going to miss it. You should bring it back before you get in trouble."

"Take a break, Frank. Sit in the boat a while and rest."

"Go to Hell."

"Really, I won't even move, so you can still say you swam the whole lake."

"Bring the damn boat back to Fieldman, Sam."

"At least float on your back."

I did float for a little while.

"You know, it's a good thing I'm here. Nobody would ever believe you crossed this lake. If you make it, that is."

"I'll make it."

And I did. I reached the other bank a little after five o'clock. My father was there waiting for me in his felt hat and camel-colored overcoat. His arms were crossed over his chest. Sammy pulled the canoe up before I reached shore and talked to my father. I could feel my muscles, tight in my legs and arms. When I got out and stood on the shore, I had won a victory inside. I had done the impossible. I was panting and I couldn't stand steady and my skin was wrinkly.

"I did it, Dad."

My father said nothing.

"I swam the whole lake. The whole lake." I walked up to my father. I was going to hug him, which is strange because we very rarely exchanged physical signs of affection. I didn't hug him. When I got close enough, he hit me with a closed fist in the jaw. I landed on my back on the ground. There was no rage in my father's blow. Just duty. Sammy helped me up and into my father's car. We left the canoe where it was. It was a long ride home because the dirt road that wrapped around the lake was overgrown with high weeds and there were rocks in the way and some muddy areas where the lake had flowed over during the storm two days ago.

I think my father was proud deep down. He didn't call me a stupid son-of-a-bitch or reproach me for disobeying his orders or confine me to my room until I got married. He just hit me. When we got home, he pan-fried a hamburger for me, wished me a happy birthday, and sent me to bed.

The next day my father woke me before he left for work at seven. It hurt to move. "Today you bring that canoe back to Fieldman. Right after breakfast."

I nodded. He shut the door and went to work.

Greg Paré

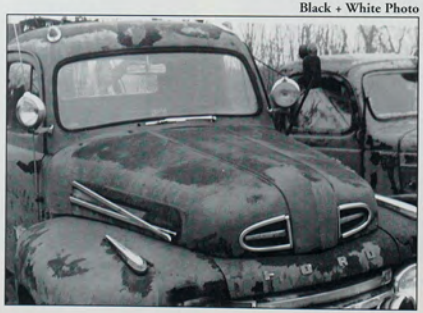
Series of Digitally Manipulated Art **Stacy Morse**

His Garden

I threw his garbage into a box
I put it in a safe place
I stopped taking care of his garden
The flowers had all died
Under the weight of our silence
The sand from the beach
Fell out of the cuff of my jeans
Making the bed prickly
Making the bed too dirty
For lovemaking
I feel each grain pressing into my skin
And pretend that they are his toenails
Scratching along my shins

Leigh Matheu

Black + White Photo



Caleb Cabral

beestung and five

A girl was beestung in the schoolyard—pierced—between two
fingers on her left hand.

It happened quick,
fast,
in a flash of yellow
and black.
No crying out—just a watery smile up at
a teacher who never suspected mistakes.

Beestung and five, she clenched a fistful of cotton jumper to
press against the pain,
climbed stairs to join her class inside,
and never questioned why.

Angela Karma Rourke

Black + White Photo by Arthur Silva

Training Pigeons

Training pigeons has never been a one-way street.

Pigeons are not empty vessels.

They have wings and, having such,
Have much in common
With airplanes and angels.

I cannot begin to tell you the things
Still to be learned about aviation
And immortality.

I myself have never trained a pigeon,
But I once met a man in the city,
At a small table,
In a train station restaurant
Intimately arranged
And run by a woman who
Trained pigeons in the art of urban isolation.
The man told me she has discovered
How to sleep with her eyes open.

"So many birds," she says, overhearing
Our talk. "They'll need to learn someday
About being a face in the crowd."

Laughter travels northbound outside,
Concealed by the train's roar and the rattle
Of our dishes. "We had to learn it ourselves,"
She says. "For example,

If I said to you that I saw a pigeon
Learning from a ragged man
Loneliness, and teaching
The same man flight,
Would you picture in your mind
A silver and purple bird,
Or one mostly grey with some white?"

Jay Peters

By November

I sit feeling guilty
not doing my work
books piled around me
like a moat of annoyance.

Winter, my grievance
it's coming, you see
killing the trees
making them naked
and still.
And still, even a senior
and all —that's me.
These classes make me feel naked
and stupid
with their answers to every question
their inter-
pretations rattle mine wrong
like ragtime plucked on nylon
History said —no way!
but yes,
and beautifully sweet and strong.

Benjamin Goulet

Black + White Photo

Arthur Silva

Silent Film

The words
they tumble, like falling seasons
out of rain
into our conversations.
What do we talk about
when we are talking?
When I can't look at you and smile
despite the damage I've repaired.
When at 3 o'clock in the morning it is all there,
things not safe to think about.
When the day forces other things to matter
that really do not
and really cannot
move me at all
anymore.

What do we talk about
when we are talking?
When I constantly see you walking
up and down the stairwell on lonely
winter days.
When the snow lies like sleeping polar bears,
a snow we dare not fall into
for fear of failing in everything we've ever done.

I sit alone at a table in a smoky room
the windows open
the rain falling in
the shades falling down.
I sit across the table
and watch your life slowly passing
before your eyes
and wonder about our words and their import
on our lives
in their meaninglessness
to our days
days without end
days without nights.
I've given so much time to the footprints that stand at my door
to live and to sit
dying by the fireplace.
I've given time to the words that haunt my mornings
and you
would you ask me to ever see you again?
After your black robe is worn
and your name is dragged through the world
asking, with fists clenched, "What do we talk about
when we are talking?"
We stop and listen for the trains
deep in the night
and wonder why that sound is the loneliest sound in the world.

What do we talk about
when we are talking?
We talk about our hidden pain
when the conversation seems to be
about something very different.
What do we talk about
when we are talking?
We talk about brilliant words spoken
by brilliant men living
and hating every moment
of every brilliant word.
We talk about
the night
laying on the hillside
with its many empty silences.

It is not yet winter,
so that is one less silence
we have to listen for.

But sitting here now
with your honesty in a chair,
the rain on your fingertips,
and the wind blowing through me like a scarecrow,
I realize
I may never get to stumble through the world with you,
never get to sleep
or crawl blindly
through America,
but that is okay
because I know what I've seen
and what I hear in your voice.
A greater intelligence than I could ever know.
A greater intelligence
of myself.

I know now
that I will never be the same.
After all this time
I wouldn't ever forget
how we need to be in love
with real things
and real people
and how it is never the same
after the first written sentence
and the first spoken word
of our lives
and all the hereafters
we always talk about
but know we will never know.

Anthony Loffredio

Barter

John sat at his work station putting the finishing touches on a box of earrings when his supervisor, Bill, walked over with a new guy. "And this completes the tour. This is where you'll be working—next to John." He said this as he pointed to the empty chair beside him. "John, I want you to meet Mike. He's a new worker here."

Bill's introduction broke John's concentration. Frustrated because the earring back missed the stem, John threw the card to the table. His face reddened, but Bill, used to this reaction, patted him on the shoulder saying, "That's okay, you'll get it next time." John recognized the encouragement and sheepishly turned towards the new guy.

"John, this is Mike," Bill repeated. "He'll be working here, next to you." John stood up so fast he knocked his chair over. He wiped his left hand on his pants and extended it towards Mike. Mike took it and gave it a firm shake, but John didn't let go, rather he squeezed harder. Mike's fingers first turned red then a purple-blue, yet he said nothing. John smiled, kissed Mike's hand and released it. "Mike, Mike, Mike..." John repeated as he pointed to him.

"That's right John ... Mike," Bill said. "Now, would you like to show Mike what we do here?" John sat and stomped his feet as Bill walked away.

"Look," John said, and with all of his concentration he picked up an empty earring card. He pulled a fake pearl earring from another bin on the desk and stuck it through the card. Then came the hardest part; John stuck out his tongue as he picked up a tiny earring backing. Finally, with the backing positioned between his stubby forefinger and thumb, he tried to put it on the stub. He missed and the stub pricked his finger. Perspiration beaded up on his forehead and he tried again, this time completing the job. He repeated the entire process, tongue and all, on the adjacent hole and said, "Done," placing the card in a box with his name on it.

When Mike finished his first card, he held it up for John's approval. John, who had watched the operation, took the card, gave it a once over, stomped his feet with delight and said, "Good." Mike took back the card and put it into John's box. "No. Over there, silly," John said pointing to a box on Mike's desk. Where a card went was important because the daily wages were set by the number of cards each worker made.

It was expected that John would make one hundred cards in one hour's time. Because he couldn't count, Bill drew a line on the box that let John know he had met the goal. For any card above the line, John, like all other carders, would get a twenty-five cent bonus. When he first began a year ago, he never made the line, but now he made it in forty minutes. Once at the line he waited until someone emptied the box before he started on another batch. The job was easy for Mike. Within two weeks time his quota was moved up from one-hundred to one-fifty per hour.

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The lunch room conversations were bubbling on in Spanish, Cambodian, and English. John sat silently eating his lunch. Mike came in, and sat next to him. At his arrival, John, who had turned his concentration back to his lunch, tapped his foot, and when Mike sat down John involuntarily started bouncing his leg. John looked at him with a tender face and took another bite of his sandwhich.

After he unpacked his McDonald's, Mike broke the silence.

"What ya got there John?"

"A bologna sandwich, two cookies and a dark soda," he said before he swallowed.

A piece of chewed bologna landed on Mike's arm. He didn't seem to notice.

"Who made it for you?"

John bit off another piece of the sandwich and said, "Me," while hitting his chest with his open hand.

"Just bologna? No cheese or mayonnaise?"

John's head drooped and his leg stopped moving. His eyes watered and they lost the wide-eyed happy glow. Mike read the signs. "No, that's okay. You can have your sandwich however you like it." John's eyes widened and his foot tapped. "I mean, just thought it would be plain without that other stuff," Mike said.

Mike turned to his food and took a bite. Lunch break was nearly over and he was just starting to eat. "Here, have some of these fries," he said passing them to John.

Since he had already finished, John was happy to have something more to eat. "Thanks," he said lightly punching Mike's arm.

Mike, swallowed a bite of his Big Mac and wondered out loud, "Where does he live?" John heard, and pulled a wallet from his pocket. He flicked it open like TV detectives do and showed the insides to Mike. On one side of it there was a plastic police badge and, on the other, his address written on a card.

"You a cop?" Mike said pointing. John shook his head, smiling his biggest grin.

"Who do you live with?"

"Steve, my friend."

"Is Steve handicapped too?"

John looked at Mike. The question didn't register. "Steve, my friend," he repeated.

Mike didn't push anymore. He finished his lunch and said, "Come on, we've got to get back to work."

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Mike rushed to his table just in time, and when John turned to say hello, he noticed something new: Mike was wearing a Walkman. John pointed, "Let me try?"

"Sure," Mike said placing the headphones around John's wide head.

"Loud!" John screamed. Some of the workers turned to see what was the matter, laughed, and turned back to their work. After the volume was adjusted, John listened. He liked the music and began to bang his arms on the desk. He tried to match the beat, but his coordination didn't cooperate. Earrings, empty cards, and the backs of the earrings flew everywhere. John stomped and banged louder, until, in his excitement, he tipped the chair over backwards, landing on his back with his feet in the air.

The sudden drop scared John and he let out a roaring yell. Everyone, including Bill, stopped what they were doing and gathered around. Mike was helping John to his feet. The Walkman was shattered on the floor, and John had earrings stuck into the back of his shirt.

After Mike calmed John down, Bill asked, "What happened?" He listened and handed down his sentence: "No more Walkmans," he bellowed. John recognized the angry tone, and his face drooped more than it already was. "Now clean up this mess." John began to bawl again, and everyone left except Mike.

"It's okay," he said rubbing the words into John's back. When John was calm enough, Mike went to get a barrel so he could clean up.

Once back, Mike cleaned while John watched. Mike inspected the Walkman and found that not even the headphones could be salvaged. "No, no ... not this CD," Mike said with the cracked disc in his hands. "I just bought this," he said holding it out to John. "Do you know how much a CD costs, not to mention the player? I had to save for five weeks to get that thing!"

John's bottom lip stuck out and his body was caved in. "Sorry," he exhaled. He began to rock back and forth in his chair. He was now sobbing and had to wipe his nose.

"Sorry? What about my hundred and fifty bucks?" Mike stammered as he threw the broken pieces into the trash can. He looked at John and cursed under his breath, "Fucking retard," and went to put the barrel away.

John watched him go. He had seen others walk away mad and never come back. He thought this was happening again, and he put his head on his table and cried for his loss. Bill came by and asked, "John, what's wrong?"

"Mike's gone," he managed to choke out.

"He's coming back," Bill said. "Here he is now."

John leapt from his chair and bear-hugged Mike. He was pushed away, but that didn't stop his smile or his chant. "Mike's back. Mike's back...."

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It was break time and a group of workers was gathered around the catering truck. "Do you want anything?" Mike asked as he and John came out of the building.

"Yes, please. A blueberry doughnut," John answered.

"Okay, I'll get it for you."

John stopped and waited. Three co-workers were walking towards him talking. *"Mi pinga no está bien,"* said Carlos.

"Porqué?" asked Manny.

"He's tired. No sleeping last night. *Mi esposa no está aquí. Ella visita su padre en Nueva York."*

They were close enough to John for him to hear them, but he didn't understand what they said. He had heard them talking like this before. He liked the sounds they made.

"Hey John, how're ya doing?" Carlos asked.

"Good. What about you?" John shot back.

"Better than I was yesterday. I got laid last night and boy was she good," he said grabbing himself.

Mike came back and handed John his doughnut. "What about you?" Manny asked, "You gettin' any? I heard the girls were crazy for you."

John said, "I get it every night," and he bit into the doughnut. He took off half of it in one bite. His cheeks puffed out as his jaw moved up and down.

"You shittin' me John?" George said. "You really gettin' sum?"

"You bet," John said. "Every night. Boy, is it good."

"I don't even get it that much," Mike laughed out.

Manny jumped in, "I told you, the girls are crazy for 'im."

Carlos grabbed himself again, "Shit, John, you get more than all of us, don't ya?"

John popped the rest of the doughnut in his mouth. He smiled, swallowed hard and shook his head yes. Everyone laughed, so John joined them. He tilted his head back and gave his deepest guttural laugh.

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"John, can you do me a favor? You see, there is a girl that works over there that I like, and I really want to talk to her," Mike began. "The problem is: I can't be there and here at the same time. If you finish up these forty cards for me, I'll bring you a snack tomorrow."

John stared at him. "Do you understand me?"

John nodded, even though he wasn't sure what Mike was talking about.

"Just do these here," Mike reiterated pointing to the forty cards he had counted out, then he was gone.

Since his box was already to the line when he had made the bargain, John made quick work of Mike's forty. He finished and put them into Mike's box before Bill came to empty the boxes.

"Where's Mike?" Bill asked.

"Over there," John answered pointing in the direction where Mike went. Bill looked towards the bathrooms.

The next day, Mike brought the promised snack and presented it to John. It was a lemon square with a white sugar topping. John hit his hands together and smiled. He took it and devoured it in two bites.

That day Mike went off in the afternoon to see his newfound love, and John worked for another pastry. Mike came back excited. "She's going to go out with me," he said. "Thanks to you, I might have a new girlfriend." He patted John's back.

"Me too," John said reaching for his wallet.

"Get out, man, you have a girlfriend?"

John flipped open the wallet, moved the badge and handed the wallet to Mike. "Lisa Taylor," he proudly said.

She was wheelchair bound. John was standing beside her. They both had big smiles. He was holding her hand forward. "I love her," John sheepishly announced.

"Are you engaged?" Mike asked then rephrased, "Are you getting married?"

John shook his head yes. His face looked like a happy Buddha, and his smile was so large it nearly pushed his eyes closed. "Wow, that's great," Mike said after he examined the photo again.

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John was not only able to work, but he could also take the bus back and forth, even though he needed to transfer buses mid-trip. He stood waiting at the same bus stop every morning; Steve always got him off in plenty of time, just in case he was sidetracked along the way.

John stood at the bus stop and counted cars. The highest he could count was two, and after that he would randomly mix in numbers and letters, until he was satisfied, only to find himself saying one and two again. "One, two, twenty, a, six, em, fifteen,..." John said under his breath.

Behind him five teenaged boys were also waiting for the bus. One of them took out a joint, and the others huddled around. They passed the smoke around, each taking a deep hit. "You ever seen a retard get high?" one asked motioning his head towards John. The others laughted and agreed that they hadn't even seen one so much as drunk, let alone high. They surrounded John.

"...seventeen, yu, de, five," John stopped counting when the kids got in his way. He looked at them and smelled something funny. One of the boys addressed him, saying, "Hey buddy, whach ya doin'?"

John pushed his glasses back up his nose. He had begun to swear harder after they had surrounded him. "Waitin' for the bus," he said. His shirt was sticking to his back.

The speaker put his arm around John's shoulder. "Man, where you got to go?" He pulled his arm away and John's shirt clung to it.

John was uncomfortable. "Work. Got to go on the bus to work," he said matter-of-factly.

Someone chimed in, "Forget work. Hang with us. We got somethin' for ya."

John backed away, his eyes watered and his free hand hit nervously against his side. He wanted to take deep breaths, but the smoke from the marijuana cigarette scratched at his throat. Finally, he sobbed. Snot ran from his nose, and tears streamed down his cheeks.

The boys danced around John as if he were a Maypole. "Here, take a hit," one of them said holding the joint to John's mouth. John's eyes widened with fear at the sight of it. By mistake, he took a deep breath and puked. The boys laughed at him. "Give him another hit," someone said. Two boys grabbed John's arms, and the boy with the pot shook the vomit from his hand, and after lighting a new smoke, lifted it to John's mouth.

John's lunch fell to the ground and he struck out. He hit the antagonist solid on the nose, breaking it. Blood immediately poured from the spot, spilling onto the sidewalk, the boy's shirt and John. Everything stopped. The boys stared as the injured boy held his face in his hands. John blinked, they were gone, and the bus was pulling into the stop. He boarded, forgetting his lunch in the puddle of blood.

In his seat, John shook. He wiped his bloody hand on the seat and cried. No one on the bus moved to help him. He was calmer on the second bus. His chin was buried in his chest. The tears stopped; instead he mumbled words even he didn't understand.

Mike was outside waiting for John. He had brought a package of Ring Dings for him. "What happened? What's all this blood? Are you hurt?" he asked, his voice accelerating with each question. Not able to explain, John thrust his head into Mike's shoulder and sobbed. Mike rubbed his back. "It's okay now," Mike cooed to him. "Let's go inside and get you cleaned up."

After John had washed his face with cold water, he was calm enough to tell Mike what happened. Mike puzzled most of it together by asking a lot of questions, repeating and rewording as necessary. He assured John that he had done the right thing, and when he was totally calm, Mike called him "Champ."

By mid-morning, the Champ was back to his normal self. He and Mike were quietly trying to catch up on their work. When Bill came by to empty the boxes he asked, "How are you doing John?" John looked up at him, smiled his Buddha smile and said, "Mike my friend," and he punched Mike in the arm.

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"Hey, John, isn't that Mike's box?" Bill asked. He was a little early collecting the cards because he had to go to a meeting in another building. "Where's Mike?"

"Over there," John said looking up from a new card.

"In the bathroom?" Bill demanded.

"With his girlfriend, silly," John answered reaching for his wallet. "I have a girlfriend too."

Bill didn't finish the conversation. He turned and bellowed, "Mike, get your ass over here!"

Mike instantly appeared, "What's the matter? Why are you yelling?"

John put his wallet back and the happy creases on his face disappeared. He slouched into his chair and looked at his work.

"In my office, now!" Bill yelled pointing the way.

Once inside, Bill closed the door and asked, "Where were you just now?"

"In the bathroom. Why?" Mike said with an attitude.

"John said you were with your girlfriend. And I caught him putting work in your box."

"Maybe he made a mistake."

"John doesn't make those kind of mistakes." Bill said shaking his head. "He's doing your work, covering your ass so you can talk to some chick—you must be some kind of lowlife to take advantage of a retard!"

"I pay him for his work," Mike confessed. "So just leave us alone. No one's getting hurt here. Besides, John has never worked so hard, and he likes the challenge."

"And you like the free time, so don't try to bullshit me. His quota hasn't gone up so much as one card."

"Quota. Quota!" Mike yelled. "What do you care about his quota? You know damn well that the state gets his check and all he gets from it is twenty-five dollars. You want more work from him and what does he get? Nothing! Not one fucking thing. At least he gets something from me. Who's using who, Billy Boy?"

"Don't you raise your voice to me, and don't you accuse me of using John." Bill's voice was heard clear across the shop. He was standing, pointing his index finger down Mike's throat. "And this isn't a pick-up joint!" He composed himself. The meeting in the other building had already begun without him. "Who is she?"

Mike sat silent.

"Who is she?" Bill asked again, and, after a brief space of silence, he said in a possessed voice, "Get out of here. You're fired!"

Mike extended his middle finger, waved it in Bill's face and stomped out of the room.

Back at his desk, John had heard all of the shouting. He recognized his name and some of the other words. Lots of times when he heard shouting and yelling, he got a bad feeling, like he did something wrong.

Mike staggered back to what just minutes ago was his desk. "John, I've got to leave early. Keep all of the work for yourself ... I ... I...."

"What's wrong?" John asked then looked down, and said, "I'm sorry." His sad face was showing. He didn't know what he had done wrong.

Mike put on a happy face and said, "I'm leaving early with my girl. You take it easy." He patted John's back. "Everything's okay."

John opened up with a smile and he stomped his feet. "That's my Champ," Mike said, and he left.

The next day, John came to work and waited in the break room for Mike. Bill noticed him standing there and said, "Come on to your table, John. It's time to get to work."

"Where's Mike?"

"I fired him."

The words didn't register. "Where's Mike?"

"He doesn't work here anymore."

John still didn't get it. "Where's Mike?" he demanded.

"He is sick today," Bill lied. "Now let's get to work."

Charlie Bibeault

Photo of Clarrisa Sligh, 1991 taken and provided by Ellen Eisenman

About Clarissa Sligh...

Artist/Photographer, writer, lecturer, and teacher, Clarissa Sligh has received wide acclaim for her explorations of family, society, ethnicity, and gender. Her work is an ongoing investigation of our perceptions of individuality and the "norm." She employs various computer, photo, and graphic media to produce prints and books that involve a revisioning of the semiotics of cultural icons and histories.

Wavefront staff met with Clarissa Sligh in October of 1997 when an exhibit of her work was shown in the RIC Art Center, Bannister Gallery.

Interview with Clarissa

Interviewed by Jane I. Monaghan and Jesse D. Marsden

WAVEFRONT: *Obviously a lot of your pieces address the issue of literacy in one way or another, but to have a collection of your works be focused towards literacy. Is that something new for you? Did that feel comfortable?*

SLIGH: It doesn't feel uncomfortable because some of the earliest shows that some of this work were in were called "literacy shows." For example, there was a curator out of an Arts Center in the Bronx in New York, and he curated a show that had the word "literacy" in the title. So I'm not uncomfortable with the idea. But a lot of the work was very conceptual, and a lot of the people didn't know how it was related to literacy, but you know, there are a lot of different ways that you can relate artwork to literacy.

WAVEFRONT: *And what are some of those ways that you would relate your artwork to...*

SLIGH: To literacy?

WAVEFRONT: *Yeah.*

SLIGH: I think that one thing that I try to bring out in my work was how one is required to learn some things. Or to learn in a culture where you feel as though you're an outsider. Growing up as a Black Southerner in a small town, we definitely had a different dialect than what's found in reading *Dick and Jane*. And, I mean for me, all through school I was always corrected and told to say, "Say it this way, say it that way, this is not correct, that's not correct." English this, that and the other. And I think that, in general, Americans have somewhat of an inferiority complex about what's correct English anyway, because we don't speak the King's English. We speak American English.

WAVEFRONT: *Right.*

SLIGH: So, it's different anyway. But it's based on that. So, I think there's a way in which, when you have to give up the way you learned how to talk as a baby, to learn how to talk and write and think a different way, there's a way that you're being asked to give up part of who you are. Or you're being told that part of who you are and the way you are is wrong. Or is incorrect. I think that always hurts to a certain extent. So I think that was a lot of what I was trying to bring out in the *Reading Dick and Jane* work. The ways in which one has to give up, you know, who one is...

WAVEFRONT: *So we're learning ... "No, that's not right."*

SLIGH: Right.

WAVEFRONT: *"Start all over again."*

SLIGH: Right. Not even just start over again but you just have to learn it our way, do it our way. That kind of thing.

WAVEFRONT: *Who did you find that would tell you that? Was it white teachers or...*

SLIGH: Black teachers.

WAVEFRONT: *Black teachers mostly?*

SLIGH: Yeah.

WAVEFRONT: *There's one of your works, "Our parents..."*

SLIGH: "Our parents want us to read this stuff..."

WAVEFRONT: *Right. "We heard our teachers say we're not smart enough."*

SLIGH: Uh-huh.

WAVEFRONT: *So that would also be black teachers that you had?*

SLIGH: Yes. Yes.

WAVEFRONT: *Ok.*

SLIGH: And actually black teachers are probably harder on black kids than white teachers. I think there's a way they feel that they have more invested in the black kids doing well in the structure. You know ... the system. So they are harder in many ways. It's just that I think people need to find a way to do it in a way that's not so destructive, so oppressive. The other part about it is that it's all part of the class system. You know. When I began looking at making this work, I was looking at how I have spent so many years trying to change from being Working Class to being Middle Class and how that was the goal, the desirable goal that one is given. You know, you're handed it, you know— "this is your goal."

WAVEFRONT: *It's a struggle to define or improve upon yourself.*

SLIGH: And so there are many ways in which you are called upon to give up who you are, and then, you know, there's the Middle Class. So many of whom are trying to get to something else. And the odd thing about it is that no one is really sure what anything is, you know. When you're Working Class, you're not quite sure what being Middle Class is. And when you're Middle Class, you're not sure what being an Owning Class or Wealthy or Rich, you know, born rich is. But you subscribe to those things based on certain stereotypes that we're all given.

WAVEFRONT: *Right. Like the "Dick and Jane" thing.*

SLIGH: Right, right.

WAVEFRONT: *And the language ... I imagine the pressure to correct your language goes along with that, because it is so often about class.*

SLIGH: Yes, language and your behavior and your appearance.

WAVEFRONT: *So, you've connected your work to race and class. There's also a gender theme, and sexual abuse is also included.*

SLIGH: Right.

WAVEFRONT: *It seems like you have always been working with a combination of text and image. That's probably going on in your head—whatever images you put down were accompanied by a dialogue that you ended up needing to also include.*

SLIGH: It's true, and I purposely did that to try to go back to the voice of the child that was the real voice—rather than the schooled voice or the educated voice—the voice within. For example, in one of the pieces, "Waiting for Daddy," I decided, rather than truncate the words where they are supposed to be truncated, I would just truncate them where they ended up on the edge of the page and just continue the words. And I said to myself, "People are going to think that I am illiterate." And "Nobody's going to be able to read this," or "They're going to be angry," or whatever, you know. When you're working, you think a lot of things. What was really interesting was that young people got it right away—the whole piece. There's just something ... they're really open, you know. They are learning the rules, but they haven't been squashed by the rules.

WAVEFRONT: *Yeah, they haven't been ingrained.*

SLIGH: They're not as rigid.

WAVEFRONT: *That seems fascinating, the whole process you just described, because you were going back to that voice that was when you started to learn the proper way to do it ... when you started to be taught to disassociate your behavior from yourself. Your first concern was that people would think you were illiterate.*

SLIGH: Right, and even with that piece, "We Didn't Know Who We Was," I did it years ago at a place called "Lower-East-Side Printshop," and there were a lot of other people around making work. Everytime somebody would look at that piece and they would read it, they would say, "This isn't right! This isn't right! This is the wrong way to say it! This is the wrong way to say it!" I said, "Nooo, it's not. It's the right way to say it." "But, it's 'Who We Were!'" I said, "No! It's 'Who We Was.'" Because that's how we said it. You know: "We was this, we was that." It was kind of funny because a lot of people would get it when they saw it, but when people would see me working on it, they would say, "This isn't right." They were actually just trying to help me catch a mistake.

WAVEFRONT: *Yeah, we all have that little grammar censor. It's interesting, too, because the "We Was" can seem almost more appropriate because "Was" refers to a single unit and that's how the experience was for you as a community—not necessarily grouped together as one by good things but also by bad things and the forces that worked against you. So it wasn't just lots of different people who all "were." "Was" is more appropriate in a logical way, even though it was just the natural expression.*

WAVEFRONT: *It was meant to be past tense, "We didn't know." Has that changed? Do you now know?*

SLIGH: No. (laughs)

WAVEFRONT: *So what does that refer to? Does that refer to identity in general? Or is that open to interpretation?*

SLIGH: Well, no. What I like to do with the work is refer to myself, but I like for it to resonate with everyone. I don't think most Americans know who they are and we're struggling there. So, it does end up resonating for a lot of people. But, remember when I showed those slides [at my gallery talk] from that book. I knew really, really early that I didn't know who I was and there was no one I could ask, 'cause no one knew what I was asking. And that's the way it is when you're young—you ask the adult, and they don't know what it is you're asking, so you never get an answer. And so, before it was popular to go to Africa, I had gone to Africa and spent a year traveling cross-country. That was one place I wanted to go, and I took my daughter when she was four and went across the continent. I was only going to be gone a few weeks. I thought six weeks at the most and my money would run out, but it didn't because people were really hospitable. I met a lot of people; they helped me out. Because I had grown up with those books, I wanted to see what the African people were like. It was really amazing to me how different we were. Later, I began to think of what were the things that made us different, and there were a lot of similarities, in some ways, but there were a lot of differences.

WAVEFRONT: *Between you and the people that you met in Africa?*

SLIGH: Yes. And between Americans, American Blacks and Africans. So it was amazing for me—and this piece comes out of this also—you know, that beforehand and after having been to Africa about three times and finally being able to articulate it in a piece that I was satisfied with, because I had tried to make that piece several times and I just couldn't get to it, and I really wasn't able to do it until I began doing the research on my family background, and then finally the piece came. But I think basically the whole thing is, trying to understand something about who we are, about who I am, about who anyone is.

WAVEFRONT: *That's what keeps coming back to me when I look at your work, because collage is constructing different images that you take from so many different places, and we often, we kind of filter what people say you are, what theory you are—it's a combination of factors.*

SLIGH: Right. And collage is good for it because it's a piecing together of things.

WAVEFRONT: *And you also reuse, putting all the things back together.*

SLIGH: Right—and trying to gain some kind of understanding in the process of reintegrating or integrating certain things.

WAVEFRONT: *Yeah, feeling whole. Especially because once a certain piece describes itself it's almost like where identity starts. Sometimes it's knowing what you aren't and understanding the negative and then you have to go to the positive again about what you are.*

SLIGH: One thing about the *Reading Dick and Jane* book is that on some pages there's computer type and on some pages there's handwriting. The handwriting is where I'm trying to give more voice to the children, and then the other is where I'm trying to give more voice to the text, to the textbook, to the origins of the textbook, and that is one of the reasons why I wrote on my early works in handwriting—because I wanted to put, I wanted to put that mark, the personal, the handwriting. You know, like your fingerprint, your signature is used to identify you. I wanted to use those things. I wanted to put something there that was of me that was not just mechanical. You know, like the photograph captures the image in the certain way, but I always view that as the mechanical, so I wanted to put in something that was more the personal mark.

WAVEFRONT: *It's sort of the recreating of it all, the reclaiming of your own language in a way, and that works really effectively with the text from* Dick and Jane. *That little part with someone else saying, "Oh this is the language that you have to use."*

SLIGH: Um-hm. And then from the response I've gotten from most people they tell me that—it's just real interesting how everyone—not everyone, I can't say that about everyone—but so many people have different responses to having had to learn to read from that book. Some people said it was totally boring and stupid, and others said, "Oh I loved it! I loved having my book and having to say those words and knowing I was doing it right." It was real interesting, you know, peoples' different responses.

WAVEFRONT: *It's too bad they were too shy to write those on the piece.*

SLIGH: I know, I know.

WAVEFRONT: *That was one of my questions, too. How did you feel about the final product of that audience participation—even though you didn't necessarily get, in a way, what you were hoping for—how did you feel about the final product?*

I Sucked My Thumb, 1989. Clarrisa Sligh

Play With Jane, 1988. Clarrisa Sligh

SLIGH: I got some pieces back that I thought were interesting—that I thought could be a way for me to think about doing future work—and that is making the image and then working back into it, you know, with other media—more than I had been doing. So I felt as though I got a direction from it—a possible direction, and I got a couple of good pieces. And I also, it's also gotten me to think about, how does one get the viewer to respond at the site without putting up a sign? So, that's something that I've been thinking about a lot over the past few months—because I'd like to do more interactive stuff and—you know I mentioned something I was going to do—something, put it on the Internet. But that's more geared for something that's interactive, and so people know. But how does one come upon something? And certainly the environment determines, you know, how one can respond to things, like in a museum.

WAVEFRONT: *We're so used to being in a museum or a gallery that it's sort of like, "here's my field of personal space, that there is the artist's field of space" and there is a gap between.*

SLIGH: And the museums won't, in most cases won't even let you create anything that's interactive because of their insurance issues.

WAVEFRONT: *Or touch, alter.*

SLIGH: Right, right. So I've been trying to think of different ways to do that and certainly a lot of artists have taken their work to other places and other spaces. Like out on the streets, or they've put it in a different context. So, I really think I'd like to do more things like that—put work in different contexts, see what happens.

WAVEFRONT: *Now, I had a question, if I could get back just to the different reactions people have. There have been numerous criticisms from the African-American community about Dick and Jane. Are you familiar with Toni Morrison's* The Bluest Eye*?*

SLIGH: Well, you know, I didn't know that book until someone told me about it after I'd made my work. I did read it after that.

WAVEFRONT: *Do people kind of challenge you about Toni Morrison at all?*

SLIGH: No.

WAVEFRONT: *The parallel commonality there makes it all the more powerful—that you both chose to address that.*

SLIGH: When I was making the book at Visual Studies Workshop, Joan Lyons, who was the manager of the press, had asked me if I had ever seen that book and I said, "No, I hadn't seen it." She'd read it earlier—like five or six years earlier—but then it came out as a reprint and that's when I saw it. She was the only one I had heard anything from in relationship to that.

WAVEFRONT: *It's a big part of the reading curriculum here.*

SLIGH: *The Bluest Eye?*

WAVEFRONT: *Yeah. One of the general education courses usually covers it.*

SLIGH: It's been in reprint, so I don't know how long they might have been including it, but I had never heard of it. But that's great.

WAVEFRONT: *It's sort of reassuring that there are a lot more people out there who want to hear about Dick and Jane.*

SLIGH: You know, there was a big show that was put together about *Dick and Jane* by some people in New York—I'm sure in cooperation with the publisher. I've seen it at Barnes and Noble.

WAVEFRONT: *Is that the coffee-table book?*

SLIGH: Yeah.

WAVEFRONT: *And that was celebratory?*

SLIGH: Yes.

WAVEFRONT: *So they were celebrating Dick and Jane?*

SLIGH: Yes, yes, yeah! And I understand they try to relate it to the new culture, but I haven't seen it.

WAVEFRONT: *So they changed it?*

SLIGH: Well, it's not really put out as a text. It's put out as a celebration of *Dick and Jane* and they try to relate it to peoples' lives today. That kind of thing.

WAVEFRONT: *I was shocked that you had found some areas where Dick and Jane was still being used.*

SLIGH: Well, you know I, I think it's hard for art to really make a difference in terms of social ills. I think it's very, very hard, in terms of trying to make a change out in the world. I view what I do more as a healing process for myself: As a way of making myself whole. And at the same time, I put it out there because I'm interested to see whether or not ... or how other people respond to it. How the viewers respond to it. And it is an art context not in a political rally context. You know, it's not like I'm in an ... like with Act-Up, for example. So, it's not placed in that context where I'm trying to, to get some kind of direct action. But I do feel that every little thing that we do is connected and can be connected. In physics they say for every action there is a reaction. You know? I think that all these little actions and reactions ... it can help to create an awareness among people. And that can move on, you know, in various little ways to other people and maybe even to other artists. And that can help move something in relationship to how they are thinking about their work or how they are in relationship to their work. So, I am primarily in the realm of Art and Art-making but I do feel, because of my life, I'm a part of a process that is so political that that's a big part of who I am. So it's very hard for me to make a statement that's not political.

WAVEFRONT: *Yeah. But, but what you're doing, you're making a statement...*

SLIGH: Yeah.

WAVEFRONT: *...encouraging the viewers to enter into a kind of dialogue about those things, Not so much that you're saying, "Change this." You're just saying, "Think about this."*

SLIGH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I also want people to think about their lives. You know? Because ... the whole idea about being a, a witness for what's going on in the world. I think is important. I mean, in the sense that, you know, not to go numb in the face of what's going on in the world. To really try to notice what's going on is, is really important. You know? Whether you do anything about it or not, but to, but to *notice* it.

Discovering My Own Literacy: A Personal Reflection

For more than twenty-five years, I have been fortunate to be a first-grade public school teacher. Over the course of my teaching career, I have seen many curriculum changes. One notable change has been an emphasis on process writing in the classroom. The concept of process writing, as envisioned and described by leading theorists Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins, emphasizes the natural desire in each child to write and to see himself or herself as an important learner with things to say. Writing becomes a vehicle for the conveyance of a child's unique and special ideas and thoughts. The act of writing is now viewed as an active process with phases of prewriting, composing, postwriting, and evaluation of the writing piece by the writers themselves. Gone are the formal restraints: the emphasis on correct spelling, accurate grammar, and neatness. Many teachers now believe that, with fewer constraints placed on a child, more emphasis can be placed on the meaning and content of a child's writing.

Attempting to adapt my teaching methods to reflect the current theories of writing, I have added journal writing and writing workshops to my daily curriculum. My six- and seven-year-old students are asked to write a short descriptive or reflective piece in their journals. During this journal writing time in the classroom, my students struggle to commit their ideas to writing, and I am invariably confronted with comments such as "I don't know what to write!" and "I'm all out of good ideas!" Although I encourage the children to use invented spelling and stress repeatedly that I am most interested in their thoughts and ideas, the students find this daily writing assignment to be a difficult and laborious task.

After many years away from an academic setting, I have resumed the role of student in Rhode Island College's graduate program. I earned a Master's degree years ago, but I am now taking thirty more hours of coursework for state certification as a Reading Specialist/Consultant. Struggling with my return to school has enhanced my ability to identify with my six- and seven-year-old students as they attempt process writing in their journals.

Dr. Robert Rude, the professor for my research seminar course (ELED 562: Review of Research in Reading), encourages exploration of one's own literacy as a necessary prerequisite to effective learning. The underlying premise is that, in order to be an effective teacher of reading, a Reading Specialist must be immersed in literate activities (reading and writing) daily. Literacy also includes writing activities of many different forms: formal/informal, structured/freeform, etc. Dr. Rude therefore assigns various writing tasks. One of the many course requirements is the submission of a weekly reflective journal. Each journal entry is to be composed of two parts: reflections upon/reactions to the readings and an update of the progress made on the "teacher-as-researcher" project.

When the professor first explained this seemingly easy requirement for the course, my reaction was one of relief. Most of my time would be devoted to the major requirement of a full research study, with all the accompanying data analysis, review of literature and references, and implications for classroom instruction. The weekly journal assignment, at first glance, appeared to be relatively simple and vapid. It certainly paled in comparison to the time and effort I would have to expend on my research project.

On the night before my first journal entry was to be submitted, I confidently sat down at my laptop computer in the kitchen and began to compose the reflective journal piece. I soon found my pulse quickening and my breathing becoming more rapid. I began asking myself questions such as, "What does he really want?" "How can I honestly react to that article?" "How long does this have to be?" and "Do I have to do this every week or can I skip a few?" I wondered what it was about this task that was producing so much anxiety and stress. Even though I have the luxury of a laptop computer with state-of-the-art software (which makes editing an easy task and includes Spell Check), my first journal entry took more than two hours to complete.

It wasn't until after I had finished my writing that I realized that I could now identify with my first-grade students. Just as I had struggled with the parameters of the assignment (appropriate style and format) and with the need for my professor to approve of my writing, so, too, must my students struggle with similar thoughts. I have now grown to more fully appreciate the fact that young children also have anxiety and fears as they face their daily writing tasks. The children are just beginning to explore their own emerging literacy skills and are concerned with letter formation, spacing, and spelling, as well as expression of their own ideas and thoughts.

The professor's course requirement has encouraged me to explore my own literacy and to use writing as a means of immersion in literate activities. As the semester has progressed, some of the anxiety and distress that the requisite weekly writing has produced have diminished. However, every Sunday night as I sit and begin to compose at my computer, some of the same questions and uneasy feelings return.

Having completed most of my first semester in the program, I feel that I am now able to have a broader perspective on literacy. One of the most important outcomes of the writing assignment is my greater empathy and understanding for students as they struggle with literacy skills. The next time one of my pupils has difficulty with writing or finds it arduous to begin the writing process, I will not dismiss such uneasy feelings and merely suggest possible topics. Rather, I will pull a chair up beside this student and reply, "I know exactly how you feel!"

Christine W. Crowther

Language, Music, and Literacy

Most people define literacy as the ability to read and comprehend a text's language. We could expand this definition by including the interpretation of the text as a component of literacy. Interpretation, which students and readers of literature practice frequently, includes the subtext—material not seen on the surface level of a text. Many think interpretation a necessary component of literacy, as it requires insight and reflection on the part of the reader. Focusing on the classical and band genres of music, what comparisons can we make between language literacy and music literacy? Can we define the two similarly? What about the audience's role in this?

If we define music literacy similarly to language literacy, we would also include the reading, comprehension, and interpretation of works in its definition. Reading includes the fundamental ability to read notes on a page. A musician must know how to read a score before she can perform it. Before she can perform it well, continuing with the comparison to language literacy, she needs to comprehend and interpret the meaning of the piece.

Music literacy, however, at least in the classical genre, does not place as much emphasis on individual interpretation as language literacy. Dr. Edward Markward, professor of music and conductor of the Rhode Island College Symphony Orchestra, believes that interpretation "leaves us too wide open to doing things that the composer did not intend." If musicians practice it at all, they should do so cautiously—without great freedom. He does concede, though, that opinions of what the composer's intentions were differ, and in that way "there comes that sort of catch word interpretation." The main point is that the interpretation of classical music has its restrictions, and performers should not do it capriciously. Because of the lack of emphasis on interpretation in this genre, we cannot conclude that music literacy is greatly similar to language literacy.

Band literature, however, allows for more interpretation. Dr. Rob Franzblau, professor of music and conductor of the Rhode Island College Wind Ensemble, believes that the band genre of music does not restrict the performer quite as much as the classical genre. He says, "Even if the composer has put an exact metronome marking, you still have great freedom, because the composer may hear your performance and say, 'I like that tempo of yours better than what I marked,' and that's happened countless times." Like language, "music is not a science—it's an art. There are no right or wrong answers." In this instance, music literacy and language literacy have similarities.

Music literacy involves an audience in addition to the performer. An audience's language literacy aids in its music literacy. When they read a concert's program notes, they prepare and educate themselves for what they are about to hear. Dr. Markward thinks of program notes as a way of "knock[ing] down barriers that have existed for so long in classical music [between audience and performer]." By reading program notes, the audience increases their music literacy, understanding a piece on an aural and intellectual level. Like language literacy, an audience's gain in music literacy "can start anytime, at any age," according to Dr. Franzblau.

In order to increase either type of literacy, language or music, the audience needs to have an awareness, an appreciation for the material at hand. As Dr. Markward confirms, "the more awareness you have, the more literacy you have, the more enriching the experience will be." Some conductors feel, as does Dr. Franzblau, that it is their responsibility to "heighten awareness and perception." Franzblau believes that he conducts in order to develop the audience's music literacy via awareness. He says that without awareness and literacy on the part of the audience, a concert is a "social occasion and not an artistic one." He reasons, "[There is] nothing wrong with social, but let's do both." Increasing a person's language literacy does the same thing. It turns social discussions into artistic ones, creating exciting ideas and possibilities for humankind.

In writing this article, I found that some similarities exist between language literacy and music literacy. Both literacies involve the fundamental ability to read texts. Depending on the genre, music literacy may include artistic interpretation. Both literacies also consider awareness important to their thriving. Dr. Markward mentions one final similarity between the two, saying "understand[ing] a Shakespeare play takes a great deal of devotion on the part of the listener or the watcher. Understand[ing] a Brahms symphony takes a great deal of time and you have to work at it. But then in the end, anything that is worth it one has to work at." Literacy in any field requires effort, but offers infinite rewards.

Stephanie Atwood-Tucker