

# TRANSITION

CANADIAN MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.



# TRANSITION

## PUBLISHER:

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(Saskatchewan Division) Inc.

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### *Our Mission:*

*Founded in 1950, The Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc. is a volunteer-based organization which supports and promotes the rights of persons with mental illness to maximize their full potential; and promotes and enhances the mental health and well-being of all members of the community.*

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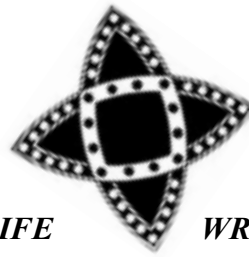
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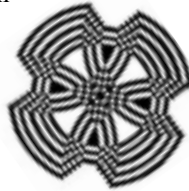
Leona Hudy (left) of Melville, was one of the recipients of the 2009 CMHA Community Award. She was nominated for her work with the immigrant community in Yorkton and area, by Donia Alvarado-Okraine (right), Program Director of CMHA Yorkton Branch.

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# Stigma

TED DYCK

The Greek or Latin root of *stigma* is *stig*, which means stick; the whole word itself initially meant simply a mark made by a pointed instrument. More generally, *stigma* came to mean a mark made upon the skin by burning it with a hot iron (a brand, in other words), or by cutting or pricking it with a sharp instrument. It later accrued the meaning of a mark of disgrace or infamy, usually inefaceable. Its plural is *stigmata*, which are marks resembling the wounds on the crucified body of Christ. Pathologically, a *stigma* is a morbid spot or dot on the skin from which the bearer bleeds spontaneously. (*The Oxford English Dictionary*)

Anyone who has ever suffered from a mental illness knows all these meanings without consulting a dictionary. To have a mental illness is to be marked with a cut from a sharp stick, to be branded with a hot iron, to bear the wounds of crucifixion on one's soul, to bleed spontaneously.

Whereas illnesses such as heart disease or cancer or cystic fibrosis elicit only empathy in others, mental illness all too often elicits scorn, fear, loathing, revulsion, or worse. Its scarlet letters are more powerful than the disease they signify.

Why this should be so has exercised better minds than mine, and to no avail.

Is it the possibly *immaterial* bases of the illness? The absence of definitively identifiable *causes*? The *fear* that we see ourselves reflected in those who suffer from it?

Perhaps the stigma that society associates with mental illness is itself a sign that society is ill: If it's true that almost everyone is one degree away from experiencing mental illness directly, then to stigmatize mental illness is effectively to stigmatize oneself while pretending to stigmatize the Other; such pretense is a form of repression; and excessive repression may lead to neurosis.

The same reasoning suggests a cure for the stigma of mental illness: if everyone who has suffered or knows someone who has suffered from mental illness publicly said so, the stigma would disappear. For if everyone is marked with the same mark, then the mark is meaningless. Stigma gone.

Stigma is the sub-text of every story or poem published in this and earlier issues of this magazine.

Stigma is a motif in Barry Styre's evocative rendering of a Self besieged by the Other on our cover.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

# Change to government programs underway

DAVID NELSON, RPN, RSW  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Once again we are through a busy and productive summer, and into an even busier fall agenda.

A great deal of work is going on with the implementation of the SAID (Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability) program, and CMHA's involvement in the new PIAT (Provincial Implementation Advisory Team) group. It takes a lot longer than one would imagine to implement a new program, with a great deal more work necessary to design an appropriate "assessment tool" and determine a "socially acceptable" level of benefit for persons in the new SAID program.

CMHA will, on behalf of DISC (Disability Income Support Coalition), be carrying out a major public phone survey across the province in late November 2009 to gather public opinion on the level of benefits issue.

Other items on our agenda are to work collaboratively with Regional Health Authorities and the Ministry of Health as "Mental Health Plans" are developed which will capture the

philosophy of "Patient First" and "Recovery" in the changes made.

An exciting time of change, and we look forward to having you involved at whatever level you can!



SUNSET WALK BY DRYICONS (<http://dryicons.com>)



# A framework for action

The CMHA(SK) Annual Provincial Conference was held this year on June 19-21 in Weyburn. Its theme, "Against All Odds" was addressed by two keynote speakers. Since many of our readers (including the Editor) could not attend the conference, TRANSITION thought it appropriate to present something of the flavour of the conference by highlighting the contributions of these speakers.

The CEO of CMHA National, Dr. Taylor Alexander, delivered a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Stigma: a coordinated and strategic approach." The presentation, which Dr. Alexander has kindly made available to TRANSITION, appears to follow closely the document "Stigma and mental illness: a framework for action" by the Canadian Mental Health Association and available for downloading from its site. This latter document is presented, with CMHA's permission, below: it is a succinct treatment of a major problem that continues to haunt the mental health field and individuals impacted by mental health problems.

## STIGMA AND MENTAL ILLNESS

### A Framework for Action by the Canadian Mental Health Association

#### INTRODUCTION

Mental illness can affect anybody, regardless of age, gender, culture, ethnicity, or social class. But no matter who they are, people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are all likely to experience stigma. Public attitudes and beliefs, often based on fear and misunderstanding, stereotype individuals with mental illness, exposing them to prejudice and discrimination. Stigma infects every issue surrounding mental illness, often with worse consequences than the illness itself. In 2001, the World Health Organization declared stigma to be the "single most important barrier to overcome in the community.

This paper discusses stigma against people with mental illness: what it is, challenges in trying to tackle it, and some promising strategies. Our message is based on the firm belief that the best hope for fighting stigma lies in a multipronged strategic approach.

*"I was a counselor, I was a substitute teacher, I was a daycare worker, I worked in a women's shelter, but once they labeled me "mentally ill", I lost all credibility."*  
(Ruth Johnson, Out of the Shadows, 2006)

*"The real issue is the constant struggle for dignity... We attach no blame to someone who develops a physical illness, but when it comes to mental illness, people experience discrimination on a daily basis."*  
(Nancy Hall, The Last Taboo, 2001, p. 212)

*"There's something about a mental illness that scares the heck out of people. They don't know how to react."* (Scott Simmie, journalist, 2000)

## CONCEPTS: STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

*Stigma* refers to negative attitudes or beliefs that are held about people who are perceived as different. Because stigma relates to internal thoughts, it is difficult to take legal action against it.

*Discrimination* is the behaviour resulting from stigma. Discrimination refers to actions taken to exclude others because of their perceived differences, but it can also be manifest in more overt acts of hostility and aggression. There are legal protections against discrimination, which focuses on the behaviour itself, rather than on its victims.

## FIGHTING STIGMA: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

### Challenges

Efforts to combat stigma are complicated by several factors.

*Stigma can be found in many places*

First of all, stigma itself is multi-faceted, and resides in many different places. In society-at-large, mental illness is not well understood, and the media often reinforce negative public stereotypes. Stigma can also be found in all kinds of relationships, including those involving health or social service providers.

Individuals with mental illness and their family members may also experience "self-stigma", viewing themselves with embarrassment or self-loathing as a result of internalizing the negative perceptions around them. Because of the many faces of stigma, battling it requires mobilizing on a number of different fronts.

*Practitioners who ... look at and treat a patient as if he was in constant crisis, a psychosis in itself and incapable to make decisions, and, by treating him so, effectively stop him from being able to make any decision... break the pattern of hope, of any kind of feeling that there is still hope, that we are still feeling alive despite the diagnosis.*  
(Loise Forest, "Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health Services". Roundtable at Douglas Hospital, Montreal, 2007.)

*Stigma is different from discrimination*

The confusion of stigma (beliefs) with discrimination (actions) can also impede efforts to address it. Is our goal to change beliefs, actions, or both? Without clarity about the desired outcomes of a change strategy, effectiveness can be elusive. Once the distinctions are articulated, as is starting to happen, choices can be made about where to focus. Some consumers and family members have recently shifted their attention to the more concrete target, discriminatory behaviours resulting from stigma.



### *Evaluation is difficult*

Finally, measuring the success of anti-stigma efforts is an enormous challenge. With attitude shifts, it is difficult to pinpoint a tangible product that can be counted or measured. One might try to track changed behaviours for evidence of a program's effectiveness, but so many factors can influence a person's behaviour, it is hard to be certain that the program was responsible.

Despite these barriers, research has been able to identify some practices that appear to help achieve attitude shifts.

### **What works**

#### *Public education, according to specific criteria*

The first line of defense against stigma is often thought to be positive messages delivered through public education. But simply providing information will not necessarily change attitudes, which can be strongly fixed, especially if they are based on fear. And even if information does modify attitudes, it rarely changes behaviour.

*"That (public) education is needed is a given... What is problematic is the route that is taken to achieve this end." (Network Magazine, CMHA Ontario Division.)*

Research findings are helpful in identifying public education approaches that are most likely to be effective. And one of the clearest of these is the need for the public education program to be directed to a particular target group.

- **Target a specific audience rather than the general public at large**

Although it may be tempting to use a single broad-based program to try to change the way people think and act, studies suggest that these types of mass campaigns are not as successful as those that are more tightly focused. A campaign is far more likely to have effective outcomes if it:

- starts by identifying specific constituencies such as mental health professionals, the media, employers, or medical students
- precisely tailors the content of its message to the specific beliefs and behaviours of the group

Studies on stigma reduction suggest additional tips for maximizing the chance for success of public education efforts. It is significant that many of these remind us that people with mental illness are the centre of concern.

- **Involve people with mental illness and their families in all aspects of the program, from design through to evaluation**
- **Incorporate direct contact between the public and people with mental illness and their families**
- **Keep in mind that the ultimate goal of reducing stigma is to improve the lives of people with mental illness, as well as promoting their resilience and recovery (CMHA's vision)**

#### *Other kinds of strategies*

Public education is one approach to dealing with stigma. But public education alone will not free our society from stigma. It is equally important to fight stigma from the inside out, by



DI DECAIRE

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*People with mental illness have told us that what is most important to them is belonging in community, with “a home, a job, and a friend”.*

building strong communities, supporting consumer empowerment and family organizations, and creating strong systems of services and supports with staff who can offer acceptance and hope. The broad reach of these approaches, which go beyond changing attitudes and beliefs, gives them the potential to effect fundamental community changes with long-lasting impacts.

- **Promote proximity and interpersonal connections**

People with mental illness have told us that what is most important to them is belonging in community, with “a home, a job, and a friend.” There is research to suggest that fostering connections between the public and people with mental illness this way not only benefits people with mental illness in their journey to recovery, but also helps to reduce public fears and negative beliefs about this population. It is an alternative way of fighting stigma.

There are already many programs in place to foster the inclusion of people with mental illness in communities, thereby creating the opportunity for the public to get to know them as neighbours, co-workers, and friends. These can be facilitated by:

- Developing intersectoral linkages for service planning and delivery between mental health systems and generic services and supports
  - For example, with employers, elementary to post-secondary educators, income support providers, housing developers, recreation programs, interest groups, religious institutions, self-help groups
- Developing or maintaining interdepartmental linkages at provincial and federal government levels for joint development of policies that promote inclusion and recovery for those with mental illness
  - For example, among Health, Justice, HRSDC, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Taking direct action on the social determinants of health that will facilitate community inclusion
  - For example, starting with a mental health housing program
- **Support consumer empowerment and family organizations**

In recent decades, consumers have been using their own voices and strengths to establish their place in the community, advocate for their needs, support one another, and work toward recovery. Their presence as a constituency with strength and courage counters erroneous public attitudes. It also helps reduce any personal sense of shame and helplessness caused by stigma, and supplements professional services as an alternate route into community. Families, when organized, can also turn embarrassment into positive action on behalf of one another and their family members. And they are strong potential allies in delivering positive messages to the public.

- **Develop an integrated network of sensitive services and supports.**

An integrated network of quality mental health services and supports is one of the resources that can help people recover and build connections in community.

And people with mental illness who are connected to community as employers or employees, students or educators, serv-

**Rather than relying only on a public education campaign, we need a longterm strategic policy approach involving a variety of components.**

ice providers, volunteers, participants in interest groups and so on are, by their very presence as citizens, refuting baseless stereotypes.

But services need to be accessible to all those who need them, and their staff need support and encouragement to let their guard down and their humanity through. When people who have used mental health services describe what has helped them most, they talk about “someone who believed in me,” and services that were delivered in a spirit of respect, acceptance, and faith in their potential for recovery. Services or supports such as these can counter the feelings of despair, helplessness or frustration that stem from stigma, and replace such feelings with confidence, self-respect and a sense of hope.

## **A COORDINATED STRATEGIC APPROACH**

While the strategies we have described are all promising, they lose much of their impact if applied as individual disconnected programs. The evidence clearly suggests that simply providing information to the public, or undertaking any single initiative for that matter, will not significantly change attitudes unless it is but one component of a broader, multi-faceted approach at a variety of levels.

A long-term strategic approach will contain a variety of elements such as those described in this paper. They are summarized in the list below.

- Public education campaigns that are evidence-based
  - targeted to particular audiences
  - involving people with mental illness in planning, implementation and evaluation
  - involving contact with people and their families
- Collaborative initiatives that support people’s inclusion in community
  - intersectoral linkages for planning and service delivery
  - interdepartmental partnerships at all levels of government
- Government action on the social determinants of health in all jurisdictions, starting with a federal mental health housing strategy
- Policies that support consumer self-help initiatives and empowerment
  - consumer-run services, advocacy, other initiatives



- o consumers as service providers in the mainstream system
- Support for families to organize, raise awareness, promote inclusion
- Integrated networks of community services and supports for people with mental illness, substance abuse, and concurrent disorders, with supports for staff to provide sensitive, respectful and accepting services
- Enforcement of anti-discrimination policies, and new legislation if needed

## CONCLUSION

Just as a building needs to start with a solid blueprint, a national initiative to fight stigma must start with a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategic plan. This is our best hope for achieving a significant and lasting victory over stigma and its impacts.

Look at us, see us, we are women, men, sisters and brothers, wives or husbands, parents and grandparents. We could be your sisters and brothers, your husband or wife, your parents or grandparents, we could even be you. (Loise Forest, "Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health Services". Roundtable at Douglas Hospital, Montreal, 2007.)



JAMES SKELTON

## A note about language

There are many different terms to describe people with mental illness. Each one reflects a particular perspective, and there is no consensus about a single preferred descriptor.

Stigma probably plays a role even in this issue. It makes us all extra cautious about how we describe our own mental health problems and those of others, and hence particularly sensitive to the language we use.

The terms we have chosen in this paper were carefully considered, but we respectfully recognize that there are many other equally valid terms in use throughout Canada, and indeed within the CMHA itself.

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# Creating healthy communities

*The second keynote address by Gail Schwartz consisted of excerpts from her multimedia performance piece "Crazy" followed by an interactive workshop. We present below a description of "Crazy" in the author's own words and the poems created by the anonymous participants in the workshop.*

GAIL MARLENE SCHWARTZ

"Crazy" has been part of my identity since early childhood, when I was sent to see my first counselor. Only when I was in graduate school in 2001 did I begin asking fundamental questions about my condition. When depression and anxiety began interfering with my studies, an advisor suggested I refocus my work on my experience instead of dropping out. I began writing, moving, and singing about my feelings when I was able; I also began an unusual video journal. Whenever I experienced strong bouts of dark emotion, out came the camera. In addition, I started reading and researching about many aspects of anxiety and depression and my core beliefs began to change. It dawned on me that I might be able to use my power and privilege (as a white, upper-middle class, educated, uninstitutionalized American with good access to health care) to help facilitate social change – to generate conversation, help reduce stigma, and start shifting paradigms around psychic suffering by offering my story in a public forum. Crazy the performance piece was born, "against all odds," and became my vehicle to explore with communities the questions surrounding what we call anxiety and depression. As an artist, my role is to use my skills to tell my story in hopes that universal themes and questions will emerge from the details presented in the play, rather than speaking for all consumers.

Like any work of art, the stories and characters in this

piece have emerged from both my "real life" and from my imagination. The work is autobiographically-based, true in its essence and heartily imagined in many of its details. I've found this an ideal way to broach with audiences a topic that is tremendously personal.

I invite you to share with one another some of the questions out of which this piece developed. What is "crazy" and what is "normal"? Who gets to decide and how are these decisions instituted? How does corporate power influence our understanding of psychic pain and trauma? What is the role of storytelling in healing? Why are darker emotions, and the public expression of them, so taboo in North American cultures? How do individualized approaches, like one-on-one therapy or medication, frame the experience of and response to "crazy"? What conditions in our culture are contributing to epidemic proportions of emotional turmoil? I choose a public forum in which to work because I firmly feel this is a problem with social, not individual, root causes. I hope this piece can be part of the larger conversation about how to create healthy and sustainable communities and systems in challenging times.

In this session, I will first perform about 25 minutes of excerpts from the show. Afterwards, we will have a 45 minute conversation in which I invite you to share responses, reactions, and questions. Finally, following the break, I invite you to join me in an interactive workshop where we will explore issues related to anxiety, depression, and mental health that past audiences have enjoyed very much. I hope to give you, as mental health professionals, a taste of how artists can contribute to mental health work and encourage interdisciplinary in thinking about ways to address these very real problems in North American society.

## Saskatchewan AGM 2009

### Poems

- 1) Crazy is fear, discrimination, stigma
- Crazy is fear, powerlessness, sadness
- Crazy is loser, do it alone, help
- Crazy is its ok, how can I help, I care about you
- Crazy is mom, sister, me
- Crazy is poverty, mental illness, illiteracy
- Crazy is travel, purchasing property, leaving Saskatchewan for the winter
- Crazy is the telephone, polio vaccine, electricity
- Crazy is interview, CPR, driving the new truck
- Crazy is the wedding, children and grandparents





## LIVING THE LIFE - NON FICTION

2) Crazy is kidding, fun, carefree  
Crazy is fear, exasperation, fatigue  
Crazy is I'll never get better, why can't I feel better, I am sick of this  
Crazy is go shopping, well everyone gets a little down, don't worry it will pass  
Crazy is my sister, my aunt, my daughter  
Crazy is poverty, dual diagnosis, crime  
Crazy is going to university, upgrading my house, doing more landscaping in my yard  
Crazy is central heating, motor vehicles, designer drugs (eg, anti-psychotics)  
Crazy is letting my housework go to pot, laying in bed for an afternoon, walking in the rain  
Crazy is birth of children, walking in the rain, epiphany during a lecture I was giving about how far I have come

3) Crazy is Dad, medications, fat  
Crazy is hopeless, helpless, frustration  
Crazy is get over it, unwantedness, what's wrong with you  
Crazy is stop being so selfish, eat, pray  
Crazy is dad, sister, mom  
Crazy is discrimination, poverty, obesity  
Crazy is travel, anonymously helping people, lasik eye surgery  
Crazy is the internet, universal health care, hair dye  
Crazy is dropping in on my parents, calling an old friend, playing hooky to go to the pool on a hot sunny day  
Crazy is parasailing, swimming with dolphins, walking down the aisle toward my true love

4) Crazy is nuts, bananas, danger  
Crazy is sad, mad, dead  
Crazy is no good, failure, stupid  
Crazy is shake it off, get active or busy, do something, smarten up  
Crazy is mom, my cousin, Roy  
Crazy is alcohol, drugs, STDs  
Crazy is vacation, paying off my bills, sharing the wealth  
Crazy is condoms, the wheel, the toaster  
Crazy is buying a new car, sleeping in and weeding the yard  
Crazy is marriage to Donna, the new car, the house

5) Crazy is wild, out of control, unreal  
Crazy is dark, isolation, panic  
Crazy is unworthy, sick, useless  
Crazy is get control, keep it to yourself, don't tell me.  
Crazy is my daughter, Mom, Ruth and cousin Lorna  
Crazy is gambling, deceit, entitlement  
Crazy is travel, helping my family, helping causes  
Crazy is motorized travel, antibiotics, television  
Crazy is wearing shorts to work, not working on a weekend, cleaning out the cupboard  
Crazy is the birth of my children, traveling with my sister and traveling with my husband

6) Crazy is creative, lonely, worry  
Crazy is worry, fear, loneliness  
Crazy is you're useless, I have to be dead, nothing will help.  
Crazy is smarten up, you'll get over it, I had it worse  
Crazy is Yolanda, Anne, Barb, Moe, Dad, Grandma  
Crazy is poverty, war, loneliness  
Crazy is researching mental health history, paying for my therapy, share with groups and individuals  
Crazy is the telephone, the telescope, rubik's cube  
Crazy is losing my temper, putting my skirt inside out  
Crazy is walking in the rain and wondering "am I happy"-a new questions; celebration of healing and pecan mud slides

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7) Crazy is unhappy, scared, outsider  
Crazy is lonely, darkness, sad  
Crazy is I'm stupid, ugly and better off dead  
Crazy is pull up your socks, don't talk about it, what did YOU do to cause this  
Crazy is my friend Carol, Grandma Kathy and Perry  
Crazy is all about me, easy communication, money is more important than family  
Crazy is giving to church, building a hospital, affordable housing  
Crazy is the telescope, the weigh scale, tire jack  
Crazy is 6 a.m. yoga, missing church, forgetting the weekly call to Dad  
Crazy is the birth of my children, my daughter's acceptance to medical school, and my childhood on the farm

8) Crazy is me, a good time  
Crazy is panic, fear, sadness, hopelessness  
Crazy is what's wrong with me, I can't, I hate my life  
Crazy is smarten up, get over it, slap to the head.  
Crazy is Janis, Shelly, Shontell  
Crazy is economics, homelessness, addiction  
Crazy is nor working, helping people, buying a cabin  
Crazy is the wheel, the toaster, soap  
Crazy is doing the dishes, getting the van to salvage, sewed daughter into dress  
Crazy is Ash, Mac and Remy

9) Crazy is fun, circus, excitement.  
Crazy is nausea, fear, anger  
Crazy is all in your head, just get up, one more day  
Crazy is everyone feels this way, it'll get better, it's not that bad  
Crazy is my sister, my cousin, my friend  
Crazy is housing, life skills, education  
Crazy is education, travel, taking care of my family  
Crazy is plastic, the airplane, the internet  
Crazy is never cleaned the office, quading with no helmet, no alcohol  
Crazy is first time flying, youngest sister born, going to San Francisco

10) Crazy is poor, isolated, hopeless  
Crazy is overwhelmed, helpless, immobilized  
Crazy is you idiot, you can't do it, don't even try, you'll fail  
Crazy is you don't have anything to be depressed about, smarten up, you are to blame  
Crazy is my parent, my siblings, my grandparent  
Crazy is psychopharmaceuticals economics, poverty, war/aggression/environment  
Crazy is buy a retreat and start a summer camp program, help siblings/nieces/nephews, and travel the world  
Crazy is the wheel, the telephone, the Thompson fishing hook  
Crazy is a two week holiday, revamping the house, move to the middle of the bed  
Crazy is high school graduation, convocating masters, this week, cabin, job and love





## WRITING THE LIFE – NON FICTION

“VV”

VICTOR ENNS

**T**O BEGIN. I am depressed right now trying to write right now trying to remember what it felt like the first time it felt like anything I can remember promising myself I would never say to myself as a grown-up that I wish I was a kid again could it have started that soon, that I came from the factory this way. This would have been before anything really bad, that might be different from what the other kids in town experienced, had happened. That came later.

I had trouble learning to read when I was five because I couldn't see. My Mother, convinced I wasn't stupid, took me to the optometrist in the City. Two weeks later my first pair of glasses came in the small brown box that all glasses came in to the village Post Office. Everything became clear and I could learn to read and reading became my way out of myself, or my house, or my school, or my town. Books came in brown envelopes with fluffy gray stuffing from the University Extension Library and I could have six for six weeks before we sent them back.

There were books at home too, beside the Bible. There was *Black Beauty*, *My Friend Flicka* and *Wild Animals I Have Known*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little Women* and *Jo's Boys*. My favourite was *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, about a boy who was discovered to be the inheritor of an English estate leaving his life as a poor boy in a small town in North America. I didn't know that there was a better book called *My Secret Garden* by the same author that I would read to my children three decades later.

Aspiring to be English was the highest calling to the second generation of immigrants, but we spoke German at home at least until we had television in 1960 and I went to school. I was a preacher's kid, a teacher's kid, and the principal's kid in this small town, no wonder I wanted into a nice wealthy English family as far away as I could imagine. Sometimes though, aspiration was the name of the game, walking hand in hand with achievement.

Being the son of the Father and the Mother I was expected to aspire to be as good as Jesus, and smarter if possible. Throughout grade school I was given \$.25 for a first place finish in class, \$.10 for a second place finish and a nickel for third. I never got a dime or a quarter, I was always third in class because of poor penmanship, and difficulties with math for which I was once strapped.

Meanwhile I tried the best I could, not to be killed by the boys in the higher grades who had dubbed me Einstein because my mother bragged about me and what I could read to the other grades. RETREAT! RETREAT!

I tried desperately to fit in, to play sports, to have friends who would play with me even if there were people who saw them with me, or with whom they could play instead. But there was always a risk of being found as inadequate to my peers as I assumed I was to my parents. (*Author's note: If there wasn't*

*ANY self-pity in this piece, it wouldn't be true.*) RETREAT! RETREAT!

I would find a place to be alone with a book, and I would be safe. Sometimes it was in the branches of an apple tree in the garden, but that's another story.

\* \* \*

I STOPPED TRYING to fit in when I hit puberty. I found there might be one thing I could do better than other kids, something to which I could aspire, where I could be guaranteed virtually no competition.

REWIND. You see how easy it is to avoid the subject of being sexually molested by a stranger when I was 11. Thirty years of therapy and I still find it difficult to tell that story, though in some ways I am always telling that story, taking the blame, making it my fault because I was stupid and I was responsible for getting into that boat because I wanted to go fishing, and blaming all men for hurting not just women and girls which we hear about every day and is in itself sickening enough, but also boys and other men who can't talk about it without sounding like less a man for it.

RETREAT! RETREAT! I am going to pick up my book and read to stop crying so my eyes aren't too red when I go to the Comedy Festival tonight, as part of my job. Will I pour myself my first drink of the day? It's 4:00 p.m.

\* \* \*

FAST FORWARD: Haven't picked up the book, have picked up a gin and tonic. Less alcohol than the whiskey I prefer. And I was wondering as I was mixing my drink whether I am more depressed because I'm drinking more, or drinking more because I'm more depressed and maybe the meds aren't quite as effective. I've been with this meds combination for nine years now, often the others pooped out in six months.

Also been thinking my third wife is turning to her studies, she is reading for her Ph.D., which resonates with my mother studying at home behind closed doors for her second degree when I wanted her. I was a needy child shouting *Mama, Ich will herein!*

But my wife is reading in the kitchen, and, though claiming to be poor company for the next 15 weeks, is always there for me, not always understanding and sometimes in denial, but always there for me. It's me who wants to get away, to withdraw where I have no responsibilities and where my moods, my disorder does not affect the people around me.

NO EXPLAINING. NO UNDERSTANDING NECESSARY.

\* \* \*

I should say something about the usefulness of fellow travelers and encouragement. Maybe later.

\* \* \*

WHAT I WAS BETTER AT was reading, sure, but also, as it turned out writing. I had my first story published in *Wee Wisdom*, "Roger Clark at Indianapolis." I loved racing stories so I wrote one for a Grade Eight class assignment and asked

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*I had a slipped hip, the pain my parents had ignored for the better part of three months was real, after all.*

my parents to send it to the magazine that was looking for submissions from its readers. And could you believe it, it was accepted and now I knew what I wanted to do.

And then we moved to the City. I had always wanted to move to the city. The city was sophisticated, the country town was not. Or so most of the stories went as rural depopulation began at the turn of the 1960s. A friend that had got to the city the year before came over with windowpane acid one weekend when my parents were away which is the one and only time I tried it, just amazed at Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin and a scuttle. I would have been fourteen.

My hip hurt. I went to the doctor several times who couldn't find anything wrong, so the diagnosis was I was having adjustment problems, trouble fitting into my new urban environment. Maybe this is the first time my parents believed there was something not quite right in my head. Of course I was having trouble fitting in: I had started using the cane my parents had bought in Germany to help me walk. The kids in the new school thought I was a nut case. (*Author's note: There are many different names, even the pejorative one easier for me to accept than mental illness.*) Turns out they may have been right.

What they were wrong about was my hip. After one pitiful crawl home from the bus stop one fall I was put on the bus to see the doctor the next day. This time he did one simple test, sent me for an x-ray and admitted me for the first of my three surgeries at the hospital next to the river. I had a slipped hip, the pain my parents had ignored for the better part of three months was real, after all. I did not spare the guilt, then or after, this one I thought they owed me, one for which I did not have to blame myself.

Ten days in the hospital, three four-inch pins in my hip, and three and a half months on crutches and everything was better. Except for one thing, the disconnect with my parents was complete. I no longer wanted to live with them or live by their Mennonite faith and protestant work ethic. (*Author's note: But I didn't tell them.*) I asked to go to the one Mennonite boarding school, back in the town in which I grew up and had felt persecuted. What I knew was there. And now I was a city kid going back.

FAST FORWARD: The cast is coming off my leg on Tuesday. I slipped and fell on an icy street and broke my ankle, eventually needing a plate and seven (much shorter) screws in a day surgery repair. After this repair it was back to the Ambulatory Care Clinic, in the health centre by the river, no longer a hospital, but still a place I go to get fixed up unless I'm seeing a shrink.

\* \* \*

I COULD STOP now and you'd already have enough of a picture to believe that at some point in my life I would be diagnosed as a depressive. REPEAT. Bad genes (predisposition from the factory), a sexual molestation, and parental neglect. Shake well.

This, of course, is reductionist, but these are the scabs I

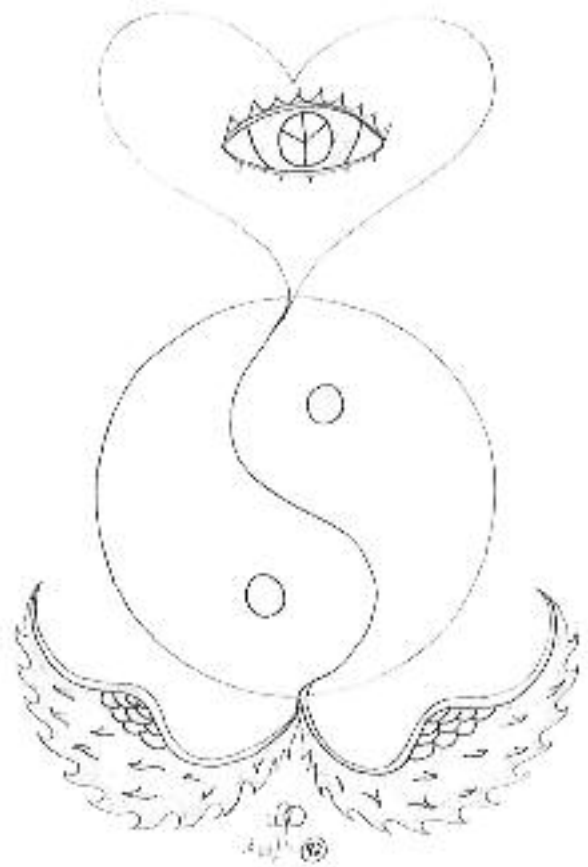
keep picking, in one case quite literally as I have developed a skin condition on my scar on my hip. Go figure.

\* \* \*

ONSET was probably that fall with the hip, and the first major episode lasted I don't know how long. I "called for help" twice in a residential boarding school with ridiculous attempts to kill myself by tying a leather shoelace around my neck and choking myself, and another time mixing 222s with Coke which we had heard could be a lethal combination. The Principal was my friend's father and I was able to keep him from sharing any of this with anyone. No reason to embarrass me or anyone else.

I may have fared better than a girl on whom I had a crush. She ended up with a series of electroshock treatment to cure what ailed her. One thing she forgot was having made out with me and I had to tell the boy with whom she was in love with long curly hair to go to her. They are still married, surmounting troubles.

Of course there were no counselors and it would have been too embarrassing to see one if there had been. I did find a group of other smart preacher's kids to hang out with, but even they sensed that somehow I was different. That and girlfriends were a bit of respite. Then I got to university and discovered an



THE FLIGHT BY HENRY PETERS



approving peer group, whiskey and beer.

Unfortunately I got married when I was 19, wanting to rescue a damsel in distress with the added benefit of having sex. I turned out to be a worse experience than the one I had rescued her from, and there was no real sex. But I was in university, and there it was cool to go see counselors, so I did.

DIAGNOSIS: Acute depression, which I joked about to my wife who didn't think there was anything cute about depression or the drinking I went to for help instead of the shrink.

FAST FORWARD: This is getting boring. More of a biography than writing about depression, but then always a sense of not wanting to be defined by the disorder by mental illness. (Author's note: This is bullshit, all I am writing about is how I got sick, how my depression has been with me all my life. What is missing, are the moments of happiness. I'm sure there were some.) Something I didn't accept as any term that could be applied to myself until I was in my 40s and on my third shrink. I had intended to write about depression from the inside of each of my books as a guide, it would make as much sense to talk about each shrink I saw, each medication or combination of medications I took; but this is me here right now writing with the cat at the window wanting to be let in.

\* \* \*

Out of control, I was able to live on student aid and food poached from my parent's house and work at jobs in university. This would be after my wife kicked me out in the spring of 1979. ONE GOOD THING happened though is that I got into an advanced creative writing workshop. I had never stopped writing and seriously wanted to be a poet, so I lived what I thought the part looked like and wrote very angry-young-man poems. It was the only course I think I finished that year, and so much better to write out the anger than act it out. A feeling of relief. These came to be called *Jimmy Bang Poems*.

THEY LAUGHED. The first time I read from the poems in public after their publication the audience laughed. I decided a laugh was a good thing, and started to bring on the cheese and ham, meantime I was horribly confused. Why the fuck do they think this is funny?

\* \* \*

TO CONTINUE. The comedy show last night with *The Seven Deadly Sins* as its theme was pretty funny, especially Tim Nutt riffing on Anger. He was even better when they brought him out after the CBC taping because he could swear. The profanity didn't, in itself, make him funnier, he could just be more himself, and you could feel the whole audience relax. This is another disconnect, when you are depressed, who are you? And if you're clinically, chronically depressed, is that who you are? Are the medications just managing the symptoms? I have learned I can't even take a "drug holiday" because I immediately get sicker. If I am on citalapram, bupropion and resperidone so I am functioning and productive, am I someone else?

NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT DEPRESSION, IT

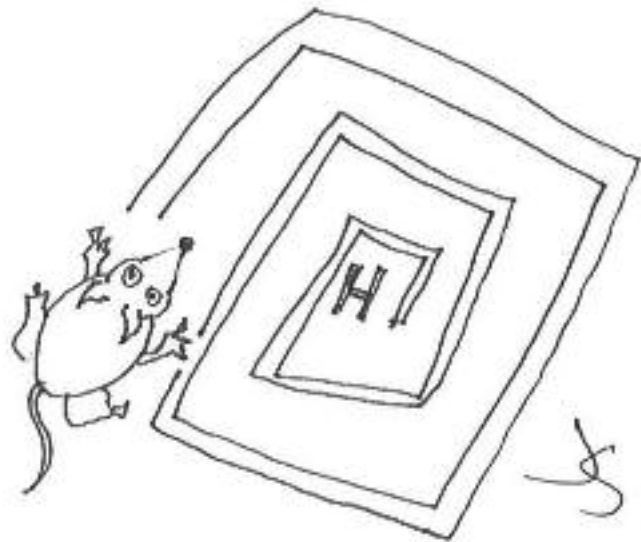
IS YOUR (MY) FAULT. If it's genes, they are still inside you. If it's chemistry it is still your serotonin. If it is what you think, it is you who are thinking it, If it is what happened to you, it is still how you respond to it. The depressive knows this and will rarely fight back when a friend or a lover accuses them of making themselves sick.

I started writing today wanting to talk a little about anger since I had a nice segue from last night. Clearly, given the *Jimmy Bang Poems*, I had huge anger issues. I could act them out on the page, but many of these and much of the anger were self-directed. (Author's Note: Depression being anger turned inward is a cliché pretty much accepted in contemporary society, but it doesn't make it any less true, or less unacceptable if the depressive is sitting next to you.)

I WROTE two stories then that were never published, one about a University campus shooting with a sympathetic portrayal of the shooter, and the other about an artist who made a deal with a live model to also be a dead model, whom the artist kills violently with a lead pipe, using the blood and entrails to paint a picture. With hindsight, in this one I likely saw myself as the artist and the model. But still no therapy.

FAST FORWARD. I am listening to Leonard Cohen because there is a rolling sound track running through most of my waking hours. I've put on Leonard's *Songs of Love and Hate* because I wanted to talk about anger here, now. I've stepped into an avalanche and there are no letters in the mailbox anymore. It's come as no surprise that Cohen's a depressive who has tried Zen meditation, wine, and medications to help. But now he has to work because his manager spent his retirement money. Having to work is a much underestimated motivator. I am going to hear him on April 30, my birthday present, yes, I'm a bull-headed Aries who likes to start things.

REWIND. The Sex Pistols were the sound track for the



BUT DOC? BY JAMES SKELTON

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*I was also in trouble. Really depressed, drinking too much, feeling the going to work and loving was too hard.*

late seventies, for *The Jimmy Bang Poems*. And for the amateur 8mm Jimmy Bang Movie, with the cameraman losing the money shot of me putting out a cigarette in my palm. I was annoyed he had dropped the camera and tried to save me. I was annoyed at anyone who tried to save me, preferred they just watch the show. Where's my Lou Reed, listen to *Berlin*.

\* \* \*

FAST FORWARD. I woke up this morning anxious to get back to writing this piece, and anxious how my wife would feel if I did. She feels that spending too much time thinking about your depression, just makes you feel more depressed. Wallowing, she called it yesterday.

So the assignment is to write about depression, without at least showing that I'm feeling depressed. There are two issues for me here. One, how can I pull other people into this self-revealing meander, I am sure neither my wife nor my kids want to be mentioned. How do you write about depression without mentioning the affect it has on other people? But how fair is it to invade their privacy to drag them into the page of a mental health magazine? Two, how can I write, how can I communicate truthfully and honestly if I don't? Besides, if I was actually really depressed it is unlikely I would be able to write about it cogently.

I APPROACH THE WORLD through the alphabet. There have been a number of people who have expressed the opinion that I write well about depression. I enjoy the praise but wonder what kind of depression do I have if I can write about it well? The ability to read is what goes first. The attention and focus just aren't there. I can tell how depressed I am by the rate I read novels, whether they are big or small, whether I can only read magazine articles, and finally if I watch tv alone. I must be doing relatively well, because I am reading novels, one of them over 900 pages, and then publishing reviews in the local paper. I've been averaging one a month and I probably read two or three others in between.

\* \* \*

TURNING 26 was a big deal. It is still what I call when someone finally grows up and out of adolescence and at least makes some effort at being an adult willing to take responsibility for their actions. I met the woman who was to become my second wife, got my first job outside the University, and by 1984 was expecting my first child.

I was also in trouble. Really depressed, drinking too much, feeling the going to work and loving was too hard.

PICKING A PSYCHIATRIST out of the phone book is not recommended. I tried it with bad results. I had a 15 minute interview and was given a prescription that I don't remember. All I know is that after three days I was completely dissociating from my surroundings and having pretty much what I figured was a psychotic break. Fortunately my wife phoned my sister-in-law who was well acquainted with social services in my new province of residence, and I went to the local mental health centre where I had the extreme good fortune to be

referred to the first psychiatrist who was to take my mental health inventory and treat me over a number of years.

We started with relaxation exercises and Xanax, an addictive tranquilizer, because I had a strong case of anxiety neuroses to go with the depression. Then we added Antabuse and I stopped drinking. Then I stopped writing. But I started talking in session, and for the first time talking about what ailed me in a therapeutic context.

This took longer than I think because my next collection of poems was published in 1985, and I know I was drinking as I was revising the manuscript, the changes still quaintly arriving by post. For me drinking and writing are inextricably linked, and one of the challenges yet to be faced or accepted, one that has confronted many writers before me.

*Correct in this Culture* was the name of the book, and that was what I was trying to be. I was married, raising children, and loving my suburban back yard, and I always had work I liked to do. I figured if I followed the rules, I would win a picture book life. I actually did want to be correct in this culture, and I never understood the artist's rush to marginalize themselves as incorrect. I produced buttons, the audience made choices. No-one *really* wanted to be correct, and being loopy was always better than being correct. I always wondered what they imagined needed correction, while my synapses picked up rhythms from a strange universe.

There were poems then too, but many fewer, and much less time because the family came first. After a year on Xanax I was able, with the help of the shrink and relaxation exercises, able to come off the tranq and was clean and sober for the birth of my next two children in 1986, 1989.

ABANDONMENT is a major theme for depressives like me. You will probably have picked that up already regarding my mother. This was one of the anxieties in 1984 when our first child was born. Turned out I had every reason to be anxious (*Author's note: One of the nice things about a good shrink is the constant reality checks and the acknowledgment that it is in fact "normal" to feel the way you do during major life changes, but also always being told when you really are fucked up*) and despite some lovely poems published 20 years later in my third collection, *Lucky Man*, I did feel abandoned by my wife who now turned all her attention to the children. How could I complain, when I knew how I felt about the lack of MY mother's attention?

Throughout this struggle, either my second or third episode, I only missed two days of work, though I shared what I was going through with some of my employers who were quite understanding. I was working in the arts, one of the places some difference is tolerated, and attractive to folks who are different for that reason.

\* \* \*

BEING DIFFERENT. This could be some big postmodernist riff with side references to R.D. Laing (whom I heard lecture at the university but who was so totally wasted on coke, or so I



thought, to be unintelligible). His thesis was there was no abnormal behaviour and all experiences real or imagined were valid and to be accepted. Again, simplified, reductionist, but you get the idea, no-one is unacceptably different.

That's only one take on difference, the other is more likely to come with the denial of other people in your life. They get depressed too they tell you, you are no different, as if you are claiming some special status that makes you somehow unique or distinctive, usually the next phrase is with "Snap out of it" or "Pull yourself up with your own bootstraps." These are phrases that should be in the brochures they make-up for people who are living with depressives on the list of things you can not say to a depressive, no matter how tempted you might be. On the other hand, who wants to be unacceptably different?

\* \* \*

REWIND. While I had changed jobs successfully in 1988, I was less fortunate in 1991 when I took a job that got the family back to my home city where our children could get to know their grandparents. This move might have been prompted by the arrival of another episode, but it was definitely exacerbated by the worst job I had ever had in my life. I started drinking again and finding it very hard to work. Fortunately I was thrown a life preserver by someone in the same building, and for the only time I can remember, though it was shrink aided, it was a situation in which the change of job totally relieved the depressive symptoms.

I continued to be a successful arts administrator, not writing very much, and certainly not in any disciplined way until 1995 when my son was diagnosed with a brain tumour. I had started therapy with a new shrink after unsuccessful efforts with two others, one of them a Mennonite I thought might have a clearer picture of what baggage I was carrying from my ethnicity/religion. Wrong.

The new shrink and the crisis postponed the next episode until 1996-1997. We had been through the tricyclics by this time and were now onto the first SSRI's. By this time I needed the medication. Effexor was one of the better anti-depressants on the market and it worked fine until it pooped out after six months.

EVERYTHING CAME CRASHING DOWN. This time was different. I don't know what happened. No matter how often I tried to explain to my son who had the brain tumour in 1995 that I did not get sick because he got sick, that in fact I had a knack of getting sick for no reason when all was going well, he has never believed me. Nor does he believe that he isn't the reason that his mother and I got divorced. It didn't help that we quoted statistics that said 80% of marriages where there had been a life threatening situation in the immediate family, ended in divorce. He quoted this phrase in a radio interview two years back. He is often a survivor spokesperson.

\* \* \*

MY WIFE got tired of living with a depressive. She asked me to leave. I did. This was a big mistake because I needed to be

with my kids. Fortunately, working full-time and being a single mom proved too much for her and she invited me back. I explained to her I was happy to come back, but I was not leaving the kids again.

She had to keep working full time, but I at least could do the housework, pretty much all I did between 1997 and 1999, because I lost my job. I had a clause in my contract that let my employer release me with 6 months notice for no reason, and we all signed confidentiality agreements. I offered to come back two days a week, we were trying new medications and the talk therapy was going very well, but I was supervising a staff of 16 and this seemed too big a risk for my employer to take.

It didn't help that the staff was quite happy to get rid of another Executive Director, especially one who had broken down and cried in a meeting. I myself had been involved in getting rid of the one before. Live by the sword, die by the sword. Artists and arts administrators, at least in this city, have as much of a killer instinct when there is blood in the water as any shark or corporate maven. It never seemed to be quite this vicious in the other province when I had worked there in the 80s. The co-operative spirit, and the need for mutual support to get anything done superseded all else. If someone fell down, you would pick them up rather than step on them to improve your own situation.

The insurance company's attempts at rehab were ridiculous, having me look at long distance truck driving and landscaping as options. They wanted me off their disability plan and then decided to discontinue their monthly support.

\* \* \*

I HAD TO SUE the insurance company for a settlement, which took longer than the reserves I had from my termination settlement, but the job got done. Tons of tests, and a funny situation in which I did so poorly on a visual spatial memory test (look at the shapes, we'll take them out and put a blindfold over your eyes and you put them back) they thought I might be faking, because no-one had ever done so poorly on one of these tests. My reaction times to visual images were also judged to be too slow, even for a depressive. Still the paperwork got done, and I always see this time as the time I was certified as mentally ill. This word had started creeping into my vocabulary and discussions with my shrink. This diagnosis also suggested there might be just a hint of bipolar, because when I was working I was very efficient and worked, if not manically, at a high speed.

I took this back to my good shrink, who assured me working efficiently and quickly was something that I was good at, and not part of my disorder. By this time I had seen the head of a mood disorder clinic who had me do an intensive survey and one intense therapy session in which I had another psychotic break, but lasting less than five minutes. He wrote up a list of four different medication protocols for me, while my regular psychiatrist kept pushing the talk therapy.

THE RIGHT MEDICATION PROTOCOL was the third



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*But I have to say I was predisposed to believe in medication, because my parents did and they had a lovely medicine cabinet.*

on the list. A cocktail, it includes citalapram, bupropion and resperidone (primarily as a sleep aid, but maybe a little to take a bit of the edge off any manic potential) which we started in late 1999. I started a magazine out of my house in 1999, and by 2000 I had landed my first job after this episode, at less than a third of the salary I had been making at the job from which I was fired. This was the most lasting, most devastating episode during which I wrote almost nothing.

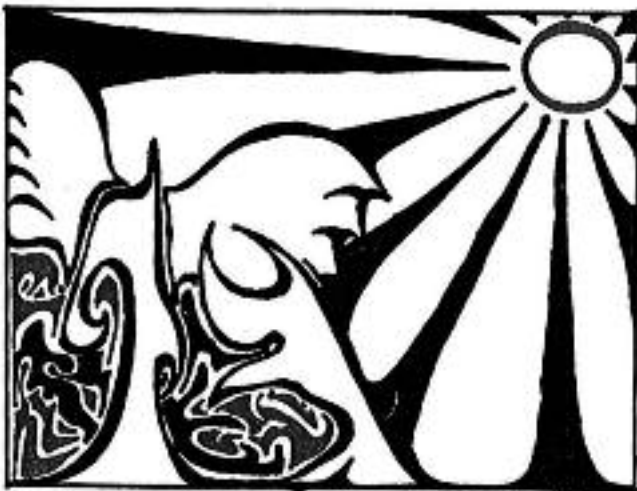
I did try cognitive therapy, the only group I've ever done and my last, in a dismal second story office off a highway. It was clear that *what you are thinking* is the problem and it's your fault. But *the trick* is to psych yourself out by snapping a rubber band on your wrist when you have bad thoughts so you can think good thoughts instead. It made my skin crawl. Essentially you were trying to outsmart yourself, and if you could behave as if you were happy, eventually you would be. (Author's note: "Let a smile be your umbrella.")

The truth is the negative tapes playing in my head stopped when I started taking resperidone. It shouldn't be that clear, and maybe I'm making it up. All I know is when I tried to cut back on even my low dose of 1 mg of resperidone a night a couple of years ago, the bad thoughts kept flooding back, like ugly bats looking to fasten their claws to the convolutions of my brain. But I have to say I was predisposed to believe in medication, because my parents did and they had a lovely medicine cabinet.

From their shelves I found Ritalin to stay awake and Sinnequan, maybe to sleep, maybe for depression, who knows. I took my mother's musical jewelry box from her dresser after she died. I have tried to put every empty bottle of every drug I have taken before and since into the chest, ripping out some of the drawers that were getting in the way.

\* \* \*

I open the case: The music has long since stopped playing, the little ballerina has stopped dancing.



HENRY PETERS

This is what is in this box. My mother's obituary, noting August 6th, 2000 as the day she died, with me in her room half asleep and waiting. (Author's note: *Another story I have been avoiding is how I had my worst depression when my mother was dying. I was with her for the two years, until she abandoned me for the last time.*) So the coincidence - the right med cocktail, my mother dead. I have ten hours of her story on digital tape, her memoirs poorly typed by my father, and my promise to tell her story on my lips as I kissed her goodbye. (Surely a little melodrama is in order when the kid's mom dies, really!)

\* \* \*

THE EMPTY BOTTLES in the jewelry box are : trimipramine, nortryptoline, tranlycypromine, moclobemide, trazadone, doxepin, my Dad's doxepin, his Ritalin, my nefazodone, sertraline, buspirone, three tabs left in a bottle of lorazepam with someone's name I don't know on the label (I take one of the three that's left), fluoxetine, venlafaxine, bupropion, resperidone and citalapram. I usually say it took 17 attempts and 15 years to find meds that worked for me, and what have they done for me lately.

FAST FORWARD. I am just off the phone talking to my three kids. Here is the problem. What can I say here? It is part of who I am and "my situation," but it is their privacy and I hope the editor has a way of dealing with all of this because I have decided simply, or not simply, to write it all down.

I STARTED WITH MY DAUGHTER who might have liked to come over for Sunday dinner. She's moved into her first apartment and has no furniture except for her bed. We might have some here, but I don't want to see her today because I find it stressful because I feel so incredibly guilty for fucking her up too. So I told her I was writing, which is always writing and drinking and I've poured a glass of wine and it's 2:00 p.m. It's amazing how important when you start drinking is. It's always better if I wait until 4:00, 5:00 is even better because except for "writing nights" I never drink after dinner, except for the occasional brandy night-cap, but those are actually quite rare. And the amount of drinking I can do between 5:00 and 7:00 or 8:00, always now wine for dinner, is enough but limited enough.

This is another reason working outside the house is so important, and why it will be good to get the cast off my leg and me going into the office from 9:00 – 5:00 every day, and why I have to find a way to disconnect writing from drinking, because if I ever want to be a full-time writer I can not drink all day without killing myself and ruining another relationship. But for now, work is another thing that keeps me from the pit, and I just write enough to satisfy my compulsion without withdrawing more than two nights a week.

I'm evading what I want to say. My daughter is on Effexor and in weekly therapy. She is nineteen, having completed one year of university a year ago. She is also in AA, and seems to think all her problems are related to substance abuse, mostly alcohol.



I think she feels abandoned first by her mother who moved out to catch up on what she missed out when she married me at 20, and by me who went to look for solace in another relationship and the bottle. Unfortunately, my daughter also seems to have inherited my metabolism, which can process vast amounts of liquor quite quickly, and her mother's use of marijuana for relaxation. I wonder where I put those relaxation tapes.

My guilt comes from entering into a new relationship and spending time in my girlfriend's home with her family that I could have been spending with mine. And then when my girlfriend had to move to Toronto for a year, retreating to my bedroom and writing and drinking myself into oblivion. Here I finally was able to write about what I had been telling my shrinks for nearly 30 years, but it took me to many dark places, exacerbated by alcohol. It is a manuscript called *boy* for which I am still searching for a publisher. My daughter coped by excelling academically, knowing it was the one expectation, the one accomplishment for which she would get recognition from her parents, and something in which she could take pride in herself.

THEN I TALK TO MY OLDEST SON. He is devastated. He has lost a good deal of cartilage in his knee and has osteoarthritis. He is 25, and as he told me "exercise, and competition were my antidepressants, my drugs and alcohol." Telling him his reaction to such a huge loss, which right now looks like it will keep him from judo, and definitely from long-distance running, is normal, does not reassure him. The fact that he is moving from a PhD program in the States to one in Toronto where his wife can work and where they will have their first apartment together is just something on a list that he knows is supposed to make him feel better, but doesn't. I know the feeling and I wonder what genes, what neuroses I have passed on to him

MY YOUNGEST SON turns 23 in July . He is a fully certified radiation therapist. He kills cancer. He had 33 radiation treatments after his surgery when he was nine. He is a very empathetic radiation therapist and will do well in his profession. He was the last to leave home, just this year. Now he lives in another city, is renting a condo, and has furniture.

FACE IT. The kids are doing well. The two boys, the oldest seems the least fucked up, but even the daughter in whom I see so much of myself is doing well, showing up for work at 7:30 every morning. She wants to spend a year living on her own in an apartment before she decides whether she will return to school, and what she might do.

THE TRUTH IS that all five of us in that "original" family have been in therapy at one time or another, dealing with anxieties and depressions of varying degrees of severity. All I can say is the system worked for us. It took a while for me to find the right help , but it was fantastic when it was sorted, and the system helped me find the help I needed for my kids when they needed it.

WAS/IS IT ALL ROSES? As I said I told my ex-wife, if there were problems, she would be the one to leave. At the most charitable, I sense she might have waited to bug out until I was relatively healthy, certainly well enough to look after the children. In my own haphazard way I did, much like when I was sick at home and she was working. But I knew to stay healthy. (*Author's note: I have read some psychology as well as literature and have accepted Freud's hypothesis that the definition of mental health is the ability to love and work.*) I would need a lover and a companion, and in my mind that would be another wife.

I AM WAITING FOR HER to come home from grocery shopping, listening to Al Green and Lyle Lovett singing *When Time Slips Away*. Drinking a second glass of wine, wondering what trouble I am in today. You should have been at the wedding July 2007, we had a live jazz band in the best French restaurant in town. You know I think I will always keep working because I like the expensive things in life, but I know I will always keep writing because I need to live.

I ALSO KNOW I AM NEAR THE EDGE of the abyss once again, chosen by the Consul in *Under the Volcano*. Jesse Winchester has a lovely song that goes "If I'm walking on thin ice I might as well dance." That's me. Dancing, the last thing any Mennonite knows how to do.

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HUMAN BECOMING BY JAMES SKELTON

It's the end of the weekend. I am exhausted, tired of writing, tired of being as normal as I know how, tired of writing this piece. There are parts I've missed, and I want to go back. I wonder though if I should go on.

I'm listening to Elliott Smith, the suicide from my daughter's age. It is quieter than Nirvana which I brought home to my son. Joke. But it's true. There are celebrity suicides for every generation. While it fills the glossies, it empties my heart, like knowing we've lost another like Nicholas Hughes (Ted and Sylvia's son) in Alaska.

THE MORBIDITY RATE keeps moving around depending on how many reoccurring depressive episodes you've had, but I don't think it gets any worse than 30% at the most serious level. That is I have at least a 70% chance living to be 91 like my Dad who had his own moments locked away in his study.

DIGRESSION: My father served as the de facto spiritual advisor for my mother's relatives even though her church excommunicated her. While it is his silences with fits of rage to which I relate my own depression, there is also true craziness on the other side of the family. Let me tell you a quick story.

My father answers the door in suburban Fort Richmond and its Canada Post with a box. My dad signs for it and wonders what it could be coming from the north. Turns out it is the ashes of my mom's cousin. The relatives hadn't bothered telling my mom and dad Cousin had cancer and committed suicide. It was cheaper to have him cremated and shipped, and since my dad was a minister he would know what to do.

He didn't but he found out, and took the box to the country for burial. Two months later Canada Post is at the door again. This time the delivery from Thunder Bay. Turns out it's the cousin's son who committed suicide when his rock n roll girlfriend didn't want anything more to do with this totally fucked up dude who was following her on her tour. So my Dad again with the box, again back to the country, another burial, the son next to the father.

You have to wonder why it's so hard to talk about a disease with a 30% morbidity rate. Not even depressives want to think that depressions could kill them.

FACE IT. Suicide is how most depressives die And once again it is generally understood to be the depressives' fault. A choice they've made – a wonderful step into the abyss, along with the Consul in *Under the Volcano*. I've not made any more attempts since high school, and all I'll cop to is suicidal ideation, on a bad day or weekend, and sure, I've ordered a new copy of *Volcano*. But still wouldn't it be just a little relieving knowing there was a walk or a ribbon campaign, or some people that could be public about giving a shit? The big D instead of the big C?

REWIND. Though I did finally tell my dad I was leaving a club that I wouldn't be part of if they had me as a member, there were returns to the church. First to take the kids to Sunday School so they could read literature written from the beginning of writing to the end of the 20th century anyway, and

also to know there could be solace and comfort in ritual and liturgy even in a church not admitting to either.

But I have come back to this because there is a story. When my son's life was at risk, the church community was wonderful, and even if eventually we got tired of lasagna and banana bread, the support was felt. When I was too sick to work, I did look to the church for a little help, and they in turn looked to me to help them. There was a mental health support group, and because of my ancestry and former job there was a good hope I would take charge of this group and this way we could help each other. I became a little involved in the larger faith mental health community and began to be looked on as a possible spokesperson.

Now there is a thing about witnessing which bears some relationship to confession, whether it is to your home church community or the readers of *TRANSITION* magazine. (*Author's note: They would probably have figured that out for themselves.*) But the big church of which I was a member had one *Mental Health Sunday* annually where they would have a guest speaker to urge acceptance of the unacceptable.

In 1998 I agreed to speak to the congregation. I prepared a text based on a dark psalm, 123, I think, that ends:

“Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.  
Our soul has had more than its fill  
of the scorn of those who are at ease,  
of the contempt of the proud.”

Well, it came to be my turn behind the pulpit, this preacher's kid with a large congregation before him, and I went completely to pieces. I witnessed, not by sharing the story I did try to get through, but being a shaking, sobbing mess. It was too real.

While there was some compassion from fellow travelers at coffee in the basement after the service, I had committed a cardinal sin. I made church members uncomfortable, and most of all embarrassed. That was the last of *Mental Health Sundays* as far as I know, and the end of the church's mood disorder self-help group.

My relationship with the church ended when my parents died, my father a few years ago. I understand religion can be a mighty source of strength and comfort, but it's not one I'll turn to again.

ON THE THIRD DAY I decided to stop working on this first draft, at least for a while. I've written 15 pages, 7,735 words, and I know I'm not quite finished. I wanted to talk about confessional poetry, lacking a better name, the crop of Americans, particularly Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. I wanted to talk about my book *Lucky Man* which I finished between 2000 and 2005 when it was published.

Maybe I'll tidy up tomorrow.



# Bring it on

CATHERINE R. FENWICK

I've seen my future and it looks good. This past September I played a frail elderly woman in an episode of a popular television series, which was being shot in a nearby small town. Hair, make-up, and props transformed me from a fit, energetic sixty-two-year-old into a walker-using ninety-something.

I arrived on the lot and made my way to the Hair and Make-up trailer. "Hi Cathy, I'm Leah and I'll be your hairdresser. This is Monica. She'll make your face look old. Okay?"

"Sure, I can't wait to see what I'm going to look like twenty or thirty years from now."

My hair cringed a little when it was touched by the hot curling iron. I generally shower, comb, and go. No muss, no fuss. Leah made little curls all over my head. She then back-combed it until it looked like the foam on a badly poured glass of beer, all white and bubbly.

"It's pretty windy out today and we don't want your hair to move. Here's a tissue to cover your face," she said as she sprayed the froth with a blast of sticky, smelly, firm-hold nonsense. Leah stepped back and admired her creation "She's coming over to you Monica. Do your magic."

I jumped down from the pumped-up chair and pranced over to the make-up stool. A thick layer of matte facial cover-up applied with a sponge trowel, dustings of pink and grey applied with brushes, lines and shadings done with a charcoal pencil and "Voila!" I'm an old lady.

"So this is what I have to look forward to," I said, grinning at the image in the mirror. "You are artists -- hair and make-up

artists."

I waved to Leah and Monica as I stepped down from the trailer. My next stop was the Wardrobe Room. "Hi Robert, I need some old lady clothes." I'd worked with Robert many times before.

"Wow, Cathy? I hardly recognize you. Did they ever do a good job," and he handed me a tatty old sweater.

On the set I was given a walker and directed to a pair of white lines on the road, which marked my first position. After one rehearsal, the Director said, "Cathy, would you stand over there on the sidewalk. When I say 'background' please move as fast as possible to your first position. On 'action,' cross the road just as you did in rehearsal."

I nodded, grabbed the walker in my left hand, walked briskly several yards to the indicated sideline, and stood -- alert -- waiting for the magic words. On "background" I picked up the walker, sprinted to my first position, set the walker carefully on the white lines, and with hunched shoulders, slid into character. On "action," I stared intently ahead and moved the walker forward -- walker step, step; walker, step, step -- I shuffled agonizingly slowly across the wide street.

"Great job, checking the gate, print that." No need for another take. I can do old lady.

This image of myself as a ninety-something woman wasn't scary. I welcome the wisdom that comes with the flurry of white hair. Inner beauty and core strength continue to grow stronger as socially stipulated beauty and physical strength diminishes.

Eternal youth is a crazy obsession. I don't go for those cosmetic surgeries that plasticize muscles and obliterate facial expression. I don't want my face to look like a performer's hand puppet, with a permanent smile, and a jaw that moves mechanically up and down.

I prefer a natural landscape to a carefully groomed lawn; don't want to look like I've "put some effort into it" -- as a friend once said to me.

Oh, I'll admit to shaving the moustache and plucking the occasional facial hair. I'll soon give up on the eyebrow shaping as my skin is too loose and eyesight too out of focus. The last time I tweezed off little bits of epidermis causing bleeding, and ended up with tiny dots of tissue paper forming a path along my brows like Australian Aboriginal Dot Art.

Yes, I could colour my hair, get a face-lift, tummy-tuck, boob-job, look like I've put a little effort into it. I could do some beautification, but underneath it all I'd still be a hag. And that's a good thing.

I met my inner hag a few years ago on a pilgrimage to ancient goddess sights in Britain. I learned about the triple goddess -- maiden, mother, crone. I survived maidenhood with grainy guts and sheer determination; in motherhood I was a bear protecting her cubs; in the ritual transformation to cronehood I've found my wise teacher, counsellor, elder, and healer. I embrace my inner wise old woman, which is the original definition of hag. Call me a hag and I'll hug you.



JAMES SKELTON

# In memoriam

DIANNE MILLER

For each of the 24 years following my father's death, I have missed him the most during the summer while vacationing at our family cabin on Emma Lake, 50 km north of Prince Albert. This spring I decided to write him a letter.

Dear Dad,

Even you wouldn't be waterskiing at 6:00 a.m. this morning. There's a wind out of the northwest whipping the lake into frothy whitecaps and whisking them south to push against the beach at Sunnyside. It's like the wind and waves are conspiring to shake off all those springtime weekenders who are itching to play with their water toys. I remember how you'd be anxious to kick-start summer, like the time you dove in for a determined swim during a late spring snowstorm while the rest of us, cozy in our siwash sweaters, watched and laughed. I don't mind the breeze so much because, like my memories of you, my view of these restless waves encircled by shivering pines nourishes my spirit regardless of the weather. I'm drawn here each summer to be both soothed and energized and, by loving what you loved, maintain a thread of connection between my life and your death.

I think you'd be pleased at the way we've maintained and improved the cabin. None of us is quite as handy with a hammer or wrench as you were, but you'd be surprised at what we've accomplished - new water system, new dock, fresh paint job on the old X-90 siding. You built everything to last, but we learned the hard way that's not possible.

My back and arms are stiff from yesterday's raking - nine bags this time - and from hauling the window shutters into summer storage. I'd swear they're getting heavier every year. I realize I'm now eight months older, but not nearly as fit and strong as you were when you died at age 59.

May 28, 1985. It's been 24 years since you left for work at 6:30 in the morning and were dead within the hour. A workplace accident reported in a 15 second spot on CKBI News Prince Albert. A 10-line news story in provincial newspapers. The obituary did not read, "He slipped away peacefully with his family at his side." No wonder such accidents are referred to as tragedies, the tragedy being that you should have had another 30 years to enjoy a well-deserved retirement and time with us.

Saying that, I immediately feel guilty, knowing there are countless other families who also have reason to mourn and feel just as cheated. Those matter-of-fact listings of each weekend's death toll never used to touch me, but now I envision a grieving spouse, children, friends, a funeral, a somber first Christmas, and the sad reminders that come with anniversaries and birthdays. Empathy is born from experience - a tough lesson. I guess we are to feel fortunate that we had you in our lives long enough to learn from you and to establish lasting memories, but that's small comfort.

There are times when I see an elderly gentleman, vigorous

and erect, hat set at a confident angle, and I can't help but wonder what path your life would've taken had you lived to be 83 today. How many kilometers would you and Mom have driven, exploring the highways of North America? How many years would you have continued to jog, water ski, skate, build and repair? It's hard to imagine that you would've become feeble and content to breathe the air of decay in a nursing home.

I know you would've enjoyed getting to know your sons-in-law and, especially, your grandsons. They're great kids with a love for hockey to rival yours, one a goalie and the other a right-winger nicknamed The Rocket after your favourite Montreal Canadienne, Rocket Richard. Had you lived, you would've seen the last two games of the Stanley Cup finals in 1985 (The Oilers beat the Flyers, by the way.) and, I suspect, you'd be cheering for Detroit in this year's final. On the bright side, you missed the horror of 9/11, the bankruptcy of your favourite car company, Chrysler, and society's current fascination with all things foolish such as Paris Hilton, Twitter, and reality TV.

I can't help but wonder if you're watching over us, following our footsteps as we stumble through life? You taught me honesty, hard work, self-reliance, and respect for others, but not so much a belief in a higher power. I can't picture you wearing heavenly white and playing defense on God's hockey team. But where are you? You weren't present in the body we viewed at the funeral home and you certainly aren't in the casket we buried. Damn death. So abrupt, final, uncertain.

The answer I choose to believe is that you are present in all of us - your wife, your daughters, your friends, and your colleagues - and you will live on through your grandsons. We have a responsibility to live as you taught us and to sustain your life through memory. When I'm at the cabin you built, at the lake you loved, I feel closest to you, so be assured, that until death claims me too, I'll be back every summer.

Love,  
Dianne



ANGELIC LOVE

DI DECAIRE



# One more bad night

Excerpt from “Candlelight” . . . the story of an alcoholic

JAY SIMS

The sun that floods my living room is like bleach in my eyes. What time is it? I’m parched.

Find water. Need a smoke too.

I wake up on the couch, still fully clothed.

My coat is on the floor beside me. Still wearing my shoes.

Reach into coat, left pocket. Open crumpled Player’s pack ... empty. Damn. Look for ashtray. Find a good butt. Reach for lighter.

Gone. Go to toaster oven. Search for wallet while stumbling to the kitchen. Heart races slightly.

Where’s my wallet?

There it is, back pocket. I never put it in my back pocket. (In actuality I had dropped it inside of the bar last night; an honest patron took pity on me and stuffed it into my jeans, unbeknownst to me, when he saw it fall from my hands.)

Open wallet. Nervous drum roll inside my head. Wallet empty. Find an instant teller receipt.

Actually, find four of them.

Remember only one trip to the bank machine before I got to the Last Chance Corral.

Find last withdrawal receipt.

1:40 a.m. ... Golden Whistle Tavern. Requested funds, 60.00. Service fee 2.50.

Available funds ... 489.00. Where the hell went my 60.00? Read other three receipts.

Ok, where went my 240.00?

9:45 p.m. ... 7/11 Grande Ave Location...60.00.

11:24 p.m. ... Golden Whistle...60.00.

1:10 a.m. Golden Whistle...60.00.

Must’ve made a lot of new friends last night.

Could use one now. Self Cursing begins.

Rent comes out in three days. Rent is 675.00. Stomach sinks.

Fumble with the coffee maker. Out of filters. Walk a mile to the washroom. Toilet paper saves the day; double it up and pour in the Grounds.

What time is it? 1:30 p.m. I work at 3. Hardly enough time to gather a coherent thought. Ok, the rent. Think. Think harder. Solution; beg boss for money.

Tell him I fell down outside, lost wallet. Wait a minute...do even have a job still? Jeve.

Told Jeve, the bar manager, off last night, before I was ejected from the Roadhouse.

Had a verbal contest with a customer while smoking a cigarette in the non-smoking bar.

Was still wearing work uniform. Company’s not to thrilled with me, I can only imagine.

Customer cursed me, I remember that. A dad with a little boy and a wife. Sitting down to dinner.

Looked like he wanted to hit me. I told him to relax and pretend I wasn’t even there, broad smile on my face, certain of my comedic effect amidst a cloud of Player’s Filter and a Budweiser Fog.

Laughed a little, while I glanced around. No-one laughed with me.

Jeve put the cigarette out for me.

What did I do after leaving the Roadhouse? I don’t want to know.

Stomach sinks deeper with this reflection.

Stomach rumbles with hunger.

It’s been nearly 24 hours since my last meal. I never eat and drink my booze simultaneously. (Ruins a good buzz.) It’s Wednesday. Payday was Friday last.

Almost the weekend again, and another week away from next pay.

My sons will be here Friday afternoon. My little angels, 7 and 9 years old.

But the fridge is empty. I’m supposed to be their Dad; their provider; their hero.

Supposed to be.

Think, Jay. Think. Can’t think.

Self pep talk ... Ok Jay, we’ve been here before. We’ve always survived. We’ll find a way.

Grab a shower. Head to work.

Walking to work (lost my driver’s license). Have to explain myself when I get there. Go to boss right away. Apologize profusely. No, better yet, act as if nothing happened. Stay in the shadows. Can’t borrow money today. If I’m still employed, stay quiet.

Work my tail off. Prove to him that he still has a use for me.

I can’t shoulder the weight of my thoughts anymore. I’ve woken up too many times like this; 20 years and running strong. 20 years, now invading my mind in flash frame sequence.

Last night, last month, last year, today, what will happen tomorrow. Past, present and future all suddenly collide within me like a train wreck.

To Hell with it. Stop at the liquor store on the way to work. What’s an eight dollar bottle of Sherry going to harm me now? The rent’s already dwindling away. Why not? In fact, make it two bottles.

Could be a long, sleepless night.

Why can’t I just stop? People always tell me I should, or at least learn to “control” my drinking.

I always laugh at that one. There’s no such word as “control” in my self-medication routine.

And besides that, I seem to lose the choice to stop just as soon as I start. It’s a mystery to me.

It’s a mystery to many.

Slowly but surely I seem to fade into a meaningless existence. Slowly but surely, hope fades to fear, life fades to death.

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# Losing the game, winning the season

JODI M. WEBB

**M**onday morning quarterbacks can look back at the weekend's games and pinpoint where the mistakes were made, how the game could have been won. But by Monday morning it's too late. The game is over. I look back at the last ten years of my life and agonize over the mistakes.

I should have known when my husband (then boyfriend) was constantly late for dates that something was wrong. It wasn't always work running over. It was something else.

I should have known when he started complaining about going to my parents' home for big holiday gatherings. It wasn't that he wanted to have a quiet celebration at our home. It was something else.

He insisted on driving to Disney World instead of flying or taking a train and refused to use the assortment of buses, trains, monorails, and boats available to make our way around that huge playground. The one time I did get him on a Disney bus he jumped off at the next stop without even telling me, leaving me stranded with two toddlers and two strollers. I should have known.

When he constantly forgot to pick me up at the grocery store, church, work. When he picked a huge fight before every party. When he talked about being a 'nervous' kid during school. When the doctor prescribed medication that he prompt-

ly flushed down the toilet. Maybe I didn't want to know.

So now we are stuck. He hasn't been on a family vacation in a decade. Weddings, graduations, Dads and Donuts Day at Kindergarten. Unless a celebration is held at our home he isn't there.

When the chips are down I know not to rely on him. He brings no money into this house he never leaves. He couldn't teach our daughter to drive. When I was sick he had to call an ambulance. When I was in labor he had to call my father. It's been years since he's driven more than 5 miles away from our home.

Parenting is harder. There is no divide and conquer when the children have activities on the same day. I must choose who gets to go to their practice or party or game and who has to skip. Somehow I must reinforce the love of a father so removed from their lives many of their friends think we are divorced.

He does all he can at home. He spends special time with our children. He mows the lawn, shovels the snow, takes out the trash. But his role in our lives stops at the end of our road. We all lead lives beyond his reach.

I look back and see the mistakes. The game may be over but there's still a whole season left. Maybe if I watch closely enough I can spot the opportunities and turn our team around. Maybe someday our family life will extend farther than the end of the road.



PASSAGES BY HENRY PETERS



# Consolation

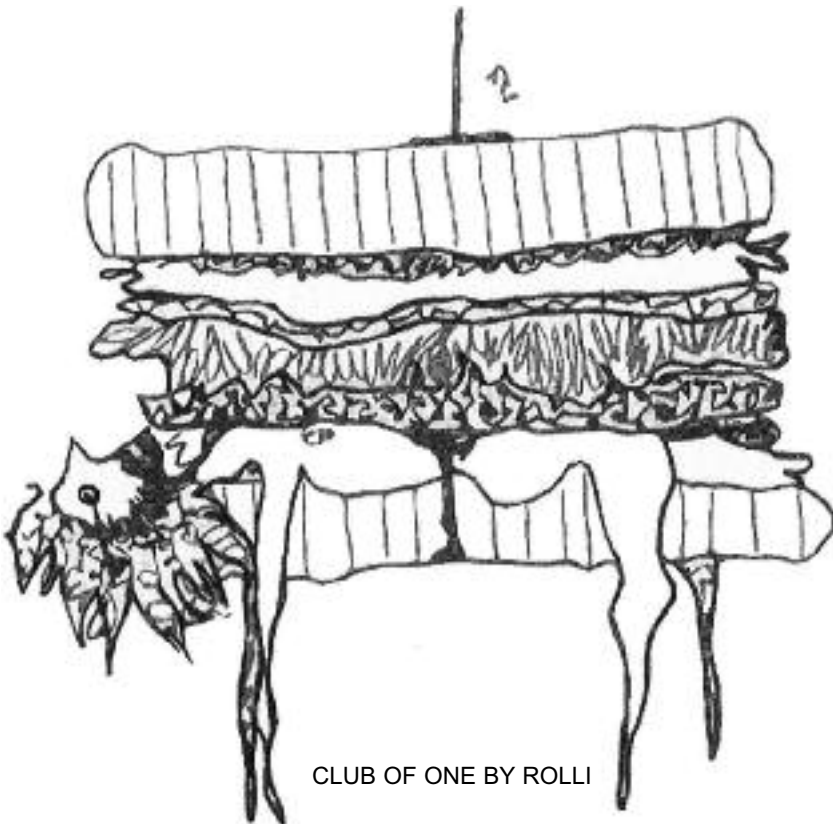
GORD BRAUN

You hear the wind out there?  
See those trees tossing?  
Hear those oversized wind-chimes?  
See those cars going by?  
Feel that ancient cold when you look out your security door?

They don't care about you and your problems.  
They're saying, you care too much.  
Whatever's at you is small and temporary and immaterial.

This is not indifference, not defeat,  
but consolation.  
It means you can go on.

It means there was a time when you didn't exist  
and that time will come again,  
that all works of good and evil are being undone  
without mercy or malice.



CLUB OF ONE BY ROLLI

# Day pass

DONNA BURKS

In the mist-tinged light I see your smile  
creased with age and sadness  
as you tell me your dream  
of switchblades razors  
a stiletto with an ivory handle  
how you ripped open this world  
of meager welfare checks  
and food banks filled with red bins  
of rotted vegetables

I hold your hand and listen  
stare at your gauze-wrapped  
wrist as we walk in the rain  
through the streets of the old section  
past peeled paint on wooden fences  
and a scruffy white stray crouched  
beneath the broken steps  
of a deserted house.

A battered pickup splashes water  
on the sidewalk near the corner  
where the gray tongue of morning licks  
the shadows of the whores  
who gather there at night.

A chilly wind sweeps along behind us  
bruised sullen clouds chase  
feeble rays of sunlight into hiding  
we wrap our tattered blanket of hope  
tightly around us voices touching  
in the cold November air.

A few brown brittle leaves still cling  
to stark tree branches we watch  
their struggle end in a fierce gust  
they whirl past us and are caught  
wet and lifeless in a chain link fence.

Later we round a corner and stop  
the sterile glare of the hospital  
before us.

With hands clasped we linger  
for a moment.



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# The compass

DAVID CAWOOD

Every day I would see him walking  
past pawnshops  
    coffee houses  
        graffiti-tagged walls  
            and the Chinese corner store.

His faded coveralls pressed; his face clean-shaven.  
His jacket pockets bulged with odd shapes.

He always wore something on his head:  
    in winter, a fur-lined aviator's cap  
    in summer, an old brown fedora  
        most often, a sailor's cap with frayed gold braid.

One day he asked me  
    if I wanted to see his mementoes.  
        Surprised  
            I nodded and smiled.

From his right pocket, he pulled a purple velvet sack  
    poured out a collection of coins  
        into his large palm.  
He told me they were from his days at sea  
    from countries all over the globe.  
All I saw were pennies, nickels and a few dimes.

An awkward silence

He carefully returned his treasures  
    into the pouch  
        and slipped it back into his pocket.  
As I turned to leave  
    he retrieved a compass  
        its needle swung sharply to the north.  
He slowly closed it  
    rubbed the cover gently with his thumb.

I saw etched on the scratched but shiny silver surface  
    an anchor and a rope  
        surrounded by maple leaves.

# Riddle me

VICTOR ENNS

like a wet dahlia in the rain  
like the trace of a purple felt marker  
like hammers hitting the strings of a badly tuned piano  
like the echo of boots stomping downstairs  
as if it mattered

like a no account derelict with an open hand  
like the scent of a rotted tuber  
like a bed unchanged  
like a faulty clause in a long sentence  
as if it mattered

like a cat vomiting its breakfast  
like a dog licking it up  
like a bird on the ground  
as if it mattered

like a misanthrope at a party  
like an arrest gone bad  
like an accident that didn't wait to happen  
as if it mattered

like the taste of thick milk  
like the back of a leaving lover  
as if it mattered

like the roughness of braided rope  
like the reek of dead chickens in the henhouse  
as if it mattered

like heavily callused feet  
like having nowhere to go  
as if it mattered

like the book with just one line  
as if it mattered

as if

it mattered





# Psychopharmacology

CATHERINE R. FENWICK

Anxiolytic assessment  
Behavioural barbiturates  
Clozapine cognitions  
Diazepam diagnostics  
Existential equanil  
Freudian fuddle-duddle

Gerontologist group  
Hypnotic history  
Indiscreet imipramine  
Jagged jabbers  
Kantian keeners

Lithium libido  
Magnanimous meprobamate  
Noxious neuroleptics  
Organic oxylates

Protriptyline presence  
Quintessential quack  
Ransack rapture  
Solipsistic sedative

Tricyclic trips  
Urbane urges  
Vainglorious valium  
Waldon wisdom

Xenophobic Xerophilus  
Yama Yielding  
Zirconic zzzz



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# Freight train whistle

JOAN MACINTOSH

The village back road  
trails off to the rail line

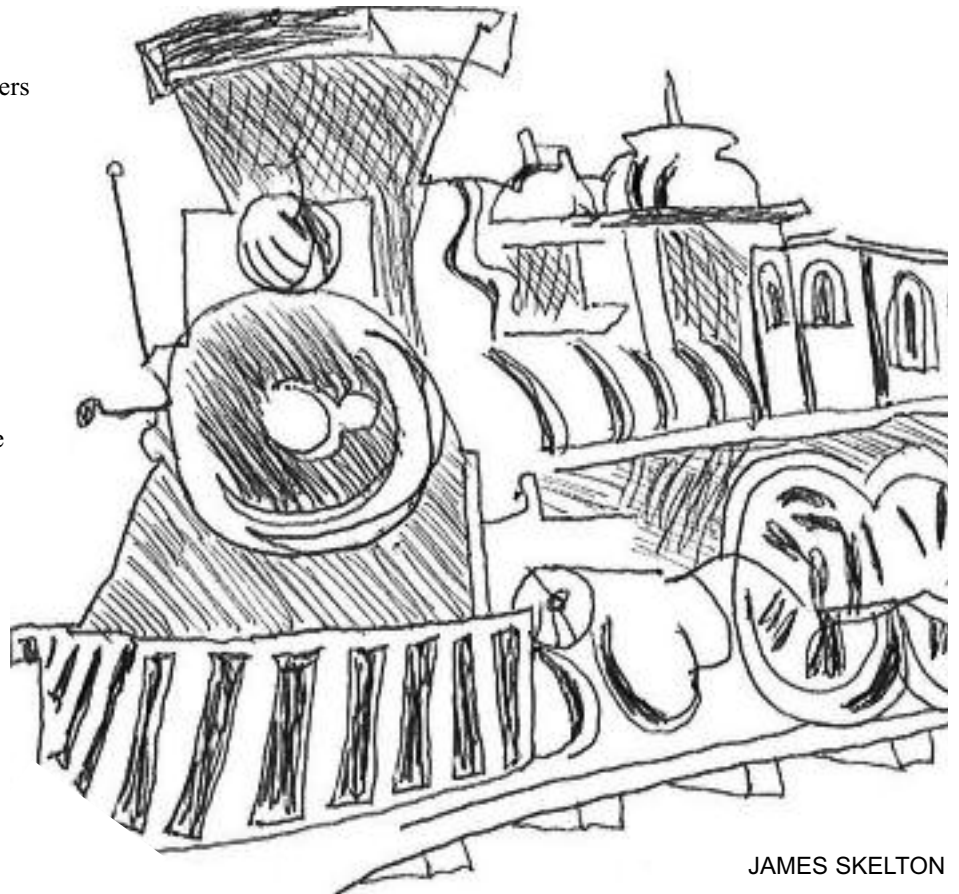
Only a freight train  
pushes through the woods  
at dusk near  
the take-out  
porch door

I feel like the birch leaves  
are telling me something deeper

Older  
than the pain of the village  
tar paper bungalows  
devoured children  
withered mouths  
of the moneyed land-owners

Softer  
than the weary stretch of  
clapboard houses, hungry  
eyes gleaming  
behind the parted curtain

Young leaves  
draw me  
down the path  
of the freight train whistle  
into the woodlands  
birch bark arms



JAMES SKELTON



# M. the Star

ROLLI

Well I live here  
in a strip ripped from the big book  
swept into, rolled up  
smoke in paper

I and the other gentle ones

When we talk  
for we know v. much, sir  
believe me  
the sound is - blundered  
on walls  
lives a moment  
and folds  
a chloroformed lady

So they walk on

I speak of the ones  
who are not gentle  
ones who won't listen

When we holla  
when we drum, they  
afraid of our ritual  
send us  
to a strange white place away  
the Cushioned Palace  
where walls eat words  
devour them  
til there's nothing  
in our throats  
and we're empty fools  
like them

It was no breakdown, sir  
no down no  
but through

Finally home, one morning  
after a broken-down night of circles

shunning my routes  
for I'd been dogged, sir  
I was wise

I opened the door and  
there was the beating star  
of pure whiteness

And what to do?  
With shadows about  
around me, now?

And it was my room  
after all  
my own

I stepped within

This felt correct

It was - whiteness  
only

Blind, I  
was unsure which I was  
and which the star

I'm unsure still, sir

This  
is why they call me M. the Star

And that, Mme.  
and that, Renard  
the Star

It pleases god  
for us to be so  
as shining as any night pins  
as reliable

but wrapped up in paper  
Chinese lanterns

\*

I'll burn here  
till the world ends



## Tired, requiring sleep, We

ROLLI

are fatigue, aren't  
we, dear?

plush with it, stuffed  
drawn through the day and dust  
coffee bean eyes  
clicking on floor tiles  
dropping off  
stuck back

and back

with milk, or black?

\*

What I'd like  
more than anything  
is to wake once, one morning  
on my eyelids, lift them  
to blue glass  
and wind in teeth  
like leaves, between  
from a cracked summer window  
thinking nothing  
of one

rising, thinking  
nothing

apart  
on concrete  
nothing - one

among many breaths together

\*

We glum ones  
can't quit our own orbits  
morose with introspect, necks  
bent listening  
to the hum under the skin  
of blood

Anomalous, the holes, that  
light grows heavy itself  
extinguishing

\*

You're weary, dear; we  
all are, old

Roll over, pour  
it back so

and so

Hope it's thick enough  
and black

and I hope you don't choke



# When I could walk no more

ROLLI

When I could walk no more, I  
I'd gone on forever  
with uneven step, yet  
never stopping  
stopped, at last  
spat upon dust  
and rested

From long walking  
I was light as soul, or  
soul and old vestment  
bright through holes  
like a woken house

Sitting on a broad stone  
resting

The wind was very good  
at such a time

This was years ago

I rest there still  
I rest here  
thinner by the year, yet  
would you guess  
less delicate, better?

This, and this also is true

I speak as no poet, no  
broken-down man  
trembling with theoreticals  
thinking this a sand world, dry  
and eye-long sand

I speak as  
I am  
a tired traveler, only  
ordinary man grown tired  
through long walking

This must be believed, above all

I'll rest till well, when well  
walk on

There's more to my song than this



YET RESTLESS BY ROLLI

# RSVP

JAN WOOD

Dec. 02 Stroke of Midnight: *"We'll patch you up . . . it will be a first class flight on opiate wings, a medically assisted boarding and departure . . ."* They guaranteed I'd be eating Christmas dinner at Your place Lord. I refused, thought it impolite to arrive unannounced. I hope You don't mind sharing glucose in a tube.

Dec. 10 Craft Time 2 pm: *"All Happy View residents will meet in the craft room to string popcorn for the tree."* It appears they are planning a party with no room for Your crib. I'm practicing lighting the Advent candles, and using the blender, making one-handed plans for us to dine quietly in room 201 on turkey puree and gelatin.

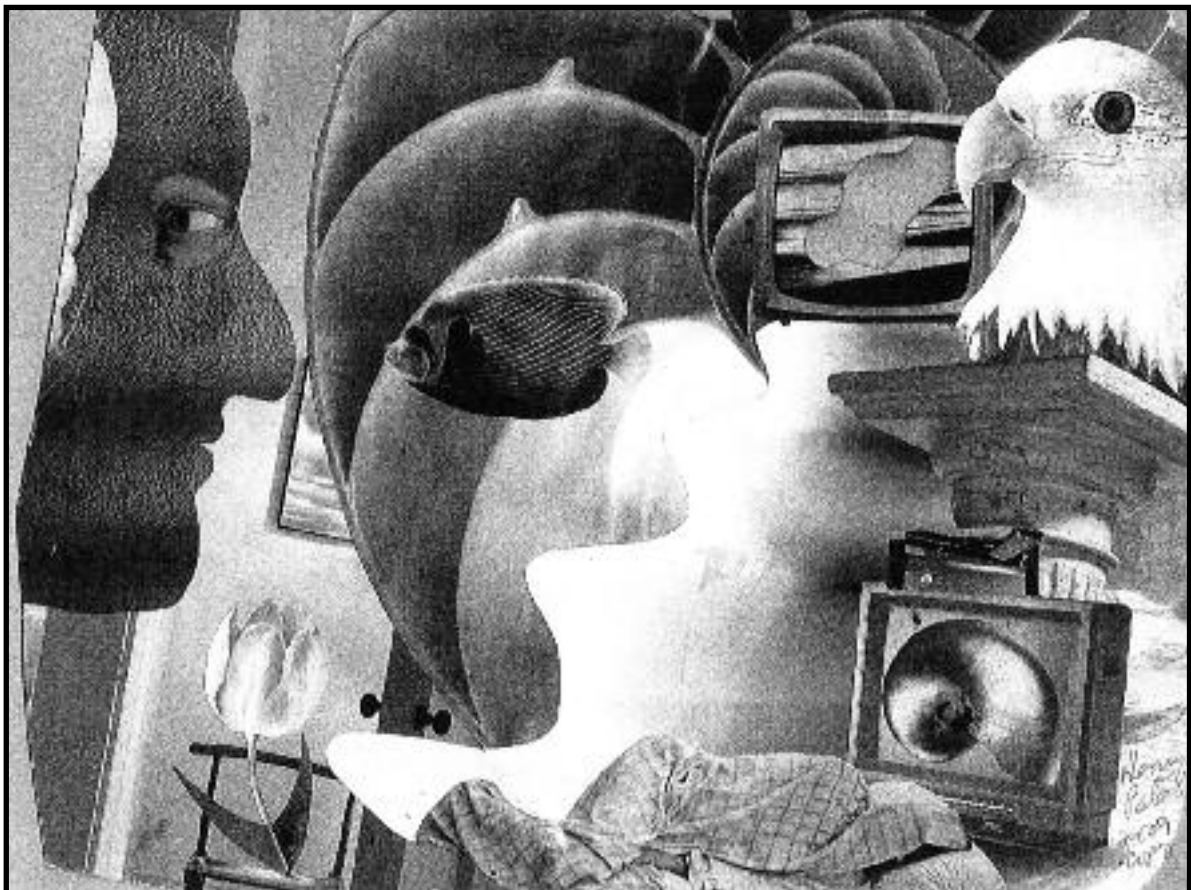
Dec. 20 Update 9 am: *"This morning all Happy View residents will report to the front office to receive their assessments . . ."* Nine decades strong in spirit, I wheeled down. Amid the holiday cheer, tax collectors prepared my journey from respite to independent living; packed me up with a walker and raised toilet seat in the back of a Bronco.

Dec. 20 Departure 2 pm: *"Fear not you'll be home for Christmas . . . the pastel angels cried."* Preoccupied with my oxygen tank I missed the doors sliding shut on a heaven of wide hallways, call bells and soft soled attention.

Dec. 24 Visitors 2 pm: *"Merry Christmas! Enjoy the season! Rest and rejoice!"* Friends and neighbours arrived bearing gifts of golden cookies, perfuming a house with sage and laying wreaths. I watched as Mama kept in her heart the secret of my sleepless nights and soiled bedding.

Dec. 25 Questions 10 pm: *"Help me understand the situation Lord . . . am I to come to You for dinner or You to me?"* With her aching fingers Mama is breaking the last of Mrs. T's shortbread, dipping it in sweet mulled wine, holding the crumbs to my lips that I might eat.

Dec. 26 Stroke of Dawn: *". . . but only say the word and I shall be healed."*



MAGAZINE COLLAGE BY HENRY PETERS



# Keeping silent

JOHN S. BARKER

Keeping silent while they argue around me. God, they are so damn noisy. Never mind. Stop paying attention. I wonder whether the rain will wash the bird droppings from the trunk of my car.

I've had about enough of it. Those squealing women's voices just pierce my ears and make my stomach squirm. Push back from the table, stand slowly, feign interest, say nothing. Can't get away fast enough, though.

What are they arguing about? Is it theology, bromatology, alethiology? Eschatology, epistemology, ethnomusicology? Not tonight. Tonight it's numbers. What ology is that? Can't remember. How can I forget that? Just had it on the tip of my tongue. Numerology? Almost. Almost. Numerology. That's it. But not the mystic kind of numerology. The philosophical kind. Numbers as entities. Pythagoras. Numbers as truth. Platonic Forms.

Can't be bothered to take a number in a store. If they're too busy to sell me deli meat, then I don't need to spend the money on it, either. Thanks for coming. Thanks for leaving. Dead salted protein anyway. Who needs it?

Clear the table. Wash the dishes. Count the knives, forks and spoons. Make sure I didn't drop one accidentally into the garbage like I did seventeen years ago and began accusing my daughter of stealing. No, they're all here. Same as yesterday. Twelve knives, twelve forks, twelve spoons. Three twelves. Thirty-six pieces. Not counting the serving spoon, the butter knife and the sugar spoon. That makes thirty-nine. The Thirty-nine Steps.

Put the glasses up in the cupboard, the plates too. Don't drop them. Can't stand the noise. Dark out now. Harder to clean up broken things in the dark. You need sunlight to do a good job.

All that soapy water. Just like giving the kids a bath when they were little. First Barbara. She was so tiny. She weighed about as much as a cantaloupe then. And those curls in her hair. Like my mother's. All those years ago. And then Jeff, who hated it. Hated it. Hated it ever since the day he was born. Screaming blue murder every day. Those big roles of baby fat on his hands. Strong grip, too. He sure had some aversion to water then. Not later, of course. He loved the water when he was a bit older. But then? I've never seen anything like it before in my life. People must have thought we were torturing him.

The noise, the noise, the noise of it all. They keep yammering. Let me out of here for God's sake.

Count the knives, the forks the spoons. Thirty-six pieces. All there. Not counting the serving spoon, the butter knife and the sugar spoon.

Looks like a nice night out for a walk. Just grab my coat, grab my hat. Leave my worries on the doorstep. What were they going on about in there anyway?

Nice air. Cool, nice breeze. It might rain a bit later. I can always tell when it's going to rain. I can feel it. Nobody believes me, but it's true. Sometimes I get migraines, sometimes a sore hip. Love the streetlamp light. Soft glow. Pleasant. I'll just walk down to the corner and see what the traffic is like. That wind is a bit cooler than I thought. That guy is too close to the curb. He could have hit me. Blinded by the headlights for a minute. He was going fast. These cars are so quiet, I can't hear them until they're practically beside me. Walk on the left of the road. Watch the lights. Leaves rustle in the breeze. No moon out. Too bad about that. Moonlight is a comfort in the dark.

How far have I walked? I'll count the steps. The Thirty-nine Steps. It's a mystery. There's Joe's house. I think that's his house. How did I get here? They've got two gables painted a rusty red, which you could never tell at night. But there's always a lamp lit in each window. Makes the house look like



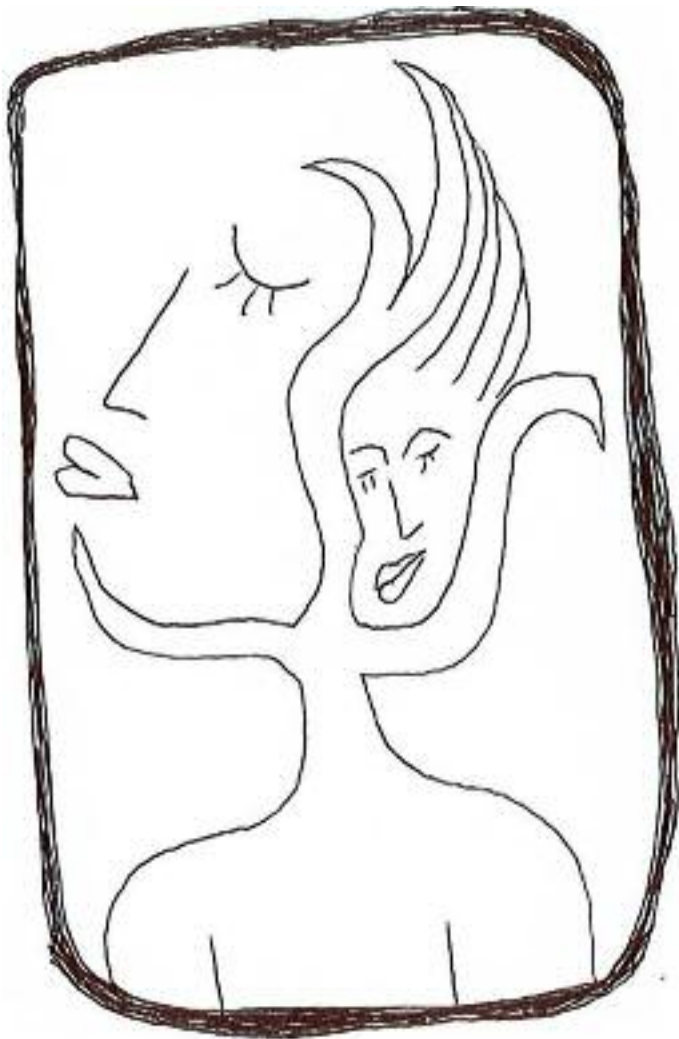
TELEMORPH BY HENRY PETERS



it's got eyes. That's uncomfortable. Houses looking at me all the time. Lynn told me to wear my hat. She was right. There's a chill out here. I'll just walk down to the corner. There's a Mac's Milk there. I can get a coffee and warm up a bit.

It's quiet out. Where has everyone gone? It was busy a minute ago.

Silly old fool. I must have turned the wrong way at the corner. Now which way do I go? If they just kept quiet a bit I'd have been happy to sit there with them. Just as always. All those years helping Jeff with his numbers. Four times four is sixteen. Five times five is twenty-five. Six times six. What is six times six? Thirty-nine Steps. That can't be right. Any number multiplied by itself is a square. The root of a square is the root of the problem. How do you get to the root of the problem? The square root of thirty-nine is about 6.25. Six and a quarter. A quarter is two dimes and a nickel. That'll buy you a



COUPLE BY JAMES SKELTON

phone call these days, and not much else. But I won't stand in line for it.

Street lamp light. No moon. House lights are all out except for two or three. I don't know why. Where is Lynn? I thought she was right behind me a minute ago. I could hear her calling me just now.

The road is wet. The air is damp.

How long have I wandered against the tyranny of my years? I am a soul alone in this darkness, faltering and falling through the crevices of memory, a snowflake, or crystal of ice, blown and tossed against a slope, which cannot stick, and which, freed, floats on again until it simply dissolves in a warm current of air, into nothing at all. Where have I gone? How far have I come? Is this even me? These hands, which lifted children high, and cradled them close; these hands, which built homes, fashioned wood, welded steel, spread earth; these hands seem now no longer my own, and hang in front of me little more than dead leaves clinging to winter limbs. Even though Heaven may watch us, it is Hell who hunts us down.

Trees are ominous in the black. Witch's claws and goblin's teeth, groaning in the wind. Stop for a minute. Take a bit of a rest. Up under this carport. Motion sensor light. Blinding. All that darkness, and now I'm blinded by the light. Just sit down against the wall for a minute. The light will go out again. A noise. Cat's eyes? No, raccoon's. That blasted light comes on again. No rest here. Best move along. Move along.

Walk to the corner. It's brighter over there. Maybe a main road. Maybe something open. I am tired, and have walked too long. Where do I even belong? Lynn will tell me.

There's a place open. Gas station. Go to the attendant. He's looking at me strangely. Don't trust him. He offers me water – is that what it is? – and asks me to sit down. Wants my wallet. Looking for something. Am I being robbed? Finds my driver's license. Takes it. Gives it back. Who the hell do you think you are? Best not say anything. I can manage. We'll see how this turns out. Phone book. He's talking to Lynn. He must be. How did he get my number?

Six times six is thirty-six. Twelve knives, twelve forks, twelve spoons. Count them again. Twelve knives, twelve forks, twelve spoons. Why do I feel as if something is missing?

A car pulls up. A man gets out, rushes through the door.

“Dad?” he says. Who is he? “Are you okay? You've been gone hours. How did you even get here? We've been worried sick. Why did you leave?”

Stop badgering me. I'm no invalid. I wanted to go for a walk. That's all. And what business is it of his? I just want some quiet.

“It's me, Jeff,” he says. That can't be. That's impossible. Jeff is just a baby. But that's not right, now. And I can see Lynn in his eyes. “Come home,” he says.

He takes my arm. I feel his grip, strong, secure. His hands the way mine used to be. Really, I don't need his help. But I am so very tired now.



# Molly Riddy

LAURA BEST

I can remember finding Mum crying alone in the sun-porch one spring afternoon so many years ago. She didn't know I was there, thought that I had gone with Doreen and my father to catch tadpoles to take to school on Monday morning. She looked so forlorn and I suppose if I'd have had an ounce of brains in my head I would have gone to her, offered her comfort. Instead, I disappeared like a thief, her moment of privacy stolen. I had stolen it from her, and worst of all she would never know.

In the months that followed I became conscious of those moments of silence while we waited for her to answer one of Doreen's endless questions, of that faraway look that would come over her in the evenings as she sat blank-faced in front of the television, of the times, red-eyed, she'd hurry out of the room. There was something different about her -- some flip side, a coin tossed high in the air.

She sighed whenever Dad came into the room. "What's the matter, Mum?" he'd ask.

"Nothing," she'd reply. "Nothing's the matter."

"But nothing's right!" I wanted to cry out.

In spite of all that I knew and understood, it still came as a shock the day we arrived home from school and found her gone. She might have left a note. Surely we deserved some explanation. "Mum went to get some rest," Dad said.

"Where?" asked Doreen. "Where did she go?"

"That's not for you to worry about," he said. "When's she's ready she'll be home."

Dad spent that fall cutting and dragging Christmas trees for a local company. Seven days a week he worked and his absence only deepened that growing sense of longing I felt with Mum gone. He started work the last week of October, that time of the year when the diminished daylight hours erased more and more of our already deprived lives. That was also the time Molly came into our lives.

"Her name is Molly Riddy," said Dad. "She'll be here when you get home from school tomorrow."

"A baby sitter," I snorted.

"A housekeeper," Dad insisted.

"Who is this Molly Riddy?" Doreen asked that night in bed.

"God only knows," I replied, wishing it would stay that way.

Of course it didn't. She was in the kitchen the next afternoon when we arrived home from school, a short, round woman with big black eyes.

"Doreen and Mary-deth," she said, "Your father will be home in jig time, then I'll be out of your way."

She did not introduce herself to us but continued to prepare supper, bustling about from one side of the kitchen to the next, searching the cupboards for pots and pans. How strange it felt to see someone working in Mum's kitchen, especially this Molly Riddy with her chubby body and dark, knowing

eyes. Doreen and I just stood there for a time waiting for Molly to say something more. Twice she looked up but did not offer us even a smile. Standing there watching it all, it was as if I was no longer a part of my own life. It was as if I had walked into someone else's home, some place I didn't belong. I wanted then to cry out for Mum but I knew it would do no good.

Tired of being ignored, Doreen and I left the kitchen for the sanctuary of our bedroom. Once in our room Doreen began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"Molly Riddy . . . Molly Riddy," said Doreen jumping up and down on our bed.

I grabbed her off the bed and set her on the floor. "Stop jumping like you've got ants in your pants."

"Ants in my pants . . . Ants in my pants," chanted Doreen.

"Can't you be serious for a moment?" I asked, annoyed at Doreen's indifference upon seeing Molly in the kitchen cooking and cleaning; touching Mum's things.

"Serious? I am serious. About Molly Riddy, that is," she said giggling again.

"I wish you'd stop saying her name. It sounds stupid." Dad had no right to bring this Molly Riddy into our house.

The week Molly came to us was an especially difficult time for me. There was a boy in school who was constantly teasing me. 'Orphan,' he'd whisper when he passed by me in the hallway. I hated him for reminding me of Mum's absence, wished it would all go away: the hoping and praying for Mum's return, not wanting anyone at school to ask about her, certain that I would shatter if they did. What I wished to remain a secret, I knew was most surely common knowledge, for there was precious little that happened in our community without someone finding out. I knew they were all aware of my home situation and I suspected there were those who knew more than I.

One afternoon, when I was feeling particularly down, I went off the sun porch and cried. Strangely it made me feel closer to Mum. It started to become a regular practise and I found myself almost craving those times when alone in my misery I could bleed out my sorrow.

Molly discovered me one day and said, "Such tears for someone so young," making a ttt . . . ttt . . . ttt sound with her mouth.

"Leave me alone," I snapped fiercely, feeling instantly foolish at being discovered and at the same time angered by Molly's intrusion. I saw her only as reminder of Mum's absence, feeling certain that with Molly there to take care of us Mum would never return.

"I'll leave," said Molly, "if you think that'll make it better."

Doreen was a chatterbox in Molly's presence even though Molly scarcely bothered to say any more than one sentence to her at a time. It didn't stop Doreen from talking, however.

"Do you like Molly?" Doreen asked me one evening shortly after Molly arrived.

"What's to like?" I said. "She washes the clothes and makes supper."

"I think she's funny," said Doreen skipping across the floor.

Doreen spent much of her time following Molly around while she worked. Always Molly was singing or humming or whistling while cooking and cleaning.

"The turd bird's singing," she'd cackle, and Doreen would laugh and laugh. It was almost infectious, that laugh of Doreen's for it injected some spark back into a house that had somehow forgotten how to live. Strangely, I became accustomed to Molly's presence over time, to the smell of food coming from the kitchen, the orderly way the house was kept. Slowly, there came the undeniable realization that tranquillity was settling among us. Mum was gone. But we were surviving. I didn't want to admit it, not in the beginning. But it was the truth.

That Christmas we spent alone, just Doreen and Dad and me.



JAMES SKELTON

There was Molly, but then I'm still not sure if she could be counted, still for the life of me can't figure just where she fit into our lives back then. What I do know is I was grateful for her presence, the calming effect she had on all our lives, the way she had of taking something strange and making it appear normal, an anchor that kept us from drifting too far from the truth. As Christmas approached the usual excitement I might have felt was not there. Although my life felt comfortable, manageable even, I understood there could not be those usual feelings of excitement experienced during the holiday season with Mum not there. I waited to hear some words from her, a card or phone call, my spirits sinking further with each passing day.

"Have you heard anything from Mum?" I wanted to ask Dad, hoping that she might send word to us over the holidays, knowing if he said, 'No,' I'd be crushed.

"You can bet your mother's thinking of the both of you." That's all the promise Molly ever made when Doreen asked if she thought Mum would come home for Christmas. Dad sometimes spoke like she had gone to a foreign land visiting and perhaps Doreen believed that was the case, but I knew different. Mom had packed her things and left without a word. She hadn't gone on holidays. She just didn't want to be around us.

Doreen, like most eight year olds, was a whirlpool of excitement, prodding Molly as to the contents of some packages Dad had brought home earlier in the week.

"Is it new clothes?"

"It is what it is," answered Molly.

"At least give me a hint," Doreen whined. "Do you even know what it is?"

"I knows what I knows," said Molly with a wink.

"You're hopeless," said Doreen.

"I am what I am," Molly chuckled chasing some dust around with the broom. "What is it you want for Christmas, Mary-deth?"

"I wants what I gets," I replied walking away, not wanting Molly to see the smile on my face.

"Oh, a smart-alec is it?" called out Molly.

On Christmas morning there were chocolates and some hard candy in our stockings, an orange stuffed deep into the toe. I hadn't wanted to put up a stocking, thinking I was too old but Dad insisted. "Mum would want us to keep everything the same." Two miniature wooden cribs were sitting on the floor next to the Christmas tree painted in the same turquoise colour as the windmill my father had built two summers ago. Inside the cribs were handmade quilts fashioned from tiny blocks cut and sewn together. Mine was blue and Doreen's yellow.

"Mum made them," my father said as he watched us pull back the quilts. We gave him an odd look. ". . . before she left, that is. They were in the closet." Beneath the quilted fabric were homemade dolls with embroidered faces and yarn hair sticking out from beneath their lacy bonnets. Doreen picked her doll up and looked at her from all angles, coddled her in her



arms as she sat on the floor by the Christmas tree.

“Her name's Amy,” she said looking at my father for approval. My father was beaming. I looked at mine lying in the crib, smiled as I thought of Mum's hands producing the stitches. I was too old for a doll. But then, Mum would have known that.

At one time she would have known.

“Aren't you going to pick her up?” my father asked.

“Later,” I said. “I have to stuff the chicken first.” Molly had made the potato stuffing yesterday and left instructions as to how I was to prepare the chicken for cooking.

“You'll be on your own tomorrow, Mary-deth,” she'd said.

“There's plenty of time for that,” Dad said. His eyebrows sat awkwardly on his forehead, something I'd noticed since Mum's leaving. “We'll open the presents first.” Reaching down inside the crib he took out the doll and handed her to me. I felt silly. Thirteen years old and sitting with a doll in my arms, my father watching me like I was a child taking her first steps. I wished he'd stop looking.

“So what do you think, Meredith?” he asked.

I looked at her yellow, yarn hair which hung in two braids, the blue embroidered eyes, long black lashes, and the soft flannel nightie that covered her body and wanted to cry.

“She's nice. Mum makes such nice things,” I said, hoping to please him in some small way. When he smiled I saw his mouth quiver ever so slightly. It made me sad, seeing him that way. Always it made me feel sad.

We opened the presents from Dad: new winter boots, tops and slacks, all the things we usually got at Christmas time, there was a small necklace and bracelet set for each of us with tiny white stones, a Snakes and Ladders game for us to share, a real purse for me and a small teddy bear for Doreen.

Molly had knitted us mittens and caps, wrapped them up in brown paper and placed a bright red bow on top. There was no tag, just our names written across the paper in Molly's handwriting. I felt guilty, thinking that Doreen and I could have made her something, a homemade card, at the very least. It struck me then, just how little I knew about Molly, willing only to invite the notion that she was here at our beck and call, to see to our needs and in doing so, I gave no thought to hers.

Doreen and I had pooled our money and sent to Simpson Sears for a screwdriver set for Dad. Crawling beneath the tree, Doreen found it and handed it to him. He opened it like it was the best present he'd ever received but I could tell he was just putting on. I was old enough to see that much. I secretly hoped that somewhere beneath the tree there would be a present for each of us from Mum. But when the last of the gifts were opened, not one tag had said, “From Mum.” I struggled to keep the disappointment to myself.

“What's wrong?” Dad asked me once the presents were opened.

“Nothing's wrong.”

“It's Mum. Isn't it?”

I jumped up off the chesterfield. “No it's not Mum!” I

screamed, running from the room, purposely knocking over a chair in the process. It was in that moment, as I ran screaming from the living room, that the truth dawned on me fully and squarely like a slap on the face. Mum was gone and no matter what Dad promised she wasn't coming home.

We carried our cribs and dolls up the stairs with us when we went to bed that night, placing them on the floor near the bed.

“I'm sleeping with Amy,” said Doreen taking her doll from out of the crib. We both climbed into bed. “Meredith,” whispered Doreen. I lay silently in the dark wishing Doreen to be quiet. She turned toward me. “Meredith,” she repeated.

“What?”

“Do you miss Mum?” she asked. I fought once more to hold back tears, only to have a small noise escape me. “Are you crying?”

“No,” I lied, trying to keep my voice from giving me away. My nose felt instantly plugged. I cleared my throat.

“It was weird today without Mum,” she said.

“Shut up, Doreen,” I said, turning my back to her.

The day after Christmas Molly was back to do the cleaning as if that small pause in our daily routine called Christmas hadn't failed to thwart her attempts to produce a spotless house.

“And yours was a merry Christmas, I expect?” she asked, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows as they always were while she worked. I looked at her, then gave a quick shrug.

“How was yours?” I asked turning her question on her. I wanted to say thanks for the mitts and caps but didn't, thinking it would sound stupid.

“When you're my age one Christmas is the same as the next. You think yourself lucky just to wake up in the morning,” she said measuring out some flour for baking. “Want to help?” I shook my head.

“What was your worst Christmas?” I asked, then.

“My worst? I can't say there's been a worst. Christmas is Christmas. You take it or leave it,” she said.

One day in January we arrived home from school and Dad met us at the door. “I've a surprise for you,” he said. “Just wait till you see.” Molly, who was standing in the living room, gave us a troubled look. “You can come out now,” Dad called. The door to the kitchen opened and there in the doorway stood Mum.

“My girls,” she said as she reached out to us. Doreen looked at her for a few moments then ran into her open arms. She came toward me and wrapped her arms around me. I stood frozen, my arms at my side, unwilling to seek the familiarity of her body. She seemed not to notice.

“Look how you've grown,” she said standing back from us. “Molly was telling me you had a good Christmas.” She sat down in one of the armchairs and crossed her legs, adjusting the hem of her dress so that it covered her knee. “I tried to come but it just didn't work out. The timing was all bad. Dr.

---

*I felt suddenly brave. This was my chance to say the things I'd been thinking these past months.*

Hazel said I shouldn't rush into anything." Mum opened her purse and took out a cigarette; her hands trembled as she lighted it. Doreen climbed up beside Mum and looked lovingly at her. "I don't know how much your father has told you," she continued, "but I've been going through a difficult time."

"He didn't tell us anything," I said coldly, looking toward Dad.

She blew smoke out of her mouth, knocking the ashes off her cigarette into the ashtray with a smoke-stained finger. "I was afraid of that," she said with a sigh. "I needed a rest . . . Some time to think."

"I missed you," crooned Doreen. She looked ready to crawl down Mum's throat.

"And I missed you both, too. More than you know."

I jumped up from my chair. "That's right we never will know," I said sarked by the way Mum was attempting to smooth things over, pretending as if she'd been gone for a few days.

"Meredith, I can see you're upset," said Mum with a tortured smile. She sounded almost too calm.

"You went away without saying anything!" I cried.

"That's enough," my father scolded.

My mother stood up and held up her hand. "No. Meredith should be allowed to speak."

I felt suddenly brave. This was my chance to say the things I'd been thinking these past months.

"We didn't know where you went or if you were coming home."

"The coward's way. Yes, I suppose I deserve that . . . I left it up to your father. I can see now that was wrong. But you have to understand the state I was in."

"State? Why do I have to understand that? Do you know what it was like for us, not knowing where you were and when you'd be back?" My voice was horribly loud, my body trembling on the inside.

"Mary-deth," said Molly sternly. "Come . . . We'll talk." Molly led me out into the kitchen.

I paced the kitchen, wanting to run out into the living room to be near Mum, at the same time wanting to run as far away from her as I could.

"I want her to leave," I fumed.

"Don't talk silly. Of course you don't want her to leave,"

said Molly.

"She deserted us and now she's making excuses. Like that makes it alright."

"You think you have it all figured out Mary-deth," Molly said, "Nothing is ever that simple. The mind can be a devil. Treacherous, even."

"I don't care about her mind."

"No, my child," she said pulling me suddenly into an embrace, "you only care about her. Nothing will change that." I stood in the kitchen holding fast to Molly, my body heaving, sighing, releasing. "You let it all out," she said brushing my hair. "You let it out."

Things changed after that, the same in some ways, only different in some immeasurable way. Better? I'm not sure. In Dad I saw a softening, as if he too was afraid Mum would go away again never to come back. He looked at her as though she was a flower, delicate and sweet, her petals drooping in the heat of an August day. She paused often while speaking as if searching for the right word, covering up those things she seemed to have forgotten, silly things like the name of her favourite book or

the dolls she made for Doreen and me before she went away. Never again did Dad ask, "What's the matter Mum?" afraid perhaps of what the answer might be.

Doreen, who had seemed untouched by Mum's absence, had nightmares for weeks after her return, crying out for her in those moments before fully awake, quieting upon the realization that Mum was there.

Over time I began to understand Mum better, realizing that beneath the guise of motherhood was a person, with thoughts and feelings and fears . . . so many fears. Then too, I also saw her strength, her determination to come back to us, the courage it must have taken on her part to get better. I'm not sure what they did to her in that hospital, if they ran electricity through her brain the way I have heard they used to do so often back in the sixties, but what I do know is that she did come back to us, at least some part of her did. Life is so very complex, a mixture of known and unknown, truths and untruths. And as Molly so rightly put it that day in the kitchen, "Nothing is ever that simple."





# Hadley's instincts

LORI ANN BLOOMFIELD

Hadley had impulsively stepped into this brightly painted coffee shop driven by fatigue and lured by the glass case filled with cakes and pastries. As she perched on a chair that didn't balance properly, a mug of lemon tea and a slice of chocolate cake with a fancy name she couldn't remember in front of her, she began to regret her impulsiveness. She was the only person sitting alone.

Feeling self-conscious, she sat with her back overly straight, her head bowed. Her tea was too hot to drink and as a rule she never ate without having something nearby she could gulp in case of choking. She blew on the tea, impatiently waiting for it to cool. Though Hadley had never choked on anything in her life she believed you could never be too careful.

Remembering the copy of *Jump* she had picked up earlier, Hadley bent down and retrieved it from her tote bag. *Jump* was a free weekly newspaper. Spreading it open on the table, she attempted to look absorbed by it. As she turned the pages she occasionally glanced up furtively. The small coffee shop was quickly filling up with young people and noise; almost every table was now occupied. The sounds of music and laughter were beginning to mount, bouncing off the walls and jarring Hadley's nerves. Feeling old and out of place all she wanted to do was finish her food and go.

Even though the tea had cooled only enough to be sipped, not gulped, Hadley plunged her plastic fork into the cake. She would chew carefully. The cake was a triple layer, dark chocolate concoction, so tall she smeared icing across her cheek trying to maneuver a forkful into her mouth. As she wiped it off she glanced around to see if anyone had noticed and was relieved to discover none of the self-absorbed young people were paying any attention to her. I could rob this place and get away with it, she thought. No one here would even be able to give a description of me to the police. As her daydream gathered momentum she was soon robbing banks and jewellery stores, baffling the police with her flawless, invisible escapes. Hadley was envisioning newspaper stories about herself and trying to think up a headline worthy nickname when she was bumped from behind and almost knocked off her chair.

"Sorry. I didn't hurt you, did I?"

Startled, Hadley looked up at the man who had jostled her out of her reverie. Noticing the grey in his hair she was secretly glad not to be the oldest person in the shop.

"I'm fine," Hadley answered.

He smiled down at her and hesitated only a second before asking, "Would you mind if I joined you? All the tables are taken."

Hadley quickly glanced around to see if he was lying, but there were no empty tables. Reluctantly she folded her newspaper and motioned for him to sit down. She was not good at thinking up excuses quickly.

"Thanks. I come here almost every Saturday but have

never seen it so busy. It must be the gorgeous weather," the stranger said as he sank down onto the chair opposite her.

Feeling flustered Hadley smiled back but said nothing. She watched as he stirred two packets of sugar into his coffee. She guessed he was in his late forties, probably five years or so older than herself.

"Do you live around here?" the stranger asked, leaning across the table so Hadley could hear him over the din.

Hadley thought the question impertinent. "No! I was doing some shopping nearby and wanted to sit down for a moment."

A tall boy wearing baggy pants and a baseball hat twisted sideways rushed by, knocking Hadley's chair and causing her to spill her tea. The stranger half rose and put out an arm to steady her. "Would you like to switch seats?"

"No. I'm fine, really." Hadley motioned for him to sit back down while she used her only napkin to soak up the spilt tea. She fussed with the spill long after it had been mopped up, feeling embarrassed and wishing she could leave.

"They take a bit of getting used to," the stranger said, jerking his head towards the kids. "I work at the university so I know what they are like."

"At the university? That's interesting." Hadley wondered if he was a professor.

"I manage the campus bookstore. Thankless work that is." He lowered his head and shook it in mock despair.

Hadley giggled in spite of herself.

"What do you do?" he asked.

"I work in a knitting shop."

"I can't knit but it looks like you enjoy reading," the stranger said, motioning to the bag of books at Hadley's feet. He craned his head, trying to read the title on top but Hadley nudged the bag under the table. She was embarrassed by her bag of murder mysteries after discovering he worked at the university bookstore. He probably only read serious literature.

"I was poking around the used bookstores earlier." Hadley could feel herself blushing. "Found some things I couldn't resist."

"I love to read, too. Sometimes I'm afraid my house will collapse under the weight of all my books," he laughed. He had a smooth deep voice like a radio announcer's.

He gazed at the tabletop for a few moments before pointing to Hadley's hand. "That's an interesting ring."

Hadley was beginning to feel like a specimen under a microscope. She was unused to having so much attention paid to her but held out her right hand, obedient as a little girl. "It belonged to my grandmother. It's an opal."

They sat in silence. The music had been turned up louder and the steady, pulsing beat was giving Hadley a headache. The stranger sipped his coffee calmly while Hadley nervously pushed the remaining bit of cake around her plate. The coffee shop was so crowded the door was barely visible from where she sat.

At the same moment four people stood up and left, the stranger asked, "Do you read Jump every week?" Their sudden vacancy had created enough of a tear in the crowd for Hadley to see a rectangle of sunlight and the sidewalk beckoning beyond.

Without taking her eyes off the doorway, Hadley stood up and clumsily began gathering up her things. "Usually. But I really have to go now."

"That's too bad." He looked genuinely disappointed. Then he stood up and said, "My name is Steven. Maybe I'll see you here again, sometime." And the stranger, now named Steven, extended his hand towards Hadley.

"I'm Hadley. Nice to meet you." Even as they were shaking hands, Hadley was sidling by him, her eyes hooked on the door, desperate to be out on the street and moving towards home.



LADY MIDNIGHT BY ROLLI

\* \* \*

The next Monday at Tied in Knots, the knitting shop where Hadley worked, she debated with herself whether or not to tell her coworkers about Steven. Part of her wanted to; they were always talking about men while Hadley stood silently by. She knew they thought she was some sort of virginal spinster. But if she told them she would have to endure endless planning sessions about what she should do next. Hadley suspected in all of history there had never been a general who spent as much time plotting his next move as her coworkers did.

They would never understand that all Hadley wanted to do was think about Steven. Today she was imagining herself in tight blue jeans and high heels, a black silky blouse unbuttoned far enough for a hot pink bra to be peeking out, casually flipping through *The Joy of Sex* in a deserted aisle of the university bookstore. Just as Steven appeared, asking coyly if she needed help, Hadley's boss, Cindy, interrupted her daydream.

"Hadley, what are you doing?"

Hadley realized she had been tossing her head and smiling at the imaginary Steven. "Nothing," she stammered. Quickly, she refastened her ponytail, hoping Cindy would be fooled into thinking she had only been fussing with her hair.

Cindy stared at her suspiciously before saying, "I'm going on my break. I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

Hadley decided not to mention Steven.

The following Saturday night Hadley was sitting alone at her kitchen table, eating Chinese take-away straight from the container and glancing through the latest issue of *Jump*, when her name, printed in bold black letters, caught her eye. Breathlessly, she read:

Hadley

To the charming women I had the  
pleasure of sharing a table with at the  
End of the World Café on Sat. May 12th.

Please call so we can meet again for  
coffee or maybe dinner? Steven 781-1175

With growing giddiness Hadley reread the message several times. Her eyes lingered over the words: charming, pleasure, please call. While her chow mein grew cold she imagined dinners with Steven in fancy restaurants, tickets to the symphony, even their first Christmas together. She was smiling to herself and humming *White Christmas* when she cracked open her fortune cookie. Printed on the small curl of rectangular paper was: In brightest daylight deception may lurk. Hadley felt the ground tilt beneath her.

She pictured Steven in his house, anxiously awaiting her call. As she visualized the rooms she noticed a roll of duct tape on a bookshelf, then a length of rope on the mantle. Her imagination placed a baseball bat in the corner, handcuffs under a sofa cushion and a butcher knife in Steven's bedside drawer. The fortune cookie lay broken and untouched in front of her.



That night Hadley barely slept.

The next week at work as Hadley was sorting through a new shipment of yarn she tried to remember what exactly she had said to Steven. Had she told him the name of the store where she worked? She didn't think so, but wasn't sure. Each time she replayed their conversation she got more confused. But if he knew where she worked he wouldn't be searching for her through Jump, she reasoned. Still, her head jerked up in alarm every time the bell rang over the door.

That Friday, when the day the new issue of Jump came out, Hadley got off the subway a stop early on her way home

from work and ducked into a used CD shop. A fresh stack of newspapers sat just inside the door. Hadley slipped in, lifted the top copy off the pile then hurried home.

Once inside her door she rushed to the kitchen table, spread out Jump and frantically began flipping through the pages. There was Steven's message again, on page forty-four, in the classifieds. Feeling hunted, Hadley slumped down in a chair and reread the message. It was exactly the same as a week ago. She wondered if Steven had ever done this before. Maybe his name wasn't even Steven, she thought. Maybe he used aliases. That would be clever. Maybe there were other messages to other women right here alongside her own. Trembling, Hadley scanned her memory for any recent news stories about serial killers or rapists. When she couldn't think of any she scolded herself for not keeping up better with the news.

That weekend she stayed in her own neighbourhood, not wanting to risk running into Steven. Sunday afternoon she spent in the park near her apartment, reading on a bench and watching people walk their dogs. Maybe I should get a dog, she thought. A big, mean-looking one, like that rottweiler over there.

The following Friday Steven's message was in Jump for the third week in a row. Hadley had not expected him to be so persistent. There were only a few knitting shops in the city. Soon he would find her, she thought. That weekend she stayed in, pacing around her apartment and worrying whether three deadbolts were enough.

At work on Monday she was so jittery she jumped every time a customer came through the door. How could she have ever thought that bell made a friendly, tinkling sound? It sounded like a gun going off. Mid-afternoon she caught Cindy looking at her strangely.

"What?" Hadley asked, alarmed.

Cindy pointed to Hadley's feet. In her nervousness Hadley had been unraveling a ball of yarn. She was standing ankle deep in a tangled mess of blue wool.

"I'm so sorry, Cindy. Deduct it from my pay cheque." Hadley bent down and began gathering up the mess.

"Leave it be, Hadley. Why don't you go home early and get some rest. You look exhausted." Cindy gently took Hadley's arm and maneuvered her towards the door.

Hadley called in sick for rest of that week and stayed cloistered in her apartment with the drapes drawn. On Friday she ducked out wearing sunglasses and a hat to get the new issue of Jump.

Steven's message was gone. Hadley felt curiously let down before deciding he had probably found some other poor soul to prey on. I only hope she has my sharp instincts for danger, Hadley thought as she moved to open the curtains for the first time in days. As the sunlight flowed in, another episode slid quietly out of Hadley's life.



HENRY PETERS



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# S.A.D.

JANN EVERARD

Mark leaps up with the alarm and massages his eager body into the cotton containment of briefs. Katia hits the snooze button and snakes her arm towards the bedside lamp. She flips the switch and suns her face in twelve-hundred lumens until the back of her eyelids shine crimson.

The snooze alarm buzzes a second time. Katia rolls reluctantly from bed.

Mark bustles in the dark kitchen. He watches, rapt, the flakes of snow that gleam in the pearl of morning moonlight. Mark is eager to ski on the weekend, to make first tracks.

Katia slams her palm against the kitchen light switch, turns on eight spotlights, two suspended bulbs over the island and six recessed halogens under the cupboards. Mark squints. Katia bathes in the light, dazed but still somnolent.

Mark runs along the valley road dressed in a florescent jacket. He savors his runner's high, the Crayola strokes of the rising sun and the icy crunch under his trainers.

Katia roams the house feeling weighty and tearful. She toasts and devours a bagel, three chocolate chip cookies and two coffees. She calls the office, books off sick again. Her

annual leave is almost used up. It's only February.

Mark bites his tongue. He says nothing about the rising electrical bills, the musty laundry, the stretch of fabric across the front of Katia's jeans. Mark slips the business section of the newspaper into his briefcase. He pecks Katia's cheek, recalls the taste of her lips, the almost forgotten musk of her inner thighs.

Katia sits down to the crossword, impatient for Mark to leave so she can crawl back into bed. Her hair smells of oil and bacon from last night's makeshift sandwiches. Katia craves a sun-filled holiday to Mexico or the Caribbean.

Mark imagines a holiday from Katia's dark glances.

As he leaves, Mark reminds Katia to meet at Allen's Bistro at seven. Dinner with friends.

Katia begs off. The place is dark and gloomy she complains. Go without me.

Mark thinks he will and conjures up the glowing face of Jessica, the pitch and frequency of her laughter. Her exuberance.

Both Mark and Katia miss the article on Seasonal Affective Disorder in the paper's health supplement. It would shine a light on everything. Perhaps save a marriage that is eclipsed by real and imagined darkness.

## Heavy hitter

ED GARY

The highway trucker pulled into an all-night restaurant along the Trans-Canada Highway outside Revelstoke, and offered to buy Brad a coffee and a burger. Inside Brad headed directly for the washroom. The waitress stared aghast at the blood on Brad's army tunic but the trucker made a discreet calming gesture, then spoke to her urgently once Brad was out of sight.

Two Mounties walked in while Brad was washing down the burger with his second coffee. After the trucker made himself scarce they asked Brad about the blood. In the same indifferent, detached tone he'd used during the drive telling the trucker, he told the policemen of punching the guy out at the motel back near Golden, just this end of the Kicking Horse Pass. He woke in the dark to find the man in bed with him, grasping Brad's genitals and trying to kiss him. The guy's breath stank. Brad tried pushing him away, then started punching. He hadn't flown into a rage or anything, he just wanted to make the guy quit and go away. Brad didn't recall stopping punching, just that suddenly he was outside on the road trying to hitch another ride. It all seemed rather dreamlike. He hadn't noticed blood on his uniform until the trucker asked if he'd been in a fight. In answer to one cop's question, Brad said he really didn't know how he'd come to be in the room with the guy. He sounded puzzled.

The head Mountie, Corporal Rattray, said Brad would have to come to the detachment while they contacted Golden to check at the motel. Sure the guy's sexual assault on Brad was a serious matter, but maybe Brad went too far in beating him up. Brad objected he had to report in at Camp Chilliwack later that day, but the corporal said he'd call the military police if need be and explain Brad was helping the RCMP clear up something.

While they waited at the detachment for the Golden RCMP to radio back with what they'd found, Corporal Rattray asked if Brad would help him work up an identikit portrait of the guy he'd punched out. The corporal said he'd taken the identification course a year ago and liked to practice. With Brad making the choices and commenting, the corporal quickly developed a picture of a young, sturdy man in his late teens or early twenties, with a dark moustache.

Before Golden got back to them, Brad's eyes glazed over and he fell asleep. When they couldn't rouse him to a coherent level, a couple of young Mounties supported him back to the detention block. When Brad woke up twelve hours later he gazed around as though puzzled, and asked the guard why he was in a cell. He got no answer. Later the uncommunicative guard took Brad to a small room where a man wearing civvy clothing introduced himself as an RCMP detective from Vancouver. Brad asked again why he was there, and the detective said it would help him to answer that if Brad could first tell



him how he had gotten to Golden.

Brad explained he'd been hitch-hiking back to the Chilliwack army training camp after a couple of weeks leave. He'd run out of money, couldn't afford the train, not even a bus. He hadn't wanted to bother his parents for help. Outside Calgary a guy had picked him up. Very friendly, he'd been, chatty. They talked all the way through the Kicking Horse Pass after Lake Louise. He was interested in Brad's army career. Turned out he worked for the same oil company Brad's father had worked for back when Brad was a kid. It was well after dark when they reached Golden and the man said he was going to take a motel room for the night, offered to let Brad share free of charge, would drive him on to Chilliwack the next day. Brad had worried it might be a homosexual come on, but he was tired and broke. Anyway, he knew how to take care of himself. There were two beds. The guy didn't try anything. They turned in and went to sleep. Brad said that was the last he remembered.

The detective pulled out a photograph, blown up from a driver's licence. Brad agreed it was the man at the motel. Then the officer said that the man in the picture looked nothing like the identikit portrait Brad had completed with Corporal Rattray early in the morning. Brad looked blank. He didn't remember Corporal Rattray, an interview, or making an identikit portrait. The detective showed it to him. Brad said he'd never seen the man in his life. In response to further questions Brad said he didn't remember any conversation with a trucker, or indeed how he got to Revelstoke. The last thing he remembered was going to bed at Golden. The detective called him a liar, and told him he was under arrest for murder. The guard took Brad back to his cell.

The next day Brad was transferred to the Kamloops Gaol. He was a celebrity. Prisoners accorded respect to a guy who had killed some queer with his bare hands. Brad didn't enjoy the notoriety. He was more worried about the hands of an eventual hangman tightening a noose around his neck. The other prisoners said not to worry, the government allowed hardly anyone to hang. Of course there'd been those two cop killers swung back to back in Toronto late last year, but you could see the government had to let that go ahead. Brad focused on the "hardly," it left plenty of room for him to shuffle onto the trapdoor.

Brad's army buddies chipped in to help him get a lawyer, and his family put up what they said they could. The lawyer got a psychiatrist to examine him.

The psychiatrist told the lawyer Brad obviously suffered from amnesia about the killing, which showed signs of being something called "murder without apparent motive." There'd been a recent medical journal article on it. The idea was something triggers a deeply buried memory, a traumatic residue, and the person substitutes whoever is in front of him for someone who abused him in the past and couldn't be attacked then.

"But Brad told me he's unable to remember anything like sexual abuse ever happening," the lawyer objected.

"That's typical with early childhood traumatic experiences," the shrink said. "When something is too overwhelming for the young mind to register, it kind of shuts down. It deliberately forgets the event afterwards. Maybe it doesn't even register it at the time; then there literally is no memory because nothing was recorded, though there would be a discernable trace of a traumatic interlude."

The lawyer pointed out that the ferocity of the beating hardly squared with Brad's telling Corporal Rattray he didn't feel any rage. "That's typical too," the shrink insisted. "The conscious mind isn't controlling or even much noticing what's happening. What's involved is a deeper, more primitive part of the brain, what we call the reptilian mind. It's a bit like a boxer, reacting by instinct rather than from conscious control."

"So if he doesn't remember anything and didn't feel any rage, why did he go ape-shit?"

"Not remembering and not being in a rage, that's all at the conscious level. Deep down, he retains some recollection of a very fearful, very threatening experience. This is kind of at a level something like what the computer people call hard wiring. And when something in the present triggers it, there can be an instinctive striking out. The acts are ferocious all right, but they're not thought out and directed."

The lawyer was pragmatic. He told Brad a jury would be more sympathetic to a clean-cut soldier understandably fighting off an aggressive homo than to some psychiatric mumbo jumbo about an amnesic inner lizard turning a guy into Godzilla over something that might have happened a long time



HENRY PETERS

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*Brad tried not to think about killing the man, but sometimes he couldn't help it.*

ago. "Remember, the forensic evidence doesn't disprove anything you said to Rattray about the guy groping you." The lawyer dismissed the difference between the drawing and the actual victim. "So it was dark in the room!"

The lawyer was right. Despite the Crown Prosecutor's calling Brad an "army trained killer," and harping about Brad's boxing experience in the military, Brad was acquitted. He went back to the army, finished his training, and was commissioned. He was effective as a young officer. It didn't hurt him in maintaining discipline that word got around among the troops that he'd once beaten a man to death. But Brad didn't like having such a reputation. Eventually he decided he needed a change. He left the army, and got a job as an administrator with a municipality.

Brad tried not to think about killing the man, but sometimes he couldn't help it. He still found it hard to believe. Despite the sarcasm of the Crown Prosecutor in cross-examination, Brad's memory of the event really was hazy. He honestly didn't know whether the man had hit on him or whether he had just somehow thought it was about to happen. He wondered about something the psychiatrist had told him, that the triggering event could have been entirely innocuous. "Say he gets up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. He's naked, he's still got a waking erection, and because he's still half asleep he bumps into your bed. You wake up, you can just see him, and the sight panics you." Brad didn't enjoy thinking that maybe he'd killed a man who wasn't threatening him. But where did the vision of the guy come from, the feel of his hands fondling Brad's cock and balls, the stench of the man's breath as he tried to kiss Brad?

Ten years after Brad's acquittal he paid a visit to his parents. He didn't see them often. Relations between him and his father had gotten testier over the years. They grated on one another. While he was at his old home Brad passed some time by going through the family photo albums. His father was in the room when Brad was flipping the pages of one album from the late nineteen forties. Brad glanced casually at a photograph of a baseball team, the uniforms bearing the name of the oil company his father had been working for. There was a man ... he stared at the photo.

"Dad, who's this guy?" he asked, passing the album over with one hand and with the other pointing to a player standing in the second row.

His father looked at images from a quarter century earlier. "Oh, that was Kip Walsh. Yeah, Kip. He played second base when he was in town. Really good, a swell player."

"What was he, from one of the field crews?"

"No, we still had an office down in Turner Valley then, from the old oilfield days. He was ... hell, kind of an office boy, that's all. But one hell of a heavy hitter." It was the man in the identikit portrait, Brad had no doubt. The hair, the moustache. "Why you asking?"

"I think I seen him somewhere."

"Sure, here. He used to come over after games, sometimes, for a year or two. We'd go out to the bar first, have a few drinks and smokes, and he'd come over here and we'd let him spend the night so he didn't have to drive back until he'd sobered up."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, we'd let him bunk in with you, share your bed."

Brad felt a chill running through him. He forced himself to speak calmly, "What's he do now?"

"Dunno for sure. He's become kind of a Wandering Willie. Always some new job here, there. Never settles down anywhere long. Gets by on odd jobs and playing a little semi-pro ball."

"He'd be kind of old for that, now?"

"Still good enough for the bush leagues I guess. Like I say, he could really shake a stick." His father shrugged. "He left this area a few years after that photo. He ... had a drinking problem by then. He comes through here every four, five years or so, visiting family. Looks me up. Still drinking, of course, and still smokes like a chimney. We knock back a few and talk. He's forever in some different town, playing for the town team or a company squad. Matter of fact. . . ." His father got up and went over to a sideboard, dug around, then returned holding a photograph. "Last time he was through here was just last year, and he gave me this. Seems to me he said he was down in the States. He's been playing ball down there off and on for years. Looks like somebody's pizza joint sponsoring his team, that name on his shirt."

It was a photograph of a man in his forties, in baseball uniform. The same man. Maybe thirty pounds heavier, and with a bloated look that said he drank a lot all right, but unarguably the same man. Brad shrugged and tossed the photograph on the coffee table. He noted later in the day that his father had put it back in the sideboard. When Brad left the next day, the photograph went with him.

Some work at the library established that the name on the uniform wasn't a pizza joint. Gallipolis was a small centre in Ohio. And the telephone directory for that part of the state had a number and address for Kip Walsh.

Six months later Brad left on his annual vacation, heading out on a vaguely described trip. He was travelling by bus, at random. Buy a ticket to one place, then when he got there decide where to go next. It was in Regina that he decided to cross down into the United States. By the time he got to Fargo, North Dakota he still hadn't actually made up his mind to go on down to Ohio and visit Kip in Gallipolis, which was over a day's ride away. But at Fargo there was a long layover before any bus was heading out anywhere. Killing time walking around town, he came upon an open air market selling farm produce and home crafts. There was a booth selling baseball stuff. It had some good quality half-size bats for little kids. Brad picked out one made of hickory – solid, heavy. He slipped the bat into his shoulder tote, the perfect present for a heavy hitter.



# No Mr. Bojangles

ELIZABETH P. GLIXMAN

*The body says what words cannot.* – Martha Graham

She is dancing in the parking lot. It is hard to accept this dance as pure dancing like Isadora Duncan's sashays or Fred Astaire's tapping. No yellow voile scarf with a dahlia pattern flows around her thin gizzard neck. There are no shiny and scuffed metal clickers on her dirty sneakers. She is no Mr. Bojangles, no brush shuffle ball change. Her movements aren't like Gene Kelly's or Michal Baryshnikov's. No jeté. Plié. Arabesque.

Everyone avoids her. When she comes close to them, they cross the treeless street. No one is comfortable with her outbursts and accusations and the way she sings hard working old blues songs. They think she is a shrew who is stone deaf. Everyone at the apartment complex is medicated on some form of misery. But when Ettie dances in the parking lot their eyes fill with strange alertness.

It is hard to not stare at Ettie. She wears striped men's shirt and pale blue jeans, work boots, and her gray hair is short and cropped, her walk defiant with a thrust that says don't you screw around with me. She is small maybe five four and thin. She has five children from her life fornicating with a pedophile.

No one believes she ever worked as a dancer. No one is certain she has sons. She tells people, as they walk away, her sons have never forgiven her. I think, if they exist, they are embarrassed about their mother.

The dance happens at dusk and dawn. She must sense the change in air or barometric pressure. She walks into the parking lot that has become her performance stage and bows. The she becomes a bird. She darts, leaps and jumps away from the hunter's gun. Dances for an hour. Then she fades like the end of a movie before the light changes. She dances that edge of nothingness where we all have no form, are eternal, beings dressed in human clothes and manners. She is neither man nor woman on the black parking lot tar. A photographer from the local paper took her picture against the falling snow one year. She looked like a marionette on strings who had taken amphetamines.

I've watched her dance for three years. I never joined her in her gone rampant choreography and her recent finger clicking, knees slapping Temptation routine or her razor edge hip-hop until today. Today I danced in private, encapsulated in visions of lost animals, dead family pets eaten by coyotes or swift owls, and people who lived in the eighteen hundreds whose images I knew only from faded pictures. My great grandmother short and stout with lace falling on her large breast covered by stiff cotton pleats, my great grandfather, bearded and dark, the brim of his hat covering dark well-like eyes, a great uncle who immigrated to Palestine whom I've never seen.

I sway against the walls in my living room where pictures of flowers unfolding dance troupes and pictures of dead children in graves are hidden in ancient film title posters. I am a worshiper at the Wailing Wall, dancing, mourning. Like Ettie I need to leap and fly or I will go blank or become a harpy who cannot stand her screeches. I move in my room with curtains open slightly like a whisper.

Lorna in the rental office told me that Ettie is vengeful. "There is something in her brain, maybe a malnourished cell, that causes her to be that way," she says. Lorna thinks about nutrition "Be careful," she says. "Ettie says she is going to get the men who broke into her house and put bad drugs in her good drugs." She told Lorna she knew this would happen. Her ex-husband was out to get her. He must have taken her boys with him when he poisoned the drugs. Her boys hate her even though she saved them from her husband. "You mark my word that son of a bitch will get his if it is the last thing I do."

When I first moved here, Ettie knocked on my door every day, sometimes twice, to use the telephone to call her drug dealer. She smokes marijuana to ease her eye pain. This is her story. The management knows. She said they said it's okay as long as she doesn't grow plants. I told her in Canada smoking marijuana for medical reasons was allowed. Maybe she would move there. She asked me to buy her a map of Canada wherever maps are sold. I would miss her dancing, if she moved to Saskatchewan or Ontario, or the place where bears hibernate. Ettie told me we had a child together. It was then I knew her dancing was inspired and I could not duplicate it.

Since Lorna told me to be careful of Ettie, I look forward like a horse with blinders when I see her walking the sidewalk in front of my apartment, or when she is dancing in the parking lot. It is easy, only I have to be quick. She moves like fast-forward on the VCR.

The winter has left, as has spring. Ettie's arms and legs and hips have adjusted to the temperatures. She danced more when the sun was out. It is 7:00 p.m., a warm summer night. I see her in the parking lot. She has the map of Canada in her hands. She uses it as a prop. She flings it wide, salutes it and dances around it like it is a Mexican hat. I envy her. She has traveled far from here in her dance, and she is dancing with movements I could never learn at kick box classes or watching the Nutcracker Suite. After following her arms and legs, I go to my room and turn on a Bessie Smith recording. I turn on Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin, and Oklahoma. I swing and tap and pirouette and slither. And I watch Ettie dance in the parking lot through the slightly opened blinds.

It is 7:00 p.m. of the next day. Ettie is not swaying her skinny hips above the cold asphalt. I saw her at the picnic table next to her apartment earlier that morning. She was screeching, "God dam blue jays, you can't fool me. I know who you are."

She directed them away like a traffic cop. Her movements were dances hard-edged thrusts, more lyrical than a picture of cars speeding on the freeway at night or trains smashing

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together in the dark off curved black tracks.

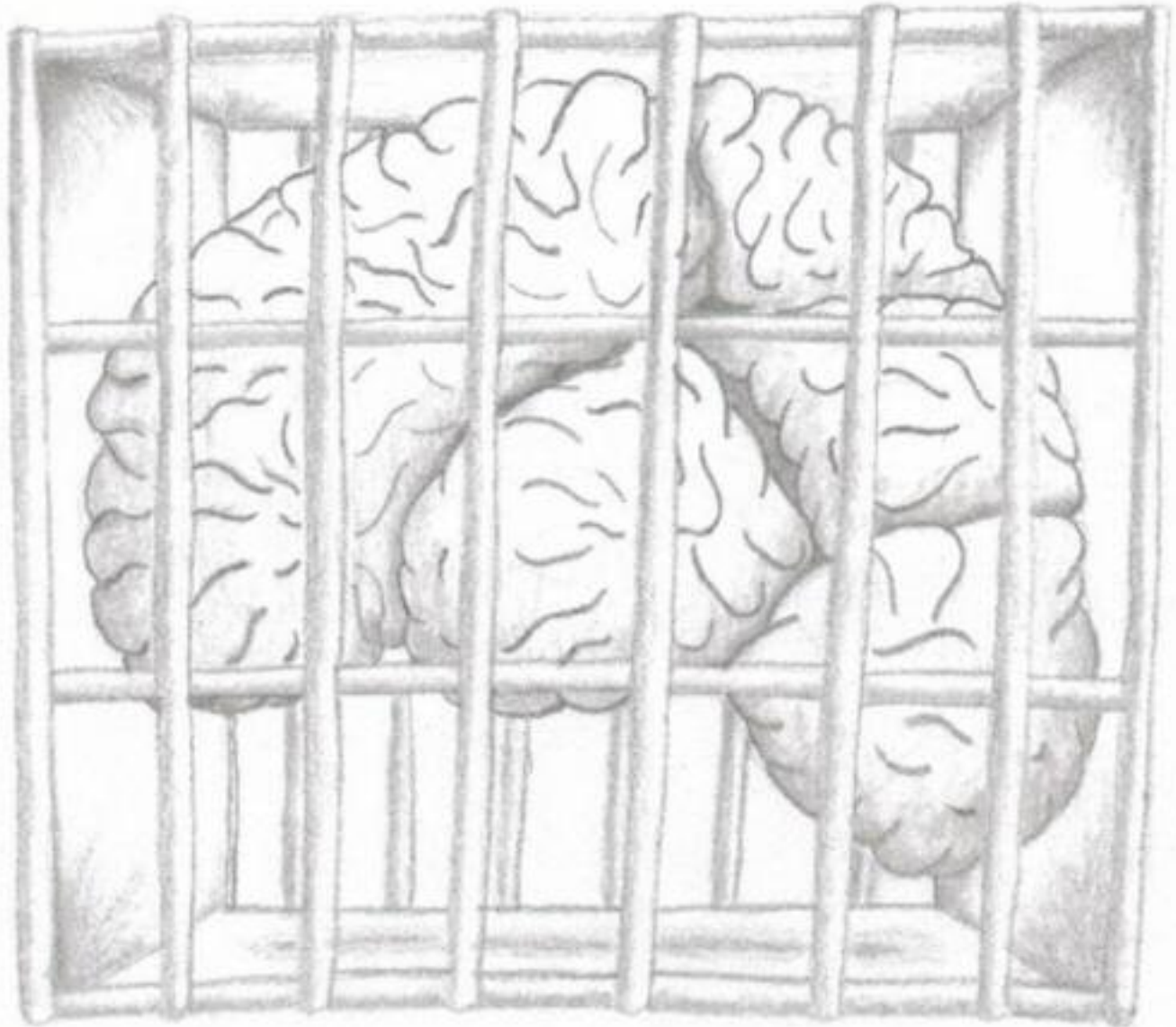
That afternoon she had been wandering the sidewalk with the point where her two legs intersected filled with a long tube that made her look like a man. I looked away from the crevices in the blinds and saw an Al Jolson look alike on a talent contest singing Mammy on TV.

For days there has been no dancing body in the parking lot. Through the crack of a mail slot in my front door, a white paper slips to the floor, a note from my neighbor: Ettie has been taken to the hospital. Her son came to get her. Her apartment is for rent. Do you know of anyone looking for a home?

“No,” I answer and turn to look at the empty stage of the parking lot and a framed picture of Mr. Bojangles tapping his

way to heaven on my wall.

I’ve decided. I will dance in the parking lot so people will not feel bad. They need entertainment to get through the day. But I have to be careful. I need to live here. I have no sons that might help me someday or a husband to chase. I know there is no hope that my deceased animals will return with my great uncle’s descendants from Palestine whom I have never seen and give me a place to dance my life unencumbered by prying eyes and people who sweep the parking lot of non refundable useless packages. Or people who hear music unlike any they’ve known and dance to that music at dawn and dusk when they can hear each note like an angel is handing the sound to them on a plate.



CAGED BRAIN BY DI DECAIRE



## Bloodlines

CHERYL RICCO

"My life sucks," Nadine sputters. "I hate it here, I hate it here, *I fucking hate it here.*"

Tears stream down her cheeks as she wipes her nose on the sleeve of her black hoodie. She sits in the shadows of her bedroom, her back pinned against the closed door blocking intruders from coming in. Her legs are pulled tightly toward her chest. A broken exacto knife tip rests between her fingers. Raw, nail-bitten hands push up the sleeves of her sweatshirt.

*"Why does she hate me so much?" Nadine asked her brother while he jammed balls of clothes into a long green duffle bag.*

*"Look Nad," David began, "she doesn't give a crap about what we've been through with Mom and Dad, okay. For Deirdra, Mom isn't in a mental hospital, Mom's dead."*

*"Mom's not dead!" Nadine screeched at David. "She's sick. She'll get better."*

*"Oh come off it, Nad!" David barked. "You know that Mom's never going to be the same again. She's on too many pills. Face it for Christ's sake, the Mom you remember is gone."*

*Stunned by her brother's words, Nadine stood in front of her brother, her long hair matted against her cheeks. "Dad gave up on her and now you're doin' it too!"*

*"What am I suppose to do, Nad? Live here under HER rules? I'm sixteen, I can take care of myself! I mean, if I don't get the hell out of here, I'll go crazy too!"*

*"Mom's not crazy!" Nadine trembled and flopped down onto the floor in front of the bedroom door.*

*David knelt down beside his sister. "Dealing with Deirdra is hard enough, Nad, I don't need you on my ass too. I know Mom can't help how she is, but crazy and, schizophrenic almost mean the same thing when you see your own mother lock herself and you in the washroom to hide from whoever it was she thinks was after her."*

*"But you're leavin'," Nadine pleaded. "You're leaving me here, with HER, alone."*

*"Dad's home this weekend, things will be fine" David said.*

*"And what am I suppose to do when he's not around, huh?"*

*David sighed, stood, zipped up his duffle bag and looked at his sister's dark brown eyes. "We'll figure something out. Once I'm settled in I'll call you. I'll check my email at the library and stuff so, you can email me. Okay?"*

*He threw the bag over his shoulder and moved toward the door. "I'm not leaving to hurt you, Nad, but I gotta look out for number one. I can't fight your demons too."*

*David nudged his sister away from the door with his foot. Not wanting to see his sister's face, he gently patted her head, opened and then closed the door with a click.*

*"You're my brother," Nadine swallowed.*

"I hate you," Nadine whispers to the darkness.

Droplets of blood bubble to the opening of the final laceration. The dull pain soothes her. She breathes more calmly and gently rubs the path of uneven scars and swollen lines along her inner wrist and arm.

"Everything's under control, Davey," she thinks. "I don't need anyone."



HENRY PETERS



# Mental illness in the family

DARRELL DOWNTON

Kallio, Wayne. *Mind Gone Astray*. iUniverse.com, 2009.  
Softcover. 272 pp. \$24.59

My overall impression of this book is that it is a good book to read. It does an excellent job of telling a story and showing what it is like to be a family member living with someone with a mental illness. It does a good job of showing the inadequate funding and poor facilities for mental health care. It shows the government's failure to provide proper services for home care for elderly people with mental illness.

I will now give two lists, what I liked about the book and what I didn't.

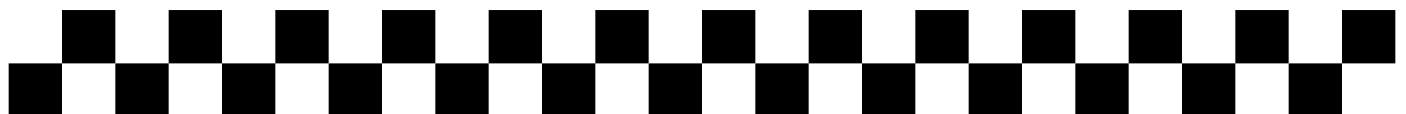
#### Liked:

1. Using words like shattered hopes and torment – both give excellent pictures.
2. Using a story-telling format.
3. Pointing out that few people know how to respond to a loved one suffering from a mental illness.
4. Giving a family perspective on mental illness. Not much is written about mental illness by family members, so the book fills a gap.
5. Showing the threat mental illness poses for close relationships.
6. Pointing out that a nervous breakdown can cause short-term memory loss.
7. Giving a good sense of the emotional issues involved.
8. Dealing with under-funding and poor care support.
9. Including the religious element without being pushy about it. Religious faith can be a valuable source of encouragement and hope.
10. Showing the difficulty of trying to understand mental illness.
11. Pointing out the importance and difficulty of family members maintaining their own mental health.
12. Putting very human faces on the suffering of both the person with a mental illness and the family and loved ones.
13. Showing the value of realistic expectations.
14. Emphasizing hope that is recovery oriented.
15. Treating recovery as a series of small steps, not big improvements.
16. Using humour in such a serious book. Humour is important for the health of the consumer and the family.



#### Disliked:

1. I thought early on in the book the story jumped around and was sometimes hard to understand.
2. I don't agree that ECT (Electroconvulsive Therapy) is a small risk. Loss of memory is hardly a small risk.
3. I would have liked a little more emphasis on hope to balance the emphasis on despair.
4. I thought the book was a little bit on the pessimistic side. Many suffering from mental illness are not as seriously affected as the book seems to suggest.





# Re: writing the self

TED DYCK

Park, Jeff. *Writing at the Edge: Narrative and Writing Process Theory*. Peter Lang, 2005.  
Paperback. 179 pp. \$ 35.

As part of my preparation for this fall's writing therapy project (see the editorial in the Spring 2009 issue), I've been doing a bit of research in this area. Luckily, Saskatchewan's own Jeff Park (University of Saskatchewan) has recently published a book that is an excellent introduction into the subject.

I say introduction because Park surveys the state of the theory of writing therapy in "Writing theory and the shift to process" (chapter 2) and "Narrative as knowing, evocation, being" (chapter 3) before he applies it to his own extensive workshop experience. As the chapter titles suggest, writing therapy is concerned more with the process than the product, and as Park emphasizes, the process he is most interested in is so-called freewriting – a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique in which the individual writes continuously for a fixed short period of time without regard to grammar, style, or (sometimes) topic. Because freewriting is often assumed to be close to the self, it presumably allows for the fuller expression of that self, which in turn leads to a healthy development and healing of that self.

Park is careful, however, to explore this assumption in two ways – first, he questions the notion of a unified self; second, he argues that writing, even freewriting, always has a social aspect in that it is directed to an Other (even if only to the writer as reader). These explorations lead naturally into a consideration of the role of narrative in the on-going construction of the story of any one of the several selves that a writer may inhabit. This latter role is an important extension of our understanding of how, theoretically speaking, writing might be therapeutic.

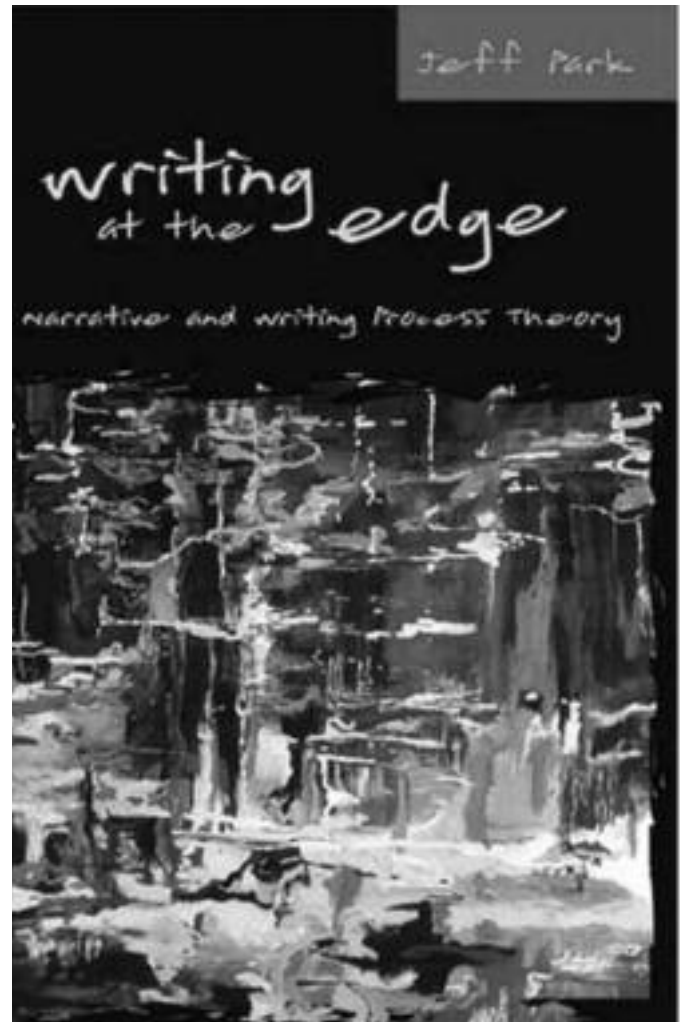
Of course Park's book is much more than an introduction – it is also a description and analysis of the writings of a group that he has facilitated for many years, a writing group, moreover, whose members are clients of the CMHA Saskatoon branch. That is, Park applies writing therapy theory not only to the experiences of professional writers, who almost uniformly agree that writing has a therapeutic function, but also to the experiences and writings of persons who have come to writing without any literary or other motivations.

In the central chapters 4 ("Narrative as integrated research") and 6 ("The writing of the participants"), Park re-writes works of selected participants in the group as first-person narratives and then analyzes these narratives to ferret out what writing means to their writers and how it helps to heal them. These chapters are in many senses the core of the book, despite their somewhat unorthodox methodology. To what extent these re-written narratives actually represent (Park prefers the word evoke) their pre-authors is perhaps debatable, though Park has tried hard to ensure their authenticity (inter-

viewing the participants, using the participants' original manuscripts, and getting the participants' approval of the re-written documents). That quibble aside, and it may amount to no more than a question about heavy editing, the narratives and their analyses leave no doubt that important therapeutic effects are experienced by the participants as evoked in their re-writings.

Park revisits at book's end the theoretical questions with which he began, re-examined now with the insights of his own experiences with the writing group. In his own words, "writing ... [is] the creation of an artifact whose meaning is always contextualized in cultural and social relationships" (133). A final chapter considers pedagogical principles underlying the practices of writing [therapy].

Park's work is, in my view as a writer recently engaged in writing therapy, an extremely valuable contribution to an understanding, theoretical and practical, of what such writing involves. Despite my reservation above, I would say unequivocally that the book is a must read for anyone teaching writing – whether for therapy or for art, process or product.





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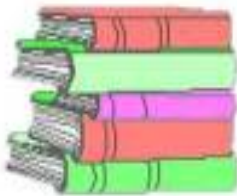


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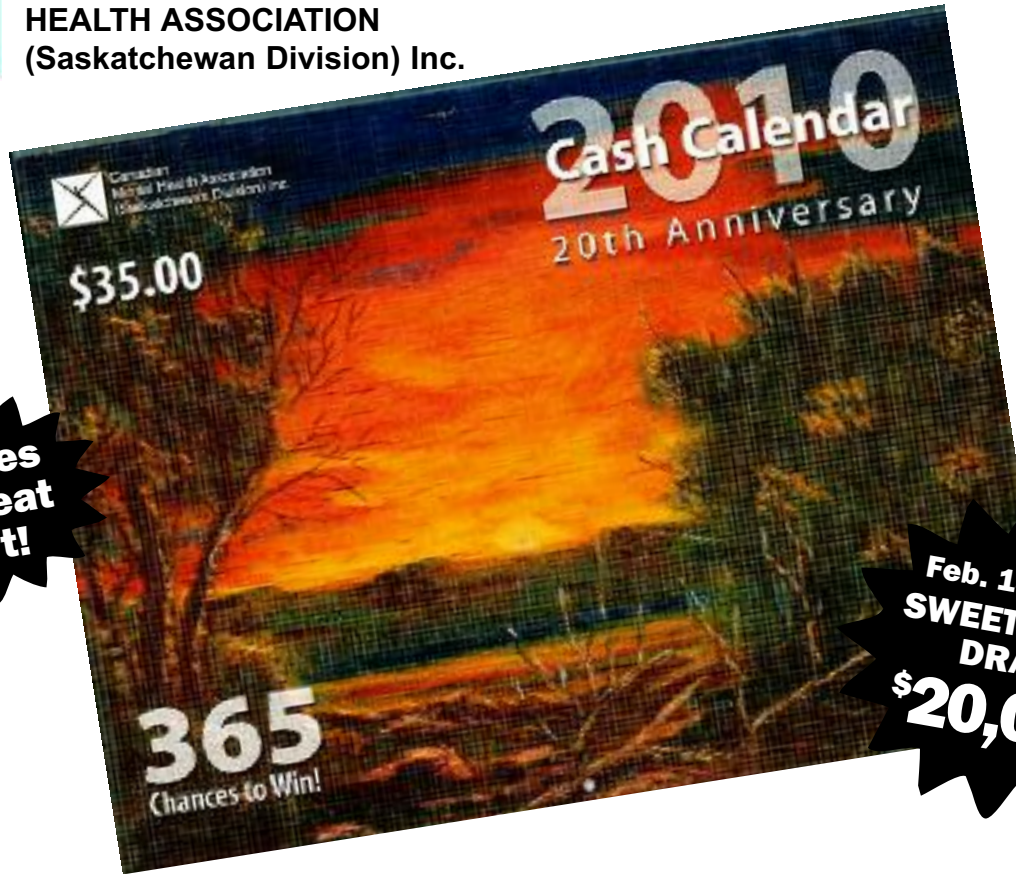
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