

# Bear River Review 2006

The reason the Bear River Writers' Conference exists is to encourage new writing. It only makes sense that we do what we can to help some of that work find an audience. Here we've created a space for people who have been a part of the conference to share their writing with their colleagues and with any other reader who may stumble across it. We hope people enjoy the work and find it helpful with their own projects. Enter and have some fun!!

*~Keith Taylor, Director*

We are delighted to bring you Issue 3 of the Bear River Review. We use this on-line format as a way of getting the work around to its readers but perhaps at some point we will have an actual as well as a virtual journal. For those of you new to this site, the review is for writing that resulted from attendance at the Bear River Writers' Conference. The writers began their work there—workshopped it there—were inspired there. And their writing inspires us. We thank you, our writers, for making Issue 3 possible and thank you, our readers, for entering this issue. Issues 1 and 2 are also excellent and available for you to peruse. Welcome to the BRR. Enjoy!

*~Chris Lord, Editor*

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# Lee Brooks

Lee has a sonnet in the most recent *The Iowa Review*, and one in *Light: A Quarterly of Light Verse, No. 54* (Autumn 2006). The working title of his sonnet collection is *Charms Against the Dark*. He is also a novelist, including: *Greensward*—Love across the race/money line on Detroit's east side; *Dana's Rules*—Real life and unlove at a corporate law firm in Detroit; *Xuliss*—Love in the land of sea monsters. Lee teaches writing at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, and is the father of two teenagers and one 21-year-old. He has been a journal-keeper since May 1977. He attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. We are honored to present six of his superb sonnets here.

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*Lee wrote "This Is a Very Short Love Story" at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2006, when he was in a workshop with Bob Hicok.*

## ~ This Is a Very Short Love Story ~

You made me fall in love with you – for this  
I'm grateful. Otherwise I might have doubted  
That my nerves retain their suppleness.  
And yet, in bliss, composure has been routed –  
You are far too beautiful for me.  
With years, I've learned I shouldn't volunteer  
My defects, but they're here for you to see –  
I hope your eye has not been too severe.  
  
I haven't asked your name – still out of breath  
At how I spoke, and how you stayed in reach

And answered – ah! Your smile erases death!  
And as for your bare shoulders on the beach –

Of course I knew you were already taken;  
I certainly don't feel I've been forsaken.

*“Once” appeared in Barry Wallenstein’s Poetry in Performance 34.*

~ **Once** ~

Once you said you still love all the ones  
You loved before me. Once you start to love,  
You told me once, your loving after runs  
Forever. This you could assure me of.  
So all the ones whom you loved after me,  
I gather you must you still love them as well –  
How wonderful to love so endlessly!  
Forgive me, though, for wondering – Can you tell –

How was it that your love for me once ended?  
You were learning how to love a new  
One then – Perhaps your love-rule was suspended?  
Now, however, you must love me, too –

Again – along with all your other ever-  
Loved ones – Twice my lover, twice as clever.

~ **Flightless: On 9/11** ~

Black coffee spilt in small white cups, a lot of  
Steeplly jungled mountains in the distance,  
A glowing sea – a scene we never thought of  
Till that day. Without devout assistance

We would still be wrapped in self-delusion;  
On that day, those lightless souls, who up  
Till then were luckless, too, and in confusion  
Boasted of their lust for death, blew up

The comfort we once took in numbers and  
In towering symbols of our super power –  
Our reveries fill beaches with white sand,  
A continent away from zero hour.

Beloved – we don't need to travel there –  
Darkness spills his shadows everywhere.

~ **Moon Wrecks** ~

A waning crescent, two days shy of new –  
The moon's reflective sphere now floats so near  
The rising sun it's all awash in blue.  
We only see a fossil's edge from here

A curving coral ridge as pale as bone  
So vaguely sketched upon the wine-dark sky

That many captains sailing through this zone  
Have run their craft aground before they spy

The lunar iceberg, most of it submerged  
Beneath unconscious vacancies of space –  
Trajectories of hope, now all converged  
In wreckage on the moon's umbrageous face.

When we explore that shore of pure eclipse  
We'll find a graveyard filled with crews and ships.

*"Rapprochement" arose from the confluence of a trip to Newfoundland and the reading of  
Thomas Lynch's wonderful book, Booking Passage: We Irish and Americans. ~ Lee Brooks*

### ~ **Rapprochement** ~

By dawn the boats are stocked with nets and knives;  
Men cross the coves to capes where Codfish goes,  
While back in drowsy rooms their kids and wives  
Sit down to eat and talk of deez and doze.

This coast is Celtic sod, the parish next  
To westerly of Kerry and West Clare,  
A scant two-thousand-mile reach, though vexed  
Inveterately by a troubled air

Comprised of countervailing Westerlies  
Who've vowed to blow this hard recusant isle –  
Where fixity is twisted in the trees –

Across the North Atlantic, mile by mile,  
Until at last the folk of Newfoundland  
May beach their island on the Irish strand.

*“Wanting” appeared in The Iowa Review, Vol. 36, No. 3. Lee read “Wanting” at the Bear River participants’ reading in 2005.*

~ **Wanting** ~

Bejesus gone, the customs of the clan  
Look crazy. Woman, she just ain’t the same –  
She lost what once belong to make a man  
Get up and make a song about her name.

It used to be bejazzments in the air  
Romagnetizing woman’s hair, and eyes  
Electrolyzing bone; and just a flare  
Of hip be like a hook to hypnotize.

That woman, just a girl. It ain’t your voice  
She listen for, but Momma, and her friend.  
That thing you wanted – that don’t be her choice;  
She want a baby, and the coin to spend.

That woman on the far side of the river –  
What she want you can’t no more deliver.

# Sue Budin

Sue Budin is an Ann Arbor poet who has had work published in Moving Out, Ann Arbor Review and Ibbetson Street Press. She has also written reviews of poetry anthologies and led writing workshops for youth in her work as a librarian at the Ann Arbor District Library. Sue attended Bear River Writers' Conference in 2001 and worked with Robert Haas.

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## ~ August before the storm ~

The boy drops his glass and water forms  
a small pond on the kitchen floor.

Outside, purple finches perch  
on an empty bird feeder.

“What have you done?” she cries over  
and over, her body hunched, stiffened,

the scream opening her mouth and  
rushing out until the air in her is gone,  
let loose, coloring the walls and floor  
with trembling words,  
all that passion she had stored like  
jars of grain to mold from lack of use,  
her words musty, hidden like yellow  
folded papers where angry verses spread like  
Rhorshach butterflies.

She must air everything out,  
the bed sheets spread on grass

and the windows open so wide  
all is revealed.

In the folds of afternoon  
there are shadows where the children cower.  
She is moving toward them, calling out  
sounds she doesn't understand. Is this longing?  
She holds it like seed in the palm of her hand.

Birds come.

# Rebecca Cummins

After graduating from the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, Vermont, in 1996, Rebecca Cummins continued the study of writing through writers' conferences at University of Iowa, Indiana University, and at the Bear River Writers' Conference in Michigan. Instructors/writers who have had the most significant influence on her perspective and style include Isobel Armstrong, David Huddle, and Thomas Lynch. In 2001, while living in west-central Illinois, Rebecca created the "Celebration of Expressive Arts" as a forum for regional writers, musicians, and artists to share original work in a focused, collegial environment. Although currently serving as a public school principal in New Hampshire, she continues to write poetry, essays, and short-short stories.

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## ~ So Hungry ~

I saw you duck into a store in Brattleboro  
so as not to meet me on the street  
today, I know  
because not 10 minutes before  
when I saw my boss across  
the street, I looked away  
and did the same thing, on purpose.

But I would have loved having coffee  
with either one of you:

None of us, I suppose,  
wanted to risk conversation

Without getting to have one  
I went instead to Everybody's Bookstore  
to look up an old friend, my favorite writing mentor...  
sure enough, there he was  
in a New England Anthology of local poets, even though he isn't.  
He's a Virginian.

So I listened to him, droning slightly  
with the nasal swell of superiority, sidling into that scholarly fad  
and I got a little sad.

I respectfully excused myself, and let him slip back  
into the throng of his high-class crowd,  
while I took up with another writer, a younger man,  
my daughter's almost-husband-but-NOT  
because he was so intense and neurotic  
(grinding his teeth all night long, no hope of a cure, but  
a jaw so set by dawn, he looked sharp and determined)  
NOW in a good place  
for one such as he – working on a PhD in English in Iowa City

I admit, I was a reluctant listener, pulled in only by recognition of his name,  
feeling a bit envious – of his slot on the roster of knowns,  
not his dis-ease –

but very soon I saw what was up:  
I heard the muffled scream, I knew the voice:  
one Gabriel Garcia Marquez, raising “A Very Old Man  
With Enormous Wings” clutched  
in his bound fist, I heard him  
rattling the bars of words that had been stolen  
and reshaped to lock him in and out....

and I was very sad,  
but very glad –  
this young man – who takes a writer hostage,  
who toys with a woman’s heart –  
is NOT my son in law.

Oh, the arrogance of writers! I give them up to their devices.

I started to leave when my old mentor tugged my sleeve and whispered.

Oh yes! Thank you! I breathed.

Immediately, I bought the humble Sandra Cisneros, invited her  
to the Mole’s Eye Pub, and sat with my chin  
in my cupped hands, staring into her  
deep brown eyes that she keeps wide open  
while you read her, and she offered me drink,  
more full-bodied and dry and rich  
than the Cabernet I was sipping (more to linger long than to savor).

When I listen to Cisneros read inside my head  
in her thick-tongued, racing, hesitant pace,  
I want to clasp her, fondle her words, twist them,  
braid them into cords, wrap her up, keep her close....  
but she’s so quick! She always slips away, like a vapor.  
She can’t be captured by any  
lover’s tricks of craft or envy.

No one can have her “Bread.”

Well, someone may snatch a bite now and then, and that she understands,  
if it comes from a deep hunger.

It's the fat and rich who steal the recipe and sell it as their own,  
never giving truth or deference to source, THOSE thieves are not to be tolerated,  
not to be celebrated – don't even listen to them!

I am only nibbling, I tell her, at her edges;  
my eyes begging only crumbs, I say, but when I read her,  
I “rip big chunks with [my] hands” from page 70 and  
devour all of “Bread” again and again,  
as if you can keep it hot and fresh from the oven with the heat of your chewing,  
and I can't leave her alone, I keep pawing,  
until I've taken her “Eleven” and her “Salvador Late or Early”  
and I want her, I want her “My Wicked Way” to be mine – all mine  
and my eating only makes me more hungry  
makes me aware that I am starving  
and I wonder if people at other tables  
can see my pouched cheeks  
saving up for a long cold spell –  
and the crumbs all down my sweater  
and the look on my face like the child I was  
caught in the pantry stealing  
the raspberry roses  
meant for Christmas stockings.

I am just so hungry.

~ Airing Laundry ~

These two stretch marriage  
like folding an old washed sheet,  
still warm from the dryer,  
full of static heat.

Grasping callous edges, they  
wrench it far apart-- outward,  
wide and stiff as if keeping  
tattered hems aligned at full  
arms length might ease  
battered wrinkles creased  
in restless sleep.

In mid fresh air quick snaps test  
the wearied weave:  
It breathes.

Across the taut expanse  
eyes meet and hold,  
poker-still, mischievous....  
shall we dance or fold?

Without flinching, inching  
forward toward the other side,  
they lift in surrender the thin white sheet,  
now cool and tender  
between laced fingertips,  
as lips meet eye-to-eye  
across the slackened line.

# Joan Donaldson

Joan Donaldson attended the 2006 Bear River Writers' Conference and worked with Jerry Dennis. Joan and her husband are organic blueberry farmers and traditional musicians. She brought her harp to the conference and one of her fondest memories is when a camper in the cottage next door said: "I was sitting on the porch thinking that this place is heavenly and then I heard harp music floating from your cottage!"

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## ~ Wings of Snow ~

In the early morning twilight, I sink my shovel into eighteen inches of lake effect snow that smothers the path between my house and the goat barn. Snowflakes swirl around me. Ribbons of snow twist and curl from the gray swollen clouds drifting off of Lake Michigan and across our fruit farm. A great horned owl calls from the woods; his voice ripples over the quarter mile separating his abode from mine. Although December snows sift over the land, his cry hints that the earth's orbit shifts towards the days in February when the great horned owl's call will draw to him a mate.

My husband and I rarely glimpse the gray tufted giant, but his diminutive relative, the screech owl, has blinked

at us. Sometimes he perches on one of the posts supporting the bird feeder, waiting for a vole to pop through the snow. One winter the screech owl resided in the second story of our barn where my husband stores his weights, and on drizzly days when John lifted dumbbells, the little owl's head followed John's motions. After January's arctic air ruffled his feathers, he moved into the wood duck house overlooking our woodshed, and every evening he would watch us trudge through the snow carrying an armload of firewood.

Wind lifts the limbs of the red pines shielding my house and snow sprays like a stream foaming over a waterfall, misting my face. The odor of wet wool rises from my mittens. The rooster crows, wondering when I will serve breakfast to the inhabitants of

the barn. I dig in my shovel and toss the feathery powder. Now the great horned owl is silent.

A few years back during another snowstorm we were inching along a rural road that sliced empty cornfields. Wind sculpted wraiths of snow that spiraled and spun over the barren acres. Suddenly white wings dove past our car, skimmed the ditch bank and flew upwards. John and I stared at each other.

“That was no goose,” he said.

“Turn around, please,” I asked.

We reversed direction and despite the storm we spied him, crowning a telephone pole. We abandoned the car, stood beneath the pole, and gazed up at the two-foot high snowy owl. His amber eyes darted over us before he resumed his focus on the surrounding fields. How could he detect a tunneling mouse through the shawl of falling snow? Regal, impassive, he never glanced our way again as we memorized the flecking of slate gray that brushed the tips of his feath-

ers. We knew that the owl’s presence alerted us that further north his food supply had dwindled. He had migrated south along the lakeshore, a wintry gift for those whose eyes scanned the sky. A car stopped.

“Need help?” the driver asked, snow blowing through his rolled-down window.

“No, thanks. We’re looking at the snowy owl.” John pointed.

The driver glanced, smiled, and drove away. After two other cars paused, we tumbled back into our warm vehicle, thankful for the rural code to assist any stalled vehicle, yet not wanting to deceive those offering their help. I looked back as our tires rumbled along the rutted road. The visitor from the north vanished in a sweep of snow.

# Suzanne Fleming

Suzanne Fleming is a free-lance writer who contributed to the Ann Arbor News science section and the Ann Arbor Observer during the 1980s and 90s. She took up her pen again to write about her real-life return to the North for the Bear River Writers' Conference. There she attended Jerry Dennis's nature writing workshop and also took a fly-fishing lesson from him. Suzanne works at the University of Michigan Health System as a program coordinator and plans to continue to write about nature and the environment.

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## ~ North ~

After West Branch, the trees began to thicken. Dark evergreens appeared and against them the slash of white birch. The air felt different, too. Cooler and smelling of pine. Her heart always quickened as she came to this point where the flat fields gave way to woods. Passing trucks became fewer, the silences longer.

In anticipation of northern Michigan, she rolled down the car window. A rush of air. Sun grazed her forearm as it rested on the sill. The breeze lifted her hair. She felt light.

Yet she was afraid, too, and felt a tightening in her gut. For the North brought memories. Too many.

She touched her forehead and sighed. The long bike ride from M-119 north from Harbor Springs flashed through her mind. Even as her hands tightened on the steering wheel, she could feel the handlebars of her mountain bike, the taut brakes quick to respond to her touch. She and her husband had biked from Harbor Springs to Cross Village last summer. They had tunneled the canopied bluff road, pressing uphill, and then soaring down.

They had stopped for lunch at Goodhart where they had sat out a rain squall. At a picnic table under the dripping trees, they had eaten hard-boiled eggs, dill pickles and roast beef sandwiches. A group of black-vested motorcyclists had joined them, leaving their bikes, massive black and silver machines splattered with raindrops,

against his and her sleek purple bikes. They ate companionably—she, her husband, and the motorcyclists. They talked about the rain and the slickness of the road.

Harbor Springs was not far way, she saw now driving north on I-75 in her car. She noted a sign for Petoskey and Harbor Springs—100 miles. Not far at all. Too close, really.

An hour or so later, she stopped for gas and wandered the adjoining store, glancing at maps, newspapers, trail mix and soda pop. She stood longer at the fishing section. She knew nothing about the sport but found the lures, especially the flies, intriguing. She fingered the tiny tufts. She liked the gray-whiskered one with eyes. “What kind of fish likes that?” she wondered.

Men knew about such things, which lure to use, the best times for fishing. She thought of Hemingway’s Nick Adams who used grasshoppers as bait. She continued to stand by the fishing gear, not really thinking. She supposed she should move on, after all, she had filled her tank with gas and drank

nearly a bottle of mineral water. And yet, she lingered, turning now to watch the cars beetling by, glinting in the sun. The drivers seemed in a hurry to reach the North.

A woman startled her. “You fly fish?” asked the woman, pushing back her sunglasses. She was tanned with streaked hair pulled back in a band. She was wearing a dark green shirt, perhaps of water resistant material.

Her husband had worn a shirt like that. Moleskin, she thought absently. “No, no, I don’t fly fish. I’m just...I’m just looking.”

“Well you should. You’re headed north, aren’t you?”

“Yes, well, soon—I just stopped for gas.”

“I ask,” the green-shirted woman continued, “because I saw you looking at the flies and I thought you looked like a woman who fishes.”

A woman who fishes. She turned the words over. Good words. Again she touched the gray-tufted fly.

She and her husband had loved the North and had canoed the Pine and Au Sable rivers, but never had they fished. Yet she remembered coming around the bend in the road one late afternoon by an Au Sable tributary and seeing three men knee-deep in waders. One of them was twirling his line in the air. Glinting, the heavy line, looping rhythmically, caught the afternoon sun. They had paused in their car and watched the artistry of the fly fishers. She had wondered then what it would feel like to lay out a line and have the fly light just like an insect on the water. Power and lightness.

They had planned to return north this summer. For one thing, there were the green Adirondack chairs they had seen stacked outside a garden shop. They had hoped to return and buy them when they had more room in the trunk of the car. The chairs would fit well on their deck at home. She thought now that she might have seen them earlier, the chairs, as she sped by a nameless town. No reason to stop now.

Her husband had died suddenly just before Thanksgiving. He too had loved the North, the wild ferns, the birch, the life close to nature. "It is good," he had said. She had a momentary desire to turn back and stop and buy the chairs, as if it would bring him back. As if the long winter had been a nightmare.

Now she was alone, standing in a gas station store.

"I have a brochure here," said the woman in green, with a friendly quizzical face. "There's a group of us—women who fly fish."

Did she know then, this woman in green, that she had lost something—the one with whom she had traveled here and dreamed of endless days of hiking and exploring the rivers of the North one by one.

"Well I might. I mean, I could learn," she responded.

"There's good fishing in the Au Sable. And we'll be meeting this Saturday. Join us if you wish."

She took the brochure and saw photos. Women holding fish, smiling. Names, places. Places she could go.

She had intended to visit a friend in Harbor Springs, to visit familiar roads and to bike. But suddenly, the thought of holding a fly rod and standing alone, she and the river, beckoned. It would be good, she thought. A woman who fishes.

Yes, she thought, she might join them, these women who fly fished. There would be plenty of times to visit Harbor Springs and old friends. There would plenty of times she could return to places of memory.

But this was the time to fish.

She consulted her map, seeing the pink line towards Grayling. She traced the new road she would have to find. She could be there in an hour. She could spend the next day studying the river and visiting the fly fish shop. Soon there would be women arriving, like the woman in green, friendly, she hoped, and comfortable in the outdoors. Women from whom she could

learn. There would be cool green water, sun-dappled in places, and shady along the riverbanks. And there would be fish. Big speckled trout, like those held proudly by the smiling women in the photos.

# Steve Gilzow

Steve Gilzow devoted nearly 30 years of his life teaching 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade in Milan, Michigan. He loved it. He counts many of his former students and their parents among his friends. Since retiring in 2004, he has published two feature articles in the Ann Arbor Observer. He has also created the artwork for four Observer covers. Steve lives on a dirt road between Saline and Milan with his lovely wife, Ava. Their home is surrounded by dozens of mature white pines they planted as seedlings. Their one daughter, Ann, works in publishing in Chicago. While at the Bear River Writing Conference in 2005, he made a point of launching his canoe in the Bear River outside Petoskey and poling upstream. This piece was started on the final day of Jerry Dennis's Sense of Place workshop.

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## ~ Marooned ~

What is it with June bugs? No matter where they find themselves, they seem stranded, incapable of travel, marooned. On land, their legs are too thin and short to move their bulbous bodies. In water, they flail helplessly. I know they can fly, so why don't they? Yet, during their month, they're everywhere. How can such poor design be so successful?

One morning in early June, I scooped a June bug from Walloon Lake while out in my canoe. This June bug was one of thousands dimpling the

surface. Some tried the backstroke, others the Australian crawl, none of them getting anywhere. Here they were, 200 yards from shore. They must have flown, drawn by some light that left them.

Floating among the June bugs were thousands of Mayflies. The water was clotted with insects named for consecutive months. Typical for dawn, there was no wind, the lake surface flat. My wooden canoe, Red Zinger, glided among the tiny bodies, her bow parting a small insect-filled wake. Most of the June bugs were waving their legs. The Mayflies seemed to

have given up. I felt like the Carpathia, too late to rescue the passengers from the Titanic. Had everyone been treading water all night?

If I could overlook the battle for life being lost by multitudes all around me, there was much to appreciate in this Walloon Lake dawn. First, and most compelling, the silence. I'd put RZ in the water before 6:00 a.m. Even the birds had barely begun. A single loon, a few robins, widely spaced mourning doves, a crow, more crows. Yesterday's sounds—jet skis and pontoon boats—were gone. The June bugs and Mayflies were silent.

Along with the silence was the building presence of light. The pink wash over the far hills off in the direction of Wolverine was giving way as the sun cleared the ridge rimming the lake. Reflections began appearing below trees lining the shore—cedars, birch, white pine, and hemlock. The cedars curved out over the water, roots exposed, defying gravity. A paddle stroke brought me to a line of four matching cedars. They leaned from

the bank, each a bit more horizontal than the last, a stop-action photo of a single tree falling. An old white pine reached above its neighbors. Its top branches pointed windward, like a turning hitchhiker, staring at a passing car, arm outstretched.

I was out paddling simply aiming to be present, to receive what's in the moment. For most mornings of the past thirty years, I've sat in silent meditation for a half hour or more, following my breath. The damaged knees that kept me out of Viet Nam also keep me out of the lotus posture, so when meditating, I kneel. When paddling, I kneel. This morning on Walloon Lake, during the time of day when my mind is accustomed to following the breath, the practice seems to continue. Paddle strokes become inhalations and exhalations.

As I glide closer to shore, the sandy lake bottom comes up. Snails wander, carving tiny furrows. Trunks of cedars lay jumbled, ready for a game of giant pick-up sticks. Only the trunks are there—what happens to the branches?

A few feet from the bank, gentle waves catch the light. The bulge of water is a long sliding lens, magnifying and distorting stones below. On the other side of the canoe, light reaches the bottom as a wavering, golden net. The net slides over zebra mussels. Here, so close to shore, there are no Mayflies, no dog-paddling June bugs.

There is a narrow opening in the trees. A little beach, less than twenty feet wide, provides a place to land RZ. Hopping out before she scrapes, I pull her up on the narrow band of sand. She looks good there. I love this canoe. I take her picture.

It's 6:30 now. More birds; a redwing blackbird, others from that large group whose songs are familiar to me, their names unknown. The light is stronger now. Colors of stones wake up. I stand ankle-deep in water, my back to the lake, inspecting stones. There's a Petoskey, and another. I take a picture of the stones.

When I straighten up and turn around, RZ has left me. She has silently slipped away. She is a hun-

dred yards off shore and still drifting. She has never done this before. The camera is still in my hand. Without thinking, I take her picture. And now I'm marooned.

My first try for her is fully clothed. This won't do. She has gone beyond shallow water. I roll up my pant legs and wade out a few yards. In early June, at dawn, the water of Walloon Lake is cold. Not for the first time in my life, I am making feeble attempts at solving a problem, postponing the real solution. That solution (and I know this all along) requires abandoning comfort.

Back to shore, off come the pants. The deeper jade-green water is cold, but not so cold as I'd imagined. A few yards from reaching RZ, the bottom falls away; my feet no longer reach. For the first time since buying it two years ago, I experience how well this Personal Flotation Device, this PFD, really does keep my upper body at the surface. My movement towards RZ becomes a leaping version of the breaststroke. Not really walking, not

quite swimming; moonwalking astronauts come to mind.

Just before I reach RZ, I'm back among the June bugs and Mayflies. It would be easy to inhale or swallow them. For a moment, I am one of their number. Eyeball to eyeball, we regard each other with mutual incomprehension, all of us treading water.

A rope is tied to RZ, her "painter line." Taking it in hand, I begin the rescue sidestroke back to shore. Eventually, my feet find bottom. RZ follows me like an obedient, rounded-up horse, docile after a flight from the corral. For some reason, the spell of the morning is broken. A distant motor starts up, then another. Standing, dripping on the shore, I pull RZ completely out of the water. She rests there, innocent.

Paddling back to the put-in, there is a moment when I'm again surrounded by June bugs and Mayflies. I pluck a single June bug from the water.

She spent the rest of the day with me—trying to walk on water and

swim on land, never flying. She drifted away—died—in the afternoon. There was no line to hold, no way to bring her back. Maybe she was no longer marooned.

# Christopher Giroux

Christopher Giroux is an instructor of English at Saginaw Valley State University, is also pursuing doctoral work at Wayne State University. He has attended Bear River since 2004 and feels privileged to have worked under the direction of Laura Kasischke and Thomas Lynch.

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## ~ Threshold ~

Still hanging  
on its hinges,  
the door of our century-old farmhouse awaits.

Wanting to help,  
you clutch sheaves of 80 grit.

Belatedly, your mom warns  
of lead dust.

You dress in protest:

Hello Kitty sunglasses, yellow garden gloves, long sleeves.

You dream a future

of ironing, dogwalking, driving,

of patent leather shoes and caterpillars,

of Shiphewana and Halloween—princesses and superheroes;

how long before my secret identity is unmasked?

I talk of tomorrow:

precariously,

the door will balance,

on sawhorses, on flagstones,

be subjected to putty knives, paintbrushes, steel wool  
dipped in 1776,

a discontinued stripper,  
gleaned from the local antique mall.  
Black market,  
I like to think,  
history revealing history,  
whitewash, primers, stains.

While we clean up,  
NPR reports a woodpecker  
long thought extinct;  
movement of the dial  
finds coyotes wandering our sub,  
their days numbered.  
Remainders are swept up,  
brushed off,  
the twentieth century falling through our fingers,  
filling up our lungs.

### ~ **This I Believe: C Is Still for Cookie** ~

It's so simple you'll laugh, but this I believe... Sesame Street has shaped my life. Maybe it's because I'm a grouch myself, maybe it's because I was their target audience, age two, back in 1969. Either way, I now sit with my four-year-old, and I really get it. Literally... I get the celebrity

appearances and “in jokes” (when I recognize the celebrity), and as my daughter sits transfixed, wearing her one-piece footed pajamas, she clutches her lamb, christened Lambie, and I'm taken aback.

I remember watching, transfixed, with my own stuffed animals. I recall sitting, Indian-style, in train pajamas, their ribbed cuffs itching and inching

their way past my ankles. The letter of the day would float across the screen. Somehow, its relatives and neighbors, spilling from my bowl of Alpha Bits, would migrate from lap to mouth, the sugary coating never quite registering on the tongue. At some point, I was joined by an Ernie puppet of rubber head and open mouth, cylindrical sponge arms, the signature turtleneck.

But to be fair, this is all apparent, right? What child doesn't recognize the all-consuming importance of a chocolate chip cookie, the joy of a rubber duck, the treasures of a trash-can? And so, as my Ernie puppet was bequeathed to younger siblings, joining their Cookie Monster with rattling eyes and Oscar of matted fur, the more traumatizing lessons surfaced too: the anguish of being green, that growth comes from facing fears (if not taming them), the momentary hardships of sharing toys—and talents.

Sesame's lessons, in retrospect, also have bearing on my adult life, my work as a teacher of college writing. Working together and giving others

their due? These are the basics of peer review and MLA documentation.

The "one of these things is not like the other" song becomes an analogy for developing focused paragraphs. Remember Grover and The Monster at the End of the Book? A metaphor for writer's block, the fear of moving forward, the potential for joy and self-knowledge at journey's end despite—no, because of—the messes.

The more relevant message, though, still resonates in my living room.

Now, as my daughter chuckles at the mishaps of the brothers Noodle, I'm slowly becoming cognizant (yes, repetition is key to Sesame) of my actions and the emotional tsunami posed by a seemingly innocent response—"no," or "don't"—when hopes run high.

And unlike her classmates who've moved on to the Cartoon Network, my child is excited to hear REM sing "Shiny Happy Monsters," to scream "Dad, it's your song!" which is my cue to propose a dance-off. So, in our living room, in front of the bank of windows that face our street, I dance, whether dressed for the day or still

wearing my ratty bathrobe. As we spin, the cat, our neighbors, passersby, as always, act the judge.

So, with all apologies to Robert Fulghum, this I believe... most everything that I need to know I learned from Sesame Street—or could have, had I been paying attention.

# Leigh Grant

Leigh Grant teaches writing at Oakland Community College in Auburn Hills, Michigan and Macomb Community College. She has received Wayne State University's John Clare Prize for Poetry, endowed by the Academy of American Poets, and an honorable mention from the Springfed Metro Detroit Writers for prose. Her poetry and fiction have been published in *Controlled Burn*, *The Paradidomi Review*, *Cardinal Sins*, and *43 Negative 83*. She credits a great deal of her inspiration to Laura Kasischke and her fiction workshops at Bear River in 2002 and 2005.

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## ~ What Brian Fisher Knows ~

"It's not a hickory. Sorry. If it were, the leaves would alternate. Must be an ash." He held the branch in his hand, turning it over, gently. When he released the branch he shrugged: "Most of them are diseased now anyway."

I knew of the Emerald Ash Borer, the thick sap of disease, the wilting of leaves much too soon, of a tree standing alone in mid-May, naked, abandoned, disrobed—not like the others. I also knew that sometimes that was the way it was—that sometimes you'd stand naked, vulnerable, unarmed, weakened by some awful thing.

He had started young, running with the big boys at fifteen, the hard and fast boys who poured gin into their Gatorade, even as early as third period, the kind of boys who'd park at obtuse angles and irregular arcs in the drivers' ed lot before school. Sometimes during lunch he'd be sitting in that old silver Datsun, windows rolled up tight, Jim Morrison or Roger Waters' voice seeping out somehow, rising up in a sort of haze, the smoky trail of discontent, of angst.

I can remember the first time I'd ever heard someone use the word angst. It was in my senior writing seminar, the class that only serious students took, boys and girls who drank bitter black

coffee from stainless steel mugs in the mornings, who sewed political slogans onto their heavy backpacks and grew their hair long, or who wore thick plastic frames for near-sightedness. If you'd open up those backpacks you'd find Karl Marx holding his tongue, elbowing Jack Kerouac, with Howard Zinn reaching across for a cigarette in the dark. Those boys and girls never drank soda pop, only ginseng-laced energy drinks, or organic carrot juice. They used words like "bourgeois" and "icon," and listened to Cat Stevens and Joni Mitchell.

My teacher, Mr. Canfield, had said the word with such force, angst, such delicate enunciation, angst, that it echoed in my mind. He said it with a short a, the sort of way some people say "vase," as if only Bohemians and the French did it right, turning a simple glass container into a classical ideal that would never hold daisies, or carnations. Angst. If I had felt it in my seven-teen years I hadn't really noticed—I preferred to refer to it as melancholy—such a pretty word, so much more lyrical, so many more syllables.

Brian Fisher was full of angst. He was angst walking.

He stared right through the girls who batted their lashes at him. He preferred to run along during gym class, running off the track and into the neighborhood streets, down the main drag. On field trips into the city he'd slip off the bus unnoticed when we had reached our destination, his tie-dyed shirt a camouflage among the store-fronts and street vendors, his single diamond earring sending shards of silvery light into the air. He would always find what he was looking for, and it would never be enough. He would still crawl into bed feeling the same emptiness, the same nothingness he called his own.

Brian Fisher was angst—angst dressed in faded cotton tees, Birkenstock sandals, carpenter's pants. Angst with deeply-tanned skin and piercing green eyes. Evasive angst, angst breathing, probable angst, angst daily and nightly, angst on the move.

As of today, he had only been home for two months. He had been able to leave six months early. The cells were overcrowded, his behavior good, his honesty appealing, his memory of that night skewed, erased, unremarkable—his memory so absent that its absence was believable.

On the day of the first autumn frost, Brian Fisher became angst on the front page of his hometown paper. A month later, the miraculous absence of despair in his letters left me feeling a sort of Zen rapture, a sort of thankfulness for his acceptance of things, of his openness and peace. Perhaps alone, in the dark, lying still on a cot barely large enough for the length and breadth of him, Brian felt full—full of something, free from nothing, but nonetheless calling it home.

# Jim Halligan

Jim Halligan lives in San Leandro, California. He received a Masters in English/Creative Writing from San Francisco State University in 1982. He published a few poems back then. His writing slowed down for several years but he is writing a lot now, and sending out poems again. Jim teaches communication, conflict resolution, and critical thinking at San Francisco State University. He attended the Bear River Writers' Conference for the first time in 2006, and was in Bob Hicock's workshop. "Natural Cycles" and "The Pulse of Poetry" are two of five poems that were the result of his attendance at the conference.

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## ~ The Pulse of Poetry ~

Each time each poet hits a hard consonant,  
an invisible drummer living in the speakers  
scans the unsuspecting poem and announces  
the rhythmic click of its bones.

Each new reader appears and the drummer adapts,  
never leading, just pulsing perfectly as though  
possessing the skeleton key to all of our emotions.

For Keith's nubile guilt as his friend evaporated,  
a graceless bass beat, followed by a tympanic  
tickle for those who resist belonging. Beneath  
his thinning hair his rounded body shakes  
to the snare/buzz of all the women who turned  
him down even though he'd never asked.

Tim in his tow-headed crew cut, impeccable sideburns,  
sings of the shadow soldiers still dancing between  
mortar shells in Iraq. Somehow the drummer knows  
war needs the inexorable pound of Tycos,  
at once signaling danger and keeping it at bay.

Just before he leaves Tim's wife Carrie slides  
behind the podium, brushing his arm, and offers  
a lesson in logging, explaining the jamcrackers, who  
cavort on the river's cache of logs without remorse,  
breaking the ravenous logjams. Beating, it seems,  
from deep within the poem itself, insistent  
kettle drum taps accompany the athletic flex  
of the loggers knees, their faces shed of fear.

Later Bob asks, what if all the fathers, subjects  
of their sons' poems, gathered to write the answer?  
As men circle the ghost drums emulate congas,  
escorting the dust upward to settle in scared throats  
that struggle to harmonize their misunderstanding.

The last poet's name has cleverly escaped, but  
he is backed by the vagrant trills of an electric  
piano springing his man Tony-from-the-streets  
to life without apparent need of percussion, the poet  
and his hologram thrashing as one with the music.

Voice is the pericardium of the poem, shielding  
the heart's chambers from errant blows, buttressing  
the purity of each syllable. Every song line enters  
some bloodstream, pain travels in packs, faith

forms in our veins and arteries, like pearls filling  
a barnacled shell, like fresh beads of sweat.

~ **Natural Cycles** ~

I keep wanting to start the same way,  
doused in birdsongs I can't answer –  
I enjoy the nowhere they lead.  
Diligent legions of insects chanting  
remind me how easily they could  
commandeer our senses by tomorrow.

Naively we freeze the questions  
in the headlights' glare: how many  
finches can sit on the edge of a smile?  
How would pollutants explain themselves?  
I rotate in those beams like wayward dust.

Mosquitoes critique my blood, but  
I manage to mount the natural cycle,  
the leg swung over with grace, firmly  
fixing my ass between the cranking  
of the big dipper and winter's solace.

The surrounded night quiets its cricketing.  
For the time being I perch on one  
stool, time on the other. Insects  
and I magnify as the birdsongs lapse.  
The moon curls around the silence.

Now I notice how the mowed lawn  
has pasted itself on my ankles like  
allergenic Braille. My fingers feel  
for the answers they can't find. I wish  
for tender, white com-on-the-cob, heirloom  
tomatoes, their skins ripping on the vines.  
I wait for the warm breath of automobiles to vanish.

# Don Hewlett

Don Hewlett became interested in poetry from a “poetry crawl” during the Plymouth, Michigan, Art Fair in 1997, and began reading his father’s poems at open mic sessions in Plymouth and Ann Arbor. Don then took Creative Writing at Schoolcraft College in 1998 with Kathleen Ripley Leo. Don’s poetry has been published in the Wayne Literary Review, Poetry in Performance, and the Poetry Tribe Review Anthology. Don was monitor of the poetry circle “Your Poetry Group” at the Plymouth, Michigan Library for six years. He attended the 2002 Heartlande Playwright retreat and had a play in the 2004, 12-hour, play marathon held at Oakland University and a staged reading at the “Village Players Theater” in Birmingham, Michigan. He also paints and his art has appeared in the MacGuffin Literary Magazine. He attended four Bear River Writers’ Conferences; 2001 with Richard Tillinghast, 2002 with Keith Taylor, 2005 with Barry Wallenstein and 2006 with Bob Hicok.

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## ~ Bear River Bonfire Camp Daggett ~

Charring aromatics

Charring aromatics

A new log burning

A new log burning

I face its crimson

I face its crimson

And you sit snug

And you sit snug

So close to me

So close to me  
Wrapped tight in red  
  
Wrapped tight in red  
Our fire grows  
  
Our fire grows  
With heat on our chest  
  
With heat on our chest  
And misty nights  
  
And misty nights  
Cool on the back  
  
Cool on the back  
Sue whispers  
  
Sue whispers  
To keep you warm  
  
To keep you warm  
My arm extends  
  
My arm extends  
Over your shoulders  
  
Over your shoulders  
With soft verses  
  
With soft verses  
Serenading the fire

Serenading the fire  
To sleep

To sleep  
Holding hands

Holding hands  
On the wood chips

On the wood chips  
Path under tall trees

Path under tall trees  
To your dark cabin

To your dark cabin  
A goodnight kiss

A goodnight kiss  
Lasted

Lasted

(published in The Poetry Tribe Review Anthology, 2003)

~ **Playwright Retreat**  
**Camp Skyline, April 2002** ~

1.  
To write, I sit at an octagon table  
next to the north windows...  
In the empty fireplace, I imagine  
a glowing orange  
against the brisk outside.  
The light snow...  
swirls to the wind's rhythm, melts.

West... a panorama of snowless,  
winter brown, grassy hills...  
And descending this north slope  
a stand of bare trees so thick  
snow still rests within.

2.  
I remember the cabin at Camp Howell  
a January Boy Scout overnight,  
a light swirling snow. Rising early  
we carry the scout master,  
still zipped in his sleeping bag,  
roll him down the brown grassy hill,  
onto the frozen lake. We run back laughing.  
Our penalty, around and around the cabin,  
five times without coats. I smile... it was worth it.

3.

Now a Brown Hawk,... with wings wide,  
glides down this north slope at treetop.  
Reaching the valley turns east  
flies along the trough, then lifts,  
around and around in a long spiral,  
higher than the hill top,  
into a cloud of snow.

In the morning I'll hike the grassy hills  
hoping to catch a glimpse of the deer.  
Then I recall, like the Unicorn, these creatures  
show themselves only to a privileged few.

# John Hildebidle

John Hildebidle continues to await the appearance of his fourth collection of poems, *Signs, Translations* (Salmon Press). Recently his work has appeared often on the www, at (among other places) *Wilderness House Review*. He teaches English at MIT.

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## ~ Bearings ~

He'd been warned summers could be warm—but the stifling heat shocked even the locals. Still everyone said he had to explore. Dutifully he set out. He'd picked his hotel by price, not location: but it proved to sit right on the river bank. So if—no, when—he lost his bearings, he'd find a square (no challenge), walk the perimeter until he felt even the faintest breeze—then head out bravely into it. Presto!! Home base. It was a magnificent city, unlike any he'd ever seen. He vowed he'd come back, perhaps some autumn, and surely not alone.

## ~ . . . From Prague

### Just on the Ground ~

The bus from the airport features a sultry voice  
Announcing stops in an incomprehensible tongue.  
Still, I triumph in finding the proper stop, the metro,  
The hotel. Then, with time to spare and armed  
With not one but two maps, a stroll  
Decays into utter confusion. As always.  
Even asking directions offers no aid. In the end,  
Having managed not to retrace my footsteps,  
I stumble back to familiar ground, in good time

For a restorative nap. Now the need for dinner calls.  
The desk clerk's advice proves useless. An anonymous  
Web sage advises: Getting lost is simple. Staying lost is an art.

~ **Settling in Nicely** ~

The attainment of tedium – truest acclimatization.  
Isolations of language help – all the more  
To we naturally garrulous types. Strangers  
Are genial, but their English is passable at best,  
So to engage in idle chat seems like a great imposition.  
Oddities abound – seated over a beer in a sidewalk café,  
I watch a parade of revving Corvettes, with police escort,  
Shatter the silence of a noble city square.  
Tour guides hold aloft flags on radio antennas.  
Music at every corner delights, but estranges  
All the more. In a huge square full of jpeging tourists  
A shawled old woman strokes and kisses  
A pair of horses hitched to a carriage.  
To seem a tourist is the best camouflage.  
TV available but erratic – the Tour de France,  
Condoleezza Rice, Jackie Chan dubbed in Czech,  
MTV – writhing anatomy transcends barriers of language.  
Sleep is the true best home.

~ **The Last Night** ~

Yet one more terrace on the river, serving  
Czech beer, onion soup, venison. The flood-weir  
Murmurs equably, tour-boats ply the water,  
The air is sweet with the promise of home.

# Brian Hoey

Brian A. Hoey is a University of Michigan alum (Ph.D., 2002) and currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life, a Sloan Center for the Study of Working Families, in Ann Arbor. A continuing interest in career change, personal identity and the moral meanings of work informs his current research on New Work, unconventional arrangements of work, family and community life explored by so-called free-agents of the post-industrial economy. His work appears primarily in academic publications such as the *American Ethnologist*, the *Journal of Anthropological Research*, the *Journal for Contemporary Ethnography and Ethnology*. Brian wrote “Arrivals and Departures” at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2006 in Richard Tillinghast’s workshop on travel writing. This is an excerpt from a longer biographical piece Brian is writing on his first experience in Indonesia and before beginning his doctoral studies.

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Excerpt from “Crossing Wallace’s  
Line: An Evolution of Meaning”

## ~ Arrivals and Departures ~

I will be in Bali in four hours. On a monitor at the front of the cabin, our flight’s progress is tracked over the Tasman Sea. The plane’s white icon flickers momentarily and advances, herky-jerky, further along its arc from Auckland to Denpasar. The screen informs that we are at 39,000 feet—the temperature an unfathomable negative 54 degrees Celsius. I close my eyes and

draw in a breath, slowly, to turn my attention away from disquieting figures. I open them again to the landscape below. The land near Cairns is visible only as large patches within a sheet of clouds. Tracks of forest in an otherwise barren expanse are cut jaggedly by thin rivers that, in the sun, shimmer and vibrate like mercury.

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Dawn. I am in Bali. Drawn out of restless sleep, I hear a bubbling of voices. The sound saturates the darkened room and fills my head. Alone in still-

ness, my thoughts nearly gather in a swirl of words I do not understand. Although reluctant to consciousness after yesterday's crush of experience, hunger peels my body from the mattress. I rise through air thick with moisture and swing my feet off the wooden platform to rest on cool tiles. My head spins. Bracing against the wall, I propel my body toward a sheet metal door. Pushing past it, I step into sunlight. Relieving myself into a hole at the floor, I gaze up to see where light passes through missing clay slabs in the roof. Visible high above, suspended in bright blue and straining against earthly tethers, are dozens of kites of fantastic shapes. Some are like story tale dragons. Others mythical birds with resplendent colors. They jump with crackling energy in a breeze I cannot feel among crowded buildings.

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The metal plane too bounces through the sky. We dance together there, the kites and I, in the presence of a dark volcano high above the green of Bali. Kites and plane shake

and sway before Gunung Agung. Below us, in the shadow of the mountain, a tapestry of rice paddies spread out from the ragged shore. While in the lowlands, each paddy is a good-sized pond, as the land quickly rises into hills, they stack up into narrow steps; a staircase to descend. Down from these heights, through feathery clouds, I come earthward.

The plane circles over the ocean and tips sideways as it again approaches land. I can see a ribbon of bright white collected at the shore where marching waves collapse. Past brilliant sand and a splash of palms are scores of white washed buildings. Sharply peaked roofs of bright red tile that burn in the evening sun. Then we are skipping down the runway. The plane taxis, pulls up near the terminal, and stops. I release my belt, collect my heavy pack and poise at the edge of the seat. Welcoming passengers to our destination, the cabin crew brakes the seal of our cool metal tube and empties us, one by one, onto molten tarmac. We stagger in the heat, dazzled by the equatorial sun. Behind us jet engines whine, herding

us forward to the terminal.

I make my way through immigration and step out into the street with a two-month visitor's visa. Stuffing my passport in my waist belt, I lean against a light pole. Every surface is coated with a film of dust. A wide road in front of the airport is heavy with motorcycle traffic. Some carry what seem to be entire families. Women and older girls ride sidesaddle in skirts or sarong. Some hold baskets on their heads. Male drivers wear a helmet. Everyone seems to stare at me standing, hairy and dishelved, with my bag curled up at my feet. Surveying the area, I attempt to get my bearings. On one side of the busy street, the airport stretches out behind me toward a rocky shoreline. The other side is lined with tall, drooping banyan trees painted white at their base. After not more than a moment's reflection, I am beset by dozens of men who grab my arms and, in their broken English, tell me each that they will take me to "transport." The rest of the people on my flight have boarded air-conditioned buses to the insulated, upscale tourist enclaves to the north.

Although surrounded, I feel alone. I refuse to go with any of these men, partly out of suspicion but mostly out of aggravation. Even when single-mindedly stupid, this becomes a theme for my first visit to Indonesia: my personal quest not to be taken as an ignorant tourist. Ducking inside the terminal, a German vacationer recognizes my stunned expression. He offers to rescue me. I accept his help. Soon we are chatting as we wait for his Taiwanese girlfriend. Having spent a couple of months here already, he is an old hand. When Ting Ting arrives, he pulls a white frangipani flower from his shirt pocket and deftly places it behind her ear. We leave together and dodge nearly constant traffic to cross the street. Once on the other side, he easily flags down one of many blue vans with wide open sides into which people pile.

We have but seconds to leap into our own tightly packed van before it pulls away from the curb and speeds again on its way. I heave my bag and body in one motion. When I land inside, I find my head mere inches from an ashen

faced woman with rotted teeth stained red from the betel nut that many older Indonesians chew for its stimulating alkaloids. Nestled together, we careen toward Kuta. Where once a quiet fishing village stood, a Mecca for the globe trotting “backpacker” has taken its place. It is the first stop for many pan-Asian travelers. It is often the only stop for others who come to drink cheap beer, sing bad Karaoke, and pay for sex with local women.

Perched near the open door, the wind slaps me. Against the gale, a boy not more than ten somehow lights a cigarette. He takes a heavy drag. Upon his exhalation, I savor the unexpected fragrance of kretek, a cigarette made of dried cloves and tobacco. In a blur we pass by racks made of bamboo filled with tall, glass jars. I would later learn that these hold a measure of gasoline. They are a kind of makeshift filling station. Passing family compounds, I see women bent with brooms of gathered twigs, one hand against the small of their backs, sweep the sidewalk and entryways to their homes. Small fires smolder in yards to clear collected

trash and leaves. The acrid smoke of burning plastic mingles on the wind with kretek and offerings of incense.

From time to time, we pass elaborate Hindu temples of red brick, carved statues draped in black and white checkered cloth. Yellow and white flags snapping sharply in the wind above. Nearby I catch sight of a gleaming silver dome rising from the jumble of rooftops. The Muslim call to prayer wails over loudspeakers. Down an adjacent alleyway, a line of men dressed in colorful sarong and oval shaped black caps file toward the mosque, holding hands.

Over the din of the engine and howling wind, the German shouts something to our driver who yanks the wheel and slams on the brakes. The three of us spill out onto the road’s edge. Before our van lurches back into a relentless flow of vehicles, my eyes meet the old woman’s. She glares at me with apparent sternness. In an instant, before the van hurtles again into a stream of dust, her expression explodes into a nearly toothless grin. The

transformation unnerves me. I turn away to the sidewalk. Stepping through its broken surface, I almost plunge my leg into fetid sewage that flows in a gutter beneath. While I must proceed with great concentration to avoid other breaks in the concrete, Ting Ting and the German are absorbed in one another. After a short while, they point me down an alley toward a place where I can find a cheap room. They have their own arrangements, but I am hesitant to part from them.

# Karin Hoffecker

Karin Hoffecker teaches in Birmingham, Michigan. She was a finalist for the 2002 James Hearst Poetry Prize at The North American Review. She was awarded Second Place for poetry in the 2006 Metro Times contest. She has earned multiple awards from the journal Penumbra. Her poetry has appeared in numerous other journals, among them Across the Long Bridge, The Comstock Review, The MacGuffin, Mona Poetica, Passager, and Spire. She is currently working on a novel. Karin attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005 working with Peter Ho Davies, and in 2006 working with Bob Hicok.

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## ~ Another Look ~

The horizon,  
gray matter along 1-75,  
the bloody carcass of a dog  
smeared on the shoulder.  
I notice the nothingness  
of a constant green palette,  
how fickle the sun can be,  
choosing when to be kind.  
And how I am unkind  
when she asks,  
Aren't my flowers beautiful?  
and I don't answer.  
I can't tell her,  
that since he left,  
geraniums are colorless,  
begonias listless,

that the hosta is conquering,  
its leaves consuming the garden.  
Just as he consumed the world  
with his camera lens,  
teaching me to see: elegance  
in roadside towers, the delicacy  
of Queen Anne's lace at sunset.

### ~ **Thinking About Affluence** ~

I'm taking a chance on lawn  
pests this year, saving funds  
to replace an ancient, energy  
inefficient furnace, a stately  
old ash in decline. But my  
grass is lush, the lawn well  
manicured, so I look affluent  
to neighbors who know nothing  
of my finances. I ration a week's  
worth of \$3.00 a gallon gold  
on my drive up north. Gas prices  
are higher, the landscape different  
this year. I see Blazers, Jeeps,  
a Chrysler Minivan with FOR SALE  
signs planted along US-131.

Last year, there were boats:  
Pontoon, Sun Fish, a Kayak sitting  
roadside all summer. I wonder  
about the occupants of the poverty  
stricken shacks that pepper  
the landscape. I can't take my eyes  
away from the wood rotted exteriors  
hiding behind plastic windmills,  
glittery chimes, so many rusted  
crusted cars, stacks of old tires,  
a child's dirty blue plastic pool.

When I visit our family lake home,  
on the Walloon waterfront,  
my aging dog sleeps in the guest  
cottage. Not because of extravagance,  
but the allergies of others. I sit on  
the porch, her by my side stretched  
across the floor in one languid yawn.  
I still see my son, running up  
the barnacled dock, with the small  
mouthed bass he caught dangling  
from his fishing pole like a sock.  
I paid to have the fish mounted.  
He was ten and it mattered.

# Rajko Igic

Rajko Igic is a Senior Scientist in the John Stroger Hospital of Cook County, Chicago, Illinois. Formerly, he was professor and Head of the Department of Pharmacology at the Medical School, University of Tuzla, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The civil war forced him to leave Tuzla in May 1992, and he moved to the United States in 1993. Dr. Igic attended the 2006 Bear River Writers' Conference where his workshop leader was Thomas Lynch.

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## ~ The Destiny of One Contrabass ~

When Steven, a famous Gypsy musician, died,  
Jovan bought his contrabass and joined  
the tamburitza band in St. Ivan.

This Gypsy band played at wedding parties,  
family feasts, and entertained guests at the inn,  
who, when drunk, would ask the musicians  
to follow them home.

Jovan was a superstitious man.  
People teased him, saying that  
one should not buy the musical instrument  
of a dead man—his ghost could appear  
and take it away.

Though Jovan shook off this possibility,  
each night on his way home from the inn,  
fear spread through his spine—  
fear that Steven's ghost would suddenly appear.

One night, after more wine than usual,  
Jovan heard a very different sound  
from the strings of his contrabass.  
It was the saddest tone he had ever heard.

Oh contrabass! You cry! You moan!  
Your heart seeks Steven,  
it calls to him.  
Yes, you grieve, indeed.  
Such strange tones—that sorrow—  
it reminds me of a weeping winter wind  
that rhythmically claps in the night  
an open attic door  
to wake both old and young from slumber.

With midnight already passed,  
the last inn guests depart, and  
musicians disperse  
into village streets illuminated only by  
fragile moonlight.  
With his large contrabass on his back,  
Jovan heads home alone,  
to the very end of St. Ivan, on the side facing Silbas,  
the village where he bought this instrument.

At the very last corner of the main street,  
just before his own home alley,  
Jovan sees it.  
There! Behind the mulberry tree—an apparition!  
It is but the village joker draped in a white sheet,  
yet Jovan sees Steven's ghost,

come to claim his contrabass.

He grasps the neck of the instrument,  
with all his power swings at the mulberry tree.

A scream, a crash, then a long, drawn out moan and  
Jovan runs sobbing into the night.

In the morning, not far from our house,  
I found the ruined contrabass.

No longer capable of song,  
its bent wires still softly buzzing,  
while a gentle wind spread the sound  
announcing the sorrow of its death.

# Kathleen Ivanoff

Kathleen Ivanoff is a graduate student at Eastern Michigan University in the Women's Studies department, with a concentration in creative writing. She is currently working on finishing her first book, *Mercury Grayce* as the final project and will graduate in spring 2007. She attended the Bear River Conference for the first time in 2006 and thoroughly enjoyed Richard Tillinghast's wonderful workshop on writing about "place."

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## ~ Body As Place ~

There was a book of old brown pictures showing the people who lived one hundred years ago. The people, none smiling, had bright eyes. Some mean and hard, others large and wet; their bodies erased by volumes of grubby clothing.

We took a picture up north with a saloon background that was an imitation of the one-hundred-years-ago people. In it, we smiled with our newly straightened teeth, and tugged at the itchy lace collars and dull wool skirts buttoned over candy colored shorts. The outfits smelled like the cold, shut bedroom closet at our aunt's house, minus the violet sachet.

Outside, our sun was cheerful and we knew we had ice cream coming, then a swim. The sun in the book was not so generous. It caused squinting and dust. The children were as unsmiling as the adults. The baby looked like a dirty sweet potato, wrapped in white cotton. They stood there, expecting nothing, waiting for nothing. Just a dry chore or meal to fix coming up with the stern sun. Even the chickens looked tough.

Towards the back of the book were my favorite pictures. Ladies with hair grown down to their feet. It seemed like a miracle. Mom said they never cut their hair their whole lives. Usually, they wore it in braids, and then pinned it to the top of their heads. I thought of the headache I got from the hair-sprayed bun that I had to

have for some dresses, or the way my wet hair tugged my neck back after laying down in the bathtub or emerging from the pool. The ladies were naked in these pictures, but you couldn't see anything because of their hair. They looked at you sideways, covered by a shoulder, no smiles, dark eyes and the long fall of hair.

In the gift shop, mom showed us jewelry made of dead ladies' hair, though they were alive when they cut it off and made it into an heirloom. I thought she was saying a hair loom, because the jewelry was woven, but she meant it was something that you get from your grandmother. In spite of the delicate weaving, it had no soul, but reminded you of an appendage to a mouse colored corpse. I couldn't help think of their solemn faces, looping and braiding and weaving their old hair. As if they didn't have enough to do, embroidering and cooking and scrubbing. No time for laziness under a stern sun.

Also, mom bought us a science kind of toy. It was a transparent plastic

woman, 18 inches tall, with all her organs showing through. They rattled a little in the cage of her plastic skin. It was meant to be a learning toy—where we might spark an interest in biology or medicine. Unfortunately, we didn't learn the way the organs worked—only how they looked: thick, ropey intestines, a flat purple liver, and a heart with a red and blue bow at the top. She also had the optional “miracle of creation” pregnancy parts that snapped over her intestines to replace the regular flat belly with the small uterus. But you couldn't see the little baby inside. I wanted it to work like a Russian doll, but there was only the helmet sized uterus to see. There were brains too, like miniature intestines for digesting ideas.

She towered over our Barbie dolls, so we made her into an alien robot, like you might see on Outer Limits. We pretended the aliens dissected and then reassembled a woman they captured, but forgot to cover her up with skin and a face, so she was a scary doll—terrorizing our Barbies, especially because they had silky, tinsel colored hair and

beautiful clothes. Barbie's clothes could never fit her either—she was like a reverse Cinderella—trying to shove her giant glass body into a tiny, shiny evening gown. Soon we grew to hate the Visible Woman—she was like a hairless Sasquach—especially when you compared Barbie's tiny perpetually tiptoeing feet. The Visible Woman, with her big flat feet, would never be able to dance with Ken on a date, and she had no lipstick-colored mouth to kiss.

Eventually, she got stuck in the laundry shoot. When you opened it, a gloomy cellar wind rose up and the little door squealed loudly on its metal hinge like the ladies caught in dungeons on Rita Bell's Prize Movie. My sister had thrown her in there, as a prisoner, but she got wedged half way down, and we didn't tell until a nightgown got stuck on top of her. Mom poked the broom down the shoot and the Visible Woman cracked and fell through to the pile of towels below. I ran downstairs and collected the pieces. With her guts in hand, I ran back upstairs to look for Barbie.

# Chris Lord

Chris Lord wrote poetry in the early 70s, was Assistant Editor of the Ann Arbor Review, and a poet in residence through Washtenaw Community College and the Michigan Council of the Arts. Chris returned to writing in the mid-90s. Her poetry has been published in the Ann Arbor Review, Bonfire Review, The MacGuffin, Cranbrook Writers 2001 Anthology, an Audubon Society Newsletter, Black Moon, Lucid Stone, Current, Only a River Between Us, Poetry Tribe Review Anthology, Detroit's Writers Voice on-line, The Wayne Literary Review, and Poetry in Performance 34. Her poetry has won 1st place in three Ann Arbor Current poetry contests, 2nd place in the Detroit 300 competition, and third place in The Poetry Tribe competition, with several Honorable Mentions, all of which she appreciates. She is currently co-hosting a reading series with Esther Hurwitz at Sweetwaters Coffee & Tea in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Chris attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2001 working with Richard Tillinghast, 2002 with Keith Taylor, 2005 with Bob Hicok, and 2006 with Laura Kasischke. She is honored to be Editor of Bear River Review Issues 1, 2, and 3.

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## ~ Blue Lint in the Moon's House ~

Three sparrows weave wind  
with the drooping branches of a lilac bush  
A house wren, tail upright, chatters its domain  
from the top rung of a sloping wood fence  
A fledgling sparrow taking an early flight  
lands on its mother's back, slides off, beak open  
A starling feeds in the seeding grass  
casts a black spell over a finch's singing  
A mother cardinal leaves the high wire

to drink from a birdbath, plucks the fur of  
the cat sleeping under the spirea bush,  
carries it to the flowering tree to line its nest

\*

The sun I have waited for is too bright  
I lose my way as I stare into its red mirror,  
search for what can and cannot be seen  
I change my hair but cannot change my face  
change houses but not my home  
change the clock but time is still the same  
I cannot turn back, cannot collect the warm egg  
My hands are my grandmother's hands  
dipping a freshly killed hen in boiling water

I stalk fledgling memory; the cat stalks the sun  
I sit beside the wren on the fence;  
a robin, a cardinal splash in the birdbath  
The birds cannot see the cat against the wall  
I dismantle the wall each day for sun and bird,  
find it rebuilt each morning from blocks of night  
I lean against it, tired of planting nameless seeds,  
know I will not recognize what grows  
for I am grown and cannot recognize what matters

Perhaps it is not the light I need to see but what  
flowers in the approaching dark, dropping a star  
in the cat's mouth, pulling reason behind rain  
I listen to the yellow warble scaling the wall,  
to the song falling into whispers of grass

I collect the wind's hair for a nest but cannot see  
into the small opening in the moon's house  
I bring a dragonfly as a gift  
wait in silence to be asked in

# Patricia Miller

Patricia Miller lives with her husband, race horses, and cat Charles near Williamston, Michigan. She works at Michigan State University as a writer, editor, and event coordinator. Her essays, poems, and articles are published widely in books, magazines, webzines, and newspapers throughout the Midwest. She has written and edited academic publications and books, and read her poems at public forums in East Lansing and Walloon Lake. She is the author of an as yet unpublished novel about the Great Depression and Midwest Dust Bowl era. Her travel articles have appeared monthly for many years in Michigan Traveler magazine. She was recently published in Michigan Blue. This piece, "Grandmother's Sofa", was written at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2006 in a memoir workshop taught by Sue Silverman.

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## ~ Grandmother's Sofa ~

The old sofa at my Grandmother's house was covered with prickly horsehair, and the scent of Bryll Cream, dust, and vaguely old people wafted from the cushions as I plopped down on them. You know, that musty, simple smell, from a time before deodorant and perfume, bath gel and spritz, scented linen and polyester clothing.

The horsehair was a dark maroon color and stuck to my sweaty bare legs below my shorts with a scratchy, elevating feeling of sitting above the

couch, not on it. The hand crocheted lace doily on the back, held in place with unsafe straight pins, had a slick gray spot in the center, the stain of one too many sleepy heads nodding off and resting there.

I would perch on this horsehair sofa and listen for the quarter and half hour chime of the Grandfather's clock at the top of grandma's narrow, steep stairs. The Westminster chimes were enchanting and soothing as the quarter hours of the day slipped away. My uncle Harvey, kind but childless, would sit across from me, having no

idea of what to talk to me about, what might engage a young girl slip sliding around on the lofty heft of the horsehair. The clock alone marked our silent quarter hours together.

I wondered aloud if this was real horsehair. Did it once cover an actual horse? He soberly agreed that it did, that horsehair sofas last for a long time, and so horse hair was useful. I thought it was more appropriate to be still serving the horse, but those were days of sweet innocence as to the true origins of horse hair, cat gut, meat, and leather among other things.

Sliding to the floor with a thud, down the maroon cascade of prickly horsehair, I would run out the door to skip in the yard in my scruffy tennis shoes, and watch the coal trucks rumble by, all thoughts of horsehair behind me. It's good to be a kid, to not know, and to neglect and forget.

# Sarah Mkhonza

Sarah Mkhonza is a writer activist and professor of English from the University of Swaziland. She has published novels, short stories and poetry. She has taught at Saint Mary's College and Michigan State. She is currently a Visiting Scholar at Cornell University. She believes that textual intervention is a good method for writers to use in getting involved in creating understanding of issues. She believes that texts that express issues of women and children are necessary for society to understand itself.

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## ~ Excerpt from “Eyes Are Moving” ~

I met Bingo at the railway station in the early seventies. Even as kids we played together. Everybody knew Bingo's father had come from Lesotho. That is why we called him “Ntate.” Even now, after five years of marriage I still call him Ntate. He still looks as he did years ago.

We used to play at Bingo's home when we were young. They had all kinds of playthings. Ntate had built them a swing with the tire of an old car. Throughout my early teens I enjoyed this kind of play. We also played in our cardboard box village which we had built just below the pig

sty. It is here that I knitted hats with wooden sticks and put them on our wooden dolls. We used to put heaps of cardboard and slide down the slope that was near the rhubarb plants. I remember reading a piece of paper about the first heart transplant that had been performed on one Phillip Bleiberg. Even though the newspaper was old, I read this news as if it was new. I was sitting on bricks near our cardboard house, holding the paper with my right hand. It is here and on this day that Bingo gave me the look that sparked what would become the love affair of the century in Kadake.

I remember how I came home from Motshane Secondary school and found that Bingo had made statues of soap

stone. I marveled at the smooth bald heads and the salt-like beaded hair he had made. The statues looked so real. He had also made some ashtrays and three elephants. I was fascinated. Soon after this, Bingo started to give me money. He had started to sell his sculptures to the tourists at the Oshoek Border Gate. His sisters also started to sell their crochet work at the border. Business was booming in the seventies. Women sold shawls, jackets and bedspreads made of wool. They also took some of the products to South Africa. I even made a bedspread for myself. I liked the feel of newly crocheted wool. It felt soft and warm.

Five years later, at the tender age of twenty I married Bingo. I had been through two years of teacher training college at William Pitcher Teacher Training College. I thanked God that I had escaped expulsion from the college because I was two months pregnant when I graduated. William Pitcher College had strict rules about women and pregnancy in those days. Women students who got pregnant were sent away from the college. I escaped all

this because my pregnancy was still very far from being conspicuous.

Ours was a small wedding. It was held at Kadake Railway Station, outside our house at what was known then as the Quarters. It was held in the yard. The dahlias were in full bloom that summer. Their purple, yellow, pink and red petals stared at me with joy. I wore a silk gown of white and went through what was a humble ceremony like a modest fairy. I was not thinking about pots and pans. I was living in the future in the sky. I expected a lot from life. I was ready for it to give what it had kept for me and I was ready to embrace everything starting with the baby that was concealed under my long flowing gown. I was not thinking about our small community of railway workers. I was thinking about towns and suburbs in the towns of Mbabane and Manzini or even the townships of Johannesburg. I was eager to live.

My mind went to all those things as I sat under the white gown of satin and tulle. We had spent time when

preparing my gown. We had looked at My Fair Lady and Drum. We finally settled on a gown we saw in one of the Portuguese magazines that my neighbour had given us. It was not difficult to find a dress maker. One of the Mozambican men who was a dress maker put the material we bought in Mbabane together and made me one of the nicest gowns one could think of. Armed with that, I was ready for a future that would live to tell itself.

We did not have a honey moon. Instead we went to a small four-roomed stick and mud shelter that Ntate and Bingo had knocked together in a hurry. It was at the corner of a winding road in the skom plaas called Matarasdorp. The skom of Matarasdorp was about two miles from the railway station. It was a place that had come up with the advent of the iron ore mining on the Bomvu Ridge. Though small, the four-walled shelter looked like a mansion to me. I did not worry about the dirt floor even though I had grown up at the railway station and lived in a three-bedroomed house with a cement floor.

It is now, after five years of marriage, I realize what a poor sense of judgment I had then. I wait for Bingo into the night and when the candle has been switched off, I can see through the holes. When the candle is on, I become afraid that people can peep through and see that I am alone. The structure has become as much of a dilemma in Bingo's absence as if it has a personality of its own. I sometimes feel trapped by the solitude of the bed and feel that even if I walked out, the lack of security that comes with the haunted emptiness would make me feel like a crazy wanton. This is how I feel right now as I turn this way and that on this bed.

“Sh!—Sh!” I can hear him fumbling with the keys on the flimsy door. It is turning and the door is opening. Bingo has come home. It is three o'clock in the morning and I have been up all night. Tomorrow is a school day. Now you know why I feel so bad. He is walking towards the bedroom, if I may call the curtained partition that I have made out of a curtain a bedroom. I must pretend to

be asleep in order to avoid screaming. It is so natural and so bad to scream because he will just ignore me. I lie low and pretend to be fast asleep. I can hear him undressing here in this room in the dark. He is taking off his shoes. I can tell from the sound of the leather as each shoe rubs against each other. I can also smell his socks. I feel like a hag as I move over to my side of the bed. He is snoring! One minute and he is snoring!

“Sh!—Sh!” Bingo’s snoring is down to a low now. Even though I am suffocating from his drunken breath, I will continue to tell my story. Even the telling kills me with shame. My son is asleep. I wonder how long I can shield him from all this chaos.

from “**Crying The Tears Of Red Ochre,**” by Sarah Mkhonza

~ **Poem 36. My Story is on the Leaves** ~

*(In memory of Sheana Khumalo who died at the hands of her husband)*

Write my story on the trees  
Dig it out from down there  
Where it lies with me in the grave  
Spread the red ochre on the trees  
Powder them with red  
And write on every leaf.

I want to rustle in the wind  
My welts like veins on a leaf  
Written on all the mountains  
For I no longer live contained

Plant me on every meadow  
Like grass I want to sway  
Cast me on the rivers  
My leaves floating on the river  
Going into all corners  
That float undirected  
Like leaves after a flood  
For they cluster on the banks  
Like confused thoughts  
Disturbing sad stories  
Knowing the killer of their teller

Tell my story daily  
Wash my tears off me  
For I died too young  
To live and leave the very world  
That buries my story  
Here in silence from all

They will talk to the wind  
When they see storied trees  
That once grew on a branch  
That beat me and scarred me  
And left me bleeding on the earth  
Till to death off I went  
Only to be revived

In the words of the dead  
Who are speaking in the trees

Make up what went down  
My face, my head, on the crown  
Of tall trees and short ones  
Tell of my muffled cries with dignity  
The way my corpse went down  
Leaving an unmoving silence  
To be revived by you

# Peg Padnos

Peg Padnos is a registered nurse and writer of poetry and essays. Her work has appeared in *The American Journal of Nursing*, *Mediphors*, *Poetry in Performance* and *Bear River Review*. She participated in Thomas Lynch's creative non-fiction workshop in 2004.

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## ~ Not Quite Drying Out ~

*With apologies to R.L.*

The patient is distilling time—there's nothing more.  
No help now from the pint of port  
hung above his head.  
Even the NG tube is corked.

Pricked before breakfast  
veins roll across the floor.  
A plastic bag of pee  
whiskies from the room.

No help now from his nurse,  
her therapeutic barbs tincturing past  
lesions in legs. Skin thins.  
Breathing shallows.  
Lips crack like nuts.

When he looks about for family,  
their rumming faces blur.  
His X-ray eyes see shadows.  
Surrender xanthenes to dried parchment.

Once she was as close to him as salt to sea.  
He dreams of kisses burned into her chest,  
of diagnoses spilling from the well-thumbed chart,  
of volcanoes spitting incandescent rocks into the heart.  
As the IV drip runs dry,  
saline binges in a trough beside the bed.  
Lancets and latex gloves loll by the sink.

Is he still distilling time? Outside  
ambulances grog through December slush,  
ushering new cases to the bay,  
headlights amber as old Scotch.

Peg wrote, “The title alludes to a true location in Zeeland, Michigan where a Burger King shares its driveway with the Yntema Funeral Home. It never ceases to amaze me.”

### ~ **Death & Burgers** ~

Just off Business Highway 31 a fast-food joint reposes  
next to a funeral home. “Have it your way,”  
one supposes, scanning the shared driveway: Left, to  
the red brick mortuary with tombstone- template  
windows; right, to the mausoleum of buff brick, where  
“May I take your order” crackles through static  
channels. Death or deep fry, burger combos,  
eternal happy meals, closed white Styrofoam caskets

of chicken nuggets glopped with mother's mayonnaise or  
sweet and sour sauce in tiny satin pillows.

(Cushions of salt and pepper on the side.)

Pay your respects, now, to those big folks stretched out  
in cherried coffins, cheeks ruddy as ketchup.

Of dusky pickled sickness or mustard jaundice, nothing remains.

Bravo, hearty eaters, you licked your wrappers clean.

Never mind that you took your beefy raptures a bit soon.

We need to eat, after all. Did you ever glance over  
from this very burger place as you mowed down  
great dripping slabs? Did you see mourners roll in  
to the sizzle of beef patties and the hiss of potato stiff?  
Did you drop by for a snack when the prayers and tears  
had stopped? All right, on to the business of burial.

# Judy Reid

Judy Reid has a Master's in Education and had always considered herself a visual artist, with painting, photography and hand crafts, until she retired from Detroit Public Schools. Then she started studying the craft of words. She attends several workshops, retreats and conferences each year to learn and practice the craft of writing. Bob Hicok's coaching techniques, explorations, and inspirations are among the main reasons for her returns to the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Judy hopes one day to publish her chapbook, "I'm new at this."

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## ~ house shadow ~

the shadow knows why the cold wants to belong  
and hug with the secrets from a long lost time  
to settle in a house with moans and laughter gone

through the roof forbidden winds blow and moon shines on  
to touch memories of lives that left their roots behind  
the shadow knows why the cold wants to belong

dusty icons flake, await decisions from the impatient throng  
drying wood, burnt smells, shattered edges, decay struggles with time  
to settle in a house with moans and laughter gone

doors swing open, can't stop the rush of yesterday's right-ons  
grief moves in and out of window grime  
the shadow knows why the cold wants to belong

shadow jumps back into the forlorn black but before long  
gathers motives, hopes and dreams from clime  
to settle in a house with moans and laughter gone

end this homelessness, live with me, come along  
share the security of memories from bygone time  
the shadow knows why the cold wants to belong  
to settle in a closed house with moans and laughter gone

# William Reid

William Bennett Reid, as a writer, prefers to use his full name, but still answers to “Willie” to those who grew up with him on the east side of Detroit in the Brewster projects. Others may choose whatever they prefer: William, Will, Bill, Billy, Reid or something they’ve created. Educated primarily in southeast Michigan, he holds a Master’s in Education. Bob Hicok has coached and inspired his work in poetry for the past two years at Bear River Writers’ Conferences 2005 and 2006.

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## ~ Magoo (Part 1) ~

Early one day last month, I lay on my couch,  
looked out the window through sheltering blinds.  
I could see a big ass, pure white, cottonball cloud  
lofted above bare-branched treetops  
dragging some same-sized siblings eastward  
like Christian children crossing the Jordan  
seeking a homeland or simply free to roam at will.  
Obviously none of us are pure or white, nor necessarily big assed,  
but we can know of roaming.  
We know of homelessness.

What this has to do with anything is just a way to show  
some natural differences between me, a big white cloud, and Magoo.  
Me at the moment I’m housed, sedentary, and by most measures alive,  
or at least lively. The big white cloud has floated away,  
perhaps toward bigger dark and more imposing encounters.  
What we all know is skies are changeable, not always blue.  
We know we cannot make or change blue skies,  
but like the blue of police uniforms, they can change us.

As to Magoo he has been moved on. He has met his demise.  
The villain being an odious bullet in the chest shot from the weapon  
of a State of Michigan police officer. Just think,  
we banned capital punishment in Michigan years ago.  
Homeless, hapless, and to some hopeless. “Mentally challenged”  
– notice I’m using the latest buzzword here – it gives credence  
to the report, verified by video from the police patrol car camera:  
He was unarmed. He was empty handed.

This killing summoned memories of the Chicago poet  
who wrote of a brother killed by a police warning shot.  
I think the newspaper gave his name as Daniel something, I can’t recall.  
Maybe it was me thinking biblical and “Thou shall not kill.”  
I knew at first glance at the picture furnished by the family  
he was the man who called himself Magoo. He’d caught me  
coming out of the Opera House after poetry class.  
I had begun to snap street scene pictures to write about later.

He was carrying a six feet tall green imitation fig tree.  
Cemented in the pot. Claimed to have “liberated” it  
to help it find a good home where it could put down roots and grow.  
But for me he said, I “could have it for ten dollars or even five  
if I was ‘a l’il short.” I told Magoo I was more than ‘a l’il short.”  
We agreed I would take his picture; there would be no charge.  
I would take his picture with or without the tree.  
He suggested one by himself, two with the tree, and one of the tree only.

Each shot, he gave me a grin like someone told him to “say cheese.”  
I followed his movements across Grand Circus Park to the corner  
of Woodward and Adams. There upon the church steps,  
he laid the tree on its side and laid himself down beside it.

I'd thought to ask him as he lay down, what history was there in calling himself Magoo, and how could he, as a shepherd of a foundling fig tree, still use the name of a bumbling, short sighted cartoon character? I still want to know, but like clouds I had to move on.

# Lisa Rye

Lisa Rye resides in Bloomfield Hills and Harbor Springs, Michigan. She completed her BFA degree at The University of Michigan in 1979 and her MFA degree at Vermont College in 2004. She has published poems in *Artful Dodge*, *California Quarterly*, *English Journal*, *Penumbra*, *Permafrost*, *Rattle*, *REAL*, *Riversedge*, *The MacGuffin*, and *The Paterson Literary Review* and has a poem in Roger Weingarten's anthology, *Manthology*. Lisa has received many honorable mentions and been nominated four times for Pushcart Prizes. She is married to Jonathan and has two sons, Benjamin and Calvin. Lisa's first book of poems is *Blood Sisters*, her second book, *My Son's Hands*, in process, deals with the pain and illness of her son, who at age 17 was stricken by a rare disease, and who is now recovering. Lisa and her husband are philanthropists who have put over 100 kids and teenagers through college and / or special educational programs, and now help fund autoimmune disease and scleroderma research projects.

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## ~ My Son's Hands ~

have been cursed by a form of scleroderma,  
the "turn to stone disease." I watch them  
rest on the kitchen counter,  
curved and perched like a bird's claws  
as if waiting to fly far away. And when he talks  
with them they look like boxing gloves,  
but I know they have no punch. Is it because

I think much too much has been taken  
from someone so young, that he seems to know,  
how this illness that's forming him  
is so beautifully sad to me,

like an unwritten poem that's haunting  
until it finally works itself out? If I were to choose  
any power I could have, I'd choose flying. And, of man,

I would choose strength,  
but my bird boxer hasn't had a choice.  
When I bend to help him wipe up spilled Pepsi,  
gesturing wildly, he scolds  
I can do it by myself, and I see  
his strength through his anger,  
how he fights through all this. How he flies.

### ~ Cutting through Turbulence ~

Over the plane's wing, in other-worldly blue  
mountains of mist, I'm sure it's God I see.  
My husband grasps the armrests and shuts his eyes,  
as if that will save him. Not me.

Having put my trust into the next world,  
sudden jolts and screeches aren't scary anymore.  
In this one, from what I've seen,  
living means struggle for so many

and I'm not talking about the squirming kid  
dragging lemon sucker across his face, up in the bulkhead,  
and his mom, her blood pressure  
rising with each repetition, Settle down.

The loops and turns of the years, between home  
and dropping off my son at college taught me  
it takes nearly a lifetime to read yellow curves,  
on roads and on that boy's face, as warnings

to slow down and enjoy the ride, because later,  
when a rare disease attacked my son's body,  
I was forced to yield. It's been hard to forgive  
my head up in clouds. If I could go back,

straight teeth wouldn't matter; I'd give my baby his bottle  
as long as it soothed him. And thank God,  
I never believed in using the rod,  
because now, who would I hit?

After writing tomorrow's to-do list, I realize,  
if ink and a coffee-stained napkin offer hope  
on a rough plane ride, surely illness and misfortune  
must have greater purposes too.

When the plane hits an air pocket and drops,  
I grab my husband's hand and whisper,  
Open your eyes.  
We're all still here.

# Sarah Sala

Sarah Sala is a third year student majoring in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Michigan. She is the Co-Editor-In-Chief at the “Oleander Review,” the Literary Editor at “Shei Magazine” and a staff writer for “Chill Magazine.” She enjoyed working with Sue Silverman and her gang of awesome women at the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2006!

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## ~ At the Mouth of a Funeral Parlor ~

There are people  
discussing souls in terms  
of music and color and plants and water.  
And then everyone  
is talking at once.

# Veronica Sanitate

Poet, writer, editor Veronica Sanitate is a Michigan native. She is co-owner and Vice President of Ocean Organics, manufacturers of the Emerald Isle and MaineStream Organics lines of seaweed-based fertilizers. As School Improvement Team Co-Chair at Michigan's largest high school (where her son is a Varsity football and lacrosse player) she has introduced programs to build self esteem and awareness. She is a Reiki Master and a member of the University of Michigan's Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies. She holds a Master's Degree in Liberal Studies. Veronica attended the initial Bear River Writers' Conferences at Camp Daggett, studying with Robert Hass, Betsy Cox, and Barry Wallenstein; at Camp Michiganiana she worked with Lorna Goodison.

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Cabin Communications was written in the late afternoon after an exercise in Barry Wallenstein's class where we worked with "improbable metaphors"—images that say the opposite of what one would ordinarily expect. In this poem—silent cacophony, chaotic rhythm, breezy walls, damp fire, bone wet (not bone dry), milk-yellow, etc.

## ~ Cabin Communications ~

In the cabin with screens  
and no shutters

the borderless rain beats a  
rhythm of chaos

a silent cacophony leading  
to dreaming

the drummings  
and dronings

of seasons before. As if  
the rain is a greeting,  
a recurring message of  
earth's decay and reseeded  
that each cabin dweller takes  
to her hearth. Umbrellaless  
girls paint their names,  
their nails and their loves  
on breezy walls over names  
of sleepless girls who slept  
there before. They know  
only of themselves; curl  
their hair into rings like  
their mothers did, waiting  
for life's instants to fill  
into hours. Their boots  
smell of smoke from  
the damp fire and their  
bone-wet feet are steamed  
apple sour. They place  
milk-yellow stars on  
the cosmos' rafters to fluoresce

in the dark and bless them,  
perforating the night

and leaving joy as a message  
for those who come after.

~ **Empty canoes. Ceremony Over. Do not photo.** ~  
(Closing Night at Camp Daggett—16 Pictures I Didn't Take)

1. In the lodge, two young women stair-sit  
close and smiling, waiting.

2. Dead fox walking, stuffed raccoon watching  
from beams so thick they've preserved their treeness.

3. A spider so huge I thought it was an exhibit  
until it moved. And Mary, flustered, squashing it.

4. Tim fiddling with his hat as his fiancé reads  
her poem about their romance.

4.5. The lilt of her voice; its lift and sing.  
His face dark, holding in, sweetness  
before things shift and become something  
else; grow distant.

5. New voices we make room for.

6. Laura's bare arms and clingy gold lace  
charming your sight from her face.

7. Veronica's red headed son climbing onto her lap. Resting his hand on her mouth.
8. The blooming belly of the 16-year-old under a clean white tee. Analogous, the 45-year-old's black snugs over her 8 times-delivered expanse.
- 8.5 Elasticity. She sleeps efficiently against the wall, arms folded protectively.
9. The woman with black, black hair waving her hands explaining she's not out-doorsy, but back-yardsy.
10. Joe rocking, rocking, rocking.
11. Water glass a quarter full, not three-quarters empty.
12. Long, flagrant hair. Then, the concise hair of the minister who tells her father's sins, unconvinced of forgiveness.
13. Man in blue shirt with symbols: cross, moon, sun, star, and the words "House of Clues."
- 13.5 Later I see it says "House of Blues."
14. After the poet's reading, I pictured the sound of dead romances sweating into shape.
15. The quiet of the boathouse.
16. The final photo of the empty place.

Written in Barry Wallenstein workshop @ Bear River, 2003

Barry had introduced us to “transformation poetry” which would take a recurring form with this type of statement: I am \_\_\_\_\_; I wish to be \_\_\_\_\_; I deserve to be \_\_\_\_\_.

I messed with the intent and also my commitment to the pattern.

~ **Sometimes I'm rain** ~

Mostly I'm vapor  
I used to be everything  
Sometimes I'm nothing

I used to be panic  
Sometimes I'm random  
Mostly I'm fog

Mostly I'm drizzle  
Sometimes I'm doubtful  
I used to be beautiful

I used to be happy  
Sometimes I'm happy  
Mostly I am

Sometimes it's clear  
I used to be sunny  
Mostly it's muddy

Sometimes I'm clear  
I used to be cloudy  
Sometimes I'm weird

Sometimes I'm a leaf on a pear tree  
Mostly I know this  
I used to be green

Mostly I'm sane  
Sometimes I'm certain  
I used to be rain.

# Melissa Seitz

Melissa Seitz teaches creative writing at Saginaw Valley State University and is the faculty advisor for its literary magazine, Cardinal Sins. She plays electric guitar and runs half marathons. Her poetry and fiction have been published in the Bear River Review, Paradidomi, Cardinal Sins, Cardinalis, 43 Negative 83, and the forthcoming Weathervane: A Journal of Great Lakes Writing. She has been to the Bear River Writers' Conference three times: 2002, 2005 (Laura Kasischke) and 2006 (Jerry Dennis).

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~ Dig. Scrape. Dig. ~

She peels off the snow-laden gloves,  
feels the rush of frigid air on her hands  
as guttural language erupts  
from somewhere within—  
an arrogant prayer,  
her genuflection complete.

She raises her hands  
towards the brilliant Michigan sky,  
reaches towards the sun, poised  
like the tip of a question mark.  
Her knuckles burn, a wildfire rages.  
Dig. Scrape. Dig.

She jams her fingers downward, uses  
them like inadequate ice picks, cups  
her hands like awkward commas,  
and digs, laments the absence of a shovel,  
or any tool that could save her hands.  
Dig. Scrape. Dig.

She looks to her right,  
sees the bizarre path she's carved with boots and hands,  
the mess she's made of others' sorrow.  
Ten inches of lake-effect snow  
have created havoc on her familiar.  
Dig. A stone. Scrape. A name, not hers. Dig.

The snow, now pink around the hem of her digging,  
frames her raw fingers, the color of the hibiscus  
she plants in the spring.  
She traces her daughter's name,  
etched across the granite slab,  
examines the dates, cruel bookends,  
for the story she cannot write.

### ~ Peripheral Vision ~

“So men lead us to war for enough oil to continue to go to war for oil.”  
Grace Paley, Ms. Magazine, 2003.

I.  
One day, a man lost his peripheral vision,  
as he constantly checked his left, his right,  
not in the streets of Baghdad, or Fallujah,  
where so much had depended upon his ability  
to detect the enemy,  
but in Michigan, on I-75.  
The enemy had followed him home.

He learned the back roads,  
memorized birds and streams,  
and imagined badges rusting in his dreams.

## II.

One day, a woman lost her peripheral vision,  
when she began missing left turns, familiar streets.  
She blamed it on stress, the demands of nursing in a prison,  
where so much had depended upon her ability  
to detect the enemy,  
but in her patients, not herself.  
The enemy had followed her home.  
She learned to make right-hand turns,  
memorized dogs and trees,  
and imagined grandchildren she would never see.

## III.

He lives.

She dies.

And we drive towards the light with our eyes closed.

He says: Over 3000 soldiers have died in Iraq since March 2003.

She said: Over 13,000 people die from brain tumors every year.\*

We sing: And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for?\*\*\*

\*<http://www.irsa.org/glioblastoma.html>

\*\*I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die-Rag by Country Joe and the Fish

# David Seter

Dave Seter was born in Chicago. A licensed civil engineer, he lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area. His poems have appeared in various journals including Karamu, Wisconsin Review, and Blue Collar Review. Dave was in Bob Hicok's class at the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2006.

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## ~ Rental Car ~

It's a Chevy  
but I want Cadillac,  
need to find it on the map  
of Michigan. It's night  
and the dome light doesn't work.  
Funny how the headlights, too,  
gave out at dark, making me  
twist a different knob to avoid danger  
and traffic cops.

The trunk  
has no keyhole, only a medallion.  
I can't open it at all.  
The button marked  
trunk? Wrong, the remote,  
like a spouse sleeping on a couch,  
won't obey my command.

Along Highway 131,  
shoeless pickup trucks  
rust away next to barns,

long removed from service  
and the showroom's Windexed glass.

I don't find many Cadillacs  
halfway from Grand Rapids to Canada,  
and arrive hungry and late  
at the Bob Evans restaurant.

A sign says wait,  
while a white-haired waitress  
counsels a waiter, young buck.  
He gabs too much,  
serves his pals extra Cokes.

The manager wants it to stop.  
The waiter nods, repeats,  
don't gab so much,  
retreats in my direction  
with a menu, seems  
just out of high school.  
But I bet he could tell someone  
it's crackpot  
not to install a keyhole  
in the trunk of a Chevy.

Through turkey and cornbread  
smeared with honey I want  
to hear him to say,  
No keyhole?  
Some guy in a necktie  
thought that one up...  
He overfills my iced tea,

twice. I sense  
he wants to rev, not rust away  
like some have done. As I pay  
my check and grab my keys, I need  
to be right about that.

# Barbara Stark-Nemon

Barbara Stark-Nemon lives and writes in Ann Arbor and in Northport, Michigan. She first attended Bear River Writer's Conference in June, 2006. She is currently writing her first novel.

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## ~ Karolina ~

Karolina Rosenfelder pulled a shredded shawl tighter around her shoulders. She crossed the freezing damp ground of the Dresdner barracks yard toward a small fire outside the kitchen house where the soup pot hung.

“What will Max get for his dinner,” she wondered, escaping always to thoughts of her brother whom she had now not seen in more than a month. Perhaps as near as 300 meters from here, he would be finishing what little work he might still be able to do, and working his way, as she was, to the next meal. Stepping carefully, measuring her weakness in light breaths, eyes cast down, she joined the other women moving in their habitually ordered, but listless mass, tin cups in hand. The illness and exhaustion of starvation had long

ago surpassed obsessive thoughts of hunger and contaminated their every move. Not 20 feet away from the pitiful conclusion to the day's dearth of food, Karolina felt a hand on her arm. Gasping silently, she turned only her eyes to meet the sideways glance of Frau Koppel, her young friend and protector. She felt but did not see the small bundle slipped into the folds of her shawl. Her own involuntary clutching of what was surely forbidden produced a trembling fear that she quickly willed away lest the hard eyed kitchen worker detect something worthy of cruel play and single her out. Wordlessly Frau Koppel merged into the silent sea of the other women, and in a moment, Karolina had her soup of potato peels and had started the trudge back to the barracks.

The sickly broth was warm this evening—nearly hot—and with desperation Karolina wished to wrap

both her hands around the cup and hold it close to her chest as she moved. Instead the package in her other hand burned with danger and importance. Tilting her face toward her cup to feel the weak steam she began to breathe more slowly as her fingers worked around the rough burlap under the shawl to deduce its contents. A soft lump, the crinkle of paper, were the only clues. Stepping over the threshold into the dim low building she made her way directly to a center row of rough wooden bunks. She sat heavily on a bottom bunk midway down the row. As an older woman, the unwritten but strictly adhered to social order of the camp meant that she did not have to climb to reach her cramped platform and threadbare blanket. Neither did the rats and the lice, but she was grateful nonetheless. She bent her head and reached for her spoon at the foot of the bunk. As others moved about her, she ate quickly, not even savoring the moment of warmth traveling through her body. She carefully cleaned the spoon and cup with her tongue and set them aside.

Looking out and up into the aisle, Karolina glimpsed Frau Koppel in her bunk against the wall in the third tier. She was young and still strong enough to work, this woman with honey colored hair, who cared for her own mother in the bunk below her lovingly and cleverly. She had made time to care for Karolina as well, whose own two daughters were lost to her; one so young, her breasts eaten away by cancer, the other gone in time to America. The two women's eyes met and wordlessly the younger nodded, conveying from her perch that it was safe to open the packet.

Quickly Karolina bent over and unfolded the burlap. With a soft cry she held a small square of old cheese wrapped in a piece of bread crust. Beneath it a stained brown wrapper was covered with writing in her brother's hand, nearly illegible with poor ink and shaky script.

*Dearest Karolina,*

*Yesterday the refuse fell from the garbage wagon I pulled and this treasure I found for you. The guard did not see me bend further to*

*grab it, but I fell and now my foot is crushed. Your foolish gay brother, who has loved you always, and in his time was a fine acrobat, I fear has fallen to the final peril. I have here a friend of my kind who will hold me in my pain until the end, so do not worry my sweet clever sister. Axel will take to the factory this treasure and if Frau Koppel works today, I know you will receive it. She has found the smallest vial with two pain pills and I will have the second tonight.*

*Always, I have loved you best.*

*Your devoted brother,*

*Max*

# Jessica Stern

Jessie Stern attended Richard McCann's workshop on memoirs at her first Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, where she got the needed boost to complete the autobiography she had been working on since 1998. In 2006 she was in Laura Kasischke's workshop. She participates in a monthly senior writers' group which compiles a book of members' works to be sold at the annual Detroit Jewish Book Fair in November.

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## ~ The Self ~

A little deeper down  
But reachable  
There is the real self  
Shining bright  
Wanting to be found  
Release me it cries out  
Yet so much remains  
Layer upon layer of  
Darkness still blocking its light  
Its truth  
So many old crushing moments  
Bearing down  
Can the struggle be engaged  
Ah yes  
Dig deeper  
The self smiles  
It is waiting

# Pia Taavila

Pia Taavila attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 and 2005 and 2006. Her first collection, book-length, is forthcoming from the Gallaudet University Press in the spring of 2008, which asked her to include about 25 poems (out of a total of one hundred) about being raised by deaf parents. Signing was the norm in the family home. Pia often writes poems about that delightfully slippery slope of navigating between deaf and hearing worlds. The gift of signing is what allows her to teach at Gallaudet University, the nation's only liberal arts university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

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## ~ To Hear Again ~

How can I enter their world of deafness?

When I was twelve, my parents built  
a round, above-ground pool  
with bottom folds of excess vinyl  
wide enough to anchor there.  
I dove down deep to grasp the blue  
and slippery liner. I held on,  
letting water seep into my ears.  
Even after exhaled bubbles lifted  
to the rippling surface, I stayed below,  
the stillness pressing against my skin,  
against my sense of the outer world,  
its rattling chatter, its constant  
noise.

My lungs began to burn. I lost  
the urge to gulp, grew calm as

sunlight streamed above me.  
My hair grew long in mermaid waving  
while my feet floated high aloft,  
small and foreign, pale as clouds.  
I closed my eyes, abandoned thought,  
listened to silence. I tried to feel  
the permanence of nothing.  
When I could bear no more I swam;  
rustling branches framed my rising  
as birdsong pierced the air,  
riotous.

### ~ Spelling Test ~

Under the knife-gnawed desk,  
my hands knuckled past  
clumps of gum, rested in my lap,  
waited for the first word,  
the bee to begin. Amalgamated.

Mrs. Skevold paced the classroom.  
With red lips pursed, she succinctly  
enunciated each syllable, repeating  
our weekly words, their elocution  
grand in my hungry ears.

Amalgamated. My finger tried  
a few faltering letters, backed  
up, tried again, fumbled.

I erased the mistakes with a wave,  
then found the path: a-m-a-l...

When it felt right on my hands,  
when I worked it through,  
I raised my pencil to the page,  
the numbered lines  
falling into place.

# Borka Tomljenovic

Borka Tomljenovic immigrated to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1992 when Yugoslavia began to fall apart. She was a faculty member at the University of Zagreb and a lecturer at the English Academy for Dramatic Arts, Zagreb. Borka has been a U.S. citizen since 1997. She has authored and coauthored many publications and has a manuscript in progress. She attended the Bear River Writers' Conference in 2004 working with Richard McCann, and in 2005, working with Keith Taylor.

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## ~ An Old Picture Postcard ~

I placed an advertisement in the newspaper that I was looking for picture postcards of my town, Tuzla in Bosnia, between the two wars.

Among the few who responded to this advertisement was a librarian from Petrovaradin. I wrote to him and one day he appeared with a large pack of the requested cards.

Unlike me, this young man was a genuine and enthusiastic card collector. He seemed to know all about this topic. Once he began to speak about the attractions that such a hobby can offer, it was difficult to stop him. I felt embarrassed because he treated me as an equal. I therefore

tried to make it clear from the very beginning that I was not a real collector, and that I merely needed a visual illustration for something I was writing. However, he paid little attention to what I was telling him and went on speaking about what a well-versed person can detect in a picture postcard, a true mine of information. It is not only a peculiar and authentic document of a time and the atmosphere pertaining to a particular period but it also provides various useful data, such as when and where it was printed, not to mention stamps and post-marks, which for some collectors are of even greater value. Moreover, there is also a hand-written text vividly illustrating the role picture postcards have as a means

of communication between people. He held forth in such a way while I was obliged to listen to him with a growing feeling that I was doing it under false pretenses.

“This is all very interesting,” I finally managed to interrupt him, “and you have told me a lot of things of which until now I was quite unaware. But, I am not a collector. All I need these pictures for is to illustrate my text a little. For I believe that a good picture speaks more than a thousand words.”

I couldn't, of course, tell him that most of the things he had spoken of were of no consequence to me. However, we parted great friends, and he left me about a dozen very nice pictures of my town, which I had only superficially looked at during his visit.

When I was alone I took a proper look at his picture postcards. A strange feeling comes over you while you look at those old picture postcards with the parts of a town in which you spent your childhood and youth, and which over a period of some thirty or forty years has changed so much that much

of it now exists only in your memory. Old postcards magically transfer one into the past stirring up memories of days and events that have vanished without a trace.

While I was looking at those cards I was surprised at how much has been recorded and preserved in them. With a pang of nostalgia I looked at the peaceful and half-empty streets of my childhood in which shaggy mountain horses were encountered more frequently than automobiles.

In one postcard you could see displayed peasant national costumes which since the Second World War have almost completely disappeared. In another postcard our little town looked like an old engraving. It depicted that part of the town in which we used to live, showing the old Bristol Hotel, demolished after the war, with the round domes of our Orthodox church, and slender minarets of the mosques.

How accurately those old picture postcards have preserved a fragment of the time and the world I knew and loved so well. Absentmindedly I

turned the other side of that postcard and began to read:

“Dear godmother,

We have received your card . . .”

At this point, deeply moved and quite incredulous, I stopped reading to take a more close look at the hand writing. However incredibly before me stood my mother’s handwriting, so dear and so well-known to me. And the address was written in my father’s hand, clearly and accurately, so characteristic of him. At the end of the card I could read, also in my father’s hand, “Greetings from your godfather Milan.”

A whirlwind of thoughts passed through my mind, reverting to the days when my parents were still young. All that was to happen to them in their future at the moment when my mother wrote this card had happened long ago, had become the past and had fallen into oblivion. And my parents themselves had become part of that past which in so extraordinary a way this picture postcard brought to life again and by

force of circumstances placed into my hands.

What incredible things can happen to you during a lifetime. When I had placed the advertisement that I was looking for picture postcards of our town between the two wars, I could not have anticipated that among them I would come across one that was written by my young parents when I was not yet three years old. I learnt this from the bottom of the card, where it was written “February 17, 1921.” The card was sent from Tuzla in Bosnia to Novi Sad in Vojvodina, and since then it had waited for more than 60 years, perhaps forgotten in some card box in the attic, or in a drawer, to be claimed by that young librarian from Petrovaradin, and of all things to find its way to me.





