

Bear River Review Responds To War

The Bear River Review hopes to capture some of the work done and discussed at the Bear River Writers' Conference. Since it is clear to us that writers are involved in the swirl of their moment in history, that we are all citizens of some part of the world, and that much of the discussion recently has been about the current war in Iraq, it seemed only right to respond positively to the suggestion from Anne-Marie Oomen that we put together this special issue. Chris Lord has done a wonderful job running to ground work she heard quickly in the participant's reading, or even work she only heard people mention in passing. What follows is a snapshot of some of the ways this small community of writers is thinking about the current war or about the other wars that have shaped us.

~Keith Taylor, Director

The idea for this special edition of the Bear River Review, Bear River Writers Respond to War, was born during the June 2006 Bear River Writers' Conference when Tracy Rosewarne first read aloud her poem, "To Steven, from Fallujah." The poem triggered the suggestion from the BR inaugural review's featured writer, Anne-Marie Oomen, to do this issue, and we are grateful to her for the idea. We are also fortunate to have had powerful works submitted to us by a number of faculty and attendees. Their honesty and vision allow us to experience war-time events through new eyes, taking us places we have never been. We thank you - writer, reader, visitor—for being part of this important issue. We encourage your feedback in the form of "Letters to the Editor" to BearRiver-ChrisLord for our next issue.

~Chris Lord, Editor

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Table of Contents

Kaye Curren

Rohn Federbush

Cindy Glovinsky

Barbara Grimball

Don Hewlett

John Hildebidle

Rajko Igic

Elizabeth Kostova

Mardi Link

Chris Lord

Thomas Lynch

Don Maxwell

Patricia Miller

Sarah Mkhonza

Anne-Marie Oomen

Tracy Rosenwarne

Dave Seter

Sue Silverman

Onna Solomon

Richard Solomon

Jessie Stern

Ellen Stone

David Stringer

Pia Taavila

Keith Taylor

Richard Tillinghast

Barry Wallenstein

Kaye Curren

Kaye Curren was coordinator for Bear River Writer's Conference 2006. She's written computer books, educational materials, articles and humor columns. At present she is passionate about memoir. When not coordinating the conference, she attended Sue Silverman's workshop, became completely entranced with gardenias but wrote not a word. *A Prophetic View of War* is not Sue's fault.

~ A Prophetic View of War ~

In all the uproar and all the smoke, have we asked the Almighty
What's going on?
What's Your fix on this?
He sighs and says,
"The whole heart [of man] is sick, who can know it?"

In all the thunder and all the roar, have we asked the Lord God?
What's war about?
What's Your take on it?
The book opens and the Word says:
"I am the Lord that healeth thee."

In our efforts to define the enemy, have we consulted the One who knows?
Our Father says, "His name is rebellion, Abaddon, Lucifer gone bad
Praise turned to greed, grumbling and ENVY
And he cries, 'I want what YOU have!'
Follow him or follow Me."

Rohn Federbush

Several non-fiction articles, poems and short stories of Rohn Federbush's are published. In 1995, she received a Masters of Arts in Creative Writing from Eastern Michigan University. Vermont College and Colgate University awarded her summer conference scholarships. A favorite ghost story won honorable mention from the Iowa Literary Awards. She was a semi finalist for the James Fellowship in Sisters, Oregon, and, more recently ,a finalist for a romantic suspense novel in the Marlene RW A contest. She retired from the University of Michigan as Administrator of the Applied Physics Ph.D. Program.

~ Abandoning Bosnia ~

A low rumble invaded Meta's dream. Leaning her ear against the safe wall of her father's chest, she could feel the vibrations through his sweater. The dream fireplace cast orange flickering lights in the nightmare room. Her face felt the tire's dry heat. Her dream father was reciting his story of angels rolling potatoes around heaven to make thunder. Suddenly awake, she scrambled out of bed. The racket outside reached a crescendo of grinding steel, slamming doors, and raised voices. As she opened her bedroom door, her father stepped into the hall, too.

"Trucks," he whispered, as if to avoid waking her mother.

Downstairs the two of them grabbed coats off the front hall rack and stepped outside into the glow of an orange sunrise. Soldiers were unloading trucks, taking large crates into the library across the street from their front door. For a moment, the still sleepy Meta hoped the boxes were a shipment of new books. Instead, the crates showed gleaming shells between the slats. A folded crane sat on a flat bed truck. Dark silhouettes of men were busy attaching the crane to the round barrel of a huge gun. Finally, with half the troops waiting on the roof, the anti-aircraft cannon was swung high into the peach-rose

sky and placed on the white domed roof of the library.

Meta felt her mother's hand on her shoulder, "Meta, Raike, come inside," she ordered. "The soldiers are watching - and you, Meta, you're not properly dressed."

"Proper?" her father's voice rose in anger. "Why should we be proper?" Meta shut the front door on the spectacle. Her father continued to rant, "Civilization just expired. A gun perched on our library?"

"We'll be safer, won't we?" Her mother asked, busy with breakfast.

"No, we won't be!" Her father pulled at his white hair. "Now the library will be a target."

"But the gun will protect us, Raike," her mother argued. "Eat. You'll see. Why would they put a gun on the library if they thought it would cause damage?"

Her father choked on his toast. Meta handed him her glass of milk. He gasped, "The library will be destroyed in a week with every book in it. Meta,

go over and check out all you can carry. Put them in the basement. If they ask, say they're for Professor Heinrich. Hema, don't you go over there. We do not need you lecturing those soldiers about their duty to Moslems. And, Meta, I'm serious, get the books - don't go to school."

"School was closed three weeks ago, Father." Meta tried not to see the fresh lines of pain on her mother's face. "Do you think the soldiers will let me take the books?"

"Just don't preach to them. Start with the classics: Plato, Steinbeck, Shakespeare, Chekhov. Oh God, it's no use. They'll all be destroyed!" He stood up, distracted. "Hema, we have to leave."

"We're leaving," her mother said. "Sit down and finish your breakfast. Listen to your favorite Roman Emperor: leave off your love of books or you will die murmuring."

Hema put more toast on her husband's plate, and patted his hand. "Your mother wrote that the Consulate in

Paris is working on our visa. I don't have everything packed yet."

"Just a suitcase. We can only take a suitcase. Put the photos with the books in the basement. I need to go to the dean's office for the letter of recommendation to that Chicago university. I should be back by three. Please, Meta, tell me you'll work all day bringing over books."

Meta walked him to the door, "I will, Father, I will. There's space under the basement steps." He tugged at her chin as he turned away.

Back in the kitchen, her mother laid their clean plates between dishtowels in the cupboard. She grinned during the task, telling Meta her Croatian neighbor complained about plates cracking during the last Serbian shelling. Meta shook her head to dislodge her bleak thoughts. Her father hoped to save books stacked in the basement while her mother saved the china. The shells would fall where they would.

Upstairs in her bedroom, she glimpsed her face in the taped mirror. On her dresser stood a framed picture of her mother at sixteen. Hema, the girl in the picture, held a bouquet of fresh violets to her hair. Streamers of ivy and lace tied to the flowers surrounded the confident happy face. Meta sighed. Downstairs only 34 years old, her mother's hooded dark eyelids now hid faded eyes. Her nose seemed longer, certainly thinner than in the wedding picture. And her mother's brow now showed deep lines of worry. The incline of her cheeks were webbed with tiny lines, and her bony neck revealed deep furrows. 'Maps of hatred,' Meta thought, as she tucked the framed photograph into her open suitcase.

Moslems hated by the Serbs, Moslems tolerated but mistrusted by the Croats. Her mother was despised in the town where her grandparents and the grandparents before them had been born. Without warning, people were targets of open hostility. Meta's grandparents had dissolved like broken vases. Heart attacks

and cancer were diagnosed for both within a year. The last month of their lives they both shook. The doctor said the shaking was caused by the painkillers. But Meta knew better, they were terrified out of life. She went back to her mirror to examine the fear creeping around the corners of her own eyes.

“You can’t scare me to death,” she said, brushing her hair back from her forehead.

All day long, Meta hurried back and forth across the street to the library in Sarajevo, which was housed in a cathedral finished in 1540. In the library, stained-glass windows of Archbishop Stepinac and assorted apostles seemed to roll their emptied eyes heavenward. In the past, Meta loved to scan the books from the second floor balcony that circled the interior - going from the dark shadows of the shelves into the bright light of the stained glass windows.

During the first few trips to the library, Meta remained unnoticed by the young soldiers. The dusty old librarian helped her make decisions. He even carried a load of art books across the street, setting them just inside the door before hurrying back to his besieged library. On the steps of the library, the loose handle of the old picnic basket Meta used to cart the books came off and the books tumbled out. She gave a little cry and two of the soldiers came over to help. One slim shy boy, not a soldier really, pulled on her coat sleeve as she started back across the street.

Her mother was standing in the open door, hands on her hips. “You’re exhausted. You need lunch. Your father can bring over what he wants. I will not allow you to be pawed by those ruffians.”

“He just pulled my sleeve,” Meta defended the boy. “He doesn’t look sixteen.”

“Old enough to know what he wants. Now eat.” Her mother tried to sweeten the last edict, but it resembled a pitiful whine.

In the days that followed, her father, Raike, trudged back and forth from the library. As he predicted, the gun did not help anyone. They and the gun on the library were now Serbian targets. Incoming shells constantly terrorized them at night. They moved the couch, a bed, one chair, and a small table into the windowless coal room. During the day, the street filled with refugees lucky enough to have a place to go. Food was getting scarce. Out front, a huge shell hole replaced the street. Her father said they were lucky that the bomb hadn't hit the sewer or water lines.

One late afternoon, Meta and her father returned from the library lugging pillowcases of books. Hema met them inside the entranceway. “Enough already. We don't have room to walk. Meta, go upstairs.”

Meta obeyed, but not before she saw her father flinch. She tried not to

listen but hastened down the steps when she heard dishes being broken. To her surprise, her father was the one pulling a towel out from under a stack of dishes in the cupboard. Ten plates went crashing into the corner.

“Children!” Meta shouted, “Petulant children!”

Her mother doubled-up with laughter and her father started to giggle. He knelt down beside her mother. Now they were eye to eye.

“Hema,” he started to weep. “Let's leave Bosnia to the rats in the city, and the rabbits in the country until all the hatred is killed off.”

Her mother kissed his hair and held out her arm to include Meta. “Soon. We'll get the visa soon. I'm packed. We'll be safe soon.”

Meta crept away, leaving them still in an embrace. She opened the front door. The young soldier who had pulled on her sleeve was lounging in the library doorway. He brightened when he saw her and waved. She blew

him a kiss. He caught it, and hugged it to his chest. Meta closed the door softly; and smiling, went up to bed.

At dawn, the gun on the roof of the library awakened them with the familiar sounds of danger. She joined her mother in the kitchen who was rehearsing her morning tasks over the din. No milk, coffee enough for two days, a month's supply of soap from her Jewish mother-in-law in France. Nothing else. No visa.

Hema sent Meta to flush the toilet, which was working! She filled the tub. This much water was a bonus. True it was orange, but it would settle. Her mother would make her bleach the tub again. Meta couldn't remember if they had any more bleach.

She knocked on her father's door. "The tub is for hair washing in the sink today. I'll heat it later."

"Thank you, Meta, but my hair is okay," her father said.

"We still need to be beautiful," she said. "Rest for a while."

"The gun is still playing," he said as he stepped into the hall, as if the noise came from a violin. A shell landed nearby and rocked the house. "They're returning fire again. You make coffee in the basement; and I'll go get the breakfast rolls."

"Wait till the shelling stops," Meta pleaded.

"That's what everyone else is doing," he said. "This way there might even be a loaf of bread with the rolls."

It wouldn't do any good to argue. He never felt personally threatened. He had just gone out the back door, when her mother made her last trip to the basement. The coffee pot was in her left hand and she was on the bottom step when a huge shock shook the house. All was still. Then the earth seemed to heave in another explosion. As Meta pulled her mother into a corner, she noticed a water pipe had sprung a leak. When it grew quiet outside, her mother wrapped the pipe in metallic tape and dusted off the coffee pot. They still had electricity.

Meta crept out the back door with her mother close behind her.

Fire engines were just connecting their hoses across the street. Water gushed out. The library was on fire, the roof was gone. Meta wondered, which would be worse for the books: the water or the smoke? But the firemen were only wetting down her house and the one on the other side of the library. They ignored the library, which crackled away. Burning pages of books were floating down like colorful autumn leaves. Explosions continued. The shells stored in the library basement continued to explode, sending more books to the heavens. Where was her father? Meta looked around, her mother had started toward the bakery. Meta pulled her back down into the basement.

“Gone.” Her mother folded. “He’s probably gone.” She clasped her head and moaned.

Meta dragged her to the couch in the coal room.

Hema moaned on, “He thinks he’s God’s chosen. Well, maybe today, he can ask.” She beat her head with her fists.

Meta wrapped her mother’s distraught hands in a dishtowel, tucking them under the apron in her lap. The binding seemed to calm her. Meta went back outside to search. Raike stood on the sidewalk in front of the house watching the fireworks. He reached up and caught a burning page, blew it out, and started to read.

Meta tugged at his elbow, “Father, come in, it’s not safe! Mother thinks you’re dead!”

“A page from Marcus Aurelius,” Raike said. “We will all die murmuring. Why did I think our house would be safe? It will burn to the ground with all the books for fodder.”

The two of them returned to the basement. Her father sat down and began to eat a sweet roll. “We have to leave now,” he said to her mother. He seemed jubilant. “There’s nothing left.”

For the first time, her mother agreed.
Meta's father had found a UN truck
driver at the bakery, who said he
would take them out.

As they locked the door, her mother
shouted to the hateful neighbors,
“We'll be back!”

Meta hoped they would never return.
She pulled her hair close, not wanting
her father to see her face. She felt
lines beginning to marshal themselves
across her brow. Her tears traced deep
salt furrows down her cheeks. She was
terrified that her face would be as lined
as her mother's before nightfall. This
time the rumble of the UN vehicles
held no dream of fatherly protection.

Hugging her suitcase to her chest,
Meta looked out the back of the truck.
Shells were still exploding from the
library's basement. Incoming shells
were adding to the din on her street.
Fires were spreading in her town, in
her country.

Where was that boy soldier? Where
was her kiss kept now?

Cindy Glovinsky

Cindy Glovinsky has published poems and stories in *Ploughshares*, *Aries*, *The Chaffin Journal*, and *Barbaric Yawp* and two non-fiction books with St. Martin's Press. She wrote this story in a Bear River workshop led by *Atlantic Monthly* fiction editor Mike Curtis, in response to his "shooting the elephant" assignment—named after a story by George Orwell—to write about a character behaving in conflict with his/her own moral values.

~ Abandoning Bosnia ~

"Hey, c'mon, Jude, let's go, it's time."

Alex paced up and down like someone desperate to go to the bathroom.

"I just want to get this line right."

Raising her violin up under her chin, Judy played the passage one more time, but the double-stops were still out of tune. It's Paganini after all, she told herself—did you really think it would be easy? If you can play this, you can play anything.

"C'mon!"

Judy yanked herself away from the stand, loosened her best bow, set her violin down in its velvet-lined case and

sighed. Her lesson was tomorrow, and she wasn't ready at all. Plus there was a music history test she hadn't studied for. But Alex was insisting that she go with him, acting like she would be Nero fiddling while Rome burned if she didn't, not to mention abandoning him, Alex, when he needed her at his side. A guilt trip, that's what it was, but she had promised to go and now she would have to keep her promise. She looked back over her shoulder at her violin, lying in its open case, its lovely dark brown wood freshly polished, fixing it in her memory as though she would be away from it for months, not just a few hours. Then she turned away, snatched her green woven poncho up from the waterbed, pulled it down over

her head, and followed Alex out the door like a rat following the pied piper.

“Do you have to walk so fast?” she complained, panting a little as she scurried along at his side. They slipped between the two apartment buildings behind theirs and headed towards the big intersection where five streets came together. The light was red and cars were coming, but Alex hustled Judy across the street and up the hill.

“It’s probably already started,” he said, speeding ahead. “We better hurry. We don’t want to miss out. After all, this is *history*.” It was the fourth time he had said the history thing.

“If you say that one more time I’m going to scream,” said Judy. She could turn around and go back, she thought, have the Paganini caprice all in her fingers by the time Alex got home. She could, but instead of going back she kept on walking towards—what? It was as though she was tied to Alex by invisible wires and he was dragging her up the hill.

The stupid thing was, she thought, by tomorrow Alex would have totally forgotten everything that had happened. Even if they got hit over their heads with clubs and spent the night in jail he would have forgotten it. He would forget it all and she would spend the rest of her life brooding about it—that was the difference between them.

It was the third protest he had dragged her to since she moved into his apartment last summer. Before she met Alex, Judy never would have demonstrated, not that she hadn’t had opportunities. She had gone through four years of undergrad at Oberlin, where everyone she knew was constantly on the march, without attending a single event herself, even after Kent State. Not that she was for the war. She just wasn’t sure that things were as simple as her friends made out. And until she was sure she was right, Judith was not about to pretend that she was. But then she met Alex.

They were almost up to Central Campus now, and she could hear shouts. “Stop the killing! Stop the war! Stop the killing! Stop the war!” It sounded a little like the pep club in high school, from which Judy had dropped out after a few weeks. But no, she told herself. This wasn’t about football. This was about war. People were dying.

Now they were on the edges of a crowd that was filling in all the empty spaces between the University buildings like water from a burst fire hydrant. Alex was shouting something. “Over there,” he was saying. “Let’s go over where we can see.”

Ragged rows of bodies were marching slowly forward, tousle-haired, clothed in olive drab jackets, embroidered bell-bottoms and blue work-shirts, striped overalls with peace signs and on their feet, hiking boots and moccasins, loafers and tennis shoes, all marching forward with total certainty. Every single person in the crowd was absolutely certain he or she was 100% right, everyone except

Judy, who could never be sure about anything, deserving absolutely no credit for being here since she was here only because of Alex and for no other reason. Everybody else was here to keep people from dying and Judy was here because of Alex. If that wasn’t stupid, what was? She might as well be at home with her violin. She could see it lying in its case, waiting for her. Yet here she was.

An immoral war, they all said it was, and of course they were right. All wars were immoral, she told herself. But how could they know what the right way to end this particular war might be? Things were so terribly complicated. She could quit her violin and drop out of Music School and spend every bit of time and energy trying to understand all the ins and outs of this war but at the end of the day she would still probably know hardly anything. It would be like trying to learn Paganini when you had never even seen a violin. You would almost have to be in the State Department or the CIA or something like that to have any idea at all of what really

went on, all the ins and outs of which government official had said what and what the North Vietnamese were likely to do and what the Chinese were likely to do and what the Russians were likely to do. Lyndon Johnson had done what the generals advised, and he was a Democrat, one of the good guys. Maybe he knew something he couldn't tell anyone. And what if the Domino Theory was right? How could they know with such certainty that it wasn't? If the domino theory was right and the Communists started gobbling up one country after another until they reached California, all these people would be to blame. Had they ever even thought about that? Of course that probably wasn't what would happen, but how could you know?

Now in the midst of the crowd, a young man with a scraggly black beard had climbed onto another young man's shoulders and was shouting words she could only half hear, didn't really want to hear. "Just think," Alex shouted in Judy's ear. "This is history!" She nodded.

The self-appointed leader on the shoulders was shouting something and a girl next to him was yelling that they should all march out to the highway. "To the highway!" someone shouted, and they all started to march. Judy felt herself pulled along as the crowd shouted: "1—2—3—4. We don't want your fucking war! 1—2—3—4. We don't want your fucking . . ." Alex was shouting along with the crowd. Everyone was shouting but Judy, which made her the one, the only one, they were shouting at, the one that Alex was shouting at. Yet if she chose, she could become one of the shouters rather than the only shoutee. It was just words, after all. Whatever she might believe or not believe about the war, she wouldn't be hurting anyone by just saying words. She started mouthing the words, saying them quietly, trying them out. Alex smiled down at her and squeezed her hand. She began to shout. "1—2—3—4. We don't want . . ." Suddenly it no longer mattered whether the war was right or the war was wrong, it only mattered that she was part of Alex and Alex was part of her and they were

part of the swelling, surging crowd
all marching together with streams
of humanity feeding in from the side
streets like the arms of a giant octopus.
They marched and shouted, shouted
and marched, one huge body, sweeping
along the Elm-lined avenue towards
the highway. Then the first, brave souls
were up on the overpass. Brakes
squealed, but the crowd held, filling in
the space. A cheer went up. A moment
later a row of headlights beamed
towards them. A solid line of helmeted
policemen were marching at them with
dogs and clubs.

Alex pulled at her for a moment, then
ran off towards safety, but Judy kept
marching straight towards the line.

Barbara Grimball

Both writing and photography intrigue Barbara Grimball as means to explore the world. Barbara says it is through the objectivity of the camera lens that she discovers elements which motivate writing, especially poetry. Whether her subject is the architecture of a magnificent building like the Flat Iron in New York, or the intimate architecture of the human face, she finds in each sort of place the desire to create sacredly, as Alfred Stieglitz wrote, or at least fail well in the attempt. She lives in Anderson, Indiana with her husband Ray, and has two children and one grandchild Justin.

~ A Recipe for Punch ~

A response to war, of all things

She laid out the recipe,
tenderly unfurling its corners like a flag.

She punctured the can of Hawaiian punch
its silver galvanized top, round,
now with two triangle holes in it.

There were two 7-Ups and she popped the tops
on them. They sizzled and hissed as if their
tails had been yanked. She pulled a cardboard can
of frozen orange juice out of the freezer, unzipped
its plastic zipper and sat it on the counter, left it to
thaw some.

Then she cut one lemon and one perfectly shaped
lime into slices. She lifted the lime and smelled it.
It felt cool; its juices moistened her fingers.

She carefully plucked out the seeds from the lemon slices, slit open a 5lb bag of sugar, and poured out two cups of fine white granulated sweetness.

The punch bowl was glassy, and cut so that the sunlight in the window scattered rainbow shards through its patterned surface. She put her hand inside the bowl and the shards danced through her fingers. She set the bowl on the counter. It was heavy.

It would get heavier. Her punch cup was

crystal, thin and perfectly cut and had a chime on its rim, if you flicked it perfectly and listened.

The lemon was perfect. The lime was perfect.

(No one would spike it till later.)

She poured the red punch from the slit can into the bowl.

It swirled like rainwater in the corner drain.

Mixed all. The 7-Up, now almost a 5 or 6-Up since the fizz was secreting itself out rapidly.

Orange juice, its half frozen chunks plopping, a perfect expression of physics.

One can of pineapple juice, then one can of water, which she measured in the empty pineapple juice can.

Then the cut lemon and the cut lime, floating them in another example of perfect physics, whose outline on the board she could not write, but could see, right now.

She added sugar, its hardness dissolving – the attributes of dissolution perfect. Her stirring thickened the juice. The flavors melded, and finally she

added dollops of Rainbow Sherbet.

It was done. It was complete. She put down her mixing spoon.

She lifted her small crystal glass

with a tiny handle into which

a man could not comfortably insert his finger or thumb,

although he might try.

She scooped up a cup of punch, perfectly physically made, and without a care poured it into the tiny cup.

She lifted the cup to her mouth, a lovely red mouth whose

lips spoke little, for what physically could she say,

that could possibly replace the utter joy of home-made

punch. She tasted the rainbow sherbet, and let it linger on

her tongue. On CNN, photographs pummeled the airwaves –

war, war, war. She muted the TV. Looking out

her kitchen window, she tasted punch,

that was not as yet spiked,

that had sat in a bowl on her kitchen counter,

with one lemon and one lime in perfect physical balance

floating among the rainbow sherbet on her tongue which she held mute.

Don Hewlett

Don Hewlett's poetry has been published in the *Wayne Literary Review*, *Poetry in Performance*, and the *Poetry Tribe Review Anthology*. Don has been 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 three Bear River Writers' Conferences; 2001 with Richard Tillinghast, 2002 with Keith Taylor, and 2005 with Barry Wallenstein. The poem "Actospeare" was started during his workshop with Barry.

~ The Big War ~

World War II started and I became eight five weeks later. Hawaii was a tropical island, not the USA. I did not really comprehend and could not feel the emotions that so many felt, like fear, or hate, or patriotism. In the movie newsreels, there was Pearl Harbor smoking and ships sinking. Awed at the sight, yes; still I don't remember feeling any fear or hate.

For the war effort:

My forty-year-old father put piles of scrap wire or steel along the curb for pickup and recycling. I remember

an old telephone, a radio, some telephone wires, some furnace duct, a bedspring, and some rubber tires. Newspapers were collected and went to recycle. There were air raid safety drills at school where I went to the eerie basement with low ceilings and steam pipes. No windows—this was a little scary. For fire drills I still went outside. It was four bells for fire and eight for air raids.

And for the "lights out" practice at home, Mr. Foley was our street warden. When the air raid sirens would blow after dark we turned off all our lights and pulled the shades. Mr. Foley in a white helmet with a

triangle symbol on it would walk the streets with his powerful narrow beam flashlight. He would shine it on any house where light was leaking out and blow his police type whistle until the leak was off. He could shine that light for a half a block. Luckily no bombers were there. On a moonless night all you could see of Mr. Foley was that white helmet. Searchlights scanned the sky for the duration of the drill. Of course we just peeked out from behind the shades not being allowed outside during the drill. Mr. Foley's flashlight was almost as bright as the searchlights. Part of the warden's job was to tell us about our war effort. He taught us first aid, eliminating shiny signs and such. One day he had a part of an incendiary bomb. He lighted it and showed that water wouldn't put out its fire and only a sandbag could be used to smother it. We made some sand bags of old cloth we had.

My father worked as the accountant for a Benzoil gasoline station. Every night he dumped gasoline ration stamps on the table. My brother and

sister and I would sort them according to their letter. "A" allowed the most gasoline for a month—this driver must have an important job for the war, while "B, C, and D" were lesser amounts. After sorting we pasted them to big sheets of one hundred each. The gas station could then use these to buy more stock. Not just gasoline but butter and sugar and other foods were rationed; every month mother would get a book of ration stamps for each member of the family. Late in the war Oleomargarine became available unrationed. The white one pound butter substitute came with a dot of yellow coloring in the container for mixing into the margarine so you could imagine it was butter.

My mother would send care packages filled with clothes, soap, toilet paper (scarce here), and other items, to her relatives in Finland. She also took a night job working for Vickers making machine parts for the army. Vickers was only a mile away so she was able to walk to work. I remember her in a dark blue work shirt and pants and wearing a matching dark blue hat

with a visor and a built in hair net for safety (company supplied or required because all the Vickers workers wore them) as she left for work carrying a brown bag lunch. I sometimes walked with her to the plant. Next to the American flag, the company flew a flag with a big white flag trimmed in blue with a big gold "E" in the middle for excellence in their war effort.

Houses started to sprout flags in their windows. These eight by twelve-inch flags hung down from a cord. In the middle were stars in a vertical row, set on a white background trimmed in red, representing the number of family members in the service. There wasn't a block without at least three houses with these flags. If a star was in gold, it meant that serviceperson had been killed. Uniformed men and women began appearing all over. And I would go to the movies and see soldiers and sailors in action. Carrying and shooting guns, throwing hand grenades, the movie stars best buddy is always killed to make killing the hated Germans and Japanese a good thing, always winning. So when I

played with my friends in the field at the end of the block, we dug foxholes and played at war always winning against the hated Axis.

My mother's brothers Waino and Richard joined the merchant marine and came over in uniform a few times. Both survived the war with Waino serving in the Aleutian Islands and Richard on the Atlantic.

My father's brother Owen was killed in the Japanese march of captured soldiers on Bataan. Another brother Sam joined the paratroops but the war ended before he was needed in battle. I joined the Navy Air Reserves when I was eighteen. By then the Korean War was nearing its end and I was not called to active duty. Both of my brothers joined the naval reserves when they were eighteen. Neither was called to serve.

Had I become patriotic? Yes. Did I understand fear? Yes. Did I know to hate an enemy? Yes.

Did I understand war? No.

John Hildebidle

John Hildebidle spent a wandering childhood before arriving in the Boston, Massachusetts area for college, where he settled for good, it seems. He has taught social studies at a suburban public Junior High, and English at both Harvard and MIT, where he is now. John lives in Cambridge. He has published two “scholarly” (i.e., highly soporific) books, a collection of stories, and three volumes of poetry. A fourth is currently in process. John attended the Bear River Writers’ Conference in 2005 where Tom Lynch was his mentor, and 2006, where he worked with Richard Tillinghast. He proudly wears the Petoskey tee shirt he brought home.

For Delmar G. Booze

~ Lost in Vietnam ~

What’s the precise term for a group of tourists?
A confusion? A curiosity? Here, now, it’s a solemnity,
as they read the list, in unexpected silence.
The memorial’s hidden, as though sinking,
still, in a quagmire. Korea earns a platoon
of weary statues, World War II a grandiloquence
of fountains. This, even with Lincoln and Washington
looking on, is assertively understated.

Some few take the time to consult the directory,
find the name of a brother, a son, a neighbor.
One rose leans. Most of us just saunter,
in mild confusion, reaching out now and again
to touch the name of a total stranger,

Dead and gone years ago, in some unfamiliar place.

~ Ghosts in Uniforms ~

The Sunday supplement had the predictable story –
a square-jawed, crewcut, clear-eyed fellow,
nineteen or twenty at the most, from Montana
or one of the Dakotas who threw himself
on a live grenade to save his unit,
joining the parade of ghosts, so many in odd dress:
shakoes, watch caps, Zouave trousers,
camouflage, crisp full-dress.

I had not thought death had undone so many.
More truthfully, I had ignored that death had undone so many,
and was still at work, names in the morning papers,
grainy photos and flag-draped coffins: “Small town says good-bye.”
Time was, I saw the newest John Wayne flick every Saturday with Dad.
When they built a new school, we used the trenches for the foundations
to fight out World War Something, day after day after day.
But when I had the chance to heed the call, I stopped
just this side of a dash to Canada. My hands are clean –
never fired a gun, never cast a vote for any leader
who put troops “in harm’s way” (hard not to snicker
at the blandness of that phrase). But aside from a few marches,
the occasional petition, what have I ever done
to accomplish what the song preaches: *Give peace a chance?*

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. In 1993 he moved to the U.S.

~ Red Roses ~

For Dusica, Toša's daughter

Whenever I see red roses,
I think of my cousin Toša,
the only son of uncle Matija,
killed in his father's garden.

Fierce German bombs on Belgrade—
our weak and disunited army
quickly surrendered the country to Hitler,
sooner than when NATO bombed us.

My father with other soldiers
taken prisoners from St. Ivan,
sent to labor camp in Germany.
Toša, an officer,
eluded the enemy's ring,
to return home.

Three nights later, Hungarian soldiers,
guided by local Germans,
took him into the garden
where spring had come.

Two strong shots—
bullets struck my cousin,
his body on the muddy ground,
where now red roses grow.

Elizabeth Kostova

Elizabeth Kostova writes fiction, essays, and poetry. She has been published in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Poets & Writers Magazine*, and *The Best American Poetry*. Her first novel, *The Historian*, has been translated into 39 languages. She holds an MFA from the University of Michigan.

~ Gettysburg ~

Did they fight through the woods, among the trees?
Did they fight through the woods, among the locust trees?

July 1

Here's a pasture, illusion fought on ordinary ground, disaster.
Use your bayonet when your gun has spent its fire; it goes
deeper, moves faster, plows your brother like a striking hoof.

God

has left this war behind. Later
there will be time for you to find
a soldier's coffee-pot, which is uninfluenced
by the change come over its owner.
And a hinged knife and fork, so useful at dinner.

Refrain: Did they fight through the woods, among the trees?
Did they fight among the locust trees?

July 2

Here, two armies meet by chance.
In their surprise they sow the turf with bullets
like the teeth of a shark. Why
should the casing of us, flesh, be so loved?

Here, it is pierced by bone, there, lies open
to the core. Later you will not forget the indecencies:
inside each of us
there's a frame.

Refrain: Did they fight through the woods, among the trees?

July 3

hinged fork later plows cannon the lean what down
by and countryside painted teeth John boot shark
under tree will there bone flow an Brown shards
near well leans loved farm near cannon ground sky
on locust then gushing cannon Willy where rock sky
tree turf plunge nearly down wild sky

Outside, a scarecrow leans, exhausted, on a fence.

1995

Two women in the bonnet and flower prints of a quiet sect
leaving at 5:10 hear frogs
along a stream. The cardinal flower blooms.
Monuments rise like walking sticks in the clusters of rock
and we come to see the sculpted legs, or painted,
sensual under painted trousers. John Brown preaches
stiffened on a pedestal and here –
is a farm. And there a boulder
where the dead lay, boot-heels against rock,
heads thrown back to see the absence of birds.

Mardi Link

Mardi Link is the mother of three sons, and the editor of a small publishing company in Traverse City.

~ Act Like A Patriot Now ~

Act like a patriot now.

Because our telephones are bombs.

Your face on camera, with your bullet eyes,

is a bomb. Library books are bombs.

Bookstores are where bombs go to rhyme with each other.

Duck. These bombs can only be written in sand.

Propaganda dropped from the dry sky

can ruin a perfectly good stanza.

We are not allowed to see why

the poets are lying down. No photos, please.

The flash would decay their red, white, and blue blankets.

Our hand-lettered “Welcome Home” is for nothing.

Act like a patriot now.

What we need are more soldiers

equipped with red pens. And their own hands to hold them.

Soldiers free to edit out what isn't working.

I am a simple woman. I don't know much

about politics or meter. But, I am beginning to think

that the leaders of my government

don't even know how

to write a poem.

Chris Lord

Chris Lord's poetry has been published in literary reviews, small press mags, and ezines and has placed in competitions. She is honored to be editor of Bear River Writers Respond to War. She believes in this issue, believes if we learn to respect our differences, the people of the world can come together over our commonness, and work together to negotiate a lasting peace.

~ Cochlea ~

Deafness sleepwalks under the camouflage of night
through Allied fire in Ellie's inner ear – she does not
want to hear Tommy guns, thunder in the sky,
static broadcasts of bombings at Pearl Harbor,

tanks rolling toward the latest front, numbers of dead
and wounded, words of invasion and occupation,
trains leaving, arriving, the opening of boxcar doors,
muted cries coming from an inhuman heart's camp

Ellie's deafness absolves itself by day, fights gravity;
is a snail clinging to the bony labyrinth of moral balance,
a cracked anvil in praying hands, a shell unable to echo
the sound of boots marching in fluid-filled canals

She hears Christian Scientists claim mind over matter
cures all if you truly believe, and Ellie believes – chooses
not to hear words blocking sun, hiding in attics, denying
their religion, stripping membranes of tiny ear stones

She believes in a hearing-impaired God who reads the lips
of her soldier speaking by radio across a slanted moon -

dreams he is dancing with her at the Stage Door Canteen,
sending her nylons from the PX, asking her to be his bride

She takes the broken wafer, drinks from the half-filled cup,
saves lard in a coffee can to exchange at the grocery store
to help him fight his third campaign. He returns to her
with bullet-proof medals, a miniature American flag,

a photo of a Japanese comfort woman, lays face down on a
mutilated mat, chokes on radio's replays of bombs nicknamed
Little Boy and Fat Man, on the apple he bought from an
arrogant Red Cross with the last of his yen on VJ-Day

Ellie polishes the piano with the hem of her shortened skirt,
plays the songs she believes lie buried in ear-shaped pouches
of their hearts. He sits beside her, his fingers straddle oceans
and octaves, play the silent chords of fallen comrades by ear

Thomas Lynch

Thomas Lynch is the author of three collections of poetry: His collection of essays, *The Undertaking -- Life Studies from the Dismal Trade* won The Heartland Prize for non-fiction, The American Book Award, and was a Finalist for the National Book Award. It has been translated into eight languages. *Bodies in Motion and at Rest* won The Great Lakes Book Award. *Booking Passage -- We Irish and Americans*, a third collection of nonfiction, was published in 2005. His work has appeared in journals and newspapers throughout the UK, Ireland and the United States, and has been broadcast on NPR and the BBC. He is an Adjunct Professor in the graduate creative writing program at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

“Great Hatred, Little Room”
originally appeared as an OpEd piece
for the New York Times

~ Great Hatred, Little Room ~

Like President Bush, I like clearing
brush in August. We both like
quittance of the suit and tie, freedom
from duty and detail, and to breathe
deeply the insouciant air of summer.

He makes for his ranch in Crawford,
Texas, a town with no bars and five
churches. I come to my holdings near
Carrigaholt, here in West Clare, where
there are six bars and one church and

the house my great-grandfather left
more than a century ago for a better
life in America.

Of course, we have our differences
– the president and me. He flies on
Air Force 1 with an entourage. I fly
steerage with hopes for an aisle seat.
His ranch runs to 1600 acres. My
cottage sits on something less than
two. He fishes for bass stocked in
his private lake. I fish for mackerel in
the North Atlantic. He keeps cattle
and horses. I have a pair of piebald
asses – “Charles” and “Camilla” I call
them, after the sweethearts on the
neighboring island. I suppose we’re

just trying to reconnect with our roots and home places -- Mr. Bush and me -- we have that in common. He identifies as a Texan in the John Wayne sense as I do with the Irish in the Barry Fitzgerald. And we're both in our fifties, both white, both male, both Christian and American with all the perks. We both went into our father's businesses. We both married up, avoided Vietnam, quit drink for all of the usual reasons, pray for our children to outlive us and have the usual performance anxieties. He works out a couple hours a day. I go for long walks by the sea. We both occupy that fraction of a fraction of the planet's inhabitants for whom keeping body and soul together -- shelter, safety, food and drink -- is not the immediate, everyday concern. We count ourselves among the blessed and elect who struggle with the troubles of surfeit rather than shortfall.

So why do I sense we are from different planets? Is it that old Anglo-Irish thing? Or the WASP and Catholic thing?

"The same but different" my late and ancient cousin Nora Lynch used to say, confronted by such mysteries and verities.

*Out of Ireland have we come,
Great hatred, little room,
Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.*

It was in August of 1931 that W.B. Yeats wrote "Remorse for Intemperate Speech" which includes this remarkable stanza. The poet had witnessed the birthing of a new Irish nation through insurgency and civil war. He had served as a Free State senator, and, after winning the Nobel Prize for literature, was the country's public man of letters. An Anglo-Irishman who had ditched High Church Christianity in favor of swamis and Theosophists and his wife's dabbling in the occult, he was torn between the right-wing politics of between-wars Europe and the romantic, mythic past of Ireland. His poem confesses and laments that reason and breeding, imagination

and good intention are nonetheless trumped by the contagion of hatred and by the human propensity towards extreme and unquestioning enthusiasm for a cause – whatever cause. It is what links enemies, what makes “terrorists” “martyrs” among their own and patriots on every side – a fanatic heart beating in the breast of every true believer.

Yeats’ remorse was real and well it should have been. The century he wrote this poem in became the bloodiest in the history of our species. Wars and ethnic cleansings, holocausts and atom bombings – each an exercise in the God-awful formula by which the smaller the world becomes, by technologies of travel and communications, the more amplified our hatreds and the more lethal our weaponries likewise become. Great hatred, little room, indeed.

So far this century proceeds apace: famines and genocides, invasions, occupations and suicide bombers. Humankind goes on burning the bridges in front and behind us

without apology, our own worst enemies, God help us all.

And maybe this is the part I find most distancing about my president, not his fanatic heart – the unassailable sense he projects that God is on his side – we all have that. (*Out of Israel, Out of Iraq, Out of Iran, Out of Anywhere have we come/ Great hatred, little room* has maimed us all.) But that he seems to lack anything like real remorse, here in the third August of Iraq, in the fourth August of Afghanistan, in the fifth August of his presidency, for all of the intemperate speech – for the weapons of mass destruction that were not there, the Mission Accomplished that really wasn’t, for the funerals he will not attend, the mothers of the dead he will not speak to, the bodies of the dead we are not allowed to see and all of the soldiers and civilians whose lives have been irretrievably lost or irreparably changed by his (and our) “Bring it On” bravado in a world made more perilous by such pronouncements. Surely we must all bear our share of guilt and deep

regret, some sadness at the fact that he we are, another August into our existence and whether we arrive by way of evolution or intelligent design or the hand of God working over the void, no history can record that we've progressed beyond our hateful, warring and fanatical ways.

We may be irreversibly committed to play out the homicidal saga of Iraq – having stood for the big lies, must we now endure all the little lies they spawn? But each of us, if we are to look our own kind in the eye, should at least be willing to say we're sorry, that all over the planet, whatever the causes, we're still killing our own kind – the same but different – but our own kind none-the-less. Even on vacation we oughtn't hide from that.

Don Maxwell

Born and raised in Paris, Donald R. (Don) Maxwell holds two PhD degrees. One from the University of Cambridge (Medicine) and more recently from the University of Michigan (French Literature), where he was Visiting Assistant Professor and Lecturer in French. He spent many years in bio-medical research in France, England and the U.S. and was Senior VP for Research & Development of a major US Corporation. He is the author of numerous scientific publications. Don is also the author of two literary monographs: *The Abacus and the Rainbow: Bergson, Proust and the Digital-Analogic Opposition*; and *Science and Literature: the Divergent Cultures of Discovery and Creation*, as well as two memoirs: *A Journey from Wartime Europe to Self-Discovery* and *Cambridge to Paris and America: A Second Journey of Discovery*. He attended Bear River in '04 and '06.

~ Growing up in Wartime Europe and America ~

Part I

~ L'été 1939 ~

The day World-War-II was declared: September 3, 1939, we arrived from France into London's Victoria Station, just as the air-raid sirens were screaming an alert. An unidentified plane had been sighted heading for London. "A sneak German attack," someone said. False alarm – it was merely a British plane that had lost its way!

The summer of 1939 was a particularly beautiful one in France, with seemingly endless sunny days that melted into beautiful cool evenings. We were vacationing in France on the coast of Brittany. The village of Perros-Guirec, where we stayed, nestles between two rocky points that cradle a beautiful wide and flat sandy beach. When the tide was low, it was way, way out and I spent the long sunny afternoons on the beach with my best friends Gretchen and Dieter. They were blond, blue-eyed and German, but spoke perfect *français*, as beautifully as

French children. With the sun beating down on my back till it crackled and with Gretchen at my side, I would walk over the rocks looking for muscles and crabs in the pools that the tide had left behind. I was very fond of Gretchen and completely unconcerned that she was German – the people we were supposed to hate.

When my Dad heard that I had made friends with Germans, he became very angry.

“I forbid you to have any thing to do with *les Bosch!* They’re horrid people and can’t be trusted, we don’t know what they might do next.”

I am afraid I ignored what he said, and continued to meet with Gretchen, but now it was even more exciting because it was forbidden and our meetings were clandestine!

Later in the afternoons, I would wander through the still and deserted hotel dining room where the tables were already set for dinner with white tablecloths, crystal glasses and shining silver-ware. The large open

bay windows surrounding the dining room looked out onto the sand dunes and beach and through them came the light of the evening sun mingled with the almost imperceptible sea breeze that gently moved the light white curtains. The fragrance in the dining room was of red wine mingled with that of fresh bread and the salty tang of the sea.

Adjacent to the dining room was a small bar, which was tended by Jean-Pierre, a thin and disreputable-looking young man in his early 20’s who was usually wrapped in a tattered green apron. I often chatted with Jean-Pierre who showed me how to test the quality of brandy by pouring a bottle-cap full onto a white plate, igniting it and then inspecting the residue. Standing behind the bar, he showed me how, as a pilot, he would out-manuever the Nazi invaders.

“This is how I will shoot down *les sales Bosch* if they dare attack La France,” he said, screwing up his face. With each of his outstretched hands representing a fighter plane,

he simulated the sound of machine-guns as the invading Messerschmitt desperately tried to evade Jean-Pierre's bullets. Little did we realize how close this was to impending reality! I don't know what became of Jean-Pierre, but I don't think he would have been any match for a trained Luftwaffe pilot.

My older brother, Philip, became very ill with a sinus infection, caught in the unsanitary public swimming pool whose water was only changed when flooded by the high tide. Antibiotics had not yet been discovered and the infection rapidly spread, dangerously threatening one of his eyes. There were no medical facilities in Perros-Guirec, so my Dad drove Philip at break-neck speed over the archaic Breton roads to an equally primitive clinic in Saint-Brieuc. There Phil stayed for some weeks before he was fit enough to return to England.

Maman stayed behind in France with Philip while Dad drove my sister, other brother and me to Saint- Malo where we took a steamer to Southampton and then the train to

London, where on arrival at Victoria we were greeted by the first of many air raid alerts.

In the following months, there were frequent air-raid warnings and drills at School and these were a welcome distraction from the tedium of spelling lessons that I especially abhorred. We rapidly filed down from the classroom in the Lawrence Building of Brentwood School, to hurriedly built air-raid shelters that were only half under ground.

“They won't do you any good in caise of a direct 'it'”, said the caretaker in his Cockney accent, “but it might protect you from fallin' buildings or a near 'it.'”

On one occasion, there was an air raid when we were playing soccer. As the sirens wailed, we wondered whether it was another drill or a real raid. A teacher anxiously ordered us into the ditches along the lane that bordered the soccer field, and we stayed there, chatting excitedly and shivering in the damp, as enemy planes flew overhead. We never considered or talked about

any real danger, and thought the air raids were rather fun and exciting.

Our home was about an hour's drive from London on the main road leading from the East Coast. It was thought that in case of a German invasion, this would be a main strategic thoroughfare from the coast to London and therefore a road that needed to be well guarded. The Army placed tank traps, consisting of large concrete boulders and barbed-wire barriers, across the roadway near to our home. British Tommies in their khaki uniforms and round tin helmets would stop any of the few cars driving through and ask for identity papers, and briefly search the back. There was also an occasional machine gun emplacement surrounded by sandbags just after a curve in the road. On my way to school, about a mile away, I walked through the barriers and the soldiers guarding the tank traps chatted and joked with me. I felt safe and secure in my school uniform of red cap, dark flannel trousers and jacket, white shirt, stiff white collar and black tie.

I always carried my leather satchel that hung from a strap across my shoulders, but now there was an important addition – a gas mask. This was in a cardboard box, about 8 inches a side, and suspended from my shoulder by a piece of string. Everyone was supposed to carry their gas masks that the government issued to all civilians on the East Coast in the spring of 1940 as they were our only defense against a gas attack that fortunately never materialized.

Our home did not have an air-raid shelter, although some of our neighbors had a bomb-shelter built in their gardens. When the sirens sounded at night, we would get up, and with a mixture of excitement and sleepiness tramp downstairs and sit on the floor in the hall near the stairs. Apparently, this was the safest place in our home, which like most English houses had no cellar. Crouching in the hallway, I could clearly hear the sound of airplanes overhead and quickly learned to distinguish the sound of enemy planes from those of our own aircraft. The engines of the

German planes pulsed in intensity whilst our planes had a continuous sound, probably because they were single-engine fighters. We would wait listening patiently to the sound of the overhead planes, the ‘ack-ack’ of the anti-aircraft guns and to distantly falling bombs. When the continuous wailing of the ‘all-clear’ sounded, we would sleepily tramp back upstairs to bed, rather disappointed if we had not heard any bombs!

We had little news from the family and friends in France until after the war, although one telegram arrived through the Red Cross in Switzerland – announcing the demise of my Uncle Georges. One of our best friends in France was the Savreux family. Maurice Savreux, who had a son of my age, was a well known impressionist painter and lived with his family in a large private chateau-like mansion: l’Hôtel de Chaulnes, that bordered the Seine near Sèvres. The eighteenth century philosopher and author, Denis Diderot had lived in the Hôtel de Chaulnes and it was here that he used to meet

with d’Alembert and his other collaborators when compiling the *Grande Encyclopédie* of 1763.

To a young boy like me, the Hôtel de Chaulnes seemed wonderfully secretive with many old rooms, staircases and corridors in which one could wander, get lost or hide. There was a mysterious tower at one end of the chateau, which encased a helical staircase leading to a small room at the top from which one had a magnificently panoramic view of the formal gardens and tree-covered estate. There was a long, low masonry wall bordering the Seine that ran along the side of the estate, and a gravel pathway that stretched in front of the wall and followed the river for a few hundred yards. Numerous overhanging shrubs and trees also bordered the river so that portions of the garden were dark and shady.

Unfortunately, the château was almost totally destroyed the night of March 3, 1942, during an air raid by the Royal Air Force on the nearby Renault factories that were then held

by the enemy. One evening, after the war, a melancholy Maurice Savreux was strolling through the grounds of his devastated estate when he encountered a man in RAF uniform walking in the grounds and dejectedly kicking the rubble as he went. The pilot came up to Monsieur Savreux and introduced himself:

“Monsieur,” said the airman in tolerable French, “I am an RAF officer and I have an apology to make.”

“I was the pilot of a Mosquito bomber, and in March 1942, we were making a raid on the Renault factory on the Seine and hadn’t yet dropped our bombs when a squadron of the new Messerschmitt fighters attacked us. To escape, we were forced to drop our bombs hurriedly and make a run for it.” After a pause, he continued:

“I fear I inadvertently dropped my bombs on your beautiful château. I hope no one was hurt.” After another pause he took Maurice Savreux’s hand and with a tear in his eye walked away as he said:

“I do apologize - war is exceedingly stupid.”

Part II

~ Welcome to America ~

« *Voulez-vous aller en Amérique* » (“Do you want to go to America”) asked Maman? Although I didn’t realize it at the time, Maman always spoke to me in French and when she spoke in English, it was with a strong French accent that she never lost in spite of living in England for many years. However, at that time, May 1940, I didn’t realize she spoke to me in French and I didn’t recognize until over five years later that she spoke English with a strong French accent. Usually if someone spoke to me in French, I would naturally answer in French and vice-versa.

It was a sunny afternoon, my brother Philip and I had just finished Tea, which was punctually at half-past four in the dining room, and were about to

go upstairs to our bedroom and start our homework, when Maman asked the question quite casually. « *Voulez-vous aller en Amérique?* » (“Do you want to go to America?”)

I was eleven and my brother Philip thirteen. There had been rumors at school of children being evacuated to America or Canada to escape the bombs that were falling in increasing numbers and the German invasion that according to rumors was imminent. I understood the meaning of the question, and I knew my father was an American.

A few weeks later, my Dad put Philip and me on a train at Paddington Station in London. I was a little sad, and perhaps a trifle confused at the hurried preparations before we left. Our compartment in the train soon filled up with men in uniform, mostly soldiers going on leave. They all wore thick khaki uniforms, carried backpacks or duffel bags and many had their rifles that were cumbersome. After a while, the soldiers started singing and joking,

and one soldier noticing that I looked rather gloomy and glum, said to me:

“So your being evacuated and sent away from home, are you lad? Well, don’t worry. Someday, you’ll also be coming home and when you are, you will be singing and joking like we are. You’ll see!”

We traveled alone by train and boat from London to Dublin and then by road across Ireland to Galway, where after waiting for a few days, we boarded the SS Washington. A week later, we passed the Statue of Liberty and entered the New York harbor.

As soon as we docked in New York, most of the passengers pushed their way down the gangplank to awaiting friends, cars and taxis. After a few minutes the loudspeakers on board blared out: “All unaccompanied minors must report immediately to the First Class Lounge to await your guardians.” Philip and I picked up our backpacks and trudged down to the lounge. A stewardess wrote my name on a luggage label and tied it to my jacket lapel. (Just like Paddington

Bear). I waited nervously for about half-an-hour, until the stewardess called out:

“Philip and Donald Maxwell please come to the desk immediately, your guardian is coming on board.” We went to the desk and the stewardess said, “Your guardian, a Mrs. MacDonald, is coming on board. You will be going home with her, you know. Will you recognize her?”

“No,” I rapidly replied, “I have never seen her in my life.”

I waited a rather tense five minutes, not knowing what to expect. Finally I saw a lady, dressed in a flowery, blue and white suit come to the desk and say something to the stewardess, who then walked over to us and said: “This is Mrs. MacDonald, boys!”

With a broad grin and speaking rapidly with a strong American accent the lady in the blue and white dress said: “Hi Don, I am Connie MacDonald, “say, why don’t you call me: Aunt Connie, that would be dandy! Mr. MacDonald,” she continued, “that is

Uncle Bryce, is waiting for us on the dock, if you’ll get your things, we’ll go and find him.”

Carrying my blue school raincoat, a small suitcase and backpack, I scurried down the gang plank with this jolly lady as she, Aunt Connie, explained: “Uncle Bryce will be easy to find; he has gray hair and looks like an old man!” We soon found him standing on the dock. He looked nice and pleasantly plump with thinning gray hair, wearing light gray trousers and a white sport shirt. He had a kind face covered with wrinkles that seem to fall into place as he thoughtfully smiled at me and jovially holding out his hand said: “Hi, Don, welcome to America!”

We followed Uncle Bryce and Aunt Connie outside, to the MacDonald’s big dark blue American car. Aunt Connie put on a pair of white lace gloves, took the driver’s seat and started to drive rapidly but skillfully through the Sunday morning traffic of New York City.

Some of Aunt Connie’s favorite

words, that were new to me and which I heard many times that first day, were the adjectives *dandy* and *swell*. “What *dandy* jackets you guys have,” and “I have a *swell* idea, let’s go home by the Hoboken ferry.” She was always full of life, energy, and suggestions, whilst Uncle Bryce was usually calm, quiet, and reflective.

It was a hot sunny July day when, for the first time, we drove up the Boulevard in Westfield, New Jersey, to the MacDonald’s white frame house that was to be my home for many years to come. I had never seen a road like the Boulevard before, either in France or England. I was accustomed to houses that had fences or hedges around them and a large gate in front of the driveway. The complete lack of fences or hedges amazed me. There was only one smooth green lawn stretching up and down the entire road. The absence of barriers between the houses also symbolized a more friendly, neighborly and relaxed attitude that was very different from the rather aloof and unapproachable manner in England. As the years went

by that relaxed and friendly attitude entered me by a sort of osmosis, changed my personality and I hope has never left.

A few days after our arrival, Aunt Connie announced: “We must get you guys into the Y- Camp.” I climbed into the large blue Pontiac, and Aunt Connie drove to the YMCA in downtown Westfield, and introduced me to the Director. At the morning assembly, the Director announced: “Two young refugees from the bombing of London have just joined the Camp. Would those brave young men from war-torn England please stand up”? So slowly, I stood up and received a loud round of applause. Unfortunately, no one told me to sit down. As a result, when the clapping stopped, there followed a long silence during which I continued to stand like an idiot, until the chap next to me pulled on my shorts and said: “Sit down, you English jerk”.

The strangest and most wonderful discovery that day was the *Coke* machine. Outside, by the entrance to the YMCA was a red metal *Coca-*

Cola machine. Of course, I had never seen or even heard of *Coca-Cola*. In England, we didn't have bottled soft drinks of any sort. A friend, for all of a sudden I had many friends, put a nickel in the machine and out rolled one of those hour-glass shaped bottles of *Coke*. This he immediately opened and passed to me for a taste. That first taste was strange, forever remembered, yet never again quite reproduced.

For the next five wonderful years, I lived with the MacDonald family and became part of it. I played football and basketball in the winter and loved to play softball in the long summer evenings. I became a real *Noo Joisey* teenager, and spoke like one. I rarely thought about my European family and completely forgot my native tongue – *le français*.

In the summers, I worked on the local farms as a '*Victory Farm Volunteer*' helping to harvest rye, potatoes, beans and tomatoes for 35 cents an hour. It was hard work under the hot New Jersey sun, but I loved every minute of it. Sometimes the farms also

employed migrant workers, most of whom were African-American. Often, the entire family worked together picking beans and eight to ten year-olds would help their mother by putting their pickings in their mum's basket while, with a baby strung on her back, she worked and sang:

You are my sunshine, my only
sunshine,
You make me happy when skies
are gray,
You'll never know Dear, how
much I love you,
Please don't take my sunshine
away.

Next to the fields were some sheds or shacks that were the homes of the migrant workers for the season. These shacks had no windows and sometimes no door, merely an opening for an entrance, dirt for the floor, and perhaps a soot-filled chimney at one end. To work shoulder to shoulder with these folk and realize what they had to look forward to at the end of their hard day's work was an interesting and instructive

experience in class distinction, racism and the value of work and education. In the evenings, when I was home, I would sometimes think of the guys of my age that I had chatted to while we worked side-by-side in the fields. I wondered how they spent their spare time, and what they had for dinner.

I did not work on Saturdays and on one particular Saturday morning during the hot summer of 1945, something unexpected and strange occurred. Something happened that removed me from this peaceful and idealistic way of life. Somebody closed the door to the farms and to the softball games and removed me from all my school friends. That was a person I loved dearly but who came from a different world, one that I had entirely forgotten.

This special Saturday morning, I was in the 'den' of the MacDonald's home in Westfield, reading the sports page of the New York Herald Tribune, checking on the New York Giants. The phone rang. I went to the phone by the stairs and heard the voice of a

strange woman speaking in a foreign language. I did not understand a word of what she said, and said so in a very impolite manner. I was about to hang up the phone, when the woman's voice changed to English and with a pronounced foreign accent hesitatingly said:

"But . . . But Donald, this is your mother speaking - I am in New York City."

Patricia Miller

Patricia P. Miller lives with her husband and cherished cat Charles near Williamston, Michigan. She works at Michigan State University as a writer, editor, and event coordinator. Her essays and articles are published widely in books, magazines, and newspapers throughout the Midwest. She has written and edited academic publications and books, and read her poems at public forums in East Lansing. 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 and her husband own and race harness horses throughout the Midwest.

~ Quiet Where They Sleep ~

The boys of war, dressed and polished.
Ideals by the head full; reality by the heart full.
March to the two-step of the drum's urgent beat.
Must go; must train, must fight, must kill.

Must die? Who declares that? Whose order sends them?
Whose buddy sees the heads implode, the fingers fly, the bodies incinerate?

It's quiet now. No guns roar, no IED's explode, no rockets soar.
No blood-dank soil to remind; no burned out jeeps. No pulverized concrete.
Only the clink of dirt and rock, raining down, covering what remains.
Only tears of deep pain and loss.
Quiet where they sleep.

The enemy just who is that? What color is he? With what does he cover his
devil's horns with that surely sprout from his head. Tiny enemy eyes, narrow,
dark, evil and mean. He must go; he must train; he must kill—or you will kill him.

But who is he? A son, a brother, a father, a husband. Oh yes, to some other mother, brother, sister, child, wife. He's the enemy; he's evil; he must die.

But who are you? A son, a brother, a sister, father, or wife? A mother? Surely not. You who are sent to train, to fight, to kill, to be killed? Are you not the enemy too? The hunted one, the prey, the evil one. Just Who is Who?

It's quiet where they sleep. No more battle noise, no more tears, but no more life. It's the price you pay. The silence.

At what an immeasurable cost.

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.

~ Earth's Tears Will Flow Into the Wind ~

“The young man looked at me and said to me ‘Say it loud! Samora Machel is a dog! Repeat after me!’

“I repeated like a parrot. ‘Samora Machel is a dog!’ My voice was loud as it rang into the night. I was surprised by its loudness.” Geda said, as her face contorted with pain.

“‘Go and tell all these children what you have seen and heard. Do you hear me?’ The soldier commanded me as if I were a child. I thought he was talking to the two of us older women, but he picked me out by pushing me aside with his gun. ‘I mean you, not the woman with the

baby.’ He said facing away from the other woman whom we called Rosita. I do not remember what happened to Rosita. I think she died when we were in the alley on the day of the last attack. I really don’t remember even though we had left the village together and run in the direction of the forest that was in the east when all the villagers had disappeared by running away from the sound of the firing guns. We had not heard the gun fire. We just took off when we heard the boys say ‘Aye!!!!’ Everybody knew that meant the soldiers were upon the village. It meant we should run. I just think about her as we stood there and how I envied her because I thought her fate would be different. She was younger. God knew what fate lay ahead of people like her not me. I had to respond to the question which was asked.

“Yes I do,” I answered and wondered why it was important for Renamo soldiers to have people suffer for a cause that was not understood. We were all people of Mozambique. What was the issue? I had learnt to ask questions and answer them myself. If you ask me now, my child, all I can tell you is that the issue was war. When war looked at you through the eyes of a person you did not ask questions. You provided answers for what you did not know. You did not have time to think. Yet deep down in me I still look back and think. I think and feel that if I could look into those eyes again I would faint. I can look at your eyes and feel that the story is a real story because you remind me that I am here in front of you. Are you still listening?”

“I am listening?” I said my eyes glued on Geda’s face.

“The young man took a panga and hacked my breast off my chest. I was surprised at the stroke. I thought that he was killing me. I closed my eyes and when I felt the stroke and the burning pain I was shocked. I

saw my breast on the floor and blood started to pour out of me like a tap had just been opened. I looked at my breast which lay on the floor. Blood was seeping out of the part that had attached it to my chest like droplets that were being forced out of a brow of a sweating hard worker.

“They were boys of my son’s age. I mean the boys of Dhlakama. They were looking at my breast which they had ripped off my chest. My chest was burning with pain. The panga they had used to rip it off was dangling on the right hand of the other soldier. I just looked at them. I felt numb one minute and felt a burning pain the next. I wanted to scream and my voice would just not come out. If I had screamed it would have felt like pretence. Such was the pain that was locked inside my chest. It could not be expressed with sounds. It was just a big lump that seemed to turn this way and that when ever my eyes came face to face with the horrors of war.” Geda said swaying this side and that side on her bench. Her hands were on her face. I could see that she was

holding back the tears that were ready to flow and get blown into the wind. They were tears of a past that was full of sad memories.

“I cast my eyes towards the ground again. There lay my breast. It lay dejectedly on the ground like some fruit that had fallen off a tree after a heavy wind. I thought of the milk that had flowed from it. It had once been a life source for the generations that I had begotten. They lay strewn in the bushes of Quelimane at different places. Some were dead. Some were hiding. Here was my breast which had suckled them lying on the ground. I had been the type of woman who breastfed on the right hand breast most of the time. It had been the real life source of my children. I was really proud of this breast. I was very proud of life. To watch it as it lay there was like watching all that I stood for go to waste. When the soldiers moved on I took my breast and wrapped it into a piece of cloth. It just did not feel right to leave it there. It was a bloody mess that I had to take with me. I vowed that I would carry it with me as long as I lived.

“I thought about the words of the man. His voice tore into the center of my being. The final stroke that had ripped my breast off flashed in and out of my mind. I was surprised by the precision of a surgeon that he had used. It occurred to me right then that he was used to doing this to women. I was shocked. This powerful severing of flesh would remain painted at the core of my being for years. What did it matter to me if Samora Machel was a dog? I had suckled children who were dead. I had suckled this very soldier who was so full of war that he was dishing it out to me in hard strokes that tore into my being. I had suckled the babies who lay groaning in these bushes of Quelimane. War lay painted in this night sky. I could hear the groans of the boys who had fallen. Yet I was standing there listening to the instruction of the soldier like a parrot, my whole body limp with pain. Yet I spoke the words of hate as if they were mine. What did it matter to me if Samora was a fool? I had never seen a dog sever the breast of a female dog and here I was reciting after the soldier

that one person was a fool and a dog. Who was a dog and who was a fool? I felt that I was worse than a fool and a dog as I stood right there. Such is war my child. It brings out the essence of foolishness in you and puts it right in front of you because you realize that all you stand for is nothing. It can be taken away in one fell swoop by a soldier who is following instructions that come from a god you have never seen. What god creates and kills just because he thinks the next person is clever or stupid? How do we prove clever and stupid in times of war? I don't know my child. I don't know. Are you still listening?"

"I am still listening Geda, continue." I said as I sniffed trying to hold back the tears that were forcing misery into my eyes. It was a misery that made me feel the ring of the twenty five liter cut into my bottom. I became numb when she talked about her experiences of war. I just looked into the veld and cast my eyes beyond the Lubombo Mountains and looked towards Mozambique as if I could see the scenes that she was talking to me

about unfold in the telling that she was doing.

Geda Mkitima was talking to me. We were sitting outside my mother's little house. That day I was sitting opposite her and looking at the window frames I had just bought so that the builders could put the final touches to the little verandah of the house. A strong feeling of accomplishment went with watching my mother move about her own yard. I still smile to myself even today when I think of the words my mother always said when she thought I had done something good. "If my mother would rise from the grave and see what this child has done. What would she do? Everybody must learn from this child. Use your energy for yourself before you can go and waste your life away at another person's place. Look at me. I worked in people's fields. I labored, fetched water, cut trees for fields and what did I gain? Nothing! If I had been working for myself I would be very rich now. I would have everything." I never answered my mother when she spoke like that. I just kept quiet and

laughed. I knew she was sad about her loss from her last marriage. Her in-laws had taken everything from her. She was very bitter. She had lost her husband's benefits from the plantation company called Ubombo Ranches. She had lost her home and her fields. She had even lost the three cattle that her husband had put forward for her bride price. I was tired of my mother's stories. As I sat opposite Geda Mkitima I was enjoying the new vibrancy that had come with this strange woman. She did not speak the language of my people. Yet I listened to her as if I was from her country. While this annoyed my mother, it fascinated me. She did not fetch water. She did not go to gather firewood. She did not sweep the yard. All this made my mother mad. "The problem with Mkitima is that she wants to rule you. She is so lazy!" My mother said as she went about picking papers in the yard and preparing a rough broom of rushes that she would use to sweep the yard.

We lived on the opposite side of the Umtimphofu River from the Mkhaya Reserve. We were the community that had suddenly become a threat to wild life. We had to pay money to go and gather firewood across the river. We also had to pay money to cut poles for building huts on our side of the river. While the land had belonged to my ancestors, we were now strangers who had to be kept out of it by the fences that protected wild life that had come from as far as the Republic of South Africa. In order to get water to drink, my mother had to go to the empty river bed and scoop out the river sand and wait for the water to seep into the hole and when it was full, she and the rest of the community would sink an old drum and protect the water that would be a life source for about a thousand Swazis who lived in the expanse of land called KaMkhweli. A lot of things happen in the community. Drinking is the main pass time. People gather at the homesteads where people drink. They buy a liter of home-made brew for a rand and go and sit in clusters

and drink. Others meet and go and make relationships that can even result in babies who have HIV/AIDS. Some meet on Sundays and sing songs and pray in a little wooden ram shackle four-cornered structure that has a corrugated roof that they call a church. The woman who is in charge of the “church” is a short, fat dark-skinned lady who laughs as quickly as she snarls. She conducts funeral services, collects offerings and prepares for the arrival of the “bishop.”

Such was the community that I returned to when I grew up. It was different from the KaMkhweli I had left four decades ago to go and get an education. Only one person remembered when I left. It was Gogo Mkhubose. She would speak of me as if I was a legend. “I ask them, she would say, about this child. I say where is she? They tell me that she went to live with a teacher. I ask them, if she went to live with a teacher why is she not coming back? They say, she goes to school. I keep quiet and I ask after another year.

Where is this teacher? They say she lives at Phonjwane. I ask, why are we not going to visit her. She is our child. I want to see her. My child I am telling you that when I see you. I see Magedu. This is Magedu alive. I say this because of your grandmother. She would want me to tell you these things. She sent you there because there was no money. She wanted you to learn.” Mkhubose would tell me all these stories and I would listen. I would learn from her how people had felt about my going away. It gave me an idea of how I should re-enter the community forty years after I had left. I was young then. I was old now. If we were poor then we were not poor now. This made my mission very clear. I had to look at our lives differently and fit myself into my community as a person who could do something for someone. I had to help my mother and my people. How I asked myself. I was not sure. I just hoped that I would find out as life unfolded in front of me.

I decided to rebuild my grandmother's home. This is what I was doing when I came home and found Geda Mkitima. I must confess that at first I was not happy with her arrival. My uncles were making me nervous. They had told me that I had to report that there was a stranger who had come to stay with us. I was not sure if this was being done in the kind of spirit I like to do things in. I decided to do nothing about it. If my uncles called me to discuss the issue I knew how I would answer. I would throw the ball in their court. I lived in the city. I did not live in the countryside. They saw the woman arrive in the community and did nothing about it. Why did I have to take action against her? What if the police decided to deport her? I knew that I would not be pleased with that. As I sat opposite her that day I had thought about all these questions and told myself that she would live with my mother until she decided to leave. I had listened to my mother's story about her arrival. She had told me that she was asleep when she heard a knock in the early hours of the morning.

"Knock, knock," the voice had said.

"Who are you? What do you want at this time of night?" My mother asked in a fearful voice. It was a difficult time when old ladies were afraid of the young men who had started to lust after them because they were afraid of the young women who had HIV/AIDS. My mother had had a funny experience with a young man who had come to her place and knocked at her door for the whole night, yet when she saw him during the day he had looked as sheepish as a lamb. She was wary of people who arrived in the middle of the night.

"My name is Mkitima. They have chased me away from down there where I live. Someone told me that there is an old woman who lives alone." The voice continued to explain the circumstances that led to its being there in broken siSwati. My mother told me that she had opened and found an old woman whom she let into the house. From that day Geda Mkitima had lived with my mother and picked up herself and

replanted herself in the new place where life found her. As I sat opposite her listening to her story, I knew that this was a story like no other.

“Who was your husband?” I asked Mkitima one day.

“Don’t ask. He died in the war.” She would answer with a stern face.

“And your children?”

“Don’t ask. Some died in the war. Some may still be alive. I don’t know. It was a war like no other. I tried to do the best I could. I shudder when I think of the last days I was with them. You don’t know what it is like to watch all your children die in front of you. It was painful. I just managed. The children that I saw die made the mistake of herding for the fence when they were in full view of the enemy. If they had waited, they would be alive right now. All of my five! It was as if the bullets were picking mine only. I still hear them whizzing this way and that over our heads. It was war. When it comes you have no choice. You just run. Life means running, hiding and

feeling as if tomorrow will not be there. You are happy when the dawn comes. You learn to live for the next breath, because the one after that may find you no more. You do not look at the dead. You just pity them and run.

“The day when I saw my five children die we had been cornered into a place where we could hide. There were dongas and a few bushes. I thought we were lucky. The bullets whizzed this way and that, I shouted at the children. ‘Go down,’ You are not really shouting. You are forcing a loud whisper and they tell each other. There were about ten children there. There was one woman. I am just saying this. I am not sure. I stole a glance at the people I was talking to. I was happy when I saw the heads go down and disappear into the donga. We crawled-ran as we crouched and came towards each other. The bullets were zigzagging over our heads. I was breathlessly tired. I looked at one of the boys as he came towards me. His shoulder was bleeding. He had been grazed by a bullet right at the part where the arm and the shoulder join

each other. It did not matter to me what his name was. He was my son. In this situation you did not show pity. You had to inculcate bravery in the children. I just looked at them and indicated to him to go down. I could see he was weary with pain. We were running and following the donga hoping to go up further north having eluded the soldiers who were now to the south of us. I do not know who said the children should go out of the donga. I just heard a furor of bullets and heard voices yell into the night. Heads fell and I knew that most of the young inexperienced boys had died. They were five of them. Some who fell were mine. I was left with the little ones. We herded for a rock when the bullets seized to torture us.

“I will not forget the death of the little boy who called me ‘mama, mama.’ He was so young and full of love. He should not have died. They have shot him. ‘Mama, they have shot him.’ The boy with the wound on his shoulder said handing me the baby whose limbs were flailing from the bullet wound that had gone into his

stomach. ‘Bring him here,’ I said and run back to the bushes. He handed me the baby and I took him in my arms. I was still carrying my breast which had been hacked off my chest by the soldier. I watched the baby breathe its last and took the hunk of flesh that was my breast and put the dead nipple inside the dead mouth and put it on the ground. I crouched further down and went to pick four stones that lay three feet from me. I put them around the two and said a prayer as I threw handfuls of earth on them. My eyes filled as I performed this ritual and I let the tears flow down my cheeks. They were blown into the wind. I carelessly let them float away from me into the westward wind that whistled in that early dawn. I sniffed and turned away from the children. I had taught them not to cry. Here I was crying for the dead of the earth. Here I was breaking a rule of war that every survivor knew was important. Crying during times of war made you feel as if you were betraying yourself to pain. If the enemy wanted you to feel pain, crying was an indication that

your spirit had been conquered. When you held back your tears you felt as if you could take the next challenge in its stride. If you needed to breathe you could breathe. Crying blocked your mouth with anguish and screams that would not be heard. I thought about all this as I muffled cries into the approaching dawn.

“I was glad when we saw the South African fence miles away. We had the landmarks. If we ran successfully through the flatlands and made it to the thorn bushes, we would be close to the border and the fiercest grounds of war would be behind us. I turned away from the ground where I had buried the flesh of my flesh and the little boy and crouched towards the bushes, knowing that I would never be the same Geda again.

“I turned and walked away. I could see the streaks of dawn in the east. I thanked God for another day. That is when I saw the South African fence. We knew that the fence was electrified. We lost one child who would not wait for us to pick a brush

and de-electrify it. He was charred in front of us by the current. When the soldiers saw us at dawn we had crossed the fence. You look at me wipe these tears. Don't look at them. They will always flow into the wind when I think about the war in Quelimane. I still think of the children. I lost all of them on the way.”

“What about the girls, Mkitimal?”

“Don't ask me, child. They were taken long before we left the village. Most of the girls had been taken much earlier. It had been said that they were taken by the army to go and cook for the soldiers. We cried tears that dried on our faces. We hope they are still alive. The whole village lost its girls to the soldiers. Some people told us that they were raped. All we heard about them was a rumor that I still hear up to this day. I got here by myself. I roam the night because sometimes these stories still live in my head. I cannot sleep. I long gave up sleep. It is a luxury of fools who have never known the ravages of war. I cannot sleep and dream of the pain

of this world. It is not sleep. I just rest and wake up and go and gather food. My husband used to cook and fetch water from the river. I cannot be like a Swazi woman. I heal the sick. That is why I went to get this medicine for you.” She said as she gave me the white milky concoction that she had prepared for me to take with porridge.

I still think of Geda Mkitima and hear the bullets as they whiz over my head in her telling. It is like waking up from a dream. I ask God where I have been because I never feel like I am living inside my skin whenever I revisit Geda’s stories of the war in Mozambique. My mother still lives with Geda. They still quarrel about her refusal to fetch water and firewood. Geda still dances to marabenta when the little radio I gave them plays Mozambican music. Yes, I see them working out a life on the same Bushveld of Swaziland that I grew up in. It is almost twenty years since the battles that Geda Mkitima is talking about. I am listening to her in this year of 2004 as if I was listening to a radio. The lowveld rings of her

voice in my ears even though I am now thousands of miles away from her. I miss the happy days when we would dance to Mozambican music. Geda would shake her body and laugh. She would ask for ‘Go Black’ to put in her hair and I would tease her and laugh at her asking her who would look at her because she had no husband. She would smoke fish on some days and make a poultice for my body on others. She would also slaughter my mother’s chickens without asking for them. To her survival meant taking and making use of anything in sight. Her dark solid figure with the rounded buttocks that swung this way and that way to marabenta still remain painted in my mind. Her doek which falls to the side and her waist cloth still affirm the truth about her. She was Geda Mkitima, a woman who had survived the war and did not know how to get back to Mozambique. Sometimes you would even wonder if she wanted to go home because home to her seemed to be where she was at that time.

Anne-Marie Oomen

Anne-Marie Oomen is the author of *Pulling Down the Barn*, a Michigan Notable Book; and the forthcoming *House of Fields* (Wayne State University Press); two chapbooks of poetry, *Seasons of the Sleeping Bear*, and *Moniker* with Ray Nargis; and the forthcoming *Uncoded Woman*, (Milkweed Press). She is represented in *New Poems of the Third Coast: Contemporary Michigan Poetry*. She edited *Looking Over My Shoulder: Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, an anthology of seniors' essays funded by Michigan Humanities Council; has written and produced several plays including the award-winning *Northern Belles*, as well as *Wives of An American King* based on the James Jesse Strang story. She serves as Chair of Creative Writing at Interlochen Arts Academy where she is faculty editor for the *Interlochen Review*. She and her husband have built their own home in Empire, Michigan where they live with a large cat named Walt Whitman. She was featured in the inaugural issue of the Bear River Review.

“Dynamite” is a Chapter from *House of Fields: Memories of a Rural Education*. The press is Wayne State University Press, publication, November 2006.

~ Dynamite ~

For a long time it lives in the granary and we don't know about it. Or rather, we know about the heavy box with peeling paper wrap, red lettering and the skull and crossbones on the outside, but we don't know what it holds. We stare at the box when we play in the

wheat bins, but we have been warned never to touch it in such serious tones that even Tom and Rick, “the boys,” are not tempted. Still, it is alive with our looking, our thorny interest.

Over breakfast one morning, my father says he must blow it up.

“Blow what up?” Tom is hopping from one foot to the other and his elbows stick out like something flapping. Rick is quiet like he is, watching from his chair. The little girls, Marijo and Patty, are still asleep.

My mother has put her cup down with a sharp click.

“To get rid of it.”

Tom asks, “Can we do like they do in the movies? Can we blow up the chicken coop?”

My father sighs. He is looking at my mother. “I’ve been reading. The stuff is old. Unstable. It could be dangerous.”

“Unstable?” she asks.

“Nitroglycerin in that form is supposed to be turned every month. I didn’t know that. I’ve never done it.” His uncertainty hovers crow-like over the table.

“You’re saying it could go off at any time?”

“Not if we get rid of it.”

“It’s been in the granary since you cleared the pasture.” My mother lifts her cup, blows on her coffee, silently counts the years.

“You blew up something?” Tom, putting it together, is frantic that he

might have missed something. He is kneeling on his chair, his hands on top of his head.

“We blew some ditches. Didn’t use it all.” My father stares at his eggs.

“How many are left?” My mother’s voice is too light. The number will make the threat into something she can measure.

“Half a box,” he says. She waits. He rubs his hand on the back of his head and does not look at her. “Fifty or so.”

She gasps.

I don’t know how many fifty is but the sound of her breath tells me it is a lot. And then there are these new words: explode, unstable. Night or glisten. They sound like what they must mean. Something unexpected.

When it becomes clear that nothing will be blown up except the dynamite itself, Tom and Rick settle for following my father, trailing at his pockets and underfoot until my father’s patience is worn. My mother has tried every argument and has

made every suggestion for other ways to rid ourselves of it, but my father says no one else can do it, and it must be done. When the time comes, my father tells all of us to stay at the house. My brothers are appalled that they cannot be with him. They wiggle like puppies but our mother forbids them from taking one step off the back porch. From the porch, we can see across the barnyards to the granary and the fields beyond. Here, we are protected.

We watch this unfolding like a story.

He lifts and places a long piece of wood over the steps to the granary to make a ramp. He pushes the big wooden slider door to the side and climbs into the building. My mother, watching, puts a hand over her mouth. When it takes a long time for him to come out, she looks away, stares down at some dog shit piled along the edge of the yard.

My mother doesn't look away from anything.

When he comes back into the light, he

is carrying the box with the red letters in front of him, a little away from his body. He walks differently than I have ever seen him walk, like cold syrup from a spilled bottle. He walks away from the buildings, away from the barns, workshop, the chicken coop. Stopping now and then to hold very still, he climbs the east hill. He places his feet so carefully I think they are like the cars in a choo-choo train, one after another, alike and evenly spaced as days until he disappears like something sinking on the other side of the hill. My mother makes a rough cluck in her throat. Without her anchor of steadiness, a gnawing of worry grows in us. Unable to sit still on the steps for more than a few seconds, we wiggle in and out of the shadows on the porch, first at the railings, then the gray clapboarding, then swinging on the post and peeling its shards of old paint until she speaks sharply to stop it. We shift our gaze from her face to the hill and back to her face. After a while something in it loosens, a shoelace coming free of its knot. My father appears, rising like

a dark ghost over the hill's crest, his body silhouetted against the sky. But now he walks in a natural pace down the hill and turns toward the house. My mother breathes.

"Did it go off?" Tom looks as though he is about to wail. Rick is biting his lower lip.

"Not yet." My mother whispers.

My father does not speak with us. His face is still thinking, focused on what he must do. He comes to the house swiftly, walking with quick, hard steps. He bangs down the rickety steps to the basement, rummages. When he climbs up the rough steps, he is carrying his rifle and a small box of shells.

My mother looks at him.

"It's the only way I can think of." He says to her and leaves again, the rifle in the crook of his elbow.

"Yer gonna shoot it?" Tom asks, delight pouring from every cell. Rick smiles.

We move as one body to the porch rail to track his movements. Again, he crosses the barnyards, leaves the circle of buildings, climbs to the crest, and at the very top of the hill but still in full view, he kneels, loads the gun slowly, then lowers himself to his belly. He is so low in the grasses that the rifle, extended before him as he aims, looks like the stinger of a mosquito. Then he shimmies back, down from the highest point.

Watching how he is using the hill to protect himself, my hands turn cold. I look at my mother. Again, she is looking down, her mouth calm, as though there was something of great interest growing between the boards in the porch.

At the first sound, everyone looks at each other. But it is merely a gun shot, a sound that, because we live among hunters and hunting from the time we can crawl, we know. Despite its power, it is familiar. It does not frighten us.

“He missed.” My brother says, a little disgusted. Rick shakes his head, scuffs the dirt below the lowest step.

“It’s hard at that angle,” my mother tells him.

But when he misses a second time, she makes a tisking sound, as though someone annoyed her that she would like to scold. Her mouth knots up again, her expression turns tight and too quiet. My hands ache. I pull the hem of my tee shirt and stick my thumb into my mouth. She is one to speak her mind, she is one to say when something is not right. And if she is not doing that now, what is wrong?

Fifty sticks of dynamite.

The explosion, when it comes, makes the sharp pop of the rifle seem like a toy sound. This sound is lightning and thunder at exactly the same moment, a small and ugly sun, hard and fast, scarring the mind. It is bigger than any other sound in our small lives. It rolls down the hillsides, bangs against the barns and sheds, bounces off everything, leaving

it raw as skin scraped clean, then shoves itself deep into the crevasses of dreams. It is night collapsed onto itself, stars blinking on and off at once. I hear it, we all hear it, and there is nothing that can take it back.

Dust and smoke flies up and out like gray fireworks, then drops into a slow cloud down the hill.

My father lays in the grass for so long that my mother makes a motion like an animal tied to something it cannot get away from. Her body jerks toward him, then back, holding itself in some cage. At last, he pushes himself up on all fours, rises to his knees, lifts the rifle, stands, dusts off his arms, scuffs in the dirt, unloads the gun and disappears over the crest. For the first time since the task began, we are still. A stream of dark smoke rises and rises. Finally, for the second time, he appears above the crest. He gestures that it is okay for us to come. My brothers leap like peas from rubber slingshots.

I turn to see my mother, her face white, looking up at the kitchen window. A single crack spread all the

way across the clear glass, dividing it like a cut from a knife. It breaks the reflection of the fields in two. I look away. Then I am running too, with wild curiosity, to see this thing that was big enough to change the world.

I want to tell my father that it was a good story.

When my mother and I reach the hilltop and look down the slope, my brothers are running around the hole. They have already been stopped from climbing into it because, my father says, “Hot as hell.”

“As hell,” Tom says, his voice big.

I look down into a gray hole that smells like metal that’s too hot. The grass all around is singed black for several feet. Here and there tiny flames pop up out of nowhere. My father walks around and around, stepping on burnt grass, twisting his boot hard onto these places. He asks my mother to bring the water bucket. He tells us to look, then move away until it all cools down. I step close, sniffing the bitterness that stings and hold my

breath as I realize how big the hole is. The hole could fit my mother and me, my father and Tom and Rick. It could fit Marijo and Patty—though she is too small to walk, maybe even my bigger cousins, Eddy Jo and Harry, Mike and Teddy and Kathy. I stand with my body open, thinking how many of my family could climb into it and not ever fill it. But what makes me feel sick—even as I am trying to figure out how many people could fit—is how empty it is. Something that was our own dirt, solid, steady as a field is now like a hot gray bowl. The hole is empty, a mouth that needs to be filled and can never be filled. Like it ate itself. There was earth and now there is not. It scares me more than the cracked window.

When I look at my father, I see that he is too quiet. I think about the sound, how it came to us bigger than anything real, how it made emptiness, not the good kind where you can sit in it and listen to the outside world, but a new kind, the kind that would hurt you if you stayed inside it too long. You would never be able to hear anything in a hole like that. You

would never fill it with anything, people or words, because it is the kind of empty that could, yes I know this now, it could kill you. I look hard at my father's face which is deep red like he has been in the sun too long. I realize he has no eyebrows.

~ **Cleaning Kill: A War Story** ~

My father's hands are impossible, broad as shovels, the fingers, long, thick, and squared off. They look massive, brutal, unthinking, at least clumsy. They are none of these things. I don't believe his precision as he slits the belly skin on a ten-pound Chinook, sliding the slim fillet knife from the tail to the fin, slipping his fingers into the cavity to pull out the guts. His movement is all delicate control, too fine for the crude muscularity of his fingers. Watching him, I remember my father is a careful person with his hands; he has touched me so gently I might have been glass. I see contradiction only when I look at his face—the impassivity and detachment of stone.

The hooked nose and wide brow are like a mask.

I remember he hated to clean his kill.

I remember when I was small, my mother sputtered often about having to clean his kill—rabbits, squirrels, even pheasant. The argument was routine and not serious. He brought the game to the basement, and she would be grateful for the meal, and angry that she had to do the “dirty work.” I asked mom once why he didn't clean his kill. When she answered, “the smell,” it never occurred to me to ask for an explanation. When I was six or seven years old, after Mom's exhausting delivery of my youngest sister, after the long recovery, after her bad back got worse, he began to clean the game, small and large.

Recently, I was home. On the table, he had spread a map of Africa. He had been watching the reruns of the mini-series “The Winds of War,” and his hands were tracing some of the places he remembered. Places in Africa and Italy.

I had never heard him talk about the war. Our family knows he served in the army during the last two and a half years of World War II, in a battalion that defended anti-aircraft infantry. He had never told us more than that. It had become a family joke to ask him what he did in the war. He'd shake his head and say, "I don't know." The strange thing—he actually looked puzzled, as though he really didn't know. It was an incongruous look on the face of an intelligent man. Once, when we pressed him about it, my mother scolded us sharply.

Later, she told us he'd had malaria six times.

Now, he was staring down at the map. I sat across from him and asked. I asked softly, sensing I was trespassing but unable to respect his privacy, "Where were you, dad?"

The huge fingers did not tremble as he pointed to borders and rivers, and then he said the names. "I was in Africa, and in the invasions of Sicily and Italy, in the Second Army Corps."

He thought they campaigned as far as Tabessa. He believed he landed on the south side of Sicily near Platani where they helped build a road straight through the mountains with a bulldozer.

"What was that like?" I tried to be gentle and general with these questions; I tried not to break his willingness to talk.

"Oh, sometimes we'd stall half a day at a time because the army only built one lane, and if someone had a wreck it might take them that long to clear the road."

From Palermo they went to Salerno, then finally to Rome.

"Was there fighting?"

"Not much. Not there. The Italian soldiers would surrender as soon as the American soldiers approached their lines.

"Really? Why was that?"

"They were hungry. I never seen such starvation. They ate potato peeling

we threw away. That's how I learned to peel potatoes so good. We made sure they got that much." My father chuckles, and then grows quiet. He looks at me and I can see on the edge of the calm, inscrutable face, the surge of stories, words almost spoken. He says, "Well. You better ask."

"How old were you?"

"Nineteen."

"Tell me where you started."

"First, I was in Al Guettar Pass, and we moved through the Kassarine Pass. I had a bad sergeant. A really bad guy."

My father would not explain what this meant, but he said it three or four times, vehemently. He said the sergeant was an "idiot."

"You hated him?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"What did you do?"

"I asked to be transferred."

"To get away from him?"

"Yeah."

"Where'd you go?"

"Only one place you could go if you was transferred."

He was transferred to platoon headquarters nearer the front where he worked in communications.

"Communications. So you were safer, away from the fighting?"

"Well. It was just a radio in a jeep. There was some fighting almost everyday."

At some point in this convoluted conversation, he told me about the guns. He was a little apologetic; I remember he was nineteen at the time.

"In Africa, they were firing 40 mm's, round after round. After a certain number of rounds, the barrels to these guns had to be changed because they'd get so hot, they'd melt, and become warped. To change the barrel we'd rest it on two saw horses. Once one of these barrels was so hot it

burned through the saw horses and fell in the sand. The gunners had been afraid to stop firing until the anti-aircraft left.

“One time, two soldiers were operating a water-cooled machine gun, one of them pumped the water, and one fired. But shrapnel cut the hose from the tank to the guns and so they pumped the water right into the gunpit. My buddy, Peavine, said it was a ‘Dirty trick—he coulda’ drowned instead of getting shot.’ ”

“Peavine? That was his name?”

“Yeah, I don’t know why. Maybe ‘cause he was from the South.”

“Did you keep in touch with him, with anyone?”

“I... I don’t think he made it.”

He tried to think of clever things people said, but he couldn’t hide how many memories ended like Peavine’s.

His hands were loose in his lap when he told me the last story.

“Once, they assigned the

communications jeep to a particular fox hole. It was quiet, a lull. After a while, I was bored and fed-up, so I wandered away from the headquarters, looking for my buddies. All of a sudden, the first of four Messerschmitts flew over. When that happens the big guns swivel around to follow them, but then little Stuka, dive bombers, come in right behind them, bombing from the other direction, but all the guns are turned the wrong way.

“I dived into the nearest fox hole, but the gun’s concussion was so big, the muzzle blast whips up against the legs of my pants, and it stings my skin, feels like a burn.”

He chuckled but wiped his face, sweating mildly. “I thought I was hit. I heard that when you are hit really bad, it feels tame at first because your body is in shock. I really thought I’d been shot through the legs. When I realized I wasn’t hit at all, I got up and started running toward headquarters, but when the bombing got too close I had to get down again, get out of

the fire. There was a wheat field so I scrambled into this wheat and stayed real flat. I turned my head to one side. I could see the shrapnel slicing the wheat down all around me, slipping it over like a knife.

“When the bombing eased up, I got going again. I wanted to get back pretty bad, and I was running through the smoke and the dust, but it was so thick I couldn’t see where I was.”

He shook his head, embarrassed, “I guess I was lost for a while. When it finally cleared, I figured out I was way ahead of headquarters, almost at the front of the convoy. I had to find my way back to where the jeep was. But when I got there, the jeep had been hit. One of the bombs landed between the bumper and the frame. The truck was, what’s the word, disintegrated. Enemy fliers been trying to bomb the whole motor pool. A lot of people got killed that day.”

He stopped talking then, folded up the map. He walked into the living room and turned on the television.

He was in that “theatre” from December of 1942 until June of 1945.

He never tells me if he killed.

That night after dad went to bed, my mother stares into the blue light of the TV without the sound.

“What was dad like when he came home?” I ask.

“Well you know, I was dating your Uncle Joe a little, and I didn’t think I liked your dad.” She sighs, stares at some silent scene.

“Why not?”

“Oh, I thought he acted like a snob, like he was too good for me?”

“What changed your mind?”

“I don’t know. After we started dating, he told me he’d been away so long, he’d forgotten how to act with a woman. He was afraid of making a mistake.” Her face softens.

Then she said there were worse things than he told me, that he was telling me the easy things. “You remember

how I used to complain about him not cleaning his game. Well, that's why." Then my mother said these words, "He didn't tell me for a long time, not 'till after we'd been married for years. He couldn't bear to do it. The smell of the gutting and the blood reminded him of picking up the bodies of the dead men."

She told me he picked up parts of one of his close buddies once. She looked at me, awed, "He could do all that, and come back, and provide for a family."

We sat in the TV light, and I remembered his hands, how steady they were when he cleaned his kill. You could see him close his mind to do the work. He worked precisely, with great economy. It was as though he would not breathe. If he thought of something else, I could not know what it was. If the smell held the flesh and blood of a human being, he did not betray us or himself.

Tracy Rosewarne

Tracy has been teaching English at Community High School for ten years. She has her M.A. in Secondary Curriculum. She has two books published with *Heinemann: They Still Can't Spell?* and *Purposeful Writing*. Tracy was not sure what to put in her biography and said, "I am just really starting to think about creative writing, as I have spent years focusing on teacher research and nonfiction. I use my high school class as a source of inspiration--my students are incredible. Their enthusiasm and ideas make me want to work on writing more, and I am going to do so."

~ To Steven, from Fallujah ~

At the age of Romeo, standing in a hot, high school room
Lines of Shakespeare and love
Stammering out of your mouth,
You imagined what it would be like for you
to be Romeo
and to have found your Juliet.

Your mother raised you –
her Romeo wilted
and gone just a year after your birth
She raised you.

She sent you off to the world –
to the university – to find what it is that makes us
all want to live.

You found it for a fleeting moment – on the shore
of Californian beaches
surfing in with the waves
living in cohesion with the tides

And then the towers fell.

And then you rose.

You rose and signed the papers

because surfing didn't seem as significant as war.

You took their tests and passed into high

head job positions

With the marines.

Going home that night you lied in bed contemplating.

You weren't joining the marines to do head work

You were joining the marines to fight.

Your mom contemplated cutting off your trigger finger

When you slept peacefully in your bed – sleeping peacefully

Before the war took you.

Your mom wanted to know why you

– her only son - was going.

But most your mom wanted you to stay.

Infantry 0311 was tattooed

on your right forearm a month later.

Infantry. 0311.

Forever will stay on your skin.

The skin where you tried to brush off

the death of your best friend.

Brush it off you said.

There isn't time to mourn in war.

You said it just like the Marines taught you to.

You lived in the Fallujah train station.

Complete with beds and a duct-taped together Rocky style gym.
You slept with your pants on, your boots on, your gun
next to you - your blouse hanging on it.

You slept in 15 minute increments. You still do.

That one day, that day
when you were at the train station
the calls came that there was a boy
a young boy
jumping the wire –
you said you would take it.
You walked out towards him
Your gun posed to shoot
The young boy – 12 years old in blue sweatpants and a white shirt –
A blue round circle was in his hand
You yelled at him to stop.
He kept coming.
Running towards you.
Running towards the pile of food scraps.
A blue circle was in his hand.
You yelled for him to stop.
He didn't hear,
he didn't understand,
or worse
he was just hungry.

There was a blue
circle in his hand.
You saw a blue
circle in his hand.

He didn't stop.
You took the shots.
You had to take the shots.
Two shots – one in his front left temple.
The other in his heart.
Blood stained through his shirt –
not in a violent way,
But in a quiet, contained way.
His face still intact – the bullet
making a clear circular
mark in his left temple

Both of the shots forcing his eyes wide
open for the rest of his existence.
Forcing his eyes wide open for the rest
of your existence.

His mom and dad ran up behind him.
Clamoring to the fence
separating the marines from the Iraqi people
Screams arched out of the mother's body
her husband held her
Screams arched and he held her tighter.

Her son was lying on top of
a pile of food remnants.
Eyes wide open.

You, Steven, you had to look.
You took the shot.

You said that in Fallujah everything
is gray.

If you looked and it was a blue
explosive, you were right.

If you looked and it was a blue
ball, you were wrong.

But you said that can't think of it like
that
in the midst of war.

There isn't time.
There isn't time
to mourn.

So you say that "we" took the shot. "We" had to.

But in between the lines you ask
where do you put that?
Where do you put the fact that "you",
you Steven,
killed a 12 year old boy?

The 12 year old Iraqi boy who
will never grow up.

He had a
blue ball
in his hand.

He
Was hungry.

~ **Waiting at the Dinner Table** ~

There was a quiet in Darfur,
A quiet that came before the deaths
Before the 100 days that took over
800,000 lives of men who loved women,
women who loved their children,
and of children who thought that parents
could save them from anything.

There was a quiet before the beginning An
evening where women and men were
preparing to eat, to bathe, to rest and to sleep.
Making lists of what needs to be done
tomorrow, this week, this month.
Keeping in their heads the dreams
of next summer, next year, and
the years that come so quickly
after those. The years that come
Before you know it,
Or the years that are gone
Before you know it.
Because life can change
In its quietness.

1983.

It's Raining Men in America
Hallelujah,
Filled the spaces between people
in cars going anywhere.

2004.

Toxic in America

Filled the spaces between people
in cars going anywhere.

And all that time

in between two long decades
all of those songs were played
as the silent tunes of deaths
in Rwanda crept in to interrupt
quiet family meals, trips to schools and the market,
Peaceful nighttime rest.

And this whole time, we kept track
of the songs on the Billboard –
ignoring the warnings and realities.

We looked at our children and couldn't
imagine life without them.

We set up neighborhood watch programs
to keep our children safe.

We didn't care enough to stop
the deaths of two million
men who loved women,
women who loved their children,
and children who thought that parents
could save them from anything.
Two million died in cruel hands.

How do you know that a child,
newborn, ten years old, four years old,
fifteen years old, how do you know

that they are being murdered
in the truest sense and in the time of their murders
how do you continue to listen to the radio
to do your laundry, to decide which kind
of ice cream you want to eat?

In Chad brutal militias attack towns,
murder babies, rape daughters and burn huts
Darfur may be multiplied manyfold
As we continue day to day. Believing
That somebody has to stop this, not
believing that this is happening today.

And it is happening today and it will
happen again tomorrow and the next
day and there are no plans of it stopping.

Look back in the mirror
and there is always a family getting
ready to eat dinner
sitting quietly
before their deaths.

The Armenian families in the killings of 1915
when Ottoman Turks killed
1.5 million men who loved women,
women who loved their children, and
children who thought their parents
could protect them.
Or maybe it is the family sitting
down in Germany celebrating the Sabbath

when the knock comes – the voices
shouting through the street declaring
that it is time to go – time to grab whatever you
can carry on your back and go –
it is time to form lines and to wait
it is time to learn to live in the barracks to
learn to live without your family, without
the food your family ate together,
without.

It is time to watch those around you die
and to feel your body shrivel.
But none of that matters right now.

That was then. And we know
that history repeats itself.
So we will wait.

The world is full of families sitting
down to dinner – waiting.

I am counting in my head the numbers who
have died in genocides.
And I am counting in my head as the seconds tick
how many more will die
as I sit and count and count and count.

I sit and wait at my dinner table.

Dave 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*.

~ Bristlecone Pine ~

I'd rather feed the roots of the Bristlecone pine
than green the grass of a foreign graveyard.
Rather than fight I retreat to ten thousand feet.
This High Sierra peak holds blue hope
that war's bound to become obsolete.
It's hard to think, the air's too thin to support
army intelligence, but just right
for the Bristlecone pine, its trunk preserved
by icy nights despite the sparse cover of bark
sanded down by wind. Three thousand
years old, this tree inches into another century.
Long ago and far away, the worlds of Troy,
Waterloo, and Nagasaki, made the news.
But this dumb tree, alive through it all,
never knew, and grows more beautiful to me.
We rack our brains for peaceful solutions,
but I choose to sit dumb at the knee
of the Bristlecone pine, wondering what's intelligence
and where we might go to survive it.

~ **Military Hill 88** ~

Long gone, the army lingers on
in numbers, in stencils, in its propensity
to itemize. With permission
soldiers have deserted Hill 88.
It's the persistence in the wind
that defends me from horseflies.
Since this is a recreation area now,
open space, the broken-down guardhouse
welcomes all, denies none. Ghost defenders
wait for night to deal with their ghost enemies.
The wind enters and leaves this deserted
motor shed at will, rounds a corner, wails
in a unique language of glassless windows.
In the language of lupine, I pluck
and scatter a few petals, purple,
color of blood before it spills, oxygenates,
color of religion and sorrow.

Sue William

Sue William Silverman's first memoir, *Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You* (University of Georgia Press), won the AWP award series in creative nonfiction. Her second memoir is *Love Sick: One Woman's Journey Through Sexual Addiction* (W. W. Norton), while her poetry collection is *Hieroglyphics in Neon* (Orchises Press). Three essays won literary competitions with the following journals: *Hotel Amerika* (2005), *Mid-American Review* (2005), and *Water~Stone* (2006). In addition to writing, she is associate editor of *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* and teaches in the low-residency MFA in Writing program at Vermont College. Please visit www.suewilliamsilverman.com.

(From: *Hieroglyphics in Neon* by Sue William Silverman, Orchises Press, 2006.)

~ A Brief History of Weapons of Mass Destruction ~

In 75 A.D., 50,000 Roman soldiers surround walled Jerusalem catapulting 30-ton limestone balls, dead animals, diseased bodies, captured soldiers, flaming objects, sand bags to blind-- all hurtling from 26-foot stock houses built from 12 miles of trees in 10 days, designed by Vitruvius--skeletal silhouettes darkening a blue Mediterranean sky-- the launching mechanism a sinewy rope from Achilles' tendons of cows-- two and a half miles hammered, soaked, twisted, dried, bowstring stretched

between wood arms, 9-ton torsion
pulling the slider, winch handle manually
cranked, winding the rope around the cylinder,
cocking the claw and trigger block, whipping
back and catapulting the missile 123 yards,
boulders blackened to disguise, demolishing
protective walls, city in flames. For the next
almost 2000 years it's the same--
only much better, and only far worse.

Onna Solomon

Onna Solomon's writing has appeared in *32 Poems*, *Diner*, *Van Gogh's Ear* and *Punk Planet*. She recently moved back to Ann Arbor after finishing her MA in poetry at Boston University.

~ Privilege ~

I have never driven the streets
with a gun in my lap, never
evacuated the wounded as
my grandfather did, though
he refused to talk about the war.

Sometimes I'm curious—I want to
grasp the heft of those bodies
in his hands, but mostly I'm glad
I have never, in any way,
reached toward death without caution,

though the night he died, I did
slip my hand into his cold palm
and I felt just what I felt
when I was a child—a safeness
I have known all my life.

Onna Solomon

Richard Solomon is a developmental pediatrician in private practice in Ann Arbor. Recently he has published his poetry in the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *5am*, *Freefall* and *Krax*. He and his wife of 34 years live in Ann Arbor.

~ Ann Arbor Art Fair 2005 ~

I sit in one of the dives
On fifty-second street. . .

—W.H. Auden
September 1939

Surrounded by hundreds of combat boots
Lined up like gravestones, I'm sitting in the Diag
Where thirty years ago I drove my MGB onto the 'M'
And had to be chased off by security police. Back then
I listened to *Machine Gun* stoned in black light.
My draft number was 49. I got out with a bad back, 1-Y.

Now I'm listening to names: soldiers and families
Who've died in Iraq; his disembodied voice
Flat, somber, monotonous, calling each one out.
A mournful flute. The carillon of Burton Tower
Playing now for 13 minutes. High noon.
The shadows of oak leaves on this page.

There were no Weapons of Mass Destruction.
We invaded a country without provocation.
I've written my senator but haven't
Burned myself in the square.

In July a hundred thousand invade the town
Ravage the beauty and leave.
I'm eating sour blueberries from the farmer's market.
My pocket full of business cards from the artists I loved.
Like the Rothko-esque landscapes in thick gold frames.
The artist and I could have been lovers.
On Liberty, packed like Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras,
I bought *Seize the Day* and *Dangling Man*
At Dawn Treader's sidewalk book sale
Where the old crone told me about the boots.

'Chief warrant officer William I. Brenner 36'

Burton Tower has been playing for 13 minutes now
The sun shining on this page. Rising too fast,
The moral limits beyond which the mind snaps.

'Ranwaal Mohammed, age unknown.'

A beautiful woman in a wheelchair, lips pierced,
Wearing beads, in black; black hair pulled back
Pensive among the boots listens to the names.

The dead accumulate. If you'd have been there
You might have been affected forever or
Dropped a bomb on a whole city and been glad.

You should have seen the giant Bear Made of Nails
Tom Monahan, the Dominoes Pizza tycoon, bought.
The farther I got away the less it bothered me.

Jessie Stern

Jessie Stern attended her first Bear River Writers' Conference in 2005, and returned in 2006 where she wrote extensively in Laura Kasischke's workshop, and shared her work with very appreciative participants.

~ War No More ~

Let there be war no more
The millennia have suffered
The planet pleads for relief
What can we do
Where can we turn
Is there hope

Humanity possesses three gifts
Shall we insist on Reason
Why not the Word too
And then there is Love
But gifts need to be opened
Not left in their box

To be used
Remove the bows
Lift the lids
Cherish them
Only then can they bring hope
Let us begin the task

Release the gifts Begin
with intention Close
the book on war

Stop the killing the blame the hate
No more sparks of anger to divert our will
the gifts belong to humanity

Awareness of our failings
A first step
Brings us closer to our goal
Liberates and fertilizes our yearnings for peace
We must find a way
Let there be war no more

Ellen Stone

Ellen Stone teaches both writing and special education at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She lives in Ann Arbor with her three daughters, Rebekah, Clare and Abby, and her husband, Roger. Her poems have appeared in Cottonwood Magazine, KansasQuarterly, and the Detroit Metro Times.

~ Ashen Angels ~

After a photograph: A civilian runs from *Ground Zero* by Larry Towell

The city is full of ash.
Police litter the streets
gathering like stiff
mannequins determined
to fill their hands
with hope.

Fleeing a dust filled street,
she is desperate to find
the ashen angels who
have floated down
and collect
in asphalt crevices.

Her face is full of old trees,
their exposed roots
gnarled and raw,
weeping
by an empty river.

She carries
a cloak of nighttime.
Her clothes are stained,
burned with crying.
What she has seen
she cannot say.

She cannot say.

~ **Bedtime prayer in Baghdad** ~

Bloom outside my window,
carry me away,
away from a world
that has left me behind.
Let me kick
a fast, fast ball
down a long city block
stretching forever,
miles into the leggy twilight.
I want to chase
white moths in the damp
night of summer, lie still
in the tall hiding grass
like a fat green grasshopper
quiet until you find me,
later, when everyone is gone.

Take me somewhere silent.

No guns or bombs,

only the sky on top,

only the night

full of all that light,

that open space.

Clear places

I could crawl through

to a world where

I'm always safe.

Sky, cover me,

cover me up.

Your soft blanket,

mine.

David Stringer

David Stringer retired from teaching in Ann Arbor to work as a writer and a barista. A Hopwood winner, he has published a book of poetry, *The Beast Speaks*, and has recently completed a chapbook of poems, *Inhale/Exhale*. With Robert Pasick and others he co-authored *Pet Loss: A Death in the Family*. His book about the murder of his brother is being looked at by a publisher. David and his wife Kim divide their time between Michigan and Florida.

~ When War Is Good ~

We are all aware of the horrors of war. Literature conveys them powerfully, as does film in its visceral way and more recently the television news. You can come up with your own favorite examples of war imaginatively rendered.

We can all agree: war sucks.

Do the obvious horrors of war mean that war is never justified? Is war justified to prevent genocide? Think of the Holocaust, of Darfur, or of the slaughter of Native Americans. Is war justified to repel the invasion of sovereign territory? Think of Hitler in Poland, Saddam Hussein in Kuwait, or the Japanese in Pearl Harbor. Be careful here, because admitting that some wars are OK admits the horrors. But saying that war is never justified may admit moral horrors that are equally repugnant.

Sometimes war is justifiable. The question, then, is how to determine whether it is, and then how to fight it ethically.

War, potential horrors and all, is justified when:

- It is used to stop inarguable human rights violations.

- The decision to go to war is the product of open multinational debate and consensus.
- The goals of the war are clear and attainable through the means.
- War is the last alternative for resolving a dispute, after sincere negotiation and other forms of diplomacy, and after economic sanctions and other forms of non-violent coercion.
- The principle of proportionality is enforced, with anticipated violence and destruction, especially to non-combatants, outweighed by the anticipated benefit.

Other moral principles will occur to you. The difficulty is in applying these and other principles to specific situations. It's a debate worth having.

My point is simple: It is easy to deplore war in terms of the destruction of human life and the moral degradation into which participants may sink. Regrettably, however, we are going to have wars. Our weapons have evolved faster than our ability to empathize, negotiate and persuade, especially when claims are couched in religious or ethnic righteousness. If wars are inevitable into the foreseeable future, let's wage them in the brightest moral light.

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 (2007), which asked her to include about 25 poems (out of a total of one hundred) about being raised by deaf parents. Pia lives in Virginia and teaches English at Gallaudet University. Pia's son, Zach Walters, is being deployed to Iraq. We think of him and wish him well.

~ Guest Room ~

At the airport, my son
and I wait in line. It is 5 a.m.
We attempt small pleasantries, but he is leaving.
He shoulders a backpack, shuffles his feet,
clutches a ticket and a thrumming need to fly.
Wearing fatigues and berets, soldiers grasp
the barrels of loaded rifles, patrol
the sprawling horde that winds
and tangles down the dim concourse.

Some people shove, several babies cry.
My son just smiles and asks if I remember:
the long way home. I turn a page
in the novel I am reading.
He checks his baggage, hugs me goodbye.
Passing through security, he turns back to wave.
His head disappears in the fading throng.
Driving back, I listen to the news,
check all my rearview mirrors.

Standing at the hotel window,
I watch plane after plane lift into
the burgeoning dawn.
Six stories down, a jogger braves the circling path.
Autumn leaves swirl around her feet.
Morning fog rises off the tree-lined river;
I hear the cries of geese.
From rusting bracken, a woodland duck
ascends the current and is gone from me.

Keith Taylor

Keith will have two new books out this year: *Guilty at the Rapture*, a collection of poems and stories; and *Battered Guitars: The Poetry and Prose of Kostas Karyotakis*, a book he translated with his friend William Reader. He has published a collection of very short stories, five chapbooks of poems, and two co-edited volumes. Over the years his work has appeared in a couple of hundred places, ranging from *Story* to the *Los Angeles Times*, from *Bird Watcher's Digest* to the *Chicago Tribune* to *Michigan Quarterly Review* (two issues of which he recently guest edited), *Poetry Ireland*, and *The Southern Review*. He has won awards for his work here and in Europe. He works as the coordinator of undergraduate creative writing at the University of Michigan.

From Guilty at the Rapture, Hanging Loose Press, Brooklyn, New York

~ POPPAWOOD ~

My sister and I slid across the floor in our stocking feet. It's what kids are supposed to do, despite grandmothers worrying about slivers or broken china. Our living room was long and narrow, the front end of a converted barracks. Mountain View Bible College, where my father taught Pauline Epistles and Homiletics, bought the building from the Canadian military in 1947, after the Germans were defeated and there was no longer a need to send prairie wheat farmers off to Dieppe, the Pas de Calais, Juno Beach. The Bible College couldn't pay my father much, but we lived for free where lonely young men, hardly more than boys, had laughed or lain terrified before shipping out. My sister and I would run as fast as we dared then slide to the couch at the far end, crying "Poppawood, Poppawood, Poppawood ... " as many times as we could while still sliding. Sometimes our father would pretend to be the monster who would devour us if we ever stopped saying "Poppawood." We didn't talk about the soldiers who had lived in the barracks. We never heard, not once, the lamentations of their ghosts.

Richard Tillinghast

Richard Tillinghast has taught writing at Berkeley, Harvard, the Omega Institute and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference; for twenty years he was on the faculty of the MFA program at the University of Michigan. In 2001, in collaboration with James McCullough, Richard founded Bear River and was director through 2005. He has recently taken early retirement and is living in rural Ireland, writing full-time. An inveterate traveler, he was formerly Editor-in-Chief of *Let's Go, the travel guide to Europe*, and author of many travel articles for the New York Times and other periodicals. He reads Turkish, is active as a translator of Turkish poetry, and often spends time in Istanbul. In addition, he has also worked for many years as a book reviewer and essayist, publishing frequently in *The New Republic*, the *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, *The Nation*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere. He is the author of seven books of poetry and two books of essays, most recently *Poetry and What Is Real*, University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Istanbul: Meditations on Empire previously published in *Margie*.

~ Istanbul: Meditations on Empire ~

The poem I wrote last night in my dream
disappears before breakfast.
Scraps of it blow by me
down two-thousand-year-old streets:
Centurions on the march,
columns of legions
with faces identically carved, spears at the ready.
And out in front, warrior emperors—
archangelic profiles and hawk-like zealots' eyes.
In winged boots of silver they strode,

crosses on their banners.

Seraphic script told their legends in Greek.

St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: *I wish to know
the price of bread. The bread man answers,
'The Father is greater than the son.' I ask whether my
bath is ready. My servant replies,
'The son has been made of nothing.'
In streets, markets, squares and crossroads,
they talk of nothing else.*

When they deposed an emperor, they would slit his tongue
and cut off his nose.

Plastic bottles, filter tips
and every other non-biodegradable thing
piles up around
rows of helmeted marble legions
stuck haphazardly in the mud
beside a bus stop and a mosque
after the archeologists left.
Among the huge peacock-eyes on fallen marble shafts
one row of soldiers has been cemented in upside down.

It's all use and re-use and refuse.

Bells from my dream hammer against
the cracked and buckled marble of Byzantium.
*God rings the bells, earth rings the bells, the sky itself is ringing.
The Holy Wisdom, the Great Church, is ringing out the message.
For every bell there is a priest, and for every priest a deacon.
To the left the emperor is singing, to the right the patriarch,
and all the columns tremble with the thunder of the chant*

while nomadic border-fighters
muscle over the city walls
and their cannons blast gaps through which more fighters pour.

Once Constantine's city was looted and ravished
for the customary three days
and the fires died down—
while stiffening corpses lay about the streets
and dogs fattened,
the Conqueror, in sky-blue boots,
wearing an enormous turban,
dismounted, sprinkling a handful of dust on his head,
and entered through one of the church's nine bronze doors,
quoting a melancholy distich in Persian—
something about a spider
spinning her web in the Palace of the Caesars
and an owl hooting from the towers
of a king whose name I don't remember.

Dome over dome over dome
gone the way the Venetians would go
with their glorious waterborne empire.
The polluted tides of history slosh up underneath it all—
the stone lion of St. Mark's propping up
an eroded tablet of Christ's gospel
at high tide
of bitter coffee and oil slicks and coal smoke
in any port in the Mediterranean
from Malta to Constantinople.

I make my way with a headache

and unsure feet down a steep street in Pera
where a dead-drunk woman in a cotton house dress
lies passed out on the sidewalk,
everyone just walking around her
as if she were a sack of garbage
here in this crossroad of empires.

Back in my hotel room I drink hot brandy
and read Graham Greene
while on CNN a new empire,
having neither the poetry and absolutism of the Turks,
nor the otherworldliness and willingness the Byzantines had
to cut out your enemy's tongue in the name of God,
moves into the deserts of Mesopotamia.
A general with a Great Plains accent
stands in front of an easel and points out Baghdad and Damascus.
All he knows of these cities,
he learned from a map in the back of his Bible.

Barry Wallenstein

Barry Wallenstein is the author of five collections of poetry, *Beast Is a Wolf With Brown Fire*, (BOA Editions, 1977), *Roller Coaster Kid* (T.Y. Crowell, 1982), *Love and Crush* (Persea Books, 1991), *The Short Life of the Five Minute Dancer* (Ridgeway Press, 1993), *A Measure of Conduct* (Ridgeway Press, 1999). His poetry has appeared in over 100 journals in the U.S. and abroad, in such places as *Transatlantic Review*, *The Nation*, *Centennial Review*, and *American Poetry Review*. His 1971 book *Visions & Revisions: The Poets Practice* [T.Y. Crowell] was reissued in a new and expanded edition by Broadview Press [2002] (co-editor, Bob Burr). A special interest is his performance of poetry with jazz collaboration. He has made five recordings of his poetry with jazz, the most recent being *Pandemonium* [Cadence Jazz Records CJR 1194] November, 2005. He is a Professor of literature and creative writing at the City University of New York and is also an editor of the journal, *American Book Review*. At City College he is Director of the Poetry Outreach Center, and for the past 34 years he has coordinated the city-wide Annual Spring Poetry Festival at City College which includes poets of all ages and presents their work in an annual publication, *Poetry in Performance*. The introduction from *Poetry in Performance 33* from the festival in 2005 is included in this issue.

From *Poetry in Performance 33*, a book of poems written by New York City public school students and read at the 33rd Annual Spring Poetry Festival, The City College, New York, on May 10, 2005

~ Introduction by Barry Wallenstein, August 2005 ~

... It has been said that poets are the weather vanes of their culture, and that the poetry of the young especially measures the temperature of the nation. Apart from the beauty implicit in the art of poetry, there

are prevalent themes that recur each year—for example, poems reflecting the comforts and discomforts of childhood and adolescence, familial love and hate and, of course, love and loss. Over the past two years, however, themes of war and terror have come to rival these perennial subjects. Last year’s Poetry Festival book contained many poems from all grade levels depicting fear and despair regarding war. In a year’s time the wars “against terror” or, in a different parlance, “of terror,” have escalated and the deaths on all sides are mounting. The poetry registers this fact.

Ironically perhaps, these young people’s poems about war were written not from the points of view of war’s immediate victims, but from citizens of a war-engaged nation. The poems, whether by 3rd grade students or by poets from the senior ranks, demonstrate how the empathetic grace or power of a writer’s spirit can bring the speaker into proximity with those under fire; the danger is felt from far away. As one student writes

in his poem “A War in Thoughts!”; “The scars of war emerge in all of us/ Pretending that we will survive that war.” Taking empathy to a sad extreme, this poem ends with the thought, “that is the binding chaos that lingers.”

More prevalent than the certainty expressed in the lines above, are the questions the majority of these poems ask; some are coolly ironic or rhetorical, some honest and heartbreaking in their sane pleading. They are not answered easily with word or action, and the writers indicate this knowledge from a very young age. We learn that the power of the questions themselves proves humanity’s wish to survive and even struggle against the illogic of war and the deeply self-destructive aims of the war makers.

Many people—sensitive and knowledgeable people at that—resist the ancient notion that poets be considered as prophets, seers with great intuition who instead of just shivering at their predictions create

art out of the most terrible visions. Poetic strategies like rhyme, rhythm, figurative language, and stanzaic form satisfy the reader and bring relief and inspiration, almost independent of the visions themselves and their often frightening implications.

Looking at W. H. Auden's now famous poem, "September 1, 1939," we marvel at its controlled performance as much as we are impressed by its foretelling of World War II. It begins:

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

There are no questions asked here but the conflict it portends did lead to a questioning. How could humans treat each other so inhumanly? That

war was won, so history seems to say, by the right side, the good side, but the large question that goes to the heart of bloody conflict remains as unanswerable now as then. In 1966, with the Vietnam war raging, costing thousands of lives on all sides of a conflict that now appears meaningless and worse, the poet Robert Lowell wrote in a letter the editors of the *Partisan Review*: "I think our foreign policies are quite likely leading us to the third and worst world war, not right away probably, but over a stretch of time, within twenty or thirty years." Now we have upon us what seems to be an endless "war on terror" in which each attack, each posture of power and aggression toward an amorphous enemy causes numerous terrorist counter attacks—insuring longevity for the enterprise, a war-engendered economy that greatly benefits a few, and a misery so widespread that no nation seems to be able to escape the evolving horror.

"Just another Number," by another high school student ends with a series of questions:

We ask ourselves rhetorical
questions like,
Why do we have to go to war in the
first place?
We sacrifice young lives for nothing
Only to hurt their families and
friends
What the fallen soldiers only get in
return is
Just another number on the
death toll.

These despairing but not unreasonable thoughts are shared by many in this age group—and beyond. Another poem has as its title the refrain, “Is it really worth it?” the “it,” being the entire enterprise of living. However, by the end of this troubled poem the “it” achieves a more specific context:

Is it really worth
All the fear
 Found in the eyes of
 those unsure
All the homes destroyed
 That once belonged to
 hopeful families
All the guns

Placed in the arms of 10 year
old boys ordered to fight.
Is it really worth it?
Is the war really worth it?

The answer is clear in the urgency and repetition of the question.

Rather than address these self-answering questions, another high school poem begins with an assertive rebellious stance: “Someone needs to take the crown from/the master and chief of this county./ Someone needs to de-throne/this rival of the world.” The spirit of dissent, central to a century of the best of US poetry, so clear and sharp in this poem, leads to an inspired and sophisticated use of language: “This man has turned our aggressive paradise/into a massive mania, which/concerns our basic nature.” The lines here are indirect and can draw the reader into other questions having to do with interpretation, but the resistant (and angry and hurt) disposition central to this attempt at poetry has a purposeful quality that is essential to our continuance. . .

~ **Tony's Preferences** ~

Some prefer berries in cream—
quiet music above
and a good book
open to a page that pleases the mind
while not dulling the taste for the
berries
or the cream.

Myself, I prefer the brothel
on the east corner of Vine Street
over all the others
and for the ordinary reasons – the
rose tints,
the skirts generally,
the scented space and tact of the
staff—
how magically they appear with favors
and then disappear fast,
the breeze that comes off an evening
as sweetly as Suzie, Suzie from the
alley,
slips out of very little and is delicate,
and then, best of all, she's not delicate
& hills,
yes, fresh as plump and the valleys

and the comfort comes home
in this place – years away from
certainties
and the lustings after war.

~ **Hell** ~

I. End of September, 2001

The news reports on the media
are neater now, better organized—
lotion beneath the wreath of briars.

Those who look away might miss
a sharp comment on audacity,
another replay of impact,
explosion, fire, collapse, rubble...

or the presence of authority
warning, declaiming, simulating—
rubble, collapse, fire and explosion.

II. The Fanatics

We dwell in this grand city,
an island, a symbol,
and, for now, a target on the wane.

In their hands other symbols,
Buddhas, stars, crosses, glorious
crescent moons,
are being smashed.

So some of us in turn
smash them—all sides
in the throes of righteousness

waiting to burn—and burn again
as temper twines itself
deep into continuous night.

On the streets the price of dope has
risen
along with the need
and the rats run free.

There are no sharks in the waters
off Manhattan Island—
but it's a cold dangerous swim – and
to where?

