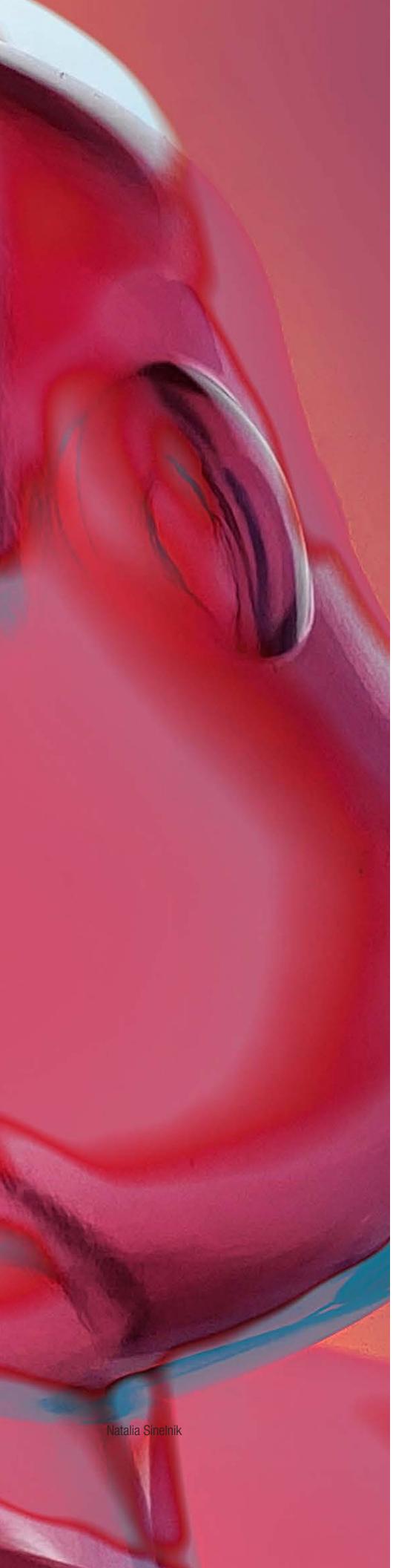


NEW READER MAGAZINE

NRM





NEW READER MAGAZINE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When I took on the role of Managing Editor four months ago, I both knew and did not know what to expect.

On one hand, I've been with *NRM* since 2019, working closely with our previous managing editor, Kyla, who was very good at the job. On the other, I've never had to manage the whole magazine by myself before and I realized it wasn't going to be the same. It, in fact, turned out to be even more different than I'd expected and prepared myself for.

The job proved to be challenging indeed, but I struggled the most with the numerous submissions that I got to read, and the hundreds more that I could not. It was both awesome and humbling to be able to witness the very act of baring out one's soul through writing and art many times over. In the end, I was able to accept some of the most moving stories and pieces I've seen my whole life, but not without having to bid goodbye to many more others.

In the process, I learned the importance of knowing the art of "**No Filter.**"

Spurred on by countless submitted pieces both raw and beautiful, I learned which thoughts I should let out: ones of pureness, love, admiration; and which ones I should keep to myself.

This issue, we're introducing some very special people that we can't wait for you to meet.

Matt Gold reminds us to see the beauty in everything, not just in the things normally portrayed to be subjects in photos. **Anna Ico Tingzon** shares what it's like to be truly thankful for all the good in life (and we mean everything). Contributors **Ben von Jagow**, **Jihoon Park**, and **Katherine Ruth Hofer** each talk to *NRM* about their pieces and what it's like to be writers in today's relatively new world. **Bill Arnott** is back this quarter with a funny yet insightful experience he had with Buddhism.

We're also really excited for you to see the selection we've prepared this quarter!

There will be stories pulled from the deepest of souls that will make you look harder into yourself, and pieces so gloriously mundane you'll probably ask, "how come I never saw how pretty this was before?"

With "**No Filter,**" we hope to rekindle the passion we all innately have for the simplest things. We hope you remember to take a step back, away from the perceived societal standards and see things for what they truly are—before the prettying up, the sugarcoating, and the filtering.

Finally, we hope this issue pushes you to speak up and be honest, in one way or another.

Oh, and it's nice to meet you, dear reader!

Here's to you!



Contents

Feature

- 08 21 Extra Goodness
ROSALIE ABATAYO
- 12 Contributor's Corner: (Non-Fiction): Ben von Jagow
SARAH EROY
- 16 Contributor's Corner: (Fiction): Jihoon Park
JAZIE PILONES
- 22 Contributor's Corner (Poetry): Katherine Ruth Hofer
KATHLEEN CRUCILLO
- 26 Bill Arnott's Beat: On Buddhism
BILL ARNOTT
- 26 through Gold-colored lenses
AIRA CALINA
- 98 Art Contributions:
My First Wife
Electrified Nimbus
Tomales Bay
RACHEL TEFERET



60

Poetry

- 40 On Being a Mother
The Big Sleep
How to Teach How to Love
MARI-CARMEN MARÍN
- 50 Definitions
The hard thing
CHRISTIAN VINSON
- 54 I lied, she said
Saturdays in Madison
Losing Me
LEA ANGELICA KARL
- 64 Dream of Fishing
Love Poem
Train Poem
ALLAN JOHNSTON
- 74 Kentucky Coffee Tree
Lake Sturgeon
Rugged individuals
JEREMY NATHAN MARKS
- 80 The Reluctant Partier
Rarity
Date Night
KATHERINE RUTH HOFER



08

Fiction/Non-fiction

- 36 The Dark Before the Dawn
LUKE BELING
- 48 The Great Squirrel Epidemic
JIHOON PARK
- 60 It Takes All Kinds
MARK RUSSO
- 70 Taken for a Ride
JACK COEY
- 86 Chasing the Northern Lights and Counting My Lucky Stars
BEN VON JAGOW
- 96 Ubiquitously You
BOB MCNEIL



22

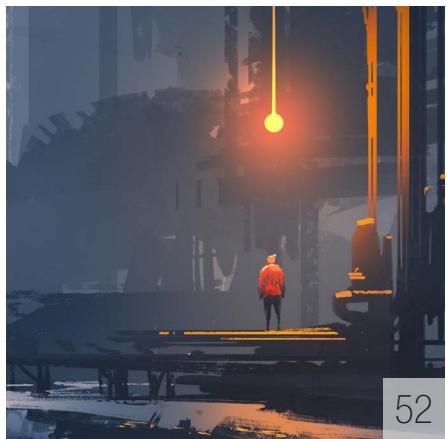
New Reader Media

104 To-Read List

NRM takes on the challenge of bookmarking emerging voices in the indie publishing world, presented in random order.



54



52



36



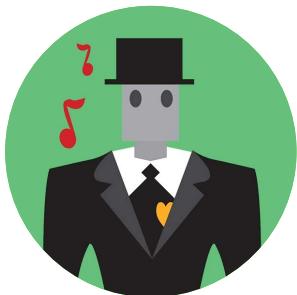
16



16



86



Stephen Ellis Natelson MD

INTVW by Sarah Eroy

When we set off to college, it's not unusual that we take up majors that are completely on a different track than what we love. For some, it's because they see the thing that they "love" as a hobby and the track that they are taking as an occupation. For others, they do because it is what's expected of them, perhaps due to family traditions or based on their aptitude.

But while some people may not get to study what they love for different reasons, it's too early to declare game over. Afterall, life is a winding road which may take us to places we never expect to be at. In this issue, we are elated to bring you Dr. Stephen Natelson as he shares with **NRM** his journey as a writer and a doctor and the becoming of his sci-fi, *Heart of Gold*.

NRM: When did you fall in love with writing? And who or what influenced your style in writing?

DR. STEPHEN NATELSON: I entered Carleton College in 1954. I was impressed with Jack (Jax) Lucas who had been the editor of *Downbeat Magazine*. I also admired Reed Whittemore who became Poet Laureate of the United States. I hoped to major in English.

My father was a famous chemist. He felt that the reason to attend college was to learn a science. I also was on the track and football teams.

I felt I had to obey my father and chose Mathematics because it had no labs, allowing me to attend sport practices. I minored in English.

When I graduated in 1958, I won a Fulbright Scholarship to Germany. On the way, an uncle of mine insisted that I apply to medical school. I told him I would apply to three schools and see what happens. I was not a pre-med in college, and I lacked organic chemistry. I took that in German in Germany and passed.

I was admitted to the University of Rochester Medical School. I was very busy and focused on medicine, putting off any thoughts of writing. I did write a few poems.

After Medical school, I entered the U.S. Air Force and spent 1 year at Wright Patterson Air Force Base and was

assigned to the U.S. Air Force Base in Aviano, Italy where I was Director of Base Medical Services (DBMS) for three years. I was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal and decided to pursue Neurosurgery after that. I studied Neurosurgery for 4 years at Ohio State and then one year as Chief Resident in Neurology at the University of New Mexico. I was much too busy to be a serious writer.

I practiced Neurosurgery in Knoxville TN from June of 1972 to December of 2007.

When I retired, I had time on my hands and elected to see if I could still write, which led to *Heart of Gold*.

NRM: What was your creative process in writing *Heart of Gold*?

SN: I chose the science fiction genre because I had a Top Secret NATO Cosmic clearance and came in contact with security services.

Heart of Gold is about an android created by the NSA. His name is Lemuel (Lem) Gold, hence the title.

I used my knowledge of poetry and music to give the readers the pleasure of that and a number of obscure facts that I discovered along the way.

NRM: What message would you like to relay to your readers?

SN: My message to readers is to enjoy constantly learning new things.

NRM: What do you think is the role of a writer in society?

SN: A writer should give enjoyment and knowledge to his audience and perhaps help to shape attitudes.

NRM: Are you working on something else right now?

SN: I am now more than 83 years old and I think my career as a writer, short as it was, is over.



The Power of Good Bye: Walking into Freedom

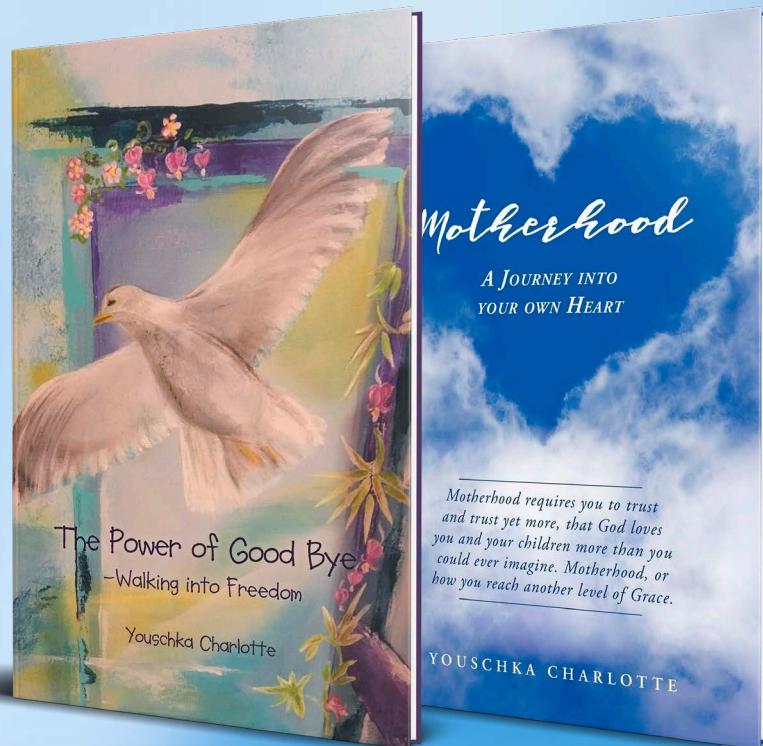
by Youschka Charlotte

Available on amazon.com
Kindle \$2.99 | Paperback \$12.99

The Power of Good Bye: Walking into Freedom is a powerful story where author Youschka Charlotte recounts her journey to letting go of old baggage, fear, doubt, and worry by fostering a strong sense of trust in Jesus. She tackles the liberating feeling that one experiences when bidding goodbye to things and circumstances that are no longer necessary.

No matter one's religious inclination, this book—without being preachy—allows its reader to feel a deep sense of faith, loss, and hope through the author's perspective and personal experiences.

This book is a must-read for those who are in a state of pain or who are trying to muster courage to acknowledge when everything is enough and all there's left is to go on and move forward.



Motherhood: A Journey Into Your Own Heart journals Youschka Charlotte's winding path into spiritual renewal by embracing two pivotal aspects in her life: parenthood and faith. Charlotte cautiously explains the deep influence parenthood possesses. Her story reminds the world of the space where empathy and self-control should thrive together—the essence of non-conventional motherhood.

Charlotte's articulate distinction with her honest and inspiring confessions shines again in yet another unanticipated masterpiece. Gently written for warm-hearted readers, Youschka's story comforts struggling parents. Through healing and emotional growth—and a reformed relationship with God—one breaks the chain of intergenerational turmoils, symbolizing the height of motherhood's all-encompassing love.

An excellent read for all parents who share the genuine and selfless desire of creating a secure and tranquil home: one that transcends ages and fosters a holistic emphatic impact to their children, and of their children to the world.

Motherhood: A Journey Into Your Own Heart

by Youschka Charlotte

Available on amazon.com
Kindle \$2.99 | Paperback \$8.99

21 Extra Goodness: Every Child is a Gift and is Gifted

ROSALIE ABATAYO

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively hit many. Businesses closed, jobs were lost, families struggled. But for Singapore-based mom Anna Ico Tingzon, the pandemic opened a door to further her advocacy for inclusion and the vision for a better quality life for children with special needs, particularly those living with Trisomy 21 or Down syndrome, as it's commonly known.

Amid the circuit break or lockdown in Singapore in June 2020, Anna established a home-based business that sells home-cooked Filipino dishes. She named it 21 Extra Goodness, coined from the 'good' that is the blessing of a child born with Trisomy 21.

Anna herself is mom to three-year-old Marian who was born with Trisomy 21.

While a typical baby is born with 46 chromosomes or two sets of 23 chromosomes, one with Trisomy 21 has one extra chromosome: chromosome 21. This extra copy alters the body and brain development which may lead to both mental and physical challenges for the child.

"Having a child with Trisomy 21 is a blessing to our family; and therefore considered 'Good,'" Anna shares to NRM.

Although babies with Trisomy 21 might act and look similar, medical experts believe that they, too, have unique qualities and abilities as individuals. These potential qualities are what Anna and other advocates of Down syndrome awareness hope to tap and bring out.



Anna Ico Tingzon, founder of 21 Extra Goodness, with her three-year-old daughter, Marian. Photo courtesy of 21 Extra Goodness

"Our mission is to empower individuals with Down syndrome and achieve their utmost potential through education, inclusive education, and fair employment, thus creating a better quality of life,"



Anna Ico Tingzon's meal from 2020 as part of her advocacy for Down syndrome awareness, early intervention, and support for families with special needs.



"Our mission is to empower individuals with Down syndrome and achieve their utmost potential through early intervention, inclusive education, and fair employment, thereby achieving a better quality of life," Anna explains.

21 Extra Goodness and the Magic of Early Intervention

A year since it was established, 21 Extra Goodness has taken part in several movements to advance its cause. Last October, 21EG, in collaboration with Connected Kids Therapy Center and The Asian Parent – Philippines, hosted a three-part webinar series alongside therapists and a developmental pediatrician to promote early intervention during COVID-19. The event was promoted to over two million followers across social media platforms.

"Parent empowerment is very crucial in raising a child with special needs. They need to know through a medical diagnosis what their child has. Only then, can they help their child have a better quality of life as they need to give the child ample early intervention to reach his/her milestones," Anna explains.

Like any other pursuits in life, creating awareness for and helping special needs children may lead to challenges along the way. As for 21EG, Anna says they are just thankful that the food business sustains their advocacy.

"Last Christmas, we partnered with the Down Syndrome Association (Singapore) where a portion of the proceeds made during the month of December was donated to DSA," Anna added.

In time with World Down Syndrome Day last March, 21EG and DSA launched the "Bag of Goodness" campaign where they donated

own syndrome
early intervention,
reby achieving a



I established 21 Extra Goodness in June advocacy of promoting Down syndrome ent, maximizing potentials of children s. I Photo courtesy of 21 Extra Goodness



"Celebrate inclusion. Our voices are stronger because we stand together on awareness and inclusion."

hampers to new mothers whose babies have Down syndrome or other special needs.

"Don't give up. Every act of kindness, however small, creates a ripple effect to those who need it. Persons with special needs are to be treated with an open heart and mind and should be treated with respect," Anna calls on her fellow advocates.

Anna also highlights the value of collaboration among individuals or organizations with similar causes. "Celebrate inclusion. Our voices are stronger because we stand together on awareness and inclusion."

"An advocacy is not done by one person alone. It takes an entire community to change people's mindset[s]. 21 Extra Goodness merely continues what others have started, always striving to improve, if not better, the plight of persons with disabilities such as Down syndrome, so that they are accepted and included in society," Anna adds.



Steven D. Alston

INTVW by Rosalie Abatayo

Steven Alston, a Born Again believer, has always been deeply involved with the church since his teens. He found his faith grew even more after he was honorably discharged as a disabled war veteran. As a believer, he had always wondered whether humans are souls or spirits.

Read on as he shares to **NRM** the answers he found from his extensive research and reflection, leading to his writing his new book, *The Eikons of God*.

NRM: What changes did the pandemic bring in your everyday life? Are these changes welcome and for the better?

STEVEN ALSTON: The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic has taken its toll on many of us in various ways. For me, it provided a great learning opportunity and a new method for measuring the quality of my own decision making. We were all forced to go into lockdown, shelter in place and answer to the demands of a new normal. I embraced this change in several ways; one in particular was by taking the time and opportunity to re-assess the validity of all my current projects and pursuits; The biggest question became: Were all projects and pursuits leading to a desired and meaningful end? Well, after the reassessment I found that some were and some weren't. So, I learned something very important. So important that I keep it at the forefront of my mind; whenever making decisions about what I choose to undertake and get involved in.

My time and energy are two of the most valuable possessions that I have to offer. And these possessions should only be applied to good investments that lead to vital returns for myself and others.

NRM: The present pandemic somehow worked to affect everyone's faith differently—some wavered while others strengthened. From your perspective, how did the challenges affect your faith and those of the people around you?

SA: I am a Christian Believer and my faith is completely and totally in God regarding all aspects of life. I find that my faith and the faith of those in my Christian Community increased in strength. The COVID-19 pandemic was a Biblical prediction that came to pass. Matthew 24:7 is part of a passage called "Olivet Discourse" where Jesus the Son of God, states that in the last days "...there will be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers' places."

Famines-In February of 2020 Swarms of locusts threatened at least 5 Countries with severe famine. Pestilences-March of 2020 the World Health

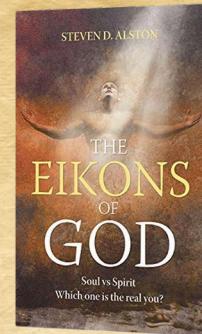
Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the world's population.

Earthquakes- March 2020 two weeks after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, a 6.5 magnitude earthquake struck near Boise Idaho. These types of signs not only happened in 2020 but in the exact order that Jesus predicted; leading to the end of the world as we know it. All major events predicted in the Bible that have already come to pass, obviously didn't mean that the world would end shortly after these events took place; but they did serve as a clear sign that the end is approaching. The signs Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24, were not only predicted to happen but to happen more frequently and closer together as time goes on.

According to the Bible, pestilences like COVID-19 weren't the first virus to become a pandemic and won't be the last. I am completely convinced that the Bible is a God inspired inerrant book of truth; Therefore, when COVID-19 invaded our world my faith and the faith of those around me grew stronger. Christian Believers who are well-informed, should never be surprised or become fearful about these types of prophetic occurrences mentioned in the Bible. We may not know the when and the where of these predictions but we do know the what and the why.

NRM: Your work in *The Eikons of God* is very thought-provoking and deep in terms of reflecting on one's faith and life. How did you arrive at the book's central question of whether humans are souls or spirits?

SA: For years I accepted what I was told from certain religious leaders about my spiritual identity until a few years ago. I decided to research the question of Soul vs Spirit: Which one is the real you? And record my answer in the book, *The Eikons of God*. Eikon is the Greek word for image. As I began my research, I decided not to use any other books or commentaries; I'm not against using commentaries, I use them from time to time but I have come to learn that the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. I started in Genesis 1:26 (KJV) which states, "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion..." I noticed that the scripture didn't say "...after our likeness; spirit soul and body or soul, spirit and body." Instead, it reads, "...after our likeness and let them have dominion..." Although this verse discusses the word image and likeness, it doesn't really answer my question because it doesn't mention whether we are souls or spirits. So, as I began to study other



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Kindle \$8.99 | Paperback \$10.95

passages, especially the writings of Paul, I could not find one verse that specifically states that we are either spirits or souls.

Here's another example: If we take Hebrews 4:12 out of context we can use this verse to support the belief that we are spirits with souls who live in bodies, because the verse states, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." But if we keep the verse in context, the Author is simply making reference to the power of God's word as it relates to true belief in him.

In this fourth chapter of Hebrews as a continuation from chapter 3, the Author points the Jews to God's promise of offering rest to those who believe. He further discusses; Just because the gospel is preached it doesn't mean that it is received by faith. Unbelief caused Israel not to enter Canaan after Egypt.

So for those who claim to be believers in the spiritual things of God but don't live according to the Bible, the inspired word of God has the power to reveal what is truly happening in and between the soul and spirit realm as well as the body. So even in this passage where the Author names the three parts, soul, spirit, and body, he isn't making a claim as to which one is our true identity. But through further research and much prayer, I found the answer.

NRM: How do you want *The Eikons of God* to affect the lives of your readers?

SA: I want my readers to see themselves the way God sees them. I also want them to develop their understanding of God's thought process and specific purpose for creating us the way he did.

NRM: The people who read your book may be curious to prove or disprove the points that you raised in *The Eikons of God*. What would you advise them to do to satisfy their inquiry themselves?

SA: Research, Research, Research! I would like for my readers to do research and challenge the information written in my book. This can accomplish three wonderful things:

1. Increase the readers' knowledge
2. Increases my knowledge
3. Confirm what we both already know.



Andrew (Andy) Porter Brown

INTVV by Regie Vocales

NRM: While you were writing the book, *The Trial of Blood: Oral Accounts of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia*, have you already envisioned it to be on the big screen? What are your thoughts on turning your book into a movie?

ANDY PORTER BROWN: When I was writing or researching the book, I never thought of it as material for a movie. It took over 30 years to research it, and I still might not have finished it if not for the COVID [pandemic] and Donald Trump's appeal to what I call the "Darker Angels of our humanity."

I wanted people to view the Civil War and Lee's Army by the men who did the actual fighting, and their view was shaped by the men they fought beside. There was no mass communications then, and what the line soldier saw and felt was limited, as it always is in any war's battle, to the immediate and always present fear of maiming, death, failing your friends, and disgracing the men to whom you've given your word of honor. It's an old concept but on a battlefield in any war it is always true.

NRM: The book is written on many accounts of war veterans. In order for these stories to be in one movie, would you prefer a linear or episodic narrative?

APB: I think I would prefer something like Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, or the RAF film, *Battle of Britain*. War is for the men and women involved in a series of episodes, too often signposted by first hand experiences of life and death. As you can see by my examples, I prefer episodic storytelling to narration.

NRM: Historical war epics have a potential to become blockbusters. With this premise, would you consider casting A-list celebrities, or cast aspiring talents and other lesser known individuals?

APB: After 56 years of theater and film work, this is a no-brainer. Cast for character. Forget big name stars (unless they want to do cameo character work). [T]his type of work I think should always go to relative unknown characters that can handle the dialect. Soldiers are boys, not men. Average age 17.

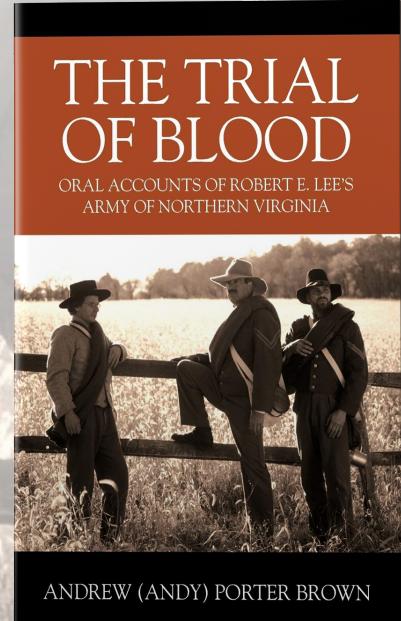
NRM: Many war movies and veteran biopics were already produced. What is something in your material that makes it different this time?

APB: Much of what I styled my writing on was the reporting of Ernie Pyle and the characters created by Bill Mauldin. After 50 years of teaching in high schools and colleges, I found out that textbooks handle grand themes in ways that are nothing like the reality of what happened.

America had slavery because as early as the birth of a nation the planters of the south needed slaves to work the field, and servants for the cities. Texas revolted not against the cruelty of Mexico, but because Mexican control forbid slavery. In the North, more children died in the bobbin mills and coal mines than slaves died in the south. Only two out of every ten Rebel soldiers owned slaves, and of those who did own slaves, most of these slaves were "House Servants." I would suggest that every reader take a look at James W. Lowewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. The more you research the more you find isn't true.

NRM: If your book becomes a full feature, where do you think your story will have more impact? Why?

APB: I don't know and can't even guess. This much I can say: "Nobody can be free as long as we are divided between what we want to be true, and what history and science demonstrates to be true." This is my small grain of sand thrown in the gears of ignorance and the big lie. Put it this way: Get your shots so we can build immunity, and wear the damn mask.





Ben von Jagow

INTVW by Sarah Eroy
Photo by Bert Santens



iterature and photography are two beautiful forms of art that capture the eyes, the mind, and the heart of readers or onlookers alike. What's even more magnificent is seeing both forms of art in one piece, stimulating imaginations in its literary elements and materializing these visions in vivid photographs.

Dip into a marriage of writing and photography as Cape Town-based Canadian writer-poet-photographer Ben von Jagow talks to NRM about "Chasing the Northern Lights and Counting My Lucky Stars," a captivating photo essay showing the beauty of the Aurora borealis.

NRM: "Chasing the Northern Lights and Counting My Lucky Stars" is a unique work, but to you it may really be just a marriage of two of the things you love doing: writing and photography. What made you want to make a photo essay about your Northern Lights tour-guiding of all things?

Ben von Jagow: The work, to me, is symbiotic. As a writer, I've always relied on words as a form of expression. But to capture the beauty of the aurora through words alone,

sheesh, that would require a writer much more talented than me. By including photographs and text, the experience becomes that much more immersive for the readers. I also believe the story lends context to the photos. The images are beautiful, sure, but to have a bit of backstory, I think that's what makes art resonate.

NRM: What was your creative process like when you were only planning to and then actually writing the piece?

BvJ: Initially, I fell in love with the photographs, and I just wanted to share them with as many people as possible. I submitted a few of them to different literary journals but shortly after decided they worked best as a collection. At the same time, I was writing a story about my guiding experiences. I'm ashamed to admit that the idea to merge the two mediums didn't come until after both projects were finished. Looking back now, though, I'm glad I came to my senses.



NRM: You're a writer, a poet, a photographer. Are you partial to any of these three art forms?

BvJ: They all have a special place in my heart, though I discovered each at a different period in my life. Writing was my first love. I travelled a fair bit after university, and I wrote a lot about my experiences and the people I met along the way. Poetry is a somewhat new affair, though I've fallen pretty hard for it. I like the brevity that poetry affords. If, for example, I wanted to explore a topic through prose, I might have to create a full story to communicate my message. With poetry, I can be concise. I can hammer out what I want to say in a few lines and then move on to the next topic. Photography is my most recent undertaking, and it is certainly the most humbling. While living in Denmark, I was fortunate to stay with a very talented photographer, Colin Cobb. Now a good friend of mine, Colin showed me a lot about not just the technical aspects of photography but the creative ones. Watching him and seeing what he was capable of, that was a source of inspiration for me. So, to answer your question, I view myself as a writer first—both poetry and prose—and a photographer second. But I plan on exploring all three art forms in the years to come.

NRM: What do you like most about your work?

BvJ: Hmm, that's a tough one. I'm going to touch on your previous point and say that I like having all three art forms at my disposal. That way, I can approach a topic and then choose how I want to convey my message. Maybe a photograph will do something justice, maybe it won't. When that's the case, I can turn to my words. The northern lights, for example, are a visual experience. The words I paint will always fail in comparison to what my camera can capture. A poem, on the other hand, is a way for me to convey something personal, something a bit more internal. So, yeah, I like having the three forms in my arsenal. And I like knowing that I can now merge them if need be.

NRM: Are you working on something else right now? What can fans of your work expect from you?

BvJ: At the moment, I'm putting together a collection of short stories. I'm going through the editing process now, so it should be released shortly. On top of that, I've been doing a lot of astrophotography. I'm currently living in South Africa, and the night sky here is just stunning. I'm not in the southern hemisphere often, so when I do visit, I try to take as many pictures as possible.



Gail Winegar

INTVW by Aira Calina

What makes one a serial killer?

Inspired by real-life events close to home, Gail Winegar took it upon herself to seek light on the perpetrators and victims of murder and the judicial system. She interviewed countless people and attentively observed unending court trials involving these cases to try and cover every angle.

In this issue of NRM, we bring you Gail Winegar as she shares the events that led her through writing *Vincible: In the Wake of a Serial Killer*, her reflections upon what she found in her extensive research, and more.

NRM: *Vincible: In The Wake of a Serial Killer* is a chilling thriller that's inspired by real events. Can you tell us more about the process of turning undoubtedly scarring real-life events into this haunting yet gripping tale?

GAIL WINEGAR: When my friend's daughter was brutally murdered, I took an obvious interest in the case of these two sadistic killers. Their barbaric acts of horror left indelible scars in their wake and senselessly forced innocent people to endure irreversible suffering. I began attending the inexhaustible hearings and trials of this horrific case, and was astonished that the "right to a speedy trial" did not apply to the victims.

NRM: Did you have to edit something out of your book? If so, what was it and how did it change the story? If not, was this because you believed the story was in its best form with all elements present or is there any other reason?

GW: I spent countless hours interviewing people from as many angles as possible, and found that as I unraveled circumstances from each side, my understanding and empathy grew. At one point, towards the end of the trial, I found myself feeling strangely compassionate toward Axel, who had unwittingly been groomed into becoming a killer. One evening my husband accidentally backed his truck over my 3-month-old puppy, Iris, crushing her back legs. She shrieked in pain incessantly, as we rushed her to the veterinary hospital. When we arrived, Iris continued to howl and I fell to the floor with Iris in my arms. I sobbed over her in a heaving puddle and could not be consoled. I cried her name over and over, but instead of calling her "Iris" I kept repeating "Jessie," the name of a victim. I couldn't understand for a moment how anyone could cause harm to any soul or creature under any circumstance—let alone inflicting torture purposely. Any perceived empathy I had for a killer instantly and permanently

dissipated—any excuse for violence in any form ceased to exist. At the same time I had a panoramic understanding that I could not deny.

NRM: In the book, you have both male and female characters. What's the most difficult thing about writing characters from the opposite sex?

GW: I had no difficulty writing from the perspective of either male or female. People are people and manage their feelings from different places no matter who they are. Women, and especially mothers, have a profound tenderness and vulnerability towards their children. Men sometimes have the burden of putting aside their own feelings for a time in order to hold up their loved ones. But grief will always take its toll in one way or another and unfortunately, no emotionally healthy person is exempt from its grasp.

NRM: How do you select the names of your characters?

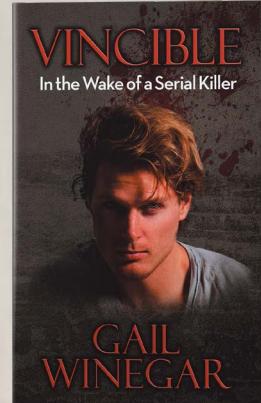
GW: Choosing names for my characters comes easily. They practically select themselves and take on the identity of the individual. It's very difficult to have to change a name midstream for some reason.

NRM: As of this writing, you have two books published in total. Do you want each book to stand on its own, or are you trying to build a body of work with connections between each book? What's in store for your readers?

GW: As of this writing, I have three books published in total, all completely different genres. Of course, like most authors, I have many unpublished works that may or may not ever see the light of day.

My publisher wanted me to write a sequel to *Vincible*, and I actually outlined it, calling it *Convincible*. I spent a good deal of time with the project, but eventually put it on hold because I prefer to write more light-hearted things. Unlike *Vincible*, *Convincible* predominantly had to come out of my own head and I found it disturbing to manufacture the scenes. So we'll see if Vince wins over in the future.

In the meantime, I am busy working on a children's book series called *Silver and Samm*, which is a sheer pleasure to compose. I also write a blog, "Off the Wall, a Blithe n' Brazen Blog" at gailwinegar.com.





Stephen Porpora

INTVW by Keith Ayuman

There is nothing that a parent would want more than to see his or her child at the peak of his potential. This is true even when the direst of circumstances befall them, dimming the chances for the child to reach his ambitions and aim for the highest star.

Whilst difficult, author Stephen Porpora and his wife, Judi, refused to give their son up to the grim diagnosis made by doctors after young Devon suffered a life-threatening seizure in 1982. The couple strived with Devon to keep him at his old elementary school despite doctors telling them he needed to relearn everything in a special school and might never have a normal life again.

The family's experiences in enduring that dark moment up until seeing Devon make it to the 1994 Olympic Festival rowing team are immortalized in Stephen Porpora's book, *The Unlikeliest Olympian*. Read on as Stephen shares with NRM the most powerful motivations that fueled them as parents and the prospects of this story to touch more hearts through the big screen!

NRM: Given the personal take of the book, what gave you the courage to write each page?

Stephen Porpora: While the book spans an actual time frame from 1982-1994, it wasn't until my wife Judi passed away suddenly in the fall 2000 at age 51 that I began writing in earnest. Her passing is not part of the story (other than a brief mention in the introduction) but it was certainly the inspiration. She was with me as I composed each page. As I searched for the right words and phrases, I wondered how she would have retold that part of our story. I wish I could have asked her. It was not my intention for the book to be only a memorial to her, but I could not have completed it without Judi as my coauthor.

Your question asks what gave me the "courage" to write each page? I like to think of it more as determination. No matter what word you choose, Judi provided it and that's why I dedicated the book to her. I wanted this book to be a hard copy testament to what a remarkable, selfless, and disciplined person she was.

NRM: If *The Unlikeliest Olympian* gets adapted for the big screen, do you think it will still emulate the same emotion?

SP: While character development is so crucial to any book, I feel strongly that a well-crafted movie adds another layer of emotional communication and texture to that character—visual. Obviously, that depends on the skills of the actors and director, but if properly presented, I believe the emotional impact of a film can exceed that of the book.

NRM: What are your plans for the film adaptation's marketing? Who are your target audience?

SP: I believe that the title, *The Unlikeliest Olympian - Our 12 Year Struggle to Save Our Child - A Story for Every Parent*, and my sketch on the front cover of the book establishes the target audiences for this read or any film adaptation. I've received calls and letters from readers who have told me that they wish they read this book when their kids were young. Some called it a blueprint for navigating parenting. Others have pointed out the recurring messages of determination, not fearing failure, not blindly accepting the "experts" pronounced sentencing of your child and never letting your child doubt your faith in him or her. The most meaningful response to the book came from my son Devon after he read the finished book for the first time. HE was "The Unlikeliest Olympian" and it was difficult for him to read the story about the challenges of his youth - particularly the struggles he doesn't remember (he remembers little of the early years of his recovery when he was on heavy doses of anti-seizure drugs). He said that the book reminded him of how he felt sometimes "trying to breathe as people push your head underwater and knowing he could reach out and grab his parents' outstretched arms."

Parents aren't the only primary target audiences. There is the sports aspect to the book. On the cover is one of my sketches. It is a sketch of Devon as a strapping 17-year-old athlete, a rower preparing for a big race—The 1994 Olympic Festival qualifier. But he was an unlikely athlete. Banned by his doctors from playing any contact sports where he could sustain a blow to his head, he was a scrawny kid with no athletic skills. Judi and I discovered an obscure

little youth crew program on an adjoining harbor and when Devon turned 13, we enrolled him. I fought for 2 years to have our local high school add rowing to its varsity sports program and the team flourished. It turns out that Devon was uniquely suited for the sport, possessing a very high aerobic threshold. He recruited his best friend, a fine natural athlete and together they excelled in high school-age rowing competitions all over the US and Canada. Their coach was a remarkable person. A telemetry engineer by trade, he had a mathematician's understanding of the rowing stroke but also a psychologist's understanding of how a youth athlete's mind works. The book delves deeply into the disciplines of athletic training and conditioning but also into the psychology of competition.

NRM: If inevitable limitations in movie-making come into play, would you willing to compromise anything if your book ever gets adapted to a feature length film?

SP: I am totally realistic about the compromises necessary for a book to make the jump from print to film. While I don't have first-hand experience with this transition I did spend many years doing TV work as a financial contributor to many media outlets while working as a floor trader on the NY Stock exchange. I understand the need to be pointed and concise and make each word count and leave out the fluff.

NRM: Other than being a writer, what makes Stephen Porpora interesting and different from others?

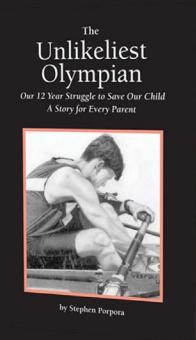
SP: I think what makes me unique is the lesson my dear father drilled into my young brain—that "no matter how difficult a project seems, once you've committed to it, you will figure a way to accomplish it." I have lived by this attitude all my life and it has allowed me to walk through a varied list of doors and acquire a diverse toolbox of skills.

I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s clamming, oystering and scalloping on the abundant ecosystem that was the Great South Bay on the southern shoreline of Long Island. When I was eight, my dad helped me build my own skimmer skiff and put an old outboard motor on it. His rule was that I had to earn my own money to pay for gas and maintain the boat. He taught me to harvest shellfish which I sold at our local fish market on our creek. After two years, the motor died. When I told him, he simply handed me a toolbox and told me to take it completely apart and when finished, he would help me rebuild it as good as new. "You can do this - just think it through step-by-step" he told me. I was discouraged at first but after some skinned knuckles and tears I got it apart and he helped me rebuild it "good as new."

I have rebuilt many motors since - lawn mowers, boat and car motors, even electric trains, but that is not my point here. It is the "can-do, do-not-fear" attitude that Dad taught me that has been so valuable and, yes, unique, to me. He constantly reinforced that each new challenge will be daunting at first, scary and it will be easy to accept defeat and quit, but don't. Push through that first effort, survive the required apparent failures and keep thinking and trying new ways and learning - and believe, truly believe you will succeed.

This question began with "Other than a writer," what makes me interesting and different. I don't consider myself a writer. I never showed any inclination toward writing. I decided to try writing this book in 2001 with no clue what was involved. Then after I retired from my career as a floor trader on the NY Stock Exchange in 2008, I was invited to write financial Op Eds for the financial newspaper *Investor's Business Daily*. They published my first submission and many after. Now I write a monthly essay for my local magazine *Huntington Bay Life*.

Similarly, I never showed much artistic talent, but back in the 1970s I decided that I wanted to sketch and began in 1975 to create my annual Christmas card. I've continued this tradition for the past 46 years and 21 of these sketches are presented in my book at the beginning of each chapter. While many other people have accomplished much more than I, this attitude, passed on to me by my dad, has allowed me to take on challenges and develop skills that make me interesting and different.





INTVW by Jazie Pilones

Writing is an art, and writers, indisputably, are artists who show their ingenuity through the play of words which creates vivid images in the readers' minds. With every scribbled letter, every character development, and every plot twist, a writer conveys a message. Whether writing for fiction or nonfiction prose, writers play a role and purpose—whether to persuade, inform, enlighten, explain, or entertain readers.

Read on as Jihoon Park, NRM's featured fiction writer for this issue, shares his take on the roles of writers in society, his inspirations, and his serendipitous metaphors in writing.

NRM: As a writer, what is the role you play in society?

JIHOON PARK: I'm very flattered that you call me a writer! I definitely don't feel like a "real writer" yet. I still have many things to learn about the craft. I'm in the school of thought that

writers, like all artists, are primarily entertainers and magicians. Regardless of the personal and ideological reasons an artist gets into their craft, from a societal point of view, art first and foremost provides a respite from the everyday tedium of life. Maybe using the word "entertainer" sounds degrading, but I personally think there's a lot of honor in that.

NRM: Why fiction writing and what influenced you?

JP: I've always enjoyed reading fiction, but it wasn't until I discovered the innovative and high-concept works of writers such as Donald Barthelme, Jorge Luis Borges, and Kurt Vonnegut that I was inspired to start writing myself. Writing became a way for me to explore ideas and realms far from my own reality. I think writing is also more conducive to these types of narratives when compared to other art forms such as visual art or films, since you're only limited by the capabilities of language itself.



NRM: “The Great Squirrel Pandemic” seems to speak of a subtle metaphor. What is the message that you originally intended to get across?

JP: I didn’t originally go into the story with a specific metaphor in mind, and I usually don’t in my writing process. Even as metaphors began cropping up in the story, I focused more on the narrative itself than trying to push a particular message, and by the end I think the metaphors in the story were developed enough without being too on the nose. As for the exact message I’m not too sure myself, maybe something to do with abundance and artistry?

NRM: Tell us about your theme/s? Do you plan on sticking to one or exploring some more?

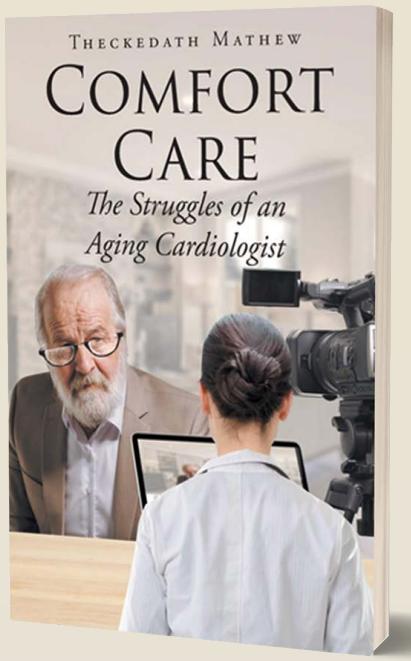
JP: Like my last response, I don’t really prioritize conveying a particular metaphor or a theme. Looking back at my own works though, artistry and absurdity seem to be pretty common themes.

NRM: Do you hear from your readers much? What kinds of things do they say, and what kinds of things do you want to hear?

JP: Not too much, but I’d love to hear more about what people think after they’ve read my work!



A Red Squirrel Eating a Nut by Basil Bradley



Comfort Care: The Struggles of an Aging Cardiologist

Available on amazon.com
Kindle \$8.99 | Paperback \$17.95



Joshua: The Odyssey of an Ordinary Man

Available on amazon.com
Paperback \$20.00

Theckedath Mathew MD

INTVW by Regie Vocales

Cardiologist and author Dr. Theckedath M. Mathew shares with **NRM** two of his brilliant and insightful books, *JOSHUA: The Odyssey of an Ordinary Man* and *Comfort Care: The Struggles of an Aging Cardiologist*. Read on to find the unique narrative on the life of Jesus and the captivating and informative piece dealing with the contemporary issues of aging in America against the backdrop of the tumultuous life stories of an accomplished cardiologist.

NRM: Your book, *JOSHUA: The Odyssey of an Ordinary Man*, is chronicling the journey of Jesus during the eighteen years of his life after he visited the temple when he was twelve. How were you able to find or formulate information about this unaccounted era of Jesus' life?

DR. THECKEDATH MATHEW: What is the basis for accounting [for] his life for 17 years? This is an age-old question. Many people have tried to answer the question but they are all unsatisfactory and lack reasoning. There is no documentation about that period of 17 years. But if you can scientifically analyze his words and deeds, you can figure out where he was. Jesus disappeared from the temple at the age of 13 and reappeared at the age of 30 from nowhere as a man of wisdom, substance, great oratory skills, love, and compassion. Up to Jesus' time, some nine great philosophers had come and gone. Aknaughton from Egypt, Cicero from Rome, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle from Greece, Confucius from China, Buddha from India, and I am also including Vyassa from India who is the author of the book Bhagvat Githa. There are DNA matches of many of the words and deeds from these philosophers to that of Jesus.

Jesus was a very inquisitive boy. By the age of 13, he had mastered the Torah. He had many questions. That is why he went to the Temple. His questions were anathema to the priests and therefore he was chased out. During the life of Jesus, there were very many Greeks in Israel. Jesus learned Greek and had some insights into the greek culture and literature. Then he left for Egypt. The route to Egypt was well known. He looked into the history of the Exodus and learned that the Jewish crowd in Egypt at that time was very small, not more than a couple of thousands. I reasoned that he secured a job at the library of Alexandria where he got acquainted with the collection of the Knowledge of the world that The Ptolemies had collected at the Library. After about 4 years he went to Rome, where he learned in detail about Cicero, his philosophy, style of meditation, and in particular the style of rhetoric with the usage of parables to prove a point. After about two or three years he traveled to Athens, Greece. He walked through the footprints of the great philosophers and probably had seen some of the Greek dramas. From his travels so far, Jesus had learned vaguely about the great Eastern civilization of India and China. Jesus returned to Palestine. It was only natural that a Jew gets married at the age of 21. He married and had a child. Jesus was troubled by the Roman rule of Palestine. Being pragmatic, he did not lead a revolution against the Romans. He continued his journey. He went to Babylonia and learned that most of the stories in the Torah are a direct copy of Babylonian literature. He saw the Laws of Khamurabi inscribed and displayed on a dark stone at Esagila. He also learned the Babylonian prayer very similar to "our father who art in heaven..."

In Babylon, he got connected with a caravan returning to China. He got a ride. The leader of the Caravan was a senior Government official well educated and well versed in Confucianism. In that long journey of three months, Jesus learned a lot about the Chinese civil laws and the teachings of Confucius. In Bactria, Joshua got out and the Chinese caravan turned north to Xian. There was lots of travel between Bactria and Taxila in India. Joshua got a ride in an old chariot pulled by a horse to Drapsaka and from there joined a caravan going to Taxila. Taxila was a great learning center from the times of the great emperor Chandra Gupta Maurya and further enriched as a Buddhist study center by emperor Ashoka. Joshua stayed in Taxila and learned Buddhism and Confucianism. After three years he moved to Madhura under the tutelage of the great sage Vyasa. He learned Bhagavad Gita in great detail along with other Indian epics. After four years at the age of thirty, Joshua returned to India.

I don't believe that Jesus had any superhuman powers. I am in the Aristotelian corner. God is the "unmoved mover." He doesn't come to earth to micromanage men. If you take out the mysticism, magic, and sorceries from the Jesus stories you will see the greatest philosopher of all who said and did things from his learnings and wisdom. Let me give you a few examples:

- A: the prayer "our father" from the Book of Hymns, Babylon 2300 B.C.
- B: "Do not speak before you think" Book of wisdom Babylon. 2300 B.C.
- C: "Do good to the men who do evil to you" Book of wisdom 2300 Babylon.
- D: "Remove the vile from your eyes before you attack trivial evils in others." Confucius 490 B.C.
- E: "Do unto others that you like to be done to yourself." Confucius 490 B.C.
- F: 'No man of wisdom is respected in his own Village: Confucius 490 B, C
- G: " Do your karma without fear or favor" Bhagavad Gita circa 100 B.C.
- H: "do not harm any beings." Budha circa 500 B.C.
- I: " Total non-violence." Budha circa 500 B.C.
- J: The technique of using parables in all the rhetorics. Cicero 130-43 B.C.

All these examples and more prove that Jesus had learned from all those philosophers. At the turn of the first millennium by traveling to those places. However, some of his most profound teachings do not have any precedents or examples from history.

A: Jesus was the first philosopher ever to come to the rescue of women and take up their cause. The first activist for women's rights. Eg: the story of the crowd trying to stone a harlot. " Who amongst you without sin may cast the first stone"

B: His admonition against the pedophiles. "It's much better that a millstone be tied around his neck and him being sent to the deepest fathom of the ocean." Here, Jesus is favoring capital punishment

C: His admonition against the Pharisees. "Cursed art thou. nothing but whitewashed tombs"

D: Jesus was the first philosopher who set an example for equal wages. Eg: the parable of workers calling to the job in the morning, noon and afternoon and giving equal wages.

E: Jesus admonished laziness and hard work. The parable of giving the same amount of money to three people all three of them investing differently with different outcomes.

F: Jesus' deed against untouchability. Eg. taking a drink from a Samaritan woman.

G: Jesus' famous parable about the good Samaritan is a testimony of the humanity of the inferior Samaritan against the upper-class priests, businessmen, and all.

In essence, it is beyond doubt that Jesus has traveled the world during that 17 years and learned from the philosophers of the East and West. in addition to being a bold, brilliant, genius. Unfortunately, so far he is not presented like that. He is presented as a 'God' showing superhuman miracles. So his personality is belittled. His position in human history as the paramount philosopher is marred. I have researched Jesus for fifteen years, tried to read all the great works of mankind up till the time of Jesus, and traveled to all those nations and civilizations that Jesus may have traveled. I present this book for the world to read. JESUS was a man. An ordinary man with extraordinary qualities. The greatest philosopher of all times

NRM: What was your inspiration in writing this book? Is making a feature film out of it a consideration prior to its creation?

TM: I was born into a middle-class Catholic family in India. At the age of 12, I was trained as an altar boy. I was impressed by the life of Jesus, particularly his trial and passion. But I didn't quite believe that he was God. I wanted to read the whole bible but it didn't happen at that time. Then at age 13, I was abused by a priest. But at the same time, I knew many priests like sages. I thought: some men are born pigs and some pigs are forked priests. I was a brilliant student. I usually passed the examinations in first, Class, and first rank. Also gold medalist twice, I secured the maximum degrees and diplomas in medicine and Cardiology. (B.Sc First class gold medalist in the University; M.B.B.S. first-class; M.D.; M.R.C.P; F.A.C.P; F.A.C.C; F.A.C.P; & F.S.C.A.I) started working as an Interventional Cardiologist. All those years the story of Jesus stuck in my mind as an unfinished business. My hobbies were music, reading, and traveling. I took Jesus as a research project. I don't usually read books; I study them. I studied the Old Testament, The new testament, The Greek philosophers, Babylonian history and writing, Egyptian history. Josephus, Herodotus, Cicero, Confucious, Budha, The great Indian epics, The Bhagavad Gita, and many many other books particularly anything and everything written about Jesus especially the historical Jesus. Most of them were rubbish. I thought Jesus was a prodigy, most likely the son of a Roman soldier born to a young Galilean woman out of wedlock and most certainly he traveled the world. As my reading surged, I found so many similarities in his words and deeds to many other philosophers. Then I traveled to ALL those places where Jesus might have traveled; Palestine, Babylon (Iraq), Egypt, Rome, Greece, Syria, Pakistan, (Taxila), many places in India and China. This research took fifteen years. Consequently, I clearly saw a Jesus whom nobody else saw; The most consequential of all philosophers. I was anxious to reveal the findings to the rest of the world. Hence I wrote the book- a new bible that nobody ever thought of.

A Movie? Yes. Many movies have been made about Jesus. All of them depict him as the son of God or God himself, focusing on the last thirty-six hours of his life. I am telling a story about Jesus that nobody has ever told.

NRM: How would marketing this potential feature film be played considering this is a "historical fiction"—as it's called online—and religious to an extent?

TM: This movie is certainly [historical] fiction. Jesus was a historical person. There is a continuous uninterrupted storyline about Jesus, right from the first century AD onwards through his disciples and testament writers. All the canonical testaments are non-contemporaneous. But there is one by Peter that is contemporaneous talking very briefly about Jesus. There is mention about a person that fits the description of Jesus in the writings of Josephus who was a historian appointed by the Romans. Mark wrote his testament within thirty-five years after the death of Jesus. Then came [the book according to] Luke, written about forty-five years after the crucifixion. Then came Mathew and John about ninety-five and one hundred thirty years later. The canonical testaments made a deliberate effort to paint Jesus as divine in Mark and finally as God himself by John.

NRM: What is something in your material that would entice the young and the old, the faithful, and the nonbelievers to watch the movie other than shedding light on the eighteen-year blur of Jesus' life?

TM: My story talks about Jesus in a convincing way describing where he went, how he went, whom he met, what he learned, and how that influenced him and changed him. There is nothing superhuman in his words and deeds that are divine. All the miracles, the divine birth, the turning of the water to wine, and all are deliberately included in his story to make him comparable to some of the other Gods of that time like the Zeus of the Greeks, The Brahma of India, and the Atten of the Egyptians.

NRM: What would you tell critics and skeptics about your account of how Jesus' life was lived?

TM: I will tell them the verifiable truth that he was not divine. He did things a man can do and that he was the most consequential philosopher of all times. Let people love and respect him not because he turned water into wine or walked over water or raised the dead but because of his philosophy of non-violence, love towards fellow human beings, and his compassion to women. He publicly touched a harlot, raised her hand to the sky, and challenged the crowd: " who amongst you without sin may cast the first stone." He drank water from a Samaritan woman- a taboo those days. Pedophilia is a cancer that has destroyed Catholicism. Two thousand years back Jesus admonished them " It is better that a millstone be tied around their neck...." He made the most scathing remarks about the Pharisees. In essence, Jesus was the very first philosopher who made the most remarkable statements about the various aspects of human life to create a world in peace and prosperity.

NRM: We also have here your book, *Comfort Care: The Struggles of an Aging Cardiologist*, from just last year, December 2020. Tell us more about it and also your thoughts on making this into a full movie.

TM: I have given just one way of narrating the story. But there can be many different ways.

End of life is a fearful thought mostly because of the pain, suffering, and lack of dignity. There is no clear understanding or discussion about this subject and most people are ignorant of the options of end-of-life care. The story describes some of the episodes in the life of a brilliant student engulfed in the socio-political turbulence of his time. In the creation of the screenplay, some of the episodes must be narrated.

The screenplay can start with Jacob's preparation for going to the assisted living facility as described in the first chapter. All his life history is revealed as a flashback when he is dictating the stories to Terri: the sexual abuse by the priest, the way Jacob protested by taking the students from the retreat hall and marching to the church; his suspension from the school; his arrest and jailing in the anti-communist revolution including one of his speeches to the students; the struggles and the mele by the students and the bus conductor, the ringing of the long bell by Jacob and the following fights between the students and the bus mechanics and the subsequent arrest and jailing. Evicted from the college, Jacob goes to the granite pit and tills the stones. Jacob eloping from home to join the army and his father finding him at the railway station sleeping, covering his face with a newspaper. Jacob gets a new lease on his life by getting admission to St. Berchmans College in Kerala. Show a collage of shots like his excellence in a perfect dissection of the arterial system of a frog. The professor demonstrates his dissection to other students, Jacob getting perfect scores in the examinations. some shots as a Senior Under Officer in the National Cadet Corps leading a platoon, perfect turn-out, saluting and all. Some shots of his acting skills and getting the coveted prize as the Best Actor in the University of Kerala playing the role of Barabas in the Biblical story. The college principal conducts a commendation ceremony by assembling the whole students and teachers in the auditorium and making an emotional speech. In the final examination, Jacob got First Class and First Rank in the University and a gold medal. Jacob got admission to the medical school in the National merit list.

Then the camera should go back to the Assisted living facility showing some of the cognitive dysfunctions of Jacob like forgetting the sequence of events, forgetting to eat dinner, and forgetting to change his clothes. And Jacob getting nightmares of death, the pain, suffering, and all.

The camera goes back to medical school. Show collages of events. The senior students were jealous of Jacob and his achievements. They gave him severe shots of ragging as I have described in the book. Jacob went away from the Hostel and became a day schooler. Severe financial stress in the family took a toll on Jacob's life. He got the National Government merit scholarship but that wasn't enough. The professors were not very friendly to students. They terrorized the students by failing them for silly reasons.

In the first year, only 17 students passed out of 60. Jacob passed easily. Some students attempted suicide. Jacob was a kind and compassionate young doctor. Here we should narrate images of the little girl Mary's story as I have described in the book. Jacob was very active in the dramatic club. He attended a powerful theatre club in the town and acted in many dramas. He assembled a team from Medical school and practiced a short play, "Bishop Candlesticks" adapted from The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Jacob got another medal from the University. During this time a very beautiful girl named Jasmine was showing interest in Jacob. Jacob also liked her. But it didn't go any further. Jacob completed his M.D. and started the House surgery.

The camera goes back to the assisted living facility. Jacob had an episode of fecal incontinence, while at sleep and it continued. He went on diapers. The humiliated and disgusted Jacob approached Dr. Nadaraja, a renowned surgeon, and decided to have a colostomy. Jacob renewed his dictations with Terri. His one year of experience in private practice at Kozhencerry under an unethical surgeon. Here we will show the images of Jacob going to a remote house on a hilltop to assist a complicated delivery. Also the episode of giving anesthesia to a young girl using the brutal technique of a mask and ether spray. Then he got a reply to his application for a medical position in Zambia. He resigned from his practice and went home to prepare for the journey to Zambia. Here we should show images of his sendoff to Zambia as narrated in the book. The camera now turns to Zambia and his first job under a hypocrite South African Indian doctor who still practices apartheid. Images of the abortion and the death of the young lady and the C-section of the obese lady where Jacob got into problems and his boss did not answer the call. Then we can show Jacob's work as a senior house officer under Dr. Chuke and answering his questions smartly. Then an episode with Dr. Obinechi and his temper tantrum in taking care of a patient with rabies. The dictation continues. Jacob goes to England for higher studies and Joins his medical school friend Dr. V. John. Images of his M.R.C.P examination and the smart answers by Jacob. Jacob completed the M.R.C.P. examination in a record time of seven months. Images of the convocation and following interaction with the police for drunken driving and not obeying the traffic lights. Jacob's answers to the police and the benevolence of the British police. Jacob got several job offers and he decided to go to Rochester N.Y. for higher studies.

The camera goes to the Emergency room. Super crowded ED with rude behaviors. Some images can be shown as I have narrated in the book. Jacob very quickly proved to be a dependable physician to the nurses. The nurses consulted on many cases that were mismanaged by the senior residents. The chief of Medicine noted his clinical superiority immediately; collages of the patient with cryptococcal meningitis and brain tumor' complaints to the chief of medicine and the chief arranging a special examination for Jacob and made him Board eligible. Subsequent fellowship in Cardiology and his travels to Cleveland clinic for getting training in angioplasty. Jacob started his practice as a very successful Interventional Cardiologist. His practice was very busy, here we should go to a collage-mode to show some of the cases that Jacob treated: the case of aortic dissection Jacob diagnosed by bedside Echo and the surgeon took the patient to the O.R. and fixed it; the case of an acute right to left intracardiac shunt Jacob diagnosed and treated by inflating a Swan Ganz balloon and held it against the PFO and temporarily closed the PFO until the next day the CT surgeon corrected by open-heart surgery; the case of frequent visit of a patient to the ED with fake pain and she getting seven cardiac angiograms and then Jacob put his foot down and told the patient's family that it was psychosomatic disorder and the following disciplinary action by the administration. The lawsuit for sexual abuse by the office staff. and the court trial.

Camera back to Jacob's room. Progressive sleep disturbances. Jacob called his friend and PCP and asked for Nembutal. With some hesitancy Dr. Cole prescribed it. Jacob collected it and kept it safely. Jacob told Terri to take him to the medical library where he got a copy of the famous article by Dr. Timothy Quill titled " A Case of Individual Decision making " published in the

New England Journal of Medicine- a case of euthanasia! Terri read the article and knew the direction Jacob was moving. Through Terri, he also bought a copy of the book "Death and Dying" by Timothy Quill. Terri read that book too. Then Jacob developed a seizure at night and fell from the bed and was left unattended on the floor until Terri came in the morning. Jacob was taken to the hospital and saw an interventional Radiologist who detected atrial fibrillation. A cerebral angiography detected a thrombus at the bifurcation of the Middle Cerebral Artery. The thrombus was retrieved and Jacob was put on antiplatelet agents and heparin. The hemiparesis rapidly improved.

Jacob was preoccupied with the thought of pain, suffering, and lack of dignity over his life and wanted to take his life. He collected another supply of thirty pills of Nembutal from Dr. Cole. He arranged through Terri to get a copy of the book "Final Exit" by Derek Humphry. Terri read the book carefully and gave it back to Jacob. "Final Exit" narrated in detail all that needs to be known about Self Deliverance. He has a few more stories to be dictated; the story of the University Professor who operated on a case of Cardiomyopathy with a systolic murmur misdiagnosed as a case of severe aortic stenosis and operated on him leading to the death of the patient. Another case of progressive shortness of breath was wrongly diagnosed as COPD by the Pulmonary professor at the University. Finally resolved the symptoms by pericardectomy. Another case of classical IHSS with progressive shortness of breath. Jacob referred her for evaluation of cardiac transplantation to the University Cardiology Transplant team. They evaluated her and declined evaluation because her pumping function was normal. Instead, they wanted to operate her for trivial Aortic Regurgitation thinking that the valve was the problem. After about three months the patient collapsed with cardiogenic shock due to severe LV outlet obstruction. Then she underwent cardiac transplantation and recovered. Camera back to the Manor visitors room where Terri and Maggie are chatting. The mood is somber. Terri is telling Maggie: "Jacob is planning for self-deliverance..." and explains the whole steps of self-deliverance, The whisky, Nembutal, plastic bag and all... the need for a health care proxy and the Living will Then they both walked to Jacob's room.

The camera went back to Jacob's room. He is alone. Reading Final Exit. Jacob got up and found a whisky bottle and a glass from the kitchen and brought it to his bedside nightstand. He collected three medicine bottles with 30 tablets of Nembutal in each one of them and counted the pills to ninety. He heard the doorbell. Jacob quickly covered the collection with a bath towel and then opened the door. Maggie and Terri talked to Jacob about the need for a health care proxy and the Living will. Jacob agreed. Then Jacob opened his mind and told them in detail about his wish for Self-deliverance. He explained the process and begged them not to dissuade him from his efforts. They agreed and promised him to help Jacob for a peaceful exit and Terri insisted that it is not the time yet.

Jacob's room. The visit by a priest and their discussion about the soul, heaven, and all. Jacob told him that he is an agnostic and declined confession. Later on, Jacob goes to bed and drifts off to sleep. He gets up (This is a dream sequence) Jacob gets situated on his bed propped up. put a plastic bag over his head. The room is almost dark. He drinks two large whiskies, then powders the 90 pills and mixes it with marmalade and makes a pudding in a cup and he eats all of them, becoming really drowsy. The plastic bag is now pulled over his nose. the bag becomes cloudy. Jacob suffocates. Struggles. and tried to pull off the bag but couldn't. Then he gets up with a wild scream. No bag on his head and the accessories are still there on the nightstand untouched.

A few days later, Jacob got abdominal pain, [went] to the ED, and [was eventually] diagnosed with liver cancer...Consultation with Dr. Nadarajan and the surgery. From the surgery he did not recover well. . He was brought back to the Manor. In Maggie's presence, Terri explains the whole steps of comfort care. Jacob was at ease. They got a vial of morphine, Whenever needed Terri gave him a shot of Morphine 6 mg each. Jacob had no worries, no fear of death, no fear of loss of dignity. Jacob's breathing labored. Terri pushed the last dose of morphine. Jacob died peacefully.

NRM: If given the chance to produce and direct this movie, how would you want elderly care to be represented in terms of the cast, the atmosphere, the narrative, to name a few?

TM: In this novel, I have mainly focussed on Jacob's life. But there is one scene where Jacob, after his retirement, goes to the hospital to visit one of his previous employees. There was a stench of feces in the room. The patient was soiled for over a day. But there was nobody to clean the patient and she was in fact neglected. Jacob went to the nurses' station and received cold feet. In this scene, one can show patients screaming and crying for help. But I haven't really focused on the population at large struggling to cope with death and dying. Generally, there is great ambivalence on the part of physicians to prescribe pain medications to patients, even dying patients. The fear is addiction, abuse, selling the medicine in the black market, and all. What is the fear of addiction in a dying patient? Remember the story of my grandmother I had narrated. She was getting a ration of opium every month from the Government. My book does not answer all the questions about elderly care at large. But it can certainly provoke a discussion. I think everybody should have a living will and health care proxy with DNR, DNI as the case may be. The philosophy of home hospice care must be taught to all citizens. And at the end of life, they should be treated at home with plenty of morphine under strict supervision. If we can do so, the health care expenses can be cut in half.

NRM: The story also touches on the topic of euthanasia, a taboo and very sensitive topic that challenges moral principles and ethical judgment. How would you portray this in your movie without it leaving a traumatic mark, and instead start a serious discussion in different institutions?

TM: As an author, I have done extensive research on euthanasia. I don't agree with the concept. The theme of this book is to discourage euthanasia and promote comfort care. Jacob researched euthanasia and thought that it is the right way to go in spite of the fact that he is a super-specialist. But Terri was able to convince him that comfort care is a much better way. Remember I have narrated a scene (albeit a dream sequence) of Jacob trying for self-deliverance ending as a nightmare. I have tried to show the violence and the horror of euthanasia

NRM: Would you say this book would also become a hit in the blockbusters? Why or why not?

TM: Certainly, yes. First of all, written by a man who knows the subject. This subject is applicable to ALL without any exception. No other subject can claim that status. Every scene is real and therefore the audience can relate to it. A THOUGHT WILL LINGER IN THE MINDS OF ANYBODY WHO WATCHES THE MOVIE. IF THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED TO JACOB, WHAT ABOUT ME? Maybe they will think about a living will and health care proxy. There should develop a discussion about the use of painkillers most effectively.

NRM: What are your final thoughts on these two magnificent books becoming feature films? What is your message for your potential audience?

TM: Regarding JOSHUA, I have really rewritten the Bible without taking anything from the 12 or so testaments. The audience will appreciate the extensive research behind writing this book. Even atheists and agnostics will come to love the man Jesus of Nazareth. It can provoke more research about the life and times of Jesus. This book should be a textbook in History Philosophy classes in Universities. If properly done this will be the most remarkable movie ever done about Jesus and nobody will dare to make any more movies about Jesus of Nazareth. Regarding Comfort Care. This is an apt subject for a movie of consequences whose time is overdue. This is a universal subject. People will leave the movie theater thinking about their end of life at least passively. This move is sure to begin a national discussion about death and dying. Finally, the author is a dramatist, actor, and writer. If I can be an assistant director to the movies, it would be meaningful.

Katherine Ruth Hofer

INTVW by Kathleen Crucillo

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drastic change to the way people all over the world socialize. In attempts to keep us from even worse situations, authorities have limited travels and in-person engagements, including work arrangements. Budapest-based English tutor and proofreader **Katherine Ruth Hofer** would know the difference all too well, with her missionary experience offering a clear view of how it was like to be able to openly interact with others.

New Reader Magazine had the honor of chatting with Katherine about the pandemic, her poetry inspirations, and *The Reluctant Partier*—one of her poems which offer an introspective view about one's struggle on self-image, connection, and social withdrawal. Read all about it here!

NRM: How are you dealing with the pandemic? How do your experiences in missionary work inspire your writing?

Katherine Ruth Hofer: I have been dealing well with the pandemic, thank you for asking. I managed to avoid catching anything since the outbreak began, and I have recently been vaccinated. I have also been lucky to do quite well on my own in my apartment here in Budapest, and have relished the time working at home, though I have missed my favorite cafés.

My experiences as a missionary have inspired my writing probably more than I realize, in that they have afforded me a perspective on life not available to many people. Namely, this is being called to live by the command to love other people in the devoted way that a missionary undertakes.



If I have learned anything as a missionary, it is how to love others, no matter who they are. This love interweaves with my independent, free-thinking spirit, and I feel that this dynamic comes out in my writing. I try to find the balance between realism and a persistent hope for something beyond, a balance to which God calls me, I believe.

NRM: As a humanitarian and an educator, how personal is writing for you? Who are you writing for?

KRH: Writing for me is a very personal and immersive experience. In it, I draw out my inner thoughts and feelings, and in one sense I write for myself, in a very immediate way, and in another sense, there are certainly things I wish to say to others who are not present. I am writing for anyone who needs a breath of fresh air, so to speak. I hope that my poems can do this. I find that the incongruence of truths that exist despite seeming contradiction to be fascinating, and a core feature of my work. I believe that when we take the time to look at life this way, we can all find a deeper understanding, and so really, I am writing for anyone. As a person who has filled different roles in my adult life, I have likely come to this belief from the many kinds of people I have met.

An important note to make is that my more autobiographical poems about my past are for people I still know today, and for people whom I no longer know, to say things I had never been able to say at the time.

NRM: What do you love about your poetry? While we're at it, how do you think people's assumptions of you influence your works and artistic role?

KRH: One thing I love about my poetry is that I can express notions that I find I do not express otherwise. In some ways, it is an even deeper dive than diary-keeping, something I had been doing for years until I started focusing on producing poems. I do continue to keep a diary, but my sights have shifted, and I now find my time writing best spent by making notes for poems on the bus or tram, or in concentrated work at my desk or on my couch. I find there seems to be a plethora of poems to pull out of my mind and heart, and so it is endlessly exciting and truly a thrill. I write as much as my time allows.

I often feel the desire to explain my point of view, as a reaction to what I feel

are other people's assumptions of me. I have overcome my past, but memories have a way of sneaking up behind me when I most wish to be unencumbered. Assumptions can be restricting, but in the face of these, I try to find joy in defying expectations. When I write, I try to express what I find to be true, hoping that people can listen. I am a person who continues to evolve, in ways both purposefully chosen and unconscious. I used to be quite shy, but now I would say I have learned how to trust others and express myself, though I can still be reserved in some respects. A portion of what I write has been written to compensate for the times I was not heard, as I now find that I am a person with much to say.

NRM: Your works, like "The Reluctant Partier"—a personal favorite—offer an introspective view about one's struggle on self-image, connection, and social withdrawal. Was this style a self-discovery? Who are your early writing influences?

KRH: I would say that my style is definitely an exploration, and I believe my method is akin to turning over a concept, or self-concept, in my mind so that I can see all of the facets which make it up, sort of the way a person would turn over a crystal in their hand to see all of the light refracted within it. I do discover pieces of the puzzle of my life, and in that there is much self-discovery, and putting words to the things I already believe is extremely gratifying.

My earliest poetic influence, to choose the first significant poet, was Emily Dickinson. I had a book of her poetry as a girl, a Scholastic edition. Also, I am her sixth cousin, five times removed, so I feel that this link emphasizes how important a writer she has been and even now continues to be, for me. As a teenager, I discovered e e cummings in a textbook, and fell in love. Since then, I have read much of his work, and am still inspired.

NRM: Are you the loneliest when writing or when socializing?

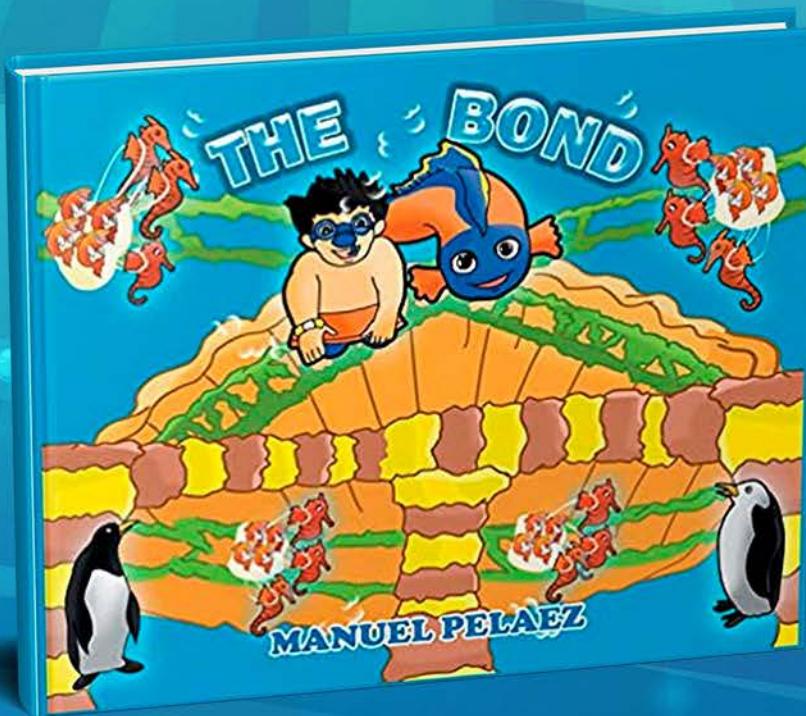
KRH: I would say the answer is, when socializing, as I sometimes miss my close friends while with people I do not know as well.

Many of my close friends are scattered around the globe. However, these days, I do try to appreciate the people with whom I happen to be spending time, even if a part of me has its reservations.



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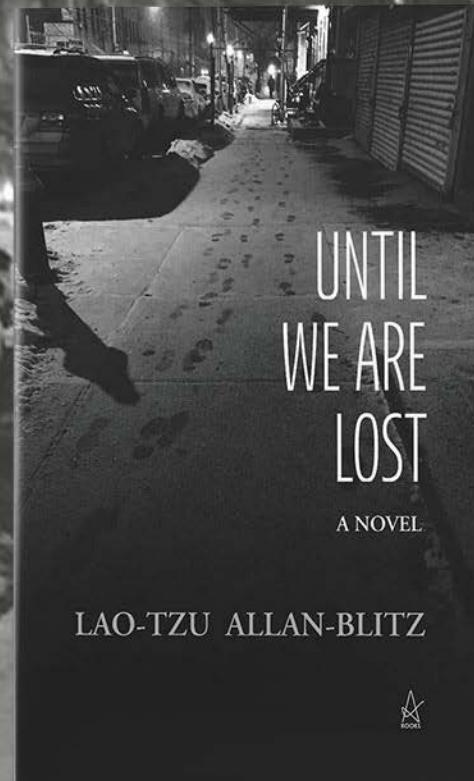
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Bill Arnott's Beat: On Buddhism

Buddhism espouses four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. Within these truths, somewhat ironically, is the tenet to not cling to rules. However. Say what you will about Siddhartha, the prince who up and left his royal digs to wander, meditate and more or less enlighten. His followers, no doubt in-keeping with his teachings, tend to be forgiving of the man who walked out on his spouse and child. I assume his family stayed in the palace, although I've yet to find any reference to those the bodhisattva left behind. Perhaps a stark reminder of the first noble truth. It's believed he left a note. On the fridge, I presume.

I had a relative who attended a weekend workshop on Buddhism. Prior to the retreat, we (the rest of the family) said, "Cool. What do you hope to get out of it?" To which the person in question replied, quite simply, "Enlightenment." Well, that would be a good use of an afternoon at the Exit 16 Travelodge, was what we thought, but didn't say. Instead our responses were a range of noncommittal single syllable sounds. Variations, ironically, of *ah* and *ohm*. I remember a lack of eye contact amongst those of us making the sounds, doing our best to be supportive.

Following the retreat, we asked, with kindness not evident in my preceding commentary, how it went. The response was, "I learned it's all about karma." This sounded positive. "Yep," the person continued. "I made a list. Everyone who's ever wronged me. I'm gonna make sure they get what's coming to them!" To which the rest of us, once more, focussed on not making eye contact, again making our inadvertent transcendental meditation sounds. *Ahh. Hmm.* Being a family unit we'd reserve judgement, until it could be unleashed when the judgee was absent. We were, after all, considerate. (Never say a bad word about anyone, when they're in the room.)

Fast forward a couple of decades and I'm chuckling as I remember that—one person's skewed and vengeful interpretation of Buddha's teachings. Meanwhile I'm doing my best to keep an open mind as I shuffle into a convention centre for my own enlightenment-themed afternoon. I was on my way to a private audience with His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the Buddhist formerly known as Lhamo Thondup. I was considering what to say. Would it be presumptuous to leap in on a first name basis? *Lhamo! I'm Bill!* Would he answer to H-H? Or should I go with a more formal but equally warm, *Mr. Thondup, I'm Mr. Arnott. But please, call me Bill. Everybody does!*

As I entered the cavernous meeting room I realized I had a private audience along with five-thousand other private audience attendees. This was what fifty dollars got me (plus non-refundable fee). When I signed up for the event I thought, *When again will I ever get a chance to see this guy in the flesh, albeit wrapped in maroon?* Apart from the robe it was much the same thing I thought when I went to see the Rolling Stones, thirty years and twelve comeback tours ago. The fifth noble truth? Never underestimate the allure of ticket sales.

It turned out my fifty dollars (plus non-refundable fee) got me a hardbacked chair in an endless row at the back of the room. I was in a clump of good looking, athletic people in spandex—employees of the local yoga clothing manufacturing giant, who'd made the Dalai's visit into a staff event. The billionaire owner shuffled down our row, straddling me for a few awkward moments as he plucked the most photogenic bodies from the line to join him up front. Yuck, I thought, or something similar. In my defense, my enlightenment hadn't yet kicked in. That was scheduled for two-thirty.

I did, in fact, want to hear what the Lama had to say. It was a privilege to be in the same space. (Yes, yes, it's all the same space, I realize, but just set your quantum mindset on pause for a moment.) H-H didn't disappoint. It was a decent event despite the sprawling, impersonal venue. He shared insights, anecdotes, reminders of kindness, cautions to bullies and a host of platitudes. In addition to the words of the holy man on stage, I figured the jokes alone would make the afternoon worthwhile. I wasn't disappointed. Later that day I was at a friend's. "What'd you do today?" he asked. *Hung out with the*

Dalai Lama, I said. "Big hitter, the Lama," he replied, quoting *Caddyshack* and not missing a beat.

I did indeed get good takeaways from my less-than-private audience with the Tibetan Buddhist. Reminders of the stuff we ought to inherently practice but all too easily let slide. Of course through it all the greatest lesson to me was one of forgiveness, letting unseen burdens go, wiping clean the perceived slates of wrongdoing and ill-will. And yes, almost assuredly, letting people think what they choose to think, even when they're wrong. Who was I to judge, after all? Sure the job was there but I'd never been asked to fill the role. I simply volunteered. Maybe that's another noble truth that circles back to the first—the one about suffering, starting us out once more on the path, a road that leads us if not directly to, then at least in the direction of something akin to enlightenment.



Bill Arnott is the award-winning author of *Gone Viking: A Travel Saga*, *Gone Viking II: Beyond Boundaries* and the #1 Bestseller, *Bill Arnott's Beat: Road Stories & Writers' Tips*. When not trekking the globe with a small pack and journal, Bill can be found on Canada's west coast, making music and friends. Join Bill's Artist Showcase for fun interviews and updates.



through Gold-colored lenses

AIRA CALINA

Have you ever heard the saying that goes, "People take pictures of what they love"? Because I have and it's way more times than I'd care to remember. I guess it's understandable, though. What with limited film rolls, limited device storages, and limited everything, you'd have to be really careful not to let any of those one-offs go to waste.

We can't afford to let 'comes' be 'goes'; we need 'stays.' And we need them to be pretty, regardless of how subjective 'pretty' could be.

So then, I have just a few more questions: what happens to the outtakes, to the shots behind the camera, or to the scenes its lens can't reach? What happens to the views that are not what people love? What of the *mundane*? Well, as it turns out, it's not such a hopeless case for them. There're precious people like **Matt Gold** who pick up on things not many people would readily (or choose to) see.

Matt Gold is a Brooklyn-based mobile photographer whose driving theme is "making the mundane viewable." I got to know more about him. And you will too.

Before moving to Brooklyn to pursue music, Matt lived in Ohio and then in Indiana. Although he started taking photos with his flip phone in 2008, he didn't really focus on photography and put more weight on making music. That is until 2020, when the pandemic hit. While many of us discovered new things to do while in quarantine, Matt saw his erstwhile casual hobby in a new light. Matt's discovery that he could actually make waves by taking photos—something he simply enjoyed doing before—was what finally turned the hobby into something he can be known for.

The shift in focus from one art form to another wasn't very difficult for Matt, as his cinematic perspective of the world and his attention to detail are both crucial traits for either. Whether he's making music or taking photos, he likes being able to show people what he sees, leaving the interpretation to the receiver. "I think I am a photographer because overall, I am a creative at heart. I must always be creating to be happy, regardless of the format," Matt says.

When looking through Matt's Instagram the first time, the uninitiated can become overwhelmed with the numerous moods and themes that greet them. It's the good kind of overwhelming, though, because if you're not very mindful of your time, you could end up mired into a plethora of colors and compositions with just a few scrolls.

Viewers could even observe many times how the artist can breach the line between mixed media and photography, especially with the addition of colors and color corrections.

This diversity in themes, though unplanned and borne of in-the-moment realizations, is the charm that makes Matt's photos work so well. Unlike profiles with calculated aesthetics (some can be overly executed), Matt's screams authenticity and casts a light on the many, many inspirations he's had, whether it be nostalgia, the environment, or other artists. "I just have a lot of different avenues I like to take artistically and don't let myself get confined to one format."



Features

As someone who has no knowledge of photography and how it works on a technical level, I steadily grew curious of what Matt's photography was about the more time I spent studying and admiring it. I will never forget the rush of emotions I got when I found even the slightest solid reason I liked his photos so much. It's pretty simple: the taking of the mundane and making it something else.

"Making the mundane viewable, to me, means taking the ordinary and common and looking at it with a different perspective," Matt says when asked about the significance of his Instagram bio. "Maybe it's a different angle of viewing something, or creating something completely not related to the original subject. It always excites me to pick an object and figure out how far I can push it," the photographer adds, further pointing to an example where street cones can turn into strippers after he captures them on his camera. Though eureka moments don't happen as much as they do in movies, there are times when Matt could get a photo just how he wants it in one or two shots.

Though it may not be too obvious, Matt's relatively unorthodox pictures can be done on a mobile device. We know because that's what he does. He's since gone from being a flip phone photographer to being an iPhone photographer, and his craft's only become even more interesting. "[It] shows the viewer that something great can be created, even by the simplest of tools. No bells or whistles are needed; if you have the vision and the eye, it will happen," Matt says.

Photography is more than just focusing on a subject and then pressing or clicking on buttons to produce a result. On the contrary, the visual art form can be quite difficult at times, in the same way creating something from scratch can be challenging.

There are many factors to consider when trying to come up with a photo worthy enough to be presented to other people: lighting, mood, color, environment. With all that to think about, it comes as no surprise that Matt sometimes runs into problems with execution. When even one of those factors are altered or a bit off, an original photo idea can become completely different when actually taken.

Matt's advice:

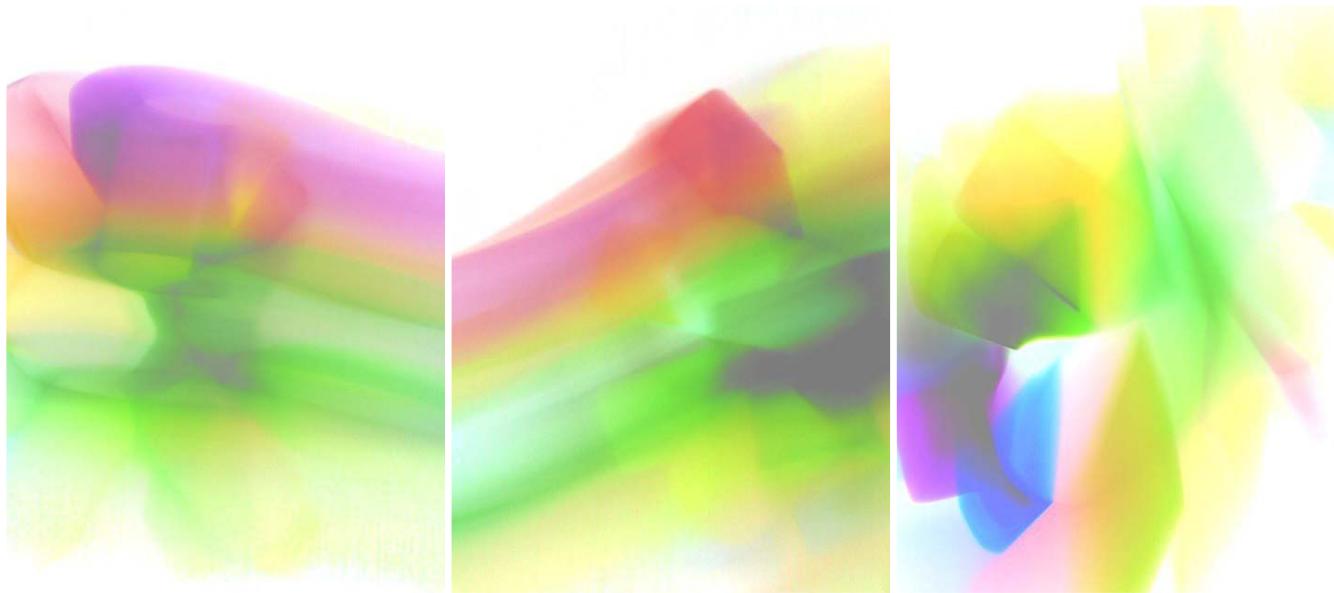
- Go by the old standard: less is more
- Go with your gut

"I always look at an image the next day as a refresher and to take a new look and ask myself, 'is it done? Does it say what you wanted?' Sometimes, you just know, other times it comes a bit slower," Matt shares. "I also feel it's good to get opinions and first impressions. It's always a challenge editing your own work and getting out of your own head," he adds.

Another challenge Matt faces when creating is the sometimes all-too-obvious difference between photos taken with an iPhone and those taken with a professional camera.



The lack of a proper studio can also be troublesome to some extent. Matt, however, feels as though those are not problems too big to address. In time, a better camera and a decent studio will come and he'll have no problem adapting, just like he did when he made the switch from flip phone to iPhone. "I change slowly. I get comfortable with what I am using until it becomes frustrating or I am not getting what I want visually, then I make the switch."



Like many other artists, Matt, too, struggles with getting noticed in a sea of talent and skill, even more now that most of everything has converged online. Navigating social media can be one of, if not the, trickiest part in Matt's chosen career.

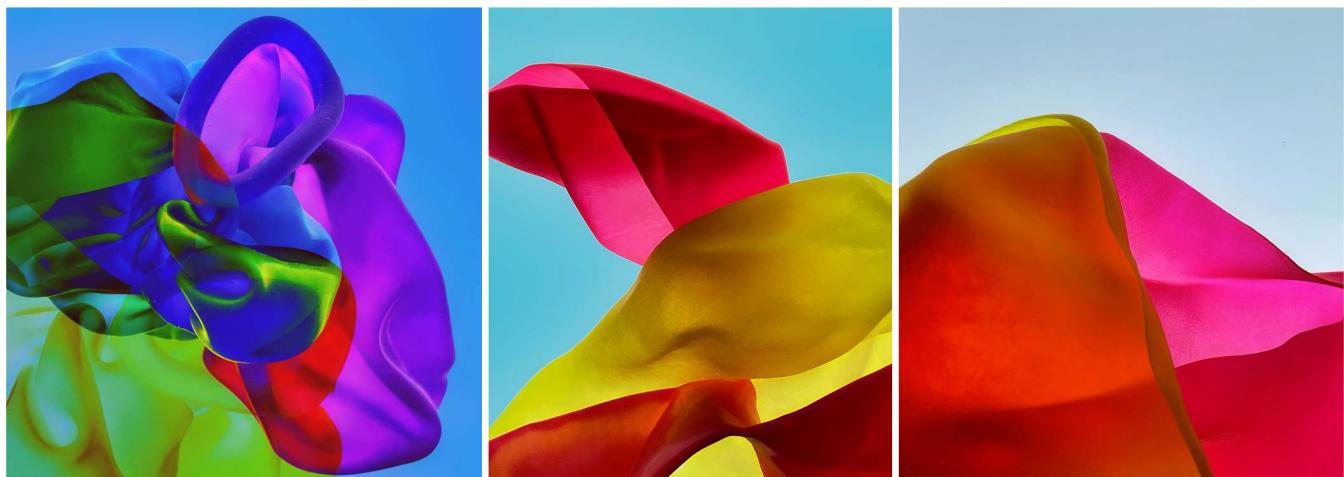
Now, personally, I think Matt is either too humble to admit or has lived with it too long to notice how well he works around wrinkles like that.

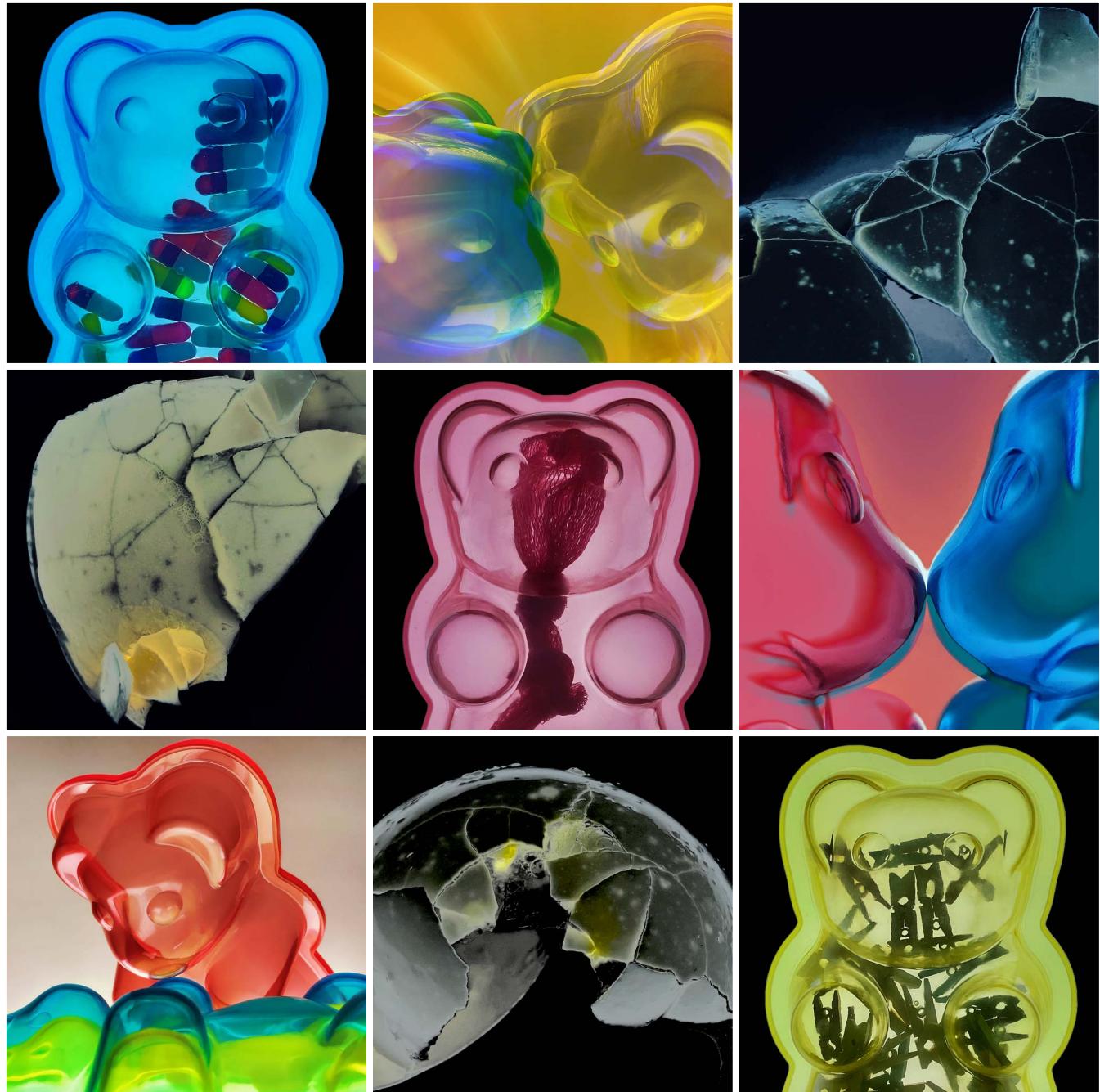
For example, not many people know that due to a retinal detachment in his left eye after being assaulted, he has a warped vision in his left eye. Though it's an annoyance to him, it doesn't seem to be a hindrance to his craft. That much is apparent in the photos he's shown the world.

Matt doesn't believe that the best results come exclusively from the use of the best equipment. While it certainly depends on what you are shooting, "if you want it bad enough, an image or career, you will find a way to make

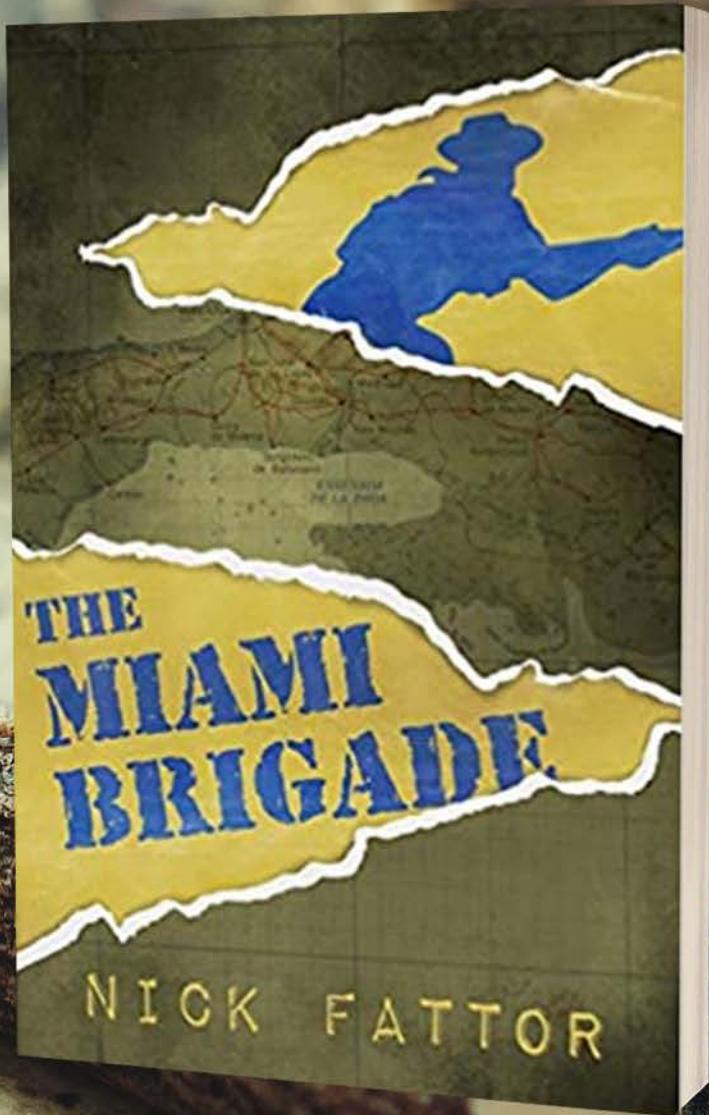
whatever you are using or doing work," Matt says, coming full circle to making do of things as they are or as you have them; making the mundane viewable. There is no time for excuses, he says, because if you aren't going for it, there are a hundred others who are.

Matt's photos can incite a feeling of familiarity; a fleeting but poignant notion of knowing something and just not seeing it like you normally would. It's like looking at something with fresh eyes—leaving and then coming back and having a newfound understanding of something. Matt's photography takes us through a shortcut, directly into the moving bit, the part that most people would want to be in. And while it may not be obvious right away, these photos are still made up of things that people love, even as extras. Sometimes, that's all it takes.





Matt has many more photos up on his Instagram account. Follow him [@mattgoldphoto](#)



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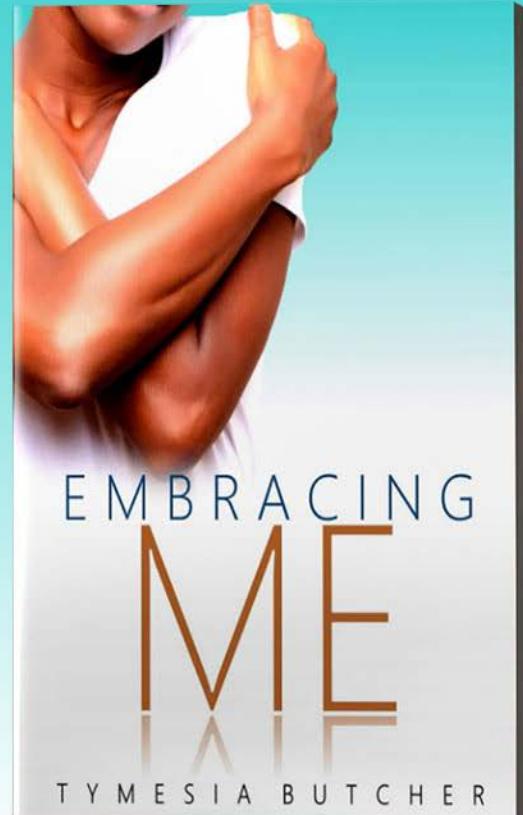
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Literary Work



Luke Beling is an emerging South-African born author who enjoys provoking curiosity through thoughtful storytelling. Growing up in post-apartheid South Africa, diversity, justice, and the often overlooked are glowing themes within his writing. He currently resides with his wife and four daughters on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Tithi Luadthong



The Dark Before the Dawn

LUKE BELING

When he carried more than the shirt on his back, it was only because his stomach couldn't keep what was in his hands. Days like those were the finding of freckles on his black skin.

His mornings came with thoughts of killing birds. If the roosters hadn't been the village hope for chickens laying eggs or offered more than stretched skin on bones, he would've struck them with a rock. The young kids might've only realized their departure after a few nights sipping on soup from the carcasses. He didn't need the feathered crowing dark sky reminders to break his silence, to move him to his feet from a night on sandy earth. Though the ground was the shape of his back, it felt hard as sheetrock, and the cold kept bitter bites no matter which way he turned.

His journey into town began without shoes on red dirt, the kind of dirt that keeps in rivers with nothing to hide. Tin-shanty roofs played with the moonlight, bouncing beams of white to and fro, chasing shadows. The early smells of beans cooking over fires and the occasional whiff of coffee mixed in hot water reminded him of the day's duties.

Most of the other boys his age had the fortune of having a father, men leaving with the dawn to work in gardens, build houses, or watch cars. He never knew what happened to his, just that he wasn't there one day. His last memory of him was the last day he went to school, around the same time hair started sprouting under his armpits. If this bothered him, nobody knew. Perhaps only his mother, who watched him grow into somebody he wasn't yet supposed to be.

The oldest of five, she couldn't stop him if the rest of his brothers and sisters had any chance of eating at dark. As a result, he was a king in his house, subject to only one rule:

"You are not allowed to catch a ride with Moya. Do you understand? If he offers to take you into town, politely say no."

His best friend's dad worked as a taxi driver. Early on, Johnson obeyed his mother's command for months. But every refusal was the turning down of water for parched lips. One day Moya found him under the shade of a shrub not even a quarter way into the city.

"Good morning, my boy. What exactly are you doing here?"

Literary Work

Johnson had his face tucked under small leaves, hardly able to keep a mouse from getting scorched.

"I'm just taking a break."

Moya slid into the passenger seat and stretched his hand towards him.

"Get in."

From then on, free rides into the city kept him from leaving before the roosters caught wind of the day.

Moya drove like a shark, weaving in and out of lanes no matter the line, dotted or solid. He didn't even need a steering wheel to make other drivers curse and fear. One morning Johnson jumped up onto the passenger seat and noticed a wrench fitted to the column. His wide-eyed gaze turned upwards.

"What?"

The young boy didn't know whether to fasten the seatbelt or keep one hand on the door in case he'd need to open it and jump.

"Where's the steering wheel?"

Moya's smile was a bird in a hurricane. "I don't need it. Somebody gave me a cow for it."

He pushed his seat back to give him room to move the tool, then started the engine as though he'd driven with a wrench for his entire career.

Johnson learned to let his head fall with gravity, like the rest of the passengers, gathering their thoughts for the day or drifting back to the sleep they'd left before the light. But his discipline wouldn't hold for very long. Once he was awake, he couldn't go back to sleep, and his thoughts were simple and undisturbed. He'd play a game with himself, trying to keep his head as stiff as concrete, then wiggle his eyes to corners where'd he'd watch the other faces for signs of life.

Old, young, middle-aged men and women hung their mouths over their knees, and if it weren't for their chests moving up and down, most of them would've passed for bones in a field.

He wondered how long it would be until he might become one of them. But for now, he found amusement watching their bodies move with Moya's erratic driving, invisible shoving that couldn't shatter their somber states.

After a giggle or two, his highway sights became his feet and cigarette butts that had missed the open window.

The offramp into the suburbs was a line reeling his vision to the surface. He watched avenues of trees magically appear between bright red-roofs and walls that stretched like snakeskin.

Who are these people, and what do they do? He thought to himself. His favorite house ran up into the clouds. He had to duck under the passenger window to catch its entire height, which he never got bored of doing.

"One day, I'm going to own that house."

Moya's laugh was a chimney that needed cleaning, swollen and stumbling air from his lungs.

"If you ever own a house like that, I might become our next president."

Though the older man was mostly a blister to the boy, when the time came for dropping Johnson at the red light, he offered the cool of a hundred trees.

"Make sure you turn with the sun. They won't be able to see your sign if their eyes are fighting the light. If somebody gives you problems, tell them I'm your father. If that white man asks you to leave, disappear for a while, then come right back."

This day, like the others, Moya put his emergency lights on and stopped traffic so Johnson could jump out in the place he'd stay until nightfall. A group of men, leaning against a wall, snickered from afar with threats of "paying rent or else." Moya, unafraid of a pack of lions, spun a U-turn. He drove his taxi as close to their feet without pinning them against the wall.

"You leave that boy alone today. Touch him, and you're dead."

If their bloated bellies weren't skin-tight holes of fear, they might've thrown fists at him. Instead, they nodded their heads until his backlights turned bright. Then their toes wiggled like worms on a hook, relishing the taste of artificial freedom.

The morning rush was a winter's chance of crops. Men and women on their way to work, taking their kids to school, stayed preoccupied with brushing hair, fitting ties, and final touches to powdered faces. He learned from the others that getting too close to the windows made them feel scared, but eye-contact was vital.

He didn't need to suck his stomach in or make his face gaunt like a ghost. None of them did. But the boys that had been doing it for a while carried tricks like a deck of cards. At first, he wondered whether a smile or a blank stare might serve him better. They all argued about this daily. Some believed that sadness was the hand that provoked generosity. Others thought that a grin brought connection. Johnson tried both, but any time young children returned his gaze, he couldn't help but put his teeth on full display.

By lunch, the day was a furnace, and all his profits he could hold in two fingers. He needed at least a fistful to buy paraffin and beans for the night. The shade near the forbidden wall was free, but in it, the leftovers of men who were either late or too lazy. Against the voice of Moya in his head, he found a resting spot.

"You're Charlie's kid, aren't you?"

A cigarette-mouthing man caught his attention as Johnson's bottom touched his heels.

The young boy turned to look at him while the man threw his dry mouth off the bridge.

"Yes. But he's gone."

The older man's eyes went small as he drew the smoke into his lungs.

Then he coughed, and smoke came from his mouth with invisible nails scratching his throat on the way out. A small cloud of it made Johnson hold his breath.

"Do you know what happened to your dad?"

Johnson opened his mouth, and the smoke made him teary.

"I don't know. My mom said he just disappeared."

Watching the young boy struggle, the older man waved his hands back and forth, fanning the vapor out of sight.

"I knew your father. He used to sit with me against this wall waiting for work."

Johnson's eyes went sharp, fixed on the man.

"Do you know what happened to him?"

The sun was a burning fire chasing their comfort. Johnson moved closer, watching the drag turn to embers, considering the disappearing shade worth temporary discomfort for his lungs.

"You catch a ride with Moya in the mornings, don't you?"

The other boys came running out of their hiding place, a piece of grass near the traffic light burned brown by the daylight. Theirs was lunch on flat backs, sweat swelling behind their brows, and like Johnson without a hope to cure their hunger. One of them spotted a string of cars while seeing Johnson in the shade with the old man.

"Johnson, get back out here! You're going to miss the noon rush!"

Though the boys fought for every inch of concrete, some realized their discomfort was better carried when shared. At day's end, they held open hands, counted their profit then split it evenly. Johnson preferred this collaboration to the cut-throat jostling of *every man for himself*. A sense of unity came from it; accountability and the heavy burden of being the provider for his dwelling became a more manageable load in friends' company.

His neck turned crane-like considering the practical ramifications of missing a rush. But his heart kept his body still, attentive to every word from the stranger.

The man looked towards the begging boys.

"You going to join them?"

Back turned, neck facing the same direction as his chest, Johnson replied:

"What happened to my dad?"

The man's face sunk into the concrete below his bare feet.

"Does your mother know you ride in Moya's taxi?"

Johnson sprung from his heels.

"What does that matter?"

"Ask Moya what happened to your dad. He knows."

The shade turned into a memory of the morning. The afternoon sun inflicted more pain on his bare skin than the ball of fire before lunch. He stayed in its wrath.

"If you know, then you tell me."

The stranger picked up his tattered bag from the ground and walked away, offering a final strand:

"I do know. But it is not for me to tell. Ask Moya."

The day continued in a haze, smiles hiding fast trains of thought, working out what he could've missed. One hand reached out a window with a paper note, and as it touched his skin, the generous gift was off with a current of wind.

"Hey Johnson, that lady just gave you a ten! Get it before it blows away!"

His eyes broke from the horizon, and his feet hit the melting tar, weaving through cars, without care for getting hit. At the edge of the street, the cash slipped into the gutter. Johnson pushed his bony arms into the opening and flung his fingertips in every direction, clinching at ghosts.

The unexpected weight kept his eyes swollen. When he couldn't hold them any longer, big tears ran down his cheeks, finding only salt on his skin for all his searching.

He sat on the gutter with his head in his hands, ignoring the

rumbling of cars and the raving of his clan's petition to get back to business, palms cupped like a bowl.

When the early evening dropped on the day, Johnson was still in the arms of catatonia. A roar and screeching tires woke him, then almost put him on his back as he lept from the concrete in fear of getting slammed.

Passing cars with drivers holding their horns almost collided with the big white taxi as Moya kept no regard for proper parking, satisfied with his position in the middle of the road.

"Johnson! What are you doing?"

He stayed still on his feet.

"What happened to my dad?"

Moya stuck his head out of the driver's window, stiff-necked, veins surfacing on his face like rift lines in volcanic territory.

"Get in right now!"

Johnson's concave chest inflated his shirt like air filling a balloon with a hole in it.

"I'm not getting in until you tell me what happened to him."

The hazard lights began a flickering rage, a subtle warning to the passing traffic that the vehicle stuck in the middle of the road wasn't moving any time soon.

Moya lept from the car, a young boxer with a loaded punch. But Johnson saw it coming. He turned around and sprinted towards the grass, evading the clutch of his predator.

"Johnson, get back here!"

But the older man's legs in stride were nothing more than a bluff. Johnson disappeared in the darkness. He ran until he couldn't see his feet touching the earth, and then he collapsed in tall grass with hands over his mouth.

Moya's scamper turned static. His palms hit his knees. His lungs sucked air like a vacuum on sand. The hard ball of rage bouncing in the corridors of his heart went soft, giving way to feelings he feared most. The ones that needed answering. He stayed on the dirt, but not because of his lack of breath.

The sobbing sound was a wake-up call at night, a heavy rain in a parched desert. Johnson's heart slowed, listening to Moya's crying. He raised his head from the tall grass to find a peek of the man, like a meerkat watching a wounded jackal.

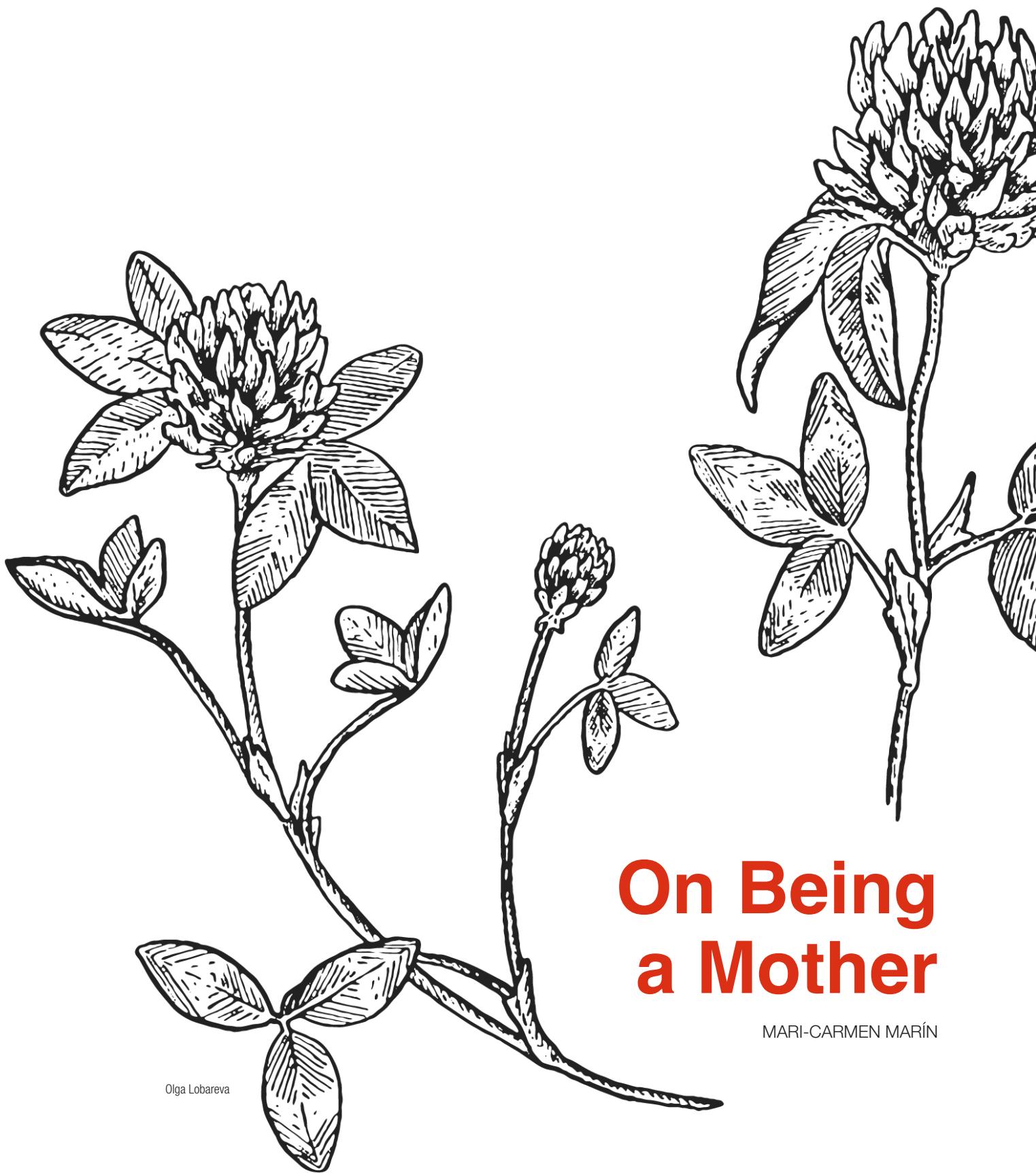
The weeping was the kind that kept no space for words, deep wailing from the depths of his stomach, a torrent without a dam wall.

Johnson forgot he was standing, drawn by the sadness. He inched closer, hiding the thud of his feet in Moya's mourning. He was just a gentle stone's throw away from him when red and blue lights made him stiff, shining from the street in a dancing frenzy.

Moya's head stayed low, slipping from his fingertips. The red-blue chaos turned into two white lights coming closer from the direction of the taxi.

Johnson wanted to warn him, knowing their kind, but Moya stood up before he got there. The howling taxi driver cupped his hands over his mouth, raised his head to the black sheet of night, then screamed with agony:

"I killed him. I killed him."



On Being a Mother

MARI-CARMEN MARÍN

Olga Lobareva

(THE BEGINNING)

Nobody told me
 that nausea could last nine months, two could weigh less
 than one; that my pillow would become my punching
 bag, and slow drivers could unleash my inner Leviathan.
Nobody told me
 that a baby could cry for two straight hours at night, while a mother
 should remain calm; that bathroom breaks would be my only time
 to be alone, and pedicures more a guilt-trip than a balm for feet so sore.

(4 PM, ELEVEN YEARS LATER)

I go for a walk with Jackson.

Endless puffy cotton balls
surround the sky above us,

I imagine . . .

a colony of ants around spilled
honey on the kitchen countertop.

an army of zombies devouring
living human flesh.

a litter of piglets
jostling each other, then
sucking milk from their subdued
mother, who lies still on her side.

I shudder.

(4:30 PM)

The cotton balls have grown
apart and stretch like long fingers slipping out
of the grasp of the sky.

There stands a clear blue expanse,

a heavenly ocean,

a floating paradise.

We stop and admire.

Then, my awe turns sour.

I wrap my arm around the arm
of my son. I need my only cloud
to be closer to my sky.



The Big Sleep

MARI-CARMEN MARÍN

Olga Lobareva



June 25, 2009

"Will you inject some Propofol?" I ask.
 One look at my bloodshot eyes
 and he knows it's not a question,
 but an order. I can see the minutes
 of his gold Rolex ticking toward 5:30 am
 until the numbers float
 around the face
 of his watch and disappear.
 Then, it happens again—for the fifth time. The beast
 sinks its fangs into my chest and I wake up,
 gasping for air. Nothing tames the beast or quenches
 its thirst—no hot bath, no warm milk, no whiskey,
 no sedatives, not even a shot of a potent anesthetic,
 not all together on one long night.
 I flip to my right side. Tiny spiders crawl down my arm.
 I flip to my left side. A lightning bolt shoots down my back.
 I lie on my stomach. My neck muscles go into spasms.
 I toss my pillow away. The beast refuses to leave.

Go back to sleep. Go back to sleep. Go. Back. To. Sleep.
LEAVE ME ALONE!

I sit up, punching the air
 with my fists, and pull
 the IV line. My eyes open wide,
 a cold sweat beading my face.
 I want to see the beast drowning in a sea
 of Propofol. As the drip is continuously infused,
 my veins swell. I take a deep breath and close
 my eyes, waiting for my relief.



Mari-Carmen Marín was born in Málaga, Spain, but moved to Houston, TX, in 2003, where she has found her second home. She is a professor of English at Lone Star College—Tomball, and enjoys dancing, drawing, reading, and writing poetry in her spare time. Writing poetry is her comfy chair in front of a fireplace on a stormy winter day.

Her work has appeared in several places, including *Wordriver Literary Review*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Dash Literary Journal*, *Months to Years*, *The Awakenings Review*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *San Fedele Press*, *Willowdown Books*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Green Light Literary Journal*, *Mothers Always Write*, *Breath & Shadow*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Poets' Choice*, *iō Literary Journal*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Toho Journal Online*, *Poetica Review*, *Sepia Journal*. Her debut collection of poetry, *Swimming, Not Drowning*, is going to be released this summer by Legacy Book Press.

How to Teach How to Love

MARI-CARMEN MARÍN





In the mornings after you wake up,
wash your face, pat it dry. Then,
look at yourself in the mirror, smile,
and say, "I am special; I am enough."

Open the door of your house and greet
the world outside. If you can, have
breakfast in your balcony or backyard.
Savor your coffee while listening to

the leaves rustling and the birds making
their morning announcements. Breathe a
deep breath full of hope and good luck
for the day to come.

Give your husband, your wife, your
children, your mom, your dad, your
siblings, your dog, your cat, whoever
is close to you, a big long hug.

When you can, turn the radio on, dance,
laugh, and make others laugh. Listen
to them, show them that you understand
and care. Look at their eyes and find out:

are they happy? Are they sad? If they are
troubled, help them—if you can—and if you
can't, let them know they're not alone. Cry
with them, if you need to—crying together

may heal wounds faster than any drug. At
the end of the day, before you go to bed,
wash your face, pat it dry. Then, look at
yourself in the mirror, smile, and say,

"Today, I have done something special;
I've shown love and I've been loved back."

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The Demon of the Well

James Hendricks

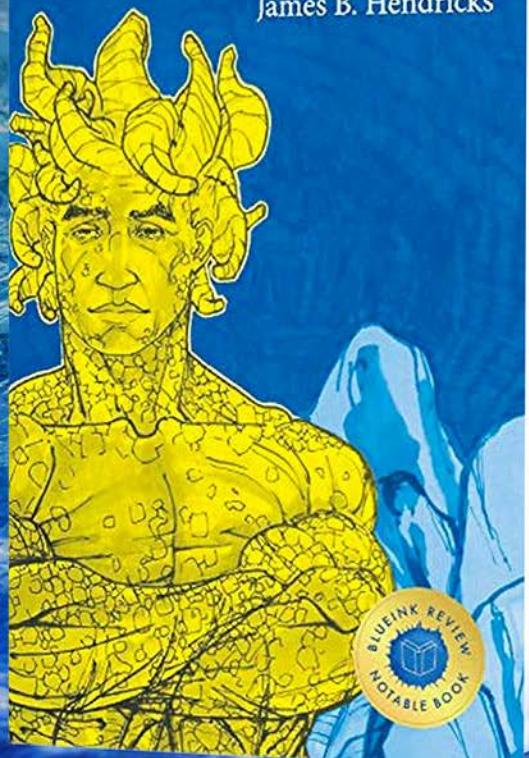
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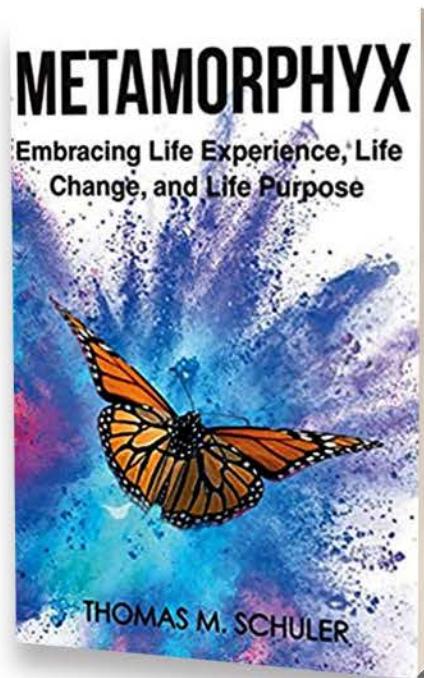
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The Great Squirrel Epidemic

JIHOON PARK

The curator stared at the magnificent Degas, a generous gift from the Met. Three ballerinas on the barre, their tutus bathing in the sunlight coming in through the studio windows.

Beautiful, he thought to himself.
Yes, this

Degas will put our museum on the map.

People will come from miles

around to see our Degas. He clapped for himself and smiled, echoing the museum halls.

The archivist came with a fruit basket and a bottle of champagne.

"Courtesy of the Met. A gesture of good faith. We should send one back," said the archivist.

"This is all bananas," said the curator.

"Yes, these are Klua Klua bananas from the Philippines. Very rare." The archivist held one in front of his lips, making a big yellow smile. The curator took no notice.

"What fruits do we have a surplus of?"

"We're having a fruit shortage. A nasty gnat infestation in the kitchen pantry. But we have a surplus of tomato soup in our cafeteria."

"Great, send them a basket of that. Maybe they'll send us another Degas."

Just then, the museum guard burst into the room, gasping to catch his breath. "Squirrels!" he yelled. "There must be a million of them. They demand to be recognized."

"They're probably just here to visit. It's free admissions night," said the curator.

"They seem pretty serious. They brought their artworks."

The guard fanned himself with two museum brochures, one in each hand.

"Maybe if we give them souvenirs from the gift shop they'll leave us alone," the archivist said, peeling a banana and sticking it in his mouth. "We have those modernist-themed trail mix packets. Each one comes with a modernist trading card."

"No, let's not waste those on the squirrels," the curator said. "I'm still not done collecting. I'm missing Dali and Ernst, they're very rare. I must've gone through a hundred packets already."

"I've got an Ernst card. I'm willing to trade it for a Matisse."
"Okay. Later though."

Outside the museum steps were hundreds of

thousands of squirrels and their artworks, stretching all the way down the city square. People shouted from their apartment windows, throwing down Molotov cocktails and old furniture.

"Disgusting vermin!"
"Stupid motherfuckers!"

But the scurry of squirrels kept growing, more squirrels showing up with their paintings and sculptures every minute.

"Can we call the exterminator?" the curator asked.

"He's at night school," said the archivist, now eating two bananas at once. "I doubt he'll come at such a late notice. Can we even exterminate them? They're not doing anything illegal, technically."

"Well, we have to do something."

A red squirrel with an ingrown tooth mustered up the steps, holding a ten-foot-tall marble statue over its shoulder. The statue depicted a muscular squirrel holding and contemplating a walnut. The curator carefully considered the statue.

"I can tell you've devoted years to your craft, but it's unoriginal. You lack true talent. We cannot display this statue, especially since we recently got a very rare Degas. It would sully his name."

The red squirrel sulked away. Another squirrel came forward with an oil painting of a female squirrel reclining on a tree branch with a single acorn covering its genitalia.

"This painting doesn't have that spark of ingenuity we are looking for, and the subject matter isn't aligned with our curatorial tastes. I'm sorry."

As the squirrel slunk away with its painting, more squirrels scampered up the steps, eager to present their works. The curator waved his arms and shook his head.

"Unfortunately, we are not adding any new material to our collections. We appreciate your interest but please go back to the forest."

A gunshot rang out, sending the squirrels into a frenzy.

"Goddamn squirrels!" yelled the trapper, reloading his shotgun. His bloodhound caught squirrel after squirrel, ferociously shaking their bones apart. Some of the squirrels ran, abandoning their artworks to escape. Others, struck with sudden inspiration, began painting and sculpting. One ambitious squirrel began sculpting the *Pietá* out of marble, a squirrel Mary holding a dying squirrel Christ. There were so many squirrels clumped together on the street that the trapper didn't even need to aim. People cheered from their windows, throwing roses and brassieres.

The trapper tossed the corpses into his knapsack. Yessir, there's enough pelts here to make some big money so let's make me some big money, he thought to himself. Yessir, they'll be calling me the Pelt King of the West! I'll get me one of em convertibles and one of em expensive Chinese mail-order brides. I'll get me one of em apartments with a jacuzzi tub. I'll finally get my canines filled with gold, and when I smile and wink at folks, they'll see my golden gleam and think, now there goes an auspicious man, a man of means and qualities!

The trapper walked up the steps to the museum. "Thank you for gathering these squirrels here sirs, makes my work that much easier. We're a pretty good team if you don't mind me saying."

"Who are you to be killing all these squirrels?" asked the archivist. "What right do you have?"

The trapper pulled a document from his fur coat. "Governor's statement. He's calling it the great squirrel epidemic. Folks are getting mighty fed up with em takin to the streets, causing all this ruckus with their stinkin up our streets with their pissin and shittin, overflowing our precious sewers, well, the governor himself is paying five whole dollars per dead squirrel, so yessir I do in fact have every right to be killing and pelting these here squirrels. I hope we can do business together, I'm something of a tycoon in the making you see." The trapper handed the archivist and curator coupons. 25% OFF ALL GRIFFY'S GENUINE SQUIRREL PELTS, FOR ALL YOUR LEATHER & PELT NEEDS. The trapper walked back down the steps and continued his massacre. People in the apartments were now throwing down jewelry and Spanish doubloons.

"Maybe we should let the squirrels in," said the archivist. "We can store their work in temporary holdings. Maybe they can help us with the gnat problem, maybe they can clear out that rotting corpse in our heating vents,

maybe they are everything the museum needs right now."

"We need that extra space in temporary holdings," said the curator, "in case the Met sends us more works. Also, I don't want them pissing and shitting in our museum halls. It's a sacred place. They'll just have to tough it out like everyone else."

The trapper had filled ten rusty pickup trucks with dead squirrels. He sat atop the biggest pile of corpses and lit a pipe. He began cutting up a squirrel into small bits with a pocketknife, tossing them to his bloodhound. A job well done, the trapper thought to himself. It ain't much, but it's honest work.

The curator and archivist watched as torrents of blood flowed through the city square and down the sewer grates. The last of the surviving squirrels were running back to the forest.

"They died for a good cause," said the curator, fiddling with the trapper's coupon. "We will set up a memorial gallery in their honor, maybe a scholarship grant. Now, let's go trade my Matisse for your Ernst card. We can celebrate with the champagne." He walked back into the museum.

The archivist stared out at the city square. The apartment residents, finally safe from the squirrels, came out with baseball bats and crowbars and began destroying the countless bloodstained, abandoned artworks. They dipped their fingertips in pools of blood and put war paint on their faces.

Is there beauty in abundance? the archivist wondered. He peeled the last Klua Klua banana, and as he ate, he wondered when he would be able to eat such a rare fruit again.

Jihoon Park's fiction is forthcoming or published in *Storm Cellar*, *The Forge Literary Magazine*, *Atticus Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Little Patuxent Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently a MFA student at George Mason University where he also teaches. He is from San Jose, California. He can be found on Twitter [@jihoon_park94](https://twitter.com/jihoon_park94).





Tithi Luadthong

Definitions

CHRISTIAN VINSON

tradition /trə'dɪsh(ə)n/, n. hopping in the lifted pickup and heading out of town; the windows rolled down and the radio cranked up; Genoa cemetery as the sun sets; Easter, hunting lizards instead of eggs; something special until it's shit.

safety /'sæftē/, n. lingering warmth from the sun, promising its return the next day; wet sage dancing with the air; the serenity of the desert snow globe before it breaks.

family /'fam(ə)lē/, n. 1. all the descendants of a common ancestor. 2. the sound of a bottle shattering and mom's screams coming from behind the truck; mom's nose and a 40oz. Old English, both broken; dad's eyes saying, "shut up or you're next".



Christian Vinson is an undergraduate student studying Professional and Creative Writing at Central Washington University. With an alcoholic father and a drug-addicted mother, Christian Vinson had a tumultuous childhood. Vinson uses his upbringing as a driving force in his work. Vinson writes poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. He is planning on pursuing his MFA upon completion of his undergraduate program.

Born in Carson City, Nevada, he spent his first fourteen years bouncing around unstable households across the Pacific Northwest. Vinson lost contact with his mother when he was five, and his father died when he was fourteen. During his last four years of high school, he resided with his stepmother and her abusive boyfriend. He currently resides in the Seattle area. Vinson is currently an unpublished writer.

The hard thing

CHRISTIAN VINSON

was not seeing
you dead. Vision:
ya, I have that; it
blinds me. The past
is a sin unforgotten
called father, and love
for you, in spite of you
is the fight in my heart, fight
like you did with mom.
How to grieve for you?
Who even are you? Do I remember joy,
the days you showed love, or maybe,
the golf club to mom's gut? Did you
forgive yourself
for open wounds, which would never
heal again? Because honestly
I am trying now
to hold onto you. I try
because I refuse to see.

Tithi Luadthong



Ekaterina Arkhangelskaia

I lied, she said

LEA ANGELICA KARL

Though not of loving you.

Remember the worn tread beneath us
And a four-cylinder lull igniting
The idling air between
You and me; just like little fires
Lighting dark; I never told you how
That night I began to breathe
A sky not like the one we knew.

To be honest, it was not real
When a pothole pavement met my feet
On that tested Midwest road
Where the seasons charged a toll
And a brazen girl stepped in retreat
Of you; it was but a fallacy, my dear.

In a sapphire shutter Victorian, a boy
Into a shallow glass, poured a blue gin.
But to say I indulged without reason—
For not your touch wistful on the bottle
Nor an us reborn amid whimsy
Nor even a nostalgic us yet unborn,
Would be a wild insincerity.

A decade closing and I still could not
Stop; behind the driver's seat to you
I lied about living during our time apart.
Did you believe that my lungs did not
Shake; when between you and me
The air abandoned the sky that we knew.

I lied and I lied and I lied, my love,
When I spoke of your heart
And wished for it whole.
Truth be told
I wanted it broken and split apart
So I could build it back better
For you; using pieces of my own.

It was untrue when I asked for a lifetime
With you; when I felt that enough was
An ending beside you. To be honest, I dream
Of unticking clocks and a sun ever setting
And unsettling; between you and me,
I do confess that I have lied,

Though never of loving you.



Ekaterina Arkhangelskaia

Saturdays in Madison

LEA ANGELICA KARL

Waffles strawberries blueberries
A syrup medley
The flavors heavy
Not unlike the confident rattle
Of my headphones this morning
Beyond the State Street scuttle
The sensory stimuli simulate a simplicity
To set my mind alight
Today my hair is golden yellow
In the right light
So maybe you will say hi to me
And I will say hello
Your speckled spaniel will lick its lips
As if to concur or beget
The space to trot between us
With a wily spring in its step.
On the narrowing isthmus
We water down souls will seek
Refuge on Mendota
A secondhand sailboat wallow
In the deep
The Muskelunge will cackle
And call us shallow.



Ekaterina Arkhangelskaia

Losing Me

LEA ANGELICA KARL

I relate to unrelating.
The obligate oxymoron—
Sporting a stapled-on smile like
I can stomach your consumption
Of my cannibalized heart like
I am made of good intention.
But I am unmade like the bed
Upon which we pretend to sleep.

My little shapeshifter, watch as
I work the wheel like you worked me.
My world spinning beneath your grasp—
I was mesmerized by the mold
You set ablaze where now a tired
Wildflower bends and wilts inside.

I will die for the undying
Death of a girl with my old name
Who wears my striped socks and dried tears
And reads recycled words aloud.

So I sleep under the spring grass
Where it will never grow again.

Lea Angelica Karl is a hobbyist writer born and rooted in the rural Northwoods of Wisconsin where she was raised upon the back of a horse. Currently located in Madison, Wisconsin, she is a biomedical research specialist by profession and attends the University of Wisconsin-Madison for creative writing. She finds artistic inspiration through empathetic introspection and examination of the natural world.



It Takes All Kinds

MARK RUSSO

I got to tell you what happened on the subway the other day. Well, that day business is slow, right? The park's a mute peopleless-green. So, I decide to take the day off. I wind down the yellow umbrella, put away the hot dogs and buns, close the lid on the cart, and wheel it down to the commissary. Then I head for the subway for a little sightseeing. Don't get me wrong though. I like selling hot dogs. I've been selling them for the last five years, since I bought the cart with the inheritance my parents left me. I figure the inheritance was my winning lottery ticket and buying the hot dog stand has turned out alright. I mean, it pays the rent. And anyone will tell you that I definitely needed to settle down, do something with my life. But, you know it's also fun every now and then to see what your customers do when they're not eating hot dogs. And, you tell me, where are they when they're not eating hot dogs on the street? I'll tell you where they are, they're on the subway, right? Of course, they are. Besides it lets me flick off a little stress.

You're probably thinking, "Why didn't you go to a movie?" or something like that.

Well, I'm not one for movies; they're too flat. I need something more real-like, you know? Besides, the admission's free. At least it is for an athletic guy like me who can hurdle the turnstile.

So, I get on at the Fort Hamilton Station and grab a dirty blue corner seat next to the end-door. There's this fire-extinguisher hanging on the wall above me. What can I say, I like protection. You got to know that, at this point, I'm feeling like a payload in a pneumatic tube. I mean riding the subway never gets old! I just stretch out my legs, cup the back of my head with the palms of my hands and look down the aisle of vertical metallic poles. Ceiling lights ricochet off windows and plastic seats that line the walls on either side of the aisle. A droning "duuuuu dunt dunt - dunt dunt dunt dunt" in four/four time vibrates the soles of my sneakers. The rumbling percussion combines with stale grease and popcorn to mesmerize me. It's wild, man.

Nothing to do but wait for the curtain to rise. You know what I mean?

Tithi Luadthong



From the git-go, I'm not alone. A black-habited nun who sits near one of the retractable doors fingers cherry-wood rosary beads and stares with pea-like eyes at a boy and girl, maybe eighteen or twenty. The nun's just like the one I had in grade school. You know, the one that takes you into a cloak room, stands in front of you in black hoodie and robe, her round wrinkled bulldog face framed in matching white bib and head band. All the while, she's slapping a wooden yard stick in the palm of her hand. Then she lets loose and whacks the palms of your hands. Most of the time it's two whacks, but sometimes three. It's a hell of a price to pay for just looking up Jessie's dress. But you take it because you know it could be worse; because the Bible tells you that the righteous can bury you up to your neck in dirt and throw stones at you until you're just a bloody pulp. Oh yeah . . . those were difficult days for me, for sure.

Anyway, this nun sketches a wry smile from cheek to cheek as she watches the boy whisper and the girl giggle. Diamond skinned snakes chase panthers along the boy's arm

that drapes over the girl's shoulder and across her chest. He's burying his face in the tight ringlets of her shiny black hair while she snuggles a snake with her cheek.

The girl reminds me of my first real love, Judith. Boy, that turned out to be a disaster. And it wasn't really that long ago either, maybe eight years. I was as old then as this girl is now. Judith was really beautiful, sweet too. She'd always ask me what kind of future we had together. And though she never came right out and mentioned marriage, I kind of heard it in the distance. Guys are quick to pick up on these kind of things, right? And, to tell you the truth, that seemed ok with me too, but the guys in my gang . . . they had other ideas for us. They said it wasn't real love unless we fucked. What did I know? I believed them. So, one night, while we're playing around in her bedroom, I make my move. Not that I know what I'm doing, right? But, I already have her blouse off and I'm petting while she's purring. So I figure, what the hell and start to take her pants off. That did not go well! She starts to whine, then yell and then buries

Literary Work

her fingernails into my arms. I swear to you, I thought I was going to bleed to death. Then she pushes me out of bed onto the floor, says she's disappointed in me and doesn't want to see me again. Well, that was the end of that. Since then, other than a few dates here and there, I've been pretty much alone. No, I don't like it, but, then again, it's not easy meeting someone in the city. Especially, when you've got to work all the time just to pay the rent. There's simply not much time or money left for getting to know someone.

Well, watching the nun as she eyes the kids, I imagine she's thinking we haven't made much progress since Adam and Eve. But the kids, not concerned with the nun, look up from time to time and laugh at a guy in dark suit and blue tie who stands in front of them strangling a pole with one hand and reading a folded newspaper in the other. You know, had I stuck it out in school, I could be that guy today. But, then the kids would be laughing at me. Am I wrong?

I'm thinking, it takes all kinds.

Meanwhile, I'm amazed that no one's paying attention to some young guy in long hair out there in the center of the aisle between the retractable doors. He wears an American flag shirt-and-pants combo: blue square of fifty white stars over his left breast and red and white striped legs. He grips a pole with outstretched arms and swings his body upward until it hovers parallel to the floor. The reflection of the folds of this human flag wave rhythmically in the mercury-colored windows of the doors.

What a patriot, I say, and look around for a receptive ear. But no one's listening. My older brother's a patriot. One day, out of nowhere, he comes home in olive green wool clothes and says he's leaving. I tell him I want to go with him but he says I can't, I haven't got the right stuff . . . something like that. I felt bad. I don't know why but all my life I've always wanted to help him, be like his assistant, you know? He never let me though. So, I stopped trying. And after the parents died, I never saw him again. So, I figure, for my brother's sake, I'd drop a quarter in the bucket at the base of the pole, I would, that is, if I didn't have to get up to do it.

Then from somewhere above comes this hollow voice: commanding, godlike,

"NINTH AVENUE AND THIRTY-NINTH STREET," it says.

Suddenly, yellow light flashes through the mirror-like windows, as if powered by the voice, and gives life to a maze of wires and pipes lining the walls that pass by outside with ever-decreasing velocity.

God says, "STEP AWAY FROM THE DOORS. STEP AWAY FROM THE DOORS. APPROACHING THE STATION."

A metallic screech instantly mutes the droning and I lunge forward slightly and rock back into my seat.

The hydraulic doors whoosh open and a multicolored stream of buzzing geometric shapes funnel in like bees from a disturbed hive and wash away the flag-guy. The swarm flows over seats and clings to vertical poles until the floor disappears. Then a chiming "dwaaa doo, dwaaa doo" permeates the car and the hydraulic doors whoosh shut.

God announces, "NEXT STOP THIRTY-SIXTH STREET AND

FOURTH AVENUE. TRANSFERS TO "N" AND "R" LINES."

The windows go dark: lights go on inside and the metered "duuuuu dunt dunt - dunt dunt dunt dunt" resumes my foot-massage. The flag-guy's been replaced by an onyx-haired young woman in jeans and baggy sweatshirt who sits in a folding chair, a cello between her knees. She rocks side to side and runs a bow across the strings creating a celestial ribbon of low warm sounds that rise into ever more strident ones only to fall back again.

Now, that's worth a dollar. I think and consider risking my seat to introduce myself. I think that maybe I could get the nun to trade seats but then decide it would be more comfortable and less chance of rejection to watch Miss Cherub between partially closed eye-lids and pretend that we're an item.

"THIRTY-SIXTH STREET AND FOURTH," God says, followed by the "dwaa doo, dwaa doo" chimes.

"Whoosh."

No one gets out at this stop, but the incoming crowd nudges a bowed-legged woman through the doors and down the aisle. She carries two bags in one hand and leans on a cane in the other. The bags pull her down, but the cane keeps her up. She looks around, up, and down the car, and grabs a pole in front of a boy who sits slouched over. The woman studies the crown of the boy's head with an intensity that would turn me to salt. But he doesn't look up. He fiddles with an orange foam finger pompom. Well, I say to myself that I probably should offer my seat to the old gal. Besides, that might make me look good to Miss Cherub and get her blessing. But, you've got to be practical, right? The thought of pushing through this mass of bodies and possibly losing the seat for both of us just didn't make sense.

Then, at Prospect Avenue, three more join the flock: a tonsured Hare Krishna monk in an iridescent orange robe and two stubble-haired dudes with black acanthus leaves crawling out of their leather jackets and up their necks.

I take the stubble-haired guys for pickpockets.

Krishna, fingering a string of green ceramic Japa beads, quickly takes a seat opposite the nun. You'd think these religious types could join up to get rid of the pickpockets, wouldn't you. But, neither Krishna or the nun make a move and the pickpockets, rattling chains hung from their tooth-studded belts, push spiritually unimpeded through the crowd.

While Miss Cherub continues to play, Krishna begins to chant and the stubble-haired pickpockets grab a pole on either side of the old lady. One of them leans over and says something to her. My arms stiffen as I grab the bottom of my seat. I tell myself, they better not try anything. The old lady shakes her head, but Mr. Stubble-hair puts his hand on her shoulder and says something else. He then looks down at Sponge-finger and says,

"Hey kid!"

The boy curls further into himself like a pill bug under attack.

"Kid, I'm talking to you. Look at me!"

Mr. Stubble-hair reaches out and grabs Sponge-finger's shoulder.

"Why don't you give this lady your seat? Show some respect!" he says. Sponge-finger doesn't move, just continues to look down and away from Mr. Stubble-hair, but Mr. Stubble-hair doesn't disappear. In fact, the second Mr. Stubble-hair grabs the kid's other shoulder and, together, they lift him up out of his seat.

"Please Miss, have a seat," they say in harmony. " You say you're going to the end of the line? Well, we'll go there with you."

The cello concerto reaches crescendo.

The windows brighten.

"Dwaa doo, dwaa doo" chimes.

Krishna chants; God interrupts,

"APPROACHING UNION STREET"

"Whoosh"

Sponge-finger ducks under the arms of Messrs. Stubble-hair and shoots through the hydraulic doors like a pea from a straw. As he leaves, an old man dragging a pillow cover overflowing with paper and rags gets on. He looks down the aisle at me with that what-a-nice-young-man look. The flapping soles of his sneakers slap the floor as he shuffles toward me. He stares down at me. I return his smile then look away to avoid sustained eye-contact. That's when I meet the stare of one of the Stubble-hair twins. His eyes bore into mine and he curls his upper lip. I'm beginning to think I should have found a seat next to the nun. A warm prickly sensation flows into my cheeks. I can't hear the cello and right about now, I'm feeling like a refugee in need of shelter. Mr. Stubble-hair takes a step towards me. I try to find Miss Cherub. Maybe wrap her music around us and make us disappear. But, the crowd has blotted her out. I've lost her. Oh well, what's new, right?

"Dwaa doo, dwaa doo"

"NEXT STOP: ATLANTIC AVENUE/BARCLAYS CENTER."

"Duuuuu dunt dunt - dunt dunt dunt dunt"

"Whoosh"

"APPROACHING ATLANTIC AVENUE/BARCLAYS CENTER."

Now, I'm beginning to perspire and decide that the most Darwinian thing for me to do is to make this my stop. I stand and, like a clock, synchronize my movement with the opening of the doors, slip past Messrs. Stubble-hair and lunge out of the car onto the station platform. I hear the doors whoosh decisively behind me.

There I was, alone, surrounded by faceless bodies pushing me in every conceivable direction. For some reason, I felt I'd left something in the train.

So I check right? Nothing appears to be missing and if I can believe my reflection in the kiosk window, I'm the same person as I was when I got on. But I philosophically conclude that it's not safe anywhere, anymore and decide to head back to my flat.

On the platform, the cross current of the crowd continues to toss me about and carries me toward the exit stairway that leads from the catacomb darkness below into a soft white fluorescent glow above. Looking up I scan a sea of heads that bob like salmon going upstream until . . . midway. . . I come across an ebony waterfall of hair whose flow, imparting a kind

of calmness to the frenzy, is only interrupted by the pegs of a cello. It's Miss Cherub from the train! Maybe I'm just swept along by the crowd, I don't know, but something pushes me towards her. Like a snake with elbows, I make my way pushing and shoving upward until I'm right behind her. I suck in a lot of air really fast and then slowly blow it out.

Can I help? I ask

She looks at me with the same expression the old lady on the train gave to Mr. Stubble-hair. She doesn't say anything, just looks at me like she doesn't understand the question.

I really want to help, I explain.

She looks away from me and turns to look at the people below us. I feel like she's disappearing. But I don't want to lose her again. So I say, please, let me help.

She squeezes her brow rippling the skin above her nose. She stays that way for an eternal split second. Then she loosens her grip, allows the cello to relax and surrender to me. We walk quickly to the next train and I'm wondering if she likes hot dogs, if we could combine our incomes and get a quiet apartment together: one near a park. I carry the cello into the car and find a seat for her and the cello. Although she sits and I stand, I feel as if the monkey's off of my back, you know what I mean? Then, it's like I'm in Chinatown standing in front of the window at Ting's Gift Shop on Doyers Street looking at one of those gorgeous porcelain dolls that I was always tempted to buy but never did. I ask her name. She smiles.

"Angie," she says, "Angie."

"NEXT STOP: FORTY-SECOND STREET-BRYANT PARK."

"Duuuuu dunt dunt - dunt dunt dunt dunt"

"Whoosh"

Mark Russo was born on January 1, 1950 in Queens, New York City, New York. His father was an aspiring writer and his mother, a painter. After less than a year, the family moved to Cleveland then to Cincinnati, Ohio, where Mark lived until he moved to Maine in 1999. As a student of the University of Cincinnati he focused on the Greek, Latin, German, and French languages and World Literature. After running the family business for 20 years, he entered the University of Maine School of Law and was accepted to the Bar in 2002. He practiced Immigration Law in the State of Maine for over 18 years.

In addition to two legal publications in Law Journals, he has recently published a short story, "The Treatment," in the *34 Parallel Magazine Literary Magazine* (Issue 77) and a Flash Fiction Story, "The Century Plant," in *The Flash Fiction Magazine* (October 22, 2020).

Dream of Fishing

ALLAN JOHNSTON

Line in, I see the world as fish might see it—

sweet with moment, movement, the sky curled inside
the ominous wheel of dryness. In my realm
I watch all made abounce and pragmatic—the film of life

yet to pounce upon the bait. I wait,
then strike. Or is it I who hold the line,
abated next to the glinting, feathered fly
still enticing, entrapping?

I wake from napping.





torky

Love Poem

ALLAN JOHNSTON

Because I pulled pigtails and let friends bite
into the spite I had for such loss
when the time came,
and you, Elsie,
with your Germanic plane of chin

back from the prick of forecasting nose
leaned in to kiss as the boys held me pinned
on the grass in front of Mrs. Winthrop's
house and the curved homeward slope of yard—

bent and kissed on a dare, you did,
and then, released, I cared to wipe,
curse, and charge my friends
into the oblivion of forgetting,

as, years later, the pre-adolescent sex play
surfaces—Elsie and Marie,
the latter known throughout school as a slut,
age of my older brother and into it,
boy;

and her sister, smaller, blonde, homelier,
maybe after her own, played into the game
I thought I was innocent of or naive to, I,
lost to such precociousness and all
with uneventful oedipal missing not giving in,

yet somehow, secretly, that first kiss still leans on me,
remixed and now brought home: blind, fighting desire.



torky

Train Poem

ALLAN JOHNSTON

She reads the Russian news, a story of Giants
—is this the baseball team? Events of a fabulous
other time? Movies? Biblical? My skill
in piecing out the sounds of Cyrillic script
leave me lost with what I assume
to be giant something or other.

Meanwhile,

the train lurches into holding while, staring,
I pass without response to anything
that could be offered—boys of the library trysts
in evil speculation on monstrous possible
truths of the Resurrection buried
in post-deconstruction eclipses. I once read
that the train system in Chicago
survived the Second World War, at which time
most systems got rebuilt. It might
explain the clatter and fragmented aspect
of these cars that creak toward entropy
as the system slows and bleeds its seeming
“express” qualities at speeds I could almost walk at.
Thus I am come to the system, all the veins
and contours of cities stretched in curves of trends
emanating from a center, certain of all
brimming indulgence or business concluded
as we ride to the city’s heart.

Originally from southern California, Allan Johnston earned his M.A. in Creative Writing and his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Davis. His poems have appeared in over sixty journals, including *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Rattle*, *Rhino*, and *New Reader Magazine*. He has published two full-length poetry collections (*Tasks of Survival*, 1996; *In a Window*, 2018) and three chapbooks (*Northport*, 2010; *Departures*, 2013; *Contingencies*, 2015), and received an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship, Pushcart Prize nomination (2009 and 2016), and First Prize in Poetry in the Outrider Press Literary Anthology competition (2010). His translations and co-translations of poems from the French and German have appeared in *Ezra*, *Metamorphosis*, and *Transference*. He teaches writing and literature at Columbia College and DePaul University in Chicago. He reads or has read for *Word River*, *r.kv.r.y*, and the Illinois Emerging Poets competition, and is co-editor of *JPSE: Journal for the Philosophical Study of Education*. His scholarly articles have appeared in *Twentieth Century Literature*, *College Literature*, and several other journals.



torky



Tithi Luadthong

TAKEN FOR A RIDE

Jack Coey

Silas stuck his thumb out and could see the clouds. The breeze from the cars slapped him in the face. He figured he had three hours to get to Keene, and didn't know what to make of the clouds. He saw Linda's face. He hurt her; he knew he did. It couldn't have been any different, he told himself. He would start over. He was thirty-one. A fire-engine red mustang flew by. He remembered feeling a girl up in the backseat of that car. Between two cans of beer and lust, he thought he would lose his mind. The girl, Natalie Phillips, who is now a mother of two, laughs whenever she sees him. A car slowed down and pulled to the shoulder of the road, and Silas ran to get in, and as he got to the car, the driver gunned the engine and drove off.

"What a prick," he thought.

He stood as the dust swirled around him. He felt a sprinkle. Another car didn't stop until he was soaking wet.

The driver looked about thirty with blonde hair and blue eyes, slightly pudgy, and there was church music playing. He looked like he'd been outdoors.

"Where are you going?"

"Keene."

They rode in silence.

"You must have a good reason to get soaking wet to get a ride?"

"Not really. This wasn't planned."

The driver sadly smiled.

"You can let me off whenever you need to. I don't want to take you out of your way."

"I'm going to Keene."

Silas watched the trees flickering by.

"You live there?"

"My calling is there..."

"Oh? I see."

Silas felt himself get tense. The church music.

"We had a retreat in the mountains over the weekend. I'm Ryan. I'm the minister of *The Blood of the Lamb Church* in Keene."

"Oh, hey, I'm Silas, and I'm on retreat from an angry girlfriend."

Another sad smile.

"I thought it was funny," thought Silas.

"So, you have no clothes, no food, no shelter, no family?"

"And I'm soaking wet..."

Once again, the tepid smile.

"This guy ever laugh?" wondered Silas.

They were silent.

"Part of our mission is we provide shelter for homeless people, and there are some cots available if you would be interested."

Silas winced at the word, "cot."

"Sure. For a couple of nights anyway. I'm going to get a job pretty quick."

"What do you do?"

"Pretty much anything. Gas station, retail, restaurant work – you name it."

"We ask that if you stay in our shelter, you become part of our congregation, so we know you're getting the proper guidance."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that."

Ryan looked at Silas.

"You don't believe in Our Lord, Jesus Christ?"

"Maybe it's time for me to get out?"

"You're lost, hitchhiking to a strange town in the middle of a rain shower after fighting with your girlfriend, and you don't need the comfort of The Lord?"

"I don't mean to upset you. How about you pull over and I'll go on my way?"

Ryan slowed the car and pulled over in the breakdown lane.

"You are throwing away a chance for a better life. It will take time and effort, but with the blessing of Our Lord, you can live a life of righteousness."

"Thanks for the ride, Ryan."

Silas stood by the car, and was about to slam the door, when he saw in the backseat a sweatshirt with *Keene Middle School* written on it.

Jack Coey lives in Keene, NH.

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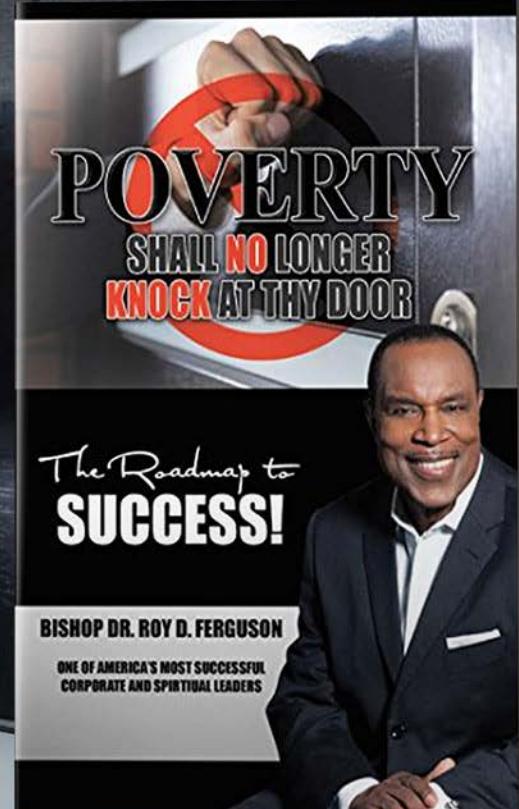
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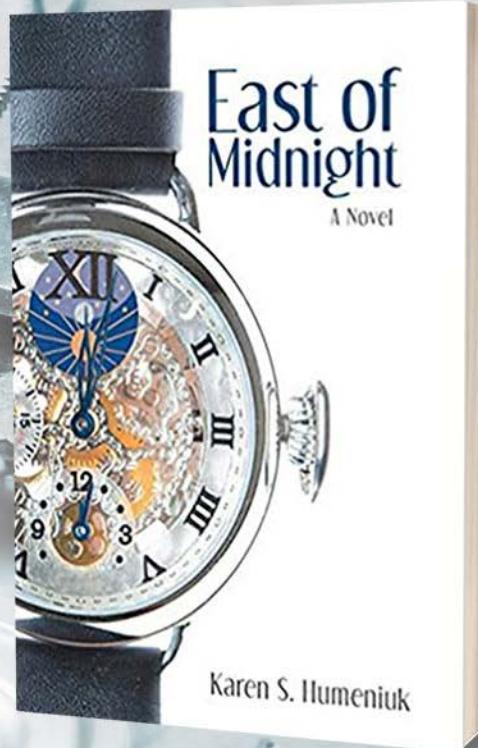
Karen S. Humeniuk

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KENTUCKY COFFEE TREE

Jeremy Nathan Marks

O say can you see
Kentucky Coffee Tree
Wikipedia tells me
you are an “evolutionary

anachronism”

I like you because you come from
the prairies and river valleys
once stumped by Johnny Appleseed

Now you ride
into my subdivision
on Ford-Chevy flatbeds
get paid under-the-table wages

I've planted you in my yard
because I read that your poison pods
can be roasted to brew a hot beverage
not quite as strong as Columbian coffee
but free(!) and with less caffeine

Like moonshine
I drink what I find
my mortgage is high
money is scarce and credit is tight

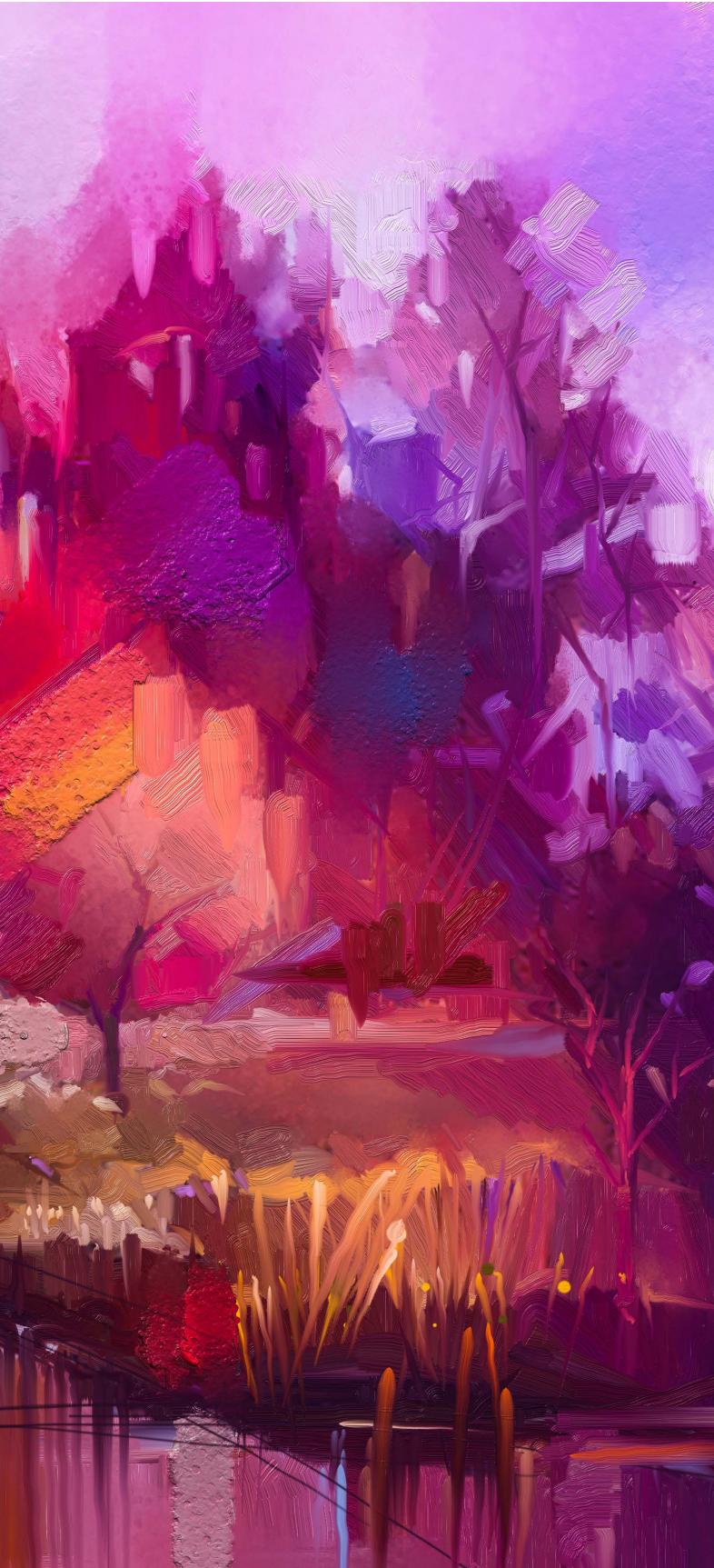
I've also taken to harvesting fungi
from the local woodlot
I find mushrooms scattered among
so many discarded face masks

PPE plants
they sprout up in mists
hanging over us

Like a divine shroud.



number168



LAKE STURGEON

Jeremy Nathan Marks

At a scrum, biologists from the Michigan Office
of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
were asked about the 6'10 240 lbs Lake Sturgeon
they caught in the Detroit River on Cinco de Mayo

CNN carried the event:

Can the sturgeon play power forward for the Pistons?
What is its position on abortion?
Is it a Democrat or a Republican?
Will it seek a vaccination?
What is its stance on Facebook's ban
of Trump?
Does it support Liz Cheney or Kevin McCarthy?

One biologist said that he had not had a chance to ask the sturgeon
any of these questions, he simply tagged the fish then took a selfie
lying beside the sturgeon's incredible length and bulk before letting
it go back into the swift flow of the river

I don't know if the fish is an American or a Canadian
the biologist said, she might be a dual citizen

She? someone asked

Yes, the biologist replied

Well, I guess it can play in the WNBA if it wants to.

- - -
Postscript: That sturgeon was more than a century old.

Literary Work



RUGGED INDIVIDUALS

Jeremy Nathan Marks

In decades past
Wolves were placed
on something called a Red List
but now Red means socialist
and many politicians won't take advice
from biologists

Legislators audit labs and departments
because of rumors that scientists
teach critical theories which state
that democracy doesn't function
without its keystone species

Mammalians

Wolf should have been born a Snail Darter
an innocuous minnow that doesn't scare voters
the State has taken down dams for her

Wolf should become a Lake Sturgeon
a two hundred forty pound, six foot ten centenarian
living on the bottom of the Great Lakes Basin

(What if Wolf learned how to dance?
Could she audition for reality television?)

Alas, she looks like ever the disobedient dog
Coyote's twin, that frontier trickster bastard

American Hyena

I suppose Wolf could take solace
that other great mammals
Elephant and Giraffe for instance
don't get to be pelts
but become so many stuffed trophies
American taxidermies

In recent years the iconic American hunter
got a makeover
body armor over sweats
or yoga pants
chauffeured in a climate controlled Land Rover
then emptying their semi-autos

Toppling mastodon like so many Baghdad bombs

It's their wealth and privilege
supplying checks and Rhinos
Lions and Wolves for politicos
and their photo ops

Wolf, never was she given the chance to become
a rented mule or a domesticated dog
she's just too wild for those who say they love

Rugged individuals.

Jeremy Nathan Marks lives in Canada. Recent work appears in 365 Tomorrows, New Verse News, Dissident Vice, Ginosko Review, Boog City, The Last Leaves, Bewildering Stories, Jewish Literary Journal, and The Journal of Expressive Writing.

The Reluctant Partier

KATHERINE RUTH HOFER

Either all this is broken or it's my imagination,
but I am standing in the doorway,
half of me in the kitchen,
half absorbing cigarette smoke drifting
around early spring air. It's easier to stand split in two
to listen to conversations I'm not a part of,
which I call a reverse cocktail party effect, not quite here,
not quite there, effectively alone.
There are two men outside, one who takes nothing
seriously but himself, and one who takes nothing
seriously. Inside, there is banter about pasta,
and I'm still thinking about the kinds
of friendships that survive
name changes.

Rarity

KATHERINE RUTH HOFER

The doctor told me that is it rare
for a patient to have ringing in their ears,
but I am rare, manifested both in light
and in weight, seen in the shape of my ear
itself, but just go on the internet,
and you will see that nothing is really rare,
just worth a laugh or a charity fund.

Date Night

KATHERINE RUTH HOFER

Instead of watching this movie about the end of the world,
what I really want to do is enact a private art installation
in which we kiss while listening to an audio recording
of the things we would say if we were having a conversation.

Katherine Ruth Hofer is an American woman aged 29 years, and a freelance English tutor and proofreader living in Budapest, Hungary. She possesses a BA in Intercultural Studies from Biola University, where her first published poem appeared in the *Inkslinger*. She hails from Ontario, California, and has also lived in Raleigh, North Carolina. She spent three years in northeastern Romania as a missionary working with children and young people. She is seeking to expand her experience as a writer of poetry.



Chasing the Northern Lights and Counting My Lucky Stars

photo by Bert Santens

A PHOTO ESSAY BY BEN VON JAGOW

“**T**his job isn’t for everyone,” my interviewer, a man named Jens, said through a lagged Skype call.

I nodded.

I assumed he was referring to the frigid arctic temperatures, the long hours, or the absence of sleep and sunlight.

“It’s tough work here and most of the people we hire will end up leaving.”

I assured him, as I’m assuming most other recruits did, that I was a man who finished what I started, that he could count on me.

He gave me a lips-pursed nod.

“That’s good to hear.”

One week and two flights later and I’m touching down in Tromsø, Norway, a frozen city 350 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle. From November to March, the extent of my contract and my stay, the sun will not rise above the horizon. I will awaken to darkness, walk to work in darkness, and when I return at the day’s end, tired, exhausted, and frigid, the sky will still be black. More seasoned residents will suggest vitamin D pills, sun lamps, posters of tropical beaches; some of it will help but nothing, I’m told, will replace the effect of natural sunshine. The only lights I can expect to see are artificial. Artificial or green.



Like most others I pass on the ice-slicked streets, I'm here because of aurora borealis, the northern lights. Unlike the other multilayered internationals though, I'm here to work.

"A northern lights guide, eh? Very cool. So, how does that work?"

It's a question I'll be asked a hundred times over during the months of my stay. In those early days I merely repeated, more or less verbatim, what Jens had told me in that initial interview: that each night, as a guide, I usher a group of guests into the arctic and, hopefully, show them the northern lights. It's the boiled-down version and over time I'll learn to tailor my response into something more theatrical. In reality, the guests, and their overall happiness, are my responsibility. My decisions will dictate whether or not these people, who have flown in from all over the world and paid a handsome sum to see some dancing lights, will leave feeling fulfilled.

As is usually the case with nature, there are no guarantees. A guide at, say, The Louvre, needn't worry that the Venus de Milo has mysteriously walked off the premises. Or that clouds will blanket the Mona Lisa. The job offers a level of assurance that aurora chasing simply can't guarantee. Fortunately, I have resources at my disposal to help increase my chances of success. The first being weather maps.

"We look at the weather every day at five o'clock sharp," Mario, one of the senior guides, tells me on my first day.

"That's how we determine where we're headed for the night."

He pulls up the first page on a browser filled with more than twenty tabs. "See this? This is a weather map of the surrounding area."

The map is covered by an ominous blue blob.

"Blue is precipitation."

He waits for me to say something but I don't.

"Precipitation means clouds."

Another few silent seconds pass before he sighs.

"Clouds are not ideal when you're trying to find the northern lights."

"Ah," I say, silently chastising myself.

"So, tonight will be bad?" It's hard to hide the disappointment in my voice. The night marks my first chase and, what I hope, will be my inauguration to the lights.

"Not necessarily," Mario says. "Because of the geography here." He circles the screen with his pointer finger. "We have a lot of microclimates. Conditions can change by the hour."

Mario slides the clock tab from five to six o'clock. The blue blob shifts west, slightly. He then clicks through seven, eight, nine, ten, and eleven o'clock. I watch as the blue blob inches towards the coast and disappears off-screen.

"There we go," he says. "Tonight, we're heading east." He points to a colourless patch, the largest in a small archipelago of grey spots amidst a sea of blue. "That's our window."



We do drive east that night, two and a half hours, all the way into Finland. We don't end up seeing the northern lights, the conditions are worse than anticipated, but I leave with a valuable lesson. It's four in the morning when we drop the guests off, and despite not seeing the aurora, they're content. Mario has delivered a show worthy of the quarter grand each guest has paid for the night's expedition.

"You won't see a show every night," he explains to me in the office afterwards. "In which case, you will have to be their show." He says this while pointing a finger at my jacketed chest. He's right. It's a point I will have to learn quickly or be forced to find work elsewhere. Not all demands of being a guide are physical; what usually breaks recruits are the social pressures.

Flash forward a month. It's Christmas Eve and my fourth tour guiding solo. I'm paired with one of the more experienced drivers, a Finnish man named Teppo, but despite ensuring a safe ride, his presence does little to assuage my nerves.

We gather our guests swiftly. Everyone is waiting outside their hotels and no one is late or missing. I send the Operations team a message and it takes less than twenty seconds for them to clear our departure. We're the first bus to hit the road and because of that, we'll be plagued with the most responsibility. It will be my job to update the other busses on the weather.

Similar to my first night, the conditions look best around the Finnish border. I have a place in mind along the Peerasuvanto River, which borders Finland and Sweden. If I can't find clear skies tonight, I can at least walk my guests across frozen waters into a new country. It won't atone for a lack of the lights but it might be enough to keep them satisfied.



0 - 3,8 km

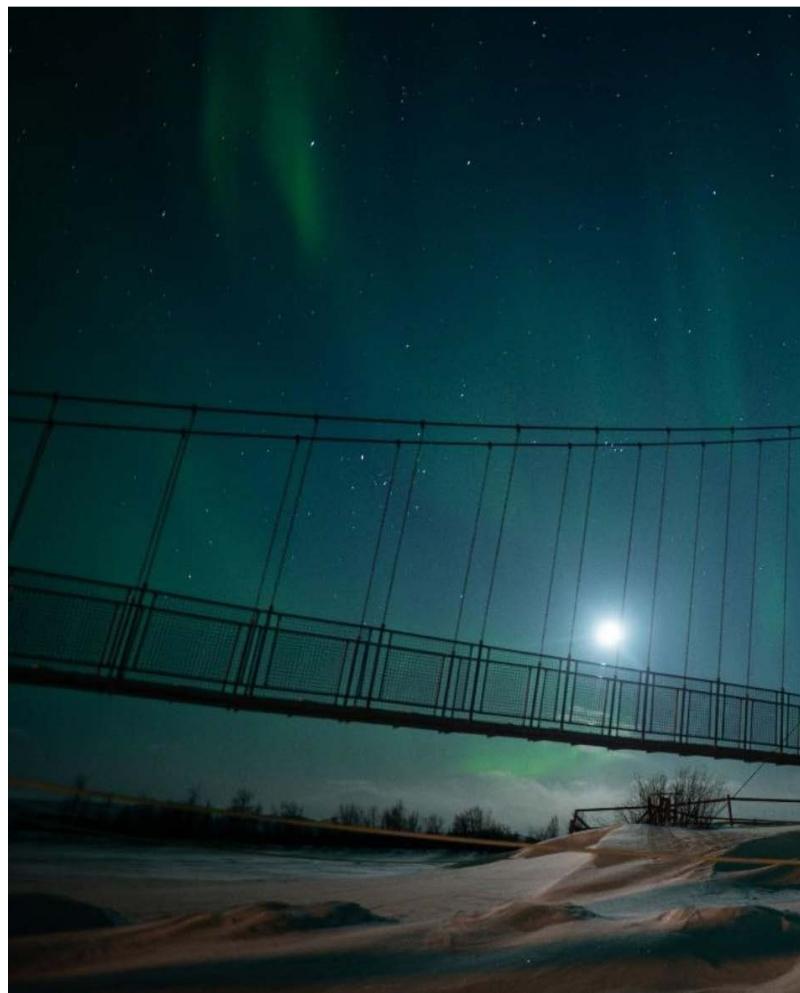


We drive the two and a half hours and by the time we reach the Finnish border, my guests are restless, fidgety, or downright irritable. I pull my camera out for the umpteenth time and scan the sky through the windshield. A camera, because of its sensitivity to light, is far better at detecting the aurora than the naked eye. I see nothing though, not even the faintest hint of green.

When we reach Keinovuopio, I have Teppo park on the ice that covers the river. I turn on the lights, burning a few retinas in the process, and try to gauge the mood. Twelve eyes stare at me blankly, waiting. I take the time to explain that, because we are parked halfway across the river, half of the bus is now in Sweden while the other half is still in Finland. Instead of rapturous cheers for my efforts though, I witness panic engulf the crowd.

"We're on a river right now!?" someone shouts. "Is this safe?"

It takes a full minute for me to assure the bus that, yes, despite being parked on a river, we are indeed safe. I point through the window at the other tire tracks and remark that the Finns sometimes land planes on these frozen rivers, but the mitigating process is arduous, and my highlight of the night has turned into a motive for distrust.





Once I've assured everyone that no one's life is in danger, I step off the bus to check the skies. The good news is that they're clear. I can't see a single cloud and because of the new moon, stars are prevalent. The bad news is that there's still no sign of the aurora. I point my camera to the north and take a long exposure shot but see nothing, no green glow.

"Damn," I mutter.

I invite my guests to step off the bus and, unsurprisingly, they hurry out. A few of them remark on the clarity and I take the time to spout off some star facts. We might be spending the next five hours beneath this sky, staring upward, so it helps to know a bit about what's going on overhead.

Literary Work

I point out the Milky Way, Venus, and the Big Dipper, talk about Orion and the possibility that the left shoulder, the star Betelgeuse, might soon explode into a Supernova. The guests stare expectantly for a couple of minutes then turn to me. At which point I mention that “soon” in astronomical terms could mean another 100,000 years. I almost hear a collective sigh.

The guests are getting restless. Stars are interesting but they paid to see the northern lights. Someone asks if we should change locations but I shake my head. The aurora takes place over a hundred kilometres above us. As long as we have clear skies and activity, we'll be able to witness the show.

There are actually three necessary conditions to see the aurora: darkness, clear skies, and activity. Darkness is the easiest of the three conditions to fulfill. At this latitude, the sun won't rise above the horizon until March. The only light pollution to contend with comes from the city and after a half-hour driving, it ceases to become a factor. Weather is usually the most difficult of the three hurdles to circumvent. Countless stories circulate the office of clouds moving in seconds before a spectacular dancing show begins. But the final variable, activity, is often the most frustrating. You can park yourself in the darkest field on the clearest night and still not witness anything. Aurora activity, despite all the websites, monitors, and apps, is difficult to predict. Some days, the fish just don't bite. That's life.

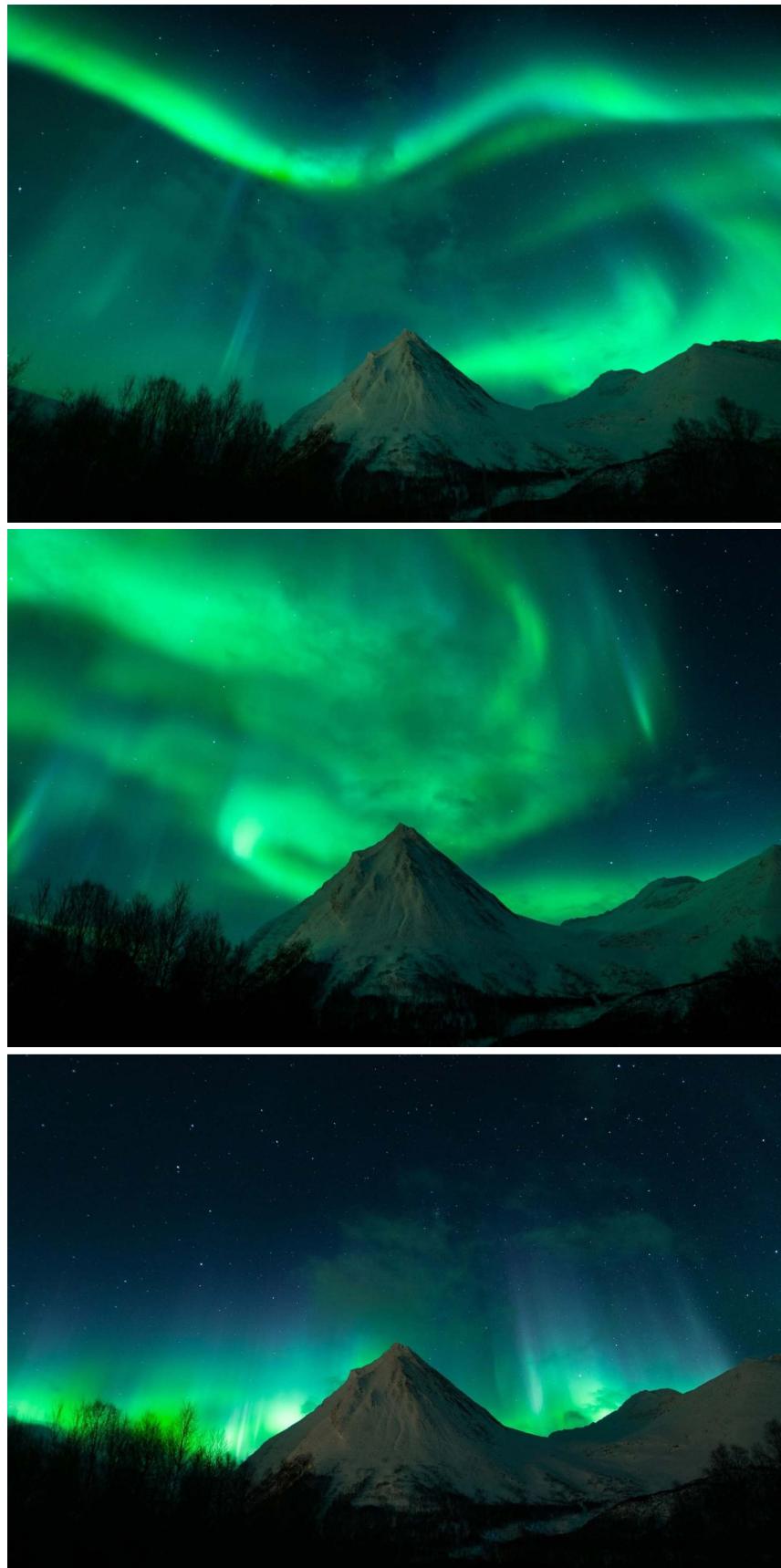
I build a small fire which is well received. Some of my guests are from tropical climates and the weather in Finland, -25 Celsius, is the coldest temperature they've ever experienced. I don't mention that a campfire is a huge source of light pollution and will in fact make seeing the aurora that much more difficult. Instead, I lay out the reindeer skins and teach them how to roast marshmallows.

After stories and a warm dinner of campfire stew, I check my watch. It's after midnight and we still have a two-and-a-half-hour drive back to Tromsø. I mention this to the group and, dejectedly, they agree, it is time to head home. We pack up our things and board the bus but not before I take one last photograph, another long exposure shot. This time though, I see something – a faint green glow. It isn't much but it's the most we've seen all night.





Literary Work



I inform my guests, some of whom have already begun removing their mittens and jackets, and rush back to the camera. In the half-minute it's taken me to update my group, the lights have increased in intensity. There's a green band, discernible to the naked eye, snaking across the horizon.

I snap a series of photographs as I hear my guests flood from the bus.

"Wooah," I hear. And "Look."

The aurora is proliferating, spilling across the sky like an eerie green river.

"I see pink," someone shouts.

The shutter on my camera clicks and I see it too. The lights, pink and green, are shimmering like a sheet caught in a summer breeze. I start to explain the science behind the colours then stop. One needn't dissect the rainbow.

The show lasts for more than a half-hour. Each time we threaten to leave it picks up again, more brilliant than before. Our necks hurt from craning back and forth. No one can feel their fingers but it's a worthy sacrifice. The display marks one of the best shows of the season.

By the time we finally board the bus, the group is animated, satisfied, like children on Christmas. They talk feverishly amongst themselves for over an hour and then drift into sated slumbers. At drop off, with sleepy-eyes and smiles on their faces, they shake my hand and proffer their gratitude.

"Thank you for making my dreams come true," someone tells me and I nod. "It was my pleasure."

I arrive back at the office shortly after five in the morning. Sleep won't come for a few more hours. There are still supplies to unload, pictures to edit, and tour logs to prepare. And though I have my work cut out for me, I can see a light at the end of the tunnel. It's faint at the moment but hopefully, hopefully, it will start to brighten then shine then dance.

Ben von Jagow is a writer, poet, and photographer from Ottawa, Canada who lives in Cape Town. His work has appeared in literary journals such as *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Marathon Literary Review*, *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, Jersey Devil Press, Gordon Square Review, and *The Literary Review of Canada*, among others. For more of Ben's work, visit benvj.com.



UBIQUITOUSLY YOU

Bob McNeil



Bob McNeil, writer, editor, and spoken word artist, is the author of *Verses of Realness*. Hal Sirowitz, a Queens Poet Laureate, called the book "A fantastic trip through the mind of a poet who doesn't flinch at the truth." Among Bob's recent accomplishments, he found working on *Lyrics of Mature Hearts* to be a humbling experience because of the anthology's talented contributors. Copies of that collection are available here.

Valeriy Novikov

You get used to the sun laughing at your inability to rise. Your clock is jocular as well, chortling between bells at you. Each annoying tintinnabular sound is there to rouse you. All of the clock's attempts are to no avail. Coffin-lid-rigid, you continue lying on your bed. Unconcerned with the alarm, you await the ferry back to unconsciousness.

Later after getting up and cleansing your mouth, you have the one beverage that your brain and body deem essential: caffeine. No matter the number of attempts at memorization, you cannot recall the day that coffee became as important as air, food, water, and shelter. Once every drop gets pumped into your gullet, you feel the way a car does upon getting premium gasoline.

Everything is rote for you. Diurnally you are accustomed to showering at a specific hour and then preening. Furthermore, by standing naked in front of the bathroom mirror, you always scrutinize your body.

You dress. Frequently you look at the labels on your clothes. Not one garment is anonymous or generic. No, each garment has a designation worthy of a phonebook. Aside from the fact that public nudity is an offense in most areas, you do not understand why designers decide what apparel is appropriate.

Fully clad, you commute. Any travel mode will do as long as it moves at speeds on par with either a cheetah, Usain Bolt, the Kawasaki Ninja H2, the Bugatti Veyron Super Sport, and the CRH380A or something faster. You must reach a destination that your heart detests quickly. Admit that a lobotomy and lodgings in a mental asylum would be better than the madness of racing to a place you wish were on the wrong side of a wrecking ball.

If given a chance, you would not work at all. Thus far as it stands, until you come into The Wells Fargo of inheritances, win the lottery, or rob a bank, you are stuck in the workforce. Such is the tale of an adult who has to benth press the weight of bills and what a weight it is. You have the planet Jupiter's weight in debts.

You arrive. From nine a.m. to five p.m., your time becomes enslaved by an employer. Very soon, whatever feelings you have of independence and confidence will be incarcerated during those hours. Granted, you will get paid, but it never seems like enough for filing your individualism away.

Halfway through the entryway, you see other people waiting for the elevator. Faced with finite options, you greet them and ask how they feel. It is all perfunctory. You do not care how they feel. Quite honestly, they do not care about your feelings either. Old indoctrination from parents and teachers transforms everyone into parrots that say, "Good morning. How are you? Have a nice day." All you want to say is, "Until the votes come in, I can't tell if the morning is good or not. That should tell you how I am. And by the by, the day would be nicer if we didn't share greetings."

Never forget the Weather Spectators, all of whom are annoying. You tolerate their need to editorialize about each fluctuation. Over and over again, they complain when

it is either hot or cold as if protestation can make some deity adjust the temperature to some requested specifications. Therefore you fantasize about saying, "Weather the damn weather complaining about it is the equivalent of pitching pebbles at a military tank. It is futile."

Along with others, you ride the elevator. Amidst faces that fell to the floor a long time ago, you empathize with the plight of lobsters in a bucket. Somehow while experiencing claustrophobia, you want to yell about the width of your hatred for the job. You gripe to yourself rather than screaming about your discomfort. Not content to merely stand, you notice the numbers of the floors. Irony's long feathers tickle your armpits. Considering the misfortune of employment, it seems farcical that there is no thirteenth floor. To inspire someone's triskaidekaphobia, you want to paint the disturbing number all over the walls.

Your floor appears. You arrive at work. Far worse than you expected, the clock says, "You're late." Regardless of how much you try, any attempt at sneaking to your desk is a waste of subterfuge. Your boss sees you. Save your imagined Ninja skills for sneaking to the water cooler or bathroom when not needed later today. None of the behindhand minutes make your boss any happier about you still being alive.

Infantilized by your employer's reproaching look, you walk inside.

Obviously, you know what your boss looks like, but within fantasies, the employer takes on other appearances. Determined by the trek your thoughts take, the authoritative figure can be any historical dictator, a police dog, or a demon right out of some scripture.

Co-workers, many of whom you tolerate, are staring at your being as if it should be wearing an asbestos suit. Honestly, you are about a cyberslacking second away from feeling a fire. Contrary to your physical mass, your job makes you feel on par with a non-refundable bottle, something seen and unwanted.

Except for their bobblehead motions of acknowledgment, no one cares that you are there. You do not speak; instead, your body nods like the famous drinking bird toy. Dejected, you squat before your desk where other annoyances congregate.

There you are doing what your imagination despises, which is work. Why even mention the type of work? A designation will not make the job any more likable.

At the very least, despite the way work seizes most of your existence, you maintain a paramount possession: yourself. Life knows that you labor to become the being of your design. This is your essay, poem, or story. Anybody known for annoyance will get edited out with another job, but you will still have the paragraphs or staves of your selfhood.

Each existence will be another autobiographical edition on a bookshelf. Your tome, although awaiting more chapters, should receive herds of blurbs because it exists. Grant yourself a favorable review each day, knowing you will wind up out of print at some point.



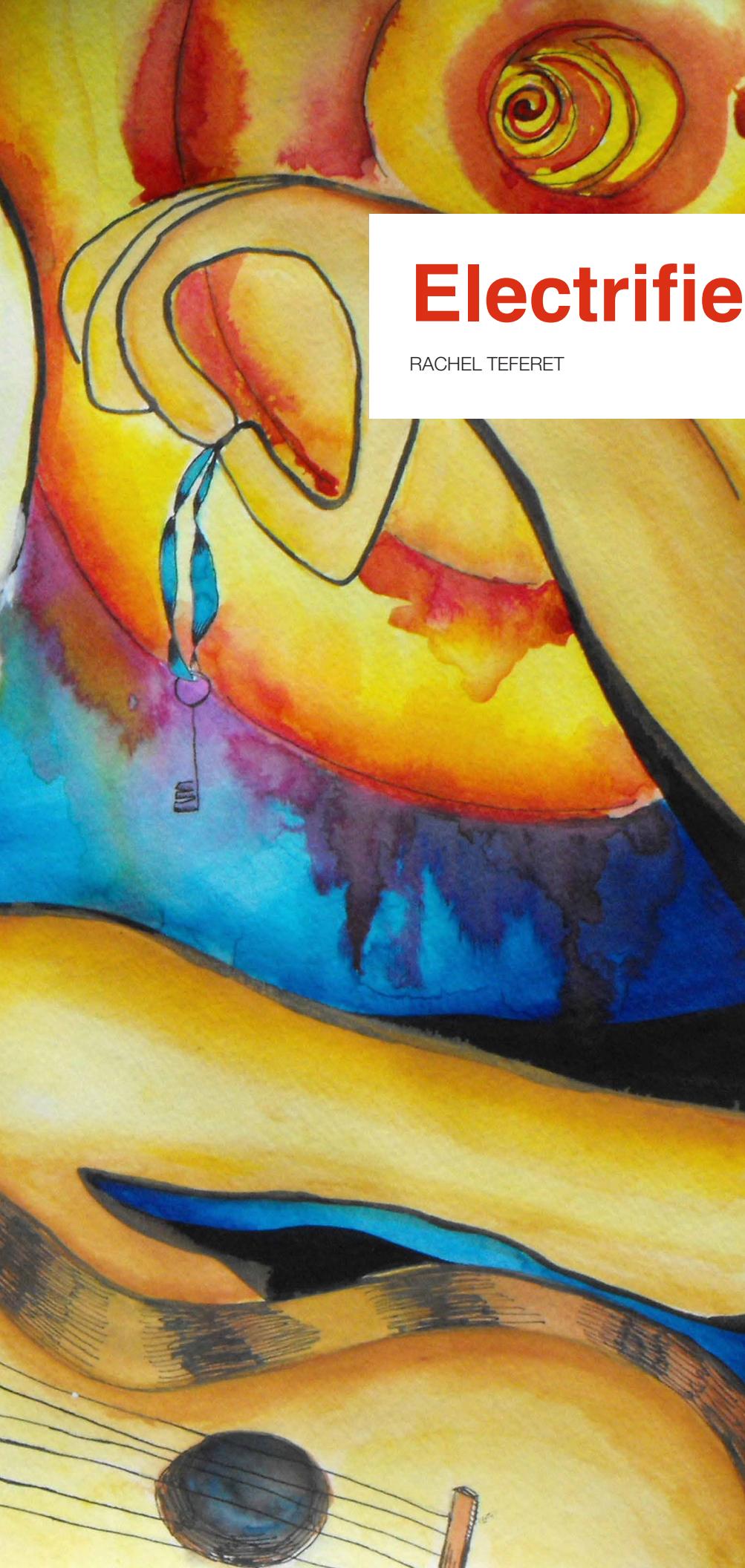
My First Wife

RACHEL TEFERET

Rachel Rose Teferet graduated from Rutgers University with a BA in Fine Arts and a penchant for photoshopping the world with her eyes. She is an artist, writer, and editor. Her writing and artwork have been published by *Subprimal Poetry Art*, *The Tishman Review*, *Page & Spine*, *Black Rabbit Quarterly*, *Slink Chunk Press*, Manawaker Podcast, *Sierra College Literary Magazine* as the winner of the 2016 Flash Fiction Contest, and more. Her play "The Necromancer's Daughter" has been performed at Synthetic Unlimited in Nevada City, California. She has close to 6,000 followers on her blog lettersandfeathers.wordpress.com, and over 5,500 followers on Twitter as [@art4earthlings](https://twitter.com/art4earthlings).

Art

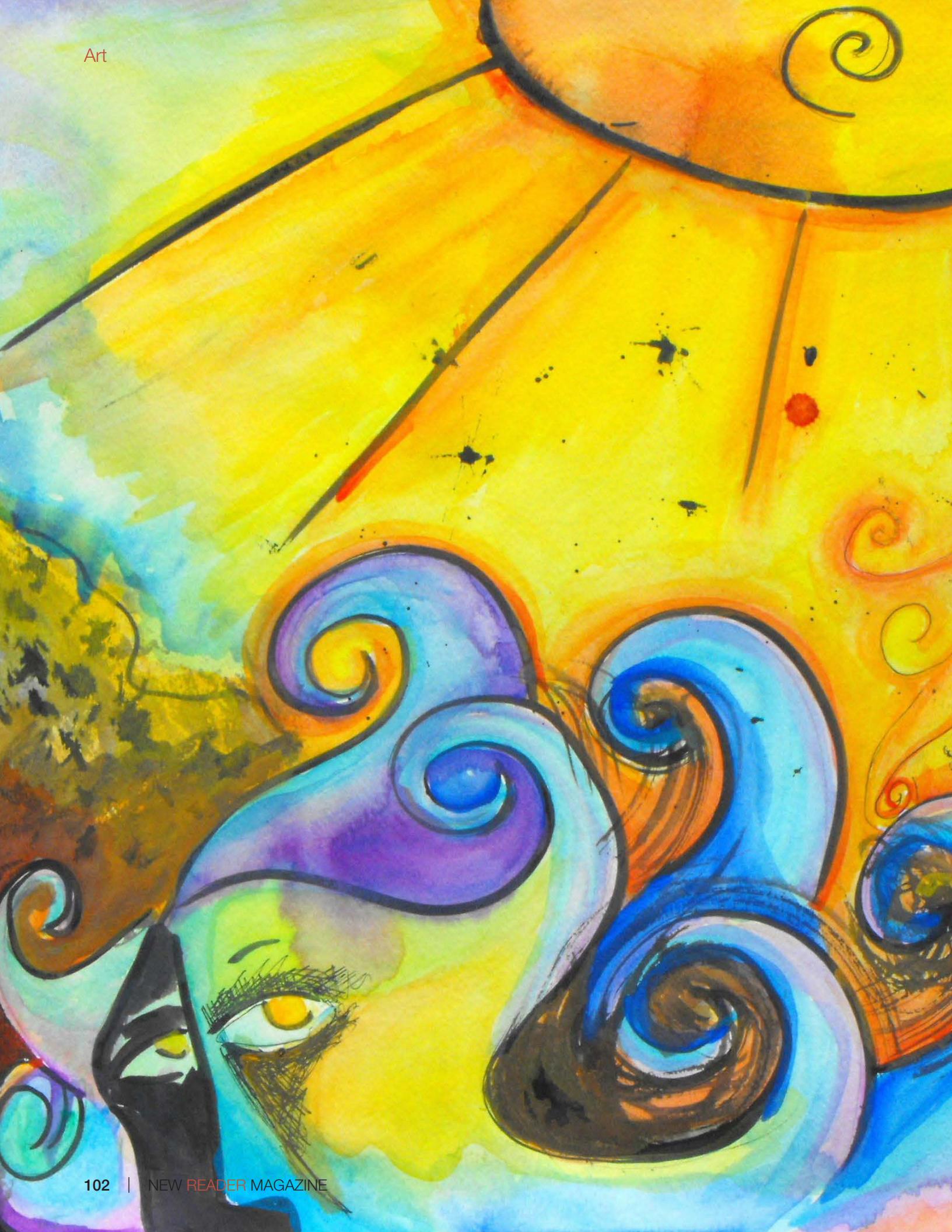




Painting

Electrified Nimbus

RACHEL TEFERET





Painting

Tomales Bay

RACHEL TEFERET



To-Read-List

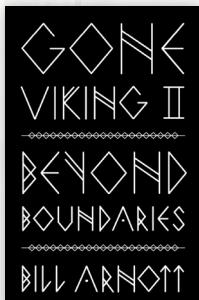
New Reader Media, a creative marketing firm working in partnership with New Reader Magazine, takes on the challenge of bookmarking emerging voices in the indie publishing world. Presented in no particular order, here's New Reader Media's reading list for this quarter of 2021!



Gone Viking: A Travel Saga

BILL ARNOTT

From a bestselling author, poet, and musician comes a literary treat set to take its readers on a journey right on their reading chairs. Filled with adventure, history, and unforced hilarity, this book is highly recommended for anyone craving for a good time.

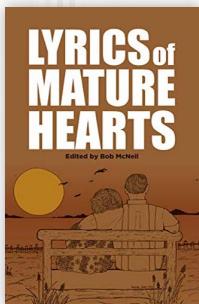


Gone Viking II: Beyond Boundaries

BILL ARNOTT

Bestselling author, poet, and songwriter Bill Arnott has gone viking again—bringing you in a journey around the world by foot, bus, train, boat, and plane with insight and humour as indispensable companions.

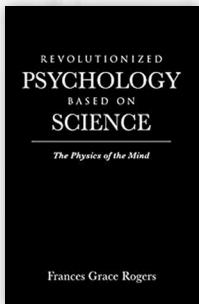
Catch *Gone Viking II: Beyond Boundaries* this November 5, 2021!



Lyrics of Mature Hearts

GORDON P. BOIS, BOB MCNEIL

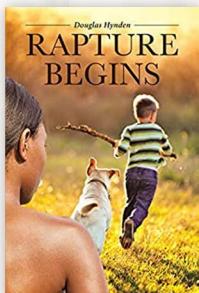
A beautiful collection about the bittersweet backdrop of one's adult years. It houses subjects as familiar as they are personal, like fear, longing, and gratefulness, accompanied by stunningly apt illustrations by George Juan Vivo. A touching read for all ages.



Revolutionized Psychology Based on Science

FRANCES GRACE ROGERS

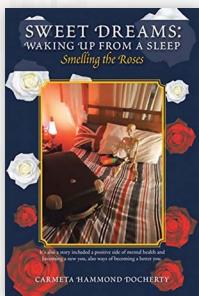
Perfect for those inclined in the holistic understanding of human capacity and mental functioning, *Revolutionized Psychology Based on Science: The Physics of the Mind* delves into human spirit grounded by wisdom, human values, and reverence for life—that which is true, right, and lasting.



Rapture Begins

DOUGLAS HYNDEN

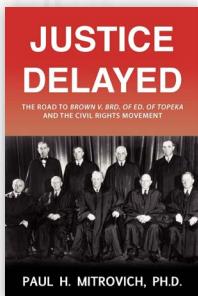
The terror of knowing his identity, his intense yearning for truth, and discovering what life in this world is all about—explore David's boyhood with a mysterious woman in this coming-of-age novel, *Rapture Begins*.



Sweet Dreams: Waking Up from a Sleep: Smelling the Roses

JCARMETA CAROLYN HAMMOND DOCHERTY

Poignant, inspirational, true-to-life... This biography tells the heartfelt self-discovery of Carmeta—a vibrant, energetic, and loving mother of two—as she journeys through life's atrocities into spiritual awakening eventually through Christ. A must-read book every reader seeking a Christ-centered life should not miss.

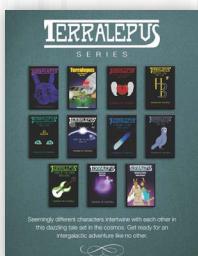


Justice Delayed

PAUL H. MITROVICH

The road to justice and the civil rights movement has been a long and winding road.

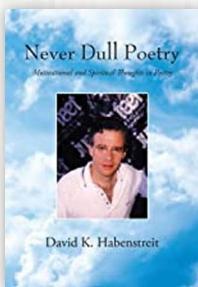
Dr. Paul Mitrovich's *Justice Delayed* follows the landmark ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* which set the precursor that the rights laid out in Constitution are as much possessed by the blacks as any other citizen.



Terralepus

KATHLEEN M. HAMILTON

Seemingly different characters intertwine with each other in this dazzling series of tales set in the cosmos. Get ready for an intergalactic adventure like no other!



Never Dull Poetry: Motivational and Spiritual Thoughts in Poetry

DAVID K HABENSTREIT

A collection of poetry that appeals to a diverse audience, *Never Dull Poetry* seeks to motivate and inspire people to achieve positive things.

Delve into an insightful reflection of life, spirituality, and love with every stanza.

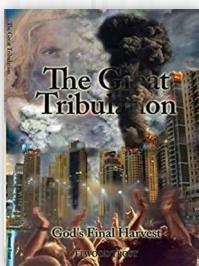


The Handsome Twist

PEZHMUN DENNIS GHIASSI

With universal love and self-acceptance calling, Pezhmun finally awakens.

The Handsome Twist is a wicked and compelling tale about a doomed boy in the heart of a mysterious forest—saving the world, by saving himself.



The Great Tribulation: God's Final Harvest

ELWOOD TROST

The Great Tribulation: God's Final Harvest describes preceding events before Judgment Day as prophesied in The Old Testament. This book is written to indulge your curiosity on how to escape Armageddon.

NRM

NEW READER MAGAZINE

Helping you connect with your audience online and *beyond*.