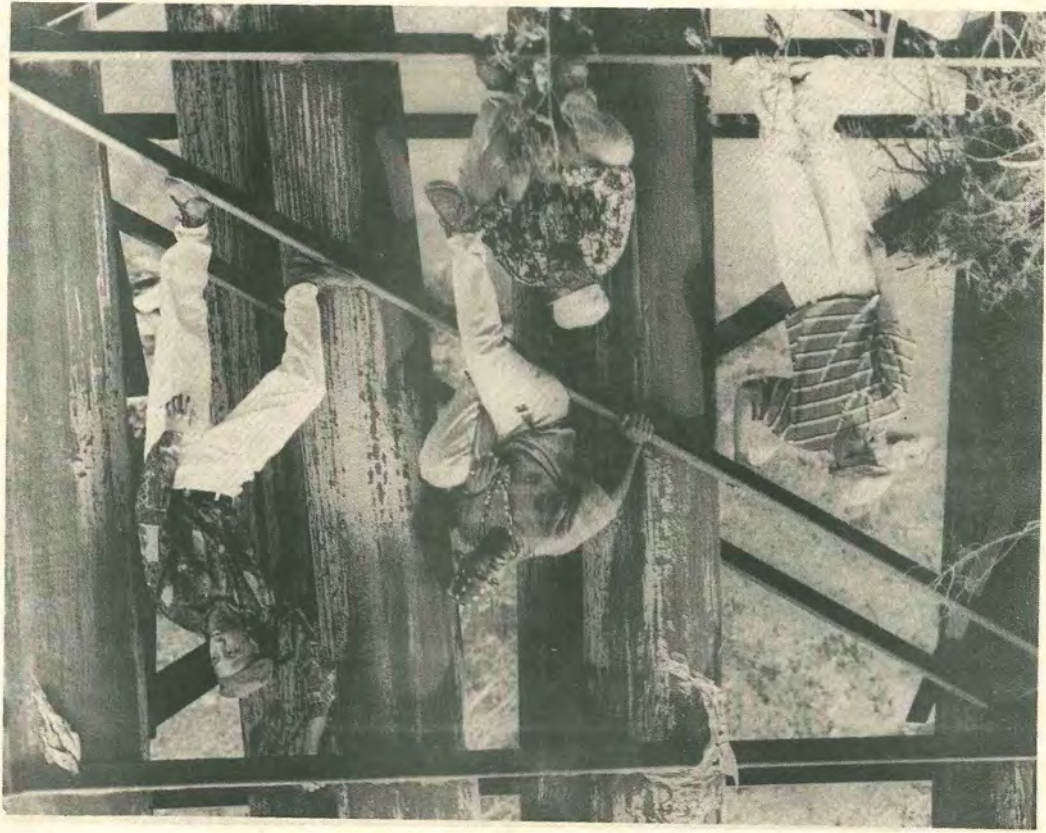




What we are

Bayou Review
Fall 1994





Buffalo Bayou Browsing

--Jeffrey Henry



Bayou Review

Fall '94

A Collection of Works by Students Attending the
University of Houston-Downtown

Being A Poet

Rats! This is not working
 another hour is gone and still nothing
 the mere thought of this, what was I thinking?
 so write down something, it is better than nothing.

This is so hard
 how I hate all of this rhyming
 I better stop
 surely this must be as distasteful as miming.

I have had enough of all this rhyming affair
 surely one can see, this is going nowhere.

Not to be critical
 or sound overly cynical
 trash like this though is overly typical.

Well finally this poem is nearing its death
 oh joys of joy, now maybe I can finally rest
 regardless of how this poem turns out
 keep this in mind, I can finally shout
 I have beaten a worthy opponent, how true
 nothing in this poem though makes any sense oh boohoo
 good grief it is over I am now sad to say, it is all over and
 even the day.

--Vittorio Bonomi

We are the University of Houston-Downtown.

We are students who gather in the shadow of the Houston skyline.

We are a reflection of the city and the world.

Dr. Sylvia Bowman, Dr. Andre de Korvin, Pam Hird and Dr. Juan Carlos Reina selected the works that appear in this issue of the Bayou Review.

The Individual



Images

Today

Death comes quicker than
the flicker of a moment.
Rest for tomorrow.

--Leavery W. Davidson

The Harmony

The river rushes,
the tree roots drink long and deep
the world is silent.

--Vittorio Bonomi



Black Rock

Not a real place
just an area
of Buffalo

Frigid winters
and hot humid summers
in between beautiful springs and falls

Work days
Drink nights
a tavern on every corner

Old Irish and Polish
Lower-middle class
Chevy plant
Blue-collar
Trap

No one gets out from under the "Rock"

--Patrick Farrell

The Sports Bar

Double glass doors
lead to a bright, open room
wooden floors, walls, ceiling, tables and chairs

Make yourself at home
smoking to the right
non-smoking to the left

Juke box in the corner plays old music
from the 70's
Archies, Beatles, Seager and Styx

"Everybody was kung fu fightin"

Bar straight ahead
TVs everywhere
up, down, all around
College football, Canadian football, Pro football, hockey,
wrestling, lacrosse
Arena football?

Sit down
wooden stool at the wooden bar

"They say you want a revolution"

Waitress
Sandy
bleached blonde hair
short shorts and tight half-shirt

"Get ya a beer?"
Miller Lite
wings and fries
Squeak of sneakers on the floor

"Oh sugar, sugar"

Memorabilia

helmets, hats, bats, balls, autographs, and banners

Rose, Moon, and Ryan

Lions, Tigers, and Bears

"Cold Beer!"

Signs

men

ladies

buckets of beer

peroxide in the air

don't drink and drive

"Order up!"

Sandy

teaches fifth grade during the day

waitresses for

the money

"Welcome to the Grand Illusion"

Many men gather

to root

on their home

team

for good or bad

"Another round?"

--Patrick Farrell

Skates of Leather

These skates, like a wild black panther
Twisting and turning; roaming above the ground
Eager to leap toward the sky
Wheels fast as the panther's claw
A coat of silky shining black coal
Swiftly gliding over the mountains and hills
Never weary, tired or still.

--Leavery W. Davidson

Tutorials

Walk through walls
on the roofs of buildings
and oceans.

Cloak yourself in light,
and black leather.

My seekers will
flee

on towards a new reality.

Taking refuge in the industrial
underground.

At home in its dimly lit
nicotine stained clubs.

There they will laugh and love in run-on sentences,
compose grammatically different philosophies,
and cherish frag and spliced art.

--Juan Antonio Helm (Zonker)



Laundry Gods

by Partrick Farrell

One day while folding laundry, I realized why my life was so horrible. Socks lost in the laundry. Yes! That was it! Lost socks! There is nothing that caused me more grief than losing socks in the laundry.

It's not the cost of replacing the socks that bothers me so much, it's the fact that new socks are so . . . virginal. Worn socks are stretched to fit. They know where to give and where to hold tight. With worn socks I know which side is up because there is a spot stretched out for my heel, and I know which sock goes on my left foot and which goes on my right foot because of the large spot my big toe stretches out. On the other hand, new socks are ignorant and this is what really bothers me. Where do my old socks go? Who takes them? I couldn't be losing them! Someone or something must be taking my socks.

Are the washer and dryer manufacturers playing a practical joke? Are these machines designed to betray me? Maybe these machines are designed to kidnap or destroy socks. The possibilities are endless, but I had to find the answer.

My first task would be to examine the machinery for an intentional sock abducting design or perhaps for flaws in the construction that would allow socks to escape. I started my quest by examining the washing machine. I got out my tool box and went to work. I disconnected the electrical plug, the water supply, and the drain hose. Then, I removed the huge sheet-metal case which exposed the inner workings of the washer. I thoroughly examined the agitator and washing drum for possible trap doors or sock gathering devices but could find none. Well, my first step was complete. The washing machine was innocent. I would now have to put it back together. The reassembly would be very difficult since I did not label the parts of the washing machine when I took it apart.

Next, I took the dryer apart. However, this time I was careful to label all parts as to make the reassembly easier. I examined the heating element, motor, and tumbling drum very carefully but could find nothing that would suggest the dryer was stealing my socks.

Since neither one of these machines was designed to accumulate socks, there must be another cause for their disappearances. Maybe the socks were being blown out the exhaust hose on the dryer, incinerated by the dryer, or perhaps they were being discharged with the waste water from the washing machine. I would have to investigate all of these possibilities. First, I connected a filter on the end of the dryer exhaust hose. After a week, my

socks were still disappearing, and there were none to be found in the filter. Therefore, the socks could not be getting blown out the exhaust hose.

Next, I thought about the possibility of the dryer incinerating the socks. Since I discovered no holes in the tumbling drum when I examined it earlier, the socks would have been incinerated inside the tumbling drum. There was no visible damage to any other items of clothing so I discounted this possibility.

Finally, I connected a filter to the drain hose of the washing machine. Once again I waited one week. Again some socks came up missing and none were to be found in the filter. The washer was also acquitted of all charges.

Through my investigation, I had proven the washer and dryer to be innocent in the case of the missing socks. I was now at a loss to explain the disappearance of my socks. I was beginning to get really frustrated and was desperate for an answer. After many sleepless nights and many lost socks, enlightenment dawned. Since the socks seemed to be disappearing into thin air and there was no explanation for these disappearances, there must be some kind of divine cause.

This is when I first became aware of the Laundry Gods. I say Gods because I believe there is one who governs the washing machine and another who governs the dryer. But, why are these Gods taking my socks? Are the Gods angry? What did I do to offend them? More importantly, what could I do to appease them?

My attempts to appease the Gods started by trial and error. First, I thought that they didn't like the laundry detergent or fabric softener that I was using, so over the next few weeks I tried every possible combination of the two. However, my efforts were futile, and I continued to lose socks. Next, I thought that it was the water; after all, Houston is not known for its quality tap water. I had a water filtration system installed in the house, but once again I was unsuccessful and continued to lose socks. I was getting near the end of my rope and was willing to try just about anything. Then, that night on the late show I saw an erotic "B" movie which gave me an idea. In this movie the natives were sacrificing a young virgin to a volcano god. After the sacrifice, the volcano subsided and the island was saved.

This was the answer! I must make an offering to the Laundry Gods. I couldn't very well sacrifice a young virgin for every load of laundry. I would have to find something else. Over the next few days, I gave this much thought, and finally, it came to me. Since I have to buy new socks to replace the ones that disappear, I will start sacrificing uncomfortable virgin socks, that I don't like anyway, to the Laundry Gods.

Now, I only needed to decide how to do this. Should I burn the socks? No! That would be too smoky and would make the house smell. Instead, I would cut them in half and make an altar in dedication to the Laundry Gods. I decided to use the athletic socks with the colorful stripes. I would cut them in half and mount the toe end on the wall. As I mounted these socks on the wall, I would create the shape of a giant sock, adding one for every wash and dry cycle. The colorful end of the sock I would use to make a headdress similar to those worn by American Indians. Since the Laundry Gods only took socks, I decided that I would only need to sacrifice a sock before loads that included socks. Therefore, I would get a separate hamper for my socks and wash them all at the same time.

I still remember the first time I made the sacrifice. I took the socks out of the sock hamper and carefully took them to the washing machine. I deposited the socks and the soap into the washing machine and closed the lid. Then I took the first virgin sock and cut it in half. I promptly mounted the toe half on the wall, and the other half I attached to my bandanna to start my headdress, which I would wear during future sacrifices. As I did this, I begged the Laundry Gods to see my socks safely through the wash cycle. When the washing machine was finished, I removed the socks and placed them in the dryer with the fabric softener. I then took the mate to the first sacrificial sock and cut it in half also. I then placed both ends in their appropriate places and begged the Laundry Gods to see my socks through a safe drying cycle. When the dryer stopped, I immediately opened it and examined my load of socks; they were all present and accounted for.

It has been two years since this first sacrifice. Now my headdress is almost too heavy to wear, and my wall is covered with toe pieces of sacrificial socks. However, I'm proud to say that I have not lost any socks since that day. In fact, some of my socks have lived very productive lives and have been retired with full honors. Me, I've never been happier, nor have I had better peace of mind since I've learned how to satisfy the Laundry Gods.

Relationships



Family
Portrait

Father Figure

"Sorry Honey, I can't pay my child support this month. It's been slow at work."

"Mommy, I'm hungry. What's for dinner?"

I'm sorry, child. It's been slow at work. We won't be eating tonight.

"Macaroni and cheese with tuna, Sweetheart."

"Oh, gross."

I know your birthday's in two weeks, but I've decided to run off with this woman without telling you goodbye. I won't be seeing you again, but always remember that your Daddy loves you.

Yea, right. I'm sure they'll remember. For a long time.

"Mommy, we need a Daddy for our new house."

"I'll be the Daddy, Honey."

The best one they ever had.

-- Karen Geiger

The Dream and the Dreamers

When I look in the mirror I don't see white,
 When I look at you it's not black I see.
 I am not black and you are not white, nor can we be.

I was youthful and innocent but were you?
 We shared classes and projects, but I had no clue
 If you felt like less of a person than I.

I'm reflecting on growing up now and I begin to smile.
 We laughed amid the crepe paper, the lockers, and
 sometimes tears.
 But now I wonder why you cried--even after all these
 years.

Brenda, in Marshall, is of our same age.
 I see in her such anger and rage.
 She grew up with "No Coloreds" signs.

Today I'm so angry and puzzled, with a sort of shame.
 We were friends and I knew you, but am I to blame?
 Were you treated badly? I chose you for my group.

After almost twenty years I really must say,
 Marilyn, I would have defended you. I hope you knew--
 Skin color never mattered, "I had a dream, too."

--Sharon Hummel

sweet baby mine

baby mine
sweet love affair
boy or girl
i do not care
i cry i panic
what to do
can i handle
three
i've already two
my stomach swells
my clothes
don't fit
my hand
cradles you
i feel your kick
i can't move so
fast how slow
my gait
burdened with
your excess
weight
i feel you
flip twist and turn
space growing scarce
in your nine month
home
i walk to your room
i see your things
soft downy blankets
plastic rings
bottle feed
or give you my breast
so tired now
such little rest
to the restroom
so many times
you'll soon be here
sweet baby mine

i wake with a start
the pains begin
our long hard journey
nears its end
to the hospital
away we speed
in a few hours
they'll hand you
to me
we arrive in the dark
now the windows
show day
ten centimeters
i hear someone say
push real hard
she pats my hand
i feel so weak i'm
sure i can't
but i know
you're just a
breath away
i take one deep
then start to pray
i feel you
finally gently
slip free
confused emotions
love and need pain forgotten
in my embrace
finally finally
you are
placed

--Yolanda Marie Bridges

Grandmother Erin

You have too many children
 You can't love them all
 You have too many children
 Yet they all hear when you call
 You call with a voice
 As soft as your sands
 You bid us all come
 Come kiss your soiled hands
 But you've too many children
 I can never draw near
 They fight amongst themselves
 They ridicule they jeer
 But you love your warriors
 You pride in their boldness
 And you drink with the wild ones
 As a comfort in coldness
 You've too many children
 Love can't go that far
 And that husband of yours
 Is too fond of the jar
 You yell with a voice
 Like the rocks on your hillsides
 But bombs and laughter
 They drown out your shrill chides
 but I hear them
 a daughter of one of
 your middle children
 and I feel helpless
 confused
 I have chosen water
 over blood
 I have even
 mixed the two

my love for you is
a strange inheritance
from my parents
and though I have
walked through your green fields
braced myself against your winds
breathed your salt and fresh air
and
known your cold rains
I have also
felt your pains
the soiled hands I long to kiss
can never hold me
riddled as they are with rheumatism
is my pain of not being embraced
the same
as the pain of your not knowing
what you might be embracing
You have too many children
Do you know us all by sight
And if you don't
Who gives a damn

I might

--Anne Marie Sherlock

A Child Of Seven

I was born in the month of December
This I was taught to always remember
Three siblings before me were boys
Always busy breaking my toys
The years come and go quickly
Sitting and hoping for a little sister.

Mother went away and gave birth to another
Oh No! Not another brother
They fought and sometimes teased
Until they had me climbing trees
Two more kids' later - That made seven
When they were boys I wanted to run to heaven.
The children of these seven will be
The new branches of the same tree.

--Leavery W. Davidson





Cornet

by Mitch Cullin

His long fingers danced delicately about the three valves, sending slow, mellow, round melodies upward, away.

The boy swayed his blond head in the warm breeze which fluttered from across the dunes to sweep over him and his father. He was oblivious to where he was, to where he was being taken, or to where he had ever been. He was, however, aware of the broad shoulders and back carrying him, of the strange and unique new smell of saltwater air wafting with the wind, but, as always, he simply floated. He had been floating in darkness for over twelve years now, since before his birth.

Here he was draped around his father, his lengthy legs wrapped and locked at the man's waist, his thin arms stretched and bent in on either side of his father's neck. He felt the man's spine against the center of his pale, slight chest. He could feel the large hands tightly gripping his own hands, the familiar fingertips pressing gently on the cushions of his soft palms.

"How about it, huh?" his father said, deliberately kicking sand to the sky. The apparent excitement in the man's voice, the arch of the sand caught before them in the breeze—these things escaped the boy.

His loose lips kissed the metal with open jaw holiness.

On the beach, Rick attempted to finish undressing Eliot. He had already cast the boy's yellow tank top aside, had managed to work the boy's shorts and underwear down to his ankles, but now Eliot had had enough. He began struggling, as was his custom, squirming spasmodically on his back, partially twisting his frantic body off one end of the large rainbow-colored beach towel. He swung his fists blindly, gasping painfully as he did so, narrowly missing his father's face.

Rick sat back in defeat and waited for his brother to arrive with the knapsack. He watched as his son flailed about, feeling the warmth of the sun spread along his back, and heard children playing somewhere down the beach. He turned in the sand, saw Ben running across the dunes, the red-canvas knapsack in hand.

He climbed to his feet, glancing at Eliot, who had suddenly grown still and quiet. He saw the milky pupils, the white stomach rising and falling rhythmically. The boy was frozen in place, his arms held over his head, the fingers curved in awkwardly.

Third valve out on d-flat, less pressure, more air . . .

Ben removed his T-shirt. Then he removed his swimming trunks. "I'm going in," he told Rick, who was too busy digging around in the knapsack to notice that his brother was naked.

"Be right there." Rick fixed his eyes on Eliot as he brought the instrument out. The boy lay almost completely motionless on his back, his hands rummaging through the sand.

Ben sprinted away, making a dash for the surf, streaking toward the open scar of water.

Rick moved the instrument to Eliot's lips, guiding the metal end down, until the boy reflexively opened his mouth—the thin hands flew from the sand, grasped hold of the instrument, and the magic began. It never ceased to amaze Rick how this worked, how the magic took hold of the boy, how ears that could never hear could create such beauty. It was not exactly music, not structured or formed, but something all together separate, cacophonous and infinitely more expressive.

Eliot's cheeks inflated and out it came, pouring forth, spinning and spiraling. The magic came from the instrument, from the boy, proclaiming his existence.

Rick leaned in over Eliot. He slowly finished removing the shorts and underwear, which were tangled about the boy's ankles, then he reached into the knapsack to retrieve his son's blue-black swimming trunks.

Each push of the valve took him higher, or lower, as he made sounds both fast and bright, slow and evolved.

The white stallion came upon the pair—a long-haired man helping a skinny boy in blue-black swimming trunks to his feet. The man gripped the instrument in one hand, while holding the nape of the boy's neck with the other. On the horse sat a teenage girl, darkly tanned in a two-piece suit, who had been drawn along the beach by distant, unusually sublime music.

She watched the man and boy, saw how the man was guiding the boy; the boy's feet twisted inward, crossing precariously as he stepped forward in the sand. With the man gazing at the boy, the boy's head rolling from side to side stupidly, she was not noticed at first.

When the horse grunted, the man glanced up to see the stud and girl rider. "My brother said it was angels," she said. The man appeared startled, uncertain. He pulled the boy closer, moving his hand from the boy's neck to the boy's shoulder. "You can't see angels, I think," she continued. "I don't think you can."

"Hello," the man spoke in a friendly but guarded way.

The girl smiled, her teeth in bright contrast to the brown of her face. She pointed down at the instrument, fingering the reins as she did so. "Could you play?"

The man lifted the instrument, considered it, then said, "I don't. I . . ."

"You can." She nodded. "You really can." She looked to the boy, hoping he might agree with her, but he only remained as before, head tilting one way then another. "Is he your son?"

"Yes," the man said flatly, wishing the girl would leave.

"Hi, I'm Anne," she told the boy. "We're here for a week."

"Anne," the man said, very matter-of-factly, "he's deaf."

The girl's smile turned to a frown. "Sorry. I didn't mean—"

The man caught sight of his brother in the ocean, framed between the horse's thick legs, tumbling in the waves.

The boy started muttering. "What's he saying?" the girl asked.

"Nothing," the man replied. "Not a thing." He inhaled the scent of something pungent and common.

"Oh," the girl said, her voice tinged with a vague sadness, "I'd like to hear you play."

"It's not me, see," the man said, gently stroking the boy's shoulder, the stiff odor rising.

"Him?" The girl's mouth gaped with an amazement and realization which faintly offended the man. "You said he couldn't—"

"He can't."

"But—" She observed the dead-white centers of the boy's pupils.

"We're going in now." The man casually tossed the instrument behind him into the open knapsack, where it landed with an inaudible hollow ring. "Nice to meet you, Anne."

"Will he play?" she asked.

The man shook his head. "I'm sorry."

The stud grew uneasy underneath the girl. "He's blind."

The man began guiding the boy again, walking him past the horse and rider.

"It's a miracle, you know." The stud kicked at the sand, wavering some. She tightened the reins, watching the man and boy go by. "Him being like that and all. I'd like to hear him play." A harsh aroma lingered where the pair passed, lifting to the girl's nostrils. "We're here for a week."

In his mind, lips vibrating into metal—warm, dark, mellow liquid dripping across his skin into the wind.

Ben returned to the beach to find Rick and Eliot just as he had left them, with the boy on the big beach towel on his back and his brother hovering about him. Eliot's hands were again on the instrument, creating something which passed directly from the solid to the vapor state and condensed back to solid form. The boy, pacified and playing lowly, was naked, his swimming trunks discarded in a pile beyond the knapsack. Rick ran a baby wipe between Eliot's legs and into the crack of his bottom. "Thought you were about in," Ben said, casting a shadow across his brother's back.

"An accident," Rick replied, folding the baby wipe once.

"Really great out there. Really great."

"I'm sure." Rick worked the wipe through the boy's bottom one last time, then looked to Ben, who stood naked behind him. "Jesus, Ben—"

"Come on." Ben grinned. "Nothing like it."

Rick surveyed the beach, his eyes darting back and forth, but the white stallion and girl were nowhere to be seen. "Be careful, you know."

Ben shrugged indifferently. "Bring the kid in."

"He messed his suit," Rick sighed, letting the wipe fall to the sand.

"So." Opulent drops of water slipped down Ben's smooth chest to a tangle of brown, glistening pubic hairs.

"Are you going back in?"

Ben shook water from his hair. "Not yet," he said.

Rick nodded thoughtfully, a hand reaching for the instrument. "Right," he said, emphatically.

Don't stop the air.

In the distance, on the horizon, three great gray clouds crept, maneuvering toward the zenith, threatening what was otherwise a perfect day for swimming and sunbathing. Ben sat in the hot sand, knees drawn to his chest, with newly applied sunscreen spread thick and creamy on his already burnt shoulders. His attention was focused on a pair of pallid, bare backsides—one small and slender, the other big-boned and barely overweight—as they headed off to the swell that broke on the shore, inching ever so slowly into the ocean.

Big breath

Rick stood waist deep, keeping Eliot afloat in the surf, with one arm stretched under the boy's rib cage and the other extended across the slight abdomen. He moved Eliot's firm, horizontal body in the foam, splash, the breaking of water, as waves washed over and around them. The boy was

rigid—buoyant in shifting coldness, the heat on his back, saltwater forcing against his lips, the surging influx of the tide, drifting somewhere other than the quality of familiarity. But well-known fingers secured him, and he understood, however abstractly, the safety associated with those strong hands.

Bigbreath

Now Eliot's body loosened. The boy breathed in so deeply that Rick felt, for the first time, a ripple of hard muscles under a thin layer of baby fat pressing on his forearm from the center of his son's chest. Gurgling sounds of pleasure came from Eliot's throat. "Yes," Rick said. "That's right." The boy started working his legs, kicking them against the water, pounding his feet in tandem.

Bigbreath BigBreathBIG

Tufts of fine hair existed in Eliot's armpits, appearing as if by legerdemain, discovered by Rick as he lifted the boy from the sea to hold him. He had never seen the small mess before, sprouting in long strands of brown. He cradled Eliot, a hand supporting the boy's head, and realized just then how far they both had come. He studied the slender legs, which were no longer smooth and hairless, covered now with a blond eiderdown that spread to the boy's pubis. Suddenly, as the waves crashed harder on them, Rick found himself overwhelmed with inexplicable delight. He brought Eliot's body closer, pressing the boy's warm chest against his chest, and kissed his son gently on the forehead. Eliot's murmurs of happiness increased. A high comber curled toward them, and Rick fell back into it, gripping his son tightly, laughing, slipping briefly underwater.

BrEaThBIGBREATHBI

Along the scar, the white stallion came charging and bucking, its rider thrown somewhere in the dunes. Ben, who had been dozing on his back, sat up with a start as the stud approached. The horse slowed, stopping before him, a veneer of sweat glowing on the silvery mane, its ears cocked to the breeze, a delicate and summoning melody instilled in its brain.



The Clearing

by Cathy K. Ragsdale

Pleasant memories of my mother's family tend to make me a wee bit sad. What was once is no more, like dandelion seed scattered in the wind. We were once so close, generations intertwined; generations twisted one onto another. Besides the traditional age aunts and uncles, my mother (twenty-five at the time) happened to be pregnant with my younger brother at the same time my maternal grandmother was pregnant with my uncle David.

Of course, an uncle four years younger than myself calls for adjustments to decorum; naturally I could never bring myself to call him Uncle. He was always just Davy to me.

Davy's older sister, Janice, is a mere five years older than myself. As a child, my aunt Janice was always cheerful. She was everyone's darling at home, school and church. Janice was very studious and excelled at practically all her endeavors.

Although she always was a bit voluptuous, the boys never seemed to notice and adored her simply because she was such fun. I, too, adored my aunt, although indirectly, Janice may be the reason Bullet died as he did.

My grandparent's farm house was divided in half by stairs accessible from each side of the house. Two doors, heavy with an agglomeration of yellowed white paint, guarded both entrances of the always-dark stairwell. Occasional exposure to daylight illuminated ancient, limp, outer garments and filthy hunting hats hung upon rusty nails.

The harsh glare of a single naked bulb at the top of the dusty stairs provided numerous ghastly and sinister shadows to stimulate children's overactive imaginations.

The most terrifying trip of all was the trip one made after all were asleep and nature necessitated a visit to the single chamber pot in Grandma's bedroom.

How silly we children were as we teased Grandma about her morning trip out behind the barn. She made her way slowly; her aging hand held the swinging "honey pot" that had been the actual object of our laughter. I wish now I'd have been kinder; she sacrificed herself, doing the most unpleasant of tasks when she could have easily demanded that someone else do that noxious chore.

Often, my family and I stayed overnight. When visiting, my little sister and I shared the bed with my aunt Janice who was nine at the time. She'd hold my hand, and with her other arm carefully supporting my sister's back, we'd slowly ascend the stairs.

She'd gently whisper while we climbed those worn wooden stairs, "It's okay if you sleep with me. But, you have to promise not to pee in my bed!"

I was four at the time and my little sister was three. Of course, we gave our solemn promise we'd wouldn't. We slept three to a bed; I against the wall near a window that faced the Appalachian mountains. My sister slept in the middle and Aunt Janice guarded an escape by sleeping on the outside.

The next morning, with the exuberance that only small children can muster at such an early hour, my sister and I giggled when we discovered a Rin Tin Tin sticker adhered to the metal post of Janice's bed. Naturally we were both avid fans of the famous canine star.

It wasn't long afterwards that we moved into a rented farmhouse of our own and my father presented my sister and me with our own German Shepherd pup.

He was such a cute puppy, little pink tongue and warm, loving, amber eyes. A little black and tan chunk of a pup, his little fat body constantly in motion and my, how his little tail wagged. We wanted to call the puppy Rin Tin Tin, but Dad insisted we call him something else.

"Bullet, let's call him Bullet."

Bullet hardly described that adorable bundle of motion. What a fabulous dog, he grew up to be: big, strong and loyal. As he matured, his eyes gradually lost their merriment and in its stead he acquired this intense, steady, serious stare. He seemed always close, patiently watching over us as we constructed trampled-ragweed houses and otherwise pursued assorted mischief while exploring the vast openness of our meadow. The meadow seemed quite grand at the time, but it was simply an uncultivated plot behind our home.

Bullet shared the good times and the bad. Sometimes we were forced to eat a poor man's supper of fried potatoes and bread scraps with several eggs broken upon that greasy mess. There were many times during winter when Bullet had to content himself with boiled potato skins. I suppose he didn't mind so awfully much, although who could have blamed him had he decided to move on.

Our rented farmhouse was divided into two separate living areas and my father's brother and his family lived in the other side. One morning, Uncle Eugene disrupted our breakfast,

"Ward, get out here," he yelled as he pounded on the screen door.

My dad went out onto the back porch and murmured a reply. There we were, my mom and her little brood gathered on our side of the porch. My aunt Ruth had my cousins gathered up behind Gene on their side of the porch.

"Look damn it, I want you to keep that dog's food put up. Why in the hell did you have to get a dog? Dog shit, every where."

My dad murmured something else and motioned to the children gathered about.

"Either you keep the dog's food out of reach or I'll kill that damn dog." As Gene shouted, he viciously thrust a large butcher knife into the wooden post of the porch only inches from Dad's head.

Oh my, the argument was quite heated. At the time, it seemed they were going to kill each other. My aunt was crying, my mom was getting mad and I was beginning to wonder if my cousins were friend or foe.

My rascal cousin, Brian, loved dog kibble. On a dare we had all sampled some; only Brian liked it enough to continue eating it. Eugene wanted Dad to keep the feed put up; of course, Dad thought Uncle Eugene should supervise his children.

Several weeks had passed before I realized we were preparing to move again; this time to the western part of the Pennsylvania, a good 200 miles away. Bullet was full grown and Dad decided that it would be inconvenient to take him along.

Later that day, we all went for a ride in the car. Bullet was quite excited about the trip, went from window to window, his wagging tail occasionally hitting either my sister and me in the face. Bullet felt quite confident he was well loved because he often went for car rides with us and these intimate car rides confirmed that he was part of our tribe.

I'm sure Bullet didn't understand why Dad chose to drive us to a neighboring valley and leave Bullet at a heavily traveled intersection.

What a pathetic sight we must have been, two little girls in pigtails staring out the rear view window, laughing at our dog's desperate attempt to catch the sedan. Bullet made a valiant effort, racing full speed on the sharp coarse gravel. We were simply too young to know the terrible injustice of what my dad had just done.

When we woke the next morning, Bullet had already found his way home and greeted us on the porch. I wasn't surprised; Bullet had done just as Rin Tin Tin would have done. The trip had been quite a challenge, his body ached from the eight-mile trip. The pads of his paws were tender from racing on the gravel. Bullet had made it home and nothing would harm his children. As always, he was there to guard us.

My parents began packing our few belongings in the car. Whatever fit in the trunk remained ours; my parents abandoned all else.

Bullet got to take another car ride, probably his last. We drove to a place where the woods met the valley. A farm stood off in the distance and was barely visible through a partial clearing in the trees.

It was an especially pretty March day, the sky a spectacular blue. A brisk breeze teased the uppermost branches of the trees. The birds, a frantic bunch, merrily chirped and prepared nests for little ones. A mountain creek ambled nearby, clear water, clean white sand and smooth round pebbles in a shallow pool that had formed where the creek widened. A large oak grew near the pool. Last winter's debris had collected at the base of the tree's trunk. Of course, there were other trees, but the one most prominent in my memory would be that large one by the creek.

Who could have guessed that my father was about to commit the most unthinkable, unspeakable evil I have ever witnessed another person do.

No one laughed as our father fastened the chain around the thick, coarse bark of the oak beside the creek. My father returned to the car; he neither hurried or made any attempt to be secretive. He opened the trunk, unloaded a large bag of dog food and carried it to where our dog, my dog, obediently sat chained to that damned tree. He casually tore open the bag of food and set it beside Bullet.

Bullet ignored the food; his warm amber eyes stared intently at my father's face. I'm quite sure my father avoided that questioning stare and without a pat or spoken word, my dad abandoned my good friend again.

Intelligent, dignified creature that he was, Bullet had gotten the idea. He didn't pull at his chain; he was very nonchalant as he laid his head upon his paws and watched us drive away. Unlike the rest of us, Bullet was truly a class act and he deserved better.

The World



Politics

"My Struggling Life"

a true life experienced

Life isn't about winning. In reality, it is about struggling and that's why I live to challenge it.

Ever since I was seven years old, I've struggled against Communism and civil war in Cambodia.

I witnessed public execution and mass murders,
I stumbled upon mass graves and killing fields too.

Everyday for four years, I did hard labor
From morning to darkness
Fourteen to sixteen hours a day
In the rain, cold, and hot afternoon.

Shoeless and clothless, I walked many distant miles going to work.
Shoeless and clothless, I swam one, two and three rivers returning home.

Home sweet home, nobody, no parents, sisters nor big brothers, except I and two baby brothers.

I built many small dams and picked up rice in a rice field in the rain, cold and hot afternoons.

I planted vegetables and fished in distant lands

Still not enough food to eat nor a place to sleep.

I ate dogs, frogs, toads, lizards, snakes, rats, grasshoppers, crickets, dirt, charcoal and the bark of trees.

I've been starved and infested with diseases

I almost died.

I was haunted by demons, ghosts and the devil, too.

I've been shot at so many times by Khmer Rouges and Vietcongs.

I dodged bullets, bomb shells and Khmer Rouges, too.

I threw grenades, detonated bombs, and shot Khmer Rouges back.

I journeyed from Cambodia to Thailand, shoeless and clothless, for two sleepless days and nights in a dense jungle evading Khmer Rouges and Thai criminals.

I lived in a rotten refugee camp.

Slum, poverty, abuse, discrimination and fear of Thai's authoritarian rule.

I was without a father.

I was deprived of my childhood.

I was ignorant.

I can't read, write and speak Cambodian properly.

I can't read, write and speak English in correct grammar.

In my prolonged struggle against pain and suffering in life,
I become a strong and decent man.

Let my struggle be everyone's learning lesson.

Stop the violence, hatred, racism and discrimination.

Stop wanting and complaining too much of everything.

Be ambitious and a leader.

Love, respect and treat everyone equal.

Life is too short.

--El Kevin Sar





Christmas in the Town of Hope

by Michael Bermudez

Christmas of 1992 seemed to be the bleakest Christmas of all for millions of Filipinos living in Central Luzon. On July 1992, after six hundred years of dormancy, Mt. Pinatubo exploded in all its fury and covered the sky in a cloak of ash. Thousands upon thousands of people fled their homes and left everything they owned: livestock, ricefields, and all other means of livelihood. Ashfall from the volcano covered virtually all the surroundings for many weeks. Months later, after some people tried to salvage and rebuild whatever remained of their belongings, lahar, ash and dirt mixed with tons of water deposited in volcano craters by the recent typhoons, gushed down the mountain. This created powerful currents that engulfed the already devastated countryside. By December much of Central Luzon was covered by a desert of ashfall and mud several meters thick, and the unfortunate evacuees were ready to celebrate Christmas in makeshift relocation camps.

Even though I faithfully followed the events of the Pinatubo eruption from the very beginning, watched the television coverages and perused a lot of newspaper articles, I felt a certain degree of apathy towards the victims of the disaster. It was not because I was heartless, but the eruption did not radically affect or change my life. Since I lived in Manila, which was hundreds of kilometers away from Pinatubo, the only effect the volcano had on my life was a deposit of ash several centimeters thick on my rooftop. It didn't matter to me, then that there were people in the world who lived in indigence because of the catastrophe, so long as I still had food on my table, and a warm bed to stretch my feet in. Those were my thoughts and feelings until I had to see firsthand the destitution of the evacuees and the destruction made by the volcano.

During December 1992, I had the opportunity to visit Sitio Layak, an evacuation center in the hills of Central Luzon, together with other volunteers, as part of a Christmas outreach program. On the way to the camp, as the bus passed the outskirts of Manila and Bulacan province, the reality of the eruption soon emerged before my eyes. The once fertile granary of the Philippines was now a sea of gray ash. Only the tops of houses, churches, trees, lamp posts, and bridges juttred out of the desert of pumice and dirt. The once mighty rivers of Abacan and Pampanga were virtually left like mud puddles. The Zambales mountains, draped in white, did indeed look like the imposing sentinels on Rocky Mountain postcards, but the eerie thing about their beauty was that as we viewed the mountains closely, the white covering was not snow, but tons of shimmering ash, dirt, and sand!

The surrounding areas looked like a monotonous, surrealistic painting -- a nightmare of ash, destruction, and desolation.

When we reached Sitio Layak, we were greeted by hundreds of men, women, and children, even though the weather was unbearably hot from the lack of shade trees.

These people managed to smile and wear their best Sunday clothes just to welcome us. Children still frolicked on the dusty roads under the strong rays of the sun. The young people were excitedly showing us the handicrafts they ingeniously created from the dried lava and ash that caused them much misfortune. As we wandered around the barrio, we were surprised to see that the camp shanties had Christmas lights, bunting, and lanterns. In spite of the disaster and tragedies that had befallen them, these people were actually looking forward to celebrating Christmas. The people of Sitio Layak lost their homes, livelihood, and all their material belongings, but not their joy of living and cheerful spirit. These people, who had just experienced the worst tragedy life had to offer, courageously rose above the ashes of despair and started to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives. They showed great inner strength as they began to rebuild their homes and livelihoods. Because of their ingenuity and skill, they built handicrafts from ashfall that was considered useless so that they could still earn a decent living. The people of Sitio Layak, the town of hope, were the source of inspiration for those troubled times.

As we prepared to leave the site and board the bus that December afternoon, I looked back at these smiling people still waving goodbye. At that moment, my perspective of life became broader. I felt not only deep sadness, regret and sympathy, but also their inner strength within me. The citizens of Sitio Layak taught me to see beyond the tragedy and bravely face what life had to offer. As the engines of the bus went on, I couldn't stop thinking about how these people had influenced my life greatly in one day. Before the dust scattered by the screeching bus wheels completely blocked our view of these strong-willed people, I looked inside myself and realized that I had changed.

Empty Rafts

Send 'em back to Cuba.
 Real Americans, we say
 send 'em back where they came from.
 Send 'em back,
 they'll take our jobs, our money
 (our women)
 and undermine our Good American Freedom.
 Send 'em back.

Our Coast Guard's out there now
 wasting our Solid American Tax Dollars
 with our Brave American Boys
 (God bless 'em)
 risking life and limb to save those
 (communists)
 Cubans.
 Send 'em back
 (let 'em drown)

The Radioman said a storm came through
 (they shoulda stayed in Cuba)
 Said the Coast Guard found some empty rafts
 (so what?)
 after the storm.
 Warm and dry Americans, we close our eyes,
 (serves 'em right)
 change the channel and believe
 nobody drowned.

No desperate men and women tried to hold on
to the raft
to the idea
to the (phantom) freedom
that lured them from their homes.

Full and Sleepy Americans, we loosen our belts,
turn off the news, and dismiss the idea
that fathers and mothers, families and children
tried to stay above the waves
until the waves said ENOUGH!
and pushed them under the sea.

Safe and Secure Americans, we change the subject
unwilling to think too long about
empty rafts.

--Tommy N. Thomason

Cosmos



The Black
Hole of Love

Float

Dancers of love
Gracefully moving to the
soft beat of their heart.

--Leavery W. Davidson



Karen

Courting blue
teardrop eyes
swell my soul

Nose
so flawless and fitting
it is inconspicuous

Lips laugh
to inform
full cheeks
creating a delightful smile

Golden-gold hair
reaches for
and dances on
sensuous shoulders

So much
I think I know
or
would like to know
about this woman

Is she as perfect as she seems?
or
Is it simply
infatuation
I feel for my fresh acquaintance?

I fear I may never know.

--Patrick Farrell

Passion

An indigo force
that wells up in the soul
unbridled
at times
repressed

Passion's favorite playground
is to find another
with the same indigo hue

For one passion
alone
is like a tree
falling
in an empty forest

It makes no sound

--Karen Geiger



Angela

I have a friend who seeks entry to the underground
to which I belong
today she learned to understand
tomorrow, acceptance
soon her eyes will grow accustomed to the darkness
though she does not know
she has always been one of us
her eyes know the twilight
of living apart from
not a part of ,
we await
happy to welcome her
we have always loved her

--Juan Antonio Helm (Zonker)

Christy

when I die,
I might see God, Sid Vicious, and Buddha
jamming

but right now I 'd rather see you
laying in bed with me
your wicked smile
red, red lipstick staining my sheets

and my mind

--Juan Antonio Helm (Zonker)



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God and Country



--Walter Gomeró

