



Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Fellows
1999

Writing on the Wall

by

Members of the
Connecticut Writing Project
1999 Summer Institute

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The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of the University of Connecticut Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 166 sites in this country and abroad.

In the project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. During subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further programs, please write or call the director:

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Shaving Herman

Steven J. Albrecht

My grandfather, plagued by Parkinson's Disease, could not shave during the last years of his life. A razor in his trembling hands threatened to remove more than stubble, and after a half-hour before a mirror, he would emerge from the bathroom bloodied. He had always been proud of his appearance, but fearing the blade, he reluctantly resigned himself to whiskers when he reached ninety. That was when I, along with my sister and brother, began to shave Grandpa.

To me he had always been a mysterious old man, whom I still saw with the frightened awe he inspired when I was a child. He spoke with a thick German accent, rolling guttural Rs deep in his throat. After the Alzheimer's struck, he often forgot words. He would bark out cryptic orders for my grandmother to decipher: "Hey, Liz," he would shout as Misty, a Yorkshire Terrier, scratched at the door, "the cow wants to go out." "Hey, Liz, put some of that red stuff on my bread."

Although he died weak, forgetful, confused, and dottering, he left behind a legacy of stories, which he told while we shaved him. Stripping back the fiction to reveal the truth locked within his ruined mind and body, however, is difficult. For example, he described walking to Italy to see Mussolini hanged, but when the fascist dictator was shot, my grandfather lived in Waterbury.

The stories he told most vividly took place during his childhood in Stetin, Germany. There, the snow fell in drifts so deep that he and his sister, Hertha, could only escape the wintery prison of their house by jumping from second-floor windows. Fish and eels swam so plentifully in the Oder River that to catch them all he needed to do was scoop them up in a bucket. In my grandfather's stories, this childhood wonderland ended with World War I. "The English people," he would say, "they dropped a bomb on my house and killed everyone inside." And here he would pause and grin, "except for me." At this point, my grandmother would call out "Oh, Herman, shut up! Your mother died of breast cancer." Hertha, furthermore, was now an old woman still living in Berlin.

He could recall the rampant inflation that took place during the Weimar Republic. "There were millions, and billions, and trillions," he would explain. "It cost so much to buy bread; the people had to put all their money in a wheel barrow just to carry it." And the Kiev Naval Mutiny left an impression on him, even if he couldn't remember who, where, or when. "All the soldiers, they killed the people in charge, and then they got rid of the Kaiser." As he told it, the execution of one of his friends by S. S. officers led him to leave his homeland in 1929 to sail the world. Hitler's S. S., however, did not yet exist.

After walking across Germany, my grandfather found work on a merchant marine ship on which he shoveled coal into the furnace that powered it. It must have been backbreaking work, but it did not break him. When, in 1931, "the boat" docked in New York my grandfather and a friend decided to see the city. They also decided not to return to the ship and, thus, entered the U. S. illegally. At this time, he also chose Herman as his new name, and his given name, Gerhardt, became just one more buried artifact of his abandoned European past.

He often described how difficult it was to shave on the boat. As the ship listed from side to side, he would stand before a small mirror and bravely take the sharp edge of a straight razor to his face, chin, and neck. In spite of the ship's rolling, he never cut himself, never slipped, never scratched. A perfect shave every time.

* * *

When grandfather's hands began to shake, he attempted to use the electric shaver I gave him for Christmas one year. He gave up when his hands became too unsteady for the Braun. When my grandmother first asked me to help remove his beard, I could not say no, although I wanted to. With reluctance, even disgust, I approached the old fool for whom I had had little patience. The first time I touched his face, I felt a shock rush up my arm as I discovered that his rough-looking, wrinkled skin was soft and warm. Soon, shaving time became a ritual.

Each time I came through the porch door for a visit, my grandfather would sing out "Hey Liz, George Bush is here," unable to recall my name. As he lay back in his recliner, waiting for me to get a towel, wash his face, and begin shaving, he would start to tell his stories. "Do you know I worked on a boat?" "Do you know, the English people, they dropped a bomb on my house?"

Shaving my grandfather helped to demystify the man I had seen as frightening and foreign. As his Alzheimer's progressed, his stories became increasingly muddled, and the facts of his life sank deeper and deeper into the sea of his past. As the man beneath the facade became lost to me, I learned to chart the only thing of which I could be certain, not a record of his journeys, but the familiar contours of his face.

A Memorial

Jason Courtmanche

I lingered a moment before getting into the limo. It had been a warm April, and the cherry blossoms were full and white. Their scent was heady and intoxicatingly sweet. The old green in the Italian neighborhood was the most beautiful part of New Haven this time of year. The sky was so high, its blueness looked thin. There was no humidity. The chauffeur and everyone else waited for me as I lingered to breathe in the cherry blossom smell and stay a moment with the sky. The mechanical noise which indicated the keys were in the ignition and a door—mine—was open tugged at my attention. I did not want to proceed from that perfectly bittersweet moment, but I slid into my seat. My grandfather rested peacefully in the box behind me.

We drove out of Wooster Square and onto State Street. We turned left and crossed Orange, where the old station house had been. The limo turned silently and black onto Dixwell, just above York Square. We drove through the blight of a once-majestic neighborhood till we reached the town line, turned, and headed past church and supermarket toward Beaverdale Memorial Cemetery. Though I had been past this patch of greenness and masonry countless times in the last twenty years, I had not entered this place since the man who now lay prone behind me was still tall, strong, and almost frighteningly awesome to the boy I was then.

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"There's nobody left but me now who remembers," said my grandfather. He pulled the stump of his unlit cigar from between his teeth with the fingers of his left hand.

"Betty's too old. She forgets," he said in reference to his older sister. His left hand held the cigar out the open window while he talked. His right hand nonchalantly rested upon the steering wheel of his Cadillac. I liked riding on the high seats of the Caddy. I liked the smell of the cigar and his old clothes. He pulled the brim of his cap down upon the brow above his eyes when the low sun leaped through the car window as he turned into Beaverdale.

"You know, my mother had another child," he said to me without turning. I knew that. "She died only a couple days old." He paused. "She was the first one buried in this plot." I nodded silently without turning.

He gracefully pulled the long, blue car alongside a beech tree near a break in the stones from where we'd walk the short distance to his parents' grave. He got out without talking, leaving the windows down and the keys in the ignition. The ding-dong of the car reminding him of the left-behind keys sang briefly. He shut the door and opened the back. He took out a small arrangement of mixed flowers and walked around to my side of the car. I fell in step beside him as we walked to the stone.

It was wide and grey. His surname stood alone on its face. Two small, flat stones crept from the grass. His mother's and father's names were etched there. His infant sister had no stone. I knew that she lay between her parents. Dying flowers emerged from the earth behind his mother's name.

My grandfather kneeled difficultly upon the grass. His breath was deep and raspy, sucked in through his teeth, which held his cigar almost menacingly.

"Here, take these." He handed me the old flowers in one inglorious clump. Plastic tubes which had once held water bit onto the stems.

"Bastards should get their own damn flowers," he muttered. Three water tubes protruded

from the grass, flowerless.

"Somebody took 'em," I said. It wasn't a question, so he didn't answer.

He plucked them from the earth and slipped them into his pocket. He then methodically placed the fresh flowers in the grass where the old ones had been. As he arranged them, I watched the trees and the birds and the sun perform their late spring dance. A pained grunt indicated he was rising and drew my attention.

"That's it," he said. "Let's go, Bud." He turned and walked towards his car. I fell in step. He had placed no flowers near the name of the father who had died too young. He never did.

"I'm the only one who takes care of that now," he repeated. "Don't know who'll remember to when I'm gone."

He stopped at his door as I got in, lit his cigar anew, sucked the embers till they glowed red, and got in the car. We drove off in silence. I still held the dead flowers.

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At the cemetery, a blue tarp covered the headstone and obscured partially the family name. The other old men who had served with him and under him when he patrolled New Haven on a cycle and then captained the traffic division, the ones who had come to the funeral home and told stories of his dignity and bravado, of the cocksure way he wore his hat askew and held his hands casually on his hips, did not come to the burial plot. Death was too close for them, and recounted stories and sorrow-tainted laughter in the parlor were as near as they would allow themselves to come.

I heard the echo of their gentle laughter and smelled the lingering scent of the cherry blossoms as I watched the sun set behind the deacon I could not hear. I squinted my eyes into the late afternoon glare and recalled how I had loved the smell of the cigar, and the high seats of the cadillac, and the low sun, and how my grandfather squinted into it menacingly from beneath his cap. And now the earth lay open in front of me where I would watch him slip away.

What's For Supper?

Constance Crawford

A Summer Institute reflection

"Why don't you just write?" Chris demanded more than asked.

"I'm never really sure how to get started," I replied hesitantly.

"Just start writing, something will come to you," he cursed as he went back to his reading. Why is she always complaining? If she'd get down to business instead of wasting time thinking about it, she'd probably get something done. I don't know why I spend so much time worrying about it anyway. She wanted to do it. It's her problem!

Saturday, introductions completed, everyone seated. The chairs were comfortable enough, but I was afraid we'd get around to sharing sooner or later. I'd be exposed!

"Take out your notebooks and we'll do a few idea generating activities to get everyone started. Facts about yourself with one lie thrown in for everyone to guess—just let those words flow!"

What if we have to share? Oh God! I can't even think of ten facts about myself, and I never was good at lying. I wonder if everyone else will put the lie last. Does read-around mean we have to share?

Well, I read that fast enough so no one probably noticed how bad it really was. At least everyone's heard my voice.

"I'm going to give you some words, write down anything that comes to your mind when I say them: Rain, Road, Hand, After, Desk..."

Gee, it's getting easier, at least I can think of word associations.

"Now choose one word from the list and compose a paragraph."

It was easy enough to compose something, but as I reread the paragraph to myself, I'm wondering if I might need counseling, never mind writing skills . . . the road is always dirt? . . . my feet keep moving, but I'm getting nowhere? . . . I can never get over the hill? . . . Oh Lord, I better wait 'til the next one to share.

These people must have been writing for years; they really can write, even the one who said hers was awful!

"You haven't started yet?" Chris screamed from upstairs.

"Well, I'm just about to start, I've got a few ideas; it's just that everyone writes these stories, and I have no idea how to develop anything—no plan."

"Well, I'm hungry, what's for supper?"

"Oh my God, what time is it? Where are the kids?" I panicked.

"Al's gone to Mel's and Alex is upstairs. Do we have anything in the fridge?"

"There's hot dogs and I think there's stuff for salad."

"I think I'll just go out for grinders. Do you want anything?" He asked impatiently.

"No, I've got to finish this. I'll find something later."

June 28, the first full day . . . heat, humidity, teamwork, reflections, and finally pizza . . .

"Don't go too far; it's back for more writing tonight." (and probably sharing) I'm sure they've forgotten the sound of my voice by now, and I'll have to share something tonight for sure. Oh good, there's a safety rule.

"OK, get an object from the blanket that reminds you of something and write anything that comes to mind. Just keep writing."

Wow, look at those things . . . nothing . . . There must be at least fifty things to choose from down there . . . nothing . . . Have I lost my mind? I have no memory of anything from my past? Oh, there's one of those old razor blades. I can write about my hairy legs in eighth grade and my mother never letting me shave them. All my friends shaved! "You'll get cut, and the hairs will grow back twice as thick." I'll never forget going to graduation with knee socks. Yeah, it's all coming back to me, this is great!

You made a doll with your grandmother so there would be an object to hold all your memories of her? Jeez, their stories make me cry! Razor blades for shaving legs? I'm going to have to pass on sharing one more time.

Oh good, a picture reflection piece, at least I can think of a picture. I remember looking at that senior picture of Ali on the bureau this morning. I feel a little more confident. I can even remember what she was wearing.

You haven't spoken to your son in how long? A broken marriage, there's nothing but a T-shirt to hold it together? There's a few more people crying now. A picture, yellowed from wear? You haven't told him yet how much you care? How can these people write like this?

Forget it, I can't read mine. Oh no, Amy's sharing and she's the only one other than myself who hasn't shared yet! I'm sure they've forgotten the sound of my voice by now—will this day ever end?

"Are you ever coming to bed?" Chris yelled from somewhere.

"I'll be right there." I answered quickly, "Can you bring the basket of clothes upstairs? Alex and Ali make your lunch for tomorrow, I've got to finish this."

Response groups 'til 3:30, I'll have to share now. Well, here goes, my turn. I guess I'll share the picture reflection. They're not laughing? Good thing I only gave them numbers 4, 5 and 6 for their responses. I hope I got down all they had to say, I really would like to work on the piece.

"Why do these clothes smell like this? Have they been in the washing machine for days?" Chris Jr. cursed from the cellar.

"I need a uniform for tonight's game, is it clean?" Alex asked as he came in to breakfast.

"Did you slide last night?" I asked.

"No." he answered.

"Then it's okay for tonight's game," I answered hesitantly.

"Haven't you finished that paper yet?" Chris asked.

"No, but I think I've thought of a way to begin."

"Why don't you just write?" Chris demanded more than asked.

"I'm never really sure how to get started . . ."

"Just start writing, something will come to you . . ."

Ceremony

Tami Devine

The bridesmaid stands sweating, in line, under the emerald canopy in front of the crisp, white, steepled chapel. Her usually effortless hair is sprayed perfectly; in fact, it is no longer hair at all but an intricately carved, painted stone sculpture. Her brushed mulberry dress plunges much lower than her physique tolerates, and she tugs at the back to raise the front to hide her too white, too flat chest. She supposes her absence of cleavage will be overlooked in light of the generous over-compensation of the other three plastic mannequins assembled in formation behind her.

It doesn't matter anyway. Her dress could be transparent. Or pulled up around her waist. Hers is not the dress the perfumed and breathless audience, stacked in their gleaming pews, will strain to take in.

The Bride, in china white, beckoning, smooth vanilla, luxurious lace layered upon lace, will float—ethereal—between the bow-decked rows of spectators. The light of every window will hungrily suck on that fine, rare delicacy and will, without a thought, sweep away the muted plum shadows like warm, canned cranberry sauce at the Thanksgiving table.

On cue, the bridesmaid proceeds down someone else's aisle, arm-in-arm with a faceless tuxedoed figurine. She smiles the regulation, "I am an extension of the bouquet" smile, but no one sees her performance. All the eyes in the hollow room look through or slip past her toward something else. Step—pause—feet together. Step—pause—feet together. Step—pause—feet together.

The music in the air is an echoed afterthought. A few disjointed notes tinkle like wind chimes on a neighbor's porch. A prelude. A formality. No one hears a note. She reaches her position at the front and takes her place with the others—pinks on the left, black and whites to the right. Hushed whispers. Rustling fabric. Wooden doors at the mouth of the chapel yawn open. One majestic organ note fills the room and all of them. Paralysis.

The top of her scalp tingles furiously as she eyes the shining opacity of the girl, her friend, who is savoring her long-awaited and glorious voyage down the coveted red carpet. This one has been chosen, she thinks, with her back teeth clamped firmly together. Selected. Re-deemed. The bridesmaid feels a kick in her gut, a rushing realization. She has lost a race. She has been hustled. She has worked so hard—harder than everyone else. She has the life everyone works toward, complete with job, success, security, confidence, friends, well-trained dog, "love," but most importantly, she has a plan. Her plan, however, requires that dress. She can't do that part herself.

The bridge of her nose begins to sting. Hot liquid pain simmers under her eyelids, pushing between her thick, mascara caked lashes. She wonders what the hell is wrong with her. It's a wedding, for Christ's sake. They happen every day. Not like this they don't. Not to your best friend.

She stands defeated, thinking of loose ends. She'd had love but never commitment. She'd loved like an ambitious girl scout trying to make a campfire with a couple of wet twigs. She'd cast her line out, as hard as she could, into that rank and buggy lake, and stared unfalteringly at that damn bobber. Did it move? Oh, I think I got one. Steady again. Wait. Reel it quickly back in. Her dad's words, "You just need to be patient, honey."

But she deserved to be picked. She had been playing by all the established rules. By now she should have the prize. The Bride gracefully hands her the bouquet so she can be free to receive her golden, ringed approval. The Bride's passing glance is one of deep pity, as if to say,

"you'll accomplish this some day. It must be difficult for you. Hang in there."

This grandiose silk and polyester flower concoction is a joke. This is all a festival of superficiality and puppetry. The bridesmaid feels her ego scoff. She has her integrity; she has herself. Her list of credits and accolades is far more notable than any \$20,000 tribute to hypocrisy could ever be, she screams to herself. She wipes away the black trails of eyeliner from her pink, dusted cheeks and takes a deep, reconciled breath.

As the Bride glides back down the aisle, the bridesmaid's eyes bounce instinctively from the hazy white puffed veil, to the sweeping meringue train and back again, and again. Deep within her ribcage, she feels the triumphant gongs of the brass bells from somewhere high above. She watches the crowd move with the folds of the silk, white gown. She falls back in step. Step—pause—feet together. Step—pause—feet together. Step—pause—feet together . . .

Her eyes reflexively, guiltily, scan the black and white, vague swarm for a silhouette of a face—any face—turned in her direction.

Caring for Roses During the Fall Season

Dave Dunn

As I survey my rose garden from my kitchen window during this late July day, I am reminded how quickly the rose-growing season has passed. The full, rich blooms of June are long gone, and the exciting rose shows have become memories. Though many of my bushes are still producing sporadic flowers, most look exhausted from the heat, insects, and disease. Despite my best efforts, it was difficult to kill off the Japanese beetle population. It seemed like the entire neighborhood's contribution of beetles were in my garden. I sprayed—sometimes twice a week—but they kept coming. Also, the high humidity contributed to heavy black spot on some of my best plants. In brief, it was a bittersweet season.

It is not too early to start thinking about winter protection. The intense heat of July and August will soon be replaced by cool weather. September can yield some of the best flowers of the season, but it is wise to plan now for the winter, and without delay. New England has been spared intensely cold weather and snow for at least three years, but a bitterly cold winter is long overdue. As a result, I intend to do things a little differently.

I begin winter protection in August by withholding granular fertilization after the 10th. I continue to provide the plants with fish meal and/or seaweed meal (mixed with water) until about the third week. Generally, the plants do not need fertilizer rich in nitrogen after this time, because their growth slows considerably, due to decreasing sunlight and cooler temperatures. Fertilizing with a high nitrogen base increases the possibility of late-season growth and winter damage. The plants simply do not have the opportunity to harden before the frosts arrive in early October.

If you plan to enter rose shows in September, continue to prune the bushes of wilted blooms; otherwise, refrain from pruning. This practice allows the bushes to gradually enter dormancy. Some rosarians also give each bush a gallon of phosphate to help with the "hardening" process.

September is an excellent time to closely examine the condition of your plants. Healthy roses will survive winter cold much better than weak, diseased ones. If the plant is weak, you may want to shovel prune it now, instead of wasting the effort saving it.

In October, collect as many fallen leaves as possible. Leaves are an excellent source of compost, and they can be used to make compost or winter protect. Generally, I would not substitute them for soil as a primary source for protection, but they can be used to cover entire plants, especially climbers, after soil has been mounded over the plant's bud union.

Most rosarians officially begin the hilling process in November, during the Thanksgiving weekend, but after last year's cold sneak-attack, I will begin hilling mostly old roses that are naturally cold-hardy. I do not cover them at all. They evolve into a deep dormancy that can withstand bitterly cold temperatures down to -20 to -30 degrees (Gallicas, Damasks, Mosses, Centifolias, Rugosas, and Albas). However, I do make an effort to remove leaves from the bushes. You do not want diseases to be carried over into the next season. I rake and discard these leaves. Next, I remove the numerous climbers that I have on trellises and rake the collected leaves of October over them. Most are hardy and need no more protection, but two "Sombreuil" plants will be hilled up to twelve inches at their base before I rake leaves on them.

My Bourbon plants suffered a great deal of winter kill, and each will be hilled with soil and buried with leaves this year. I will use the same procedure with other tender plants, especially "Mermaid."

I protect my Hybrid Teas and David Austin shrubs differently. Some rosarians like to tie

the rosebushes in place to prevent the plants from damaging winds, which is an excellent procedure, but I prune mine to about a foot above the ground and mound soil to cover the entire plant. I then use a rose cone to fit over the mound (if possible). I place a heavy stone over the tops of the cones to prevent them from blowing off. (Do you know what it is like to chase a rose cone down the street? It is bad enough that some of my neighbors think I am growing something illegal under the cones.) I then rake the remainder of the fallen leaves around the cones to further anchor the cones in place and to keep the ground cold. Roses can easily break dormancy during a winter thaw, only to be killed by sudden temperature freezes.

These procedures entail much work, but the process can be done over a period of time in November. If you enjoy roses as much as I do, you will do whatever is necessary to protect them from New England winters.

Untitled

Joel Greene

Strangers on a block of wood,
Teachers think "So far, so good."

Writing, writing, Monday night
We sneak off for just "a bite."
Laugh and talk until it's one,
Chow on Cheez Jax, that was fun.

Reading, reading, must stay up
Oh no! An empty coffee cup!
Run off to our workshop lab
Tylenol I need to grab.

Sleeping, sleeping, til it's eight,
I sure as heck do not feel great.
In the car and on the road
Brain on mental overload.

Sweating, sweating, heat's too much
That AC does really suck.
Weeks go by in such a blur
Who is him and who is her?

Wond'ring, wond'ring, can it be
Some theorists are not for me.
With Berlin and then Knoblauch
I want to scream out "What the fauch! !!"

Printing, printing, there's our thoughts
More stick paper must be bought.
Ling'ring questions on the walls
That Yagelski's got some balls!

Working, working, til it's lunch
Off to eat now, one big bunch.
Back to work and if we fail
Checks will not be in the mail.

Searching, searching, for a book
Third floor north is where we look.
Homer's at the library
Microfiche is not for me.

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Searching, searching, for a book
Third floor north is where we look.
Homer's at the library
Microfiche is not for me.

Talking, talking, my workshop
Will this madness never stop?
Male and female gender roles,
From the mouth of our pal, Joel.

Filming, Filming, every one
Don't stop now, we're almost done.
Uh oh! Stand with mouth agape
I forgot the goddamn tape.

Thinking, Thinking, midnight's come.
That's the end of this poem.

From that little block of wood
Friendships made, so far . . . so good.

I Remember the Smell of the Campfire and the Cry of the Sea Gulls

Cathy Holdridge

We were all sitting around the roaring campfire. Bill added another piece of wood, and the burning embers exploded. We reared back in our chairs afraid to get hit by sparks. The little kids were lined up by the picnic table to get marshmallows for their new-found sticks. They had scurried around the campsite searching for just the right type of stick for roasting marshmallows. The little explorers had hunted behind the tent and along the brook in search of that perfect roasting utensil that wasn't too short or wasn't still part of a tree. After the kids found their perfect sticks, adults had to whittle the ends to make sharp points. The children then settled themselves around the fire and began the ritual of roasting the marshmallows. Some of the marshmallows quickly caught fire because they were put in the flame. Another fluffy, white treat turned golden brown as the youngster gently rotated the stick in his grubby little hands. "Who wants this one?" yelled one of the little boys.

"Daddy, you like yours all black, right?" yelled another marshmallow roaster.

Still another shouted, "This one's for Mommy!"

As the kids roasted their marshmallows, the smoke, like a soft cloud, drifted toward where I was sitting. It filled my nostrils, covered my hair and clothes, and transferred me back to a similar scene years ago on Sandy Point. There were about six kids sitting on the sand in front of a fire. Three old army tents were set up away from the fire. The strong odor of seaweed permeated near the tents. It was to be used for bedding underneath the sleeping bags. The group of children had to scrounge around for their sticks, and so these would be saved for another night's treat. Along with roasting marshmallows, this group was also telling scary ghost stories. Sea gulls were nesting in the high grass. We awakened each morning to the cries of the sea gulls, and we were lulled to sleep at night by the fog horn blating like a lamb in the distance.

Every year Dad took us camping on Sandy Point off the coast of Stonington and Watch Hill located in Little Narragansett Bay. It's about a three mile stretch of beach, and for a child it was paradise. For my father, it was also paradise. He could relive his childhood and give his children his undivided attention and the memorable experience he had had as a youth growing up in Stonington. We'd pack our boat with the essentials for two weeks of camping, and off we'd go. The agenda included playing in the water all day and sometimes finding the quahogs we had for dinner that night. The starving children ate peanut butter and crackers and thought it was caviar. Dad would be the cook, and we had some great meals. Clam chowder and steamers were a staple, but then there was always Franco American spaghetti with hamburger thrown in for protein. Dad was well known for his rice pudding. I especially remember clean-up. Those in charge of dishes would wash them in the sand by the shore. Looking back, I don't know why we never got sick, but it sure was fun washing dishes in the sand. One didn't need Brillo!

Many years have passed since we've camped on Sandy Point. Camping isn't allowed any longer. A land preservation group owns it now, and people have to pay a fee to use the beach for the day. Those children who use to sit by the campfire and wash dishes in the sand are all adults now.

The last time I visited Sandy Point was eight years ago on a brisk fall afternoon, as my sisters, my brother, and I sprinkled some of my father's ashes on the shoreline. The ashes drifted into the water and disappeared, but they are forever a part of the water and our hearts. The smoke of a campfire, floating over me like a blanket of comfort, brought me back to my youth, and I

remembered the sea gulls crying and the lap of the waves on the shore.

Sensibilities

Andrea Namnour-Allen

It's still a warm, tranquil day in late October. It's a great day for a favorite trip to Comstock Ferre Garden Center in Wethersfield, Connecticut. The garden center has a long standing history in that corner of the town, and it is also a horticultural delight.

Old Wethersfield, with stately homes named after men of substance (Miles Beecher, 1765, Standish McCormick, 1678), are masterpieces of 17th- and 18th-century colonial structures. It's a place rooted in traditions and venerable customs. Clearly, a way of life is perpetuated.

In this established town the old and the new are designed into a cornucopia of plenty and privilege. And there are two seasons when its environments are particularly engaging: winter at Christmas time, and now, the season of gathering, of harvest. The images of pudgy cranberries, jolly, fat pumpkins, oddly shaped gourds, decorative Indian corn, dried flowers and herbs always thrill me with anticipation. I wanted to have my mother-in-law along to enjoy the day with me.

Annie Allen, whom I love very much, is a grand lady in the most regal sense. Elegant in appearance, gracious in demeanor, she is private, proud and resilient. (One of the dividends of my marriage to her son has been the witnessing of an old truism: If the son is good to his mother, he will be good to his wife.)

"Mom, while we're out shopping, let's stop by Comestock and see what the annual harvest fair has to offer. We can get the chrysanthemums for the front porch and order the Thanksgiving centerpiece for the dining room table."

"Fine, we can get the flowers, but we'll order the arrangement at another place. I'm not interested in staying too long. Didn't you and Gregg have an unpleasant experience in Wethersfield?"

"You're probably right, but I've got to get some bayberry candles."

Under the market canopy, I spotted the candles on one of the many craft tables. As we headed down the aisle, my vision spied a gaudily displayed row of cloth dolls. Pickaninnies in long muslin dresses, red and white gingham aprons and bandannas wrapped around their heads, were resting near statues of black-faced jockeys holding lamps.

The poppets had plump torsos, squat legs and broadly sewn on smiles. The sight and sale of these items were offensive, and I was in a vocal snit.

My mother-in-law's face, solemn and stern, the same expression that I remember when we visited—she reluctantly—the Carter Plantation in Williamsburg Virginia, silently put her dark, honey-hued arm through mine and escorted me out of this place.

As we were leaving I saw a beautiful flaxen-haired girl tug on her mother's arm and demand a souvenir of the ebony-faced doll.

The air began to have a bite to it, the chill of November was beginning to settle in.

Let Go

David Polochanin

The swinging gate of a chain-link fence still leads to the place I once feared most.

Bare feet pitter-pattered on hot cement as children cannon-balled into the swimming pool at Rockwell Park in Bristol, where tall maples and oaks shaded the grounds. Those tall trees camouflaged the terror I faced every Saturday over two summers.

This was where my dad gave me swimming lessons.

I was more than a reluctant learner. I hated the water and everything associated with swimming. I thought I would drown. I was afraid. I remember my dad saying to me, "You can do this, Dave."

And I remember saying to myself and to him, my coach, that I couldn't.

Chest-high water, or the unthinkable, water over my head, made me feel as if I was not in control, powerless, at the mercy of a sparkling natural resource.

Still, I would get in the pool. Some days, though, I wouldn't do anything but stand there.

My dad was next to me, all the time, in the pool. He modeled for me what it was like to swim, gently putting his hands forward, allowing his body to float forward to the edge of the pool. He would emerge from the surface, spitting water out of his mouth, wiping his eyes and hair.

He encouraged me to float forward, but I resisted. It was difficult for me just to get my head wet. After much prodding from my dad, I would concede, hold my nose and go under, squatting down in the 3-foot deep end for only seconds before coming back up.

Chlorine tablets that the lifeguards poured into the filter permeated the air, emitting a strong odor that stained my skin for hours after being in the pool. Kids screamed all around me. Some jumped over me. All of them knew how to swim. They had no fear.

I was usually the only one there learning how to swim, and that made me feel inferior. The lifeguards would look at me and recognize me as the kid who couldn't swim from the week before.

This fear swirled in my mind, creating anticipation, and ultimately giving me a poor attitude. There were times, I recall, when my feet wouldn't move. I wouldn't let them. I didn't want to drown. I didn't want to take my feet off the hard, secure bottom of the pool.

"C'mon, Dave," my dad would say, as if it was so easy. Well, it wasn't easy. I hated coming here. I didn't see the point of learning how to swim. I didn't care. It wasn't going to make me a better person.

But I was 12 years old, far too old to not know how to swim, and eventually peer pressure set in. I turned down pool parties and other invitations to swim in an in-ground pool on hot summer days.

After many lessons and some maturing, I reached the point where I no longer became afraid of swimming. I was just waiting for the proper moment to do it. I had learned all the basics but I remained hesitant. I held back, as if waiting for some magical moment to happen.

I had to make this happen. My dad couldn't swim for me.

I had to let go of the edge of the pool. I had to kick off, and swim without my dad's hands cradling my stomach. I felt ready but something was holding me back.

It was during a 1985 family vacation in Niagara Falls, Ontario that I faced my fear and overcame it. Nonchalantly, I stepped on the diving board and jumped up and down. It didn't bother me. I mustered up the courage that remained unseen in my soul and jumped in the 10-foot deep end, my feet touching the bottom. I returned to the surface, kicking my legs to stay afloat,

spit water out of my mouth, and wiped water from my face. I did it.

I climbed the pool ladder, got out, and jumped in again. Finally, I beat this fear. I won.

I never looked forward to those summer days in which my dad would take me swimming, but now I thank him for it. For if he hadn't, I wouldn't have the courage, the inner strength, or the willingness to take risks that I have today.

Untitled

Kim Richard

It was Saturday night, and as usual, her husband was working. Thank God for UCONN basketball. She was watching the game in her living room. It was more fun watching Coach Calhoun explode during the game on the big screen T. V. At half time, she decided to hit the hay. Jim wouldn't be home for hours, and there was no use waiting up for him. She let the dog out one last time, carefully checked all of the locks and windows, walked upstairs to brush her teeth, and washed her face before getting into bed. The dog jumped up and immediately ran under the covers to cuddle in for the night. She dozed off and on, trying hard to stay awake for the last half of the game, even though UCONN was up by 24 points.

She hated to stay by herself. SO many nights, while Jim was working, she would sit at home, watching rented movies. Most couples went out on weekends, enjoying their time together. Since she had known him, Jim had been a mobile disc jockey, providing fun and entertainment for brides and grooms. She was a weekend widow.

CRASH! A broken window? She woke up—was she dreaming or did she hear glass breaking downstairs? She saw a big lump under the covers and thought to herself, "must have been dreaming—the dog didn't hear anything." She glanced at the clock. The reddish hue of 10:30 told her the exact time. The game was well over—UCONN must have won.

She heard footsteps walking on the floor downstairs. Now she wasn't dreaming, and Mooshu awoke. She heard it, too, and struggled to get out from underneath the covers. It must be Jim—but it's too early. He was working until 12:00, and even though he was working locally this evening, he still wouldn't be home until at least 12:30 "He must have gotten out early," she thought to herself. "He'll come upstairs when he's done."

She rolled over and reached for the remote control. 10:35—Twenty-five more minutes and a rerun of *Friends* would be coming on. She channel surfed, first to VH1 where another episode of *Pop Up Video* was on. She loved that show. It had always interested her to read and hear about the profiles of celebrities. Flip! E! Entertainment. Another boring episode of *Mysteries and Scandals*. 10:45—She flipped the channel back to channel 4 where she would patiently wait for *Friends* to come on. She heard footsteps walking; the stairs began to creak. "Jim. Is that you?"

Mooshu was aroused now by the sound that she had heard downstairs. Her tail was wagging a mile a minute, hoping that her dad would be home so that everyone could turn in for a good night of sleeping. I guess I should get up and take her out anyway, she thought to herself. Fifteen more minutes until *Friends* started—she had time. She put on her robe and walked to her bedroom door. "Come on, Mooshu. Let's go downstairs and go outside."

She crossed the threshold of her bedroom door. She was immediately stunned by a hand grabbing her arm, another covering her mouth. Her eyes widened at the surprise attack, and she immediately tried to force the stranger's hand away from her mouth. Before she had a chance to scream, a knife was at her throat. The intruder was behind her. He pulled her body into his chest and dragged her back into her bedroom. Her feet scraped against the carpet, giving her rug burns on her heels. She struggled to break free, but the grip was too powerful. Who was this person?

The stranger threw her on the bed and immediately got on top of her. He pinned her hands down with both hands and used his legs to pin down her legs. As she looked up, the light from the T. V. confirmed a man's face. He was dressed in black except his face, which had a white, rugged look. His eyes could have glowed in the dark, they were so blue. His hair was dark and clean cut, and he had a husky build.

Was this really happening? What do I do? Where is the dog? These are the questions that were running through her mind. Whimpering, she struggled to break free of the man's tight grip.

"If ya know what's good for ya, you'll shut the fuck up," he hissed not into her ear but directly in front of her face. She could smell a faint odor of cheap cologne, along with whiskey and cigarette smoke. He spread her legs with his legs and reached down between her thighs. Her eyes widened, and she whimpered. Oh God—please—don't. Pleas ran through her mind but couldn't find their way to her lips. Nothing would come out. Did her face look frightened? She wondered. Was the man going to hurt her? Please take anything you want, she wanted to tell him, just leave my dog and me alone.

Mooshu was at the foot of the bed—not barking, just wagging her tail. So much for a watchdog. She walked up the bed and tried to get his attention by snuggling up to him. She was looking for a treat. Every visitor gave her a treat; why would this one be any different? She knew her dog well and could see the thoughts running through her mind. He was taken aback by the dog's affection for him. He immediately took one hand and shoved the dog away so hard she fell off the bed. In that split second, she used her free hand to scratch his face. She could feel her nails digging into his skin, his flesh scraping underneath her fingernails. Her quickness startled him, and he grabbed his face, freeing her from his grip. She swam through the comforter of the king-sized bed, trying to find the edge of the bed. When she reached the edge, her feet scrambled to find the ground. The dog barked, thinking that a game was in play. Her feet finally landed on the ground, and she hustled for the bedroom door. As she ran, it seemed like the door was getting farther and farther away. Just as she reached the door, he came from the side and stood in front of the door. The smirk that said, "I've got you now," was forever embedded in her mind. She stopped short, looked around the room for another option, but couldn't think quick enough. He grabbed her, and together they struggled for power. As they turned, she couldn't help but notice how big her bedroom was—it seemed so much bigger in the dark.

The light from the T. V. was flickering like a strobe light as the commercials were constantly changing. Their shadows danced on the wall. As they struggled, they hit her nightstand, and the wedding photo of her and Jim crashed to the ground, breaking into a hundred pieces. He lost his balance as he made contact with the nightstand, and again, she was free. She fell to the ground and crawled towards the door. Broken glass crunched into her knees. She winced in pain. The dog continued to bark. As she raced for the bedroom door, he grabbed her ankles and slashed at her Achilles' tendon with his knife. A rush of pain ran through her body. She screamed in agony. He pulled her closer towards him, as if he were pulling a rope in a game of tug-of-war. Her limp body reached him, and he immediately grabbed a hold of her and slit her nightgown across the stomach. She could feel the blood oozing down her belly. The sight of her blood made her queasy, and the room began to spin around as the opening song for *Friends* began.

"Oh no, no one told you life was gonna be this way. Your job's a joke, you're broke, your love life's D. O. A."

She tried hard to regain her composure. Think! Her adrenaline began to pump, and her mind was yelling at her to pull herself together and get out of the house. She screamed louder, hoping for a neighbor to hear her. Reasoning began to sink in. Why bother screaming? Your house is in the middle of the woods, and your nearest neighbor is two miles down the road.

She suddenly found herself in a standing position. He was standing behind her and had her hands clasped together with his. He was whispering into her ear. She refused to listen, blocked his words out of her head, and tried desperately to focus on how the hell to get out.

The dog, thinking that this was a game, jumped up on the stranger, again, freeing her from his tight grip. She quickly turned, kneed him in the groin, and stumbled out of the room. The stranger doubled over in pain, giving her and Mooshu a chance to get out of the bedroom. She staggered down the stairs, with Mooshu following close behind. She mapped out her home in her mind. Such a big house—where was the quickest exit?

As she approached the bottom of the stairs, she turned left, only to see another stranger, dressed in black.

A Driving Life

Kim Robinson

The new-car smell was intoxicating. The leather-encased gear shift, emblazoned with the words Park, Neutral and Drive, indicated an emerging life of convenience and ease. Four-wheel drive would safely shuttle me and my new daughter through the treacherous roads of suburban life. The cruise control and CD player seemed to be glowing, as if illuminated by the halos of the angels I swore were singing behind them.

"Something's not right . . . It's too nice . . . I'm not here yet." The words lingered in my mind even as I drove the new car off the lot. But this was not my first new car, nor would it be my last. Actually, my first new car remained at the dealership, somehow reminding me of a disregarded pet that had been driven far away from home and hideously deposited on some lonesome stretch. No strong emotional ties had bound me to the car before that moment — before I considered what my life had been like before and after I bought that first new car, the hairpin curves it had cornered along the way, and before I considered the person I had become: a person *with electric seat warmers*, for crying out loud.

That first new car brought me to Connecticut, this place I sometimes poke my head outside of, wondering where everybody went. I bought it in 1989, when my life began to take a series of strange and scary turns, one of which landed me here. Before that first new car I had only driven old beaters.

My first foray into car ownership was a burnt-orange Sunbird that I got for only eight hundred dollars because it had major body damage in the rear. I later sold it for twenty-five hundred dollars after an elderly man graciously rear-ended me, rearranging the already mangled end. With my new funds I managed to squeeze in a few more college credits and a down payment on a better used car. This one I bought at one of those lots that has a trailer and fifteen or twenty used cars in various states of previous ownership, prices shoe-polished on the windshields, and some guy named Nick sitting in a makeshift office, ready to pounce. They had just the right finance program for me: no credit-check, and a bi-weekly payment of eighty dollars. At the time this seemed perfectly reasonable, as I was waiting tables and easily making eighty dollars in one night's work. I would like to be able to describe the car in more detail, but the sad truth is that I only had it for a few months and my memory of it is shaky. I remember it was blue. And mostly I remember what it looked like when I went to see it the day after it was totaled.

"It's a wonder you survived," was all the dealer could tell me. I'm not sure why we had it towed to the dealership; this was during the days when my father was bailing me out of whatever mess I had made at the moment, and he knew the dealer. I had no collision insurance (the accident was termed "no-fault") and still owed two thousand dollars on the car. But my father and his used-car friend worked out a tidy plan: they would give me another car worth much less, and add the price to my existing payment plan. So I left the dealership that day with a four hundred dollar 1974 Buick Century and a twenty-four hundred dollar contract. (This event would actually foreshadow my later years, when the discovery of credit cards would cause me to pay way more than I should for just about everything.)

But the Buick was good to me, and served me well for four strong years. We called her "The Guac," in reference to the avocado shade and rusty patches which combined to resemble a nice batch of fresh guacamole. (The habit of naming our cars surfaced when a friend's car suddenly lost control of all its functions on the right side and was sufficiently dubbed "Ellen Corby.")

Back then, I was fairly easy to please, requiring only an adequate stereo and ample heat, both of which were standard options in The Guac. Despite the brutal Texas summers, air-conditioning was not a huge priority for me. Besides, I had devised a cooling system of my own which I was quite proud of: blowing into a large cup of ice water. I feel sure I endangered many lives in my headspinning state, as the cool air bounced off the ice and collected at my face with each sustained respiration. What the car lacked in cool air, however, it made up for in heat. The Guac was famous for its blasting warm air, which blew from beneath the dashboard, targeting both the front-seat passenger's left shin and my right one. One of my friends still claims he sustained second-degree burns from that gusting heat, and I have little reason to doubt him. On really cold days, I loved to incubate the interior, sealing the windows tight, creating sauna-like conditions. Once we reached our destination, my friends would stumble out of the car, gasping, welcoming the cool winter wind.

But finally, after four years of faithful duty, The Guac expired. One morning, as I placed the key in the ignition and attempted to turn over the motor, she remained still, as if she had died the night before, in her slumber. I was ill-prepared for another major car search (actually, I was perpetually ill-prepared for just about anything in those days) and had to act fast. It turned out my boss's girlfriend had just bought a new car and wanted to sell her 1979 Volare for a cool five hundred dollars, so I bought it. I loved the Volare, a car that needed no name by virtue of the fact that it had a theme song. But the song ended too soon, as the Volare developed major problems not long after I took ownership.

It was around this time that I began a full-time summer job doing clerical work in an office at, ironically, an automobile finance company. I developed a major crush on one of the managers and we were dating around the time my Volare began to fail. He convinced me to buy a new car. "Why not?" he queried, "I'm sure you make enough money here to afford the payments." To be honest, the paychecks I was receiving were a new concept—as a waitress relying solely on tips, I never accumulated much money at a time, and I usually blew through what I had pretty fast. But these paychecks were substantial, steady, and fun. Combined with my weekend tips, I was making a pretty good living. Why shouldn't I have a nice car? I'm almost twenty-five years old. Who am I kidding with this college thing? I'm nickle-and-diming my way through courses, trying to put together something that resembles a degree plan, waiting tables every night when I could be dressing up for work each day, and joining the rest of the adult world. Oh yeah, and the handsome manager wants to help. There was nothing stopping me.

That first new car was a 1990 Honda Civic hatchback. Cloth interior was the only option I added to the already stripped down model, since the idea of sweaty thighs peeling away from vinyl seats revolted me. It had an adequate stereo and ample heat, and the air-conditioning was a bonus. I did not fall in love with the car, and was only mildly pleased to drive it off the lot. The forms and contracts I had to complete at this dealership were far more ominous and foreboding than the one-page, xeroxed copies I completed at Nick's Used Car Lot. I somehow felt as if I was signing my life away when I bought my first new car, and in a way, I was.

I would not take back my life until years later, after that first new car would take me out of my home, away from my friends and family, into a strange new world of forced independence. I packed up my Honda and drove halfway across the country for a guy, one of the dumbest reasons to do anything, as experience has taught me. But when the relationship didn't work out early on, I made the decision to stay and tough it out. After stumbling through some initial trials, I managed to put my life on track. I returned to school and earned a degree with relative ease. (I soon discovered that actually attending classes was the missing link in my earlier years.) And then suddenly I was getting married, buying a home and having a child, as if I had turned a

corner and unexpectedly began careening wildly into control.

The acquisition of the car with electric seat warmers and four-wheel drive was tucked neatly between marrying and buying a home. I no longer have that car—it was a lease deal, and after two years we needed to review our options. I really didn't care what I'd be driving, as long as it had an adequate stereo (adequate now defined as having a CD player) and of course, ample heat (seats notwithstanding), and since my husband has a penchant for all things enormous in scale, we ended up with a mini-van. I did *not* want a mini-van, which seemed to somehow acknowledge an inevitable course toward soccer-mom status, but since I could not come up with any viable options, my husband prevailed.

I've long since retired the notion of naming cars—a car with a name requires character that can only come with age and experience, neither of which I look for in a car today. When I get on the highway I can push a button and take my foot off the gas, yet remain consistently on course. I don't blast the heat anymore, since there is usually a small child to consider. I make my car payments on-line. And I also no longer have to blow in a cup to keep cool. I like to think I've evolved.

I Will Survive

Amy Schiller

Mom had it all figured out! Her formula for a happy life included several directives: "Money isn't everything. . . . Nice girls don't swear, drink or smoke. . . . Share with your sister and stay friends for life . . . Just as I take care of your grandparents, I expect you to take care of me. . . . When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Needless to say, her endless litany of sermons wore on my nerves.

Every day, Mom and I commuted together thirty minutes to and from Hartford. While Mom taught at Fox Elementary School, I took classes and studied at Trinity College.

My first semester at Trinity was a disaster. In addition to Mom's daily homilies, I was lonely. Primarily a residential college, as a commuting student I was isolated from my peers. All my friends lived on campus. True, Mom generously stayed late so I could use the library. However, I missed the spontaneity of campus life.

Even worse, our five room raised ranch was devoid of physical, personal, and spiritual space. Helping herself to my clothes and records, my 16 year old sister had absolutely no respect for personal property! Paula spewed my records all over her bed. Seeing my cat sprawled across my naked records, digging her claws into the grooves drove me nuts. When I complained to my parents, much to my dismay, I was lectured for being selfish. The night of my first calculus exam, I was expected to give up my room to my visiting grandparents. Relegated to the kitchen table, I pored over the theorems and attempted the computations. As the only phone was in the living room, private conversations were out of the question. In a bustling house, there wasn't a place to be alone.

By October, I yearned for a room on campus. Taking the initiative, I got a second job in Accounts Payable in a department store and arranged for a student loan to finance the move. I was determined to declare my independence.

My first appointment with the Dean of Housing was dismal; no rooms were available. Slumping out of the office, her secretary offered a glimmer of hope. She chimed in, "Students transfer, drop out or decide to go abroad. I'll keep my eyes open for you. Check in with me each week."

"Thanks," I replied. There was still hope.

Each week I'd check in. Each week there was no room available. Then one day in early December, a letter appeared in my mailbox. They had found me a room! The Dean wanted to meet with me at two that afternoon.

Flying high, endless thoughts darted through my mind. "A roommate, late night bull sessions, being "one-of-the-gang," no more daily commutes, my own space, and NO MORE SERMONS!" Who would my roommate be? Did I know her? Was she the same size? We could share clothes, double date, and divulge our deepest secrets.

As I entered the Dean's office, I knew that something was very wrong. Expecting to meet with the Dean alone, I was stunned to see Margot (another freshman) and two Resident Assistants (RAs) sitting in the office. "Margot, are we rooming together?" I asked.

"Let's wait for the Dean," one of the RAs interjected.

The Dean explained, "The good news is that we have a vacant room; the bad news is you will probably want to pass on the offer. Margot and the RAs will fill you in on the situation. Please keep this conversation confidential."

I knew Margot from freshman chemistry. Like me, she was pre-med. Margot had lots of friends and lived in North Campus, a very social dorm.

Margot began, "I can't deal with another semester with my roommate. I've been working with the RAs since October. One of my friend's roommates left school, so I'm moving in with her. If you like, you can have my room."

"Who's your roommate?" I said.

"Cindy Smith, do you know her?"

"Never met her," I said.

"That doesn't surprise me. Cindy is anti-social," remarked Margot.

The RA shared, "Cindy is an only child and is used to getting her own way." Memories of my sister's pilfering and my mother's "you can't always get what you want" sermon loomed in my brain. Determined to live on campus, I asked "Does she steal things or abuse your stuff?"

"No."

"Is she a slob?"

"No."

"Does she drink, smoke or 'sex' you out of the room?"

"Hell no! She's a female geek, a math major," the other RA piped in.

"How bad can she be? She's not a slob or a thief, she's just odd. I'll take it!" I announced.

Everyone wished me luck. They warned me that Cindy knew about the meeting but refused to come. Both RAs told me to see them if I couldn't tame the beast. "So much for a best friend, but at least I'll be on campus," I thought.

Winter break seemed endless. Moving day arrived. Packing all my worldly possessions in Dad's van, we took one load to move in. In 1973, the personal computer was still on the drawing board, and microwaves weren't on the consumer market. The most affluent students owned refrigerators, calculators, or televisions; my two prized possessions were an inexpensive stereo and an electric typewriter.

As the newcomer, I expected Cindy to exercise squatter's rights. Cindy was in the room when my Dad and I brought in the first load. Dressed as a Catholic school girl in a white oxford shirt and blue pleated skirt, she looked mousy. Petite, with dirty blond hair, Cindy looked meek. Cindy's true character quickly overcame the facade of her docile appearance as she glared at me with hate through her wire rimmed glasses.

"Hi Cindy. I'm your roommate Amy, and this is my Dad, Mr. Kravitz," I said as I attempted to break the ice.

Like a junkyard dog, Cindy growled a low "Errr." Ignoring us, she continued unpacking her luggage, her little paws meticulously hanging a dozen identical white shirts in her closet.

"We'll be back soon," I said.

When Dad and I got to the van, Dad told me I could go home anytime I wanted. Asserting my independence, I grabbed another box. I would charm the beast.

Making a dozen trips up and down the stairs, Cindy growled her "Errr" each time we entered the door. Never offering to help, she refused to open the door to let us in.

Despite the hostile reception, I was pleased to have my own place. Making my bed with the matching comforter and sheets, I lined up my favorite stuffed animals along the side. Like a bird of prey, Cindy stared in disgust as I arranged my mementos and tacked up the posters. After unpacking the last box, I attempted another conversation.

"Look, Cindy, I know you expected a single when Margot moved out. I'd be disappointed too," I continued. "Can we try to be civil to each other?"

Cindy stamped her feet and scowled. Stewing in anger, she pouted in silence. As I set up my stereo, I made another attempt for conversation. "What type of music do you listen to?" I

asked.

"I don't," Cindy snapped back.

"Don't worry, I'm not into acid rock," I said as I put on Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.

"I need total quiet to study," ordered Cindy.

"That's OK, I prefer quiet during study time too," I conceded. "When do you study?" I asked.

"All the time," she responded, "I'm a math major."

"That's impressive. I started out as pre-med, but I'm switching to psych. Calculus was my downfall."

"Just my luck, a lame brain," she replied snidely. "Do you have a boyfriend? I won't be 'sexiled.'"

Remembering Mom's warning, "Wait for your wedding night" I replied, "Don't worry. There's no one special."

Cindy continued, "I have an 8:30 class so I go to bed at 9:00."

"I'll try to study in the library," I offered. Desperate for some common ground, I noticed her TV. "You've got a TV. That's great. What do you watch, soaps, sitcoms, variety shows?"

"Only the news, I have to study," she barked.

"Don't worry, I only watch *General Hospital*. Luke is so hot. I'm going to Mather for dinner. You want to come?"

"No," she turned away from me.

As I left the room, my fantasy for the perfect roommate seemed to evaporate. Still, I was free. Waiting down the hall lurked my friends Amy, Don, Carol and Louisa.

"How's the roommate from hell?" they asked in unison.

"She's not very friendly, but I wouldn't call her the roommate from hell. She's shy and set in her ways. I'll deal. It beats the hell out of living at home," I countered, remembering Mom's "Don't kick somebody when they're down."

When I returned to the room, the little snip had rearranged the TV so only she could see it. "What a bitch," I thought. "Well, I guess it's *General Hospital* in the lounge."

Facing the deep freeze in my room, I reached out and made friends with my dormmates. Taking pity on me, someone always took me in for a chat. To avoid the witch, my friends and I only hung out in my room when Cindy was at class. Cindy growled her famous "Errr" every time she saw my friends in or out of my room.

Using the strategy of appeasement, I avoided confrontation by caving in to Cindy's demands. Knowing that Cindy turned in early, I trudged through snow to work in the library until midnight. A light sleeper, I did everything to minimize Cindy's discomfort. Indeed, I left my PJs and toiletries in the bathroom, so I only opened the door once to go to sleep. Each night Cindy moaned and groaned "Errr" because the light from the hall woke her up. Cindy's alarm blared loudly at 6:00 AM. Before breakfast, Cindy would turn on the overhead light and slam in and out of the room. To creep me out, she would stare at me like a vulture circling for the kill.

By February, my dream for perfect roommate was six feet under. It was time to stand my ground. Each time Cindy made a snide remark, I'd smile and walk away, heeding my Mom's advice "If you don't have anything nice to say, say nothing at all." Resolving to stand firm but not be unkind, my friends and I no longer cowered at her stares. No longer did I hide in the library until midnight. Instead, I worked at my desk with a small desk lamp until my work was done. Still considerate, I endeavored to finish my typing by 10 PM. Despite Cindy's snarls and moaning, I held firm. This drove Cindy crazy. I had won. I held the tiger by the tail. Following Mom's wisdom, I "never stooped" to Cindy's level.

In April, Dean Peters called me to congratulate my for toughing out the year. Respecting my perseverance and maturity, she rigged the room lottery to give me the best number for the sophomore class. For sophomore year, I made plans to room with my best friend, Adrien. Bringing her TV and fridge, Adrien and I had a year of sharing, double dates, and marvelous secrets. Yes Mom, I was given a lemon but managed to make lemonade.

By my senior year I was married . . . back to the roommate from hell.

The Cookie Cutter

Barbara Snyder

So many objects were strewn across the floor, but I picked up a metal five-sided star-shaped cookie cutter with a misshapen handle. Someone might have stepped on it, leaving the handle useless. The edges of the star have been crushed, so they will no longer delineate a star shape with crisp points.

This cookie cutter could have been fairly new but at a time was in someone's way and got damaged.

This object called out to me because I collect antique cookie cutters. I collect only the ones which form an outline of an object and therefore have no covering or handle across them.

My collection consists of a Star of David and a small set of the suits of playing cards—diamond, spade, heart, and club—that came from my grandmother's house many years ago. I keep these in an old wooden bowl on a kitchen counter where, behind glass doors, I display antique objects used in many old kitchens over the years.

I have fun with my animal cookie cutters. When I'm not using the counter for a buffet for a family party, I display the animals whimsically in a row along the back of the oak counter. I line them up so the edge that is folded, the part a hand held when they were used, is facing the observer. Due to this constraint the animals face right or left. I arrange them so they are all going in the direction that they are facing, and they meet in the middle of the counter. The birds, cows, horses, and even elephants parade along. I joke that I don't want the rabbits too close together because everyone knows what happens when rabbits get together.

I am always watching for cookie cutters when I go to antique shows or shops. Often I have to search in musty corners where small items are hidden or dig deeply into cracked pottery bowls to pick out any animal and then guess what it is before I try to remember if I have that species in my collection.

These antique cookie cutters reflect three parts in my life. As I've already mentioned, the cookie cutters are for fun. I don't have cutesy objects displayed around my house. I decorate with live plants, flowers, and original paintings and photographs. I appreciate natural beauty and color, so these animal cookie cutters are my one attempt at comic relief.

I love cookies. The cookie cutters represent delicious food. A homemade chocolate chip cookie is my absolute favorite food. When my son was questioned about what food I eat since I am a vegetarian, he replied, "Cookies." He got a laugh, but he knew this to be the truth.

In our home when the children were teenagers, and the going got tough with too much homework or studying to do for exams, or girlfriend or boyfriend relationships caused a problem, the escape was to bake chocolate chip cookies. When someone was in the kitchen mixing up the batter, others were drawn in by the sound of the electric mixer or the smell of chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven. There was always the admonition to stop snitching the dough or there would be none left to bake. We each have an opinion if the raw dough or baked cookie is better.

More importantly, this was a time and place for mother-and-child conversation and problem solving or an offer to finish the task of baking or cleaning up or to help with studying. By this time in their lives they baked independently, but prior to this we spent many hours in the kitchen baking, cooking, and reading recipes together. The picture that comes to my mind is of a child kneeling on a chair dragged up against the counter with sleeves pushed up above the elbows.

Cookie cutters represent the beginning of my collection of antiques. As I got older I

began to appreciate antiques. They seemed mysterious to me at first until I realized I could choose what appealed to me. The first antique I acquired was an oak Hoosier cabinet when I had been married about ten years. It was quite old because it was made completely of wood. This piece of furniture was intended to be used in a kitchen since there weren't cabinets at that time. I felt quite bold when I decided to place it in our family room to store board games and maps. The Hoosier, as it is referred to now, contains the clay objects my children created in elementary school as well as all of the letters they mailed home while they were in college.

The cookie cutters began my antique collection, and they continue to be objects I seek out when I am antiquing. There is far more meaning to cookie cutters for me than I realized. I can connect the cookie cutter I picked up to myself and the present stage in my life.

The damaged star is me. My life had always been perfect. I had the ideal husband who provided very well for me. We were able to accumulate riches in material objects as well as a perfect family of a handsome son and a beautiful daughter who have grown into bright and caring young adults. As the cookie cutter was crushed, so was my spirit when I was told by my husband he no longer loved me after thirty years of marriage. The misshapen handle represents the marriage which connected us that he is ending by divorce. As that cookie cutter, which produced perfect stars at one time, is rendered useless, so is this once-loving relationship.

My outlook on life has always been that in something bad you can always find some good. Though some moments seem unbearable and hopeless, if I hadn't had the many years of marriage, I wouldn't have produced two wonderful children and been able to live the lifestyle I've experienced. I will continue my search for cookie cutters.

Chapter of Difference

Idris Trotman

As I lay under the canopy of tropical trees, Kwmae helped towel the sweat that seemed single-mindedly to evacuate my body. My companion constantly rearranged the leaves that had become my mattress in an attempt to make my discomfort comfortable.

"He has the sickness."

"He is very bad."

I heard these voices speak as if the person they spoke of was not there. Kwmae would add a shhhhhh, shhhhhh to their conversation in a protective paternal voice.

Delusion, illusions, dreams, thoughts all rushed to my mind as a train would burst into its next station.

"I told you that your gallivanting around the world would cost ya some day."

Was that the voice of my mother? I thought.

Maa? Maa, is that you?"

Kwmae replied, "No Idris, but I am here."

I would open my eyes every so often to reassure myself that I was still alive. On one such trip to reality, I noticed a very large creature jumping playfully from branch to branch. Things jumping in the trees weren't new to this boy from Bedsty, but the size was of note to me. In my semi-conscious state I screamed,

"Awwwww, look at the size of that squirrel!"

Laughing broke the tension for a moment and one of the gentlemen said, "That is not a squirrel Idrisu. That is a monkey"

The laughter, at my expense, soon returned to the sobering thickness as they contemplated my destiny. Even in my delusional state I could tell what was going on, what questions they were asking themselves.

"How would we get him to medical care? Should we send someone or try and carry him out of the bush? If we carry him out, how? Should we make an Indian-style sled or bodily lift him?"

I was growing too weak to speak, to defend myself. These questions would get answered to the convenience of my traveling companions, not me. The thought of dying in this jungle was not a pleasant one for me, and I had no way of communicating my feelings. A tear began to lead what would become a steady stream of followers down my feverish body as I heard Kwmae's commanding voice say,

"We take Idrisu. We take him with us."

His warm brown eyes returned to mine as if to confirm his translation of my thoughts. As an affirming smile broke out onto my face, it detoured the parade of tears that were already in progress and my mouth began to fill with its determined progression.

As my eyes closed, flashes of my four-year daughter Shayne passed before me like a video in fast forward. Streams of thoughts long since forgotten became clear one act sonnets, vignettes that reached back to my youth. Connie and Katherine Harewood and the dancing that we did in the local community center. Scoring the game winning points playing basketball for my junior high school. Being beaten mercilessly by angry white parents who didn't want me and my fellow twelve year olds to attend the same school as their children. My mother's warm eyes and reassuring smile that always encouraged. My sisters always accusing me of reading the direction to any game that we happened to be playing.

"Maa, Junnie's cheating again."

The death of my father as my lips touched his, trying without success to breathe air into his collapsing lungs. As these short takes of my life moved to center screen faster than the one before, I found myself being sucked into an abyss of finality that was death or at least other-than-here-ness. I was in need of an escape. Escape from a place where few come back from. As a warm wave of panic began to cover me as a tablecloth would a dining room table, I forced myself to refocus on the first of these vignettes, Shayne. As I lurched forward towards my baby girl, my eyes sprang open, and I sat straight up sweating and alive.

"It is all right, Sidi Idrisu. You are all right."

Kwmae's warm, angelic glance reassured me that I had been there and back safely. Somehow he knew of the journey that I had been on.

As the parade of sweat continued which had gathered more participants in its trek to my neck and beyond, I noticed that we were moving. I was laying on some sort of make shift gurney. As they carried me through the bush, Kwmae was still by my side. He gave me the impression that I had been out for a long time but didn't think it was necessary for me to know how long. We were on the move, and I was relieved.

In what must have been a half a day later, we broke through the canopy of trees, and we were in the clear. Another mile or two down this road and we would be near a small village that had a medical clinic. The clinic was an open-aired establishment that housed the medical supplies and office records inside and the patients outside: Mothers holding little crying babies or children running around with rashes looking more like they were burnt. Women in colorful head wraps with piercing brown eyes breast-fed their infants as freely as women in the west would adjust their makeup. There was no sense of urgency to anything that was going on. As I was laid on one of the benches, curious children came over to see this person who was obviously brother but obviously not from around here.

"Min ainna anta? Min ainna anta?"

They would begin to chorus. They were asking, From where are you? Wanting to know where this strange looking African could be from. I weakly said, "America." This got everyone's attention. An American. Questions cascaded down at me at a rate too fast for me to respond to in my state. Just then, as if always knowing when I was in need, Kwmae patiently and with a smile got everyone to leave me to rest.

"Huwa mareeda." "He's sick."

The next memory I have of this adventure was being in a room in the student hostel of the University of Ghana at Lagon. I was told by the young ward that came twice a day to bring my serving of fufu and bread or bread and fufu, depending on what the cook was in the mood for, that I have been asleep for about twenty four hours. The room wasn't painted brown; the floor was earthen. The covering of the window that has long since given up any attempts of keeping out the mosquitoes was an aging piece of burlap that was even worse at keeping out the African sun. Many people came to visit the American who had the fever, not to inquire about his health but rather to ask questions about America. I would ask these wayfarers if they had any contact with my traveling companions, as I wanted to thank them for saving my life. After some days of asking any and everyone who would come to my door, I finally was able to get word to one of my partners. Within a week they were standing in front of me as I awoke. We smiled and hugged and shared long stares of reminiscence. I asked if they had seen Kwmae. They looked at me strangely, unsure of what to say.

"Have you seen him?"

"Seen who, my brother?"

"Kwmae"

"Who is Kwmae, Sidi Idrisu?"

"Come on, you know who Kwmae is. He was with us in the bush. He stayed next to me the entire time I was sick."

"Sidi Idrisu, there was no one with us. It was just we three in the bush. I know no Kwmae."

"Come on, man, this isn't funny anymore. Where is Kwmae?"

They took long looks at each other before slowly turning to me as if I were still delirious with the fever. There was a calm that embraced the room with an otherworldly texture.

Kwmae man, Kwmae. Don't do this, man. I need to thank him.

"Sidi Idrisu, we know no Kwmae; it was just us three in the bush. We carried you out alone and brought you to the clinic at the foot of the Aburi Mountains. No Kwmae, Sidi. No Kwmae. We will leave you to rest, Sidi. We will return when you feel stronger."

Kwmae was there with me. Stroking my brow, holding my hand protecting me. Wasn't he?