

# TALKING LEAVES



2006

# *Talking Leaves*

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# Talking Leaves Staff



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## Statement of policy and purpose

The *Talking Leaves* Editorial Board accepts original works of fiction, poetry, photography, and line drawings from students at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus and IUPUI Indianapolis. Each anonymous submission is reviewed by at least three members of the Editorial Board and is judged solely on artistic merit.

Cover Art

Bixby Bridge  
Highway 1, California  
by Carrie M. Shumaker

## From the Faculty Co-Sponsors

Readers will find that the themes of *Talking Leaves* 2006 student literary Magazine reflect student experiences both personal and global. Creative works range from lyrical thoughts on love and family, to haunting stories about the effects and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, to an image gallery of photos by a student who served in Afghanistan. The magazine's tenor reflects the gravity of worlds battered by the turmoil of nature, war, and human relationships. Please note our featured faculty artist for this year, Robert Stilwell. We hope you will enjoy these thoughtful pieces as much as we had compiling them for you in *Talking Leaves* 2006.

The magazine's title "Talking Leaves" has its origins rooted in Native American lore and metaphor. The story goes like this: Native Americans noticed new settlers carrying papers that had writing on them (literally contracts, maps, and letters). These papers rustled like leaves and "talked" to people. The Native Americans realized the power of being able to send thoughts to another by way of talking leaves. We at *Talking Leaves* ask that you celebrate the importance of the written word by reading this issue. We thank former adjunct faculty, Howard Wills, for suggesting this romantic title.

The faculty co-sponsors extend special thanks to the campus Student Council and the English Club for their support of *Talking Leaves*.

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## Listen to the Night

Kristen Reeves

Be still. Silent. Listen.  
Listen to the rhythm of  
night's song.  
As I sit,  
sitting on my roof, I listen  
to the orchestrated music,  
the trees wave,  
thrashing their arms about.  
hear the drums,  
the beating rhythm of  
cricket's wings  
and the insects sing.  
The wind.  
No, the violin,  
plays a sweet, shrill melody  
chilling me,  
The same as any symphony.  
any piece has many movements.  
Each association of night  
plays a part.  
If you're silent and listen  
closely, you can hear  
each instrument.  
I look forward to tomorrow  
night, because tomorrow  
night, I will hear a  
brand new song.

## **Junk**

Jamie Morris

Zyklon B.B. guns, point blank range,  
bank on the underdog, whose singing in the rain.  
Sad man, glad man, tripping on a trash can,  
scratching on a bad rash can really make you mad, man.  
Chinese surgery, underwater crawling,  
turn around, upside down, feels like falling.  
Chicken soup kitchen, a home for the stars,  
government cheese, and broken down cars.  
Dire strait jackets just to cover up your back,  
Polyester track suits off a goodwill rack.  
A street sign language, calling out to its own,  
minarets jutting like a space shuttle bone.  
Sore thumb sticking a syringe of heroin  
tap on the blunt end, stick the narrow in.

## **To a Society of Strangers (or Meursault's Malady)**

Jamie Morris

Ink stains of shadows,  
linger upon my prison walls.  
Thoughts trail back to simpler times,  
yet still the guillotine calls.  
I had shot an Arab; he had a knife,  
damn that cursed heat.  
The sun was glaring on my brow,  
that's what led me to my feat.  
Can't the others see as I,  
that they are all quite absurd.  
That I acted then as I do now,  
though the name of Truth has been obscured.  
Cast your lot, and call me strange,  
or base, monstrous, uncaring.  
Condemned to die by all of those  
seen as moral, right, unerring.  
I reject you monsters and your kind,  
Your society, and god.  
Waste your time with trifle matters,  
now that's what I call odd.  
No remorse on what I've done,  
no apologies I'll give.  
When one knows that their time is nigh,  
it is truly when they live.

## Manifestation

John Barnett

1 A.M. faces in the darkened television screen  
The digital clock refuses to strike  
You've been here so many nights  
When mist loiters like VapoRub fumes  
And disembodied voices summon from the kitchen  
Astral weeks come and go  
With bloody dawns and amber Indiana dusk light  
The clamor downstairs and sounds of revelry

Thirty years ago yesterday  
Playing bridge on folding poker tables that  
Cobwebs now cover  
Drinking bitter beer and mixed-drink misery  
Wondering when the kids will call  
Awaiting a Florida sabbatical

Take your medicine, they'd say  
You'll feel new again

The green pill for blood pressure  
The red for headaches  
The blue horse pill for the pain in your side  
A greasy, costly rainbow of panaceas and relaxants

That Neil Diamond album still plays in your head  
Cracklin' Rosie and Coldwater Morning  
Rattling the basement walls with his heavy Hasidic baritone

Your shadow paces my bedroom floor  
The smell of Virginia Slims climbs the ventilation shaft  
Keeping me awake with your ashcan rants  
About how no one really bothered when the end was near  
Spectral existence a painful nightmare  
Moth-eaten nightgown tickling hardwood floors  
The noise of hair being brushed before the bathroom mirror  
An oddity of silent scream

Five years ago today  
With slippers on frozen feet and chicken stock on the boil  
Husband gone and children too busy to trouble themselves with illness  
A lonely conclusion to such a storied life  
But in the coldest depths of January  
Your body would take no more  
Softly succumbing to eighty-five years of memory and substance  
Life's force falters  
A broken axle sending souls off the highway  
Careening into the side rails and overcorrecting across the concrete expanse  
Into Death's ditch

I'll go on sleeping in the room you occupied  
When the fields of Woodstock rang out to the world  
Nicotine from decades of smoldering cigarettes  
Clouds my lungs only with regret  
For never having met you while you had breath  
To play bridge in the basement and swig Bombay Sapphire and tonics

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To be there

when the end

was near

***Fantasy***  
*Kristi Vance*

*She was caught in a trace of love at first sight,  
Hearing sounds of a waterfall while holding him tightly.  
From the top of the rocks, the water sprits  
As does their love, it will overcome.  
Is this true love or are we misled  
To think that true love is on the road ahead?*

*They are surrounded by trees with a smell of sweet nature,  
While seeing a perfect view painted by the creation maker.  
Just as the trees bloom gorgeous and die:  
Is that an image of love, to care but only a lie?  
Is their love short lived as are those that change their mind?  
Or is their love a fantasy that they both will find?*

*They watch the sun begin its cyclical evening decline  
And think their love unlike the sun has begun its desired climb.  
In due time, the sun again will rise  
And so like their love, see it in their eyes?  
The couple wonders if there is any love resembling heavenly light  
Or is love just a story they were read at night?*

*So, if you know the method for true love, please share,  
For in the minds of some, the fantasies still dwell.*

## **Ocean of You**

Brandi Smith

I glimpse into the ocean of you  
dissolving into your deep still waters  
that ebb and flow with you.  
I long for your waves to crash over my body,  
welcoming me into your constant surf.  
Sea foam green swirls fill my mouth  
as you drench me in salty swells  
drowning out all other sounds.  
There are currents and more currents  
each one pulling me in  
the deeper I go, the more I long to see.  
Your waters envelop me, soothe yet arouse  
till I am over-flowing with your ocean deep  
and my heart is moored  
and my soul satisfied.  
I could no more turn away  
from your calming waters  
than I could turn away  
from the radiant sun above.

## **Life**

Julie James

Raging rivers, wild and free  
Without a care in the world  
Quickly snatch whatever crosses their path,  
No matter what the cost.  
Dipping and diving, under and over,  
Across countless possessions,  
Paying no heed to direction,  
As the momentum builds,  
So does the force,  
Taking nothing in recourse.  
Bending, winding, no shelter for cover,  
Twigs snap to obey.  
Weathered rocks washed away to nothing,  
As we begin to face yet another day.

## **Dreams of Purity**

Emily Griffin

Glimpsing into  
The sweet dreams  
Of cozy pups,  
My eyes caught,  
Colorful dreams with  
Dress-up palaces, and  
Children dancing in the skies  
With innocent hearts.  
Ecstatic,  
As hints of color  
Radiated off  
All their wholesome faces.  
Busy little bees  
They are,  
In their delicate world  
Of fruitful heavens and  
Flowing honey streams.  
To be so purely busy,  
While resting.



**Robert Sullivan**

## Raging Katrina

Julie James

Flashes of lightening,  
blasts of wind, urging stragglers on.  
Innocent lives, torn into shreds.  
Total destruction unknown to man.  
as waves crash all around,  
metal is heard twisting and turning.  
Lives lost and lives touched  
by unsuspecting victims  
as they are surrounded by rubble.  
The sun sets on the ravaged land  
as flood waters black with debris rush by.  
As we question God's will,  
souls are filled with  
a new hope for tomorrow.  
She has taken so much  
yet given nothing in return  
and normal life fails  
to exist for those in her path.  
Broken homes, broken bodies.  
Broken hearts filled with  
unimaginable pain,  
as it begins again as  
her sister approaches.

## Survivor of Katrina

Sherry Traylor

Overwhelming inhuman silence,  
Water whispering as metal groans.  
Haphazard floating possessions.  
Stench, foul things floating.  
Human waste and car oil.  
Our necessities denied by nature's poison,  
We are left with what is,  
Exposed to the bones as ourselves.  
Starving, lost children.  
Holocaust of the seas reclaiming.  
Left to the mercy of those with,  
Those without - wait.

## **Raging Storms**

Brandi Smith

She lay on her back in the wet, thick blades of coarse grass, staring up at the darkening sky. The warm moisture seeped into the thin pale pink cotton maternity shirt that enveloped her angular, almost emaciated frame. Small shorts draped her coltish legs to the middle of her thigh, leaving the rest of her leg exposed to the sharp edges of the grass planted in front of the small shotgun house she called home. Oblivious to any discomfort, her eyes never left the sky. Watching the black and gray clouds roll swiftly by, she was reminded of a train speeding on its track. Destined to arrive on time, the clouds kept a steady pace. The storm was predicted to be the worst New Orleans had ever known, but she knew better. The storm that raged inside her heart, body, and mind could match any hurricane. Katrina, it was called. An oddly feminine name for something predicted to be so destructive. Innocuous monikers for life-ending events seemed purposely deceptive.

The sky hadn't opened yet, but it would soon. She could feel the eminent rain in her bones. Her jagged nerves felt as if they were no longer housed inside her small frame, but raw and exposed, sharpening her senses. The smell of the brackish sea water filled her nostrils, burning the fine hairs that lined the inside of her nose. She inhaled deeply letting the moisture-laden air fill her lungs and roll across her tongue, tasting the salt, as one would on a lover's body. The normal humidity, usually only slightly oppressive, was now pushing down on her sternum, attempting to return her into the wet, rich earth beneath her.

She closed her eyes and listened to the melody of sounds swirling around her. The hammers striking eight-penny nail heads into plywood window covers matched the racing of her heart. Instructions were being issued to the small children of the neighborhood by their parents. Fear resounded in the voices filtering over the panicked movement of treasured household items. Storm doors, car doors, and shutters all slamming shut in a symphony of crashes echoing loudly on the narrow street. The rapper, 50 Cent's "21 Questions" thumped loudly from a car down the block. This storm of noise was caused by people and was only a prelude to the storm raging by Mother Nature's

intent. Weather reports predicted this would be the worst storm to hit Louisiana in hundreds of years; possibly it would be the worst ever. That thought made her smile. It was only fair that others should be the victims of a tragedy of this proportion. She was not going to be a victim any longer. This year had taken everything from her and left her bitter and hollow, yet resolute. This storm would be the end of her suffering and the beginning for so many others.

She listened acutely to the voices, attempting to identify the owners. She heard Tonya's voice shouting to one of her six children, "Dante, git your sisters in the car. I ain't tellin' ya' again. The storms a comin', boy and I ain't gittin' swept away 'cuz you don' lissen." Tonya was a single parent, working two jobs. All of her family lives in New Orleans Parish. She had a boyfriend for a while, until the police finally arrested him after months of beating Tonya.

She heard Bert, the grizzled old man three houses down, fighting with his overweight black Lab. Bert retired from the Navy and cussed like he was still in, "God damn it, Sailor, get your fat ass in this car. I should leave your lazy, good fo' nothin' ass here." Bert was famous for his arguments with that dog. The dog tended to ignore most of Bert's verbal attacks by plodding his way onto the front porch, where he slept the day away. The kids in the neighborhood loved Sailor but were terrified of Bert.

Etienne Benoit, the street's most colorful inhabitant, was yelling instructions to her newest lover, Raul. Nobody knew Etienne's real name, just her stage name. Rumor had it that in her peak she was the most sought after drag queen in New Orleans. Now, she worked in a dive called Le Roundup on St. Louis Street. According to Etienne, people had no taste anymore. "Raul, honey, don't drag those gowns in the grass. Each one is worth more than your tight brown ass. Once you're done, you need to get my tiaras and my make up bags. Don't you let my wigs get wet, sweetie. Oooh, it's starting to get windy. My weave is going to pull right outta my head. You need to move your little booty faster. We need to get outta here, fast, precious. Etienne can't afford another weave this soon."

These people, once friends or family, were now strangers to her. She knew they talked about her, her tragedies, her behavior. She could hear her neighbor speaking to her

husband as they loaded their rusted SUV. Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville" floated into the air every time the car door opened. "Look at her, George. She done lost her mind; it's true what everyone says. Just layin' there in the grass like nothin' happenin'. We should call somebody." "Mind your own business, Helen. This ain't our concern. We got a house to load up and kids to be worryin' about. She ain't been right since her husband died. You cain't fix her. Let's go."

The voices faded. She wasn't angry at them. Betrayal became her best friend early this year and she now expected it from every voice and face, familiar or foreign. She would have felt betrayed had they made any overture to help her. She didn't want help. Not from them, not now, not ever. She no longer wanted anything from anyone. God, her country, her body, her neighbors had all betrayed her and left her brittle and deadened to the world. She folded her hands across her chest and closed her eyes to the threatening sky. Silent tears dripped to the emerald grass, saline and dew, body absorbing into earth. Soon it would be over. Her calm would come in the aftermath of the storm, not before.

Monikers, she thinks. Labels, names, ranks, promises, empty rhetoric, it would all be forgotten. The freshly scrubbed soldier, in dress greens, his rank pins gleaming in the sun, blinding her. He smelled of Old Spice as he stood on her front doorstep, a yellow telegram in hand, expressing the sympathy of the country he couldn't possibly feel. Her husband's helicopter had crashed in Iraq. He served his country with honor and valor. She felt the Medal of Honor digging into her hands, a reminder of all she lost. He shouldn't have been there in the first place. He was scheduled to return two months before the crash that claimed his life and her soul. John was coming home, he promised. Her President promised John's return after a one-year tour. God was supposed to protect him, her religion promised. All promises broken, shattered, and hollow. She fingered the ribbon and metal in her hand; as if it were the rosary she had long since discarded. This was what John fought and died for. It wasn't worth it.

Word had spread quickly and people arrived with full casseroles and empty condolences. They stayed for what seemed like weeks. Her house was a revolving door of people with nothing to say, to offer, to do. None of them could bring John back. She grew

tired of the sympathetic stares and whispers after the first hour and retreated to the bedroom she once shared with her husband. The faded baby blue room with cracked walls still smelled of John's cologne. She pulled one of his T-shirts from the bureau drawer and curled into a fetal position. Her mother made excuses and accepted the visitor's shallow sympathy for her, coming up to the room occasionally to tell her how rude she was being. John's body was flown home and he was buried with full military honors. The flag, resplendent in red, white, and blue, was removed from her husband's coffin, folded smartly and handed to her by some general she'd never met. That night she took shears to her chestnut hair, cropping off all the soft curls that John had so loved to twirl in bed at night as they planned their future. She put the flag in the back of the closet, removed all the photographs of John and shut down. She locked herself in the bedroom, refused to eat, to have anything to do with the process of life. The neighbors stopped coming and after a week, her wounded mother departed. The day her mother left, she found a note in familiar looping script, relaying a message from her boss at Dollar General letting her know her position had been filled. She didn't like the job anyway. The thought of dealing with people was absolutely terrifying. She didn't tell her mother about the baby. She couldn't. She hadn't even told John.

It was on John's week of leave they had conceived the baby they always wanted. One night, in their bedroom lit with lavender candles of all shapes and sizes and scented with the roses he bought for her, they made love hungrily at first then tenderly. She was sure it was on the second time that she became pregnant. Far from combat, death, and despair, she and John spent a week in bliss. Then all too soon it was time for him to dress in the uniform he hadn't worn all week and get back on the plane that would deliver him to the country where his life was extinguished. Her husband, best friend, father of their child was killed only a month after his return to the senseless war. She found out she was pregnant the day she was notified of his death.

She opens her eyes to check the progress of the storm. The dark clouds are rolling now at a much faster pace. They collide and form large ominous clumps of black and gray. Lightning streaks the sky behind the clouds. The wind picks up, bending the palm and banyan trees that line the street and scattering blood red hibiscus buds in the yards.

The eye of the storm is not scheduled for landfall until later that evening, but the rain finally starts. Large drops fall on her, shocking her skin --at first-- then becoming part of the same rhythms of this storm. She lifts her head slightly, noticing the quiet of the neighborhood. Those who are leaving have gone already and those who opted to stay have barricaded themselves behind thin plywood and sandbag levees. She lays her head of shaggy uneven hair back onto the grass and closes her eyes from the stinging rain. Her clothes are soaked and clinging to her like a second skin. The cold drops are refreshing, and for this moment she feels more alive than she has in the past year. The numbness that couldn't be erased before now begins to wear off. Her body tingles and the skin on her arms and legs breaks out into thousands of tiny bumps. She shivers from the cold and in anticipation. It won't be long now until her storm will meet Katrina's head on.

She runs her hands along her concave stomach and the pain surges through her, as though lightning struck her prone body. She would have been nearly at term. She would have been a mother soon. But, her body, a co-conspirator in the crime of betrayal, rejected the life she and John created in love, expelling their physical union upon a crimson surge. Another betrayal, another loss, another reason to lie in the grass on the eve of a hurricane. After three short months of having the child inside her, she began to cramp when she woke and by that evening was no longer a mother to be. The doctor was sympathetic, with large brown vacant eyes, telling her it was okay. You can have more, she said. You're young and your body is healthy. Her soul felt as barren and hollow as her freshly evacuated womb. Lying in the hospital bed listening to the doctor's shallow attempts at comfort, she felt rage. The same rage she feels again now. She knows the baby died because of her body, her President, her country, her God. The doctor didn't say that in so many words, but she knew. The stress of her husband's death, the doctor explained, was too much and probably contributed to the miscarriage.

Tears rain from her eyes again, this time mixing with the rain before falling to the earth. She didn't have the words to tell the doctor there would be no more children. She would have no other opportunities for creating life. She lost John and his baby. She would lose no more.

After returning from the hospital, she unplugged the phone, the computer, the television and carried them all outside to the curb. She removed all the smiling pictures hanging in the house, boxed them and had them sent to her mother. The newspaper subscription was cancelled with a note taped to the door next to the one asking anyone who came to her door to please turn around and go away. She eradicated all reminders of life. She knew her neighbors watched her closely and talked about the notes and the increasing pile of possessions sitting on the curb. Everyday she carried out more of the things that once filled her home with love, sometimes little things like vases and clocks. Other days she lugged large pieces of furniture down the three small steps of her porch and into the grass, digging ruts as she pulled. A few brave neighbors offered assistance, but she simply stared at them vacantly, silently and continued as if she wasn't aware of their existence. The last room she cleared was the nursery she had started. She gathered the clothes and diapers, the fuzzy animals and crib cover. She pulled down the drapes and tapestries on the wall and took them outside to the trashcan, into which she poured gasoline, and lit a match.

The police came that day. They asked to come inside her home and look around. They found a bed and dresser, a crib and changing table, no other furniture. All the mirrors in the home were shattered and heavy brocade drapes, sometimes sheets, covered the windows. They interviewed neighbors, put her gently in the back of their black and white cruiser, and took her to the hospital, where she was given an IV for dehydration and held for seventy-two hours for observation. She was evaluated by doctors and therapists, given antidepressants and sent home with an appointment card for therapy and a prescription for Effexor. She threw the card and pills away in the trashcan outside the hospital door and went home.

The rain is heavier now, pelting her with drops that feel like shards of glass. She looks at her arm expecting to find tiny droplets of blood, but she sees none and is disappointed at their absence. She hopes none of her neighbors called the police on her. That would ruin her plan. Hopefully, they are too worried about themselves to pay her any attention. That is the American way, isn't it? Worry about yourself and don't get involved, unless you have personal stake in another's actions, unless their behavior will

affect you in a negative way, unless you feel the need for reprisals or revenge...unless you choose to enter a war in order to finish what your father started.

She opens her eyes to survey the street for any conspirators in the betrayal. She sees nothing: an empty street already littered with debris. Saplings broken by the wind carry in the collecting water that runs swiftly along the curb. Toppled lawn ornaments remind her of a battlefield of fallen soldiers. A plastic pink flamingo from down the block migrated to her yard, lodging itself in the hibiscus bush that has been stripped and deflowered. She laughs and the sound catches in her throat, mixing with rain and coming out as a gurgle. There is nothing funny about this tableau and yet she can't help finding humor in it. Macabre, yet intriguing, the slow destruction of the street captures her attention and for the first time in hours she sits up. Resting her arms on her bent knees, she swipes at the water dripping into her eyes. The rain is heavier now than before and she can hardly see in front of her face. The trees whip from side to side, some snapping under the tremendous force, some just bending and swaying.

The trees remind her of people. Some people are saplings that snap under pressure, and some people are more like the mature trees that withstand the force and remain upright and strong. Oh, they will be scarred by the storm, but when it's over the trees will be a testament to strength and deep roots. She always thought she was more like those trees. She never considered herself to be like the saplings. She now knew the truth. She broke under pressure, she bent and snapped. She didn't envy the larger trees for their will and survival. No, it was the saplings she most envied. Their end came quickly at the hand of Katrina. They did not suffer the pain of trying to withstand the barrage of needle sharp rain and crushing winds. They simply gave in to nature's will and allowed their reedy bodies to be easily broken. Those small trees were a symbol of what she was attempting to become. The will of the larger trees no longer appealed to her. Their fight was long and difficult, requiring much more resistance than she harbored.

Katrina was pummeling her small street, tearing and ripping everything in her path. Mother Nature's newest child showed no mercy in her attempt to destroy life. Katrina blew ferociously from her core. She raged against the standing houses, determined to sweep them out of her path. When met with resistance, Katrina pushed

harder and succeeded in dislodging shingles and shutters and scattering them in the wind. It was almost completely black outside, the storm clouds blanketing the sky. The wind and rain combined to create a natural wall.

She grew drowsy listening to the rhythm of the rain and the undulating winds. She pinned John's medal to her pink shirt with shaking hands, tingling from the cold and closed her eyes again. She was a sapling, willing to give in, to snap without fight. Sleep came almost immediately and she dreamt of her honeymoon with John.

The young couple didn't have much money and settled on a week in Vermont for their honeymoon. It was the rainy season, forcing them inside the drafty cabin for most of the week. John lit fires to keep them warm at night and they lay together on the fur rug reveling in their love, planning their future to the backdrop of the musical rain. She could smell his cologne and feel the stubble on his cheeks. She heard his soft voice singing a Dave Matthew's Band tune in the shower. Still in the warmth of the bed, she laughed when he would hum through the parts he didn't know. Most mornings that week, she would pad out of bed and into the shower with him, missing the closeness of his body. They played cards and Scrabble and then ventured out into town when the rain let up. Mostly they stayed secluded, away from the world. They laughed and touched, held each other tenderly at night, and talked for hours. On their last night, John made dinner for her and lit candles in the cabin. They ate in front of the fire, feeding each other, stopping in between bites to kiss and caress. After dinner they drank cheap champagne from plastic cups. Their bodies joined seamlessly in a burning embrace. John's calloused hands were gentle in their possession of her body. His kisses fluttered on her neck as he whispered in her ear. She let her fingers drift across his firm chest and wrap themselves in the silken curls.

She woke abruptly. Her arms reached out for her husband, only to find frigid water slipping between her fingers. Dreams were cruel. They played small films of fantasy, exciting and alluring, but ended all too soon. During that short family video in her mind, John was still with her. She wasn't sure how long she'd been sleeping, but realized the storm was now raging at a new strength. She felt the cold water lapping against her bare toes. Her arms were nearly covered in water. The waves crashed against

her, churning sea and rain water into her face. She choked on the acrid mixture and spit it out of her mouth in disgust. She fumbled, feeling her shirt for John's medal, relieved to find it still attached. Sirens bleated like sheep in the distance, alerting danger and telling the story of destruction in their plaintive wails. She listened to the barrage of noises, wondering if this was similar to what John heard before he died.

It wouldn't be much longer now. Katrina was almost at full power. She felt the churning waters begin to envelop her small frame and she was weightless in the murky water. She wrapped her arms tightly around her body as she was tossed back and forth. A metal trashcan propelled into her with force and she reached out to hold on, before letting the go. The cold metal slipped from her grasp and the water reached out with invisible hands and pulled her under, claiming her body. She struggled instinctively to find the surface. Her lungs began to burn from lack of air. She felt the pain, but stopped struggling, letting the water fill her mouth and lungs. She lay prone as the raging waters returned her to the earth. A wave crashed over her, dragging her under for the last time. She wondered what moniker she would receive and knew, like all the other monikers, none would tell her story. None would capture the storms raging inside her.



**Neptune Pool at Hearst Castle**  
**San Simeon, California**  
Carrie M. Shumaker

## Jazz Funeral

John Barnett

Just last week

Sulking on a stool at Dickie Brennan's  
Nursing a whiskey sour  
The Young Olympians playing their rain song on polished brass  
Before the bartender changed stations



Weather Channel dispatch

Flaccid anchors discuss doomed fates  
This ant farm seasoned for observation  
Shepard Smith  
That officious New England haircut  
Erecting satellites on the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse  
Primed to report misery to the idle world

First of the sky's tears

A stinging syringe from space  
Immense dome turned crude Ramada Inn  
Overflowing with careless and homeless  
To the annoyance of a toiling regime  
Busy babysitting derricks  
Shooting blindly on sand-soaked streets  
Defending puppet-show freedom  
Typical Monday afternoon

Hiding in the attic like an anxious bat

Syrupy canned pears and runcible spoon... check  
First Aid and flashlight... check  
Ragged copy of Watership Down... check  
We Rabbits willing to accept our fate

Slapdash gusts scar tender eardrums

Sounds of wall cracks and news crews  
Dropping toxic paint chips  
Transmitting flawless carnage live on camera

Eye the size of Everest

Hulking and taunting over busted window panes  
Mocking Fat Tuesday's with ominous glibness  
The record flips to Side Two

~~~~~  
We peek our heads  
    From holes in molehill rooftops  
        During these dog days  
            Before the levees tore  
                And bodies bloated in the swill  
                    And politicians scrambled for photo-ops  
                        And civil rights begged renewal

I wade through soaked splinters  
    Homes tattered like second-hand cloth  
        Stranded pets howl unsettling elegies  
            Their isolated cries echo to static

Milk carton glides by on an oil slick  
    Young girl missing on a faded label  
        Far from this mad scientist experiment  
            Miles north, where music still inks paint-by-number skies

~~~~~  
Indigent hordes swarm city centers  
    As ravenous wasps flee their nests  
        Only when disturbed  
            Provoked by their own stalwart resolve  
                Unwilling to trade Carlyle's Saturday dime beers  
                    For an elusive existence and MRE's on tap

The Green Line delivers  
    Our Broken souls westward  
        To lands less damply burdensome  
            Where motherless children and childless mothers  
                Collide with heartless force, unrecognized  
                    Their breadcrumb sins washed down clogged drains  
                        In fecal-encrusted shower stalls  
                            Greedy flies gather  
                                Attracted neither by honey nor vinegar but  
                                    That nauseating stink of purged society

They gorge on our failures  
    We struggle for scraps

~~~~~  
First moment of silence

Unpunctuated by Coast Guard rotors

Hunched over a porcelain bowl in Abilene  
Roach motel lamplight flickers like dying stars  
Take-out food tastes of cardboard and singed eyelash  
Jim and Margot's number in my pocket  
Zero nerve to make that call

Two-hundred hours  
Give or take a few thousand forlorn lives  
And hindsight fixed on a 60/40 blur  
The dread of all senses replayed  
A macabre nickelodeon  
Phantasmagoria of auburn water and rotting rubble  
My world since birth  
Cut short by the switching of stations in a bar

Jazz funeral processions haunt cleared streets  
A city muzzled against all wills

## *Insomnia*

Sherry Traylor

- Red flashing lights
  - Bright against the dark room
- Counting time I have left to sleep
- Twisting to the silent countdown
  - Turning on the fan for noise
  - Cover the silence and dread
    - Of glancing towards
- Those red glowing lights blinking



Robert Sullivan

**The Burnt Chapel**  
Sherry Traylor

Walking through powdered pieces of someone's memories  
Half a window pane  
A blackened figure looking skyward

Light streams through prisms  
Broken glass of gold-yellow and blue  
Desolated charred remnants of a vision

Once filled with many  
Sitting in reverence and silence  
Waiting

My wandering noticed only by the trees  
The wind blowing ashes around my blackened shoes

## **A Letter From Mr. Arthur Woodsworth**

Brad Bott

To whom it may concern,

It happened upon a time that I decided to call upon one Dr. Huffendorff. Now I had never met this Dr. Huffendorff before, but all my acquaintances insisted on me doing so. They all said, “You have never met anyone quite like him,” “Interesting views that one has,” or “You would get along superb with him.” Of course, this having peaked my curiosity, I inquired of my friend Dr. Harding how I might set up a meeting with the gentleman.

“Don’t you worry about a thing, good sir,” he said, “I will make all the proper arrangements. You just worry about getting your estate in order. You may want to pack lightly, though.”

“Why should I pack lightly?” I inquired.

“Just trust me, you just be here tomorrow at noon and leave the rest up to me.”

I reluctantly agreed and returned to my dwellings to prepare for my excursion. I returned to the designated spot the following day promptly at noon. I had only packed the necessary toiletries and one spare suit. Dr. Harding arrived shortly after and proceeded to usher me into a taxi before I could get a word in otherwise.

“Now don’t you worry about a thing. I have arranged everything.” He thrust a letter through the window into my hand, which I promptly shoved in my coat pocket. “Show this upon your arrival and everything will be taken care of.” With that, he hit the top of the taxi and the driver sped off towards some unknown destination. I have to admit I was feeling rather nervous. I mean I had just been shoved into a taxi going who knows where. I was half tempted to call it all off at that moment, but my curiosity got the upper hand, so I decided to just enjoy the ride.

We were out of the city in short order, the buildings gradually giving way to rolling hills. Then the hills gave way to thick forest. The scenery made me drowsy and I found myself waking with a start when the cab finally stopped.

“Ere ye are sir,” the driver said.

“How much do I owe you?”

“Oh, no charge sir, yer friend already took care of it.”

I got out with my bag in tow and thanked the driver. He then sped away, leaving me in a cloud of dust. I finally realized I was standing in front of a large four story brick building, surrounded on all sides by a brick wall and forest. I walked up to the front door and rang the bell. I assumed this was Dr. Huffendorff’s residence. Instantly, a gentleman opened the door and rushed me in.

“Go down the hall and take a left. The woman at the desk will take care of you.”

I have to admit this was all rather overwhelming. Nevertheless, I proceeded down the hall and to the left. The woman was sitting behind one of those desks that are more like counters, with a glass partition and an intercom for communication. I stood there for a good ten minutes before she finally looked up.

She asked in a rather impatient tone, “May I help you, sir?”

“I’m here to see Dr. Huffendorff.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“As far as I know I do.”

“Your name?”

“Mr. Arthur Woodsworth.”

She glanced down at a ledger on her desk then looked up and said, “Your name is not on my list.”

“I was told everything was taken care of by Dr. Harding.”

“I’m sorry, but you don’t have an appointment. You can make an appointment now if you would like.”

I thought on this for a moment before remembering the letter in my pocket. I pulled it out and passed it under the glass to the woman. “This should explain everything,” I said.

It took her a moment to read over the letter. She appeared to have scrutinized the signature. Then she got on the phone and talked for several minutes, none of which could I hear as she had turned off the intercom. Finally, she hung the phone up and turned the

intercom back on. "Sorry about the misunderstanding, sir. Everything is in order. Someone will be out shortly to attend to you. Feel free to have a seat."

No sooner had I sat down than two large gentlemen appeared and asked me to come with them. One of the men picked up my bag and took his post on my left hand side, the other on my right. They took me to a plain room with a bed, a chair, and a heater. There were no decorations, not a single picture or sculpture. Even the draperies were of a plain white design. The two gentlemen left, taking my bag and closing the door behind them.

For two days I was left in my room and not allowed to see Dr. Huffendorff. I figured it was on account of him being very busy. I was left to my own devices, yet I was not permitted to leave my room. Finally, on the third day, I was granted an audience with the doctor.

I am going to pause for a moment to clear up a few things. First, it had long been known to me that many of my opinions and theories were considered by my colleagues to be "eccentric" or "rantings of lunacy." I attributed this to my superior mental capacity. I generally found it hard to hold a conversation for any length of time with anybody. Second, Dr. Huffendorff's residence was a relatively sterile environment. Everyone I had met up to this point was wearing long white lab coats or surgical garments. This I naturally attributed to the doctor's running his business right out of his home. I also figured this was why I had not seen my personal belongings since I was shown to my room. Finally, I attributed my not being able to leave my room to their not wanting me to disturb the normal routines and overall harmony of Dr. Huffendorff's practice.

I will now return to the issue at hand. I was shown to a large recreation room, for my meeting, but not before they insisted that I put on a rough, scratchy, uncomfortable robe and a pair of heavy, plain, ugly slippers instead of my suit. I found this rather odd. Nevertheless, I complied because I really wanted to meet Dr. Huffendorff. I sat down on a comfortable sofa and awaited his arrival. Shortly after, he showed up wearing the same thing I was. Obviously, this was going to be an informal meeting. He wore thick rimmed, black eyeglasses, and his grey hair was in a state of disarray.

He sat down and proceeded without an introduction. “If a monkey jumps through the hoops and then circles the mulberry bush, what do you get?”

“A popped weasel, perhaps?” I inquired.

“Exactly. I see you have been reading the rings of Saturn.”

“Yes, I have also read the rings on the maple tree,” I replied.

The doctor was starting to get excited as he proceeded. “So you have been to Canada, have you?”

“Yes, I agree speaking French is easy, but you are getting off of the subject.”

“What a wonder that Eiffel Tower is, huh?”

“Of course, but the Tower of Babel, try explaining that.”

“Ah, who cares about height anyhow? The important thing is religion, wouldn’t you say?”

“But the cross was made out of dogwood don’t you know?”

“Ho-ho, now you’ve said it. That Judas was a weasel, wouldn’t you agree?”

I responded in a not so polite manner, “Now sir, you are just going in circles. I bid you good day, sir.”

He yelled after me, “Wait! The rabbits are still running loose!”

I calmly replied, “There are rabbits loose all right, and they’re hopping around in your head. I said good day, sir.”

I had it in my mind to walk out without my belongings then and there. However, I was stopped short by a man in a lab coat.

“You cannot leave, sir. If you continue, I will be forced to place you in restraints. Kindly take a seat or, if you prefer, I will escort you to your room.”

“Who do you think you are trying to hold me in this manner?”

“I am Dr. Huffendorff. I am in charge of this asylum, and as a result, in charge of you.”

“Asylum? Dr. Huffendorff? Then who was I just talking to?” I had to ask.

“That was Mr. Twenkles. I might add, the two of you got on superbly. Why, I haven’t seen him quite so animated in years.”

“There must be some sort of misunderstanding here. I was supposed to meet you, not some lunatic. My friend, Dr. Harding, was supposed to arrange everything. I gave the receptionist the letter he sent with me. That should clear everything up.”

“First off, you have met me, now haven’t you. Second, the letter did clear everything up. Dr. Harding’s letter said you were quite mad. Furthermore, it goes on to say how you would insist on this all being a big misunderstanding. He informed us that he has been treating you for some years. However, he grows weary of your antics and wanted you committed. So you see, there has not been any misunderstanding.”

“But there has,” I said. “Dr. Harding was a friend and colleague, not my doctor. He was just jealous of my superior intellect. Ask any of my friends, they will tell you.”

“Dr. Harding also wrote that you would say that and provided a list of people who would corroborate his story. That is what I have been doing these past two days, tracking down those people. Every last one of them concurred.” Dr. Huffendorff turned to walk away when he finished speaking.

I grabbed him by the arm and spun him around. “Please...,” but I got no further than that before two orderlies took hold of me and carried me to my room kicking and screaming. They then strapped me to the bed as Dr. Huffendorff walked in.

“Now, sir, perhaps some quiet time is in store for you. I think it will do you some good.” Then he left the room followed quickly by the orderlies.

And here I have been for the past two years. Sometimes I am allowed to talk with Mr. Twenkles and other times they permit me to walk the grounds. Most of the time, however, I am kept in solitary confinement because of the ruckus I cause amongst the other patients. As you can see, I am in a rather bad situation. If anybody reading this can get word to my family, I would be greatly indebted to you forever. As they should be able to clear up this whole mess, I urge you to make haste. I cannot stand this much longer. I can feel the other patients’ sickness slowly slipping into my conscience. For the love of everything holy, please hurry!

Sincerely,

Mr. Arthur Woodsworth

P.S. There is one thing I would like to say if Dr. Harding happens to be reading this letter. This, sir, was a very rotten trick unbecoming of a gentleman of your standings.

P.P.S. The rabbits are running loose all over the place.

## The Passing of the Storm

Jacque Bontrager

It was another one of *those* nights. One when I felt as if my soul were a raging storm. Tears poured in torrents down my clammy cheeks, my heart pounded like out-of-control thunder, and lighting-sharp words flashed out of my mouth as my parents and I engaged in another one of our “what-is-wrong-with-you-we-want-to-help-you” *discussions*. I called them arguments, because generally when there is a pair-- or even a group-- of people yelling at one another, it constitutes an argument. As a matter of fact, I didn't know what was wrong with me, or how anything could possibly *be* wrong with me. I was a rich, spoiled, gets-everything-she-wants type of girl. However, I couldn't get *everything* that I wanted.

In fact, the one thing that I wanted most in the world was disguised in the most odd of packages. My parents and I had accepted the opportunity to house a foreign exchange student for a full year. I realize that using the word *house* doesn't exactly make you think of a warm and fuzzy family-type deal. I sure didn't think that it was going to be. In fact, the thought of “housing” someone from a foreign country that hardly spoke English made my future appear even bleaker, but we'll get back to that later.

I wasn't what you would call an optimistic person back then. I was a girl that didn't really fit in. Of course, I had friends... or, more accurately, acquaintances that I liked to think of as friends, because these were the people that I shared the bulk of my time with. However, these were the sort of people my mom *did not* want me spending time with. She didn't have too much to worry about, seeing as I hardly spent any time out of school with them. I spent my time out of school writing angst-ridden poetry about what a sick, sad world it was. I spent my time *alone*. *Always alone*. If I wasn't alone, I was wishing that I was. Being an identity-confused teenager, unsure of her place in the world, I was not confident exposing myself to anyone but myself. This is just how I was.

I think one major reason I always wanted to be alone was because I didn't know exactly who I was, where I belonged, what I was all about, or whom I could really trust. I didn't have anyone to discuss the feelings that were trapped deep in my soul. I mean, come on... who actually bares their soul to their parents? Especially being a young teen? That's what I thought. I was too embarrassed by how I felt most of the time to admit to my parents that anything was wrong and I didn't feel comfortable enough with any of my friends to discuss any issues with them. I felt much more comfortable taking joyrides at night, sneaking a cigarette, and then facing the wrath of my parents when I got home. Yeah, I had good *friends*, right?

Well, this all changed when Noemi came. She was the smallest teenager I'd ever seen in my life, almost outweighed by my 8-year-old niece. However, no one should have ever let her appearance fool them. She was one of the strongest people I have ever known. She was the sort of person who would walk up to anyone as though they were long-lost friends and talk for an hour. The kind of person who would take a mangy dog into the house, give him a bath, and keep him forever because he was without a home... even if he had fleas. She was the kind of person who, if you don't know them, makes you sort of nauseous because they are loved by *everyone*... and I was thinking to myself, "yippee... another person I get to feel inferior to and uncomfortable around."

At first, Noemi and I didn't really talk much. It was hard to forget that she was a stranger in my home. It felt very awkward to ride in the tiny, sort of smelly, cab of my truck a mile down the road to school and try to make conversation with this girl who was *always* smiling and *always* optimistic. She was like a freak of nature to me.... I just didn't understand how someone could be so cheery and happy to see another day, and to *meet new people*. I mean, what was that all about?

Then, the homesickness came. At first, Noemi would just seem a little down, and I didn't really think much about it. I mean, everyone gets sad now and then, even a happiness machine like her. However, hearing her crying and seeing her red, puffy, tear-streaked face really got to me. It made her seem human after all. It gave us something to talk about, because I knew what it felt like to be alone. I knew what it

was like to feel sad and out of place and uncomfortable in your own skin. I knew what it was like to cry for hours and hours and hours and still feel like the dark-gray clouds of hopelessness in your soul were filled-to-bursting. We were suddenly seeing eye-to-eye.

From then on, our nights were filled with the deepest heart-to-heart conversations I had ever shared with anyone in my entire life. We started hanging out together all of the time. She sort of led me to “the crew,” my best friends for the rest of my high-school career, some for the rest of my life. However, no one from the crew could ever compare to Noemi. She taught me how to look forward to each day as though it were a new beginning... how to view the world through rose-colored lenses, so to speak. She taught me to take joy in the most simple things in life... dinner with your family, laughing so hard with your friends that you almost felt like your sides would split, and not taking anything in the world for granted. Especially not your family, not the time that you share with them, not the moments you spend in the morning talking over coffee, discussing the news, or even what you’re going to do that day. She taught me not to take God for granted, because without a relationship with Him, you had *nothing* in the world. She taught me to just go with the flow, and that even though dark clouds roll in, the storm will eventually pass.

Noemi and I still talk on the phone as often as possible. Also, e-mail and letters keep us as close as ever. When we talk on the phone our conversations go on for hours and hours, and our parents get a little mad, of course, but they understand. It makes me sort of sad to think about the future when we will both be busy with our real lives. This past summer I got to go to Europe and visit her for an entire month, and this-coming spring she will be flying over here to be an attendant at my wedding. I can’t imagine the next time we will be able to visit with one another, especially not every year, but I am optimistic that we will continue to have a close relationship and be the best of friends. She will forever be my sister.

## Photo Gallery of Afghanistan

Robert Sullivan







**James**  
Rita Saylor

*02/24/99 time 1943-Respirations have ceased.  
No palpable blood pressure. Body prepared for  
transport to morgue.*

Twenty-five minutes after writing this entry in the chart I found myself standing in the yellow, dimmed light of that long hallway on 4North South at Community Hospital. My feet were frozen to the cold marble floor. My eyes fixed on the red velvet fabric that surrounded James's body. I could hear nothing. I only thought of him.

I started that day dreading the alarm clock. The inevitable hustle and bustle to complete everything on my dreadful "to do" list without too much pain. After getting my unwilling children on the bus for school, I was off to my doctor's appointment where he had an emergency and left me waiting. However, I know the real truth about that emergency. He just wanted an extended breakfast with his new bride. Next, I headed across town where I waited in line for more than one hour just to renew my license plate. By now I was filled with frustration, but I had to go to the grocery store and then I had to be to at work by 3 p.m.

I punched the time card just in the nick of time. I did not need another tardy notice on my record. My fellow co-workers were already gathered around the tape recorder listening to the day-shift nurses' report. I sat slumped in my chair as the voices protruding from this machine reported to me about the day's events and who I would care for that evening. I thought, "Great, another 'to do list.'" I first learned of James from this report. He was involved in a motorcycle accident and had suffered from severe brain injuries, broken ribs, and numerous other elements caused from this unfortunate accident. He is what medical professionals refer to as "A Train Wreck." Staff report swiftly came to an end, and I went off to encounter the horrors of my evening.

I started my rounds that evening with James. I can still see the fluffed pillows engulfing his torso and back, rotating his body mass toward the portal of his room.

He was snuggled under a red blanket made of soft velvet fabric. The aroma of spring flowers filled the entire room. He had plump cheeks, mystic black hair, sparkling eyes and broad football player shoulders. His face could brighten a room with the slightest upward curving of his mouth. He appeared stable and I thought he would just require a lot of nursing maintenance. I would later discover his presence in my day would mean much more.

***2/24/99 time 1545 –Orientation unattainable. Neuro checks completed with weakness on both right and left lower extremities. Skin pink with +1 edema in left leg. Capillary refill good. Trach intact with O2 at 2L per Nasal Canula. Bowel sounds + all four quads. Auscultation of lungs clear. No obvious signs of pain. Mother at beside.***

Each of my other patients required as much of my time as James.

The call light of room 237 was buzzing in my ear. Shelly wanted help to the restroom and Mrs. Jones needed to be given her routine pain medication. I also needed to get Rusty down for a CT scan. Rush! Rush! I thought this day was never going to end.

I made my rounds and did not get back to see James for some time. However, when I found my way back to his room, a unique stench penetrated my nose and left me with the most unpleasant feeling of dread. Without missing a beat I graciously smiled at James giving him a little pat on the bottom, and said, “You have had a little gift for me. Let’s get you and those sheets cleaned.”

James’s mother was nestled in the corner reading a *Time* magazine. She giggled at me and said, “He has been moaning more and seems to be a bit uncomfortable.” I examined James as I continued to scrub away the stench and told her that I would bring him some pain medication.

***2/24/99 time 1700 –Mother stated “pt seems uncomfortable”. Noticeable face grimacing with low moans. Morphine 2mg IV given. Will continue to monitor pain.***

The evening progressed. Dinner trays were arriving and with that came the patient’s groans of disapproval. Sally wanted salt on her potatoes. The gentleman down the hall wanted vanilla instead of chocolate pudding. Mrs. Jones wanted tea in

exchange for the coffee. “Don’t forget the sugar, LOTS of sugar,” she would say. About now I was dreaming about 5 minutes of alone time, or maybe even a swift restroom break. Nevertheless, it was back to James’s room before I could make that dream a reality.

***2/24/99 time 1735 – Pt. Resting well. No evidence of pain or discomfort. Mom states “he seems better” Two-Cal bolus feed at this time. No residual from G-tube, routine meds administered.***

The evening just kept advancing. I had no time to chart. There was no time to take a break. I surely hoped this day would end soon. Throughout this evening, like so many others, I began to question why I had become a nurse. Why would anyone do this? Just then I saw James’s mom rush down the hall. Her face was filled with panic. In a loud voice she said, “Come quick!”

***2/24/99 time 1910 –found pt with moderate amount of yellow/green mucus oozing from trach site. Suctioned, with little improvement. Non-responsive to any type of verbal/painful stimuli. Respirations shallow with periods of apnea. No pulse detected. Code Blue called.***

The nursing mode kicked into high gear. I call the “Code Blue” and started CPR. People were gushing through the entry. The red emergency cart filled with tubes, needles, medication, oxygen and all essentials needed in an emergency led the way. I placed the CPR board behind him and lowered the bed in a flat position. James’s torso exposed, and above him was me, repeatedly compressing his sternum into his heart. Down-1, Down-2, Down-3, Down-4, Down-5, and BREATH!

Dr. Rink enters James’s room. He begins to spout out verbal order after verbal order. Sweat is pooling under my arms and on my forehead. Adrenalin is speeding through all our veins. We anxiously work for what seemed hours to revive James. When I notice his mother watching us from the corner with great fear. Oh my god, I think to myself as Dr. Rink stops all life saving efforts. Too much time had elapsed and there was no hope of survival. His mother was overwhelmed with grief. I tried to comfort her as best as I could, but found her comforting me instead. How ironic this seemed.

The room was cleaned and his mother waited with James until the morgue arrived for his motionless frame. Many thoughts swam through my head about the evening. Just before they transported him down the hall she opened her heart again to me and said, "I really appreciate all you did for James. You are truly a gifted nurse." Then she hugged me and walked behind him, as I stood watching under those yellow dimmed lights of that long hallway on 4 North South.

I realized later, as I was writing that evening's events in the chart, that I truly loved the nursing profession. It is a profession that includes, days of chaos, confusion, and total commitment, and you must not forget to check the labs, the doctors' orders, or the medication record. Sometimes you fight the urge to think that a patient is a bother because you've been running all day and night and not had time for yourself or to do any charting. But when you remember you are there to help them, not to do your charting, you put a smile on your face and say, "What can I do for you?" I have cried on the best of days and laughed on the worst of days because that is nursing. It is **love, peace, heartache, tears, sweat, a simple smile, and taking care of someone who has just died.** This paradox is the reality of nursing, and I had forgotten some of that throughout my hectic day. James and his mother lifted my heart that evening and showed me that I truly belonged in the nursing profession.

## The Chase

Ranae Shoaf

Brad revved up the engine of our brand new Datsun 4-door as we settled in for a joy ride. Oh, how we loved that car! It was shiny white with leather bucket seats, and it had that intoxicating new car smell. It was so cool compared to the big yellow van that was our family car; it even had power windows. Dad bought it to drive to his new job, and it was the first time we'd ever been a two-car family. Brad, the oldest, always got to drive. He was the only one who knew how to shift a four-on-the-floor, anyway. He'd lean the seat back, roll the window down, hang his elbow out, and start it up. *Brrruuummm brrruuummm*

Our family arrived in sections, and Brad and I were the first part. Just a year and a half different in age, and one year apart in school, we traveled through each stage of childhood together. Even after finishing his time in the military, our father seemed to be restless for a challenge, and we moved nine times in the eighteen years that I lived at home. Of the children in our family, only Brad and I lived in all of those places. The four younger siblings we had by the time we graduated from high school had each been born in a different state. We fought a lot when we were young - not real fighting, just the teasing and bickering that make parents wonder why they ever had children. There was one time, when I was in sixth grade, I had a slumber party and the next day was trying to nap. I was lying on the couch in the living room, and Brad was playing outside in the snow.

*Bam.* A snowball hit the window above my head. I raised up from the couch and glared out the window.

“Stop it, Brad! I’m trying to sleep!”

“Ha ha ha!” (Evil laughter from the yard because of course that is *exactly* why he was doing it.)

*Bam.* Another direct hit.

“I mean it, Brad. Stop it now or I’m telling!”

This went on a few more times with me whining appropriately, fueling his delight. Then it was a *bam* and *CRACK*. That snowball must’ve been pretty icy

because it broke the window! I was absolutely delighted, knowing he would get in *so* much trouble when Mom and Dad got home.

When we were in high school we hung out sometimes, even going to Friday night dances together. It was cheaper to go "drag" than "stag," and neither of us had a boyfriend or girlfriend. We danced together on occasion at church dances, but that would have been just too weird at school dances. As it was, people would tease us when we were seen talking at school or waving in the halls.

"Isn't that your brother?"

"Yeah."

"You LIKE him?"

"That's weird."

Our family had recently moved to Arizona, so we didn't know many people, and we hadn't had a lot of chances to make new friends. Dad would soon take the car when he went ahead to his next job in Alaska, so we had to take advantage of the time we had with it. I don't think he ever realized we drove it. We certainly never asked his permission.

I turned on the radio and flipped it to the channel that played our favorite songs: "Na, Na, Hey, Hey," "Come Together," "Ain't No Sunshine," and "Spirit in the Sky." We sang along when they came on. Inside the car, all of our other cares and worries seemed to vanish; it was always good times. Brad liked to drive fast – it added to the excitement of our adventure. He'd gun the engine and rev it hard before he shifted to the next gear.

Once when we were driving, we attracted the attention of a local policeman.

*Wwwrrreee Wwwrrreee*

*Brrruupppa Brrruupppa Brrruupppa Brrruupppa.* Brad shifted down and pulled over.

The policeman pulled in beside us, walked around to Brad's window, and leaned in. "So, buddy, whar's the fire?" he drawled.

"Sorry, Officer, I didn't realize how fast I was going."

"Waall, ah'm gonna hafta give you a ticket."

But then, just as the officer pulled out his little clipboard, Brad kicked it back into first, yanked the steering wheel, and took off! *Brrruuummm Brrruuummm*

“HEY!” the officer yelled, “COME BACK HERE!” He raced around and jumped back in his vehicle and took off after us again. *Wwwrrreee Wwwrrreee*

After a bit of a wild chase, Brad pulled over again. *Brrruupppa Brrruupppa Brrruupppa Brrruupppa*. “What’s the problem, Officer?” he asked innocently while I tried unsuccessfully to stifle my giggles. I turned the radio down so we could hear what the officer was saying.

“WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?” he yelled. “WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?! You can’t just drive off while ah’m giving you a ticket!”

Brad acted contrite. “Yes sir, Officer, I’m very sorry.”

“All right, then, ah’m gonna write yur ticket now.”

As he pulled the clipboard out again, Brad could not resist. He started the car back up and shifted into high gear. *Brrruuummm brrruuummm*

“WHAT THE...” the officer yelled again. “THAT’S NOT FAIR!!!” Back to his vehicle he ran, back inside he jumped, back behind us he raced. *Wwwrrreee Wwwrrreee*

By then we were laughing so hard our sides ached. We weren’t always so blatantly disrespectful to authority figures; we just didn’t have any respect for *this* officer. He was, after all, our younger brother, and we never let him have the upper hand.

After driving awhile as fast as we could, the siren screaming the whole time, Brad pulled over again. JD got out of the big yellow police car, came over, nearly in tears, and demanded to know why we kept taking off. Brad and I were spent from laughing so hard, but we probably would’ve done it again if Mom hadn’t opened the garage door and hollered, “Kids! Time to come in for dinner!”

## **Two Fools Fishing**

Buddy Cundiff

Two people were sitting on the tailgate of the truck, reminiscing about the adventure from which they had just returned. There was me, Buddy, a semi-experienced outdoorsman, my very good friend - Daniel Quinette. Dan was a little fellow, short, and scrawny, with a large beard, mustache, and a thick, full head of hair. Typically, Dan was a stack of dynamite ready to explode at any given moment. Yet, he found peace and solitude in the adventures of the outdoors. Myself, I was simply a medium build. I spent a lot of time working out in high school, which was only a few years earlier. Here we are on the tailgate of a 1981 Ford F100, the old style ranger.

Dawn, my daughter, about 7 years old, at the time, with such innocence about her, one couldn't help but admire her youth. Dawn was full of spunk and vigor. Dawn rarely let a moment go by without chiming in on a conversation. Everything was going to be different today. Dawn walked up to the truck, began listening in on the conversation. She then chimes in with instructions from her mom.

"Dad, momma said 'Dinner is about done, be gettin ready.'" Dawn stated as she continues to listen in on the conversation.

"Dan, we barely made it out alive. We had some close calls didn't we?"  
Buddy continues talking with Dan.

"Which time? The Great Dane, the raccoons, or dat - boat thing, they were all close calls?"

"Wow, I forgot all bout da boat thing," as I giggled, kind of chuckling to myself, "It was a scary thing!"

"Dad, ya didn't tell me and Nic 'bout the boat. Did ya'all take a boat down on that little pond? What kinda boat did ya use? That pond is so small Dad."

"Ya big dummy," declares Dan. "That was a funny story, ya should have told her long ago."

“Well, I’m sorry. I didn’t find it so stinking funny! I don’t like talkin’ bout pain that often, ya know”

“Please Dad. I’d like to hear the story – *please*,” she whined.

“Oh, come on Buddy; tell ‘er bout da boat. Our wonderful, “Yacht.” I’ll help ya tell her!”

“OK, I will smarty pants.”

“Dawn, you remember that spot, right? Down in Spencer, the old house with the farm pond down the little hill, by the woods. Where Dad and Dan like to go hunt, remember?”

“*Yes, Dad!*” Dawn states sarcastically. “I don’t know ‘bout any boat though, that pond was covered in weeds, and the house was overrun with mice. I remember it really well!”

“OK, I’ll tell ya. Just sit down here on the tailgate with Dan and me. I hope we have enough time before dinner is done.”

We had been in the woods for 4 days, out of food, water, almost everything. We still had some beer, but beer does not sustain life. We had tried to catch fish for food with no prevails. It was mid-July and the vegetation in and around the pond was thriving. The pond was very overgrown with cattails and weeds. There were only a few places that we could access the water by shore. So we had to find a way to get over by the cattails across the pond, where we knew the big fish were. There was no boat, or anything that we could find to get us anywhere close. We would have to look for ideas in other places.

We went up the hill to the old, dilapidated shed. As we were walking toward the shed, through the tall weeds, I ended up stuck in a large brier patch. Dan found a masonry tub, in the shed; it was a large, rusty, metal container. It was 4 foot long, 3 foot wide and 12 to 14 inches deep. We didn’t know how it would work in water, but we were desperate. We launched the tub, into the water, to test for leaks. It was leaking on all four corners. We had to do something to slow the ongoing leaks, and we had absolutely no equipment to do the work.

I scurried up to the abandoned house and began to fumble through everything. The house had been stripped for renovation about twenty years ago. There was one

room that we could sleep in. It had a bed, a table, and a refrigerator. I found some aluminum foil, on the table, usually used when cooking. I would be able to use this - somehow. I remembered there was a tall candle, in a bottom drawer, in what used to be the kitchen. As I opened the drawer, three mice scurried out the back. Have I mentioned my incredible fear of mice? It was a very tense moment for me, then it faded when I seen the candle I was after. I got out the candle. I sat and thought for a moment: recovering from the mice, and pondering on how to fix this tub into a boat. What and how could we use these items to make something like this work? The fireworks went off, all the light bulbs lit up, I figured out how to fix the tub.

I took the foil, and placed it over the corners of the tub. As I rubbed the foil onto the seams of the tub, the foil began to mold and stick to the sides. When the foil was in place, I melted the candle on top of the foil. The foil made the new seams, the candle would act as glue and water seal for the new seams. The foil and candle wax, along with the pressure from the water pushing in on it should do the job. This would, in theory and in mind, create a waterproof barrier. It worked; it was floating - like a real boat! Now we were ready to fish for dinner, in our reconstructed "boat."

Since I was bigger in size than Dan, I put him in the boat, and shoved him off. He stayed adjacent to the shore at first, he seemed nervous about the entire thing. He wanted to make sure everything was okay, with the boat. Then he used a stick to paddle over to where the fish were jumping. Within the first ten minutes, he caught three nice fish for dinner. We would eat tonight!

Unfortunately, I wasn't happy that Dan was the only one who was catching our meal. I felt like I needed to catch some for us, as well. I told Dan after dinner that I would go out and catch some more fish. I thought I would be okay in the boat. Dan suggested that he would go out in the boat with me. Unfortunately, our judgment was distorted from the alcohol beyond making good judgment calls.

We sailed out together. It was about eleven o'clock, at night, and it was so dark, you literally could not see your hand in front of your face. Without the lantern, we couldn't even see each other. We noticed that the water was only inches, from the top of the boat, and moments from pouring itself into the boat. With every slight movement the water became closer and closer to infiltrating the boat. We continued

to fish for the next meal, unabated by the chance of capsizing. Our uncontrollable urge to eat, driven by alcohol, drove us fearlessly onto the water.

I began to paddle. Water came over the top and into the boat. We scooped the water out with our hands, and then we set off again. We made it over to the area Dan had triumphed before. I tossed my line one way, Dan the other. Within no time I had a huge bite!

“Dan, I found Moby Dick! Get ready, we can eat for days now!”

Dan quickly reminded me that we didn't have a net. We would have to haul Moby in by hand. Moby was very large, and strong, yet we didn't know what Moby was. I had a large pole with 25-pound test line. With this I could catch a 30-pound fish with no problem, but that won't decrease the fight in Moby.

I kept reeling, and pulling on the pole. The boat began to move. We were now being drug around the pond, in the middle of the night, by Moby. Moby must have sensed his demise, because he was fighting with everything he had! I was not going to give up the fight! I was hungry as well as intoxicated, but I wanted to catch - Moby.

We were so disoriented because it was so dark. The lantern fell over as I tugged on the fishing pole. When it did, one of the mantels on the lantern broke. The lantern was now only producing half the light as it was before. We were able to see our antagonist, a giant catfish we named Moby. Moby leapt out of the water and into the air, and with a large splash, Moby dove straight for the bottom. I almost lost the fishing pole when the line became taut again. Water gushed in over the edge, into the boat, once again. Dan was bailing out the water frantically with both hands, to keep us afloat. I pulled Moby up to the surface, with all my strength. Finally, we saw Moby come to the surface of the water. Moby and I were weary from fighting with each other. I was holding Moby the Giant catfish on the top of the water with my fishing pole. Moby seemingly, lost the battle. Moby and I gazed into each other's eyes as to look into the eyes of your opponent after a boxing match. Moby looked at me hard, with a deep stare. I returned his gaze with a smile, my defeat over his lacking strength. I can now accept my trophy, dinner.

I reached over to grab Moby. As I stretched my arm out and slightly leaned toward the water, Dan did so at the exact same time. The water so close to the top,

and both Dan and I moving in the same direction to recover the fish, we were doomed. The boat capsized catapulting us headlong into the blinding abyss, along with everything in the boat. The lantern hissed angrily as the water quenched its dreary flame. The darkness was so overwhelming it confused us, even more, as we surfaced. One moment we were triumphantly reaching for Moby, the next we were swimming in the darkness. When I came to the surface, in the blackness of the night, Dan's mournful wail was unforgettable.

"I can't swim!" He flailed, blew the water out of his mouth, and then he screamed it again.

"Now you tell me! Reach out your arm! I can help you, if you will just grab my arm," I screamed.

As he did, he was so frightened, he pulled me straight under! I was now being drowned by a frantic person who can't swim. In lifeguard training, I have learnt to pull the drowning person underwater in this scenario. They will let you go when this happens. The last place someone who can't swim wants to be - is underwater. Therefore, out of fear they will let you go. I had to do this to Dan. I did, and he let me go. It worked well.

"I am going to die, help me!" Dan gurgled!

"I will help you, but first you have to settle down! Reach out for my hand. I'll grab your shirt, and then we can swim ashore!"

This time he was listening. I grabbed his shirt and we (really just me) began to swim. I could barely move with all my clothes on.

I started to take off my boots, and then I felt the pain of something hitting my shin, then again. With every kick I was hitting something hard, very hard. It was a rock. I let Dan go, he began to scream again. I shouted for him to stand up. He did, and soon we walked ashore.

"You know Dan; we probably could have stayed another couple days."

"We can go camping, at least now we know what to expect, maybe we can even plan better."

"Great, I will get the lantern fixed. You want to borrow somebody's boat?"

"Don't even go there!"

“Daddy, can I go?” The young, beautiful little eyes stole our hearts.

“No boats, no boats. Dan, I don’t trust us with boats!”

“Uhhh, no problem here, no boats allowed!”

“No beer Dan, absolutely no beer!”

“I know, I know, let’s go eat - can we?”

Dan shut the tailgate as the three walk off to have dinner. Buddy has a limp in his right Leg, but he keeps up with his young daughter. Nothing like fresh caught catfish from a small farm pond shared with family and friends.

## Faculty Focus

### Hundreds of Scenes by Alexander Gardner

Robert Stilwell

Moon light as tacit, chill  
Unfocusing photographs,  
His glass plates chipped like jars,  
Each battle's desolation: our lines  
Fall back, tonight, at any point;  
Our whitewashed churches are burning,  
As were our cedar woods, out awful thickets,  
Our hillside orchards; all our snipers  
Lie tumbled, much like Shaker fences  
Of flat-piled field stones. Melville wrote  
"What like a bullet can undeceive!" The lost  
become their losses. Dim letters home  
have been scattered down every smudging trench  
---and we might almost follow  
a passage, here or there,  
by our cold, but steady, lamp...

*Alexander Gardner, along with Mathew Brady, was the pre-eminent battlefield photographer during the War Between the States.*



Traitor's Gate, The Tower of London,  
London, England