

Rebirth Issue: Stories by A. Lorenti and George Somers; Poetry by Gerald McElreath;
Cartoon by John Wright; A Gallery of Personal Photos; Staccato Microfiction and The Dream Journal

The Blotter

MAGAZINE

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Episode 4: A New Beginning.

Mom frequently nabbed me staring into the open refrigerator. I was searching for something special with that discerning palate that every teenager has, and because I also suffered from some undiagnosed attention deficit malady, my discernment only manifest itself with the fridge door ajar. “You need to make a decision,” Mom would say. I always believed that was exactly what I was doing.

I’m aware that this does not an editor’s resume make. But opportunity often has nothing to do with planning, or good timing. Whenever I really need something, it is rarely available. I suppose that this is neither a sin nor a shame; not even a universal truth that I can lean on. So, being asked to step up into the big shoes at The Blotter is an honor, and I’m not so much flattered as flustered. Tally-ho, nevertheless.

Microphones and flashbulbs.

Q: What do you love about The Blotter?

A: It’s always something. Not always for me, but for you, and you. That’s about right, too. Were each issue made to my specs there’d be a passel of disappointed readers who’d eventually stop picking her up and taking a gander. That’s how taste works. I’ve enjoyed the wit, much of it delivered by Mr. Pence, who is humor’s James Bond, always dry; shaken not stirred. I love that there’s never a bump in the batch. How can that be? Does anyone but me care that in three and one half years the work has always been good-fine with only the very occasional occlusion, and those being the merest questions of style or flavor. Not facts, mind you, only opinion. I love that there have been pieces that shone with the brilliance of magnesium flares. And my fave list is different from yours, of course. I’ve seen pieces so clear and clever as to fan the green flames of a writer’s envy. I should have written that. Damn it all!

And I love that every month there was a run of 6K for free in most of my favorite hang-outs, and only a handful of

those weren't picked up and perused, folded into a hip pocket like a flask of Black Jack, rolled up inside the toilet tissue for the next guy, stuffed into the driver's visor and jammed into a backpack. Or used to wipe up a latte ring on the table. Every month, the bits got full frontal pink-and-hair exposure to an expectant readership.

I've read an editor's bitter rant that his magazine's only public were its writers and, thusly, they had to pay a reading fee to submit. Not so The Blotter. While there are certainly dozens of names in her stable of authors, there are thousands of readers, an audience of which she can be proud, and respect, and for whom they could keep on keeping on.

So I feel like Charlie Kane on his first morning at the Inquirer. *Enthusiastic!* Or DiNiro as Capone, "A man should have enthusiasms." I'm *trepidatious*. Not even sure that's a word, but what the hell! *Flirty*. You've had a time-honored affection for Johnny and his tastes, his comprehension of your tastes. Can I make you like me? How much spectacular thigh do I need to flash you to catch a ride?

As your new editor, a manifesto may be suitable – to flex my muscles a little. A vision also; to continue to produce quality blah on a blah basis blahdy-blah. Yeah, we'll see.

Maybe if I promise to eat a worm you all will keep sending your finest kind for me to read and select and print. I'll do my level best. No, that's not good enough, is it? How about I'll do your best - what you should always expect and then some.

So...let your shoulders relax, eyes go half-lidded, for a little while. Read up; it's not work, not due today, and there's still a couple of hours of daylight.

And thanks, JP, for all the fish.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

The Blotter may contain certain words or ideas that offend. While this was in no way our intent, it is a gas. Continue at your own risk.

“Genetics” - a chapter excerpt from the novel *Minding My Own* by A. Lorenti

Occasionally I'd complain to my mother's youngest sister, Carmella, that my mother must hate me. Carmella is the baby of my mother's family and, as the baby, missed a lot of what the older children endured. She thinks of Mom as her second mother, so her advice consists of reasons to support the position that I should be thankful I didn't have it worse.

Carmella told me how Little Grandma put her eldest daughter to work by the age of

six. How Helen would have to iron her brother's shirts, clean the house and help with the meals. How she had to quit school at 16 so she could be home to help with the smaller children. She rarely went anywhere, had few friends and no time for hobbies. If she ever spoke back, or did not do as told, Grandma would beat her with a broom handle until she bled. This was supposed to help me feel better? No, my mom didn't hate me. My psychopath grandmother raised an abusive bitch who just happens to be my mother.

“Oh, yeah? So then what's Grandma's excuse?”

“Well, you know Papa drank – and he was mean when he was drunk. He'd beat her. I think a few of the miscarriages happened because of those beatings.”

Grandpa? I didn't believe it. Maybe he got mad sometimes and may have said mean

things, but could he have been that bad? Not the man I knew. Grandma was such a witch, I felt if he went off on her, she probably provoked him and deserved it. There was also the fact that I never felt she liked me much, and I know the feeling was mutual. “Lots of decent women get tangled up with abusive men – they don't all end up beating their kids bloody with broom handles.” “Grandma has her reasons:” said Aunt Carmella “the mother who raised her, and the mother who gave her away.” That got my attention.

At the age of fifteen, my great grandmother killed a man with an ax. He was her lover, an aristocrat from a rich family who lived in a small town in southern Italy. Great grandma was the family maid. They played around, she got pregnant – and he wouldn't marry her. Apparently, she didn't take it very well.

As I listened to the story about my maternal great grandmother I thought, “What guts!” Fifteen years old. She knew the odds of a hot shot marrying the maid but she told him about the



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baby anyway. I imagine him scornfully asking “Are you insane?” I imagine her eyes narrowing into slits as he turned away from her, her tears and pleas a minor annoyance. That must have been the “ah ha” moment. Maybe she tossed aside the chicken whose neck she recently twisted in preparation for the evening meal, the woodbin catching her eye. It must have been easy to snap up the ax. Without a sound raising it over her head, and utilizing the strength of righteous indignation, slicing down with everything she had, burying it in his back up to the handle. At that moment, I’m sure she was insane.

Grandma was born in an Italian prison in 1899. Shortly after her birth, Theresa Maria’s mother gave her to a woman being released on a lesser charge. This woman- who Grandma believed was her natural mother - raised her along with her own children. Grandma didn’t learn the truth until she was 60 years old. Her “sisters” gave her the

news when their mother passed on.

How could she not know something was wrong? And what about the wicked step sisters – if you could call them that – dropping the news at their mother’s funeral?

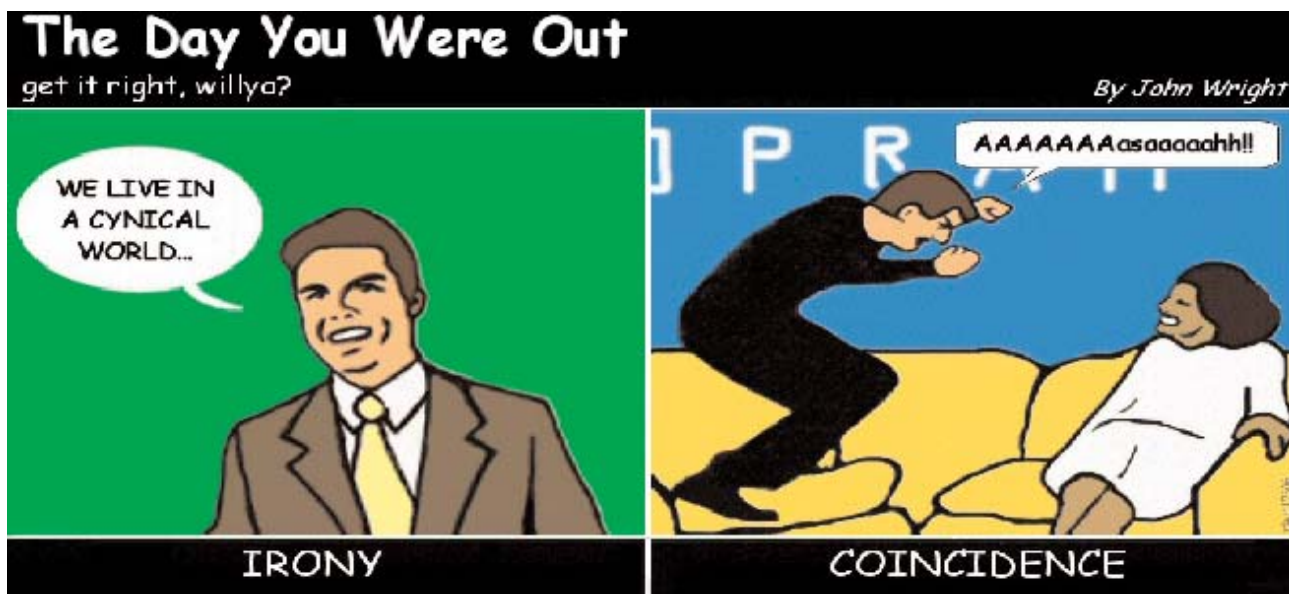
I knew Grandma came to America as a young bride – maybe 15 years old herself. She was just a little thing, leaving the only home and family she ever knew, traveling with a relative stranger for a husband, to make a life in a place where she knew no one and couldn’t speak the language. Little Grandpa was all she had – and she was pregnant on the journey.

Frankly, there was nothing little about Little Grandpa. He weighed close to 300 pounds and stood about 5’8”. We called him Little Grandpa because – well, I’m not really sure. That’s just how we refer to him. I’m thinking we use the term for differentiation - “little” for mom’s side of the family and “big” for dads. We never knew our paternal grandfather who

died when dad was 18 – but did call our paternal grandmother “Big Grandma”. She was a larger woman than Little Grandma – though not by much.

Over the years, I learned bits and pieces about my mother’s father. How he drank for most of his adult life. How he was an angry drunk. How Grandma was regularly on the receiving end of that anger. Little Grandma was a small woman, perhaps 4’10” and 100 pounds – but tough to the bone. She bore him ten children – my mother the first girl and seventh child - and lost another four – either by miscarriage or still-birth.

Grandpa carried on like that for years. Drink, work, drink, come home drunk, find reasons to knock Grandma around until – for some unexplained reason, around the age of 40 he changed. Aunt Carmella said he found God. He still had wine with meals, but no more than that and truly became a changed man. His transformation occurred long



The Blotter

before I was born.

I know one thing for sure about Little Grandpa. He was the first person who really loved me. I was his favorite grandchild, and he had lots of grandchildren. He was always happy to see me, ready with a hug and a small piece of candy or a trinket (whispering "Don't tell your mama" in broken English). Grandpa always had time for me. He'd let me hang around while he worked in his garden or under the grapevine in the backyard. I would climb up the trellis and watch him at work below – clearing ground, pulling weeds, sometimes simply sitting in the shade and reading the paper. I remember the deep purple fruit I would pick off that vine, the tart sweet taste of the grape as I popped it from its

skin and swallowed it whole. The white grape juice I buy for my son tastes exactly like those grapes. The first time I drank some it was like being transported back in time. I closed my eyes and could almost hear Grandpa muttering in Italian as he moved under the arbor.

Little Grandpa was the only calm harbor in the storm of my childhood. He would protect me from Helen – who needed little provocation to slap a face or yank hair to maintain control. Mom rarely smiled – and anger simmered under her surface. When Grandpa was around, I garnered safe passage through those waters.

He was 51 when I was born. He died when I was eight. Afterwards, the storm raged unchecked.

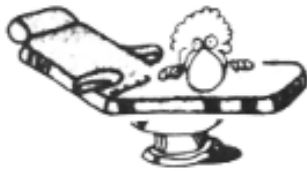
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Excerpt From A Sunday School Lesson Following The School Shootings In Jonesboro, Arkansas

by George Somers

Emil was a bully. He was also Jewish, which made him one of a persecuted minority back in the 1940's, which is when this story happened. All of that persecution was taking place over in Europe. We only found out the details after the war, but in 1943 all we knew was a lot of talk about the Warsaw Ghetto, "concentration camps", "yellow stars", and some vague tales about horrible atrocities in eastern Europe behind the battle lines in occupied Poland and Russia. I think that if Emil had been over there, he would have been one of the hated Jewish police who helped the SS load the boxcars for Treblinka. He was not loved by any of us, Jew or Gentile, at _____ High School in the spring of 1943. And he returned our hatred in spades, picking on the weakest of us to torment and terrorize. He would beat his victims into weeping jelly for the amusement of his friends. Those of us who might in more current times have been labeled "nerds" gave him a wide berth and avoided getting caught alone before or after school. At _____ High, he was an *eminence gris*.

Somehow, in spite of his activities, he had avoided get-

ting caught and dealt with by school authorities. Mr. J., my math teacher, Mr. S., the Dean of boys, and the principal, Mr. C., probably were doing their best. They couldn't be everywhere all of the time. Emil was clever enough to avoid any trouble when they were present. He had his own crowd of toadies and sycophants who enjoyed watching him torture the helpless. They were jackals and hyenas in human form, and we despised them almost as much as we hated Emil.

You ask – where were the good guys? I think that they had their own fish to fry. _____ was the type of school where all the little cliques of students revolved in separate orbits oblivious of each other. Nobody who noticed was about to put himself or herself in the way to deal with Emil, or any other petty tyrant. We nerds were sheep to be thrown to the wolves. It was up to us to deal with the problem. If we did not, we had to suffer.

Myself, I didn't look for trouble. I had had my fair share with one bastard named Kirk in junior high. The awful fear of his punishment ate through me like a cancer. I was reduced to shrieking hysterics before he

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

I'm on the top floor of either a house or a church – there are many stairs and corridors in this building, some make sense and lead places, like storage rooms and kitchens, the others do not – to bedrooms with no room for beds or small closets with many windows high up that let in light, but do not tell me where in the house they are by letting me look out and get some perspective. In one room, a woman from my church shows me a cookie sheet with different dessert treats on them, then uses a spatula to give me two, they are like brownies, only green with mint flavoring – I know this although I don't taste them. I hold them upside-down on my hand and keep moving through the house.

Upstairs and downstairs, I feel like I'm in some sort of video game – a first person shooter where there are plenty of rooms for the enemy to be hiding and I have to look in each space for secrets and ammo in order to complete the round.

Eventually I come to another populated space, and hand off my cookies to the occupants there, there are only three cookies, but by breaking them in half, everyone including me gets at least a taste. Yep, mint. Not very good, a little bit gooey, but not bad for dream cookies, which often turn into big, hulking loogies or chewing tobacco, which in my dreams I cannot clear from my mouth even with my hands because they re-generate back into my mouth – very annoying.

Also annoying, the corridors and stairways occasionally do the Alice in Wonderland thing where they twist perspective, cramping me against the ceiling, or stretching out forever below me so that I do not trust them not to continue down into the cold and scary belly of the earth. Turning around, I feel fortunate that the direction from which I have come does not alter into a closet, with boxes ready to tumble and shelves that I cannot reach. I hate it when that happens. Instead, rather than the nightmare-morph that can occasionally happen in a dream like this, it stays sunny-day and cookies. - GS Chapel Hill.

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterra.com

*WE ARE THE BLOTTER,
THE MIGHTY, MIGHTY BLOTTER.
EVERY WHERE WE GO, PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW:
WHO WE ARE, WHERE WE COME FROM..*



Here's Pop teaching the lads at Camp Minnisink the defensive rudiments of the sweet science in the summer of 1948 - a bit more than four years after his altercation with the school bully. Following graduation, he did some smokers in the Navy, bare-knuckles. Along with Joe Paterno, Hugh Hefner and Tony Bennett, Pop turned octegenarian this year. In a police line up with those fellows, he'd be the one with a small scar near his right eyebrow, earned at one of those events. Counselor was a job Pop was good at, he worked at a number of camps over the next few years, including one where a quiet, pretty girl from Hartsville, South Carolina caught his fancy.



Grandpa's house, Christmas, circa 1958. My uncle is in shirt-sleeves, braving the New Jersey cold because it was a sunny day. Me, bundled up in hand-me-down winter togs. This was the Christmas my older sister got a Toodaloo doll, made famous in scenes of my toddler self beating up on it in eight millimeter, color, family home movies. Grandma is inside, basting a turkey and keeping my cousins out of the molasses mints. God, I miss those mints.

I happened upon this photo of Julius Wuerthner: mid 1920's, Great-Great Uncle Clarence Murch's best friend.

A score of years earlier they had graduated from Law School together, and taken some well-earned vacation time, going out west by train to visit the raw, wide open spaces of Montana. Unfortunately, they happened upon the state capital Helena at a time when the citizens of that burg were trying to clean up the unsavory and still predatory element that remained of the post-Butch Cassidy Hole In The Wall Gang. Clarence and Julius were arrested for being in town, similar to the arrest of Sylvester Stallone by Brian Dennehy - it's not that we don't like you, we just don't like your type. Under duress, my ancestor and his friend admitted that they were lawyers. This did nothing to improve their lot. Instead, they were offered the choice of being ridden out of town on a rail, or becoming local judges. They chose the latter, and participated in the kangaroo trials of previously arrested "criminals", all of whom were mandatorily found guilty and subsequently hanged. After the jails were empty, Julius and Clarence were ridden out of town on rails, anyway. The event was ever after referred to as "the Taming of Helena" and put an end to the wild west in the Big Sky state (at least until the recent invasion by Hollywood moguls seeking escape from Lost Angels.) As for Julius and Clarence, they worked their way north to Great Falls, and set up shop selling supplies to Yukon-bound gold miner wannabes. Not bad work if you can get it.

Note: I can find nothing about this event on the Internet. Tell you what; I'll give a free year's subscription to **The Blotter** for the first person providing verifiable documentation about The Taming.

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Just a thought: what if all my memories and photographs aren't real, and I'm just a 21st century replicant?

The Blotter

even hit me once. And that did no good. I had to endure a bare knuckle beating from Kirk before he would let me go. He beat on me as regularly as he could, when he could catch me. I learned in three years how to run fast and far. The times he caught me were sheer misery, but most of the time I dodged him fair and square.

Emil was a different matter altogether. At age sixteen he was six feet one and over two hundred pounds. He was totally nasty, enjoying picking out some weakling and holding him with one meaty arm while he slowly beat him into a pulp with the other in front of his crowd of cheerleaders. I think I know

now a little of what it must have been like in Auschwitz or Sobibor. The places swarmed with sociopaths in black SS uniforms; evil types who took fiendish pleasure in torturing to death helpless people. You never knew who would be next. I was sixteen, and it was 1943 and Europe was only in the newspapers and places like death camps weren't going to be part of our cultural knowledge for years to come. But Emil wasn't a Nazi. He was just your plain, garden variety bully, and if you were smart, you avoided him. I did.

I did until the day he picked on Guy. You know Guy. He was the fat kid with glasses:

inconspicuous, inoffensive and innocent. Like a quiet clown character, Guy wandered through high school, dull and slow. No matter, I knew him and we walked together to and from school daily for about seven or eight blocks. I don't think that we ever talked much. He wasn't much of a talker. We weren't very close. When Emil sought Guy out on the playground after lunch one day and taunted him into a "fight", my stomach crawled. Where was Mr. J. when we needed him? I watched in horror and fascination as Emil reduced Guy to tears even before he hit him. Then he proceeded to beat the tar out of him. Guy didn't have

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a chance. It was pitiful; he didn't even try to defend himself. He stood there and was punched repeatedly and unmercifully and Emil's crowd just laughed and laughed at Guy's humiliation. Emil crushed Guy's glasses underfoot before he stalked off with his bootlickers in tow.

I can remember the next day as clearly as today, though it has to be all of fifty-five years ago. I don't know what came over me. I went up to Emil and challenged him to fight. I remember flying into a rage and calling him every dirty name I could think of. I guess I knew that I was going to get the beating of my life and without conscious decision I determined to get in at least one good shot before the deluge. In the midst of my tirade, as he stood there laughing at the "hundred thirty five pounder" who dared to face him, I hauled off and gave him a straight right to the nose with everything I had behind it. I felt and heard at the same time his nose breaking and crunching under my fist. Emil let out a howl of pain and surprise heard all over the playground. I'm sure Mr. J. must have heard it, too, but there was no sign of him, or Mr. S., or the principal Mr. C. I never saw them.

The next ten minutes seemed to last forever, as Emil pounded on me with his fists. I covered up as best I could, and took most of the punishment on my ribs as he whaled away. He succeeded in blackening one of

my eyes and puffing a lip, but after satisfying himself that he had beaten me into submission, he and his friends stalked off, sure of their victory. And as I cleaned myself up in the boys' locker room, I discovered one interesting fact. The first punch he landed was the only one that hurt. I was numb to all of the rest. Oh, sure, now I was hurting all over, but this was twenty minutes after it had finished.

Somehow, I got through the remainder of the day. When I got home, I made some excuse to Mom, and after a very quick supper I went to bed and fell asleep exhausted more in spirit than in body. Dad was out of

town on business for a couple of weeks and my kid brothers were strangely silent. I was sure that the rumor mill in town had reached down to the junior high and they knew what had happened, but they didn't ask any questions.

The next day after lunch, Emil was out there on the playground in back of school with his crowd of pals. He had a bandage across the bridge of his nose and both nostrils were packed with cotton. His nose had swollen to twice its size and was a bright purple. Don't ask me what possessed me. There was no master plan. I just saw red when he sauntered by with

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his buddies as if nothing had happened. So, there I was, standing in front of him and asking if he was ready for round two. I trotted off towards the other end of the field and the crowd gathered in seconds. As soon as Emil entered the ring they made, I hauled off and popped that broken beak with all of my might.

Emil never had time to grin, or savor the beating he was going to give me. His poor smashed nose shattered in bloody froth all over his face and he let out a bull bellow of pain as he realized I had beaten him to the punch. He charged, flailing wildly with both fists. This time I didn't cover up. For some reason beyond me, I stood up and slipped inside his rush and got in two more shots before he bore me down with his weight. He didn't wait for me to get up, but sat astride me and pounded me with both of his fists while I was down. Actually, that worked in my favor, for most of

his blows rained down on my arms and body, and very few got to my face. Still, by the time he tired and got up, leaving me half-conscious in the dirt, I looked pretty bad. Both of my eyes were blackened and one was swollen shut. My fists were both swollen and the knuckles of my hands were scraped raw. My ribs felt as if I had been run over by a truck. My clothes were torn and dirty. But, if I remember right, Emil and his friends were not laughing when they left. Yes, there was no sign of teacher one. Messrs. J., S. and C. never showed their faces. There had been a noisy crowd of more than fifty people in that corner of the field, but no teacher made a move to break it up.

So I was not a little surprised when my math teacher came into the locker room as I was cleaning up and inquired how long this "crusade" of mine was going to last.

"I didn't know you cared, Mr. J.," I mumbled without sarcasm through swollen lips.

"Oh, I care, son. We all care," the math teacher said. "Mr. S. cares and so does Mr. C. That's why we've kept out of this." I frowned and he continued.

"You seem to be on a one-man campaign to finally settle Emil's hash. You see, Emil's father is rich and influential. It would do us no good to discipline him. His father would tie us up in litigation, and Happy Emil would just

keep on doing his bit, picking on the weak kids. If we come down on him, nothing would be accomplished, and we would lose credibility." I just stood there, listening.

"I know you wonder why I'm telling you this, don't you?" asked Mr. J. I nodded, amazed that one of my teachers was admitting that he could do nothing; that he was helpless in the face of the bully's father.

"Well, if you ever tell anyone that I said this, I'll have to deny it. It's true, though. But if you can stick it out, he may give in and that will be the end of him as a bully. A lot of guys in this school will thank you for standing up to him. Can you take it?"

I explained that my father was out of town, but I wasn't sure about Mom or my kid brothers. I looked at myself in the mirror and wondered what kind of story I could tell that would explain my current shape.

"Leave this to me," the math teacher said. "I'll square it with your mom, somehow. You just get some rest tonight. Tomorrow may be the telling day."

With that, he left the locker room. All afternoon my teachers had been most solicitous, but there was never a mention as to the cause of my disfigurement. When I got home that afternoon, there was not a word from my mother. She didn't look happy, and for someone who had an opinion on every-

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thing, she was strangely silent. I'm sure that the word about this confrontation with Emil was all over town, but there was not a peep from my brothers, and it was as if our house was quarantined.

When I arrived at school the next morning, Brad, one of the star football players, came up to me.

"Everyone is behind you, you know," he said. "Keep up the good work." He seemed almost embarrassed when he spoke. Before this, we had not said more than a couple of words to each other in three years. Later, Jack, the president of the Student Council, walked up to me and said that he wanted to shake my hand. Sheepishly, he wished me well. When he asked me if I was hurt, I said that it was only when I laughed. Old joke, we both chuckled. My morning teachers looked at me as if I was a wounded hero or something. Miss T., the French teacher about whom all of us red-blooded boys fantasized, came over to me and in her sweetest voice called me her *pauvre blesse*. I hadn't a clue what that meant, but it sounded just great coming from her. Soon enough, lunchtime came around and it was time for round three.

It never came off. I went up to Emil and loudly called him out again. I had a big grin on my smashed-up face, belying the crawling fear in my belly. If he took me up on it, could I take another gross beating?

"Come on Emil, you creep!" I shouted. I tightened my fists.

Well, Emil said that he didn't want to fight me anymore. He said something about his doctor telling him that it was going to take months to mend his broken nose, and his father had told him that there were to be no more fights or he would be taken out of school permanently. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I asked Emil if that meant there were no more picking on people like Guy, and he nodded yes. He was not a happy person. His nose was a purple and red blob. It was horribly swollen and flattened. I almost felt pity for him, for what I had done. In the end, I allowed as how if he kept the peace, so would I. On that note, we parted. The crowd sounded almost disappointed that they weren't going to be entertained by "round three".

His so-called "friends" looked lost. In a day or so, he was left quite alone. Emil kept a low profile for the rest of the spring of 1943. The following September he went out for the football team and made varsity. He was a fearsome lineman and quickly became a two-way player *par excellence*. He made holes on offense that you could drive trucks through. On defense, he was a single wing equivalent of a modern middle linebacker. We only lost one game that fall, when Emil was sick with the flu.

I've seen Emil occasionally at reunions. We just cele-

brated our fiftieth in 1994. Over 200 alumni came out of a class of over four hundred. It was quite a showing. He was there, with his wife. He's still a big man, but has gone to fat in later years. We were civil to each other. We greeted and shook hands and that's it. We went our separate ways. We didn't talk about these events, nor did any of the other alumni. It's a part of our past that most of us are not proud of.

In subsequent years I have never seen Guy at a reunion. I hobnob with my Jewish friends in the class. Then, as now, I'm part of their clique. I hope they see me as a righteous Gentile. Considering how thick the anti-Semitism was in the 1940's, that would be something.



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 -Thursday JANUARY 18th: asheville's KINGS OF PRUSSIA w/raleigh's the 3 CHRISTIS [54 9/9:30pm 18+ kingsofprussia.com]
 -Thursday JANUARY 25th: "ALL ages" erwin's CRACKLE KAPONE w/kannapolis' X-BREED & n-sane mixe's EDIFIDE [ALL ages \$4 9/9:30p myspace.com/south_erwin_recordz]
 -Tuesday JANUARY 30th: "FREE ALL ages" films nite: 'the ACLU Freedom Files: Gay And Lesbian Rights' followed by 'Breaking The Spell' [63min] [FREE ALL ages 7/7:30p - snax 2 share, bring sum if ya want! aclu.tv/crimethinc.com]

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Number 344.

Smiling eyes, bright and crinkling at the corners as she talked with her friends. White tee-shirt with some obscure college name in blue script. Yellow jersey too short-shorts, her backside round and barely contained beneath. Someone had misinformed her that junk-in-the-trunk was *de rigueur* rather than a pleasantly occasional alternative in a crowd of female forms. That same whomever had left out that you needed to be famously rich to successfully navigate such curves. He was number 345 and this is what he was thinking.

He wasn't impatient, standing behind her. Certainly there weren't three hundred forty-three people in front of them. He couldn't even imagine this was a numeral representing today's daily order quantity. Just a number. Today we'll start at 300. Tomorrow it'll be four hundred fifty-six.

Chicago dog, boiled, on a steamed bun with chili and sweet pickle relish, diced banana peppers and white onions. A side of ripple chips. That was her order, she told the other girl. He hadn't even looked at the other girl. Couldn't have described her.

She undid her petite, incongruous nanny-bun, and shook her hair gently loose. It was dark and wavy from being trapped under rubber bands and just a little bit wet, shiny and seal-like. It fell longer than he'd thought it might, he could feel the breeze of it. She arched her back with her arms up, gathering it back together between forefingers and thumbs. A whiff of sweat and floral-noted cologne. In spite of himself, he inhaled deeply, like a lion might on catching scent of a grazing animal.

But he was no hunter. If there really were three hundred forty-three customers ahead, then, well, something. He had ten or so years on the college types that frequented this Calipie/zola-burger/walnut accented salad joint. Way too old to walk up and say hey. Too old to hang out until noticed. Closer to invisible than desirable. Perhaps that was why he leaned towards women, girls, like her. She was nothing remarkable, except to him, on this afternoon. Older did such things to you. Feeling passed-by did, too.

No, that wasn't fair. This sort of moment couldn't be his alone. He'd never had an original thought in his life. Such a sudden thing, and with

such a maudlin fluff of thought. Was this his intellectual high-water mark?

He had a flash of memory of having so strong a hunger. His chest tightened. What had happened to that...pinched feeling, where you adore someone who had just some of those qualities your heart imagined it desired? Where it was enough to know she was out there, somewhere in the periphery of your day. Satisfied just to want, to hope, and finding it too much to wish. A feeling ending after, say, high school, although the lack only revealed itself far into so-called adulthood as you realized you don't love anything, much. For life had tainted the flavor of everything, even something so real as a Chicago dog.

Staccato Microfiction
is an itinerant iteration of
Staccato Magazine,
Matthew Boyd, Editor.

Please send your submissions, five hundred words or less, to staccatomag@yahoo.com.

Don't argue, just do it.

Ian Wakes

by Gerald McElreath

Ian sleeps in the crook of my arm
 Just four days old and obviously dreaming.
 His eyelids fluttering, his tiny hands twitching
 He whimpers a small, sad whine
 And then wakes up with a red face and crying
 Just four days old and a nightmare!
 What can a baby fear so in his sleep
 What horrors can he imagine when he can barely see
 Maybe just fear of not knowing where he is
 Four days before cushioned in a dark, warm bubble
 Protected from shocks and pain by life-giving liquid
 Then forced into light and cold
 and soon pricked and prodded
 Does he dream of his terrible journey
 Is the bright world his nightmare
 His first days cause for fear and crying?
 In the womb babies don't cry.
 But within days Ian smiles
 There's also no laughter in the womb.

CONTRIBUTORS

A. Lorenti is a second gen Italian-American and a child of the sixties who says she actually remembers those years. She writes for money. I can't even imagine that. *Minding My Own* is her first novel. Way!

George Somers, faithful subscriber to the Blotter, hint-nudge-wink you slackers, is my Dad, although there has never been even the least hint of nepotism in our family.

John Wright wanted to know if he should give me a serious bio or a funny one. Please, John, a funny one. Please.

Gerald McElreath works at UNC (in Chapel Hill - we need to say that because we're invading Greensboro and soon to invade Charlotte) with his wife, a now-cheerful baby Ian, and a wild dog masquerading as a domestic one.



For what it's worth, I was told that **The Dream Journal** was not good. Not good at all. I was told by others that it was one of the things they love. Fickle, fickle.

SAT Question #42

What do Jesus and *The Blotter* have in common?

- Ⓐ A. Occasionally someone finds their words offensive
- Ⓑ B. They've both risen from the dead
- Ⓒ C. We associate both with drinking wine
- Ⓓ D. All of the above

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