

Oh, it's a jolly holiday with stories from Tom Sheehan and Leo Lichy; poems by Laala Kashef Alghata and Jon Rentler; the artwork-and-play of Wendy Kowalski; and The Dream Journal.

The Blotter

MARCH 2008 MAGAZINE



THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE

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Large, Treasurer
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Editor
Lewis Copulsky.....Publishing
Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Director of
Development
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Advertisers and Subscriptions Contact:

Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:

Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

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Cover art: detail of "Hush" by
Wendy Kowalski - see centerfold for
more.

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com
919.933.4720 (business hours only!
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The Blotter is a production of
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

"Seasoning"

I am driving Bea to school this morning and the sun is coming up behind us, very yellow and orange in the clouds, when she points out a rainbow in front of us, a harbinger of rain heading our way. It turns out that this is the first one she's ever seen, not on TV or drawn with a handful of crayons in one fist. The real thing, up in the sky lit by the sunrise. The radio offers Offenbach's "Orpheus in the Underworld". You might know it as the "Can-can". I'm picturing young women in frilly dresses and stockings with seams in the back. Then:

"Dad? What is the little man called?" She's not being coy. She's different from her older sister. Doesn't play to the crowd.

"Little man..." I'm stumped. Is she talking about the Manhattan Project? Probably not.

"At the end of the rainbow."

Oh.

"A leprechaun." Every new word is a lesson. "Can you say it?"

"Leprechaun," she says. "Dad, can we make a wish?"

"I think so."

"But maybe we have to wait until we find the pot." I glance in the rear-view. She's thinking about gold. In her five year old world, gold is foil wrapped around chocolate. Admittedly, it's a good dream.

"Maybe so," I reply.

"Then can I have some pretzels?" I like how all of the razzle-dazzle of reality doesn't cause her to lose focus from the important things. Mind, she's only just finished breakfast. I give her a couple anyway. Don't tell her mom.

When we arrive, this phenomenal thing happens. We dismount from the Nissan, shoulder the backpack and look up. Over the school, the rainbow has arched from one horizon to the other, the complete spectrum of light to see. Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Purple, Indigo. Still no more questions from the five-year-old. No "did you wish for that?" or some such cloyingly sweet bit.

"Pretty," she says finally, as much to herself as to me.

You better believe it, kid.

I'm reading *War and Peace*. I've never read it before; all three and a half pounds of novel; not stem to stern with no professor asking questions and shaking his head in response to my utter lack of critical insight. This is a new translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, whose names sound competent and not at all American, so very likely they actually understand a foreign language and I am hopeful that it is Russian. Anyway, it came to me highly recommended. I do wonder, of course, what was done wrong in previous translations. Is Russian constructed so radically different from English that aspects were previously "lost"? Or was the English version of my cold-war youth translated, perhaps, from the French? I don't know. It's weird, though. I am not going alone into that good book. No one should sail such a large ship of words single-handedly. Along with *W&P*, I have a meaty biography of Napoleon in his later years, and a piece of reading-candy about the battle of Waterloo from the point of view of an Irish rifleman in the British army. That should help me get into an 1815 state of mind.

In all my conversations with friends about the historical turning points of the nineteenth century, no one seems to touch on the salient points of

1815. While it is all very interesting that Napoleon was able to go from exile on Elba to leader of a 150,000 man-jack *Grande Armee* in 100 days, then proceed to lose to Wellington within 50 more days, changing the face of Europe forever, writers often leave out the primary killer of young men of that period: poor communications skills. No kidding, guys, there's something deeply wrong with that ever-popular phrase "if you would be so kind as to". I think, and my daughters would agree, if you want something done, say, "Do this." And if you want it done now say, "Do this now." I'll bet that Bonaparte just wasn't clear enough with his best bud, Marshal Ney. Maybe he said, "You know what to do, *mon frere*." And I think that Ney didn't really know, he'd been writing a note in Italian to this girl he knew in Naples, and he was using pen and had made a couple of mistakes and thought that maybe if he drew flowers on the mistakes she wouldn't notice, or maybe he should start all over but where was the box of stationery? And why did Boney keep nudging him? So now he was too embarrassed to say anything. And crap, as they say, happens.

Almost fifty years after Waterloo, Robert E. Lee lost the battle of Gettysburg, due in large part to his inability to scare the living shoite out of his generals, and tell them in no uncertain terms what he wanted them to do. Rather than saying, "If it is at all practicable, would you please endeavor with some haste to secure the hill in front of you", he might have worded his orders a bit more like Georgie Patton: "That hill there? See it? You're going to take that hill, right now. Get your fat ass up that hill, sir!" As clear as those instructions are, they still have that formal, respectful quality. You know, Patton would have shoved *practicable* up someone's ass.

I'm thinking about Instant Messenger. We have to stop collapsing our own language into OBTW's, TTFN's and LOL's. We should say what we mean, mean what we say, and sweet meat say what. (OK, maybe not that last one.) If we don't stem this tide, our kids are going to end up dumber than we. I mean us. We'uns? (See? It's started!)

Do you suppose that Spartacus' high-school friends called him "Sparkle-ass" until he cut them open with a Thracian knife?

I'm grouching about my sister, Wende, who has moved to Hawaii. It is a point of no small pain to me. Not that I don't like Hawaii – I've never been, I hear it's nice, and who's hurt by strictly-fresh pineapple and the occasional volcano? It is just that my sister is so far away. This is pure selfishness on my part. But when you have a good friend, someone that you can talk to every day and not get bored and whose opinions you respect, and who explains all the tricky stuff to you so you don't seem like a fool to everyone, and they move six time-zones away? Well, it is dismaying. Like I always say: you need to keep your enemies close and your friends closer. (So one of you can hold your enemy while the other pokes at them with a sharp stick.) I miss my sister. I've explained to my wife that in twenty five years or so, I plan to spend my days sitting on the front porch with my sister and grumbling and drinking tea and reading. Probably *War and Peace* – I'm serious, it's a big book.

That's all for now. Stay tuned for info on our first fiction contest, and be nice to each other, we're all we have.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

It's just possible that this issue is the one, the very first, that hasn't anything to offend even the most fragile of hothouse-orchid sensibilities. On the other hand, it might have all manner of salacious perversion. Hey, you never know.

The Dumpmaster's Boy

by Tom Sheehan

Ears I had, and eyes, and I used them well. Before I walked by the group of men on the corner, bringing my Grandfather's lunch to the city dump where he worked, I knew they'd be talking about me. We had moved from Charlestown. We'd move back for sure, a game with landlords and cold water flats. Even at six years of age, in 1934, there were certainties. It was the time of day, before the sun was up straight. The way they lounged. Who they were. How their clothes hung on them the way visitors come from out of town or right from ships. It was the clatter of their voices, snappy as a swung bag of clothespins.

At times their teeth clicked a harmony. It could be measured. Ancient Irish men made noises that were music to my ears. My Grandfather made music. He was Irish. One of them said one day, in a whisper I could hear, that my Grandfather was sick. That's when I got the worry. Even at six years of age, there were certainties, and uncertainties, and the unknown. I had become a worrier.

"Oosh," or "Ach," they'd say as I walked by, or "Arrah" in the old tongue, their teeth clicking on briars, the old Irishmen gathered outside Clougherty's bar in the west end of Malden, Massachusetts. The Depression made a living taste about us, Prohibition afoot, and the things that rose with us at breakfast, what there was of it, were set with the absence of a late snack.

Clicking still, the men were as dark as the insides of that holy place behind them I hadn't been inside of yet. Their jackets and pants were harsh to the touch, and their dark gray caps sat jaunty on their heads.

Squat pipes, teeth-bitten, twirled smoke up under the brims.

Jaws set like anchors for those who were shaven, white-forested for those not. Any other place in the world they'd be sitting out front of a mine shaft or a gas works, far from home, "Ochone" keening from their lips, the grief. They'd be sitting on wooden boxes, milk crates, or odd scrounged chairs, with Clougherty's, a temple of mystery behind them, behind a dark, dark door.

Even short of my seventh birthday, I'd know the air around them even before I saw them. My nose would be up proper, testing. The coal-cut of gas slid over on its covering wing from the gas works back of Commercial Street. It is a smell lingering to this day, a smell that comes back, as though it's on reminder visits. I know it whenever gasoline is being pumped at a station or being spouted into a lawn mower. I know it when I see an old and odd coal car now and then sitting like a fossil along little-used railroad tracks. I know it in the depths of an old cellar when coal dust, fine as crushed days telling of fieldstone and time, waits to be found by a nose like mine.

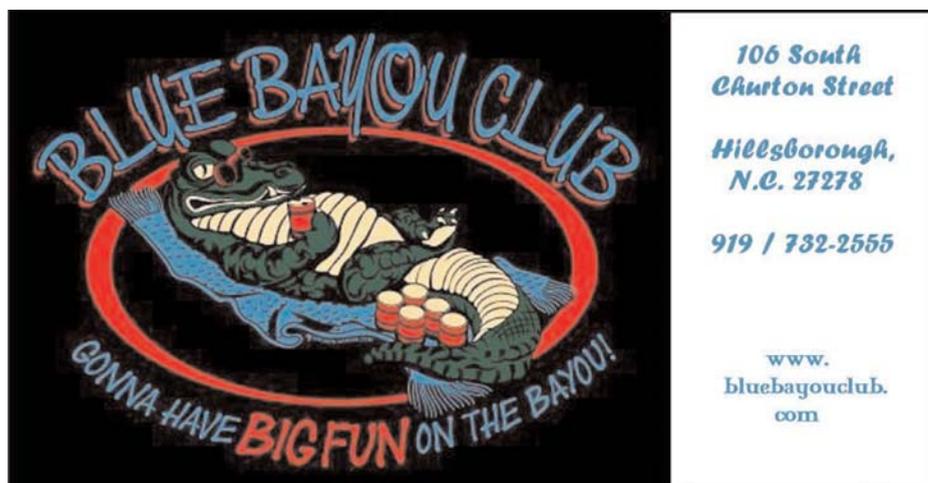
The smell was so strong it allowed the creation of games when I'd hold my breath. I'd pretend the Kaiser's freeking men were after me with their bags of green-awful gas.



They told you that nobody likes a smart ass?



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I'd puff my cheeks, waiting for G-8 or Nippy or Bull Martin, my pulp heroes, to come to my rescue. My face would get brick red and my chest would heave against itself. Behind my eyes I'd see the rotters with their gas bags knocking down the way from Highland Avenue or The Fellsway, coming at me. There were times when I could let Hell break loose.

The old Irishers' voices would bring me back, voices that later I would stamp as high-pitched Yeatsian tongue in poetic treble. In time the memories of them would bring me a new music, hearing The Man on record, hearing it "in the deep heart's core," knowing the haunt of it forever.

"That's for sure Johnny Igoe's boy acarryin' his lunch to the dump. Now that's a good lad for his Grandfather altogether, won't you know." Pipe smoke would rise, a hand held in half salute.

They were not knocking the dump. For too many of us at that time it was hardware store and haberdashery, all-around supplier of used goods. It had endless yield and my Grandfather, dumpmaster, city employee, was the head picker. Johnny Igoe had first call, first dibs. All he had to do was point at something and it was his, the chair with only one leg missing, a still-shiny pot, a book with its cover nearly gone asunder, an iron fire engine or tin plane, the kind to keep.

As I passed the men, they'd be quiet a bit and let the smoke twirl up under their caps and their feet go still on the walkway. Amaze you they could, some of the older ones. They often played their shoes on the pavement like a soft shoe set, or a tambourine shushed and low. Some would nod their heads the way priests do when they look in

your eye, heads cocked. Some looked like teachers my brother had at the school up on Pleasant Street. How they cocked their noses, as if they knew everything there was to know on the face of the Earth.

I watched their eyes, their hands, their feet, when I went by them on my errand. So many messages could be picked out of the air, so much understood about the long stretch of time. Gold chains across their vests, anchored to hidden watches, clutched inward a dazzle of daylight or sunlight. Occasionally one of them would work the shiny chain in his fingers. Twirling it, they'd cut the air in little loops, catching light rays, spilling seconds out of hours. Now and then a watch went into that small circle, in disdain of the flight or the compound of hours. It was noiseless, a sun around a fist, and, like the sun, silent in journey.

Someday I'd swing a watch or chain like that in small mechanics, the wrist pure and musical, time on the fly, sunlight all mine, or on its journey.

But then, entrusted to my hands, was the great sandwich in a line of great sandwiches. My Grandfather Johnny Igoe's lunch of a day I carried, two good fingers thick, and the bread crusty and thick, too. It was wrapped in brown paper and tied up in white string by my Grandmother, Mary Brennan Igoe. Out of her oven that very morning the bread had come, six loaves so golden and gleaming a mouth'd water for an hour or more. Sometimes a whole day if she ever got cross with you for *a poor deed, poor deed indeed*. You could be begging for a block of butter to drop into the hot wrap of it.

Her black stove flung itself across the kitchen back wall. It snapped noises only chimneys could

catch hold of, mysterious crackling noises. They had an ultimate power that drove every one of us out of that room but her on any July or August day. She had her colors. The stains under her arms turned as dark as lakes, her hair white, the blue eyes deep as the ovens themselves. Only the back of her wrist would touch her brow, the gesture of relief that only comes to women. Especially to those who warm by the oven, their eyes closed in tiny relief, a look off into the distance before going back about their business.

Bake she was born for and bake she did, and having kids in her days. She was forever giving off tarts and slabs of pies and tasty things thick and chewy with gobs of cinnamon in them. Sugar trailed in every corner of the house and a wonder the little black ants didn't carry off the whole house of it.

"Suck on your tooth when you're done, Thomas. You might get another day out of it," the laugh in her throat like the bells at Mass in the right hands.

Mary Brennan Igoe was different from my father's mother, Mary Elizabeth King Sheehan right out of Cork. There was an elegant thirty-year widow for you. Tall and gracious, precise of language she was, with her little black widow's hat on her head and the shiny glasses on her nose. They'd be a bread roll or two in her pocketbook from whenever she supped outside her Somerville home. Her pocketbook was always black. It always shone the light around it. A touch of new leather at her hands as if a bargain had just been made.

At Ginn and Co. in Cambridge, she was a bookbinder, for more than sixty years eventually, and never baked a pie in her life it seems. Or baked bread. But she could wash your feet and scrub your

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back on a visit with her slender fingers and make you feel new all over. And she knew history and got books with broken covers or those which were not yet bound, geographies and histories and once in a great while there'd be poems. We'd get Amergin or Columcille or Donnchadh Mor O'Dala or Dallan MacMore or Saint Ita or Saint Colman, about Saint Patrick and Eileen Aroon and Fionn and Saint Brendan and Diarmaid and Grainne and a host of kings afoot on the very land itself. Much of it told to me, of course, though I was a reader, according to my Grandfather, long before some of his own children brought the pages home to comfort.

Grandma Igoe would stand beside that great stove or by the buffet in the front room where she stored her finished goods. The pies and tarts and cakes and cream puffs were so elegant you could steal but for the threat of the Lord hanging in the air over you. Her jelly rolls were historic, mounded and rolled and sugared. The sweet red line twisted its marble pattern you could only see from the end view, gathering inward until it disappeared, the way it could disappear *sure down that b'y's t'roat*.

Buffet drawers were crammed with her baked goods, the big ones at the bottom and the small

ones at the top, and the cubbyholes behind doors at each end. My Grandfather said she baked every day of her last thirty years. He said the memory of hunger in the old country hung its dark face at the head of the stairs, waiting to visit again.

"Jayzuz, bless the memory," he would say.

And I could hear her say, "Hunger," in that musical voice of hers, "twill be a guest here if I ever once t'urn my back t'him."

Flour clung about her like weeds against a fence. It might have been atomized on her before the atomizer was thought of. Her arms were white with it, and her apron and the neck of her dress where her hands were always at work fixing herself as if something wasn't set right. As if she had an itch waiting on her. White was her hair, too, like snow left over from late March and April in the back yard. Yet patches of sweat, dark as plaster in a leaky ceiling, were squeezed under her arms and moved perilously on her large breasts. Sometimes, though I dared never tell her, but especially when she wore her blue dress, I'd pretend the patches of sweat were maps of parts of the world I wanted to visit. The maps I'd seen in the Atlas at the library with my Grandfather.

All of Russia came up, dark with its lakes and seas and strange names at the edges of oceans. The steamy Congo he told me about came also, plunked in the middle of Africa, with rivers and hidden lakes, and creatures that ate up little people in a single bite. Once, from the first moment, a deep stain was Brazil, down there under my feet. The country kept growing and growing. It grew with the pies and the cakes and the six loaves of bread. All morning it grew. She never knew how big that country got. That it might grow so ponderous geography books would have to be done over. The globe itself would tip on its side and bring her down.

In the lunch package I carried was also a pint whiskey bottle, filled with coffee, dark and shoe-colored, crammed against the sandwich. The top of the bottle would be plugged with an old cork or a twist of paper. Grandma worked it down in as she turned the bottle in her floury hands. Sometimes it was from an old *Globe* or *Traveler* or *Transcript*, or a page out of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Or it might come from a copy of *G-8 and His Battle Aces* I'd already read, Nippy and Bull Martin done for that issue.

She always left a loop in the package's string. When my hand got tired of the lugging the package near all the way to the dump, I could slip a finger in the loop. I'd swing it along with me, still safe for delivery.

Off to the Malden City Dump was I, *the little caterer* my Grandfather would say, carrying his lunch. "As long as the weather is *dacent*," his only rule. He'd raise one pointed finger over his head, taking the deep blessing of the Lord on its tip for all that were bound by such high appointment. That was as much anointment as ever I understood.



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And my reward would come, once I got there. Once I got past Commercial Street and Medford Street. And past the factories that could spill people out of them some hours the way Fenway Park did at game's end.

Once I got past Mulcahy's Bar and my Uncle Johnny squinting out the back window at me with his burning eyes on the sandwich pack. *Sticks* they called him ever since he came back from France and *The Big Stink*. *That's what* he called World War One. His legs still brought him a pain only the pint could cure. Crutches, more likely than not swiped from the Malden Hospital, were jammed up under his armpit. Foul air still held out in his chest from the freekin' Kaiser's gas. And his mouth always watering for one of Grandma's sandwiches she only made for those in the work.

Often I got past the pub with no name out front but which I called Uncle Dermott's Place. He could be found there of an evening. Or a morning. Or an afternoon, with the sun out over Medford and still in the trees or splashing like ducks in the Mystic River. Or when his last job was into its second or third day and *his pain* became too real to ignore. Sometimes I didn't get past him.

A pair of uncles I had in them! War heroes from *The Big Stink*, carrying the pain yet. France and Germany never far away from them. Their eyes were dark, their cheeks high and thin, their wrists coming out of jacket sleeves thin as morning gruel.

Once I got past Dinty Mulligan's house with his white Chow bigger than his bark and mean as nails, I'd be real close. Once past there, and all the other obstacles a boy had, I'd get my reward. I never thought that anyone would

trouble me on my errand, like kidnapping or knocking me down and stealing the lunch. No, not Johnny Igoe's boy, not the dumpmaster's boy, not the boy with two heroes for uncles. Nobody would bother an Irish lad bringing lunch to the dumpmaster who never ate it, who gave it off to the drunks who crowded around him. They were the drunks who came every night to prop their cold feet up on the ring of his great monger's stove. They were the drunks whose hands went fishing in that brown package like birds' beaks did to suet in the backyard feeder. Their skinny little hands had nails for fingers and wrists thin as death itself, and their eyes almost *gone over*. Some of them for sure also carried the pain of all of France as baggage.

Nobody in the world would hurt Johnny Igoe's boy. "A sharp eye, lad, a sharp eye is all you'll need, and a brain to match the work of it."

At the last, I'd hurry to see if he was still there, waiting for me as I crossed the railroad tracks after looking and listening both ways. I'd strain to see if he was still sitting on his bench, alive. I'd look for his pipe lit and smoking up under his gray cap, his back against the little house he made out of scraps. It was an elegant little house that could have saved lives in the old country and saved them here. A lean tin chimney sprouted out of the top like a Jack o' the Beanstalk thing.

Now he leaned on the little house, waiting.

I'd catch the rich, ripe smell of the dump, dense as a bag over my head. Foul old stuff. Damp. Liquid stuff. Food gone bad. Old wet blankets falling apart. Horses in there someplace, perhaps pieces of them, their shit anyway from the milk

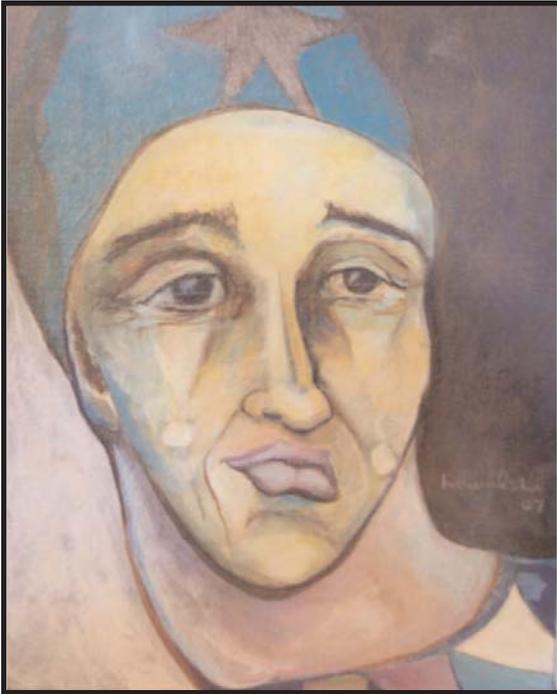
barns and the milk companies. The manure coming to life again from Hood's and Whiting's delivery barns. Cluttered newspapers came thicker with water, ink blobbing in clumps, words going downhill like sundown. Squashes rotted to the last seed of hope. Plaster dust drowned in puddles, houses going away. Wood going so sour it would melt in your hands. Once a week, it seemed, a cat or dog was caught on the wrong side of life.

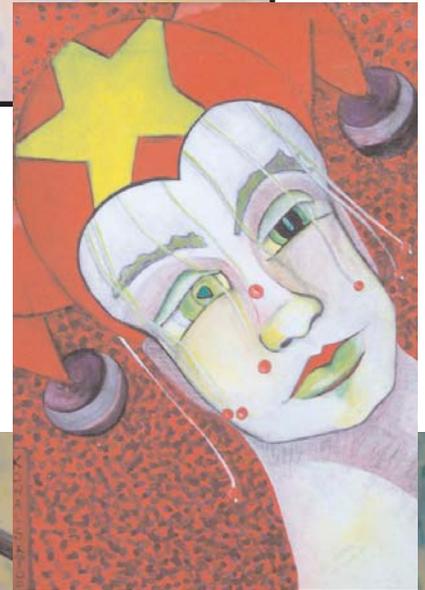
Proof of the senses were shared with my street comrades then, my friends who roamed alleys with me. Blindfolded we could tell where we were if we had been there before. We knew alleys that could run right out from under our feet and go down a drain. Alleys that wore continuous walls of sweat, even in winter. Alleys that taught us what veneer meant even before the word came into our vocabulary. We knew family backyards because of their discards, what they threw out, in what quantity, in what kind of container. What was one family's poison, was the same to another family. And that was rot within the hour of being tossed out onto a pile of yesterday's leavings.

Smells, like those of the dump, were living things, were markers, were signposts. Paying attention was necessary, for we were survivors as well as scavengers.

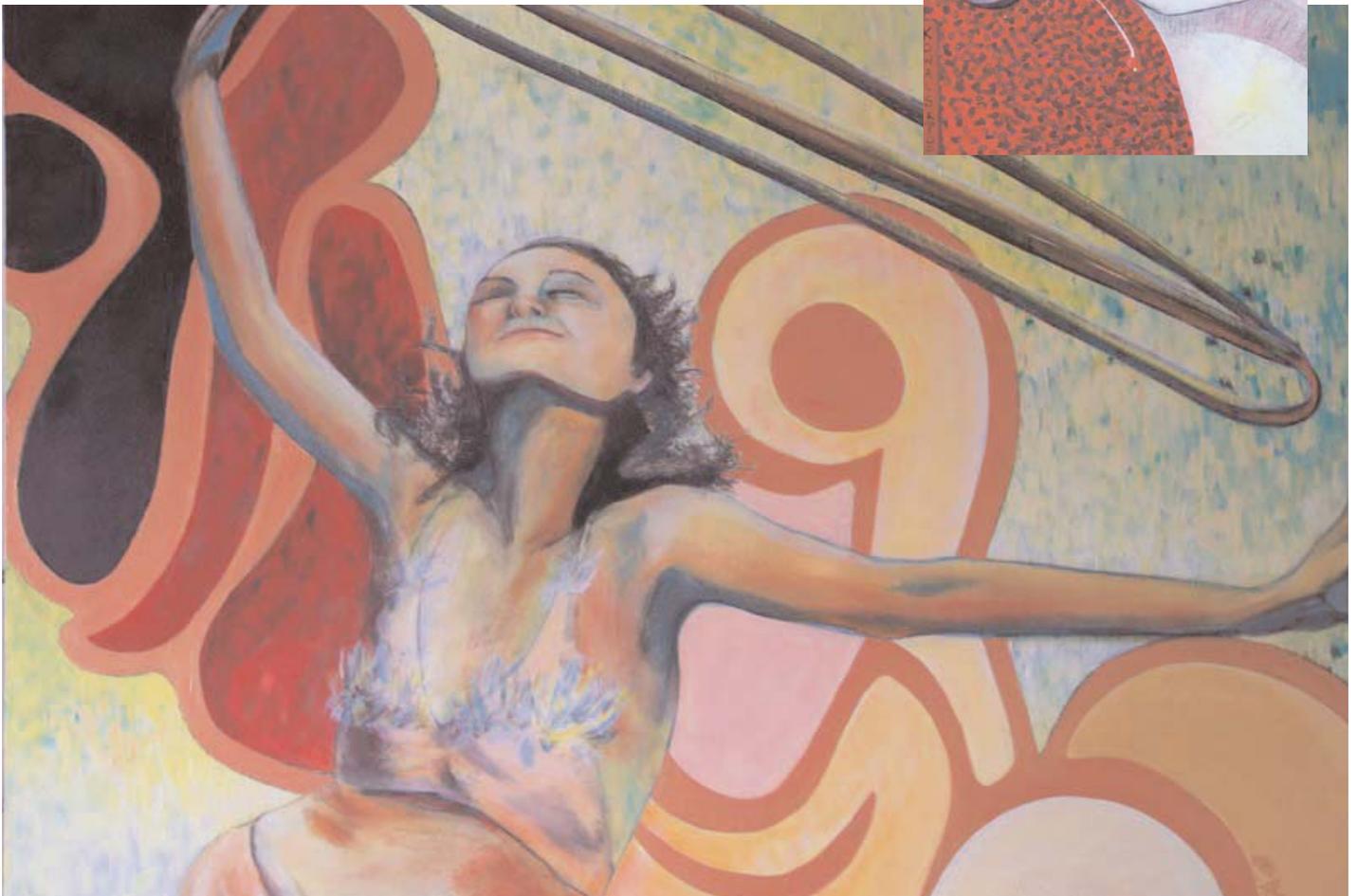
The dump smell itself was a livable smell. It was compost. Things could grow in it, get green again. Not like the coal gas smell that cut down into you sharp as a knife in the hands of a wacky doctor or a charlatan. Not at all like the gas works, the way its smell penetrated everything, wall and roof and window. Into the church even and you on your knees trying to get away from it. You swore black dust was sprouting

Wendy Kowalski - Wilmington, NC
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Left: We Must We Must
Upper Left: Acrobat
Lower Left: Hush
Above: Leap
Right: Jester for Change
Below: Having the Time of My Life



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things on you, and growing its own little meanness.

He'd be there at the shack, my Grandfather, at last, not gone anywhere, not undone, waving across the dump. Here was the little man whose magical voice rang down the days. It leaped alleys and lanes and railroad tracks that came across the centuries from Italy and Greece and Denmark and other dark places. Those were the places he swore the horsemen of the Central Plains of Europe rode through on their long route to Ireland. To the last end of Europe itself.

And even from England, for all of the stories. Whole poems came out of that man's mouth. Whole poems! Whole poems without a stumbling pause and never repeated until I might ask for one. That so many poems fit in such a small man was the end of amazement. He must have filled his arms and legs and the whole of his chest besides his white-haired head, with the poems. On he'd go, on and on, magic on top of magic. The Argo watery and wind-driven, the waves crashing on rocks. Perhaps Beowulf about in the land, or Grendel, or The Red King or Righ Seamus (King James). All of a Saturday afternoon he'd give off Brian

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The Midnight Court at the Feekle, without a stop. Unless your eye began to blink and head nod and the fill coming on you sooner than counted on.

Oh, sometimes he was daft with a poem that took a long time to learn, and so easy with others that came with music right into them, like:

The pale moon was rising above
the green mountains,
The sun was declining beneath
the blue sea,
When I stray'd with my love to
the pure crystal fountain
That stands in the beautiful vale
of Tralee.

She was lovely and fair as the rose
of the summer,
Yet 'twas not her beauty alone that
won me,
Oh, no, 'twas the truth in her eyes
ever beaming
That made me love Mary, the
Rose of Tralee.

About his eyes the crinkles would fair light up with Billy Mulchinock's poem. And he'd push me with his roughed hand as though words were being pressed into place for ever, his pipe chomped in his teeth. But then,

when his eyes darkened, when his lips set like steel as though a curse was about to form, I'd know a change was coming. It was so when he started *Lament for the Death of Owen Roe O'Neill*:

"Did they dare, did they dare, to
slay Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill?"

"Yes, they slew with poison him
they feared to meet with steel."

"May god wither up their hearts!
May their blood cease to flow!

May they walk in living death,
who poisoned Eoghan Ruadh!"

"Though it break my heart to
hear, say again the bitter words."

"From Derry, against Cromwell,
he marched to measure swords:

But weapon of the Sacsanach met
him on his way,

And he died at Cloch Uachtar,
upon Saint Leonard's day."

I never knew, of course, from one day to the next, who last had his ear. Or what sword struck him, what knife still at stab from Roscommon, with its *grief* calling. Or whose words he last sang. Or if the words, the weight of the words, had brought him down. It was not the same game that came with the sweaty maps of my Grandmother's blue dress. It was the worry of the *little caterer*.

Nearing him across the dump, I'd wave to him my joy. His cap would signal back a joy. Before I ran the last yards I'd look for the day's pickings, to pray for his little successes. And for the whole family. They'd be stacked at the near end of the dump where Goldberg's junk wagon could come in from the lane for the pick-up.

Iron and tin and pipes of all classes in one pile, pieces of stoves and car parts. There'd be unknown black objects as much mystery as



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Russia and all its lakes and rivers. Pots and pans came another mound of salvage, silvery and coppery and throwing off pieces of the sun on good days.

There'd be doubled-over and tripled-over sheets of lead from wrecks of houses and roofs and downed chimneys. Roofing tar black as ever still clutched at edges old as scabs, thick now in their pressings as slabs from a pine. I'd think about grabbing off a few sheets and melting them and pouring the melt into the casting molds to make more lead soldiers. My lead soldiers stood as an army at home, by the hundreds. Kaiser's men and Doughboys and Tommies and Washington's sore troopers and some from a place called Balaclava in their giddy uniforms.

The army of soldiers was in the cellar near the coal bin where Uncle Lew's beer can hung on a nail. Grandma wouldn't let him drink upstairs in the house proper.

My Grandmother would say, "You'll not drink up here, Lewis, the day of any day, and the b'y needs more sojers like I need a hole in me head." But Grandfather would smile and wink a soft wink she daren't see even if she did. And we'd have more soldiers coming from clumps of lead he'd bring home another day.

Sojers. But not Lewis drinking in the house proper. Or Uncle Johnny or Uncle Dermott or Uncle Tim or Uncle Tom.

Alongside the pile of pots and things tin and iron, and brassy bits, shining like bits of gold, knockers and hinges and old bells with a *dacent sound still lodged in them*, would be a pile of rags. He'd already have been through the pile searching for sweaters and jackets and pants and towels and dresses and things worn whose names I didn't know.

The good things!

The good things would be set aside again, and I'd get my choice of a pair of pants or a shirt or a sweater. It might be a belt I'd have to cut down to my size and use a nail to drive new holes in. And now and then, like a family store, there'd be a pair of boots for me. Once I found a new jackknife still in the boot pocket, the little leather scabbard my right hand could drop to and touch. The laces were made of real rawhide and came near to the knee. His eyes twinkled and he nodded and said, "For me little caterer."

The good things would be brought home and doled out, the dole coming over on the ship I understood. Sometimes it would go to family and sometimes to neighbors. The good things elicited not a

sneer nor a twisted head or a frown. A proud boy or girl would look lovely in a new dress or a jacket or a pair of pants that Johnny Igoe had rescued from oblivion. A boy in an old worn green shirt forever would be one day in a blue or red one. It would have come from the Malden City Dump at the hands of Johnny Igoe who'd not let the world go to waste, or anything in it.

The Dumpmaster. My Grandfather.

I wondered then, more often than not, how long would such a man live, carrying the weight of all his words.

It wasn't going to be forever, though you couldn't tell me so.

But that was my worry all the while.

He hung on until he was ninety-seven through one of his wars and four of ours.

I never knew until much later that the words were heavy, but the poems were not, except the one poem of his own, and the lines:

Though adopted by Columbia
I am Erin's faithful child.



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"Cardboard Clifford"

by Leo Lichy

Having entertained thoughts of travel for months on end, and somehow managed to cobble together enough funds for a flight to New York, I was in excited mood. However, this quickly changed on the eve of my vacation. Just as I was exiting my house for the airport, I received an overdue charge from my local public library. It was for a book that I stole years ago. I was furious. I dropped my case and composed an angry letter.

"Good God man, have you no decency? Is there nothing you won't stoop to? First, you force me out of the state with your incessant fines and exorbitant reservation charges, then the moment I set foot on Massachusetts soil again you harass me over a trivial seventy-five dollar charge for a book I sold to an antiques dealer in the late nineties!" I wrung my handkerchief and stamped my foot. "This is no way for a middle-aged man to behave. Know your place in the world, you vile pest!"

As if the overdue demand wasn't bad enough, the fact that it was written on the back of a postcard had me spitting teeth. Was this any way for a librarian to behave? Currently, it seemed that Mr. Andrew Purvey, Rare Books and Collectibles Librarian, was presently vacationing in Cancun. The post-script at the bottom of the demand said: "Please reply to this overdue statement before April tenth, as I will be away on holiday in Aruba."

"Andrew Purvey, I am beginning to wonder if you're not a spy, or perhaps some small-time tour operator in secret. You have traveled Mexico

and the Caribbean, seemingly on paid leave. You probably also have an expense account. How you have managed to scam your way into this privileged position, Lord knows. I know I should like to do something similar if I could."

The more I thought about Mr. Andrew Purvey, the more resentful I became. It prompted me to remember my old friend Clifford Tullington and I calmed a great deal. After university, he had taken a position as an Assistant Librarian in the public library service and was forever cuckolded by his overbearing manager. One year, he claimed that a cardboard standee of Sean Connery, posing in his *Dr No* tuxedo, was in such bad condition that it could not be sold in the Christmas library sale. The following year he resurrected it, having fashioned it in his own image — spectacles, monkey face and monstrously large sideburns — and erected it beside his office desk.

His hateful manager mistook the standee for the real Clifford. Each day she piled a gargantuan heap of damaged oversize books at the feet of C a r d b o a r d Clifford, for deletion from the library catalogue.

To the onlooker (as we all know, library staff are as observant as a hedgehog crossing the road) this cardboard figure was as lifelike as Clifford. Considering Clifford rarely moved, spoke, or did any work, it is perhaps not such a terribly foolish mistake to make.

His manager, considering Clifford THE ENEMY, delighted in forever stacking the pile of books by his feet. She liked the sight of this heap because it meant Clifford would be tremendously busy. Each day she thought the pile of books was a totally new heap and that Clifford was working hard. Secretly, each day she hoped that the gargantuan pile of books would collapse and injure Clifford.

And so, for over six months, cardboard Clifford was hidden behind a pile of books. Few paid him any attention. His audience was limited to mice and bookworm.

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The advertisement features a cartoon illustration of a drummer with wild, shaggy brown hair, a large mustache, and a wide, toothy grin. He is wearing a yellow shirt and is captured in the middle of playing a drum set. The background is a light blue sky. The text is arranged in a mix of bold, black, sans-serif fonts and handwritten-style fonts in orange and black. At the bottom, the phone number and website are displayed in a red, outlined font.

The real Clifford was lazing on a beach in Honolulu. He was turning pink from the sun and getting fat from Pina Coladas. His bank account flourished and all because of Sean Connery and his investment in crayons and sticky tape.

Nobody would ever have known his true identity if the books hadn't toppled and crushed cardboard Clifford. While the real Clifford was spending his spare time (which amounted to twenty-four hours a day) traveling the globe, collecting hotel bills and offering worthless drivel on third rate beverages in foreign countries to the magazine *The World Through Beer Goggles*, cardboard Clifford was being rescued from underneath half a ton of paper and rushed to hospital.

When the doctor pronounced Clifford "pulp," his manager stopped her weeping and realized the extent of the caper. She invested the library budget for the following year on retrieving Clifford from Spain, merely in order to shame him to his fellow colleagues. Rather than sack him, she spent her remaining years heaping on Clifford a cruel daily ritual of humiliation and scorn.

This was his punishment for years until her death. He even had a workday named after him — Clifford Shame Day — whereby

library staff members were required to spit at Clifford every time they passed him.

I thought of Mr. Andrew Purvey and hoped he would suffer the same fate as Clifford. I resolved to put a note in the library suggestion box to this effect.

I also brainstormed a new method for allowing library staff to take vacation time — they must all compete in a quiz, or a treasure hunt (in a rampant search for a missing piece of library stock), with the winner taking the plaudits and the vacation. Naturally, the losers would get nothing.

The notion of competing for vacation pleased me. However, I was not sure about the form that the competition would take. I felt the contest would make a great spectacle and could be enjoyed by the public at large. My vision was of a Supermarket Shop style race, where each member of staff had one minute to grab as many items as possible. The one with the basket containing library items accumulating to the greatest monetary worth would win the holiday. Extra points could be awarded for items that have been borrowed from the library the least number of times. The manager would keep time, perhaps by boiling a kettle and when it pinged, "game over" would be called.

I felt that my suggestions would be welcomed warmly and might even make me money. If that was the case, then one day Mr. Andrew Purvey's overdue library item demand might actually be paid.



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

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

Dear Mermaid, i loved this dream. hope you do too:

I suddenly find myself in Yemen in a building that seemed like a large hostel. I run into a woman who befriends me. She tells me what to do and gives me her journal with her name and address in it reluctantly. We go to her workplace. There are 6 computer stations in an office the size of a large closet.

I find my way out into the streets after being lost in the corridors of the hostel. I peruse a market where white women are selling clothes and cool items. I know I need to find clothes and a hat to assimilate but I don't have any money with me. I somehow get a hat and begin to feel like I won't be caught. What I was doing was illegal. I get a book and run into my friend and give her my book to repay her for the one she gave me. Her's was cloth-bound. Mine was paper.

It's now time to go to the airport to leave. It starts raining. There suddenly is a rack of raincoats. One was on sale! LL Bean. Pink with a soft lining. I and two others look up and there's a sign with my name and a 7 above the hostel announcing that it's time for me to leave. This way you can't stay beyond when you're supposed to. I realize my bags, passport and ticket are still at the hostel. Big problem. I wake up.

(At one point I am touring the country. People are fleeing and occasionally one is tortured. Women have burkas on. I run into other tourists like me. There was lots of orange color.

L. H., Cyberspace, N. C.



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"Ashes to Ashes"

Stardust glimmers patterns
of eternity along a moonlit sky,
falling in loops and curves
at my feet, fearing seclusion.
The night turns ashes of grey,
colour failing this, the ceiling
of our thought, the moon
a crescent bubbling behind
the charcoal clouds.
Hope flees this battle scene,
joy runs fast on its heel
as despair murmurs, blowing
softy on my mind.

by Laala Kashef Alghata

"My Friend"

Let our voices ring
as we reach out
to disown the world
and claim each other.
Hello, my friend.
I tell you I'm scared
of beds, of the minutes
that creep by
before we fall asleep.
I tell you I cry.
Let us close our eyes,
stretch our lips
in a hollow O,
scream out our souls
and claim each other.
Hello, my dear.
You tell me you're scared
of the monsters
underneath your bed,
of swinging your long legs
over the edge.
Let us link our arms,
build a human wall
composed of every atom
we're made of,
let us create
the ultimate friendship.
Hello, darling. Hello.

No Art School For You Two (revised)

by Jon Rentler

Hitler was refused Art School
Will I be too?
Thick-lensed speculators spout
Eager fingers typewriter prone

In that single rejection
Letter, pulp of straw
His Austrian back broke

Brokeback, he knew
The number of angels to fit
On the head of a pin

He drained the muses' spring
Gave them free passage
Jews, gypsies, fairies
All aboard his train

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CONTRIBUTORS

Tom Sheehan's *Epic Cures*, short stories from Press 53, won a 2006 IPPY Award. *A Collection of Friends*, from Pocol Press, was nominated for an Albrend Memoir Award. *This Rare Earth & Other Flights*, poems, was issued by Lit Pot Press in 2003. He has nine Pushcart and two Million Writer nominations, a Silver Rose Award from ART. Recent work has been accepted in Australia, New Zealand, France, Turkey, Ireland, Scotland, England, and China, as well as in the U.S. He served in 31st Infantry Regiment, Korea, 1951, and retired in 1990. He meets again soon for a lunch/gab session with pals, the ROMEOs, Retired Old Men Eating Out (91, 79, 78, 77). He can hardly wait. His pals will each have one martini, he'll have three beers, and the waitress will shine on them.

(*Note the ages of my buddies and co-editors of two Saugus books, issue one (A Gathering of Memories, Saugus 1900-2000) sold out all 2500 copies at \$42 each, all proceeds to high school scholarships; and 1000 sold of 2000 printed of our second book, Of Time and the River, Saugus 1900-2005. Tom W., I am sure, doesn't mind we stole one of his titles.)

Leo Lichy: is the pseudonym of a former newspaper journalist from England, who has lived and worked in Canada and Australia. He is presently living in the US as a permanent resident.

Wendy Kowalski's work has graced our pages before, and can currently be seen at The Galleria at Kerr Lake in Clarksville, VA. The show is a benefit for Hospice.

Bahriani poet and novelist (and student) **Laala Kashaf Alghata** writes regularly for the Bahrain and Kuwait issues of *Clientele*, a lifestyle magazine and is the editor of the poetry journal, *Write Me a Metaphor*. Her most recent book, *Behind the Mask: A Folded Heart* (2006), a collection of poetry and prose, is available at Amazon.co.uk and her work appears online in poetry journals such as *All Things Girl*, *Argotist Online*, and *La Fenetre*.

Jon Rentler has recently returned from Ireland's Burren College of Art. He now spends his Pennsylvanian days trying his hardest to be deliriously American and trying to decipher what that really means.

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