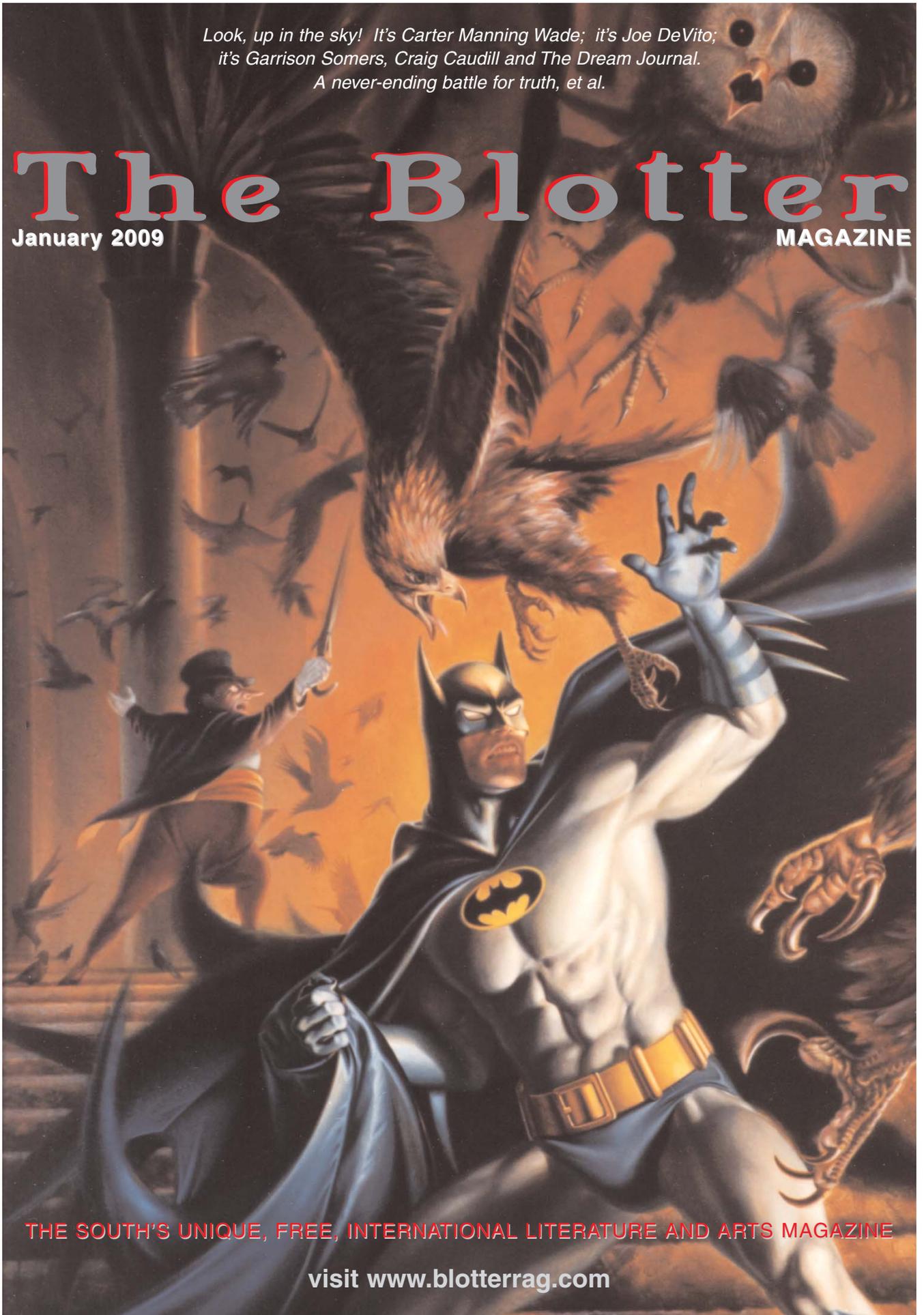


*Look, up in the sky! It's Carter Manning Wade; it's Joe DeVito;  
it's Garrison Somers, Craig Caudill and The Dream Journal.  
A never-ending battle for truth, et al.*

# The Blotter

January 2009

MAGAZINE



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

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## "Holiday Form Letter"

Another year, and we've successfully landed the helicopter on the moving ship. There were some wins – The Blotter co-produced a documentary film on poetry and the creative process. It's currently in post-production now: editing, graphics and suchlike. For those of us that like talking about poetry it will be a pretty cool thing. For those of us who tailgate party back to the college from which we graduated as if we were co-owners of the football team, not so much, I suspect. We won a small stipend from a local corporation's entrepreneurship grant program. Not the grant, mind, but still something. (Glass half-full, half-full). We've brought on two terrific editorial interns who help out about the place – enthusiastic, competent young people from the local university (tee-hee, guess which one!). We've also been receiving extraordinary assistance from a public relations professional who likes the cut of our jib, and who's hurt by that? She's our grant-mistress, and we've finally got some irons in the fire. This May we reached and passed our fifth anniversary – a significant landmark in magazine publishing akin to graduating from high-school. Some less obvious moments of interest: receiving an invite from a local publisher to a book-launch, receiving requests to blurb new books, receiving advance-reader-copies of books to read. All kind of fun for an editor.

Hey, we've also had some near-misses. We nominated Marty for a local Arts award – he's into everything Arts in the NC Triangle and deserving of recognition. We put together a plan for our first-ever fiction contest, but didn't roll it out because of the financials. 'Nuff said. No point in having a bang-up fiction contest if its explosion takes out the foundations of the castle, as it were. (We're still going to do it, but when we have all of the ducks in proper rows.)

And we've been keeping on keeping on. Our Blotter-sponsored concerts and open-mics. The magazine itself: all of the stories, poems, artwork, essays, book-reviews, author interviews. And the dreams, in journal form of course. We bumped up our distribution to seven thousand copies per monthly issue. I don't know how that compares to anyone else, but it sounds significant, doesn't it?

I've been doing some Blotter underground work: helping teach fourth graders how to get creative with their writing, helping teach first graders to be proud about putting two sentences together successfully, gently judging middle-schoolers' Young Authors Competition entries, helping some peer authors polish their gems-to-be. We at The Blotter have always believed that with a good word here and a nudge there you never know what might happen. We feel that the magazine can be more than just a magazine; it can be a tool for learning, a launching point for a writer's growth. It can educate. If in spite of all of our tongue-in-cheekiness, this reevaluation of our core mission (yikes) gives us gravitas, entry into the salons, an opportunity to make a difference, then tally-ho. That's what

we're about.

So. A good year. Near great, even. We're still running on a shoestring and hot-air. We're still the best sixteen pages, with four color printing, in recycled pulp, and still free! free! free!, in the land. Of course, we're still looking for a few good donations. Not a mint, certainly not in these troubled times. But in a world of risky businesses, you could do worse than to drop something coin of the realm in a bucket as worthy – if I may say so - as The Blotter. It's not going to be used for a visit to the spa or corporate jet. Just good paper and ink and postage, my friends.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



**The Blotter** Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is published in the first half of each month and enjoys a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

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CAUTION

*Could ya, just once, watch the mouth? Do I gotta come down there and shut it for ya? Do I? I'm not kidding, pal. God knows kids today aint got no respect.*

**"Flood, Fire, and Lost Keys" an excerpt from *Fiddle-dee-dee-vah: Musings of a 21st Century Southern Belle Divorcee*  
by Carter Manning Wade**

Strange noises emanating from the master bathroom toilet worried me. Not my husband, though. He was plotting his escape. The toilet sat gurgling as he bounded up and down the stairs with his arms overflowing with loads of clothes and books. He piled all his stuff onto the back of his brother-in-law's pick up truck while our six year old son and I watched and the baby was soundly sleeping in her crib. She was oblivious to the silent seismic shift in her world.

How did I get here? Well, how about I narrow it down to *how did this day start?*

Earlier that morning, yes, only two days after Christmas, our tow-headed six year old son enjoyed his happy ritual of crawling in bed with Mommy and Daddy to watch

the Saturday morning cartoons. As he sat between us that morning glued to Winnie the Pooh, I looked at my husband and softly said,

"Tell him."

He leaned up on one elbow.

"Umm. Son, I will be living in a different place for awhile. I'm moving today."

That unglued him, all right. Our son turned to his dad with a confused expression on his face. Blinking his bright blue eyes he asked,

"Why?"

"Umm..." Nope. That was all of it.

"Your daddy will live somewhere else for awhile. You can see him as often as you want. It will be OK honey," I lied, thanking God I was on anti-depressants.

A few hours later found me watching my husband cram our round top table, with the Celadon damask table skirt still on it, onto the rapidly-filling flat bed. That table skirt had been sewn by hand, a rare moment in my domestic goddessness. I really had to dig down deep figuring that nightmare out. *So, you do use high school geometry? Why, yes I do!* And did I want the skirt back? No. I was past sewing table skirts. There were bigger issues to sew back together.

After the truck drove off, my son and I walked back into the house. I locked the door and my son asked,

"How long will Daddy be gone, Mommy?"

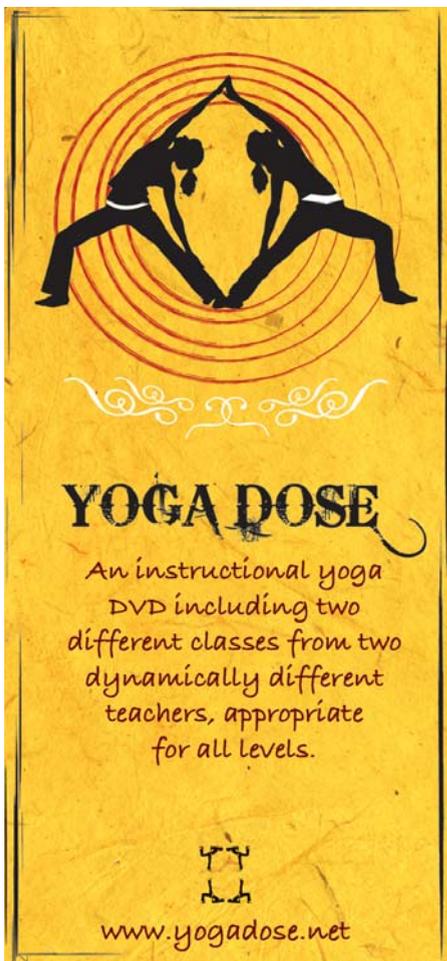
"Oh. Daddy is going to a different place for a while." I said. I did not cry because I did not want our son to cry. I had hoped what I said was true. I was wrong. So I was alone. Yes, sixty days after he told me he was unhappy, he was gone. But put away your tissues, folks.

That possessed toilet demanded my attention.

Two weeks after Christmas (twelve days after my husband fled for those of you taking notes) my son woke up, came into the bedroom, used the master bathroom toilet, but it would not flush. He told me so.

I made a mental note to deal with that in the morning as I proceeded to nod out face down on the bed with my clothes still on. When I awoke around 2 in the blessed AM I staggered out of bed heading for the hall bathroom. Even in my sleep stupor I knew to avoid the master bath. While I finished my business I heard a slight but constant tapping sound. Let's see, I thought. The ancient sheltie is underfoot in the master bedroom. My son is back asleep in his room and my daughter's asleep in hers. I am definitely not making the noise. Hmm. I stood in the hallway outside the bathroom, looking towards the stairs. The tapping sound was louder.

Oh Crap! I raced down the



The image shows the cover of a DVD titled "YOGA DOSE". At the top, there is a stylized illustration of two figures in a yoga pose, mirrored across a vertical axis, set against a background of concentric circles. Below the illustration is a decorative flourish. The title "YOGA DOSE" is written in a bold, serif font. Underneath the title, the text reads: "An instructional yoga DVD including two different classes from two dynamically different teachers, appropriate for all levels." At the bottom of the cover, there are two small icons of people in yoga poses and the website address "www.yogadose.net".



The image shows the logo for the Blue Bayou Club. The logo features a central illustration of a crocodile or alligator in a bayou, with a red cup and several cans floating nearby. The text "BLUE BAYOU CLUB" is written in a large, stylized, blue font with a red outline, arching over the illustration. Below the illustration, the text "GONNA HAVE BIG FUN ON THE BAYOU!" is written in a similar style. To the right of the logo, the address "106 South Churton Street Hillsborough, N.C. 27278" and the phone number "919 / 732-2555" are listed. At the bottom right, the website "www.bluebayouclub.com" is provided.

steps, flipping on lights as I went. As I rounded the corner into the living room - it was raining! On the antiques! The 19<sup>th</sup> century plantation table from my maternal great-great-grandparents' plantation had mini-puddles on the green leather inlay. The mahogany and brass table from my umpteenth grandfather on my Daddy's side was shiny with water. The wet floor, the continued drops, water spray hitting my ankles: my world was under attack!

Looking at the raining ceiling I felt that extra-strength you get in tragic emergencies. I shoved the antiques out of the deluge. Racing up the steps to the master bedroom I leaped over the still happily sleeping sheltie and into the bathroom, which, not surprisingly, was now a small lake. I turned the water off at the base of the toilet. One useful thing I learned from my vanished husband. I scampered to the hall closet, grabbed towels and raced back to the bathroom to soak up the lake. My sheltie now looked at me warily across her hairless nose like an awakened Grannie while scooting closer to the safety of the bed. The only reason it had not flooded in the bedroom was the toe-stubbing height of the threshold. Thank you, God, for small favors and my husband's bad carpentry!

Back downstairs again to the kitchen to gather buckets and pots to catch the water and a mop to clean up. Now I was furious with my twelve days gone-husband. On the way back upstairs, I grabbed the phone.

"The bedroom toilet overflowed. It is raining potty-water in

the living room because you didn't fix the toilet before you walked out!"

Did that solve anything? No. But I felt better waking him up.

After a few hours of mopping, bucket and pot dumping and towel work I could do no more. I collapsed again on the bed face down.

Alarm clock. Groan.

That morning I had to fetch the babysitter for my two year old daughter. My son had a meeting with a therapist at 11:00 to help him with the nightmares. All brand-new since his daddy left. Prior to picking the babysitter up, I decided to vacuum the downstairs den, our playroom - thankfully unscathed by the flood. As I was sucking up Cheerios and who-knows-what with the vacuum cleaner, it made a loud belch and black smoke began to spew from it. I snatched up this devil machine and told it,

"You! Into the garage. I will not burn down the house too!" I parked it in the open air garage, on cement near nothing. If this baby wanted to burn, it could just incinerate itself.

Okay...

So I took my children to get the babysitter. As soon as she was seatbelted in I said, "You will not believe what has happened to me in the last few hours," and proceeded to unload on my captive babysitter my tales of flood and fire.

When we got back to the house at 10:00 the phone was ringing. Caller ID said Bargain Box, and when I answered the phone there was a man on the line.

That was all bad. Let me tell

you why.

I was President of the Junior League. *Yes, yes, believe it or not.* And as a non-profit organization, we had fundraisers, one of which was a consignment shop called Bargain Box. Bargain Box was always closed on Wednesday. Today was Wednesday. As Junior League was an all female organization, and with, therefore, only female workers at the Bargain Box, I was surprised to hear a male voice on the line.

The voice asked me if this was Carter Wade.

"Yes, it is," I said as I braced myself on the kitchen counter. *What now?*

"This is the Bristol, Virginia Police department. How are you doing today?"

"That depends," I said. My eyes closed and my stomach lurched.

He introduced himself and proceeded to tell me the Bargain Box was found with its door ajar by a passerby. The police had been summoned. They found the membership manual with my name on as President. But, thankfully, the Bargain Box had not been broken into. *A bright spot in my day.*

Yes, in a matter of eight hours I had single-handedly faced flood, fire and the police and survived!

Admittedly, some of my crises I make myself. Not long after that fiasco-rama, I was venting with a friend. *Gosh. Why would I be doing that?* I was on the cordless phone staying out of earshot of my six year old as he played in the yard. Venting is good, say I, but not so good when you are not paying atten-



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tion to where your keys are. A six year old, a big backyard, keys on the steps and a somewhat distracted mom equals a major Uh-Oh moment. Yes, my Uh-Oh moment was when at bedtime when I realized my keys were not on the last-seen spot - the steps.

"Where are they?" I asked myself aloud. Then I remembered my son had had them in his hands six hours before.

I recalled that at the moment when I saw him pick them up I'd thought I need to get those from him and put them up higher. I did not do this. I don't know why. I mean, I do know why, but I cannot explain it.

Now my keys are not just keys on a ring. I have an oh-so-fab Kate Spade wallet with a key fob. This grey sateen fashion statement was at my side all the time or was supposed to be because it held my keys, Drivers License and credit cards all conveniently together. Frankly, at this point my whole life was missing. So, at 11:00pm I turned on the out-

side lights, put on my robe and tennis shoes, grabbed my flashlight and headed out into the yard. As I attempted to retrace my son's steps, I realized he had been in the front yard and the back yard as well. I looked in all the ivy clusters, boxwoods, sifted through the sand- box, pushed around under toys and rocks. I crawled into the tree house - OK I was desperate! I searched all over. No keys. Lost life.

I am certain the neighbors thought I had lost my mind. Over the next morning's coffee my neighbors would lean their heads together.

"That poor woman was all over her yard last night," they'd whisper. "My guess is she's cracking up."

I trudged back into the house unsuccessful, deciding to get up at sunrise to look again. I was not going to call my X up to borrow his keys. I did not need or want his help. Although I did need his keys.

When I got upstairs I found my son had crawled into my bed. Bless his heart.

Idea!

"Honey? Are you awake?"

"Mmm-hmmm," he muttered.

"Do you remember where you put Mommy's keys?"

"Mmm. Yes." Rubbing his eyes.

"Do you want to go on a treasure hunt and find them?"

"Yes!" He sat bolt right up in my bed with a big smile and his bright blues shining. *Mommy always had the best plans.*

I put his coat and tennis

shoes on him and gave him the flashlight. Out into the yard he happily scampered to one of trees with ivy at the base and happily dug up the keys from the dirt under the ivy. Smiling broadly he proudly brought the keys to me.

"Thank you honey!" I said as I hugged him. "Now let's get you some milk"

I put the keys on top of the fridge. Opened it to get out his much-beloved chocolate milk.

As I filled his glass he smiled happily. Watching him gulp down the chocolate milk I thought what a crazy couple of weeks this had been. What an adventure this is going to be! If I only knew...



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## "A Foaling Tale"

by Garrison Somers

It is a dark and stormy night. Mel's mind is on other things when I tell her that this is how I'm going to begin. It is a writer's lame jest and receives a deservedly weak smile. She moves on, padding across the living room to do something and then turns back, task unaccomplished, and sits again on the couch. Midwife's nerves. I put away my grin. Ron is the one who called me to say that the mother is waxing. Twenty-four to forty-eight hours until birth, he reports. Now when I arrive, soggy from the down-pour, Ron is out. Mel's not sure where. What? I say, confused and concerned. Should the horse start something now, something beyond waxing - a level of horse-birth I do not yet understand - and my assistance be necessary in some way other than observation, we're all in deep horse doo-doo. Oh. He is searching for a soldering iron and some other parts, so that she can finish her creation: an audio-visual system for the horse stall. A baby monitor for foaling. It is a gift he gave her for her recent birthday, but the wiring does not reach from the house out to the stall, so the two of them are busy fixing it, wires and solder and new little parts for the ends of wires and magnifying glasses for close-work and so on. I am worried that they are better at this sort of thing - the infinitesimally small details - than the big picture. All I can think is that there is a mother horse outside in the cold rain and they are in here, tinkering. Isn't there something we should be doing? Correction. Isn't there something they should be doing? Mel gets up again, returning to the table, under the lights, like a surgeon. I keep my seat, no help with the electronics, either. What, I ask myself, am I doing here?

This is Alamance County, in a log cabin in the woods. Milk cows ruminant in their barns down the hill. A haymow stretches along a rise across the road, waiting for drier days. We are only about fifteen minutes from deepest civilization, but you can

hardly tell that from here. I'm sitting on an overstuffed chair, wearing my five-dollar reading glasses, a legal pad on my lap and a red pen and a travel mug of coffee in my hands. The coffee is cold although it was only a short drive over. I'm taking notes and asking Mel questions and she is quiet and thoughtful as she answers me. My notes are all show, though, and anyway, the living room is so dark that I can't read what little I'm writing, though it's warm and comfortable. Mel's eyes are sensitive to light, and her skin is clear and pale, like polished Alabama marble. She is a handsome, horsey woman. It is odd to see her without sunglasses, which she even wears inside, typing in her office like a Blues Sister, and odder still not to see her in a hat. She wears hats all of the time; to keep the sun off of her face, the fluorescent glare out of her eyes. It is her style, as distinctive as a tattoo, and how you can find her in a crowd. She reports that she has twenty-six hats, various cowboy and slouch, fedora, and planter. Maybe more. It is quite something.

Mel and Ron have been waiting many seasons to have this baby. This is not their first attempt to have an Arabian foal. Last year there was a tragedy involving a newborn. It was a cool spring, the foal and mother were in their stall. The baby had been sleeping on the floor - the stall was plenty big enough for both mother and child, but during the night, the

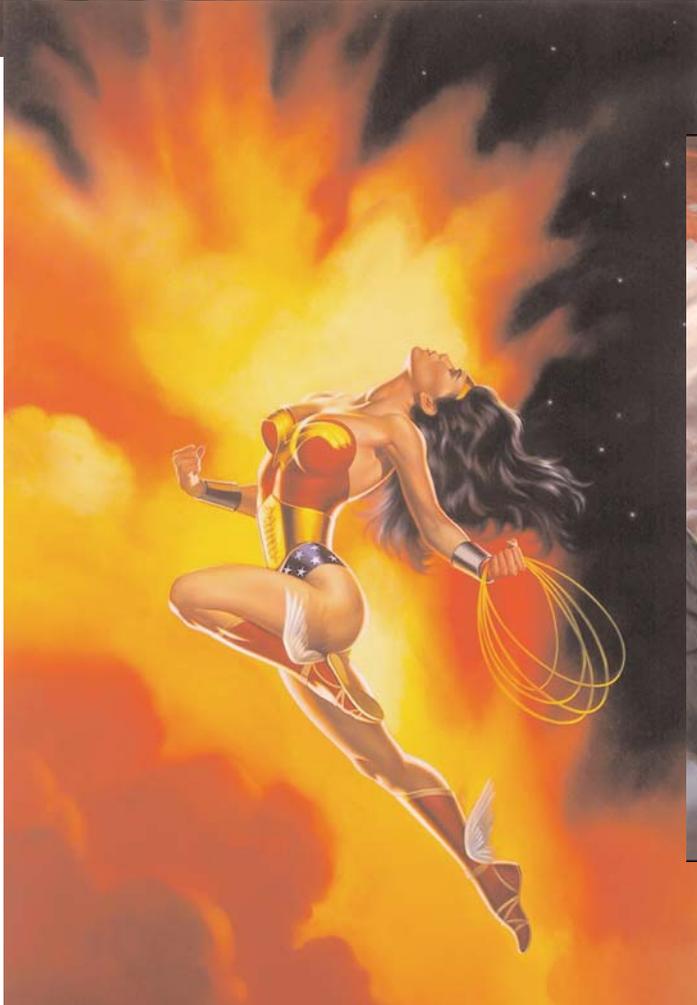
baby had awakened. Some motion during sleeping had placed the foal's head in front of a small hole at the bottom of the stall door. Upon reflection, no one knew how the hole came to be there. Perhaps the board had been kicked, or it was just shorter than the other boards by a few inches. No, it was just a hole between the door and the dirt floor too small for a full grown horse; too small even for the farm dogs that patrolled the stalls for rats and other vermin. Nevertheless, the tiny foal, curious and investigative, saw it as a place where its head ought to go. But the youngster was all forward and no retreat. Its head stuck and without help, it couldn't extricate itself. So it pushed on, bawling. The mother awakened, worried, to find her child trapped. Her assistance caused more damage than good. Knowing no alternative, it shoved the stuck body of the crying little horse. Finally, after much effort, the youngster, aided by its mother, was out through that hole, much too small for its young, strong, fragile body. The foal's skin was torn in many places. It was exhausted, bruised, confused, and out in the pasture with the other horses. Stumbling in the early morning, the foal must have been crying: for its mother, because of its wounds, out of hunger. The other horses were young themselves, two and three years old. Their instinct for self-preservation and preservation of the herd - in the wild a crying horse is a dangerous commodity - caused them to bump and buffet the baby with their heads and hooves. In the wild, wounded ani-

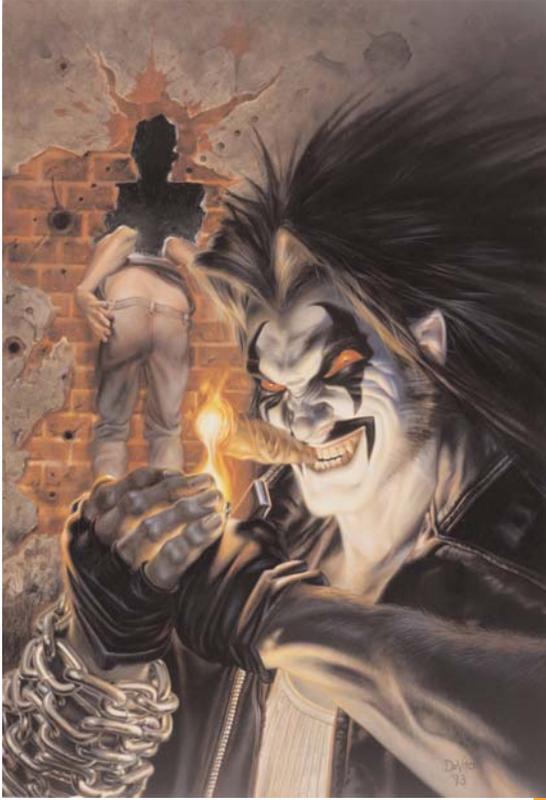
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## The Blotter

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imals draw hunters – coyotes, cougars, wolves and bears. Horses have a sense for what they can and cannot do. The older animals, mature enough to stay out in the pasture all night, knew that they could not protect the foal from potential predators. Instead they were trying, in their equine way, to make the foal be quiet and lie down in the deep grass for its own protection. Their actions were futile. The wounded and weakened horse, which Mel and her friends found in the morning on its side with eyes swollen shut, bloody wounds covered in mud, could not weather the battering it took. She died presently and they found it difficult to find solace over her loss.

A horse is but a pet, inasmuch as it is an animal owned by a human. Certainly, some horses are used for working, as engines of strength and movement for riding or pulling wheeled vehicles or farm tools. But, like dogs and cats and other creatures, horses fill that urge people often have to take care of something alive. Call it what you may, I will refer to it as the mothering instinct. For many, this urge is fulfilled by parenting. For others, it is augmented or completed by having a pet. I like cats; another might claim to be a dog person, or enjoy tropical fish or hamsters. There is, however, some ineffable quality to horses that make them different to those that love them. Is it that they have heuristic intelligence and a capacity for loyalty? Their size and strength dwarf ours, yet they can be tamed and may display a disarming gentleness. A horse's longevity potential, closer to our own than a dog's or cat's, offers a bond that might span a human's experience. Millennia of domestication have instilled in us a perception of their beauty. Whether the reasons be some or all of these; we often elevate the horse to a status above that of pet. They share our space in this journey and we consider our lot improved because of it. Over a hundred years since internal combustion and the wheel took over the role, we still consider horses our 'pards'. Can they love us? There are those who believe that they cannot; love is a gift

reserved for Man. But I cannot say that there is not a bond shared between horse and human, human and horse, that approaches something close.

We go upstairs to one of the bedrooms so I can see Mel's perch, where she keeps a weather eye on the mother, Impulse, who stands in her stall lit with a workshop lamp. This is the stall that Ron and the guys and I built two weeks ago. Made with cedar posts and rough-hewn spruce that Mel wheedled out of a lumber yard manager, it is strong and keeps the rain off of the mother-to-be. From her vantage point, leaning on the arm of a chair near the window Mel can try to push away some of the trepidation that has built up since last Spring. That episode ended in sadness and much shaking of heads at bad luck and put chinks in the armor of resolve. To be here again less than a year later is surprisingly moving, for in no way is having a horse like getting pet kittens. I am staggered by the planning required; I liken it to having a child.

Outside, the rainfall grows in intensity. The log house's tin roof rolls its snare drum. Mel describes the participation that she will have in the birth of the foal. There are risks, great risks. Horses do not come into the world easily. Good is when the face and forehooves present themselves first. Bad is the back-end first, the face only, the hooves only, any other presentation. So much of the foal's birth is the foal's responsibility. If it comes face and hooves first, the water breaks and lubricates the birth canal, and the shoulders – the widest part of the horse, help spread the mother's pelvic structure. It's either that or a C-section, Mel clarifies. We'd have to call in the large-animal vet.

I cannot picture a horse having that kind of procedure. Won't it ruin the horse? I ask, thinking about the Cesarean scar supporting so much horse insides. Aren't there too many parts of the horse that the belly holds in? It isn't as bad as that, she says, but there are complications that are different from humans – colic for example, will twist up a horse's intestines

and cause infection leading to...

They have leased Impulse for the entire year. She has been naturally inseminated by a local stallion that has been successfully passing on his genes for a number of years. Impulse is a sweet old thing the color of a rainy June sky. In contrast to the warm sunny day we had while we hammered up her stall, she stood in her yard, surrounded by the regularly clicking electric fence and tried to rest, the foal inside her a quiet burden. She picked through hay forked to her, her sensitive lips selecting only the tenderest shoots. Standing on three feet through the warm afternoon of our sawing and hammering, her left rear foot was always three or four inches off the ground, the muddy shoe pointing aft. I had asked Ron if she was merely taking a load off. Yes, he said, but she was also keeping her guard up. Anyone coming up unexpectedly on her could come away with a well-placed kick in the chest. Mel's received a kick like this before. Holy crap, I think. Just motherly instinct.

I ask Mel whether she hopes for a stallion or a mare. Oh, a mare, she says. Male horses are typically gelded ninety-nine times out of a hundred. More, even. Being a stallion is no fabulous life, I learn, because it has to be kept separate from all other horses except when it is called to do the one thing that being a stallion is good for. Sometimes genetics makes stallions crazy. Mares in estrus make stallions crazy. Being stalled and pastured alone makes stallions crazy. My own anthropomorphic view supposes that if a stallion were a racehorse, it might have a little better situation, but Mel says geldings have the best of all worlds. They are allowed to hang around with the mares, permitted to take advantage of whatever circumstances may come from hanging around mares, without any procreation penalty. After the initial procedure, well, suffice to say they're otherwise generally happy creatures. Mel relates a story about a stallion whose count and motility is so low and slow as to, somehow, make him a valuable asset. Apparently, he efficaciously passes on other highly

regarded attributes. What they are I do not ask. I assume the measures of beauty in a horse are simple: intelligence, speed, strength, ability to excel at all things equestrian, those qualities that have drawn humans to them for so many thousands of years. The downside for him is that all of his inseminations are artificially managed.

Back downstairs I sit on the couch. Mel paces, walking to the phone, staring as if it were in cahoots with the weather and Ron's disappearance. She talks as she walks, telling me about the amniotic sack. One of the midwifery tasks of humans for horses is to assist with breaking the newborn out of the amniotic sack. Didn't you see it when your own children were born? she asks. God, no! I say. It is translucent, she informs me, and slippery and cold. Disgusting to tear open. Thick layers of soggy wax paper, I think, or the strange Hollywood special effects stuff from *Alien* or *Independence Day*. Hatched with red and blue veins. Always the stuff of life. Even the afterbirth, she says, contains risks. I had imagined them planting it under a rose bush, and tell her so. Yes, she says, but first you have to examine it carefully after all the hectic events have transpired, to ensure that it has been completely expelled by the mother.

What are the hectic events? I am led through the potentialities. When the foal is dropped, it is important to keep the mother and foal from tangling the umbilical cord. Immediately after the foal is dropped, the mother's body pumps an extraordinary amount of blood into the foal via the umbilical. I cannot imagine this and ask Mel. An animal is born without the blood necessary to live? Yes, indeed. Like a brand new Chrysler, the foal is topped off before it is driven off the lot. How do you know when it is right to cut the cord? You don't cut it. The mother and foal will break the umbilical, and then the midwives jump in with iodine. The cord is not tied off, because of the infection risk. Between birth and the umbilical breaking, the mother and foal bond.

There's even more to worry

about. Unusual among mammals, the horse does not share protective immunities between mother and foal. The newborn is naked to the world of bacteria and virus. The burst of energy that the transfusion of mother's blood provides gets the newborn lively and warm and on its feet. The next goal is the vital ingestion of colostrum, from the mother's teats, thick and un-milk-like, but braced with nutrients and natural infection fighters and antibodies. Before the foal drops, the teats leach this thick matter that looks like candle wax, in effect keeping them clean during the birth. Ah ha! Ron told me when he called that Impulse was waxing! For crying out loud, I think. I'd been assuming that it was a reference similar to, perhaps, the waxing and waning of the moon. Something like, say, the birth canal widening in preparation for the ensuing birth, or, I don't know. Leave it to horse people to be practical in their naming conventions.

The front door bangs open. Ron has returned from his journey, a wet paper sack under one arm. He hands off his package to Mel and she spreads out bits and parts on the kitchen table. She is handy with tools like this, makes jewelry and repairs tack for reciprocal favors. Ron comes into the kitchen, he has changed into drier, more comfortable clothes for the long wait. It could be an hour from now, or the weekend. Without speaking, he points into the kitchen: plates, forks, knives. I take a piece of chocolate cake. It is birthday cake

and I realize that at some point it is appropriate to wish Mel a belated happy birthday, but I am feeling strange and out of place now, so I sit quietly and eat my cake.

Ron and Mel are one of those remarkable married couples that can work quietly and well with each other on the same project. He tilts his head back and watches her manipulate the hot soldering tool. They both attend to the little electronic details, pointing and acting as third hand for each other when required. The rain is quieter now, and I can hear their mantel clock tip-tap above my head. Mel hands the cable to Ron and he inspects it. An unspoken adjustment is necessary and she melts the solder and refits. It's late. I had intended to stay and get more of the flavor of the birth, perhaps stand watch for the entire night. That is impractical, though, and as I said, horse people are practical people. I am still welcome, but they are working and I am ignored. They don't ask me to leave. Nevertheless, I put on my coat and stow my notes and pen. Mel is engrossed in her soldering task.

Ron is slipping on muddy wellies and a slicker. He and I go out the back door together and I jog out to my truck and come back under a big golf umbrella. Mel has the TV room window thrown open while Ron stretches the now-lengthened cable across to Impulse's stall. The mud is deep and my shoes are inadequate. Rainwater sluices through the pasture that they have in their back yard. The electric fence ribbon



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# The Blotter

twitches and wiggles in the wind, ticking as the jolts cycle through the wire. The pounding rain has kicked up the rich pong of horse dung and it clings to my nostrils. I am trying to be of some use by holding the new cable up like a goofy, out of place, telephone pole. After a moment, Ron relieves me and strings the cable temporarily to a hanging branch with a bit of black electrician's tape. When he's done, I shake his hand. I'm off, I say. OK, he says. I walk through the curtain of rain to my truck. They don't need me here right now.

Although I have asked to be called when Impulse begins to foal. Ron says that this is pointless, because by the time I get the call and drive over, the foal will be born. If things go well, horses bear their young quickly. I suppose this makes sense, because so much of the world is a predator to a wild mare. I try to explain that it is the foal that I want to see. I am frightened by the thought of the actual foaling in ways that my participation in the birth of my own girls never made me. I can't explain to him why this is so. Instead I say that's OK, maybe if you could let me know when I can come over again?

And so, I make my way home through the rain and wind in my old pick-up, the wolves kept at bay by the windshield wipers, the thick safety glass, the steel and rubber and the engine's many, many horses.

Four days after the rainy night, Impulse sits and begins to expel her precious cargo. Mel is right there. She has been awake for most of the last few days, vigilant, as the labor

has been much longer than they expected. Perhaps Impulse was not happy with the weather. Fortuitously, the dreary rain of last week has subsided, and two days of late Spring sun have dried the ground around the stall a little bit. Ron puts down additional straw in the stall, and goes to bed; he must return into the office in the morning. At three AM – Mel has told me that this is usually when mares give birth, between two and four in the morning (a time when cougars and wolves have already taken their evening meal?) – old reliable Impulse stands and walks and lies down and stands again. She is trying to move the fetus around to the proper presentation; this wise horse can sense that the face and front feet are not where they should be. Finally she is ready, and lies down for the quick birth. Mel helps straighten one leg, and suddenly, there it is. A boy. No, a girl. A filly, brown with a handsome white blaze, named Ila.

If I know Mel she doesn't cry with joy, but with all practicality wakes up Ron to tell him the good news. Together they do the work of cleaning up the newborn, and getting the soft horse-blanket strapped on her against the Spring chill. They make sure that Ila figures out how food works, nudging her to Impulse's teats for victuals. Ron snaps some digital pictures, one or two, to send to those of us that are interested in how things are turning out. Only then, when the filly is on her feet, the mother is safe, everyone is fed, and Ron is back in bed so that he can go to work in the morning, can Mel relax, cry, pray and sleep. She dreams of land, a small

house, sun and pasture, shade under trees, fences and horses and quiet days to enjoy them.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Carter Manning Wade** writes, "with roots that run through the Carolinas like kudzu, CMW finds herself a sudden single mom to her two children: a two year old and a kindergarten in the mountains of NE Tennessee. This Spartanburg, SC native navigates the hurdles and (deep) potholes of a life where chivalry has become as a rare as a tropical disease in the Arctic. As a UGA grad., veteran of the deceased textile industry and a former Junior League prez, she ponders life without a hoopskirt but with a six-year unemployment gap (SAHM) and a fierce desire to successfully provide for her children with a smile on her face. Wouldn't the Belles of old be proud?"

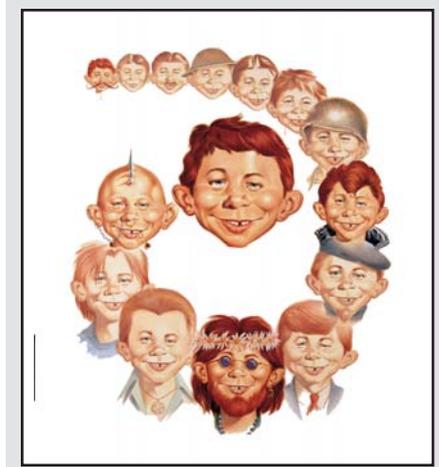
**Craig Caudill** of Covington, Kentucky writes, "I am a freelance writer and video artist. I have been published in international journals such as *Poetry Salzburg Review* in Austria, *Parameter Magazine* in Manchester U.K. as well as smaller presses like *Sein und Werden*, *Zygote in my Coffee*, and *Mount Zion Press*. I am currently writing a memoir and two novels."

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## "From Now On..."

by Craig Caudill

I have decided that from now on,  
no more edgy shit. I have decided  
hallmark cards and fortune cookies,  
perhaps I will submit scripts for a remake  
of touched by an angel,

From now on I will wear cardigan sweaters,  
with perfectly manicured Hands done  
by Korean women only

from now on,  
I will only soft Rock

I will only "Blast from the Past" I will  
sing Belinda Carlisle songs  
At the local karaoke

I will join a Unitarian church, I will  
eat fish on Friday, just to be safe.  
I will watch Disney movies, I will join  
a reading group, I will take my vitamins

I will join a nicer version of the young democrats  
My adult material will consist of only saucy novels  
My only spice will be mild bell pepper, I will only  
eat sweet and sour chicken

I Will shun all pork products with exception to sausage and  
Pepperoni

I will join books of the month club, I will finally  
Read Walt Whitman like Oprah suggests.  
Will be nicer to people, will remember the spirit  
Will not play my stereo so loud, will buy the best of  
Hootie and the Blowfish, because I saw them at Wal-Mart  
in the parking lot

I will have my aura cleansed, will meditate daily,  
wash my hands Regularly, abstain from masturbation.  
Will listen to Kenny and Dolly's Island in the stream.

I will only soft rock.

## The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

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

mermaid@blotterraag.com

I was caught in the classroom without clothing, nothing  
but a bathtowel to cover myself. And it was time for  
classes to change, which was far more important than  
any personal embarrassment I might suffer. I ran into  
the hallway as other students began slamming doors  
open and filling all available space in the toothpaste  
tubes of halls. I had sneakers on now, somehow - mir-  
acle! - and with a sharp-right-rudder I popped a door  
open into the outside. A stairway led up the hill. The  
sun was sinking in the western sky - was this the last  
class of the day? How I ran, my towel wrapped about  
me - with hope that I might still be on time. I looked  
over my right shoulder and she was there. I couldn't  
see her face but I could tell with certainty that it was  
her. Impress her! I jumped up on the railing of the  
stairway and surfed it as if it were a great iron wave  
and my sneakers a face-cutting twin-fin. Was she  
impressed? I don't know. My towel stayed on - a good  
thing, I think.

MG - Cyberspace

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# An Interview With The Artist About When He Was A Young Man: Inside the art of Joe DeVito

*Editor's Note: Joe DeVito, and I know each other from way back. We grew up in suburban New Jersey in a bedroom community where my Dad taught in the junior high. Our schools took regular field trips to places like the Museum of Natural History – where I discovered the Hall of Dinosaurs. I dug pits in the back yard looking for bones, and dreamed of following in the Gobi-Desert-exploring shoes of Roy Chapman Andrews. Joe, on the other hand, had different dreams. He could draw. His older brother Vito, a star running back on our high-school's football team, could, too. Little brother Raphael was a cherub with curly hair that would occasionally sit still to be his older brothers' artist's model. My bedroom wall had a poster of the dinosaur mural at Yale. Joe's bedroom contained his own art.*

*Thirty years after our own high school graduation, I began drafting a novel about Italian brother-soldiers captured at the battle of Stalingrad. I modeled the two brothers after Raphael and Joe, carefully extracting their relationship from my own memories. Curiosity led me to find Joe again on his website. Here I found the brilliant drawings of childhood now come to life.*

*Ed: Can you tell a little about how you became a professional artist, what it was like growing up in an "art household"?*

JoeD: I was born into a close-knit Catholic, Sicilian family living in Hell's Kitchen, New York City. Both my mother and my older brother, Vito, were very artistic. I had an Uncle, Joe, whom I was named after, who was both a priest and an artist. He was the first person I actually saw work on a painting, when he would visit my grandmother. My family lived with my grandmother and my aunt in a three-storey brownstone on W43rd St. My uncle would talk to my brother and I about Leonardo, Michelangelo and art in general. When he could, he gave us drawing lessons. I vividly remember working with my charcoal pencils on newsprint pads, mostly copying dinosaurs from the 'How And Why Book of Dinosaurs.'

Our home was full of statues and

icons. The basement was particularly mysterious. Something like a catacomb, it was filled with mysterious sculptures and old artifacts my uncle would collect. It had tons of cobwebs and old machines and that dank smell of brick and dirt. To this day, it all evokes a sense of mystery and fascination. Outside, the multitude of sounds and sights, both near and far off, always made it seem like something was going on and my daydreams would fill in the blanks. I traveled many places without ever leaving my small backyard.

We moved to Berkeley Heights, NJ, when I was six, right around the corner from you, Joe S., Ed R. and Ronnie S.. It was true culture shock, and far more astounding to me at the time, environmental shock. I went from fenced in asphalt and concrete playgrounds with metal monkey bars in NYC, to open fields, woods, tree forts, and the best friends a kid could have in NJ. It was paradise. I cannot imagine having a better childhood.

I discovered that I was fairly coordinated and very physical when I actually had a field to run in. Sports, and just playing with everyone, took huge chunks of time away from my focusing on art. I have no doubt I'm the better for it, though.

Throughout it all, my sensibilities never changed. Art was always a part of me even though I only worked at it sporadically through high school. As I got older it took over completely. Through a long series of crazy events, I found myself back in NYC; first attending Parsons School of Design, then the Art Student's League. That was almost thirty years ago and I've been working professionally as a painter, sculptor, occasional author, and in recent years college professor, ever since.

*Ed: When did you decide that you were interested in the classic characters like Tarzan, Superman, Kong?*

JoeD: I really can't remember a time when I wasn't. King Kong was the first, and set the tone for all the others. I first saw that flick when I was about four. My older Brother, Vito (also a

painter, sculptor and a monster movie fan), sat me down to watch it. For the first time all the dinosaurs that had mesmerized me in books and museums came to life and began to move. Of course, Kong himself was my favorite of all. His anthropomorphism struck a cord in my already overactive imagination.

*Ed: Can you tell us how you got involved with the Cooper family and King Kong?*

JoeD: When I first got the idea to do a prequel/sequel story on King Kong I realized that I needed to look into the rights situation so see if it was possible. Describing that journey could easily fill a book.

The logical place to start was the family of Merian C. Cooper, the man who created King Kong. He was a truly extraordinary human being (anyone wanting to find out what he had to do with WWI, early military aviation and Russian prisoner of war camps, King Kong, Katherine Hepburn, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers, 'Gone With The Wind', WWII, the Flying Tigers, John Ford, John Wayne, the founding of Pan Am Airlines, 'This is Cinerama' and a whole lot more, should read Mark Vaz's book "Living Dangerously, The Adventures of Merian C. Cooper, Creator of King Kong). Merian Cooper passed on in the early '70's.

After a great deal of research, in the early 1990's I managed to track down Charles FitzSimons (one of the producers of the Batman TV show in the 1960's and the brother of Maureen O'Hara among many other incredible things), who was the president of the Screen Writers Guild in Hollywood and the lawyer who handled all the affairs for the Cooper family.

He took an instant liking to my proposal and we developed a wonderful friendship that lasted up until his death. He was a true mentor, guiding me all along the way and establishing contact with the Cooper family, which thankfully liked my work as well and gave me their exclusive endorsement. I have remained very close to the Coopers ever since and we are involved in many projects together. Developing those relationships and others was one of the true blessings of the whole endeavor and something I never anticipated when I first set out.

*Ed: As a writer, it's often hard to "stop working" and take a break from a story*

*that's pushing to come out. Is it the same for artists? What do you do to relax from your work? Does your family ever tell you that you work "too much?"*

JoeD: Do they ever. I've been married for twenty years and have two daughters, both teenagers. The oldest is going to college next year. Along the way, there have been plenty of times when everyone told me I need to get out of the studio more often. One time, while fooling around in that regard, they locked me in my studio and forgot to let me out before they left for several hours. I managed to get out and back in the house, but only after having to run around the outside of my house in my underwear to the front door (it was a very hot summer afternoon - long story!). I'm sure that's not what they envisioned when they said I should get out more.

On the other hand, these days they're thrilled that I have a lot of work - as a freelancer you can never have enough - and we count our blessings. The inability-to-take-a-break syndrome is probably symptomatic of most creative types. It's the unavoidable consequence of doing what you love to do. Therein lies an interesting contradiction: what do you do to relax when you get burnt out from doing what you love to do when you relax? For me the Achilles heel of painting and writing is the lack of exercise. When I work on larger sculptures they can be quite physically demanding, but even there, what you're really looking for is a release from the sustained focus necessary to create. I guess the best thing is trying to do something more physical - biking usually works great for me.

*Ed: Have you ever collaborated with your brother on a project?*

JoeD: My brother Vito and I collaborated on a Newsweek cover and several book covers early on. I'm a bit more tightly wound than my brother when it comes to being a perfectionist and we almost killed each other. We've always remained close, though, and would have continued to collaborate had he not moved out to the Hamptons on Long Island. As a result he ended up getting into wildlife and sporting (mainly hunting/fishing). I stayed in the fantastic arts and have also expanded into corporate commissions and the fine arts, where I have been working on everything from

painting to monumental sculpture.

*Ed: Do you remember the pick-up football games we used to play on Memorial Field? Joe S., John M., Pete I., Pete D., Nicky F., Ronnie S., all the other guys. (We could never let you get the ball, because you could outrun everyone on our team.)*

JoeD: I'll never forget those days! And we can't forget Bug - besides being the first girl I ever kissed, she could compete with any of us on an equal footing for years. As I mentioned earlier, I cannot imagine having had a better childhood. I can still smell the grass on Memorial Field and ice skating and sleigh riding in the winter. Remember how the clouds whirled overhead before a thunderstorm on a summer day and we would play up until the last second? If there was no lightning, sometimes we wouldn't stop at all. Even after all these years - what's it been, over forty, can you believe that? - most of us are all still in touch from time to time. Here we are working on an article together. A rare thing in this world.

*Ed: What are you up to these days and what's on the horizon?*

JoeD: There are so many things going on, I am having a hard time keeping track. Everything from painting, sculpting in both the illustration and fine arts and writing as well.

There are all kinds of plans revolving around my Kong book from comic books to late film pre-production. I hope to have definitive movie production news in just a few months. Along those lines, I just finished my first screenplay, co-written with Brad Strickland. It is for a new property I created tentatively called 'The Primordials' that I will be shopping around shortly. 'The Primordials' is a wild trilogy that brings a whole new twist to the scientific understanding of origins of mankind, monsters, and a whole lot more.

I'm also illustrating quite a bit, painting Doc Savage and other classic characters. Property design and development (characters, machines and environments, that sort of thing) is one of my favorite things to do. This has expanded into corporate commissions, which have ranged from the painting and sculpting of awards, to the creation of unique retirement gifts for CEOs. It's all pretty cool stuff to work on.

I've also been taking on personal commissions in both painting and sculpture and working increasingly more on paintings and sculptures for churches and shrines. When I was a kid I always dreamed of doing something like Michaelangelo and Leonardo. I suppose it's the closest I'll ever come. It is tremendously gratifying to have the opportunity.

The down side of it all is the lack of time. I am ever aware of how little of it there is and that I am now closer to the end than the beginning. It is a very sobering thought. I am more and more cognizant of my limitations in that regard.

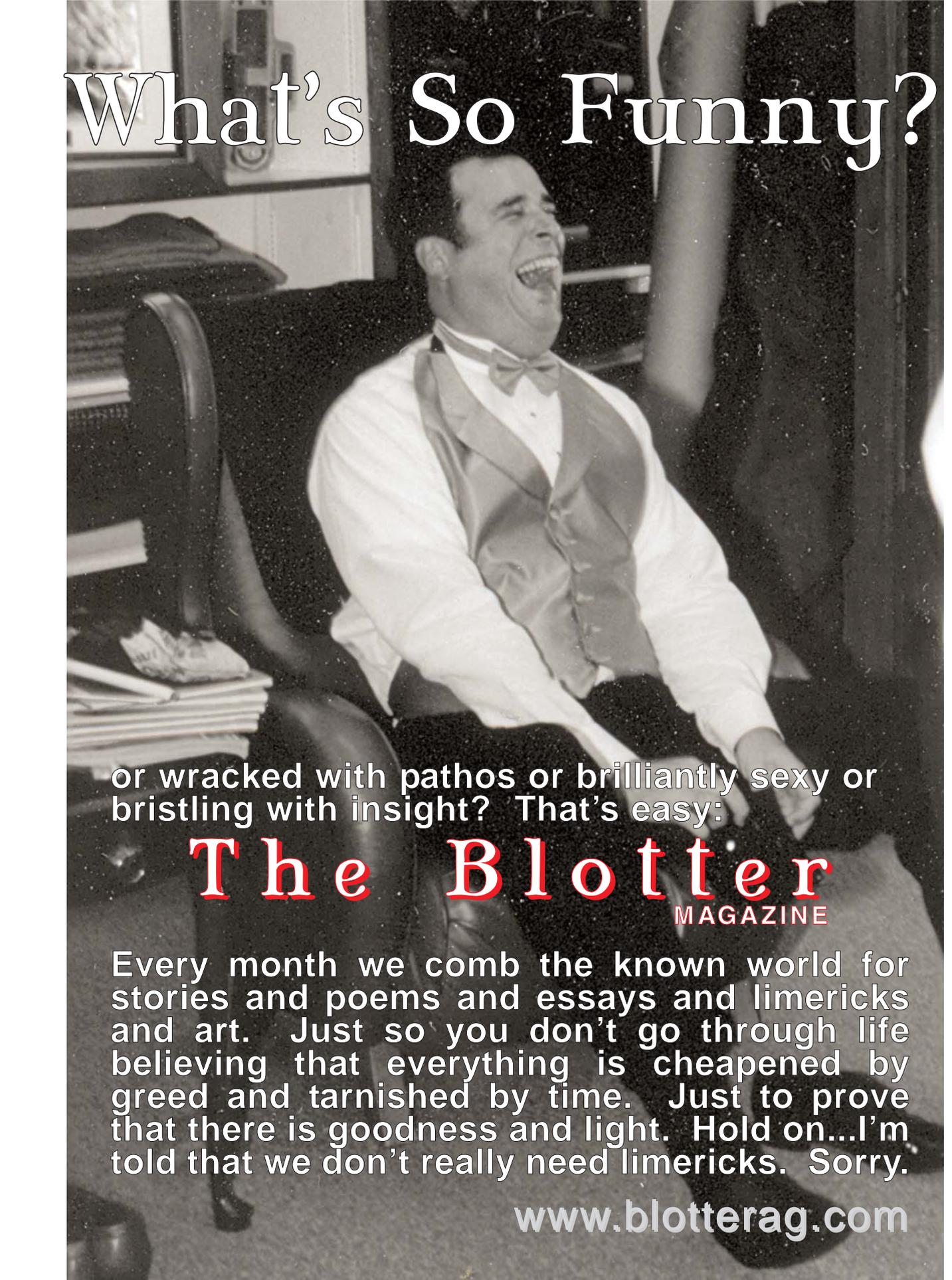
*Ed: Something we never considered much when we were playing as kids -*

JoeD: It was the farthest thing from our minds. I remember hanging out in your living room with your dad reading us stories. He had that incredible voice and impersonated all of the characters in the stories. I vividly remember that and the sense of the fantasy and timelessness that surrounded it all. There were no boundaries of time and space and the days were filled with imagination.

To augment that, you lived right across the street from the library. I always felt that the Berkeley Heights library was one of the best I've ever been in. I know some of that is because of the memories I attach to it. I learned so much from all the time I spent there, reading all the dinosaur, animal, science and history books. Come to think of it, I think the first art show I ever had was in that library. When my Kong books came out I made sure to donate copies to the library. The thought of a little kid lying on the library floor (I used to lie on the floor and read my favorite books for hours on end) lost in a fantasy world of a book I created is beyond words. To be able to complete the circle like that is an extraordinarily special feeling.

At any rate, here we are all these years later and still kicking. In hindsight, there's nothing I would have changed about those years and I consider myself extremely lucky to have grown up with everyone in that town. I sometimes wonder what would have happened to me had I not been able to move to Berkeley Heights. I am truly thankful.

*Ed: And thank you to you, Joe.*



# What's So Funny?

or wracked with pathos or brilliantly sexy or  
bristling with insight? That's easy:

## The Blotter

MAGAZINE

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