

*Au natural in this heat? Makes sense to us.
Florence Reiss Kraut, Tom Pescatore,
Phil Juliano and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

August 2012

MAGAZINE



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

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"Snippets"

From a letter sent to us intended for one of our authors:

"I am not your man, and if he does answer, you'll have at least something to compare his answers to, though I was not impressed by the depth of thought you gave your article, or you're bored to death or trying despoetly for Editor, or just fill pages maybe. Are you on shakey ground? Your next job riding the cardboard Rail Road?"

From a letter to me from my daughter:

"Well, I bet you knew that; you had me as a daughter. I was a toughie. But, I'm proud of you. I guess it doesn't take much to say that, along with the usual, 'I love you, daddy.' But as I've gotten older, I really, truly realized what it's all about. You're surprised? Don't be. "

A note from a contributor:

Dear Mr. Somers,
I received the June reprints a few days ago. They look great! Thank you again for accepting my story.
Sincerely,

PS I always wanted to have chickens...

A recipe sent by my sister, with many important asides, an upside-down emoticon and the last mention I've ever received about an "ice box":

The recipe, verbatim, from Aunt Pat, in Frieda's handwriting (I changed the little "o" in degrees to the written word as no degree symbol on my keyboard.):

Frieda's Cookies

1 large egg }
1 cup sugar }
1/2 lb. oleo (I use Imperial) } mix these
1 teasp. vanilla extract }
1 " almond " } add
1/4 " salt }
2 1/2 cup flour }
1/2 " cornstarch } (1/4 cup additional flour to have dough come clear of the bowl.)
1 teasp. baking powder } blend these in separate bowl. Add gradually to above creamed mixture. Use the extra flour to get good texture, but do not overwork the dough. Put for ten min. in ice box. Take enough dough and put in cookie press with the serrated disk. Press gently to desired length.

Bake 7 min. at 375 degrees or till nice tan.

I hope this is understandable. 1/4 teas. salt and 1/2 cup cornstarch. the cookies were about three inches long when Aunt Frieda made them. I hope XXXXX likes these (how could she not!)

A fairly gutsy note attached with an online submission:

Hi Garry,

Here are some samples of the writing I've done in journalism so far this year. One is a review about a steakhouse in North Carolina, actually. I received an A-. The Cecil article is a brief about a skate spot on campus...I have great skateboarding connections so I wouldn't be surprised if I use that to my advantage for later stories. B on that. Another is a personal essay about a prank my friend and I had been planning all throughout high school. Got a B on that one. And last but not least, a profile about a phlebotomist. I just handed that in yesterday so I have yet to know what I receive. All of these are the raw versions. I figured I may as well send you my original works as I handed them in without corrections from my teacher. Thanks!

A rather tentative note from another sub.:

Have been a little reticent to go completely over your remarks yet (easily mortified due to bad experiences in childhood - mother used to steal my writing and try to use it to show people what was "wrong" with me; have a hard time still sometimes, goofy as it sounds) - am leaving to take girl children (one mine) out of town in an hour or so but will return Saturday for a few days and will check back then.

And one final note that answers the question "Do you editors think that you're God or something?"

Just had to send you a note of your own, because without you yesterday wouldn't have happened...

Sincerely,

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



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CAUTION

There are four aspects to your existence: the things you know that you know, the things you know that you don't know and two other things.

“A Normal Man”

by Florence Reiss Kraut

They call Bikram Yoga hot yoga, and George knows why; the temperature in the room reaches one hundred degrees. He is standing before the mirror, surrounded by twenty two students in various states of undress and is attempting to bend backward, arms in an arc over his head. “Go back, way back, fall back one more time,” the teacher says. Then, “Change.” That is the signal to come out of the posture, stand quiet, focus on his eyes in the mirror, breathe through his nose and wait for the next pose.

The teacher is tiny. She stands on a platform before them, or walks around the room, touching someone’s shoulder to get them to stand straighter. She reminds George of Anni. She has red hair too. Anni would laugh at him doing yoga. So, in fact, would everyone who knew him. He’d played handball and baseball as a young man and even boxed when he was in his twenties; yoga was a practice that came from a distant

land, a world away from him. But that, he told himself, was where he wanted to be...a world away.

Before the class started he had sprawled on his back in the dead man’s pose, feeling heat from the vents that blew all around the room. The room was steamy, warm, dark. He was supposed to still himself, relax before the exertion of the yoga, but he could only think of the warmth of the shower, when he stood, eyes closed, hot water sluicing his back. *Anni used to come in behind him like a shadow, circle him with her arms, press her curves against his back. “Anni,” he would say. “Soap me.” He loved being naked with her.*

Now, standing in the center of the room, the lights are bright, the teacher keeps up a steady pattern of instructions and he is supposed to still his mind and follow her words. This is George’s fourth class. He got lots of congratulations from the teacher for coming back. It was an act of will, not desire, coming back, but

as he stands under the skylight, seeing his belly hanging slightly over his black swim shorts, and his bare chest with its small nascent breasts, he wonders why he came. He used to be a man who enjoyed being nude—on the beach—in a bedroom. When he was younger and his body was hard, he was vain and would admire himself in store windows when he walked by. Now, he hates photos of himself and barely looks in the mirror.

He has been told no one looks at anyone else in the class, but he doesn’t believe it. He looks at everyone. At fifty-five, George knows he is one of the older people in the room, but not the oldest. His chest hair is coarse and gray. He is beginning to bald, and beads of sweat pimple his head and his shoulders; rivulets drip down his cheeks. It seems to him he is sweating more than anyone in the class except the man two spaces to the side of him, but maybe that isn’t true. He doesn’t trust his perceptions any more. He notices how that man is dripping onto his mat, sometimes spraying perspiration around him, and George wonders again, self-conscious, if anyone is watching him.

“Change,” the teacher says after the Eagle pose. He has brought two quart bottles filled with ice and Gatorade and the blue plas-



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tic Nalgene bottles sweat also, standing on the floor beside his yoga mat. He drinks and drinks, wipes the water coursing off his face with his hand towel, and then they begin again: The Standing Series. He stands on his left leg, his right leg bent like an angle iron; he is supposed to hold his right leg by the foot and remain for one minute, standing on his left leg which is “like a tree, a post, unbending,” the teacher says. He can’t. He holds his right leg just beneath the knee.

“Change,” the teacher says. George does a little back stretch, looking behind him. There is a woman in the corner with curly hair, like Anni’s. Everywhere he goes he looks for Anni. There’s a hole in his universe since she left

him. He is trying to fill his life with activity, the way Anni filled their apartment with her art.

Anni teaches art in an elementary school in Brooklyn, but she is also an artist of found objects. Sometimes when she is working she is in such a frenzy of activity that her hair seems to fuzz, almost steaming out of her. She fills boxes with plastic bubble wrap, bottle caps, buttons, soft gray foam, caps from yogurt cups. She paints them, glues them, draws around them. She uses graph paper, cardboard from shirts, pieces of driftwood, egg crates. Every piece of flotsam is useful in her art. But she has taken it all elsewhere now, and he doesn’t know what she is doing anymore.

At least, he thinks, he no longer

compulsively eats as he did when she first left. He would stand in the kitchen shoveling food into his mouth from the refrigerator until he was so full he was sick to his stomach. His heart raced and he felt his blood pounding in his head. He imagined he was having a heart attack or a stroke.

Visits to the doctor were unsettling; nothing was really wrong with him. Dr. Butler put him through all kinds of tests, but nothing showed up.

“Blood pressure is just a little high. Stress,” Dr. Butler said. He put him on medication and dismissed him. “You’re all right. Lose a little weight,” he said. “Learn to relax.”

So he tried meditation, but he couldn’t stop his mind from racing. He went to the gym, but

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quit after a week. Bikram yoga is supposed to still his mind, but his mind is as feverish as ever, like little squirrel feet are racing around and around his brain. And he has gone from despair to something like anger.

How could she have left him? He's gone over it again and again. Was it because of her mother's illness and death? Would it have made a difference if they had been able to have a child, he wonders now. She was ambivalent about parenthood for so long. One minute she'd be cooing over her friend Marcia's baby, nuzzling her nose in the creases in the baby's neck, murmuring how they should have one soon. The next minute she would say, "Look at Marcia and Frank. They're prisoners in their own

home. Can't ever go anywhere without that baby." Or, "I work with kids all day. I don't need a baby at home to fulfill me." It was as if she were picking petals off a daisy: do I want to get pregnant, do I not? Then, at the age of forty-one, she decided she did.

But they had waited too long and there followed months and months of thermometers, trying new positions, fertility tests, the deadening sexual dance of infertility. And there was disappointment and desperation every month when she came out of the bathroom her face like a clay mask. She didn't even have to shake her head; he knew. He wonders if she thinks about it now. And what about adoption? Should they have gone down that long expensive route? George's mind is full of what ifs and whys; he has no answers.

So they stopped trying to have a baby and filled their lives with all kinds of things...he volunteered as a Big Brother and put in time at the local Democratic Party. She joined a choral society and a book group at the library. They both worked once a month at the local soup kitchen.

He thought they had a rich, full life. At least it seemed it was: an apartment in Greenwich Village, weekend outings to the Berkshires or the Hamptons, an occasional trip to Europe.

They laughed sometimes to think that two kids from the Bronx had such a life. They never dreamed of this growing up. He was the son of Hungarian immigrants who opened a bakery store on Westchester Avenue and quickly became competition for the Italian bakery in the neighborhood. She was the only daughter of a postal worker and a kindergarten teacher. She lived in the middle class housing project that was Parkchester, where there was grass between the buildings and protected places for the kids to play.

George always imagined they were the great loves in one another's lives. Now he knows that it was true for him, but not for her. They met when he was in eleventh grade at LaGuardia High School where they were both accepted through competitive examinations. He played the clarinet and dreamed of being a professional musician; she was an



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art major. She was laughing at a lunchroom table where his best friend, Bernie, was sitting. Seeing her, he thought of fireflies, incandescent lanterns, luminescence, she had that much light around her. From that minute George couldn't breathe properly in her presence. He felt his breath shallow and thin in his throat; he would stop himself, look down at his feet and say, "slow, slow," as if willing his heart to stop its rat-tat against his chest. He couldn't believe she liked him, but she did.

The teacher is saying, "Trikonosana, Triangle Pose, the peak of the series, the marriage of heart and mind." He contorts his body, bending one knee, stretching his arms up and out. He feels his heart pound with the exertion. "Change," she says, and they repeat the pose on the other side. He feels dizzy and decides to take a break. He lies on his back, feet facing the back wall. Just breathe, he tells himself. It is tempting to stay there for the rest of the class. He knows what is coming. There are twenty-six postures, each repeated twice, and a beginning and ending

breathing exercise. The class is predictable, just the way he thought his life was.

He was surprised when Anni walked out, but he shouldn't have been. Yes, she was quieter than usual for months. He asked her what was wrong. She always said "Nothing." Once he found her standing head pressed against the

window in the living room, crying silently. He touched her shoulder; she turned into his chest and laid her head there. It made him feel they were together again. But they weren't. She was bored, tired, depressed. She snapped at him for no reason. He thought then her black moods were because of her moth-

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er's illness and he even said as much to her:

She shook her head. "I don't think you get it, George."

"I get *you*, of course I do. Maybe I don't get *it*, but I get *you*. Nobody gets you like I do." *I didn't get it, he admits to himself now. I didn't even know there was something to get.*

"No, you don't. You think I'm the dutiful daughter and I don't mind going down to Florida every time my father calls about my mother," she said. "But I hate it. Every time I find her grayer and saggier, wasting away, shaking and shaking with the palsy, her mind slipping in and out. And he's dying from caretaking and she's dying from Parkinsons. I'm terrified that will happen to me! I need something,

but I don't know what!"

"Anni, you're depressed," he repeated. "It's natural. You're losing your mother."

"You don't understand. You're just too normal. You're the most normal person I know." It sounded like an accusation.

"What do you mean normal? Do you mean ordinary? Not exciting enough?"

She shrugged and turned from him, pushing her fingers through her hair. "I don't know," she mumbled. "Maybe. Maybe I'm too neurotic for you." She wore the word neurotic with pride, the way she wore her black clothes and black eyeliner around her green eyes.

He protested that he wasn't too normal, she wasn't too neurotic, but she just shook her head, and

turned and closed the bedroom door. It was one of the ways she had of leaving him. Going into the bedroom and closing the door. Or disappearing for an afternoon of art galleries and not inviting him when he would have loved to go with her. He sees now she left him often, in little bits and pieces. He just had ignored it.

The damp cold of New York winter gave way to soft spring. When Anni's father called that last time to tell them her mother had pneumonia, they flew together to Florida, to the gated community where her parents had put down roots eight years before. George and Anni stayed for three days, watching her mother die.

The last night her mother Jenny lay, hands quiet over the white bed sheet. Her father Sam, Anni, and George all stood by the bed. Jenny's eyes stayed open pinned on her husband until he said to her, "Yes, Jenny, it's OK, you can go." Then she closed her eyes, gradually her breath grew faint and she was gone. It was a beautiful death and everyone talked about it, about how her father and mother were so devoted to each other that Jenny wouldn't

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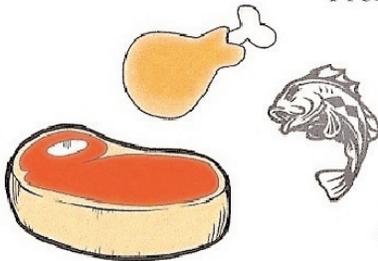
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die until Sam said it was all right. And they wondered how he was going to survive now that Jenny was gone.

But Sam had done just fine, sucking in his gut at the pool, laughing with the scores of women who were suddenly bringing him pot roast and chocolate chip cookies. And it was Anni who had not done well. "I'm the one who needs something new," Anni said to George. "And here's my father, my father for Chrissakes, who has the new life." Her father was suave again as he was as a young man. He picked himself up after a month or so and went on a cruise, learned to tango and smile and laugh with all the blonde ladies who fawned over him at the pool. How happy he was, a man who has suddenly been given a new

lease on life, and his face bronzed and his eyes sparkled and he danced.

That was when Anni left George, right after her father came home from the cruise and visited them in New York. She walked out of his life with Mark, an artist and fellow teacher she had met in a SoHo art gallery. They were both on summer break and she packed up her art supplies and moved in with him.

George remembers. In the yoga studio they are all stretched on the floor now lying on their backs for Savasana, the dead man pose, relaxing before the floor series begins. The teacher says it is a long rest. "Two minutes." If George weren't so tired he would laugh. Anni would have laughed.

He is remembering how she left him. She had been out all after-

noon, and when she came back she sat him down, took his hands in hers and said, "I'm leaving, George. I'm sorry, but I can't stay anymore. I just don't love you the way I should." She didn't look him in the eyes, but squeezed his hands, stood up and went to the bedroom. He followed, watching her move through their room, bagging flimsy summer blouses and long gypsy skirts with her sleep tee shirts all into a black plastic bag.

He didn't want to watch, but he couldn't help himself. "Where are you going? With who?"

He begged. "Please don't go, Anni, please. We can work it out." She didn't answer. Thinking of it now he is humiliated. *How he had begged.* He watched out the window and saw her join a tall, shaggy haired man

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who took the bag from her hands. George punched the wall over and over again until his fist ached.

His heart pounds now and he lies in Savasana and tries not to think of it. *One day things seemed fine. The next everything was broken.*

He had tried to puzzle out what had happened. It's true their young dreams had not come true. She was not a renowned artist, but she still did her art. He was not the world class clarinetist he had dreamed of becoming, but he taught music in a private high school and played his clarinet in a small jazz band that did gigs around the city and in upstate clubs. He thought it was a good life, but it must have been a cliché: a middle-aged couple, the

wife, searching for something new, takes a lover and moves out. The husband is devastated.

He still feels his chest cave when he thinks of Anni with her scrungy Mark, tumbling between the bed sheets of Mark's apartment. They were silk bed sheets, she will tell him later, when he compulsively questions her, wanting to know everything that happened while they were apart.

He will come home one day and find her waiting in the hallway at the door of their apartment. She will still have the key, could enter herself, but does not. She will wait, eyes downcast, after he stares silently at her—after he opens the door and stands aside to let her in. She will whisper "I'm so sorry." He will think *it's not so simple*, but will let

her into the apartment anyway.

Of course he doesn't know this as he lies in his Bikram yoga class in the resting pose of Savasana. He doesn't know what will happen that day a few months later in the hallway of their apartment. He doesn't know that he will take her back and live with her for two more years always waiting to see if she will leave him again, never completely breathing deep.

He doesn't know how terrified he will feel when they learn that she has cancer, or that the anguish and rage he felt when she told him she was leaving will vanish at the sight of her using his electric razor to buzz her hair off before it falls out in clumps from the chemotherapy, or how moved he will be by the heartbreaking beauty of her small, perfectly



rounded skull.

He doesn't know that he will cradle her head in his hand and rock her like a baby when she is dying, and they will talk and talk about the times when they were young, repeating their old stories.

She will tell him about getting her name taken by the Parkchester Police for walking on the grass, of playing jump rope in the big oval, of roller skating on Friday nights at St. Helena's and watching double features Saturday at the Lowe's American. And he will tell her about selling pastries in his parents' bakery, roasting the potatoes he and his friends called "mickies" in Boy Scout bonfires and eating them burnt and black.

He will tell her how he thought he had the flu when she left him because he ached all over, and he will hurt again when she tells him

about the first time Mark kissed her, even though she said she had the inexplicable urge to brush her teeth and longed for George's familiar taste. But he will make her laugh remembering the time they waited for five hours for free tickets to Shakespeare in the Park and the minute they spread their blanket for a picnic it poured and the play was cancelled; they will talk about the time, as college kids, they splurged together on tickets to the last game of the 1978 World Series when their beloved Yankees beat the Los Angeles Dodgers by winning four games straight after losing the first two. She will remind him of how she surprised him with tickets to "Cats," when they were impossible to get and she wouldn't tell him how much she paid.

And she will say he should learn to dance the tango and then they will not talk any more.

And he does not know that three years after Anni dies, when he has found a comfortable middle aged woman named Sarah, going a little to plump, whose grandchildren clamber all over him because their own Poppy is gone, he doesn't know how that act of loving Anni and hating Anni and loving her again, will make him into a man who can find and live in contentment with Sarah.

Today George goes through the motions in the yoga studio, doing fixed-firm pose and half tortoise pose, camel pose and rabbit pose and each time he holds on as best he can until the teacher says, "Change."



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.

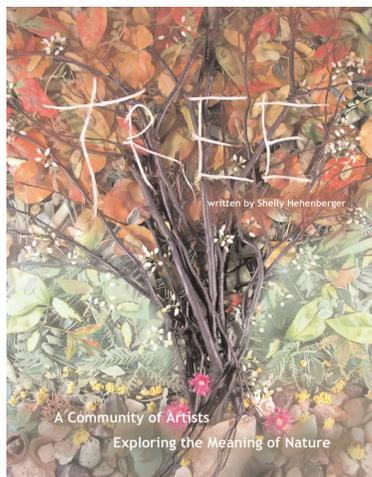
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A drink of water tastes bitter, but I cannot rinse the bitter water out of my mouth. I hook my finger on top of my tongue and try to haul out the acrid saliva, but it is gluey and thick. I want to cough, but I don't want to make any noise, not the kind of noise that coughing is, that human barking which would echo and bounce off the walls. The room is large, a cathedral of stone with pillars that curve far overhead and I think Europe but I don't know how I got here, or why. I smack my lips together and feel the gunk in my mouth that will not give. Frustration reigns here. In any other situation I might enjoy this visit, this tour, but instead of grandeur, there is that blandness of flawed focus and dust motes dancing mindlessly in my way. Shadows of people praying are out there, beyond my vision. The light jets through the windows but nothing in the room holds its color. It reflects dullness off of the stones. There are fewer shades of gray than one would think.

“We killed them”

Artists don't sit inside all
day to write and type and suffer,
they play on their iphones and macs
with dull eyes editing music files,
remixing old sounds, taking
photographs that seem
somehow older even though they
don't know why, they catch the movie
to marvel at the book (it's YA fiction)
then the next day read it on the train
cover out and facing the crowd, and
they dance at night clubs to hip-hop and
techno in the nearest up-and-coming
neighborhood, their drunken image tagged on
facebook, exchanging that for actual fame,
and remain blissfully ignorant of the truth
because artists don't think for themselves
or think at all anymore, hell,
they don't even try, because
for the most part
when their head hits the pillow
around 5am
they're plain fucking dead
and nobody gives a fuck.

Three by Tom Pescatore



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a collaborative, all ages, fine arts book illustrated by members of Paintbrush Forest, a group of artists from the Orange County, NC, area. Proceeds from **Tree** support the Haw River Assembly, a NC environmental organization. Check out www.paintbrushforest.com to purchase prints of the original book art, to make a donation, and to order your own copy of **Tree**. Or find us at many fine local Triangle retail locations. Thank you.

“On-coming”

Saw the tracks on the
 wrong side of Columbus,
 Vitaly had pulled out into
 oncoming traffic, wrong side
 of the road, heading right into
 old broken down trolley River
 Styx and we were next to try
 and cross it, but I noticed in those
 final seconds and we slid to a halt
 on a patch of grass, and the faces in
 the cars were watching, the headlights
 blaring, the last vespa bent to the road south
 before we could u-turn the bitch and
 get on I-95, “Fuck, Vitaly, you
 almost killed us!” Will was hammering
 the dashboard, “Yea,
 I admit that but they gotta put up some fucking signs,”
 He’s right I thought in the back seat
 there weren’t any signs, no signs
 pointing the wrong direction.

“To dream of Reality and the Outcome”

We stood back-to-back
 against the insane map of the stars
 bordering on un-reality,
 I saw every twinkling existence
 the shroud of the milky way
 the black holes and supernova
 births, we stepped toward them
 and the darkened moving away,
 our footholds were hard, invisible
 but concrete, space was something
 else entirely, not what we’d been told,
 each time we moved forward
 it was like gigantic light-speed leaps,
 the stars were merely illusory lights
 a thumbnail of burning gases on black wallpaper,
 there was the great charade, the great
 universal lie,
 our lives were vindicated.

Found poetry "My Family Photographs"

By Olivia Somers (age 13)

This is my sister, and me standing with her.

This is her sweater tied around her waist, and more of me standing with her.

Mom is very good at taking pictures.

This is her birthday party we had at the bookstore,

And this is her birthday dinner we had at the Cheesecake Factory.

This is the train we rode on, to Texas,

This is my sister's book-bag with activities to do.

This is a sweet-tea my Mom was drinking,

And this is my sister with a happy birthday sticker on her chest.

This is a salt shaker that was on our table.

This is a pepper shaker that was also on our table.

This is my sister Beatrice making a silly face,

With anticipation.

Dad's attempt of a smile.

This is my Mom who's very, very happy.

CREATIVE METALSMITHS

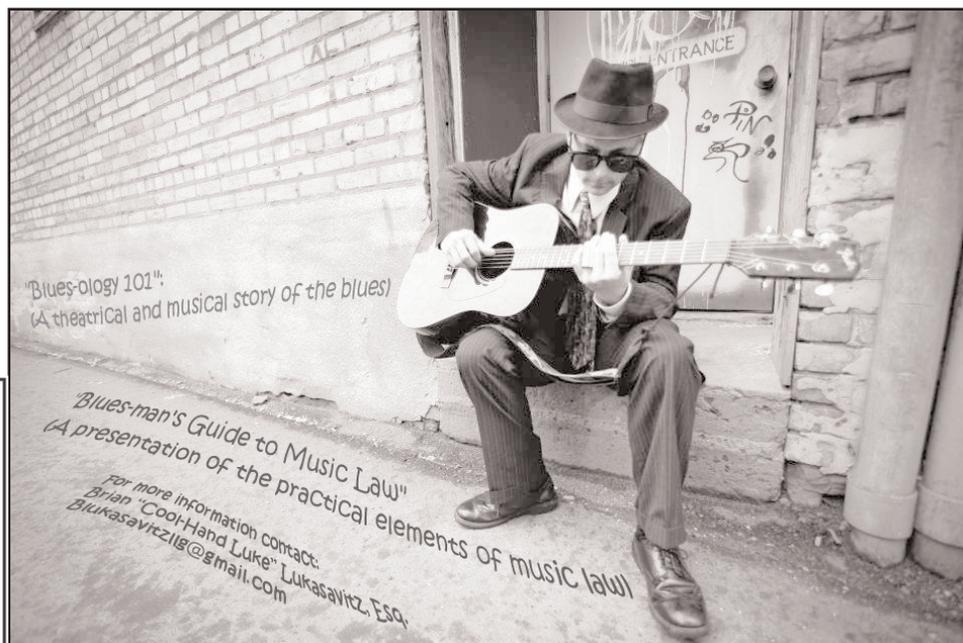
Kim Maitland

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Weekdays 11 - 6 * Saturdays 10 - 5 * Sundays 12 - 5



CONTRIBUTORS:

Florence Reiss Kraus writes, "My short fiction has been published on-line and in print in *Evening Street Press*, *The Write Room*, *Peeks and Valleys*, *The Westchester Review* and most recently in *SNReview*. I am a social worker who lives and writes in Rye, New York."

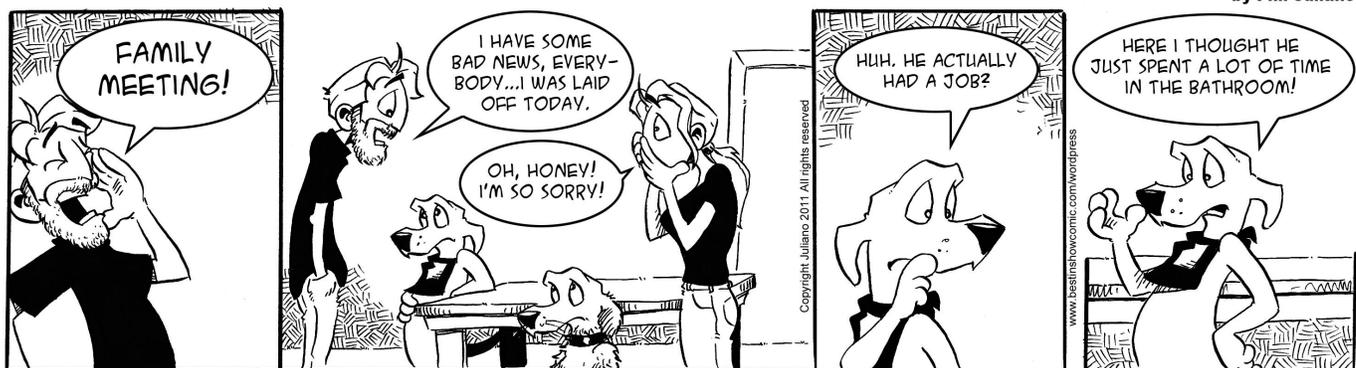
Jeffrey J. Turnage, of Columbus, MS is a country lawyer, a pretty fair watercolorist, and has been instructing us for years on how to deal with the beaver issue we have in the pond down the hill.

Tom Pescatore grew up outside Philadelphia, he is an active member of the growing poetry/lit scene within the city and hopes to spread the word on Philadelphia's new poets. He maintains a poetry blog: amagicalmistake.blogspot.com. His work has been published in over literary magazines both nationally and internationally but he'd rather have them carved on the Walt Whitman bridge or on the sidewalks of Philadelphia's old Skid Row.

Ed. Note: *I didn't heretofore buy into the au currant concept of found poetry - my hackles are ruffled by the idea that crafted work can suddenly wash up on one's shores - but I must say I like this piece my own daughter assembled while looking at family photographs. And while I believe that I am able to separate myself from the content enough to have an objective opinion, I will admit that I might be wrong. So far, however, it works for me.*

We're either coming up on **Phil Juliano's** second anniversary on these pages, or have inadvertantly passed it like we might a scary looking hitchhiker on the side of a gravel road. Of course, many people take such things more seriously than we do.

Best In Show

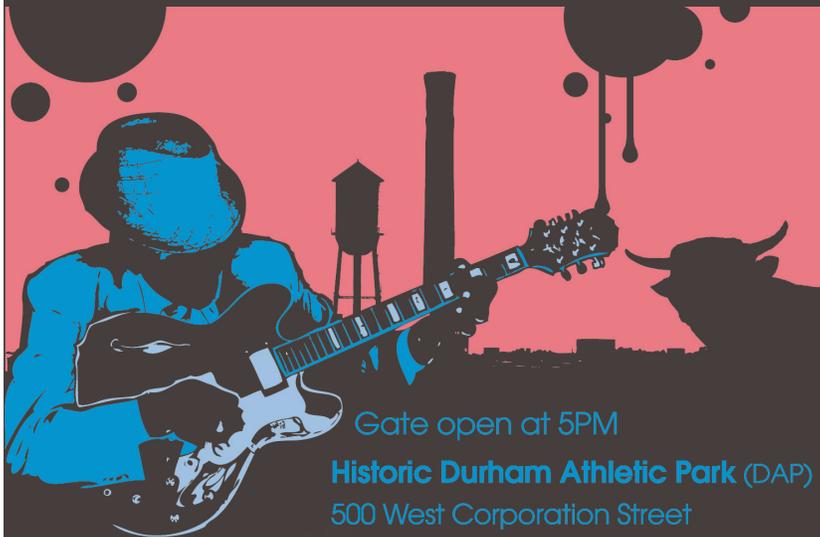


by Phil Juliano

Final Tidbits: Well, it's hotter than the hinges of Brimstoneville and the hens don't like it one bit. I've actually been feeding them watermelon, which they attack like dogfaces on Omaha. Speaking of beaches, get your beach reading right here, a copy of *Tree*, published by PencilPoint Mountain (www.pencilpointmountain.com), an imprint of The Blotter Magazine, Inc. What is an imprint? It's what happens to your right cheekbone when you are a wise-ass to Evander Holyfield. Need karma-reparations? Make a donation to The Blotter (www.blotterrag.com). Buy a Blotter t-shirt while you're there, we're almost out and want to place another merch order. And, as always, visit your local independent bookstore, faithful to a fault and with plenty of air-conditioning! Stop spinning in circles, asking, "Where have I seen that girl in 'Hunger Games' before, or was it something I misremember in a dream?" Open a book, turn on the local jazz station, grab a handful of pistachios, call your Dad - there's been conversations about a student loan, and give someone you like a kiss, they deserve it, and if they don't, well, you do, don't you? Got it? Good!

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