

*What happens if you look up from your phone?
Deborah Whelan, Nancy Nau Sullivan, Pooja Bjaturia,
Hannah Jones, Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE

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"The Secret Life of Walter's Mitties"

On the writing front, I'm trying to finish a novel that doesn't want to end. At the same time, here at home strange things are afoot. School brings them on, I think. For example, our youngest walks around singing songs with the words purposefully misspoken. Wait...can you purposefully misspeak? Anyway, she does this to make her older sister crazy. No, that's wrong! Big sis says. She follows her around from bathroom to kitchen to bedroom. You're saying it wrong! I'm not saying it at all, says younger, quite logically. I'm singing it. Which is kerosene splashed on the flame of frustration for elder. No! she tries to out-decibel her little sister. It goes like this! And she sings the correct words, in a key a half note higher and to a rhythm two steps behind. I assume this is done so that the listener (me?) can differentiate between the wrong version and the corrected version, however in the bedlam of two loud teenage voices it is difficult to parse which is which.

I no longer referee these sorts of events. They are plenty old enough to grasp that the world is perfectly designed to make you nuts if you let it. I am also old enough to have learned that not everything needs my fine-tuning in order to be workable. What I once might have placed my two-cents into I don't even look up from my book to observe. I figure that if it's really bad I will smell smoke or hear the foley-effect of punching from Rocky II.

This saves time, too, which I use for other things.

Like trying to stay in shape. Hey, Dad, says the younger. You need to plank. Holy crap, I think, obviously misunderstanding her. To clarify: I was in the Navy once, and plank has but two meanings, both inappropriate to a twelve-year-old. But then she shows me, propping her body on the floor like she's just about to but not doing a push-up. It looks arduous, and I don't want to do one, much less many of these planks. *Oh, but Dad*, says the elder, the eye-roll *totally* audible, *you only do one, and hold it as long as you can. Like, anyone can plank.*

I try. It is difficult to get my gut off the floor. With a giggle, my older daughter pushes down on my fanny with her tennis-shoe. I remind myself to spend her college savings on expensive coffee drinks. In ten seconds, blood is leaking from my eyeballs (not really) and I can hear Petty Officer Dick screaming in my ear. *Jeez, Somers, you are the classic definition of pathetic in three different dictionaries!* (I swear to God, his name was Dick. You can't make things like this up.) I count inside my head to thirty, and then flop onto the floor, sweating and broken.

Nice, Dad. That was twenty seconds.

I crawl on the floor for a moment, trying to get back on my feet. It

is not pretty. Not pretty at all.

What is the big deal? Here I've prepared my NPR ready pitch against needing to consume all of my "writing time" walking or stair-climbing or cross-training or iron-manning or tough-muddering or any of that frankly psychopathic exercise behavior. My youngest stops me with a single made-up word: *moobs*.

Who stayed awake nights thinking of these things? Some coke-and-caffeine addicted star-chaser in Hollywood? Or was it a writer with poor typing skills? *You know, man-boobs*, the younger one giggles, as pleased as punch that she is the center of humor-attention. *Don't worry*, my wife says, mis-reading the horror on my face. *You don't have them, yet.* (*Yet* is my take-away from this loving statement. Holy crap!) Heavenly father, what in the world have I wrought? I have two daughters that think the funniest damned thing in the world is making their father wince by saying man-boobs. *Man-boobs!* shouts the elder. *Moobs!* The younger one is dancing around the living room chanting the word again and again. Sometimes she can be so mature, I think. *Dad! Wait!* shouts the elder, never willing to accept supporting-actress honors. *Mitties! Get it?* Yes, my dear, I do.

In the end - writing - I don't get blocked but I do occasionally get clipped. Flagrantly fouled with a penalty resulting in movement of the ball halfway to the *gaol*. So I stop temporarily, looking for something: wondering about the etymology of a phrase, searching for deeper meaning. Writing is good and it can be fun. And when I'm thinking about what sentence goes next (instead of daydreaming), sometimes I just push away from the desk and lift a dumbbell. Yes, that is as unfortunate and weird as it sounds. Defying gravity helps me, I am told, in more ways than weight reduction. Nevertheless, I'm fighting a mid-section that is just short of crisis. And you may read into that what you will.

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CAUTION

I can can can-can, can't I?

“No Child of Mine”

by Deborah Whelan

I pull sticky hands from the meatballs I'm mixing for the Christmas potluck and press the phone to my ear. A girl's voice, soft and tremulous: 'Hi, It's Callie. Callie Osmond.' She clears her throat and starts again. 'Rachel's friend? I'm calling from Alberta.'

Len is heading back outside, pushing feet into boots, almost out the door. I wave my free hand and jerk my chin toward the extension on the hall table.

I wait while he pulls off a glove and picks up. 'This is Rachel's mom. Her dad's on the line, too. How are you, Callie?'

What I want to say is, 'Why are you calling? What's wrong?'

Callie's intake of breath lasts forever, then her words tangle up in a sigh. 'I'm really worried about Rachel. She's missed four days work and she won't come out of her apartment and she won't let me in. She's upset, and yelling, and I don't know what to do.'

The phone hangs heavy in my fingers and I resist the urge to let it drop. I see my sister's ghost hovering next to the bowl of

bloody meat. But Len doesn't notice Jean. He never does. He just goes on speaking in strong, sensible Len fashion, his shoulder propped against the kitchen door. He's wearing one boot and there's a small puddle forming next to the heel. He murmurs more words and Callie does too but I can't understand what they're saying; a headache buzzes between my ears. I gently replace the phone and open the pantry door next to the fridge and pour whiskey into a mug. When I turn around, Len is dialing and Jean is gone. I drink while he hits redial a dozen times. Finally, he nods and I pick up.

It's our little girl, our sweet child. I bite down hard on my lip. Rachel's voice stretches into a high thin line, a singsong monotone. 'I can't let Callie in, Dad. She's one of them they'll get me if I leave please please please help me they're going to kill me Mafia she's with the Mafia I know too much.'

Len's voice is calm, soothing like salve; he gathers her pain to himself. 'I'll be there as soon as I can. I want you to eat something, pack your suitcase, and lie

down and rest, try to get some sleep.'

'I can't eat anything, Dad. I think they've been in here and poisoned my food.' She sobs and her teeth clatter against the phone.

'Did something happen at work, honey?'

'They're evil, Dad, they're spies - it's not really an optical place. And they know I know. They're coming for me.'

'Rachel, it's Mom.' The whiskey has smoothed out the bumps in my anxiety and I find words. They surface from a lifetime ago when I struggled to calm the waters in which my sister tossed, lost in her manic world. I reassure Rachel as I tried to comfort Jean. My voice is soft and steady. Even I believe me.

'Callie is one of the good guys, my love, and the police know everything. You don't have to worry.' I close my eyes and pray that this is what she needs to hear. 'I want you to make some of the chamomile tea that I sent you. Boil the water really well and you'll be safe. I promise. I'll have pea soup and fresh bread ready when

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you get home, and your bed all ready for you. You can sleep as long as you want. We won't let anyone hurt you, my love.'

I gulp two more shots of whiskey while Len talks to Air Canada and books a flight across the country, from Deer Lake to Red Deer. Just last week, Rachel sounded breezy and energized. She didn't want to come home for Christmas. Instead, she gushed on and on about her amazing plans to go snowboarding and skiing with her friends. I should have recognized the warning signs. Now, depending on the weather and her condition, she would be here after all. Be careful what you wish for.

'There's a 9 o'clock flight,' Len says, scratching the crown of his head. He picks up the bottle of whiskey and returns it to the cupboard. 'Four stops. That's the best I can do. I won't have time to finish the driveway.'

I follow him into our bedroom and flop on the bed as he opens drawers and packs his old Dunlop gym bag. He sits beside me, zips the bag then cradles it on his lap. 'We used this when she was born, remember that? We were bringing her home from St. Clare's. I'd just bought it. You had it over your shoulder and she spit up all over it.'

'It still smells sour.' I snuggle into his neck for a moment, then he's up and out and picking his way through the snow, brushing off the windshield and turning to wave. Our jeep crawls along the road to the bend where it joins the highway and he's gone.

The fresh snow glows blue in the moonlight and smothers the spruce and fir that climb the mountains behind our house. From the kitchen window, it's as perfect a Christmas card as those that decorate our mantel. We're living the dream, our friends say, while they're still plugging in forty hour weeks in foggy old St. John's and we've left it all behind - lucky us, here in our red house on Bonne Bay. This is the place where blue jays wait at eight o'clock every morning for peanuts, where moose roam down from the woods on dusky summer evenings and feast on my attempts at a vegetable garden. Last summer, in desperation, I built four by eight fences made of chicken wire to protect my carrots and potatoes, beets and cabbages. My garden now resembles a succession of cemetery plots but the problem is solved.

Not like this problem. This one I have left to Len.

I pull on my skidoo boots over my jeans, find Len's red plaid

jacket, my wool mittens and a toque that is stuck through with spruce needles from my struggle with the tree that stands dripping and fragrant in the living room, waiting for attention. As I pass the mirror in the hallway, I am startled at the dark circled eyes and downturned mouth ready to open in a silent scream.

I grab the shovel and scrape off the front steps. The driveway will take hours to clear if I pace myself. There's a snow blower in the shed but I don't use it much; there's so much room here and the snow spreads like cream. I do not miss the St. John's winters with snow shoved and blown into grey crags around our driveway so that we walked out into a tunnel from our front door. I miss the trek around Signal Hill, and going to plays at the LSPU hall: The good times, the safe places. I do not miss the Waterford Hospital and Bowring Park and the memories that twist like a knife in ice.

It's best that Len is going to Rachel; she will be calmer and he will be able to reason with her, or at least reach her. That's an unspoken truth and I'm fine with it. She has always preferred her father, has always fought me on every issue from dressing herself to wearing



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The Blotter

black lipstick.

I would love to have my time back. I should have listened when there were mutterings. *She is not right. Normal doesn't run in her blood. Just look at her aunt.* I ignored it. I said fuck you. She's my daughter. Don't you dare.

I stop to catch my breath. Overhead, webs of cloud trail across the moon. The air is heavier, wet in my lungs.

I could have been a better mother - more patient, less sanctimonious, and more vigilant. She would be different now, wouldn't she? Maybe Len wouldn't be flying across the country three days before Christmas to bring her home.

In August, I made the ferry crossing to Nova Scotia when Rachel lived in Halifax with Billy, a musician twice her age, in a hole of an apartment on Cole Street, playing her guitar and crooning in her Tracey Chapman sound-alike voice in dismal bars. Her bony frame had disappeared into fat although she pushed away the food I cooked for her. She drank coffee and lit one cigarette after another from the moment she dragged herself out of bed. When she thought I didn't see, she

sloshed vodka into her cup.

'Come home for a while, Rachel. Maybe you can apply to go back to school. You said you were thinking about college again.' I searched for my daughter in the spongy face. 'You love St. John's. You have so many friends there.'

I knew that she would never think of living in the middle of nowhere with us. That would be no life for a twenty-one year old, and no life for us with the cloud of her presence covering the sun. Too many years of slamming doors, kicking holes in walls embellished with screams of 'fuck you, Mom' erased that possibility.

Her beautiful glossy brown hair drooped in a tangled, greasy ponytail. 'I'm leaving for Alberta in a few weeks, Mom. By myself. I talked to Callie Osmond - remember her? We used to play on the same volleyball team in high school. Remember? She lived next to the school on Freshwater Road.'

I don't remember Callie. I don't remember a volleyball team.

'Anyway, I have her on Facebook. She's living in Red Deer and she said I could rent her basement apartment and she's sure she can get me a job where she works.' Her voice raced, rose and changed.

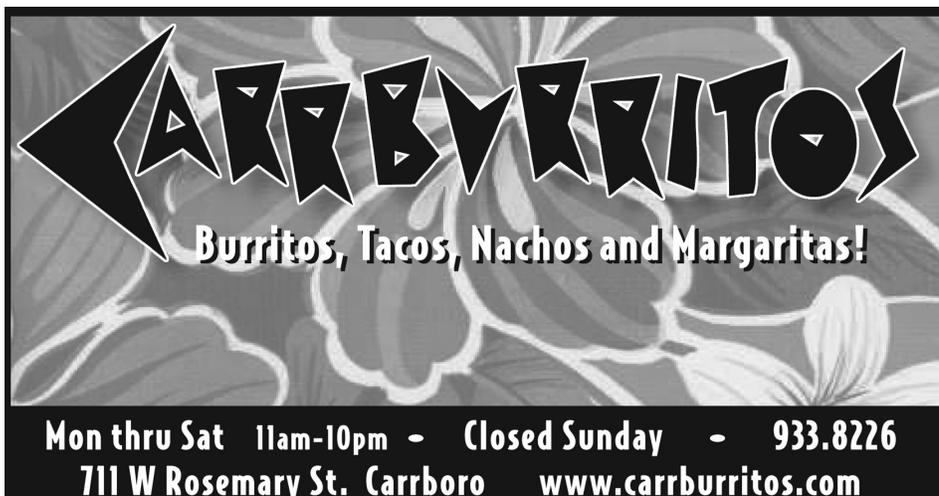
I don't recognize you, Rachel. Come out, come out, wherever you are. 'I need to do some training but I think this could be it.'

She was wound up again, ready to spring in another direction. She'd been ecstatic when she left for Toronto, where she knew she would make it in the music business, and before that when she lived in the Okanagan, where she had found her life's work on a quarter horse ranch. Then would come the phone calls, the tears, the melancholy. Len would go to the bank and transfer funds. Rachel would fly home. She would sleep, eat, blame me for ruining her life. She would leave again. We had the system down.

Except this time she is lost. This time, Len will have to bring her back from the edge.

The moon has faded to black. Sweat smothers me and I peel off the plaid coat. The night is motionless; the sound of a snowmobile somewhere in the Bay echoes off the mountains. I have at least two days before they get back, longer if the forecast is right and there's more snow. I don't know if I should hope for good weather. I don't know if I can bear their arrival. And what I know will follow.

Jean was five years younger, my energetic and stubborn sister, my one and only sibling who I pretended was my very own live doll. She went to kindergarten with her shoelaces dragging behind her for a month until she learned to tie them herself. No one was allowed to help her with anything, ever. She grew up fierce and uncompromising. Wild, some people said, but that was manage-



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able until she began to tear at the edges.

Jean was lost and our mother refused to talk about it. 'She's always been like that,' Mom said, her lips pursed as tight as a buttonhole. 'Looking for attention, that's all. There's nothing wrong with Jean that decent food and a good talking to won't fix. She's smoking God knows what, and drinking, and I'm sure she's sleeping around with that motorcycle hoodlum. There's no sense talking to her.' Her chin jutted out as she gathered her cardigan tightly around her. 'No wonder she has these spells. And it's just spells, mind. No child of mine is mental.'

'Don't you think it could be the other way around, Mom? That she's acting this way because she's sick?'

She snatched up her knitting and sat in her burgundy glider chair in the corner. 'Jean's not sick. I don't want you talking about this to anyone, understand? She'll get something from the doctor and it'll calm her nerves.'

The Doctor: This is who Mom believed in, the pill pusher who was a god in Mom's eyes, who gave Jean what she asked for. The police brought Jean home a few times. Causing a disturbance was the usual reason. Then, one bitter November evening, they picked her up at the Basilica dressed in shorts and a tee shirt. The custodian called them, concerned about the young one lying at the foot of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, screaming at the statue to shut up and leave her alone. She was violent, unreachable. This was her first stay in the Waterford Hospital.

The ward smelled of desperation and vomit. I held my sister's hand, as limp as a dead fish. A greasy film formed on the chicken noodle soup that I brought in for her.

'There's a new movie out with Goldie Hawn,' I told her. 'Seems Like Old Times'. Soon as you're feeling better, we'll go.' Jean's vacant eyes moved past mine, her lips moving to words that have no sound.

'There's a microwave by the nurse's station. I'll warm up the soup. You need to eat.'

Her hand snapped out and slapped the bowl to the floor.

The doctors propped her up with drugs so that she resembled the original Jean. She could go home and start all over.

The circus began. She was stable on her meds; she was released. 'I am dead,' she whispered to me as we sat on her bed and I brushed the tangles out of her hair. 'There is nothing in here.' She smacked her forehead. 'Nothing.' We walked in Bowring Park, our favorite place. She stared down at her feet while pigeons flapped around our heads and fanned our faces, their pink feet tucked neatly into their bellies. On the way out, she stopped a little way behind me to dig in her pocket and toss a handful of seeds to the ducks. A good sign, I thought, until we got home and I found the empty pill bottles in her coat.

A week later, she was back on the ward. The doctors adjusted her drugs; she was stabilized. She came home. She flushed her meds down the toilet. The television talked to her. 'I have to stop the war, she said. 'It's all up to me.'

The wallpaper in her bedroom hid the devil behind its daisy petals; she took the quilt off the bed and curled up in her closet.

During her fifth extended visit to the Waterford, when she was doing so well that she had ground privileges, she slipped across the road to Bowring Park and over the bridge, the same bridge where we threw wads of bread and watched trout jump, where we dropped pennies and made wishes. Twenty-one years old and dead in the water, her head smashed open on the rocks, her life running red downstream.

I can see Jean's face as plain as the last day I spoke to her. Rachel doesn't look like her except sometimes around the eyes where there is a smokiness that draws you in but there is nothing, only a void, an endless sea. I tell myself not to borrow trouble. Rachel is still young; she'll grow out of this. Then I remember our mother, dear Sadie, who buried her head so deeply in her refusal to see that even when it was all over, she called it a tragic accident. She just sat in that damned glider chair, cradling the urn with Jean's ashes on her lap, rocking, weeping, rocking.

The snow has started up again. Flakes as soft and large as feathers fall around me and I stare up into the blackness as they swirl down. I feel as if I am drifting up and off into space, away from Bonne Bay and Len and Rachel, away from the specter that follows at my heels, reincarnating itself into my life as I hide behind the mountains.



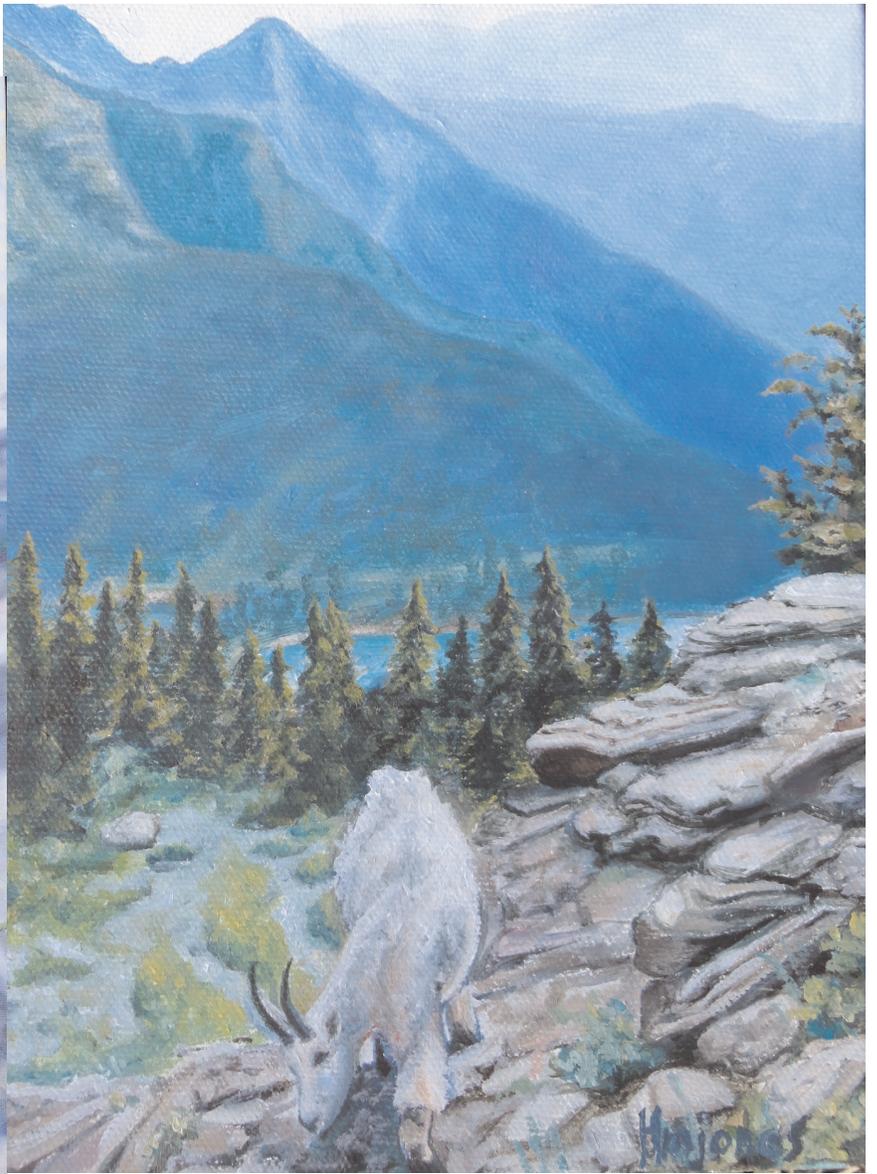
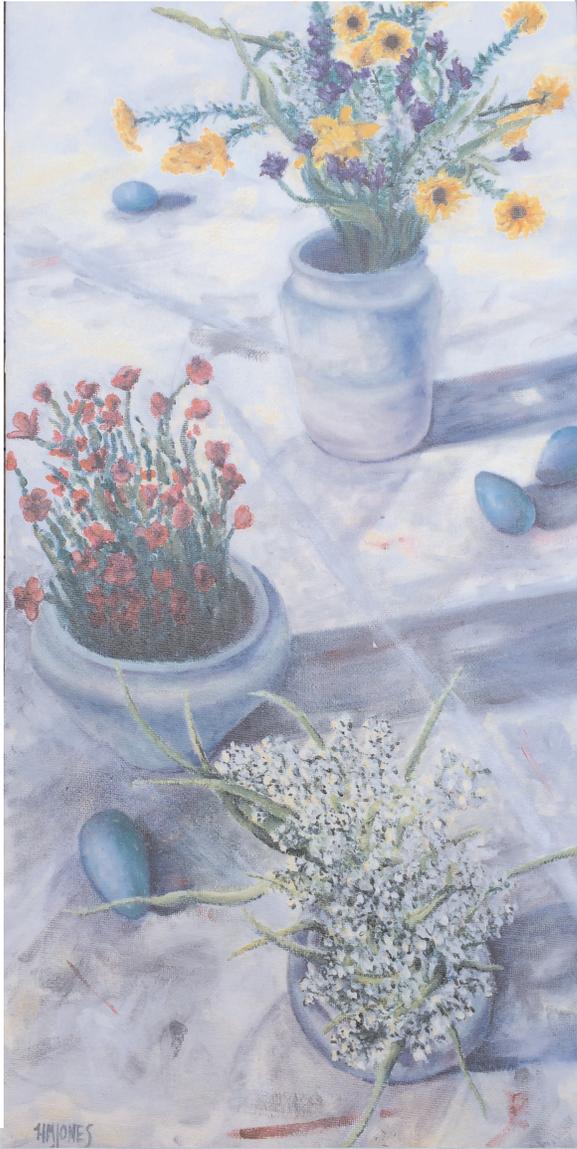


“As a collection, my work addresses the continuous need in life to balance the modern day expectation of constant movement with the quiet and restorative aspects of being still. Furthermore, it acknowledges that in a given moment, we can find balance at any point along this spectrum. To convey movement and stillness, my paintings feature high contrast lighting, geometric shape, bold color, and variations in brushstroke. In addition, I often explore how light falls on a space, whether indoors or in nature, and specifically, how light influences the commotion or tranquility of the scene. All of this creates differing energy levels, which I use to capture the balance between chaos and peace.



I usually find these moments of balance in nature, so much of my inspiration comes from exploring the outdoors. I grew up hiking and climbing in the Smoky and Appalachian mountains in Tennessee. In addition, I have spent considerable time exploring the beautiful coastline and snowy wilderness of Maine. I draw on all of these experiences, as well as travels to Italy, Denmark, and Latin America for subjects to my work. For me, painting is a way to slow down and find peace in my own life while acknowledging and appreciating the energy intrinsic to being alive. This has become particularly vital in the last few months during which I have started medical school. Painting removes me from my fast paced day-to-day life and allows me to exist fully in the present. The process also helps me to experience the very sense of rejuvenation and restorative energy of a still space that I often try to convey in my work.”





Hannah Jones - Durham, NC

“Celebrate”

by Nancy Nau Sullivan

It was an odd group, and it got odder still.

But we'll talk about that later.

The three celebrated authors, who I had never heard of, hung around outside while we sat in the living room with our wine and goodies, waiting. Meggie had told us something about them online when she sent out the invitation for the reading. They were all part of a local writer's workshop. Look them up, she wrote in her invitation. One of them has been on the *Today* show.

OK, life was a little placid in Queretaro, so I would just take her up on it and come over to the reading on a Sunday afternoon. Meggie, a generous ex-pat from Michigan, was the type of person who made a livelihood out of knowing people, consequently, most of the people I met in Queretaro knew Meggie. The retired couple trying to learn Spanish, the ex-Peace Corps volunteer who opened New York Pasta Delite (NYPD—he got such a kick out of that), and then this woman writer from Minneapolis who knew someone in Alexandria who had a cousin in New York, who offered his house for the writers workshop every year in Queretaro, Mexico. “Oh, the world is getting so small,” Meggie pointed out one Thursday night over a treat of fettucine con chipotle at NYPD. Her hospitality preceded her, and it

was full-blown for the Sunday afternoon reading. The bottles were chilling on the tile counter, and trays of stuffed and creamy things floated among the guests.

I took a large gulp of the Mexican semi-seco. I had tasted worse but I didn't know where. It didn't matter because Meggie had really laid out a spread to make us forget the wine. I loaded a plate with empanadas, hummus and carrots, to be good, and churros, to be bad. I would regret this, but what the hell. It was Sunday, and the sun was shining in Quertaro, like always. What could be more perfect. Besides, the celebrated authors were on parade. We were ready, about 40 of us, seated in comfy chairs and sofás pushed back along the white stucco walls of the bright salón. Yes, I will call this a salón, I said to myself—Today, this is much more than just a living room with all this celebration going on.

First, came the tall beautiful blond in lovely grey linen pants and a pale green shirt that said “GIN WITH SUGAR DONUTS” in sequins I never would have thought up that color combination. I would have to

remember it because it was stunning on her large breasts and long legs. (Alas, I have small breasts and short legs and I hate gin.) She limped. She must have had a bad prosthetic hip or leg, but that didn't prevent her from wearing high wedge sandals that looked lethal. I kept thinking, I must tell her later about Dr. Mick.

She was much too perky during her reading about a visit to Diego Rivera's house in Guanajuato where she saw paintings of children in beautiful white dresses—which the author assumed were baptismal gowns but were actually burial gowns. The children were dead, their glossy round heads and caramel skin preserved forever upstairs at that museum. She had been particularly awestruck because she

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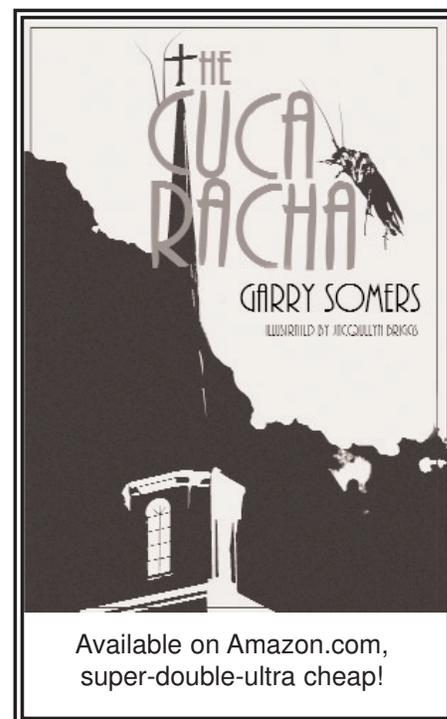
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had lost a child to a rare disease at age two, the parallel sadness suddenly entering her tone as it dawned on her that she had no more pictures, no paintings, of her child except for the fake arrangement of a last birthday party where everyone was gay and celebrating. She had little to celebrate, but she was celebrated on the *Today* show.

“Los angelitos,” she said. “Baby angels.” That affected her. She continued to read her essay, in the same perky tone as before, sun lighting her remarkably bright blond hair, while the smile did not leave her face. The door slammed behind her, someone dropped a glass.

Eyes set upon her in wonder. How could she tell it, how could she live it?

“It helps to write it,” Meggie said, wistfully, out loud, when she heard the murmur from across the room.

The blond author adjusted herself in the armchair. She teased, conspiratorially, the second celebrated author, who sat on a sofá next to her, his disheveled appearance calculated: terribly

scuffed combat boots without laces, rumpled black shirt and black jeans, rings on various random fingers. His little-boy face showed too many signs of celebration over the years. He had been a cute boy, you could tell that from his manner and his shock of black hair and straight little nose, but he wasn't cute any more. He had an earnest, self-satisfied look about him, as did the other celebrated ones, but, now faded slightly, still keeping up the hippie look, he gamely accepted the attention of the group, mostly old ladies (myself included) who adored writers from afar, some who wanted to be writers, most who didn't know a damn thing about writing but read Danielle Steel, and they knew a good story when they saw it. The little French woman, drinking Mexican semi-seco before the reading, pointed that out to me. “You should just see her mansión in San Francisco. She must be doing something right.”

But I didn't want to listen to the French woman any more. She had followed me to a chair alongside mine, yolk from a

deviled egg sitting on her upper lip, chatting on about a Vietnam vet who came home to nothing in one of Danielle's stories. “It was so sad,” the egg still there.

I focused on Celebration Number Two sitting next to the blond, now coquettish. He had crossed one floppy boot over a thin leg and he wiggled it.. I couldn't take my eyes off his scruffy foot, but then I did. He told of his love for a gifted lesbian painter, how he had kissed her eyelids, but not her lips, and how they lay together in bed, for comfort. She ended up raped and murdered in an alley in Buffalo. He read the excerpt of his writing on his phone, from his memoir, one of five published books he'd made. “It does me good to read this, to almost bite it off,” he said, “this part of my life, and then just spit it out.” He deferred to the beautiful blond, that theirs were sad stories, and then, still wiggling a boot, he looked down, away, lost in thought about the time when his love was with him. She was clearly there with him in that momento.

The third celebrated author was thin of face, of rear, of

Best In Show



by Phil Juliano

The Blotter

arm, and bouncy, if that could be, but she was. She had short black hair, a bit greasy and stringy. Her publisher was St. Martin's Press, she told us right off the bat. Her reading was totally incomprehensible, something about a woman in Africa being in love (presumably white on black) and realizing it wouldn't work when she saw him leaving town in the back of pick-up truck. That was the gist I got from about 15 minutes of the pages selected in the middle of the book, *Men Don't Get It*. I didn't get it. I don't think anyone else did either, but this was a polite group, and one that was getting slightly drunk and bilious on satay, cucumbers covered in tuna, and piles of hummus.

The blank expressions did nothing to dampen the

enthusiasm of this celebrated author. After all, she had St. Martin's Press, and she was the one who had started the writer's workshop in Queretaro! She threw out her arms. "We are the roots," she said, like they (or we?) were a gigantic, lush tree that had sprouted here in the middle of Mexico. Yes, they had sprouted, this writing workshop that was her baby, her love, of mostly Americans, here in Queretaro. Her lovely friends, Roberto and Sean, had a house in the Centro, vacant most of the year when the weather was passable in New York and they could abide el norte, and they had offered her Mexico. Who wouldn't be happy? Would she like to use the casa to bring some would-be writers together? Sean asked. Yes, she definitely liked the idea, and so it happened. From places in the US to here, to my temporary hometown of Queretaro, Mexico.

A bit quietly, and with some embarrassment, the reading ended. No one had questions, not at first. We wanted to drink more, so we did, following each other to the roof top to watch the sun light up the sky with a few gold streaks

before it retired for the day.

"So," the professor with thick white hair in a booming voice said, "Tell me. How do you write?" He must have liked the sound of his voice because he repeated, "No, I mean, just how do you do it? How do you write?"

He was addressing a clot of MFA students from Chicago, most of them on scholarships to the workshop for their celebrated embryonic efforts.

"Oh, I dunno," said one. "A writer writes."

That shut him up.

I had mistaken the sonorous professor all evening. At first, I thought he was with the students, then with the French woman, but, no. He had no one checking on him, clinging to him, correcting him, or bringing him food.

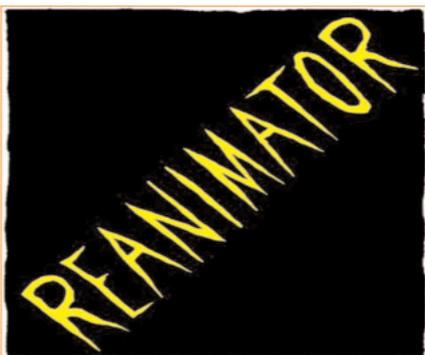
I asked him, "Where do you teach?"

He said, "Oh, God, no. I'm not a teacher. Who would do that?"

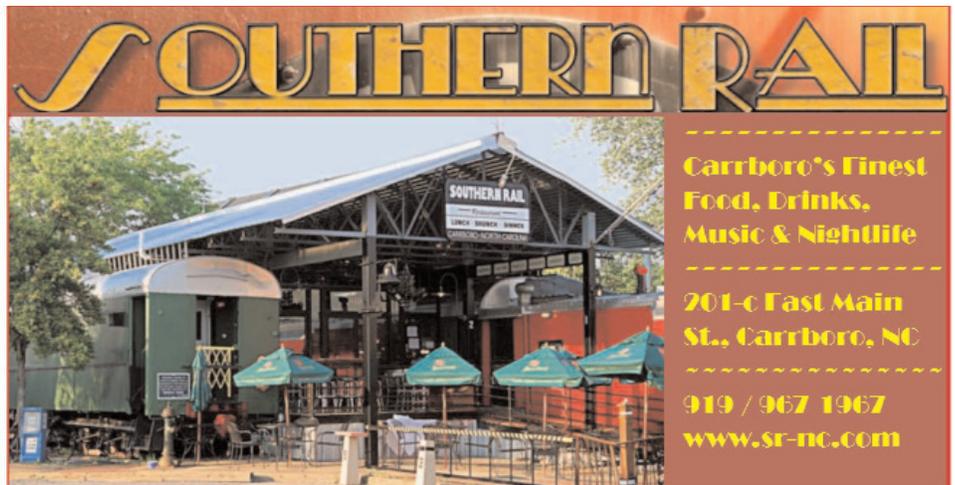
"Well, I would," I said. "I do."

That shut him up, too. We both looked into our wine glasses.

I took a rather large sip.



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“Where are you from?”

He said, “I’ve lived here eight years.”

“Really? You sound so, American.”

“I lived in France for 20 years.”

“Uh, huh. And?”

“Originally, I’m from Tampa.”

The little Mexican attendants, wearing black aprons with skulls imprinted on them, circulated with trays, offering miniature ham and cheese tortas, olives and radishes. I didn’t see a tortilla all night. The semi-seco and red wine flowed.

That little devil, Meggie, I thought. Got to love her. I filled my glass again with the wine, although I could hardly choke it down. I really wanted a buzz of some kind. Red gave me a headache, and this probably would, too. The whole afternoon was giving me a headache so I decided to drown it and see what would float my way.

The non-professor was shoveling in the last of his empanadas and knocking back the red. He wasn’t alone.

Then odd things happened. The combat boots guy was nuzzling the tiny French woman in the corner, the Peace Corps guy was arm and arm with Meggie, and the blond was pawing the bouncy, skinny, black-haired one over by the last of the satay. It was getting cool up there on the roof, I thought, but not for some.

I wandered downstairs, the non-professor trailing behind, and we casually sat on the white leather sofa in the salon. Someone had magically turned on lamps in four corners of the room and lit candles, which immediately put a silken glow on my world. The non-professor shifted his knees in

my direction. “So, what do you teach?” He was slightly abashed. The French doors were open. I looked out at the blue-black Mexican sky. I heard the MFA students leaving, the heavy metal door clanging behind them: They were laughing. “What a bunch of old farts,” one of them said as the sound of them got smaller and smaller.

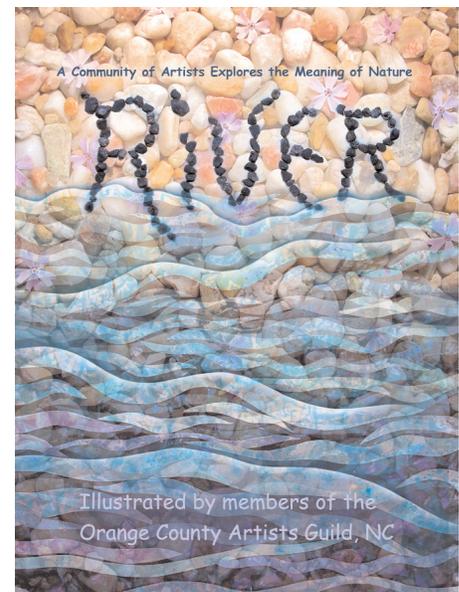


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"My Name Isn't Simone"

by Pooja Bhatia

come here,

stay beside me
while i hide from myself

i'll buy you a drink
at your expense;
i charge by the poison

puckered lips lined
with beads of sweat...
i've given a pseudonym

a conspicuous demon
sits proud on your shoulder-
the ruler of many

another manhattan, please
i'm forgetting the backdrop;
each phrase spoken gets chased

straight down the hatch
gradually more demons appear
telling tall tales as to why they're there

i've been misplacing morals
as you watch my cleavage
swallow your regret

take my hand
it's eager- lead the way upstairs
& meet my shadow

don't fret about morning
once the light shines in
i've already escaped you.

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@blotterrag.com

Dream Sequence!

"You're next," she said to me while nibbling my fingers, a sick smile playing sweetly across her face. I looked down at the pillow in front of my face, purposefully avoiding her eyes. "So I'm going to disappear?" I said. From the corner of my eye I saw all traces of light heartedness drop from her features like a slate wiped clean. Her pupils hardened. Panic in my throat. The words had spilled from my mouth like a wall of water I was helpless to hold back. I knew I had gone too far. Now I had to feign ignorance, pretend my words were shallow banter, act as though I had no idea of the lives she had mercilessly and methodically cut short. And I was next, she had said. My fingers in her mouth. Her bites became harder and I knew she wanted badly to clamp down, to draw blood, to taste the knowledge and fear pulsing, shivering through my veins. What had I done? I scrambled for conversation to explain away and bury what I had just revealed. Why had I come here when I knew what she was planning?

Olivia G. - Grand Rapids, MI

CONTRIBUTORS:

Deborah Whelan of Hearts Delight/Islington, Newfoundland (that's Canada, ya'll) writes, "I began writing short stories a few years ago and realized that something I always wanted to do but was afraid to try was exciting and rewarding and frustrating at the same time. Several of my stories have been included in a provincial publication named 'The Cuffer Anthology' since its inception six years ago. A 'cuffer' in our province means a tale or a yarn. Also, some short pieces were published on-line through CBC Writes. Room Magazine out of British Columbia recently published 'Losing Martin' and another magazine in Nova Scotia will be printing 'Minted Sacrificial Lamb' in the fall. That's all I have to brag about and I don't want to bore you too much. Thank you for taking the time to read my story." No: thank you, Deborah! *** **Nancy Nau Sullivan** notes, "Presently, I'm teaching English in the Peace Corps in Queretaro, Mexico. Before service, I taught English at the City Colleges of Chicago for seven years and, at one time, was a reporter and editor at newspapers throughout the Midwest. I have a master's degree in journalism from Marquette University. My home is Chicago--soon again. (Recent addendum: I left the Peace Corps two weeks ago after a year of service. I am happily ensconced in the Indiana Dunes working on Dust and Rain: Mexican Love Stories and the sequel to my mystery, Saving Tuna Street.)" *** **Pooja Bhaturia** of Chapel Hill, NC, was also featured in our June issue. She coils hair and crafts verse with equal aplomb. *** **Hannah Jones** writes, "Born and raised in Tennessee, I grew up hiking on the mountains overlooking Chattanooga. In 2006, I traveled to Tuscany, Italy and studied landscape painting under the instruction of painter Daud Akhriev. I attended Bowdoin College in Brunswick, ME, where I continued to study oil painting under Mark Wethli and Jum Mullen and graduated with a major in Biology in 2012. I currently live in Chapel Hill, NC, where I am a first year student at the UNC School of Medicine." *** **Phil Juliano** has been cartooning for over twenty years. "Best In Show" is currently being featured in several newspapers and magazines and is syndicated by MCT Campus where it is distributed to college and university newspapers across the country. To see more of Phil's work go to www.bestinshowcomic.com

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photo: Joshua R. Craig

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