

April 2020

The Blotter

magazine

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“April”

Recently, that is in the past five years or so, I’ve begun to notice that I “define” and “judge” with the same fat paintbrush. I’m not proud of it, but there you are. Just another opinionated older man with some sort of chip on his shoulder.

So what exactly do I mean about defining and judging? That in the act of believing that my input is needed on a subject, I am simultaneously deciding something about my audience. And as I think I’m clearing the air, I become part of the reason it...smells.

It’s not too late, though, is it? I can cure myself of this malady. Not completely by myself, of course. I have very good people who want me to not end up a curmudgeonly old bastard who no one wants to be around. So then how do I fix this rut I’ve driven myself into.

Introspection might help. A bit of my daughters looking over my shoulder while I type might also be useful.

What are the circumstances where I find myself in that mode, frustrating and in disagreement with others? Where do I socialize? Where do I get in trouble?

I ask that because the only social media platform I still use is Twitter and it is a bit ironic that nothing about it is faintly birdlike. Admittedly, my presence there is a bit silly: I haven’t many followers, and myself follow mostly local folks and other writers and editors.

Wait – did I just use the word “silly” to explain my feelings about Twitter? That sounds like judgment to me, too. Backspace/erase. What I meant to say is one could find my use of Twitter more on the order of observer than active participant. Indeed, I sometimes begin a tweet, or a response to someone else’s, and then stop in mid-thought, suddenly aware that I have nothing useful to add to the mix. Delete my thought. Leave the virtual premises. Find something useful to do.

Still...

I see writers post on Twitter their hopes and fears about WIPS, the process of writing, the search for the right words, crowdsourcing names for characters, places and titles and telling how they feel about submitting and getting rejected or accepted. In my judgment (uh-oh), they seem to be frustrated or elated with equal abandon. They love and hate editors and publishers. Do I understand this? You bet. It’s a

real bitch working in a vacuum, with only some vague idea what will happen at the end of each step. Their confidence in themselves, their writing groups, their agents, and the opinions of their loved ones seem to be one day of writer's block away from being dashed, and social media seems like holding a monkey-rope to like-minded individuals going through the same crap. I mean, it sucks being a writer.

On the other hand...

Editors tend to post their thoughts business-like, about reading schedules and press releases and they announce what's up in the next issue and then descend all *my precious* into how so many authors are difficult or easy to deal with (in the submission stage) and how deep or insurmountable the terrible slush pile - the reading, the reading! - is and what in the world is this hack thinking who bites the hand that feeds them or can't follow basic submission guidelines? And such post-threads are can't-look-away fun to read and it's a bit tricky for me to stay out of the mosh pit. Yes, yes, all writers are self-centered layabouts with no idea what it takes to run a railroad.

It totally sucks being an editor, too.

There seems to me to be a general mood (is there such thing as an anecdotal mood?) among the writing/editing/publishing, selling and reading *community* that we're at odds with one another. That writers compete for readers, that bookstores are fighting each other for the same disposable income, and that editors can't decide on a unified theory for Oxford commas. I've seen authors post the idea that they should be compensated financially for their efforts. Yes, say I. If one can get recompense for a story, essay or poem, then that is a good thing. And no good comes from having an online debate with writers and editors about supply-side economics in the *community*. Come on, I suspect that every editor would prefer to be a paying enterprise. And yet no editor should be berated for not being able to be one. If a publishing team has found a way to produce a literary organ but is not quite able to make a profit from it, then it is still a good effort, worthwhile and valuable to the *community*. Submit to it, if you want. Don't if you don't.

On the other hand, editors should not take it personally when the occasional writer goes a bit rogue on them in social media or even in a response to a response email. If someone asks if you're a paying mar-

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in the Great State of Georgia!



The Blotter Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is an education concern. Our primary interest is the furthering of creative writing and fine arts, with the magazine being a means to that end. We publish in the first half of each month and enjoy a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

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CAUTION

you hear me say life's take

“Recruit”

by Paul Perilli

We began at one end of the banquet tables, then went around and back so we finished where we started. There were two rows of four set end to end, covered with tabbed dividers and the pages of text, color images and diagrams that went with them. Our job was to insert all of it in order into the big, white 3-ring binders intended for the participants of a heart disease conference taking place the next week at a downtown Boston hotel.

Back from college for winter break my sophomore year, I'd signed up at Manpower's local office. I was available to do almost anything to make money those weeks, and Manpower's agents were happy to satisfy my wishes.

The banquet table gig took place in a room in a factory building next to the old Southeast Expressway. It was a dingy space, with tall ceilings and soot-stained windows. Three of us were assigned to do the job, myself, a female with light hair, and a hyper man around forty, who was there to participate in the task as well as to make sure the project got done in three days.

Needless to say, it was monotonous labor made tolerable for one reason, my female co-worker and I hit it off that first morning.

I'll call her Amy. Amy was a friendly, upbeat personality. An optimistic one too. Maybe too
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upbeat and optimistic considering the grimy setting we were doing boring work in. But it wasn't at all annoying. In fact, I found it refreshing. The talk and joking around between us started before lunch break that first day and continued until the job was done. This many years later I'm not sure what was said, but I retain the impression of a situation leading somewhere. The man overseeing our work, I believe his name was Bob, never interfered. He may have been humored. He may have been jealous. Whatever. It didn't matter. Since the work was proceeding in a timely way, he never had to tell us to get back to it.

I'll admit I was surprised anything but formal conversation came between Amy and myself. Nothing like that had happened on my previous assignments. Amy was older. Twenty-three, she told me. She'd traveled a lot and graduated from a college in Ohio. She lived with several roommates in a place near Commonwealth Ave. I, of course, lived with my family.

On days two and three I woke up looking forward to the climb up the concrete stairs to the room with the banquet tables. Each day Amy was there before me. Each day we were there before Bob. Each day we filled the hours with silly chatter and dumb jokes. On our last afternoon, when it was time to wave so long to Bob and the 3-ring binders,

Amy asked me if I wanted to go back to her place to meet her roommates. It didn't take a lot of thinking to decide. I said sure. It would be a good first step to whatever the second step might be.

We sat next to each other on the trolley to Kenmore Square. All the way we continued our trivial banter. I was sure of one thing, something was in the works.

From Kenmore station we walked to a four-story brownstone on Bay State Road with a big front door. A building in such good shape, it made me wonder why Amy was working a crappy temp job as I was?

Going up the steps I wondered which floor she lived on? Amy told me all of them.

“You must have a lot of roommates,” I said as we went into a large room, a kind of drawing room with a fireplace and plaster moldings on the ceilings. There was a couch, several chairs and a desk. Amy told me to have a seat, she'd be back soon. She headed to another door and when it closed behind her I sat on the couch. I looked around. I stared a while at the black rotary dial phone on the desk wondering if I should call my parents to tell them I'd be late or not coming home at all.

That thought was still in progress when two guys came in the room and introduced themselves. They looked to be in their

mid to late twenties. Both were clean-shaven, had short hair and were dressed in white shirts and khaki pants. Not the roommates I expected to meet.

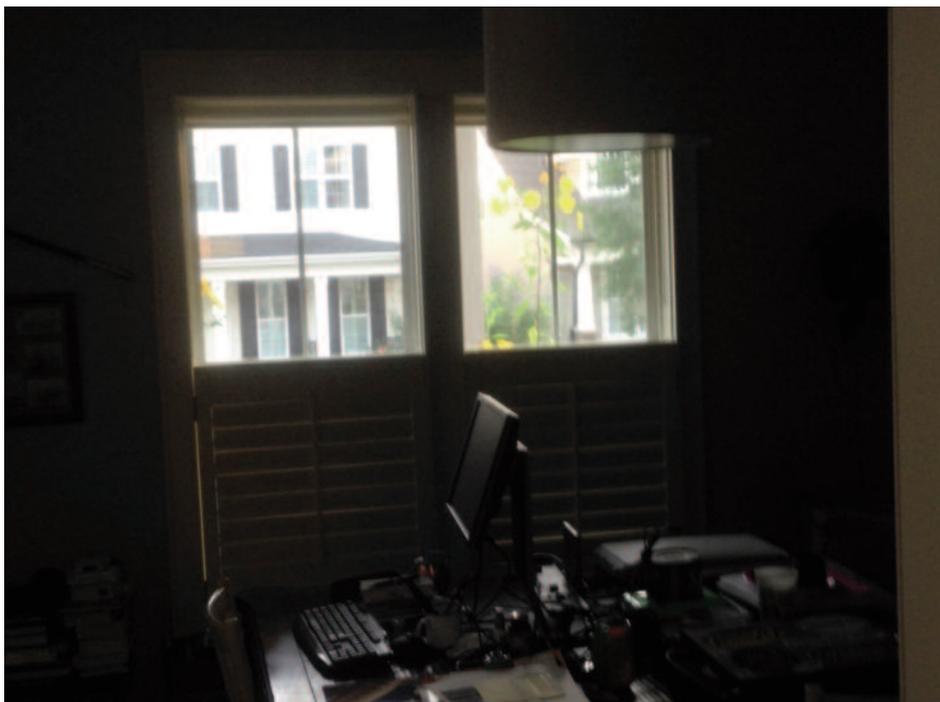
They introduced themselves. Allen and Ron I'll call them. We shook hands and they sat with me, Allen on the couch, Ron in a deep cushioned chair.

Ron told me Amy would be out in a minute. He sat forward, staring at me wide-eyed as if reading a line of fine print on my forehead. He asked me if I liked the job I'd worked on with Amy? He asked if I liked Amy? He asked what my major was in college? What did I want to do with my future? What did my parents do? There was just enough time to catch my breath between questions. The more there were the shorter my answers got. But Ron continued to ask away. He continued staring at me. On the couch, I felt Allen edging closer.

"When is Amy coming back?" I interrupted the interrogation.

That was what it felt like, a debriefing of my time spent in the world I knew in the years I'd been in it.

My question didn't deter Ron. From there he went off into what sounded like a scripted dialogue about the organization they belonged to. How they were becoming more popular. How they were looking for new members. Not just anyone. Amy mentioned I seemed like an excellent candidate. After that, he told me the name of their organization and that's when I knew what he was describing was in fact a cult. An international one notorious for brainwashing its



members.

By then it was clear: what I thought was flirting was in fact a recruiting tactic. An effective one for a somewhat naïve nineteen year old. Any goings-on I'd imagined occurring between Amy and me were erased just like that.

With that in mind, I stopped answering questions. I shook my head a lot. A door opened and Amy came in. Her timing was perfect, as if from a playbook. She stood with her arms crossed. She asked me how I was doing? Did I like Allen and Ron? Was [their organization] something I'd want to be a part of?

"I can't say right now, I have to get going," I said. "Maybe."

I stood up. Allen and Ron stood up too. It occurred to me to get to the door I'd have to go through both of them. Something I was willing to try if it came to that. I wouldn't make it easy if they wanted to kidnap me.

Space opened up when Ron

went over to the desk. He picked a folder with a clear plastic cover off it and gave it to me with the comment everything I needed to know about them was in it. If I wasn't sure about something, I should call there and ask for him.

I said thanks. I didn't know why. Maybe I'll see you at another job, I told Amy. I didn't know why I said that either. She went to the door and opened it to let me out. Down on the sidewalk I started laughing. I was relieved nothing had happened. Half a block away I slam dunked the binder into a trash barrel and took Beacon Street back to Kenmore Square.

At my parents' place later on my mother was irritated I didn't call to tell them I was going to miss dinner.

"Oh," she said, "and before I forget, Manpower called. They have another job for you that starts tomorrow." ❖

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.

I know this is not supposed to be a political magazine, or lean one way or the other in a social-sense. But I had a dream the other night, and it contained certain individuals, and it stuck with me long enough after waking up to make it onto paper (electronically, I mean) and so I won't use any proper nouns and if you know who I'm talking about, good, and if you don't, well, also good.

I would never be a personal advisor to anyone, much less this high-ranking politician, but there I am, in an office, having a conversation about things, with him/her (yes, I'm trying to be cagey). I'm sitting on a couch – like an analyst or someone being analysed? – and he/she/they are floating beside me in the air as if this were Alice in Wonderland and I'm trying to deal with the Cheshire Cat.

The questions are obsequious. Would I like a cup of coffee – they make very good coffee? Who does? They. Would I actually be expecting he/she/they to make their own coffee? Of course someone else makes it and they have a nice coffee-maker as I should already know.

Do I like this tie? It's nice. Do I know how expensive it is? No I do not. (Nor do I care. Does anyone still give a 1980's rat's ass about how expensive a tie is or who made it, or how exclusive it is?)

He/she/they float over to the coffee trolley and pour a cup. Some of it spills over the top of the cup into the saucer, and he/she/they dump that onto the carpet and look around to see if anyone else (there's no one else in the room) notices. Sugar? No, thank you. Milk? No, black, please. Sugar? (a second time just in case I changed my mind?) No, thank you.

He/she/they hand me the coffee cup and saucer after floating back across the room.

I don't really want coffee, so I set the coffee cup down on a very non-private office table – something like a pine box sitting on its side with the bottom broken off so I can see inside. It is unpolished and has nails holding it together. There is a dog sleeping in the box, head resting on front paws, it's jowls rippling with every exhale. It reminds me of the sleeping dogs in the old Tom and Jerry cartoons, only this is not a cartoon.

Don't you have any questions for me? Yes, I say (How are you floating on your side in the air four feet off of the ground, but no, that would be impolite). Are you planning any trips abroad? Why, yes, I am. I want to go to Baluchistan to see the Baluchitherium. I read about them back in school and I always wanted to see one.

Ah, I say. Somehow, I know exactly what he/she/they is talking about. Baluchitherium were one of the giant creatures from the Age of Mammals (along with Mammoths, Mastodons, Saber-toothed Cats, Woolly Rhinoceros's and big turtly-looking things I can't remember the name of.)

You do know that Baluchistan is not a country, right? Of course it is. I saw it on a map when I saw a picture of the Baluchitherium. Largest land mammal on earth. Largest and best. Mammals feed their young milk, you know. Yes, but that must have been an old map, because....

Are you calling me a liar? No. Are you calling me a fool? No.

So when do we go? he/she/they ask me. I...we...? Yes, this is a good idea. We should go together. It's a big animal. Biggest land animal ever!

I pull out my smart-phone and for a moment I cannot remember my password. I just type any four characters, hoping that he/she/they will see that nothing happens and move on to something else, but the random selection makes the damned phone work and I check my calendar.

I'm free in March, most days, anyhow, I say. This seems even more nutty than other things going on in the dream, as my calendar is usually full of work and other stuff. I even track Taco Tuesdays on my calendar, when my best friend and I get together and talk and eat Tacos.

Can it be a Tuesday? he/she/they ask. We could get Baluchistan Tacos.... The government will pay for them. I'll bet they're excellent. He is lying on his back, looking wistfully at the ceiling with a too-wide smile, again like the Cheshire Cat, and his tie dangles almost to the floor.

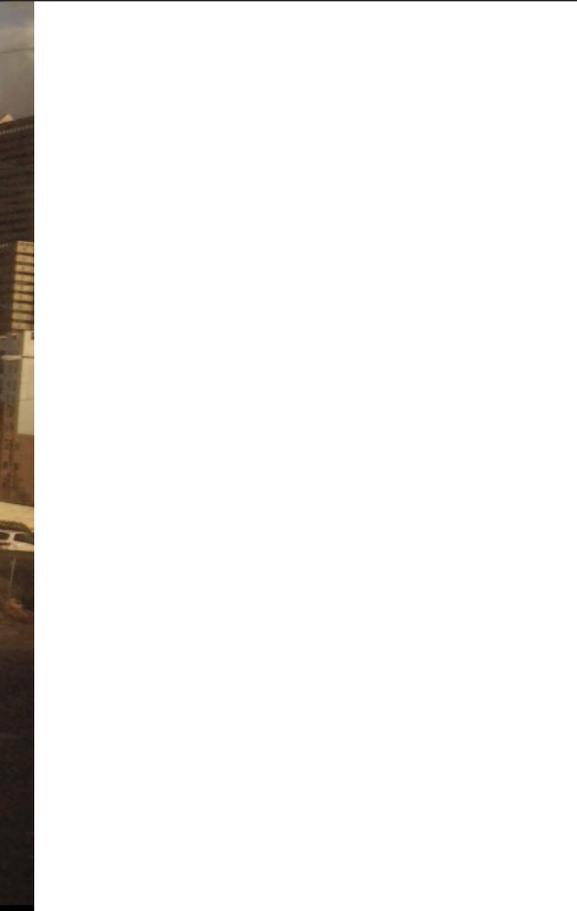
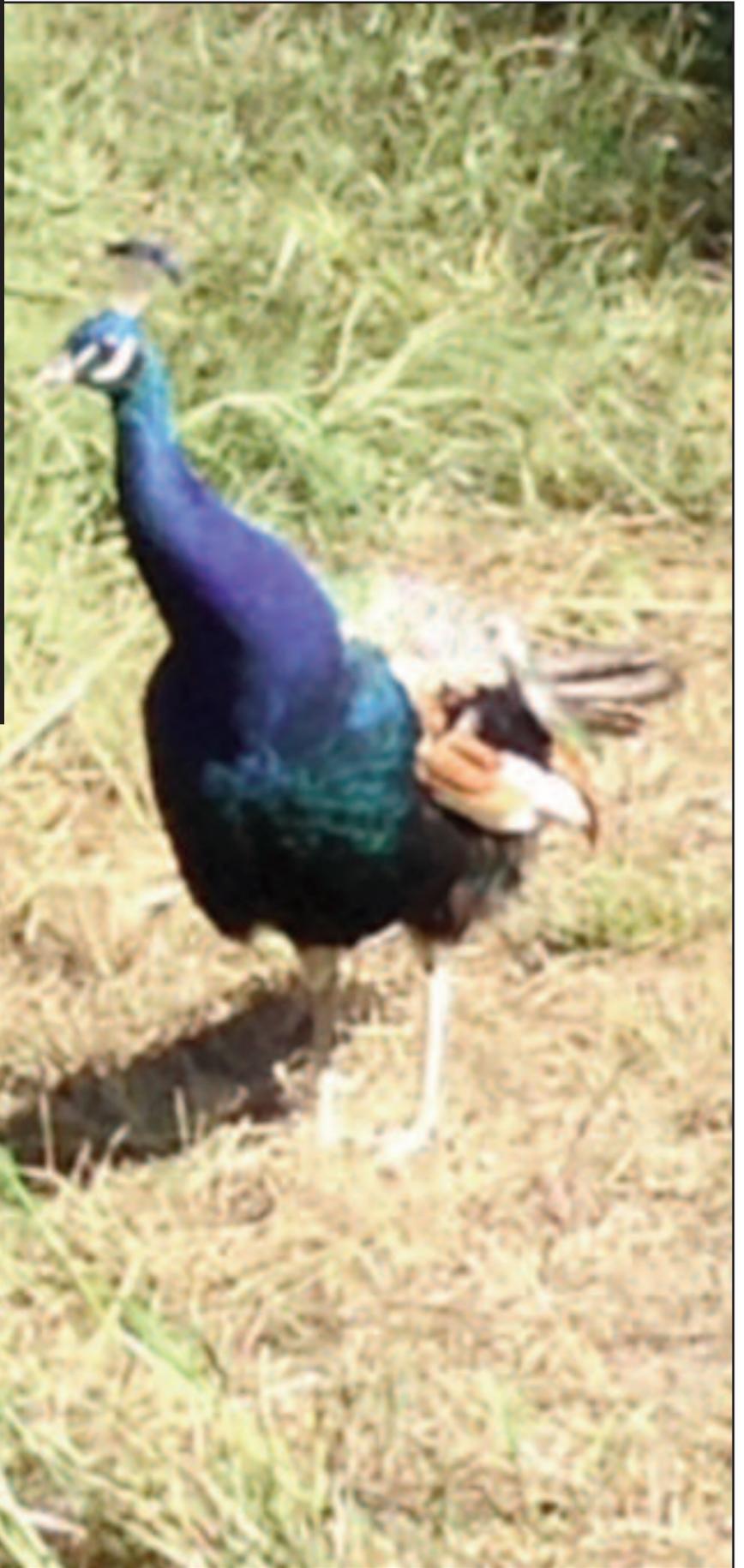
That's my night with my best friend. Bring her along! But...OK. She doesn't like flying, so that's a non-starter, but it would be a heck of an adventure and she loves tacos, and particularly she loves free tacos. I am close to actually dialing my friend and telling her that we've been asked to go on a political junket, but then I realize that there is no Baluchistan (it's now a region divided between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and the Baluchitherium has been extinct since the Cenozoic era ended), and I probably shouldn't interrupt this interview with a personal call.

Do you like your job? he/she/they asks me. It's pretty good. Would you like a better one? Uh-oh, I think. I don't want to work here, in any capacity, even for a Cheshire Cat.

Oh, now I remember! It's Glyptotherium – giant armadillo.

— PD - cyberspace





“A Cynic’s Song”

by Felix Imonti

I awakened at five o’clock in the morning to the chirping of birds in the tree outside of my bedroom window. They were singing a message to me. “Your wife is dead and we don’t care. We have our own meaningless lives to live.” She had died twenty hours before. Like billions of strangers before and billions to come, she had emerged from the limitless pool of oblivion, touched my life for twenty-six years and three months and returned to nothingness.

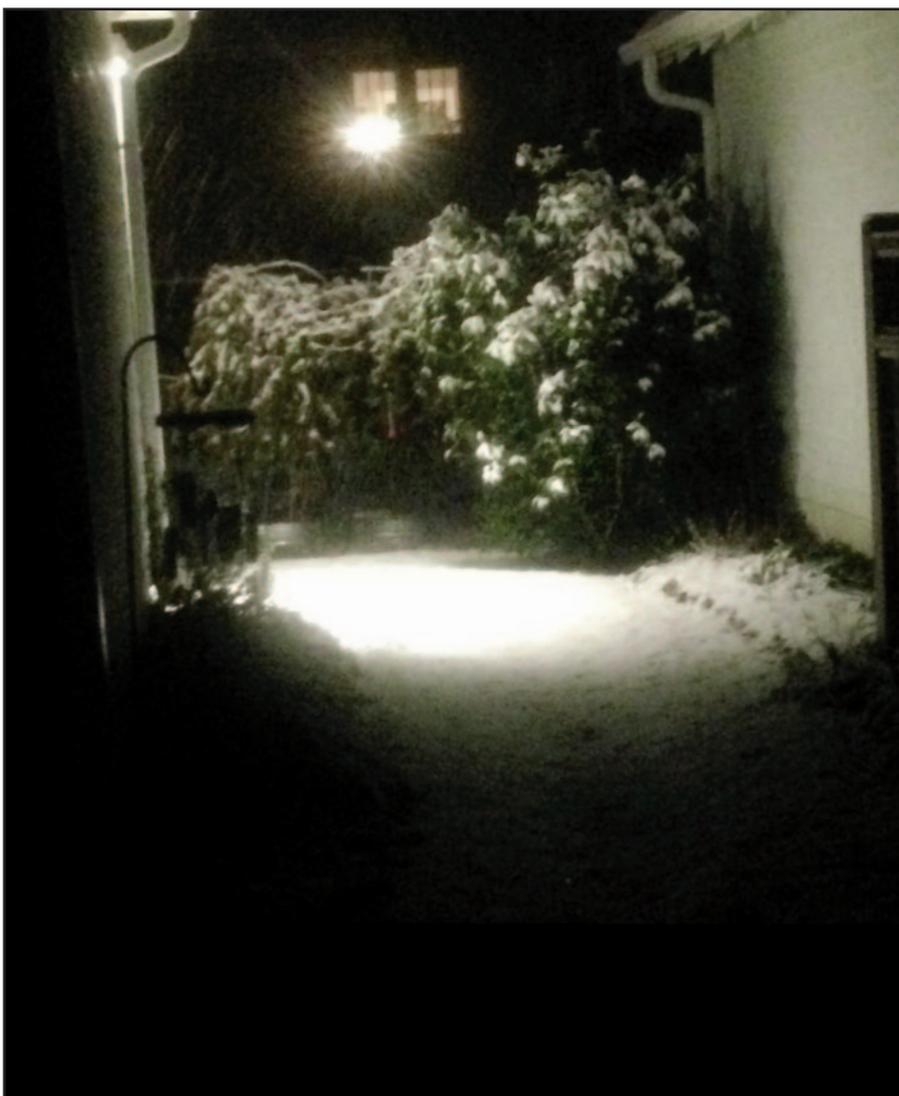
She was to die again as her name was erased from documents and her clothes taken from drawers and closets to be sent to a center for battered women. Strangers would carry away her clothes and would care nothing about the person who had in many cases made those items with her hands. In time, she would live only in the memories of those who knew her, until those memories faded into the sea of the forgotten.

We do not ask why an elephant or an ant lives. Their lives have no value or purpose to us. Only the life of a human being has meaning, but we cannot decide

upon what that meaning is.

What we proclaim is that we are different from all other living creatures because we have souls or spirits. No one has ever seen one of the special near divine features, but we are certain that we possess the spiritual characteristics that make us superior to all other species.

Demonstrating our modesty, we have branded ourselves, Homo Sapiens (man the wise). More than a century ago, the author Stephen Crane questioned just how wise we are. He asked the question why we exist and what role we have in the universe.



A man said to the universe:

“Sir, I exist!”

“However,” replied the universe,
“The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation.”

Over many years, I have seen the question of our specialness asked numerous times under various circumstances; and never answered. On a train between Manhattan and Poughkeepsie, I eavesdropped on a man explaining to his ten or so old son, “we are New Yorkers.” It was supposed to endow them with some special quality, although he did not explain what that quality was and likely didn’t know.

Another time, I watched on the evening television news a mob of crazed baseball fans swarming into the streets around the stadium in Boston. “We won. We won,” they were screaming as they vandalized and looted local businesses. Except for guzzling beer and wolfing down hot dogs, the victorious fans had done nothing, but they claimed all of the glory.

We need to bind ourselves to something greater than us. We attach ourselves to flags, to religions, the sports teams, to social movements, to races, to professions or to genders. What façade we are projecting for everyone

else to see is what we are and not who we are. If you cannot identify something inside of you that makes you unique and display it to others, how can you support a reason for being in this world. There must be a purpose for our presence and that purpose must be determined by a power beyond us. We have to invent an afterlife where only human beings with our superiority can go. A dog dies and is gone. A human being’s body dies, but the spirit or soul lives on in some invisible imagined world.

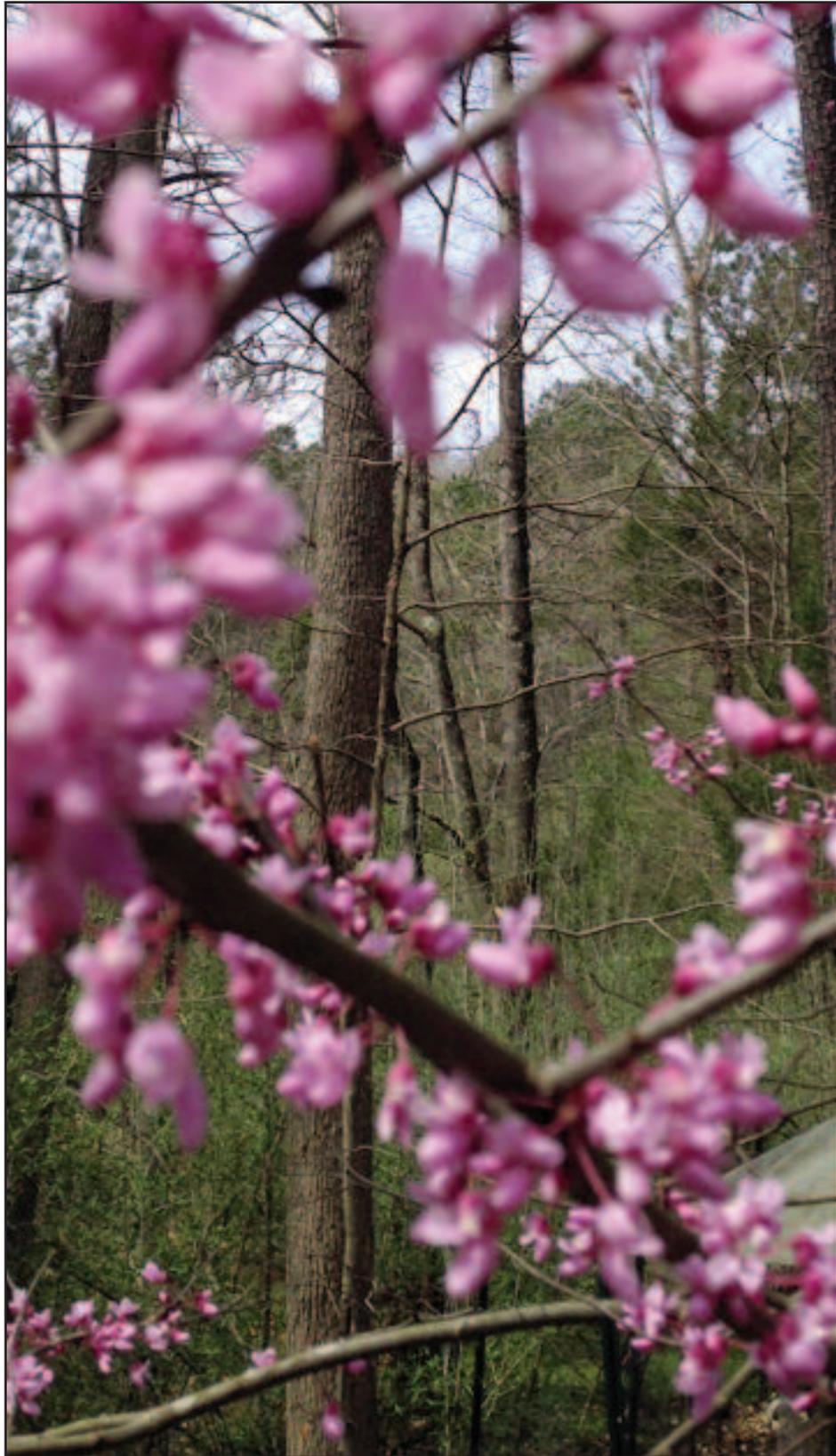
Have you heard about someone who is battling to be significant speak of having a page in history as if being remembered in a thousand years explains the granting of life? It is a curiosity to listen to such personalities in society contemplate a legacy. What will the future say about me as if it is of great importance and a driving force? Of course, no one can determine what still unborn historians will say of someone living today. The builder of the legacy can only hope that whatever he or she constructs as an image will survive the ages, but it is only a hope that can never be secure.

Does Julius Caesar know what the future is saying about him

and does it alter how he languishes in eternity? Although we think of Hitler and the other Hitler type characters of history as monsters, it is doubtful that they had such an image of themselves and likely saw their legacy in grand terms.

Actually, we really do know the answer to what we imagine is a dilemma. It is summarized in a commonly known phrase, “we go along in order to get along.” What that says is that most human beings have no independent identity and must attach to something outside. So long as we can convince our self that the cloak that we have adopted to give us a sense of value has meaning, we can face the passing years and the approach of nothingness in comfort. Those fortunate few who are liberated from the need for the delusion of a meaning for living or dying will sing in turn to the flock of indifferent birds assembled on a nearby branch, “Just like you, I will be dead and it won’t matter.”





“Discarded Psalm No. 1”

By David Lewitzky

I'm the man with a plan
Gonna do a taxonomy of Eden
All them plants and animals Adam named
All that swarming, spreading life
I'll give em Latin names, be scientific-like

And God said: No shit

I'm gonna have my way with Eve
After all, she did bite on that apple.
Siren with her snaky tongue, her nipping teeth
Adam wouldn't really mind
He's pissed off at her

And God said: Hold on there buckaroo

I'm gonna sail with Cap'n Noah two-by two
Invent the GPS for him
Free him from despair
Gonna clean out all the cages
Dirty job – Someone's gotta do it

And God said:: I'll do that

I'm mythic man; the first Israelite: Tent maker for Abraham
Abe and I are Founders: Fathers to a nation
I'm the stuff of legend; the architect of Babel
I'm artistic: I composed the songs that David sings
And I'm smart: I wrote the law books handed down to Solomon

And God said: Bless you anyway, Batman
Bless you anyway

"Beyond"

by David Lewitsky

Beyond the city where I live
Beyond the city hall of infamy
Saint Buffalo The Flaky
Angel of our Holy City, floats

Beyond my dreamless sleep
Lie the deepest of my dreams
And Saint Monotony Patron Saint
Of sorcery, breathes profoundly, waits

Beyond the highway that circles the world
Is the highway from my house to yours
Where Saint Cruiser The Hopeful wanders
And Saint Demolition Derby rolls

Beyond my limp-dick dotage
King Dave orgies, ruts and plays
Saint Predator The Party Girl
Opens the windows, unlocks the gate

Beyond my beckoning tomb, Saint Funny Guy
Saint Cholesterol and Saint Nurse
Feed, amuse, and soothe me
Eyeless, earless and mute

continued from page 3

ket, answer the question. If they ask “why not?” answer the question. If it’s a trigger-question, let it go. Let it go. I’m against blackballing, giving a writer a piece of my mind (I haven’t much to spare, honestly), or ghosting. I’ve had a contributor apologize to me for not getting back to me before I’ve already accepted their submission to let me know that they were accepted somewhere else. And I suspect that the timing was close, and the other venue was a paying gig. Well, good for them for being paid for their efforts, and as for me, I congratulate them and then shut up and go back to work.

In the end, I hope I’m learning something. If I’ve nothing useful to add, or even if I think I might, move on. That’s my “over the shoulder” crew’s unit of measure. A friend recently gave me a jar of “umami dust,” for giving that distinctive flavor to soups, roasts, stews. You know umami? The Cambridge English dictionary online defines it as “a fifth taste, sort of like savory, only not.” Just kidding. They really tried, I’m sure, but it’s not useful to just tell us it has something to do with glutamates, when we don’t even know what glutamates are, other than the team name for the University of Southern New Hampshire.

I want to be the textual equivalent of umami dust. Somehow, I will try to get there, without driving everyone else nuts.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

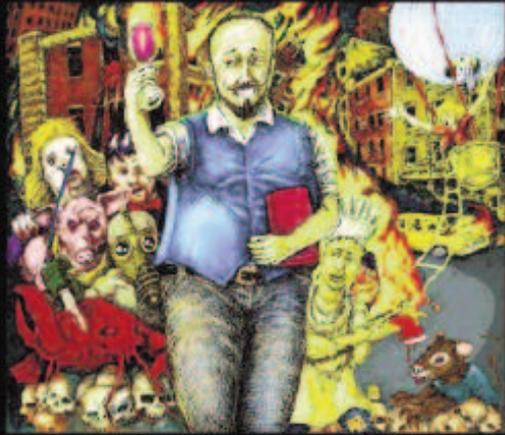
Contributors

Paul Perilli lives in Brooklyn, NY. His fiction and nonfiction have been published in *The Transnational*, *Thema*, *Numero Cinq*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine* and others. His speculative fiction 'Summary Report to the Committee' appears in *Overland's False Documents* issue. His story 'Orwell's Year' appears as a chapbook from Blue Cubicle Press. His nonfiction travel piece 'Prices of Translation' appears in *Wanderlust Journal's* 2019 print anthology from Wild Dog Press.

After many years of traveling, **Felix Imonti** has settled in Canada and is occupied writing and investing. He has published the history book *Violent Justice* as well as numerous articles in the fields of international politics and economics. You can read some of the material at <https://watchinggeopoliticalgames.wordpress.com/>. He is published as well short stories in *50 Word Stories*, *Commuter Lit*, *Selcouth Station*, and *The Sweet Tree Review*.

David Lewitsky writes, “I’m a 79 y. o. former social worker/family therapist living in Buffalo, New York. In 2002 I resumed writing poetry after a 35 year hiatus. During that time I carried a sandwich board in my head declaring me: "Poet. Not writing!" I've published about 100 poems in a variety of litmags such as *Nimrod*, *Passages North*, and *The Limestone Review*.

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Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over
long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student,
who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't
face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in
danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

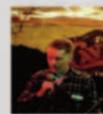
A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...



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by Marty Smith



(publisher & book reviewer, "The Blotter Magazine;" contributor to the "Urban
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