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The Blotter

magazine

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W W W . C L M P . O R G

“Correspondence”

I finally had the presence of mind to finish reading “In which I become invincible (1971).” It’s beautiful, wistfully so. It says quite a bit about “now.” Doubtless, Miss _____’s secret is probably very much like _____’s, the one I had to remove from my ratty, poorly scribbled reminiscence of the 1970s & more for the Patti Smith painting.

That you leave her secret a secret - because it isn’t about the secret, it’s about the people: the father, the mother, the kid, the town. About intolerance and the judgmental and those who quietly stand between the hateful and those unjustly hated. Because people should stand between them, stand up for and alongside the hated, the “different” who are “different solely because communal prejudices define them as “them,” not us. That’s a hell of a thing & too real. And it’s just like life, therefore believable.

As for showing this publication on Duotrope, good. We’ll get submissions. My junk forms a low bar to get over, so some actually talented folk may take a run at it and submit.

As for “comments.” My more jester-like inclinations would be to print them and let me assume my most ornery mountainous persona and let me ask the writer just who in the holy fuck do they think they are? Such commentations make my ass crave firewood and give my innards the collerymombus for there is but one cure. (A near direct quote from an old man back home who was hamming it up for those who purchased his illegal liquor [no joke]. It took me about 6 months to figure out - on my own, mind you - “collerymombus” was his version of “cholera morbus.” I coincidentally read a Victorian report that called cholera “the cholera morbus” and put it together. It’s funnier not figured out, I think.)

Or, you could just select a few to print and let them run without response except if there’s some need to respond. Or place comments that tend to contradict or accidentally answer one another one after the other. That’s assuming we get more than one piece of mail.

I’m not going to comment on our irresponsible House of Non-Representation, the crisis in Israel, the innocent in the Gaza mixed in with Hamas. To say the least, things are sliding off in all directions, to

paraphrase Leonard Cohen.

And so it goes.

I hope you and yours are well and remain so. Peace to you.

...thank you for this note, and please know that it is a tidbit of joy in very strange and terrible times. Spent a difficult couple of hours last night trying to be Dad and non-mansplainer to elder daughter, who is just absorbing all of the news and finding it difficult to wring out the sponge. There are no good answers, but some of what she hears and sees is based on faulty history, and I try to be careful talking about the complex history of the area. She is patient with me, although I know that she prefers shorter answers, better resolutions to her feelings. She wears her heart on her sleeve in this regard and is frustrated with me when I don't paint in black and white.

Blame, of course, is for little children. That this is so doesn't help in the least.

Regarding your piece - I find it not the least bit ratty or scribbled. Never do - anything that you write. Find you lucid and erudite.

My dad called them "collywobblers", and broadly applied the term to any kind of gut issue, from the flu to eating too many steamed clams.

I leave you this afternoon with a paraphrased quote by Emerson: A deep man believes...that the evil eye can wither, that the heart's blessing can heal; that love...can overcome all odds.

Be good. Thinking about you.

Dear friend,

All times, all history, I imagine is best thought of as terrible in some degree. Some moments in history are worse, horrendous, difficult to face - and to even face them often damages a human to their depths. While at the same moment, here and there within individual lives, things are good, people are good, they do exceptional things, they improve and repair and persist... or they hide until history grinds them to dirt along with nameless multitudes of people who, nevertheless, had names as meaningful as any ever uttered.

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

less egg to fry

“Challenging the Americans”

by Victor Pogostin

On a sunny April afternoon, the Secret Service led a Baseball Team through the rear entrance into the White House compound. On the south lawn, the Team wearing dark red baseball jackets with a Taco Bell logo was lined up next to a small group of staffers waiting to welcome home the President. Soon the Marine One helicopter hovered over the helipad and with a soft whoop-whoop sound landed delicately in its center.

George W. Bush and Barbara Bush with her dog Millie came down the airstairs. The President, a life-long aficionado of the game waived to the waiting staffers and smiling widely went over to the baseball team. He shook hands with everyone and wished them the best of luck.

In late 80s the USSR was opening to the West. Businesses on both sides of the secular iron curtain started looking for direct opportunities in Russia circumventing the stringent rules of the Ministry for Foreign Trade. PepsiCo and its affiliates jumped on the wagon too, and the twelve-game tour of the United States by the Soviet National baseball Team sponsored by Taco Bell rolled out in Annapolis on April 11, 1989. I travelled with the team as its inter-

preter.

Upon leaving Moscow, the pep talks from the Sports Committee officials boiled down to two main directives: “Beat the Americans in their own national game and beware of agents provocateur attempting to entice the Soviet athletes to America.”

The baseball field was a no man’s land to the Soviets and beating the Americans in the game was like beating the Oxford grads in English language contest. But what the hell! As a famous Soviet stand-up comedy writer said, if you start smoking cigars and drinking whisky English will come in naturally. Perhaps, the Sports Committee presumed, the same algorithm would work in baseball and if you learn to chew and spit tobacco, the rest like throwing, catching, and hitting would fall in easy. The team was picked up from all ball sports and after a brief training parachuted in America.

On the eve of the first game our bus was making its way in the evening traffic jam. It was getting dark and began to drizzle. The GPS was not yet introduced for cars and the driver lost his bearings in the rush-hour jam. Ahead of us a group of men in navy uniforms was walking on the shoulder of the road. When we caught up with them the bus slowed down to a

stop.

The driver opened the passenger door and asked one of them for directions to the Naval Academy Campus.

“You are close,” said the first officer. “Can we ride with you? I’ll navigate.”

“Hop in,” I said.

Two midshipmen got in.

Our brief conversation and the wet road traffic buzz livened up the drowsy players and started a loud chit chat.

“Hey man,” one of the officers turned to me, “what language you guys speak?”

“Russian,” I said matter-of-factly.

“Holy Smoke!” He gave a gasp. “No kidding?”

“Nope, the first Soviet national baseball team,” I said reassuringly.

“Blimey,” he slapped his buddy on the shoulder, “the boys will burst when we tell them we were on a bus with Russians.”

The Assistant coach, an ex-military type, moved closer to the front, slapped me on the shoulder and jumped into the conversation.

“Tell them Vic, we’ll get them tomorrow.”

I translated.

"My knees are shaking, but we'll sure be there to watch," The officer scoffed.

It still drizzled in the morning, but the game started on time. The Navy won 21-1.

Offbeat intelligence collection lesson...

After the game the team was invited to lunch in the Naval Academy mess hall.

"Fucking rain helped them," kept grumbling the third coach.

"It rained on both teams," I said.

"Whatever... I want revenge," he said. "You did serve in the naval intelligence, Vic"

"Reconnaissance, why?"

"Same shit. Now we'll beat them at our game. Let me show you how to gather intelligence."

"I am all ears."

With an eagle eye he looked over the long, accurate rows of tables separated by large net fruit baskets. Each table had the same number of seats and, wrapped in napkins, cutlery sets.

"Now!" he said triumphantly, "we multiply the number of seats per table by the number of tables in the mess and we'll know how many officers-in-training there are."

"Got it," I said.

He was still counting and mumbling the numbers when an ensign officer happened to pass by our table. I stopped him with a question: "Excuse me Sir, how many

midshipmen graduate from the Academy a year?

He replied clearly: "About 1200, Sir. What else can I help you with?"

"Thank you, Sir. I was fully briefed."

I translated the answer to the mumbling Assistant coach.

He pouted, stopped mumbling, and shushed the laughing players.

A storm in a pop-cup...

"What the fuck is that?" the Taco Bell Rep shook his head in disbelief.

He was looking at the Coca-Cola cases piled in the corner of our dugout as if it was a rattlesnake?"

"There was no pop for the game, and we got Coke in Kmart. What's wrong?" I said.

The freckled-faced Rep turned red.

"Tell you later. Now please help."

He wrapped the Cola cases in a black garbage bag, and I helped him to load the bundle in the trunk of his rental Ford. Ten minutes later he returned with the Pepsi-Cola cases.

"Now tell," I said.

The story of the over a hundred-year-old Cola Wars was a fascinating introduction into the free market brotherly competition.

Borscht mutiny and a reconciliation prize...

The show went on. The players enjoyed travelling across America

and shopping at Kmart from Maryland to Washington, D.C. and to Virginia and then North Carolina and Atlanta and all the way down to Florida. Even the "Yeah, yeah Taco Bell" that they were asked to rant to a camera after every Taco Bell meal didn't bother them much, at least not till the end of week one.

In about seven days, the Head of the delegation told me we must renegotiate the meal plan.

"The team wants borscht, or no more "yeah, yeah Taco Bell." He said.

Finding a non-kosher borscht in Atlanta wasn't easy and the team settled for some likeness of a soup that was added to our dinner menu. The "yeah, yeah" was resumed and the teams' managers were offered a reconciliation perk, a night on town in Atlanta.

The All or None Co.

Those were the days when the insipid and half-lit streets of Moscow made the glittering streets of downtown Atlanta look like the promised land of adventure.

"Gentlemen, where would you like to be on a Saturday night?" said our host.

"Some place we can't find at home," said the blond manager.

"Well then how about the gentlemen's club?"

"Black tie?" I asked thinking back to the Oxford Club in London where even my nine-year-old son was requested to get a suit jacket.

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"Jeans are fine. We are very democratic here."

"Sounds intriguing," said the brunette manager.

It was dark when the four of us drove up to the club. Can't remember its name, only a long line of men some with women, some tipsy, outside the dark grey hangar with a self-explanatory neon sign.

"Not exactly the club I thought," I said.

"What if the Sports Committee finds out we went to a strip joint?" said the blond.

"If the three of us go, who'd tattletale?" reasoned the brunette.

"What if someone talks to us, no one should know we are from the USSR," said the blond.

"I'll tell them you are a Swede and you a Turk and none of you speak English," I suggested.

We returned to the slow-moving line, broke the deal to our host and chattered lively in anticipation of the forbidden fruit.

"Hey guys, where do you come from?" The four-eyes man standing ahead of us said.

The managers looked at me, their eyes wide open.

Our host stepped in.

"One from Stockholm and the other from Istanbul and guess what? Not a word of English."

"Yeah, I just returned from Stockholm," the four-eyes livened up, "great place where ..."

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He was happy to hang out, but the line moved up and the talkative four-eyes disappeared in the hangar womb.

"Bullet dodged," laughed the host, "Go ahead!"

Inside we shied away from the main podium and moved to an individual table in a far corner.

The host ordered beer and left us for a few minutes. Soon two young women, a strawberry-blond and a brown-haired, fluttered like large butterflies onto our table in their hot seductive dance. In about ten minutes the butterflies stripped to the buff and then the inevitable "where you guys are from?" followed by.

"New York," said the host, "and the blond is from Sweden and brunette from Turkey."

Before we knew it, the strawberry-blond exclaimed "Swedish, me too!" and landed in our blond manager's lap, put her arms around his neck and started whispering in his ear.

Caught off guard he put a finger to his lips and stared at me his wide-open eyes screaming for help. I got the message and said the first words that came to mind.

"Sorry dear," I said with a sad sigh, "he is mute from birth."

"Poor sweet boy." The dancer sighed with motherly regret and the show was over.

The Team lost all twelve games even to school clubs. No agent-provocateur attempted to entice

the Soviet athletes to America. On the bright side, the players parted with the inflated expectations of the multi-million dollar offers and were back in the learning mood, and they failed to learn how to chew tobacco and spit on the field, at least not at that time. ❖

"The New Year's Dream"

By David M. Harris

You, poor year, have only 365 days,
or 366, depending on who you are,
to achieve greatness. Do years, like people,
dream of being remembered? Would you rather
be forgotten? Do you envy 1888
for the Great Blizzard? 1929 for the Crash?
Or 1837, remembered (if at all) for the death
of Pushkin. A bad time, especially for Pushkin,
but a good year for Dickens, who published
Oliver Twist. What makes a good year?
A year doesn't mess on the carpet.
A year doesn't neglect its chores.

A year lives in landmarks. In 1980,
my father died, I got my first job in film production,
Reagan was elected.
How tiresome, to be someone else's signpost,
like the Giant Chicken whose absence
marks the turn toward Aunt Eunice's house.
Better, perhaps, to pass, uneventful, into
the long list of forgotten years.

Kela Kexel
Gastonia, NC



Upper Left: "I know I am in truth"

Above: "Shine your light for the world to see"

Upper Right: "'Grow with the flow"

Lower Right: "If I ruled the world"

Lower Left: "Ashes to ashes"



"The Aramanthine Fairy

by Pawel Markiewicz

Like sparkles of dreamery – fantasy,
born from hundreds of thoughts and from memories,
you compass the world of mythology.
Here and there plenty of effusions.

Fairy – she-paramour of druids, priests,
kiss a fairway of starlets and the moon!
In you a hope of dazzling, wistful bards.
Ancient is the myth like cave of Plato.

You go away and fly away such eagle.
The mirror of ontology shows time.
Your poetries so delicate such flax.
Eudemonia will live softly in us.

You are autumn fantasy, born from oak.
Like rain of demand you fill chivalry.
Stars of non-destruction need your verdict.
Thoughts with miracles - vast eternity.

The soft-mossy tombstones are only yours.
Such rook you sing song - bards-desperados.

I adore Kant's heaven – it is my time.
The bards honor the autumnal fairies.

Such refreshing yesterday-rain you are.
You are inspired like dreamy Erlkings.
You narrate myths, legends – having a glaive.
You glare at a mirror of timelessness.

In clouds of homeland dreameries come true,
when your romantic tear – fay-like tear-gem,
becharms a world of the Morningstar – whole.
Pixie, your canzone is crystal clear.

Midnight, the winglets of dreams carry you,
when the thousands of kings of oaks wake up.
Sparrows, magpies think of heaven – it's blue,
filled with comet-dust and star-dust of mine.

Monuments of distant and drunk nature,
praise your meek, amaranthine liberty.
You are sprite – she-guide of Nature-mother
Through, like rainbow-shine, dreamed eternity.

glaive – archaic: sword

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.

Lying on the lawn in the back yard, beneath one of the two walnut trees. Face down now. I can smell the summertime, see the green through my eyelids. My sister is swinging back and forth on the old tire that we actually have tied up to one of the strong branches of this tree, the rope creaks softly like a frog's croak. Rib-bit. Rib-bit. She hums, too, a song I don't recognize. It gets louder, then softer, then loud again, as she swings. She keeps the rhythm of the playground, the languorous up and down of a tire-rope.

My nose tickles from a blade of grass. I open my eyes, just a little. Squint. There is something red. A ladybug slowly climbing. So close it is out of focus. Anything other than a ladybug, I would squeal and jump to my feet. Funny, that.

Everything is soft and warm beneath me. Smells good, like summertime. I know, summertime is not a very specific odor, but it is the best I can think of. I could sleep here. I don't even consider the irony that I am already asleep.

I would like to see more of what is going on, but it is hard to open my eyes in the sunshine glare. How high is my sister swinging? What if she is breaking the record? What – more importantly – if she is flying right off the tire and into the sky, even if only for a moment?

LGG - cyberspace

continued from page 3

Being a Jew-by-choice, I see all of this through multiple lenses and through the one I've carried since early childhood: that all of this will turn out badly. I was raised to believe such "apocalyptic" things to the point no one ever encouraged me to even plan for a future; the world was about to end - there is no point. So, I didn't. I just learned things, made things, kept to myself, became a news junkie... it filled up the time. Because, from that point of view, life is "doing time." You're in prison awaiting the cosmic jailbreak.

That is a fucked-up thing to lay on a kid. Even when or if you stop buying it, down deep in your soul is the suspicion that hell is just about to be unleashed on earth... and you deserve to suffer in it.

And the Jewish story is drawn from the history of the people. As the old joke goes, every Jewish holy-day celebration consists of the same story: "They tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat." But in that sarcasm is a truth - it keeps happening. And all Jews, secular or religious in some way or extremely (even extremist) religious all grasp: Given enough time "they," whoever decides to take on the role of "They" this time, will try to kill us. Like Pharaoh. Like Haman. Like every medieval despot and prince and village. Like the Cossacks in the Ukraine and the pale. Like the Hitlerites. And like the 6 Day War and the Yom Kippur War. If you're a Jew, you'll live long enough to meet some hateful antisemites, even violent ones, threatening ones, murderous ones. And you may live to see people so filled with hate for your religion, your ethnicity, your history and "nature," as they imagine it, that they will cut the heads off infants and toddlers and shoot hundreds of unarmed peaceful people and kidnap as many as possible to execute and torture and film for publicity. Because where you see people, "they" see demons and bad history all intermingled.

Here we are. With nuclear weapons this time. With Russia off the rails in an alliance with Iran. With Iran in its usual alliances with Hamas, Syria, and Hezbollah. With China involved around the edges. This will not go well. It already hasn't for thousands of Israelis who can't even stand Netanyahu or Likud or their policies and for thousands of Palestinians who are not supporters of Hamas - as if they get a choice about where those bastards set up shop in their apartment buildings or move their rocket launchers next to schools.

It's not going to turn out well for anyone.

I don't envy you trying to explain any of this to an intelligent young person. Not at all. I have difficulty explaining it to adults and, mainly, don't.

I have links to sources you may, or may not, find useful - or your daughter may. Or may not. Mileage may vary, but it's the only useful thing I've seen presently and I'm a longtime supporter of the ADL. Take a look if you wish. Links included below.

Peace be with you and your family and friends. We have something to go through neither of us have seen and, good lord, we've seen some rotten things - Vietnam, Cambodia, Gulf War, Rwanda, the Afghan and Iraqi invasions and wars.... What else is there to say that is meaningful?

G-d have mercy on us all.

...Hey there - I know that I do this a fair bit, and if it is troubling to you, I apologize. I love what you wrote in our recent correspondence. And it's been making me think. I would like to share it. And I swear, if the thought makes you uncomfortable (including that I always seem to do this) let me know and I won't mention it again. And I swear that I am not...grooming you...to be a writer. Because you already are.

The Blotter is supposed to be "apolitical" in nature, and I have respected that for the years of my tenure as editor. I've even rejected pieces because of their leanings. However, the three notes you and I have shared, starting with your reading of "In Which I Become..." to your astute observations of 10/12 make me want to share them with readers. Why? Because it is thoughtful commentary. Just because I think it should be read by others.

What do you think about this? It would take the place of my regular "editorial" in the December issue. If I put together the piece - the back and forth between us, and show it to you, would you consider it?

Thank you, also, for sending the reading material. I'm on it. I need it.

...my friend, let's do it. If it seems right, it must be right - the zeitgeist smells this way, so we may as well call it and describe it and even curse it. I'm proud you consider me a writer [or anything else]. I'll take it as long as the words and the images carry some meaning, some spark in the falling of night. Night has fallen before and people persisted until day returned. That is the hope: Life will prevail. But for those whose lives won't persist or prevail... G-d help us to alleviate their suffering and remember they are and were beyond price in this world. Needed, as we all need one another in order to even grasp who we are and why we're here. Needed for their beauty which dulled eyes and ears may slip across, miss, impoverished in that missing. It is All of Us or None of Us because there is only Us, no "Other," no "They," no "Them." We will come to this awareness or we will kill every living thing, I fear. But against my fear and the apocalyptic lies my parent's religion crushed me with, I choose hope and life, hope in life. That we might bend the zeitgeist's insanities into something less crooked and more humane, something human.

So, yes. Do this. I trust your judgment, friend.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

The Art of Kela Kexel

Artist statement for the Open Eye gallery show:

I'm calling this, my first ever gallery show, "Kelaidescape: thru the storm." In loving memory of my mom and dad who both left here too soon, and dedicated to my boys for whom I'd move mountains and who I hope to make proud by showing them that even and especially in the face of adversity, it is okay to indulge in a dream, no matter how impractical it may seem.

I've been through the storm, through a long dark night, until eventually I learned to see in the dark and slowly, slowly found my way back to the light. Jihad, Amanda, Nora, Maria, I couldn't have done this without you! One love everyone! I hope you enjoy.

Kela Kexel was born in Racine, WI, to world travel-loving parents who brought her to Japan at age 5, on what would turn out to be the first of many trips abroad. Kela went on to live, work and study in France, Spain, Senegal, Dominican Republic, and Uganda before eventually moving to this area as caregiver to her mother who received a life-saving lung transplant at Duke in 2016. Kela now works from home as a French/Spanish/Wolof medical interpreter while also homeschooling her two boys, the loves of her life.

After taking 2 art classes in college 20 some years ago, Kela started making art in the last couple of years as a way to cope with heavy grief, crippling anxiety and Covid-related isolation and uncertainty...and her daily art practice, which she often does now while interpreting, has ultimately taken her through the storm, and finally to a place of radical healing, peace and ever-increasing alignment. She hopes to be able to begin worldschooling with her boys soon, while continuing to make art on a daily basis, drawing on the people and places around her for inspiration.

Kela's artwork will be up at the Open Eye Cafe in Carrboro until November 19th.

Contributors:

Dr. Victor Pogostin lives just outside Toronto, Ontario, is the author of Blotter Books volume "Russian Roulette" (find it on Amazon). and has these great stories about his well-spent youth. He is currently working on a second volume of true tales.

Until 2003, **David M. Harris** had never lived more than fifty miles from New York City. Since then he has moved to Tennessee, acquired a daughter and a classic MG, and gotten serious about poetry. His work has appeared in Pirene's Fountain (and in First Water, the Best of Pirene's Fountain anthology), Gargoyle, The Labletter, The Pedestal, and other places. His first collection of poetry, The Review Mirror, was published by Unsolicited Press in 2013. He is on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/david.m.harris1>. He is also the author of Democracy and Other Problems, an essay collection; Bill, the Galactic Hero: the Final Incoherent Adventure (a novel with Harry Harrison); numerous magazine articles; several published short stories; and two produced screenplays.

Paweł Markiewicz was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetries in many magazines. He writes in English and German.

RUSSIAN ROULETTE



Victor Pogostin



Imagine, if you can, James Thurber and E. B. White sharing a taxi to the airport with Alexander Solzhenitsyn. They're stuck in traffic, will most certainly miss their flights, but are spinning their yarns to each other while sharing a flask of good whiskey and some snacks they purloined from the hotel mini-refrigerator. The cabby, listening intently to the raucous tales regaling from the back seat, has turned off the meter, because why not?

Now you have some idea of the writing of Victor Pogostin, PhD, in his collection of stories *Russian Roulette*.

These...personal papers...of a cold-war - and beyond - intellectual in an occasionally warm world are insightful, funny, and poignant.

And all true.

Find it on Amazon!


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