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“Have to’s and Should not’s”

What do people do when preparing for the new year?

Let me rephrase– what are you supposed to do when preparing for the new year?

Write some type of New Year’s resolution, make a couple goals that may or may not make it to March; April at the latest... do a little cleaning maybe?

I’ve been contemplating this a lot the past couple weeks along with the nuances of “should” versus “supposed to” and I keep coming to the same conclusion– I probably should do a lot of things, but when it comes down to it, do I really have to?

Yeah yeah I know some of you are groaning or snickering at that thought, ‘oh but you HAVE to pay taxes’, ‘oh you HAVE to wash your hands after the bathroom’ – uh, no...? I should definitely do those things, and I’m grown enough, intelligent enough, and self-aware enough to agree that all those things are good ideas, and I continue to do those types of things to be able to live the healthy/safe/happy life I want to live; by adhering to cultural and societal norms.

But then again if I chose not to adhere to one or any of these norms put in place, I should at least be self-aware enough of the consequences that come from doing those things (or by not doing them, vice versa.)

Sometimes I like to sit and think about my past choices in a “butterfly effect” way. Not with regards to any particular memory but simply how each one of my past decisions have gotten me to this one particular moment in my life. I enjoy being creative for example. I could probably attribute that to seeing the passion that flowed through my dad with words as he wrote, and the imagination and drive that fueled my mom as a god-sent project manager throughout my childhood. I don’t drink coffee as much as I used to. I think about my fourth grade teacher quite often (I mean, more than one might naturally think of their elementary school teachers?) She was probably the same age I am now when I was her student and I can’t help but think of all the small, yet impactful pieces of life knowledge she gave me, probably without even realizing it. It was fourth grade so we didn’t have different teachers for separate subjects yet, but I could tell she enjoyed teaching language arts the best. The second week of class we were all

given composition, tape-bound notebooks that were to become our writing journals, and before we were to ever begin writing we were tasked with decorating the outside of it to our hearts content. She was so proficient at bringing the creativity out of children, I could practically draw to a T what the cover of my journal looked like.

Now while I'm aware it's not one of my "more productive" qualities, I am an environment-based worker. Yeah, I can get work done anywhere (homework, work-work, projects, writing, art, etc.) but boy do I prefer getting myself out of bed an hour early just to get the perfect seat in a coffee shop (Star*ucks voided), a piping chai, with my freshly charged headphones (for a piping hot playlist might I add). I know I'm about to have the most productive work session of my life when the warm glow of sunrise hits my cheek as I'm sitting in my window booth, watching the steam from my drink blow condensation on my laptop screen as another customer walks in the front door.

The act of giving us time to make the book feel like it was truly ours is probably what made our writing assignments so good and personal. Those journals were like a safe space in some ways, or at least for me it was. I still have that fourth grade language arts notebook sitting on a shelf with quite literally hundreds of other previously filled childhood journals and scrapbooks and diaries. I go through that fourth grade notebook and read, and even at ten years old I was writing imagery that I would hope even Tolkien would be proud of (wow we're feeling a little ballsy this morning!)

I think my fourth grade teacher, in an environment that very much resembled Adam Sandler's depiction of kindergarteners in his new animated movie about this class pet lizard or something, was amazing at taking that typical chaos that flows out of children like a fucking geyser and channeling it into something not only educational but meaningful and fun. She was never "keeping us busy," it was something that her students, the rest of us, were very tuned into too, and looking back now, it was something I think we respected. She wasn't looking at us like this was a job, she wasn't a babysitter, she was (metaphorically!! She was an educator...) the fun aunt that would teach you how to put a tampon in, take you shopping but also teach you the importance of saving habits at the same time, and sneak you a little alcohol at family functions; but remember to beat your ass when she caught you doing something you know you shouldn't be.

Less than an hour a day for around 180 days instilled in me so many things; personality traits, life lessons, pet peeves, hobbies, habits,

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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

aint no place for a street

“The Shirt Stays On During Sex”

by Kashawn Taylor

When you find out you have to go to prison several worries plague your waking hours, and sometimes the sleeping hours, too. Money, your future, pets, your shit, your friends and family. These are logical anxieties knowing you'll soon live in a place where, according to TV, you'll have to shower naked with a bunch of sex-deprived men, and keep a tight grip on soap. As a queer male, the sanctity and safety of my back door should have been a bigger priority. For me, however, the main concern swimming about my head was a different part of my body.

I have gynecomastia. Yes, I have man-boobs, and no, I am not just fat. I didn't take any meds as a child for which I might now be entitled to financial compensation. I just drew the tits-end of the life stick. Growing up, I was a tiny little thing – imagine a short, smiling, gap-toothed nugget who looked like he just hopped off a row boat from a third world country. After moving back to Connecticut after a year and the Sunshine State, I ballooned. In fourth and fifth grade, I was still the same happy, sweet kid, only rounder. A certified chunky monkey. By sixth grade my stomach had thinned but the breasts stayed.

For most of my adolescent life,

they weren't a huge problem. I just avoided things like swimming during P.E., shirts-and-skins sports games, and generally taking my shirt off, sometimes for showers. There were times when I joked about them:

“Who's going to play the girl?” one of my friends would ask while playing make-believe in the empty field next to my house. I'd sigh resignedly and say, “I will... since, ya know, I have boobs and all!” Then flash them and yell, “Girls gone wild!” over and over à la Regina George's little sister in Mean Girls. Even at 12, my defense mechanisms were top-tier. Shout out, my brain!

It wasn't until college that I became obsessed with my body. Until that point, I'd assumed my jugs came from being a tad squishier than average. Not counting ungodly amounts of porn, I hadn't seen many shirtless men. Porn stars and public figures had to look good in various forms of undress; it was their job, and I was smart enough to know that.

But college dorms have communal bathrooms, which mean real-life shirtless men.

I started wondering why the 250-pound guy down the hall was flat-chested while I, a 140-pound baby angel, could squeeze my chest together and create cleavage to rival Pamela Anderson. By college

I knew about gynecomastia, but refused to believe I had actual man-boobs. What I had up top, along with my dump-truck ass and lack of washboard abs, was a product of laziness. I equated my breasts with being fat. So I did what any desperate, self-loathing young man would do: I stopped eating almost everything, and started working out like a madman. For nearly two years, I survived on coffee, bananas, pears, and multivitamins.

Everything on my body strength... except my breasts. Finally, I was thin, but still I could fit into a small b-cup bra, for sure. I gave up on what my friend Raven termed “Anorexia Lite” and returned to normal eating habits. For a while I just ignored the issue though the niggling thoughts tormented my psyche. Failing to detach the idea of boobs from being fat, I tortured myself for years with wild diets, intense workouts, and disordered eating. Nothing worked, and I felt perpetually embarrassed, full of shame.

Once, I made a joke to my friend Chris, innocent and harmless as he'd just changed in front of me at one of our regular sleepovers.

“Your ass is fatter than your girlfriend's,” I said, pointing out a previously established fact.

He laughed, a rosy color appeared in his face, and said, “Yeah, well...

” – he paused, as if looking for the perfect words – “I’m pretty sure you have boobs.”

I immediately went home and seriously contemplated returning under the cover of night and slashing his tires.

By focusing on my fitness, I kept my mammary malady from growing out of control. If I couldn't get rid of them, they damn sure weren't getting any bigger. But that all changed after my accident. In the year and a half between my accident and starting my bid, I let myself go. Part of that, I can attribute to Seroquel, which I later learned promotes weight gain. The majority of the blame may be placed on depression, fear of the future, and simply not giving a fuck.

I had gained forty pounds, had new stretch marks on my belly and old donut crumbs under the folds of my titties.

I think, somewhere deep in my subconscious, I accepted begrudgingly that I had gynecomastia. At that point, I felt I needed a bra. My boobs bobbed around under my shirt like water balloons in a bucket of water. I wanted – no, needed – a medical diagnosis. Luckily for me, I am a full-blown hypochondriac, and think any tingle in my arm or slight pain in my head is a heart attack or brain aneurysm. And, one night, while lying supine eating a Wendy's Baconator and feeling myself up, I thought I found a lump in my left breast.

“I think I found a lump in my breast,” I explained the next morning to my doctor’s receptionist.

“I thought you said this was for you, sir.” Her Latina accent was as thick as my friend Chris, her voice annoyed.

“It is for me,” I said through gritted teeth. My face grew hotter and hiding my frustration became difficult. “I said my breast, didn't I?”

“One moment, please.” That one moment turned into several. She had forgotten to place me on hold and, through keystrokes, I heard her whisper, “He found a lump on his breast.”

“Who are you talking to?” I said loudly and rudely.

“I – I – I – uh...” It took her a second to find the words. “We have an opening tomorrow at the on-site urgent care. Nine a.m. work?”

The next morning I let the resident physician's assistant fill up my tits. She was not impressed when I asked for a drink in exchange for the fondling.

She suggested I lose the weight. When I explained the problem’s long-term nature, from before I was fat, she asked about past medications. After I ruled that out, she looked up from the computer and eyed me, slowly. “Any history of hormone usage?”

“No, I’m not trans.”

She looked puzzled. “Not ever?”

“No. Hey, can I put my shirt back

on?”

After I was dressed, she explained that what I felt was most likely tissue and nothing to lose sleep over.

“So, I was wondering if this – my breasts – were gynecomastia?”

“Oh, yeah. Definitely.”

She suggested I speak with my PCP for options for tackling my titties. Before leaving, however, I forced her to schedule a mammogram and breast ultrasound at the hospital. If I had boobs-boobs and not fat-boobs, I needed the full experience. I'd already been catastrophizing for hours; I endured the abashment and terror of a medical visit. I needed to be 100% in the clear.

I did not have breast cancer. I did learn that mammograms hurt. A lot.

Due to the pandemic my visit with my PCP was through Zoom.

“So, I have gynecomastia. It's bothered me my whole life. Plus, I'm going to jail soon. I'm wondering what could be done.”

For a split-second, my doctor's eyes lit up. I saw him sneakily fix his face. “Really?” The excitement all too audible in his voice. “Show me.”

I could feel his eyes widen through the screen as I flashed the camera my breasts. Again, I grew hot with deep, heavy shame. My tits were worth more than a five dollar co-pay.

“Nice,” he said. “I see.”

The Blotter

He referred me to a surgeon, but I was way too busy feeling miserable about my situation to make an appointment. If I was going to prison, so be it. My boobs and I could be a target if the other inmates so decide. Besides, my public defender made it crystal clear my case was not slowing down for a little breast reduction.

Prison bathrooms were nothing like the TV show Oz. I had never seen Oz before, but screenshots popped up on the Internet sometimes showing open showers and naked men bloodied on the shower floor. The showers had single stalls and, more surprisingly, curtains. All anyone had to fear was making eye contact through the clear upper portion of the curtains while jerking off.

Though I had more privacy, I still felt uncomfortable. Eventually, I spoke with the doctor about my breast tissue issue.

"I'd like to see the weight come down," he said, eyes glued to his computer screen reviewing another inmate's lab results.

"Me too."

The doctor, an upper middle-aged neurotic little man with salt-and-pepper hair and glasses, went over my blood pressure, pressured me into following a vegan diet, and suggested I read a book by his father. "Roberts," he said, pointing at his badge and then at the slip of paper on which he'd written book recommendations. We sat in a thick, awkward silence for a moment.

"That's my dad."

He tried to dismiss me and I pressed the issue..

"Well... again, your weight."

Why he assumed I hadn't already tried just being skinny was beyond me. My condition was chronic, skinny legend or not, and I explained that tersely.

His eyes sparkled with understanding and he said, "Really? Let me see." This sounded all too familiar.

In the end he prescribed me water pills as a first result. While I hope they work, I am investing in myself and losing weight through diet and exercise. The level of comfort I have with my body is rising, as is my overall confidence in this setting. If I can have confidence in prison around hyper-masculine strangers, I'd have confidence in any situation.

And that's how I came to love my God-given body!

Just kidding. It's six months later. The pills – which, for some reason, I am still taking daily – didn't work. I still have boobs. They're smaller, but still there, and still as mortifying as ever.

I'm down to pre-rock bottom weight. My confidence waxes and wanes like a moody ocean, but my mental health is relatively stable without an antipsychotic. It turns out that not using drugs or alcohol really improves self-esteem. I do, however, think of my boobs every day. I've even perfected a walk with perfect arm placement

to hide them. Think a more relaxed version of Black Panther's signature pose.

My tumultuous tatas are rarely brought up, unless I mention it.

"What's gynoco– whatever you said?" asked my best jail friend Kenny.

"Legit man boobs."

"So those are tits? All this time, I thought they were pecs."

Sometimes he makes jokes about my chest. Sometimes people make suggestions on how I could tone up my pecs while in the weight room. The jokes are lighthearted, the advice well-intentioned, but any mention of my affliction is a pound of salt in a stubborn wound. I know body positivity is in, and more power to anyone who can accept how the universe shaped them. But I just can't.

I am waiting impatiently until the day I can have a surgeon chop these things off. By then, I may learn to accept myself as I am. If I don't love myself in all my flaws, what other person will? There's a possibility I'll come around. I can't predict the future.

But probably not. ❖

“The Art of Accountability”

by Shawn Younker

Nobody was quite prepared when the alarm sounded, jarring everyone and interrupting their daily routine. Only the mental health crowd was able to ignore it, so steeped in psych medication that they too far gone in slumber to acknowledge the blaring cacophony.

From my cell window here on the second floor, I witnessed a throng of prison guards dash towards the gymnasium like a swarm of angry wasps. This proved only vaguely interesting at the time, however, since unruly incidents had become something of the norm these days. We seem to be getting used to the scenes. Some people blamed the weather, and others pointed to the disrespect of our gatekeepers.

Whatever the case may be, I sighed and took a break from my work. Strolling down the catwalk, I overheard several jeers from the inmate population. Mindless violence was always cause for excitement among the ranks, sadly enough. When I stopped at the last cell on the left, a familiar sight encouraged me to smile.

Old man Sanders sat at his desk, heavily engrossed in his most recent project, oversized reading specs slightly askew on his nose, gray hair sprung wildly in tangled wisps. On the easel beside him is a canvas depicting some aquatic scene, a colorful

rendering complete with marine life and billowing fronds of kelp or some other class of sea fauna.

Sanders is an artist of repute. Over the last twenty-nine years of his incarceration, he has managed to launch, finance, and run his own business. It is mainly an arts and crafts retail line, catering to those who are interested in paintings, sketches, and quality renderings from prison artists. And from all appearances, business is booming.

“What’s all the commotion outside?” I ask, dimly curious.

Sanders only shrugs noncommittally, never taking his eyes off the charcoal smearing on the desk in front of him. “Who really knows?” he says. “Probably another stabbing.”

“No surprise there.”
“Getting to be a daily ritual,” he says flatly.

“Sure is,” I concur. “How’s the business?”

He exhales tiredly, lifting his glasses. “Good as gold. Only have two more orders to fill this month, than a week’s vacation.”

“You mean to say, some time off?”

He grunts. “Same thing.”

This one-man enterprise, amusingly titled: Convict Showcase, averages about 5 or 6 paintings per month, in addition to the assortment of crafts he is able to piece together from vari-

ous materials available to the inmate population. Some favorites include miniature pool tables, teddy bears, and personalized throw pillows. These simple items bring a generous dollar on today’s market. A market, incidentally, that Sanders has spent a virtual lifetime cornering.

Before I have a chance to comment on the rising tide of violence plaguing our institution this year, a voice on the loudspeaker brusquely orders everyone to return to their cells immediately. Lockdown procedures were now in effect. Oh, joy.

Back in my cell, I resumed work on an article I’d been composing for a popular magazine. Although, after several futile attempts, I eventually had to abandon the project. My mind was on other matters. Namely, the depressing state-of-affairs for men like Sanders. Men, who by all accounts pose no danger to anyone, anywhere, but are doomed to spend the rest of their days paying the ultimate price. A shitty bit of knowledge, to be sure.

Ah, the wonders of Pennsylvania justice.

Beyond my cell window, I watch the security team drag their quarry across the prison yard, his eyes red and swollen from copious volumes of pepper spray. He will be taken to solitary and, depending on his infraction, be

treated accordingly.

It is better to go to heaven missing a leg than to be stuck on earth missing a soul.

That is the prevailing wisdom of countless theologians and, in fact, it was this biblical axiom that came to mind when things took a shocking turn for the worst. Nobody could have seen it coming, including me.

From the vestibule came a platoon of jack-booted commandos, hellbent on apprehension. I watched this spectacle with mild amusement, at first, wondering how long the lockdown would take. Resigned to get back to my work on the overdue article, I frowned and did a double-take as the security team headed towards a familiar cell.

Sanders.

Apparently, as the rumor mill would later reveal, the previous incident was indeed a stabbing. Some violent prisoner shanked a guard. The instrument of attack, unbelievably, proved to be a

weapon fashioned from a paint brush handle.

Since our friend Sanders held the title for renowned prison artist – it did not take any grand leap of logic to infer how they arrived at this tenuous juncture. As is so often the case, in prison as well as out, shaky conjecture quickly resolves into fact. Followed by blame and persecution.

He was innocent, of course.

Sanders no more manufactured a shiv than would a child construct an evil cyborg to deliberately haunt his dreams. But it is a widely known truth that prison staff are not the most reasonable lot. Guilt assumed is guilt ascertained. Anyhow, Sanders took the brunt of these charges like a good sport, patiently and respectful. Even when the goon squad trashed his cell. Even when they hurled groundless accusations at him. And yes, even when they purposefully, spitefully wrecked his art-

work and related materials.

An unfortunate and most demeaning turn of events, to say the least. But, as I've said previously, we are getting used to these scenes. Even in prison.

A lot of people claim it comes down to a matter of accountability. Those with power seem to be increasingly immune from it. Admitting an error or misjudgment is, by all accounts, beneath them. Consequently, when it comes to Average Joe, sins both real and imagined are all too often publicized with fervor, then unilaterally punished to the max. This is the America we've come to know and accept.

As it turned out, Sanders was eventually absolved of any wrongdoing and released from solitary. Security cameras and investigative reviews cleared him. However, not until he served sixty days of isolation. Even after his return to population, no apology was made nor any effort to reimburse the poor guy for his art materials and paintings that were destroyed in their "search for additional weaponry."

"How did you do it?" I asked him later. "How did you endure such an outrage without totally losing it?"

He only frowned and shook his head. "Better to lose a little," he said solemnly, "than to fight them and lose it all."

I chuffed and turned away. What a fine epitaph for this post-modern era in our Commonwealth's justice system. ❖



Olivia Somers

"The Ferrari"

by Scott D. Culp

Ask any Chronobiologist, "the study of innate biological rhythms" what the vacuum of solitary confinement does to one's emotional state and they'll try and factor in the time, tides, sun, moon, light, temperature, etc. The only thing I've read that comes close to my reality is from the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca, and his descriptions of silver miners who encountered phenomena from long term mental distress, psychic pressure from claustrophobia, and the full tempest of panic as they imagined the ceilings and walls enclosing them. With no sunsets or sunrises something inherent and primordial devolves into instinct, and like animals in a zoo you become sad and pensive. Eventually something clicks and you succumb to your enclosure and fall into a paralytic shock, "which can be recognized by the endless pacing back and forth". My extended stay in this subterranean cave has nothing to do with me breaking the prison rules. As a convicted bank robber the staff here views me as an escape risk, and leader/organizer. I find it difficult to organize my own thoughts much less lead an uprising against the bologna sandwiches that are served daily. The California Prison system creates darkness where light is so desperately needed. There's an urban

legend about the draconian use of Solitary Confinement, it says that over time this place permanently dismantles the last vestiges of hope. Instead of becoming easier overtime, the accumulative effects of a prolonged stay results in diminishing returns. In the 1980's an expedition into a cave called Sarawak Chamber, "in the Malay Archipelago" a group of cavers had to be guided out after becoming emotionally despondent. In these places you become adroit at communicating with your fellow condemned. Reading lips, American signing, or just passing lines we reach out to one another. I've learned that my life isn't written in the stars, but in the hearts of those men around me. Recently I spoke, "vis-a-vis the vent" with someone from Stockton. For hours we shared our life experiences. He was in for a parole violation and as we continued to speak, things just weren't adding up. He said that he had worked part-time at Costco in Tracy, and then later remarked that he left for work at 5:00 AM and didn't return until 5:00 PM, "Stockton is about 20 miles from Tracy". Finally he admitted that he was ashamed to tell me that he didn't own a car, and walked the 40 miles to and fro. It floored me! Can you believe he was ashamed of that? There's always an uncanny

mixture of bravado amongst a den of thieves, however any prisoner worth his salt displaces those false veneers, and finds within himself elements of authenticity. Personally I'd rather befriend someone who walks 40 miles back and forth to a part-time job than someone who drives a Ferrari. The context and meaning of my own struggles stood in stark contrast. I had lost sight of the beauty that lies there-in. His story emboldened me to look deeper within myself and focus on that inward voice, and not on the foot-fall echoing off the walls of this concrete cave. ❖

“The Gate, The Wire, The World”

by Jesse Powell

Through the gate
 over the wire that slashes
 is an old world
 where I used to live.

TV makes me think
 that world still exists, and it's largely unchanged,
 accessible to people like me
 but I'm now more like my cellies than my friends in the old world.

Truthfully, that lucky old world
 will never be available to me – not even a little –
 because I've been in here now
 because I've existed behind the gate, under the wire.

The metal desk, the plastic chairs, the clear plastic-encased bear trimmer
 symbolize my new world, the one where I'll always belong
 just as 5:15 dinners and 9:15 count
 will never not click in my brain, even when I'm “free.”

That I cannot go home kills me
 death by thousands of days
 empty of meaning, I search for a purpose,
 but I'm lost in a graveyard of lost souls.

Trust me, I know I made this mess
 most of us are damn well aware of that in here,
 and the stripping of our privacy, dignity, humanity, our choices
 would not let us forget, even if we weren't too tired to try.

Tenderness, sensitivity, and gentleness cut up at the gate, then ground inside the walls
 sharp shards created by the pieces of our hearts, dams hastily and poorly erected
 so we can hold back the floods
 threatening to spill forth from us.

Trust is a truncheon
wielded against your former homies
you're mad at for cheating at cards, owing you scrip, stealing some noodles,
or no reason at all.

Tattered shreds of self-worth
flutter in the whistling wind
while your compromises and survival-centered choices
rob your spirit to pay for a honey bun you got on credit last week.

Tyrants in dark blue rule over us
overshadowing the few who actually look at us
as human fucking beings
while our humanity breaks down further and further
leaving a brittle, emasculated, felon-stamped shell,
that our mamas, our dads, our wives, our kids
get to try and piece back together once we
make it back through
the wire
the gate
to the new world.

two by Susie Gharib

“On the Way to Jerusalem”

[Dedicated to the massacred children of Gaza]

On the way to Jerusalem,
you'll find on both sides of the road
lamps of gold,
invisible to foes,
whose flames are lit by the blood
of massacred children
who now wear snow-white robes,
fluttering in the sky,
forming canopies that shield
the Holy Sepulchre and Al-Aqsa Mosque
from fiery gall.

On the way to Jerusalem
you are bound to be buoyed
by the chants of massacred children,
inaudible to foes,
heralding marches to the Dome of the Rock
to uproot myriads of weeds and thorns,
to kiss the dust that still flows
from the feet of every prophet
who had trodden on this holy soil.

“Icons”

They marvel at the number of icons present in my bedroom,
but they know I am not the fanatically religious
or even practising type.

Eight is the total number,
in addition to a picture of the interior
of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

My favorite one is the Last Supper
with its protruding figures.
It has sat on this wall for years
and its aura has not dimmed in the least.
The bread in his hand is what I would like to taste.
The sense of companionship that prevails
is unparalleled in my own personal and reading history.
Judas must have been demented to betray him.
I am intrigued by the sparseness of the table
and the eager faces that believe in equality.
I am not a socialist by the way
and I hate every –ism that exists.
It is not his miraculous feats,
walking upon water and becalming storms,
that appeal to me most;
it is his Humility.

As for that of John the Baptist,
it is his association with water
and its ritualistic cleansing.

This leaves me with the Virgin
whose appeal is her ability
to conceive without being impregnated.
She is usually depicted with downcast eyes,
but I believe her to be the strongest woman
who ever existed.
Very few people know that real strength
is very far from being muscular.

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.

Dream: I am kept prisoner in a windowless home by a tyrannical tyrannosaurus. It takes pleasure in chasing me around the rooms, up and down stairs and cruelly leaves the door open only to run me down when I try and escape. It relentlessly mocks me with cheap insults: "We were so much better without you." "My brain is bigger than yours." "We ruled the world for 200 times longer than you."

Maxwell C. - cyberspace

Contributors:

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Scott D. Culp is in Chino, CA.

Jesse Powell is in Moose Lake, MN.

Dr. Susie Gharib, a Syrian university lecturer, is the author of *To Dance on the Ugly* (a collection of English poetry) and *Classical Adaptations*, three film scripts adapted from D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Her poetry, fiction, and literary essays have appeared in numerous journals and magazines.

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insight, and so much more than I'm probably noseblind to. Now, I don't have to explain the concept of "life has choices" because who has the time (or patience frankly) but sometimes it's cathartic to have this type of non-maniacal Charlie Kelly 'Pepe Silvia—everything's connected' type of moment.

So, take the road less traveled, or take whatever road you want to take.

Or, don't even take a road at all! Trek through the woods and find something completely new. The "Frostian" ideology as my dad calls it.

Here are a few tips I'd like to leave you with as we go into this new year:

Don't forget to stop and ask yourself, "Who am I doing this for?"

Don't attribute to malice what can be attributed to ignorance— there is a difference.

Say please and thank you, be kind; just because you might be turning a new leaf doesn't mean you have to turn into an asshole (there we go again with the have to's!)

And breathe. Take your time if you can. Enjoy the day. Can we bring back waving? I like waving at people just for fun.

Do things that are just for fun.

Sometimes there's not enough fun.

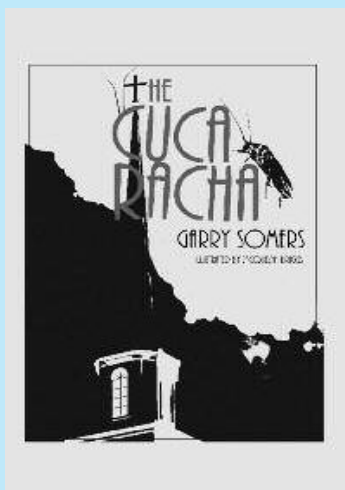
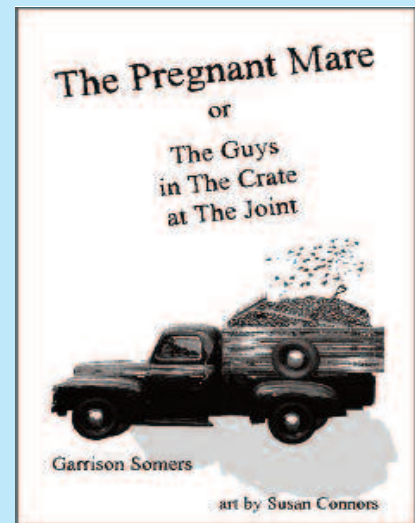
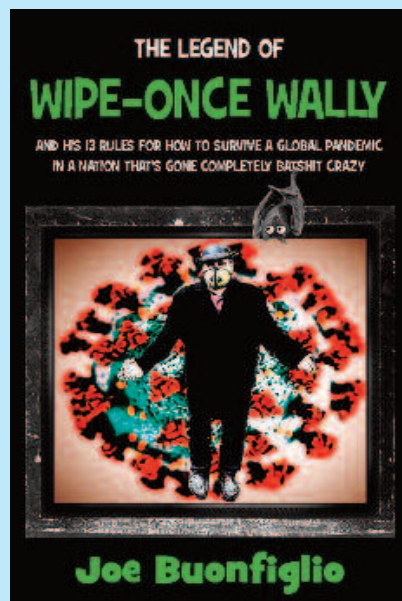
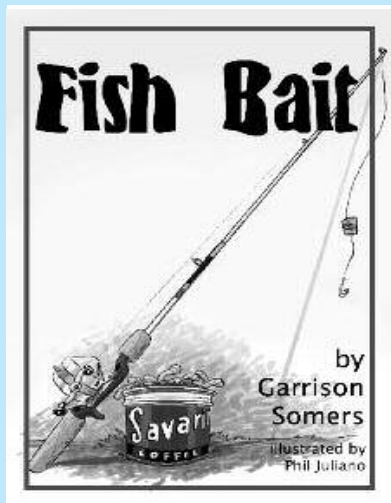
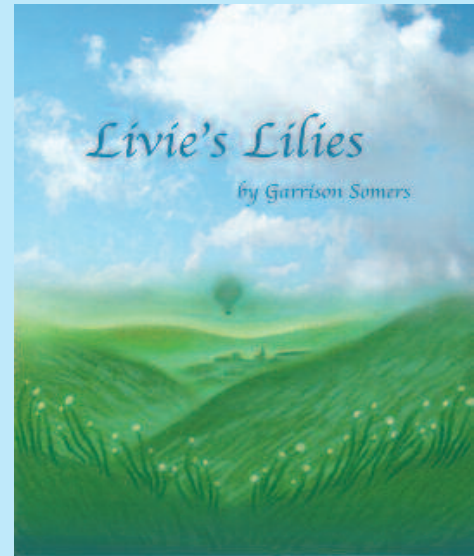
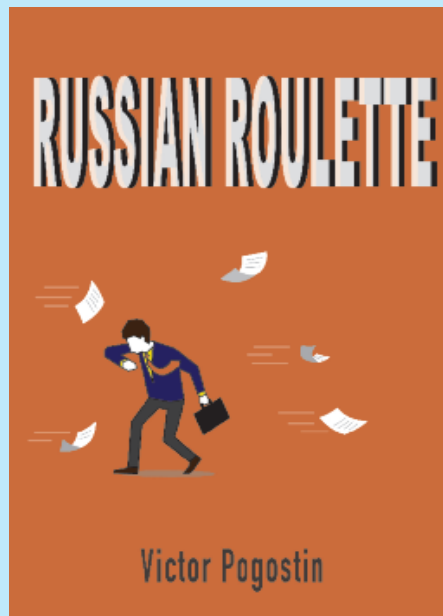
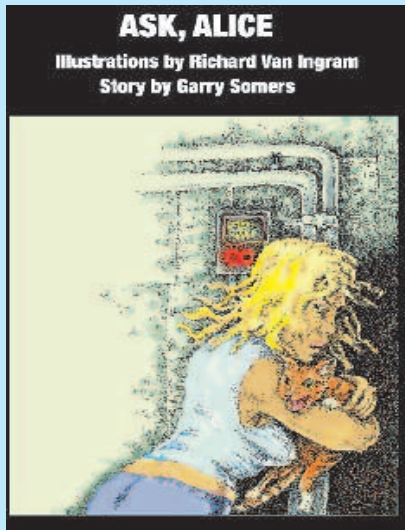
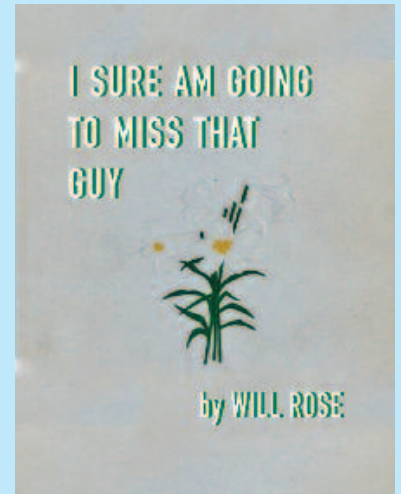
Happy New Year.

P.S. Thanks Ms. Tompkins, wherever you are

Olivia - Guest Editor



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