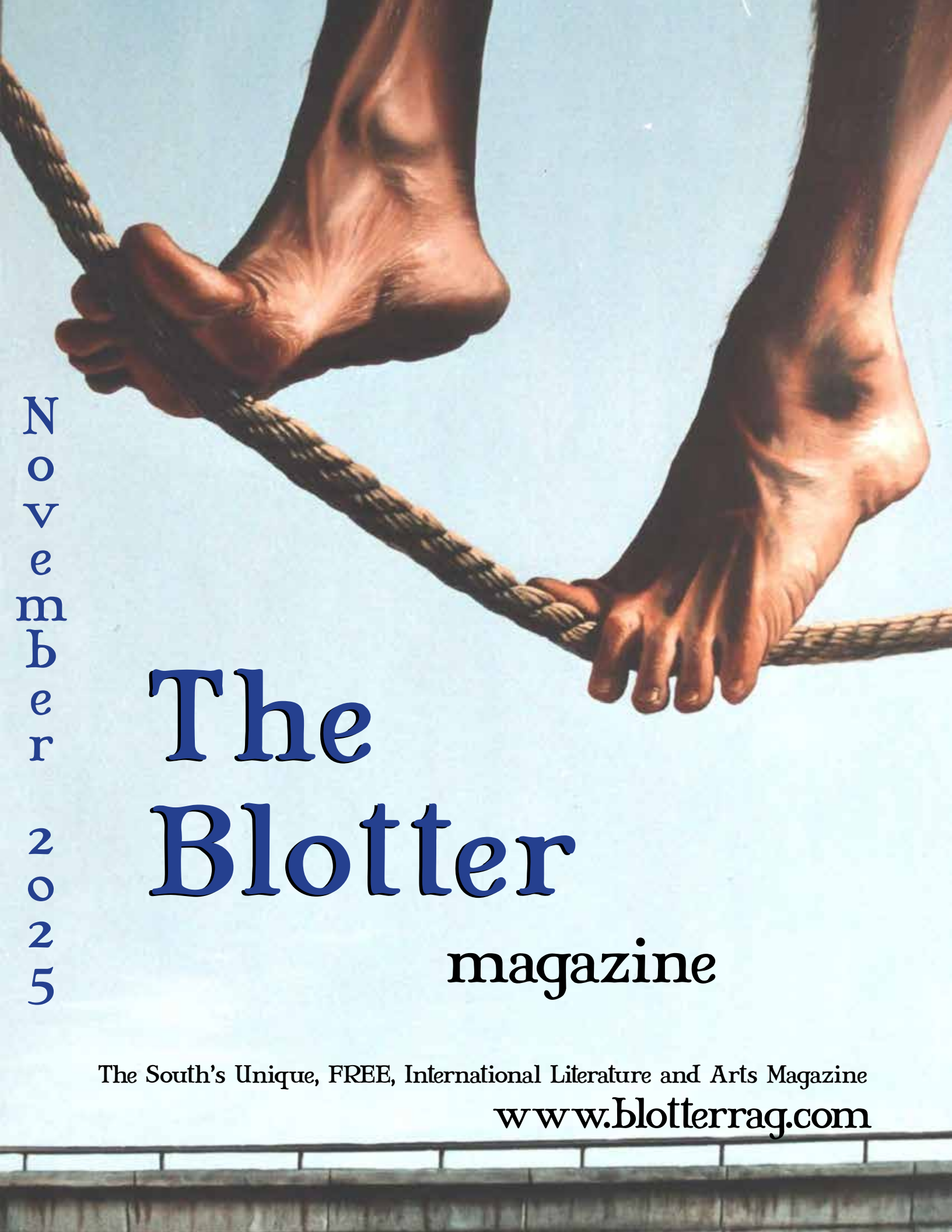




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The Blotter

magazine

The South's Unique, FREE, International Literature and Arts Magazine

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The Blotter

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"November Tidings"

I don't know about you, but I work in a busy part of my house. It's nice, but busy. I have had to learn to keep focused or never complete anything because of the very interesting things passing by my window on one side of my desk or the doorway on the other side. Outside, people walking their dogs – all kinds of dogs! – or the fellow down the street who likes to run his leaf blower. A lot. Spring, summer or fall, there he goes. Up and down the street, moving leaves and grass clippings and sometimes just pushing dust around like a khamsin in the Egyptian desert. I think it may be therapy. Or his love language. Either way, it gets him out of the house. Across the way, the next-door neighbors are having a new roof put on. (The hammers sound like someone typing very, very slowly. Working on a difficult passage, hoping that it's just a factor of wordsmithing and not the onset of actual writers' block.) On the other hand, how much fun must it be to be so young that standing forty or fifty feet off the ground without a net or parachute seems like a good idea? Like a grand adventure?

Another neighbor has something being delivered in a brown cardboard box. Is it just me or is it a cultural sea-change that we really like having our stuff delivered to us instead of going out and shopping because it turns each delivery into a sort of merry holiday with presents? What did I get? Oh, goody, the special toothpaste I ordered yesterday!

There's a noise in the kitchen: no great mystery. The blender is grinding out this morning's breakfast smoothie. Ice, orange juice, yoghurt and kale, tempered with cinnamon. Would I like a glass? I guess so. It sounds worse than it is, which is a left-handed compliment at best, and coincidentally something that I've occasionally heard after reading a poem of mine aloud. Beneath the blender's racket is talking, because it would seem you can create a smoothie while being on a Zoom conference call, muting and un-muting yourself in a sort of sport. Something like pickleball, I expect.

I have been in this office for ten years. No, eleven. A fortress of nothing like solitude. There are two chairs in the room, one at the desk, and one in the corner in case I have a hankering to get up and go over there and sit down. Or if you visit, there's a place to relax while I just finish this sentence I'm working on. You can look at all the pictures I have on the wall, different pieces of art or photos or drawings.

From this desk – well not this actual desk...it's new and replaces an old dining-room table I used as a desk – I've read a thousand stories, probably more, and many poems and essays. I've written six novels, started a half-dozen more with varying levels of quality and completion. A hundred or so poems. Lots of stories. I have bookshelves behind me, to the left and right of me, half-a-league onward. They are full of books I've read and many books I'm going to read, I promise. I don't know about you, but I have nowhere near enough books.

Also, there's an aquarium on one shelf, with two gold sword-tails in it and they seem happy enough. It's difficult to tell with fish. My younger daughter thinks the tank should be larger. So do I. And in a small window behind me there are a handful of potted plants – African violets. They were doing very well but have some kind of botanical problem I cannot figure out. It says here on the care page that I'm either watering them too much or not enough. Thank you. That's very helpful.

There are two more lamps in the office now than there used to be, so this winter will be less...depressing. Maybe. And I have a smart-speaker to play classical radio from New York, like I'm back in the nineteen-seventies. Yes, that's a long time ago, but nothing about Mahler has changed since then, other than a growing respect for his compositions. I've changed a lot. I wear cleaner shoes and don't enjoy going out in the cold to play as much as I did way back then. When I see young men outside wearing shorts in the middle of winter I am not impressed with their bravery as much as I am convinced of their nit-wittery.

I wonder what I will have for lunch. I should have lunch. The midday meal is kind of a mystery wrapped in a conundrum. If you get up early, say 7:00, midday is logically and socially normed at somewhere around noon. But if you are like me, there is no standard wake-up call, like a bugle or alarm clock or pet hound that needs to be let out for walks. I sometimes get up a good while after the sunrise breaks through the window and glares at me with its potent eye. 8:30, even 9 o'clock. For shame, my mom would say. (Don't tell her.) You're wasting the day away. It is funny how sleep is seen as waste. I get some of my best ideas when I'm half asleep, and certainly all of my best rest. So who knows when the middle of the day will designate itself? Some might even say we're out of control. Best to eat right now.

Garry Somers - (mermaidblotter@gmail.com)

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

not my name, ame, ame

“You Really Don’t Want to Know”

by Gary D. Grossman

For forty years my family has lived in an oak-tree lined, middle-class, neighborhood in Athens, Georgia. The houses on Highland Avenue range from post-World War Two, single family red brick homes, to new necropoli—McMansions constructed over the graves of small Depression-era homes. Our asbestos clapboard house was fabricated in 1941 and was the second home built on the street. Across the street lay the oldest house, a typical 2-bedroom, red brick Georgia Piedmont home, which looks out over a shallow crick edged with large, old trees—yellow poplar, white and red oak and mockernut hickories. We are less than 1.5 miles from a busy, student-filled downtown, but on a quiet, sunny day we inhale soul-restoring air from our own little copse of oaks and pines.

Kitty-corner from our home and to the left of the oldest house, lies a streamlined, stucco and steel modernist house designed and built in the early 60’s by an architect and his wife. This house, whose street-side view only shows one story, was built into the sloping hillside, and has a basement-level story that views the crick and glen. The light entering this window is literally forest green—reflecting off the adjacent leaf-filled slope. As originally constructed, this house was hidden by a very un-Southern, cement privacy wall, although given its modernist style and high-seated exterior windows, not much could be seen anyway. Our friends would visit and sarcastically exclaim “We didn’t know double-wides were allowed on Highland Avenue.”

I don’t know what deranged wraiths were released by construction of this atyp-

ical house, but they laid down very bad juju—I mean spontaneous combustion, dead possum in the attic smell juju, clangs and bangs in the night, juju, and our 84 year old neighbor told us that the architect and his wife divorced shortly after the house was finished. The bad hoodoo continued to torment later owners, with the next three couples all divorcing: a philosophy professor and his wife, an agronomy professor and his ecology PhD student wife, and the subject of my story, a physical therapist named Leah, and her physical therapist husband.

Leah ended up with the house, and thus began a great friendship between her and myself, my wife, and our two daughters. It is most apt to describe Leah as a willowy, misplaced flower child of the 60’s. In her previous incarnation I’m sure she lived in a commune and was gently chided by her fellow communards for wearing too much patchouli oil. But digging deep to plumb my own residue of ancient hippiedom, I found this refreshing rather than unusual.

Leah was a reliable, friendly, and caring neighbor, and when I developed a bad case of carpal tunnel syndrome from 25 years of writing scientific papers, she volunteered to give my arms and shoulders, deep neuromuscular massages weekly. Her strong hands smelled slightly of rose-scented massage cream and I could hear my connective tissues crackling while muscles were released by her expert hands. Free medical care—who could complain?

Like many childless adults, Leah had her furbabies, two cats—a docile orange-striped female and an assertive, grey tabby male weighing slightly over 17 pounds. This was

Winston, a nutted male, and despite his size, and anatomical losses, he was active but not overly aggressive; he didn't bite or scratch, he was just a big ole boy who could shoulder his way to the front of the line.

Once or twice a year Leah would go visit family in New York or DC and of course, we would take care of her cat-children. This wasn't an odious task; the cats were not picky eaters and were easily satisfied by a standard mixture of dry and canned cat food. But they were house cats, and in Leah's absence sans parental control, they sometimes schemed their way into trouble. With their preternaturally acute hearing, they knew exactly when I was turning the key in the lock and would lurk just behind the door, as if waiting for the starting pistol in a foot race. Their break-outs only were prevented by opening the door slightly, and then quickly blocking the opening with my extended foot and leg. After a few days, Winston tumbled to my tactics and actually leapt to freedom by hurdling my outstretched right leg and size eleven running shoe. I could hear leaves crunching under his bounding form as he headed towards the stream below.

Normally this would not have been a problem—Winston occasionally went walk-about when Leah was home, but would return to her stoop after several hours of romping through the neighborhood. Today was an iron-grey 42 degree day in November and I expected his quick return home—instead, he dawdled outside.

Recently, our neighbors had become angered by an irresponsible dog owner living several blocks to the east of our street. This owner allowed his three, large and aggressive dogs—German Shepard, Samoyed, and Chow mix, to freely roam the neighborhood. Despite multiple complaints to the police, no action was taken despite our town's strict leash law. The dogs eventually began to terrorize neighborhood pedestrians

and runners, and even bit a woman in her 70's. Residents began taking matters into their own hands, carrying baseball bats and wooden canes to ward off potential attacks.

After Winston's escape I walked across the street to our house; continuously searching Leah's stoop from between the white shuttered windows of our dining room. Suddenly, I heard high-pitched cat screams, accompanied by excited, throaty barks from our front lawn, and rushing outside, I found Winston in the jaws of the law-breaker's Shepherd. The blood left my face as I exhaled a quick "holy shit," given that bad juju had now leapt the street. I charged the dog; he dropped Winston, and I ran back inside for a bath towel to staunch his bleeding wounds and comfort the stricken cat. The scene was grisly with three growling dogs in attack posture, eyeing me from a distance of about 10 feet. As I walked back to our front door, cat in arms, Winston's breathing ceased. I laid him, towel-wrapped and all, on the floor of the coolest place in our house—our red clay basement.

I knew that a call to Leah was necessary, so I dialed her cell, and voice rising in anxiety, told her about Winston. She began sobbing, and I imagined her face twisted in pain. Tears fell across my cheeks, as I told her how desperately sorry I was for breaking her trust. Leah said she would call in a day or so, after she had thought about "next steps". She phoned the following day and said she wanted to have a funeral for Winston, a closure rite for both her and the cat—something spiritual, because she had not been there when Winston passed. She spoke with friends who agreed to make a cat casket, but my first thought was "how do I preserve Winston for ten days until Lisa's back on Highland Avenue?"

Being a professor of ecology, I soon realized that I had ample space for Winston in my lab freezer. I quickly drove to campus, Winston secured, matted fur and all, in

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his towel on the floor of my Volvo wagon, for a short stay in my freezer. Opening the freezer door, steam fled my lips as I exhaled deeply, gently placed Winston on the second shelf, closed the freezer door, and returned home. In a matter of hours Winston was frozen in the same running posture he was in when he tried to outrace the dog pack. The coppery smell of cat blood lingered in the Volvo as I drove home.

It had been an average autumn in Athens and the hardwoods still were graced with Klimt-palette, leaves: salmon maples, pumpkin-colored hickories, and maroon oaks. Most, however, lay prone on the ground, and the rich earthy smell of decaying oak leaves wafted through the air. Leah returned and a week later, crossed the street to our house holding a turquoise casket, bejeweled with large green, red, and amber crystals.

I coughed to suppress my reaction because the casket was clearly for a cat of no more than seven or eight pounds, an animal half the size of Winston. The big, neutered male was never going to fit inside. Leah mentioned she wanted to see Winston's corpse but I said "that's not really a good idea," and she acquiesced. We were like that; we held each other's trust.

As I walked back inside with the casket, my main thought was "how the fuck am I going to get Winston into this box."

Two days later, Leah knocked on our front door, announcing that she and her friends had planned the burial for next weekend—"could I have Winston prepared by then." I said "sure," completely unaware of the Polar Vortex that was about to turn our town into an icicle—daytime highs now in the twenties. The salmon, pumpkin orange, and golden leaves turned dull brown overnight and dropped almost in unison—the ground now carpeted with a hazardous layer of frozen leaves. And though I am one of those annoying folks who rarely catches

even a cold, I managed to pick up a severe case of respiratory flu on the Thursday before the funeral.

It was now Friday, I was being boiled alive with a temperature of 102 degrees—my mental and physical resources severely taxed by both the virus and the strategy required for Winston's "coffin downsizing". I was wearing my "comfort suit", gray sweatpants and an oversized olive-green sweatshirt, and drove to the lab to get Winston. Pulled from the freezer, Winston's towel-wrapped corpse weighed as much as a gravestone-sized chunk of Georgia granite. My hopes were sinking like a leaky canoe, as I carried him to my steel-gray Volvo station wagon. With the ground covered by icy leaves, walking safely was a slow proposition and I trod carefully over the glass-like ground as I transferred Winston from my car to our backyard wooden picnic table.

I realized that any plan would require "defrosting" the cat and peeling off the frozen towel, but how to accomplish this? Thinking of frozen chicken, I decided to soak Winston in water for several hours, filled a brown 35 gallon garbage can with water, and gently plopped him in. I returned to the warmth inside, my wife having thoughtfully built a fire, then fell asleep for two hours, and reemerged, only to find Winston still frozen. Somehow my fevered brain had ignored the fact that the air temperature was still below freezing and the water actually was as cold, or even colder, than the frozen cat. I quickly placed Winston on our green-painted picnic table and gently removed the bloody towel from his body.

At this juncture, two salient facts must be resurrected. First, I'm fevered and not exactly functioning like a candidate for MENSA. Second, the casket is big enough to hold Winston's body, but not his extended frozen legs. I also fear that Leah will notice what I'm doing in the back yard, if she just

happens to glance towards the gap between a bank of rhododendrons and a now leafless hydrangea, in our side yard. And Winston, still frozen, remains atop our picnic table. Oh, did I mention that in removing the cat from the garbage can, I managed to get 35 degree water all over my comfy sweat pants, and now was gyrating like a pole-dancer with overdue rent.

I paused to take in the scene: frozen cat and coffin. I realized Winston's legs would need to be removed before he would fit in the casket. Broken off, I could lay them atop his corpse and everything would be copacetic. As I mentioned, I work out regularly, so my first thought was "the legs are frozen, I can easily break them off by hand, I mean this is only a 17 pound dead cat". Clutching the still rigid corpse to my chest, my sweat-shirt absorbing liquefied blood and clumps of wet cat hair, I repeatedly yanked down on a forelimb but couldn't manage to break it off. I tried hind-limbs as well, to no avail, even though my strength was augmented by the rank smell of old wet cat fur. "Not working, not working at all."

I remembered that I had a 15 pound sledge hammer in the garage, which even the movies portray as the perfect tool for leg-breaking. I wistfully moved Winston from the table to the ground, and then hoisted the blue fiberglass handle of the sledge to a seventy-five degree angle from my right side. Like Babe Ruth swinging for the fences, I bashed the cat's foreleg at the shoulder, and then cried "oh crap" as Winston was slap-shot like a hockey puck across 20 feet of icy leaves, through the gap between rhododendron and hydrangea, and onto my front lawn. For about eighteen seconds, the time it took me to prudently, but swiftly, walk from back to front, Winston's frozen corpse was clearly visible to anyone near the street. Fortunately, neither Leah nor anyone else saw me scoop him up—my back shielding the cat-view from her house

and my quick steps to return him to our back yard.

But more purposeful applications of the sledge led to success, and after securing the body, I was able to remove the deceased cat's legs with minimal fuss. By this time, despite the frigid air, those devilish influenza bugs had me sweating and panting as if I had run four miles in August heat. Trying to keep it together until the job was complete, I gently folded Winston's body and legs into the coffin, closed the lid, went inside for two more acetaminophen capsules, and a quick rest on the bathroom floor (remember that cat hair and blood).

Arising an hour later, I realized that one problem still remained. How could I make sure that no one would be able to open the casket and find Winston's dismembered body? The casket maker thoughtfully had provided six long wood screws to secure the coffin lid, so I went out to the garage to find my most powerful electric drill, inserted a screw driver bit and screwed the lid down tight as a surf clam in exposed sand. Using the strength remaining in my flu-stricken body, and the complete horsepower of the drill, I stripped the six screw-heads one by one, until Houdini himself couldn't have opened that casket.

I was both done and finished.

My final task was to return Winston and the coffin to Leah across the street, so I changed into clean sweats, returned to our icy back yard, and grabbed the casket. As I cradled the cat-coffin in my arms I suddenly felt icy water run down my left leg, and realized that the coffin bottom wasn't water tight and that Winston had begun to defrost. Completely exhausted, I crossed the street, coffin in arms, rang Leah's doorbell and handed Winston over. She looked down at the dark wet blotch on my sweatpants and said "What's that?" I replied, "you really don't want to know." ❖

“Staying Alive”

by Dan Delehant

Staying Alive:

Mega hit by the Bee Gees back in the 20th Century’s “Disco” Era. And by far the #1 song of the late 21st Century and beyond.



It has always been assumed that the discoveries of science would move mankind into the future via more and more sophisticated technologic advancements so that eventually humans would live wondrous lives surrounded by incredible machines that such would seem much like magic to us today.

It has been said that the Age of Miracles is over and what sent it into eclipse was science. Once the strict methodologies of science took foothold the so called miracles of the religious/superstitious age were relegated back into the realm of fables and fairy tales. But science induced its own Age of Miracles. Miracles that required not to employ metaphysics at all, but rather genera-

tions of stringent study, relentless research, and trial and error to the limits of human capabilities.

Change has always come at humans like lightning out of a cloudless sky. In prehistoric times, untold millennia went by with the nascent humans living via primitive hunting and gathering. Roving bands of hominids with shockingly big brains and a consciousness heretofore unknown to the four billion year old planet that for most of that time teemed with unconscious life of one sort or another. These ultra-conscious bipedal opportunists, through much assumed struggle, survived and then thrived. In time, like the proverbial lightning out of the clear blue sky they discovered fire. In an unimagined short time, the Homo sapiens rose to the pinnacle of survival success. But they were not done. Indeed, they were just getting started.

In time, lightning again came out of a clear sky and the Age of Agriculture was born. Everything changed for the big brained omnivorous wanderers with their previously unheard of, well developed speech. Figuratively overnight, because of the advent of farming, centers of population began to form. No longer was it necessary to roam to find food and the bipedal, risen quasi apes with massive brains and burgeoning consciousness began to centralize themselves. It might even be said that civilization had begun.

More millennia transpired before the lightning struck again—out of nowhere, and un-

predicted, came the Industrial Revolution. The advent of industry and all it entailed required even a tighter centralization of populations. Mechanical miracles abounded, the age of engines arrived and with it came all manner of sooty baggage. But the Homo Sapiens, super apes persevered and the planet buzzed as never before. Mighty cities arose, populations exploded. World Wars were fought and the humans died in numbers untold and difficult to believe, but despite those decimating horrors they proliferated and thrived as never before. But the lightning out of the cloudless sky was coming now with a frequency previously unknown. One fine clear blue day, not all that long after the last thunder bolt, came another.

The Age of Technology revamped the human world almost overnight. The advent of the computer, and the ubiquitous cellphone, and their know-it-all cousin, the internet, conquered the planet's diverse populations and changed everything. The vast earth was suddenly insanely smaller. Nearly the entirety of humanity was "connected." As the 21st Century raced on, the humans set themselves off exploring and inhabiting their moon and sort-of-nearby, Mars. The human race seemed poised on the precipice of great things and explorations and habitations only hinted at in the past. But it was not to be, for another bolt of lightning out of that fateful clear blue sky—it came to be called the ETM —“The Age of the Embryonic/Telemeric Miracle.”

The ETM application was insanely simplistic—a single injection administered at the chosen arbitrary age, usually 25, granted one ostensibly eternal life! The biologics of the human body and brain became self-re-

pairing and propagating. All one needed to do is not get killed and one would live on figuratively, and perhaps literally, forever. In the year 2165 all who allowed themselves to be inoculated back in 2083 were still alive and unchanged physically from the day of their inoculation. The following years saw fewer and fewer babies born. For one thing, a side effect of the inoculation was it hampered human reproduction inasmuch as females chose not to put their lives at risk via pregnancy. Artificial birth processes were popular for a short time but the fear of impending over-population problems soon gave surcease to all manner of birthing. The population soon became steady and, save for the occasional rare accidental supremely tragic death, there were some twenty billion ETM undying humans on the planet earth.

The Zealots, as they came to be called, refused the inoculations and most died, per usual, between seventy and ninety years. The Zealots were religious in nature and thought their deaths were but necessary requirements to enter a metaphysical paradise. As the decades wore on, however, these Zealots dwindled drastically in numbers. Most sooner or later chose a sure thing eternity in the here and now over taking a roulette-like chance on some God's or religion's promised, but unproven afterlife. Death bed de-conversions were not unusual. A scientific version of “Extreme Unction” was performed with regularity. Dying, older individuals, former Zealots, with their penultimate breaths breathed out the words, “Quick! Give me the shot!”

So all the world's populations were not just composed of perpetually 25 year olds—there was a small contingent of immortal senior citizens, most were reformed or “saved” Zealots.

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The vanguard human populations on the moon and Mars soon returned to the safer confines of earth. Within a generation, the human efforts to go beyond their home planet lost impetus and those dangerous, extra-earth strongholds were abandoned. Once inoculated, one had only one objective—do not endanger yourselves. Do not get killed! Stay alive! Airplane travel, train travel, even automobile travel fell off to nothing. Automobiles still existed, but all were equipped with governors that restricted speeds to under 10 MPH. Factories closed, for they were threats to human safety. Wars became impossible. All the weapons of destruction were deactivated and destroyed. Anything that could take a life was canceled or dismantled. Any human or animal that posed a threat to human life was swiftly eliminated. The once bustling planet, in a matter of a few decades, shut itself down. Even riding a horse was considered an insane risk. Muscle powered bicycles and tricycles became the most used method of transportation. Technology soon dwindled and all but disappeared inasmuch as manufacturing ceased. The phones and the internet went dead. The old earth got pre-tech wide again. The planet had changed—shut itself down in the name of the old Bee Gee's Disco song, Staying Alive.

The effects of the ETM injection and the fear of childbirth complications sounded the death knell for any new generation of humans. There were rumors that somewhere people were working on protective human carapaces, but thus far it had come to nothing. For sustenance, most of the population were returning to farming—with hand implements. Machines, fuels, and etcetera were growing rare, besides, they seemed, and were, too dangerous. No one wished to take unnecessary risks. Why take any chance?

Within the span of a couple of generations the age of agriculture had returned. The world's humans and their societies and civilization itself, had regressed. Then, after but a century of deathlessness, the planet was populated with only humans of peaceful intent. There were no more Cains on the planet, only Abels. Peace had finally come to the earth's oft-tormented preeminent species. The world, the people of earth, had changed. The counter-culture, peace and love hippies of the ancient 1960s would have beamed with "We told you we could do it."



*State of the Art Vehicle Circa 2250
(Even 2-wheeled bicycles soon were deemed too dangerous.)*

Peace had finally come to the long-beleaguered peoples of the blue planet. They achieved tranquility among themselves without gods, without prayer, but rather by a mere repairing and sustaining serum delivered via a needle's single puncture. The only question now is—how long, for centuries, for millennia, could they so live? Was personal existence nature's strongest objective or would the cessation of reproduction

cause nature to rise up and smite the undying for violating its ancient dictum—to reproduce? Would time reawaken the ancient seminal genes of aggression and wreak havoc upon the now peaceful planet and its now gentle populations? Only time itself would tell and the old earth still had eons of time left to its disposal. One has to doubt that the fateful clear blue sky shall cease from hurling lightning down upon the now tranquil human tillers and reapers. I mean, it is well remembered that the Disco era was short-lived.

The sky had never been bluer and clearer. Centuries of zero carbon emissions had cleansed the firmament. The ostensibly immortal lungs of Homo sapiens forgot the noxious fumes of the past. War was but a vague item of history, even anger and enmity of any degree grew rare. A millennium of such transpired. Each human's memory required a reset every century or so, but that was an easy price to meet for everlastingness. The old orb rolled on, bluer and greener than ever. But the clear sky was not done with cloudless lightning.

It was during the two week-long Winter Solstice Holiday in the year 3316 that the lightning came again out of the crystal clear blue sky. The peaceful peoples of earth were no match for the alien space wayfarers for they had lost the very cerebral instrument that had brought them down from the trees and out of the savannah-lands of old Africa so very long ago. The ostensibly immortal gentle tillers of the earth had abandoned aggression. For centuries human beings prayed for world peace and when it finally came upon them it cost them their very existence. After a horrific savaging, the gentle, peace-loving, “deathless” humans were gone, eradicated forever. A new race had arrived. A space faring population that never re-

nounced the instrument that garnered them their ascendancy. The new conquerors of earth had not forsaken their greatest asset. In fact, they had developed AGGRESSION to such a degree that it seemed as magic to the doomed original children of earth. ❖

"A Big White House Like My Uncle's"

by Holly Guran

Today my feet lead me down
the rutted lane where the river's wide—
a silver sheen that sighs.

Across the water's breadth, a house
still white, or white again despite its years,
a history the river can't contain.

Nostalgia coats that past,
avoids the sight of shacks, far behind,
where the hired folks stayed.

Families came north to pick the apples
my uncle grew. Once a year
invited for a swim in his pool, a barbecue.

When Leroy and his wife
asked me and my sister in, the shack was hot
from burning kerosene,

thin walls lined with newsprint,
no faucet in the small room.
A bucket though, out back a privy.

"It smells in here," my spontaneous sister
had to say. Embarrassed for both of us
and old enough to feel ashamed

my uncle's workers had to live this way,
I still smell the fumes
that made me sick that day.

"Reminders"

by Terry Trowbridge

Unsure of what yellow flower species
you pointed at yesterday
 (the flowers that made you laugh)
 (the flowers we should have put in your hair)
I will settle for just leaving my dandelion lawn alone
forever
in remembrance of our date.

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 cannot climb the hill back up to the parking lot. I try, but the slope is covered with tiny bits of gravel and is steep, and my feet slip out from beneath me, so that my hands are scraping on the ground. I brush them off, the gravel and sand sticks to the sweat on my palms. It doesn't hurt, like it might if I were awake, (although I am not aware until I wake that I am asleep.) The sun is behind me, but still I don't look up the hill to see how far I must climb. There is nothing to grab on to – roots, branches, larger stones imbedded in the ground. I don't know what is further down the hill, maybe trees, maybe a stream. If it's there, its noise doesn't reach up here. Should I stop trying to climb and go down to the bottom? If I get there, will I be able to find my way out? Have I already done this, and reached this point and can go up no further? It is quite the conundrum.

Gregg - cyberspace

“Read It Or Don’t”

book reviews by Mary Fallon

Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen

I decide to read this book because it’s now a musical, and it’s coming to my performing arts center next season. I had seen the movie, and did not like it because the actors they chose to play the key parts did not match what I had created in my head. I’ll be interested to see how the musical creates the animals and the circus and if the actors match the characters in my head.

It turns out I read Elephants in 2008 and 2010 and coded both reads as “YES” to re-read and to recommend. I will add the 2025 reading to that list. It’s a story set in the 1930’s when everyone was poor and good liquor was tough to get. One of the characters is sickened by a tainted batch of home-made booze. The love interest and heroine is beaten by her rich and powerful husband. The main character is an almost qualified vet, and his love for animals keeps all the circus animals thriving. It’s a good representation of the hard times of being a traveling show, of having no cash, of being in love with someone you cannot be with. All sorts of stories with all sorts of characters.

I had forgotten the setting to tell us all of these stories: an aging man in a nursing home. And all of a sudden his life changes when – yes – the circus comes to town.

Read it.

Shadow Divers by Robert Kurson

I don’t usually read non-fiction. I like a story rather than facts and figures and dates. Although this book felt a little like an assigned textbook reading, the true life tale kept me interested.

A December 25th New Yorker article led me to Shadow Divers. Jon Finkel, a self-proclaimed meathead, works out in his garage and has his own newsletter “Book & Biceps”. He recommends this book to fellow gym rats.

The true story, very carefully researched by Robert Kurson, is about two deep sea divers (John Chatterton and Richie Kohler) who discover a German U-Boat off the Jersey shore. No one seems to know which submarine it is – both the US and Germany claiming no knowledge.

One part of the book that is fascinating is how dangerous and difficult it is to dive to 230 feet. They describe in detail the type of air to use, how to find the wreck again and again and how to decompress, search, look for clues. I learned a lot about diving and began to think all deep sea divers are either crazy or brave.

The other part of the book is the research the main characters did in Navy Archives and German records.

We come to learn not all history is accurate and that human error or intervention distorts the records.

John and Richie began to care about the men in the sub, where they came from and how they ended up in Jersey. The dive becomes more and more about the sailors then the treasure. There are photos of the few artifacts from the ship, but also ones of the fateful crew.

If you are a gym rat or not, the story is compelling.

Read it.

CONTRIBUTORS

Gary Grossman, Professor Emeritus of Animal Ecology, University of Georgia, has poems, short fiction and essays in over 65 literary reviews. He doesn't enter contests but his work has been nominated for awards - no wins yet though, so meh. Gary enjoys running, music, fishing, and gardening. His poetry books *Lyrical Years* (2023, Kelsay), *What I Meant to Say Was...* (2023, Impspired) and *Objects in Mirror May Be Closer Than They Appear* (2025, Arroyo Seco), and graphic memoir *My Life in Fish—One Scientist's Journey...* (2023, Impspired) all are available from the author or Amazon. Website: <https://www.garygrossman.net/>

Dan Delehant writes, "I have had stories appear in *Twisted Endings Magazine*, *Liquid Imagination Magazine*, and others. I also have stories coming out in late July and early August of this year in *Dear Booze Online Magazine*. What has always astounded me about human life is that for all our collective insight and study it seems no one is ever insightful enough to correctly predict the future. My rendition is probably erroneous, but again - 'It could happen.'"

Holly Guran is author of *Now Before and Ever* (Kelsay Books), *Twilight Chorus*, *River of Bones* and two chapbooks. Selections from narrative poems, based on a 19th century correspondence between a mill girl and the editor she married, have been performed in Boston and at the Lowell National Park.

Canadian researcher **Terry Trowbridge's** poems have appeared in *The New Quarterly*, *Carousel*, *subTerrain*, *paperplates*, *Dalhousie Review*, *untethered*, *Nashwaak Review*, *Orbis*, *Snakeskin Poetry*, *American Mathematical Monthly*, *M58*, *CV2*, *Brittle Star*, *Lascaux Review*, *Carmina*, *Progenitor*, *Muleskinner*, *Sulphur*, *Northridge Review*, *Ex-Puritan*, *Perceptions*, *Granfalloon*, *Literary Hatchet*, *Calliope*, *New Note*, *Confetti*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, and more. He is grateful to the Ontario Arts Council for grant funding during the polycrisis.

Mary Fallon is from Buffalo, New York and is a voracious (and opinionated) reader. Her mother, Edna, got the wagon out every week and dragged the Fallon children to the local library. It became an addiction for all 4 siblings. In the 80's Mary was living at home and made the mistake of leaving her partially read book on the kitchen table when she went to work. When Mary returned from her day, Edna was almost through the book. Mary never left an unfinished book out again.

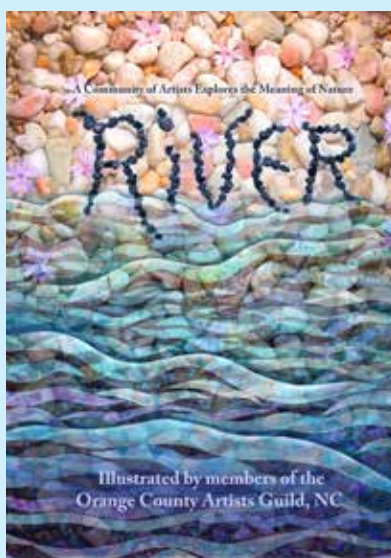


Victor Pogostin, PhD, is a teller of tales. Stories that are often funny, sometimes moving, but always entertaining. His are about being in the Soviet Navy. And they're true.

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