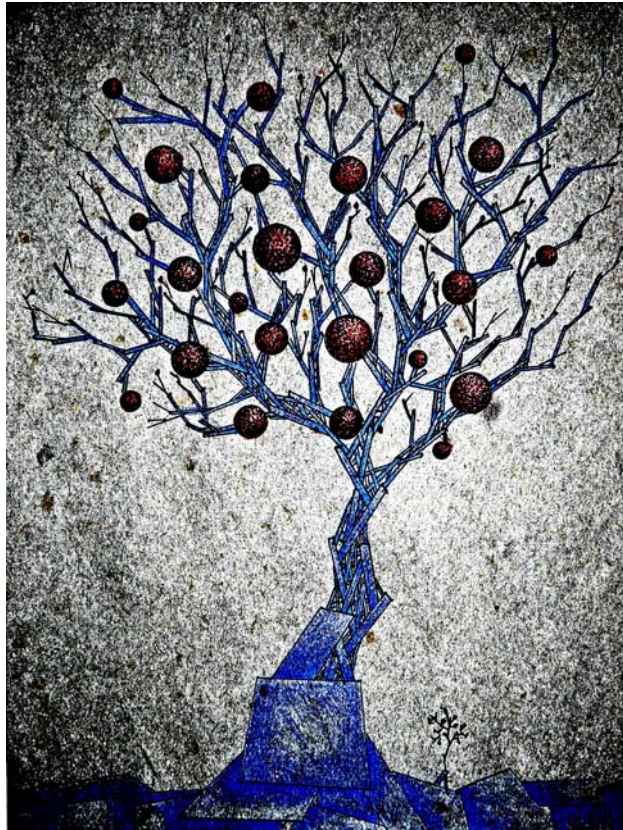


San Antonio Writing Project Summer Institute 2007 Anthology



Graphic by Adam Koehler

The predominant view of writing in our society is that it is a tool for communication, for transmission of information. But writing is also a way of "coming to know"-- a way of organizing our thoughts, of figuring things out, of making meaning of our experiences and "fragile thoughts."

-Jeffrey N. Golub

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Preface by Sheryll E. Putnam | <i>ii</i> |
| Deepavali and Nava Rasas by Kalpana Iyengar | 1 |
| The Hanging Tree by Robert M. Caldwell | 8 |
| Miss Vickers by Nora Gonzalez | 20 |
| Breathless by Ruben C. Cantu | 23 |
| Borrowed Feast by Sheryll E. Putnam | 31 |
| Dance in Circles by Joni Koehler | 35 |
| Untitled, Part II by Kimberley Saxon | 41 |
| Mountain Woman by Katherine Willis | 43 |
| Mountain Mother Giving Birth by Katherine Willis | 44 |
| I Am Not in the Right Frame to Write by Jennifer Hall | 49 |
| Highway 1 by Irene Rendon | 51 |
| Victorious Victoria by Erlinda O. Reyes | 58 |
| My Yearly Exam by Nancy Gregory | 63 |
| Moving Away From Home by Roxanne Henkin | 66 |
| Quotations | 71 |

Preface

Time passes so quickly, but memories and friendships forged during our weeks together as members of the San Antonio Writing project hold the promise of enduring long after we take our leave. We have traveled the gamut of emotions, shared our experiences, stories, and ideas, and in a matter of weeks created an entity far bigger than ourselves. It is with the deepest of regrets that we part company at all, for it is not possible to leave a place without leaving part of ourselves behind. As the revered playwright Shakespeare wrote, “*Parting is such sweet sorrow.*”

Our collaboration represents an affirmation of our unified love of the written word as well as our passionate reverence for teaching and learning. As we leave each other, we reach out to those with whom we shared our days and celebrate the great things we accomplished, both individually, and as a team. We stand here, proud of everything we have done in our dual roles as students and teachers, and we offer you, our reader, a glimpse into the world we knew for these short weeks, and hope it touches you as it did us. We give to you our legacy, the words we left behind.

Sheryll E. Putnam,

San Antonio Writing Project Summer Institute, 2007

Deepavali and the Nava¹ Rasas

Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar

Raudra'dbhutas'ca s'ringaro
Hasyam viro daya tatha
Bhayanakas'ca bibhatsah
S'antah sa-prema-bhaktikah
(Bhagavatam)²

Hindus celebrate Deepavali like the Jewish people who rejoice in the miracle of the Menorah in Israel (Hannakuh). Deepavali, also called the Festival of Lights, is an Indian festival to honor the return of Prince Rama to Ayodhya after his fourteen-year exile. In addition, lighting lamps, giving gifts, cooking massive amounts of food, including tempting desserts, visiting family and friends, cleaning the house, buying new clothes for family, and attending music and dance concerts are all part of the festival. Also, it is that time of the year when people seek gratification to their senses through theatrical performances because the nine Rasas are the predominant archetypal³ emotions that are portrayed through dance, music, and drama. The viewers seek psychological oneness with the characters on stage by living the characters themselves. Also, the Indian stage enables the audience to experience Catharsis (purgation of emotions) during these performances. The nine Rasas or emotions are:

¹ Nava is nine in Sanskrit

² Bhagavatham is the Hindu epic written by Veda Vyasa

³ Archetype is defined as the first original model of which all other persons, objects, or concepts are merely derivative, copied, patterned, or emulated. Kalidasa and Shakespeare were epitomized for popularizing many archetypal characters.

1. Sringara (Love)
2. Roudra (Wrath)
3. Hasya (Comic)
4. Bibhatsa (Disgust)
5. Vira (Heroic)
6. Karuna (Pathos/Pity)
7. Adbhuta (Wonder)
8. Bhayanaka (Fear)
9. Shanta (Peace)

1. **Sringara** (Love) is the queen of all the Rasas because of its enticing quality. Love can manifest in different forms and it can be established between mother and child like the affection that Yashoda had for Krishna in Gokula or the affection that Hester Prynne showered on Pearl in “The Scarlet Letter.” The love that existed between Primvada, Anasuya, and Shankuntala in Kalidasa’s “Abhijnan Shankuntala,”⁴ the carnal love that flowered between Dushyanta and Shankuntala in the same play, or the sensual love that Juliet felt for Romeo in “Romeo and Juliet” are typical of man woman relationship. However, the attachment that Elinor had for Marianne in “Sense and Sensibility” is unique. So when you watch “Krishna Leela,” “Scarlet Letter,” “Abignana Shankuntala,” “Romeo and Juliet,” or “Sense and Sensibility,” you experience all the different levels of love in one theatrical experience.
2. **Roudra (Anger)** is rather disturbing because of its outcome in the viewers. For example, Duryodhana’s violent behavior including his offensive body

⁴ Kalidasa is a 4th Century Sanskrit Playwright. He is called the Homer of India.

language while dealing with the Pandavas is characteristic of an ignoble, malicious, and evil character in Mahabharata. Roudra is a quality that befits evil-minded people like Shakespeare's Richard 111. On the other hand, Durvasa's⁵ anger in "Abignana Shankuntala" is spent when appeased by Shakuntala's sakhis (friends), Anasuya and primvada. But, the anger Iago developed towards Othello because of unfavorable leadership could not be overcome at any point. So the anger of an evil person consumes him/her, but the anger of a good person is forgotten. Roudra is a demonstrative emotion that is very hard to imply. Shakara in Shudraka's⁶ "Mrichakatika" and Iago in Shakespeare's "Othello" are rogues that show anger through evil deeds against good people who fail to comply with their cunning tricks and hence bring forth their own downfall.

3. **Hasya (Comic)** is a very difficult mood to establish because of the expectations of the audience. Comic is meant to relieve the viewer of any tensions established in the performance due to unexpected death, transference of affections, abuse, or a wrong doing to a noble character. The purpose of comic relief is predominantly for distraction from the tragedy. Shakespeare's clowns, especially in "King Lear" and "Much Ado about Nothing" are created to perform this task of appeasing the audience. So Hasya is intended to save the audience from the overwhelming sadness that may linger in the viewer's mind to haunt them for a while during and after the entertainment.
4. **Beebhatsa (Disgust)** is loathsomeness, which is rarely portrayed on the stage because it creates disgust in the viewers' mind: the episode where

⁵ Durvasa is a divine saint known for his spontaneous outbursts of anger.

⁶ Shudraka is a 2nd century Sanskrit Playwright.

Bheema drinks Dushasana's blood to fulfill Draupadi's vow, the incident when Laxmana cuts off Shoorpanaka's nose to protect Sita, the killing of Jarasandha, the ghosts in Julius Ceaser and Macbeth, the drowning of Ophelia in Hamlet, the brutal murder of Julius Ceaser, and the suicide episode involving young Father Time and his siblings in "Tess" are all examples of representation of this nauseating, repulsive, and annoying emotion.

5. **Veera (Heroic)** is the embodiment of protagonists in literature. Arjuna, for Example, in Mahabharata is known for his chivalry. This emotion naturally evokes love in women because it is the prerogative of handsome young men. No wonder Arjuna won the admiration of several beautiful women like, Subhadra, Draupadi, Chirtangada, and Uttara in Mahabharata. It is noteworthy that Arjuna was Draupadi's favorite husband because of his heroic qualities. Similarly, Marianne could not resist the company of the chivalrous but opportunistic Whickam in "Sense and Sensibility."
6. **Karuna (Pity)** is conviviality, which calls for very emotive representation. This emotion renders the viewers weak because they empathize with the characters in the performance or the incidents in songs. It is rather difficult to portray this mood without the character's involvement with the role. Dasharata's⁷ pain during Rama's seperation when the latter leaves Ahyodha in order for Dasharata to fulfil Kaikeyi's promise is one scene that evokes Karuna in the readers, watchers, or the listeners. Similarly, Kunti's lament at the death of Pandu in the forest in Mahabharata evokes compassion in the audience. Likewise, Hero's lament in "Much Ado about Nothing" when she

⁷ Dasharata is the king of Ayodya and he is prince Rama's father in the epic Ramayana written by Valmiki.

was branded an adulteress in front of an assembly on the day of her wedding evokes mercy. King Lear's lunacy when his own blood rejects him is wretched. Consequently it is the psychological time where the viewers' past sad experience can surface and hence make them morose.

7. **Adhbhuta (Wonder)** is an illusory mood that creates suspense in the minds of the viewer. This is predominantly visual for authenticity of expression. Duryodhana's experience at the Pandava palace in Indraprasta is the result of Adhbhuta. The portrayal of murders of Julius Ceaser and Macbeth can be considered an illusion on the stage. Also, the skillful use of weapons, words or a particular raga/tune in music can arouse bewilderment in the audience.
8. **Bhayanaka (Fear)** is psychological repugnance that depends on the viewers' emotional perceptions during the performances. Terror is the consequence of a fearful experience. For example, Ravana is terrorized after the death of Meghanand and Kumbhakarna. The master conspirator, Brutus lives in a perpetual state of internal insecure emotional strife after his fellow traitors, Casca and Cinna are killed. Although he is sure of his destruction, he lives in a state of denial due to ego. But eventually kills himself because he could not fight fright.
9. **Shanta (Peace)** is tranquility that is the result of turmoil, war, or catastrophe. It is the result of catharsis (purgation of emotions), especially when the mind is free of any tension. After climax, there is always peace. Gautam Buddha had an epiphany⁸ under the Bodhi tree because his mind was free of attachment or tension. Oliver in "Oliver Twist" finds peace

⁸ Epiphany is a comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization.

after he finds a home. Beatrice is not calm until she settles the contention against her cousin, Hero. So Shanta is the product of both dreadful and pleasant experiences in the theater. This emotion is the consequence of the nine Rasas.

In conclusion, the vicarious theatrical experiences enable the audience to taste the Nava Rasas/Catharsis that finally lead them to an altered and relinquished state of mind. These Rasas guide the viewers and listeners through all the different emotions to a point where the freedom from these feelings is achieved. If the audience allows such participation, they transcend to a privileged level of maturity by the end of performances and concerts. If you attend about five thousand music, dance, and dramatic performances, you might get a foretaste of Buddha's knowledge of discovery of enlightenment!!!!



Mrs. Bana Shastri Ramanath
Director
Natyanjali School of Indian Dance
San Antonio



A Shakespeare's Play at Cornell University

Robert M. Caldwell

Following is the first chapter of a novel that is a major part of my work in the San Antonio Writer's Project. It is only partially edited and in July 2007 continues to be a work in progress. The novel will be the story of Lucy Campbell, a young woman born in New Covenant, Montana in 1851. Her father disappears in 1856 and her mother dies in 1867. Left as an orphan, she lives with her Aunt and Uncle until she marries and travels to the panhandle of Texas to continue her life as the wife of a rancher in the Texas high plains just before the end of the 19th century and in the early days of the 20th century.

The Hanging Tree

Chapter One

[Base Plot Point]

The tree, twisted and gnarled, leaned against the hill, alone and defiant. It had withstood the onslaught of many tornadoes, thunderstorms, snow storms and rain squalls for hundreds of years. Still it stood and dominated the country side for many miles around. On the vast, open planes of eastern Montana the buffalo grass swayed in the wind in distinct waves back and forth and back and forth. One could almost count the passage of time in their regularity. Standing on the hill and turning around 360 degrees, one could see that only the tree would disrupt the sky line and the hypnotic effect of the undulating grass, back and forth and back and forth. Absolutely nothing was present on the plain to disrupt the effect of the waves - except the twisted and gnarled tree. For good reason, this is called the "big sky country." The lines of the bark and branches of the tree was in sharp contrast to the regular rhythm of the waves of grass. The bark twisted and turned almost without rhyme or become tired and had allowed the bark to grow as it would with out the aid of rules of order, but one could know such chaos was not the rule for this tree for the lines were mesmerizing in the regularity of the parallel lines as they twisted and turned. In that regularity one could see the world's movement to the good, the ultimate triumph.

The tree had three main branches that separated about eight feet about the ground. Two of these branches grew out of the trunk, twisted almost to within two feet of the ground and then turned back up toward the sky. In the wind these branches would sway almost to the ground.

Children would sit on the branch as it swayed to the ground and then turned back up toward the sky- a natural swing. If one looked carefully one could see parallel marks around the branches left by ropes, not the ropes of a child's swing, but the hangman's rope of death. Several people who acted as hangmen had removed the bodies of outlaws, but they left the rope around the branches. As the tree continued to grow, the rope became tighter and tighter. Finally, the bark began to grow around the rope until the rope became so stressed and weathered it broke and fell away, leaving a permanent mark in the bark- a mark of infamy and guilt. Guilt not of the men who had committed crimes and been hanged, but the guilt of the men who had unjustly hanged innocent men - men who had done nothing wrong other than having fallen victim to mob rule.

The young woman's form began to appear over the rise of the hill. One could not see trail, road, farm house, or town from which the young woman came; only buffalo grass gently swaying in the breeze. Slowly the young woman walked up to the old tree and caressed and stroked the tree's gnarled and twisted patterns. The old tree seemed to shudder and stand a little more tall and straight and wise. The tree knew that he and the girl were connected some how in time. It did not know what the connection was, but the life of the girl had been there before. Again the girl reached out and stroked the bark and felt the trading of life.

Jane knew that something was up for Oscar had been moody and quiet, a sure sign that something was on his mind. On Wednesday night they had the usual supper of bacon, corn, and beans with cornbread. She put Molly and Mack outside so they could keep an ear and an eye out for any Indians that might be lurking in the area. Molly and Mack were two huge mastiffs, weighing well over 129 lbs each, that had been given to Jane and Oscar when they were married in St. Louis by Jane's uncle who bred them from a dame and sire that came to America from England in 1829. They were very jealous of any individual or animal coming near the house day or night. As a result, Jane was always comforted by their presence anytime Oscar was away. Jane had not had any trouble getting Lucy to bed and had even been able to get herself to bed early after a few minutes of spinning to make cloth for new clothes for her and Lucy. Short after she laid down, Oscar came in from tending the livestock; he changed clothes and lay down beside her.

“Jane, I need to talk to you.”

“I know. I have been waiting for this conversation for you have been moody and quiet. What is going on?”

“You know that I have been saving money for some time to buy some cattle. I have saved about \$200. Sheriff Jackson told me that Sam Ochoa has a spread between Cherry Creek and Porcupine Creek about twenty miles north of New Covenant where he has cattle to sell. I will need about a day to find his place and three or four days to drive the cattle back. You can look for me to return in not more than two weeks.”

“But what am I going to do while you are gone?” All of the plowing that needs to be done is finished for the next month. You have plenty of corn, beans and apples set aside. We recently slaughtered that hog, so you have more than enough meat and the cows are giving enough milk. I should be back in less than two weeks. I am not going any further east than Porcupine Creek and no further north than the western branch of Porcupine Creek.”

Oscar’s family had come to the United States in 1831 from England where most of his people had been seafaring people. Oscar had been born in 1830 in New Bedford. He had wanted to come west at an early age, but he had no money, so at the age of 16 he signed on to a whaling vessel to save enough money for a move west. The whaling vessels made a huge fortune in 1846 in the waters of the Bering Straits, so Oscar came home with a small fortune. Following his whaling adventure, he began his western trek taking a train and then steamboat to St. Louis to buy pack horses, bags, a tent, cooking equipment, a Hawken .50 caliber rifle, a Colt .45 pistol, a large hunting knife, and other equipment necessary for a westward journey. While in St. Louis Oscar met and married Jane Campbell, daughter of Jeremiah Campbell of the Campbells of St. Louis. After the wedding he purchased an extra Colt for Jane. Oscar then spent some time showing Jane how to use the firearms. And he was glad he did. One day a medium sized herd of buffalo stampeded through the farm and completely trampled the vegetable garden and two of the corn fields. They had decimated the split rail fencing, but had caused only minor damage to the barn, house and out houses and sheds. When Oscar finally realized what was happening, he loaded one of the Sharps, gave it to Jane, and let her practice firing at a moving target. She had hit and killed two large bull buffalo. Their meat and hide had been some consolation for the damage done to the farm. At least once a month Oscar would take Jane out onto the prairie to practice using the Colt on the jack rabbits and prairie dogs digging up the gardens.

Before daylight on the morning after his conversation with Jane, Oscar saddled his favorite roan, gathered his rifle, the saddle bags he had packed the day before, his rain slicker, and his money pouch, and rode out of the farm yard. Jane did not want him to go. Hers was not the loneliness of a wife who does not want her husband to leave for a trip; she experienced the loneliness that comes

from the deep fear that one will never see one's mate again. Her feelings had surpassed fear and was approaching terror. But she had no choice but to swallow her feelings and concentrate on her daughter.

Oscar rode off into the darkness. He rode over to and then about five miles north along Cherry Creek and then turned east toward Porcupine Creek. About half way to Porcupine Creek he encountered a lone rider rounding up stray cattle without brands. As he rode up the cowboy stopped and warily watched his approach. The cowboy was riding a horse with Sam Ochoa's brand, the Box O.

"Cowboy, I am Oscar Campbell and I am looking for Sam Ochoa to buy some cattle. Do you know where I can find him?" Oscar said as he rode up, reached out his hand, and shook hands with the cowboy.

"Hello, Oscar Campbell. But thanks for the offer." Oscar wheeled his horse around and headed west back toward Cherry Creek. He then turned up Porcupine Creek for a ways and came across a horse track riding west. He turned at that point and headed west. He had been riding for most of the day when he came to the head waters of Cherry Creek, so he stopped and made camp for the night. He made a meal of jerky and cornbread, so there was nothing to cook, but he made a simple fire anyway for the warmth and light. After he hobbled his horse, he simply lay down on a blanket with his saddle as a pillow, and went to sleep. The next morning he ate more jerky and cornbread and drank some water. Again he was on the trail before sun up.

He had not gone far when he began to see the trail of a small herd that was being watched over by a lone rider. After going less than a mile, Oscar began to realize that two horses were trailing that herd. He had been tracking herd for several miles when he topped a ridge and saw the herd traveling further west. He was finally able to catch up to the herd and the trailing rider.

"I am looking for Sam Ochoa. Are you he?"

The man immediately look away from Oscar and rubbed his chin with his left hand while placing his left hand on the handle of his pistol.

"No! Sam is on the other side of the herd looking for more strays in that bunch of cotton woods over toward the creek."

As Oscar rode away toward the other rider the man loosened his rifle in its scabbard.

Oscar was momentarily surprised at the nervousness of the cowboy, but he set his own concern aside and concentrated on finding Sam. On top of a small rise, Oscar soon saw a lone rider scouting the distance for anything of interest.

“Are you Sam Ochoa?” Oscar asked as he approached.

The man looked around and answered in the affirmative as he loosened his own pistol in its scabbard.

“Aim Sam Ochoa.” The man was about 6’3” tall with sandy hair like Oscar’s and weighed maybe 185 lbs.

“I thought you would be shorter.” Oscar said laughing. The man did not respond to Oscar’s efforts to be sociable. Oscar was confused for several people had told him how sociable and friendly Sam was. Oscar decided to get on with business. Some men just did not like to talk, especially here on the plains.

Listen, I need to buy a small herd of cattle. I need about 15 or 20 head of cattle to start a small herd. Are you interested in sell?”

“I will if the price is right. How much you willing to pay?”

“I will pay you \$90.00 for 20 of the head.”

“I am willing to sell you 20 for \$100.00.”

“You’re asking top dollar for 20 head not all of which have any brand at all. That means that they are free cattle. Do I need to ask around to find out who they belong to?”

“Ok! Deal.” The tall dark man realized that he did not need to push this too far.

Oscar gave the man the \$90.00. “Say, I need a receipt for these cattle. I don’t want anyone think that I stole those cattle without the brands.”

“I don’t have any paper.” the man said.

“I have some right here and a pencil.” Oscar had come prepared.

“You write out what you want to receipt to say and I will put my mark.” the man said with a look of concern on his face. My mark is recognized all over these parts, in New Covenant and Nashua.

Oscar wrote out the receipt and handed it and the pencil to Sam. The man took the pencil and made a mark at the bottom of the page, an “X” with a curlicue on the two legs of the “X”. Oscar took the paper back, folded it, and placed it in his pocket. He then rode into the herd and cut out 20 of the best and youngest looking animals. He had some trouble because, once cattle are bunched up in a herd, they do not like to be separated. As a result, he would separate one bunch and turn back into the herd when the first bunch would try to move back into the herd. The man who had sold him the cattle made no effort to help. Oscar finally separated his 20 head and turned them back to the east to take them back to Cherry Creek. Oscar did not think to wonder why the

larger herd continued moving toward the west. The sun was already setting, so Oscar began to settle the herd down to bed them for the night. As he prepared his own camp next to his new herd, he sang softly to himself to soothe the cattle. On the second morning on the trail back to his spread, Oscar was up before sun-up and began to move his new herd. About mid morning he was met by several men who were heavily armed and looked non-to-happy. One of the men looked like the fellow that owned the livery stable in New Covenant, but Oscar could not be sure. He had never had any business with t"u get those cattle?"

"I brought them from Sam Ochoa."

"When did you buy them?"

"Day before yesterday!" Oscar responded.

"How much did you pay for them?" The man continued to question Oscar.

Oscar began to get annoyed at the questions from men he did not know.

"You guys sure are asking a lot of questions about none of your business."

"Son, this is our business. Sam Ochoa was found shot to death three days ago above Porcupine Creek. And the herd he was rounding up was gone. We followed the trail of the cattle west with two men moving them. The trail then turned back to the east with only one man moving them. Ane now we find you here with the herd. That makes it our business.

Oscar now understood their animosity.

"Mister, I met Sam Ochoa for the first time day before yesterday just west of here. I talked with him about buying some cattle and we struck a deal. I gave him \$90.00 and he let me cut 20 head out of the herd he was moving.

"What did he look like?"

"He was about 6' 2", maybe 180 lbs. With blond hair and blue eyes. He was riding an Appaloosas with a Square - O brand."

"Cowboy, those cattle belong Sam Ochoa. That might have been Sam's horse, but he was short, thin with black hair and brown eyes."

"The man I met agreed to sell me 20 head of cattle for \$90. I asked him for a receipt but he said that he could not write so he would make a mark on a paper that anyone with in 40 miles would recognize. Here. Here is the paper." The cowboy took a paper from his pocket and showed it to the man who was talking to him. The paper was immediately wadded up and thrown to the ground.

"Your lying. Everyone around here knows that Sam could write as well as anyone.

"Well, I am telling you that somewhere around here is a man with blond hair and \$90 dollars in his pocket riding an Appaloosas mare with a black saddle."

"I guess that some people will say anything to keep from getting hanged. And unless you can say something to convince us to the contrary, you're about to be hanged."

"And what about a fair trial by jury? What about any trial?"

"You had your trial when you killed Sam. And we are your jury."

"But what if I didn't kill this Sam. What if I am telling you the truth? What are you going to do then?"

"I am going home to sleep like a baby knowing that I have gotten some justice for my best friend."

The horsemen had ridden across several miles to get to the one tree that was big enough to do the job.

After Oscar had been gone for three weeks, Jane Campbell began to work more and more feverishly around the cabin. For Jane the only way to handle stress was to work it to death. Jane began to suspect that something awful had happened after four weeks and not a word. After eight weeks, she had to admit and prepare for the fact that he was not coming back. Several people had tried to "cheer" her up by telling her that he was not worth worrying about for he had abandoned her, but she did not believe it. Their relationship had just been too strong in every sense of the word.

"Lucy, are you going to stay here and play in the sand box?"

"Yes, Ma'ma."

"I am going out to the barn and into the cellar to take stock of what we have and what we will need for the winter. You stay here and play."

"Ok, Ma'ma."

She moved out into the barn. They still had the one cow that would give milk for Lucy. They had several hogs that would provide bacon and other meats. But she was not sure about the slaughtering. She knew how to butcher a hog; she was not sure about handling it for the slaughter. Maybe she could get her brother to come up from New Covenant for a few days to help with the job.

She knew that she had plenty of corn and beans for her and Lucy and she had hay for the livestock. Jane and Lucy might get tired of beans, but they could survive. There was not as much firewood as she would have liked, but over the past week she had seen several caterpillars and they

all had rather thin coats, so Jane had reason to believe that they would have a mild winter. She and Lucy could make it through a mild winter if they were careful and did not waste wood. The water barrels were all full, and the creek would freeze over, but it never stopped flowing.

The one thing Jane would not measure or assess was the work that had to be done. The heavy work is what worried her. She was afraid that she was just not strong enough. Last week probably a wolf had come close to the farm and scared one of the mules which had broken down part of the fence. That break would now have to be repaired. She would have to hitch the mule to the small wagon and drive it about 10 miles to Porcupine Creek where she could find Cedar trees. She would have to cut the trees to length, load them up and haul them back home. She would then have to strip them, and dig a hole to place them in the ground. With the wagon ride, this would be at least a three day job and she would have to take Lucy with her. Jane began to deal with the fact that she would not be able to keep the homestead by herself for the problems seemed insurmountable. She knew that if she moved into town she could find work- she was an excellent cook and she had worked as a midwife before and she knew that eating and having babies were basic to life, even in the great plains, so her services would be needed.

Only later did Jane think about the homestead. She was vaguely aware that they had to live on the property to keep it. If she left the property for longer than a certain length of time, someone else could claim it. She would have to risk it; she did not see that she had any choice. Her mind was definitively made up several weeks later when the first winds of winter began to blow across the plains. She remembered very vividly the temperatures well below zero, the blizzards, and the five foot snow drifts.

First she had to find a place to live so she and Lucy packed the small wagon, hitched up the one mule, and headed to New Covenant. After she arrived, she began to ask around town for available housing for her and Lucy, but no housing could be found. After three days of searching, Jane had no choice but to travel up Porcupine Creek to her brother's place and ask for a place to live until she could find work. Jane did not want to displace anyone in the house, so she was pleased to take the loft in the barn. After they moved the hay off to the side, the floor was clean and solid. Uncle Doc sent some hands over and they put Jane's bed in the loft with her dresser and chifaro. Jane then hung two blankets across the opening by the ladder so she and Lucy could have some privacy from the hands working in the barn during the day. The first couple of nights that Lucy and her mother slept there, they were comforted with the soft lowing and grunting of the animals.

The next day she went to Uncle Doc. "Uncle Doc, I need to borrow Joel for the day tomorrow. I need him to go back to the homestead with me with the wagon and get those supplies that we left behind. We might as well get the stuff, bring it back here, and then we can eat it or use it."

After Joel and Jane returned from the home stead, Jane went to talk to her brother again. "Uncle Doc."

"Hello, Jane. Are you about to get settled in? How are things going for you?"

"We are fine. We have moved everything in that we will need for a short period of time. But I wanted to ask you if anyone here will get upset if I begin to do some cooking in the kitchen. I am a good cook and that is one way I can make a contribution."

"Now Jane, you know that I did not invite you to come here and work"

"Big Brother, you did not invite me. I invited myself. You just agreed."

"Well, what ever. You do not have to work to earn you keep.

"I know, but I need to feel like I am making a contribution. Plus I am getting bored sitting around all of the time."

"Well, you do what ever you want. I will talk to Three Fingers and tell him to let you in the kitchen. He won't like it, but he can learn to live with it. Besides, he might learn something from your cooking." Three Fingers was the name given to the old Chinamen by the Indians. He had missed with a clever one day and chopped off two of his own fingers. So the Indians called him Three fingers. He was not a bad cook, but he was limited in what he could fix, so his meals had a distinct lack of variety.

"Thanks, Big Brother." With a certain sense of relief, Jane moved into the kitchen, not waiting for Uncle Doc to talk to Three Fingers. Immediately she began to work on an apple pie with the apples she had brought from her home. Uncle Doc was right. Three Fingers did not like her intrusion, but he knew she was Uncle Doc's sister, so he had sense enough to keep his mouth shut.

Jane continued working in the kitchen. Several months after her conversation with Uncle Doc, Jane heard the front door open and voices in the house; voices of a crowd. Drying her hands on her apron, Jane moved into the living room to see what was going on.

Jack Sansom was coming into the room with several other men. The only one that Jane knew was Uncle Doc but as soon as she heard Jack Sansom's name, she knew that she was in the presence of one of the largest farmers/ranchers in this part of Montana. She had heard that he had

almost 750 acres under the plow and he had recently acquired tens-of- thousands more acres. No one knew why but they knew that he was not going to farm it for that was too much for one farm. When she saw this crowd of men, she was glad that she had made several of her famous apple pies. She also knew that she was going to have to mix up a big plate of biscuits. Then Jane understood why Three Fingers had begun cooking that big venison roast.

After the men ate, Uncle Doc passed around his favorite, and only, humidor of cigars that he had been saving for a special occasion. After every one was smoking, Mr. Sansome stood up.

“Gentlemen, recently I acquired tens-of-thousands of acres of land on either side of Porcupine creek almost up to Canada. I am sure you are wondering why for I can not possible be farming that much land. Well, I want to share with you my new venture, and ask you if you want to join me. Recently we began a huge influx of men along the Lewis and Clark trail going to the Bitter Root Valley out west. They are going to the gold fields that were discovered two years ago in Bannack. Three months ago I asked Eli Bascome to keep a count for me of the men who come through his store going to the gold fields. He told me that he had over two hundred men come through who were not local people and were heading to the gold fields. Mining towns are now popping up all up and down the western side of the Rocky Mountains and those men have to eat, so I intend to provide them with all the meat they want. If you are willing to join me, we will combine all of our excess cattle and drive the herd along the Lewis and Clark trail through Cut Bank and over the Rocky Mountains through the Marias Pass. By the time we get them there, beef will be in short supply and we can charge what ever we want. Then we can start breeding our cows to build up the herd and do all of this again next year.”

“But what about the Indians? You know we have treaties with them and you are not supposed to travel over their land and scare the buffalo. You know that cattle and buffalo do not mix.” Bill Saxon said with a real note of concern in his voice.

“Bill, I have already talked to Captain Donaldson at Fort Belknap. He has connections in Washington, and he assures me that President Pierce wants to get elected again in '57, so he is not going to support the Indians over any voter until after the election. We have almost a year to get this done. Anyway, he is up to his rear end in this fiasco with the Kansas- Nebraska bill and the concern with the number of free states as opposed to the number of slave state, and the resulting sacking of Lawrence, Kansas. He is not going to worry about a bunch of Indians who are upset about some dumb buffalo.” As he said this, Sam was reminded of his own isolation. Washington was 1,877 miles away. On a good horse at 25 miles a day, that was 2 ½ months away not to include

the time spent in trying to cross the Mississippi River and the time in Washington. To go and to and return was a 5 month trip unless you sold your horse in St. Louis and rode the train from there. You could always buy another horse in St. Louis for the return trip. Even with the train it was a three month trip.. Any newspaper he might see was already three months old. He had not personal contact at all. Information was truly a rare commodity. He felt confident that President Pierce would not be reelected, but he had no idea who the strongest alternative candidate might be. Also he suspected that something was afoot with the argument between the free and slave states, but he had no idea where the argument was going.

Andrew Imburgia stood up. “ I don't know about the rest of you, but I am willing to make a little extra money for a change. Besides, you will have the biggest risk for a large part of the cattle will be yours.” Most of the other men nodded in agreement. Mr. Sansome smiled in triumph. The men continued talking between themselves about the necessary plans for such an under taking.

After Uncle Doc, and the other men had finished business and their cigars, Jack stood up and walked into the kitchen.

“Where can I find the lady, or man, who cooked this pie?”

Jane turned around. “I baked the pies. May I help you?”

“Am I addressing Mrs. Campbell?”

“You are. What can I do for you?”

“Uncle Doc told me that you need a job and a place to live?”

Jane immediately became wary for she was not sure of his intent since she was an “unattached” female.

“Mr. Sansome, until I have definitive proof of what happened to my husband, I consider myself to be a married woman and I have no reason to change that. I do need a job and a place to live, but that is all that I need.”

“Mrs. Campbell, I am aware of what Uncle Doc knows about your husband. All that I am offering is a job and a place for your and your daughter to live. Are you interested?”

“As long as we both understand what I need and what you are offering, I am interested. Tell me more.”

“Mrs. Campbell. You know that I have a very large farm and I employ many hands to run it. I can keep my help on the job if I pay them well and feed them. I have had a hell of a time getting and keeping a good cook. You are a good cook and you have lived in this area for some time so you know how to handle the loneliness. If you will come and live on my spread with you

daughter and cook for me and my men, I will pay you handsomely and you can live in the cooks house which is separate from the main house and opposite the bunkhouse. You will have an elderly Chinese man to help you in the kitchen and I have hands that will go into town to get you the supplies that you need. One more thing Mrs. Campbell. I have earmarked one acre of land between my place and Nashua. I am have already made plans to build a school on that acre as soon as I can find a teacher who will come out here and live. I have located the school so it can be accessed by the kids in town and on the farm. Any questions?”

“Mr. Sansom, I really appreciate your making this offer. I love to cook and I am good at it. Also I have been concerned about Lucy, so your solution gives me the answers to many questions. Thanks again.”

“Mrs. Campbell, I am not sure I am doing you any favors. I have a lot of men to feed and I frequently have company come in for various reasons. You will earn your pay.”

“I understand and I fully expect to earn my keep. Thanks again for the opportunity.” Jane felt a big sigh of relief. A major concern had been answered. She had known that she would be okay. She had been concerned about Lucy. Now she knew that Lucy also would have a home, and even a school.

Miss Vickers

By Nora Gonzalez

This September Miss Vickers, “Mi Abuelita” will be ninety years old. It’s not like she is setting any world records for oldest human being or anything like that but ninety any way you look at is a lot of time spent living and breathing here on Earth. My family and I are the fortunate ones, the ones that have had her around for such a long time. In our eyes she is still young, smart, vivacious, and makes you laugh aloud at a moments notice like the times she mimics other family members or shows you how she killed the bat that was flying around her house with a broom. “I swung at it several times until I finally wounded him”, she recalls as she tells several of us including her great-great granddaughter the story and then her head goes sideways onto her chest as her shoulders inch up and her arms flap rapidly mimicking the wounded animal...quite the comical actress she is.

When my Abuelito was alive over 12 years ago, she would serve him his dinner and there was no pleasure in her eyes to this cultural, forced custom that is observed in many Hispanic homes. Heating up the tortillas on the *comal* was a nightly ritual to be included with the meal. The tortillas would often go flying from the *comal* to the table without a miss or ricochet. Many nights she would yell at him while he would so graciously look outside through the screen door and keep eating the *frijoles, arroz, and calavacita con pollo* set in front of him because he would always turn off his hearing aide at dinner time as if he knew what was forthcoming. Eating in piece is something that was important to him. He once told me that when buying the three cemetery plots side by side it was for a predetermined reason. The intention was that there would be a person between them in death. This person would help keep the peace between the two of them after they died.

She is the only Abuelita that calls herself “Miss Vickers”. When you call her house and you ask who is speaking...”Miss Vickers”, she answers. No one really knows where she got this name, perhaps from a movie, from thin air or a radio show. No one really knows yet it has become her nickname. It is an amusing name for a Mexican woman that was born at the turn of the century.

I am a selfish person because I want her to live as long as I do or longer so my children and grandchildren will remember her and know her like I do. This of course is simply an unrealistic desire creviced deep within me, something that will not happen because death at this time is hovering and whispering her name. A few weeks ago she endured a mild stroke and although it didn't leave her paralyzed or crippled it left her weak, tired and feeble. This has been the most frustrating and difficult thing for her because up until then she mopped, swept her floors and hung clothes out to dry on a daily basis. These tasks that were simple at one time are now time consuming and tedious without the help of one of her four daughters. These daughters, my aunts and my mother, come to her house on a daily basis. They come when they can and never at any one set time. One of my aunts, widowed and retired, is also her neighbor and bares so much of the responsibility of checking on her and making Miss Vicker's life manageable.

Miss Vickers was born on a Texas ranch near Hondo, Texas, a few miles southwest of the large city of San Antonio. A small, small little cow town buried somewhere on the map of this large state. Her father ranched on someone's property near Yancy outside of the city. She will tell you very little about her childhood when you ask her and look at her white European descent skin and hazel green eyes. One does not know why, maybe because she was only twelve years old when she married my *Abuelito* or maybe it's because she doesn't really remember. My family and I all think it's a combination of both. She attended school for several years because her grandmother, Mama Rosa, would send her to the one room school house where she learned to read and write but only in Spanish she tells me. She doesn't know how many hours, days or possibly years she attended, she just knows she was able to go from time to time. This she tells me without fear of being judged or chastised.

It is said that parents should not outlive their children but the future and the grim reaper comes without asking, without permission. One would attempt to know how difficult it must be to outlive a child no matter what age of the child or the fact that she still has six other adult children still alive. Her seventy-two year old son died this past year and he is buried and rests in the cemetery not far from where my *Abuelito* is buried. It was after this death that she also spiritually buried a part of herself as he was lowered to his grave. It appears to the family that this is when she began the unknowing process of uncovering the Earth in preparation for her departure from our lives. It was

then that she realized that her life would not be the same and that life is just that....life like a beautiful flower that eventually wilts and dies.

In the ninety years she has aged gracefully, filled her life with a husband, children and several generations after this without remorse or regret. Deep inside her soul she knows that a fountain of youth does not exist as her Spanish forefathers thought and hoped for. There isn't much more happiness that one person could possibly ask for in this three ring circus of existence. For now she sits on her metal chair with the walker near by bathed, in her pink cotton duster and soft terry cloth slippers and waits to see who will come to visit her on this day.

Breathless

By Ruben C. Cantu

There are some stories worth telling and others, I'll admit, that I would rather forget. The ones I remember with fondness, and sometimes a little regret, have their own serendipitous outcomes, even though I never intended for things to come out that way. For instance, whenever I've had a few drinks, and I get somewhat bored, I'll start doing odd things. Not dangerous things, or illegal things, just something to liven up the crowd and make things interesting.

There was the time I put a cone on top of my head in a grocery store. My friend and I were somewhere outside of San Antonio and we felt as if we had stepped into the Twilight Zone. We were tired of the usual Friday nights of hitting the bar scene, or barbecuing chicken wings in the backyard and hearing the same tired exploits we tell each other, so we decided to venture out to small towns around San Antonio. It was like stepping into another dimension in time. First of all, there were no Mexicans. Coming from a city where the population is almost 60% Hispanic, it felt a little strange at first. That in itself wouldn't have been so odd except that everyone, and I mean everyone, was dressed like they just stepped off the set of a "Hee-Haw" show. All the guys had on huge cowboy hats, tight Wrangler jeans, big round belt buckles, western boots, and they were all chewing on chaw. In every small town we passed through, everyone was dressed alike. The women were dressed like the people in the movie "Peggy Sue Got Married." The girls wore big pettycoat skirts and had huge puffy hairdos. My friend and I thought we had entered a time warp. What added to the surrealistic mood was that we were only twenty minutes outside of the city. I felt like a character in a Kurt Vonnegut story. People in these towns were all riding around in their pick-up trucks and sitting outside on the street curbs. It really did feel like we had stepped into a caricature version of small town Texas life.

The only things missing were tumbleweeds, horses, and six shooters, and I'm sure we would have seen those things if we had stayed longer. On the way back to San Antonio my friend and I decided to stop at their local H.E.B. store to buy some chicken wings to take home. When we walked inside, we noticed that there were no customers in the store. It was totally vacant except for one cashier and the two of us. In the restroom, which was the biggest restroom I had ever seen, my friend and I decided to test the acoustics. My friend took the low notes and I took the high notes.

"Ba-Ba . . . Ba-Ba-Ba," my friend be-bopped.

"Ooh-Ooh . . . Ooh-Ooh-Ooh," I scaddled.

After a few minutes, and realizing we didn't know the words to any songs, we walked out giving each other high-five's as if we had just walked off a concert stage, sounding more like the Rambunctious Brothers than the Riotous Brothers. But we weren't done, yet; we noticed the cashier was not very impressed with our antics, so I bet my friend I could make her laugh. He bet me four chicken wings that I couldn't and the game was afoot. Remember, boredom and a few drinks make me frisky, and we had been stopping for a few beers at every new hick town we passed through. So, that's when I put the big, orange cone on my head. It was on the floor covering a wet spot in front of the cashier. I lifted one leg and both my arms in a mock karate stance. Then my friend starts hollering, "cone-head Tai-Chi . . . cone-head Tai-Chi," while I'm standing there looking like Ralph Macchio in "Karate Kid" with a big orange cone on my head. We left the store and I owed my friend four chicken wings.

That's an excursion my friend likes to tell when it's storytelling time around the campfire. But, my favorite is when a conspiracy was formed on a train I took to California when I went looking for a job. I had just finished graduating from college and was offered a job teaching in Los Angeles. I scraped up enough money for train fare and five days of food and motel living. I convinced my friends that I was leaving for good, although I was only going to see if the job offer was still good, and to see

what the ambiance was like in the land of mountains, beaches and movie stars. So, they threw me a going away party. My train didn't leave until 3:AM so we had plenty of time to party. They dropped me off at the train station and we said our good-byes. I told everyone I would come back to see them when I was rich and famous. I had a plan. I would work there for three years, get resident status, go to school at one of California's elite colleges for writers, write a screen play, have it made into a movie, and become the next Stephen King. Yeah, I had big dreams.

When I got on the train there were other people that looked like they just got back from a party. There was a big, fat man, with a beard that was singing to himself; there was an old lady with very colorful clothing and wearing tons of makeup; and there were three girls that seemed to be having a real good time. When I said hello to them, they gave me that look. They put on their "we're too good for you so don't even try to talk to us you insignificant fool" act (at least that's what it felt like). Well, of course, that's all I needed to put on my own act. So, I began to do my impersonations. Now, I'll admit, my impressions aren't meant to be carbon copies of the people I'm supposed to be imitating. They're meant to be bad, so bad that they're somewhat funny, at least most of my friends think their funny. Most women, though, especially strangers, get irritated. To this day I'm still trying to figure out why? I guess people just don't have a sense of humor anymore. At first the girls just stood there and tried to ignore me. I did my Johnny Carson, my Elvis, and my Sammy Davis Jr. Then I did my last imitation, the one that usually gets women angry; the women cursed at me and scurried away. At first I didn't think anything of it since I've seen that type of reaction before, but when two porters on the train escorted me to a car that was isolated and totally away from the other passengers, then I thought something strange was going on. Why would a few innocent imitations get me banned from the other passengers? Something wasn't right. I fell asleep and decided to forget about all this nonsense, for now anyway.

The next day I was bored sitting in a train car by myself and decided to join the other passengers. It was a three-day train trip to California and I wasn't spending it sitting alone. I walked through all the cars towards the train car where I was supposed to be sitting. I noticed the fat guy that sang to himself. "Why didn't they ban him?" I asked myself. He was making crude comments to this girl that was walking up and down the aisle. She was wearing tight daisy dukes and kept strutting up and down the train car.

"Yeah, baby. I could have a party with you!" the fat guy would say as she walked by. She would ignore him and keep walking. A few minutes later she would return seemingly wearing even less clothing.

"Oh, yeah, sweetheart. I want to marry you! Today! Right now! Come sit on my lap and we'll talk about it!" the fat guy would blurt out. Everyone sitting on the train seemed to be oblivious to what was going on. It didn't seem fair. I get exiled for doing an imitation, and this guy gets to harass women and nothing happens. But I knew the score. Some people can get away with murder and some people get the death penalty for throwing away a gum wrapper on the floor. I decided to sit quietly and mind my own business. Suddenly, a little boy comes up to me and asks me my name. I didn't want to be rude so I told him. The little boy is mumbling about something. As I'm trying to understand him, the lady with the revealing clothing comes running down the car, grabs him by the arm and pulls him away. A few minutes later the Conductor of the train comes charging down the aisle.

"If you say one more word to anyone I'm throwing you off the train," he said as he stooped down and put his face in mine.

"But we're in the desert," I said to the conductor.

"I don't care," he said gruffly, "want to test me?"

"But, I haven't done anything," I protested.

"One more word!" he ordered me.

I glared at the fat guy as he sat there twiddling his thumbs as if he hadn't done a thing. I looked down the aisle and noticed the daisy duke lady and the little boy standing in the doorway. She was glaring at me. "There's a conspiracy against me on this train," I thought to myself. I spent the rest of my trip in the isolated car by myself. To keep myself busy I started writing a complaint letter against the Conductor of the train. It wasn't a coincidence that all those people were from California.

In California a so-called Good Samaritan who offered to help me with my luggage robbed me. A suburban gang almost jumped me. A man wanted by "Americas Most Wanted" was staying above me in the motel. From my window, I got to see a Swat Team take him down. It was a blonde woman wearing daisy dukes that got him to open his door. I had noticed her walking around the motel the last few days. She had smiled at me but by this time I was afraid to say anything to anyone. She turned out to be an F.B.I. agent. Later, I almost got arrested in a grocery store for taking a picture of their fruit. Apparently, taking pictures of fruit is illegal in California. The police had me against the wall, frisking me, asking me all kinds of questions. They tried to take my camera away. The first few days I was in California, I couldn't find anyone who spoke English. I couldn't even find anyone to speak Spanish. The first time I spoke English to anyone was when I made a long distance phone call to San Antonio and spoke to my sister. After telling her of some of my experiences, she begged me to come home. Funny thing, I don't even get along with my sister. And needless to say, I never made any job contacts. It seems I went during Memorial weekend and the whole state had shut down. I got to California on a Wednesday, and the state shut down on Thursday. It seems they take really long weekend holidays over there. I ran out of money and got kicked out of my motel room. I slept outside next to the pool on a lounge chair. During the day I walked around Venice Beach, probably the best part of the whole trip, even though a beach

cop scolded me for asking too many questions. Hungry, tired and broke, I made my way back to the train station, which consisted of a bench, a phone, and a trash can, and waited for the train to pick me up.

I couldn't wait to get back to San Antonio. My friends were glad that I had decided not to stay in California. They threw me a "Welcome Home" party. I also found out that a local school district had been trying to reach me. They wanted to know if I was still looking for a job? I told them that I was planning on moving to California. I told them I had a job offer to teach there. The man in the personnel office wanted to know if I didn't mind staying in San Antonio for awhile? I figured I could put my "California Dreams" on hold. That was almost thirteen years ago. I got the job teaching at a local school in San Antonio and have been there ever since. Do I regret not going back to California? Do I regret not pursuing riches and fame? When I ponder the possible scenarios, I think about an incident that took place after three, long, frustrating years of teaching high school. It seemed I always got the toughest of the roughest kids in my classes. One day I was sitting in my hot, bug infested, portable classroom across the street from the school, and I was reading a brochure I had gotten in the mail. It was offering workshops to aspiring writers. As I read through the details of each workshop, I notice the name of one of the lecturers giving the workshop. It was a fellow classmate of mine from college. We worked on the same Literary Magazine at the University. I remember her saying how talented she thought I was and how she admired my writing. Now, several years later, this ex-classmate of mine was teaching and lecturing around the country. She went to some fancy Graduate School in California and had won several awards for her poetry. And here I was, sitting in a cramped portable, telling kids to take the pencils out of their noses. Strange how some things work out. "This ex-classmate of mine had stolen my life," I thought to myself.

I was sitting there sulking when one of my students walked in. Maria was one of the first students I had taught my first year on the job. She was almost a senior now and had grown into a smart, mature, young lady. I still remember Maria as a dorky, giggly, precocious freshman. I remember teasing Maria whenever I would see her walking down the hall.

"Maria. . . I just met a girl named Maria," I would belt out in full operatic style.

"Shut up, sir," Maria would shout back at me, embarrassed, then try to duck away before anyone noticed.

Now, Maria was the Editor of the school's Literary Magazine and had brought me some poems to read. We were trying to decide which contributions by students were worthy of publishing in the magazine. Maria sensed something was wrong and kept prodding me to tell her. After I told her about California and of this ex-classmate stealing my life, Maria just stood there, studying me for a minute, trying to think of the right words to say. Then she turned around, and as she walked out of the portable, she stopped, and turned back around to face me.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, sir, but you know what?" she says matter-of-factly.

"No, what?" I ask, still eyeing the brochure.

"Who makes a bigger impact on kids?"

Some stories are worth telling. I haven't done "CONE-HEAD TAI-CHI" or any of my other infamous impressions lately. Another thing I feel worth mentioning, I just celebrated five years without taking a drink. Oh, I still do a few impressions, some habits die hard, but not the one that almost got me thrown off the train. I'm still trying to figure out why it incites people so much. Picture this: Have you ever seen the movie "Breathless" with Richard Gere? There's a shower scene where he's taking a bath and singing. He's standing there singing and dancing in the shower. Then there's another scene in the same movie where he's looking at himself in the mirror, but his back is turned and he turns around and pretends he's shooting guns.

All I do is combine the two scenes. I pretend I'm in the shower, singing and dancing, looking backwards into a mirror, shooting two guns. Why do women get so upset over that? I remember I did the "Breathless" impression on a plane when I took a trip to Cancun, Mexico once. You won't believe what happened there. But, I'll save that story for another time.

By Sheryll Putnam

The Filipino market was crowded and noisy, and the little boy wrinkled his nose distastefully at the smell of dried fish cooking in one of the booths. It had never been a favorite of his, although he knew his brothers and sisters would cry for a taste. Still, the money in his pocket would not buy one piece of fish, let alone the six or so he would need to feed his twelve brothers and sisters.

An elbow in his side reminded him of his task, and scowling, he hurried after his sister Lourdes, ignoring the pain of the pebbled streets on his bare feet.

A pretty girl about eight or nine was sitting at a table eating pancit and shrimp, and Rueben paused to look at her longingly. Her long hair shone like black silk, and her dress was pressed and clean, a far cry from his battered shirt and cutoffs. She ate idly, disinterestedly, as though the food before her held no delight. Reuben's stomach growled and he stared at the girl, mentally calculating the cost of her feast. It was a week's salary for Papa, no doubt.

"Hurry, Rueben, we must find the pan de sal for Mama, we have no time to waste on foolish dreams." Lourdes whispered, tugging on his arm. His dark eyes narrowed and he whispered conspiratorially to his younger sister, Felicia, "I'm hungry."

She glared at him, for it was this unspoken thing that they did not speak of their needs, so rarely satisfied, it was like torture to do so, and long since had they all agreed to not fixate on what could not change. "Pray to Our Lady," Lourdes muttered, instructing him to offer up his sinful envy to the Virgin Mary. However, it was like some rebellious beast in Rueben, and suddenly his feet would not move despite the growing urgency of his sisters' hands.

"I'm hungry," he repeated, his voice rising, resentment causing his eyes to gleam. Suddenly, eleven years of his life without enough of anything made him feel angry, especially as he thought of a future that held the promise of more of the same. "I'm hungry." He snapped, again, angrily.

"Come with me, little man, I shall sit you and your sisters," the waiter said, appearing at their side like an angel. The children stared, awestruck, as the carefully dressed man bowed gracefully and swept a graceful hand towards the empty table on the patio, across from the young diner whose eyes had come to rest on them.

Dumbly, the three children sat, not daring to speak as the man set their places before them and bowed again. Reuben quickly recovered himself, elbowing his sisters and smiling brightly.

"What may I get you to start?" The waiter queried, his kind eyes expectant as the two girls

stared with frightened eyes at their brother, who seemed to swell with pride as he stretched his hand extravagantly over the menu and said, in his best grown up voice, “order what pleases you, sisters...”

“I want Adobo chicken and lumpia...” Felicia whispered, covering her lovely face with her hands, her heart pounding in her chest as she silently crossed herself, nearly drooling as she thought of the deliciously salty concoction with the egg rolls.

“Good choice,” the waiter commented, approvingly, bowing slightly at her, “and you, young miss,” he asked, smiling down at Lourdes, “what would you like?”

“Pancit and Kare-Kare, and an orange cola.” She gasped, turning a deep shade of red, as she imagined the beef dish with the thick sauce and salivating as she thought of the noodles she had tried once at school, leftovers from her teacher’s lunch.

Reuben beamed and glanced over at the beautiful girl and lifted his voice loudly, “I’ll have what the lovely lady is having,” he said, imperiously, as though he were a fine man used to dining.

His sisters stared at him, caught between laughter and horror. “Reuben, how will we pay for this?” Lourdes whispered, her small face pinched and scared. “Reuben, we have to go before we are caught.”

He glared at her, “I’m hungry,” he told her, quietly, simply, “Aren’t you?”

“Thank you, that will be all.” He said, lifting his voice as he smiled at the waiter who smiled warmly back at him.

The children sat quietly for awhile, Reuben staunchly ignoring his sisters who whispered frantically to each other as he smiled over at the little girl who returned his smile, twirling a strand of her beautiful hair and peeking at him through lowered lashes. Dazed, He could only imagine courting a girl like her, whose striking looks and wealthy airs would surely cause Papa to laugh and Mama to curse, he thought, laughing out loud.

Sighing, he watched her as she flashed her dazzling eyes, flirting shamelessly now, her food forgotten. Reuben watched her, fascinated, allowing his mind to stretch the illusion, imagining her as a part of his life, imagining meals like this as a part of his every day existence. Imagine, he thought, his eyes darkening and his lips settling grimly as he lowered his eyes and thought of the baby sister who had died of hunger. Imagine being free from the daily struggle of just trying to survive, from battling the deadly beast that haunted their days and stole from them their weakest. Scowling, Reuben felt his heart darken, because he hated hunger, hunger that brought death, which he knew, only too well. Reuben hated being hungry, and as he sat at the table waiting for food he

knew he could not pay for, he felt as though it was owed to him, owed to his sisters, compensation for too many years of not having enough of anything.

The waiter arrived with laden trays of steaming food, more food than Reuben and his sisters had ever seen in their short, underprivileged lives. He pressed a paper into Reuben's hands that he quickly pocketed, watching as Felicia squealed with delight and fear, wetting herself in her excitement and then lowering her eyes in shame as Lourdes loudly reprimanded her for her foolishness. The waiter bowed, whispering in Lourdes ear that it "was no problem, no problem, darling..." so that Felicia gave him a sweetly adoring look before diving into her plate with her hands, forgetting the silverware that remained wrapped in the fabric napkins as she hungrily scooped the adobo into her mouth with shaking fingers.

Lourdes showed a little more restraint, awkwardly picking up her fork and looking pained as she poked at her pancit, guilt causing the rock in her throat to thicken. This lasted only briefly, for hunger made fear give way, and finally, she too began to eat quickly, rapturously, pleasure making her face flush as she made audible sounds of enjoyment as she shoveled the food into her mouth.

Perhaps it was the distinctly plebian way the children ate that made the rich little girl pause, her eyes widening and her flirtatious ways halting as her face darkened. Reuben felt his heart sink as he watched her face as she watched them eat, taking in the enthusiasm of his sisters, the laden table that was covered with fine dishes that seemed to scream out their unfamiliarity to the whole world. Reuben felt his heart sink as the girl snapped her fingers and the waiter appeared at her side, frowning as she whispered conspiratorially in his ears something that made him glance their way.

"Hurry, hurry..." Reuben muttered, his illusions shattering as he, too, began to stuff his mouth with his choice, choking at the sudden lump that made the food stick as he tried to force it down.

Gasping, he, grabbed at Lourdes' soda, drinking it all she protested, her eyes tearing as she watched the precious fluid disappear. "No, no," she whimpered, unfamiliar with the pain of losing something she had never had before, but Reuben kicked her viciously under the table, snarling at her to eat quickly. "Salbahee, Salbahee!" He swore, kicking her again, "damn you, eat, eat!"

The waiter began his journey back to them, but Praise God, Jesus, and Mary, another customer called out, drawing him away from them mercifully. "Eat!" Reuben urged, as the little rich girl stared at them, her indignant face making her suddenly less beautiful as she signaled for the busy waiter again. "Hurry!" Reuben gasped, forcing the last bit of food down his throat, feeling like an imposter as he grabbed Felicia's hand in his and leaned over quietly. "Sister, you must listen

carefully...when I tell you, you must run, as fast as you can. Meet me at the vendor for the Pan de sal, and do not look back this way, do you hear me?"

Felicia's eyes widened, and she looked up at Lourdes who had also finished the last of her food, but for her lumpia. Stuffing the three into her shirt, she nodded seriously, her eyes fearful as she turned her legs to the side, bracing herself for the order.

"Go!" Reuben snapped, and all three children suddenly bolted from the table, running desperately into the street. Loud shouts filled the air, and Reuben pumped his skinny legs, stumbling briefly as his feet caught the edge of broken pavement. Wincing, but fearing the reprisal for their thievery, Reuben ran, his heart pounding as he tore through the filthy market streets.

Fifteen minutes later, the three children reunited at the old bakery shop, each face flushed, and somehow healthier than they were before. "We should not have done that," Lourdes said, shamefully, lowering her head, and dropping the extra pesos into the religious offering tray after they paid for their bread.

Felicia smiled, her eyes lit, "But Praise God, I've never had a better day in my life!" The five year old cried out, her face shining.

Reuben sighed, his stomach full, but feeling guilt heavily in his heart. Never had he felt so full, and so guilty.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled the paper out and looked at it, his eyes widening as he read.

"Merry Christmas, children, God Bless you." It said, next to a total that read \$0.00.

Dance In Circles

By Joni Koehler

I told him I would rather go to the basketball game, but he didn't hear me. He thought of the plan before he consulted me; it was tattooed on his cerebral cortex. He wanted to go to the dance. He thought we would enjoy it. He heard the rhythmic pulse of drums as he readied us and shooed us out the door. "The dance," he said, a glint of the far away in his eye, "Adam will like it."

Our son, Adam, didn't want to go to the dance, either, but he didn't want to disappoint his father. So we went, the three of us. Sponsored by the Atascosa County FFA (Future Farmers of America), the dance concludes the Atascosa County Stock Show each year. Our Adam had shown rabbits there just the day before, had been showing rabbits ever since the sixth grade. In the sixth grade, Adam was cute, round with baby fat on his belly and cheeks. Now, at the age of fifteen, all the roundness had flown. He'd transformed into an angular specimen, the air of a man clinging to him like a suit two sizes too large. He was the kind of boy that wore his masculinity with grace, a masculinity that caused girls to declare him sexy. I knew this is true because a couple of years earlier while helping him clean out his locker, I discovered small slip of paper someone had slipped through the venting in the door. The word, "sexy" stood alone in the center of the page.

We drove to Pleasanton early and had supper at Shorty's. We ate steaks, baked potatoes, and salad in imitation wooden bowls. My husband, Brian, likes Shorty's salad, because it is shredded and because it is iceberg. We took our time at Shorty's, saying very little to one another, just enjoying the décor and listening to the conversations of those around us. Adam and Brian commented on the various stuffed deer and elk that were hanging on the walls. Right before we left, Adam said, "Dad, I don't want to go to the dance. Let's just go home."

"That's fine with me," I said. "It has been a long weekend, honey. Let's just go home."

"Are you sure?" My husband looked at Adam. "We've come all this way, and we don't have to stay long. I really think you will enjoy it, son."

My husband has this way of looking determined that no one notices except me. I couldn't even tell you what it is, not a way of holding his mouth, or a look in his eye, maybe it's a hormone he gives off, but when I looked at him, I knew we were going to that dance.

"Son, Dad's right. We did come all this way, and we can leave after a few minutes if it isn't any fun. Let's just go, okay?"

"But I won't know anybody."

“You know us,” said Dad. “Besides, there might be some pretty girls there. Maybe she’ll be there.” He motioned to the girl that was sitting two tables behind us. Creamy red hair hung to her waist, a splash of freckles graced the milky skin across the bridge of her pert little nose. She was wearing cowboy jeans and a wide belt with an even wider belt buckle.

“She’s not pretty, Dad.” Adam smiled and shook his head as if to say, “What’s wrong with you two?”

“Okay, someone pretty, then.” Brian said. “You’ll never know if we don’t go.”

Adam agreed uneasily and we left. Those moments when we were sitting in the car, the two men seemed to square off, not with words, but in the divergence of their desires. It was a moment upon which much seemed to balance. I kept my mouth shut, realizing that I was not part of this primal ritual.

As we drove to the show barn, I pictured my husband as a boy, going to dances with his parents, the heavy gold chain he wore around his neck, the aura of cologne, the large cowboy hat. When it was his time to become a man, this was the creature he had become, a southern suave out to procure a woman. Was he reliving this rite of passage through our son?

We arrived early, and parked near one of the outbuildings next to the barn. There were only three or four cars in the parking lot, which, with the exception of one security light that shone between the two buildings, was dark. Three or four bare bulbs cast the goat enclosure directly in front of us in an anemic glow. We watched the goats wander around the small enclosure, bleating. Someone had blindfolded them. I don’t know why.

Another car pulled up next to us, and I hoped it would be a carload of cute girls for Adam. I was disappointed when a pregnant woman got out of the car with three small children. We watched as they walked over to the goat enclosure and looked at the blindfolded goats. Their bleating took on a desperate quality when they realized people were near, taking on the sound of the word “free.” While the goats pleaded, “Freeeeeeee! Freeeeee!” we listened to the radio, hoping the dance would start soon.

After an interminable wait, my husband said, “Let’s go in. It’s getting cold out here.”

I was ready. The testosterone buildup in the car was starting to clog my arteries. Maybe there would be a woman in the room, and she and I could share understanding looks as our husbands and sons engaged in their medieval posturing.

The show barn looks like a very large storage shed, made out of corrugated tin, painted blue, with a tin roof. A cement floor lays at one end and a dirt show ring the other. The walls sport that

seventies fake wood paneling on the end where the dance floor resides. The show ring has a series of gigantic garage doors for walls, so that they can be opened to the outside when it gets hot, or stinky, or both.

The crowd was thin, maybe twenty people. We paid our money, but I felt certain that this experience would disappoint Adam. There was something so fragile about him standing there, so young and handsome, so... partnerless.

I wondered how he would like dancing with me, if that would make things better or worse. I felt intuitively that it would only hurt, that there was a part of him I could no longer touch. His desire to branch out beyond his mama and daddy endeared me to him at that moment.

A small group of people from our hometown gathered in a knot on the far end of the building, and we joined them. The children were boys, all of them. Somehow, we got into a conversation about asking girls to dance. One of the men said, "When I was a boy, I had this 4-H leader, and when we went to camp each summer, there was a dance every night. That woman made us dance with the girls. If we didn't ask a girl to dance immediately after it started, she came to us with a broom in her hand and said, "If you don't dance with a girl, you'll be dancing with this all day tomorrow." By God, I hated that old woman for making me do it, but I knew how to ask a girl to dance after that." He shot meaningful glances toward his son and nephew, and they shook their heads and stuffed their hands further into their pockets. Adam stood up straighter and his look grew thoughtful. If only some girls would show up.

The three of us sat down near the edge of the dance floor in silence. Brian was thinking of his glory days, the dances at Kicker's Palace, and all the dozens of girls he had danced with, been smart enough and brave enough to ask, and they had been smart enough to say yes. In his mind, he was twirling around the floor already, maybe with the girl of the creamy red hair. He had a thing for red hair before he met me. All of his dancing days happened before he met me. I am Baptist, so I don't know how to dance.

I was wondering whether my husband was ever sorry he didn't marry a country girl, someone who wasn't afraid to pluck the feathers off dead birds. Did he ever regret that I don't have sympathetic memories of country dances, that I don't especially like Hank Williams, either the junior or the senior version? Does he know that there was a time when the sight of his polyester Wranglers, gold chain, and large straw hat would have sent me running the other way? Does he ever feel he made an unfortunate choice? Like when we come to these dances and I am a fish out of a stock pond, not understanding why people even want to put on a dance? These were my thoughts.

Adam cut the silence. He said, "I don't know how to dance." I looked at Brian, and he looked at me. We hadn't prepared him for this one thing, one thing we could not teach him, not there, not then. It was too late.

"Well," I said, "I bet there are a lot of girls here who will teach you."

"Yes, of course, son," said Brian, "All you have to do is ask."

He looked at us as if we were crazy. I began mentally anticipating the fallout of this decision: the kid would slump in the chair right where he was sitting. He wouldn't dance at all because there weren't any girls, and even if there were, he'd be too mad(scared, embarrassed or shy) to ask, and then he'd be disappointed with himself and live with regrets, kicking himself long into the night after we were asleep. Moreover, it would be Brian's fault, for forcing our baby into a social situation for which he was not prepared.

Then, a group of girls walked in. They were in a pack, and they stood on the periphery of the dance floor just as the D.J. began playing the first song. They were tall and thin, mostly, but I couldn't see too well because of the dim lighting, and because they were bunched in so close. The short ones were probably in the middle, letting their more alluring sisters act as scouts to draw in the males. Their clothing was clean and modest. Adam acted completely uninterested.

Another group bounded through the door. Happy and buoyant, they had a couple of boys with them. Small wonder. They wore copious amounts of make-up and uncopious amounts of clothing. They sported the western ho look, belly buttons aglow, jeans crammed into low, tight jeans. I swear I saw one pubic hair hanging out. They waltzed toward us smiling confidently and sweeping the room with their eyes. The girls, every one of them, took Adam in, acknowledging their own allure with the come get me looks they shot.

The friend sitting next to us said, "Here's what I don't understand. Those girls don't have Mama's? I don't see how they get out of the house looking like that."

I shrugged in agreement, and looked at Adam. To his credit, and he wasn't watching the undressed girls, but the decent looking pack of girls who had first entered the room.

Without a word of warning, Adam took a deep breath and stood up. He rubbed his hands down the front of his legs and approached them. He spoke, listened to their response, and then moved on to another group of girls. He said something to them also, and listened to their response. Then, he came back to the chair and sat down.

"What did you say, Son?" said Brian.

"I told them I don't know how to dance, and asked if anyone would teach me."

“What’d they say?”

“They don’t know how either.”

I stared in disbelief. I thought, stupid girls! Have you girls never heard of lying? Here is a cute, decent boy asking you to dance and you turn him down. When I glanced over at my son, his world caved in, glaring at his father, I wanted to pluck their hair out. I even considered siccing one of the slutty girls on him. They’d teach him to dance, alright, you dumb nice girls.

However, I felt pride in my son for trying, for being the one to ask, for not being one of those little boys who wait for girls to come and get him. This new phenomenon of the shark female did not exist when I was in school.

Anyway, I was pretty sure this kid’s life had gone straight to hell by way of a kicker dance, when suddenly a girl approached him. She whispered something we couldn’t hear, and he got up and followed her. My husband and I watched as he crossed into a dark corner of the dance floor. The girl (tall, pretty) handed him over to another girl (short, slightly overweight) and she grabbed his hands to strike the dance pose. They took a couple of halting steps together, and then he abruptly let go and returned to the chairs. He sat down and sighed, “Wow. I just dodged a big bullet there.”

I was just about to ask him what he meant when he saw *her*. She, the siren, the song, the impetus to a boy’s wobbly dancing legs. He immediately rose back up from the chair he’d fallen into twice, defeated and discouraged, and went to her. He said something, she said something, and they took each other’s hands and walked over to the dance floor. She only knew the waltz, but she began to teach him, and she stayed with him for the rest of the night.

She had also shown rabbits the day before. We had all noticed her, because she was very pretty, she’d been next to Adam while they showed rabbits, and one of her rabbits had jumped off the table during the competition and she had to go and chase it.

Brian and I watched their halting progress for the first song. As the song ended, he nudged me. “Let’s dance.”

“Okay,” I said, “Maybe one.”

He was clean and he smelled good. He bent at the knees as someone showed him, to make his height closer to mine. At the end of the dance, I hugged him, and when the music started up, he pulled me back into position, and we danced again. We danced to slow country classics, like “Silver Wings,” his favorite, and some new country songs that were too fast for him, so he just took them slower. We danced the “Macarena.” Once, I turned the wrong direction on the “Hey, Macarena,”

part, and I made eye contact with Adam. He was dancing in the line next to the girl, and he smiled at me. If his non-dancing, direction-challenged, Baptist mother embarrassed him, it didn't show.

For a long time we danced. When we were ready to leave, we told Adam to say goodbye to his friend, and Brian pulled him aside and told him to get her number. He said, "Don't worry, Dad, I already did."

As soon as we got out the door, he told us her name, that she was from Poteet, and that her dad ran a fish hatchery. Brian chuckled and said, "I guess you're going to want a hat and some boots now."

Adam said, "Yeah that might be a good idea." That surprised me. He had resisted the cowboy look for years, had been belligerent about it. Now, a girl had danced with him, and he was willing, eager to be a cowboy.

He said he'd like to see her again. We said sure, even though we knew he couldn't drive yet, and that it would mean dropping him off and picking him up, a thirty-minute drive.

The next Thursday, we were sitting at the supper table, and as we finished eating, he said, "Can she come over tomorrow?" We agreed, and he left the table to call her and make the arrangements. Then he came back and sat down. He looked at my husband and said, "I need to clean up around here."

Before my mouth could drop open, my husband said, "I'll help you." For the first time, I realized how important women are to men, how we have the power to make sixteen-year-old boys strut around in cowboy hats, vacuuming their bedrooms and whistling a Hank Williams tune, how we have the power to make a grown man voluntarily vacuum the living room floor, without anybody asking, on a Thursday night.

I said a quick prayer, that this girl wouldn't use her power to hurt my son.

My husband and I got up from the table. He held out his hands and said, "Dance with me."

He grabbed my hands and whirled me into the bedroom, where he gave me a fat cowboy kiss. We danced on silver wings, around and around the room.

UNTITLED, PART II

By Kim Saxon

Stella Linnamaker sat in the pink light from an early sunset on the green, lacquered bench, waiting for her connecting bus to Los Angeles. Her single, tapestry-covered bag waited at her feet for this final leg of the trip that she knew would define her life. Golden, Stella was too bright for her hometown in Minnesota. There, people on the streets turned away or looked above or below her to address her, which only happened when she asked a question. Men were instinctively afraid of being burned by her radiance, and women were afraid of being outshone. She had died her hair black, which didn't dim her light, scuffed her shoes, and wore grey dresses with high, white collared necks, but still, Stella blinded those around her. She was now placing her hope in the dimming effects of celluloid in order to live freely in the world.

But as Stella stared down at her carefully scuffed toes, she held her ears to drown the tuneless whistle she had been hearing since she had exited at this last stop on her journey west. The noise was deafening to her, and it made her homesick, reminding her of a bird that woke her from a tentative sunrise sleep in her bed at her mother's house. She startled at the car horn playing a recognizable shave-and-a-haircut and looked up, her bright eyes meeting a constellation-bright smile. Without a word, Stella picked up her tapestry bag and slipped into the passenger seat of the waiting, idling, cherry-red Chevy.

Even though Rosie had died ten years before, the Wednesday ladies still called the faded pink couch in Linda's Cut and Curl "Rosie's Sofa." Every week for the last thirty years, they carefully attended their Wednesday afternoon wash-and-set appointments with Linda or Dora or one of the other "girls," and they waited their turns, lounging primly on the couch, leafing through dog-eared back issues of women's magazines as they talked around their husbands' latest illnesses and their own, painful bunions.

After thirty years, the Wednesday evening ladies were the longest lasting beauty shop group at Linda's. They remembered when the place was called Rosie's Cut and Curl, when the pink couch was the bright color of Pepto Bismol -- when it matched the shade of their lipstick and they used it as a measure of just how grossly the manufacturer had violated the formula for "Pink Dreams" nail polish. On that couch, the ten original women had laughed loudly with guilt at Penny's dirty jokes, cried for Biddy's sick granddaughter, and toasted Marge's daughter's engagement to the high school's starting quarterback. They had shared graduations, their children's successes and failures, and their husbands' retirement woes.

And, sitting on that couch, they had watched the bright fabric fade slowly through the years to a tame rose-petal pink – the “appropriate” pink of the flowers they had placed on the graves of the group members fading out before them.

This Wednesday evening, six pale pink ladies perched on Rosie’s sofa. The same coffee table brimming with dog-eared magazines sat in front of them, and the same blend of hairspray and perm solution hugged them like a friend. They were a quieter bunch these days, venturing from their now-empty houses in search of companionship in a time it seemed like everyone they knew well was dead or dying. They smiled and talked, but their eyes gave away an emptiness.

That is, until the evening they watched, breathlessly, as the shining woman at the bus stop climbed in to Billy Harper’s passenger seat.

Six ladies glowed hot pink as they held hands and watched from Linda’s plate glass window as the cherry-red Chevy drove to the end of Main Street and its bright-white passengers combusted like Fourth of July fireworks in the evening sky, their last embers fluttering into the indigo night.

The only sign the Chevy and its passengers existed was the silver dollar that spun on its edge down the now empty street.

###

“Mountain Mother”

Katherine Willis.

I hungered to see

The self and was sated,

Startled and solemnized.

Liquid brown eyes,

Passion and patience.

Unbelievable for someone

Whose kind has been nearly decimated.

Cautiously smelling the remains

Of yesterday’s perfume

On my wrist.

The She gorilla

Provides me with

A time-tunnel view

Of those primal days

When we humans were pitiful slugs

Amongst the then awesome

Numbers of the great apes.

How can I ever see

All that has been suffered

And imprinted upon

This captive spirit?

“Mountain Woman Giving Birth”

By Katherine Willis

Preternaturally dark, but not dank – with an ambient hush calling to mind the opening tones of Clannad’s “Mystic Ring” – I feel transported in time. Back, so far back that walking upright is predominantly the realm of velocaraptors and Tyrannosauriii! I’m in a cave Boma – it’s close to 4 o’clock in the morning and I’m one of only four humans in the immediate area of a mother-to-be. Said mother has the bearing and gravity worthy of her DNA – worthy of centuries of breeding and generational imprinting. She’s not the last of her lineage, but there don’t remain too many others. The delivery of a healthy baby will be good for her, yes, but to the doctor waiting nearby and the two other anxious men close to where I am huddled, this baby may be a veritable cause celebre! Its addition to the family group will be significant in that the mother is almost past her child-bearing years and the family line has been practically decimated.

From time to time the fecund female has turned her head to the right and chilled me with a look of ages-old resignation and knowledge primeval. She’d rather be tucked away high in the mountains, ensconced in an expertly dug, earthen, bowl-like Boma, shrouded by dense ferns, creepers and other ancient growth. Instead, she’s in a country not native to her kind. And although she’s safe from predators hungry for the ‘magic’ of her hands, voracious in their pursuit of exotic trophies – she’s tethered, nonetheless, by glass and stone borders, by her captors’ protectionist politics and by an undisguised public interest - the result, perhaps, of old “Tarzan” reruns, “King Kong” remakes, and a much-improved National Geographic series.

When our eyes have met, I'm as transfixed by the depth of her genealogical experience as I was when I first met the father of her soon-to-be born child – which I've been told will be another girl (she has already given birth to one boy and one girl). As with the father, I am humbled – rather than frightened – in her presence. But, unlike the father - whose gaze pulled me into a vortex of primordial life pulsating with the ever present struggle between predator and prey – the female's orbs emanate a tenderness the father can ill afford in an environment of heavy silences punctuated by sudden violence amidst an endless arboreal canopy of indeterminate ages.

The father had scornfully refused to have a vitamin treat tossed in the air at him – as I had done for both his son and daughter. While the juveniles reveled in their ability to snatch the proffered treats mid-flight, the adult male had gravely extended his muscled arm palm upward just as any other dignified gentleman would. Without thought or hesitation I'd handed over a spherical snack, brushing the tips of my fingers down that massive, leathery “mitt” of a hand as my hand slowly retracted. Almost thoughtfully – definitely not violently – the male had clasped my forearm and drawn it towards him, through the slender bars that separated us. Seeing my appendage disappear into a dark area like something out of “Stargate” was surreal – as if I were observing someone else's body melting into an alien world, so detached was I in that moment. I vaguely remember thinking how hysterical my parents would be when they got the call informing them that their only child had perished as a result of having once again put herself in harm's way, heedless of the certain anguish such information would cause them. And any thought of the inconveniences commensurate with losing my right rather than my left arm only surfaced much later. At that moment I was mesmerized by my “handler” ~ time standing out in bas relief. Then slowly, after examining it top and

bottom, my forearm and hand were extended through the bars and offered back to me for my own mundane usage. Later, whenever those incredible moments floated to the surface of my consciousness, time might seem to stand still until the whole scene replayed itself. And as much as I know that for a few brief moments my life (and most definitely limb) had actually hung suspended in the balance of a powerful creature's prerogative, the overwhelming sensation that remains is one of awe – like the poignant scene from Spielberg's seminal film "Empire of the Sun" when the intractable Jamie myopically blocks out the ugliness of the internment camp to which he's been delivered, so spellbound is he at the sight of a sleek Japanese bomber. All he can manage to do is place his hands lovingly on the belly of the plane and touch his forehead to its smooth exterior – an aircraft both awe- inspiring and terror-inducing; an object at which to marvel even as it annihilates. Such had been my experience – an exercise in contextual cognitive dissonance: equal parts horror and wonder.

Now I was huddled some twenty feet away from the mate of that embodiment of wonder and unsheathed power.

When I'd been alerted that the highly anticipated birth was eminent and reminded that I needed to factor in "cleansing" time, I'd been concerned about the invasive procedures involved in order to insure as decontaminated a birthing arena as possible. Certain colleagues whose envy could barely be contained had delighted in regaling me with alarming anecdotes related to their own experiences in the "cleanser" followed by the inevitable dire admonition to "try and avoid being blinded by all the toxic spray, or poisoned either by inhalation or swallowing – as allegedly a few of my unfortunate predecessors had been."

Since that jangling call some five hours ago I could still detect slight traces of ammonia on my arms and something else far more effective than “Oxy-Orange” for \$19.95. Those odors had been assimilated by the stronger, more pervasive aromas of underground moisture interlaced with the pungency of a naturally hirsute creature, anxious and exhausted, remembering where and how long her usually powerful body would experience pain.

Then – not so much suddenly, but more akin to an upsurge of a river’s jagged fluidity – the mother’s huffing and rolling became more pronounced and with a great heave and ‘S’ fashioning of herself, a wet black head began to protrude from her lower abdominal area, mostly blocked from my sight in this pocket of procreation. More quickly than I’d ever expected there was a swing of an arm and a scooping movement with a hand and then a miniscule replica flailing about was brought to its mother’s neck.

For such a long-awaited event, in any other culture I’m sure that there would have been countless congratulations and smiles. But here, I marveled at the calm on the part of the doctor and the exchanged looks between two Preserve Supervisors that – to me – acknowledged the fluctuations and extra watch hours in their schedules throughout the coming months. Another fellow Preserve Guide – two years my senior in experience – gave me a glance that said “Can you believe we’ve witnessed this?” I even think my fellow guide came to grudgingly find me a bit more acceptable, slightly more valid as a colleague because of having shared this “practically never in a lifetime experience.” Unlike the other Preserve Guides, I didn’t have a degree in anything scientifically – never mind zoologically or biologically – related. I was a Communications Major for God’s sake, enlisted into the sacred ranks for my communication skills more than experience or academia – and since my hiring, expected to learn mountains of material related to wild life from

varying continents, and outlast the sometimes sadistic, always dangerous, initiation tasks assigned to me by seasoned guides from places like South Africa and Australia. Regions where scars were emblematic of character and a source of pride, even envy! I'd endured the tasks, collected a fair amount of minor scars, still hadn't had any teeth knocked out, and now . . . been a part of Wild Life Preserve history!

For days afterward I was careful to avoid making too big of a deal about having had this experience, partly in order to avoid racking up any more resentment amongst the other "more deserving" guides, but mostly because, for me, watching the silver-backed gorilla female give birth was such a private and powerful experience. As I'd slid out backwards from the Boma, the mother had glanced my way. Her breathing was more regular and I wondered if she registered me as another female like herself. I felt at the time that she did. And hers was the more formidable bond that seemed forged in that underground maternal context. Her body had given life and I had seen what a greater power that was. But I could leave and she and her baby were bound irrevocably to that fixed area – always on display. With protection there came sacrifice, and that sacrifice was true freedom.

Years after the infamy of 911, I'm once again thinking of being protected and perhaps paying a price for that in the form of limited freedom. However, unlike the animal kingdom with its incredible passed on memory and instinct, we humans will eventually forget what our world was like before endless inspection lines at airports and will have adjusted to additional limitations to our heretofore "freedoms." But the animals never forget and each generation born into captivity "remembers" and possibly ponders what its life would be like to once again run, swim, slither, or waddle unfettered for even a brief time . . . prior to the crack of a poacher's rifle or the net of the zoological collector.

I Don't Want to Write Today

Jennifer Hall

I am not in the right frame of mind to write, at least not to write anything intended for this audience in this place and in this time. I don't want to do it. If I were at home or outside or alone or writing for someone I really know then perhaps --- but let's be honest, I just don't feel like doing it. I don't want to reveal myself to anyone here – I don't want to force some kind of intimacy with revelatory writing. But I also don't want to dissemble. I don't want to pretend today. I don't want to censor myself to meet anyone's expectations or to protect myself. I don't feel like talking about myself and about what is really important to me today. And I don't want to talk about why I feel the need to protect myself or censor myself because out of that discussion comes catharsis and I am having none of that! I don't need or want it today.

For one thing, that kind of revelatory writing has to come from a position of safety, a position of trust. I have known most of the people in this group for mere days. I don't feel that this is a long enough time for me to start being too honest. For another, that's just not who I am. There are only a few people in this world who really know me well and I'm fine with that.

Anyway, it's beautiful outside today. I want to be out there in the hot sun playing with my dogs, feeling the energy of the sun under their fur. I want to fill up their wading pool so they can drink clean cold water and Scooter, the lab, can lie down in it and be happy. I want to brush Lucky, the shepherd mix, so I can get the rest of his winter undercoat out. There are still a few birds in our neighborhood that haven't yet incorporated fragments of his elemental being into their homes. Speaking of birds, I want to watch the teenage mockingbirds try to con their parents into bringing them food when they are more than capable of procuring it themselves. I want to hear that mechanical cheeping noise they make as they tightrope walk along the fence. I want to watch the parents swoop down and pick up grasshoppers.

I want to pick up all of the bricks that fell over the other night so the grass under them doesn't die. I want to lie on the grass in the shade and look at the sky and be quiet for a while. I don't want to talk to anyone about words or ideas today ... or about why I don't want to talk about these things.

I want to read a book and drink limeade and weed my herb gardens. I don't want to talk about myself or why I said what I said or why I did what I did or why I am what I am like Popeye and who I am because I just am and today just is. I want to weed out plants that are useless to me and preserve the ones that benefit me, whether because of their sight or smell or taste. I want to cut back the rosemary before it stifles all of my mint and check to see if there is any garlic ready to be harvested or whether any more peaches are ripe. Did you know that you can just stick an onion in the ground and it will grow? Amazing.

I want to touch the smooth and swollen aloe vera leaves and look at all of the babies sprouting at the base of the biggest plant. And pick off last year's crepe myrtle pods so the new flowers can grow as the tree sheds its skin. And wait for the iris to bloom.

I want to water the ground by the fence and see if the toad comes up out of his hole and looks at me balefully like he did the other evening. I want to worry over my peppers and chide them into growing. I want to wonder at the red brush-like flowers my mom convinced me to buy that have resolutely bloomed for weeks now even though I have a history of killing flowers.

I want to ponder the commitments I have made recently – the round robin story my sister and I are writing, the CDs I promised to burn, the mail art project I need to mail. The quilt top I need to finish. The wall hanging that needs completing. The room I need to finish cleaning out. The garage that still, after three years in this house, has boxes in it and the unloved or less-loved books that there is no room for in the house. And there might be a mouse in there! I should probably do something about that. I want to start to finish one of these projects so I can cross it off as done and done when it is finally done.

So I'm thinking you can probably see why I don't want to write today. The energy that flows through me today is making it hard for me to stay in my seat. Crackling impatience to be moving around, walking, running, throwing dog toys for them to chase, digging, pruning, shaping, shearing, checking the mail, bringing in the trash cans, anything anything anything as long as it is not static and it is not still and it is not inert and it is not motionless.

“Highway 1”

By Iréne Rendón

A canopy of gray hung over the day. Excitement and wonder was the theme, this day.

As the wheels of a rented yellow Ryder truck rolled away from the curb of 226 Highway Drive, I saw mom with tear's streaming down her face. Irma, my sister, bit her lip. She fought the tears. Daddy, Lil' Rudy and Big Rudy waved good-bye. Looking from the rear view mirror, I saw mom bless us with the sign of the cross.

We were off; about to begin a new adventure in our life. For over ten years, I had dreamed of living in San Francisco. The day had finally arrived; it was today.

Four days later, we arrived in San Francisco, California.

As we turned left on Valencia, then left again onto Powers Street, we parked in front of 15 1/2, a San Francisco flat in the Mission District.

The west coast sky was darkening, it was late Friday, the day before New Year's Eve, 1994. A cool night, many interesting smells and sounds of the city wafted up to greet the holiday night.

The Ryder truck was overpowering on this narrow, hilly street, straight out of a Wayne Theibaud painting. The truck appeared to be balancing on its tip toes. The giant vehicle was packed with all my chivas, house furnishings, that was how Kathy, my companion, referred to it.

That night, we retired late, exhausted from the 1700 mile drive, and carrying furniture up a narrow staircase. Abruptly, I was awakened by screams, squealing brakes, glass crashing, and flashing lights. The first words I uttered was, "Is it an earthquake"? Immediately, I thought about mom, she had warned me, "Pero abi tiene earthquakes". Her words rang as loud as the strong blaring voice speaking over an intercom, "Get of the vehicle!". I walked over to the window where I had a full view of the kerfuffle. A feeling of relief came over me, when I realized it was not an earthquake, but yet, what a horrible welcome this was to San Francisco. I was used to living in a quiet, peaceful, safe neighborhood, but here, I was in a target range, abi,abi!

The days became weeks and weeks turned into months. Kathy landed employment at a Women's gym on Market Street. It did not pay much, but it was a job. We didn't have bills and certainly no credit card debt. Rent was cheap at first, living with Sand, my friend, we lived out of one room. Being Texans and used to the open spaces and parking outside one's residence was what we were used to. But, here, parking was a problem. Some nights we parked three to six blocks away and the streets were steep hills. This new way of living was horrifying and it was taking a toll on Kathy.

It was early Spring, but in Northern California, San Francisco, Bay Area it is always cold. One must always have a jacket, when the marine layer attacks the City, one shivers from the Pacific ocean cold.

Kathy had had it, she needed to escape the tight, smothering, claustrophobic feeling of "No Space". No space in the house, no parking space, no space in restaurants. She was on a verge of "space collapse". She was not used to the insanity of the City. She's from West Texas, Abilene, a farm girl, huh, look who's talking.

We decided to drive to L.A., it was only five hours away. We drove in Kathy's 1990 Nissan truck it wasn't a coup, but it did have a camper shell. Highway 1 was the route we took. We talked, we planned, we laughed we saw the Pacific ocean cliffs, then it become night. California roads are not lit up like Texas roads. Between the two of us we must have had fourteen dollars and a gas card. Carl's Junior's sold burgers for 99 cents, we each had one for dinner. It was fun and after all, we were on an adventure.

Several hours later, we were still miles away from L.A. and it was becoming night. We did not have money for a motel and we had not spotted a roadside park. Kathy was getting grumpy. Oh no, I didn't want that. I had to do something and quick! "Stop, stop!", I said, "Let me drive I will find us a place to rest". "Now go in the back to the camper, let me drive, " I ordered.

I took the wheel and I drove in the dark night. I absolutely did not know where I was, just somewhere in the world. I couldn't even call Big Rudy, my brother-in-law, to come get me. The street sign read Venice. I thought Venice beach, so where's the ocean? I drove and I drove on a very long road. It was slightly foggy, misty, it was the marine layer, all around me. It was scary. The only lights were at the intersections and they were miles apart. I felt scared. I felt like driving up to someone's house and asking to spend the

night. I prayed! I prayed and then I prayed more. I pleaded for a safe place to park, and it had to be lighted. I kept reminding myself, "I told Kathy I would find us a place". Oh God, but where? Suddenly, in the far distance I saw what appeared to be a gas station/store. I hadn't run into one before. I drove up and parked. Before my eyes I saw a mechanic's shop next to the store and there was a security light. It was a shabby looking place, but it was perfect. Quickly, I jumped off the truck and walked up to the service window. An attendant was there waiting to serve his customers. I asked in an innocent, questioning tone of voice, "What time does the mechanic open the shop? The attendant, speaking with a foreign accent replied, "8:00 o'clock.", then I responded, "I am having a problem with my truck, may I park in the back next to the shop?" His reply was, "Yes". Then I asked still another question, "What time do you get off work"? He answered, "8:00 o'clock". "Will you wake me up when you get off work?", I asked. Again, he responded with "Yes".

As I returned to the truck, I was elated, I was exhausted, but mostly I was thankful. "Thank you God", I kept repeating, "Thank you". I lifted the window of the camper and crawled into it. I made myself comfortable and slept.

A loud knock and a friendly voice announced, "It 's 8:00 o'clock. Kathy and I sat up in the camper, I relayed the evening story and she said, "I knew you would handle it".

The morning traffic was heavy, but the Southern California skies appeared warm, friendly, cheerful and exciting. We were 20 miles away from L.A. We stopped at Denny's for breakfast to have a "Grand Slam" only \$1.99 at the time, it even included coffee!

We were off to explore the day. It was ours. Driving up and down the streets of L. A. we approached Hollywood Boulevard. We parked and we begin to walk. A young man dressed in a Hawaiian shirt was offering tickets for a T.V. show . He offered us tickets and even asked what showtime we would like. We both agreed to accept the 2:00 o'clock show. He gave us directions to the studio. At 1:30 we drove to the studio in Hollywood. A line of people was forming and we joined that line of fans. Soon we were in the studio and took our seats. At first, we were entertained by a tall man. I recognized this tall man. He was from the "Mike and Matty" show. I had seen the show at the flat in San Francisco. The show started and as quickly as it did, it was over. I still remember the blinking neon red sign which read "applaud". Then a voice came over an intercom announcing, "Mike and

Matty” will return momentarily to meet and take pictures with you. Wow! what a day, “Yeah, let’s meet them!”, we said.

We stood in line, then, it was our turn. Mike and Matty greeted us with handshakes and smiles. Matty asked, “Where are you from”? I answered, “Texas”. Immediately, she said, “Oh, I am so sorry about Selena, what a tragedy. She was from Texas” .

We stood for a few more seconds next to them as they flashed a camera. We walked off with a trophy, the picture, the memory for our day. Still dressed in the same clothes we had slept in the night before. The fact that two overfed short haired leaping gnomes should be in Hollywood, that day was the beginning of the adventurous journey of the Golden State.

“Victorious, Victoria”

By Erlinda Reyes

It is June 22, 2006 in the afternoon; it is 6:30 p.m. to be exact. I hurry from the parking lot trying to get to the Palomino Hall at Palo Alto College. As I walk faster I can see people going into the building, some dressed casually, some in gowns and with cameras. They all seem happy to be there, at school believe it or not!

I enter the foyer of the building past the long hall and I can see a table lined with a white cloth and a green and white banner, which reads “Welcome to Palo Alto College High School Equivalency Program.” While people are busy chatting, laughing and taking pictures the crowd is getting bigger and so is the noise. I’m glad that it’s a good turnout. I look around searching for familiar faces and see Ms. Salinas, the Program Coordinator and Ms. Vargas, the Student Services Specialist, busily going over the final arrangements for the evening. When I finally reach their table, I’m greeted with a warm welcome. I sneak a look at my watch and hope everything goes smoothly and on time because I need to get to school myself. I have my own school assignment to finish and be ready for tomorrow’s workday.

Pretty soon I’m ready to find a seat as the Commencement ceremonies are about to

start. As I enter the auditorium I see her, Victoria Dehoyos. She's with her mother and other family members. She looks beautiful as usual, like a young model with her tall slender body, big round blue eyes and chestnut color, hi-lighted hair made up in cascading curls. Vicky is wearing a sleek black pantsuit and wait, she is talking..... to her mother, apparently they have made up! The mother is wearing a long white gown and looks content. Oh.... it made me happy to see them together. As I get closer to them Victoria's mother, Mrs. Maria Dehoyos, turns around and says, "Mrs. Reyes I'm so glad to see you and happy that you were able to come". I smiled and answered, " I'm happy to be here and did not want to miss seeing Victoria get her GED diploma after all her hard work". " Oh, Mrs. Reyes you made all this possible for her with your help and support. All the homes visits, phone calls and constant talking to her gave her different options for finishing school." "It's all been worth it, " I responded." "She made her decision and stayed focused."

"Yes, Reyes, but you never gave up on her like I did." I was so angry when she started dating. I liked the boy but she was too young. I gave up on her every time she ran away and got in trouble in Michigan. You understood that we are migrant families and

had been going up North for years to work in the fields picking sugar beets. We migrate to earn a living not to waste time and money. I didn't expect for Vicky and her brother to make those kinds of decisions. She was not supposed to listen to her "so called" friends and tag a car." " Para mí, esos no son amigos! Because of what she did Vicky had to go back and do Community Service and when she returned she didn't want to go back to school. I'm glad you encouraged her to go back. When she had too many absences and was going to have to go to court, you encouraged her again to get a GED. She was getting too old to be a Freshmen in High School. You've been helping us ever since she was in 3rd grade. "You've really helped all of us in the family."

"Mrs Dehoyos" I added, " enjoy your afternoon with her." "Yes, Mrs. Reyes you're right, but I have to tell my family we hope things never happen that way again and appreciate all the support you gave Victoria. I remember when you would come to the house and she was not there, because she decided to stay at a friend's house. You still kept coming back. (usted continuo visitar con ella." Tengo agradecimiento", Sra. Erlinda. I will not forget that you paid for her student ID so that she could test for her GED. "You even gave us school supplies, shoes and clothing." " Mrs. Dehoyos, I didn't give it to you

it was the Migrant Program in our district.” “ Yes, but you made sure we got the help.

Thank you for not giving up on her or us. She listened to you.”

Suddenly, it was time to go in and everyone got to their seat. We were all very proud and cheered when Victoria’s name was called. After the reception Mrs. Dehoyos insisted we all take pictures together. What a rewarding experience to be there with them!

Especially as this would be my last year with the program, some of the services would continue through Region 20. I hope that I’ve served the migrant population the way they deserve to be treated and served.

Migrant students have been described as coming in quietly into our schools and not asking for help, then they are gone. Migratory families follow the crops and take their children out of school. Studies show that migrant students have a high drop out rate. Through the years the program had many migrant students graduate and go on to college. One of the migrant students earned her degree in Communications from St. Mary’s University. She was later hired by Telemundo channel 41 television station and worked as the Public Relations person. Later she got married and had a little girl. Her brother earned his degree from University of Texas at San Antonio, Mechanical Engineer. One of

our other young men earned a degree in automotive from Wisconsin Automotive

Technical School and another student is still at the University of Texas in Austin, this

student graduated in the top 10 % of his class.

Ultimately we all need to be both persistent and consistent in what we do to help break the cycle of poverty or at least try to make a dent in the drop out rate.

My Yearly Exam

“. . . writing is . . . a way of ‘coming to know’ – a way of. . . figuring things out, of making meaning of our experiences and ‘fragile thoughts.’” ~ Jeffrey Golub

A doctor’s office is my least favorite place, yet I go faithfully every year to ensure that my heart’s still ticking and that unwelcome masses have not insidiously invaded my body and set up shop in unsuspecting tissue. I’d rather be anywhere than squeezed into a cheap metal chair, buried between anxious patients gnawing on fingernails or talking loudly on cell phones until their name is called. “It’s all so efficient, so assembly ‘line-ish’ - pigs on the slaughter block,” I always think to myself.

Friday afternoon was no different. After taking three wrong turns (on the same dreary, pot-holed streets I had wandered down last year), I pulled my car into a parking space, sighed heavily, and got out and walked to the front door.

The inside was beautifully decorated. The doctor had spared no expense: lavish carpeting, sophisticated blue wallpaper, and thick, wing-back chairs. Gone were the metal monstrosities from last June.

I checked in with the nurse, filled out the obligatory insurance forms, and quietly took a seat, watching the door swinging to and fro as patients entered and exited the examination rooms. The waiting area was filled with middle-aged patients, buried absentmindedly in magazines, avoiding eye contact - all lost in private reveries.

It was while I was reading the novel I had brought to pass the time that I heard the first of it: deep, guttural sounds emerging from the nurses’ station. “Did Dr. Guttierrez bring his dog to work?” I wondered. “How odd.”

With that, the door opened. Out shuffled a young man, tall – handsome, if not for the twisted mouth and contorted left arm. Unsteady on his feet, he lurched to the right and slammed into the wall. His hands moved frantically up and down its surface as he struggled to balance himself and

follow its contours to his seat. I stared ashamedly, but reassured myself that he was blind and wasn't aware of my rudeness.

As he crept along the wall, he growled and jerked his head incessantly, snapped it rapid-fire, like a machine gun round unleashed on an unwitting enemy. His hands banged against a table lamp, and the room reverberated with the animalistic sounds of his fear, anger, and bewilderment.

I watched, riveted by the horror. "Don't look," I told myself, yet I couldn't turn away.

"Should I get up and help him?" I wondered.

"Where is the nurse?"

"Can he find his way?"

"Is he upset, or is he used to this?"

I looked around the room for help, but all heads were lowered, eyes averted.

I heard the nervous shuffling of magazines.

Throats clearing.

Forced coughs.

One lady got up and escaped to the bathroom.

Before I could act, before I could even decide what to do, the door whipped open and out sprung a nurse's aide, who quickly took charge by grabbing his arm and leading him across the room to an empty seat.

She whispered directions in his ear. "Definitely his caregiver," I told myself, as I watched her settle him down. But "settling him down" didn't come easily. As he burrowed into the couch, he howled forlornly, a newborn coyote abandoned in the wilderness, and began to bark and whine like an animal whose paw was being ripped and chewed by the iron teeth of a hunter's trap.

Unnerved by his inhuman shrieks and writhings, I scanned the room and saw the same unease and helpless confusion in the faces of the other patients. I bowed my head. I wanted to pray, to ask for understanding – and yes, to thank God that my brothers and sisters and children and husband and friends are healthy and whole. But words didn't come. I couldn't form the words to a single prayer.

I couldn't summon the vision of a loving God. "Where is the mercy in this?" I asked myself. "What life lesson am I supposed to take from the suffering of such a defenseless man?"

He got up eventually, and squeezing the arm of his companion, stumbled out of the office and into the parking lot - going back, I suppose - to whatever facility "houses" him, feeds him, changes his diapers.

Soon they called my name, and I got up too, and wearily headed to the consultation room. The doctor greeted me cordially, but I knew - despite the examination to come - that there were questions his medical expertise could simply never answer.

Nancy Gregory

June 2007

Moving Away From Home

Sermon for August 10, 2007

Temple Beth El

By Dr. Roxanne Henkin

The Torah Portions in August focus on the Jews contemplating their move to the promised land. Since that time, the Jews lost Israel, were dispersed throughout the world and only recently, returned to their homeland. As Americans, many of us have moved both across the country and across the world. Even in San Antonio, only 21% of the Jewish population was born here. What does it mean to be rooted to a place and what does it mean to be a transplant?

Once upon a time, I was rooted to a place. It was Chicago, Illinois and the surrounding suburbs. I was born in Chicago and I lived there all my life (except for college and two years in South Bend, Indiana). I was born into a large extended family that included Grandparents on both sides, Aunts and Uncles and many cousins of all varieties. I remember holidays at my Bubbys when I was a child and my other Grandparents would be invited as well as my cousins' other Grandparents and cousins, so there was always a lot of people and activity and love to go around. There's a Yiddish word for these people that truly described our relationship, Machatunim which means relatives of relatives, which makes you family.

But my family didn't stay in one place very long. My Aunts and Uncles and cousins and Great Aunts and Great Uncles all moved to California. This migration started long before I was born, in 1920 when my Grandmother's brother Paul ran away to California to become a Jewish cowboy. His letters home described the paradise of Los Angeles, his frustration at chasing calves that eluded him all day, but beat him home at night, and the lack of morals and inner strength that he found in the stars and starlets he met at Hollywood parties. His parents eventually made him move back to Chicago, but he returned to California in his fifties after his adult daughter moved there.

Since Uncle Paul began the migration, almost all our relatives moved to California throughout my childhood. I spent so many vacations in LA and to a lesser extent, San Francisco that today both cities feel like home even though I've never lived in either. My Grandparents retired and moved to

LA on the day I was stood up for a date which I remember experiencing as the more traumatic of the events. When my parents left in 1980, I had the strange sensation of being the last one left in the family to reside in Chicago. You could find more of our relatives in the Jewish Waldeim Cemetery than alive and well and living in Chicago.

If there was one thing that I believed, it was that I would never leave the Chicago area. I was determined to stay put and live near my children. I felt strongly about this particularly after my parents moved to San Antonio and I was left in Chicago missing them. I wouldn't leave my children and I didn't want to miss any important events. So we stayed in Chicago throughout the eighties and nineties and watched our kids grow up.

Meanwhile, my parents had moved not to California like everyone before them, but to San Antonio. They found California too expensive and too congested, and decided to take a trip around the country and check out potential sites. They drove into San Antonio on a beautiful and warm December day, saw the River Walk and were hooked. My brother had just finished college and followed them to San Antonio and my sister had already moved to the Bay area, so I was the one left behind.

Over the years, we visited San Antonio and fell in love with it ourselves. We always came for Spring Break which in Illinois usually falls around the last week of March. Sunbathing in my parents' backyard was always wonderful after the long, cold snowy and shivery winter. Still every time my parents brought up the topic of moving here, we just shook our head. We couldn't imagine uprooting ourselves and leaving behind our life in Chicago. As a professor, I had been awarded tenure and the title of full professor at a private university in Chicago. I knew that it would be difficult to replace that position. As a literacy educator, I had consulted in many school districts and had contacts all over the city. Added to that all my friendships that I had developed over the years, and I knew that my life in Chicago could never be replicated anywhere else.

Still there was always this feeling that would begin in October or November when the bad weather started to set in. Wouldn't it be nice to be in San Antonio in the winter and escape driving in the snow? Wouldn't it be lovely to live closer to my parents? In March 2003 during our Spring break in

San Antonio, I saw a position posted on the UTSA website for a professor. I applied, was offered the position, and in August we moved here.

I know that this is but one personal story out of millions, people move away every day, but for me this was a first. The Jewish people have been forced to leave their homes over and over again throughout history. We've yearned to return to Israel for generations and yet only recently, has that dream been realized. The state of Israel is only two and ½ years older than me, so I am among the oldest of people alive who can't remember the time before Israel existed. So many Jews, many surviving the Holocaust uprooted themselves and moved to Israel to start their lives over. How difficult it must have been, to be in a strange country, without anything, trying to build a new life.

The United States, too, is filled with immigrants, uprooted from their homelands, seeking a better life in the United States. People from around the world have started over, looking for opportunities they didn't have before. My Grandparents, Great-Grandparents, and two Great-Great Grandparents came to the US to escape the oppression of Eastern Europe and the Russian Pogroms. They came to the US to survive. My Great-Uncle Jewish Cowboy's parents came from the Ukraine and spoke no English. America has been good to their descendants, and I know that however traumatic, my move to San Antonio has been, it is not comparable to the sacrifices my ancestors made.

We had a difficult move. We left behind our daughter and her six week old twin boys, a son whose three week old baby had just died, and an unsold house. The day of the move we sobbed with our daughter as our belongings were loaded onto the moving truck. We arrived in San Antonio on a Sunday and I immediately started working on Monday. The next few months were a blur but I remember wishing that we had been here at least 5 months or 1 year. We often wanted to move back. I remember my sister told me that when you've been somewhere two years or longer, you'll probably stay, but that half the people who move to San Francisco move back home before then. I understood their desire and wasn't sure that we'd stay. Even with my parents here and my brother in Houston, we yearned for Chicago. In the beginning, we flew back four times each year.

We are not alone in moving to San Antonio. According to the 2007 San Antonio Jewish Community Study (Sheskin, 2007) 13% of the Jewish population has moved here within the last 5

years. Most of the new arrivals are not as lucky as we are to have family in the area. All of us have to make new friends, and find our place in the city as we establish new roots. We joined as many groups as we could find, which was something we didn't need to do in Chicago. We also began going to Friday night services at Temple Beth El.

My parents were members of the Temple and I had always enjoyed going to services when we would visit them. In fact, I was always looking for a temple like Beth El in the far west suburbs of Chicago where I lived. When my Grandmother moved to San Antonio from Los Angeles, she would take the bus from the Madison Apartments every week. She loved the services, and it was something we always did with her when we were in town. Sometimes when I'm sitting in the sanctuary, I can feel her smiling presence asking me what page we are on now. My Grandmother was fortunate, because she had her daughter and son-in-law who checked up on her, and took her to the movies every Sunday. In her last years she was surrounded by family.

Not everyone is so lucky. The Jews of San Antonio make up less than 1% of the population. Twenty-four percent of the Jewish population consists of persons age 65 or older with 12% age 75 or older. Twenty-one percent of Jewish people 65 or older live alone. Since 61% of Jews age 50 or older either have no children or no adult children in the area, many people are aging alone and away from family. Without family ties, who will help them with the challenges that growing older presents? If moving to San Antonio in mid-life was wrenching for me, how much more difficult will it be to navigate my retirement in years to come?

The Temple has a group that helps to address this need. It's called Yad B'Yad. The purpose of this committee is to provide friendship and companionship to the elderly who are confined to their homes because of illness and age related problems. We need volunteers to match up with the people on our list. It involves visiting them once a month and calling to check up on them in-between visits. This is one concrete thing that any of us can do. And there is so much more that we might offer. Do you have a neighbor whose spouse had died or who lives alone? What kind of effort can you make to be a friend? The Temple offers many opportunities to reach out including helping at the San Antonio Food Bank and working with Meals On Wheels. If everyone here decided today to take on one activity, think of the difference that we could make in individual's lives.

We moved here four years ago, and in that time, San Antonio is beginning to feel like home. About the time we arrived, so did a young man named Matthew Karnes. He moved from Erie, Pennsylvania to become the Director of Physical Therapy at Healthlink Health Club, in the Baptist Health System. I met him after I broke my shoulder, had a shoulder replacement, and was sent there for physical therapy. You might have seen the footage of him on the television as he ran over 100 miles in 23 hours on loop 1604 last Spring to raise money for the Baptist Health System employees who were in financial crisis. He died this June in a motorcycle accident at age 27. His memorial service talked about how he had raised over \$40,000 for the fund. He was one young man who made a difference.

I began this talk asking what does it mean to be rooted to one place and what does it mean to be a transplant? A transplant has to uproot her or himself step by agonizing step until the new roots begin to take hold and thrive. Although my world in Chicago could never be replicated, my new life in San Antonio has brought the pleasures of being close to my parents, making new friends and the joy of discovering a new city. But ultimately, whether you are a transplant or firmly rooted in your home city, you have to face the challenges and joys of life as they occur. Each of us tries to do the best that we can, but can we do more? Can we do more to brighten the life of someone who needs us? Can we give more, to improve the quality of another's life? What can we do to make a difference? We each need to look into our own hearts to find the answer.

Quotes

“One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.” Carl Jung
(Ruben C. Cantu)

“Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school, they marked up walls, pavements, and newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils... The child’s marks say ‘I am’.” Donald Graves
(Nancy Gregory)

“When I approach a child, he inspires me in two sentiments; tenderness for what he is and respect for what he may become.” Louis Pasteur
(Nora Gonzales)

“I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions.”
James Michener
(Bob Caldwell)

(Aurelia Desilva)

“When something can be read without effort, great effort has gone into its writing.” Enrique Jardiel Poncela
(Roxanne Henkin)

“I read a book one day and my whole life was changed. Even on the first page I was so affected by the book’s intensity I felt my body sever itself and pull away from the chair where I sat reading...It was such a powerful influence that the light surging from the pages illumined my face; its incandescence dazzled my intellect but also endowed it with brilliant lucidity. This was the kind of light within which I could recast myself.” (Orhan Pamuk)
(Jennifer Hall)

“The castle of Cair Paravel hill toward above them; before them were the sands, with rocks and little pools of salt water, and long miles of bluish – green waves breaking forever and ever on the beach. And, oh, the cry of the sea gulls! Have you heard it? Can you remember?” (C.S. Lewis)
(Joni Koehler)

“What struggling students need, then, is not more of the basics but a sense of what others find most interesting and useful about books, writing, and ideas.” (Joseph Harris, *A Teaching Subject*)
(Lennie Irvin)

“The old is not necessarily admirable, and new always despicable; the wise discriminate and decide; fools let others decide for them. (Kalidasa’s *Malavikagnimitra*)
(Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar)

“I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of hunger, or life that gnaws in us all.” Richard Wright
(Sheryll Putnam)

“One must be drenched in words, literally soaked in them, to have the right ones form themselves into the proper pattern at the right moment.” Hart Crane
(Irene Rendon)

“If we succeed in giving the love of learning, the learning itself is sure to follow.” John Lubbock
(Erlinda O. Reyes)

“Writing, I think, is not a part from living. Writing is a kind of double living. The writer experiences everything twice. Once in reality and once in that mirror that always waits before or behind.” Catherine Drinker Bowen
(Kim Saxon)

“Life cannot ever really defeat a writer who is in love with writing. For life itself is a writer’s lover until death – fascinating, cruel, lavish, warm, cold, treacherous, constant.” Edna Ferber
(Katherine Willis)