

I Christine

Christine could not believe it. He met someone on the bus and went home with her and had sex. What kind of person does that? He waved off her hurt and said it was nothing. Numbly, she tried to believe him.

She went to visit her friend at OttawaU the next weekend. In Ottawa, she and her girlfriend went out to a bar with some friends of hers. Christine laughed with them.

Back at home, she told Malcolm about the weekend and he got angry and jealous. She realized how he would always be controlling, and she would always be the one who was wrong. She knew it was over, and told him to go.

She went out to the nearby liquor store and got 2 empty boxes and packed up his stuff. Already things looked better.

The next day she went to her job as part-time manager of a corner store. She saw that it was May 5. El Cinco de mayo, she thought. She went to the Mexican food section and started work. She took all the yellow and red boxes of nachos and built a curved wall at the end of an aisle. She got cans of refried beans and tomatillos and bottles of salsa and made pyramids of bottles and cans. When she was finished she stood back and thought that everything was going to be ok.

II Emma

On her 30th birthday, Emma went to the hardware store and bought the cordless drill she had always wanted.

Slade Lander

## FUTURE

She made one last stroke of the canoe paddle and rested in on the gunnels and sat quietly as the canoe drifted toward the dock. She had spent ten days canoeing in Killarney Park with seven other women who had survived cancer. It was an experience unlike any other in her life and she wondered how she would make it part of the rest of her life. She accepted that she had received a gift of life and that accepting that gift did not mean that she was sure of what to do with it. She looked towards the approaching dock and imagined the canoe landing at the dock and herself disembarking from the canoe and walking across the dock to the shore and realized that, whatever happened, with that simple action she would be walking out of her past and into her future.

Slade Lander

Dreamcatcher

She danced herself out of her mother's wounds; danced the heel tap and the hitch kick, grand jeté and pas de chat. She studied dance for many years but never thought she was good enough. So she dropped out. And gave up her dreams.

Until.

Until she needed money. Then she got on a stage, wriggled her hips and felt the ecstasy of performance... in one sympathetic old man snapping awake in a corner.

Yes, she danced as an exotic dancer for 8 years. She didn't have a pimp or a family to feed, didn't have a drug addiction or an alcoholic thirst. She just wanted to dance but was too afraid to do it where it mattered. So she twirled in misty strip joints, with shattered women and shaken men. Pas de deux with a pole, impaled and interred, twisting in the wreckage of her fears. Suffocating. She had to stop.

So she stopped.

And her feet idled for a long time.

Until.

Until she met a medicine woman who revealed her spirit name: Shadow Dancing Woman.

Wow.

She said she could do better than treading in obscurity, wading in the murk.

What do I do?

You know how to dance in the rain, she said; now try dancing in the sun. So, she is dancing again, échappé and élevé, leaning into the light, pirouetting towards the glow. Shining on. Like a giddy diamond. Dancing and dancing, baby, until she dances her thread-like body right over the gossamer moon.

\*Story by Karen Dubin

I sat in my garden and watched the grass grow. I lifted my face to the sun and rubbed its warmth into my skin. I exhaled and rested.

The thought burst into my mind.

My spine straightened and I became a statue of curiosity.

“A story.”

That was what the thought said to me.

I knew from other times that there was a voice in my head that talked to me.

“What kind of story?” I questioned.

“About a frog.”

“What’s the frog’s name?”

“Gring.”

I sat. Feeling that something important had just happened.

My heart burst open.

The voice spoke again.

“There was once a frog named Gring

A magical frog was Gring

His was a secret

Until it was not

And all were better for it”

I went into the house. Opened my computer. Wrote the words pouring into my mind. The more words I wrote, the more words there were. Over the months, sometimes I had trouble moving my fingers fast enough to write them all down.

At first, I did not know I was writing a book ... about animals, their personal problems, their challenges, their bad feelings about themselves and each other, their hidden strengths. The story progressed. I realized I was writing an autobiography. The animals were archetypes. Parts of me. As each animal grew in nature, I felt something in me grow.

To-day, I stand taller inside myself than ever before.

I listen carefully now when my Wise Voice speaks.

Sharon Hudson

## INSPIRATION I

Years ago I saw a rehearsal for a recital in which a girl named Galya danced on top of a grand piano. I couldn't believe that the school would allow that. Wouldn't the Music Department stop this sacrilege?

I have kept the outrageous bravery of the choreographer in my heart ever since, inspiring me to let my real self come through my work and secretly delight in seeing the profane be lifted by the sacred.

Phyllis Whyte

"Or the time my dad brought a lone sailor home one winter to stay with our family for a couple of weeks, who'd claimed to have defected from the Russian ship moored in the harbour. He was gaunt and stinky and stayed in the attic room. Until the day I came home alone after school and saw my mother's purse hanging by one strap from the kitchen door knob, and heard my mother rushing around upstairs in a flurry of sound that made the gaping purse look guilty of something."

Sara Porter

## COMPASSION

When I was twelve, I confided in my teacher that I felt funny when the other kids ganged up on another girl who had wiry hair, buck teeth and a raging temper. She named the feeling for me: compassion. I didn't mention that I also felt embarrassed and overwhelmed by my own emotion. So, the other side of compassion became shame, which I still feel when I listen to the news on the radio. I weep alone in the car, then, just keep driving so it falls away behind me.

Nancy Pottage

I said I was sorry.  
I didn't mean to hurt you.  
I didn't mean to take it.  
But I lost it, it's gone.  
I'm sorry.

Leena Raudvee

I realized I had been living in an apology I didn't need to be making. I hadn't done anything wrong, though that feeling persisted and entrenched itself in my every waking hour. I'm slowly shaking off this cumbersome perception but I am forever unfolding the layers of it's legacy.

lo bil

J.B.A.D.K.  
... What?  
You are not funny.  
Explain please.  
I put the word  
"BAD" between  
J.K.

...  
You said "JK" but  
but what you said  
wasn't funny.  
oh. clever.

Jack Bride

## APOLOGY II

We both opened an important conversation with apologies.

Ginger Scott

she lifts the parcel  
higher  
so close to the breast  
I can smell what  
detergent she uses,  
and feel appalled at my  
penchant for filth.

the cruelty of cleanliness  
abided.  
I feel, always,  
at arms length -  
as if the stench of urine  
could be subjected to the smell of  
piss.

yet, a lady  
dances, a lady.

Rani Rivera

He heard a sound behind him and turned and looked down the pathway. She was coming up the path. He knew that she had not seen him yet because she was looking down at the stones and gravel on the pathway as she carefully made her way along it. He waited patiently; he could have called out, but he did not. She stopped and looked up and saw him and, as she saw him and recognized him, she smiled and, with that smile, he felt joy.

Slade Lander

## JOY

It can be hard to express joy.

-- Ginger Scott

The Artist

My artist aunt is 94 and palliative. And I'm 66, so we have known each other for a very long time. When I was very young I knew she was different. She fell in love with my father's brother, married and had 8 children on a southern Ontario farm. She never seemed to worry about the things others did and showed joy about things she noticed.

But what I didn't really understand was how much she and her artwork influenced us and gave creative freedom to us children, hers and the cousins. We were excited to ride the pony, play in the barn, follow the creek, skate on the pond. But her artwork always caused gave us things to question and joy in appreciating what unusual beauty she created.

As her health deteriorates, I have come to see how she lived the richness of an artist's life collecting things that 'spoke' to her, had art books out everywhere in that farmhouse, and cherished images and discussions about art. She was a spectacular painter and if she had stayed in the USA she would likely have stood with those like Helen Frankenthaler, Louise Bourgeois, or Betty Goodwin. Instead she married my father's brother who she loved deeply.

My aunt's way of being and embracing the beauty of ideas she envisioned was a kind of nutrition and nourishment for her children and their cousins. She was kathauthentic and we were influenced by her even when we didn't notice.

A couple of weeks ago knowing the days and weeks are short, I had a special few hours with my aunt where for the first time we spent a good part of that afternoon talking about her sketchbooks and mine. What a precious few hours that was.

Kathleen Quinn

**Why is your face so red?** You must be mistaken that is not my face. That is doberman pincer that was born in a volcano. I do not know where my face is, but that is not mine. **Why does your hand tremble so?** Again you are mistaken, for those are not my hands. Those are branches and twigs shuttering in a storm of high velocity wind, wrapped in live wire. **I'm so sorry I have not heard a word you've said. Your voice is clenched and strained, I cannot make out the words.** Wrong again, this is not a voice, its a pit of hissing snakes, its a car crash in slow motion through the static of a bull horn.

En Lai Mah

## ANGER

I was cleaning the kitchen in a fury, hoping to break something, when I got the phone call about his death. Sudden, shocking, early. I felt somehow that I had brought it on, by smashing cast iron frying pans around in the sink with the drinking glasses.

Nancy Pottage

He watched the images play over and over on CNN: The plane flying into the tower; the falling bodies; the towers collapsing. His first response had been a vivid anger, yet, with each repetition, as if it were obeying some law of entropy, the anger diminished, until he was left with a sorrow he had never known and then he turned the television off and wept.

Slade Lander

Great to hear from you. Thanks for keeping in touch. I wish you much success with

My apologies for not being a better friend, correspondent, and collaborator.

Thanks for being an inspiration. Very few of us have the stamina, determination and vision to sustain a creative life, engaging with the process and the public, year after year.

I'm still on the path of obscurity, making visual art in my studio....resigned, knowing how unlikely any of it will ever be seen out in the world. An exercise in futility.

Mostly, though, I'm finding simple joy and solace in playing music...moment to moment. That's it. now..... then now..... then now.

In the end, we are our stories.....but we are not our stories.

love,

Claude

Claude Smith

My gift of fragrant oil to comfort your dying was my apology. I am so sorry I could not write the words nor accept your spoken ones so long ago. My young heart could not find the way through its suffering to forgiveness - may you have forgiven me.

Elizabeth Chitty (St. Catherines)

Countless occurrences, blurry eyed disturbances  
Personal fabrications, the unwinding stitch flourishes

Shine the light on me,

let me step to center

Judge me, prod me,

allow me admittance to enter

I couldn't tell, I didn't know, I did not

see

Not so much my actions, as it is me

Set the tone, strike the mood of sincerity

cerity

But I can't tell even tell if indeed sincere

is this apology

En Lai Mah

## APOLOGY

As I have flown past the age of bearing children,

As I am losing faith that I will ever be cherished by a man,

I wonder if I can offer an apology

To the woman in me who is a mother

To the woman in me who is a lover

And, would she accept it if I could?

Ruth Matthews (Netherlands)

She waited until she was in hospital to ask me. My friend with terminal cancer had one more favour to ask and I hesitated to answer. I had already helped her with her will and agreed to be her executor and I was happy to do those things for her, but not this last request. I looked at her, silently pleading that she ask someone else. Finally, reluctantly, I agreed. I would look after Cathy, her mentally challenged daughter.

I had admired my friend's devotion to her child-like, middle-aged daughter, but I had not sought out Cathy's company. Most people avoided Cathy because of her tendency to talk a little too loudly and to repeat the same thing over and over. But now, with that promise, I had linked my future to hers.

Cathy and I set about getting to know each other. The first months had some rough patches. She tested my patience: intentionally sometimes, but not always. In time I gained a greater understanding of her disability and learned to be patient with things she couldn't help. In return I gained her trust and her desire to please me.

When her mother died I viewed Cathy as a burden I had taken on, but I've come to appreciate her direct honesty and genuine good nature and, to my surprise, I've come to enjoy her company.

Recently Cathy required a medical procedure that made her very nervous. I accompanied her to the hospital and she asked me to stay and hold her hand. And I did. I stood at her bedside and she gripped my hand, and I was as happy to be there as she was to have me there. Cathy has not burdened my life, she has enriched it.

Carol Dorman

A burden is something we carry. For me it is the weight of memory and a legacy of guilt. I watch as my mother loses her memory. The transfer begins or did it begin long ago. Who's memories are these that I hold? A constant refrain...do you remember? Remember....remember....remember the time when.... you... he... she... we... I... . Feeling the guilt of prodding where I do not belong, I retreat to the shadows and watch. Watch as the memories she cannot remember play themselves out as she disappears/ appears in the twilight of her sundown.

Susan Hamann

She called him unexpectedly and, with clinical detachment, told him the diagnosis of cancer that she had just received. He listened, as if from a distance place, knowing that soon enough he would have to leave that place.

"Don't tell Mom and Dad," she said in closing.

"What? You may be dying and you're not going to tell Mom and Dad?" he exclaimed.

"I will. Just not yet. They'll freak out and I can't deal with that. I'll tell them when I can deal with them."

"So I'm just supposed to keep this secret, this burden, until you're ready to tell them?"

"Yes. I guess that's it. I guess I hadn't thought it through. Fuck, I have enough to deal with. You're the one who's supposed to be able to deal with things."

Slade Lander

## BURDEN

A secret in an envelope that wasn't heavy until I opened it. There must be some undiscovered law of physics that will one day explain this phenomenon, the weight of knowledge.

Nancy Pottage

Determination of Love

Adobe Window

Quietly intimate now, after, the lovers lie languorous in each other's arms. No breeze disturbs their passion-spent rest, no gusts sway the torn cotton covering of the small window set high in the adobe wall. Slashes of sunlight cut across their tanned and sweated bodies like rivers of gold, like segments of ripe orange.

Outside, the bleaching sun blazes down against the white wall made nearly invisible by the glare, while the black square of the window stares, unblinking, like an eye refusing to surrender to the torturer's gaze. For the desperate starling, parched and exhausted from its fruitless search, the dark-stained block appears a refuge from the sun's incessant heat, and it alights on the sill, moving swiftly into the recessed shadow.

Cooler now and rested, the young starling, ever inquisitive, explores beyond the shadow, pushing its head through a gap in the thin drapes. Beneath him lies a world of welcome gloom, a map of shadows, an atlas of unfamiliar forms. With barely a glance behind him into the suffocating heat of day, the bird leaps through the curtain into the mote-speckled room that beckons with the image of a forest clearing.

Gliding silently through the heavy air, the young explorer slowly circles the room, unsure now of his direction but certain of his desires. Seeking water, he sees it in the golden sparkling streams that gently rise and fall with slow and certain regularity. He swoops and, landing on what he has no vocabulary to call a thigh, he quickly pecks at the glistening skin.

"Aagghhhh!"

Jak King

## DETERMINATION

Jette, land, feet together, right turn, left turn, assemble, assemble, piqué en releve, hold two, shit

Jette, land, feet together, right turn, left turn, assemble, assemble, piqué en releve, hold two, three, fuck

Jette, land, feet together, right turn, left turn, assemble, assemble, piqué en releve, hold two, three, four, YES!

Slade Lander

blackbird.

I cried in the shower that morning while you were washing your balls.

I mean, it wasn't the way you were washing your balls, you had proper technique, I'm sure, it's just that I was jealous of the light that stretched itself across your back.

I didn't notice her razor right away. Or her jewelry. Or her scarves. I just thought you owned a lot of girly things because you were foreign and eccentric.

You said the paintings were your sister's and I preferred it that way.

But there I was, using her shampoo, wondering if maybe you liked my hair better when it reminded you of her. Maybe if my hair smelled like your wife's hair, when you closed your eyes, you'd think you loved me too.

I'll hold on tighter than the wet hair on your neck, I thought. I'll wash over you like the morning. I'll consume you, blackbird, records and cigarettes!

After all, crying while you scrubbed your balls was the happiest I'd been in years.

So I asserted my dominance by using up all of her tampons, and her moisturizer, and marked my territory with bobby pins, and ate your freckles for breakfast for months.

Now you're in the kitchen making me quesadillas. And I haven't washed my hair in days.

Catt Filippov

Unable to write is almost like unable to breathe. As if I am getting some air, but never a full breath. An emotional monster begins to take over. I become unreasonable, moody and depressed. Invisible bars are the worst kind. You can not convince anyone that you are jailed, and they'll never understand if you try. The bars blend in so well at times that even I am convinced they are not there. I forget they exist and carry on with life. But I can feel them. Every time I take a step toward myself, every time I remember who I am and every time that I seek my own truths. They appear before me and remind me. I own them. I put them there. Only I can take them down. Many people continue living with half breaths. They simply accept the circumstances and compromise everything. It's easier than going to war. Too many people settle when everything is possible. I could choose to give in to the lack of time, resources and circumstances that don't agree with the life I have chosen as a writer. But this is what brings me balance. This is who I am. My enthusiasm for life and love never end. Inspired and consumed with explosive creativity that demands my time and attention, I sit and write.

Eli Mihalopoulou

There was once a man who desired a woman, but she did not desire him in return. He was generous, patient and understanding, but the weight of his unmet desire hung heavily on his heart. Finding solace in escape, he sailed many miles across oceans with the driving hope that he might win her affection, somehow. Persistent, unwavering and determined, he made many meaningful offerings, but she continued to evade and disappoint him. His desire was a source of great beauty and inspiration in his imagination, but it also threatened intense despair. His spirit was like clay in her hands, that she held with a muddled combination of care and manipulation. They continued in this tension for many years, testing the limits of desire and the messy way that it manifests as love, living the unfortunate reality that desire is not enough.

(Anonymous)

## DESIRE

This one-sided relationship between you and me is going not too badly.

I know things about you like where you work, where you live, what your favourite colour is. But not what you dreamt last night (But then no one knows everything about anyone ...) "Talking is good" you once said, and conversations between us in my head flow easily. Why shouldn't they? We have so much in common ... the same star holds us within its reach ... we cast shadows according to the same laws ... we're both incredible kissers ...

But what if, on occasion, I am overwhelmed by the desire to meet across a table that bemused, quixotic gaze of yours ... to touch your hair, your arm, your face ... to watch you cup your chin in your hand, lit cigarette held characteristically aloft? ah, then i surrender to the silky, burnt-orange aftertaste of the Grand Marnier, and think, "This is almost as good."

Yeah, almost ...

pat beaven

Pretezza

Julianne became a painter in part because her husband was a selfish lover, and the arrangement fed into itself like a quiet fountain. It pleased him to know she was admired, and a Venezuelan woman named Lucia or Lucinda did the laundry and vacuumed once a week. Upstairs at irregular hours, Julianne would sweep and scrape her spite across canvases in heavy, vibrant swaths destined for the hallways of strangers, and later tolerate her husband painting his own oblivious studies in a string of tiny puddles left to cool on her abdomen. Again today, she lay splayed and half-covered and stared out their first floor bedroom window through the sheer white curtains that swayed slowly in the mid-summer afternoon breeze from their backyard. White curtains. White carpet. White shutters on the closets. A shaft of sunlight that the cat loved. Her husband hoisted himself off their new bed and thankfully walked away from her on bare feet into the ensuite bathroom to pee. It was a sound that no longer registered for her. She had forgotten how or why to listen to him, as he continued to simplify in front of her eyes into processes and mundane functions and inexplicable comings and goings. Sometimes animosity swelled to her surface, so she avoided him for the rest of the day. Last week he asked for a birthday cake. She spat twice in the batter and then later watched him eat it. She wasn't hungry, she said.

Ron Kelly

## INSPIRATION II

"He had a fractured relationship with his father at best, an emotionally brutal one at worst. He wanted to be a good father, he just didn't always know how. He was a man of few words but those words spoke volumes, so when he gave a compliment, it carried great value.

You see, he was rather creative, often completing his daughter's grade school art projects for her.

She thought she would never really accomplish anything "artistic" – even more frustrating since her paternal grandfather was an artist of some note (being quite unaware of extent of the personal history). After a few years at a weekly pottery class, his daughter finally, cautiously, optimistically showed some of her work to him. "If only Leonard could see you now", he said approvingly, lovingly, proudly, wistfully... It felt as if he was really saying those words for himself, wishing for his father to see what HE had accomplished. He accomplished more than he could have imagined. Several years later, after Alzheimer's Disease stole his life from him, his daughter often reflects on that moment and continues to be inspired by it."

Wendy Hutchinson

## DETERMINATION II

“Take it back”

Words are such humbling things. Once uttered, they become part of the universe. So many words, such an expansive universe.

Take the word 'womb'. At the age of seven this word was full of mystery. On a Friday evening in the car with my father on the way to Novena, I asked him what the word 'womb' meant. His reply: "Better ask your mother." For the rest of the ride I squirmed in my seat, my cheeks flushed with shame. If only I could take it back.

At age 13 my father tried to rape me. I said NO. This word didn't ask to be taken back. No regrets.

Marian Scott

## The Sledgehammer Shot

As a kid I was a baseball freak. I lived for it. I loved to swing the hickory. I wasn't in the lumber business. (In ball-lingo, when you strike out, you're simply hauling lumber back to the pines - the bench.) I worked at my game like a maniac. I was the second best player in my family. Dave was it. You cannot imagine how much that pissed me off! He cared more about music than baseball. Imagine that! He was a natural ballplayer. Much more so than I.

Listen: we were playing ball at recess at good old H.H.S. We were in Grades 7 and 8. I was playing third base. I had the best seat in the house for what was about to happen. Dave was batting. He got a pitch about shoulder high. He laid the perfect swing on it. The bat was level, his feet were planted, he didn't twist, he broke his wrists perfectly. I've played and seen a lot of ball. That was it! At that point I should have walked from the field and quit! I'm fifty-six years old. I have never seen a ball hit that hard! That damn hard! Ever! Ever!

Home plate was at the McMillan's fence. The ball was still rising as it went over our left fielder's head. It cleared the swing set. It bounced once and went over the six-foot chain-link fence by about twenty feet. Everybody's jaw dropped. Nobody (except Dave) moved. It was no big deal to him. He had to 'shoosh' along the runners in front of him. There was no need to hurry, he could have walked around the bases about five times. I imagine that someone eventually retrieved that ball.

Have the years caused me to embellish the story somewhat? Hell no!! The next time that you see Dave, ask him about the sledgehammer shot that Kenny mentioned. He still thinks it was no big deal.

Ken Whyte

## BURDEN II

I always feared I was a burden to my mother. I probably am but it seems less important now. Is there some way to change this fear? At the same time, she feels that she has let us down. Is our fear just a consequence of each other's fear?

- lo bil

A cat's love is a burden.

-- Ginger Scott

Burden. It wakes me up in the morning. It reminds me i'm not free. I am bound.

-- Anonymous

## COMPASSION II

It was anger at first - hate - she told me she hated me, to my face. Blame - raw anger. I went away, saddened, hurt, depressed - what had I done to deserve this? Self-pity - wallowing - hatred in return. But I did not want this.

My new partner, he made me see that she may have been influenced. Suddenly, my hate turned into compassion - her rage was not something she could contain. I realized she had been out of control. I felt, finally, compassion - it is true that love transcends hatred.

-- Elisa Hollenberg

She walked on a trail that led from one hamlet to another. The ground was damp and the clouds were low enough to create mist. The village below the mountain was wrapped in fog and she hurried to descend to bring news of the death because she would have to retrace her steps before darkness obscured the trail. There would be no moon this night.

Ilse Matalon

Their enemy becomes their greatest love.

-- Ryan Genereaux

University Rosary

I was a poor university student with only 5 bucks in my pocket to pay the cover charge to the night club I was going to with friends. As I walked past a homeless man on my way to the bar we made eye contact and he asked me for some change. I apologized and said I was sorry but I had none.

"That's okay. I love you." He answered back.

"Thank you" was the only reply I could think of to give over my shoulder as I passed him.

"Hey wait" he called out.

My friend who I was walking with sped up his pace. My arm was linked with his and I had no choice but to speed up too. However the lamppost that was directly in my path brought me to an abrupt stop right before I went crashing into it.

The homeless man caught up to us.

"Here, I want you to have this." he said reaching out his fisted hand.

I put out my hand, palm up, without thinking. Into it he dropped a small steel rosary. I looked up at him.

"Are you sure? Don't you need this?" I asked.

"Don't worry I have one too." He reached into his shirt and pulled out a cross on a chain around his neck and then pointed to the one around mine.

I carry that rosary wherever I travel. It is a reminder that everyone has something to give.

Katherine Robson

you approach fast / smell of copper and taste of salt / a swift embrace / release / sulfur and dew / craning to see / a liminal space / as imaginary, as ocean

you approach slow / touch of atmosphere and swollen / a tilt of the head / closing to see / sweet and plump / for the first time / whirlpool and wonder and wanton

eyes awake / you disappear fast

Desire

Void

She woke up as he slowly slid out of the blanket, fumbled his bathrobe, tip toed to the bathroom.... Her ears anticipate the faint flow of pee. He doesn't flush, afraid of waking her. He is back under the blanket. She rolls over and pulls his body into hers, warming his cold skin, spooning him she starts rubbing his right temple. He sighs and his leg trembles as her fingers find a pressure point. His limbs let go and his breathing becomes a steady murmur. He is asleep.

Her eyes still shut, she counts down backwards, 97, 96..., 43, 12. Again she counts backwards, this time by threes, 97, 94, 91...,67. She is back at 97; her head is invaded by images, thoughts, words and voices. Little by little she removes her arm, peeling her skin from his, rolls on her side and sneaks out of the bed, the bedroom, into the living room and lays flat on the couch pulling the Afghani scratchy-shawl over herself. Staring at the ceiling, the snapshots, the voices, the faces take fuller shape in the dim light of the dawn. So many promises, commitments to keep, so many things to do, roads to choose, so much wanted, needed, required. All rolling over each other, each pushing the others down as they are drowned by the rush of yet others. Which one to take up first? This one? No. This? No... No. She recedes; they insist. Slowly the woman who receives the images, who does the imaginings, slips away. Detached completely, beyond her self, she becomes total refusal.

Her hands across her chest, her neck bent between the armrest and her left shoulder, unable to move; so heavy. Freely she slides downward, pulled into her void. No reason for anything, no desire to do anything, to be anything.

Her body burns; she is a big ball of acid disintegrating from the inside out, a finished life laying there decomposing....

So unceremoniously am I done. I am not depressed. I am not sad. I am not anxious. I am not afraid. I am just naught.

Shokoufeh Sakhi, January 19th , 2015

They left the Mars Restaurant as the sky was starting to lighten and the heat of the approaching day could be felt. They put their arms around each other's waist and jaywalked across College Street angling towards her apartment on Oxford Street. He felt the music and crush of Lee's Palace fade away and the drug fade away and felt, with a detachment, desire take their place and marveled at the naturalness of his erection.

Slade Lander

Past / Present

She stood in front of the apartment building at West End Avenue and Eighty-Seventh Street on the Upper West Side of New York City as if she were bearing a offering. This was where her grandmother-----her father's mother-----had lived until her death a year-and-a-half before. This was her first visit to New York City since her grandmother's death and she wanted, somehow, to pay homage. Her grandmother's ashes were interred at a cemetery in Washington Heights but that was not where her spirit was. It was here, in this building, in this street, in this block and she could feel the energy that had been part of her grandmother. The man who had recently become her lover stood patiently behind her. She stood and waited until the past had become part of the present and then turned to go.

Slade Lander

## PAST

WHAT I WISH I'D SAID

You walked out the door, suitcase in hand, for the very last time. I watched your familiar back as you left without looking back. I said nothing.

Do I wish I'd called out to you, pleaded with you to reconsider, to come back? No, not really. Sometimes partings are inevitable and necessary.

But I wish I'd said thank you. Thank you for coming into my life when you did. Thank you for the books, the music, the conversations, the new ideas, the love of adventure you brought with you. Thank you for changing the course of my life. Thank you for loving me when you did.

Annette Clough

Wherever I go and whatever I do during the past year or so I am almost always the oldest person in the room

Maybe that is because I am almost 91 and maybe folks my age aren't interested in the many things I am interested in.

I belong to a Walking group every Sunday at 9:00am---I am the oldest of the group.

I play bridge three times a week with six or seven "senior" ladies. I am the oldest.

I go to exercise classes.....

You have the picture, right?

Be that as it may I want to tell you about an inspiring time I had recently on New Year's Day.

I was invited by my late husband's cousin to lunch --- in addition to the host and hostess there were the host's Mother (Stella) a widow and her dear friend (Dave) a widower.

Stella (I will call her) is 96, and her friend Joe is 99.

In June they will both be celebrating another birthday. Joe's 100th party is in the works.

I was so impressed and inspired by their positive attitude, their involvement in the today's world and their loving relationship with each other. They each have remained in their own homes, with several of their children and grand children living not far away.

At lunch there were no discussions of allergies, of diets, etc. We all enjoyed the delicious luncheon that our host and hostess had prepared, and we all exchanged stories about-- what else--the past, present--(future-not so much.)

Because Joe no longer drives, Stella is available to drive him where he needs to go--she can also drive at night so they are able to go out to dine or to a movie etc.

That afternoon left me with a great feeling of admiration and inspiration for this couple-and I -for a change-was not the oldest in the room.

Zelda Ruth Harris

“Inspiration” The Theramin. Magic-maker, magic-making. Noise into Sound into Music. Elastic, full, bending round and open, squeezing vibes flat to slip out the other end as another tone, another sound, another stretched voice that can groan and laugh and sigh transporting the listening ear and drumming the ear drum out of humdrum.

Maxine Heppner

No child left Behind

Here is something that Mary and I feel very passionate about. This is a message to the kid out there who really wants to play guitar but who's parents don't have the resources for formal lessons. It can be hard raising a family. I remember some lean times when my three were growing. If you are that kid, don't give up. Borrow a guitar. Ask your teachers, relatives, friends. Someone will know someone. There are a lot of guitars out there in closets, unplayed. My grandmother had one in the attic. It was a cheap little Eaton's model from the 1930's with palm trees painted on it and for me it was love at first sight. When you find one, promise the lender that you will take amazing care of it and do it! Years ago I looked out the window while waiting for a student to arrive and there he was plodding along, dragging the guitar (case-less) along the sidewalk! Yikes! Once you get the guitar, call me and I'll give you a 45 minute lesson for free to get you started. Besides that, find other people who play and just ask some questions. A lot of learning is done this way. People love sharing. And of course, there is the internet. But you have to be determined and commit to working hard, and if you do, you will succeed. I guarantee it will enrich your life in countless ways. Hope this helps,

Dave

## INSPIRATION II

She entered the empty dance studio and marvelled at the clarity of the frigid mid-winter light that filled the space. For an instant, she had the vision that every dance, every movement that had happened in that space was still in that space, held for all time, if only one could find the key to unlock them. And then the vision was gone and she was alone in an empty studio. She slowly peeled off the multitudes of layers that separate her from the cold until she was standing in a tee shirt and sweat pants. She took her notebook out of her dance bag and carefully placed it on a stool at the side of the studio. She did not open it; that would come later. She walked to the middle of the studio and stood still, centering herself for her preparation. She looked around the studio again and this time it seemed to mock her with its emptiness. She knew she could not rely on inspiration alone to create; she could only rely on her work and her practice. That comforted her and she began.

Slade Lander

My jaw clicks, I can only cock my head to the right.  
Lips over tongue.  
Would rather rub noses than teeth.  
Closed eyes are preferable to sight.  
Hands can kiss too, and maybe ought to.  
The small of the back, the cheek, the little crevice  
under the back of the head.  
People over inanimate objects.  
Sincerity over people objects.  
Slow rather than fast unless, unless, unless, ahh at  
last.

En Lai Mah

The dawn came. Lying on a grassy hillside, looking out at misty  
skies and vanishing castles. The night was swallowed up in con-  
versation, by the fire, long after everyone else went to bed. A  
spare bottle of wine. A moment of silence. A look. Heartbeats  
so fast and furious I swear you could hear them. And then a  
spark. Intertwined hands. The dawn filled with fireworks.

Šimon Mizera

## KISS

Though it was not the kiss he had dreamed of, he  
kissed her gently on both cheeks, turned, and  
walked away. If he could not have love, then at  
least he would have sadness.

I was looking for you.  
For the longest time, I needed you.  
I never found you.  
Eventually, I gave up. I settled and compromised. I stopped believing.  
I padded wet clay all over my dreams, ideas and thoughts until they resem-  
bled what those around me accepted and wanted to see. The years went  
by, the clay began to dry and all seemed peaceful.  
There were no more battles, no more war. Immobility was a small price to  
pay.  
Inside my clay statue, the air was musty and old. But I was safe.

Then you came, like a million waves of the Aegean crashing into me. In a  
brief moment of letting go and forgetting who I had become, I found my-  
self.  
Suddenly I wanted to live, breathe and be free.  
Chaos replaced what resembled peace in my mind. A wonderful chaos that  
proved I was still alive. I began to feel uncomfortable. Desire stirred within  
me.  
I began to twitch and challenge the clay that secretly held me.  
Finally, there was a crack. The air that hurried through smelled so fresh  
and new. The blood in my veins began to pump faster and faster until I  
could no longer settle for anything less.  
You stood before me, solid. You knew.  
Slowly you poured into my soul filling all the empty spaces, provoking me  
to dream with kisses soft, sexy and sweet.

Eli Mihalopoulou

Does hurt come from love? How is hurt and love connected? They seem to me to be two sides of the same coin. Could hurt actually be love disguised? The body's way of showing others the love they have lost. Is hate a reminder of our love? Are all of these components of a quest for finding joy and compassion? Could this be the missing link? Do I need to find compassion to dissolve the pain I feel? Stop this chain reaction of fear and dis-ease causing pain and lead me to joy and sweet sweet love.

I cannot make sense of the pain and hurt my brother has put on me. It seems as though I only get more and more lost the more I try. There is no sense inside it, only the reality that he has a tremendous amount of pain and a sense of loss inside of him.

Dissolve that pain with love. Love for my brother and the good that lives inside of him. Compassion and prayer can ease his pain. He needs love that is all, that is all.

Jasmin McGraw

Instant recognition – that first look into each other’s eyes. Past lives together? Premonition of how pivotal we would be to one another? Lovers first, and when that shifted... best friends and confidants. I felt so alive with you, brilliant, passionate, ignited. Hours spent exploring vast realms of ideas, humanity, sorrow, rage, hope. God we were good together for so many years (and maybe just a bit too enmeshed).

The psychotic breakdowns took a toll. But you always “came back” ...until that last time three years ago. The doctors then said that you are now in a permanent psychotic state. We who love you tried SO HARD to help you, to protect you. And with disdain you accused me of always wanting to be safe...not something you valued for yourself. In your inimitable feisty way, you chose your own path and disappeared. It has been two years now with no clue as to your whereabouts and we have exhausted all means of trying to locate you. How are you surviving? The university finally had to eliminate your teaching position as you were not able to hold it all together... your inspired pedagogy and mentorship no longer enough. Are you alive or dead? Will I ever know what happened to you? All I can do now is send prayers and love out to you, hoping that this will reach you on some plane beyond linear time and space. And yes, my love, I hope you are safe.

Bayla Greenspoon

## LOVE /

She had stopped crying but he still paced slowly back and forth on the rough planks of the nursery floor holding his infant daughter against his chest and feeling her breathing, laboured because of her cold, against the beat of his heart. She gasped and her body shuddered and he knew she had finally fallen asleep. He paced for a few more minutes and then, slowly, gently, lowered her into her crib and covered her with a blanket. He stood and looked down at her and, through the fatigue that, a year-and-a-half before, he would not have believed possible, he felt a love that went to the core of his being.

Slade Lander

私は誕生日を迎えるたびに深さを知る。光と闇、そして愛。引力への誘惑、宇宙への渴望。  
私の旅はまだはじまったばかり。

I know the depth each time to greet the birthday. Light and darkness and love,. Temptation to attraction, craving for the universe.  
Just my journey begun.

Noriko Kato

Sarah strummed the ukulele to Moldy Peaches as Kit rapped and rambled poetic narratives connecting them. “It was a moment like every other moment, at the same time, they felt that anything was possible, anything could happen here in Berlin. It would be years later until they would fully understand the importance of their shared moment in time. They would reflect years later that it was this moment marked change their lives.”

Kate Hollett

And I shall do things  
I love  
or hope to, and you might agree  
lying on a floor  
And writing something, any-  
thing  
against a backdrop of beauty,  
tepid and alive, alive  
even  
or  
Art with a capital  
trying feverishly  
to be cold and astute  
when my heart  
my heart...

-- Rani Rivera

## Past and present creating future

This week, I moved out of my house where I have lived for 5 years... during that time I said good-bye to my sweet mother (breast cancer) and saw my dear Dad slip into forgetfulness... I have toured thousands of miles and played many concerts and made recordings and lived my bassoon-playing dream. I fixed this house with the help of friends, and sold it before it became too much for me to carry, and moved my many boxes of archives from my life, my parents' lives, my grandparents' and even great grandparents' lives... I realize that my greatest possessions are the stories from my life and the lives of family members who have gone before me. I sold my house, moved into an apartment and bought a church. And that's another story.

Nadina Mackie Jackson

## Past or Love

It's interesting what interests the brain, the details we skip over, slide through, brush aside and even more so, the tiniest moments that stop in time and cement in our memory.

Like that moment, more than ten years ago- busy mall, dodging people to maintain my course.

I finally arrive.

And you, standing in stillness in front of the glass elevator, beside the fountain that surprises on-lookers every quarter hour.

You, in that ripped trench coat that suited you so well.

And me, stunned by the beauty of you and your stillness, the beauty we would find between us and the longing I still feel when my thoughts return to you.

Shannon Roszell

## Determination Joy Love Future

Dancing to the altar?

Are dance studios promising locations for women to meet husbands?

Yesterday my wife and I began the semester of classes at the Dance Studio. There were thirty lovely women in ballet class. Since this was the first class of the fall semester, students were chatting before class sharing their experiences during the vacation. The teacher who is a well-known ballerina, formerly a principal dancer with the City Ballet, was greeting students.

Suddenly there was a silence. Everyone looked at the new man who walked into class. The teacher recognized the stranger as her former dance partner from the City Ballet so she screamed, "Lance, where have you been all these years?" as she ran to greet him. He blushed. He was clearly ashamed to discuss his recent experiences. He sheepishly responded in a barely audible whisper, "I just left the big house," indicating the State Penitentiary across the street. She asked, "Lance, how did you ever get there?" He hung his head obviously ashamed to discuss the matters. He replied in almost imperceptible utterances, "I . . . murdered . . . my . . . wife." She shrieked, "Thank my lucky stars!" She was enraptured crying tears of joy. She replied, "Wonderful! You're not married!"

Are dance studios promising locations to meet husbands for women?

On the other hand, if you're a man who is looking for a beautiful woman, go to a dance class!

James Robert Brašić

## MULTIPLES

Past. Future. Anger. Compassion.

There comes a time when you notice yourself using the same words, with the same breathe with the same movement again and again.

"My father is sick. He has multiple myeloma which is a fancy word for bone cancer."

You want to stop repeating these words but like an old record you simple repeat repeat repeat. It hurts you to say them, but now you dont' really have much of a chance.

"He has almost died 6 times. But you know, he's kind of a miracle."

And over the years as you watch your father deteriorate you start to deteriorate as well. Your soul hurts. Your heart aches and you begin to give up hope. Which is crazy because, well, you never have felt this way ever. In your entire 40 years of life, you have been a hopeful kind source of inspiration, knowing that all would come to good. And now, as you look at your emaciated father, you doubt this. You find anger. You find deep sadness.

And you want to stop being in this rut, but there is nothing that you can do. The reality is that your father is dying.

And then one day he dies.

## A Girl From Hell

I get into her car. She has short hair. She drives. It's past midnight. We talk. Short blond hair. We talk politics, we talk economics, we talk bullshit. She wears this long loose jacket, can't check out her breasts. All of a sudden I look out the window, and I recognize that I have never been in this neighborhood. She smokes constantly. Maybe I need to smoke. I search my pocket for cigarettes but can't find any. I ask her to pull over somewhere, because I need to buy some. She pulls over. I get frustrated. Why should I buy cigarettes from a store I've never been before? I like to walk in and say "Hey Tim, give me a pack of Reds." And I like to see that guy, what's his name, that idiot mopping the shop. And I like to make eyes at this girl who's always entering when I'm leaving. I like to get the door for her and she doesn't bother to say a word or waste a smile. If I buy a pack here, in this fucking neighborhood, then I'll have to wait until tomorrow night for all that to happen. I open the door and step out of the car.

## Nazli Akhtari

To be or not, then what purpose have I got. If not then what am I to be?  
To live life to it's fullest, and not to skip a beat.  
To breath the air around me, and feel the grass beneath my feet  
To love the life that lays before me, with all it's unknown bliss.  
To know the passion and ecstasy for living, like young lovers when they kiss.  
To open up my mind, and heart to infinite possibilities, then watch my  
thoughts turn into dreams  
as I realize my abilities.  
My purpose I am free to say, is to live my life like a child at play.  
Thank You

## Zena Lord

## Serenity/Acceptance/Being in the Moment

Last December there was an ice storm in Toronto. All over the city, limbs fell on wires and the power went off. We slept one night with blankets piled high and toques on - like camping in the fall. I taped the sound of the icicle-ed trees groaning and tinkling in the wind. We drained the water pipes and left for Quebec a place that knows ice storms.

When we returned the back yard was full of branches. I spent January 2014 enjoying snapping, sawing, piling, and moving wood. A wonderful activity, I have photos to show the daily change happening. Very satisfying work, it's like shoveling shit.

## Phyllis Whyte

## All fourteen

An experience.

I regret my insignificance to myself.

"Apology to myself

to others, for not acting on instinct, on DESIRE

, Determination, to stop apologizing, refrain from committing the same crime

Joy, Burden, Anger, Desire, Kiss, Love, Past, Present, Future."

We were all friends. A European -like city. (montreal) I loved her. First year university. Infatuated by her beauty. red ruby lips. clear green eyes. ever changing hair cut and color. her politics. protests. and she did her own hair, her own baking, her own cooking, her own breathing. Same religion, i thought.

She met him, in february. at a potluck. cutest boy (or did i especially want him because she did) (im wearing her discarded sweater). he was into the alternative cool stuff, like shooting deer with bow and arrow, sleeping rent free, cooking for everyone, and wearing a bandana around his neck. dark curly hair. tarot card reader.

I never said a thing about how i wanted to be. the three of us on the couch and me out of the love bubble, a side gig to their main act. aching for love, to touch and cuddle. i kept my mouth shut. i heard but though i wanted it, ck. i ached inside, moaning, devouring myself in future thoughts. then, in time, i realized the future never came, already here.

here i am, many months later.

In my fantasy we are building our lives together in a three story building with living quarters, a cafe, a studio and rooftop garden. always working, always laughing, always loving. here i am, many months later. i leave them.

they, separate, no longer in the same city. I, carrying weight with me, regret (regret is like smoke, intangible mist, once evaporated though the smell may remain). my silence. i disparage it. i write, i speak my mind, i break my vow of celibacy and aloneness for this young life leads itself to wonder, to sing, to build bricks of love that bind us humans, beings. to become and to be. in love, living, with greatness and giving. fly forth, bird girl, break free from your chains! get out of your hunger and into your veins!

in spring i await. I leave this page with you, i let it be.

dance?

Shall i

i dance.

## Bracha Stettin

MULTIPLES

Determination, Burden, Desire, Past, Present, Future.

'Untitled' is a photo and text-based work that explores the poetics of a young mother raising a young girl.

Meredith admired the speckles of flour that had landed on her apron. The print was floral; violet and pink flower buds, small and slightly faded. She brushed the powder softly, drawing it across the arch of her thigh. She hated baking. Z stood back from the oven as if stern concentration would turn it on. Her hands were clasped behind her, her chin tipped forward, eyes slightly narrowed. Her breath was slowly paced and expectant. Turn the big knob slightly to the left, Meredith muttered, closing her eyes to muster all of the supportive patience available to her. I know, Z replied. Meredith both loved and hated moments like these, when Z would feign all of the insight of a ninety-four year old war veteran. It was a skill the girl had seemed to hone far too well during only eleven years of life. Do you want my help, Meredith offered, thinking that this might be the nice way of expediting a mother-daughter exercise in domestic quality time. No, Z returned. I'm checking off the list of ingredients in my head. I want to be sure that this is the batch we want to bake. No use putting them in if we won't want what will come out. How does the list look, inquired Meredith. Fine, Z said. Good enough to be upgraded into the oven? Maybe, Z said. Why maybe, Meredith asked. This was no longer endearing. I think we skimmed on the shortening.

Sky Fairchild-Waller

## MULTIPLES

Serenity/Acceptance/Being in the Moment

Last December there was an ice storm in Toronto. All over the city, limbs fell on wires and the power went off. We slept one night with blankets piled high and toques on - like camping in the fall. I taped the sound of the icicle-ed trees groaning and tinkling in the wind. We drained the water pipes and left for Quebec a place that knows ice storms.

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Phyllis Whyte

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Nadina Mackie Jackson

I escaped from the storm, the waves. As I lay on the sand, drying out, the clouds broke and I was bathed in sunlight. Then, I was totally serene.

-- Leena Raudvee

My uncle always says "si el problema tiene solución, pa que se preocupa? Y si el problema no tiene solución, pa que se preocupa?" Which in a non official translation says "if the problem has a solution, why do you worry? And if the problem has no solution, why do you worry?"... I repeat this words of wisdom in my head quite often trying to find the calmness, zen mode, serenity, as I find myself in this very uncomfortable situation.

Let me explain. I was offered to go on tour for 2 fantastic projects for 2015. There was something like a 40% chance I would not be able to go on one because it was international and my legality in this country is still in process. This means that if my papers are not solved before the tour and I go, I would not be able to come back to the country. So I am prepared for it to not happen. However I was supposed to have that solved way before the tour was going to happen.

The other was a canadian tour that seemed in my mind confirmed under any circumstance. It was later in the year, it was in the country, and if the papers would not be ready I can always be a volunteer...

Anyways one tour is down, that's a fact. The funny thing it was the one i thought it was for sure. Even though I did everything I had to do, and specially having had a "yes" so confirmed! I think a "NO" es even harder to swallow if it follows a previous "YES!". Like the kid who is told "you can have the candy" and then later on the mom changes her mind... Although, I have to say, the difference between the kid and me is this particular kid does not need to pay rent, buy food or anything like that, while me, well... I just lost not only an amazing job opportunity, I truly love what I do, but a very confirmed income source... Man freelancing can be stressful.

I have not received my papers but there is still hope for the international one... or not... I guess serenity is to not hope... To accept...

Mateo Galindo Torres

A bath with candles and soft music.  
A clean room  
A productive day  
A quiet moment  
A perfectly delivered complement  
An afternoon snooze  
A breathe of laughter  
A page turning, after a final chapter  
A pleasant death to the sweet here after

En Lai Mah

## SERENITY

"Serenity Now!" was a mantra exclaimed throughout a whole episode of Seinfeld. It was a good T.V. Series and remains so today. It has stood the test of time. It ended with, "Serenity Now, Insanity Later."

-- Jack Bride

He stood at the surf's edge on Chesterman Beach and looked westward across the Pacific Ocean into the setting sun. The storm had passed but there were still ragged banners of black clouds racing eastward and mountains of clouds further west. The strong wind drove the surf into the shore and the spray from the waves into his eyes. Shielding his eyes, he looked out at the sunset and saw a kaleidoscope of extreme colours: oranges, purples, blues, reds mixed together on a pallet of the gods. As he stared out at the tumultuous water he realized in his soul that there was nothing but the weight and power of the ocean between him and Japan and that behind him was the weight and power of the mountains and the continent. Even though he felt that he was in the center of a swirl of chaos between two conflicting powers that dwarfed his being, he still felt a sense of serenity that he had never felt before.

Slade Lander

It was a deep blue, almost black, a color you might see in the sky as the sun last rays faded over the horizon. The fisherman, hair streaked with flecks of grey, scratched his salt encrusted stubble and stared at his rippling reflection in the vast mirror. Perhaps a school of fish swimming by looked back up at him. Perhaps a wandering squid watched him. But all he saw was his wrinkled face silently frowning back. The fisherman casted and followed the neon bobber with his eyes, as it gently landed in the water with a satisfying kerplop. He looked down once more to see his face still quietly frowning, looking like as if it had bit something sour. Then the grey clouds turned into bright colors, varying from the softest pinks to the darkest reds. The sun reached out as it woke up from its sleep. It came over and softly kissed the fisherman's forehead and started rising up into the sky. Unbeknownst to the fisherman, his reflection smiled back at him.

Minjae Kim