

**The
Golden Nib
Anthology
2009**

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The Midwife

by Solveig Eggerz

Picking driftwood one day on the shore, Hervor had tripped over a cracked leather bag. She took it home and cleaned out the sand. Into the bag she dropped a wooden spatula, a pair of scissors, a clean cloth, some yarrow salve and yarrow leaves. It stood on the kitchen counter, always ready. Now she was an official healer. Mamma, flown away on a godwit's wing, would be proud.

It was an October afternoon, already dark, with rain slanting onto the window pane. Jon lay in the bedroom recovering from yesterday on the thwart, and Bergthora slept on the sofa on the downside of her coffee spiral. Tosca was in school, bursting out of clothes that didn't fit any longer. Hervor sat on a kitchen chair stitching bugs and reptiles into tea towels. Fishermen from the Faroe Islands bought them for their wives in Thorshavn. Yesterday she'd sewed sticklebacks with bulging eyes.

A knock on the door sent a thrill up her spine. A neighbor wanted her to pop piglets out of the back of a sow. She would catch the sweet-smelling babies, so their mother couldn't eat them. And when her neighbors slaughtered a pig, they would wrap a slice of pork in a newspaper and bring it to her.

Instead, she found a small, chinless boy standing on the steps. His shaved head was shiny from the rain. "Mamma can't squeeze the baby out," he said in a muffled voice.

His chin looked familiar. "Who's your father?" she asked.

He spoke into his chest. "Oddur."

Of course, Oddur, leader of the Edge Boys. She recalled the time long ago. She'd just married Jon, when Jon's son, Magnus, ten years old then, came home with ripped clothes and a bloody face. He'd sniveled, *Edge Boys*. Arm around his trembling shoulders, she'd led him outside. He'd pointed to the shacks perched among rocks where the earth ended and the sea began.

The boy was watching her now. "Oddur," he said again.

"Yes, I know," she said. She knew all right, remembered the day eight-year old Tosca came home with her knickers on inside out. Bergthora had sniffed the girl's hair, labeled the smell. *Edge Boy shacks*. That was when Hervor realized she had could easily strangle a man.

The mushroom boy was waiting. Blue shadows lay under his eyes. His earlobe was ragged. "Will ya come?" he asked.

Oddur would beat him if he returned alone. She fetched her calf delivery bag, threw in the horsehair rope—something for the woman to chew on—and pulled on her coat.

As they walked through the tussocks toward the shacks, she turned to the boy. "How was school today?"

"School?"

She remembered. Oddur kept them home, taught them politics. Kids sat in the dark while Oddur raved about the one-party system.

The mushroom boy quickened his pace as they approached the shack. A tattered car seat and a car battery lay in the yard. The door opened. Oddur stood just inside the door. His hand grasped hers, and a finger wiggled against her palm. She felt an urge to crack him across the face. A groan came from the end of the dark hallway.

“Show me your wife,” she said.

Oddur signaled to the boy. He padded along the dirt floor and ducked under a door frame. A woman lay under a gray sheet. Her eyes were closed, and her quivering chin pointed to the ceiling. A candle on a saucer provided the only light. The room felt moist as if the beams were sweating.

Hervor took a handkerchief from her pocket, wiped the woman’s face and sang Mamma’s words. “Elves tiptoed through the moss. They stole the woman, pulled her into the warm earth.”

The woman shuddered as the spent muscles of her womb contracted again. Hervor stroked her trembling belly, then turned her onto her side, rubbed her shoulders and the small of her back. Slowly the woman raised a knee, giving God one more chance. *Take this blasted baby out of my body.* But no crowning head appeared. Her teeth chattered. Hervor had heard about surgeons, how they cut a woman open and lifted the baby out. But they didn’t work in shacks.

In the hall she found Oddur slumped against the wall. “Take her to the hospital,” she said

He shook his head. “Doctors are commies.”

“Then you’ll lose her.”

“She’s done it before—nearly died each time.”

Her foot tingled. How good it would feel to kick him in the groin. Instead she walked to the stove, found a saucepan, cleaned out the oatmeal lickings, and filled it with water. She took yarrow leaves from her cow-birthing bag and made tea in a cracked cup. For bleeding, she thought.

In the bedroom, she placed pillows under the woman’s shoulders, brought the cup to her lips. The woman smiled weakly, but she grimaced as her body tried once again to expel the baby.

Towards morning, a tiny wrinkled creature emerged. Hervor held the pathetic lump of life in her hands, pictured its future as Oddur’s brat with a nose that ran green in all seasons. She laid the mewling baby on the woman’s chest and cut the cord. For a moment, she thought the grimy world in the shack would regain its balance.

Then the blood pearly between the woman’s legs. The drops formed a thin stream, and the woman lay in a scarlet pool. Hervor grasped the towel and pushed it against the woman’s crotch. She held it there until the warm, wet stickiness covered her hands. She reached for the pillow on Oddur’s side of the bed. Kneeling between the woman’s trembling legs, she thrust it against the towel, all the time knowing she could not stop this emptying out of life.

At the same time, the woman’s face took on the white color of emptiness. A gurgling sound came from her throat. A tremor passed through her body. Her eyes no longer rolled in pain as the features of her face froze. Hervor pictured her

gliding through a crack in the mountain ring and into the paradise beyond Esja Mountain. From there, her route would take her upward, straight to heaven.

“Fly away, my love. Don’t look back,” she said, stroking the woman’s cheek, cool now. In the hall, she handed Oddur the baby. “Well?” he asked.

“Gone.”

In the darkness, she sensed children crowding around her. She wanted to hate them because Oddur had spawned them, but the lump in her throat got in the way. The mushroom boy touched her elbow. For a second she placed her hand on his bald head, then she picked up her bag and walked out the door. Outside, she turned towards the ocean and breathed in the cold, clean air. She’d wanted to save the woman. For what? Up ahead, the clouds parted, and the sun shone through.

Back home, she put her bag on the kitchen table. Her mother-in-law, Bergthora, looked up. “Did you save the poor louse?”

Hervor recalled the woman’s peaceful look. Free of pain. Free of Oddur.

“Yes,” she said.

Jingles

by Bernie Ghiselin

It ran with the personals in the Village shopping weekly, page 15, along with the beauty salons and massage parlors.

Beast Seeks Beauty

*DWM, sixtyish, a hermit and troll;
bilious, cynical, phlegmatic; seeks svelte,
lissome, well-educated Lolita of song and
laughter, a good cook, to boot; to savour
together the sensual and aesthetic
joys of life. Contact # 5803*

Vince held the paper to the light and smiled. His best yet. A savage blow against these pretentious missives, these mating croons of the hopeless. He liked the British spelling of "savour," the play on the letter "s," the controlled hiss. Surely, he would receive scalding letters of contempt. Sexist scum, pervert, nihilist. He couldn't wait.

"Mine is the beauty of the coiled rattler," he said.

He put away the paper and stepped to the window overlooking the streets, far below. The rain started early and would go all day, casting the city in daylight darkness. He saw city rain as the carrier of soot and grime.

Nevertheless, a good day to work. Cold, foul weather sharpened his focus.

He riffled through articles, studies on nitrogen oxide control, the purging of coal fired boilers of poisonous contaminants. He read about slagging, corrosion, acid plume, opacity. He let his imagination crawl inside massive industrial boilers. What's it like in there?

His challenge? To capture this urgency to cleanse the air in bold renderings; to create designs, images that would seize consciousness and sound the alarm. He reached for his pens, his color pencils. He switched on the Mac.

Over long years, for ad firms, publishers, Vince did it all: illustrator, graphic artist, spinner of images. He took classes, attended seminars, he kept up. He learned to write jingles, to weave appealing text into his artistry. He understood visual rhythm and pattern.

"I will tattoo the brain into fear and alarm," he mumbled. "Sparks of fire, yes. The fire of the sun, the inferno. Whiteness to intensify. Sapphire or lapis lazuli, for the chemical reagents."

On he went, sketching this image and that as he read about sulfur, vanadium, magnesium based slurries. Alone with his crusade, Vince was happy. He ignored the news; he switched off the answering machine. Happy.

Every few days he did check the mail for notes, letters of insult and outrage. But what should appear? An invitation, an ordinary invitation. No address, of course, but a phone number and the name, Lolita. "Call after 7, weekdays." How bizarre!

That evening he phoned. "I placed the ad in jest," he said. "It's my attempt to destroy an institution. I did not expect a sincere invitation. Nor do I particularly --"

"I know," she said. "That's why I responded. Because it was so farcical."

He cleared his throat. Well now, a young woman who seeks adventure.

"Are you there?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I -- "

"What do I call you?"

"Tom Cruise," he said.

"Aren't you a bit old to be Tom Cruise?"

"How about Robert Redford? Would that work?"

"Much better. Look, Robert, I'm suggesting dinner one evening, in a busy restaurant."

"A busy --?"

"In case you are a howling madman brandishing a knife."

Her voice, guileless, playful. And confident. The new woman, no doubt.

"What do you mean, nothing further?"

"I mean no commitment, nothing beyond one evening. I thought someone who wrote such a personal ad would be, well, interesting. A bright person full of stimulating talk."

"Oh, I am. I am. Bright. Stimulating."

"That you might enjoy the company of a woman who appreciates your sense of humor."

"How do you know that I have a sense of humor? Perhaps I'm a nauseating crank."

"That's what we will discover. And quickly."

"And you, Lolita, are you svelte and lissome, a woman of song and laughter?"

"Oh, I am. Yes. Shall I sing something?"

"An excellent cook?"

"You should taste my chicken fricassee with asparagus. I use thyme and mushrooms."

"Sounds nice," he said.

No doubt some student doing a paper on misfits. Or some evangelical, eager to save me. Am I being set up? If I meet her, should I bring a gun?

"You know, it's impolite to hold a lady on the phone."

"Well, Lolita, I'll tell you. You do sound like a nice gal, certainly bright. But, well, I've never done this. This personal was placed as -- "

"Shyness I can understand, Robert. Tell you what? Take a couple of days to think it over. Call me back."

"Good idea," he said. "I'll think it over."

With relief, he hung up. He returned to coal soot and slag shedding. He examined computer graphics of gases raging inside boilers. How to capture this drama in a manner at once alarming yet edifying? Perhaps a bright jingle on sludge removal? No, it should be heroic, courageous. He thought of "La Marseillaise." Then he forgot it.

"I don't think the company would go for that."

He read, he sketched, he re-sketched. It wasn't right; it wasn't blending. It should leap from drafting table. It should bite and draw blood, but it wasn't. It was nothing but a Cubist scramble of color and space; stagnant, impassive. "I misunderstand whiteness," he mumbled. "And the blue, again heavy." Something so basic--white, blue--this wasn't like him. What was he missing? How did he land this account, anyway? Again he stepped to the window. He watched rain spreading SO_x and NO_x over the streets and city parks.

Two days later, he thought of Lolita.

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Four times since leaving the garage he turned back, but found the courage to continue. Three city blocks in the cold, and no scarf. He felt like a fool; all this retreating. He stepped inside Marina's Grill in somewhat a crouch, as though entering an industrial boiler coated with vanadium and potassium. The place smelled of beer, smoke, and overcooked spaghetti sauce.

He looked about for a woman in her late thirties, alone with a bottle of Chardonnay and two glasses. The agreed sign. Unfortunately, she was easy to spot; he so hoped he would be jilted. She smiled as he walked over.

"Robert?"

"Lolita, I presume." He took a seat and poured wine for both.

"This wasn't easy for you, I imagine. And you didn't keep me waiting."

"May we just sip wine for a moment, to, uh, get oriented?"

"Good idea."

Vince could not simply sit and talk. He needed to relax, to situate himself among a crowd of people who weren't moving from one place to another. In his daily routine, he avoided people. His world was his condo, his work, his rage. He took comfort in the truism: reality is a mistake. Alas, so long the hermit.

This Lolita. Nicely plump and such a young face, too young. She oozed health; it bounded across the table. Such rosy cheeks, clear hazel eyes, and so many white teeth. He must remember this whiteness. Yes, this was the pure whiteness he sought.

"You certainly don't look like a howling madman brandishing a knife," she said.

"Thanks. What do I look like?"

"A man who's retired, but not enjoying his retirement. Pale. Overweight. Stressed. Needing a long rest and better food."

"That's quite enough."

"Sorry."

Vince sketched his background. Graphics artist, designer, illustrator for magazines, catalogues, and such. Forced into retirement and freelancing when

the agency began outsourcing. So near retirement, so unpopular at the firm, he was the first to go.

"Your current project?" she asked.

"A brochure for a chemical company. High tech stuff. They deal in agents that reduce air pollution. From industrial boilers, you know?"

"Oh."

"Do you want me to go on?"

"No."

"Thank you. Your voice on the phone. I took you for, oh, nineteen or twenty. Perhaps a college student."

"I get that a lot," she said.

"You're barely sipping the wine. It really isn't bad."

"I don't drink that much."

At once, Vince saw an ordeal lay before him. A tedious ordeal. "I'd like a salad, or something. Haven't eaten since noon."

"Sounds good," she said. "But first, do we wish to stick with Lolita and Robert. Or . . . ?"

"Let's not. My name is Vince."

"I'm Shirley." They smiled. So nice to be back in high school, thought Vince.

They nibbled on avocado, spinach, and tuna. Lolita Shirley launched into her health regime. No tobacco, little alcohol. An hour walk, once a day. No red meat. No pretzels, chips, or junk food. Indeed, no calories with criminal records ever cross her lips.

As she talked, she seemed to grow younger. Her cheeks grew rosier. Her tongue seemed to smile. By the time she mentioned her church work, he was sure, she'd probably be seven years old. Why she thought a sagging, dyspeptic wreck such as Vince would be interested in all this, he could not understand. Undoubtedly, he frightened her. There she was, sitting across the table from clogged arteries and wheezing lungs. It was her defense, all these vegetables, all this about Yoga. A cleansing, it was.

"I didn't realize," he said. "This place, it must not be comfortable for you. The smoke, the rich food. Perhaps we can find some -- ."

"That's okay." She smiled forgivingly. "It's centrally located."

He looked about and sighed. If he didn't jump in and talk about himself, inventing wild things as he went along, the evening would race from ordinary boredom to the painfully lugubrious. Clearly, this Lolita Shirley woman had nothing interesting to say. No saucy secrets to share. *Why must I hiss?* Where was the Lolita who called him that night? The brash modern who promised adventure?

Lolita Shirley asked about his children. He noticed she did not smile. She seemed apprehensive, tentative; as though asking if he's off the bottle, out of the drunk tank.

"Two daughters," he said. "I'm proud of'em. We don't get together much, but that's okay. Long as they're doing well."

Lolita Shirley wanted to hear more.

Vince told her about Lorraine, married to a real estate shark in Trenton. "I visit every so often." The truth? He avoided them, even their children. Their conversation never strayed far from leaf blowers, mulching, roof repairs, and furniture. At bottom, every conversation—they could be talking about the Knicks—was about money, power, comfort, and status. Vince made it sound family friendly.

Lolita Shirley hung on every word. She listened as though Vince was describing his long ago climb to the peak of Mt. Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary.

"Then there's Holly, a gypsy. She's still in Paris, I think. Traveling secretary with some antique furniture outfit. Runs around with a Moroccan. She writes me in bad French."

None of this moved things off the dime. The more Vince talked, the more Lolita Shirley grew quiet, as though her health review drained her. She seemed to grow smaller. A man so glib, he didn't know where to take the conversation. If he kept talking, would she vanish entirely? He wanted to tell her about his work with the Shining Path guerrillas, in Peru.

"You seem rather dour," he said. "Have I touched a nerve?"

She took a sip of wine and hesitated. Again her face; cautious, guarded. She put a hand to her throat and took a deep breath. "I think I've lost my daughter."

Vince didn't want to hear this. "Lost?"

She reached for her napkin and dabbed her cheek. "I'm sorry. I wanted so much to be gay, spontaneous. To take my mind off . . ."

Vince looked about the restaurant. My God, is she crying? Is she actually crying?

"I thought something unusual, like answering your crazy personal. That it would be a pleasant distraction. I have so few . . . never mind."

Vince wanted to retreat to his boilers, to popcorn ash and sulfuric acid.

"I think she's run off to be with her father," she said. "The way she left. Not even a note."

"I'm very sorry," said Vince. He was on safe ground, being sorry. Can't go wrong, being sorry. "Would you rather take a walk?"

"It's too cold," she said. "I think I'd like more wine."

"Certainly." He emptied the bottle. "Had she been in trouble? With drugs, or --"

"No, no, none of that." She fell silent, her expression vacant. Vince thought about ash fusion temperatures. He waited. He so hoped she would change the subject.

"It was the way Barbara packed and ran. So willingly."

Reduced clinker and sootblower maintenance. Particulate matter, smog formation. Urea conversion processes to generate ammonia for SCR systems.

". . . since he left things were not going well, between us, but she might have given me some explanation. Talked it out. I suppose my harping on his drinking drove Howard to . . ."

Vince so wished all this might be squeezed into a jingle, a catchy aphorism. That was his genius. Boiling things down to pith and concision, no matter how complex and messy.

"Barbara needed to understand. She roamed about out all night . . . that boy, I'll swear, I could smell marijuana . . . her crowd, her friends, they hook up. After school. Do you know what that means? Really means?"

"Computer modeling brings slag control into 21st Century," he said.

"What?"

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"You've said that."

"I was thinking out loud. I --"

"You didn't hear a word I said."

"Oh yes. Your husband, Howard, your daughter, Barbara, they've, uh, hit the road."

"I thought a man of your, your creativity, would understand."

"I do. I do."

"No. You don't. You're embarrassed."

He wiped his lips and looked away.

She sat rock still. She gave him such a frozen look of contempt he couldn't remember. Hatred, mingled with fear. He perspired; he wiped his forehead, his neck. Where is the waitress? He wanted to vanish. Lolita Shirley radiated intense loathing.

"You do, indeed, brandish knives, now don't you?" At once, she rose and left. Vince sat leaden and sweating. He sipped water and waited for the check.

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Vince sat at his drafting table and wrote:

Heathen Seeks Saviour

DWM, sixtyish, a wine-and-cheese,
tax-and-spend, power-to-the-people
Age of Aquarius 'why not' liberal
of nuance and vision; seeks righteous,
born again neo-con Saint Teresa of

He could not continue. He rested his pen and stepped to the window. He looked down at the streets, still wet from the contaminating rains. From somewhere a jackhammer drill, vicious and insistent, raising dust and grime, punishing the lungs, the eardrums of passersby. Why did he think this way? Why must he quarantine himself? Alas, he thought, one does not erase the stains of purity overnight.

Summer Discoveries

by Stanley Trice

With school out, every Thursday morning his sisters and Mother went to town for the weekly sale specials. They clumped together like wet clay. Jeremy guessed it was important for them to maintain a social network, but not so important for men. The first Thursday they were gone, Jeremy stayed with Papa who made a nest of tools in the garage tinkering on the rototiller. The cars had become too computerized and he took them away to be fixed. At least he could manage the simple tiller machine with the two cycle engine.

As Papa made random adjustments between four cycle engine and tines, Jeremy handed him greasy tools like screw drivers and pliers. This made Jeremy's palms and fingers greasy. He decided to avoid further fatherly direction.

"Papa, what tool do you need now?" Jeremy asked. Papa didn't answer. Jeremy guessed it would have broken Papa's concentration loosening a rusted nut.

"Adjustable wrench," he said. Jeremy thought Papa sounded like a doctor doing open heart surgery.

Jeremy gave him the wrench with one hand and a small hammer with the other thinking a few whacks on the nut would help. Papa ignored the offered hammer. Jeremy put it back.

"Hammer," Papa said.

Jeremy gave him the hammer and picked up the pliers from the floor. Immediately, Papa reached down for the pliers that weren't there.

"Why did you put the pliers back? Hand them here."

Jeremy handed him the pliers and waited for further instructions. All he got were grunts from his Papa struggling with the nut. Jeremy circled his father to see what tool he would be expecting when they suddenly bumped legs. Unexpectedly, Jeremy fell backward throwing his greasy hands behind him to keep his pants off the dirty concrete floor. The grease on his hands took hold like grease would do on concrete floors, and Jeremy slid backward fast while kicking out with his legs for balance. He hit Papa's ass who in turn lost his balance and tipped the rototiller over in his effort not to. The exposed tines looked like a laughing skeleton.

To break the silence of Papa sitting in his toolbox, Jeremy suggested they buy a new tiller. Papa spit out some distorted words which Jeremy never remembered. He backed out making sure he didn't slip on the greasy concrete floor and proud that he kept his pants clean. He looked back once to watch Papa climb out of the toolbox with grease smeared in splotches on his pants.

Jeremy took this opportunity to sneak into his sister's bedroom. Men never stayed together, anyway. At least that's what he learned every Thursday in the summer. Besides, Jeremy figured it was time to learn something about these other people he shared a house with. Maybe I'm supposed to be with them instead of Papa, he thought. I could have this all wrong, this male-female relationship, he thought.

All three sisters shared one room that was three times larger than his, but to hold three developing girls it had too many clothes and looked smaller. That was his first impression as Jeremy pushed open the bedroom door with his heart thumping as if he was running a marathon. When the floor creaked, Jeremy jumped. It was not because he was scared. He was just being careful.

He flipped on their overhead light to better see the scattering of clothes and size of the room. Wendy the youngest had clothes piled on the floor next to her made up bed. Glenda, too. The oldest Sarah had the messiest part with clothes and shoes even on her unmade up bed. Maybe his sisters had more clothes because they were shaped different from him, Jeremy thought. He did not understand the blouses with buttons on the wrong side and skirts that wrapped around their thighs. These clothes looked like it would be harder to run fast or climb things.

Their big room that looked bigger with the lights on. It looked bigger than the dining room and kitchen put together because it was. You could make three rooms out of theirs and each one would probably be bigger than mine, Jeremy thought. They even had their own bathroom. Jeremy was not going in there. He did not want to accidentally find female products that they used in places Jeremy had not figured out yet.

Standing at the doorway, Jeremy almost forgot why he entered his sisters' bedroom. He still did not know why, but he figured their bureau would be a good start. He felt pretty good about things as he pulled open the top drawer.

Jeremy could not figure out who owned the lacy underwear. He did not know why he touched the lacy things. But, the fingers on his left hand just ended up tangled in the elastic and silk. It was a trap. He shook his hand trying not to mangle the rest of the slippery material meant to cover leaky holes and support bags of flesh. He did not want to think about that since they belonged to the sister family. The material was so fragile that they moved on their own into contorted shapes that did not look like a neatly folded patterns. Why did they have a messy room and a tidy bureau drawer?

He had to get away. Jeremy could see his whole arm being dragged inside the long drawer. Finally, Jeremy shook his hand free leaving a clump of twisted, slippery material looking like a dead body. I didn't do anything wrong. "Just curious", Jeremy told the room. Shaky voice he almost did not recognize as he closed the door.

He figured he had been there too long already. Jeremy thought about what it would look like getting caught holding his sisters' underthings. He suddenly remembered that some of the under clothes touched body parts that were alien to him. He did not want to catch anything. They talked about cooties when they talked about boys. Jeremy did not know what cooties were, but they sounded like something girls gave to boys who touched girl things.

Later, while pretending to read in his room, Jeremy he heard the threesome and Mother come home. Among the spill of chattering and a chaos of shopping bags, he suddenly remembered that he had left the bureau drawer wide open. Panic feeling came right into his throat. He felt like an idiot and a fool.

Jeremy heard them pile into their bedroom still chattering away like a flock of crows cawing at each other for attention. With a glass cup shoved so close to his ear that it hurt, Jeremy heard someone shove the bureau drawer closed without breaking stride in their chatter. He swallowed that hardness in his throat and vowed not to go snooping again.

The next Thursday, Jeremy made it back into his sisters' bedroom after they and Mother left for town to shop. At first, Jeremy approached Papa in the garage, but his father's look told him to get lost. In his sisters' room, Jeremy stayed away from the sinister bureau drawer with the dark, unspeakable secrets that had it out for him. Instead, he stood near the beds smelling sweet perfume and surveying Sarah's vanity at a distance.

One thing Jeremy learned from Sarah's vanity was that she was the first to use makeup. He studied the tubes, canisters, and brushes without really seeing them. Somehow, this world of his sisters contained fragments of a society he had yet to fully understand one day. They had connection with each other made by the makeup and pieces of clothing they used to create an attraction. Jeremy wondered what it would feel like to fix his body so that people noticed and liked him. But, people might see something I didn't want to show them, he thought.

Jeremy walked out of the room slowly and steadily knowing that he wouldn't be found out. There was no one to see him come or go from this adjoining room to his. He regretted that he had not found something to prove that the sisters had been in his room and been just as curious. There was no evidence that they had any interest in who he was. Until the next month.

In July 1983, Glenda hit sixteen like a locomotive smashes into a car stuck on the tracks. Jeremy saw more of her skin than ever before. On the night of her birthday party, the house filled with giggling and gagging girl chatter.

"You're a boy. You think boys will be attracted to this body and love me?"

Glenda had pounded on his door with her foot and Jeremy wondered why she did not feel pain. They stood facing each other on the threshold of the door. Jeremy only hoped one day to be taller than she.

"What about your party?" Jeremy could hear people singing 'Happy Birthday' in the dining room.

"They don't need me. They know the words. Are boys going to love me?"

Predictions like this had no meaning to him at his less than mature age.

"Yeah, of course boys will like you. Why wouldn't they? You didn't get a tattoo, did you?"

"No, stupid. Why would I get a tattoo? Will boys like me if I had one?"

Jeremy did not like this situation. Glenda sought his brotherly advice on a topic he still did not understand himself. "You're a girl. You're not fat. Your face isn't scarred. You got hips and breasts, so you got all the right equipment. And, your skin is hairless and smooth and fleshy."

"I know what I want. It's to get laid before I get out of high school. If I can't do that on my own, I expect you to help me when you get older."

She spun around and left as the singing died down. Jeremy shut his bedroom door trying not to picture Glenda having sex with someone he knew.

That evening, Jeremy saw her reading *Christine*. Jeremy imagined the evil car driven by a maniac Glenda running him down over and over because he could not provide her a suitable suitor.

To avoid Glenda's presence for the next few days, Jeremy stayed outside pushing the vibrating rototiller between plant rows. A hot humid sun pushed sweat from his face that fell in a spiral and bounced off the hard clay. Through his salty haze, Jeremy scrutinized tomato vines slipping through wire mesh and green leaves that dangled pea pods from narrow stems. He puzzled at the onion sprouts and cabbage balls and wondered at how living things could creep up from such inhospitable clay. He admired his Papa's talent to mother plants into living things from this incompatible soil. Why couldn't the edgy moods of his sisters be put to greater use and come out to witness life's growth?

Papa had placed the plants with enough space for Mr. Rototiller to breeze through. Jeremy just had to keep the machine from running away and taking him with it. He hit as many rocks as he could so that fixing a jammed rototiller engine would make Papa happy. Sometimes Mr. Rototiller hit the rock Jeremy meant for it to hit, spun in a non-straight direction, and took out one of those precious plants. Maybe his duty out here on the hard clay tundra of Papa's farmland included hope that life would spring up despite loss. At least the tines would need sharpening so Papa would be happy with something to do.

Whenever Mother took the sisters in tow, Papa did not take his son. Papa had the clay soiled farm to hunt for spots to grow eatable plants that only he could do right. It was a question of communication. Jeremy thought that Mr. Rototiller clipped down those plants on purpose to bring about communication with Papa that didn't happen.

At the end of July, Papa divided the girls' bedroom into three. This caused a major renovation to one side of the house that ended with a reduction to Jeremy's room. Another question as to why being the son was so good. Outside, Jeremy pushed Mr. Rototiller feeling his brain vibrating in his skull while inside his house world got smaller.

In the heat of summer and under the solitude of a hot sun, Jeremy felt the ground beat back. He watched the clumps of clay get smaller with each churn of the tines; he imagined the same thing happening to him and his bedroom. Maybe Papa did not realize this. Jeremy pretended he did not, anyway.

Driving Home from Hot Springs

By Linn Harrison

It is early when I set out from Hot Springs this time. The familiar road winds north, passing small towns and open fields on its way to Warm Springs Mountain. This morning, the winter sunlight is bright and the air carries the warmth of early spring, not so far distant now. There are few signs of activity on this Saturday morning: mud from tractor tires on the road between fields, three men loading bales on to a truck. The farms are a mixed lot. Some look prosperous, their white fences gleaming, but most are dilapidated with rusted equipment piled at the edge of a field or pushed up against a barn, a few weathered boards lying in the grass. The towns are empty as I pass, their parking lots deserted and no one in sight.

I turn east to cross the mountain. Before I reach the first rise, I see a tree alone in a pasture, twisted against the wind, its bare branches black against the yellowed grass. As the road climbs, pine trees repeat against the side of the hill like a woodblock print. The sun glances off a steeple, pure white, in the distance. When I reach the top, mountain ranges fill the horizon, four tiers stacked against the sky. I should know the names of these mountains but have never learned them, in spite of the topographic map hanging in the upstairs hallway at home. The valley floor opens, and I see Bath Alum, the old brick house surrounded by fields. If you know to look, there is a second house hidden high on the west slope of the next ridge, a concrete aerie above the circling hawks, barely visible from below.

The streams become broader as I continue, their names hinting at history: Jordan Run, Thompson Creek. I am following the Calf Pasture River now. The Cow Pasture and Bull Pasture Rivers are nearby, recalling some long-ago farm. The water is clear today after a dry winter, and the greens and browns of the bottom show clearly. I am too far from the edge to spot fish, but imagine them along the curve of the bank or in the pools on the far side of the small rapids. The road turns north to follow Mill Creek along the base of the mountain. Train tracks run parallel to the creek on the far bank. The bare branches are backlit against the water, which casts bright accents onto the boulders lining the stream bed. Sunlight falls on the forest floor and last year's leaves dampen sound and shadow. There is a stillness in the forest that grounds me like a taproot twisting deep below the surface, seeking its source. I imagine box turtles in their hibernacula beneath the leaf litter. Each is bound to its small holding through slow days and the years' cycles, its fate tied to that of the earth supporting it.

The road climbs away from the stream, barely visible through the trees. Descending into Goshen, I see painted tin roofs and a short steeple. The creek widens and spreads out, losing its wildness for a time as buildings cluster along the banks. A lumber yard stands to one side, train tracks to the other, reminding me how rivers were domesticated as the land was settled. At a crossing, the road

forks and a bridge leads over the water. Just past the lumber yard, I cross Bratton's Run and follow it out of Goshen.

Outside of town, there are cabins and camps on the opposite bank. The fields give way to forest. The road curves beside the stream and around the bend, rhododendrons are stacked on the steep slope above the road, climbing out of sight. As I approach Goshen Pass, the current quickens. I round the next bend and see the Maury River, cutting through the steep slope. The river is rocky and wild, with rapids coursing past stands of boulders. A fisherman wades in the shallows, braced against the current. At the edge of the bank, there is a small grassy area where those brave enough can put in, with a rough shelter to one side to which the river pays little heed in its drive through the narrow valley.

I climb out of the pass, entering Wilson's Springs. The river is calm here, gathering small creeks that cut through the farmland in either direction. After climbing another rise, I can see the river stretching out through the fields. I follow the road to the north and turn to catch one last glimpse of the Maury River, broad and serene as it heads south to join the James. The sight lifts me with the current, tracing this and other rivers in their progress to the ocean.

The terrain changes now, flattening into farmland as I enter the Shenandoah Valley. A few cows dot the landscape. I brake, almost missing the steep turn, the asphalt clinging to the rocky hill. The road passes through Brownsburg, then Bustleburg. The main street through the center of town is lined with log cabins and inns, no gas stations or convenience stores in sight. Approaching Raphine, I pass Wades Mill, still grinding flour and corn meal, with the vineyard just beyond it. In the distance, there are signs high above the fields for gas or food. Trucks are circling slowly up the ramp. Behind me the landscape recedes, flat and two dimensional.

Either/Or versus Both/And

by Paul Stimson

*Excerpted from **On Earth as in Heaven** (in preparation)*

Charles Darwin's second book was titled, "The Descent of Man." Many people are affronted by the idea of being descended from apes; somehow it is even more threatening than discovering a criminal or a politician in the lineage. But there is an old doggerel, written purportedly by an ape and recounting outrageous deeds of mankind, which no self-respecting ape would consider. The final couplet is unforgettable:

*Yes, man descended,
the ornery cuss — But
Brother, he didn't
descend from us!*

Could it be that many of the people who argue stridently over the tension between the writings of Darwin and the Book of Genesis have not given more than a cursory glance to either? Or, if they have studied Genesis, have they overlooked what is known about the origin and intent of the story? Genesis was among the last of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures — the Old Testament — to be written down. For uncounted centuries, the several myths compiled into the book were in the oral tradition, passed from generation to generation by word of mouth.

Myth is a word that has lost its meaning in modern usage. Most people think it is a catch-all label for things that are not true; in fact, it denotes deeper truths told by fictional means. Six-year-old fans of Dr. Seuss understand this. The ancient myth-makers, perhaps tribal leaders in the Land of Israel, pondered their plight as deeply flawed creatures of all-powerful, all-loving God, and imagined apples, serpents and fig-leaves as analogies, just as Dr. Seuss conjured up Star-bellied Sneetches to point up the absurdity of prejudice.

The popular criticism of Darwin centers on matters he never addressed. Creationism? Intelligent Design? Surely he would have pronounced them beyond the scope of scientific inquiry — and he was a scientist, through and through. Does that mean he would have ruled out the possibility of their place in reality? No, he was a trained thinker, and he would have known better.

Most of us, not-so-well-trained thinkers, do not handle complexities and subtleties so well. We pride ourselves on our rationality, but emotion can trump reason at every turn. When a widespread disagreement has gone unresolved for a long time it turns into polarization, and the opposing camps see each other as enemies. And enemies must be defeated, by fair means or foul. The foul means can include oversimplifying, distorting, trivializing and demonizing the opposing view.

The upshot is that when an *either-or* polarization is in the air, few stop to consider the possibility of *both-and*. Which is predominant in our formation as people, genetics or environment? This nature *vs.* nurture disagreement has been in the air for generations; the rational conclusion seems to be *both-and*, inseparably and interactively.

As we seek to comprehend nature, we find ever-increasing complexity in all directions. At the dawn of the 20th Century, Science sincerely believed that we knew almost everything. A notable physicist, addressing a graduating class, sympathized with them because the pioneering was all done, and there was so little more to investigate. Atoms were long thought to be the indivisible, fundamental particles; in time we learned that they are composed of protons, neutrons and electrons. Indivisible sub-atomic particles? No, the field of sub-sub-atomic particles keeps digging deeper, finding quarks, bosons and gluons. Will scientists of the 22nd Century be studying sub-sub-sub-atomic particles?

And into the growing complexity, paradox enters. Einstein once remarked that reality is not only queerer than we suppose, it is queerer than we are able to suppose. Let us disabuse ourselves of any notion that we will find our way into the Mind of the Maker. But, rather than remain in the present morass, let us examine three terms that are central to the discussion: *creation, intelligent design, and evolution*, and see what can be dispassionately said about them.

Creation implies that our present reality had a beginning. This is not a long-standing assumption; some astronomers a century ago — and Einstein himself! — believed in a steady-state Universe that simply had always existed. Creationists today divide into two camps, one believing the age of the Universe to be about 13 billion years, and the other something less than 10,000 years, with nothing in between. In the United States today the split is something like 60/40, so neither side can rationally ignore the other. In neither purported event were there journalists on the scene, so both sides extract their inferences from what can be seen now.

Intelligent Design is an ages-old concept. The Psalmist wrote, "The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament telleth His Handiwork." Physicists inform us that the Creator had to start by inventing the laws of physics: if the physical constants were altered so much as a hair's breadth, there would be no stars or planets. No telescope can grasp the immensity; no microscope can resolve the intricacy of a single atom. The ninety-two elements are capable of interacting in a near-infinity of compounds; the vastness of energy is beyond imagination. Was it all created just for us, on this one minuscule planet? We sure do behave as if it has been.

Evolution is the inflammatory word. Young-Earth proponents are strident in labeling it 'only a theory,' but it is not seen just in the fossil record: real-time breeding records of domestic animals show the mechanism clearly at work. To those who refuse to read and heed we can offer only a polite farewell: no further dialog is possible. Those still on board might point out that evolutionary improvement of a species is one thing, but evolution of one species into another is conceptually different. But when a sub-species has isolated itself to the point where it no longer consents to interbreed with the parent species, by definition, a new species has arisen — a new species that can be expected to continue diverging from its parent. Again, we must say farewell to dissenters.

Searching the above for all that is non-contradictory, what synthesis can we construct? All who subscribe to the concept of a created Universe must consider whether it could have created itself, and if not, there must have been a creator, generally named God, Allah or Yahweh, among other names. And if that creation shows signs of having been intelligently designed, there must have been an intelligent designer on the team. Again, we assign the name of God. We have thus covered the *who, what and where*; the remaining questions center on the *when, why and how*.

On the *when* question, the two sides differ by six orders of magnitude, and neither side will listen to the arguments of the other, so no resolution is foreseeable. *Why* is a fascinating question, but beyond the scope of objective inquiry. Surely the Creator is a lover, intent upon creating objects for that love. Both sides might agree that the urge to create is a compelling force in any creative being, and the Creator will forever astonish us with the ingenuity, resourcefulness and interactiveness of the *how*, Either Creation or Evolution? Why is it difficult to grasp the *both/and*? Surely our Creator is clever enough — and wise enough — to create an evolving Universe.

An Adoption Story

By Rebecca Anne Patton

“Who do you look like?” “Where is your family from?” It sounds innocent enough. People ask on a fairly regular basis. And most people can answer with an easy, “oh my dad’s family is from Italy” or a more complicated “well my grandmother and I both have the same shade of grey eyes but I act just like my mom.” Most people are inherently curious. They’ll see a photo of you and your family at work or posted up at school and ponder the questions aloud. Or when you get married they’ll wonder what you’re children will look like. Growing up the who do you look like question was almost inevitable, my sister looks a lot like my mom and while I resembled my parents I had no mirror image staring back at me. The answer was more complicated and so I would usually go along with whatever was brought up or just shrug.

It can be a hard thing to swallow sometimes, looking in the mirror and not knowing where your eyes came from, the color of your hair, the shape of your face – the little things others take for granted.

My answers weren’t so easy to attain. I was adopted as an infant. And while I was never told to view it as a secret, it isn’t something I go around announcing either. Besides, who really goes around saying, “hi my name’s Caitlin and I’m adopted”? It’s a part of me and probably in a way impacted who I am, but I don’t consider it a defining characteristic or something I necessarily want to share with the woman in the next cubicle at work.

But the question and others echoed in my head. I don’t remember when they started but I imagine once I was old enough to understand the concept of adoption they were bound to have been there. *Who do I look like? Why? Where are they? Do they think of me? What are they like? Are they happy?*

In a way not knowing was nice. I could imagine anything I wanted. Much like creating my characters in the stories I liked to write, I could make up lives without the messiness of everyday life. The truth could be scary, what if it wasn’t as nice and neat as the library books my mom had read me proclaimed. I had watched enough *Dateline* to know the world didn’t always work that way and sometimes fiction is a little cleaner than the truth. Besides didn’t curiosity kill the cat? I decided to keep quiet. I was sure this was a phase. Beyond that, I didn’t want to hurt my parents by digging too far into my past.

Going to college was my turning point. The questions started to pound into my head. I started thinking that maybe getting to my future meant knowing my past.

I started to rationalize it in my head, that really all I needed was medical records, that was fair. If I ever had children I needed to know if I carried some horrible life-threatening disease. My rationalizations weren’t enough for me to ask my parents. They never brought it up and I never felt like I should. I felt guilty enough just thinking about it. My parents had raised me and loved me and I

loved them, my heart told me that it should be enough. That the questions shouldn't matter so much.

Still, when my roommate was gone and the curiosity got the better of me, I searched adoption sites for answers. Was I the lone adoptee thinking these things? Could I find them on the little information I knew (where and when I was born?).

I read blogs and research; I wasn't the lone adoptee after all. There were hundreds, probably thousands, of people just like me with their own questions. Some were even searching for answers. Still, for four years I kept it a secret. I would read the blogs or message boards occasionally but I never really thought I would get an answer to my questions.

I clearly remember the day that changed everything. My boyfriend and I had driven down to Virginia to visit my parents. It was the last morning there, the car was packed and we were ready to go. The four of us had had lunch and said our goodbyes. But my mom, my boyfriend and I had lingered around the kitchen table, chit-chatting about nothing.

"I wonder what color eyes your kids will have," my mom had said. I can hear the words today four years later still echoing in my head. I stared back at her, no answer came to mind. Did she want me to explain how I had learned in eighth grade about Mendel and peas and genetics? "I mean Tim has such blue eyes and yours are almost black."

"I don't know," I mumbled. "It has to do with genetics; if I carry the recessive gene for blue eyes."

She paused and then said the sentence that changed everything. "If you ever want to know... we have the information. I lost track of her but I know a little about him – like where he went to school and his occupation."

I was shocked. I didn't know they knew. I had always assumed I was placed by an agency. Not that she knew their names or anything about them. I couldn't say anything. I just stared at her until someone changed the subject. I remember getting in the car and thinking the whole way back why didn't I ask any questions, that was my opening, possibly my one chance. If I wanted to know so badly why hadn't I said anything?

At the time I lived a few states a way and this wasn't a conversation to have over the phone. I thought about what to do. Did I bring it up again? Did I ask her more questions or did I keep my mouth shut and forget it happened? And if I got up the courage to ask, did I really want to know? What would I do with my newfound information? Once again, curiosity got the better of me. I couldn't not know. Now that I knew they that they had some of my answers, I couldn't make myself walk away.

I went home at Thanksgiving, my decision made. I would get my parents alone and ask them. I didn't need to know anymore than a name. I wasn't thinking ahead at that point. I was moving one step at a time and figuring it all out as I went along. I wasn't even sure if I really wanted to go looking for my birth parents. I agonized over Thanksgiving break. I didn't know how to bring it up and it seemed the opportunity wasn't going to happen.

I was on the computer one night before I had to leave. My mom came in and looked at me. “Are you okay? You’ve been so quiet,” she asked hugging me. Moms seem to inherently know when something isn’t right – when an unspoken hurt lingers.

Something inside me broke and I burst into tears.

“Are you okay? What’s wrong?”

I was sobbing. “You’re going to be mad at me. I can’t... just go away.” Even now, years later, tears prick my eyes.

“Honey, I love you, I won’t be mad. Is everything okay?” Here was my big opportunity and I couldn’t even get the words out. I was so scared and nervous. She led me back to my parents’ room and we sat on the bed. “You can tell me anything...” My tears had sparked her own. She kept hugging me, waiting for whatever I was about to say. I’m sure she was prepared for the worse; that I was pregnant, or lost my job, or going to jail.

“Remember in August, when you said you knew who my birth parents were,” I managed to choke out.

“Is that all?” She smiled and it went so much better than I thought. Her tears were for my pain not out of anger. She hugged me, “I never thought you wanted to know. You never mentioned it and so I never brought it up.” That night, she and my dad told me what they knew.

They were young – too young to have a baby and be parents. My parents had desperately wanted a baby and had found out about the situation through their church. It all sounded so easy. I had pictures, granted they were a good twenty years old but at least I could finally see them. Those two grainy photos, one from a church directory and the other clipped from a newspaper were amazing to me. I had names and a picture. Right away looking at him I could see the resemblance. My eyes stared back at me. His face was shaped exactly as my own. I’m not sure anyone who has grown up knowing they have their mother’s pointed chin and their grandfather’s auburn hair can know what this feels like. This little burst of joy that came with finally knowing.

“What do you think you want to do?” My mom asked.

I shrugged, “I don’t know... this is a lot.”

It wasn’t a lie. I didn’t know at the time what I wanted to do. Seeking them out would be a big decision and wasn’t something I could take lightly. I couldn’t exactly walk into their lives only to walk out days later, my most pressing questions answered, my curiosity sated.

Back at school and work, I searched online and found him. It was amazingly easy. I was shocked. It was the holidays though. So even if I wanted to talk to him, I couldn’t exactly drop into someone’s life at Christmas.

Early in the New Year, I made my decision. I knew I had to talk to them if I could. Knowing who I looked like only answered one of my questions. I needed to know more. “This doesn’t change anything,” I told my parents.

“I know,” they had said. They were beyond supportive and it was all more than I could ask for. Their support lifted the fear that had pushed away my questions for so long. I didn’t need to feel guilty.

Tim was supportive but worried that I would get hurt. “Are you sure you want to do this? What if they say no?” He would ask me. “I’ll support you, but I want you to be sure you know what you’re getting into.”

“I’m going into this thinking they’ll say no. They don’t owe me anything. They can walk away. If I think they’ll say no and they say yes, that will be great.” I would smile. Expecting the worst meant anything else would be an improvement. Naively I believed that in expecting the worse I was preparing myself, preventing any future hurt that might arise.

A little more research and I found out the state would contact my birth mother (who I couldn’t find online) for me. They would see if she was interested in a reunion and get back to me. I was told, I could write her a letter. For someone who loves to write, it was one of the hardest things I have ever written. What do you tell someone you’ve never met?

So, I wrote that I wasn’t angry but admired her courage that she did a very brave and hard thing. That I was okay and I was happy. That my parents and family were fantastic and I wouldn’t trade it for the world. I wrote a little bit about myself; things you would put on a dating application: I’m short, I like to do yoga, I have dark brown hair and dark brown eyes, I like to read and write. I’m in graduate school. I sent the letter off and hoped for the best.

I asked my mom to find someone to contact my birth father. I couldn’t make the phone call myself. I was afraid he would hang up on me or I wouldn’t know what to say. My mom asked a friend who was a lawyer if he would mind doing it. I was nervous. It was all happening so fast. What if he did say no? Tim was right, could I deal with that?

I was at work when I got the email from my mom’s friend. “I’ve spoken with Jack and he’s thrilled. He’ll be contacting you shortly.” All hopes of getting any work done was gone. I checked my email every five minutes. What would he say? What would I say? How do you introduce yourself to your birth father? There were no books or guides to talk me through this one.

The email was short and sweet. It was much like my letter sent off to the state. I wrote back right a way. Thanking him for wanting to talk to me and telling him about me. He wanted to call me. I remember my hands shaking when I answered the phone. Not sure what to say but the conversation coming so easily - it was as if I had known him my whole life. He told me about his family, his job, his kids, he asked about me, what did I look like, what did I like to do. It appeared he had the same questions that I had.

It was weird those first few weeks and months. We both had to feel each other out, figure out where this would go, what we would do.

He still spoke with my birth-mother occasionally and he gently informed me that she wasn’t ready to talk to me. All those months of saying it wouldn’t matter fell away - it did matter. This too I kept secret. I couldn’t explain how I felt, even now it’s hard. I locked myself in my room and cried. I had to grieve for a relationship I would never have, for a woman I could never know. I wasn’t angry really, I was more hurt. It was one thing to say you couldn’t see someone but it was another to say you didn’t want to.

“What are you going to do?” Tim finally asked me.

“What can I do?” I replied, “I have to respect her decision. I don’t understand it and I don’t really like it... but I have to respect it.”

Getting to that point has made me see that maybe that’s how everything in life is. I might not like my friend’s boyfriend or her new hair cut or that she’s going to move across country but I have to respect her decision and support her the best way I can.

Four years later my birth-mother hasn’t changed her mind and I haven’t tried to contact her since my letter to the state. I’m not going to force myself on her. I’m okay with it. It would be nice to know who she is but I’ve moved on with my life and I’m happy with the people who are in it.

I met Jack about two months after we first talked. I was so nervous driving down to see him. I had asked that no one go with me and that his family not be there. I was afraid I would be overwhelmed or that it would be awkward introducing him to my parents and Tim and me to his wife and kids. I needed to go alone and do this on my terms.

I remember pulling into his driveway, my hands shaking, not knowing what to say. But like everything else, it was surprisingly easy. We answered each others questions. The little things are probably the most interesting to me. I don’t like chocolate neither does Jack, his daughter or his mother. He says that my mannerism and walk is a lot like my birth-mother’s.

Jack and I still talk regularly. He and his family participated in my wedding in July and it was nice to see all of my families come together. It’s no weirder than having parents that are divorced or in-laws, it’s just more people that love you and support you.

I don’t want to sugar-coat it though. There have been some negatives. My birth-mother’s decision not to talk to me hurt. And surprisingly, I received negative reactions from a handful of friends. For whatever reason, they had a hard time with my decision to meet Jack and his family and try to find my birth mother. Instead of being supportive and perhaps a little concerned like my parents and Tim, they are angry, confrontational or just ignored the whole thing. Their comments are usually along the lines of, “I don’t understand why you want to talk to them,” “They aren’t your family,” “They weren’t there when you were younger...” The list goes on and on. Each more hurtful than the last.

They never seem to realize that their being negative hurts worse than my birth mother’s refusal to see me. These are people that supposedly care about me and yet they can’t or won’t understand my decision. I want to scream at them that this was my decision. That it doesn’t affect them and no one wants to be judged by people that love them.

Yelling at people, however, is hardly effective and nothing I can say will change minds. Instead, what gets me through is remembering all my friends that stood by me. The friends that listened to me while I agonized over whether to contact Jack. The friends that happily listened to me tell of talking to him and meeting him. I thank God everyday for people like that and I pray that the others with time will understand that this was something I had to do.

There is no book that tells you how to handle a reunion with your birth-family. There is no manual that tells you how to deal with all the feelings and

emotions. At times it is confusing and hard. But I wouldn't change what I did for the world. I found a piece of myself. I look forward to the day when I can tell my son or daughter about both of their family histories, my parents that raised me and my biological parents. In a way I think I did this for them. Everyone deserves to know where they came from. It makes me happy to know that one day when I have a baby and I look into their dark brown eyes or see their smile across a room, I'll know where every part of them comes from.

Name has been changed.

Yellow Heat

by Rod Vanderhoof

At noon I'm threatened by the flame yellows of the Devil's Anvil. The burning fireball of the Arab sun further bleaches the parched desert. Winds swirl in dirty, mustard-colored dust clouds. Canteens are empty and the heat, relentless. Sarge checks his compass then orders those who are left to suck it up and follow.

My face turns scarlet: my lips blister; hunger and thirst knot my psyche. I contemplate the death sleep. I'm a crazy man and hallucinate in a glaring yellow madness. My body doesn't walk; instead, it floats in a sulfur lake that reeks of putrid flesh. Legs are numb. If I fall I'll evaporate before hitting the ground.

The wind is the Devil's own blowtorch and blasts the scene. Hot sand sears through boots. Scorpions avoid cremation by scrambling under bile-colored, emaciated plants.

Yellow on the Devil's Anvil is the color of cowardice, the color of desperation and the color of failure.

Sarge orders us to take five, and so I collapse. Soon he hollers, "Saddle up," but I can't rise. He yanks my arms, pulls me to my feet and shouts, "You're yellow!"

"Don't call me yellow, Sarge," I say. "Call me what you will, but don't call me yellow. I hate yellow on this, the Devil's Anvil."

The trudge resumes. The Devil is testing my soul but I swear he'll not get me. I know he's hiding in the shade of a big rock somewhere. The yellow heat is too much, even for him.

Poetic Meditations

by Patricia Daly-Lipe

On this earth there is oneness.
It is a rhythmic flow, a great symphony that is life.
Trees with roots, stems and leaves
Shells, fins, furs and wings, all living things.
Each has a purpose and to each, an end
And then ...a new beginning.

Let us recapture the imagination of a child
See again the mystery, beauty and joy of God
Playing within and behind, beyond and above.
Unite with the intimacy of commitment.
Trust takes time
But the gift is therewaiting.

O taunt me not with anger and impatience.
Treat me not like the mushroom
Whom nature mocks with an umbrella,
Shielding her aspiring stem from the kiss of Apollo.

No, consider a small blade of grass
Growing on a rock in the woods,
So frail to have pushed through the hard unyielding mass,
A miracle alone in the forest
Noticed because she's different,
So small in the grandeur of the tall trees.
Alone? ...not really.

The sun caresses her blade; she bends back for more.
And she grows,
Not to be tall like her neighbors,
But to be all she can be
Bending and straining,
Getting bigger and stronger.
A soft summer breeze soothes her, fondles her gently
And she responds, shyly,
Her small body trembles, sensitive, yielding.
The hardship of forcing her way through the rock
Left behind, forgotten.

Rains come and she drinks with greed the manna of life.
"Grow, grow," she hears.

Again she responds.
The night comes.
The stars, gods of her universe, appear overhead.
“What am I to do?” she cries.
“Be, just be,” they tell her.
She sleeps.

It is morning and the dew slips slowly down her sides
As the sun comes back to encourage.
And so the days pass
Until one day she yields,
Yields to the earth and falls ever so gently,
Sliding off the rock down,
Down to the soft, sandy soil.

Do not be sad.
Her life was dear, her goal achieved.
She was what she was and she was meant to be.

Too Far

by Julie Leverenz

Fear
Runs crawls scrambles
hiding itself from the big
angry redness softly stalking.

Woman
Arching smiling seductress
watches smoothing, soothing, cooing—
his cooling hot touch.

Time
Sheds bleeding tears
and no is an opposite,
obstinate but ah hell
Why not.

Wind
Breathes hot soulless dust into
flopping faded
blue-pleated curtains.

Day
Raps fiercely
on the shattered door.

My God!
cries out a darkness
deeply dying
and no man can know.

The Contributors

Patricia Daly-Lipe was born in La Jolla, California, and spent half her childhood in Washington D.C., the home of several generations of her mother's family. In 1961, her mother died. Only 18, Patricia returned to Vassar College with a year at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, and earned a B.A. degree in Philosophy.

Later, as a single parent of three children, she raised, raced, and showed Thoroughbred horses. She also completed a Masters degree followed by a PhD.

Patricia has taught English and writing, written for magazines, had a newspaper column, and sold many of her paintings.

She now lives in Virginia with her husband and a menagerie of dogs, horses, and cats. Author of five books, she was the 2002 winner of San Diego Book Awards Association, recipient of the 2004 Woman of Achievement Award, Best Books Award Finalist, and 1st runner up trophy winner JADA Award Winning Novel contest 2006.

Solveig Eggerz, a native of Iceland, is the author of the award-winning novel, *Seal Woman*, published in 2008 by Ghost Road Press. She received a PhD in Comparative Literature from Catholic University, writing a dissertation on medieval anti-feminist satire. She speaks Icelandic and German, and is currently learning Italian.

Her interest in folklore is reflected in storytelling to children and adults. It also informs *Seal Woman*. She has introduced folklore and fairytales into a writing program at women's shelters in Washington, DC. She teaches a writing workshop at The Writers Center in Bethesda.

Solveig's writings have appeared in *The Northern Virginia Review*, *Palo Alto Review*, *Lincoln Review*, *Midstream*, *Issues*, *The Journal of the Baltimore Writers Alliance*, *The Christian Century*, *Open Windows: An Anthology*. Her short story, "The Volunteer," won an award in 1998 from the Baltimore Writers Alliance. *Seal Woman* won first prize for fiction from the Maryland Writers Association and was a 2009 Eric Hoffer finalist.

Solveig has three grown children and lives in Alexandria, VA.

Bernie Ghiselin is a retired journalist who has worked on newspapers in Norfolk, Richmond, and Charlotte, NC. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from UNC-Greensboro. His work with the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, and

his later free lance writing include articles and studies on executive training and leadership development. He lives in Kilmarnock, VA, where he is working on two novels.

Linn Harrison practices Neurology at the University of Virginia, School of Medicine. She attended the Taos Writing Retreat for Health Professionals in 2008 and participates in a monthly writing group. This is her first non-medical publication.

Julie Leverenz, a Princeton, New Jersey native, has lived in Williamsburg, Virginia, for 33 years with her husband and a series of only cats. A Dickinson College graduate (French and Religion), she obtained an M.B.A. and founded the Women in Business Program at the College of William and Mary. She tried to retire in 2008 from Jefferson Lab, where she was a Contracting Officer, but was recently called back as a consultant. Her first (and, until now, only) published poem appeared in a high school anthology in 1964. The mission of her semi-retirement is to write a book based on 40 years of letters from her best friend; in the process, she rediscovered the precursor to “Too Far” in one of her early diaries. Having written countless documents and correspondence for work and family since her youth, she is now discovering the joy, frustration and addiction of writing for publication.

Rebecca Anne Patton has always loved reading and writing. In high school, she wrote for a teen section of the Richmond Times Dispatch. While in college, she had a short story published in the Lynchburg College literary magazine, *The Prism*. While there she also wrote for the school paper. She is a graduate of Lynchburg College and Monmouth University and currently works in marketing in Richmond. She resides in Mechanicsville, Virginia with her husband and their Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.

Paul B. Stimson's career was in engineering and oceanography. His father was an Episcopal priest who planted spiritual seeds that sprouted after his death in 1972. Paul's interest in theology spans three decades; the essays that comprise his book were written in the latter half of that period. The book therefore has no thematic continuity from one article to the next, but there are two overarching themes: the magnificent, transcendent, paradoxical reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, and its intimate presence among us here on Earth. Throughout, the book strives to dispel the myriad misapprehensions of God and his Universe.

Lacking a beginning, development and conclusion, the book is open-ended with 53 short chapters and probably a few more to come. He has printed and bound

more than 100 copies that look like published books. At some early date he will declare the book complete, and move to next steps.

Stanley B. Trice grew up in Spotsylvania County and now lives in south Stafford County. He currently commutes by train to Northern Virginia where he works on budgets and legislative issues for the Defense Department. Stanley has had a dozen of his short stories published in national and international small press magazines in addition to several essays published locally. He has served as vice president and secretary of the Riverside Writers in addition to leading the anthology committee. Stanley recently completed two books and is actively looking for an agent. “Summer Discoveries” is an excerpt of *A Boy’s Life*. The second book *Evidence of a Commuter Train* is based on too many commutes to work.

Rod Vanderhoof grew up in the Puget Sound area of the Pacific Northwest. He studied economics at the University of Washington and was Distinguished Military Graduate, Air Force ROTC. He earned a Stanford MBA, served twenty years in the Air Force, and retired as a lieutenant colonel. He traded bonds and stocks for nearly twenty years with Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc. in Washington D.C.

Rod authored a novel, *The Cry of the Shidepoke*, plus numerous short stories, and wrote two short comedy pieces published in the June and July 2009 issues of *The Virginia Heritage Gazette*. He was coeditor of three literary anthologies and wrote three books on genealogy and family history. He earned the Riverside Writers “Best Fiction Prize, 2008” for his short story, “I Send My Regrets.”