



rathalla review

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rathalla review

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Rathalla Review

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Huguette Despault May

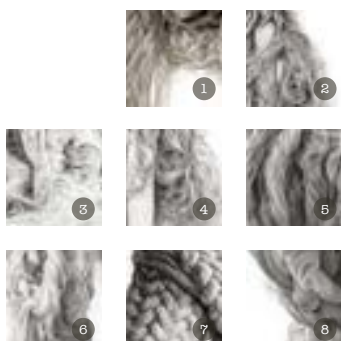
holds Bachelor's and Masters degrees in Fine Arts from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts / Tufts University. Earlier, she had studied at the Schuler School of Fine Arts (a classical atelier in Baltimore) and also received an Associate of Arts in Photography with honors from Dundalk Community College, Baltimore, Maryland. She served as curator for the contemporary drawing exhibition "Affirming the Hand" ('05) at the Courtyard Gallery, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and, since 2005, has exhibited her drawing work annually during the New Bedford Open Studios. Her earlier pastel work appeared in the Annual Open Exhibition "For Pastels Only" at the National Arts Club in New York while a member of the Pastel Society of America. May's photography was featured in *Finding the Charm in Charm City* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) and her illustrations were featured in *The Baby Gear Guide* (Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1985). Drawings from May's "Hawser" series of rope images have been juried into four volumes of *Studio Visit Magazine*, *A Contemporary Exhibition in Print* (The Open Studios Press, 2008/09/10), and were featured on the cover of Volume Six. Her work is in the corporate collections of MediTech in Fall River, Massachusetts and the Ciba Vision Global headquarters in Duluth, Georgia. May has worked as an illustrator and in the 1990's owned and operated Art & Image, a professional photography and digital restoration business. The artist has maintained a studio in New Bedford since 2005, moving to the Hatch Street studios in 2007, where she finds the light and space ideal for working on her large charcoal drawings. Portfolios of May's current work are available for viewing at her website www.huguetteamay.com.

artist statement

This series began with the chance discovery of an abandoned ship's hawser (a rope used in mooring or towing a ship) during one of my early trips to New Bedford, Massachusetts. The rope's heft and tattered state immediately suggested an exciting series of drawing investigations. Each drawing in the Hawser Series derives from that single piece of Korean War era rope.

In the drawing I encountered abundant physicality: "muscle" "hairiness" and "sinew" which lead to meditating on the many evocative rope-derived idioms and aphorisms embedded in the English language. These often referred colorfully and metaphorically to the human condition: "end of one's tether", "at loose ends" and "all strung out" being but a few examples. Beyond its former utility at sea, this industrial-strength tether has served anew as an elegant model for my graphical musings on the strands of our human strengths and frailties.

1. fuzzy logic, 2007;
2. core strength, 2006;
3. tumult, 2009;
4. the core, 2009;
5. umbilicals, 2009;
6. loosened, 2006;
7. core to core, 2010;
8. slippage, 2010



Crushed Turtle/Didn't Make the News

The South Branch raged, curled over the dam
fell into the street leaving debris and small
creatures flopping and crawling on the pavement.

In the shadow of my bumper a young
turtle squatted, intestines popped through
the top of the shell, yellow eggs blurted-

luminous spheres on the
black macadam. I bent to identify the species:
a snapper. Did I see a movement of her beak?

Did her left back claw twitch a micrometer?
Could there still be life within that cracked
grey dome bleeding river water and roe?

Fear of salmonella kept me from scooping
her up and driving to the vet. Her cause was
lost, her spherical possibilities spilled.

I could have toed her onto some newspaper
and tossed her back into the river
but I didn't do it,

allowing someone else to witness
the broken integrity of the carapace,
the public display of her interior.

MaryAnn L. Miller

MaryAnn L. Miller grew up in Western Pennsylvania and has lived in rural New Jersey for over forty years. She earned an MFA from Rosemont College and is currently completing a Postgraduate semester with the poet David Wojahn at Vermont College.

She has been published in Philadelphia Poets Anthology 2011 and 2013, Certain Circuits, The International Review of African American Art, and forthcoming in The Fox Chase Review 2013. MaryAnn was the Resident Book Artist at the Experimental Printmaking Institute, Lafayette College for eleven years. Her work is in the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Miller's book of poems, Locus Mentis, has been published by PS Books. She creates and publishes hand bound artist books, pairing artists with poets, through her Lucia Press.

Abraham Elm

Abraham Elm lives in Portland, Oregon, where he works as a writer and editor. "Nostalgia" is his first published short story.

In the morning I took a taxi to Bellevue — a city of buildings, not people. I drifted through the wide, clean streets until I found a park in the shadow of an immense spire of glass. There was a bench in the middle of a ring of golden trees, and for the next few hours I sat there, suspended in an exceptional silence, alone with the fog and the glistening grass and the countless shades of autumn.

I had been there before, many years earlier, at the end of a summer I wish had never occurred. It was during a time in my life when I longed for nonexistence—the first time, perhaps, that I truly appreciated the utter hopelessness of humanity. There was a war going on in a distant country; sickness and death were infecting my family, and friendship, as always, proved to be a poor substitute. I felt helpless and useless and impossibly far away from the nearest human being.

But this time, as I sat so contentedly on the park bench, I refused to focus on these fragments of my past. I studied every detail of my present surroundings, from the mottled patterns on the dying leaves to the lazy motion of the fog. I was intent on keeping my mind with my body, on preventing my thoughts from wandering away from me. When I finally left the park I felt weary with peace.

After a long walk through the city, I lost myself in the bright aisles of a supermarket. I don't know what drew me to such a place, a place so completely different from the park. Why would I have traded the silent and solitary natural world for an artificial world of noise and crowds? I suppose I've always been drawn, in pure or perverted ways, to the superfluous—and so much of life, when we think about it carefully (which we rarely do), is superfluous. Perhaps that word defines civilization better than any other. We are in a state of superfluity, a light and airy state, comfortably free from the weight of consequence. We can do anything, everything, nothing, and the outcome remains the same.

I left the supermarket with these thoughts in my mind, with the park's spell of peace shattered. The vacancy of Bellevue disturbed me. What were all the tall buildings for, the wide, clean streets, the bridges and parks and statues? It seemed more like a movie set than a real city.

In search of reassurance I walked to the library, where at last I found people who were somewhat similar to me. I filled my arms with an assortment of books and took a seat at a table by the window. From where I sat I could see the park; farther away, visible only as a silver strip between buildings, was the water, the barrier between my past and present. It was easy to forget the previous nights now that I had moved on; it is always easy for me to forget the past when it is removed in distance as well as time.

I brought my thoughts back to the library and the books in front of me. I

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from page 6: Nostalgia by Abraham Elm
read through a slim volume of Keats, then immersed myself in a much thicker volume of Yeats. What a peculiar power words possess; what an enchanting escape they provide! The world we think is real—the world pressing down on us, with all its objects, at every second—vanishes with the first whisper of a beautiful poem. Reality dissolves in the presence of such lovely language, and the new emotions that swim through us feel much more real than whatever sensations we thought we had been experiencing.

But then we close the book and the old world returns. I closed Yeats and gazed at my surroundings: lines of shelves and desks and chairs and lonely men and women resting here and there. I looked through the window at the silent cityscape and began to question my solitude.

In the morning I sought comfort in the immensity of the ocean. I took a ferry to Vancouver Island, telling myself as I waited on board that my worries meant nothing. I tried to look at myself from the ocean's perspective; I longed for its indifference. "I am small and young and inconsequential," I told myself. "My joys and sorrows mean nothing to the universe, so why should they mean anything to me?"

As the massive ship plunged westward I ate lunch from a vending machine and drank several cups of weak, warm coffee. I then took *The Myth of Sisyphus* out of my backpack and began to read. The opening lines of that infamous essay reminded me of an incident that occurred during my freshman year of college. Without the slightest idea of what career I wanted to pursue, I had enrolled in an introductory philosophy course. On the first day of class the professor shuffled into the lecture hall looking sullen and disheveled. "According to Camus," he said, heaving his tattered briefcase onto the lectern, "all of philosophy comes down to one essential question: whether or not an individual should kill himself." He paused for a moment after saying this, leaving us students to shift uncomfortably in our seats. Then he reached into his briefcase and withdrew a revolver. "After fifty-eight years," he said, "I have found an answer to this question." He raised the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. Through the terrified gasps and shouts came not an explosion but a tiny click—the gun had not been loaded. The professor grinned. "Just kidding,"

he said, winking at us and shaking with laughter. Some of the students joined him; others walked out of the room. "Who says philosophy has to be boring?" he bellowed between bursts of mirth.

This incident is what first drew my attention to suicide as a philosophical issue. I would later say to my mother, "It's odd that you should want to bring me into this world but have no interest in keeping me here." We had been fighting about the usual things and were very upset, though for vastly different reasons. I only spoke these words after she had callously dismissed my threats of suicide. I wasn't really considering suicide, for I had read Schopenhauer's opinions on the matter, but I would have liked my mother to show more sensitivity towards my feelings.

Parents, of course, maintain a curiously contradictory position: on the one hand they love their children with a devotion unimaginable in other relationships; but on the other hand they have committed an egregious violation by bringing another soul into the world—for how can anyone justify imposing existence upon someone else without first asking his permission?

I returned Camus to my backpack and walked outside to get some fresh air. The whole world was gray that morning—the sky, the sea, the islands hovering above the horizon. It was cold as well, and the wind off the water made it colder still. Soon the ferry would turn to the north and enter Victoria Harbor. When I was fourteen I visited Victoria with my mother and father. We spent a week at the Empress Hotel, living quietly, quaintly, taking long walks along the waterfront, spending evenings in bookstores and theaters, dining at expensive restaurants and drinking coffee at crowded cafés. How far I had drifted from that way of life, from such comfort and love. Could I even consider myself to be the same person? Surely not. We remember, but we are not our memories.

A thick fog hung over the harbor and obscured the shore. The pulses and drones of ship horns filled the air, fading slowly in the stillness. I remained on the outside deck until the ship docked. After waiting in a stifling hallway with dozens of strangers, I stepped into the fresh air. The fog thinned as I walked away from the harbor. Seagulls circled overhead in their curious way, eyeing me, it seemed, with jealousy, as though they wanted to land but were forbidden from doing so. I walked to a hotel, reserved a room, and immediately fell asleep.

I slept for several hours, and though I was phys-

ically rested when I awoke, I felt mentally lethargic. I left my hotel and wandered around the city until I found a movie theater. An anachronistic marquee advertised multiple shows, but I was drawn at once to a French film starring the achingly beautiful Madeleine Consigny.

For the next two hours I was enchanted—by Mlle Consigny, by the French language, and by the arboreal landscape in which the film took place. On the screen, time moved like smoke in a still room; the story lingered here and there, rose and fell, twisted and twirled and eventually dispersed. As I walked out of the theater I tried to picture what Mlle Consigny must have looked like as a girl—an impossible task. I promised myself that I would learn to speak French. Soon my fantasies reached an extravagant extent: I found myself tiptoeing around the most delicate details of a novel I would write—a novel that would serve a single purpose: to be made into a film starring Mlle Consigny. I would be asked to write the screenplay for the film, of course, and the director would insist on my presence at the shooting of each and every scene. It would only be natural, then, for Mlle Consigny to seek me out, to marvel at my ideas, to invite me back to her home...

And so my fantasies continued while I walked back to the hotel. My mental lethargy was gone, and in its place was a hunger for new knowledge. I asked a stranger where the nearest bookstore was and then followed her directions to a magnificent stone building. I heaved open its grand wooden door and stepped inside. An evocative papery air greeted me, and I breathed it in with covetous pleasure. If only I had been born a book rather than a person! I would have fit in nicely on a shelf, in an atmosphere of quiet contemplation, tucked snugly between my comrades.

Disappointment overcame me as soon as I stepped out of the bookstore. It is remarkable how we can find greater wonder in a piece of paper than in the world as it really is, fully colored and three-dimensional. Perhaps it is this ability (I hesitate to call it a proclivity) that separates man from the animals.

At one point in my life I carried a notebook with me wherever I went, and whenever I discovered a new way in which man distinguishes himself from the beasts, I wrote it down. Unfortunately this notebook no longer survives, and I cannot remember its con-

tents with much clarity. (I can remember the first entry, however: Men find a need to keep a list of the ways in which they are different from animals; animals do not.) After several years of this practice, I became profoundly discouraged by the characteristics peculiar to mankind. I slipped into a period of depression during which my daily routine consisted of taking long, hot showers and reading Sherlock Holmes stories. A doctor (whose advice I had not sought) told me that this was a common coping mechanism among men whose childhoods had never properly ended.

What does one do upon returning from dreams to reality? This has been the most important question of my life, I suppose, and I faced it with familiar weariness on that evening in Victoria. In the absence of an answer to this question, I had to do something to distract myself. I walked to a park on the waterfront and sat down on a bench that looked out across the harbor. The bench was surrounded by an expanse of grass sloping down to the water. A young girl in a white dress was playing in the grass. Farther away, at the water's edge, stood her father. He waved and called out her name, but she kept her attention focused on an object in her hands. I imagined it was a colorful stone, or perhaps a tiny animal, something she could whisper to and take care of and share her secrets with. I was suddenly overcome by the desire to trade places with whatever she was holding. I would look up at her, my eyes wet with affection, and she would pat me on the head and assure me that everything would be good again. Then, raising my head to her lips, she would tell me a wonderful secret that no one else knew. My eyes would widen and I would promise never to tell another soul. She would laugh and then set me down in the grass, and I would run around in circles, skipping and shouting and snatching at the ends of her dress.

But I couldn't trade places, so I remained where I was and continued to watch her. How different she was from me! How sullen my soul seemed in comparison to hers! The doctor had accused me of not growing out of my childhood, but I wonder if my problem was in fact an entirely different one: I had never been a child at all.

I spent a week in Victoria, wandering through foggy streets and silent bookstores, drinking coffee late into

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John Cullen

John Cullen attended school at SUNY Geneseo and BGSU in Ohio. After working a number of jobs such as beekeeper and driveway repair man, he currently teaches English. His work has appeared in journals such as The Cincinnati Poetry Review, The MacGuffin, Controlled Burn, and Gulf Coast.

Michigan Blues

My oldest sister collected A's
in high school, and led her class
graduation garbed in the traditional black
robe, mortar board aslant and the top dressed
with strips of white medical tape
outlining a peace sign. Her speech invoked
the sixties as a brand new era, a tuning in
of spiritual awareness. Today, her stereo presets
to AM radio stations and local talk
show hosts screaming the mark
of the beast, proclaiming bar codes
a magical plan etched by the Wall Street demon.
She writes in the air with her cigarette,
each exhale a draft outlining betrayals.
Too bad for me, I'm collateral
damage, sitting nearby, trying to manage
a peanut butter sandwich with a blob
of Miracle Whip forced from a squeeze bottle.

"Look at this." She holds up the newspaper.
"Payless Shoes is having a sale,
Today Only: buy two pair and get the third
one free. Do the math. It's a steal.
We all need shoes." Before I know it,
I'm navigating half empty through traffic
on 28th and Division, driving her

to the nearest Payless Shoe store and half wishing
the Book of Revelations revealed anything
more than venom dripped on Rome by an island-bound crank.
She has waited three months to be rechristened
Veneer Specialist at the local factory, meaning
she got laid off after ten years of gluing shaved wood
onto fiberboard desk tops to make them appear
like solid wood. I wait outside, wishing I smoked.

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What it Brings

Pineapple and ham slices
dealt evenly across red sauce
on an herb crust brushed with oil.
That's what I ordered an hour before
my wife called, the hitch in her voice letting
slip the news her mother had died.

The hospice nurse, attending another soon to leave
this world living her last moments
from a cabin on the river, arrived
to sit with them until I got home,
and our neighbor materialized outside the door
having heard the news on the emergency band.

Steam curled from slits in the box
I balanced on the heated passenger seat
and covered with a towel, my little trick
to bank the oven's fire, just the way she liked it.
I drove as fast as possible for home.
The nurse confirmed the death,
not that anyone would have mistaken it, but it had to be
certified, the light in the eye, stethoscope
to the chest. There was nothing
to be done except wait until I arrived.

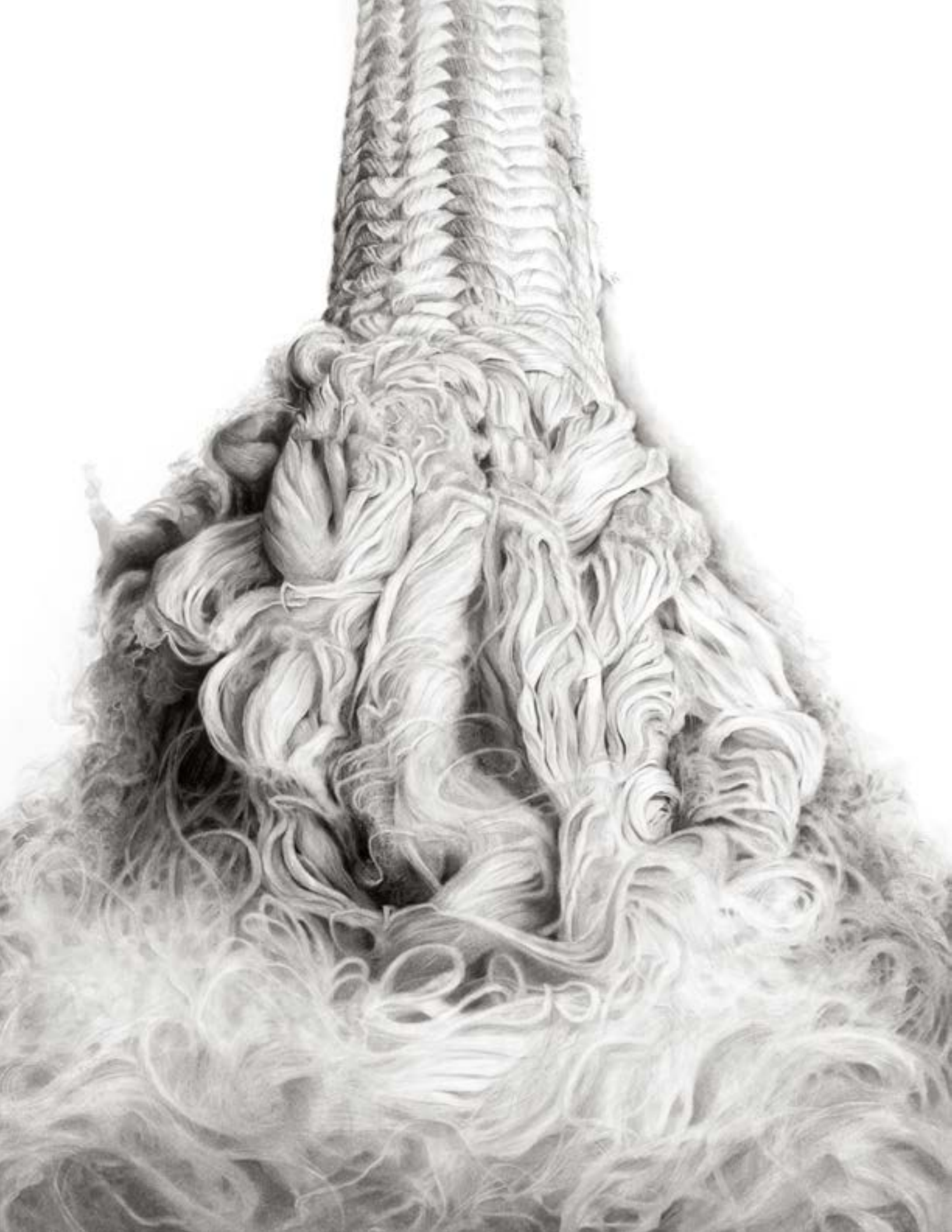
The four of us settled at the living room
table holding hands
with the pizza and silence.
After what seemed like eternity
we heard the funeral director's Cruiser roll up
and rushed out on the deck to meet him.

We talked for ten minutes, met his assistant,
then gathered, again, at the table.
She's still in the bedroom, we told them.
He wasn't sure we could navigate around the kitchen island
with the gurney, and said we might need to
carry her body from the bed to the kitchen.
I followed the assistant into the bedroom.

He pushed back his cowboy hat.
"Why, she's just a little skeeter.
And if we have to carry her, she'll be fine with it."

For some reason, I felt like laughing.
He said they would make her comfortable,
unfolded the gurney and then tucked
a red velvet cover around her shoulders
and down to her feet. Her head rested on a pillow,
turned
slightly to one side as if she were asleep
or, I thought, waiting to get a haircut.

They rolled the gurney from the bedroom,
then out the door, then lifted
carefully down each step, watchful
for drop and bump. Then the door
slammed shut, the car rolled out the driveway.
There I was, with nothing left but the cold
pizza, which suddenly appeared
to be the strangest object I had ever seen.



Chasing Papers

She was harping on his diet again. “For heaven’s sake, Cliff. It’s a salad. You like salad.”

She showed him the recipe, a two-page spread in a glossy ladies’ magazine, as if that would make it more enticing.

The list of ingredients was daunting: exotic vegetables and herbs, nutritional yeast, silken tofu. He’d never heard of nutritional yeast, and on principle he wouldn’t go near something called silken tofu. It sounded like fabric. He stared at the pictures, the hodgepodge of colors, shredded up plant parts tossed together and slathered in oil.

“What’s wrong with lettuce salad?”

She took the magazine back. “Oh, forget it.”

He hadn’t intended to come off as quite so disagreeable. Trying to make amends, he said, “Forget what?” He cupped his ear and hunched over. “Pardon the senile citizen.”

But his timing was off, and she didn’t laugh. Or maybe it wasn’t funny anymore, with sixty-five bearing down on them. He straightened.

“I’m feeling old,” he said.

“Feeling old.” She wasn’t even smiling. “Imagine that.”

After her bath that night, she went directly to the bedroom, and by the time he came upstairs she was already asleep. Their spat stuck with him. Florence was a good wife and he wanted to oblige her. If only he weren’t so particular about food and things.

He got in and lay there, straight as a stick. It was cold on his half of the bed, but he stayed away from her. If he woke her up, she’d have one more thing to hold against him.

It wasn’t just unusual recipes that had caught her fancy. She’d taken up with a series of fads lately. Those thick, wordy novels, for instance, with airy illustrations on the front. He himself was never much into fluff and daydreams, but every night she went to bed with her book. And seven hours later she would throw off the covers and greet the morning like Cinderella gone to meet her prince. She was up well before dawn these days. She said she needed a space to pattern her energy. He didn’t know what five o’clock in the morning had to do with space. Pattern her energy. When had she started talking like that? It probably had to do with that yoga studio she visited every Tuesday evening.

He wondered if her new interests signaled some kind of dissatisfaction. In fact, nothing seemed good enough for her these days. Her appearance, for example: she’d always been a primper, but she’d never been so done up that her self-assurance didn’t come through. Her self-assurance had been so dependable. Now she was constantly disparaging her hair, her figure, her complexion. He didn’t know how to respond. He’d already made the mistake

Bryan Wang

Bryan Shawn Wang lives with his wife and children in Berks County, Pennsylvania. His fiction has appeared, or is forthcoming, in places such as Valparaiso Fiction Review, decomP, Solstice, LITnIMAGE, Prime Number Magazine, and JMWW and has been shortlisted for the storySouth Million Writers Award.

of agreeing that the phrase aging beauty was oxymoronic. When he should have told her that age granted its own beauty, or that she was the exception to the rule. Although what did it matter? Who was she dressing up for anymore?

She had other grievances as well. Apparently the white tile floor in the powder room and laundry had always been a hardship to her, as had the stove and the side-by-side icebox, both top-of-the-line appliances from Sears once upon a time and still going strong. He'd tried to explain that nowadays nothing was built to last, that everything from back then endured. That was about right, she said. The fridge and the house and her whole gosh darn life were just things to be endured.

She wasn't ungrateful; he couldn't believe that of her. She was fidgety was all. They'd never been able to have a family, and working the counter at the True Value hadn't exactly kept her busy over the years. There was nothing to anchor her. Maybe fidgetiness was the cause, maybe it was the effect. Still, they'd spent thirty-four years getting everything into place. Why fidget now? Learning how to make a life with somebody was like chasing after a sheet of paper in the wind. Some important document—a schoolboy's theme, a certificate, a contract. And now that he'd finally caught up and taken hold of it, she'd snatched it from him, sent it sailing back into the breeze, and expected him to get up and start running all over again.

They usually watched a news program at that time of the evening, but another channel was running a talent show that she'd heard was quite popular these days.

"The news is always the same old, same old," she said.

He was about to point out that they called it news for a reason, but he understood what she meant, at least to a certain extent—the newsman hadn't aged at all in the past twenty years, the Jews and the Palestinians still couldn't get their act together, and Americans were growing fatter and dumber every year no matter how hard they tried to keep up with the rest of the world.

The difference between the two of them was that he didn't mind hearing about it more than once. He could always pick up something new the second time around.

The talent show opened with a singing group, who did a bouncy version of "I Lost My Blues (Can You Help Me Find Them?)." Although she said she'd pay money to hear a group like that in person, he tended to agree with

the judges, who'd panned the act. The singers were too showy. He hated when performers used flash and flair as a disguise.

She muted the television. "They're on stage in front of three thousand people. What do you think they could possibly hide?"

"Their singing was a little flat, wasn't it?"

"You thought their voices were flat?"

He understood. Who was he to criticize a singer? He couldn't find a right note if it was sitting beside him. "I'm not an expert," he said. "I'm just repeating the judges' opinion."

She turned the sound back on. "You can have your own opinions, Cliff. The experts aren't always right."

"I think the audience agreed with the judges, too."

"The crowd's not always right, either."

He couldn't keep his voice from rising. "The music was lousy, and the costumes were atrocious. Grown men in pastels. If that's not a distraction, I don't know what is. That's my honest opinion."

"Not everybody," she said, "can survive on three suits for his entire adult life."

He didn't answer. She knew he took pride in those three suits. Navy blue, brown, and the three-piece charcoal gray: he could address virtually any situation with his three suits. And he reveled, just a little, in the implication that he'd so meticulously maintained both the garments and his waistline for so long. He was accomplished at maintaining things, and where was the shame in that? You found something worth taking care of, you took care of it, it lasted for you—that was what he called a no-hassle guarantee. The principle of careful maintenance, he'd come to learn, applied to everything from a man's health to his home to a happy marriage.

Only now, apparently, it didn't.

"You know what," he said. Another act, a lady with a parrot recycling old knock-knock jokes, was getting dished. "That singing group wasn't so bad."

"Don't change just to please me," she said. "I know you have your beloved principles to uphold."

As they drove home from seafood night at Zeno's, he came right out with it.

"Are you unhappy with me, Flo?"

She sat huddled in her seat, pressed against the door, her arms wrapped around herself. She didn't respond.

During their meal, she'd barely acknowledged him



while she worked over her plate, some kind of stew with shellfish, steamed vegetables, rice. She'd gone through the dish so quickly he was afraid she might choke. What's your hurry, he'd asked, but she kept shoveling it in. Like she had a hole to fill, but it was emptying faster than she could fill it.

He looked down at his hands clutched tight around the steering wheel, locked at ten and two. He forced his fingers open and stretched them. He dimmed the brights for an oncoming car, checked the dashboard and mirrors, and then switched the brights back on. He scanned the road ahead for potential hazards.

"Are you unhappy, Flo?" he asked again, louder this time, so she couldn't miss it.

Her answer was a hiss. "Are you unhappy?" She bit down on the word the way she might pronounce a foreign term, some unfamiliar phrase. You. When had he become something foreign to her? Thirty-four years together and he was a stranger? Did he need to introduce himself? Excuse me, Miss. I'm Clifford Brown. May I have the honor of this dance?

The day they'd first met, he'd been sitting across from her at a table in the community room of the public library, each of them somehow enrolled in the same craft workshop—on German paper cutting, of all things. He'd given up on his own project with its shabby and crinkled edges, and instead watched as she guided her scissors and knife around the pattern of a brooding swan. She cut like an explorer staking claim to new territory. Tail feathers emerged, the sweep of the bird's neck, its delicate beak. Even the remnants she left on the table were exquisite and suggestive.

When she caught him watching, she stopped. "Would you like this?" she asked, and she held out her swan, her precious paper swan, as if it were some insignificant trinket or cheap imitation.

Unnerved, he blurted the only line with which he'd ever been taught to approach a lady: "Miss, I'm Clifford Brown. May I have the honor of this dance?"

He felt himself redden. He, who was always so careful with his words. He, who so prided himself on his composure. His mind grasped for a way to assemble a dance hall out of the room, with its murals and posters and stiff carpeting, the boisterous children and itinerant seniors chattering around them, the wide table separating him from her—for a way to make sense of his nonsensical question. But although she was laughing, her laughter was of the amused variety, not the uncharitable, and

soon he was laughing as well. How could caution and poise stand in the way of such delight?

"No, ma'am," he said out loud now. He let his eyes stray from the road for an instant. "I'm not in the least bit unhappy."

She was going to cry—he could feel the despair amassing between them, an abrupt atmospheric change, like the gusts that can kick up before a storm—and yet he couldn't stop his mouth.

"Are you leaving me, Flo?" He hadn't even had time to inspect the thought before he spoke it. But of course she had found somebody else—somebody dashing, somebody young. The nagging about this and that. The Tuesday visits to the yoga studio. She'd not only been fidgety, she'd been restless. She'd sought somebody who would woo her again, compliment her and lavish impractical baubles on her. Somebody who could stomach those strange meals, the sauces and dressings with unappealing names. Somebody who would kiss her whenever and wherever she longed to be kissed. She'd fallen in love with that kind of a man.

He glanced at her and saw his wife from a hundred different perspectives, none of them quite the perspective from which he'd viewed her before. He'd been torn into a hundred different pieces, and the tattered scraps lay around her, silent and broken.

She was crying, rolling sobs erupting from the quiet grief that seemed to stretch endlessly ahead of them.

"Where would I go?" she asked. "Where in the world would I go, Clifford?"

He had no answer. So there had been no compliments, no wooing, no impractical baubles. There had been no one else. The pieces of him reassembled themselves, fitting back together so neatly there was not a single crease showing. And yet he felt himself more fragile than he'd ever been, for the possibility that perhaps she wished him torn apart, that perhaps she'd be better off if he were.

He unlocked his hands from the steering wheel. The road was straight and empty. He pulled her close to him. He cupped his palms around her cheeks, covering every flaw she could quibble with, covering everything she used to conceal those flaws. He stroked away her thinning hair. He waited until her eyes stopped fluttering away from his, until they remained as steady as his own. He kissed her, and for a brief moment the car raced ahead, driven solely of its own accord.

Splayed on the sidewalk, 3rd and Pine,
a robin lies still, whole, round-bellied or at least
as round-bellied as a bird can be
a week before Christmas.

Look, my friend Janet says as we walk by
and I look, though I don't want to see
how one thin thread of red blood
trickles from its beak onto concrete,
bead-black eye wide open
on an unforgiving world.

From San Francisco my sister writes:
Mia is dying—cancer of unknown origin—
two little kids at home and who says
life is fair and who ever
said it?

Dead bird.
Dying friend.
It's not even 9 a.m. Thursday,
three days more before light
stops waning, begins
imperceptibly, to build.

Some days I wake wondering
if I can take it, I write back
though I know I will.

I was a eleven
when I discovered the story—
The Lady or the Tiger—
a book I bought at a flea market for a quarter
mostly for its green leather cover,

for an elegantly etched front plate of a man
standing before two entry ways,
vellum overlay fogging the scene,
gold letters embossed on a green spine—
I loved the feel of that book—
a bargain at a quarter even then.

Liz Abrams-Morley

Liz Abrams-Morley's collection, *Necessary Turns*, was published by Word Press in 2010 and won an Eric Hoffer Award for Excellence in Small Press Publishing that year. Other collections include *Learning to Calculate the Half Life* (Zinka Press) and *What Winter Reveals* (Plan B Press). Her poems and short stories have been published in a variety of nationally distributed anthologies, journals, and ezines, and have been read on NPR.

She provided text for two award-winning limited edition artist's books and is collaborating with two colleagues on a workbook of writing prompts. New poems are in *Per-simmon Tree*, *Philadelphia Stories* and *Passager*. Her story "Mitzraim Means Tight Places, The Rabbi Said" was performed at The Adrienne Theatre as part of InterAct Theatre's Writing Aloud Series.

Co-founder/director of *Around the Block Writers' Collaborative* (www.writearoundtheblock.org), Liz was honored for "Distinguished Teaching, Graduate Level" in April of 2009 for her work on the MFA faculty at Rosemont College. She has served as an artist in the schools at all grade levels since 1990.

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Chapter Six: The German Jews Arrive

Richard D. Bank, Esq.

Richard D. Bank, Esq. is the author of six books including *The Everything Guide to Writing Nonfiction* (Adams Media, 2010). He is a past president and current board member of the Philadelphia Writers' Conference and has published over 100 articles, essays, short stories and book reviews in various journals and periodicals. Richard has taught writing courses at the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University and other venues. He currently is on faculty at Rosemont College in the Graduate Publishing and MFA programs where he teaches courses including creative nonfiction and publishing law. Richard provides services as a writing coach for serious writers.

Author's Note

The following is an excerpt from a work-in-progress entitled *I AM TEREZIN*, a book of creative nonfiction written in the first person as a memoir from the point of view of the actual concentration camp Theresienstadt (a.k.a. Terezin). Theresienstadt had the dubious distinction of being the Nazi's showcase to the world and became known as the Paradise Ghetto but in fact, of the 140,000 Jews who were interred there at one time or another, only 17,000 survived.

In the summer of 1942, SS Lieutenant-General Reinhard Heydrich's vision for what I was to become became a reality with the arrival of the first German Jews. If my entire existence was nothing but a charade—a sham the Germans set forth before an all too receptive worldwide audience—nowhere was it more evident than in the expressions of the wizened visages of those former German citizens of the Hebrew faith as they alighted from the trains in Bauschowitz.

I saw it in their upturned faces eagerly seeking a welcoming environment. Eyes betraying a glimmer of hope as they walked with a briskness belying their advanced years. Their belief that The Fatherland remained their country and had only been temporarily abducted by the Nazis made them susceptible to the carefully laid pretense that this move was not deportation but only a relocation.

Such was the state of affairs late in the afternoon of October 9, 1942 with the arrival of a fresh transport. When the train pulled into the station at Bauschowitz that day, an eerie quiet greeted the rolling rail cars as they screeched to a halt on the rusted tracks. Suddenly, the stillness that had permeated the small depot was shattered by shouts of "Schnell! Macht Schnell!" barked by German soldiers strutting like warlords in their drab gray coats. Czech police in green uniforms groveled alongside the Germans echoing the cry for those debarking to make haste.

The disembarking passengers hardly noticed that huddling in a remote corner was a handful of Jewish police, easily mistaken for railway employees because they wore red conductor caps. Nor did the arriving Jews pay much attention to the four SS men in their black leather jackets smoking cigarettes who, with twisted grins planted on their frozen faces, regarded the people bustling and bumbling before them as one would chuckle at circus clowns tumbling over each other.

With the sun setting behind a distant line of trees, Sophie and Ludwig Frank detrained along with several hundred other German Jews. They and their fellow travelers were taken aback at the brusqueness with which they were treated. After all, Sophie thought, the transfer was to have been merely a "change of address," or so she had been informed when she and her husband were ordered to pack their belongings and prepare to leave Germany. Sophie mulled this over as she replayed in her mind the scene from a few days earlier.

"Where are we going?" Sophie had asked, squaring her shoulders and stepping between the smug German officer and her husband who had fallen back into the shadows of the lamp lighting their two-room residence in the Jewish quarter.

"To a lovely place called Theresenbad or, as some say, Theresienstadt am See," the young man said as if describing a lovely village on the lake. "It is like Carlsbad, Frau. Indeed, it is not far from Carlsbad. A health spa,

Frau!" But Sophie detected a sinister glimmer in his black eyes and the upturn of his thin lips was more a sneer than a smile. "Pack your suitcases with care," the blond soldier shouted over his shoulder as he departed.

Sophie had lived her entire life in Germany so she was anxious to learn all she could about where she and her husband were headed. After making a number of inquiries, she determined that Theresienstadt, a city located north of Prague and not far from the German border, had been recently designated a Jewish town for German speaking Jews over sixty where they could live the remainder of their lives. In addition, Jews who had served the Vaterland in World War I and were disabled or decorated also qualified for residency. So being sent to dwell within my walls seemed logical, Sophie concluded, since Ludwig was a week away from his sixty-third birthday, a decorated War veteran, and still easily agitated due to the poison gas he had inhaled in the trenches. Moreover, the move seemed auspicious given the terrible rumors she had heard about the destinations in the East where most of her friends and family had been deported and becoming one of my residents appeared a much more desirable option.

At the train station, Sophie became apprehensive when everyone was instructed to line up for a medical inspection. She tugged at the short sleeve of her dress to try and cover her swollen arm where she injected herself daily with insulin for diabetes. Sophie worried that the disease might prevent her from being admitted into the town but her fears were allayed when she saw the friendly face of the Jewish physician conducting the cursory examinations. She assumed the doctor was Jewish by the red and white armband he wore. In the center, "K. L. Terezin" was written while running down the side in cursive letters was the name "Dr. Reines." In a short time, Sophie and Ludwig would be assigned similar armbands with their names inscribed.

"Will I be able to secure insulin here?" Sophie asked after Dr. Reines noticed the bulge on her arm.

"I'm afraid not, Frau. But do not be concerned. The diet in Terezin works wonders on diabetics! None of the sweets and harmful foods that would raise your sugar is available." The physician forced a laugh and returned to his task. Dr. Reines appraised Ludwig with a glance and returned to Sophie. "You both can move on. No need for a ride on the truck. You two can walk with the rest."

With a wave of the physician's hand, Sophie and Ludwig were dismissed. Sophie like so many of my other

residents was relieved to learn that this initial screening was not the feared selection process they had heard about in furtive whispers detailing how those deemed unfit were deported east. Sophie sighed with relief. The examination was only to see if she and Ludwig could walk to the town. Sophie took comfort thinking how considerate it was to provide transportation for those unable to make the hike.

After an hour, with typical German efficiency, the bulk of the newcomers were ordered into rows four abreast and, clutching their baggage, they commenced their trek to the new home I would provide them situated somewhere in the distant horizon. The procession bypassed the houses of the Czechoslovakian population and tramped directly in my direction.

As the wearied procession slowly skirted the swamp-land, Sophie shivered in the cold damp air enveloping her. The deep moats surrounding my imposing granite ramparts intensified the dank smell and soggy atmosphere causing the marchers to grumble as they plodded, still four abreast, under the archway leading inside.

Sophie didn't know what to expect. Would there be an official delegation to greet them? Would thousands of Jewish men and women be stirring about their business like any typical city? In my earlier days, I certainly had hoped to provide grand receptions but I had given up on such pipe dreams for some time. I would have even been satisfied if Sophie could have seen the shadows of my inhabitants against lights flickering off the drawn sheets on the windows where they were having supper in their homes and perhaps preparing for bed. But this, too, was not to be. Like almost everything of importance, the matter was out of my control.

Every arrival day was the same with a strict curfew imposed by Commandant Seidel leaving Sophie, like the others passing through my walls for the first time, unprepared for what awaited. With night falling, Sophie and Ludwig gazed in a daze at the empty streets barren and void of human life as though they had entered a ghost town. The only sounds they heard were the shuffling of their own feet along the cobblestones and the occasional banging of luggage jarring against the pavement. Sophie had grown weary and her feet heavy so she was relieved when the procession came to a halt at the doorway of a bleak stone building that served as my absorption center.

As crestfallen as Sophie felt, had she arrived a few months earlier with the first transports of German Jews, I am afraid to say she would have been even more

disappointed with her initial quarters. In those days the search, or *Schleuse* as it was called, was conducted in a makeshift area of casements with sloping passages leading upwards. Ultimately, the arrivals spilled into broad long rooms where the search was undertaken. The temporary sleeping quarters were stables filled with hay where the people slept in rows. Sometimes, they would remain there for as long as a week until permanent facilities were assigned—as if anything about me could ever be considered “permanent!”

But by fall when Sophie arrived, things had improved. Precise procedures were followed. One by one, names were matched to a list and crossed off as they entered the absorption center. Luggage was checked. All money and jewelry was confiscated including Ludwig’s gold watch, which he had been given on his bar mitzvah a half century earlier. Indeed, everything of any conceivable value was seized: medicine, scissors, and blade sharpeners; flasks filled with cognac, cookies and chocolate was commandeered. Physical examinations under the supervision of Dr. Reines were conducted and once again, Sophie was assured she would fare well without her insulin injection.

With little to do but wait, Sophie studied her temporary quarters and committed them to memory so that when she closed her eyes in a vain attempt to sleep, she still could see the mold covered walls and dim craggy corners. She and Ludwig grew accustomed to the foul smelling clammy air and the stench of unwashed unkempt bodies huddled so close together that shifts were assigned for sitting or lying on the sodden floors.

Finally, at the end of the third day, the intake operation was complete. Although transports had only been arriving since June, by the end of that year, 109,000 Jews became my residents. On New Year’s Day, 1943, more than half of these “favored” Jews were dead having succumbed to disease, beatings, execution, or transport east.

Before being discharged from the absorption center, there remained the matter of a proper orientation, which was presented by one of the block elders. In Sophie’s case, the information that would prove so crucial for her survival was provided by Fritz Janovitz. Fritz was one of my favorites to introduce me to each new group of arrivals because he took pride in anything even remotely Jewish. He had been an ardent supporter of Jewish nationalism from his days as a student and eventually served as the head of the Jewish youth organization in Reichenberg. In 1931 after his family’s business closed,

Fritz had settled in Prague but he moved seven years later to Zurich where he secured work. But his people silently beckoned when Czechoslovakia mobilized and he returned to serve the Jewish community placing himself in harm’s way. It wasn’t long before he became one of my residents and was conferred with the position of block elder in the Magdeburg barracks.

Fritz had this way about him that was open, warm and sincere. Sophie saw it at once and was impressed with the young, handsome and well-dressed man thinking that maybe things weren’t so bad after all. He spoke words of encouragement and went so far as to suggest a sense of humor wouldn’t hurt. Above all, he implored—be patient; there was no rush; there was nowhere one had to go; things would come in time. He carefully explained how the institutions and authorities operated and fielded every question until no more hands were raised. As always, Fritz had done his job well.

Once the orientation was complete, everyone was given ration slips, an initial three day allotment of moldy bread, provided with new Roman numerals replacing the numbers previously assigned at embarkation to secure their identity, and directed to their respective living quarters. In the case of Sophie’s group, the men were to be housed in the *Sudenten* barracks—an immense three story building at my periphery and the women and children were directed to the *Hamburger* and *Dresden* barracks—three story buildings covering an entire block. Cries of protest and tears of anguish filled the absorption center as families were torn asunder. Such times were the most difficult for me to withstand—except, of course, the transports east.

A wave of panic swept over Ludwig’s face at the thought of being alone. Sophie saw the terror in his eyes and she insisted on speaking to someone in authority. She explained how her husband’s hearing had been impaired by the incessant roar of canons when he had served his country. “He was decorated! Did you know that? And is this how he is to be repaid?” Sophie confronted the staff representative from the Council of Elders whose placid expression remained unchanged. There was nothing he could do even if he was so inclined. But the German officer peering over his shoulder took interest.

“You say your husband was decorated, Frau?” Sophie looked up at the German officer, a man in his fifties with a gray mustache who, she thought, must have seen duty in the First World War.



“Yes,” she answered. The German turned his sullen eyes toward Ludwig. Sophie detected a glint of recognition in his gaze that the Jew standing before him might have been one of his comrades with whom he had fought side by side in the trenches. The German whispered into the Jewish official’s ear. The Jewish bureaucrat shrugged and wrote new instructions on a slip of paper.

Before leaving the absorption center, all luggages were returned though considerably lighter after being pilfered by the Germans and Czechs. Sophie grimaced at this turn of events, but actually, she was quite fortunate. While there were a few transports where my arrivals received their suitcases intact, in many cases, all personal belongings vanished into thin air never to be seen again. It really was a matter of providence whether anything was returned at all. Finally, like everyone else, Sophie and Ludwig were given their bedrolls and sent on their way.

After wandering the ghetto’s dark streets for more than an hour, Sophie and Ludwig located their living quarters in a building crammed with families consisting of the staff serving the Jewish governing authority known as the Council of Elders—the title provided courtesy of the Germans in reference to the infamous anti-Semitic tome, *The Elders of Zion*. Climbing three flights of narrow creaking stairs, a seemingly endless area presented itself though it was difficult to gauge the size of the room because sections were cordoned off by hanging sheets separating one family from another.

People were scurrying everywhere but no one took the time to greet them or even acknowledge their presence. A cacophony of languages caused Sophie’s head to swirl. Many spoke High German but as Sophie and Ludwig sidled through the throng, Sophie could tell from dialects that many of the Jews were from Bohemia and Moravia. Later, the dormitory would also be home to Jews from the Netherlands, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Denmark.

Just as Sophie was about to give up securing a place to sleep, she spotted an unoccupied space in a far corner that was perhaps two meters by two meters. A ragged mattress was precariously balanced on a makeshift box spring and pushed against the moldy wall. There was barely enough room for Ludwig and Sophie to stand after they plopped their luggage on the musty floor. But they would make do, Sophie resolved, staring wide-eyed at what would be their

home for the next two and a half years.

Except for the one time the Red Cross visited the ghetto, daily life remained virtually unchanged. Though I had little to offer in the way of comfort and conveniences, I did provide a sense of security to my denizens in the knowledge they could expect things to proceed with predictability day to day, week to week and even year to year if they lived that long. So every morning, Sophie and Ludwig knew to queue up for a breakfast of ersatz coffee and their daily allotment of a one-half loaf of black bread. In the afternoon, they were served either a tasteless lentil soup made from dried ground or a weak soup called wrucken consisting of white turnips and a mixture of sand, dirt and a trace of flour to give it substance. Sipping her cup of ersatz coffee, Sophie took consolation that the absence of sugar would indeed keep her diabetes in check.

Eventually, Sophie and Ludwig grew accustomed to the cold damp air and the incessant gnawing of an empty stomach. But the loss of privacy was another matter. Sophie and Ludwig had always valued their privacy and losing it was perhaps the most difficult adjustment to make. People were everywhere—perpetually scrambling about and falling over one another. The courtyards were constantly crowded with long lines of sunken faces and haunting eyes waiting to be fed, receive rations, or petition the Council for some special request. To Sophie’s amazement, there was also the clamor and shouting of children at play. Sophie delighted in watching the small youngsters prance and run about and she prayed they would remain oblivious to their fate.

Sophie and Ludwig fell into a routine keeping busy from morning until night. Sophie was assigned to tend the gardens, which the Council of Elders hoped would provide fresh vegetables for the populace. Sophie had always loved her gardens at home and with that experience she proved herself helpful in making my gardens flourish—something which brought me much pride. Ludwig, on the other hand like many of the men, did not have the practical experience that I sorely needed in order to function. He had been a cattle broker and with no cattle let alone a market for them, he was of little use to me and had to be assigned to maintenance details. Naturally, he was not happy performing menial work but eventually he accepted his new lot in life. Ludwig took matters day by day and had little interests in the goings-on of the ghetto other than what directly affected his immediate needs.

Sometimes, late in the afternoon or in the early

evening hours, a singer or musician filled the air with song and music. Entertainment and cultural activities became periodic events with a symphony performing on a regular basis. Several artist studios were established and a makeshift library boasted so many volumes that most municipalities would have been jealous. Some of my most rewarding accomplishments were the cultural and educational programs I afforded, and I'll speak more of that later.

But of all the activities established within my walls, most precious to Sophie was the vibrant religious life I provided, for despite all she had endured and was yet to bear, she never lost her faith in God. This was something that always amazed me, and Sophie was not alone in holding steadfast to her religious beliefs. I cannot say the same for myself. Having been conceived at a time when the destruction of an entire race was ordained, I never experienced anything that would give me even the slightest hint that there existed a benevolent providence to which prayers might be directed and comfort and justice sought. Yet, I could understand the believers in my midst since they were a part of me and I could visualize how before she reached my walls, Sophie would set a Shabbas dinner every Friday evening with a special white tablecloth, candles, challah, wine and snuffbox. Her home was open to any stranger or visitor traveling through the tiny town of Odenbach where she had lived. On the High Holidays, she wore her finest dress when she accompanied Ludwig, himself accoutered in tails and a top hat, to travel to the synagogue in Frankfurt.

So who was I to stand in their way? In Theresienstadt, daily services of all sorts were conducted in clandestine locations out of the watchful eye of the Czech and Nazi guards. Sophie and Ludwig would attend whenever they had the opportunity and she particularly enjoyed the sermons and lectures. Services were led by rabbis, cantors or laymen. But the formality of an organized prayer service that Sophie found comforting was largely absent; the lack of a leader left a void in the community. A Moses was needed to provide spiritual life if this remnant of Jewry was to survive intact. Sophie sensed this need and less than three months after her arrival, her hopes for such a man was realized.

On January 27, 1943, the last Jews from Berlin marched under my archway. As they tramped through the streets, word quickly spread that Rabbi Baeck had arrived. Despite the usual curfew, people ventured out

to see the man who had been the former chief rabbi of Berlin and spiritual leader of Germany's Jews; a man who refused opportunities to flee Germany choosing instead to remain; a man who resolutely declared that he would emigrate only when he was "the last Jew alive in Germany."

Sophie was more circumspect, and she secured a spot by a window not risking a curfew violation. But she had no trouble discerning Dr. Leo Baeck at the forefront of the slowly moving throng. In fact, with his high forehead and white hair, Baeck reminded Sophie of Moses leading the Hebrews out of slavery and into years of wandering before reaching freedom and the Promised Land. How ironic, I thought at the time, that this "Moses" is leading his people into slavery and how many more years will it be that any of them regain their freedom, if ever.

But the circumstances did not diminish the majesty of the man. Though almost seventy, each step Baeck took was made with determination and purpose—the same gait and demeanor he would display when pushing the garbage cart or a hearse stacked with potatoes and bread through my streets; always taking time to stop and consider a question put before him by some passer-by. And when he answered, he spoke with the identical tone and thoughtfulness he employed when delivering a sermon to his congregation or a lecture to a group of rabbis and scholars. Articulated in a high-pitched voice, each word was chosen with care building sentences that flowed with equal rhythm in a steady unbroken current. To emphasize a point, Baeck would gesture with his hand or narrow his eyes as if an arrow was about to be shot from a bow.

I came to learn more of the man beneath the public image — the mere mortal removed from the pedestal upon which his people had placed him. The austere and confident exterior belied his inner suffering, torment and doubts. Like most Germans, Baeck kept his troubles to himself. Such things were private matters, not meant to be turned into a public display. For instance, he had hoped to be reunited with his four sisters whom I had received months earlier but to his dismay, when he arrived only one was still alive and she died soon thereafter. Nor had his heart fully recovered following the death of his wife shortly before he began his journey to reach me. And how he still missed the trips to London where he visited with his daughter when escorting groups of children for relocation in England. On such excursions, his daughter pleaded with him to remain

with her. There was no longer any future for the Jews in Germany, she argued. His life was already in danger; she need not have reminded him. What was there to return to? To which Baeck always made the same resolute reply, "As long as there is a minyan to be served, I will return." But no one would have known any of this from his outward appearance.

Despite Baeck's humility, he was not unmindful of his position of leadership. As the former president of the Reichsvertretung, the representative body of German Jews, Baeck was immediately acknowledged by the Council of Elders and declared its "honorary" president. Naturally, the Council could not allow so distinguished a man to reside in the common barracks swarming with people like bees in a beehive, so Baeck was assigned a small albeit dreary room in one of the houses of the "prominents."

While I never approved of this practice that resulted in some of my denizens receiving special privileges such as private living quarters and extra food rations, I understand that it is human nature to create class distinctions and even more so in certain cultures such as Germany and Austria. But given that in the end, the Germans looked upon all my occupants — "prominents" included — as being nothing more than sub-human creatures no better than vermin, and almost all would suffer the same fate, I would have preferred no self created divisions among my people and had hoped they would consider themselves as being simply "Jews"—one and all.

Like all the "prominents," Baeck accepted his favored treatment without giving it much thought. He simply went about transforming his living quarters into a sanctum where he could continue to work on his book, *This People*. Writing books was important to Baeck and for good reason for it was a book he authored in 1905, *The Essence of Judaism*, that placed him at the forefront of German Jewry. Though lacking a convivial and dynamic personality, Baeck's integrity and scholarship as well as his previous positions of leadership made him a much sought after figure after his arrival. On a regular basis people would gather in the barracks to hear him lecture on Plato, Kant, Aristotle, Spinoza and Herodotus.

Accustomed to the burdens of responsibility and leadership, Baeck assumed the yoke of his new position with acceptance. Nothing, however, in his roles as rabbi, educator, spiritual leader or simply one more inmate pushing a cart through my streets prepared

him for the profound moral dilemma he was confronted with that August.

It began well before Baeck's arrival in January of 1943. Rumors of all sorts were abounding — furtively whispered in the alleys or spoken in hushed tones in the barracks. Voices at once both incredulous and fearful posited the possibility that those boarding the transports leaving the Bauschowitz station for Lithuania and Latvia were shot to death upon their arrival; speculations were made that in Auschwitz, where many transports were destined, those not found fit for labor or some other useful purpose, were killed by gas; at times, some suggested, the trains simply stopped in a remote spot and the people were driven out to be shot or herded into enclosed vans and gassed.

But this was mere gossip, was it not? Based on wild imagination and fear. Or so I thought... at first. Most believed the Germans were a civilized people despite their anti-Semitism. They would not carry out such atrocities. Nonetheless, at the prodding of the Council of Elders seeking some reassurances, Jakob Edelstein, the head of the Council, diffidently raised the question with Commandant Seidl for corroboration. Stroking back his wavy dark hair and sliding his glasses over the bridge of his nose, Edelstein asked the Commandant if, as some had heard, Jews on the transports were gassed. Without hesitation, Seidl declared, "I have no idea of such a thing!"

Edelstein darted back to the Council's offices anxious to assure the members that there was no basis to the rumors. Seidl had always been forthright had he not? Edelstein began as he sought out the anxious faces around the table for confirmation. The transports go to labor camps, he continued. And while conditions may be harsh and people die from work, malnutrition and disease, as some do even here he pointed out, they are not murdered. There still remains life and hope, he concluded.

Nonetheless, the rumors persisted and the shootings and gassings lingered in the back of everyone's mind. If only the issue could be put to rest—one way or the other; if only someone whom everyone believed and trusted proclaimed whether or not it was so. Such a moment presented itself in August 1943, with a knock on the door of Rabbi Baeck's room. Opening the door, Baeck encountered the face of a stranger. The man hesitated for a moment and then introduced himself as a Czech engineer by the name of Grunberg. Baeck bid the man to enter. He appeared anxious and

asked in a muted voice if they could speak in confidence. Baeck assured him he could.

The men sat down in the cramped quarters, and as Grunberg related what he had learned, the rabbi's shoulders sagged lower and lower with each new piece of information foisted upon him. One night, Grunberg began, he had been shook from his sleep by the appearance of a good friend whom he had not seen for years. Because he was half Jewish, his friend had been sent to Auschwitz where he was put to labor. While there, he learned of the gas chambers. Fearful that at the end of the day he would also be gassed, he made an escape and returned to Prague where he bribed a Czech policeman to allow him to enter Theresienstadt so he could warn Grunberg of the fate that awaited him and the other Jews. "But who will believe me?" Grunberg asked. Hence, he sought out Rabbi Baeck whom almost everyone would certainly heed.

Baeck accepted what Grunberg had said. There had been too many reports of the gas chambers in Auschwitz to deny an eyewitness account from someone who risked his life to convey the message. But what to do? Baeck rested his head against his hand stroking his white mustache and goatee with his forefinger. His eyebrows arched over the clear frames of his spectacles while he pondered the quandary put before him.

He knew that once he informed the Council of Elders, it would be only a matter of hours before word of the gas chambers would spread like wildfire and engulf the camp. And what good would come of it? As Baeck would recount in his memoirs, "Living in the expectation of death by gassing would be all the harder. And this death was not certain for all..." Best to live in the hope that freedom and life lay ahead, which for some might even come to pass, he concluded.

As it turned out, nine out of every ten of my inhabitants did not live to see the freedom and life Baeck had wished for them.



Submission Guidelines

Rathalla Review strives to publish the finest fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art. We accept submissions on a rolling basis and there is no reading fee.

General Guidelines

- All submissions should be typed, 12-point font, double-spaced with a minimum 1-inch margin.
- **DO NOT INCLUDE YOUR NAME ON THE DOCUMENT.**
- Number all pages and include the title in either the header or footer.
- Include your word count on the first page.
- Only work submitted through our online submission form will be considered. Submissions will be accepted as either a .DOC, .DOCX, .RTF, or .PDF attachment.
- Do not use special characters in your filename: ! @ # \$ % ^ * /
- Please do not zip or compress attachments and please do not embed your submissions in the "Cover Letter" box on the form. (A nice, friendly note is okay!) Your cover letter should NOT include any personal information.
- We do not accept previously published work. This includes work published online.
- Simultaneous submissions are accepted. Please let us know immediately if your work is accepted elsewhere.
- Please do not re-submit previously submitted material unless expressly asked to do so by the editor. We read our submissions carefully, and just because we don't accept it doesn't mean another publisher won't.
- We will send notice by email regarding the acceptance or rejection of your material within three months of submission. Please do not contact us regarding the status of your work before the end of the three-month period.
- We publish a fall and spring online issue. You will be notified if your work is accepted online. In addition, your work may appear in our annual print issue.

Visit rathallareview.org/submit to read our current list of submission guidelines and to reach out submission manager.

Fiction

We accept short stories or novel excerpts in varying lengths up to 7,500 words. We look for fiction that features sharp writing, carefully crafted plots, and, above all, compelling characters. Novel excerpts should be able to stand alone as a complete work.

Poetry

Up to three poems may be submitted simultaneously. **Please submit multiple poems in separate documents.** Please indicate the titles in the title field. Give the titles and line counts for all poems in the appropriate fields of the submission form.

Creative Nonfiction

We accept essays or book excerpts in varying lengths up to 7,500 words. We look for nonfiction that features sharp writing and careful craft. Book excerpts should be able to stand alone as a complete work.

Art

We select one Featured Artist for each issue of Rathalla Review whose body of work is incorporated throughout the magazine.

When submitting, attach images as a .JPEG, .PNG or .PDF file formatted to 8.75 inches by 11.75 inches to account for trim. Please include a 250-word bio as well.

You may submit up to 10 pieces for our consideration, but 3-4 selections indicative of your body of work is acceptable if you would like to highlight your best work. If you have an online portfolio, include the link when you submit.

I discovered the author Michael Martone in a Rosemont College short story writing class. We were reading his book of short fiction titled *Michael Martone*, and by this very specific title I assumed it was his biography. I soon realized that it was his biography—but a fake one. Well, sort of. *Michael Martone* is a compilation of fifty fictional contributor's notes. All of these anecdotes are self-invented, humorously inflated versions of the author that Michael sent to literary journals to accompany his intended stories for print. You will learn that Michael is a circus performer in one note and a movie extra in the next. Then, he might die in another. You never know where he will take you or if it's real or who is actually alive. This fall I wrote to Michael to learn more about him and his craft, and he was kind to write back and share some details about his writing and his life.

This past summer, Michael's mother passed away—something he wrote about several times in *Michael Martone*. “My mother,” he said, “when she was alive, read *Michael Martone* and worried that *Michael Martone's* mother in the book *Michael Martone* dies several times and in several different ways. We talked about that. I always said to her that ‘*Michael Martone's* mother is not you, my mother, but a fiction’. I said to her, ‘See, you may die, but I can and do bring you back again and again from death.’ I think it was, on my part, that childish wish, magical thinking, that if death was unexpected all I needed to do was imagine all manner of dying to thwart her dying. It was a kind of spell. Alas, I did not imagine stroke. And it was a stroke that killed my mother.” I asked him which note was dearest to him and he said, “They are all dear, of course, like one's children. But the one where we learn that *Michael Martone's* mother wrote all of *Michael Martone's* fiction, including the fiction about *Michael Martone's* mother writing all of *Michael Martone's* fiction, would be the one.”

As a result, these notes have become iconic literary pranks, and yet they are also artistic works in their own right. In fact, Michael's Wikipedia page says that his forte is “false biographies.”

Despite the lack of reliability, there is a string of consistency that pulls through each note: his Indiana roots. Nearly all of the stories begin, “*Michael Martone* was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana and grew up there.” So, I believed that much—especially since his other published works include *Alive and Dead in Indiana*; *Fort Wayne Is Seventh on Hitler's List*; and *The Blue Guide to Indiana*, which includes tourist information for made-up landmarks, summoned from Michael's mind, in Indiana. Since his hometown is thematic throughout his work, I asked Michael how this place, this Midwestern city, this passage

Elizabeth Knauss

Elizabeth is a Philadelphia native who is currently attending Rosemont College for a master's degree in publishing with a concentration in writing and editing. She is a writer of fiction and a composer of music. And she believes the two are very closely related.

to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River, affected him and his writing. And he said, "I think of Fort Wayne and Indiana as not so much my postage stamp of land as Faulkner said of Mississippi but as my lab to run experiments in discovering the edges of our ability to know real things and places intimately and simulate the reality of the real."

And if writing is an experiment and Fort Wayne is a lab, then Michael is an inventor, straying from what is expected or ordinary, using a toolbox of experiential resources to show off the beauty of language and even the process of writing it. When asked how publishers reacted to his pseudo-notes, he said, "They reacted in many different ways, but I regarded this as part of the art. We often get bogged down with the product, the poem or story that we work on so diligently. We forget about the context, the frame of art, and forget or do not believe that, as artists, we also want to manipulate and shape that. We hand over the framing to the editor, the publisher, the bookmaker. I think now if one 'writes' one does not merely 'write' but also participates in the activities assigned to editors, designers, reviewers. The computer is a very powerful device and it is deconstructing the concept of the 'author' right before our eyes. I am, you are, we all are now this amalgam of writer, editor, publisher, reader. The hierarchies, genres, precincts, specializations are blurred, are perhaps meant to be blurred, are demanding to be blurred."

Considering Michael's fusion of writing and art between writer and publisher, I wondered for a moment if my interview with him would be true. Secretly, I hoped that I would become a part of the stunt, and that he would bestow a piece of fiction upon me. But, this is all true. I think.

Michael now lives in Tuscaloosa and is a professor of writing in the MFA program at the University of Alabama, a sanctum of sports and home of the legendary football team Crimson Tide. "Last year," Michael said, commenting on the school's accomplishments, "Alabama won four national championships. In football, gymnastics, softball, golf. There is lacrosse. Crew on the Black Warrior River. Women's basketball and volleyball perform in the building where George Wallace once stood blocking the integration of the university. I like that the teams here may be the only ones in the nation that not only wear school colors (crimson and white) but also sport a pattern,

the hound's tooth. When I moved to the south, I was told in order to understand the south one must know the four largest funerals in the history of the south. Jefferson Davis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Elvis, and Paul "Bear" Bryant. I don't know if I do understand the south but this helps a little."

Besides his enjoyment of football and the spirit of the south, I gather that Michael has found a home among his students. And the other way around. If you've ever been in a writing workshop, you know it can be nail biting to have a professor or a group of peers unpeel your work like it's a busted car or a patient on the table or just a spotty banana. I believe Michael gets that, or else he doesn't think it's useful to judge in a thumbs up/thumbs down style. "To be a critic is to wield a knife," he said. "It is work that must be done but I prefer to take the knife and smear the butter instead of cutting off the crusts." He said he's "no longer interested in policing or judging what is good writing or bad writing. I think that is for the writer to judge. I want to enter into texts with curiosity instead of criticism. I want to not care in a careful way. I see my students not as students so much as writers writing who need space and time to pose and answer their own questions about what it means to be a writer and what a writer writes. I have no brief. I have no dog in the fight. I see my job right now as a medium. Not a promoter of good or a protector from evil. Just a medium medium."

He inspires his students and in return is inspired. Students served as a catalyst for his latest book, *Four for a Quarter*, which is a compilation of short stories separated into four sections that are also divided into four further chapterettes—a nesting doll of literary goodness. Now, you may be wondering why Michael chose this very even number as a hinge for his latest creative burst. And the answer is: a photo booth. Michael used to teach writing at Harvard University, and he noticed that the students did not seem to venture too far out of Harvard Square. But nearby, only a subway stop away actually, there was a Woolworth's with an old analog photo booth offering four pictures for a quarter.

Michael said, "The whole idea that there was a structure, an architecture that was in the genre of the 'booth' was interesting. And it was a narrative delivery device." He conjured the idea of having his students create stories by using the four photos as a writ-

ing prompt. The photo booth became a story generator. “The pictures in the booth came one after the other in sequence,” Michael said. “People planned a little scenario, or they improvised, leaping from stone to stone. I like the form of it. Why four pictures seemed to be the right amount for the amusement. Not three. Not five.” This became Michael’s way of getting his students not only to explore Cambridge, but also to explore a different path to writing. He saved the photos, a keepsake beyond the idea that writing stops when the pen rests. From the subway ride to saying “cheese” to creating a story out of four images inside four squares, Michael taught his students to see what is bizarre and magnificent through something as simple and affordable as a quarter. “Now, all these years later,” he said, “I have a record too of everyone I taught. One thing I notice about the form is that the third picture is usually the odd one out. In that way it is like the four-frame comic strip. You have the setting, the rising action, the climax and an ending.”

As Michael shared his unconventional paths to writing, I wondered if this Duchamp-esque writer had any unique writing routines to match. However, he said he tries to invent something new for each writing project and doesn’t stick to one concrete way of writing. He said, “For a while I wrote in exam blue books. Then on different typewriters. Note cards. Different computers. Different times a day. What is special for me was to not think of writing as something special or removed from the everyday. It is something I do when I can do it.”

This advice, like his teaching style, was comforting to me. When reviewing the daily rituals of writers I admire—Flannery O’Conner, for example, who wrote for three hours every day, or the very strict schedule of C.S. Lewis, who planned his socializing to the minute—it is inspiring to know a successful author who isn’t waking up at four a.m. to write five-thousand-plus words, sitting in his favorite green chair that permeates creativity. “I think it is most like meals,” Michael said. “I have favorite things to eat and then I find new favorite things or places or times of day. I love oatmeal now. And dried cherries. Olives. Green beans. I like things in season. Peaches! And I don’t mind when they go out of season. They will be back. Or not.” And, when it comes to where he writes, well, Michael had a different way of interpreting my question. “I don’t have a favorite. I write a lot of post-

cards. On airplanes. I always try to get a seat on the port side. An aisle. Any port in a storm.”

When asked how it feels to complete a book—how he felt years ago and how it feels now—Michael recalled the advice of Whitman, Moore, and Dickinson, “You are always writing just one book. Maybe thinking that way is another way of keeping going. It isn’t serial publishing, it is continually publishing. You would ask me how it was like to take that last breath in 1984. No, it wasn’t my last breath. I haven’t finished my book yet.” For Michael it’s not the destination, it’s the ride. “The existential nature of the medium we work in is linear, line after line. It is the accumulation. The accretion I like.” And that’s the truth.

