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# PEGASUS

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Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, was born from the blood of Medusa's severed head after the hero Perseus slew her. Legend has it that it was Pegasus' stomping on Mt. Olympus that caused the springs of water to form that eventually birthed the Muses.  
Thus, Pegasus has gone down in history as a symbol of creative genius.

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# **Guest Author**

## **Susan Petrole**

### **Author Biography**

I started writing stories in elementary school, and I've been writing more or less ever since. Majoring in psychology and minoring in English at Moravian College, I found myself interested in writing about interesting characters with intriguing personalities and relationships more than stories with elaborate plot twists.

After Moravian, I continued to pursue my writing at West Chester University, where I graduated in 2001 with a Masters in English with a creative writing concentration. I then moved to New England, and, in addition to my writing, began working as an editor for Abbeywood Press. Abbeywood is a small, independent press with a desire to publish quality work and a commitment to treating writers and artists with respect, acknowledging the dedication required to pursue creative ambition. This job is a perfect fit for me, for it provides a dual purpose: It allows me to grow as a writer through editing, and as an editor through writing.

I continue writing short stories, essays, poetry, and a novel. My short stories have appeared in *The Manuscript*, *Daedalus*, and *New England Writer's Network*. I also have a memoir, essay, and short story forthcoming in anthologies to be published by Abbeywood Press, and one of my stories has recently been accepted by *Ginger Hill*.

### **Advice for Writers**

As an editor, I look for writing that doesn't seem like "writing." In other words, I am drawn to pieces that make me lose myself and forget that I am reading. Originality in style and language is great, as long as it does not distract. Of course, I also look for memorable, realistic characters in settings that are believable, which can apply to any fictional situation. I think that even science fiction or fantasy requires believability.

As far as advice, always allow yourself to make mistakes when you are writing a first draft. Anne Lamott, in her wonderful book on writing, *Bird by Bird*, says that the first draft is the "down" draft: You write it down. The second draft is the "up" draft: You fix it up. This is great advice. Allow yourself complete freedom in that first draft. There is plenty of time and space to "fix it up" later. Also, I hear the same advice over and over: Tell the truth. To me, this means the truth of your Self. If you honor that truth, your writing will always improve. Most of all, enjoy your writing. Creativity is a gift that we all have, and using it enhances life so much. It certainly has for me.

## Summer Shower

Susan Petrole

A four-year-old girl lies in the middle of a field. It is high summer, just before dusk, and a fierce rain has begun. The rain soaks both the grass and the girl. She wears a white cotton nightgown with yellow rose buds, her favorite because the rose buds look like polka dots. But she isn't thinking about her nightgown, or the soaking rain, or anything except the sounds coming from the small white house to her left. It is far away, yet she hears her mother's shrill cries and her father's booming shouts, both rising louder than the rumbling thunder.

Back home, the possibility of her being noticed by her parents was too great, and being noticed frightens her more than the sizzling snakes of lighting flashes she is now seeing in the darkened sky. Even so, the girl is strangely calm. The raindrops feel like warm kisses on her face, the shaking grass blades somehow comforting, like puppets. Gnats buzz through the humid air, and the girl wonders if they are trying to find their way home. They are so tiny, like pencil tips, but still the girl imagines they must have a home.

The nightgown sticks to her skin in the pelting rain. She wonders if they will look for her, or even notice she is gone. As she gets colder, she hopes they will realize. But she doesn't consider going back. Now it is too late; now she will get in trouble for sure.

Rumbles of thunder seem to come up from the earth, and the nearby stream rushes so fiercely. The grass puppets sway faster and faster. The whole world sounds angry, as though everything everywhere is fighting along with her parents, and she envies and despises the power they possess. Children who have never heard of God think their parents can command such storms.

The girl begins to focus more on the actual words she hears. Her father calls her mother an ungrateful bitch. She doesn't know what this means but knows it is bad because her mother shouts back even louder, calling her father lazy, calling him a zero. The girl knows the number zero. It means nothing. If her mother ever called her this, she would want to cry and cry and never stop.

The girl covers her ears and kicks her bare feet in the mushy earth. She burrows her toes deep in the soil. It feels like the wet sand at the ocean, where her parents took her weeks before. It was the happiest day of her whole life because her father actually paid attention to her without being angry. He even carried her into the ocean on his shoulders, making her feel like the white soaring birds around her. She held her arms out like wings. Her mother stood at the water's edge and watched them, clapping her hands, dancing around in her bathing suit the same color as the blueberry snow cone they bought her. Now her parents seem like strangers, not at all like those two happy people at the beach.

She scans the edge of the woods in hopes of seeing a deer. She often spies deer eating grass at the edge of the woods, blinking their smooth, shiny eyes. They always dart into the woods, so the girl watches their white tails bobbing against the green until they disappear like ghosts. Now she wonders if the rain has scared them all away.

Suddenly, the girl hears the crashing sound of glass breaking, followed by the whine of the screen door, the coughing sputter of a pick-up truck, the screen door once more. The noise doesn't make her jump, but her father's voice does. *Claire! How dare you take my truck! You stop! Stop! That's stealin' ya know! Come back here!* The girl doesn't turn around to look. Maybe she can disappear into the earth or prance into the woods like a deer. *You know you gotta come back some time and face me!* **CLAIR LOUISE HARPER!** The girl wonders why he's still yelling because the truck is gone. He is yelling at nothing but the woods, the sky, and his daughter.

She runs. The grass is high and slippery, but she doesn't slow until she reaches the woods. Safety. The rain-spattered trees create a noisy roof over the stream and rocky ground. She has navigated these



woods many times before, but always with the security of her mother's firm hand to steady her wobbles. The girl is shaky on uneven ground, still on fawn's legs.

She ventures down the slope anyway, paying close attention to the stone clusters. The girl notices big carpenter ants crawling over their uneven surfaces. Her damp hair falls in her eyes; her breathing comes faster. She is shivering, clutching her nightgown to keep it away from the grabbing branches. Finally, she gets to the bottom of the long slope to the rushing stream.

On quiet sunny days her mother lets her jump from rock to rock in the shallow water. The girl thinks of them as her own little islands. She is their giant, and she can command all of it. Her mother calls her Queen of the Mountain. The girl likes the sound of this.

Now she sees that the stream is different; the rocks are engulfed by rising water. She crouches down, careful not to let her bottom touch the mud. And then she thinks about her mother's leaving. Maybe she will come back soon. Maybe she's just "cooling off." That's what her mother says when her father disappears. It never occurred to the girl that mothers may need to "cool off" too.

She thinks about her father waiting back at the house, waiting not for her but for her mother. The girl sometimes thinks her father forgets about her because he is always yelling at her just for being in the way, saying things like *You're always grabbing at me, trying to trip me up!* And that's just if she's in the doorway while he's trying to get through in his clumsy way. Once she'd hit her head on a beer bottle that dangled from his hand like a bell. He yelled at her but never said he was sorry.

It is her mother who takes care of her, her mother who reads her stories and runs a wide toothed comb through her mess of dark matted curls, her mother who tucks her in bed every night. She smooths the girl's hair away from her face and always says *Tomorrow will be better, sweetheart*. So even on the good days, days where there is no yelling, the girl thinks this. She always assumed that her mother did, too. Now the girl thinks maybe her mother drove away to find tomorrow without her.

Her legs ache from all the crouching down, and eventually she lets herself fall back on the mud, surprised by its softness, how much it feels like a bed. The rain slows. The stars arrive out of nowhere, like magic. Then, darkness. It is a different kind of dark, not like her bedroom at night. It is dark and light at the same time. The green leaves turn silver, and white flecks bob along the water's surface. She wonders if stars appear on water like they do in the sky. She puts her hands over her eyes and makes the world disappear. Then, to her delight, she removes her hands and sees the night world again.

The girl decides to stay. She listens to the water's whispering rush and watches the high leaves quiver. They remind of her the wet blades of grass. She speaks aloud to the trees, the water, the invisible deer. *Tomorrow will be better*. With each repetition, the memories fade: her father's angry cacophony, her mother, who the girl imagined speeding down Route 209 in her pink bathrobe.

The girl loves the sound of her voice, and soon even the water and dripping trees disappear. She closes her eyes and listens. Her own words seem better than any bedtime story, and soon she falls into a deep sleep even though she is lying on the slick bank of a rushing stream.

*\*Originally published in "New England Writers Network" Summer 2004, Volume II: Number 1*

*The Trek*  
Dona J. Dulin

Drop me in a northern wood,  
Of balsam pine and birches white,  
And leave me with just one true friend,  
To sit with me at campfire light.

And we will track the mountain path,  
Through forest glen and dew drenched dale,  
Ingesting all the woodland gives,  
As soft we tread each footworn trail.

And she will see the things I miss,  
And I, all that escapes her eye,  
To know the spirit of the Earth  
And hear the mountains' gentle sigh.

Hear no lament for worldly goods  
As riches here astound the soul  
Star-studded nights and sun strewn days,  
Valued more than any gold.

The graceful fern, the orange eft,  
The otter in aquatic dance  
The timid fawn, the raging moose,  
To catch a glimpse, perchance, perchance.

We'll breathe the quenching liquid air,  
In shaded valley, damp and still,  
Consolation ever sweet  
Refreshment from the conquered hill.

That stood in stalwart power there  
As if to dare us to ascend  
As we make way o'er sweat slick root  
Inching round the crag filled bend.

As steeply postured mountainsides  
Strained as if reaching t'ward the sky  
With boulders strewn, the path unclear.  
Embattled, yes, but still we try

To test the spirit and its shell  
To feel our chests beat like a drum  
Hamstrings tight and calves strained sore.  
Stress filled back and feet near numb.

On summit breath, look to the sky,  
To see in perfect chevron, glide  
The symmetry of southern flight.  
Descent begins this mountainside.

The pleasures of this sojourn are  
Of elemental treasure store  
Of crackling fire warm at night  
Of refreshing water, cool and pure.

Of shelter cozy, safe and warm  
And simple fare for strengthened frame  
But best by far, is one true friend  
Who shares the trek and feels the same.

*Pegasus would like to apologize to Dona J. Dulin for a misprint of this poem that appeared in last year's publication.*



*Midnight*  
**Carl Gunlefinger**

The eleventh stroke upon the midnight clock  
Waits for the other.  
The final click of the futile hour,  
For it has no ring, no need for bells,  
No chance of glory.

It is only a tick or merely a tap.  
Merely a gentle drop,  
Bringing back the day.

*Dockside Tavern*  
**Carl Gunlefinger**

In a dockside tavern  
A bay window floats upon the sky,  
The scene is one of Orange-purple and hazy grey,  
Purified in a shadow marsh.

This moment waits to be taken,  
But is often forgotten, in a dockside tavern.

***A Mountain, a Sea, a Cloud, a Life***  
**Minjoo Kweon**

Emerald skies envelope  
It's a dream now.  
The once icy clarity  
Of *the mountain and the seas*  
Now the isle, a mist and a cloud

It descends at night  
With eyes closed  
The body is  
A dead weight.  
The anchor  
For the fishing boat  
Splashes solitude.

Early morning/late night.  
When one twenty-four crosses over another  
3 a.m.  
The lights are flickering in the city  
Everywhere music and dancing

Far away  
A crane flies into invisibility  
Flashing blood red on its beak

Loneliness:  
People everywhere  
Bodies crushing in their  
Haste to see the leader,  
Dead  
In the throng. The ambulance wails  
As a child in the night  
If one could only see *the mountain and the seas*

***Golden Autumn***  
**Minjoo Kweon**

Crimson clouds float low  
Over the field of billowing wheat,  
Golden  
Locks blowing in the last rays of sun,  
Blushing red,  
Squirming under the gaze  
Of icy eyes.  
The mountain, painted orange,  
On fire with rage,  
Sits enveloped in mist in early morning.  
The geese on the lake float slowly downwards  
Each is a feather falling  
Softly, carefully, lightly  
Caressing Autumn's hand.



***Nature's Symphony***  
**By Lancet Jades**

If a tree fell in a forest and no one was round,  
Would it invoke the miracle of sound?  
If a star in the sky were to suddenly fail,  
Would the sky cry with rainstorms and hail?  
If a rock were to break; one strong as a titan,  
Would that lessen the world's load, the weight it carries lighten?  
As I gaze upon nature so beautiful and true,  
My fears extinguish; I no longer feel blue.  
The greens of the leaves, the pure flowing water,  
Nature makes beautiful weaves: the forest is her daughter.

From mountains to valleys, I can escape my bane,  
I find little in nature that makes me complain.  
But nature is not limited; it extends to the stars,  
The sun, the planets shine like fireflies in jars.  
If your luck finds you well, in a green forest,  
Then count your blessings, or it could make you the sorest.  
The trees and plants make a bright green fleece.  
Lest you forget, nature's merely on lease.

*Mirror*  
T.S. Bates

Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
Who's the ugliest one of them all?  
Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
Who's the fattest one of them all?  
Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
Why are you the deceiving one of them all?  
Just when we are satisfied with ourselves,  
Here you come telling us that we are wrong.  
Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
Why are we not the prettiest one of them all?  
What's wrong with us?  
Do we not fit your little expectations of what we're supposed to be?  
Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
You're wrong to tell us this,  
Because we are the prettiest one of them all,  
We are everything that we're supposed to be,  
And even more.  
Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
Why should we feed into your lies anymore?



## *Am I?*

### **Pablo**

Am I a madman? A trickster born of tall tales,  
A hangman?  
Am I the lonesome, dirty, hell-beaten cook who drinks and drops his last dime?  
Am I capable of nothing except that which I mime?  
Child of the future, father of time,  
Wild-boned youth with passion for sex, grime, and, slime...  
Or poet divine who creates within the cradle of crime?  
Pretty boy punk pursuing pleasure in my prime, maybe  
Master of Zen, tickler of time,  
A saint stuck in the wilderness with tequila and a lime,  
Searching for those who also hear the Cherubim's chime...  
Cheering and Jeering and Seeking in Time.

Am I a criminal? A subtle soul spiller with sounds subliminal?  
I'm devoted that you be more than minimal; although these bodies  
Be terminal, who you are is eternal...  
Flesh and blood flow in time from your divine kernel-  
Spiritual seed, in your soul you hold what you need,  
So be bold and breathe!  
And if you need me, you'll find me singin' and dancin' in the streets,  
Because soul food is what I feed.

***The Poet's Mind***  
**Carl Gunlefinger**

Curse not the poet's mind...  
For destruction of conscious reality  
For the pain; the viable beauty that strikes upon the hour.

In twilight and in the descending hours when minds of silence seize  
Synesthetic-fascist reveries exist.

Curse not the poet's mind and drink of his heart.  
For the blood of his soul will be your salvation.

As if only to watch sea foam riverbeds,  
Drink from the edges of a broken glass  
That fits in salt-rimmed wounds.

Curse not the poets' mind...for their minds only bleed to reveal truth.  
Curse not the poets' mind...for the perception of instantaneous infinity,  
Where all walks of shadow,  
And beauty exists in the essence of hope.

For all is present in blood let puddles,  
And in minds compelled to cry.

As tears whisper unto infinity,  
The poet's mind bleeds in silence.  
And the blood of his soul will be your salvation.

## *Requiem for Her Hands* Dona J. Dulin

These artful hands paint each design,  
And carefully sketch every fine line.  
The beauty flowed like grains of sand,  
'Til she traded the brush for a wedding band.

These dream filled, youthful hands.

These hands that pulled the polo on,  
And buttoned buttons one by one.  
They calmed fights and soothed skinned knees,  
And lowered frightened girls from trees.

These gentle, loving hands.

These firm hands held the enraged child,  
Or calmed the night mare, running wild,  
And scrubbed the floors and tattered shirt,  
And planted flowers in the dirt.

These firm, tough, working hands.

They pinned the flowers on my gown,  
To mark some passing, I had grown.  
With pride filled smile, as if to say,  
"With love, I send you on your way."

These lined but lovely hands.

These trembling hands that held my child,  
Through glistening tears she softly smiled.  
These wrinkled hands still seemed so strong,  
When baking cakes the whole night long.

These aged and much loved hands.

These hands in pain and swollen sore,  
Unrecognizable any more,  
I stroke them as I watch her sleep,  
Held to my cheek as I softly weep.

These sick and weary hands.  
These hands, so cold, are now at rest,  
I lay them gently crossed her chest.  
These hands that loved and often kissed,  
These hands that will be sorely missed.

These stilled and cherished hands.

In looking glass, I stop to see  
A grief stained, saddened, heart sick me.  
Trying to begin again,  
And stare amazed, for at arm's end...

Are these my mother's hands?



## *An Apartment in the City*

### Mallory Hickey

I wake from a blissful night's sleep to the incredible aroma of fresh coffee brewing in the kitchen. I stretch my arms and legs and yawn as I gradually open my eyes. I am forced to close them when the harsh, vivid sun leaking in from a tiny crack in the dark curtains stings my brain. As my outstretched limbs feel nothing but air, I recall that I haven't touched my husband in months.

After a few more minutes of procrastination, I pull my tired body out of the large bed. I take my white bathrobe off of the high wooden bedpost and put it on over my pink silk nightgown. My stomach gurgles as I descend the spiral staircase of my posh New York apartment. Ever since I was a little girl, I wished for a home equipped with a spiral staircase.

"Good morning," I grin at my husband.

Charlie is standing in the kitchen sipping coffee and reading today's paper. I notice he hasn't shaved in a few days, and I find his scruffies rather attractive. His hair is a little messed and his blue-striped tie is not perfect around his slender neck, so I know there's something disturbing him. I fell in love with him for his perfectionism.

"What's the matter?" I ask, hoping he'll actually give me a sincere and honest answer.

But he just looks at me, trying to burn a hole in me. "Nothing."

To avoid getting frustrated or angry with him I just walk over to the stainless steel refrigerator and take out my skim milk. I pour some coffee and a bowl of Special K and sit at the kitchen table in the corner and eat. I try to enjoy my breakfast, but I can't shake the strange feeling that I got from Charlie. I sense hostility and annoyance towards me. No matter how much I analyze our relationship, I am left with no answers.

His happiness has always fluctuated from month to month but this has been month after month of melancholy and sadness. I worry for him because no matter what, I used to be enough to make him smile.

After I finish every last flake of cereal, I walk the bowl over and place it in the metal sink. I look over at him, hoping for something in return.

"Well?" I put my hands on my hips but feel like my mother, so I let them fall as I stare hard into his eyes. Searching for something.

Nothing. He just looks at me like *"why are you bothering me?"*

"I just wanted to tell you that I'm going to be late for dinner tonight, you can wait for me if you want but I won't expect anything." I try to act tough but I fail. Then I panic and can't remember what I'm trying to say to him. "I have another meeting with Dan tonight about the, um, Gordon account." I wait for some sort of reaction from him. Do I have to scream to get his attention? I recite the speech again in my head, analyze it and still find nothing wrong with it. I think I did all right.

"Okay," he says, detached.

I feel like screaming at him. *"That's it? That's all you got? If you had to fight for me, would you? Or roll over and let yourself die like a f\*\*\*ing coward?"* But like him, I bite my tongue.

At a loss for words I can actually express to him, I quit trying for the moment. As I walk away from Charlie, I think of Dan and how amazing he is. I question why I was so unlucky as to not have met Dan first. He and I could have fallen in love. But no. Charlie promised me this life first. We're stuck together.

I walk into the living room and admire our wedding picture on the end table. I run my fingers over the glass and see a hint of happiness in our eyes that I'm not sure I've ever noticed before. I can feel his eyes on my back, watching me, and I wonder where our happiness went or if it ever existed at all.

Each day, it's getting harder and harder to look her in the eye. Every time she comes near me I want to wrap my hands around her bony neck and squeeze. I want to throw up every time I have to look at her. She smiles at me through her glossy perfect pink lips and acts like the angel she thinks I see when I look at her. How could she do this to me? Throw away our life. What is so much better about him?

"Good morning," she sings as she descends the long spiral staircase. She wears her long white bathrobe open over her sheer nightgown and it flaps against the back of her legs with each step. I know what she's thinking. She thinks I'm standing here looking up at her like she's some perfect, heavenly creature.

Samantha greets me in the kitchen of our New York apartment with a flawless smile and for a moment, I actually think I see a fragment of the happiness I used to. Then I remember that it's nothingness. She is nothing. Worth nothing.

"What's the matter?"

That f\*\*\*ing smile again. I lean against the stainless steel dishwasher and watch her prance around our sleek kitchen. I stare at her over the white mug of steaming coffee under my nose. I make a conscious effort not to blink as I sip my cup.

"Nothing." I want to seem crazy to her.

I put the cup back on the saucer and bring the newspaper back underneath my nose. I try to pretend that she's not in the room but I can't seem to make myself ignore her. I never could.

I pretended to read the newspaper as I watch her make herself a bowl of Special K. I cringe as her long white tipped artificial nails curl around the pink milk top. I never noticed how trashy they make her look. Whore.

She leaves the milk on the counter and sits facing me at the small, white, two-person table in the corner of the room. I stare at her mouth as it engulfs the large metal spoon again and again. I become livid when I think of what that sloppy mouth has been doing. She ruined everything. For what? A few good times in the sack? I've given her everything I could. I gave her the life she always wanted.

She finishes her breakfast and walks the bowl over to the sink. As she throws it in the sink she looks at me with something to say. I try to act like she's not there.

"Well?" She puts her hands on her hips.

I look up from my reading with a raised eyebrow.

Her arms fall from her hips and smack at her sides. "I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to be late for dinner tonight, you can wait for me if you want but I won't expect anything. I have another late meeting with Dan tonight about the, um, Gordon account."

I'm speechless. Here she is practically telling me she's f\*\*\*ing him. She completely hesitated before she said what they were working on. Having trouble finding a lie quick enough?

"Okay." I attempt to stay neutral, try to be emotionless as rage rushes through me. I watch her walk into the living room and think of all the great years we had together. I would have moved heaven for her. I don't know why, but I can't seem to take my eyes off her. I put down the newspaper and follow her into our living room. I watch her hold our wedding picture, dying to know what she's thinking about. But I'm sure I don't want to know. She's probably busting with excitement about her dinner date tonight with Dan. What happened? Why am I no longer good enough?



*Untitled*  
Sarah Shigmore

It was early, almost too early to think straight. His tall, thin body was pressed against the wall near the door, a cigarette in his hand and an angry look on his face. Students shuffled passed, groggy and oblivious to his existence, which is the way he wanted it. His shirt said DEFTONES on it, and his acid washed jeans were about 2 sizes too big. He was a person who used music as an escape - an escape from reality, and all of the people who did not understand him. He tried so hard not to care what people think about him, but at the same time, his black hair was perfectly spiked, not one piece out of place, and he had the trendiest New Balance sneakers on. As two girls walked by, laughing and talking a bit too loud for the early hour, he glared at them with his piercing brown eyes and looked away in disgust. He was bothered by the fact that they seemed so happy and carefree in a world where there was so much to be angry about. He never wanted to risk the chance that someone may see him at a weak point, left feeling completely exposed.

Later that day, he went home, back to a place where his parents had given up on trying to get through to him and his siblings were decked out from head to toe in the newest fashion trends. He hated them, just like he hated himself. He turned up his stereo as loud as it could go and let the angry shrieking of his favorite band bring another miserable day to an end. Then, he woke up in the morning, angrier than he was the day before. Deep in the back of his mind, he began to wonder which would hurt less: a quick, sharp end to it all, or a long, aching life alone.

*A Random Snow Storm in July*  
Mallory Hickey

The wall of heavily fallen snow is packed in front of your screen door, making escape quite difficult. With a slight push of your right hip you make a small opening for your arm to fit through to the cold outside. You stretch your arm as far as your body will allow, reaching a gloved hand for the wooden shovel handle leaning up against the house. After a struggle you grab it and begin making a path for yourself out the door. The white fluffy snow reaches well up to your calves and you guess it has to be around ten inches high. With each shovel full of snow you begin to feel the strain in your arms and your back and realize you are in it for the long haul. You dread the pain you know you're going to feel in the morning. You keep your head down as snowflakes blow in the wind around you. Your nose begins to drip and freeze as your sinuses burn and eyes water. You feel like a robot as you go through the mindless, repetitive motions: scoop, lift, throw.

After what feels like hours, you pause and look at how far you've come and grasp the weight of your task. You take a deep breath, rejuvenated from your short break and begin to reconsider your method. If you use your legs to lift and put your entire body into it, the tightly packed snow feels a bit lighter. You kick your foot down on the shovel, finally feeling the pavement below and reminisce about the good old days when you lived with a man.



## *How to Be a Writer or a Failure*

**Andy Preast**

First, you want to attend kindergarten one year earlier than the other kids. Forget preschool. Have your mom talk with the kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Ayers, and tell her to just hold you back after this year so you won't be immature. Go through kindergarten and at the end realize you're on the way to first grade with Mrs. Bruno, because they cannot hold someone back who had this much understanding in kindergarten.

After first grade, realize the work is much too simple and you can basically not pay attention and just fool around all day. Start getting in trouble and seeing Sister Mary on a day-to-day basis. At the end of first grade, start fighting a lot with a red headed kid, Shawn, and some others.

By the time you reach second grade you should get kicked out of catholic school. Start public school and realize that here you cannot fit in either. This is when you'll want to get out of control and start begging for the attention of others.

Once again, see your principal on a day-to-day basis, but at least now kids are laughing at you. Make sure you don't realize they're laughing at you though; you have to make sure you think they're laughing with you so you feel you fit in. This is where your parents feel they can no longer control you and decide to yell a lot and hit you more.

Then, I want you to be babysat by your sister. When you get out of control, have her throw you down the wooden basement steps that lead to a basement that looks more like a dungeon. She'll know you fear the basement; have her lock you down there. No, wait, don't just get locked down there. Have her tie you up with your older brothers' karate belts and gag you with panty hose. Then tell her to run outside and bang on the windows so you think someone is down there.

This is where you cry and beg for mercy, tied to the pole in the dark in a dirty cement basement. Discover you have an extreme problem with closed in spaces now and fear the basement like no other place.

When your parents are out all night, sleep in their bed. But realize you don't like sleep for fear someone is always in the house. Stare into that digital clock that sits on the end table and count the lines of the numbers. For example, on a digital clock, an 8 has 7 little lines that make up the 8. Count these numbers every time the clock changes one minute and count over and determine the winner for each bout by who has more lines. Develop a sudden hatred for even numbers. Realize you can't be in the car with an even number on the tuner. Nothing you can do can be even, even numbers always win in the bouts. Realize it's a bit weird, but odd numbers are better for sure.

Reach middle school and realize your clothes are different from anyone else's. At thirteen, decide you need a job and a pair of them Nike Air Jordans you see all the popular kids with. Find a job as a dishwasher and lie and say you're 16. You always heard Erin's Pub was good for this and, as a 13-year-old kid, you only have to work until 2:30 am.

Through middle school and all your troubles, realize English is the only thing you get compliments on from your teachers. Blow them comments off like the bad ass you are and strut along.

Reach high school. Once again be an outcast and go on your way to getting in more trouble. Get home, get beat, get soap in your mouth. But now realize the beatings don't affect you much and you can live with them if you must. Realize while arguing with anyone you seem to cry. It sounds weird, but it is possible to be a person that cries in anger instead of yells. Then, in 12th grade, get called down to the office. Have your guidance counselor talk with you. Realize they want you out of that school. He will tell you that he would hate to make you miss your last six months as a senior but you've become a menace. Have him say he realizes your academic knowledge is high and that your trouble might lie with your boredom in classes. Have him strike a deal with you.

He is going to say you can walk in graduation (which you don't want to anyways), go to school dances (which you never would have *ever*) and play school sports (which you despise) as long as you don't go to classes the second semester. You won't know how this is working out, but you realize you have enough credits halfway through the year anyway and this is great. Sign the paper and feel great.

After high school comes to an end, decide a trip to Texas wouldn't be so bad. Tell your parents and your dad will say *If you leave you can't return here*. Pack your bags and leave for Texas, regardless. Get there and have nowhere to stay so sleep in a park. Stay there two or three weeks and head back home.

When you get home, move in with your girlfriend. Begin to get closer with her and find out she's a bit of a liar. Develop hate and rage. Start to think back how you've always seemed to be f\*\*\*ed over and realize things will never change. Have it remind you of the Payless shoes you wore that the kids made fun of. Imagine those shoes with their holes and when it rained you had to insert cardboard to protect your socks. Now become a completely negative person. Decide after a year of working maybe you should go back to school because you hate work. Remember back to 11<sup>th</sup> grade when your teacher Mrs. Anderson told you what a great writer you were and how your parallel structure was like no other. Realize you don't know what parallel structure is but decide on journalism anyway.

Start school and hate everyone. Look around your classes at the well-fed kids with their new clothes and their slick hairdos. Realize these kids have never seen a jail cell, been in a fight, had a night without a roof over their heads or even had to pay for their own sh\*\*. Realize you have a deep hatred for society because everyone seems the same. Think that they all wear the same things and act the same way, and remember why you never even wanted these stupid things they wear, even if you did have the money. Realize today kids cannot think for themselves and that society has gone out the window.

Take a writing course and English classes and realize the stupidity. Think to yourself that these kids all agree Shakespeare and Faulkner were great writers. Think about if have they ever heard of John Fante, Ezra Pound, Celine, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, Carson McCullers? No. They might have heard of Hemmingway, but he sh\*\* the bed after too long, and when he realized it he put a shotgun to his mouth.

Now take a creative writing course and realize you may never succeed as a writer for all you can think of is negativity and alcohol and the style of the down and out person that most people will never understand. Decide one day you might have to give into society and surrender to an 8 hour job. But, for now, lean back one last time as your typewriter ribbon breaks once again and sip your bottle of Taylor Port wine (4.99 a fifth) and realize you just never want to be back in rehab or jail again.



## *The Dark Side of the Bar*

### James Bencrowsky

It was around 10 pm on a humid July evening. The regular crowd was piling in at the El Gancho Suncio, a dive bar for lonely truckers and motorcycle gangs, a few miles north of the Mexican border. The local bar band, The Three Amigos, were playing an upbeat Mexican number. The music stopped as they had stepped off stage to get a drink; the bar's mood mellowed down a few notches. Anticipations ran high, however, as loud footsteps were heard from beyond the door, along with a deep-pitched melody that went something like, *Dun Dun Dun-Dunt Dunt dun-Dunt Dunt dun...* The old fashion saloon doors flew open and in walked a man of an alarming height of around 6'6. The stranger was dressed solely in black. The whole place had seen him walk in, and they continued to watch him as he sat in a dark corner at the end of the bar. After the awkward silence, The Three Amigos began to strum their guitars once more.

The bartender walked up to the man, trembling to ask, "You never been here before. You got a name?"

The man in black replied in a voice that sounded as if he was talking into a fan, "Darth Vader". The bartender poured Vader a shot of Jack just as he requested, then walked away.

Five minutes passed and Vader had not touched the glass. He began to wonder if the decisions he had made in life were the right ones. He stared endlessly upon the glass on the counter, thinking *If only I didn't need this ridiculous helmet, I could enjoy a drink.*

He wondered why on earth he had chosen black for his suit, it was far too hot to wear this thing in July, in Texas. He would do anything to go back and not have given into adolescent peer pressure put on him by the Emperor.

The bar was now as noisy as it had been when he walked in. Vader caught a guy giving him the dirty eye from across the way. He choked the life out of him using the force. After this he began to stare at his shot of Jack, wondering why he chose the dark side of the forces, why he had just killed that man for no good reason, and why he had betrayed the Jedi order.

A few hours had past while Vader contemplated his life, focused on the same old thought that always settled in on him when he turned to drinking: He never got to see his kids, Luke and Leia, grow up. Soon he made up his mind: it was time to return to the Jedi order and make things right with his children.

Just as he stood up, three men approached him. "Hey, you killed our friend, Ese! Now we kill you!" The man swung at Vader with a switchblade. Vader stepped back and suddenly there was a humming noise and a great red glow. Vader had pulled his light saber. Without hesitation, he spun his sword of light around, decapitating the first man. The second man soon charged at him, and Vader once again used the choke method he had used on the guy who gave him the dirty eye. The third man tried to flee, but he was hurled through the air and into a mirror behind the bar.

Vader put back his light saber, smashed the shot of Jack on the table using the force, and walked out, realizing that he would never be able to turn from the path of the dark side.



## *A Fairy Tale* Mallory Hickey

The bright red numbers on the alarm clock change to 3:30 as "Foxy Lady" softly begins to play from the speakers. A slender, feminine hand with pink fingernails reaches over to the nightstand and lowers the volume to a whisper. She sighs and looks over at the tiny snoring, sleeping body next to hers. She listens to the captivating guitar emitting from the radio and struggles to not fall back asleep. She grows jealous and angry as the seconds move by. However, she knows that no matter how much she wants to stay in bed, she has to get up and go to work.

*I wish I didn't have to work every single night of the week, she thought to herself. I couldn't do that to them though. I hate to think of an excited child waking up in the morning expecting a dollar under their pillow and being disappointed.*

She tosses the covers off of herself and slowly raises herself out of the bed, trying not to disturb the sleeping body next to her. She slides her feet into fuzzy white slippers and shuffles toward the mahogany nightstand. She turns on the soft Tiffany lamp and the small, red glass dragonflies atop the shade illuminate the corner of the room. She goes through the familiar routine of preparing for her flight. She opens the small drawer, pulls out a bic lighter and the Hello Kitty band-aid tin that contains the magic that makes her fly. She plops down into the purple bean bag chair in the corner of the room. The lamp gives a soft light to her face as she flips open the top and delicately pulls out a joint. She raises it to her nostrils and breathes in deeply as a smile stretches across her face. *Oooh...she must have gotten some good stuff from the Pan this time.* However, when she examines the craftsmanship she is a little disappointed. *Wow Tink, do you think you could take your time the next time you insist on rolling it for me?*

The Tooth Fairy places the joint between her lips and flicks the lighter to ignite it. Smoke drifts from the red cherry end and floats towards the ceiling creating a thick wall around her. She coughs as her lungs can no longer hold in her first hit. As she continues to puff her eye lids droop and her body begins to lighten. The more she smokes the higher and longer she can fly through the night collecting the children's baby teeth from under their pillows. She puffs a little too hard and begins to cough uncontrollably. She reaches for the glass of water on the nightstand and gathers her composure. A small fairy sleeping in the bed next to her turns over, reaches out her hand, spreads her fingers and groans.

The Tooth Fairy hits the joint and holds it in, "What?"

"Yo." Tinkerbell is half asleep, her face buried in the pillow underneath her. "Wanna share?" Her voice is tired and raspy.

"Umm..." The Tooth Fairy stalls as she raises it to her lips a few more times. She inhales deeply and manages to mutter, "Yeah, just a sec," with the hits stirring in her lungs. Feeling content and pretty stoned she places the still lit roach in Tinkerbell's fingers, preps her wings and gathers the things she needs for work. She bends down, sweetly kisses Tinkerbell, "Bye. Have a fun day of doing nothing." The Tooth Fairy laughs and begins to leave, but not before adding, "Maybe you could be productive and practice your joint-rolling skills."

Tinkerbell sits up in the bed and hits the remaining joint. Her big green eyes are barely open and her blonde hair is a tangled mess atop her head. She raises a middle finger at the Tooth Fairy's back as she exits the room.

## *The Chronicles of Reinhardt: The Battle of Winter Forest*

### Andrew Waeckel

A warrior stands alone at the entrance of the Winter Forest. His name is Reinhardt and he is a dragon slayer. He is wielding a platinum silver katana with both hands. Blood red runic symbols are inscribed on the edge of the blade, yet their meaning is unknown. He is wearing a jet black hooded cloak. His body is shrouded in darkness, and his face remains unseen. His goal is to slay the Zombie Dragon of the Winter Forest.

The forest is locked in eternal winter. The undead dragon's mere existence is a curse upon nature. It is responsible for the crying heavens and the howling winds. The sun is nowhere to be seen in the dark grey abyss that is the sky above. The forest is frozen in time; the trees are blanketed in sheets of white snow as they rest peacefully in their coffins of ice. They are almost completely covered by their diamond capes.

The warrior called Reinhardt finally enters the Winter Forest. He hears nothing but the thoughts inside of his head as he gazes upon the endless maze of trees. The smell of the cool, clean winter air purifies him with perfection; the unforgiving, cold breeze pierces through his hard dragon scale body armor and gently touches his soft skin. He is filled with a sacred sensation as the blessed air breathes upon his flesh.

Eventually, he finds a clearing in the forest, which is filled with large piles of crushed skulls and battered bones. He sees the dragon resting in the distance. The warrior starts to walk towards the dragon, but stops once it senses his presence. The fighter stands perfectly still and is prepared for battle. The dragon's stench and sight are unbearable. Rotting flesh slowly falls off of its decaying bones. Its claws and fangs are encrusted with dried blood and guts from previous meals. Yellow pus droops from its evil, ruby red eyes. Poisonous green gas surrounds its entire body. The dragon stands up and screams at him. The shrieking war cry shakes his once firm stance and makes him tremble in terror and fear.

Reinhardt knows exactly how to fight dragons. From a respectable distance, the dragon would breathe its fiery breath upon him. In close quarters combat, the dragon might attempt to scratch or bite him with its claws or fangs. It would be much easier to dodge its melee attacks than its breath attacks. However, this dragon's body was completely surrounded by poisonous gas. The warrior has never fought a dragon like this before in his life. Time is running out, but the fighter knows what he has to do.

While the dragon prepares to incinerate him with its breath of fire, the warrior holds up his magic sword with both hands. The blood-red runic inscriptions on the edge of the blade begin to glow brightly. Mere seconds before the dragon opens its mouth to scorch the fighter beyond recognition, holy lightning strikes the dragon's head and divine thunder shakes the heavens. The dragon's head explodes from the shock of the electrical burst and its blood and bones fly off in all different directions. Right after this attack, the hero dashes forward and cleaves the dragon's body in half with his sword. He is so fast that the poisonous gas cannot even touch him.

Reinhardt stands next to the Zombie Dragon's corpse as he watches the snow disappear from the Winter Forest. The dragon is now dead; the forest free from its curse. Eternal winter has ended on this day.



## *The Ebay Massacre*

Shane Toogood

Father Jarred Hannigan dried his sweaty palms. He was no stranger to performing a sermon, but with sin breathing down his spine, he was sure to choke.

The engravings on the crucifix pricked his fingers as he rubbed. His breaths shattered as his bible began to run from his hand. He walked down the aisle of church following the altar boy who held a cross in the air.

His eyes, sopping with guilt, mopped over his spectators waiting for mass to commence. The church was so silent that one could hear the dead breath-so crisp and silent that all heard the bang of the crashing holy book on the tile floor.

The corpulent priest knelt down to pick the green book off the ground when his anxiety held him hostage. He fell to the ground, still grasping the silver, jeweled crucifix. A solitary bead of fault drove over his wrinkled cheek.

How could he have committed such a sin, such a felony? While caressing the rubies on the cross his state of mind was back on his laptop, staring fawn-eyed at the screen.

There were six days, six hours, and six minutes left for bidding on a vintage, mint condition, sealed, *God Bless Tiny Tim* record album. Father Hannigan placed the highest bid of \$35.00 on the record, and proceeded to shop on eBay. He admired his perfect feedback-14,523 positive comments.

As he scanned through other members' feedback, he came across an eBay store that caught his interest. He was a little boy discovering candy for the first time. Double-clicking on the link, he peeked through Jesus Christ Superstore. His eyes goggled at the beautiful jeweled crucifix pasted on the screen.

Its indentations had the Ten Commandments scripted in Latin:

- I. I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange Gods before me
- II. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
- III. Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath Day
- IV. Honor thy father and thy mother
- V. Thou shalt not kill
- VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery
- VII. Thou shalt not steal
- VIII. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor
- IX. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife
- X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods

Without hesitation, Father Hannigan clicked the red button *Buy it Now*. His credit card was out as fast as he clicked the *PayPal* button. The information was filled, and the transaction was complete.

A knock at the door by the deacon made the priest flinch. "Come in!"

"Father, I hate to bother you this morning, but there is money missing from the church's account."

"I'm sure there is a mix-up at the bank. Make a few calls to straighten this mess out. Good day."

With a smile and a nod the deacon left.

The next few days were grueling for the avid eBay purchaser. His masses were appalling. Not only would he stumble over sentences, but his speech was slurred. Excitement possessed him from swelling head to aching feet.



Every day he stood at the mailbox like a dog ready to pounce at the courier. He could not anticipate it any longer-he needed to have that cross in his hands.

Finally, on the third day, the package came. A torn UPS package sticker was sprawled in the top right corner. His hands were dancing, and his mouth became a sauna. The letter opener in his shaking hands slid across the thin, tawny tape. The package was opened and packing peanuts were engulfing the priest.

The chain felt cool around his hand as he slid the cross out of the box. A bright shine of silver flashed over his eyes. His eyes grazed the item until his wide orbs ceased. A gap was where the ruby should have been.

A furious priest flew the cross on the ground causing uproar from the Styrofoam peanuts. With a flip of the box, Father Hannigan shook it intensely. More peanuts-no jewel. As the Tsunami of "safe" packing settled, he was on eBay e-mailing the Jesus Christ Superstore.

"Hello! I had just received item #0777025-a jeweled crucifix. I am extremely upset to find that the center ruby is missing. I will not leave negative feedback as long as you replace the damaged item. Please respond ASAP. I am sending the crucifix back today. Thank you, Jarred Hannigan." The priest mumbled as he typed. His e-mail address ended the letter, and it was sent.

After pacing the rectory office for four hours Father Hannigan rushed to his computer. He massaged the crucifix with his thumb. There was no response from the Jesus Christ Superstore.

He squinted in disgust and packed the cross back in the damaged box it came in. A quick drive to the post office and he had returned, back in the computer chair. To ease his mind he browsed on eBay. But nothing made the priest content. He flew the chair back and hit the computer desk.

His fingers flew over the keyboard as he spewed out another e-mail:

"I had just e-mailed you six hours ago and you have yet to respond. The defective item you have sent to me was sent back for replacement. It is missing a jewel. This is an angry e-mail...send!" He stated as his index finger pounded the send button.

Twelve hours and four e-mails later, the room was a campground attacked by a pack of wild bears. Papers cluttered the blue rug. A bible was maimed at the spine and was in two different resting places. He didn't sleep that night.

Sunday was approaching and no e-mail from the store. More e-mails from Father Hannigan piled their inbox.

"Excuse me, Father." The deacon walked in slowly rapping at the door.

Father Hannigan's head was pudding in his palm as he leaned on his desk. "Enter."

"I have counted the deposit twice and I keep coming up \$35.00 short. I don't understand though. When we counted after the six o'clock mass it was accurate."

"That can't be true," began Father Hannigan. "Count it again."

"But, Father, I had three other people count and..."

"Count. It. Again." Each detached word became more forceful as he spat them at the deacon.

The deacon lowered his head, and kissed his hand. His arm quivered as he placed the kiss on a statue of Jesus by the door. The door resounded when it shut. The echo jumped on the priest's ears.

He shimmied to the laptop, and looked at his e-mail. He still had not heard from the store, nor had he got his new ankh. His legs carried him to his record player where he tried to cheer up with the sound of Tiny Tim. *Tip-toe Thru' The Tulips With Me* played followed by *Livin' In The Sunlight, Lovin' In The Moonlight*. The record crackled as the seventies artist's voice filtered through the air. The agitated priest picked up the 45, and hurled it at the wall. He cried as he looked for ticket prices to Florida.

Father Hannigan's boarding pass read Gate B3: Orlando, Florida. It was a two-hour flight until he was in the sunny paradise. He had paid with cash, \$1,123.00-a round trip, and non-stop flight. In his sweater pocket were the directions to the hotel and a few local shops.

Soon after he boarded he slid into his seat. They were in the air within minutes. Electronics were allowed, so Father Hannigan whipped out his laptop from his only baggage. He stared out the window at the streets below as the computer started.

A smirk appeared on his face as he typed ebay.com into the address bar. He signed himself in, and went to My Ebay. He clicked the feedback forum, selected negative, and proceeded to type under the Jesus Christ Superstore: Horrible product. Does not respond to numerous emails. NOT RECOMMENDED.

The hotel room reeked of cigarette smoke and beef jerky. He looked at the directions to three stores on his list. First on his list was the edged weapons store. Second, Goodwill. Third, the Jesus Christ Superstore. He took a cab to the rental car lot. A red Honda awaited him in the parking lot. Taking the keys, he drove away.

He desperately tried to drive while looking at the directions. A few times he would drift into the shoulder, but automatically corrected himself. A devious smile began to rip at his face.

After purchasing some items at the stores on his list, he pulled in to the lot. He took his boarding pass out and looked at the time. He had only five hours before his flight departed. He slid the leather gloves over his gangly hands, and fetched the brown bag from behind the seat.

His mouth was dry, so he took a swig of the bottled water he had sitting in the cup holder. No effect. He took another mouthful. Still no effect. His mouth continued to go dry. His pupils grew. His legs were melting into the seat of the car.

Father Hannigan glanced in the bag, opened the door, and cautiously made his way into the store. A man looked at him through his glasses. He was behind the counter holding a novel.

"Good day, Sir." His voice was mellow. His ponytail was pulled back so tight his eyes began to slant upward. "What can I do you for?" Every sentence that came out of his mouth was sung in soprano.

"Are you in charge of the eBay account?" Stammered Father Hannigan.

"I am. It is only my wife and I that run this store. Did you have a question?"

Father Hannigan tried to moisten his lips so he did not crack his voice again when speaking. "Do you have a jeweled crucifix?"

"Indeed we do." The man, whose nametag Father Hannigan could not read because his eyes were glossed with water, uncrossed his legs, shut the book, and rounded the register. "It is right this way."

The man walked down a small aisle barely big enough for the priest to fit through. "We have it in gold and silver." As the man looked over the glass, Father Hannigan skimmed the room for security cameras - there were none.

Silently, he unwrapped the bag. His hand wobbled as he drew the knife to the man's neck. "I got what I need." His arm jerked back-a trail of blood following in sync. The crash of the glass was muffled from the dead man's head breaking the case. The priest reached into the case and took the silver crucifix. His smile decreased as he placed the crucifix around his thick neck.

He never told anyone of his departure. The deacon ran up to him. "Father. Money is missing again! I don't understand what is happening. Father?"

Father Hannigan walked past him, dropped his laptop bag, and washed his hands. "I don't know what to tell you. How much is it this time?"

"One thousand, one-hundred and twenty-three dollars." The deacon read off a memo pad that recorded the missing money.



"Well, replace it. That is your job."

Father Hannigan walked away. The girl in the front of the rectory desk called to him, "You have a package on your desk, Father."

He walked into his office, and sat down in front of the package. He could not see the sender through fogged eyes, but he reluctantly tore the tape. He reached his hand in the box, and felt a cool chain around his hand. He gasped, and pulled out a silver crucifix. The glare of the ruby made his face crimson. His thumb was covering the fifth commandment-thou shalt not kill.

He fell back in his chair and read the letter that was attached.

*Dear holy\_man-*

*I am terribly sorry for the poor product we sent you. It was an honest mistake. My wife and I are glad to replace the damaged item. I wish you would have e-mailed us to give us a heads up. We did put our new e-mail address in the letter enclosed with the first crucifix. Again, we are very sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you, and God bless you.*

Father Hannigan's eyes were too wet to read the signature at the end of the letter. He lifted the cross from around his neck, and slammed it on the desk.

It was time for mass. Father Hannigan dressed himself sluggishly, hung the cross over his neck, and dried his sweaty palms. He was no stranger to performing a sermon, but with sin breathing down his spine, he was sure to choke.

The engravings on the crucifix pricked his fingers as he rubbed. His breaths shattered as his bible began to run from his hand. He walked down the aisle of church following the altar boy who held a cross in the air.

His guilty eyes mopped over the spectators waiting for mass to commence. The church was so silent that one could hear the dead breath-so crisp and silent that all heard the bang of the crashing holy book on the tile floor.

The corpulent priest knelt down to pick the green book off the ground when his anxiety held him hostage. He fell to the ground, still grasping the silver, jeweled crucifix. A solitary bead of sweat drove over his wrinkled cheek. How could he have committed such a sin, such a felony?



## *Snapshots of America*

Mary B. McAllister

On Tuesday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, we finally start to think seriously about what we'd do for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Several plans are in the air -- I want to take my husband on his first camping adventure, we'd been thinking about a motorcycle trip through Pennsylvania's famous Route 6 and my husband had been promoting Prince Edward Island. I had also been listening for years to his claim that New York City had the *world's* best fireworks displays.

By 11:30 am we finally decide to check the weather. A large front was forecasted to hit the eastern half of the country, beginning on Friday with thunderstorms predicted through Monday, the fourth. Camping is out. But the bad weather isn't due until Thursday evening. Tuesday and Wednesday are supposed to be beautiful. Prince Edward Island would take a week, but there is enough time to explore Route 6 on our new motorcycle.

We'd just bought the motorcycle three months before and riding "pillion" on the back had been a brand new experience for me. At first I was terrified. I had visions of falling off and being flattened like a cartoon character by the oncoming traffic. But leisurely rides through Amish country had changed my impression. The experience is more friendly, animated and vivacious than the same trip in a "cage." The little Amish boys would always wave from the back window of their horse drawn carriages. On the back of the motorcycle, even with my helmet on, I can smell summer. I can smell alfalfa -- that grassy sweet hayride aroma, the mellow earthiness of shady stretch of road and the marshy smell of humidity. I am still scared of the highways.

By 12:40pm we are dressed, fed, and ready to go. To make up for our late start, I agree that we will take the Turnpike for a while. On the side streets, going under 40 mph I sit separately, upright and can hook my thumbs into the handles on my seat and rest my tush against the small trunk mounted behind me. But on the Turnpike at 70, 80. *My god we must have passed that semi at 90! Why did I agree to the Turnpike?* My chest is smack up against his back. I'm crunched down behind him, with my palms squeezing his chest. I pant until we pass the truck. Huge treacherous tires threaten to suck me off my seat and smear my body on the pavement... My eyes are slits staring into the back of the right side of his helmet. I look to the mile markers on the right side of the road ... 312.9, 312.8, 312.7 then 309.5, 309.4, 309.3.... Ok, I am still buffeted some by our speed but am breathing normally. I keep counting...257.9,257.8. I see the sign for Harrisburg. We're getting off.

Just north of Harrisburg, the Texaco on Route 322 is our first stop. Stopping, I have a sense of elation as if we'd gotten out of school early. I had survived the first hour on the highway. But once inside the truck stop I enter a whole different world. Cigarette smoke soaks every corner, the food looks stale and the people look sapped and dingy. Getting a de-caf coffee is a major production, but it only costs \$0.86. I am happy to get going again. We start off at an enjoyable 50-mph.

I am the type of person who is too busy doing things to stop to think about what I see. But since you can't be heard on the back of a motorcycle, you have to think about what you see. Back on the highway a post 9/11 billboard hawking patriotism catches my attention -- not the slogan but the picture, a little girl atop someone's shoulders waving an American flag. I realize that she must be the New Columbia, her fresh face shining, arms reaching to embrace, to include us all in her confidence for the future. This four-year old has

replaced the classic goddess. Columbia is no longer distant and powerful or even mature. She is familiar, ordinary, part of this lifetime, part of the crowd. She doesn't look out into the potential distance but into an immediate, still innocent future. She is America, reinvented and a bit ironic.

It is just a few miles further on Route 322, that swiftly flowing empty four-lane beauty, appropriated and funded by Pennsylvania legislators wanting a quick ride up to Penn State games. But we are not going as far as State College, PA. We are following the path of the Susquehanna River. Following it north to its headwaters in Appalachian Plateau. Hundreds of years ago this land must have been populated by Indians living along the river. According to the road sign, the Susquehannok Indians, were decimated by Iroquois warriors. The river laps at the highway, high from a week of rain. As we ride by I imagine Iroquois warriors coordinating their raids with the havoc wrecked by floods.

The highway hugs the west side of the river in a shallow valley between Blue and Second Mountains. From the highway, Second Mountain is at best a small, distant, treeless hill and Blue Mountain is a wide denuded promontory jutting off into what looks like a flat grassy seabed. We pass Dauphin Rapids which surprises the passerby with a 25-foot replica of Lady Liberty set in the river atop the remains of an old railroad bridge pier. We skirt small, now dilapidated but curiously eccentric, little river towns, the centers of which no longer abut the river. A fifteen-foot sea serpent guards the parking lot of roadside diner. Schools, no longer needed by boomers, have been converted to seniors centers and antique warehouses. We continue north on Highway 15/11 passing Duncannon where a bridge marks the Juacinta River flowing into the Susquehanna.... then Amity Hall, New Buffalo, and Montgomery Ferry. Further ahead lie Mahony Ridge and Buffalo Mountain.

To the right everything is river. If there are towns on its eastern shores, we don't know. The river is wide enough to obscure them, and there are no bridges. We pass islands in the river and huge, current-polished boulders, like submerged cars, their roofs surfacing in some waterlogged traffic jam. Paul Robeson sings in my head...

Ol' man river, that ol' man river,  
He must know sumpin', but don't say nothin',  
He jus' keeps rollin', He keeps on rollin' along.

The sign says that Susquehanna is 440 miles long, the 16<sup>th</sup> longest river in the US. Once the river itself was the highway. First carrying Indians, then colonists, then lumber, coal and iron ore. Now both the river and Highway 15/11 both look to me to be forgotten. These towns with their long defunct ferries and steam engine tracks slowly contract. Level with the highway for miles the indifferent river rolls on, banks scattered with way stations. We see more shady banks and a singular picnic table set with a cheery, sunflower-patterned cloth and 6 vinyl kitchen chairs – a party waiting for people.

We pass Liverpool, Independence, Port Trevorton, and more river islands, then Selingrove. Route 11 splits off to follow the northeast fork of the river. We see signs saying that we'd missed the turn for New York border and the Endless Mountains. *Good, we're not going that way.* We are still on Route 15, which they call "the Great Shamokin Path." Apparently, the Iroquois warriors massacred pioneers too. Before the American Revolution this path must have been the edge of the colonial frontier. About the time of the French and Indian War the English colonists would have gradually pushed the Iroquois back north and away from the river. The British lost that war and the Iroquois attacked the colonists sensing that the British were powerless to defend them. *Hmm... I have a new respect for the Iroquois and the American Revolution is starting to make sense. No*



*wonder why George Washington thought that he could defeat one of the world's largest standing armies; he'd seen the Iroquois and the French do it.*

My husband pulls over to the side of the road long enough to complain that I'm dancing on the back. *Well, it's getting a little boring.* The road has been flat and straight for a long time. When we're swooping up and down the curves on the back roads of Lancaster riding on the back is like down hill skiing on wheels. We tack left, then right. I keep my torso upright but bend at the waist with the curves. And I get to see this much younger person inside of my husband. It's then that his daring, 15year old self takes over, hunched up and leaning into the curves just like those crazy kids racing motorcycles on Speed TV. I go back to reading he road signs.

Sunbury. Sunbury was incorporated in 1772, but the name and the colonial town replaced the much older Indian settlement of Shamokin that spanned the forks of the Susquehanna. Shamokin was the nexus of a network of the Indian paths going in all four directions. Route 15 continues north for another 5 minutes. Just before Lewisburg the PA Department of Transportation has posted a huge orange sign warning us to be wary of aggressive drivers in this high accident corridor. We take their advice but find only slowly moving traffic and a series of stoplights. We trudge through Lewisburg and past Bucknell University, home of the Bisons. Hard to imagine today, but judging from the names of local roads: "Buffalo Drive," "Buffalo Crossing," and "Buffalo Run Road," they were here once.

We are still following the river into the Appalachian Plateau. We shortcut Williamsport going west on Scenic Highway 44, where at about 2,500 feet (and about 5 hours from the New Jersey Coast) we reach the small farming community of Jersey Shore. *What a sense of humor these folks have. We must be 200 miles from the Jersey Shore!* Finally, we pass another couple on a motorcycle. Usually we see lots of other motorcyclists. It's one of the nicest things about riding. Everybody waves to each other. I feel like I'm in the South. It's not a princess or even a political wave. To wave at another motorcyclist, you let go of the seat handle, lower you left arm and stick just your fingers and palm out keeping the hand close to the body. We stop for something to drink and met some friendly locals. I learn that Jersey Shore was originally called Waynesburg. After an influx of New Jersey immigrants, the people living on the other side of the Susquehanna started calling Waynesburg "the Jersey shore."

Our next stop is Lock Haven. Lock Haven looks like the quintessential small American town with curlicue ironwork on the bridge into town and old-fashioned street lamps. Mixed in among the newer buildings I could see vestiges of the town built on 19<sup>th</sup> century lumber profits and the windfalls brought by Pennsylvania Canal. Gothic Revival and Victorian mansions are sprinkled in downtown and on Water Street. But here too was an even older place. Present day Lock Haven was also built on Old Town, an Indian settlement. *Did the Old Town Indians envision a Pennsylvania Canal? Numerous Indian river trails converge there. Or, is history the story of successive peoples competing for the same strategic resources?*

We cross the river, park the motorcycle near the lock and take a walk through the sleepy downtown looking for an ice cream parlor. We find one, but it's closed – not enough business until after 6 on weekdays. We settle for water and take off northwest on another scenic highway, Route 120, away from the river and into the forest.

This is the best part of the day's ride. The weather is coolish yet still comfortable, the road traverses uphill and the late day light slants in between the trees. In front of me my rider accelerates and starts to nod into



the curves, at one with the iron horse. Now he's the one dancing and I need to follow closely. I sit upright with my left hand resting on his waist, right hooked into my seat handle. As I follow him, bending into the curve I shift my weight to my inside foot. And we dance, skating through one curve and then another. Left and right, up this forested mountain.

We ride through the Sproul and Susquehannock State Forests and into Pennsylvania's Elk Forest. The road signs change from deer warnings to elk warnings. We don't see either. We do see individual homes, trailer parks and little hamlets seemingly inside state lands. The hamlets and villages are forlorn – a few streets clustered along the highway without sidewalks, a grocery or a gas station, but every one has a local bar. Many of the little homes along the road are so lonesome and unkempt that they might be deserted except for the 7 foot satellite dishes pointing into the western sky. Others with front yard vegetable gardens and pert, crew cut lawns that seem to belong to the proud citizens in Our Town. And others, just wacky. *Who keeps a white flocked Christmas tree on the front porch of a log cabin in July?*

At 6 pm conditions are still early summer evening perfect, but I'm getting hungry and need a bathroom. I am glad to reach Emporium. We stop in a 1950's gas station complete with uniformed attendant. The restroom is tiled in black ceramic trimmed in red bull nose with white fixtures and is immaculate. Feeling guilty that we aren't gassing up, I look for something to buy. The gas station sells Zippo lighter memorabilia, as nearby Bradford is the home of the famous lighter. But I'm not a collector and just buy a Hershey bar. The day's last leg is through Elk County into St. Mary's. Just another half-hour or so and we should be there. I've been riding comfortably all afternoon in a summer weight mesh jacket, jeans and leather gloves. But the sun is starting to set and now and I'm cold. I add a fleece vest from the trunk.

St. Mary's is supposed to be the mecca of motorcyclists so I'm not surprised when a perfect stranger tells us that "our group" is "up at the Comfort Inn, 'bout a mile out on the Million Dollar Highway." *A million dollars doesn't go very far in St. Mary's.* The Million Dollar Highway has a Comfort Inn, a Best Western, a Pep Boys, a Taco Bell, a car dealership, a Wendy's, a pizza place and a sports bar. We bed the motorcycle down for the night in a quiet corner of the Best Western and head off to the sports bar for wings, a recommendation from Bambie, our hotel receptionist. Bambie is no less disappointed in St. Mary's restaurant offerings than we are. "The only decent restaurant in town, a German restaurant, closed down back in January." The economies of these small towns don't support the Mom and Pop establishments and the fast food chains drive them out of business. Only the local bars survive. Bavarian Catholics escaping religious harassment in Baltimore founded this town. They still make Staub Beer here, an excellent pilsner.

It's one in the morning. I've been in bed for an hour but still can't sleep. I've tried deep knee bends. I've tried counting sheep. I've tried meditating. My husband is snoring. I'm reading the introductory pages of the phone book. *Not bad really.* St. Mary's was once the Carbon Capital of the World. They've now reinvented themselves as a major producer of powdered metals. They've been through a few industries here. When they realized they wouldn't survive as an agricultural center, they turned to mining and lumber. Flatter places, close to the Susquehanna like Lock Haven had already been logged before the Civil War, but St. Mary's had to wait for the steam locomotive. The city fathers piggybacked logging profits into a railroad. That failed and then they went into carbon cell batteries. That industry moved west, so they switched to powdered metal parts. Puts our current problem of exported manufacturing jobs into perspective. And it puts me to sleep.

The morning fog has lifted by 8 am, my seat is wet but we head out anyway for "the famous Route 6." I'm operating on 4 hours sleep and a sugary breakfast. We travel northwest towards Warren. The caffeine is

starting to wear off and there's nothing to see except nondescript little towns. The sign that says that Route 6 is the Grand Army of the Republic Highway. They must mean the Grand Army of the Union Forces of the Republic Highway. But Route 6 traverses the country from Cape Cod to California, which couldn't have been completed until well after the Civil War. I guess we'd have to go to the Route 6 Museum to find out. But not today. Today we want see the Allegheny Reservoir, the Kinzua Dam and the Kinzua Railroad Viaduct. We are at the dam by 9am.

This is the dam featured in Governor Rendell's "Visit PA" TV ad campaign. Today, a very junior member of the Army Corps of Engineers runs the dam's visitor center. He is very friendly and informative. We are disappointed to learn that the Kinzua Railroad Viaduct, at one time the longest and tallest railroad bridge in the world, blew down in a recent rain storm. *So much for the "Tracks in the Sky."* The dam looks better in pictures than in person. Today, it's buggy and not releasing much water at the moment, despite the recent rain. We take the perfunctory pictures and move on. As we accelerate uphill leaving the dam we scare off maybe a dozen carrion hawks breakfasting on road kill. I notice the birds much more riding on the motorcycle. I'd seen them circling as we approached the dam. Often we startle them, and they can't fly high enough or fast enough away from us. If I were to reach up, I might be able to touch a claw.

Just over the first hill we see that it is the dam that creates Kinzua Lake, part of the Allegheny Reservoir. *Forget the dam, Rendell. Feature this as Pennsylvania's Lake Tahoe. OK, sans the 12,000 foot mountains.* This looks like the Land of Sky Blue Waters.

*"From the Land of Sky Blue Waters (Waters),  
From the land of pines, lofty balsam,  
Comes the beer refreshing,  
Hamm's the beer refreshing"*

Looks just like that scene from the old commercial. I always thought that that was somewhere in Minnesota.

The lake spreads for miles pushing out into Allegheny National Forest bordering the shore. No boats this morning just the deep blue waters, islands and giant stands of tall pines. What's amazing is that this is manmade. We follow Longhouse Scenic Drive for a while past big brown and yellow signs for campgrounds - Dewdrop, Kiasutha, Red Bridge, Tracy Ridge, and Willow Bay. We stop for a tour. Even at 15-mph the sound of our engine pierces the serenity and echoes against the trunks. I peek at the lake between the shade. I breathe deeply and my lungs and sinuses draw in the warmth. My eye lids close and that cranky feeling disappears. Here and there is an acrid whiff of cold campfire.

We speed up again, back on the main road. The lavish aromas of the campground gone. We are still within the 500 acres of the Allegheny Forest skirting the reservoir, then crossing it again. *The Reservoir was created for flood control? They flood 35 miles of the Allegheny River for flood control, oh and hydroelectric power.* Pumped storage -- it's the cheapest and most flexible electric supply there is. They probably got only 50 MWs (about 1/100 of the generating capacity of a nuclear plant). The utility pumps in the off peak hours when supply is cheap and runs down the pond during peak hours when supply costs are high. *Which came first, flood control or hydro?*

We're on a straight, flat road again. We ride through an endless string of towns no one has ever heard of. I startle awake. We stop suddenly and my weight is thrown forward. With his own weight, the weight of the bike and now my weight, my husband has about 700 pounds on the handlebars. Good thing we were going straight and not fast. We pull over. "No, I didn't fall asleep." "Yes, I will be careful." We ride around for a



while looking for someplace to stop for coffee or a coke. Nothing. We stop and I get a chocolate ice cream cone, my husband doesn't want one. Three hours and 150 miles later we're stopping in Smethport for lunch. It's always worse after lunch. And it's gray, not hot, not cold, not sunny. Two hours more of hardware stores, insurance offices, antique stores and gift shops, Christmas stores, camping supply, restaurants and railroad tracks.

I notice them again -- the yellow ribbon magnets on vans and pickups and station wagons. I see more yellow ribbons here. The writing on the ribbons, is it the name of a serviceman or woman? It's too small to see. In small towns and rural areas I see faded bouquets of yellow ribbon tied to churchyards and driveways and fences. It first occurred to me on the way up as we passed through Clinton County when we crossed the Susquehanna in Clinton County near Hyner. The bridge was called the Gold Star Mother's Bridge. Further south, bridges are named for politicians, statesmen, military leaders or others who won.

In the last hour it's gone from gray to dark gray. Storm clouds have gathered in the west. We will outrun the storm. We cutout Wellsboro and the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. We shortcut south on 287. The road is empty. We're going 60-mph. The sky is charcoal. The clouds look like they've rolled ahead of us to the northeast. Then lightening. At English Center the road rises and the storm is almost on top of us. We are soaked by the time we park and take shelter under the eaves of the Hilltop Restaurant. It's open but air-conditioned, and we wait outside a half-hour while the rain passes. I watch a couple inside drinking coffee.

I'm cold for a while, but by the time we stop at the new Sheetz Gas Station and Mini Mart in Williamsport, I'm just damp. The sun is shining and it's summer again. The storm has gone off to drench Manhattan and northern Jersey. If we use the expressway we can be home by 7:30. We retrace our route south on 15/11. The river is on our left but no longer novel; fifty miles, forty miles, thirty miles to Harrisburg. I grab the cuffs of my jacket. My arms form a sail to the wind. I hold on with my knees and the insides of my legs. The sun and the highway speed have completely dried my clothes. Most of the traffic is gone. The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission Building reflects the sunset. *Is it still all white guys who work there?* A truck passes. I sink inside my jacket and rotate my ankles out and back, feet still resting on the pegs. It's 7:30. It will be dark in an hour. Harrisburg 248.1, 248.2, 248.3.... Sixty miles to Downingtown, 310.7, 310.8, 310.9.

Seven hundred miles since we left and we are finally home. Next year, maybe fireworks.