

Volume XVI~ October 2015

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

Survivor



Featured Poets: Sara Bailey | Howard Winn | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction: "The Missouri Tornado" by Stephen M. Hood

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH

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Torrid Literature Journal - Volume XVI Survivor

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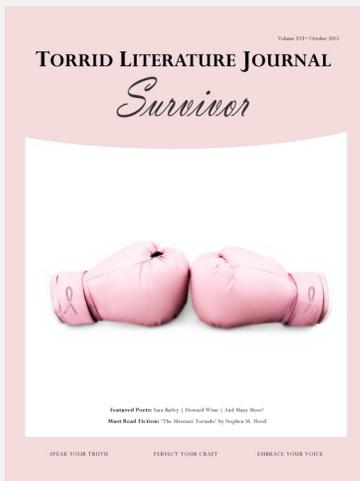
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CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

All members of our team will be listed on the Masthead section of our website. In addition, members of our team will gain valuable experience while making an impact on the literary community. If you plan to apply for a position, please keep in mind that your time commitment will vary depending on your position and the project you are working on. However, please plan to spend a minimum of 2 hours a week with a 6 month to 1 year commitment to the position. Everyone on our team will need to be familiar with the products and services we provide, as this is the best way for people to understand our mission for the culture of literature and art.

All positions can be fulfilled remotely unless otherwise noted.

We're currently accepting applications for several blogging positions until they are filled. We're looking for bloggers who will create literary content for our blog. Successful candidates will be expected to create at least one post per quarter, although more is encouraged.

Minimum length of participation is 12 months. Please take this into account before applying.

Questions? Please send an email to jobs@tlpublishing.org. Please visit http://torridliterature.com/Careers_Opportunities.html for more information.

FROM THE EDITOR

2015 has been an eventful year. There have been positive moments and truthfully, a few not so positive moments. There were moments of success but there were also moments that could be labeled as setbacks. Keep in mind though, that your journey is not about the mistakes you've made. It's about the manifestation. It's about overcoming challenges while transitioning into someone greater. How have you changed? Did you change in response to the demands of your journey or has your journey changed you? Did you learn anything? How will these lessons benefit you next year? These are some of the questions that you should reflect on when you when you take into consideration how far you have come.

Additionally, as you prepare to end this year, remember that your perspective is a key point when it comes to processing information. How you choose to view a situation generally determines how you will work to get through it. When writers create art, they're working through something. Inspiration starts with the stroke of an idea or emotion. From there it's all about the transformation. A blank page becomes a platform that makes a statement on behalf of the creator. The same can be said about life as it is filled with pages. What's your story? What does your life say about you? More importantly, are you living louder than your words?

We're excited to close out this year with the *Torrid Literature Journal* – Volume XVI Survivor. Our last issue of 2015 provides readers with a refreshing reminder that life should be enjoyed. Literature is more than ink on paper. A poem is never just a poem. A story is not just a clever grouping of scenes with witty dialogue. Literature is life. It's a necessary component for survival. Whether its poetry, fiction, or nonfiction, people run towards it like moths to a flame because literature has an attractive undertone that beckons attention.

Additionally, as a publisher that provides a platform for writers, we are always eager to give honor where it's due. This is why we created our Hall of Fame for literary excellence. We want to highlight the phenomenal writers who have blessed our pages. In this issue, we announce our 2015 Hall of Fame inductees. Each year, we publish over 100 poems and stories. Last year was no different. We asked for your votes and you obliged our request. These eight inductees were chosen by readers like you. Please join us in congratulating our new Hall of Fame members.

Following the release of Volume XVI are several other exciting projects that have been underway. Next month our open mic show will make a dynamic return to The Bunker in Tampa, Florida. Quite some time has passed since our last show and we're looking forward to this evening. Save the date and join us as we celebrate the power of expression and the diverse beauty of art. As always, if you live outside of the Tampa community, but you still would like to attend a poetry event, consider attending one in your local community. You can even start one on your own or in collaboration with other artists.

In addition to our open mic show, we're also excited to

share the official release date for our Christian anthology, *The Effects of Grace*. Our second Christian title will be published on December 1st. Readers who enjoyed *Enter the Gateway*, will fall in love with this anthology as it provides hope and encouragement to readers.

Speaking of support, we're always looking for ways to expand our platform for writers. That being said, we are now providing editing services for poetry manuscripts and chapbooks. We're excited about the expansion of our business and we look forward to working with our future clients. Contact us for a free, no obligation quote. Visit our website for more information.

We would be remiss if we didn't mention that something big is taking place in the literary world for the month of November. Lovers of fiction are already familiar with the importance of this month. November is National Novel Writing Month. Thousands of writers around the world will take on the literary challenge to write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days. Whether you're a plotter or pantsers, this competition is for everyone who's ever wanted to write a novel. If you're one of many writers who have this desire then put aside fear and accept that this is something you can do. Follow our blog and social media pages for tips and inspiration during this 30 day challenge.

As a writer, what better way is there to end the year than by completing a literary project? However, many people who want to write get stuck in the beginning. Whenever I feel doubt rising up on the inside, I focus on a very familiar saying: starve your doubts, feed your faith. You can't feed both and expect to win at the same time. One has to diminish and eventually lose.

Don't be afraid of failure. If you expect to gain anything in life then you have to take the first step, which requires a leap of faith. Success doesn't just appear out of thin air. As you wrap up 2015 and begin to look forward to next year, I want to personally encourage you to push yourself in ways that you haven't done before. Much like physical fitness, we must avoid the plateau effect. We must avoid becoming too complacent with our current standing that we forget we're supposed to continually strive for greater. You are already in too deep to quit. Let's keep moving forward. We're survivors because quitting isn't an option. Survival is our only choice.

Be blessed. Be you. Be torrid.

Sincerely,
Alice Saunders

Follow me on Twitter:
[@lyricaltempest](#)

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TL Publishing Group

Please join TL Publishing Group in welcoming the 2015 Torridian Hall of Fame members. These eight writers were all published in Volumes IX - XII of the Torrid Literature Journal. They were chosen through a voting process where they received the highest votes in their category. These writers are from all over the world and each one of them has a unique style that draws attention to their literary craft. If you are unfamiliar with their work, please check out the issue their work appeared in. You can purchase our journals at any time by visiting our online store.

Additionally, please visit our website to learn more about our 2013 and 2014 Torridian Hall of Fame members, including their writing history and other places where you can read their work.

Our Hall of Fame serves as a platform to preserve, honor and promote the growth and culture of literature. Follow us as we prepare to vote for our next season of inductees for Volumes XIII - XVI of the Torrid Literature Journal. Voting starts November 1, 2015 and runs through February 1, 2016. More information will be provided closer to the start of the next voting season.

2015 Hall of Fame Inductees

Volume IX

Sandra Widner Burch: Slow Dance (Poetry)

Leah Schwartz: The Diary of a Claustrophobic Mouse (Fiction)

Volume X

Neha Praseed: Reality (Poetry)

Chase Parnell: Life or Death? (Fiction)

Volume XI

Rachael Stanford: We Is (Poetry)

G.L. Snodgrass: Prom Date (Fiction)

Volume XII

Alicia Cook: Jess Cook (Poetry)

Danny Judge: Exhausted (Fiction)



When: Saturday, November 14, 2015
Time: 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM
Where: The Bunker (f.k.a. Tre Amici)
1907 N 19th St., Tampa, FL 33605 | P (813) 247-6964
Contact: Tiffani Barner | tbarner@torridliterature.com
www.torridliterature.com
www.tpublishing.org

Tampa's family friendly open mic show!
Price: Free!

Join TL Publishing Group and the Tampa community as we celebrate poetry and the arts with our open mic event. Our open mic events are always family friendly and provide an open platform that welcomes all types of artists. In the past, numerous singers, musicians, bands, comedians, poets, spoken word artists, and storytellers have blessed our stage, leaving the microphone in flames.

At our upcoming event, we have R.J. Kerker as our special host for the evening. R.J. is a member of the American Song Box band and a long time supporter of the arts community in Tampa, Florida. He also co-hosted open mic night at Café Kili for several years before retiring to focus on other musical projects. Visit his band page to learn more:

<http://facebook.com/american-song-box>
<http://reverbnation.com/amersongbox>

Visit us during open mic night to learn more about the performers for the evening. There is no charge to attend this event. All performers, emerging and experienced artists, are encouraged to come out and participate.

Please visit our website and like our fan page on Facebook to receive important updates regarding this upcoming event:

<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>
http://www.torridliterature.com/Open_Mic.html

If you have any questions, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com.

ODE TO LITERATURE

MAPLE LIVES

By John Grey

My maple encroaches on the power lines.
It's nature versus the company and
there can only be one winner.
What do I tell a tree that only knows
one thing - to grow?
It's survived a hundred seasons or more.
It's been hurricane-whipped,
drought-seared, taunted by woodpeckers,
stripped of its leaves, snow-capped,
faced lightning alone
and had every one its boughs
strangled by ice.
It didn't go through all that
just to hear me say that between
blue sky and its upper branches,
is the thin line that keeps our houses lit,
our televisions running.
My maple spreads itself with dignity
when the tree-cutters come
with their ladders and power saws,
decapitate her lovely head.
It's a lesser tree that greets me when
the job is done.
Or it's a lesser world
for there are no lesser trees.

John Grey is an Australian born poet. Recently published in *Oyez Review*, *Rockhurst Review* and *Spindrift* with work upcoming in *New Plains Review*, *Big Muddy Review*, *Willow Review* and *Louisiana Literature*.

James Stoner earned a Masters in Liberal Studies and a Masters in Creative Writing. He is a Senior Lecturer of English at the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee. He was a featured poet in *The Pacific Review* and has had published other poems in *Cultural Logic*, *The Awakenings Review*, *Education Studies*, and in the poetry anthology *Silent Voices*.

SONG OF CATASTROPHE

By James Stoner

Everywhere I went
a voice followed me
like invasive vines
choking a tree,
a preying predator,
saying, "Get ready,
become like the rock,
petrify your soft self,
you ask too much."
Hands on ears,
I did not know what it
meant and told it to go
away from me,
to leave me be.
But the voice was
persistent and told me,
"Gather all that you love,
dig a hole and dump them in,
one by one."
Not this! I cried, Not that!
The voice urged me,
"Dump them in. You must
do this. That is loss.
learn to lose—
make it the root of life, let go."
The voice asked, "Now
what do you hold?"
Nothing, nothingness.
"Want less, even of
eating and sleeping.
Let the well refill
with your longing.
Let the hour leave as it came,
realize hunger, start over.
Now what do you hold?"
Seeds hold the root of life.
"You will be turning and
returning to me.
Water all that you've lost
with your flame filled tears,
The wind shifts
and the earth turns.
Now, what do you know?"
To love my loss.
Loss is like water taken
from a well that
eventually,
steadily refills.

Amber Allen works in pharmacy, a stressful job lacking in creativity. Writing is her passion, and its how she expresses herself. The part of poetry Allen likes most is the connectivity it brings between writer and reader, no matter which role she plays. Allen loves connecting with fellow writers, which is actually how she learned about Torrid.

TREPIDATION II

By Amber Allen

You

look at me and I sigh,
my world filled with a
pure haze and fully

Complete

now that I know the
power of your smile.
You have brought life to

me.

A life I never dreamed of,
but now is real, too real.
That is the power of

you-

the ability to bring about
dreams so big my stomach
flutters in fear. I get a

Scare

from you optimism, and
every bit of positivity you so
painstakingly draw out of

me.

Phillip Farris is a communication major that spends his free time reading and/or writing. He currently resides on the island of Guam, but is originally from Tampa, Florida.

KEYHOLE

By Philip Farris

Through this keyhole my eye foresees
A surging tide awaiting me
Patches of snow throughout the ground
Hindering hearts all around
Under this door a light shines bright
Glimmering and blinding throughout the night
Adjusting my grip onto this hold
A beauty before me that is so bold
An abstract vision to my naked eye
Clearly leaves me all petrified
Bracing for the sight to see
Sets my mind to utter ease
A quiver and shiver with the thought
Of this illusion that leaves me distraught
An image designed in my perception
A familiar face with my reflection
Glancing closer through this hole
I find my heart forever sold
In a love I know will never last
Haunted by this polluted past
Now, as this image begins to flicker
Perhaps my mind even grows sicker
Because I know my life will not be the same
For a love so pure is hard to tame
Blinking at once this image goes black
Concealing all the qualities I lack
Washing away all that loomed
I jarred the door open to see only a broom.

WHEN DREAMS ARE REALITY

By Philip Farris

She speaks to me in my dreams
Sensual words that corrupt my ears

Her smell is of perfection
Which fumes my inner soul

And I wonder if this is love?

This distant feeling
Radiating from my finger tips

This soundless motion
Emitting beauty and grace

Her eyes leer in my direction
Recanting the visions of my past
And purging these forgotten senses

Yet, still I can hear her whispers
Haunting my perception
And lurking in my enchanted memories

For this cannot be a mere dream
But, a world of horror
Etched by a distant image
That no longer exists

She is gone
A forgotten soul
Only to travel onward.

Jolene Munch Cardoza is a native Floridian and member of the American Theatre Critics Association. As an ardent ally of the Washington, D.C. theatre community for 13 years, she has reviewed theatre for a variety of publications and media outlets, including *The Washington Examiner*, *Metro Weekly*, *Washington Theater Review*, and *Theatre Spotlight*, among others. She attended the University of South Florida in Tampa and is a graduate of the Eugene O'Neill National Critics Institute. She currently resides in New England.

A COFFIN AND A DOOR

By Jolene Munch Cardoza

A coffin and a door
are about the same size,
width and height.

Each serving roughly the same purpose,
the same protection,
the same business plan.

One is a steady escort
from this room to that,
from outside to inside,
exit to entry.

The other, a sturdy safeguard
of metal and steel
or wood or bulletproof element,
providing the means
for you to disappear
from this world
and move into
the next.

A coffin and a donut
are not the same size,
width nor height.

Each serving a different purpose,
different needs,
different shapes.

One keeping the body
preserved
from outside interference,
the rain and wind,
the sun and sleet,
a box not one can devour.

The other, a reliable treat,
slowly decaying the body,
reversing the health,
suppressing the craving.

A coffee and a doorknob
are two different tools
used by the same body.

Each serving its own purpose,
a unique taste,

a unique function.

One keeping you moving,
running through your veins,
a cheap and easy fuel
for the living.

The other sees you coming and,
in anticipation of your handshake,
turns silently,
slowing you down.

Howard Winn's poetry and fiction has been published recently in such journals as *Dalhousie Review*, *Galway Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Descant (Canada)*, *Antigonish Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Chaffin Review*, *Evansville Review*, and *BlueLine*. Winn's B. A. is from Vassar College and his M. A. is from the Writing Program of Stanford University. His doctoral work was done at N.Y.U. Winn a SUNY faculty member.

AFTERMATH

By Howard Winn

The house is empty,
even of sound.
The widow watches
the winter outside
and feels the winter inside.
The potted plants
bloom in a false spring
in the bay window.
The children call now
but they are away
and living their lives.
The grandchildren
are back in school
and have new lives
to explore and to learn.
Friends have called
and talked of lunch.
They have rallied,
but they also have
lives and duties,
facing the need to get on
with what time is left.
At the end she is alone
as all will be.

Liza Marshtein is a rising senior in Charleston, South Carolina. She has been writing since she was eight years old and thought this would be a good chance to have some poems noticed.

NATURE

By Liza Marshtein

The Earth is a golf ball
Painted with blues, reds, whites, greens
A world full of wonder
Wonders that have always stood the test of time
Natural beauty rings as the winds chime
Waterfalls are the wonder walls
Cool water I find serene
A strong current pulling me under
Hidden away for years, marveled at when found
The simple truths that make the earth go round
Down, down the lava falls
In the sun, lava sheens
Rebuild and lava asunders
Burning, then settling, the flow is done
And just like its flow, lava had its run
In contrast to heat, there's a shawl
Cold, white, an icy figurine
Melting, glaciers going under
No longer the ice queen, the water seeps up
Running over, what happened Arctic cup?
Pulling in the strong current
Wet, grainy sand soaks all the coasts
Dark and clear, water flows
Cotton candy sunset sinking lower
Apollo hands the sun to the moon knower
Winds whistle, the clouds are reverent
Floating by, the breeze boasts
Down, down, down, falls the icy white snow

Pattie Flint is an uprooted Seattle native toughing it out in Scotland binding books by hand. She has been published in *Five [Quarterly]*, *Hippocampus* and *TAB*, amongst others. She is currently working on her MFA at Cedar Crest College.

HOME AS PEOPLE

By Pattie Flint

I miss the way
I used to miss things.
I can't stop writing
about people and
love like walking
cliches talking to
myself in stanzas
is a poor excuse
for poorer poetry.
When did life become
the dark and when
did home become
people I can't stop
writing about.

Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time she has either reading or writing. Her works have appeared in numerous publications and her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web. Her debut novel, *The Rose Master*, was published in 2014 and was called a “strong and satisfying effort” by Publishers Weekly.

REASON

By Valentina Cano

I've lost most of my grip on this
My hands have cracked
and weakened into moonlit mollusks
that cannot see a reason
to latch on to this free-falling anchor.

FOR THE DEAD BIRD

By Valentina Cano

There is a bird carcass in the park,
opened up like a gift,
ragged edges of skin like wrapping paper,
stained black with blood.
One wing is extended upward,
a monolith among the grass,
as if reaching for a sky
it'll never find again.

Vincent Klein is 30 years old, and recently divorced. He is a Paralegal in the United States Navy, and currently resides in Guam with his German Shepherd/Labrador Retriever, Sammy, named after Samantha from I Am Legend. He has been writing poetry since he was 16 years old, and draws much of his inspiration from hip-hop culture. His greatest inspirations in his work are his heart, and *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, a book of Tupac Amaru Shakur's poetry that was published after his death. His recent works chronicle his struggle to win the heart of the love of his life, despite having to overcome obstacles at every turn.

MY HEART'S CRUSADE

By Vincent Klein

Dreaming of your smile,
As I gaze upon the night sky,
I find myself pondering how,
Because I already know why,

Entangled with emotions,
Both of Love and hate,
The threat of a looming evil,
Has revealed my true fate,

No cause more exemplary,
No heart more pure,
No reason other than Love,
For the strength to endure,

This shall be my defining moment,
A virtuous task at hand,
Praying for the conviction to overcome,
I make my final stand,

Even in good fortune,
My heart has never known such defeat,
Because what now grows here,
Comes from the most resilient seed,

In an effort to nurse it back to health,
The promise has already been made,
Because mending your broken heart,
Has become my noble crusade,

No other stakes so high,
No task so grand,
No greater reward,
Than for you to take my hand,

With you as my queen,
And your princess at our side,
We shall never be lost,
With our hearts as our guide,

Though this cruel world may test us,
And place obstacles in our path,
With Love on our side,
We'll have everything we need to have.

Benjamin Schmitt's poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Grist Journal*, *Solo Novo*, *The Monarch Review*, *Blue Lyra Review*, *Packintown Review*, and elsewhere. His first book was published in 2013 by Kelsay Books. It is entitled *The Global Conspiracy to Get You in Bed*. He currently lives in Seattle with his wife where he teaches workshops to both children and adults.

BUTTON

for Aaron

By Benjamin Schmitt

My youth was spent
suffering from fantasies
of old age, lonely as I communicated
with the mocking world.
Now I live for
a single button
inside an enormous and otherwise empty chest
surrounded by a shadowy thicket.
Birds call out in the night,
drunks ramble,
the moon takes a swing at me
for joking about his mother.
My hope is in the button
plain and plastic.
It is all that is left.
Through the holes of this button
I weave my loss
until I have designed a garment.
This clothing
brought to my muse,
most gifted tailor,
she takes the measurements
and fits every inch
until an aspect of the glory, power, and humility appears
but only for a moment can these threads
contain the semblance.
The form disappears,
the button endures beside me.
My hope is in the button.

Rick Hartwell is a retired middle school teacher (remember the hormonally-challenged?) living in Southern California. He believes in the succinct, that the small becomes large; and, like the Transcendentalists and William Blake, that the instant contains eternity. Given his “druthers,” if he’s not writing, Rick would rather still be tailing plywood in a mill in Oregon. He can be reached at rdhartwell@gmail.com.

TIME’S SCARS

By Richard Hartwell

Time is a murky application of
geometry to psychology,
a geometric ray, starting from
a point definite in space
extending outward, linearly,
definitely, straight to infinity;
time must travel undisturbed,
forward. But we all know
such is not the case.

Time folds and wraps back
upon itself, crisscrosses its
own axis of travel until the
mind rebuses upon itself,
duplicating in fancy what
it could not play in fact;
all have encountered this
duplicity, this counterfeit,
unknowing time’s accuracy.

Facts lie to memory,
recollection’s reality
can be subverted by
truth of actuality; parallel
lines of non-Euclidean
duality cross and double-
cross until rug burns
of personal myth form
protective scars, retold.

Onward drifts a dream,
daring the future to
compress into truth,
yet acknowledging the
past as being unreliable;
yawning abscesses of life,
open wounds of memory,
dictates of guilt liberally
spread across dreams.

Sara Bailey is a native of Arkansas and she earned her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Central Arkansas. Bailey then went on to earn my Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (Fiction Focus) at Murray State University in Kentucky. Although she loves fiction, she has written poetry since she was in high school. Every once in awhile, the mood moves her to put pen to paper. One of Bailey's poems was published in the University of Central Arkansas' student literary publication, *The Vortex*. I had another published in a tiny publication that was ran out of the city's newspaper, *The Log Cabin Democrat*, in 2015.

GLACIEM

By Sara Bailey

All is not as quiet
As one thinks it should be.

Snow is ice, but ice
Is not snow;
It does not blanket.
It coats.
It does not muffle.
It crackles like frozen fire
And it burns.

A clear, glossy glaze
Sparkling so in the sun,
Not as mundane as
A drab diamond.
Frosted trees bow humbly
Amidst the spun glass
Barbed wire of a wild,
Twisted tangle of weeds.

The luster does not blind;
It beckons.
Nature's prism bending
The sun's benign rays
Like the boughs bend,
Until they don't.

Creaks and cracks,
A limb, not amputated,
But torn from the trunk
Without bloodshed.
Frozen blood does not flow.

Torn and tattered,
The trees stand,
Naked as a bone,
Solemn and white.
Splinters strewn about
Like cruel confetti.

Tyler Pufpaff has been previously published in *Torrid Literature Journal XIII*. He writes from experience and seek new experiences every day. He is currently studying social ecology in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Two

By Tyler Pufpaff

Two molded by different hands, by artists that never knew the other.
Masterpieces were made with similar brushes yet different shades.
Shades that consisted of the same paints, diversified their pieces.
Pieces that started out the same like,

Two dominoes falling into the same track.
They came from separate ends but were both pushed in the same direction.
Directions that fated them to meet, uniting their souls.
Souls that would resonate together like,

Two best friends singing to the radio at excessive volumes.
Driving over speed limits unaware of the world around them.
They want to see it all, to have the experience of a lifetime,
A lifetime full of opportunity, and so they seize it like,

Two persistently changing their future.

Bailey Workman loves writing and despises injustice. She has been published three previous times.

MEMORIAM

By Bailey Workman

Dying gracefully is the cruelest oxymoron.

You say death, and instantly I see the man I viewed
strong and eternal as any California redwood,
reduced to confused rambling.

The one who amazed me with the capacity of his stomach,
wasting away from lack of any appetite, all stolen by Death.

The hands that threw countless footballs and baseballs,
turned skin and bones.

And I am forced to face the reality
that the man I hold as a standard is withering away,
and there is no such thing as dying gracefully.

B. Diehl is a poet from Phillipsburg, NJ. He discovered his passion for reading and writing at a very young age (age five to be exact) and all the way from kindergarten to his last year in college, he wrote short fiction stories in his spare time. However, in January, 2013, Diehl found his inner-poet...and he has been writing poetry, non-stop, ever since.

HAROLD PICKED A WINNER

By B. Diehl

Standing in line at a Starbucks with you
after a night of uncharacteristically heavy drinking ---
scotch on the rocks and Jägerbomb-dessert.

Your friends are with us and keep talking about
how your one sorority-sister has a big nose
and looks a bit like Squidward from SpongeBob SquarePants.

But with you by my side, I don't mind the gossip.
I don't even mind that the cashier is openly picking his nose;
I don't imagine brownish-green boogers, floating in my latté.
So long as you're laughing, I feel just fine.

There's just something about you, sweetheart.
I saw it last night, and even now, when I'm sober.
It's like your smile has a sound
that fills my inner-demons' ears ---
and they can't even hear when the summoner calls.

While standing in this line, I don't mind it's slow pace.
I'll stand here all day long, listening to you laugh
at your friends' cheesy jokes (stolen from Twitter
or some popular movie about college partygoers).

The line moves up; it's almost our turn.
And the cashier --- "Harold," according to his nametag ---
is still digging for gold (or maybe itching his brain).

I look back at your face ---
such little makeup, such natural charm ---
and I take out my wallet, happy to pay
(despite my usual reluctance to spending).

At the register, Harold just picked a winner.

And for once in my life,
maybe I did, too.

Philip C. Kolin has published seven collection of poems, most recently *Reading God's Handwriting* (Kaufmann Publishing, 2012); *In the Custody of Words* (Franciscan Univ. Press, 2013), and *Departures: A Collection of Poems* (2015 Negative Capability Press). His poems have appeared in *Christianity and Literature*, *Spiritus*, *The Windhover*, *The Cresset*, *America*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *The Other Journal*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, etc.

AFTERLIFE

By Philip C. Kolin

This mid winter morning comes
with a wooing sun to waken
azaleas and Sweet William
but all her dreams have been
postponed until mummy winter passes

wrapped tight in frost and forgetfulness,
the icy narcotics of age locking her behind
barred doors and buzzer bells.

Perhaps when her memory
brightens again and flowers escape
stark stalks embalmed in this void of tears

a new world will arrive
with butterfly bush and quilted leaves
spreading their spray of color.

Then at last she can pat on rouge
and honeycomb her lips promising
the man she loves an afterlife.

Lisbon Tawanda Chigwenjere is a young poet from Harare, Zimbabwe. He was born a twin on the 28th of May. He is currently pursuing an honors degree in Politics and Public Management at the Midlands State University in Gweru, Zimbabwe. Three of his poems, "Days of My Youth", "The Tongue of the Learned", and "Fight, Soldier, Fight", have appeared in *Enter the Gateway*, a Christian poetry anthology published by TL Publishing Group, Florida. His poems have also appeared in Zimbabwean newspapers such as *The Sunday Mail* and *News Day*, and in the official newsletter of the *Midlands State University - The Pulse*. He has been published both in print and media.

SIR LISBON LOVES EVE

By Lisbon Tawanda Chigwenjere

Sir Lisbon loves Eve,
He doesn't want her to leave,
He loves her with all his heart,
She is the inspiration to his art,
In all his poems he writes about Eve,
Asking her not to leave,
His art will only die,
If she decides to wave him good bye

Sir Lisbon and Eve will be hand in glove,
Because Sir Lisbon is madly in love,
Though as far as Bulawayo she might be,
She will always be loved by Lee,
Yea, do not stop loving her Sir,
Because your lady is lovely and fair,
Sir Lisbon loves Eve,
He doesn't want her to leave

Ed Higgins teaches creative writing and literature at George Fox University, south of Portland, Oregon. His poems and short fiction have appeared in numerous print and online journals including: *Monkeybicycle*, *Tattoo Highway*, *Pen Pusher*, *Word Riot*, *qarrtsilun*, and *Blue Print Review*, among others. He and his wife live on a small organic farm where they raise a menagerie of animals including chickens, ducks, Jersey steers, pigs, Oberhasli milk goats, two whippets, a manx barn cat (who doesn't care for the whippets), a pair of Bourbon Red turkeys (King Strut and Nefra-Turkey), and an alpaca named Machu-Picchu.

DAFFODILS

By Ed Higgins

up sprung. blossoms clumped.
stems tangled, trumpets yellow.
shouting. blue sky. to us.
wind touched. gently swaying.
breeze dancing. narcissistic
announcement.
spring's arriving.

Jim Landwehr enjoys writing creative non-fiction, fiction, and poetry. His poetry collection, *Written Life*, was released by eLectio Publishing in March of 2015. His first book, *Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir* was published by eLectio Publishing in 2014. He has non-fiction stories published in *Main Street Rag*, *Prairie Rose Publications*, *Boundary Waters Journal*, *Forge Journal*, *MidWest Outdoors Magazine* and others. His poetry has been featured in *Versé Wisconsin*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Echoes Poetry Journal*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas Magazine*, the *Wisconsin Poets Calendar*, *Off the Coast Poetry Journal*, and many others. Jim lives and works in Waukesha, Wisconsin with his wife Donna, and their two children Sarah and Ben.

SACKED

By Jim Landwehr

Aging rains a mist on his heart

 pray it away

 wish it away

 blow it away

Dawn invades

between the cracks of drawn curtains

meant to postpone tomorrow or

perhaps awaken to a simpler yesterday.

When trouble was not

Fears were misguided

Next year a long-distance dream

Life's eloquent riddle nags

asking questions of its vacant host

Where are you taking me?

Why this way, not that?

Wouldn't it be fun if...

So a deal is struck

A peaceable accord with God

Fountains of memories well up

Mountains of hope begin as hills

Boys running bring back lost days

He moves on, carrying the sack.

Brooklyn-writer **Charlie Weeks** composes with any sort of liquid poison soaking in his mind. Whose casually 'aw-shucks' demeanor has always got some need of expression where paper is needed to catch those words before they get lost. All so some audience out there can see what he's got to see in these unique times. His propensity for spontaneous means of expression has been aided by an openness to hold onto the muse for long enough to create something meaningful. With a spare pen and cocktail napkin always handy, he keeps this habit alive. His debut chapbook *Silhouettes Over Waterfalls* is due to be released this spring by Finishing Line Press. www.charliewykes.com.

A SPIRITUAL

By Charlie Weeks

Summed up moments
Some didn't allow
New seasons to come forth

With a triumphant torch
Of survival retorting revivals
Spoken too soon to be in tune

While grey solace lays astray
Inside squalid bedrooms
As night lights served no use

Justin Rose grew up in northern WI where he developed an early love of literature. He loved the classics before he could read, studying the illustrations in children's abridgements of novels like *Moby Dick*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *The Invisible Man*. As soon as he could read, he devoured dozens of such abridgements, often reading them through in a single sitting. As he grew and neared high school, he began to seek out the real versions of the abridgements that had amused him as a child. This began his love affair with written words. Justin attempted his first novel in grade school and since then has never stopped writing. He later went on to study writing in high school and currently majors in Professional Writing at Pensacola Christian College. He has been published in *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Apocrypha and Abstractions*, and *Teen Ink*.

FILL MY HEART (SONNET)

By Justin Rose

Beneath a sky of sparkling gems, I lie.
With gaze transfixed by sundry blazing fires,
I dream up worlds that round each fire fly.
Each world I craft and steep in love and ire.
None see the wonders that I see, none know
The joys, the tears, that form the thousand souls
I place upon imaginary globes.
I live through those I craft, their thoughts, their pulse.
But broken men of shattered shards, those torn
From soul that's mine, can hardly fill the hole
Inside the soul that gave them life. What's born
Of me cannot replace that which you stole.
To fill my void with more than me, I start
To dare a deeper dream—to win your heart.

Erren Geraud Kelly is a pushcart nominated poet based in Portland, Oregon. He has been writing for 25 years and has over 100 publications in print and online in such publications as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mudfish*, *Poetry Magazine* (online), *Ceremony*, *Cactus Heart*, *Similar Peaks*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Poetry Salzburg* and other publications. His most recent publication was in *In Our Own Words*, a Generation X poetry anthology; he was also published in other anthologies such as *Fertile Ground*, *Beyond The Frontier* and other anthologies. His work can also be seen on Youtube under the "Gallery Cabaret," links. He also the author of the chapbook, *Disturbing The Peace*, on Night Ballet Press. He received his B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He loves to read and travel, having visited 45 states and Canada and Europe. The themes in his writings vary, but he has always had a soft spot for subjects and people who are not in the mainstream.

AURORA BOREALIS (NORTHERN LIGHTS)

By Erren Geraud Kelly

sometimes, you are visible,
a spirit dancing in the night. I'm sirius
perhaps, you are a solar wind;
I surrender to your magnetic force
as you leave
a trail of stars behind;
they form a pattern in the sky,
revealing your shape. To
know your beauty,
is to see the colors in the night
like the spirits, you change colors
frequently, from pink, to green, to red.
they evolve into a geomagnetic storm;
i'm blinded by your science

holmes or sam spade have tried to
analyze your glow,
the electrical storm, you leave behind
yields a cinematic sky, even the most
trained eye of a stargazer cannot decipher.
even if agatha christie,
could solve the mystery of you,
she would be
reeling like me,
in the colors of electrons,

STARS

By Erren Geraud Kelly

Stars hover over me like the memory of you, they
Hold me captive, like a word from your lips
A vision that will never leave me
Nor does it dim in its intensity; in the
Night ; stars explode like a smile
On your face, like a picture of you
Now stored away, but your face lingers

Brilliant as a tune playing in the background,
Rich as the planets in orbit
A planet from far away is
Dwarfed by a huge moon, like your memory
Bearing down on me , a benevolent goddess
Even as I watch the stars align and
Reveal you, you are a wonder of the age;
Revel in your light, as you rain your love on me
Yielding blessings from a fertile heart

Jacob Erin-Cilberto, originally from Bronx, NY, now resides in Carbondale, Illinois. Erin-Cilberto has been writing and publishing poetry since 1970. He currently teaches at John A. Logan and Shawnee Community colleges in Southern Illinois. His work has appeared in numerous small magazines and journals including: *Café Review*, *Skyline Magazine*, *Hudson View*, *Wind Journal*, *Pegasus*, *Parnassus* and others. Erin-Cilberto also writes reviews of poetry books for *Chiron Review*, *Skyline Review*, *Birchbrook Press* and others. He has reviewed books by B.Z Niditch, Michael Miller, Barry Wallenstein, Marcus Rome, musician Tom Maclear and others. *Intersection Blues* his lucky 13th book of poetry is available through Water Forest Press, Stormville, NY. His previous two books an *Abstract Waltz* and *Used Lanterns* are also available through Water Forest Press. His books are also available on *BarnesandNoble.com* and *Amazon.com* as well as Goodreads. Erin-Cilberto has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry in 2006-2007-2008 and again in 2010. He teaches poetry workshops for Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

NOT THE "REAL COMFORTABLE" KIND

By Jacob Erin-Cilberto

time shrinks
like a thrice washed pair of Levis
pockets heavy with memory
cuffs scuffed from experience
color faded like ancient skin

stains, the freckles accumulated
from years of existence,
zipper a bit rusted
like the heart too often
left out in the rain
hanging on the line to dry out

emotional aches and pains
too delicate to put in the dryer
which would only shrink
time faster

it's ephemeral enough as it is
and age seems something
some of us are not wearing
too well to begin with,

but when our autumn
has its clearance sale
if the jeans still fit at all

we'll wear them one more time
before our body is given
to Goodwill...

BOARDING PASS

By Jacob Erin-Cilberto

fly me into your friendly skies
my wings are singed
my flight pattern rejected
by another's control tower

auto pilot gets really monotonous
can't escape the doldrums of staggering heartbeats
i am constantly tripping on my own cloud of pain
yet i feel that even your rain

could make me blush again
like a painted sunset
ridges of blue-gray bordered
in red amazement

tuck me beneath your propeller breaths
sing me a wind song
and i will fasten my seat belt of trust
to your beautiful motion

as love rises into the stratosphere
higher than any heart
ever thought
it could reach.

FICTION

THE MISSOURI TORNADO

By Stephen M. Hood

Stephen Hood lives in Chicago, Illinois where he works as an editor and writer. Most recently his work was seen in *Burrow Press* and *The General Correspondent*. After working as a sports journalist for CBS Hood transitioned to playwriting where his play "When the Fall is All That's Left" was produced Off-Broadway. Hood is a graduate of Jacksonville University in Florida.

After the Tornado came and demolished enough of the town, visitors were as common as rats in garbage. My neighbor Tal Bronson had seen three tornadoes in his lifetime—not one like this, but—for the people at the bookends of the country, most of them only knew what they saw on TV, so that's what our contribution came to be for a few days: a bad tornado that killed a few dozen people.

After high school I knew college wasn't for me, so I got a good job with Shem, a classmate of mine whose father had a company, working construction—highways mostly but sometimes building houses, usually at least an hour away in the better parts of Missouri. It was a nice job, the pay was livable, the hours were early on both ends, up before dawn, done before dinner, and the people I worked with became friends quickly. I noticed there seemed to be a lot of angry Americans around the country out of work; I certainly wasn't one of them.

A year in I hadn't made enough money yet to get a car myself so I either borrowed from my girl or Shem or one of the other guys I worked with would pick me up and we'd drive out to the site. I lived with my folks still. Saving up for a place of my own seemed like a good idea, especially since I'd get married one day, maybe even to Cheryl my girlfriend. She was a recent development and we had no immediate plans to move in together, but the way things were going I could tell it'd be the thing to do at some point. I was smart, I saved.

The tornado came on a Tuesday around dusk. I've heard people say it sounds like a freight train, which is about half correct. The devil is driving that freight train, screaming joy and curses as he rolls through the town. It hit everything.

By then Cheryl and I had been together for about two months, give or take some drunken hookups before hand, and we were having dinner at her folks place. They were out of town visiting relatives near Springfield, Illinois. Cheryl had a passion for cooking, even though she worked at an Applebees, a job that came down on her like a crushing weight. She had a dream of going to the Culinary Institute of America, or some place like it, and opening up a restaurant in this town, the kind of restaurant people would travel to and talk about on travel TV shows. There was one guy on the Food Network who went around the country to places in Idaho and Nebraska and all he did was eat at the best local joints. They were always packed full of people. That was her dream.

That night, Tuesday night, she was going to make a three-course meal. As far as I have to travel to build houses was about as far as she had to travel to get the right ingredients, but she said it was worth it. I don't know what it was she was starting to make or what the end result was going to be but the smell was enough to fall in love with. While she prepared her ingredients in the kitchen and I stood on the porch drinking what may have been my fourth glass of wine in my entire life, enjoying it entirely, the sky turned yellow and the air stopped for a moment before dropping a few degrees. There was no way to not notice a yellow sky and a sudden chill, but when everything seems so perfect an excuse can be made to right everything that should seem wrong. The air was still, the sky yellow, but there were no clouds in front of me. Shrugging curiously I walked inside from the front porch to tell Cheryl about it. Her head was down, looking at the chopping board. Behind her, through the window in the kitchen there was blackness.

I stopped and stared and she turned to me. "What?"

"Well, shit. That's not normal," I said.

Cheryl looked at me for a second, insulted, thinking I was talking about her food, and then I pointed outside. She turned and we stood there, apart, staring at the sky, nothing much to see but blackness. While we were staring, the cone of the tornado began to drop from the sky like an arm reaching down to snatch up the town and then spit it out. It was as if someone had torn a hole in the sky and all the contents of hell were violently leaking down towards the earth.

Suddenly Cheryl screeched, "Is that a fucking tornado?" We both knew it was. Though we'd never seen one in real life

we'd seen enough pictures. "Where's the Goddamn siren?"

Speak of the devil and he shall appear. The siren blared across the sky and then was swallowed up by the sounds of howling wind. It's what I imagine World War II was like when the bombers were about to fly overhead in Britain, that was the sound of the siren being drowned out. With the black of the clouds and the dark swirling brown of the tornado it was hard to tell how far away it was or which direction it was moving.

There was no basement to run to, no tornado shelter. I grabbed Cheryl by the arm, squeezing hard enough to leave a bruise above her elbow, my fingers imprinting themselves on her, and we ran to the bathroom. As soon as we started running the sound began, the devil screaming behind us, hunting us. We tumbled into the bathroom, into the tub when things began shaking. As the ground moved beneath us and the sound got louder, me holding Cheryl, she closed the shower curtain. I held her deep against me, wondering why she closed the curtain. Why? The screaming got louder and closer, the ground moving quickly beneath us. I remember thinking that it was strange the power was still on and wondering if I should turn the light off.

Cheryl and I were holding on to each other, looking up, praying and hoping to be passed over. The power went and a split second after that the roof was ripped off like the metal lid of a can of beans, stuck at one tiny point and twisting to get free only for a moment until it was finally torn and thrown away. Still looking up, both of us were silent, holding on as the tornado swept by us. I closed my eyes; Cheryl grabbed my neck, her nails digging deeper into my skin. A shotgun blast of air shoved my body on top of hers and as I lay there I felt my feet being pulled upward for a moment then pushed back to the base of the tub.

We lay there for half an hour, maybe more. Cheryl was breathing beneath me, spasms of tears flowing. I got onto my knees and looked at her. She pleaded, "Oh God," then descended into an uncontrollable sob. I picked her up hoping to calm her and carried her out of what was left of the house. Nothing—nothing was really left except for the floor and the bottom of a few walls, though I hadn't noticed until I got outside. And when I did, Cheryl in my arms, carrying her across what was once the threshold of her parents home, which they had lived in only a few years, I saw all the nothing that was left, just an alley of destruction. I was thinking, *thank God her parents were out of town, thank God, thank God.*

The sky cleared and became a pleasant dusky orange; the ground was dry and littered with debris. We reached an untouched square foot of the lawn that had been mostly ripped up and I let Cheryl stand, her head still buried in my arm. I wrapped my arms around her as I looked at the street. It was entirely silent.

Then, one by one, the living came out onto their lawns, into the street, onto the sidewalk. A man carried his two little girls and his wife followed carrying a puppy in her arms. They looked around, amazed. Ray Beckwood, Cheryl's neighbor and a man who came out of retirement to open a Wendy's after his wife died, walked out of his flattened house and stood looking down the path of destruction as if he were expecting a guest. Dozens of people came out of the skeleton remains of their houses, all looking at each other thankful that no one was hurt.

Relief was interrupted by a scream, a wailing scream of death. A woman stumbling over a pile of rubble, her face dripping with rivers of blood, came out to her part of the street screaming for help, screaming and screaming. I told Cheryl not to move and ran over to her, Ray moving as fast as he could and another guy who lived across the street; we all sprinted toward the woman.

She was young, in her thirties maybe, and her husband was trapped, she thought, in the rubble of their new home. Ray lifted the woman by putting her arm around his neck and they hobbled out, away from the splintered wood and shattered glass. The other guy and I started moving planks of board and broken pieces of furniture, digging, moving, hoping to find this man.

One by one more screams came from every end of the street. They all carried into the sky, a swirling of fear and sorrow. More people alive, more people missing, more people dead. We kept digging, moving around different areas of the rubble, looking for a sign, or trying to hear a sound. I stopped if I thought I heard something and put up my finger, but every time I did, every time there was the possibility that something was moving beneath me, I gave the woman false hope and she'd weep again.

The remaining dusk light had faded and Ray got a neighbor to bring his car around to use for light and I saw others down the street doing the same thing. People like me and this other guy and Ray all trying to find people we didn't know. Not knowing who we were looking for or where they were or in what condition, we dug and dug. Then the other guy found him. I didn't look, I knew he was dead. The guy called me over quietly, "Hey, come 'ere," and it was certain. I never checked a man's pulse before but I did it like I'd seen it happen on TV and I felt nothing. Looking over at Ray who was with the woman, who was screaming less now, I shook my head. She saw me and I lost feeling in my legs and arms. She went peacefully quiet.

Ray told us to carry the body out and we did. The woman just sat there, silently, looking down at her dead husband. There was nothing to scream about or cry about anymore, I guess. He was dead.

We had worked at it for about an hour, with Cheryl standing in the middle of the street, holding her neck with one hand as if someone had just stolen a necklace off her. I walked over and put my hands on her shoulders. She didn't look at me, only said, "I wonder if anyone knows yet."

I didn't know where to go but we started walking towards town. Ray was with the woman and when we passed him he said, "I've never seen one like this." I figured he meant the tornado. The woman didn't seem to hear him as she looked down at her dead husband. I could've sworn I saw her smile a little bit as she moved his shaggy hair off his forehead.

We walked, every street illuminated by car lights. I thought with all the cars that made it through okay maybe we all should've just taken cover in the backseat of cars, turned on the radio and waited it out while it picked off our homes one by one. It was something I felt guilty about as it crossed my mind and I wondered what Cheryl was thinking. I turned to her and said we should be thankful that we're alive and her parents were out of town.

"Yeah," she gave a half committed answer. "We're bound to know some people." I knew what she meant. We made it to town, a building destroyed next to a building in perfect condition. The Presbyterian Church destroyed, the movie theater fine. The Salvation Army was also fine but the grocery store was flattened. There wasn't really a plan to the path of the tornado. It went out to destroy and it didn't matter what was saved or not.

Unlike the residential streets outside of town, everything here was dark. No cars, no lights, except the occasional flash-light, nothing really. It made sense, not a lot of people lived in town. We came up to where the grocery store used to be and we saw Ralph, the owner, standing outside his shop looking around at the untouched buildings then back at his store.

We went up to him, he never looked at us, even when I quietly said his name. He folded his arms and raised his hand on his chin. "What do you know," he said with resignation, "Salvation Army made it through. Good for them." It was as if he'd just lost a hand at poker by someone else's dumb luck. "I mean, nothing. Not a scratch." He stopped and nudged a piece of plywood with his foot. "Where are people going to get their food?" There was no sign of distress in his voice.

"You okay, Ralph?" I asked meaning him and his family. He turned and surveyed us both.

"Yeah, I'm fine, we're all fine. You guys?"

We were and we kept walking until we heard the grumble of a generator coming from down the street. Peering from behind the movie theater was a light like a beacon guiding us to communal safety. We walked towards it like so many night insects and found a group of people standing around a few work lights being powered by a gas generator outside the K-12 school. Maybe two-dozen or so people were in a semi-circle around the mayor who seemed to be bleeding down her arm.

We got closer and heard her speaking to the crowd, "...we get more and then we can get everyone in the school. The fire department has been destroyed but we called out to our neighbors, looks like some were hit too." There was a collective groan of sympathy. "Right now we have to work together. Find your loved ones..." She kept talking and people were nodding their heads. More responsibility than she had ever had or wanted, she was ready to act.

Everyone followed her instructions to get water, more generators, help those who needed it, and anything else that might need doing. The ambulances and fire trucks came a couple hours later, some from about an hour away. Everything got loud and bright, around midnight helicopters were flying overhead and there were lots of people in town we'd never seen before. Cheryl and I camped out in the gym of the school on wrestling mats, her head on my chest. That night I was worried the mats would give us worms. My thoughts were crowded with the immediate worries. I slept eventually.

When we woke up it was because of the light coming through the gym windows and the feeling of staying in someone else's place, that uncomfortable unwelcome feeling. Cheryl was awake, still lying on me. We got up and walked outside into a mass of people. Immediately outside the school were dozens of television cameras, vans, helicopters flying overhead, people hustling about.

We didn't know where we were going but we made our way towards her parent's home again. As we passed the camera crews, some reading CBS, CNN, FoxNews, MSNBC and so on, we overheard bits of their broadcasts: Ninety dead, fifty missing; dozens missing, most feared dead; town flattened by a deadly tornado; worst tornado on record. Nothing else could be said, really, and this was news, I suppose. With that many dead, I was sure to know some of them.

The destruction looked worse in daylight, dirtier and sinful. The grocery store was the worst mess, all that food everywhere, the smell of rotting seafood and dairy emanating from the rubble. Ralph wasn't standing there anymore, though I expected him to be. Behind us people were pulling away boards and debris from where the Presbyterian Church once was and then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

My mother was standing behind me, her hand on her mouth, crying, my father behind her. We hugged, and then they hugged Cheryl. In the aftermath I had completely forgotten to worry about my parents, I just assumed that they'd be all right. My entire life nothing ever happened to them, why would it have been different this time? I pulled my parents towards me in both arms and I tried to wash away the guilt that was sweeping through me.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

By Or Amit

Or Amit lives in Cologne, Germany.

A red SUV cuts me off and I hiss out a "mother fucker" through clenched teeth. I wish I could have a moment alone with that driver. Then I remember: damn—I did it again! I push the little button on the side of my wristwatch and hear the click. That's 58 this week.

Morgan, my therapist, says negative thoughts cause my anxiety and depression. To control these thoughts, she gave me a small counter to attach to my watch. Every time I have a negative thought, I press the button. I count Sundays through Saturdays and then we discuss my progress on Mondays.

Fifty-eight this week, and it's barely two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. Morgan says I should shoot for ten percent fewer negative thoughts every week until I have fewer than three a day. This week's goal is to have fewer than sixty negative thoughts.

I get home and park the car. I'm starving, and there's not a clean plate to be found in the kitchen, which my housemate Ben has left in ruins again. I take a deep breath: it only takes a minute to wash a plate, and I don't need any more clicks today.

I have a late lunch in front of the television. The Whopper tastes great, the Grey Goose is smooth, *M*A*S*H* is on the tube and I feel so good I'm almost happy. Perhaps I can stay under sixty this week, after all.

I take a nap. I'm tired, and this evening I'm going on a first date with Ella, the gorgeous grad student from the lab next door. Why she agreed to go out with me, I'll never know. I only asked her because Morgan said I needed to practice talking to women, and I figured there would be little anxiety involved when I know the answer in advance. Then Ella said yes and screwed everything up. There's plenty of opportunity for negative thoughts when you're on a first date with a beautiful woman.

I wake up, shower, get dressed. We're meeting at a bar at 9:30. The drive is smooth and I get there ten minutes early. I order a White Russian and wait for her. Now it's 9:40 already, and she's still not here. The bitch stood me up. She's decided I'm not good enough for her.

Fifty-nine.

What would Morgan say if she were here? *Take it easy. Maybe she's just stuck in traffic. Inventing negative scenarios adds to your anxiety. Relax. Think positively.*

Ten more minutes pass. Maybe she's had an emergency. Just when I'm about to leave Ella shows up. Her face is radiant with that cute, nerdy smile of hers.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she apologizes immediately. "My sister wouldn't let me off the phone. She just goes on and on."

"That's okay. I just got here myself," I lie.

She sits and orders a martini.

Always show interest in what people do. People like talking about themselves, and it shows you care.

"So, how's that new genetic network modeling project going?" I ask, trying to conceal my utter contempt for computational biology.

"Oh, it's going great. We're starting on a new grant next week, so we'll be able to do some really neat stuff. How about you? Was that paper of yours accepted?"

I lie and tell her it was. Discussing the second revision request may cost me another click.

"Wanna play pool?" she asks.

"Sure," I reply. I love pool, even though I stink.

I try to restrain my competitive nature while we play. I always play to win, but now I have to make small talk during the game. It's confusing, but also quite pleasant. We talk about our favorite movies, plans for the future, everything. I lose track of time.

"You know, I was kind of surprised that you asked me out," she says suddenly. "I've been thinking of asking you out a few times, but you always seem so indifferent and self-focused, so I didn't think you'd be interested."

She wanted to ask me out? I think that for the first time ever, I feel that thing people call self-esteem. Now I have to think fast. What do I say that sounds neither too desperate nor too apathetic?

Be natural. Ask her something. Show interest in her private life. Show her you care.

"So, you said you were on the phone with your sister for a long time. Everything okay?"

"Oh, she just has one of her mood swings again. You know, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, that whole thing. Her shrink told her that she needed to modify her thought processes. She's just a big baby, if you ask me."

My hands tighten around the cue.

Be polite. Show empathy. She doesn't know. People can't read your mind. Don't try to read theirs.

"Well, you know, depression and anxiety are illnesses just like any other physical..."

"Oh, come on!" she cuts me off. "All that self-pity psycho-babble. Positive thinking, learned optimism, cognitive-behavioral whatever. I'm telling you, some people just like to whine."

Don't think negatively. Don't think negatively. Don't think. Don't think. Don't. Stop it. Don't!

A police officer gives me a perfunctory "watch your head" as he lowers me into the squad car. Through the window, I watch the ambulance lights flicker and dissolve into the busy Saturday night traffic. In the background, the officer is blabbing something about attorneys and rights and remaining silent. My hands are cuffed behind my back, but I can somehow bring the left one far enough forward to look at my watch: 12:04 AM, Sunday. The counter next to the dial reads the vaunted number: 59. I did it! Morgan will be so proud of me.

THE CHILD

By Justin Rose

Justin Rose is a twenty year old Wisconsin native in his junior year of college pursuing a Professional Writing degree. Growing up, reading was always one of his passions. He immersed himself from an early age in classic literature, and his love for reading never faded. As he read, he developed the desire to write, to create for others the same wonders that reading created for him. Since the age of twelve, Rose taught himself to write. And, in high school writing classes and his time in college, he has striven to hone the raw skills he's gathered in his own pursuits.

I hear the cries of a child, weeping in fear and confusion. It chills, soaking through my flesh and clinging to the bones beneath. It saturates the air, here in this dark place. More than sound, it melds with substance and emotion. I run forward through scarcely-varying darkness and call out to the child. Life's scattered branches scrape at my legs and waist, slap against my face, bend beneath my forearms. I feel trails of blood trickling sporadically over my body from a dozen gashes. But the pain only drives me forward, makes me search all the harder, infuriates me. Such despair and innocence mingle in that mournful cry. It echoes all about me, filling the confines of my prison.

I spin, my legs catching and snagging on the twisted thorns of regret and turmoil. My feet stir in a blanket of fallen memories, kicking about small eddies of dry, vibrantly-colored past thoughts. But in the current darkness, their colors are a muted grey, their beauty lost. I focus on the voice. It seems familiar, a dimly remembered companion or a long-forgotten friend. I run once more as a clear cry splits the night, vainly striving to reach the sound, to find the lost and helpless child who has wandered into this world of my despair. Perhaps, if I can save him, I can somehow redeem my own lost soul. Perhaps, by finding this hopeless life, I can rekindle purpose even for myself and once more fill this space with the light of meaning's fire.

Another cry splits the night. And by the light of a crescent moon, I glimpse a pale form cowering beneath the bows of a lightning-scarred pine. The tree catches my attention for a moment. My eyes travel down its vertical split, the scar of a lightning bolt. Two sets of initials are carved into the pine's supple bark, my own and those of another. And between them runs the ugly scar, a gulf to forever divide us. For a moment, a burst of starlight fills the sky as memories of a better time return. But they wink out as quickly as they appear and leave behind a deeper black. I focus on the child. I must aid the child.

I kneel down, extending a reassuring hand.

My fingers tap the unyielding face of a simple mirror. I stare at the image inside. I stare at the broken, weeping, infant shell who sits before me. I stare at myself.

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TL Publishing Group is always looking for submissions. We publish 4 issues a year and our journals are available online and in print. When it comes to reviewing a submission, we don't look for a particular theme. We look at the work itself, specifically its message, delivery, and structure. We accept a variety of submissions including: poetry, fiction, and articles. We also accept requests for interviews and book reviews.

All submissions may be uploaded by visiting:

<http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>

We encourage everyone to become familiar with the Torrid Literature Journal first by reading previous editions. This will give writers a general idea of the type of content we look for. Our submission period for the Torrid Literature Journal is year round and our response time varies depending on the volume of submissions received.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@torridliterature.com. We look forward to the reading experience.



Dear Reader,

Survival is the art of continuing to move forward despite any obstacles or challenges that may exist. We can definitely attest to the fact that there has been no shortage of challenges this year. If anything, we've discovered small hurdles in between the big ones that we're trying to get over. Nevertheless, we're appreciative of the path that we've walked because we're stronger at the end of it all.

At the end we are all victorious. Additionally, no victory is too small. They all count so we celebrate every one of them without shame. This is why the writers who appear in our journals so special. They are survivors of what has afflicted them. They've been where the readers are so they don't mind standing out because they're operating in their element. They're striving to speak their truth while they embrace their voice.

With that being said, we hope that you've soaked in every bit of inspiration that these contributing writers have been handing out. We want you to have an abundance of positive energy as you strive to walk in your purpose. We want you feel motivated to follow your own path.

If you've set aside any dreams this year, now is the time to reinstate them. 2015 is coming to a close, so start the next year off right. Grab ahold of what you've been putting off for too long. You've been blessed with visions for a reason. Moreover, you've been blessed with the skill and know-how to help those visions manifest into something more than a just a dream.

Our point is this: you deserve to know where your path is destined to take you. Be brave enough to walk your own path. Victory is waiting for you. Therefore, be encouraged.

We look forward to seeing you again in Volume XVII. Be sure to subscribe to our eNewsletter to receive important updates and breaking news about our publications and fellow writers.

- Editorial Staff



“A coffin and a door are about the same size...” – Jolene Munch Cardoza

“Time folds and wraps back upon itself...” – Richard Hartwell

“Dying gracefully is the cruelest oxymoron...” - Bailey Workman

TL Publishing Group LLC closes out the year with Volume XVI Survivor. The literary material in this publication is guaranteed to leave an impact on the hearts and minds of readers as the writers speak their truth in the way that only they can.

With fresh and familiar voices gracing the pages of this publication, readers will quickly fall in love with the extraordinary way in which the writers share moments from their lives. Readers will laugh, cry, and even hold their breath as they journey from poem to poem and story to story.

Every writer has a unique signature and through the Torrid Literature Journal, TL Publishing Group is continuing to compile the best selections of literature that reveal the benefits of artistic expression. Readers will finish this publication feeling eager to embrace their own voice and craft.

TL Publishing Group remains true to their mission as they continue to expand their platform for writers. From publishing and editing services to literary events and contests, they are diligently and consistently pouring into the culture of literature. Supporters of artistic expression are encouraged to stick close with TL Publishing Group as they continue on their journey.

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