Editorial advisors
Melissa Berninger
Mary Kennan Herbert
Josh LaMore
Jake Matkov
Cecilia Muhlstein
Morgan Schulz
Michael Sohn
Lewis Warsh

Cover photograph


Downtown Brooklyn: A Journal of Writing is published by the English Department at LIU Brooklyn. We thank Gale Stevens Haynes (LIU Vice-President of Operations) & Dean David Cohen of the Richard L. Conolly College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for their encouragement and steadfast support over the years. Issues 1-22 of the magazine are available in the Periodicals Collection of the LIU Brooklyn Library and in the Little Magazine Collection of Memorial Library at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Issues 23 and 24 and this issue are available only via The Longest Island (the English Department’s blog).

LIU encourages freedom of expression. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not of the editor, the English Department, or LIU.

Number twenty-five / ISSN 1536-8475

© 2016 by Downtown Brooklyn: A Journal of Writing. All rights revert to authors upon publication.
dedication

It would not have been possible to produce this issue without the enthusiastic support and inexhaustible helpfulness of Faye Pollack.

Thank you, Faye. This one’s for you.
# downtown brooklyn
## a journal of writing

### number twenty-five
#### 2016

## contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Liliana Almendarez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wayne Berninger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>John Casquarelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cynthia Maris Dantzic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lydia Flores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Christine Francavilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sarah Francois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sarah Ghoshal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mary Kennan Herbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Jibarosoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Josh LaMore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Elspeth Woodcock Macdonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Andres Marulanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Steve Newton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Kimarlee Nguyen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Raquel Lucia Pimentel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Huma Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Huma Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Huma Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Michael Sohn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Mike Traber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Lewis Warsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Tejan Green Waszak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>bio notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>call for submissions (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Puzzle pieces scattered across a table. Who cares if we don't eat? Better to put them together than to quell our hunger. One look at you, my heart flutters with a lost song. Don't call it love, tastes like ashes against my tongue. Listen to the chorus. I wish the feeling of missing you wasn't so strong, an aural illusion. A train rumbles over Manhattan bridge, building lights remind me of lives behind closed doors alone while you travel home, I want to whisper words into your ear. Be well. Do not seek danger. Remember me when you are alone. Don't forget to send me a word. Just one. Softly. And smile. It always reaches me, fills me up to my head, makes my scalp tingle, I feel full in the dark. I keep writing to you on my skin. Lines connect us. Can you read them or should I cut deeper? Thin razor marks etched onto me. It hardly hurts. You, a muse, or a grey dove expecting seeds from my hand. We all want answers. I've wrapped my self around you, you've hardly noticed. Who cares, after all, they are only feelings falling off a tree. You will never take a bite of the fruit. You'll lose a tooth if you dare. You cover your heart for good measure. Don't worry I won't hurt you, much. A woman
carries purple orchids, a flower dying on the vine in cold water. I'm a predator but you don't mind being devoured. When the walls are quiet you imagine me moaning on top of you before we've even met naked. I walk on this cold night, contracting. I want only what you offer freely. This lonesome feeling will last as long as the season. When you are ready to share your despair, remember me fondly.
DEAD AIR

January light is spare, glints
in the corners of our eyes. Boots
crack icy snow with every step.
A bitter wind chafes tender spots
leaving behind red patches above
my cheeks. Kisses. You buried your
self beneath my skin. We are lost,
a rapid decline, a force upon us,
bottomless free fall. What is left
is the sound of your breath, puffs
of white smoke leaving your lips.
Wayne Berninger

AGONY NARRATIVE(S)

Click or scan.

John Casquarelli

missing a pair of chromosomes

I often think about that place near sorrow  
that elliptical dance in some larger darkness  
when that happens I thank my conscious body  
shake the sky off my back and say  
if this is the end at least I won’t have to  
cling to all my nostalgia

there’s a detour at every turn  
our imagined relevant moments  
if you choose to unravel  
look for the trail of anecdotes  
when you find it turn around  
walk the other way and never come back

our interface is a chemical computer  
stuffed in coat pockets due to  
verbal tricks and rigged data  
when I stare at the data for  
long periods of time I daydream  
in a neon reverse-osmosis  
confusion can be a marketplace  
packed with shiny tin cans and red rubies

sun beats down through a canopy of fruit trees  
breeze carries smell of roast duck  
outdoor kitchen with miniature tea set  
pond with fish and turtles  
space that is more than a social experiment  
where random people meet  
share honey in an urban beehive  
get both hands and minds dirty  
and appreciate that dirt
Cynthia Maris Dantzic

SIX HAIKU: NATURE AS SCIENCE, AND ART

Earth's turning, sun sets,  
Gravity pulls, water falls,  
Nature plies its art.

Buds unfurl in Spring,  
Revealing inner color;  
Nature needs no brush.

Clouds shedding raindrops  
Watercolor earth’s canvas.  
Nature, the painter.

Caterpillars don  
Intricate woven garments  
Shed, as butterflies.

Nautilus spirals,  
Nature’s mathematicians.  
Art -- and science, too.

Edison’s wisdom:  
If we could duplicate grass,  
That would be science!
Lydia Flores

WINE

burn of intimacy

the stubble
stubborn

5 o'clock
shadow

cloaking
where the light is

keeps pouring

your dark eyes
your alcohol hands
touching me into wine.
Jim pulled into the spot marked ‘Chaplain’ and turned off the engine. The morning air was still damp and cool enough to make him shiver even with the windows closed. He reached for his coffee, carefully lifting the lid off the container. The forecast called for the first hot day of summer, but it was taking its time. He watched the nurses scurrying across the parking lot, sweaters stretched over mounds of flesh, shoulders hunched forward, trying to block out the chill.

He pulled the egg sandwich from the bag on the passenger seat and ate his breakfast to the sound of birds chirping from the nearby trees. He enjoyed this part of his day, sitting in the car, watching the new shift arrive, eating in silence.

“Why don’t you go inside like a normal person?”

Jim didn’t need to see who it was. It was Raj’s habit to arrive early and smoke a cigarette or two before starting his day. Each man to his own poison, Jim thought starting the car just to open a window.

“That’s a nasty habit you have there,” Jim said nodding at the burning butt. “You think your patients can’t smell that?”

“Of course they do,” Raj said sucking on the end. “That’s why they love me. I preach from a broken pedestal. And you, Chaplain? What’s your addiction?” He smiled at Jim the way he smiled at everyone. Jim caught himself wondering if the man went to sleep smiling.

“I enjoy listening to the sound of my arteries hardening as I consume this greasy sandwich.” He waited for Raj to answer but the man just nodded and smiled. “I don’t necessarily believe people need company this early in the morning,” Jim finally added.

“You think your patients can’t smell that?”

“Your problem is you think you’re different from everyone else.”

Jim tapped the white collar around his neck. “This says I am.”

Raj silently chuckled. “There’s something wrong with your religion if it makes you feel that way.”

“Maybe that’s why I sit in the car by myself.”

Raj shook his head, then leaned forward looking around the inside of the car as if he was trying to spot something specific, maybe some words to pull out of the air. “You know just as well as me,” he said, “we carry our demons with us. For
me, it’s the bacteria that will one day decompose our bodies. For you, it’s the devil fighting for your soul. We live each day fighting what will kill us eventually.”

“I’m glad you’re not in my profession, Doc,” Jim said.

Raj laughed. “I’ve been meaning to tell you. The vets...they like you. You do good work.”

“Even Riley?”

Raj’s eyebrows darted up toward his greased black hair and his smile thinned for a moment. “He’s a lot like you. Thinks no one understands him.” He sucked the last of his cigarette and flicked the smoldering butt at the ‘Chaplain’ sign. “I’ll see you inside, yes?”

Jim saluted and finished the remainder of his coffee. He liked Raj. The man seemed to live in the hospital, always there any time Jim worked, day or night. He was tempted to ask one of the nurses whether the man had a social life but he didn’t want to get involved. After all, this wasn’t like a parish. He took this job to get away from the kind of work and scrutiny that went along with it. He gulped the rest of his coffee, coughing on the sugar that had settled to the bottom of the cup. Show time, he said to himself.

The veteran’s hospital was located an hour’s drive from his house, another reason why Jim liked it. He was a stranger here, replacing the chaplain who held the job for over a quarter century, an ex-Marine who wanted to help those on the last leg of life come to terms with their addictions, disappointments, disillusions, traumas and broken lives. He approached the patients as though they were fallen soldiers on the battlefield, telling them how great they served their country, their families and their friends in that order before allowing them to slip away in peace. Jim hadn’t thought much about this kind of work at the seminary. His professional life was grounded within a community, nurturing relationships, seeing congregants through their seasons. Chaplains didn’t make those connections, not ones that lasted long anyway. They were transients, serving those in need at the time they needed someone the most. It was the chaplain who heard their dirty secrets, the sins and transgressions, not friends or spouses or children. It was he, a stranger, who quelled their fears and put their mind to rest. And when they passed, he walked away.

In greener times, this kind of work had all the appeal of preaching in a foreign language on some busy corner. But time and circumstances changed that outlook for Jim. Now, he didn’t mind showing up for a few hours every day just to
listen. There were no sermons to write, no back door politics coming from the
Ladies Auxiliary, no fund raising for new pews or catechisms. The only thing they
wanted from him was an open mind and a heart free of judgement. Sometimes a
nod was more than enough. He didn’t fool himself into thinking he could rid
them of their demons, that somehow, he’d change their lives with a few quotes of
Scripture. It hadn’t worked for him. That was the unkindest cut of all. But they
weren’t expecting miracles and that made all the difference.

He stepped off the elevator and approached the nurse’s station, greeting
Sylvia before she had a chance to look up. Like most of the nurses, she was twenty
pounds overweight, wore no makeup and had her hair cut unattractively short.
Her skin sagged around her face and hung from her arms the few times she went
without her sweater. Health care workers, he concluded, didn’t know the first
thing about taking care of themselves.

“Hey, Chaplain,” she said still not looking up. “Don’t you take a day off?”
“I will when Dr. Patel does.”
Sylvia smiled. “Remind me to save a room for the two of you. This place is full
of guys like you.”

“Now, Sylvia, who’s got it better than me?”
She looked up at him and he saw a flicker of envy. He imagined the nurses’
conversations to each other on his long ride home, how they wished they had a
job like that, going from room to room and just listening to people. No bedpans
to clean, no drugs to administer, no endless complaints from family. Jim found a
certain amount of solace knowing how clueless they really were. Let them think
what they want. They will anyway, even when the truth is laid at their feet.

He started his rounds with those who were too sick to know he was there.
Most were sedated or in the midst of a midmorning nap. They woke them early to
have their breakfast and give them their meds before the doctors made their
rounds. Even at the end of one’s life, inches from death, there were schedules and
routines to follow.

From the ones who were awake, he asked whether they’d like some company.
Sometimes, just a glance at the collar was enough for them to mumble something
and look away. Not everyone saw him as a comfort. His presence signaled a truth
they would rather put off for another day. He might as well come in wearing a
long, hooded black robe and sickle. He wished he could come in dressed in
dungarees and a T shirt, anything that might cause them to open up sooner and
relax. Many had made it their mission in life to believe there was nothing wrong with them, that it was everyone else who had the problem understanding they were fine, just fine. Jim admired the way they tried so hard to go on as if nothing was unusual. On the outside, they hid their pain in packs of cigarettes, bottles of wine, prescription meds or hand rolled joints. By the time they checked into the hospital, they were too far down the road to dredge up the memories and feelings they pretended weren’t there.

“That’s it?” Sylvia asked when he emerged from the last room four hours later. She glanced at her watch as if he were on the clock.

“I’m going to head for the lounge. Riley’s hiding from me.”

Sylvia shook her head. “Good luck with that.”

Her remark irritated Jim, as if Riley’s bleak outlook was poisoning the carefree atmosphere of the ward. Maybe they wished he would die already so that they didn’t need to tend to someone who couldn’t be grateful for the care he was getting. Jim wished he hadn’t lost the skill of knowing how to put things politely to people like Sylvia. That used to come to him easily years ago. Now he was more inclined to say it bluntly, without regard to the speaker’s feelings, which often shocked people when it came from a guy wearing a collar.

“You’ll probably be gone by the time I’m finished,” he said instead. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Sylvia.”

“I don’t work Sundays, Pastor” she called after him. “You never remember.”

Jim smiled to himself. “Of course I do,” he whispered under his breath.

The lounge was flooded with the sun as it moved west across the sky. Unlike the ward itself which had no view of the outside world except the slivers that could be glimpsed from patients rooms, the lounge was a long rectangular room with a wall of windows that looked out the back of the hospital, over the sloping hills and trees. Many afternoons, when he had finished his work but didn’t want to face going home to an empty house, he’d sit with his back to the door and track the movement of the sun across the sky and waited for it to dip behind the trees.

He entertained himself by trying to guess what time it was by the length of the shadows cast by the trees or the intensity of the sunlight hitting the leaves. Sometimes, he’d try to guess the number of animals that would cross in front of him or scurry up the tree, not leaving until he was right. He usually left as the ward was transitioning from one shift to the next, keeping his mind occupied with the task of what to make for dinner. He’d start by concentrating on his
stomach and determining if, in an hour, he’d be ravenous or in the mood for something light. By the time the last traces of light disappeared from the sky, Jim would be home, cooking himself some franks and beans or throwing a few sausages on the grill and wondering how many vodka martinis it would take to induce sleep.

But for now, he mind was focused on getting to the lounge and staking out a good seat. He enjoyed his time here after rounds, spending a few hours talking to anyone he missed but more important, to mark time which he seemed to have a lot of recently. He watched the seasons change, the bare trees sprouting small green buds, the thick green foliage that suddenly, overnight, was washed in yellows, red and oranges, as if a painter came out one night and colored over a painting. He watched those brightly colored leaves form a blanket at the bottom of each tree before turning brown and brittle, leaving behind naked branches to sway and shiver in the cold.

He entered the lounge and stopped by the coffee station, shaking a few sugar packets and pouring powdered non-dairy creamer into a Styrofoam cup. He drowned the mixture with the burnt, black liquid never stopping to think about the cancer those refined chemicals would cause.

From the corner of his eye, Jim spotted Tom Riley sitting at the farthest end of the lounge. Jim took a seat where he could watch the man’s profile while staring out the window. Riley was only in his early sixties but time hadn’t been kind. He was extremely thin, preferring his nourishment from nicotine or something liquid sustenance from a bottle of Jack Daniel. Jim stirred his coffee and wondered what the conversation would be like today.

“How’s it going, Tom?” he asked after a few minutes.

Riley tilted his head ever so slightly. “It’s going,” he said.

“Mind if I join you?” Jim asked getting up and moving closer.

He licked the stirrer and stuck it in his shoe.

“Not much conversation today.”

Riley adjusted the angle of his head so that he looked directly out the window.

“Don’t come here looking for any.”

Jim didn’t object. He’d like to think that he was smart enough to have a proven plan when it came to dealing with guys like Riley but these days it was better to avoid conflict. Hadn’t he had enough of that already? He wasn’t a young man himself, just a few years past fifty. Doctor told him at this last checkup he was healthy as a horse. Jim thought of his parents who had died a few years
before and figured he’d be around at least another quarter century. Twenty-five years. He left the doctor’s office feeling like he had just been handed a prison sentence.

Jim stared at the liquid in his cup, a sickly brown and brought it to his lips. It tasted burnt and artificial. He gazed at Riley, admiring the man for the flaws he so proudly clung to. The man was a Vietnam vet who carefully preserved the details of that era in his appearance. He kept his hair long and sported a stubble of a beard that was always the same length. His face had as many creases as a folded cotton shirt and his teeth, when he showed them, were yellowed and tanned from tobacco. Lung cancer had gotten the best of him but he wasn’t going down grasping at straws. Raj told Jim that Riley refused treatment for the cancer. ‘Fighting one poison with another?’ he told Raj. ‘That doesn’t seem logical. Sooner or later, time is up.’

“You save any souls today, Chappy?” Riley asked, his voice raspy. He cleared the phlegm and spat into a paper napkin. Then he patted his hospital gown as if there were a pack of cigarettes to be found. “Only the Catholics do that,” Jim said. “They bought the concession stand.” “What are you, then?” “Lutheran. We listen without judging.” “That’s bullshit” Riley said, turning to look at him. “Everyone judges.” Jim pulled the stirrer out of his shoe and stuck it between his teeth, chewing. “Like who?” “Them nurses, for one. I see it in their eyes.” “Their judgement day will come, too.” Riley laughed. “That’s a fucked up thing for someone like you to say.” “We’re all fucked up, Riley. Some just hide it better than others.” Riley fidgeted. “So what’s your sin?” “Sin? This collar says I’m above all that. That’s my sin.” Riley turned his attention to Jim, his small blue eyes watery. “You had to do something bad to get this post.” “Tell you what….you tell me your sins and I’ll tell you mine,” Jim said.

Riley’s attention drifted and he turned his head and stared back out the window. “Mine is nothing special. Booze, blow, some pussy every now and then when it was free and easy. I don’t buy into this redemption and afterlife shit. That’s why most of them stay away from me. I tell the truth.” He smiled baring
his stained teeth. His wrinkles deepened around his eyes. “It ain’t a pretty picture, know what I mean?”

The plastic stirrer grinded under Jim’s molars. “You want to know my sin? I’m a fraud. I’m here because no one knows me. No one asks too many questions or expects miracles. I like that.”

“I don’t need saving, Chappy.”

“Good because that’s not in my job description anymore. Just keep that under your hat. I don’t want to blow my cover.”

“Then why bother with me?”

Jim smiled. Raj had told Jim about Riley’s background, how he enlisted in the army at eighteen, sent to Vietnam to fight an enemy who didn’t always wear uniforms and sometimes came in the form of women and children. He killed to stay alive because that was what he was told to do. He came home with all his body parts but found that most of what made him feel alive had been left over there or killed completely. He drifted from one job to another, one city to another, living now on disability and social security. He was rail thin and had a constant cough that threatened to crack his ribs. Still, if given a chance, he’d pick up a carton of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey.

“Because you’re the one person I can be honest with,” Jim said. “I hear you’re looking to check out and go home. Why?” Jim asked. “Got everything you need here. Meals, showers, clean sheets, service every hour of the day. It’s like a good budget hotel.”

Riley shrugged. “This is not where I want to die. Not here.” He hunted around for his phantom cigarettes and Jim wished he smoked just to have something to give the guy.

“You ought to hit Dr. Patel up for a smoke,” he said, rising. “That man is a chimney.”

Riley’s eyes followed him. “What’s the matter, Chappy? he asked. “Was it something I said?”

“No,” Jim said looking down at his empty cup. “Don’t want to overstay my welcome. Got some errands to run.”

“Pick me up a pack of cigs, will you? There’s a small terrace on the other side of the ward, where the nurses and doctors have their lounge. We can sneak out there. You may even want to bring something better to drink.”
“Booze and cigarettes, huh?” Jim said, nodding. “Tell you what, I’ll bring the smokes if you can find a match.”

Riley suddenly became animated. “Don’t think I’m not resourceful, Chappy. You just bring them smokes.”

It was still light when Jim left, summer’s curse. Jim listened to the radio on the ride home. He needed to shake this version of himself with some good rock and relive memories associated with a better time, a more devout self. The conversation with Riley dogged him on the ride back. It was only natural for the man to come to terms with his death and meet it as bravely as he met his enemy in the jungles of Vietnam. After all, his killer was with him every day, buried deep within his lungs, robbing him of any peaceful death. Riley was well aware of the seriousness of his condition but he took it no different from being told he had an ingrown toenail. He discussed death as if he were planning a trip. While everyone around him lived in fear, Riley treated it as he would a pesky dog. The other vets looked to Jim to make sense of it all, show them how there was a purpose even in this final stage. Jim was their guide, the ferryman in some respect, taking them from one shore to another. But Riley needed no boat, no guidance, no help. He was going to walk to the other shore by himself, wading in waist deep, ignoring the cries around him. It was Riley’s detachment that Jim envied.

The air grew warm and Jim opened his windows to keep his eyes from closing. A warm breeze blew in, hardly enough to cool him off. The weatherman had finally gotten the forecast right. It was warm enough that Jim could spend the rest of the day on his deck with just his T-shirt and shorts. Not remembering if he had enough beer, he stopped by the supermarket and picked up a six pack along with some steaks and potatoes. On the checkout line, he debated whether to grill the steaks all at once and reheat them for dinner for the next few days or make one and freeze the rest. The minutiae he obsessed over these days was disturbing but comforting.

Arriving home, he changed into his bathing suit and fixed a peanut butter sandwich, kicking himself for not picking up another jar. Not so long ago, it would have been a chore to have to get back in the car again and drive to the supermarket or swing by it the next evening after work. He’d be preoccupied with all the things he could be doing instead of running these errands. He and his wife fought about that often. He stopped chewing and allowed himself a moment to think about Patty and then Jeff. He ran down the number of months in his mind:
sixty eight. He wasn’t sure why he counted in months and not years. Years wouldn’t sound as bad. Maybe that was the reason why. Maybe this was just another way to punish himself.

He stuffed the last bite into his mouth and chewed vigorously, checking the refrigerator for something to wash it down. Two bottles of beer from last week were nicely chilled and he grabbed one as he threw the six pack on the bottom shelf. He opened the bottle and drank it over the sink, scraping the last clumps of white bread off his back molars with his tongue. Before stepping out onto the exposed part of the deck, he peeked across the patch of ground that separated his deck from Alice’s. It was just a matter of time before his new neighbor would decide to sit on her back porch and then he’d have to decide whether to sit on his deck or not. Maybe she had seen him getting in and out of his car, pulling up to the house in the late afternoon and thought him rude for not coming by and introducing himself. That’s what people in these closed communities do, isn’t it? The thought provided no comfort to his long days and troubled nights. As long as he kept his distance, he was still in control but even that was slipping away.
Sarah Francois

ADDICT(ED)

He sighed
It was as
involuntary
as breathing
it was the
worst of times
sky was blue
black, heavy
with the weight
of the promise of
tomorrow's suffering
   clouds parted in disgust
   like his lips
      making space for
      UPCHUCK

Toilet worship was a steady part of his daily routine.
He was hungover, yet still drunk.
The space between today’s
regret and yesterday’s victory
was getting smaller
merging almost
but it could’ve been worse.

Vomiting was his 8’clock mass
*Kyrie Eleison*
Christ Have mercy
came out of his mouth
along with his daily promise to stop
drinking
to never again let this substance
pass through his lips.
Yet every night
the moon signaled
his loss of conviction.

He was bewildered.
How come he couldn’t remember the pain from just this morning’s debacle?
How has his resolve dissolved so quickly?
*Glory be to The Father...*
When prayers passed through
his lips
it was by rote
and tasted
strangely
like mimosas

He wasn’t KESHA
so he didn’t brush his teeth with Jack Daniels
instead he used Crest
concentrating on the weight of the toothbrush in his hand.
concentrating on keeping yesterday evening’s snack in his stomach
trying to piece together LAST NIGHT
until he gave up on that
last activity altogether.
AN URGENT MATTER

Pricked my thimbled finger trying hard to keep this secret. Went through stages where I thought I could forget but it remains. Lies hidden subrosa under pained smiles. Wakes me up every night around midnight. Hurls insults at my person until three am. For ten years, I’ve bit my lips when it threatened to spill forth.
Sarah Ghoshal

BEFORE AND AFTER

The couch - my office, lounge, movie theater, bed. I took advantage of any moment to spend time with it, to allow it to appreciate my curves, my underbelly, the tips of my toes on rainy afternoons or documentary weekend mornings.

What a companion, my soft, leather mistress.

Now, she waits while I make you happy.

Because baby, the happy that lives in you is all the happy I'll ever need, the peek in the mirror, the slight shift of your head, the way your hands rake softly across my cheeks as I give you all of me in the dead of the night.
RAIN BOOTS

Along with a rain coat, small, yellow, with a hood lined in red, snacks – apples, small, round fancy pants cheerios, blueberries, cheese. Cow’s milk. Forms forms forms.

Months away yet.

Here I sit, watching you throw yourself at the dog, still at his level, still hoping he’ll love you.

You stand at the window, thunder rising, rain leaking onto your hands - wet on the sill - legs still fat, feet not sure of the distance to the floor, not yet unleashed in a storm.
COLLECTION

That’s a nice stash
you have in that bucket.

I build it for you to
distract you from my
absence.

Each time, it fills up
with all manner
of secret play and I know

you’ll empty it out
before the hour

is through. You’ll
give voice to
rolling giraffes,

to rubber bracelets
and cardboard
birds.

You’ll speak in tongues.

Then you’ll abandon
it all when the dog moves,

whispering,
inviting you to lift
your knees high
enough to enter

his world.
STOMP

All that lies beneath you would tremble if alive. Dogs with rabbit ears, player plastic piano, oxy-moron triangle blocks, the blanket I’m sure you plan on from the far corner, foam borders and full and meaningful baskets. One arm flails free, waving or just feeling the air. It’s not enough.

We have to secure the letters near the bottom, anchor them to carpet bay, gird their defense with unlikely dental floss and rubber bracelets meant for 1985 Sally and her blocks of socks, get ready for the moment you realize you can actually let go.
Mary Kennan Herbert

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DISCARD?

My body is irrelevant.
Only the words might endure.

You wish. Keats, Crane, Hikmet.
You wish.

Old hands hover under water,
like trout with infections.

Students are bored with old H₂O stories.
The trout gasps again, and then leaps.

What can I share?
No longer sleek as a song.

Yet, don’t hang up. Don’t delete.
A mockingbird has decided
to stay, spend the winter.
A flash of white on his wings
gives a quick preview of hope
to that hungry trout. Mayflies tempt,

and holly berries for a mockingbird.
Now I am remembering

a brown thrasher (mockingbird’s cousin),
or even an indigo bunting,

the feathered things
to deflect Emily Dickinson’s sorrow,
or whatever.
AGE SEVEN

In an empty classroom, late afternoon, I practice the Palmer method to refine my penmanship, to brush up my mastery of handwriting. There!

Look how good I am at this! I know, saith the Deity, watching, always looking sharply at me. I know who you are, pen in hand. Do it.

Loop those capital letters CAREFULLY, across the page, steady as she goes. It makes me nervous to write for the Man Upstairs or the woman on top.

Age seven, I’m not yet in Heaven. Nor am I a mistress of this Earth. I need to practice making I, I, I again. Over and over, until the person in the mirror cracks a grin, a grimace, a glimmer of approval, before the ink dries, or the story ends-- behind my eyes:

The best time of day is late afternoon when sunlight paints my desk with the kind of light you won’t forget until an afternoon maybe (guess!) seventy years later, on a late afternoon. Everything is the same, or never again.
CUE THE ALBATROSS

Skin was my silken sheet.  
Shit, it is no longer sweet.

Basal cell carcinomas  
circled the cavalry.

John Wayne arrived,  
his troopers raced across my cheek.

“We’ll burn it off!” the good doc said.  
And did, yet skin cannot be fed

into stories or poems of glory.  
We bear these scars to deserts

or distant beaches, and beyond  
the coasts, soars an albatross

hungry and unconcerned  
about our loss. I have a hunch

that big bird will not land  
in my life, even for lunch.

It is liberated from my fetters.  
It flies freely until snacks

float on the surface of the sea,  
announcing a meal. Plastic wrapped,

convenient packaging to carry  
home to the chicks.

Feed them dutifully, fully,  
and then they die, bellies full

of plastic. Thank you, human  
ingenuity, technology. Here’s
just another poet among her betters, practicing writing I, I, I until

puberty or gerontology interferes with thinking and-- thinking sucks!

Remember that afternoon sunlight? It paints your desk and your skin

into cancer analogies, like birds and the ocean winds.
Jibarosoy

TIO MANOLO

My Tio Manolo
would sneak quarters
into my palm
whenever
He visited us.
I was still
in pre-school.
But what
I really wanted
was for him
to take me
by hand,
into the mysteries
of manhood
and rum blackouts
to discover
the intoxicating
scent of a
woman’s perfume
mixed with
unruly sweat
lingering on
his stubbled cheeks.
I wanted scars
from bar room fights.
Scars that crossed
his torso
like a rumpled
Centipede.
I wanted to
walk eagerly
into the night,
suit-dressed, prepared for battle over women, rum, money, a word, or nothing.

But what Most impressed me were his old pictures resting on my abuela's moth-balled sala cabinets. Tio Manolo, posing proudly for the camera, high up and confident. A gladiator or conquering hero. Bold dreams on the saddle. A large black brush mustache, his only shield, hiding a wry smile below dark piercing eyes that could salt the open wound of any onlookers thinking they could take him on. But one day I looked closer at those B/W pics.
He seemed to
be slipping
off that saddle,
perched to one side,
off-balanced,
like a baby,
struggling
to stay upright.
A 200 pound
untidy mass
tottering
on top
of that
poor,
small burro,
with it’s legs
splayed,
unable, finally,
to carry
that mighty weight.
The race turned right at Saint Rose’s on 74th street.

The kids up the block, with their Greenwood Cemetery sticks, created a diversion. Viewers missed the act entirely.

A Mars Candy Bars truck on 5th avenue was mysteriously emptied as bodega owner, Mike Schvitz, thinking that he could make a deal, fought with the driver over the length and time of delivery and the price of the product.

The kids had no need for the store after that and Saint Rose took on a new meaning.
Madness ensues in a *purpleblue* down the sidewalk of her street. She leans back and remembers the anticipation...

*a goldengreen*.

There were the phonecalls and then letters taped to a repair sign that featured a phonograph and a graffitied T.V.
The dog lays by the pool, chin over tail. His eyes’ curved blue interiors drift to the water’s edge.

A bird stops by, slamming his slick head against an invisible greenhouse ceiling as a black cat, green eyes, tail thumping, watches it all unfold.

That’s when a child slides fast the screen door. Her diaper falling off as she runs past the concreted blue and across the grass made of plastic to the palm tree’s roots. She sits. The dog comes. The bird and cat never move.
ON SLOUGH POND, CAPE COD

Drops silently stud the pond.
The trees contribute drip-lapping of after-rain.
Mist lifts over the water.
Hard-working squirrels
Race up and down trees, urgent as New Yorkers.
Sounds in the woods -- rain approaches.

It’s muggy: warm, intimate muggy.
Which has, here, a hold-your-breath quality.
The drying deck’s speckled, ominously,
With darkened knotholes occasionally paired and staring.
And sand, once footprints, appears trickled
As if to show, the desperate, a way out.
It’s so still, traffic is audible miles away.
Now an invisible plane (little, earnest) takes over.
Then crickets are back, or is it red squirrel?
But the leaves are erect, quiet.
The sweet pepper, apparently, arrested in life.
Time stands still -- but for the dripping.

8/27/13
JULY 14, 2014

1.

rain on all sides
    out every window
splintering the boards on the deck
    plunking onto the bucket in back,
        Nature’s metronome.
Splash washing,
No-worry rain -- everything’s used to being wet
    and re-wet
nothing shrinks or runs, dilutes or dissolves.

No birds, again. No sooner said --
That seagull doesn’t sound too happy.
That’s a “cry” if ever I heard one.
A “where are you-I’m here” call.
Not one of those atmospheric,
We’re-paid-to-do-this,
Part-of-the-scenery calls.

I will not worry. Just observe. It’s calming down now, anyway.
No, it’s not. But this house has been standing a very long time.
60 years. “There’s always a first time,” (my mother’s voice).
The water could wash away the sand under the house.
There are changes with global warming.
Rains are stronger, longer, more persuasive.
And we can hardly speak above this one.

The metronome is past adagio.
And it’s not the bucket. there is no bucket.
Now a drumbeat. Water torture?
There are a million gulls on the pond.
Lights darkening. The clock’s stopped.
The paperclips are writhing.

next day
It’s still raining. I stealthily turned on the radio ...
Why is it hard to turn on the radio?
Because We Do Not Use The Radio here.
Or the TV, if there were one.
A bird cries, “Unique New York, Unique New York,” truly --
Some birds speak very clearly.
The radio proclaims that seven inches fell in Plymouth,
And somewhere else it topped the rain gauge.
THOUGHTS IN A CRÊPE SHOP

It's not nothing, but I will not cry;
   This is not the other side of limbo.
I do not hate you -- don't think about you enough
   To warrant it.
     You are not mean.

The ice box door slams shut.
As of yesterday, I am grown up,
   But not so grown up
     As to be able to forgo another crêpe.
It's Thursday after all. I love you.

But, crêpes are good
   For moods and words
     For obscuring tears and fears
Bent but not broken. Breathing.
The panting is over. Kept it light.

3/3/16
Andres Marulanda

PRINCESS CONCHITA AND THE ALTAR BOY

A gramophone is playing in the distance
soft melody of tango is in the air
the altar boy is dancing and singing
“mi Buenos Aires querido...”

As if removed from Garcia Marquez’s memory,
reminiscences of a surrealistic town.
Calves were raffled at Sundays’ market,
meadows filled with yellows, blues, and reds.

Conchita means shell in Spanish,
the most precious love.
She left behind her little town,
holding a Christmas doll and a mustard seed.

The meeting was set in Bogotá city,
a pharmacy named New York.
He asked for ‘Chocolate Santafereño’
for her, just some peasant cheese, por favor.

Only God knew what He had in mind.
The seed delicately planted in a wooden pot,
fertilized with humility,
watered with kindness every day.

Like the most beautiful orchid,
vivid purple and exquisite scent,
fruits of the greatest value,
rooted in a ceiba tree.

Love came, appeared and transformed
the altar boy into a wise man,
the princess into a queen.
A heart within a seashell.

Walking on the shore,
where sea and sand meet,
love flows out into the universe;
together, a tenacious boy and his loving wife.
Steve Newton

THE GREEN FIELDS OF HOME

Deer Season 2007

The traffic was heavy that day as I came home from work in northern New Jersey, driving down the country road that takes me home. There in the center of the road was a fawn, stuck in traffic, unable to move. It had been hit by a car or truck, and the driver had not stopped, so the fawn was craning its head around, hurt in ways that didn’t show at first, but broken and dying.

I pulled my truck over and got out in the middle of the road to direct traffic as another truck, a van, stopped on the other side of the road. The driver, a middle aged woman dressed in jeans and a plaid flannel shirt, walked over to the fawn and picked it up and then carried it over to the roadside shoulder, where the fawn then lay outstretched. The police were called.

After she carried the fawn out of the road I pulled my truck over a little bit farther onto the shoulder. I then walked across the highway to where the van’s driver and her partner, another woman, were kneeling down next to the deer. I didn’t know what to do. I had no idea whether or not the fawn would want to be touched by a human. But it seemed like the right thing to do, so I just started petting it, stroking its breathing side, trying to let it know that someone was there, and it was not alone. I stroked the fawn’s speckled fur, and held my hand against its side, feeling the life rising and falling in its body as it breathed, for maybe twenty minutes.

Then it died. The police never did come. There was a very brief shake, a kind of shudder, and a shaking of its legs, just before the fawn stopped breathing. I felt it quivering under my fingers and palm as it passed away. My hope is that it didn’t die in fear, as it surely would have if it had been left paralyzed in traffic, with its new world broken into unrecognizable parts. I know it’s not much, at least in the larger scheme of things, but it seems that at least I helped save the fawn from that particular terror, broken legs or spine holding it hostage to the cars speeding by, zooming machines filled with people who would not even stop for a baby deer.
who needed help. I don’t know what to make of this, of the people who wouldn’t stop, other than to say that I was shocked by their callous behavior. But there is one more thing that I need to say about this.

The other car that did stop was a van from a nearby home for mentally challenged people. The driver and her partner, then, were both used to taking care of fellow sentient creatures that could not take care of themselves. The whole time I was petting the fawn, one of their clients was walking around, talking loudly. She was asking about the fawn, whether it was dying. She was rolling her head around, walking in circles, creating a stir, punctuating the scene with some kind of chaotic drama. When the fawn died the women drove away in their van. They were going on into their lives, to more scenes not unlike the one that had just happened by the side of the road, but with different specific details. They took care of fellow beings all the time that the people driving by in their cars didn’t want to see, much less stop and help. They did this every day, all day. I went on to my life as well, but for me it was much more of an anomaly, an interruption that was striking in its charged drama. We left the fawn there by the side of the road, and a couple of days later it was gone, either taken away by the town or by scavengers. Dead deer by the side of the road are very common in northern New Jersey. In a way, however, at least for me, the fawn lives on, staying in my memory as a crippled and broken baby animal stuck in traffic in the middle of the road, and then, beautiful in its new fur, taking its last breaths in this world.

No Masks 1960

In fourth grade I got hooked on reading horse stories, and then grew to love books. It was the horse running on a beach or in a canyon, or walking high on a mountainside, that did it, I think, the absolute freedom. I never would have put it in those terms then, of course, would not have thought about something like freedom, but that’s what it was, plus the muscles. What great bodies they had! Rippling and big and strong.

Combine that with a sea breeze or a ridge top high in the Rocky Mountains, and what boy would not want to imagine himself there, all big muscles and wind blown speed? But it was also the simplicity, the way that there was nothing
complicated there, nothing to figure out, no wrong feelings or gut wrenching failures, no losing, no shame, and no masks.

*The Sight of Horses 1973*

We had just come down out of the mountains, the San Juans on the western edge of the San Luis Valley in Southern Colorado, after spending a day hiking and driving through yellow aspens. It was the summer of 1973 and I was 21 years old. My friend Koz was driving a green mid-sixties Dodge Dart sedan.

It was one of those liminal times just after sunset. We were on a perfectly straight road that stretched across the valley floor. We were tired after a day in the mountains but also looking forward to a night out of heavy drinking in the bars of Alamosa, the closest town to where we lived, which was something we did nightly in those days. There was no traffic and no cars either behind us or coming our way, just a leisurely shot down a string straight road in the middle of nowhere.

Then there was a group of horses in the middle of the road, running toward us. I don’t know how we came upon them so quickly without seeing them in the distance, but there they were, apparently entranced by the headlights in the same way that deer get jacked and become paralyzed, leading to the famous “deer in the headlights” phrase. Things happened fast.

I remember the horses, the sight of them in the light surrounded by the dark, but it is such a powerful, archetypally dreamlike image that I also somehow don’t completely trust it, but there it is. It almost seems too dramatic to be true, in a way, a group of horses, manes flying back, eyes wide and wild, running down a road in the high mountain west in the summer night, towards two young men hurtling witlessly towards them in an old sixties car.

The horses are the last things I remember. My friend who was driving told me that we left the road, went into a ditch, to avoid the horses, and I must have fainted, because he said I was flopping around like a rag doll for the few seconds before we flipped and hit a telephone pole airborne going somewhere around 50 miles an hour.
We were going sideways in the air, with the roof perpendicular to the ground when we hit, which was a blessing. Oddly, this was one of those one in a million cases where not wearing seatbelts saved us. The roof of the car wound up down to the floorboard in the backseat, and I was crumpled up underneath the dashboard.

I woke up in the dark not knowing where I was or what had happened. I had suffered a concussion, apparently, after I fainted. I remember kicking at glass, probably the windshield, and climbing out of the car, although the memories at this point are somewhat indistinct, blurry, especially the part about climbing out of the car.

We were wrapped around the telephone pole and on top of a barbed wire fence that must have been alongside the pole. It was night. We were way out in the country. Oddly enough, though, we were also close to a house, one of the very few around. I walked up to the house to ask for assistance calling for an ambulance, knocking loudly on the door, calling out for help, but to no avail. So much for the friendly brotherhood of country people, at least way out in the Colorado Desert after dark.

They did, however, call for the police and an ambulance. The people in the house must have looked out through their curtains and seen the wreck, and it might have just been an old woman or old man, by herself or himself and scared, which could have explained not answering the door, but at any rate, someone called. They never did come to the door or turn the lights on.

I had gone back to the wreck to try and get my friend out. On the one hand I had heard about the possibility of hurting someone worse by moving them before the ambulance arrives, but on the other hand I had also seen lots of TV shows and movies where cars blow up and burn after a wreck, and my friend was still inside. I was also probably in some kind of shock myself, and at the very least was quite disoriented. To say it was unreal is for once a very apt phrase.

There really had been a rip in time, a tear in existence, and I had seemingly instantly gone from a pleasant ride home from a day in the mountains, scented
with pine and moss by the side of rushing streams, to a nightmare scene of destruction where, all of sudden, it seemed like making a decision was rather crucial. As in, a life and death situation, or potentially one, but the only way that would be established, whether or not this was life or death, was when it was too late—in other words, when the car caught fire. I decided to pull my friend out of the car, only he was knocked out cold, and then I got him stuck on the barbed wire fence as I tried to pull him out of the car window. This woke him up.

Great. Now the car was going to blow up with me trying to unsnag a guy, with what turned out to be a broken collar bone, from a barbed wire fence that the twisted metal of the Detroit wreck had wrapped itself around like a leech sucking on a frog’s leg in a Louisiana bayou. My friend was half in, half out of the driver’s side window, groaning because of his broken bone and the barbed wire raking into his skin, while I was trying to avoid a Dodge Dart barbeque out there on the range, where the skies are not cloudy all day.

Whoa. What a situation. But the police and ambulance arrived before we were crispy fried. They said someone in the house had called them. I can’t exactly recall how they got my friend out of the car and off the wire fence, but it was probably not too hard for them, given that they had not been knocked out and, unlike me, they actually knew what they were doing. But there is one more vivid part of the story, something that still makes me cringe, 43 years later in 2016.

When we got to the hospital we were given all kinds of tests, but the first thing we had to do was take off our shoes, and for the life of me to this day I’m not sure why. My friend and I and another young guy were living in an adobe house out in the middle of lettuce fields, and we did not have running water. We took showers in the gym at the local college in town. I can’t remember exactly why there was no water at the house. It made for some long stretches between laundry, though, and I had been hiking all day, so . . .

When I took off my boots the nurse acted like she had just opened a coffin that had buried for a few weeks. She jumped back and groaned and held her nose like something from a cartoon or a silent movie, eyes wide at first, then squinting at me. Then she laid into me for having smelly feet.
There I was, in the hospital after surviving a nearly fatal car wreck that was not our fault (a rancher had been notoriously bad about maintaining his fences), suffered a concussion, struggled under what I thought was for sure the imminent shadow of death to free my trapped friend, only to fail at that and get him stuck on a barbed wire fence, and now this lady in the white uniform was actually busting my chops about my stinky feet, and in a very public and mortifyingly embarrassing way. It was memorable.

A few days later we went and saw the car in the junkyard, with the roof down to the floor in the backseat, and all four wheels off the ground. The junkyard guys said that when the car came in they did not think that anyone could have survived.

But I remember the sight of those horses running towards us, looking out the windshield for a brief moment before we left the road to avoid hitting them and then flipped up and hit the telephone pole sideways. I remember the sight of those horses.

_A New Friend and a Mother’s Gift_ 2006

Deer are everywhere in northern New Jersey, it seems, deep woods and mountainsides, suburban neighborhoods and cow pastures. They seem able to adapt to almost any environment in this part of the world, and the only predator, for adult deer at least, is humans, whether hunters or drivers in their cars and trucks.

One afternoon I was out walking in my neighborhood, townhouses surrounded by woods and fields, when I saw a young deer standing not far from the road, seemingly paying close attention to something in front of it. The deer’s head was down, slightly turning, and it was occasionally nodding.

When I got a bit closer I could see what was going on. It was a house cat, just standing there slightly bent down, looking up at the deer. The deer, at this point, was pawing the ground in front of it, like a bull in an old cartoon before it is about
to charge, but the feeling I got from watching the deer was the farthest thing from aggression. It looked to me like the deer wanted to play.

I have no idea how the deer knew that this smaller animal it had encountered was no threat to it. It could have just been the size, but a bobcat is not all that much bigger, if you think about it. It’s bigger, for sure, but the bobcat is still fairly close in both size and appearance, and it is, in fact, a predator for deer, often launching itself onto the deer from low hanging tree branches.

But this deer just wanted a friend, it seemed. I stood and watched them transfixed, as I had never seen anything like it.

That same summer I saw a doe with two fawns, who were both nursing at the same time, standing in the middle of a country road. They were close to the intersection of their road with the road that I was traveling down, and I pulled over, once again startled by what I was seeing.

I soon noticed a buck in a field close to where they standing. He was lying down in the dry grass, on his stomach, legs folded under him, watching the two fawns nursing. At one point the mother just walked away from the two fawns and headed straight for the buck. When she got close he got up and walked away, into the woods. I don’t know how she communicated what was on her mind, but however she did it, he got the message. She then walked back to her fawns and they followed her off the road and into the woods a distance from the buck, and on the other side of the road.

_Tentacles in a Confessional_

The past still remains immobile, patient and unchanging as old pictures in a photo album, or the pictures of horses in my childhood books that I would read as the day wore down to summer twilight, comfortable in my summer shortie pajamas. Age introduces uncertainty along with stiffening joints and clogged arteries, and that is just the way of things, but I never thought I would feel less at home in the world than I did when I was young, as I do now.
There have been times in recent years when I have felt like that fawn in the middle of the road, broken and helpless while the cars and trucks roar past, looking around without any understanding of how this situation came to be. Other times it has seemed like once again I am flying headlong through the Colorado night, when a vision of running horses appears charging headlong out of the dark, as incongruous as tentacles in a confessional.

I spend my days as if I am listening to an answering machine filled with blackmail messages, or like I am knocking on the front door of a house where nobody lives, still looking for someone to play with, like the deer pawing the ground in front of the housecat. Perhaps I am searching for the certainty and focus of the doe leaving her fawns to chase away the stag.

I can see the skyline of Manhattan in the distance from one of the buildings where I teach, at a state university in New Jersey. I live about an hour away from there, way up in the hills of the most northern part of the state. There is a fairground not that far away, where they have the NJ State Fair in August. Much of it’s garish and cheap, which is fun in its own kind of way, but they also have livestock shows and barns full of pigs and sheep and goats and rabbits and chickens.

I usually go there at least once a year. I don’t know why I find comfort being around other creatures, but when I travel around the world as I do with some regularity one of the things that I almost always like to do is visit zoos, or other kinds of animal parks, which are not always well maintained, to say the least, but I still enjoy them, and I don’t know exactly why.

Perhaps it is because these places can still be portals, of a sort, gateways, to a time when simplicity was the only afternoon I knew. Sometimes, when I walk through the barns at the fair, or visit the snow monkeys at their hot springs park near Nagano, in the alpine mountains of central Japan, I feel myself strung as tight as a cello bow, tuned to a vibration that is anchored deep in the earth yet stretches to the stars, with clouds sailing high above the green fields of home, wherever that home may be.
Kimarlee Nguyen

EULOGY

She does not remember the ring with its half diamond or that one day where she left it at work and spent the whole weekend ripping apart the cushions and tipping over the bookcase and drawers looking for it. She does not remember the man who put the ring on her finger either, or the way he always held her hand during breakfast and dinner, every night for thirty five years, or the sweat of his palms when he reached for her at night.

She does not remember the first house with its two floors and the backyard with its neat white fence and the one tree that she used to tie the clothesline around. And she most definitely does not remember the clothespins in her mouth, the feel of his damp button-down shirts and suit pants or that day hail fell out of the summer sky and knocked the clothesline down. The grass stains on his white shirts never did wash out.

Not the first apartment either, just one big room and a bathroom that smelled of mildew but they were there together, touching and touching because there was no one around anymore to tell them not to. Not the old room in her childhood house, right above her mother’s where at night she could hear her mother cry out for her father, dead for a long time now. Not the winter nights, long and lonely, where she crept out to the roof and watched the planes fly overhead.

She does not remember college or the big shot football player who died because he was drunk and running naked through the library and fell headfirst down the long, spiraling staircase (“Such a fucking stupid way to die” her then roommate said, crying hard while they huddled together in the candlelit shadow of the makeshift vigil erected in front of his frat house). She does not remember lying to her mother that college was going okay. don’t worry. nothing new, Ma.

She does not remember the way desktop lamps burned into her eyes as she stayed up late to study or the weird hour right before sunrise when she was too tired from working to go to class but knew that she had to. Her job at the diner downtown was not the worst job she ever had but she does not remember the low whistles of truck drivers who sat at the counter, squat and square, or the high wail of babies during the Sunday rush.
She does not remember the first night she let a boy into her bed or the day she spent after, all proud that she was no longer a virgin and how she wore that fact like a medal pinned to her chest.

She does not remember the aquarium. Not the circus, or the zoo, or catching snowflakes on her tongue or the crisp snap of leaves under her black boots on the way to school.

What she remembers is the summer when her grandfather taught her how to roll cigars, rough things wrapped in strips of bark that he had to sell down by the riverbank where the fishermen were because money was tight that year and there was not enough work to go around. She would sit for hours afterwards, right there on her grandfather’s old blue porch, smelling her fingers, amazed at how the tobacco scent would linger in the crests of the skin beneath her fingernails, and the echo of her grandfather calling her to dinner chased her down the steps and to the front door.
Raquel Lucia Pimentel

the boys

promised to
help the stern man
with a pocket full of change
a hand full of bees & waves

waves and thunder
rocky shores
wear down his knees
his pocket full of change

red sky
thunder and waves
bees, rocks & just a pocket full
change—

waiting
waiting

boys with a handful of bees

& waves

thunder and waves
wearing down his knees

pocket full of change

oxy in his dreams.
future

a desk under rays of sun. dust floating on warm air & getting trapped between eyelids and radiators. humidity makes an appearance in spite of the afternoon that has been lost in shelves of yesterday’s memories. children avoiding splashes of water on streets overcrowded by double parked cars, street vendors, missing person’s signs—

on the 11th floor you see her looking out the window shouting orders from the kitchen watching time close her doors. shriveled eighty, time watched her...never pacifying the landscape that has since been replaced with markets

super or mini.

phone contraptions without a ring just wrinkled hands. tired eyes. a staring contest. dusty desks on a gray afternoon wiped and re-wiped and wiped again. memories flipping a new page in an old book. thin lines penciled where the ink once was.
photograph of the F train 2.28.2015

she slips through the sliding doors on the quiet train. a maze in a maze of the mundane living—breathing their dismembered youth, their skin clinging to the metal Guardian Angel...hoping against hope.

ghost train is always on time.
Huma Sheikh

KASHMIRI KAHLWA

“Hang on,” my mother says softly
    “I am just arranging the table.”

I look on while she pours Kahwa
    its saffron antennas

a sleek nectar of saffron
a twig, a gold rod/and coral/
appearing the color of yellow to orange

    fondle the ceramic sides of the cup

like a kaleidoscope, that alloys
the hints of cracked cardamoms
against their own amber

or taste as pomegranates
full and fine of the lilacs
sweet to tongue and sound to eye

Or morsel like almond pearls
and beads of the rosary
film rising to the top

Or bamboo like cinnamon sticks
and hazel of the tinge
fresh from the vine.
Its framework a glitter
of ashen-gold porcelain cup
over the saucer.

My father sitting across from me
tips the cup up, sips the last of it.

It is the saffron vineyard room
not far from red-gold fields
where ashen sparrows peck at cherries—
their copious meal

a genteel wazwan in rose-water—
melted minced meat
flavor blown

that tastes
rista : coral lamb/ mini ovals

It’s the seasoned vineyard field
not far from our saffron room
where the ceremonial gustuba lamb
balls sizzle,
sheets of yogurt smoke soaring from it

everyday
through the Sun that hangs at noon and sets at night

everyday
through a yoke of tangerine that soothes mingled flavors

everyday
through a rising tide of fragrances that last and swell.

Everyday
everything becomes a yoke of tangerine.
Michael Sohn

D’APRÈS ANNE SLACIK

This work appears on the following eighteen unnumbered pages.
D’après Anne Slacik

pour Anne Slacik

Michael Sohn
parole comme peinture — indémêlable, lorsqu’elle se prononce, de la première aspérité.

André du Bouchet, “aveuglément, peinture”
I

Mers
III

la langue elle-même : peinture

(avec André)
la langue elle-même : peinture
d’un matériau conducteur de la perception pressentie — à communiquer sans qu’elle se perde, ou qu’elle ne soit perdue tout à fait à jamais — il s’agit confiné avec ce qui aura été touché, dans l’épaisseur plus avant du support. À quoi ressembler. le dosage
peindre contre la parole à l'épaisseur de sa matière, comme à un mur s'attachera elle-même, la peinture, tour à tour — terre
peinture.

e ce point-ci sur un intervalle qui sépare de la peinture. C'est la peinture.
[…] s’il a, recréé par lui-même, pris soin de conserver de son débarras strictement une piété aux vingt-quatre lettres comme elles se sont, par le miracle de l’infinité, fixées en quelque langue la sienne, puis un sens pour leurs symétries, action, reflet, jusqu’à une transfiguration en le terme surnaturel, qu’est le vers; il possède, ce civilisé édennique, au-dessus d’autre bien, l’élément de félicités, une doctrine en même temps qu’une contrée.

Stéphane Mallarmé, “La Musique et les Lettres”
Outdoors is the rain

A woman pushes a stroller beyond the shelter of an awning, a child lags behind.
“Wo bist du?” “Da bin ich.”
“Where are you?” “Here am I.”

I step aside then cross the avenue.

A woman is waiting out a traffic light.
She seems petite and is wearing a short black dress that almost reaches her knees
Her legs are bare and bright She is wearing black shoes and carries a matching umbrella.

The go light glows. She seems to have her own wind and glides across the street before the mass of umbrella heads.

Gutters funnel rainwater to drains, to the sea.

Indoors is the dry

Dry as a desert a desert with walls.
“Wo bist du?” “Da bin ich.”
INTERRUPTED BEER

So, this is where it was.
So, this is what it is
a dance hall become a super market.

Around a corner
the tenement still is,
a grey brick front, black fire escapes,
a bar at street level.

Screens cover the bar’s windows,
its padded door creaks behind us.

Stale air
sour with sweat,
no tv glows
no music blares.

We sit at the bar
and talk of poets,
Whitman didn’t drink
Dylan Thomas did
James Wright did but stopped.

We talk of dances and dates,
of lovers lost and flown.

The poem I would write
would hold the past in a nest
cradled with words,
what wasn’t seen is seen
between print lines.
“I grew up with Dylan”
a bar fly slurs.
“Dylan was a liar then”
my buddy rises
“and he’s still a liar”
my buddy eases him to the john.

The poem I will write
will see the past in flight,
the present is its metaphor.
NAPOLEON IN BOOTS

He who would rise
from the masses
in a feudal society,
a society with as many rungs
on the ladder between serf and King
as there are gargoyles
on a gothic cathedral
must have a cat.

A cat who plans and speaks
and thinks on her hind paws.
A cat who has not yet risen
from her masses,
who remembers hunger and mice
and how to hunt.
A cat who flatters an evil giant
into showing off his shape shifting powers:
a roaring lion becomes a trumpeting elephant
becomes a squeaking mouse.
A cat who knows
now is the time to pounce.

He who would rise
from the masses
will assume that giant’s wealth.
He will act as if he was
in nobility born
and he will no longer need
a cat with mouse on her breath.
He will speak in powdered flatteries
and marry a King’s daughter.
He will become an evil Seigneur
and another Puss will come.
Lewis Warsh

TO THE PENGUIN BOY

The people behind the wall are laughing
at something they saw on television. Her
hair floats over the surface of the pool
like a wreath. All I can hear are the tears
of a clown down through the years. A small
cabin in the woods beneath the
whispering pines.

You can say there were two strands, but of
unequal length. Pictures of mackerel & carp,
an animal starving in its skin. Everything
will be different the next time you pass
through town. It’s pointless to promise something
you can never give.

You can almost see the ocean over the
distant hills. You can gauge the distance
between the hills and the water. The fog
rolls in at the same time everyday.
The victim is not the person who wakes
in the middle of the night. The victim is not
the person who sleeps until noon.

Was it a figure of speech, or an alliteration,
that led us to cross the stream, in slow motion,
between the branches, or something like
the repetition of a heartbeat, that made us
fall asleep on the grass?

All I know is that my own worst enemy
has come to visit. That nothing has changed
in all the years since we first met. Feel free
to sweep up after me as I follow every path through the past that we call our own. Nothing has changed about our feelings for one another, while the world around us goes up in flames.

Drive your Subaru over the bridge into the water, if that’s what you want. Carp leaping into the air, looking for flies. But what about the pelicans, their beaks pointed into the sun?
SHOW OF HANDS

There’s always a last time and a first time
For everything--you meet your double where
He left you on the sidewalk long ago--
There are many street corners where last
Conversations took place--a door slammed
And he walked out and she never saw him again--
The boat is turning around and coming back
To the harbor--we begin where we left off
Years ago, it’s like a song--Let your mind
Go blank for a minute and her face appears--
It could be anyone, knocking at your door
For no reason

It’s time to settle into my lawn chair and watch
The grass grow, if you know what I mean--a boy
On a dance floor steps on the young girl’s toes--
It’s like the trailer for an old movie that won’t
Go away--and now he leads her back to her chair--
His hair covers his eyes and he can’t see anything--
And what could he say if he could and who cares?

It’s sticky fingers in this life so I better go home
Before the chair collapses under my weight
And my ship comes in one minute too late
(or too soon) and you can’t give away something
You don’t have to someone you don’t know
(Branches of the old elm swaying in the wind,
No vanity)
Tejan Green Waszak

STAR OF HAPPINESS
-- for J & J

A feeling you can touch,
Moving through and around us,
Delivered through beautiful brown eyes,
The sparkle of life.

still
hopeful
giving

Blessings
Twice experienced for the first time,
A magic I attempt to put in words.

A room with a view,
A star sprinkled sky,
Flowers in bloom,
Carefree and moving to the soft tune of a breeze.

I've seen love--
A pleasure, a dream, a mood
And joy unspeakable.

Enough to remind me
How great and full
This life can be.
IT’S ART / IT’S LOVE / IT’S WHATEVER

It is and it is and it is.
You will never be here again, he said.
I haven’t figured out what this or that means.
You are where you came from
And where you are now
And it’s electric!
Like when you used to write things by hand
And live in the moment.
I put you in December and ordered your mood
Before we undid love.
ALL IN

Under a blanket of beautiful midnight, love and peace in and around us.

Warm
like the Sun
dipped in Black.

Drifting into another world
or finally making sense of this one.

Hands held
in every lifetime
you are mine.

The Sun and the Moon
and the Earth feel our rhythm.

Souls reclaiming the music,
making a life,
finding freedom.

Hope in your spirit, love in your bones,
beauty in your smile.

This is ours
and no one cheats us
of this moment.
bio notes

Chicana poet, playwright, and visual artist Liliana Almendarez (Creative Writing MFA, 2010) is the author of *A Scorched Page* (poetry) and “Glass Knives,” which was selected for *Best American Short Plays 2006-2007* (Applause Books). Liliana is currently working on a new book of poetry and blogs about her creative process at http://lilylazuli.blogspot.com.

Wayne Berninger (BS, English, Jacksonville University, 1990; MA, English/Creative Writing, LIU Brooklyn, 1992; MS, Library and Information Science/Rare Books and Special Collections, LIU Post, 2014) advises all undergraduate English majors; manages the English Department’s website, blog, and social media; and teaches first-year composition and core literature courses. He co-founded *Downtown Brooklyn* in 1992 with Barbara Henning and Rudy Baron and has been Editor since 1998.

John Casquarelli (MFA, Creative Writing, 2012) is the author of two full-length collections, *On Equilibrium of Song* (Overpass Books 2011) and *Lavender* (Authorspress 2014). He teaches English at Trinidad State Junior College. John is a recipient of the Esther Hyneman Graduate Award for Poetry (2010) and the Kafka Residency Prize in Hostka, Czech Republic (2016). He is a member of a literary and art community called the *Unbearables*. His work has appeared in the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association’s (HETL) anthology, *Teaching as a Human Experience* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing). In addition to past issues of *Downtown Brooklyn*, his work has appeared in *Storm Cycle: Best of Kind of a Hurricane Press, Pilgrimage Magazine, Suisun Valley Review, Ginosko Literary Journal, visceral brooklyn*, and *The Lonely Crowd*.

Cynthia Maris Dantzic, Senior Professor of Art, has been a longtime contributor to *Downtown Brooklyn*. Her art, calligraphy, and/or poetry has appeared in every issue since issue 12 (2003). Her ninth book, *100 New York Calligraphers*, appeared in the summer of 2015. She continues to show work in drawing, calligraphy and photography in a number of New York galleries.
Lydia Flores is working toward her MFA in Creative Writing at LIU Brooklyn. Her work has appeared in *The Poeming Pigeon, The Rain Party & Disaster Society*, and *Coraddi Magazine*.

Christine Francavilla is an LIU Brooklyn alumna (MFA, Creative Writing, 2011). Her work has appeared in *Downtown Brooklyn, Here’s Brooklyn*, and *BQE*.

Sarah Francois is working toward her MFA in Creative Writing at LIU Brooklyn. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetic Diversity, Downtown Brooklyn, Brooklyn Paramount* and *Visceral Brooklyn*. She waxes poetic on her [blog](#) and on [Twitter](#).

Sarah Ghoshal earned her MFA in Creative Writing from LIU Brooklyn (2008) and has two chapbooks, *Changing the Grid* (Finishing Line Press, 2015) and *The Pine Tree Experiment* (Lucky Bastard Press, 2015). Sarah has been nominated for Best of the Net, and her poetry can also be found in *Yellow Chair Review, Arsenic Lobster, Winter Tangerine Review, Reunion: The Dallas Review* and *Red Savina Review*, among others. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, their two happy children, and their faithful dog, Comet, who flies through the air with the greatest of ease.

A widely-published poet, Mary Kennan Herbert teaches literature and writing as an adjunct professor in the English Department at LIU Brooklyn.

Jibarosoy is the pseudonym of a professor at LIU whose connection to poetry is rhythmic and personal. He is still trying to let his words reflect that rhythm.

Josh LaMore earned his BA in English (Literature concentration) from LIU Brooklyn and was 2014’s valedictorian. Since graduating, Josh has combed the high and low lands of the southwest, working for the National Park Service and the National Collegiate Honors Council’s Partners in the Parks program. As a result of his adventuring, he landed a book contract with the non-profit Zion Natural History Association to write about the natural and cultural history of Cedar Breaks National Monument in southwest Utah. Josh currently lives in
Brooklyn. He worked briefly for the Central Park Conservancy and now works as a freelance writer, tutor, tour guide, artist assistant, and project manager. To see what Josh is currently up to, visit www.joshlamore.wordpress.com.

**Elspeth Woodcock Macdonald** completed her MFA in creative writing at LIU Brooklyn in 2013. Formerly a Montessori preschool teacher, and free-lance fabric designer, Elspeth is grateful to her husband, Nick Macdonald, (retired after 24 years with LIU), for the introduction to the MFA program, which started her on her current writing path, and keeps her from hovering over treasured sons, Ethan and Zachary, and their incomparable families.

A native of Colombia, **Andres Marulanda** holds a BS from the Universidad de los Andes. In 2000, he enrolled in LIU Brooklyn’s English Language Institute, then continued at LIU Brooklyn to earn his MBA (2002). He now directs the LIU Brooklyn Testing Center and teaches Spanish as an adjunct professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature.

From 1992 to 1999, **Steve Newton** was an Assistant Professor of English at LIU Brooklyn, where he also served as Director of the Writing Center. He is now a Professor of English at William Paterson University.

**Kimarlee Nguyen** was born and raised in Revere, Massachusetts, to a family of Khmer Rouge survivors. She holds a BA in English from Vassar College and an MFA in Creative Writing (2016) from LIU Brooklyn. She teaches English at The Brooklyn Latin School. Her fiction has appeared in *Drunken Boat, Hyphen Magazine, The Adroit Journal, Corium Magazine, visceral brooklyn, Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* and an upcoming anthology from Third Woman Press. This is her second appearance in *Downtown Brooklyn*.

**Raquel Lucia Pimentel** holds a BA in English from St. Joseph’s College and is now working toward her MFA in Creative Writing at LIU Brooklyn.

A native of Kashmir, **Huma Sheikh** holds degrees in creative writing, English literature, journalism, and communication studies, and she is now working toward her MFA in creative writing at LIU Brooklyn. She has taught writing and
literature classes at the University of South Dakota and Texas A&M University. Her poems and nonfiction have appeared or have been accepted for publication in Chicago Literatti, The New Writers Series Anthology, Guernica, and Warscapes. A chapbook is forthcoming, and she is at work on a book of creative nonfiction.

**Michael Sohn** has been teaching in the first-year Writing Program at the LIU Brooklyn English Department since 1997. His poems have appeared in Downtown Brooklyn and Zen Monster.

**Mike Traber** attended Emerson College before coming to LIU Brooklyn, where he completed his BA (English, 1974). His poems have appeared in Kaleidoscope, Ariel, Villager, The Raintown Review, Passager, Red Wheelbarrow and The Distillery, among others, including Downtown Brooklyn.

**Lewis Warsh**’s most recent books are Alien Abduction (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015), One Foot Out the Door: Collected Stories (Spuyten Duyvil, 2014), A Place in the Sun (Spuyten Duyvil, 2010) and Inseparable: Poems 1995-2005 (Granary Books, 2008). His new novel, Delusions of Being Observed, will be serialized in The Brooklyn Rail beginning in September, 2016. He is editor and publisher of United Artists Books and was founding director (2007-13) of the Creative Writing MFA program at LIU Brooklyn. He is presently a Professor in the English Department at LIU Brooklyn.

**Tejan Green Waszak** is an alumna (2010) of LIU Brooklyn’s Creative Writing MFA program. While at LIU Brooklyn, she worked as a tutor in the Writing Center and then as a Graduate Teaching Fellow in the English Department. She is a writer, writing consultant, and college English instructor living in NYC. She recently co-authored a poetry collection entitled We Were Us with fellow LIU alumnus, Jeremy Beauregard.
call for submissions (?)

It is too early to say whether there will be a 26th issue.

Please follow The Longest Island (the English Department’s blog) for news.