

# Island Writer *magazine*

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*of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands*

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Cover art: Ripples, taken by Ashley de Kroon, a photographer based in Saanich, BC. She is most interested in self portraiture and nature photography, and is currently studying visual art and computer science at UVic. Her work explores light, colour, and abstraction.



## From the Editor

One of the best things about my volunteer role is the process of working with the editorial team of *Island Writer*. I tremendously enjoy the give and take of ideas; each Content Editor takes their job very seriously, and stands up for their opinions. For this issue, I asked them to be on the lookout for positive stories. It was Anne, in particular, who pushed back, gently reminding me that “quality comes first.”

While I completely agree, I’m still interested in seeing positive pieces. I’m fed up with the doom and gloom imposed upon us by the legacy and social media, by our continental neighbours, by the world. Surely there is so much good we aren’t acknowledging — after all, we live in Canada. The best part of Canada!

It’s important to take the time to acknowledge our wonders. Besides our inspiring scenery and gentle weather, we have tremendously creative people. I believe we have the best new and established authors. I know that our volunteer team is awesome, that the Victoria Writers’ Society is amazing, that our home with the Coastal Salish people is gracious, and that our stories are beautiful.

Please enjoy this issue, assured that our dedicated team has pulled together another collection of fabulous content from amazing local talent.

Keep writing!  
Cynthia Philp  
Editor, *Island Writer Magazine*



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## Volunteer Acknowledgement

If you've never volunteered behind the scenes of a non-profit organization, you may be under the impression that the Victoria Writers' Society runs smoothly thanks to a couple of people who put in a few hours every other week or so. Nothing could be further from the truth! It's noteworthy that shepherding an organization like ours through the social and cultural upheavals — such as massive technological changes and the pandemic — takes many hours of dedication. We have been very fortunate to benefit from the donated time and efforts from a few key volunteers who are stepping back from their roles this year, satisfied to see our Society running strong and ready for the future.

Edeana Malcolm contributed to the Steering Committee for just over 15 years, taking the helm in turns as Critique Group Coordinator, Contest Coordinator, Vice President, and finally elected as President for five years, staying on for an additional two as Past President. She willingly stepped forward to help with anything that would benefit our Society. Everyone has something lovely to say about Edeana — she understands modern technology, she runs meetings smoothly, she's a great problem solver — in other words, she's a great leader.

Laura Smith smashed records for long-term dedication. On the Steering Committee for almost two decades, and elected as Treasurer of the VWS for much of that, she has ensured our bank account has stayed healthy, even with changes to printing and room rental costs, as well as the changing needs of our membership. Whenever we had a question about what had been tried before, it was Laura we turned to.

Ada Robinson has been the calm presence behind our attempt to provide critique group support for our writers. She patiently kept lists of interested members, ready to pull a group together whenever someone said they were willing to be a critique group leader. In addition, Ada is a non-profit bylaw guru, making sure our founding documents are current, relevant and in line with regulatory requirements.

Oriana Varas was the newest member of the Steering Committee, but brought much appreciated energy and technological expertise to the group. She was invaluable in modernizing our branding, updating the newsletter, and understanding anything social media related.

Diane Massam co-ordinated our very popular contests for two years, pulling together an impressive slate of judges, marketing the opportunity and proudly introducing the winners at each contest announcement celebration. While Diane is stepping back from this role on the Steering Committee, I am delighted to say that she's joined our *Island Writer* editorial team.

The Victoria Writers' Society is stronger because of the contributions of these volunteers. They brought tremendous energy and ideas to our group, and most of all — we are fairly certain that we haven't seen the last of them — they are generous with their time, expertise and assistance.

If you think that these fabulous volunteers dedicated every waking moment to the Victoria Writers' Society, it is good to note that each of them worked on their own projects, some even publishing during their volunteer time with the Steering Committee. The VWS enabled them to network and grow their understanding of our local written creative scene.

If you happen to bump into Edeana, Laura, Ada, Diane or Oriana at one of our meetings, please say thank you for all they have done to help members of the VWS move forward with our writing goals.

# *S.M. Perkins Carr*

## The Old Guest Ranch

This spring the swallows will be homeless  
They'll swoop across the grieving grasslands,  
wings remembering: Mrs. Marriott cooking breakfast,  
a small hut by the lake's edge still smelling of fresh-caught fish,  
teenagers' initials etched into wooden walls,  
a fox living under the porch,  
and the ghost my sister saw.

We had to tear the old ranch down, they said.  
History carries too much liability.

It's true we all trespassed on the creaking floorboards  
and cows wandered in for shade  
My husband used to climb the dilapidated staircase  
to photograph summerlight passing through gaps in the roof.  
Year after year, lighter and lighter,  
the cracks expanded and swallows dove in.  
Sun-painted white lines stretched across torn mattresses  
and broken mirrors.

By December, winter sun filtered through clouds  
its colourless fingers groping for piles of timber cloaked in snow.  
They lit fires on New Year's Day  
orange-red cackling through blackened walls.  
Our pale cheeks blushed pink as we watched,  
unsure how to breathe

While snow and wood and swallows' nests  
were devoured into steam and smoke  
and heat.

This spring I'll wander across the barren lot  
like a widowed ghost consoling the searching swallows.  
And my husband's cameras will capture  
only light and space  
and loss.

# Norman Bell

## Two Weeks in March

Friday, March 13, 2020.

Two days ago, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Yesterday, they shut down the NBA, the NFL, and the NHL. Then, worst of all, word came through last night that Tom Hanks had coronavirus.

“For God’s sakes, not Tom Hanks!!!” I’d said to my wife Sarah after reading the news.

The way things have been going, I thought it would be a good idea to head over to the supermarket to pick up a few things. I get there at about noon and discover I’m not the only one who had this idea. The parking lot is full, so I park about two blocks up the street.

Inside, it’s a madhouse. Produce shelves are bare. People are speed-walking around the store like they’re in a film running at double speed. Everyone is in fight-or-flight mode, with a heavy emphasis on flight. Shivers race through my body as I hurry down the aisles, trying to find our old favourites. Organic bananas? No. Cereal ... Coffee ... yes. Nut packets, no. Spaghetti, yes. Chili, no. Two cans of chicken soup left. I grab them. Then I hit the frozen section. Oh no! They’re out of chicken nuggets, Olivia’s #1 dinner staple! I turn the corner. Oh crap! They’re out of toilet paper!

My breathing gets shallow as apocalyptic movie scenes flash through my brain. Tom Cruise tries to get his family on the ferry in *War of the Worlds*. Jeff Goldblum spots a Tyrannosaurus Rex in the sideview mirror in *Jurassic Park*. Crowds run screaming as a UFO blows up the Empire State Building in *Independence Day*.

I fill my cart up as best I can and race to the checkout area. It's packed like the front section at a Taylor Swift concert, but with shopping carts and groceries. On a regular day, the cashiers make idle banter as they check out and bag groceries. ("Hi Mrs. Johnson, I see you got the custard tarts today, huh? Man, I sure love those.") Today there's no banter. All of the cashiers are heads-down, faces frowning, brows sweating, as they hurriedly bag their butts off. It's as if they were in some kind of *Hunger Games* competition where only the fastest cashier will make it out alive. The young guy who is scanning and bagging my groceries is wearing a fun and inviting red Hawaiian shirt that provides a stark contrast to the frozen look of terror on his face.

Fifteen minutes later, I push my cart out the door, then up the block on a rickety sidewalk to where my car is parked. My precariously balanced pile of groceries is teetering like the presents in the Grinch's sleigh at the top of Mount Crumpet. After I load in the groceries, I consider taking the cart back to the store. But then I think, "Screw it — it's the coronavirus apocalypse." I leave it in the grass.

Ten minutes later, I get home and start bringing in the groceries. Ten minutes after that, my wife Sarah and my nine-year-old daughter Olivia come through the door.

"What are you doing home? It's only 1:30." I ask. Olivia has a stunned, frozen look on her face.

"They closed the schools," Sarah says. "The teachers told the students to grab their coats and belongings and go home immediately."

I look at Olivia. "Are you okay?" She nods but still looks stunned and frozen. She heads upstairs and Sarah and I look at each other.

"How long is this going to go on for?" I ask her.

"I don't know," she says. "They're saying maybe two weeks."

My jaw drops: "TWO WEEKS!?"

Saturday, March 14, 2020.

I'm sitting in my home office staring at my computer. On the screen is a graph, a line rising sharply from the left to the right. It's the number of coronavirus cases in Italy over the past week. I'm poring over articles and social media posts when I run across a dire message on Facebook from a Canadian woman stuck in Spain.

*Hello all, I am writing to you from my fourth day in coronavirus quarantine here in Barcelona. This is a message to everyone — family, friends, former colleagues, peers and teammates back home (or wherever you are in the world). Please take this virus seriously... In just ONE WEEK the coronavirus has caused Spain to crumble, and it appears the worst is yet to come.*

I lived in Barcelona for a few years in the early 2000s and still know people there. I send a message to my friend Emily via Facebook Messenger.

3/14/20, 9:38 AM: Hi Emily — I hope you're doing okay. I wanted to check in and see how things are going with the coronavirus. I read an alarming post from someone who's in Barcelona and wanted to know if it's as bad as that in your opinion.

That afternoon, I check Facebook and see that she's responded.

3/14/20, 4:07 PM: John, I don't know anyone infected but we are in complete lockdown. Only supermarkets and pharmacies are open. All hotels, restaurants, bars, are shut down and in darkness. I can't tell you what the hospitals are like (and hopefully I won't get to see them) but for sure this is a very serious situation. The few idiots that are not taking it seriously could literally destroy the rest. The sooner everywhere else follows suit the better!

A few minutes later, I'm in the kitchen pacing back and forth. "Shit, shit, shit!" I say out loud.

Sarah comes into the kitchen and sees me pacing around, muttering and grunting. “What is it?” she asks.

I grab her by the shoulders and look into her eyes. “This is it, Sarah!” I tell her, wide-eyed. “It’s the big one! The thing! Is this the apocalypse? I don’t know if it’s the apocalypse, but it’s the big one ... Okay, maybe not the big one ... but a big one ... shit, shit, shit!”

“John don’t say that! You’ve been reading the *New York Times* again, haven’t you?”

“Of course!”

“And the *Washington Post*?”

“Yes!”

“And *CNN*?”

“Yes, *CNN* too!”

“John, we’ve talked about this before. All that news isn’t good for you. They blow things up and make them sound worse than they actually are.”

“I know Sarah! But this is different! This really is the big one!”

“Well, that may be true, but what good is it going to do you to obsess over it?”

She’s right. I know she is. But staying off the news right now simply isn’t an option. My higher brain functioning is gradually shifting into a more hypervigilant, primitive entity. I decide to give this prehistoric-feeling new me a name: Grug. This is the name of the dad in the animated movie *The Croods*, and it feels fitting because I’m starting to feel like a caveman. As I stand there in the kitchen, Grug is evaluating life in, shall we say, more basic terms.

“Uhh. Danger ... Once we have enough information, we can assess situation, then we can determine if we and family need to stockpile toilet paper and canned goods, dig hole in backyard and live in it. Or maybe we pack belongings and cats in car and drive to remote location in forest. Uhh.”

I leave Sarah in the kitchen and head upstairs to my office, where my glowing computer screen beckons, and I soon find my eyeballs glued to the screen, jumping from one horrific headline to the next.

- White House Takes New Line After Dire Report on Death Toll
- Washington shuts down restaurants and bars to fight coronavirus: ‘This is bigger than all of us’
- WWE will hold *WrestleMania 36* in an empty Orlando arena

Alarm bells go off: “*WrestleMania* with no live audience? Noooooooooo!”



Wednesday, March 18, 2020.

By midweek, Sarah and I have worked out our new pandemic grocery ritual. Here’s how it goes:

1. When the DoorDash person knocks on the door, we don our masks, our disposable rubber gloves, grab our spray bottles of disinfectant, and open the door.
2. We wave gratefully to the DoorDash delivery driver, while ensuring they are at least 65 feet away from us.
3. We walk slowly and carefully towards the grocery bags, as though we are astronauts on Mars getting ready to inspect a radioactive bomb that could explode if we breathe on it.
4. We vigorously spray our spray bottles until each bag is covered with at least a quarter inch of disinfectant.
5. Then, in slow motion, we carry each bag carefully inside one at a time.

As we do all this, we keep a watchful eye out for our two cats, Ulta and Umpo, especially Umpo, who will take any opportunity to don his explorer cap and dash outside. This, of course, would be a complete disaster, since Umpo could potentially go across the street and into the neighbor's front yard, or heaven forbid, their back yard, and then we would be forced to make a choice to between risking infection by interacting with the neighbors or just bidding adieu to poor Umpo and wishing him the best out there in the infected, biohazardous terrain we now lived in. With the stakes this high, it only took us a couple of times to realize that Ulta and Umpo needed to be sealed off in solitary confinement during these sensitive missions (i.e. we put them in the bathroom.)

Having assembled the five grocery bags in the kitchen, we're ready for phase two, which is by far the longest and most arduous phase.

1. We each reach into the bag with our gloved hands and pull out a grocery item. Sarah carefully lifts out a cantaloupe. I delicately hoist up a box of organic cocoa puffs.
2. We examine each object carefully as if it's an alien spawn, looking in vain for signs of whether it's covered in coronavirus thingees or not. (Alas, since the thingees are microscopic, there's no way to tell.)
3. We then hold up our sanitizer spray bottles, and in unison we let loose, spraying repeatedly until each grocery item is covered in another quarter inch of disinfectant.
4. We then wipe off every centimeter of each item vigorously for 15 minutes, ensuring (we hope) that no coronavirus thingees have survived.

We repeat this process for the next five-and-a-half hours, until all the groceries are put away on the shelves, all of which have also been sprayed with a half inch of sanitizer.

We celebrate the completion of our mission by cutting open the cantaloupe. We cut off a couple of slices, lower our masks and slowly take a bite, looking to enjoy the fruits of our labor.

But both of our mouths crinkle, and we simultaneously say “Ewww!”

Because all we can taste is hand sanitizer.



Monday, March 23, 2020.

I awaken bleary-eyed from a fitful nap. At this point, there’s really no day or night. It’s just one big, long day-night. I have no idea what time it is. I come out of the bedroom in my boxers and a T-shirt I got the year before when we went to Disneyland. It has a smiling Mickey Mouse on it and under him it says “Best Day Ever!”

As I enter the living room, I am greeted by the digitized sounds of disco music. Sarah is vigorously boogying down to the sounds of her second weekly pandemic Zoom dance party. On the screen is a massive, kaleidoscopic Brady Bunch — 50 little squares, each filled with people who are clearly determined to shake off their pandemic blues.

From the hall, I hear grunting sounds and explosions blaring from the TV upstairs as Olivia buries herself in a video game. I notice a light on in Olivia’s room and go in to turn it off. As I turn to walk out, a red rectangular piece of paper taped to the wall behind the door catches my eye. I come in closer to take a look. It says:

Top five mental health practices:

1. Meditation
2. Box breathing
3. Exercise (jumping jacks)

4. Cold baths
5. Minecraft

Looks like today, she's going with number five.



Later that day, we get a follow-up email from Olivia's teacher, Mrs. Logan. She explains that while they're waiting for the okay to return to in-person learning, the class will be doing a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning at home. There will be two hours of instruction from the teacher via Zoom in the morning, and then the rest of the day, the students will work on assignments and worksheets asynchronously (i.e. independently).

"How are we supposed to get Olivia to do her assignments?" Sarah says. "I mean, I'm busy with my job, you're busy with yours. Who's going to be keeping track of what she's doing or not doing?"

"I'll do it," I say. "I mean, Olivia's nine now. How bad could it be?"

The next morning, we get Olivia set up so she can access her class on Zoom.

"Hey Olivia! Maybe this is going to be kind of fun, huh?" I say. "I mean, instead of you going to school, school's coming to you! Right here in the comfort of your own home!"

Olivia gives me a look that says, "Stuff it, Dad."

We zoom in to the Zoom room, and there we see 15 of Olivia's classmates. At first glance, it looks like a forlorn, all-kids version of *Hollywood Squares*. Every child looks sad, scared, or zoned-out, except for one — a kid over on the right side, one square down from the top, who's got a big smile on his face and seems to be jamming out to a tune that only he can hear.

"Hey, look Olivia — it's Riley!" I say, pointing to his square. "Looks like he's excited to try this new-fangled Zoom school thing out!" Olivia rolls her eyes.

After a few minutes, Mrs. Logan zooms in. She looks pale and stressed, but then she puts on a smile and addresses the class.

“Hello everyone!” she says. “It’s so lovely to see your faces today. Even if we can’t be together in the classroom, at least we can still be together here on Zoom.”

At that moment, someone else enters the Zoom room. Their camera is off, but there’s a picture of a person in a gorilla mask. They come off mute and start making chimpanzee sounds.

“Oooh-oooh-oooh-oooh-AAH-AAH-AAH-AAH!!”

The kids barely take notice. They still look sad, scared, or zoned-out, except for Riley, who is laughing and jumping around like a monkey.

“We’ve got a Zoom bomber!” says Mrs. Logan, “Alright everyone! Drop off the call right now! We’ll try again later! Gorilla man! I’ve got your number, mister!”

We jump off the Zoom call and the screen goes dark. Olivia and I look at each other.

“Well, that was an interesting first day of class.” she says.



Wednesday, March 25, 2020.

It’s 5:47 p.m. I walk into the kitchen, still wearing my “Best Day Ever!” T-shirt. I grab a bowl of organic cocoa puffs, head into the living room, and look out the front window in time to see my neighbor Ned lowering the back of his pick-up truck.

I move in a step and squint so I can get a closer look at what he’s unloading. After about ten seconds, my mouth drops open as I realize what it is: A full pallet of toilet paper. Math isn’t my strong suit, but I’m guessing there must be eight or nine hundred rolls of toilet paper on that pallet. I feel my cheeks start to get hot as I watch Ned get a wheelbarrow out of his garage. He takes it over to the back of the truck, then jumps up into his truck bed, breaks open the wrapping, and starts stacking one case of toilet paper on top of another.

“Look at this guy,” I say to Sarah.

“Not now John. I’m dancing to Disco Inferno,” says Sarah. She’s doing her Zoom dance party again.

“No, come over here for just a second.”

Sarah sighs. “Okay, what is it?”

“Look at this.” I point at Ned.

Sarah takes a step forward and squints.

“Is that toilet paper?”

“Yes!” I say.

“John, listen, what Ned does is Ned’s business.”

“Are you kidding?! Do you know how many people are out there right now wiping their butts with newspaper? With sponges? With leaves?!”

“John, please. I need to get back to the dance party.”

“This will not stand!” I say, and I make for the door.

“John! No!” She tries to pull me back, but I break free. I grab a blue surgical mask that is hanging from the coat rack and put it on, open the door, and walk out onto my porch, down our walkway, and into the street. Ned’s back is toward me as he lowers yet another case of toilet paper into his wheelbarrow.

“Hey Ned!”

He whips around quickly.

“Hey there John!” Ned says. “Nice mask you got there.”

Ned, notably, isn’t wearing a mask, so I make sure that there is at least 37 feet between us.

“Thanks. Hey, what are you doing with all that toilet paper?”

“Oh this? Ha! It’s a funny thing. You know, before this whole pandemic thing even started, like, I don’t know, back in early February, heck, maybe it was even in late January now that I think about it, I ordered this giant pallet of toilet paper. Way way before I or you or anybody else ever knew that toilet paper would become such a hot ticket item.”

“Uh-huh,” I say. “How many rolls of toilet paper have you got there Ned? Eight hundred? Nine hundred?”

“Nine hundred?” Ned chuckles. “No John. What you’re looking at here is nearly two thousand rolls of pure TP goodness.”

“Wow, that’s impressive Ned. Do you know how many rolls we’ve got left?”

“No, how many?”

“Seven.”

“Ooh. Seven. That sounds tough.”

“You know,” I say. “It just doesn’t seem fair that some people get 2000 rolls of toilet paper, and some people only get seven.”

“Well,” Ned says. “Life is unfair sometimes, isn’t it?”

“Look, I’ll make a deal with you Ned. I’ll stay out of your business if you hand over just one case of that toilet paper.”

Ned shrinks back and hunches down a bit.

“No way.”

“Come on Ned. How many rolls of toilet paper could one case be? Eighty?”

“Ninety-six.”

“Ninety-six rolls. Surely you can spare 96 rolls. That would leave you with about nineteen hundred rolls, wouldn’t it?”

“Get back!” he says. His eyes become strained.

“Come on Ned,” I say as I move toward him. Now I’m maybe 27 feet away from him.

“Stay away!” he says. “You’ll pry my toilet paper from my cold, dead hands!”

Ned has dropped into his Grug brain, and I can feel my own Grug amping up. It’s starting to feel like it’s time for a winner-take-all cage match for Ned’s gargantuan stash of ass wipes. I’m on the verge of taking another step forward when I hear Sarah’s voice from behind me.

“John! I need your help! Quick! Get in here!!!”

I look back at Sarah, then at Ned. I point at him.

“To be continued,” I say.

“For your sake, I hope not,” Ned says.

As I run back down the path through the front yard, I think: “Wait a second, did Ned just threaten me?” Then I’m up

to the porch and into the house. Sarah is in the living room, glaring at me.

“What is it?” I ask.

“What is it?! Let me tell you what it is, John. It’s me pretending there’s an emergency to save you from getting beat to hell by our fine neighbor Ned Hutchinson. Do you know how that fight could have ended?”

“Sarah — “

“No John, it happens all the time, and we’re not going to end up another statistic just because you were having a caveman brawl for a case of toilet paper!”

As we stand there in the living room, glaring at each other and breathing heavily, Olivia comes downstairs and clearly senses the tension in the room.

“Hey Mom and Dad!”

We look over at her. Her eyes close as she takes a deep breath. “Mental health practice number two,” she says. “Box breathing.”

Sarah and I look across the living room at each other.

The three of us stand there, breathing in deeply.

We hold it ...

One ... two ... three ... four ...

Then we exhale and hold it ...

One ... two ... three ... four ...

As I stand there with my wife and daughter, trying to calm down, I glance toward the window and see Ned wheelbarrowing another couple of cases of toilet paper up to his house.



Friday, March 27, 2020.

It’s been two weeks since schools closed. It’s been brutal, but we made it. Sarah and I are eager to hear from the school district about how they’re planning to approach the return to classrooms the following week. We know an email update is coming from the school superintendent this morning, and we’re

watching our inboxes with eager anticipation. Of course, we know that the pandemic is still raging, but we still have hopes that the school district has come up with a plan to return kids to school.

At 7:58 a.m. the email comes through. The headline says it all.

“Schools closed for six more weeks.”

Sarah and I swoon, hold our arms up in the air and shake our fists. At the top of our lungs, we yell:

“SIX WEEKS!?”

# *Sarah Weaver*

## More than a Cycling Story

“It will be the hardest physical thing you’ve done in your 60 years ... but you’ll find it’s worth it.” Mark was serious. “You’re reasonably fit; you’ll make a good road cyclist.”

I’d met him the year before, in the small B.C. Interior town where I lived. For years as a writer, I’d pushed myself, staying glued to a computer to meet report-writing deadlines, then walking in nearby parks to decompress, and to connect with nature. Although I didn’t realize it at the time, I was ready for a different kind of challenge, to expand my sense of who I was, and of what I could accomplish, physically.

Mark was a cyclist; it seemed something we could do together, so I said yes when he suggested I buy a road bike. I’d not ridden anything since I was little. In March we visited a shop to choose what I would order. There, a huge protractor-type device was brought out to measure the angles my body made on the bike. This was to ensure I ordered one that fit me. “If the geometry’s not right, you won’t be comfortable and cycling won’t work for you,” Mark said.

My bike would arrive at the end of May. While I waited, Mark set up his own bike on a stationary trainer in the garage, and I climbed on, wearing my new cycling shoes. I worked at clipping them into the pedals.

“Clipping in makes your pedal stroke efficient for its full revolution,” Mark said. “It gives you much more power. You’ll need to learn the snappy twist that releases your shoe from the pedal.”

Clipping in and out was hard; I took a long time to “get” it.

“Unclipping has to be quick,” Mark repeated. “You’ve got to do it without thinking about it.”

When I sat on the bike’s seat, my feet would be unable to touch the ground. This meant that any time I wanted to stop I’d need to raise my butt off the seat, lean forward, and unclip a shoe from the pedal. That way I’d have a leg free to reach the ground. It sounded seamless when Mark described it, but I was beginning to have doubts about my skills. Nerves were making me fearful.

One day, sitting in a park with my journal, I visualized myself cycling. I wrote a series of affirmations, and repeated them as a mantra, hoping to improve my outlook. *I am confident and coordinated. I am focused. Learning new skills makes me feel good about myself. I enjoy challenge.*

I walked home with the words swirling in my head. Then, the bike arrived. It was a foreign object, inviting, yet scary. I looked at the gears, the levers on the handlebars for shifting and braking, the odd-shaped pedals — *How could I, at 62, ever learn this technology?*

On the first warm day, I took the bike outside onto the neighbourhood road. Mark stood by the house and shouted encouragement. I lifted my leg over the bar, clipped in my right shoe, pushed up onto the seat and clipped in the left, just as I had on the stationary trainer. But I’d spent so much time on that trainer, I forgot I had to pedal the bike to keep it from toppling. I fell in slow motion sideways onto the hard pavement in front of the house. I was banged up and shaken.

I climbed onto the bike again, flushed. This time I did not clip in. I sat on the seat and pushed off. I wobbled but kept the bike going. There was a speed bump in our strata development a short distance down the road; as I approached it, I braked and put my foot down — the automatic reaction from the years of cycling on that old three-speed. But with my bottom still on the bike seat, my foot couldn’t reach the pavement; I fell again. I now had scrapes and grazes on elbows and knees, and my body

hurt. I was also aware that neighbours were likely watching my antics through their blinds. My brain stopped functioning, and my mouth struggled to form words.

“I can’t do this,” I said.

“Yes you can,” Mark said. “Get some momentum going, and just ride the bike. And when you’re stopping, lift off the saddle before you unclip and put your foot down.”

The voice in my head chattered non-stop; it said things like *You’re over 60; reaction times slow down as you get older*, and *You’ve never been coordinated — why do you think you can do this?*

I was infused with fear of falling — and yet another inner voice countered my negativity. *You are not a quitter. Just keep at it. You want to ride this bike.*



The visualizations I had done earlier were not enough; even the simple task of stopping a bicycle was proving too complex! I must go back to basics, teach my body new skills so they would become instinctive reactions.

I began with practice drills in the neighbourhood. There were four blocks where I could ride back and forth on the level, and expect few cars. First, I worked at riding the bike without my feet clipped in and practised lifting my bottom off the seat when I braked. Next, I learned to clip in as I rode, then to unclip. Right foot, then left foot, in and out, repeat. The learning process was slow.

One day I was riding with Mark along a local street that was normally quiet. This time, though, traffic was backed up, waiting for a train to clear a level crossing. Mark rode his bike between the cars and the curb, assuming I was following. But I couldn’t — the gap looked far too narrow for me to safely ride, wobbly as I felt. So, I slid off the seat, placed my feet on the ground, and hopped forward between the cars and the curb, feeling like an ungainly elephant.

And crossing those tracks, elevated on a narrow berm, took skill. Low gear to climb up, then accelerate and bump over the tracks so the skinny tires didn't skid, then down the other side, braking for another stop sign while unclipping a foot and lifting my bottom from the seat. So complicated! The first time I did it, I was panting from anxiety — but I succeeded. We rode around downtown, practising stopping and starting at intersections. At one, I somehow punctured my calf on the bike's gear sprocket. Blood dripped down my shin and soaked my sock, but I kept going.

Finally, one day in June, Mark said, "It's time. You've been practising and practising — you've got to get onto the road." Instantly, my stomach was twisting in knots. Could I do this? Was I really comfortable enough at those simultaneous actions I'd been rehearsing?

"The best way to learn," Mark said, "is to just do it."

So, on with cycling shorts, jersey, helmet and shoes. Water bottles filled, energy bar cut up. Finally, I was on the bike and pedalling. We were heading out of town, toward a road that wound through a farming valley and was frequented by cyclists. Our route passed through downtown, then crossed the highway. At each intersection, I focused on remembering the drill for stopping and starting. By the time we were pedalling the last hill before dropping into the valley I was exhausted with nervous tension. There was a four-way stop half-way up the hill.

"You must come to a complete stop," Mark said. "Otherwise, you're not legal." And he advised me to practise stopping with my feet clipped in, by braking and applying pressure to the pedals at the same time, rocking the bike a little. "You can keep the bike balanced by doing this," he said. "That way you're ready to go when it's clear."

But it was too much for me. I'd fallen off the bike so many times to feel comfortable staying clipped in at a stop sign, practising a brand-new balancing manoeuvre. When I reached the

four-way stop there were no cars, so I ignored the stop sign, and kept rolling.

For the last few hundred metres of the hill, I dropped to my lowest gear; my legs were burning. I was going so slowly I could not keep the bike straight. It wobbled back and forth, cars revving their motors beside me. I was hot, struggling for breath. But stopping was not an option. I focused on the repetitive motion of pushing pedals down with my quads and pulling them up with my calf muscles. Finally, I was at the top. I cycled to the shoulder, panting.

“I made it! My quads are on fire but I made it!” I was excited by what I’d achieved.

“You did well, Sarah,” Mark said, “now let’s get onto the valley road. When you have some speed, I’ll show you how to shift into the faster gears.”

*Oh oh — my nerves were talking back to me. I’m not ready for this ... What if I crash ...*

But I didn’t.

Instead, I found an exhilaration I did not know existed, a euphoria only attainable from pushing my body to its limits, through the pain of muscles fatigued and sore from working hard.

Over the next months and years, I reached the fitness level that Mark had described at the beginning of my journey. I had reversals, times when I was convinced I was not meant to be a road cyclist. But I stuck with it, and Mark stuck with me.



I was proud of how far I’d come. But more than that, I loved the joy, the times when I felt my body and bike were in harmony, when my cadence was perfect and the road smooth, when I glided up and down hills surrounded by forests and sky. Or, I stood on my pedals, my torso leaning into the handlebars, my hands placed in the “drops,” and I powered my way up a hill, in a rhythmic dance with the bike, feeling strong and agile. There was nothing like it.

And sometimes, the exhilaration was accompanied by a thrill of fear, when I was descending a hill at 60 km an hour, knowing I was on the edge of control. What if a squirrel ran out from that bush beside the road, or around the next sharp bend the pavement was broken?

I loved the sensuousness of cycling, the aroma of wild roses by the road, the visceral odour of fresh manure, the sweet scent of mown hay, and the heat from the asphalt on a hot afternoon when I would pour cooling water through the vents in my helmet. Being outside on the road I noticed so much more than when driving — the silhouettes of vultures circling overhead on thermals, a bushy-tailed fox in tall meadow grass, the silence of a cool early morning, and the shrill whistle of hawks above me. And I loved the exhaustion at the end of a ride, the physicality of the demands on my body, the intense focus I had needed, the way the minutes stretched out.

Mark and I hauled our bikes on the car, and pedalled on roads throughout B.C. My bike took me along the spectacular Skeena River, and up a strenuous hill in north-east B.C. to a wind farm dotted with turbines. We cycled past waterfalls in the Kootenays and to a coffee bar at a lavender farm above Okanagan Lake. Each time I returned from a ride, I thanked my bike for the journey it had carried me on, for bringing me safely through the perils of the road.

And there were perils. Debris from logging trucks on the road shoulder. Unexpected cross-winds while descending a narrow valley with a steep bank down to a river. Farmyard dogs that chased cyclists. But usually I could enter a trance-like state, my mind unencumbered, as I worked hard, with my legs in fluid motion while the wind cooled my face.



Then, we moved to Victoria, a city of cyclists. I discovered riding by the ocean, breathing the salty tang of kelp. But I was spoiled by those quiet interior B.C. roads; cycling in Victoria

was demanding. I needed constant focus for vehicles, other cyclists, pedestrians, dogs and people in wheelchairs. I found myself rising early in the morning to cycle when the roads and paths were quieter. I missed the rural countryside, the sounds of the forest and the fields, the whoosh of my tires running down a hill.

Cycling in the busy city was no longer a source of joy, and I began to cycle less. I nagged myself with the thought *I should go for a bike ride*. But even as I thought that, I was experiencing the world in a different way. I was returning to the joy of walking, finding pleasure in slowing down, in paying attention. There was beauty and interest to be found wherever I went — and walking, I realized, was also multi-sensory. I found murals painted on the backs of buildings, public art hidden on beaches, and funky installations tucked in plazas. I heard new bird calls in wetland areas, felt ocean spray in my face on blustery days, touched leathery leaves of the Garry oak and inhaled the delicate fragrance of cherry blossom. I followed my curiosity, and began to photograph and research what I was discovering, from camas meadows in spring, to lichen on old fence rails. I learned about Victoria's weather, its history, its geography. And all the while I learned, I photographed and wrote.

Slowing down gave space for curiosity and discovery. It created the opportunity to be present, to notice the landscape. Mary Oliver wrote about this when she said:

*I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed.*

The time had come for me to let go of my bike. I advertised it for sale, dropped the price, then dropped it again. Finally, one drizzly morning, I wheeled it for the last time, to meet the woman who'd responded to my ad. I was aware of the bike's

lightness, its grace, how easily it responded to my touch, how it had kept me safe for so many years. Such a beautiful piece of technology. The woman who would buy it was in awe.

“It looks so much better than in the photos! You’ve taken such good care of it!”

Now, someone else was excited by my bike. I wrote a receipt, and walked away, with a few crisp bills in my pocket. I did not look back.

# *Alison Colwell*

## What is Remembered

We're gathered on the white sand of broken shells. Above the tide line, the quiet sound of lapping waves accompanies Levi's voice. Levi is a local Indigenous educator, sharing his history of this place with a group of writers, poets and scientists gathered for a climate change conference on Galiano Island. The eroded bank reveals layers of shells, telling the story of thousands of years of habitation in Sumnuw, this place we call Montague Provincial Park.

The March sun is bright, but still cold. I press my hands deep into my pockets and look out from the beach toward Charles, Sphinx and Wallace Islands. Behind the smaller islands, I can see the rise of Mount Maxwell on Saltspring, with the blue tips of Vancouver Island's mountains in the far distance.

I'm listening to Levi. Then I see something, tucked behind the exposed roots of the fir tree, in the small hollow where the high tide has eaten away at the bank. It's the plush brown fur of a river otter.

For a long moment I pretend it's sleeping, that it hasn't heard the heavy tramp of our feet on the shingle, that it's basking in this cold bright sun. That in the next breath, its eyes will open, and it will slide sinuously out from under the roots. Teeth showing, perhaps, as it passes between us and steals silently into the water. The river otters adapted to life on the coast after the European fur trade decimated the sea otters.

But it still doesn't move.

Levi shares the creation myths of this beach and this string of islands. As he describes the changing landscape and

the dangers of sea level rise, I finally accept that the otter must be dead.

Not everything is a sign, I tell myself, standing in the cold sun trying not to make a connection between the first dead otter I've ever seen, and the conversations we've been having over the last three days. Climate change is sea level rise, habitat loss, rising water temperatures, disruptions to migration, species extinction. There could be another reason for the dead otter. But it's unlikely.

For the past few days, we've been exploring the role of writers and poets telling stories about the slow-moving disaster that's approaching us all. Are we modern-day prophets warning with images of dystopian futures, or are we counsellors, showing others how to grieve? What is the role of artists in this uncertain future?

The story of the dead otter is a fragment of my narrative. Not a sign, maybe. But certainly, a symbol. This island is fragile and changing. Most of us standing on that beach are immigrants, cut away from our history and our connection to place. We are surrounded by what is lost. And we cannot recognize what is missing. We need to open our eyes and pay attention. We need to tell these stories.

*Joy Huebert*

## Higher than Normal Call Volumes

Visa! They never answer.  
My mother died owing thousands of dollars  
we could not pay,  
no money, no house,  
her most valuable possession an ancient car.

The mechanic explains that the wreck needs work  
But considering its age, let it go?

At the funeral I smile inappropriately,  
think of Visa revenge,  
quickly adjust my face,  
and express appropriate sorrow.  
After the funeral I clear the dying car of  
Kleenex, pens, loose change  
and in the trunk  
my aunt's ashes,  
she who had died two years earlier.

Now we have two sets of ashes  
to put somewhere — but where?  
and the damned car.

I contact Visa again to sort out the bill  
*Higher than normal call volumes*  
They will just have to do  
without.

# Christine Cosack

## The Man from Netra

He knows them by how their eyes cast on him. The unrepentant Nazi who glares with arrogant reproach, the demurely apologetic Christian who averts her eyes, the socialist *klassen-kampf* fighter who stares openly in hooded anger and directs her five-year-old to drop some coins into the Jew's cap. They all mark him as a Jew the very minute they see him standing in the shadowed corner of the *Junghof*. He is a very visible Jew; no one would mistake his high, rounded forehead, his wiry black hair or his short stature. The way he walks marks him as one who had once been beaten; was once allowed, no, encouraged to be beaten. His small steps seek the city's shadows and the safety of plastered walls and his shoulders round forward to protect his heart. Back in Palestine, he had tried to learn to walk like his young self again, like the boy who had run fancy-free in the streets of their small town in the hills of the *Ringgau*, but he had found himself unable. Nothing in his conquered body or in his fractured mind would incite his shoulders to sink, would free his hips to move generously with each stride, would loosen his elbows away from their guard duty over his treacherously thin-boned rib cage. He is to be forever trapped in this body that remembers all and refuses to be harnessed to his desire for expansive freedom and a world empty of hate.

He knows the Aryan supremacist whose contempt about this Jew's survival curls his lips into a smirk and whose glare holds his eyes a fraction too long. A sneer that says *you may have gotten away with your miserable life this time, Jew, but just as soon as I am up again, I will come for you*. He shrinks away

from those scowls and lowers his eyes in reflexive shame and fear. His shame stems from his own inability to meet such eyes with affront and dignity. Why can neither his mind nor his body conjure the winner's pride? These beasts, followers of hideous doctrines and perpetrators of worse deeds are the vanquished, are the ones who lost the war. And yet they walk with pride and arrogance; arms swinging loosely from wide shoulders, weather-appropriate clothing signalling their economic prowess; their hair, skin, and eyes unmarked by the deprivations of near starvation and toxic living quarters. Every time he meets one of those haughty gazes, he is thrust again into the cell in *Hammelsgasse* where each day of those six long months started out as being his last on this earth. Clear blue eyes had held his with force as the pot with another prisoner's excrement was upended over him, or worse yet, over his one thin blanket. Contempt, hate, insinuation and provocation had danced in mocking eyes and occasionally, complete disinterest. Those eyes had been on him during beatings, and when he was refused water for three long, hellish days. When gun muzzles had dug forcefully into his privates and been shoved into his eye and mouth. Then, when the ear-splitting shot had taken only a fragment of lobe instead of his life, those eyes had snickered, been full of light.

And now, 12 years after his dispassionate release from the infamous Gestapo prison mere blocks away from here, men and women with such eyes walk by him on their way to the cheese merchant and sneer, sometimes spit or raise their heads in arrogance as their glance aims to diminish him. Yet here he stands, most days of the week, with his cap upended on the cobblestones in front of him, the borrowed violin pressed against his neck and chin, the bow rhythmically lifting his elbow away from his side. He plays melancholy pieces: Chopin, the second movement of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto*, Gluck's *Melodie*, Bach's *Sonata No. 5 in F minor*, Albinoni's *Adagio* and, in the most basic protective gesture, he always aims to pull the bow back to himself. This tendency shortens the lighter upswing notes and imbues his

play with a cadenced imbalance, something he feels in every cell of his body and therefore has no desire to correct. In any event, the violin is not his instrument; he could never pretend to be anything more than an average player but playing it here at the market earns him a living. A small, handwritten cardboard sign next to his cap reads: Yehuda Rosen, piano tuner and teacher.

The shoppers who don't meet his eyes are the ones who toss him a *groschen*. If the coin falls beside the cap and rolls a distance away, they do not pick it up to place it more carefully into the receptacle, but simply walk on. He knows them to be ones who had been intimidated by Hitler's rise and might, who had quietly opposed Nazism and had voted for Hindenburg in '32, just as his parents had done. Their shame is likely equal to his own, yet for different reasons and not as deep. Their coins are a soul cleanser, a nominal penance in this apparent Christian country. He does not loathe them, in fact, he plays his mournful music to match their sensibilities; he plays to tickle those gratuitous coins from their purses that afford his survival. If pressed, he would admit to feeling a sort of passive disdain for these German housewives and their civil servant husbands. Were he a graphic artist, he might caricature them as the bulging midriff of a fat, pimply teenager; situated closely to the trunk that upholds the whole, comfortably swathed in warming or cooling cloths, chafed now and again by the tight belt but overall maintaining a convenient status quo. He is intent to not nurture hatred in himself and so dismisses their culpability as ignorance and callowness. Over the ensuing decades, he would teach himself to by-and-large ignore this segment of the population, to position himself with his shoulder to them.

He plays a few bars of Weill's *Drei Groschen Oper* for a young couple under-dressed for the biting north wind. They smile conspiratorial assent and hand him a piece of *graubrot* but do not stop to listen. The few passersby who halt their momentum when they encounter this frail-looking musician dressed in rags, do so to show kinship and support. They listen to the end of

a piece and reward his ineptitude with claps, some coins, a piece of fruit. A large man in a long camel-hair coat stops and opens a paper-wrapped parcel he has just purchased from the meat monger. The man tears off a sizable piece of ham, places it into his cap, and then winks at him before turning and walking away. Was that an act of generosity, or did he know enough about Hebrews to understand and mock the prohibition against eating pork? Yehuda doesn't care; his mouth floods with the meat's scent and he bends quickly to retrieve the pink lump and situate it safely in the front pocket of his trousers. Several of the market merchants habitually bestow the odd piece of fruit, bread, and turnip at the end of the day and he knows he will have a veritable banquet tonight in his drab room. When next he places the violin's chin rest, he smiles and plays Verdi's *Drinking Song*.

When the market ends amid light grey drizzle, he wraps the violin into its heavy, waxed linen cloth and then carefully counts today's coins. One *mark* and forty pennies. With his right hand, he massages his sore chin, calculates and sighs. His small furnished room cost five *marks* per week and *Frau Weiler* will want her rent tomorrow, on Saturday. He will have to ask her for an extension again and he involuntarily shudders as he imagines her reproachful gaze. She knows very well that he plays the church organ on Sunday mornings and always earns enough to pay the rent's shortfall, but she refuses to change her collection day.

"The other tenants pay Saturdays — I don't know why you should have it any different. Besides, I don't like to do business on the Lord's Day."

*What about me?* he wants to shout. *Why must I touch money on the day of rest and abstention?*

Would the Lord recognize his ingenuity if he were to shift his observance of Shabbat to Monday, say, when there are no markets and no *Frau Weiler* with her outstretched hand and sour face? While God might make allowances, any rabbi worth his salt would not and Yehuda nurtures a small, fervent hope

that a thriving Jewish community will re-emerge in this city, complete with scholars, synagogue and Pesach celebrations. Oh, how he had loved the Seder in Palestine, the coming together of the entire community, the shared food, joy and music, the sense of belonging and safety. How they had eaten and danced and fantasized about the birth of Israel and permanent peace. But peace never came, and he was bidden to carry a gun and to drive the Arabs from the land. I can not, he had said, I cannot kill, nor threaten, force or shout. I am but a piano teacher and cannot, will not maim a human being. I can not be like *them*, he had thought and then had returned to live among *them*, because he did not know where else to go.



He shoulders his satchel and clasps the instrument under the arm. He walks through the market, thanking the merchants who had given him food stuffs for their generosity and wishes them a peaceful weekend, makes a bit of small talk here and there, is invited to share a glass of grappa with the olive monger. When the drizzle turns to rain and the marketplace has all but emptied, he sets his feet east and walks toward the center of town. Soon he arrives at the restored *Römerberg* plaza, where Allied bombs had wrought complete destruction less than a decade ago. Now the famed neo-gothic facades loom once more and preside with medieval indifference above the city's core. He sidles through a small archway to knock on a recessed door, which opens almost immediately. Bright lights penetrate the gloaming, indescribably delicious food scents envelop him and a hand reaches for his arm. "Good evening *Herr Rosen*, what a pleasure to see you." He enters the warm, rich aroma of the Hungarian restaurant, follows the gentle pressure on his arm through the fog collecting on the inside of his glasses. *Herr Molnár* leads him through a long, tight corridor into the *künstlerraum*, the cluttered former storeroom the current proprietor has converted into a change and wait space for the musicians, who nightly

serenade his dinner guests. In thick cigarette smoke, three men are bent over a card game, then their faces turn toward the newcomer and crease into welcoming smiles.



“Ah, Yehuda, my friend, here you are and in plenty of time.” As he rises from his seat, the speaker looks toward the restaurant’s owner. “Do we have time, *Herr Molnár*?”

“Yes, yes, more than half an hour,” comes the reply as the man turns and walks back to the kitchen. Amidst the animated laughter of the three men, who collaborated in secrecy for a week to bestow this gift upon their forlorn friend, Yehuda is hustled across the corridor into the main dining room. The large, elongated space is bathed in soft light emanating from three chandeliers suspended from a vaulted ceiling. Several men in tuxedo-like *kellner* uniforms walk among the many linen-covered tables, laying out dinner plates and cutlery, lighting wall sconces and table candles and polishing glasses. An air of exclusive elegance permeates the scene, and he becomes keenly aware of his attire’s miserable state of repair. As Yehuda begins to turn back, his distracted gaze falls toward the end of the room, where a large bay window frames a makeshift stage. His breath arrests when he beholds the enormous grand Bechstein with its heavily ornamented case. He stares open-mouthed as the beauty and promise of the instrument floods his entire being with never-forgotten notes, bars, scales, tremolos, cadences and melodies; with warmth and light and an indescribable awareness of peace. He barely feels his friends’ hands on his arms and back, barely hears their murmured explanations of how the city’s actuary had approached *Herr Molnár* about perhaps buying his piano for the restaurant, how *Herr Molnár*, in turn, had asked the musicians if their repertoire could accommodate a switch from their cimbalom to a grand and how they all had immediately thought of him, their friend Yehuda, who can keep this instrument tuned and will be allowed to play it, of course,

when the restaurant is not open. He sinks onto the small stool and his right hand automatically lifts and lands with his forefinger on the middle C. He presses the key with reverence and hears the lovely note emerge precise. His fingers meander over D, F, G and A, then their sharps. He spreads his arms wide and plays the same octave on the low and high ends of the keyboard. The grand is tuned perfectly. He lifts his head and beams at his friends with an expression so redolent with wonder, gratitude and bliss, the three men lower their gazes reflectively. Then one steps to the curved rim and removes the candelabra, and another lifts the lid and props it open. Yehuda plays a handful of bars and cords, and they listen with appreciation to the beautiful, clear harmonics. The three men are apt musicians and have tuned and played this grand piano for a week now, but their friend's mastery of the instrument is clear from the first handful of notes he plays. They step aside.



He is inside a dream. Here, he lives with his large, extended family in Netra, his childhood home a mere hour north of here. The village is small and neat, the cobblestone roads laid wide to allow passage for cars, mule carts, tractors, and boys on bicycles alike. As his fingers conjure Mendelssohn's joyous *Italian Symphony*, he rides from home to home, delivers and receives errand requests and freshly baked buns, collects his cousins for a race, is the first to overhear talk of his sister's intended. Then the uplifting melodies of Prokofiev's *Classical* take him into his mother's kitchen where her bright smile, gentle hands, and sweet treats await. During the second movement of Mozart's *Piano concerto No. 17*, his face splits into a beatific smile and his hands fly in swooping arcs over the keys as he helps his tailor father sweep up the sewing room in the house's front. Then he leans into the *allegretto* and his arms roam wide, his shoulders dance loosely and his buttocks lift and lean to follow the strings of notes as he floats weightless in a clear, warm lake, as he wanders

with his brother and cousin through the sun-dappled forests of the *Ringgau* to collect mosses and mushrooms. His hands find Mozart's vibrant and joyful *Little Serenade* and he feels Esther's moist, red lips on his own, in the haystack behind her father's house. He is allowed to place his hand over her budding breast during Liszt's *Liebstraum* and the magical, dreamlike feeling deepens. It is as though the music sweeps and flows through every fibre of his body and leaves only light in its wake. And so, he plays and plays and loses himself in the world that once was.

Later, they tell him that no one dared to interrupt. During the evening hours, the restaurant accommodated two full sittings, and his three friends changed into their trio costumes but did not play a single note. Instead, they sat at a small table next to the swinging kitchen doors where *Herr* Molnár himself served them deep plates heaped with fragrant *goulash*, loaves of fresh white bread, and ample glasses of fine wine. Later still, after he too has been given a bowl of paprika scented stew and a generous helping of *langos*, the head waiter, *Herr* Kovacs, approaches and lays a handful of coins on the table.

"The dinner guests tipped richly today and here is your share," he smiles. "There was not a single complaint all night," he adds quietly, "no serving too small, no soup too cool."

The restaurant's owner and his three friends arrange a new schedule, and he is asked to return every Friday evening to play solo for both sittings. He walks home in a daze, his heart at once heavy with the unspeakable loss of everyone who had ever cared for him and the sweetness of joyful remembrance. The following Friday, he mends his clothes with care, then borrows the heavy iron from Frau Weiler. She appears to be a nuance friendlier toward him since he paid his rent last week on time, for once. Again, his friends await in the restaurant's *künstler-raum* and they do not reproach him for costing them a half day's earnings. Tonight, he plays Johann Strauss and scenes from Gioachino Rossini's comedic operas, Tchaikovsky's *Dance of the sugar plum fairy* and Vivaldi's *Spring concerto*. Two marriage

proposals are delivered in the dining room during Pachelbel's *Canon* (and accepted) and the owners of two competing *haberdasher* businesses come to a satisfying agreement concerning their advertisement strategies during his rendition of Chopin's *Prelude in Em*. The room is hushed, and diners handle their silverware with care, speak in quiet tones and feel within themselves a scintillating sense of joy and promise.

And he feels ... free. Free to breathe evenly, to be again with his lost and murdered family, to mourn, nurture hope, dream. Free to conjure music that is life.

*Kim Harrison*

## The Space Walkers

Pretend space walkers Earl Hillman and Leon Jackson buried the school strap in Silver Creek graveyard, as deep as they could under Earl's great-grandmother's tomb. The night before, they'd stayed up and watched the astronauts take off on the television. Leon hoped the spacemen would travel to the moon.

Earl's dad said it was only a few orbits round the world. "Man still has his limits. What's your limit, Leon?"

Leon wasn't sure he even knew the meaning of the word.

"The only one who has no limits," Earl's dad continued. "is God."

Leon knew he wasn't God. But maybe he could break a few limits, like the astronauts.

"Someone broke the 8th Commandment," announced Mrs. Satre the next afternoon, in front of the whole class. "Whoever stole my strap come forward now."

The hefty teacher pointed to Randy Samson, the thin, long-armed boy she'd punished a few days before, belting him across his left hand in front of the whole class. "Was it you?"

Leon kept his eye on the astronaut photo from his *Canadian Boy* magazine. The spaceman floated facing the halo of the moon. In his lifetime, Leon was sure he'd travel there.

"You got the strap for your own good," Mrs. Satre said. "If you stole it, you are in serious trouble."

Leon checked out the other kids, all staring at Randy.

"Not me," Randy said. He rubbed his bristly haired head and grimaced. He'd been adopted by the Arnolds, a religious family in the valley, after his parents couldn't take care of him.

“Get that infantile smirk off your face,” said Mrs. Satre. Her big mole-pocked forearms bulged as she pointed at the world globe behind her. “Wars start easily,” she told the class. “But they’re hard to stop.”

Leon wondered what she meant. Randy wasn’t smirking now.

Leon glanced over at Earl, who’d snatched the strap from the teacher’s desk at noon hour that day, while Mrs. Satre ate lunch in the staff room. He and Leon had snuck out of the school grounds and crept across the creek and up the hill to the graveyard. Now, his friend doodled on his Book of Common Prayer. Earl was the smartest boy in the class. In Grade 5, he won the top award for having the highest marks.

“Mrs. Satre’s not God. She does evil things.” Earl said a few hours before, as he lifted the strap from the desk and the two boys jumped out the side door. They crossed the rocks over the creek, the water flowing strong. Leon watched the tops of his shoes and followed his friend.

“The teacher never straps you,” Leon said.

“That’s because she knows my dad fought in the war” Earl told him. “He helped defeat people like her.”

Leon never thought of Mrs. Satre as an enemy. She did have a different way of speaking, and she came from some country far across the sea. A picture of a steep-roofed village hung above her desk and when he asked her where it came from, she said she painted it herself.

“My goal was to be an artist,” she told Leon. “What’s your goal?” “I want to be an astronaut,” Leon told her.

She gave him a tight smile. “That will take courage. A lot of discipline and risk.”

Everyone had seen it on television. A U.S. spaceman walking for ten minutes in space. Now Leon and Earl were outside the school, like the astronauts outside the earth. They had about 30 minutes to take their cemetery trip, Leon calculated, so about two and a half times longer than the space walk.

“This is our mission,” Earl told him. “For Randy.”

Leon always followed Earl. Just the day before Randy snatched a cookie out of Leon’s lunchbox. “How come you care about Randy so much?” Leon asked. “He’s always doing bad things.”

“It was what Mrs. Satre did. It wasn’t right.” Earl kept the strap zipped up under his coat and held the coat front as he moved.

“We’ll always be the space walkers,” Leon said. “Even if someone catches us.” He reached to his coat pocket and pulled out his special astronaut flashlight which he carried everywhere these days, turned it on and shone it towards Earl. “Remember? I got this for my birthday.”

“Yes,” Earl said. He looked at the flashlight. “Can I hold that on the way back?”

“Sure,” Leon said.

Both boys lifted their legs high as they stepped round the pine trees, trying to move with the least gravity resistance. They marched into the graveyard, with its tombs cut into the side of the hill and pine trees all around. Great Grandma Hillman lay deep in the loam under a dark grey stone cross. Earl and Leon had visited her grave many times.

Earl pulled the short leather belt out of his coat and laid it on top of the cross. “Nobody will ever find the strap here,” Earl said. “Great Grandma will take care of it.”

Leon thought of Mrs. Satre. Was she evil, like Leon said. And what was evil, exactly?

“Doesn’t your dad ever get mad?” Leon asked. “And hit you?”

Earl dug with a stick and with his hands. “Dad gets mad once in a while,” he said. “But he doesn’t hit me.” He raised the spade high, then smashed it down.

Leon remembered the first time he ate dinner at Earl’s house. Mrs. Hillman gave him an empty plate and said, “Help Yourself.” At Leon’s house, his mom put all the food on the plate

ahead of time. The Hillman's place smelled like cinnamon and chopped wood.

Mr. Hillman was always out chopping wood.

"Does your dad ever swear?" Leon asked.

Earl dug deeper into his great-grandmother's grave. "Not at me," he said. "Maybe when he hits his thumb with a hammer." He pulled out some more dirt with his hands. "We buried Great Grandma in this coffin, with her old hunting rifle. That's what she wanted, to hunt in heaven."

Leon grabbed the leather belt off the stone cross. "My dad spanks me," he demonstrated. "Like this. But only if I do a really bad thing, like lie or talk back." He put the belt back on the cross and stood reading the inscription. "There's a rifle down there?"

Earl looked up. "I didn't like the way the teacher hit Randy" he said. "How she made him stand in front of everybody. I told my mom. She said he had courage not to cry."

"My dad says your mom's very religious," Leon said.

"She doesn't like fighting" Earl told him.

Leon nodded. "Randy's got a war going with Mrs. Satre."

The week before, Randy stole Donna Smith's special pen, yesterday, he'd stolen a Grade 1's peanut butter sandwiches.

"If you don't change your behavior," Mrs. Satre told Randy just before she strapped him, "You'll end up in jail just like your father."

Earl continued "My mom said that Randy needs more food, and Mrs. Satre needs to get closer to Jesus."

Leon thought of Randy's grimaces as the teacher hit him. Leon didn't feel anything himself, since he wasn't being punished, but he figured Mrs. Satre was doing the right thing. "You have to be cruel to be kind," his mother always told him.

"Hold your right hand over your wrist!" the teacher yelled at Randy just before she strapped him.

The bony boy looked out the window at the willow tree. Leon saw Mrs. Satre's thick forearm lift. Then the strap came down five times. Afterwards, Randy returned to his desk, sat

staring forward, with one hand still holding the other. Leon watched Earl following the teacher's movements as she opened a drawer and shoved the strap back in the desk.

"Now finish the rest of your arithmetic," Mrs. Satre told the class.

"I could hear the whacks," Leon said, as Earl knelt at his great grandmother's grave.

"My dad said he saw a guy get whacked during the war. He gave too many orders." Earl's hands were black with dirt. He reached up with those black hands. "Hand me the strap."

Leon's teeth chattered as he shoved the belt over. The leather looked like it might jump right out of his hands and start slapping him around. Earlier that week, Leon's dad had kicked him for cracking the top of the toilet tank. "I wanted to know what was in there," Leon told his dad. "When I put it back, it came down too fast."

"Think twice about your stupid curiosity!" his dad yelled as he jumped forward and booted Leon a few times in the leg. Leon ran out to the woods, hid a while and tried not to cry.

Now he stared at the strap lying about an elbow's length down, leaned over and smelled the ground. Pine needles and pitch. His legs shivered. He remembered dead cow bones he'd seen at the side of the road. Earl's great grandma was just a skeleton down there. He lifted his head up to face the stone cross, and thought what his dad would say if he found out they were burying the strap. "What would your dad do if he knew?" he asked Earl.

"He wouldn't like it," Earl said. "But he'd say we were courageous to help Randy. Testing the limits like the space walkers."

"Maybe we should take it back," Leon offered. "We could get into big trouble."

Earl threw a handful of dirt in the hole. "It's too late," he said. "We're astronauts, remember? Once your rocket's taken off, you can't turn around." He kicked at the grave with his foot. "Are you surrendering?"

Leon threw another handful of soil down. His teeth chattered.

“If the U.S. gave up,” Earl continued, “The Russians would be the only ones in space.”

Leon looked at the tree roots behind the tombstone and thought of those roots growing deep into the ground.

“If you won’t fill the hole then I will,” Earl said, sitting down and kicking at the dirt.

Leon watched the earth and a few stones cover the black leather strap. “I’ll help,” he said, and joined his friend in the kicking.

“Great Grandma will guard the strap” Earl smiled. “With her rifle.”

The two boys scuffed over the hole with the edges of their runners. They stomped the surface flat and hard and threw pine needles down. Earl knelt to smoothe out the needles. Leon stared at the top of Earl’s head, all the bristly brown hair. His friend stood up.

“How would you like it,” Earl asked, “If you were Randy?”

“I don’t know,” Leon said. He handed Earl the astronaut flashlight. “Let’s do the space walk back.”

The two boys ran down the hill and across the rocks over the creek. All the while, Leon thought about Earl’s question. He’d often wondered what it would be like to be an astronaut or a super-hero, but never somebody like Randy, whose dad was in jail. He kept hearing the strap whacks.

He watched Earl jump over the rocks in the creek. Leon followed and slipped. He felt the water cold in his shoe and along his pantleg. *I can’t do everything Earl does*, he thought.

That afternoon during class, when Mrs. Satre told Randy to get the infantile smirk off his face, Leon raised his hand. “What’s infantile?” he asked, and Randy grinned.

“That doesn’t matter right now,” Mrs. Satre said. “Do you know where that strap is?”

Leon grimaced back at Randy.

“You better answer me,” she told him. “Nobody leaves this room until I find out.” She looked closer. “Why are your pantlegs so filthy?”

“I fell in the creek,” Leon said.

Some kids in the class laughed. How much would any punishment hurt, Leon thought. Randy never ever cried. Anyway, now Mrs. Satre didn’t have a strap.

“The creek is out-of-bounds,” the teacher said. “You kids are breaking all the limits! You, of all children, Leon. You’ve always been such a good boy.”

Leon looked across the rows at Earl. He felt like he was floating. Yes, floating in space and breaking all the limits. His mouth opened, and his voice poured out. “I went to the cemetery and buried the strap deep in a grave,” he said. “I was pretending to be an astronaut,” he continued. “In a rocket ship. A spaceman can do anything!” Leon stood, pulled his astronaut flashlight from his desk and turned it on. “See?”

“Sit down,” said Mrs. Satre. “I don’t want to hear any more ridiculous stories.”

Earl threw a balled-up piece of paper at Leon. “Shut up,” he said.

“Okay you boys,” Mrs. Satre told them. “I don’t have the strap, but I have the yardstick. Get over here, you two.”

Leon and Earl stepped to the front of the room.

“Face the class and bend over,” said Mrs. Satre.

She took the yardstick and whacked each boy a few times on the rear end. Leon looked back to see her giant pasty face, heard her heavy breath as she raised her arm for another hit.

*It doesn’t hurt*, he told himself. He thought about being courageous and stood still and let the whacks come.

Earl’s face turned red, but he didn’t move either.

*We are spacemen together*, Leon thought. *Testing the limits.*

“I never knew Mrs. Satre would use the yardstick,” Leon said after school, as he and Earl stepped on the school bus.

Earl shoved by him, pushed his elbow into Leon's nose. "You told about the strap."

"I did it for Randy. To say he wasn't the stealer. I never told about you. Anyway, Mrs. Satre didn't believe me."

"She'll be thinking all night about what you said," Earl told him. "I bet we get questioned tomorrow."

Leon tried to sit with Earl, but his friend jumped up and moved to the front.

"We'll always be the space walkers." Leon called out.

Earl turned away.

Leon looked out the window as the bus passed the graveyard. The yardstick spanking was nothing. Now he was in trouble with his best friend. He'd have to face his parents if Mrs. Satre questioned him about the strap and Leon told the truth. He hoped he could lie well enough. If he was Earl's brother, and lived at Earl's house, it would all be different. He could talk about limits and courage and God and evil with Earl's mom and dad, who did not hit or swear, help himself to food at supper, even accidentally crack the toilet top, and all would all be fine.

"I wish I could go home to your house," Leon called across the bus aisle, but Earl stayed silent.

Leon thought of Randy and Mrs. Satre. *A war starts easily,* he thought. *But it's really hard to stop.*

# *Andrew Moore*

## Going Up

I had planned a meeting with the director at the Town Hall and I was bracing myself for an uphill battle, as I had to convince him to offer a street of houses to our charitable housing organization. Dilapidated houses, full of squatters whom I was hoping to support.

I stood by the elevator on the ground floor in the huge atrium entrance waiting for a young woman representative from the squatting group. She was their chairperson, a bit of a contradiction, squatters having a chairperson I thought but I found it intriguing.

The squatter's representative arrived just in time. She looked stunning, more like a chairperson than a squatter. In fact, she looked like she had just come off a catwalk: black leather trousers, fashion-house jacket, amazingly long golden ringlets covering her red cheeks. She must have run from the tube station. I had already looked up the floor we needed so I hit the elevator button as soon as we got through the sliding doors.

We stopped at the third floor but the sign just mentioned Environmental Services. We tried the top floor because it promised Municipal Services. That wasn't it either. Somehow by mistake we descended to the basement and then ended up where we started. All the time I was very conscious of the proximity of the gorgeous apparition I was sharing this tight space with. Maybe I was pushing buttons that would allow us to get lost in the corridors of the Town Hall, forever.

The meeting, when we found the right floor, went very smoothly. The director was only too pleased to rid his council of a potentially complex housing problem.

Forty years later, I am married to my elevator partner, and we've had many more ups than downs. She is still the chairperson. It's a mystery how she always manages to have the casting vote. I'm still the service provider, happy to take part in making our dreams come true. Whenever I find myself in an elevator alone with my wife, I can't help putting my arms around her and giving her a big kiss. "What was that for?" she always says, just so that I can again remind her of the story of how we met.

# Karin Hedetniemi

## Wild Things

A soft breeze rustles the top of the aspens. Autumn leaves float down into the grasses. The lake is gently rippled, then calm again.

I'm still enchanted by the shorebird that was here a while ago, a rare migration encounter with an American Avocet. Such a beautiful creature with its long legs and slender curved beak, delicately foraging in the reeds.

Far in the distance, a coyote howls — a looping, mournful cry. I pause, tilt my ear to the sky. Nothing else for the moment.

My thoughts drift. It's an overcast day, no sunset. Just the wind lifting, with light draining away, morphing into shadows.

Another howl, and then another, gathering in numbers now, their primitive voices yipping over the trees. I glance at my watch: it's already four o'clock. Far later than I intended to stay. Logically, I know the coyotes pose no threat to me. But here at this remote lake, in such an open space, I feel a bit vulnerable and now acutely aware — I'm alone.

Time to go. *Now.*

I scrape my belongings into my pack and start heading down the trail. The coyotes — *or are they wolves?* — wail again, seeming closer now. Recalling that I hiked a full hour into the bush to find this patch of solitude means I'm now the equivalent full hour away from the trailhead. I've got to hustle if I want to make it back to my vehicle before dark.

Maybe I can shave off five or ten minutes.

Walking briskly into the woods, I glance side to side for any evidence of wildlife: moose, elk, deer. It was a bad idea to

hike alone during dusk. I'm in a national park. *Why didn't I tell anyone exactly where I was going?* The coyote-wolves keep howling, their wild calls piercing the air. I imagine them ripping into their dinner — the warm beating heart of a hare, all bloody fur and fury.

Breathing heavier, making steady tracks through the woods now. Forty minutes to go.

I trot down a small decline, step into a grassy opening — and freeze.

There's a herd of bison grazing next to the path, including one enormous bull, weighing maybe two thousand pounds — a mere 50 feet in front of me. The bull lifts his heavy head and locks eyes with mine. My heart starts beating audibly inside my chest. *Thump-thump, thump-thump.*

My brain races in a quick assessment. *I can't retreat, it's getting dark.*

The bull doesn't move. He stands there, chewing in slow motion, looking at me. His tail swishes. *Is that an agitated swish?*

I stand there, frozen. *Inhale, exhale.* Twenty seconds feels like 20 minutes.

*Thump-thump, thump-thump.*

The bull turns his head slightly to the left. His massive body slowly follows.

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

I'm a rabbit, ready to spring.

*Thump-thump. Thump-THUMP.*

He takes a few molasses steps, lowers his head, and returns to grazing — I launch.

*THUMP-THUMP. THUMP-THUMP.*

Confidently a hundred feet past the bull, sheltered by trees and obscured from his view, I start jogging. I never once glance back.

Now I don't trust the woods. There might be more bison ahead, or worse: the lurking wolf pack, ready to encircle me in terror.

Worse still: cougars.

My unleashed imagination fills the woods with the wildest things. Now I run for my life, propelled forward on adrenalin until my lungs and thighs burn. A recurring childhood nightmare is finally manifesting, fulfilling my unavoidable fate to make front-page headlines: Local woman maimed and killed by a bear. *Because she went hiking alone at dusk.*

Somewhere in the nightmare, I recognize the sound of safety: faint motor engines on the parkway. My pace slows. My lungs gasp. Within minutes, I arrive back at the trailhead. There are two people casually chatting in the parking lot, still a few unclaimed cars.

I drive home in the prairie dark, in a dreamlike trance, headlights flickering past me on the highway.

Signal to turn into my neighbourhood, pull into my driveway, turn off the engine. Retreat into the glowing warmth of my home, where my husband has dinner in the oven, and my two hungry children are waiting for me, eyes shiny and bright.

# *Tharani Balachandran*

## **Instructions to ChatGPT in the Year 2043**

Write me a song that describes the pit in my stomach every time I pass him in the street with his new lover. Play it outside their window at 2 a.m.

Describe a good wife. Roll a pie crust on the sidewalk in front of my apartment to show everyone what a good wife I would have made.

Give me the words to defend myself when I am accused of not trying hard enough, when in fact, I am not trying hard enough. Teach me to fight for what I want.

Explain why everyone loves me but no one is in love with me. In sonnet form.

Explain why I am more scared of being left at the altar than of spiders.

Explain the difference between a tremor in my heart and an earthquake.

Make me something tasty for lunch.

Make the bed.

Make the baby stop crying.

Make me stop crying.

Make me the kind of dancer people like to watch at weddings.

Make me a Tinder profile. Match with someone I will like. Go on the date for me. No, I don't care where you go to eat. No, I don't care what you wear. Yes, I am aware you can't actually go on a date for me. Yes, I am aware that I need to take more risks for love.

Blush when I walk into the room. Be spontaneous. Bring the romance back. Bring me marigolds every morning.

# Annalyse Shefski

## Salal

I was 8 years old when my mom moved us to Ucluelet. She said she'd always wanted to raise me there, at least for a few years. I gave no protest to a new adventure.

The first morning in our new basement suite, I woke early and waited patiently for Mom to rise. I savoured the smell of fresh paint and floor varnish from under my duvet. With permission to explore I headed through the backyard to the beach, my *Dora the Explorer* camping chair in tow. I watched from my throne as another girl made her way toward me, hopping expertly from log to log, wearing a big shiny bike helmet and fiery red pig-tails. She introduced herself as Teagan, and she became my first friend in town. I followed her across the marsh to a tied island. We hopped across frothing surge channels churning with kelp and restless coastal spirits. We shuffled along walls of jet black basalt, leaning on sea stacks for support. Baby hermits crunched under our shoes, a sacrifice to our crusade. The mecca was a plateau of smooth grey stones nestled above the jutting coastline. Behind us loomed a wild contortion of windblown shore pines and Sitkas, and ahead an incomprehensible vastness of sea and sky thrashing amongst itself. A single buoy rang in and out of the fog. It was as far West as I had ever been.

“This is our secret spot,” gleamed Teagan.

The droning of the fog horn lulled me to sleep at night. It permeated the ground from the shore, through the groaning fault line which slept under the town, and across the inlet into the mountains. In the morning, breakfast was a tupperware of organic cereal and almond milk. It sloshed around in my

lap on the ride to school. Mom drove a used Ford Focus, rusty around the tires from the salt in the air. I stuck my head out of the window no matter the weather. I hated the stuffy car smell. I gathered condensation with my fingertips and trailed it along the rubber trim, which was growing micro forests of moss.

On the announcements at school they warned of wolf or cougar sightings and ordered us to walk home in buddies. Instead, we took the trail down to Big Beach to “rescue” fish from the tide pools. We picked salal berries off their bushes. Mom’s boyfriend taught me that if I pinched them with my little fingers in a certain way, they unfolded into a fleshy flower. Mom would congratulate me on my consistent intake of antioxidants and I grinned with pride through purple crooked teeth.

Last summer I found myself in Ucluelet again, and the first place I walked to from the center of town was the Secret Spot. I was dating a surfer from Ontario (an oxymoron) who was staying in a van in the harbour. I joked that I was the real local, but I knew I was a poser. We didn’t make it to the beach that week. I taught him the trick with the salal berries and drafted a poem where he was the fingers and I was the berry. Several weeks later he texted me a paragraph on how he couldn’t do it anymore. I was in the mountains during a record heat wave, high and dry. I was embarrassed of how inside out I’d turned. Everyone could see my flesh and bone, and the wine stained cracks on my lips. I couldn’t rinse the bitterness from my mouth for months. I mourned the adventures we had planned. I expected a freedom from him that I didn’t know I could achieve on my own. I learned how to feel the ripeness of a fruit, and when to toss an open bottle before it brewed into vinegar.

I used to poke my head through the holes in the backyard fence in Ucluelet, looking for fairies. One evening I discovered a crowd of blue bioluminescent mushrooms. When I watched the Steller’s Jay dipping in and out of the trees at dusk, their tails left the same electric blue glow. Even then I knew there were no coincidences.

My friend Kaida and I used to pretend we were a pack of wolves after school. We went to swimming lessons together at the pool in the basement of the West Coast Motel. I loved the intoxicating sting of chlorine. We played mermaids and I pretended to drown at the deep end, but I never let myself sink all the way. There was something unnerving about touching the tile at the bottom and hearing her voice echo from above. The soft warmth of the cedar sauna brought me back to earth. We sang “Electric Avenue” on the car ride home, our wet hair steaming the windows, seamless with the fog outside.

I was a mouth breather for most of my childhood. My abnormally large adenoids were inexplicable to specialists, but they promised I would grow out of them. I developed a mild overbite and left snowballs of tissue everywhere I went. Sometimes, standing by myself on the beach, I stopped playing so I could try to breathe. I was painfully aware of the limited capacity in my lungs. I wondered if I could ever feel satisfied from the air, if the world might look different or if my brain could work better. I stayed in during recess catching up on work that my peers could finish three times as fast as I could. Sitting at my desk by the window I listened to the faint sounds of play outside, and felt far below the surface.

I used to bark at the sea lions on the gas dock, from my window in the Blue Room, in the house that Mom’s boyfriend’s family let us stay in when he got mean. I loved that house and the backyard, with the rope swing which hung from the top of a towering cedar.

How to fly:

1. Grab the soggy, mossy, braided rope, so thick your little red hands can barely keep hold from below the round wood seat.
2. Drag said rope across the dewy grass and walk it up the rotting boardwalk, pretend you’re pulling your weary

and weathered boat to shore after a sleepless night at sea.

3. Climb the embankment held together with salal roots, using your other little hand to dig into the wet soil.
4. Manage to scale the first wooden makeshift platform, then the second, while gripping the rope like your boat might float away.
5. Stand at the top, be brave enough to push the milk crate to the edge like you saw the big kids do (make sure Mom doesn't see this).
6. In one movement, step onto the crate, feel the wobble, leap onto the seat and push off.
7. Feel your gut in your throat as you freefall 10 feet, then swing and crest at 30 feet above the lawn.
8. Close your eyes on the swing back, then open them on the second crest to imagine transforming into Raven the Trickster and taking off above the harbour.

This year I came back to the coast to go camping with my girls. We rented wetsuits, and those big foam surfboards for beginners. We were Selkies, giggling around our truck and balancing on the gravel to pull on our sticky neoprene skins. We walked into the surf of Cox Bay. I rocked with the waves for hours. I watched with glee as my fingers turned pink and my hair crusted with salt. In the crush of waves, I could breathe. I was weightless and clean. My lungs had never felt so full and my heart so warm. I remembered that I've always been the hand, and the berry, so I pushed.

# *Edeana Malcolm*

## For Reena Virk

murdered by classmates, body found in the Gorge waterway

I drag my dreams looking for bodies  
trapped in the limbs of half-buried trees.  
A ghost breaks free and floats in murky water,  
no longer mired on the sea bottom.  
Promise me you will never forget  
how the branches reach upward,  
how the roots dig downward,  
how the eyes search outward  
and how the soul, sticky with sap, flows inward.  
For I am too tangled,  
too tangled in words.

Reciting this poem in the park,  
I almost walk into a young tree.  
A plaque beneath it says,  
“For our beloved daughter and granddaughter  
Reena Virk 1983-1997.”

They dragged the sea for you.  
They planted this tree for you.  
This poem — for you.



*PKOLS photo by Joy Huebert*

# *Eden Conti*

## GG's Jewellery Box

Bags of jewellery are piled on top of one another. Ziplocs filled with earrings and necklaces, and all manner of metal accessories are strewn across the bed. For a woman with no taste for flamboyance, my great-grandmother had an impressive jewellery collection. I sit on the bed with my mother in her childhood bedroom that I know only as the site for my childhood summer antics. The room is littered with reminders of my great-grandmother, whom we called GG, and pieces from the lives of the three generations that came after her. My mother and I peck through the jewellery like crows while my grandmother, Mima, finds more boxes downstairs.

We have spent the day combing through GG's storage unit and I feel as if I've been bathed in dust and dragged through 80 years I never lived. This is all a part of my grandmother's grieving process and wasn't how my mom and I wanted to spend our visit. But my mother's grateful to have me, her daughter, around to ease the grief. I didn't understand GG was my great-grandmother until I was about ten years old, and the six years we had together after that were largely spent living on opposing coasts of the U.S.; nonetheless someone who's interested is better than nothing. Now, sorting through her possessions, I feel distinctly out of place. A framed drawing that used to be hers is shoved into my backpack. It feels wrong, like a pillaging of the dead.



I want to go to bed but Mima thinks now is a good time to go through GG's jewellery. She wants me to see the pieces before I

go back home because she knows of my affinity for good accessories. But this feels worse than the storage unit. The greedy part of my brain is hunting for treasure while another part is trying to claw and grasp onto any piece of my great-grandmother I can find. I already carry her name with my every day, but it's Rose instead of Rosemary. She was born as June Rosemary Riggs, but she always went by Rosemary. She hated the name June. If she had passed 16 years earlier my middle name would be June instead of Rose, but my mother didn't want to christen me with a name GG hated. I think I like June better and never understood her disdain for such a sweet name.

"How's it going in here?" Mima asks as she plops two more gallon bags onto the bed.

"GG had style. I'll give her that," my mom says somewhere between sarcasm and genuine compliment — a place she speaks from often. I cannot tell if the jewellery is any good. Some pieces are garish, others odd, and the majority all too obviously once belonged to a British woman born in the 1920s. The hodgepodge is made up of costume jewellery, real silver and gold, and trinkets she collected from her many travels with her husband. There is a surprising number of earrings considering the fact that GG didn't get her ears pierced until she was in her late fifties. Her husband had always wanted to buy her nice earrings, but clip-ons only got him so far. It took him being hospitalized from his first heart attack to convince her.

I never saw her wear most of the pieces now laid out on the bed and can hardly imagine she ever did. The stoic woman I thought was eight feet tall when I was a child wouldn't have worn the earrings in my hand: three concentric metal circles with a piece of purple sea glass in the middle. The pearls I come across later seem more like her and match what I assumed she would've worn every day. They're wrapped in tissue paper and shaped like tear drops. The studs clack together as I undo the careful wrapping.

“I think those ones are real,” Mima says when she sees me holding them up in the lamplight.

“I can’t imagine GG having fake pearls,” my mother agrees. She is right. GG was not the kind of woman to half-ass anything, least of all the authenticity of her pearls. I set the earrings down on the pillow, separate from the rest, hoping I can have them. A 16-year-old owning real pearls seems ridiculous but the idea makes me feel like a lady. They are classy in every sense of the word. GG would like that I am trying to be more chic, more like her — at least I think she would.

Pushing aside a now empty plastic bag, I find a striking pair of earrings with blue and green glass beads placed on top of one another hanging in a small metal frame. They are light like GG was in the summer of 2018. That summer saw the gathering of her three children, eight grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren for one week. She spent her days sitting in the wicker chairs in the corner of the kitchen. The windows that looked out onto the expansive yard washed her in a yellow light and gave her a view of the near constant chaos of so many children running around. In my memory, she was always in one of the wicker chairs or at the head of the table wearing a stark white cardigan that matched her hair.

After one of the big family dinners, my sister and I cleared the table. I picked up napkins while she stacked plates. GG was staring out at the river when she started talking. My mother and grandmother were washing dishes in the kitchen, so she must have been talking to my sister and me.

“When I was a girl, we were very poor.”

My sister and I stayed silent, unsure if there was more. GG told us that during the war she and her sisters had to go without a lot, as is evidenced by her disastrously crooked teeth. What she remembered most was that they were allowed to have one strawberry for dessert, if they were lucky. But sometimes, GG would sneak an extra one in a napkin and save it for later.

I pick up a red necklace. The chain is dainty and the gem sparkles like sun-kissed fruit. The shine reminds me of the one piece of jewellery that isn't here: GG's engagement ring. The ring has three diamonds, a silver band, and just the right amount of sparkle. GG's young love turned life partner, Francis, gifted her the ring that my mother will now inherit. From the bed I can see a picture of the young couple stuck to the edge of the mirror above the dresser, among other family pictures. Francis was a design student who ended up in Scotland with the U.S. Air Force during WWII. He was billeted in the house neighboring GG's, and it did not take long for the pair to meet and fall in love. GG moved to New York, Francis's hometown, without knowing a soul. She came over on a commercial boat with another British war bride and moved into an apartment she and Francis, and their firstborn, shared with another couple. The pair eventually escaped the big city for the fisherman's town known as Gloucester, Mass. The sepia photograph looks nothing like the woman I knew. In it, she has light brown curls, can't be more than 19 years old, and looks more like a historical figure clutching onto her decorated army sweetheart. That same picture hangs on the wall of my childhood home and always has.

A necklace that looks as if it was made of chainmail finds its way out of the mess. My mother whistles and holds it up for us to see. More loops of chain than I can count hang off the necklace. There is something medieval looking about it.

"Holy cow, feel how heavy this is." She places the necklace into my hands. The metal pools in my palms and weighs them down. The coolness takes me by surprise. It feels the way the granite of our kitchen island back in rural Oregon felt under my palms when I spoke to GG for the last time.

At the beginning of the lockdown from COVID-19 she was at the Seacoast Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Gloucester trying to recover from the effects of a stroke. She never did. My mother called me downstairs and told me GG was on the phone. She told me to say something, anything. GG couldn't speak, but

I'd like to think she could hear me. I don't remember what I told her. All that comes to mind is the granite counters and how sweaty my palms felt.



I pass the necklace over to Mima.

“Jeez Louise, this thing weighs a pound and a half,” Mima says, holding it up to her own collarbone. “Now when do you suppose she would’ve worn this?”

I could picture GG wearing it in her professor days. After living in New York and Gloucester she moved, once again, to Utah. She was living in houses her husband, an architect and sculptor, had designed. GG decided to enroll in university at the age of 40 and get a degree while mothering her three children. She graduated summa cum laude from Brigham Young University and became an interior design instructor. The grey and red cover of the textbook she wrote sits on the coffee table of my childhood home. It took me years to figure out I was related to the author.

A flash of purple catches my eye. A butterfly brooch that has purple wings speckled with red is mixed in with an assortment of other pins. I can see this one on GG's lapel or resting atop the folds of her cardigan while she sat amidst church pews and familiar friends. It would be displayed as proudly as she presented herself to the world. She was not one to ask for help. My mother always knew GG as a rather unpleasant woman. This may have been due to GG's untreated anxieties and unrelenting PMS that doctors didn't know how to diagnose, but GG also didn't like the way my mom talked to her mother during mom's teen years. Things didn't get better between the two until my mom grew up and GG went on antidepressants. They never did reconcile their rifts, and my great-grandmother remained stoic as ever.

GG's composure only broke once in 2016, as far as my mother has witnessed, when a small group of family members

got together to spread Francis's ashes. They set out from the harbour on my grandfather's boat. GG was seated near the edge of the deck, her usual spot for boat outings, and hardly said a word all day. When her husband's ashes were cast out amidst the waves, her facade crumbled. For an entire ten seconds sobs poured out of her; every bit of the sadness she had been hiding away bubbled over. No one else on the boat acknowledged what had happened. This version of GG hardly ever showed her face.



I slide a ring onto my middle finger. There are two metal triangles stacked on top of one another and an adjustable band. I think my mom says it's real silver. The metal is nearly in the shape of a spade yet still elegant; not unlike GG herself. She was no-nonsense and ruthless, especially when it came to cards. During the summer GG visited Oregon we spent hours playing the family favorite card game, Spite and Malice.

She and I were divided into different branches during the tournament, and sat diagonal to one another around our family's dining room table. She went for less trash talk than usual and opted instead for self-contented hums and an impenetrable bluff. I was sorry for my sister, seated beside GG, who spent the entire game waiting for a single turn where she wasn't blocked. That never came. GG took the game's name to heart. Although, she did let a little giggle slip after mercilessly defeating her grandchildren and their children. This was the closest she ever got to gloating.

The ring is too loose. I move it to my thumb instead, pointing up towards my nail. I wish I could have beat her at cards, just once.

I comb through the pieces of jewellery I've set aside with as much care as GG would have. Like how she took care to wear the same petite watch high on her wrist every day and always have her nails done.

“Is it weird for me to take the pearls?” I ask my mother, just to be sure.

“Why would it be?” She seems genuinely puzzled. “You love earrings, and who knows, maybe you’ll have an excuse to wear them soon.”

I push them into the stash I collected on the pillow. My hands are still coated in dust from the storage unit and now reek of pennies from handling so much old metal. I consider the piles of jewellery we have yet to comb through and dread the day I will have to do this with my own mother’s collection. Perhaps by then most of the pieces will be the same, traded down again and again.

There is no clear amount of time that must pass for something to be considered an heirloom, but three generations seems more than enough.

# *Warren Steck*

## The Mirror

Tom worked at the tourism office and prided himself on being clean-shaven and well-groomed, as his job required. He liked the job, which involved meeting a lot of people from a lot of places, and he was good at it — naturally cheery and approachable. Tom's older brother Ernest worked at the bank.

One Wednesday evening Tom did the rounds of the mid-week neighbourhood garage sales and saw a nice little shaving mirror. It was about 10 inches square and had a thin wooden frame with hooks and a piano wire for easy hanging on the wall. He bought it for just one dollar from the old lady, who exchanged not a word with him. Back at his apartment, he installed the mirror in the bathroom over the sink, at just the right height. It looked great, it brightened up the little bathroom, and Tom's reflection in it was gratifyingly bright and sharp. The next morning, he used it while shaving and was very pleased with it. Yet he experienced an inexplicable wave of unease right after shaving, which passed by the time he reached the office. The next morning, Friday, was the same. Tom got an excellent shave but afterwards felt a similar wave of unease. He tried to attribute the feeling to something but could think of no cause for it.

Saturday was not a workday. Tom was going to a party that night, so he held off shaving until early evening. He had a late night, not arriving home until three in the morning. Visiting his dark washroom, he noticed at once that a tiny, almost imperceptible bit of light was present in the mirror. As he watched, it flickered very faintly, and he had the distinct feeling of some flit of movement in the background of the mirror. He watched for

nearly 20 minutes, yet he could not make up his mind whether the extremely faint light and possible flitting motion were real or imagined, or whether the drinks he had had at the party were affecting his vision. He went to bed and slept soundly.

Next morning, Tom enjoyed a leisurely Sunday shave, yet again the feeling of something wrong stirred in him. He determined to find out what was happening. His first test was to return to the shaving mirror an hour after his shaving visit. Without any shaving, he still soon began to feel disturbed. When he moved away from in front of his mirror, the feeling gradually subsided; moving back in front of the mirror brought his unease back. When he put his face very close to the mirror, unease turned to something more like incipient terror, yet that too subsided when he moved away from the mirror. So, it was the mirror. But what about the mirror?

Tom examined his new mirror very thoroughly over the next few days. In broad daylight, or in the lighted bathroom, it seemed just an ordinary shaving mirror, even though capable of causing him nervous tension. But in darkness it was more menacing. Peering into it then, Tom again thought that he could see very faint motions in what he began calling “the reflection world.” He thought too that he could just barely discern some dark scenery objects in the mirror: perhaps buildings, perhaps trees, perhaps water. Perhaps, perhaps, but he wasn’t at all sure.

The scene possibly changed slightly from night to night. Maybe. Tom soon became convinced that he could hear faint, indistinct sounds emanating from the mirror. Again, he wasn’t sure; sometimes he heard them and sometimes not, faint muffled sounds as of far-off traffic or the roar of a far-distant crowd, or even the sound of flowing water. Tom began keeping a notebook summary of his nightly observations, for he had begun getting up almost every night to keep watch over his marvellous mirror.

After several weeks he began to feel tired, chronically tired, and somewhat depressed. It was only partly from loss of sleep. He was worried. As summer turned to autumn, he still had gained no

decisive knowledge of what was going on, so one day he decided to visit the old woman from whom he had bought the piece.

She answered the door promptly and knew before he asked why he had come. "It's about the mirror, isn't it?"

"Yes. I just have a couple of questions."

"I can guess the questions already, but I really don't know the answers. Yes, the mirror is strange. Things do happen in it, darkly, mostly harmless and quiet things, but sometimes they made me uneasy and even frightened. Have you seen the Face yet?"

"What face?"

"The Face, an unmistakable man's face — not quite human — which seems to see you looking in. I saw it several times, and it must have seen me. When finally it spoke to me, I was terrified and decided then and there to sell the mirror. You bought it."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"I thought that I might have been imagining it all in my old age. You too probably doubt the reality of what you have seen."

"Mmmm ... that's true. But, what have we seen?"

"I don't know, but it's probably nothing good. Now please go away and don't come back here. Please."

Tom walked home slowly. He felt so tired; he needed help. He would phone Ernest. He invited Ernest over for coffee, but his brother sensed that there was more to it than that. "You look exhausted, Tom."

"I am exhausted, Ernie. Ernie, do you believe in magic and the supernatural?"

"Certainly not. What are you driving at?"

Then Tom told the whole story from beginning to end. His brother was incredulous but naturally wanted to see the mysterious mirror. They went to the bathroom, shut the close-fitting door and turned off the light. It was pitch dark. After a few minutes, Tom asked, "What do you see?" Ernest replied "Nothing." Then he reluctantly admitted that an infinitesimal level of light did seem to emanate from the mirror. "Yes, yes!" shouted Tom,

feeling justified at long last. “Now let’s watch the mirror carefully for several minutes.” Nothing could be seen at first, then the faintest of shadows passed across the mirror, and a point of very dim and far-off light moved in it.

“You see? See?” Tom clutched Ernest’s arm as they both seemed to see the faint and dubious movements.

“Interesting,” whispered Ernest. “But I’m not sure those are real movements.”

“Ernie, do you feel strange now? Are you nervous or tense or feeling odd?”

“Maybe a little odd,” admitted Ernest. “Let’s turn the light back on and go finish our coffees in the living room.”

In the end, Ernest convinced Tom that nothing was amiss. Privately he believed that Tom was hallucinating. They engaged in some trivial talk, then Ernest went home. He was troubled about his younger brother. Tom made himself a simple supper, read for awhile, and went to bed. He by now dreaded shaving in the morning. He had begun to shave in the kitchen before leaving for work. At work, Tom’s mind kept returning to his darkened mirror. By this point he had become obsessed by it and was thinking about it ceaselessly. He had come to fear the mirror. At the suite he now kept the bathroom door shut and only went in out of necessity.

Tom’s work supervisor Lisa called him aside one day to discuss “problems,” for it seemed from Tom’s haggard appearance and uneven work performance that personal problems must exist. Tom correctly supposed that Lisa might think him mentally unbalanced if he recounted the real story to her, so he mumbled about health problems and feeling depressed. That revealed to him the reality that he did indeed have health problems and was indeed depressed. He should see his doctor sometime — sometime.

It was early October when Tom first encountered the Face. As so often in obsessions, he had been unable to part with his mirror and equally unable to leave it unwatched. He felt that he

was slowly making progress in understanding what was there in the mirror scene. People were never present there. Suddenly one night the Face appeared. A large, dark, not-quite-human face abruptly stared out at him with its huge mouth open, and began speaking slowly and in a very deep voice: “You, you. I see you.”

Tom’s instinctive brain was screaming don’t make eye contact. Tom exited the bathroom at once and closed the door after himself; he was sweating cold sweat and shaking. He turned on all the apartment lights. Then, late as it was, he telephoned his brother Ernest to ask if he could go over and sleep at his place that night.

“Girlfriend problems?”

“No. Ernie, I’ll explain, but not over the phone. Please.”

Ernest was not amused by the story of the Face. He felt in his own mind that his brother was now having pretty serious mental problems, yet he didn’t know what to do. He didn’t want to call the police — not yet. Next day they met at Tom’s place and looked — of course — at the mirror. There was nothing to be seen. Several days passed without further incident, but Tom now always shaved in the kitchen, or even at work.

Tom had begun taking a glass of scotch to steady his nerves before sleeping. One evening he downed two glasses. In the wee hours of that night, Tom woke hearing a voice calling out “You, you. I want to talk to you.” The deep voice was of course coming from the bathroom, and Tom knew well whose voice it was. The voice kept calling for half an hour, until Tom could no longer resist his deep inner urge to hear what the Face had to say. He staggered boozily into the dark bathroom and immediately saw the Face. “Here I am. Speak.”

“You — you are going to die.”

Half-inebriated Tom briskly retorted that everyone must die, and asked boldly what, in that case, was the Face’s exact message?

The Face, round and small-eyed, looked taken aback. “You ... are going to die ... soon.” But Tom was emboldened both by the

scotch and by his successful put-down of the Face's first attempt at oracular utterance. At last, he had had his fill of ghosts. "And who are you, sir, to claim such knowledge?"

The Face sputtered and hesitated. "I am ... the Lord of the Mirror," it intoned pompously.

"Never heard of you," snapped Tom. "How dare you wake me in the middle of the night to listen to your twaddle!"

"You ... are going to die!" the Face announced again.

But Tom was by now beginning to enjoy this encounter with his mirror's self-proclaimed Lord. "No, it's you who are going to die when I smash this mirror."

There was no reply. Quickly the Face faded out and the mirror resumed its plain and lifeless appearance.

In the morning, Tom deliberately shaved in the bathroom, using his shaving mirror once again. He felt only a little down afterwards, and he attributed that much to his evening drinks. After work, he phoned Ernest to tell him all about the second encounter with the Face. His brother considered that tale as final proof of Tom's insanity, and he rushed right over, with the Social Services number in his pocket. Tom was in good humour, but Ernest decided it would be best to stay overnight with his agitated brother. Then he would call Social Services.

About two in the morning, they both heard a loud "You, you, I want to talk to you again" and they both went into the pitch-dark bathroom and saw the Face. Now Ernest was stupefied; his eyes were popping and his hair stood on end.

"Let me handle this," whispered Tom. "What is it this time?"

"I don't want to die, so I will make you a deal," said the Face. "Spare the mirror, I beg you, for it is my life. Sell it, pack it away somewhere, but please don't destroy it. Then, as long as I live, I will try to keep you alive and well. A deal?"

Tom looked at Ernest. They agreed in whispers that Tom had nothing to lose, so why not take the offer. "OK, it's a deal," said Tom to the Face, "and here is a witness, my own good brother."

“Thank you. Goodbye,” said the Face nonchalantly as it faded out.

Their nerves on edge and their minds in highest gear, the brothers stayed awake through the remainder of the night, talking. Ernest’s plans to call the authorities were cancelled. All remained quiet. Over breakfast they discussed whether the Face boded evil or not. Tom remarked “No, not real evil, maybe malevolence, and very probably stupidity. I bested him too easily.”

“So, what are you going to do with the mirror?” Ernest asked.

“I won’t ever sell it. I couldn’t. I’ll pack it up and store it safely in the basement. If the Face was right and I soon am dead, you can have it, Ernie. Move it into your own basement. Keep it safe and pass it on.”

Tom went off to work. Ernest stayed and brooded for the better part of an hour about how the mirror had wrecked his brother’s life. It had been a mistake for poor Tom to agree to any deal with the Face. But ... that was Tom’s own deal, wasn’t it? Ernest went to the closet, opened Tom’s toolbox, took out the largest hammer, and strode into the well-lighted bathroom. Without any dithering or delay, he swung the hammer hard and smashed the shaving mirror into a thousand pieces. Shards of glass covered the floor. There was an instant of weird sound, like a heartbeat stopping. Ernest bent over and pulverized each of the larger glass pieces, then he swept the whole lot into a dustpan and flushed the bits down the toilet. Finally, quaking, he flushed over and over, seven times.

He decided that he must inform Tom of what he had done even though Tom would not be happy about it. He rang up the Tourism Office and asked to speak to Tom. After considerable delay and commotion, he was told that his brother had arrived a few minutes before, yes, but then had immediately collapsed and died at his desk. Paramedics were just coming in the door. Heart attack? He hadn’t been well lately, you know ... .

# *Shamana Ali*

## Skinful

My skin is a sin.  
Not dark enough. Not light enough. Not red. Not black.  
Not seen. Not to speak.  
Knots in my stomach.

Brown skin imposter. Pretendian.  
I'm a different kind of Indian.  
Not from Reserve. Not from Asia.  
Only from where they displaced us.

Found family, found me,  
Found sapodilla in Saskatoon berry.  
Defined these days as appropriation  
Because I am not from that nation.

But they said Indians only  
when they invited me to Eric's party.  
They called me grandmother, when I was 20.  
Knew me as family, without the biology.

Fit me to a T.

A dented T.

# *Warren Steck*

## The First Aircraft

To fly has always been a dream of earth-bound humans, and countless men of former times laboured on inventions that would make it possible to journey through the air. Inspired by tales of Icarus' waxed-on wings, of Sindbad's flying carpet, of Elijah's fiery chariot, and of various angel-borne (or devil-borne) flights, there was a great deal of early research and experimentation with flying apparatus. Leonardo da Vinci drew several aircraft plans, yet the challenge was still very much alive in eighteenth-century Europe. For heavier-than-air flight faced an apparently insurmountable barrier: the power which a human could supply was just not sufficient to get a flying machine into the air. At that time, the combustion engine had not yet been perfected. So, alternative methods of flight were looked at.

In Paris in 1780, a 30-year-old chemist-physicist named Alexandre Charles discovered that when iron filings were thrown into nitric acid, a mysterious gas was given off which was lighter than air. Today we call it hydrogen gas. It occurred to Charles that if that gas could be held in a very lightweight container, the extreme lightness of the gas might allow the container to rise into the air. And with a very large container, a substantial object — a human? — might ride aloft.

It was a vision soundly based on discoveries recently made, but prophetic for all that. Charles foresaw correctly that France's military would want to use airships to observe enemy movements. He also foresaw the potential for rapid transport of letters, materials and even people across difficult terrain — perhaps across oceans.

As with so many visionary innovators, Charles supposed that his vision and personal insights put him in a unique position to seize this innovation opportunity. But that wasn't so. Far south of Paris, two young brothers named Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier had also been working on the challenges of manned flight. Their starting point was the simple knowledge that hot air rises; they had found that a very lightweight container full of hot air would rise into the air. If heaters could somehow be taken along on a flight, it might even be possible to maintain and control the craft aloft with a payload.

The Montgolfiers — a family of extraordinarily tall men and women — were papermakers in a town near Lyons. Indeed, Joseph was director of one of the best paper factories in France. It was quite easy for the Montgolfier brothers to build small model paper-and-glue containers, heat them carefully over a fire, and watch them float across the room. Etienne was the “research” genius, Joseph the “development” genius of their team. Like Alexandre Charles, they realized that only very large containers full of hot air would have enough buoyancy to carry a human being into the skies. So, this was primarily a “scale-up” challenge. They decided to go for it.

It is remarkable that the two efforts, taking place in France at precisely the same time, were completely unknown to each other. By 1782 both research teams were moving steadily along with development. The going was slow, for there were formidable technical problems whose solution required many up-front research activities.

Alexandre Charles' family, like the Montgolfiers, was in the paper-making business. Charles himself was a capable chemist. He first tried paper containers for his gas, but he soon discovered that, although eminently lightweight, they didn't confine hydrogen effectively. The gas quickly leaked right through paper walls, and moreover the finer the paper the faster the leakage. The laws of porosity and gas diffusion had not yet been formulated. Charles only knew that he needed a better container

material than just paper. He was lucky enough to interest Paris' pre-eminent paper manufacturer, Jean-Baptiste Reveillon, a progressive man with an ear for new ideas: an "innovator." Reveillon owned a large and technically advanced factory in the suburbs of Paris. But just as Reveillon prepared to ink a business deal with Charles, he heard of the activities of the Montgolfiers. At the last moment Reveillon decided to partner instead with them, whose family he knew slightly and whose technological approach he considered better.

Alexandre Charles didn't suffer the pain of rejection for long, for he soon found other strong partners in the Robert brothers of Paris. They agreed that Charles would be responsible for the airship designs and for the hydrogen production, while they — the Roberts were early industrialists — would take on the engineering and manufacturing roles. By the autumn of 1782 both competing teams had laid plans and had funding in hand for research, for development, and for first commercialization activities. Both camps, thanks to Reveillon, now knew of each others' existence. It became a race for glory and fortune.

On their side, the Montgolfiers found the problem of heating large paper containers frustrating. Eventually they decided — reluctantly — on making a continuous heating apparatus an integral part of the aircraft structure and which would go aloft with it. In an age when "heating apparatus" meant fire, this was tricky technology to use with paper aircraft. The added weight of this apparatus also meant that the gas container would have to be even larger than initially anticipated.

However, Alexandre Charles had his own frustrations trying to generate and handle large amounts of hydrogen. Both teams were working at the very limits of the science and technology of their time. Eventually, Charles and the Roberts were able to generate hydrogen in a copper vessel from which it could be introduced into a deflated "balloon" via a system of valves and pipes. It was slow, and the hazard of explosion was very real.

Working independently, the two rival teams settled in to

their now-urgent development work. It appears that each camp was initially dismissive of the other. Charles and the Roberts in Paris probably considered the Montgolfiers a bunch of provincial amateurs — as indeed they were. The Montgolfiers in central France probably saw Charles' approach as too complicated and impractical — in 1782 that was a justifiable judgement. The Montgolfiers eventually devised a method of firing up an open-ended balloon without setting it aflame, and they conducted their first model flight indoors in a huge barn on 23 November 1782. Success and jubilation! They immediately planned a bigger prototype for a full-scale outdoor test. But it took all winter.

The world's first aircraft flight took place on 5 June 1783 at Annonay, near Lyons, in the presence of a visiting group of nobles and military men from Paris. Indeed, the Montgolfiers had deliberately scheduled the test for that day so that these worthies would see it, go back to the capital, and tell everyone there. It was the Montgolfiers' first move in their astute commercialization strategy — their first "marketing" ploy. The big hot-air balloon filled out, strained at its ropes, and when cut free rose majestically into the air and travelled a respectable two kilometers horizontally, although at no great altitude, before returning to the ground.

It is difficult in our jaded age to appreciate the extent to which the onlookers were dumbfounded with astonishment that day. The flight — the first flight of a man-made object since the creation of the world — was soon the talk of all France. Word of the flight very soon reached Charles and the Roberts. Horrified at being unexpectedly scooped, they rushed to get their hydrogen gas system into the public eye. The Robert brothers had just developed a vital piece of new technology: a method for dissolving rubber. The resulting solution could be painted on a paper balloon to make it much less permeable to hydrogen. This first-ever latex coating solved Charles' main technical problem — more or less. And so, the world's first hydrogen balloon flight took place just a few weeks after the Montgolfiers'

hot-air exploit. Charles and his partners decided to launch from the centre of Paris — they too were marketing geniuses — and at dawn on 28 August 1783 an enormous crowd watched the successful take-off. As the balloon lifted off, there was an audible gasp from the awestruck crowd. Mouths fell open. Women fainted. Children screamed. The airship traveled some 15 kilometres, coming down at the tiny village of Gonesse, terrifying the whole village. After overcoming their fear of this Thing fallen from the sky, the villagers destroyed the balloon with pitchforks and axes. “We have killed the monster!”

Charles and the Roberts were elated by the success of their flight, but the destruction of their big balloon was a serious setback. With their next flight already in mind, the Roberts persuaded the Bishop of Paris to have an announcement read in all the churches of the region, explaining that balloons were harmless objects to be treated with respect. This ingenious public relations tactic worked.

Next, the Montgolfiers upped the ante in October 1783 with another hot-air balloon flight, this time carrying a chicken, two ducks and a young goat high into the air. This flight was longer and extraordinarily successful, all the little passengers landing without injury. But it didn't make much public impression because this time there was no audience visiting from the capital. Reveillon and the Montgolfiers then decided to stake everything on a manned flight, to be launched from Versailles in the presence of King Louis XVI himself. Reveillon and Etienne Montgolfier built a 60,000-cubic-ft balloon specifically designed for making flights with humans. It had rich decorative touches of gold figures on a blue background, including fleur-de-lis, signs of the zodiac, and suns with King Louis XVI's face in the centre. Etienne Montgolfier himself was the very first human to lift off earth in a balloon, making a tethered test “flight” at the Reveillon workshop on 15 October 1783. Later that same day, the nobleman Jean-Paul Pilatre de Rozier became the second person to ascend briefly into the air, to the 80-foot length of the same tether.

Two very adventurous nobles next volunteered to take the untethered balloon up. On 21 November 1783, Francois D'Arlandes and Pilatre de Rozier became the first men to really fly: untethered. Their job was no picnic. Standing on a very small platform, alongside a firestove and a woodpile of fuel, they had to feed the fire not too much, not too little, and also they had to steer the airship via a rudder sail. Amazingly, they successfully piloted their huge craft over more than 10 kilometres, and they even managed a smooth landing. Now they were the talk of Europe, and the event was also reported in America.

Charles' team was back in the air within two weeks with a record-breaking long and high-altitude flight, also launched from Versailles, using a "high-tech" balloon replete with pressure gauges, control valves and a rudder-card. At the launch, Charles was about to cut the restraining cord when by chance he noticed that none other than tall Etienne Montgolfier was in the front ranks of the nearly 100,000 spectators. Charles stopped — we will never know what passed through his mind at that moment — then he walked over to Montgolfier, passed the shears to him, and generously acknowledged him before the vast crowd as the true inventor of lighter-than-air machines. They cut the rope together. The balloon ascended rapidly, right into a Bourbon-white cloud, to the accompaniment of a loud "Ooooooh" from the enraptured spectators. More ladies fainted, and several men too. The flight was perfect and the landing was orderly, 32 kilometres distant from the launch site, to a warm welcome by villagers. Airships had achieved public acceptance.

The completely unexpected then occurred: Charles, the Roberts, Reveillon and the Montgolfiers all joined forces — a merger. The business deal was swiftly done, and an aircraft industry was born. It had mostly happened in a spectacular innovation burst of just 14 weeks in 1783. Yet the success was lasting. To this day, the French term for a hot-air balloon is "montgolfière," and for a gas-filled balloon "charlière."

# *J.F. Judy Brooks*

## I'll Have Salad Please

The day was quickly becoming too hot and muggy for garden chores. It was time to quit, so I headed for some shade, got myself comfortably installed in a deck chair, feet up on an old Rubbermaid stool, ready to read the latest issue of *The Costco Connection*. While this magazine has many redeeming features, it is not to be confused with their other dispatch, *The Wellness Connection*. Something that will soon become obvious.

To continue ... I was in the food section, deep into reading about the wonders of walnut oil, when, on flipping the page, I was struck by an illustration that can only be described as the epitome of fusion cuisine. It was a perfect marriage of the culinary palates of my childhood — food from the great provinces of Newfoundland and Quebec, all combined in one savoury dish! A veritable tour de force from the quirky imagination of Chef Dylan Benoit, who named it:

### Grilled Lobster Poutine (*swoon*)

This is not your average gravy-slathered mound of wimpy fries, covered in a meltdown of no-name mozzarella. No indeed. We are talking real French Fries — crispy-brown on the outside, soft and plump on the inside. The kind you'd get from any respectable Québécois *casse-croûte*. Next, we are talking tender morsels of yummy East Coast lobster, instantly reminding me that some of my favorite cousins are fishermen — the very ones who haul in lobster traps from the miserably cold North Atlantic. And not one of them can swim.

What's more, Chef Benoit's recipe calls for a near-classic bearnaise sauce, made with a pound of dairy butter, melted and lovingly combined with a splash of lemon juice, a dash of Tabasco, a little white wine and a sprig of tarragon. Chunks of grilled lobster are added and the sauce ladled over the bed of fries. The plate is finished with a crumble of feta and some chopped chives. Not a stick of mozzarella in sight.

This combo thrills me no end. I can taste it, picture myself diving into a platter of its deliciousness. But wait! I would never eat this, much less make the recipe. I value my arteries too much. It is and will remain a frivolous romp through the gastronomic world of Foodies. And besides, on such a glorious summer day, all I want is a large green salad ...

perhaps a lobster salad,

with fries on the side.

# *Louise Arnott*

## Beached

“Beach time old girl.” Cecelia took Daisy’s face in her hands and planted a kiss on her nose. She unhooked the leash. “No tormenting gulls, no otter poop snacks.”

Free, Daisy raced down the steep slope, tail high, her bark at full pitch.

Adam grimaced. “Must you kiss the bloody dog? Think where that nose has been.”

Cecelia winked. “I kissed you this morning and I knew where those lips had been.”

Theirs was a companionable walk along the familiar path. Approaching the treacherous steps leading to the beach, Cecelia surreptitiously rubbed her aching hip, as Adam exclaimed, “Finally. It only took three phone calls to get hand rails installed. Still, be careful, Cecelia. We don’t need you taking any more tumbles.”

Pausing part way down to catch her breath, Cecelia blew warmth into her fingers and jammed her hands into her pockets. Adam pulled out nubby wool gloves. He handed his ill-prepared spouse the right one and donned the left.

Cecelia smiled. “Thanks, Love.” Not seeing Daisy, she gave an ear-piercing finger-whistle.

Adam winced. “Must you, Cecelia?”

Daisy reluctantly abandoned her industrious scavenging and woofed an enthusiastic welcome. Nails clicking on damp wood, she tore up the steps and nudged the left pocket of Adam’s tweed duffle coat.

“I suppose you want a treat.”

Daisy sat, bottom wriggling, her eyes never leaving Adam's hand.

Muttering "hip don't fail me now," Cecelia braced herself for the long drop from the bottom step. Her knee buckled as her foot bounced off an unexpected taut, rubbery surface. She probed carefully, then as her weight shifted, she tumbled, arms flailing, into exploding detritus.

She shrieked. "Eew, gross, what is it?" She scrambled backwards, her hands and knees dripping in putrid goop. Tears flooding her eyes, Cecelia retched, wiped her mouth, spit and retched again.

Daisy bounded down the staircase, nose aquiver, captivated by the odiferous delights. Adam, frantically searched for the least precarious way to reach her, called, "Are you hurt, Love?"

She shook her head and he quipped, "Oh, my dear wife, though not swallowed by it, you appear to have landed in the belly of the whale." He squinted. "Although I believe this expired creature was once a seal."

"Adam, I need help, not intellectual humour."

"Having naught but my handkerchief to offer, I would recommend the bay as your bath, while I ..."

Cecelia let out a shriek. "Daisy. Stop. Come. Now! Grab her Adam."

Adam seized Daisy by the collar and straight-armed her over to Cecelia. He picked his way back to the steps and with one hand on the railing said, "I am going to trudge home and return in my truck with clean, warm clothes and the tarp for additional comfort. Your malodorous mongrel will ride in back with ..."

"Me?"

"If the noisome stench of seal carcass lingers my love ..."

"No!"

"But, Dear, my truck ..."

"You pompous ass. Bring my car. Wear nose-plugs, ride with us, windows down. Or walk home. Please hurry, Dear."

# *Dana Reinhardt*

## Snake Oil

It started so innocuously ... sneakily almost

Marriage. Business.

stress, so many flus, colds

Intro the Mega supplements: boost your immune system!

Vitamin C, Vitamin E, B-complex, Multis, Fish oil,

Zinc, Selenium



Buy a house. Start a family. Marital unbliss.

anxious, not sleeping well

Cue the botanicals: calm your nervous system!

Holy Basil, Passionflower, St John's Wort,

Ashwagandha, Curcumin, Valerian Root



Divorce. Start again.

can't relax, despair

Make way for the illegals: cure your depression!

THC, CBD, LSD, Psilocybin, microdosing



Aging. Menopause.

so tired, brain fog, sleep where did you go?

Enter the Neurotransmitters: change your brain!

Serotonin, Melatonin, 5-HTP, L-theanine, GABA,

Amino Acids, Adaptogens

Why can I not just be enough,

in this one precious body?

*P.J. Smith*

## Scammers

Franky fidgets at the end of a makeshift boardroom table. Smiles nervously at his new hightops, while his brown eyes dart around the cavernous room he's only ever heard described fearfully.

The vault. Cinder-block. Windowless. Concealed inside abandoned tunnels under the city's rough and dirty downtown streets.

They'd blindfolded him and walked him down a dank passageway.

Being summoned here could be good or bad. Franky and the others have no way of knowing. The shiny white sneakers are a reward and good sign. But he's wary.

Some never return from the vault. Franky and the other operators know that some taken on day trips, supposedly for fun and shopping, have not returned. Those operators — they're always told — have been sent back to family. When they're told these stories, Franky and crew feel twinges of hope, quickly snuffed by the reality that their handlers carry guns and the vault actually exists. There's no choice; they must believe and do what they're told.

Touching the sneakers, Franky believes it won't be the day when others are told he's been returned to his mother. True, he misses and wishes for her. Instinctively, though he knows their separation keeps them alive. Equally, he's aware that one day his usefulness might end.

Not today. He's done well and pleased his handler, Jared.

All day, Jared's been shoulder-slapping and re-assuring Franky that the boss is grateful for such a big take. "It's sizeable.

He noticed.” At the mall, Jared bought Franky the sneakers plus cigarettes, colas, gum. “It’s a big score for our team. You’ve done good, kid.”

The vault is eerily quiet. Stagnant air.

Franky squirms.

Next to him, Jared, wearing black-framed glasses, stares at his laptop. Soon, the bunker fills with other section heads, who nod and bury their faces into their laptops. Some step out for a smoke; others mill about, or sit fixedly with furrowed brows.

Franky studies each face. Comparatively, Jared seems relaxed. This is good. Most of their days are tense — grinding to meet quotas — and if something bad was going to happen then Jared would show it.

Wary-eyed, though, Franky tremors and his knee thumps a table leg. Jared reaches over firm-handed to stop it.

“He doesn’t like that,” Jared nods at the door. “Nervous people make him nervous.”

Franky gulps, eyes the door. “Sorry.”

“He’s old school. Don’t say a word unless spoken to.”

“Yes.”

“And don’t stare.” Jared points at the sneakers. “They fit okay?”

Franky stares at the door. “Perfect, thank you.”

“You earned it.” Another shoulder slap.

The door swings open. A large overcoated man steps in followed by two black-suited brutes. Frank’s eyes bulge. First time meeting the boss; he prays it’s not the last.

“Please be seated.” Boss remains standing as the suits remove his overcoat. He nods at every face.

The boss. Looks like a movie gangster. Grizzled, dark-eyed, grey-bearded. Sneering look. Green-tinted glasses. Deep facial scar.

Franky gawks and gulps.

Boss leans on the table with the knuckles of his clenched fists. Looks round the table at each section head: help desk,

innovation, IT, research, security and the handlers for phone, email and social media operators.

He stares intently at Jared and Franky, who gawks at the scar. “That’s some solid work,” boss grins, showing gold-capped teeth. Jared just nods.

Boss stands up. Long inhale. Exhale. Wags a finger round the table before pointing at Jared and Franky. “This email team is getting results — the rest of you take notice.” He squints: “I’ll be listening to your reports with interest.”

Stares at Franky, whose leg thumps the table. Jared nudges Franky to stand. Boss removes his jacket, rolls up his sleeves. “So, you’re Franky, eh? Nice catch, son.”

Franky swallows. Mouth dry, he nods, smiles. Boss eyeballs Jared. “How much, exactly?”

“Hundred and twenty-six thousand.”

“Impressive. You used the tax scheme?”

“Yeah. Once she let us in, we got access to her savings.”

“No hitches? Backtracks?”

“None so far. All smooth.” Jared acknowledges Franky’s labors. “The pandemic paved the way, keeping everyone cooped up.”

Boss smirks. “Compliant.”

“Exactly. Ready to follow government orders. We just slid an extra message into her inbox. The tax template, Franky’s handiwork, perfect.”

The section heads nod at Franky, who just stares looking scared at the hightops.

“Effective,” boss grins. “Solid numbers.” He rubs his chin. “That’s a big take, enough to bring heat. Who’s the target? Anyone we should worry about?”

Jared checks his laptop.

“Elderly widow. Lives alone.”

“She’s not cleaned out?”

“No, no. We left some.”

“Good. The bank will help her. Family?”

“Granddaughter.”

“Where’s she?”

“Gone.”

Boss smirks. “Good. Routines?”

“Nothing much. She regularly visits a place called the Lavender Room.”

Boss chortles. “The what? Lavender Room? What’s that, a fuckin’ teahouse or something? How nice.” The mood in the room lightens. “Okay, so everything’s wiped clean?”

“Not a trace.” Jared thumbs at Franky. “He’s good.”

“Nice score, guys,” boss sighs. “Turn it over to security to keep an eye, okay? Someone’s always looking.” Boss looks fixedly at Franky. “So, you spoke to her?”

“Yes, sir.” Franky uses the same clear voice and diction he’s been told to practise. “I had been watching her, sir, through the camera. She appeared confused, so I called to offer assistance.”

“No questions?”

“None sir. She was worried about the notice we sent, so I explained carefully, reassuring her.”

“Good work.” Boss relaxes. “You’ve been treated well?”

Slowly, Franky steps away from the table to show off his sneakers.

“Nice.” Boss taps his phone, shows Franky a photo. “Your mother and sister, we’re taking good care of them, muchacho.”

Franky gapes at the image — his mother and sister, unsmiling and expressionless. Unusual. He misses them, worries constantly. He blushes as boss gestures him to sit down. Franky can’t get the image out of his head: *mi madre*. He’d do anything to see her again. He squeezes the seat with both hands to suppress his rising anger.

At wrap-up, boss reminds the handlers to keep their crews vaccinated and ESL updated. “I don’t want anything messing up operations, clear?” The two suits help boss with his overcoat. “That’s it, people. Let’s get rich.”

Driving back to the warehouse, as Jared yacks on his phone, Franky stares out the window. Looking down, his sneakers seem now to pinch his feet.

On the city's west side, Rosie Jones sits anxiously behind an oak desk in the sunroom of her seaside cottage.

She fumbles with her laptop. Rosie's computer literacy is poor and she's had a scare, a tax reassessment with arrears. She's flustered about the urgent emails and yesterday's phone call from a tax agent, though the young man was reassuring, pleasant and polite as he patiently guided her through an online appeals form:

“Clearly, there has been a mistake, madam, a computer error.”

“Oh dear.”

“We are very sorry for the inconvenience this causes you.”

“Well, how long will this take?”

“A day or two, madam. Just click send madam ... perfect. All done.”

Waiting for email to twirl open, she sips jasmine tea and sees outside the sun's sparkle and breeze fluttering her flowers as red monarchs take flight.

Normally soothing. Not today.

Rosie frets too about her granddaughter Emma, who suddenly upped-and-left to move south with a new boyfriend. Just before leaving, Emma set up Rosie's new laptop, email and online banking and bookmarked a few pages, leaving sticky notes around the screen.

Her hand trembles as she mouse clicks.

Email opens and she finds no new messages from the tax office. Relief. Her pulse slows, she sighs. Just as the young man said: “No news is good news.”

Calmer now, her mind turns to Emma. Deciding to send her a small money transfer, along with a message, Rosie re-reads the sticky notes. She pecks the keys to enter her banking password.

Scrolling up and down, she sees her accounts — chequing and two savings — but something’s wrong.

Squinting, adjusting her glasses, she rechecks the accounts. Wide-eyed she stares at the screen. Her heart and mind race. Staring back are the savings-account balances. She clicks, scrolls, clicks. Something’s very wrong: What’s happened? This can’t be right.

Readjusts her glasses, ponders whether her eyes have finally failed. Second and third looks. Nothing changes.

Sheer panic.

Frantically fumbling with her phone, she calls a 1-800 number, shakingly follows the prompts. Short breathed. Veins coursing. Oh my. This can’t be.

Following a string of panicked phone conversations, she rushes by taxi to the bank, where they offer water and reassure Rosie — as a longtime customer — that they’re investigating the fraud and working closely with police detectives, who may want to talk to her.

Back home, Rosie feels nauseous. She weeps for her Frank: He’ll be rolling in his grave. A tree faller and miller, old-fashioned and honest, Frank nearly broke his back saving every penny for their West-Coast retirement. Nearly lost it all. Frank was leery of computers and warned her. What have I done? She paces, tries again to reach Emma.

Soon, two burly men arrive, identify themselves as fraud detectives. The younger one is a tech specialist who examines her phone and laptop. The officers speak in comforting tones, telling Rosie she did nothing wrong.

“You were targeted,” says the older cop, unshaven. “These cyber-criminals prey on senior citizens. Always crawl out during the tax season.”

“They’re convincing,” adds the techie, explaining the messages she received are highly sophisticated. “Some are masters at this.”

Trembling, Rosie pours tea and carefully listens as the investigators explain email phishing.

“These are huge crime rings,” the older cop explains. “Massive networks, highly organized. Russians are behind many dark net operations.”

The dark net. Rosie feels her head spin with all the terminology. She wonders what Frank would think. “If you saw them at work,” the techie says, “you would see a room of operators on laptops and cell phones, talking to innocent people like you.”

“They hunt for people with savings,” the older cop gestures outside, “in these areas of the city. Believe me, you’re not alone.”

Techie checks the laptop camera, nods to the older cop. They say nothing.

Overwhelmed, Rosie tries to focus. “They make it look very real, they use just the right kind of urgent language,” techie says. “It just takes one wrong click.”

One wrong click. Rosie thinks about the links she clicked and the caller. “Oh, what have I done?” she blurts. “I feel so stupid.”

“You were preyed upon,” affirms the older cop. “You have nothing to feel ashamed about.”

They ask detailed questions about the young caller — the scambaiter. “Did his speech seem too formal, maybe rehearsed?”

“Perhaps,” Rosie pauses. “Sort of like talking to a hotel concierge. He called me madam.”

The detectives make notes and speak quietly while glancing at Rosie with pitying expressions.

Struggling to take it all in, she asks about the young caller, and then comes the shock.

“These scambaiters, many are just kids, mostly boys, typically migrants,” the older cop offers. Grim-faced, he explains that desperate migrants get swindled by human smugglers, who sell them to crime rings. Those with computer or English skills are used in fraud shops.

“They’re shown photos of their family, told that their ‘pay’ is being sent to their parents, who’re used as drug mules or prostitutes. It’s all lies. They live in constant fear.”

“Oh my.” Rosie looks ashen. “This is terrible.”

Abruptly, they stand to leave, assuring Rosie that her physical safety is not threatened. “Like rats,” says older cop, “they just stay underground.” They tell they’re keeping an eye on the syndicates. “They’re hard to catch. But the citizens want action.”

They say they’ll be in touch. But they seem busy and she doubts they’ll call.

Next morning’s bright light slides through the boarded-up warehouse windows but Franky and crew feel the walls and the dark closing in.

Jared and the handlers seem highly preoccupied, trilling nervously on phones, whispering, spooked-looking.

That’s because word on the street has moved fast. Counter-informants have told boss a takedown is coming. Unflinching, he’s packed his bags and ordered Jared to shutdown and leave no trail.

Suspiciously, Franky eyes Jared and watches uneasily the other operators and behind them the pacing handlers.

Huddling at smoke break, Franky’s crew talk skittishly. He tries to assuage; says there’s nothing to worry about. Inside himself, he’s terrified. He won’t speak his fears, and prays.

Then it comes.

“You’re being moved to a new location.” Bug-eyed, Jared slaps a table and orders them down a fire escape.

Downstairs, exit doors closed.

Jared leading, the handlers pull their guns, herding the operators into a concrete room.

Steel door slams shut.

Nowhere to go.

Panic.

Gun muzzles glow, shots echo the walls.

Screaming. No fighting back, no chance.

Franky shields himself, falls on others, bodies fall on him.  
Collapsing, he sees his blood-spattered sneakers.

In his mind, all he can see is his mother's face.

Next day, Rosie watches news about the raid, hailed triumphantly by the mayor in the battle against cyber crime. Shutting down a major crime syndicate. TV footage of body bags. Victims unknown. Bulleted bloodstained walls.

A trail of bloody footprints.

Thankfully no police casualties. Investigators won't release details but warn citizens about armed suspects, adding a search is underway for more victims.

Rosie reads the online news, sees images of the fugitives, including Jared's mugshot, though she has no idea who any of the gangsters are. Ruddy-faced and sinister looking, they're criminal heavyweights, news anchors say.

In her sunroom — Frank built it for her — she spends the day scrolling headlines and reading sidebar stories. Curiously, nothing about migrants or human trafficking. None of the accounts seem to capture that part of the story.

Puzzled, she wonders about the young man.

Checking her phone, Rosie finds a voice message from a police fraud detective who would like to ask her questions. That's odd, she thinks, but calls the number and leaves a message.

Uneasily, she also tries calling Emma. Still no answer.

Rosie's email inbox flags 20 items — bank notices, real estate, investment, insurance solicitations, special-offer links. She sighs, closes the laptop, pushes it aside.

Her phone rings. She answers excitedly. "Emma?"

Long pause. "I'm sorry, madam."

"Oh my," Rosie startles. "It's you."

"Yes, madam." Franky stammers. "I'm so sorry."

Rosie shakes. "What do you want?"

“To say I’m sorry.” Franky clears his throat. “Excuse me, madam, will the bank repay you?”

“Well, yes. But what you did was wrong. And hurtful.”

“Yes, madam. I’m sorry.”

Comforting sunlight bathes the room. “Are you ... okay?”

He describes the harrowing escape — from under bodies — and hiding downtown, remembering her number. “I’m scared. I want to find my mother.”

Rosie notices through the sunroom window that the cherry trees have blossomed with their reliably pink and cheery flowers.

“There’s a safe place we can meet.”

# *Christine Havelka*

## Dream of Owls

“I heard the owls last night.”

“Have you seen my running shorts?” He looks past me to scan the room.

“They’re in the dryer, remember?” I turn on the coffee maker. “I heard them, their calls echoing from one tree to the other. Then I dreamt about them.” In my mind’s eye I see broad, speckled wings, a tiny, curved beak tucked under eyes as enormous as headlights.

“What time is it?”

“Eight-thirty. In my dream, there was a row of them on a branch, staring at me with their big, yellow eyes.” I am caught in the predatory intent of that gaze, feel it in my sinews. The line that divides the real from imagined is a trembling bolt of electricity in my belly.

“Is coffee ready?”

“Almost.” He scurries about in a rush to escape out the door.

“Is there any of the green slop you drink left?”

“I thought you hated that stuff.”

“Yeah, but it’s good for me. I can drink it on the way.”

“What do owls in dreams mean?” I watch as the green smoothie chugs into the coffee mug. I twist on the lid. Owls, mysterious predators of the night, calling to each other, calling to me. An irresistible pull, like the draw of a first kiss. His feathery hot breath a whispered promise in my ear. Dark with intent. Thrilling.

“Someone’s going to die? I don’t know. Damn.”

“What?”

“There’s a hole in my running socks.”

“Doesn’t it seem strange that owls live around here with all these houses? Raw nature so close.” I jiggle the milk container as I stand with the fridge open. “Can you pick up milk on your way home?”

“Huh? Not sure about these socks.” He fingers the hole; a frown creases his brow. Will he turn his intent gaze on me? I hunger for the time when Saturdays found us nestled in bed, our bolthole from the numbing order of our weekday lives.

“Dammit, they’re my only good pair.”

“Just wear them. The hole’s not that big.” I pour steaming coffee into my oversized mug. “Coffee’s ready.”

“I’m going to be late. The group won’t wait.”

“In my dream, I tried not to scare them.” My hands prickle from the heat of the mug. “I wanted them to stay, turn their eyes on me, to see me, really see me.” A wild animal awakening, quivering under death’s steely stare.

“Do we need anything else besides milk?” He sips the smoothie, makes a face.

“I can’t think of anything.” I sit and look out the window. “I wonder which trees they called each other from.” Do they know I’m here? Do they dream about me?

“Gotta run, ha-ha, pun.” The door closes. I exhale, watch my breath bend a tendril of steam away, watch it dissolve.

“Pun,” I murmur, sipping the black promise of my dream, feeling its burn settle into my belly.



## Book Reviews

*I Didn't Make Admiral* by George H. Jackson

Reviewed by Stephen Hammond

From the start of *I Didn't Make Admiral, but what a life, no regrets!* right through to the end, you can tell that George Jackson is a fun-loving character; he didn't mind bending the rules in order to get the best out of life. After an introduction to his early formative years during the Depression, we are taken on a journey of his escapades, such as the time he put his early nautical skills to work by assuring his buddy Ron that he knew how to make a raft to cross Esquimalt Harbour. As the raft began taking on water, George's biggest concern was not the sinking raft but that their rescuers were the Navy Harbour Patrol. Big trouble, or was it a lucky break? With George's father being the Superintendent of Auxiliary Vessels the harbour patrol let him off easy.

George's adventures are comical, but also reflective of class and privilege, such as the time he and other midshipmen had first class passage on the *RMS Carinthia* from Montreal to Liverpool. He tells of a full ship and, for some reason, his having an extra-large cabin. He writes:

"My cabin steward, named Christmas (no kidding!), told me with a flourish of a large key that it opened the door at the passage end to tourist class. That is where the young ladies were! I had it made, or so I thought ... let me explain. First class was very formal with mess-kit or dinner jacket required every

evening except first and last night. There were very few young ladies, and those that were there were closely chaperoned by mothers wary of young naval officers. Quite a different situation in tourist; no moms, and I had the key! Well, did we ever keep Christmas busy, what with being doorman and bartender. He didn't have an idle evening and needless to say, he got a large tip at the end of the sailing."

George takes us through many parts of his life as he shares stories not through rose-coloured glasses but through the lens of an octogenarian recounting and reflecting. His love of the water is a common thread throughout the book; however it's the stories of his life whether at sea or on land that give us a real clue to his personal and professional life. It's not just that his "goodness" shines through, but we get a glimpse of a person who takes risks to live and love surrounded by family and other important people in his life.

It's an enjoyable and worthwhile read. Encourage an old writer by purchasing this book through Friesen Press bookstore, or request it through any bookstore.

*Barcelona Red Metallic* by Christine Cosack  
Reviewed by Brett Josef Grubisic  
(excerpt)

The title of Christine Cosack’s debut novel refers to a proprietary shade of red that Toyota introduced in the early 2000s. Flecks of that paint are the primary clue in a satisfyingly twisty case that begins with a fatal hit-and-run and culminates in another violent — and seriously unexpected — action taken behind the wheel.

Southern Vancouver Island resident Cosack opens her novel with overlapping strands of story. A prologue set in 1975 introduces Jo, an anguished mother who’s hearing about the short life expectancy of her son Oliver, a child born with cystic fibrosis. Jumping forward about 40 years, Cosack depicts the death of Lena, a young child whose unlocked bicycle tempts her one fatal morning. Cosack then switches focus with a chilling glimpse of the driver, a budding psychopath who experiences a “rush of pleasure” at seeing and causing Lena’s death.

Within hours, Oyster Hill — a suburban community on the Sunshine Coast — reacts with grief, anger and suspicion as neighbours ponder the who and why of the case. Local law begins to cooperate with an investigative team, led by Luci, that arrives from the city.

Initial suspects include a secretive loner with anger issues and a ferocious dog, as well as local artist Jo and her husband, son and grandson. Plus, innumerable drivers of vehicles with a popular paint colour.

From the start, Cosack’s fascination with her protagonist Jo is evident. The story of *Barcelona Red Metallic* sets aside ample space for her, outlining the person she became in order to stand her ground with patronizing or indifferent doctors

and explaining the serendipity of her becoming a well-regarded artist.

Jo's heartache and strength, as well as her fiercely protective love, are eventually integral to the plot. On occasion, though, the scenes of her contending with the numerous difficulties of Oliver's illness over the years seem to belong to a different kind of novel — about a mother's all-consuming love, for instance. In Cosack's novel Jo's complexity, as well as her personal evolution, ethical deliberations, motivations, and actions tend to steal thunder, especially from the investigation whose completion gives the story its ready-made arc.

Cosack succeeds at her sketch of a small coastal town with a few secrets beneath its idyllic surface. Somewhere between a cosy mystery and Sam Wiebe, *Barcelona Red Metallic* keeps readers riveted, curious and unnerved.



The book is available in all local bookstores (Munro's, Bolen, Russell, Ivy's, Indigo, Tanner's), and at Books and Shenanigans in Cook Street Village. That particular store promotes local authors like no other. Also available online through Amazon, Indigo et al.

*Maid Of Gold* by Edeana Malcom  
Reviewed by Britta Gundersen

With *Maid of Gold*, local author Edeana Malcolm is at the top of her game. In her ninth novel, the author brings readers the story of Jane and James — ordinary names for characters who are far from ordinary.

As she has done with other works of historical fiction, Malcolm performs a bit of alchemy as she spins real events into an engaging tale. In this case, it was the marriage of two ancestors who lived most of their lives firmly rooted in Quebec. But passenger lists from sailing ships and an 1853 marriage certificate show that Jane Inglis and James Houghton, both very young and somewhat naive, spent more than a year in Australia at the height of the 1850s gold rush.

Like her main characters, Malcolm went prospecting (in this case, for a good yarn). From scant details, she creates the story of Jane, a young woman who, for more than one reason, crosses the globe to join others bound for the Australian gold fields. Jane is both rash and sensible. At times she is head-strong; other times she is emotional, as a woman not yet 20 years old may have been. In short, she is a complex, fully developed character.

James is a bit of a dreamer whose love for his new wife turns to loathing when she shares her deepest secret. However, by the standards of the mid-1800s, he is a man of honour and Malcolm's depiction is entirely credible.

In the end (well, not really the end), Jane and James return to Canada, though not together.

Each minor character is a small nugget. Mac and his family, determined to create a future in Australia; Mrs. Malloy and her children, who bear witness to Jane's bias against Catholics and James' sense of compassion; Miss Ashley, who sets her sights

on James; and Mr. Davis, a Welshman-turned-gold-miner, who proposes to Jane on a regular basis all bring *Maid of Gold* to life. Finally, there is James's family, set up in contrast to Jane's own.

Settings are treated with great care: the chill of Quebec City winters; the charred remains of the 1852 Montreal fire; the bustle of New York City's harbour; the mud and muck of Melbourne; and the mysteries and dangers of the Australian bush. Conditions on a plodding sailing ship, a speedy clipper ship and North American passenger trains ring true. Clearly, the author dug deeply to research conditions in miners' tent camps, mine sites and the rough and tumble communities that were beginning to rise out of the Australian bush.

Historical events such as the miners' protests in the towns of Bendigo and Ballarat and 1850 sensibilities and prejudices related to religion, race, place of origin and class are well-researched. Readers who wish to explore these topics may refer to Malcolm's helpful bibliography.

Edeana Malcolm proves once again that there is treasure to be found in the true stories of our ancestors and leaves readers wondering what gems they will discover between the covers of her next book.



*Maid of Gold* is available directly from the author, or as an e-book or Print on Demand at Draft2Digital, or at Bolen Books.



## Contributors

**Ali, Shamana** (Poem. My Dented Tea) Shamana is a singer, writer, photographer who lives on Salt Spring Island. She has sold her photos featuring lines of her poetry as cards and canvases at the Saturday market under the banner Poets Corner.

**Arnott, Louise** (Flash Fiction. Beached) Louise moved from land-locked Calgary to Victoria. Instead of spending time near water, she and her quirky sense of humour are self-locked in her basement writing-room contemplating ordinary people doing ordinary things, sometimes with unusual results.

**Balachandran, Tharani** (Poem. Instructions to ChatGPT in the Year 2043) Tharani Balachandran is the author of two poetry chapbooks, including *Brown Sugar Skin*, released in 2024. She is a nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, and her work has appeared in numerous publications including *On the Seawall*, *Anti-Heroic Chic* and the *Racket*. Tharani lives on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen peoples in Victoria, B.C. with her husband and daughter.

**Bell, Norman** (Fiction. Two Weeks in March) Norman Bell is a dual citizen who relocated from Seattle to Vancouver Island in 2022. He is the author of the business book *The Story Powered Speaker*. He enjoys writing both fiction and poetry.

**Brooks, JF Judy** (Flash Fiction. I'll Have Salad Please) A long-time Vancouver Island resident, Judy enjoys writing poetry, flash fiction and other short stories. Her work has appeared in several editions of *Island Writer*, and more recently, in *CV Collective*

*Magazine* online. She is an enthusiastic member of the Comox Valley Writers Society.

**Colwell, Alison** (Creative Nonfiction. What is Remembered) Alison Colwell is a writer, mother, domestic violence survivor and community organizer. Her work has been published in several literary journals including: *The Humber Literary Review*, *The Ocotillo Review*, *Roi Faineant Literary Press*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, and *Grist*. She lives on Galiano Island B.C., Canada. Connect with her at: [alisoncolwell.com](http://alisoncolwell.com).

**Conti, Eden** (Creative Nonfiction. GG's Jewellery Box) Eden Conti is currently studying writing at the University of Victoria with a focus in journalism. She has a love for lyrical prose and is fascinated by the little things. She seeks to uplift to joy and connection in her writing.

**Cosack, Christine** (Fiction. The Man from Netra) Christine Cosack was born in Germany, came of age in France, and flourished since arriving in Canada. She is new-ish to writing as an art form and thrilled that Second Story Press took a chance and published her debut novel *Barcelona Red Metallic* last autumn.

**Havelka, Christine** (Flash Fiction. Dream of Owls) Christine Havelka is a writer who lives on the WSANEC homelands on Vancouver Island. She holds a degree in English literature and her work has been short-listed in The Writers' Union of Canada postcard story contest and has appeared in various publications. Recently one of her poems was painted on a window in the village of Oak Bay. The wild West Coast where she lives has always been her inspiration.

**Harrison, Kim** (Fiction. The Space Walkers) Kim Harrison lives and writes out of Victoria, B.C., Canada. He's had over 70 short stories published in the past five years. His blogspot re: publications and music videos can be found at [harrisonkim1.blogspot.com](http://harrisonkim1.blogspot.com)

**Hedetniemi, Karin** (Creative Nonfiction. Wild Things) Karin Hedetniemi photographs and writes from Victoria. Her place-inspired creative work appears in *Grain*, *Prairie Fire*, *Parentheses*, *EVENT*, and other literary journals. In 2020, Karin won the non-fiction contest from the Royal City Literary Arts Society. Find her at [AGoldenHour.com](http://AGoldenHour.com).

**Huebert, Joy** (Poem. Higher than Normal Call Volumes) Joy has published stories, poems and creative nonfiction in many Canadian literary magazines. She placed first in the *Grain Magazine*, Short Grain postcard story competition, the Victoria Writers' Society fiction contest and the Victoria School of Writing, Postcard story competition. Joy is the author of *My Brother's Basement*, published by Quadra Books.

**Malcolm, Edeana** (Poem. For Reena Virk) Edeanna Malcolm has written nine historical novels. Her latest, *Maid of Gold*, published in 2024, is set in the 1850s and tells the story of a couple from Quebec City who travel to the Australian Gold Rush in Melbourne and then return home circumnavigating the world by sailing ship. It is based on the story of her ancestors.

**Moore, Andrew** (Flash Fiction. Going Up) Andrew specializes in community development. He works with First Nations around B.C. assisting them to create a vision for their future and helping transform this into reality. He is a musician, performer and producer.

**Perkins Carr, S.M.** (Poem. Old Guest Ranch) S.M. Perkins Carr is an author, poet, musician and music therapist. She self-published her debut novel, *Searching for Persephone*, in 2022. Originally from North Vancouver, she lived in England for ten years, and settled in Victoria in 2019.

**Reinhardt, Dana** (Poem. Snake Oil) At age 12, Dana spent her summer spinning cotton candy and selling corndogs at the PNE. That same year Dana was given a beautiful journal and

she began writing. Dana currently hosts cooking classes and culinary adventures in Tuscany, Sicily, Paris and the Loire Valley and is currently writing her memoir, *I Remember Every Bite*.

**Shefski, Annalysse** (Creative Nonfiction. Salal) I was born in North Vancouver and raised across multiple towns on Vancouver Island. I currently study screenwriting and creative non-fiction at UVic. In my free time I wander aimlessly and listen to the wind.

**Smith, PJ** (Fiction. Scammers) P.J. Smith is a former newspaper reporter, covering crime and politics, and a communicator for land claims and child welfare. Currently, he writes short stories and poetry about contemporary social issues.

**Steck, Warren** (Nonfiction. *The First Aircraft*; Fiction. *The Mirror*) I came to writing through science, as a molecular biologist and R&D executive at the National Research Council of Canada. After retirement and a move to Victoria, I began to write more creatively. *Century* (2018) is a new Roman history; *Madame Yersinia* (2023) is a new history of bubonic plague; and *Off The Beaten Track* (2024) is a whimsical collection of short stories.

**Weaver, Sarah** (Creative Nonfiction. *More Than a Cycling Story*) Sarah writes poetry and memoir. Her website is [sarahweaver.ca](http://sarahweaver.ca), and her blog *Coast Lines* is at [linesfromthecoast.blogspot.com](http://linesfromthecoast.blogspot.com)



## Editorial and Production Team

*Cynthia Philp.* Editor of *Island Writer*. Cynthia, editor of *Island Writer* for the past two years, has previously sat on the editorial board of *Gardens West Magazine* and edited many, many newsletters. She has published fiction and nonfiction pieces in several Canadian magazines, written three novels, and knows exactly how stinging a rejection letter can be. She loves cheering on new authors.

*Anne Hopkinson.* Poetry content editor. Anne writes from her home in Victoria, and is president of Planet Earth Poetry, a reading series of 27 years. She is a nature-lover, book addict and water rat. Her work appears in anthologies and journals, recently *Antigonish Review* and *New Quarterly*. She won the Canadian Stories Poetry Prize for 2019, and was short-listed for the B.C. Federation of Writers Poetry Prize in 2019. In 2021 she won the Emily Carr Poetry Contest in Victoria.

*Joy Huebert,* Fiction content editor. Joy has published stories, poems and creative nonfiction in many Canadian literary magazines. She placed first in the *Grain Magazine*, Short Grain postcard story competition, the Victoria Writers' Society fiction contest and the Victoria School of Writing, Postcard story competition. Joy is the author of *My Brother's Basement*, published by Quadra Books.

*Sage Strachan.* Creative Nonfiction content editor. Having moved to Victoria for UVic's Creative Writing program, where they co-facilitated workshops and edited participants' work, they are now honoured to join the *Island Writer* team. A recipient

of The Keith and Shirley Wagner Prize for Writing, Sage fills their spare time volunteering with a variety of artistic and academic groups, as well as participating as a proud member of the Undergrad Trans Studies Community.

*Diane Massam.* Flash Fiction content editor. Diane writes about the entanglement of nature and mind. With recent publications in *The New Quarterly* and *Queens Quarterly*, she won the FBCW poetry competition (2021) and the Arc Award of Awesomeness (September 2024). She has completed a certificate in creative writing with the University of Toronto, where she is a professor emeritus of linguistics with many years of experience as an editor and educator.

*Caroline Mufford.* Style and line editor. In love with grammar since age 10. Working on a collection of creative nonfiction set in B.C. Retired (award-winning) journalist at newspapers, magazines and news websites, taught college English, and is author of *Quesnel: A Multi-Cultural Tapestry*. Single space after period! Moved to Victoria 2006.

*Iryna Spica.* Designer. Iryna works to create beautiful books. She has been the designer of *Island Writer* for several years.

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June and December. Note that the December edition also includes winners  
of our annual writing contest, which has separate submission guidelines  
as noted on our website.

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### *Island Writer* can be purchased at the following **BOOKSTORES:**

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Dana Reinhardt

President, Victoria Writers' Society