

TEMPE Writers Forum

Volume 1
April 2015

*Writing From the
Tempe Community*

Tempe
Writers
Forum

Volume 1

Tempe Writers Forum



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April 2015

 Tempe Public Library

Tempe, Arizona, 2015

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Stories are what makes a community.

By sharing stories, people see common values and experiences. The connections this develops lead us to empathize with each other, treat each other with more kindness and respect. Stories open us up to common goals and common challenges and this motivates us to work together for the common good.

I was inspired that so many people entered our first community writing contest. Nearly 200 people submitted personal stories, fiction or poetry with stories of motherhood, physical challenges, love, ambitions and childhood.

Stories can change our city for the better. We learn what we all want most and find ways to achieve those goals, together.

Thank you to the people who shared their stories with us. Thanks to the Tempe Public Library staff and Arizona State University's creative writing community for their efforts in compiling them.

I present to you the *Tempe Writers Forum, Volume 1*.

Mayor Mark Mitchell
City of Tempe

Dear Friends,

Arizona State University is pleased to celebrate the first annual Tempe Community Writing Contest and its resulting publication, the *Tempe Writers Forum*.

In all it does, ASU aims to develop master learners who are prepared to thrive in life and to contribute to their communities — today and tomorrow. Helping people become more confident writers is an important part of that learning.

Articulate writing requires clear thinking and both contribute to success in many life endeavors. The process of writing, like any of the arts, can also be an outlet for expression and a lifelong journey that enriches our individual lives and our communities.

The first annual Tempe Community Writing Contest is a natural next-step in the organic collaborations that ASU, the City of Tempe, and Tempe Public Library enjoy. We share a strong commitment to work that is socially embedded in our communities and, in particular, to helping individuals develop as readers, writers and engaged citizens.

I thank all those in the Tempe Public Library, the City of Tempe, at ASU, and in the community who have enthusiastically supported the contest and encouraged and evaluated submissions — I especially thank all the writers who shared their work.

Sharing our stories — real and imagined — and reading stories of others expands our empathy, ignites new ideas about possibilities, and stretches our humanity, as this first volume of the *Tempe Writers Forum* so impressively confirms.

Warm regards,

Duane H. Roen

Dean, College of Letters and Sciences and University College

My life has been influenced and enhanced by the words of so many authors. I cannot imagine a world without the written word and am proud to have spent my career in a profession devoted to providing access to, and discovery of, the world's authors.

As librarians we depend on writers as much as readers depend on libraries. Thus the role of libraries to encourage and assist emerging and new authors is extremely important. All of us at the Tempe Public Library are proud of the quality and popularity of our "Writers on Writing" series, in which published authors share their experiences with budding writers about how they developed as writers. The Library's workshop series for new authors on the steps to get published was a popular offshoot of that program.

We have learned that there are many people in Tempe who are budding new authors. Two of the authors in this book regularly attend our "Writer's Connection" work group, in which these emerging writers share their work with each other and give constructive advice and critiques with the guidance of library staff.

Tempe is also home to some great, established authors: our state Poet Laureate Alberto Rios, and national award-winning novelists Jewell Parker Rhodes, Ron Carlson, and Melissa Pritchard, to name a few.

The Tempe Public Library staff values our role in supporting Tempe's current and future authors, and thank our partners at College of Letters and Sciences at Arizona State University for assisting us in that effort. All of us are extremely proud of the writers contained in this publication, wishing them all success in the future.

Barbara Roberts
Deputy Community Services Director –
Library and Cultural Services

Spare Parts



by Mark Sutz

Adult Fiction

Spare Parts

When I was ten, I traded my younger brother Bob, then seven, for three deer legs and a dead snake. The transaction took place on a July afternoon at an opening in the fence between our backyard and the Conwell's. The buyer was their youngest daughter, Alicia, a girl about Bob's age, with a permanent blackberry stain on the corners of her lips and the fingertips of her right hand.

She and Bob had played silently every afternoon that summer in the enormous sandbox and playhouse her father had built for her and which all the neighborhood kids under ten had coveted during construction with a dry-mouthed envy. Bob was like a child king there, Alicia a miniscule queen, the sandbox their joyous domain. They reminded me of kittens, innocently regal and playing in the sun.

Alicia had once reluctantly let a few of the neighborhood kids into her dad's taxidermy shed looming next to the playhouse. This was after some of the boys, me included, had called her every childish version of a liar that we could think of when she started going on about how many dead animal parts her dad had hanging on the walls of the shed. It was even better

than she'd described — legs and heads and claws and hooves all tacked up on the walls like a spare parts warehouse for the zoo.

That summer, Bob and I had terrorized yet another housekeeper into leaving. Chung-sun, the Korean girl my dad had hired on a Sunday, was, by the following Friday, telling him in broken English and perfect Korean hand gestures that she wanted her pay for the week and would find better kids to take care of somewhere else. The day after Chung-sun left was the one-year anniversary of my mother's death.

We were planning on visiting her grave that sunny Saturday, but my father said we'd go the following week, told us Mom wouldn't be happy that we'd driven away another woman who only wanted us to be good boys. He left us alone while he took one of his long weekend runs in the woods near our house. Since Mom had died, he'd become a fitness junkie and if he didn't get his run in Bob and I knew we'd be in for silent dinners of rotisserie chicken and creamed corn. "Don't answer the door," he told me, "and if you need anything, call the Conwells. Please be good."

As I did whenever Bob and I were alone, I made hot dogs for lunch. For some reason, I noticed this time that the hot dog juice left in the pot looked remarkably similar to the lemonade dad would make from concentrate — cloudy, yellowish, the flakes of hot dog skin like citrus pulp. After I bunned and plated the hot dogs, I filled a clear tumbler with ice, poured the steaming hot dog juice in, topped it with more ice, stirred it around, stuck a finger in to make sure it was cooled and yelled for Bob to come into the kitchen.

“Bob. HOT DOGS AND LEMONADE.”

He ran into the kitchen, sat down and went right for the tumbler. A few gulpy swallows later, and at the apex of my uncontrolled laughter, he threw the tumbler of hot dog juice and ice at me and punched me square in the nose. The blow was so hard my knees jellied and I saw little white dots in my eyes. I could still hear him, though. “You jerk. You jerk. You jerk.”

After I pulled myself off the floor, I put a hand to my nose and my fingers came away covered in blood. I smeared it all over my face and ran to where I knew Bob would be hiding. I was trying not to cry and when I found him in the closet behind all the winter coats Bob said, “Youcan’t hit me, youcan’t hit me, youcan’t hit me, I’ll tell dad, I’ll tell dad, I’ll tell dad.”

Bob had hit me before, but never with such bloody consequences. Whenever I’d gone to my dad and complained, he said I couldn’t hit him back because I was older and bigger and had to set an example.

So, with no other choice, I marched Bob out to the fence, his arm behind his back, my nose bleeding down my white t-shirt and yelled for Alicia. She came running from inside her playhouse.

She looked at my face and shirt and said, “What happened?”

“I’ll trade him to you. Forever. For something in there.” I pointed to her dad’s shed. She grinned a little and seemed to forget about how I looked. I held Bob in a headlock and could feel him shaking. Alicia returned with the snake and deer legs.

“These were in his throwaway box,” she said and shrugged.

I pushed Bob away, took them out of her hands and said,

“You’re her brother now. Don’t ever come back.”

She held his hand and they walked toward the sandbox. Bob looked over his shoulder and I could tell he was crying, but the transaction seemed about the smartest thing I could have done at the moment

I clutched at the contraband and walked back into our house, listening for my dad, but he hadn’t yet come back. The deer legs felt as hard as steel in my hands, the fur smooth and warm over the bone. I went into the bathroom to clean up. There was so much blood on my face and t-shirt that I threw up the moment I saw my reflection in the mirror. I cleaned myself up, wiped up the vomit, and imagined how nice it was going to be to not have Bob around anymore. I figured if my dad wanted to see him, he could always go over to the Conwells’.

When my dad returned from his run, I met him at the front door. I put my fingers to my lips. “Shhh,” I said. “We’re playing hide and seek and Bob thinks I’m in the basement. He’s down there looking for me.” He tousled my hair and whispered okay.

I went down to the basement and, free of Bob and more fighting, I thought about what I was going to do with my newly acquired trophies. Perhaps a three-legged table that I could pose the snake on.

I knew my trade was discovered when I heard Mr. Conwell banging on our front door an hour or two later. I came up from the basement, heard a flurry of words including something about Bob wanting to live with the Conwells until he was a million years old, and my dad and Mr. Conwell were gone.

Certain of where they were heading, I made my way out our

back door and to the opening in the fence. It was dark now, the only light from Mr. Conwell's shed. Alicia was standing over Bob and my dad reached down and picked him up. They all looked so small standing in the sandbox, Bob a lump in my dad's arms. I could see Mrs. Conwell through their kitchen window. She was wearing a light green apron and laughing into the phone.



Mark Sutz

Mark Sutz lives and writes in Tempe. He is a freelance editor/writer/tutor, long-time book collector, and thrift-store browser. He is a fan of long novels, short annoyances, and endless coffee. Chat with him at masutz@gmail.com



In This Corner



by Andrea Avery

College Fiction

In This Corner

After lunch, before heading out to interview *El Murcielago Ciego* — Arizona amateur middleweight boxing’s “Blind Bat” — Joelle Freitag cried in the bathroom. It wasn’t heaving, gasping crying; it wasn’t cover-your-face crying or pound-a-pillow crying or what her 14-year-old son called the “ugly cry.” It was serene crying, like those weeping icons in Brazil and Malta that cry blood: Other than the tears slipping down her gray face, Joelle was empty-eyed; she was stone.

Joelle set her office key and ID badge on the slanted metal lid of the tampon bin, her hand hovering till she was sure they wouldn’t slide off, and then she sat on the toilet in her clothes and let them come, the tears. She did not slump against the closed door and slide slowly downward the way women her age did on TV. She did not hug her knees. She did not rock. She sat, and she cried, and then she picked up her keys and her lanyard and her badge and she washed her hands and wiped her face with a rough brown paper towel and then she went back to her desk.

She heard her mother’s voice suggesting she harness the pick-me-up power of a good lipstick — “fake it till you make

it, sweetheart” — but she did not apply any. Nor did she decide not to. She just — didn’t.

After crying, she did not feel better, and she did not feel worse.

At her desk, she checked her messages. No surprises there. The factchecker, late getting back to her on the Top Doctors story: wants to know if Wednesday’s cool. Bibbe, in Omaha: went to the scariest pedicure place ... funniest story ... just wants to say hi. Joelle didn’t delete the messages, but she didn’t return them. She gathered her notebook, a couple of pens, and her sunglasses. On her computer, she set her office status to “away: interview.” For return time, she chose “out for rest of day.” She pushed in her chair. She shut down.

On her way to the car, she shot Carl a text message asking him to thaw the pork chops. She added a 😊 because the message looked too short, too bossy, otherwise. She added a 😊 even though the ones Carl added — on your way home? 😊 — floated right past her; they were Frisbees she didn’t bother jumping for but dutifully plodded toward, collecting them and lobbing them back.

Grand Ave. is the only street in Phoenix that doesn’t follow the grid. It slices through downtown at an acute diagonal, sloshing through a frothy wake of garages and bodegas and shitty hotels. Where it plows through Roosevelt, boutiques and hippy-dippy coffeeshops and gallery/“artspace” batter the seediness into a temporary submission for three blocks before it recovers and bounces to its feet: bodega, garage, hotel. Bodega, garage, hotel.

The Mendoza Boxing Gym sat there, at the corner of Roosevelt and Grand, hunched low and sun-baked, a white building with dirty windows.

Joelle parked in the uncovered lot and wrestled with the puckered, spring-loaded windshield shade. She looked at her notes: Ruben Medina, 22, Mexican-American boxer. Calls himself the Blind Bat. “Wants to fight the African guy from that New Yorker story,” his agent, Ken Goodyear, had said. “Good hook,” Goodyear had said. “A lot of potential.”

When she’d moved to Phoenix 15 years earlier, she’d brought nothing but a couple of notebooks, an old cat, and a pair of flip-flops. That wasn’t true, but it was family folklore now; she’d moved here from Denver to marry Carl, who had landed a good job at ON Semiconductor a year before. That legend, when relayed to their son, Daniel, was meant to show just how unimaginably *young* Mom had been, how she didn’t know what she was getting into but was willing to leap, flip-flopped-feet first, into the adventure of her life. “Threw her umbrella and her puffy coat away,” Carl would say, “to follow the beat of her next big story.” She freelanced for a year, the cat died, she got pregnant and a full-time job.

During those first months, before the cat died and before Daniel came, when Carl was at work, Joelle would drive the streets of Phoenix in the Toyota Corolla with Colorado plates (See? She *had* brought more than notebooks and sandals and a dying cat to Phoenix) and watch the city shape-shift in front of her very eyes: What a difference a couple of blocks makes, she’d think, as the trawled McDowell from the west, through the bar-

rio, with its heady detergent and fabric softener smells weeping out of two-a-block laundromats; into the gay antiques district; up and over the burbling bulges of Papago into the desert, past the botanical garden and the zoo, descending into the mon-eyed Old West, into America's most livable city. Phoenix wasn't much of a city then — certainly there was more to do, see, and buy now, and as editor of the city magazine it was her job to tell people just how much there was to do, see and buy — but, as they'd always said in her circles, it had so much potential.

As she drove the streets now, even if she struck out for unfamiliar points west or north, to “neighborhoods” that had sprung up overnight, she couldn't summon that same sense of curiosity, of surprise. She'd be driving down a wide, four-lane boulevard and sense, before it happened, that the gated community of stucco houses that flanked her would morph and yield a barrio or a gay antiques district. Phoenix finally had things other cities had: hipster cupcake bakeries and performing arts spaces and a film festival and independent coffeeshops and nationally acclaimed brick-oven pizza and a light rail — but it no longer had what Joelle had liked best about it.

Ken Goodyear was a tall rectangle of a man, tan, solidly built from feet to hips, with a big feet and a thick middle. Above the waist, he thinned out quickly. His chest and arms were large-framed to match his bottom half but they seemed atrophied, sinewy. His face had a papery transparency. His wispy gold hair lifted from his dry, faded-tan face and, catching with the light, became almost invisible. To Joelle, he looked like a clarinet.

“There she is,” Ken said as Joelle pushed the door open

and entered, extending a long arm toward her. Joelle swung her shoulder bag around so it parked at the small of her back; she balanced her notebooks in the crook of one arm like a baby and extended her hand. Behind him, in the corner of the otherwise empty gym, a blocky Mexican boy cupped a cell phone to his ear, staring absently at the space where the wall met the ceiling, his lips a thin, tight line. He lifted his other arm and fitted his face into the bulge of his bicep, wiping away sweat. He nodded into the phone, then flipped it shut and tossed it onto one of the low, vinyl chairs along the wall. For a moment, he rested both fists on his hips, his chest heaving. Then, tilting his face upward, he lifted both hands and pressed the heels of his palms deep into his eyes.

“... which is why I think this is a great story to tell,” Good-year was saying. “A little bit of everything. Let’s talk to the man himself.” He turned around to look at the boy Joelle had been watching. “Rubayno!” He shouted, though he didn’t need to. “Quit mooning over that NO-vee-oh of yours and get over here and get famous.”

The truth was: When Joelle moved to Phoenix, she wasn’t exactly as young as they always made her sound, not as fearless or life-lusting. After nearly eight years in Boulder, she’d seen the Mork and Mindy house; she’d covered what amounted to the JonBenet Ramsey beat for the *CU Independent* and then, after graduation, for the independent *Boulder Weekly*. When she’d first moved to Boulder, she’d loved the dusky winter air. She’d loved the way the nighttime chill crept in, suggesting — even as the sun was trailing blue-gloved fingers on the cold, crusted

snow — a deep freeze, a cold snap, a storm to come. Carl said, “Phoenix,” and Joelle knew that it might pain her to miss the silver-blue cast of sun on snow. But she also knew that it had been many months since she last felt anything like the thrilling jab of expectation and warning she used to feel at the silver-blue cast of sun on snow, so she went to Phoenix, where afternoon sun on mountains did the trick, at least for a while.

Joelle was not going to get her hook as long as Ken Goodyear, human clarinet, was squawking. He was a walking press release, this guy, and she was never going to be able to get a 4,000-word cover story out of his talking points. She needed to get Ruben alone. She thought about what was nearby: a tiki bar, a no-name convenience store, nothing. She didn’t know what he could eat to keep his weight where it needed to be, or if he would drink alcohol. There was nothing around here but a gaudy, suspect burrito place and one of those gentrified hempy coffeeshops. She didn’t think she could do Aliberto’s. She didn’t think Ruben was a latte guy. She didn’t know if she’d have to hold his arm or read the menu to him or help him count his money.

“Ken,” she said. “I’d really like to interview Ruben — each of you — individually. I think I’ll start with Ruben. He and I are going —”

“To Starbucks,” Ruben finished.

Ken and Joelle were a matching pair of open mouths, silent O-shaped bells. “You’re driving,” he said to Joelle.

He *was* a latte guy. He was an iced-tall-sugar-free-caramel-nonfat-latte guy. “And *The New York Times*,” he said, reaching

handily to his right to pull a copy of the paper from the easel-shaped stand. He paid for Joelle's iced coffee even though she said he shouldn't — couldn't, really — and he paid for them both with exact change, expertly picking through the change in one upturned hand with his wide fingers. The barista said, "Those'll be right up, Rubio."

At the small circular table, Ruben said, "Read" and Joelle knew he was asking her to read from the paper. She checked his face for confirmation but got nothing; his broad, pitted, pummeled face was tilted slightly, like he was listening for something or posing for a school photographer. His eyes were big, thick-lashed, and brown. Joelle leafed through the paper and stopped at sports, assuming.

"Read 'Modern Love,'" he said.

She did the interview with Goodyear over the phone.

"So this kid, he shows up at the gym out of shape a year ago, flabby as all hell, but ready to fight. I didn't know he was blind right off, see, because he hides it well, don't you think?"

"Mm."

"Anyway, he says to Mario, owns the gym, that he's been fighting with his brothers and as long as they fight fair — you know they have to be blindfolded to spar with him — he's a winner every time. Kid's a bulldog, you know. I think it's because he can't see what's coming, so he's got no fear to work against. Anyway, the kid's got money to pay Mario — this isn't a charity case — Mario gets the kid in shape and then sends him to me. Says the kid's got some crazy idea about a match with an African."

“Right, Uganda.”

“Yeah, whatever. Seems Rube had read about this guy in the *New Yorker*—“

“The *Times*, right –“

“And this crazy African was running out of people to blind-fold and beat the shit out of in his village or whatever, and in the article, I guess, he closes with wondering if there’s anyone in America would want to fight him.”

“And Ruben wants to.”

“Damn right he wants to! It was his idea. I don’t know where he got it — don’t ask me what a little beaner’s doing reading the *New Yorker*, but — he’s a damn good fighter and there aren’t that many blind boxers to go around, you know? See what I mean? It’s got everything you need for a good story — you got a blind guy, you got sports, you got Africans. It’s the American dream. So I start thinking we can set up this fight, get that African over here, charge for tickets.”

“How will you get him over here?”

“A goddamn zebra. What do you think? We’ll put him on an airplane.”

“Right, but who’s paying for it?”

“Money’s not a problem. The match won’t be, you know, approved. Can’t get the African licensed to box. It’s more of a feel-good story and to bring it back to money, what you asked, I got money. And you know, Ruben’s got a good job, too. He’s got a whole mess of brothers who want to see this happen, and they’ve all chipped in, and his parents — now this is off the record because we don’t exactly have all of their *paperwork* if you

know what I mean — anyway his parents are doing alright. You know, people think all illegals are maids but these guys, they have nicer cars than I do! And Ruben — no question. He’s legal, as long as we’re still using the same Constitution, if you know what I mean.”

“Right. And Ruben’s ready for the match?”

“Ready as he’ll ever be. This little Mexican can’t wait to beat the shit out of this African. We scraped together a little something, a purse, you know and Rube told me if he wins the purse he’s paying to get his little señorita over here, getting her some papers. Oh, shit. That’s —“

“Off the record.”

“Right.”

When Joelle finished reading to Ruben, he smiled at her, big white square teeth. Everything about this kid was big and open. “Nice,” he said. “That one sounds familiar.”

“Your girlfriend — how does she feel about the match? Will she come?”

“Maybe, if Border Patrol decides to take the weekend off,” he said, laughing. Then, as though he thought he’d been too hard on Joelle, he tipped back in his chair and softened. “No, my girl lives in Chihuahua. And she doesn’t want to see me punch nobody, anyway. Doesn’t want to see her boyfriend get murdered by an African, either.”

“Do you think you’ll get murdered?”

Ruben’s smile wobbled. “Nah, I don’t think that. I’ll win. Or I’ll lose. One or the other.”

“If you win?””

“If I win, I’ll have done exactly what I was supposed to. There aren’t that many people I can fight, who are like me.”

“And if you lose?”

“If I lose, then that’s it. They won’t be calling the magazine people to do a story on Ruben Medina’s second chance. Win or lose, I’ll never be right here again; it’ll never be Ruben Medina’s first fight ever again.”

“So you’re afraid, either way.”

“I’m not afraid. It’s just — I could disappear, you know? Maybe go to Mexico, get married, have a bunch of babies, disappear. And they’ll still be talking about me up here.”

“They’ll say, ‘He coulda been a contender,’” Joelle said, trying.

Ruben laughed. “Right!” And then after a moment: “But you should just see her,” he said, shaking his head, twisting the green straw in the top of his cup.

Joelle wondered if Ruben had seen his girl. If he’d always been blind. She was botching this interview. She didn’t care.

“She’s beautiful, and she’s so damn nice to me — I don’t know why,” he said, and then, squinting like he was trying to picture her or find the right word, “She’s just a —“

“Total knockout,” Joelle supplied. And they laughed together. People watching through the windows would have thought they were friends.

Goodyear was a crazy bigot, but he was good at his job, which was more than Joelle could say about herself. She’d pushed the deadline as much as she could. She was late. The night of the bout, Joelle found herself back at Mendoza, sitting in one of the vinyl chairs along the wall, her notebook in her

lap. She hadn't seen Ruben, but she'd seen several lookalikes she assumed were his brothers. They all had perfectly circular faces and black, boar-bristle hair. They wore matching black T-shirts that said *murcielago ciego* and the date of the match.

She'd written the story, a predictable, acceptable story that came this close to being, essentially, a 4,000-word way of saying that Ruben was both lover and fighter (headline to come) She'd watch the bout, take her notes back to the office in the morning, and finish it up. It would be late, but it would be done.

The African was there, with his contingent. He was warming up, sparring with a white guy blindfolded with a red bandana. He was taller than Ruben, she thought, worried. But then she thought of Ruben's thickness, his boxy, bulky chest and powerful arms. The Ugandan was tall but wiry. They probably weighed the same. Someone probably looked into that. She'd have to get the details on the Ugandan's height and weight, check the spelling of his name.

She watched the Ugandan. They'd finished warming up. His opponent pulled off the blindfold and stuffed it in the pocket of his pleated khaki pants, ducked out of the ring. The Ugandan kept bouncing — to keep his heartrate up, his muscles warm, she knew, but she couldn't help but wonder if he was afraid. She thought of what Goodyear had said, that if you couldn't see your opponent coming — couldn't see him winding up to punch you, could hear his muted animal roar but couldn't see the foam at the corner of his mouth — you couldn't be afraid. But she watched the Ugandan, bouncing tirelessly at the center of the ring, arms up in a block, eyes darting wildly, alone.

She thought, sure, you can't see it coming, but — you can't see it coming. At any instant a punch could come out of nowhere, knock you silly or start the fight that makes you a hero, coronate you or kill you. At any instant.

It wasn't that the world was unkind to Joelle; no, she could never say that, not a world with Carl and Daniel and Bibbe in it. It was this: If hard knocks or kindnesses were coming her way, she knew to expect them, knew where they'd come from and how long they would last.

But then Ruben didn't show. Joelle got the news from Goodyear. One of Ruben's brothers got the call from the blind bat himself. He'd gone to Mexico. Took one of the shuttles. Wasn't coming back.

"It was the girl," Goodyear said, folding his wooden body into the chair beside Joelle. When news of Ruben's going AWOL spread, the gym had emptied: Ruben's brothers were headed home to do damage control, try to explain to their immigrant parents why their youngest had decided to flee across the border in the wrong direction. The African went back to his hotel with his handlers, perfectly happy to enjoy his desert vacation but disappointed at not getting to meet his match.

"What a dumb little shit," Goodyear said. "To waste all this potential on a piece of pussy — sorry — ass. Did he say anything to you?" He turned to Joelle.

"Must have been the girl," Joelle could only think of her story, of 3,500 words sitting on her computer waiting for its finishing touches.

"I'll kill him if I ever see him again," Goodyear sighed. "He

won't get this chance again."

Joelle could only think of her story, her late story, her story that wouldn't happen. She thought of it blinking on the bright white screen.

"That kid has cleaned my clock," Goodyear said. "What am I going to do with this blind African?"

Joelle thought of moving her cursor to the end of the story and deleting the whole thing, keystroke by keystroke, line by line, till all that was left was the blue-white light from the blank screen.

And what she felt next started as a jab in her gut but then it spread, warming. She pictured Ruben on the bus to Chihuahua, tilting his face to the open window, pictured his girlfriend burying her face in his neck, pictured their bristle-haired children. She thought of running the magazine with eight blank pages where the story was supposed to go. She thought of losing her job. And she cried. It was a runny, crazy, what-the-hell cry. She laughed as she cried. She laughed at Goodyear's bewildered clarinet face. She laughed at herself. She was cracking, thawing to let in the wonderful, terrifying heat of possibility.



Andrea Avery

Andrea Avery is the 10th-grade English teacher at Phoenix Country Day School. She earned a BA in music and an MFA in creative writing from ASU and is currently pursuing her doctorate in education in ASU's Leadership and Innovation program. She lives in the West Valley with her husband, Fred Decker, and their four cats.



Jaywalking



by Claire Newfeld

High School Fiction

Jaywalking

Every morning I wake up at the very edge of the bed with Jay's arm slung heavily across my chest. I'm freezing, because we can only afford to run the heater for part of the night, and Jay hogs the blankets. Sometimes I'll be naked from the waist down, and find my shorts and underwear tangled in the sheets. On rare occasions my wrists will still be tied to the bedpost and I'll have to wait until Jay wakes up so he can untie me. I don't dare try to wake him up myself. He'll shout loudly enough to wake the entire neighborhood, and the last thing I need is to attract attention.

This is a good morning. My pajama bottoms are on and my wrists are free, albeit sore and imprinted with rope marks. My hangover is better than usual. I quietly lift Jay's arm off of my chest and crawl out of bed. I have to make breakfast before he wakes up. Jay is ravenously hungry in the morning (I'm pretty sure it's the weed), so he wants food as soon as possible. If it takes too long he'll shout, and depending on the intensity of his hangover, he might hit. And people will notice the bruises.

I pad into the kitchen. Jay started the alcohol early last night, so he got me drunk before I could do the dinner dishes. I make

a mental note to wash them before I leave for work. I open the cabinet above the stove and pull my box of Tylenol out from the behind the jars of pickled food. I pop two in my mouth and swallow them with a glass of tonic water. That usually kills the hangover. I've developed a pretty high tolerance for headaches, since I have them so often. I'm almost thankful Jay makes me drink so much; it dulls the pain of what he does to me afterward.

I set his omelet down on the table just as he stumbles into the kitchen. His bathrobe is on backwards and he's only wearing one sock. He's clearly more hung over than me, but I can't remember if he drank more than me, or any of the subsequent events. Judging by the deep rope marks on my wrist and the burning sensation on my thighs, he was pretty violent. I shudder at the thought. I'm not sure if he thinks I like it or not. I'm very sure that even if he thought I didn't like it, he wouldn't stop.

Jay sits down heavily and lets his head hit the table, making a loud noise. I stand next to him awkwardly, not knowing what to do. There's no telling how he'll react if I try to comfort him. He finally lifts his head up and looks at me with those big brown eyes I fell in love with.

"I'm hurt," he says in what sounds like a whimper. Good. He's in his lovey-dovey mood. I'm too tired to deal with any of the others.

"I know," I say softly. I hand him the fork. He needs to eat so I can get him out of here as soon as possible. I've slipped some of the Tylenol in the omelet. I can't let him handle pills on his

own; he'll take too many. So I hide the proper dosage in his food and let him believe that his hangovers simply disappear after breakfast. He takes the fork and squeezes my hand for a second. My heart rate quickens, and I remember why I ran off with him in the first place. Times like these, when he's not yelling or hitting or drinking or tying me to the bedpost, I remember. I can't help but wonder if he still loves me. If, under all the mood swings and awful sex games and swearing, he actually has a heart. A small, twisted heart, but still a heart.

When he's finished, he goes back into the bedroom to get dressed. He's a construction worker, so he doesn't even bother to shower or shave in the mornings. I hear a crash and wince; he must be rummaging through the closet. I turn around to see him storming toward me.

"Where is my hard hat?!" he shouts. Great. This morning was going so well, and I've already made him mad.

"I put it on the window sill in the living room to dry. It was filthy, so I washed it last night," I say cautiously, backing up. I make sure my voice is small. Jay always likes to be the loudest.

He pushes me against the cabinets. When I try to get up, he slaps me across the face. It stings, but at least it won't leave a bruise. "Who the hell do you think you are," he says quietly. "You think you can touch my stuff? Did I ask you to clean my hard hat? You think you can control my life? Well think again. Because you can't!" He's shouting now. He storms over to the door and slams it behind him. I listen for the noise of his car starting and the squeal of his tires against the pavement. As soon as he's gone I rush into the bathroom.

I look terrible. There are dark circles under my eyes, my hair is limp and dry, and my left cheek has a red mark where he slapped me. I didn't used to look like this. I used to be pretty. Back in high school I was a cheerleader, and boys would whistle at me when I walked down the hall. I wasn't remotely good at anything, so the only thing I had going for me was my appearance, and I used it. I didn't know myself until people started noticing how beautiful I was. There were the nerds and the jocks and the stoners; I was the pretty girl.

Then I met Jay. It was the spring of my senior year, and I was starting to panic. Everyone was preparing for college or getting jobs or moving out. But I had no idea what I was doing. I could go to the community college next to my high school, but what would I study? Nothing at school interested me. I could get a job somewhere, but where? Suddenly being the pretty girl was no longer a good thing.

I was at a party one night when I met Jay. It was in someone's backyard in the poor part of town. I was leaning up against the keg when my eyes locked with Jay's. He was across the grass, watching a group of people kick around a soccer ball. When we looked at each other, his eyes didn't hover over my breasts or my legs like all the other boys. Instead he held my gaze and flashed a crooked half-smile. My heart fluttered. No one had ever looked at me like that.

We started dating after that. He wasn't aggressive or violent back then. In fact, he was a perfect gentleman. He was two years older than me, and he worked as a mechanic for Honda in the Autoplex. He had his own apartment, and when I graduated, I

moved in with him. It felt so perfect. I was just so in love that I didn't think about anything else but him.

The first year we lived together was great. Then his grandmother died, and he was heartbroken. He didn't come out of the house for months, and when he finally did, it was for alcohol and weed. He lost his job at the Honda, although his boss did send an Edible Arrangement with a note that simply read, "Condolences." His moods would fluctuate between needy and controlling, and he started becoming incredibly possessive. Whenever I tried to go visit my sister or my friends, he'd come up with some sort of excuse to prevent me from going. He'd pick fights with men who happened to look at me in public. It's a wonder he never got arrested for assault or disturbing the peace.

And then the sex games started. To this day I'm not entirely sure what happens. All I can remember is that he gets me drunk and ties me up, and then I usually black out. I'll wake up the next morning and find red marks all over my body, and I'll be so sore I can barely move.

Nine years of this, and I'm still here.

My second grade teacher used to tell us, "You may only help one person in your lifetime, but to that person, you've changed the world." Well, maybe that was true, and maybe Jay is my person. Whether or not Jay loves me back ultimately doesn't matter. He needs me. Without me to put up with his mood swings and make sure he gets the right amount of Tylenol and carry out his sexual fantasies, where would he be? Sure, I've thought about leaving. But even though I've had enough money stored

up for a year now, I can never bring myself to leave. I think about how much he needs me, how he'll probably never find another person who cares about him like I do. And I remember what he's done for me. He's given me a purpose, a way to actually do something good in this infinitesimal time span called life. And when I'm standing in front of my empty suitcase, I thinking about that and I can't make myself pack up and leave.

The sound of the phone ringing brings me back to the present. It's Allie. She's probably the closest thing I have to a friend. We wait tables at Hunky Dory together.

"Thank God you're awake," Allie says when I answer the phone. "I forgot to tell you last night. The boss called me and said he wants us in an hour early today to cover for Carly and Natalie. They can't come today for some reason."

"What? That gives me no time to get ready!" I hang up before she can say anything else. I've got ten minutes to cover up the rope marks. Thank God my work uniform has a long skirt to cover up the red streaks on my legs. I smear liquid foundation and concealer over my wrists and face, not even trying very hard to blend it in. Better it look uneven than get questions like where did that mark come from.

I barely get to work on time. It's Friday morning, so the restaurant is buzzing with businessmen, students, and joggers getting their coffee fix. "Good, you came," Allie says rushing over to me. She shoves my apron into my arms and hurries back behind the counter. "Hurry, we're smashed!" I tie my apron behind my back and head behind the counter.

"How was the audition last night?" I ask Allie as I fill drink

orders. Allie moved out here to Los Angeles three years ago to pursue an acting career.

“I’m not sure,” she sighs. “They were pretty deadpan the whole time. I hope they liked me, because if I book this gig, it would get the attention of other casting directors! I wouldn’t have to work here anymore! I could move into Beverly Hills and my life could finally start! I just can’t wait to get out of this stupid uniform and start doing what I love to do. I’m like ... a flower waiting to bloom, you know? It’s kind of sad. I’ve been alive for twenty-one years, but I don’t feel like I’ve started living yet. I’m not meant to be in a restaurant; I’m meant to be on camera. I was born to do it, I just know. You get what I’m saying?” I do.

She starts to go into the kitchen, but I stop her. “When did you realize you were meant to be an actress?”

She sets down the stack of plates she’s holding and sits down on the chair behind the counter.

“When I was in high school,” she begins, “I was a terrible person. I wasn’t the prettiest, or the smartest, or the best at anything, but I wanted so badly to be something, anything. So when my cheerleading coach made me team captain, I let it go to my head. She probably did it because I was so depressed and she felt sorry for me, but I convinced myself that it was because I really was the best and the prettiest and born to be a leader. So I started picking on the nerds and kicking people off the squad for no reason other than I thought I could. And eventually I realized that I didn’t have a team to be a captain of. The girls who were left hated me, and for that matter, so did the rest of

the school. And I realized that I had even less than before I became cheerleading captain, and I was miserable. So I quit cheerleading and decided to try something I'd never done before. I tried playing softball, the decathlon team, the German club, pretty much every extracurricular my school offered. I hated all of it, and even though I was pretty good at some of the stuff, it didn't matter. If I wasn't happy, why bother doing it?

"And then I auditioned for the spring musical. I didn't get a very big part, and I wasn't very confident, but when I got on stage opening night, and saw all those people in the audience looking up at us ... it was something I had never felt before.

"It was joy. Pure joy. And passion. And I realized that I had to spend my life doing this, no matter how many people told me I couldn't." She gets up and picks up the stack of plates again. She starts to go into the kitchen but turns around again.

"Nicole?" she says. "What's your passion?"

My phone rings before I can think of something to respond. It's Jay's construction company. Strange. I slowly press accept.

"Is this Nicole Parker?" a male voice asks.

"Yes," I say. My heart pounds.

"This is Arthur Mercury from Kaleel Construction Company. There was an accident on site here involving Jay Greene. You're listed as his only contact."

"Is everyone okay? What did he do?" I start pulling off my apron and running to the back room to grab my purse. A million scenarios are flashing through my mind. Did he beat someone up? Set fire to the building? Break one of the machines?

"Ma'am, a faulty crane smashed into the building he was

working in. He fell from the fifth story. He's in the emergency room right now."

My mind goes numb, as does the rest of my body. I see black dots swim from all sides and cloud my vision. I don't even feel my phone fall from my hand, but I know it does because I hear the loud clatter as it hits the ground. I start to stagger and fall to the floor, but I feel arms fold around me and hold me up. I hear Allie's voice saying something, but I can't understand her because it sounds like she's talking underwater. I try to stop the black dots, push them out of my eyes, but I can't. I feel them penetrate my mind, and I stop thinking altogether.

I wake up on the couch in the lounge. My mind becomes conscious before the rest of my body does, and I struggle to move my limbs and open my eyes. I hear what sounds like Allie saying something frantically. My senses slowly come back to life and I try to sit up, but hands press me down. Finally I see Allie standing over me, saying my name repeatedly and telling me not to get up. I try to remember what happened, but my mind feels like it's been stuffed with cotton candy. I realize that Allie has been talking.

"You were gone and when I found you, you were on the floor! Are you okay? What happened?" she says. Her eyes are wide and her voice is high pitched and sounds like it's being pressed down into her throat by nerves. She reaches into her pocket and hands me my cell phone. "I found this on the ground next to you. Did someone call you and rattle your chains or something?"

Suddenly everything comes back. Jay. Faulty crane. Emer-

gency Room.

“I have to go!” I yell, and push Allie away from me. I don’t even bother to take off my apron. I run across the parking lot so determined that I almost sprint past my car.

When I run into the waiting room, a man wearing a polo shirt with a Kaleel Construction Company logo stands up when I run into the waiting room. “You must be Nicole? I’m Arthur. You have nothing to worry about. He’s got a few cracked ribs and a broke leg, but he’s going to live. They’re fixing him up right now. He’ll have to stay here for a few nights, but he’ll be fine.”

Across the room, a nurse speaks to a group of people. There is a young boy, a woman in her 30’s, and two older people, one man and one woman. I can’t hear what the nurse is saying, but I watch their faces fall from hopeful to crushed. The woman cries and hugs the elderly man, and the older woman picks up the boy and whispers something in his ear. The nurse lets out a big breath and stands awkwardly.

Arthur puts his hand on my shoulder. “The other one ... he wasn’t so lucky.”

My heart breaks. I had no idea who this man was, but he had a family who would never see him again.

“He was a good man,” Arthur says. “Loved his family. Sometimes he’d bring his son to the site and show him what he did to get food on their table. And such a friendly guy. He’ll be missed.”

He sits down with a grim look on his face, and I can tell he’s struggling to keep his tears in. I sit on the chair across from him

and don't move. At some point a nurse comes and starts talking to me, but I only hear the part when she says that Jay will need to stay in the hospital for three nights at least. The family leaves, still crying and holding each other. The little boy is the only dry-eyed one, obviously not understanding what had happened to his father. Why Jay? I think suddenly. Why did Jay live and not the other one? The other man was responsible and took care of his family, and yet Jay, who hit his lover and tied her to the bedpost, had lived. At least the family had each other for strength. If Jay had died, I would have nothing.

But why do I feel so useless? Jay breaks me down so much I want to scream sometimes, but he also holds me up, gives me something to live for. I suddenly think of what Allie said earlier. After feeling completely lost and alone, she found something she loved and had to do for the rest of her life. Well, how do I feel now? Is depending on someone who ties me up and slaps me daily the life I want for myself?

I'm not sure how long I've been sitting there, but it's pitch dark outside, so it must be awhile. The moon looks especially far away through the glass windows. I haven't seen the moon in a long time; Jay always gets me drunk by the time the sun goes down. And there it is tonight, a tiny white dot poking through the clouds. I wish I could see the stars, but they're being covered up by an incoming rainstorm.

At some point I fall asleep, and I wake up to a nurse shaking me gently. It's raining, and I remember the moon from last night. All around me the room is buzzing. People wait anxiously, carrying flowers and stuffed animals to healing loved ones.

Next to me, two women are crying.

“Jay is awake. You can see him now,” the nurse says to me. She smiles with innocent angel eyes. Lucky girl.

I ask the nurse to give me a minute, and she goes to wait by the door that would lead me down the stark hallways by the door to the current meaning of my life. I ask the receptionist for paper and a pen and I write a single line.

It's time for me to see the moon again.

I hand the note to the nurse and ask her to bring it to Jay. Then I turn to the exit. There's a pain in my chest, but I ignore it. And I walk away.

CLAIRE NEWFELD

Jaywalking

Claire Newfeld

Claire Newfeld is currently a senior at Tempe Preparatory Academy. In addition to her creative writing, she is a monthly reporter and editor-in-chief of her school's student newspaper. She is also deeply involved in community service and musical theatre. She looks forward to attending college after she graduates from high school.



No Dwelling



by Mary Louise Kiernan Hagerdon

Adult Poetry

No Dwelling

My high-on-the-hill home must be multiply listed
with no time to rue. I resolve myself like
the persistent sparrow mourning its egg-filled nest
knocked from above the front door cornice.
Bewildered, the bird shuddered mid-air,
its wings backpedalling furiously in place.
How fast can a bird's heart beat before bursting?

Quelling my own palpitations, I will mirror
the ways of the winged one that rebuilt its nest
flight after flight after flight after flight,
meshing leaves and twigs with mossy mud, then
weaving in a single strand of my child's hair
loosened during a porchside hairbrushing.
How fast can my own heart beat before soaring?



Mary Louise Kiernan Hagerdon

Mary Louise Kiernan Hagerdon is a former copywriter, proof-reader and reporter whose poems and essays have appeared in *Pudding*, *Hudson Valley Echoes*, *Catskill Country Magazine*, *The Times Herald-Record* and *The New York Times*. In 1997 she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications in Written Media through the State University of New York. In 2007 she completed her first online writing course through Arizona State University. With her husband Steve, Mary Louise winters in Arizona's Valley of the Sun and summers in New York's Hudson Valley.



Rural Epicurean



by Kyle Bassett

College Poetry

Rural Epicurean

Old byre and scalpel help us perform
gentle operations on our southern kind of sickness.
When the conquistadors arrived first, the plains made them
seasick. We too would be nauseous if we could see
forever through the tall grass.

Once, you caught me in the shed admiring the tools,
praising the way time has made actions into objects.
Hammer, weed eater, screwdriver, toaster.
My mom taught me how to fix a lawnmower.
Your father showed you how to shoot.
We agree that destruction has a steep learning curve.

Dusk insists we share our family secrets —
feudal chicken-fried steak, bacon wrapped everything, ice,
then beer, then more ice, Washington lavender —
Until stars conquer their reference points, infinitely
rising like well placed porches wrapping the night.



Kyle Bassett

Kyle J. Bassett is a native Texan. He currently works as a poetry editor for *Hayden's Ferry Review* while earning his MFA at Arizona State University. He lives in Arizona with his wife, Laura, and their cat, Thesis. Kyle enjoys music, scotch, and bacon – in no particular order.



Cosmonaut



by Benjamin Shindel

High School Poetry

Cosmonaut

distance makes the heart grow fonder, i thought, so i figured i'd
move away for a while
i searched "home" in amazon.com and filtered by distance:
largest-to-smallest

i moved into one of the old modules on the international space
station
that they didn't need anymore
i put in three-sixty degrees of shag carpeting and made it my
own
it was kind of lonely at first, but they installed internet access
after a couple of weeks
then it was pretty okay

i had to leave my stash of altoids on the ground because up in
space
the dust would get everywhere, and it would probably be bad
for breathing

when i moved in, all the signs and manuals for maintenance
were in cyrillic lettering

which was pretty neat
i've never been good at learning languages
but i've never been a handy kind of person either
it's not like i was gonna fix the space shower if it broke anyhow

a fun game, if you ever have the time, is to write english words
with cyrillic letters
everything looks cold war era but kind of net-arty

someone left an old russian one-kopek coin up there
a really old one from before the soviets
it had definitely been out of circulation for a while
which made me think it was the good luck charm of some
cosmonaut
i couldn't flip it in zero gravity

i had all the furnishings done in swiss red, navy blue, charcoal,
and off-white
when my friends saw the place, they said "neat"

they also said "what's your wifi password?"
it was "cybercat777"
one of them asked if there were any capital letters
but i didn't think there was a need for capital letters in space
it just doesn't fit with the aesthetic

after 'gravity' came out on netflix, i looked out my window to
make sure, y'know

i felt pretty stupid ... hollywood sure “got me”

i started to only wear bathrobes
there was usually no one to impress in space
and if i was skyping someone, i could always say “it’s night time
in orbit right now”
“that’s why i’m not dressed”
i still have the largest wardrobe of anyone in my orbit

my closet houses ten pairs of shoes i never wear, but no
sunglasses, which would have been nice
never was a big fan of sunglasses down on earth

people ask me how i can afford to live up here, but the rent
really isn’t that high
some grounded cosmonaut is renting it out, he had to come
down for vertigo treatment
he just wanted to make some quick cash
honestly this location sucks anyway, no good schools in the
area, climate sucks for gardening
can’t even grow a tomato plant

my friends say they have trouble picking out gifts for me
nothing works in zero gravity, especially flowers and chocolate

my amazon wishlist is just a bunch of magnets
higher priority items are boxes of words to make poems and
profound sentences with

i hope to eventually cover all the open metal spaces with
personalized messages
and cleverly arranged sequences of magnetic animals and foods
and household appliances
and eyes and noses and lips made into mismatched faces with
exaggerated emotions

after i leave and someone else moves into this place, will they
rearrange everything?
turn all the lips upside down and furrow all the magnetic
eyebrows

question: i wonder if i'm allowed to call the international space
station my pad
seems like it demands formality, it being a cooperative scientific
institution and all
answer: nasa doesn't follow me on twitter, so i can call it
whatever i please
and if i want, i can trash the place too and write on the
bathroom walls with sharpie
...that was a lie, there are no walls in the bathroom, and
sharpies don't work in space

crying in space is a tragedy
the tears float around and around you until you clean them up

it's impossible to love someone in space
when you try to pull them towards you, they just float away

kissing doesn't work, because as soon as your lips come into
contact with theirs
the repelling forces prove stronger than the forces of attraction
and the two bodies push apart

i wish i had magnetic lips



Benjamin Shindel

I am a senior at McClintock High School, and enjoy the suburbs, art, and culture. I think that poetry is interesting and vital because it is more emotive and more accessible than prose, and it can transcend different cultural backgrounds. When I write poetry, I try to capture not a temporal setting or a physical event, but rather a notable aesthetic.



Breastfeeding Mama



by Katherine Cowley

Adult Nonfiction

Breastfeeding Mama

I lay on the bed, limp cabbage stuffed into my bra, wishing I believed in some Mayan earth-mother fertility goddess. Surely that was Mayan, right? Some sort of seated, squarish figurine with breasts hanging down to the ground, at peace with the world and herself. This earth-mother would not be the type to look at her nakedness in the mirror two days after giving birth and cry at no longer recognizing her body. She would be confident, serene, and in control.

When I brought my perfect, little newborn home from the hospital, I was not confident, I was not serene, and I definitely did not feel in control, especially when it came to breastfeeding. I followed the lactation specialist's admonition: "To prevent engorgement, feed your baby as often as she likes." This strategy failed. My breasts became heavy rocks, unripe cantaloupes that I tried soothing with leaf after leaf of chilled cabbage. My flat nipples — one of those awkward medical conditions you never bring up in normal conversation — made it nearly impossible for my poor baby Myra to latch on to satiate her hunger. Night after night, she would scream for hours as I desperately tried to keep my nipple in her mouth so she could suck even a few

drops of milk. The phrase “Myra the milk monster” was born.

During these near-sleepless nights, I needed a story to support me, and I reached out to anything I could find that would help me survive breastfeeding. After all, throwing my body out an upstairs window was not an option. I considered the Super Mama Story. The Natural Mama. The Feminist Mama. The Conservative, Traditional Mama. The Bond-with-your-Baby Mama. The Enthusiastic, Breastfeeding-while-Blogging Mama. All of these archetypal mothers happily breastfeed despite whatever challenges come their way. But none of their stories seemed strong enough for my raw and aching breasts.

A few months before childbirth, I’d taken a traumatizing breastfeeding class from an Evil Lactation Specialist who liked to intimidate us and bash our mothers. In the class we practiced holding naked, plastic baby dolls in breastfeeding positions. The lactation specialist ridiculed me for my question, “What am I supposed to do with the baby’s arms — where do they go?” She also may have given me the evil eye (as she talked, she would stare at us until we looked down at our desks). Because of this breastfeeding class, I had a gnawing fear of visiting an expert.

Every book, website, and breastfeeding advocate said that if breastfeeding hurt, you were holding your baby incorrectly. So I looked at lots of diagrams. Tummy to tummy. Back straight. Nose touching my breast. Unfortunately, I unknowingly positioned my newborn at a slightly wrong angle which ripped my nipples, resulting in open wounds that were aggravated every hour-and-a-half when I nursed my baby. My pregnancy bible scared me about using nursing pads with plastic in them, so I

cut up pieces of an old towel. A few weeks later, towel remnants surfaced from inside my breasts, the same way your body slowly ejects a thorn or a porcupine needle.

More than anything I wanted to quit, and unrequested, free formula samples magically arrived on my doorstep. (The ads and coupons that came with the formula even said, “Strong Moms Use Formula.” How did they know I felt nothing like a Strong Mom at that moment?) Yet I grew up watching my mom breastfeed my five younger siblings. So I clung to it desperately, in part because of the incessant propaganda on how much better breastfeeding is for your baby, but also because in my mind breastfeeding stood for motherhood. If I could breastfeed, then surely I could make the transition from educated, working woman to full-time nurturer in a wild world of heavenly homemakers and bizarre, epic, mixed-berry jams.

After several failed attempts, I managed to use a breast pump to relieve my engorgement. Pink, bloody milk dripped steadily through the white piece of plastic and into a blue coffee mug. It did not matter to me that my blood would not hurt my infant, or that she was drinking it anyway, every time she nursed: I washed the pumped milk down the drain. My breastfeeding chart shows that I spent at least eight hours a day with my baby parasitically attached to my chest. During my remaining free time I read my breastfeeding book and its corny pep talks: “Determination! Will power! Problems are rare.” I tried to think of any novels I’d read with breastfeeding mothers, coming-of-age stories related to warm milk and nursing bras. None came to mind.

I quickly emptied an entire tube of lanolin — which I prefer to call sheep sweat — a standard remedy for dryness and cracking. The key for temporary relief was to apply the sheep wax liberally to my nipples, while imagining soft balls of anti-itch, wool yarn. My mom arrived and became my surrogate La Leche League, fixing my baby's nursing position. After a phone consultation with a (different, kinder) lactation specialist, I began draping black tea bags on my bleeding breasts. I would wet the tea bags with warm water, squeeze out a bit of the excess liquid, and putter around my house for ten minutes, bags balancing on my uncovered nipples. After I let my breasts air dry, I would attempt to hand squeeze some milk and rub it into the cracked and bleeding skin. I never did manage to hand squeeze out milk, though the Namibian mother in the film *Babies* makes it look so easy.

After a while engorgement disappeared, as did many of the latching problems. But next came mastitis: red streaking, an infection in my breasts and a burning, ever-burning, as if I were the featured sacrifice for an Aztec fire ritual. Every time my baby swallowed milk I sobbed, trying not to scream. I had been prepared for the pain of childbirth — I'd spent nine months knowing it was coming. In addition to hearing everyone's horror birth stories, I practiced all the standard breathing and meditation exercises to soft sea music. But no one ever told me it was possible for breastfeeding to hurt.

The night before I went on antibiotics for mastitis my arms shook as I held my baby, hesitating to bring her to my breast. I took a deep breath and pulled her close. She latched on, gulp

ing hungrily. Pain shot through my breast; my mouth filled with salt as tears streamed down my face. Suddenly, my three-week-old pulled off my breast and turned her head to look up at my face. Her eyes lit up, and her countenance showed more knowledge and compassion than I thought possible in an infant. Myra smiled at me, the first smile she gave me, and one of the most precious gifts I have ever received. That smile carried me forward, providing a reason to keep going.

During the following weeks I continued taking 800 milligrams of Ibuprofen at a time so I could stand nursing. I fought back nausea every time I looked in the bathroom mirror and saw the scabs covering my nipples. I kept hoping and praying and wondering if I would ever find joy and happiness in motherhood.

Somewhere along the way I discovered my motherhood story, a story that speaks to me and carried me through breastfeeding. This story is from my great-great grandmother Margaret Adele May Garrigus. Everyone tells the story of how Maggie lost her thumb in a horse accident. Her large husband fainted at the sight of her blood, so tiny Maggie carried him to the car and drove herself to a doctor. That's not all though. When her first marriage ended, she worked two jobs to support her six kids. And after one of her daughters disappeared, she raised her grandson. There's another story about my great-great grandmother Margaret, one that's not talked about very much. Her last baby did the unthinkable: he bit off her nipple while breastfeeding.

Fortunately, history does not always repeat itself. Breast-

feeding my daughter improved, and I weaned Myra at eleven months old, with both my nipples still intact. According to parenting books I may have committed an unforgivable crime against the universe by skipping formula and switching my daughter to whole milk even though she wasn't quite a year old. I breastfed my second daughter, Charlotte, until she was eighteen months old. Breastfeeding my second daughter was a much friendlier experience, though it included a lactation specialist and three bouts of mastitis.

The books insist that breastfeeding is not painful. I disagree. Yes, there is beauty to feeding a child a meal my body created. I generally enjoyed holding my daughter close to me and feeling her relax in her arms as she sucked until she reached that blissful, nirvana state of milk drunkenness. Yet every single time I nursed, every time when the milk began rushing from my breasts into my ravenous baby's mouth, I experienced a small bit of pain. Supposedly this "let-down reflex" is not painful; yet personally I found those few seconds unpleasant, as it felt like my breasts were about to burst. More than that, it was arduous to breastfeed every few hours, every single day. It can be painful to give so much of yourself to someone else, even when that person needs it so desperately.

Like my great-great grandmother, I survived breastfeeding, but not unscathed. Both my nipples carry permanent scars, lines that testify what I was willing to give my children. One of my nipples has an indented scar in the shape of an x, and if I look at it too closely in the mirror I always cringe. Apparently I am no earth mother — despite layering cabbage on my breasts

— but I am a mother with a story. As I've shared my story, I've found friends and family members with breastfeeding challenges. Some continued to breastfeed; others switched to formula. I admire them either way. As I exchange breastfeeding stories, I always find myself thinking of my great-great grandmother, wishing I could hear her tell her own story.

Margaret's story tells me that sometimes life is not okay. Sometimes there is not a redeeming factor, to mastitis or sleepless nights or loss of limb and loved one. But you move forward anyway, even though motherhood is challenging. And story by story, smile by smile, as your children grow and you live with hope and courage, you find joy.



Katherine Cowley

Katherine Cowley has worked as a documentary film producer, a radio producer, and a writing teacher. Her essays and short stories have been published and won awards in the *Locutorium*, the BYU Studies Personal Essay Contest, the Meeting of the Myths, Four Centuries of Mormon Stories, and the Mormon Lit Blitz. You can also read her essays and stories online at katherinecowley.com. Katherine has lived across the United States, in Brazil, and in Finland, and currently resides in Arizona with her husband and two daughters.



The Importance of 2 Pounds



by Lori Basaldu

Adult Nonfiction

The Importance of 2 Pounds

There are some things in life that are not predictable because you don't know it exists. It never ran through your mind, and because you have never heard of it, there was no way to fear it.

By the time the pregnancy test came along I had been endlessly peeing on ovulation sticks, waiting for the smiley face to appear indicating “go time,” keeping my legs in the air for 20 minutes to let gravity help the sperm swim to the desired location. We endured miscarriage, fertility meds, the infamous shots in the bum, and — there is something else that may not get mentioned when Giuliana Rancic talks about IVF on a reality show — the money involved can be extreme. Going through another IVF treatment is not possible financially. If it doesn't work, it's over; there are no more chances. It has to work. There is pressure in this pregnancy test, anxiety-producing pressure. The call came.

Two little sunflower seeds were spotted on the ultrasound. So small I didn't notice them. I thought there was nothing there, an image I had seen before during a miscarriage ultrasound. When he said the words, it was magic, and because I was not expect-

ing it, I was shocked. I called my husband on the way back to work. I said, “The doc asked, ‘can you count to two?’ It’s twins.” We felt lucky and privileged. Time was flying and we were about to be in a whirlwind of excitement along with everyone in our lives.

Soon after, I woke up and there was blood. My heart pounded, a lump came into my throat. I thought it was over. I called my husband and when he answered, my voice did not work. I was diagnosed with a hemorrhage. Over the next few weeks, the hemorrhage sac was getting bigger along with the babies. The question that seemed to be resonating was just how much blood loss a couple of growing babies could endure before they would show the effects of it.

And then it happened. The nightmare of a pregnant couple. The fear of any pregnancy, if you knew it existed. The babies spoke from the womb. They said, “We are headed out and there is no stopping us.” There is a theory in the hospital NICU that premature babies are experts on many things. They know, even when we don’t, that they need to come out.

I didn’t know the concept existed that a person could get pregnant, be halfway through the pregnancy term, 17 weeks to go, no baby bump, no food cravings or weird smelling sensations, no baby showers, and suddenly give birth to a couple of 1 pound babies, and watch them grow in an incubator instead of growing in a womb.

I guess we knew something serious was happening when there were too many doctors and nurses piling into the room to count. I remember a very nice anesthesiologist stroking my hair

and telling me it was going to be okay, that they were going to be strong little fighters. He was the first to believe that my little family would get through this. The babies were delivered and taken away from me. They were given oxygen tubes and feeding tubes. One doctor told us, “Your daughter was trying so hard to breathe on her own, we actually let her try for a few seconds.” The hemorrhage sac was delivered, too, about 7 inches long. One of the docs said the babies seemed strong. We held on to that statement for weeks, repeating it to relatives and friends across the country over the phone. We had no idea if it was true or not.

Harper weighed 1 pound 5 ounces. Robinson weighed 1 pound 7 ounces. We decided to name them after two strong people, the courageous Jackie Robinson and the famed author Harper Lee. We hoped it would benefit our tiny babies to be namesakes for people who had quiet strength in their DNA. It occurred to me that the late Jackie Robinson may watch over a child who was named for him. We needed all the help we could get.

The next day, I walked through a door at the hospital that would change my life forever. There were small windows, and intercoms and doors that open by buzzers. What I saw was a science fiction movie about a hospital growing babies in incubators. A line of isolettes, babies under bright lights making everything appear blue. All the babies look alike, perfectly still and facing upward. The sound of oxygen machines mimics an ocean. Bells go off from monitors indicating a baby in distress. How could this happen? Whose babies are these? They don't

look much like babies. They don't have eyes, only skin where eyes would be. They had no voice; they cannot make the sound of a cry because of tubes in their throats. Their skin was translucent; I could see into their bodies. All the parents seemed to walk around in a daze. For 110 days I would be emotionally shackled to that room.

The next few weeks were spent listening, learning and watching, in a fugue state mostly. The doctors do their rounds from baby to baby; it's all in slow motion. Are they hiding information from us? I kept feeling that nobody wanted to tell me how dire the situation was, or what the future would likely hold for a baby born at this stage of a pregnancy, about halfway through. We were asked if we wanted to have a baptism. The babies were fighting for their lives. We were still in shock, sitting next to incubators and waiting. Waiting for babies to grow. Minutes ticked by. Days. Weeks. Have we eaten? We didn't know. Pumping breast milk every 3 hours, I was told by the nurses that every drop will help heal the babies, and I held on to this as my only source of control. I tried to think of ways to have time pass faster, a unique desire I learned exists when you have babies in a NICU. Instead of walking around the workplace pregnant, or having strangers touch my tummy in a grocery store line, we would come to the hospital and help our babies grow. Holding naked baby bodies against our naked chests was the very best way to help them grow; we became kangaroos in a hospital room and it was consistently the one-hour highlight of our day. Time, once whirling by, now was standing still.

We held our breath when the babies were weighed on scales

and their height checked every “Measurement Monday.” One ounce was a milestone of huge proportions to us. When the number of ounces added up to another pound, we cried. Getting from 1 pound to 2 were by far the longest days of my life, 30 of them.

The nurses were people we may not have ever known in our ordinary lives. They didn’t belong to my Bunco club; I didn’t know them from the neighborhood, the workplace or my Facebook connections. They were strangers. They held all of our hope. It’s bizarre to put all of your trust into strangers, to give them the power to bring life into two human beings, but that is what they did. They got to work immediately and we watched them bring our babies to life. The nurses would care for our babies and create a womb-like atmosphere in an incubator with their magic hands, while having conversations with each other. “Are you going to the birthday party for Laurie? It’s a surprise, she has no idea what is in store for her.” “Ah yes, can’t wait to see her expression.” The nurses acted like this is not the worst thing they have ever seen in their careers, these beanie babies making no sounds and with skin that was shockingly see-through. There was comfort in their everyday conversation.

Almost immediately, about day two, the nurses started to make comments to us that gave us normalized feelings. I was shocked to hear the words, “Harper is so strong, she’s going to be running a board room someday.” It gave her a personality. “Robbie is a cutie, he will follow her around, adoring her.” It made them seem like two real human beings, not 1pound micro-preemies filled with tubes and monitors and picc lines.

“I think Harper will be an instigator,” was stated many times. Often their monitors would beep at the same time and the nurses would say, “They are very connected; they are communicating with each other.”

When you find yourself at a place in your life where there is something significant happening that you have virtually no control over, you are forced to take a hard and close look at your relationship with your Higher Power and how much faith you are putting in Him. This can be a very important time in a person’s life ... in a marriage ... it will change you forever. We sought out prayers from everyone we knew. We spent time in a mist of spiritual awakening. We begged for miracles. We had to believe a miracle could happen for us. My husband said, “We will be grateful for every minute we get to be with our babies. We will be strong for them.”

Harper’s legs were the size of fingers. She fought hard every day to gain ounces. Robbie stopped breathing several times. The nurses took drops of my breast milk and fed him from a Q-tip. Robbie was hungry out of the womb. He ate from the Q-tip as if it were a steak dinner. We were not creating birth announcements, getting pictures of our newborns dressed in bows and ball caps as we had imagined hundreds of times. The nurses put my husband’s wedding ring on one of the baby’s forearms so we could capture their size for their first photo.

For three-and-a-half months we would become experts of the NICU, the staff, the shift schedules, the overhead announcements, and the various personalities and patterns of hospital life. The nurses became our therapists and touchstones. The

kids would endure heart surgeries at 2 weeks old, numerous blood transfusions, brain scans, lab pricks, eye exams, hearing exams and a brain bleed. We watched their eyelids develop, we watched as they opened each eye: one then two then three then four, each days apart, so each baby resembled a pirate for a few days. We watched their ears form, their eyebrows come in. Most emotional of all was the day we heard their voices. We cheered for poops and pees — that felt like normal baby stuff to us. We stared at machines pumping air into their lungs, making their tiny bodies and the entire room shake as rhythmic as a snare drum. We changed diapers the size of Monopoly money. Sometimes their small heads would move slightly in the direction of our voices when we arrived; they seemed to know who we were; they seemed to desire our arrival. They would wrap their small hand around one of our fingers when we reached for them through the small portal. We read books, sang songs, took pictures, and daydreamed of running, reading, talking children. Most of all, we told the babies we believed in them, were proud of them, and whispered in their tiny ears that they could do this. At night when we left, we turned on an artificial heartbeat sound machine that played in their incubators, hoping to give them the feeling of a womb — a place of warmth and safety. A place that was taken away from them.

A few times I remember sobbing and asking, “Why is this happening to us?” That kind of narcissistic injury is short-lived. Once back in the room with the babies, seeing their little hands and feet, their yawns, and hearing them communicate with each other through their monitors, it seemed once again that

just maybe they could fight through this.

Our children did come home slightly prior to their due date, and they looked every bit like a normal set of newborn twins, and we looked every bit like proud, nervous first-time parents. And it is true that Harper is strong and bright, and Robbie is a cutie whom everyone adores, and they do seem to communicate with each other; the nurses were right, even from day two.

Today, we believe a miracle has taken place in our lives, along with determination inside 1 pound bodies. At 3 years old, our twins are strong, healthy and thriving. They laugh and smile and talk as if they have no memory of what they have been through, as if they have never had a day of stress in their lives. They both run and run and run and run and love the fresh air.

When we go walking around the neighborhood, we look like a normal family of four. The babies look like they have had a normal transition from conception to delivery to today, just like any other family. Most people who see us, and wave from their garage, or look up from their yard-work, likely have no thought that there was a day not so long ago that we delivered two 1 pound babies who would have to dig deep within themselves, and find the strength to breathe, and grow, and endure pain, and have a will to survive based solely on the voices of their parents telling them they had to do it ... for the four of us.

And so it was that my life was profoundly changed on April 12, 2012, at 8:13 and 8:15 in the evening, when I gave birth to twins at 23 weeks and 5 days gestation. I have become a more inspired person, a person who believes in miracles, a more spiritually grounded person. I have become a better human

being because of the kindness that came to me during a time of need from friends and relatives and from nurses who were once strangers who work in a place I had never been to before. I try to do better work at my job, and show more compassion to my clients because I am inspired by the high caliber of work that is being done at the hospital where the kids stayed. I am more emotional; I get choked up over a nice comment made by a Starbucks barista, as if a part of me has become uncovered. There were gifts mailed to my newborn children from people we had never met, and a prayer shawl made for us from women who do not know us but heard of our story from 10 states away.

So many people, too many to count, came into our lives when we needed the support to help us through our journey. Gifts at our door, emails, notes in the mail, and visits to the hospital ... people jumped on planes and prayed from all over the country. A simple letter was received from Jackie Robinson's widow stating how proud "Jack" would have been to know our son was named for him and how proud she is of Robbie for his incredible endurance. There is comfort in that kind of community, to know there are people rooting for our family, for the 1 pound babies, and it made a difference. It enabled us to bring a positive spirit each day, for the 110 days we walked through the front doors of the NICU, and in turn that helped the babies have the strength they needed to continue fighting and growing and believing they had the strength of 100 people. In a sense they did.



Lori Basaldu

Lori is a Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Therapist at Terros. She has been working with people with drug and alcohol issues, homelessness, poverty and mental illness for 12 years. She lives in Gilbert with her husband and 3 year old twins. This is the first time she has ever entered a formal writing contest perhaps because it's the first time she's ever had a story to tell.



Something Else



by Andrea Avery

College Nonfiction

Something Else

I was at Target when I decided to get my knees replaced. I was looking through the greeting cards while a little boy, kindergarten-age, tugged at his distracted mom's purse. "Mom. Mommy. Mom! MOM!" he screamed. "Mommy. Why does she look like that? Why, Mom? Mom!" His mom was either well-practiced at ignoring him or truly absorbed by the push-button "sounds-of-ocean-solitude" display in front of her. "Mommy! Why. Does. Her. Legs. Look. Like. That?" he persisted, brow furrowed, eyes glued to my legs, which were stuck in a bent position, lacking about 30 degrees of extension so that I looked—always—as though I were about to hop. A billion times over this had happened, and I'd always tried to be game about it. So I looked at him, intending to smile beatifically in his direction, expecting him to hide apologetically behind his mother's legs, expecting her to mouth "I'm so sorry" silently and steer him by his little shoulders to another aisle.

You can't blame the kid, really. He was only stating what I really should have been screaming at my own image in the mirror during the five years or so that it took for my knees to go from "normal" to, well, *that*.

I don't know when it started happening. I have only endpoints to gauge the speed with which arthritis froze my knees. Becoming crippled — as opposed to being maimed — is like aging that way: There's no day when you go from being six to being seven to being 25. You look back at an old photo of yourself at six, sturdy and brown, in hand-me-down corduroys and your brother's T-shirt and waist-length pigtails and think, *That's me?* Because you can't reconcile it with the angular, pale person you've become.

When I graduated from high school in 1995 my knees were fine. I know for sure, because I have pictures of my legs, sheathed in opaque white tights, sticking out straight and long from under the hem of that unfortunate babydoll dress I thought made me look Grunge in a Good Way.

I have a picture of me in jeans and a flannel shirt of my dad's, comically wielding an axe in Flagstaff, Arizona, circa 1997 or 1998, and in it my legs are almost straight—but it's hard to tell if the slight bend in them is just the stance I chose as I hefted the axe over my shoulder or if it's a stance my body imposed on me.

There are pictures of me from the Best Summer Ever, the fabled Summer of 2000, that beautiful, ideal summer when Beth and Deanna and I hit the road for sunny California a week or so after collecting our bachelor's degrees in music. On a gray day, we rented cruiser bicycles at Venice Beach and there is a picture of me, in Capri-length jeans and a lightweight black sweater, straddling the gigantic-looking yellow cruiser, at a full stop, tipped slightly off balance with one foot on the ground, leg bent. What I know about this picture is that the bike was actu

ally the right size for me, the *real* me anyway, the me that was a few inches taller, but that the leg length I'd started losing made it hard to reach the pedals, hard to plant my feet when stopped. My locked-up knees made it painful to pedal the bike and I remember wishing the activity—oh, the day, the trip! — would be over soon. But I smiled hugely for the camera, because I knew that this was a *fun* thing we were doing and if I said anything it would make my two dear friends feel bad.

And then there is a whole series of pictures from 2003 in which, despite the long, wine-colored crepe dress I'm wearing to mask it, I look like I'm about to fall into an invisible bench, the bend of my knees is so pronounced. In all of these pictures I am several inches shorter than both my mother and my sister — which isn't strange except that when I'd left home after high school, I was about 5'8", my mother about 5'7" and my sister about 5'6".

I'd always been tall. Not freakishly so, just a bit taller than average. Tall enough to be in the back row of class photographs and to be asked to reach things on high shelves for teachers and other kids. But looking back on my college and graduate school years, between 1995 and 2003, I realize that no one commented on my height, no one asked me to reach anything, I was placed in the middle or — horror! — front rows of group photos.

The bend in my knees had gradually stolen about four inches of my height from me — such that my mom's boyfriend called me a "delightful little person" after meeting me, a description that sounded wrong to my mom (and later, to me). Delightful, sure, but *little*?

Because my knees had gone and gotten stuck in this position, unable to straighten and with only the slightest amount of flexion, I adopted a weird gait.

Try it: Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the ground in front of you and your knees bent to a handsome 90 degrees. Now slide your feet away from you until the bend in your knees is slightly more obtuse, about 110 degrees if you can eyeball it or if you happen to have a goniometer or protractor on hand. You must keep your knees bent at this angle, no matter what. You may want to duct-tape a medium-size red rubber playground ball to the back of each knee.

Now. Stand up. No arms on your chair? Sucks to be you. Rock back and forth until you've gained enough momentum to propel yourself forward and out of the chair and hope you don't overshoot and fall forward, because getting up from the floor is even harder.

Once you're up, take a few steps, but you mustn't bend or straighten your legs. Your feet must stay flat on the ground. You'll kind of shuffle to where you're going. A boy you become friends with later will say, "When I first saw you walk it looked like both of your legs were asleep." In comparison to the other things you've heard, this comment will seem gentle, artful even, and you'll think for a moment, does he *like* me like me?

If there are stairs between you and where you're headed, you'll have to walk down them sideways, step by plodding step.

People ask me now if my knees were painful when they were like that. I don't know. I guess so. Pain is like noise. When it's persistent, your glorious, efficient body tunes it out. No sense

paying attention to a constant car alarm.

What was painful during those years was going to parties. Trying to score the seat on the couch next to the arm so I'd have something to use to pull myself out of its depths. Going to the bathroom to find a low toilet seat and the sink countertop too far away to lean on to get up. Learning to pee standing up and hoping no one found out.

What hurt badly was meeting at a dinner party a sweet-faced boy with a mangled hand that looked like a flipper, short and weak from some congenital illness, and thinking we made a perfect pair. Going on a walk in the hot August night with him, having him say, "Hold on. Wait. You really walk like that? I thought you were goofing."

What hurt, perhaps more than anything, was climbing the stairs to my brother's townhouse for our first Christmas celebration as a broken family and having my suddenly single father open the door and — before the "hello there, Punkin'" and the beard-scratchy kiss on the cheek I was desperate for — scan my lower body and say, "Ugh. Is that all the more your knees bend these days?" I'll remember that forever, but I don't recall if I got the kiss or the "Punkin."

So you can't blame the little boy in Target for his question. Why *did* my legs look like that? The more I thought about it, the more my internal monologue took on the cranky timbre of a preschooler. *Why?* Why had I told myself, over and over, that everyone had something to deal with, some cross to bear? Why had I filled pages of a sketchbook with dresses I imagined would be perfect for someone like me, stiff, armor-like Schia-

parelli-inspired dresses that belled dramatically between waist and shin to cover up the sins of my legs? Why hadn't I called an orthopedic surgeon and looked into knee replacement?

Because I was 26. At 26, the idea of trading in my original parts, no matter how faulty they were, felt something like defeat. Joint replacements have come a long way in the last 20 years. But still, under ideal circumstances the new joint should outlive its bearer. Go ahead and give 75-year-old Grandma a new hip. Grandma, go to town. You'll die before the pit-resistant titanium wears out, before the joint starts loosening.

But if I started this process now, this swapping out of eroded, misshapen joints for smooth titanium ones, how many times would I have to repeat it? My dreamboat knee-and-hip guy, Dr. Armstrong, says new knees can last 20 years, but since I plan on living at least long enough to see all my friends get arthritis — ha! — I should expect to replace them two or three more times before I die, each “revision” (how delicious that those operations are called that!) more difficult than the last, each time the wafer-like patella getting thinner and thinner.

In order to want to get rid of a body part, you have to have some measure of hate — disavowal, at least — for that part. And it's not hard to find someone who claims to hate part of her body; it's not even hard to find someone who has gone so far as to swap it out, a snub nose for a generically straight one, small breasts for large.

But if you hate your body part — your nose, say — because of its shape, because of its fixed wrongness, because you just don't feel it represents you, your hatred is contained. If you hate

your body part because it was decimated by a disease that is still in you and always will be — and that is voracious in its appetite for organs and systems — then you are opening the floodgates for a self-hatred with no end.

If I were to hate my legs, what would stop me from hating my hands, my feet, my elbows, myself? I refuse.

At times, I admire my body. My rotator cuff tear did exactly what a therapist said it might: It healed itself. Years later, when I looked into shoulder replacement, sure that the doctor would once again tell me my bone was so soft and unhealthy as to be unfixable, the MRI showed no evidence of that old tear. “Are you sure you tore your rotator cuff?” this surgeon asked. I am sure. I have my memory and, better yet, I have my mother’s notes with the arthroscopic surgeon’s report.

My body has been as kind as it can be. It has timed its destruction cleverly and elegantly. I didn’t tear the extensor tendon in both hands at once. Much in the same way my hands were planning their coup while I lavished attention on my shoulder, my knees were silently rebelling while I coddled my hand. But they were polite about it. They have good timing.

And on that day in Target, my knees had only recently become my biggest problem. For years, they’d clicked when I bent them; they flexed and extended not fluidly but like a ratchet or the door of a car, falling into notches of open- or closed-ness. My body has been graceful in this way, if no other: It has never given me more than one arthritis crisis at a time. If there is one rule my body has taught me and then followed, it is this: There is only room for so much pain at once.

My knees cooperated when I needed to attend to the clutch of pain in my abdomen when I lost my appendix. My knees hauled my body to all those hand therapy appointments, and my knees would wait to fail me until I had hands that minister to them, that could deftly rub Vitamin E into my knee scars to keep them pliable.

My body has a good timing. It is teaching me how to live in it as gently as it can. So it's hard to want to take a knife to it.

I've had this disease since I was 12, an age when I was still awed by the world, OK with confusion, game for anything, elastic. Awesome, whatever. Here's the part when they introduce letters to math class. No point resisting, I'll get the hang of it. Here's the part where I get a "chronic" illness called "early onset polyarticular rheumatoid arthritis." Sure. Cool. I just hope I get a boyfriend. Continue doodling Batman logo on canvas Keds.

And although the words "joint replacement" had been invoked long ago, way back at the beginning of my relationship with arthritis, hospitals, blood draws and physical therapy, soberly invoked by a Dr. White as an "inevitability," more to my mom than to me, I hadn't ever considered it.

Instead, I'd devoted an awful lot of energy to accepting my deformity. To developing a kind of grace. To masking it. To learning how to pose in pictures so that I didn't look too weird. To developing responses to questions from strangers. Intrusive questions like, "Why are you walking like a gimp? *Are* you a gimp?"

Mostly, I insisted on viewing these occasions as chances to educate! To inform! To reach out! The irritated hot-shot profes

sor who asked me why I was riding the elevator to the second floor when she had to get to the sixth and was late already found herself with a sassy T.A., a chipper elevator companion to the sixth floor who spewed a measured, minute-long speech that went something like this: “I have rheumatoid arthritis, a chronic autoimmune disease that causes all of the joints in my body to become inflamed, painful and deformed. It also causes intermittent, low-grade fevers and fatigue. I may look healthy to you, but I have difficulty climbing stairs and that is why I chose to take the elevator today.”

Dumb, well-behaved girl. What I’d gone and done, early on, was develop a Great Attitude about my arthritis. Doctors, teachers, guidance counselors would comment on it, musing about how I never seemed to wonder “Why me?” And so I learned, early on, that this was prized above all. I was told — though never overtly, of course: Don’t complain, don’t be angry. Don’t be one of those bitter disabled people who victimize themselves and blame the world (this is one option from the same limited menu that includes the Supercrip). Thing is, a good dose of Why me? — or, rather, What the hell? Why *anyone*? — is a good thing. A Great Attitude can be taken too far; dealing with what life hands you, rolling with the punches, being a trouper can mean not calling the doctor when you should.

And my Great Attitude has meant smiling when insult is added to injury.

I was tired of being a curiosity and a cause.

And up to the day when that little boy in Target accosted his mother with his insistent questioning, I’d reserved my snarky

responses for adults who ought to know better than to call a girl a gimpy when she's minding her own business. Up until then, I'd been gentle with children, trying to smile at them when they stared. But not this day. I looked at the little boy and he didn't look away. He stared. He said, again, fiercely, "Why does her legs look like that. MOM." I didn't smile benevolently. I hissed at him, "Because I was rude and I stared at strangers when I was little."

And that shut him up. His mother glared at me and then she piloted him to another aisle. And I was instantly transformed into the villain: In this case, the scary lady, myopic, always with a Dowager's hump, frequently wielding a cane, usually wearing a moth-eaten cardigan, living in the creepy Victorian house on the corner that kids dare one another to approach. Forget Jenna Elfman. This is me, played by Cloris Leachman in a character role.

I was freakish, objectionable, disfigured, broken, and I'd refused to be a saint: Bad Disabled Person. I gave disabled people a bad name. I was mean and scary. I had two cats and a hundred cardigans. I was one boarded-up-Victorian-house-on-the-corner from being that lady.

I didn't want to be that — I didn't want to be any of these things anymore. I wanted another choice: I wanted to be invisible, anonymous, unremarkable. More truthfully, I wanted to be the one to decide what was visible about me. I wanted to decide when to be anonymous, when to be weird. I wanted to be remarkable for my always bold, frequently dubious fashion choices. I wanted to have control. I wanted people to ask me

where I got my shoes. I wanted people to stop me and say, “Excuse me, sorry, I hate to bother you, but who cuts your hair?” I wanted people to stare at me because I was rocking Material Girl fingerless lace gloves with an Ethel Mertz shirtdress, not because my body was strange.

I wanted my dad to shake his head bemusedly when he saw me next, the way he used to when I’d clang into the kitchen dripping in gummy bracelets and friendship pins. He’d chuckle and dig a noogie into my scalp — this was before illness, before my body became a tender-hot specimen to be touched carefully or not at all — and say, “Boy, you’re something else.”

Yes, that’s it, I decided in Target. I was not going to be a saintly martyr serenely disembodied from her earthly physical form. I was not going to be a bitter spirit trapped hopelessly in her albatross of her body. I would be *something else*.



Andrea Avery

Andrea Avery is the 10th-grade English teacher at Phoenix Country Day School. She earned a BA in music and an MFA in creative writing from ASU and is currently pursuing her doctorate in education in ASU's Leadership and Innovation program. She lives in the West Valley with her husband, Fred Decker, and their four cats.





FICTION

Tom Bonfiglio's stories have appeared in two dozen publications, including *Fiction*, *Lake Effect*, *Wag's Revue*, *Evergreen Review*, *Fringe Magazine*, *mixer* and *The Literary Review*. He teaches writing at Arizona State University.

Dana Diehl is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at Arizona State University, where she serves as editor-in-chief for *Hayden's Ferry Review*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Swarm*, *Phoebe*, *Sonora Review*, *Hobart*, and elsewhere.

Roxanne Doty, PhD, Assoc. Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies Sciences, has published short stories in *Forge*, Phoenix's *Four Chambers Literary Magazine*, *I-70 Review* and *Soundings Review*. Another short story was recently selected as a finalist in the *New Letter's* Alexander Patterson Cappon Prize for Fiction.

Allegra Hyde is a Masters in Fine Arts candidate in Creative Writing at Arizona State University, where she also serves as prose editor for *Hayden's Ferry Review*. Her short stories and essays have appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Passages North*, *North American Review*, and many other journals.

POETRY

Andrea Janelle Dickens is originally from Tempe, but spent much of her childhood in Virginia. She currently teaches in the Writing Programs of the ASU English Department. She is the author of *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* and of several dozen published poems. Her poems have recently appeared



in *The New South*, *streetcake*, *Found Poetry Review*, *82 *Review*, *Of Zoos*, and anthologies by Kind of a Hurricane Press and Silver Birch Press.

Rosemarie Dombrowski, PhD, is the co-founder of the Phoenix Poetry Series, the editor of the undergraduate writing journal on ASU's Downtown campus, and a poetry editor for the Phoenix-based literary magazine *Four Chambers*. Her first full-length collection of poetry, *The Book of Emergencies*, was published by Five Oaks Press in 2014. She can typically be found performing and/or teaching classes on the “anti-story,” Lady Gaga, and rebellious poetics.

Patricia Murphy, MFA, teaches creative writing at Arizona State University where she is the founding editor of the literary magazine *Superstition Review*. Her poems have appeared in many literary journals, including *The Iowa Review*, *Quarterly West* and *American Poetry Review*. Her poems have received awards from *Glimmer Train Press*, *The Southern California Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Madison Review*, and *Bellevue Literary Review*.

Ryan Holden received his Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Arizona State University. His poems have been published in *Hobble Creek Review*, *Adirondack Review*, and *Ampersand Review*. He currently teaches at Arizona State University.

Kelly Nelson, PhD, is the author of the chapbook *Rivers I Don't Live By*. Her poetry has appeared or will in *RHINO*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Mojave River Review* and *Found Poetry Review*. She teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University.



NON-FICTION (PERSONAL ESSAYS, MEMOIRS)

Rebecca Byrkit is an award-winning author of four books of poetry; her work appears in *Ploughshares*, *Best American Poetry*, *Crazyhorse*, *Arizona Highways*, *Rolling Stone* and *New Letters*, among many other journals and anthologies. She is a founding faculty member of the Masters of Liberal Studies program at ASU, teaching Special Topics.

Dana Diehl is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at Arizona State University, where she serves as editor-in-chief for *Hayden's Ferry Review*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Swarm*, *Phoebe*, *Sonora Review*, *Hobart*, and elsewhere.

Paul Morris directs the Master of Liberal Studies program at Arizona State University and teaches nonfiction writing. He writes about travel, food and the Greater Phoenix area for the *Valley Guide Magazine* as writer-at-large.

Kimberlee Perez, PhD, is a scholar-artist who performs, researches and teaches in performance, intercultural/cultural, and queer studies. She has published in *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *Liminalities*, *Performance Research*, the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, and contributed chapters to several edited book collections. She currently serves as Editorial Assistant to *Text & Performance Quarterly*.

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