

# The Whirlwind Review

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## Jim Pahz

### Covering the Bases

Let me say at the outset that my father is not Catholic, despite his propensity for relics and medals. Actually, my dad is not much of anything at all when it comes to religion. If you asked him what faith he practiced he would think long and hard. There wouldn't be an automatic response. Then, he would say something like secular humanist—which is to say he believes in everything and nothing. He doesn't rely on supernatural forces or religious dogma. He likes to go his own way and is big on the scientific method.

So now that I've established what my father is not, I can tell you what he is. He is a collector. His mind doesn't dwell on theosophical matters, but on the here and now, and the things he can hold in his hands. And he has a lot in his hands and even more stuff in his desk drawer. My dad collects all kinds of things. He buys most of them from eBay. Each week little packages arrive in the mail. In the last few weeks he has collected badges (law enforcement and firemen's badges), brass plaques, necklaces from India, and most recently, religious medals. But Dad doesn't buy individual items; he buys stuff in lots. His last purchase consisted of 185 medals of assorted saints. Some were made from steel, some from oxidized silver, and others from aluminum. I came to visit one day, and Dad was sitting at his kitchen table with all his medals spread out in front of him. It looked like he was working on a disassembled jigsaw puzzle.

"Why so many medals?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "I like the way they look. They are cool. I'll enjoy them for a while and then sell some of the extras at the flea market."

After appreciating his medals for a considerable length of time, he took out a plastic bag from a kitchen drawer and put all the medals in the bag.

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What I'm about to tell you sounds improbable at best—perhaps unbelievable. You might say it attests to the joy of collecting, or maybe it was a Christmas miracle. I don't know.

Three weeks before Christmas, my father's back went out. When he got out of bed that morning he could hardly move, and he couldn't stand erect. He was hunched over like Quasimodo. Each time he attempted to walk he was in agonizing pain.

Mother took him first to a chiropractor who only seemed to exacerbate the condition, so she brought him next to the family physician. The doctor pushed, pulled, and twisted him. All Dad did was cry out in pain. Finally the doctor put my father on powerful pain medications. Then he wrote a prescription for my father to see a physical therapist. "If the therapy doesn't work after three sessions," the doctor advised, "we'll

admit you to the hospital and run an MRI. It could mean surgery, but it's too premature to tell."

After a few days of bed rest, and while under the effects of the narcotics, Dad started his physical therapy regime. At first it was very difficult because he was so stiff. When the session ended Dad was exhausted. After he returned home he took more medicine and slept for three hours. The second session went a little easier and the third better yet. But despite the therapy, Dad still could not stand up straight and continued to use a walker.

On Christmas Eve, Dad was discouraged over his lack of improvement. "I may never walk upright again," he said sullenly. "What a terrible way to spend the holidays. I am an invalid." Then he asked me if I would get the plastic bag with the religious medals from his desk drawer. I asked why, and he replied, "I am going to put the bag under my pillow and pray that the saints intercede for me."

"You're kidding," I said. "You don't actually believe that stuff, do you?"

"I neither believe nor disbelieve. I'm playing the odds. I mean, it can't hurt, can it? What do I know about religion, anyway? Not much."

So here's where the story gets bizarre. The next morning when Dad awakes, he climbs out of bed and stands straight as an arrow. Doubting his senses he begins to walk around the house. After a few laps he announces to mother and me, "I'm healed. I can walk, and there isn't any pain! It's a Christmas miracle. Now I can enjoy the holidays."

"To what do you owe your recovery?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"Do you think it's because of those saints?" I inquired.

"Not necessarily, but maybe."

"Is there any particular one to which you would attribute this victory?"

"No. I give gratitude to all of them. I think it was a team effort."

"Couldn't be just a coincidence, or luck?"

"I suppose. Frankly, it doesn't matter. I'm better and that is the important thing. Therefore, I'm grateful."

"Maybe it was the act of praying itself," I suggested "It must be cathartic to pray."

"Yes, I believe it is. Don't people say that God answers prayers? He certainly answered mine."

"That's what they say, but I'm not sure that I believe it. It could be the placebo effect."

"Yes...it could be, or maybe the placebo effect is God answering prayer. All I know is that something worked. For me, that's all that matters."

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When the new year arrived I asked Dad if he had made a new year's resolution.

"Yes," he said. "I resolved to stop collecting. Well, not stop all together, but to become more discriminating in my acquisitions. As I grow older I want to develop more of a philosophical mindset. It's not just stuff I'm after. If you accumulate too much crap, you become a hoarder. That's not good. Even I don't want that much stuff. No, I want to collect things that will help me develop my spirituality, my soul. I want to become more peaceful and centered."

"Is it working for you?" I inquired.

"I think so," Dad answered. He went to his desk and removed an object from the drawer where he kept his eBay treasures. "Look here," he said, placing the item in my hand.

"What is it?"

"It's a Tibetan Prayer Wheel."

"What do you do with it?"

"You spin it when you pray. It helps you focus so you can achieve enlightenment."

"I see." I wasn't sure how to respond. After a few moments I asked, "Anything else?"

"Yes." He reached in and removed a silver object about two inches long and handed it to me. It was embossed with Hebrew letters.

"What is it?"

"A Mezuzah."

"A what?"

"It's Jewish. You attach it to your doorframe. I think it's a beautiful work of art. It contains a piece of parchment which has words from the Torah written on it. That's part of the Bible."

"Yes, I know, Dad, but what are you going to do with it?"

"Attach it to the doorframe. It will bless the house and by attaching it I will be doing something righteous. I think."

"I thought you were a Secular Humanist? Isn't that what you always said? What about scientific inquiry, objectivity, and all that kind of stuff?"

"Nice words. They sound good. I believe a healthy skepticism is desirable, but you can't argue with results. You see how well I'm walking. I am no longer the crooked man I was a month ago. So I'm giving thanks. If I am skeptical of anything it's of Secular Humanism itself. I mean, what has it done for me? Nothing. It may be a politically correct thing to say, but they are empty words."

"Well," I said. "At least you didn't have to travel to France and visit Lourdes to get your healing. You never left the house."

"I have a medal from Lourdes. Would you like to see it?"

"Not now, but later. You know Dad, it has occurred to me that maybe eBay is your path to enlightenment. As you said, you can't argue with results. Anyway, whatever, or whomever is responsible for your recovery, I am happy for you. I don't know about prayer wheels or the silver thing you attach to your doorframe, but if those trinkets help illuminate your path, then I believe they're a good thing. Think of them as spiritual aids. But I would reserve a little gratitude for the physical therapist, the person who pulled and pushed you. He might have played some part in your Christmas miracle, but what do I know?"

## Jonathan Bundy

### Son of Israel

When I was a child, my mother told me how the Lord rescued his people the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. But my young mind didn't understand slavery. As I've grown older, my understanding of God's action has deepened.

Last April, my family celebrated the Passover during the Easter weekend, the same way we have for several years. My family isn't Jewish, however we celebrate the Jewish Passover to remember God's deliverance and love.

The name "Passover" comes from the book of Exodus. The Lord told the ancient Israelites to slaughter a lamb and mark the doorframes of their house with its blood so he would see the blood and "pass over" the doorway when he went through the land to kill the Egyptians. The Passover meal was Jesus' last supper with his disciples.

We eat the Passover Seder together — my mom, my dad, and my brothers. But my oldest brother has been unable to eat with us the last three years.

*My older brother started smoking during his first tour in Afghanistan. I imagine James sitting around with his Marine buddies, smoking cigarettes. They smoke for the stress. They smoke because there's nothing else to do. Right now they're smoking because they're bored, and at least when you're smoking you're doing something ... it keeps you on guard because there's an ember inches from your face. A soldier's life is lengths of monotony interrupted by moment of adrenaline-pumping action.*

The Passover Seder is rich in tradition and symbolism. I remember my dad reading from a book and my younger brother becoming bored. My dad shortened the litany last year.

The Passover celebrates Israel's liberation from bondage, God's protection as they journeyed through the desert, and the Israelites arrival in the Promised Land, a second Eden. The Jews sing a traditional song called Dayenu at the Passover each year. The song celebrates the blessings God gave to the ancient Israelites.

If He had brought us out of Egypt/and not executed justice upon the Egyptians/—  
Dayenu, it would have sufficed!

*Right now, my brother James is in Afghanistan for his second tour of duty. He is a U.S. Marine.*

*James told a story about what happened on patrol during his first tour. His group was moving through the desert. Suddenly, a Marine yelled. "I see something!"*

*James dropped to his belly, pointed his M16 assault rifle in that direction, and peered down his scope. Nothing. Nothing except sand dunes dipping up and down like frozen waves.*

*Finally, something moved. He saw a hump rise above the waves. A camel. More camels appeared, plowing through the sand like land-whales. A solitary Afghan man was walking with the camels.*

*I imagine the Afghan stared at the American soldiers, men thousands of miles from home, wandering. Strangers in the desert.*

If the Lord had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years/and had not fed us the manna/— Dayenu, it would have sufficed!

The Israelites ate lamb for their Passover Seder, the same lamb they slaughtered to mark the doorframes of their home. Each year, my mom cooks pot roast for my family's Passover Seder meal.

I walked through the kitchen, stopped. I smelled the aroma. I walked to the stove, turn on the oven light, and see the cooking pot. My mother makes pot roast in the same cooking pot each time — my mouth salivated with eagerness.

The deep, metal pot was covered with tinfoil. Carrots, onions, potatoes, and beef were inside. The key is the meat. The rest of the food is cooked and flavored in the beef's juices.

While the Israelites were in the desert, the Lord sent manna from heaven so they wouldn't starve.

*My brother eats nasty, instant-ready military meals called MREs (Meal, Ready-to-Eat). These meals stay good for years, maybe longer, no expiration date on these boys. The military will probably use the leftover meals in the next armed conflict. I like to think they are dropped from the sky by huge airplanes — crates and crates of waterless food.*

Before we eat, my mother reads a traditional prayer a Jewish hostess would recite.

"Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this season," she says. "May our home be consecrated O God, by the light of your countenance shining upon us in the blessing and bringing us peace."

I walked into the kitchen, my plate open and empty. The pot sat on the oven, and the tinfoil was gone. I heaped my plate with carrots, onions, potatoes, beef, and used a ladle to pour the juice onto my food.

I wiped butter across the potatoes, meat, and carrots. I ate different combinations of the food, experimenting with it — first, potatoes and carrots, then meat and folds of onion, now just a chunk of tender beef. My fork shredded the meat, and I realized I could easily separate the beef into little strips if I wanted.

We drank grape juice, which my 9-year-old brother mixed, from wine glasses like water towers.

We ate matzo during the Passover Seder. Matzo is unleavened bread, bread without yeast that looks like big sardine crackers. The Jews eat matzo to remember how their ancestors left Egypt: the ancient Israelites left Egypt in haste and didn't have time to let their bread rise.

During the Last Supper, Jesus would have blessed matzo, broken it, and given it to his disciples and said, "Take and eat ... this is my body."

*Real warfare isn't like a video game. There are no checkpoints. No extra lives. And you don't have to make a mistake to die.*

*James said each Marine is supposed to carry four tourniquets with them in case of dismemberment. He said he only carried two with him. "If I lose more than two limbs, I'd rather die," he said.*

If He had given us the Torah/and had not brought us into the Land of Israel/—  
Dayenu, it would have sufficed!

After the Lord saved Israel from slavery, he promised he would guide them through the desert like Afghanistan and into the Promised Land. But the Israelites scorned and disobeyed the Lord even after witnessing his power. So the Lord declared that everyone who was delivered from Egypt would die in the desert, except for the children and two righteous men: Joshua and Caleb. The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty long years.

As I write this, my brother is still in the desert.

## Karen Yochim

### The Enemies List

The Judeo-Christian ethic teaches followers to love their enemies. And that can often be a tall order, if not an insurmountable one. We're also counseled to pray for our enemies, and that too can be a challenge. If we've felt misused, manipulated, put-down, lied to, stolen from, or worse, we may find it difficult to forgive and forget. We may instead harbor a shadowy place inside of us where we are growing and feeding resentment and anger as surely as a hot, humid closet harbors mold.

Using the term loosely, by "enemies" I mean those who have shown by word or deed their ill will toward us. Aside from criminal acts, this could be by betrayal, deception, sabotage, gossip, etc. But learning the hard way, I have discovered a way to overcome my natural inclination to think darkly about my enemies or adversaries. It all started when I heard Kurt Vonnegut speak at a writer's workshop years ago. That night he was speaking about fiction writing, and talked about the need for stories to include an enemy. He explained that an enemy makes the characters behave in interesting and lively ways, doing things they otherwise would not.

Integrating his advice into my own life, I looked back and saw that those people who had worked against me in the past had indeed caused me to do things I otherwise wouldn't have done. And some of these actions have worked out exceedingly well for me. It is through this realization that I now can better understand the concept of loving our enemies. (Except in my case, it's more like tolerate them.) We don't see the whole picture at first. It's only down the road that we can see what events that person has set in motion. In retrospect, we may find one day that coming into contact with that "enemy" has benefited us in some unforeseen way.

As far as praying for our enemies....maybe our prayers will help to turn them around, and they will become more straight forward and grow out of any manipulative or deceitful behaviors they had engaged in previously. God works in mysterious ways, and we never know how things are going to turn out. Often, events that are set in motion by a betrayal can work out in beneficial ways we never could have foreseen.

An example is this: For twenty years I owned a bird sanctuary in the heart of a highly popular Florida resort town. It was almost half an acre of woods with a small cypress cottage and a magnificent banyan tree. Developers kept after me for years to sell it, but I wouldn't give it up for their plans, no matter how much money was offered. But I did want to move to Louisiana and a more rural setting.

Enter a sweet petite blonde lady who promised she'd leave the woods untouched and live there as a caretaker just as I had. She worked on me for months and convinced me she was sincere and committed to preserving this unique property. I agreed to sell it to her for much less than the developers were willing to give me,

because of her promise to keep the property undeveloped. I left for Louisiana but within a month had a call from my daughter, who was crying inconsolably, and telling me the woman had put the property up for sale to the highest bidder!

We were devastated. It took months for us to get over the shock of this betrayal. I spiraled into depression as the anger and sadness did its work. However, once the worst of the emotional storm had passed, I used what I'd learned from Kurt Vonnegut to assess the impact this had had on me. What I realized was: I'd bought an old Acadian forty-acre farm on Bayou Teche with money from the sale. The beautiful farm has acres of woods, pecan trees, and fields, and in case I somehow missed that this was Meant To Be, the adjoining farm's street number writ large on the mailbox is 2139....the exact street number of the bulldozed Florida property! Plus, there's enough money from the sale left over to rescue even more acreage in the future. None of this would have occurred without the deceit and betrayal of this woman, this "enemy."

Thinking about the effects so called enemies have had on us can prove to be illuminating. And upon reflection, if we discover our actions have somehow brought about good things in our life, just maybe we can then look upon adversaries in a different light. They say if we merely forgive and don't forget, we haven't truly forgiven. I can't say I've forgotten, because my stomach tightens just writing about this woman's betrayal. I can say I'd pull her out of a lake if she were drowning, but I can't say I'd have so much as a cup of coffee with her while she was drying off.

So I have a way to go in the "forgive your enemies" department, but I've learned to at least notice what my response is to an adversary, and how this response changes the path of my journey through this world. And I do stay grateful to Kurt Vonnegut for his wisdom and insight into the human condition, and his help toward learning to assess the effects of enemies, in fiction or in real life, and the possibilities for significant change that they can offer.

## Lowell Uda

### My Samoan Crab

I

Chester, my Samoan crab, is a gift from God. I caught him a long time ago, when I was a boy, and I've had him with me ever since. It is through Chester that I can hear and see God in the darkest, most subterranean places of my life. My arthropod friend has taught me, and continues to teach me, a great deal about being human and about our God of Blessing and Renewal.

I've had a recent encounter with him: Chester, my Samoan crab, is molting, gone soft on me. I should have known this--that crabs molt, just like birds and even snakes. But I'll return to more about Chester later, after describing one of the teeming places of my childhood--a place where awe and imagination were alive every morning and every day.

From the sixth grade onward, I grew up on the windward side of Oahu, in the foothills of Olomana, a mountain that stood separate from the Koolaus, a range of mountains that stretched like a wet, green wall in the west.

Among the foothills in which I lived lay a large body of brackish water which had once been a royal Hawaiian fishpond, the Kawainui, or "the big water" (Ka = the; wai = water; nui = big). I loved to climb one of the hills, so I could see the full expanse of the pond--the gleaming body of water surrounded by reeds and connected by canals to Kailua Bay.

A newly paved road ran straight through the reeds along the eastern edge of the pond. To get to school, I had to walk a mile on that road, then another half mile through the houses, truck farms and pastures on the edge of Kailua town. I went barefooted in those days, like all the other kids, and the tarmac, wet and cold in the morning, hopped with huge toads. A faint odor of sulfur scented the air, and mist or low-lying fog hung over the reeds on either side of the road. Every once in a while a black mud hen, sometimes with red on its head, moved quietly in open water among the reeds. When it was winter on the mainland, wonderful Vs of ducks--mallards and teals--whistled overhead and dropped down out of sight onto the Big Water. Walking there, I felt alone but connected to all of creation.

The road crossed two canals. On the first canal, a Filipino family lived in a small house that was partly on stilts in the water. The men of the family rowed out into the pond and set fish traps for mullets. On a regular basis, they cleared the buffalo grass choking the banks of the canals with machetes, then waded along the edge with nets, catching hundreds of catfish. They grabbed the catfish out of the nets with bare hands, skillfully avoiding painful stabs from the bone hard dorsal fins.

My brother Robert and I did our fishing from the bridge of the second canal. We used bamboo poles with line, a lead weight, and a hook. No reel. We used shrimp for bait. We caught *oholehole*, a good eating fish with white meat, and *oio*, a not-so-good bonefish.

It was off the second canal bridge that my brother and I went crabbing for the first time. We had watched an old Japanese man with a net and bucket come by and catch a couple of what he called Samoan crabs. They had green and blue spots on their backs. We asked him a lot of questions, then bought our own round crabbing net from the hardware store and fish head--the head of an *aku*, a kind of tuna--from the town fish market. We tied the fish head to the net, the way the old man showed us, then lowered the net into the murky brackish water of the canal.

It was the most amazing thing. Out of those brackish depths came crab after crab. We ran home with a bucketful. Our mother was very excited, even ecstatic, at our catch. She loved crabs, and she loved eating them. She brought a huge pot of water to boil in the driveway and cooked the crabs to a bright red. She showed us how to eat a crab properly, opening the crab up and showing us the *ono*, delicious parts under the broad back. I later learned that the broad back was called the carapace. She taught us how to get all the meat out of the legs and claws. I won't go into all the details of our feast, but let me say that I learned a great deal about how crabs are put together--how their mighty claws worked, for example.

One day my brother and I caught the crab of all crabs. At first, we thought the net was stuck in the muck of the canal bottom or snagged against one of the bridge pillars. But it wasn't. Then, as we slowly lifted the reluctant net, we thought maybe we had caught a rock. Somehow the current had swept a large one into the net. But it was not a rock. A huge crab looking very much like a rock--a dark, dangerous one--straddled the net. I was awe-struck as I watched the water flowing off the crab's back and dripping from the net.

Where in God's creation had this crab come from--nurtured at what depths? We couldn't get this crab into our bucket. Its large claws and shelly legs caught on the rim of the bucket. I poked at the crab with a stick, and it grabbed so tight I could lift it up into the air—a huge, spider-like thing that felt bigger than the Big Water from which it came--and it was then that Chester scurried across my soul. I had caught my Samoan crab, or it had caught me.

My Samoan Crab is, for me, a soul image, imagination itself. It began living in me soon after it emerged from the deep and it continued to live in me even after being greedily consumed by my family. Through my Samoan crab my soul is related to God.

## II

When I was an undergraduate I began writing about my Samoan Crab, how it would scuttle across the floor of my mind with its lime-structured legs. It wasn't until graduate school that I finished my story about Chester.

I had invented an Asian doctor who lived in the middle of a town fast becoming a bedroom community to Honolulu. The doctor's little house was literally in the middle of town with businesses pressing on all sides of it. His property was prime real estate. But he refused to sell.

In his lifestyle, the doctor lived on the periphery of society, an outsider demonized as a “phantom abortionist.” Long ago, he had a wife and a son, whom he said he loved but had little time for. Afraid of intimacy, he dealt with his wife’s and son’s growing needs and wants by working long hours and developing a reputation as a perfectionist who wanted only the best for his patients. One day, overworked and stressed by his family obligations, the doctor lost consciousness while operating on a woman. He injured the woman badly with assistant and scrub nurses as witnesses, and thus his life unraveled. The doctor’s wife divorced the doctor, taking the son with her, and the doctor retreated from society.

In the current action, the doctor spends much of his time catching Samoan crabs in the canals of the Kawaiinui. He envies the apparent invulnerability of these crabs, their hard protective coverings, armor against the slings and arrows of change. He harbors the crabs in a large barrel in his backyard, keeps to himself and lives a narrow, circumscribed life, until one day a neighbor woman’s cat wanders into the yard and encounters the doctor’s prize Samoan crab—incidentally, named Chester. In the face-off, the crab crushes one of the cat’s wrists in his larger claw, and the doctor allows his crabs to kill and consume the cat.

Mistaking the cat’s screams for a woman’s, the neighbor woman calls the police and rushes into the doctor’s cottage expecting to find mayhem. But all is quiet in the doctor’s cottage. The policeman sends the neighbor woman home, but looking back, she sees the doctor and the policeman standing over the dead cat practically buried in crabs. Incensed, the neighbor woman rushes back to re-confront the doctor.

The doctor is both attracted and repelled by the neighbor woman, who likes men, even violent ones, and is no model of virtue. The slovenly way she lives, not to mention the taunts she hurls at him, torment the doctor. To get her to cease her taunting, the doctor climbs the stairs to her apartment, where he tells her about losing consciousness in the operating room, about hurting the woman on the operating table, and about how his life became unraveled. In reaction to the doctor’s story, the neighbor woman overwhelms the doctor in a wrestling match. She won’t release him from her hold until he promises to cook one of his crabs for her. The one she wants to eat is Chester, the doctor’s prize crab, and another wrestling match ensues during which Chester is kicked, chipping his claw.

Through her further encounters with the doctor (he does cook her a crab, though not Chester; she overwhelms him with a kind of raw intimacy), she provides him with the best chance to escape isolation and seclusion and to be restored to community. The doctor senses this. But he is unable to perform, unforgiving of himself and incorrigible. With Chester in hand, he chases the woman out of his cottage. And when the Board of Health condemns his backyard barrel, he fixes up his basement with mud and water from the pond so his crabs can stay out of sight and wet and alive.

I remember how some of my peers in graduate school hated this Asian doctor. They thought he was evil incarnate. He loved his crabs more than warm blooded animals, more than people. He was a misogynist, and a coward who wrongly believed that his crabs were the beginning and end of all existence, their broad, armored backs and heavy claws shields against all pain and suffering. Like the crabs, the doctor buried himself in the muck and refused to come out.

I remember how I struggled with these reactions to the doctor. He was maddeningly antisocial, anti-others, anti-woman. But I could not reject the doctor. I found in him a well-intentioned fellow sufferer, a human being. He had suffered the loss not only of job and reputation, but of wife and son through divorce. Most of all, he had lost that world in which awe and imagination were alive and available every day of his life. But he was aware of that loss, and through his latest encounter with the outside world he was able to grieve that loss.

It was through the doctor that I became reacquainted with my Samoan crab and discovered the God of Compassion. I had to accept the doctor as he was and allow him to live even in a fictional world—especially in a fictional world. Thus, I allow my own Samoan crab to come forward out of the darkness. Thus I give my Samoan crab the name Chester. Out of the depths comes a blessing.

### III

When Chester scurries into my mind, I remember the passage from Matthew when Jesus says: "So have no fear of them: for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Jesus comes to us wherever we are and speaks to us in the darkness of our lives. Fear, a desire to escape pain and suffering, may tempt us to bury ourselves deep in the muck, to develop broad armored backs and huge claws. But God whispers in the darkness, inviting us to hear his creative word and to use our imaginations to create a new world in which our soul are alive in the full light. He invites us to have continual and vital conversations with him.

The images for our conversations with God come to us unbidden. It may not be what we expect, or what we had hoped for, or what we would choose if we were given a choice. It may be unusual, or bizarre. But it is there, provoking our imaginations into activity, and that's what matters.

In his book *Healing Fiction*, psychotherapist James Hillman shows us how to take our lives not "literally" but "literarily." When we take our lives literally, we become sick, paralyzed. When we take our lives literarily, using our imagination to shape a story of hope, we can free and heal ourselves from the intolerable images that prevent our transformation into human beings. "If we are ill because of... intolerable images," Hillman says, "we get well because of imagination.... [We] ... can imagine life, and not only think, feel, perceive, or learn it. ... (I)magination is a place where one can be, a kind of being."

Hillman suggests that "imagination is all" because it is in imagination that we meet God. Through the word, through the spoken story, through symbols, we can be about soul-making, telling the soul's story, rather than be about soul-killing.

So where am I with my Samoan crab? Chester is molting, gone soft on me. He has absorbed much of the calcium from his old carapace, his old legs and claws. His hard, protective shell has softened, ready to be abandoned for something new.

I remember when I used to come upon softened crabs in tide pools. I thought there was something wrong with them, I thought they were sick. They were inedible, I kicked them away. Should things so vulnerable be alive? I did not regard the softening of shells as a natural process of growth.

But my Samoan crab, Chester--this fiction through which my soul talks to God--is soft, so vulnerable. So I wait to be spoken to, I wait again in the dark to hear what God wants me to tell in the light.

## Katherine Davis

### Crying for God

My parents are pack rats, though not at a hoarding extreme. The Connecticut home they bought in 1955 now has many decades' worth of junk haphazardly piled up in it. My father is a disorganized collector, so his share of the mess is "valuable." My mother is someone who never finishes anything she begins, so her share consists of half-completed projects. Now that they are elderly, every year they spend 3 or 4 months in their second home in Florida, which they have also begun to pack full of collections and projects.

My brother and I have discovered that while they are in Florida and their Connecticut house sits empty, he and I can slowly clean things out. We make stealth missions in to throw things away. If we just skim a little bit off of every pile, they don't perceive that anything is different. We have done this for several years, and only once did my mother notice that something was gone—her plastic bags saved from trips to the grocery store—and that was because my brother couldn't resist getting rid of *all* of them.

It was on one of these trash-gathering missions that I was in their bedroom, pulling unread issues of *Biography Magazine* out of a stack that was the product of an approximately five-year subscription. I glanced at the shelf above them to see if anything could be skimmed from there when I saw a stack of letters. They were letters typewritten to my parents, mailed from New York and from Boston, in business-size envelopes. *My letters.*

I used to write to my parents. As a teenager their home had become intolerable for me, and the moment I turned 18 I moved to New York City and never looked back. We maintained a cordial relationship, but the more time passed and I failed to visit regularly, the more strain there was on our interactions. They had no idea who I was or what I did with my time. I wanted to reach out to them, imagining that if we could recreate our family relationship then we could be the adult friends I'd always hoped. So I wrote to them.

I wrote a letter every month or so, detailing my activities (leaving the unsavory parts out) and trying to express my thoughts to them. I hoped that if they only knew who I was, instead of who they imagined I was, they would surely come to like me. But it didn't really seem to work out that way. We weren't getting particularly closer. Plus, they never wrote back, so I didn't know how I was being received.

I tried harder in the letters to express my true self. Though I was not a religious believer I had started attending churches, visiting this one or that one on different Sundays. I wrote to my parents about the experience. It always seemed that in the midst of a church service, I would begin to cry. There was no weeping, no sound, but a stream of uncontrollable tears washing down my cheeks minute after minute. Was it the

beauty of the surroundings? Was it the music? Was it the faith that people around me had in their big, invisible god? I didn't know what was causing it. But at least I felt *something*. Church seemed to be the only time and place that my feelings were beyond my own tight control.

I wrote to my parents about the silent crying in church, the power of the experience, and my ponderings about what it might mean. I didn't try to make a tidy story out of it but just described my raw emotion and messy state of existence. I thought they might be moved.

I went to different churches, and the tears almost always came. Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, it didn't matter. Church made me cry. Even after I moved to Boston in my mid-twenties, I continued going to churches and continued writing the letters. My parents never mentioned it. In fact, it almost seemed that my revealing letters had made us even more distant; like they didn't want to know so much about me. Was that real? Or was my vulnerability just making me more needy for their approval? Perhaps everything was exactly the same as always.

I never spoke to anyone in the churches, and no one ever spoke to me. Retrospectively, it seems odd that no one ever approached the stranger who was silently crying during the Eucharist or to the music.

Eventually I stopped going to churches, and I stopped crying, too. As the years have passed since then, it all seems like a very embarrassing blur, and I don't recognize myself in the memory. What was I doing? Who was that emotional mess crumpled in the pew? Now I am relieved that no one ever spoke to me, and I am glad that I will remain forever an anonymous woman clutching wet tissues. No one has to know about it and I can pretend it never happened.

Except, I left evidence. The letters. I wish I had never written them. They certainly didn't get me anywhere with my parents. I would think of them sometimes, and regret them. I would blush at their very existence and hope that they were long gone, never to be seen again by anyone.

But now here they were! Twenty years later, sitting on a shelf. They had been opened, and read, and saved. It was evidence of something, though I don't know what. Evidence that my parents had cared? Maybe not, but I could pretend as much.

And now I could destroy them all, too. I could destroy the evidence of my entire crying-in-churches phase. No one would ever have to know that I went through a protracted, ineffable period in which god, or my lack of god, made me cry. I could wipe it from the face of the earth.

I sat down on my parents' bed with the letters and went through them, one by one. I skimmed them all and put aside anything that mentioned church or god. In fact, not many of them talked about it, which suggests my memory had rendered that phase bigger than it really was. The remaining letters went back into their spot on the dust-covered shelf. The incriminating letters went into my purse, and later into the trash at my home after being ripped into a million tiny pieces.

And now, no one will ever know the secret that makes me ashamed decades after the fact.

## Reva Rasmussen

### Where to Find the Buddha

It was March in a northern climate. An icy wind cut through dank air. A year alone in China had been harder than I'd expected. Not only had I lost my name and language; the noise and clamor of a society building a new world economy had destroyed all attempts at inner peace. I needed a lot of things, but mostly I needed quiet, so I took a taxi out of the city of Nanjing to see a Buddhist temple. Surely, this old place would have something for me.

The taxi turned off the hard-packed gravel road onto a mushy dirt road, sliding a bit side to side causing me to slide across the seat in back. The taxi passed a low concrete building, housing for the monks. I did not see any monks, but I knew they were there because their wash was hanging out to dry under the narrow, overhanging roof. When the taxi stopped, I got out and gingerly walked across the sodden ground and into the temple. It was a small room with a ten foot seated Buddha immediately in sight. Round, threadbare cushions were arrayed in a semicircle in front of him, but before I could see more, someone shouted at me. I turned to see an old woman wearing a thick, cotton-padded jacket in a stall in a dark corner. A low-wattage, bare bulb dangled from a frayed cord above her head. The old woman squinted and shouted again, thrusting forward a packet of incense sticks and red candles. "*Duo shao qian?*" I asked. How much? That much Chinese, I knew. The old woman made a cross of her two pointer fingers, the hand signal for ten. "*Shi yuan! Shi yuan! Shi yuan!*" she shouted, shaking her fingers. Ten Chinese dollars. I gave the old woman a ten *yuan* note and took the incense sticks and candles.

Then, I did what I had come to do. I put my candles on a small altar, and holding the incense, bowed three times to the Buddha. I began to pray, searching for Buddha's peace until my prayers were shattered by the old woman shouting again. I turned and saw another visitor, a young Chinese woman, walking timidly to the old woman in the corner, holding out a ten *yuan* note. I turned back to Buddha and cleared my mind for prayer. I breathed deeply. It was quiet in the temple.

I heard the deep, comforting sound of a gong. It vibrated briefly until the peace was shattered by the old woman shouting, "*Wu yuan! Wu yuan!*" The visitor was trembling near the gong, while the old woman waved five fingers in front of her face. Apparently, there was a price to be paid for hitting the gong. The visitor opened her purse and pulled out a bunch of small bills. The old woman grabbed one and continued to shout as the visitor left.

It was no good in the temple. I grabbed my incense sticks and candles and left.

Outside, it was drizzling. I walked through the mud and rain and past my waiting taxi to a small, covered stand of burning candles. Their wax had dripped down into the muck beneath where it clotted amidst a mash of incense wrappers, tissues, and plastic bags. It was ugly but quiet here. I skewered and lit my candles. Then, I lit the packet of incense sticks. Holding them between my clasped hands and against my chest, I took a deep breath, hoping to pray at last. The cold, misty rain was gentle on my face. The gong sounded, and it aided my search for a quiet place within myself. The gong resounded, then was followed by the voice of a lone monk. It was an ordinary voice, but beautiful in its reverence. I watched the candles burn. Again, I heard the gong, and the monk's song, plaintive, eloquent, and peaceful, seeped through the rain and into my heart. Standing in the chill drizzle, I thanked God for the monk; then I prayed. I prayed for myself, I prayed for patience and strength and bravery. I prayed as the candles burned against the drizzle, as the incense smoked in the chill. I prayed in the presence of the gong and the voice; I prayed until peace wrapped itself about me and held me in its warm embrace.

Smiling for the first time in days, I walked back, looking for the monk. I saw none. I only saw the old woman, alone in the temple as she swung the heavy wooden beam resounding the gong. The old woman placed her palms together and raised her ordinary and beautiful voice in glorious prayer.

## Ron Rieki

### Wine Country

This short story is a blooper. Of my spiritual life. It's been like a snake, the mistakes. There have been so many unnecessary files. The person who haunts me the most is a Christian. She told me I didn't believe in God. I did, but she told me I didn't. Two monks signaled for me not to listen, but I did. I looked at the weather forecast, tried to see God in it. She left me. Said I wasn't Christian enough, that I didn't pray loud enough. I tried to pray loudly by myself. It felt like I was a snake. It felt like the sixth day. It felt like running on wire. She wrote about eggs a lot. She was a poet. She said she loved God more than anyone, including me.

## Jo Going

### Forgiveness

That part that looks in the window,  
sitting on the steps--  
take her in, love her.  
Bring everything inside.  
    It is that simple.

## Armely Matas

Letting Go  
(at Taos, Pueblo)

What brings you here?  
What makes you stare at this mountain  
with face soaking from flood of your eyes?  
River keeps mumbling  
You don't get an answer  
Wind silent in its coldness  
If only  
three white crosses behind you  
and mountain could talk  
But it's not some answers you seek  
You come here smothered by silence  
in this piece of land  
where you hear its story  
through smell of this earth  
baking under the sun  
wet from morning rain  
What's on the mountain?  
What lies beyond its body?  
Marked with your ancestors' sweat and scent?  
You knew  
Don't you feel it in the spirit of your bones?  
Cradling feet of your sadness  
calling you home where your stories dwell?  
Within you carry their rhythm  
way they blew fire with pursed lips  
releasing air from the depths of their gut  
clucking of their tongues  
beating of drums  
coiling sound of flute  
joining with twilight wind  
seeping into your marrow  
Before drinking all in  
let go  
You don't own your story

It belongs to the ones who forgot  
pungent odor of ancient fires  
beating of butterflies' wings  
and secret ache of a timid heart  
Give It away  
Be refilled again and...  
again  
Didn't you texture it with tears  
flowing from tender eyes of your soul?  
That's all that matters  
and  
It loved you back

I drove to the Pueblo after lunch one Thursday in September. Staying at Mabel Dodge Luhan House in Taos, New Mexico, I joined twenty-three writing peers who came back for our third session in a year-long silent writing retreat with Natalie Goldberg, a Zen writing teacher.

This was my second visit to the Pueblo. First was on a Monday. I spent half that day sitting and writing on a wooden bench by the river munching a fat brown cookie. For two bucks, I got the cookie from one of the adobe shops near the entrance of the Pueblo across the church. The sign by the door saying "stove-oven baked bread" perked my reverence to any food that brushes elbows with a woodstove. I stepped in. Inside, a dozen cookies sat in a huge plastic square container looking brown as my forearms and thick as the palm of my hands.

The cookies reminded me of a summer vacation when I was thirteen, standing at the back of my Aunt Fely's bakery. The giant woodstove oven rattled. Uncle Pa-eng just fed it with a sack of coconut shells. They crackled with searing heat. Smell of dough, burning firewood, and sweat wove into the air whisked by two lopsided fans groaning from the ceiling. On top of long wooden counters, steel trays of fresh baked cookies lined up. Perspiring, I glowed staring at the cookies with thoughts of bounty. My eyes however, glued on the fat brown ones stained with half-burnt molasses. If chewed slowly, these cookies churn in your mouth like rolling clouds in the summer sky turning into soft rain showers, soaking gardens of sweet potatoes in June.

Monday, sitting under the sun by the river with a fat cookie and gazing at the endless dark mountain beyond, brought me back to Southern Philippines in my grandfather's farm. A matted brown dog lying near my bench needing a bath, red ants crawling along cracks on the ground making detours to the strap of my sandals, faint hammering of wood against wood, I was home. Pueblo felt home.

Thursday lunch, I had my coffee in a paper cup. I saved it. The Pueblo did not have coffee. I longed for the thick brown cookie. It would go well with the dark brew

sweetened with two packets of brown sugar. My chest had been feeling heavy for days. I ached inside. Though complete, I could not let go of 'Dirty Kitchen', my short memoir. Tears would just flow (anytime and anywhere). I sometimes hear soft sobs in my sleep. I thought the cookie could help and spending time 'home' might ease the pain. And it did.

It felt free to cry walking by the river and eat my cookie. I wrote sitting in this sadness, faint sobs hushed by the gurgling water. I wrote letting out the ache around my chest constricting my throat. I wrote touching pain's elbow, releasing it gently to the tip of my pen, allowing it to bleed across pages. Writing acknowledges loudly my coming to terms with what I know and don't know, with what I have and don't have, with who I am, and where I came from. This felt good. Love has been sitting and walking with me (all along). Writing however, escorts Love to the forefront. And it was okay Let go.

## Ayaz Daryl Nielsen

### Beginnings

Halfway to poetry  
Halfway to an ending  
and I hear the call  
of your beginning

Can you meet me here,  
halfway? Can you wait  
until I arrive at  
where you could begin?

Will you wait for me?

## Barbara Daniels

### Lifting the Sky

Hums lull a baby at his mother's breast,  
first speech as music, a woman resting  
on warm sand. Pelicans laze overhead.  
Gannets splash down for fish.

Light sifts toward them, every bending  
met by lifting, moving water, tender air.  
Words—little acrobats—mime  
hunts and revenges, death driven.

They describe the lift and drag  
of birds' wings in turbid air.  
They teach the child to be lonely.  
Mother, he says, water, flower;

voice a needle, voice a thread, mouth  
an emblem of appetite. He might be  
Adam naming the milk, the cup,  
the dog, the bone. He learns to lie,

use language as magic, words  
like pillars lifting the sky. What is he  
writing now, stirring the dust?  
He writes illusion, song, command.

## Barbara Daniels

### The Woman Whose Heart Has Healed

Dreaming, stopped heart,  
a woman wakes  
in her kitchen, touches  
her canisters, dishes,  
sits in a sofa  
cupped to her shape.

When she comes home  
after surgery,  
her daughter kisses her  
like a child  
when she lifts her.

Her life returns to her,  
lost coat found  
where it ought to be,  
hung in the back  
of the front-hall closet.

Today the woman  
can write again.  
She forms her name  
in large block letters,  
using a blue crayon.

## Bija Andrew Wright

### Scripture

From Delhi to Dehra Dun, a line of text  
unfurls on walls that face the railway line,  
will they be read by gods, their writers blessed?

As train cars pass one station, then the next,  
then the next, these curly letters hang like vines,  
from Kalka to Kolkata, a line of text.

I notice them when the sleeper comes to rest,  
and blur my eyes to see mantras for divine  
words to reach the gods, may they be blessed.

Whether advertising underpants and vests,  
or painted in graffiti, "This wall is mine,"  
from Mumbai to Mount Abu, this line of text

is the chant of a spinning nation, dispossessed  
to cry out to the heavens, "See our sign,"  
when read by the gods, their writers will be blessed.

From Kerala to Kashmir, a stream of text.  
May it be read by the gods.  
May India be blessed.

## Cynthia Malloy

### Of Writing and Rain

I like to write in the rain  
to keep my mind's attention  
lest it be too cozy inside,  
warm and dry, leaving my  
brain to wander into a deep slumber,  
take a rest from trying to  
catch lightning-bolt thoughts  
before they exit gray mass  
at incalculable speed  
leaving behind an encore  
of clapping thunder.  
I like the hard downpour of rain,  
the gully washer deluge of  
cats and dogs slapping me  
in the face, not the slow showers  
or light sprinkles precipitating ideas  
that pour too slowly into my soul  
then refuse to leave, waste my time  
on folks I'd just as soon forget,  
and leave words on paper a slight blur  
still legible to a cerebellum that  
just wants to be washed clean  
by torrential skies that  
leave behind no residue, no evidence  
of lead, ink, blood or tears.  
I like to write in the rain  
splattered with verses  
falling from a poet's heaven  
and listen to Keat's lament,  
*"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."*

## Dharisha Jhutti

### Strike

From distant  
Parting sky,  
Lightning  
Strikes Earth.  
Nature flaunts  
Her two sides,  
Poles apart.  
Deathly, she stabs the helpless,  
Starts fires,  
Destroys her  
Own, storms  
Hiding ships  
On the far  
Horizon.  
Lively, writers transform  
Her light and  
Power,  
Change  
W Her  
a  
y.

Free, they live where words flame: a story glows, a poem sparks, opens hearts, heals man.

J. B. Mulligan

fruit of the probability tree

Last night I didn't write a poem.  
I had the itch to scratch,  
but couldn't find the stick.

Days like the limbs and branches  
of trees leading into a sky,  
a forest rooted in clouds.

Decisions lead to decisions,  
the son looks at the father  
and fears what he may become.

The future gazes down or back,  
waiting for what was done  
to arrive, and tell it what to be.

## Jody Nusholtz

### Two Griefs

Throw yourself onto the potter's wheel  
Laughing.  
Make of yourself a beautiful bowl,  
A glazed and fired vessel,  
And let it grow smooth with wear

For there are two griefs,  
One to let ripe fruit  
Rot in its place  
On your table,  
The other to sit yearning  
Once the bowl is empty.

## Jody Nusholtz

Okay, God

I'm ready for you to make the call  
or announcement,  
however you do it—  
implant the thought,  
have us run out of coffee,  
out of town,  
out of anything but patience.

*I will to will thy will*

Have us both run in to Starbucks  
or to catch a plane,  
put us in adjacent seats

*remember, your seat cushion bottom is your flotation device*

in a writing workshop  
in for a twenty-thousand mile service  
in for the long haul  
anything but in between,  
in response  
in reverence  
in awe of the gentle white fire,  
just in the same place at the same time  
because you brought us there.  
When we tell the story of our meeting  
we will call it an accident  
and smile.

## Maril Crabtree

Muse Sister  
*for Marjorie Culver, 1910 - 2005*

I don't remember  
the color of her eyes  
I never knew  
the color of her hair  
before silver claimed it  
but memories like these  
fade anyway, the fickle mind  
plays tricks:  
what to keep, what to throw away

I don't even remember  
the words she wrote,  
but I know how I felt  
when I read them:  
drenched in beauty, stunned,  
polished by truth  
like a stone tumbled in silt.  
Her words warmed me  
even more than her smile.  
They opened me  
when I felt closed.  
They cleansed me when  
the muck of ordinary life  
overwhelmed me.

My sister poet,  
your words changed me,  
gave me life and courage,  
blessed my spirit  
as we now bless yours.

## Maril Crabtree

### It's a Mystery

Where do those bestsellers go when they've had their day, when they've slipped and started the sunset slide? Those tired words too old to be renewed, too dead to be resurrected, too quaint to be on the cutting edge of *now* – do their plots find a decent burial?

Or do they rest, bide their time, dust off their jackets of once-smart colors ablaze with gold letters, rearrange themselves into gentler phrases, tender chapters where no one gets knifed or shot, hacked up or garroted, and wait for the world to catch up to them?

## Marissa Cohen

### Word Rescue

pull me out, words  
letters, give me wings  
verbs and adjectives, bring me choices.  
fork the straight road, let me peek down the path  
let us pile on decisions like magical bracelets  
laddered down the arms of gentle women

we are old, too old to forget the crumbling of generations,  
too young to stop the electric current of  
god's hand  
too foolish to silence the spirit inside  
you cannot give up  
even if you are frightened to feel your hands curve  
around pens, even if what comes out may recreate  
your myth  
or snap you open  
or crack you wide

no accident that god and ink have three letters  
both words create and destroy  
and are over in a whisper

## Martin Willitts Jr.

### How To Write, Spiritually

a voice instructed, write paradoxes  
no one, not even yourself can untangle  
if you had a thousand hands  
under thousands of aimless suns. No,  
write simply, corrected the voice,  
as an ant carrying more than its own weight  
in a line of numberless ants each carrying  
more impossible weights. No, write  
in the middle path, elusive as a butterfly  
traveling to a place only generations of memory  
remember, and if they die interrupted on the journey  
it is alright. No, do not write day-dreams.  
By the time one thought enters like a first night bride,  
her lover has aged. No, be active so everyone knows  
what is buzzing inside your hornet nest heart. No,  
everything has passed, What is written  
is already erased. There is sap from a broken limb  
already coalescing already--- you missed it ---  
a flight of rain has departed without you.

## M.S. Rooney

Pour what comes

through the spout,  
what was given  
you to brew.

Remember:

Heat is your responsibility.

Cream and lemon curdle  
when ladled in  
together.

Serve at once.

## M.S. Rooney

### Untitled

that poem  
you put on  
like a glove  
that novel  
you approach  
like a monument  
that word  
you tuck up  
beneath your tongue  
feel it opening Ali Baba caves  
crusted with brittle vines  
and hoarfrost

## Sarah Clark Monagle

### Lightkeepers

That song you played, I knew the words  
They were a down blanket wrapping around  
And the poem you read  
Towered like the sunflowers outside my summer window  
The drawing you did, in black and white,  
Danced in vivid colors when I saw it  
And I knew what it meant  
Your words, not words, but streams of light  
Until you turned away, and then it was  
Like remembering something that never happened

## Jill Jepson

### Stories are Gifts

Stories are gifts. The Universe offers them, not merely to us as individual writers, but to the world. Writers are the ones charged with the work of giving stories form and passing them on to others. To receive and be open to stories, to treat them with care and respect, and to offer them to the world is not merely our work, but our sacred responsibility.

“If stories come to you, care for them,” says Badger in Barry Lopez’s *Crow and Weasel*. Stories, like living beings, need to be nurtured. It isn’t enough to merely receive them. For them to flower, they must be sheltered, nourished, and allowed to rest and grow.

Think of your story as an infant. Although it possesses all that it will eventually need to become whole, at this point, it can’t speak or act on its own. Imagine caring for your story as you would a newborn. Sometimes you leave it alone to sleep, but you also spend a lot of time trying to keep it happy.

Carry your story with you. I know a writer who symbolically infuses a stone with each story, then carries it in his pocket. Try this. From time to time, pull your story out to hold and watch—or you can just forget about it until it is ready to be discovered under the drugstore receipt at the bottom of your handbag.

Among the Dine people—known to many as the Navajo—to be told a story is a great honor. In ancient Celtic cultures, storytelling was considered a service to the community. But contemporary writers seldom think of their work as a gift or service. Much has been written about how people heal themselves through writing, but almost nothing has been said about the ways writing can help heal another person, a community, or the Earth.

Envisioning your story as your personal gift is an acknowledgment of the significance and beauty of the work you are doing. It reminds you that your work has meaning and substance. It is vital that we keep this awareness alive. One way we can do this is to consciously alter our way of thinking of our stories so that we become aware that they are our gifts to the world.

Begin your writing by offering your story. Before you begin to write each day, make a statement about the gift you are bestowing. Say aloud, “I offer my writing to the people of South America” or “This story is my gift to my grandmother” or “This is for you, world.” If you want to make the offering more concrete, write it down and place it somewhere in sight.

Keep your gift in mind as you write. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that our stories are offerings, especially as we become lost in our work—and all the egoistic

feelings it brings up. Try to stop writing from time to time and remind yourself. Look at the statement you wrote at the beginning. Speak it. Visualize yourself giving your story to others. Try to instill a deep feeling of generosity inside yourself as you work.

Conclude by offering your story. When you have finished a story, symbolically offer it. Light a candle and hold the story up toward the sky or close to your heart. Infuse it with your love. If you have a home altar, you can place it there for a time. Set it outside or by a window, in moonlight. Whatever you can do to ritualize your offering will confirm that you are bestowing a gift that is not only priceless, but unique in all the world.

## Terry Martin

### Starting

Sometimes it begins  
with a stirring that urges  
and leads you on, like  
a stream feeling its way  
toward the ocean  
into which it will empty.

Sometimes it's coaxing  
notes from a guitar,  
the plucked string,  
reverberating.

It's untangling knots of dreams,  
dancing to the end of the page  
out over the margins  
into other stories, other worlds.

Sometimes the light is in you  
as you name yourself.

And when it works, there's the gift  
of someone else nodding,  
*I've felt that, too.*

## Tonya Northenor

### The Thin Lines

I think of Williams with his doctor's pad,  
fitting to it what words the thin lines allowed.  
Dickinson, exasperated by brilliance and a woman's heart,  
in a world of black and white.  
The bankers, lawyers, painters, and hordes  
of other teachers.  
Fitting their ageless voices onto notepads and napkins,  
between phone calls and beakers,  
between brushstrokes and conferences.  
At times, cash register rings or customer complaints  
the only rhythm they can hear. Those  
little words rising and fading like lunar phases,  
regardless of how the writer's planet spins.  
The rivers running, as if underground,  
as if in a tongue that needs a translator  
or much time to comprehend.  
Feeling, more than watching, them lisp  
across the waterfall edge, burning in deeper,  
more out of reach, with a crash and a murmur  
as they turn further below.

## Tonya Northenor

### Bag Full of Stories

I bring home from my grandmother's - potatoes in a plastic bag.  
New potatoes, tasting of dirt and air.  
Like eating Sunday afternoons.  
I do not drag off antiques but bags full of stories  
clasped in the garden and neatly twisted off from their stalk of days.  
I bring home stories  
from the schoolteacher, the mother, the farmer's wife -  
and though I want to know,  
there are days when I want to stretch my legs as we walk,  
to race the dog down the road,  
to go read in dark corners. I want to ask the old roses  
why I will have no stories to tell;  
how I can someday make my granddaughters  
hungry to hear.

## Author Biographies

### Jonathan Bundy

Jonathan Bundy is a young writer from Columbus, Ohio. He writes fiction, creative nonfiction, and other stuff that doesn't fall into neat categories. Jonathan is a 2012 graduate of Cedarville University, and he is a self-proclaimed expert on vampires (Dracula, not *Twilight*).

### Marissa Cohen

Marissa Cohen writes about everything from astrology to women's issues. Her creative writing has been seen in *The Survivor's Review*, *The Zodiac Review*, Grammarly.com, and *The Contributor*. She writes for many publications, including Chemistry.com, her own CBS-advertised website HappyGanesh.com, and for her "On the Shelves" book column in *She Magazine*. In 2003, she received the Letters Honorarium from the Fort Lauderdale branch of the National League of American Pen Women, and in 2011, the Poet Laureate of Florida called her creative work "powerful, both intellectually and emotionally." She can be contacted at [marissa@happyganish.com](mailto:marissa@happyganish.com).

### Maril Crabtree

Maril Crabtree resides in Kansas City but calls planet Earth home. She writes creative nonfiction and poetry and has authored several books on the spiritual impact of nature, including *Sacred Messengers: True Stories of the Power of the Natural World*. She is a poetry editor for *Kansas City Voices* literary magazine. Contact her at [www.marilcrabtree.com](http://www.marilcrabtree.com).

### Barbara Daniels

Barbara Daniels' chapbook *Quinn and Marie* is available from Casa de Cinco Hermanas and her book *Rose Fever* from WordTech Press. She received two Individual Artist Fellowships from the New Jersey Council on the Arts and earned an M.F.A. in poetry at Vermont College.

### Katherine Davis

Katherine Davis (pseudonym) lives in Oklahoma, where she is a professor of Religious Studies. She writes and publishes on topics in American religious history. She is an active member of the Oklahoma Atheists.

### Jo Going

Jo Going, now residing in a coastal Alaskan village, lived for many years in a wilderness homestead cabin in interior Alaska. Her writing is published in many journals and anthologies. Her book of poems and paintings, *Wild Cranes*, which won the Library Fellows Award and was published by the National Museum of Women in the Arts, is also held in the permanent Franklin Furnace collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Wild Cranes* can be viewed in the museums' archives and at [www.jogoing.net](http://www.jogoing.net).

### Darisha Jhutti

Darisha Jhutti is in her third year of an award-winning poetry program, which has enhanced her writing skills and increased her commitment to the art form. Although a new, young poet, she has been fortunate to have already had various poems published in a number of venues and has won several awards. She focuses on spiritual and deep themes in her poetry and enjoys the path of writing.

### Cynthia Morton Malloy

Cynthia Morton Malloy lives on Lake Livingston, near Onalaska, Texas. She recently retired from many years of writing technical manuals and reading contracts in the commercial real estate world to focus on her love of poetry and prose writing. She is working on a collection of poems and a memoir. Cindy attends a writing class in Huntsville, Texas, is a member of Roxie's Readings in Longview, Texas, and participates in various area book clubs.

### Terry Martin

Terry Martin is an English Professor at Central Washington University. Her poems, essays, and articles have appeared in over 250 publications and she has edited both journals and anthologies. Her first book of poems, *Wishboats*, won the Judges' Choice Award at Seattle's Bumbershoot Book Fair in 2000. Her most recent book, *The Secret Language of Women*, was published by Blue Begonia Press in 2006. She lives with her family in Yakima, Washington.

### Armely Matas

Armely Matas was born and raised in Padada Davao del Sur, Philippines. A Board Certified Clinical Nurse Specialist in Adult Psychiatry, she practices and teaches mindfulness-based Interventions to the mentally ill population. A published author in *Cognitive Behavioral Practice Journal*, her creative nonfiction piece, "When Robert Mapplethorpe Meets *Banana Rose*" will appear in the October/November 2012 issue of *Milk Sugar* literary magazine. Having dropped out of her doctoral studies, she works on a novel, hikes in the Appalachian Trail, and goes island hopping when visiting her hometown. She continues to study with Zen Writing Teacher, Natalie Goldberg and lives in Frederick, Maryland.

### Sarah Clark Monagle

Sarah Clark Monagle is an educator, mother, writer, photographer and brain tumor survivor. Her work has been published in several poetry reviews, and she is a regular contributor to the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series. She is currently working on both a children's book and a poetry collection.

### J.B. Mulligan

J.B. Mulligan has had poems and stories published in several hundred magazines, including *Deronda Review*, *Red Rock Review*, *Bluestem*, *Stone's Throw*, *Blue Unicorn*, and *Autumn Sky*, and has had two chapbooks published: *The Stations of the Cross* and *THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS*, as well as appearing in the anthology *Inside Out: A Gathering of Poets*.

### Ayaz Daryl Nielsen

Ayaz Daryl Nielsen is a poet/husband/father/veteran/x-roughneck (as on oil rigs)/hospice nurse—he is editor/custodian of *Bear Creek Haiku*. Among favorite homes for his poetry are *Lilliput Review*, *Yellow Mama*, *Barbaric Yawp*, *Lynx* and *Shemom*.

### Tonya Northenor

Tonya Northenor is Assistant Professor of English at Owensboro Community and Technical College in Kentucky. She earned an M.F.A. from the University of Memphis. Her poetry has been published in journals including *Appalachian Heritage*, *Calyx*, and *Earth's Daughters*. Her work has also appeared in anthologies such as *Mamas and Papas: On the Sublime and Heartbreaking Art of Parenting*

### Jody Nusholtz

Jody Nusholtz is a writer and writing professor living in Baltimore, Maryland. She holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies, focusing on the ways writing, states of consciousness, and psychological transformation are connected. Her ten-minute play *Saving Mrs. Goldfarb* was produced in 2011, her play *Back to Baltimore* received a directed reading in 2009, and her poetry has appeared in *Kalliope*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, and *Sojourner*. Jody is currently co-writing a musical.

### Jim Pahz

Jim Pahz lives in Central Michigan with his wife Cheryl. He is the author of a collection of short stories titled *Saving Turtles*, and has co-authored with his wife two novels: *McAngel* and *Almost Chosen...Nearly Saved*. His website is [jcpahz.com](http://jcpahz.com).

### Reva Rasmussen

Reva Rasmussen is a writer, a traveler and a registered nurse in Minneapolis. She has published commentaries in the *StarTribune* and *MinnPost.com*, a short story on the BBC World Service, an essay in *Writing for a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job* and several short stories. She is near completion of *Silk and Agate Roads*, a novel based on her travels in China with a Muslim woman.

### Ron Riecki

Ron Riecki's *Dandelion Cottage: A Play* and *Your Map is Wrong: a Collection of Plays Set in Michigan's Upper Peninsula* have been published by Northern Michigan University Press.

### M.S. Rooney

M. S. Rooney and her husband, poet Dan Noreen, live in Sonoma, California. Her work appears in journals and anthologies, including *Clare*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Lilliput*, *Main Street Rag*, *Other Voices*, *Rockhurst Review* and *3 AM Magazine*.

### Lowell Uda

A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Lowell Uda has taught English at the University of Hawaii and the University of Montana, and worked in Montana state government. After that he became a United Methodist minister, pastoring churches in Colorado and Montana. His short story, "The Cherry Tree," won first prize in the 2011 Common Review Short Story Prize contest. His stories and poems have appeared in literary and other magazines, including *The North American Review*, *Transpacific*, *Hawaii Review*, *The Chariton Review* and, more recently, in *Written River: A Journal of Eco-poetics* (forthcoming), *Assisi*, *5x5*, *In Our Own Voice*, *Divide: Journal of Literature, Arts and Ideas*, *Poems Across the Big Sky*, *Moonrabbit Review*, and *The Other Side*. He is presently working on a memoir and a novel.

### Martin Willitts, Jr.

Martin Willitts, Jr. was nominated for two Best of The Net awards and his 5th Pushcart award. He has had eight poetry chapbooks accepted this year including *True Simplicity* (Poets Wear Prada Press, 2011), *My Heart Is Seven Wild Swans Lifting* (Slow Trains, 2011), *Why Women Are A Ribbon Around A Bomb* (Last Automat, 2011), *Art Is Always an Impression of What an Artist Sees* (Muse Café, 2011), *Protest, Petition, Write, Speak: Matilda Joslyn Gage Poems* (Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2011), *How To Find Peace* (Kattywumpus Press, 2011), *Swimming In The Ladle Of Stars* (Pudding House, 2011) and *Secrets No One Wants To Talk About* (Dos Madres Press, 2011).

### Bija Andrew Wright

Bija Andrew Wright studied fiction writing at Bowling Green State University and Zen Buddhist meditation at Still Point Zen Buddhist Temple. "Bija" is a Pali Buddhist name meaning "seed." He now teaches writing in and around Detroit.

### Karen Yochim

Karen Yochim is a free-lance writer and songwriter living on an old Acadian farm by the fabled Bayou Teche. Some of her songs have been included in feature film soundtracks, and her daughter, Twinkle, has recorded four CDs of Karen's songs. You can watch Twinkle sing the Karen's "Old Texas Picker" on YouTube.