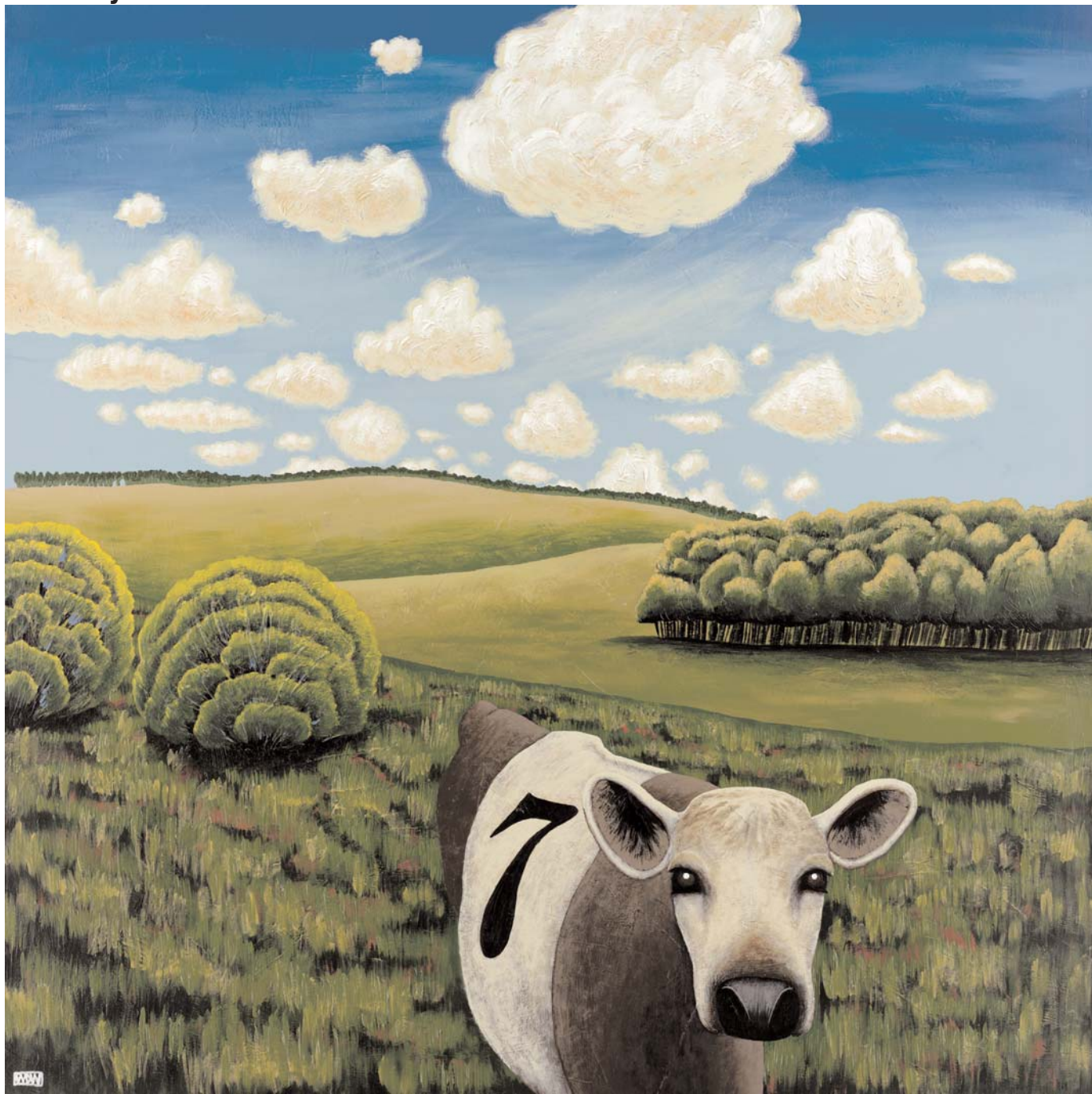


Yeah, we fussed. Stories by Renato Escudero, James L. Sprouse, Neil Ellis Orts and Randall Cox; Adam Moorad's poetry; Wendy Detrick Worsham's art; a new Best In Show; & The Dream Journal.

The Blotter

January 2010

MAGAZINE



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Front cover "Cow Number 7
Wandered Off Again" by Wendy
Detrick Worsham. See facing editorial
page and centerfold for more.

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"Commencement"

Why, you may ask, did we wait until now to speak with all of you newly graduated pups? Well, partly it's because a fair portion of you have only just now returned to the real world after basking in the glow of finishing school, spending your graduation presents, taking your decompression vacations, and are only just now looking to the future, your new beginnings, your five-year missions, your next generations (insert whatever Star-Trek buzz-line works for you). You're not going off to be a doctor, a lawyer or an Indian chief. So you make a reasonably good audience for a thousand word diatribe on the nature of making the jump from student to working-class-slob, and some of what that entails. You got to hear what a real professional speaker thinks at your cap-and-gown ceremony, and if they filled you with their hot air, then at least some of that has bled off and you're ready to listen again. And because back in May I wasn't really sure what I would say to young folks if I had a chance. Wouldn't I want to have answers?

Perhaps all of your ducks are already in a row. You've done your internships, all of your work-study resume enhancers. Balanced academics with extra-curricular activities. I really miss being a lifeguard. (I was never actually a lifeguard, but I sure miss sitting on the side of the pool vaguely trying to guard a certain young lady's life.) You've utilized your institute of higher learning's job/skill resources, and found that first post-grad opportunity. Good for you. Now sit down, shut up and drink your iced mochachino.

As for the rest of you, you may feel like you can't find your ass with both hands and a flashlight (for what it's worth, this is a business term with which you will need to familiarize yourself.) Trust me, it just doesn't matter. Everyone I've ever met is troubled to different degrees by the working world. Everyone has that niggling voice in the back of their head that says, "What was I thinking, finishing that last required class? Why did I turn in that library copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* and pay the late fine? Why did I graduate?" What you were doing was being fiscally responsible. After all, Mom and Dad aren't wealthy, right? They are? Really? OK, well, they're not filthy rich. They are? No kidding? That much, eh? What was your name again?

But you have graduated indeed. And to paraphrase Jim Lovell: oh, crap, Houston, what was that noise and where is all of the oxygen? Well, all of your friends were moving on, too, and how much intramural flag-football can one play? And you're the high scorer on Wii bowling at the frat, and that's a legacy you can hang your hat on. So what's my point? Don't panic. We're all in the same boat. Let's call this boat, for argument's sake, Titanic. Well enough made, and using all of the most modern materials and ship-building skills of the time, crewed by the best sailors of the day. Still, we've hit the berg and are foundering. What now, Leonardo? The global economy, as you all know, means many things but if you'll forgive the multiple-movie metaphor, mostly it infers that there is no way you can just Jeremiah Johnson yourself out farther west than any of your fellow gradu-

ates and muddle through the current downturn trapping muskrat and chasing *grizz*.

No. You're on a ship surrounded by cold water and it sure feels like there's a list. What do you do?

Well, you start by being polite. Stop being a jerk. Stop shouting in public and running around in circles because you're afraid. Help the little old ladies up from steerage. Untie the tangled lifeboat. Pull anyone you see out of the cold water, and make sure they're OK. Stop crying about whose fault it is that the ship is sinking. Listen to other passengers – see who needs help and who has useful ideas. Then find yourself a life preserver. You won't have to keep it on forever. If you find a bunch of life preservers, make sure you let people know. Help them put them on. If anyone shows you a solution to the ship going down, and they instruct you to not tell anyone else about it, walk away from them. Someday, when you're on a boat that isn't sinking, and you feel like playing that way, well, then maybe you go ahead. Being honest isn't for everyone, I guess. In the mean time, be someone your Mom would be proud of. Be hopeful, and kind.

It is common knowledge that generals always fight the previous war. That is, they seem to be unable or unwilling to recognize that Vietnam isn't Korea and whatever we're doing now isn't Desert Storm, and so on. Our leaders are probably using outdated ideas to deal with this economic situation; they're trying *something*, at least. Doing nothing, and waiting for results, well, you know you'd be just as frustrated, only with *nothing* to say for it, rather than *tried this and failed*. So, this aint your Granddaddy's recession, and although I believe that you should follow the new truth-in-advertising advice about CV's (stop using the old buzzwords!), almost everything else being spouted by magazines, Internet news-venues and TV talking-headaches, are ancient, stale chestnuts. I don't think that there are any magic methods for finding jobs. And that's not what this essay is about, anyway. It's about being civil in uncivilized times. Hang on to any job you can get. Show up on time. Do it well, whatever it is. Times are tough. Sit down and shut up. Make yourself a good cup of cheap coffee.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



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The Blotter Magazine, Inc.

(again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is an education concern. Our primary interest is the furthering of creative writing and fine arts, with the magazine being a means to that end. We publish in the first half of each month and enjoy a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

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CAUTION

Rabbits, rabbits rabbits. Not that we're superstitious or worried about bad luck. It's just that one shouldn't take unnecessary risks and if saying those words ensures a bit of comfort or reduces mental distress, then who are we to quibble?

"Sing to the Pigeons"

by Renato Escudero

Papi used to smoke out on the balcony in his old wicker chair. Next to the rusty railing he never let me lean on, he kept a little wooden chest. That was his corner. It wasn't for folding laundry, hiding lottery tickets or dominoes or decks of Spanish cards; it wasn't for me to sit on or keep my scripts inside, all the parts I would play someday. It was for papi's things: his six tools, his pipe, his newspapers, his handblown tumblers, which he only dusted off when la tia Julia made her special sangría. In the evenings while he read his paper, I'd recite monologues to Julia's potted plants, practice mime faces behind the line of drying bed sheets.

Papi would look at my silhouette through a sheet and say in his rich accent, "Presencia, hijo. Your presence of the stage is faulty. Up, up on the milk crate, and beam brighter than the footlights. Give me some lines without jumping side-to-side, like a pendulum."

There was never much room to move around, but being on the tenth floor gave you the

feeling that you were performing before the entire world. At least to the plaza down below with the basilica and its bells and dots of pigeons around the gazebo.

On Sundays, if the elevator was working, Papi and I would go down and sing boleros in the gazebo. Julia took pictures of us from the balcony, great panoramic black-and-whites that made us look small as pigeons. But the gazebo and the church and the sea of cobblestones came out just fine. When the elevator was broken, which happened often, I'd have to sing to the birds alone. If I remembered to put a hard bolillo in my pocket to feed them, I'd have a captive audience pecking at my feet, but mostly they'd fly away before I had a chance to open my mouth and stretch out my arms. Ay, pinches palomas and their droppings! Who needs them anyway? I could always twirl a curl and belt out a scale up to the balcony, where papi was waiting.

"Did you hear me, Papi? Do I sound just like you?"

Papi sat me down in his chair, which carried the scent of

tobacco and sangría, and I'd lean back in the smoky comfort of his motley worn serape, enraptured while he showed me how to sing. Up on the milk crate he went, careful of his achy hip, and projected a little Perales onto the rooftops filled with roosting pigeons.

Y yo en mi ventana veré la mañana vestirse de gris...

Today I still sit out on the balcony in the wicker chair, now duct-taped at the legs. I don't sing much, but I listen to the birds cooing as I memorize my lines. I smoke his pipe, and me and Julia drink wine from the last of Papi's chipped tumblers. Y las pinches palomas leave their droppings on the railing for us.





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"A Matter Of Time"

by Randall Cox

"Grandpa, what does it feel like to get old?"

The grandfather looked at the boy for a protracted moment, as if considering how to distill the vagaries of life into words the child would easily understand.

Finally: "It hurts, boy. The springy muscles that you have in your youth begin to lose their coil, and your skin begins to droop and sag, and when it rains, all of your life's mistakes ache deep inside your tired bones. When that happens you can't get comfortable, you can only sit there and hurt. And it hurts a lot." The grandfather drew in a long, wet breath between his gray whiskers. "When people that are close to you begin to realize that you are old, they try to make things easier for you, because they care about you, but eventually you become another household chore for them to take care of, and they resent you for it, and they resent you for being a reminder of their own mortality, a reminder that one day they too will get old and their skin will sag, and their bones will hurt, and the quick will leave them, years after their finest hour; and

you must ignore this, because they cannot help feeling this way, and you cannot let yourself be consumed with guilt by the burden of your breath, by the weakness of your muscles, by the things you can't remember. It is only the way of things. But you already know all of this, don't you, boy? Because you are already old."

The young boy raised his eyebrows in question.

"What do you mean? Are you alright, Grandpa?"

"Yes, of course I am. But you are not, are you? Your cheeks have drooped to your jaw and there are wrinkles around your mouth." The boy's hands rose slowly to the sides of his face and his eyes widened. "And what of your teeth? You lost them years ago. Do you remember why? Was it poverty or neglect?" The young boy probed the inside of his mouth with his tongue. "It is not easy to chew food with your gums, but you have managed, just as you have managed with all of the difficulties of the years behind you. Your back has helped to carry you for a lifetime, and now you are hunched over,

and walk with a cane, isn't that right?" The boy's eyes turned glassy. "A cross to bear, that's what I would say. It is hell getting old, boy, but you know that, because you are telling me."

"Grandpa, stop." The boy was crying.

"And you think me crazy, but you can feel it, can't you? You know, because you have lived your life and it is as good as over, and it always has been. You know what you've done, even if you can't remember it all. You remember your school, and your friends, the change of your body and its physical whispers, of the obsessive prurience that consumed you intermittently throughout all of it, and the desire for money and belongings and power, and the resignation to find security for your blood and name, and the years of anxiety and worry, and relief and restlessness, that all fell as husks from your life, leaving you old and feeble before you were aware of blinking twice. You have done it all, because you are telling me now, and your life and years are behind you, as they always were."

The boy tried to speak, to plead with his grandfather that it wasn't so, but he was struggled as it was with calming himself.

"Your stake in life is not a



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claim of territory between life and death, boy, between two mere *points*, because there is little difference between what you will do and what you have already done. I haven't known you long, not as long as you or I have been alive, but time and age will separate us, before bringing us together once more. In the meantime, I will miss you terribly."



"Scenes from the Retirement of Henry Spater"

by Neil Ellis Orts

Henry Spater liked books about dance. He hid them in a box in his closet, as if they were pornography.

Henry was blindsided by Paul, from the church, at a bookstore in Durham. Henry was looking at an issue of Dance Magazine. Being in Durham, he thought he was safe, but there came Paul, loud as ever, skipped any kind of "hi, how are you" and said, "Dance? What are you looking at that for?"

Henry put the magazine back on the rack and stuttered something about it looking interesting.

"Interesting?" Paul said. "Look at that fag on the cover! You're not turning fag in your old age, are you?"

Henry forced a laugh, said how he'd just seen a poster for the festival at Duke, was wondering if the locals were getting national notice, and what was Paul doing in Durham anyway?

When his wife, Cora, retired, one of the younger teach-

ers at her elementary school gave her a pair of season tickets to the American Dance Festival. Cora taught two generations how to add, subtract, multiply and divide, and even when she had to teach units on art and social studies, she did so with a compass and protractor. Cora and Henry had never been to the festival before, had never even talked about it, so she didn't quite know what to think about the gift. Still, dutiful to the gesture, she and Henry drove the 45 minutes to Durham to see what it was all about.

"Bare breasts!" Cora railed all the way home. "Bare breasts!"

Henry conceded he didn't see the need for all that nudity but what he didn't say was . . . anything. He didn't say anything. It was as if he didn't know how to talk.

After Cora died, he continued to live in the house he and Cora had bought, the house where they raised their Helen. Henry had retired two years earlier than Cora, from decades of teaching business skills to high school students, typing, accounting, those sorts of things, so was already a little used to being alone. He changed nothing in the house, moved about it in much the same way he always had with one exception.

In his bedroom, he rearranged things around a bit, just enough to make more room in front of the full-length mirror Cora had on the closet door. With the help of some instructional video he found online,

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Henry stood in front of Cora's mirror and attempted his first plié.

Henry learned about dance belts online and decided to order one from an internet retailer. The first time he tried it on, he tugged and twisted with the stretchy material for half an hour before he found a way to arrange everything somewhat comfortably. He finally understood how the male dancers looked so contained in their tights. When he stood in front of the mirror, his skinny, white body, pale blue veins showing everywhere—well if he didn't look like the models online, he decided he didn't look bad. In fact, it gave him a little thrill to see himself like that in Cora's mirror.

Helen came over for dinner once a week, which Henry appreciated. She cooked for him those evenings and she made things almost exactly like Cora had. Nights she came without her husband were his favorite nights of all. Stan, Helen's husband, was a holy roller. Although Henry and Cora were faithful church-goers, Congregationalists, Henry couldn't help feeling there was something not quite right with holy rollers. Now his daughter was one, too, but she was less of one when she didn't have her husband with her. With Stan, they would go on and on about loose morals and degenerate behavior.

The online dance supplier from which Henry bought his dance belt also had a print catalog, which they started sending to his home. On Stan-less evening, Helen saw one on the coffee table. On the cover, teenaged girls in short skirts and

tights did the splits.

"Dad?" Helen asked with concern. She flipped through it cautiously. "What are you doing with this?"

He mumbled something about not being sure how he got on that mailing list.

She acted like she was looking through a Penthouse magazine. "Well, I just don't think you should be looking at this," she said and took it to the kitchen, where she dropped it in the garbage.

Cora died suddenly the same summer she retired, not long after they went to Durham. Everyone said how sad it was, how she never got to enjoy her well-deserved retirement. Helen's last conversation with her mother was about the bare breasted dancers, so she always blamed them for giving her mother the shock that killed her.

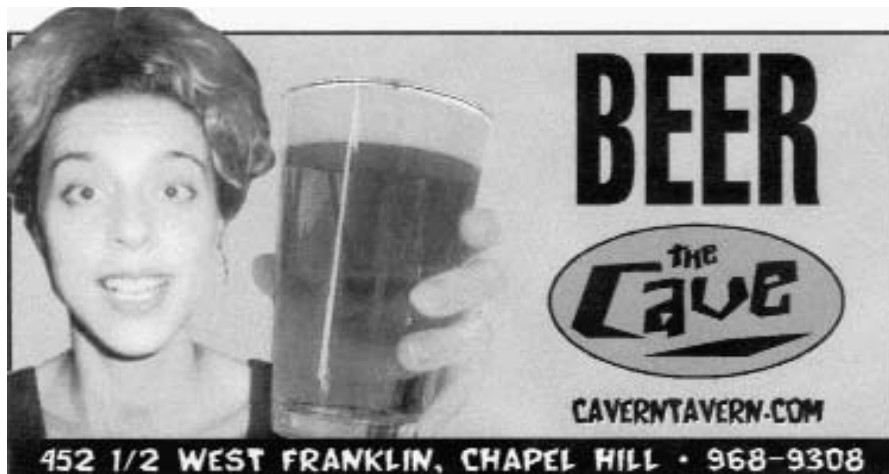
Henry was bereft and grieved as any man who lost a lifelong companion, but that last week of the American Dance Festival, he used one of the tickets from Cora's retirement gift. He left the theater speechless.

He didn't dare tell Helen he'd been back to Durham, especially so soon after Cora's death.

Online shopping became Henry's pastime. Dance books and videos from Amazon.com came regularly and he closely tracked the package on the UPS site, so he knew he'd be home when it came. He didn't want the UPS driver to leave it on the front step for a neighbor to find—or worse, Helen, if she dropped by unexpectedly. Luckily, UPS usually came by mid-afternoon when she was working and he felt safe that she'd always be at work when the delivery was made. He started being scrupulous about filing away his credit card bills so Helen wouldn't see them by accident.

He longed for a pair of tights, but after he called the dance supply place to have himself removed from their mailing list, he didn't feel right ordering from them again. He also didn't feel safe going to a dance supply store in Durham or anywhere else for that matter. Not after his run-in with Paul at the bookstore. He once found a pair of Cora's old pantyhose and tried them on, but he really disliked how they looked. Besides, they were impossible to get off in a hurry. Henry reluctantly decided tights were too risky all around.

So, during the winter,





Left: Two Sheep Flying

Lower Left: Mourning Dove

Right: Big Dove

Below: Cowbird in Technicolor

Below Right: Two Sheep Meeting

Editorial Page: Peace Dove



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The Blotter

Henry practiced his pliés and tendus wearing sweat pants, but during the summer, he wore only his dance belt. He made sure all the doors were locked when he did that. Helen had a key but he'd hear her in time to put on some shorts before she made it to the bedroom. There was no way he'd ever be able to explain the dance belt. It would be no different than if she caught him wearing Cora's pantyhose.

The summer after Cora died, and every summer since, Henry would sneak into Durham to see at least half of the annual dance festival. Sometimes, Helen would drop by the house when he was gone and this worried her to no end.

"You should keep your cell phone on when you're out driving alone at night," she fussed.

Henry started going to movies during the day, while Helen was at work, so he could say he was at the movies and talk about them when she asked these questions.

"Do you have a girlfriend somewhere?" Helen asked. "You're acting like a teenager!"

Henry was born in May of 1939 and he decided to treat

himself for his seventieth birthday. He went to the American Dance Festival website and with a shaky hand clicked on "order season tickets." He made a mental note to be especially careful with that credit card statement.

The first performance for his seventieth birthday season was by a Chinese company, or at least it had a Chinese name. And bare breasted dancers. Henry had long since become used to the nudity, though. He was mesmerized by dancers who shuffled through blue and white confetti. He couldn't do that in his bedroom, but he thought he might be able to get by with trying it in his backyard with leaves when autumn came. When he got home from the theater, he sat on the floor, wearing only his dance belt, and tried to copy the pose of the dancers who sat on stage with their heads bent back so far they looked headless. His body couldn't get it exactly right, but he felt like he got pretty close.

The next performance was by two Israeli men who dressed in plain work pants and dark t-shirts. They crouched in stillness for a long time and then made very alien looking move-

ments. They shuffled all over the stage on their knees. Once he got home, Henry put on a t-shirt and khaki pants and posed in front of the mirror, seeing how long he could maintain that half crouch. He probably couldn't hold it as long as the men on stage, but he felt proud of the time he did manage. All those pliés paid off. Surely he had the strongest thighs of any seventy year-old he knew. He tried the knee walk, but had to give it up quickly.

Next was a ballet company, but dancing some decidedly contemporary moves. The choreographer - another Israeli - was awarded a choreographic prize and before the show began, he made an acceptance speech. He advised all the dancers in the room to stop dancing in front of mirrors. He spoke of the pleasure in dancing, like you didn't need another reason to move.

Back home again, Henry undressed. He wore his dance belt to the theater. It made him feel a part of it, somehow. He looked into Cora's mirror and adjusted the little black garment before he walked out of the bedroom.

He went to Helen's old room, now a guest room. There were no floor length mirrors in there. He plied and then stood up straight. He lifted his arms and tried not to pay any attention to what position they were in. He tried moving his shoulders, and then he peeled his left foot off the floor. He bent to one side, then to the other. He felt a wonderful stretch, even if the bends were not very far. He tried to move his hips and he found that painful spot that sometimes kept him from going as deeply into his pliés as he wanted, but he felt the pain in a new way. It was



a sign of life. He pulled away from the pain and tried twisting his torso.

Every movement was slow, deliberate. They were nothing like the explosive gestures he'd just seen on stage, but they were expressive. That was the word. His limited, careful turns, they felt like he was finally responding to Cora that night they drove back from Durham. An old man in a dance belt, he felt sweat on his forehead and he felt pleasure.

He made quick shuffling steps out into the hallway, picturing confetti flying at his feet. He made a tiny leap, not even the clearing the width of the bathroom door, but then he made another one and cared not at all if it was tiny. He held up his arms and shouted down the hall, "Yes!" He took a bow and said, "Thank you!" He raised his arms once more and again, more quietly, said, "Yes!"

He sat down on the floor of that empty house, next to the bathroom door. His back felt slick against the doorjamb. He sat there a long time and cried and cried and cried.



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Frozen slices of time and space – the long, connected back yards of my youth. Pussy lines, ruts scraped in the earth with a heel that must be crossed at all costs or forever wear the fearful badge. (Was he a coach or a bully?)

Grass grows in clumps that connect the clay but leave some spots oddly bare. Live-oaks mark the fifty yard line, their roots exposed like knuckles to rap against bare shins and knees and hips, the gravel of acorns a small and slippery traverse. Bruises worn as honorifics showed that you'd scrimmaged here, some other day, some sunnier afternoon when everyone came to play.

This was always a gauntlet, but not, I thought, one preventing me from getting home. My house was a right turn in the end-zone; just keep holding the ball – tuck it in under your arm, protect it with your free hand – and let your cleats dig into the macadam and brightly spark against the stones. Go faster, faster. They're chasing you! The trees reach over left and right to cover the street, block out the sunset. Yellow, man-made light on porches, on ornamental lamp-posts, light the way as necessary. It flickers behind waving leaves, falling leaves, blown from their perches by the first cold winds of autumn. The cold reaches fingers inside the collar of my shirt, up my sleeves. Run faster!

Darker spots - storm drains - have no secrets. No one stops by them at night. No one checks for a lost baseball or a nickel that slipped from a summertime pocket. You keep going, ball tucked safely, cleats grabbing secure. Where is my house? There, at the end of the street, the top end, where the hill flattens out and the light is on in the kitchen. I don't know who is there, but I know that they will unlock the back door when they hear my feet running on the driveway.

Steve - NY

"Juicy Fruit"

by James L. Sprouse

You stop in the store where she works on the corner of 3rd and Magnolia to buy the *Wall Street Journal* on your way to work at the tannery. You want to get out of the killing business, the foul, acid fumes that burn your eyes and leave an ugly remnant on your tongue that you try to drown with whisky on your way home at night if you've got any money. You've been doing a little trading on the stock market because your old friend, Bobby Suave, at the high school reunion told you it's the way to get rich, and he'd earned a couple hundred thou last year. You thought you'd try it. You're not getting any younger. You want to pick up a bag of Red Man chew because they won't let you smoke on the killing floor, but you don't want her to think you're a hick so you buy a pack of Juicy Fruit. She smiles at you, a nice friendly smile, but she knows, you think. She knows you want something besides chewing gum, and you feel yourself turning red. You set your paper on the counter, making sure she sees it's *The Journal*—even blue-collar men have dreams, and maybe you're

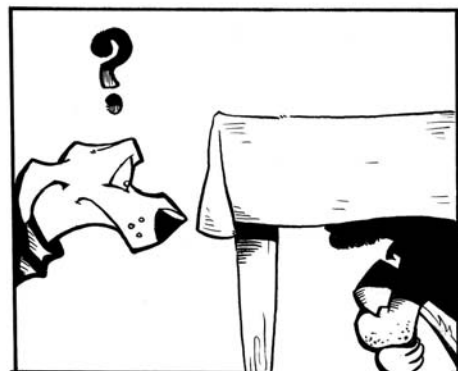
actually a multimillionaire in disguise—and she does. You can tell by the way her eyes widen a tiny bit when she takes your money, a ten-dollar bill, and you tell her to keep the change. No coffee break today for you, Mister Big Shot.

You leave with your paper and your gum and walk around the corner and down the block because you don't want her to know you ride the bus instead of driving your car . . . your *imaginary* car that is, a Corvette, but you dropped your house keys on the floor when you left, and she runs out to catch you. But it's too late. You're already on the bus, walking towards the back, where you'll sit and read about your stocks—Reynolds Tobacco, Shell Oil, a couple of the big ones—but she spies you through the window and waves your keys over her head, and you decide, what the hell, you may as well stop and get them, so you pull the string for the next corner, which is right about where you are now, in front of the store. Now you're going to lose your bus fare in addition to the big tip you gave her, but her chasing after the bus changes everything. She knew it

all along, that you rode the bus. But you know she cares enough about you to run out the door with your keys and try to flag down the bus to return them to you, and you think, maybe you'll ask her out, take her to Little Joe's, have a few beers, plug the jukebox with quarters and play songs you think she likes, shoot some pool, but you won't take her back to your place until your investments pay off, and you can move out of the depressing one room, share-a-bathroom rent you have now and into a better one. The bus stops in front of the store, and you run to the door, grab onto the chrome silver pole, and try to swing yourself out without touching the steps, a man so light on his feet that dancing must be second nature to you.

Too bad your heavy boot drops a little faster than you thought, too bad you catch your heel on the bottom step, too bad gravity is against you, and you trip and tumble to the sidewalk right at her feet like a drunken bum—which all of a sudden you are. A drunken bum. A tobacco-chewing hick with a dirty, low-paying job that stinks you up with the smell of death and rotting flesh, a fool with the *Wall Street Journal* under your arm like a clown or some character on a

"Best In Show" by Phil Juliano



sitcom about the world's stupid-est idiot, a faker who hasn't amounted to anything and never will. Dream on you stupid dreamer. She smiles at you, that big friendly smile she gave you in the store, and tries to help you up, but in that moment your entire useless life flashes in front of you, just like you're dying from a heart attack, and you swat her hand away like it's a wasp trying to sting you, and you can tell it hurts her because you hit hard, but suddenly it doesn't matter. You feel a pain like there's an elephant sitting on your chest, and you break out in a cold sweat as the pain starts up the left side of your neck and you think you've got the worst toothache you've ever had in your life, so bad that you get sick and vomit all over her shoes. The last thing you see is your *Wall Street Journal* blowing down the street and her feet, jumping backwards to get as far away from you as she can.



Call for Entries!

"The Laine Cunningham Novel Award"

The Blotter's Long Form Fiction Contest
for Novella and Novel length works

1. The purpose of our contest is to provide a venue for writers to have their work read and commented on by our editors and judges. Additionally, the winner of this contest will have his/her work published here on these pages. And last but not least, the winner will receive the monetary prize of \$500.00. (Award monies are provided by the prize sponsor and the entry fee for the contest helps boost this lil' rag's ability to keep on truckin'.)
2. Our pre-reader judges are intelligent and highly proud of their educations. Our final judge is smart, well-read and mean as a snake. But we told her that she could be the final judge and what can you do?
3. Transparency is very important to us, and we make every effort to eliminate any conflict of interest situation from going down in our contest. In that light, Blotter volunteers and their family members and/or employees are prohibited from entering our contest.

To enter the contest, please submit your work with a \$25 entry fee by check or money order to: The Blotter Magazine, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705.

Your entry must contain the following: no less than 10 pages, no more than 20 pages of the opening of your novel or novella, typed & double-spaced, without your name. On a separate cover page type your name, the title of your novel or novella and a one page synopsis of your novel or novella. Remember, you have to have the entire book written, so that if and when you win, you can show us the rest!

BONUS: Enter the writing contest AND get a year's subscription to The Blotter for only \$30! (Regular annual subscription donations are \$25 total and you don't even get to enter a writing contest with that price!)

Once again, first prize is \$500, plus a "library" of books selected by The Blotter (many signed by the authors). Second prize is \$125, again with a "library" of recent releases. Third prize will be just the "library." All placements, including honorable mentions, will receive an award certificate, proof positive of your success as an author, suitable for mocking your sophomore English teacher, who always wondered how you graduated at all.

Our contest will be run in line with the rules of ethics and mechanics recommended by the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, as outlined in their 2006 monograph on the subject. You can't view for free, but you may purchase the monograph entitled "Publishing Contests: Ethics and Mechanics" through the CLMP at <http://www.clmp.org/about/monographs.html>. This is the document we have used in coming up with the rules and conditions of this contest.

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"congenital"

a disease
of exposure
gives me a lift

things are already in
a hopeless state of deterioration

villages in south america
have no sanitary inspectors

i am are more interested
in oscar night

Four by Adam Moorad

"spitting cobra spit"

find the maximum dosage
that can be administered
without vomiting

stick with that dose

find it a much more satisfactory place
to live

or the only other way
off the sofa

"trains riding sideways"

i am not familiar
i don't know what emotions were when

so many people automatically made ill

by any sort of routine work

by the mold of monopoly
and possession

"polaroid"

in the back room of a drugstore
only one result is possible:
a situation of absolute need

the same is true
of anyone

in a state of absolute hunger
or fear

what looks like chaos at first glance
you have already created

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CONTRIBUTORS

Renato Escudero of Alameda, CA, holds MFA and MA degrees from San Francisco State University, where he has also taught creative writing. He is the winner of the 2008 John Steinbeck Award for the Short Story, and my fiction has appeared, or will be appearing, in *580 SPLIT: ONLINE EXCLUSIVES*, *REED MAGAZINE*, *SARANAC REVIEW*, *SLAB* and other publications.

Randall Cox is a writer living in Raleigh, NC. He likes animals and striped shirts.

Wendy Detrick Worsham writes, "My paintings are acrylic on canvas. They often include found objects, either those from nature like leaves and flowers or antique items such as old photos and architectural elements. I'm drawn to nature so my subjects are animals, flowers, trees, and landscapes with a preference towards farm animals. They just make me smile." See her work at Sugarloaf Craft Festival, Chantilly, VA December 11-13, 2009

Neil Ellis Orts reveals, "The story was written while I was in Durham as an NEA Fellow with the Institute for Dance Criticism at the American Dance Festival. (I was there from June 20 - July 10.) After writing criticism for a couple of weeks, we fellows were given an assignment to respond to the festival in any way we wished. Since I am a fiction writer as well as a dance writer, I wrote the short story. Besides writing on arts and religion for OutSmart, a local GLBT magazine here in Houston, I have had fiction published in small and obscure places like *MO: Writings from the River*, *Windhover*, *NanoFiction*, and an anthology called *Charmed Lives*." See Neil's work at:

<http://www.neonuma.com>

<http://neonumaarts.blogspot.com/>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/neonews/>

James L. Sprouse writes, "My work has appeared in *Abraxis*, *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Puckerbrush Review*, and *Wisconsin Review*. I am the author of the chapbook *Methane* (1972, Stonemarrow Press), and I have worked as a logger in British Columbia; cannery worker in Alaska; tree planter in Oregon; as well as a heavy equipment operator, semi truck driver, commercial fisherman, fruit picker, and bartender. I have ridden freight trains in the Pacific Northwest and Canada, hitchhiked to nearly every state in the U.S., to Mexico, and across Canada. In the mid-'80s I traveled to Delhi and Rajasthan, India, ("to seek enlightenment") but almost died of malaria. I have spent the past 25 years as a practitioner of Zen Buddhism, a calling that took me to England, Poland, France, and the Netherlands. I am employed by the Veterans Administration Hospital in Togus, Maine.

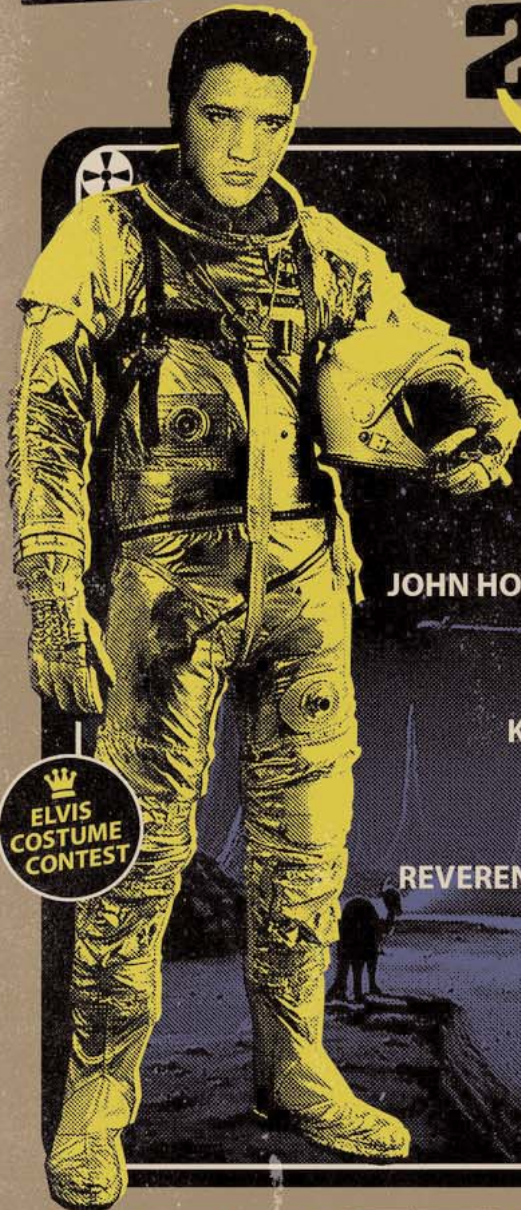
Adam Moorad's writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *3 A.M. Magazine*, *H_ngm_n*, *Johnny America*, *PANK*, *Underground Voices*, among other places. He lives in Brooklyn and works in publishing. Visit him here:

<http://adamadamadamadamadam.blogspot.com>

Phil Juliano is battering down the hatches, ruffling a few feathers and standing up for what's right. That's also what we like about him.

Final Tid-Bits: Coming up on the final weeks for you to submit your work to our long-form fiction contest. Weather's getting cooler and oddly rainy - more fun to sit in front of a hissing and crackling fireplace than sweating in a beach chair behind sunglasses and beneath a campaign-hat, although I do miss going to the pool and occasionally looking up to see if the shadows have moved over me. Visit your local independent bookstore, they have plenty of things to read - I don't want to hear any of you saying, "I'm bored." Got it? Good!

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