

*In rebuttal to the slave behind Augustus' chariot whispering,
"all fame is fleeting," we have Alan Dehmer, Sergio A. Ortiz, Rich Ives,
a new Best In Show & The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

August 2010

MAGAZINE



THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE
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Front cover, "Buddha from above" by
Alan Dehmer - see centerfold for
more.

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The Blotter is a production of
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

"The Sunny Side of The Street"

Another submission of mine has been returned with a no. Actually, not even a real *no*, or my personal preference, no thank-you. In fact, I was impatient and looked up the list of finalists on the contest website, and that's how I found out I was not one of them. I am deflated, of course, but not as off-put as I usually am from such things. Maybe I'm becoming more mature. It's extremely unlikely, but still possible.

I remain somewhat confident despite this setback to my small collection of short stories, a group that had been short-listed in a previous submission-of-the-contest-variety. I guess I feel okay about what we refer to in the biz as its "quality of content." Nevertheless, I wonder what is still wrong. There must be something still wrong with it, right? Hear that? That's my confidence eroding.

Holy crap! Maybe my word choices are offensive. Or maybe I am not catching all of the typos typos. Or I'm writing in an antiquated, overly-stylized fashion. I'm not cool enough. Or I'm too cool. I know, right? Shaaah!

Oh, I understand that I shouldn't think like this. This from the fat books on publishing that I sneak peeks in at the Barnes & Noble. Agents will tell you, because it's no skin off their noses to do so, that decisions are not always based on *good* versus *bad*. Getting chosen to be published is not about the quality of one's writing, it's about getting past the slush pile. It's having a *platform*, a package of instantly accessible information on you and your work, a cover letter that invites a reader to go on. In other words, you have to have the right stuff. What that right stuff should be, however, is still a mystery to me, and a pretty good one at that.

And, confidentially, I'm stumped by the so-called *truth* about quality. I have heard from one contemporary poet about their having published over 500 pieces out there in the never-never of electronic and paper journals. I don't think even Emily Dickinson wrote 500 poems that she found worthy of sharing with readers. At some point, even in a long life, there is a point where we should stop talking and start listening. That's just me, though.

And we're walking, we're walking.

I'm caught by the leg in the generational trap. You see, I was taught that there are journals and there are *journals*. There is this word, this magic adjective, that divides the publishing world into Yes and *Ugh*; Woo-hoo! and Oh, well... The word is "respected" and it

used to make all the difference.

I'm also the very wise-ass who wrote that the internet was an enormous manure field with a chocolate cake in the middle. You have to wade through the manure to find the chocolate cake, but when you reach it, you're not so hungry any more. Wrong! everyone under the age of fifty shouts. I may be wiser to the *What* and *How* but what I am less intelligent about is the *Where*. But you see, I am one of those writers in the middle-age, torn between the old school publishers, academic journals and stuffy periodicals, and the electronic 'zines and blogs and tweets and texts. Can a person have a writing career sending only 140 characters per piece? How can characters be developed in such miniscule bursts? I don't know. But things are surely coming that I don't know in carload lots. Stand by.

So I do not submit enough. I should, everyone says, be more widely casting my net in much deeper waters, and with greater frequency. Wow. I agree, because I am a sucker for fishing metaphors. So do more, I am instructed by folks I trust. Send more. Yes, I know, I know. But how does anyone deal with all of the *nos*? The poet with 500 published pieces? How many *nos* did they receive, and keep on sending those poems out until the answer was yes? And why don't we know their name?

The answer is *who cares?* They're writing poetry, and people are reading poetry and short stories and, I suppose, novels and novellas. If some of them aren't so good, well, then fewer people will read them and the writers and poets will apply their craft and they will do better next time. I mean, it's inevitable that writing gets better, because we, as a society in general, demand higher quality. Right?

Hello? Right?

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

Language is a slippery slope. One man's meat is another's poison. Who are we to make light of the tools that writers use to communicate their message? If we shadows have offended and all...

Three Prose Poems

by Rich Ives

“Another Spiritual Friend”

The terrible invention of angels builds a temporary shelter, like the respectable brick home of the bashful child molester. He answers quickly and politely when you run out of gas.

But it's not like you remember the grass, for example, is green, or the safety of adulthood. His mind could be clenched so tight he could barely eat. Besides, it was not the town you were still leaving that burst into flames, but it disturbed your progress anyway.

No, they weren't really expecting you, a misunderstood friend of a friend with no real talent and twelve easy payments. You had acquired a valuable free gift, hadn't you, and the next stop certainly wasn't going anywhere without you.

But I was tired of supplying inspiration and a solid foundation for success in later life. I had behavior. I had a way. I was the real father. I was away. I was a man who had crossed the borders of a country that didn't have any. I could see my breath ascending into the great dark hands of the descending night.

That guarantee I sent you was priceless. You grew up, didn't you? But you have to know how to use it. It's only because you complained that I know your more patient story.

If you haven't invented yourself, you can't patent the product. That's what the home office always says.

Telling someone like me your plan is never a good idea. Someone like me might answer politely and wait for an opportunity. Someone like me might market the fear.

I've already seen your life and I thought it was mine. You deserve a refund, but you aren't going to get it.

Cause of death: perfection, someone else's wings, a bright blue lump in the opening throat.



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“Anticipatory”

She was holding back because she was afraid if she let herself out she would explode. It wasn't anger at all. It was overabundance. She knew she could like letting go too much and not be able to stop so she stopped first and it made her feel like she might just spill out someday.

Young girls have always studied the emotional forces of the world and they have decided whether or not those forces are on their side. Sort of like how a young boy will decide if a mud puddle is lonely or not.

She didn't know why she was always going somewhere, but maybe she wasn't, maybe she was waiting in motion. She would say to herself, “I was just going around to places. I was just missing too many places.”

According to her mother, she had too much guff. She would give her mother an excuse and her mother would say, “Don't give me any of your guff.” And then her mother would fuss over something in the kitchen and leave her alone. Because, of course, her mother remembered feeling like she was going to explode and she didn't want to feel like that anymore just because her daughter was.

Eventually the young girl told her girlfriends that she was wondering how boys were put together. This was an interesting problem for the girls to solve. She was nervous. She had those twirlies, like with her finger in the ends of her hair, and giggles and sighs bubbling up inside of her even after the girlfriends went away.

It wasn't innocent. It wasn't innocent at all.

That night she dreamed about a bowl of eyes and a fence made out of children's bones. She dreamed about a bird that could fly backwards. She thought about herself in the dream. She watched herself doing that and she watched herself watching herself. What to do now?

Because by now a couple of boys could see in her eyes what she wanted, but they didn't believe what they saw. They hadn't seen it before.

Perhaps crying in the rain is redundant, but that's what her mother was doing. She remembered wanting what she couldn't have. Because now she had had it and she didn't want it and she didn't know what else she wanted.

She didn't want her daughter to find what she had found.

“Shut the story's door, but don't lock it,” she said. “I wanted to cut myself, but I burned instead.”



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“Contract for a Small Dish of Seeds”

One of the things the government doesn't do for us is inspect the possibilities. Watch for these anomalies in your research. Don't expect the subject matter to alter to accommodate the evasive theme.

How would you respond, for example, to an official who says; “Every day my mother beats me with a long willow switch. I'm scared because I've begun to like it.”

Some of the neighbors, you conjecture, of the man who first had a special room for sleeping, must have thought he was pretty smart. They might have thought he was very sensitive and wanted to acknowledge his hidden depth, but he felt so deeply it made him sick and he vomited his portable heart into the beggar's hands. If it looked like a handful of old coins, that was only because the beggar wanted to use his gift. He probably understood the obligations.

In this way the beggar had already become a flower. You can't fix a flower with old coins. The beggar had to call his broker to verify the exact amount of the loss. That's how happy he thought he was. He wanted to know exactly how much his useless discovery was worth.

Although the government does not approve of a man who is begging in the street, his research might be used for subtle improvements in the enduring strains of the increasingly numerous transient flowers which now line our walkways and boulevards. We should try to understand how such things come about if we want to apply ourselves.

And if a beggar already has something in his dish, which is not money, perhaps his persistent need to bloom can be used to locate outside a special place for sleeping available to nearly all of us. This is what flowers accept when they refuse government assistance. They have nothing to offer but themselves. It's an agreement. It's a way of carrying the ideas to other places. It's a gesture you may not realize you have made when you give alms thoughtlessly.

Sleep now, because the subject matter does not alter to accommodate the theme and it's how we understand the meaning of the exchange. The government makes many mistakes and it does not know how to rest. If it sleeps, it will disappear. This is why we must do its understanding for it.



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real dreams, real weird

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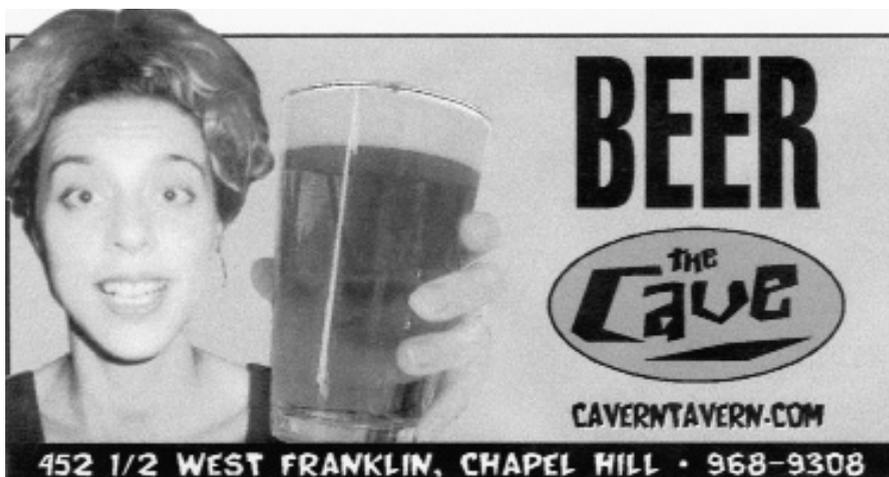
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Just before the first lamplight of morning shatters any dream like a well-placed rock does a fragile windowpane, I have my vision. In this apparition, which freely morphs between lucidity and the madness of the exhausted subconscious, I am standing on a treeless hill. Laid out below me are thousands of people, basking in midsummer sunshine. Around the base of the hill are white tents. In fact, except for the multi-hued clothing of the revelers, this might have looked like an encampment of civil war soldiers. Within the tents are more people, carousing and eating, for in front and behind are charcoal grills and braziers, their wisps of smoke carrying to me the hint of smoked sausage and brisket.

The day doesn't stay sunny for long. I find that if I look at dream sky it fast-forwards, clouds forming and dissolving to reform a second later in stop-action splendor. Gloom is more the norm in my mind's never-never. It is easier to understand, to the extent that dreams are direct and opposite reflections of reality, intended to maintain a psychic balance. My days, you see are generally happy ones. The electric crackle of lightning is not far off, nor the deep shudder of thunder. Everyone out of the rain, comes the shout, although the rain has not yet materialized. Don't let the food get wet, which strikes me as a near non-sequitor. I, or my eye, stay with the scene, as the hilltop clears of the fabulous crowd. Good, safety is the word, I think.

When all that is left is a man and a large wicker basket, I realize what a dark turn this will take. He begins unrolling the fragile cloth of his hot-air balloon, even as the clouds darken and the wind finally picks up and makes his task nearly impossible. Running about, he flattens the cloth against the skin of the hillside. In the sunshine this must be a beautiful sight, but it is all variants of gray in this impending storm. How will he control the flame into the mouth of the silk? How will he lift into the storm?

James - cyberspace



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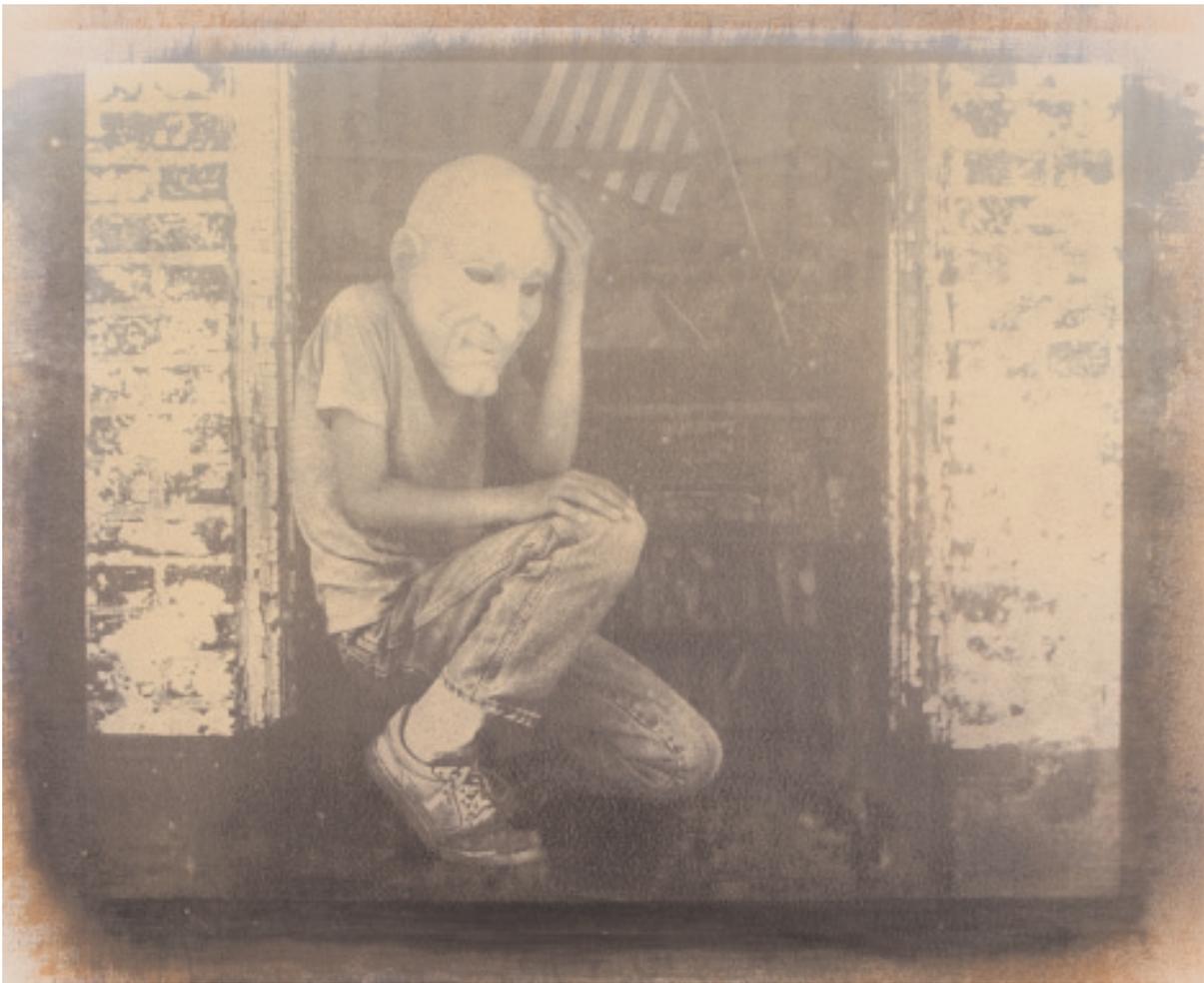
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Upper Left - "Homage."
Lower Left - "Donagh Patrick."

Upper Right - "Vanishing 2."
Lower Right - "Birches."

**Alan Dehmer -
Chapel Hill, NC
www.woodsedge.net**

I'm interested in the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi. It comes from the Buddhist assertion of impermanence and can be found in the simple, natural, ever-changing, imperfect, and incomplete world around us. Fall leaves are an expression of wabi-sabi. So is rust. Beauty in decay. Impermanence.



The gum bichromate printing process offers a kind of value-added layer to the photograph. Expressive and alternative print-making of this type takes as its starting point the original moment captured in time. But then, layer by layer over the course of a week or a month or a year, something new is born, a gum print. To be sure, it bears the mark of that first photographic moment, but also bears something more that cannot be explained solely by the multiple layers of pigment applied.

“She’s a homophobic warlord with a miniature bible carefully tucked in her bra”

It started before she could read
at Sunday mass
she’d stare at the faces of immovable angels—
La Madonna and byzantine saints
in cut-glass windows—imagining herself
speaking to the masses.

When her boobs started growing
the junior high jock,
a prodigy bible-belt-preacher,
invited her to Watchtower
study classes. They graduated from high school,
got married, and filled-out
their NRA applications
on the very same day.

Everything is stasis, but she walks-in
on her husband and the church’s accountant,
a six foot love gift from the Castro district.

Two hundred nineteen years after La Bastille
she remarried,
joined a New Age theosophy movement
learned to suck her thumbs and self flagellate
while screaming slogans
about the Constitutional Rights of breeders
at a prime-time puppeteer program in Puerto Rico.

“Of The Boar”

Another delay! I'll have plenty of time
to think about him. Was he always two?
The one that disappeared with my boyfriend
that last year of college was the one I hated.

He'd talk down to me and turn right back
into his original mannequin self,
wave his hand in a fury when I interrupted
while he gossiped on the phone.

That one never knew I heard all the ugly things
he ever said about me. Yet I remained his
friend for over thirty years. I should have dropped
him off on his head in the Ukraine as soon as I realized
why he fell from that balcony in Connecticut.

There's a wild boar walking around the city
in the pouring rain. He wears a traditional Scythian
neckerchief, but the foul odor of betrayal
gives him away. Everyone knows he approaches
and they leave. Here I was thinking I'd write
about Tamara and her baby. Another delay!

Three by Sergio A. Ortiz

“To Tamara”

Don't be afraid. That unlucky
bastard who turned his back on you
and the baby will haunt like an Irish potato
in the time of famine.

There is no career in denying
he's the father. He rides
against a crocodile to become
history's double-humped yellow camel

grazing on the margins of your lives.
Trust yourself. Rip that uncertainty
from your eyes. Stop hiding
the child you carry.

She's blessed with mother-of-pearl,
Atlantic and Caribbean fragrance,
and deep-deep, blue-blue skies.

Inside The Artist's Head - Alan Dehmer

By nature I'm inclined to alchemy, whether mixing pigments with sensitizer in the photo lab, making herbal medicines, or preparing food in the kitchen. Mixing, stirring and altering matter. Creating something from something else. I don't think there's a higher purpose in life than to create.

My Dad was an amateur photographer. Fairly active when I was a young boy, he used a small 4' x 6' black and white darkroom that his father had made for him.

I got to watch and sometimes even help process film. In my private time, I'd slip into the darkroom and pretend it was a spaceship—a room in black, sliding door, fans, red lights, orange lights. I learned early on that anything can be visualized in a darkroom. Those memories—sensory and emotional—remain clear and strong more than 45 years later.

Photography still maintains its magic for me today. Watching a silver print develop in the tray brings chills just like it did 25 years ago when I bought my first camera and started making prints on the floor of a laundry room closet. There, kneeling next to the dryer, my future wife's roommate taught me the fundamentals of black and white printing and processing. Soon after, I was shooting for others for money, and before I knew it, I was a working freelance photojournalist.

In my twenties, my creative work was mostly writing poetry and short stories, primarily for myself, and more politically and socially oriented writing for my job. By the

time I bought my first camera, a Canon AE-1 Program, I was ready to expand what I was doing with writing to include images as well.

From the beginning, my goal as a photojournalist was to reveal truth. I knew images had to be more than truthful for people to want to look at them, but seeking truth was my first interest in making them. I took a workshop with Susan Meisalis, the documentary photographer who had become a war photographer in the 1980s. Her documentary work in Nicaragua became known when the U.S.'s role supporting the Contras in Central America during the Reagan administration drew media attention. I also took a workshop with Earl Dotter, the old labor photographer, who was right out of the Lewis Hine tradition. He advocated for uncovering corporate malfeasance regardless of the consequences to one's personal welfare. Both of these teachers wrestled with truth and beauty in their work and they helped me understand the photographic issues better as I took my first steps into the world of photography.

Alongside the images, I wrote of these true things. And I imagined I would write and photograph in this way for the rest of my days. My wife was a working journalist when I met her. Shortly after our wedding, we took off for Africa. Our backpacks were filled with sound recording and photo equipment, books, journals, food and barely enough room to squeeze in clothes. We spent nearly a year writing stories and photographing throughout North and West Africa and came back with a lifetime's

memory of adventure, wonder and discovery. My life as a photographer was rolling.

But a good life is nothing but change acted on with purpose. I became a householder in my thirties and forties. Wife, family, jobs—creation on slow cook. After our first child was born, I consciously removed the international photojournalist hat I'd been wearing. Just like that I didn't want to be away doing work that was inherently dangerous when I could be home celebrating the life of our child.

In 1987 I took a job as the photographer on a regional news magazine for a few years until it folded. I also worked freelance for some of my old contacts, like Time Magazine and the Christian Science Monitor. I started shooting local theatre, and expanded my skills and equipment to branch into commercial and fashion photography. But I didn't really like the commercial work. Good pay but too many compromises.

It was about then that I discovered the world of alternative photography. I wanted to produce something better than the hackneyed theatre shots seen in all newspapers alongside a written review of the show. I was looking for a way to tell a metaphorical story in one image. Self-taught, I'd never had the pleasure of taking a photo history course. But we were living down the street from Duke University in Durham, NC and its good neighbor policy allowed me use of the university library. Duke has an excellent collection of beautifully printed photography books—both current and top quality originals, and reproductions of early works. I visited every chance I could get. I became entranced with the nineteenth century world

of variety in printmaking. I'd been shooting and printing with silver, never knowing there were alternatives to the everyday black and white print. Within a year I'd made cyanotype, VanDyke, Liquid Light, albumen and gum bichromate prints.

It was all very exciting but other issues were brewing in my life as well. I was worried about the direction America seemed to be moving in. I spent a good deal of time photographing on the streets, including city life here in North Carolina and in New York — people, billboards, graffiti and so on. That work became a one man show called "States of America."

As the Persian Gulf War moved into high gear, I witnessed and recorded a new generation of war propaganda and an emerging American nationalism that bothered my democratic sensibilities. Walking through cities and towns

— commercial, industrial and residential neighborhoods — taught me a lot about two things. One was the stark difference both in appearance and behavior between people and places of poverty and wealth, and the other was the limitations of photography to have much direct impact.

Looking for impact, I ended up teaching middle and high school throughout my forties. I would have liked to teach photography from the beginning, but there were no photography positions available, so I taught social studies to 7th graders. The curriculum was Africa and Asia and my first-hand experience as a photojournalist in Africa helped bring history and culture to life. I even took two "field trips" with my students — some of whom had never been out of the county, let alone on an airplane — to Ghana, West Africa. One outcome of the second study tour was a photo exhibit by my

seventh grade students and myself at the Center for Documentary Studies in Durham, NC.

I did end up teaching photography full-time at the Durham School of the Arts. But eventually, I decided to devote my full energies to printmaking again, which is why I built the Woods Edge studio in 2002.

The alchemists implore practitioners of the art to "do their work with true imagination, not a fanciful one." I think they mean to approach their work with clarity of mind and to carry always the sense of higher purpose that any act of creation deserves. For me, brushing sensitizer and pigment onto artist's paper and making images that hold truth and beauty is one way I manifest the energy of creation in my life.



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"Fifty Things You Cannot Do"

Tell the football family that their child probably won't play professionally. Understand and explain to a friend the economic factors of Africa's hunger. Voluntarily stop driving when you are so old you no longer have the hand-eye coordination. Want only one piece of pie. Consistently touch her in that perfect spot. Satisfactorily film fireworks. Actually agree with a lover on what made a movie good. Understand how this very morning someone is waking up next to the person you find the most beautiful in the world and thinking *oh, for pity's sake, not again*. Fix, or damage, France's self-esteem. Keep constituents consistently content. Rationalize the business reason for outsourcing to your laid-off employee. Explain pluralistic thinking to a

fanatic. Successfully explain your boyfriend to your father. Make banana bread with fresh bananas. Make Woody Allen funny ever again. Ever. Win over a college basketball star to the argument that one more year at your alma mater is a fair trade for five million dollars in the NBA. Ever find someone as good as Joe DiMaggio. Paint as well as a sunset. Appreciate childhood during childhood. Stop and smell the roses. Hold back the coming of the night. Argue with the sun. Improve your career by bicycling to work. Not scratch that ineffable itch. Have good plastic surgery. Make mosquitoes or cockroaches go away. Imagine Hell. Fight off the gag reflex forever. Put quality into words and use those words to improve quality. Explain why you love your broth-

er. Teach a child to love fishing on the first try. Read *Finnegan's Wake* in a coffee shop. Truly comprehend China. Taste donuts in a dream. Be actually cool after you're fifty years old. Convince a man who's upset about his hair loss that a good short haircut will fix it. Have imagined that Jose Feliciano could actually cover The Doors' "Light My Fire." Envision a chance meeting in 1955 between Yogi Berra and Albert Einstein. Teach a cat. Say, "Keep constituents consistently content," five times, really fast. Keep your eyes closed when someone says "now, don't peek," and leads you up to the edge of the Grand Canyon. Keep from saying "ya'll" when you move down South. Not deserve two for flinching. Not watch your lover while they undress. Drink Vodka like a Russian. Suppress your discomfort at the urologist. Not wonder what *really* happened to JFK. Sneeze without blinking. Quietly flag a New York City cab. Gracefully eat mac and cheese.

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Rich Ives lives in Camano Island, Washington, and has received grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Trust, Seattle Arts Commission and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for his work in poetry, fiction, editing, publishing, translation and photography. His writing has appeared in *Verse*, *North American Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and many more. He is the 2009 winner of the *Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award* from *Bitter Oleander*. His story collection, *The Balloon Containing the Water Containing the Narrative Begins Leaking*, was one of five finalists for the 2009 *Starcherone Innovative Fiction Prize*.

Alan Dehmer - see pages 12 and 13!

Sergio A. Ortiz of San Juan, Puerto Rico, is a retired educator, poet, and photographer. He has a B.A. in English literature, and a M.A. in philosophy. His photographs have been published or are forthcoming in: *W5RAn.com*, *The Neglected Ratio*, and *The Monongahela Review*. He was recently published, or is forthcoming in: *The Battered Suitcase*, *Poor Mojo's Almanac(k)*, *WTF PWM*, *The 13th Warrior Review*, *Dark Lady Poetry*, and *Writers' Bloc*. *Flutter Press* published his debut chapbook, *At the Tail End of Dusk* (2009). *Ronin Press* will publish his second chapbook: *Topography of a Desire*, due out in May

Although **Phil Juliano** is syndicated in many fine publications, he, nevertheless, shows up in ours as well. Go figure.

Final Tid-Bits:

I'm down to 254, on my way, I think, to invisible. God, I miss sugar. Thanks to Flyleaf Books in Chapel Hill for hosting our Novel Contest awards shindig. After a meal of take-out Chinese recently, I received a fortune that said, "You will be awarded some great honor." Truer words - it is an honor to put together this mag each month for your perusal. Thanks for that. The new edition of the *Chicago Book of Style* says that you may choose to put one or two spaces after each sentence. It's up to you. Isn't that good? I am reading the book that won the particular Bakeless Literary prize for which my good friend Ron Cooper's novel "Hume's Fork" was shortlisted. So far the judges were wrong. I'm just saying. Visit your local independent bookstore, they have air-conditioning and plenty of things to read - I don't want to hear any of you saying, "I'm bored." Got it? Good!

Best In Show

by Phil Juliano





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