

The Blotter

G. M. Somers.....Editor-in-Chief
Martin K. Smith....Publisher-at-Large,
Treasurer
Marilyn Fontenot.....Director of
Development
Laine Cunningham.....Publishing
Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Marketing
Advisor
Richard Hess.....Programs Director
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Advertisers and Subscriptions Contact:

Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:

Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com
919.933.4720 (business hours only!
you may call for information about
snail-mail submissions)

Marketing & Public Relations Contact:

Marilyn Fontenot
marilyngfontenot@gmail.com
919.240.4845

FRONT COVER, "Butterfly migration"
by Beatrice.

Unless otherwise noted, all content
copyright 2014 by the artist, not the
magazine.

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

[c l m p]

Council of Literary Magazines & Presses
w w w . c l m p . o r g

www.blotterrag.com

"January 21 2014"

The old gray-matter ain't what it used to be. I find that it is no longer the razor-edged weapon of recall that I used to wield with pride and aplomb. Niggling facts nudge me towards the conclusion that I need to get on with capturing as much of the past as possible in ethereal-ink: I can't always dredge up the correct word or name in a conversation, I must leave spaces for the things I cannot instantly place. I'm told that this is par for the back nine, which is where I am currently duffing. Nothing to fear, not hardened synapses or brain chemistry breakdown or anything. Well then, what? I think it may have a lot to do with the clutter I currently wade through on a daily basis. Teenagers are far more difficult to stay-at-home-parent than their toddler or grade-school selves. To stay on top of the situation, I devote a greater portion of my sharpness to keeping them on time and on task. It is arduous and all-consuming.

I recently came across an old photograph of a family gathering; the year is 1965. In the picture is everyone from my Dad's side of the family; my uncles and all of my cousins and my Grandma – looking stoic and unhappy that whoever decided it was picture-time was taking her away from either making Thanksgiving supper or cleaning up after Thanksgiving supper – it could easily go either way. Grandpa's working the Kodak, bossing everyone around with settle downs and say cheeses. I am just 8 years old – that's me over on the left-hand side of the photo, in profile, watching everyone else trying to get settled to take a photo containing so many young children. Dad is sitting, not looking at the camera, thinking, obviously distracted in that way that only he can be unless you count me in that Venn diagram of people who can make themselves completely entertained by what is going on in their own heads without any need for outside influence. (That is a genetic hand-me-down if ever there was one.) Everyone else is smiling at Grandpa, hamming it up, handsome, pretty, wonderfully young.

How well do I remember 1965? Third grade. My teacher was Miss Gerhart, who got married over the summer of '65 and became Mrs. Trader. We were independently reading that fall – making lists of books we read. I loved our public library. The front entrance had display windows where they occasionally placed dioramas of different subjects. Truth: children love dioramas! Dinosaurs. Rocks and Minerals. Native American Settlements (still called Indian villages back in 1965). Jungle animals! Civil War Battlefields.

I read biographies, about Daniel Boone and Kit Carson and George Armstrong Custer. They were good books, replete with the fallacies of history that such things had back then. I got in trouble

that fall for claiming that I read "Old Ironsides," until Mrs. Trader and my parents conferred about my advanced reading habits. I later read "God Is My Co-pilot" and this freaked everyone out until I read "The Martian Chronicles." I ran out of good books to read in the children's library. Have no fear, there are lots of good books upstairs in the adult section, and comfortable sofas and chairs that children aren't allowed to sit in. I was, however, allowed to pick a book from upstairs and take it out. One at a time.

In 1965 my best friend David moved away - only two towns over, but to a kid that's an impossible distance. Almost every day we played together, the game we always liked the best: Fighter Pilots for the RAF. Occasionally we were captured and held prisoner in a local *stalag*. We needed to escape. David did all the escape planning on scraps of mimeograph paper from Dad's desk. I did the tunnel digging. Down the stairs on my stomach, around the living room. The tunnel exited into the kitchen for snacks. Later we took this game outside and created a tunnel along the neighbor's boxwood hedge, past the dog-kennel, out into the gutter of the street. It was a good tunnel and lasted for many days of the good war in our heads. The game worked just as well at his house, where we could tunnel into the crawlspace on the other side of the bedroom wall and through the insulation and into his folks' bedroom. When he was going to move, I stole his Corgi model of a Hawker Hurricane, because that's what friends do – we covet each other's lives so much that we cannot help ourselves. My mom or dad must have returned it, probably because my lie that David gave it to me didn't stand up to intense cross-examination. The truth, that I miss playing every day with my friend never surfaced during the trial.

This was also the fall that I first had one of dad's sandwiches. Other kids imitate their dads playing tennis or golf. I watched my Dad make himself weekend lunches, spreading everything around the kitchen counter, cobbling together a Dagwood, and heading off to read the paper – leaving Mom to come into the kitchen later and holler at him to come in and clean up after himself (and then clean up after him.) Now I tried one of these myself – Jewish rye, a couple of slabs of liverwurst or braunschweiger (they are different but to this day I don't know how), a slice of provolone and some Hunts or Heinz slathered on top. Dad also used lettuce for color and crunch, but at eight I wasn't an aficionado of vegetables. It's a hell of a thing having a good sandwich, a sandwich that stands the test of time and taste buds, and quite something for it to be handed down from generation to generation, father to son, in that way that transcends any of the socio-political issues of the day and any value-disagreements that will certainly come in ensuing years. A good sandwich can mend, hold

continued on page 15

We often use Bobco fonts, copyrighted shareware from the Church of the Subgenius. Prabob. We also use Mary Jane Antique and other freeware fonts from Apostrophic Labs and other fonts from other sources.



in the Great State of Georgia!



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.

Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re. same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

*Don't you forget about me,
don't dont*

"Spirit Houses"

by Marsha Temlock

There are doorways to forgiveness between this world and the past, but only certain people can pass through them. What if we had the chance to pass through that doorway, would we take it, and would we get it right this time?

A vial of dirt came in the mail a week after I buried my mother.

Dry-eyed I'd stood by her grave and watched the cemetery workers fill the trench. "Now we can both rest in peace," I murmured.

My brother-in-law took Claire's hand. He nodded to my nieces and the four walked toward the limo hired for the occasion. My sister looked over her shoulder. "Meet you back at the house."

The only thing left to do was pack our mother's clothes in cartons and drop them off at Goodwill. We had already parceled out her jewelry and valuables. Our last filial duty would be listing the house and disposing of the furniture neither of us wanted.

The vial of grave dirt came in a manila envelope lined with bubble wrap. The tube was the length and width of my index finger. It was ordinary loam with bits of clay and, possibly, the carapaces of dead insects. Cousin Eli's handwritten note was wrapped around the vial and secured with a wide brown rubber band. It read:

Dear Sheryl,
www.blotterraq.com

As I was not invited to attend Aunt Miriam's funeral, I took it upon myself to visit her gravesite to pay my last respects. I know you and your mother had your difference. She was a good person and I hope you will, in time, forgive her for any unhappiness she may have caused you.

you keep sending stuff like this in the mail, remember how the FBI went after those guys who sent the anthrax, the less said about my relationship with my mother, the better. I'm sorry she's dead, and I'd like to move on."

"Sorry if I offended you. Look, I have an extra ticket to see La



M. Temlock

Cousin Eli

Forgive her? Twice I threw the vial in the trash and twice I got up in the middle of the night to retrieve it. I put the damn thing in my desk drawer knowing Eli would call to make sure I'd gotten the package.

"Listen, Eli, aside from the fact that you could get into trouble if

Bohème. You interested?"

I sighed. It was impossible to stay angry with Eli. He's always been a little peculiar. Through the years I've learned to make allowances because basically I like him and I know he means well. "Thanks, I said, but I have this monster paper for my course in school admin. Another time."

I suppose after someone dies it's

perfectly natural to dream about them. For days my mother was as close as my breath. One night when she appeared to me, I swear she said, "You can make it easier for both of us, Sheryl. I know you can."

Unable to go back to sleep, I went downstairs and turned on the television. There was a travelogue about Southeast Asian countries. The narrator was talking about religious practices and activities in places like Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam associated with veneration for the dead. He described spirit houses, little shelters that are erected by the devout for the happiness of the Spirits that must be placated less harm come to the living.

By nature I'm not a superstitious person, but there was definite synchronicity in what I was hearing. Could it be that my mother's spirit was calling me, that she was wandering in her post-afterlife journey and that I would make her journey easier if I erected a shrine? And what about the vial of earth? Was that another sign?

Despite the fact that it was the middle of the night, I put on my robe and slippers and went into the garage, the vial of earth

clutched in my hand, looking for a spade among the gardening tools. I live in a gated community in New Jersey called Willow Manor. After my divorce, I left Manhattan and bought a condo with the money I got in my settlement.

I hoped the night shielded me from any nosy neighbor who might be suffering insomnia and began my furtive digging under a weeping willow. In the morning I found some stones, painted them white, and arranged them in a circle. This small act, even if it were senseless, pleased me.

I was in Starbucks working on my paper when Claire called to rant about Eli. "The man is a nutcase," she barked. "He should be locked up."

"Why, because he dug up a little dirt? It's not like Mom's going to

FROM CREATION TO CONTRACT



Laine Cunningham
WRITER'S RESOURCE

Ghostwritten/rewritten over 200 projects

Editor and publishing consultant with twenty years of experience helps you capture attention from top publishers and agents. Querries, proposals, developmental help and more for fiction and nonfiction.

Toll-free 866-212-9805
writersresource.us

miss it," I said lightly.

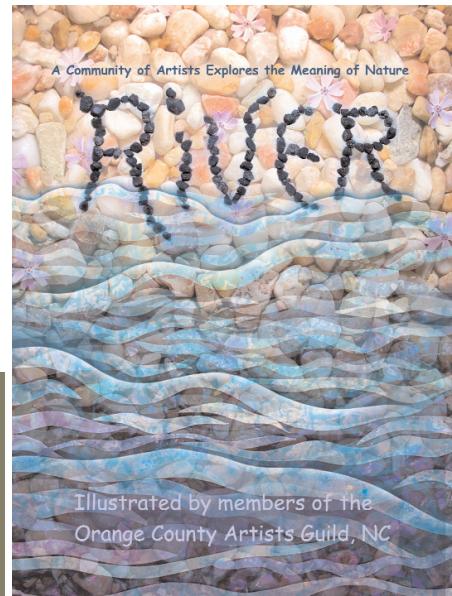
"Good god, Sheryl. What a thing to say."

"Look, Claire, Eli is perfectly harmless. I think you're overreacting."

"I am not overreacting," she shouted. "It's ghoulish is what it is. I'm going to have him barred from the cemetery."

"You can't stop someone from visiting their relative's grave."

"You can if you suspect they're



From Pencil Point Mountain Books
(an imprint of The Blotter Magazine, Inc.)

"River: A Community of Artists Explores the Meaning of Nature."
We'd love for you to go on over to www.paintbrushforest.com and pick up a copy or two. We're pretty sure you'll love it, too.

CLIFF'S MEAT MARKET

QUALITY MEATS
Beef · Poultry · Pork · Lamb
Sausage · Seafood

If we don't have it, we'll order it for you!



We carry beer & wine

Mon-Sat 9 am-6 pm
919 942 2196
100 W. Main Street, Carrboro



SUB ROSA INVESTIGATIONS

Marilyn Fontenot
197 Vickers Road
Chapel Hill, NC
919-904-7442

www.subrosa.editorsproof.com

The Blotter

vandalizing it."

"Eli's not vandalizing Mom's grave."

The woman at the next table stared at me. I put my hand over the phone and stage-whispered, "Claire, can we not talk about this now?"

"Why would he do such a thing?"

"Maybe Eli's pissed you didn't invite him to her funeral."

"Sure, blame me," she cried.

"If the shoe fits." I closed the cover my lap top and began gathering my things. I needed some fresh air.

"Did you throw it out?" she asked.

"No?"

"You didn't?"

"It's bad luck," I said. "I buried it in the backyard."

"No way."

"Look I gotta go. I'm going to be late for my class. Good-bye,

Claire."

"Sheryl, maybe you should to talk to that woman you were seeing."

I let out little puffs of air. "I'm done with Helen. I don't need a shrink. I'm fine."

"I'm not sure. I know you hold certain things against me ..."

"I don't hold anything against you, Claire," I said wearily. "I worked through all that long ago."

"You were always jealous of my relationship with Mom."

My head was splitting. "I've really got to go." I turned off my mobile in case Claire called back and stood on the sidewalk just watching all the people. Everyone was rushing somewhere yet, in the end, they would all land up in the same place.

* * *

In my purse there are five plastic sandwich bags and a spade. It takes me ten minutes to locate our family plot. There are so many different sections and rows it's easy to get lost. I'm wearing

old jeans, a tee shirt, and sneakers. My hair is tied back with a red bandana. I slip on the yellow rubber gloves I use when washing dishes and then I carefully scoop up earth at each grave site and seal each bag I've labeled Dad, Grandma Sophie, Grandpa Barney. I've decided to create altars for each of them. Before I leave, I look for pebbles and place one on each headstone because it's customary for Jews to leave a pebble or twig on the headstone to show visitors someone has been there. There's a clanking from a small earth-mover while workers excavate a new area where they'll be digging new trenches. I hear the blaring of traffic from the highway in the distance. I look up. Clouds bury the sun. I cross my arms over my chest. I should have worn a sweater. The clouds move quickly. I put the plastic bags and the spade in my purse. I drive home feeling a bit like a grave robber.

Each day I got out and check the four little shrines. Foolishly, I left apples as an offering on my father's birthday and some animal foraging for food has scattered the stones so now I can't tell one from the other.

When Eli calls to invite me to hear Carmen, I beg off. "I've got finals next week."

"How did you do on your paper?"

"Got an A."

"See, it's paying off."

"Don't be ridiculous," I say, but secretly a lot of nice things have been happening since I started

452 1/2 WEST FRANKLIN, CHAPEL HILL • 968-9308

paying homage to my dead relatives. They must be pleased because the guy I met on Match.com called to ask me out and I may be in for a promotion.

"Look, Eli," I say, "I've been thinking about sending away for four ancestral spirit houses. The animals keep upsetting the little burial spots out back. You can buy these houses online. Some of them are pretty elaborate but I was thinking I would get some that look like bird houses and stand them in the cul de sac."

"I don't know, Sheryl," he says warily.

When I get them, Eli helps me assemble the spirit houses. I place mementoes inside — a pair of my mother's earrings, my dad's eyeglasses, one of Grandmother's recipes and in my grandfather's an *I like Ike* campaign button Eli donated — that no one can see unless they're looking for something. I feel fairly confident I can get away with my "bird house" project until Mr. Jamison, this old guy who thinks he owns Willow Manor, starts snooping around.

"I am here in an official capacity," he announces when he rings my bell. "It's in regard to those voodoo houses you erected." And then he thrusts the condo owner's manual in my face and points to

a page that has the words 'religious-free environment' highlighted in yellow.

When I try to explain that my spirit houses are not religious, they're meant to venerate my deceased family, "a very common in places like Vietnam who honor the dead soldiers whose physical remains they can't locate," I know I've hit a nerve.

Mr. Jamison stiffens. "I lost a brother in the Vietnam War. I know what he saw and it wasn't spirits. It was the barrel of a gun when he crawled through the tunnels and got his head blown off by the Viet Cong. If you know what's good for you, Miss Stern, you'll remove those spook boxes."

My heart is pounding. I call my sister and ask to talk to my lawyer brother-in-law who agrees with Mr. Jamison.

Claire insists I talk to a rabbi. "It's all well and good to show respect to the dead, but I think you're going about this the wrong way." Claire thinks I'm depressed about Mom's dying. She's convinced "I'm losing it."

Rabbi Klein is very young. He wears sweatpants and a multi-colored crocheted skull cap held in place with two hair clips. I offer him a paper cup of ginger tea and set out a box of Kleenex because he keeps interrupting his commentary—a simplified Talmudic interpretation of the afterlife—with a series of sneezes.

"Rabbi, I don't believe I have violated some Jewish law by choosing spirit houses as my way to honor the dead."

"You are familiar with the commandment Thou wilt have no other gods before me?"

"Rabbi, I am not worshipping a golden calf."

He smiled indulgently. "My concern, Miss Stern, Sheryl, ... may I call you Sheryl?"

"Of course, Rabbi. Some more ginger tea? Or I could make some chamomile if you prefer. It's no bother."

"No, thank you. The ginger is delicious." He tents his fingers into a steeple. "As you know there are those who look for reasons, who don't understand"

CARR BURRITOS

Burritos, Tacos, Nachos and Margaritas!

Mon thru Sat 11am-10pm - Closed Sunday - 933.8226
711 W Rosemary St. Carrboro www.carrburritos.com

CREATIVE METALSMITHS

Kim Maitland

117 E. Franklin St., Chapel Hill
919-967-2037

www.creativemetalsmiths.com

Weekdays 11 - 6 * Saturdays 10 - 5 * Sundays 12 - 5

The Blotter

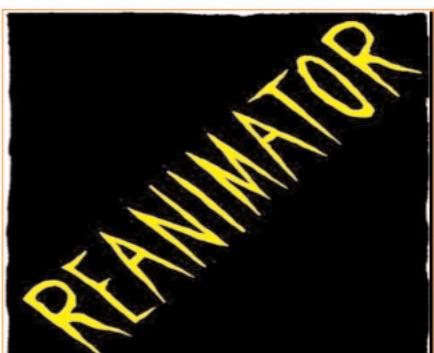
"And you are worried my spirit houses will stir up anti-Semitism?"

"Let's put it this way, there are less obvious ways to commemorate those who have passed on. I suggest you light Yahrzeit candles on the anniversaries of their death."

"But I want to honor their spirit everyday. It is my way of seeking forgiveness in case I slighted them when they were alive." My mother, for example.

"In which case you should fast on Yom Kippur and throw your sins in the water."

"Thank you for coming, rabbi." We both stand up. I shake Rabbi Klein's hand and take one of the cards he carries in his wallet.



344 Patterson Avenue (behind Krankies)
Winston-Salem, NC
336 / 794-6936



www.blotterrag.com

Rabbi Klein is available to officiate at weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs and funerals.

The condo association sends an official from the zoning commission who trumps up some violation and I pay a \$300 fine. I have no choice but to remove the spirit houses.

At Christmas and Chanukah the community is awash with lighted evergreens and electric menorahs. The owner's manual lists new restrictions regarding mangers (no live animals), the size of inflatable Santa Clauses or rein-

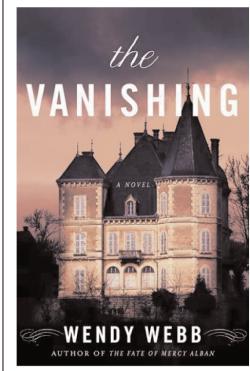
deers and specifically bans ancestral shrines on community property.

I paint my mother's spirit house forest green and add a little perch. On the second-year anniversary of her passing a robin builds a nest inside the box. More synchronicity. I find two blue speckled eggs, one on each earring. I watch the flurry of activity from my window. My mother's spirit is a source of encouragement when the babies are learning to fly.



A graphic design for Christian Thompson's book. It features a black piggy bank with a circular pattern on its back, centered on a yellow background. Below the pig, the title "CHRISTIAN THOMPSON" is in large, bold, dark letters, followed by the subtitle "the hog father" in a smaller, italicized script. Contact information is listed below: 919-593-4567, PORKINTHEROAD@GMAIL.COM, and @PORKINTHEROAD.

A graphic design for Bull Spec magazine. The title "BULL SPEC" is written in large, white, stylized letters that look like they are made of wood or bark. Below the title, the subtitle "a magazine of speculative fiction" is written in a smaller, white, cursive font. Above the title, the text "NEWS: THE MANLY WADE WELLMAN AWARD" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The background is dark.



GUIDE TO LOCAL EVENTS

FEBRUARY 1 (Saturday) Chapel Hill's Flyleaf Books hosts **Wendy Webb** for her ghost/occult novel *The Vanishing*. 11 am.

FEBRUARY 21-23 (Friday-Sunday) MystiCon in Roanoke, VA with guests John de Lancie, Todd McCaffery, and A.J. Hartley.

MARCH 7 (Friday) Raleigh's Quail Ridge Books hosts #1 NYT bestselling author **Kim Harrison** for *The Undead Pool*. 7:30 pm.

MARCH 17 (Monday) Chapel Hill's Flyleaf Books hosts the "Three Nightmares You Can't Resist" tour with authors Kristen Simmons, Mindee Arnett, and Jenna Black. 7 pm.

APRIL 5-6 (Saturday-Sunday) 2014 North Carolina Literary Festival hosted by the NCSU Libraries at NC State University.

"Invisible God Created the Visible World"

by Matthew Maslowski

It was that time of year when the geese return for the winter and grace the southern environs with their majesty, shattering the predawn stillness with syncopated honking and riddling the countryside with their shit. The perfectly camouflaged turds resemble plugs of earth left behind after aeration and press themselves softly into the deeply grooved treads of shoes; yet despite the mess one cannot help but notice and even admire the color – a most remarkable olive drab green. It was Florence's eleventh winter, though she was a Leo, an August child, and therefore still but ten. The four-room cabin she shared with her father was nestled deep in a sagging gully at the edge of the game-lands along the foothills of the Appalachians. The tired mountains bordered the western line of the property, beaten soft over countless weathered millennia. Though lush most of the year, the mountains now held wintry sleeping flora, an endless burden

of dendriform nudity, the deciduous carotenoids of autumn heaped in a brown rotting mass, interrupted intermittently by conifers. Florence missed the green leaves and spent her days during this time in layered clothing.

That morning she woke early, emerging from her makeshift bed of mismatched couch cushions, threadbare blankets, and ripped portions of egg carton foam. She sneezed, then registered the metallic odor of propane. Her nest of bedding was situated in a circle on the living room floor beside the propane heater mounted hurriedly into the thin cabin wall. She stood and stretched, rubbing sleep from her eyes with the knuckles of her index fingers. One crusted granule stuck to her finger. She wiped it on the leg of her flannel pajama bottoms and knelt in front of the heater. The pilot was out. The three ceramic tiles along the back were cold and stained. She could hear the whis-

per of gas hissing through the line. Florence stood and yawned, her breath condensing in the cold cabin air. She shivered slightly and walked towards the kitchen stepping instinctually over the piles of clothes, rotting books riddled with earwigs, and empty food containers.

The box of matches on the stove was empty, so Florence tore a page from a tattered magazine which had been rolled up then stuffed into a rusted percolator on the windowsill. She pushed the knob for the smallest eye on the stove and held it down for the few seconds waiting for the gas to ignite. As the electric igniter popped away Florence looked at the magazine page, an advertisement for scented Maxi pads with wings. She titled it slightly to scoot the glare away from the gloss to read the header: *Don't Let Your Period Get in Your Way!* The center photo was of a woman dressed in all white tennis apparel, tight white shorts, her arm extended in a backhand

SOUTHERN RAIL

Carrboro's Finest
Food, Drinks,
Music & Nightlife

201-e East Main
St., Carrboro, NC

919 / 967 1967
www.sr-nc.com

20% off
Your first haircut
at the new salon
with selected stylists

ALTERED
image
Hair Designers

Appointments: 919-286-3732
600 Foster Street, Durham, NC 27701
www.AlteredImageDurham.com **NEW LOCATION!!**

The Blotter

swing, the tennis racket frozen in air, her toothy smile a perfect bleached-white match for her outfit. The ring of gas bloomed into flame. She dipped the corner of the advert into the blue halo and watched as the flame curled and wrinkled the page, devouring the sentence from the exclamation point back. The pilot lit without incident and soon the tiles of the heater were glowing once again. She held her hands as close to the thin metal grate as she could bear. Her eyes followed the cracked lines along her knuckles, the constant dry cold of winter too much for even her young resilient skin to endure.

The wind picked up outside. The old poplar which hung low over the cabin scraped its dry barren fingers across the metal roofing. Florence listened for a moment, head slightly to the side and eyes staring wide in lost reverie. It was a familiar sound for her, one she always had known, like the sound of one's own breath or the throb of heartbeats with fingers pressed hard in the ears. Suddenly she blinked, only then realizing one sound she had definitely not heard this morning: her father's snoring.

The single bedroom was separated from the living room by a louvered door, hinged in the middle. Florence stepped toward the door and leaned her ear against the dusty slats. Her father's bed (a single twin box-spring with a sleeping bag on top) lay only two feet or so on the other side of the door. She could usually hear his breath even between the violent attacks of snorts and gurgles of his apnea. Yet now she heard only the rush

of mountain air and her poplar branch against the roof. The track which ran along the top of the door frame had been bent long ago making it impossible to pull the partition open the way it had been designed to do. Florence pushed down on the knob slightly to disengage the top from the runner then swung the door towards her, the middle bending awkwardly.

The room was dark, as always, and it took a moment for her eyes to adjust as she peered in from the doorway. The windows were covered on the inside with sheets of aluminum foil, the jagged edges bunched along the sills and edges of the wall, blocking the grey morning light. Stacks of drawers lay under each of the two windows. Sleeves, pants, socks spilled out over the sides. The dresser lingered in the far corner. The spaces intended to hold the drawers were filled instead with liquor bottles lying on their sides, the colorful metal tops poking out like buttons on a doll's overcoat. All the walls were bare except for a small four-inch frame hanging over the bed. Inside the frame was a tattered cross-stitch in red thread, flowing script which read *Jesus Wept*. The bed was empty.

Florence felt a slight stab of worry. It was not altogether odd for her father to be out and about without her, but it was indeed an anomaly for him to be about so early with the first blush of full dawn still the better part of an hour away. She had not heard him leave. He would have had to step over and around her sleeping place to exit through the front door. The only other possible

means of egress were the windows and those had long since been painted shut. Maybe he had been woken by the extra chill and also noticed the pilot light was out? Maybe he had just run out to the side shed, down by the spring house to gather logs? Her worry grew with an ever-increasing sense of stillness in the small cabin. The wind had waned outside and her poplar branch had noticeably ceased its reassuring stroking on the metal roof above her. She would bundle up and try to catch up with him. He would be proud that she had already noticed the pilot and had fixed it. But first she needed to use the bathroom.

The commode flushed as usual but the tank did not refill. Florence pulled her trousers back up and twisted the faucet handle. A splatter of water spat into the sink followed by the sound of gurgling pipes. The well pump switch must have frozen shut again. She finished dressing and stepped out into the grey mist of cold mountain air. It was too early in the season for the first snow, though she could make out the powdery dust at the tops of the taller mountains in the distance. Crab grass stiff with frost crunched underfoot as she made her way around the backside of the cabin. The well pump was hidden under a fiberglass approximation of a small boulder. Florence worked her tiny fingers under the lip of the fake boulder and lifted with all her strength. The cover rose slowly and eventually tipped on its side, revealing the blue cylindrical pump housing within its hollow. Her finger lifted the plastic inset and flicked

the tiny metal servo three times. On the third the switch toggled and she heard the pulsing whir of the pump for just the few seconds it took to pressurize the system. She imagined the toilet faithfully filling its tank, glad to be alone, as if saving face from its prior malfunction.

Florence made her way to the spring house. Built long before even her father was born, the tiny wooden structure stood only a few feet high and straddled the narrow creek that cut along the eastern edge of the gully. In the summers they would place watermelons inside to keep them cool and crisp. The wood pile was stacked on the far side of the creek under a lean-to. Her father was nowhere in sight.

Now Florence ran up the path which cut over the creek towards the duck pond. Her breath quickened as her tiny lungs ached under the stain of the cold air. Twice she ripped through unnerving spider webs which she brushed from her face with an open palm. Thin branches of saplings barely her own height smacked against the unclothed skin of her reddened face and hands. At last brush and trees gave way to the small clear-

ing around the pond. Florence stopped her run four steps from the tree line and scanned the banks and clearing with wide eyes, moist with tears from the cold and exertion. Seven geese stood in a loose huddle to her left. Their heads dipped and bowed, rising quickly. One honked, then others joined. She took a few steps closer to the bank of the pond where the cat-tails and wild wheat were tall and brittle. The geese made other ghastly noises now, their collective warnings having gone unheeded. Florence glared at them for a moment, hating the hissing of their beaks and ruffling of feathers. After one last scan of the clearing Florence flung herself back towards the tree line. Within four strides she was in a full panicked run back down the path, back towards the cabin, her footfalls punctuated by the incessant honking which cut through the forest with crystalline clarity. Florence wiped a bead of mucus from her top lip with the edge of her sleeve and imagined where her father might be waiting - maybe sitting on the porch with his hat pulled low and pipe billowing, wondering where she had been all this time; or in the

kitchen, boiling water to pour into the foil pie pan with pin holes holding coarsely ground coffee; or by the spring house loading split logs under his arm for the cabin. She thought back to the events of the morning, from her first conscious thought of the cold cabin, the pilot light and on, revisiting her steps to tease out any details or insinuated information she may have missed. During this examination a thought bubbled to the surface that was so immediate a concern that she slowed pace to a walk, her hand held as if to cover her lips but the fingers not touching the mouth: she had left the fiber-glass pump cover off the well pump.

Florence flew towards the cabin. She caught the edge of the creek and followed it along the far side of the line, watching through the jarring bounces of her footfalls for any shape or sign of her father on the porch. She scampered past the spring house, around to the back and skidded to a stop. The cover was missing; it was not tipped to the side as she had left it. As her mind registered this fact, her eyes worked over the ground. Where the well pump should have been was now

Best In Show



The Blotter

clear, undisturbed ground, like a wound healed without scarring. She spun around to gather her bearings. The cabin still stood behind her, the poplar above it, its branches swaying slightly and caressing the metal roof, inaudibly at this distance. The creek there to the left; yes, the old stump rotten in the middle with insect decay; the slight rise in grade to the right before the shoulder of the dirt road. Florence walked closer, knelt and extended a trembling hand to the earth, palming the spot and half expecting the ground to give way like a thin layer of ice over a puddle, the pump somehow underneath. But the ground was firm, unbroken. She grasped a tiny clod and brought it to her face. The loamy scent of cut earth wafted past her partially clogged nostrils. She wiped the tear that dripped from her duct to the tip of her chaffed nose, leaving a streak of moistened soil across her reddened cheek.

She burst through the front door of the cabin. The foil in her father's window was gone and the bedroom glowed in a harsh and unfamiliar light. Her father's bed was still empty, his shelves and bottles as they were, but the small wooden frame holding the cross-stitch was no longer there. Florence cupped her mouth and shut her eyes, squeezing confused tears onto the tender skin of her cheeks. She slowly opened her eyes, knowing the frame was there, she had just missed it, she was expecting things to be different, the pump and the fiberglass housing shaped like a rock was also just outside,

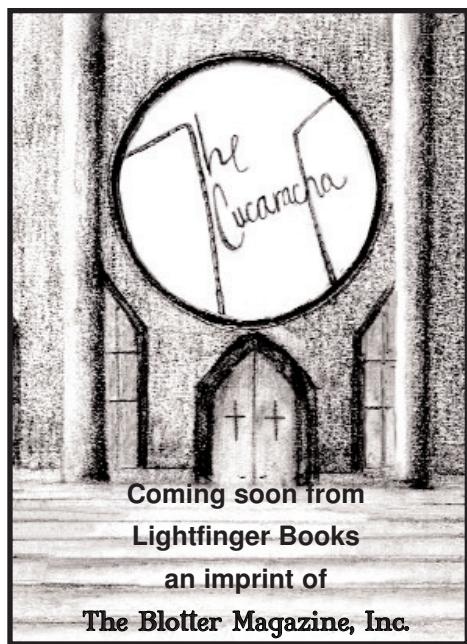
where it had always been... But when she opened her eyes the wall was a blank slate of off-white cream. Stepping up on the box spring, Florence sniffed and steadied herself, coughed a bubble of phlegm from her throat. A string of saliva clung to the left corner of her mouth, swaying in her labored breath. Her fingers ran along the wall. There was no discoloration from the frame having been there, no scrape marks on the paint, not so much as a hole for a tack nail.

She stumbled into the living room. Her bedding lay as she had left it. The propane heater dutifully burned away, its three tiles glowing red with darker spots of carbon dancing behind light bent by heat. Florence walked mechanically to the kitchen. Her bloodshot eyes drew an unfocused bead on the curled linoleum at the base of the oven. The tiny ten-year-old body swayed under the weight of exhaustion and fear. Blinking, she turned to the window sill. The percolator sat propped against the filthy pane. She pulled the coiled magazine from its center and it unfolded in her hands, opening to an advertisement for scented Maxi pads with wings, the woman in white, the tennis racket, the header. With all her might Florence threw the magazine against the wall and ran out of the cabin, knocking over garbage bags and losing her footing on old clothes and books torn at their spine.

Her little hands clung to the railing of the small front porch as she took in the deepest breath she could manage, her

lungs burning from the cold and aching from the strain. Then she screamed with eyes shut tight. She screamed louder than she could ever remember, shrill and sustained, until the air ran out and with it her knees, and she sunk to her rump, cross legged, arms above her, still connected to the railing by her fingers. The forest, the woods returned no sound. Not even an echo. Florence cried herself out and as the catharsis dampened her initial panics, she realized that all of this material confusion had clouded the real trauma, the only element of her world whose absence could violate her simple yet attenuated sense of order: her father was missing still.

She stood and rubbed her palms against her jeans. He might have gone down to set traps. Why hadn't she thought of that before? The season was starting soon. She walked through the door, intent on adding an extra coat layer to venture out past the duck pond to the border of the game-lands, but her feet froze at



the threshold. The room – her living room, her sleeping area – was completely bare. Gone were her cushions, blankets, and foam. Gone were the books of rotting pages, bags of garbage, food containers, and clothes. The walls were smooth as egg shells even where the propane heater had been just moments ago – plucked out like a tooth from gums and replaced with more wall, as if it had never been.

The woods scrolled by in her periphery as Florence ran as fast her legs could carry her. The sounds of her gasping breath interrupted by sobs and wordless utterances muffled the crunching of brush and twigs underfoot. She had long left the path behind and forged a new trail, one whose trajectory was dictated less by a path of least resistance and more by an unreasoned mechanical hysteria whose sole compass was terror.

She was startled suddenly by the eruption of sounds from the air, just above the canopy. Florence looked up, glancing to direct the next few steps and then searching the sky again to see them. And there they were: seven geese cutting a V-shaped swath across the midmorning mountain sky, the honking erratic and unceasing. She yelled back at the mocking fowl, the bouncing of her steps jarring the pitch each time a foot hit the ground, until the toe of her shoe caught a twisted root and brought the rest of her crashing against the earth. She lifted her head gradually, the calls of the geese fading with distance and memory. Before her the giant trunk of a poplar rose

from the winter ground. Her eyes followed it, the first fifteen feet or so branchless, until they came to rest on a small wooden frame carefully nailed to the bark. And inside the frame a cross-stitch, the red thread forming letters barely legible from her vantage, yet the shape of the words unmistakable. And young Florence dug

her fingers against the old moss-laden bark caking her chipped nails with a smear of chlorophyll green and black mud as she sounded out the words in her troubled mind, *Jesus Wept*.



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterra.com

I was never late to class when I attended college – never so sure of myself, my standing in the classroom – so to have “late to class” dreams seems ironic and appropriate. In this one, I need to shower, have undressed and wrapped myself in a towel, am prepared to pick one of the two – yes two - bathrooms in my room, but stop to look out the window across the way at some sort of doctor’s office. In this office are lines of what appear to be students of both genders of all shapes and sizes going through physical examinations, like you might have when joining the military. They are all taking their clothes off and allowing doctors to poke and prod, subjecting themselves to rather rude, intimate peering. I realize that I am both one of the rude ones and at risk of being late for class. Oh, and still in need of a shower.

As I turn around to use the bathroom, my room is invaded by students – again men and women – and they have already taken over the facilities, at least of shower number one. So I sneak around to the other shower – who would imagine that a student’s room would have two?! – and enter. Empty it appears to be. I hang up my towel go to turn on the water, but at that instant the shower is not only on, but the stall is full of women already showering. Rather than being the prurient super-bowl of collegiate achievement, it is as embarrassing as it would be in real life.

Strangers are not sexy, nor are they forgiving. They do, however, understand being late. Moving out of the way of the shower stream, they tell me to hurry up and to not use all of the hot water. I wash myself in silent chastity.

Secret - Chapel Hill, NC

"The Educated Class at Play"

by Michael Andreoni

Couple A: Work Work Work Kids Kids Kids

Couple B: Work Work Work Kids Kids Kids

Couple C Work Work Work Work Work

Couple A Work Work Work Kids Kids Doggy

Couple B Oh Doggy! Doggy Doggy! Doggy Pics! Doggy Pics! Doggy pics!

Couple A Doggy Pics! Doggy Videos! Doggy Videos! Doggy Videos!

Couple C Kitty Cat! Kitty Cat Pics! Kitty Cat Videos!

Couple A kitty cat

Couple B Doggy! Doggy! Doggy!

Misanthrope I read a story that's doing strange things to me

?

??

???

Couple A Tired

Couple B So Tired

Couple C Exhausted

Couple A Home Kids Kids Kids Work Work Work Doggy

Couple B Home Kids Kids Kids Work Work Work Doggy

Couple C Home Work Work Work Work Work Kitty Cat

Misanthrope Well, goodnight. I don't know when I've had more fun.

continued from page 3

together when everything else is coming apart.

One more thing about the picture: Mom sits on the floor near Dad, smiling at the camera. I remember Mom got up each morning and walked to the train station to commute to her job. 1965 was the year cities begin burning. TV and the newspapers tried to explain to pale New Jersey suburbans what was going on and why. My own vague awareness of race was that my favorite baseball player was Willie Mays and that he had skin a different color from mine and that had nothing to do with anything. Does an eight year old's love of the game and a man who plays that game with a fierce joy define "by any means necessary?" The following summer, Dad would bundle us into the VW bus and drive into the smoke of Newark's riots to fetch Mom from her office at the State Commission for the Blind, where she taught young blind people of all colors how to type. The irony of this was lost on me for many years.

So I can't rant with the best of them anymore. I sound feebler, less rapier-witty. I fall back, apologizing while I try to find the tip of my tongue and extract the word or idea that I misplaced. This is an old man's task, like correcting one's own grammar or mispronouncing a word until someone hands you a dictionary. Is this my Hell? Am I coming apart at the seams, destined to grumble and grouse without rhyme or reason? Will I eventually sit in the corner with a conical hat on my gray head, a permanent frown on my lips, growling at injustices like a toothless badger?

Perhaps railing aloud at the gods is a young person's game. I can rely, instead, on my memory's capacity to arrive when it so chooses, and capture its golden threads when they are spun, on paper. There is nothing wrong with that. If a word does not show itself when I want it to, I will set a place for it and move on, trusting it to arrive on its own time.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

CONTRIBUTORS:

Marsha A. Temlock's work has graced The Blotter's pages before. She teaches English at Norwalk Community College in Norwalk, CT. She is the author of **Your Child's Divorce: What to Expect ... What You Can Do** (*Impact Publishers*.) Her poetry, fiction and nonfiction have been published by the *Weston Publishing Group*, *Chicago Suburban Women*, and most recently, *the Write Room*, and *Airplane Reading*. She also contributes to various online websites dealing with family relationships. She was a columnist for the *Westport News* and *New Canaan News Review*. Currently she blogs about divorce for the *Huffington Post*. Marsha divides her time between Manhattan and Westport, CT.

Matthew Maslowski grew up in the mountains of North Carolina. He is currently studying creative writing at Queens University of Charlotte and is scheduled to earn his MFA this spring, but that date of graduation is contingent on Trader Joe's not running out of coffee. Matthew lives in Raleigh, NC.

Michael Andreoni's stories have appeared in *U. of Chicago/Euphony*, *Pif*, *Calliope*, *Defenestration*, *Ducts*, *Crack the Spine*, and other publications. He lives between town and gown near Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Phil Juliano has been cartooning for over twenty years. His comic strip, "Best In Show", is a visual interpretation of his daily life and struggle to find his place in society. He's a beer snob, baseball fan and avid outdoorsman, usually all at the same time. "Best In Show" is currently being featured in several newspapers and magazines and is syndicated by MCT Campus where it is distributed to college and university newspapers across the country. To see more of Phil's work go to www.bestinshowcomic.com

WOMEN'S FLAT TRACK ROLLER DERBY



SATURDAY
FEBRUARY
22

★ DORTON ARENA
NC FAIRGROUNDS RALEIGH

Saturday ♦ Double Header ♦ Doors 2pm
OPENER 3:00pm ♦ HEADLINER 5:00pm

ADVANCE TICKETS, GROUP
DISCOUNTS, AND MORE INFO

CAROLINAROLLERGIRLS.COM

Up To
\$4 OFF

ROLLER DERBY TICKETS

2 Ways to Save!

1. Redeem Online by entering **2014BLOT** in the promo code box at CarolinaRollergirls.com. \$1 OFF each adult ticket, up to four (4) tickets.
2. Bring this Coupon to the Box Office for \$4 OFF one (1) adult ticket on game day.

No substitutions or rain checks. Cannot be combined with other promotional offers. Limit one coupon per person. No cash value. No copies accepted.
Expires 02/22/2014.



photo: Joshua R. Craig

look what we found: a way to help The Blotter, not spend any money, and surf the Net all day. check this out.



GoodSearch

YOU SEARCH WE GIVE™

① Choose Your Cause

Enter your charity or school below and click Verify.

② Search

Search the web just as you normally would.

③ We Donate

We'll donate to your cause for every search. Yes, it's that easy!

powered by **YAHOO! SEARCH**

who put the bomp in the bomp sh bomp sh bomp

Search

Please use this site honestly. Fraudulent searches will result in your charity being delisted.

WHO DO YOU GOODSEARCH FOR?

enter your charity here ... **The Blotter Magazine**

Verify

Enter the charity or school you support here then click "verify." Next, search from above and earn money for your cause!



whenever you want to search the Web for something, go to "www.goodsearch.com", and type in "The Blotter Magazine" under "who do you Goodsearch for?" for every search, they'll donate a penny to us. and pennies do add up, eventually. give it a try.

xxooxoxox - The Blotter Gang