

# WATERSHED



*Watershed*

Volume 17, Number 2

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## *These Two Messengers*

The room blurs tonight like nights  
I spent pleading for insight at the convent  
the crucifix glowing in too much candlelight and yearning.

I stroke the velvet above Jonathan's tailbone  
and he holds my finger at the edge of meaning  
groping for someone to know out there.

I grieve and savor this at once because  
my mom missed all this.  
She didn't touch me much  
but she would have kneaded these plump thighs.

I feel lost between these two messengers.  
She had squeezed my hand too  
but on the other side of meaning  
right before it ends.  
She had died that next morning  
but that night, hardly there  
she grabbed my hand  
without a word  
and almost didn't let go  
as if trying to press into  
that terrified palm  
something that would outlast  
her moving on out of being.

When years later I stood staring up  
at God touching Adam at the Sistine Chapel  
I knew she had outdone  
Michaelangelo,  
gone beyond God.  
And I ran out of a church in Italy  
because the mosaic was too green  
without her.

*Diane E. Imhoff*

## *Chalklines*

It wasn't the climbing blaze roses  
or the finches popping millet seeds  
it was Jonathan  
all over me  
as we lay on the outdoor sofa  
screaming.

It was the skin,  
the closeness:  
He was calling me out of my head  
out of my books.  
Come howl with me.

So we howled and howled  
like the wolves we had heard  
the night before.  
And I was as close to him  
to the world  
to some sense of being as I could be  
having forgotten all that long ago.

I wanted to be a primitive,  
to be without boundaries.  
I didn't want to know that  
the sun and the lupin and the  
patches of monkey paw weren't me.

I wanted to play again  
and know that  
the only darkness  
is when you can't see  
your hopscotch chalklines anymore  
and you know that soon  
your mother will call you  
into the light.

*Diane E. Imhoff*

*It is good to be with you  
in the morning*

to hear your roar  
to feel wet sand under me  
have flies check out  
my gear and hand  
have driftwood and debris  
all around me.

I would like to shove  
the songbird down my throat  
steal the seagull's anxious call  
for tough times.

It is good to be with you  
in the morning,  
to peer through  
that tiny rectangle of blue light  
in the huge curved fetal rock  
near Point Bonita.

If I slide through that belly button  
if I hold my breath at high tide  
and crash through  
will I find myself back in a womb,  
protected by the curve of  
my mama's knees  
as she sleeps at night,  
or do the gulls  
circle the same on that other side,  
scavengers that they are!

Even so  
that light shining out of such a huge  
black mass of resistance  
makes me believe  
there are ways through.

*Diane E. Imhoff*

## *In Which Holly Fescue Tells a Story About Her Mother*

The women my mother would bring home were small and frail. Their place would be at the end of the bed in her room while she lay at the head and talked. I'd come home from school and say hello and introduce myself to the woman smoking a cigarette in all the blankets with the stereo on and the windows open letting in cool air. My mother liked to play with hair, so she sometimes did that while we chatted a bit about my day.

Father came home around eight, after dinner, just in time for the news, and he didn't go to bed until four when something woke him up on the couch. He never questioned my mother on how she spent her days and she never told him. I didn't speak his language so we never talked about anything anyway.

This is a woman friend of mine, she'd say. We met at a social the other night. Isn't she swell?

Nice to meet you, she'd say. Mom looked sleepy and ragged, sometimes pale as if she were incredibly sick, green, sometimes, too, but the room had an airy sense to it, a clean, anti-sickness feeling that reminded me of peaceful things. And eventually I began to recognize the women my mother brought home, and they remembered me, too. I was 13 when I started drinking Jack Daniels and smoking, and 13 when I stayed for a small talk with my mother and a woman friend. I stood in the door and she asked me questions. I told her I was in ninth grade and about all the classes I had as she nodded and smiled. She said I was pretty as a rose and told my mother I had a beautiful name. She reached down for a fifth of JD and drank some, then offered it to my mother who drank, too. My mouth watered as I thought of my own fifth, and I left to drink in my own room in the garage, smoking cigarettes and listening to music while doing my homework.

They were thin and frail looking women, always, and my mother was fat and short, but you could tell she was really a beautiful lady. She had a pretty smile. I started talking more to the women, each different but all the same, all pretty and talkative, smoking and drinking, as my

mother's hand lay upon their heads. I'd counted hundreds in all my life, I thought, but then saw a pattern, and knew many of them. I was being welcomed by them more. They spoke to me in front of the soft music and invited me in to sit down. I was 14 and seeing a boy whom I slept with most nights, and drank and talked with, too. My mother and her women friends knew about him and invited me in to ask questions and talk. I got on the bed and crooked my elbow for something to lean against. The room was pale and airy, clean with cigarette smoke and the fragrance of flowers. The woman friend offered me a drink of her liquor and I took it, all the while my mother playing with her hair, tugging and slipping it through her fingers, smiling faintly, looking beautiful with a cigarette in the other hand. She didn't ask me to stop drinking or leave, but lay there in the coolness of her room, staring out the window to the backyard and talking.

A woman friend held my hand and looked at it once, telling me I had wonderful hands and my life line was long, though it split off and faded in an indescribable way. She said it was a complex hand as she turned it and told me about my future. I said it was my favorite hand, and she agreed that it was a good one. I have scars all over that hand, and some calluses, too, and I wore a big ring a boyfriend had given me. She traced lines on it and turned it over and over. Your mother has a long life line too, she said, and my mother laughed, covering her mouth with her hands and closing her eyes. The woman let go of my hand and stretched. I asked if I had soft hands and she told me, yes, very soft. I sat up and left, saying goodbye. I called my boyfriend and he came over to sleep with me. He didn't know about the women my mother would bring home.

No one ever told me they loved me but some said I was a smart girl and a good person. My boyfriend never said he loved me, but he treated me in a fine way, as if he did. When he didn't come by, I didn't mind. Every day I drank and smoked and did some homework. My father did the dishes in the morning before work and the house was always kept clean, though I never saw anyone do it.

Some afternoons I would come home and go to say hello to my mother and she would be curled up next to one of the women who was invariably awake or not. I only

whispered hello and maybe got a quiet smile in return as I shut the door. I didn't know my mother was dying.

When I was 16, I came home and found my father in the bed instead of my mom and one of the women she brought home. The thick, pale comforters and flowered pillows were arranged so he looked like he was inside a heavenly pit. He was sleeping. I said hi to him, but he only lay there breathing. I was half drunk from the day at school, tired and curious. I lit a cigarette and sat on the bed next to him, running my fingers through his hair until he woke up. When he opened his eyes and saw me, he cried very quietly and held a pillow with both hands until his knuckles were yellow. He didn't know how to talk with me but he spoke anyway. He said so much I was there for an hour, just listening and only understanding that my mother had gone. I asked him what he was going to do, but he didn't say anything. I looked at one of his hands. It was rough and coarse, the fingers hard, short and knobby. There were cuts that he flinched at when I touched them. I left his hand alone and rubbed his back until he fell asleep again, staring wide-eyed at one of the white walls. I went into the garage and called my boyfriend, asked him for good company because my mother had just died and I was lonely. He came over and we drank on my bed. I didn't go to school for a long time, and don't remember what I did to fill the days that passed until the women my mother brought home started coming by. I don't remember a funeral or service. I remember flowers, though, and hot food, the liquor they brought, and sometimes they would lie with me and pull softly at my hair when I couldn't sleep. I had left my father in that room for a long time before I checked to see if he was still there. He wasn't when I did open the door, half expecting a corpse, stiff and putrid across the bed. The room was cold, though, the bed made and windows open, and I shut the door solidly, going back to my room in the garage.

Quietly, one afternoon, I was lifted by my underarms and carried away. I could smell the smell of my mother and the women in the room, and feel the cool air that came from the open windows there. I heard cars going and people talking, one incredibly insistent and

involved with how beautiful I was, how she would take me and make sure I was happy. All the rest I don't remember, I never found out who she was or where she took me. I was asleep and drunk, and in my mind's theatre, I remembered the parts played out of my mother and the women she brought home.

*sts*

## *The Day I Stopped Singing and Decided to Hide*

My mother's bony finger pointing to the parlor. Me swimming through a sea of lime green shag. And something pounding up my throat. Blue feathers in my mouth. My eyes on little Janet's hot brown thighs. The tortured neighbors begging me to shine the noise away. Begging me, like Jesus, to shine for them each day. To grind the saw-tooth moment into sand.

But I am just a little man—my mother's little man. I spit the feathers out between my teeth. I feel the roll of thunder up my throat. The beat of angel's wings beating me to death. And just before I fall, I whisper, "mother, no."

*Bob Garner*

*faces*

below the big  
blue face of day  
the emerald heat  
of cottonwood

the tattered velvet  
afternoon  
the ivory shade  
of bone

an orange cat  
with orange eyes  
the empty grin  
of clapboard teeth

the tar-black face  
of night  
the hat-black highway

*Bob Garner*

*just hank*

like a slab of turkey  
on a gun-gray  
guerney

just hank

hospital blue  
no teeth

a shower cap  
and plastic booties

sandwich bags  
for worried minds

and restless feet  
just hank

a gummy grin  
thumbs up

before the brutal  
pin

just hank

to pose the question:  
who'll chip the paint  
away

and brush it on  
when hank  
is gone?

*Bob Garner*

*Mall Kid*

I'm Kim

a doll  
a wall  
a wild mod  
mall kid

I walk low  
kid all  
a wild mad id

a dim mild  
mall kid

I milk  
a mad old dad

kill law  
do ill  
add a kid

mid odd ilk  
a ma

a mall kid

*Dave Golz*

## The Date

"Tell us whom you picked, Bob," says Tim Sessions, the host of the show.

"I picked Marlene," says Bob, and Marlene appears on a screen to a round of applause.

Tim says: "Hello, Marlene. Welcome to *Healthy Love*."

"Hi, Tim. Thank you. I'm so happy to be here," she says, jiggling her pom-poms.

"Now we'll get back to you in just a sec, Marlene, but first, Bob, tell us how things started off on your date."

"Well, I called Marlene and asked her where she'd like to go, and she said she didn't care much for bars or restaurants, but that she might like to go jogging somewhere out of town, along the river, with maybe a picnic later, especially if we'd have fresh fruits, whole grain bread for our sandwiches, no fatty lunch meats, and no mayonnaise, ("Ah-hah's" and scattered clapping), and that suited me just fine."

Tim nods approvingly and smiles up at Marlene on the screen, then turns again to Bob. "What did you think of Marlene when you first saw her?" he asks.

"I appraised her realistically," says Bob. "She seemed to be a very radiant being, full of life and love. I felt very comfortable meeting her, and didn't experience any rushes of desire for her, no connections to old patterns of need, no tensions." (Chuckles of recognition; some clapping)

"Were you nervous when you first arrived?"

"Certainly, there is fear as long as we are growing. But I know that the way out is through, and I pushed on through it beautifully, knowing I would learn from stepping into the next moment that life had to offer me." (Claps and whistles)

"How about you, Marlene?" asks Tim. "How did Bob strike you?"

"Well, Tim, I liked the way he was dressed in clean white Nike sweats and comfortable energy shoes. ("Oohs" and whistles) I knew he was the master of his life. Everything he needed seemed to be within him. When we

talked, he communicated his thoughts and feelings clearly and effectively, and I told him I felt I could nurture him, without feeling threatened by him, without having any need to manipulate him. We are obligated to develop ourselves, no one else."

"What did you think of that, Bob?"

"As I told Marlene, abundance is my natural state of being, and I accept it. The more I give, the more I have to give. I'm relaxed and centered. I feel blissful just being alive. We both soon knew that we had no compulsion to rescue each other. If something were to trouble Marlene, I could trust her to handle it, and be available for support. "  
{Applause}

"Well, what happened at the river, Bob?"

"We jogged at our optimum levels for oxygen processing, checking our pulses periodically. Then we walked for a while, and later, at a resting pulse-rate, we settled down for a fat-free picnic lunch. We talked about our lives, and opened our hearts."

"How attractive people become as they open up and share their feelings!" says Tim. "There's really a lightness about positive people...I'm sorry. Go on, Bob."

"Marlene said there is no one more loving than the person who can own his own power, and I had to agree. It's not the ability to get someone else to do what you want them to do, I said, it's the ability to get yourself to do what you want to do. She said she knew she was the cause of whatever feelings she might have, so there was never a reason to blame anyone else for her troubles, if she were ever to have any. She said that as she attended to what needed doing in her life, any anger she might have toward others would completely dissolve. I took a risk, which I try to do every day to expand my comfort zone, and asked her if we might make love in the shelter of a little grove by the river."

"Bob was really good at out-talking any negativity that might arise in himself," Marlene chimed in. "He speaks to himself in a very loving voice. And he accepted me as I am. I believe acceptance is the antithesis of denial and control, don't you, Tim?"

"Yes I do, Marlene. So did you agree to make love?"

"I feel free to admit that I allowed myself some confusion in my decision. It is through confusion that I am

able to come to clarity. Then I trusted my impulse and said yes, knowing that whatever happened as a result of my decision, I would handle it with confidence. I place myself on the up side of any situation, and I had thought of all the positive things that might happen if I chose either answer. If it didn't work out, I knew I could change it. I accepted this responsibility. (Applause) The grove was a safe place, and it was a lovely afternoon for outdoor sex. And Bob assured me that he had a condom, though I had some with me, too. " (More applause)

"Didn't any conflict arise during the course of your date, Bob?" asks Tim.

"Of course," said Bob. "Conflict is a necessary part of any developing relationship. We disagreed about what music to listen to while driving back to town. I wanted KSFT, the soft-rock station, and Marlene wanted KAGE, the new age sound. She read me through what I said, listening to my emotions, and she said she was hurt. I knew she really meant she wanted to be important to me."

"How'd that work out?" asks Tim.

"We negotiated according to a 'win-win' model. We defined our positions without having to defend ourselves, acknowledged each other's emotions, and explored alternatives with self-respect. Eventually we agreed to listen to KSFT, and to put on a Windham Hill tape when we got to her apartment."

"So how did your date end, Bob?" asks Tim.

"As we said goodbye at her door, we freely gave each other our 'Thanks.' We both noticed the wonderful things that had happened to us that day. Indeed, a miracle had seemed to happen." (Applause)

"Let's see whom the audience picked for you, Bob," says Tim. A tally flashes on the screen. "They picked Marlene! 56%! (Applause) Would you like to go out with Marlene again, at our expense?"

"I trust my subconscious mind in matters such as this," says Bob. "And I would! I am free and happy about this choice, no matter what Marlene decides."

"How about you, Marlene?"

"Oh, yes," she says. "It's all happening perfectly!"

Marlene steps out onto stage, (cheers and clapping) and she and Bob freely give each other a supportive hug, as Tim signs off with, "That's our show for tonight, but we'll see you next time, with another couple hoping to create...*Healthy Love!*"

*Dave Golz*

My boots slip  
in the snow.

On the ridge  
I follow snowprints  
moving through  
manzanita and pine.

I stop  
struck  
by sheer white.

From tall slim  
pines  
on a higher ridge  
A bird calls—  
Notes tumble to me.

I climb silk  
sounds  
through cold space  
cut clean

to you.

*Pamela Spoto*

## *Crossing Rosebud Creek*

stood the tired hooves of horses  
waiting at the water's edge

dust rises  
swept into specters  
high with the wind  
of far off dances  
the saddles are worn and scarred  
riderless from

the sudden volley of an ambush.

stood the wild hooves of horses  
free from the wooden corrals  
and branding irons

dusted by the feet  
of painted warriors

on the edge of water.

*Mike Waltz*

*gringo*

This man is white  
colorless skin  
that holds a soul.  
his fathers have been slavers,  
makers of war,  
lovers of themselves.

There is the possible  
in every being  
for mystic dances,  
and spirits  
to move beneath the flesh.  
like the wild grasses  
that sway steadily with the wind,  
it moves them  
as one green ocean.  
The heat comes  
to turn them dry  
for fire to burn them as a single  
brilliant sun.

This man has taken off his skin  
and is standing in  
a field of wild grasses  
waiting for the wind,  
for fire,  
and for rain.

*Mike Waltz*

## *The Hushing*

When I dream  
there is one who walks  
the rain-washed stones  
of a garden.  
Roses brush her hands as she passes,  
while the bees  
stay silent  
to hear her breathing.  
Deep in her eyes  
is a landscape of amber green  
like forests in the face of sunset.

I wait for the songs of dusk  
to lead me to the soft lapping of a meadow brook.

Soon the sun will finish sleeping,  
and wake me  
    because  
    in dreams,  
    worlds move slower.  
    The snowing mountain  
    stands high above us  
    as we pass between ourselves,  
    drift in clouds  
    fall to earth as rain.

*Mike Waltz*

*re-birth*

they are running over women on the freeways  
black stockings, red pumps  
all over the road, leather mini-skirts  
and lace bras, diced on the center divider.

the cars are all different, men and women  
behind the wheel, none of them noticing  
the casualties. the daily news refuses  
to announce the statistics anymore.

in the ice plant, up the hill to the street,  
naked women run, stripped of their social  
graces. they run with wonder on their lips  
and gray bags, beneath their eyes.

and no one looks up from the traffic, not one  
man or woman stops to clothe them. few  
understand that they are marvelous,  
shimmering like dewy leaves in the new sun.

*Melanie Smith*

## *Marvin and Edna's Fine Life, Etc...*

She stapled his ears and kissed his nose. Marvin farted loudly. "Go!" she screamed. Marvin Fernscher snatched his aluminum briefcase from within the undooored gas over. Marvin bolted through the open front door of the mobile home, snagged his bare right foot on the head of a nail protruding from one of the porch steps, fell to his knees and hands at the bottom, got up, continued running. "Cocksuckers! Motherfuckers!" shouted Marvin over and over as he ran down the hill.

She watched him disappear.

Edna turned on the oven. A two-foot ball of fire shot out and onto her face. Edna's hair went up in flames. "That motherfucking son-of-a-bitch! I'll kill him!" Edna ran her head under the kitchen faucet until the fire was out. "That cocksucking, motherfucking, two-balled bitch! I am going to kick his goddamned fat ass when I get my hands on him!"

Edna smeared Vaseline all over her charred bald head and face and got out the cake pans. "Do I have any goddamned eggs?" she screeched, and opened the fridge. "That goddamned asshole ate all the goddamned eggs again!"

Edna sat down on the floor and lit a cigarette.

The angel had been speaking to her for about five minutes before Edna realized it. She was customarily oblivious to delicacy. Especially in her own home. It was one of those nude little cherubs like Edna had seen fluttering in a painting over her neighbor's fireplace that time she had run out of sugar and didn't feel like driving to the store so she went next door to borrow some knowing that she was really taking it and had no intention of replacing it like she knew she was supposed to pretend to be intending in order to get some. She hated her neighbor. She hated all of her neighbors. She hated the very idea of neighbors and all the sappy and fake courtesies and small talk that words with the root "neighbor" made her think of.

"Edna...," the angel continued. Edna's eyes wandered about the cluttered kitchen as the angel talked. They fixed upon the hundred or so glass jars jammed onto the shelf below her sink. "Labels...," she thought fiendishly, "they

need new labels." It was entirely unsuitable to Edna that her jars had labels on them that had been put there over two weeks ago. She recalled fondly placing each sticky label on the front of every jar she owned. "*Pickles*," she mused. "*Peaches, Sauerkraut, Fig Jam...and Radicchio*," though she knew she would never fill that particular jar. "*New Moroccan Corn Chowder*," Edna had made up that name herself; she had never heard of such a thing, but she liked the way it sounded. "*New Moroccan Corn Chowder*," she whispered to herself. She knew she wouldn't change the name of that jar for a long time. "*Seven Peas Corn Medley*," she read. Corn had been on her mind for weeks now. There was a whole series of corn jars: *Corn Stew, Iowa Corn Jam, Pickled Corn and Red Cabbage, Edna's Best Western Creamy Corn Butter*...And her eyes stopped on her favorite of all the corn jars—*Baby Corn Crystals with Ham, Carrots, and Rocket Lettuce*. One of these days, Edna was going to make that; one of these days, that jar would be full. Edna fell onto her back from the jolting ecstasy of wishful thinking. She rocked her head from side to side repeatedly, repeating, "*Baby Corn Crystals with Ham, Carrots, and Rocket Lettuce*," each time one of her flushed jowls touched the cold linoleum.

"I need water!" bellowed Edna, as she jumped to her feet and barrelled down the long narrow hallway towards the Dog Room, deftly hurdling all objects in her path. Edna knew she could find a drink of water in any number of places within the safety of the Dog Room. She reached quickly into her right hip pocket and unsnapped the key. She was glad she was wearing her lavender stirrup pants. Synchronicity seemed to be operating in Edna's life at this most necessary moment. Had she been wearing any other pair of pants, the Dog Room key would not have been so close at hand. In the black bell-bottoms, for example, the key was snapped to the inside of the lower left hem, a far reach in a situation such as this, demanding a split-second response; the red boot-cuts had a key snapped to a discreet spot, awkward to get to in a hurry, inside the inner right thigh part of the pants, and so on...Edna, upon inserting the key into the keyhole and quickly turning it, felt the familiar electric rush of good fortune pass through every molecule in her body.

"Water!" she screamed, as she fell through the doorway, down about four feet to the rocky ground below. There was no water. There was no Dog Room. Someone had obviously stolen the entire Dog Room and its fifty-two skinny matted poodles in cages, along with all manner of supplies, including little round stainless steel bowls containing water, during the night while Marvin and Edna were sleeping. It seemed that someone had acutally sawed the room right off the mobile home and taken it somewhere. But where?

Edna's mind worked quickly. "Who would want to do this to me?" she whined, as she lay face down in the rubble. "Ow! My face!" complained Edna loudly, as she sat up, picking the gravel from her cooked and now-bleeding cheeks. "What the hell is your problem?" her neighbor screamed from the porch next door. "Oh, go fuck yourself!" Edna retorted. The neighbor retreated to the inside of his house with a slam of his huge wooden front door. "Fuck you, so-called Jerry!" she yelled as she heard the door bang shut. "Fuck him," she mumbled. "He'll never get his sugar back at the rate he's going!"

Edna's face dripped blood and her legs wobbled as she tried to stand. "My glasses! Where are my glasses?" shouted Edna, suddenly standing erect and panic-stricken. Edna's vision was extremely poor without her black cat's-eye glasses. She had had to go without them on several other occasions, once when she had left them on the floor of one of the stalls of the ladies' bathroom at the Regal Suburban Ultramall and didn't have them returned to her for exactly two weeks, and, as Edna described it whenever she told this particular story, "It was a nightmare." She had walked from the bathroom, not realizing that she couldn't see, until she found herself face down in the fountain in the center of the Food Court, screaming and flailing amongst the floating Coke cups and cigarette butts, with ripped-up shins from having hit the brickwall with such, shall we say, blind force. Predictably, the thirteen days that followed went pretty much the same way, with Edna finding herself in similar awkward and painful situations, like the day she lost her right pointer finger in the park when she mistook that biker's pit bull for a red squirrel and offered it a peanut. By the time of the current glasses incident, Edna simply could

not bear the loss or injury of any more body parts.

"I just can't stand this any more!" shrieked the fed-up Edna, looking for her precious black spectacles, crawling around on what used to be under-the-house debris, heretofore traversed only by field mice, bugs, black widow spiders, and an occasional adventurous corn snake. She periodically stopped crawling to dab at her tears and bloody cheeks with the hem of her favorite blouse. At last, after almost an hour of vicious and frantic searching, Edna found her glasses. She found them in the last place she looked—a most unlikely place—wedged almost out of arm's reach down a gopher hole. Almost, but not quite far enough to escape her fatty clutch. "Aha!" cried Edna insanely, as her right hand clipped onto the elusive eyeglasses, pulled them from the hole, and triumphantly held them skyward, all in one wickedly quick move. "*Gott sei dank! Meine Augenbrille!*" she trumpeted feverishly. Edna couldn't believe her ears—she had just said, "Thank God! My eyeglasses!" in German, and Edna knew that she didn't know a lick of German...that is, until now. What was happening to her?

She was changing, that's for sure. Edna could feel the stirrings of change in the very depths of her soul. Ever since she had read that story in *Hidden Desire* last week. Edna had begun to notice things happening inside of her that she had never felt before—things that felt funny and squirmy...but nice. Oh yes. But *nice*. That was the only way Edna could describe it. "*Nett...*," she moaned...

to be continued...

*Christine Szuggar-Martinelli*

## *Recipe for Need*

In the year of her blooming,  
her mother would guide her hands  
into the spongy blend  
of yeast and flour,  
kneading the passage  
of autumn  
into winter.  
Snow lay curled  
and heavy off the eaves  
as they wrapped doughy ends  
back into the middle  
and began again.  
Stories were told.  
Lives discussed.  
Love and history  
rising in the pans.

There were tunnels, later.  
Not more than most, but  
long and dark nonetheless:  
kneading shoulders of men  
who would not love back,  
wrapping herself around  
dreams that could not come true.  
She would cry  
over fallen loaves,  
muse over uncooked centers,  
worry over glistening slabs of dough  
resting flat in the pans.

Still,  
all who entered her scented  
kitchen would wonder  
at her relentless attempts:  
a shifting of ingredients,  
textures teased

with amber honey tears,  
secrets baked into golden crusts.  
Loaves brought forth  
by hopeful hands.

*M.E. Parker*

## *Night Writing*

Inside these walls  
the night stands apart.  
It is waiting softly,  
black fluted edges  
against the perimeter  
of my writing  
light. The room glows  
butter  
melted by candle flame;  
darkened pine knots  
punctuate  
wallboard sentences.

I am alone  
with my basket of words.  
Tangled nouns and verbs  
become  
knitted lines,  
falling onto the page  
in odd-shaped  
sweaters.

In the wider light of  
morning,  
I will ask you  
to  
try them on.

*M.E. Parker*

## *A Poem From Kitty*

Last night at Kitty's  
she cooked me poems,  
bread that puffed  
up like clouds  
and peppery sauce  
that simmered slow  
on the stove top.

She told me in detail  
about the broccoli,  
its beginnings  
with the Asians  
at the farmers' market  
and the way  
it spiraled  
on the stalk  
like pale green castles.  
Her hands traced  
her words above the  
broccoli's flowery top  
like blind ones  
not touching  
even the softest part  
of her fingers.

By candlelight we drank  
Bengal tea  
with milk and honey  
and spoke of friends  
nearby  
and Christmas packages  
yet to wrap  
and work and the rain  
and death  
and husbands,  
until the bread  
and the tea  
and the husbands  
and the broccoli

settled  
into a warm haven  
in the darkness  
of our bellies  
and rose skyward  
into winter  
like a forgiving  
moon.

*Kathleen Kirby*

## *Making Sips*

We talked of death  
you on the couch  
the window glass  
chilled behind you.  
Stitch by stitch  
you told me your vision  
transforming  
leather squares  
of purple and blue  
and the color of roses  
into patchwork globes  
plump with pellets.  
Sip by sip  
I watched  
your fingers move  
while I drank  
orange blossom tea  
from a porcelain cup.

*Kathleen Kirby*

*Monologue from  
"I Guess I'll Just Learn to Drink Whiskey"*

[Holding her latest manuscript in her hand, 14-year-old Nolie gestures in a sweeping motion to indicate her family members on stage (Mother, Matt, Hilda, Dan).]

NOLIE: You see, they've been holding this against me all along, because they know I know something they don't. Like right now, I'm watchin' my little brother Dan over there, wanting to throw scissors at me 'cause Mama ain't home and all he knows how to cook is mashed potatoes and canned corn. Look at those purple bags under his eyes. Eight years old. But I know because of this paper I'm holdin' in my hands the worst part hasn't even happened, you see, because right now, this very instant, because of this paper I'm savin', I'm time-connected. I'm connected all the way up to the day my little brother's 32 years old and some 16-year-old boy steps out of a car and shoots him—kills him for no reason—just when he was startin' to get the hang of life. And they all hold that against me, that I know the double meanings of things—like I'm stealin' somethin' from each day passin'—and I do. I do.

That's why I'm gonna be able to laugh the day Mary Blakeley comes over to comfort Mama about Dan—she sits down next to her on the couch for awhile then suddenly out of the blue she stands up and says, "You know, Rosemary, I was standin' in line down at the grocery store this mornin', right behind John Williams—I was just lookin' at him and I started thinkin'—if God wanted to take someone, why didn't he just take him?"

Of course, when the time comes, I can't just burst out and laugh or anything—I couldn't even explain why it sounds so funny. But I can chuckle to myself later on, in a painful kind of way. And that's what they won't allow for around here, right now. The pain. That's why little brother's eyes are always purple. Matty can cut you down and feel better, and Hilda can just go out. But me and Dan gotta live with it. Or start drinkin' that gin old Lucien passes out like spritzer—

*Jennifer McLeod*

## *My Father's Axe*

My father was good with the axe—in fact, that's how he died, chopping wood, a finale really more appropriate to my mother's side of the family, the Klecmans, which means Kleckmann or woodsman, which also means there was an Austrian snuck into the Slavs somewhere in my grandfather's past. And, now that I think about it, my father wasn't the only one who was well versed in this shining concept. I mean, for instance, my brother Willie had an axe, which is really a guitar; and my brother Dan's ice skates were more like axes on the feet of babes before he learned how to use them; and my sister Hilda must have got the axe several times at her places of employment—not only that, but I recall she was also pretty deft at chopping off somebody's head whenever she spoke to them, but I guess that's ruining the blade of a good argument (in full swing).

But, as I was saying, my father was very good with his axe, and used it on several occasions even more memorable than the final one. Once he went on a spree, full of Ezra Brooks, of course, and chopped up all of his fine wood-carvings because my mom remotely hinted at his preference for hanging around home drinking over looking for work. He made a furious five-limbed figure as he strode about the huge back yard with the long axe in his grip. First, to my fullest sense of amazement and wonder, he chopped up my favorite sculpture of his—a tree stump with a wolverine or martin or something just at the point of emerging from the wood. I used to love to watch him work on it, from a great distance, because it seemed like he knew exactly where the little creature was hiding the whole time he stood there freeing it. And my father was wonderful to look at, when he was engrossed in something else. When he finally swung the axe to it, which was quite impressive in itself, long and lean with a shining edge, I was almost certain he took the wolverine off first just to spite me, but now I guess it was to spite himself.

He also chopped up the yellow woman that same day, which I loved almost as much as the animal stump. She was just standing there, a yellow woman with blond hair and yellow skin and all dressed in yellow, made of some

strange wood that wasn't supposed to be carved, that had fibers running through it so she looked textured like some of the best fabrics nowadays. She was beautiful, really, but gone in a silvery flash, before I knew her.

I don't think my dad chopped up his smooth, curving coffee tables of redwood; I think they actually sold long before. What he did chop up to everyone's dismay though was the side of our house! I think that's when all of us got worried and found hiding spots all over the yard. I remember the slit-shaped axe holes stayed in the side of the house for years afterwards. I have no idea why. And after he did that, my dad went back to the work shop where he spent most of his time anyway.

But, as I was saying, the very best time was one day in summer when I was sitting at the piano playing "Maiden maiden tell me true, what can live without the dew" and I heard something ominous on the roof—except mixed in with the music, I couldn't even tell it was a noise. It could have been my imagination at that point. But I did get up from the piano and wander around the living room for a minute, listening and humming. My family was around somewhere, probably gearing up for the daily yardwork assignments, which I didn't like because one time I poked my eyeball on a very sturdy twig while weeding in between the hedges and got in trouble even though it bled.

Anyway, I went outside on the front porch and looked out at the dreaded hedge row. Suddenly, I heard it, the unmistakable axe sound, coming from directly above me. Oh God, he was at it again, but then, what did I expect? I listened to it carefully. It was the steady, methodical, purposeful, heavily philosophically declarative chop of a man who had not only drunk too much, but who had also arrived at a lifelong understanding and, having taken a position, could now only take action, by chopping down our favorite tree in the front yard, the one that shaded the porch and housed the beautiful little brown sparrows and medium-sized blue-egged robins all year round.

I remembered that my father had threatened to chop the tree down before, but I never thought he'd really do it, though I wasn't shocked or anything, just disgusted a little. So I listened to him work, cursing here and there at an uncooperative branch or a limb just out of reach. Now, I'm

not even sure why he was on the roof instead of the ground, where the tree ended up as a wooden chair, but I stood there on the porch in my shorts and bare feet, feeling how hard and smooth the cement was with my toes, thinking how it would ruin his axe if he tried to chop it.

Then all at once, the chopping stopped. I heard a yell or a groan or something, but I blanked that out immediately. What I really remember is suddenly seeing these huge drops of bright red blood coming down and making splats on the sidewalk, like paint, and like rain. And I could hear each drop splatting, but sort of thudding, too, soft wet red raindrops on hard grey cement. They sounded like they would soak into the cement, but they didn't, forming these little tiny bright red puddles instead, and all from my dad's leg, as I soon learned from my brother Matthew, who was the only one that didn't feel the need to hide until the event was over.

I smelled and tasted nothing, I think. My eyes were too filled with the red drops from the rooftop. I only remember staring at them. I never even saw my dad get down and manage his way to the hospital in his blue stick-shift pickup. I just stood there, amazed as hell that such an enormous thing could happen to him; but I may as well tell you, I was not only filled with this amazement, and fear of how it would all turn out, but I could also feel strains of excitement, curiosity at the drops, and even the slightest imaginative hopefulness that this time he'd really done it—to himself, of course.

Of course, my father made it through that day like he did every other, not saying much about the fine axe job he'd done on his own leg, and of course none of us dared venture into the subject, except in our own minds. I always wondered how many of us were hoping that day the way I was, and about the range of disappointment that must have spread secretly, like ink, behind every impenetrable facade. Sometimes, I would sit and think about it, in the new wooden chair that grew up out of the earth between the front porch and the sidewalk, rubbing my heels along the bottom where the knots rose up in protest. I would imagine where the sparrows might have removed to, and the robins, and, sometimes, I would imagine bright red drops, falling down like rain.

*Jennifer McLeod*

*I also know a man*

as I said  
to my friend  
in disbelief

because he is  
a good listener,  
they don't talk

really, they don't  
ever talk anymore  
to each other

and why not.  
riding in our  
new car

my friend said  
for Christ's sake  
watch

where you're driving  
it's a rumor, it's  
just a rumor.

*Matt Orendorff*

## *Yerba Buena*

morning road  
north out of Half Moon Bay  
the night's chill lingers  
but my window is down  
scents of sweet herb  
and salt tang  
monochromed in stone  
mount hard edged, burred in lichen haze  
to sky like porcelain  
the air's a perfect medium for sense

clean as bone  
remote as eternity  
a gibbous moon  
matches my speed

last night, on the trip out,  
south through the valley to the bay  
my daughter trusted sleep beside me while  
this moon rode my shoulder  
so near I heard a cosmic wind  
brush across her surface  
so densely luminous  
the bronzed light stained my careful hands

swimming the inner atmosphere  
portal to portal  
she trailed her wake  
while I rested  
in an unfamiliar bed  
shuddering to the rhythms of the sea

now  
becalmed in this  
sweet breath of morning  
her ancient hulk unreadable

floats  
like the memory of my dreams  
into day

*Miftah Hartwell MacNeil*

*Wheat*

your stomach  
is a wind-warmed prairie  
of slowly waving wheat

i thresh this grain  
on the floor of you

i separate the chaff

and lie kicking in  
the soft  
golden grasses

*René Wellman*

Behind my grandparents' house  
was a long narrow  
lawn, lush  
in summer and  
resting dark green  
chairs on the center  
of its generous back.

Beside the garage grew  
mint my grandfather  
used to flavor cool drinks  
in cut glass, sweaty and  
fit with bright terry-cloth  
sleeves which pulled tight  
on the bottom like socks.

Tasting of water, smooth,  
green and bitter, their drinks  
glistened and chimed, their  
voices chorused with Scotty and Yo,  
remembering the antics of youth  
and of children gone now  
and far away.

Slipping between their chairs  
out of one lap and onto  
another, I'd hear only tales  
of laughter, taste only green  
bourbon words, on wooden chairs  
in the shade of an elm  
near the thorny trees of my birth.

*Rachael Andhra Christman*

## *How to Deal with Chemotherapy-Induced Alopecia Without Pulling Your Hair Out*

It starts with your pubic hair.

You notice in the shower. Funny, you think, I thought it would start with my head. You check and re-check, pulling your head hair (cut short, to lessen the shock), searching your pillow case, examining your comb. Nothing.

Not that you *want* your hair to fall out. No! You've moaned to your therapist and sobbed to your cancer support group how afraid you are of losing your hair. How silly you feel, it even takes the lead over fear of being ill. How trivial! You feel so ashamed.

An anthropologist in the group says, of course it's not silly. Hair is a powerful symbol; it's natural to fear and mourn its loss. Your therapist points out there are many who refuse to take chemotherapy because of the hair loss, and *you're* doing it, look how brave you are!

"Yeah?" you sniffle, and stick out your chin, feeling braver already.

You ponder the social and personal significance of hair, and lack thereof.

You try to imagine yourself bald. It should be easy, just look in the mirror and pretend you don't see your hair.

It's impossible. You've never seen your bare scalp, so how can you imagine it?

So you look for other ways. You go in search of pictures of bald women like Sinead O'Connor and Sigourney Weaver, brave women who look good without hair. You find nothing but postcards of Buddhist monks. Close, but no banana. You buy them anyway.

You shop for scarves and hats. You think, how silly of me, I shouldn't be spending all this money on vanity (you're still stuck in your shameful phase). You cry to your therapist about how hard you've worked to appear normal and now you're going to stick out like a sore thumb, people look twice at women with headwear.

You consider a wig and remember how anxious you got the last time you tried on wigs. Save that idea for later, if the scarves don't work.

You watch a video produced by a woman who took

chemotherapy and lost all her hair. You learn how to tie scarves in various styles and create different looks. You also see that the woman demonstrating the scarves is bald. Ah-ha! That's how you'll look: old, and odd, but not really ugly. Definitely better with a scarf *on*, though.

So you practice tying scarves. You buy more headwear, still feeling guilty about spending money on "vanity," but you justify your actions by telling yourself these things will help you cope.

You go to the eye doctor for new glasses. Change is inevitable, why not change as much as you can? Embrace it! You get a totally new style of glasses. A big improvement.

You get out your old dangling earrings, the biggest ones, and buy even more. Big, bright earrings you never would have worn before. You're feeling brave!

By now you have several new hats and a whole drawerful of scarves, even a new outfit. You're ready. You wait, almost impatiently, for your new look to come. Not long now. Tick, tick, tick. You think about dressing up as Humpty Dumpty for Halloween. Tick, tick, tick. "Hair today, gone tomorrow!" you joke with a friend. Tick, tick.

All of a sudden it creeps up on you. You're idly chatting on the phone with a friend about trivial things, and you twist a finger in your hair. Out come several strands. How funny, you think, here it comes, and I wasn't even expecting it. Quelle surprise!

At first it's gradual: you have to tug to get the hair out. A couple days later you notice you can't get it all off your body in the shower. And whenever you touch your head you have to brush off your shoulder. You feel like you're dripping hair all over. What a mess!

By this time you can see your scalp. You're sweeping up all the time, and you wear hats whenever you go out. You find hair everywhere. But it's not only your hair. Strange things may be happening all over your body: nausea, sores, dry skin, achiness, tiredness. You feel wounded. You feel like you're falling apart.

You see happy people and wonder just what the hell it is they're so damn happy about. You write letters to your friends asking if God is punishing you. You scrawl big, angry pen strokes in your journal. At night, you weep endlessly into your pillow until you fall asleep.

Within about a week you've had it. Most of your hair is gone, why not just shave it off and vacuum your house? Here's where it gets interesting. You see a new part of yourself. Of course, it's not really *new*, you've just never seen it before. You feel naked, vulnerable. And ugly. But you get used to it, and pretty soon you're not hurrying to get away from the mirror. You pause and study yourself. At first you think your face looks like an accident, a set of features pasted onto an egg at the last minute. But look closer.

Notice the shape of your skull, feel the smoothness. See and feel the dips and slopes, the ridges, lumps and bumps. Notice your hairline, how it arcs above your face. Identify old scars, and remember how you got them. Marvel at the way your ears hook in at the sides.

Spend a frustrating afternoon figuring out how to do eyebrows. First they're too light in color, so you darken them. Oops, too much, you look like a slut. Take them off and start again. Damn! Paint and draw eyebrows four times until you begin to get it right. Your morning routine is definitely lengthened by all the make-up and scarf business you do to look better. But it's worth it, you think, at least you won't scare the neighbor kids.

Actually, you like your new look: it's a whole new dimension. Draw pictures of yourself bald. Declare to your cat that she's being *way* too fastidious about her hair; it is, after all, so...so *transitory*. You have reached a higher level.

Delight in the sunlight sinking, unhampered by hair, into your head. Sense the heat from the table lamp as you sit reading at night. Notice the feel of a towel brushing against your scalp, the coolness of your pillowcase and sheets. Explore the sensation of touching your bare head, feeling your body heat escaping, the coolness of your fingertips. Feel the air wafting, flowing across your skin as you move through a room, or even turn your head. Be grateful you can feel.

Dream of your hair growing back, perhaps a different color, maybe even curly. Wake up and stroke your fuzzy, bald head, happy in the knowledge that your hair *will* grow back, but not just yet; you still have more to learn.

Mary Beth Dion

## Women

### I. Emergence

I emerge from the shower with a new body.  
All of my taboo hair is gone, I feel that now  
I am a woman.  
I am lighter, and weaker.  
Shaving felt like a magical half-hour crash diet,  
Smooth removal of the androgenous scrim.

My fantasy is this:  
Tomorrow I will get into the shower, take up my razor  
And remove another layer, the next day another,  
Like a well-insulated whale.  
A week from now my body will be perfect.  
Then I can stop, or I can keep on going,  
Here I am Kate Moss, here I am Twiggy, here I am barely,  
Here I am not at all.

As I smooth lotion onto my brand-new legs  
I realize why this hairlessness is required.  
It is a deeper level of nakedness,  
It is a constant undressing.

### II. History

I see a powerful woman.  
She is a big black woman.  
Her clothes are flashy, sexy.  
She wears big jewelry, bright colors, generous lipstick,  
Her careful hair has taken hours.  
She moves loosely, occupies space unashamed.  
She lays indisputable claim on her space, squatter's rights.  
The power that lives in her flesh comes from the time  
When strength was the only asset a woman could have,  
When many children could be borne and taken away,  
And you had to turn your back and keep on picking.  
When the more space you took up the harder it was  
For them to pretend you weren't there.

She has a pale bloated shadow, a white woman  
Whose fat doesn't have the substance of body.  
She hasn't grown into it, she tries to move like a small  
woman.  
Her wash-n-wear hair allows her escape from the mirror.  
The only requirement of her history  
Is to occupy as little space as possible.

### III. Resplendence

On the bus, a woman is putting on lotion.  
The big bottle sits next to her.  
First she smooths it on her elbows, then her arms and  
wrists,  
There is a light gland in the dark skin around her wrist.  
Then the knees, the thighs, the calves and ankles,  
She takes off each shoe and lotions one foot, the other.  
To stretch the skin over her cheekbones.  
Then begins again,  
Elbows, arms, wrists, knees, thighs, calves, ankles, feet, face.  
She has strong woman's thighs,  
She puts on lotion, mile after mile.

She borders on transformation,  
Becomes pliable, sensuous to the touch.  
She has no hair on her body, no rough skin, no callouses,  
Not a single protection.  
She becomes an open clam, a lobster with no shell.

Then again, she prepares well for the world,  
Slicked up, she can slip away from any grasp.  
She is elusive and safe as a bar of soap.

As we near my stop she puts away the lotion.  
She rubs some Vaseline on her lips.  
She stands up and tucks in her shirt,  
Fastens her loosely hanging belt,  
Pulls a handful of jewelry from her pocket.  
One by one she puts on the rings, four, five, six of them,  
Big gold earrings go into her ears, like armor.  
She fastens the watch onto her wrist.  
The bus pulls to the curb.

I want to see the final effect  
But in the confusion of bodies  
I end up in front of her.  
I walk slowly, hoping she will pass me.  
Finally looking over my shoulder I see  
She isn't there.  
She has gone another way, slipped from my grasp.

I picture her walking,  
Resplendent with the power she has gained  
From her public performance, from her exposure,  
The way sexual revelations gain power among virgins.

*Gypsy J. Shrepel*

## *Hat*

I try to hold on to things  
like the hat, made in Guatamala

the first one was pink and silver  
it fell off my head in the park

the second one was green  
it fell off my lap in a theater

Is my heart breaking, that  
my honeymoon hat  
and  
my anniversary hat  
slip so easily away?

*Gypsy J. Shrepel*

## Apple

I stand at the sink peeling this red apple  
separating the red from the stark white  
and it smells of fall,  
of birthdays and Halloween and the coming of  
Thanksgiving.

The open window blows cloudy fall-breath at me,  
this prelude of winter tosses the still-green trees  
the chill reminds me that my sweater is warm.  
In the silence of my house I hear echoes of children's voices,  
I bear the heritage of proud worn women  
with calloused hands and many children  
who stood at their sinks peeling apples,  
letting the long red strips pile in the basin.

*Gypsy J. Shrepel*

## Contributors

*Rachael Andhra Christman* writes poems, has dogs, goes to the movies, has a good family. Her house is a mess and she is too busy, but she is mostly happy.

*Mary Beth Dion* lives in Chico

*Bob Garner* looks like everyone else his age.

*Dave Golz* left a career in research and teaching geology and came to CSUC to "live merrily and trust to good verses." He has been a Curator of Paleontology at the L. A. County Museum of Natural History and taught at The University of Wyoming, Northern Illinois University, and CSU Sacramento. He leads workshops with a clinical psychologist part time. Although he has always loved literature, being a student in an English Department is a new adventure.

*Diane E. Imhoff* lives in Chico.

*Kathleen Kirby* lives in Chico.

*Miftah Hartwell MacNeil* is a native of the central valley, but has lived in Hawaii and Virginia as well. She now lives in Chico with her husband, an economist, and three of their five children. She is working on a book about grieving, caring for her daughter who is dying, and practicing Tai Chi Ch'uan.

*Jennifer McLeod* is a graduate student in the English Department at CSUC. One of her stories won an English Department award and was nominated for an Intro Award from the Associated Writing Programs.

*Matt Orendorff* grew up in Chico and doesn't like to talk about himself.

*M.E. Parker* has lived extensively in coastal and southcentral Alaska. She now resides in Chico, working as a registered nurse in an emergency department, as well as part-time at CSUC's School of Nursing. She enjoys most outdoor activities, including weeding her garden.

*Gypsy J. Schrepel* recalls, as one of her fondest early memories, finding an old journal filled with her mother's poetry. She was seven or eight at the time, and thinks that's what inspired her to begin writing her own poetry. She will graduate this May with a BA in Economics, but her true loves are music and writing.

*Melanie Smith* says that anything exciting in her life she has tried to write down, and sometimes the excitement lingers in the words.

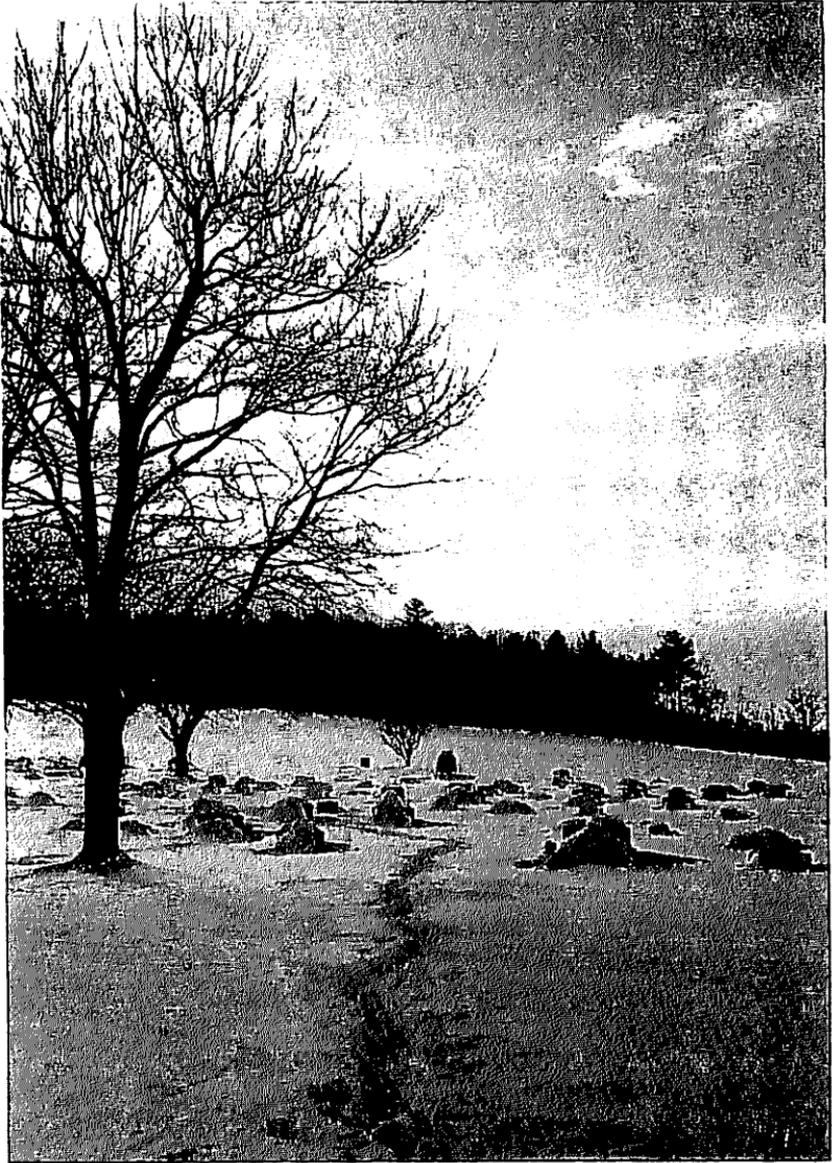
*Pamela Spoto* is a poet and teacher.

*sts* is short and likes it that way, thank you very much.

*Christine Szuggar-Martinelli* is a graduate student in English and teaches Freshman Composition at CSUC. Her most recent "find" in fiction is Tom Robbins' *Skinny Legs and All*. She wants to say "Hi, Scooter," to Tim's hamster.

*Mike Waltz* was born in Martinez, CA, attended Diablo Valley College, and is finishing studies in English and Creative Writing at CSUC this spring.

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*Where my father will be buried*

*Rachael Andhra Christman*

Watershed was set in 10 point Trump Medieval. Page make-up by Phil Quinn. The text was printed on 70# Sundance Claro Tan (a recycled paper) by the CSU Chico Print Shop.

