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THE
HITCHLIT REVIEW



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Poetry

An Atheist Searching for God

Joshua H. Baker

In his room, in the dust goblins beneath the box springs,
 in rings of light moisture-refracted around a winter moon.
In Christmas presents, plastic Easter eggs, breaks between the sermon
 and Sunday School classes.
In a showerhead's hot water as medicine, shaking off hangover grogginess
 and thoughts of depression.
In the discovered perfection of geometric proofs, schoolboy crushes,
 ice storms that cancel school for days.
In eyeballs rolling horizon to horizon, skin pulled taut by fear, arm out,
thumb up,
 pretending to be a man on I-90.
In lottery tickets, personal ads, all you can eat Vegas buffets,
 four seasons of indulgence.
In LSD, mushroom, coke, morphine, anything at all
 smoked, shot, snorted, swallowed.
In running, then driving away after open hand of drunk lover smacked face,
 starlight night ruined.
In the Bible, new age books, dogeared self-help manuals,
 a half empty bottle of Jack Daniels.
In 15,000 miles of odometer clicks, cutting desert dust, left arm browning,
 chasing non-existent planetary Eden.
In white paint ceiling cracks that widen after midnight
 when back sweat ticks to sheets, alone.
He searches with infrared goggles, microscopes, celestial charts, treasure
maps,
 and finally, a bloodhound with yellow teeth.

When the sun burns out, as it will five or six billion years down the star's
hydrogen burning line, earthlings will not receive the funeral notice for
eight minutes. They will be busy, anyway, posing in vinyl lounge chairs,
wearing short skirts, driving cop-attracting sports cars, eating freeze-dried
everything, sure of their dogmas and destinies, keeping bloodshot eyes on
their horoscopes before the physical horizon, actions creating elegies.

If the Soul Were Immortal

Bray McDonald

If the soul were immortal why torture ourselves with a body
or hurt ourselves with meaningless dreams?
Why would we chemically battle time and the elements
in a suit of vulnerable hide?
Is this a vermiform stage of human evolution where the tomb
is a chrysalis from which we emerge colorful and winged?

If the soul were immortal how would we handle
the perpetuity of forever?
How could we correspond to all those other ethereal selves
adrift in an eternity with no Cartesian coordinates?

How would we process our thoughts and desires
in a state of undefined vagueness
with no solid foundation to which we could cling?
Would there be enough space to fulfill our time
if the soul were immortal?

On the Residency Porch

Rupert Fike

When Gabe lays out Spengler's theory
 (dinner dishes cleared, second glass of wine) -
how Western culture peaked long ago
 and has been in sad decline ever since -
I try not to take the news personally
 (though I do give a quiet British, "Drat!"),
because I thought I had so many fresh
 and exciting takes on the world to share.
I was going to use these three hidden weeks
 to turn a plodding narrative upside down.
But now smarter people have ruined things,
 informed me it's all been done before.
Now I'm stuck with old Oswald Spengler
 shaking that big bald head of his at me,
at the whole sorry lot of humankind
 screaming from our front seat on *Life-O-Rama*,
this rusted-out looping roller coaster
 we're stuck on for all time, its wino
operator with the lever shoved to *Death*.

And I know Gabe didn't mean to undercut me.

It's just that he's excited by the notion
that we can never really add to what
 the Greeks so lovingly left out for us
like favorite after-school snacks.

And I do get it that the constant upward arc
is doomed. Newton said so. Gravity says so.

That's why airplanes stall. From the hubris
of too steep a climb they lose what they need,
 the wind beneath their wings. Not to bring
Bette Midler or sappy songs into this,
 but we all need lift, we need flight plans
ending with a long lazy turn so we'll
 come in with the sun at our backs
for the hard double-bump landing
 that usually makes two people scream,
the landing we never walk away from.

Shatter

Maggie DeCapua

I am 6,367 days old
and I create galaxies in my spare time.
My mind is outer space when
I let him fingerpaint across me,
blurring sunsets past my edges.
He peels all my layers off at once,
or he tries --

I get tangled in the thread.
(we exist as a tiger
and a housecat
in this world)

He acts like one good fuck
and I'll believe
in God again,
like I'll believe we're worth saving —
and is it any difference whether
it's God's name or his
that puddles past my lips
when he searches
for stars beneath my skin?
He's a force to shatter a universe.

Rebel

Maggie DeCapua

The pink hair was
my shadow's idea.

The derby skates,
the leather boots.

My shadow self smokes cigarettes,
toasts me when I

day-drink, her
beer is already open.

I could never stand the taste.

This shadow girl,

pincushion piercings,
street bike,

throws her head back

like a great crow cackling,

caws the one word

I never could:

No.

Lucky Seven

Maggie DeCapua

I watched a clockwork spider
make patterns on the window,
lattice over glass.
With only three legs on one side,
she walked with a spidery limp,
always skewed
in one direction.

It was a back limb she was without,
next to her spinnerets.
I felt sorry,
not afraid, as she scrambled
to keep her footing
on dusty glass
and rotting wood.

I think she felt my eyes on her
as she crawled methodically
to the center of the pane
and out again,
mechanically,
like the legs that remained
ran on steam power,
before retreating to the corner
and curling seven legs around herself.

The Meaning of Evolution

Changming Yuan

More advanced in evolution
Than their human masters are chickens
As they outnumber the stars in the whole
Universe, and occupy every corner of
The entire planet, but as in-dividuals

No chicken can fly higher than a low

Fence, make love within its confinement
Or live together with its children. The only
Thing they do besides laying eggs and growing
Meat is standing there, day and night, as if

Meditating about the meaning of evolution

Agentic Soul

Ernest Gordon Taulbee

Dear Dr. Stanley Milgram, thank you much.
You made an observation long ago
about an acquiescence to power
and how we all release our possession
of our actions and do as we are told.

We have been pressing the button that shocks
for one hundred days, and our fingers stay
perched and ready to deliver the charge.
Our souls smile on obedient culture
Being quiet and not responsible.

The Color of My Aura

Ernest Gordon Taulbee

You look at me and say
The color of aura
Suggest static and angst
Tinted with anger and
Confusion. Calm. Submit
To something much greater.

Don't get me wrong, nonsense
Is nonsense no matter
The book followed; know this
I adjudge your aura
The color of bullshit
Like all other dogma.

You have some sort of right
Despite your faith being
A tremoring trigger
Finger ready to pull
Us all down into the
Open missile silo.

You hold onto your faith
Without regard to truth
And seem shocked when I ask
Questions that chip at an
Eon of unanswered
Prayers by thousands of gods.

Evidence means nothing.
In fact, rejecting it
Is a sign of your full
Devotion to auras
That color your beliefs
To a tint that's blinding

There has to be an end.
Religions end while you
Wait on second comings
That bore me to the point
I want to go away
And burn out my aura.

Self Portrait

Holly Day

My daughter spreads the glue over the board
and picks out the colors and sizes of the seeds. Together,
we carefully trickle waves of millet and poppy next to each other
draw out the outline of the farmhouse with such slow, steady, patient hands
it's almost as though a pair of strangers are drawing the pictures
instead of us. My daughter takes deep, slow breaths
as though she's afraid that breathing normal will disrupt her
preternaturally straight lines, and as I listen to her breathing, I realize
I've been holding my own breath completely.

My daughter squirts another careful blob of glue onto the plywood
and this time, haystacks blossom under a stream of flat yellow gourd seeds.
For a moment, they look so real I have to stop and step back from the
picture
take it all in. My daughter continues to work as I watch,
drawing the outlines of fields with tiny green split peas and dried zinnia
seeds
filling in the gaps with handfuls of lettuce seeds so tiny they look like sand
somehow brought to our dusty farm from a beach an impossible world
away.

Someday

James Scruton

Someday, I used to think, these freckles
will converge to form the perfect tan,
just as someday I'd be tall enough
to lift my jump-shot over a defender,
my voice someday too deep to be mistaken
for my sister's on the phone.

I thought someday I'd understand
car engines and the stock market,
know whom to trust, what to say
to the beautiful or the grieving.
I still expect my flecks of grey
will turn a sage-like silver,
my wrinkles a map of wisdom.

Most things may never happen,
Larkin wrote, *this one will.*
Someday I'll be dust or something
like it. Ashes. Compost.
A little of me salvaged, maybe—
the odd organ, whatever's usable
in my veins when valves choke off,
sparks finally refuse to take
those old synaptic leaps.
I used to think about all this
some days. Some days now I don't.

The Governor Declares Day of Prayer

James Scruton

South of here they're praying
for rain, a stadium of folded hands
and faces damp with tears,
forty-thousand faithful swaying
like righteous trees in a storm.

Maybe this year it will work,
showering the governor with praise
from now until election day.
Maybe a cloud of prayers could rise,
pass over acres of parking lot,

drift above fields the color
of rust. Surely goodness and mercy
will follow like thunder after lightning,
pastures surely green again
beneath those unstill waters.

King Solomon Solves a Problem

Ed Wade

King Solomon scribbles
his gaudy Roman numerals
on his stone tablet, calculating
the wisdom of long division.

He carries the little i , drops it
down onto the next column,
mindful there may be a remainder.

He works his problem backwards
to see that it checks out,
evaluating each negative
and positive sign,

knowing what can be done
theoretically can not be undone
in practice.

He knows this problem
has larger implications
than these two mothers and
the naked baby on the table
before him.

He bites down on his pen,
contemplating bisection
and wondering if it will reveal
the distance between rightness
and righteousness,

and the non-transitive properties
of being right and being right.

Young

James Croal Jackson

I can tell you how many points LeBron scored last night
or who won the World Series,
but I can't fix the leaking faucet in the bathroom,
won't mow the lawn if not overgrown.

I don't change the oil in my Ford
nor bring home a solid paycheck—
but I will live in an apartment
to avoid responsibility.

I'll pay lots of money to tell
a landlord *I can't do it.*

I've already lived in a car to avoid the responsibility
of telling a landlord *I can't do it.*

I didn't know how to fix it when it broke down,
and a Samaritan changed my flat tire when I burst it
when turning into a potholed Burger King lot
and I claimed I was about to fix it.

He told me not to pay more than twenty-five dollars for a used tire—
*no more than twenty-five dollars, and get the rim hammered out
for free!*

I went to the tire shop and paid their thirty-five to avoid conflict.
Wordlessly they stopped eastbound traffic on Pico
and I backed away and left.

One thing I can do well is parallel park,
as if reverse-navigation is worth bragging about

but I'll take it.

No one has the courage to fit inside this small space.
No one can fit inside here but me

unredeemed

Jan Ball

The priest in green vestments
rushes from his dressing room
to the simple podium
in the sacristy
of this dark, ancient church, not
up the stairs of a pulpit medieval-
carved with elongated evangelists
around the periphery, as I've seen
in other 16th century churches,
and says something in French that
we don't understand but we do get
his gesture to the mainly female
congregation sprinkled around
the old Grenoble church, like he is
pulling in a fishnet, so the pews
creak as the parishioners move
forward obligingly.

As tourists, we hug the shadows
in the back to observe the rituals
I know so well from my life
as a professional Catholic nun,
candles already flickering eerily
while self-acknowledged sinners
kneel in obsequious postures
before Jesus bleeding on the cross
to redeem their sins.

My husband nudges me and
whispers, with alarm, "He's
coming down the aisle toward us,"
and I can almost hear the rustle
of the priest's purple satin clothes.
We make a beeline for the massive
brass-trimmed door, and push it
hard to reveal the sunny square.

Fiction

Theresa Harris

Kate LaDew

You're born on New Year's Eve. 1906 or 1909. Your official bio makes you older, your tombstone, younger. One written in ink, the other in marble. But what doesn't matter is, you can sing and you can dance and you can act. What matters is, you are black. You are a woman. And it is now, or any time.

Maids. Hat check girls. Waitresses. Prostitutes. Tribal women. Blues singers. These are the women you play because these are the women you can be, while the rest lace themselves up as Southern belles, socialites and molls. You're their friend, their confidant, just as young, just as pretty, a maid's uniform can't hide that. But they are blonde, even in black and white, and no matter how many times your voice is heard, your name doesn't appear onscreen. The radio's easier, no one can see your face, but — no one can see your face. The arch of your brows, the smirk in your smile, the deep dark life of your eyes. You crowd around a microphone with people the same color as you and entertain a world that isn't.

When you're 33 or 36, Val Lewton and RKO show up, and, after ten years in Hollywood, you rescue yourself. In movies with names like *Cat People*, *I Walked with a Zombie*, *Phantom Lady* and *Strange Illusion*, you play a waitress and a maid and a maid and a maid but you have guts and looks and sass and smarts and when the white people see monsters, you run and they don't and the audience sides with you.

At 38 or 41, you're finally offered a part with a first and last name. She is an *ex*-maid, and you could kill somebody for the difference they claim it makes, but you take it and when Robert Mitchum sits down next to you, the camera rolls into life and so do you. It's the best you've ever been and it's the best you'll ever be given.

Looking around the parking lot and the studio at all the pale eager faces, the straight hair, the light eyes, the upturned chins that have never had to look down, you find yourself halfway to a decision. There's a sharp, deep anger inside you, crisp as cut apple, and maybe your father was a sharecropper and your mother was his wife and you're a thousand miles from Texas — it isn't enough. When you attend the premiere and watch your straight, bright body move on the largest screen you've ever seen, it isn't enough and it's the least human you've ever felt. You are in the balcony. Fifteen years and you are in the balcony. Roped off, an exhibit with your short, succinct label in bold brick letters: COLORED. All the

distance in the world can't separate you from that. Your hands move before your mind tells them to. Gripping the edge, you drop your eyes and take in the scene. 63 movies have given you a director's eye. One lid closes and your fingers form a rectangle, boxing in the tuxedoed and diamond encrusted crowd below. When the camera clicks you know, fully and completely, you are not a part of this, you have never been a part of this. You will never be allowed to be a part of this.

So you descend the stairs and walk out the backdoor of the theater, the one that isn't but might as well be marked especially for people like you. You don't pause. You walk until you get to your apartment. You turn on the light. It's filled with everything you care about. Some are framed posters of movies only you know you were in. They will have to go. It will all have to go.



No-one can appreciate quiet unless they've known noise. Thirty years later you die a doctor's wife, comfortable and safe in Inglewood, living off the money you earned when you were young and beautiful and so much less than you wanted to be. Two months before your 79th birthday (or is it 76th?) you find yourself in Angelus - Rosedale Cemetery, in the same ground as former Los Angeles mayors (the 10th, 31st, 35th, 36th, 38th and 41st), Rasputin's daughter, the composer of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, suffragette Caroline Severance, Hattie McDaniel, the first black woman to win an Academy Award, Ernestine Wade, Sapphire from *Amos n Andy*, and Dooley Wilson, Sam in *Casablanca*. There's also Louise Peete, the second woman to be executed in the state's gas chamber. You don't know who she killed to get there, but maybe they had it coming.

You played maids. Hat check girls. Waitresses. Prostitutes. Tribal women. Blues singers. And the most unreal thing of all: an actress. The night you die, you have a vision. Dancing across a stage you can't see for the flowers at your feet, your waist bends and the applause is a cyclone picking up all the little black girls in the world and tipping them over to look down at a black form, the center of all the lights and noise and booming freedom and energy and life. Sparks shoot from their tiny hands and you look up at millions of eyes that see you and all you really are, the similitude of your outside and the endless parade of grit and ability and intelligence and grace of your inside. The arch of your brows, the smirk in your smile, the deep dark life of you winks at all those little girls who watch you like a dream. You are black. You are a woman. You exist. Have, are and will, now or any time.

Road to Free Love

Russell Helms

At Brownside Middle School, Dr. Ernst Hardwick was the minister of propaganda. He took pride in his job and considered his tasks as all important. Dr. Ernie, as he was known, stood about five-five and resembled a large child with a small head. His favorite color was lavender, and he was fond of dressing in corduroys with soft sweaters. His face was stern, but his small nose gave him an innocent look.

Right on time at 7:45, Dr. Ernie entered the low brick building, saying hello to the Minister of Security, Alf Robbins. In his cracker-box office Dr. Ernie checked his marker board for his day's duties. He always planned a week in advance and noted today's entry as "Long Live International Middle Schoolism!" His announcement over the PA system happened at 8:15, and he prepared his speech, reading Bakunin. In the halls he could hear the scurrying of little feet, the slamming of lockers, and that precious din of little voices in the morning. He thought back to his mother, remembering her words, "Take the tiger by the tail, son!"

There was a knock at his steel door. It was Dr. Hardin, the Commandant.

"Well, hey there, Ernie," said Hardin. "Got us some collectivist anarchism on the plate today?"

"Darn tootin'," said Ernie.

"I admire your increasing radicalism, but it could be that your staunch appeal against imperialism may be reaching too far," said Hardin.

"Ha," said Ernie. "Well, then banish me to Siberia. Everything that exists is rational. Remember that."

"Need to run that up the flagpole and see how it flies," said Hardin.

Ernie flushed. "Your colloquialism stifles me." Hardin just laughed and was on his way to warm up the microphone.

Ernie reviewed his notes and did a practice speech. He'd watched videos of Hitler speaking and tried out one of his moves, eyes straight forward, his fist over his heart. Stalin was so lackluster. No sense in letting a little history get in the way of propaganda.

He headed down the gray hall, the walls decorated with posters. There was a fifth-grade display titled "What is property?" in honor of Proudhon. He smiled, knowing that all property one day would be owned

by small collectives that governed themselves. He popped in a breath mint and cleared his throat.

A lone fourth grader was at his locker.

Ernie spoke. "Young man, shouldn't you be in class? The revolution is waiting you know."

Little Dirk looked sheepish and batted his long lashes. "I'm sorry. My dad didn't wake up. He was at the rally last night and got drunk."

"Hmm," said Ernie. "For a good cause I suppose. The malevolence of government can never be underestimated, remember that."

"Uh, yes sir," said Dirk, dressed in a shabby coat, and he ran along to class.

Dr. Ernie entered the Commandant's office and was greeted by the receptionist, Comrade Betty.

"Well good morning and hidy ho!" she said.

"Yes, praise our so-called God and let the blessings flow," said Ernie. He could hear the Commandant making announcements, reminding the students of a "spontaneous order" lecture that was mandatory instead of lunch.

Commandant Hardin finished with announcements and handed the microphone to Dr. Ernie.

"Dobroye utro, young comrades!" said Ernie. He patted his small belly. "To start, the comrades at Northport Middle School across town have adopted the stance of mutualism, whereas we all know that revolutionary anarchism is the field to be plowed, the flower to be watered, the dog to be scratched..."

In room 23, the class of sixth graders sat, some with faces in hands. Just as bored was Comrade Betty Wilkins, the teacher, who pretended to take notes. She sipped on lemon water and ate a chocolate, glancing at the class to make sure they were appreciating the message. One of the fluorescent bulbs was humming, flashing dull then off-bright.

Ernie continued. "Young ones, comrades, the middle school exists as a counter to our so-called government. The revolution depends on you. We have begun with small acts of violence, but soon we will rise, and God bless the day our blood will drown the opposition to a stateless society. As such we will be marching on Northport Middle to first correct the ways of the wayward. There's little room for argument here and our comrades in arms, although misled, will know the true path to freedom, which is absolute revolution!" Ernie had risen from his rolling chair, his elbows planted on the small desk.

He continued: "Comrade teachers, please prepare the young ones for battle training during recess the entire week. Casualties are to be expected. That is all." He clicked off the microphone, satisfied with his efforts. He turned to Commandant Hardin for affirmation.

"Well, I guess that will get the cows to kicking," said Hardin. "I can't believe those sodomites at Northport Middle have adopted mutualism, as if it would be that easy. Sheesh. Let the bloodbath begin." He belched and apologized.

That same day, on the playground, the children were drawn into groups of twelve and given jerseys and cheap steak knives. On the end of each knife was a rubber cap. Green represented mutualism and red represented revolutionary anarchism. It was a warm spring day with the clouds like a trailer park in the sky. Comrade Betty looked over her group of twenty-four, wondering if an ambulance would be called.

"Okay," said Betty. "Don't try and kill each other, right?" She wore tan slacks with a tan button-up top. For effect she wore a beret at a tilt.

"Do we have to?" said Comrade Tom. He lived in the orphanage, which was ripe for insurrection.

"I have to pee," said Comrade Felicia. She was cute as a bug in her flowered dress. She held the knife behind her back.

"Well, we can't have those mutualists undermining the revolution can we?" said Betty.

"I forgot what a revolution is," said another little comrade.

Betty tried to think of a simple way to put it. "It's like playing a kickball game and you want to win."

The twenty-four pairs of eyes looked dubious.

"Okay," said Betty. "Green on this side and red over here." She was left standing in the middle. "When I say Forward! advance and kill someone. Just pretend that it's a sack of potatoes that you're stabbing."

Already on the far side of the vast playground, shouts could be heard.

"Okay, now take the rubber thingies off the end of your knives."

Little rubber things fell to the ground, some going into pockets.

"Forward!"

Before she knew it, all twenty-four little comrades were upon her, stabbing her thighs, her kidneys, her belly. She fell to the ground, the sound of her shrieking drowned in the guttural cheer of her little people, moving now to her chest and neck. When she stopped crying out, the children stood back, making a ring around her.

“Long live international proletarianism!” said Comrade Tom, and then they were upon him, knowing the difference between Marxism and Anarchism, driven by the promise of free love.

Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc

Robert D. Kirvel

Ta-Nehisi Coates, We Were Eight Years in Power, p. 88

Art [has] no responsibility to be hopeful or optimistic or make anyone feel better about the world. It must reflect the world ... not in hopes of changing it but in the mean and selfish desire to not be enrolled in its lie.

American Association for the Advancement of Science, Feb 3

Satellite and tide-gauge data confirm global mean sea levels are not just rising, but, according to the AAAS, the amount of yearly increase is accelerating.

Zolfo Springs, Florida, Feb 5

“Infinity Vista” is the name selected by the Board of Directors for 23 acres of treeless swampland in central Florida, divided into 184 one-eighth acre “estates.” The property is being marketed by developers to “Bob and Betty Buyers” who won’t understand the development’s cute name but “will like how the words strike the ear.”

Aunt Jan’s FacePage, Feb 6

Those polar ice caps are getting bigger not smaller at both ends if you want to know what’s really happening. That’s how all the photos show it from outer space on the news. It’s the 4,000 scientists hired by Al Gore and Hillary Clinton to make a killing at the movies who are lying through their teeth because they get paid to scare us to death.

Aunt Jan’s FacePage, Feb 7

A thousand years ago the carbon levels were a zillion times higher, and it wasn’t any warmer then but colder than today. Look at your fur bears and saber-tooth cats and how big the ferns

grew back then with all that carbon in your ice cores from the North Pole. You don't hear all those college people telling you that when they talk about global warming because it isn't true, and they know it. Plants grow better with more carbon, so it's good for world hunger. You kill carbon and you kill off plants.

Environmental Protection Agency, Mar 3

The Head of the EPA today issued a national policy advisory identifying cigarette smoke as beneficial to plant life, "which thrives on carbon dioxide or monoxide, whatever, as everybody knows."

EPA, Mar 4

The EPA today released an amended advisory identifying cigarette smoke as nonhazardous to human health, which is what they meant to announce in the first place.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, Mar 5

Smoking never harmed anybody. It's the job you have that pays you money that buys those opioid pills that make you high that kill you, damn those union people to hell. People kill people, that's the way it's always been, and besides, my granddaddy smoked and drank bourbon all his life until Jesus called him to heaven when he was 80 years old, so explain that.

Department of Defense, Mar 14

The DOD has linked increases in skin and pancreatic cancer in the United States to Patagonian dissidents protesting oil exploration in the nation's Puerto Deseado region.

Alabamassippi State House, Mar 17

The Governor announced this morning any skin tone darker than Starbucks® Macchiato is punishable by incarceration for 5 years. "Let's just cut to the chase," the Governor urged, adding the measure would save taxpayers "all the expenses associated with

processing individual defendants in custody through habeas corpus” before sending them directly to labor camps.

Aunt Jan’s FacePage, Mar 19

Vaccines don’t protect you from any a those damn disease things either. It’s your hopes and prayers on the Internet that climb the stairs to heaven to sit right where He sits on a throne with His mighty white hair streaming down His robe who looks like George Clooney, only wiser, and rewards your adoration of Him with a long and blessed life that gives you your long life. Besides, vaccines are proven to cause Asperger’s Syndrome from eating raw carrots. Just look at my half-sister’s kid if you don’t believe it.

District Board of Education, March 22

A survey of Washington DC high school seniors revealed this week that 47 percent believe Patagonia is located somewhere around the District of Columbia beltway.

The Executive Office, Washington D.C., Mar 30

“A free press is the lying enemy of the people and will become a poisonous footnote in American history.” Forty percent of the nation’s citizens support this statement.

National Rifle Association, Apr 1

The NRA endorses a Constitutional Amendment granting blind children the God-given right to shoot any kind of dumb animal they please.

Texas School Board, Apr 8

In a storm of decisions “raining down on classrooms like holy turds from Jesus,” according to a liberal news source, the Texas State Board of Education adopted new standards on Thursday, including a requirement that textbooks name The Almighty as the nation’s Founding Father, and Patagonia as a fascist state.

From The Addendum to the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows by Jody Collins, age 11, Plano, Texas, after another school shooting, Apr 11

Will I be remembered more for what I've done in this world or what was done to me?

The Restored Church of God, April 17

According to Disembodied Mathematicians for Christ, 2 plus 2 do not necessarily equal 4, proving planet Earth is 8214 years old. In response to that fact, members of the Texas School Board voted unanimously to revise all arithmetic books used in public schools.

John Milton, way back a long time ago in something he presumably wrote

The mind is owned by the self and can make a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, Apr 19

Anyways I'm sure you all will remember that heat spell last summer we thought would go on forever when I prayed for rain, and guess what? It rained cats and dogs and cooled off by 20 degrees, so explain that with your climate change if you want to try.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, May 11

What's the matter with people don't they want to make American great again? Now they're bringing back jobs in the factories when coal is free to burn because they can allow coal tar to go into the water again that everybody knows never did a bit of harm to anybody.

American Families Research Council (AFRC), June 4

Fagmasks® manufactured by the AFRC went on sale today after that organization published "proof" breathing unfiltered air in the

vicinity of a homo makes you queer. Proceeds from mask sales will be donated to Electroconvulsive Shock, Inc., a therapeutic rehabilitation consortium. The organization is developing anti-Patagonia masks for production in September.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, June 16

And don't get me started on those doctors out there who call it their practice, and that's what it is. Practice for sure. Who else would make a customer wait on those metal chairs for hours then charge you a couple hundred dollars for three minutes of saying just go on home now and take an aspirin or something? Plus paying thousands for health insurance at work. A racket is what it is.

Columbus, Ohio, second Monday in October

The Ohio State Legislature today passed funding for a statue of Christopher Columbus on the Statehouse lawn to commemorate his discovery of Daylight Savings Time that gives white American farmers an extra hour for harvesting crops.

Jody Collins, age 11, Lubbock, Texas, Oct 16

Every nation that ever started a war has the same thing in common. The country was run by men.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, Oct 27

So I go to my fast-food to get some fries, and guess what? The lazy-ass jerks who think they deserve as much pay per hour as I make after 20 years on the job can't even get my order right. They're over there flippin' burgers and yapping and listening to some hoochie mama radio station that can't even speak American, and guess what? Another crazy-ass kid at the cash register can't make change is what, but she thinks flippin' burgers and not making change she deserves as much per hour as I do after 30 years working my ass off every single day.

European Union, Nov 13

Following a unanimous vote by member nations, the manufacture and sales of motor vehicles operated by gasoline engines will be banned in the EU after 2025.

The White House, Nov 14

The President today signed an Executive Order designating the European Union as a terrorist organization, “along with Patagonia, obviously.”

State Department, Nov 15

A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State issued a declaration this morning that yesterday never happened. Any claim that yesterday took place, according to the release, “is a hoax.” The declaration gained credibility when Patagonia could not be reached for comment.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, Nov 17

OK, so now they're out there saying Thug Lives Matter. Excuse me, but no they don't because those Patagonians who go out there and riot how Thug Lives Matter in the streets are all just thugs plain and simple.

Aunt Jan's FacePage, final entry

Everything happens for a reason.

Ernst Mayr, biologist, paraphrasing something he wrote

Higher intelligence may be an evolutionary error incapable of surviving for more than a passing moment of evolutionary time.

Bottled Power

Logan Myhre

The bottle was just like any other. It was molded from a piece of Polyethylene Terephthalate, also known as simple plastic. This plastic was blown out into a cylindrical shape, becoming narrow at the top. It was then filled with normal drinking water, capped, labeled, and marked as \$1.99 to ensure a hefty profit. This bottle was packaged with a bunch of other bottles, loaded onto a semi-truck, and sent to a convenience store. A young man named Brian stocked this bottle and its identical twins onto a cooler shelf for seven bucks an hour.

No one could ever figure out at what stage the bottle changed. It could have been during the process of making the plastic, when it was made into a bottle shape, or any of the other steps in the process. Hell it could have been the actual water. Some scientists have since theorized that the water, normally composed of just a simple bond between two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom, somehow chemically shifted and the events that followed simply lined up in what would become the greatest coincidence to ever take place. The arguments and research haven't stopped since and probably won't for a long time. It will likely remain science's greatest enigma until the end of time. Religious entities across the globe insist that science had nothing to do with it and that their deity of choice was responsible for this miracle.

One thing is certain though. Emily Walker, a young, smiling, 16-year-old girl strolled into the Happy-Go-Lucky convenience store on Parker Lane after soccer practice on April 12, 2018 at around 5:47 p.m. and grabbed a water bottle. After politely denying Brian's request for her number (he was working the register that day), she paid \$2.10 for the bottle and left the store.

Emily was quite parched from running around a soccer field the past couple of hours so she popped the cap open on the bottle. She lifted it towards her mouth and drank, like really chugged it. It swam down her throat like a fish swimming downstream, quenching her thirst in the way that only water could sometimes. She would later recall that it was the best water she's ever tasted, but that could have just been hindsight. Emily had intended on drinking the entirety of the bottle's contents so she could dispose of the crushed skeleton right away but she found that she wasn't able to finish what was there.

This is the peculiar part of the story. Emily glanced at the bottle and it was still full. Not full in the sense that it had a few drinks taken out of

it, it was full as in not a single drop was gone. At this moment, to any bystander, Emily would've looked like some stoned high school girl contemplating the greater meaning of a water bottle, but Emily was really freaking out. She turned the bottle upside down, letting the water spill out onto the ground for a solid 30 seconds, long enough to drain a bottle of its size, but the bottle continued to spew water like a garden hose left on by some forgetful dad. She watched as the water formed a puddle at her feet, soaking into her tennis shoes. She stood outside the convenience store watching this for a solid 2 minutes before tipping the bottle right-side up again. The bottle remained full. It looked pristine, almost like it was mocking her.

Emily, thinking that she had been drugged or something, maybe by Brian, walked quickly to her car and tossed the bottle in the backseat. She opened the door of her beat up 2001 Dodge Stratus, climbed into the driver's seat, turned the ignition, and sped off. She was nervous about driving if she had been drugged but staying in the parking lot meant the potential for Brian or whoever to kidnap her or something. As she drove, Emily noticed something odd. She felt fine. Like absolutely fine. She was a little tired because of practice and a long day at school, but her thoughts were as clear as the water that had fascinated her just minutes before.

Emily, as anyone in her situation might, pinched herself, hard. Realizing she wasn't in some sort of drug trip or dream, she turned a corner and drove straight to her friend Katy's house.

From Katy's perspective, what was about to happen probably did look like Emily was on drugs. While Katy was sitting on her parent's newly purchased couch watching trashy reality shows about rich people, Emily ripped through the door like a madman. She marched towards Katy, water bottle in hand, and grabbed Katy by the wrist, yanked her off of the couch, and dragged her into the kitchen.

Katy, as anyone would, freaked out a little.

"What the hell are you doing?" Katy yelled, then scrunched her face up as she her nose smelled. "Eww you didn't even shower before coming over here you sweat monster."

Emily ignored her, she was on a mission. "Watch this," she said as she popped the cap on the bottle and poured it into the sink.

"Wow, gravity, so amazing," Katy remarked, clearly unamused.

But Katy quickly caught on to what was happening, and she wasn't so inclined towards sarcasm after that.

"You're seeing what I'm seeing right? I'm not crazy?" Emily said, a slight squeak in her voice.

“Holy Shit Emily. When did you become a magician? Are you going to do that at the school talent show, because I think it would kill? Show me how you’re doing it.” Katy said, sincerely bewildered.

“I’m not doing anything! The bottle is literally endless; it never runs out of water. Here you try it,” Emily said, excited to share her discovery, as she tipped the water bottle back up and handed it to Katy.

Katy was stunned. The water bottle was still full, though she was still convinced it was some sort of lame magic trick. She tipped the bottle into the sink, letting it pour into the drain. She tipped it back up and it was still full. She repeated this process multiple times. They both just could not wrap their mind around what was happening.

The two girls spent the rest of the evening testing out the bottle. They tried pouring it out dozens of times, then they got creative. They wondered what would happen if they tried turning the water into something else. Katy’s mom recently bought a bunch of those little Mio bottles, which you squeeze into water to make it juice. As they squeezed the sweet-smelling fruit punch mixture into the bottle, nothing happened. The juice would hit the water and sink into it, not homogenizing at all. It was like there was just too much water in the bottle for the Mio to affect its color or taste. It was like squeezing a lemon into a lake.

At around 10:30 p.m. Emily’s parents called her. They were furious that Emily had missed curfew and declared that she was hereby grounded for a week. Emily, in the mess of everything, had totally forgotten about the rules that normally governed her life. She almost chuckled; her life was finally exciting.

“I’ve got to go; my parents are pissed. I’ll see you tomorrow,” Emily said, gathering her belongings and the bottle.

“Hey what if I gave you like \$20 for that bottle, I know you could use it” Katy asked, semi-jokingly.

“L O L. I’m not selling this bottle, especially not for twenty bucks. See you tomorrow dude,” Emily chuckled as she opened Kate’s door and exited. Kate shrugged, maybe something magic would happen to her. At least that’s how the conversation went down in the movie version a few years ago.

The next day at school Emily began showing everyone the bottle. It soon became clear to the student body that this was not some trick, and something truly special was happening. The students hoarded Emily all morning, itching to get a look at the bottle. The brave ones asked for a drink or to hold it, but Emily was not having any of it. She had grown increasingly concerned that someone was going to steal the bottle from her.

She began pouring water from the bottle into small paper cups and giving those to the persistent ones.

It wasn't long before the teachers became interested in the bottle and classes pretty much ceased for the day. Everyone sat in the lunchroom and watched Emily continually demonstrate the bottle's peculiar ability. The teachers and students would raise their hand like it was some sort of keynote speech and ask questions. Where had she gotten the bottle? Was it like that right away? Was she a witch? She answered all of these questions honestly and the last one with a chuckle. Emily, who most would previously consider as a pretty normal person, had become the most exciting thing at the school.

After a series of videos posted that day on every social media platform in existence, yes even Myspace, the water bottle became a viral icon with incredible speed. All of the major media publications had seen this and swarmed the high school by the end of the day like mosquitos on a hot summer evening. Emily had interviews scheduled for CNN, MSNBC, and even begrudgingly agreed to do FOX News. People started asking Emily questions she didn't know how to answer. What was she going to do with the bottle? Did she feel obligated to donate it to help cure world thirst? Was she a witch? She answered the first two with a nervous "I don't know" and the last one with a wide-eyed "absolutely not."

By the end of the week, the bottle was the only thing anyone was talking about. Large corporations began contacting Emily with offers of unimaginable wealth. They promised her that she would never work a day in her life and that she would have anything she wanted at her fingertips. They obviously wanted to turn the bottle into a new business model. They wanted to figure out what made it tick and replicate it, selling everyone an endless water bottle like they would a car. They imagined massive stores full of endless water bottles.

It would become less about the water and more about the pizzazz. Which bottle could you afford? They would be very expensive obviously. There would be a market for cheaper used ones after normal water bottles became obsolete, raising sanitary concerns the public would probably ignore. They would run campaigns promising to donate a bottle to Africa every time one was purchased, though they would obviously not follow through. They would figure out how to profit off of Africa as well because it was a market that needed endless clean water desperately. Some brave non-profits jumped into the mix as well, offering what they could but promising Emily that they would do the most good with the bottle. They promised her that she would be the new face of their organization, a philanthropist for the history books.

Getting the water bottle would've been like striking gold, or like striking an entire mountain of gold covered in diamonds. Everyone and their mother wanted that bottle. Foreign countries started looking into the matter, though feared contacting Emily in any way would cause an international incident. The American government grew paranoid as well. They were worried this bottle was going to cause some sort of World War 3. FBI and CIA agents were stationed outside Emily's house full time, partially to protect her and partially to survey what she was doing. The conversation quickly grew to be much less about the bottle and more about everyone's lust to have the bottle themselves.

Not long after, and for fear of their safety, Emily and her family flew themselves to an undisclosed location at the behest of one of the many corporations looking to woo them.

Emily spent the next two weeks holding meetings with some of the most important people in the world. It's rumored she even met former President Barack Obama. The hot rumor is that he told her she should find a way to help people with the bottle, although certain news networks rumored the opposite.

That message, if it really was relayed, must not have stuck because Emily went on live television on May 2nd to announce that she was selling the bottle to Berry, a large tech corporation, for an undisclosed price. The rumors regarding this deal were, and still are, all over the place. Some people say they offered her 1.2 billion dollars outright and a cut of the profits, others say they offered her an unimaginable piece of tech. The former is probably most accurate. One thing was clear though, Emily was going to be set.

Berry, clearly very pleased with themselves, announced that they would be researching the bottle and would use their findings to "revolutionize the way we consume water, our most basic human need." This was PR speak for "We are about to make a shit-ton of cash."

I know I said the peculiar part of the story was in the beginning, but this is really the peculiar part, because while magic is crazy, it's even crazier when it defies its own rules. A public event was held for Emily to give the bottle to Berry. There were tons and tons of security. Imagine the Super Bowl but multiplied by fifteen.

Anyways, this huge ceremony was held. Emily gave an emotional speech about how the bottle was the most insane thing that's ever happened to her and how she's just so happy that God gave her this miracle. She said she hoped that her discovery would change the world for the better. It was PR speak for "I'm about to make a shit ton of cash." If we are to be fair to Emily, it's not like she didn't need the money. It's one

thing to hold these corporation's feet to the fire, but Emily didn't exactly come from a wealthy background. She's the daughter of an elementary teacher and a father who had recently been laid off from his factory job, so money was always a concern in her household. The bottle was going to solve everything. The sympathy that you may feel for her though doesn't change what happened after this.

Then the moment of truth came. Emily would ceremoniously hand the bottle over to Berry's CEO in a moment that would be photographed and plastered on the front page of every newspaper or blog site. Emily slowly walked to the middle of the stage as Berry's CEO did and they both reached their hands out and grasped the bottle, holding it there. As Emily retracted her hand and the bottle rested in the grasp of Berry's CEO, the crowd gasped collectively.

The bottle began to drain on its own, like a bath plug pulled after a long soak. It wasn't even clear where the water was going; it was pulling a vanishing act. No one spoke the entire time this was happening. Emily looked stunned, then began to cry before she was whisked away by a team of security guards. Berry's CEO followed suit, minus the crying part. He looked furious.

The entire crowd, and everyone watching at home, sat speechless for what seemed like hours. It wasn't really hours though, it was more like eight minutes, which is still a considerable amount of time. After they realized nobody was coming out to talk to them, they hung their heads in disappointment and exited the building to head back to their normal lives. This momentous let down would later become a course for conversation. Where were you when the infamous bottle stopped working?

Behind the scenes, things were falling apart quickly. Berry's CEO walked backstage and gave Emily the bottle, demanding she tell him what she did. At this point Emily was already a mess. She, through breaks of snots and sniffles, explained that the bottle was punishing her. It was clear to her what had happened, though everyone else seemed lost. The corporate suits present scoffed and stared at her like a broken legged steer that could no longer help till the land. As an onlooker, you'd probably think they were about to grab a gun from the house and put her out of her misery.

Emily didn't seem to notice them. She just held the bottle, staring at it. It looked like a pathetic \$1.99 (\$2.10 if you include tax) piece of empty plastic. She was reminded of the first time she drank from the dumb bottle and the mocking look it gave her. It seemed to be doing the same thing right now. She couldn't believe it. This bottle was now like any other.

Non-Fiction

A Defining Moment (A Memoir)

Michael Glassman

Moored at the pier, our aluminum rowboat at low tide barely floated above the mucky water at the edge of the marsh.

Wearing a wide brimmed straw hat atop her short blonde hair, my young teen daughter Jennifer, in cutoff blue jeans and tee shirt reached over the gunnel to untie us. But the boat stayed put. Her twin sister, Allison, wearing a one-piece swimsuit, with her long black hair tied in a bun knot helped Jen pole us into the main stream of Swan Pond River, a snake like narrow body of water emptying into Nantucket Sound. The girls poled as if they were trained in Venice. Our boat was soon adrift like a kite lifted off the ground by a gust of wind.

My wife Betsy sat in the prow and the girls in the stern. I sat in the middle awaiting the handover of the oars for the row to the beach.

Allie and Jen sang the John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt children's song from the pier to the inlet. They just didn't sing it, *they screamed it*. That short passage of time from pier to ocean, rowing through the still rising mist of morning, remains one of the happiest memories of my life.

Even at eight a.m., finding an open spot on the beach near the inlet was difficult. The forecast called for a sunny day- the first in five days. With our oars held upright we managed to squeeze between two Sunfish hulls with their brightly colored lateen sails flapping this way and that to the rhythm of the breeze.

Earlier, the breeze rested among the seagrass beds and seaside lavender atop the dunes; twirled around the piping plover nesting in the grass; envied the shadow of the great blue heron overhead. When, awakened by the rising sun, it went out to play.

We had the choice to walk across Lower County Road to the entrance of a foot path leading to a more isolated part of the beach; this path was infested with scattering fiddler crabs. Jen would rather take the boat; Allie didn't mind- she loved animals. There was a house at the beginning of the trail that we had to pass to get to the water. Over the years, perhaps even ten years, we often saw the woman who owned the saltbox Cape Cod house. She sat in an aluminum chair close by a screen door. Her grass front lawn spread out to the margins of the marsh giving her a clear view of the path.

Except for a first-year hello she never made conversation. Still, I was proud that she could see my girls' growth from one year to the next.

When I was a teacher, the first day of school after a *two-month* summer vacation impressed me as to how my students had physically changed. She was privileged to witness a ten-year period of changes. Somewhat akin to time lapse photography.

The following summer we took the path on our first day of vacation. A short distance from her house we were surprised to see four large windmill blades attached to the front of a newly built two-story beach house. We didn't think it had anything to do with us. When we got close enough we saw that we were fenced out of *our* beach. It took a few moments to understand that a part of our lives we had always taken for granted was now a memory. We turned and slowly retreated back to our cottage. When passing the woman, now in her aluminum chair, I said, "I guess we're not welcome here anymore."

She replied, "You never were."

Cakes and Confirmation

Janice Bohman

It's summer vacation. We're bored. Sarah's dad is out on a pastoral call. We shut his office door, close the window blinds, sit at his desk, and flip through the local phone book. All those names—which ones seem deserving? Sarah and I take turns dialing.

“Smith's Mortuary. Some go to Heaven. Some go to Hello.”

Slam the phone down.

“Har de har.”

(That's my laugh.) Sarah's is a tinkly giggle.

Repeat.

Sinning in church! No one catches us. Lightning doesn't strike.

Over the next few months, we dare each other to explore the sacred building. The church is practically home base for Sarah, with her kitchen door just a dozen feet from the church's back door. I'm leery – God may be watching—so, at first, we poke through neutral territory (the basement, kitchen, classrooms, and storage areas) to demystify one room at a time.

It's a Sunday, and everyone else is in the main service. The second-floor classrooms are dead quiet without kids. Sarah and I wander through the little rooms, and I find a square hatch in the second-grade classroom wall. We open it. Lo! There's the choir thirty feet below us. Their heads shine and frizz above purple robes. One of us whispers a great idea. We tear up a used Sunday School lesson pamphlet and make spitballs. We let fly. To stifle our giggles, we cover our mouths. The choir is busy trying to make glorious harmony—bass, tenor, alto, and quivery soprano—and they don't notice. Our goof is strangely satisfying.

Our Lutheran church hired Sarah's father Peter when she and I were in the early primary grades. He followed a minister who gave us many years of hell-fire-and-damnation sermons with arm waving and dark threats. At Sunday suppers, my dad waved his arms, too, when he railed about those sermons. My grandfather stopped going to church.

My mom says the synod sent us Peter to make up for our suffering. Peter is funny. He delivers upbeat sermons and wears showy liturgical

scarves. When the dark sanctuary carpet needed to be replaced, he installed a cheery fuchsia one.

That fuchsia, however, has caused a fuss. Some think that hot pink is not a religious color. Church colors are dull, like the ones on the front of our Sunday School lesson pamphlets—olive, burnt orange, browns, stone blue, maroon, and sometimes purple—dark colors for serious matters. Even our Christmas pamphlet shows Mary in a dark blue robe as she holds her new baby Jesus. The golden glow of her halo provides the only bright spot.

We read those same lesson pamphlets every year. We learn about Adam and Eve in the autumn, then Noah and Moses. Jesus appears in December, dies, then rises with the Easter Bunny. Lot, Jonah, and Matthew/ Mark-/Luke/ and/John march by in strict annual order. In our younger years, the teacher, always one of our mothers, read the lesson to the class. Now that we're older, we have to read to them.

A glorious summer's almost spent, and grade school will start again in a couple weeks. Julia, Bruce, and I circle the dining room table. We are making piles of Sunday school lessons. Mama is the Sunday School Committee chairman again, and she makes us sort the (damn) lessons every August. (Mama says damn and hell when she sews). They come wrapped as one set per kid. We're resorting them into piles by week, and we've created a maze pattern on the table. This chore takes forever. It's the final summer insult, after pinning the clothes on the line outside to keep from heating up the house with the dryer. Clothesline duty takes just one of us at a time, but we sort the lessons together. We talk while we walk, skip, or run around the table. Julia is slow and Bruce elbows her. I tell Bruce to leave her alone, then Julia kicks me.

"You kids stop arguing," Mama yells from the kitchen.

She shouldn't be the chairman all the time, I think. It makes her crabby. Around and around the table we circle and plop down pictures of bearded men in sandals and dreary maroon or olive robes – our salvation.

As our reward, Mama's making a cake. While I wait to lick the bowl, I think about Jesus and heaven. "Mama, will Sadie go to hell when she dies? Dogs can't go to church."

Mama puts the mixer down on the counter and gets a distant look on her face. She looks annoyed about something.

“No, Sadie won’t go to hell. I don’t think dogs go to hell. I don’t believe that good people who don’t go to Christian churches will go to hell, either.”

Oh. That’s not what they say in church.

The fuchsia carpet isn’t the only disturbance that Sarah’s dad brings forth. His wife Rebecca is tiny, with a pixie haircut and a wide smile. She bounces. Originally, she seemed adorable, but she developed a reputation as a busy-body by rocking the boat. Whatever she suggests is more than a suggestion and less than welcome. It could be children’s choir practice time, women’s circle activities, who should wash communion glasses - anything.

My mom tells us about the church gossip surrounding Rebecca. Mom blames it on the old ladies (German, she says, meaning all about rules) who don’t appreciate the newcomer butting in. I can tell it isn’t just the old ladies. Like we see on the three channels on TV, fathers work at the mill or in offices, mothers bake Betty Crocker cakes, families live in box houses, kids go to school and salute the flag with the Pledge of Allegiance, and everyone attends church on Sunday. World War II and the depression which our parents told us about are over, and the good life has arrived. Why mess with success?

When Sarah and I enter junior high, Rebecca announces she will teach our Sunday school class. Though we have to go to Confirmation class on Saturdays with Peter for two years, Rebecca says we should still attend Sunday school. She says we’re too old for the regular Bible lessons so she will teach us about other religions. We have a big fat book, all words and no pictures. The religions Rebecca discusses are all Christian ones. The furthest afield we get is Mormons, and Rebecca thinks they’re twisted.

The second year, Rebecca teaches sex education. The classroom feels packed with our big bodies. We are all taller than she is now. Rebecca marches into class with the dreaded sex-ed manual, slaps the book on the table, and smiles at each of us in turn.

“Good morning,” she says. Then, with the same peppy tone of voice she would use to describe how the angels rejoice over the birth of baby Jesus, Rebecca says, “Masturbation causes blindness.”

Holy crap! I stare at the floor. Rebecca keeps talking. I realize that I know, somehow, what masturbation is, and I don't want to talk about it, especially not with the boys here. I'm sure everyone is staring at the floor.

The boys disappear from class. We girls, too chicken to quit, finish the class still ignorant of how sex works and what's good about it, other than for "procreating good Christian families." In general, Rebecca's idea of sex-ed follows the same approach as showing car crash photos in driving school.

Rebecca and Peter have their own good Christian family of five children. Sarah is the third girl. By the time we get to high school, one sister's off at college and the other has a job in big city Seattle. We ignore Sarah's two younger brothers.

Rebecca and Peter graciously treat me as a member of their family. Rebecca bakes cookies for us, and she likes to sit down and chat; but Sarah matches her mother in squirrely energy, so we usually escape. They let Sarah and me borrow their car after school. The church supplied the minister's family car, and Peter chose a sporty yellow-and-black sedan. The old ladies of the church complained vociferously: a minister shouldn't want, have, or flaunt a racy car. Members also phone the parsonage to report when they spot Sarah and me driving it into the A&W. This is an unholy use of a vehicle which the church collection plate purchased. Luckily, unless Sarah's parents just don't tell us, no one notices us smoking in it.

We can afford fifty cents for a pack of cigarettes, but we have to babysit to earn enough money to buy a six-pack of beer from older boys. One night, Sarah says she knows where the key to the communion cupboard is. Free wine! Key in hand, we sneak into the kitchen. We leave all the lights off. While Sarah opens the cabinet, I keep watch. All is quiet. Sarah screws the top off one of the bottles. We each take a communion glass and fill it. The wine is syrupy and blood dark. It tastes worse than it does during communion - like punishment.

The country is back at war. In our high school hallway, a friend points out a girl whose boyfriend has just been killed in Viet Nam. I didn't know him, and I don't know her. We hear that in big U.S. cities, kids are dropping out of the mainstream in protest over Vietnam. Some arm themselves for violent protest. Others march. Yet others hide under

clouds of marijuana and grimy sheets. In our town, the protests are confined to the few national pages of the newspaper. It seems so far away.

Uninterested in Vietnam, Sarah and I branch out to explore other churches – all of them Christian in our town. One of us always has to talk the other one into it. We giggle at the Baptist bathtub. The Episcopal church is as ornate as we've heard. We drive by the evangelical church and never see anyone we know outside. The building is white and smooth, with windows up too high to see in. Neither of us suggests exploring there.

One afternoon, Sarah hears that her dad is marrying a boy and a pregnant girl. We sneak in. The sanctuary doors are thick wood and heavy. We know how loud they creak. Both of us concentrate to slowly and silently drag the doors open just enough to slide by, and we creep in stocking feet up the carpeted stairs to the balcony. From there we watch a sad scene. The bride has her overcoat on indoors. We hear soft words, see no joy. Our excitement about sneaking in on this minor scandal is certainly the highlight in the sanctuary, and it fades like a guttered candle.

Sarah and I are not “fast.” We go to church camp together and play flute duets at high school concerts. We each date, but spend more time talking about boys. Up late hours with our teenage body clocks, Sarah and I progress to sneaking out our bedroom windows and wandering around town in the dark. One night, we attract some wild boys. We are walking in a park when their car lights catch us; and they rev the engine and speed toward us. Running away into pitch darkness, we fall headlong into an unseen basement stairwell. When the boys find us, they are disappointed. They were looking for guys to beat up, not girls. We don't understand. They offer to give us rides home. We refuse. Because Sarah is bruised and scraped from the fall, she has to confess to her mother the next day. Rebecca doesn't act upset, and I don't hear a peep from my mom. We start announcing our adventures in advance.

“We're going to ride our bikes twenty miles up the median strip of the highway to the river park,” I tell Mama. I watch her try to look open-minded. The median strip is wide, so, typically for us, our plan is more foolish than dangerous.

It's a hot day with blue skies. I always feel most myself on my bicycle, and I leave my high school facade behind as we ride. We leave our town behind, too, as we travel into the countryside with the river burbling beside us. Sarah and I relish our freedom ride, but my bike gets a flat tire at

the park. We decide to hitch home. We do know that hitchhiking isn't smart. A battered black pickup stops, and an older Nez Perce man gets out. His pickup is covered with "Jesus Saves" decals. This is reassuring. We bounce back to town in the rear of his pickup next to our bicycles. My mom picks us up at the Safeway parking lot. I tell her about the dents and decals on the pickup, about the man and his cowboy hat, and about waving from my bike to the drivers on the freeway—every delicious detail.

One night after another daft antic of ours, the cops bring Sarah and me home in the middle of the night. Our mothers are not surprised. They seem completely calm about it. We can't figure them out.

Peter has cancer. He's in Seattle for treatment. I am worried, and I ask my mom if Peter will die.

"Probably," she says. She knows he and I are close. She says, "You know, Peter told me he worries about your soul." She watches to see what I will say to this.

I did argue with Peter a lot in confirmation class, but it was because I like him and enjoy our battles. Also, I think the Holy Spirit is a ridiculous concept. Now I wonder if Peter feels abandoned by the Holy Spirit. That confirmation material we studied, discussed, and took tests on—about the Father Son and Holy Ghost, resurrection and forgiveness, Nicene Creed, and communion of the blood and body of Christ—does Peter believe it still? I say nothing.

Sarah is off at a Lutheran college on the coast. I'm at a small school only a hundred miles from home. It's my first frat party, and I get in a car with drunk TKE's. Scrunched in the back seat in my new sundress and lots of makeup, I'm thinking this adventure is really stupid and the boys aren't that cute. My parents would be furious. I am committing a sin. We speed up and fly down the highway. I feel frightened and free.

The boys drop me back safe at school. No lightning. I am unpunished. I realize I don't believe in God. I give up religion on the spot and driving in cars with drunk fraternity boys. I shed all that, in what seems like an instant.

Contributors

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Jan Ball has had 260 her poems appear in journals such as: *Calyx*, *Connecticut Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Nimrod*, and *Phoebe*, in Great Britain, Canada, India and the U.S. Jan's two chapbooks: *accompanying spouse* (2011) and *Chapter of Faults* (2014) were published with Finishing Line Press. Jan's first full-length poetry book, *I Wanted to Dance with My Father* was published by Finishing Line Press in September, 2017. When not working out, gardening at their farm, or traveling, Jan and her husband like to cook for friends.

Janice Bohman grew up in a lumber family in northern Idaho. She is a writer and bookbinder in the San Francisco Bay Area

Holly Day's poetry has recently appeared in *Big Muddy*, *The Cape Rock*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry collections, *A Perfect Day for Semaphore* (Finishing Line Press), *I'm in a Place Where Reason Went Missing* (Main Street Rag Publishing Co.), and *Where We Went Wrong* (Clare Songbirds Publishing) will be out mid-2018, with *The Yellow Dot of a Daisy* already out on Alien Buddha Press.

Maggie DeCapua is a pink haired poet who lives for the first snowfalls of winter and the second cup of coffee of the morning. Maggie is a game designer, cartoonist, and protector of bees. Her work has been published in *The Ladybroad Ledger*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Willard and Maple*, and *Gambling the Aisle*.

Rupert Fike's second collection of poems, *Hello the House*, won the 2017 Violet Reed Haas Poetry Prize from *Snake Nation Press*. He was runner-up as Georgia Author of the Year after the publication of his first book of poems, *Lotus Buffet* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2011). His stories and poems have appeared in *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Scalamag Magazine*, *The Georgetown Review*, *A&U America's AIDS Magazine*, *The Alabama Literary Quarterly*, *The Buddhist Poetry Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Chattahoochee Review* and others. He has a poem inscribed in a downtown Atlanta plaza, and his non-fiction, *Voices from The Farm*, presents the hardships of life on a 1970s Tennessee commune.

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James Scruton has published two full collections and three chapbooks, most recently *Blind Season* (Orchard Street Press, 2017), and my work has appeared widely in such journals as *Poet Lore*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *North American Review*, and *Poetry*, which awarded me its Frederick Bock Prize in 1996.

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