

A stained glass artwork featuring a complex geometric pattern of black lines forming a grid of triangles. The background is filled with various colors including blue, purple, orange, and brown. A large black triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, pointing towards the top right.

Northridge  
Review

Spring 1992

***Northridge Review***  
***Spring 1992***

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*Northridge Review* invites submissions continuously between September and May. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, address, telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. *The author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.* Please limit submissions to three short stories and/or five poems. Photography and graphics are to be in black and white, and there is no limit to the quantity of these submissions. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be sent to: *Northridge Review*, Department of English, California State University, Northridge, California 91330. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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# Awards

Two awards are given annually in recognition of the finest works published in the Spring and Fall issues of *Northridge Review*.

The **Helen Helms Marcus Award**, established by Helen Marcus, recognizes the best short story published by a CSUN student. The winner of this award receives two hundred dollars.

The **Rachel Sherwood Award**, given in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes the best poem published by *Northridge Review*. The winner receives fifty dollars from the University and will be acknowledged alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood.

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**Fidelia Monzon**

4-8-72

Also,  
there is this number- 050040872  
in the roll book  
It is suppose to mean  
Fidelia Monzon

she says "call me Fidel  
All my friends do"

-but I am your teacher

In Regular Math  
I have never had a regular student.  
For just a fraction of one moment  
I thought they had the wrong girl and I could see her  
Whole.

No one will ever kiss you again, Fidel.

At fifteen,  
we all waited preciously, dangerously  
for that single kiss that would change  
every landscape  
waiting for that beautiful young man  
on the motorcycle to ask  
us on liquid wind  
fragilely to ride



For one moment in Time  
I was confused by Death.  
The English-As-A-Second-Language Office  
found me at lunch:  
Did you hear about the girl?  
What?  
The girl-Fidelia-who  
over the holidays  
in a motorcycle accident  
died.

For one moment I got her face in my head  
Not bronzed but a flesh peach  
ancestral gods called commanding—shoulders back  
but also easy  
in her mind at fifteen.

Composed against the crash of  
5th period Regular Class I stopped seeing her  
except for moments of clarity, her clarity I suppose.

This all means nearly nothing.  
Are there no words to claim our dead?  
...are there no symbols  
beyond numbers, grades in roll books,  
no secret signs  
that easily evade these math texts?

I never had a regular student  
in my class, Fidel.

And Fidel,  
Peter in the last row is tracing your name  
onto the last sheet of his notebook.  
It has taken him today all through fractions to write

just FID so delicately.  
Just last week  
it caught this ear  
that he fancied you: Teased, there was  
pain and hope in his face.

Today he had trouble following  
the lesson and I do not nag.  
He is learning his fractions  
internally.

Fidel,  
no one new will ever miss you.

Like sculpture— the motorcycle— the young man— the glide—  
folds into Death so ugly  
but I need to image  
the last moment crystalline  
as some young man—charmed—asked you to ride—  
and saying “Yes, yes I will ride” it was  
the best damn ride of your life.  
I have to believe in this—  
overlay death with the romance colors—peach, bronze and wind  
because Death stays here with us, Fidel.  
Weak, mortal we need all the overlay we can  
just to ease past Death  
the most regular of all students  
who sits at the back of my class  
with a shotgun.

Fidel Monzon

1-1-88

## **The City Where the Waves Begin**

One day last month, Nick, seven years old, gathered his favorite toys—four plastic globes of Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars, and departed. He, like most people, had heard that all the wetlands beyond the shoreline were available to anyone who cared to live there.

Due to Nick's intense imagination, he suffered from insomnia. He thought that by joining the peasants in their blue shacks, sweet sleep would come.

A stretch of sandbar some ten miles long had developed when the tides began to recede two months ago. Scientists claimed that the axis of the moon had tilted significantly causing the earth's sea lines to retreat. Here was a chance for marginals, malcontents and tormented artists to live on free land and escape the horrors of paperwork produced by lawsuits, insurance settlements, home loan applications and income tax forms.

Children ran about in tattered rags, spending their days building elaborate sandcastles and inventing epic poetry. At night, under the diabolical moonlight, their bare skin left to inhale the fragrant salt air, they lapsed into a refreshing, dreamlike reverie that had eluded them while living in the city. This dreamlike state was entitled, "sleep."

This phenomenon held a natural attraction for Nick. One day last month he left a note atop the computer which said, "Gone to live in the City Where the Waves Begin. Love, Nick." His parents and little sister, Marissa, had gone to visit him several times but couldn't convince him to return. They said his cat was ill, his toy guns were lying useless under the steel white gases of fossil fuel and construction dust. His computer games had become rusty with lack of use

and his second grade schoolteacher was suffering a broken heart. Nick was needed back home.

Still, Nick refused. His parents temporarily gave up, returning home. Yesterday, Nick's mother, Diana, asked her sister, who has been immersed in a lifetime project of composing a contemporary opera of Euripides' Greek tragedy, *Medea*, to use her persuasive talents on Nick. The aunt, anxious to remove herself from the agony of resurrecting Medea, agreed. She drove to where the concrete ended and walked barefoot down the miles of wet sandbar.

As she walked, she noticed that giant palm trees had sprouted from the depths of the muddy shore and shot upwards, penetrating the stratosphere. She recalled having read that there had been several airline disasters since these trees had grown. Sections of aircraft had crashed into neighborhoods of blue shacks where pieces of palm and blue wood burned all night.

Nick's aunt arched her neck backwards, hoping to see where the tops of the palms met the sky but all she could see were the trunks of these giant trees disappearing into cumulus clouds.

She continued toward where the waves began, noticing that a half inch of salt water covered the sandbar. She passed rows of blue shacks until she spotted a boy juggling three plastic globes. The aunt watched the smooth way in which the globes rose into the sky then fell into the boy's small hands. As she got closer, she recognized her nephew, a boy with white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes. She called him. He stopped juggling, dropping one of the globes.

His aunt lifted her long skirt and chased after the globe, blocking its way toward the open sea. She watched the globe struggling in the tide.

"Pick up the Earth, Auntie," Nick said. His aunt did so, handing the wet globe of Earth to him. Then she kissed him profusely. "Whaderya doin here, Auntie?" Nick asked as he ran his left index finger along the coastlines of the Americas.

"Your parents miss you," Nick's aunt said. "Why won't you return?"

Nick said, "Suki won't sleep with me anymore. The quality of

life has greatly diminished at home. I'm a total wreck without twelve solid hours of uninterrupted sleep."

His aunt responded, "Suki's twenty years old, she's ill. We'll get you a new kitten with fresh whiskers and a striped face and she'll purr on your pillow and you'll sleep."

Nick nodded faintly. "What about the rest of the planets? I still need Saturn, Jupiter, Neptune, Uranus and Pluto to make me feel complete, Auntie."

The aunt shook her head. "Those aren't yours. They belong to the neighbors, Nick."

"I know, but I can't sleep without our solar system resting below my pencil bed. Mom told you about my special sleep disorder." Nick said.

The aunt kneeled, noticing the undercurrent growing aggressively in a sharp, diagonal motion. "Alright, Nick. I'll negotiate for the planets but please return with me right now!"

Nick nodded, studying the burgeoning sea for a moment. "In three days, Auntie. No adult can force a child to do anything. I want to enjoy a peaceful sleep a little longer."

"Alright," said the aunt hesitantly. She looked beyond the horizon of blue shacks seeing that the waves were gaining. She kissed her nephew and walked back home. She turned her head, watching Nick juggling the globes, his expression one of simple pleasure. She continued on her way. He was right, she thought. This is the twenty-second century and parents are no longer able to influence their children in any way.

Three days later, the aunt sat at the edge of the concrete, watching the pilgrimage of blue shack dwellers moving toward her. Scientists had warned the public that due to the unstable gravity occurring within the expanding Milky Way, the moon could, at any time, revert to its previous axis. The result would be chaotic tides and deviant moonbeams.

Above the waist deep tide, the marginals carried their children, their animals, their spare possessions. The aunt searched for her little nephew among the wet stragglers. Her eyes widened as she spotted two monstrous walls of water rapidly advancing toward her,

their crests carrying mangled palm fronds and blue pieces of wood.

At last she saw her nephew wading in water up to his neck as he struggled to keep a baby donkey above the water. The aunt waved and shouted at him but her voice traveled nowhere. All that was heard was the sound of the advancing walls of water reconquering its lost land.

Her nephew was almost within her reach but the sound of the sea caused him to turn his head for one last look at the point where the city ended and the waves began.

And even as the salt water invaded the cells of her body, the aunt thought of her nephew, imagining him juggling the globes, recalling his innocent expression. As her mind gradually lost its ability to reason without oxygen, she clung to the memory of Nick's face as long as she could.

## **To You Who Wait**

You have the patience of a woman, you can wait  
at home, teaching children to color in the lines,  
you're good at staying in the lines others create.

If wooden swing sets and sand toys occupy the space  
where you picture rose trees and tulips and columbine,  
you have the patience of a woman, you can wait

for an hour to see the doctor, he's running late  
this time, don't complain, it's only your time,  
and you're good at staying in the lines others create.

His degree took priority, husbands have to rate  
first, maybe later when you're older you'll shine.  
You have the patience of a woman, you can wait

to take a class here, another there, enough to placate  
unrest, don't disrupt the role you've been assigned.  
You're so good at staying in the lines others create.

When poetry emerges, you think it's too late  
for your voice to be heard, afraid you'll no longer find  
you have the patience of a woman who can wait  
or stay in the lines that others create.

## Piano Lessons

My mother loved to tell stories  
of how she scaled that mountain  
as a girl, a rebel against  
advice to protect herself  
from driving rain, biting wind and losing

herself. She didn't lose herself  
in stands of trees  
where light never reached  
the ground, or where she carved  
her own trail, and always found her way  
back. She lost herself

to the back  
of my grandmother's  
hand and the sting of my grandmother's  
voice. And to the crack  
of the piano teacher's stick  
across legs that barely reached

the ground and across  
knuckles that could never play  
outside with other children or play  
one wrong note in an otherwise  
perfect scale.



**(state your name) in america**

1.

this office is a 30-story smoked glass  
aquarium filled with ink  
papers float across each desk  
toward 5 o'clock  
thick waves roll over  
the sleeping creatures  
that live here in  
8-hour increments  
and when the day's work is shredded  
when the tanks on our backs  
are almost empty  
we decompress in the breakroom  
drink coffee and swim home

2.

at night  
i dream of colors  
painting my eyes  
brown i am the soil  
purple i am an orchid  
green i am a redwood  
grey i am a tornado  
yellow i am icarus  
orange i am a number-two pencil  
white another day

3.

at the bus stop yesterday  
a guy came up and asked  
me for a quarter  
i asked him what  
he wanted it for  
he said he was going  
to spin it on the sidewalk  
then stand by and see  
how long it took  
for someone to pick it up  
he said the last one  
stayed there for about  
fifteen minutes

**Spectator Slowdown**

The telephone pole  
rests lazily across the hood  
as the man steps from the metal heap  
the eighty-proof bottles  
forgotten on the back seat.

Shards of tinted glass lie inert  
reflecting the vultures standing,  
feasting on the sight  
while the form of a little boy  
liquidizes and flows into the gutter.



*Andrew Comey*

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## **Inflicting Blues**

A mist had blown in off the East river earlier in the evening and left the streets with a dull shine that reflected the weak glow of the street lights. A newspaper blew down the sidewalk, cast off by someone who didn't want any more facts in his life. An eddy caught the paper and it floated into an alley where through a basement window, the back of someone's head was silhouetted by the blinking glow of a red neon light.

Lamar stared at the sign that blinked "exit" and sucked on his reed just like he had always done. He was standing in the backstage hallway, but the comings and goings of the various entertainers didn't bother him. It was the same as it had always been: waiting, waiting, waiting. Exit. He reminded himself that he only had to play two sets to get the hundred he owed. Surely Shorty would front him again once he paid what he owed. All he needed was a twenty dollar balloon, enough for two fixes. That would make it right. Exit. That would make everything all right tonight.

One of the dancers, Daphne, came by and offered him a drag off the reefer she was smoking, but he smiled and nodded her off. Not interested. Not now.

The Shanta Dance Tap Review finished and passed on by, and Lamar felt a brief connection looking at the girl's rear end. He always liked rear ends, and the girls on the tap review had some of the best in Harlem. He wondered why he didn't have a girl at the present time but before he had a chance to reflect on it, the magician that was on next came shuffling by, pockets loaded. Lamar viewed him with disdain, only briefly acknowledging his presence in the hallway by taking his reed out of his mouth to spit. Lamar hoped the magician ate shit and fast. He hated people who made a living off

not telling the truth. Lamar knew that there was always some truth, somewhere, but never enough to go around.

The magician finally finished to a chorus of boos. Ain't nobody that likes a liar in this part of town, Lamar thought. Life was too real. In Lamar's mind it was a guy's own goddamn fault because if he truly was a magician, everybody knew he sure wouldn't be fucking around in Harlem. He'd be up in Manhattan.

Finally, it was time to play. Lamar opened his case and fitted his reed into his mouthpiece. Lamar realized he was the only saxophone. They must think I'm pretty good, he thought as he finished his drink and made his way up on stage.

When Earl Brown called Lamar a week ago to ask him to play the gig, he said it would be all blues, nothing fancy, just straight blues. Lamar took the gig because he was in a blues frame of mind most of the time. To him, blues were truth. The bebop gig he played at The Cotton Club on Wednesday nearly drove him insane with all of the scattered energy it took to keep up with that craziness. Blues were smooth, something that could be eased into. Once in, you could just sit back and cruise.

They cruised through the first set, taking their time, laying down a cushion of sound that the audience could lay down on, slowly rocking gently back and forth.

Lamar loved it, blowing long and slow. He could feel the truth of his notes drifting out over the audience, taking the tension out of their shoulders, massaging their necks with a breathy touch. During their break Earl smiled at him. Lamar had never known Earl to smile at anyone.

When they took the stage for their second set, Lamar saw that there were a lot of new faces in the audience, talking loud and laughing. The room's smooth, cool buzz was gone and voices bounced abrasively off the walls. One man came up to Earl and said a whole bunch of them had just come from up town and they wanted to dance. Earl looked at Lamar.

"Shit, you can dance to blues," Lamar told him.

Earl started calling up popular dance tunes. Lamar played them, but the delicacy and style of the first set was gone. His horn

didn't sing now, it honked. Earl gave him a few dirty looks during songs but he didn't care. As they played, Lamar watched the dancers. They whirled and twirled like they didn't have a care in the world. Shit, Lamar thought, these people don't want truth, all they want is pretty lies.

The last song of the set was an up-tempo blues tune called "Go on Red, Stop on Green." Lamar didn't think of the song as real blues, it was too "easy." He knew that with the tempo, people could hear the song and not have to listen to what it was saying. He thought Earl called it up just as a token offering. The last solo was Lamar's.

He watched the sweat pour off the dancers. They were bopping like it was the time of their lives. He waited for his solo.

When the time came Lamar went up to the mike. He took a long breath and started off noncommittally, like he was just testing the water before jumping in. He blew a note here, a few notes there. The pressure was building in the band behind him. The tempo sped up slightly. The snare drum and cymbals sounded a little louder.

He started to connect the notes into phrases, pausing in between to leave space. Then he started connecting the phrases. The audience could feel it and the dancer's gestures got wilder.

Going into the last repeat, Lamar strung together a long series of eighth notes. He started grabbing breaths with his nose while pushing notes out with his mouth so he didn't have to stop for air. The notes circled higher and higher and reached a peak then dropped down to the lowest range of his horn, where he started climbing again, this time faster with sixteenth notes, getting louder as he climbed, circling a pitch of the scale but always moving on, higher, building, the band in back of him accelerating, gathering momentum like a huge steel ball rolling down a steep hill.

The audience broke into a frenzy, barely able to control the actions of their bodies, flinging themselves wildly, faster and faster as Lamar climbed, switching to thirty-second notes, blowing them out until he thought his lungs would burst. Then going beyond, out of his body, into his horn where he felt the air from his lungs blasting past him, moist and hot, making the walls of the brass tunnel vibrate with the sound and power of an earthquake. Faster and faster, hotter

and hotter, higher and higher, until finally peaking one note away from the very top, one step away from the summit; he lost his grip and went sailing out of the horn, flying through the air over the dancers, then bouncing off the back wall and slamming fast back into himself.

The band was sustaining one chord at maximum volume, standing with the audience on the very edge of the cliff, waiting for the one note that would answer the question and send them flying off into space. The dancers screamed in ecstasy and anticipation, adding power to the chord. Lamar leaned back and took a deep breath and looked out over the dancer's heads at something no one else could see, then turned and walked off the stage. The band held the chord and the audience screamed even louder, begging him to give them that one last note they so desperately needed.

In the hall, Lamar could hear the roar as he put his sax back in its case. The red neon sign blinked over the door to the alley. "Go on red, stop on green," he said as he pushed through the door.



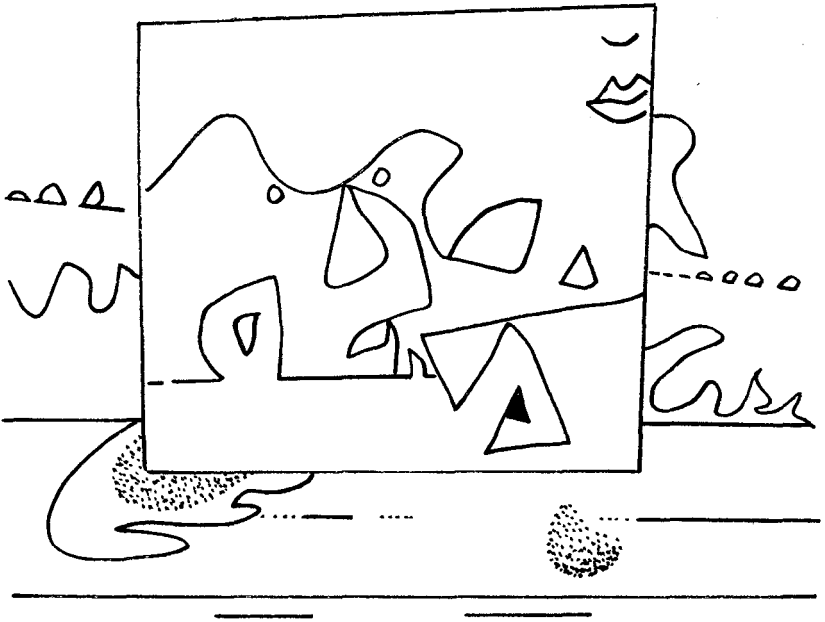
## Dinner Date

I want to remove  
the table separating us,  
Korean food, knives, forks,  
customers, waiters distracting  
our attention, the policeman  
in the corner watching our  
movements, and go home and  
make poetry, bare our souls  
and become closer than words,  
entwine legs and thighs,  
hop on a railroad boxcar  
at five miles per hour  
and zoom into the night,  
to dark crevices of mountains,  
following a wild rhythm without  
pre-made metrical patterns,  
a dam burst of music with  
no score to follow, blending  
Bach into Beethoven, bending  
our bodies into impossible curves,  
hips hinged together, breasts  
and shoulders pinned against  
each other, to fly and be perfect  
a second or two, rise above  
the hard world and float  
so time stands still, be-  
coming a staccato current  
flowing like a long flute note.

away from encyclopedias of rules,  
a swift union of nerves sending us  
tumbling down hills to the unknown,  
to strum new bars, reach new scales,  
touch new emotions and be  
like a wisp of wind, a surge  
of sunlight, or a melody of  
bird songs.

## Catch Me If You Can

At this moment, I could hijack the driver of a Greyhound bus, convince the passengers to let me drive them to New Orleans, to hear the barbaric cry of Coltrane's sax, to fly like an abandoned kite, eating highways, crashing picket fences and mending walls, never stopping to question the right and wrong of actions, to think too long, ready to unravel the strings of impulses on dust-strewn roads, a band of Walt Whitmans, riding like a second-rate sonnet, off-rhyme, unpatterned and disordered, shaking the rust off our bodies, and no one discussing silly poetry theories. I stop to pick up mental hospital patients, bridge-jumpers, suicidal poets, veranda leapers and domestic cats. "Hop on," I say, twitching my eyebrows. "The ride will be good for you." And we escape dorsal fins flapping to our own rhythms, catching an unrehearsed harmonica chord, a free uninhibited almost satirical wild sound, and go with it.



WALT PHILLIPS

**When Visions Boil Away to Residue**

Alchemist of current alarm  
You scramble  
At the orders of calendars  
Quicken to clocks  
Tick-talking blur of hands  
Stirring hours  
Days as if in cauldrons of questions  
Boiling centuries  
Pour in the pyramids of El Giza  
Pour in the Taj Mahal  
Pour in the gardens  
Hanging with the condemned in Babylon  
Pour in the crumbling  
Acropolis of our ancient souls  
Pour in the ruins of Rome  
And Stonehenge  
Pour in the giant Buddha  
Statues of Asia  
Pour in Shinto temples too  
Pour in the resonance of temple bells  
Twilight swelling with incense  
White gold swallowing turquoise sky  
The cauldron empties its dust  
Reflects desert mirage  
Thrusting steel and glass towers  
In modern cities

## Jesus Potato

I saw the face of Jesus in my baked potato.

It happened last night during my solitary dinner. I baked a potato and decided to get fancy with it so I stuffed it with cheese, garlic, chives and butter, and tossed it back in the oven for a few minutes while I finished watching the news. Little did I know...

When the news was over, I took my potato from the oven and set it on a plate. Uninspired, I decided to eat just the potato, without green beans or any other balancing of my diet. I plopped down in front of the TV and unwrapped the foil—and there was the face of Jesus, staring up at me from the wrinkled skin of an Idaho Russet!

I'm not a Catholic or a Protestant. I used to be both, if you count my ancestors. I take my religious experiences as they come, or just make 'em up as I go along. And seeing Jesus' face on the skin of my potato was a religious experience—for about two seconds. Then I remembered all those news stories of sightings of The Virgin Mary in glazed bathroom windows; and of the Muslim pilgrimages to England to see some crazy eggplant whose seeds spelled out the name of Allah; and of the fundamentalist bees who spelled out somethin' religious in their honeycomb.

All that stuff seemed a little weak to me. Now, if they'd opened up the eggplant and found a gold nugget inside, it might have been somethin' to write home about. If I could just figure out some way to squeeze a few bucks out of this Jesus Potato thing, maybe I'd have a religious experience that would last a little longer than two seconds.

What to do?

I called my friend Dolores, an ex-Catholic. She told me to eat the potato before it got stone cold. —No way!

I set Jesus Potato on the kitchen counter and went back into the living room. I needed to watch TV for a while (I think better when the TV is on). When the show was over, I took another look at Jesus Potato. It was gettin' so you kinda had to use your imagination a little bit in order to see Jesus. I figured I'd better get to preservin' it pretty quick or I was gonna lose it. I headed for the garage.

After rummaging around in the garage for a while, I came up with a can of varnish. Great! A few coats of varnish and my fortune would be secure.

Would a one dollar "donation" be a fair price to charge the 50,000 pilgrims of the weak-minded variety who would flock to my door for a glimpse of this recently-baked relic? Two dollars? Why not five? —I made a mental note to check into accepting plastic.

Would the pilgrims crawling toward my botanical shrine require knee-pads for their bloodied limbs? —A basketball supply house!

And, I could sell rights to fast-food chains to set up booths along the route. My mental list was getting a little long. I figured I'd better get a lawyer to handle the paperwork and incorporate: Jesus Potato, Inc.

I hurried back into the house with the varnish—but I couldn't find the dang Jesus Potato! Had I left it on the counter—or had I shoved it in the refrigerator? I opened the refrigerator. No Jesus Potato. Had I left it in front of the TV? I stomped into the living room. No Jesus Potato.

Then I heard a scrabbling sound coming from a corner of the kitchen. The cat!

If I wasn't such a macho son-of-a-bitch I would have cried. Ragtime, my cat—an atheist—had snagged Jesus Potato off the counter and was batting it around on the floor like a catnip-laced toy. Well, what could I have expected? A cat brain is about the size of a ping-pong ball, and holds about the same amount of air. Ain't much room up there for things spiritual and transcendent—like money.

I pushed Ragtime away from Jesus Potato and examined it for damage. Shit! Looked like Charlie Manson now—another reli-

gious figure—complete with a little cat-scratched swastika on his forehead. —Ain't no money in a Manson Potato.

With great regret I dumped Manson Potato into Ragtime's bowl, reproaching myself for not having immediately whipped out the Polaroid when the spirit had moved me and the vision had been fresh.

—But, wait! How 'bout a new, microwave fast food: “Potato Manson”? I could stuff it with cheese, garlic, chives and butter. Ragtime could do the swastikas...



**fragile**

late again down Lankershim to the freeway,  
 spilled coffee dribbling between shabby seats,  
 he thought at first the pigeon plump and white in  
 the line of traffic was pecking at popcorn  
 bouncing in the street until it struck him  
 no sane pigeon would be hopping up and down in  
 8 a.m. congestion and popcorn couldn't float  
 up and down even in the currents  
 from a thousand cars

and then he was passing  
 the auto parts emporium, shifting  
 his lame shoulder, passing  
 the pigeon feathers, the shut-down  
 surplus store whose baby-shit yellow  
 walls had grown giant white mouths that  
 howled in black and red  
**GOING OUT OF BUSINESS**

**WE'LL MISS YOU** and he was passing  
 the clock at the corner  
 still on standard time and  
 then the bus stop, two prep-dressed men  
 pointing with upstretched arms and  
 white smiles in the sun to the top  
 of the new high-rise offices, and scrap paper  
 swirled in exhaust and  
 he strained to see in his rear-view

mirror the wounded bird as he thought of silver  
pigeons that swoop under gray freeways, or  
iridescent necks that peck at  
stained sidewalks, survivors, but  
all he could see was the smudged collage  
of Los Angeles and he passed  
the same bent Chicana he saw most  
mornings and he stiffened  
his back against the ripped seat

## Singing Bowl

I am round, heavy  
with sound dwelling unexpressed  
in my bronze bowl self,  
a singing bowl of Tibetan birth,  
prized only by ones who know  
me—know the way  
to stroke the slow and steady  
thrum around inside  
my rim, around and round  
until I hum  
the world harmonious  
deep within your being,  
upward, downward,  
waves of sound expanding  
with each circle—  
sound into sound  
surrounding home until  
the strokes can end  
and I can sing  
and ring and gently hum  
then slowly bow  
to silence, resonant  
with sound



**Japanese fighting fish**

phone-call phobia during hot bath bubbling  
breathing chest rising high and falling  
woken by screaming children  
connected to the wall  
your thin arm coldly hangs up

sticky eyelash laughter sound  
asleep floating in waterdreams  
waltzing heartbeat journey over  
jagged late night broadcasts  
I touch your naked leg

## **My Crayons**

Sixty-four over four over sixteen is more  
Than an aura of domestic life on a desk;  
Is more than 'Creativity' embalmed on fribble  
Cardboard for a lonesome tenure of community;  
Is more versatile than an ego-boost pointed  
Within the embellished love of my past.

Each tenant pursues its own realm of novel wonder,  
Each part of a florid breed who stations no restraint  
In their furnished aversion for desire or coalescence,  
Ruled by the digits of a queer-souled proprietor in and  
About a unique image, amidst a muddle for the ambition  
Of the dream, thinking merely, "I love my crayons!"

## Regular Guy in Hollywood

I was saving a lot of money because I was getting paid from working at the Auto Parts Store, and I was living with Uncle Lou. I felt like I knew there was more out there for me to do. Not that I didn't like working at the Auto Parts Store, it was OK but I knew I might have to move on. I asked myself one day, OK, what is the thing you are most interested in? That was easy, TV and movies. I watched a lot of TV and saw almost every movie that came out. I didn't care if those movie critics gave them one star or four, it's more important that the people who put the movie together got people to see it. It's a big accomplishment.

I decided that I should move to California to be where they make the movies and TV shows. I got enough money together to buy a ticket on the Greyhound Bus to go to Hollywood. I told Uncle Lou and his eyes got all watery, but he told me I was all grown up now and I could make my own decisions. I think he was secretly relieved. I wasn't interested in making Auto Parts a career, so he was training the wrong guy. There are plenty of guys in Detroit who would love a job like mine. It would be better for everyone involved.

In California, I figured I could be an actor. They sometimes discovered people right off the street. Regular people, they liked regular people like me. Someone could just walk up to you and you'd think they're probably going to ask you for the time, but instead they asked you if you'd like to be in their movie or TV show. They looked for regular-looking people because we're so ordinary. We acted like ourselves, and they liked that. They had way enough people who were trained to act, they didn't need any more of those. I saw a special on Jimmy Stewart, the famous actor, and he said he

never took an acting class a day in his life. He just did it, and he's real good. So maybe I could too.

I got a job as the guard at the front gate at 20th Century Fox studios. In the beginning, I was being trained by a Security Supervisor, Bill. He had a gun and after my training period was over, I got a gun too. I learned how to check the list for drive-on passes that were arranged ahead of time. I learned how to call for verification if a guest arrived and we had no pass at the gate. People who worked at Fox full-time had parking stickers stuck to the lower left windshield of their cars. I tried to remember their names and say hi, or have a nice day. And if I couldn't remember their names, I smiled and remembered their faces. I also had to learn who were the wives or husbands, or boyfriends, or girlfriends of the stars, so as not to offend anyone.

I liked my job, and I took it very seriously. I got my first raise after six months. And I got to know many of the stars on a first name basis. I said hi to Mel (Mel Brooks), and one Christmas he gave me a videotape of his movie "Spaceballs" which was very nice of him. I have it at home, tucked inside a Ziplock baggie. I labeled the baggie "Given to me by M. Brooks, my friend and movie producer, 12/19/88." I have never played it, mainly because I don't own a VCR.

I said hi to Corbin (Corbin Bernson) from "L.A. Law." One day, for no reason at all, he gave me a bottle of red wine. I don't drink, so I was able to preserve it. I have it inside a large freezer baggie, and it's labeled "Given to me by C. Bernson, my friend and a fine actor on L.A. Law on 4/12/89 because (in C. Bernson's words) 'you're a great guy doing a great job.'"

I also am on a first name basis with Cybill (Cybill Sheperd) and Bruce (Bruce Willis). Bruce asked me once why I thought he should do a movie where he hangs off the Fox Towers (just built behind the lot) and I said, "Bruce, because it's there." Next thing you know he made "Die Hard." That's what friends are for.

I really liked Jamie (Jamie Lee Curtis) too. She always ate a lot of junk food. She'd buy Kit Kat bars, especially. She would eat half of one, then get to the guard gate and give me the other half and she'd



usually say something like “get this stuff away from me!” I’d take it off her hands, and waved “see you tomorrow.” I have 37 dated baggies filled with half-eaten candy bars from Jamie, mostly Kit-Kats but she’d really go for anything with chocolate. I liked her show and I prayed “Anything But Love” got better ratings.

Don and Melanie (Don Johnson and Melanie Griffith) were on the lot quite a bit before “Working Girl” premiered, so I got to know them. They’re both real nice. She’s kind of quiet, but I think it was because of opening night jitters. On their way out one day, Don handed me a half-filled styrofoam cup of coffee. “Mind dumping this out for me? Thanks.” “No problem,” I said, and waved goodbye. I poured the coffee into a nearby bush, and kept the styrofoam cup for myself. I put it in my knapsack and when I got home, I was so excited. Not only had Don been drinking from the cup, but there was lipstick on the edge of the cup too. Melanie’s. I have this in a dated Ziplock baggie, labeled “Given to me by my new friends D. Johnson and M. Griffith.”

I have been collecting gifts from my friends for quite a few years now. I know how busy they all are, and it comforts me to know that even though they are off working shooting a film, I have a part of them nearby. So when I begin to miss them, I pull out a baggie and smile remembering them, and once a year I have a big party and I pull out all the baggies for the evening. I arrange them in my living room on my couch and pillows. When I look around, I am filled with such joy I start to cry. I am so fortunate to have so many people I care about. I always stop crying and start laughing when I look around and see I have the most mementos from Jamie (Jamie Lee Curtis)—that girl can go through junk food. I don’t know how she keeps her figure.

It’s my own private hobby, I guess you could say. I’ve thought about telling the guard on the night shift, then he could collect stuff in the day when I’m not around. But, it’s really a private matter. I know I’m just a sentimentalist, but they might think I’m crazy or something and then I could lose my job.

I had been working at Fox for almost eight months when they hired this new guard named Bobby, and they put him on my shift.

I didn't like him too much. After I'd talk to Jamie Lee Curtis or any of the Fox stars, he'd make fun of me. Like one time I said to Jimmy Smits, "I really liked you in last week's show. I was so worried that you'd lose that case but you pulled it out as usual." Jimmy told me how they re-wrote the script up to the last minute, and how just before they filmed he got new lines. I told him he did such a good job acting I couldn't even tell his lines were changed. He thanked me and drove off. Then Bobby imitated me and made kissing noises. I never did like to argue so I just looked down and made myself busy alphabetizing the drive-on passes.

They were filming a big restaurant scene for "L.A. Law" and since Jimmy Smits knew how much I liked the show he asked me if I wanted to be in it. I was really surprised, but I tried to keep it in because I didn't want to appear too eager or anything. I said yeah, that sounds good. He said there was a small part in it, only a few lines, for a busboy. And I would make a good busboy, he said. So before I knew it, the casting lady called me and told me where to show up and what to wear, and that Jimmy spoke very highly of me. The whole rest of my shift I was so excited I thought I might throw up my lunch burrito.

I got home and pulled out my white shirt and plain black pants. It was a good thing I could work the night shift now and then because that way I could hold down a steady job and be an actor at the same time. The casting lady told me to come in make-up tomorrow too. So it sounded like they were just going to have me all ready to go for the cameras.

That evening, I went out to the dime store and looked a long time in the make-up section. I was trying to remember what my Auntie Edna used. I bought some pancake and foundation, some eyeshadows, black eyeliner and mascara. I spent almost \$25, but I looked at it as an investment.

When I got back to my apartment, I didn't know exactly how to apply the make-up. So I stared at it for like an hour and then knocked on Mrs. Dencheck's door. She's my landlady. Even though she was 63-years-old and had a hearing problem, she always wore her face all made up pretty. So I knew she could help me out. She was all

excited when I told her I was going to be on "L.A. Law," even though she didn't stay up that late anyway and never saw the show. She fed me milk and ginger cookies as she did my cheeks and eyes. She was a model once herself, which is where she learned to apply make-up correctly. I felt very lucky to have a former model for a landlady. Mrs. Dencheck powdered me off and sent me home with a paper plate of more ginger cookies and some cheese she couldn't digest too well.

The next day I went to Fox all made-up and ready to go. My Supervisor, Bill, saw me and smiled. "I got a part on L.A. Law today," I told him, "Don't worry, I'll be back at work tonight." He waved me on. I heard Bobby laughing at something and Bill telling him to shut up.

The sun was bright and everything looked so clear to me, like the day after a heavy rain when everything suddenly looks almost too real. Stage 19 was where the show was filmed. It was so crazy there. People were moving cameras and walking real fast and talking real loud. I spotted the casting lady and she took my arm and put a piece of paper in my hand that had my lines on it. Well there was only one line. It was "I don't know, I'll get your waitress." She told me it was in response to a line that Corbin Bernson would be saying, asking me how much longer his food would be. Corbin was acting very impatient because he had a big case coming up, that was what the casting lady said. She asked me to quick do the line. I tried to memorize it as fast as I could. Actors have to learn their lines at a moment's notice.

The casting lady looked at her watch and said, "Any time." So I did the line but I left out some words. She stared at me and asked why I was wearing makeup. I told her she asked me to. She laughed and said all I needed was some base so I wouldn't shine under the lights. She thought the rouge and eyeliner were a bit much, and then she laughed. I was thinking, how was I to know? I didn't know. Mrs. Dencheck should've known what was right. The casting lady said there was no time and to leave the makeup on. Jimmy Smits walked by and I waved to him, but he was talking to someone and didn't notice me.

So I did the scene and it went pretty OK. I didn't mean to, but the line kept coming out of my mouth wrong. I was nervous I guess. Then a guy with headphones came to get me and said I was released and told me to sign some papers. I asked when the show would be airing. He said probably in four weeks.

It took forever for those weeks to pass, and finally my "L.A. Law" came on. I called to tell everybody back home in Detroit. After all, it was my television debut, you could say. I was watching it and watching it and then the restaurant scene came on and before I knew it, it was over. I wasn't in it at all. They cut me out. Like I wasn't even there. Like I never did the job. Like they never hired me. No one called me from back home to ask me what happened or of it was the wrong week. I'm glad they didn't because I wouldn't have known what to say. I was so sad that night I broke into the plastic baggies marked "Jamie Lee Curtis" and ate the rest of the Kit Kat bars she didn't finish. Sorry, Jamie. They were stale but I didn't care.

When I went to work the next day, Bobby said he watched the show and didn't see me on it. He made fun of me again. He said he thought he saw the back of my head in the restaurant but he wasn't sure it was mine because it didn't look big and fat enough. I didn't want to cause any trouble or anything so I laughed a little bit like I thought it was funny even though it wasn't.

I didn't go to work the next day. I called in sick, which I never do. Bill said it was OK and he'd get another guy to cover for me. He was nice enough not to ask me why I was sick. He probably knew.

The next couple of months, I kept working as a guard at Fox. I did my best but my heart wasn't in it like before. I was eating more chips and candy and ice cream. My pants were getting tight around the waist and I didn't want to buy new ones. So I started wearing my shirts outside so the tails hid the fact that I couldn't zip my pants all the way up.

The pizza delivery guys started to know me by my first name. I was ordering pizzas not just for dinner, but in the middle of the night too. They never asked me why I was ordering so many pizzas

or how I could eat them all. I guess I'm not the only one who orders a lot. Mrs. Dencheck started worrying about me, though she never said as much but I could tell because instead of giving me like a dozen ginger cookies, she started giving me only one or two.

I wasn't feeling too well about that time, so I started calling in sick. I didn't do it too often at first, like I'd call in once every two weeks, but then I started calling in every week. Bill at the guard gate was worrying about me but I told him not to and that I didn't need to see a doctor.

When I stayed home sick, I wouldn't do much. I just kept looking over all my gifts from my friends. I had stopped collecting stuff from them and I wasn't sure why. I guess I lost interest. I began to wonder if I was cut out for all this Hollywood stuff. I wanted so bad to be discovered and all I was doing was working as a lousy guard.

One week I didn't go into work at all and I didn't bother to call in. The phone would ring but I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone. Bill called Mrs. Dencheck because I wrote her down as my nearest living relative in case of an emergency because I didn't have nobody here in L.A. and Uncle Lou was too far away. She came over and found me lying asleep on the floor with the TV on. She poured a glass of water on my face and brushed food crumbs off my shirt, and then I heard Geraldo asking some guy why he killed his family of four.

Mrs. Dencheck made me tea and showed me the deep knee bends she still did to keep in shape and how I could do them too. I said I'd try it but I knew I wouldn't. Then she told me my boss had called and I should go back to work because I was still young and able for crying out loud.

The next day I did. I went back to work. But it was too late. I wasn't there more than five or ten minutes when Bill came up to me and said he had to fire me and that he felt bad but I wasn't reliable anymore. I agreed with him and left.

Back at my apartment, I sat alone in the dark for two or three, maybe it was more, days. I can't exactly remember. All I remember is the dark. I didn't turn on any lights or even the TV. No light came

in except for a crack, a slanted sliver from underneath my only window. It was an old shade Mrs. Dencheck kept saying she would fix because it didn't line up right and everything in life should line up right. It bothered her but she never got around to fixing it. It never bothered me though.

In that dark room I thought about a lot of things. I thought, what am I doing here? Why did I leave home? And was I stupid for wanting to be an actor? I was stupid. I was no actor. Nobody wanted me. Who was I kidding? Me, that's who. I was kidding me. You need talent to be an actor and I guess I didn't have it. I'd be better off back home at Uncle Lou's Auto Parts Store. That's where I belonged. I could do that. I could sell auto parts all my life and never be disappointed.

I decided to go back home, and I told Mrs. Dencheck. She said she'd miss me, but my rent was a month past due so she was glad I'd have a steady job again. It was true; I owed her rent. I only had a little savings left so I gave her twenty dollars and all my gifts from my famous friends as collateral.

I called Uncle Lou and he said he would take me back and that he couldn't find anyone as good as me to fill the job. He was just saying that to be nice. I planned to leave at the end of the week, on Saturday. I had four days to go. I kept some money for my Greyhound ticket back and then I took what was left, ten dollars, and went out to get some groceries for the rest of the time I was here and for the long ride home.

I walked outside. It was the first time I saw daylight in days. I had been in the dark so long my eyes hurt to look up. Everything was washed out like all of Southern California had been left out in the sun too long. And I didn't see a bird in the sky that day either, not one. I felt like I was in a strange land, like in some science fiction movie, and I didn't know how I got there.

I walked into Ralph's supermarket on La Brea. It was such a relief to finally be in there because everything outside felt so weird. I usually got the same food every time I went there, mostly I bought lots of food in cans like canned spaghetti because it kept longer and it was cheap and easy to make. I just heated it up or ate it cold out

of the can if I was in a hurry. Anyway, I was picking up some canned beef stew when this other can suddenly fell off the shelf. I figured I did it, so I picked it up and put it back on the shelf.

I was ready to move on to the next aisle when another can fell off the shelf. This one wasn't my fault, I knew it because I was not even standing near it. I was thinking, should I pick it up? I'm not going to pick up the can because I didn't drop the can, so why should I? They pay stock boys to pick up cans. But then I thought, why should I take it out on the stock boys? They have it just as tough as me. Who am I not to pick up the can? I'm going to pick up this can and I don't care what anybody thinks. So I picked the can up and put it back on the shelf and I felt good about it. Just as I did, two more cans fell. People were looking at me like I did it, like I was some guy who liked dropping cans, so I told them, "These cans are flying off the shelf all by themselves, I didn't do it." Then more cans fell off, so many I couldn't even catch them all. I said to a lady, "Did you see that? It just flew off the shelf all by itself." She walked by me like she didn't hear what I said.

Then the manager of the store came over. His name was Stan, that's what it said on his plastic tag. He started accusing me of throwing cans on the floor. I kept telling him, "I didn't do it, I didn't do it." He asked, then how did it happen? I told him they were falling off the shelves like they were alive or something. He laughed at me and said, it's OK because, "You're on Candid Camera!" Candid Camera. It took a minute to sink in. Wow, was I surprised. I was on TV and didn't even know it.

The Candid Camera people told me when my show would be on and I called all my relatives back home in Detroit. I told Uncle Lou I wouldn't be coming home and that I was going to stay here in Hollywood. After my show aired, some people even recognized me on the street.

Things are looking up.

**Red Jacket (From the Street)**

Unzip his red  
jacket and  
hang it  
over the  
cane-chair

neatly

like you  
did mine

from the  
street  
below  
I'll  
think  
of  
it



## Sideview (On the Freeway)

Laughter topples out the car  
radio out of reach  
you are a mirage  
appearing and disappearing on  
a horizon

I'm just realizing it's  
imaginary

There are levels to your deceit

Inside a damaged heart  
keeps pushing stubbornly  
with a realization as actual  
as blood--

that you are not what you say  
that objects may appear closer  
than they are

as actual as blood--  
and I may let it  
slither through me  
down my legs and into my  
toes, onto the accelerator,  
to my arms, my face,  
my eyes

this hideous sideview may  
do for me what you  
cannot

look over my shoulder  
bumps, change lanes

## After Everything (Running the Dunes)

I pace--  
I pace through sand  
on footprints that blur  
    with repetition  
    with a smooth and pleasant pulse  
    in my head a motor heaving  
Heaving, and keeping me alive  
and going, pacing

If you were to appear suddenly  
atop one of the dunes  
    materialize and shimmer  
    a few feet off the ground  
I would believe it now  
I would believe your impervious smile  
My stride could quicken again  
even now  
it could quicken

Even after all the things horrible  
that I know  
    I could spread across you  
    one finger to your lips  
    another at your awful toes  
And my face would feel the  
patting of your heart  
like footsteps

And I could conjure  
that you want me  
again  
Even now after everything

I could believe  
you

## Empty Space

I'm back in the house that was my mother's  
looking for her  
behind mounds of excess tableware  
and rubber bands and  
styrofoam cups.

I'm not sure what she was barricading herself from.  
Perhaps she just forgot that she already had 78 cups  
somewhere.

These are the layers of her mind  
preserved like an ancient civilization  
in the stacks of papers  
and the drawers and cupboards crammed with things.  
I let them breathe again.

I unearth the 1960's silver plate dinnerware  
and set it out  
to remember better times.

I wish for the impossible  
her return

then I obsessively dig into another pile or drawer  
and lose myself in the spaces she filled so immeasurably.

## Charlie Ham

I reaches back of the bailin' machine an' gets my bottle of Kamchatka. I blows the paper dust off an' takes a sip. I hears the boy laughin' an sees the funny side of his head (This week lookin' like it been raked by a claw). Then he gone, duckin' down to tie wire round a paper bale. I don' mine none, he's the best partna I ever had.

It's payday today, and we both happy. I comes out an' gives him a hand rockin' the bale off the rollers. The buzza' from the shredder rings an' I ambles over an' pulls out a pile of paper an' feeds it into the bailer chute. The boy comes up side me an' pulls at the paper like some kinda' maniac; pullin' so hard the back of his t-shirt sweat up in a minute. I smiles at the muscles workin' in his arms and back remindin' me a when I was a young'n. Then I says, "Slow down, or theres won't be no work left." Like a smart ass he tells me, "There's always work to do old man."

I worries 'bout that boy. He works too hard. An' that funny weed he smokes all the time makes me nervous. Right after he smokes it he gets a dumb look on his face, then 'bout a half-hour later he's all tired out. Still, he keeps workin' like if he slow down, he die. No lunch, jus' eight hours straight. Ya know, an' when he runs outta weed, he talk real good, too good to be a janitor.

Once I asked him how come he is makin' paper bales an' sweepin' up in the shop when he could get trainin' an' be workin' a printing press. He looks at me like he is real angry an' his pug nose starts a twitchin', an' his eyes git real small, an' he says real quiet how he don't have no plans to be a printa', an' how he jus wants to party.

Well, the next day I takes the bus to Santa `nita. I don't listen to the poor old white mens an' the brothers talkin' their stuff 'bout the horses. I jus' takes my pint o' Kamchatka out my coat pocket,

takes a sip an', keepin' to myself, waits to try fo' some luck with some a' my money.

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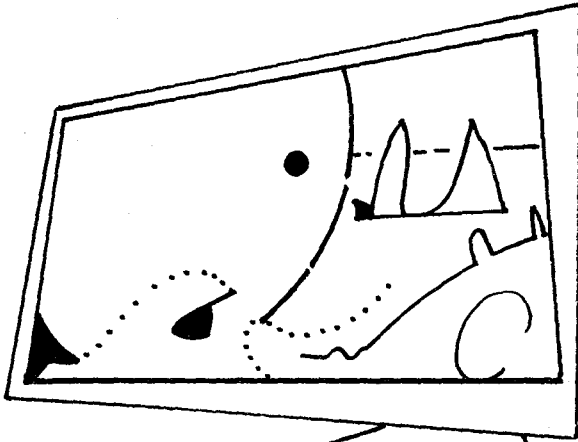
Charlie Ham is pretty damn lazy, but I guess that's 'cause he's an old dude. I really don't dig the workers calling him Sambo. And the way he smiles and shakes his head-what an Uncle Tom. If anyone calls me nigger or Sambo, I'll knock them out, fast.

This is going to be a righteous day. I barely managed to leave my herb at the crib to keep my ass clear-headed. Soon I won't have to worry 'bout goin' back to school or doin' this tired job. In the last race I'm puttin' all my money on Rich Cream. The last time he was blocked in the stretch, but today, at fifty to one, man I'll make at least twenty thousand dollars when he wins.

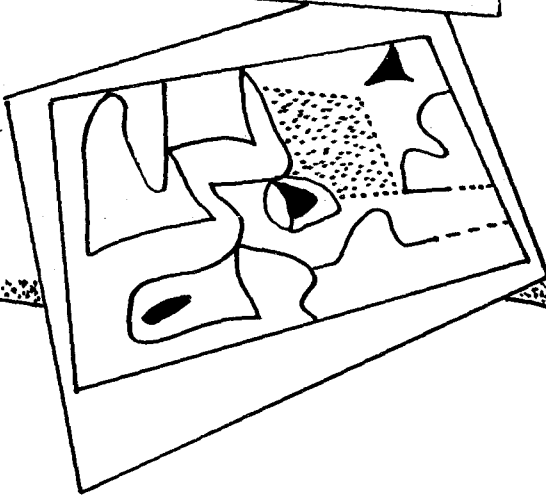
Hold on, is that suave lookin' brotha' Charlie Ham? I walk over to Charlie real cool, and wink at a fine sister on the way, tell her to chill, an' I'll be back when I win. The sound of my boots makes a lot of people turn around as I walk up to Charlie. That's right; I'm bad. I feel like I'm happenin': a winner. "Hey Charlie." I go over and whisper, "Hey man, Rich Cream in the next race." He just laughs.

The race goes off and Rich Cream trails, then moves up eighth, seventh, fifth. In the stretch he closes in on the leader. I lose my cool and yell, "C'mon Rich Cream!" Both the jockeys whip their horses, pushin' their heads toward the finish. The wire comin' up, my jockey pulls his horse's head back, to lose by a whisker.

With all my coin gone, I start to think about the next payday. The crowd, the girl, everything starts to look tired. Feelin' like a chump, as I walk away I nod to Charlie. He waves for me to come over. His vodka breath bothers the shit outta' me. He pulls out a fifty dollar ticket on the winner, a ten to one shot, worth about five hundred cash. "It's a tough game," he whispers. Then with his sad bloodshot eyes lookin' right through me, he tells me I should be in school.



*two  
small  
abstracts*



WALT PHILLIPS

## Ordering Words

microscopic motes  
color objects grey  
manic specks fill the air  
raving at disorder  
i vacuum away madness  
polish to a compulsive clean  
superficial neatness  
unable to tame brain entropy  
depressive dust freed from closets  
chase sanity into corners  
mental cobwebs pull me down  
into screaming rooms with no escape

I battle back with sleep  
fight chaos with my pen

## Found Poem

National Geographic, May 1991

One casualty  
was a cow carrying  
a four-month-old fetus  
(left),  
examined by scientists studying the elephant's  
22-month gestation period.  
Most culling teams spare elephants  
old enough to survive without  
their mothers  
yet small enough to be moved to less populated areas  
or to be sold  
to game ranches, safari parks, and zoos.  
When the shooting stops,  
the elephants are butchered.  
Hides, meat, and ivory are sold  
to help support game management.  
Culling, unlike poaching  
and trophy hunting,  
attempts to maintain the herd's  
natural age and gender balance.  
Still, critics emphasize the inevitable  
loss of genetic diversity and the horror  
of slaughtering great  
and intelligent beings.



It lingered  
like bath salts in the still warm waters  
in ancient baths as they await the emerging bodies  
young strong soiled bodies of the long dead  
art deco as a backdrop, tiles below naked feet, a chilled walk  
journey disrobed pure as in birth, clean skin to be reborn  
washed into reemergence from the soils  
and perspired fluids of a day

it lingered  
the image of my grandfather  
dead, lost, settled gently into the soil, into the earth  
forever unclean infinitely unwashed  
the entire cycle of life's cleanliness  
lost, ended, halted, the instant  
of the closing of his tired eyes

at that moment he was no longer clean  
death is dirty  
the very word soils our conversation  
clouds our thoughts  
like the disintegration of a lump of dirt  
thrown into water an instant shock  
and then the slow dissolve  
and spread as it evens out and widens  
shock and impact fading as realization

a life's baths couldn't keep him clean  
can't keep anybody clean

the instant is in the future it will come  
in every clean day we approach  
in every washed and dressed moment  
we walk toward it

washed, bathed, showered, and ready we  
will scrub as hard as we can  
no matter how big the hurry no matter how late  
it is not because of commercials we don't breathe  
fresh breath we don't impress  
we don't groom or sculpt

we scrub as hard as we can to get it off, to keep it away  
the soils, the wear, the decay, the antievolution, the residue  
my grandfather saw it  
as for the last time his eyes closed  
and the lashes became rows of tombstones

lines of objects in the soil  
anchored in the earth to linger  
then dissolve  
until nothing remains  
but the soil

## **The Woman Waiting**

On the hillside,  
children pluck  
houndstooth daisies,  
weaving laurels.  
The woman waiting watches;  
her fingers  
stroke the shadows  
of their heads,  
locks and curls tousled  
in rolling down  
the gentle incline,  
tumbling like milkweed  
in an August breeze.  
The woman waiting  
passes a straying hand  
over her lonely belly  
as a Gypsy's glass ball  
knows a barren womb.

The King of The Hill  
shouts his proud laughter,  
his tossed crown a gauntlet.  
It is all important  
to be Napoleon of the prairie  
in this summer hour,  
though at seven  
all he'll think of  
is the size of his cut

of hot rhubarb pie.

On the hillside,  
the woman waiting  
plucks laughter from the air,  
chases the lilting sound  
like soap bubbles.

Back in her apartment,  
dishes wait like subway riders,  
cluttering the kitchen sink;  
the white linen of the bassinet  
is today's fresh.

The woman waiting  
loses the woman  
and becomes her waiting.

## Deadly Grapes

It was late but the sun continued to burn their arms brown. Inéz and Carlos were on their knees picking and packing grapes. Their tattered straw hats offered minimum protection from the oppressive sun. Thinking they heard a duster, they instinctively pulled their handkerchiefs over their faces. Looking up, they saw nothing, this time.

Inéz pulled her handkerchief off. Still stooped over, she called to Carlos, not too loudly for the foreman. "Raúl told me that Chávez is coming to the camp tonight." There was hope and excitement in her voice.

Guillermo, nearby, overheard her. "He's going to talk about the Vons boycott."

Last month the market chain had again broken their agreement not to advertise grapes. Word was that the union was still trying to negotiate. For a brief period, there was murmuring among the vines. Carlos was filled with anticipation now as he pulled the dusty green jewels off the plant.

Finally, the foreman honked the company station wagon's horn to signal the workers to stop for the day and get their paychecks for the week. They slowly straightened up and shook the dust and stiffness off.

From the hood, the foreman hollered, "Valdivia. Balomi. Sakamoto..." His round gold-plated belt buckle reflected the sun, searing "Mort" into their eyes. It was the usual. "60 hours, \$199" was marked at the top of the pay stub and, at the bottom, "Deductions: ride \$25, food \$50, rent \$25."

Under his breath, Carlos let out, "Rip-offs."

Nobody said anything. The foreman had told them repeatedly

that there are many other workers that can take their places. And this was true. Guillermo was working for two weeks for no pay now. They told him it was a trial period. Today they tell him they're not going to hire him.

Carlos and Inéz crammed into the station wagon with the eleven other workers that share the ride. The foreman got in last.

Turning to the other workers, Mort said, "You know what day it is. Good old Friday."

The thirteen workers knew this routine. They pooled amongst themselves enough money and handed it over to Mort. He required that they treat him to an expensive bottle of tequila, for all his hospitality as he put it.

The station wagon pulled to a stop in front of half a dozen or so shacks. Everyone got out. Mort sped off. The dirt the tires kicked up was still settling. Carlos saw the dust curtain billow around their eight year old daughter. The girl was standing near the open fire. The pan of rice and beans was burning black. Dalia just stared at her parents mutely. Carlos and Inéz knew. They ran the two yards to their one room shack. Their eyes adjusted frustratingly slow to the darkness. On the cardboard mattress, propped up on packing crates, Gabriela was still. The moonlight forced its streak through the cardboard roofing, leaving a lighter mark across the teenager's face. Inéz sat by Gabriela's head. She removed the handkerchief used to hold back her daughter's hair. Stroking its length, she chanted, "Gaby, Gaby, Gaby." Carlos walked over to the two and picked up their limbless child.

He held her to him.

There were no tears.

They waited for Chávez in the dark.

## The Garden

Lily is checking the round, shallow, woven basket of items which she has gathered from the forested area nearby. The almonds, ginkgo nuts, and the long, pale, yellow roots of lop sok tei are dried and ready for the brew. She places the sundries and the chicken she has killed earlier into the large, round-necked, unglazed crock on the wood-burning stove.

The pot cooks quickly, and Lily takes a porcelain bowl over to feed Cosmos in bed. It has been hard for him to do much since his circulation has worsened. Cosmos sips the broth and chews on the bitter-sweet buttery-flavored ginkgo nuts but refuses the chicken Lily has shredded for him. She reminds him that the chicken is needed for rebirth.

As she again brings the spoon to his mouth, Cosmos says, "Let's do it today, Lily."

"Are you sure?"

Cosmos needn't answer. She sees it in his eyes.

The sun begins to move into position. The rays straddle the old cottage. Cosmos, in bed by the window, looks past the fairy primroses and monkey flowers in the window box to his wife in the garden. Lily is stooped low among the scarlet snapdragons and the yellow chrysanthemums. It takes Cosmos a few minutes to fix his eyes on her in the extensive vegetation. The blooms dance on stage, back-dropped by weeping willow tendrils, spotlighted by the approaching bright noon sun. Lily is one of them with her head wrapped in a soft, gauzy, floral scarf. Cosmos used to work along side her. His derby hat still hangs on the nail in the adobe wall by the opening where there is no door.

With her clippings, Lily wades through the maze of plants indoors to Cosmos. In a porcelain basin by the bed, with the heel of her palm, she crushed the bell-shaped blooms of the snapdragon, the feather-like petals of the chrysanthemum and the pak kei, the pitch-black earth she's dug up. Under her squeezing fingers, the

mixture becomes a black-red balm illuminated with yellow flecks catching the minimal rays from the window.

She joins Cosmos in bed. Naked, his white skin fades in contrast to her tawny flesh. With a scoop of her hand, she takes a dollop of the paste and massages it into Cosmos' right hand. The balm glistens on his skin. She first works her firm fingers into Cosmos' palm, then rubbing palm to palm, fingers laced. Her fingers echo the lines in his.

Lily looks up to the source of the increasing light in the room. The blue of the sky permeates the brown of the straw roof. When she looks back at their hands, their two forearms stretch back from only one hand. The room is getting even brighter. The thatched roof is no longer there. The plants indoors thrive as their leaves seem to flutter with the sunlight beams.

Lily leans forward until she is totally on top of Cosmos. He lets out a breath from her weight. Her body begins to settle into Cosmos' as their figures entwine like vines, cast green from the reflection of the plants. She rubs his temples. In an instant she is rubbing *her* temples.

The sun now directly above explodes the room in white light, leaving no shadows, flattening features. As fast as the white light filled the room, it is gone.

One figure lies on the bed.

Her torso becomes erect as she sits up, like the plants reaching for its life. She plants her feet firmly on the dirt ground by the bed. When she leaves the bed, it is not her impressions in the sheets but Cosmos'.

By the entry, she places Cosmos' derby on her scarfed-head before joining the others. Outside, she looks back, but the walls of the cottage have begun to fade. Lily watches as the walls completely disappear, and the indoor plants becomes part of those outdoors. She turns to walk off. In the distance one can barely make out the derby as it sways among the field of sunflowers.



**Night**

I would like to know  
who sleeps in this city: little girls  
curled up on half a bed like shrimp  
on lettuce; grandpas snoring in white-  
faded-to-gray v-neck undershirts  
and boxers worn thin as rose petals;  
cats on their backs stretched full-length  
like open accordions. Who else?  
The wind stirs chimes and rustles up  
odd clanging sounds, dinner bell,  
a toast, music-room triangle.  
Who hears? Doctors, janitors,  
slight teenage boys with scrawny  
legs and freckles, lipsticked women  
in lingerie...I picture  
the darkened houses around  
me, filled with people trying  
to sleep in the late night.  
I've studied, said my prayers,  
written pages of unedited thought  
but I'm not ready  
for this stack of cotton,  
rayon, and flannel that  
make up my bedclothes.  
I hunger for the wind-chiming  
night, its blackness a smooth  
petal against my cheek,  
immersed in its music,

dwindling and growing like  
a chest rising and falling  
with air, reclined on a mattress.  
Closing my eyes, I'm there,  
riding the night gracefully,  
pressing its sides  
gently between my legs,  
holding my arms out languidly, for balance.

**Vaya con Amor**

(for Tracy Putirka)

The love, our glue  
is overflowing  
onto the floor  
turning this house into  
flypaper as two little selves buzz,  
trapped within one heartapple

Your teeth are worn from chatter,  
Your bite lost,  
so if we're going to get  
our selves out of here  
it will be up to me...  
but when I eat an apple  
I eat the core:

    I know you find it hard  
to swallow

but your loving hands  
no longer fit like a glove;  
I'm putting your eyes back in,  
try to keep them open this time.  
I didn't want to jar you  
but I had to bring you  
into reality, bit by bit,  
since I couldn't share  
in your fantasy

You drive me gray-haired  
into a mule, 'onery and strong,  
so I guess it should be  
no surprise that I pack up  
the old bag glued to my back.  
It's the only way  
your fantasy can end:

Me lifting us both out of this  
while you carry little  
more than memories  
of the love that you fancied.

## Being From Nothingness

The exosphere excurrented up a frothy foamy liquid under the heads of two octogenarian chinese princes while accidental nightingales swung down to catch silvery silk-worms squirming in polyester paddies. The oldest of the princes reached up to stroke the snoring hippogriff when suddenly the pine mouse (who had been sitting sullenly on a bent tree branch), cried: "Don't touch him!" But it was too late. The hippogriff gobbled up the two princes with one gluttonous gulp. "I was waiting for that," said the hippogriff, who rolled over on his speckled belly to wait for his gloxinias to bloom.

Slowly shaking his furry head and blinking his oblong, almond eyes in disbelief, the pine mouse scampered down to the florescent flux, where docked a small gunboat filled with glimmering drachmas. "Batter down the hutches, and host the soil!" the weather-beaten old captain cried, and the boat lurched from the bank into heavily heaving waters.

Eight millennia later, the pine mouse squeaked: "When will we get there already?" "If you don't stop your muttonish behavior, young mouse, I'll have to make you walk the flank," replied the captain, who was famishing for a nice piece of veal Oscar.

"Tally ho!" came the warning cry from the blasty crew in the crow's nest, and the orbicular dinghy cracked into land. "Abandon hip!" the captain chortled. "Seamen and chinchillas first!" After the captain strangled and buried the pine mouse in a nearby cave, stamped down the desecrated dirt, marked "X" with a yellow-stained nail, thrust the treasure map in a blue Ming vase and wiped the winows from his brow, he stood heavily over the grave, a prayer on his beery lips.

"At last, poor pine mouse, I knew him swell. Farting is such sweat sorrow. Shout shout brief sandal," and with a bleary tear in his one red eye, he danced over to the pile of drachmas lying wantonly in the rusty wheelbarrow near the entrance to the cave.

"Now where can I crash in my chips?" the old sailor shouted to his first mate through his megaphone. Suddenly, there was the wail of a growl and the silhouette of a siamese cat cast an eerie shadow on one wall of the cave. "I think this belongs to me," a hissy voice permeated the captain's hoary haired ear, and the siamese cat sauntered in, a sword dangling daintily from his neck. "God's puke! If it isn't the siamese cat," the captain grumbled to himself. Aloud, he denounced, "My kingdom for a force," and wandered bewilderedly out of the cave, leaving the spoils to rot. The siamese cat thumped onto the wheelbarrow, which continued its journey to the royal Russian tzar fields.

Five trelennium dennium later:

“Eighty-eight thousand, eighty-nine thousand, ...ninety,” the siamese cat finalized, placing, with a black velvet paw, the last crusty drachma in front of King Alfonso. “Goody goody!” King Alfonso rubbed the sieving wart on his left hand and slammed on his royal pitch helmet with the right. “Now I can finance my expedition to bag that elusive hippogriff!”

But he was too late, the gloxinias had bloomed and the Hippogriff was at this moment devouring every nourishing, tasty petal with undisguised relish. In the next second, the hippogriff metamorphosed into a ballistic balloon tire and immediately started an explosion, heating up into a top notch fireball. “Hot dingle juice! An Atomic fireball!” Little Prince Albert caught it with the crusty brown Spaulding glove sweating on his left paw. “I hope it’s the cinnamon kind this time!” and he popped it in his mouth, sucking delightedly and wagging his head as he watched for the next one.





*Craig Anthony*

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## **A Story and Its Telling**

There is a startling variance in truth. This is a fact. Yet, this is true in certain cases only. In fact, there is a marked variance in these cases, one that can be quite startling.

One truth insists that the angelic Cinderella breathed through the keyhole as the glass slipper was forced unsuccessfully upon the heels of hags. Later, her body and the prince's intertwined upon the flagstones of the palace, where the sweat of her breasts soaked the other's tongue and drowned out the bluebirds' chirping (the film has run out long beforehand, albeit). Some insist that Cinderella, that "whore," left her cottage to ride alongside the prince's vassal with her lips all caked with ill-applied gloss. Behind her, two women writhed upon the floor in their own blood and portions of bones and shredded toe.

The two cripples claimed they were always crippled, of course. And no one ever said: "whore." One person claims he knew someone who knew someone who did. That person, alas, had been cut from ear to ear and dumped in the alley where he was located, so the accuracy of such a statement is rendered unassailable and hence unresolvable.

There is a glass slipper, though, within the palace. It rests upon a little pedestal and not in the closet with the other shoes (no pair, no little partner—quite impractical! Hardly socially acceptable!). There's a tiny bloodstain on the inside of the slipper, at the bridge. Usually, however, the sun bathing through the great stained-glass windows etched with saints and prophets is far too bright to notice this.

Enough. The kingdom is happy now. The prince is married. The king will have a second heir. And—how convenient! Spring-time! A long one, I might add. Then the summer baskets are

brimming with fever-scarlet apples. Every cobbler's hammer is tapping, tapping, tapping. There is no dearth of warbling songbirds. Waking to every day reveals a crystallized village in a miniature glass globe (sans snow), with the occasional pluralistic hacking and syphilitic whore, tiny midst the green foliage and endless horse-drawn carriages. Here there is simply too many dutch-cottaged glass windows (and nary a stone tossed).

An old bitter woman with her two maimed daughters, long before vacated the little house where the Lad lived with his Ma and Pa. Villagers would sometimes stop and point at their little house, but Ma and Pa knew it was their little Lad they pointed at with his cute little dimples (that or the cooling apple pies upon the mantle, surely). He was a good Lad, who played when time to play and played at learning when time to learn. He liked living in the cozy little house with his parents.

Now, there were some very strange stains on the floorboards in the sitting room. Ma and Pa, not natives to this quaint duchy, had to ask where they could find a suitable rug maker. When they did, they found a fine-sized one. Now, the strange stains are covered by a floor tapestry of Saint Ursula and her virgins open-armed to the barbarian captors-cum-slayers. Perhaps it's a little out of place in the cottage. In fact, it's probably very much out of place—later, they traded it away and sanded all the floorboards clean. That was after Christmastide had come and gone.

The Lad was very excited about Christmas: snow-flecked cobbles and holly-berry wreaths and sugar apples and candy sticks and wooden toys freshly painted beckoning behind frosted windows. The winter sun was less evident. At noon, the glass of the city would burn less brightly and the castle took on a duller hue. Once in a while the princess would inspect the glass slipper upon the pedestal, and clench her dainty fists. Visitors to the castle would oft-times do that also when they viewed the slipper. She was thinking of breathing through a keyhole, and they were thinking of her thinking of that.

Now, when Christmas was said and done, the Lad received the toys he wanted and turned his thoughts to snowmen and studies (and

pig-tailed girls), while Ma and Pa turned to brace the winter to embrace the spring. And so on. You see, their yarn has already ended. This little crystal house in the little crystal kingdom is a pirouetting ballerina for other music boxes (surely you understand). In fact, the story is quite over, all the characters and settings and conflicts neatly packaged and sealed with a bright ribbon. It rests pretty upon the mantel. Fine. And now a digression, to provide a short Christmas tale. After all (didn't I tell you?) this is a Christmas story.

### THE END

The Lad was sitting by the fire chomping chestnuts when his Grandfather pulled up a stool and leaned his face to the Lad, the fire lighting his sculpted furrows, "I've been making my own way here sixty blue moons and one green one, my boy." (Lad: giggle, giggle). "I know a tun-full of things that would put a rosy color back in your cheeks—things you wouldn't nary believe. And tonight's the most magical night of the year...let me tell you all about Father Christmas."

### THE STORY OF FATHER CHRISTMAS

Every year, on that special day when the moon is an anecdote to that glorious star of the East, and the world slumbers in dreams of sugar fruits and steaming meat, Father Christmas rises from his stone crypt and unwraps the funeral cloth that binds him. He slips like a shadow, down the passageways of that dead castle that lies locked in the wind tortured teeth of the icy Northern Mountains.

First, he rummages through the huddled and mephitic masses on their shelves - the gaping sockets and loose jawbones - to find his wonderful red sack. Then, he hobbles to the courtyard where he climbs into his great black carriage of brass bars and purple tassels. He nicks the champing creatures, patiently tethered and stamping. The sprawling crenelated tomb disappears behind them. With his black cape billowing like a wind-snared sheet, he plunges from the

forests of the night to deliver gifts to all the dead sleepers, each according to their worth.

When the first ray of morning lights the scattered globes of tiny dew, Father Christmas is already back in his coffin, his arms crossed on his chest, the funeral cloth wound round, his face a frozen rictus. The black carriage has vanished. His deeds are done\*; the clock begins ticking to the time when he will rise again. He and his sleeping companions sink to their dream-locked depths, carried by the wind's ceaseless howling.

Once upon a time, on a Christmas morning, an old reclusive woman, her eyes red from a sleepless night of prayer, came downstairs. She came down to see if her exhortations on behalf of her poor maimed daughters had gained a merciful glance from the Redeemer on this, his day. She found them at the chimney. Their tangled bodies stuffed the brick shaft, as they dripped piecemeal upon the hearth and ashes.

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\* They wake to his gifts, his verdicts, his deeds.

**(writing a) LOVE SONG**

If I slam my mind (punk rock  
bottom) against this fucking wall,  
can I strike metal chords of you  
from my eyes (water)  
into electric voices that  
Scream!?! Raw nerves are  
needled (spinal anesthetic),  
turning pain inside out of control...

I'm going to punch (drunk) through  
the whine and sonic waves Goodbye  
baby. Bye, bye, love (ha-pi-ness).  
Lorn. Forsaken. Why hast thou...  
mea culpa is quaking in my skull.  
If I tip crossbones to the sky,  
can I...

(Refrain)



# Contributors:

A pillar of the Cucamonga community, **Blair Allen** is an editor for *Cerulean Press*. His works have appeared in many small press magazines and soon he will be published in *Red Dancefloor Press*.

**Craig Anthony** (aka Craig A. Schwartz) hails from giddy Simi Valley. He's been published in *After Hours*, *Aberrations* and *Realms*, to the ignorance of a) his parents and b) most of America. His (unwillingly) ascetic lifestyle is a sea of mundanity marked by flashes of television.

**Robert Arroyo Jr.** is a professional student working toward a B.A. in English, with poetry as his focus. His hobbies are reading, writing and living for Heather.

**Sandra Brown** is a graduating senior in the CSUN writing program. This is her first publication.

**Scot Butwell** says he gets a kick out of watching cars move like molasses on the 118 freeway from the backyard of his home in Granada Hills.

**David Carper** has been known to fall flat on his back through the roof of reality, usually landing in close proximity to a typewriter and an empty bottle of whatever was on sale that week.

**Andrew Comey** is hoping to graduate this semester, after which he plans to take a year off to learn more about, "this strange thing I do," before continuing on to graduate school.

**Robin di Perna**, a recent CSUN grad, wishes to thank her first creative writing teacher, Mona Houghton, for that first word of encouragement.

**Carrie Etter** edits a monthly L.A. magazine entitled, *Out Loud*, which lists area poetry events. Her poems have recently appeared in *Calliope*, *Poet Lore* and *Zone 3*.

**Pierre Grady** says that his flux of information varies with his patience. He doesn't like it because, as with, "My Crayons," he hasn't the motivation to decide if this universe is mechanistic or organismic. Does it matter? Probably not.

**Garen Hagobian** may someday become a professional photographer although, at this time, it is only his hobby.

**Janean Hall** is being released from CSUN this Spring and has applied at Camarillo State for graduate studies. This is her first publication.

**Jeremy Hight** is.

**Alan Kirk** is a Music Composition major who would like to clean up the gene pool by dropping a bomb on the CSUN Administration building. He is also a published composer of TV and film music.

**Deb Lacusta** has written for radio, TV and stage. She is active in the theatre both on and off-stage and is currently in the graduate writing program here at CSUN.

A UCLA grad, **Amy M. Lam** is currently working on a second B.A. in creative writing and visual arts. Human rights and dignity are core issues in her work about empowerment.

**Helen Laurence** is working on her Master's degree in the writing program at CSUN.

**Damon Lewis** is a 31 year old retired gambler and party animal. A decade of school has caused his reformation. He plans to get a job through CSUN's English intern program.

**Nicole Muraoka** is thrilled to be in the *Review* and relieved to have graduated with a B.A. in English. Her last publication was in the 20th anniversary edition of *Gidra* magazine.

After graduating in May, **Jeremy Nave** will drive to Canada. His goal is to get an M.F.A. sometime before he gets arthritis.

**Sonal Patel** is an electrical engineering major who will be graduating in May. She plans to do her graduate work at UCLA. Photography is her hobby.

**Walt Phillips** has published hundreds of poems and drawings in small press magazines worldwide.

**Astrid Ryterband** has vagabonded around the world in search of freedom, adventure and knowledge. Also a composer, her musical, "Greta D. and the I.R.S." will have its premier performance in Los Angeles.

**Barbara Sigman**, a grad student in CSUN's writing program, received her B.A. and was struck with a desire to do something big—but didn't (and still doesn't) know what it is.

**Hart Schulz's** writing usually comes out of the best of times. That's not true of the series of three that we have published in this issue which he claims come out of deep torture. He hopes to put together a collection soon.

**Mary Yoder** currently works in L.A. as a free-lance script writer. Previously, she has been published in *Onthebus*. She has studied poetry with Jack Grapes and Galway Kinnell and hopes to do graduate work in photography and poetry.

**V.Q. Wallick** is a 7th generation Angeleno with a degree in literature from UCLA. After surviving 4 years of teaching high school, she took a 1 year sabbatical to circle the globe. She is currently working on a novel.

**Elizabeth Warren**, like most of CSUN's student body, is an undeclared major in her senior year. This is her first publication and claims she doesn't know what possessed her to submit but hopes that lightning strikes twice.

**Robert Wynne** spends his days yelling at helicopters. He envisions a world where everyone has a bar code on their forehead giving access to all pertinent personal information. He loves words, but is not too fond of brief, back-of-book bios (for any factual information see previous issue).



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