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## HEATHER TOSTESON

### INTRODUCTION: WRITING TO REPAIR

#### *What IS Repair in Human Relations?*

We tend to select topics for our anthologies that resonate with us personally—and which we would like to explore with others because they are common challenges, essential for healthy, resilient relationships . . . and difficult to stay with comfortably. Repair is one of them for me—perhaps because it requires such patient good faith, accountability tempered by self-acceptance, and a firm sense of proportion and time, none of which, even at sixty-one, are my most reliable virtues (although they are my husband's). Repair also requires attunement, a taste for the subjective worlds of others, an ardent desire for things to turn out 'right,' a flexible and inventive freedom to re-imagine that 'right' in a way that makes room for changing insights, realities, and stories, and tenacity that verges on the quixotic, all of which, for better and worse, are intrinsic to me.

But what *is* repair? In the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, it is defined as "1. restore (something damaged, worn, or faulty) to good condition. 2. set right (a rift in relations)." Its root is the Latin "*reparare*, from *re-* 'back' + *parare* 'make ready'." In the two definitions, we hear some of the tensions we experience with repair in human relations. What *is* it that we are making ready? And ready for what? What is this *thing* that is damaged, worn, or faulty? What thing has a rift in it? Is it just a hairline fracture? A shattering? A molten mess?

Whatever we are able to do with it now, to repair means something was once whole, functioning, that now is not. It may well be something whose wholeness or functioning we recognize only in retrospect, perhaps only when it is too late. When we agree to try to repair a relationship, we are agreeing first of all to know it as *not* the seamless, intrinsic, seemingly reliable thing it was before. Repaired, a relationship may be good as new, but it will not, by definition, be new. It may function better than before, but its vulnerability (to damage, wear, or fault) is now part of our understanding of it.

Repair, if we undertake it, also means that we are committing

ourselves to live in a world that is not all about new beginnings, right steps, happily-ever-afters. It's not just about our best selves or the best selves of those we choose to live with. Even knowing that, we are going back for more, redefining what a good ending, or a good relationship, or a good self, is in the process.

But what was that relationship? A shared goal that people needed to conform to and couldn't or wouldn't? A resonant affective flow that has been blocked or channeled elsewhere? A shared reality that has been shattered? What planet did you come from, we wonder when we no longer feel we have any common ground. What does repair have to do with separate solar systems, expanding universes?

This metaphorical play has an important purpose, for how we imagine what a relationship is has a lot to do with how we imagine what repair is both needed and possible. To ground us in the particular, I share one from my relationship with my husband (my third and, if either of us has anything to say about it, my last).

This is a story about *Our Baby*. My husband and I have been married for almost fifteen years now. The marriage is a keeper and both of us are keenly aware of our good fortune in finding each other—and the mutual tenacity that kept us coming back, seeking new ways to connect, over an issue that astonished us with its ferocious intensity for years: our children. I don't mean ours, of course. I mean the two he fathered and the one I mothered to adulthood. Although our children were young adults when we met, we fell in love with the (essentially single) parent in each other. We identified with the challenges and rewards of the role. We saw ourselves reflected there. Wouldn't we have done it better together, we wondered. However, second, or third, marriages have, for everyone concerned, complex histories of powerful attachments, painful and often devastating ruptures, ours perhaps more than many. So, although we identified with each other imaginatively, the reality was something very different. The ruptures my son and I had experienced and the ruptures my husband and his children had experienced intersected poorly. They didn't cancel each other out, they magnified each other. All the ambivalences that our children 'should' have directed toward others found their way toward us (and why shouldn't they, since we, the historically turn-to parents, were the ones who were inexplicably changing). But we were so well-intentioned, so undeserving! I don't think our children (all off making their own mistakes, building their own lives) gave us much thought most of

## WENDY BROWN-BÁEZ

## A GOOD DAY

This is the beginning. It all starts here. The *cocinera* serves us cold salted cucumber slices, then brings a dish of dried red peppers instead of chili powder. Careful to add a few seeds at a time, the crisp explosion of salt and chili in my mouth is the best way I can describe our relationship. Not sweet, like you might expect with a gay guy. And not tender, like you might think a marriage should be. But salty and spicy. I like it that way, and not because I don't yearn for the sweet and tender as well. But I need the provocation.

I have returned to Mexico after four years of being a widow and on the first anniversary of my son's death. Mexico is also salty and spicy. Sweetness comes from a song drifting through the sultry air or a smile caught between me and a *señorita* on the bus or the lilting accents of the Spanish language. But all of the "*quiero*"s and "*mi corazón*"s won't change the past and I bite my tongue on the tears I am afraid could drown me.

Alejandro is a gorgeous macho Mexican male who would rather go to the dentist than caress me. He is the husband destiny has now chosen for me, and I will spend the rest of my life trying to figure out why.

Nevertheless, today it begins. No matter that the idea of *Sol y Luna* came to us on my birthday when Alejandro gave me a gold moon on a neckband to match his gold sun. No matter that we have searched for a place, drawn up budgets and made numerous phone calls. And no matter that we won't sign the lease until we return to town on Monday. Here in this small *pueblito* in the mountains, sleeping in a hotel room with a barrier between us as thick as steel bars, the taste of red pepper is wild in my mouth, and I finally know it will come true. *Sol y Luna*, a contemporary art gallery. More than that, despite my hesitation about staying in Mexico with Alejandro, I know I



clear liquid oozed over the block and onto the counter.

From the far end of the sofa Roger sat with his mouth hung open. He thought of what he should be feeling but nothing appropriate registered. Her actions surprised him. There was no cue for her next move. She was going to sneer at him, he anticipated, and sign, "Now you know how me feel!" Instead, his wife walked over to the television, unplugged the wires from the closed-captioning device, and wrapped them around the machine. The television image shrank to a dot where the anchorwoman's lips were and disappeared. Rhondee snatched her keys off the top of the microwave oven and left by the front door with her captioning device under her arm. Roger waited for the vibrations to rock across the hardwood floor when the door slammed, but nothing happened. She left the door open.

Roger looked back at the television and saw that his wife left behind her muddy handprints all over the screen. He slowly got up to look in the sink. It smelled like a freshly-turned garden. He wondered which two of the leaves were the original ones that Rhondee gave him at the start of their relationship, before it had grown wild and out of proportion. Roger padded down the hall to peek into his son's room. Cody had slept through another silent argument.

Roger was still looking at the mastodon when Cody jumped on his back and knocked the remaining dirt out of his hands.

"Daddy! Me saw balloon man. He make-make balloon, like this . . ." Cody showed his father how the man blew a long, narrow balloon and twisted it into different shapes.

"Well, let's go buy a balloon. You know what kind of animal you want?"

"Yep!"

"Good. And, let's buy one for your mother. You know what kind of animal she wants?" Roger was thinking that Rhondee probably drove over to her mother's to cool off from the fight.

"Don't-know," said Cody. "Have idea—we tell balloon man make-make talking bird."

Roger raised his right hand to correct him but restrained himself. He lifted his left hand and signed, "Okay, and then, we'll go over to your grandmother's."

## R.E. HAYES

### GAIT

In the time of the half-remembered Korean War, army brass assigned young Victor Kittle to graves registration duty. On bloodstained burned hills, amid hell-on-earth battlefield chaos, he had risked all to bring out the KIAs and the wounded, often with vital organs exposed, dangling from grotesquely sundered flesh.

Decades later Kittle became the government über boss in the corner office, the director. Everyone on the staff at some point had heard his sermon regarding army combat medics. How, in anticipation of a dying GI's last breath, doctors had shrouded the soldier's face in gauze and waited out his final minutes on earth. Kittle always concluded with: "Sulfa killed infections, plasma saved lives, morphine stopped the screams." He relished the role of motivator-in-chief and was in his element linking this dying with work, with productivity, with "not spinning your wheels."

Cal Harris was a federal labor lawyer in the Chicago regional office. Earlier today, Kittle sent him a memo warning he might get passed over for third-year promotion, the big one.

Alone now in his small windowless office, Harris stared blankly at the memo thinking how heartsick Ellen and Justin would feel gazing down at his gauze draped, walnut-brown face.

Six months ago, Kittle evaluated Harris's gait. Said he had observed him walking with "greater determination," which in Kittle's rheumy eyes meant he could expect better productivity in the future, all monthly caseload time targets met.

Kittle was a paternalistic Boston liberal, and Harris did not intuit mean-spiritedness from the old man. But with only two and a half black lawyers on the staff of twenty-seven, the remark was demeaning, he thought, straight out of *Gone With the Wind*. As if finally he had learned to serve silver goblets of frosty mint juleps on the veranda without spilling a drop—and just

## ANDY WEATHERWAX

*POSSESSION*

There are few words more ambiguous in meaning than possession.  
The dictionary says possession is the act of having or taking into  
control.

In legal terms it can mean occupancy of property,  
without regard for ownership, or without regard for legality  
as with drugs or weapons.

Possession can also refer to control of a ball or puck;  
or domination by something, a spirit, a passion, an idea;  
or a psychological state in which an individual's normal personality  
is replaced by another.

But possession is most often associated with ownership,  
though it need not refer to literal ownership.  
Sure, we can speak of Bob's hat if Bob owns a hat,  
but we can also speak of Bob's children even if Bob doesn't own them.

Which brings me to Parkinson's disease.

It's a funny name for it.  
I have it, yet it is not mine.  
Parkinson never had it, he just found it.  
Now I have it, now it's my Parkinson's disease.

We would never speak of my Bob's hat,  
just makes no sense.  
Anyhow, that's not the point.  
The point is, it's possessive.

That is exactly what it is.

*MY TEACHER*

I'd like to run with the boys,  
cook dinner on an open flame,  
and enjoy a glass of wine with friends and family

grasping at the past, I weep  
an icy wall of anger and resentment builds  
frozen, unable to break free from this frigid barrier  
that holds hardened self-pity near and dear

I close my eyes and listen  
to the sounds of the summer barbecue  
the laughter of the boys  
the chatter of friends and family

I close my eyes and breathe  
letting the warm waters of gratitude rush in  
thawing the raw grip of expectation  
letting go of *I wish*, letting reality-as-it-is arise

I close my eyes and smile  
it is what it is  
and there is no way to escape it  
I am of the nature to grow old, to fall ill, to die

everyone I love and all that I hold dear  
is of the same nature  
this I learn time and again  
humbled by illness,  
my great  
teacher

condition was not reversible. But how could I tell this religious man there would be no miracle for him?

Torn between the obvious and the miraculous, given this grave honor of rendering some kind of truthful information to a man momentarily clear enough to want to know what was really happening, I put my hand on his shoulder, smiled, and summoned my best imitation of the offhand remark, my best imitation of his own reassuring beside manner.

*You're doing OK. You'll pull out of this. You'll be going home soon.*

He looked into my eyes and at least for a moment, he knew the truth.

## EVELYN SHARENOV

### *DELIVERANCE*

Let me tell you about myself. I live alone and although that's a recent development, I'm settled with that. I consider myself average; well, maybe not average but not special or chosen in any way. I must add that I don't say this as an apology for any past hubris or explanation for my current station in life.

My son is healthy and intelligent. I usually enjoy good health although just now I'm down with the flu. I haven't moved from this bed in days, haven't showered or shaved or dressed. I'm perfectly comfortable. My son's cat is on the bed with me, basking in a square of sunlight, her pleasure principle undisturbed by my growing pains. I miss my son, suddenly and completely, my son of ten years ago, who would have fallen asleep in my lap. But he'll be home from college for spring break and then he'll be back for the summer. I reach over and scratch the cat under her chin; she stretches, then rolls onto her back. The cat, abandoned when my son went off to college, has adopted me and we sleep together in Eric's bed, keeping it warm for him in his absence.

Things average out. I like to think I am in the exact middle of my life, with as much ahead as has gone before. I have a small but respectable law practice. It has become more lucrative as the economy sinks into the Pacific Ocean and people sue each other not out of acrimony or greed but to survive. I like to think I am doing some good for my clients.

My wife's departure is not my first taste of loss. I've always felt as if something were missing, as if everything always turns out to be less than I expected—marriage, kids, life. When I was a kid I became obsessed with the plate-twirler on the Ed Sullivan show, the man who ran across the stage giving a twist to this pole or that plate, in an effort to keep them all spinning; I kept waiting for a single plate to fall and shatter but I can't recall that it ever happened while I was watching. My parents were mesmerized by animal acts

## DIANE MIERZWIK

### SUNSET RED

*Roe v Wade, 1973*

*The Supreme Court establishes a woman's right to safe and legal abortion, overriding the anti-abortion laws of many states.*

"You're so ugly, you're the reason there's adoption," one of my students joked with another while we stood on the blacktop awaiting the all clear signal for the latest bomb threat on the campus.

"Hey, I'm adopted!" I interjected.

Both boys looked stunned, too young to remember so many unwed pregnant girls in a disapproving society. Keeping a child out of wedlock was so unacceptable in the United States, young families were recruited to adopt babies born out of the free love movement. Abortion was illegal.

Though I am two generations older than my students, I have no memory of when abortion was illegal, or when adopting a healthy baby did not cost thousands of dollars. Still, I have always believed that giving a child up for adoption is the kinder, more difficult decision.

"If you knew a woman who was pregnant, who already had eight kids, three who were deaf, two who were blind, one mentally retarded, and the woman had syphilis—would you suggest an abortion?" a college professor asked as a way of shaking my convictions.

He could then inform me I had just prevented the world from the pleasure of Beethoven's genius, if I fell into his trap. I responded, "That would be up to the woman, who should be in charge of her body. Not me."

When I was teaching persuasive writing and helping students draft counter arguments, a young female student listened as I gave reasons abortion should be legal, prompting the students who were anti-abortion to come up with arguments to defend their position. This was easy for me, since I was pro-choice.

I began with the argument of an unwanted child born to a destructive household. All the students were quiet, save Tanesha who said quietly, "It's better than being dead," as if she knew more than me, and she probably did.

Silenced, I grappled with the idea that if abortion had been legal, I would most likely never have been born, let alone put up for adoption.

*Corning Glass Works v. Brennan, 1974*

*The Equal Credit Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination in consumer credit practices on the basis of sex, race, marital status, religion, national origin, age, or receipt of public assistance.*

Bill and I arrived at the carpet store to meet with their credit specialist. Buying carpet for our second home, I had visited the store earlier in the week, found the carpet I wanted, and filled out the credit application. Today, we just needed to sign the papers and set up an appointment for installation.

Bill and I sat in chairs opposite a squat, balding man who pushed the papers our way. I perused the first page and asked, "Why is my name listed second?"

The man rubbed his chin and looked confused.

"When I filled out the financing paperwork, I put my name as the borrower and my husband's as the co-borrower. It's been switched here." I pushed the paper back toward him.

"It's just our company. That's the way they do things."

"But, it clearly showed in the paperwork that I make more money than my husband."

Bill sat quietly beside me, still.

"It's just our company; that's the way they do things. If you'll just sign."

I pushed back my chair and announced, "I refuse to do business with a company so clearly sexist in how it handles its customers." Marching from the building, I said to Bill, "Come on."

I strode from the store and didn't wait to see if Bill had followed me until we were in the parking lot, where I allowed him to unlock my car door and open it for me.

## JIM PAHZ

### GOOD INTENTIONS

I first met Angelina in the beginning of her sophomore year. One day she just showed up at our door. She was a pleasant-looking individual, somewhat overweight, and appeared a little sad. I could sense she was nervous. She explained that she was a friend of a friend and mentioned some names I didn't recognize. "And," she said, hesitating, "well . . . I heard you had horses. I was wondering if you might let me come sometime and brush them. I'm not asking to ride the horses, I just want to groom them. I've had experience, I've been around horses all my life. I know this is an unusual request, and I apologize for making it. I have rehearsed this speech because I wanted to get it right. I practiced. I wasn't sure I could do this but I was told you and your wife were nice people and that you taught at the university. I hope you understand. I really like horses. I like being around them. They make me feel good."

I didn't know what to say. This girl was a stranger. There was something so pitiful about her that I was genuinely moved. I thought of my father and how he used to tell me to try and cultivate a *gracious spirit*. Those words were important to him. It was his version of the golden rule: treat others as you yourself would like to be treated.

I called Hannah into the room and introduced her to Angelina. I knew Hannah had a gracious spirit. Angelina stood with her head bent, eyes downcast, and repeated her request. Then Hannah reached for her hand and in a soft, motherly voice said to the young lady, "Sure you can. Come, Angelina, would you like to meet our horses?"

That was the beginning of a relationship that would last through Angelina's college career. At first we didn't pay much attention when she came and spent thirty or forty minutes in the barn. Then one day after Angelina had been coming for about five weeks we noticed her car had been parked outside the barn for a long time. "I better go check on her," I said, "and make



## CARIDAD MORO

### *PERSPECTIVE*

My mother does not like escalators  
 moving ladders she calls them  
 and in an attempt to enlighten me  
 she speaks of *Abuela Panchita*  
 who took a tumble in *El Encanto*  
 the only store in Havana  
 to have one at the time.

Folklore or no  
 I think  
 her downright dumb—

because we are in Miami  
 because I am thirteen  
 because should the escalator break down  
 I can walk my way to rescue.

I prey on her pride  
 shame her into a ride  
 mutter *Chicken*  
 beneath my breath.

Years later,  
 in the first apartment  
 I can barely afford  
 she offers to decorate  
 her favorite thing to do  
 so I find her offer tainted—

because there is no sacrifice  
 because without sacrifice, it's merely fun  
 because I think it should cost her  
 something to help me.

Still, we pick out colors,  
 cover my nicotine stained walls  
 with Miami Vice Aqua and Pepto Pink  
 to the beat of Donna Summer.

When it comes time for edges  
 taller than either of us  
 she climbs each rung  
 and I realize how little  
 fear has to do with reason—

because she is still afraid of heights  
 because she is trembling and terrified  
 because she is painting  
 saying *For you, mija, for you.*

## PAUL HOSTOVSKY

### *LADDERS*

Leaf-muck on the one hand,  
 a great view on the other.  
 All things being equal  
 I like it up here where the air  
 is clearer, and my thoughts  
 are clearer, and this old  
 ladder creaks and sways  
 under me like a boat, my son  
 text messaging his girlfriend  
 with two thumbs and a foot  
 on the bottom rung. My anchor.  
 I can almost see his mother  
 clear across New England (God  
 bless her) in her own house now  
 with her own leaf-muck clogging  
 her downspouts and gutters.  
 As Rainer Maria Rilke would say,  
 you can't lean a ladder up  
 against another ladder  
 just because you're in love  
 and want to make something out of it.  
 What you need is a solitude  
 as big as a house to sit in  
 the middle. But we were young  
 and in love and in a hurry and we  
 took a running start—all the doors  
 in the house flinging open as we flew  
 through it and out toward each other,  
 my ladder in my hands and her

ladder in her hands . . . And we  
 kind of mucked it up on the one hand,  
 but on the other we ended up with  
 these two solitudes in autumn  
 and this son with a cell phone  
 calling up to me now, asking me what  
 it's like up here, wanting to have a turn.

## GEORGANN TURNER

### *TALKING WITH SOPHIE*

Sophie hunches over her fries at McDonalds, snarfling and runny-eyed, temporarily deaf in one ear, half-staff eyes a bit wobbly. We've just seen the doctor and I don't want to take her back to school. We've stopped for lunch before we go home so she can rest.

Sophie is seventeen. She's got dark hair, pale skin, lots of freckles, a crooked smile that lights up the room, gorgeous blue eyes, what my family always called Black Irish. I adopted Sophie and her biological sister Grace from the foster care system. Grace was placed with me when she was eighteen months old. Sophie was placed with me ten months later, when she was one. Their adoptions weren't final until several years later. Sophie has had a lot of character building experiences. She will not peak in high school.

"Grace's getting moved to the state hospital today," I tell her. "The lithium's not working. She's swelling up like a puffer fish. But at least she'll be there for a long time so they can take their time figuring out what's going to work. Too bad about the lithium though, cause it really seemed to get rid of Sydney." Grace is eighteen. Sydney is the hallucination that tells Grace to set the house on fire, slash her wrists and jump off the roof. We really hoped to see the back of Sydney.

Sophie glances at me. She's not wanted to talk about Grace, not wanted to know what's going on with her. And she feels a little guilty about it. She says, "I know it's not Grace's fault what's happening to her but I'm not ready to deal with it yet. I know at some point I'm probably going to have to take care of her or something, but I don't really want to have to do anything right now." She dips a fry in some catsup.

"I know. You don't have to do anything right now. You don't have to deal with it. You have to take care of yourself. You have to get an education. You have to grow up. Besides, your dad and I are taking care of Grace."

I touch her hand. I make eye contact. I want to make sure she knows



## SOPHIA J. NOLAN

### NO RESERVATIONS

I apologize again, "Johnny, I'm sorry." I'm drunk on one shot, a cranberry and vodka, and lack of sleep. The light from his one-person kitchen spills into the living room that also serves as his bedroom where we lie on the bed. I'm on the bottom and he's holding himself up over top of me.

It's 2:37 a.m.

He puts his hand on my face, thumb on my lips, and uses words to make me hush. "Amanda, I've already told you, it's in the past." He nestles down closer to me and his bare chest is warm even through my T-shirt. He holds me close to himself, slides his fingers through those of my right hand and drunkenly begins to whisper.

I drive to the Whistle Stop Café in Narrowsburg, New York, just over the border from Beach Lake where I live. It's June. The sun is hot, the wind cool. It's been a rainy summer mostly, but we catch it on a good day. Johnny picks me up in his charcoal Mustang. He's late but now it's shiny and clean both inside and out. It's been years since I've actually *seen* him and I find myself surprised by the deep sound of his voice.

We race along the backroads of the boonies we've both spent good chunks of our lives in. He turns the music up loud and opens the windows. The wind sends my hair in every direction and I find myself inadvertently smiling at the ridiculousness of all of this. He grabs my hand between shifting from fourth to fifth gear, continuously speeding through the pined forests, and shakes it around in an attempt to get me to dance.

I'm too shy to tell him that I'm cold with the windows down. I'm enjoying it too much to put the window back up. I feel young and free.

He apologizes several times for the mess of work clothes in the back seat but I assure him over and over again that I don't mind at all. He hasn't

seen the inside of *my* car.

He takes me to an early dinner at The Carriage House where he orders a beer and we both order sandwiches. I'm hardly interested in the food and mostly too nervous to eat, but happy to be reminded of the fact that he can carry a conversation.

I'm wishing I wasn't too nervous to talk.

The Mustang roars to life once again and soon we're racing off in no certain direction; we just know we don't want the night to be over yet.

A decision is reached eventually and we take a drive to his father's lake house. Ben, his father, and Kathleen, Johnny's stepmom, are there opening it up for the summer, airing it out and cleaning when we arrive, but assure us they'll be leaving soon. Kathleen gives me a huge hug; the last time I saw her was on our cruise to Canada three years earlier.

It feels like my family, which is close to his family, has been trying to get Johnny and me together for a while, always asking how Johnny is or if I'd seen him recently as though we went to neighboring schools, not schools four hours apart. Ben talks to Johnny like a friend rather than a son but it's nice to know they are so close in that way.

"How have you been, Kathleen?" I resort to starting our own separate conversation to avoid feeling as though I'm hovering.

Kathleen excitedly replies that she's been doing well; her smile is friendly, captivating, and unavoidably makes me smile too. I feel eyes on me and turn my head only to find Johnny taking a glance back at me.

Ben and Kathleen go inside. Nervous that he'll push me in, I follow Johnny to the end of the dock where we dip our feet into the dark, brisk water. He shows me the Celtic tattoos on the arches of his feet and tells me how they mean something about family. I tell him I don't have any tattoos yet.

His father and Kathleen yell goodbye from shore and they've only just pulled out by the time we're taking off our shirts and shorts. I applaud myself for having thought to wear a flattering bra and panties that cover my rear as I follow Johnny who jumps fearlessly into the water. I'm a better swimmer than he, but I'm deathly afraid of dark water. I beg Johnny to stay near me; he gives me that quirky, overly confident smile, his blonde beard glistening with water, and assures me he'll never let anything happen to me.

I blindly believe it, every word of it.

Eventually the sun begins to plunge below the mountains surrounding

## MELANIE REITZEL

### WHEN SAMBA POPS THE CORNERS

for Cpl. Paul Bang-Knudsen

*I'm on a mission*—is what Samba tries to communicate in the big box store to anyone who reaches down to pet her when she forms the body bubble of space she was taught to make between strangers and her master—the soldier, home now, who still wakes at night hearing gunfire when a door in a country he can't leave behind is kicked open, who can't handle surprises, not a tap on the shoulder, not a *Heya, Paul!* from across the lawn and never a burst, a shout from the dining room at birthday time, who needs to remind himself when a fork pings to the floor that he's still in the kitchen. *No need to take cover*—his black lab declares *I'm going to hit the end of every aisle, the edge of every corner before you do, where I will look to the left, to the right, and if it's a situation I will stop, I will turn and then, Corporal, I will look you right in the eye, the warning I was trained to give that says "People are just around the corner, just plain people" so come on Corporal, hold on. And I'll keep doing it so that one of these days the rattle we'll hear from over in canned goods, of a shopping cart maybe carrying peanut butter and paper towels, being pushed by a father on his way home to his family, will be nothing more than what it is; a loose wheel in need of a wrench and a couple of drops of oil.*

### BIG GAME HUNTER

Looking down at his feet at breakfast they thought at first it might be fleas but he remembered that couldn't be because their dog Emmett was imaginary and they weren't animal people in any other way, so he thought it might have been the night he couldn't sleep and went down to the couch and turned on "Kill Bill" because some nights the roaring in his ears makes silence unbearable and "Kill Bill" keeps her awake, then he recalled that his foot had been sticking outside the blanket but how did the little critter, whatever it was, get in the house he wondered and she tactfully reminded him that he liked to keep the bathroom window open after his shower and that was the only window in the house that wasn't screened so maybe something got in that way and made its way downstairs to the couch—no way to know, really, but it's probably gone now, having had its fill. But later that night there was buzzing near her ears and she went *swat, swat, swat* in the dark, then there was quiet but when she woke with bites on her hands any false sense of security *looks like we got it* was gone and sure enough the night after that in bed there was more buzzing, more swatting, until he announced along about 4 a.m. *I think we're going to need a net over the bed* to which she replied *And let's order up some quinine, too* but the next morning she hears this giant *fwap!* and he says *I think I got the bugger, right between the eyes* and she thinks *How very male of him* but remembers he had been a marksman in the Marines, so she smiles instead and says *My Hero*.

## WILLIAM HENDERSON

### SCAR TISSUE

I sought D out intentionally, or someone like him. I logged into a Web site that boasts it has more than 60,000 men online at any moment. D lived nearby. We listened to the same musicians; we read the same books. He asked me to bring wine and chocolate.

His pictures did not do him justice. He had a British accent. He was interested in me, which surprised me. While he and I were together, I waited for him to realize he could do better. Which I guess he did, in the end.

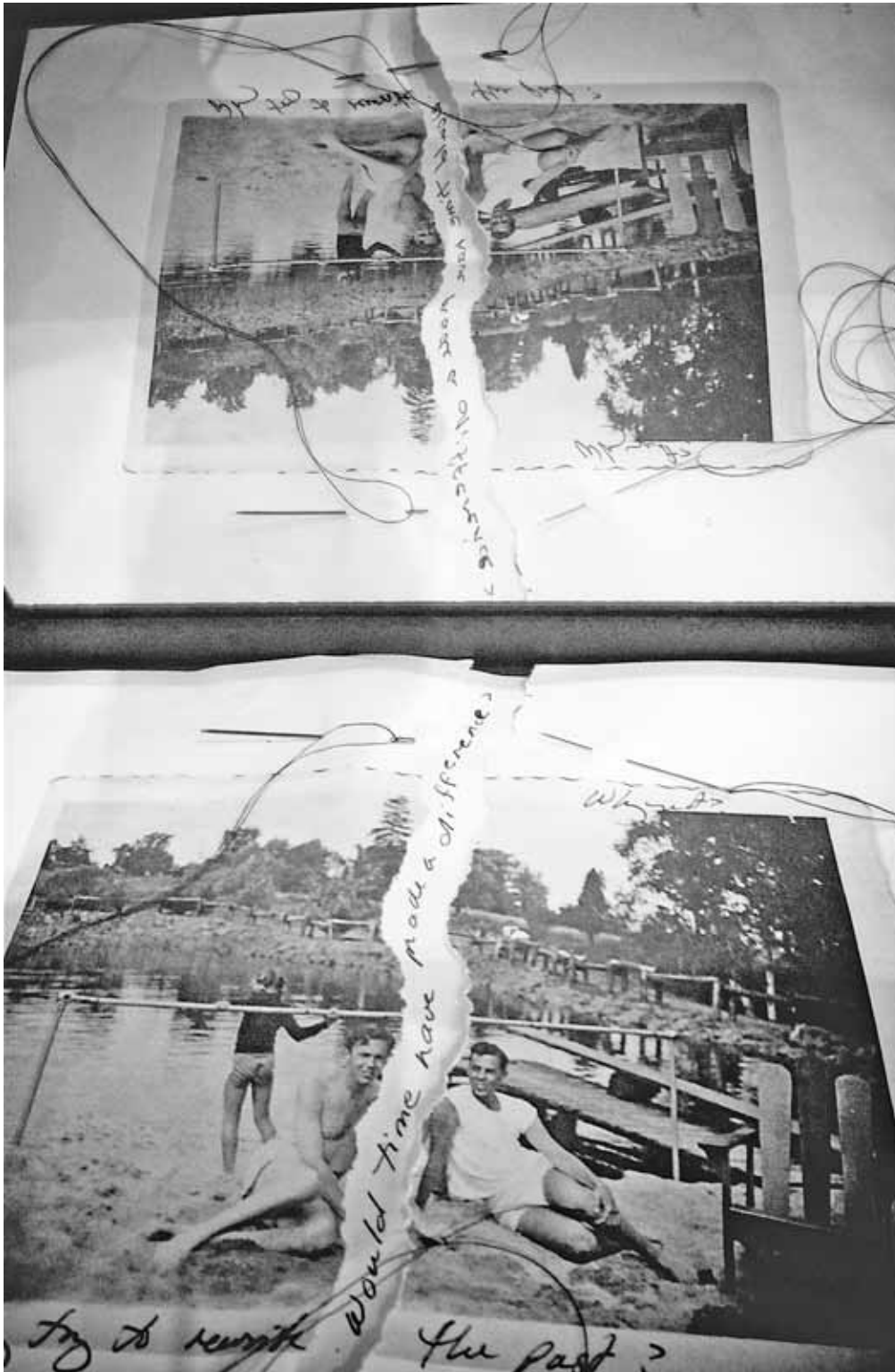
But before that, he asked me to date it out and see where a relationship could go. My wife and two-year-old son were putting puzzles together a few feet away from me when I told D I would be his boyfriend. She did not know about him; he did not know about her.

Holly and I met in college, and I asked her to marry me six months after our first date. I married Holly because I loved her, but also because I was afraid of what not wanting to marry her meant. I've always known I am gay, and so did the kids with whom I went to school. I was the faggot. In fifth-grade sex education, when I asked if two men could have a baby, the guidance counselor made it clear that two men could not have babies together. I was convinced he knew I had asked the question, even though we had been allowed to ask questions anonymously.

After Holly and I stopped having sex, we decided to have a baby. We used in-vitro.

Holly and I were strangers who shared a bed and bathroom, and then we shared a son, Avery. She focused on our son, which meant she wasn't focusing on herself, or on me, or on herself with me. She stopped seeing me, or maybe we stopped seeing each other.

Marriages, and the people inside of them, fade. You wake up one morning and you wonder how the person next to you got there. You don't want to be there beside that person. You think there must be someone better



## WENDY JONES NAKANISHI

### *A STITCH IN TIME*

I once believed that what had been broken could never be repaired. I felt that when something had gone wrong, it could never be made right. I had seen lives wrecked by acts of selfishness and brutality. It seemed that the survivors of tragedy could never recover, that they were doomed to wander the earth, visibly marked by misfortune, shunned by the happy and the secure.

It was my parents' marriage that inspired such reflections. They had married in their early twenties. Children themselves, spoiled by doting parents, they had no business getting married, let alone having children of their own.

Their wedding is immortalized in large, matte photographs. My mother is beautiful, wearing a white silky gown and pearls, her long brown hair falling around her neck in curls, her face radiant. My father is impossibly boyish and thin, a lank of hair charmingly awry, falling down his forehead. They look like blushing teenagers, stunned at their good luck, expecting a grown-up to intervene, to put a halt to the charade of such innocents entering into relations requiring gravity and maturity.

The ceremony was performed in the little white church of the tiny central Indiana town of Mount Summit. The reception was held at my grandfather's house, known as "The Maples" for the avenue of maple trees leading up a long lane to an old white two-storey farmhouse that is encircled by a large porch, its yard full of trees and flowering bushes.

The photographs depict a long-ago world. All the men are slender but muscular, individuals used to physical labor wearing suits and ties; the women are buxom and assured, dressed in their best finery, corsages pinned at the shoulder, contented, well-fed faces shaded by hats. They are pictured in rooms decorated with sprigged wallpaper and antique furniture and mantled fireplaces. Or the guests wander outside, around the front garden of a house that is isolated in the depths of the rural Midwest, surrounded by fields of

