

WISING UP ANTHOLOGIES

ILLNESS & GRACE: TERROR & TRANSFORMATION

FAMILIES: *The Frontline of Pluralism*

LOVE AFTER 70

DOUBLE LIVES, REINVENTION & THOSE WE LEAVE BEHIND

VIEW FROM THE BED: VIEW FROM THE BEDSIDE

SHIFTING BALANCE SHEETS:

Women's Stories of Naturalized Citizenship & Cultural Attachment

COMPLEX ALLEGIANCES:

Constellations of Immigration, Citizenship, & Belonging

DARING TO REPAIR: *What Is It, Who Does It & Why?*

CONNECTED: *What Remains As We All Change*

CREATIVITY & CONSTRAINT

SIBLINGS: *Our First Macrocosm*

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

SURPRISED BY JOY

CROSSING CLASS: *The Invisible Wall*

RE-CREATING OUR COMMON CHORD

GOODNESS

A Wising Up Anthology



Charles D. Brockett & Heather Tosteson
Editors

Wising Up Press

Wising Up Press
P.O. Box 2122
Decatur, GA 30031-2122
www.universaltable.org

Copyright © 2020 by Wising Up Press

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Catalogue-in-Publication data is on file with the Library of Congress.
LCCN: 2020948848

Wising Up ISBN: 978-1-7324514-7-6

To All of Us:
Past, Present, Future



TABLE OF CONTENTS

HEATHER TOSTESON <i>GOODNESS: WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT</i>	1
I. THE IDEA OF GOODNESS	
LEE GAITAN <i>GOODNESS AT 3 A.M.</i>	10
ANDY ORAM <i>BECAUSE THERE IS LIGHT</i>	13
JANET McCANN <i>REFLECTION WITH AND WITHOUT MIRROR</i>	14
<i>VIGILANTES</i>	15
WENDY JONES NAKANISHI <i>THE GOODNESS OF GOODNESS</i>	16
KEVIN STUART BRODIE <i>THE KING IS DEAD</i>	24
MARY KAY RUMMEL <i>THE SPINNING UNIVERSE: KONYA, TURKEY</i>	27
JOHNNY TOWNSEND <i>WHAT WOULD ANNE FRANK DO?</i>	29
II. SOCIAL JUSTICE	
MICHAEL KONIK <i>THE PORCH WATCHER</i>	34
BONNI CHALKIN <i>I KNOW YOU EXIST</i>	48
NORITA DITTBERNER-JAX <i>PEACE HOUSE</i>	49
J.O. HASELHOEF <i>THE CROWN ROYAL AFFAIR</i>	51
CHARLES BROCKETT & HEATHER TOSTESON <i>TOGETHER FOR THE LONG HAUL</i>	65
MARK TARALLO <i>MIRRORED EYE</i>	78

III. COMMUNITY

JENNIFER L. FREED	
<i>HELP</i>	94
<i>GOLDEN DOOR</i>	95
<i>ANGEL</i>	96
KEVIN FIDGEON	
<i>JOANNE AND ROBERT</i>	97
MARION DEUTSCHE COHEN	
<i>MY MOTHER SAID</i>	100
<i>MORE ABOUT THE POSITIVE INTEGERS,</i>	101
JOHN PIERCE	
<i>AN ODE TO D-HALL ASSIGNMENTS</i>	102
<i>MOTTO</i>	103
MARY E. KENDIG	
<i>GREGORY'S GARDEN</i>	105
TERRY SANVILLE	
<i>A BRIDGE BETWEEN TREES</i>	112

IV. FAMILY

JO MARIAN GOING	
<i>UNCLE JOHN</i>	124
STEPHANIE HART	
<i>MEDITATIONS ON GOODNESS</i>	127
PATRICK CABELLO HANSEL	
<i>THE SWALLOWS RETURN TO EAST 28TH STREET</i>	131
<i>THE SECOND BREAKFAST, 1924</i>	132
LORRAINE JEFFERY	
<i>BEYOND NEED</i>	134
<i>MY UNCLE'S LIGHT</i>	136
<i>FOR IAN</i>	138
JENNIFER L. FREED	
<i>IT ABIDES</i>	139
MARION DEUTSCHE COHEN	
<i>BRYN AT 5 AT GRAN'MA'S HOUSE</i>	141
LORI LEVY	
<i>WHEN FLOWERS CRY</i>	142
<i>HUGS</i>	143

GARY YOUNG	
<i>"HE WAS DRINKING"</i>	145
<i>"I HAD NEVER SEEN HER SO ANGRY"</i>	146
<i>"TREMBLING AND FURIOUS"</i>	147
<i>"I DISCOVERED A JOURNAL"</i>	148
<i>"KITTY SMILED"</i>	149
ANDY ORAM	
<i>KNOTS</i>	150
JOHN GREY	
<i>TO BE GOOD</i>	152
NICHOLAS SAMARAS	
<i>I AM CALLING FORTY YEARS AGO</i>	155
<i>YUROK CLASSMATES</i>	156
<i>THE KIDNAPPED CHILD LEAVES</i>	157
<i>THE KIDNAPPED CHILD IN THE HOME</i>	158
DON NOEL	
<i>THE REDHEAD</i>	160
DC DIAMONDPOLOUS	
<i>LIFE WITH ANGIE</i>	167

V. ILLNESS/CARE

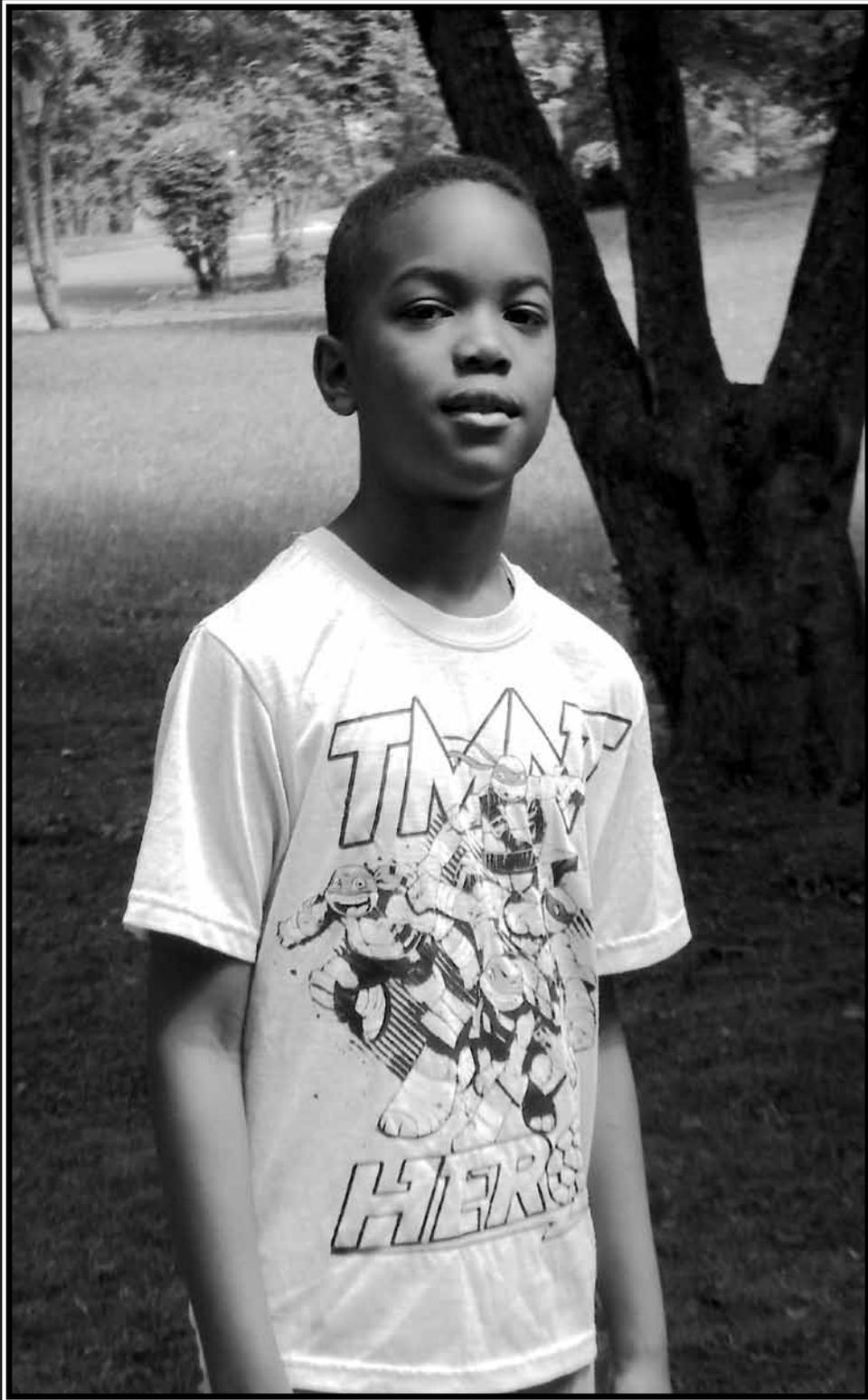
DOROTHY OLIVER PIROVANO	
<i>THERE WHEN WE NEED THEM</i>	178
NORITA DITTBERNER-JAX	
<i>RELIC</i>	183
S J ENGSTROM	
<i>TRAIN BOUND FOR GLORY</i>	184
RONA FRYE	
<i>TERRY</i>	197
HEATHER TOSTESON	
<i>THE AIR YOU BREATHE</i>	206

VI. WHOLE OF LIFE

LENORE BALLIRO	
<i>UNTITLED</i>	228
TERRI ELDERS	
<i>GRANDMA FANG'S CLOWDER OF KITTENS</i>	229

KATHIE GIORGIO	
<i>HOW YOU ARE REMEMBERED</i>	234
JENNIFER L. FREED	
<i>THANKS-GIVING</i>	242
LOWELL JAEGER	
<i>A PRAYER TO INVISIBLE STARS</i>	244
<i>DIFFICULT WILD TERRAIN</i>	245
RUTH SILIN	
<i>SMALL DISTRESSES</i>	246
<i>THE SCORE CARD</i>	247
ANDRENA ZAWINSKI	
<i>IT IS ENOUGH FOR NOW,</i>	248
JOHN L. SILVER	
<i>PROSPERO</i>	250
MARY KAY RUMMEL	
<i>A PANDEMIC STORY: SISTER THERESA LOUISE</i>	252
LORI LEVY	
<i>MEMORIAL SERVICE ON ZOOM</i>	254
GERARD SARNAT	
<i>APPRECIATING THE FIRST MORNING</i>	256
JOHN LAUE	
<i>MY LIFE AND THE CORONA VIRUS</i>	259
MILTON TEICHMAN	
<i>HAIRCUTS</i>	266
<i>HEART CURRENTS</i>	267
<i>HEARTS BREAK DIFFERENTLY</i>	268
HEATHER TOSTESON	
<i>TRUST THE EMPTINESS WITHIN</i>	270
CONTRIBUTORS	273
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	279
EDITORS/PUBLISHERS	280





HEATHER TOSTESON

GOODNESS: We Know It When We See It

Goodness is hard to define, but we know it when we see it. In action or inaction, that pause that isn't uncertain, that is more like a deep, steady breath, an existential embrace. It is easier to see goodness in others than in ourselves. But do we experience it as a choice or part of their essential nature? If a choice, what is the nature of the choice? What other adjectives constellate around it? Strong? Independent? Loving? Astute? Generous? Sui generis? Trusting? Confident? Firm? Unequivocal? Kind?

Where have you seen goodness in play? How has it changed your own life, the actual choices you make or how you evaluate your choices? Is there a cascade effect? Or is it, in its specificity, always a one-off? What happens to us when we think about it, try to describe it, share our experiences of it with others?

Our Wising Up anthology calls are invitations to others to join us in feeling and thinking our way deeper into an idea or experience that is of active interest to us personally. Sometimes that personal dimension has abated somewhat by the time we receive submissions. Sometimes the subject isn't of interest to others, so we go on to explore it in more private ways. But it feels that contemplating goodness—what it is, where we've experienced it in our own lives, how it affects our relationships with others and the world at large—is, if anything, of more interest to ourselves and to others now than when we first proposed the idea for the anthology.

My original interest was simply a reaction to the tenor of our society now, how quick we are to find and expand on the negative in each other. I am tired of it. *Really* tired of it. And frightened of it as well because I feel there is a tipping point in a society when too many people engage in this kind of polarizing negativity, a point where we become addicted to seeing the worst in each other and the world around us, and I do *not* want to reach it. My interest in finding ways to reset this balance has only grown more acute as we face a deeply contentious election, the aftermath of mass protests and counter protests, and a pandemic. Our responses to each of these reveals

WENDY JONES NAKANISHI

THE GOODNESS OF GOODNESS

In Greek the word for goodness—*agathosune*—connotes an uprightness of heart and life. Plato claimed that the "Good" is the highest of all the forms that make up the natural world and that all objects aspire to be "good." In the Bible, goodness is a manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

In the Greek and the Biblical interpretations of the term, there is an emphasis on goodness as an ideal. Plato's "Good" also bears a close relationship to the notion of "God" developed in the Middle Ages: "God" and "the Good" are more perfect than anything else and responsible for all virtue and rationality in the world.

This is a cursory outline of the historical significance of the concept, but what is goodness in the twenty-first century?

Although, nowadays, Plato is little studied and even less understood and despite our inhabiting a "post-Christian world," the quality of being moral, of displaying what is considered virtuous behavior, continues to be extolled in the present day. Modern children are exhorted by their parents and teachers to be "good," just as they have been for centuries. Goodness is the condition we are supposed to aspire to. We are urged to curb or change our sinful natures and become better people.

✱ ✱ ✱

When I was a small child, my parents insisted I kneel by my bed every night and recite the following prayer:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.*

*If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

It was only after my father left us, when I was seven, that this familiar routine came to an abrupt halt. And it was only at that time that I gave any thought to the prayer I'd been accustomed to mumble as quickly as I could, impatient to crawl into my comfortable warm bed. It was a shock to realize the prayer asked me to contemplate my own death. As a child I believed I would live forever.

Dad's departure also meant my brother and sisters and I were no longer required to attend the church just across a field from our house where he had served as the choir director. Mom began to rise late, as if reluctant to leave the bed she no longer shared with her husband, and we gave up religion at the same time as any pretensions to constituting a happy "normal" family. We lived in a tiny community in the rural northwest of Indiana, and it had long been common knowledge in our town that my parents' marriage was in serious trouble. We children got used to being pointed at and gossiped about.

I lost my faith in God and, for a time, in human goodness.

✱ ✱ ✱

When I left my hometown to enter the wider world, I encountered a far greater variety of people than I had been used to. I noticed that many, from large cities, were more "street smart" and worldly-wise than me—and that they considered me provincial and ignorant. Once I recovered from a consequent crippling sense of inferiority—when I was no longer stricken by shyness and fear and could interact with my new friends frankly and freely—I found some of them were religious and others proudly acclaimed themselves atheists, some were so kind I immediately thought of them as "good" while others exhibited a selfishness that repelled me.

I never regained my faith, but I became increasingly interested in "goodness" and especially in how I might live a "good" life.

At university I began reading the Anglo-Irish novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). Most of her twenty-six novels are explorations of how we can be good and how we can find goodness in the contemporary secularized world.

Murdoch drew some of her ideas from Plato. She argued for the replacement of the modern notion of a rational will by other ideas, such as

MICHAEL KONIK

THE PORCH WATCHER

We're huddled behind the Nerdmelt, waiting for the Monday night open mic to commence. Someone is telling a story about a comedian who used his precious three minutes of stage time to slowly, wordlessly remove all his clothing—except one sock.

"Remember that other crazy dude that used to come here?" Kyle, the host, interjects. "With the Selena Gomez stories?"

"Mike," I say, nodding. "My man, Fisher King Mike."

"Yeah. Him. So, I'm walking down Sunset, on my way here, and I see Mike at the bus bench over there by Chipotle. And, I swear, no shit, he's wearing an *alligator costume*, like, a furry felt alligator, like, a mascot, and he's got a big smile on his face, just, like, oblivious."

"Maybe he'll come to the mic like that," I say. "Gator comedy is very alt."

Kyle laughs. "Fisher King Mike is all about the alt, you know what I mean?"

We nod and chuckle and add tags onto what's been said before, a subtle current of one-upmanship rippling beneath the jokes. You can detect strenuousness behind our brand of funny, the effort to find laughs. Guys like Fisher King Mike don't have to try.

"So when's the last time you saw him?" I ask.

"Like, literally ten minutes ago."

"Yeah? I haven't seen him in a while. When's the last time he did the mic?"

"Seems like forever," one young comedian says. "Months?"

Kyle takes a deep drag from an omnipresent cigarette. "Yeah, I wanna say, like, it's been about three months since he did a set here."

"All that time I haven't seen him once," I say. "He used to do 'Revolutionary Words' over at Elderberries. Religiously. Never missed it."

"Didn't you have to ban him here once?" another guy asks Kyle.

"It wasn't, like, an outright ban. I just had to remind him about some of the ground rules. Like, the light. You gotta respect the light."

Murmurs of solemn assent. "No doubt." "Fo sho." "You *gotta*."

I'm about to mention logorrhea, compulsive talkativeness, but I know in this crowd such a word will only lead to discussions of watery stool, so I keep it to myself.

Fisher King Mike can't stop once he starts. He seems to have the same desires and compulsions as all the talented, striving young comedians grinding their way through the dues-paying mill of Los Angeles. All of us performers crave an audience. We all want someone—or a whole bunch of someones—to listen and laugh, as though what we have to offer the world is necessary and unmissable, when, in reality, it's often of interest only to the guy on stage. Fisher King Mike, unlike Hollywood aspirants who own cars and live in apartments, has no self-editing function, no superego mode to impart shame and insecurity. *Of course*, he runs the light. And of course, he's wearing an alligator costume today. Why wouldn't he?

Mike and I once went back-to-back at one long-forgotten show. To my initial alarm and eventual delight, he used most of his set—and some of the next person's—to offer a detailed commentary on what he'd just watched before he was called to the stage: *my* set. It wasn't a review or a critique, really, and it wasn't a reiteration, either. My set served as a kind of jumping off point for Mike's digressions, a starting line with no finish in sight. The mystery and surprise of where his disjointed rant might lead was kind of funny and sort of mesmerizing, and, in the end, utterly inscrutable. If it weren't a schizophrenic homeless man delivering the performance, people would call it boundary-breaking, genre-smashing, comedy genius.

Delivering an entire stand-up set dressed as a cartoon alligator—and never referencing the outfit—would be something I'd like to see. Alas, Mike doesn't show up for the Nerdmelt event that night. Or the following one, or the one after that.

But the next week, when I amble into the parking lot on a mild Monday night, Fisher King Mike is there, standing by himself, off to the side, looking very much as he did when I last saw him three or four months earlier strolling on the sidewalk outside our front garden.

He's wearing dark sunglasses and his Hollywood hat, which seems to have been inscribed with bible verses on most of the available fabric. Mike's outer coat is also covered with hand-written messages, some of them Jesus



J.O. HASELHOEF

THE CROWN ROYAL AFFAIR

June 2014

A spring night. A man in his thirties walks into the parking lot of a convenience store a few blocks from his rented apartment. He picks up a stone and smashes the glass to unlock it. Estimated replacement cost, \$500. Inside, he selects a bottle of Crown Royal, retailing for \$24.95. The police respond to the alarm and arrest him.

No stranger to the judiciary system, the man has a rap sheet, which includes numerous misdemeanors, starting at age eighteen for walking on a highway. Various driving violations and possession of marijuana follow. Because he is in jail for one of these minor offenses, he can't show up for another of his hearings and is arrested for Failure to Appear and later, Failure to Comply. He is placed on probation again.

A fall night—a few months later. According to the video on a surveillance camera at the same convenience store, the same man picks up a stone and breaks the glass door. He selects a bottle of Crown Royal and a pack of cigarettes. He exits, sits on the curb nearby, lights a cigarette, and drinks the alcohol.

The police, responding to the alarm, take the man into custody. As he is escorted to a squad car, he yells, "Hell yes, I broke into the store. I admit it."

Police records note the defendant, while on probation for the first break in, burglarized the same store a second time. The man pleads guilty, is assigned a public defender, and waives his right to a pre-sentence investigation and report. Had the two been completed, they might have pointed out the peculiarities of his case or his diagnosis of schizophrenia eleven years before.

He agrees to a plea bargain and accepts four years of prison for the two felonies—burglary and criminal damage for breaking the glass. Two other warrants, one for misdemeanor drug possession and the other for public intoxication, are quashed.

JENNIFER L. FREED

HELP

Because he's so hard of hearing,
my father places the chair exactly
where my mother asked him
not to.

She wants him to move it aside.
He asks why she keeps changing her mind.
She tries not to cry.
He throws his hands in the air.

The aide arrives, feels
the storm hovering,

puts on the tea,
tells my father she's still laughing at that joke
he told yesterday,
rests a palm on my mother's arm,
moves the chair from the path of her walker

and shifts
the air in the room, saving
a small square of the world.

GOLDEN DOOR

*Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*
—Emma Lazarus, 'The New Colossus'

Fridays at the Free Library, you navigate
the language that surrounds you here
in your new home.
You've left your bamboo hills,
your missing father, soldiers
cleansing the land
of your people.
You work nights, emptying crates,
filling big-box stores.
You share three rooms
and minimum wage
with mother, sister, her two boys,
your little girl. And today
you urge me to take
the curry noodles you brought
on a foil-covered plate,
and the golden dumplings
your wife fried specially
this morning, for you to give
to me.

TERRY SANVILLE

A BRIDGE BETWEEN TREES

Whatever Rich had been before, he'd never be again. We all dreaded that. But it took years to figure out as we struggled with the aftermath.

The summer between eighth and ninth grades, Rich, Pete and I decided to build a tree house . . . actually Rich did most of the deciding. Our families lived on Santa Barbara's Calle Poniente where it dead-ended into rolling hills covered with wild oats and spotted with California Live Oaks. Two massive trees stood close together along a ridgeline, silhouetted against the sky.

"That's where we'll build her," Rich said and pointed.

"Ah, come on," Pete whined, "we'll hafta haul everything uphill. We'll be pullin' stickers outta our socks forever."

"He's right," I chimed in.

Rich countered, "We'll be able to see anybody coming. We'll see everything."

"And they'll see us."

"I want them to," Rich said. "This is our place and nobody can take it."

Pete choked back a laugh. "That's funny. Ya sound like you're actin' in some western."

Rich grinned and drawled, "That's right, I'm the Marshal in these here parts."

We all watched *Gunsmoke* on TV every chance we got, lusting after Miss Kitty and making fun of poor Chester. We also knew that Rich was the Marshal and we his deputies. We'd known each other since first grade at Harding School and had tried projects before. The tree house would prove the toughest.

In the late 1950's, Calle Poniente had three mini-fiefdoms: the bottom near Valerio Street belonged to a bunch of little kids; the middle section to John the paper boy, the Mexicans, and pretty Becky; and the upper end to us Three Amigos. We were older than the others by a year or two, a vast

difference when you're young.

Rich motioned us into his garage. "Look at this." He rolled open a big sheet of paper across a workbench.

"What am I looking at?" I asked.

"Come on, Chet, your Pop's a draftsman. You've seen blueprints."

"You do this?" Pete asked, eyes wide.

"Yeah. Look, here're the tree trunks, like you're lookin' down from above . . . the first level and the second . . . and the high deck in the other tree." Rich showed us the details laid out in clear lines.

"What's this?" I pointed.

Rich puffed himself up. "That's the bridge between the trees."

"Cool. But how're we gonna get the stuff to build this thing? I've got nothin'."

"Me neither," Pete said.

"There's plenty of scrap lumber at that house project on Marquard."

"Jeez, a frickin' block away." Of the three of us, hulking Pete proved the most adverse to physical exertion.

Rich ignored him. "We'll pick 'em clean . . . take only used stuff . . . they won't care."

"Yeah, but what'll we take?" I asked.

"I know what we need."

Suddenly, our lazy summer of riding bikes down State Street and watching girls bake in the sun on East Beach had been usurped by the tree house challenge, albeit an exciting one.

It took a week just to drag all the materials to our construction site. The most difficult hauls were concrete-stained sheets of plywood. We stored everything under the oaks and covered it with a tarp borrowed from my Dad's woodpile. We did a lot of *borrowing*. We scrounged for nails and screws and used all of our fathers' hand tools. By the second week we'd worn a path up the hill, the annoying stickers no longer a problem.

The tree house took shape slowly. We got fancy: cut up an old red carpet and lined each room; *found* some rolled asphalt roofing and covered our castle; nailed wire over the window openings to keep the squirrels, raccoons and birds out; and built a trapdoor in the first level floor and locked it with a padlock and hasp unscrewed from Pete's father's toolshed.

But the bridge between the trees proved the most difficult. We didn't have long pieces of lumber that could span the twenty-foot distance.



GARY YOUNG

"HE WAS DRINKING"

He was drinking in the airport bar, and I asked, are you coming or going? I have been there, he said, and I almost didn't get back. He said, the engines failed, and we seemed to be falling forever; I've never been so afraid. Then he took a sip of his drink, and rolled back his sleeve. He'd printed his name down the length of his arm, and below that he'd written, Honey, I love you. It's strange, he said, what goes through your mind at a time like that. I hope to God this washes off, he said. My wife just loves to worry.



DC DIAMONDPOLOUS

LIFE WITH ANGIE

My sister Angie gives me outrageous material for my standup comedy. She's a bona fide nut case, a paranoid schizophrenic, bipolar, manic depressive—you name it—Angie fits every disorder that isn't wired to reality.

The voices inside her head tell her to run from anyone trying to help her—except me. I take my sister's sorry existence, find the humor in it—in the loonies of my own mind—and make people laugh. Do I feel guilty? I'm half Jewish, half Catholic. Humor is my way of coping. Hell, I'm a female stand-up comic, and there's no higher hurdle in show business.

Growing up, bullies at school called me circus girl. I'm 5'10", big boned, with short blond hair. I was gay and Jew bashed. I rolled in the hurt, turned it inside out, and now make people laugh. I'm a babyface dykey-looking pansexual, gender fluid, LA Dodger and Laker fan.

There have been days and nights when I've had to search for Angie. I've become an expert on underpasses—the noisiest, the filthiest, with the latest graffiti art. I could be a docent, leading tours. I'd recommend disposable shoes, cheap socks, and a jar of Vicks VapoRub to hold under the nose because the bouquet is out-of-this world.

When the audience leans forward, I know I have them. They're waiting for the punch line. But I let the tragedy of Angie's existence sink in. Like the time the cops took her into custody after she stole a crossing-guard paddle, and used it to direct traffic on the 134 freeway. Angie caused gridlock for hours. At the mental health facility, she was a model of "rationality" with anger issues that she promised she'd address. She's instinctive that way—knowing when to sane-up.

Truth is, the worry and stress have turned my comedy into a commentary on homelessness and the mentally ill. I've become an observational comedian, like my idol, George Carlin.

My 5 p.m. visit to Angie's crib, an appliance box near the Golden State



RONA FRYE

TERRY

Yesterday he could shift his old Ford truck! Just yesterday, he seemed fine. Now, sitting down to play a card game was confusing for him, a game he played hundreds of times before. Hand and Foot is like Canasta and Terry played it almost daily with our mom. Now dealing, laying out the cards and following along became complicated. Sue and mom were eyeing him, what were they were seeing?

Terry didn't act peculiar, otherwise. He still walked normally, ate normally, seemed to know everyone, so what was going on? Sue asked mom to follow her to the kitchen where they put their heads together and tried to come up with an answer. There was no answer, only questions. The only option was to take him in to the ER for analysis.

They hopped in Sue's Tahoe telling Ter that they wanted the docs to have a look at him. He was a kind, gentle, trusting soul so there was no balking at this sudden, new plan. And frankly, his thinking was off just enough that he wasn't able to discern what this meant. The drive, about half an hour long, went smoothly; no one was saying a word. There was reason to worry, but without answers what could they think.

The docs and NAs, RNs and technicians moved quickly taking a scan of his head, asking questions, checking his oxygen levels, doing eye/hand coordination, and the usual vitals. Then the waiting game to see the results. Sue and mom waited in the lounge, worrying and growing weary. Mom was no spring chicken, she was closing in on eighty-seven years of age. That made Sue close to sixty-nine. Both advanced enough in age to find this frightening occurrence exhausting.

They called me and clued me in. I was a nomadic sort, never staying put for long, but was in town at the moment. They likely forgot they could count on me. I dropped everything and drove straight to Sierra Vista. The regional hospital on Wilcox Boulevard was the location. I walked in and spotted them

LOWELL JAEGER

A PRAYER TO INVISIBLE STARS

On our rented motor scooter
weaving through the breeze along the shore,
we inhale forgotten simple joys
of youth once more—our skin toasted brown,
our hair bleached with brine, the horizon
so blue, so generous, so deceptively endless.

We are in love and long married, no
small miraculous adventure on its own, having lasted
past crashing along the long road. And now
we carry with us what survives. We wear it
like a flag, a truce of goodwill, the two of us
scouting inland toward our hotel, past military

guards posted at gates to the base,
their black rifles in hand, stern-faced
and dutiful. We see the danger; don't misunderstand us,
please. *They're just boys*, my wife says, and says it
with a heart full of hard-earned forgiveness, says it
like a prayer to invisible stars, the ones we know,

eternally burning through darkness. She waves,
and the soldiers lower their guns, just boys again,
smiling and waving. Don't misunderstand; we comprehend
the world is hemorrhaging sadness. Our small cause
is to risk our brittle skulls on an open highway
in a foreign land. We hold fast to love. We hold to the other

and won't let go.

DIFFICULT WILD TERRAIN

Cold wind blasting the truck broadside.
Threatening horizons of blue/black
encroaching storms. That image
sticks with me most, the pair of us

bumping along washboard back roads
in search of . . . well, in pursuit of . . .
well, hungry for difficult wild terrain,
sweeping landscapes so unforgivably gorgeous
we'd fallen hushed in reverence and awe.

She recalls we'd stalled mesmerized,
speechless in highland ranch country,
thrilled by an eagle diving through a dervish
of whirling grit, then winging heavenward,
fistful of prairie dog. Finally,

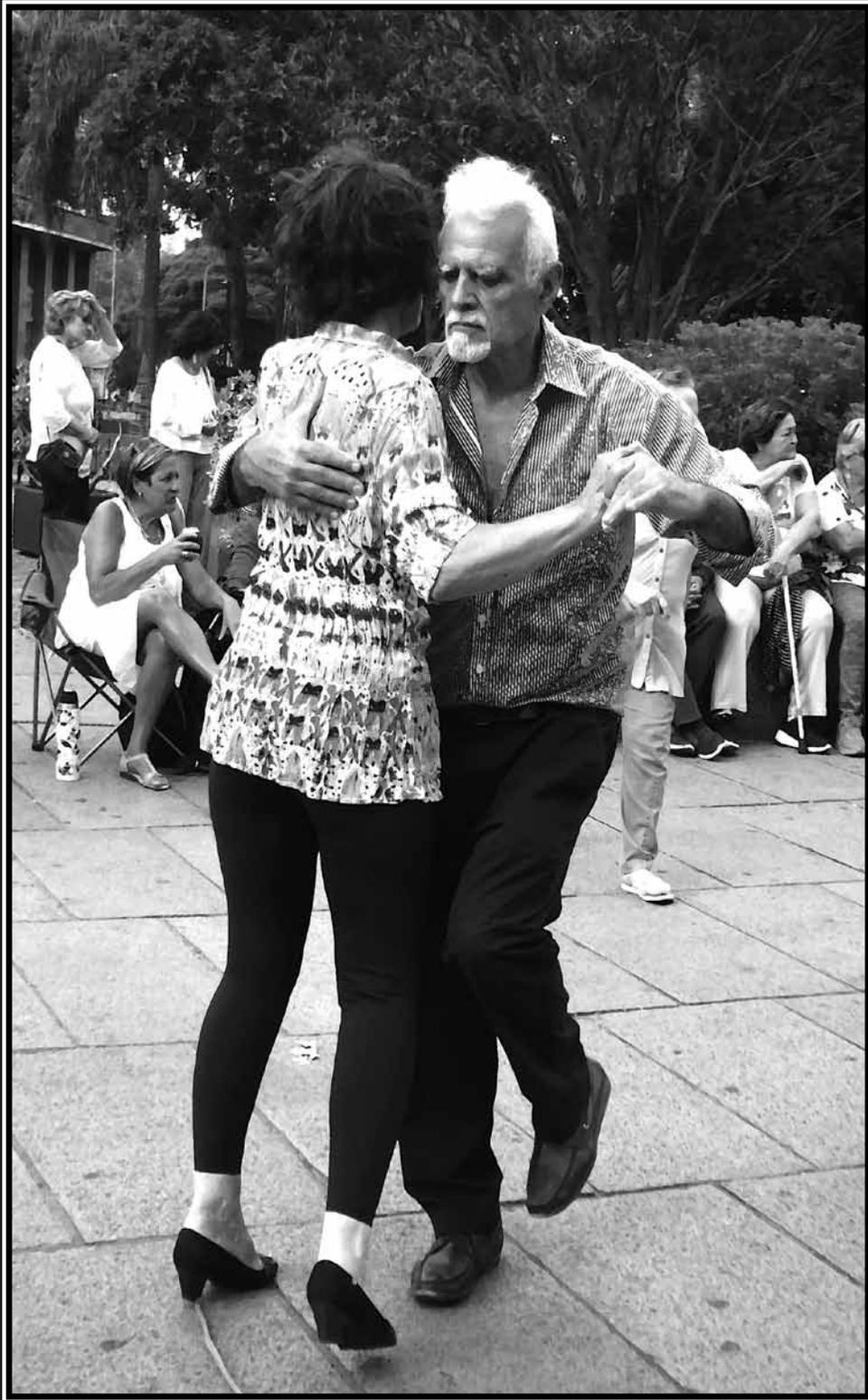
folding himself on a fence rail,
ripping crimson strips of flesh.
The blood, bone and gristle—terrible and revealing—backlit
with roiling torrents of violent sky.

She and I . . .

a snapshot of a lightning flash
long marriage. I, bedazzled behind the wheel,
and she beside me, reaching to take my hand.

Both of us goose-bumped
in the beauty of hell's wrath, thunder crack,
and cloud bursting downpour. Each of us sheltered
in loving the other. Alive in the world

we were born to explore.



JOHN LAUE

MY LIFE AND THE CORONA VIRUS

It's not that I want to die, not at all. I'm still providing useful services in the arts and otherwise, but I'm at an okay stopping point. If the universe wants to take me, I'm ready to go.

Even if I lived to be a hundred, I couldn't equal the things I've already done, the friends I've made, goals I've achieved. I've been an outlier, taking opportunities others missed, attempting things few people have, getting some unusual jobs done.

My life to this point wasn't all good; it's been the polar opposite at times, but I'm grateful for it. I'm not perfect; there's always more I could have done, and probably should have, but I've come to the conclusion I haven't wasted my time.

It would be terrible if you were close to death and you'd played it so safe and accomplished so little that you felt you'd never lived. This might be stretching the metaphor too much, but I've known people I believe are examples of that.

My wife has a male relative who's able-bodied but lives off the state and does very little besides watching TV. He justifies his existence by saying, "What are we here for except to reproduce ourselves?" He's fathered two boys, both of whom are in serious trouble with the law and otherwise.

I also thought of an old acquaintance, Bill P., who was kicked out of a monastery and failed to become a Catholic priest. He constantly strove for some great achievement, his own "masterpiece" that would bring him acclaim and allow him to believe his life worthwhile. He was working on a new type of musical notation the last time I saw him. I doubt he was saved by that.

✿ ✿ ✿

The Covid crisis is here, lies like a dark fog over our future, makes us

HEARTS BREAK DIFFERENTLY

They can shatter like a vase
that falls from the shelf.
They can harden
like clay in the sun,
earth without rain.

Or they can break open,
become vessels
for pains and pangs of others—
for the mother who has lost her child,
the neighbor trapped in addiction,
the immigrant living in fear.

There must be other ways
hearts can break
I haven't even thought of.
If mine should break one day,
let it break open all the way.

