

THE RIO REVIEW

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The Student Literary & Arts Journal
of Austin Community College

Fall 2004

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Dancer: Molly Roy — *José Bustamonte* — 2003

Editorial Note

Education is a strange game. For poets and writer-types, it can mess with your head. One example: As I write this we are beginning the school year, but it is September and when this, the first issue of *The Rio Review* for this academic year, appears, we will be at the end of October. Every writer knows that the fall is the time of year when the old begins to fade and fail. Winter is coming. But every teacher and student knows that the fall is the time of new beginnings. There is a part of me that wants to look back; there is a part that wants to look ahead.

Looking back. This issue contains work by students at ACC from the spring and summer classes. We had a huge number of poems to select from—almost four hundred poems. Faculty members John Herndon and Paige Deshong narrowed that group to about forty poems, and I narrowed those to the seventeen published here. Those who submitted poems should know that many excellent poems did not make it

into the issue. This pains all of us terribly. Similarly, students submitted over fifty prose works. Susan Haga and Maxine Beach selected what they considered the best ten works, and I chose six works to include in this issue. Again, if we were publishing all worthy submissions, we would have published many more. Thanks go to John, Paige, Susan, Maxine. Also I appreciate the work of Kathryn O'Shields, a University of Texas graduate student, who as an editorial assistant, helped organize all the submissions. Thanks also to Gary Webbernick, chair of the art department for helping select art work from ACC's permanent collection, and to Darla Johnson and José Bustamonte, who provided the photographs of the dancers. Thanks always to Terry Sherrell at Morgan Printing, who gets the journal printed so expertly.

Looking ahead: Because ACC students are such wonderful writers, and because we know there are writers

we are not attracting yet, and because ACC has such a vibrant community of students in dance, drama, film, art, photography, developmental writing, and English composition and literature, I am in the midst of talking with all these departments to see how *The Rio Review* can live up to its full subtitle—“The Literary and Arts Journal of Austin Community College.” The

college is generous in its support of this journal, and this journal wants to be generous in its support of the college. A first step in this process, a peek into the future, is our profile of Darla Johnson of the ACC Dance Department. Look for big changes in the spring—the spring issue, our second issue for this academic year, but a new beginning. Like I say, it will mess with your head.

Lyman Grant
Rio Grande Campus



THE POEMS

Seraphi Coronation — *Russell Stephenson* — 2003

Texas Son Guadalupe

Meg Ayers

Knee-deep world
Flowing amiably by
Emerald river
Moving earth
Carving new paths

Curious aquatic inhabitants
Inspect passers by
Half-dressed bodies
Baking in black, buoyant tubes

Lazy fingers keeping beat
Music floats down the river
Brave fish
Admirably tasting
Fingers dipped too long

Tumble weed wind
Merely a distraction
As the Texas sun glares

Twin Floods

Audrey Chatman

Pain
Searing inside organs not meant
To hurt this way
Not ever, for a supposed-infertile.

Blood
Trickling down thighs in rivers
Of torrent flooding
Crying to be dammed.

Dead
The murdered released
Out of body and life
Yet not out of mind.

Ghosts
Floating in dreams, seeing their
Would- have- been-mommy
But ashamed of the whore.

Daddy
Love through ejaculating
Words of panting silence
Yearning only for orgasmic release.

Tears
Shed for two unborn beauties
Burning in the incinerator of unwanted
Ripped from a womb upon the cold metal table.

what i learned of genius

Collie Farley

i never found in the
pages of my textbooks.

they spoke of inspirational
men who devoted themselves
to theories, constructed formulas
that molded our perception
of the universe. created music
despite hardship, preached
freedom and equality, lifted
the masses, broke barriers.

what i wasn't taught in
a classroom is the burden
of genius. the dark comers
of a brilliant mind, not geared
for society, easily overwhelmed.

what i know of genius
i learned in the work-worn
palms of a man who devoted
months to collecting, dismantling,
and refurbishing junkyard clocks.

hands that spent summers
whittling rough blocks
of wood into smooth connected
links, miniature billfish
boasting intricate detail.
learned to play the fiddle
from blue grass records,
strummed perfection on an
acoustic guitar, then electric.

a man lost in the workings
of his own mind: in the public
library pages of war heroes,
the theatre, method acting.
obsessed with support groups,
then magnets, the dynamics
of a tube vacuum, record players,
airplanes, drugs and alcohol,
prisms and neon signs.

what i know of genius,
i learned in the eyes
of a man who looks at me,
and realized he's never
seen his daughter before.

Our Deck

Charles Goyette

We would sit there for hours
unwinding from another day's work,
smoking cigarettes, drinking, and talking.
We had a small round table to sit by
four wooden chairs,
plants, candles and chests,
a dusty old canvas umbrella
and ceiling just over our heads.

On cool evenings we ate dinner there
to candlelight and glasses of wine,
the woods providing us a curtain
growing thicker with each passing hour.
Candles fought against the darkness
but finally would succumb to its strength
whose presence felt close enough to touch
when leaning from the railing one story above.

Thunderstorms would make our acquaintance,
the wind chimes calling us to our seats.
We'd watch the trees perform a most violent
dance

its mist blowing gently on our face.
In its wake cool air it'd leave behind
a clean, earthy smell and delicate sounds
like water dripping from the trees.

Sometimes we would slip out there late
at night having already been to bed.
Remember the air so still, so heavy
transmitting the slightest peep.
On those nights boundaries would blur
between our dreams and our realities
bringing us together, sometimes not telling us apart.

Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Barbies

Michelle Green

It's a fact of life.

A cold, hard, simple, plastic fact:

You will not be a Barbie Doll when you grow up.

You will not stand 7 towering feet tall.

You will not have measurements of 39-21-33.

You will not have perfect, perky D-Cup breasts.

You will not receive a Dream House for
Christmas.

You will not get your entire world from a toy store.

You will stand just tall enough to reach jars on
high shelves.

You will have gentle curves that fill your clothing.

You will find that a handful is all you really need.

You will work for what you want, and take pride in
it.

You will own possessions in colors other than
pink.

You will be an average woman when you grow up.

And that's the truth.

The warm, soft, amazing, fleshy truth.

Mary Lee

Patrick Griffis

Baby, whatchoo need?

She sells overpriced tallboys and forties
coffee grinders ounces of Rio Grande kilo brick
hand rolls it into two dollar penners.

There is a mottled inking
on her pendulous brown breast
that might once have been a heart
before hungry mouths
grasping fingers
pulled it out of true.
Those mouths and fingers now attuned to
cigarettes
hollow eyes staring
in the concrete and razorwire confines
of their lifetime second wombs.

She calls the white boys her babies now
and borrows bingo money
when they come to her window
at three in the morning.
Hunger, need, or small town boredom
propelling them towards the hill
for a case of King Cobra
to ride out their doomed paper acid highs.

After the Boom

Bracken Hale

Far below,
Below the pink and orange dusk,
the streets lie straight in cardinal rows.
All along the high plain
evening's breath comes,
now blows crisp and dry,
rustles through the patches
of prickly pear,
whips the lengths
of rusted wire.
Desolation like this
breeds all sorts of nuts.

The town was built
on seven hills like Rome,
the old-timers brag,
“world's largest man-made swimmin' pool,”
and “Conrad Hilton's first hotel.”
The old brick highway
followed the tracks of the railroad,
and near the rotted cross ties
you can still sometimes
find the path of the Butterfield stage,
proof that people
really passed through here.

Once, I'm told,
women walked on Main
dressed in fashions fresh from Paris.
Men wore top-hats
and crank-started model A Fords.
Bank robberies, shootouts
and overnight fortunes...
this ghost town rivaled
even Abilene in its day,
a sure place to stop at the very least.

Now,
the low moans
of diesel engines
only slow for a moment
in passing,
and then whine on east
until inaudible, on to D.F.W.,
to Texarkana and beyond no doubt.

The dove are cooing
in the thorny mesquite,
now that evening's come.
Some old couples
meet at the Dairy Queen
for a supper sure to clog arteries.
Signs welcome hunters,
discourage hippies.
The oil is gone.
Eastland got the Wal-Mart,
one last nail in the coffin.
Beneath such a vaulted sky,
you'd think that life
would grow higher than one story.
The north wind is humbling here.

Politics

Aaron Krueger

Your every thought is controlled
programmed

And now for a commercial break

Get on the ground
Hands behind your head
Head to your knees

Now your every move is controlled
But do they even see?

The roach in public housing cabinets

The 18 prisons for every new school

The blocks
which resemble
prison cells

5-0 circles
not to serve and protect
rather
harass and arrest

But hey
you're in control
go vote

While the police vehicle speeds
swerves with no signal
pulls into McDonald's

Crack cocaine was introduced
to our neighborhoods
by the same organization
who arrests you for it

But doesn't the White House lawn look nice?

Job

Eleanor Mahoney

I serve to live
But I do not live to serve
Especially when you won't give me one thought
After I smile and hand you a perfectly made
cappuccino
With creamy foam
None of that airy shit.

You'll keep your penny in change
Instead of dropping it into my tip jar
Then probably come back to complain for no
reason.

Because we've made you this beast
This slave to caffeine
Forced you to pay us 100 times more than it costs
us to make your drink
And you're angry...
But you keep coming back.

And you take it out on me.

But don't you see?

I am just a whore to this corporation, a tool in its
mission to take over the world
And monopolize small shopkeepers dreams.

I'm sorry, I really am.

But I count on my benefits and stock options. I'm
sucked into this world already

(By default) you see.

It was the only job that accepted me when I was

17

In D.C.

And it has followed me across the country.

Blame the economy

I'd rather get discounts on clothes

Than 1 pound of flavor-locked coffee beans.

But I'm in now

But I'll get out

Later.

A Look into a Runner's Mind

Matt Newbery

Clean, and rinsed, and sweating, we stretch.

Starting off slow,

I smell the morning air, and embrace winter's spirit
Leaves-fight to be below our feet on this cement,
but soon men will bag them all up. So few cars are

out

on the street today, in this small town, and I

assume most

of the ones that are will be going to Dell. I hate

myself for

staying up late the night before, because now my

body

aches for sleep. But no matter how tired I am, this

run must

go on: it must go on, because as in all things, this

defines who

I am. I may not be the fastest, or the smartest, but

I have

fortitude. It IS funny how empty you feel when

you run,

how anything can catch your attention, and how

quickly that

something is gone as you pass it by. Nature is such

a privilege,

that I think sometimes humanity doesn't realize its
importance:
instead, we build treadmills and inside tracks,
anything to
beat the elements. Right now, however, none of
this is on my mind:
I am thinking about how my sister just got her
braces off, and how
ridiculous my friend's new shoes look. I am also
reflecting
on a movie I saw recently, "Under the Tuscan
Sun," and how despite
the fact it was a "chic flick," it was excellent. It
made me want to travel,
to experience things outside of Texas, and to
discover what I really
want. Things are so strange now for me, being in
college and meeting
so many new people (change has never been my
forté), and I
realize all I took for granted in high school. Ahhh,
that car almost hit me.

To Do

Roberta Preston

Stuff pairs of trousers,
crumpled shirts,
in laundry bag,
deliver them to cleaners
so he will look starched
smart
for clients.
Check fridge,
buy two cartons of milk
for his *cafe au lait*.
Drive through rush hour
ferrying his child
to soccer, swimming,
scouts
so he can stay at work
meeting late
with clients
Collect mail,
sift through, discard
ads, credit card offers,
so he can spend
his more precious time
in front of the computer
upstairs
inaccessible.

Waiting Waters

Erin Reho

You held me heavy
and we sank
down past time,
past all memory
to a stillness
in the earth
belly full
with the likes of you,
you who just happened
to be birthed by the river
shaped by her waters
running faster than I
could swim.
We lay here silent
with the bottom's darkness
You smooth in my hand
you'll never tell
how heavy I held you,
how weightless I drowned.

At Adrianople

Will Swanter

We rushed the hill terrified of the savage blues
And reds that flowed down the screaming faces.
The rivers of sweat and paint mixed with spittle,
Which exploded with every barbaric scream.

The dirt of the hill crunched under my sandal,
And then my spear no longer knew the grip of my
hand
As it pierced not a foreign heart, but dead grass.
My legs pumped furiously for the apex.

The haze of heat shimmered to my right, where
our
Sustenance crackled under the wrath of sustained
tribes.
Their bellies sated, our loyalty frail.
I flung my body onto the thorny, dry grass.

And there I saw our leader, our Caesar, rushed
into a hut
By courageous soldiers, soldiers with spears and
grim faces.
The hut was no wise choice: straw hastens a fire's
progress.

And so the Visigoths saw the error, and cornered
their prey.

A new torch was lit, the door barricaded with
heavy logs.

Shouts from inside alerted my legs to our leader's
plight,

But they were refractory— a camel's rein in a
novice's hand.

My eyes alone reflected the courage demanded of
a soldier.

To watch is to remember, and to remember is to
summon

Old emotions once hidden: and now, away from
battle

I see the smoke of the hut mingling with the
smoke of betrayal,

And the black sky shrouding the light of the sun.

Rapture

Emily Seuss

One for memory
one for love
one for hate
and one for pain
a flower for each
like a mad Ophelia
longing for a lover
lost to madness
or to revenge
The four horsemen of my own private apocalypse
war for the blood i shed
death for my belief i abandoned
famine for what he denied me
pestilence for the rot that now festers within me

Shahrazad (and Dido) Evoke the Jinn

R. S. Tasen

for so many nights
it rustled around out there
with the dry leaf-devils
just beyond the fires

and when I wanted to write it down
half of it solidified into print
and half faded in and out of sight
nebulous and coming apart at the edges
like some phase-shifted intruder
from another dimension

and when I tried to translate it
some of it slipped right through but
the rest slammed solidly into the wall,
and was left behind in the other room

and what was left after that—
some scattered remnants of purple smoke
a few randomly charged particles
flickered briefly and floated away,
shorting themselves out eventually

like the echo of a conversation you almost walked
in on
like that train you just missed

the way the bathwater drops
just slightly when the bather steps out

the warm of the pillow after Aeneas had left
all just the burnt afterodor of a broken promise

never where it was
supposed to be
and always falling out
from under
like the pulled-out rug of language
the trapdoor of thought

Organ Shop

*January 31, 2004, Austin.
In respectful memory of
Otto Jurgen Hofmann (1918-2001)*

R. S. Tasen

This shop of elephantine pipe
organ parts—notched tubes
like long, polished metal tusks,
square wooden ribs,
tall racks of ivory keys
and pedalboards all leaning up
against cluttered shelves still labeled
with the words and writing
of the master organ maker,
gone now—that skill which once
breathed sound into these bellows and stops,
brought wires, consoles, knobs and pistons
into one vibrant presence having long
since slipped through the daycracks
that line the walls of the warehouse,
the roof rising up from the emptiness
over time, leaving behind only a well-known
aura of wood shavings, dust, rats,
and oxidation, the disorganization

of rusty tools and tangles
of electrical wiring from rows
of disemboweled cabinetry.

I came wanting to walk within
the familiar configurations, the sense
of a workspace inhabited by years
of the reverberation of experience,
echoes of touch, the deep memory
of proportion and scale and subtle adjustments,
but found instead these scattered remnants,
just the sum of the parts, now,
nothing more than a man behind
a table, leaning back in his chair,
saying, make me an offer,
while only bargain-hunters,
like ants, pick through the bones.

War and Remembrance

Michael Weeks

Thoughts of the death of my friends
Creep into my head
Why did I sit there?
While they were over there?
I give the brass what they want to hear.
They make the decisions
People died from what I said
What can I do?
To minimize pain,
To maximize death.
How can I destroy the enemy?
How can I end their life?
I tell the brass.
They tell my friends
They kill them

Did I kill them?



Sea of Weathered Betrothals — *John Nordloh* — 2000

THE PROSE

Money Problems

Jose Alcorta

He came home with bandages still on his arms and ear. These needed to be changed daily. We were used to seeing him always clowning around, dancing funny or making faces to make us laugh. After the accident, he was less confident, less jovial, and more introspective. He was still handsome, but it was difficult not to notice he was missing an ear.

He had been difficult to handle as the baby born out of wedlock to a single mother in the small town of Cotulla in 1907. With a large chip on his shoulder, getting in trouble came easy. In recalling his childhood, he spoke of spending a lot of time kneeling in punishment on dried kernels of corn in the corner of his classrooms. When he reached the age of twelve, he left school and was sent to his Uncle Juan, who was a shepherd and stayed in the fields tending sheep and goats for months at a time.

It was at that time, he discovered who his father was. Once he found out, he decided he had certain rights, so he took his father's last name of Alcorta. He stopped using his mother's last name. At seventeen he left his uncle and criss-crossed the nation riding freight trains and doing odd jobs for six years. He spoke of having to live on moldy bread and discarded onions, both thrown away by a grocery store, for several weeks waiting for a job that never materialized. Several years later in 1933, at the age of twenty- six, he married my mom. According to her pictures, she was tall and leggy with a broad smile that showed almost all her teeth. She carried an air of happiness around her. That settled him down. But he had no skills, and no education. So he worked as a laborer. His recurring advice to us kids was: "Get a job *inside*. Working outside no vale pa' nada."

After a few more weeks of daily bandage changes and hanging around the house, the skin on Dad's forearms stopped oozing and was tough enough for him to go back to work.

He decided not go back to work as a roofer.



Because he quit his job, it was surprising to hear a few weeks later he would be receiving a settlement from the roofing company. He was to receive a \$1500 cash settlement in addition to the amounts already paid for the hospital bills and time off from work. We probably should have fought for more money, but at the time needs were so great that anything was considered a godsend. Besides, with Dad's third grade education, and Mom's limited abilities, they didn't have the skills to hire a lawyer and contribute to a lawsuit. So my dad signed the release required by the company, who knew how to protect themselves against future liability; and we received the money.

As soon as they heard about the possible settlement, my parents decided the best use for the money was to buy a house. So the search began. In the past, we had lived in Prospect Hill behind a small grocery store close to Our Lady of the Lake College in central west San Antonio. We had lived on a chicken farm and a dairy farm north of San Antonio just north of Military Highway—the earliest loop around the city. And most recently we had lived next to the City Dump, where we bought our water for fifty cents a barrel from the water truck that came by every couple of weeks with the driver intently trying to avoid the bigger potholes on our street, while the wet helper standing among the splashing barrels of water hawked, “¡El aguador!”

In their lives, both my parents spent a lot of time outdoors growing up. Now that they could choose where to live, they began to look for a place with a large lot, preferably out of the central city. They wanted fruit trees and maybe space for a garden. Thus, they found the house on Humboldt Street.



The money he received from the roofing company had not gone very far. After buying the house and moving in, there was nothing left. Before he was well enough to work, I remember he started going out, and coming home late with the smell of beer on his breath. I hated that smell. He loved to “socialize” when he drank. His idea of being social was to expound his theories on everything from friendship to dying. He loved to argue when he drank. I wondered if getting more money than he had ever seen at one time affected him so that he felt a need to show what he knew.

He started looking for a job, and found one at the St. Anthony Hotel as a dishwasher. When he came home at night after work, he always brought food. “What's this Daddy?” my brother Santos asked as he crunched into something fried golden brown. “That's fried oysters,” he replied, continuing to unpack the food. “You like'm?” It was eleven thirty at night

and we had been eating beans, rice, and tortillas for supper for the umpteenth time, so we always got out of bed if he brought food. To us, eating the exotic food he brought was an adventure. While we ate, he talked about the big parties and dances the hotel had in the Anacacho Ballroom, and other Ballrooms. At other times he brought Fried Scallops, Oysters Rockefeller, and Chateaubriand.

We purported to be Catholics in those days. Those were the days when Catholics did not eat meat on Fridays. People who could afford it ate fish instead. We couldn't. The church-imposed modification to total fasting had been ingrained in our brains since the days we attended catechism as first-graders. We felt the pangs of guilt late at night when we ate fried meat or fancy steaks. But we were hungry, so we sinned, and it would add to the sum total of the pathos we felt for ourselves.



The house was small. Everyone could hear conversations. Even private

ones. "Hallo." He answered the phone early one Saturday morning. After a pause, "I can't make pay this week—I jus' stat werkin'." A look of panic came over him. "Okay, I be there nex week. No? Okay, okay, I go there now." He changed clothes and left the house, only to come back late that night stumbling and reeking of beer.

The phone calls on Saturday mornings increased in frequency and quantity. Each time, he promised to be there; he changed clothes and left the house. Each time he came back drunk. We didn't know it then, but he was also coming home poorer each time he left the house.

"Dad, where are you going," I dared to ask him one Saturday morning.

"I gad biznes downtown," he replied. These were the days before shopping malls. Everything was Downtown.

"What kind of business?"

"Not you biznes," he said breaking into a smile, showing straight white teeth and fully aware of making a funny. He paused. "I go make payments. I be back."

The pattern continued. I could tell we weren't doing well. He and Mom argued more and more. He seemed distant from all of us. He argued constantly. On Saturday mornings Mom asked him for grocery money. "Vamos a la tienda."

"¿A cual tienda?" he asked defensively, as if he really didn't know to which store she wanted to go.

"A comprar comida," she responded. It was evident she was trying to be calm, while at the same time firm about going to get groceries. He paused, and looked at her long and hard.

"No traigo dinero pa' comprar comida." It finally came out. He had no money for groceries.

"¿No te pagaron ayer?" She already knew the answer to her question—that he had just been paid yesterday. She asked where the money went. "¿En donde esta el dinero?"

"Me lo tome con mis amigos, vieja," he said with half a smirk. Admitting to having spent his full week's paycheck drinking with his friends was easy for him, but it was devastating to our

family. It meant there was no money to do anything with. No groceries. No money for school lunches. And, no money to pay bills. Nothing.

“Ay Santos, no tienes vergüenza. ¿No te da pena que no tenemos ni para comer? ¿Como vamos a pagar las cuentas? ¿Si no quieres hacer por tu familia, por que no te vas?” She let him have it. In essence she told him that if he didn’t do better, he should leave.

“¿Quieres que me vaya?” *You want me to go?* he asked.

“¿Si no puedes mantener a tu familia. . . para que te queremos? *If you can’t support us. . . why do we need you?* she said.

The radio played softly in the other room. The station had made dedications called in by listeners, and they were playing the Mexican birthday song:

*Estas son las mananitas que
cantaba el Rey David
Alas muchachas bonitas, se las
cantamos asi. . .*

I thought about my birthday coming up soon. I’d be thirteen in June. Going into junior high in September.

I wanted to think pleasant thoughts, but the situation at home was getting really bad. The threat of my father leaving was very scary. The possibility of him staying and continuing to act the way he had been was even worse. I left the room, and climbed up on the garage roof with a stack of comics. The tin roof under the chinaberry shade was cool on my back. The steady drone of cicadas serenading filled the still summer air. I spent many hours of many days on that roof.

Eventually, he left the night job at the St. Anthony Hotel, and took a job at Commercial Battery Company, on East Commerce Street making car, truck and motorcycle batteries. He worked with battery acid, so his clothes always had holes where the acid spilled. The acid went right through the thick apron he wore at work.

One evening as I came in from the roof, my father said, “You momma an I

decide you pick up my check Fridays. Can you do that?”

“Sure Dad, I’ve done it before. Remember?”

“Okay. Every Friday you come get check for you momma. You take it an make pay bills. Okay?”

“You want Mom and I to pay the bills?” The phone calls had become unbearable. As early as 8:00 AM they started. And they continued all day. “All of them?” I asked.

“Yes, I don’t want to do that no more. Don’t wanna do that cheet.”

“Can I go with you next time to see who you owe, and how much?”

“Yes, we go Sadadey.”



We left the house early on Saturday to go pay bills. We had some money this time, so we started making the rounds. I found out he owed money to almost every loan company in San Antonio.

“Dad, why do you owe to so many loan companies?” I asked.

“Because I gat to pay.”

“What do you mean, you have to pay?”

“I gat to pay another.”

“Another what.”

“Another loan company.”

“You mean you are borrowing money from one loan company to pay another loan company?”

“To make paymends.”

“To make payments on money you owe to another loan company?”

“Yes. An to make paymends to them too.”

“You mean, if you don’t have the money to make a payment, they lend you the money to make the payment to them?”

“You got it, Loli.” He sighed deeply, as if finally being able to share this nightmare brought him a measure of relief.

As we went from one loan company to another, I made note of the company, their address, and how much was owed. At every place he was treated nicely, except when he appeared to be making a payment that was less than the required amount. At every place,

they looked at me as a nice little kid. Little did they know what I was thinking.

The more I thought about it, the madder I got. What kind of people were these that made my father borrow money from them in order to make a payment to them? He owed money to about nineteen loan companies. The amounts he owed varied from as little as seven dollars to as much as eighty dollars. The total was almost four hundred dollars! This may not sound like much, but remember this was 1951. Telephone service from Ma Bell cost one dollar eighty-five cents per month, and a large loaf of bread was around fifteen cents. Hamburger meat cost about twenty-three cents a pound, and gasoline was nineteen or twenty cents a gallon.



We got home and I showed Mom the list of creditors and the amounts we owed. She was astonished. “¿Como vamos a pagar tanto?”

“We’ll pay it Mom,” I assured her. I called the telephone company and had our phone number changed. I told my Father not to give our phone number to anybody. I redid the list of creditors, showing the ones with the smallest balance at the top, and the biggest at the bottom.

“¿Cuanto necesitas para la comida? I asked how much she needed for food. This information was used to formulate what I would later find out was a budget. Every week, I picked Dad’s check. Mom and I cashed it, and we paid bills. The threatening letters from all the loan companies started arriving within a week. All were ignored and thrown away. Every week each loan company was sent something—two, three dollars. But, every week, we paid off the smallest one, so we had one less creditor. Within a year, my Dad was debt free. All he had left to pay were recurring monthly bills.

Some fun began to creep back into our lives. One Friday I had just arrived at the Battery Shop, my dad asked if I was hungry. At fourteen, I was always

hungry. In 1952, I don't know whether it was custom, preference or whether Blacks were just not allowed into cafes or restaurants, but they could get food if they wanted by entering the kitchen, which was usually in the back and ordering. They would then eat in the kitchen, or in the back of the cafe. The shop where my Father worked was in Northeast San Antonio where there was a large number of Black owned businesses, among which was a cafe two doors down the street. He told me to go get a sandwich from the cafe, but to knock on the kitchen door and order. I knocked.

"Hey little man, what you need?" Long thin body, white capped and aproned, it was apparent he was the cook.

"Umm, I'd like a sandwich, please." Another shorter black man appeared at the screen door, curious, and also wearing a white apron.

"What kind of sandwich you want?" the first man asked. Not being very familiar with sandwiches, I had no idea what to asked for.

"What kind you got? I asked, expecting two or three choices. They looked at each other as if that was precisely the question they had been waiting for all day. They started naming sandwiches while singing in a rhythmic tune while they both clapped their hands in unison:

*We got a chicken sandwich
a PB &J
We got hot mustard tuna melt
and a BLT
We got a philly steak
and some ham and cheese
We got roast beef, turkey
or a Bar-B-Que
We got a burger, a cheese melt
and a reuben too. . .
and we got a hot dog.*

I was mesmerized. There was no way I could remember any of the sandwiches they had named. So, I repeated the last thing I heard, "Give me a hot dog."

"A hot dog sandwich?" I thought they would understand I just wanted a

hot dog, and had changed my mind about the sandwich. But it was too complicated to explain at the moment.

"Yeah," I said. "Give me a hot dog sandwich." I had never heard of one, but what the heck, that day, I had the first of many hot dog sandwiches I've had in my life. It's great! Toasted bread of your choice spread with mustard, cooked sliced length-wise frankfurters (two), add lettuce, tomato, onions, and top with another slice of toasted bread spread with either mustard or mayonnaise. Yummm!

The Name of the Game

L. Kevin Lawhon

I've been getting together one Saturday a month with some friends to play a strategy game called Civilization. It's like Risk on steroids. You start out as a small civilization and build up your empire with armies, technology, wonders, etc. with the goal to take over the world or have the most points at the end. Let's just say it's really cerebral and has a LOT of rules, thus taking a long time to play, especially with six people. Because of the length, we began at ten am that particular Saturday.

Most of the adults involved with this group have children, and the kids busied themselves chasing each other around during the day and playing video games while we slowly progressed from ancient times into the Medieval era. Around six o'clock, I called for a break. As Africa, I'd

managed to secure the continent for myself and was preparing to make inroads into South America, controlled by Phil, our host for the day, but my brain was turning to mush and it was nearing time to do something about dinner. Everyone agreed. But before we ordered pizza, Phil and his wife, Courtney, suggested we take the kids down to their subdivision park and let them play on the playscape.

When we arrived at the pristine playscape—new with paint still intact and nestled between a wooded area and pool—the kids decided to play “freeze tag” and the other adults cajoled me into participating. Now you have to realize I hadn't played freeze tag since I was a kid and felt a little awkward about it. “Oh, what the heck,” I said, and joined in. The rules didn't need to

be explained. It was like my inner child handed them to me written in crayon on a Big Chief drawing pad and said, “Here you go, mister.”

We took our places, carefully searching out the best vantage points and keeping an eye on the person who was “it.” We ran across the playscape, dashing here and there, scattering the wood shavings as we went. We laughed, the children screeched with delight. We quickly discovered one person couldn’t take on an entire group and decided on an adult/child team. This worked better and I found myself zig-zagging and climbing up and down the playscape to avoid getting frozen. We had to make daring forays to free our immobilized comrades and split-second turns as one of the “enemy” shot out of hiding, reaching out to “get” me or one of the others. When everyone was caught, we’d start again with a new

team, Then it was my turn and all that concerned me was freezing as many people as I could.

It didn’t take but one or two rounds of play before my asthma flared up and I had to excuse myself to get my breathing under control. Besides, my right knee was feeling wobbly during the chase. Funny, I didn’t remember it as a problem when I was seven. I plopped down on a bench just outside the play area, sweating and panting, The rest of the group continued the game, chasing each other with unabashed, uninhibited zeal.

As I sat there, taking in the scene before me, it dawned on me that I’d lost myself in those moments. I realized I’d forgotten about the weight and responsibility of being an adult, of a mortgage, of trying to work and start a second career as a writer, of the war, of how my relationship with my best

friend would change now that he and his wife had a new baby, of the million other things constantly running through my overly-analytical mind. How long had it been since I’d stolen away from being an adult? Since I’d actually PLAYED? There was the Civilization game at the house, with its own kind of escape—the escape of becoming a mad dictator, But there, at the playscape, I found something I’d lost long, long ago: The simple joy of play.

It began to grow darker and the adults and children called out to me in a sweaty, exhausted glee, asking if I were alright and I replied that I was fine. So they extended the invitation to rejoin them, and I did, even though I knew I’d have to stop again to get my breathing under control. Then everything else melted away and there was just the joy of the chase, and being chased.

The Loss of Solitude

John David Moss

A sunset in the middle of nowhere is breathtaking, even if you take it for granted. I had viewed many sunsets while living in a farmhouse that seemed like it had been abandoned in the middle of a field. These sunsets were unspoiled by city lights and were never overshadowed by noise from traffic or neighbors. My brother and sister were not happy with this type of isolation, yet I welcomed the solitude it offered, for in this place I could hide from the world I feared.

A beautiful wilderness fence surrounded our home. Three sides of this fence consisted of pasture sprinkled with trees and wild brush. It had once been used for cattle, yet now was reserved for nature. A few old structures remained—none seemed safe. They were perfect models for oil paintings;

weathered, rotting, and most leaning, barely able to hold their form. There was a cow trough filled with dirty water and overgrown with dark green moss. An old barn still served a useful purpose, both for the storing of a neighbor's hay and as a playground for my family. A mile or two away there was a creek we used for swimming and an old gravel pit where we played. The fourth fence was the grand entrance. It consisted of a road about a quarter of a mile long and split a large field in two. Both fields had neat rows of dirt that would slowly turn in to neat rows of tall corn. When viewing a sunset from our home, you never needed to choose which side of the house to use, for every view was a delight to the eye.

Living in the city meant being surrounded by other homes, concrete

sidewalks and asphalt roads. Neat lawns and planned rows of flowers took the place of wild flowers and brush. The sounds of nature were replaced by man-made noise. Despite this contrast, what I disliked and feared most were other people. I felt out of place no matter the setting. My peers spent their time dating or talking about sex. I did not relate. I had no desire to do the things they discussed. I did not understand their passion or their lust. Every second I spent with them was a reminder that something was wrong with me. On the farm, I did not need to compare myself to anyone. This meant I had no reason to feel shame and no need to worry about fitting in.

My feelings of safety changed after one ignored sunset. On this evening my parents and sister had gone into the city, leaving me alone with my brother and a friend he had invited to stay overnight. I was left alone in the living room, watching TV, while they were in the bedroom. I did not mind; in fact, I enjoyed it because there was no one to bother me or compete for what I

wanted to watch. This solitude was interrupted by an approaching car.

The living room window had a perfect view of our grand entrance, and in the dark, you could see the lights of a car long before you could hear its approach. It was too soon for my parents return. I broke away from the television and reached the front door as the car came to a stop. I did not recognize the car or the two young men who got out. They were soldiers from Fort Hood, a military base a good thirty-minute drive away. They were handsome, with extremely short hair and well-defined muscles showing through their pale-green army t-shirts.

My brother and his friend reached the door about the time the two young men reached the front porch. I was brushed aside, as my brother opened the door and invited them in. From their introductions, I could tell they did not know each other very well. All four were excited and grinning. Even at sixteen I knew what was going on. My brother had invited them over to have sex. My brother's homosexuality was no

secret. It was not talked about, yet we all knew.

There was an extended silence as one-by-one each pair of eyes turned toward me. My brother had counted, on our parents and sister not being home; however, in all his excitement he had not planned on me. I was the fly in his soup. If they went to the bedroom and had sex, what would I do? Would I allow it? Would I tell? It was certain he did not even know what to say to me.

The silence was broken by one of the young soldiers who stepped forward and put his hand on my shoulder.

"He's okay," He told the others, "He understands what it's about. Go to the room, I'll be right there." The others obeyed and shuffled out as if they were schools kids headed to an ice cream truck.

The soldier's smile was warm and directed at me. With the smile came a wink and an understanding: This man saw the real me. I had always hid from my sexuality, unwilling to accept a part of me that I had always been told was

wrong. My fear had always been that someone would discover my dark secret and I would be rejected by my family, friends, and God. My brother lost friends and was cut off from my grandparents because of his homosexuality. I saw how horrified my parents were when they had to face this aspect of his life. I could not face the same thing happening to me.

Now I stood alone with a young man who knew I was gay, yet I was not afraid. He gave my shoulder a firm squeeze and gently guided me across the room before letting go. Instantly I missed his touch. He smiled and started toward the bedroom, "Thanks and let us know if your parents come home." I said nothing as he disappeared through the kitchen.

I sat in the living room pretending to watch TV. My thoughts were only of the world in the bedroom, which I wanted to be a part of Not because of the sex, but because in that room

someone seemed to understand me, to accept me in a way even I could not. I craved and feared that world. The darkness tightened its grip around our 100-year-old home, isolating me even more from the world where everyone else lived. I watched for the family car, waiting for the two worlds to collide. I thought little. I was numb. I had no answers to consider because I did not know the questions. I understood practically nothing.

I could see the headlights in the darkness long before I could hear the tires running over the dirt and gravel road. I arose and quietly walked to the back of the house. I hesitated, and then gently knocked on the door. There was no answer. I waited. I knocked again and spoke plainly, "They're home." The calm friendly voice of the young soldier responded with a quiet, "Thank you."

I returned to the living room and set back down, again pretending to watch

TV. A few moments passed and the family car came to a rest along side the soldier's car.

My mind can no longer recall what happened next. My parents must have wondered why these young men were visiting my brother and his friend. Maybe the two worlds did crash that night. Maybe they just passed each other with distrust. It did not matter to me, for I was not noticed. I was simply there, a body that was seen, yet not understood. I could not be a part of the world I desired and did not belong in the world of my reality. The unfortunate truth was I alone knew this.

The solitude I once viewed as a wondrous place had revealed its true meaning; it was not a peaceful place, it was "a lonely place." No one knew or understood my emptiness. I sat in isolation. Family members walked around me, talked at me, and sent me to bed, never knowing I had uncovered a frightening truth: I was alone.



Untitled — *Jessica Davila* — 1999

The Road to Wanganui

Roberta Preston

“That’s it Bob?” Dad asked as he hefted his old army trunk containing my clothes into the back of the station wagon. “Fits okay,” he grunted pushing it further into the car.

I stood on the footpath and looked up at the flat. Louisa sat on the top step of the path carefully cleaning one of her front paws. She closed her eyes as cats do when they are enjoying something.

“Bye Lou, I’ll be back in a few months,” I said, a sob catching in my throat. A few peach petals blew off the tiny tree growing against the house and drifted onto the path. Louisa jumped up and pounced on them. The mint I planted in April glowed green as the morning sun shone through the leaves. I felt strangely removed from the scene. Now when I remember that morning, I

wonder whether I had psychologically removed myself from all that was happening to me. Perhaps I had given up, feeling utterly unable to control what was happening to my body and what was about to happen to me in those spring days of 1968.

“Need to go to the potty before we leave dear?” Mum asked, her soft hair and azure cardigan glowing where a sunbeam draped itself over her shoulder. I met her gaze and noticed that her eyes mirrored the blue of her clothes and the morning sky.

“Mum, I’m not five,” I said with a grin. It felt as if she were both talking down to me and nurturing me. “Let’s go.” I was anxious to leave before I burst into tears in front of my parents. Louisa stalked towards me and rubbed

against my leg, her black tail pointing skywards. She lifted her black and white head and looked at me with a feline grin. I scratched her under the chin and lifted her up for one last cuddle. “Be a good puss.” She purred and leaned into my chest, “I’ll be back soon.” Reluctantly, I put her down on the concrete path and she slipped away across the flowerbed.

“Right. Time to go.” Dad said in his firm way easing himself into the driver’s seat. I landed in the back seat with a thud. My chest felt as if someone were pressing on it, it was almost impossible to breathe. I pulled out a handkerchief and daubed at my eyes. Dad turned the car around and I took a last look at the flat. The white gingerbread trim almost seemed to flounce around the edges of the eaves, the peach tree waved gently in the breeze. I choked back a sob and blew my nose hard so that Mum and Dad would not hear my sniffles.

We drove down Cambridge Terrace past the Child Welfare Office. I looked up to see if Hazel, Leith or Mrs. Cook were at the window but all I saw were

clouds reflected in the glass. Pigeons perched on the ornate stone friezes girding the Huddart Parker Building on Lambton Quay. The Golden Bay Cement ship rocked gently in its berth at the wharf near the Inter-Island Ferry terminal.

The wheels of the small car drummed along Highway One north. I would not be back in Wellington until after the baby was born—sometime towards the middle of December. I sat in the back and wondered whether my biological mother felt as I did when she came to Wellington to give birth to me. Did she feel the shame, guilt, deceit?

“Here, how about a fag?” Mum put two cigarettes into her mouth. I wondered whether she ever stopped to consider how comical she looked. Mum lit both cigarettes, puffed on them simultaneously then said, “Here dear,” as she reached over and put a cigarette between Dad’s lips.

At the top of the hill at Pukerua Bay the coastline curved in front of us like an exquisite necklace around a

woman’s neck. The sun glinted off the windows of tiny houses perched on the steep hills. Dad drove along the coast road at fifty-five miles per hour while I watched waves crash into black rocks. The sun illuminated the breakers turning them deep turquoise like the edge of a thick piece of glass.

“What a corker day,” Mum exclaimed, stretching out her legs and puffing on her cigarette.

“Been to the pictures lately, Bob?” Dad asked, turning his head slightly to meet my eyes in the rear vision mirror.

“David and I went to see *The Lion in Winter* a week or so ago at the Embassy,” I replied looking out of the window at the familiar but still absorbing view. “What did you think of it?” He asked.

“Really fab. Katherine Hepburn is a wonderful actress. She plays Catherine of Aragon.”

“Oh, I read the review in the *Evening Post*,” Dad replied. “You’re sure it was about Catherine of Aragon?”

“Not really.” Lately, it had been difficult to keep my mind on things at

work, the news in the paper about Vietnam.

“Well, it’s been quite a year. What with all the upheavals in America.” Dad shook his head, “Thank goodness we don’t live over there. Riots, killings . . .”

“Yes, really. What is the world coming to?” Mum chimed in, her cigarette wriggling up and down between her lips.

We had been on the road about an hour. I visualized the typing pool closed for lunch and Leith, Mrs. Cook and Hazel out running errands or sitting in the tearoom eating their sandwiches.

The Tararuas soared dark green and cloud-covered to the east. One of these days, I thought, I’ll have to go tramping with Viv and her friends but not any time soon. In 1968 pregnant women did their normal household chores or went to work but exercise for exercise’s sake was frowned on.

“I’m feeling a bit peckish Jim,” Mum said as she stubbed out her cigarette. “How about a spot of lunch?”

“Me too Dad,” I chimed in from the back seat. My tummy had started to

rumble when we crossed the bridge at Paramata and I caught a whiff of fish and chips frying.

“Alright. I could do with something too I suppose,” Dad said reluctantly. “I’m keen to get there before it gets too late.” Usually, he would pull off the road as soon as Mum mentioned she wanted to stop.

On this trip I didn’t care if they stopped for a drink or a bite to eat—anything to postpone my arrival in Wanganui. Normally, such a stop would make me feel deeply uneasy as it would have done when I lived at home. Every Saturday morning, the family used to drive thirty miles north of Wellington to our weekend house at Akatarawa.

Before Dad even backed the car out of the garage, one or both parents had had a few glasses of whiskey or a “spot” of sherry.

Thirty minutes or so into the trip, Dad would say, “How about a ‘spot’ Maggie Mam?” and he would pull off the road at a lookout we called, “Whiskey Point.” Rowlanda and I would look at each other and silently say, “Oh no!”

when Dad maneuvered the car up the driveway. He would drive the car right to the edge of the cliff, change into reverse and back up. Only a grove of *pinus radiata* stood between us and the Akatarawa River three hundred feet below. To this day, my hands get clammy and my heartbeat increases when I drive alongside steep ravines whether they are in Colorado, New Mexico or on the Coromandel Peninsula on the North Island of New Zealand where I now have some land.

I started to salivate at the prospect of lunch. A meat pie and a lamington would go down really nicely right now, I thought. Lamingtons were my favorite—squares of chocolate-covered sponge cake, rolled in coconut and washed down with a cup of tea would fill the gnawing cavity in my stomach. No wonder I had a mouth full of fillings. I loved to eat sweets and despised brushing my teeth.

“Here we are,” Dad said as he pulled the car off the main road into a driveway. A large sign shaped like a teapot swung from a pole at the side of the

road, “Rose Cottage Tea Room.” The sign squeaked in the wind.

“This looks just the ticket, but no “spots” unfortunately.” Mum said, opening her handbag, pulling out her powder compact and daubing powder on her nose.

We sat down at a table beside an open French door. A small posy of violets was arranged in a glass vase in the center of the table.

“Oh, smell these.” Mum exclaimed leaning her freshly powdered nose close to the velvety purple petals. “I do love violets!”

“Me too,” I said remembering spring afternoons when Dad came home from work with a bunch of the velvety flowers wrapped in pink florist paper for Mum. Twenty years later when I lived in Baltimore, I used to take my Great Dane dog for walks on the Goucher College campus. In the spring, I would come across clumps of violets growing wild at the edge of the woods. I would stop, stoop to inhale their fragrance and be flooded with memories of my mother.

“Three for lunch is it?” Asked the waitress, appearing at the table with a small pad of paper in her hand.

Dad nodded. “You don’t have any whiskey by any chance, do you?” The waitress looked at him askance, “Certainly not. This is a tea room.”

“Oh alright, I just thought I’d ask. What’ll you have Mummy dear?” He asked. The waitress licked the lead of her pencil.

“I’ll have the ham sandwiches and a cup of coffee thanks,” Mum said. “How about you dear?” She turned to me as the waitress scribbled down the order.

“Um...I’ll have the steak and kidney pie, a lamington, and a cup of tea.” That should fill me up I thought. I was starving—breakfast had consisted of a cup of tea and a piece of dry toast. I had been so nervous, that was all I could force down.

“And you sir?” the waitress turned to Dad.

“Actually, I’m not very hungry.” I saw the waitress’s eyebrows shoot up. “Just a coffee too thanks.”

The food arrived and I polished off my pie. Mum cut the crusts off her ham sandwich and sipped her coffee. Dad looked bored as he drank his coffee. He sat back in his chair and lit a cigarette. “We’ll miss you Bob.” He said, blowing a stream of smoke towards the ceiling.

Automatically, I said, “I’ll miss you too.” Mum stopped chewing her sandwich and looked sharply across at Dad. Suddenly, the food in my mouth tasted like week-old bread. I sipped my tea, took another bite of the lamington, and felt an urgent need to go to the toilet. “I need to make a pit stop.” I got up. “Be back in a mo.” For a month or so, I had more frequent urges to pee, and here was another one.

After lunch, we got back in the car and pattered through the small town of Bulls. We passed the Air Force Base at Ohakea; the hangers hunkered down in the paddocks. Sheep grazed on the grass surrounding the runway and I heard a droning overhead. A gray airplane lazily performed loops amongst the puffy clouds.

“Wonder if they’ll be going to Vietnam?” Dad said to no one in particular. I fell asleep as the food settled in my stomach and the warmth of the sun penetrated the car windows. Mum and Dad’s conversation hummed in the front seat and mingled with the droning of the tires on the tar-sealed road.

“Not far to go now,” I heard Dad say as I awoke. “Where are we?” I asked groggily.

“Almost there.” Dad changed down to third gear to climb a hill. To the right, the rolling pasture was a patchwork of newly-ploughed fields and bright green grass. Here and there I noticed random clump of native bush, pongas, totora, and rimu, that had escaped the farmer’s axe.

“Rich farmland up here all right.” Dad said as he got to the top of the rise and changed up to fourth gear. “Not far now, Bob. I can see the bridge.”

My stomach felt as if it were going to drop to the floor of the car. “Oh, I can hardly wait,” I said sarcastically.

“Now, now dear.” Mum turned around and looked at me, her brow

crinkled up with concern. “It’s going to be alright. Remember, ‘we are Preston’.” I groaned. All my life I had listened to this mantra and all it meant to me was, “We are weird.”

Dad crossed the bridge and pulled into the main street. A cyclist pedaled lazily down the street right in front of us. Stores lined the road signs in their windows advertising “Gumboots, So’ westers, Duck Blinds.” Signs proclaiming, “Knitting wool for summer,” and “Hallensteins for Men and Boys,” caught my eye. Wanganui looked like any other rural New Zealand town.

“Jolly cyclists. Speed up or get out of the way,” Dad swung the wheel over to the right in frustration as he tried to pass. I wondered if he were as nervous as I.

“What number Victoria Street is it?” Mum asked.

I pulled Miss Walter’s handwritten note out of my handbag. “One four three, it says here.”

“Here we are.” Dad turned the car around in the street and parked outside a high fence, painted white. A

camellia tree spilled over the fence in a cascade of glossy, dark green leaves while a carpet of crimson flowers and petals lay on the footpath underneath. Behind the fence I could see a very large house. It was a typical turn-of-the-century New Zealand house with a corrugated iron roof, verandah curling across the front and around the sides. Despite its imposing size and elegant architecture, I noticed that the paint was peeling off the windowsills, and wondered if the inside looked as dilapidated.

“Go and ring the bell dear,” Mum said as I followed her through the gate and up the path. A clothesline was visible alongside the house. It sagged under the weight of dozens of nappies.

“Looks like they have a lot of washing in this house,” I said to Mum’s back. Miss Walters had told me there would be moderate housework to do at the Quins, and I would have to help Mrs. Quin out with the babies.

“Hello there.” A woman with a delicate face, pointed chin and pleasant smile on her face opened the door. “You

must be the Prestons. Won't you come in?" She wore a cotton dress, buttoned up the front, an apron, and a pink scarf around her hair, knotted in front like "Rosie the Riveter."

We stepped over the wide threshold into a long hallway. As soon as I got into the house the smell of Urine hit me with a wallop. I gasped and felt like throwing up. Raincoats and cardigans hung over the banisters of the staircase, gumboots lay in a pile on the floor, and a toy car was parked against the cupboard under the stairs.

"I'm Mrs. Quin and this is Patrick." A little boy with straight blond hair and a freckled face peeked out from behind Mrs. Quin's legs. "You must be Roberta." She smiled at me. Lines radiated from her eyes and her forehead was bisected with long wrinkles. Her hair looked clean but uncombed

"Pleased to meet you," I murmured and shook her hand. It was wrinkled, dry and red. She looked worn out. "Most people call me 'Bobbie.'"

"Wobbie." The little boy said, looking up at me with a grin on his face.

We walked into the lounge that must have been an elegant drawing room in years gone by. Dappled sunlight filtered through a tall bay window.

"Won't you sit down, and I'll get you a cup of tea." Mrs. Quin indicated to a couple of sofas. Stuffing was escaping from the frayed arms and stains obscured the once pretty pink, green and cream chintz fabric. Dad lifted a laundry basket filled with dry clothes on the floor and sat down. "Yes, a cup of tea would hit the spot." Mrs. Quin left the room with Patrick in tow, looking back at us with a curious expression on his round face.

"Would you like a hand?" I offered, thinking that if I were going to be living here rent-free for a few months, there was no time like the present to get stuck into my new responsibilities. Also, I felt sad and thought that a conversation with a two-year-old would cheer me up.

"Oh, thanks. That would be lovely." Mrs. Quin called over her shoulder as she went into the kitchen. I followed, looking around at what

would be my home for three months. The kitchen was a huge rectangular room containing a long dining table ringed by eight chairs. Two high chairs sat at one end of the kitchen in front of the window.

Mrs. Quin put a kettle, identical in size to the one the tea lady at Child Welfare used for a staff of twenty, on the stove. She reached up and opened a cupboard and I noticed that her ankles were swollen. "Thank goodness the baby's asleep right now." She gasped as she pulled down a teapot decorated with garlands of red roses delicately painted over all sides and the lid.

"Would you get a tray dear? They're in the cupboard over there." She pointed to a cupboard near the floor. I opened the door and found the tray stacked neatly inside. I pulled it out trying not to dislodge the newspaper lining the floor of the cupboard.

Patrick hid behind his mother's legs. By the time I had put out the tray and set it with cups, saucers, and teaspoons, Patrick peeked at me with a grin on his face.

“Peek-a-boo, I see you.” I kidded him. He immediately ducked behind Mrs. Quin.

“Looks as if you are making a friend.” She commented.

The kettle whistled and Mrs. Quin poured the boiling water into the pot. “Okay. Let’s get back to your parents.”

I followed her, carefully carrying the tray. Mum and Dad sat in the living room smoking. Dad looked up at us, “Ah there you are.” He appeared restless and I wondered if he were in a hurry to get going. There were only so many cups of tea and coffee he could take before he had to wash them down with something stronger. By now it was about two o’clock and they had promised to drop in on their friends Cliff and Gladys before they returned to Wellington.

“We’ll have to be going right after this.” Dad said in a firm voice. I felt regret that they would be leaving me here but on the other hand I did not want to be around when they started drinking.

“By the way, where’s Bobbie’s room?” Dad asked as he put down his teacup.

“Oh, I forgot to show you,” Mrs. Quin looked flustered. “We can look at it right now so that you can put her things up there before you leave.”

A room of my own, I thought. I had always shared with Rowlanda. This might not be as bad as I imagined.

Dad stood up and walked out to the hall where he had left my bag. “Now, where should I take this?” He asked.

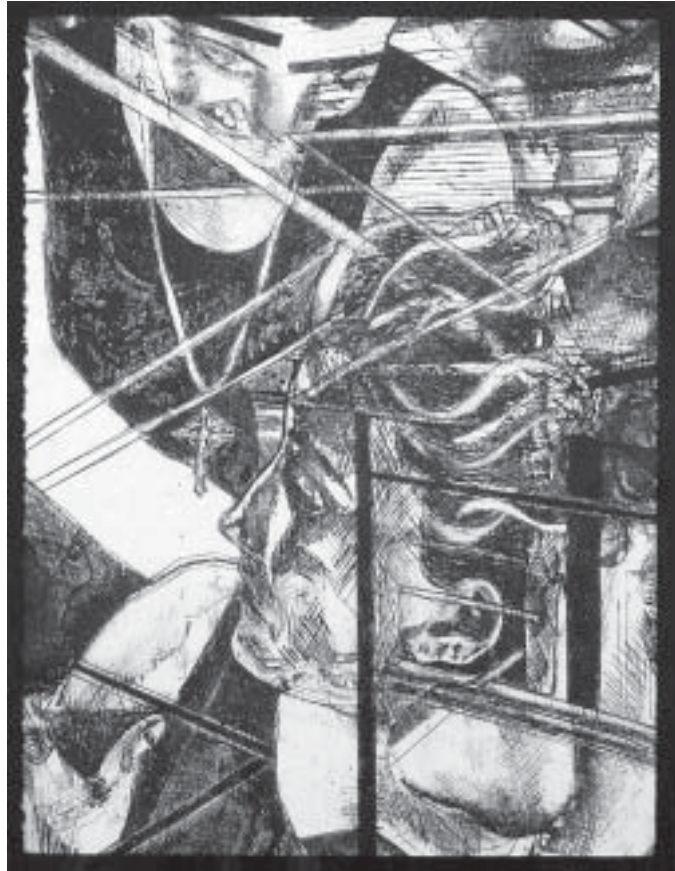
“Right up here,” Mrs. Quin pointed to the kitchen. “She has a room above the kitchen.”

We walked back through the gray-painted kitchen and followed Mrs. Quin to a door in the sidewall. It looked like a cupboard. She opened it and I saw a narrow set of stairs leading upwards.

“This used to be the maid’s room in the old days.” Mrs. Quin said as she paused at the top of the stairs to allow us to catch up.

“Looks like you’ll be the chief scullery maid Bob,” Dad said with a grim look on his face.

“Fine with me, I suppose,” I replied, looking around the wood paneled room with its tiny dormer window. “I think maybe I’m going to be comfortable here.”



I Chiama Bella Rusa — *Jayleen M. Rissing* — 2001

Patting

Phaidra Harper Vega

He was doing it again. Jennifer smiled at her new in-laws and tried to ignore the James' increasingly irritating back patting—thump, thump, thump, thump, thump. A new habit, it seemed, that developed shortly after they'd started presenting themselves as a married couple. At Happy Hours, at business dinners and, now, it seemed, at his own parents' house, James' hand was drawn toward the small of her back where it would tap its habitual rhythm. *Just smile and ignore it*, she told herself. *Maybe his hand will give out.*

“Oh. It's so good to see you!” Her mother-in-law, Sarah, pulled her into her arms and gave her a good squeeze. A faint floral scent clung to her hair. By far one of the sweetest people she had ever met, Jennifer felt as if she'd known her mother-in-law longer than the ten months it had actually been.

Petite with soft white hair and a welcoming smile, Sarah reminded Jennifer of a Tollhouse cookie kind of grandma, with a little ginger thrown in. And, as Jennifer got her first good look at the house James' grew up in, she noticed that the decor matched Sarah's personality perfectly. The living room had soft blue walls, a dried flower wreath hung behind the family pictures on the mantle, antique Queen Anne chairs upholstered in ecru and a red-as-sin couch looking better than it should in those surroundings. Surroundings so very different from the brown upholstery and football trophies she's grown up with in Oklahoma City.

“Yes! Thank you for coming!” Jennifer was swept up her father's-in-law welcome hug. Anyone could tell that Paul was the main contributor to their son's genetic makeup. Just the green color of his eyes alone was a fair

indication. “Could have gone either way in April, but it turned out to be a fair day.” Paul was what some called “salt of the earth.” She certainly thought of him as one of the good guys. *Now if only he would convince his son not to PAT MY BACK*, she thought as she stepped back into reach of James’ impulsive hand. Jennifer took another hopefully unnoticed deep breath, *Just breathe*.

“We’re so glad to be here,” Jennifer smiled genuinely and briefly glanced toward James. He followed along and hugged his parents one at a time, exchanging pleasantries and brief updates on how his job was and how their new apartment was and how, yes, they had heard that their third grandchild was already walking—he always was a clever one. Jennifer let him do the talking while she took off her jacket and placed it, along with her purse, on the hall bench. She stood there beside James and took in the sights and sounds of the family’s home at Easter time. Baskets, full of bright, colored eggs, sat on the stairs

and plastic grass spotted the hardwood floors. Laughing, and what could only be described as “the sound of horse-play,” escaped from another room.

As the conversation between James and his parents continued, Jennifer felt a little awkward. Unsure as to whether it was because she didn’t know who the Prestons were and why their daughter’s plans for leaving the state for college was so important or the continued thump, thump, thump of her husband’s hand, she thought, *Maybe avoidance is the answer*.

“Sarah, do you need any help with anything?” thinking she could make herself useful and, at the same time, avoid James’s hand for a while.

“Well, I believe Kate’s in the kitchen and you’re just in time to help her with the last of the side dishes. . .” Sarah pointed the way and Jennifer headed for the kitchen after James gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

Hmmm. . ., she thought as she pondered her annoyance with James’ patting. *Maybe it was just the public displays of affection. . . No, if it were*

that, I would be annoyed with all of it.

She wasn’t irritated when he held her hand or gave her a goodbye kiss. Just the patting. . . For some reason, she couldn’t get over it. She’d even brought it to his attention shortly after their wedding, thinking it was nerves about being married.

She remembered asking, “Why do you always pat my back when we’re ‘being a couple?’” her voice pitched to make it through the bathroom door across the bedroom of their newly acquired, Boston apartment.

The distinctive sound of tooth brushing was followed by a pause. He leaned out the bathroom door and responded, “What?” The toothbrush was still in his hand and there was foam on the corners of his mouth.

“I said, ‘Why do you always pat my back when. . . you know, we’re being a couple?’” She turned over to face the bathroom and yanked up their white bedspread so as not to lose any hard earned warmth. The winter was cold, even for Boston. Thank goodness their apartment retained heat fairly well.

James disappeared into the bathroom for a moment and reemerged sans foam, but with the toothbrush still in his hand. He appeared more than a little confused, "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the fact that every time we're in public together—at happy hours, parties, heck, the grocery store—anywhere we have to interact with others, you place your hand on my back and start patting me like. . . I don't know. . . your trying to calm some five-year-old or something." She was dumbfounded he didn't know what she was talking about. And just a bit irked by his ignorance.

"I do?" James walked toward the bed and realized half way he was still carrying his toothbrush. He turned and chucked it through the bathroom door.

Jennifer's eyebrows shot up, "Don't you care where that lands?"

"I'll pick it up in the morning." He continued toward the bed and crawled in. "Ooookay." Jennifer drew out.

James buried himself under the covers, hiding even the dark brown

locks she loved so much. "Damn it's cold," he muttered.

She smiled at the sight of the lump lying next to her. "You still haven't answered my question."

"What question?"

She asked again, slowly enunciating, "Why. . . do. . . you. . . pat. . . my. . . back. . . all. . . the. . . time?"

"Oh, well, seeing as I had never realized I did it before, I really don't know." James flinched and nearly fell out of bed, "Hey, get your cold feet off me!"

"Nope. The marriage contract specifically states that you must warm my feet on cold nights. . ." She smiled mischievously and then considered, "You never realized you pat me like that? Your hand just involuntarily goes tap, tap, tap, and you don't know you're doing it?"

"Nope." James reached up from out of the covers and turned off the small ceramic lamp next to his bed. Jennifer followed suit.

"Hmmm. . ." Silence descended for a moment, "Is it because I embarrass you?" James flipped down the covers

and rolled toward her. "What would I be embarrassed about?"

"I don't know. . . Maybe my countrified ways?" Jennifer couldn't help but smile as she said it. She had long ago lost what little 'countrified ways' she had brought with her when she first moved to Boston. Most people were shocked to find out she hadn't grown up in a well-turned New England family.

James snorted, "Yeah, right. More like it's a bad habit or something."

"Well, then, do you think you could try to break it?"

"I can try." James already sounded half asleep. Jennifer hated that. Asleep in thirty seconds or less and then she had to ponder things by herself for twenty minutes. She'd just have to try to come up with a conclusion on her own.

After that discussion, Jennifer tied ribbons to James' pinkies and gave him paper clips to hold as a reminder not to pat her back, but both were either immediately lost or only provoked questions from others. Jennifer then decided to try to ignore it, hoping that whatever prompted him to do it would

dissipate and they could live happily ever after. It's not like he did it all the time. She loved being with him and couldn't imagine a day without looking into his big, green eyes. It was just the patting that drove her crazy.

"Hey girl!" Jennifer walked through the kitchen door and was drawn back from her reminiscing by Kate's soft twang. Unlike the pronounced Oklahoma twang Jennifer remembered from her childhood, Kate's voice sounded like lemonade and blackberry cobbler. She looked over and saw her husband's sister-in-law, apron on and blond hair done just so. A stark contrast to Jennifer's naturally wavy, almost black hair. Kate even had a pearl choker on. She was like June Cleaver, in color.

"How do you manage to look so put together? I thought you had three kids or something. I can't even keep our cat fed all the time."

Kate responded, with her customary hand swish, "It's all an illusion. I just do this when we're here, in the good old Connecticut countryside. You should just see me at home. I'm all

pony tails and stained t-shirts." She reached over and gave Jennifer a hug. Stepping back, she asked, "Besides, look at you! Miss tall, dark and gorgeous. . . Care to keep me company while I whip the potatoes?"

Jennifer responded, "That's why I'm here." Kate made her feel more comfortable. She seemed familiar and easier to be around, in some respects, than her in-laws.

Kate picked up the hand mixer, "Ms. Sarah's got most of it taken care of. I practically had her push her out of the kitchen just to help with these. Jeez Louise!"

The whirring of the mixer drowned out any possibility of talking so Jennifer found a wineglass in the cabinet and helped herself to the open bottle of merlot on the countertop. Knowing Sarah was more of a white wine drinker, when she drank at all, Jennifer thought, *It's gotta be Kate's. Of course, this might explain how she manages it all.*

Once the potatoes were done, Kate looked over at Jennifer, "You look pensive. What's up?"

Jennifer smiled and placed her glass on the counter, "I was just wondering whose wine I just stole."

"Mine, of course. Help yourself." Kate found a big, glass serving bowl and started to transfer the potatoes.

Jennifer's mind wandered back to the subject of her issue with James. "Kate, does Brad have any bad habits or quirks that are annoying?"

"Honey, of course he does. They all do."

"No, I mean the kind you can't stand."

"So do I. My husband's got at least a dozen of 'em and I don't mean just leaving the toilet seat up. . . although he does that on occasion, too." She walked over and picked up her own glass of wine. "For example, after eight years of marriage, I still cannot figure out why he can't cut his toenails over a trash can or why he doesn't put his dish in the dishwasher instead of the sink. It's not as if I haven't brought these things up." She stopped for a moment and then said, "Although, I haven't brought it up in a while, now that I

think about it. I guess we just learn to live with some things. Hmm. . .” Kate finished with the potatoes and placed them in one of Sarah’s three ovens—top, bottom and the large one that was part of the range—to stay warm.

Jennifer responded, “Maybe.” This answer didn’t help her though. “What if it’s something I can’t live with?”

“Like what?” Kate walked over to Jennifer and picked up her own glass of wine.

Jennifer snuck an olive off the relish tray then answered, “Like patting me on the back incessantly.” She popped the olive in her mouth.

Kate paused and considered, “Hmmm, now that you mention it, I’ve seen James do that to you. Eeek, does he do that a lot?” She took a sip of wine.

“Feels like every time we’re in social settings together.”

“Honey, you just need to lay into him with both sets of claws.”

Nearly spitting her wine all over the granite countertop, Jennifer laughed, “Maybe so.”

Just then Sarah walked in and, looking fondly on her daughters-in-law, reached for the apron laying on the kitchen table. “What are you two girls talking about?”

Kate answered with a grin, “Oh. Just the usual things: men and their issues.”

Sarah laughed, “What did Brad do now?” She opened the large oven to check on the ham. The smell of salt and brown sugar made Jennifer’s mouth water. Her stomach growled and she realized she hadn’t eaten since breakfast.

“Not Brad this time. It’s the younger one whose got issues now.” Kate nodded her head toward Jennifer

“James? Really? What could he have possibly done in so short a time?” Sarah watched as Jennifer’s cheeks turned pink.

“Seems his got a case of the ‘jingles’.” Kate smiled knowingly.

“The ‘jingles?’” Jennifer asked.

Sarah closed the oven, wiped her hands on her apron and responded, “Kate’s referring to one of my frequently told stories.” She smiled and sat

down at the table. Kate and Jennifer joined her, getting the feeling that a story was about to begin. “Right after Paul and I were married, I discovered that Paul liked to jingle the change in his pocket when he was nervous.”

“Really?” Jennifer was surprised.

She laughed, “Oh my goodness, he’d put his hand in his pocket and. . . jingle, jingle, jingle. No one else seemed to notice. It was just this slight noise like a mosquito near your ear. Em! Nearly drove me batty.”

“Does he still do it?”

She tilted her head and thought for a moment, “Not that I know of.” She chuckled again. “It took some drastic measures, but he finally stopped—around me anyway.”

“What happened?”

“Well, we were going to his boss’ annual Christmas Party that first year he worked for Price Waterhouse and he was nervous. I didn’t know why at the time, but the jingling started as soon as we got out of the car. Usually, I could bear with it for the few moments he did it, but this time it only

stopped a moment when he took his hand out of his pocket to ring the doorbell. Then he started it up again.” Sarah shook her head, “I had had enough so I leaned over and whispered, ‘If you don’t stop that change jangling, I’m going to start singing’ Jingle Bells’ every time I hear you do it.” She chuckled. “He didn’t even have a chance to respond before the door opened and his boss ushered us in. It seemed to work though. I don’t think he was sure if I was serious or not. I wasn’t either, really. Regardless, I didn’t hear it the entire party. I was having such a good time, I even forgot about it. Then we started to make our way to the door when it got late.” Sarah leaned forward, “Paul said he was getting tired, but I think he was just ‘tired’ of his coworkers. They were a bit. . . uh. . . boisterous, let’s say.”

“Ah.” Jennifer was help rapt.

“His boss walked us out and said goodbye, in a rather drunken voice. He always got really drunk at his own parties supposedly—and that, I found out later, is what Frank was worried

about.” Sarah waved her hand, “But anyway, I froze for a second and wondered if I could really go through with it. . .”

“With what?” Jennifer was a bit confused and looked over to see Kate grinning.

“Why Jingle Bells, of course! I decided to sing it at the top of my lungs.” She sat down and giggled. “There was this moment when Paul and his boss and everyone else leaving just froze and looked at me. I just kept singing and about the time I got to ‘One horse open sleigh,’ Paul’s boss had joined in. Then slowly but surely everyone was singing by the end of the final chorus. Everyone that is, except Paul. He just stared at me with this look of confused awe then when the singing stopped, he shook his head and laughed to himself. We went home and I never hear the nervous jingle again.”

“Why was he worried about his boss getting drunk?”

“Turns out he thought I might look poorly on him because of his coworkers. Kinda silly, in hindsight, really,

but there it is.” Sarah sat back and tilted her head, not focused on anything. “Those first few months of marriage were difficult in a way and yet not difficult.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, when you’re first married you have to figure out what to do with each other. How to share the tube of toothpaste, how to fold the towels, how to *live* with each other. You don’t know how to act sometimes. Everything’s so awkward, in a way. So, things that wouldn’t bother you later tend to be irritating in the beginning.” She chuckled. “Then again, you tend to ignore other, maybe bigger stuff, until it creeps up later. . . like who does the laundry and who’s going to do the diaper changing.”

“So, would you just put up with the jingling now?”

“Oh, hell no. That was down right annoying. Some things just need to be nipped in the bud.” She smiled and placed her hand on Jennifer’s. “You just have to go with your gut. If it’s a big deal to you, then it’s a big deal to the

two of you. Sometimes you just have to knock them over the head a bit to get them to realize it.”

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Fifteen minutes later, Sarah brought the ham into the dining room. Everyone was seated in front of the good china settings—except for the children, who had plastic Easter plates—and drinks had been poured. There were piles of mashed potatoes, green bean casserole and even baked beans. The smell was intoxicating and Jennifer was *really* hungry. She had even forgotten all about the back patting, until James leaned in to kiss her on the cheek. She bristled when his hand rested on her back.

James whispered, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she whispered back.

“You look like I just stepped on your toe or something. . .”

“Really, I’m fine. I’m just really hungry.” Jennifer put on a smile and decided to “pick her battle.” She tried to remember that he didn’t mean to annoy her and that there would be

plenty of time to talk about it when they got back to Boston. She was going to enjoy herself and not worry about petty annoyance of the tap, tap, tap. Besides, as soon as James’ hands became occupied with eating, she was able to relax and enjoy the dinner conversation. Even Jennifer and Brad’s boys provided entertainment with stories of *My Life as a Young Prankster*.

“. . . and then, I used some towels to clean the mud out of my hair.”

Kate chimed in, “My good kitchen towels, mind you.”

The youngest boy laughed, “Yeah. We’re so silly.”

Kate smiled as she retorted and ruffled his hair, “Rascally is more like it!”

Jennifer looked down and, as hungry as she was, hadn’t touched her food. Concentrating, she managed to finish her mashed potatoes and half her ham before James leaned back in his chair and put his hand on her back again. Jennifer stiffened, fork in mid-air. She glanced up at Kate, who had finished and was holding the baby over her shoulder, patting her back.

A solution suddenly dawned on her. She was pretty sure it would work, but wasn’t sure if she could go through with it. The table scene looked so Norman Rockwell. Could she risk the current atmosphere for such a selfish reason? What would they all think? She contemplated the possibilities until the patting picked back up. *Oh, hell yes, I can.*

Working up her nerve and sitting straight up in her chair, she took several large gulps of water and waited for a slight pause in the conversation. It wasn’t long before the perfect opportunity presented itself. James just finished his explanation of his company’s next project, “So, I think we’ll be able to meet the deadline with little problem. It’s really a great opportunity.” He looked toward Jennifer, “Even Jennifer’s impressed.” Tap, tap, tap, tap.

Just when all eyes turned toward Jennifer and James renewed his patting vigor, she let out the loudest burp the tall glass of water afforded her. Silence descended in the dining room and the patting stopped immediately.

She put her hand on her chest and exclaimed, "Oh! Excuse me." She turned to James and said, "Thanks, honey. That helped a lot. Do you think you could pass the mashed potatoes?" Pleased with herself, she smiled and patted the hand that was now on the table instead of her back. She looked around the table at the startled faces, and continued, "Better out than in, I guess."

The young boys at the end of the table, thinking all bodily functions were hilarious, started giggling before looking toward their mother for reassurance that it was okay to laugh. Eyes, wide as saucers, stared at Jennifer for a split second before Sarah and Kate burst into guffaws. By the time the mashed potatoes reached Jennifer, everyone, including James, had joined in laughter.

Later, when James and Jennifer climbed into the guest bed and snuggled up to each other, James started chuckling again.

"What's so funny?" Jennifer asked, bemused.

"Well, I think I think finally figured it out, the whole patting thing."

"Really?"

"I think I did it to remind myself that you were still there."

"Huh?"

"Well, I think I get so worried that you're not going to like my friends or my family that in the back of my head, I need some reassurance that you haven't run off in horror."

"Why would you worry about me not liking your family? I adore them! I've told you that. And your friends are fine. Sometime I want to hang out

with mine, but that doesn't mean I don't like yours."

He interrupted, "I know that. . . logically. It's just. . . I don't know. It's weird." James shook his head and closed his eyes. "Forget it. Let's go to sleep."

Silence held for a moment.

"Are you still worried?" Jennifer quietly asked, half hoping he'd fallen asleep.

James quietly snorted and smiled, "No. I figure if you can burp like a sailor in front of my family, then you'll probably be okay if my friends get out of hand."

"That's probably true." Jennifer responded just in time to hear James' breathing change, as he fell asleep.

"Damn." Jennifer shook her head, closed her eyes and waited to sleep, holding tight to James' hand.



Dancer: Marta Peralta I — *José Bustamonte* — 2003

THE PROFILE

Exploring Dance with Darla Johnson

Shelley Seale

Expect the unexpected.

Emblazoned across the Johnson/Long Dance Company brochure, this motto embodies the nature of the 14-year-old dance and education company. The brochure continues with a challenge to “peel away layers of perceived expectations, reveal a new, unencumbered kind of beauty. . . a new definition of dance.”

Indeed. Darla Johnson, co-founder and co-artistic director, approaches dance in a thought-provoking way – both in choreographing her professional company’s productions and in teaching dance at Austin Community College. Her initial inspiration for a piece might come from a poem, novel, or bit of music. She might even start with

simply a costume idea. From such small seeds come the juxtaposition of dance, theatre and art that are the hallmark of the Johnson/Long Dance Company, which incorporates imagery, props, text and highly skilled dancing.

“I approach dance as *body poems*,” says Johnson. “I strive to kinetically embody that original idea in my choreography.” Using exploratory methods, improvisation, text and props Johnson creates an experience on the stage that routinely raises the question, “Is this dance?”

Johnson’s answer is, “Anything can be a dance, and everyone is a dancer.” She would like to dispel the notion that dance belongs to the tall, lithe and experienced. It is this belief that

guides her classes at ACC. Her classroom is never a competition, and everyone learns at his or her own level. The existing dance experience and skill level of her students are widely varied, and Johnson teaches accordingly, inviting an emotional exploration as well as a physical one. “I love being a part of someone’s discovery,” she says.

The method seems to work. Johnson has received the ACC Teaching Excellence Award twice, and her students have high praise for her. Molly Roy, a former student who has taken numerous classes with Johnson over several years, enthusiastically endorses the holistic teaching approach, which she describes as being encouraged to bring oneself as a person into the dance. “Darla is so effective as a teacher because she doesn’t leave anyone behind,” says Roy. “No matter your level of proficiency, everyone gets something and everyone has a place there.”

Johnson’s dedication is equally apparent in her professional

productions. The eight to 18 months that it takes to create each detailed and complex production is evidenced by the attention and critical praise they receive. The Johnson/Long Dance Company spent two weeks in Germany last February, after being invited to perform their most recent production, *I Stuck My Head in the Garden*. Sondra Lomax with the *Austin American-Statesman* wrote in a review that “production quality is always of the highest standard in Johnson/Long performances” and a “visual treat.” Robi Polgar said in a 1998 *Austin Chronicle* review that “the company. . . demonstrates a taut, disciplined, yet fluid and even whimsical ability.” Later, in 2003, Polgar wrote that the company “presents dynamic, engaging work that is intellectually stimulating and audience friendly.”

The Johnson/Long Dance Company is the fourth professional dance company for Johnson, a Minnesota native who is also a poet and avid gardener. She started the company

shortly after she began teaching dance at ACC. She is equally passionate about serving the community by bringing dance to places with limited arts exposure and resources. For more than ten years, her company has provided students in area schools with a safe place to express themselves creatively, without fear of being put down or made fun of. Starting at Johnston High School in 1991, the high-energy Exploring Dance Horizons program focused on at-risk youth in communities that could not afford this kind of programming.

But the Johnson/Long Dance Company doesn’t just teach these kids how to dance. Using contemporary dance as an instructional tool, the students also learn life skills such as self-confidence, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making. The method is meant to show the students how the arts apply to every area of life. “The kids deserve to have access to the arts,” Johnson says. The program has won awards from the Austin Chamber

of Commerce, the Austin Independent School District and the Adopt-a-School program.

Last year, Exploring Dance Horizons merged with another nonprofit organization called Believe in Me, adopting that name with the merger. Believe in Me was forced to close its doors as a victim of the economic downturn that has hit nonprofits, particularly the arts, hard since 9/11. Johnson and her partner, Andrew Long, thought that Believe in Me was too valuable of a resource for the Austin community to lose, and

managed to raise the \$50,000 needed to fund the program under the Johnson/Long Dance Company. One Believe in Me student says that “the only limits there are, are the ones we put on ourselves.”

The Believe in Me program also provides for service learning opportunities for ACC dance students, who are invited to participate as teacher assistants as well as choreograph and perform their own pieces at the high schools. Molly Roy became one of those assistants and was excited about the opportunity to share some of what

she had learned with the younger students. Remembering her own shyness and lack of confidence, Roy knows how the kids feel and enjoys helping to draw them out. “Believe in Me is an incredible program,” she says. “It encourages them to accept themselves and stand up for themselves, and it introduces them to a completely different kind of dance.”

In the end, it is exactly this philosophy that is taken away from an encounter with Darla Johnson’s method of dance instruction and expression. You never know what to expect.



Dancer: Marta Peralta II — *José Bustamonte* — 2003