

13th Annual

Café Shapiro

February 15, 2010

*Anthology of Selected Poems
and Short Stories*

Copyright 2010

The authors retain all copyright interests in their respective works.
Reprinted by permission.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced without permission of the authors. Please contact undergrad.library@umich.edu for permission information.

*Printed on the University of Michigan University Library's
Espresso Book Machine.*

Café Shapiro

Welcome to Café Shapiro! Café Shapiro began in February 1998 as part of the University's "Year of the Humanities and Arts" (YoHA). Originally conceived as a student coffee break, Café Shapiro takes place in the Shapiro Undergraduate Library during winter evenings in February. It features undergraduate student writers nominated by their professors, many of whom have also been nominated for various writing prizes within the University and beyond.

Students are invited to perform a live reading for a peer audience. For many student writers, Café Shapiro is a first opportunity to read publicly from their work. For others, it provides a fresh audience, and the ability to experience the work of students they may not encounter in writing classes. Through its thirteen years of existence, Café Shapiro has evolved to become a night (or several) of sharing among some of our best undergraduate writers, their friends, families, and the wider community.

Café Shapiro has been popular, and in many years we've created an anthology to provide access to these students' works after the live performance. We are delighted that this year's anthology could be printed, for the first time, on the Espresso Book Machine (EBM). The University of Michigan acquired the EBM in order to help our users connect with content in the ways most useful to them, thereby supporting the research and learning needs of students, scholars and faculty. For more information about the EBM, visit <http://www.lib.umich.edu/espresso-book-machine>. It's exciting to see our mission being realized in this year's printing of the Café Shapiro Anthology.

We hope you enjoy reading the work of these talented writers.

Shapiro Undergraduate Library Reference Department
Ann Arbor, Michigan
March 2010

Table of Contents

Nieri Avanesian

Perfect Day	3
Chomsky-ism	5
Failed Exercise in Catnap	6
SFJAZZ Collective	7

Jessica Best

Dinner	11
--------------	----

Madeline Conway

Knees	19
Amsterdam	21
Story	22
Poisonous	25
Sentier du Bazaar 26	26
Cold Water	27
Winter 2	28

Logan Corey

Storing Mobility	33
Whisp	35
Simply Un-here.....	36
What I Have That Makes Me Wiser Than Him.....	38
Visitor	38
Legacy + Snow	39

Mark Navarro

For My Mother	47
A Beer with My Father	49
Sonnet for My Nephews	52

Mark Navarro (con't.)

Rain Pours in the Midst of Blooming	53
Allison is Writing an Essay	54
Winter Balloons into Shivers	56
She's the Kind of Girl Who Eats Tomatoes Whole	58
She Would be Perfect if She Hated Ginsberg	59
Thy Voice Sings Through Wires	61
Amori Puellae	62

Allison Peters

Live CNN	71
Canyon	73
Timothy	75
Quiet	78
My Name	80
Love Poem	81

Amanda Rutishauser

Joe's	85
Hoodoo	86
Graves for Fireflies	88
Hush	89
Volition	96
Rain	97
Sorrow	98

Jessica Stokes

Entropy	101
Life	102
Coloring.....	103

Trevor Andrew Weltman

Fearless in Memory 107

Peter Yi

Chansha, China, June 14th, 1958 121

July 3rd, 1958 123

Why I Count 125

Neri Avanesian

Nieri Avanesian



I went to high school in Livonia, MI and lived there for most of my life. Here at U of M, I am a double major Political Science and Linguistics. I am currently reading an excellent novel called *Another Country* by James Baldwin about love, hate and race in New York City in the 1950s. After graduation I hope to find a job in the publishing industry and/or attend law school. If I could make my living by writing, right now, I would.

A Perfect Day (Prose Poem)

I wake up already sitting up in my bed, confused that it's 8:09 on a Sunday, and my alarm is going off. I realize it is Tuesday. Internal groan, and I lie back down, seriously contemplating skipping class again—second day in a row. Confused again, I realize that my other alarm hasn't rung yet—it's set for 8:20—ten more minutes. I must have fallen asleep because I wake up again, scared I'd overslept. I look at the clock; 8:16. Four more minutes. I'm annoyed, now. It's not like I've slept 10 hours and my body is done with it, so why do I keep waking up? It's just that I've only slept 6, and my brain is done making sense. I wake up again; 8:20—the alarm, finally. An external groan, now. To snooze or not to snooze? The answer is simple. ALWAYS snooze! I wake up again; 8:26. Now what? Dismiss. Laze about. Fall asleep. Jolt awake; 8:30. Guess I'll get up now. Pajamas and wet hair from last night's 1 AM shower. Make the coffee (always). Face. Hair. Clothes. Out the door; 8:52.

At 4:00, still walking tired and distracted from the discombobulating wake-up, I allow myself an hour to read. The line for coffee is too long; 4:06. Reading for pleasure never happens anymore and, too tired to really do anything else but sleep, I figure not spending the rest of the day in bed would be beneficial. 4:24 eyes start closing and I realize how challenging life is today. Plod on. Maybe such a stark story wasn't a good choice, this tired. Plod on. It's an interesting story, really. One of those intrepid-woman stories where she does whatever she has to, to get her life back in order. I wonder if I'd ever be so resourceful; 4:49. Okay, five more minutes. Wasn't this supposed to be for fun? Scarf. Coat. Bag. Out the door: 4:57.

Walking home, eyes open dead and steps slow; there's always that wish that someone will look up at you and life will change. But I know that I definitely wouldn't look at me the way I am now. Too

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

tired, too tired. If only sleep from 5 pm 'til morning were a realistically feasible option. I feel the winter sun on my face and find myself fantasizing about it. This is good but if it were a little warmer, oh what paradise it would be to read outside with brightness all around; something warm in my hand and a blanket underneath. Still walking and walking; really really really really really really really really (how many times can I say really) really really tired. Home now and a little hungry. I open the blinds in my room and the sun streams in. What should I eat? I choose the grapefruit, labor intensive. After peeling and peeling I put the first bit of gratification in my mouth and it's utter perfection. Juicy, sweet, tart and like sunlight in sunlight. Maybe it is a good day after all.

Chomsky-ism

Colorless glass goblets shone
Green from the light through the leaves.
Ideas were born in the dreamy dell until
Sleep stole over the thinkers as they
Furiously looked for an answer.

They'd been told to live. But in a
World made dim by complacency it was nary a
Comforting thought. Seeking more than an
Illusion, succumbing to deliria, the thinkers
Isolated life from living, still concluding little.

Colorless concepts, invisible, yet as
Green as a fresh flower-stem. This
Idea governed existence in waking and in
Sleep, while outsiders, rainwashed,
Furiously decried the contradiction.

To live in remembrance and reflection, away from the
World with its steel cloud-light was briefly
Comforting. Abstracting from but creating an
Illusion of reality and truth, the thinkers are,
In isolation, together.

Failed exercise in catnap

Even when the large corporal mass which hinders it begs stop!

The mind continues its cognitive activities

Whose stimuli keep the heart racing

Preventing the process of nodding off

(Which is quite aptly named,

but seems only to occur

when especially undesired.)

SFJAZZ Collective

Wide hands move expertly,
Caressing the neck, up and down
eliciting musical moans.
Fingers plucking in all the right places,
this way and that they move,
In throes of passion—
One silent and concentrated
The other thunderous and made alive.

Theirs is a public union
A display of devotion so sonorous
People gather to see and hear
its sensual sound.

This man and his bass
which he strokes so lovingly,
Make the music of lust;
They spark it and fan the flames
Of an aural climax.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

By low lows, and a pulsating sound,

A rhythm is set, unrelenting

Leaving satisfaction almost too dazed

to applaud

This most passionately chaste show of skill:

Of long fingers

Taut strings

Trickling sweat and

Low groans

The music of desire.

Jessica Best

Jessica Best



Jessica Best is a Senior majoring in Creative Writing through the Residential College, and her main writing heroes are David Sedaris and Michael Pollan. She hopes to someday work as a food writer. She currently lives in a co-op, where her hobbies include hanging out with her 28 housemates, making small animals out of clay, playing guitar, and preparing enormous meals.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

This section takes place during my sophomore year. As part of a class project, I was attempting to raise money for an amazing charity called Heifer International (www.heifer.org). I decided to accomplish this by hosting a series of fundraising dinners at my place, despite the fact that I lived in a dorm and had no kitchen and zero experience in planning anything like this.

For help, I turn to the internet. My usual recipe source is cookinglight.com, which I learned about through my mom, back when I was first getting into baking. The trouble is, now that I'm not living in my parents' house and benefiting from a large and expensive fridge, whose many and expensive contents always seemed to replenish on their own, I can't help seeing Cooking Light a little differently. Most recipes make the assumption that you are an adult with a counter top, a stove, and an oven, but Cooking Light goes that extra step to assume that you are an upper-middle class city-dweller with money to burn.

All I want is a simple recipe for fruit salad. This proves astoundingly difficult. Everything I can find seems to involve goat cheese and wine reductions. Back home, I would never have to fret about the cost effectiveness of buying a bag of almonds to use in a single dish, but here in my dorm room, Cooking Light seems a bit ridiculous, a window into the world of decadent yuppie privilege. Even their occasional feature about cooking on a budget tends to take for granted that you can afford to splurge on prosciutto.

Allrecipes.com is the more populist recipe database, with its contributions coming less from professionals working for a cooking/lifestyle magazine, and more from harried housewives and grandmothers. Unfortunately, after 20 years of being raised with a Cooking Light sensibility, the squarely middle-class, down-home world of Allrecipes is completely alien to me. Allrecipes doesn't expect you to own white wine or fresh parmesan, but it does ask

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

you to accept that gelatin and marshmallows will make any fruit dish better. I understand that not everyone grew up with near-limitless access to fresh produce of all colors of the rainbow. I understand that most people—myself presently included—can't afford to shop like this. And I understand that, without pomegranates and blackberries, adding pizzazz to a dish requires a certain degree of culinary creativity, but despite all of this, the first time I find a fruit salad recipe that calls for a can of apple pie filling, I can only stare in horrified fascination. Fruit salad should not be goopy.

There is a delicate balance here, between nutrition, economy, and flavor, and it's frustrating to think that maybe you can only ever get two out of three. Make do with bland fruit cocktail from a can, spend half your paycheck on exotic dates, or spice up your fruit salad with a fistful of corn syrupy, gelatinous goo: it's your choice.

In the end, I don't use a recipe at all. I buy a pint each of blueberries and strawberries—an expense justified because the rest of the ingredients don't cost me anything at all. The bulk of the fruit salad is made of bananas, oranges, and apples—all lifted one at a time, over a course of several days, from the school cafeteria. It turns out that in the struggle between price and quality, theft can be a fertile middle ground.

There's the thing as you imagine it—the bright, unfiltered idea—and then there is the banal drudgery of pulling that thing into the physical world. In the end, you will always need to make sacrifices in the service of reality. This is something you learn quickly as a writer: the story is always, always better in your head. Pieces get lost in translation—events compressed, nuances blunted, images confined to what you can spell out and imply. To try is to compromise.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Planning an event like this can feel similar: I want to serve the most delicious, healthiest, most eco-friendly meal possible, but in the end, my priority is to raise money. And so I cut corners. And, in a further display of pragmatism above all else, I buy paper plates and plastic cutlery. Normally I am all about trying to save the environment and reduce landfill sizes, but it turns out that these convictions can be temporarily peeled off and set aside, like a jacket on a muggy day. It is a little disconcerting to learn how easily I can ignore an entire section of my conscience, but I can't deny it's convenient.

I have enough to worry about anyway. The day of the dinner, I am a neurotic tornado of cooking. Some of the side dishes could be assembled ahead of time and chilled, thank God, but the enchiladas and the brownies must be prepared today and served warm. They're both favorite recipes of mine, old stand-bys that I've used many times before, but making them in triple batches on a deadline adds a new and exciting degree of insanity to the mix.

Never has Jenny and Manisha's kitchen seemed so very small. Never has their postage-stamp-sized countertop seemed so hilariously meager, or their idiosyncratic oven seemed less capable of getting the job done. To make matters worse, I've just started sautéing the onions and garlic when I realize to my horror that I've bought two cans of the wrong kind of tomatoes—sauce instead of crushed. They sport nearly identical labels, but the two are crucially different in texture—the sauce being a homogenous red mush while crushed tomatoes maintain their gloriously pulpy, seed-filled integrity.

Chelsea, to her credit, does not so much as bat a verbal eyelash when she answers her cell phone to my shouts of "Chelsea! Chelsea! Come quick, it's a tomato emergency!" The only solution I can see is to use one can of the slop before me and hope to make up the difference by adding some fresh chopped tomato. Chelsea agrees to stop by with a few tomatoes, because she is the best friend

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

in the world, and she also spends a few hours helping me cook. They're valuable hours, since I'm now running behind.

That familiar voice of doubt is going full blast in the back of my head, saying "Look at you—you don't know what you're doing. You'll never be able to pull this off." In the end, it turns out that, for brief periods of time, I can set aside my doubt the same way I can set aside my concerns about plastic forks. It's not that I become a more confident person. It's simply that I don't have time to worry: twenty people are counting on me for dinner, and I am counting on myself to make this happen. There is no mental energy to spare. No matter how much I normally define myself as someone who freaks out under pressure, the most important thing is to somehow, somehow make this work.

And when 6:30 rolls around, wonder of wonders, we are done.

*The final menu for the first Heifer Dinner:
Three batches of cheese-and-spinach enchiladas
Two batches of corn-and-black bean salad
A huge bowl of fruit salad
Garlic bread
Two batches of pasta salad
Three batches of brownies.*

(The brownies are insurance. However badly I may screw up everything else, I have yet to ruin a tray of these chewy, chocolatey baked goods. Worst-case scenario, if nothing else turns out, my guests can comfort themselves with the knowledge that they haven't wasted their money on a terrible meal—they have simply purchased the world's most expensive dessert.)

We take a moment to admire this bounty, and then it hits us: we have exactly zero seconds to move an entire feast from the third floor of an apartment building to the second floor of a dormitory

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

several blocks away. Nearly everything is in floppy, lidless containers, and nothing can be stacked.

We have Manisha's car, but even so, there are only two of us, and the logistics of transporting everything eats up fifteen minutes. When we stagger up the stairs with our first armfuls of food, I am half-convinced that all of the guests will have given up and gone off in search of a quicker dinner. I am forced to reassess this when we reach our hallway and catch sight of the crowd of people patiently waiting at my door. It is a touching sight, and when they cheerfully volunteer to carry the rest of the dishes to my room, I feel a sudden wave of gratitude so intense that it makes me giddy.

In the end, it is another sort of concession: I'd wanted to pull this off on my own, to throw these dinners together single-handedly, but almost immediately I was forced to rely on the kindness and generosity of my friends. Jenny and Manisha's kitchen, Manisha's car, Chelsea's tomatoes and assistance—hell, even the buffet table itself requires a thank-you list. It took two people to help me drag the mattress out of my room and lift the empty bedframe onto the dresser and desk, reorienting the standard-issue dorm furniture into an impromptu table which was instantly transformed into a credible piece of furniture when Caitlin lent me her paisley table cloth. Why anyone living in a dorm room would own a table cloth is a mystery to me, but I am beyond asking such questions.

My guests return bearing all of the food—it only takes them one easy trip, and when everything is finally set up, and people begin to dig into the food, ooh-ing and ahh-ing, I can finally sit down for a moment and let my shoulders untense. It's hard to believe that after weeks of preparing, the first Heifer Dinner has finally been accomplished, but the evidence is right there to see, smell and taste—wonderfully, improbably, miraculously real.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Spinach and Cheese Enchiladas (serves about 8)

8 large flour tortillas

Sauce:

One onion, chopped

Three cloves of minced garlic

Enough olive oil to coat the pan

One large can of crushed tomatoes (or half a can of tomato sauce and one chopped tomato)

Dried basil and oregano

Filling:

One cup of grated cheese (sharp cheddar is the best—it has a lot of flavor so you don't need as much of it)

Fresh spinach, chopped up a bit

Chopped green onions if you have them (otherwise, finely-chopped raw onions can do the trick)

Sliced olives, or if your friends don't like olives, black beans

- 1. Sauté the onion and garlic in the oil until soft.*
- 2. Add the tomatoes and spices. Simmer.*
- 3. In a large bowl, combine all of the filling ingredients.*
- 4. Pour half of the sauce into a baking dish.*
- 5. Divide the filling amongst the tortillas, roll them tightly, and place them on the baking dish.*
- 6. Top with the remaining sauce, and bake at 350 degrees for 15-20 minutes.*

Madeline Conway

Madeline Conway



Madeline Conway is a sophomore in the RC. She is majoring in English and Creative Writing (in the Residential College). She was the recipient of a 2010 Hopwood Undergraduate Award in Poetry for her manuscript "New Secrets" and the Jeffrey L. Weisberg Memorial Award in Poetry for her poem "Outside Tom's Truck." She lives in the Chicago area.

Knees

how could I end up
with my father's bones
not in a casket in my legs in my ribcage
the way he tore down our wallpaper he was a
Missouri hick he was a
coward he was a
pretender
he was a
coin toss he was a
missionary he was a
mortar and pestle
he ground up my mother's womb and made me
out of the dough scraps of Christmas cookies that are
supposed to make up for
the times you screamed
and the times you sought to find
something in yourself that says you are
worth living the way Jesus gave
people hope

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

you have to
put all your faith in your babies
give them milk and lead so they grow up strong
you need to
know that I have walked at night
since I can remember
trying to see if it was your knees or your feet
that took you away
but I always came back home
I always came back home so
thank you for leaving out of the
goodness of your heart thank you
for relegating me to airport terminals and
bathtubs
I have spent a lifetime in dreams following
footprints in the sand and never
once have I heard the voice of God

Amsterdam

I don't
dream up
sad nights

and I don't
resist
hugging road-curves
when I'm absentminded.

I saw
lights on a football
pitch.

His image
rang in my ears.

When I
took my eyes
from the road,

the Worry
didn't even
cross my mind.

story

when i was five years old my mom told me we weren't white

for months i thought i was black.

even though i could see that i wasn't black,
that was the only alternative.

story 2

i have only seen my father cry three times in my life.

the first was in his apartment

the second was in an airport

the third was in a hospital room

all three times he was leaving me.

story 3

my chinese grandma came to stay with us

she doesn't speak a word of english.

one day she tuned the TV to 7

i sat next to her and watched All My Children

somehow, we were communicating.

story 4

my aunt had black hair and always wore red lipstick
the night she died there was a ladybug in my bathroom

it was the middle of january.

from then on i decided the ladybug was her
whenever i see one, i wonder where she is.

story 5

gram kaiser was a lady who lived in my dad's building

her apartment was dark and she always had cookies

i used to keep in touch with her but for a couple months i forgot
her daughter told me she had died
i put on a Damien Rice CD and wept

story 6

on a bright spring afternoon
my uncle took me out of a hospital room to say
that it is my job now
to live my life to make Him proud.

i will not.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

story 7

40 days after a Chinese person dies you hold a meal

the women in my family made a shrine of her picture and a plate of food

i did not help

i sat in a folding chair in that crappy North Side apartment

and i cried and i cried and i wanted to die

story 8

there is a drink called a London Fog

it is earl gray tea with lemon and a shot of vanilla

on a cold day Saina took me to have one

and in her car in the parking lot she cried

“I’m so sorry,” she said, “I’m so sorry.”

poisonous

like the salt in the sea we want to
drain everything
we are deceitful drumbeat motion to the
tune of dehydration
we are making practice fields out of
sunspots for the final days
we are preserving it all in
machines that do not take the sweat of the
scribe and imprint it in the
story's skin
we are trusting the hypothalamus when we go to
sleep
and the world stops when you know you're not
good enough
when you know that
the fatherless child will be pitied and scorned
when you know the
choking in your heart is
unreadable on your face and you will
spend the whole night crying for
the impossible ideal
the infinite road

sentier du bazar 26

I can't make up how I felt at night in the
garden
in the walls of cement with the
wolf spiders lurking on the stairs when I'd
go up to bed and
the floor plan of the house that's
imprinted in my mind:
the back door that let the sun pour through
where a little blue bird once
flew into the glass and lay,
undignified, feathers tousled by the fall
my father picked it up,
held it in his hands
he who could choose to defy death,
hurtling towards the glass,
the bay window he chose to die in,
the view he searched for to replicate
something I will never understand
he let me bury the bird,
he who is now set in stone.

Cold Water

Hysterics are for
the worst kind
of realizations.

Like,
I live

in a house that God built
for people to be alone.

Good thing
my father left me
something more useful than money:

a head-
no, a heart-
for the road.

Because I drove
25 blocks

blurry-eyed,
screaming into the night,

foot off the pedal,
coasting
on a riptide.

winter 2

come save me from
the things I can't stand remembering:
when my father died I
watched his chest rise and never
fall I watched his eyes stop
moving I watched
his mouth drop open I couldn't
feel his heart and I am
the same girl who
laid across his chest and cried
no matter what I say
I am the same damn girl who
he wouldn't say goodbye to, I am
the same damn girl who closed his
dead mouth and she and she alone saw
the spit run out
I am the same damn girl who
wrote down his time of death
I am the same damn girl who

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

called people who didn't care to
hear the news
I am the same damn girl who
is crying out loud where the
sky and the snow will maybe
absorb my sobs so
no one has to know
this is what I would have done
in the middle of the night when I
felt the choking almost steal my
breath and maybe it's finally come
true maybe I will finally
join him maybe he's come to
take me like
the patriarch of the family should maybe he's finally
fulfilling his duty maybe he's finally
being a father maybe I'm finally
gone

Logan Corey

Logan Corey



My name is Logan Elizabeth Corey, I'm from South Haven, MI. I'm studying Creative Writing and Spanish in the Residential College. My favorite books are, "Just a Couple of Days," by Tony Vigorito, and "Even Cowgirls get the Blues," by Tom Robbins. My favorite poem of all time is "somewhere i have never traveled, gladly beyond" by e.e. cummings. After graduation, I plan on writing until my right hand gives out. Then, I'll learn to be left-handed.

Storing Mobility

often and higher than often
the train rides me
more than I ride the train
it finds me
walking alone
rapid run rapid capture
flight of rail and bone
stealthy silent cool
I feel it invade my senses
surging metal through my veins
as sparks fly off my wonder
I slide my electric eyes to close
adrenaline corrupting my every move
with a quick flick
of her nymph like tongue
all senses gone to sleep
but sight of my ear
I recognize, I know
by the way all presented
surrounds me

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

my head lolls to leftward side
drunk from the heavy smack
of the melancholy whistle
sonorous in my right ear
all rationale expired
all reason expelled
all chakras tuned to intoxication
head thrown back and eyes of determined fury:
Run Run Run
Journey only onward
up and over
stopping never
out and through the prepositions of the sky
literarily assaulting all along our way
that no confines
even law of nature or English scholar man
cannot take hold
torment our wing
tenderizing our minds to obey
the fiberglass fallacies of logic corrupted reason
with no room to grow

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

And as the train has ridden me
my mind is not the same
my limbs are not my own
my thoughts no longer belong to me
and surely the ground
no longer suitable
for my fantastical feet.

whisp

jabberwocky shoes
should never be worn
by those who keep
their feet on the ground

Simply Un-here

That I am more than silken locks

Simply Un-here

It was the same story yet again

The same timeless melody

Broken out of tune

Played by hands and played by men

Played by boys and heralded in songs of old

It was the same story again

Of his arm on mine

His breath lap my cheek

His hunger taste my sight

My sigh a mere encouragement

It was the same story again

Eyes roaming sacred flesh

Fingers ghosting knuckles clenched so fast so white

So tired so tight

Of holding back

I do not want to be saved, held, mocked, or spoken for

I am not a symbol of what your thoughts dictate I be

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

I am no human elevator
That your eyes may look up and down
I am not a gift to be unwrapped
Whenever you please
Be it your eyes or your hands both I deny
I don't dress to impress
I don't dress to seduce
I don't dress to engage
In this game of no means yes (yes means no)
In upturned outturned undone
Hypocrisy
I stare you down and I dare you to know
Challenge you to see
That I am more than silken locks
That I am more than stolen looks
That I am more than breasts measured A B C
That I am more than a question
That I am more than an answer
That you formulate in your mind
That you probe most rudely
And shove from thought to thought

That I am more than this fabricated

Falsified image you hold of me

That I am more than brown eyes

And long dark hair.

I am not here

For your amusement.

What I Have That Makes Me Wiser Than Him

(an homage to Frank O'Hara)

tits

Visitor

He saw my

sign

“Free Poems”

Asked

did I know

Allen Ginsberg?

I nodded yes

but not personally.

Legacy + Snow

I watched the snow fall
On a Monday
A standard Monday
Like I'd seen on calendars
before
And the snow that fell
Was remembered by the poets
In the way children think
Hundreds of spiral-bound notebooks
With stiff white pages
Were coated
In the memories
Of Monday
Making music out of stillness
Their words flowed easily
And free
It's that day
Poets live for
A Monday
Typical Monday

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

To notice
What others don't see
And all day
Poets were writing
All poets
But me
I watched by the window
The creative snow
Safely outside
And I free from its pull
This Monday
I stayed inside
No need to go out
To feel the chill
My grandma laid unresponsive
Unrelaxed, unstill
In her metal bed
Inside my wooden house
Cocooned in her failing shell
Of skin and bone
Spent from a life lived full

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

And a sickness too long
Only her erratic breathing
Played backdrop to a silent room
Where my pen and my notebook waited
Where was their poet now?
I turned my back to them
And waited
Listened
Counting the seconds
Between each breath
Grammie the legacy
A life lived through war,
the depression, the times
A modern animal
In a modern world
She was timeless
To me seemed ageless
And classic
But she wasn't mine
She belonged to the world
Of light

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

The subtle sounds
Of her body
Told me
She was almost home
But had yet to say goodbye
To her body, her shell
Her home no longer needed
Just a vehicle to get her there
Release her
To light
To dream
I held her hand
Still, no words did I write
Heart poised still
I wanted the comfort
Of being strong
But poets cry
As all people do
And my crystalline tears
Expelled more feeling
Than a hundred poems

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Could offer

She reminds me of a marble

Pure, smooth colored glass

With enormous luster trapped inside

I wondered

Would the light free when the marble broke

Just a glass eggshell

That could release a light

A soul?

Alone, I do not know

Only she

As she sighs is free

To laugh good-naturedly

At the fallacies

Of the philosophers

But let them try

Maybe one day they'll know

And that day

All poets will answer the call

And even I

Will write on snow.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Mark Navarro

Mark Navarro



Majors: English Language & Literature, Creative Writing & Literature (RC) / Minor in Latin

Hometown: Adrian, MI

Current Favorite Book: Moby-Dick

Current Favorite Poem: "listen" by E.E. Cummings

Post-Graduate Plans: I hope to go to graduate school in Creative Writing (MFA) and/or English (PhD) and teach Creative Writing and English (with a focus on Modernism) at a University in the future, preferably Columbia.

FOR MY MOTHER

on her birthday

in days i remember you bathed me

(as one would her son)

in scalding waters

and with your hand (rings and all - the scratches

from a ruby and your lost diamond

still fresh on my back)

your thick fingers tracing over me

their nails picking off

mane-like hairs from my shoulders

those hands held mine as we treaded

upon broken concrete next to cars

and strangers who you told me

were no one friendly

i remember you scared me so many times

but now i think it was so that

i would truly cherish those who don't

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

i placed you high in Christ's eyes
with my poems -
i placed you deep down below the strains
of our caramel skin,
our nightshade course hair,
and our deep deep eyes
with my poems as well

in my poems you were never "Mom,"
and to those i love (other than you)
you are "my Mother,"

for i believe that the "my"
is implied
when i speak to you

and "Mother" is far too much a pedestal
for you

you much prefer getting your hands dirty

A Beer with My Father

together we raise our bottles -
yours a product of years of trial and error,
mine an unknown homage to my mother's father -
and we will let the bubbles pop on the fullest lips
that you (of all people) gave to me

part of me wishes you've been hoping for this moment
since my birth; the altering consciousness of the watery brew
and the laughter that ensues as you
pat me on the head - "attaboy" -
like a stiff breeze from the lake where we caught so many fish
your hand comes beating my shoulder gently

my twenty-one years, your forty-five - when you were my age
you dreamed of having a son with whom to have a beer -
perhaps a smoke too if my sisters had not
made you quit so soon

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

we can sink our teeth into animal flesh
and overindulge ourselves, as you taught me to
to be merry, to reward a hard-day's work

i often wonder what you would be like
if you drank brandy or cognac or wine instead
of the thin deluded brew we now share -
then i wonder what i and my sisters would be like
if you drank brandy or cognac or wine instead
(somehow i think that we would be
so utterly boring) - bottled lagers are so Midwest
and i know you wouldn't have it any other way:
wine is too west for you and stouts are far too east
but this brew, brown like that old lake water,
reminds of you those days with your grandfather
who died as i was conceived - your aunt told me
that i was sent to replace him
but you guffawed at such pressures:

not that i could not keep up with the dead
but i am your son, not your grandfather,

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

and you remind me daily as i bear your name

i am always your son upon introduction,

I am always your son upon introduction,

but no one can tell as we hold our bottles -

they can see it in our eyes and lips

and hear and beards, our laughter and our rages

you like Bud and i like Pabst

but sometimes beer is just beer, Dad.

SONNET FOR MY NEPHEWS

[AUTUMN 2008]

"Now Children, this is Autumn, like I said,
to ease your Summer heat and to prepare
you both for Winter - season 'Live & Dead
where flames then ice shall take over the air -
(by God) for once we all can see the trees
so gayly wither, leave themselves so bare
to orange & yellow brown from moistly green
to lay the leaves upon the ground with care!
But, Boys, you should not sigh for Dying Wood!
I vow that he does not think this unfair;
for, in his sorrows, he knows that he should
make way for Piercing Winter's blinding glare."

now to you Children may i say this thing
so Winter makes you dread & pine for Spring?

rain pours in the midst of blooming

rain pours in the midst of blooming
o how the sun is covered and
hides his gleaming from budding wonders
as rain drowns such green aliveness

before thunder boys picked flowers for girls
and they took them in small hands
but now waves among lush grasses whisk away
the tokens for these pale blonde dears

before the droplets pool into floods
that strip blossoms from the earth
i must ask god to shed light
since the sun is so hidden:

do you heed young lovers so much
that you wash their gifts from the ground?

allison is writing an essay

allison is writing an essay
while i am writing a poem.

before, we spoke of my thickless beard
as she ran her pale boned fingers over
my sprouting face

we dreamed of lake houses and car rides
(long long drives to whoknowswhere)
and me chopping wood in some
manly thought of flannel and
gleaming red axes cleaved in oak
or maple or pine or whatever
grows in Wisconsin

we sipped black coffee, uselessly stirred
with clinking spoons over eyes
gazing through the smoke
of a stranger's cigarettes as our
bellies filled with eggs and meat
and so many other things that would
make our fathers proud

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

her white legs slid gracefully into
that extra pair of pajamas on my floor
and i tossed her my favorite sweater to keep her
from the coldness in my sheets
and for once
we left our socks on because it takes
a while for the heat to come on

she rolled over and i rolled over
and our lips met as they always do -
our arms tangled under one sweated back
and one bare, the rays through
the blinds, the air thick with heat -
ours is heavy with sleep
to greet the day
slowly

and now allison is writing an essay
while i write this poem
(o how i hope that i get to write another tomorrow)

winter balloons into shivers

winter balloons into shivers

that i & ialone taste in the air,

holding my tongue in chattering

teeth.

how!

in streaming white

pure,

does one mother say “Enough”

to life?

where does she draw the line

between death & dying?

overhead, listen: we hear birds

fleeing once immense greatly things, &

noises calming down to silences,

winds haunting barren boughs,

creeping

creeping

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

slowly

over the sun

over the light

to where we shake

to sleep

to dream

(hardly).

like a murderous child,

this murderous pure

haunts land like a season.

wet are the feet of the all -

wandering children

and red are their cheeks

like once undead roses.

kiss the frozen dew and let me lie

here to die in staggering cold

as i was born.

she is the kind of girl who eats tomatoes whole

she is the kind of girl who eats tomatoes whole
sinking her white cliff teeth into them
letting tangy juices bathe her throat
and seeds fall from her mouth's corners
behind her smile

she would be perfect if she hated Ginsberg-

she would be perfect if she hated Ginsberg-

o how i wander to her only in a far off
place, how my eyes cling to her portrait
and how her words trickle down from thin firm lips
through me, unsettled, waiting for a little taste
from this mistress of the city

but why does she have to like Ginsberg?

o if only i could take her scribbles,
if her impassioned flight over the minds
of those pleased by solitude
and frightened by commerce
would weep to see them torn
by brown liquor and green smoke

but instead, she thinks it's okay 'cause Ginsberg did it

how sweetly she is firmly standing

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

upon the ground, tall and proud
to wait for more, how sweet her wide
starred eyes, glazed with content,
how sweet they follow the sunlight
through the boughs of oak trees

does she like Kerouac too? what about O'Hara? Waldman? please
god, not Waldman!

now i think of her, writing something
beautiful, in a flowing spring dress
draping over her pale thighs
upon the stiff grass under those oak trees
and now i think of her still
wandering only in her mind
toward something so wondrous
that i cannot help
to pine

but, dammit, why does she have to like Ginsberg?

thy voice sings through wires

thy voice sings through wires
bounces through air
into mine eyes where
i drown and steep in my desire
and try to douse a lover's pyre

thy lips press against the glass
drip onto the floor
where i lie, i adore
i shriek the words that i spoke last
and drag thy lips into my past

thy fingers move down thy chest
slickness and so smooth
that drives the boys to move
to share with thee in thy distress
and rest their heads upon thy breasts

AMORI PUELLAE

[for the love of the girl]

[for alp]

ONE

thou dost creep over all thou may'st be
in wanton nights and rumpled beds
where two deep lovers lie and rest their heads
which quivered solely for i and thee
and how thy fingers may'st seek
the flesh of boy, so soft and meek

now flow thy fingers through thy hair
as horses that thy hands shall tame
to hear thy voice and fear thy name
to this one dost not thee compare
and in thy name this one dost know
that thy lovelies make mine passions grow

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

so keep thine hours white and pure
so they may slip away without a pain
as roses wilt away without the rain
in soft unscathness of thy demure
how this rose thy hours charm shall hold
the motives of this boy that thou hast told
that thou dost take mine pursèd lips
and move them down beyond thy breasts
to where the dreams of boys now crest
between thy thighs and upon thy hips
to new horses all mine eyes shall dwell
as motives turn to black and boldness swells

thou dost move thy swaggers so coy
to take thy earth within thy hand
like reins in mouths and leather bands
of the tortured person of this boy
that thou dost tempt in warmèd breath
as we sway and push beyond our death

thou choke one's heart with thighs

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

when thou lay'st on the ground so green
where stems doth break and grasses sheen
with dew that thou dost make alive
and how thy thighs lay kissed with eyes
that wish to make them their demise

thou make'st thy fingers flee
from thine dress and through the plains
of thy belly where fingers strain
to reach thy own fingers on thee
and how one can only wish for such
good livings of thy fingers' touch

TWO

how i think thy body be not spring
instead autumn seizes thy name in sleep
and how it raises thee to towers steep
to rise itself to such a lovely thing
bless thy autumn, for thee in red
shall out lovely spring instead

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

of spring itself, summer in heat
(where thou art known to be at ease),
and winter's brutal nature shall appease
mine body, for we may lie so sweet
to keep thy body warm and laced in blood
which rushes through thy veins as floods

in banter of the gods, thy name is raised
with talk of Muses, firm and small,
and goddess Venus, light and tall,
sings of how she thee once praised -
her softest child, one she taught to strain
the boys with love for which they pine in vain

all these beings thou dost know so true
both live and dead, how one must feel
that thou art blessèd with godly zeal
which flows within thy blood through and through
how this boy unworthy pines to bless
thy soul and heart which pines he in distress

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

THREE

as the porous love, thy name shall stay
within mine eyes and heart and being
through which mine self is always fleeting
to watch thee that thou dost not stray
and here i vow to keep thy soul alive
with all mine heart, this boy shall strive

to place thy being high and high again
with foolish words and untuned songs
up to the gods where it belongs
so that the Muses make thy reassent begin
and i shall lie upon the earth and stare
upon thy risings to which no god compares

thy beauty and thy demure be pride
of love and fires that keep thy fool
(this boy) burning pining for thy kisses cool
to douse the flames with lips on which i ride
and thou may'st be nothing more

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

than the one this boy dost adore
from holy seas and the ends of earth
where Aeneas lays his head in rest
and in that language, thou doth attest
that thou art holy nature's splendid birth
for thy nature this boy shall plea
to be thy love as nature loves thee free

all these lovelies over which thou reign
know thy plight and are so sweet
so nature (gods and all) shall kiss thy feet
as i wish to do in mine loving pains
and how thy being is one that i adore,
for i will write for thee forever more

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Allison Peters

Allison Peters



Allison Peters was born in Bakersfield, California and has grown up on both the west coast and in the midwest. She is a third-year LSA student majoring in English Language & Literature and minoring in both Global Media Studies and Medieval & Early Modern Studies. In 2010 she won the Academy of American Poets Prize, UMMA's "1 Year, Many Voices" contest, and her first manuscript, *The Etymology of Love*, is currently under consideration for the Hopwood Awards. She has been published in numerous literary journals, including *The American Library of Poetry*, *Avatar Review*, *Fortnight Literary Press*, *Poets' Night Out*, and *Angelic Dynamo Online*. She has recently been accepted to the UM Creative Writing Subconcentration and will be applying to MFA programs in the fall. Some of her favorite poets include Gwendolyn Brooks, Anne Carson, Frank O'Hara, Sylvia Plath and Yusef Komunyakaa.

LIVE CNN

Reporting from Haiti, they were told

We need to use your truck. IVs in a red pick-up.

“VICTIMIZED AGAIN / NO ONE TO POLICE

Allegations of rape, theft in tent cities”:

“I am not afraid because God is with me”—This Haitian girl
is thirteen years old. She has a Bible and a baby sister.

A reporter-man questions her, and the god. (Jot:

Do not question thirteen-year-old girls.)

Health care reform: Middle America

just doesn't "dig it." DOW is up 61.67 points.

A male politician posing nude

in a magazine and looking damn good.

Commercial break: New star-studded movie

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

(Valentine's Day)! FireCreek Casino. The Joy Beher Show.

Now, "WHERE ARE THE RELIEF SUPPLIES?

Doctors describe desperate shortages":

Elizabeth Cohen, Senior Medical Corespondent,

opens a box of corneas. She is a very pretty reporter-lady.

I am drinking pulpy orange juice, black coffee. LIVE

CNN plays on a 32" HDTV in my Ann Arbor apartment.

Moss, snow on the neighbor's roof. There are things to do,
places to go sit in 30 minutes, and my coffee is getting colder.

"CitiGroup suffers \$7.6 billion loss":

My aunt's husband in New York is a big deal there.

Canyon

You are always so north,
the way you look up, contemplating
hard our ceiling. Sometimes
I feel so southwest
with the view of this desert canyon out
my window. In my lopsided,
breaking chair—furniture is such a
delight but cannot speak like
canyons can—I may as well be on
an airplane, flying miles
above this roof, above our ceiling,
like the way you look north & I howling
into the deep, down sand-caves. Of course
north is not the same as up; I know
north is just as sideways as southwest.
How grand this sight,
how full & empty this wordsmith chasm.
You are always so north
at our ceiling, until I beckon you to come,

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

come see the glorious abyss. No
longer north, you nod and pat my head,
staring so south
at the endless line of buzzing cars
touching, and our downstairs
nighttime neighbors' crooked mailbox.

TIMOTHY

Timothy do you remember when
you pulled out my front tooth
since I was too afraid but it was
wobbly and you said you'd done it

before to your own and it had worked
out well for you given that gap
so you pulled and pulled and Timothy
you tugged with all your might

Timothy do you remember how I squealed
we were right on our carpet-squares and it was
storytime and you laughed open-
mouthed clutching the root between

your thumb and middle finger so

triumphantly and I touched my gums
where there was no tooth and grabbed it
from your hands and we both looked pretty

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

shocked and pleased

Timothy do you remember

Timothy do you wonder

what that tooth looks like now

the one that grew in its place

Timothy don't you want to see

Timothy do you remember how

we were the best of friends and together

we'd walk that block to school but you

were brown and my mother mistook it

for dirt one day remember when you wanted

to play she told you to go home and wash

your hands and your face and I was standing

by the door frowning because we were

going outside anyway but you said okay and went

across the street to wash your hands

and your face except you never came back

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Timothy I didn't see any dirt

Timothy your fingers didn't taste like dirt

when you stuck them in my mouth to pull out

my tooth and I was lonely at age six after that

day you didn't come back because your mother

who was all by herself took you away

maybe to wash your hands

and your face in the gutters of Detroit

Timothy do you remember the U.P.

Timothy do you remember me

Timothy we are in our twenties now

Timothy I am in Ann Arbor now

where no one can tell you you're dirty

because everyone is dirty

Timothy won't you come over to play

Quiet

Because you were quiet
I was quiet. Nothing
ever got said this way,
which was our first problem.
I'd keep thinking to crack
open my mouth, to chisel out

a gap from the chapped crease
between my two locked lips
(because I long ago had lost
the key) and blurt something
meaningful or something
meaningless. But I just couldn't.

We had a lot of problems,
us pretending to be one
thing when our eyes knew
we just weren't. When you were
quiet I was quiet.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

In silence we didn't talk
with our all-knowing eyes,
and after a while we stopped
talking with our hands
and our genitals, too. Between us
there were no sounds, especially
no music. You were quiet

so I was quiet. Now, away,
you want to talk. What could I have
to say to you now, mister? What?

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

my name

today i was asked twice for my name

first from a woman whose class i have attended for two months
i've spoken up but she hasn't known me

oh i must look awfully plain

second from a curious street man who wanted what's in my pockets
and he told me i was beautiful so beautiful and touched me

he was so polite

that evening i saw him popping change into a payphone

putting his earnings to that forgotten use

i couldn't look at him again

i'll never touch him again

maybe he was calling his daughter to apologize

god no no i don't fucking know

god what would you say if i told you you don't exist

god what would you say if i said i was sorry

even dying would be less painful

i have no crying toddler at my hip like i should

i have never seen so many leaves

Love Poem

It is silly to know what love means
even (and especially) when you are
fifty-three years old and you've been
married for thirty-five of those
and you have just the fullest heart.
I am twenty
and so unmarried
but I've got an idea or two
about love: first it means
falling—
slowly or quickly, it doesn't matter—
then it's expression,
which, as you can expect, means mostly
fucking. But then (and the oh sigh oh then of them all)
love is comfort,
which is growing lazier and fatter in less elastic skin
and getting marks that tell you you can't go back
to the days when your body was young and so stretchy
and white and soft. Love gets comfortable,
that's how you know you've made it. But see,
old people are not comfortable.
So what. So: we best love while we're young
and die in ways how would I know how.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Amanda Rutishauser

Amanda Rutishauser



Amanda is a senior at the University of Michigan majoring in English and Microbiology. She is part of the Creative Writing subconcentration for which she is writing a combined thesis in fiction and poetry. She drew inspiration for her work from Seamus Deane's exquisite novel "Reading in the Dark" and the inventive "M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A" by A. Van Jordan. After graduation she is planning to attend medical school and focus on primary care. Her hometown is Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Joe's

Sitting around at Joe's early one summer afternoon, Ferdie was going on about Quagmire Jones, the old crazy of Basin Street, who'd just knocked into Ferdie on his way over to Joe's. Quagmire was strange but, Oscar had told me, harmless, though Quag moved his legs like he was surprised to have them and his arms not at all. He shifted and swung about like a boat in an eddy and burst out with crazy things in a loud voice from time to time.

Oscar was polishing his cornet, Joe was wiping down the glasses and Ferdie, in his smart vest and brilliantine curls went on and on about it 'til Joe said he didn't want to hear anymore.

"Old Quag's got nothing to do with you," he said.

Ferdie shook his head more as if he hadn't heard than he disagreed— "I think he's a three letter man."

Joe stopped his wrist mid-wipe and said gruffly, "Morton, why do you always talk about things you know nothing about like you do?" And he went out the back door.

"What's a three letter man?" I asked.

"Your Uncle Joe," Oscar said, and winked at me. Ferdie gaped at Oscar but Oscar just looked at him and laughed. "Sure, sure, I know," he said.

Ferdie shook his head slowly, sucking his bottom lip. Then his face brightened and he held up one finger— wait— and went over to the piano and played Tony Jackson's "Pretty Baby" twice, real fast and real loud.

Hoodoo

New Orleans at that time
was surrounded by acres of cypress swamp,
that murky, mysterious jungle of twisting vines
and water creatures so small they
would burrow into your skin and wriggle
up into your body, snaking out your eyes weeks later.

I dared not step into the water, not even
dip in a toe or my little finger.

The people who lived in the swamp
were not so afraid of the water.

Goja Mama used to say when she was small
her mother dunked her in the water and held her
under until she took in a big gulp of the cypress swamp.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

In that gulp lived a worm
who grew up inside her, and now he sits fat and
happy in her stomach chewing up all the little

worms that disturb his sleep. She is not afraid to
drink the water because her big worm keeps her safe.

Goja Mama is Oscar's mother and he will not
let her dunk me in the water.

When he comes to get me
he checks in my mouth and nose while
she calls him a suspicious, no-good son and slaps him on the back.

Oscar once believed in Goja Mama's Voodoo, but now
he says that the trumpet is his religion. This makes her cry
in the morning until the swamp is salty with her tears.

Graves for Fireflies

My earliest memory
is of making graves for fireflies.
Poking my fingers into
the dark loam and dropping
them in, like dark grains of rice,
silent and so, so light.

Oscar came to where I was
sitting on the ground, making
graves for fireflies. He took
them from my hand, the little
dead ones I'd collected, took
them into his hands and blew
on them gently, pursing his lips,
smiling just a bit,
his eyes watching me,
and from between
his fingers I could see just
the slightest green glow
grow and then fade away.

Hush

The air is cold and blue
like the glistening caw
of a silver cornet
white sepulchers protrude
from wet grass that
slithers beneath your school shoes

Jumper is already ahead.

Earlier Joe caught him
trying to slip out a bottle
of bourbon in his trousers
so Joe took him up at the collar
Jumper's arms and legs twisting
his body snapping like an angry
crawfish.

It wasn't 'til later, as the band played slow, sad Bethena, that Joe realized he was missing a fifth of Tennessee whiskey.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Libation, Jumper says
emptying the bottle
at the base of a white tomb
the amber liquid splashing
on the creamy stone
then swirling away into
black dirt. It's almost gone
and Jumper takes one long pull—
grimaces—
says Louisiana Bourbon
would've been better.

With a charred stick
Jumper makes three, grimy X's
on the side of the stone,
tip of his tongue stuck
into the corner of his mouth.

Then he sits back on his haunches, moonlight brightening the
patches on his coat's shoulders, his face in shadow, like it's gone.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

This is the tomb of Marie Laveau.

You've seen a plaited
lock of soot black hair
resting on the altar
below Mama's bottle tree,
the altar surrounded
by round stones like skull caps

and you saw Oscar there,
once, long and long ago,
head bent low,
like Jumper's,
lips whispering,
like Jumper's,
his face smoothing out,
crossing into shadow.

You begin to feel something gathering into a spot on your cheek,
gently parted lips on your skin, a salty kiss as you're sleeping.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

Peering into the garden
from upstairs
in your sickbed,
the last night of the fever,
and you see Oscar
speaking with shadows,
then he lays himself
out on the ground
lacing his fingers
over his heart
and you breathe
 easy
the first time
in weeks, as if
you've grown a third lung.

It was Bethena that night too, you heard strains of it drift up
through the floor boards with shafts of light, strains of it coming
with the breeze through the window.

Oscar told you
Bethena's sad story,

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

old Joe's burning
behind him, holding
your hands, he said
a song written such as that,
written when a woman dies
is a song that wanders,
that never ends,
echoes along the river,
sorrow on the strains of the tune.

Planks from Joe's fall
into the river,
the fire squelched
with a long hiss,
by the muddy water.
A plume of gray smoke
rises from the water
like a benediction,
reaching out,
growing like a tree.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

You move off from where Jumper prays, into the gloom of
moonlight on marble, the slender downturned faces of angels
watching your every step.

So now you hear,
among the silent tombs,
from impossibly far away,
those sweet strains of Bethena,
as if its rising
from the ground
like dew,
from the water
like steam.

And you find yourself
looking up, into
the branches of a twisting
tree whose roots protrude
from the soil,
lifting the sepulcher adjacent
tipping it like a hat.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

The top stone has slid off, an inch not more. And the heaviness of the smell of decay is in the air, is up and through and under this tree.

You turn your face away
and run past
Jumper's praying shadow,
the whiskey running
in streams through the grass,
pooling in the places by his knees,
your soles slap
the cobbles of the street
as tears sting your eyes
and you feel the tree
rising and hissing,
like steam rising
from the river,
heat like a fever,
Bethena restless in the night.

Volition

We sat in the back of the church,
the Negro church on the edge of
the river, you sat with your head
bowed and I sat next to you.

It had always seemed to me
that you knew all about God.
That one day we'd walk into
the church and God would
ask what'd been keeping
you away, just as Joe always
would, polishing the counter
with a rag, never surprised to
see you but always glad.

Rain

It runs from the tips of the trees
in streams
into the streets
and overflows
into my shoes...

Welling up
from the hot places
where our ancestors
live, the sweat on their bodies,
steaming,
running in streams into
their eyes,
stinging,
running like the rain-
drops over my face.

Sorrow

And what I do not understand about sorrow is this:

How could a man bear to
put his fingers to the keys
under the eyes of so many unknown men,
unknown men requesting to hear Bethena,
beautiful, sweet Bethena?

How could he get up on the stage,
and play, a smile on his face,
when every note he played
hung in the air like sorrow?

Jessica Stokes

Jessica Stokes



I am a student of the Residential College at the University of Michigan. My goal is to cocreate and live on a commune in Colorado with my current roommate by 2017.

Entropy

The second law of thermodynamics says:

there are no sheets on my bed and there
ought not to be hair on

my head because I do
not have enough
energy to keep either
properly made.

Every day I work to keep my teeth from falling out
and my skin from wrinkling away but
Part of me has no desire to be an übermensch
Part of me loves dilapidated sofas and didactic
TVs and the idea of fading into them until there aren't any
parts of me at all and the couch and tv and bed are comfortably
put to rest in a landfill

Life

I had forgotten what it was to be tired.

I have been busy scheduling my sleep.

8 hours. The news says 8 hours.

I had forgotten what it was to be hungry.

I have been using food as an easy prop on

set as if I were as empty as Dexter Morgan.

Hobbies: I like eating and killing people.

I had forgotten what it was to be horny.

I have been busy scheduling my sex

as if I were married and didn't want

to be divorced.

I have been busy shoveling things into the void

like the skeleton whose drinks and chewed food

make Pollocks on the floor of his apartment.

Coloring

Six stuffed animals fell off your bed and
on my head this morning.

Trade rainbow bathrobe for

pink underwear

leopard leggings

rainbow socks

paint splatter bra

purple skirt

red shirt

tri-colored/patterned sweater and

the aapple

I'll eat when I start to "teach" My logic says the more
patterns and colors and aapples the better I'll be if I

take a stuffed animal as well But I have been staring at

"done" too long and now it

looks like "bone" and I am starting to think white horses are

not horses as squares are certainly rectangles

I want to look at each more but I look down...

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

not at them but the floor. I can't distinguish "oranges" from
"pears"

let alone

be there

or here

for them

for you

alright?

Trevor Andrew Weltman

Trevor Weltman



Trevor Andrew Weltman is from Huntington Woods, a quaint ‘city of homes’ in southeastern Michigan. While earning his bachelors in Asian Studies, Weltman works on fiction writing under the close instruction of Warren Jay Hecht. Weltman draws his literary inspiration from the lives and works of Fitzgerald, Zhuangzi, Warren and Maharaj.

Fearless In Memory

When Elana and I exited the freeway, there was a man standing on my side of the road (the passenger side) holding a sign. We noticed him as we pulled up to the red light. She asked me what the sign said, and I had to strain my eyes to read it; not only were we three lanes removed from where he was standing, but the words weren't terribly legible. I waited for a few cars to move out of the way.

"It says, 'Out Of Gas. Need Ride. Please.'" She and I looked at each other.

"Should we get him?"

I looked back to where he was standing. He was white, wearing a beige Carhart jacket and blue jeans. Although he wasn't homeless, he certainly looked rougher than the people she and I had grown up around. When I saw that his hands were pink I remembered my dad mentioning before he left for work that it was the coldest day of the year.

I wondered how far away his car was, and how long he'd been standing there with the sign. Two blocks and five minutes? A half mile and twenty? It was the kind of day where the layers of clothes you wore didn't matter. If you had exposed skin, the wind cut straight through it and chilled your entire body, beginning with the closest bones before ending in your teeth. I wanted to say yes to her. Yes, let's signal the man to climb in, and once he's in, we'll drive him to the nearest gas station then back to his car. And yes, Elana, it is the right thing to do. But I didn't. I couldn't resist the years of fear-mongering local news and Law and Order episodes from my youth, and instead looked at her helplessly as we started to pull away from the light. Truthfully, we were the kind of people who did like helping others: had he been elderly, or a child, or in need of water, or food, or anything, really—it's not like we even

had an appointment to keep. We were just on our way to buy me a second pair of boots on a whim because she'd heard there was a good sale at a store we both liked. I suppose there was something about inviting a stranger into her backseat—our private, secure place—that seemed wrong to us, frightening almost. Were we right in not picking him up? Justified? I guess I don't know, but whatever the case, her silence matched mine for the remaining few minutes of the ride, letting me know that she felt as awful as I did for leaving him there. I felt like a coward.

Anyway, we pulled into the parking lot of the strip mall and spent a little while searching for a spot. The mall is the kind of place you find everywhere in the suburbs, often across the street from another one exactly like it. Elana drove her green SUV expertly around people not watching where they were walking, and the mindless other drivers edging out from their parking spaces. I silently marveled—like I had so many times before—at how she, a tiny girl, maneuvered the massive car so well. She barely came up to my chin, yet she drove the 747 better than I could my own little car, and unfortunately I'd told her one night that I thought she was a finer driver than I was, something she sadly admitted to having known for a long time. Yeah, it hurt the confidence a little bit, but I didn't really let it get to me. Instead, I just did what I always did whenever she was doing something great: I marveled at her.

When we finally parked, I asked her why she didn't take the pull-through, and she just looked at me and rolled her eyes like she did every other time I asked her why she didn't take the pull-through. I hate backing out in crowded places, but she didn't seem to mind it at all. I liked that about our friendship; because we hung out so much, we often returned to scenarios that we'd been through innumerable times. Like parking. I know she saw the pull-through spot, and when she did, I also know that she knew I would have preferred she take it. But she didn't. Not to spite me, either; she did it out of preference, and for no other reason. She also knew that I was going to ask her why she didn't take the spot, and I knew

that, when I asked, she was only going to roll her eyes and not say anything. Okay, so maybe this isn't profound or life-changing or anything, but it was us. And that was profound to me. Like at the movies, when the previews would end, I'd always raise a pointed finger questioningly and ask out loud for the lights to be dimmed, and when they dimmed automatically like they were supposed to, I'd turn to see her shaking her head and smiling. "What?" I'd say, winking at her. "They love me here, you know that. They love me everywhere we go." I'd then lean in and rub my head on hers before she could retreat. Or, when she'd drive me home at the end of a long day of hanging out, I knew she'd scratch my shoulder before we ended our third hug goodbye, and she knew that I'd always do a little dance in front of her headlights before walking up the front porch to my door. And then there were restaurants—because we both had spent high school working as waitstaff at various places, we empathized deeply with those who served us. Of course, our sensitivities manifested in ways consistent with our different personalities. I, on the one hand, would be casual, a little obnoxious, and try to make the server laugh once or twice before leaving a big tip; she, on the other, was always super polite and quiet, and organized the plates when we were done eating so they could be cleared easier, all before leaving an equally large tip. We were almost predictable, at least to each other, and there was something secure about it. Sometimes, too, I'd even play it up, like I'd do something because she expected me to, just so she could feel that specialness one feels when they know somebody else so thoroughly. But that's not to say our days were not dynamic. Occasionally I would step out of these routines and surprise her with something, like a new idea or book or place to go, or her me, and sometimes she'd make a comment out of the blue that made me realize just how deep she really was.

I was thinking all of this when we walked through the sliding glass doors of the department store. Elana and I both had three loves in life: movies, food, and clothes (four, if you include travel). Yet, since we were still in college, we had established a sort

of unspoken hierarchy for how we'd spend our money. Traveling, of course, was the most expensive, and so we traveled only sparingly, and even then only with the help of our folks. Movies could be rented and therefore weren't much of an overhead (unless she returned them late, which she did almost every time). And between food and clothes, our preference was clear. Elana and I liked to eat, a lot, and I think it's safe to say that the only thing we liked more than eating was eating with each other. We'd search food magazines and the internet for new recipes to sample at one of our houses, and we both skimmed the newspaper reviews whenever they came out for recently opened restaurants or a new dish at one where we'd previously dined. Initially, our parents weren't happy with the Visa bills they got every month, but there wasn't much that they could do about it. She and I were both winning all sorts of awards and scholarships away at university, and every time she'd get a new community service award I'd gladly make the drive to her school and take her out to "celebrate." And she'd do the same for me and my writing awards. How could they argue with that? In an attempt to lower the costs (I won't even share how high they got), I stopped buying expensive clothes. That isn't to say, however, that I'd ever really spent a lot of money on clothes to begin with. But you wouldn't have known that by looking at me. I had a clotheshorse of an uncle who lived in New York, and because he was single and the same size as my brother and I, he'd send us his lightly worn suits and jeans and dress shirts. Every couple of weeks my brother and I would laugh over the phone (he lived in San Francisco then) when we'd open up packages filled with Ralph Lauren suits and Prada peacoats. Uncle enjoyed spoiling us. "You guys are already superstars," he'd say. "I just help you look the part." Nevertheless, there were still times when I needed to go shopping, and when I did, outlet stores like the one we'd just walked into more than suited my purposes. Elana, however, still liked to spend. I'd make fun of her so hard when, on the phone at night, she'd tell me that she *needed* a new purse or skirt or whatever. Coming from a girl who, when I met her in high school,

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

told me that she got ready in the morning for class by pulling all of her clothes out of her bureau and then, in her words, started “digging” for an outfit, I had no choice but to call her out. *Needed*, for Christ’s sake; the girl had four closets! She was opulent, all right. And around her I could be opulent, too, and I liked—no, loved—every minute of it.

Our other friends questioned our involvement as soon as we stopped arriving places by ourselves. “Friends?” they’d ask. “You guys are just *friends*?” Outside of people being nosy and just assuming that any guy and girl hanging out meant sex, I suppose on some level beyond simple anatomy she and I were to blame for their disbelief. After meeting each other my senior year (her junior), we were seldom parted. Everywhere I went she came with me, and when her work friends had a party, it came to be that I was included in their head count. This went for family events, too. Also, we were able to get homework done while hanging out; for us, two people who preferred to do things mostly by ourselves to begin with, this was a rare find. It was hard justifying this to our friends, as they had spent years putting up with our independent studying habits. When they’d see us sitting together in the library or at a coffee shop, they never perceived it as us just trying to get work done. They felt excluded, like we didn’t want them around or something. And it didn’t matter what we told them; nobody believed that we were just friends. So I stopped discussing it with other people. That was, until I stopped believing we were just friends myself.

Elana pulled on the back of my jacket. I slipped it off, one arm at a time, and as soon as the second arm came out and we were facing each other, she put up her hand to silently ask for my wallet. I took it out and handed it over and crinkled my nose at her before we parted for our separate areas of the store.

On my way to the shoes, I was reminded of a conversation that I’d had about her with my friend Ryan a year or so before.

Ryan was an older boy who had mentored me during my younger years on the high school soccer team. We were sitting next to each other on the edge of his bed playing a video game when he told me that Elana and I were going to get married someday. I laughed nervously and asked why he was so sure; after all, I had only just mentioned her to him for the first time. It was his turn to laugh. “Dude,” he said, “You were the biggest ladies man at KHS. I was two years ahead of you when I was there and still couldn’t lay half as many girls as you were. Hell, you laid every pretty girl in your grade and above—it was inspiring, really. Listen here, man,” he continued, maintaining an even tone while smacking aggressively on the buttons of the controller in his hands. “Over the last four years I’ve heard you talk a lot about a lot of different girls, but I’ve *never* heard you talk about any of them the way you just spoke about Elana. Hear me now, dude, you’re going to marry that girl. I can promise you that.” I didn’t understand how he could infer marriage from such a brief story about her and I getting lost on the way to her cousin’s house for dinner. He laughed again. “Not only are you going to marry her, I didn’t realize it before but you’re already in love with her, too. Aren’t you, buddy?” He nudged me on my shoulder with his. I shook my head and shut my mouth, and continued losing to him in silence.

I was angry. I looked up to Ryan. He was the one that taught me about Led Zeppelin and mushrooms and playing soccer high. Around Ryan it was cool for me to be smart, and together he and I talked ceaselessly about history; he helped me feel comfortable with myself at a time when I was comfortable with almost nothing, and I had learned so much from him over the years that I at least considered everything he said. But this time I was angry. I was angry that he had figured it out after hearing so little. He didn’t even know about any of the small things, like her always holding my jacket and wallet when we went shopping, because I had a tendency to leave them places when I tried on a new shirt or jeans; or her tucking her feet under my legs when we sat together on a couch, because she never wore socks and they were often cold;

or how I'd take breaks from my own work to grab whatever she was lost in and read it aloud to her for a few pages, not out of academic interest, but because I knew how much she enjoyed being read to. And he didn't know that, when I'd read out loud to her, she'd let her body drift down to the closest pillow and place her hands beneath her cheek. He also didn't know that the corners of her closed eyes were the only part of her that remained outwardly expressive, and that I'd watch them react to my voice and smile when I could get them to emote something. Elana and I actively tried to make each other's lives more pleasurable, and sometimes we went far out of our way to do so. Although mostly we did it without thinking. There was nobody else—not even my own mother—who I cared to do such things for. And with Elana, it never once felt like a chore. It was more like breathing; I did it because that's what one does, unquestioningly.

I was fumbling my way through the nine-and-a-halves when a man speaking loudly on his cellphone bumped into me. I turned to watch him pass, and he looked over the shoulder where his headset was and gave me a semi-apologetic wave with the hand holding his keys. I was annoyed until I saw the little boy traveling in his wake. The kid was wearing kakhis and a white button up shirt beneath a grey sweater-vest. He was adorable; he even had on black square-toed leather shoes. I gave him a little wave and a smile. He smiled back, mischievously, before retreating behind his father's legs. It was from there where he spent the next few minutes playing peek-a-boo with me.

Elana arrived on my other side and asked if I'd found anything of interest. I put my finger up to my lips to tell her to be quiet, and exaggerated my point to the little boy so he would see me do it. His face lit up when he saw her, and he buried it further into his dad's thigh. She beamed. I take back what I said before. There *was* something that Elana and I loved more than food: children. She bent over and placed her hands on her knees. "Hi there," she said to him, the zippers on her purse jingling as it slid

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

down to her wrist. “Whose that you’re hiding behind? Is that your daddy?” The little boy let out a cry of delight, and his dad, who was still talking on the phone, turned to yell at him to be quiet before seeing us looking at them. He instead put on a fake smile and hurriedly ushered the boy into a different aisle. She and I looked at each other and laughed with our eyes.

I told her that I hadn’t found anything that I liked yet. She said that the bags and jackets were no better, and I agreed with her guess that the holiday shoppers had already finished picking through the best of it. I pulled a light beige slip-on off the shelf for her approval, and following her look I put it back immediately. Not soon after I saw a boot that I really liked. When she laughed and told me that it was similar to a pair I’d owned before, I protested and told her to take a second look, and held it out for her to see.

“No, *you* look.” She snatched it from my hand and held it up in front of my nose with both of hers. She explained to me that the only difference between this new one and my old pair was the stitching. On my old pair, she said, the stitching blended in, whereas on the new one it stood out. Before I could interject, she preempted me by saying that they were *technically* different, but not enough, in her opinion, to warrant buying them a second time.

We stood in silent argument before one another. I didn’t care if I’d already owned them once; I wanted to buy the damn boot, and she knew why, too. Shirts, shorts, jackets, hats—if the stitching showed, I’d buy it. My brother and uncle were the same.

She sighed in concession. “You Ericksen men and your outside stitching. You know what? Do what you want. I just can’t believe you’re about to spend seventy bucks on a pair of shoes that you’ve already owned.”

I signaled for the clerk to bring out its mate. And when he did, Elana bent down and took it out of the box and laced it up

while I removed my shoes and put the other one on. They fit perfectly. She put them back in the box while I thanked him for helping us, and together we made our way to the checkout line.

Another friend of mine named Alex had told me a few days before how he felt around a girl he'd recently fallen in love with. He used words like "magical" and "cinemagraphic" and "fortuitous". Alex was the kind of guy who fell in love a lot, and as one of his best friends I knew that nothing I said about this new girl mattered to him. It was my job to just sit there and listen, at least for the first few weeks, anyway. At the end of his gushing, he asked me if I'd ever heard a more perfect story of love. Before I realized what I'd said I told him no, but that I was living a different kind of perfect story myself. He asked me what the hell that meant. Honestly, I was curious, too. So I continued.

"I don't know, Al, it's like, Elana and I just click. But I don't think we ever fell in love, though. Like, when we first met it wasn't like a lightening bolt of 'oh my god I want to be with this girl.' I've been in those situations before." He grunted in remembrance when I listed a few of their names. "And look at how all of those wound up? Bad. Even the more organic ones that required no games in the beginning still went only from good to worse. But with Elana, it's just always been effortless. I never *fell*, per se. Instead, it feels like we've sort of just grown more perfectly together." What I didn't tell him was that she and I had slept together the night before, and had been off-and-on for the past month. I was surprised to find that it didn't change anything. When we hooked up the first time, we just laid together after laughing and chatting like we always did, the only difference being we were in my bed without our clothes on. The lack of change unsettled me. Was it testament to the strength of our friendship, or perhaps something deeper? I didn't want to make her feel like the other girls I was seeing, and I also didn't want to feel the same way about her as I did them. So I never approached a day of her and I hanging out with the idea of sex in mind, and instead would wait

for her to come on to me. But what did it all mean? Although I wanted to talk about it with someone, I didn't discuss it with him. He was already unimpressed. And because he was poor at arguing and really only wanted to talk about himself, he told me that I shouldn't put so much trust in a concept that sounded like I'd read about it in a book. He then went on to describe to me the curvature of his new girlfriend's nose. "It's simply angelic," he said, with authority. I laughed and let him talk. How was a guy like him supposed to understand how I felt about her? How was anyone supposed to understand?

The line at the store wasn't very long, and when the girl at the checkout desk asked me cash or credit, I told her credit and she motioned to the little counter screen to swipe it myself. I reached into my pocket for my wallet, and my heart stopped briefly before I remembered giving it to Elana. She was halfway done paying for the boots with her own card by the time I was ready to ask for it back.

I played my part and didn't say anything. At that point, I knew there was nothing I could do to talk her out of it. So I wrapped my scarf around my neck while she finished up, and when she was done putting everything back into her purse, she handed me my wallet and the bag. I followed her through the glass doors and out into the parking lot, where I walked behind her in silence for a few steps before wrapping her in a massive bear hug from the back. I pushed myself up against her and held on tight and walked us in the direction of her car.

"Stop it!" she screamed, lightly resisting and laughing between my rapid-fire cheek kisses and "thank-you-Elana"s. "People are looking at us!"

When we arrived at her car door, I made faces at her in our reflection on the window until she laughed. I then turned her around and gave her a proper hug. I said thank you again, drawing

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

out the last syllable of her name like a child. I asked her why she bought me the shoes and not a new car.

“You ungrateful fuck!” she said, leaning back and hitting me on the chest. I still didn’t let her go. I was actually curious why she bought them for me.

A smile danced in her eyes. “You *did* just take second place in that essay contest, didn’t you?”

I laughed at the obviousness of it and was surprised that I hadn’t figured it out earlier. I pulled her in closer for another hug, and held on longer than I had originally planned. I wanted to tell her right then and there—in the parking lot of an outlet store!—how much I loved her, that every minute I spent with her was exactly how I wanted the rest of my life to be. That, when she was happy, I was happy, and when I knew she was happy because of something I’d done for her, I felt like I’d been part of something grand. And that the opposite was true, too. When she was upset about something, she needed to know my life wasn’t okay until I knew what the problem was and how to help her get through or fix it. That, even though I had no real idea about what I wanted to do with my life, she was the only constant I saw remaining in it five, ten—even twenty—years down the line. But I didn’t say anything. Nothing at all. I didn’t want to risk the comfort we’d so effortlessly established. I didn’t know what a relationship had in store for us, how she’d act as my girlfriend, or I as her boyfriend. I naively thought that things would remain perfect if we just left them be, that if something was supposed to happen between us it would eventually come of its own accord. I gave her a final squeeze before letting go and walking to the other side of the car and climbing in.

She cut across the middle of the lot until we were again on the road, and before getting back on the expressway we both looked to see if the man with the sign had gotten picked up. I was unable to spot him as she accelerated up the ramp, and although I was sad

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

we didn't get a second chance to help him, I was happy that he'd found a ride, that somebody else was less of a coward than I was and bolder, too, bold enough to take a chance and better a life.

We drove in silence for the rest of the ride. In front of my house I took off my seatbelt and gave her a hug goodbye. When we came apart she said something about wanting to see a movie after dinner. I agreed, and during our second hug I reminded her to return the one we'd watched the night before. She smiled and said she already had, which I told her was bullshit, and we laughed before hugging the third and final time. She scratched my shoulder as I thanked her for the boots, and I climbed out of the car and shook my hips in front of the headlights for a few seconds before walking to the door. I didn't watch her leave when she drove away. I wish now that I had.

Peter Yi

Peter Yi



Peter was born in Changsha, China and immigrated to the United States with his parents when he was 5 years old. His fondest childhood memories were riding on a bike through the corn fields outside of St. Paul, Minnesota and being enamored with the lights, sounds, and smells of the annual Minnesota State Fair. Since then, he has lived with his family in five other states. He considers New England to be his current home and feels attached to living life by the great Atlantic. Since coming to Michigan it has been the longest period of time he has been away from the ocean and although he loves Ann Arbor, he hopes to return to living life by the sea soon - possibly in New York City or San Francisco.

These following poems are based off of vague stories that my grandfather tells me about leaving his home for the city to find work during the great leap forward. The Great Leap Forward was a time period from 1958 to 1963 in China, when Chairman Mao attempted a new economic program to rapidly raise industrial production. The government set up giant worker communes that

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

focused on industrial production. Farmers left their fields to work at steel factories. However, because of disrupted market mechanisms, lowered agricultural production, and poor planning, the Great Leap Forward resulted in an excess of unusable goods and a mass starvation of the people.

Changsha, China, June 14th, 1958

Last night I dreamt of a springtime shower

Droplets drizzle from the sky onto thirsty brown terracotta tiles

Drip, Drip, Pour

The previously serene courtyard dances into life

With cackling chickens and tumbling geese

Ducking for cover

I run into the house

My house...

And wake to a very different torrent

A torrent of heat

Yellow with mud. The air, caked with a layer of sweaty

Dust. The dust of dirt

Under my fingernails

The only thing I have left from home

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

The dust of coal

Slumped over my shoulders

Two cents a pound

The dust

Of the memories

Of home

Which lingers in the air longer than I can bear

Before being blown away again by a lifeless breeze

And still I push forward

If not only to hear the

Drip, Drip, Pour

One more time

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

July 3rd, 1958

Last night I found myself lost in a rice field
Its youth betrayed by still tender blades
Yearning for the silky glow of the moon above
Which does not return such devoted affection
Instead searching in vain for its own reflection
In a pond nearby

Which I recognize, from when
My father used to take me fishing
I stand up
And walk toward its waters
Feet cushioned by sleeping grass
Once reaching the edge
I reel back, startled
The pond has been sucked completely dry
The last drop of its water
I had carried off in a bucket
To the steel mill
To calm the scorching thirst of the twisting metal
After its bath in the blast furnace

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

And I did not know to whom to apologize to

For the pond could no longer hear my words

Perhaps my childhood memories?

Whom seem to be in a daze

Still

Unable to believe what it had just seen.

Why I Count

My grandmother taught me how to count when I was seven. She taught me to count my steps as we walked from our house to the market every day, wheeling along our wagon of eggs and vegetables. She would lead and I would follow. *One. One. Two. Two. Three. Three.* And so on. On dry days each count was followed by a thud and a cloud of dust. On wet days each count was followed by a splash and a spray of rainwater. But that was a long time ago and today I still count. I've counted eight hundred and sixty three days since we buried my grandmother. I've counted one hundred and six days since I last saw home.

Now when I count I have my own habits. Sometimes I count in my head. Sometimes I count out loud. Sometimes I count as if I am spitting. Sometimes I count while I am spitting. Spit and breath and sweat fly out one burst at a time. Soon I run out of liquid spit. Then I am just spitting breath and sweat. Soon I run out of breath. Then I am just spitting sweat. I never stop sweating. Sweat swarms on my skin like flies swarm on a dead animal. Sweat forms above my lips and below my lips. I can never escape the taste of own fatigue. It always tastes salty. So I spit it out. That is why I like to count out loud.

Sometimes I count slowly. Sometimes I count fast. If I count slowly I walk slowly. If I count fast I walk fast. If I walk slowly I am gasping for breath. If I walk fast I am dying from lack of breath. But walking fast means saving time. Time is *everything*. Time means that extra dime at the end of the day. That adds up to thirty dimes every month which is three hundred pennies which can buy me two extra cups of rice and save ten extra dimes for my mother and sister back home. Two extra cups of rice gives me more energy to walk fast. But when I walk fast I am *dying* from lack of breath. There is no way for me to win. It is a vicious cycle.

Café Shapiro Anthology 2010

When I count I have a goal to reach: one hundred times one hundred – that is ten thousand steps total. Ten thousand is the number of steps it takes for me to carry coal into the city. When I have filled up my baskets with coal, and slung it over my shoulders, and take that first step, I am ready to count. If I count to one hundred, I only have nine thousand nine hundred steps left to take. If I count to one thousand, I only have nine thousand steps left to take. Sometimes I start over to fool myself that I still have ten thousand steps left to take, when really, I have eight thousand steps left. Then, I am surprised when I reach the city when I have only counted to eight thousand. And when I have reached whatever number I needed to have reached – whether it is ten thousand or eight thousand or the occasional one thousand – I turn the opposite direction and start walking back – all ten thousand steps – with empty baskets. On the walks back, I *never* count.

