

*Not too cool for ya:
N. West Moss, Rosaleen Bertolino, Rob Plath,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

September 2013

MAGAZINE



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"Old School"

Each morning I wake, wash up, and pull on my walking shoes. There are many things I must do, like getting my girls up, feeding them and getting them off to school. I also walk, because it is a pretty good exercise and it helps me be as healthy as I can be. I walk for thirty minutes every morning. I know, that's not a lot of time to spend. I used to walk for an hour on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Three hours a week instead of five half-hours a week. Wait a minute, you say. You're walking less now. Ah, but here's the thing – when I wasn't walking every day I would sometimes skip a Monday or a Friday. Walking a reasonable (to me) amount of time every day has clinched this as a habit I can afford to stick to.

So it is with writing. Like exercise, it is also an every day thing. Not *everyday*, as in ordinary, dull or mundane, but something I am driven to do each day because I want to improve. As walking improves my health, so does writing each day improve my...writing. It occurs to me that I have been writing for nearly forty years. My goodness. I write stories. I write poems. I write essays. I write novels. Editorials. Lyrics. Haiku. Letters. Journal entries. I am working on a libretto for an operetta. Everything that comes into my head that demands that I put it down on paper, I do so. Every day. I have a writer friend who tells me that I need to focus on one thing. I've let her know that this is as focused as I am able to get. I write. It's what I do.

Like most other intellectual motor skills, **writing is a discipline**. Something that requires your attention. I find that the best way to approach it is in the same way I would a new sport. I would first get the appropriate equipment. Say I wanted to move up from walking every morning to bicycling. Although I might not go and purchase a brand new Diamondback road bike, all \$4000 worth, (and the lycra shorts and jerseys and Shimano clip-on shoes), I might find an OK used bike and pick out a sweatshirt to be my motivation. As in, *when I put on that sweatshirt, it's cycling time*. I might get a good helmet – something I shouldn't buy used. And then I'd get out on the road.

The same things apply with writing. **If you want to be a writer, you have to write**. What tools work best for you? Are you a person who can sit down in front of a laptop and tippy-tap away at the keyboard without playing a video game or searching for Taylor Swift songs on YouTube? Or do you need to get away from it all, just for a while, with a pencil and one of those yellow tablets of lined paper? Either way, make it something you can return to each day.

Don't know where to begin? Try keeping a journal. Go to the

store and get yourself a composition book and a box of good pencils. I like writing free-hand as much as I like typing, and it's fun to be able to take your work outside and just scribble. Or sit in a coffee shop and just scribble. Or up in a tree, or in the back seat of a car, or anywhere. Journaling is writing to yourself, like in a diary, without the old fashioned and rigid idea that it must be a list of things that happened that day (unless, of course, that is what you want it to be.) Journaling can be about whatever you want. To get in the journaling groove, I suggest that you follow a simple plan: each daily entry write about one thing. One thing. Something that happened that day, or something you saw on TV or read in the news. Something that happened a long time ago that you've been thinking about. Let the journal be the place you can unload your thoughts, where you can rant, where you can try your hand at verse, where you can be a comedian. Can you gossip in your journal? You bet. Of course, you'll want to keep your work in a safe place. Just remember, in a journal you're the audience. Entertain yourself!

When to do your writing is up to you. Mornings are good. Or afternoons. Or just before you go to bed. Whatever works best. Try different times of day at first – see where you're most productive. Words are like energy – you have to turn them on and make them flow. I'm a night-writer myself – when things are a bit quieter in my house and I can listen to music on headphones and just type. Stephen King prefers mornings and complete, uninterrupted privacy. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) liked to work all day in a building he had constructed away from his house that overlooked the Connecticut countryside, a place where he could sit and scribble and smoke cigars and just think.

Make it a personal requirement to write in your journal every day. One of our featured authors has made it the subject of her blog for this year - to write a novel in a year. If you can keep that commitment, then set a second goal – to write a paragraph each day. One topic sentence and the supporting sentences for that topic. "Cheese is good. I've been told that cheese has protein in it and we need protein to grow big and strong. Cheese also helps keep hamburgers from becoming boring. It can be formed in easy-to-tote sticks that fit in a lunch box and may be shared with friends and enemies alike. No one ever went to war over cheese. It cannot be proven that Beethoven didn't write his Fifth Symphony while eating Roquefort cheese." There. A simple paragraph.

Later on, do what professional writers do. Set a daily word-goal for yourself. 250 words is one page, double-spaced. A reasonable goal. How good a goal is it? If you write 250 words a day, in a year you have 350 pages. If you stick to one subject, you have a book. One plot,

Continued on page 15

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CAUTION

May no fate willfully misunderstand me And half grant what I wish...

"An Apple in the Dirt"

by N. West Moss

Even in first grade the boys suspected what they couldn't yet explain – that Cindy Mangiano would become sexy. They knew it like they knew Santa Claus was probably a lie. Cindy's long, dirty blond hair, her tiny waist, made her compelling in ways that later would reveal themselves as feminine, as sexually alluring. We were all, male and female, mesmerized ahead of ourselves, ahead of time, by her.

Cindy played with her food, nibbling the crusts of her sandwiches and throwing the rest away into the garbage without looking. She twirled her hair around her finger and looked out the window as though she didn't care when Mrs. Lederman asked her a question. She seemed always on the verge of a tantrum that we all lined up to quell, her lips pouting out. We wanted her to like us, to be

included in her plans on the playground, to be in on her jokes, even the mean ones, especially the mean ones. If only she would lean over and whisper in my ear in front of the other kids. Of the many things that I didn't understand then, her power was one. I didn't know that beauty could make us forget ourselves. Any one of us would have been happy to be disregarded by her, if it meant we'd be allowed to float in her orbit.

That year she was my friend, although a few years later in fourth grade, she and LeeLee Dodecker would form a triangle with me that left me crushed and giving them both the finger impotently from inside my mittens. But in first grade, Cindy Mangiano was my friend and she got permission from her mother to ride home with me on the school bus one cool October afternoon.

When we got there, the maple trees were glowing orange in the cloudy after-school light. It was chilly enough for a sweater but not for a coat, and the wind was whipping up the leaves that my older brothers had raked into piles. The plumes of swirling red foliage and the darkening cold October sky made us feel raucous and powerful, as though we could shake the mountains.

My mother gave us two light-weight spaghetti pots, and we ran outside with them, wearing them on our heads like hats, our static-filled hair fluttering beneath the rims. We zoomed around the yard with our arms out like two crazy airplanes until we fell into the leaves, our spaghetti pots tumbling onto the ground next to us.

Lying there, breathless, with our backs pressed against the cooling earth, we laughed for no reason and with abandon.

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The wind and sky swallowed up the sound we made, so that we could howl our laughter without anyone saying we were too loud or silly or annoying or little. We lay together, like two little apples, red-cheeked, our laughter subsiding, smiling into the sky, firmly rooted in the center of our own universe.

It's the happiest I have ever been.

Cindy remained popular right through high school. She kept a round brush in the back pocket of her tight jeans and fixed her hair constantly. She had a flat stomach and round C-cup breasts, and she wore Bonnie Bell lip-gloss so that her mouth was an ever-shiny, Coca-Cola-smelling invitation.

We were friends when she chose to be, and she told me in ninth grade about the guy on the football team who liked her. He was cute, she said, but I already knew who he was. He wanted to have sex with her, had slid his hand inside her underwear out by the river at a keg party one night. She was detached about it,

just a journalist reporting back from the land of the sexually active. "Do you think he's cute?" she asked me, looking over my shoulder at someone else, someone more important. I shrugged, presumably unseen.

Years after high school I heard that something had happened to Cindy. The details were vague. It was the kind of story that got passed from person to person, the kind that no one bothered to check for accuracy. She had been living with a boyfriend, I was told, in an apartment over an auto body shop, and had suffered some kind of minor brain damage from carbon monoxide poisoning. She couldn't take care of herself after that, had to move in with her mother, probably would have to stay there forever. She was not whole exactly, not who she had once promised to become, anyway.

I've tried to recapture the way I felt under the swirling leaves back in first grade, although now it seems it was a

dream, half longed for, half dreaded. It has become ominous like the sound of far-off thunder. But when the sky gets cold and orange, when the wind feels like laughter, I feel a bottomless longing to be there again. I want to fill my hair with cool autumn wind. I want to lie in the leaves with a friend who I promise, cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die, will become beautiful one day, a friend the world can't ruin. I want to laugh up into the sky's mouth like a little apple in the dirt - the entire universe shouting right back down onto me that for once, for now, I am where I am supposed to be.



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"Mice"

by Rosaleen Bertolino

Panner's wife had fallen in love with a woman, the tall Austrian who owned the new beer garden in town. "I never thought I would ever feel this way," said Ivette, after she had asked him to sit down. "I never have before." Panner, a dark sturdy man with a stoic temperament, a pizza-maker whose hands were strong, skilled, and often gentle, did not have it in him to shout at a tearful woman.

He tried to understand how she felt. A faded memory came of a voluptuous teacher in high school whose warm scent, when she bent over his desk, made him ache painfully in ways that he had been certain could be soothed only by declaring his feelings. But the desire had been unrequited, and thus was not the same.

"I can change," Panner told his wife. "I can do better. I'll put my socks in the hamper from now on."

Ivette shook her red curls at his attempted joke and said, "This isn't anything to do with you, Panner;" her words stabbing him in the heart, because if it was his fault, then he could try to fix it, and her telling him this made that impossible.

"Oh god, Panner," Ivette said, "I don't mean to hurt you."

Panner would have preferred it if she had.

After she'd driven away, her Volvo wagon packed with two suitcases and a trunk and three cardboard boxes, Panner noticed

that the kitchen looked exactly the same as it had yesterday except that there were dirty dishes in the sink. He resented that his wife hadn't bothered to finish loading the dishwasher one last time. Then he considered that perhaps it was a sign that she intended to return to him once her infatuation passed, that her absence was only temporary and would not last long.

Hopeful, he walked into the bedroom, where her dresser drawers hung open and completely empty, and his fist plunged of its own accord straight into the wall, the sheetrock collapsing into a mouth-shaped hole, powdering his knuckles.

They had been married seven years, exactly one year longer

Best In Show



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by Phil Julianio

than he'd owned the pizzeria. Their bed was neatly made, the patchwork quilt of pink and green (which his wife had made herself) smooth and tight over the blankets. In this bed, night after night and sometimes during the day, his wife had cried out with pleasure. Panner wondered who Ivette had been thinking of all that time. He went to bed on the couch.

In the morning, he drank a pot of bitter black coffee, drove to the shop, unlocked the two deadbolts, and went to work. His hands did not need his brain to tell them what to do: they mixed the dough, rolled out the pizza crusts, brushed on the sauce, sprinkled on the cheese, slid the pies into and out of the immense roaring oven as they had six days a week for the past six years.

The man who owned the QuickWash next door limped over in the afternoon after he'd emptied the quarters from all the machines. He stood in the

doorway at a slight slant due to his artificial leg. "I'm sorry about your wife," he said.

Panner did not ask what or how he'd heard so quickly; it was a small town after all. "Me, too," he said.

"Buy you a beer?"

Panner imagined Ivette and the Austrian toasting each other with tall steins of Pilsner. "No. Thanks," he said.

"Women are bitches," Mr. Quickwash said, his face hardening.

Panner returned his attention to the dough in order to avoid continuing the conversation. He had no desire to join that club of men who spend their days ensuring that their broken hearts remain broken. Mr. Quickwash had been divorced forever. Panner would not allow himself to be angry at his wife for unearthing something she'd kept buried for so long, probably even

from herself. He blamed the Austrian going after a married woman, but he could not blame her in the way he would have a man, whom he could have challenged to a fistfight. And perhaps the Austrian had not gone after his wife at all; perhaps his wife had gone after her.

He did not leave town or hide in his house. He went to work as he always had because he did not know what else to do. He was unaware that he no longer smiled, not even falsely, nor did he chat with his customers as he had formerly. The small talk that had once spilled out of him so effortlessly had dried up because what he really wanted to ask his customers, and couldn't, was



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"Do you think she'll come back to me?" He had been certain that he and Ivette would grow old together. She had been distant at times, but it had seemed to him that was how she was made; reserved, private.

Up until now, he'd thought of himself as lucky, a man with two loves in his life; Ivette and Lisa's Pizzeria, named after his deceased mother, whose remaining savings had made his dream of a restaurant come true. How he'd struggled—the learning curve with the dough, the disastrous first oven, the unsteady cash flow, long hours as chef, waiter, marketing manager, bookkeeper, dishwasher, and janitor. But hard work and perseverance had carried him through, that and Ivette, who'd encouraged him, even when he came home only a few hours to sleep.

How thrilled he'd been the first

time he'd made a perfect pizza; the thin, chewy crust and the cheese and the film of tomato sauce melded together into a single thing, like a marriage, all in balance and heavenly in the mouth. He and Ivette had been like that, or so he'd thought one incomplete without the other.

It occurred to him now that his wife had suffered from his devotion to the pizzeria, that this devotion had felt to her like neglect, and resulted in her seeking companionship elsewhere. Of course. He would call and apologize, the sooner the better.

It was late morning, a quiet time, the rounds of dough swelling along the counter. Ivette, a nurse who worked day shifts at the hospital, rarely picked up her cell phone right away, but this time she answered on the first ring. That in itself shook Panner—the fact that he no longer

knew her work schedule, or even if she was working.

"Panner," she said, her voice cautious.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Okay."

He noted that she did not ask how he was, and tucked away his resentment in order to go ahead and say what he'd planned to say, but his shaking voice ruined everything.

"Ivette. I spent too much time at work and not enough with you. I sincerely regret that."

"It's okay, Panner."

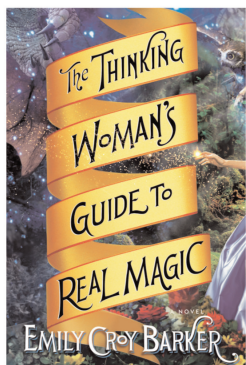
"I blame myself."

"No need, dear," said Ivette. "Please." She made the little smacking noise that was her way of blowing a kiss over the phone, and disconnected him. It felt like a slap.

Panner forced himself to return his attention to work, to begin preparing the sauce—the pureed tomatoes, the garlic, the olive oil; but he burned the garlic and had to begin again, distracted by thoughts that Ivette was punishing him, a punishment that he must endure because it might be the penance that would win her back.

BULL SPEC

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GUIDE TO LOCAL EVENTS

AUGUST 29 (Thu) Flyleaf Books hosts **Richard Kadrey** for the latest in his Sandman Slim series, *Kill City Blues*. 7 pm.

SEPTEMBER 4 (Wed) Quail Ridge Books hosts **Susan Cooper**, the Newbury Medal winning author of *The Dark is Rising*, for her new book *Ghost Hawk*. 7 pm.

SEPTEMBER 18 (Wed) The Regulator Bookshop hosts **Emily Croft Barker** for *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic*. 7 pm.

SEPTEMBER 27 (Fri) Flyleaf Books hosts **Robin Sloan** for *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*. 7 pm.

OCTOBER 2 (Wed) Flyleaf Books hosts **Steven Brust**, the author of the Vlad Taltos series, for his new novel *The Incrementalists*. 7 pm.

The pizzeria and Panner's house were at the very edge of town, and the beer garden was in the very center, and thus it was three weeks before Panner ran into either Ivette or the Austrian, and when he did, as he left the post office with a roll of stamps, he saw them together, strolling into the beer garden arm in arm. The Austrian's long, severe face wasn't pretty but had a brightness that came, perhaps, from her short, platinum hair, or perhaps from stealing his wife. She was the opposite of Panner in every way: light instead of dark, thin instead of solid, breasts instead of beard.

They did not appear to see him, and Panner was stunned at how quickly he had gone from being a husband to someone to leave to no one at all. No one. Impossible to be rejected more completely than this.

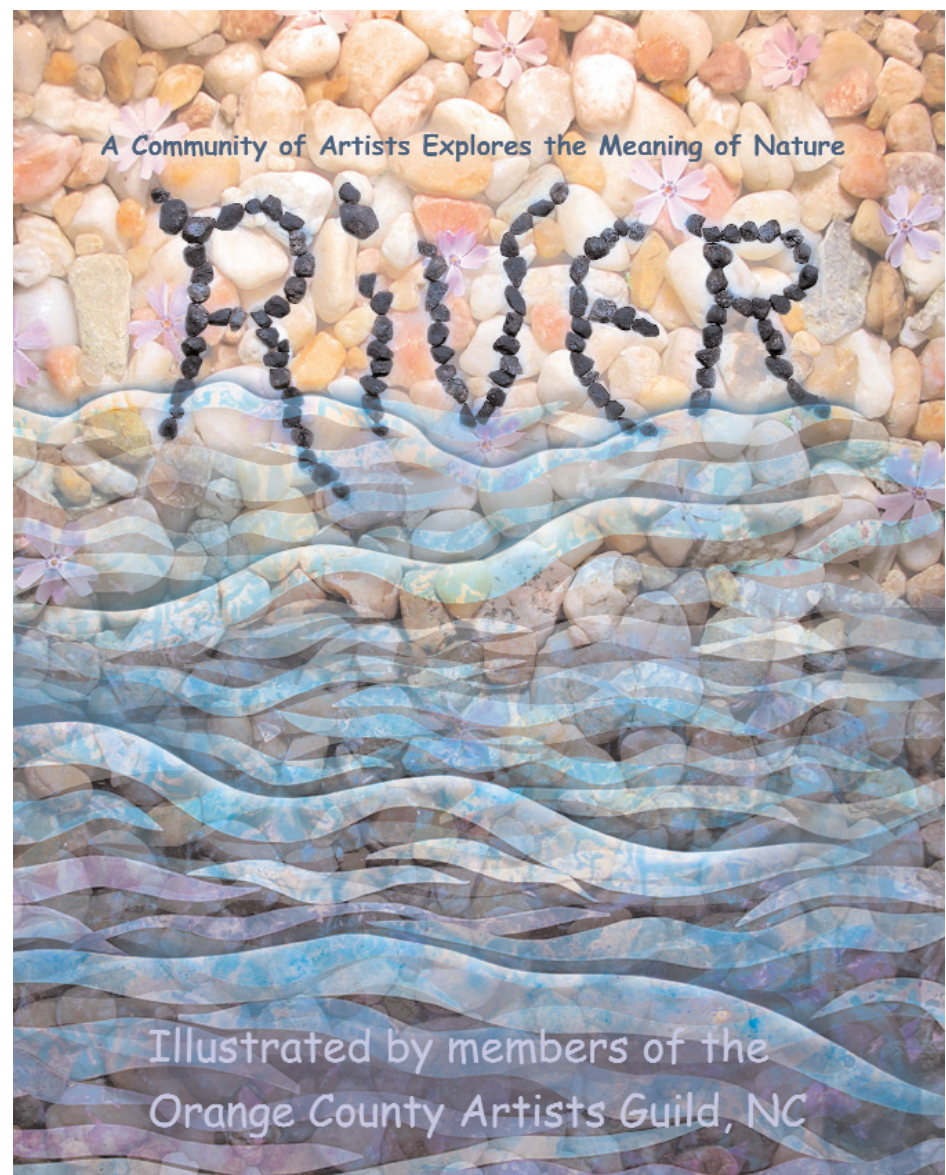
At the pizzeria that day, it felt pointless to sweep the crumbs from the floor, nor did he mop, nor did he wipe the counters clean; it was taking all his effort not to demand that his customers tell him what he had done to deserve this and whether or not they thought his wife's affair would last.

The weeks passed, the floors grew sticky, the counters crusty, and the odor of the shop when he unlocked the door was sad and stale, exactly how he felt inside. Business began to drop

off, which came as a relief. Cockroaches arrived instead of customers and scuttled into the corners when he turned on the lights. One morning, he opened the cold oven and a rat leaped out. He went after the rat with a broom but it escaped into the storeroom where it darted into the towers of canned tomatoes and although Panner knocked the cans every which way he could not find the rat. It

had vanished as if by magic.

The first mouse he saw was later that afternoon, a baby, crouched in a corner. He easily caught it. The size of a grape, it squeaked once, then curled up and fell asleep in his hand, its ears pink petals, its fur a soft creamy gray, nearly invisible whiskers tickling his palm. Panner could not bring himself to harm such a helpless, trusting creature. He



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saw what he presumed was its mother watching anxiously atop a bin of flour, and he placed the baby next to her, and the two spilled down the bin and disappeared.

Shy at first, flying into cracks in the baseboards with lightning speed whenever he unlocked the shop, with time, because he did not shout, or stamp his feet, the mice grew bolder. At first there were just two, or so it seemed, and then there were five, and then ten or eleven, sixteen, more. Panner lost count. In the long, dull evenings, when fewer and fewer customers came in, the mice kept him company. He made a trail of crumbs

along the counter all the way to where his upturned hand waited, cupped like a fertile valley with shredded cheese. One came and fed from his palm, and gradually another, and another, their fleshy little feet swarming over his wrists and fingers like little kisses.

The mice surprised him. They jumped and leaped, and several danced in circles, bouncing on their hind legs. The juvenile mice frolicked, boxing and chasing one another in the way of young mammals, like puppies, kittens, lambs.

When he unlocked the shop, the

mice would be waiting, thimble-sized friends in a row along the counter and sometimes on top of the empty cash register. Their eyes as bright as pins, they scampered before him into the kitchen.

One night, late, with no customers to serve, he poured himself tumbler of whiskey and had a party, making mice-sized pizzas, rolling the dough paper thin, spreading a single dot of sauce with his finger, and laying on a shred of cheese. The pizzas took longer to cool than cook and when he placed the tray on the floor, the mice devoured them. He ate several of the pizzas himself, along with another tumbler of whiskey, and pronounced them good.

Panner and his wife had never had children or even pets. Although fond of other people's babies and cats and dogs, she'd never wanted any of her own, something, he saw now, which might have been a clue that she'd always been hovering at the edge of their marriage, ready for a quick escape.

By now, Panner had been sleeping on the couch of his wifeless



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house for three months. By now, thanks to Panner's food and warmth and kindness there lived in the pizzeria dozens of mice.

The owner of the Quickwash limped over one afternoon, his face unsmiling above his faded football sweatshirt. He wanted to discuss the rodent problem.

Panner looked into the cold eyes of Mr. Quickwash and felt the same gut-lurch he'd had the day his wife said that she had something to tell him.

"You can't smell it? It stinks in here. I'm aware you're going through rough times, but for Christ's sake, clean the place up. I'm losing customers." Mr. Quickwash stalked away, almost squashing a mouse with his artificial leg.

As Panner sat at one of his empty front tables and gazed at the floor seeded with mouse droppings, wondering if Mr.

Quickwash would report him to the health inspector, the mouse that he'd named "Luciano" began to sing. Panner covered his ears to block out the plaintive squeaks because it suddenly occurred him that, by nurturing those he had no business nurturing, he had created a problem for the mice as well as himself. Was this what he'd done with his wife? Had he been so blinded by love that he'd been unable to detect her true desires?

The dismal condition of the pizzeria, he saw it now as surely as Ivette must have seen their marriage. His fist went into the wall. When he pulled his hand back, his knuckles were bleeding, and the hole in the wall revealed a small but pungent nest of shredded napkins.

He bought mousetraps that claimed to be "humane," because the mice that went inside, through the little metal doors, were trapped but not otherwise harmed in any way. He

did not want to hurt them, only to get them out of the pizzeria. He baited the traps with peanut butter, and the very next morning, the traps were full, mice feet making scrabbling sounds against the tin. Panner drove them to his house and opened the traps in his neglected backyard. He watched the mice stumble into the weeds. They had lived their entire lives inside the walls of the pizzeria. He scattered handfuls of birdseed into the yard and filled a shallow dish with water. He hoped they would learn to adapt, as he had, to their change in circumstances. In no time at all, the remaining mice figured out how to avoid the traps, even when baited with Brie. And though they shouldn't have, the mice still appeared to trust Panner. Luciano and his wife, a plump brown female who might have been pregnant, scaled Panner's blue-jeaned leg and nibbled flour from his thigh as he read the certified letter from the county health department, citing complaints and legal actions.

Mr. Quickwash had turned him in, or perhaps, as Quickwash claimed, a former customer. So few people came in now and those few were either very old or very young or very lonely. Panner phoned a pest-control company that advertised itself as being "humane and environmentally sensitive." As Panner explained his problem and how it had escalated, the pest-control



The Blotter

representative could be heard clicking her tongue. And when he ended the call without having gotten a satisfactory solution (she had recommended a device that electrocuted), there in the doorway stood the health inspector with his clipboard, and a predatory smile.

Panner wasn't given a choice, not if he wanted to stay in business. If the mice were not quickly and completely eliminated, the county would shutter Lisa's Pizzeria. Just like that the mice had gone from companions to unwanted guests to pests. He lured Luciano, whom he hoped to keep as a pet, into a small cage outfitted with a hamster wheel and a water bottle and brought the cage home, but when he opened the cage door to put in food, Luciano sprang out of the cage and fled. Later that night as Panner lay on the couch, unable to sleep, he thought he heard Luciano running down the hallway, but although he turned on the all lights and went from

room to room, he never found him.

As required by the health department, Panner closed the pizzeria for two weeks, and set about plugging mouse holes with steel wool and Spackle. The confused mice ran here and there in distress; several chewed new holes in the baseboard. Panner sprinkled green crystals of poison on slices of pizza and laid them on the floor. Even before he left that day the mice were eating ravenously, as if they were actors entering into their expected roles with heartbreaking enthusiasm. He locked up and did not return for three days; watching them die would be unbearable.

When Panner at last unlocked the door, his hands might as well have been red with blood. He swept small twisted corpses from the concrete floor and off metal shelves, and scrubbed and bleached the sticky steel counters and the table-tops.

A few days later a foul smell bloomed from the walls. Panner had failed to find and plug all their holes, and dozens of dying mice had crawled into these openings and curled up in their nests. Panner put a piece of duct tape over his nostrils, trying to block out the smell, but the stench crept in anyhow, just as the mice themselves had once crept so sweetly into his heart. It was a massacre for which only he could be blamed.

Attracted by the smell of death, hundreds of flies arrived, and Panner killed them, too, with a flyswatter, bug spray, and a bitter satisfaction. Having proved himself at fault, Panner felt his strength of purpose return.

He opened the front and back doors and the windows, and fresh air blew in, virtuous with the scent of detergent from the Quickwash. Paper napkins swirled off the counter and around the pizzeria like celebratory flags.

"Looking good," said Mr. Quickwash, giving a small salute as he limped by.



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Two by Rob Plath

"Undo The Sutures"

to
clot
is
to
become
callous

"Unparalleled"

what's
the
invention
of
language
compared
to
the
sigh?



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The Dream Journal

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mermaid@blotterrag.com

Picnic in a park, with cloudy skies and a breeze. The wind blows the napkins as wind always blows napkins around, and Mom calls for the kids to help pick up after them, so it becomes a game where the wind wins and the kids win and the napkins lose. They are finally returned to the picnic table in various states of shreddedness. One aunt wants to complain about no one keeping an eye on the kids and she grumps about with hands on hips counting them to make sure that they are all there. Another aunt sits in a canvas "captain's chair" with a spiked-lemonade, laughing at everything that is happening. She seems to be aware of her own shortcomings; that she cannot help make it better and that it is more amusing to just watch events unfold. Fathers stand around a smoking grill in short-sleeved shirts and cargo shorts. Like the pilots in the movie "The Right Stuff;" they make hand motions that are indecipherable and push their sunglasses up on their foreheads so that they can wiggle their eyebrows and the sunglasses will fall into place. This is done more than once, but there is no saying why it ever happened at all. It apparently entertains them enormously.

One of the tables is an old 1970's Detroit-blue aluminum fold-out table that starts as a heavy briefcase like thing - something out of The Jetsons - and when it is fully opened it can seat a family of eight, or so the legend went. Many casseroles and salads and sacks of potato rolls and macaroni foodstuffs are placed on this table. Someone then decides that it can further handle the weight of a thermos full of iced-tea, a five gallon device that would last a caravan deep into the namib. No one has calculated the actual weight of five gallons of iced tea - each gallon being eight pounds of liquid. It is the equivalent of putting a medium-sized third-grader on the old table whose design was questionable at best. Down goes the aluminum leg on one side. Here come the salads - six-bean and German potato and there the ambrosia with the shredded cocoanut and the lovely little marshmallow gems and elbow-noodle-and-mayonnaise in the ancient Tupperware. The potato-rolls intended to clothe hamburgers are salvaged, but everything else conforms to a standard picnic sized mess, soon set upon by ants after begin scooped up and thrown away by aunts. The irony of all this is that no aunt or ant is happy with the results. Excepting the one sitting in the captain's chair, who laughs and laughs, so that her chortles echo off the high pines.

MD - cyberspace

Continued from page 3

with character development? A novel. Go for it! If you don't know what to journal about today, take a glance at yesterday's entry and keep going with it. Remember that many people have great ideas for stories or novels. What keeps them from being writers is that they don't write. If you don't have a great idea for a story or novel, but still you write, congratulations! You win. You're a writer.

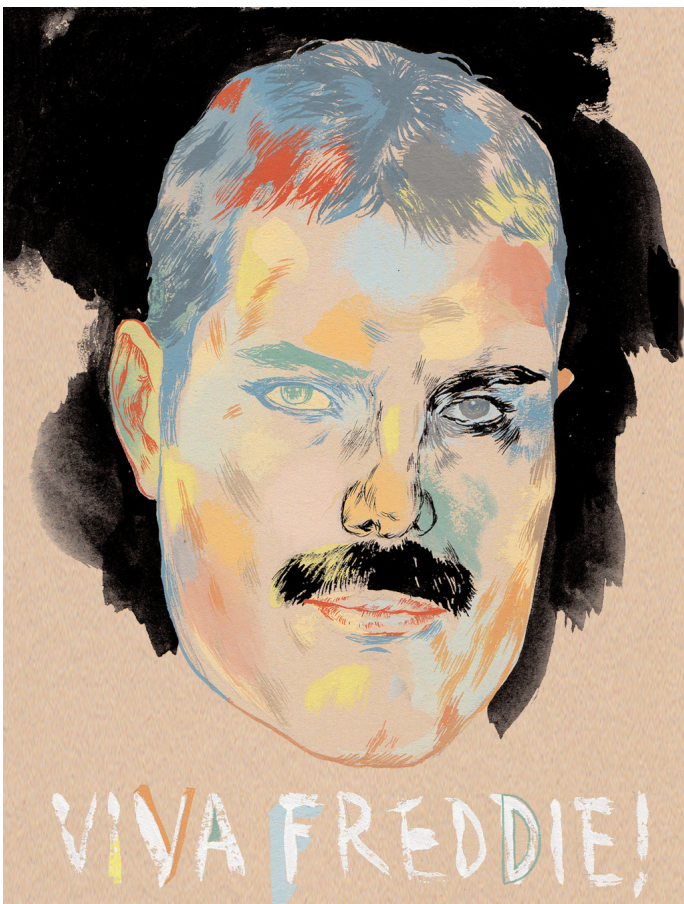
Looking back at journal entries you've made, you may reach an unpleasant conclusion. Think you're not very good? So what?! It's early in the game. There is a scholar of the game of chess that has developed a theory he calls the ten-thousand hour theory. The idea is that anyone – anyone – can become a chess-master if they dedicate ten-thousand hours to the game. Yes, that's 10,000 hours. Sound crazy? Well, let's consider that number. There are, as we said, 365 days in a year. If you started playing chess - reading about chess, studying chess – for about an hour a day from the time you were fifteen (around the time I started writing every day – poems, story ideas, letters), by the time you were twenty-five you would have 3,650 hours of that skill under your belt. Would you be a good chess player? You bet. A chess master? No, not yet, but consider that twenty-five is very young to be a chess master – only the most brilliant players *master the game* at that age (and they put in much more time than an hour a day.) Ten more years – you're thirty-five now – and you've kept up with your daily chess. 7300 hours of accumulated theory, skill, practice and dedication to the game. Are you a master yet? Possibly. We're talking about a much smaller number of people who've put that much time into one thing. You might have the...acumen, the insight and shrewdness that makes you one of the chess elite. Also, at this point you might have turned your one-hour-a-day habit into something more. You found friends who helped you with your game. You made contacts to get you into interesting and challenging matches. As you enter your third decade of playing chess (the decade that will take you to 10,000 hours) you are well positioned to make chess master.

How does this fix the writing in your first journal? It doesn't. But the 10,000 hour theory works here as well. No, I wouldn't expect you to write an hour a day. I don't expect myself to walk an hour a day. But every day I walk. Every day I try to get in shape. Every day I write.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

N. West Moss is a writer living in New Jersey. Her fiction has been published by *Memoir Journal*, *Westchester Magazine*, *The Blue Lake Review* and the anthology "*Do MFA Programs Really Work?*" She is working on a novel set in New Orleans in 1878, as well as a collection of short stories that take place in and around Bryant Park in New York City. She was a 2012 MacDowell Fellow. *** **Rosaleen Bertolino** of Fairfax, CA, writes, "My fiction has previously appeared in *Prick of the Spindle*, *The MacGuffin*, and the *Chicago Reader*, among others. I live in northern California with my family and 11 chickens." *** **Rob Plath** was here before, has been gone for a while, and has returned. He writes, "Rob Plath is a 43-year-old writer from New York. Allen Ginsberg once tutored him for two years before he died in 1997. He has published a lot with the small presses, including 8 chapbooks, three full-length collections and a play. Rob's first novel *Swallowtude* is coming out this year." *** **Phil Juliano** draws and draws and draws. He is also married, so we may assume that there is a multitude of other things he does.



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