

*Down home with Michael Campagnoli,
Kelly Ann Jacobson, Keith Norval,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

September 2015

MAGAZINE



THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE
visit www.blotterrag.com

Follow me on
twitter

Like Us On
Facebook

G. M. SomersEditor-in-Chief
Martin K. Smith.....Publisher-at-Large,
Treasurer
Marilyn Fontenot.....Director of
Development
Laine Cunningham.....Publishing
Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Marketing Advisor
Richard Hess.....Programs Director
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Subscriptions Contact:
Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Advertisers Contact:
Austin Richards
ads@blotterrag.com
940.395.5925

Submissions and Editorial Business to:
Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com

919.933.4720 (business hours only! you
may call for information about snail-mail
submissions)

Marketing & Public Relations Contact:
Marilyn Fontenot
marilyngfontenot@gmail.com
919.904.7442

COVER: "Bull Durham Lucky Strike" by
Keith Norval. See centerfold for more

Unless otherwise noted, all content copyright
2015 by the artist, not the magazine.

The Blotter is a production of
MAGAZINE
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

[clmp]

Council of Literary Magazines & Presses
w w w . c l m p . o r g

"Throwing a Monkey Wrench, part one"

My friend, the one I spoke of a while back who only listens to classical music when the mood is perfect, was joined (in my mind) recently by other friends. Their belief is that we shouldn't listen to classical music as "background" but should actually *listen* to it. That is, classical music requires more from us, it deserves to be more than just heard. Fine. I tried making my case again - the one that states the proposition that the world and our time on it is a line-segment with defined beginning and end and even if we don't know when that end is we should live as if we do and turn on the Schubert and Schumann and let them rattle around in the back in the hopes that they will cover up the daily (really!) noise made by Lawnmower Guy next door or the dishwasher in my kitchen arrhythmically clacking two coffee spoons together. And although I know that the people who wrote the music and the people who trained for years and years to perform the music and the guy with the baton who worked long and hard to get his hair to swoosh back so...Beethovenishly should get more than just an occasional toe-tap from us while we're doing something so ridiculously mundane that it doesn't even fall in any field of the Venn Diagram of valuable activities for humans (that chart in which good music is first and foremost among sapient creatures), it doesn't always work out that way.

On the other hand, if you do get a moment or two to sit with a frosty cold lemonade in the comfy chair, well then do indeed pay attention to the current opus on the stereo (god, I'm so old...), listen to the complexities of the harmonies (among other things musical) and let them awaken some of those synapses otherwise underutilized, like rubber bands snapping against your consciousness.

All of which is not really my point here, and I apologize for my typical long-windedness, although why I should apologize for being both me and typical, I don't know.. My point is that all of the people who disagreed with me in this particular and peculiar discussion about our passive-classical auditory habits were music majors, music professors, or musicians. And while I acknowledge the validity of their argument, I think they were missing mine altogether. You see, I know something about music, but I did not study music. I know some composers, but not with the intimacy that a scholar has. My musical friends hear the difference between...the things they hear and I don't even know enough to give you a cogent comparative example. And herein lies, as we say, the rub. I think that some - not all, mind - of the folks I know deeply acquainted with music are not enjoying it as much as I do. They go into analysis-mode and end up nit-picking the piece and the performance of the piece and the performers performing the piece. Their big and mightily educated brains don't let them unlearn everything they know about music; turn off the knowledge and just be, hell, I don't know...surprised by the neat sounds. And so, they feel that more time is necessary to give music its due focus. But life doesn't permit it - it is a busy,

cluttered existence and the other noise of the planet really gets in the way of hearing good music. And while we're at it, bad music gets in the way of good music, too, although this has not always been the case. An additional not-completely-related-to-my-argument point is that ready availability of good recorded music has jaded us to knowing what near-perfection is, placing it at our beck and call, and possibly spoiling our ears to good old Great-Aunt Becky sidling up to and sitting down at the old spinet and plinking out a Strauss the Younger waltz selected from the cigar-smelly sheet music from that carton in the hall closet. Why bother with, ahem, the lesser quality of that damned living-room piano (or even Aunt Becky and her hincty left hand), when you can have Daniel Barenboim whenever you want? In other words, technology - gotta love it.

Or do you? Technology insidiously forces us to beg the question: What's the point of beng a music major? (hang in there - I know the answer to this, but am playing devil's advocate) Why should anyone else bother learning anything musical? Hasn't everything good already been recorded? That is, by someone good? All the goodness of sound has been squeezed out of the universe into a giant thermos and stored cryogenically for safekeeping, right? And if I've listened to Glenn Gould play the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (or even F or G Minor, I mean, what the hell!) haven't I heard all there is to know about that piece and never need to hear it again?

Of course not. That's just nutty. Music, like food, is for enjoying again and again. In all sorts of circumstances and levels of...fidelity. Concert halls. Sunset beaches. Late mornings after the breakfast dishes have been washed. Even in the multi-purpose room of a middle school, with hundreds of semi-washed seventh-graders listening almost politely to their blating-and-beeping peers trying to discover the ancient skills of the clarinet and trumpet. Music is for performing, youself, in private or in front of a crowd of heckling siblings and cousins, all of whom have had a couple of cold ones and remember when you lost your bathing trunks in a particularly large wave on that beach trip. Because, to paraphrase a bad joke, music is like pizza - when it's good it's very good, and when it's bad you'll still eat it if you're hungry or hung-over or really lazy.

So I guess for now I have to carefully agree with my musically-educated cohorts, because they're right, we should pay better attention to great auditory art. Make time to take time. Go without lunch, maybe - do I hear better when I'm hypoglycemic? And develop our discerning skills, so we know more about what we're listening to. Ah, Bach...whoops, I mean Telemann...

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

We often use Bobco fonts, copyrighted shareware from the Church of the Subgenius. Prabob. We also use Mary Jane Antique and other freeware fonts from Apostrophic Labs and other fonts from other sources.



in the Great State of Georgia!



The Blotter Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is an education concern. Our primary interest is the furthering of creative writing and fine arts, with the magazine being a means to that end. We publish in the first half of each month and enjoy a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re. same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

That's what I am, please understand, I wanna be

"The Pocket Brando"

by Michael Campagnoli

*Family, dear boy, are mere acquaintance
by accident of birth.*

—Oscar Wilde

Speaking of Wounds: *the girlfriend of
Billy Roselli*

"Where they going?" Jim asked.

Roni punched numbers. Waited for the screen to split.

"So where they going?" he repeated.

Her fingers clicked efficiently across the keys.

"Hello?"

"Shit," she hissed and drew a finger to her mouth. "Broke another nail."

Her nails were long and painted black, so long they 'd begun to curl up. Her hair, spiked straight on top, was crew-cut close on the sides. "Two-toned burnt sienna," she called it. Dark brown and muddy orange, really. Jim and Roni worked "Claims" (Auto Division) for *Three Rivers National Life*. This was during the last year of the Reagan administration.

"So where they going?" he asked again.

"Who?"

"Your parents."

"Oh."

She put up another claim. Punched keys. Watched the screen. The room on the 22nd floor of the USX Tower was the size of a high school gymnasium. She hated it. A

windowless box. Flooded with harsh fluorescent light, flat and uncompromising. It dissolved the features of even the young into anonymous grey. For a woman Roni's age, it was especially unflattering. Jim was one of the young. Different than the others: black high-topped sneakers, mismatched sport coats, baggy slacks. His ears were pierced and one front tooth capped in gold, engraved with the letters "MB". She could count on him for a Prozac or Trofanil.

"Did I tell you the latest?"

"No. What?"

"Dolly wants a breast reduction."

"A what?"

"A breast reduction! I told her, 'For Christ sakes, your back hurts because you're a fat cow, not because your tits sag.'"

"Nice."

"Wouldn't speak to me for a week."

"Can't imagine why."

"She'll get over it."

"So, they're going away?" Roni was thirty-eight and back living with her parents.

"What?"

"They're going away?"

"Oh, yeah. . .Cleveland. One of their 'Bowling Weekends.' A League thing. A banquet or something."

In the severe light, Jim noticed a thin, jagged line, barely visible, that bisected Roni's left eyebrow. He'd seen it before and meant to ask. It was a

souvenir from Billy Roselli. That and a tattoo of a butterfly on her butt. When Roni was 16, she dated Roselli briefly. Glamorous. A bad boy. They called him "Poppy" because he had premature grey hair (tied in a ponytail) and "popped" Percodans like tic-tacs. He drove a hearse. Slept in the back.

Family is a wound you carry your entire life

—Kenny Roth

Accident of Birth:

Kenny was the youngest. The baby of the family. Unlike his older sisters, he came home after college to work in the family business. It wasn't his intention. He had always dreamed of living in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, but his father, Sam, couldn't find good help. Sam owned a neighborhood bar across from the U.S. Steel Edgar Thompson Works (now USX) in Braddock, but everyone in the family called it, "the store." So Kenny forsook Thoreau for a life in Pittsburgh. Old-fashioned and vaguely misogynistic, he had a great excess of conflicted family feeling. "What do you do," he asked, "when you believe in family, but your family are shits?"

"Thanks a lot," Sarah, his middle sister, said.

"You know *who* I mean," Kenny answered.

She knew who he meant.

Whenever Sarah talked about her older sister, she used words like "peculiar" or "weird."

"A bitch," Kenny, would correct.

"Strange," Sarah would modi-



CLIFF'S MEAT MARKET

QUALITY MEATS
Beef • Poultry • Pork • Lamb
Sausage • Seafood

If we don't have it, we'll order it for you!

We carry beer & wine

Mon-Sat 9 am—6 pm
919 942 2196
100 W. Main Street, Carrboro

Serving Carrboro and surrounding communities for over 35 years

fy.

"Asshole," Kenny'd insist.

That kind of talk made their parents, Sam and Dolly, frown. Actually, Sam would ignore it and Dolly would frown. Dolly's specialty was frowning. When pressed to make comparisons, she assumed the parental omniscient. "We love ALL our children—EQUALLY," she'd say. Each family has its myths, its necessary companions. This is a story about Sam and Dolly's.

Failure to Communicate:

"We're not exactly dealing with a stable personality," Kenny said to Dolly.

Dolly smiled.

"She's always done for herself. Always the independent one."

"Nonsense," Kenny said.

"Crossed streets at five. Walked all the way to Aunt Tilley's—by-her-self!"

"Ah, Jesus, not this again."

"At ten, she went downtown. Two bus changes! Wouldn't let me come. Not Roni. Always wanted to do things on her own."

"Probably scoring dope off prostitutes."

"You and Sarah were clingers."

"Oh-h-h," Kenny sighed.

"So cute. Right at Mommy's side."

He rolled his eyes.

"Wherever we went, you'd be clutching my hem, afraid of everything."

Kenny put a hand to each cheek, rocked his head back and forth.

"But not RONI. She was always adventurous, little Miss Independence. . ."

"I want to puke," Kenny moaned.

Dolly frowned.

She took a sip of tea.

"How many times," Kenny asked, "has she come crawling back in one kind of trouble or another?"

Dolly pursed her lips. She seemed to be suffering dyspepsia.

"How many times have you

bailed her out?"

Dolly ignored him.

"I mean literally. Forget the childhood apocrypha. We're talking holding cells."

"I don't know what you mean," Dolly answered.

"I'll make it simple. Name *one* time she's lived on her own. *One* time without taking money from you? *One* time she didn't come back home with her tail between her legs. *One* time you didn't pay the back rent and utilities or the random lawsuit?"

Dolly was cornered. She looked up—imperious, eyes fraught with potato love and an acquaintance with grief. "What *else*," she asked, employing an intonation reserved for the evocation of guilt, "are *parents* for?"

Kenny shook his head.

"Unbelievable," he muttered.

Little Miss Independence

"Roni?" Debby said and a wave of somber deliberation crossed her face. "I think she's 'rad'. I mean, some people think she's zod. Like a token. I guess she's not deadly or nothing but definitely very fly. I like her. I really do. Besides, anything 60's is in." Debby laughed and adjusted one of the three over-sized, bamboo gold earrings in her left ear. There were silver studs in her eyebrows, nose, and tongue.

"*Explain to me how self-mutilation became a fashion statement?*" Kenny asked.

Debby was 19. Most of Roni's friends were under 25. Kenny found

this curious. Dolly insisted it was perfectly normal. "Cutting edge," she said proudly.

"Yeah," Kenny answered, "like Barnum & Bailey."

Dolly ignored him.

"It wouldn't hurt," she added, turning to Sarah, "if you brightened up your wardrobe a bit. So conservative."

Sarah smiled stoically.

"Sure," Kenny agreed, "start wearing a crucifix and rosary, let your bra show at the next faculty meeting, maybe dye your hair green. After you're fired, you and Roni can have a whole new career working the booth next to 'The Three-legged Monkey-boy from Zanzibar'."

Dolly closed her eyes, pinched the bridge of her nose between two fingers.

The Bowling Weekend:

Kenny looked at his mother in disbelief.

"You're what?" he asked.

"Going away for the weekend."

She crossed her legs with femi-

20% off
Your first haircut
at the new salon
with selected stylists

**ALTERED
image**
Hair Designers

Appointments: 919-286-3732
600 Foster Street, Durham, NC 27701
www.alteredimageDurham.com

NEW LOCATION!!



The Blotter

nine efficiency. Straightened the hem of her lavender muu-muu.

"You gotta be crazy," Kenny said.

Dolly frowned.

She was a formidable woman. Large. A woman who believed in size. Asserting it. She was known for her posture.

"Let me get this right. You're leaving *her*? Alone?"

"I don't know what you mean," Dolly answered.

"You know what I mean."

There was a pause. Dolly uncrossed her legs and crossed them again. She seemed to smell something disagreeable.

"She's not a child, you know, she's a grown woman."

"Then she should begin acting like one," Kenny said.

Dolly leveled two ink-black eyes at him.

Kenny looked away.

"How about when she put your car through the windows of the Giant Eagle?" he asked.

"That was a long time ago."

"Not even two years!"

"She's changed. Grown up."

"For Christ sakes, she's middle-aged!"

"And she's OFF drugs."

"Gimme a break."

"She is! She SWORE to me. I can tell. Believe-you-me, she wouldn't be in this house ten seconds, if I thought she was still on drugs!" (punctuated by three distinct clicks of Dolly's well-polished, manicured nails on the formica kitchen table).

"What about Uncle Lou's funeral?"

"What about it?"

"When you got back, you had to rush her to the hospital."

"A reaction to shell fish."

"SHELL FISH! Yeah, we got a lot of shell fish in Pittsburgh. She looked like *Night of the Living Dead*. A heartbeat of five. You coulda' rented her out to 'Pasha the Great' to bury alive."

"I don't know where you get these things."

"JESUS!" Kenny shouted, smashing a palm to his forehead.

Dolly sighed.

She turned away from him.

The muu-muu rustled. The dark eyes filled. The room suffered a sudden decompression. Dolly presented her profile. Not bad for a woman her age. Pale bleached blonde hair. Bright red lipstick. She raised her chin, rested it on her hand. Gold bracelets jiggled. She settled into a sullen pout. It wasn't good to make Dolly pout. It brought on attacks. Migraines. Hiatal hernia. Maybe worse.

Kenny shook his head.

"What happened the last time you went to Cleveland?"

"That was different. She was grieving for Juan then."

"That's another thing. She runs away to Florida and brings back a one-eyed Irish-Cuban truck driver."

"There's nothing wrong with being Cuban."

"As long as you're not a homicidal maniac, there's not."

"He had many disappointments."

"The guy was an animal. A bonafide nut case!"

A dysfunctional family. A bro-

ken home."

"He was criminally insane! Every job Dad got him, he lost. What'd he have . . . five or six? He kept punching out supervisors."

"A troubled childhood."

"Troubled? He was DERANGED!"

"Always good to your father and me. Called us 'Mom' and 'Dad'." She gave him a long slow sideways glance. The posture of acute long-suffering. "Something *Linda's* never done."

Linda was Kenny's wife.

"I told you about that," he answered.

"Even so."

"I can't believe it," Kenny raved. He shook his head and raised his hands. "She criticizes my wife, but defends a convicted felon!"

"Maybe we do gang up a bit," Sarah agreed.

"Nonsense," Kenny exclaimed.

"She was jilted once. Do you remember?"

"Not really." (Kenny was nine). "You mean when she cried a lot?"

"A nervous breakdown."

"A what?"

"That's what Dolly called it."

"Who was the guy?"

"Walt."

"What happened?"

"They were engaged. Next thing you know, he marries this girl from Bloomfield. Had to. Roni freaked. Couldn't eat, talk, just lay in bed and cried. Maybe that's why she's like she is?"

"Not a chance. It's genetic. She was switched in the hospital."

"She's not one of *us*," Sarah said.

"She's not one of *anybody*," Kenny answered.

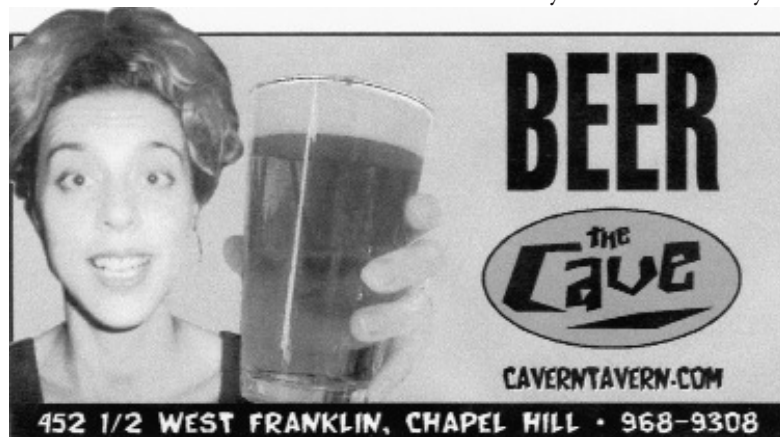
Sam smiled. He kept his thoughts to himself.

"It's nice to be nice," he said.

That was his motto.

"You just can't accept a woman who's *liberated*," Dolly cried.

"*Liberated*?" Kenny howled. "The only thing Roni's liberated from



is a conscience."

Even Dolly had to concede Roni (nee Rhona) Roth-Cochoran's personal history was marked by inconsistency. Lapses of judgment. Many of these "lapses" occurred when she was left to her own devices.

One vacation Sam and Dolly returned home to find Roni on the kitchen floor, pale and unconscious. A drug-induced swoon. Literally buried beneath a pile of freshly popped popcorn. She must have poured 10 bags of popcorn into the overheated machine. Sam opened the door and saw the pile. Then Roni's arm moved and he saw Roni. "What the hell?" Sam said. The refrigerator door gaped open and above her the beleaguered popcorn machine blew hot air.

Sam was happy-go-lucky guy. Ready with a song, a smile, another round of drinks. He just wanted things to be "nice." When they weren't, he avoided them. Not the type to hang around. "He just wasn't there," Sarah said once. "When I think of the important days in my life, happy or sad, he wasn't there. Not for one of them. I bet he doesn't even know what day I was born." (He didn't). Gone most of the time. Usually at "the store." And he wasn't faithful. Once, one of his women called the house and Dolly was on the extension. There was hell to pay. Who was he to make consequences?

So with Roni there was unfinished business. Interrupted parenting to tend. "Allowances." For Roni, everyone made "allowances."

"Roni's-uh. . .Roni," Sam would say, say thoughtfully and with a shrug.

"BELIEVE-YOU-ME," Dolly would confide, "beneath that exterior is a v-e-r-y 'SENSITIVE' girl. You don't know. We get along WON-der-FULLY." This said shortly after Roni's return to live at home for the third time (a bankruptcy, divorce, an illegitimate child).

"They'll do it 'til they get it right," Kenny declared.

None of them were getting any younger.

Failure To Communicate, PART TWO:

"I just don't understand," Dolly said.

"You don't *want* to understand," Kenny told her.

"Get over it," Sarah advised. "They don't have a clue."

He couldn't get over it.

"You know how your father feels about family."

"*Family?* This is the guy who goes to work, comes home, and falls asleep in a chair?"

"For God's sake," Dolly cried. "Not this again."

"He never showed up for anything. A Little League game, a school play, the day I won the mile in the City Championships. Nothing. I'm his *only* son for Christ sake. Is that all *family* is?"

Second Thoughts: *The Bowling Weekend*

"What about the time we went to Atlantic City?" Sam asked Dolly.

They were packing to leave for Cleveland.

"Oh," Dolly consoled, "that was years ago. She was just a child then." (Thirty-three at the time).

"Maybe," Sam said, "maybe."

Later, Dolly sought to assuage any lingering doubt.

"She feels very close to you, now," Dolly told him. "All the old resentments are gone. I know this for a fact."

So they left. Friday afternoon. Sam came home early from "the store." (Everyone referred to the family busi-

ness as "the store.") They put their bags in the car and drove away.

"You gotta be nuts," Kenny said to his father.

"Take 'em chance," Sam said.

"I have AB-SO-LUTE faith," Dolly assured them.

Friday night: *prelude to mayhem*

Roni couldn't find a sitter, so she talked Sue and Debby (no small feat) into watching horror flicks on cable. "Bound and hagged," they called it (staying home on a weekend night). Roni promised Panama gold, munchies, and wine. Sam forgot the wine. Roni was furious. At twenty after six, she grabbed Shane, her two-year-old, in a huff, stuffed him in a coat, and tugged him out to the car.

The girls were coming at seven.

Cursing stoplights, dodging pot-holes, she pushed her beaten-up old Subaru through the wet cobblestone streets of Swissvale and Edgewood. She hated Pittsburgh. Too dark and forboding. A whole city covered by successive generations of nacreous crud. A rubberized dirt layered so thick that even sandblasting was superfluous.

When she got to "the store" (it was a bar, really, a blue-collar joint across from USX in Braddock), she left Shane strapped in his child seat and stormed in.

She didn't say anything. Just stood there. She gave Kenny "the look." The "sour bitch" look he called it. He ignored her.

"Gimme some Ruinite," she demanded. Her long purple nails clicked on the counter. She took an impatient pull off a *Benson & Hedges*. Menthol. At work they called her



CARRBYRRITOS
Burritos, Tacos, Nachos and Margaritas!

Mon thru Sat 11am-10pm - Closed Sunday - 933.8226
711 W Rosemary St. Carrboro www.carrburritos.com





Keith Norval - Raleigh, NC
www.keithnorval.com



The Blotter

"Dragon Lady."

Kenny tried to joke.

"Don't give me any shit!" she cried. "I'm in a bad mood."

The guys pretended not to hear. They waited for Kenny's answer. Hoped for his answer. There was only silence.

"Give me the *fucking* wine," Roni said.

The guys stared down at their beers (Iron City with bumps of Calvert's on the side). A row of shiny bottles and dirty glasses gurgled in the sink.

Kenny wanted to hit.

How could he hit?

He gave her the wine.

Then she asked for a twenty—a "loan" from "the store."

The nails clicked again. The fingers snapped.

She was barely five feet tall. Kenny felt the urge to pick up the cash register and squash her like a bug, to rip her larynx out and strangle her with it. Instead, he gave her the twenty. "What the hell. . ." he'd say. She'd bullied him since they were kids. Now he enjoyed obvious physical advantage, but what could he do? He couldn't hit her. She was family. And she made him feel guilt. So he let her get away with things, mostly as a reflex, a kind of old habit, an emotional blackmail. Some things in a family, he believed, are better left unsaid; once said, change things forever. And besides, she was sort of pathetic, really (already a certain amount of sagging and cellulite), a fucked-out look, like a painted-up old actress in her black stockings and Madonna slut shoes.

So Kenny made excuses.

They all made excuses.

Family is nice. Family is good. Nancy and I wouldn't be one without one.

—Ronald Reagan, Speech to the National Family Council, 1984

Speaking of Nice: *Saturday afternoon*

Linda Roth tucked her legs beneath her and lit a cigarette. She untied a blue bandanna and shook her long curly hair free. The kids were out and gone. Kenny at work. The house

cleaned and vacuumed. A tub of wash in the machine. Coffee brewed. The afternoon was hers.

In the back yard, the late autumn sun shined on bright green grass. The wind lifted the branches of the sugar maples. A golden light filtered through the leaves. It reminded her of morning matins at St. Dominic's when she was a child (the choir's soft chant, Father Anthony's rich baritone). The light, the memory, the redolence of fresh ground coffee engendered, if not epiphany, at least a stillness. A moment of ease.

Soon Rose, laden with gifts, would enter her door. Rose was plump and considerate. Dark hair and warm eyes. Married to Gino for 15 years.

"From Venuto's," Rose announced, unpacking the cannoli, "strawberry and nut!" Linda filled two mugs with espresso. They settled in white wicker chairs, sheltered on the treeshaded patio.

"The daughter still there?" Linda asked.

"No," Rose answered. "She's teaching aerobics now."

"What was her name?"

"Marie."

"Oh, yeah. I always liked her."

"Just had her second. Named him Brock. Alfredo for the grandfather. But little Raffaella can't say Brock. So she calls him 'Broccoli'—Broccoli Alfredo."

They both laughed.

"I love this!" Linda cried, tasting the cannoli.

"It's new."

Moments later, there came a series of knocks. The handle to the front door jiggled. The knocks turned to thumps, grew impatient, became a pounding. Just as Linda approached, the door was propelled open, shouldered by a familiar figure toting a child on a prominent though meager hip.

"You scared me," Linda said.

"Hrump," the figure grunted and pushed past.

In the living room, Rose pedaled backwards to avoid collision.

"Hello," she said and looked at Linda.

Linda shrugged.

The intruder ignored them.

She busied herself.

Crouched like a Sumo wrestler (for such a small woman she presented surprisingly broad, puckered flanks), elbows and arms thrashed. A blanket appeared. It was spread on the floor and Shane was propped upon it. Roni grabbed the remote and switched to MTV.

"He likes 'Metallica,'" she told them.

"*The kid's brain dead,*" Kenny decided over dinner.

"*Don't be cruel,*" Linda told him, ". . . I'm worried. He doesn't crawl. I've never seen him crawl."

"Exactly."

"*Roni says: 'He's so easy. He entertains himself.'*"

"*Zonked on valium,*" was Kenny's opinion.

"*Poor thing,*" Linda sighed, "I feel sorry for him. He laid there 30 minutes today without moving."

"*The kid's mutant,*" Kenny concluded, *chomping a piece of meat, "already a moron."*

Roni plopped on the sofa. "Didn't get up till noon. Went to Animal House last night. You know, that private club." She lit a joint. Her hair was matted and bent, a greasy helmet. She wore a pink blouse and brown matador slacks. The slacks were shrunk short, hiked almost to her knees. "Benny had this coke," she began but her mouth contorted into a yawn. The yawn extended. She shuddered, groaned, forgot what she was talking about. She took another drag off the joint and promptly fell asleep. The joint ("sticks" Roni called them) was propped precariously in her hand.

Roni's mouth gaped open. The room reverberated with the sound of glottal shock. Meanwhile, violent images flashed across the screen. Shane gurgled and cooed. It was then that Linda detected the familiar odor of soiled diaper.

Saturday Night, Let the Games Begin: *score one for Uncle Milt*

"Ever have sex in your parent's

bed?" Soup asked. (It was Sue, but everyone called her "Soup." It came from an old dirty joke. Something to do with a prostitute and peas and carrots. No one could remember it anymore. She hated it, but everyone called her "Soup"). "You know, just to get even for them being too strict?"

"Naff," Debby said. "Ever play 'Scramble Pills?'"

"What?"

"You know, get all the pills from the medicine chest, put them in a bowl, and take turns gulping them down?"

"Nasty."

The band called itself "Shag Slavers." They were loud, very LOUD, prided themselves on volume. Skin Heads. Black tees under grandpa's flannel. Brown baggy pants. Black combat boots. The crowd loved them.

"You want it HOT?" the lead singer yelled. Long hair. Tattoos. He was older than the others. Body bloated turning to fat. A Boomer with eyeliner and dyed black hair. Sweat dripped down his nose onto the microphone.

"Yes," the crowd cried, "YES!"

"Then let's get AMPED," he shouted. "Let's really ROCK-AND-ROLL!"

"YEA!" the crowd roared, "YEA-A-A!!!"

A wall of sound barreled across the room.

"What a drool," Debby said.

"U-g-g-h," Soup answered. "He's gross! A double-bagger." Soup was the pretty one. Pale blue eyes, amber hair, smooth milk-white skin, a line of blue-green hickies down her neck.

"David Lee Roth!" Debby said. She was big. Blonde. A Polish girl, who gave the impression of being fat, but wasn't really. Just big. Big-boned, big hands, big wrists, hips, neck. Her calves were enormous. But she was agreeable, even beautiful, in a healthy peasant kind of way. She reminded you, for some reason, of a doomed cowgirl. One who at 21 had reached her peak, perhaps gone beyond it, and would never be quite as beautiful, nor happy, again.

"You call these friends?" Kenny asked in reference to Sue and Debby. "What kind of person has 'friends' like these?"

"They're very nice girls," Dolly answered.

"Girls—yes—GIRLS. They're kids, babies. Roni's past 40."

"She thinks 'young.'"

"You see what I mean?" Kenny said to Sarah.

"I know, I know," Sarah replied.

"Yeah," Soup said, "a refugee from the 60's!"

They squealed. Looked over at Roni. Squealed more.

"Reminds me of a guy from Zootz," Roni said, oblivious, propped on a barstool.

"Where?" Debby asked.

"Zootz," Roni replied, "this after-hours club I go to. 'Acid House' they call it. I'd seen him before—rosary beads, crucifix, swastika in one ear, green hair—you know, a leather type."

"Now tell me," Kenny asked, "what kind of statement is green hair?"

"Sounds skanky," Debby said.

"Into Devil worship," Roni continued. "Really weird. At first he just stared at me. Then he came over. Didn't say anything. Put his head on the table and started to lick my fingers."

"Yee-uck!" Debby squealed.

"I'm into pain," he said, and put my hand in his mouth."

"Wha'ja do?"

"Ignored him."

"Barf," Debby said.

Soup wasn't listening. She was eyeing a guy across the room.

"I was with this girl, Lilith," Roni went on.

"Yeah," Debby said tentatively.

"A Druid."

"A what?"

"Druid. Had this far-out tattoo on her face. A vagina. . ."

Soup and Debby rolled their eyes.

First Soup, then Debby got picked up. They left separately. It was

Ok. They all agreed. No hard feelings. What they always did. Around closing, a guy sat next to Roni at the bar.

"You look like Debby Harry," he said. Trying to be memorable. Roni ignored him. The moment stretched. She considered the alternative. Decided to laugh. He laughed too. He was young. Very young.

He told her he played bass guitar. Between bands. Looking for a hook-up. But he was tired of the same old "garage-door grunge shit." He wanted to do something important. Like REM or Smashing Pumpkins. She had him pegged for a college kid. A frat boy out of Pitt or Carnegie-Mellon. In the car, she noticed he had an over-bite and big front teeth. Vaguely reminiscent of a young Milton Berle.

"Who?" he asked.

"Never mind," she said.

His name was Peter.

They did it in Sam and Dolly's bed.

"Jesus," Kenny asked, "don't you care who you bring into this house?"

"There wasn't anything wrong with him. Besides, it's none of your fucking business."

"Ever hear of AIDS?"

"Go to hell," she said.

Strangers In The Night: a case of Miltus interruptus

"Get off! Get off!" Roni cried frantically. But Uncle Miltie didn't budge. Someone was knocking on the front door downstairs. Roni was afraid they'd wake up Shane. The muffled knocking got louder. Became a pounding. She pushed up hard with the heels of her hands into Milton's soft underbelly.

"Damn," he grunted and paused as she slid out.

Wrapped in only a sheet, she staggered on the stairs. Unacquainted with her legs. The 'ludes were kicking in, making it difficult to maneuver. "Like gliding down a river on a raft," she'd tell people, though she'd never been on a raft, or a river, for that matter.

The pounding continued.

The Blotter

She dialed 911 and peeked through the eyehole.

"Oh Christ!" she muttered and opened the door. "What the hell do *you* want?"

It was Jim from work.

He was all made up, a pretty boy (actually quite attractive, she thought) in tight leather pants, blush, liner, and mascara. He flicked his long lashes nervously, 2 or 3 times for dramatic effect, and evoked his most desperate look.

"Can 'we' come in?" he asked.

Then Roni saw who the 'we' was.

Standing half in shadows further down the porch was a kind of "young Brando," a pocket Brando, a Brando-in-miniature, full of sassy arrogance and disdain, unctuous, brooding, thick-lipped, big-eyed, a nose vaguely phallic. He stood there cocky, insolent, supremely indifferent.

"Please," Jim pleaded, "P-l-e-a-s-e. . .!" He darted skittish glances over his shoulder to make certain "Brando" hadn't left.

Roni looked at "Brando." There was a rawness about him. Pubescently erotic. Florid and ripe. Pustulant. He wore a black leather jacket and hooked his hands in his jeans just above his crotch. She had to admit, a little retro but very dishy. She'd swap Uncle Miltie in a second.

"Paa—LEEESE. . .!" Jim begged, frantic now with imploration.

"What's the matter with *your* place?" Roni asked.

"My parents are HOME." A fierce sibilance. An emphatic stare.

You know THAT, his eyes conveyed, WHY are you doing this to me? His gestures became more theatrical and wildly effeminate.

"For Christ sakes," Roni scowled. She was making him pay.

Jim shrank inward. One long defeated sigh.

"Oh. . .all right," she said. "But *no* noise. My kid's sleeping upstairs."

"Thank you, Thank you," Jim effused. His whole body expressed relief. "Come on," he said, holding the screen door open for the figure in the corner. "Come on," he repeated seductively, looking coy.

For a moment, "Brando" stood motionless. One leg propped behind him, he leaned against one of the columns of the porch. A cigarette in his left ear. A toothpick dangled from his mouth.

The door remained open.

After what seemed like minutes, he flicked the toothpick into the bushes and began to move. His movement was deliberate. An unmistakable announcement of self. A hook and saunter. Chest pumped out above tight-fitting jeans. The slight indication of pigeon toes.

"The living room and that's IT!" Roni said. "UNDERSTAND?"

"Yes!" Jim gushed, "Oh yes-yes-yes!" He took Roni's hands and kissed them. "Smooch, smooch, smooch," he said. "Isn't Roni wonderful?" he asked the miniature Brando, "Just wonderful!!!"

Brando smirked.

"He's such a brute," Jim whis-

pered. "Honestly, I don't know what I see in him."

"No NOISE," Roni repeated.

As she turned to go, she noticed Brando's hair was very black and greasy, heaped up in an Elvis pompadour. The light was not flattering. He had a bad case of acne.

"And remember," she said, a prohibitive finger pointed with ominous intent, "just the living room."

Jim kissed her hands again. He trailed her to the stairs. Watched as she ascended, flat-footed, straight-backed, hump-shouldered with prerogative. "Now, that's a great broad!" he said.

When "the broad" re-entered Sam and Dolly's room, her date ("toy-boys" Soup called them) laughed wildly. He was watching the Three Stooges on channel 38. Thank God, Roni thought, the Nintendo's downstairs.

An Hour Later: *score one for Brando*

The 'ludes were hitting hard, blotting out everything. Roni woke up. She was thirsty. She looked over for "the kid." What was his name? Peter? But he was already gone. That was Ok. The last thing she wanted was male smugness in the morning.

At the bottom of the stairs, to her right, she heard something in the darkness of the living room. She snapped on the kitchen light. When her eyes adjusted, she discerned movement. A thrashing in the semi-darkness. And remembered Jim. The miniature Brando.

Suddenly (she didn't know why), she was possessed by overwhelm-

Best In Show



ing emotion: pissed—shocked—disgusted. One thing to talk about it, but the actual physical fact? She was outraged.

“LISTEN,” she cried, harsh with loathing, “I want you outta here by DAWN. BEFORE THE SUN COMES UP—GOD DAMN IT!”

All movement ceased.

“I have a child upstairs, for Christ sakes!” Her voice sounded reedy and ready to break. “Do you hear me?” she asked.

“Yes,” a small voice answered.

It was Jim.

Now she saw him. On all fours, head down, and the miniature Brando mounting from behind. Only Brando was decidedly not miniature. Roni flinched. “Oh!” she cried and fled. “DAWN!” she called over her shoulder in full retreat. “DAWN!”

“Yes,” Jim moaned. The movement resumed. “Oh, Y-e-s-s!”

Another Hour Later: THE MOTHER OF ALL MIGRAINES

The front door swung open.

It was Dolly and Sam.

The bed at the Hyatt was unacceptable. “This is not a Sealy Extra Extra Firm,” Dolly asserted. “I distinctly requested Sealy Extra Extra Firm.” It was impossible. She couldn’t stay another minute. Her back wouldn’t permit it. Sam had to pack the car in the middle of the night. They drove home.

Around 3 a.m., Dolly unlocked the front door of the house on Merrimac Street. The door swung open and she was confronted by the image of Jim and the decidedly “un-miniature” Brando humping (unceremoniously) in her newly redecorated living room, on her new carpet, propped on her new pillows, watching themselves before her new wall-to-wall floor-to-ceiling mirrors. (“It will make the room seem twice as large, darling,” the decorator assured Dolly).

“Sam! Sam!” Dolly cried, her voice strangled by fear and unreality.

She swooned.

Sam’s mouth fell open.

“What the hell. . .?” he said (a

favorite expression) and dropped the suitcases.

Crisis ensued. Chaos. Perhaps the only thing entirely clear at that moment was that Dolly was about to get the worst migraine in the history of American medicine.

This is how Roni explained it:

Earlier that evening, she went to ‘the club.’ Not much was happening. After a few drinks, she decided to go home. On her way out, she ran into Jim and his “friend.” They chatted amiably. An “off” night, so Roni invited them back to watch “Casablanca” on The Movie Channel.

Around midnight, she developed a headache (that darn green screen on her new Glysex at work) and decided to turn in. But “Casablanca” was only half complete. Jim and his “friend” asked if they could watch what remained. Roni had known Jim for a long time. Trusted him implicitly. It never crossed her mind that anything untoward could occur. She bid them “Good night,” asked them to turn off the lights and TV, to lock the door behind them. That was the last thing she knew until Sam and Dolly arrived home.

“When I found out,” Roni told Dolly, “I was absolutely furious! I’m still shaking. Shane was sleeping just above them. Who knows what could have happened. I’ll never forgive Jim. NEVER!”

Dolly was an enlightened woman of her generation, who possessed a working knowledge of quantum physics. She understood that time and space could be relative, elastic, subject to revision based upon altered point of view. That is to say, on Monday morning (after an appropriate period of sulking and silence), the past revealed itself differently. Only someone, say, as unimaginative as Kenny, would stubbornly insist that all facts be accurate, accounted for, and consequential. Besides, objective reality was no longer a relevant concept, no longer a dependable framework within which human beings could order their lives. What was “real” was a function of per-

ception. At least as it applied to Roni. After all, how could she be held accountable for the irresponsible actions of others? Thus, the episode in question was officially categorized. It would never be mentioned again.

Epilogue: *Morning in America*

Monday 6 a.m.: *Sing, Sam sing!*

Roni sipped a cup of coffee. Across the table, Shane sampled Gerber’s mush. In the kitchen, Dolly bent awkwardly before the refrigerator. “Now, where is that?” she complained. “Do you have it out there?”

No answer.

“Do you have the margarine?”

Dolly called.

“No,” Roni replied.

“Where can it be?” Dolly wondered. “I bought one just last week. I’m positive.” She moved things around. “Sure it isn’t out there?”

Before Roni could speak, she saw it peeking out between the Corn Flakes and the No-Fat Farm Rich. She noticed, also, something foreign in the tub. At first it was no more than a peripheral blur. Ragged. Something coarse and knotted in the saffron goo. Bent. Jagged. A spiral. A coil. And there was another and another. What could it be? Roni suffered a brief attack of vertigo.

“I don’t know,” Dolly said, standing upright, hands on hips, ruminant. She peered dumbly in the open fridge. “I must be losing my mind.”

Roni closed her eyes. Perhaps she was mistaken. She looked again.

This time there was no doubt. Indisputable. Lurking in the open tub was Brando’s hair. Jim was blonde. Roni brown. The hair in the container was thick and shiny, black and virulent, cankerous, mephitic. Brando’s black hair. Brando’s black. . .PUBIC. . .hair!

She wanted to retch, to flee the house, the neighborhood, the state, the planet. An ineluctable desire for motion. To move as fast and as far away as possible from the dreaded objects. But she couldn’t leave them there. Something had to be done!

Dolly closed the refrigerator door, picked up her coffee from a near-

The Blotter

by counter, and started toward the dining room. "I must be going crazy," she said.

Roni panicked. She grabbed a handful of napkins, scooped the top inch of the margarine clean, rolled it into another ball of napkins and dumped it into her purse.

"What's wrong with you?" Dolly asked as she sat down.

"Nothing," Roni answered, snapping the clip of her purse.

"You have the oddest look on your face. Are you feeling well?"

"No, I'm fine," Roni nodded.

"There it is!" Dolly cried triumphantly.

Roni flinched. Her eyes opened wide. "What? What?" she said reaching instinctively for her purse.

"Didn't you see it?"

"What!"

"The Margarine," Dolly said, pointing to the errant tub.

"Oh—guess I didn't," Roni mumbled, relieved. Then she watched in horror as Dolly buttered a raisin bagel. Not satisfied to cover the whole surface, she heaped on extra—just for good measure. One pinky extended, she took several lady-sized bites.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Dolly asked as she chewed daintily. "You look so pale."

"Do I?" Roni answered. She couldn't take her eyes off the forbidding oval.

"You know," Dolly decided, "we should stop going to 'Bagel Land.'" She held the bagel aloft for inspection. "It's just not the same since the son took over."

Roni was finding it difficult to breathe. She bit her tongue, sucked in her cheeks. Stared hard at the Corn Flakes. Tried not to speculate about the exact capacity in which the tub was employed.

At that moment, Sam came padding through in his robe and slippers. Wizen and unshaved, thick salt-and-pepper hair tousled and tossed. He hummed a favorite tune. Dolly, regal in her housecoat, chewed quite happily. She sat the dining room table like a coach-and-four.

Roni looked at the two of

them and had to laugh. She just had to laugh.

"What's so funny," Dolly asked.

"Nothing," Roni answered. Her eyes began to fill.

"That's not nice," Dolly said, smiling.

"*It's nice to be nice*," Sam said, right on cue, re-entering the dining room, coffee in hand.

Roni couldn't stand it. She really began to laugh. Laugh hard.

Shane laughed too.

Dolly beamed.

Then Sam, standing by Roni, leaned down, put one arm around her shoulder, gestured like the lounge singers he'd seen at the Moose, and broke into song:

Smile though your heart is breaking

Smile even though it's aching

When there are clouds in the sky

You'll get by. . . if you just smile. . .

Roni gagged. Tears rolled down her cheeks, milk spouted from her nose, dribbled down her chin.

Kenny walked in, there to pick up his father for work. He poured a cup of coffee and entered the dining room.

When Roni saw him, she laughed even more. She looked at the three of them, from one to the other—dumb, benign smiles each—and she just couldn't help it. She laughed, cackled, sobbed, choked, began to heave. Roni had to run to the kitchen sink. Bleary-eyed, rufescent, she grabbed blindly for a glass of water.

"What's going on?" Kenny asked.

"That girl," Dolly said, shaking her head. She couldn't remember Roni ever laughing so hard.

Kenny smiled cautiously.

"Want a bagel?" Dolly said to Kenny. "Try the fat-free margarine, it has a very distinct taste."

Roni doubled over, holding her sides, fighting for air.

"What?" Sam kept saying, laughing himself, trying to prop Roni up, "What?"

Shane bounced in his high-chair making goofy noises.

They all laughed. They didn't

know why, but they all began to laugh. Even Kenny. "THAT GIRL," Dolly repeated, wiping tears from her eyes. Just when they were beginning to slow down, one would look at the other, and they'd start over again. Kenny had his arm around his father for mutual support. Roni was sprawled spread-legged in an open kitchen drawer. And they laughed. They all laughed.

"Isn't it wonderful," Dolly thought, "how well we get along?"

Coda: *Who said all happy families are alike?*

—Kenny Roth

—the end—



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.

If nothing else, we'd love to read them.

We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterrag.com

Most of the time my wife wakes me up from the worst (I don't know for sure, because she always wakes me up just in time) parts of my nightmares. Something I do in my sleep - shake, snort, shout - alerts her in her own sleep-addled place to come to my rescue. A hand on my arm, gentle, then more firm, breaks (brakes) the descent into subconscious horror. I try and thank her as I gasp for the fresh air of awakened-ness and shake the images of the deep dark from my brain. She always says "OK, goodnight," then turns over to try and regain that place she was when I interrupted with my occasional night-train riding off the rails. If I remember - I don't always, thank goodness - I apologize in the morning. Sometimes she remembers, sometimes not. That is also pretty good, considering.

J-Man - cyberspace

"Motherhood"

by Kelly Ann Jacobson

I dreamt that I had a daughter
who did not look like me.
In the dream we swam in water,
as blue and vast as the sea.

And beneath the steady surface
lay presents wrapped in gold—
piles and piles of presents
with contents unfortold.

My daughter was much too little
to dive for her surprise;
her father was noncommittal,
so I closed my fearful eyes.

I went below, and swam, and stroked
as long as breath would last,
Yet there was much more gold that soaked
in boxes still amassed.

The oxygen left my body,
and all sight left my eyes;
the life that once belonged to me
now just another prize.

Mothers, in their loyal love,
will give their daughters all,
until there's nothing left to give,
but a hollow, floating doll.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Michael Campagnoli writes, "In the past, I taught literature and writing while studying for a Ph.D. at Indiana University. Since then, I've worked a variety of jobs, including fisherman, journalist, and short-order cook. Currently, I proofread/line-edit the local newspaper and home school my sixteen year-old son.

My awards include the New Letters Poetry Award, the All Nations Press Chapbook Award, and The Chiron Review Novella Prize. My fiction and poetry have appeared in New Letters, Nimrod, Southern Humanities Review, Descant, and elsewhere. I've published three chapbooks and my poems and stories have been anthologized in Best New Writing of 2010, ISFN's Anthology #1, and The Bethany Reader."

Blotterfriend **Kelly Ann Jacobson** is a novelist, editor, and poet who lives in Falls Church, Virginia. She recently received her MA in Fiction at Johns Hopkins University, and she now teaches as an Adjunct Professor of Composition and Literature. Information about her published novels, poetry, short stories, and nonfiction can be found at www.kellyannjacobson.com.

Keith Norval has been reading The Blotter for ten years. He paints mostly oil on canvas. and is based in Raleigh, NC.

Phil Juliano sent us a note that he is taking a short vay-kay with his family. Good, he deserves it, so don't *nobody* hassle him.

CREATIVE METALSMITHS

Kim Maitland

117 E. Franklin St., Chapel Hill

919-967-2037

www.creativemetalsmiths.com

Weekdays 11 - 6 * Saturdays 10 - 5 * Sundays 12 - 5



... have good
taste.

They read
"The Blotter".

So should
you.

Subscriptions \$25.

www.blotterrag.com

**Friendship, loyalty, nostalgia; and the joy
and healing power of music...**

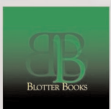
A Southern college town and its thriving local music scene,
where the music's neither "sacred" nor "profane" so long as it's
good...

A lost tape of a beloved band's legendary show...

A record label, poised to break big, which certain people want
to be part of - by any means necessary...

Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over
long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student,
who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't
face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in
danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...



Blotter Books presents:

All Tomorrow's Parties

by Marty Smith



(publisher & book reviewer, "The Blotter Magazine;" contributor to the "Urban
Hiker;" former host of "New Frontiers" and "Laugh Tracks" on WXDU - FM,
Duke University Radio)

Available in print or e-reader at www.wileequixote.com



*all
tomorrow's
parties*

marty smith