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Klondike Krunch Popsicle

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The Teaching in Prison Poem, and
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Cover and photography by Alexander Rojas

Photography by Caitlin Crowley

Editors – KC Kirkley & Marcella Prokop

Editor's Forward

To consider the past is to choose between regret and nostalgia. Is there any other way of looking back? And those two choices are closer to each other than we might assume, modulated by time and perspective, replacing one another as the years go by, often mixing together in a soupy mix of longing and guilt.

Young students learn the dictum early on: we must know our history or we will be doomed to repeat it; and the poets show us the devastating pull of memory on our present. In his "Ode to Memory," Tennyson addressed it as "Thou who stealest fire / From the fountains of the past, / To glorify the present" and welcomed it to "Strengthen me, enlighten me! / I faint in this obscurity / Thou dewy dawn of memory."

Emily Dickinson had a darker view (of course):

Remorse - is Memory - awake -
Her Parties all astir -
A Presence of Departed Acts -
At window - and at Door -

Its Past - set down before the Soul
And lighted with a Match -
Perusal - to facilitate -
And help Belief to stretch -

Remorse is cureless - the Disease
Not even God - can heal -
For 'tis His institution - and
The Adequate of Hell -

This month's selections of poetry and fiction also consider that practice of looking back. Though it's fraught with danger and pain, it can also inspire.

Enjoy!

KC Kirkley

Jennifer Raha

is Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Chowan University. Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Triquarterly*, *Canary*, *Nimrod*, and *Blue Lyra*.



"Passages" by Caitlin Crowley

Two Poems by Jennifer Raha

Elegy for my youth

At their desks, the students pop up and down
like children's toys, Lawrence
declaring he'd made it through the whole class
without sleeping; he works nights,
cracks jokes in class, has fun until dozing off.

I don't mind it, enjoy the laughter—
so few of the students laughing, even before class,
their silence filling like a hot oven
steams the kitchen in summer.

I'm always thinking about summer,
the tan legs, the running resumed, the pounding
of pavement making me invincible,
alongside Adele and One Republic, convenience pop
that makes the day as simple
as picking a bar in college and a life—

I thought I had done that, could decide
the kind of woman I would become, that I couldn't
haphazardly spread into middle age,
into a reckless freedom of boundlessness.

I dream of butt in mud planting, open fields
or spiraling roads, no limits.

No limits—the quote on the inspirational poster
in my own brother's high school. My high school.

Such an odd aphorism for us county kids
who can't figure out all this hustle and busy and *wait*—

- -

Klondike Krunch Popsicle

At the stoplight by Dollar Deals and Big Lots,
three generations eat ice-cream in a navy minivan.

Grandma drives with her bright hair,
her bottled strawberry blond.

The daughter, in worn middle age,
looks out the window

as the girl in the back, six, maybe,
moves around on her calves

getting a better glimpse of something.
And it's true, there's always something

better in the front seat. Except
maybe today, I think, as I watch them

alone from my car on the day after Christmas,
watch the three of them

eating ice-cream, tongues wagging
oblivious to time or to traffic

oblivious to me, stealing
my past back with their present.

- -

Jack Zimmerman

grew up on the Southwest Side of Chicago and spent four years in the Navy during the Vietnam War. He's worked as a college instructor, piano tuner, newspaper columnist, and for a time was a trombone player on WGN's "Bozo's Circus." He's a published novelist and an avid storyteller. In 2012, Jack won the Helen Coburn Meier and Tim Meier Arts Achievement Award. In 2014 he retired from the PR department of Lyric Opera, where, among other things, he answered complaint letters. His newest collection of stories, *Family Photos*, will be ready for telling in early 2016.



Photograph by Alexander Rojas

Wakes

by Jack Zimmerman

My mother grew up around 78th and Exchange. Her father owned two or three trucks and hauled wire for the wire mill. He was an Irish immigrant who grabbed on to half the American dream. He owned a business but never a house.

My father's people had a saloon at 50th and Western. The building's still there. My father grew up in that saloon. He was more at home in a bar than anywhere else. In the late 1930s he went to work as a traffic engineer for the Chicago Park District. His alderman got him the job. My dad had studied engineering, but it was the Depression, and he wound up working as a helper on a beer truck. Eventually, his alderman took care of him, got him on at the Park District. He stayed there for most of his working life.

The thing about my father was that he knew every street in Chicago, even North-Side diagonals like Milwaukee, Elston, and Lincoln. Even real obscure diagonals like the very remote Northwest Highway. He knew them all. Whenever we were out somewhere, somebody'd stop him. "Hey, John!" the guy'd say. "I gotta delivery at Diversey and Western. How far north's that?"

My father'd smile. "Twenty-eight hundred!" he'd say.

My mom was always so proud of him for knowing so much about Chicago. "Your father's a genius," she'd say. "He knows all those Northside streets!"

My parents didn't go to the theater or to art shows, or concerts or even movies. They were South Siders. They went to wakes. It didn't matter if they knew the deceased or not. If they knew the corpse's second cousin, that was close enough. Hell, if they knew a friend of the corpse's second cousin that was just as good. I remember my father coming home from work one night:

He rushes into the kitchen. "We gotta get over to Stransky's" he says. "Jimmy Marzullo's mother-in-law's laid out there!"

My mom gets real indignant. "I saw nothing about it in either morning paper," she says.

"It's in the Herald-American!" my father says and throws down the folded newspaper, like it's a winning poker hand.

Stransky's was Otto V. Stransky and Son Funeral Chapel at 51st and Western. It was my father's favorite place for wakes. He had gone to school with the son in Stransky and Son and he never missed a chance to attend a wake or funeral there. The two parlors at Stransky's were big and spacious. Lots of plush upholstered furniture for the grieving and Stransky's had a smoker, a basement room for smoking and storytelling. But it wasn't the plush upholstery or the basement smoker that called to my father. It was the bar next door: The Blue Condors Club.

At Stransky's, men sat in the smoker, talking about baseball, democratic politics or speculating when the first black family would move west of Halsted. They then adjourned to the Condors to continue their discussions. My mother often sent me there to get my father. The grieving at Stransky's finished by ten, but the Condors closed after midnight.

"Mom wants to go," I'd say to my father as he sat at the Condors' bar.

"I'll be right there," he'd say. But he never came right away.

My mother and I waited in the car, a '54 Olds 88 parked in Stransky's lot. My mother sat behind the wheel because she knew my father would be too drunk to drive. Pretty soon, he'd stumble over and settle into the passenger seat – never offer an apology. My mom would give him the silent treatment, and she wouldn't say anything to me, either, but only because she was so mad at him.

I hated all that silence. I'd do my little-kid best to start a conversation, but I'd get no takers, so I'd quietly sit between them in the front seat. As we headed south on Western Avenue, I'd pass the time watching the lights of used car lots dance across our windshield.

I remember one morning when my father was poring over the *Tribune* and he found a death notice for a guy who was a friend of a distant cousin. His wake was on the North Side.

"How far north?" my mother asks.

"Foster Avenue," my father says, with the paper still stretched out in front of him.

"Foster? Foster? Where's that?" she says nearly getting hysterical.

"Fifty-two hundred north," my father says.

My mother then sits down on a kitchen chair, and draws a long, slow breath. She'd only been north of the Loop one time. That was the day she and her sister ditched high school to watch Hack Wilson play with the Cubs. "Can we get up to Foster and back in the same night?" she asks.

"We'll leave the minute I get home from work," my father says. "And make sure the kid wears a suit."

We left at 5:30. This was before Chicago had expressways, and before cars had air-conditioning. We sweated our way up Western, from 6300 south all the way to 5200 north. Got to the funeral home at 7:30. The place was nothing compared to Stransky's, one parlor and a pathetic little smoker.

My father pays his respects and shakes a few hands and heads for the bar across the street – says he knows somebody there. My father was one of those people who knew somebody everywhere.

My mother and I sit in the funeral parlor, talking to complete strangers for a couple of hours. Finally, we go out to the car and we find my father asleep on the back seat. My mother looks real sad. "Let's go," she whispers. We drive off, and she does her best to retrace my father's route.

That was impossible. The woman had no sense of direction. And there were all those North Side streets that sounded so strange to our South Side ears: Catalpa, Balmoral, Bryn Mawr, Pratt, Roscoe, Wellington, Wolfram, Barry . . . Christ, we were lost for hours. We drove in circles. We stopped at gas stations for directions, but we couldn't find our way. And through all this, my father slept.

Sometime past midnight, my mother stops the car. "John," she says, and shakes him.

"We're lost!"

"What street you on?" he asks and doesn't even bother to sit up.

"Milwaukee. We just passed Division," she says.

He opens one eye. "Addresses getting' bigger or smaller?"

"Smaller," she says.

"Keep goin'. Cross Chicago Avenue, make a right on Ogden, then a left on Western." He then goes back to sleep.

We found our way, and once we were home, my father got out of the car and managed to get into bed without any help from my mother and me. The next morning my mother bragged about her husband to anybody who'd listen. "My John knows all those North Side streets – better than any North Sider!"

When I was thirteen, my father made a final visit to Stransky's. He died suddenly and was waked there for three days. Everybody came, even the Mayor, the old man himself, Richard J. Daley. But it didn't matter who came. My father wouldn't be flying with the Condors anymore.

On the day of the funeral, as the mourners filed past the casket, more than one put his hand on my shoulder. "Your father was a genius," they said. "He knew all those North Side streets."

- -

Ron Riecki

Ron Riecki's books include *U.P.: a novel*, *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (2014 Michigan Notable Book), and *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula*, <http://msupress.org/books/book/?id=50-1D0-3479#.VKZ4kmTF-PU>. His play "Carol" was in The Best Ten-Minute Plays 2012, *The First Real Halloween* was best sci-fi/fantasy screenplay for the 2014 International Family Film Festival, and "The Family Jewel" was selected by Pulitzer Prize-winner Robert Olen Butler for *The Best Small Fictions 2015*. Riecki's non-fiction, fiction, and poetry have been published in *Shenandoah*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Juked*, *decomp*, *Spillway*, *New Ohio Review*, and many other literary journals. His screenplays have been finalists for the Beverly Hills Screenplay Contest, Crimson Screen Horror Film Fest, Fantasmagorical Film Festival, The International Horror Hotel Film Festival, Marquee Lights Competition, Terror Film Festival, and other screenplay contests.



Photograph by Alexander Rojas

Three Poems by Ron Riecki

The Poem That Got Me Killed

It hit too close to home.
Or it hit home.
Exploded the kitchen.
Made my brother go mad.
Or not mad.
But more like stupid.
The inability to make proper choices.
It comes with heroin.
The cooking pots midair.
The air filled with smoke.
Me, coughing, saying
What do you care?
You don't read anyway.
But here's a fist.
And here's another fist.
And here's a fist made of Ronnie James Dio.
The radio in the background
is being strangled by country music.
I shouldn't've wrote about his addiction.
Should have asked him first.
"Can I write about your heroin addiction?"
"No."
"Well, fuck you, I'm going to anyway."
And here I am.
At it again.
I can almost hear the fists being made.
A factory for fists.
Santa's sleigh filled with those motherfuckers.
Just present after present after present.

--

The Teaching in Prison Poem

It was easy.
The teaching.
The worry about getting stabbed was hard.
But when I look back on it,
I probably should have worried about that less.
Or maybe worrying about it less
would have got me stabbed.
It's sort of like being a tree in the woods,
pissed on by some hunter
with a penis the size of a muskrat.
If you like that metaphor,
here's another one.
A leprechaun is fucking a leper.
Both of them die
because of the inability to afford heat
this winter.

- -

My Philosophy Teacher Tells Us a War Story

It's a short one.

He was on a ship.

A guy was running towards him.

Not to him.

To somebody else.

But the guy didn't see the plane's blades—
whatever they're called.

I'm going with "plane's blades."

When they're going really fast,
they're invisible.

Anyway, the guy ran into them
and the philosophy teacher
said it was like he evaporated.

Then he went on
to bore us to hell
with stuff Aristotle said.

- -

Patricia Ann McNair

teaches in the Department of Creative Writing, Columbia College Chicago. Her short story collection, *The Temple of Air*, won the Chicago Writers Association's Book of the Year, Southern Illinois University's Devil's Kitchen Readers Award, and Society of Midland Authors Finalist Award. Her short story, "My Mother's Daughter" won first prize in SolLit's fiction awards in 2014. McNair's work has appeared in *American Fiction: Best Unpublished Short Stories by Emerging Writers*, *Prime Number*, *River Teeth*, *Fourth Genre*, *Brevity*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and other publications.



"Light at the End" by Caitlin Crowley

Tommy on the Roof

by Patricia Ann McNair

In the dream he is flying. Moonglow on his face.

We used to climb out on the roof when we were kids. Nighttime, under the stars. Big sister (me) and little brother. He was scared at first, so small and blond. Afraid of heights, afraid of falling. When did that change? I held Tommy's hand as he stepped out of his window, kept him steady on his feet until he got used to looking down. The evergreen that Dad planted spread its needled arms over the gutter, reached for us. You couldn't see us from the street, thanks to that big, beautiful tree. You couldn't see anything. We were ten, twelve. Two years between us.

"High," he said, and I could hear it in his voice, the change that was coming, a squawk in the word's middle. "Like flying," he said. And Tommy let go of my hand, settled down on the blanket I'd brought out. I sat next to him and our knees touched.

Dad was dead just two days then. Mom was drinking downstairs in the kitchen; we could see the light from the window beneath us, evergreen shadows thrown over the lawn. Sometimes we heard her wail.

Folks say it's hereditary this thing, this thing that makes us feel empty, needy, yearning toward whatever fills us up. Dad was a junkie. Mom was a drunk. (She's not now, not anymore, she's God-filled instead and I can barely stand to listen to her talk anymore, to her prayers of nothingness: "let go and let God." Let him what?) I liked boys. And he did, too, Tommy, my brother. And junk. And drink. Even as a kid. He was never big on God, though.

On weekend nights for months, years, we met up there, on the roof outside his window. Sometimes he'd be there first, sometimes I would. A bottle of something. Something to smoke. My window was at the back of the house and I would have to climb up the slant to the peak (split-level, suburban home, full of junkies and drunks even though you might not know it to look at us: station wagon, newspaper route, Mom at the bank and Dad gone so me pushing the lawnmower on summer days) and when I got up there I would look out on the dark world beneath me, the places I knew and didn't, over the rooftops of our neighbors, past the park and the trees, to the horizon. Then I'd whistle soft and Tommy would turn and tilt and there I was, his sister, towering over him, my head in the stars. I'd pretend to slip then, trip on a shingle, lose my footing, wave my arms, whisper "oh

shit.” And no matter how many times I did it, old joke, bad, old joke, my brother would freeze and draw breath loud enough to hear inside the house, probably. If anyone was listening.

One time I came over the peak and found him under the blanket (up there always, days and nights, rain or clear) with Randy from down the street, a dark-haired boy from my grade, one I always wanted but could never have (even though I tried, tight jeans and flirting, tops you could see my nipples through) and they didn’t notice me because they were looking at each other, heads together, blond Tommy, dark Randy, bodies pressed and moving, urgent.

We stopped talking then for a while. Not because it was a boy up there with Tommy, but because it was *the* boy up there with Tommy. And he knew it, knew Randy was what I wanted. And it wouldn’t be until later, much later when I read his diary as I packed up his stuff, sorted out what to keep and what to give away, that I’d find out Randy was there that night because Tommy had invited him. For me. For me.

It was Randy who was to blame, I wanted to believe. Because Randy was going steady. Promised to a girl with that stupid promise ring (a band, a diamond chip) and then he stopped talking to Tommy even though he made sure to talk about him. “Faggot.” Not like we didn’t know. Not like anyone didn’t know. But still, Tommy was emptier than ever and used whatever he could to fill himself up, more so than ever, scary so, from right about then on. And that’s when I tried to talk to him again, but it was too late. He even said that: “Too late, sister. Too late.”

The evergreen tree grew close to the house and its roots got into the foundation and Mom, sobered up and God-filled by then, got someone from the church to come. And I heard Tommy crying and watched the church man come out of my brother’s bedroom before he cut down the tree, before he hauled it away. And you could see everything then. The street, the roof, the gutters clogged with needles, the blanket flattened on the shingles.

When it came time for me to leave for college, Mom was proud and Tommy was in the basement then, moved with his stuff and his stereo and he kept his door locked and his music loud and he could sneak out from underground by the cellar door. And the day before I was meant to go, Tommy was gone. Gone for good, I hoped. Not because I wanted him gone always, but because it was good I wanted for him, and I thought gone, gone from here, maybe he’d find good.

“Flew,” the note on his pillow said.

Years later, he's there in my dreams, flying still.

And when I pull into the driveway of Mom's house, walk past the flimsy white plastic cross she has planted where the evergreen used to be, I can't help but look up to the roof, to Tommy's window.

He's not there, he's never there. Good. Good and gone.

Still, I can't help but look.

- -

Peyton Brown

is a garbage man and improviser living in Chicago. Writes only while drunk. Prefers pajamas to most other forms of clothing. Previously published poetry has only appeared scrawled on conspicuously placed bar napkins. Has a cigar box filled with childhood swim team participation ribbons, for some reason. Not fond of children.



Photograph by Alexander Rojas

For S., Who Worries Too Much
by Peyton Brown

For how she wonders
If her brain is good enough;
If her face is clear enough,
And her body enough
Of what a body should be.
Or too little?

For the things she thinks
That she hates,
When she doesn't realize
That we're all too busy
Hating our own thoughts
To hate her for hers.
Who forgets:
We're all trapped in here, too,
Tapping on the walls,
Listening for a response,
And too seldom hearing it
When it comes.

For what she regrets doing,
And what she regrets

Not having done.

When the fullness,

And the rightness

Of a life is never easy.

Or simple.

Or explained.

For the ache between

The hither and yawn

Of movement and boredom.

And whether to travel,

Or should you stay still?

And, in that stillness, find

Peace? Contentment?

Or, more likely: neither.

For the wanting of too much,

Getting of too little,

And deserving more than most

In a world, hard;

In a life, messy,

Messed, and missing.

For her days of want,
And nights of full,
And the grey in-between;
Each one spilling meaning.
Each one singing
Happiness ahead! or
Sadness, soon.
But none measured
Better than the last;
None saying who she is,
Or what she's for,
Or how well
She should be loved.

For the woman who
Hurt herself too much,
Over too little.
For the girl who
Stood in the rain,
And smiled at the lightning.

Laugh at the sky,
Nervous heart.
And bend to the wind,

Dear one,

Which blows you

I don't know where.

But away...

Always away.

- -

Chad Cheatham

won the Matthew Arnold Essay Award while attending the City Colleges of Chicago. He went on to study writing and film at the University of Arizona, but dropped out so he could give birth to a small music rag, *The Crutch*, where he reigned as editor in chief (2003-2006). In relation to the publication, *UR Chicago* named Chad as one of their “30 Under 30” in 2005. Not wanting to hustle anything but a handful of screenplays in the last eight years, he has compiled a dusty cache of short stories, essays, and prose. He is currently working on a cable series.



Photograph by Alexander Rojas

Common Place

by Chad Cheatham

This common place, with its hip cliques and fraternity networks and who ya knows – this common place, from which I recoiled and left long ago at the side of a desolate stretch of road in a common place – the very same common place, now with older faces and siphoned rat races and louder streets and danger on the way to the corner store, night or day. Lines of anxiety, all wanting to be part of something someone said was something. It's nothing. It's the same new nothing.

It's a common place, leveling the trick – like any other place that scribbles unwritten rules on the gossip lips of those who now must build a childhood before their neighborhood gets the hose and polish and high rents and new buildings that cheapen the brick and strip the blocks of their segregated character – each graffitied with corruption and violence.

Discourse removed, apathy added, a shriek of complacency – a new restaurant, a new restaurant, a new restaurant – the ache in the common place needs a brand and a connected name and a how do you do. It cannot last because it is suspension, not progression. Beyond the jungles and the levees and the machines, this common place still holds dreams unseen, set for the next set of great architects, fitted for a future age of action.

- -

About the Artists

Alexander Rojas

Alexander Rojas is a filmmaker and lifelong Chicagoan from the Little Village/Pilsen community. He grew up in Chicago's local punk scene and would go on to study film and writing at Northwestern University. His films have premiered multiple times at Slamdance and the Chicago Underground Film Festival. He is currently in pre-production on his first feature and a co-host of the *Newtrons Do It Better* podcast.

Caitlin Crowley

Caitlin Crowley is a fine art film & darkroom photographer from Fort Wayne, Indiana. She has a B.A of Studio Art from the University of Saint Francis. Caitlin's photography has been published in *F-Stop Magazine* and *Feature Shoot*. When she is not behind the camera, Caitlin enjoys running, roller derby, and sushi.

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