

Vol 03, Issue 11

Summer Path 2014

Stone Path Review



Contents

Images

22 Cover

photography by Aaron Bowen

23 Rainbow at the Ranch

photography by Brian Biggs

23 11/11 @ 11:11

photography by Brian Biggs

25 Collection

photography by Galen Faison

24 Sunlight on Shells

photography by A.J. Huffman

27 Collection

photography by Claire Ibarra

13 Northern Pearly-Eye

photography by John Sikkila

Interview

31 Beth Donovan

Stone Path Review

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Words

2 Artist Quarter

3 Introduction by William Ricci

4 Tonka Truck

poetry by John Michael Flynn

5 The Fountain poetry by Michael Gould

6 Ravel's Lament

poetry by Kathryn Hujda

7 Blossoming poetry by J.B. Mulligan

8 Guantanamo poetry by Sarah Nour

9 Trying to Believe

poetry by David Rutter

10 Flow - Meditation by a River

poetry by Jeffrey Willius

11 Getting Low

short story by Michael K. Gause

13 Patient Care

short story by Kathleen Lindstrom

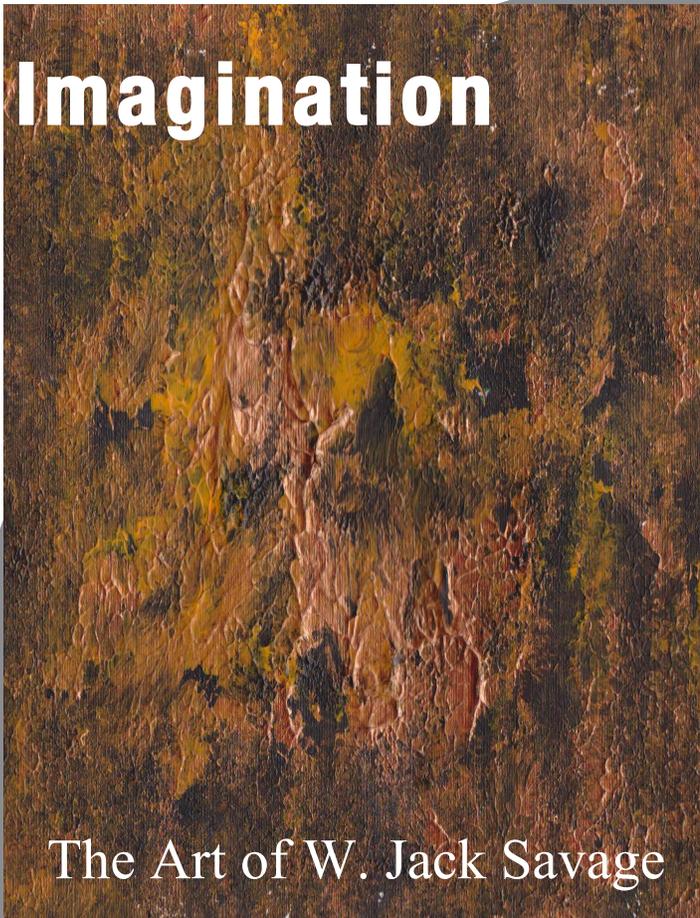
Cover Image

by Aaron Bowen

Location/image info: see page 22

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Imagination



The Art of W. Jack Savage

Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage book

Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage is a collection of more than 60 pieces from St. Paul, MN native (now living in California) W. Jack Savage. This can be purchased at Amazon.com.

More information at
www.wjacksavage.com

Aaron Bowen & “Final Friday” limited engagement

Reverie Coffee Roasters, 2611 E Douglas Ave of Wichita, Kansas presents, “Final Friday” show on July 25th, from 6-9 pm. Collection will be on display thru August 26th.

www.facebook.com/events/1584389968454008/

Included in the showing;
“Wichita Noir/13 photographs of Briley Meek”
by Aaron Bowen. This is a combination of
photography with encaustic (wax) medium on
6 x 6 inch cradled wood panels.



“I have learned that creativity comes from doing things--you just have to start, do something, even though you may not know the final destination. You have to let the process, the experience, teach you. Kind of humbling in a way..”

A Bowen

Summer 2014 Introduction

by William Ricci

Welcome to Summer 2014, our 11th issue of Stone Path Review.

We celebrate summer, the time of growth, with an issue packed full of beautiful, insightful, and thought-provoking writing; photography about life, the daily moments near us, and an interview with a farmer.

As life continues to accelerate and we become more integrated with technology, what does it mean to be living?

I watch the pond in our backyard for hours, at different times of the day, through everything that nature throws at me. The activity of many creatures - ducks, red-winged blackbirds, muskrats, and ravens - follow the amount of sunlight, moonlight, rain, snow, and other influences. This world of nature, of beings interacting directly with their environment, involves adaptation and a survival instinct for themselves and their offspring. They have a path and a purpose.

At a moment before the sun reaches over the treetops, my only thought is of nothing. All of the sounds emerging from this pond cover me like my Winnie the Pooh security blanket from childhood, and I am able to let go. At that moment, I feel something that has become foreign, that has become elusive - peace. It has taken time, experience, patience, awareness, and the desire to grow and change, to get here.

And the journey is still on going.

What is living?

We are born into this world with a physical body and metaphysical being of a mind and a soul. These pieces come together and create the human that learns to crawl, walk, and exist within the space. That path is comprised of many strings, and each string has many threads. At any point, we can jump from one string to another, and from one thread to the next and the life we experience changes. This jump can be a conscious choice, influenced and caused by the environment, or a shove. How we react to that change determines the experience and how we live. Do we embrace change, or run from what is unfamiliar? And what do we take away from that change?

What is living then?

Each experience is the chance for growth. Whether we initiate the change and take control or react to what we find and against all odds, blind to outcomes, we forge ahead, we can continue to build the person we are now, and who we are growing into. Through questioning and cultivation, we find the person within that has always been there, that we were born with.

Living is being our true self, becoming our true self, and choosing to grow.



Tonka Truck

by John Michael Flynn

My brother picks it up
Brings it to an upright mirror
Studies the flaking paint of its roof
And remembers his earlier self
Without a street face
When everything he did
Had to meet our mother's approval

So much of him reduced
Recovered and reborn out of decay,
Lost as forgotten innocence
Killed off with his coltish impulses
His fine prim dreams
Beached to shifting sand bars
Seasons of unrelenting erosion

He puts the toy back where he found it
Tells me at least its wheels still function

John Michael Flynn's work has appeared recently
in Bare Root, Superstition Review, and Dewpoint.
www.basilrosa.com



The Fountain

by Michael Gould

It is curious how the mist rises like smoke,
every morning in the same direction,
past crumbling stone walls where dragonflies hang
from ivy,
spreading and shutting their wings like lighthouse
beacons,
in the crisp symmetry of the predawn air.

The day begins with a chute of sunlight
off a broken window pane,
tearing through the moist air like a signal flare
shot
from the deck of a doomed fishing boat
into an empty night sky.

Michael Gould is a student at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He lives in Richfield, Minnesota.



Ravel's Lament

by Kathryn Hujda

"I did my work slowly, drop by drop. I tore it out of me by pieces."

Strings reverberate closely with Ravel --
the sunken harp within piano rim sings
with dissonant intervals hidden
amongst delicate melodies.
I play them, again and again:
these octaves imperfect, these chords
that circle around harmony --
seeking the touch that makes discomfort
out of tones. I search the shadows
that permeate, shadows that change shape
but never fully resolve. I know:
his outdated forms, his oldest friends,
his mother, his lover; his people, his pride --
everything we can't bear to lose.

Kathryn Hujda is a performing artist and keeper of cultural memory working in the Twin Cities.



Blossoming

by J.B. Mulligan

The rose of the day opens.
Shadows like shell-bits fall away
and the head emerges.

Birth in its various forms
happens, as if it were not
a miracle, as if the drop

of rain at the end of a leaf
were not commonplace,
an everywhere scream

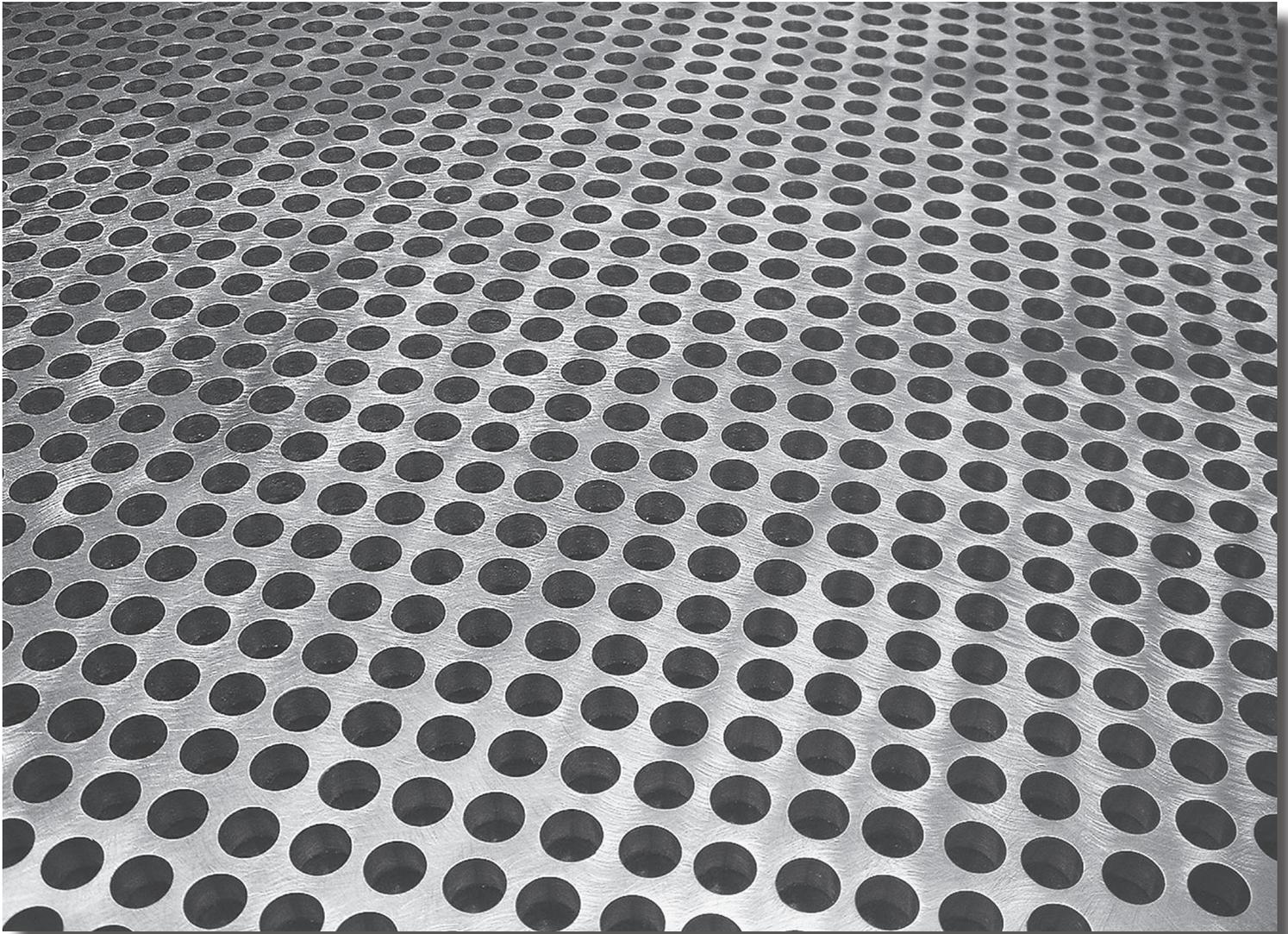
above the spreading void
of light. Bit by jagged bit
the mosaic of the universe

assembles itself in an eye.
An answer might be possible
if there could ever be a question.

A dog nearby starts to bark.
The glass falls from your hand.
You pick up a different glass.

Petals tumble like dice
across the lawn. White clouds
blossom, spread, disappear.

J.B. Mulligan has had poems and stories in several hundred magazines over the past 35 years and has had two chapbooks published: *The Stations of the Cross* and *THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS*, and an e-book, *The City Of Now And Then*.



Guantanamo

by Sarah Nour

I brought children into this perilous world,
Our lands set on cages in the mounds of earth.

The only battles I fought were in the dark room.
Authority figures, fluent in force, interrogate the
Arab.

Numbers in orange uniforms fall towards heaven
As the bloodfruit bleeds, like open pomegranates.

Thousands of eyes hold the cruelty they rouse in
my veins.

Those numbers had names and faces once.

I lost count of the tally marks.

Fall, summer, spring, and winter have passed
beyond these walls.

Sarah Nour is currently a graduate student going for her Master's in fiction writing, as well as an assistant professor, teaching English 101 to freshmen students. Sarah is also a freelance journalist who writes for local publications, such as book reviews for the magazine the High Plains Reader, and reviews of art exhibitions for an Arts Partnership blog.



Trying to Believe

by David Rutter

He knows
You're lying
Through your teeth
As the words
Spill out of your mouth
He can feel the track marks
As he runs his fingers
Down your arm
And your body
Next to his in bed
Is as cold as the death
That waits
Just around the next bend
In the road
But he loves you
More than life itself
And against his better judgement
He's trying to believe in you

He knows
You're lying
When you tell him
Where you've been all night
He knows you didn't
Fall asleep again
On my couch, while we worked
He tells himself
You're sleeping with me
Just to hold the truth at bay

Because that's so much better
Than the alternative
For if he were
To embrace the truth
He'd have to act
But he's your husband
And he doesn't want to leave
So he's just trying to believe

You know
You're lying
To yourself
When you say
You're just taking off your clothes
You'll never take it further
You'll never let them touch you
That's where you draw the line
But somewhere
In the back of your mind
You know for certain
That when push comes to shove
You'll do what it takes
Hell, I would too
But just to make it through the day
We've got to pretend
That you and I have something left
Worth trying to believe in

David Rutter is a Ojai, CA based writer of poetry, fiction and theatre. This year his work has been published in Haggard & Halloo, The Wilderness House Literary Review, Subliminal Interiors, and Dressing Room Poetry Journal, among others. and most recently, the Los Angeles Times.



Flow - Meditation by a River

by Jeffrey Willius

Your life's wanderings have brought you to a small river. You sit on a large deadfall—oak, perhaps—whose body time has stripped of bark. The dry wood is warmed by late May sun.

Better than silence, the place murmurs with comings and goings of countless living things. You watch life's drama play out, as if unreeled slowly, frame by frame, by the passing water.

A kingfisher laces the far bank of the river, dipping and rising from one vantage point to the next. The filament of his presence passes from riverine space into that of your soul, seamlessly, and back out again, then slowly out of sight down around the bend.

Just below you, a school of redhorse works the shallows, vacuuming the sandy bottom. You marvel at the interplay between each purposeful individual and the seeming randomness of the group. It, too, swirls slowly past with the current

and disappears.

You imagine the thoughts and emotions of your day, like these other living things, coming into view in and over the water. They too fly and swim and pass through, from the unimaginable expanse of the cosmos, into and through the slice of it that is your consciousness, and then back out again to join the eternal flow of life.

You sit there, as aware as one can possibly be of the simple joy of this place of calmness and connection. You glow with gratitude for the fact that your presence, your being, is solid and true, informed, but not defined, by concerns of the mind. You sit... and feel... the smooth, warm wood under your seat.

Jeffrey Willius is a seasoned writer, graphic designer, inventor and inveterate observer of life. He produces the popular blog, One Man's Wonder, his reflections on life, Nature and new ways of seeing. His first book, *Under the Wild Ginger*, is receiving wide acclaim for its exploration of the common ground shared by Nature and spirituality. Willius lives in Minneapolis and Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, Mexico. www.onemanswonder.com



Getting Low

by Michael K. Gause

Every other day he walked down to the park to watch kids dare gravity on the monkey bars. Box elders and clouds framed the playground in a scene that drowned out thoughts of smashed noses and broken necks. The thoughts came anyway. He had learned to blink them away or recall the birth of his son, the rare goodness that comes of so much blood. From the bench he watched dirt-bright faces sprint in all directions, impossible speeds around slide and swing toward nothing but themselves in a Mobius strip of abandon, a perpetual motion machine in laughter. The legs in his mind remembered the lurch, burst, and the arc - the drive of the chase. He rubbed his

knees at the thought of it. Prickly rushes of blood feeding quads and calf. It was a memory so vivid it distanced him. The simple sense it made to fight the wind with your face. The half shadow you find yourself sitting in when you slow down. Nostalgia is a kind of running, too, he thought. But if that were true, he figured he should have corporate sponsorship by now.

His watery eyes still marveled at it all. He saw a glimpse of them catching a glimpse of him in mirrors and closed shop windows. What a weird old uncle they seemed to have taken up with. He could feel the wrinkles with a light brush of a finger or against themselves with every smile or wince. A boy in a skull and crossbones T-shirt shot past. His legs twitched at the thought. He

wondered if they had been pulling a secret night shift over the years, cheating on him with a marathon runner, a construction worker, and his hard time all done. His knees reminded him that, by the way, they have decided to retire and any work from now on was going to cost extra. He knew it was natural for things to disintegrate, for entropy to apply itself without discrimination. His body had, somewhere in the night, become closer to errant scaffolding, creak-filled and leaning against something larger that never seemed to get fixed. What once felt like a single, fluid system was now a network of fiefdoms. Arms, neck, and back had become plots of land, purchased cheap and growing fallow. Through the seasons each one grew a little wilder, filling with weeds you couldn't possibly fight. Marshland pains. Strange growth on withering stumps. Branches and tensile-lost limbs. He looked over the playground. Brother trees. All the years he spent growing up in forests, looking for a sign. Weekends in slow reverence around oak and elder listening, watching as the wind coaxed secrets from the leaves. They never told him the secrets he thought lay in solitude. Waiting. Watching. Sometimes in a prayer. In return, only movement and the sound of waves trying to leave.

They'd said nature had the answers, if you knew how to listen. So he listened, a whole life listening. And by now he figured he'd tried every damned way a man's ear can do it. If they did have

secrets, they were sure as hell keeping them

close. Looking out at the first buds of spring, he stood and stretched. He knew that with every passing year his hearing would only get worse. He also knew that he would keep listening, deciphering, hoping for something to get him through the hard seasons yet to come.

Michael K. Gause was sprung from the wet earth of Nashville, TN while the Beatles were still together. He cut his teeth on forest solitude and the Diet Rite Cola. In 1995 a freak nuclear explosion sent him sprawling into a parking lot in St. Paul, MN. He decided to stay and see what the north was all about.



photography by John Sikkilas - Northern Pearly-Eye

Patient Care

by Kathleen Lindstrom

His eyeglasses have slipped sideways on his face. So she takes them off, places them in the drawer and then documents that his fever is gone and his breathing is normal. She clicks off his bed light, pulls the Grisham novel from his hand, places it on the table and makes sure his phone, call light, TV remote, water and Kleenex are within easy reach.

She records observations in his chart, then tucks in his blanket and pats his leg. She turns to leave and whispers, "Good night, Mr. Jenkins. Sleep

well."

Snapping on latex gloves, she braces herself for the next patient, her last one for the night.

"There she is!" Jeremiah Lauder growls when she enters his room. "Eleven o'clock sharp. Goin' around, wakin' everyone up to give 'em a sleepin' pill so's they can fall asleep."

"How're you doing, Mr. Lauder? Still can't sleep?"

"Damn place! Too much racket! All those carts goin' up and down the hall. All you quacks traipsin' around, figurin' out ways to torment us!"

He continues complaining while she picks up newspapers littering the room and stacks them neatly onto the visitor's chair. He's thrown dozens of used, wadded-up, Kleenex onto the floor an explosion of some kind; some turbulence taking place. She gathers them up and places them into a plastic bag.

She reaches for his wrist, but he pulls away as if stung. "Nu-uh! Find someone else to torture," he shouts, cradling that hand to his heart, protecting it from amputation. "Just leave me alone; let me die. And I ain't dyin' here, just so's you know!"

This man was disoriented and dehydrated when brought to the ER that afternoon. He was jaundiced, coughing up blood; his face mottled with spider veins, his eyes yellow. He complained of stomach pains, nosebleeds, problems peeing, no appetite, swollen legs and—if you read between the lines—a long life of pure misery. He was admitted immediately.

He claims to be forty-nine, but looks sixty. A mop of white hair, thick and coarse, keeps falling into his eyes. He is over six feet tall and weighs one-hundred-fifty-three pounds; his skin has the texture of leather and hangs off his bones. His fingers are long and delicate, like a pianist's. But he lists his profession as a philosopher, retired. He is divorced. When asked how many children he has, he filled the space with a smiley face.

There is no one to contact in an emergency.

Doctors are waiting for test results, but she's sure it has something to do with the liver. Something deadly; surely irreversible.

"What can I get for you, Mr. Lauder? Are you in pain? Do you need the bed pan? Should I turn the TV...?"

"Keep that dang thing off! It's garbage, all of it. Turns your brains to mush. A conspiracy is what it is."

She walks over to his bed, sits down on the chair, their eyes level now. She places her hand on the bed—a peace offering. He watches her hand, alert to its danger.

"I don't blame you, Mr. Lauder. This is a scary place. You're a smart man. When it's my time, I'm going deep into the woods to build a nest like the animals. They'll find me in the spring—melted into the earth—no tubes, no machines, no hospital gowns showing off my butt."

He stares at her, not sure what to make of this turn of events.

"I'm doing rounds now. You're my last patient and then I go home. But I want to make sure you're okay before I go. I'll take your pulse and write it down. Then no one will bother you. I want to make sure you're comfortable. That's all. And that you get a good night sleep. Sometimes sleep is all we need to feel better." She smiles again. "You okay with that?"

He nods, looking relieved. "You're a tricky little thing, ain't ya?"

So he surrenders his wrist, and then studies her while she counts the beats of his heart—his eyes eagle-sharp. He nods yes when she offers him sleeping pills and a glass of water. He lets her move him around as she flounces up his pillows and tucks in his blankets. She jots down vitals on her clipboard and he keeps her in sight, noting the tic under her left eye, her jaw working, trying to find a comfortable position.

Finally, she looks him over, smiles and tugs on his blanket toe. Her eyes are kind. She is tired; he can see that.

"Good night, Mr. Lauder; sleep well. See you tomorrow."

She switches off the light and is almost out the door when he calls out. "Miss? Nurse? What's your ..."

She looks back at him. “Marcie, my name is Marcie.”

The room is moon-lit and he’s looking almost healthy now. “Patience,” he tells her. “That’s what it needs.”

“Wha..?”

“Just that.”

She leaves the room, shakes her head. *Where do these kooks come from? Why do they end up here on my floor?*

She heads back to the nurse’s desk—a round oasis of light set in the middle of four wings that converge to form a cross. The hospital was built a hundred years ago by German nuns who named it after St. Frances de Sales. People started calling it *St. Fran’s* when the County took over in the late sixties and when life was speeding up. Saying the full name just took too long.

Marcie sees that Lily has clocked in and, as usual, is busy re-arranging papers and files and chairs and everything else to meet her need for organizational perfection. She’s in her late forties, fifty pounds overweight, grandmotherly-looking, sweet-faced. If you didn’t know better, you’d want to curl up in her lap, seeking sympathy and warmth. But Lily would push you off, tell you to buck up, take your meds, stop your whining. And you’d end up on the floor feeling bruised.

“It’s almost eleven-thirty,” Lily tells her, half-sipping her beloved *grande cappuccino* and half-reading notes left behind by the previous crew. “You’re working late. Everyone’s gone.”

“So what else is new?”

“Go home! We’re here now. Your hubby is waiting; he needs you more than we do.”

“I’m going, I’m going.”

“And by the way,” Lily whispers, knowing how words echo down these empty halls at night, “how’s he doing?”

Marcie rubs her jaw, studies papers on the desk, pretends to decipher someone’s scribbled post-it note. “Fine,” she murmurs, needing to change the subject. “Just fine. Be careful with the man in 506. He might seem belligerent, but he’s a softy inside; probably scared. Just be patient with him. Be kind.”

“Gotcha,” Lily tells her. “Now go.”

In the employees’ lounge, Marcie opens her locker and comes face to face with her five-by-seven photo of Private First Class Cameron Marienfeld taken after basic training and before shipping out to Iraq. There he is, in his uniform, looking robust and happy, ready to save the world—his chiseled jaw, the sly grin, leaning into the camera, probably trying to engage the photographer in a conversation, eager to hear about his life, his experiences, loves, heart aches, regrets (he was so *curious* about people). And of course, his eyes—hazel, sometimes gray, sometimes green, brown around the edges; filled with one spot of light, or twinkle, or something she could never figure out—as if he’s laughing at a joke in his head, or just about to.

“Light, schmite,” her mother snorted when hearing about this new man in her life. “He’s probably on drugs.”

Marcie grabs her purse and slips into her coat, then looks in the full-length mirror. A woman in her early thirties, wearing pink scrubs is looking back: blond hair (needing a serious touch-up on the roots, she notes), blotchy skin, bags under her eyes, big nose, thin lips, fifteen pounds too heavy, tired looking—old.

She sticks out her tongue at the woman in the mirror; then decides to take the stairs. She could do with the exercise.

The chapel is on the main floor, on her way to the parking lot. Marcie decides to stop in for a

minute or two—something she’s been doing a lot lately. It’s an interfaith chapel, which is a good thing, because she has some serious issues with God right now and can’t commit to any particular belief.

Instead, she uses this place to sit in silence and decompress—something that relaxes her but also makes her cry, which feels good, oddly enough.

The chapel is dark except for some ambient lighting and a few lit candles casting jittery shadows against the wall. Marcie finds a chair, sits, sighs, closes her eyes and waits; but the charm of this place isn’t working tonight. Her jaw aches and her head throbs. She can barely stay awake and needs to get home.

Her dentist said she was grinding her teeth in her sleep, and to consider wearing a mouth guard—or start looking for dentures in a few years. He said it could be a sign of stress in her life; and he hoped everything was all right.

Marcie gets up from the chair and decides to light a candle instead. Give *something* back to this place for a change. The candle rack sits under a painting of St. Frances de Sales and a plaque she’s never noticed before:

“Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage ... every day begin the task anew.”

She lights the candle, watching the flame flicker and grow. Then she unzips her purse, digs out her car keys and heads for the parking lot.

Patience my ass.

Some nights are worse than others. I see them coming, crouched in the shadows, and I can’t do

anything about it. There they are. Over there in the dark, looking for me, bombs wrapped around their waists, finally spotting me, pointing, running toward me. I’m screaming, rolling off the jeep, clawing at the sand, digging for a hole to hide in.

But I’m not in the desert. I’m on the bedroom floor squeezing under the bed, howling like a dog. Marcie is wide awake, sitting up, covering herself with a blanket, looking scared, her mouth open, her eyes like bullet holes.

Her touch is fire and I can’t bear the pain. I yell at her to leave me alone. Don’t touch me. Go away! I can’t stand it!

“Baby, it’s okay. You’re safe now. You’re home.” Her words are acid eating into my heart. I vomit in the toilet then curl up on the floor. I fall asleep.

I’m guarding an alley in Fallujah and the insurgent I shot is six feet away. Right between the eyes. A nice clean shot. But it blew out the back of his head and his blood is puddling the ground. He is thin, peach fuzz growing on his upper lip, cheeks soft as rose petals. He sits up. He smiles.

It’s after midnight and Marcie drives past her house, slows down, sees TV lights flickering in the darkness. She circles the block a few times, comes back and pulls into the driveway.

They bought this fixer-upper five years ago, when mortgage rates were low and everyone told them to buy. It looks like every other house on the block—rectangular, twelve-hundred square feet, a small kitchen, dining room and living room, two bedrooms, one floor, one bath, a one-car garage—perfect for a couple getting started.

So they bought it and Cam made it better.

He spent weekends and nights tearing down walls, putting in hard wood floors, adding

skylights, installing track lighting, modernizing the kitchen and repainting, replastering, and renovating anything he could get his hands on. She'd never seen him so happy—like a house-remodeling-addict high on his drug of choice. Once a week he'd bring her flowers, his apology for making such a mess.

Marcie guns the motor, slams the garage door shut, stomps up the back steps and rattles the keys.

"It's me," she assures him, walking through the kitchen, hoping he'll greet her back, knowing he won't. "How was your day?" She hangs her coat in the closet and joins him in the living room.

"Good," he says. He's slouched into the couch, legs spread, a Heineken resting on one knee, stockings-feet, torn jeans, dirty sweatshirt (too big for him now), a three-week-old beard, probably four or five days without a shower.

"Good," she responds.

She grabs a Pepsi from the fridge and straddles a dining room chair—joining him at the other end of the room, keeping her distance. They watch an infomercial in silence—a perky brunette in tights demonstrates the many exercises you can do on one piece of equipment costing only \$149.99 if you call within the next ten minutes.

"Abs, arms, legs, butt, everything," she gushes. "You'll see a difference in two weeks. And best of all, it folds up and fits under your bed—just like this."

"It's a piece of junk that'll wreck your back," Marcie says out loud. "Fools born every second."

He tries to laugh, "Yeah."

His facial bones stick out like stones. His skin, even in the sun, is sallow. The hair on his once-shaved head is growing back gray. His eyes have sunk into shadows. That spot of light is gone.

He clicks to a new channel where a happy couple runs through a field of flowers, soaked in bright colors, surrounded by butterflies, freed from those nasty allergies thanks to this wonderful drug

they want you to buy.

It reminds her of their trip to his parent's farm, right after he proposed. He wanted to show her where he'd grown up "and to show you off; to show them how lucky I am." They were walking through tall grass on their way to the north pasture to see the new calves, when he pulled her down and started to make love. They were half undressed and ready to go when dozens of butterflies (she's sure there were that many), surrounded them, drawing attention to where they were and what they were up to—which made them laugh and quickly changed the mood.

She could swear they wanted to play. Or maybe they were trying to figure out what was going on in the middle of that field on such a hot summer day. Then, as if someone gave an order, they all picked up and flew away. Marcie and Cam stayed there, laying on their backs, holding hands, planning their wedding, imagining their future, binging on the blue in that vast rural sky—marveling at the nature of things, at the mystery of bugs emerging as these glorious creatures from such dark cocoons.

Several months later, when they were burying her mother, Cameron handed Marcie a box and told her to open it up. When she did, butterflies flew out and up into the sky. One circled the group several times before finally taking off.

"She's out of her cocoon," he whispered. "She's free now."

They call me a hero and gush about my courage. They greet me at the airport with marching bands and waving flags, joyous faces, or happy tears. They run up to me before I'm even off the tarmac. I hug them—Marcie and my

parents, my sister, Peggy, and her husband, Jeff—and tell me how good it is to have me home. I smile. I look happy. It's what they want.

They give me something called exit counseling, to reintegrate me into everyday life—or so I don't launch a grenade into someone's parked car on the way home. They tell me not to drink and drive. To pay my bills on time. Not to beat my wife. Not to kick my dogs. Not to exceed the speed limit. Not to do drugs. I nod my head, letting them know I get it. I know what's expected.

But they don't tell me how to feel safe with my wife, or how to sleep in a real bed, or how to fit into crowds, or how not to jump at loud noises, or how to relax when I drive past those parked cars that may or may not hide a bomb inside.

“Did you call the VA?” Marcie asks, trying to sound blasé, like she's asking for the time or temperature. She rubs her jaw, revisiting the ache.

He punches up the volume, absorbed in a *Cheers* rerun now, the one where Sam and Diane are having a fight, pinching each other's noses, crouching down further onto the floor, each determined to have the last word. Cam laughs with the soundtrack, but it's false and they know it.

“Nope. Not yet.”

Marcie sips her Pepsi.

“Allen keeps calling me,” she tells him, “wondering when you'll be back.” She looks for a sign—something—a twitch, a blink, anything to show he's heard. “Says they've been using temps and are still keeping your job open, waiting for you. Their books are crap he said. They need you. You're the best accountant they ever had.”

He sinks down into the couch.

Good. She hopes he's ashamed, or pissed off,

or *something*, something to pierce that armor and bleed him back to life.

She turns to watch the *Cheers* rerun, which brings back memories of their first big fight. They weren't pulling at each other's noses like Sam and Diane, but they were definitely trying to out-talk each other, or battle for control, or set some boundaries, or create ground rules for this life they were building together. He'd just signed up as a volunteer firefighter, which made her angry. First it was his overtime, then his obsession with renovating the house, then her own late hours at the hospital; and now he would be called away day or night to fight fires and save lives. “What about me?” she'd yelled into his face. “When will you ever have time for *me*?”

She can't remember how they worked it out, but they did, finding an everyday rhythm to accommodate a marriage and satisfy their own personal needs.

But she was surprised when Cam signed up with the National Guard after nine-eleven. Those fallen firefighters were his brothers, he explained; and he wanted to save lives—or get even. He wasn't sure which at the time.

Marcie's stomach knots up at the memory; reminding her how stupid she was for letting him go.

Her jaw hurts; her head aches. She rises from the dining room chair, goes into the kitchen and dumps the empty Pepsi can into the recycling bag. She returns to the living room and chooses the chair next to the TV, so he has to look at her. TV images flash across his face, highlighting the hollows, but hiding the details—his laugh lines, that boyhood scar slicing through his eyebrow, the bump on his nose, that light in his eye.

“Cam ...”

He doesn't move. His grip on the remote

tightens.

“I can’t do this any more. You’ve been home for almost four months, and you haven’t done anything to get back. You won’t leave this house. You sleep on the sofa. You don’t eat. You look like shit. There are so many services out there and you don’t do anything.”

She tries to remember what else she was going to say, wishing she’d rehearsed this little spiel ahead of time, or maybe kept some notes.

“It must have been hell over there; but there are people who can help you. You can work through this. Life is too short.”

Then Marcie loses her train of thought. His expression hasn’t changed; and she figures he won’t respond, anyway. So she gets right to the point.

“This is no way to live, Cam. Either you leave or I will. I want my husband back, but I don’t know how to do it.”

Her voice breaks.

“I still love him. But I don’t know who *you* are any more. You’re a stranger.”

That’s all she can think of right now. She’s forgotten something important, but this will have to do. Her hands shake and the twitch under her eye is merciless. Her heart is pounding; her breathing, ragged. She has to get out of here; hopefully with her dignity intact.

In the bedroom, Marcie pulls off her scrubs, tosses them into the hamper and slips between the sheets. She feels like fool. *What have I just done?* She swallows some Ambien and waits for sleep, which comes quickly. She dreams of her mother, who is bald from chemo, and planting tulip bulbs in the back yard. She tells her daughter *it takes time but they’ll show up every spring and they’ll be yellow. Don’t worry. They’ll always come back.* Then the sky turns black and they rush into the house before the downpour; but when Marcie turns

around, her mother is gone. She begins to cry. The loss is unbearable and her crying wakes her up to a gray light filling their little bedroom. It’s only five-thirty in the morning, so she tries to go back to sleep. That’s when she realizes Cameron is on the bed, spooned against her, his face in her hair, his arm around her waist.

“Shhh,” he says, “go back to sleep.”

“Cam, wha..?”

“It’s okay. You were dreaming.”

Too tired to argue, Marcie falls back into a dreamless sleep lasting until the alarm goes off several hours later. She rises from bed, then heads to the kitchen to make coffee. The TV is off, and the sofa is empty, his pillow and blanket stacked military-taut on the chair. She looks out the window and sees his truck is gone. There’s a note taped to the fridge: *“I’ve gone to the VA. See you later. C.”*

They’re all there—in the dark—hiding, waiting, ready to pounce; and then (when you don’t expect it) they jump out, an ambush, blowing horns and yelling: ‘welcome home;’ and then laughing when you hide behind the door, waiting for that bullet with your name on it. They think it’s a joke, but then their faces change to pity, or embarrassment, or goddamn compassion. So you ease their discomfort with a smile and some jokes, because that’s what a normal person would do.

But you’re not normal any more. You kill boys too young to shave. You shoot them right between the eyes because you’re so good at it. You gather up body parts of women and children who got too close to a bomb. You accidentally kill a man with his hands raised.

I am a soldier, trained to kill. My purpose in

life is to meet and destroy the enemy. I'm not who you think I am. I am a killing machine. I am your tax dollars at work.

Three new patients were admitted last night: a woman heart attack, a teenage pneumonia, an eighty-four-year-old man with food poisoning. “The food poisoning is suspicious,” Teresa tells her. “Police have been here and may come again.”

Two were also discharged, she adds, the diabetic and the man in 506. Tests on the man in 506 came back and showed cancer had spread to his liver. Soon after hearing that, he disappeared. “We don’t know how he got out of here,” Teresa says, “but Jennie checked in on him right after lunch, and his bed was empty; no sign of him anywhere. Nobody saw him leave and Security says he’s not on any of their cameras.”

Teresa is in her mid-twenties, two years out of college, still eager to ease the world’s suffering. Blond and brown-eyed, she has a cheerleader’s peppy looks, happy dimples, and a big diamond on her left hand. Marcie gives her three more years before she has a baby and starts looking for an eight-to-five job in some doctor’s office.

The news of Mr. Lauder saddens Marcie. She hates to admit it, but these cranky guys tug at her heartstrings the hardest.

Cameron hadn’t come home when she left for work that afternoon. She doesn’t know what it means. Did he go to the VA? Did he really want to get help? Did it go well? Did he walk out like he’s done before?

But she refuses to pick at every possibility, and makes herself focus, instead, on her patients—particularly on Mrs. Jungsted, the new heart attack in 515. This 72-year-old woman came to the

ER with her husband, complaining of chest pains, apologizing for the *bother*, wondering if it was her heart or “just plain old heart burn.” She was admitted immediately, placed on nasal cannula oxygen therapy, rushed to the catherization lab and is now on morphine to relieve the pain and reduce the myocardial workload. The woman weighs less than 100 pounds, dyes her gray hair dark brown, shapes her eyebrows like Joan Crawford’s and is wide-eyed with fear when Marcie introduces herself.

She reminds Marcie of her own mother. So she holds her hand while they talk, which seems to comfort them both.

“Ralph—that’s my husband—has gone back home,” Mrs. Jungsted explains. “He’s not good with this sort of thing. Doesn’t like sickness or hospitals. I worry about him, you know; how he’ll cook for himself with me not there.”

“Your heart attack was mild,” Marcie assures her. “You’ll be walking these halls tomorrow and they’ll probably be sending you home in a day or two.”

She sees the woman’s fear turn to disbelief and then, as tears come, to a look of relief.

“They’ll put you on an after-care program and in six months, maybe even sooner, if you do everything they say, your heart may be healthier than a thirty-year-old’s.”

“A thirty-year-old?”

“Well ...” and they both laugh, “maybe not *that* young.”

“Ralph better watch out,” Mrs. Jungsted says. “He won’t be able to keep up with me.”

“And maybe he’ll start cooking for *you!*”

“That’ll be the day!”

Marcie pats her hand, gets up to check the IV and heart monitors, double-checks her chart, adds her own notes, asks if she needs anything else, then

tugs at the woman's blanketed toe.

"You're doing great," she tells her. "Try to get some sleep. I'll check back in an hour or so."

By now, it's time for her six-o'clock break, so Marcie enters Room 506, remembering last night's visit with this irritated man. Housekeeping has changed the bed, wiped the room clean and readied it for the next patient. She walks in, peeks through the drapes, down into the parking lot, not sure what she's looking for. *Maybe he'll come here; maybe he'll surprise me.* She falls into a chair, glad to be off her feet for awhile. She closes her eyes and tries to find that illusive *peace* that's evaded her lately.

But she chuckles when an orderly walks by wheeling an empty hospital bed, followed by two visitors—one talking loudly to the other, using simple, precise language—as if that other person was deaf.

He's right; this is a noisy place.

Then she notices a hospital ID bracelet under the bed: Jeremiah Lauder, DOB October 22, 1955. *Huh. He really was 49.*

What was it he'd told her—out of the blue like that?

Be patient, or it's patience, or it's patients, or it takes patience (or patients?) Something like that. Something that still doesn't make any sense.

She drops the bracelet in her pocket, but can't let go, needing to rub it between her fingers, warm it up, get something going, a fire maybe. Something. Even when she returns to the main desk and Teresa is handing her the phone, her eyes big, her face solemn and kind. "It's for you," she whispers. "It's your husband I think."

Marcie's heart is racing and she can't let go.

The guy must have gone through a pack of cigarettes while we sat there. He was short, skinny, had a stubble, thinning hair, horned-rimmed glasses, wore

a Vikings t-shirt, combat boots, jeans. He did all the talking, told his story: how he'd fought in Desert Storm, couldn't sleep, alcohol, drugs, nightmares, lost his job, lost his wife, his kids, lived on the streets. Lost over six years of his life—this program saved him. It took awhile, he said, but it finally kicked in. He's remarried, has two little kids, no more nightmares, six years in AA, life is good now. Yes, really, he said. When I stared (still doubtful) at his cigarette, the nicotine stains, the butt-filled ash tray, he laughed. "Yeah, I know. One problem at a time. This one is taking a little longer."

Turns out he's a psychologist, has a group of six vets meeting twice a week; has an opening. But only if I want to. It won't work otherwise. You'll have to work hard, really hard and it won't be fun; it won't happen overnight. Maybe time in a hospital, maybe medication. He doesn't know me well enough to know what I'll need.

I drive around, all over the city, all day long. I call Marcie at work. She sounds relieved to hear from me. I tell her about the program, its possibilities. She starts to cry. She has to get involved, I tell her. "You're family; they want you to come to some meetings; can you do that?" She cries some more. Of course I can, she says.

Then I don't know what else to say. But the silence is okay. I can feel her strength at the other end. Like some sturdy rock you can build on. I don't know what to say.

"He says it's a journey," I blurt out, "probably a long one. He says we need to be patient."

Then she cries some more.

Kathleen Lindstrom started writing fiction about 10 years ago and since then has had 26 stories published - the last four in Lindenwood Literary Review, St. Anthony Messenger, Lake Region Review and Talking Stick.



Dear God

photography by Aaron Bowen

Aaron Bowen resides and enjoys life in Wichita, Kansas. His interest in photography took root in the 10th grade. Aaron also shoots portraits, one series which had been on exhibit at a local coffee shop in Wichita, KS.
www.aaronbowenphotography.com



Rainbow at the Ranch

photography by Brian Biggs



11/11 @ 11:11

photography by Brian Biggs

Mr. Biggs graduated from the University of Washington in 1964, where he majored in theatre and played football. After graduating he spent four years in the Marines. He received his MFA in Directing from the University of Portland in 1974. He has returned to Vietnam on three occasions and three stories from his Vietnam experiences have been published.



Sunlight on Shells photography by A.J. Huffman

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has published six collections of poetry and has been published in numerous national and international literary journals. She is currently the editor for Kind of a Hurricane Press literary journals. <http://www.kindofahurricane.com>



Hands

photography by Galen Faison



Boy and Water

photography by Galen Faison

Galen Faison is currently enjoying several years employed as a library associate at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He reads daily and tries to write accordingly. He is also a hobbyist photographer and videographer.



Berries

photography by Galen Faison



Lily

photography by Claire Ibarra

Claire is a writer, poet, and photographer residing in Miami, Florida. Her photographs have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Roadside Fiction*, *LummoX*, and *Foliate Oak*. Claire was a visual artist in residence for *Counterexample Poetics*, and she is currently art director for *Gulf Stream Magazine*.



For the Birds

photography by Claire Ibarra



Glistening
photography by Claire Ibarra



Poinciana

photography by Claire Ibarra



Beth Donovan

as interviewed
by Patricia Youker

I first learned of Beth through her Facebook page where she chronicles a new chapter in her life. Beth had a calling to escape the career she had built her entire adult life, and to pursue a dream.

Beth has a strong voice, steeped in the daily activities on a farm in Kansas, and knows how to tell a story filled with humor and interesting information.

Below is a glimpse of the adventures and learning process of her new lifestyle.

SPR: What is the name of your farm and is there a story behind it?

BD: Castle Argghhh Farm is the name. Here is the story:

My husband is a retired military officer. I'm an opinionated b*tch. We both used to write (separately) letters to the editor to the Kansas City Star, and our letters were accepted more often than not. But then, the KC Star changed their editorial board. They no longer ever approved

either of our letters for publication. That had served as an outlet to express our grumpiness with things, and now, we had no outlet.

So, in 2003, in the run up to the Iraq War, my husband, John, was horribly frustrated with how pundits were getting the facts wrong on questions of how the military works. He often yelled at either the computer or the TV, "Argghhh!!!".

John had lost his outlet for his frustrations. So I insisted he start a blog, I named it Argghhh!!! And he started writing. Somehow, people started calling his blog 'Castle Argghhh!!!'. It was only natural, then, to name our farm, "Castle Argghhh", when we moved here.

SPR: What led you to raise goats? What did you do before? How long?

BD: Way back in college, where I majored in psychology, I happened to take a Fiber Arts class. I learned how to wash, dye, spin and weave. It was fascinating to me and I never forgot that class.

The seven years before we moved out here, I worked for a medical technology company - Cerner Corporation. I was in their Advanced Technology Group and implemented Enterprise System Management solution in hospitals all over the USA and in the UK. I traveled about 48 weeks a year. I'd leave Kansas City on Sunday night or Monday morning, fly to that week's location, put in at least 50 hours in a chilly data center, and fly back home on Thursday night or Friday morning. I loved what I did. However, it was exhausting.

Before Cerner, I also worked for Sprint and a small telecom, Birch. I was in information technology at both of those companies. I started in IT by getting on the Sprint internal help desk

way back in about '93. It seems that I had a knack for figuring out how to fix things, and I ended up getting a lot of on the job training. I was promoted a lot and was extremely fortunate.

We had just purchased our farm when my IT job was eliminated.

I had in mind that I'd get some sheep and perhaps raise them for their wool. But then, I met some sheep, and gosh darn, they are NOT very personable. So, I did some reading, and learned about Colored Angora Goats. Goats have personality, and their mohair can be profitable, or so the line goes.



I bought 3 goats from a farm close to St. Louis. I bought another two goats from a farm in Osawatamie, Kansas. From those five goats came all my current goats. They are endlessly entertaining and each has their own peculiarities. I finally have enough goats that I'm starting to sell some to people who want fiber animals.

SPR: Besides goats, what else do you raise?

SPR: We have peafowl, ducks, chickens, guineas and two very old horses. I don't know if I would say we actually raise them so much as they are pets.

SPR: Tell us what an average day is like on the farm.

BD: The cats wake me up at 5:00 am every morning. They are relentless. They don't bother my husband - they bother me. We have one cat, DC (stands for dumped cat - he was dumped out here some years ago), who does not fool around with breakfast time. I have central sleep apnea, and I need to sleep with a CPAP machine so I don't quit breathing in my sleep and die. DC has learned that he can turn off my CPAP machine and that I will quickly wake up while I'm gasping for air. I'm beginning to think that DC should stand for Dick Cat, because he is kind of a dick. Feeding the cats is the first, no, second chore each day. The very first thing I do each morning is get our ancient, incredibly obese, rescue dog, Kiki, out the door before she poops. I probably manage to get her out before poop about 60 percent of the time.

Then, the Livestock Guardian Dogs, Buffy and Molly, come inside for their breakfast and for their morning nap. Their biggest job is to protect all the animals from predators during the night.

Then I get our old horses' - Willy is 31 or 32 and Petey is only about 21, but blind in one eye -





special mash ready. They eat a lot of very expensive senior horse chow mixed with beet pulp and soaked in water - so they can digest it better. I feed the horses in the pasture down the hill from the house, in hopes that the goats will not notice the yummy mash and go steal it for themselves. This means I have to check before I bring the horse feed out to the Polaris Ranger to be sure that no goats are aware of my actions.

You see, a couple of years ago, a windstorm knocked a big old tree down over the fence into the goats' night pasture. About half of them climb over the tree and escape every morning so they can eat the best weeds before the rest of the goats are let out for the day. They are rather naughty, and have been known to ambush me when I'm trying to get the horses their breakfast.

I will be very nonchalant and walk over to the water hydrant and replace the goats' water with very fresh water. They like that and will normally

come to see what I'm doing and then drink their water. Then I rush back to the house, grab the buckets of feed that are soaking in water and run out the other door, jump into the Polaris Ranger, and drive down to where the horses get their food.

Then I drive back up the hill to the house. By then, the escapee goats have realized I tricked them and are starting to head down the hill. So, I yell at them to turn around, and surprisingly, they always turn around. Now, it's time to let the other goats, the well-behaved goats, mostly does and kids, out of the pasture. They all mosey on over to the field to the west and graze for a couple of hours before coming back and hanging out on our driveway, under an old elm tree.



By now, it's 11 am, and I try to get caught up on cleaning mohair and getting it ready for spinning or for selling. I am at least two years behind, I'm afraid. This time of year, I'm still shearing one or two goats a day. I usually wait until after lunch to trick and capture a goat and get it on my shearing stand. It has taken me five years, but I am finally able to shear, give immunizations, trim feet, and worm a goat in less than an hour. Usually. By the time I'm finished with shearing, it's time to come in the house, clean a bit and figure out what to cook for dinner.

Then, at dusk, I feed the horses again, convince the goats to get into their night pasture, get the

LGDs to go outside to work all night, feed the cats and other dogs again, and maybe spend some time in front of the TV with my husband. If I think about it, I work on needle felting one thing or another.

Of course, in winter, I feed the fowl -in the summer, they are free range. Also, I have a very few angora rabbits - only 6 - and I feed them and water them twice a day. At one time, I thought that rabbits would be a money maker, well, maybe for someone much younger, but not for me, so I've given away most of them, and the remaining are rather elderly, so I'm just making sure they are fed and healthy and I cut their hair whenever it starts to look unruly.

And once I get in after taking care of all the critters, I take a bath and fall into bed.

SPR: There is a story about the FedEx driver - can you share that story with us?

Oh, there are always funny things that happen here. Two of our young kids, Bernadette and Pharaoh, are very friendly. Anytime the UPS guy or the mail lady or the FedEx guy comes to deliver something, the two little goats jump into their trucks. Some drivers are better than others about this.

SPR: Other funny antics that you would like to share?

Here is a story about our free-range chickens - this just happened a couple of weeks ago - A tale about a chicken, our pickup truck, and a bale of hay.

John and I had some errands to run in town. It was about lunchtime, so John suggested we go to our favorite Mexican Restaurant in Lansing, Kansas. We went in, had a nice lunch, and then walked back

outside to get in our F-150 pickup truck. Well, as we approached the truck, a little black bantam hen flew to the top of the cab, and then flew off into the parking lot. Apparently, she had hitched a ride with us from the farm and decided this was where she wanted to be. She apparently hid behind a bale of hay that had been in the truck for a couple of months. Little bantam hens can fly, and we were not able to catch her, and we hope she has found happiness in Lansing, Kansas. When we got home, John decided to get that darn old bale of hay out of the pickup. He pulled it out with a pitchfork, and we found all kinds of chicken eggs that all of our chickens had apparently been lying in the truck behind the hay bale and under the tool chest. We figured that little bantam hen had been trying to hatch all those eggs, and must have been traveling with John to work every day in the truck and then back home. She was working on a futile project, though, because we don't have any roosters, and none of the eggs would be fertile.

Anyway, it was a good lesson learned. Don't leave a square bale of hay in a truck if you have chickens.

Because chickens are kinda weird.



Beth Donovan lives in Easton, Kansas - about 12 miles West of Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. You can follow Beth on her Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/bunnyherder

Stone Path Review

AN ARTISTIC JOURNAL OF PATHS THROUGH IMAGES AND WORDS

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