Canon

Spring '00
Editor's Note

Pathways are an important feature of life. Pathways are avenues of discovery and change.
They are symbols of movement. The scenery changes as you progress.
You might find something wonderful along the way or come to your path's end
and have to chart a new one.

Poems, stories, and images can take us down pathways of thought and discovery.
Each one has its own twists, turns, and surprises to be found. We, the Canon staff,
would like you to read and view these pieces and discover something about yourself as you do.
God has a path for each of us to follow. You may not always know His ways, and you may
follow a wrong path for a while. But there is a path that is just right for each of us,
and we encourage you to seek your own.

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The Canon accepts works from Dordt College students, faculty, and staff.

Every published piece should reflect the author's fleshing out of his or her own Christian worldview.
This does not mean, however, that the pieces should be only about God or should reflect a narrow definition
of Christianity, for “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Ps. 24:1)

In adhering to the broad guideline above and in sensitivity to those who may be adversely affected
by excessive violence, vulgar language, or sexually explicit content, the Canon will publish
no piece containing such material, nor will it publish material that advocates illegal activitie
or promotes bigotry toward any race, sex, ethnic group, age group, or religion. The Canon will also refuse
any factual material that slanders a member of the Dordt College community or is libelous.

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Facts About Poetry

by Laura Huisken

I have learned that a poem doesn’t have to rhyme,
because in time
It will find its place
and put a smile on a face.
It will do its part
and touch someone's heart
and that's only the start.
A poem in all its glory
can sometimes tell a story
of love and passion,
or make fun of someone's fashion.
A poem can be serious or funny
or mean
or as sweet as honey.
It can be of the present or of the past;
it can be long and drawn out
or short and fast.
Love poems are good
that talk about fate
or poems from the Hood
that talk about hate.
It could be about the reaction of your date
when you show up on the doorstep two hours late.
A poem doesn't need rhythm or meter
because its goal
is to express your heart.
And in the end as I close this poem,
please don't criticize and tear it apart,
for this poet has written it from her heart.
Carol to the True West

by Benjamin Groenwold

eetrol to the TrliteWest
by Benjamin Groenwold
that place beyond the setting sun
where all is bright; all battles won,
beyond the mountains high and cold,
and past the waste where age grows old:
oh how the hawk within me now
longs to flee there; if he knew how.

I trod the seasons once around
and then again, and there I found
a mirror hall reflecting the sea:
the same thing twice and endlessly.
I heard the chaos of the waves:
the seagulls leave when the madman raves.

past the spinning of this earth,
there seasons meld in one rebirth
beyond the dumbness of the deep
there silence sings, and birds will keep
the peace in rhythm and in flight
while I am caught and caged tonight.

I walked the streets at sundown cold,
lost in crowds as shadows took hold
there faceless faces feign going home —
an endless tramp in monochrome.
I looked up; saw the angry red glow
and silhouettes winging above us below.

once, in these times and dates and places,
this darkened globe of withered faces,
bright wings spread near, a child woke,
the seasons joined, the Herald spoke:
"Peace on Earth!— all lands shall be blessed:
a new Sun is born, and with Him, the West."
Child's Speech
to a Butterfly

by Benjamin Groenewold

like chasing a rainbow's end on foot
while swept along in a herd of unicorns,
I'll close my hand on a symphony
because I can.

my sword will split each note into half-notes
and speed the beat till I run at eagle's pace;
I'll match your velvet night and fire above
because I can.

when I chase you to my hall of mirrors,
I'll cage you in a thousand silver sheets
and I'll watch you there; but then I'll let you go
because you're beautiful.

I'll meet you where shadows go at noontime —
in that meadow where snowflakes go in spring
you'll fly there and I'll follow; you'll show me
because you can.

You'll meet me in my hall of mirrors:
when you paint yourself on my thousand sheets of silver,
all my silver will melt—I'll step outside through a window
because You came.
True Light

by Benjamin Groenewold

I once was blind but now I see
For You have set new light in me.
My eyes stare straight—a blind man’s gaze—
You keep me from my darker ways.
The hills and flowers all went gray
Your unseen hand draws me toward day.
My hand in Yours, we run through the skies
For You lead me; my hands are eyes.

Now let me bend where You once bent
And put my hands where Your hands went:
On dirty feet and unwashed pride,
On bread till all are satisfied.
Now help me serve that I might see
How I might know Your “Follow Me”
My hand in Yours, my heart will rise
I’ll know true light; my hands are eyes.
It used to be that my two younger brothers would always gang up on me. It wasn't anything malicious, but it was just that they had more in common with each other than either of them did with me. Simply put, I was a girl, and they were boys. Somehow, during the throes of adolescence, things changed.

Gabe, the older of the two, and I sort of became friends. I'm not really sure when it happened, or how, but we bonded.

Ever since then, we've had a strange relationship. We almost never talk about day to day things—girlfriends or boyfriends, schoolwork, or even the latest movie. But when it comes to some kind of major event, I always know that I can talk to him. And he can come to me with anything that's going on. It's kind of a scary arrangement, because every time he comes to talk to me I'm afraid of what might be brought up. It crosses my mind that he may tell me his girlfriend is pregnant, or that he's dropping out of college.

Last Christmas, while I was home from college on break, we had a few talks of this kind. As soon as I stepped into his room for the first time, I knew something was going on. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and he was lying on his queen-size bed, playing Super Mario Brothers on his old Nintendo. Ordinarily, he would have been out cruising the loop on Main Street, stopping to check out all of the chicks, and grunting with his friends about cars.

"What's up?" I asked, expecting his typically apathetic answer of "nothing." But he stopped playing the video game, and said "well, mom and dad caught me." His eyes were cloudy, and his brow wrinkled as he stared at the navy carpet on the floor.

"How did they catch you?"

"Well, they didn't exactly. Noah and I snuck out last weekend and went to a party. On the way home the cops stopped us, and gave me a breath test. I failed big time." He looked distraught but laughed in spite of himself. "I'm grounded for a month, and I got my license taken away for six months."
I just kind of stared at him, not sure what to say. I glanced around his room, trying to think of how to proceed. I glanced at his dresser, and saw a photo of him with Noah and my dad when they were skiing in Vail. “What did mom and dad do?” I turned around and closed the door to his room, and had a seat on the plaid comforter he was sitting on.

“Well,” they haven’t done anything yet, you know how they are...” and his voice trailed off. He looked up at me then, and I saw tears in his eyes. “I just wish they’d leave me alone,” he pleaded, as his voice cracked. “They don’t understand... I just like to go out with my friends and have a good time, I ain’t no alcoholic or anything.”

A flood of slogans raced through my mind. Friends don’t let friends drive drunk. The first step is denial. “Gabe, do you usually drive drunk?” I tried to disguise my accusation in a question, but he didn’t care.

“You know how mom and dad are.” And I did know. “They don’t let me stay overnight anywhere, so when I go to a party I have to go home. I try not to, but sometimes they just make me. They don’t understand how I feel. Dad is always gone on business. When he comes home, he just yells at me and punishes me. That stupid company is the most important thing to him. He works all the time; he doesn’t even know me. When he had to sign the ticket for the cop, he put Noah’s middle name on it instead of mine. He never talks to me unless I’m in trouble, and I know that when they ask me to come into their room I’m in trouble.”

Ironically, just at that moment, I heard my dad’s voice sharply calling, “Gabe, come here. Mom and I want to talk to you.” Gabe half grunted and half laughed.

“That’s what they always say,” he grunted. “They never mean it ... Dad talks, and Mom listens. I’ve already heard this lecture three times this month. I don’t know why I have to hear it again.” He brushed past me, into the hallway between his bedroom and that of our parents.

I sat in his room for a few minutes, watching Mario still paused in mid-air. I unpause the game and tried to guide Mario through the rest of the fifth level, but my expertise failed me, and instead I sent him plunging down a crack. I never saw where he ended up.

The rest of that day our house felt like it was caught in the middle of a thunderstorm. By the time evening rolled around, I couldn’t stand it anymore; I had to leave. I went to the coffee shop in Orange City, one of my favorite places to just sit and think. I sat at a small round wooden table and read. I remember exactly what I was reading—_The Edible Woman_ by Margaret Atwood. I threw myself into the book, eager to forget what was going on at my house. I stayed at the coffee shop until well after twelve, until I was the last person there.

As I drove home, I turned up the music in my car. I turned it up so that I could sing at the top of my lungs and not hear myself. I wished I could do that at home—simply turn the volume up so that I could block out the rest of the things that were going on.

Gabe came into the bathroom that night as I was getting ready for bed. While I was at college, I had forgotten how much I hated the cartoon, Gummy Bears wallpaper in our bathroom. Gabe stood at the sink next to me, brushing his teeth, his arms tan and muscular from working construction.

I glanced at his bare upper body a few times, not sure what I was seeing. And then I asked him. “Gabe, what is that on your arm?” There was a large red scar, about the size of a quarter, on his bicep.

“It’s a scar.” I waited for him to elaborate on his obvious answer, but he didn’t.

“I know it’s a scar. What happened?” I had already chalked it up to teenage stupidity in my mind, remembering that sometimes his friends were idiotic and burned each other with cigarettes for fun, but this scar was abnormally large for that.

“I burned myself with a lighter.” That was all he said. My stomach sunk. My eyes grew large, and I put my toothbrush down on the counter. “Why?” I tried to control my tone of voice, not knowing how to react to him.

“I don’t know...” His voice trailed off, and he continued to brush his teeth. Up and down, back and forth. “I was mad at Dad, and I didn’t know what else to do.”

He simply had gotten so angry that he had burned his arm with an open flame. We had both been angry with our father many times—sick of him being a workaholic, sick of him ignoring us—but I had never seen such an outward expression of it before.

My parents never found out about that scar. I’m pretty sure they don’t know to this day. It was the last time we ever spoke of it, but certainly not the last time I’ve thought about it. We sat in family counseling a few weeks later for the first and last time, and that scar stayed in the front of my mind the whole time. My parents tried to explain to us that they’d always given us independence because they thought that was what we wanted. At that session they said that they realized maybe that wasn’t the right thing to do.

I’ve thought about these incidents a lot in the past year, and what it means to be overlooked. And I’ve also thought about what it means to be independent. And I’ve also thought about what it means to be overlooked, and wondered what the difference is. I’ve never come to any clear conclusions, but only I know that my parents thought they were doing the right thing. I’ve also wondered how Gabe’s family, or my own family, is going to be different. I wonder how the things we experienced during childhood will carry into the way we raise our own children. I know that I have few visible scars from growing up with a workaholic, but I can’t say the same for Gabe. His arms are covered with them.
On not reaching the line I drew

by Beth Vander Ziel

Don't look down at me
I'm trying so hard—I want to be perfect
  for you
  for myself
  but I can't
the best I can do is ok
you say that's enough
I'm great the way I am
then why don't I believe it
I'm really being perfect not for you
  but for my image of you
  not for myself
but for what I think you expect me to be
I want to stop
  not worry
  live life
  be ok
not live up to perfect expectations
that I put on myself
  for you
  for me.
Silent Words

by Beth Vander Ziel

Sitting on the cold, hard floor
I don’t know what to say, what to do
How can I help you—what do you want
The silence is overpowering—it waits to be broken
like the glass over the fire extinguisher, hammer ready
Do I swing the hammer or not?
What will help you?
I don’t know, I just don’t know
The hammer swings—my senseless words shatter
The silence
They tumble over each other like water out of an overfilled cup
each one striving to outdo the others and prove their usefulness.
The only problem is that these hillbilly, backcountry words
don’t fit in at the sophisticated art show this situation is.
Out of place and useless, they fall
fluttering to the ground, the broken feathers of my peacock tail
I have nothing to offer—
no priceless gem of advice, no easy solution
The only thing I have, I give—
my love.
I send wave after wave of it crashing on the beach of your soul.
If only you could see these waves, or at least feel them
But maybe you can
I hope so.
Then as the cliff grew airless and above seemed
To scrape the sunless stars, the thin path drove
And pierced the dead stone and I stepped inside
Where a Spring-wide valley cupped sunlight in
Its hollows and poured bird-song through the air.
There, caught in wondering, weak-kneed awe, I stopped
Until I saw the dance and liquid flash
Where a streamlet burst out laughing near my feet.

Long left behind, now, are the darkling woods
Of the depthless pits in shadow under
The black-leaved trees. No sunlight ever shone
Past the grim roof of those rotting trees.
The track led on past the twilight lands,
Their grey-shadowed isles and their misty shores,
Where ghosts and goblins hunted all unseen
In the lightless woods of my dream-dimmed world.

Now, the path has narrowed and become steep
And up the twisting track I climbed; higher
Through the world’s stone-sharp mountain backbone,
Where the dryads of the pine wood wake and
Move sleepless through cathedral stillness; where
The pines lift their branches to keep the hush
In holy reverence with the sky surging rock
That forms the mountains ageless and unchanged.

I found all this as I passed through the glades
And sunlit meadows; and I knew the far-off
Desire of the trees for the sky,
Mountains for the ancient starlit fires.
Through crag-like cliffs, past chasms gaping dark,
I traced back my winding way and saw how
It arced onward like an arrow toward
The last topaz rays of the dying sun.

At my strength’s end, I came to the final wall
That towered like the land’s last dark barrier against
The sun. It rose up sheer in near seamless,
Somber folds of stone dimmed past midnight black,
And as I climbed the single stair-like cleft
That hung between obsidian and abyss,
As high mountains fell far below, my breath
Came short, and each step trembled for an end.

And there beside the water, the sunbeams
Quivered, glinting on a harp of graceful gold
Stringed with bright silver. A wind sighed between
The strings to strike an echo of its sound.
Then all was still with the hush of a thousand pines
As the harp flashed sunfire in my unsure hands.
Then soft broke the melody through the silent wood,
And sweeter still it sang, and everything was good.
Closer to God

John De Jong
My First Cigar—
Only Half-Finished

by Sarah Den Boer

I breathe in.
Inside, the
smoke scorches
down my throat,
slinking about my lungs.
Blowing out, the
smoke unfurls,
skipping from my lips,
dancing into
the dense night.

With a sigh
I lean over the
railing of the boat,
resting the bony
part of my elbows
on the smooth metal.
A flick of my finger
and the grey ash
timidly flutters
down into
the water.

Hearing my name
I turn sharply,
the smoke in my
chest grating.
Quickly I toss
the cigar over
my shoulder
and force a smile
as he approaches.
Crux

by Benjamin Groenewold

spiraling up sharp stairs come neurons all on edge
dizzying higher climb to this untenable ledge:
I fail to gasp; oh how this eye-blinding height burns—
the heavy world lurches and sickeningly turns
come now, oh cooling dove, while my bones grate to dust
with your wings bring wind; that I might slip this evil thrust

but no—down crushing on my shoulders, straining, stretching I
am born up in agony, up tears my cry:
“My God!” abysses yawn beneath me, voids gape above
how this hated place reeks bile where once was only love!
I’m a stormcloud hung on lightning, pierced a thousand ways
longing to call down fire; I must stay and bear the blaze.

These nails do not bind me to this tortured wood;
I cling here, forcing evil’s hand against the good.
Heart, beat stronger, for still more battered I must be
Angels—hide your faces, lest I cry to set me free
For the chains on my captors are still undiminished,
But now I’ve bound myself—behold, it shall be finished!
Hands

Stephen Van Wyk
"Old Jim?" his neighbors would say when their coffee-
time conversation turned towards the old man who lived in
an old trailer at the end of town, "don't bother with him—if
he wanted company, he'd step outside a little more often." Then, likely as not, everyone would lean forward in anticipa-
tion, and the speaker would lower his voice a little: "You
know, ever since she died, he's kept himself almost as shut
up as a bird in a cage. I've heard he goes out once a month
for supplies and that's all. It simply isn't natural, let me tell
you."

Tonight, of all nights, Old Jim was sure to stay shut up in
his "cage." It was a night so cold even the air itself seemed
frozen, and the old man was sitting in his small kitchen. His
eyes were dim and watery, his gray mustache was spotted
with grease stains and bits of food, and his faded overalls
were mottled with grease, oil, and dirt. He had drawn a metal
folding chair close to a small portable heater that, no matter
how much it buzzed and shook, seemed unable to bring the
air temperature much above tepid. Rather than providing
some comfort, the heater's electrical warmth seemed
instead to be no more than an apology for the bitter purity of
the clear, cold winter's night outside.

To make matters worse, the winter cold had made it
impossible to close the outside door properly. The wind
whispered to itself in joy as its cold fingers reached around
and under the door, into the old man's small room.

As another gust made the screen door rattle and the
doorframe moan, the old man shivered. He got to his feet
and, taking a threadbare blanket, tried to stuff it under the
door to keep some of the cold outside where it belonged. But
it seemed no use. If the wind had been kept from blowing
under the door, it was just as free as it ever had been to blow
during the door and the doorframe's sides. Muttering
under his breath the old man hobbled back to his seat. He
scraped the chair over the worn linoleum, bringing it closer
to the small heater. As another gust made the thin walls of
the trailer shudder, the wind licked through the door and
caressed his back—its touch sinking deeper than icicles driv-
en beneath skin.

The old man sighed. His eyes roved round the place—
perhaps searching for some object of comfort, perhaps for
some tool of release—it was hard to say which. His eyes
swirled over the kitchen sink—full of unwashed plates and
chipped mugs; onto an unsteady looking table with a thickly
veneered top—still holding the remains of suppers long gone;
only a small shelf and a faded picture of a young woman—
her face filled by an unfaded radiance (from this he averted
his eyes quickly); and then onto the window, which had its
one plastic shutter half drawn up. There the old man's eyes
rested awhile.

It was snowing out there. The wind had whipped the
falling snow into a swift, white clarity, and the old man
could hear the fierce hissing of
the snow-crystals as they swept
against the tin sides of the trailer.
Once in a while, the wind would shift a little, and a
bit of that free, hard whiteness would come sitting
through the door and into a cluttered world of dirty
dishes, cheap plastic, veneer, and painted metal—the
world of the old man's trailer. And there, as if in defi-
ance of the electrical heater, the snow would simply lay
by the door, refusing to melt.

After sitting close to the small heater for a while
longer, the old man pushed himself up from his folding
chair and, with hands clumsy from cold, moved a dent-
ed metal tea kettle onto his two-burner stove. From
there, he made his way to the cupboard and, upon finding
it empty, hesitated a moment, and then went to a
smaller cupboard and slowly took
down an old mug that looked as if
it hadn't been used in a long time.
A name—a woman's name—was printed on its side. It alone
of all the crockery strewn over the
table, counter and sink, had not been
chipped or discolored or
damaged in any way. He
turned it over in his hands, as
if examining it for defects, and a
certain warmth came into his eyes. His
eyes strayed to the window for a moment,
and there was a look of distance in them—a
remembering look.

He stood there until a sudden hard gust of
wind banged against the door, bringing him
back from his reverie. Holding the cup as care-
fully as his unsteady hands would allow, his
back bowed with age and effort, he began to
recess the small distance to the counter.
Before he'd come much more than halfway,
however, a fit of chills seized him, and the
cup, slipping from his hands, fell and shat-
tered on the floor.
The old man's bent back went rigid, his head and eyes
were riveted on the shattered ceramic on the floor, his
outstretched hands were still. It seemed as if he had
been caught out of time by the breaking of some memo-
ry sharp as the shards of the cup there on the floor.
The linoleum under the shards was moist and dirty; already
some of the cup's alabaster-white pieces were stained
and spotted brown. There was a new stillness in the
shack: for a moment the dirty plates, the rickety table,
and even the old newspapers littered across the floor
seemed to stand quiet, witnesses to some final verdict.
almost erect, his back nearly unbent. With great deliberation, he pushed the door back and forth until he had knocked it free of the ice, and then flung it wide open.

The wind rushed in with a triumphant roar, and snowflakes swirled and eddied in its wake, hanging lightly on air like tiny figures caught up in some intricate dance. The tremendous booming of the wind was swallowed by the harsh singing of the snow. Oddly enough, the old man did not shiver now, but instead breathed deep the cold air, and chuckled a little to himself.

After waiting just a moment on the doorstep, he crossed the threshold and stepped out into the wild heart of the snowstorm. Snow rose in clouds as his feet plunged through the new-made drifts. The wind was not so strong and rough as before, but seemed almost playful now—it caught at the flakes and danced them around him and onto him and into his clothes, so that it was not long before both his stains and the old color of his clothes had been swallowed up in white. More flakes swirled around him, and then, by some trick of the still softening wind, swirled themselves together for an instant so that there seemed to be a pillar of snow standing upright before the old man. He smiled. Then a stronger wind lashed out, seeming sure to blow the whirling snow-pillar into confusion once more. And yet, the wind seemed to do no more to destroy the pillar than to whisk away a little snow from its edges, as one might whisk snow away from ice, or as chisel flakes of stone from a block of marble. An instant later, the wind weakened again—dropped to nothing—and the sculpting (if that is what it was) was complete.

And the man, his eyes no longer dim and distant but bright with a long lost joy, took the white-gloved hand of the white-dressed young woman now standing in front of him. Her eyes too, were ablaze with a fire of love, just as they had been in the old picture back in the trailer. Hand in hand they walked, feet breaking up the soft snow, sending it flying up in billows and buttresses that rose, rushed, and eddied round, changing quick as a veil of butterflies. They walked on through the dancing snowflakes and the clean air, leaving behind—once and for all—the lukewarm, tumble-down trailer and its broken door. Soon they disappeared behind a keen-edged drift, and were lost to sight.

In the morning, the old man's neighbors, all exclaiming with a vigorous horror at the savage fury of the snowstorm, discovered his decrepit trailer empty and the snow already drifting over much of the floor, coating everything white.

"Ah," they would say to each other later, over coffee and donuts, and near the electrical hum of their own larger heaters, "Old Jim cracked at last. Always knew it would happen, living alone for all those years in that tumbledown shack, him and his dreams. It simply wasn't natural."
If there is one word that deserves to be hauled out into a back alley and dismembered letter by letter, it is this one. Images of pink frilly dresses, Veggie Tales, and helpless puppies flood into my mind. I quickly shove them out as I fight the wave of nausea that follows.

Why do I feel like defacing those pictures of babies sitting in flowers? Why do I want to smash Precious Moments figurines to smithereens? Why do I want to put a big black X over stylized hearts?

As long as I can remember I've held a strong contempt for the word cute. It seems like such a cop-out description. Whenever I hear it used I think, "What? Can you find no better adjective than that? With so many words in the English language, is cute the only one you can think up?" The word is used so often it seems to apply to every area of life.

"Oh, your shirt is so cute!"
"They make such a cute couple!"
"That's such a cute car!"
"Oh, that house is so cute!"

What's next? Soon we'll be calling Bill Clinton cute, or Fidel Castro, or nuclear warfare. Already this year I've heard a girl squeal, "Oh, Dr. Van Dyk is such a cute old man!" Get me a bucket so I can throw up into it. Cutely, of course.

I don't believe we can call everything cute. My Reformed worldview backs me up on this. To label every conceivable object, person, or idea that comes along as cute is simply reductionistic. We can't reduce so many things in life to one mindless adjective when they really are much more complex and rich.

The word itself isn't all that bothers me. I also dislike the idea behind it. The idea seems to deny reality—it suggests a naive innocence. The pink frilly dress mentioned above probably is made of 100% polyester. Veggie Tales are just annoying little vegetables that somehow acquired souls. The helpless puppies probably have rabies.

The worst thing anyone can ever tell me is that I'm cute. It evokes ideas in my mind that are just not accurate, and are in fact the opposite of what I want to be. Being called cute makes me sound like I'm sweet. But I'm not—I can be nasty. It makes me sound weak. But I'm not—I'm independent. It makes me sound childish.

What I dislike most of all about the word cute is that it doesn't sound like it's taking anything seriously. I want to be taken seriously as a person, and when someone tells me I'm cute I feel like all that I consider important about myself has just been brushed aside. Barney may be cute, but you can't take him seriously. And whoever heard of a cute feminist?

My worst run-in with cuteness happened about a year ago. I was home for Christmas and my friend Lisa said to me, "Do you know what my sister said about you? She said, 'You know, when I think of Sarah I think of a bunny—all cute and cuddly.'"

I grimaced. After that, bunnies became a plague in my life. They popped up everywhere, hopping across the road, scampering through our yard. Every time I saw one I was once again reminded of those insulting words Lisa's sister uttered.

However, one day I was talking with another friend who knows how I feel about bunnies and he said, "Last night I had a dream about you. I dreamt that you were searching everywhere for some bunnies."

I groaned, positive I knew what was coming next. But I was surprised.

"And then you found some, and together we threw them into the blender. Then you hit puree."

I let out a contented sigh. Finally, a happy ending.

It's time we got rid of the gushy, overused, oversimplified word cute and sent it packing. The only place I'd like to see it appear is on the extinction list. Or else we could always toss it into the blender and puree it out of this world.
A glimpse into the physical and emotional reality of the Bubonic plague.

“Bring out the dead,”
“Bring out the dead,”
Moans throughout the forsaken land.
The rumbling carts of corpses
Make their way through the struggling masses.

A dismal pall
hangs over her—this once-bright jewel
where men of genius
and women of unfortold beauty and grace
danced, laughed, and made love.
This crowning triumph
is no more.
For the land is barren and laid to waste.
Life and fertility are dead.
Hope and laughter fled long ago.
The squalid edge reams with fetid shells of humanity.
Through the silence of Death’s shroud,
The wailing and cries of the dying.
The putrid stench of ruptured skin wafts upon the air.
Death leaves his stain upon the skin—Black, Black, and Blacker.
The screams of agony no one hears in the suffocating silence.

Through the mud and the muck
The carts rumble on carrying their burden of a hellish nightmare.
The bodies in the streets, solidified in Death’s grotesque grip.
Socketless eyes, frozen grimaces, claws of hands.
Insanity walks among The living,
The first to make a claim.
One scream of horrific terror. The soul freezes.
Eyes go vacant.
This prison of nothingness and agony.

Death brings his tormented relief.
The apparitions of humanity run but cannot hide.
Death stalks the land.
The bells toll Death’s gruesome knell.
Reality is dimmed.
Only here and now exists.
There is no tomorrow and
Today is lost and dying.

A city of death and insanity.
The shroud of Death Hovers closer, enfolds her to his bosom.
The bells toll.
“Bring out your dead,”
“Bring out your dead,”
The carts rumble on.
by Danielle Vriend

in the tool shed
with gasoline-soaked rags
limp beside strawberry-stained baskets
one lone rake
propped against the leaning wall

he stood
scrutinizing his tools
mumbled
then reached for the far left spade
whispering with cobwebs

he began to dig
gently, slowly
around bean plants
tucked beneath the rhubarb
careful not to disturb the snow peas

metal meeting earth and clanking
with rocks
until
a hole

put him in, he said
gruffly
tenderly

the muddled ball of white fur
slid off the plastic plate
locked forever in rodent grimace

we filled it up
earth on earth
i watched his calloused, hairy hands
shuffle dirt

with one last lingering look
at the solemn little mound
a tribute to the pet gods

his earthy hand surrounded mine
i was glad
he belonged to me
China- Doll's Lament

by Holly Meyer

I pleaded with God for a china-doll's heart,
but a china-doll’s eyes were all he would grant.
striped of by tears and thus of their balm,
where should the tide of my grief flow now?

A lullaby wafts from Sheol’s throat
soothing to even a porcelain ear,
but He’s jerking the strings on my china-doll limbs
to force me to dance to the morbid tune.

“The world loves a clown.” “Dance, gypsy, dance!”
“Trap a laugh in those eyes to conceal every grief.”
“Reality is only what blind men see.”
“Paste a trouble-free smile on that china-doll face.”
I want the grass to breathe

by David Schaap

As I lay down
in the hands of the grass
I make a request:
I want the grass to breathe
beneath me and my heart

Each blade would join the other
to unburden my arms
The grass would breathe life
and begin raising me above the green,
my hair still touching the dirt
My vision diminishing, slowly
then
It casts me up
high into the blue, past
and through the black
The dark pulling the ash
out through my skin,
space moves around me
my sight returns and
Then
Planets
Stars
Galaxies

Silence

My blood no longer dark
i would know how to cry
And as the nothing would embrace me,
I would feel it in my heart
The nothing
The Refreshment Girl
by David Schaap

"Between Thought and Expression lies a Lifetime"
—“Some Kinda Love,” Velvet Underground

I watched the movie Star Wars the other day,
in the movie theater, a childhood thing,
and before stepping into the fantasy
I wanted something in my stomach

I stepped up

“Hi.”

our eyes met
as she looked up from
the grease and fingerprints
left on her counter

then

her face,
with those flawless eyes,
they begged me

“Hi.”

her face
it lifted my being and
her air held me up
and I realized that her uniform
was the only thing keeping her
from dropping into the darkness at her feet
and soacking into the filth

A smile.

our minds flowed into each other
and I saw further into her than
she could ever see herself:
her jagged thoughts
jumbled together into
and manifestation,
a hope and a need for someone
with eyes that dried tears and
ears that spoke affection

“May I help you?”

Her red hair shielded her face
hewed from a life she never realized
and polished by times
she both remembered and forgot;
the retreat of her neck,
weathered and smooth,
closed my eyes and
soothed our fear

“Yeah...”

I stood aside and watched myself
reaching, holding, and forming
that quiet screaming face;
‘it’s all right’: my whisper
my hands mixed with her hair,
I was holding her
supporting her,
and kissing her eyes,
kissing her eyes

“I think...”

I emptied into her, I know that
she emptied into me, I knew that also
she burned, I melted
everything inside me fell
and I cried like a father,
but her face stood
it was searching, it was bruised
it pressed into my chest

“Junior Mints, please.”

my heart screamed
she understood, she accepted
and she held it inside of her;
her eyes let me scan
my past, my future, my present;
her eyes filled the cavity
that sunk deep into my mind
and she knew that I had searched for
her eyes all my life

I only ate 6 Junior Mints
as I sat through the dream
flickering ahead of me
then I got into my car
and drove away

Her red hair shielded her face
hewed from a life she never realized
and polished by times
she both remembered and forgot;
the retreat of her neck,
weathered and smooth,
closed my eyes and
soothed our fear

“May I help you?”
Postmodern Blues

by Andrew Moody

It seems to me at times
I’m spun around by riddled rhymes
that fall so sweetly off the smiling lips of the blind who lead the blind

Whatever’s cool is cool with me
and who can say what truth should be
as long as you and I are fine and no one gets offended

But what should come of you and me
in this relativistic tranquility?
I grasp from black and white but all I see through clouded eyes are
ever widening, ever deepening, never ending shades of grey

I’ve had enough of feel good philosophy
Political correctness has slowly devoured me
I need something else to fill the hole
left by this senseless rigmarole
Stand up and help to save my soul before all this gray turns to black.
Are We Neighbours or What??
by Rebecca J. Hathaway

Have you ever felt like your international friends know nothing about your country? If you are an American the answer is “no,” for who could fail to recognize the details of the greatest superpower in the world? However, if you are a Canadian, you may perhaps sympathize with me on an account of the most pathetic example of ignorance ever demonstrated in history.

At a concert given by a great Canadian artist a couple years ago, I was amused by one of his comical interludes... a variation of “Oh Canada”, as interpreted by a typical American. The words as follows were sung to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner, “Oh Canada, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.”

Although I laughed out loud, I knew all too well the validity of such a harmless insinuation. Few Americans know the Canadian anthem, and all too often I’ve been asked, “Who is your president?”! Besides this, Americans will happily rattle off fifty states without being able to name one province, unless, of course, they have a great aunt living there.

Besides the fact that “Canada is north”, most Americans will generally agree that we live in igloos, catch great flying bottles of Coke while being wary of spear-bearing, polar-bear catching Eskimos. Another amusing image is that of the Royal Mounted Police, and some would assume that we all ride around on horses with large, brown-rimmed hats and enforce peacefulness with one glance.

“And the French, what is their damage anyway? I heard they were going to take over Canada or something; why don’t they just join the States”? If you want to see colour, just say this to a Canadian and your assumed image of our “quiet” pride will be immediately transformed. Perhaps we may not be as outwardly obnoxious as some overly-patriotic, fire-cracking Americans, but our very real pride, in a country ranked number one in the world to live in, will definitely be aroused by such an ignorant suggestion.

The examples are limitless; however, my intention is not to smear the evidence in the faces of our genuinely good-intentioned allies. The real question remains, “What is the cause for such a innocently hurtful situation?”

There are many reasons really; the first is the lack of Canadian history; i.e. “none”, taught to the youth of the United States. Young Canadians, however, are made familiar with more than the basic elements of American pastime. Who decides that Canadian history should not be taught in the States, yet American history is elementary for most any country?

Media, as well, contributes to the problem. With over forty television stations available to Canadians, there is little wonder why we Northerners have begun to excel in United States trivia.

Without a doubt the United States plays a huge role in the world, economically and militarily. Although Canada cannot begin to compare in size or strength, I think it is important for Americans to understand our uniqueness and realize that belonging to a country has more to do with heart than with the ability to be incredibly influential on a global level. But the border is there, and to cross it means new taxes, a health system, and a culture contained within a single province. I think the people of the United States might do well to learn a bit of our life, knowing that we will forever remain distinct from the US, but not less. And who wouldn’t be thrilled “abowt” that, eh?
Trapped

by Lynette Bakker

I cut myself off from the world
In a self-imposed prison of words.
Fictional characters were my playmates
And the closest friend I knew.

They danced out from the pages
And captured my childish fancy.
Yet somehow they hold me captive
And keep me from living my life.

I dwell inside a bubble
That keeps me safe from reality.
But now I can’t escape it
And suddenly I find I’m alone.

I want to join the world I see
From over the edge of my book
But somehow I’ve forgotten
How to take the first step.
On a Sunday Afternoon, Reflecting
by Ryan Vande Kraats

This is the way the world returns
the world returns
...turns

ice into
drips and ripples
streams of drips and ripples
flowing resurrected
freed, flowing

water, like a
blessing
shimmering
in the gutters,
anointing sandy streets
removing the stone

reflecting the sun
light,

the trees awaiting
spring and

my feet are
splashing

This is the way the world returns
not with a bang but a whisper
Taking Walks

by Sarah M. Eekhoff

“Let’s go,” my mom whispered late one summer night as she crept down the stairs of our old house. She had just finished checking on my brother Chad and sister Lisa as they lay asleep in their respective beds.

“Okay,” I replied quietly, tightening the laces on my black Nikes. “The lights are off in the camper. I think Grandpa and Grandma are asleep.”

“Good,” Mom smiled. “They would kill us if they knew we were still up.”

We turned off the lights, waited a moment, then squeezed out the cracked screen door, holding our breath as it squeaked shut and latched with a loud click. We inched our way down the sidewalk for about a block, keeping our mouths still and our eyes fixed on Grandpa and Grandma’s camper parked on the lawn behind our three-story house.

As soon as we got out of earshot we let out sighs of relief and began to talk. First, our words trickled slowly out as we discussed Grandma’s terrible meat-loaf and Chad’s T-ball game, then a torrent emerged as Mom spilled her frustration with Grandma’s meddling, and I complained about Lisa’s cold words toward me. We walked and walked, all the way around our small town, turning out along a quiet blacktop for about half a mile, over an ancient bridge and between a row of dark evergreens to a quiet cemetery.

Walks have always been an important part of my life. Growing up without a television, I often took walks with my family. We kids would race ahead in the twilight, spinning around the cold grey poles of street signs and tickling our bare feet with the long emerald grass of the lawns we passed. Mom and Dad would walk behind us, holding hands and discussing income taxes and the Christian school.

In the winter, we would struggle into our mismatched snow pants and heavy jackets and pile onto the cracked wooden sled. Dad would pull us down the deserted streets that were coated with a thin layer of ice that glistened like a layer of diamonds in the orange glow of the streetlights. After our energy had worn him out, we would take turns pulling each other, running faster and faster until either the rider fell off or the puller slipped and landed with a loud crack on the ice.

From the dull brown of August to the bright green of May, I walked the seven blocks to grade school. During recess my best friends, Carrie and Angela, and I would walk around the soccer field and talk about the boys we were in love with and the girls we hated.

High school days rolled around and time for walking became more limited. Basketball games and history quizzes filled my thoughts until one sunny day in May when Mom received a telephone call at school, telling her that there had been an accident. One week later, on another beautiful day, we buried my father in the small cemetery one half mile out of town.

Mom’s parents drove in from Chicago for the funeral and parked their camper in our backyard for weeks. Mom and I began sneaking out at night to get some space and to breathe. I loved the aura of forbiddenness, the tense knot that squeezed my stomach as we willed the door not to squeak and tiptoed past the camper that cradled my grandparents, who were blissfully snoring through the silent defiance of their daughter as each night she escaped their suffocating sympathy and constant questions.

Ambling through those still summer nights, with the yellow moon illuminating the road between scarce street lights and the black shadows providing the feeling of secrecy, my view of a walk changed from a sport to be raced through to a time-out from the game of life. Time did not actually stop, of course, but everything else did. No legal papers could be signed, no books read, no piano played. No basketball shots could be practiced, no driver’s education book looked over, no phone calls answered. It was just me and my mom, strolling through the night while we talked.

Walks became more frequent throughout the rest of my high school years. I walked with my friend Mark around the track at the YMCA while we discussed his low self-esteem, with Tracy around town after fights with her dad while we calmed her emotions, and down gravel roads around my boyfriend Joel’s house while we contemplated our future. Walks became a way to freeze time, to take a break from life and get to know my friends without distractions.

I took my walk therapy with me to college. Here I walked with my best friend Trixi, and we spilled our concerns for the future. I walked with my other best friend Chris and we debated the issues of women in church office and the ethics of journalism. I walked with Michelle and she became one of my best friends.

Last August I flew to England for a Serve mission project and while overseas my walks changed once more. I began to walk with God.

2000 Canon
Each night as my British and American team members and I left the black and white double decker bus that served as our outreach center, we would walk the two miles back to the small houses of our English host families. Every night, while the others sang silly songs and laughed at each other’s accents, I walked on ahead by myself and began to talk out loud to God. Suddenly, my walks took on a whole new perspective. Not only was I breaking from the hectic run of life, but I was talking to the Judge of the race. I told him of my fears and desires, I confessed my weaknesses while asking for his perfect strength, and I quieted my heart from the cheap noises of the world to really listen to the music of my God.

I was not disappointed. When I listened, God spoke, but it was only a whisper so I had to distance myself from the chattering of my friends and walk alone with God. As with my friends, when I walked with God my relationship with Him deepened and I was refreshed with a new focus and reorganized priorities.

When I returned to the States, I filled up my college schedule with classes, work, and editing the yearbook. Walks once again took a backseat to tests, presentations, and deadlines. Now I squeeze in a walk about once a week with some of my friends, but my walks with God, though scattered frequently throughout my first semester, quietly faded as second semester’s class overload gobbled up any extra minutes that I had.

I miss taking walks. I miss the breath of fresh air taken from routine and the gathering of thoughts they afford. I miss the talks with my friends about things that matter. I miss the quiet whisper of God that still comes but is muffled by the roar of books and papers.

Mom says that after someone you love dies, you have a choice to either live or die with them. She chose to live and so did I. But sometimes I need to quit living so much, to stop packing my schedule. I should slow down and take in the scenery while breathing in the aroma of God’s grace. I should stop doing so much and start thinking about why I am doing it. I need to stop running and take a walk.
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