

THE

MOBILELIBRARY

Volume 3

Issue 1



Volume 3 Issue 1

Curated, edited, and published by The Aerogramme Center for
Arts and Culture.

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ISSN 2767-9691 (print)
ISSN 2767-9683 (online)

Designed by The Aerogramme Center
for Arts and Culutre
Edited by Zoë Elena Moldenhauer

Printed in the United States

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www.aerogramme.org

MISSION

The Mobile Library Magazine provides a multi-digital exhibiting experience for artists and writers to showcase their work during the pandemic closures. Each publication is unique, pairing 6 artists and 6 writers together at different stages in their career to build a collaborative experience.

This year, Volume 3 will explore the theme of memory with Issue 1 exploring memory, moments, and experiences of childhood. Each contributor responded to our prompt 'what does it mean to record a moment' and 'how do we choose which objects to represent a specific moment of our lives.'

Cover Image

Basak Kilicbeyli. House, drawing the hood, 2021.

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Manager's Son

Text by Brock Dethier
Artwork by Elena Grossi

Every teacher needs a summer job.
Dad's was managing the Kollegewidgwok Yacht Club.
He fired the cannon at 8 am
and again for every winner of Wednesday and Saturday races.
He heaved race course buoys into position
and ferried people to their boats
in a chugging green committee boat,
a mysterious but generally cooperative beast.

On race days sometimes a lucky child
would ride the committee boat with Dad
and watch the race.
He would coil lines and retrieve bumpers
while keeping the wheel straight
and goosing the throttle when we left the harbor.
Blue Hill Bay was his domain.

Da lontano, 2019.
Analog photog-
raphy, scan,
digital print on
fine art paper. 9
x 14 cm.

Time Capsule: Childhood

I liked to surf on the foam-filled bumpers
that rolled around in the back of the boat,
and one day, no surprise,
I lost my footing and smacked the engine housing with my nose.
As my father told the story, he rushed me to the club,
drove me to the hospital
where the doctor stuck something up my broken nose,
and got back in time to fire the finishing cannon.

I learned to be helpful around the club,
holding the door of the ice box
when the ice man came with his huge tongs
carrying blocks that would keep us cold for a week,
tallying up the hashmarks on the Pop Account board
so Dad could charge each family,
ferrying sailors with Dad on race day,
watching him ease up to each boat,
throwing sailbags into cockpits.

Once when he needed the big pump from the clubhouse,
I ran up and got it, but then coming down
the steep low-tide gangway to the dock,
I tripped and fell head first into the bay,
still holding the pump. I clamored out,
but they had to get the Scuba guy to retrieve it.
Dad never said a word.

I'd like to say that as manager's son I learned every knot
and nautical term and knew every rock in the harbor
but somehow I never caught his knack for predicting wind,
couldn't imitate his touch on the tiller.
He was 97 when he sailed last,
still warning of each lobster buoy, reef, or wind change,
still not complaining when a rogue wave soaked him.

Dad had an impressive career—
finished Princeton and began teaching at 20,
captain in the war,
coach of several national squash champs,
revered teacher and principal—
but I grew up in awe of the man
who knew when the next puff was coming.



Da lontano, 2019.

Analog photography, scan, digital print on fine art paper. 9 x 14 cm.

Burn Days

When it rained, we burned.

All summer we cut and trimmed trees to preserve the view,
and even when we saved trunks for firewood,
we had to do something with useless limbs and tops.
You can dump only so much stuff in the woods
before the woods start looking like a dump.

We would drag branches to the burn site,
make a pile of the driest and most flammable,
spread the other limbs ten feet way.
Mom would call the fire marshal for a permit,
and we'd march to the site
with metal rakes, hoes, saws, loppers, firestarters.

Mom was the pro.

Whatever the weather, she'd kneel
at the upwind end of the pile,
hollow out a little hole at the base,
from inside her jacket produce a handful of shredded birchbark
and with a single match, deftly struck,
she'd light her tinder, blow on it,
add more bark.

Once the fire was hot enough to start eating its way up the pile,
she'd back off and admire her work
while the rest of the gang cut trees into manageable sizes
or dragged more from a distance,
lounging around the fire to throw on stray limbs
and hear the sizzlesnap of evergreen needles
quick-frying before the pop,
slickers steaming in the fire's heat,
hot faces and wet backs.

We'd drag limbs past the rotting studio
where Edouard used to practice his violin,
along paths he and his brothers lined with logs
now green with moss. The first bonfires on the property
were probably scrapwood fires,
burning splintery remnants of sheds and shacks and derricks

abandoned by the miners. I wonder how soon they realized
saplings were the next enemy,
started cremating piles of pulled-up and clipped-down
balsams and spruce. The branches we burned came from trees
my parents could have pulled up years ago.

After the initial flare-ups,
when most of the branches had been hauled,
Dad would appear in his full-length smoke-colored raincoat.
Noisy activity now replaced by rain hush,
he would lean on the long rake,
watch blue and yellow tongues flick from orange glow,
adjust the edges of the pile,
patrol the surroundings for burnables,
stoop with a grunt, toss them on the pile with an easy motion,
assign chores to helpers until,
"Why don't you take the other tools and get out of the rain?"

He'd emerge from the woods an hour after everyone else
and take a rare bath,
then join us in the warm kitchen
where Mom made muffins and soup in the wood cook stove.
In the morning the ash would be cold
and we'd set out with saws and loppers
to start greening the pile again.



My First Poem

Da lontano, 2019.
Analog photog-
raphy, scan,
digital print on
fine art paper. 9
x 14 cm.

From our porch, you could see the tall white pine
on Vincent's Head, high land
that sticks out into the cove,
protecting the inner harbor against southerlies.
It was a landmark, an orientation point,
and for a 12-year-old tree-climbing boy,
a challenge.

I climbed for the view,
for the lording-it-over-the-earthbound appeal,
and because I was good at it,
because I sensed that I should use
my shinnying, my stretch, my strength,
my desire while I had them.
I delighted in exercising monkey-muscles.

The crux of the climb was the transfer.
There were no limbs on the bottom 20 feet of the big tree.

I had to thrash my way up through poky dead branches
of its sister tree, then up high
where the limbs were springy,
scotch out on a branch
and step over to a bigger branch on the bigger tree.

Then it was just a matter of climbing up
until the branches started breaking under my hands,
holding on to the swaying top
while trying to register for a lifetime
the view of McHeard's Cove,
Newberry Neck, Blue Hill Bay—
boats, lobster buoys, whitecaps.

My greatest challenge provoked my first poem.
I don't think I cared about art.
I was, quietly, showing off.
I couldn't brag about my achievement anywhere—
my father hated people who were full of themselves—
but I captured it in a poem when a voice said
"This is special. Write about it."

I miss the dexterity of my tree climbing days,
but not pine sap in hair and clothes, bark-skinned knees.
I long for that kind of quest—
finite, with an end point, a top, a reward,
a crux where I go out on a limb
and with skill, knowledge, and faith in myself,
step over to a bigger challenge.

Priming the Pump

My first great solo responsibility:
hustle down the back path to the well,
barefoot in dusk, feet leather-tough, no wincing,
pry the well top off,
throw the bucket in,
fish it around to get it half full,
haul it back out,
locate the right part of the ancient pump,
yell "OK" as loudly as possible
so they'd flip the switch at the house
as I pour water into the pump,
which chokes and sputters
then starts cranking.
"It's going," I call,
then saunter back uphill to much praise,
the boy who brought water.



Da lontano, 2019.

Analog photography, scan, digital print on fine art paper. 9 x 14 cm.



Da lontano, 2019.

Analog photography, scan, digital print on fine art paper. 9 x 14 cm.

Pulling Evergreens

In the 1920s, from their house on a granite cliff,
our parents could see East Blue Hill in the north,
Mt Desert to the east,
all the way around to Long Island in the south.
As the forest closed in, our mother fought to preserve bits of view
and taught us a hierarchy of trees.

We learned to diss balsams.
Sure, the needles were my favorite smell,
but they grew quickly, blocked the view,
died young, and their sap pockets and
poky dead branches made them a nuisance
to get rid of at any age. Best to attack them
when small enough to pull.

Young spruce received the same treatment,
though my mother had to admit they were
beautiful trees. They weren't good firewood
and we didn't need the shade.
There's no air in a spruce grove.

White pines, too, we'd yank,
though we all admired
their tall, swaying elders,
descendants of trees milled on site
to build the house in 1921.

To hardwoods we were more deferential.
We'd clear around a rare red oak,
leave some of the young birches, maples, and beeches
if they didn't hog too much sunlight and view.
We knew eventually they'd end up in the fireplace.

We had the area around the house thinned
the year before our mother died.
The extra light made us all feel more alive
and encouraged evergreen seedlings to rise
in great abundance on the forest floor.

pp. 15.
Layla van der
Oord. With Jola,
2022. Indian ink
and color pen-
cil. A5.



Jacob and Esau

Text by Paul Hostovsky

Artwork by Layla van der Oord

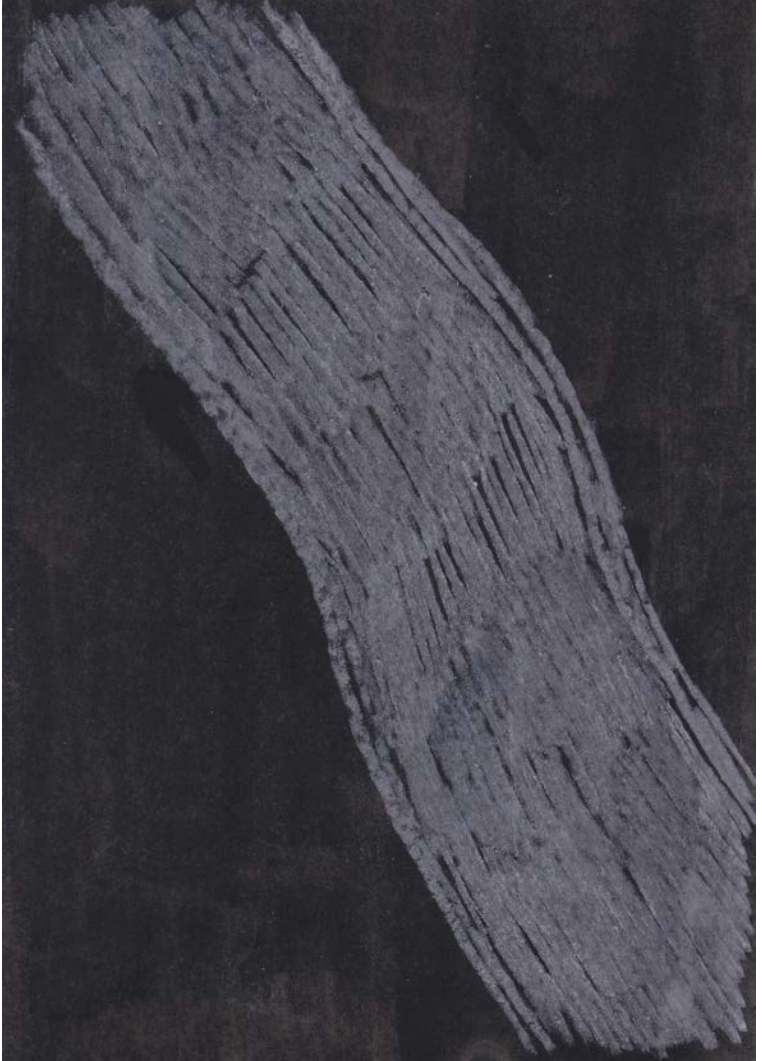
My bar mitzvah portion was the story of Jacob and Esau and the lentil soup. At thirteen I was as smooth as Jacob: I had learned just enough Hebrew to read that bit from the Torah aloud, impress the congregation and get the money. It was all a kind of fraud—I had no idea what any of the words *meant*. I had never even tasted lentil soup. And when I finally did, I didn't like it. The story of Jacob and Esau and the lentil soup and the blind father, Isaac, as it turns out, is a story of fraud. And thirteen isn't the age when manhood begins—that was the biggest fraud—though it roughly coincides with the onset of puberty. At thirteen I could count the number of hairs that were growing down there: approximately thirteen. I learned about approximate equality in algebra class that same year: when any two quantities are close enough in value that the difference is negligible, you use the approximately-equal-to sign with a squiggly, which looked like one of the curling tender tendrils growing down there. So it all fit together approximately. I didn't have a hairy brother like Esau or a blind father like Isaac, but I was smooth: practically all of my friends were hairier than me. I knew this because of gym class and because of peripheral vision. I pretended not to see, but I saw. I saw I would be a late bloomer. I saw that lentil soup was an acquired taste. I saw I wouldn't start liking it until many years later, when I'd grown enough pubic hair to sport an excellent beard. A beard is technically pubic hair on your face—any hair that wasn't there before puberty is technically pubic hair, a factoid that I thought the rabbi might appreciate. So I told him during one of our boring weekly bar mitzvah lessons. He made a face like he had indigestion, then fondled his pubic hair and told me to keep reading. Just keep reading.

Fame

I used to wonder what it felt like
to be David Mitnik
who had hair under his arms already
in the 6th grade. More specifically,
I wondered if one could feel the hair there—
if one had hair there—
or was it more like the hair on your head
which you can't really feel
unless the sun is beating down on it or the rain
has soaked it through, and then, arguably,
it's the rain or sun you feel and not the hair
per se. But the hair that grew
where the sun didn't shine—now that
I knew nothing about at the famous
tender age of twelve and a half. I didn't
want to *be* David Mitnik, I just wanted
something like an autograph—
what might rub off of his signature
armpit hair by being in his presence,
on his team, or even in his chair in his absence.
I remember once when he was absent
I sat down at his desk—still warm, it seemed,
from so much precociousness—
and I imagined myself in his skin,
the hair crowding my seat like
a crowd in their seats, each individual
tendrils standing up and cheering, doing the wave, rooting
for puberty! Which finally came, of course,
but it grew old fast. And it wasn't long
before I ached to return to the obscure
vacant lots of childhood
where nothing much grew
and the old games ruled
and the smooth balls flew.



With Joyce, 2022.
Indian ink and color pencil. A5.



With Karin, 2022.
Indian ink and color pencil. A5.

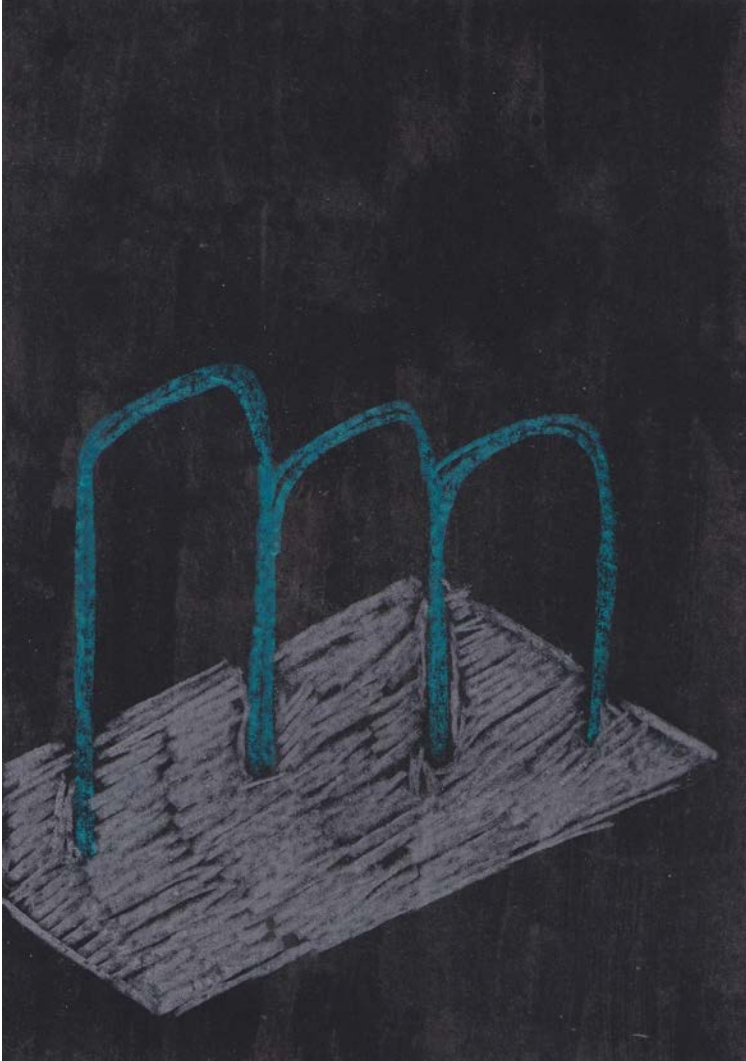
Coconut

Bear with me I
want to tell you
something about
happiness
it's hard to get at
but the thing is
I wasn't looking
I was looking
somewhere else
when my son found it
in the fruit section
and came running
holding it out
in his small hands
asking me what
it was and could we
keep it it only
cost 99 cents
hairy and brown
hard as a rock
and something swishing
around inside
and what on earth
and where on earth
and this was happiness
this little ball
of interest beating
inside his chest
this interestedness
beaming out
from his face pleading
happiness
and because I wasn't

happy I said
to put it back
because I didn't want it
because we didn't need it
and because he was happy
he started to cry
right there in aisle
five so when we
got it home we
put it in the middle
of the kitchen table
and sat on either
side of it and began

Going Back

It's not that I want to be young again—
God no. I wouldn't wish that on my worsted-
sweatered-old-man-in-sensible-shoes
self. I mean, we barely made it out alive
the first time around. But I'd like to talk to him—
that lonely, bored, back-row kid
I was back then. Because I think he would have
liked me. I mean, I think he would have liked
the way he turned out. And I know he would have liked
to ask me a million questions. Many of which
I know the answers to. I picture us sitting
on a bench in Taylor Park, one of his PF Fliers
jackhammering nervously next to my sensible shoes.
He looks away. Doesn't speak. I ask him if
there's anything he'd like to know. He looks up at me—
from this angle he can see all my ugly nose hairs,
thick as grave-grass. I no longer even bother
to trim them. "How old are you?" he asks me
and I tell him: 62. "Do you have any kids?" Yes. Two.
"Where are they now?" One is in New York City
and one is in Hawaii. "Do you miss them?"
Yes. Very much. But I miss you even more,
if that's possible. "Am I going to beat Marc Peo
in the wrestling tournament?" Now it's my turn
to look away. "That's OK," he says, "you don't
have to say it. I understand." And he puts his little hand
on my shoulder. "What about Cheryl Lubecki?"
What *about* her? "Well, do you think she likes me?"
I think your strategy of pretending not to be interested in her
isn't working. "OK, thanks for telling me." And he looks
away again. A long silence. The trees in the park,
which are much older than both of us, seem to chortle
in the breeze. Is there anything else you'd like to know?
He takes a minute to think. Then asks, "Are you happy?"
Oh yes, in fact (and I start to choke up a little) being here now
with you, I am happier than I have ever been in my life.



With Hannah, 2022.
Indian ink and color pencil. A5.



With Oma, 2022.
Indian ink and color pencil. A5.

Youth and Beauty

When I was young and good-looking
I mean really young like thirteen or fourteen
I mean really good-looking like Leanne Simon definitely noticed me
in the halls and in the cafeteria
even though she never said a word to me
when I was young and good-looking
and she was young and good-looking
in fact Leanne Simon was probably the best-looking girl in my grade
she was so pretty you just wanted to stare at her
and look for the flaw in her perfection
because there had to be a flaw but there was no flaw
and if she had wanted to be with me like go out with me
which of course she didn't but just for the sake of argument
I wouldn't even have known what to do with Leanne Simon
I mean I probably would have shown her my stamp collection
and my coin collection and my runner-up tennis trophy
or maybe the nutcracker my parents brought home from Denmark
with the intricately carved wooden handles
but I don't think I would have touched her because
when I was young and good-looking
I was less interested in touching beauty than just staring at it
and looking for the flaws and not finding any
so I definitely wouldn't have wanted to get in her pants
because I didn't know what was in her pants and didn't want to know
I just wanted to be around her and in front of her
and on every side of her especially her good side
so I probably would have showed her my record collection
and maybe we would have sat on my bed together
and listened to records and not even given a thought
to what two young and good-looking people might do
on a bed or in a bed but I'd like to think
that maybe I would have asked her to dance
which is one of the best ways to be around beauty
and examine its perfection from all sides for the flaws that aren't there
but chances are I wouldn't have had the balls to ask her to dance
as I sat there next to her on the bed listening to the music
and fidgeting with the nutcracker in my hands
after she'd held it in her hands and admired it and handed it back to me







Thought Mirage in Theater No. 3

Text by Shaun Anthony McMichael
Artwork by Cristiana da Silva

It's Dad's day. So Mom can water her lame ol' plants herself. They don't even have flowers on them. Not that she needs flowers when she has boyfriends to buy her ones. Maybe if I'd water more, flowers would grow. Then her boyfriends wouldn't have anything to buy her and they could go away.

I'll have to water anyway if Dad doesn't show up soon. He's already an hour late. And he didn't show up last week.

He told me on the phone he was sick.

"That's one way to put it," my mom said.

But he *had* sounded sick.

I'm at the front window waiting for his car to drive up so he can take me to a movie. I'm scared to make him wait. I'm scared that he'd drive passed the house by accident because he's forgotten where we live because it's been a year now since he lived here and he's been forgetting things lately, like how old I am.

pp.26-27.
Cristiana da
Silva. Co-
alescência,
Crystal Image
Series. Ink on
plaster.

Coalescência,
Crystal Image
Series. Ink on
plaster.

Thinking about him driving off makes me hot and squirmy like I have to pee, so I stay at the window.

Dad's car parked crooked at the curb. It usually sounds like an old dog panting when it pulls up, but I didn't even hear it. That's what happens when I'm lost in thought, my mom says. It's like I'm in a mirage she says. I blank out and miss stuff.

The car's the color of a penny. Dad's sitting in it. Sitting kind of back. Like he's asleep. I dare myself to wait at the window until he wakes up. Until my mom shouts that I shouldn't make him wait. I need to be back before four to finish up my chores. She's got people coming over later she says.

I run out. I knock on the window and Dad sits up quick. He blinks and smiles his smile which makes lines grow out from his mouth like the Cheshire Cat. He raises his eyebrows too. He's wearing shiny grey pants and a silky shirt that swirls like white flowers. He opens the door for me because it's too heavy.

"You're late dad."

"I'm here aren't I?" he says back.

The theater is called the Sunset something something. My dad says it's a second hand theater that shows movies that have been out a while and that most people are tired of watching. It's in a part of town that doesn't have sidewalks.

"It doesn't have sunsets either. Getta load'a that," Dad says.

Dad likes this part of town now. He must because he's always bringing me here and bumping into people he knows: two really tall ladies with hair as big as my mom's plants. Another man who seemed really nervous and yelled at my Dad a bunch and then left because I guess Dad was supposed to bring him something important and he forgot.

Dad never introduces me to these people, but keeps me kind of behind his leg instead. Maybe he doesn't want me knowing them too well so I can't tell mom about them which I wouldn't because I don't snitch.

Dad tells me snitches are teacher's-pet brown noses and so I don't do it. Not even on Mom and all her boyfriends. Janie from school has an older sister who has a boyfriend. Older sisters are

supposed to have boyfriends, not moms. But Dad says mom got tired of him. That's why. He asks me about them, but I don't tell him anything.

We're out in front and he's looking at the movie posters. There's nothing good to see. It's hot. Dad is sweating and saying "man, its cooking" like the sun is really cooking him. He's wobbling and as he wobbles I hear the sound of candy—maybe tic-tacks—ticking in his pockets.

"Well, pal," he says. "Since, I think you've seen all these. Which one would you hate to see the least?" He laugh-coughs like he does a lot.

"Are you laughing? Or coughing," I asked him one time.

"Both."

"Why?"

"I don't know," he said. "I guess cuz when you're old, the same things that are funny also make you feel sick."

"I don't know," I say, thinking about the movies. As we hold hands, I swing his arm back and forth. Not too hard though because his hand's are sweaty enough for me to slip out of if I wiggled too much.

He wipes his head, "I kind of want to see *Born on the Fourth of July*."

"Why do you want to see that?"

"Because it's about a guy who's broke and out of luck. Like me."

"Let's see that then."

"It's a war movie. Your mom would kill me."

"Oh."

"What about this one? Have you seen this one? It has animals in it."

"Okay."

"You haven't seen it before?"

"No," I lie. I feel a pinch inside. I close my eyes thinking about the lie and when I open them, Dad is smiling his Cheshire-cat smile.

"We don't have to see anything today, honey."

"No. I haven't seen it. Really."

"We can go."

I feel hot and like I can't breathe much. Like the sun's cooking me and I'm shrinking like a raisin. Getting smaller. So small I can't do anything. Last time I felt small was a few Dad-days ago when he brought me to a park but he fell asleep on a swing and it took me a while to wake him up. I felt so little, I had to start

shouting to feel big again.

He woke up but didn't remember where the car was. I had to hold his hand and we had to go looking for the car together. Then he'd taken me right home.

Don't take me home, I feel like crying. I *am* crying.

"Okay, okay," he says and pulls me into the line. "Just don't cry."

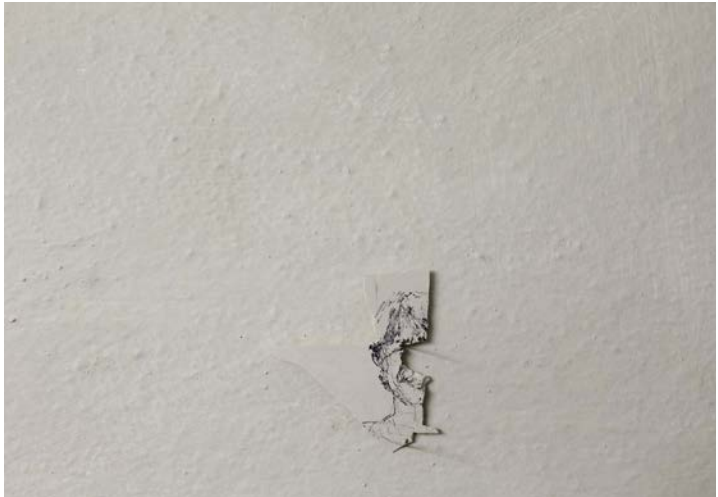
No one's in our theater. Theater No. 3. It makes me mad. I want it to be like the commercials when there're lots of people in the theater laughing together and eating whatever's in the commercial—candy or something. With no one in the theater, there's no one to get mad at Dad when he gets up and leaves, which means he'll do it a lot more.

He's gotten up once already and came back smelling like something mom removes stains with. He says he went to get a drink of water.

I wonder why he didn't get popcorn or candy for me. Maybe because he's like the man born on fourth of July and doesn't have any money. I'd ask but I don't want to make him feel bad.

A yellow haired guy walks in. He looks like Janie's older sister's boyfriend. I wonder if my boyfriend will look like him. He says he's going to start the show. The seats feel like the old couch downstairs and smell like dust. And they're blowing fans. Which makes it cool. But loud. At least we're not getting cooked anymore.

The movie starts. It's a cartoon movie about animals go-



Coalescência,
Crystal Image
Series. Ink on
plaster.

ing to heaven. All animals—dogs, cats. Even an orangutan. It doesn't say anything about people though.

Since I've seen it already—with Janie a few months ago—I look at Dad to see what he thinks. But he's not watching. He's pushing buttons on a little beeping black box he carries around. Then he's leaning over his armrest going *pst, pst* to the yellow-haired guy sweeping. Dad talks to him about the second-hand theater.

"So things look like a bust here, huh?"

"What's the point of going to a second-run theater when you can get the tape in the super market, right?" the guy says.

"But you can't get a tape for a dollar, like you can a movie here."

"Yeah, but you can get it right away—whenever you want it.

"People and their quick fixes."

"You got that right, sir."

"I mean, what place can make you feel like a man like a darkened theater?" Dad asks.

"Uh, maybe home?" the guy asks.

"Sure. If they decide to take you back," Dad says.

I think that's what he said. Dad's hard to hear lately. He talks like he's talking through mud. Maybe that's what he's coughing on. Mud deep inside him that makes him sick a lot.

The yellow haired guy goes back to sweeping then goes away.

Dad laugh-coughs a little. I hear the tic-tacs ticking in his pockets.

"How you liking your movie, kiddo?" he asks.

It's "my" movie because he doesn't care about it. I don't answer him, pretending I'm watching the movie.

"Are the animals all going to heaven?" he whispers. His words stick together like carts on a big, slow train.

"Not yet. They have to do some things first."

"Do you think pigeons could go to heaven?"

"No. That's silly."

"What about rats?"

"Noooo, dad. Only puppies and kittens and orangutans."

He doesn't ask me anything else. Maybe I should have said dads could go to heaven too.

The main character in the cartoon is a dog. He's a bad dog. He's bad because he convinces the girl in the movie to follow him around to places that are weird and ugly. Kind of like the wonderland Alice goes to, which I hate her for doing because she



Coalescência,
Crystal Image
Series. Ink on
plaster.

leaves her picnic and her kitten and jumps down that stupid hole on purpose.

The dog in the movie doesn't pant or wheeze like my dad's car, but he sings. Him and the other dogs. And cats. And the orangutan. All along to the same song, which doesn't make sense to me. People wouldn't know the same song unless they practiced a bunch or were together a bunch. And no one anymore seems to be together enough to do any of that.

I think about our drive in dad's big car to the place with trees and the white mountain—the one with the dome on it. Dad's car didn't cough back then and we were together a lot. We went through a big tunnel in the place and Dad told us to hold our breath so everything didn't fall on top of us. Mom and I could do it, but Dad held his breath the whole way in the dark.

Dad's asleep. I can hear his snores louder than the fans and the voices on the movie. None of this is very fun. Every Saturday morning, I think it's going to be fun again but it never is.

Maybe I say I like it because Mom doesn't like it. She says it's dangerous being out with him. But she has to be wrong. Because she's wrong about everything now. She's been wrong about everything since she kicked my dad out and told him to get lost and wouldn't let him back in. Even when he got on his knees and banged on the door.

Now she wears weird black dresses, plays ugly music

and has boyfriends over. They're strange men moving in big circles around the house. They never say hello and make me feel small.

I start feeling small in the theater too, realizing I'm the only person awake in this big, dark room. The lamps along the walls are asleep. The colors of the movie swirl in a weird way like a dream. Or a mirage.

The movie's half over. I've been lost in my thoughts for a while, I guess. But I haven't missed anything.

"Dad... Dad," I say softly.

I wonder who he'd wake up for. I wish I had a cloth to rub under his nose like the doctors do in the afternoon shows my mom watches.

I know! I'll sit on his lap. He used to pick me up and put me there. He used to put our dog there. He used to put Mom there and laugh without coughing.

I crawl up and look at him. He's sweaty. His cheeks are scratchy. He looks like a monkey, asleep like that. How long it would take him to wake up if I just left him here? I grab at his cheeks. Pull them apart, making him look even more like a monkey. I peel open his eyelids and see dark circles moving back and forth.

He's sitting far back in his chair. I see his tic-tac box poking out of his pocket. All I have to do is slip them out quietly so I can get a better look. There. Like that. Now the tic tacs are ticking in my hand.

The tic-tacs aren't orange or red like the cinnamon kind but round and white. Like the little pills Allison took to get smaller in Wonderland.

He chokes and sits up. His head wags from side to side and he asks where he is. He says my mom's name. *Becky*.

I almost drop the tic-tac box. I put them in the pocket of my skirt.

The first thing Dad does is check his pocket for them and I get all hot inside. He sits up straight. Looks under the seat and says a dirty word.

The tic-tacs are burning in my pocket. But I can't say anything.

The black box on his belt beeps.

He takes it between his hands and presses it a couple times. His face curls with wrinkles but he's not smiling. He's making this awful face like he's just gotten hit in the tummy.

"Honey, have you seen anything? Anything of mine.... around?"

I shake my head, thinking how it's like I've hit my Dad in the tummy.

He tries to stand up. He falls into the seat in front of him.

"Dad!"

"Oh, thanks honey."

He's looking back and forth at the floor.

"What's wrong?"

I'm hot and squirmy but I don't have to go to the bathroom. I took his candy.

He starts to walk up the ramp.

"Where are you going?"

"To the bathroom."

He walks wobbly up the carpet along the rows of yellow lights and leaves out the black doors.

I put one in my mouth. It tastes like chalk. Like pills a doctor gives you. I spit it out. Well, he can have his gross ol' tic-tacs back. If he'd just come back, I'd give them to him.

I think about why he needs them so much. Maybe they *are* something a doctor gave him. I should go run and give them to him but I don't move. I do what I'm supposed to do when a parent leaves me somewhere. I sit back down and wait for him to come back. Not knowing where he is is bad, but trying to find him and getting lost would be worse.

I try to watch the movie. The thing that doesn't make sense about the movie is that there's no God in it. Wouldn't he be deciding who got into heaven and who didn't? All the movie shows is an orangutan guarding the big, pearly gate and since he's always half-asleep, he lets almost everybody in. Maybe the orangutan *is* God in this movie.

Dad's told me it's kind of like that. That God doesn't care what you do and you can get into heaven no matter what. Mom used to say that God cares a lot. So much it can hurt. And if you hurt God, you don't get in. I'm not sure what she'd say now. But she'd be wrong anyway.

I want to ask Dad if this is what he meant about heaven. But he's still gone in the bathroom. Or maybe he went to the doctor to get more pills and forgot about me.

Almost the whole movie's gone by and he's still not back.

Maybe he's lost. He couldn't even find his own car that time. How could he find a bathroom? I should have walked him there. Now he's lost—without his pills—and I'm lost too. Alice had to go somewhere to get lost, but I guess you can get lost by just sitting. Especially if no one ever comes back to find you.



Coalescência,
Crystal Image
Series. Ink on
plaster.

I'm hot and can't breathe much. The tears feel like wet pins coming out of me. The movie's ending. All the character's like each other again and one by one they're going to heaven. And then it's over.

People's names in white letters start running up the tall black screen.

If I'm already lost, maybe I have to go somewhere to get unlost now.

The lights wake up and I don't feel small anymore.

The way to get unlost is to find my dad.

The yellow haired guy starts sweeping. I pass him and follow the signs to the bathroom.

"Hey, where'd your dad go?" he asks.

I tell him I don't know. But I'm not going to be like mom and tell my dad to get lost. I'm going to go find him.

The walls of the bathroom are covered with newspapers and the toilet has its mouth open and running. My dad's lying on the floor.

The floor's wet. The flower shapes on his white shirt look more like dark blue clouds now because the shirt is all wet too.

He must have found another doctor because there are pills everywhere.

His face doesn't seem to have lines anymore, the lines that say when something's funny or when something hurts. The face doesn't seem to have anything to say. It's like he went to sleep again—only this time for good.

When I get lost in thought, I miss stuff. It's like I'm in a mirage.

I got small. There was the yellow haired guy. He got mad and then he went to a phone. Then there were big men running into the bathroom probably looking for my dad. He's not in there though. Which I guess they'll figure out.

My throat hurts. Do all dads go to heaven even if they've been bad? And how do they get passed the orangutan?

I walk outside and passed the red lights and noise.

There's dad's big penny-colored car. I try the door and it opens. 'Why would anyone want to steal this piece of junk,' Dad always says.

I get in and shut the door and everything goes quiet. I feel big sitting at the steering wheel and can look out through the space in its middle. I see the yellow haired boy run out but I slide down so he can't see me and he leaves.

It's still Dad's day.

The steering wheel feels hot and I can't see, so I close my eyes.

I start the car and ask Dad where he'd like to go. We drive and drive on a big freeway for a really long time. Dad can sleep all he wants in the back. We stop for lunch. And then we're in the place with the trees. They stare at us like giant people and have faces made of wood that don't say anything as we drive in. There's the mountain. It's getting bigger and I can see its dome. At the bottom, there's a tunnel. He tells me to drive in. Its dark and the trees go and the mountain goes and the sounds go. It's a theater with no movie. No dogs or cats. No one singing. A theater without rows of lights, without doors. I keep my hands on the wheel like he says, but as things get darker, I slide down and I take a big, long breath.





DB 1571

EXPRESS

1571

Kitchen Stories

Text by Elaine Haroutunian Reardon
Artwork by Colin Gillespie

pp. 38-39.
Colin Gillespie. My German
Train, 2022.

When I woke in the morning
and begged for stories, Gram said
don't talk too much, flies
will get into your mouth.
I still wanted a story.
She'd say *later, after our work.*

She tied an apron around me,
pulled the stool to the table,
gave me parsley, cracked wheat,
ground lamb, and my own basin
of water to wet my hands
as we worked together.

She said *knead so it's
soft as a baby's bottom.
Shape smooth balls.*
We poked our thumbs inside
to open them up, then spooned
in stuffing. But I still wanted a story.

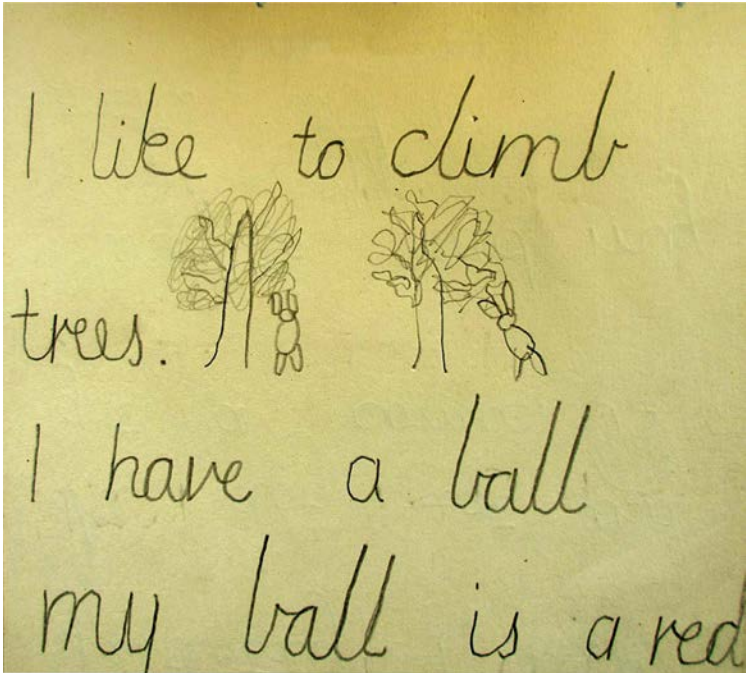
Gram said *My grandmother made kofta
like us, and I carried pilav and kofta to my
father and grandpa in the fields.* Sometimes she
rode the donkey, other times a horse.
Gram said *never ride a horse, or a camel.*
And we never did, in our Boston home.

That house was different from ours here.
Animals lived downstairs, people above.
I asked if we could have chickens here, now.
She said *no, not here.* She said to keep my mouth
closed, not to talk so much, flies would get in.

Kitchen Stories, Continued

I watched her story unfold in my mind.
Her final day home, when she and her sisters
returned from school and found everyone dead,
the locked church set on fire. A silent village,
except for soldiers that gathered up leftover people.

She walked from her mountain village,
part of a death march,
ate grasses and leaves,
anything they found.
Two sisters fell in the dessert,
three trudged on to Aleppo
and onward from there, surviving.



Writing Aged 7, 2022.
Pencil on paper.

Jeanne Remembers Vernal Street

Jeanne remembers
our kitchen when
we were young enough
to skate on the streets late
afternoons. She remembers
eating stuffed grape leaves
when Gram stacked them
in the pot, put a plate
on top to hold them together,
and simmered fragrance
into our play space.

Jeanne remembers each September
we picked purple grapes, cooked them
on the stove, and thickened the juice.
Gram spread this *mahlez* on thin fabric,
hung it to dry in the attic. We kids crept
upstairs to peel off the *bastegh*
as it dried, rolled it with walnuts,
and grinned. Sweet thieves.

Some days the table was filled
with flour, dough, and boreg, hand pies
stuffed with cheeses, meat, and herbs,
perfect to capture young hungry girls.
Gram ate this when she was young,
in the old country, far away. We all had
old countries in our neighborhood.

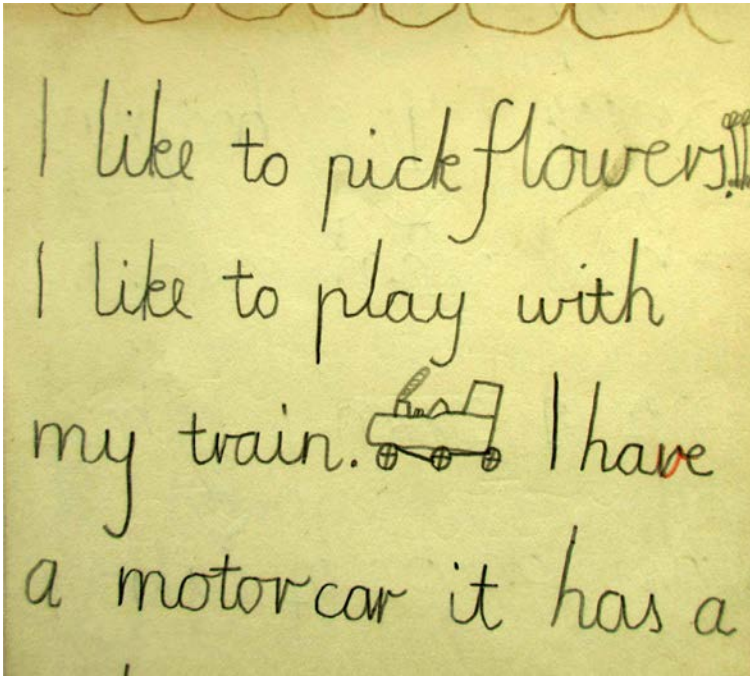
Nesselrode Pudding

My dad ate Nesselrode Pudding
on their New York honeymoon
back in the 40s at the Taft Hotel.
Delicious, light as air, he said.

Cooking for others can be
a lot like prayer, the settling
in to a quiet mind, eliminating
distractions, imagining contentment
arriving on a plate through alchemy
of mixing, heating, of spices and love.

When I was twelve I found
recipes for the pudding,
and cooked them one by one,
offering them up at supper time.
I remember egg whites

that rose like clouds, whipped yolks
and sugar transformed to a golden foam.
I worked for a for a smile to reach his eyes.
But what does a 12 year old know
of honeymoons and hope?



Writing Aged 7, 2022.
Pencil on paper.

Childhood Memories

Text by Colin Gillespie

Most memories of childhood are shaped by the time and location (country) within which that early stage of life is experienced – for me – it was in the U.K. during the Second World War – 1939-45.

For people then – one priority was that of staying ‘informed’ – censorship had been imposed on all social media, so the ‘wireless’ (Radio) was an important focal point within daily life. Families routinely gathered together at appointed times to listen to the news bulletins. I remember being aware that I was included in these daily gatherings and sensing somehow that this was important – this was probably heightened by my being allowed to peer – through a woven screen at the back of the radio – into its dark interior – where one could see valves pulsing dark red.

Another aspect of life then was shaped by the introduction of ‘rationing’. Shopping was a daily event (as refrigeration was available to only a few) and I always looked forward to being included within this ritual – of standing in long queues and listening to ‘grown-ups’ talking – visiting several shops during each outing – the bakers, the butchers, the grocers, the fishmongers, etc – all of which offered different visual experiences, smells and sounds. With the return home there was the the experience of helping unpack small amounts of food stuffs – many of which were usually measured in ounces or very small quantities – these were laid out, inspected and then carefully placed in the pantry. The pantry was a very small space attached to the kitchen – which had a thick stone shelf in it – to help keep foods cool (few people had refrigerators). The pantry was the most important area of the house and it symbolised the ingenuity then required – to ‘make things last’ over a span of days.

The oldest record of my childhood is the attached photograph – taken when 2/3 years of age? – I still remember that occasion. My parents had taken me to a department store that had a photographic studio. The photographer had a large collection of teddy bears – I assume to amuse and focus the attention of his child sitters – however, I remember thinking then that his intention must be to give me one to take home – when this did not

happen – the smiles were replaced by tears. Perhaps this was my first experience of what it can feel like to be ‘deceived’.

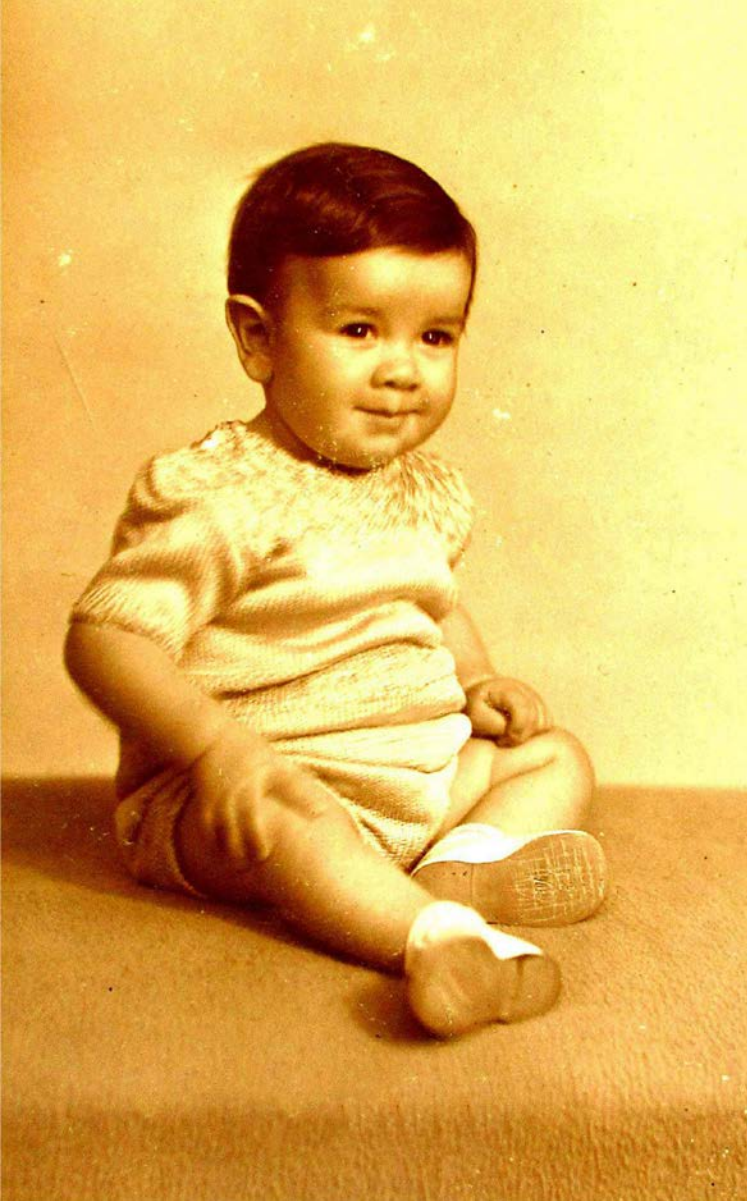
Childhood memories may lie dormant for many years and only reappear when something acts as a ‘trigger’ - a sound or word or image/object – I still have a few such stimuli.

One being a small tin made train – which I wrote about in an early school book – when aged 7 years. It was produced in Germany and marked as such – I do remember thinking that it was strange I had such a toy – something made by our ‘enemy’ – how could it have ended up being in my hands? Had I captured it in a dream? Had it been used to buy someone’s freedom?

A second toy from that same time was ‘Betty’ – her name chosen by myself. She is a small (8”) doll made from felt and canvas and depicting a ‘WREN’ (a member of the then Womens Royal Naval Service). She and many other military based designs were produced by Norah Wellings - a lady who had set up a doll making firm that specialised in such products. I also had a sailor doll - and remember often showing Betty & he to ‘grown ups’.

It could be that these toys were given to me by one of many evacuees that stayed temporarily in my house. These were people who had been ‘bombed out’ of their homes or moved away from areas of risk - and other people - in ‘safe’ areas volunteered to house them. I feel that this passage of ‘grown ups’ through my early life was probably quite important as regards my ‘growing up’ and I looked forward to new faces appearing. I remember the sense of anticipation when I was told that new people would be arriving. One such person was a dentist- who gave me a facsimile skull - with removable teeth that I enjoyed ‘extracting’ and replacing - I still have the skull but the teeth have long since been lost.

A final strong memory of early years is that of climbing trees. My house was near to a wooded area that served as a meeting place for local children. The older ones would impress the younger by demonstrating their climbing skills - some individual trees would represent a challenge greater than others - and ‘I dare you’ was a constant presence. None of us could have known what ‘adrenaline’ was - but I certainly remember that strange mix of fear & elation when - in the sight of others - one reached that next - even higher - branch of a challenging tree.



Aged 2-3 years, 2022.
Archive photograph.



Betty, 2022.

Snow Storm

We walked up Main Street
to McKinnon's Market,
me in the carriage, Dad at Mom's
side, an adventure,
the whole of us together
in the snowy aftermath.
The neighborhood was silent in
a snowcover, our whole world
hushed and clean, and we
three were together.

Into McKinnons we'd go,
with the smell of his new
8 O'Clock Coffee display
up front, grinder pouring
out fragrance. There were eggs
and pork from McDonald's
Pig Farm, down by the cemetery.

In those years the trash collectors
came into our backyards to collect
for garbage for McDonald's pigs,
at least that's what Dad told me.
We'd buy bread, eggs, and a bit of fish,
load it into the old carriage with me,
walk home through plowed streets.

Preserved

We were surprised to find this Armenian
treasure on our visit to my Irish
Godfather's new house,
a world away from our Cambridge street.

Beyond the tumbled stone wall we passed
into an orchard, and entered Eden. It wasn't
only the children that gaped with wonder.
The grownups fell silent, too.

How quickly the old country can resurrect
in our hearts. For Dad and Jimmy Sullivan,
the Irish countryside rose like a captured
bird who discovers an open window.

Gram's family in 1915 Kharpet rose in her mind,
her family still safe. Her childhood farm
lay before her for a moment out of time,
as fragrance of quince filled her.

Gram picked three quince from Jimmy Sullivan's tree.
He gave her more. Jimmy's own kids were running around
like banshees. We hadn't ever had that much space to run
together—and we didn't know what to do with it.

The next morning Gram cooked quince. She washed
the fruits, scraped away the furry coating, and sliced
through the hardness, working alone, except for me,
watching. She inhaled fragrance as she stirred.

White quince turned gold, jars with fruit suspended
in light. Memories distilled, preserved in amber.



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The Amusement Park

Text by John C. Mannone

Artwork by Gaia Giongo

Every summer right at the end
of the school year, we'd pack
into a dozen yellow busses bound
for Gwynn Oak Amusement Park.

Quiet, but excited, I sat on green
leather, too short to see above
the backs of seats in front of me.

The other second graders not as shy,
sat two-by-two, but I sat alone staring
out the window framing the world
passing by in a blur. The whole trip,

I clutched the few ride tickets
that my mother had bought for me
—a couple strips of flimsy, red stubs
with bold black letters inked in.

Other kids had what looked like
rolls of them. Sister Marie held
my hand as we boarded

the Tilt-a-Whirl. That lady
bug looking shell, redder
than the tickets, spun and rocked
on a tilted platform. I'd hang

on to Sister Marie, at times
grabbing her Franciscan chord
dangling from her waist, as if that
would make the ride stop or make

the butterflies in my stomach
go away. But when she took me
on the Loop-de-Loop, I cried.

A ride on the
carousel, 2022.
Analog collage
and pencil.
18 x 25 cm.

She smiled and reassured me inside
that wire-caged wheel with seats.
Her face, framed in white and black,
dimpled through, her soft laugh

like an answered prayer. She taught
me more than math that day,
especially when it came to "The Comet,"
a rickety old rollercoaster not designed

for sissy-kids, the only kind I knew,
but for grown-up kids. I didn't want
to grow up that fast. She cradled me

as I braced for the plunge
down the rails. I loved the screams
she made, with smiles just as loud.
I lived

for another ride with her. (She bought
me the tickets.) It wasn't only physics
that kept me safe that day.

Today, there are only memories
left of the wooden roller coaster
buried under asphalt, a parking lot.

And Sister Marie, she's buried, too,
in my little-boy heart.

All my mothers are.

Espresso

Percolate and flip the 3-stage aluminum pot.
Let gravity pull the water through the Italian roast
–Medaglia d’Oro–rich, earthy, bitter. Tame
the liquor with a clump of sugar, stirred swirls
capture starburst-glitter from kitchen light
dangling in my universe like a sun. My father
leans over me; I am ten, his likeness mirrors
inside the fluid folds of the dark pool.
His bristly mustache, trimmed perfectly,
accents a stern face but softens in that glow,
even after he left. Years later
the image in my cup stares back:
father ghosting over my shoulders
in the shimmers.



Be an outsider, 2023.
Analog collage. 19 x 15 cm.

The Apprentice

I stare at the meal
on my dish, each item
placed as if a piece
of art. I'm the apprentice
and you showed me
the magic of food.
Every gesture, a treat
for the palate—an art
of poetry, literally
in the preparation,
the cooking, the eating.

Without words, you
taught me the alchemy
of lamb and sautéed
onions with potatoes
and peas—that food
is another form of poetry.

From my childhood
I watched you brown
the shoulder blade—chops
seasoned with oregano
or thyme—in olive oil,
deglaze the pan for every
scrap of caramelized lamb
with a bit of butter before
the yellow onions sweat
their sweetness into the pan,
before chunked potatoes
carry on the mission of flavor
exchange through their porous
bodies. Then the mixture
enjoys the return of the lamb
nestled nicely. In the last
minutes, the magic happens.
Peas, a drained can's worth,
position themselves in each
nook and potato crevice

to absorb the buttery juice
and complexities with their own
by osmosis through one-way
semipermeable membranes.

It's exquisite
to hear you sing Bizet's Carmen
along with Maria Callas; and I,
sipping wine poured from
a bottle of Carmènère
to crescendo the memory
of you. I wish I could
wave my wooden spoon
and conjure you, Mother,
back into my kitchen...

but I guess I just did.



Bravo!, 2022.
Analog collage. 35 x 50 cm.

Smyrna Figs

In the center of my garden, the nectar-thick air mixes with the moist soil and sinks into my nostrils. A dirt-brown shovel spades the dark earth beneath grandfather's black leather shoes that guide the blade. I remember. The shovel's thud, crumble of loamy clay, smooth scrapes of grit against metal, the unearthing of earthworms as big as snakes, and their writhing nakedness: exposed, helpless when scooped up with a bed of fallen fig leaves, their cool bodies squirming on summer-hot steel. I was four.

Alone, I'd look for them between the blades of grass under fig trees bearing sweet figs. Always tempted though never denied the good fruit, I didn't know when to stop eating them. I forgot about the snakes.



Getting old waiting for justice, 2022. Analog collage. 15 x 25 cm.

Rhythm

I've written this poem before
in bronze, my eyes sculpting
the past like this metal statue
in the park. It could've been me
on that bike. The one I wanted
but didn't have. My friend, too
without a bike but we'd walk
everywhere even to dangerous
places.

There was rhythm to our shoes,
distinct and much different from
the spokes of bicycles or wheels
of a train. We walked to Penn
Station in Baltimore. I was eight,
he was ten and curious like me.
Too curious. We didn't ride bikes
because we didn't have them.
But we liked the rhythm
of trains.

I've mourned this poem before,
different words yet still going
to the same forbidden places
because we were curious. He was
too curious. I told him *No!*
it's too dangerous.

So we turned
around and walked home
because we didn't have bikes
to ride, but we thought about
the rhythm of bicycles. I wish
we had bikes so we could've
gone to the park, not to
perilous
places. The next day, my friend
went alone. He walked because
he had no bike. I was at home.
He liked the rhythm of trains,
the hum

in those green wires above them
that he shouldn't have grabbed.
I wish I had a bike to have taken
my friend to the park, where we could
have listen to the rhythm, to the rhythm
of the wind blowing through the trees
instead.

pp. 64.
Gaia Giongo.
It's snowing!,
2023. Analog
collage. 34 x 53
cm.



An Army of Frogs

Text by Mark Blickley

Artwork by Basak Kilicbeyli

"I don't want to go to school today, Ma. I don't feel well."

"You felt well enough to stay over Lamont's house two hours past your curfew, playing video games. Now get up and get ready for school. And I mean now, Gregory John Burton!"

The boy jumped out of bed. He knew that when his mother called him by his full name instead of the familiar Greg, she could not be argued with and was primed for the yelling that would most certainly alert his father and bring him into the conflict.

As he scuffed his way towards the bathroom, he thought about explaining to his mother why he had distracted himself to the point of disobedience at Lamont's last night. They were both trying to erase the fear and anxiety of what was sure to be the most horrible day of their seven-year education the next morning.

His father flung open the bathroom door, his waist wrapped in a purple towel as he delicately dragged a large comb through his thinning brown hair. "It's all yours. How's it going, Sport?"

"Terrible," answered Greg. "This morning we're going to cut up a frog. Yuck."

His father paused his grooming to put a hand on his son's shoulder. "Don't worry, Greg. I remember not being too thrilled by the dissection my science teacher forced us to do, but he reminded us that we don't kill the frogs, that they were already dead. And if we didn't learn from their sacrifice, then their deaths were wasted. He also told us to pretend that we were surgeons cutting into a patient. It turned out to be quite interesting."

"Yeah, well the only cutting I'd like to do is to cut class today. Dissection's disgusting. I mean, there's already enough violence in schools."

"I suppose you have a point, Greg. I remember reading an article about that serial killer who cut up his victims and ate them. What was his name?"

"Jeffrey Dahmer?"

Yeah, that's him. Right before the prison inmates killed him Dahmer gave an interview where he said that he became

fascinated with blood and guts when his school gave him a knife and a dead animal to cut apart in biology class."

"Gee thanks, Dad."

His father made a silly face, scooped him off the ground and tossed him into the air. The squeals of delight coming from the boy temporarily made Greg forget about the brutal day he was about to endure until his sister Carol, hearing her brother's screams of pleasure, trotted into the living room and demanded that her father also give her the chance to go airborne.

Greg's four and a half block walk to school took on the pace and enthusiasm of a killer being led down death row for a private sitting with an electrician. As he turned the corner he saw Kostas, Selim, and Pascal climbing the steep steps leading to the school's entrance. When he shouted at them to wait up he thought that they, too, had a sickly look about them. The four of them silently scuffed their way to the classroom.

Everyone except Regina Boloff was inside and in their seat. Greg didn't think Regina would show up. Every time Mrs. Worton would give a math or spelling test, Regina would wet her pants and cry. When this happened, Mrs. Worton would send for the school nurse and Regina's mother would come to pick her up and take her home. The day afterwards Regina was always absent.

As Greg settled himself behind his desk, he noticed Regina walking in. This worried him. Because of the terrible importance of the day, even Regina's embarrassment couldn't allow her to stay home, and she certainly had made a huge mess the day before during the math quiz. But what really bothered Greg was that none of his classmates (or himself, for that matter) bothered to tease her. The class looked as if their thoughts were a million miles away.

Mrs. Worton strolled in and put on a big smile, even bigger than the smile she gave when the class presented her with a large, multi-colored paperweight, shaped like an egg, for Christmas. Trumella, Austin's father, took the seven dollars and sixty-four cents the kids had raised and picked it out for the class from the stationary store he owned. Greg thought it was a beauty.

Behind his teacher's smile Greg knew she was nervous too because she took roll call before the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. Nothing was mentioned about what they had to do in a matter of hours.

For the first time all year the classroom hours sped by. The clock read 10:30 when Mrs. Worton ordered them to lay down

their pencils. She then distributed 11x15 sheets of construction paper to each student and told them they were to use it to create a frog map that they would fill in as they dissected their frogs.

Greg raised his hand. "What do you mean by a frog map? I don't understand."

Mrs. Worton looked sternly at Greg. "Had you been turning in your homework regularly the past two weeks, Mr. Burton, you would have known that the handouts I gave out in class were to prep you for this project."

"Why do we have to cut open a frog?" whined Regina. "What's the point?"

"The point," said Mrs. Worton curtly, "is to satisfy national standards for sixth grade introduction to organs and organ systems."

"I get all the info I need about organs and organ systems by sneaking on to my father's Spice Channel website," Hector whispered to Greg. Both giggled.

"Hector, is there something you'd like to share with the rest of the class?" asked Mrs. Worton.

Hector shook his head.

"Very well, then. As you cut away the layers of the frog's anatomy, you will record your findings on your frog map. Everyone draw an outline of a frog using the markers I placed on your desks before you arrived this morning."

What followed was the greatest shock in a day already filled with much tension and apprehension. The frogs that Mrs. Worton handed out to each student weren't dead and pickled, but alive.

"Oh my God," said Habib.

"Gross," said Sophia.

"This is gonna be cool," said Badra.

"Your frogs have all been anesthetized so they won't feel any pain," Mrs. Worton smiled.

"I bet," muttered Greg.

Mrs. Worton heard Greg's remark but chose to ignore it. "The school paid extra so that we could observe the organ systems of a living frog," she said rather proudly. "Before we begin the actual cutting, please weigh your frog and measure its length from snout to vent and record this data in the lower righthand corner of your frog map."

Greg waved his arm. "What's a vent?"

"Had you been studying like the rest of the class, you'd know that the vent is the cloaca."

"The what?" shrugged Greg.

"It's the ass, you ass," whispered Badra.

The moment Greg's hand squeezed around his frog and felt it inhaling and exhaling, he wanted to run outside and set it free instead of lining up in the back of the classroom, waiting his turn to use the scale. But he figured what would the point of freeing it be? There aren't any ponds around here. It would just get squashed by a car or some punk would shove a firecracker down its throat.

After all the students measured and weighed their frogs and returned to their desks, Mrs. Worton pulled her desk to the center of the room to talk them through the surgery while slicing up her very own frog. "Our first step will be to decapitate the frog with your special dissection scissors and then pith its spinal cord with the pithing needle on your tray. The frog will twitch. Pithing greatly reduces the incidence and intensity of muscle contractions, thus simplifying the dissection."

Most of the class scrunched their faces with revulsion as they followed Mrs. Worton's commands.

"As you hold the frog's head," continued Mrs. Worton, "squeeze it with your thumb and index finger to open its mouth for easier insertion of the scissors into the mouth. Hold your frog against the tray with your palm as it may twitch while you are decapitating it."

Greg did as he was told and placed the lower scissor blade inside his frog's mouth while the outer blade rested on the back of the frog's head. Without applying much force, he was surprised how quickly the head was severed from the body. His frog twitched and contorted so violently that it jerked out of his hand and fell to the floor, where it flopped about like an awkward break-dancer trying to spin into a finale.

Mrs. Worton hurried over, responding to the many shrieks of disgust surrounding Greg's desk. "Didn't I tell you to pith your frog?" she asked.

Greg just stared at her as she picked up his headless frog and dropped it onto his tray. It continued to twitch. She handed him a pair of forceps and ordered him to lift the skin of the abdomen with them before cutting into the skin, from left to right. Greg made an incision with his dissecting scissors into the lower abdomen and then cut along the sides of the frog to make a flap of the skin and abdominal musculature. He then lifted the flap back and cut it off, exposing the internal organs that his teacher called the viscera. The exposed innards of the frog were such an

appalling sight that it made Greg want to heave his breakfast.

"Now cut off the intestine and urine duct from the hip to free the viscera from the body," said Mrs. Worton. "Be careful not to touch the nerve when cutting."

Many nerves were touched in the classroom, and most of them belonged to the students. As he snipped through muscle fascia, hemostats, and the sciatic nerve of his frog, Greg felt terrible. He thought about the trauma he underwent weeks earlier, the day he had to get a stupid TB test. And that was simply a prick of his skin while his frog, who was alive and breathing when he first held him, was now dead and Greg was ordered to remove its skin because Mrs. Worton said the skin represented one of the ten body systems a frog needs in order to survive. One of the ten body systems they needed to expose and explore. She called the skin the Integumentary System, but flaying the frog proved too much for Greg. He lay down his scalpel and put a paper towel over his torn, mutilated amphibian.

"Hey, Mrs. Worton," said Victor. "What are gonna do we do with all of these frogs after we're done?"

"Victor, do you know what you call a group of frogs?"

Victor shrugged. "What do you mean?"

Mrs. Worton smiled. "Well, a group of fish is called a school. A group of geese are called a gaggle. A group of birds are called a flock. A group of horses are called a herd. But what do you call a group of frogs?"

"Butchered," muttered Greg.

Mrs. Worton once again ignored Greg's comment. "A group of frogs are called an army. An army of frogs."



A Bronx Fall

It's been sixty-one years, but I'll never forget my ninth birthday. It fell on a pleasant, early autumn Sunday. Unlike previous years, there was no party or exuberant family celebration. In fact, my ninth birthday promised to be a rather bleak one. My father's terminal bout with cancer had reduced him to a stick figure who spent all his time laying on the couch. His illness made a mockery out of the area of our fifth-floor Bronx apartment that we called a living room. And as I, my mother, and three sisters sliced into a hurriedly prepared birthday cake, my father's loud gasps for each breath in the living room adjacent to the kitchen festivities was a reminder of all that was wrong with the season.

And what a season it had been! Our Belmont Avenue apartment was within walking distance of Yankee Stadium where once again the M&M boys (Mantle and Maris) had led their team to yet another pennant. Just two days after my October 1st birthday, the New York Yankees were scheduled to meet the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series. The Yankees' march towards the American League pennant included a major league record for most home runs by a ball club, but it was hard for me to follow all the excitement that had lit up the Bronx during that 1961 baseball season, a season that was coming to an official close on my ninth birthday. Mantle and Maris, Maris and Mantle—those were the buzz words that defined that summer.

After eating cake and opening a few presents, I lifted up the kitchen window and pressed my face against the rusty window grill where I scouted a peculiar sight five stories below. Strangely enough, none of the bigger kids—the guys in Junior High—were playing stickball in the street. There was always a Sunday afternoon stickball game played on the Belmont Avenue street in front of my building, yet on this beautiful Sunday afternoon, the street was deserted.

I immediately called my best friend Ralph Guerra, a recent refugee from Castro's Cuba, and was able to corral about a half-dozen guys for a stickball game. I brought the spanking new pink Spalden ball that my twin sister Kathi had given me as a birthday gift while another friend, Victor Elias, brought his impressive looking stickball bat—a former mop stick that was handsomely wrapped with electrical tape at the handle to offer up a superior grip.

We grade school kids charged into the streets and quickly took up our positions. Every moment was filled with apprehension and fear—fear that the bigger, meaner kids would suddenly appear and implement their ritual threat to shove our stickball bat up where “the sun don’t shine” if we did not immediately vacate their street.

Because the ball belonged to me, I declared myself the pitcher. Stickball pitchers did not require any special skills to play that position. A strong, accurate arm was unimportant when you had to have the ball reach home plate on a bounce. The most dangerous positions were catcher and batter because they were the only players in the street whose backs were to the traffic. Their safety, indeed their very lives, was often dependent on the pitcher and infielders signaling at them to move away from fast-approaching cars, trucks and the occasional motorcycle. Sunday afternoon traffic was always light on Belmont Avenue and that was why it was such an unusual gift to have the “field” free on my birthday.



House, drawing the hood, 2021. Digital drawing. 34 x 46 in.

I was not a very good ballplayer. Small for my age, I loved to play but was never invited to join in with the older kids who dominated the street, unlike some of my bigger and stronger fourth-grade friends. Shut out of neighborhood games, I lacked the repetitive, competitive exposure every athlete needs in order to improve their performance and so when my turn came to hit, I struck out. On Ralphie's first at bat he blasted a home run that flew past two sewer covers and came to a rolling stop just short of Tremont Avenue.

On my second trip to the plate, I truly became one with the powerhouse Yankees who were also playing their final regular season game just blocks away. I want to set the record straight. That day there was a third M added to those Bronx M&M Boys Of Fall that '61 season—Maris, Mantle and Mark.

I joined the company with those two great Yankee sluggers during the second at bat of my birthday game. I don't remember much about the pitch I hit, but I do remember that I did not get a solid whack at that bouncing Spalden. Fearing that I would once again strikeout, I choked up on the decorative mop stick and stuck the bat out without really swinging it—not unlike a bunting motion—to increase my chances of making contact. I was barely able to get a piece of the ball to tap the end of the stick. As the ball dribbled weakly towards the first baseman, I threw down the bat and sprinted toward the green '56 Chevy that had been designated as first base.

And that's when I heard it: the roar of many voices from the many heads that had popped out from the many tenement windows, showering down encouragement to me, an insecure nine-year-old hustling to leg out a lazy ground ball into a base hit. I had never performed in front of an audience before, and I'll never forget the adrenaline rush that accompanied my race to that parked car. And as I ran, I was amazed that my feeble grounder could inspire such an outpouring of excitement and emotion. I sped down the street determined to reach base safely, all the while wondering how many of my neighbors knew that it was my birthday and if they were cheering so loudly for me so that my withering father, sprawled out on the living couch, could hear them and thus be able to share in my glory? With my outstretched hands groping for that green Chevy, I made it to first base without even the attempt of a tag being made on me. Hector, the first baseman, must have been distracted by the shouting tenement faces because he bobbed my easy grounder. I saw the ball roll to his right as I crashed triumphantly into the car.

I closed my eyes and hugged the Chevy for what must have been a few seconds—although it felt like minutes—and with a huge grin, losing myself in the praise showering down on me. I forgot all about my dying father and crying mother and disappointing birthday celebration; I was a Bronx baseball hero just like Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris!

When I opened my eyes, I saw Hector, Victor, Ralphie, and the other guys jumping up and down, slapping each other on the back and screaming out, "He did it! He did it! Maris hit 61!" The joy and warmth I was feeling from my neighbors immediately vanished as I realized that their excited shouts weren't for me but were simply a community news bulletin that Babe Ruth's major league home run record had just been shattered 18 blocks away by one of the M&M boys. I lowered my head. What was I thinking? Surprised and humiliated, I was grateful no one else on the block had any inkling of my foolish fantasy and the shame it brought me.

Whenever I heard the name Roger Maris mentioned in later years it usually made me anxious and I would immediately resurrect the embarrassment I felt on that Sunday, October afternoon. But as I watched Mark McGuire break Roger Maris' home run record on Sept. 8, 1998, and saw Sammy Sosa hug him, I remembered those precious few seconds of glory thirty-seven years earlier when I became one with those M&M boys and heard those autumn cheers that made me feel proud and strong and gave me a respite from the rapidly approaching Bronx winter that would leave my heart as empty as my living couch.

Installation
Image: House,
drawing the
hood.



Volume 3 Issue 1

Curated, edited, and published by The Aerogramme Center for
Arts and Culture.

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ISSN 2767-9691 (print)

ISSN 2767-9683 (online)

Designed by The Aerogramme Center
for Arts and Culutre

Edited by Zoë Elena Moldenhauer

Printed in the United States

@aerogrammearts
www.aerogramme.org

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