

ISSUE TWENTY-EIGHT
FIRST CLASS I of II.2007
(now published Feb./Aug.)
SIX BUCKS

*...for a killer mix of short fiction
and poetics – compiled with
finely honed editorial acumen –
it's hard to find a better mag to
wedge in your back pocket...*



**First
Class**

IS THE HEEL ON YOUR HEAD TODAY? TOMORROW? YET?
28

BENNETT
CATLIN
EVERY
DE FRANCE
GALING
INMAN
KRIESEL
MAURER
O'MALLEY
MEYER
SMAREDS
TRICARO
UI-NEILL
WHEATCROFT



ISSUE TWENTY-EIGHT
FEBRUARY, 2007

NOTICE!

DUE TO TYPEFACES EVOLVING, THIS DIGITAL VERSIONS OF FIRST CLASS HAS A DIFFERENT APPEARANCE THAN THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT AND DESIGN, AS TYPEFACES HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH SOMEWHAT SIMILAR FONTS. SO, IF YOU WANT AN AUTHENTIC ORIGINAL, CONTACT ME AT christopherm@four-sep.com. ALSO NOTE THAT THE BELOW ADDRESS NO LONGER EXISTS.

WEBSITE : www.four-sep.com

CONTACT : christopherm@four-sep.com



ALL CONTENTS ©2007
FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS
Indexed by *The American Humanities Index*

FIRST CLASS IS PUBLISHED IN FEBRUARY AND AUGUST EACH YEAR BY FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS. FOR INFORMATION REGARDING SUBMISSIONS SEE "CATTLE CALL" NEAR THE REAR END OF THIS ISSUE. PLEASE ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE, QUERIES, CASH, AND SUBMISSIONS,

First Class » Four-Sep Publications
POBOX 86 » FRIENDSHIP, INDIANA 47021
christopherm@four-sep.com

[www.four-sep.com]

ALL RIGHTS REVERT BACK TO AUTHORS

SUBSCRIPTION INFO:

IT'S SIMPLE. SEND \$6 FOR THE VERY NEXT ISSUE MAILED DIRECTLY TO YOUR HOME, OR \$11 FOR THE NEXT TWO. POSTAGE IS INCLUDED.
CASH OR CHECKS PAYABLE TO : CHRISTOPHER M.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

First Class contents

- 1: **Boxes And Envelopes**
by John Bennett
- 2: **Eating Out**
by John Bennett
- 3: **Suicide**
by John Bennett
- 5: **City Living**
by Alan Catlin
- 9: **Graffiti Guerilla**
by Gary Every
- 10: **Rendezvous With A Part Time God**
by Steve De France
- 11: **Gunnin For Trouble**
by Ed Galing
- 12: **Dung**
by Will Inman
- 13: **Blacktop Forest**
by Michael Kriesel
- 14: **Team Player**
by Michael Kriesel
- 15: **Hawk Shadow**
by Susan H. Maurer
- 16: **Stipe Was Right**
by Ryan O'Malley
- 17: **School Lunch**
by Andrew Meyer
- 20: **Headlines**
by Casey Smeareds
- 21: **Some Places Where That
Moment Hangs Out**
by Robert Collet Tricaro
- 22: **a cosmic clown in
e pluribus absurdum**
by roibeárd Uí-neíll
- 23: **not only mudflaps &
backwards ball caps**
by roibeárd Uí-neíll
- 24: **Mr. Ho, The Sitter And The Walker**
by John Wheatcroft

*Cover Art and Photograph, as well as any
internal photography by Christopher M*

First Class #28 contains our first-ever photo essay, which will also be featured in full-color and greater detail on the web site. I think you will find that there is a common thread linking these terrific poems, stories, and photographs. That thread begins with the food on our childrens' plates and burrows throughout society if left unchecked, unremedied and unattended. I am not the one who chose this theme, this pounding loneliness, desolation, fear and hopelessness — it came out of my pobox, relentlessly. In compiling this issue, I act as reporter, rather than editor. These selections represent an overall tone that

Again, I am pleased that your eyes are on these pages.

- Christopher M.

- christopherm@four-sep.com

Boxes And Envelopes

John Bennett

There are those who push the envelope. They're called postal employees, anachronisms in a digital, circuitry world. They earn good money for unskilled labor and their days are numbered. Some of them steal plain-wrapped packages from their carrier pouches because they know there will be drugs or porn inside. At home alone they wash down the pharmaceuticals with beer and stick the tape in the VCR. They are a below-the-radar element in America's multi-faceted sub-culture.

Others lose it big-time and shoot up the post office, killing fellow workers and paying customers without partiality; these become honorary members of Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes of Fame Club. Andy Warhol may have been the only true Twentieth-Century prophet.

The box thing is more complicated. There are boxes inside boxes and a lot of people swearing on a stack of Bibles that they are outside of them all. There is an ongoing debate about whether it is better to be in a big box or a small one.

Some people feel more boxed in than others, and when the claustrophobia gets bad enough, they meld with the envelope pushers and go around shooting down innocent bystanders; although there's no such thing, really, as an innocent bystander. We all play our part.

This entire Confederation of Dunces constitutes an element of society that provides a smoke screen for the real players in the high-stakes game of doling out misery. Those directly responsible for war and starvation are high rollers with a non-negotiable bottom line. Besides the Confederacy of Dunces, they use religion and sire cute little families to deflect attention from their true agenda; they are psychopathic corporate giants.

The odds of this sweeping scenario ever changing for the better are slim, but here are a few off-the-cuff tips on how to stem the bleeding:

Anything claiming to be the opposition isn't.

If you have an urge to put your shoulder to the wheel, stop to consider who invented it.

The best bet is to forget boxes, envelopes, wheels and fire. An impossible order, I know, but just considering it is a beginning.

Are you ready?

On your mark.

Get set.

Go.

Second time in a restaurant in one day. It's chronic. Autobiographical. It has nothing to do with food. It's how a lone wolf finishes his days in an industrial society.

What am I talking about? I'm giving away my age. My orientation. All the marbles that I won shooting across the wide circle in the dirt. Or playing potsies.

Remember potsies? Of course you don't. You weren't even born yet. It sounds faggish, but we were red-blooded men back then, already at the age of ten.

What is it then? Shit, it slips my mind. Oh, right. The Information Age. But that's probably over with too. In fact, I'm sure it is. Maybe I'm ahead of the times. Maybe I've always been. Maybe this is the Disinformation Age, maybe it's always been. Deciphering zero, a special field for experts with benefits and good pay.

Time marches on. Time to get a grip and bite the bullet that the gun discharges. Time out while we come up with a flank maneuver. Time and the river. Think Tanks and Sherman tanks. What? What Sherman tanks? Have they gone the way of the buffalo? I'm sorry, I'm doing the best I know how. Anyway, that's what Think Tanks do, they keep weapons dealers rolling in clover and life expectancy down in unfavorable parts of the world.

Where was I? In a restaurant. For the second time today. How did I wind up here, deep in the wilderness? Must be I'm locked down in a mental lapse. They spin it as dementia and strap me into a straitjacket. Transport me back through the Industrial Age, the Stone Age, the Ice Age. "Wait here," they say, "the doctor will be with you in a moment."

I realize I'm on a carousel. The sun rises and glints off the golden ring. I stretch out to grab it.

Something snaps in my neck, and I feel the warm, unspinnable pain ripple through my mind like radiation. It settles behind my eyes, and I look around and realize I'm still sitting in the restaurant.

"Have you decided, sir?" the waitress says. "Coffee, sir?" she says. "Take your time, sir," she says, and wanders off.

I look out the large dark window and see a caged beast looking in at me.

"This is the Age of Transformation," I think, and fade into my reflection.

The people who can't stand it. Who put their hands over their ears and say, "No, no, no!" As if it were being done to them. As if the act knocks the legs out from under their pet theory on happiness. I wonder about such people. About their stern disapproval. Their "life is precious" escape clause. There's no love in their judgment, no compassion; just indignation, which is a form of fear. These are the same people who see racial undertones in the most innocuous places, as if a person who is Black or Asian or Latino is exempt from life's vagaries and cruelties, as if a person of color is by default blameless, something other than human.

There have been times I've hurt so bad inside I skirted close to suicide. Once, 25 years ago, sitting in the cab of a friend's truck, I said I wanted to die. He was sick of listening to it and whipped a pistol out from under his seat, handed it to me and said, "Go ahead then, blow your brains out." I couldn't do it. But when

I T WAS A HOT SUMMER NIGHT, AND PEOPLE WERE OUT ON THEIR PORCHES AND CONGREGATING ON STREET CORNERS. I MET A LOT OF EYES, AND NONE OF THEM HAD THAT "LIFE IS PRECIOUS" LOOK IN THEM.

he emptied the cylinder of all but one bullet, swung it closed again and twirled it, I put the barrel in my mouth without hesitation and pulled the trigger.

There are a lot of ways to commit suicide. Back in that same time frame (it was a particularly bad year) I walked, alone, deep into a black Philadelphia ghetto at two in the morning, an act some people might argue was tantamount to suicide. It was a hot summer night, and people were out on their porches and congregating on street corners. I met a lot of eyes, and none of them had that "life is precious" look in them. My eyes were my passport through a neighborhood of statistical high crime and suicide.

After about an hour of walking I came across a cheap hotel, a borderline flophouse, and went inside. A heavy-set black man in an impeccable white suit sat behind metal mesh and bullet-proof glass. He glared at me and flicked on an intercom.

"Yes?" he said.

"Do you have any vacancies?" I said.

"You got to be kidding," he said, his amplified voice echoing off the paint-peeled walls and tile floor of the small lobby.

“I need a room,” I said.

He studied me for a minute and then said, “You’re fucking crazy.” He got up, pushed a button that sounded a buzzer and unlocked a door, and came out of his bunker.

He took me to the second floor in a freight elevator and showed me a room with no lock on the door.

“Okay,” I said.

“That’s \$20,” he said. “Up front.”

I fished a twenty out of my wallet and handed it to him.

He stuffed it into his pocket, and then the look on his face changed. “Listen, man,” he said. “I don’t need no one killing themselves in one of my rooms.”

“Don’t worry,” I said.

I woke up the next morning with sunlight streaming through the window and a cleaning lady mopping the floor around my bed.

“Get your sorry white ass out of that bed so’s I can finish my work,” she said, and I did.

People who don’t carry enough pain to understand suicide are dead already.

Once he made up his mind, there was no sense trying to talk him out of something. She tried anyway.

“Why don’t you stay home tonight, something will turn up.”

It was like talking to stone.

He sipped his reheated black coffee. It tasted like old motor oil.

He won’t say anything until it’s time to go, she thought, then he’ll be vague. And unrealistic. She sat staring through the yellowing, dust coated curtains at the brick wall outside. Someone sat in an identical apartment building staring back.

They couldn’t see each other.

“It has to be done, how else will we eat?” He said, rising.

“Work, we could work, other people work.”

“Work—”

“Never mind. Forget it. Forget I said anything. When will you be back?”

“A week. Ten days.”

“So long?”

“It’s a complicated deal.”

“A week to ten days sounds more like very complicated to me.”

“If everything goes right we’ll be eating real food and drinking champagne. Every night of the week. We’ll have a party and invite friends.” He said.

She said: “What friends?”

He put on his dark, mud spattered rain coat and kissed her hard. Don’t worry everything will be all right.

We’ll be on Easy Street.

Easy Street, she said to the closed door. How the hell do you get to Easy Street from a dump like this?

If everything worked out okay, he would say.

Yeah, like finding a million to one shot winning ticket among all the losers at the track, she would say.

How long ago was it that he left?

A week? Ten days? Two weeks?

Fifteen days, she thought. Fifteen empty days and fourteen endless nights.

Nothing much left now, not even food stamps. She sipped her black coffee and stared at the walls. Grime

covered, thick with grease and hand prints. Small hand prints. Who's were they? Who knows? Who cares?

She watched the black ants climbing uphill across the buckied speckled linoleum. Watched them reach the crest of the peak and descend into the darkness below.

Outside, she could hear the fire engine sirens, the hydrants bursting with rust colored water gradually turning clear and the children playing in the torrents. At least, someone had found a moment of respite from the heat that clung to the concrete and the curbs, an invisible wall creeping closer, suffocating all who were unfortunate enough to be trapped inside.

Inside, she sipped black coffee. The youngest baby in the apartment directly to her right awoke and began crying. The others awoke as well, and joined in.

A bottle broke against the wall in the apartment to the left of her. A man cursed loudly in Spanish and a woman's curses followed. It was a beer bottle. She only threw what she drank and that was always Rheingold.

Rheingold, she thought, no gold from any Rhine River or anywhere else around here. We're lucky we got running water. And that won't last.

Not with the hydrants running.

Better boil some more water while it lasts, she thinks.

But she doesn't move.

They drink Tawny Port upstairs.

They make real loud noises when they hit something solid. Something like a wall or a floor. And lots of pieces. They were definitely a couple that was into broken glass in a major way, she thought, the alley was filled with it. Broken picture tubes and blacked out TV screens, down the tubes appliances, anything at all, throw it out the window when you're done with it. That was the philosophy upstairs. Seventeen floors is a lot of stairs to walk in the heat. Let whatever it is drop in the night.

No one cares.

Downstairs, the records are all Heavy Metal, shooting out the stars music mixed in with bad drugs, afternoons spent rolling drunks and bums on all kinds of skid rows. A guy could make a killing on the right day of every month rolling a nobody with a wad and nowhere to stash it.

He must have made a killing downstairs. Maybe several killings. The music is louder than usual, pulsating the floor and the walls, the brain fires are burning, she thought, and I get to smell all of the smoke.

And its always been this way.

Always.

She thought about burning some more water on the stove.

She was that kind of cook, he would say, she could burn water. Burn air if you let her. Everything she touched tasted scorched.

He was right.

She could burn anything. Did it all the time as a matter of fact.

Except for coffee.

She was good at coffee.

She liked coffee better than food, he often said.

He was right about that too. If he was so damned smart, how come he was out on the streets wasting his time looking for Easy Street when he could be wasting his time working a steady job?

The same reason
I'm not working.
We're who we are
and we have no
place to go.

I haven't eaten
in three days and
who cares?

No one cares.

Maybe I won't
move until he
comes back.

If he comes back.

She thought
about burning
some more water.

Thought of how
the aluminum pot

would seize up, a red glow in the center of the scorched black where the gas flame touched. Thought of the four double circles of black holes leaking gas, polluting the air and how she could put an end to this.

All I have to do is get off my butt and turn some knobs.

It was easy, even a kid could do it.

Easy, like getting a job and keeping it.

Anyone could do that.

She didn't move.

Mostly, she thought about loud noises and fireballs interrupting sleep on Easy Street. Thought of all the heads without faces leaning out of windows looking up and down.

MOSTLY, SHE THOUGHT

ABOUT LOUD NOISES

AND FIREBALLS INTER-

RUPTING SLEEP ON EASY

STREET. THOUGHT OF

ALL THE HEADS WITHOUT

FACES LEANING OUT OF

WINDOWS LOOKING

UP AND DOWN.

The police barricades.

The flashing lights.

She'd seen it thousands of times before.

Everyone had.

“What an awful shame,” They would say, “Such a waste, such a good looking woman in the prime of life of life.”

Who am I kidding?

She sipped the last of her coffee.

Smelled the gas.

What the hell, we're on Easy Street now, she thought, anything goes. The sky's the limit. Tapped a cigarette from her Marlboro hardpack he kept by the stove and even though she didn't smoke, she lit a match.

Broken glass glitters
beneath the street lights
where moths circle
and the bats swoop
like airborne sharks.
Automobile headlights
turn and swerve
slowly illuminating the alley,
blades of barbed wire glistening momentarily.
Then the headlight glare drives away,
the alley fades black into darkness.

HlSSSsssssss

The smell of fresh paint lingers,
fumes to cop a little buzz,
and the wet sticky touch
of fresh spray on a brick wall.
Does it really matter what I say
or just that you don't want it said.
Guerilla graffiti must be finished quickly
before a squad car happens by.
I push a little white button
and like a genie released from a magic bottle
color leaps from my can;
spaghetti loud dynamite spaztastic
airborne bubbles, bombs of paint
are released into a hopeless world
of concrete, gray, and black
My portraits are painted on the
underside of the overpass
as million of commuters race by
unaware of the underworld
where I ply my trade,
a spray paint poet rhyming with colors
Vibrant enough to release the heroic soul
I never get to show
in this life I lack,
color to feed my eyes,
colors to fertilize my dreams.
HlSSSssssssssssssssssss

Rendezvous With A Part Time God

Steve De France

Who is the gaunt stranger in the train station?
There—where he slides into the crowd.
Why does he stand perfectly still in the dark?
Why is it only you and I see him?
Only you and I hear his ragged breathing,
see his pock marked face,
smell his breath like dandelion wine.
See where his burning gaze
settles on a smiling salesman.

Where are the Gods to shield
the less significant people?
Where is the God of brothels,
gutters, and darkest corners of the city?
Don't these people need God most?

Will the less significant beings be
assigned a non-union God?
An hourly part-time God?
A God without a corner celestial edifice.
A shabby ruffian kind of God
who hangs out on park benches, public urinals,
and sleeps in his clothes at bus stations?

Will this non-union scab of a God
foul up the last prayers of the dying,
mar the last rites,
causing the bureaucrat Gods in heaven
to simply mark an "X" in the box for "lost?"

Gunnin For Trouble

Ed Galing

they say guns kill
and i found this damn
gun that my grandfather
left me, up in his attic,
when he died, he willed
it to me, but i don't like
guns, never did, so i take
it to the police station,
for them to dispose of it,
they tell me they can't
dispose of it, they have no
place to put it,

i

keep thinking, this damn
gun is old, but in the wrong
hands it could kill someone.

so i drive it over to
the sheriffs office nearby,
he says the same thing,
can't take it off your hands, he
says, we don't take old guns,
sell it,

but hell, i don't wanna sell
it, i tell him, it might kill
someone in the wrong hands, i
just wanta get rid of it,

anyway, nobody would take
this damn gun out of my hands,
and i got all kinds of suggestions
what to do with it, except nobody
wanted to take it outa my hands...

jesus christ, this fuckin
government, hollarin that guns kill,
but nobody wants to dispose of them,

so i take the gun back to my
house, not knowin what else to do,
got an axe and hammered the shit out
of it... i broke the barrel in two parts,
ripped out the fuckin guts, and threw
the whole thing in the trash can...

hope the garbage men don't
mind, and don't try to put it together.

we are a nation
of keepers
kept
and machine operators
i am one of the kept

among the kept are poultry
pigs
and people
among the kept are tracts of land-fields
waterways
mountains of dung
killing what we meant to grow on

some keepers are kept in some ways
and some kept are keepers in other ways
and nearly all are machine operators
whether it's a pencil sharpener or a derrick

it takes mountains of dung makers to make war
as we keep and kill each other

Blacktop Forest

Michael Kriesel

I live in a Chicago parking lot.
Norway pines and evergreens
surround my silver trailer. I
have a propane stove, two plastic
jugs I fill with water at a diner
every morning. My only neighbor's
Jim, who shares his Cutty Sark
and lives in a Dodge at the edge
of the parking lot. Christmas
Eve, a girl in her twenties
takes pictures of me eating
beans in my orange Elmer Fudd
hunting cap and dark coveralls.
Riding the bus back to Wisconsin,
my jacket pockets bulge with
rolls of five dollar bills. I
won't have to work until spring.

Team Player

Michael Kriesel

Each spring, all the employees (mostly women in their fifties) sign a softball at a special meeting, followed by a potluck. Bob said the manager asked him to sign the ball too, even though technically he's not a J.C. Penney employee. Maintenance is sub-contracted to the lowest bidder.

We are an odd couple,
the friar and I, we
talk akimbo in the stairwell,
a few blocks from where
the dumber than donkeys will
convene their convention,
near the upwelling of Penn
Station, in our scarred
city, target #1.

The friar's uneasy. Earlier
there was fire, smoke, transformer
fire. He's reminded of the night,
blackout, when the homeless,
scared, slept in pews as the friars
tried to offer comfort.

He speaks so frankly of his doomsday fears
(they're in the air) that I briefly
think the umbrella of his faith has lost its ribs.

Stipe Was Right

Ryan O'Malley

Exxon
showed
the largest profit
ever recorded
of 34 billion
in a year

It's the middle
of January,
Chicago
48
and Breezy

My uncle
is fighting
for a monarchy
while I half ass
school
and work
for my Daddy

I witnessed
the worst mind
of my generation
go mad
all by himself
and take half of
us with him.

I need fifty bucks
for a full tank
and a cheap pack
of reasons

It's 72
and pleasant
whenever you
go for a run
straddling faultlines
with your steps

you're fighting
a spare tire
for this spring season

while i'm on the line
with Goodyear

trading sanity
for some
all weather
treads

toasting to myself
and the shoes
I used to fill

School Lunch

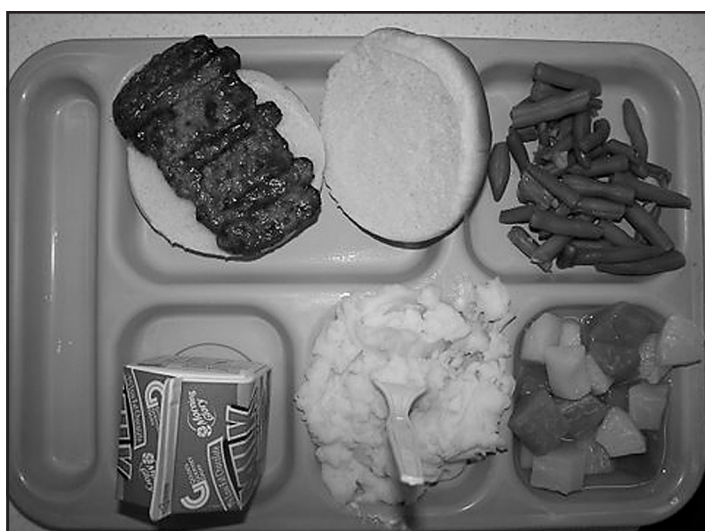
Andrew Meyer



later that afternoon no one had to wonder where the mess under billy's pant leg came from



knowing the odds are against him
mr. applesauce takes refuge



stick a fork in it never seemed so appropriate



silly developing body and brain, this is for kids



it wasn't only all the students that led
dylan and eric to the cafeteria first



seriously?

*editor's note: these photos (and more) can be
found in full, glorious color at www.four-sep.com*

Drank a bottle of wine
Fell down on the floor

My face on a paper
Drool smears the news

What did he think I would think
When I read the headline

But it was an inky mess and
I could have been wrong

As confusing as it was
I only had my shoulder to lean on, and up on

Two dead, four wounded
The bank only had 3 grand...

Where did they think they were going?

What about our lunch date?
That new place with the seafood salad...

It would have been fun
With the octopus in the sea

He's such a good tipper
What a meal. What a meal.

For a squid and whosome
Why not for a twosome?

A threesome a foursome
We could have some moresome.

I think so, but unfortunately for the foursome
It ended up with nomoresome.

Now the drool on the headline
Is a smear. And I alone lay here.

Some Places Where That Moment Hangs Out

Robert Collet Tricaro

It hangs out at a spot downtown—where
blue-gray smoke swirls into a hot evening
and an eight ball drops into the dark
inside of a green frog's mouth.

Or, on the end of a subway platform
right of the piss puddle, where two men
drain cc's
of pallid trance from a syringe.

It vacations at Yellowstone, where
a graceful hawk draws eyes from canyons and rocks
to sine-waves it sketches on blue, with gray pinions.

It walks Taylor and Ellis streets where
blonde Sadie asks, "Wanna jump honey?
Ninety bucks," and John, convention tag
pinned to his shirt, answers, "Sure, now, Ma'am?"

Sometimes it hangs out in rolls
of pink tickets in Seven Elevens
or in dark green bottles of Tanqueray.

It calms cravings in angry blood
or in bellies for bellies.
Like that hawk preying for the moment,
embodied in sallow entrails of a mouse.

a cosmic clown in e pluribus absurdum

roibeárd Uí-neill

Dumbing-down at the speed of sound:

microencephalic headbangers
vandalize tombstones & call it rebellion.
Cowboy-wannabes-ain't-ever-stepped-in-horseshit
greedily deep-throat the twangy country teat.

Commentary provided by a bloated, pill-popping conservative
who delights in nothing more than jamming
rationality's frequency.

You won't let me escape
the unimaginative soundtrack
of your unexamined lives.

Dammit, man,
even Joe Hill would find it impossible
to radicalize the lobotomized & homogenized,

every angry tone scratched from the strings of
his guitar blocked by accountants
who know enough alchemy
to petrify earwax for profit.

The fire in my head
is no longer burning.

Dumbing-down at the speed of light:

not many homes boast bookshelves anymore,
but televisions have grown larger,
with a full compliment of satellites
luring channel surfers
into a persistent vegetative state.

& I can't think of anything
that says "intellectual property rights"
quite like primetime copumentaries
priming us to accept the prison industrial complex...

...unless it's drama queens
& sperm donor rejects,
camera crew in tow,
storming the beach of a beautiful tropical island.
They chop down palm trees.
They build a shrine to Balkanization.
They boost ratings by out-backstabbing the opposition,
& each other.

Big Brother
(insert canned laughter here)
all the way to Nielson's bank.
The social conditioning proceeds apace
In a **git-r-done** so we can drink a **l-i-t-e** beer world.

The fire in my belly
is no longer burning.

I

Southern Indiana can't escape the contagion:
the Confederate flag waves from the occasional front porch,
is flaunted on tee-shirts, license plates, window clings.

My wife wrinkles her nose—
she's caught a phantom whiff of an injustice
allowed to twist under its tree for too many days.

Exhale, girl! & cherish the 1st Amendment.
Stone-blind bigots must also be at liberty
to identify themselves – how would we avoid them,
otherwise?

II

A good ol' boy eating nachos at a tractor-pull?

Thrillbilly.

A good ol' boy
who loves his carbonated beer-syrup?

Swillbilly.

A good ol' boy who defends the sociopathic cabal
bankrupting the country morally, as well as monetarily?

Shillbilly.

A good ol' boy who quantifies "female" as
find'em, finger'em, fuck'em, forget'em?

Misogynist.

A good ol' boy who gets a raise, although he does
little more than cast a shadow?

Asset.

The good ol' boys who despise you because you're a longhair,
literally & according to Webster, who want your dissident ass
dead or deported if you can't shut up & join the ranks of the
happily hypnotized?

Nationalists.

III

Yeah, 30 years of shits & giggles,
30 years in which i could never avoid working
for a man who didn't channel Rudyard Kipling 24/7.

The banjo was born in West Africa.
Timbuktu was home to one of the world's largest libraries.
The analects of Confucius flourished among rice paddies.
The Golden Rule was scripted by those early tribes of Jews.
The zero sprang from the brow of Hindus,
& the Arabs gave it to Europe.

None of it can be true.
My bosses didn't read it within
the glossy pages of a gun magazine.

Damn me & the best years of my life,
given to 4-cornered, money-cunning pragmatists
whose appreciation of math ends at the bottom line,

where they rev their engines,
confident they'll be the first
to drive their pick-up trucks

Mr. Ho, The Sitter And The Walker

John Wheatcroft

Let me tell you about my friends. Which, as you'll see, will be telling you about myself. As much as I want you to know, that is. Maybe more than you'll care to. It's hard to strike a balance in such matters.

Until I'd landed in this town and had begun to live as I do now, I'd never had a friend. All that I'd had in that way was my grandmother. Because my mother and father were busy all day and more often than not went out after dinner, I spent most evenings alone with my grandmother.

Dinner done, my grandmother and I would sit in the parlor until bedtime. She, mending, knitting or reading the Bible—that's all she ever read— and sucking peppermints. I doing homework or listening to the radio, shaped like a Palladian window. Tuned so low I'd have to put my ear against the gold-speckled fabric on the speaker. Or doing nothing.

My grandmother would be sitting in the platform rocker, whose clack clack, clack clack didn't bother me. Because I'd got used to it. I'd be in the armchair covered with the green plush used on the seats of trains at that time. In those days I could sit thinking about nothing for hours on end. As I found out later, thinking about something, anything is not a good habit to fall into.

Every so often while we'd be sitting there in silence, except for the clacking of her rocker or the low voices when the radio was on, my grandmother would shout "Hark!"

I had no idea how to hark. But knowing something was expect-ed of me, I'd give a jump in my chair, lift my shoulders, and shiver. Which seemed to satisfy my grandmother. Only long after she was gone did I connect "hark" with Christmas and angels.

My grandmother was too old to be my friend. And stern. Maybe her gray hair was pulled so tight into two knots on the back of her head that it hurt and made her cross. She was more strict than any of my teachers. Even when my parents were home, my grandmother put me to bed. After I'd finished in the bathroom, she'd make me sit beside her on the mattress of the cot I slept on and listen while she read "the portion of Scripture for the day." Then I had to kneel, fold my hands, and say out loud "Now I lay me" and "God blesses," especially for my mother and father. When I was under the covers, my grandmother would bend and kiss me on the fore-head. I've never much liked the smell of peppermint. Whether she was my mother's or my father's mother doesn't matter.

At school after my grandmother's death, I tried to have a friend, tried twice. The first time was with a boy who'd recently moved into our neighborhood. The fall semester had already started when he came into the fourth grade class I was in. Little and skinny, with a

face like a fox's, he seemed shy. His first name was Thaddeus. Kids teased him and some picked on him. Because our last names began with the same letter, he was given a desk next to mine.

During recess and at lunchtime he and I began to stick together. We didn't play football or shoot marbles with the other boys. Our houses lay in somewhat different directions, so we'd wait for each other on a corner where there was a candy store, and we'd walk the rest of the way to school together. Going home, we'd do the reverse. Neither of us minded not talking all the time.

One morning as we were crossing the street just beyond the candy store, Thaddeus asked, "Are you born again?"

I told him I didn't know what that meant. At recess and lunch that morning he wasn't there. During afternoon recess he told me he had to go home a different way to meet his mother somewhere. The next day was cold and rainy. I waited for him outside the candy store until I'd have been late if I hadn't run. When I got to our room, he was already in his seat. Thaddeus and I never spent any time together after that. He must have taken another route to and from school.

The second time I tried to have a friend was in tenth grade with a boy named Otto. He was a year ahead of me. Though I was taller than he was, he was stocky and strong-looking. We weren't in any classes together, but we both joined the chess club and would stay after school and play. I had a knack for the game and read a book on strategy, so I showed Otto some of the standard openings. Who won really didn't matter.

Between classes one afternoon I saw Otto, with three or four other boys, coming down the corridor toward me.

"Hi, Otto," I said, "see you in three thirteen." That was the room where we met. I didn't know the names of any of the others.

When Otto stepped in front of me, I drew up short. Then I felt a pain that hurt so I dropped my books and doubled over.

As Otto went on walking, he called over his shoulder, "Always protect your king, kid, right?"

Only after it had happened did I realize Otto had smashed his knee into what my grandmother had called my "nether parts." I never went back to the chess club.

I hadn't intended to tell you about the friends I almost had. Getting started on my grandmother led to one thing, Thaddeus, and another, Otto. What I do want to tell you about is the three friends I've had since coming to this town. If I tried to explain why I'm here, instead of somewhere else, living as I am, instead of another way, I'd be getting off the track again.

I've never spoken to any of my three friends. Two of them I continue to see from time to time. As for the third, well, I'll come to that.

Since all I've ever known about them is what they look like, though I have heard the voices of two of them, I could make up things about them. Give them parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins, spouses, children, in-laws, lovers, friends, enemies. And I could have them come from different places, make them be living in this town for all sorts of reasons, give them all kinds of jobs at one time or another. Two, or maybe all three, might have been in one of our wars, been wounded or killed someone. Committed a crime and spent time behind bars. They could be rich today, poor tomorrow, in between the next day. Have illnesses they do or don't know they have. Love or hate somebody secretly. As you can see, there are many possibilities, so many that I never assign any of them to any of my three friends. I'm glad I have no clues. If I had, that might ruin the friendship.

Not long after I'd landed in this town, while waiting for a prescription to be filled, I heard the clerk at the cash register in the pharmacy say to the person standing at the counter, "Thank you, Mr. Ho." At least it sounded as if he'd said "Ho." To myself I've called the man that ever since.

As I took Mr. Ho in, I saw that he had a meager little body. He was, I judged, almost a foot shorter than I am. What pinch of flesh there was between bone and skin seemed to have no muscle. Even though the afternoon was autumn-mild, on his head, the shape of an incandescent light bulb, was a green and brown felt fedora with a narrow brim. When leaving, he turned toward me but seemed not to see me. His face was at once a child's and an old man's. He looked weary maybe, I thought, from having to hold up his heavy eyelids. After that I began to notice Mr. Ho. Carrying a basket, not pushing a cart, along an aisle in the supermarket. Sitting at the edge of a table in the only coffee shop in town, sipping tea, no doubt. Waiting in line at the window in the post office. Taking short quick steps, so it seemed he was trotting, as he made his way along the main street. Always alone.

What has made Mr. Ho my friend is an act of audacity on my part that I can't account for. I'm sitting in the cinema one evening, waiting for the film to begin. The house lights are still up. Only a scattering of people here and there. Across from the side section in which I'm sitting on the aisle is Mr. Ho. I hadn't noticed him when I'd sat down.

On the knee closest to me Mr. Ho's green and brown fedora is perched, as if his knee were his head. It looks like the hat Chico Marx always wears. I wonder why Mr. Ho hasn't place it on the empty seat beside him. All at once I find myself leaning forward, reaching across the aisle, taking the hat by the brim, and plunking it on my head. Small as it is, it sits on the crown of my head precariously. To prevent it from falling off I have to hold myself perfectly still.

Mr. Ho swings around, slowly, and looks at me. Now

that I'm reliving what happened I realize actually he's looking at his hat on my head. He 's expressing no surprise, puzzlement or anger. In the indirect lighting coming from where the wall meets the vaulted ceiling, I can see only the old man in his face. It looks like a dried prune. Just as the house lights go down and music starts to blare, Mr. Ho beams me a smile, the softest sweetest smile I've ever received in my life. Although one of his upper front teeth is gold, the smile brings back the child in his face. The old man is gone.

As soon as my eyes have adjusted to the darkness, I stretch across the aisle and carefully replace Mr. Ho's hat on his knee. He doesn't look around. Giving up on the film before it's even begun, I tiptoe out, knowing I now have a friend in this town.

On the sidewalk beside the entrance to the store on the main street that sells newspapers, magazines, decent and indecent, comic and paperback

books, tobacco, candy bars, snacks, and lottery tickets, the town fathers have placed a bench. Its cast iron frame is painted black, its seat made of brown wooden slats. Every day, seven days a week, I pay a visit to this store. Why doesn't matter.

Whenever the weather's not rainy, snowy or forbiddingly cold, a middle-aged man, whose eyes bulge like green olives in a spoonful of milk, sits at the far end of the bench. The skin on his face is smooth and his cheeks are ruddy as a ripe apple. Always he's dressed in suit, coat and tie, neatly knotted, and he wears a creamy linen golfer's cap. On the top slat of the bench back hangs a white cane with an ivory handle, shaped like a bird with folded wings. The man's head is always cocked so his right ear is toward the sidewalk.

One morning a year or so after Mr. Ho had become my friend, as I left the store I seated myself as soundlessly as I could at the other end of the bench from the constant sitter. Why I have no idea, though really it doesn't matter. I'd noticed that when someone would exchange a greeting in passing or stop to chat, the sitter would address the person by name on the instant. This day no one sat down to talk, perhaps because I was also occupying the bench. But the sitter did bid good morning to half a dozen passersby and held brief conversations

WHENEVER THE WEATHER'S NOT RAINY, SNOWY OR FORBIDDINGLY COLD, A MIDDLE-AGED MAN, WHOSE EYES BULGE LIKE GREEN OLIVES IN A SPOONFUL OF MILK, SITS AT THE FAR END OF THE BENCH. THE SKIN ON HIS FACE IS SMOOTH AND HIS CHEEKS ARE RUDDY AS A RIPE APPLE.

with a couple. After a quarter of an hour or so, I got up and stole off, wondering whether the sitter knew he'd been joined by someone. Every so often in the following weeks I repeated my silent visit.

An August morning. Sun brilliant as a marigold in high bloom. Sky a distant field of bluets. I've scarcely settled myself on the bench than the sitter exclaims, "What a wonderfully clear day!" His rich baritone sings an eight tone melody. Since no one else is within earshot, he must be addressing me. I smile but make no reply.

After a short silence, he goes on. 'You're the gentleman who occasionally sits down for a spell, aren't you.' While the sitter's pitch is rising, his voice conveys too much self-assurance to be a question. Afraid he might hear my head turn, I keep looking straight ahead at the traffic passing by until a woman he addresses as Maude comes along. Without taking a place on the bench between the sitter and me, she engages him in conversation. As inaudibly as I can, I rise and steal away.

From time to time I still sit at the other end of the sitter's bench. Although I'm certain he knows I'm there, he's never addressed me again. For his delicacy I cherish his friendship. And while maintaining the silence between us, I feel as intimate with the sitter as I do with Mr. Ho. For whatever it's worth, which can't be much, I've never seen Mr. Ho pass by the sitter's bench.

No matter the season or weather, the person in tow who became my third friend would be out walking. Like me. In winter cold she'd be wearing a plaid wool jacket, khaki slacks, bright yellow gloves that covered her wrists, and brogans. In summer she'd have on a lavender muslin dress, with straps over her shoulders, and tennis shoes. Spring and fall she'd be in blue jeans, a gray pullover and mocassins. Always she'd go hatless. I'd never been on the sitter's bench when she passed, nor had I ever seen the sitter and Mr. Ho within sound or sight of each other. It seems my three friends never had to do with one another. You might say I was their only bond.

When I'm out on the town, I ambble along. Which does nothing to reduce my cholesterol or build muscle, both of which a body ought to be doing to stay healthy. I have another reason for walking. What it is doesn't matter.

In contrast to me, the walker would take long strides at a brisk pace. Which made her look like a horse that, after having been stabled for some time, is set free in a pasture. As if intending to butt someone or batter something, she'd keep her chin on her chest, like a goat. Her arms, swinging ninety degree arcs, moved like pendulums that have sped up to make time pass more quickly. Which, come to think of it, might not be a bad idea. The walker was every bit as tall as I am, over six feet, but must have been twice my weight, without a bit of flab that I could see. So intimidating did she look, bulling her way along, that whenever I'd spot her approaching, an alarm would go off inside me. I'd either cross the street or reverse course. Where I might have

been heading doesn't matter.

Because she'd never look up, from the distance I'd keep myself I wouldn't have to steal glances for fear she'd notice me. I'd come across her on streets and in alleys, on the trestle bridge that spans the river beside the town, in avenues, drives, and lanes that run through the suburbs, along the berm of roads leading in and out of the borough. Most visible were locks of black hair and a clifflike forehead. In warm weather I could see her shoulders and thighs were muscular as a weight lifter's. On winter days when she was snow-covered, she looked like an Arctic explorer or a mountain climber who refused to give up. I couldn't settle on a probable age. The walker had become my friend during the winter after the summer the sitter had.

In early morning an ice storm had come driving in. So dense a gray is the atmosphere that headlights and taillights on the occasional automobile or truck crawling along gradually become visible as yellow and red dots. Vehicle bodies are slow-gliding shadows. As they go on their way, the dots and shadows quickly fade, then vanish.

Pellets of ice slanting in from the northeast are stinging my eyes and what little of my face is exposed. Around the lower half, covering my mouth, a scarf is wrapped. A knit-wool cap is pulled down to my eyebrows. Beneath the pea jacket I have on I'm heaving for breath. The sidewalk might as well be the surface of a glacier. By the time I've shuffled and slid half a block, I decide to turn back and stay in my room. But I don't. Why I determine to go on and where I'm heading don't matter.

Even though my sense of direction and distance tell me I'm approaching the bank on the southeast corner of the two main streets of the town, I feel lost, dislocated. It's as if I were pushing myself into a gale-force wind sweeping across the Ross Ice Shelf. On the other side of the street the four-story federal building looms like a gigantic iceberg. Against the flagpole beside it, the chain on which the national ensign is hoisted and lowered in fair weather clanks arhythmically. From the time I ventured out ten or fifteen minutes ago, the handful of pedestrians I passed were muffled up, as though protecting themselves from plague. The traffic light hanging above the intersection sways crazily as it blinks a barely visible red.

Gloved hand on the stone of the bank building for a guide, as if I were blind, I feel my way to the corner and start to turn. Colliding with what I think must be the quoins of the facade, I stumble, feet flying out from under me, arms flailing.

"Oh my, I'm so sorry." As I feel myself going down, hands seize me by the armpits, steady me on my buckling legs. I catch a glimpse of icy blue eyes. "All right now, are you, brother? Do take care." Her locks of black hair glisten with frost in the morning gloom.

To my astonishment, over the hurly-burly of the storm and the clanking of the chain against the flagpole, I hear gentleness and solicitude in a voice I've imagined to be powerfully, even threateningly deep. That, along with her apology, when if anyone were at fault I was, and especially the familial epithet with which she addressed me, a total stranger, tells me I have a third

friend in this town.

She's the sister I've never had.

“HAVE YOU NO DECENCY,
WOMAN, NO SHAME?” I
BLURT OUT. “THE LEAST
YOU CAN DO
IS LET HER LIE FACE
DOWN.”

Before I'd had a chance to thank her, the walker was around the corner, behind me. Had I had time, I don't know whether I would have.

As we went on, beating our separate ways through

the storm, in my mind's eye I still could see her, upright and sure-footed despite ice and wind. That gave me a grip on myself. It let me know where I was. And who. And who I wasn't. Also it brought Mr. Ho and the sitter to mind, made me hope they were somewhere warm and secure.

After our encounter, seeing or just thinking about my new-found sister made me feel looked after. That she'd be there should I need her. From the time I was a child, taller than most others my age, I'd known I wasn't one of the strong. Gratifying as it was to have Mr. Ho and the sitter for friends, neither provided what my big sister did. It didn't matter that when we'd be in eyeshot, she'd never acknowledge recognizing me as the one she'd kept from a fall during that storm. In fact, it crossed my mind she wouldn't even remember.

About two years ago a week went by in which I hadn't come across her. That was unprecedented, since both of us constantly walked the town and its environs. A second week, a month, more months. One morning I woke up to the realization I'd never lay eyes on my sister-friend again. Imagining she might be walking and, in one way or another, saving brothers and sisters in some other place, possibly in another state or country on another continent, provided no consolation. In addition to my wonder and worry about her, with the absence of the walker's supportive friendship, old feelings of vulnerability have returned.

Last night... no, it was really near daybreak.

I'd come awake and seen a crack of gray light where the drapes don't quite come together. Then, falling back into shallow sleep, I had a deeply disturbing dream. To be open and aboveboard, I must confess that's why I've had to tell you about my friends. In my dream, dressed in a black suit, a white shirt, a dark necktie, and black pointed shoes— I've never owned any such clothing—

I'm on my way to a funeral. Whose I don't know.

The service is to be held not in a church or mortuary but in a private home, as was sometimes done when I was a child. My grandmother was buried from our house. Although I'm uncertain as to whether the place I'm heading for is located in this town, I seem sure of the way. The afternoon is warm, with heavy rain falling. Without raincoat, hat or umbrella, I'm soaked to the skin.

When I come to a large Victorian house, chalk-white, I'm confident I'm at the right address, although I don't see anyone else on the way to the funeral. After passing through an iron gate with a sprung-metal latch that clanks when I pull the gate to, I proceed up a flagstone walk and mount three steps to a porch with a peaked roof. I lift the knocker, a bronze Medusa's head or maybe a griffin's, on an elaborately carved door. When I drop the knocker it makes a dead clunk.

While I'm shaking and stamping off water, the door is opened by a gray-haired woman. She's neither old nor young. Without make-up, her elongated face is neither ugly nor attractive. Her eyes look like small agate marbles.

"Wipe your feet," she flings at me before I can explain I've come to the funeral. Her voice bristles with irritation.

I lower my eyes to discover a doormat, the like of which I've never seen before, beneath my feet. A couple of yards long and at least four feet wide, it lies on the porch floor asymmetrically, stretching from the front door to the railing to my right. Woven into the tan fiber, in conspicuous color, is a lifesize human figure. Instantly I recognize the locks of black hair, then the plaid jacket on broad shoulders. The yellow-gloved hands that had caught and held me are nowhere to be seen. The woman in the mat seems to have no arms. Below the nearer window of the house I can see khaki slacks, underneath the far window, brogans.

With a shudder I suddenly realize I'm dripping water on her face and the tips of my shoes are covering her eyes. Quickly stepping backward onto the bare wooden floor of the porch, I can see their sodden blue. Anger, an emotion I've rarely experienced in my life, comes surging up in me.

"Have you no decency, woman, no shame?" I blurt out. "The least you can do is let her lie facedown."

"Wrong," the woman snaps. Her lips are thin as stretched rubber bands. "She needs air to breathe."

"Do you mean to say she's alive?"

"Of course she's alive."

The walker looks so stiff and inert, so thoroughly woven into the mat that I don't believe the woman.

"Whose funeral is it then?" I craftily ask, surprised by the insistence I hear in my voice.

“If you don’t know,” the woman shoots back, “I’m certainly not going to tell you,” then slams the door with such violence the knocker clunks on its own. That jolts me so I lift my shoulders and shiver, despite the heat of the day.

And that’s all of the dream I can remember. Maybe that’s all there was. You know how fragmented and elusive dreams can be. Imagine my feelings upon awakening. Even now .

With the walker gone, it’s not the same for me here. I manage, barely, to get by, catching a glimpse of Mr. Ho’s fedora from time to time, and occasionally sitting for a spell of silence at the far end of the sitter’s bench. Should either of these two remaining friends be gone from my life, I’d have to leave this town. Where I’d go and what do— well, that’s another story.

wordmakers

John Bennett » xxx. [These three “shards” are culled from a nearly daily dose of Bennett’s explosive thoughts which arrive via email on a regular basis. I usually read 20-30 at a sitting as they rhythmically coalesce into a powerful whole.]

Alan Catlin » *Barmaster in Schenectady, New York. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. ‘Killer Cocktails’ is available from Four-Sep, as well as it’s fine successors ‘Hair of the Dog That Bit Me,’ ‘The Leper’s Kiss,’ and ‘Death Angels.’* [This piece is rife with quiet desperation, futile desire for redemption and the slice of a life perhaps too common in our cities.]

Gary Every » *His exceptional ‘Cat Canyon Secrets,’ 46pp of especially descriptive and fantastic stories from the southwest, is available for \$6 from the author (First Class will forward).* [I like the rhythm in this piece, and a few metaphors simply rock.]

Steve De France » xxx. [As sleazy politico-preachers rape religion, the god in each of us is for those who need it most, right? Perhaps.]

Ed Galing » *The famed Poet Laureate of Hatboro, Pennsylvania has appeared all over the independent press and numerous chaps, including ‘Tales of South Philly’ from Four-Sep Publications.* [Frustration. Simple frustration over something that should be so simple. Galing also slyly slips in a reminder that it is often futile to attempt to rationalize with bureaucracy.]

Will Inman » xxxx. [The last stanza did it for me—a fine summation of our current state in this nation.]

Michael Kriesel » xxx. [Both of these pieces are stark reminders that business and academia marginalize, marginalize, marginalize. People are not props.]

Susan Maurer » xxx. [Again, a final stanza that does it for me. Even the faithful have their fears.]

Ryan O’Malley » xxxx. [A straightforward examination of our cultural values that serves up a fair amount of self-loathing without being pathetic.]

Andrew Meyer » xxx. [Interesting photos. Kids sit before these plates, devour the contents, and move on. Perhaps I’ve thought about these images far too long. I know Mr. Meyer has.]

Casey Smeareds » xxx. [This one was just weird enough in it’s skeletal telling of the tale, that my mind wandered and filled in the details, fleshing out the tragedy or abandonment.]

Robert Collet Tricaro » xxxx. [A nice tie-up of slices of so many lives, images of desperation, and equating these human moments with that of the wild.]

roibeárd Uí-neill » *From Corydon, Indiana.* [As in the last issue, I’m hooked on his style, and enjoy every finely-crafted bit of wordplay.]

John Wheatcroft » xxxx. [This is a nice short piece on loneliness that turns despair on its head, while the protagonist tries to fit into our world.]

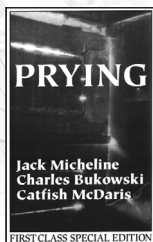
A booming thanks goes to all who have and continue to submit words on paper to First Class. I read every scrap that pries it’s way into my pobox, and enjoy and appreciate the efforts of those who submit their words to other’s scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions.

— Christopher M.

killer reads

Four-Sep Publications Chapbooks

PRYING - Prying is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic (Belgrade), Jouni Vaarakangas (Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA). *Glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp - \$5ppd*



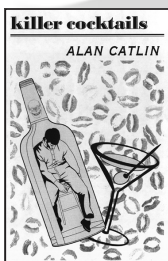
John Bennett

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - a sweet collection of John Bennett's finely honed style of 'shard writing': stripped away convention beating like a pulpy red heart. The very sharpest cutting edge of his talent, and a most eloquent assault on post-modern sensibilities.

Perfect bound/finest offset multi-color cover/72pp - \$9ppd

Alan Catlin

KILLER COCKTAILS - each piece in this collection of thirty is a portrayal of a character or event inspired by a particular cocktail. Persona and event become imbibables. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp - \$5ppd*



Alan Catlin

HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME - what you get the morning after indulging in Alan Catlin's earlier release, Killer Cocktails. Once again, plenty of deadly drink recipes that are indicative of the accompanying poetics. Another killer collection that belongs with the pleasure inducing prequel in everyone's bar (or bathroom). *High-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp - \$5ppd*

Alan Catlin

THE LEPER'S KISS - the fourth installment in the Killer Cocktails chapbook series of poetics inspired by the river of patrons on the public side of the bar and invented imbibables, fresh from the mind of Alan Catlin, Schenectady, NY's very best bartender poet. *Craft cover/linen paper/32pp - \$6ppd*

Alan Catlin

DEATH ANGELS - is 'Killer Cocktails' spun out of control. Blending poetics within prose, mixing characterization with chaos, and serving up a hell of an ass-kicking booze-drenched nite-cap; Catlin continues to call 'em as he sees 'em from his side of the bar. *Craft cover/24# paper/44pp - \$6ppd*

Stepan Chapman

COMMON ECTOIDS OF ARIZONA - a romp through the field drawings and notations of the eminent Stepan Chapman, Doctor of Etheric Zoology. A superb collection drawn from the freakish menagerie dancing in Chapman's skull. A truly awesome work of art. *Gloss cover/24# guts/44pp - \$5ppd*

Stepan Chapman

LIFE ON EARTH - travel along as Life On Earth is personified in the guise of creatures, characters and imagery (36 pieces of art!) from the inimitable pen of Chapman's distinctive ink drawings. It's a tragedy, that we are all living, as Life On Earth struggles to survive—a blasting stare into the mirror of our collective consciousness. *Gloss cover/24# guts/40pp - \$6ppd*

Christopher Cunningham

SCREAMING IN SOME BEAUTY - poetics from a strong voice in the small press merging anger, urge and the quest for art into gritty clarity and words that will ring the psyche's call to contemplation. The book feels as good in the hand as it does in the head. *Deluxe linen cover/linen guts/36pp - \$6ppd*

Ed Galing

TALES OF SOUTH PHILLY - chronicles the sights, sounds, smells and action on the streets and in the homes of a long-since-gone South Philly. Hard living turning out the best people, leaving behind a few, struggling in the crossroads of a city and growing up. *Offset slick cover/24# paper/28pp - \$5ppd*

Albert Huffstickler

IN THE CLEARING - a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp - \$5ppd*



Errol Miller

THE DRIFTER TAKES ANOTHER LOOK - pieces from the late 80s, Miller's mind ripe, the pen in his hand, once again, after an 8-year dormancy. This is the sweetest, most well preserved fruit plucked from the sealed cellar of the mind of Errol Miller, one of the more prolific writers on the scene today. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/50pp - \$6ppd*

Michael Newell

COLLISION COURSE - draws from the years Newell spent in Uzbekistan in the late '90s. These 37 observations reveal the confusion, anticipation, dirt, and beauty of the land and people wedged in the deep seat of the Slavic/Asian crossroads of ex-USSR. Invigorating. You may reconsider your own situation and stance. *Matte cover/linen paper/46pp - \$6ppd*

Michael Newell

MILES OF HIGHWAYS AND OPEN ROADS - features 42 poetic slices of the exotic loaf from which the well-travelled Newell nibbles. Never presumptuous and hyper observant, whether it's a glimpse of Jordan or Oregon, these poetics are tight and full of precise, earnest imagery from the perspective of full cultural immersion. *Matte cover/24# paper/50pp - \$6ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

DICTIONARY OF THE 21st CENTURY - features the wordplay and wit of Niditch in a format conducive to his quick, quirky jabs and observations. *Gloss cover/24# paper/32pp - \$5ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

MASKS AND BEARDS - loaded with a continuous flow of killer short pieces describing absurd characters and their even more absurd actions ala the great Russian master of the absurd - Daniil Kharmis. Modern and Post- meet on these pages. *Gloss cover/24# paper/26pp - \$5ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

MOVIE BRATS - this novella takes a serio-comic look at the tumultuous world of Hollywood and beyond during an era of political, sexual and religious uprisings. A big fat book of Niditch's intense, witty and fast-paced dialogue. *Craft cover/24# paper/48pp - \$6ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

3RILOGY - these three short fiction pieces explore art, humanity, political thought and the absurd underbelly of the 20th century. The fear of reprisal, unbelievable audacity and the mystery of murder - themes for a good read. *Craft cover/24# legal-half/34pp - \$6ppd*

Charles Ries

BAD MONK: NEITHER HERE NOR THERE - The Bad Monk, Charles Ries, marks shrewd, careful observations of the world around him, merging spirituality, a bit of beer, waffles and Milwaukee life. Bonus poem broadsheet! *2-color cover/24# paper/24pp - \$5ppd*

Charles Ries

MONJE MALO SPEAKS ENGLISH - is the second chap from the Bad Monk, Charles Ries. A refined, yet rough voice out of Milwaukee, Ries matures with meditations on Mexico, mamas, love and religion that have been pubbed throughout the indie press world. *2-color cover/24# paper/24pp - \$5ppd*

Robert Roden

THE SCOPOPHILIAC - the latest release from one of the Long Beach area's strongest voices. This collection stirs Lee Mallory to state that 'one could mount these poems, or like a greedy voyeur, just watch and listen'. Gerald Locklin observes that he 'blends the ineffable of the Symbolists and the cacophonies of Southern California rock into a music of his own'. *High-end slick cover/linen paper/24pp - \$5ppd*



Robert Roden

THE BITTER SUITE - the is jammed with Roden's poetics pinning down new life, new death and new views, wrapped in the feel of dirty starched sheets, trapped behind the dual boarded doors of desperation and longing. *Craft cover/24# paper/28pp - \$6ppd*

Spiel

INSUFFERABLE ZIPPER - you get fifteen cunning and outrageous stories and intense character sketches. It's the reclusive Spiel's world of weirdos, women and wild worldviews - like bubblegum stuck to hot sneakers, if follows you. Read what's been called a 'fresh blast to the face and ears.' *Craft cover/24# legal-half/44pp - \$7ppd*

Wade Vonasek

STARTING TO END IN THE MIDDLE - pulls together 30 pieces of Vonasek's best poetics revealing somber introspection, consistent speculation, and often a glimmer of hope. Featuring artwork by Lori Dale. Vonasek was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. *Slick cover/linen paper/32pp - \$5ppd*

Wade Vonasek

CLAY MOLDED INSANE - revolted by the social morass of the 21st century landscape, fantastic and creative words leap from poetics rife with mood and cutting splendor. Featuring artwork by Dee Rimbaud, Michael Labash, and Stepan Chapman. *2-color offset cover/linen paper/26pp - \$5ppd*

A.D. Winans

PEOPLE, YOU THINK YOU KNOW? - short fiction and poetics from one of the long-standing greats in the small press. This is Winans at his best with short fiction and gritty poetics. Get into Winans' head! Features fotos of San Fran folks, through the eyes of A.D. *Offset slick cover/linen paper/28pp - \$5ppd*



cattle call



First Class is very open to submissions. Especially sought after are pieces of short fiction, but poetics are, of course, accepted as well. **I am now also very interested in illustrations and some stark photography for both cover art and internal pages.** I seek the very best words and images you have available for me to read.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work.

For the computer users, please do **not** justify or force-justify your text. Please do not "double space" after each period.

Name and address on the first page of each piece only.

Send along a SASE.

Disposable/recyclable manuscripts are cool and mandatory.

Lastly.....drop me a letter with your submission, it sure beats the hell out of a chunk of submission text and a SASE dropping out on the table without at least a brief greeting.

I make it a point to take advantage of the technology I have available to keep track of everything that comes in and leaves First Class. You can expect timely responses and notifications. I know from experience that it is disturbing not to know the status of your words.

www.four-sep.com

Speaking of technology » » » stay up to date at : www.four-sep.com

www.four-sep.com

-Christopher M.

need a chap?

Looking for better production of your words?

For less than the copyshop? Locked out of the publishing loop?

Tired of the unending **hassles** encountered while attempting to present your words with the utmost aesthetic appeal?



Four-Sep Publications *also* produces chaps-for-hire under the imprint

"Lockout Press." There are several options available as to paperstocks and quantities, but all include full layout and design, as well as inclusion on the Lockout Press page of the Four-Sep Publications Web site. The foremost concern in this venture is to communicate your work with production matching the scale of your message. Professional layout and design along with crisp laser output will be combined with experience, skill and text-crafting ability. After dropping too many paychecks at the copyshop, I want to share the ability I now have to reduce the costs associated with this wondrous obsession, and increase the quality of the finished product. Plus, I'll be able to read more of all of your fine words. Nothing is impossible to work out, up to full-color covers and perfect-binding, and I assure you that you will reel in amazement. **Drop me a letter or e-mail (christopherm@four-sep.com) and I will work up a quote based on the info you give me.** Everything is included in the rates: layout, design, **shipping**, printing, binding, and **proofs-til-you're-happy**.

Sample rates (remember to allow 4 pages for contents and title page):

Quantity	Pages	Paper	Price	Each
50	32	24# White	\$195.25	\$3.91
50	36	24# White	178.53	3.57
100	24	24# White	246.00	2.46
100	32	24# White	237.10	2.37
200	36	24# White	391.60	1.96

The 24# White paper is firmer and more opaque, than standard 20# paper. All chaps include a cover printed on coated stock, other stocks are available. These are samples and subject to change. Some special projects and various cover options may entail a greater commitment from both parties. **For additional information, testimonials, sample cover art and more, please check out www.four-sep.com and click on the "Lockout Press" link. Due to a serious prick out there, half-down is now necessary after the first proof.**