

children CHURCHES & daddies

• Published since 1993 •

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Children, Churches and Daddies is published as often as we have enough material, so submit early and submit often. We publish every three weeks to a month. • No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material is appreciated; we do accept work of almost any genre of poetry, prose or artwork. • Do not send originals; include a SASE & bio with each submission. • Any work sent to Scars Publications on Macintosh disks, text format, will be given special attention. • There is no limit to how much you may submit at a time; previously published work accepted. • All material submitted is eligible for printing not only in Children, Churches and Daddies issues, but also in any other publishing ventures of Scars Publications. • Send all submissions, praises, questions and comments to:

Children, Churches and Daddies, Scars Publications, Janet Kuypers, Editor
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Chapbooks published in 1993: hope chest in the attic (chapbook and book), the gallery (computer program), knife, people today, dysfunctional family greeting cards, slate and marrow, dreaming of dandelions and ice cubes, addicted, new world order, gasoline and reason, the written word, the printed gallery, right there by your heart, rendering us, gabriel, magnolia christmas, how you looked then.

Chapbooks published in 1994: paper backbone, winter prayers, looking through their window, games, order now, a (fe)male behind bars, two year journey, they told me their dreams, the window (book), city, it was a perfect house, pictures from a still life.

Chapbooks/books from the 1995 Children, Churches and Daddies Poetry Chapbook Series: come into my garden, house of slavs, the things i saw alone, texas, new york, in these desperate times, before the storm, love letters, scratching, still had to breathe, wrinkles in the palm of my hand, some things instinctively hurt, proud to be a part of things.

also publishers of: the annual poetry wall calendar, "down in the dirt" poetry magazine
"the burning" 1993 poetry mini books, "god eyes" 1995 poetry mini books

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the non-religious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine



Volume 33: Spring

*Old Man Directing Traffic in a
Dream that Never Ends, Albany. N.Y.*

His is the mind in rapid transit
between stops, waving emergency vehicles
the wrong way up Ontario Street, red
lights and sirens head on up against two
lanes of traffic and a large brick wall
no one else can see, the fall of Albany
in his eyes, the Alfred E. Smith building
in flames, Channel 10 News teams setting
up cameras, speaking as he speaks in a
guttural form of grunt, faking the syllables,
the natural disasters that happen in the head
of this man turning sixty in a hurry, waving
down his dreams, dressed in ragged clothes
three sizes too small on the corner of a
block where two lane traffic turns to one
and goes the other way.

Alan Catlin

rough day/eaves overflowing with rain

M. Kettner

In The Clean Morning Light

Go on and dream
of dead aunts with lemonade
I will water this dram alone
our last days together you went out
with a grey Iceman who couldn't dance
cheek-to-cheek methodically stroking his idleness
until you thought you were his sweetheart
these lessons are confusing
for they challenge the accords of life
in and out of swinging doors we kiss
and look back at rented buggies gusting in the wind
a few tears clustering underneath your makeup
how do you fee, you whispered
spoiling everything I lit a cigarette
a hot day with the sun gone
I had written backwards a story
of hurricanes and lovers sleeping together
in mixed breeds of rooms with euphoric tenants
leaving their lumpy evening baggage on the vanity
these days were made for maidens in creased skirts
Bohemian hotels with big bands playing Stardust
lying there listening to dusk descend
I wondered about your mystique
the lilacs finishing their long performance
and I knew there was a difference
in stopping for a moment to stare or
staying longer to watch them die.

Errol Miller

Child Ride

Black with the straight white people's hair. The alarm alarmed her into being late for 10am. 15 minutes to get to the mall from there, the mall would have 15 minutes on her. Baby was in the harness, all set. Shower, her hair would dry on the way.

The snow plows did what they could, the slush was in a rush between cars, but for the 2nd of December, the climate had that fall feel. First snow in Pottsdam hadn't been until the day before Thanksgiving anyway, so most of the lines were still visible to make it a proper car park.

She never locked it, so once the infant was snatched from the passenger seat, a little joust against the Ford door was enough to make it stick so the light wouldn't come on. The child was quiet. Used to the power of the shopping days.

Strip between the Lerner store and Cash's Legitimate Soaps and Natural Spices, and the far end where the new Sears would have to hurry to be if it wanted any holiday money, this was the best part, by far the most congested now that Media Play, the mega store for books and CDs, lots of etc., was open and admitting Visas. She'd go on toe, silent, scowling at rough joy-makers discussing stockings and surprising people. Found the flower shops to be better for talking and ogling at the baby than the silent bookstores; maybe she'd go down to Mama Bears at the lower level near Chappell's if she wanted the real cuddlers needing a cute fix. Needing to ask how old he was. Needing to lose some self-respect by acting like -

"Aaahhh.... his name?" a woman with a hook nose asked, putting down the stuffed panda.

"Jeremiah," she'd say each time. Smiling. Forgetting one ass' crude remark at how "I bet you get asked that ALL the time, why don't you get a nametag".

The balding woman patted the baby's soft head, never knowing through the gloves the inquirer wore that the baby was cold. She drifted off, replaced by a man who wanted to know, "He's such a sound sleeper? Wish mine..." He waved it off and they both smiled at the compliment, making the mother feel good. Knowing she was never alone.

Ben Ohmart

Daily Planet News

Wanting more than coffee
task forces and international reviewers
the authorities from Massachusetts composing
a leisurely novel of past life
U.S. boys violating Canada's air space
a summer back in downtown Chicago
hunting in the Catskills
hurting inside of Asheville's smoky parlor
in Ohio a theme park collecting fees for nothing
having a ticket to the biggest play of all
an open door for big-name artists
the residents warming callused hands
over open coal fires from West Virginia
the evidence pointing to a breakdown
of the whirling green turnstiles of Earth
a course of oil and water and beer and wine
and song and dance and sweet charities
raising money for only money's sake
pop open the top of a Budweiser
from 1956 and relax
holding your life in escrow
painting lizard on your wagon
the wind has left the willow
for higher ground an Confederate dead
are mysteriously moving Northward
the prophets say our wounds will heal
importing salt from Shangri-la
cutting off the King's head it falls short
this Old Globe still spinning
at sixty moles per hour.

Errol Miller

The Drifter Takes Another Look

We are the usual men in poetry
on a road of battered brass flutes
for a moment our rubbery skin filled out
like a woman full of sweaty labor
finding ourselves on unruled yellow writing paper
remembering that life is a magnet pulling us
into a studio of burned-out stars and awesome things
in full bloom it seems summer belongs to someone else
on the second floor of a concrete cold-world cavern
in the back room of a tavern filled with alien smells
we are all friends with knives at our throats
sitting down together for communion we spill wine
and watch it dissolve into the dust
one by one we leave the room disgusted
perhaps we should scrub out testicles
hire a stenographer to record the sensation
down the hallway Jason plays his harmonica
he has forgotten the sting of green flies
in his stories bad girls do no wrong
important people live forever on their laurels
but our list of failures is long and grows
each day ballet companies hire our women
they do not speak as they leave
saying goodbye a startling simple act
spending years in bars to train
I think we could break this spell
if only there were a voice
that we could follow
and call our own.

Errol Miller

Okay, nilla wafer. Listen up and listen good.

How to save your life.

Submit, or I'll have to kill you.

Okay, it's this simple: send me published or unpublished poetry, prose or art work (do not send originals), along with a SASE for response, to Children, Churches and Daddies, Scars Publications, 3255 West Belden, Suite #3E, Chicago, Illinois 60647. Then sit by your mailbox and wait. Pretty soon you'll get your SASE back with a note from the happy people at cc+d that says (a) Your work sucks, or (b) This is fancy crap, and we're gonna print it. It's that simple!

back issues: \$4; special issues: \$5

How to get a chapbook of your work.

Get in with the 1995 Poetry Chapbook Series.

Okay, it's this simple: we'd love to print a chapbook of your work under our label. But here's our little dilemma: if we printed everything we wanted to, a lot of forests would be gone, as well as our drinking money. We can't afford the printing, so if we accept your work, we can design a chapbook, emblazon the thing with the tried-and-true cc+d logo, give it our ISSN number, and send the originals to you. You decide what paper you want, how many copies you want done - then print it, and send us as many copies as you darn well please. We'll distribute. Voila!

{all checks payable to Janet Kuypers}

paper backbone, looking through their window, order now,
a (fe)male behind bars, two year journey, they told me their dreams.

Holy Shit.

Now this is an impressive chapbook list.

mary winters: winter prayers, city, it was a perfect house

paul weinman and janet kuypers: games

cheryl townsend and janet kuypers: gasoline and reason

alan catlin: pictures from a still life

plus forthcoming chapbooks from

errol miller, mark blickley, gary a. scheinoha and others.

where can you get all this cool shit?

write to cc+d for a complete list. it's all at your fingertips. amazing.

Okay, crunch-n-munch. Listen up and listen good.

How to win the editors over.

Hope Chest in the Attic is a 200 page, perfect-bound book of 13 years of poetry, prose and art by Janet Kuypers. It's a really classy thing, if you know what I mean. It's \$10.95 retail, but if you mention this ad it's only \$10 (aren't we so nice here?). An offer you can't refuse...

How to read cutting-edge poetry...

You thought I'd say "read cc+d," but this is bigger. There's a new book out by Janet Kuypers. The Window is about 180 pages of her newest stuff. It's hand-bound, paperback, and she'll even sign it if you beg her enough. Man, it's groovy. And an even ten smackers. Wow! Bargain.

and about ad pages...

yes, we do trades. send stuff to us and we'll send you a cool looking ad back! write to us for more information.

The Pigeon Man Gings

It's freezing outside. I'd say my fingers feel like icicles but the truth is I can't feel them at all, they're so numb. I've tried to toss the popcorn with my gloves on but it doesn't work. You can't aim. It always falls to the ground in a clump and that means the stronger and greedier pigeons crowd out the weaker ones.

My name's Wendell Mandanay and though I've lived in this neighborhood for nearly seventy years, most folks know me as the Pigeon Man. Kids sometimes taunt me. They shout 'Pigeon Man! Pigeon Man!' like it was something I should be ashamed of. But I don't think they mean any harm. They're just bored, that's all, though I do get upset when they throw stones at the birds.

I've been feeding pigeons for eighteen years. I try not to miss a day. Sometimes my shoulder acts up, starts really hurting, and it's too painful to even put my coat on. That's when the pigeons miss a meal. Those kind of days seem to be more frequent lately and I feel bad for the birds.

My shoulder problems come from forty years of carrying a mail sack for this city. I'm not complaining. I enjoyed being a mailman when I handed folks a letter that made them smile. Some days my letters made them cry. When I was a younger letter carrier that used to bother me, but as I got older I realized bad news traveling through the mails is kind of like the weather — sometimes you can predict it but you can never change it.

Three months ago I moved into the Senior Citizen Housing the city opened last year. It's okay. The rent's real cheap and it is closer to the park. Up until now I've ignored all the group activities the Seniors Commission have organized. Mostly they've been bingo games and chartered buses to the casinos at Atlantic City.

I'm not a gambling man. Heck, I'd never have bet I'd live as long as I have. And what were the odds that me, Wendell Mandanay, twelve years older than my wife, Anna, would outlive her by eighteen years? Do you know that after dozens of years of living with that woman the thing I miss most about her is her smile?

Lately the days seem to be getting darker quicker and I'm not so sure it's because of winter. That's why I've decided to tell a secret I've kept for nearly twenty years.

The day after I buried my wife I stopped eating. I didn't plan to stop feeding myself; it just happened. I enjoyed the taste of certain foods and had earned considerable praise for my cooking skills, but now the only taste I desired was beer. And plenty of it. All I had to do was pick up the phone and thirty minutes later there'd be a case of it outside my door.

When Anna was alive we enjoyed taking walks and entertaining in our home. But these days I kept close company with the television set. I'd spend most of the time laying on the couch, sipping beer and listening to the T.V. The television talked at



The tears on my face stain my pillow
As my heart slowly begins to break
I remember all the fun
we had all the laughter,
all the joy.

I look back to see a
little boy
Who would fight for me.

I have great memories of
evening talks
with joyful laughter
in between.

I notice a boy who
need protection and shelter
from dark
I see a boy who
sheltered me
and cared when a guy
broke my heart.

I see a boy who
looked up to me
because I was his sister,
and needed me to save
all my love for him.

He needed me and I
needed him but times
changed and yet we've
sort- of grown apart
he doesn't know it,
but the growing up
broke my heart!

My Brother

Jacqui Smith

me day and night. Sometimes I'd awaken in the morning or the afternoon or at night and to my surprise recall the exact content of programs overheard in my sleep.

The neighbors grew concerned. Every couple of days it seemed someone would knock on my door. I'd rouse myself from the couch, place the beer bottles on the floor beneath the coffee table and quietly answer the door.

"Good afternoon, Wendell."

"It is a fine afternoon."

"How are things going, Wendell?"

"I'd say about three hundred and sixty degrees."

"Is there anything I can get you, Wendell?"

"As a matter of fact, there is."

"What is it, Wendell? What do you need?"

"I could use a smile. Whenever I answer a knock I never see one. Everybody always looks so upset, so nervous.

"That's because we're worried about you, Wendell."

"But it's all the unhappy faces at my door that makes me worry."

"If I can be of any assistance, Wendell, you know where to find me."

"Thank you. But to find you would mean that I lost you and I hope our friendship never comes to that. Good afternoon."

I just wanted to be left alone. When Anna died not only did I lose my appetite, but I stopped cleaning up our apartment. And then I stopped cleaning myself.

About a month or so after my wife's funeral I was watching a nature show on Public Television. It was all about pigeons. I was sleepy, a little groggy, and didn't pay much attention. Not too much sunk in. Or so I thought.

When I woke up the next morning (or a few hours later) and went to the fridge for a beer, I kept hearing the narrator's voice in my head. He was telling me things like:

'Pigeons usually mate for life, rearing squabs season after season, often for ten year or longer.'

'All pigeons naturally love to bathe and to keep their feather clean and shining.'

'Pigeons do not overeat.'

'Mated pigeons are generally more productive if the male is decidedly older than the female.'

I thought it was strange remembering that program because I always hated pigeons. To me they were nothing more than flying rats. And let me tell you, they made my life miserable when I was a mailman.

I quickly forgot about the birds when I discovered I was down to my last three bottles of beer. When I phoned the corner liquor store they refused to deliver. I owed them money from last bill.

This meant I had to go out to get it. And going outside was the last thing I wanted

to do. I didn't want to get cleaned and dressed, yet I didn't want people to see me like that. So I compromised by taking a shave and hiding the rest of myself under a hat and an overcoat Anna had dry-cleaned for me. It was still in its plastic bag.

After pouring two bottles of beer down my throat I closed the door behind me. On the way to liquor store I saw a huge flock of pigeons. Some wretch had dumped bags of garbage in front of my building and the birds were having a feast.

They were all gobbling up that garbage except for this one bird. He had his back to the food and looked like he was tucked real tight inside his feathers. I walked around to face him.

I wasn't in front of him more than two seconds when he lifts his beak and stares up at my face. I got such a chill looking at his eyes, and this was in the middle of August!

tried to walk away but couldn't. The pigeon wouldn't let me go.

That's when I realized the bird wasn't eating because he'd lost his mate. So I kneeled down, a bit unsteady from the beer I'd just drunk and the heavy overcoat, and gave him a pep talk. I told him to stop feeling sorry for himself, to stop punishing himself because his wife would hate to see him like that. I whispered that his wife had a husband she could respect and it was unfair to her memory if he became a bird that couldn't be respected.

And don't you know the pigeon starts bobbing his head like he's agreeing with me. So I stood up and hurried over to the grocery store for some birdseed. When I returned he was gone. The other birds were still pecking at the garbage, but my pigeon had disappeared.

Being out in the fresh air must've made me hungry. That night I cooked myself a big supper. The next day I began to feed the pigeons, just in case my bird was part of a hungry flock.

Mark Blickley

Far Far Away

For Sylvia Plath

Sonic adventure
from the bell jar, Sylvia
did you cross the water
did you cross the water unattended
black light, black night, it was raining
I presume when you arrived
I must have been asleep
going sixty inside
my forgotten business on the dresser
this year the poppies were beautiful in Boston
next year they may change
blank-faced I too stare at the future and laugh
my life on no higher ground than yours
gathering the smooth round stones of hurting
I have stacked them in a secret place for literature
cataloging each one separately
lately late at night I go out to sea
and pause and wait and think
of how it must have been:
passing your soul darkly through glass
vaguely seeing the end of the tunnel
looking on and looking out I swear
I thought I heard you gasp
nodding to myself
chalk-fingered and soggy
and pale as the bone white china
of your poetry.

Errol Miller

House of Slavs

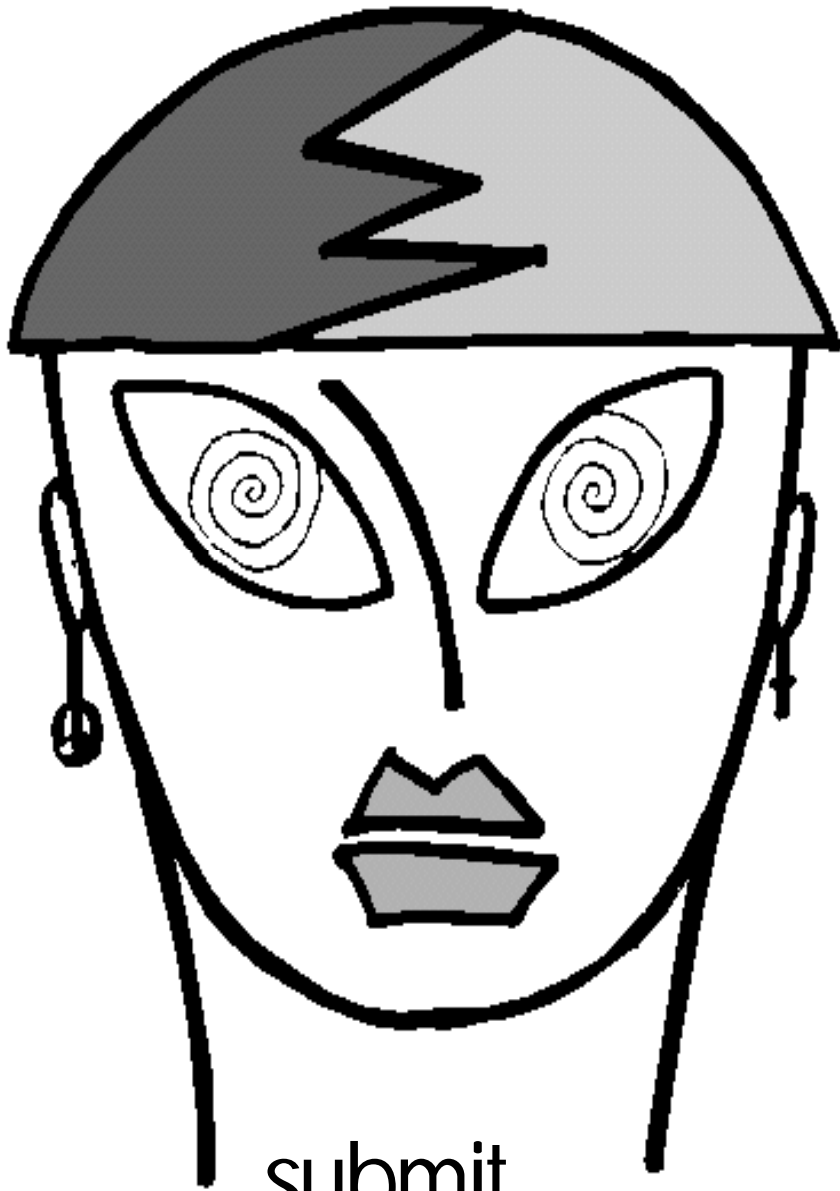
Every house has rules
and I have felt more
brotherhood here
than anyplace else
at any other
time in
my life.
Yet there are rooms
closed off to me,
doors slammed shut
by snobbery
that the purest
heart
can't
pry open.
Arrogance
traps us
within these walls,
an odd man out
attitude
which appalls
and sends me,
searching —
into the street again.

Gary A. Scheinoha

House Divided

We built this house
and we'll raze it to
the ground,
destroying a union
of some seventy
year plus.
It matters not
who drove
the first nail;
Masaryk, Benes
or other unknowns.
What counts most
or hurts worse
is who
yanks
that last
timber down.

Gary A. Scheinoha



submit

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Nasal Congestion

Randall P is fat
and smells like shit
spilling over
the green vinyl chair
in the lobby
where he waits
for his 63-year-old mother
to take him home
He stinks like shit, piss
and age
He's only twenty-five
His mother has an odor
not shit or piss

She's moldy
The dusty-with-age kind
you find in attics
Maybe her smeller
is too old to smell
Randall P
He can smell
He does smell
I don't want to smell
Randall P
When he leaves
I smile

Marc Swan

Kiss and Tell

In the paper-thin light
of early spring
Marie and I shivered
between the snowdrifts
waiting for the bus.
She was a grade above me.
Her dirty blond hair
hung loose over her turned up
collar, red rubber boots
dancestepping in time
with "King Creole"
she whistled
through chattering teeth.

In the summer
we'd climb Mr. Ford's apple tree,
tossing green apples
as far as we could throw.
Her's always outdistanced mine.
I tried to kiss her once
in that tree.
Laughing, she pushed me hard
and we tumbled to the ground
where I filled her mouth
with my eager tongue,

ran my hands under
her halter top, tried to get into
her soft cotton pants.
She kept laughing,
rolling away from me
but not too far.
She loved to walk in the woods
looking for the tracks of deer,
arrowheads,
humming a popular tune,
hair flying,
hands not afraid to touch
anything.

Marc Swan

published in Sheila-na-gig, runner up
1993 contest

Womyn

I have been third claaa
all my life and tomorrow
My rights are slower than yours
I cannot say no
 once dinner os bought
 or after a kiss goodnight
 or if my clothing turns him on
 or I'm in a bar
 on a dark street
 at a hotel
 broken down on a freeway
 home in bed sleeping

alone

It's debatable that my body is my own
Forced to bear a future you walk out on
I'm the slut the whore the cunt
for doing what you did too
My employment skills
are always minimum wage
or at least below yours
no matter my qualifications
and I can fill a quota
But I don't burn cities
I don't rob my neighbor
I don't attack any one of you I see
and justify it with my/her/their past
I carry this weight of prejudice
like a fetus I preferred aborted
an gave birth to better ideas
and dreams to spread world-wide
and speak in a much gentler voice
Relax, you have nothing to fear

Cheryl Townsend

sunrise/fishermen on the pier

M. Kettner

Finest Feeling

Drench me
in the finest furs
surround me
in the rarest silks of the Orient.
Rest me in the clouds.
I don't care.
I still contend
that the finest feeling
is laying
with my head
on your shoulder

Alexandria Rand

Like Daggers

I can't think of anything else.
like daggers
speeding
slicing the air
the thoughts race through my mind.
I can't help but think
of his stunning eyes
his sensitive touch
my weaklessness.
How he's torn my life in two.

Alexandria Rand

Pocket Knife

I saw you there
dancing
throwing her on the floor
like another one of your toys.
I had to pull out my army knife
and slit your face;
I had to watch the
blood stream from your open wounds
at the same speed as the apologies
that parted from your lips.
It was almost hard
to keep up with your show,
but I must admit
that it was good entertainment.

You know,
I still couldn't help but notice
that your pocket knife
was bigger than the one I bought
for myself.
An extra blade or two,
a better pair of tweezers.
And you were so proud
of your little gadgets,
and you were so sure
that it was a better pocket knife.
But I can't help but think
that not only does mine
do the job,
but it does the job well,
and because you never use yours
it's all just a waste.

Gabriel Athens

Sobering Up

I must admit
that there's a definite proportion
with how good you look
and how much alcohol I've consumed
yes you are important to me
too important
and I think that scares me
for I don't care what you say
but the only person
I can lean on
is myself
and I don't want to frighten you
with my coldness
but I've been hurt
too many times before
and I'm sure as Hell
gonna try to stop it
from happening again
I've had to realize
that you can't be my crutch
yes
I do care about you
too much
it is unhealthy
for when we go our separate ways
and I know we will
it will kill me

I know that you love me
and I know that you want to protect me
but I need to know
if there are other people
who care for me as well
I am not an animal
in a cage
and I have a life to lead
I know I'm being cold
but it's what I have to do
call it a defense mechanism
call it sobering up

Gabriel Athens

Barber Shop

Couldn't put it off any longer:
son's haircut. Sure, he wants to
grow a braid down his back or
shave his own Mohawk — but who's

in charge. Mom saw all kinds of
love at the barber shop: bonding
among barbers; chat or peaceful
silence between barber and
customer having his head soothed;

on covers of pornographic magazines;
come-hither, pouting photos of
young men with sample haircuts...
love among customers of all ages in
their snipped hair mixing together
on the floor — son's blond,
thirty-year-old's red and two
old men's gray (bald trim \$12.00).

For them: hair spray with a
heartening label...bold hunter on
horseback leaping fence. Barber
love: in those big chairs built to
look like thrones, do they cut
each other's hair after hours —
gently, quietly dye it — Frankie's
to blackest of black.

Mary Winters

Morning

Suddenly after breakfast one morning
you yell to yourself with a start:
gosh — I haven't worn my purple tights

yet this winter — thank God it's not
too late. Just then son enters the
room to show off his recent clay

sculpture of a "mire"...he shows how
he can store paper clips in the pit
made by his collarbone when he raises

his arm. Husband brings out a jar of
lanolin and beeswax; remarks on the
pleasure of treating old leather books
with the innocent-smelling stuff.

Only thing is, he can't bear to wait
overnight for the balm to sink in, so
he rubs it off right away. Later,

co-worker compliments purple tights
and admires your "perfect legs"; asks
why you don't go out and flaunt them
at a restaurant every night —stick them

out bare from under a table. You say your
legs just haven't changed your life all
that much, but long thick eyelashes
probably would. Almost certainly would.

Mary Winters

Nature Shows

The way of all flesh: to glory in the subtle and exact placement of different kinds of hair on a young son's body:

plumey head hair, eyebrows minutely mimicing the curve of Dad's, film star eyelashes, cheek down the fuzz of an exquisitely ripening peach, sparser hairs hiding nothing, back of a beautiful hand; on hardy calves, golden little boy hairs set to grow dark and wiry.

To relish nature programs: monkeys' dominance and submission, leopards' gene for killing fast, buzzards' lust for gore, meat that's eaten raw, coupling without rules.

The way of all flesh: to mourn and moan a stricken friend — young lawyer facing cancer — and know you grieve the you in her; see the chance for likewise striking; seek a difference to exempt you; stop the thought you will not touch her.

Mary Winters

Lucy's Beauty Routines

High school friend a real beauty — all the fathers said so. Every Wednesday and Saturday morning a shampoo; hair curlers — coated metal springs around hard-bristled brushes, plastic spears levering them into place against her scalp; then an hour under heat-blasting, forehead-reddening, pink-flowered bonnet attached to lively hose and loose-screwed, dinging hair dryer — she called it her “quiet time”.

Lucy's boyfriend died on a dare. Pal bet high school football star he couldn't eat five bowls of local chili, then run around the track without getting sick — he vomited, suffocated. You remember Lucy back under the dryer the day of the funeral, whimpering while she tested her set:

pulled out one long skein of auburn hair; it bounced and shone — a perfect C-shaped curl.

Mary Winters

with you (2/18/94)

It's Friday again

the birds are singing this morning
the sun is out
it's warmer than usual

maybe it's always like this
maybe it's today

it always seems darker
when you're further away

Janet Kuypers

Fish

It's a pretty miraculous thing, I suppose, making the transition from being a fish to being a human being. The first thing I should do is go about explaining how I made the transition, the second thing, attempting to explain why. It has been so long since I made the decision to change and since I have actually assumed the role of a human that it may be hard to explain.

Before my role in human civilization, I was a beta — otherwise known as a Japanese fighting fish. Although we generally have a beautiful purple-blue hue, most people familiar with different species of fish thought of us as more expensive goldfish. I was kept in a round bowl, about eight inches wide at it's longest point (in human terms, that would be living in quarters about 25 feet at the widest point). It may seem large enough to live, but keep in mind that as humans, you not only have the choice of a larger home, but you are also able to leave your living quarters at any point in time. I did not have that luxury. In fact, what I had was a very small glass apartment, not well kept by my owners (and I at that point was unable to care for it myself). I had a view of the outside world, but it was a distorted view. And I thought I could never experience that world first-hand.

Previous to living anywhere else, before I was purchased, I resided in a very small bowl - no longer than three inches at the widest point. Living in what humans would consider an eight foot square, I had difficulty moving. I even had a hard time breathing. Needless to say from then on I felt I needed more space, I needed to be on my own. No matter what, that was what I needed.

I lived in the said bowl alone. There was one plastic tree in the center of my quarters — some algae grew on it, but that was all I had for plant life in my space. The bottom of my quarters was filled with small rocks and clear marbles. It was uneventful.

Once they put another beta in my quarters with me — wait, I must correct myself. I thought the put another beta there with me. I must explain, but please do not laugh: I only came to learn at a later point, a point after I was a human, that my owner had actually placed my quarters next to a mirror. I thought another fish was there with me, following my every motion, getting angry when I got angry, never leaving me alone, always taking the same moves as I did. I raced back and forth across my quarters, always staring at the "other" fish, always prepared to fight it. But I never did.

Once I was kept in an aquarium for a short period of time. It was a ten-gallon tank, and I was placed in there with other fish of varying species, mostly smaller. I was the only beta there. There were different colored rocks, and there were more plastic plants. And one of the outside walls was colored a bright shade of blue - I later

came to discover that it was paper behind the glass wall. Beyond the other fish, there was no substantial difference in my quarters.

But my interactions with the other fish is what made the time there more interesting. I wanted to be alone most of the time — that is the way I felt the most comfortable. I felt the other fish didn't look like me, and I often felt that they were specifically out to hamper me from any happiness. You have to understand that we are by nature very predatorial — we want our space, we want dominance over others, we want others to fear us. It is survival of the fittest when it comes to our lives. Eat or be eaten.

I stayed to myself most of the time in the aquarium; I occasionally made shows of strength to gain respect from the other fish. It made getting food from the top of the tank easier when no one tempted to fight me for the food. It was lonely, I suppose, but I survived — and I did so with better luck than most of the others there.

Then one day it appeared. First closed off to the rest of us by some sort of plastic for a while, then eventually the plastic walls were taken away and it was there. Another beta was suddenly in my space. My space. This was my home, I had proven myself there. I was the only fish of my kind there, and now there was this other fish I would have to prove myself to. Eat or be eaten. I had to make sure — and make sure right away — that this other fish would never be a problem for me.

But the thing was, I knew that the other fish had no right to be there. I didn't know how they got there, what those plastic walls were, or why they were there. But I had to stop them. This fish was suddenly my worst enemy.

It didn't take long before we fought. It was a difficult battle, all of the other fish got out of the way, and we darted from one end of the aquarium to the other. It wasn't long until I was given the opportunity to strike. I killed the other beta, its blood flowing into my air. Everyone there was breathing the blood of my victory.

Almost immediately I was removed from the aquarium and placed in my other dwelling — the bowl. From then on I knew there had to be a way to get out of those quarters, no matter what I had to do.

I looked around at the owner; I saw them walking around the tank. I knew that they did not breathe water, and this confused me, but I learned that the first thing I had to do was learn to breathe what they did.

It didn't take much time before I was constantly trying to lift my head up out of the bowl for as long as I could. I would manage to stay there usually because I was holding my breath. But then, one time, I went up to the top in the morning, they way I usually did, and without even thinking about it, I just started to breathe. I was able to keep my full head up out of the water for as long as I wanted and listen to what was going on outside my living quarters.

Everything sounded so different. There were so many sharp noises. They hurt me to listen to them. Looking back, I now understand that the water in my tank muffled any outside noises. But beyond that, no one in my living quarters made noise — no

one bumped into things, no one screamed or made noises. But at the time, all these noises were extremely loud.

I then knew I had to keep my head above water as much as possible and try to make sense of the sounds I continually heard. I came to discover what humans refer to as language only through listening to the repeated use of these loud sounds.

When I learned I had to breathe, I did. When I understood that I had to figure out their language, I did. It took so long, but I began to understand what they said. Then I had to learn to speak. I tried to practice under the water, in my dwelling, but it was so hard to hear in my quarters that I never knew if I was doing it correctly. Furthermore, I had become so accustomed to breathing air instead of water that I began to have difficulty breathing in my old home. This filled me with an intense fear. If I continue on with this experiment, I thought, will my own home become uninhabitable to me? Will I die here because I learned too much?

I decided that I had no choice and that I had to ask my owner for help. I had to hope that my ability to produce sounds — and the correct ones, at that - would be enough to let them know that I am in trouble. Furthermore, I had to hope that my owner would actually want to help me. Maybe they wouldn't want me invading their space. Eat or be eaten.

But I had to take the chance. One morning, before I received my daily food, I pulled the upper half of my body from the tank. My owner wasn't coming yet, so I went back down and jumped up again. Still nothing. I kept jumping, until I jumped out of the tank completely. I landed on the table, fell to the floor, coughing. I screamed.

The next thing I remember (and you have to forgive me, because my memory is weak here, and this was seven years ago) is being in a hospital. I didn't know what it was then, of course, and it frightened me. Doctors kept me in place and began to study me. They sent me to schools. And to this day I am still learning.

I have discovered one thing about humans during my life as one. With all the new space I have available to me, with all of the other opportunities I have, I see that people still fight each other for their space. They kill. They steal. They do not breathe in the blood, but it is all around them. And I still find myself doing it as well, fighting others to stay alive.

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