

MEAT FOR TEA



VOL 18 ISSUE 4
THE VALLEY REVIEW

CUP

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

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Staff: Editor-in-Chief: Elizabeth MacDuffie
Layout: Mark Alan Miller
Impresario: Elizabeth MacDuffie
Intern: Sunil Kumar

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Contributors: Doug Anderson, Julie Benesh, Chris Bodily, Luke Brannon, Shirley J. Brewer, Brian Bruso, Jacob Chapman, David Clémenceau, Paul Edward Costa, Mk Smith Despres, John Dorsey, Christine Gay Dutton, S.T. Gately, Daniel Hales, Richard Wayne Horton, Leo Hwang, Indë, Matt Jasper, Mary Jennings, Taya Sanderson Kessler, Tom Kovar, Linda Kraus, Kimberly Kuchar, Julia Ludewig, Dana Henry Martin, Maxim Martin, Matthew J. McKee, Niki McQueen, Reid Messerschmidt, David P. Miller, Darlene O'Dell, David Ram, Charles Rammelkamp, Kevin Ridgeway, Thomas Rowland, Connolly Ryan, Andrew Shelffo, David R. Solheim, D.A. Stern, Edward Michael Supranowicz, Peter Tacy, Claudia Tong, Constance Walter, Michael Washburn, Gerald Yelle, Jane Yolen, Frank Zahn

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Guest Salutation: Safe Microcosms Needed

I have been in one total wreck where my hands rose into the breaking windshield glass, and I have been in one soft puff of a wreck where I wondered what had happened but was able to get some help putting it all back together and no one was really hurt. What kind of a wreck we are in after November's election is partially known and partially unknowable until details emerge. There's a quiet after an accident when the shock that has given some safe remove is itself removed and the world starts filling in. As the aftermath fades we are beginning to apprehend the enormity of a debauched Nero plucking at the breaking lyre strings of democracy—an abhorrent cylinder of a man with a sprayed-on tan banqueting at our rising expense.

Not to strain a metaphor or bore you with details of my twenty-year-old self mounting half-ton paper rolls to spin words out of a Goss Community press the size of a gymnasium—but since I'm guessing we're in for a hard crash, here's what I lived through in a small one:

4 The great great grandson of Sitting Bull would light me up then caution he thought I'd get sucked into the massive rollers of the paper web someday because I was so clumsy. He had the best weed yet I wasn't needed that shift so was assigned delivery of one burgeoning bread van full of cellophane-wrapped stacks of newspapers carrying reportage of that day. I'd never driven it but soon got used to the slow sway of pallets behind me as I cornered with the chug of engine straining against a tonnage of words thought mere until they roared to protest a child of maybe three having tricycled into the roadway from a blind drive—quite safe as it turns out because even I was surprised that my reaction time left me a foot short of having to deliver his obituary the next week. I was so focused on this accomplishment, it took a few moments to sail back into my body and notice my face was pressed into the wide left pane of the windshield and it was hard to move. The pallets had offered all papers to inform me with news that I had wrecked—not an accident, really. Just that before this, I'd admired compression in language not imagining language could compress me. I thought of that truck today— that the guys who rushed out when I radioed in were like my friends after this election again unpinning me from entombment in news that makes a world close in—leaves an impression where our bodies can be filled again and again with what is—yet also is not really us.

Our place in the chorus is to sing sweetly one another's names, walk as sounds and lights of habitation fade into what matters more: a world of refuge we can shelter in until well enough to return to the fray of pages and screens overlaid with all we do and say to weave into this larger eye that can guide our steps more wisely.

Returning from shock, I almost want to carry away some of it in my pockets to pull out later as a cup of tea, as a pleasant remove and ritual of togetherness. Shock is an extreme form of rest. Anyone who has a great task knows or will soon learn rest's value. It rides along as a half-empty yoke bearing weight equal to what the visible ox of us can stand.

I will watch my preteen trans daughter at play with her half-Sudanese half-sister and their mix of neuro-divergent siblings. I will think of nothing but the guided tour of the world I want to give them where we have little helmets to cradle their brains hurtling across quarter-pipes and pump tracks, a warm house with good food, drawings, and books to read. It's all so cozy that—if pressed—I would fight to protect it. I practice tolerance within my family and as this family resonates with a greater world and its issues outside. Yet the paradox of tolerance is that if we tolerate intolerance it may rise to sweep tolerance away. In some small and large ways, this can sway us toward engagement as we are able to rest well and gather wisdom from this huge eye we are peacefully building knowing that vision and its expression through art in rehearsal for life is the ultimate power.

Matt Jasper

what flees in the fall

Jane Yolen

What flees in the Fall--
Geese in their loud orations,
vultures in their silent circles,
deer by the hundreds,
into the depths of forest,
and bears into their quiet dens.

They will all return in the spring,
but in my fancy,
I see their footsteps,
In their wing beats,
hear them calling me
from the far south:
“We will return, but will you? Will you?”

I am already 85.
It is a good question
with no honest answer.



october morning at 87

Peter Tacy

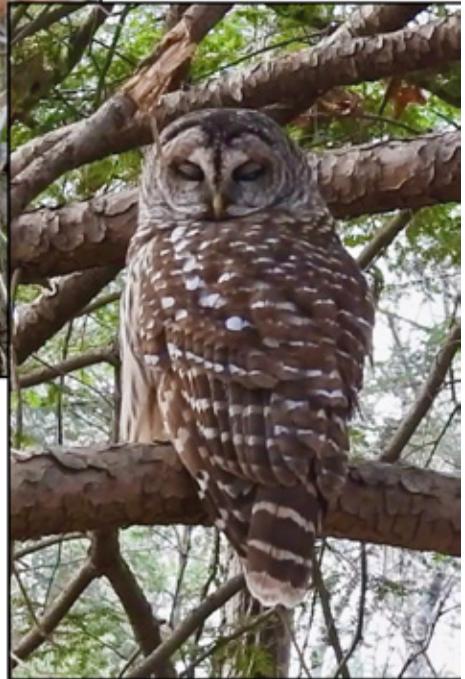
To suit the long-stored winter door
I've taken out this October day,
the sky is a refrigerant blue;
leaves are vivid, though not to stay.
First frost sparkles underfoot
as I fetch the daily paper, to learn
what lesser matters trouble those
whose days don't so gravely turn
as mine. I pull the house's heat
around me, then snugly settle in
to contemplate winter's sure arrival.
Just so, my daily metaphors begin:
welcoming autumn as a familiar friend
who decorates my days before the end.



Miriam Sirota REALTOR®

917.701.8672

Miriam.Sirota@ravelis.com | MiriamSirota.ravelis.com
200 Triangle Street | Amherst | MA 01002



sag jenkins pt.1

Reid Messerschmidt

I. Sag Jenkins Breathes In the Thick Stink of 200 Shits.

In 1972, Richard Nixon went to China and Neil Diamond recorded Hot August Night.

Incredible.

We landed on the moon for the final time, to diminished applause.

Impressive, nonetheless.

ABBA formed.

The Black Hills flooded, “The Godfather” was in theaters, and the Munich Olympics were interrupted by terrorists.

Watergate. Bloody Sunday.

Momentous occasions, all.

Ezra Pound died.

Carl Stalling died.

Sag Jenkins didn’t know about any of it. He sat, bottoms on, in an overheated fiberglass port-a-potty, soaked in sweat. He breathed the thick stink of 200 shits and took hard pulls from an old glass liter vodka bottle filled with new cheap whiskey, now three-fourths gone.

In twenty minutes, Sag Jenkins was supposed to jump nineteen cars on his motorbike, and he wouldn’t make it. In twenty minutes, 227 attendees of the Argus County Speedway in Golgotha, South Dakota would watch Sag Jenkins die.

For now he felt all right. Depressed but drunk, and that was as all right as he got these days.

Sag was on the final leg of a spectacular descent, a bender devoid of the delirious, stupid revelry of the many that came before it. A lonely bender, and a sad one.

Sadness didn’t suit Sag any more than his leathers did.

The leathers were a particularly heinous variation on the red, white, and blue Evel Knievel knock-offs that were a prerequisite for daredevilry in the seventies. Each had its own representational geometry, but the colors didn’t vary much. Sag’s had thin red and blue vertical stripes that ran from his red patent boots up to the increasingly doughy flesh of his neck, pinched and spilling over his collar. Even daredevils are forced to melt into oblivion, if they don’t kill themselves first. He also had a big white star on his back.

The ill-suited leathers were unzipped and pulled down to the waist so his mushroomed paunch could expand to its full size. It protruded from beneath his still thinnish, sunken, hair-splotched chest like a loaf of uncooked bread on a warped, knife-scarred cutting board. The zipper dug into his flesh, but he was a sniff of what was in the bottle away from a blackout, and the sharp pain wasn't sharp enough to rekindle his dimmed, half-drowned nervous system.

The blackout sat just behind his eyes and narrowed his vision. So long as he didn't open his mouth, his thoughts stayed on the withered abstraction of his ego. If it opened, his mind would mute and unhinged instinct would push out a jumble of slurred garbage. What was left of his ego would give way to allow his hideous id to enter the world like rancid water from a tragic spit take.

He was thinking, "I'm gonna throw up again."

Had he the capacity, he may have used the spasms of clarity that followed to reflect on the devastating, self-inflicted shots his ego had taken of late after a prolonged period of unreflected upon inflation, which we'll get to.

Now we need to talk about his face.

It was a mess.

2. The Finest Jinkins.

Sag was born Sagory Troyal Jinkins III on the 10th of March, 1938 in the god-and-everyone-else-forsaken town of Unberg, North Carolina, behind a perilous shack, inside of a filthy, makeshift outhouse.

The circle of life, as they say.

His father, Sagory Troyal Jinkins II, was not present for the birth. He was rarely ever really present for anything but the eight seconds after orgasm. At the time of Sag's inglorious nativity, he was, presumably, drunk somewhere.

His young mother, Artis Barbara-Anne Jinkins, was present, obviously, but a conspicuously unwilling participant. Sag was too, but she didn't consider that. She smoked cigarettes and cried in the outhouse for twenty minutes when it was over.

The Jinkins name arced back to an overcrowded exile ship the Brits used to relocate their undesirables to the New World. They'd been proving the wisdom of the sentence ever since. They were, almost to a man, drunks, rascals, creeps, freaks, deviants, liars, losers, fuck ups, shits for brains, trash, bastards, sons of a bitch, mouth breathers, and beslubbing, dankish, flap-mouthed rogues.

There were some isolated exceptions, each with caveats.

Sag's great-great grandfather, Troyal Hostetler Jinkins, was a drunk and a violent racist and misogynist, but he was also a fireman. Fire fighting in 1833 was an analogue occupation with an

87% mortality rate, and he'd gone a long way towards redeeming some of his shortcomings by saving folks from mortally unfair circumstances. There were burn scars over most of his body and exactly one half of his face to prove it.

Hostetler "Hoss" Sagory Jinkins, Sag's great uncle, shot Sag's father in the back when Sag was 10 and Hoss was a deeply worn seventy-two. It was in retribution for the murder of Hoss Sagory Jinkins III, Sagory II's cousin. He'd beaten him to death over a game of horseshoes with, of course, a horse shoe. While far from a good deed, it was a just one. Everyone who knew Sag's Father agreed that the hard push to his eternal damnation was a cause for celebration.

Sag didn't celebrate. He felt relief, but guilty for that.

By fourteen, Sag was what passed for handsome in Unberg. He was symmetrical and lean with clear skin and good teeth. He had English features, but cockney and warped by a few hundred years of questionable breeding, but warped in such a way that folks called it character.

By seventeen, Sag was, despite his brutal and ongoing upbringing, poised to be the finest Jinkins the bloodline had ever produced. He was smart, polite, and kind. He never touched booze, never snuck around or lied, and didn't let the violence in his blood poison his heart.

The Jinkins' didn't know what to do with him.

His mother once passed out from huffing Floor Brite brand floor polish. Even the presence of floor polish in the house was suspect, as the wood floors in the shack were unwaveringly dirty and splintered. They had never been polished, ever. Never would be. When she purchased it, Doc Arbuckle at Arbuckle's Five and Dime knew as much and told her so.

She woke up with an evil headache, but lay in her bed with the covers pulled up to her chin and not on the ground behind the house where she'd landed. The shack was clean to the extent that a shack can be cleaned. Instead of thanking her cautiously optimistic son set quietly on the front steps, she yelled at him to get more floor polish.

The year before Sag left home, he began his Eagle Scout Project.

He had worked himself up from a diminutive Webelos to the brink of the honor through untemperable, unsupported force of will. When he told other Jinkins' that he intended to undertake the project as one of the required steps to reach the upper echelons of the Scouts, they were surprised to learn that he was a scout at all, though he wore his badge-laden uniform nearly every day.

His project was to be the construction of a gazebo in honor of fallen soldiers, none of whom were Jinkins', a family of draft-dodgers all the way back to the early days of the Indian Wars. Jinkins' had killed or been killed in combat countless times, but none of them did it in an official capacity.

Sag's gazebo was inspired by a film he saw two towns over, in Overton, at a beat up movie house called The Schwartz. He'd found a dime outside of Ardo's Barbershop and slipped it in his pocket after some head flitting and a thorough check against the scout code and his own

self-erected system of morality. He walked twelve miles to the theater, though he didn't know what was playing.

The movie turned out to be a six-year-old print with one reel missing of Laurel and Hardy's terrible war picture, Iwo Jima Screama, but it was enough to inspire a fiery love of country in a deeply sensitive kid who needed a totem to hang his sweat-salted hat on.

He decided his project would honor the troops.

The gazebo was inspired by a conversation between a pair of old women he'd passed on the sidewalk after the movie. He didn't get the context, just heard them say it: GAZEBO.

He thought it was the most beautiful word he'd ever heard.

GAZEBO.

He didn't know what it meant, but Overton was hardly bigger than a city park, so its modest library was fifteen feet from where he silently mouthed the word:

GAZEBO.

He went in, said hello to the librarian, Mrs. Chamber, and walked straight to the elegant, familiar Encyclopedia Britannica with a corner to itself. It wasn't the first time he'd consulted it. His family didn't know much and were pretty tight lipped about the little they did know. There wasn't a book besides the Bible anywhere in Unberg, and even those mostly just collected dust. He grabbed the G volume, took a deep whiff of its musky aroma, and flipped to the correct page.

GAZEBO: A roofed structure that offers an open view of the surrounding area, typically used for relaxation or entertainment.

Relaxation and entertainment were two of the many things Unberg lacked. There was idleness, sure, but idleness taxes. Relaxation refreshes. And the horsefeathers that folks got up to were far too cruel to be considered entertainment.

Next to the definition was a picture, a color photograph. Sag thought it was as enchanting as the word. An open air palace, an elegant comingling of the works of man and Mother Nature. A cathedral with walls painted by God.

He would build a GAZEBO, he decided.

And he did.

He checked out books on carpentry, obtained the building permit, collected scrap wood, borrowed tools, and performed odd jobs for low pay to raise the money for the necessary materials. He worked tirelessly, single minded and alone for five months. He documented every step for the presentation to his Scout Master, Erwin Everest Dox.

Sag measured and cut, beveled, sanded, and stained. The work was slow. He learned on the job. His limited funds meant he could only work when money was at hand, so he spent all of his time earning more when it wasn't

The Gazebo took shape, became beautiful. Sag was pleased with his work. More pleased than he'd ever been with anything.

He had a plaque engraved, at no small cost, for the Gazebo's base. It read "Veterans Memorial Gazebo - Sag Jinkins Salutes You!"

The final act.

Completion.

When he arrived at the all-but-finished gazebo, he found his uncle. He may have been a second cousin. Keeping track was difficult and unsatisfying.

Hickory Sagory Jinkins, an especially wild and dim-witted member of the clan, in his soiled britches, soaked in sweat, somehow both feral and leisurely, swung an axe at the splintered remnants of the gazebo's base. The rest had been tossed in a pile behind him.

Sag nearly fainted.

There was panic, like drowning, then rage, like a swarm of bees. Then he was charging his cousin/uncle with the heavy bronze plaque held over his head, screaming, high and clear at first, then lower, becoming hoarse and manly. His brown eyes turned dark and sharp.

Hickory looked up with a dumb, gappy, mean, smile. He shouted, "Ran out of firewood, Saaaaagory!"

He meant to juke the boy, send him to the ground, but froze as Sag got closer. He saw his eyes, saw the boyishness drain from Sag's face above the Scout's kerchief, and lost his smile. He said, "C'mon, man, just hold on . . ." and then Sag was on him.

The first blow from the plaque drew blood. The second took consciousness. The third and fourth and fifth knocked out Hickory's remaining, precarious teeth, crushed his already crooked hog's nose, and caved in his forehead. The sixth killed him. The blows after that just made a mess.

When he was too tired to swing the plaque any longer (Sag Jinkins Salutes You!), Sag dropped it where he stood and walked home slowly, his scout uniform torn and soaked through with blood and sweat.

His mother was passed out, so he washed up and changed without a word, hitched a ride to the nearest enlistment office, and joined the military .





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