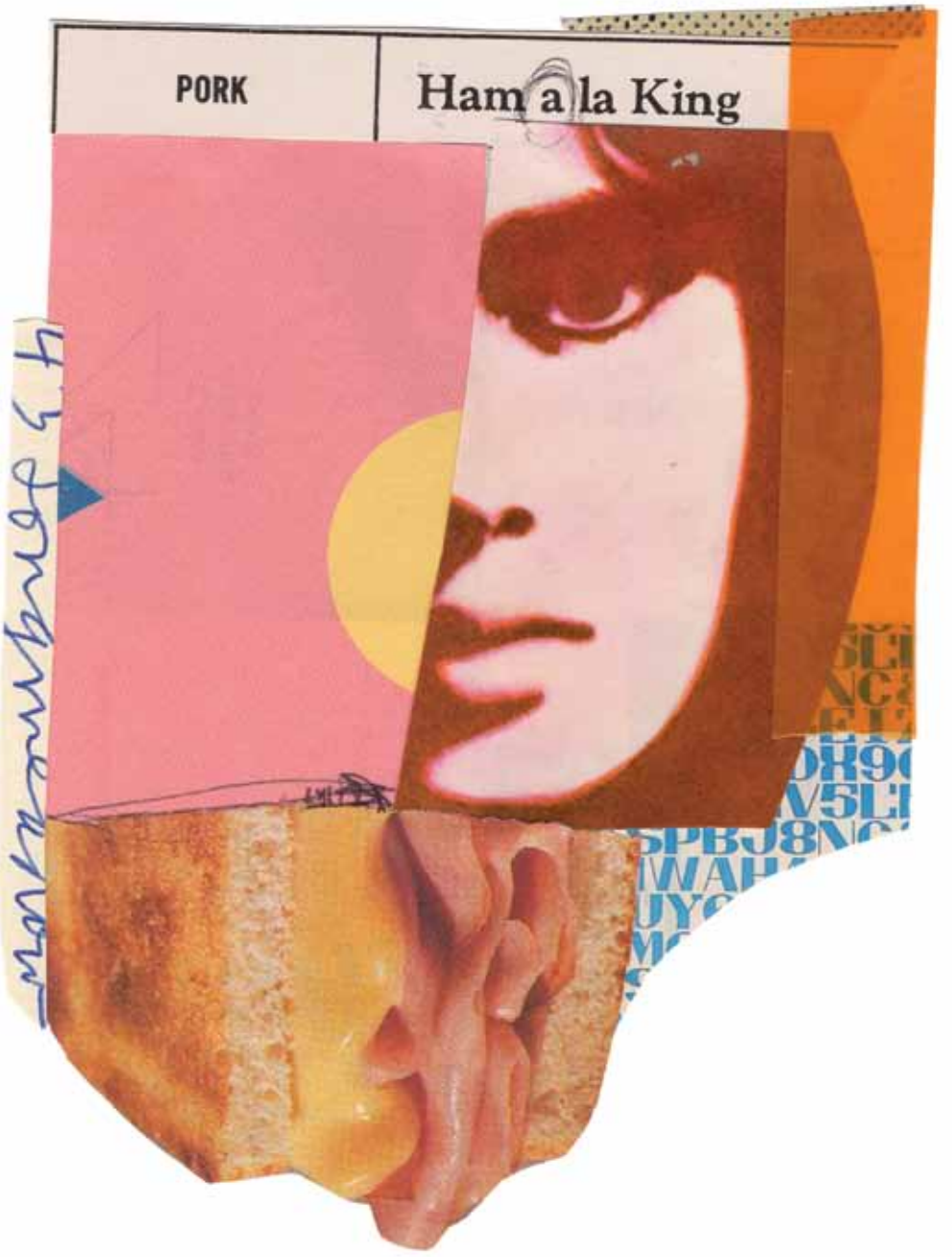
MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 9 ISSUE 1
THE VALLEY REVIEW

KUMMERSPECK



Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

Staff:
Editor-in-Chief: Elizabeth MacDuffie
Layout: Mark Alan Miller
Interns: Joseph Boisvere, Kimaya Diggs
Publicity and Ad assistants: Gina Gaetz, Kate Bodendorf
Impresario: Elizabeth MacDuffie

Cover Art:
FRONT: "Kummerspeck" by Michael Sjostedt
BACK: "Three Mice" by T-Marie Nolan

Printing:
Paradise Copies, Northampton, MA
Typeface: Gill Sans, Libel Suit (Ray Larabie)

Contributors:
Joseph Boisvere, Bill Buege, Nancy Burke, Kim Carlino, Margaret Chiarelli, Ed Coletti, Jonathan Doughty, Arika Eizenberry, Falconhead, Joseph Guadiana, Daniel Hales, William Hoffacker, Erica Hood, Jennifer Juneau, Janne Karlsson, Linda Kraus, Yaki Margulies, Roger Clark Miller, Deborah Murray, T-Marie Nolan, Edward Palumbo, Charles Rammelkamp, John Reinhart, Lavinia Roberts, Karen Robiscoe, Ethan Forrest Ross, Thomas Rowland, Michael Sjostedt, Susanna Solomon, Kate Soules, Allison Thorpe, Jim Whitten, Carol Wies, John Yamrus.

Special thanks:
Mark Alan Miller and Justin Pizzoferrato and Sonelab, Amherst Books, Broadside Books, Booklink, White Square Fine Books, Big Red Frame, The Odyssey Bookshop, Platterpus Records, FOE Gallery, Nash Gallery, Nina's Nook, Topatoco, Sean Farley/Umass FAC, Kim Carlino, Roger Clark Miller, Margart Chiarelli, Doris Madsen and the ECC, ECA+, Trinary System, Bunny's a Swine, Abandoned Building Brewery and all of our sponsors.

To submit to Meat For Tea, please go to: meatforteathevalleyreview.submittable.com/submit.
Please send all other editorial correspondences to meatfortea@gmail.com.

Vol. 9 Issue 1, March 2015, first printing. ISSN 2372-0999 (print) ISSN 2372-1200 (online)

For more information or to purchase current and back issues, PDFs and subscriptions, please visit www.meatfortea.com.

salutations from the editor

Do you keep a gratitude journal? I have done so for the past fifteen years and it's transformed my state of mind. Our brains are plastic and can change shape depending upon how we focus our attention. Like scientist Donald Hebb says, "Neurons that fire together, wire together." By cultivating a regular attitude of gratitude, one engages in "self-directed neuroplasticity" (Hanson). "[We] can use the mind to change the brain to change the mind for the better" (Hanson). Just forming the daily habit of writing down five things for which I am grateful has made me a happier person, and probably a nicer one too.

Today my five are:
1) I'm grateful Meat for Tea is turning 9 years old.
2) I'm grateful Meat for Tea was selected as a winner in its category for the 58th Annual New England Book Show.
3) I'm grateful Doris Weiner Madsen asked me to coordinate Poems and Pints, to celebrate the end of Bookfest Easthampton.
4) I'm grateful to have been asked to sit on the Literary Subcommitte of ECA+.
5) I'm grateful to all the artists, writers, and musicians who keep making Meat for Tea and the Cirques great.

I'm super excited for the Cirque this Saturday, which promises to be a doozy., and I'm looking forward to Easthampton Bookfest, this April 11th.
Love,
Elizabeth MacDuffie

the emergency room

Falconhead

Full of fat and plump, cherub faces nestled at their
mother's breasts. A sprained ankle, a swollen lip,

a malignant heart. An old woman brought in from
Lost and Found. The nurses, they have no choice but

to wrap her up in gauze and pills, and stuff her into
the butt of their jokes. And the doctors, all bleary-

eyed and caffeine-breathed, they've got the smell
of death on their hands. Wring them and scrub them

as best they can, but it'll take another kind of doctor
to cure what they've caught—god complex they call it

in here. Then there is you, all lit up like a florescent
light. *What have they got you on?* I say. But you're

all smiles by now — the Jello on your plate, the drip in
your arm, the priest at your heels. It doesn't matter that

you've only flubbed your knee, they see a spot on the x-
ray of your soul. They're taking eternal damnation into

account here. If you've got the right insurance, of course.
If you've got the right cachet, the disease *en vogue.* But

I'm all nerves under this cold reserve. *Oh, no,* I say to
Dr. Blood-On-His-Hands, *it is I who's the patient here.*

therapist *or* curse of Iyssa, goddess of heads

Falconhead

If these eyes had mouths they would
tell how they cannot grow wings to

sleep. How they turn against their
will, feast on the scene within. The

puppet-strings all in knots, the God
under the lip of thoughts, Lyssa laugh-

ing at her triumph. And when I wake
I come to you (your human zoo) you—

all buttons and proprieties—you twirl
your moustache at its ends, arch a

brow, massage your shins. But how
you like to watch me die. Is it the way

I sit? I writhe? The way I remove this
head? Spin it in my sweaty hands. O

therapist, please don't stare too long,
or I shall have to blind myself. These

eyes without their guise, wayward
follow unseen flies. And please, the-

rapist, don't use that tongue on me, or
I shall have to box my ears. These silly

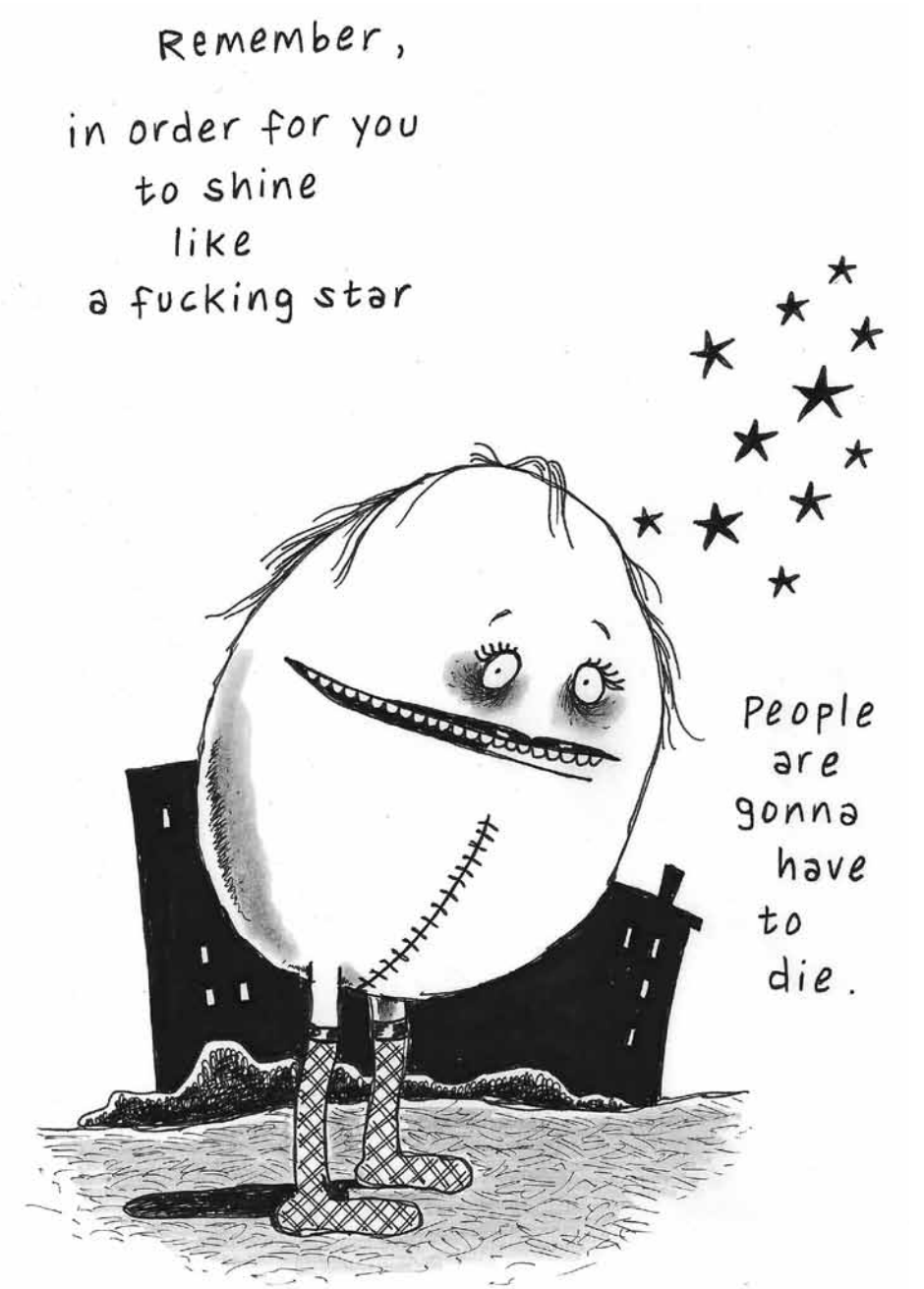
shells drink everything, have no say
in what they hear. O therapist, O the

rapist, please don't touch me there,

or I shall have to end myself. Oh, but you
are my past, don't, you see, Dr. Of-No-

thing? Dr. Of-No-Real-Degree. Look, how
these thoughts make a mess. Spray the

contents on my shirt. Thus, to you I do
come. But the Doctor's clock has rung.



shine like a star
Janne Karlsson

on becoming a statistic

Kate Soules

A few weeks one summer I worked at the local bank as a teller, filling in when too many people were out for vacation. This particular week I was in Williamstown, Vermont, working with Susan, a woman of 45 who had been a bank teller for twenty-six years.

I read silently at my teller station.

"Yes, but it doesn't do any good now. There's no point. Politicians do what they want," said a woman standing idly in the corner. I glanced up from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and down at the last check I cashed. Sometimes that good and honest stench of cow manure caked on a customer's arm and coated on the corner of a check is enough to make me gag. Hours and minutes here amble.

I thought of what Adrienne Rich wrote in "Transcendental Etude." We need to make of our lives a study, revitalize our forgotten history. I'm just unsure if this new history is enough to cover my own cracked and scored past, if I can completely repair the damage. How do you fool the mind into repairing the soul?

Statistics are simple. Numbers that reflect averages. When these numbers are paired with sexual abuse, they don't change. They still reflect averages.

When I became this statistic, I didn't think of the numbers, or even of what was happening. I experienced a dark laundry room, a tent behind an apartment complex. I remember whispers, hushing me as my footie pajamas unzipped.

It's just a statistic.

"Did you hear what Susan's son told her?" Mary asked me while Susan was at lunch. I paused from my book.

"No, what?" Mary took classes at Vermont Technical Center, a student of religion yet follower of none.

"He told her *to her face* that he didn't want to spend twenty-six years as a bank teller. He doesn't want to get stuck here like his mom. She's nervous to let him go anywhere, but what's he going to do here? She's still a bank teller."

A customer walked in wanting $150 out of his savings account.

At the time my mother sold software and my father managed the local hardware store. After we rode the bus home from school, a nanny watched my siblings and I.

This statistic fades in and out, hidden and unimportant. The abuse was meant to change our size—my sister and brother and I had big personalities to match the *Raising Your Spirited Child* book on my parents' bookshelf. Slowly our personalities became smaller, our curiosity shriveled.

With every lie she said we told she burned our taste buds, giving us too much of my father's reserve hot sauce, making us drink water to spread the oils from the peppers to every corner of our mouths. When we begged for milk she hit the backs of our heads.

"I really appreciated your article in the paper," Susan told me as she clocked back in. Mary swept her lunch off the counter and went upstairs to the kitchen.

"Which one?"

"The one about the RTCC films? It was a lovely article. You know, my son does that."

"He does?"

"Yes, he's in the photo."

I took a customer's deposit and counted the cash.

"I took the photo."

"You did? You're so talented."

I handed the customer her receipt. "Have a good day." She raised her eyebrows before she walked out the door.

"I brought your birthday present," she said giddily. We were in Medford, Oregon, students at the same boarding school. I looked around for a gift or a bag or a box, never seeing her gesture towards me.

"Why don't you take that off?" he said, tugging on my sweater twenty minutes later. My camisole underneath showed a body that was still in puberty, thin and bony yet with strangely prominent breasts. I thought I had said something to stop this, but there were still strange graspings and suckings, the twisted bed sheet, and my friend watching with her ferret.

By this time I understood what I was becoming, no matter what was said. My belt was tight around my waist; I kept checking to make sure it was still there. At the end he sat outside on the cement block behind the fence, smoking a cigarette, coming down from his high. I was wrapped in a blanket several feet away, watching this skulking figure in the street lamps and moonlight.

"What can I do for you today sir?"

"I just need to make this deposit."

"Alright, no problem."

"I also need an official check for three thousand dollars."

"That's fine. Where would you like the funds to come from?"

"My checking account."

"Do you have the number? Mary, you'll have to sign this for me. I'm not supposed to sign official checks."

"No problem." Mary whisked over and grabbed the check, squishing it through the typewriter to make it out to the payable party.

I handed him his check and receipts. "I'd like to close this checking account too. All I use is my debit card."

"Sir?"

He had already left the bank, and the next customer from the line shuffled to my station.

After that night spent wrapped in a blanket on a cement block, I felt I had become a chest freezer in summer that someone accidentally unplugged and failed to discover for a few days, food rotting at first slowly, and then more quickly as the heat took hold. My body was festering, oozing, with flies.

I routinely let the water in the shower come to a slow boil before I stepped in. I scratched in a circle around my body, flinching only when I accidentally drew blood. Slashes to my abdomen, slashes curving around my back, slashes drawing down from my thighs towards my knees. With these scratches my body resembled what it actually looked like: meat from this unplugged freezer. Each day for months I would remind myself again.

"You can go to lunch now," Mary told me when she came back down from the kitchen.

"Alright, just let me finish up." A final receipt printed. The customer asked me to shred it before taking a lollipop and shrugging out the door.

I punched out and took my bag upstairs. I pulled my yogurt from the mini-fridge, and opened my crumbling copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Someone mentioned once that revealing your personal statistics is supposed to be healing. "Get it off your chest," she said. The point was to come to the realization that if you told your story, people wouldn't judge or reject you. You would drown in support and love.

"You have to be careful what you tell people. I don't think we were ready for that. Maybe we should take a break," he said as his eyes shifted downwards. His saxophone reflected the dim lights in the university practice room. A reed he was too lazy to pick up earlier slouched by the wall.

Another someone forgot to tell me what happened in the alternative. How to brace for impact when he knows the statistics and unplugs the freezer for a second time, when he calls the flies back to life to feed.

"So we just ignore each other?"

"No. We just won't spend time together," he said timidly

I turned to leave, opened the door a crack, then asked, "Did you ever care about me at all? As a person?"

He closed his eyes and breathed out.

I shut the door trapping him in the stale air.

In an average day my body received around 500 or 800 calories, when the body needs at least 1200 to maintain a stable body weight. One clementine equaled approximately 60 calories. One slice of bread equaled 100 calories. The numbers became my refuge, an unchanging masthead that had neither soul nor body.

The clock said 3:00 p.m., and the customer told me about a shoddy spring job he'd just had on his truck. "I bought them new springs, had all the parts right there, and they charged me over three hundred," he grimaced. "That's not right."

"You're kidding."

"Naw. And when I took it up the road here, to have them put brand new springs in, it cost me four and a quarter, for parts and labor, for everything."

Mary nodded her head in sympathy.

"I just don't know if I should pay him or not. Take my time doing it maybe."

"I don't see the point in paying if they didn't perform the service you were supposed to pay them to do," I said.

"May be."

"Are they the sort who are going to whine about it?"

"They're liable to take you to small claims court saying I wouldn't pay him."

He sighed out and looked at the wall. I sat on the one stool behind our teller stations, watching his face. No one said anything.

"Maybe you're right. I'll just take my time paying him. Well, thank you ladies. Have a good day."

"You too," I said. "I hope everything works out for you."

He opened the door and a blast of hot air whirled in. A lady with her dog entered the first door into the lobby for the ATM. When she was done she came inside to get a biscuit for her terrier.

I sat down at my kitchen table in my empty apartment. The space was too big for my furniture to fill. I looked at my breakfast and coffee, then stood up and shut off the light. I ate in the dark

to keep my bills down. I took a sip of coffee that was already cold. I trusted the heat from the tenants below me to keep my pipes from freezing.

Eventually I stepped through my long hallway back to my bedroom with the olive carpet. I pulled on another sweater and crawled into bed. I didn't have to be in class until 6:00. I would sleep until four, and then begin slowly getting ready for class. I was a music graduate student and should have spent five hours practicing clarinet, but I knew I wouldn't be able to go to campus until it was time for class.

As I pulled my blankets over my head, I listened for the squirrels scratching through my walls. They came in through the abandoned chimneys. I asked why there were so many squirrels here in Huntington, West Virginia, and had been told that it was because there was no one here to hunt them. They knew they were safe within the city limits.

Sometimes I would walk one block down the street to drop off a letter I hadn't written yet. Most days I would just sleep. For one week I took advantage of the stomach flu passing around campus and didn't leave my apartment.

"Do you want to balance up?" Mary asked me. It was a quarter of five.

"Sure." I clicked on my computer to pull up the balance sheet, and started counting my hundreds. Only $800—I'd given out a lot of large today.

I methodically beat the bills from one hand to the other, perhaps the only cathartic thing about being a bank teller. Counting the coin, I pushed the dirty quarters and nickels across my counter. My hands were always black at the end from handling the cash.

I recounted. "I'm off a hundred and nine dollars Mary."

"What?"

"I think it's gone. Remember when we were busy, and I was on the phone and trying to do transactions? I think I lost it."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

"We have to do an audit. Let me get the sheet."

Susan looked at me sadly. For her, losing anything upset her. I looked at the numbers, at the average of my transactions for the day, and realized one hundred dollars was only 3% of my totals.

I put the cover over our money counter and sat back down on the stool. I watched as Mary counted through my drawer and penned the numbers into the audit sheet.