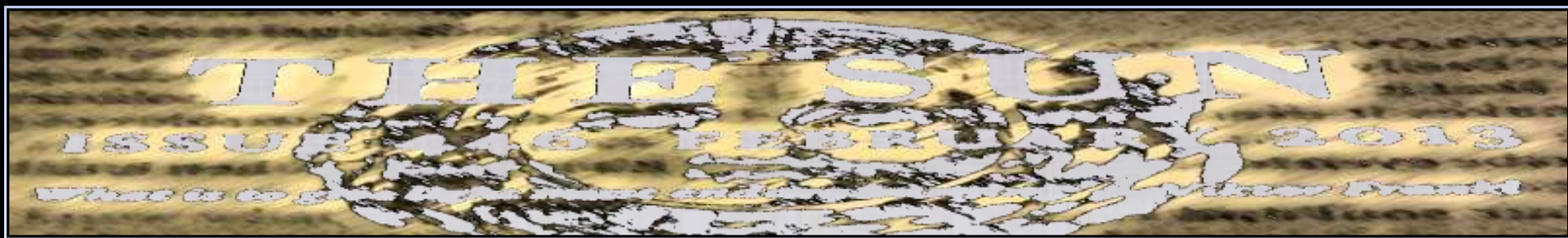


The Sun Magazine



**PERSONAL. POLITICAL. PROVOCATIVE.
AD-FREE.**



The Sun is an independent, ad-free monthly magazine that for nearly forty years has used words and photographs to invoke the splendor and heartache of being human. *The Sun* celebrates life, but not in a way that ignores its complexity. The personal essays, short stories, interviews, poetry, and photographs that appear in its pages explore the challenges we face and the moments when we rise to meet those challenges.

“Your magazine has shown me that I am not alone. You show the beauty, the wonder, and the dirty truth of the human spirit.”

Bridget Willey, *Sun* reader

“*The Sun*, with its superb photographs, is the only magazine that I sit down and read as soon as it arrives. It’s full of people like a Globe Theatre; it’s nourishing like a field of pumpkins; it’s like a grandfather who talks to total strangers.”

Robert Bly, poet



The Sun publishes the work of emerging and established artists striving to be thoughtful and authentic.

Writing from *The Sun* has:

Won the Pushcart Prize

Published in *Best American Short Stories*

Published in Best American Essays

Broadcast on National Public Radio

The Sun has attempted:

To marry the personal and political

To honor the genuine and the spiritual

To see what kind of roommates beauty and truth can be

To show that powerful teaching can be found in the lives of ordinary people



CONTRIBUTORS

BRAD DOYLE's plan in life was to be a professional basketball player for ten years and then the skipper of a small boat in the Pacific for the rest of his days. He has utterly failed to do either and is instead the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland in Oregon. He did finally write a sea novel, *The Plover*, which will be published in March 2012.

CHRIS DOUGHERTY learned to take pictures from his father, a combat photographer in Vietnam. He lives in Seattle, Washington. (beepboopiamaroboi@gmail.com)

RACHEL J. ELLIOTT works at *The Sun* and lives in Carrboro, North Carolina. Last month she made her first tintype in a photography workshop. To capture an image on the thin metal plate, she asked her eleven-year-old daughter, Ava, to pose without moving for twenty-four seconds.

BILL EMORY lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the James River watershed. He has a regular photo column in his local news weekly, *The Hood*. (www.billemore.com).

FASH GALBANY is a photographer, dancer, performance artist, and mask maker, as well as an assistant in her husband's computer-consulting business. She lives in Sedona, Arizona. (www.zomaskit.com)

ANGELO MERENDINO is the last of eleven children and says he was fortunate to grow up in a house full of love. His photographs have been published in *The New York*

04 **SWENSON's** love for photography with the Kodak Pony 135 his mother him when he left for the Korean War. lives in Dolores, a no-stoplight town in southwestern Colorado.

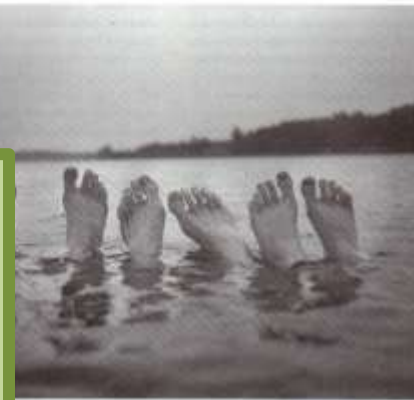
LARK TOWNSEND lives in Brooklyn, New York. (robotiched@yahoo.com)

NITA VEZIRBEANU is originally from Romania and now lives in Athens, Ohio (antavezeirbeanu.wordpress.com)

LOYD WOLF is the author of three books of photographs and the chief photographer for the Columbia Pike Documentary Project. He recently completed a project documenting Jewish social programs in Ukraine and Israel. He lives in Arlington, Virginia. (www.loydwolf.com)

JERRY GAY lives in Everett, Washington, and is the author of *Saving Rauldy*. He took this month's cover photograph in 1997. While driving through Texas, he saw a man sitting on his front porch and stopped. The man said he was originally from Rock, Arkansas, was seventy-eight years old, and had picked cotton for most of his life. (www.theauthorjerry.com)

Miraculously, the magazine he founded in 1974 survives to this day, but in heaven things sometimes turn out that way.



THE SUN
ISSUE 451 JULY 2013

What is its glow light meant to indicate? — Václav Pávek

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MANAGING EDITOR
SENIOR EDITOR
ART DIRECTOR
DIGITAL-MEDIA DES.
MANUSCRIPT EDITOR
ASSISTANT EDITOR
EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE
PROOFREADER

Tim McKim
 Andrew Stein
 Robert Graham
 David Mahaffey
 Colleen Dunfield
 Lisa Saunders
 Erica Berkley
 Rachel L. Elliott
 Seth Minko

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
CIRCULATION MANAGER
OFFICE MANAGER

WITH HELP FROM

Dave Hart, Paula Johns, and Gillian Kendall,
manuscript reading; Lauren Holder Esch,
proofreading; Angela Winter, writing retreats

Content and Design



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Readers Write



...because it is in its growth form, it grows inside me, it grows inside me, it grows inside me. And this is the reason that I am constantly looking to see how I can lighten my own footprint. It's not about judgment or moralism or perfection. It's about integrity.

...the world is not a place where I can be a hero. I can be a hero in my own mind, but I can't be a hero in the world. I can be a hero in my own mind, but I can't be a hero in the world. I can be a hero in my own mind, but I can't be a hero in the world.

...I don't mind sharing this, because I believe that we have to be honest about our humanity. I don't mind sharing this, because I believe that we have to be honest about our humanity. I don't mind sharing this, because I believe that we have to be honest about our humanity.

Within one year, a third of those released from prison are back inside. Within three years, two-thirds have returned to prison. To me that says more about the failure of prisons, parole supervision, and reentry programs than it does about the failure of individuals.

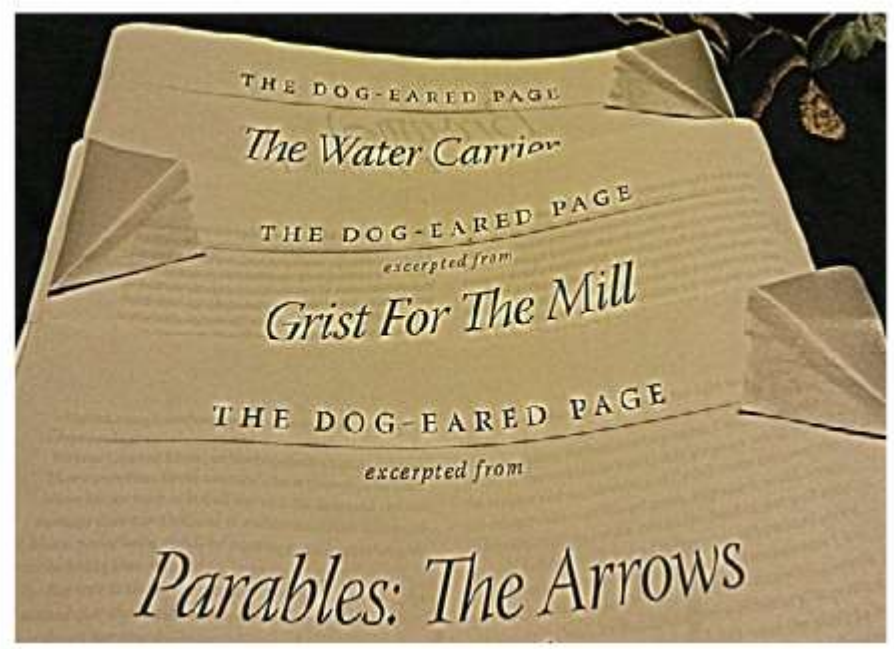
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THE TALMUD SAYS THAT YOU CAN START ON A PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR UNRIGHTEOUS REASONS, BECAUSE ONCE YOU'RE ON THAT PATH, YOU'LL BE EXPOSED TO A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING AND BEING, WHICH CAN BRING YOU TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS.



The Sun Interview

The Dog-Eared Page



Essays, Memoirs, and True Stories



When I went on a six-day meditation last summer, the alpine geography evoked in the Tatra Mountains of Poland: the peaks, the flowers, the silence. Every summer I would spend a couple of days there, just to be alone. I was often bored (photos of my tight, s

Fiction



Sunbeams



Poetry

Low Noon

JIM RALSTON

Long after our last slow day together,
say, a campfire, a walk in the woods,
getting lost and not caring;

a year since the last rain-soaked note
under my waxy blade in the parking lot,
how she'd thought about my offer:

months after we both knew it was over,
since we last kissed or had a talk
long enough to be snarled,

there comes a second kind of silence.
Drizzly and cold, say, at twelve o'clock,
could be today, November tenth.

The phone doesn't ring, the postman
doesn't bring the unexpected letter.
I forget to check the box.

The trees have dropped their leaves.
The moon sun barely tops the trees.
I'm not thinking of her either.

That which God said to the rose, and caused it to laugh in full-blown beauty. He said to my heart, and made it a hundred times more beautiful.

Rumi

We are made for Light. There are moments of perfect happiness, moments when one feels so well, at peace with oneself and with others. Such moments of fullness exist. They are rare, perhaps, but we have all experienced them. Each of us is capable of living such moments. They continue to send signals to us even when we are in despair.

Jacques Gaillet

He has spent his life best who has enjoyed it most. God will take care that we do not enjoy it any more than is good for us.

Samuel Butler

I like nothing more in the world than sitting on my ass doing nothing. And it's not my fault I have this attitude, because I happen to have an amazingly comfortable ass. It may not look like much, but if you could sit on this baby for two minutes, you'd realize that getting off this ass would be a crime against nature.

Lori Chapman

Be in touch with excellence. Don't get lost in your own moods; they wear out too easily.

Theodore Weiss

What's the use of happiness? It can't buy you money.

Henry Youngman

Underlying our glitzy modern consumer culture there is a deep spiritual undernourishment and malaise that manifests all kinds of symptoms: nervous disorders, loneliness, alienation, purposelessness. . . . So blanking out, running away, burying our heads in sand or videotape will take us nowhere in the long run. If we really want to solve our problems — and the world's problems, for they stem from the same roots — we must open up and accept the reality of suffering with full awareness. . . . Then, strange as it may seem, we reap vast rewards. For suffering has its positive side. From it we derive the experience of depth: of the fullness of our humanity.

John Seuling

Where there is veneration, even a dog's tooth emits light.
Tibetan proverb

Readers Write

-  Telling the Truth
-  Neighbors
-  Hiding Places
-  Second Chances
-  Gambling
-  Keepsakes
-  Being Alone
-  Cash
-  Speaking Up
-  Security
-  Never Again

READERS WRITE asks readers to address subjects on which they're the only authorities. Topics are intentionally broad in order to give room for expression. Writing style isn't as important as thoughtfulness and sincerity.

Because of space limitations, we're unable to print all the submissions we receive. We edit pieces, often quite heavily, but contributors have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication. (If you don't want to be contacted regarding the editing of your work, please let us know.)

We publish only nonfiction in Readers Write. Feel free to submit your writing under "Name Withheld" if it allows you to be more honest, but be sure to include your mailing address so we can give you a complimentary one-year subscription if we use your work, as a way of saying thanks. Occasionally we will choose not to publish an author's name or will use only a first name and last initial. While we don't question the truthfulness of the writing, we must be sensitive to considerations of libel or invasion of privacy. If you've already changed the names of the people involved, please say so.

Send your typed, double-spaced submissions to Readers Write, The Sun, 107 North Roberson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516. Please include your e-mail address and phone number. If you cannot type, please print clearly. We're sorry, but we can't respond to or return your work, so don't send your only copy unless you don't want it back. Because we must wait until the last minute to make our final selections, we are unable to answer questions regarding the status of submissions. If your piece is going to appear, you'll hear from us prior to publication.

UPCOMING TOPICS	DEADLINE	PUBLICATION DATE
Keepsakes	August 1	February 2014
Being Alone	September 1	March 2014
Cash	October 1	April 2014
Speaking Up	November 1	May 2014
Security	December 1	June 2014
Never Again	January 1	July 2014

MY COUSIN DAVID WAS MY BEST friend until I was thirteen years old. December 26, 2002, marked the end of our friendship. It was the last holiday we celebrated together. I have no idea how he brought in the New Year because David was a foster child, and before the start of 2003 my aunt and uncle, who had fostered him for six years, sent him back as if he were a toy that didn't work properly.

My family acted as if I'd never had a cousin David: the winter sledding, the Sunday dinners, the drives to the coast, the birthday gifts from Grandma. The foster program's policy forbade us from contacting him. Family policy forbade us from talking about him. I never even got to say goodbye because no one had told me he was leaving. Occasionally a picture with him in it would surface, and someone would point out a very interesting tree in the background to distract us from the forgotten boy with a lopsided smile.

But I never forgot David. I would lie in bed at night and think of him, working to keep my memory of him alive. At first it was easy: I'd remember our G.I. Joe villages made of twigs; our endless games of cowboys and Indians. But as I got older, I had only a blurry recollection of our childhood adventures. I came to think it was time to forget and move on. Surely David had by now. How else could he overcome being abandoned by people he thought were his family?

And then, nearly ten years after I'd last seen David, I walked into a tiny cafe and saw a man behind the counter with a familiar lopsided smile. The universe had granted us a reunion. He jumped over the bar to greet me with a tremendous hug.

Sara B.

Tacoma, Washington



SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

THE DAYS ARE GETTING SHORTER AND SO AM I. It's a fact. I used to be six feet tall. Last month, at my doctor's office, the nurse checked my height and told me I was five feet ten and a half inches. I just looked at her. There must be some mistake, I said. Maybe the measuring arm wasn't at the proper angle. Maybe she hadn't read it right. She smiled patiently. It's because of gravity, she said. The disks in our spines get compressed over time. After the age of forty we lose about a half inch in height every decade. In other words, my diminished state wasn't her fault; it was mine for having lived so long.

Hair loss, hearing loss, memory loss, and now this. I remembered a note I'd gotten recently from my friend Al. "Are you as spooked by the passage of time as I am?" he wrote. "To tell the truth, I don't know why it's not the number-one topic of conversation among people over sixty. The skids are greased, and down we slide." So what now, Al? Do I rail at gravity or stand tall, take it like a man?

I DREAMT THAT MY WIFE, NORMA, AND I WERE IN New York City, walking past the synagogue where I was bar mitzvahed in 1958. But now I was in my sixties, and my wife was no longer the dark-haired, twenty-seven-year-old shiksa I'd fallen in love with more than thirty years ago but a gray-haired woman in her fifties. My dead father made a cameo appearance to remind me to always be polite: to offer Norma my arm when we crossed the street, to ask for permission before ripping off her dress. What a perfect gentleman I was as she and I made love on the dusty floor of an abandoned warehouse in the city of my birth. As the dream ended, I begged Norma not to leave. She said, "Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere." And I said, "But yesterday is already gone."

THERE'S A CAT IN THE ROOM. THERE'S A MAN IN THE room. How about God? Is God in the room? I hear a bird singing. I can't see the bird from where I'm sitting, but I know it's close by. How close is God to me this morning? Is it delusional to think that God is here, too? That this, too, is God's address? That I don't have to read another spiritual book or hitchhike from one end of my mind to the other in order to find the next clue to God's whereabouts?

IF MY FATHER WERE STILL ALIVE, TODAY WOULD be his ninety-eighth birthday. Ninety-eight, Dad! Imagine being around in the year 2012! You'd still be a Yankees fan, I assume, and vote for the Democrats, and smoke cigars, and find plenty to argue with me about. We argued a lot when I was in my twenties, especially after I walked away from my job as a newspaper reporter and started a ragtag magazine. To you, the bizarre turn my life had taken made no sense. I looked like a hippie, talked like a hippie, used my laminated college degrees as cutting boards, and no longer wore a wristwatch because, as I tried to explain, LSD had made me understand the absolute relativity of time. Meanwhile you were running out of time. Nine months after I stood on a street in North Carolina selling the first issue of *The Sun*, you lost your "battle with cancer," as people say, though to

me it always seemed like a distinctly unfair fight — in one corner, an emaciated man with a terminal diagnosis; in the other, the heavyweight champion of the underworld, with more ways to fuck you up than any mortal enemy could devise. Two weeks after you turned sixty, you stopped breathing. When I walked into your hospital room and saw your lifeless body, my breath caught in my throat. I was twenty-nine and couldn't imagine a world without you.

I BROKE MY FAVORITE COFFEE MUG THIS MORNING.

While I was washing it in the sink, it slipped from my hands and shattered. How could I have been so careless? O that lovely mug! Here one minute, lying in broken pieces the next. No long, lingering illness. No warning signs that something was awry. No chance to prepare for the day I'd no longer be able to reach for it, cup my hand around it, bring it to my lips. This is that day.

I'M STILL WORKING ON MY BOOK. I KEEP REMIND-ing myself it's like everything else in life: I won't get it completely right. Perhaps, once it's published, I'll imagine otherwise for a day or two, or for an entire self-delusional week. During that time the book and I will text each other throughout the day, call each other late at night, exchange exquisite gifts of appreciation: an expensive Montblanc pen for me ("So you can get started on your *next* book," the book will whisper coyly); a custom-made bookcase for the book, big enough to hold a hundred copies of the leather-bound edition. ("Yes," I'll assure the book, "*real* leather.") Oh, won't we be happy, curled together on the sofa, my arms around the book, the book pressing itself against my pounding chest. Could anyone doubt we were made for each other? And I'll actually believe that this love will last, that I really did get it right, that the critics will agree, and my dead ancestors will rise from their graves to get their complimentary copies, and *Fresh Air's* Terry Gross will call, and so will my high-school principal, who never believed in me but is, amazingly, still alive and feels compelled to ask for my forgiveness. No problem, I'll assure him. No problem, I'll tell Terry, who wants to know if, during our on-air interview, I'd be willing to read a few of her favorite passages in my gravelly and oh-so-intimate voice, sitting there beside her, just the two of us.

MY CAT ZOOEY WOKE ME AT FOUR THIS MORNING.

But I'm not complaining. It's cold and rainy outside. But I live in a house with central heat and a roof that doesn't leak. At the end of March I'll turn sixty-eight. But I'd rather be old than dead and cold. Who wants to be the corpse of a man who found something to complain about every day of his life: how much he weighed, how little he exercised, an alphabet with merely twenty-six letters, primitive computers that hadn't yet been programmed to turn incoherent thoughts into unforgettable language that would stand the test of time? Yes, I'd rather be old than dead and cold. But when that's no longer the choice I'm given, when it isn't Zooey but Mr. Death who wakes me, I won't complain if he mispronounces "Safransky." Story of my life.

The
SUN
AUGUST 2013 • ISSUE 452



From the Editor:

Sy Safransky's Notebook

THE BATTLE WE DIDN'T CHOOSE

photographs by ANGELO MERENDINO



Photographer Angelo Merendino met his future wife, Jennifer, in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2002. A month later she landed a job with a cosmetics company and moved to New York City. Angelo would often travel there on the pretense of visiting his brother, but really he wanted to see her. When he finally confessed his love, he discovered that she felt the same, and the two were married in 2003 in Central Park. They danced their first dance as husband and wife serenaded by Angelo's father on his accordion.

Five months later Jennifer was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of thirty-six. Over the next four years she endured a double mastectomy, chemotherapy, radiation, and reconstructive surgery. Committed to showing the human face of her ordeal, Jennifer wrote regularly about her experience on her blog and spoke out about the link between environmental toxins and cancer. She also invited her husband to photograph her throughout her treatment.

Jennifer died in December 2011 after the cancer had metastasized into her bones, liver, and brain.

"When people see these photographs, I hope they see life before death," Angelo says. "I hope they see love before loss."

— Ed.



Photographic Essay

