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Noisy Water
Review '99



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Submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and
artwork are welcome from all current WCC students
from September through May. Include name, address,
phone, and student number *on cover letter only*; no
names on manuscripts or artwork.

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"Whatcom: Where the waters are noisy"

Preface

Welcome to the first edition of *The Noisy Water Review*,
the anthology of creative writing by students at
Whatcom Community College.

We have some fine work in this anthology, from an
interesting and amusing story about the pressure of
living up to parental expectations in taking the SAT
exams ("Taking the SAT's," by Tracy Bass), to a unique,
sharp-edged portrait of a mother ("Chickens," by Sean
Tait). In between are topical poems and stories — poems
of loss and gain, of love, friendship, and estrangement.
I'm sure you'll find many pieces of interest.

One note: I've taken some liberties in editing, even to
the point of revising a few lines in the stories and —
gasp! — in a poem. If the works have suffered because of
my impertinence, I hope the authors will forgive me.
Throughout, I've sought a uniform, effective style and
voice.

It's my hope that this and future versions of the NWR
will add to the vibrant literary community in
Bellingham.

Enjoy!

Jeffrey Klausman
June 1999

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Missing My Connection

The alarm sings out
I start to rush, but
perhaps today
the bus could leave
and I could stay
and breathe the sweet heat
through auburn hair
that falls on a freckled shoulder

and find my six-year-old's
smile, her laugh, her giggle,
her sliding on the floor
on the camp mat that, to her,
is a magic carpet,
to play all day, tuck her in tight,
kiss her good night, turn out the light

and greet my lame dog, recline
my nose in his musky musk
and speak the secret code
that spans species and pleases
and pleases and pleases.

*Everyone knows that poets are born
and not made in school.
Mary Oliver*

My Car

Surprised by the sun,
my work day done,
I tread the hot asphalt,
the prison yard
that divides my job
from my car,
my cage,
my rolling bug jar,
my tin trap death can,
my toxic waste on wheels,
my Honda-virus,
my noisome toilsome,
my turbo turd,
my beeping dumpster,
my crosswalk trespasser,
my strip mall endorsement,
my top soil evaporator,
my laugh at oiled otters,
my rubber-coated bird cruncher
my possum genocider,
my leaching junkyard,
my salmon-killing klinker,
which was covered with cherry petals.

Brandon Carli

Old days

In the old days,
I would awake on Sunday morning
Vomit in the sink
And piss on the wall outside my door.
I'd light a Marlboro on the kitchen burner
And pray for dope or death to ease my mind.

In the old days,
On a Friday night
I would go out with friends
To have a drink
And come to in the neighbor's front yard
With blood on my lips, clothes dirty and torn.

In the old days,
On a Tuesday afternoon,
I'd slip down to one of those respectable joints
Where they'd serve you until you fell off the bar stool
And leave you to sleep on the sidewalk outside.

In the old days,
At three in the morning
The room would spin and spin
Until I had to open the window
And puke down the siding into the flowers

Thank god
It's not the old days anymore.

Losing It

What have you done to yourself, Man?
Your brothers lay bleeding to death
In the streets of filth and smog.

Your sisters sell themselves
In office buildings across the land,
Unaware of the disease
That is waiting to consume.

And we sit in front of our drug
That has manipulated our minds
Into a state of nothingness
Incapable of reason, question, doubt.

But somewhere in the mantle of being
Fear flows hot and smooth
Just waiting,
Waiting for a chance to burn.

Daze

I awoke from a restless sleep
The alarm buzzing in my ear.
Even the restless sleep seems better
Than the realities of the day I now must face.
I shower and eat
Even though I am not hungry
And do not care what I smell like.
As I step out the door
My responsibilities become jumbled in my mind
I look down to see that my shirt is on inside out.
Sitting in my car (that is refusing to start)
I laugh to myself to keep from crying
Or lashing out and killing someone.
In my first class there is a beautiful girl
Who sits next to me and makes me nervous
So nervous that I sweat and my eyes hurt: speechless.
I slip outside to have a cigarette
The one constant, reliable, unchanging—
The smoke burns my eyes, the taste chokes me.

Jesus....
I think to myself
I'm going back to bed.

J.H. "Pops" Bol

Morning Song

A Villanelle

The grass tastes fearful in the light of dawn
As hunters come with eye for tender prey
With bow-strings stretched with ready arrows drawn

The meadow now exposed the forest gone
Those places once all shadow bright as day
The grass tastes fearful in the light of dawn

Go stealthily the hunters moving on
To seek you out in places where you lay
With bow-strings stretched with ready arrows drawn

Lift up your head frail busy grazing fawn
The forest fails to hide you while you play
The grass tastes fearful in the light of dawn

The early rising hunters pause to yawn
Spring up young buck you have to get away
With bow-strings stretched with ready arrows drawn

There is no hope for refuge on a lawn
No sanctuary nowhere safe to stay
The grass tastes fearful in the light of dawn
With bow-strings stretched with ready arrows drawn.

William Daniel Mark

Porcelain

A porcelain mask
With red painted smiling lips
Sara slowly withdrew from her face,
She could not make it last
As she faintly traced it with the tips
Of her fingers as she searched it with grace.

"I'm tired," she said
With the porcelain mask in hand
"I'm so tired and I don't know what to do."
With her beautiful face
And broken eyes I couldn't stand
And a heart that for the first time spoke the truth.

I wanted her to tell me
Of everything I knew that hurt
And killed her when she'd smile and take a breath,
I wanted her to yell
And tell me "No" before I asked,
And tell me everything until there's nothing left.

But instead she didn't speak
And only traced around the mask
That shined of ivory with ruby flavored lips,
"I'm tired," she said
As she sweetly shut her eyes
And off into a dream she slowly slipped.

Herb Lederer

Void

Silence, that vacuum inhabitant
rewards the struggling writer
only when words flow

for like the frozen
lock, rust remains enemy
of the writer's tablet.

Paula L. Casey

When Father Died

My father, like a bullet train,
ran too fast for me to catch up.
I never touched him, I never did.
But I didn't expect him to
stop dead in his tracks.

I grasp the rail and hoist myself
up and look benumbed at the
satin, frilly laces of his coffin.
Tearless guilt swells in my chest as
I touch him for the first time.

Faces in procession hug me and
tell me what a nice service and
how great a man this was
then pass from my life, forever.
I paid the bill before they got here.

In his grave I watch me buried
(the child that mopped up his
dreams and messes, and hoarded
them in the corner to play with
later.) I had no toys of my own.

I'm mute, bound to the tracks, as
the dirt, like that bullet train, is
shoveled over my conception.
My heart pounds as I suffocate
from what I thought was me.

Reflections in the Sand

As I'm pounded on the cold,
wet sand, I watch my essence
ebb from me. As dampness
sinks its frigid claws, propelling
me to yesterday.

Laser beams were bursting
bright, I danced into the cold,
dark night. Shadows at my
bedroom door, I danced
until the morning light.

I twirled around and made
my plea to strangers looking
back at me. Bereft of love
and promises, my soul danced
out its elegy.

In daylight driven to the
beat, in darkness drums beat
out defeat, a barren shell I
echoed forth, in rhythm to
my mind's deceit.

Salt licks awake my angry
wound and leaves me bitter, lonely,
cold. My heart bleeds out its mortal
tune. As grains of sand, I dissipate to
nothingness

my soul untold.

Sean Tait

Chickens

My mother is the one
who raised elegant white chickens
and showed me to care for the chicks
with heat lamps and wood chips.

My mother is the one
who sat at the chopping block in the fall,
a red lump of stain at her side
that went into the dog's bowl.

My mother is the one
who sat by my bed
with steaming chicken noodle soup
when I had the winter flu.

My mother is the one
who sent me to school
with egg money in my pockets
to buy warm bread and milk.

Susan Stehn

The Voice

I heard a tree growing today,

Figured surely there was something up there,
a dead branch squirrel raccoon jay.

My eyes gave me nothing,
so I kept listening.

pop pop
pop
there was no breeze.

It had to be the cones,
the cones were opening
right then and there.
I was amazed,
seeds being exposed for flight
right before my very eyes.

I sank back to lie on the grass.

maybe I shouldn't be so surprised
maybe I didn't know trees spoke
maybe I thought they only did it at night

maybe I should open a more attentive eye

Days Past

There's something to be noted in a day when both my
pinky nails fall off,
in the harmony and symmetry of such a strange
occurrence.
Had I been abusing the pig that cries wee wee wee all
the way home—
I swear if so I hadn't noticed.

There's something to be noted in a day when both my
pinky nails fall off
while talking to my mom on the phone.
It had been months since we spoke but suddenly she
was there
sharing stories of days past when she'd lost hers.

The shape of our feet
or a disregard for personal suffering—

we share the same blood.

Anthony Lucido

My Brother

he was born in 1982
nine years after me,
dressed up in his baby blues,
a pretty cool thing to see.
nothing could stop this little tike,
and he loved those dinosaurs,
he was the kid you just had to like,
and potential oozed from his pores.
he was the baseball standout,
he was always top of his class,
never allowing anyone to doubt,
never knowing the meaning of last.
truly an all-american kid,
nothing stood in his way,
always excelling at whatever he did,
we took for granted that he was ok.
but divorce soon tore his world apart,
and no one bothered to see,
that this perfect, bright, and shining upstart
was falling from his tree.
he was hurt, confused, and all alone,
his feelings were taken for granted,
because he was the star that had always shone,
support was never enacted.
but then one day in innocence,
while looking for her doll named beth,
his sister found his answer to his impotence,
a quarter-ounce bag of crystal meth.
a simple search for a little girl's toy,
finally opened our eyes to see,
that our wonderful all-american boy,
was falling from his tree.

Selah Say-Tong

scream of my generation

static flickers
and the talking newspaper
assaults my eyes.
it asks me why.
it asks me
how
and
when
will it end
perfect hair bobs
above opaque eyes
just another good job
at a very good wage
just another
professional
frowny
face
but the volume button pulses
and the sound
pierces me
so sharp
her high voice
sharp, a tack on the seat
of yesterday's teacher
as she screams
screams
screams
scream, not for the pain
but because she knew
that their respect was gone.
scream for help
we couldn't hear

not then not even
as we became

socialistic
therapeutic
matriarchic

not then and not now
even when the scream
is in our ears
not even now that the
scream is a

bullet
not
a tack

scream today, teacher,
because you are the waitress
in a nation where
we starve children for
nutritious information
serving them only
five-second sound bytes
garnished with blanks and lead,
and a

scream
bang-bang
you're dead

the plastic face on
my screen is tragic
pleading, her voice drowns out the
scream.

my hands fidget
from ADD or speed
and the screen flickers out.
alone and dark, with all my peers
I can hear our screams
can you?

One So Close

She once told me that some day we would find
her hanging off the bridge by her house,
her neck made one with the steel
held fast to her new home by the white sheet
from her bed.

I remember that day she told me
I didn't believe her because
I could feel her watching me
with those ravenous eyes, waiting—
I didn't believe her
because at the moment I did,
I felt her smile.

Today I drove over that bridge. Not thinking I
looked over the handrail
expecting to see her
bulging eyes still capable of harm,
expecting to see her
limp body, still beautiful, a fish on the tired shore,
expecting to see her
smug smile of conceited scorn—
the imprint of satisfaction that she'd won me once
more.

Norm Boyes

Silence and Regret

Only barren silence and regret remain.
Memories of coffee and cribbage
have become no more than a scattering of rock
behind the glacier's grim retreat.
Old laughter and profanity are hollow echoes in my
mind,
and I know now that the indifferent death
of our friendship wounded us both.
Sadder,
and wrapped in a blanket of fading pain,
I shiver in the darkening night,
knowing the words
that once might have helped,
are now too late.

Tracy Bass

The SAT's

I can already hear him, "You scored what?!"
How do you expect to get into a decent college? I hope
you don't plan on winning any scholarships!" He
would say this as he's yanking out his greying hair, that
same grey hair he swears I gave to him. All the while
he would point at me accusingly, a disgusted glare
fixed on his tired face.

No, I can't stand to let him down. I can't stand
to see his disappointment. That's why I've spent the
last four days locked upstairs in my room studying for
the SAT.

Many times I glanced out the window and saw
the bright sun shining down upon my neighbor's new
pool. They had bid me to come out for a swim, but I
refused. Things of far greater importance than
swimming were racing through my troubled mind. I
flinched at the mere thought of child's play, knowing I
would never again find the enjoyment in it that I used
to.

I decided, just hours into my imprisonment, that
this is how I am going to live the remainder of my life.
From this point on, I am going to derive satisfaction
from things that are relevant to my future. I will no
longer conduct myself in petty games. Instead, I will
become the adult my father has been longing for me to
be. I sat up defiantly as I thought about my new
decision.

Occasionally, throughout these first four days,
my father would knock on my door to ask me how I
was coming along. Too absorbed in my studies, I never
found the time to answer him. Instead, I sat there and
watched until his dark shadow disappeared from

beneath my door. Once it did, I would let out a sigh and stare blankly at my books.

Every once in awhile, upon hearing voices outside my door, I would find myself drawn toward them. There I would sit and listen to my father and mother as they had a "discussion." Often I would catch tidbits of their conversation. Of course, I was their favorite topic. My father would give his speech, one I had heard many times before, about the importance of my education. He would carry on for hours and end his monologue with, "After all, I didn't have Tommy so I could pay for his college education." I would then hear my mother sigh and tell him that I've turned into a fine young man. She would rave about my good character, athletic ability and work ethic until my father, apparently bored, would simply walk away.

I, too, am bored. Sitting in my room for hours upon end is nauseating. My blue walls have begun to cave in on me. Although I have never experienced claustrophobia before, I'm sure it feels something like this. My father is claustrophobic. This is only one of a long list of disorders he has acquired over the years. He also suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and hair loss. Amazingly enough, Rogaine has begun to work on his receding hairline, though the rest of his illnesses remain uncured.

On the fifth day the temperature rose to eighty-five degrees. As it became unbearably hot, I opened my bedroom door to the cool air from the living room fan. Because of this my father spied on me more than ever. I never imagined one person could make so many trips to the bathroom. I'd hear my father coming and I'd grab my books. When he saw me, the sides of his old lips curved in a grin. On one of these such trips my father stopped in the door way.

"What are you reading, Son?" he asked worriedly as he rushed into my bedroom.

"My text," I replied before I had a chance to look down. Once I did, I realized that the book on my lap was upside down. It was turned to a page that was titled "Interesting Facts About the United States."

When my father saw this his face dropped; his greying hair became shimmering white beneath my bedroom light. "Why are you reading *this*?" he demanded. Then, before I had time to think of a clever response he added, "My son is becoming a cesspool of inconsequential trivia!"

Then he stormed out of my room. It was hours before I saw him again. When he did happen to peer his head around the corner and look down at the book I was studying, I explained before he had the chance to ask, "I'm doing my Algebra."

He walked past.

Over the next days leading up to the SAT's, he checked up on me, like clockwork, at the top of every hour. Each time I saw him, I reassured him that I was studying by holding up my text. Soon enough he had become so sure of me that he would simply smile and walk by my room.

Although that gesture may not mean a lot to the average kid, coming from my father it meant a great deal. So, I studied. I looked through my English books, my algebra books, my trigonometry books. I studied any and every thing I thought the SAT's might ask me. But when, on the seventh day of my imprisonment, I had to leave my room, I felt like a new person.

My mother drove me to the college where the test was held. Once we were there she wished me luck and drove away. I walked confidently up the concrete steps leading to the testing room. After all, this was my defining moment, the moment when my father would have to congratulate me. I checked in at the front desk and took a seat in the front row. I saw the many worried faces about the crowded room, only I didn't let

them phase me. I was going to score big on this test. Oxford was going to be at my knees, begging me to attend.

A woman walked around and passed out pencils and test booklets. After she had made her way around the room, she stopped to inform us of the rules.

"Okay. Open your books and begin."

I opened my booklet to the first page. As I stared at the numbers and figures before me, my mind began to blur. The formulas began running together, jumbled and unidentifiable in my tired mind. But no matter how many times I told myself to think straight, the answers refused to come to me.

During all the confusion I thought about my father, I thought about colleges, I thought about my future. Yet none of those things seemed important to me anymore. The one vision I couldn't seem to erase from my mind was the one of me at my neighbor's house, lazily swimming in their new pool.

Kasey Bell

Big Fish Go to Sleep

Claire smiled at the sight of it. A salmon, just a dark shape on this waning November day, shuddered in the water below their little bridge, digging a hollow in the small stones for its eggs. As it did so, its fantastic hooked mouth bit at the slow current, the top of a small stream called Black Slough. On its way to the Nooksack river, the stream passed through the old homestead that her husband, Dalton, had bought with an inheritance a few years back. The stream had a clear flow and just the right kind of gravel and fallen logs for cover that made for good spawning.

Claire would be happy if she and Dalton could just keep this small salmon run from slipping to total extinction. Since moving here three years ago the fish had been one of the only cheerful aspects, apart from her baby, Tyler, of a part of the country that is cold and exposed in the winter, wet and mosquito-ridden in the summer. The land itself was once covered with great trees, but islands of stunted third growth was all that remained among marginal pasture.

Dalton, on the other hand, had told Claire that he dreamed of restoring their fish run to the abundance that must have existed 100 years ago. He wanted to organize the local community to protect the extended watershed of this part of the Nooksack. Claire listened quietly when he gushed about his vision: she preferred to hear of a rosy future that she was not so sure possible than to his more frequent rants about environmental destruction.

It wasn't easy, but she trained their dogs not to chase the five salmon that returned to the headwaters on their first year at the farm, three years ago. Last year

they added more gravel for redds and logs for cover. This year two fish, white bones protruding from fin tips, made it to their ancestral breeding ground.

Tyler had turned one year old this fall. Claire took him out to the creek one morning when she first saw the blue backs cresting the creek surface.

"Look, Tyler" she said slowly and deliberately. "Salmon. Fish. *Fiiish*."

Tyler looked. He took a few teetering steps towards the creek edge and pointed at the Cohoes as they moved up and down the stream from pool to pool, coming half out of the water to show what was left of their silvery sides as they muscled through the shoals. The fish paused, nose to the current, then bolted downstream one after the other for several yards; then they paused and then darted back up again—courting in spite of the lack of suitors.

Dalton came home in the four o'clock dusk.

"Well, it's not raining much. Should we go for a walk?"

Claire knows the importance of getting outside when they could this time of year. Even the gray day as it turned to black could soothe the mental muscle.

They saw the fish about a hundred yards past the culvert, not lying in spawned-out rigor mortis in the stream bed, but up on the bank, near the road, its belly chewed open.

"It's the Kononoviche's dog, I bet" Dalton said, referring to their new Russian immigrant neighbors.

They stood over the lifeless fish awhile. Claire squatted, stroked the curved lip of the female, and said softly, "We've got to talk to them. They just don't know the damage that dog is doing".

"I know," Dalton said. "I'll do what I can with smiles and drawings. I'll show them this fish and bring one of the dogs. We'll get the message across somehow."

A quarter mile further up the dirt road was a bend where the Kononovishes' used trailer-house lay among scrappy alder and swampy ground. As Dalton and Claire approached in the fading light, people were laughing and talking in Russian.

Two men in windbreakers were standing by the ditch bank. They were wet to their knees, but they smiled as they saw their neighbors and waved. The taller man, with gray hair, reached into the brown grass to lift the two trophies by the gills, blood and slime streaking their silver sides. His smile broadened as he proudly shouted in his new English, "*Fiiish*."

Sean Tait

Form the Top of the Stairs

My arms hung slackly at my sides and my palms were cool and clammy against the dark wool of my slacks as I stood before the collage of pictures that my sister made. I could see a certain resemblance between my own features and those of my father, who was the subject of the collage. It was supposed to be a summary of sorts, of his life and family and friends, via the medium of photography, but mostly the pictures were of him when he was a young man, not yet 30. It was supported by an easel which stood in the lobby of the funeral parlor next to the guest book. The resemblance was there, but it was not as striking as my great aunt Beatrice and cousin Susan had just said. He and I had shared a common nose and the same high forehead, and our eyes were the same color and shape, but beyond that I could see very little that he and I had had in common.

I was very self-conscious there in front of the pictures of my father when he was my age and working as a logger in the rainforests of western Washington. One picture showed him lying in a pie-cut that he had made in a giant cedar with his chainsaw in front of him, neither his boots nor his hair reaching the bark of the still standing tree. The picture next to it showed him brawny and shirtless in the sun, washing a blue pickup that I had never seen before. My mother's house was in the background, painted dirty and worn of brown that was likewise unfamiliar.

I could hear the people in the room through the doorway starting to quiet down and so turned from the easel to take my place in the family section in the rows of seats. I mumbled an apology to battered toes and

knees and felt the sympathetic pats and touches of several family friends on my elbow and shoulder. I took my place next to my sister who was giving Kleenex and comfort to Aunt Patty behind us. And then someone began to play music and later someone talked.

I thought of my earliest memory of my father. My sister and I were peering around the corner of the hallway down the stairs in my mother's house. My father stood in the doorway at the bottom of the steps with a suitcase in his hand and my mother shouted at him with her back to us. I remember how dark it was outside through the open door and the color of his shirt against that blackness. It was stained brown by sweat and dirt so that I couldn't tell what color it had been before and made me think of the color of my mother's house in the picture. At three years old, I could not understand the look that I saw on his face as he searched our faces over my mother's angry shoulder, which were the only parts of us that were not concealed by the wall at the top of the stair.

I don't remember anything else about that night, but I know that that was the night that he left. After that, my sister and I were only allowed to see him every other weekend from Friday evenings to Sunday mornings, except for holidays and birthdays. After that, my sister and I grew up moving back and forth between houses, living out of our suitcases, and learning to rely on ourselves. After that, we each cultivated our own silent resentment and planned our secret revenge, and we each knew that the other was doing the same without ever having to speak of it.

Now as I sat on the bench between my sister and my Uncle John, people began to file slowly past the casket and out the door to the cemetery. My sister took my hand and pulled me to my feet. I stared at my black leather shoes and wiped my palms on my slacks again.

My legs felt like worn-out rubber and throat was cottony. I watched my sister as she leaned over the coffin and held her head close to my father's. Then it was my turn.

I stepped forward and placed my hands on the edge of the enameled wood, and I look down at my father's face lying on a smooth satin pillow. His large, square hands were clasped on his chest. From the top of the stairs, I had seen his face framed by the doorway and the night. How could I have understood the look on his face as he left? A three-year-old boy could never comprehend what I had seen, but as I looked upon my father's face, that was so much like my own now, I knew that look, and felt glad.