

The 2River View

5.1 (Fall 2000)



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32" X 37", Acrylic & Gold Leaf

**Poems by Joel Chace, Dee Cohen, Brian Hensel,
Siel Ju, Lyn Lifshin, Joseph Lisowski, Radames
Ortiz, Ann Politte, Jennifer Poteet, Kim Welliver**

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How I Dream Without You

Nights I row to the middle
of a smooth and deep lake,
the boat sliding like a skater
across the water,
oars tugging
at the moon's reflection.
Trees crowd the shore,
a circle of spectators,
and stars signal approval
as I slip in without
a splash,
bursts of air
balloon to the surface
and silt rises in a rusty cloud.

Before waking,
I drop a chain to the bottom,
drag it across the bed,
pulling up stones, silvery fish,
and finally, wrapped in weeds,
a body.

Dee Cohen

Playground

Watch us go to the park,
plastic tires of your big wheel
clattering on the pavement,
shop windows, groceries,
bus stops and benches,
through fence slats
houses click by.

At the playground
we climb the slide,
the earth below
peeking up through holes
in the metal stairs
and the clouds swinging back and forth
in the big sky.
On top we look out
over the whole park,
the lawns bright and green,
the picnic tables laid out in rows of three,
the bandstand, a smooth curved shell
with empty seats waiting
for an audience.

You slide down first
and I hear your voice,
thin, high,
calling back to me.
I'm next
and, by the time I reach bottom,
you're gone.

Dee Cohen

Wooden Houses, Long Beach

We lived in four wooden houses,
one right after another,
all weathered with peeling paint
and dried out lawns,
small garages like playhouses in back.
I'd pack the car
full of clothes, pots, bedding
and in each we would leave something behind.
Plants, or tools, a milk crate filled with books,
a bicycle too cumbersome to load.
Someone could have tracked us,
following our trail
like animals in the woods,
our hasty departures,
our leavings, our clues,
pieces of our lives
snagged on thorn bushes
as we hurried past.

Joel Chace

of the word-kind

—when they discovered the pit and had excavated far enough to uncover the first several remains, there followed a strange, protracted period of time during which the five explorers seemed virtually paralyzed by fear, stupefaction, and titillation—

for awhile I couldn't
decide between standard
yellow legal pads and
more sturdy clasp
journals finally it was
a case where the more
expensive was also the more practical

—under seared and obviously aged ground cover, the soil itself was oddly dark, moist, and rich for such an arid environment; this alone was extremely puzzling though that particular mystery faded rapidly in the blinding light of the subsequent discoveries—

that last night as we
were tucking Clarissa
in she said daddy ask
me what is aftermath
I asked what is
aftermath Clarissa
answered aftermath
is lunch my eyes
started to fill you
know
so I turned
away and flipped
the light switch and out
of the dark I heard
her little voice say
then recess

—the first identifiable items were badly soiled and tattered pages with printed words in at least half a dozen different languages, along with patches of cloth and leather attached to splinters of bone; upon closer examination, these materials were seen to be pieces of bindings and covers from books—
sure as shit they

mean the opposite when
they say it
doesn't matter it's not
your fault

—the fusion of these manufactured substances to the bone
fragments was of course surprising but became viewed as
both astounding and horrifying as the next layer of bodies
was unearthed—

but what stuck
in my head was
you're an ass-
hole OK you're
not an asshole but
you act like
one most
of the time

—in this lower stratum the skeletons were dramatically whiter
and considerably more well preserved, in some cases wholly;
it was then discernible that the cloth and leather, now in larger
and much less decayed swatches, had actually grown out from
the centers, the very marrow of these bones—

first night on the
road I open
it and it's
like she'd packed me
a suitcase of my
own dirty laundry

—and so forth, precisely as related: the deeper the level, the
more complete and consequently more grotesque the corpses;
until, at nearly thirty feet, they struck an arm entirely fleshed
yet as if winged with a fully printed page, a limb which began
to twitch, then jerk, then rise unaided towards the hole of
light above them all—

Joel Chace

levee

The First Line
The Second Line

rain like holy
hell on Jackson Square

bobbing
along below
the dead a brand
new Panama
Gambler's hat on
Rue Royal

*what cleans the
street's not always
good for bidness*

The First Line
The Second Line

Fais
do do

*there she goes
again black
hawker in
yellow cotillion gown*

**FRESH FRESH
CRAWFISH
GET EM
FRESH**

but can't begin without
The First
Line

The Quarter
The Quarter no
not preoccupied
no The
Quarter's merely
occupied by death

The Second Coming's the
coming second

waiter with nicotine
stains on his shirt he
crosses St. Ann
to the peacock-tail mask
shop where the woman
behind the register says
*He's a nice
boy comes to me
for cigarettes*

The First Time
The Second Time
The tiny
time

it's not the
heat it's
the humanity not
the street but the
proximity not
the beat but
the timidity

Po' girl yellow
girl Po'
boy blue boy

brand new white
Panama Gambler's
hat motionless under
St. Peter's
arcade where the darkly
draped fortune teller
says *All right
goddammit here's
the deal five dollars and I'll
tell you just the
good parts*

The second's
coming

Po' mules Po' Emily
Po' Jose hang
their heads in the holy
hell raining on
Jackson Square

Two lines two
bits two
times too much

*told fortunes
in Manhattan
Houston here it's
all the same the
same*

blue notes are
the rue notes

Two lips two
arms two shoes

Po' Po' Po'
skeletons in their
Po' earth above
The Second Line

how much
more for the bad
parts

To the grave to
the wake two
shoes too sad
too glad

*hey guard my folding
chair I need
a drink*

Po'
girl Po' boy
hawking bobbing rain
like holy hell bobbing
along in The Second
Line hawking like
holy hell paying
for the good parts

the tiny time so
tiny so
straight

The First Line's
above
The Second Line's
below below the
sea below
the dead the skeletons and
their earth

**FRESH FRESH
GET EM**

Fais do
do

The coming
second First
Line levee Second
Line the dead
in their meadows
the quick on
their horns

death's the
occupation life's
the rest

The Second Line
The First Line

Siel Ju

Over

Blue and orange, the lights of St. Louis.
I was there once on a layover.
Today it's nonstop. It's all over—

The day, the wait (weight), glimmers
for change. The dry martini takes
over, at 32,000 feet.

I'm over the Rockies
with their usual turbulence.
And the night goes—

Success, I've heard,
is to begin. It's time.
I've heard this too.

To weigh in the mind what's to be missed.
They fly high over the scale
against my grievances—which are over—

This is another waiting—
a descent over the west
for heat on the pavements—

Siel Ju

Not Recommended for Use in Hot Beverages

There's no Insomnia in this city.
I've stepped boldly into greenery
with casual statements that whisk away
then bound back, puzzled at brevity.

Each visit takes on a luxury without
your talk, talk. Of course
we didn't have Tiazzis back then,
you engrossed, stirring, saying not really—

Peach changes everything, mellow
and easy, summer in a car smiling—
where to? None of the blank sobriety
with its striations, dissertations.

Even the music is foreign pop.
Time unpasses, waved away, waived,
air-conditioned into this universal
feeling of having had, been had.

Youth is wit, you'd say, though I've
been growing up. Everything is beginning
to cost a lot of money. Though I'm still
quite precocious, and quite beyond remorse.

I can admit these things generously
since you turned out being right.
I should've listened more.

Lyn Lifshin

The Mad Girl Wishes She Had a Penis on the Subway

one that was hard and huge to keep
flesh pressing up against her away,
keep a comfortable distance. A penis
like a cold hearted heart that wouldn't

feel enough to rub it raw, could go
out and battle or make a way through but
never get bruised or splinter. She
wishes her heart was a penis with a

mind of its own separate from her
head and feelings, something she could
use to push whatever was in her way aside,
mow down, steam roll, slash and burn

like a triumphant army there'd be
parades for, not punishments, but
cheers for them to stand on floats
or jeeps or trains and do it all over

Lyn Lifshin

The Mad Girl Didn't Think She Could Imagine a Dick for a Day

for weeks she'd been trying to imagine
the daughter she never had and this
seems totally unconnected though
maybe she thinks somehow they're

linked. Still, it seems a bit
absurd, nothing she would be into
but then it starts to grow on her
and she thinks of what it could

lead to, begins to swagger a
little, gets an attitude as she
starts to elbow through places she
wouldn't have entered. She doesn't

know it's a penis she feels
start to grow—it's like suddenly
carrying a loaded revolver, as if
she's got power, concealed, that no

one's on guard against, some
charm she can finger as she
moves through strangers, enters
vaults where jewels are locked,

emeralds, rubies, glittering, and she
knows with one move she could blast her
way in, open and just take the booty,
leave only a puff of white dust

Joseph Lisowski

Reversals

My daughter blesses
my regret.
Her touch is a breeze,
a balm to my ache.
Then she is gone.

I look in the wind,
the nothing that's left.
I have felt her love
and need to again.

Joseph Lisowski

Death Watch

Morning breaks through dreamless skies.
Night surrenders easily.
Summer rises once again
in folds of zinnia, daisy, marigold.

All of that is outside.
Inside, funeral roses still bloom.
They infest the air
my daughter no longer breathes.

Her scent is no longer everywhere.
Not in her t-shirts which I wear.
Not in her makeup, clothes,
and shoes her mother keeps.

It is another summer day
she has not seen, a day
without our smells and shouts,
another day without her warmth, her smile.

My brother-in-law sits now
by his father's hospital bed.
The man feels death coming fast
and orders his son to buy a funeral suit.

My brother-in-law sits among good-byes,
his mother and sisters, and his father
whom the priest has already blessed,
while my sister cries in my wife's arms.

Joseph Lisowski

Visitation

My daughter comes into our new house
on waves of music we listened to together
in our difficult island life.
The sun is crisp, Canadian air sweeps in.
I ask her what she thinks.
She only shakes her head.

I feels she's about to speak
but words are lost in transit—
somewhere between impact
and that last breath,
that last sound on one
but she has heard.

I strain to hear her voice,
my own ears damned with tears.

Joseph Lisowski

A Lesson

My daughter does not care
for me speaking of her as dead.
But her admonishments are gentle.
We speak to each other in new ways,
though I still lumber along
on halting steps and brood
like an ancient earth-worn man.
She is light
just beyond touch.
She caresses my head
with an imperceptible pale yellow
refraction of sun.

I speak to her often.
She replies in a language
without sound. I listen
and begin to learn
of love,
and its silence.

Radames Ortis

The New World

Who can say my life
here is poor?

when men are rich
enough to rattle
rib cages, to cloak
tierra in feather feet
and brown skin;

or when ears overflow
with victory chants
and bright orange
affection

Who can say the city is
all gunpowder and death?

when babies reach
for a sun perched
in a violet sky
and ice-cream trucks
serenade parking lots;
drawing smiles
on wet faces

or when Salvadorians play soccer
chasing each other with
stone calves and
pin-stripped shirts;
their voices bouncing
off company walls

Don't tell me our streets
are without music

when garbage trucks
roar through alleyways
like metal lions and
all night freight trains
pierce the neighborhood
in half

or when I dream daylight
through my glasses
and hum eternally
for a city waiting
to be burned
in the memories
of its children

Radames Ortiz

A Visit on September

A veces, I visit
the old neighborhood
and inhale the wet
smell of black earth
In refuge, across a recycle
bin, viejitos fill whisky
bottles with empty dreams
For hours, I stand there
in silence, listening to a wind
that hisses through my barrio
cracking the adobe skin of
ceramic women who sit
on red brick porches, their
mouths full of salty
sunflower seeds

I don't live here anymore
among glittering roof boards
and men who wear straw hats
to rev their '56 Chevys
beneath the shade of an elm tree
Funny, how in el barrio
things are soft and worn
The air blistered with particles
of cardboard dust and nursery
rhymes sung by children in
elementary school playgrounds
Over the years, I have
managed to accept the cement
growths of this world, to bury
it deep, deep into a body
brewing with black teeth
and marked bones
Only to come back and
disclose a truth I moved
away to hide from

Brian Hensel

Sunfish

O sunfish, so fast in the water,
you make me breathe heavy
trying to catch you, your tan

your tight muscles, and we smile
as we pass, me doing breast, you
the crawl- I love your form.

And naked in the shower, it is hard
for me to look, and now I'm embarrassed
by my body, I want my eyes to rest

on you. And that kiss that I keep
trying to give you, it does mean
something. I think it stands for hope.

O sunfish, I am afraid, I am afraid
you'll swim away, and I'll never
catch you, your blond hair, your blue

eyes that speak to me while I try to stuff
my pain in that place where a man like you
does not belong, and even if I let you read

this poem you may wonder what is wrong
with me, why does that man think so much,
why can't he just accept it's all a part of him?

Ann Politte

Mental Health

You, punishing martinet,
creep in obscure places, sulfur fumed,
focus on flaws, track pathos, dissect.

Time's up and now I'm blind and cursed,
and still fear stairs and fire and
sweet candles I've been forced to lick.

The cerebral map is charted.
I give you what you want—
syndrome here, signs of abuse,
bits of rage, blame, it's all in the genes you know,
worn bare like an old rug.

I drive home shocked at the mutant you suggest.
You, friend, tower, toss perceptions
like balls I'd fetch had I golden skills of retrieval.

Ann Politte

Uttering Blood

The mourning woman
warned me to welcome
shells of corpses, to brood
the spot of contagion.
Bright red shocks as eggs grow,
wasted, loose from the pod.
A muscled core shrivels, ebbs.
Witness the flow.

Jennifer Poteet

Numbers Game

She handed me her phone number
and a poem.
Two pieces of paper.
I unfolded one of the pieces
on the street and read it.
It had a lyric ring.
The phone number, not the poem.
I didn't read the poem until later, in bed.
It was about numerology,
which I know zero about
and she had misspelled 'numerology'
three times.

Still, it was nice
to be given a verse
by someone with a pretty smile
on a Wednesday afternoon
as I got off the downtown #9.
I tried to call her several times
although she hadn't written down her name
but the phone was always busy.
There are patterns, you know,
that push buttons make.
They play a little melody, too
if you're lucky enough to get the numbers right.

Jennifer Poteet

A Bloody Evening on the Thames

She leaves in a hiss of skirt
and perfume,
shrill-mad,
pissed
about the price of a trinket I didn't buy her,
or something she thought
I said.

The river, at least, shimmers calm.
I shiver in the quiet.
How cold would it be if I let myself drop into the water
below?
I would love to know.

Sheepish now and sober,
my sparring partner slinks
back under the shadows of the bridge,
a checkered paper boat
of steaming
fish and chips
aloft in her tiny hands.

We take it
down to the bones;
the vinegar, sweet
until there's nothing left
and that's all we can ever share.

Kim Welliver

Lydia's Window

Most nights she dreams of drowning,
a froth of white water closing over her head
and sometimes,
sometimes,
when she wakes,
she can feel the wet against her cheeks,
her lungs straining and gasping,
those two, rib-caged, crumpled tissue bags
pumping, winnowing for air,
but this is only for a moment
that stretches like an hour.
When the feeling passes
and she clears her nostrils
of water, and shakes the blur
from her blind blue eyes,
when the nurses come
like young madonnas, clean faced
hauling bedpans twice behind them,
and canisters of breath
painted green as any drowning dream
Lydia
knows her day has begun.
A day filled with small preoccupations,
a catalog of indignities,
of the enema bag, the catheter,
of the oxygen mask and its slow feed of life
into the wet sticky, emphysemic lungs,
of bedsores
sprouting from skin as dry
and cracked as macadam,
of the blind blue cataracted eyes.
But Lydia has a key, a talisman,
a touchstone
thrice calling in her frail voice,
Dear
Dear
Dear
Move me to the window please.

And the nurse, antiseptic as a hypodermic
in her starched whites
lifts the soggy body into place,
pushes the rubber wheeled, velcro strapped
straight-backed chair
to the open window
where July heat exhales
off blacktop,
reflects the metallic sheen of cars
ranked row upon orderly row,
like coffins, or mortician's tables.
Lydia doesn't see these.
For her, the window
opens upon her childhood,
upon Mediterranean hills
above a brilliant sea,
and the hot, stone-stung air
of her father's Tuscany garden
beneath silvery olive trees:
of
pungent fennel, feathery dill,
poppies
nodding extravagant heads, and
musk grapes fat and bluing on the vine.
The warm soil throngs
with the lush memories of her youth,
as she fixes her blind gaze
on the window
and forgets
for just these few hours
her
slow drowning
and the fading pulse of life.

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Contributors

Joel Chace has poems in recent publications such as *Lost and Found Times*, *Tomorrow*, *Big Bridge*, *pith*, and *Three Candles*. *Uncertain Relations* was published in June, 2000, by Birch Brook Press. Forthcoming are *Greatest Hits*, from Pudding House Publications, and *o-d-e*, from Runaway Spoon Press.

Dee Cohen lives in Southern California, where she is the director of a large childcare site. She has been published on and off line in places such as *Faultline*, *RipRap*, *California Quarterly*, *Stirring*, and *Poetry Super Highway*.

Brian Hensel is the creator and founding editor of *The Isle Review*. He earns his living as a free-lance editor and waiter. His poetry has appeared in *The Boston Poet* and *The Boston Globe*.

Siel Ju lives in Los Angeles, where she is reading, writing, and preparing for MFA programs. Her work has been published in *New Works Review* and *Allegheny Review*.

Lyn Lifshin has published numerous books of poetry, as well as anthologies of writing by women. Her latest collection, *Before It's Light*, is now being published by Black Sparrow Press.

Joseph Lisowski teaches English at Mercyhurst College North East. His published books include *The Brushwood Gate*, *Spring Street Blues*, *Looking for Lauren*, and *Near the Narcotic Sea*. He is now the poetry editor of *New Works Review*.



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Radames Ortiz is a native Houstonian and editor of *The Bayou Review* and *Coyote Magazine*. His work has appeared in places such as *Azimuth*, *Metaphor*, *di-verse city 2000*, *Revisions*, and *The Mesquite Review*. Mr. Ortiz is also the recipient of the Fabian Worsham award for Poetry.

Ann Politte is a health information specialist in St. Louis, Missouri, but lives south of the city in rural Jefferson County, where she spends her evenings swimming in Spring Lake.

Jennifer Poteet lives in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. She works by day in Manhattan in the Cable TV industry. Her poetry has appeared in *Salonika*, *Stirring*, and *The Astrophysicist's Tango Partner Speaks*, and will soon be published in *Thunder Sandwich*.

Kim Welliver has had several poems published in local journals and has won state writing competitions. She currently has two novels with an agent.

2River is a literary site on the Daemen College webserver in Amherst, New York. The address is

<http://www.daemen.edu/~2River>

2River publishes individual volumes by authors, as well as *The 2River View*, a quarterly journal of art, theory, and poetry, which first appears on-line and afterwards in print. Interested contributors should read the submission guidelines on the 2River site.

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