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### **From the Editor:**

In alchemy, faith and practice can turn the common into the very precious. Alchemists of the Middle Ages believed they could create gold out of simple base metals. Today, the most sincere writers practice alchemy. They recognize the futile attempt to put feelings down into words; they realize instead how building a text with the right words will extract each reader's own unique and powerful emotions. By beginning with the words themselves, the base metals, writers can create gold. The writers included in this issue offer their earnest attempt at this magic practiced over centuries, transmitting something common—every day language—into something precious: a poem, a story, an escape, a transcendence.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Amy Sayre-Roberts, The Horse Butcher</b> . . . . .	1
<b>Yosh Golden, Loneliness</b> . . . . .	4
<b>Glenda Hohimer, I Am You</b> . . . . .	8
<b>April Tabangcura, Whittier Narrows</b> . . . . .	9
<b>Amy Sayre-Roberts, Good Dancing Warrior</b> . . . . .	18
<b>Ryan Reeves, 01.07.00</b> . . . . .	19
<b>Penny Pennell, Mrs. Harper</b> . . . . .	20
<b>David Pitchford, Fourth Hymn to Her</b> . . . . .	28
<b>Barbara Robinette, A Vacant Verb</b> . . . . .	29
<b>Louis Bosco, Hot Times</b> . . . . .	30
<b>Ryan Reeves, 12.10.98</b> . . . . .	32
<b>Judith F. Bullock, O The Fool</b> . . . . .	33
<b>Mary Gilmore, September</b> . . . . .	36

## Hot Times

It was early June, and soon the school would empty out for the summer. Inside the classroom it was heavy hot, and the open windows did little to dissipate the early heat wave that had begun a week ago. A floor fan provided a background drone as it pushed wet air from place to place.

I was slumped at my desk at the rear as Sister Anna Frances tried vainly to get the class interested in the novel we were reading. It was late afternoon, and my attention wandered randomly, interrupted only when my gaze stopped on the wall clock. Could only five minutes have passed?

This roving gaze had taken a while to develop and perfect. The trick was to appear to be paying attention while casting sidelong glances this way and that, usually lingering on some girl. There were quite a few cute ones in the sixth grade—a lot cuter than they were in the fifth. Some were even beginning to look less like girls, and I liked to evaluate the upper development of each.

Take Suzanne, for example. She could probably nurse a baby now, not that that was what I fantasized about her. On the other hand, Marilyn was as flat chested as a boy. I had seen pictures of breasts but had never seen them in person. I figured they would be soft, sort of like rising bread dough. Just thinking about them made me dizzy.

Some of the guys liked to brag about their conquests, which were called “scores” but were mostly only getting to first base. First base was kissing, second base touching the upper body, third base the lower body, and a home run...well no one I knew had claimed a home run yet, except for Ronnie. But Ronnie was a born liar and everyone knew it, although we sure did like to hear him tell his hot stories.

I had only gotten to first base twice. Three times, in fact, but one didn't count because my mouth accidentally caught the tip of the girl's nose as I blindly sought her lips. To make matters worse, the girl thought it was funny. Talk about embarrassment!

My very first base hit occurred while playing a game of Sleeping Beauty in someone's back yard one evening. The girls would take turns being the sleeping beauty, and the boys would take turns being the prince who finds her, kisses her, and wakens her to *happiness*.

I had been nervous waiting my turn and wondering who my sleeping beauty would be. When the time came, it was flat chested Marilyn whom

I got to kiss. The girl was supposed to remain “asleep” at first and then slowly wake up. Flat chested or not, Marilyn was a great kisser, and I was in heaven!

The only other time I reached first base was at a party where Spin the Bottle was played. The girl who spun the bottle that ended up pointing to me was a big girl—an out-of-state cousin visiting the girl who was having the party.

The procedure was for the two winners to go into an empty closet and make out briefly. The big girl was even bigger when she stood up and beckoned me to follow. When the closet door closed I couldn't see a thing, but I felt her grab my shoulders roughly and pull me up to her. The eager wetness of her kiss grossed me out; however, when the door opened, I managed to swagger out like a real Don Juan.

That was it. Twelve years old and only two kisses to my credit. My eyes lingered on Suzanne and imagined what it would be like kissing her while my hands crept to the softness of her breasts. Slowly I began to sense a thickening in my groin area. Oh no, not here, I dreaded, hoping I wouldn't have to stand up soon.

Would you believe it? Sister Anna Frances was now calling on me to read a portion of the novel! This meant standing up! Desperately I pleaded for relaxation down there...to no avail. I sort of half stood up, holding the book in one hand and a sheet of paper over my fly.

“Come now, Louis. We know it's warm, but you must stand up straight in order to be heard.” Sister Anna Frances never got it right.

Everyone it seemed was staring at me now, and a few titters could be heard, along with some low guffaws. I was mortified but was about to begin reading when Sister finally wised up and told me to never mind. The bell rang soon after, ending my agony as the class rushed for the exit.

The following day Sister Anna Frances issued a change in policy: “Due to the extreme heat, readers will be allowed to remain seated if they choose.” Right then and there, every boy in class would have voted her the “Teacher of the Year” award!!

**Louis Bosco** – I am a retired state worker, married for forty-five years, grandfather of nine, and enrolled in the Senior Learners Program at UIS. Writing has always been my avocation but never came to life until I began taking creative writing classes with Jacqueline Jackson to whom I cannot give enough credit. Writing fiction is fun, but I find most satisfaction in writing about family history, the characters which comprise it, and the long-forgotten memories which this type of writing often resurrects.

**Judith F. Bullock**, senior in the Legal Studies Program at UIS, looks forward to attending graduate school at Northern Arizona University at Flagstaff in their English M.A. program, "Writing, Discourse, and Community." She currently has two works in progress: *Writer's Arcana*, *The Cryptic Craft of Writing*, a twenty-two chapter work relating the imagery of the tarot cards to the writing mind, and *Horned Goddess*, an occult novel addressing gender issues, personal identity, and witchcraft.

**Mary Gilmore** – In the fall of 2000, I attended a creative writing class at Lincoln Land Community College, out of which my short story "Die and Let Live" was accepted for publication in their journal *The Ruptured Seed*. Since then, I have attended a writer's group that meets each month at Prairie Archives Bookstore. Currently, I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Springfield and have been challenged during the Fall 2001 semester to write from a variety of fiction genre. I look forward to continuing writing fiction and studying literature at UIS and will finish my thesis in the summer of 2002.

**Yosh Golden, M.A.** – Legal Studies Program, is the mother of three daughters and spouse of UIS Professor Larry Golden. Working full-time, she writes mostly late at night. "Writing is much more challenging, but it is also very satisfying." She also occasionally lectures at high schools and at UIS on Manzanar Relocation Camp, her birthplace.

**Glenda Hohimer** – At a rather harrowing time for our nation, I find myself in an occupation that I once considered mundane. Yet, in recent weeks, the media has transformed me into an unspoken hero of sorts. I am an employee of the United States Postal Service. My passion for the written word serves as a catharsis in the midst of current national anxieties and satisfies the true sustenance of a more meaningful life. Writing is my license to create in a world that has suffered much destruction. I also work with non-fiction. Documenting life, as we know it, is my offering to posterity and serves as research for my works of fiction as well. Presently, I am crossing the threshold into the world of freelancing, hoping to capitalize on the power of words.

**Penny Pennell** is a student at the University of Illinois at Springfield. Her short story "A Dark and Stormy Night" is being published by *Eureka Literary Magazine*. Currently she is working on her third novel and is actively pursuing a career in screenwriting.

**David Pitchford** is a student, poet, writer, painter, father, husband, editor, and publisher. Pitchford pursues the goal of teaching creative writing for an accredited educational institution. He is currently involved in a fiction workshop and publishes a literary quarterly review as a volunteer for Poets & Writers Literary Forum of Springfield, IL.

**Ryan Reeves** is currently completing his master's thesis tentatively entitled "Sculpting Fixed Space: Jack Spicer, Susan Howe, and Jackson Pollack." He teaches freshman composition and literature at Springfield College and student teaches at University of Illinois at Springfield. His immediate family consists of his wife Betsy, a dog named Jack, and a bird named Eliot.

**Amy Sayre-Roberts** is a graduate student of English at UIS and is finishing a novel entitled *The Portuguese Box*, a series of entwining vignettes based on a family of Portuguese immigrants pre and post WWII. Her writing credits include previous publication in *The Alchemist Review*, a former monthly columnist for the *Jacksonville Journal Courier*, and technical writing for Levi Ray and Shoup. She lives in Springfield with her incredibly gifted and handsome husband and two faithful sled dogs, Blanca and Quoya. When not writing or at work, Amy prefers to be trekking across isolated parts of the Alaskan Wilderness with the aforementioned husband following and observing the great brown bears of Katmai. Favorite writers include Shakespeare, Faulkner, Marques, and the poet Pablo Neruda; there is no evidence that they are fond of her work at all.

**Barbara Robinette** took a poetry writing class with Nancy Perkins in the spring of 2001 and found it a fun learning experience. She is a staff clerk at UIS in the Campus Services Dept.

**April Tabangcura** – Although born in Elgin, IL, I grew up in Los Angeles County, California. In 1999, I returned to my birth state to focus on writing and earning a Bachelor in Arts degree in English. My inspiration comes from reading books by Louis Sachar and Roald Dahl. In observing the pride and determination of the culture in the Midwest, I have been drawn to reflect on my own heritage and experience.