

MASTHEAD

EDITOR IN CHIEF

LEX ENRICO SANTI

DIRECTOR OF BOOK PUBLISHING

ELIZABETH KADETSKY

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

M. M. DE VOE

ASSISTANT EDITOR

KENDRA TUTHILL

JOSH CAMPBELL

SENIOR EDITOR

KATHERINE GEHAN

FICTION READERS

WANT CHYI

KSENIYA MELNIK

CHERI JOHNSON

J. CALEB WINTERS

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

JUSTIN NICHOLAS

FUTURE INITIATIVES DIRECTOR

JOSEPH NALBONE

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

DANIELLE CREBBIN

PUBLISHING INTERN

RACHEL C. LEWIS

THIS IS OUR STORIES: HOW IT STARTED & SOME WORDS ABOUT JOSH CAMPBELL

When I founded Our Stories, I wanted it to change the world. I wanted people to care about reviewing short stories and give something back to the writers who wanted to part with their money for the chance of being published. Art should be—not so damn alienating. The irony is that I never felt that for myself—that I gave myself that much time to let myself be heard in the writing. It’s my hope that now that I have cleared my karma that I can get to that. Publishing the stories in print is one part of the karma.

The other reason I founded Our Stories was my best friend, Josh Campbell, Assistant Editor. Josh and I were the “write brothers” in college. We traded poems in creative writing class. We were in the same fraternity and from similar backgrounds and came from broken homes. We graduated college and Josh went on to Boston and began working in architecture. The two of us were always trying to live the renaissance-man-life. Josh was into structures, architecture, building and art and I was into politics, languages and social justice. We traded writing for years. We wrote one another letters. I love him like the brother I never had. He edited my manuscripts, he read everything I wrote and had written. I read everything he ever gave me with interest and love.

I went off to do an MFA and while I was writing that intentionally I was also talking to Josh every day. He had gone and got the bends, as Radiohead would say, and I helped him out. Josh inspired two careers in me, the writer and the therapist. It was because of him that I realized I had a gift of doing one-on-one therapy with others. In truth, Our Stories was the vision of letting someone else whose stories were in process, to know that someone had heard them. This is what our friendship has always been about. This is Our Stories, we're all trying desperately to know that we matter. All of your stories mattered to me. All of them.

After graduate school, Josh and I talked about jobs, what we would do. Where we would work. In a fit of inspiration told him—fuck it, the whole thing about literary journals is corrupt, why don't we just found one and that can be our steady employment until we find something anything else. So I did it. I founded Our Stories to give us jobs. It remains, for both of us, the longest we've ever been employed someplace. We're now in our 40's and we're both trying to make sense of the world. We still talk, about once every two weeks. Sometimes we have these monster calls. Neither of us write enough. Maybe that will change now too.

The journal was something we talked about over the years. He recorded this amazing interview with George Saunders, which was like recording Mick Jagger for us. He was always a better interviewer and editor than I ever was. We read short stories and talked about the issues. Sometimes we argued about the journal. I had trouble letting it all go. Josh helped me when it was dark. He helped me as a friend. He got married 3 years ago now. I stood up at his

wedding and read a poem. We ate BBQ in Kansas City. We loved the story of all of this. We loved helping each other when it all got dark. We became the men that we always wanted to become—masters in a variety of fields and passionate and kind towards the world around us.

It started as a big FU to the industry and it ends in relative obscurity. To the staff that worked with me. I love you. To all our readers who gave us hope for another way of being. Thank you. To the writers we published, we hope you continue to write into dark nights. We did something here. I'm glad to have finished it right.

Thanks for reading us.

—LES

EDITOR'S CORNER

NOTES ON VOLUME 6

Sometimes you just want to catch your breath. Sometimes you're tired of playing catch up with the issues and the submission system and the website and all the other damn ins and outs that come with running a journal. From the Fall of 2009 till the Summer of 2010 was a period of relative growth and stability for the journal. We kept publishing outstanding work and hired more staff. This issue contains some outstanding short stories and has two original interviews with Dorothy Allison and Karen E. Bender, respectively. For me, it was a year of reflection on where we came from as a journal and it was a good feeling to finally have all the right things in place to keep moving forward as a journal. Volume IV marks a turning point in the journals history--it's time to grow, it's time to keep looking at what's next. Publishing *The Best of Our Stories* is always a momentous occasion and now with this fourth volume we can take a look back.

We published the first two volumes of *Our Stories* during the summer of 2009, we hadn't planned on doing a print run when we first started the journal but we now see the value and possibilities that doing a print run allows. Volume 1 & 2 featured the fine cover art of Colin Michael Shaw (www.shawart.com). Colin is a gem of a human being and was gracious enough to lend us his art for the covers. Volume III featured the photography of Jesse Winter, (www.jessewinter.com) an extremely talented and

amazing photographer who I am also lucky to have as a friend. This catches us up. Till now. Bob Reuter, is one of the most intriguing human beings I've met this far in my life. He is, by all accounts, a man of seemingly limitless talent--a musician who has been playing the Saint Louis scene for the past thirty years, a radio DJ who is also noted for being the host of Bob's Scratchy Records on KDHX FM a local St. Louis station and finally a photographer. You can find more about Bob Reuter at www.bobreuterstl.com. I met Bob a little over a year and a half ago after he agreed to do some promotional photography for my wife, a musician in the local scene, Leslie Sanazaro. On the day that he called and said the pictures were finished he asked us to meet him at an Italian restaurant in the city. Sitting at the bar he stood an imposing figure, about six foot, with a bald head and ashen white goatee. I remember when he brought out the pictures that he took of her--he put this small five by seven box on the bar and said, I got your pictures here. A good looking man in his mid-fifties, hip in a plain-I don't give a fuck, sort of way. There was something unassuming about him, he was boyish and the way he acted seemed not to match his imposing figure or powerful presence. We opened the small box of original Bob Reuter pictures, which he'd developed and printed on Kodak paper, a work in craft and process and we were amazed.

Ever since that day I've been an advocate, fan and supporter of Bob Reuter's work. I am embarrassed to say it took me this long to actually get him into print. This magazine is more or less, his. His work is stark, subtle stares. The pictures seem capture a part of the human soul in their smiles, seductive sexy grace and powerful grainy moments. You

could see Bob's work hanging on the side of a building as does Shawna at the Galaxy Basement on page 198, makes me think, "damn, all that's missing from this picture is a damn Budweiser symbol." But this all reminds me that's not the point. Not all artists wind up in fame and fortune—life comes and damn well goes. Bob captures moments, like on page 189 in "Ray Brewer, Drunky See, Drunky Do" about to start swinging in a backyard boxing match—this is not a 1920's match, this was this century, people. Or take, one of my favorites, "Richard Buckner at Vintage Vinyl" on page 178, you see this man in the middle of a record store, singing like his life depends on it. People live their lives in front of us—Bob is paying attention and thank God someone put that camera in his hands. All of these pictures are part of make you understand what St. Louis is about but more important who is this man--Bob Reuter. Our Stories will continue to support this amazing artist and we have plans for an entire book of Bob's photography in the future.

Now, onward into the issue. In the fall of 2009, we published some amazing stories. Margaret McMullan's story Saving Instructions took on a dreamy quality of a dinner party, a bored housewife who winds up with a puff of pot and a young seductive gentlemen. Adam Smith's story, Finding Perfect, is an account of a father and son looking for the perfect christmas tree, it's not overly sentimental and plays all the right chords. Some stories capture voice and mood perfectly, Mark Wolsky's story Winter's Coming is that story, it is as if Wolsky--observant and wise--sat in a restaurant and simply copied down life going on in a small town. Travis Mills' piece, Catcher's Say, reminded me out of something of a really old antique comic whose story you

find captivating. Greg Girvan's story, *Leaving* is a rough and tumble story filled with cheating girlfriends, a bar fight and precise descriptions which take you into the life of a character who is ready for things to change in his life. Ira Sukrungruang's piece, *Forecast*, tells the story of teenagers who are struggling to find themselves but aren't old enough to figure it completely out. Finally, Kendra Tuthil conducted a brilliant interview with one of my favorite author's Dorothy Allison, one which I recently approved re-publication in the University Press of Mississippi's book entitled *Conversations with Dorothy Allison*.

In the Winter of 2010 issue, we picked Jesse Goolsby as the winner of our Richard Bausch prize for his story *Touch*. It was a beautiful take on the pressures that our nation's women and men go through coming back to the United States after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the story had me in tears by end of it. Onnesha Roychouduri's story *A Simple Migration*, tells the story of a man's last days alive, awash in a world of memories and pain--it is a story of tremendous insight into the human condition. Chellis Ying's piece, *Blue and Maroon*, dredges some of the ugliness of people into its carefully paced piece which leaves you gasping at the end of it. The last story we picked was Louis Wittig's story, *What Snuggle, the Fabric Softener Spokesbear, Says As He Takes the Seat Next to You on Continental Flight 3411 to Buffalo* (yes that's the entire title) is a piece of absurdist fiction, which is about, well, the title says it all. The piece had me laughing out loud on every page. Finally, Josh Campbell led a 5 star interview with Karen E. Bender and she provided tremendous insights into the craft of writing and teaching.

In the Spring of 2010, we conducted our first flash fiction prize, the Gordon Award. We picked Paula Paige's story *Moshiach Is Here*. I picked this story as a winner because I believe it accomplishes what all flash fiction intends to do, which is provide a powerful story that embosses the reader in a world of the writers making. Matthew Lang's story, *Island Paradise*, is poetic story of one man's thoughts--alone-in the world, he renders the story masterfully, crafting a piece of fiction which sticks with you. Connie A Lopez-Hood's story, *Sunday Night at Norm's Near Calle Ocho, 02:45AM*, is a wonderful piece of flash that gives you great insights into what it means to be Cuban-American. This piece played to my heart strings for many reasons. Finally, Townsend Walker's piece, *Slashing the Nets*, is a story that has fantastic control of language and a mastery of scene setting. It is my hope that the Gordon Award will continue to publish some of the best flash fiction in the months to come.

In the Summer of 2010 issue we published what I believe to be one of the best issues we've ever published as far as pound for point quality. The issue also stands as some of the eclectic tastes that we have at *Our Stories*--you know how some journals say, "to get a sense at what we might publish, read our issues!" well, you can know *Our Stories* by simply reading this issue page to page. Let's begin. Roy Jeffords' story *Ozmandias*, is pure literary fiction, you read between the lines of this brilliant period piece, post civil war of a kingdom in the south which holds onto its reins of oppression. Daryl Morazzini's piece, *When They Come for You*, is a reviting story which keeps your eyeballs glued to the page--it is also a good example of what it means to

revise and resubmit a story. We'd read the story before and gave Daryl some tips to get the story cleaned up and sure enough, it won second prize in our contest. Next, Glenda Bailey-Mershon's story is of visions, premonitions and a woman who can see the future, it is something different but Bailey-Mershon handles the subject matter so well that we don't blink the entire story it she carries us along. Elizabeth Boyd wrote her story, Kudzu, in the vein of Borges of a young girl whose world is ever-increasingly closing in around her. I loved this piece and it found it like a glass of cold fresh water. Ed Bull's story, Night Vision, is like Lynchian Hurt Locker--I could say more but you need to read it. Over the years that we've been publishing Our Stories we've had quite a few stories published about the wars and it's always my goal to publish literature that stands for something powerful and explores these worlds in ways which honor the soldiers, honors where we are as a country and seeks to understand the complexity of our lives. Bravo Ed. Let's see, last but not least Kerry Mackel's story, Blurts, is a very mature and hilarious story of a teacher who must deal with the uncomfortable situation of a high school student who asks about the morality of abortion. Told in quick wit and touches of brilliant dialogue we close Volume IV with going back to the school.

I hope you enjoy all of these stories. As I close this opening essay it strikes me as to how in running this thing, I've found a place to call home. I've made my home with these stories and with a staff of careful readers who I am lucky to work with me. I hope you truly enjoy these stories--each and every one of them. And for those of you who we didn't publish--keep writing, keep reading, keep revising. We do

this thing in Our Stories for you those we don't publish just as much as for those we've published here.

Cheers to all and God bless.

-Lex Enrico Santí

10/6/2010

LEX ENRICO SANTI



EDITOR IN CHIEF

Lex Enrico Santi is the editor in chief and founder of Our Stories. He founded the journal in 2006 after deciding that the writing world could use a little bit more love in its submission process.

He earned his MFA in Creative Writing from George Mason University and MSW at Washington University in Saint Louis. His own work has been published in the Word Riot, In Posse Review, Dark Sky Magazine, Prick of the Spindle, Cubista Magazine, Revista 22 and The Plum Ruby Review. He writes and raves in the great city of Saint Louis.

Our Stories remains the only literary journal that provides feedback for every submission. You can find more about him at www.alexissanti.com.

BEST OF OUR STORIES

VOLUME SIX • 2012

2	THIS IS OUR STORIES: HOW IT STARTED & SOME WORDS ABOUT JOSH CAMPBELL
5	EDITOR'S CORNER
13	BEST OF OUR STORIES
15	FLESH WOUND
22	HEY MISTER
44	RECOVERY
59	TRESSPASS
81	PALE IMPOSTERS
98	EDITOR'S CORNER
105	THE HASSELBLAD
127	AURORA
145	PROPHECY
167	SCORCHED
176	COVERED IN SOOT
181	NEW FICTION SECURITY
201	EDITOR'S CORNER



VOLUME 6

ISSUE 1, WINTER 2012

FLESH WOUND

BY: ALLISON FIELD BELL

White Russians in salsa jars. Snow crusted on a fire pit, three shitty throwing knives and an iced-over Cottonwood.

“Here’s your problem, Clara.”

Jesse is holding the butt of a knife, aiming at the tree less than four feet from where we stand on the porch. Beside us, a purple dog leash, a flower pot ashtray, frozen hiking boots, and a boxy air-conditioning unit littered with mugs. Our two wooden lawn chairs, ingeniously converted to rocking chairs, are still swaying. They’re the same puke green as the house behind them. My house. A crooked thing with a linoleum kitchen and hookah-burned carpets. The living room is posters, books, a paisley couch and a milk-crate coffee table. As a bonus, there’s a moldy basement with an old PC, a single crutch, a box full of receipts. Last week, I pulled the door open to meowing. A black cat in a sealed-off basement, the latest unresolved practical joke.

Outside, my front yard: clumps of overgrown weeds, a single dying tree that almost has me praying every storm, a broken plastic table, the fake fire pit my former roommate bought at Home Depot. The whole square of paradise is protected by a glowing white picket fence—my landlord’s sense of humor.

Jesse throws the knife at the sick tree’s trunk. It twangs off