



## RIGHT HAND POINTING

Fiction 2006

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# Hello

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Special thanks to the tireless F. John Sharp for guest editing this issue.

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*\*"Right Hand Pointing Kansas" digitally edited & processed photo montage*

## **F. John Sharp: Editor's Note**

It's possible that a collection of stories an editor chooses tells as much about that editor as the stories tell about their authors. Whether this is true, I don't know. But I do think that the collection of stories I've chosen tells more about what I believe to be the definition of Flash fiction than anything else.

Some of the stories have full arcs, with a beginning, middle and an end. Some are more like an impressionistic painting than a story, not leaving the reader with anything more specific than a feeling or an idea. Each do one thing—they embody my definition of Flash. Which is to say, there is no hard and fast definition. Something short. Something that moves me. That's it.

I'm really happy to have a mix of more established writers and some newer ones. I received a lot of good stories to look over and select from, and I'm thankful to all who have let us publish their work.

I've enjoyed this gig, and I'd like to thank Dale, first for asking me, second, for pretty much letting me to do my thing, and third, for creating a really wonderful little home for this art form.

And if anyone wants me to play them a jig...

*F. John Sharp*

## **Kim Chinquee: *Her House***

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We preferred her house. Her parents went away. Sometimes we had the whole weekend. Her mother made cheesecakes in twos and threes that we were supposed to take to Mr. Peasant, Mr. Waffle. They were almost dead. By the time I got there, her parents were gone and I'd left a note for my mother telling her not to expect me.

She'd give me one cake and she'd have the other. If there was a third, we'd split it. We were about the same size, although she could eat more. We spooned the cakes into our mouths, looking at each other laughing. Then she got the chips and chicken, and we dipped them into mayonnaise and catsup.

I headed for the bathroom, waving to her. She'd be upstairs in her private one, and by the time she came out, I'd be completely empty, had cleaned up the toilet, studied the grooves in my ribcage, relieved to see them, looked in the mirror, studying my dimples, then I'd lie on the floor, balancing a yardstick over my bones.

When she came down, we talked about boys, how happy we were to be skinny. We went to the basement, dipping into her parents' beer supply. We danced around, curling our hair.

## **Kaolin Fire: *Hypo***

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Bastard son, taking pills--has to slow down, slow down or he'll burn, crash and burn, and only stars get to do that; he's two degrees left of stardom. Micronova.

Day job, night job, keeping busy. Fingers tap a medley, but it's lifeless. He's far, further, farther--too much, and he's laying drugs on the drugs, striving for hanoi but babel's screaming in his ears. Can he hear, can he hear?

On his breaks he sups information, active always active, hemispheres clocking over to digest the constant data, digest and thread, re-thread, retread the paths of knowledge.

Normal, anti-normal, it's all the same--so slow, so simple. He dreams in doppler, symbols fighting, ripping, streaming.

Has to slow down, or his flesh will strip, crease, cease to flex--living life in a fifth the time, no peers to keep it with; a half-man band, genetic freak, doctors say the drugs should work. The drugs should work, control the stars. It's chemical, all chemical, genetical, heretical.

He sees the stars, so bright, so sharp--they're loved, not understood; mortals yearn to feel the burn, but he knows the pain, just pain.

Off-days he shoves the pain, shovels pain, hypojects it straight, CNS, and slows.

**Benjamin Buchholz:**  
***Interview with the New***  
***American Family***

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DAUGHTER: He looks at me this certain way, I don't know, like he's undressing me. I just can't think of him as dad. What mom sees I don't know. He chews and spits and has crusty fingernails. Like I could just imagine him picking me up at the football game probably parked in the far corner away from the lights in that Pinto or whatever it is he drives. I'd rather walk. It'd be safer. Living in this apartment is bad enough now but add him in, like, what, am I supposed to ever have friends over or what? It sounds like a joke or something but the wallpaper is peeling and there are ants. Ants!

MOTHER: Randy isn't bad. It's something. Cora should appreciate that. She should know I'm doing it for her because there needs to be a dad. But, sometimes I catch myself staring basically through Randy. It'd be easy enough to forget what I see when I look through him, the old winding drive up Two Elms with split rail fences and leaves turning redgold, the low purring glide of Gerald's Jag, roof-down, my hair flagging. If only Randy would say something, anything, notice me at all when I get that faraway look, snap me out of it.

FATHER: I love it when you call me that, call me that again, honey, what was it? Ahh, yes, just like that, 'Poppy-daddy,' say it! 'Poppy-daddy' yes! Hola conchita bonita, esta en fuego, lick me till I shiver. Tomorrow we'll sail the bay naked as newborns and you can read me Neruda in your cat voice, 'Ya no la quiero, es cierto, pero cuánto la quise,' I'll feed you hummus and rose petals and won't any more need to feel old, old like Margaret with her tits flat as sacks.

CAMERA, CONFESSOR: All around the stadium-lights little white moths circle and bump in the caress of night as ram Randy on a vacant street hears the far crowd roar. He tucks his shirt after a quick fucking, off to fetch Cora. And, Margaret in her nighty burns cigarette by cigarette their pictures, Caribbean vacationing on that 37-footer, lateens white like feathers against the blue bowl of the sky. Gerald doesn't think of them at all anymore, not with Bonita heaving, cleansing him of what slim trace love remained when Cora's DNA came back definitely, definitely not his.

## ***Bill West: August, 1946***

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Yuki hears the faint drone above the singing of cicadas. She sees the mirrored sun flash from a toy-tiny plane up high. Children outside school look up. The breeze carries scent of camphor trees from the Kokutaiji Temple grounds.

From the plane something black falls. White petals bloom and fill. The plane turns away sharply, its drone now high-pitched and eager.

She watches the parachute and remembers flying kites with her brother. In her head she hears the nursery rhyme,

*Falling, falling is the kite.  
Run and run to keep it right.*

How she would love to fly a kite. She would paint it, a crane flying over waves. Children would watch her run and run, her kite would soar above them all. Everyone would admire its colour and beauty, and ignore that pale imposter.

## Elsbeth Graty: *Empty Shell*

"If you press it to your ear, you can hear the sea, go on!"

I try. I hear nothing. Space.

"It doesn't work, dad" I thrust it back at him. He ejects a hollow, sad laugh.

"Keep trying," and he kisses me and leaves.

Mum cries at night. After the shouting; silence. Then when I'm in bed, struggling to find sleep, I hear low sobs, rising uncontrollably. Their rhythmic regularity lulls me, like a cradle rocking.

In the morning, I take the shell, pressing till its fat pink lips leave an imprint on the side of my face. But all I hear is emptiness. I take a bead from a broken necklace and drop it in. It rattles about without conviction.

I open my window, peer at the neat garden below. The shell slips from my fingers, blows me one last kiss as it twirls in the air and smashes down on the grey concrete slabs, scaring the early morning blackbirds into flight. I feel exhilarated. It lies in two pieces. I am disappointed. I wanted infinite fragments, invisible to the human eye. The bead rolls around unsure where to go, settling on a crack in the path.

Mum comes in, eyes bloated.

"It's time to get up." Her voice is flat.

"Didn't you hear?" I ask.

"Hear what, darling?"

I shake my head, "Nothing, nothing at all."

## **Jackson Bliss: Lost**

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My kids know the rules. Roberto and Emmanuela went off to school, dressed in doll clothes that still shrink in the sun, discolored and diminutive like nicknames. As for Juanita, that little brat, she had until seven. If she was late, helping Samsona Stagado with her chores, she'd have to stay with her for the night. That's the rule, and she knows it. The truth is, she tries to be late. We have our own problems and she's sick of everything, like moving the coche before night falls. You see, the streets fill up with patrol cars, borrachos and cowboys, and men don't understand silence the way undocumented women do. The weekly move keeps us together. We roll down the windows and listen to music as we drive up Morando Hill or through Bakersfield Commons, passing million dollar homes with fountains and trimmed hedges and TV commercials flashing through bedroom windows. I admire how well kept people's sidewalks are, the way they make their homes so pretty, adorning porches with wicker baskets, little benches made of birch and banana wood, pots of prickly pear cactus that come from the Mexican desert. And I love the way California smells at night. Reminds me of flour tortillas, the kind you buy back home when the roads shut down during traffic jams as old Mayan women sell you pineapple tamales wrapped in corn husks that look like burlap ponchos, and for fifty pesos, you can get a bag of twelve, piping hot, and passed to you right through the open windows, fogging up the glass like new lovers. By the time you're done eating, the traffic has cleared and the bus is moving again.

I hope Juanita is strong. Her absence makes my stomach hurt. And I feel guilty for rolling down the windows, it's just that the air smells like a valley in the Yucatan, like a clay oven in Campeche. If Juanita was here I'd tell her about her cousins that sleep in library stacks and study in bus depots, that dance in outfits made from silver curtains. Someday I will tell Juanita all about Mexico, about the only country that loves you like a lost girl.



you, and when I crashed at the bottom I thought I felt you hold my hand.

But no one can be in two places at once.

## **Kelsey Rakes: Border-Line Nostalgic**

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I used to stand in the middle of the railroad track on Sundays, one foot on either side of the county border line, just so I could tell you that I was in two places at once.

You would shake your head in that disapproving, familiar way, and tell me that no one could be in two places at once, and besides, standing on railroad tracks was illegal, and I had better watch it or else I was liable to get ticketed.

I informed you that wanting to live a little was not illegal.

The day you died I rode full speed down the nearby hill with my bare legs on the handlebars of my mother's bike, the sun shining full in my eyes. I swear to god my hands lifted off the handlebars and flew away, and to this day I still can't find them, but you, you know where they are.

I got a ticket for walking on those railroad tracks and two weeks ago I rode down that hill remembering

## **Liesl Jobson: *Baby Finger***

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Before I turned six my third sister was born. Dad said five women were enough. The harem was complete. Estelle was beautiful, everyone said so. Her name meant 'star'. But I was still cleverer. That Christmas I drew an angel with a harp and said, Look, Mum, I drew a 'hark', knowing the correct word, hoping she'd laugh, think me cute, wishing I'd overhear her tell this to my grandmother on the phone later. I tried to make droplets of water from the tap hover on my cheeks, like the crying poster girl. I wished an artist would draw me looking sorrowful. I practised turning my eyes down in the mirror above the mosaic tiles. My mother let me touch Estelle's soft fontanel, explaining that if I conked her on the head by accident, she would be brain damaged. Instead I bit her finger when nobody was looking. When my mother came through and found me comforting the new baby, she said I was a good girl, her little helper.

## **Kristen Tsetsi: *Seasonal Tourists***

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They came in from the cold shaking snow from heavy winter jackets, most of them thick, bright, and down-filled. The tourists to the ski town wore their colors like peacock feathers, lures drawing mates to the café at the bottom of the slopes for a cup of coffee, hot chocolate, or a promise to return, together, for breakfast.

The hotel was tucked in a cluster of evergreens at the end of a narrow, well-plowed road, the road itself a hidden turnoff from the main highway, marked only by a wooden sign knocked aslant one dead, hot summer by restless teenage locals.

The first person they saw when they came to town was the girl behind the counter. Dying neon bulbs flicked and buzzed over her counter. Her hair hung dark and straight down her back. The men found her attractive and smiled at her and invited her to ski with them.

She handed them their keys and told them check-out was at noon. Now and then, her fingertips would brush theirs.

One or two a day would ask about the yellow ribbon stapled to the counter's front panel and she would tell them it was for her manager's son.

His name was Kyle, and this was the name she would call out at night when her shift was long over and curtains hid wide windows and another bright coat draped over a chair dripped a day's worth of melted snow onto her carpet.

## **Randall Brown: *Bats and Balls***

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I let a fly ball sail over my head, hit off the fence, bounce over for a homer. If I'd have dropped it, my father might've showed some understanding. But my standing there, "still as a statue," that was beyond his ability to comprehend. I was thirteen.

We won anyway, but Dad wouldn't let me go to Dairy Queen. Instead he went to the Falcon and returned with the bat and basket of balls kept in his trunk.

When I thought I loved him, I ran over the entire earth to catch his monster launches, hurdled over the shrubs at the property line, ducked under the tetherball, ran straight through crabapples that smacked against me.

Maybe his passion for physics explained his love of the fly ball and my intuitive gift to be under the ball no matter its trajectory. He took his AP students to baseball diamonds and pool halls. He'd smash drive after drive until he could whack them level, so that a dropped ball would reach the ground simultaneously with the hit one.

Baseball. My father's love. They were entangled, like the webbing of a mitt.

My father stood at home plate and said I couldn't leave until I shagged a hundred fly balls. But I was done with baseball. The first fly ball sailed over my head. I sat down, cross-legged. After a dozen, my father started to aim for me, long looping fly balls that thudded yards, sometimes feet away.

Dusk. Pink clouds. The type of light balls got lost in. Soon line drives whizzed left and right and over me. It was as if a shadow swatted the balls over third base, curved them toward me in left field.

I had found my father's collection of Playgirl magazines in his closet. They weren't there when mom lived with us. Bats looked like giant boners—and I pictured my father holding the bats of the men in magazines and heard the playground names for him, felt a deep fear, as if he had a sickness we had to keep secret.

I wish he had found me that night with his wild line drives, picked me up and carried me home, away from a world that taught me such hate.

Throughout my childhood, I had loved chasing those colossal shots of my father.

And then I didn't.

### ***Rusty Barnes: The Crash***

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Torn up after the car crash, she put her hand on her abdomen, as if she had indigestion. Yep, she said. You're going to give birth soon. The tick of the hospital equipment filled the room. She'd been thrown through the window and landed on a guardrail and scraped along for ten feet before coming to rest tummy-first against a concrete piling.

"Not me," I said, but my hand went to my navel anyway. "You're the one's p.g.," I said. I wanted to get back to Ray and the kids, but Shandon was my best friend, and I didn't know how to tell her. She needed me now. She had a lacerated spleen and a slash like a knife-cut along her side where the skin unraveled to a foot-long spot of road-rash. Wear your seatbelt, kids.

"Not any more I'm not," she said. "But it's OK." She coughed once and a little spritz of blood appeared on her hospital johnny, and I thought of all the ways God had to end things, he chose death. He could give us life forever in some other form, some Buddhist thing, where we could go on at least. But he had to make it final.

The doctors said she wasn't continent, and might never be again. She'd want to be dead. I would want to be dead. But she might live. She had to hold onto that. It's what they said.

"Believe me, Carissa," Shandon said. "You're going to have a kid and name it for me and raise it the way a kid ought to be raised. No TV. No snacks but Cheerios and fruit and veggies. Make that baby eat right."

Just then Ray buzzed my cell and I stepped out to take the call, and when I came back Shandon was gone, just blipped out between breaths.

We named our next baby Marta after Ray's mom though. He hated the name Shandon. When he left me nineteen months after Shandon's funeral, I started the process to change Marta's name to Shandon, but it was already too late, and the papers still sit here somewhere, I'm sure.

I take Marta to the graveside and she plays in the flowers. It's where Ray meets us for the court-appointed visitation, because the park's next door. Marta plays in the plastic flowers and Ray stares bullet holes. Shandon lies propped under a stone, gone where I can't see.

I think maybe I'll change my name away from Ray's. Even one minute longer of having that man's name I can't take.

## ***Sue Miller: Three Stories***

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1.

### **Mating Ritual**

Behind the boxwood hedge where the fireflies were thickest, I waited every evening. They hung their bodies in the cooling night, hung them out, flashing twice for "Yes?" once for "Yes!" I flashed my torch twice towards his house, miles away, in another town now. I flashed and flashed but my only answer came from the night: the keening of crickets.

2.

### **Launch**

Randall looked guilty and Billy had been crying. The boys were summering in, not easing into it but chasing it full force, red-nosed and crispy--the way kids get that first week out of school--and they were pushing limits. The kitten lay dead between them, tangled in a crabbing net. "I swear, it was swimming, I swear it was!"

"Well it's not swimming now, is it."

"We were teaching it. We thought we could save it with the net, Christie."

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"Do you know how stupid you sound?"

Whimper.

I was watching them, I swear, but the sun was so warm. Tanning in the yard across the street, I closed my eyes. Just for a minute.

I thought I was so mature but I was helpless right now. My eighteen years of wisdom weren't coming through with any solutions for me at a time like this. Mom was going to be devastated and I was going to get blamed for it.

All the regret in the world wasn't bringing back that kitten. I guess Randy even tried CPR on it. He said he did, anyway. Saw it on TV. But it just lay there, limp and wet, boneless as it was lifeless when I picked it up from where the water lapped at it. The salt stung my cheeks as I turned away from them, into the wind. My eyes blurred up and I spoke to it softly, sang to it, and pretended I could make it all right again.

I walked down the ramp until I was waist deep in the sound. "What are you doing?" "Don't let it go!" Bring it back up here, Christiel!" I floated it in the water, righted it so that it did look like it was swimming, almost. I let my salt mix with the salt water all around me, but I pulled the kitten back up into my arms and cradled it across my chest.

"Dig the grave, assholes," I shot over my shoulder. I just stood there and rocked it, let the water rock me.

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3.

**Hum**

Every day I worry about something. Mostly, I worry he won't show. I know that my own smell is deafening in this July swelter, and I worry about that. But he likes it. I scream for him with my body; he reads me. He is always late. I lie on the bed and breathe, slowly, in cycles. The fan hums. I count off the time in ever-widening intervals until I've slowed myself, slowed down to almost unconscious, but I stay present, to wait. When I get to five breaths in five minutes, I know I can wait as long as it takes. He saw the note I left for him. When I passed it again this afternoon, it was pinned upside down. I know he knows to come tonight. I will wait for him. Time will drift. The hours will melt. I will worry, then dissolve it; he will come.

board of *Philadelphia Stories*. He holds an MFA in Fiction Writing from Vermont College (June 2006) and a BA from Tufts University. His stories, poems, and essays have been published widely, with recent work forthcoming in *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Del Sol Review*, *Cairn*, and *The Saint Ann's Review*. He's currently working on a short short collection, *Mad To Live*.

## Contributors

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**F. John Sharp** has published in print in *Peninsular*, *Snow Monkey* and in the upcoming *GUD*, and online in *Pindeldyboz*, *Salt River Review*, *Paumanok Review*, *Lunarity*, *Flashquake*, *In Posse Review*, and *Quantum Muse*, among others. His poetry appeared in the anthology, *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind*, published by Regent Press. He has also worked as an associate editor for the literary journals, *Night Train* and *Story Garden*. And, umm, now this.

**Rusty Barnes** lives in Revere MA where he oversees *Night Train*.

**Jackson Bliss** calls Chicago and Southern Cali home, though he's spent a great deal of time traveling through Europe and Africa. Now he's at the University of Notre Dame, working on his MFA thesis. Jackson has published work in *The Bend*, *The Oberlin Review*, *The Voice*, *BlazeVox* and *3am Magazine*. Jackson likes to volunteer, play the piano in the dark, speak French, dance to good hip-hop, ride the El for hours listening to his iPod, people watching and loitering at his favorite Thai restaurant in Chicago with his crew.

**Randall Brown** is a teacher who lives outside of Philadelphia with his wife Meg, who is a cabaret singer, and their two children. He is a Pushcart nominee, a fiction editor with *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and on the editorial

**Benjamin Buchholz** is a US Army Officer just recently returned from Iraq. His work has appeared widely at places like *Planet Magazine*, *GoodFoot*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, *MiPo* and others. For a full bibliography and other oddities, please see [www.benjaminbuchholz.com](http://www.benjaminbuchholz.com)

**Kim Chinquee**'s recent work has appeared in *Noon*, *Conjunctions*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Mississippi Review*, *Fiction International*, and several other journals. She teaches creative writing at Central Michigan University

**Kaolin Fire** is partner in a small web development company, and has a degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from the University of California, Berkeley. He has been writing for most of his life and is one of the Chief Instigators of *Greatest Uncommon Denominator* magazine. In his dwindling spare time, he also runs *Imagineries* and *Writer's Planner*, and he's trying to learn to draw.

**Elsbeth Graty** lives near Paris, France. She has been published in several magazines and ezines including *Gator Springs Gazette* and *Smokelong Quarterly*.

**Liesl Jobson** is a bassoonist in the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra. Her writing appears in anthologies and magazines in South Africa and internationally, including *The Southern Review*, *The Mississippi Review*, *Chimurenga*, *New Coin*, and *Sleeping Fish*. She won the 2005 POWA Women's Writing Poetry Competition. She was the recipient of the 2006 Ernst van Heerden Creative Writing

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Award from the University of the Witwatersrand and edits poetry at *Mad Hatters' Review*.

**Sue Miller** lives in Connecticut with an assortment of goldfish. She's an editor and founder of *Greatest Uncommon Denominator* magazine, and she's been published online and in print. You can get the lowdown at her website. <http://zzinnia.com/>

**Kelsey Rakes** wrote her first story the night before she was born. It was a rather touching story about deep sea fishing, and the ending was a real tear-jerker. Since then she has managed to do very little with her life except write short pieces of fiction that are 43% based in fact. She enjoys cartwheels, sing-a-longs, and pathological liars.

**Kristen Tsetsi** earned her MFA and has since worked as a hotel front-desk clerk and a cab driver. Her stories have been published online in *The Midtown Literary Review*, *Expository Magazine*, *Storyglossia*, *Denver Syntax*, and *Opium Magazine*, in print in *Red Weather Magazine* and *They Do Exist: An Anthology of Award Winning Short Stories*, and publishing is pending with RE:AL. She lives in upstate NY with three cats, two ecosphere shrimp, and the man she wooed with secret admirer notes when they were both seventeen. She recently completed her first novel and is beginning work on her second.

**Bill West** lives in Shropshire, England where he writes flash fiction., He is a Group Host to the on-line Write Words Flash Fiction Writers' Group. He is also a member of the Pam Casto Flash Fiction-W on-line Group, the Bridgnorth Writers' Group and I\*D Writers' Group. His work has appeared on *Flashshots*, at *Flashquake*, *Mytholog*, *Somewhat.org*, *The Lampshade*, *Quictiononline*, *Barfing Frog*, *Heavy Glow* and elsewhere. See his profile at [http://www.writewords.org.uk/bill\\_west/](http://www.writewords.org.uk/bill_west/)

