

Foreword

Family is the primary latticework and laboratory of human nature. It can be defined in many ways, depending on the perspective. From a literary standpoint, it might be considered as the unbalanced and unruly interplay of nature and nurture that gives rise to unique character and voice. This is why most protagonists in literature—and most of us, in the “nonfiction” of our lives—are defined within complex family structures.

These complex structures are vulnerable to calamity that may occur within any part of the scaffold. Illness is such a calamity that can rattle the struts of a family unit, often irrevocably. I have always been taken aback when patients tell me that they “have no family.” How can someone possibly have no family at all? Often, however, the dissolution of the family ties relates in some way to the illness at hand—the causes, the treatments, the consequences, the costs. Most families, of course, do not break completely apart because of illness, but there is no doubt that an illness in one member can have profound, often permanent, effects on the nature of the family structure.

As the editors began to assemble the stories, essays, and poems for the Spring 2007 issue of the *Bellevue Literary Review*, we were struck by how prominent a role family played in these writings. Indeed, the family dynamic was almost its own character, and many of the stories fell in line to trace the arc of a life.

The story “Polyglot,” by Wendy Marcus, follows the first pregnancy of an assimilated Russian émigré, whose experiences are played out against the lives of her students—an assemblage of immigrants learning English as a second language. Alanna Schubach’s “Tough Cookie” is the story of a mother of young children whose brush with mortality is woven into the odd truths and half-truths of the cinematic world.

In “Recoil,” by Trenton Streeting, a pre-adolescent boy has a coming-of-age experience watching his father face the limits of his abilities. Emma Wunsch, in “Lily of the Valley,” writes about a teenager with an eating disorder and the agonies of the single father who is raising her.

At the cusp of adolescence and adulthood, Oaz Nir’s story “The Little Gray and Black Box” deals with a young man with Down Syndrome whose biological and sexual urges match his chronological age, but whose mental abilities do not.

The powerful connection between adult siblings is the subject of Sheila Kohler’s essay “Sisters.” In this piece, she reflects on the death of her sister and how this might, or might not, connect to their upbringing in South Africa.

Rigoberto González, in the poem “The Mortician’s Mother-in-Law Says Goodbye,” writes of a seventy-year-old grandmother burying her adult daughter, while her young granddaughter scampers about. “Her Last Week in Their Paradise,” by Elaine Shear, focuses on the opposite relationship—an adult daughter cleaning out the Florida condominium after her elderly parents have died.

This issue of the *Bellevue Literary Review* opens with the winners of the 2007 *BLR* Prizes. We are happy to report that the contest generated intense interest, with hundreds of writers submitting their works to be judged by Sherwin Nuland, Amy Hempel, and Rafael Campo. All the submissions were evaluated blindly. Thus, it was a special pleasure to discover that in the fiction category (winner Lorie Kolak, honorable mentions Philip Levitas and Kathleen Cohn), these stories turned out to be the first published works of fiction for these authors. We are grateful to the Magliocco, Goldenberg, and Kaplan families for their support of the *BLR* prizes.

We also learned that three *BLR* authors received special mention in this year’s Pushcart Prize Anthology. Additionally, three *BLR* essays were honored as “notable essays” in *Best American Essays* and *Best American Travel Writing* in 2006. Our website (www.BLReview.org) contains news about *BLR* writers, along with information about events, subscriptions, teaching materials, and submission guidelines.

The *BLR* and NYU School of Medicine are proud to announce the inauguration of the Bellevue Literary Press, a trade publishing house that will publish authoritative literary works of fiction and nonfiction on themes that resonate with the *BLR*. This effort is being spearheaded by *BLR* nonfiction editor Jerome Lowenstein and Erika Goldman. The first eight titles will be published this year. More information is available on the *BLR* website.

The *Bellevue Literary Review* continues to grow and develop. We are grateful to you, the reader, without whom this literary journal could not exist. We hope you enjoy the stories, essays, and poems in this issue of the *BLR*.

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Editor-in-Chief