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1989 Winter Quiz & Quill Magazine

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WINTER 1989

Quiza

AND

Quill

*Laura
Gill*

QUIZ AND QUILL

Otterbein College
Westerville, Ohio

Winter 1989

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Editor's Note

The Quiz and Quill staff has enjoyed putting this issue together. What a surprise it was to look in our submission box at the beginning of the quarter and find over fifty submissions, including poetry, short stories, and essays. Needless to say, the selection process was not easy! Do not be discouraged if we didn't print you this time around. The issue could only include so much!

This quarter has also kept us busy with our annual writing contest. Each submission to the magazine was also sent away to be judged by several writing critics. I feel that this contest is a wonderful opportunity for college writers; it gives them the opportunity to write and rewrite both poetry and prose with the chance to win recognition in addition to what we usually provide in our quarterly issues. As you leaf through this issue you will see several winners. The Spring issue will print many more, so keep your eyes open for the talent of these Otterbein writers!

Finally, I wish to encourage you to submit to our Spring issue any poetry and prose that you might have. Although we will still print contest winners, we will also have some room for a few more pieces. Submissions will be due on April 10, 1989. I leave you now with this issue. Enjoy reading!

Jennifer Olin

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GROUND CONNECTION

Waist-deep in earth
My legs spread as roots
Reaching down into Gaia's bowels
Down into her volcanic depths

I'm seemingly passive
But no
They can't see
The hot generation of blood
Molten energy from her
Coursing up in my veins

My topside skin glows
My hair crackles on end
I am she and she is me

The dark, only the dark is there
To see me
Silently erupt

I spring forth into the sky
Pulsing with unheard rhythms
Dancing with unseen exultation
Reveling as one with Gaia's power

Virginia Caum-Lake

Note: According to Greek mythology, Gaia was the goddess of the earth.

MARALENE'S HOUSE

Honorable Mention, Personal Essay Contest

Maralene's house has always been my second home. There is nothing spectacular about the house itself. It sits beside a gravel road, slightly more than a mile from the shore of Lake Superior. It is a twenty-minute hike to the nearest neighbor, the Wilston's, and a thirty-minute drive to the closest city, Superior, Wisconsin. Originally, the house was a one-room log cabin. Maralene's husband, Horton, gradually added a kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom, and an attic room. I still have vague memories of taking a bath in a washtub on the kitchen floor before the bathroom was finished. I was only three or four, but I can remember splashing water everywhere as I played. I was yelled at, but it was definitely worth it.

After Horton died, Maralene completed the final addition, adding a long dining and living room and another attic room to the house. The house is kept warm by an old wood-burning stove in the new dining room. Once lit, its heat penetrates even the farthest reaches of the house to create a toasty warm haven. The crawlspace under the house, a result of the many additions, has long been home to the stray cats of that deserted road. The abandoned pets seem to migrate to Maralene's, where they soon become members of the household.

The thing that makes this house a home to me is the relationship that it has always had to my family. Almost thirty years ago, my father met Horton at Kansas State University. Their friendship brought together their fiancées, my mother and Maralene. The families have been together ever since. We drive up every May, my parents to fish and I to see my best friend Mia. One year we stuffed thirteen people into that house: Maralene; Christopher and Tracy, her children; my mother and father; Grandma Dorothy and Grandpa Jim, my father's parents; Margaret, a friend of mine from high school; Maria, our exchange student; Claudia, Maria's best friend; Joe, Christopher's best friend and Mia's brother; Mia; and me. The house was filled with noise and confusion for the entire two weeks. Except once. Mia and I stayed up late into the night, talking and laughing as teenagers are apt to do. We stopped giggling at almost the same moment and listened. The house was absolutely quiet. I could hear only the faint echo of my father snoring at the other end of the house. It was amazing. Then we went to sleep; when we had awakened, the noise and confusion had returned.

When I started college, my journey to Maralene's house moved from May to December. These trips were quite different from my earlier ones. There were only four of us: Maralene, Chris, Tracy, and me. The silence was almost deafening at first. It was so strange to see the house calm. I soon learned to love the peace as much as I had enjoyed the chaos. My favorite time of day was the afternoon when Maralene was at work and the children were still at school. The same quiet that I had experienced late one night, existed also during the day. The only sound was the gentle tap of a tree branch against the wide bay window. I would sit on the sofa by the window, staring at the vast, snow-covered field beyond the fence that ran near the house and marvelling at the peace.

My favorite memories, however, are of watching Maralene's kittens, Muffy and Buck. They arrived shortly before my first December visit, and they were as different as sisters could be. Muffy loved to be held and cuddled. Her greatest concern seemed to be finding a warm lap to sleep in. Buck, on the other hand, refused to let anyone hold her, jumping out of constricting arms and fiercely asserting her independence. She loved to tease Muffy; she would wait until the complacent cat was comfortably sleeping in someone's lap, then attack. Muffy protested but the innocent lap-owner usually protested louder. I was always amazed as I watched them play. They seemed at peace, not concerned with the past or worried about the future, but living for the moment. It has been two years since I first met Muffy and Buck, and though they have gotten older and larger, their personalities and their freedom have remained the same.

That is what I love most about Maralene's house. Even when it changes, nothing really changes. Despite the new kittens, and even the new years, my feelings have never wavered. Once you enter Maralene's house, time stops and the outside world ceases to exist. For the ten or twelve days that I spend there every year, the only reality that matters is that which exists inside those walls. It is a place of peace, a place ruled by the private world of two small kittens and the humans who join them in their abandon.

Kristen Gregerson

MOONLIGHT

Moonlight

creates a silver lake in every open field,
illuminates darkened rooftops,
engulfs the world in a single, glorified effort,

like

an unwanted nightlight on unsuspected lovers,
a silvery wisp from a goddess's crown,
a heavenly candle incessantly burning,

calming

all it touches.

Hillary Kline

Water Reflections:
Roots reaching up to heaven
Trees grow upside-down.

Lori Patterson



FIRST ENCOUNTER

I played electric guitar in high school. The metal strings, vibrating off complex components, encased in fiber glass, were distinctly unfeminine, but I liked the way they felt. Narrow grooves remained in the tips of my fingers hours after practicing in jazz band. The shoulder strap was too long, the amplifier too heavy for me to carry, and at the time, I was the only girl in the band.

That was the year we went to Cincinnati for a regional jazz festival. My mom drove down to meet friends of our family; then everyone went to hear us play. No one thought much of my situation, including me. My brother played in the band so we played music together as we once played cowboys and Indians. I remember long summer days playing in the backyard, my brother, the guys, and me. The only difference between me and the other Indians was I didn't get tackled as much. Now, I simply heard fewer dirty jokes. They screened the ones I definitely would not appreciate.

We played in the morning, ate pizza for lunch, then split up to go to seminars about our individual instruments. Due to a small misunderstanding, my guitar was left in my mom's trunk while my brother left me at the doorway of room 208. I sat at a desk near the center of the semi-circle that ringed three-fourths of the room. One other person was in the room and he sat in the corner, fingering his guitar silently. A few minutes later the room began to fill up, and as usual I was the only one in a skirt. Shortly after we were seated, the university's professor of jazz guitar came in, shut the door, and sat on a corner of the desk in the front of the room. He grunted a greeting, glanced around the room, and let out a deep sigh. He was an older man, with thin brown hair, skinny, pale limbs, and a gruff voice that he whispered with. Obviously, he was a genuine jazz article, washed up after a few years on the road, and reduced to telling high school kids how to do the same. He began by asking everyone to go around the room and say his name and school. His bony finger was the guide. He pointed to the guy in the farthest corner and began to bounce around the group. I watched his finger move along, resting for a moment on each boy while he spoke, stop on either side of me, then continue to the end and fall to his side.

My mouth swung open to interrupt the discussion that immediately started, to explain that I had been skipped, but no sound would come out. I was shocked and simply sat with my mouth open, staring at him. His words were a distant mumble as I watched him point to different guys to demonstrate new techniques. They all laughed at one boy for making

a silly mistake, but I didn't laugh. I could not join in the intimate group fun because I wasn't really part of the gang. I wanted to run out of the room, grab my guitar from my mom's car, and show them that I hadn't gone to the wrong room. I was supposed to be there, laughing and learning. I wanted to shake the old man, smack him in the face, force him to know that I was more than a cute blonde, looking dainty in my new shoes, that he passed over because of a presumption. I wanted every high school guy in the room to know that I had a name and I played guitar as well as they did, and my school thought I was wonderful, and my brother was across the hall in 215, and...and...I sat still, too weak to move. Then I thought, perhaps I was overreacting. Maybe the man did not see me.

However, the final blow came when I was suddenly awakened from my thoughts. He was trying to write on the chalkboard I was sitting in front of. He began to bump my chair and grunted for me to move. I looked up and saw the annoyed look on his face. His thoughts were etched into the wrinkles of his brow. The entire room focused their attention on me, the little girl who was in the man's way. His eyes twinkled with sarcastic laughter, "O.K., who brought his girlfriend?" Meekly I rose from the chair, picked up my coat and purse, and moved to an empty seat across the room. All eyes followed me as my new pumps clicked against the tile floor, and asked the same question. After all, I had not introduced myself and I didn't have a guitar with me.

I glared back. All of my fears were confirmed. He had not accidentally missed me. He had seen me and chosen to ignore me. His look gave me that knowledge. All of the other eyes told me why. He began to speak again and everyone quickly forgot me and went back to absorbing every word this brilliant man spoke.

In retrospect I am no longer angry with him, but more at the society that created him, and at the high school boys who reaffirmed their faith that there are limits to acceptable behavior for women. Although he was my first encounter of that sort, he was not the last, and even at twenty, in "progressive 1989," I know there are more to come. At the end of the session I gathered my things, walked up to him, shook his hand firmly and said,

"Thank you, sir. I learned a lot this afternoon."

Cyndi Miller

A CUP OF NICARAGUA IN THE MORNING

First Place, Poetry Contest

A cup of Nicaragua in the morning
The shocking black to shake the night-muck off.
A billion beans ground up to spark the flame
So doused with candied drinks the night before.

A straw-hat man of fifty stoops to pick
The seed, the gem that fuels the modern world
Dawn bends, he breaks the back that bears the weight
Of billion bean and one. He bends again—

The grog washed down with fumes on exit ramps,
The sour taste of styrofoam still there,
In boardrooms miles above Managua's mire
Deaths planned with every swig of her black blood.

A cup of Nicaragua in the morning
Each gulp, the sweat of hundred hurting hands
That bow and bleed into the billion beans,
And stain the darkened corners of our mouth.

John Deever



PANCAKES AND TEA: A TALE OF HALLOWEEN

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Over pounds of pancakes and gallons of tea,
we discuss the day.

We are me, the moon and Emmet Kelley.
Our talk is joined by a Chinese twelve-year-old
who says he just got in from running through the crowd.
"It's a wild tyme out there," says he.

So I decide to take my turn at the crowd and I leave
by the alley.

Once on the street, I follow a Pied Piper,
her flute beckoning me.

Someone recognizes me and screams my name.

"I'm not me any more. You have me confused
with someone else," I say.

Yet no one is them, they all wear costumes
over costumes.

But I do not.

I wear the costume I always wear:
the costume that is me.

Why not just deal with reality?

But I do not.

These grungy streets are hell, so I go back inside
where I brace myself against the banister
and there are atoms of glitter everywhere.

Walking up the stairs, a flash punches my face and
stays to visit with my eyes.

It is Bette Davis taking pictures without film, an unlit
cigarette dangling between cracked lips.

She just got done changing the light bulbs and
had nothing else to do.

I walk down the green hallway and knock on the
second door.
It silently opens and shows me the endless expanse
of space.
The moon is sitting on the bed, stars all around,
with a crystal tear running down her face.
And I stand miles and miles away unable to help,
let alone wipe away the tear.

I close the door and continue my journey down the
hall to the bathroom where it ends.
It's raining in the basin while Sad Emmet Kelley
washes the make-up off his face.
"What are you wearing in its place," I ask.
"Myself," says he, "The miserable costume of me is enough."
I agree, but am too tired to think and leave.

I sleep alone, covers over my head.
That is my costume: a bed.
Yet it does not hide me because
evil thoughts still burn in my mind.

The kitchen stands empty while the tea
and pancakes discuss the night.
And soon the whole world is asleep.
Even the pancakes breathe in rhythm with the tea.

Michael Mann

THE CURBSIDE CAFE

Like a strawberry soda
the pink Glad Bag sat

On its chocolate glass
by Rubbermaid

With its two fluorescent
straws.

Leona Arsenault



SOCIAL WORKER, FIRST VISIT

This is where I go:

The men street-side squat
waiting like slaves, they watch
Brown wood tenement tilts against
blue blue sky.
So pretty—the brown and blue.

Skeleton cats cower
by the sagging steps, mewing
at dust and dandelions
They shiver from me, how
 I would feed them and
 hug them and

This is where he lives, this is
where I must go
find out why Sam's ear is
cartoon-size swollen.

He stands diapered, silent
 top of the steps staring
 empty-eyed
 at me.

Marcella Hochwalt

ANGER AND DOGS

Ben ran beside him, his black coat gleaming from the salt water crashing over them. Ted pushed on, his tattered Nikes pounding the stony beach, in stride with the dog beside him. The dog playfully sped up and slowed down, teasing the boy and trying to goad him into running even faster. Ted focused on the reddening horizon and the end of the long beach.

Clouds of mist puffed tiredly from the hood of Ted's damp gray sweatshirt. His chest ached beneath his black and red varsity jacket. His face burned, though the air was chilly. It was only a track meet, dammit. Don't worry, I'll be in shape, his voice echoed in his head.

With a happy bark, the dog moved ahead, pushing the pace more. Ted grunted angrily and lengthened the stretch of his muscles to catch up. Ben knew he was training fiercely, and was doing his part to make the sophomore track star unbeatable.

But Ted was feeling the uneven pressure of the hard, round stones under his feet, and he slowed to a stop. Squinting, he clasped his hands behind his head and walked slowly away from the cold waves toward the jagged cliffs above the beach. The dog sprinted on a moment, but skidded to a halt when the pounding next to him disappeared. He trotted back the victor, careful to show respect by bowing his curious head.

They panted together for a moment as Ted collapsed hotly onto a rock that was less sharp than others. The rock jabbed his back like a bed of nails, but the biting pain was a welcome change from the constant, dull pounding his feet had endured. Always something pounding me, he thought. The dog danced and leaped in front of him, yelping and urging him back into the surf.

The mutt thinks you're a wimp, Ted thought. Being pushed and driven like a thoughtless ox infuriated him. Especially by his dog. The eager saliva swung and looped like a lasso from the dog's wagging tongue as he jumped back and forth. Ted suddenly became angry at the dog.

"You wanna go, go!" He snatched up a cold, white limb of driftwood and flung it as far into the ocean as he could. The willing animal lunged with a power Ted envied, and raced into the icy, crashing breakers.

For a moment the dog disappeared. Ted stared down the beach, glad to suffer his thoughts alone. Ted glanced out to find the swimming dog, and saw his silky black head atop a huge whitecap. Ted had not noticed the cold wind, which was now gusting furi-

ously. He shivered.

He had thrown the stick with all his anger, and the loyal beast swam out and out, ever steadily towards the bobbing stick. Both dog and driftwood seemed to hover as the waves rolled and crested around them. The dog should have had the bit of wood by now, Ted thought. A stab of fear split his heart, and he jumped to his feet, chest still heaving from the run.

"Ben!"

He ran to the water's edge. The dog paddled harder, though more slowly, out into the deep ocean which now seemed wider than all the world. Ted was already numb to the frigid water as he waded unconsciously outwards. His eyes never wavered from Ben. Sometimes the dog disappeared behind a heaving wave. He screamed and screamed at the dog to return, furious now at its blind obedience. The crashing drowned out his voice even to himself.

The black spot in the foam was barely visible now. But wait—there he was, high upon a wave so big he thought it could wash the beach away. The tiny angry branch clawed at the horizon as it protruded from the dog's mouth. For a second, Ted saw the shine of the glossy coat as Ben turned back to shore.

As Ted waded waist-deep calling his companion, a breaking wave blasted him full in the face. Falling backwards, he quickly got his legs beneath him and stood up spluttering. He backed up tensely, and shivered as he shook the water from his soaked coat. The sun submerged among the dark clouds and the colors of the beach faded from orange to gray. Ted scanned the froth for the black spot, but it failed to appear. His legs ached as if stiffened from within by solid ice, and he stumbled backward to the rock from which he had thrown the stick. His eyes remained in the water, and he shook like the blowing pines behind him, calling and calling the dog's name.

After a few silent minutes, Ben came ashore, the stick tightly clutched in his mouth. The rest of his body was completely limp, and he floated in on a white, thundering wave, his cold limbs cocked at unnatural angles. With a final crash, the sea spit the body up onto the beach like another clump of seaweed.

John Deever

The old man sat, toothless and thin, under the pale lamplight. His face white and saggy, his chin jutted straight out, and his lips molded around his gums, he raised the bottle to his wet mouth. The red elixir rolled over his tongue and down his throat. He closed his eyes and winced.

The wine was cheap, very cheap, not the good kind he had in the old days, but a cross between Kool-Aid and anti-freeze. He took another drink. He held the bottle up to the light, half-empty. Soon, very soon, he would need another friend. This one's time had nearly come.

With a grunt the old man slowly raised himself up, using the lamppost as a support, and began to walk down the nearly deserted street. Friends had come and gone pretty quick lately. Yes, in his life he had seen many a friend's time come. That was life, he had been told, but he didn't believe it.

That's how he became a bum. Yes, he knew what he was. Over the course of sixty years he had seen plenty. Watched good men, brave men die. He had once tried to count how many men he had seen killed on that hill, but the bodies were too numerous. Like dust on a bookshelf, they lay scattered on the earth. Their bodies swollen and bloated in the sun, some corpses naked from scavengers who made off with a few pieces of clothing to wear. He had tried to keep count—just too damn many of them.

He had lost it there. A virgin when he got off the ship, but a trip to a bar cured that. Then, later that week, a bomb fixed everything. The hill and killed him, too.

She couldn't take the entire blame. It was hard to understand. The old man himself had problems trying to figure out why he still lived. There were times when he wished the bomb had killed him, not just destroyed him. Sometimes he knew that she wished it, too. When she finally left, it was no surprise. The old man had been waiting for it for a long time. He was almost happy to see her go. He hated being treated like a freak. His new friends neither knew nor cared. The only problem was they never lasted very long.

The street was empty except for the prostitutes who whistled and called to him. He laughed at them. He had no need for them. What he did need was a new friend. All the stores were closed. His thin legs were tired now. He sat on the sidewalk to rest. He had

to find something soon. He couldn't wait until morning. Something else couldn't wait. The sidewalk became wet and sticky.

It was getting cold. Winter would soon come, and so would snow. The old man remembered the old box he had seen in an alley. It would make a fine shelter. His last winter home had been hauled off to the dump. He would have to put dibs on the box soon. That bar on 42nd would still be open. It was almost a five-block walk. Although he was tired, he could probably make it. First, he would rest.

A smile crept across his rubbery face as he closed his eyes. It was spring. The trees were as green as the grass, the sky, blue like her eyes. The blue jays and cardinals sang, and the wind was sweet and warm.

They had spread a big, blue blanket on the hill and had eaten a picnic lunch. The sandwiches were delicious, and the wine a good year. She laughed at a joke. She was so beautiful.

The day was so long ago but now so close. He touched her soft skin and caressed her silky hair. He loved her. He leaned over to kiss her. He could smell the perfume on her clothes. His eyes opened to a different scene.

"It's late, Pop. Go on home," the large policeman ordered. The old man stared at him.

"I ain't your pop," the old man muttered. "My son would let an old man dream." He got up and started down the street. You couldn't argue with cops, so damn self-righteous.

Reality hit the old man after the first block. The bar would be closed before he got to it. Besides, he was short on money. Tomorrow he would beg a few bucks from a pal. Yes, now he needed to rest. Morning would come soon.

The old man forgot about the box for the moment. He would have to settle for any alley tonight. The box would still be there tomorrow. Nobody knew winter was here. That was his exclusive scoop. He came to an alley and lay on some old newspapers.

He looked down the dark alley. A siren blared in the distance. It was too late. All the bars were closed. He cradled his bottle of life.

"Ah," he sighed. "Time for sleep, old buddy. Yes, time for sleep."

Ed Karshner

THIS I PRAY

Dear God
I can not ask you to let her live
I can not ask but
Could you give her strength?
She is falling faster than forests
 downward swing shaking the soil
 crushing children in her fall
She is falling, twisting, falling

I can not ask but
Could you give her peace?
Now she forgets sunshine, birth, porch flowers,
 first love.
She is forgetting all but the pain.
She wakes, surrounded
 the pain like strange men circling
 holding her hostage
 keeping dark vigil.
She is remembering all the wrong things.
Could you give her peace?

And dear God
Can you give me courage
to fill the empty rooms with love
to pale her despair
to stand
 to fall.

Dear God
Help me hold her.
This I pray.

Marcella Hochwalt



EXCHANGES

It is an odd phenomenon: the exchange of possessions from lender to borrower. What causes one to willingly yield one's material belongings to another? And why would another crave these belongings for himself? This yielding and craving, which often ends in sly new ownership, is much like a disease. The lender is compelled to lend for reasons that are seemingly unreasonable; the borrower is compelled to borrow for reasons that are seemingly practical. The one is not even remotely close to sainthood, nor is the other truly a thief; yet a curious alliance exists between them. This unlikely alliance between lender and borrower has existed between myself and my neighbor for seeming centuries.

The borrower is a man of nearly 50 years of age, a minister of a mysterious congregation close by (he calls himself "Rev"), and a friendly guy. He's the type of person you appreciate having for a neighbor, most of the time; he'll feed your cat when you're on vacation, praise you for the size and flavor of your prize tomatoes, and scare off intruders with his shot gun in the wee hours of the morning. He's a good guy. But he doesn't have a very good memory. He has the most unpleasant habit of borrowing a hammer or a set of vise-grips or a bag of fertilizer...and forgetting its origin. Over the years he has accumulated a delightful assortment of tools, gardening supplies, and kitchen gadgets...all from my collection.

The lender is a woman in her late thirties (myself, to be exact), a hardware junkie, with a seemingly endless supply of possessions. I have collected a host of unique and useful items: tiny hobby tools, odd-sized wrenches and screwdrivers and pliers, the entire cast of Craftsman electric helpers, and all manner of gardening apparatus. I delight in finding a new or unusual item, and for reasons beyond my grasp, I always seem to be using the newest toy in my collection just as my neighbor comes by for a chat. It totally escapes me how this can happen as frequently as it does. I can only speculate that he and I share some type of extra-

sensory communication, however insidious. He will stroll over to my garage within moments after I open the door, and begin to admire my newest acquisition. Before I have made careful consideration of the potential outcome of my actions, I find myself handing the "Rev" my latest treasure. He touches it lovingly, caressing the cold steel like a mistress, and hands it back to me saying, "Tell ya what. That's 'bout the nicest bastard file I've ever seen. I've got some pipe over home that I've been meaning to ream...Do you suppose I could just borrow this for an hour or so?" And my new bastard file walks away. Just like that. Time after time after time.

You might say my neighbor has figured me out. You might say he has set me up. I know the scenario; he knows the scenario. But it is irresistible. I succumb to flattery; he succumbs to greed. It is a strange alliance.

Of course, I know that the "Rev" can afford his own wrenches and kitchen gizmos and garden hoes. He brings his new toys across the yard for me to lust after and drool over too. And I've stood in his garage and admired his collection with an expression on my face like that of a child surveying her magic domain on Christmas morning. Sometimes, however, during a later reverie, I'll wonder to myself about a handsaw or a set of Phillips drivers that I noticed on his neatly organized racks; were those tools once mine? I used to own some tools exactly like those: same size, same color, same brand. It is most certainly a coincidence. But I don't remember. And I certainly wouldn't ask. He's such a good man, the "Rev." He surely wouldn't appropriate the property of his neighbor. He simply loves to borrow.

Last Christmas I looked through every toolbox, every drawer, and every garage cupboard for a hammer. I wanted a simple, wood-handled, claw-type hammer. I could not find a hammer of any description: not a tack hammer, not a rubber mallet, not even a ballpen...because the "Rev" has borrowed my entire collection. Amen.

Maxine Williams

COLORS

Third Place, Personal Essay Contest

I love red. It's bright, bold, daring, adventurous, noticeable, intense, and confident. I love the way its intensity captures the eyes and attention of unsuspecting people. As a matter of fact, I love that feeling enough to own 33 pieces of red clothing including five sweaters, four plaid skirts, three cardigans, two turtleneck shirts, and one pair of bright red shoes.

My lust for red began a little over a year ago, after I broke away from an abusive relationship. Psychologically, I was furious at the world but too afraid to tell it off. I was determined to let the world know that no one would ever get the best of me again: Red said it all.

Unconsciously at first, I started buying red and wearing red and letting the color express the anger inside me. Oddly enough, people began complimenting me when I wore red. Here I was trying to tell the world to screw off and the world was telling me, "Hey, you look great!" Wearing red probably gave people the impression that I felt powerful and in control. I was being complimented for appearing to have the strength to challenge life.

The reverse psychology worked and my self-confidence rose from 0 to 98 degrees. I hit the malls and bought everything red I could lay my hands on—a red Pendleton wool suit, a red corduroy shirt, even a pair of red socks. Friends who had told me red was my color began teasing me about how much of it I owned. But I could never be talked into a different color of anything; red had become a symbol to me about who I was and who I wanted to become.

I was a woman who felt insecure, but wanted to become adventuresome, bold, and confident. I wanted to become red, but all my life I had actually been blue: consistent, caring, conscientious, and dependable. But hearing someone tell me I worried too much and acted like a baby forced me to revolt against who I was: it forced me to revolt against my blueness.

I remember trying not to like blue, telling myself, "Nah! I don't want that blue sweater. How dull!" I didn't want to acknowledge the blue characteristics inside me if they were only going to encourage others to take advantage of me. So I flipped to the opposite end of the color spectrum, and fell in love with red.

Perhaps my red has become a self-fulfilling prophecy; I now see myself as more confident and less likely to let people use me. For a while, I needed to become red. Now I'm starting to like blue again and I'm proud of my true blue nature. But I'll never give up my red. It represents the struggles I have survived, and the new woman I have become.

Lori Patterson

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