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CML News

Choice Magazine Listening has a board of directors that meets once a year to offer insight into future projects we are considering, and to approve our budget. It's a small group of thoughtful people: some of them knew our founder and benefactress LuEsther T. Mertz personally, but all of them have demonstrated a vital commitment to the work of keeping CML alive for almost 60 years (an anniversary which arrives in 2022!). This year we met twice, virtually, and despite the screens and miles of fiber-optic cable between us, felt their perennial support and warmth undiminished. The board was especially pleased that when the editors were suddenly required to work from home last March, during a deadline, not a single issue of CML was cancelled or dropped. We are humbled by their praise and continue to be energized by their trust in what we do.

Highlights

We've made it to 2021. No small feat for the news-readers and pandemic-watchers among us. Fortunately, an abundance of highly effective, utterly ingenious vaccines have been approved worldwide and we are hopeful for a return to relative normalcy by summer. Keep holding strong, friends! And to help you through this last push toward a better day, we at CML have put together an issue that we hope will invigorate both mind and heart.

Among the many terrible paradoxes of life is the work of exacting good things from terrible circumstances. In "The Bombing and the Breakthrough" by **Jennet Conant**, we meet Lieutenant Colonel Stewart Francis Alexander, a medical officer attached to General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters. Under dire conditions, Alexander manages to make startling discoveries about the effects of mustard gas on the human body's ability to produce white blood cells, a breakthrough in the development of chemotherapy. We are especially pleased to share this piece, masterfully recorded by **Jon Osborn**, an ace CML volunteer and (like Lt. Col. Alexander) proud son of New Jersey.

2021 also marks the beginning of our third decade since the American invasion of Afghanistan. It has become, amidst the ravages of our endless war, a

land with some of the world's highest levels of opium production and drug addiction. In "Mother's House (Part One)" by **J. Malcolm Garcia**, we follow the brave and resourceful Laila Haidari as she rescues addicts who gather beneath Kabul's notorious Pol-e-Sokhta Bridge, offering them food, housing, faith, dignity, and fellowship. Haidari, known to her charges as "Mother," perseveres in the face of sexism, government inaction, and violent abuse at the hands of local drug dealers, whom she deprives of profitable victims. Garcia follows the individual stories of the recovering addicts, many of whom are traumatized veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Syria, while also tracking the long journey of Laila's own children as they make their way to the refuge of Europe.

Yet we need not travel as far as Afghanistan, alas, to find drug addiction, homelessness, and social collapse. In "The Sanctuary" by **Wes Enzina**, we witness an extraordinary experiment in social activism in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. As the city endures severe rioting and upheaval, a group of activists prevail upon the owner of a failing Sheraton hotel to transform it into free emergency housing for the homeless and displaced. While the refuge offers a safer, more humane alternative to life on the streets, this experiment in idealism is soon overrun by the realities and complications of poverty-driven behaviors as well as the overwhelming administrative demands of running the shelter.

Issue 333 is particularly rich in fiction and poetry. We offer you powerful short stories by **Kaitlyn Greenidge**, **Santiago José Sanchez**, **Joel Fishbane**, **Tim Erwin**, and **Rebecca Miller**, and poetry by **Kyoko Uchida**, **Gary Fincke**, **Robert Wrigley**, **Eduardo C. Corral**, and **Eavan Boland**, among others. Speaking of poetry, do you know the greatest cowboy poet of all time? You might know some of his verses even if you don't know his name. In "Saddle Up with Badger Clark, America's Forgotten Cowboy Poet," **Carson Vaughn** reveals the extraordinary life and career of the man who penned "A Cowboy's Prayer."

TOP PICKS

Domestic abuse is one of the leading causes of female death, trauma, and homelessness. In "The Most Dangerous Place," **Tracy Frisch** and **Finn Cohen** interview **Rachel Louise Snyder**, whose book *No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know about Domestic Violence Can Kill Us* explores the tragedy of domestic

physical violence in the United States. Learn why the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has declared home the “most dangerous place for women.”

Ray Bradbury is considered one of the finest writers in the science fiction genre. In this issue, we feature one of his most thrilling and thought-provoking short stories from the 1950s, “A Sound of Thunder,” in which a time-traveling big-game hunter discovers, bitterly, how precariously the future hinges on the past, down to the smallest butterfly. Join us on this journey through time, if you dare: “we guarantee nothing... except the dinosaurs.”

In “Look for Shape, Look for Shine,” we join **Liam Baranauskas** on his search, alongside local mystics and rock hounds, for the “crystal vortex,” a mythical mother lode of quartz crystals in Hot Springs, Arkansas, with supposedly metaphysical powers. “So where does [their] belief—any belief—come from in the first place?” Baranauskas asks. “My guess is desire. Desire to fill a lack in ourselves, to have what we think and feel be real, to live in a world of more than what’s before our eyes.”

Finally, we take a moment to mourn the loss of a great seeker of truths large and small in “Who is... Alex Trebek?”. Composed by the editors of CML, we share our fond reminiscences of our organization’s brief encounter with the beloved Jeopardy host and long-time CML supporter.

The D-B Beat

Included in the NLS’s fantastic talking book collection are a growing number of commercially produced, mass-market audiobooks. Among them is Jennet Conant’s latest, *The Great Secret* [DB 100649], from which our piece “The Bombing and the Breakthrough” was adapted. The entire collection of her bestselling World War II histories is available for download on BARD:

- *109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the secret city of Los Alamos* [DBC10237]
- *A Covert Affair: Julia Child and Paul Child in the OSS* [DB74634]
- *The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington* [DB67827]
- *Tuxedo Park: a Wall Street tycoon and the secret palace of science that changed the course of World War II* [DB54463]

And Special Thanks to...

Mary Jean H. from KY, who let us know, "I love your magazine! It's fantastic! I especially love all your fiction stories. I love, love, love CML!"

Happy winter from Mike, Raquel, Annie, Jay, and Alfredo!