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# LITERARY GAZETTE

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# BIOGRAPHIES

CHECKO MILLER mostly grew up and lived in Woodstock, NY. His profession has included being a carpentry contractor and social worker for tobacco control and cessation issues. He loves what words can do and respects the work that brings food to his table. Both arise from "gardens" of caring conscientiousness.

DOROTHY HARTZ is a native of Sullivan County currently living and gardening in Fremont Center. She is a retired teacher of English and a former staff member of the DVAA. She has freelanced for local publications and is a long-standing member of the Upper Delaware Writers Collective.

ESTHER DE JONG was born in the Netherlands. After traveling for over a decade as a fashion model she made the Catskills her home. The lyrical images Esther creates pursue a purely visual version of poetic realism. She tells stories in pictures and pictures in stories.

JOHN HIGGINS, and his partner, Pip, fell in love with each other and this area in 1993. In 2007 they returned and in 2013 relocated from NYC full time. Full steam ahead!

K. DOMINEY, country at heart, is a happy transplant from city life to bucolic Sullivan County.

KAREN MORRIS is a poet and psychoanalyst, practicing in Honesdale, PA, where she runs a dream-work study group. She is a gardener dedicated to growing antique roses in this region. Her book of poems, "Cataclysm and Other Arrangements" from Three Stones Press, PA, is scheduled for fall release.

LAUREN WHRITNER is 12 years old. She enjoys playing the piano, golfing, and writing. She attends South Kortright Central School and will be beginning 7th grade this fall. Her favorite subject in school is English and one day she hopes to become an author of many award winning books.

MARION KASELLE is a writer, artist and Qi Gong therapist who lives with her dog, horses, cats and chickens on a hilltop farm in North Branch, NY. She is the author and photographer of "Touching Horses" (London, J. A. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1995), and the author of essays and poems that have appeared in various small publications. As an original member of Yarnslingers, she has been reading her stories at local venues for the past few years.

MARYANN CAPPELLINO is a clinical social worker, Reiki master and herbalist who lives in Brooklyn and Lake Huntington, NY. She loves to cook, tell stories, garden, dance, create jewelry, and find any excuse to gather with family and friends around her kitchen table or in her garden and celebrate with good food and fine Italian wines. She has three sons, three cats, and one husband.

MARY GREENE, a resident of Narrowsburg, NY, received her MFA in poetry from Brooklyn College. She is founder and director of the Upper Delaware Writers Collective, which sponsors classes, publications and events. Greene's poetry has appeared in a number of national and local journals, and she has given readings and performances in venues all over the region. She has published three books of poetry and one book of interviews with women. She currently serves as grants coordinator at the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance.

MAURA STONE, a Bethel resident, won literary acclaim and awards with her break-out novel, "Five-Star FLEECING," a social satire of the hospitality industry. Since then, she published several ebooks and articles in numerous magazines. She's best known for her blog, kiss-keepsimpleschmuck.blogspot.com. Her website is www.MauraStone.com.

MICHO really digs dirt a lot. Currently he is professionally rooting around in the soil some and is also planting poetry to and fro.

# CONTENTS

He hopes to harvest more haiku and iambic pentameters in the near future. The 'my-ku', closely related to the Haiku, is Micho's experimental grafted poem. Worms are his recently adopted mascots, since each of them have five hearts and assist by making him flush with ideas aerating his mind.

NANCY WELLS' poems appear in "UDWC Anthology," "Leaving the Empty Room," and "PoeTree;" her chapbooks "Oh, To Be a Dandelion" and "One Sassy Blossom;" her tanka poems in "Moonbathing" 7,8 & 9, Bamboo Hut, 1 & 2; "Tanka Society of America" Anthology; this summer "Bright Star," An Organic Tanka Anthology, Vol. 4.

NORMA KETZIS BERNSTOCK is a member of the Upper Delaware Writers Collective. Her poetry has appeared in many journals and anthologies and has been recognized by the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. Her chapbook, "Don't Write a Poem About Me After I'm Dead," was published by Big Table Publishing.

PATRICIA KETT has had poems and articles published in many anthologies, magazines and newspapers. She is part of the Upper Delaware Writers Collective, with whom she has exhibited poetry/art objects for the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance.

RAMONA JAN is the founding director of Yarnslingers, a local group dedicated to the art of true first-person storytelling. She is also a published author and magazine contributor.

REY BARRETO grew up in Manhattan. As a teenager he read the novel "My Side of the Mountain." Ever since then he dreamed of living in the Catskill mountains. He moved to Jeffersonville in 2002 and then settled in Bloomingburg in 2004. He enjoys writing about nature and photographing the beautiful scenery and wildlife of Sullivan County.

SHARON MACGREGOR has been writing professionally since 1993 in a variety of vocational magazines, as a community newspaper columnist, reporter, and most recently became the assistant editor for both the Pine Bush and Mamakating Quarterly magazines. As a child, she was known to thrust her favorite book at anyone who visited her home and passionately implore them to read to her. In time she learned to read, write letters and as soon as she realized that it could be a career to put words together to tell a story, it has been her dream.

TAMARA JO D'ANTONI is an artist, healer, singer and poet. She grew up in upstate NY, into a family of artists, but pursued a career in veterinary medicine and the health sciences, using her art as an adjunct. After a near fatal accident caused her to leave her veterinary career, she has focused on her art, primarily her photography and jewelry design, and has continued healing animals and people through various form of complimentary therapies.

TOM BRAVERMAN studied philosophy at the University of Chicago for two years before leaving the U of C for a decade of travel and odd jobs. Settled in Northeast Pennsylvania and raising a family, Tom found employment as a computer programmer. After 30 years in information technology, the last two years at Oracle, Tom rediscovered philosophy, undertaking the research that resulted in "717 Hemlock Street."

TRACEY GASS RANZE is the author of the book "Storm Farmer, Collected Poems." She co-authored a book published in the High Watermark Salo(on) literary and art series, Vol. 2, No. 4, Over the Banks, as a member of the Milanville Poets, UnLtd. Her poems are also in many anthology chapbooks published by the Upper Delaware Writers Collective, of which she is a member. Gass-Ranze lives in the Upper Delaware River Valley with her family.

WILL CONWAY writes and gardens in Mongaup Valley with his lovely wife and a cat.

## My First Garden By Mary Greene

6

## My Fingers By Nancy Wells

7

## The Buzz By Checko Miller

7

## The Dirt By Ramona Jan

8

## How to Keep a Secret By Dorothy Hartz

8

## Soil By Karen Morris

9

## Planting Season By K. Dominey

9

## Grandpa's Dirt By MaryAnn Cappellino

10

## Grow By John Higgins

11

## Life By Tamara Jo D'Antoni

11

## Dirt By Lauren Whritner

12

## Summer By Marion Kaselle

12

## I Am Not a Gardener By Norma Ketzis Bernstock

13

## Mud is the New Little Black Dress By Maura Stone

14 & 15

## Black Gold By Sally Hendee

18

## Moondust in the Loam By Esther de Jong

18

## Early Morning By Patricia Kett

20

## Dirt 9x By Micho

20

## Beneath the Soil By Rey Barreto

20

## Humboldt County, 1972 By Tom Braverman

22

## Getting Into August By Sheila Dugan

24

## Dirt By Will Conway

24

## feast for pachamama By Tracey Ranze

25

## Two Parts Dirt By Sharon MacGregor

26

**The Literary Gazette** is published by **The River Reporter**/Stuart Communications, Inc. Entire contents ©2013 by Stuart Communications, Inc. Stuart Communications maintains an office at 93 Erie Ave., Narrowsburg, NY. Its mailing address is P.O. Box 150, Narrowsburg, NY 12764. Phone 845-252-7414. E-mail sales@riverreporter.com. **Publication Date: July 24, 2014**

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## From the editor

Every year **The River Reporter** publishes the **Literary Gazette**, which is filled with poems, short stories, essays and photography. This special publication supports the local arts and we thank all the writers who made submissions as well as all the advertisers who support us and the arts community.

The theme for this year's **Gazette** is "Dirt." Here in the Upper Delaware River Valley, we like to get our hands dirty. Whether you farm, tend a garden, or shop at the farmers' market, our community has fully embraced locally grown food. This issue of the **Literary Gazette** celebrates our agriculture and our country way of life.

In these pages you will find different takes on the theme—from gardening, to keeping a secret, and from digging in the dirt to politicians' scandals. The writers in this issue have embraced the theme with creativity, and some with humor, some taking a look back at their childhood and the generations of family who grew their own food. Farming, after all, was once a way of life for everyone, and although some may consider it a lost art, we are proud to say there are many flourishing farms in the region.

The photographer, Amanda Reed, and I went to four local farms to take pictures. Amanda's photography is amazing, and she even got down in the dirt to get the perfect shots. We would like to thank Willow Wisp Organic Farm, Gorzynski Ornery Farm, Apple Pond Farm, and The Anthill Farm for letting us come admire your beautiful dirt. We also thank you for providing the community with the one thing we all need: food. And, as writer Checko Miller wrote to me, "Thanks for honoring those who dig in the dirt, and poets who dig into words."

Isabel Braverman  
Editor

"I'm a dirt person. I trust the dirt.  
I don't trust diamonds and gold."  
—Eartha Kitt



## From the photographer

Amanda Reed was born in Hawley, Pennsylvania and grew up in a newspaper darkroom right next to a printing press. Her career in newspaper design and the photography that goes with it came from falling in love with the ink and the noise of the press at that young age.

Amanda combines her background in design with her love of photography to offer interesting perspectives on things we might not notice on a daily basis. In this collection, she gives her unique view of dirt and the land that shapes the Upper Delaware River Valley.

When she's not behind a camera shooting local photos or designing for **The River Reporter**, she's often found out with her family taking in all that the region has to offer.



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# My First Garden

By Mary Greene

It would be nice to say that I began gardening as a little girl, pushing sunflower seeds into the dirt under the tutelage of a sun-weathered grandmother who'd been practicing the garden arts passed down from her mother, and her mother. But, this is not the case. I was raised in suburban New Jersey, just across Sandy Hook Bay from New York City, where it was against code to hang clothing on an outdoor line, much less roto-till your lawn for food.

I did have an early experience with freshly harvested food in the visage of a farm stand that we visited summer afternoons for daily produce. I recall the sensation of stepping from the car—sunburnt and salty from a day of swimming in the ocean—into a shadowy world of big-handed farmers and dusty bins of potatoes, green beans, peaches, radishes, lettuce and the ubiquitous (ever marvelous) Jersey tomatoes and corn. My mother would gather her items into paper bags and turn them into simple, but sumptuous, sun-blessed summer feasts.

This market—Sickles Market—is now a high-end, gigantic operation, selling everything from gourmet foods to prepared dinners to linens and gifts to expensive flowers, bushes and trees. Nothing, or almost nothing, is grown on site anymore, but rather is imported from other black-dirt regions of the state. One evening after a weekend at the shore with my daughter and niece, on our way back to the Catskills, I wanted some fresh Jersey corn for our table. I knew the market had expanded, but was not prepared for the megaplex, three-parking-lot corporate beast it had become. I wandered in bewilderment through the aisles and levels, through the indoor and outdoor sections, through the lawn furniture and garden ornaments, through the tablecloths and fancy arranged bouquets, through the bakery and the takeout aisles, looking... looking for that bin of unshucked corn that I remembered from childhood. Finally, I arrived. There was the bin—maybe not too far from its original location. I began to gather my dozen ears and burst into tears.

That is one story—here is another. I began gardening when I bought my house in Narrowsburg in 1993. I was 40 years old. I got a neighbor to plow up a section of field that once had been (I was told) potato fields. The dirt was pure clay, red and hard, and the weeds were strong in that field, and did not hesitate to return. But I was determined. I had heard that raised beds were the way to go in such an environment. I spent hard days digging raised beds and then, ignorant of everything, planted all my crops in the ditches between the raised beds.



Miraculously, I had homegrown food that year, as I have had every year since. I have learned many things and have improved my soil little by little, so that now the dirt atop the beds is a rich mahogany black. I have battled slugs, weeds, too much rain, too little rain, the wrong crops for my zone, and animal predation (this year, raccoons). But every year, I have a harvest, and I have learned to can, and my shining jars of pickles, green beans and tomatoes sustain me through the long Catskill winters.

Every garden is an experiment, as every gardener will tell you.

My father is now living in an assisted living center in New Jersey, near the town where I grew up. Recently, on a visit, I had the opportunity to meet and dine with Mr. Sickles, the remaining patriarch of the family that once ran Sickles Farm. He must be a zillionaire now, but he still talks about farming. He told me that the house where I was raised was once one of his fields, before all the development began. He planted it in corn, every season.

So, corn. Jersey corn. I was sleeping in an old cornfield as I went through all my teenage angst. That is so comforting to me now, and so right.

## My Fingers

By Nancy Wells

My fingers dig deep.  
The moist earth yields.  
Once separate, now united.  
We are one.



## The Buzz

By Checko Miller

Weeding wet gardens,  
sweat pours from pores, drips from tips,  
and calls mosquitoes.

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## The Dirt

By Ramona Jan

Although I'm in recovery now, I was glad I was still drinking the Thanksgiving Day after my parent's divorce. My brother and I decided to invite them to a celebration at his house. We only did this because they swore to us that they would remain friends. Then our father walked in with a date. We know him well enough to see that this was meant as an intentional act to hurt our mother.

My father dated this woman, Peggy (whom he brought that day), thereafter for about two and a half years. One morning, I got a call from him asking me if I wanted to attend a wedding... his wedding. I said, "Oh! Are you and Peggy finally getting married?" His response was, "Peggy? I'm marrying Joan." I had not heard of Joan, but apparently four weeks earlier, without telling any of us, he switched his affections to someone named Joan. So I went to his wedding to Joan.

My mother has since settled in with a female partner the same age as myself. They make a pretty, feminine and 'once married with children' couple. They also fight often in ways that my parents did. My brother and I now meet in secret over most holiday seasons.



## How to Keep a Secret

By Dorothy Hartz

Turn up the music.  
Turn down the lights.  
Pick up a poppy seed with tweezers.  
Pink or red — how can you tell?  
Seal it in an envelope. Tape all the seams.  
Put the envelope in a plastic bag, the kind that zips.  
On the next dark of the moon, bury the bag in the back yard.  
Put a flowerpot over the spot.  
Whistle whenever you walk past the flowerpot, but never look at it.  
Chase the dog when it sniffs around the flowerpot.  
Cross the street to avoid your next door neighbor.  
Avoid bakeries, and veterans on Memorial Day.  
Give the shirt you wore to bury the bag to the Salvation Army.  
Change your phone number.  
Move away.

Years later, on vacation, your old neighbor recognizes you through the plastic surgery, though you're careful to conceal your new name. She has pictures she knows you'd love to see.  
In one, something papery and powdery and outrageously pink metastasizes on three lawns.  
"What pretty cosmos," you lie.  
The words stick to your tongue like paper, like powder.

That night, in your hotel room, scrub your dumb tongue until it bleeds.  
Turn up the air conditioner against the stale, sticky shame in the air.  
Anchor soul to body on a twisting filament of guilt, a fine fragile green stem.  
Sigh.  
Cry.  
Petals bruised, pollen dead, float into the white noise.

Dream your end.  
The heart twitch.  
The cold hollow imploding in your chest.  
Look inside.  
Find, ossified,  
a gray speck, dry in a scarlet ditch.

## Soil

By Karen Morris

I fold the wealth of compost against the grain  
of impoverished earth that is my flower bed  
of spoiled seeds.

I till the green gold of pistachio shells,  
coffee grounds and filters, celery tips,  
onion skin and cabbage leaves—

I blend my retirement fund's worth of  
bagged manure, bat guano and peat moss,  
intending to enrich.

I fuse failed riches in memory—  
intimations of dead Mother.  
Earth and the accused dirty girl cleave

then slip through my fingers,  
black as lead before it turns to gold—  
subject to my being soiled.



## Planting Season

By K. Dominey

The edge of winter is fading as  
Patches of white melt to brown.  
Throw open doors and windows to  
Breathe in the changing air.  
In grey mornings of early spring  
Trudge the mud to work the fields.  
Speed the plow till the earth  
Is once more covered in vibrant green.



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# Grandpa's Dirt

By MaryAnn Cappellino

Grandpa knew dirt. The son of feudal farmers, he was born into it and was one with it. He knew its language and listened to what it asked for. He didn't have words like carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous, but he could tell if the soil was healthy from its scent or how it felt in his hands. As a little girl I watched Grandpa in his garden gently turning the dirt so that it would loosen and breathe and graciously accept the seeds he left in its care. Grandpa knew when it was thirsty and the best time to let it drink, always before the sun or after the sun. It was a living thing to be fed and nurtured.

The knowledge of the soil, passed from my Grandpa's father and his father before him and so on down the ancestral line

where their lives and wisdom stretched out into the horizon... like the hills beyond hills of Grandpa's beloved Sicily. A knowledge of dirt was a matter of eating or not eating. From childhood, grandpa toiled under the heavy hand of the Sicilian sun. Land owned, not by his family, but by a baron. All they could keep was a third of their crop, the rest went to the baron. Barely enough to survive. When Grandpa's father died, there was one less pair of hands to work the land. Reluctantly and sadly, Grandpa, the only son, left all that he ever knew, setting out for America to find a way to provide for his mother and sisters. He was eighteen.

Grandpa carried his knowledge of the land over the hills of Sicily and across the ocean to New York. Even in the concrete city, he grew vegetables and herbs on fire escapes and on tarred roof tops of the tenements he lived in. He married the young woman he knew from his village in Sicily and they eventually settled in a small house in Brooklyn bought with years of their earnings in the factories and on the docks. When he saw the fallow dirt of the backyard he knew the blessings it held. It was there that he patiently created the garden that fills the memories of my childhood.

He rose while the sun still slept, tending his garden before heading out for a long day's labor. In the evening he would walk along its paths, the dirt fanning out in moist rows of blackness, giving back with tufts of green that were to be our food. "Don't step on the plants!" A childhood refrain that echoes still, called out by adults as we went to fetch a stray Spaldine that bounced its way into the tomato plants, or to pick fat juicy figs that we could reach with our little hands.

Some days we would hear the old sad horse with the funny straw hat clopping down our street pulling the wooden cart of the junkman who came for our castaways. His cart filled with old claw-foot tubs, corroded metal, furniture. His white straggly hair sticking out from under his woolen cap, he sat, bent over, holding the reins. An apparition amongst the Buicks, Dodges and Chevys of the fifties, that lined the streets

of my childhood. We kids would run from the garden, to catch a vanishing glimpse of another time and place. Grandpa would follow with a shovel, hoping the old horse would leave a gift of nature's fertilizer.

Grandpa scooped the dirt up in his hands, rubbed it between his palms, let it slip through his fingers, the dirt clinging under his nails and in the crevices of his leathery skin. He could feel what it needed. Grandpa took vegetable scraps from our meals and dug them into the garden, little hidden offerings for his dirt, not unlike the offerings we gave to the Madonna at our church.

When the dirt was ready and open to receiving, he planted peach, cherry and fig trees, he planted grape vines and built them a pergola to climb and wrap themselves around as they worked their way to the sun. The pergola, strong enough to hold the grapes as they grew from green to deep purple and became round and fat and juicy, hanging in voluptuous clusters, giving us fruit and wine and blessed shade to sit under on long summer days. The dirt gave back with luscious tomatoes that we ate off the vine, biting into them like apples. Their deep red juice dripping down my chin and arms, staining my shirt and upsetting my mother. Cucumbers, string beans, peppers, basil, parsley, mint, and long fat fingers of deep green zucchini showing off their yellow bonnets under the summer sun.

The zucchini, cooked in olive oil, green and thick and smelling like fresh spring flowers. Onions, garlic, chopped tomatoes, parsley and basil, reunited garden neighbors, sat like a crown atop a large bowl of yellow spaghetti. The zucchini flowers, battered and fried, a gentle sprinkle of salt and lemon juice — the food of peasants, yet fit for the long ago Baron.

We sat beneath the luscious grapes, a table set under their shade. We raised our glasses of red wine, the children's wine thinned with water, we gave thanks to God and shouted "Abbondanza." Abundance.

Bread and conversation passed around, filling our plates and our memories, our feet firmly on the cool black dirt, away from the hardness and heat of the city streets.

Grandpa died much too young, made ill by toxins inhaled at his job, sent home to die without compensation or thought. As he

slowly withered away, so did his garden, and then they were both gone. I was left with the memories of the grapes and the tomatoes and the fat figs that we ate until our stomachs ached, the family gatherings and Grandpa in his garden.

I write this as I sit in my garden, under the pergola, built from childhood memories, a place for my family to gather under its leafy shade. My garden full of lush green plants tumbling into one another and about to burst forth. Grandpa everywhere.

I know he is there when my hands are in the dirt because he whispers in my ear.



## Grow (a haiku)

By John Higgins

With the patience of  
Water, seed, soil and my love ~  
Is that a stem, Sun?



## Life

By Tamara Jo D'Antoni

till, sow, weed, harvest  
hands gloriously dirty  
tending life

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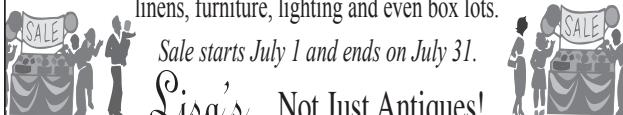
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## DIRT

By Lauren Whritner

As you dig  
More and more  
A variety of things  
Is in there galore

From rocks to trash  
To seltzer cans  
To wooden chairs  
And frying pans

From roots to bugs  
And mysterious things  
Or you may even find  
Some diamond rings

Playing cards and  
Arrowheads  
And perhaps some books  
That people have read

So just keep digging  
And keep in mind  
There are many things  
You can find

From wooden blocks  
To china dolls  
To bowling pins  
And rubber balls

From money to clothes  
And children's toys  
To many pictures  
Of girls and boys

So dig on forever  
'Cause you may find  
Something in the ground  
That's one of a kind



## Summer

By Marion Kaselle

Vision.  
Plan.  
Decisions—flowers, tree,  
how, when, where.  
Dig, plant,  
water, mulch,  
weed.  
Care,  
care.

Drought may take it,  
or rot—too much rain.  
Caring will remain  
in my hands, seeds sown, land's soul.  
Caring will remain,  
Caring sustains  
my heart.

## I Am Not a Gardener

By Norma Ketzis Bernstock

I am not a gardener but every spring when I lived in suburbia  
I purchased flats of pansies, marigolds and impatiens.  
Impatiens thrived through the entire season,  
had little luck with pansies, but I loved  
how they twisted and turned toward the sun.  
I was good about picking off dead blooms,  
enjoyed the gold and orange marigolds long into fall.

I tried to grow vegetables, fenced them in from rabbits,  
felt like a genuine farmer as I fertilized  
and watered my minuscule crops.  
But the carrots grew knobby like arthritic fingers  
because of the underground rocks and stones.  
I loved gathering long-leaf lettuce each night for salad  
but the tomatoes didn't ripen till August when  
we were in Maine so neighbors enjoyed the bounty.

These days I live in the woods where deer eat everything.  
Ornamental grasses and day lilies endure.  
I protect my weeping cherry and Japanese maple,  
chase the hungry deer as best I can.  
On a perfect summer morning I delight in donning knee pads,  
grabbing gloves and trowel, digging in dirt,  
pulling and cutting out brittle stems,  
the bees above, zipping in and out among  
the honeysuckle heavy with fresh golden blossoms.



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## Mud is the New Little Black Dress

By Maura Stone

When I established full-time residency in this rustic rural area nearly five years ago, I didn't take into account all four seasons. My lifelong acquaintance with Sullivan County never existed outside the summer familial retreat where we focused on boats, swimming, asiatic milfoil, waterskiing, kayaking and sunbathing. In other words, I was a typical cidot visiting two months a year.

Needless to say, my first winter here was brutal. I lamented then, and come to think of it, the subsequent four winters, "Why didn't anyone warn me?"

To say I was ill-equipped could be construed as an understatement; perhaps ill-informed and ignorant are more apt descriptions. I spent months in frenetic preparation to keep myself warm: caulking every seam both inside and outside the cottage, placing hay against exterior walls that admitted pipes, crawling underneath to surround water pipes with foam insulation and heat tape, cutting and gluing rigid foam insulation to exterior baseboards, placing plastic over every window and purchasing an electric and gas propane heater. I still had the ace up the sleeve: a friend's dog to maintain

body heat when all else failed.

Without resorting to the animal, I managed to survive the first evening when the temperature fell below zero. Way below zero. The following day, I bumped into the local undertaker at the community-frequented café, The Bake House.

"How do you keep yourself warm?" he asked, curious as to how I converted a 100-year-old plywood bungalow to year-round occupancy without any capital investment. "I pretty much use an electric ceramic heater," I responded.

"Yeah, I knew someone else who did the same thing," he said. "I buried him last year."

Through research (namely, grabbing hold of each person who resides here full-time), I found that flannel sheets plus fleece pajamas and a hat keeps one nice and toasty. That is, until one leaves the bed. Then, it's a whole different ball of wax.

Even so, I scrambled to maintain my ultra-chic city ways, reluctant to make the transition. Until I had to give up my shoes. For I learned that designer stiletto footwear and mud and snow just don't go together well. As I exchanged my footwear and wardrobe from fashion to heat-retention and water repellent, I became aware



that I reside in an agricultural community. It struck home when I first heard about the Tractor Parade in Callicoon. For two weeks prior to the event, I bubbled over with excitement. Don't ask me why, it just seemed like a lot of fun.

When the day came to pass, I marveled at the hundred or more tractors, especially the old ones still in operation. Hell, I couldn't get my lawn mower to work after two years and before me paraded turn-of-the-20th-century tractors clanking away at full speed.

Looking over at other participants' faces just as rapt as mine, I swelled with pride living in an area where agriculture was the mainstay. In fact, that was when I turned a corner. I put on the mandatory Sullivan County 20 pounds of additional weight and fully embraced the country life.

I still had a long road ahead of me.

"Oooh, look at the pretty flowers," I exclaimed one day at The Bake House. I befriended the proprietor, Jane and her husband, Matt, farmer at the Beaver Dam Brook Farms in Ferndale. "Did you pick them from your fields?"

They exchanged glances and were silent until Jane piped up. "Yes. Even though they're quite pretty flowers, they're chives."

Unbeknownst to Jane and Matt, I had volunteered them as my tutors. The education process must've been grueling on their side as well. As a cidot, I only knew fruit and vegetables from supermarkets and high-end organic shops where they were uniform, clean and mostly packaged. Eating fresh from the ground at The Bake House was the true culture shock.

Me at the Beaver Dam Brook Farm's stand at the Rock Hill Farmer's Market:

"Oh, what pretty squash. They look like swans."

"Are these things vegetarian licorice strips?"

"How cute — they look like moon cakes."

"Beets are also orange?"

"Lettuce really looks like this after you pick it? You mean to tell me you didn't have it processed?"

"You can eat that?"

Over time, Jane and Matt became inured to my comments. No doubt they've heard similar remarks from other cidiots. But, at least I learned.

Today, I stand proud and tall when my city friends come to visit. I drag them to Matt's stands where I get to display my knowledge:

"These things are squash. Those are the tops of garlic bulbs called, "Scapes." Beets grow in different colors. And yes, you can eat that."



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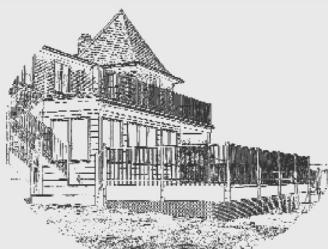
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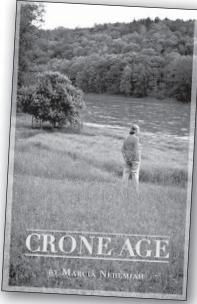
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## Black Gold

By Sally Hendee

The earth had settled after brewing for ages,  
simmering down to a rich, black soil ready to draw  
the very best from seed placed within its shallow furrows.  
They stretched like rows on a chenille bedspread toward the horizon.

Perfect lines, uniformly spaced, waited to be filled  
with small, eager bulbs and grains of suspended life,  
expected to burst and sprout beneath the covered ridges of moist earth.

They sought more exposure to the elements,  
reached above themselves, through the damp darkness.  
Pale with newness, but with the strength of plant instinct,  
they pushed upward, understanding the unseen light they needed.

There, the air moved around them. They had broken free  
from the rich cocoon of nourishment, born into the light.  
They were exposed now, vulnerable to the whims of an open, natural world.

Tended by man and wrapped in the warmth of season and sun,  
washed by the soft nudging rains that now tapped upon their lean,  
growing bodies, equally handsome and beautiful,  
they became what they were meant to be.

The nursery of deep richness, still clung to their roots,  
protected the source of it all and in some cases,  
the very identity and reason for them given the time and care.  
Sacred dirt, sacred as sun, held secrets of sustenance.

Did we look beneath us in appreciation or think less of what was underfoot?  
We cursed dirt within our homes, the very homes whose foundations  
we entrusted to it for security and stability.  
We pulled the food for our existence  
from same gritty gut.

Some knew the value of gold that was black,  
the wealth that came from the banks of turned soil.  
Some understood the wisdom of dirt.

Passionate keepers of the treasure, who deposited in those banks,  
we hoped would never tire, though the work was endless  
and nature, at times, cared little about their efforts.

Rich black furrows-deep furrowed brow,  
Moist dark earth-dark, drenched skin,  
respected the other for what was given.  
The earth tended to be thoughtful when it was thoughtfully tended.

Human roots, too, are deeply embedded in the earth.  
Our seeds left above ground, nevertheless  
dependent on the earth for nourishment and growth.  
Ancient beliefs bring us back to humble rest, when breathing is done.  
We return to the quiet, soft darkness deep within her breast.

## Moondust in the Loam

By Esther de Jong

I am back, in a field  
with freshly stirred dirt  
back in the dirt that sustains me  
Between rocks and earth,  
my toes feel the moon inside  
When in the end we fall  
and are scattered deep enough,  
we know we are a part of it.



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# Early Morning

By Patricia Kett

I walk early in the morning  
at first light, the sun in promise.  
I move into the world a blank slate,  
listen to the sounds  
aware of the smells  
open to the surprises  
of the awakening earth  
joining the scene of a leftover dream.

The ground's energy  
moves into my body  
joining the air in my lungs.  
Trees, my protectors  
allow me to breathe.  
Smaller plants share  
their blooms or fruit.  
Grasses, too numerous to name,  
lichen, moss, mushrooms born of dampness,  
scorned by those who decide what's needed.  
I think therefore I choose?  
Or do I only think I choose.  
I begin to run  
because I still can  
because it improves my heart  
because they say so  
whose minds will change  
with the next funded study.  
I feel good when I run,  
my blood vessels open  
my leg muscles move  
in perfect rhythm with  
my heart, my breath, my thoughts,  
the day fills with promises  
to keep or not.



## Dirt 9x

By Micho

I'm talking about Dirt.  
Clean Dirt.  
Dirt you smell,  
Loving the aroma.  
Dirt you get under your fingernails,  
And don't mind going to bed with.  
I'm talking about farm Dirt.  
Nature's Dirt.  
Unadulterated, unprocessed, Unfiltered Dirt.  
Dirt that is a home for  
Worms, insects, roots and vegetables.  
Dirt that makes me,  
Smile.

## Beneath the Soil

By Rey Barreto

Pick up a newspaper, turn on the t.v.,  
look at the mirror of our lives:  
another newborn thrown in a garbage can,  
another bomb blown by the terrorist hand,  
listen to the radio, listen to the streets  
of humanity trapped in rush hour, choking  
on the fumes of violence, choking on fear,  
gagging on racial tensions, gagging on hate,  
reeling from war to war, staggering ever closer  
to our own destruction,  
there seems to be no way out, and yet...

Look above you  
at the infinite blue of the sky,  
look around you  
at the ballet of the butterfly,  
feel beneath you  
the soft cool soil of the earth,  
listen to the wise old trees  
whose gnarled fingers point the way,  
the answer is there  
in the musical balance of nature  
in the brilliant dance of butterflies  
in the richness and depth of the soil  
where the roots of every spirit  
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intertwine.

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# Humboldt County, 1972

By Tom Braverman

Excerpted from: "717 Hemlock Street: The Empiricist Conversation from Locke to Gödel," a novel by Tommy Saxophone

John and I sat on the porch on attached movie theater seats John had rescued from an old East Bay movie theater just prior to its demolition. From tall glasses we drank hot coffee sweetened with condensed milk. John pointed west, towards a hilltop in the distance.

"China Creek Road is between us and that ridge. If you walk downhill from here you pretty much can't miss it. Stay on the path." John looked at me and repeated, "Stay on the path. If someone asks where you're going, tell them you're coming from Glassblower John's and you're going to Uncle Jimmy's. Hoka Hey."

"...coming from Glassblower John's going to see Uncle Jimmy." I repeated.

"...Hoka Hey...!"

"Sorry. Coming from Glassblower John's going to see Uncle Jimmy...Hoka Hey."

"Yeah. Don't forget the 'Hoka Hey.'"

Sure enough, a quarter of a mile down the path from Glassblower John's a voice out of the brush hailed, "Who goes there?"

"Uh...Tommy, coming from Glassblower John's on my way to Uncle Jimmy's."

I heard a mechanical clicking that sounded very much like a round being chambered.

"Hoka Hey," I added.

There was a pause.

"Go on then..."

I walked out of the woods into a clearing, an open space in front of a geodesic dome, the plywood sheathing three quarters complete, the remainder covered in black plastic. A young man with a sparse beard and long blonde hair gathered in a ponytail, shirtless under bib overalls and barefoot, was splitting wood rounds. The young man stopped working and leaned on the

maul, regarding my approach with an owlish, bemused expression.

"And what have we here?" he asked in a clipped British accent.

Reggie was not British, as it turned out, but a refugee from an eastern steel town. Land in southern Humboldt County, deemed by the lumber industry of no further use, was going for a few hundred dollars an acre, and Reggie and a few friends had come west to live a simpler life far from urban sprawl.

"Sit, Sir," he said, pulling out a chair for me. A young woman sat on the edge of the bed holding their infant son on her lap. The baby followed Reggie with his eyes as Reggie went to a cooler and fetched a quart container. Reggie sat down on a stool and pinched the container open and, touching it to his forehead, intoned something that sounded like "Bom Shiva." The baby laughed, squirming with pleasure. Reggie took a swig from the container and passed it to me. I started to lift the container to my lips; Reggie stopped me.

"You have to do the thing, man."

The baby was watching me now.

"Bom Shiva," I ventured.

There was no reaction from the infant.

Reggie shook his head.

"Not enough bass...Louder."

"Bom Shiva," I attempted gruffly, in as low a voice as I could manage, touching the waxy container, beaded with condensation, to my forehead. I took a sip: raspberry kefir, sweet and cold. The baby laughed and kicked his feet.

Now I passed the container to the young mother who repeated the ritual much to the baby's delight. The infant grew quiet, expectant. Reggie took the container and touched it to his son's forehead. What the baby said may or may not have sounded more or less like "Bom Shiva." But it was clear that the infant was attempting to supply the ritual incantation.

"Good boy, Charlie," Reggie said, and putting his index finger into the container, brought out a little kefir which

he offered to his son. The container went around again, and then again, until it was empty.

Reggie, watched intently by Charlie, now brought out a guitar.

I shot the sheriff...

...he sang in a soft, vibratoless tenor...

But I did not shoot the deputy...

...this last phrase sung in an ascending major triad, just as Marley himself had sung it.

Charlie was asleep and his mother laid him on the counterpane and covered him with a little blanket. Reggie fetched a jam jar from a cupboard.

"Reg, you don't know if our guest partakes," the woman said.

"Ma cherie," Reggie answered, "you are perhaps some time in Bordeaux? In zee France? And zee wine is offered you? And zo you zay," here he switched to the nasal whine of a Long Island teenager, "'Nah, I'll just have a diet Fresca,'" and falling back into mock-French, "...to refuse-ay, zis is not zo much zee politesse, no? You t'ink? Yes?"

The purple buds clustered on the little branch were "sinsemilla," seedless, as Reggie explained. Reggie demonstrated that the sticky resin was enough to cause the little branch to adhere to his fingers. "The pure schmint," Reggie called it.

I slept that night in an old oak grove. Far enough inland so that there was no fog, the night was warm, moonlit. The next morning I got up and stuffed my sleeping bag into its sack, wrapped the sack in my tarp and fastened the bundle to the bottom of my pack. Reg was standing in the doorway of his dome drinking kefir.

"China Creek Road is just at the top of the bank," he said pointing to a path that led out of the clearing, offering me the container. "Uncle Jimmy's is four or five miles up the road."

I was starting out of the clearing when I remembered there was something I'd wanted to ask.

"What does 'Hoka Hey' mean?"

"Hoka Hey?" That's Lakota for 'It's a good day to die'."



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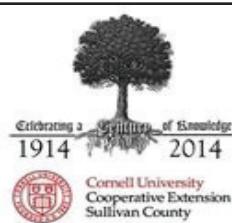
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# Getting Into August

By Sheila Dugan

July 27th  
the Universe's longest day  
I feel it

will this day never end I asked myself  
Uranus  
I reply

July 28th the usual drone  
languidly sits on the  
usual bench

the arresting officer  
answers dispassionately  
the cross-examination

were his pants down  
no says the cop  
was his zipper undone  
don't know says the cop  
was the ground wet  
nope says the cop  
did you see him urinating  
nope says the cop  
then I move to dismiss

guilty says  
the usual drone  
beyond a reasonable doubt

July 29th  
I visit Peltier in a room  
in prison

he sleeps on the floor in his cell  
to keep cool  
in the hole

July 30th I write  
passionately about  
my garden  
July 31st I pull up potatoes  
a dozen or so for dinner  
with guests

my lumpy knees  
covered with garden dirt  
look like potatoes

Tomorrow will be August  
we still have half a summer left  
today I will swim in the river



# Dirt

By Will Conway

*"Politics is an organized, publicly sanctioned amplification of the infantile itch to always have one's own way."*

— Tom Robbins, "What Is Art and If We Know What Art Is, What Is Politics?"

DNA tends to hold sway,  
in spite of goodness, Thomas J.  
Alex Hamilton redressed his vows  
through dallies with a lady's wows.  
A miracle dwelt in Grover C.  
admitting extra paternity.

Roosevelt and Eisenhower  
lent affairs a little power.  
Kennedy and Johnson  
walked their dogs around.

G. B. Senior held Jennie Fitzgerald  
in many positions, so it's been said.  
Monica's tacky blue dress  
bent underneath the desk  
left Bill with a what is  
the real meaning of is?

U. S. Rep. A. Weiner sexted,  
Mark Sandford re-reflexed his  
muscle, hiking into Argentina.  
Patraeus disturbed B's finest china.

Strom, like T. J., made Essie May,  
brown as coffee, behind the fray.  
The list expands past any one name;  
Condit and Newt, Edwards and Cain,  
Souder and Schrock, Ryan and Craig  
sharing a boast, X-rated, not vague;

snug in tales of secret undies,  
at whim of politic and sundries,  
dare beg yet for your solemn votes,  
barring flash news of undertows.

## feast for pachamama

By Tracey Gass Ranze

these snow-sumptuous and barren vegetable beds  
remind me of the coming heat, the gritty sun beat  
the fruit flower, green leaves, the canning steam  
and i wonder how much we will need by summer's end  
of soil, seeds, sprouts, sweat

as spring gets on, i know it's not just heat  
but light and dark that conduct the spark of leaves  
the sustained note of the open bud that murmurs the arrival  
of long-light, the firefly-lit, slip of night

and i have these long days to make dirt -  
to dig it from a decade of cut and heaped lawn clips  
to toss it in the wheelbarrow  
to cut in ripe kitchen compost, plus  
two scoops of limestone and a pile of rotting leaves  
to add a fork of mulch straw, a bucket of farm manure  
and finally to slow to sacred-time to scatter a prayer  
with a jelly-jar of Lynn Elfert's ashes - as per  
her posthumous request

now to feed *pachamama* - mother earth  
to roll into some shade, to cool the stir and stir  
to lean over the deep pan of the rusted garden cart  
clenching a claw tool or pitchfork or favorite wooden stick,  
mixing and mixing, even drips of salty sweat season  
as i shovel, toss, chop this black-batter in- shovel, toss, chop  
to build my garden beds, to plant my seeds, grow earth

where at rest, i listen and watch -  
the rains release the dirt and split the seed to stem  
the sun unfurl the leaves, insects consort the blooms  
seeds don their fruit, earthworms eat dirt at harvest.



*The purpose of art is washing the  
dust of daily life off our souls.*

-Pablo Picasso

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## Two Parts Dirt

By Sharon MacGregor

A cigarette hangs from her lips; the burnt ash refuses to drop and she squints to protect her pale cornflower blue eyes from the smoke that rises behind her large frame plastic glasses. Wearing polyester pants with a button-up floral print shirt in a coordinating color, her shoulders slightly stooped, she moves with purpose and crosses the narrow kitchen. Feet encased in practical slip-on loafers complete the ensemble and are a required part of being dressed for the day. Hands with long fingers are tipped by sturdy nails that are maintained to a length just long enough to be noticed as feminine and palms filled with the guts of the coffee percolator. She shakes the grinds into an old coffee can on the white counter and taps the stainless steel basket against the metal rim.

"What do you do with that?" her granddaughter asks with her head tipped to one side.

Though she does not care for the smell of freshly brewed coffee, the spent remains have a milder and more pleasant scent to her young nose.

The stoic matriarch does not waste time or effort to turn when she answers, "I mix this with the dirt for the geraniums. It's best to use one part grinds to at least two parts dirt."

Though just less than 10 years old, the young girl who swings her feet while sitting at the red and white kitchen table knows very well what geraniums are and that they line the main sidewalk leading to the front door. They are planted in the spring in dirt that is tender, rich in color and turned with an odd silver spoon. The flowers are an expected part of the scenery upon arriving at the house of her mother's mother, just as the porch with the painted cement floor, the clothes line just outside the side door, and the skeleton key that was kept hidden in the dirt in case of an emergency.

A child can count on things at their grandparents' house; skinny bottles of flavored sodas lined up on the top shelf in the refrigerator on a cardboard liner, two pairs of eyeglasses on the kitchen table along with a pile of scrap paper and a pencil, volumes upon volumes of **National Geographic** magazines lining the bookshelves and a paperback book nearby. A woman who can crochet and knit, and may seem a bit too serious to children, always had just a touch of whimsy. She created stuffed animals from yarn, had small wooden toys on the window ledges that could be collapsed by pushing up from underneath, and though she gave the impression that she was not exactly affectionate, a kiss hello and goodbye was always given to her grandchildren.

The memory is like a snapshot. One brief exchange between the woman and her grand-daughter and the rest escapes like steam after a summer rain. However, the young girl has grown to have a family of her own and faithfully makes sure at least one geranium is planted in front of her home and tells her sons they are best planted in soil that has a ratio of one part coffee grinds to at least two parts dirt.



# The River Reporter's 19th Annual 2014 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

## THE BEST BALLOT IS BACK!

We have revamped our ballot and it's better than ever! We ask that you simply vote for the people, places or businesses that you think are the BEST. Thank you for your participation and we look forward to receiving your votes. If there is a category that we are missing, let us know!

We will publish our 2014 WINNERS in our annual Readers' Choice Awards "BEST" supplement in January 2015.

**Good Luck to all!**

## BEST PLACES FOR FOOD & DRINK

Appetizers _____	Ice Cream Parlor _____
Authentic Meal _____	Italian Restaurant _____
Bagels _____	Locally-Sourced Menu _____
Bakery _____	Local Watering Hole _____
Barbeque _____	Lunch _____
Beer Selection _____	Martinis _____
Breakfast _____	Menu _____
Brunch _____	New Restaurant _____
Budget-friendly _____	Pasta Dish _____
Buffet _____	Pizza _____
Candy Shop _____	Off The Beaten Path _____
Cheesesteak Sandwich _____	Outdoor Dining _____
Chinese Restaurant _____	Overall Restaurant _____
Coffeehouse _____	- Delaware County _____
Deli _____	- Orange County _____
Desserts _____	- Pike County _____
Diner _____	- Sullivan County _____
Dinner _____	- Wayne County _____
Dinner Specials _____	- Region _____
Early Bird Specials _____	Ribs _____
Family Restaurant _____	Romantic Restaurant _____
French Fries _____	Salad _____
Gourmet Restaurant _____	Sandwiches _____
Grocery Store /Supermarket _____	Seafood _____
Hamburgers _____	Soups _____
Happy Hour _____	Steakhouse _____
Health Food Store _____	Vegetarian Food Restaurant _____
Home Cooking Restaurant _____	Wine Selection _____
Hot Dogs _____	Wings _____

## BEST PLACES TO SHOP

Antique Store _____	Jewelry Store _____
Auto Parts Store _____	Knit Shop _____
Baby/Kids Store _____	Liquor Store _____
Boat Dealer/Rental _____	Locally-made products _____
Bookstore _____	Lumberyard _____
Car Dealership _____	Medical Equipment _____
Clothing Store _____	Motorcycle Shop _____
Collectibles Store _____	Music Store _____
Consignment Shop _____	Novelty Shop _____
Electronics _____	Outdoor Recreational Vehicles _____
Farm Equipment Retailer _____	Pet Store _____
Flooring Store _____	Place to Buy Art _____
Florist _____	Pottery Studio _____
Furniture Store _____	Specialty Store _____
General Store _____	Sporting Goods Shop _____
Gift Shop _____	Tattoo/Ear Piercing Shop _____
Hardware Store _____	Vintage Shop _____
Home Décor _____	

## BEST BUSINESSES & SERVICES

Auto Service Station _____	New Business of the Year _____
Bank _____	Pet Boarding/Pampering _____
Child Care Provider _____	Pet Grooming /Groomer _____
Christmas Tree Farm _____	Pharmacy _____
Eye Care Center _____	Photography Studio _____
Elder Care Facility _____	Plumbing & Heating Supply _____
Emergency Room _____	Rehabilitation Services _____
Engaging Facebook Page _____	Recycle & Transfer Station _____
Fitness Center _____	Rental Center _____
Funeral Home _____	Real Estate Office _____
Green Business _____	Salvage Company _____
Hair & Nail Salon _____	Septic Service _____
Heating Fuel Company _____	Spa or Personal Pampering _____
Home & Garden Store _____	Storage Center _____
Hospital/ Medical Facility _____	Towing Service _____
Insurance Agency _____	Truck Center _____
Kid's Camp _____	Tuxedo Rentals _____
Kitchen & Bath Store _____	Veterinarian Clinic _____
Maternity Unit _____	Well Driller _____
Modular Homes _____	Women's Health Center _____
Mortgage Company _____	

## BEST PEOPLE

Accountant _____	Green Developer _____
Architect _____	High School Athlete _____
Auto Mechanic _____	Holistic Practitioner _____
Baker/ Specialty Cakes _____	Interior Decorator _____
Bank Teller _____	Landscape _____
Barber _____	Lawyer _____
Bartender _____	Law Enforcement Officer _____
Builder _____	Local Hero _____
Butcher _____	Massage Therapist _____
Caterer _____	Medical Specialist _____
Carpenter _____	Painter _____
Car Salesman _____	Pediatrician _____
Chef _____	Plumber _____
Chiropractor _____	Politician _____
Clergy _____	Postmaster _____
Coach _____	Radio Personality _____
Custom Cabinetry _____	Real Estate Agent _____
Dentist _____	Roof _____
Doctor _____	Teacher _____
Electrician _____	Veterinarian _____
Event Planner _____	Waiter/Waitress _____
Excavator _____	Web Designer _____
Friendly Staff _____	Yoga Teacher _____

## BEST OF OUR COMMUNITY

Ambulance Squad _____	- Golf Pro _____
Amusement/ Fun Park _____	- Musician/Band _____
Animal Shelter _____	- Photographer _____
Art Gallery _____	- Potter _____
Atmosphere _____	Local Products:
Bed & Breakfast _____	- Beer / Spirits _____
Bowling Lanes _____	- Cheese _____
Canoe Livery _____	- Eggs _____
Campground _____	- Meats _____
Chamber of Commerce _____	- Maple Syrup _____
Chicken BBQ (Volunteer) _____	- Wine _____
Cider Mill _____	Meditation Center _____
Civic Club or Organization _____	Movie Theatre _____
College _____	Museum _____
Community Festival or Street Fair _____	Neighborhood _____
Conference Center _____	Pancake Breakfast _____
Dance Studio _____	Parade _____
Day Trip _____	Penny Social _____
Fair _____	Place to Hold a Prom _____
Family Night Out _____	Places to Play Bingo _____
Farm Market _____	Place to Take out of town guests _____
Fire Department _____	Place to Take the kids _____
Golf Course _____	Playhouse Theatre _____
Historic Site _____	Post Office _____
Horseback Riding _____	Private School _____
Hotel _____	Radio Station _____
Law Office _____	Resort _____
Library _____	Shopping Area _____
Live Music Venue _____	Ski Lodge _____
Local _____	Special Area Attraction _____
- Artist _____	Sullivan Renaissance Project _____
- Author _____	Wedding Reception Location _____
- Celebrity _____	Winery _____
- Farm _____	Youth Center _____
- Getaway _____	Youth Program _____

**HOW TO VOTE:** Please print clearly your choices for "THE BEST" from the categories listed. Best choices are limited to Delaware, Orange, Pike, Sullivan and Wayne counties. You may also VOTE ONLINE: [www.RiverReporter.com/BEST](http://www.RiverReporter.com/BEST)

**HOW TO ENTER:** NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Additional ballots are available at **The River Reporter** office at 93 Erie Ave, Narrowsburg, NY. Ballots MUST be complete and include full name, address and phone number of voter. All ballots must be received by December 18, 2014. Employees of **The River Reporter** and **Stuart Communications** are permitted to vote but not eligible to win prizes. Entries that are late, damaged, illegible or missing voter's name will not be eligible. One entry per person. Mechanically reproduced or Photocopied entries are not eligible. A business, organization or person may win no more than three (3) categories. Winners will be chosen based on the number of votes received by December 18th, 2014.

**HOW TO WIN PRIZES:** All ballots will be included in a random drawing for prizes. Drawing will be held in January 2015. No duplicate winners. BEST Winners will be notified in January 2015.

## OFFICIAL "BEST" BALLOT ENTRY FORM

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