

States of Mind

The Publication of the Mental Health Association in Tompkins County

Cycles: Mental Health in the Revolving World

Autumn 2010



To understand and improve the mental health of our community

a d v o c a c y • i n f o r m a t i o n • e d u c a t i o n



The Mental Health Association in Tompkins County is composed of people working together to improve the mental health of our community. The goal of this publication is to inform the community about ideas, different viewpoints, developments and activities in the field of mental health; its contents are not intended to provide advice about individual problems. Such advice should be offered only by a person familiar with the detailed circumstances in which the problem arises. Unless otherwise noted, opinions expressed in *States of Mind* are the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the Board of Directors, staff or membership. Submissions are welcome. Please call (607) 273-9250 if you wish to submit an article, poem, story or drawing; or send it to:

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Fall Guest Editor—Margaret Wedge

From the Desk of The Executive Director

In numerous movies, plays and songs, we are encouraged to celebrate the cycles of life. There are cycles we gladly celebrate; graduation from school, being hired for our first job or putting our garden to bed for the winter can all signify a change in a cycle that for most of us is good. There are other cycles that are a struggle and something we would rather not have to face.

We have just had a summer of hot and humid days that had many feeling wonderful. Warm afternoons and sunshine can be quite a gift, and helpful in easing bones and joints that react to the cold. For some, summer is a time for being outdoors, enjoying walks or sitting outside, and seeing friends. But not everyone loves the heat.

There are others who greet the autumn with more enthusiasm, for this signals for them cool days and great nights for sleeping. They might eagerly look forward to the first snowfall and all the winter activities they enjoy. Bundling up in the quiet, cold night of winter is refreshing for many, too.

The list of positive and not-so-positive reactions to seasons (cycles) can be applied to other life events as well. Cycles of aging, cycles of illness, cycles of health mean different things to each and every one of us. What havoc transitions can play! And yet what a wonderful and challenging world we live in.

I hope you find these articles of interest and that you might one day add your own thoughts to our elegant mix.

Best,

Beth

About Time

By Rachel Josefowitz Siegel, MSW

Autumn Leaves
Glorious colors
Gone

Dreams of future
become memories
of years past

Time to watch the leaves of autumn, turning into a final burst of glory before falling to the ground. Gently they drift, a slow, mesmerizing dance of colors: gold, orange, red, and bits of green. Each leaf a separate thing of beauty, making its own journey down to earth and soil. Soon, moved in unison by wind and currents, the leaves shrivel into crumbling shades of brown. Their end is near—they will be raked, discarded, mourned perhaps, by just a few.

Like leaves, our bodies change. We too become more brittle, and we may fall or not, in our own time, in our own manner. We plan, we worry, we write instructions, we wish to be well treated, not discarded at the end. With luck, good genes, and caring doctors, we continue to live fully, still giving love and pleasure to our dear ones, still taking in their gifts of care and of companionship.

Now is the time to rejoice in the beauties of late, the wisdom of accumulated experience. Unlike the leaves of autumn, we humans do not show our late-life colors on our sleeves, we keep our dance of memories inside ourselves. Our daily lives absorb new sights, new knowledge. Our memory banks are full and prone to slow retrieval, we absorb new facts at our own rate, make new connections. We too each follow our own journey, in our own time. The loves and losses of long life feel bitter-sweet, we have few words to sing the fullness of our aging hearts.

Now is the time to be aware, awake; each day a special gift, each friend a precious asset to be cherished, each family moment to be fully relished and added to the store of feelings and deep joy. It is the time to discard past injustices, small irritations, the clutter of the mind and heart. It is not the time for full accounting of pleasures and of pains. It is, however, time to feel the present, and the past in all its glory.

The hour is now. In childhood we looked forward to many years of adult life. We still look forward now but to a shorter span, treasuring each day, each human touch, each falling leaf, and every setting sun.

Suddenly September

By Gene Stelzig

Suddenly September is here.
Crisp mornings of radiant
clarity and the rich
coating of dew on the lawn
that soon enough will
convert to the white
of hoarfrost and kill
the ragweed that makes
us sneeze and sneeze.
Days of dogwalks through
the flattened cornfields,
and of tennis and wine
(the beers of summer left
far behind in the humid
haze of July) and of
bicycle rides through
the crystalline afternoons.



September has come in
so quiet and so sudden
the breath of early
autumn is everywhere,
and the hint of the coming
of a long white winter
footdeep in snow with
bonechilling winds sweeping
through the leafstripped valley.



Suddenly September has
arrived on the scene when
the butterfly season of
late May seems only
a memory of yesterday
and the long evenings of June
are still singing
in our bones.

Postpartum depression can be greatly misunderstood by those of us who have not experienced it. Welcoming a new child into the world should be a time of joy and excitement. But for some women it is a time when they experience feelings of great anxiety, restlessness and worthlessness. These are not the usual “baby blues.” In this case, women sometimes consider hurting themselves or the child. The feelings tend to remain rather than pass and may even worsen. New moms may stop eating or exhibit other withdrawal behavior. Research shows that a change in the hormone levels following birth may lead to postpartum depression. But lifestyle and attitudes also play a role in how the new mother responds to her situation. Recommended treatment can include medication to help stabilize mood, and what is called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, in which an individual is taught to examine her belief system and change the way she sees her feelings. These avenues of support are designed to assist the woman with her new challenges as a mother and/or to address other pressing concerns.

The Mayo Clinic distinguishes the differences in symptoms as indicated below (© 1998-2010 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research). Signs and symptoms of depression after childbirth vary depending on the type of depression. Signs and symptoms of baby blues—which last only a few days or weeks—may include:

Mood swings; anxiety; sadness; irritability; crying; decreased concentration; trouble sleeping.

Postpartum depression may appear to be the baby blues at first, but the signs and symptoms are more intense and longer lasting, eventually interfering with a mother’s ability to care for her baby and handle other daily tasks. Postpartum depression symptoms may include:

Loss of appetite; insomnia; intense irritability and/or anger; overwhelming fatigue; loss of interest in sex; lack of joy in life; feelings of shame, guilt or inadequacy; severe mood swings; difficulty bonding with the baby; withdrawal from family and friends; thoughts of harming oneself or the baby.

If you or someone you know may be struggling with feelings of being overwhelmed, depressed and fearful as a new mom or mom-to-be, please reach out and get some help. Postpartum Depression will not just go away soon without medical treatment.

The Bicycle and a Chicken

By Melissa Hamilton-Kolberg



A bicycle rides
because of its wheel.

We might walk,
before crawling
or fall,
as we kneel.

In the
turn of a pedal,
life whistles, “why?”
if we find
our self crashing
'til a chicken
comes by.

“How can she help?”
I thought with a shrug,
then watched as she pecked
at a persnickety bug.

With only two wings
and a quite a small head,
I knew that she'd very soon
leave me for dead.

As I wiped off my hair
and mopped at the blood,
She cocked her head lightly
and scratched at the mud.

No aid could be seen
as I brushed off my knee,
With a crumpled up bike,
this chicken, and me.

Her feathers stuck out
in this comical tuft, as
I bent back a wheel
and gathered my stuff.

Intent was her gaze, so
I soared from the grime—
a poem rose from poultry
then gave me this rhyme.
How much is a day worth?

A moment?

A breath?

If a beak breaks a shell
to stream in the light
We can only just cheer,
“Good effort! Great fight!”

If we offer a hand to crack
for a chick—
the struggle is lost,
it may die or get sick.

We cannot sort out
as a yolk from the white,
life and our struggle
as we reach for the light.



A Transition in Time

By Sarah Murray



Cycles—what can one say about them? Well, in my experience, they appear to exist so that whatever has gone wrong in the past can somehow be made better or just different. They can provide distance and perspective. Consider each change of season and how nature even allows for all sentient beings to come alive, and in the same token pass through death. The cycle of a butterfly is my favorite example. I remember watching a movie in my formative years about how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

What I've carried with me through all this time is this: the caterpillar has a fear of the process of change that it must go through to become the beautiful butterfly. No matter the fear, the caterpillar is asked to accept change as part of being alive, because the transformation is going to take place anyway.

Ultimately, the movie takes you on the journey as the fearful caterpillar goes through its metamorphosis, emerging as a brand-new butterfly. It ends with the butterfly understanding why it had to surrender what it was for what it could become.

I continue to love this story in all its variations. Later I came to learn that the butterfly stood for renewal. All this has helped me to view my cycle, journey through life as no lesser or greater than anyone else's. It is the attitude that shapes that journey, and believing that there is potential for the better in all things. I like to think I'm between that frightened old caterpillar (whom I was) and the beautiful transcendent butterfly (whom I could become).

Life is a cycle of birth to death. What one does on this earth at this place and time is left up to each one of us. I am adopted, and growing up was a struggle for me—more than the usual. I was molested before I could talk by a babysitter. Let's just say my adoptive mother had her own struggles and I was greatly affected by them physically and emotionally. I had complicated health issues with little support. In college I witnessed the suicide of one of my fellow seniors. Then life got even more chaotic with continued medical difficulties. Somehow, I still graduated but only managed a semester of grad school. I became absolutely fearful of the medical community after

being misdiagnosed, over-tested, over-medicated, and misunderstood.

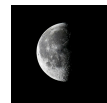
Later, I made a choice that an adoptee sometimes makes with great support. I did not have that support. In about six months of searching I found my own way—whether by Providence or fate—towards locating my birthmother. The truth can set you free, but it comes at a price.

For me that price was hurting my adoptive mom emotionally and then losing her due to long-term dependence on prescription medications, smoking and vascular disease. She was fifty-three. My reunion with my birthmother took place in a local bar. My truth was that I came from addicts, alcoholics, and mental illness—genetically speaking.

I began to face my challenges with mental and physical health one step at a time. As in the story of the butterfly, my transformation has taken its own time and unique shape—through therapy, medications, hospitalizations, etc.... and the cycle continues.

I continue to work through long-term PTSD issues, depression, fibromyalgia, and other medical problems. My conditions have turned me from being the woman I want to be with a career to someone on Disability for the past seven years battling pain, feelings of isolation and fatigue daily.

I must regularly keep my “critic” or “stinking thinking” in check, or I once



again become paralyzed and fearful, ready to crawl into the cocoon. My philosophy is, if I remain teachable and willing, then maybe my experience could be useful to others. I’ve had to learn that I cannot change my past, but I can grow from it. I could not fix my adoptive mom. I can’t change my alcoholic birth-parents or my genetic load. I can break bad cycles and put healthier ones in their place.

I have no children or biological footprint to leave behind, other than to share that part of me that yearns to become a butterfly, to have done no harm, and to leave this world a kinder, more peaceful place.

To those who somehow chose to read this, I thank you. If fear and doubt, loss and anger are part of your story, I can only offer patience and acceptance. Pause to consider the butterfly. Take the position that you are going through your own transformation. And no matter what shape that may take, you are on your own unique way to “becoming.”

I wish to share a final thought which another friend shared with me. It is not an original idea, and it is a famous quote: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”



Counter-Clockwise

By Nicholas Friedman

Spurs to the ribs of crested mares
impaled with worn brass rods,
a closely mothered cavalry of kids
anticipates, although unknowingly,
the freeing of a clutch,
the jerking of a gummy central gear
whose tenuous accord of wire and pinion
sets the crankshaft overhead
to whirling like a gritted pump jack,
and—finally—the cuing of a waltz
that leads them both away and back
to where they started.

An organ drones
beneath the crash of drums and cymbals
hammering the same relentless tune
with *one-two-three*'s stock regularity.

The carousel has barely reached a trot
before an artificial breeze
starts sifting through the children's hair.
Their faces fill with smiles, their chests with fear
as amble turns to canter.

The fog of fried food stains the air.

A calculated wave from mothers
gazing on the scene stays unreturned:
The kids cling fast to the tarnished rods,
and in their momentary bravery,
the lot of them fling back their heads
as if for holy battle-cry

or some ecstatic yawn, wet mouths drawn wide
against the air with row on row of teeth
flashing their gold beneath the glow
of half-blown bulbs.



The engineer fidgets at his post.
And fingering the greasy wooden tokens
in his pouch, he sours at the passing sight
—now here, now gone, and back again—
of his reflection as it comes and goes
with every flash of ill-lit mirrors.
Here is no zoetrope: The same gaunt image
swims beneath the excess of his vest;
the same grey tuft of chest hair sprouts
out from his undone collar, just below
a faintly wobbling chin whose shakes
seem always to be warning *no, no, no*
to youth that's not quite lost,
but disinherited.

Above him, crenellated plaster peels
itself away in clotted cakes,
and cherubim contort themselves
vaguely to heavenward, locked in poses
of celestial ecstasy—or maybe damning pain.

One chub-faced angel blows a golden horn;
another drapes his cloths across
a virgin's breast

as horses bob with rhythmic ease
to match the waltz's dizziness—
and champ, eternally, at their bits.

Drawn round by a pair of regal mares,
a carriage lined with reddish velveteen
made threadbare and discolored with the years
escorts a plump nun habited in grey,

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her stockings dull,
a crucifix slung low against her breasts.
She smiles warmly through her glasses
at the girl with vacant eyes
and pets her wild ponytails
to smooth the errant hairs back into place.
Seated beside the nun,
and yet nowhere at all, it seems,
the girl is staring nails into the air,
her shoulders slouched toward the mares
that draw her carriage on forever
and forever on. Alarmed now, she begins to rock.

A proselyte who will not hear?
The recently bereaved?
A wayward soul who needs the church to steer
her back to God?
She could be any one of these...

The nun is standing now,
pacing about the carriage as she wags a hand—
and with the other, gropes a pocketful of beads.
The pools of fat beneath her eyes have sunk
now that the smile has faded to a sneer:

*But why despair, my child, with God so near?
Your mom / your dad / your mongrel dog is now with God.
The faith will take you if you take the faith.*

She cannot / will not / would not hear
this voice above the din.

The carousel decelerates and stops.
Its cavalry dismounts,

and soon the ride is wholly clear
but for one carriage lined with velveteen
whose rider will not her leave her seat—
but rather stares and stares and stares and stares.
The nun and engineer exchange a knowing look
as next ride's horde of children mount the mares.



The freeing of the clutch;
the jerking of a central gear;
the cuing of a waltz
all set the carousel to spin again.

The girl with vacant eyes
is wet with tears.



Map of Seattle
By Lauren Zemer

At Last
By Derek Lavarney

It is clear in his mind
that now is the time
to move on from his past
and live life at last.



A Loss of Wisdom

By Larry Roberts



Death is an unpleasant aspect of life. People die. Death is not like moving away, breaking up or changing jobs. Death is final, painful, that pain difficult to describe, deeply spiritual, and can change how life is looked at. On September 10, 2010, my psychotherapist, David Mordovanec, died.

The Tompkins County Mental Health Clinic assigned David as my therapist in June 1986. It was my great good luck to be assigned David. Over the years my gratitude because of that luck grew. When he went into private practice, I went with him. I last saw David in July for a regular appointment.

I was desperate in summer 1986. I left college and returned to Ithaca because I was depressed and suicidal. I first saw David on the day I was discharged from the psychiatric unit at Cayuga Medical Center. As I got to know him, I was relieved to finally know someone who was willing to hear my pain, hear painful secrets, and as I made progress, was willing to help me keep progressing even when I became unsure and would retreat from the healing process.

David appeared to have a moral aversion to telling me what to do. And as he got to know me, he knew that I wouldn't do it anyway. It says a lot about his approach that he listened so well and could see my pain but not rush to a solution. Of course, there was the time he told me that I had to get out of bed and get myself together. He was right. He would apologize when I'd mention it, and I'd remind him how grateful I was that he said it.

Once, he wore an all-white outfit. I was uneasy for the whole session until I realized that what he was wearing bothered me. I asked him not to do it again. He never did. One day I was admiring pictures of tattoos at a gallery; it turned out they were of David's tattoos. Then there was the appointment that I went to after being treated for an intentional overdose of aspirin. Sick to my stomach, I threw up in his wicker frog-shaped wastebasket. He took it in stride.

Psychotherapy is intensely personal, requiring trust, and very early in treatment David realized how afraid I was that if he knew everything about me he would reject me and be horrified by me. In a profound way, his willingness to listen and his therapeutic skill assured me that he could hear everything I needed to tell him. That was his greatest gift to me. Simply, if he accepted me, others would as well.

I hadn't seen David since mid-July and was shocked by his death. I am grieving— hopefully in a way about which David would be happy. I had the pleasure of knowing David in a way that helped me immeasurably. His death doesn't destroy that and hasn't derailed my well-being. I am sad, but remain grateful to have known him.



A Little Fire in a Wild Field

By Gene Stelzig

The vast fires of the stars are stoked
in billion year cycles, but I will try
what a small fire in a wild field yields.

My master unbuttons in a naughty
night to swim in. Wild geese do not fly
that way, where men contend with stars and rage.

And I for sorrow sung that great fires
burn unchecked, anneal, destroy the day
to the bone. Little fires fuel the mind.

A dog must to kennel in the rain, but
I will start a little fire in a wild field.
Great wheels crash down the hill; the fool will stay.



The Ripple Effect, a.k.a What Goes Around Comes Around

By Rachael Pierce

It is extremely difficult to focus on the topic of the cycles in our lives, as they are so encompassing yet ubiquitous. This is especially true in today's hi-tech world, where my computer tells me that the "power cycle refers to resetting the network connections." And boy are we wired today with programmable thermostats and smart diabetes meters that let you prick anywhere for blood. Even my oxygen hose has a feature that beeps when there is a kink that prevents the flow in my lifeline. These vital connections take on gargantuan importance in an increasingly interconnected world. Hence we refer to the global economy and the 24-hour news cycle where the world never sleeps and the international dateline is breached moment by moment.

Yet, there is nothing new under the sun, or so they say. Clichés abound that take on greater importance as "the wisdom of the ages" is passed along via the internet. Even the crossword puzzles in the *NY Times* are replete with puns based on Confucius, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and as a second source, Shakespeare. Right now my spell check function tells me I've misspelled the word "internet," and that's the biggest joke of all. I use my dictionary, the old-fashioned kind, to double-check on the spelling. Life imitates art and the medium has become the message in reality TV and the 24-hour news cycle. The spin cycle on the clothes dryer has been overtaken by the spin cycle of politics.

The latest suicide in the news seems to have been prompted by cyberbullying, where a webcam filmed a sexual encounter and streamed it over the internet, causing the victim to jump off the George Washington Bridge. The cherry tree legend about George Washington takes on new significance as the method of death when "I cannot tell a lie" impacts this young life. While, locally, the benefit of wire fences is debated for their effect on the beauty of the landscape. What kind of crazy world is this?

One of the neatest stories I saw recently on the CBS morning news was about skipping stones. There is a contest on the shores of the Allegheny River. Each bounce of the skipped stone is counted and the winner awarded some fudge for his prize. A last-minute entrant who travelled 5 hours to get there upset the current champ (even using his stones) and won with 42 skips.

We know well of the seasonal cycle, especially as it relates to planting. But how many know the origin of the saying: "To every thing there is a

season”? No, not the song of the sixties, not Shakespeare, but the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter III, verse 1. And possibly something in Chinese history as well. 2500 years ago Plato complained about the youth and their lack of morals and barbaric music. Surely we can relate to that today.



So the cyclical nature of things abounds in Nature as well as in man's nature. For the manic depressive, a/k/a a bipolar person, cycles are the ultimate control to be observed and respected. The threat they can pose is omnipresent. To guard against their frequent interference with our sanity, we must remain ever vigilant. To picture their destructive path, I always see the oscilloscope in my mind's eye. When the pitch rises, the frequency of the cycles pushes ever closer together. When two voices are heard, the cycles collide. To tune up several instruments, an oscilloscope will show when the cycles are in synchrony. For the bipolar person this state of synchrony can keep things from reaching a fever pitch. They say, "Follow the Money," but I say follow the words and pitches. Even my voice's pitch is changed when I am upset, both volume-wise and tonally.

Tossing the stone in the water creates a ripple effect. These ripples extend in ever-widening circles. They are the perfect metaphor for the way our lives intersect with others. Likewise, they mirror the saying, "What goes around, comes around." The impact we have on others reflects back in our own daily lives. To forgive is divine. Have we shown forgiveness today? Be a good neighbor! Hold your tongue. Be careful of your words, for words have the power to destroy. And the internet, the newest communication tool, has the same power. Let's let it be an instrument of good rather than harm. Let us be mindful of our Ripple Effect and make our own destinies that much better. Take John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* and remember their wisdom. The wisdom of the ages has cycled for a reason.



Ripple
By Jay Lee



What the Eagle Fan Says By Carter Revard

I strung dazzling thrones of thunder beings
on a spiraling thread of spinning flight,
beading dawn's blood and blue of noon
to the gold and dark of day's leaving,
circling with sun the soaring heaven
over turquoise eyes of Earth below
her silver veins, her sable fur,
heard human relatives hunting beneath
calling me down, crying their need
that I bring them closer to Wakonda's ways,
and I turned from heaven to help them then.
When the bullet came it caught my heart,
the hunter's hands gave Earth its blood,
loosened light beings, and let us float
toward the sacred center of song in the drum,
but fixed us first firm in tree-heart
that green knife-dancers gave to men's knives,
ash-heart in hiding where a deer's heart had beat,
and a one-eyed serpent with silver-straight head
strung tiny rattles around white softness
in beaded harmonies of blue and red—
now I move lightly in a man's left hand,
above dancing feet follow the sun
around old songs soaring toward heaven
on human breath and I help them rise.



Carter Revard is an Osage Indian, a Rhodes scholar, and a professor of medieval English literature.



Universal Hands

By Jemma Macera

Years ago,
the young girl,
whenever she complained
of stomach pains,
was taken by the hand
up to her dad's hotel
where Jimmy Frederico, the bartender,
laid her on his knees,
made the sign of the cross
and rubbed her stomach.
What would she do without him?

Now
the no-longer-young girl
following Taoist philosophy
lies on her bed
calls in all her invisible
means of support
puts her hand on her solar plexus
and makes ever-increasing circular motions
clockwise then counter-clockwise.
She's been noticing how much calmer she feels.

Ohm

By Anonymous

Circle's spire
Mounting higher
Like desire.

Center-cease
Round release
Circle's Peace.

)

A Valediction for My Father on the Occasion of His Dementia

By David Flanagan

When you lose your mind
who will you be? Since I come
so much from you
what will that make me?

I sometimes think we cannot lose our minds
because we cannot lose ourselves
(here we are) but then recall
so many who lose their way so far
they seem to lose their very selves.
Other times I think
that we *must* lose our minds because
we lose everything we think
belongs to us: possessions,
treasured and otherwise,
legal rights, the power to decide,
lovers, loved ones, body, life.

But when they all are gone—
choices, memories, sensations,
tokens dropping from our hands,
hands that then go limp, decay,
our names and faces faded
from minds of those who loved us best—
what remains? Maybe nothing much,
for which we should give thanks.

Best to let mental residue
settle to the depths,
or drift into another stream,
fresh feelings, clearer thoughts,
perhaps a different life.



Assuming Your New Form

Author Unknown

"Assuming Your
New Form"

Come, Daughter of the Wind
And take on Shape and Form
I conjure you out of Yesterday
Out of Yesterday and Darkness

To follow me out on the stretches
Of open Prairie
To follow me into Tomorrow
To put on paws and fur

To howl beneath the Moon
And run with the pack
To be the Alpha Female
To give new life
into never-ending Generations.

Sing into Tomorrow^{*}
Sing into the Sun
Relinquish their ties upon you—
Your chains of iron shall melt
And your feet shall be released,
From the trap that binds.

^{*}
I would speak to you in Navaho
(If I could)
But I do not have the Power
To command that Language
So in English I shall say
"Come and run in the
never-ending Mountains,
The Sacred Hills."

Thoughts on Owls

By Kathryn Rutz

This time it was golden in my hands, and soft. He found it in the bed of the pick up truck and thought it couldn't have been gone more than an hour or two. The owl's head was loose on its body, the eyes closed. It smelled like truck and barn and air, but mostly, it shone. The feathered body lay in shades of gold and light brown and some cream, resting lightly on my open palms. This creature from dreams had finally stepped through the rules of my time and its nature so I could get close. More than that, I could hold it and look deeply, taking all the time in the world. There was the curved, sharp beak—a hard little apostrophe. Small claws. So soft, so golden.

I wanted to save it. I wanted to keep this little raptor-miracle—safely dead but still a wonder now that I could look hard. My eyes raked it over and over, urgently. Don't forget! Don't lose this beautiful thing! Remember!

So, we put it in the woodstove and shut the door. It was spring and the woodstove in the shop wouldn't be used again for months. It was dry and clean in there, and no insects could find it. We hoped for dessication through the slow passage of uninterrupted time and summer heat. We waited.

This was the second time I met an owl.

The first time they said, "Don't

Move. Hold your arm perfectly still because if you frighten or disturb him he may do something rough." (Rough?) Don't move, don't move, don't move. I felt the long, unnaturally curved, impossibly sharp claws wrap around the little skin and bone that was me. I must not move, not move, not move.

The Great Horned Owl at the game farm had yellow eyes that never blinked; of course they never blinked, because he was waiting for me to move. His head could turn in a wide circle on the top of his body, they said, so I waited, breathless, for his golden eyes to pass away from me and look at someone else for a moment. But that didn't happen. I looked away. He remained, still and heavy, dull in the daylight. Or waiting for something.

This owl is supposed to be hidden by trees and sky and dark but here he is, on my very own arm and not on the body of some small, suddenly dead bird or mouse or small child.

I must be still. I must be still or the owl will not be. *continued on back page.*



Photo by Mary Rutz

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Then it turned cold again. “Hey, you didn’t fire up the woodstove did you???” The owl!!!! Weather was the danger to my souvenir of beauty and safety, that bit of nature that was finally mine to keep and hold. Maybe I could put him on the mantle of the fireplace, I thought. Right up there with found feathers and photographs.

“Uh, sorry, he didn’t make it,” he said.

What?!! Oh no. What?

“It got a little too ripe for keeping.”

I don’t know what he did with it. I didn’t ask. I had been lucky for a moment.