

KALEID  SCOPE

## Adventures of the spirit

Interview  
Bill Quigley

Poetry  
David Simpson  
Cynthia Marcolina  
George Dabrowski

We Think about Death Even Over Coffee – Ruth Deming

Bios (contributors)

# INTERVIEW: ARTIST ON HOLD

## BILL QUIGLEY'S HANDMADE FURNITURE IS UP IN THE ATTIC

by Ruth Deming

Mild-mannered Bill Quigley, 46, lives in Southampton, PA with his wife Shelly and a 1930s Magic Chef stove with levers that will knock you off your feet. When you visit the Quigleys, you're likely to find Bill poring over his medical textbooks – he's studying to be an RN – and learning about all sorts of arcane diseases such as Lennox-Gastaut syndrome. We asked if we might change the subject and talk about his furniture design instead.

**Ruth:** Bill, tell me how you got involved in woodworking? Is that the right name for the art of woodworking?

**Bill:** Actually, there's something called "furniture as art." That's what I do.

**R:** How did you get into it?

**B:** Back in the '80s, I was newly divorced and decided I wanted to go back to school. I found out about the Fine Woodworking Program at Bucks County Community College. I always had a special thing for Shaker Furniture. So I went into the program thinking I was going to do reproductions of Shaker pieces. Shortly into the program my teacher explained to me that's not the way it worked. He said if you're going to make it through this program, you're going to design your own furniture.

And I found myself designing furniture that was very far from Shaker furniture: furniture that was modern or art deco pieces. People used to refer to me at Bucks as the George Jetson of furniture. And that was the beginning of a whole new thing for me.

**R:** Do you have a favorite piece you'd like to talk about?

**B:** Probably my bench is my favorite piece. That bench is in the attic. A friend strongly encouraged me, she got me convinced I've got to get the thing out of there, that it's ridiculous for it to be up in the attic.

Also, I did a coffee table. I transformed a piece in nature into a coffee table. I sketched a banana lying in the kitchen, and then transformed it into a coffee table.

**R:** Are you working on anything now?

**B:** I'm finishing up a chest of drawers for myself. This was a piece I started a long time ago and it sat unfinished. I've just been re-inspired to get back into it.

**R:** When you, me and Shelly went to the Wharton Esherick House in Paoli you told us you'd designed a door for them. Why did they ask you to design the door?

**B:** I was tipped off by my instructor at college that they needed a door, so I approached them and they said yes immediately.

**R:** Did you appreciate the opportunity?

**B:** I felt very privileged. That they had the confidence in me to do that. I went to work on that right away. It took about a month or so to finish.

**R:** So how come you stopped doing your furniture?

**B:** Well, because I took a career in occupational therapy. To pay the bills. It put my furniture-making on hold.

**R:** That's what working does sometimes, doesn't it?

**B:** Yes, it does.

## Blind Greeting

She was nothing to me  
But tic-toc heels,  
Time racing by  
On the macadam road  
Where I was, at that moment,  
Taking a lesson from the Buddha  
In slowing down,  
As I stood leashed to a dog  
Who was having a hell of a long pee.  
"Good morning," I said in the clock's direction--  
My letter to the world.  
"Goo mawning," she answered.  
Was this another Buddha I was meeting?  
Without knowing it, I'd been thinking  
White suburban soccermom  
Middle-class Republican  
Snapping out two words  
To hang etched in the air  
Like the open and shut of a silver lighter.  
Not like these two sweet plums,  
Not an Asian flute,  
Not the puzzle of the clock and the flute,  
together.

- David Simpson

## There is

There is a place...  
“Daffodil Hill”  
that gets covered every  
spring by the flowers  
beginning with the Crocus  
...but then Kevin is dead.

There is a yard...  
on White’s Road where  
the Wisteria and Lilacs  
bloom every May  
...but then Kevin is dead.

There is a red fox...  
in the neighborhood  
and it’s seen each day  
foraging for food  
...but then Kevin is dead.

There is life...  
all around and now  
everything is glowing  
green from all of the rain  
...but then Kevin is dead.

He is dead...  
and he is no more.  
He is gone!  
But the perennials?  
They will be back  
...next year.

## A Little While

The clock – Oh, yes! I pray, take back the clock  
To let my Dziadzio stroll on up the block –  
And take the Polish marble box so proud  
To let me hear my Babcia laugh aloud.

The ash tray – Deco – take it! – will you, please,  
But let me worship at my Grandpop's knees  
Or fast run from his anger, and the hurt  
To hide behind my loving Tetka's skirt.

Now let me look more closely at your smile  
In case it's gone for e'er so long the while  
And look at mine, as if the same might be  
Forever gone – now hold me – Do You See?

The stroll, the laugh, the frown, the love, the smile  
Were all our Heaven for a little while.  
The Olympian Gods were not a Grecian scheme  
But lost ancestors, visioned in a dream.

- George Dabrowski

# **WE THINK ABOUT DEATH EVEN OVER COFFEE**

**by Ruth Deming**

## **PART ONE**

### **You could see the whole countryside from up there if only you could look**

I was waiting at a small country airport for someone who worked there to take me up in a small plane. Finally he motioned to me. We walked outside and the plane was right there on the asphalt, like a car parked in the drive. It was immensely small, white, with long outstretched wings.

Of all the fears to have, flying was my most magnificent dread: Once aloft, you couldn't get off. As we walked, the plane kept getting bigger and bigger. Suddenly it was right up to your nose. And me, I'm howling and wailing inside; the whole earth, it seemed, was ringing with my cries. I had no idea whether I would get on the plane or not. All I knew was that the stuff I was born with – plus the stuff that was put in there thereafter - would determine whether or not I would get on the plane. "I'm scared," I said to the pilot as he was unlatching my door.

And that's how I broached the subject of flying to the Caribbean with my big daughter, Sarah.

### **Round coffee cups**

All I've wanted to do since I've gotten back from the Caribbean is to write about the round coffee cups and the big heavy plates they have there. Every time I see a coffee cup here in the states it just doesn't look right. The cups should be round and full so you could hold them, warm, in your hand, and watch the swirl of the coffee inside. The plates should be larger than average, white, with a lovely pink edge to them. Pink like the inside of seashells. It is perfectly marvelous to sit on the veranda of your hotel and dunk your croissants into the strong coffee mixed with hot milk.

### **My notebook**

If you're a writer you're naturally attracted to everything that has to do with writing. You especially love dictionaries encyclopedias pens pencils-with-sharp-points, that shine, computers-with-keyboards-that-remind you of typewriters, as well as all manner of

notepads notebooks diaries not to mention the soft thumb-worn pages of library books which you much prefer over the crisp but delicious-smelling books at Barnes and Noble.

When I was returning a new clock at the Rite-Aid because it looked awful in my kitchen, I had to pick out seven dollars' worth of merchandise because I'd lost the receipt. I traveled around the store for half an hour looking at all the things I didn't want. And then in the stationery aisle I saw a Mead Composition Book. I picked it up, fanned the pages, and imagined if this were something I could write in. Wide lines. Faint enough so they wouldn't jump out at you. A mottled black and white cover, so sturdy that if you put it on a table out on the veranda of the hotel, you could put a cup of coffee right on top without marring the pages.

### **The light on the porch**

When I got home from the Caribbean it was dark and Dan had the front light on for me. He opened the door with the gray cat in his arms. He's my boy. When he was little, he had platinum blond curls. I couldn't believe that a Jewish girl like me could have a son with platinum blond hair and blue eyes. Oh, it was wonderful. You loved him right from the start. His face was formless. He had a gigantic nose and looked like Uncle Benny. There was no doubt in my mind, ever, that his beauty would emerge. Now he was at the door with the cat in his arms, smiling, with his dark laughing curls.

### **Mulch**

When I got back from the Caribbean, I went into an instantaneous depression. I would walk around the living room as if it belonged to someone else. I wanted to sit on the floor and ask myself, "How did I get to a place of such high chaos?" Who knows? Maybe I'd have another one of those awful nervous breakdowns though I doubted it would come to that. So I went outside to my car, moved up the seats as far as they would go, spread a sheet across the back seat and loaded a couple of empty garbage cans onto the seat.

Scott, the man who lives by himself next door, was outside with his big ugly dog.

"I'm going to get mulch," I called over. "Did you know you can get free mulch from the township?" I knew he didn't know.

The mulch heap was full that day. I took what I needed and put it around the daffodils, the pansies and where the iris were just coming up. Handfuls of mulch, sweet-smelling, kind to the hands.

### **Good Friday**

And it was Good Friday, a week after our trip, so I put on Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers and listened to my favorite song, the part where Sam sings, “If I could just touch the hem of His garment I know I’ll be made whole again.”

## **PART TWO**

### **Confession**

Pardon me, but that wasn’t really quite true when I said earlier that all I wanted to do was write about the coffee cups. It was Thomas I wanted to write about. It’s all about Thomas.

### **The hotel lobby**

Sarah did most of the talking on our French Caribbean Island. She speaks French, Arabic, Thai and can figure out the rest of them. In her darling French, she booked us a tour of the island by one of the islanders. When she spoke, her face lit up with uncommon delight.

He came ten minutes early the next morning. Everything but everything depends on your driver. You trust him completely. You want him to really really like you and get to know you – and vice-a versa. In other words, you want to have a relationship with him. It also wouldn’t hurt if he shaved his head, moved like a conquistador, and had nice brown arms with lots of tone in the muscle. His name would be Thomas. And I think about him quite often, though less so than in the beginning.

### **We took turns sitting in front**

He had two cars and a white van. You never knew which car he was coming in. He would open the doors for us. Sometimes I sat in the front, sometimes in the back. When I’d sit in the back, I’d position myself in the middle so I could participate in the conversation.

### **The marketplace**

The three of us sat on tall stools at a bar in the marketplace. I was sipping coconut milk through a straw. Sarah was drinking an icy mango concoction. And Thomas... Thomas was drinking Coca-Cola with rum in it.

I looked at him from my tall stool. He wore a sun visor and his arms hung loose from his tank top. He had wonderful big lips. He looked different when you looked at his face frontwise than when you looked at it from the side. His face was mobile. The more we

got to know him, the more facial expressions he let us see. We learned, too, that he had many different kinds of laughter.

### **The sidewalk**

He always smelled from coconut oil which kept his skin soft and pliable. He kept the bottle of lotion in the car tray beside him. He was a hustler. He knew everyone in town and would call out greetings in patois. One time he led us across the street to where a Rasta man was selling CDs. The Rasta man had a face of such loveliness it could rival that of Cleopatra's. I told this to Thomas. "That's why I took you there," he said.

### **You see how he knew me?**

It was instantaneous. Little clues given. He watched what you looked at. Or how Sarah adjusted the silver bracelets on her wrist when he mentioned high tide. He had the quality to bind us all. To bring everybody along and make all people one. For a little while, anyway, until we break away, then drift, then form again, then break away.

### **Heart**

And on another sidewalk there was another man coming the other way. Thomas shouted a greeting to him and then he made a fist and struck it on his heart. "What does that mean?" I asked him. I knew what it meant but I wanted to hear him say it. "You saw me do that?" he asked in his throaty laughing voice. "Yes," I said. He answered that he was taking us places for the sake of love.

### **Their hands were always still**

The second day we were there, I noticed something very odd. I checked to make sure it was true before I said anything. "You know," I said. "It looks like the islanders are just standing on the sidewalks doing nothing." "Yah," said Thomas. "They just hang around. They don't do nothing." "Even when we pass their houses," I said. "You can see them in their upstairs windows, just standing there, with their hands hanging down at their sides." Thomas snorted through his nostrils.

### **It was a welfare state**

There were no crops and there were no goods. There was no history and there were no fossils. There were only tourists. Their whole lives depended on tourists. On our whims.

### **The rhythm of the Caribbean**

We were in the car. How delicious it smelled! He played loud reggae music. And would turn down the volume and call out the words to us. It was the music of an oppressed

people. And the music spilled out the windows and into the street. And when we went into the hills it spilled out there too.

I had never listened to the words before.

### **Thomas's photo album**

I asked if he minded if we looked around his house. I was looking for totems. For what mattered to him. I knew his cars mattered. They meant he was a man. But I needed to know more. I already saw the totem in his car – a Rastafarian tassel hung from the mirror, with a Jesus Christ cross dangling at the end.

On top of his refrigerator was his photo album. He turned the pages for us while we looked on. Sarah, who has marvelous social skills, is quite good at looking at pictures while I have not yet mastered the required enthusiasm. In the middle of the photo album was a picture of a white woman. She'd come down to the islands from the states and still kept in touch. They'd cared for one another. No carnal relations. She owned a beauty shop and sent him a photo of herself sitting under a hair dryer.

### **Two families**

There were pictures, too, of his family. Pictures of families are the same the world over, apparently. The family members stood there in two long rows. There was an inordinate amount of them. Arms, in this case, were slender or pudgy, and in varying shades of brown or dark purple. Faces stare out as if Bernadette of Lourdes has suddenly appeared. The people were so little you had to crane forward to see their faces.

He was one of seven children by his mother. And twenty by his father. That's how they did things down there. His father's name was Thomas McLauren. They were of Scottish descent.

### **Ah, rubies, from the depths**

He took us to one of the fine jewelry stores on the island and left us alone inside. I gasped at my courage. "Go ahead, Mom. Try on one of the ruby bracelets," Sarah said. I selected the most beautiful one and held out my arm for the woman to clasp it onto my wrist. I stepped back from the counter and let my arm dangle at my side. I wanted to see what it felt like to wear a thing of beauty. My arm felt light. Light and strong. Like it would ascend to the sky.

### **The last stop**

Thomas took us to the ocean for one last time. He took us to the one the islanders go to. It was both beautiful and damned at the same time. It had steep jagged rocks and there was litter in the corners. We sat on a stone wall. I told the both of them I was going to climb

down the rocks to the ocean. I told Thomas he was not to worry about me, that I am an athlete.

I lifted myself off the stone wall and headed down the rocky hill. You just looked down at your feet and at the next rock to hop onto, you positioned your body just so, so that you could make the leap, it was not dangerous in the least, but you had to use mightily your sense of balance. You had strong ankles and strong thighs and the tread on your shoes was beyond compare, so you just let yourself drop down, step by step, to where the rocks met the sea. Except, they never did.

### **So here's what you did to make up for it**

The sea would come up in fine peaked waves which would wash over the rocks with a great splash and leave little puddles of water and sand in each rock that had an indentation in it. And when you looked at the rock with its indentation, its scoop, it looked like a miniature little sea all its own. And you dipped your hands into the warm, still foaming water, and you splashed water onto your face and your neck and your arms. And would feel the breeze on your wet skin.

### **Souvenir**

You could only take one thing home with you. It could only be a rock or a shell. It couldn't be alive and pass on bad germs. I found in one of the little seas a small stone. I put it in my pocket and carried it home.

### **The bench, part 1**

It was the last day. We sat at the airport, les trois, sat on a bench outside for what seemed to be a very long time, waiting for our plane to take us home. We were staring into space. The heat was radiating soundless as far as the eye could see. There was nothing beautiful to look at. People walked by in little groups. The tourists were mostly French and brought their little children to the island. The children were beautiful. They each had a different little face. I saw a little girl in green eyeglasses. Did she ever look cute! They didn't carry around toys as our children do.

### **The bench, part 2**

We sat together on the bench, lined up like immigrants: Sarah with her shoes off, Thomas smoking a cigarette. And I sat there, too, with my watch on like an American. And everything was devoid of beauty. I couldn't imagine going home and being without the two of them. Or leaving my hotel room behind with its oh-so-high ceilings and the chiffröbe against the wall. And the ceiling fan. It turned by itself in the breeze. Quickly, sometimes.

## **Flashbacks**

When I thought of leaving, I had flashbacks of the abyss. Nothing to be worried about. But just the fact that you could rivet back so fast!

## **Separation**

We were all feeling it in our own way. I noticed something different about Thomas's face. I waited until I took my seat in the front, studying it some more, and then I said, "You look sad." He looked at me. "You notice that?" he asked. "Yes," I said. And he gave a certain kind of soft laugh that meant futility. And we were all of us crying inside.

## **I told her what to do**

"I let her be," I told him. "I never told her what to do. I just let her be." He nodded. And I looked at her while the three of us were sitting on the bench. And I said in my very soft but conspiratorial voice, "Look, Sarah, I've never told you what to do before, but I think it's time I spoke up." And I told her what she was to do when she got home to New York. She looked down into her lap. "I know, Mom," she said. "I know." And both of us were crying inside. And Thomas was crying with us because he knew what we were talking about. And it was about all three of us we were talking about, *les trois*.

## **A house of his own with a barbecue in back**

And what *he* had to do was buy a new house. The first house he'd given to one of the mothers of his children. This one he'd keep for himself. There were three children involved. They all lived in town or down the side streets. He'd go over and visit sometimes. Once when we were driving, he pointed to a car parked at the curb. "That's my uncle's car," he said smiling. "My boy Thomas - what you want to bet? - is in the back." We begged to see his son. He took us over and opened the back door. There he was, little Thomas, asleep on the back seat.

They were a different kind of father than ours. More like fathers who come home on a two-hour furlough.

## **Love and retreat: Fall from paradise**

He had begun distancing himself from me before our departure. I hadn't noticed it at first, or thought it was a slip-up or a joke, but then I saw it was intentional. He began calling me "Mum," some sort of contraction of the word "madam." He must have called all the tourists that. I went into a spin. I felt I was turned to stone. But I said nothing. What could I say? I could no longer be – nor pretend to be – a part of his world. I was banished.

## **PART THREE**

### **The Pool**

There was a pool out back of our hotel. It shone blue morning and night. I usually went swimming before I went to bed. There was no one there but me. I love being all by myself.

I would exhale and dive into the warm water. Everything would be blue down there. My hair would stream out like seaweed. I could see my hands breaking through the water in wavy strokes. What I really liked was feeling the slap of my arms over the water. Slap slap slap. It made a terrific noise. And made you feel so powerful... your arms and legs facilitating the passage.

### **Is faith possible in a mad world?**

He always called me "Sarah's Mom." I saw them off one night when they went out dancing. I couldn't wait until they left. I went upstairs, changed into my nightgown and closed the balcony door because it was getting chilly. The bedside lamp was on. I climbed into bed. They had flat white pillows and tight white sheets that may have been ironed. I was sitting up in bed preparing to ask for help. Actually, I was trying to summon an epiphany. Have you ever heard of anything so foolish? But I thought I could do it, but I lacked the proper mental constitution.

I took a drink of water, got my feet into position under the covers so that I was in sort of a yoga position. I was finally in the mood – faith was what I was going to ask for - and I thought the time was right. I'd had a full day, a rich day. I'd put on sunscreen no. 15 and covered my head with a hat and walked two miles to the beach. I found mimosa flowers on the way back and lay them quietly on the dresser so their aroma would fill the room. I was silently preparing to ask for help. To see god appear in full dress - a charioteer perhaps? - at the foot of my bed. Hah!

### **Show us the high place**

We were in the car purring up this steep hill where nothing was ever level. There were goats and sheep that roamed the hills. There was no flat ground and the goats and the sheep were a-tilt. You saw them from the window. They passed and were gone. I was staring in newborn wonder. That this was the Caribbean. And that only the day before I was putting my toothbrush and my contact lens solution into a plastic bag and tying it with a twisty. And now I'm up in the hills.

And the three of us flung open our doors, we each came through a different door, and came to the view from all sides. And Sarah, who is very brave, stood on a high rock in

her pink sundress. And I stood there in pause not knowing what to look at first: there were tiny dots of islands sprinkled with trees and a rectilinear desalinization plant on the edge of the sea. And, oh, it was wonderful to behold, though it was not particularly lovely. And he was over there watching us look at his land.

### ***There was the vista***

And it was a vista and not a view. A vista that shuttled you wordless from your place on the rough ground to all the great other seas of the world. This could be the Mediterranean or it could be the Aegean and it certainly could be the Great Lakes from where you were from and which were formed before the world began. And they were great seas all of them and filled to overflow. And I drank from them all; every single sea there was, I drank from. And became.

Then I threw my head back and looked up at the sky. It didn't say nothin.'

### **You don't either!**

Sarah came down from her rock and she and Thomas were walking around behind where I was standing. And they were laughing and speaking in French. And their voices filled the air like the music of the birds. And I was leaning against the rock, and felt the strong breeze of the island flow through me. And I was having a profound thought, something I had never ever thought of before. I looked back at Thomas. "You'll never in a million years believe what I'm thinking," I said procatively to him. "Oh, I know, I know," he said in that deep laughing voice I loved. "Oh, but you don't know," I said turning back to the sea. "You have absolutely no idea what I'm thinking about."

### **When**

Just carry me out on the veranda, let it be a veranda with a good view. I don't need paper and pen, not my mottled notebook. Samuel Johnson the dictionary-maker feared nothing so much as death, but if you carried me out on the veranda, a good view would be wonderful, and if I could just hear the voices of the ones I loved in the background, that would mean so much to me.

### **A matter of life and death**

Before my untimely death, - (oh, there were so many things that played hide and seek with me and I outwitted them all until the end) – but on the very first day we were there, the strap on my sandal broke and I was forced to buy some good walking shoes. So Thomas took us to one of the fine shops on the island. The woman who owned the shop was tall and elegant, her hair pulled up in a swirl. She was the kind of woman I would have fallen in love with as a child, and would pretend to have as my big sister. "Alice" is what I named her.

### **Wrap yourselves around me, o shoes almighty**

And we spent a great part of the afternoon trying on shoes. Alice was bringing them in from the left and the right. Sarah was bringing them in from the back. And I'm sitting there in the chair kicking off one shoe and pulling on the next. And I'm walking up and down the aisle with my eyes closed in terrible concentration. And there's something wrong with every one of them. And finally there were no more shoes to try on. And, oh, it was so discouraging. And we had to leave poor Alice alone with all those shoes and the tissue paper. We said our immense goodbyes. And then the corners of Alice's mouth turned up and she ran like a ballerina into the back room and plied out with a box of shoes in her arms. And we knew immediately. Even without trying them on, we knew. And we ooh'd and we ahh'd and we wept and cried out in jubilation at the birth of the newborn. We hugged each other and jumped up and down for joy and I knew I had the shoes of a lifetime. They were the color of wet sand and the clasp was made of Velcro.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ruth Deming** lives in Willow Grove, PA. She works as a therapist out of Bristol, PA. She has two grown children and is a regular contributor to "The River," a poetry journal.

**George Dabrowski** lives in Hamilton Township, NJ and works as a train conductor. "I was on a particular run and had a lot of time on my hands. So I wrote a lot of poetry."

**Cynthia Marcolina** is a licensed professional counselor. She works at a large private practice in Kulpville, PA. "Life Counseling Services," and at "Youth & Family Services," a community mental health agency in Green Lane, Montgomery County, PA. She is starting her own private practice in Souderton, PA

**Bill Quigley** studied furniture design at Bucks County Community College. He lives with his wife, Shelly, in Southampton, PA.

**David Simpson** divides his time between Verizon, Inc., where he works three days a week as a data base administrator, and home in Berwyn, PA, where he is working on the manuscript for his second book of poetry. He sings with the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia and holds an Extra Class amateur radio license. His poetry has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *River Styx*, *Verse Daily*, *La Petite Zine*, *Washington Square Review*, and *Dialog*.