

BETTER DAYS * MICROFEST 2011

NORTH RODANTHE BEACH CLUB

10 JULY 2011

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF NEIL SELINGER



Photographs by Julie Evans and Susan McGraw Keber



TOM NOLAN

Because I wake with some new cells each morning
Every day I am subtly different from the last.
The new me isn't at all obvious
To the casual, or not so casual, observer.
Each morning I am regenerated, a few million cells at a time.
Raw, untried cells.

Does my regeneration mean I'm new?
All my cells are eventually changed
Yet each fits with its older neighbors to remain me
So only the day is truly new, and so much better by its newness.



ANN C

I. LOST AND FOUND

My sister cut me out of her life for eight years:

- Trashed my Christmas gifts
- Returned-to-Sender cards I'd sent
- Moved to Arizona-No Forwarding Address

No death, just aching loss.

My daily prayer, for her and for me:

- May you be happy and healthy.
- May you be free from anger and have ease of being.

Circumstances allowed us to re-connect.

Carefully.

Two years ago.

Yesterday, over coffee in New York,
I saw yearning in her eyes
and knew there'd be **better days**.

II. HEART-SLAM

While reading the exposed words on the computer screen
from her husband to his muse,
Her brain and heart slammed toward her back-body.

The naked e-mail content entered her mind
like hooked crochet needles pushing into her eyes.

Oddly, she felt her blood escaping only through her feet.

Slowly absorbing the stunning realization
that the seventeen “best years of their lives” had fooled her,

She fought back nausea and questions arising in her belly.

They’d hit bottom.

There’d be **better days**...but for whom?



JOHN GREDLER

BETTER DAYS (for Neil Selinger)

When he was told he had an incurable illness the writing became so clear and honest hearing it was like walking on shards of broken glass.

Sitting at the table listening to his words, fearful of not being able to respond, often I was at a loss yet always grateful to walk home on bloodied feet.

Though he can no longer speak I can hear him saying to himself as he lapses into his last sleep ‘There have been no better days then these.’



ELISABETH MCGRATH

BETTER DAYS

One June day, a freak storm rocketed marble sized hailstones onto my thriving vegetable garden. Within minutes, the zucchini plants hung shredded into strings like green hair. The lettuce lay flattened. The radishes stood uprooted.

I planted again next spring. By June, a harvest looked promising. Sipping coffee one morning, I gazed out the window. The umbrella leaves of the zucchini drooped, torn and defeated. The culprit? A fat, ugly vine borer.

I cultivate only daisies now and buy vegetables at the farmers' market.



Susan McGraw Keber

Like the weather report, days are either “good” or “bad”. But in what context I ask myself?

Isn't every day an opportunity to work at something fruitful and creative? Isn't every moment an

opportunity to share with others that simple connection we as human beings long for? An exchange

of mutual understanding, a physical touch, and most coveted, a silent peace between self and world?

Life is not a contest to seek better days, but rather joyous memorable days and nights to have again.



CATHY ALLMAN

BETTER DAYS

I used to want stuff.
I wanted lists of things.
Material objects like:
cars, clothes, houses,
gear.

I used to want stuff,
Non-material effects,
like: love, kids,
peace, or not feeling
fear.

I used to want
lists like lines,
plans shaping the hours,
directions to work
near.

But now I find
there is nothing better to get to,
because this moment
has its own exact pattern of
clear,

Gleaming golden ratios,
fractals, and the tiny

instant of this day-
that better day, already
here.



KATHY CURTO

HOOKING UP WITH ST. ANTHONY

St. Anthony's the man of the hour. My man. I've been told all my life he's the go-to guy when stuff gets lost. And I'm a good Catholic girl so I believe it.

I'm looking for my words. They're lost. There were a whole slew of them yesterday, enough for a paragraph, even. Good ones, too. And now they're gone.

But I have a plan. And I'm a good Catholic girl so my plan involves three things: faith, seduction and pizza.

Wish me luck.



RUTH GREER

DAYS AHEAD

I passed the year mark since Leonard died, June 23. It's so unreal.

Most days I yearn for him. Other days, I see him in a cloudy haze. When he was moody and mean I hated him.

I saw an attorney once. "Go tell him you've hired a lawyer and want a divorce," he said.

So I did. Next, Leonard was holding me and kissing my face and we began all over again. I could never tear myself away. Now death prevails. He is gone.



LARRY WINTERS

Have you ever noticed how older folks talk about how good it was when they were growing up? Just the other day I heard an old guy telling his grandson how much fun he had on his first date with the boy's grandmother. They'd gone fishing in the Wallkill River.

The kid had been complaining about how the girl he liked wasn't interested in him because his tattoo was too small, he didn't wear his pants low enough, and his head wasn't shaved close enough.





MARCY TARDIO

BETTER DAYS

He used to wake up at night and call Mommy! Water. Tonight, on his knees by his bedside, he quietly prays to Facebook, eyes bloodshot from sleeplessness and reefer. The hard floor sends him up to bed. He falls asleep accidently, jeans below his drawers (thug-style), laptop screen more intentional with its need for rest as it lies in darkness, sleep-mode. His sweet mouth that nursed at my breast until he was five lies agape. Spittle, not milk, wets the computer keys.



LISA MAYER

BETTER DAYS

Long ago, few burdens. (Many fears.)
Years later, much freedom. (Feeling burdened.)
First love. Much joy. (Then sadness.)
Other lands. Other loves. (Different worries.)

Dreamy childhood. Taking chances. (Not many.)
Training bra, many pimples. (That sucked.)
Green passport: foreign travel. Great jobs.
First marriage. Lean body. (Bitten nails.)

Two babies. Father's death. (Joy! Sorrow!)
Growing children. Little sleep. (Pain. Hope.)
Nest empty. Gray hair. Heavy body.
Make soup! Plant garden! (Tomato blight.)

Turn sixty! Break rules! Be self!
Happy sometimes. (Not always.) (But often.)



BARBARA GOLDSTEIN

Bereft. Ravenous. Frightened. Babies squealing. Mama killed by the claws of Grimalkin.

“Take the children. I want to be with Mama”, was the last he said.

“But Papa.”

“Go!”

Cardboard boxes everywhere.

“Get in”, I told the children.

“Where are we going? ”

“To a better life”, I insisted.

I had no idea where we were going but staying was dangerous.

The moving truck rumbled along, I thought compassionately of Papa.

That night, I saw God in fields of cornstalks and big open spaces.



Ed McCann

On July 4th, while shooting a scenic overlook in Yosemite, I dropped my iPhone off a cliff, watching it bounce off the rocks and disappear into a crevice. Descending to where it had vanished, I reached in up to my shoulder and felt blindly for the phone's familiar contours, pawing the void while imagining marmots and rattlesnakes. Defeated, I sat back on my haunches and patted my empty pockets, confirming what I already knew. It was Independence Day, and I was off the grid.



JULIE EVANS

BETTER DAYS I

If only I was older and had thin arms and my veins showed and I had thick silky armpit hair and wore bandanas for a bikini and knew tai chi and smoked strange clove cigarettes and had an address book full of exciting people I knew and could go visit. If only Mom would quit getting so drunk and Dad would talk to me more and my sister would stop locking me out of her room and let me in on all the secrets.

BETTER DAYS II

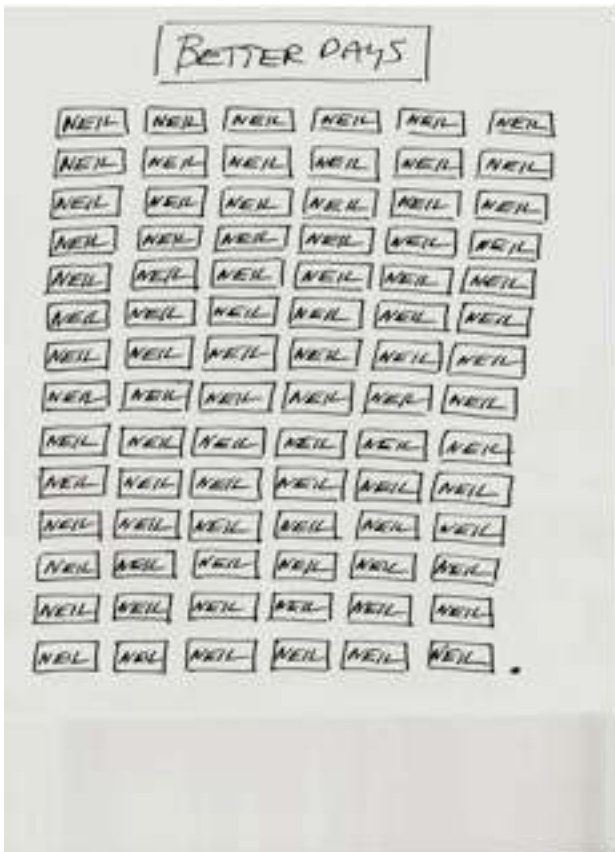
Unfortunately
It has come to
my attention
that I am not
in my office
at this time
and therefore
am unable
to respond
to this
nagging
feeling
this
horrific
pressure

to write
something
about
better days

God knows
I've had
better days
where words
would come to
me like little
beggars
pressing into
me with their
slender bodies
not caring
what I give
them
as long
as I find
a way
to tell
the world
that there
are words
out there
begging
for an audience.



RICHARD GAYNOR





CARLA CARLSON

BEFORE BREASTS

I scrambled up trees like a monkey, skinning my knees, stubbing my toes. I had no time for washing, or braiding my snarly hair. There was my mother, father, sisters and brother, our cocker spaniel, our calico cat, kids on the block, a creek with tadpoles and frogs. I dreamed of gobbling scoops of ice cream, with hot fudge, whipped cream, sprinkled cookies. Nights at my window, under the moon and silent God, I pleaded with all my power to forever remain a child.



JERRY BRODY

Night had come rapidly, before either Stacy or I had expected it. Now, only an occasional break in the clouds let the crescent moon briefly show us both our frosted breath and the long gravel covered road in front of us. The sounds of the forest were low and distant until a sudden nearby crunch of leaves left us paralyzed.

They had taken our car, our wallets, our passports, our coats and our shoes. And then they laughed as they drove off.



MARY CATHERINE BOLSTER

BETTER DAYS

Dream days are always either just around the corner or in the misty past. Like the Faberge John Hanley gave me in sixth grade. Or the book contract sure to come from Random House. Parisian nights in the arms of an Oxford-bound Brit. Mapping journeys to the Taj Mahal, Nepal, Ngongora Crater.

The best days are tricky. They may start with sun grazing my resting hand. A Merwin poem. A sunset swing beneath towering pines. A perfect crow pose.

Often Free. Seldom announced.



HELISE WINTERS

Talk to Mary, 95 years old, rickety and wizened, who'll tell you she'd had only good days spent with her closest buddies, Minerva and Max, survivors from the local pound.

Watching Minerva rocket across the faded living room drapes onto Max reclining in feline splendor gives Mary a deep, throaty laugh. Watching Max run like a whirlwind across the kitchen through the living room makes her heart flutter.

Their recklessness brings the whisper of life itself and the scent of better days to come.



STEVE

i

The old coots at the Plaza Diner,
grizzled mugs leaning over watery coffee,
mumble out of the sides of tobacco lips
about them old days back when
everyone knew their place.

Downtown at the Bakery, I lean back
with the aging hipsters, suck in yeasty air
like it's ganja floating up from Bethel or Altamont
smirking our way back to the days
when no one knew their place.

Back then Ram Dass told us "Be here now."
Missed that appointment. Smartass didn't say where.

ii

My damaged baby girl, skinny legs
up in a sling, her bare breasted mother

leaning over a metal hospital crib,
texts me a picture

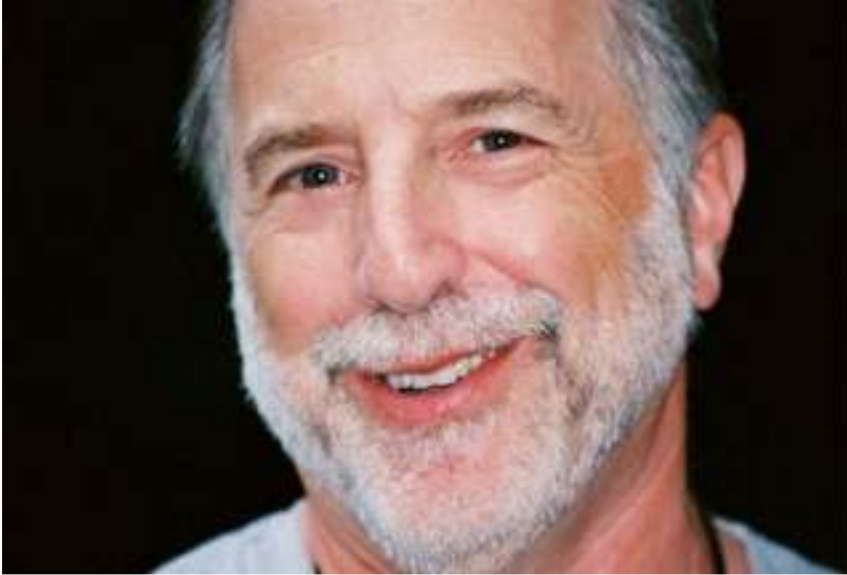
23 years later from New Mexico,
her current love in front of a tent,

their dog, ass to the camera phone,
mountains in the background. Here

my love leans over my shoulder,
looks at the tiny screen,

keeps her thoughts to herself. So
do I. Both of us wandering in the desert, wondering

where we've been, wondering
where she's going.



NEIL SELINGER

BETTER DAYS

“Those were better days, my friend, we thought they’d never end.”

“Happy days are here again.”

“The best is yet to come.”

Songwriters romanticize the past, present and future. But what are the better days we toast to? We tend to idealize the past, self-editing the embarrassing and painful moments. The future is ripe with possibility, but also disappointment. So maybe the only better days are the present ones.

If that is the case, I will quote another song: “Excuse me while I disappear.”





GALLERY



























