



**Kelly Barwick  
Literary Market Report  
December 2012**

## Table of Contents

<b>Fact Sheet.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why I chose Glimmer Train.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Prose Reviews.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Issue Comparisons.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Interview with Susan Burmeister-Brown, Co-editor/founder of Glimmer Train....</b>	<b>12</b>

## Fact Sheet

**Magazine:** Glimmer Train Stories

**Editors:** Susan Burmeister-Brown and Linda B. Swanson-Davies

**Web Address:** <http://www.glimmertrain.com/index.html>

**What They Publish:** They are not looking for novels, poems or writing geared toward children. There are four categories that rotate every month. For example, in 2012 April was “Family Matters” and August was the “Short Story Award for New Writers.” Each category has its own restrictions, such as the “Fiction Open” which calls for fiction between 2,000 and 20,000 words. Competition submissions are automatically considered for standard publication as well. Standard submissions can be made January, April, July and October.

**Submission Guidelines:** Submitted work must be previously unpublished, unless the publication was online. They prefer you submit via their website, but will accept snail mail if needed. Simultaneous submissions are okay as long as they are informed immediately if your piece is accepted elsewhere. Read times do not exceed two months from the close of a category. Competition winners are eligible for cash prizes.

**Description of Publication:** Quarterly print issues are approximately 220 pages and focuses on eight to twelve stories from veterans and rookies alike. Glimmer Train is well respected in the literary community. It started in 1990 by two sisters (Susan and Linda) who still serve as editors and they read all the work that comes in. All the work they publish is unsolicited and they pay out somewhere between 45,000 and 50,000 dollars annually to writers. They receive about 40,000 submissions a year.

**Prose Per Issue/ Amount Published Annually:** Again, there are eight to twelve pieces published in each issue. There are four issues a year, corresponding to the seasons. That shakes out to about thirty-two to forty-eight pieces a year.

**Acceptance Rate:** About .08% to 12%.

## Why I Chose Glimmer Train

Glimmer Train saw six of their published stories listed as “Notables” in the 2010 Best American Short Stories, which put them just behind *The New Yorker*. Two of those six were making their publishing debut with Glimmer Train. The two sisters who founded and edit the magazine, Susan Burmeister-Brown and Linda B. Swanson-Davies, find it important to publish new voices alongside the established. Being an emerging writer myself, I find their genuine dedication to the discovery of unheard stories heartening.

Whenever you find a magazine of Glimmer Train’s reputation, with a history of award winners *and* a strong commitment to new writers, you really can’t help but be a fan. After seeing the quality work Glimmer Train publishes, I wanted to know more about how they make it happen.

## Prose Reviews

### Spring 2012, Issue 82

*Chance* by Peter Ho Davies is a plainspoken domestic story told in close third person. It follows the emotional journey of a man and his wife as they deal with the chances that their unborn child might be born with a debilitating or fatal disease. The doctors and the genetic counselor have told them that all available tests have been inconclusive and that they would only know if they went through with the birth or if they abort the fetus and test it afterwards. They make the difficult decision to get an abortion and both struggle to cope. His wife follows people with pro-life bumper stickers and he briefly slips into a gambling addiction. They can't agree on whether or not to ask for the post-abortion test results. She wants to know and he doesn't. In the end he reflects on the randomness of chance.

Davies takes an emotional subject and uses statistics to break down the choices the main characters face. The odds and the stakes are specified in the very first sentences. "There was a chance the baby was normal. There was a chance the baby was not." Davies weaves this technique, two sentences that mirror each other but are opposites, throughout the story. It reinforces the confusion and the decision that looms over the character's heads. The story is affecting and powerful. By the time we reach the end and realize that the final decision is whether to find out the result of the test post-mortem, we realize fully that they very well might have killed their own healthy baby. There was a chance.

*Nothing, Nothing, Nothing, Connecticut* by Lindsay Sproul is a plainspoken, domestic, third person story focusing on a college student named Goldy. She is a freshman and has become so close to her suitemates that they all stay in one room together. One of them, Jill, decides she wants a dog that she can keep in her empty former room. Goldy doesn't like the dog, named Barky, as she feels that it is judging her. Goldy isn't doing well in her classes and she's having nightmares about her father. She flashes back to a time when she saw her father for the first time in several years. Eventually her inadvertent confession that she hates Jill's dog causes a rift among the roommates. To avoid Jill, Goldy does her laundry late at night but, as a result, finds herself getting hit on by a male student. Her reaction is conflicted: she is happy to be noticed but feels helpless to stop what happens next. It is implied that they have sex. The timeline jumps forward many years and we are suddenly in the close-third perspective of a lesser mentioned

roommate, Miranda. She reflects on her college years and how Goldy didn't make it through freshman year before stealing Jill's dog and disappearing. Though she thought of her often, Miranda hadn't heard from Goldy since then.

Sproul unfolds Goldy's past like slowly unwrapping a gift. It draws us in and gets us to care about Goldy's fate, which is why the ending is a bit frustrating. While I don't adhere to the thought that the ending needs to be tied up in a nice bow, I do wish I had some idea as to Goldy's whereabouts. The switch in perspective, especially for such a brief time, was jarring. There were powerful moments, such as Goldy on the roof saying, "I'm afraid I'll jump. I don't want to jump. I'm afraid I'll jump." Those moments resonate strongly. In the end, I wanted more from Goldy's story.

### **Fall 2012, Issue 83**

*Tuesday* by Ella Mei Yon is a first person, domestic story told with dream imagery. A woman leaves her lover's apartment at midnight, telling him that she sleeps better in her own bed. He asks if he'll see her the next morning, and despite wanting to say no because their relationship is not official, she nods. She then returns to her own apartment, which is in the same building, and climbs into her bed. She dreams that she's running along a cliff, wakes briefly when she feels the building shake and then slips back into a falling dream. When she wakes again she sees pages flying past her window and knows they mean something significant. She thinks of her lover on the thirtieth floor. She presses against the glass and sees a building on fire. She meets her lover in the lobby of the building and he asks her if she heard the noise and proceeds to tell her something she doesn't understand. They walk out and see crowds everywhere. The air is full of ash. People are suddenly running toward them, afraid the buildings will collapse. The woman and her lover are caught in the crowd and carried back to their apartment building where they go to the lover's apartment on the thirtieth floor. From there they watch the burning building with the lover's roommate, whose father works in one of the buildings. The woman runs down to her apartment thinking she should grab things before they leave and ends up taking nothing. They walk north slowly. She realizes loved ones must be frantic trying to contact her. In the middle of Washington Square Park her cell phone works for a moment and her mother tells her the buildings will fall. They watch from the park as both

buildings come down, leaving clouds of dust. They stay in a hotel and decide that they are a couple, as the issues they had before are insignificant now. They aren't allowed to go home for a few months and when they return ash covers the outside of her windows and she tries not to picture the ash as a former person. The roommate shows her a can of ash he saved. On the one-year anniversary they return to the park to reflect. Seven years later she goes back to the wreckage and actually looks at it, something she hasn't done before. She imagines the reverberations of the steel and thinks about how her own building shaking woke her up.

There is quite a bit of literature that has been produced about the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The event itself is so much a part of the collective consciousness that Yon never has to explicitly state what day it is and readers know exactly what she is referencing. I even felt a chill the moment the realization hit me in the story. Yon's dream-like imagery plays into the hope and feel that something so horrific wouldn't be real. Lines like, "The blur undoes itself and the fluttering crystallizes into hundreds of white pages flying by my window, their corners beating in the wind like wings" builds the tension as it slowly reveals the subject of the story while maintaining the daydream quality. Yon weaves in the thread about the woman's relationship, showing it grow stronger as the buildings fall. The aftermath is revealed in lines such as, "Since that day he hasn't wanted to talk about it, and so I haven't talked about it as much as I need to." Yon's prose is a beautiful and moving tribute to a day that was a true nightmare.

*Gas* by Philip Tate is a plainspoken, domestic story told mostly in first person. The story is presented with separate sections labeled as different dreams counting down from seven. Dream seven opens with the main character receiving oxygen and when it runs out he gets angry and starts yelling. Dream six depicts the moment the man is in a foxhole with a soldier he doesn't really know. The soldier is telling him how he's worried about who will take care of his sister after he's dead. He starts to leave the foxhole and is shot in the neck, quickly dying. The main character smells chlorine gas and nonsensically places his hand over the nose and mouth of the dead soldier. Dream five is fragmented into scenes of opening a sarcophagus to discover an ancient dead child, sucking in oxygen and feeling good enough to stand even though his legs would not support him, a view of the sister of the dead soldier exchanging rent for sex with her elderly landlord and a visit the storyteller makes to the sister in Brooklyn. He tries to tell her about the way her brother died but she doesn't want to talk about it. They sleep together, but in

the same manner in which she sleeps with the landlord. Back in the hospital where the man is getting oxygen, an elderly old lady is high and asks anyone in earshot if they want to have some fun. In dream four, the man is space walking, attaching an antenna on the outside of the spacecraft. He reflects on the use of oxygen in space. Back in the foxhole, more soldiers join the man and the dead brother and they discuss whether or not the Germans will release the chlorine gas. The man gets fed up and charges out of the foxhole and fires his gun as he passes the Germans and keeps running until he comes upon a barn where a girl hides him. When he leaves the barn later he finds the girl and her family dead, with their throats cut. He buries them and watches the bombs in the distance. During dream three, the man has his tooth removed in the dentist's office and feels the effects of the gas he's under. Back in the war he comes across a pile of bodies and takes several of the guns littering the ground. In the hospital, the man gets too much oxygen and falls out of his chair. Dream two has the man taking cover in a steeple with two sisters. The Germans find them and kill one of the sisters before trying to smoke the other two out. The man runs out of gas late at night and gets into an altercation with a cop. He eventually makes it home where it takes a moment for his mother to recognize him. In the last dream, dream one, we see that his mother has a memory problem, possibly Alzheimer's. In the steeple, the living sister uses her clothes to stuff the gaps in the door and keep the gas out. The Germans never come. In space, he mentions that he gets paid really well to install antennas. He reflects on the brightness of the earth in the blackness of space. In the steeple, a German almost kills him in his sleep but the living sister manages to shoot the assassin. Back home, the man and his biological sister share weed.

While I found the subject matter interesting, I found the fractured storytelling slightly confusing. I suppose by labeling all the sections as different dreams we are meant to question what really happened but the offshoot stories of the sarcophagus and space walking seemed either unrelated or only tangentially related. The theme of sex—which the story addresses with: “everything is sex”—never really connects to the major theme of gas, making it seem sensationalistic. The imagery, however, is often compelling and affecting, such as when he places his hand over the nose and mouth of the dead soldier to protect him from a gas attack, and the sight of bombs in the distance as he sits on the porch of the dead family's farm. As a reader, I would have enjoyed a bit more clarity in the transitions between dreams. The shape of a story is present; I'm just missing the chiseled details which would help me connect the dots.



## Winter 2013, Issue 84

*Roof Dog* by Karen Malley is a plainspoken domestic story told in the first person. It branches at times into dream-like imagery as well. A woman takes her dog, Ivy, for a walk on a cold winter night. She laments the incessant barking of the neighbor's pit bull mix, who is tethered to the second floor porch. The pit bull climbs out onto the roof and the woman names him Roof Dog. As she steps out onto the sidewalk, she slips on ice and hits her head hard enough that she can't get up. The neighborhood liaison officer, Tim Stinson, rolls up in his unmarked car to ask her if she is okay and to tell her there is nothing he can do about the barking pit bull. An older Dominican man, Henry, imposes himself on the woman's dog walk. They watch as Roof Dog, strangely un-tethered, slips and falls to the ground. Out of concern, they follow him as he limps away and alert Tim to the incident. After a few blocks, the woman is amazed as Tim herds the pit bull, who she assumed was fierce, gently into his car. She and Henry continue their walk which takes them past a man who silently smokes on his porch. She remarks on how he never says anything, but the man suddenly he speaks to ask if Tim is a cop. Snow falls heavily; the woman heads for home.

The power of this story comes out of the voice of the main character and the clearly seen cast she interacts with. From the moment her head hits the ice, which is given with beautiful lines like, "Still, the impact of my head felt resonant, as if the reverberation might have concussed the neighborhood," both she and the reader begin to question the validity of what she sees. Henry is colorful and quirky, adding humor and a foil for the woman. At times, because of the dream-like quality, one has to wonder if the words Henry says are really his own or a projection of the woman's thoughts. It keeps the reader guessing. The impending snowstorm acts as a metaphor in the woman's life, as in the end she remarks, "If I fall, the snow will erase me gradually where I lie, and I won't notice I'm gone until it's too late." It's a poignant realization that the woman works toward through the whole story.

*Patient History* by Baird Harper is a plainspoken domestic story told in third person. Glennis is a seventeen-year-old virgin on the verge of turning eighteen and making the decision between college and the Navy. In her college entrance essay, which her father wrote, it is revealed that a serial killer murdered her mother. She struggles to understand the possibility that this event has defined her character. When her father leaves on a business trip, Glennis takes their old dog to the mall, ties a sign on his collar that says, "Free dog, just take" and lets him go.

She visits the Navy recruitment kiosk in the mall, stating that she plans to join the minute she turns eighteen. When she gets home she calls a friend of her father, Rick, who builds elaborate themed trailer parks. She tells him she wants to see him and they agree to have breakfast in a couple days at a hotel where they ran into each other once before. He had flirted with her then, raising her hopes that he might be interested in more. Glennis drives out to the town Rick lives in the night before they are to meet. She gets a room at a motel, pretending to be displaced by a nearby trailer park fire. She drives to that trailer park and finds Rick there, assessing the damage. He's surprised to see her and seems frazzled. She is slightly bothered by the way he refers to the trailer park residents as trash. They part, reaffirming they will meet the next day. She goes back to the motel, crosses the street to a Planned Parenthood and uses little lies to talk to a nurse about her life options. As she leaves she sees the residents gathering to listen to Rick tell them he won't be their scapegoat for the fire. He doesn't see her. She walks to a nearby bar and pretends to have lost her ID in the trailer park fire in order to get drinks. Once she is extremely drunk, two men from the bar walk her over to her room, help her into bed, and leave. She meets Rick at the hotel the next morning and makes it clear to him that she wants to have sex. He resists at first, but then gets a room and takes her upstairs. As they have sex, Glennis realizes that she wants to join the Navy. When she returns home, her old dog is scratching at the door.

Harper's ability to layer the story with multiple threads is what keeps Glennis' actions understandable for the reader. Quick mentions of the fact that her mother was killed comes up again at the end when Glennis realizes she had been in the Planned Parenthood building with her mother when it was a pancake restaurant. Letting the dog go is framed with the desire for him to "see the world" before he dies, much like she wants to do with the Navy. Glennis displays a drinking problem throughout the story, and it colors her decisions. Her pursuit of sex with Rick is a thread started when she realizes that during a party she had held at her house, two peers had sex on her bed and left an "invisible stain" on the wall that shines in the moonlight, mocking her virginity. Harper brings in beautiful metaphors like, "To the south, the ash still rose from Millville, like an enemy port smoldering in the wake of destroyers," which links the actual place Glennis is to the place she wants to be.

## Issue Comparisons

Issues	Winter 2013, Issue 84	Fall 2012, Issue 83	Spring 2012, Issue 82
<b>Amount of Stories Within Issues</b>	<b>9 Stories 1 Essay 1 Interview</b>	<b>9 Stories 1 Essay 2 Interviews</b>	<b>10 Stories 1 Essay 1 Interview</b>
<b>Female vs. Male Authors</b>	<b>7 to 4</b>	<b>6 to 6</b>	<b>7 to 5</b>
<b>Point of View 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>5-0-4</b>	<b>2-0-7</b>	<b>2-0-8</b>
<b>Author's Credits: Pre-published – First Publication</b>	<b>9-2</b>	<b>10-2</b>	<b>10-2</b>

The amount of work in each issue is fairly consistent. The majority of space is given to short stories and there is always at least one interview and an essay that follows the theme of “Silenced Voices.” Since I wasn’t able to find a specification in Glimmer Train’s submissions section that dealt with interviews and essays, so I’m not certain where those submissions come from.

It’s interesting that women are more often published and I don’t know if that has anything to do with both editors being women themselves. The only thing constant in the point of view totals is the lack of second person stories. Otherwise, the amount of first versus third varies from issue to issue. Roughly 20% of each issue contains fiction from previously unpublished writers.

## Interview With Susan Burmeister-Brown, Co-Editor/Founder

Conducted November 13, 2012

**Kelly Barwick:** In one of the recent issues (#82) the opening story, *Torture Techniques of North Americans* by Lee Montgomery starts us off with a coming of age story in a different time and Christopher Bundy's *Spatial Disorientation*, highlighting the relationship between a grandson and his grandfather, takes us home. What is the thought process behind the ordering of the stories?

**Susan Burmeister-Brown:** Ordering the stories for an issue is some of the most fun we have! We start each issue off with what we feel is one of the strongest stories (and the story beginning has to have some "magic"), and we also end with what we feel is one of the strongest (and the end taste has to feel right), and then we find the flow from piece to piece. Sometimes there will be two stories that share some elements and we'll decide whether to separate them or to highlight their commonalities by placing them next to each other. And sometimes there are page count issues that require a story to be followed by an interview (because we always place author profile pages on the left)!

**KB:** How do you divide up the editing duties? The most recent figure I have for submissions is 40,000 a year—is that still the same or has it increased? Do you both read every piece and do you have to agree on what is chosen for publication? How large is your staff?

**SBB:** I'm a faster reader than my sister and can get a feeling for a story fairly quickly, so I do all of the initial looks at the work that comes to us through our online system. (We still get a few dozen stories a month via regular mail and we have a story screener for those. She comes by twice a month and picks them up, and returns her top 25%. The rest of the approx 40,000 stories come online.) I mark those that merit a full read, and read those at a different time. (The mindset for story screening is quite different from the one for full reading, and I actually print out the stories that I'm going to fully read.) About once a month I give Linda a stack of the stories I really like and she takes a close read. Then we discuss them and decide which ones we can't live without! While I am a faster reader, my sister is better at helping an author with any fine-tuning, so she does all of that end. We are lucky to have compatible strengths.

**KB:** In the time Glimmer Train has been in print, there have been many changes in the business of publishing. Do you feel any pressure to move to publishing full issues online and why or why not?

**SBB:** We gave some serious thought to this issue early on and we do revisit it periodically, but at this stage we've decided to remain print only. Print preserves work in a particular way.

**KB:** In the same vein, now that submissions are done mostly online, have you seen a decline in the quality of the work submitted as the amount of submissions increase? Or have you found more diamonds in the rough this way?

**SBB:** For us, the move to online submissions has been a godsend. The mail truck used to bring us a couple of full bins of manuscripts every day. After a 3-day weekend, there would be a tower of a half dozen leaning beside our door. It was overwhelming. Just the work of slitting open the envelopes and pulling out the stories is overwhelming when you're talking about over 3,000 stories a month! And then physically lugging them with us to our cars, to our houses, to all of the places where we would read stories! And then returning the vast majority of them to their authors! We had about ten story screeners who would come by each week to pick up a bin of manuscripts and give us their top 25%.

We were *\*this\** close to closing down in 2001 from complete exhaustion (and such a small percentage of the effort was going into the actual reading of submitted work), but my husband (a computer guy) said, Wait six months, let me get you set up with an online submission system and see if that helps. I was sure no one would use online submissions, and was I wrong! Within a few months, the majority of work was coming to us that way, and now almost every story comes online. I get to see every story first! It's joyous.

What you say about diamonds in the rough is true. Whereas story screeners are going to generally try to forward along fairly polished work, I can take a chance on something interesting that looks a bit rougher and decide it's going to be one of those that I print out and devote an hour of my time to.

**KB:** What was behind the decision to institute an award for new writers and for very short fiction? What has it done for writers and for Glimmer Train?

**SBB:** The new writer award was an easy decision. It's thrilling to find a great piece by a not-

very-published writer and it's a key part of our "mission." Four months a year submissions are only open to those writers. When the winner is announced each time, agents flock. Extremely gratifying. Separating out the very short stories was also a logical path. Very short pieces have their own kind of story logic and sensibility, and it's helpful to have a category twice a year where we're basically comparing apples to apples.

**KB:** Piggybacking off that, since money is made from subscribers, does that cover the incredibly generous payouts Glimmer Train awards or does some of it come out of pocket? Do you receive salaries or is it a labor of love?

**SBB:** It's a labor of love! It has been a few years since we've had to put our own money into Glimmer Train (though we certainly haven't been able to pull out any of the money we poured into GT during our first 15 years). We've finally reached a pretty solid equilibrium between income from subscriptions/contest fees and payments out to authors (as well as to our printer, subscription management company, shipping company, post office, cover artist, copy editor, layout guy, etc etc.) We decided from the outset that we wanted to pay writers, and in 1991 we were paying \$300. We're now paying \$700-\$2500 (to the winners of the Fiction Open).

**KB:** How many subscribers do you currently have? What is your typical first print run and method of distribution?

**SBB:** We typically print about 10,000 copies of each issue and the vast majority of those go to subscribers. As independent booksellers (and even chains) have gone under in the last handful of years, bookstore distribution is playing a smaller role.

Our public and university library channel has stayed remarkably steady, though. In the beginning, the majority of our issues went through independent booksellers and chains (Barnes & Noble, B Dalton, Borders, etc) and we had a half a dozen good-sized distributors. We are now down to those small few who have survived the massive upheaval in the industry, and our key focus is on subscribers.