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Book and New Media Reviews

From the Book and New Media Review Editor's Desk

Jessica Shumake, Editor

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It is possible to experience kindness, creativity, and joy when one least expects it. The day before the Conference on Community Writing (CCW) in Denver in October, I walked to Leven Deli before exploring the Denver Art Museum (DAM) with my two-year-old and four-month-old. The line at Leven Deli snaked out the door, yet before my two-year-old's impatient tugs at my leg became a meltdown, an employee approached us, complimenting the goldfish print on my shirt, surprisingly visible underneath the infant I carried in a front pack. Despite our position toward the back of the line, we were asked what we would like to eat from the menu, which I craned my neck to read. My hypervocal two-year-old chimed in with, "How about a treat?" The Leven employee smiled and asked, "Would you like to try a tahini brownie?" My two-year-old agreed and I nodded enthusiastically. Instead of a sample, we were handed an enormous brownie in a paper to-go bag. Astonished, I asked, "How much do I owe you?" The response left me speechless, "Nothing. I want you to enjoy it. I hope you have fun today." This gesture of kindness delighted my hungry toddler and caused tears to well in my eyes, which I hoped no one noticed. The drive to Denver from South Bend, with an infant and a toddler, depleted me and it felt miraculous that the three of us made it out of our hotel room before noon amid nursing, bathing, diapering, and dressing. The Leven employee saw me and my children in all our wobbliness and met us with joy and generosity. I felt myself buoyed to face any obstacles I met that day and called to write about how the gift of recognition and a delicious treat contributed to my felt sense that I could be out in the world with two small humans doing something fun—amid diaper blowouts and soaked nursing pads—while my spouse worked in the business center at the hotel. Savoring the brownie and its crunchy tahini morsels, my son, inspired by video clips of Amoako Boafo finger painting, created a messy but heartfelt collage at the Creative Hub in the DAM, which is a space for hands-on artmaking. Upon our later return to the deli with the gift of the collage in hand, the Leven employee asked my two-year-old to sign it, saying, "When you're a famous artist, I want to be able to tell people I have one of your early works." My two-year-old beamed and drew a line with a pen that barely resembled a signature. The hunt for Leven's perfect brownie continues, fueled by a new metal pan and the memory of unexpected kindness.

The reviewers featured in this issue, Michael Harker and Jamie D. I. Duncan, both offer insightful nourishment for *CLJ* readers. I hope you appreciate their reviews and that their writing inspires broad engagement with scholarship in community writing.