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POETRY OF JERRY MATHES

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In Spain

On the deck with a local beer, I watch
the Marine with his camera and telephoto
lens. He clicks pictures of sunbathing
señoritas, and some señoras,
with breasts bared under
the Andalusian sun. He is lightheaded
the way kids on Easter are giddy
with chocolate and fake grass in a basket.
His wife is beautiful. I have seen her,
reclined like Manet's Olympia, gazing at me,
and we held each other as if fragile embers
in a cold place. In this strange country
sunflowers eventually drop,
and when our bloom is drained, we'll return
to our private States and remember Spain
brighter with warm rippling fields of Franco's
executions. On guard, the Marine
marches in circles, images of half-naked women
keep him awake through the night, thinking
how lucky he is—in this exotic land.

Rancho La Brea Tar Pits

In the middle of Los Angeles,
black guck bubbles out
of the grass in the park
and smells like smoke
from a blown engine,
but on the museum
grounds, big black
lakes have life sized models
of mastodons and snarling
saber toothed tigers
and assorted reptiles, beasts
and birds circling
like cars around the block,
drivers and passengers
all looking for parking,

never thinking they'll
get sucked into the earth
from where they slouch
around the hellish pit.

Nazi Fiddle

Dad said the prison block went quiet
as the desert on a new moon night.
Before the squad shot the German
for war crimes, he handed dad
a metal photograph of his farm, saying
We're both country folk caught by war.

Dad smuggled the fiddle,
home in the mail and in his drunks
played it with his hands hardened
from branding calves,
dehorning cattle,
castrating steers,
living in the seasons of slaughter,
and the replanting of feed—

Broad fingertips on the strings,
drawing the bow, he swayed, made
the fiddle sing like a saw blade through

steel. We watched him
try to play away the ghosts with violent hands,
as the tintype of some German farm faded
on the wall.

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The work of **Jerry Mathes** has appeared in such journals as *Camas*, *The Dos Passos Review*, and *Tar River Poetry*. In May 2006 one of his works was selected first place in *The Baltimore Review Nonfiction Competition*, another nonfiction piece was an editor's choice for the 2005 *Mid-American Review's* nonfiction competition, and his work also was given first place in nonfiction by the *Rebel 47*. In April 2004, I won the Talking River Writer's Award for poetry, and my chapbook, *Twelve Lovers, Lost and Found*, was published at Lewis-Clark State College, in Lewiston, Idaho. He received a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation scholarship to study creative writing and received Special Mention for Fiction in The Pushcart Prize XXXI.