

Jacob Butlett
***The Shallows*, Issue Two**
Fiction, “Lawn Gnomes on Spikes”

Interview Questions and Answers

1. You have submitted to Cold Creek Review during every submission period. Is there something about this journal that draws you to submit your work?
 - a. I admire the journal’s design, the quality of the published work, the correspondence emails—even the friendly rejection letters. Whenever journals accept or reject my work, I submit more work their way. Therefore, I hope to submit more work to *Cold Creek* in the future.

2. We featured you in the first issue of *The Shallows*, with your essay “Muddy Expanse of Annihilating Water.” What made you decide to submit to *The Shallows* again, but this time, with a work of fiction?
 - a. As a habit, I tend to submit stories to the places that have already accepted my work. I reason that if an editor publishes Story-A of mine, then maybe the editor will publish Story-B of mine as well. Sometimes this is not the case; other times, fortunately, it is. I have been blessed that my work has satisfied the submission guidelines and mission statements of *The Shallows* thus far. If I have a story that could work for the third issue, I will probably send my story your way and, as always, hope for the best.

3. You have an extensive publication history. Is there any correlation between the journals that have published your work? What must a journal exemplify in order for you to submit your work?
 - a. I solicit my work to journals that would seriously consider accepting my work. As a result, I do not waste my time with journals that publish stories unlike my own. And that is understandable: every reader, every editor, every journal has its own literary preferences. Good soliciting, therefore, involves careful selection. I always make sure a journal is open to submissions before I read the journal’s submissions guidelines. If a journal is not open to submissions, I usually move on to another journal, one that is accepting submissions. Moreover, if a journal has a credible, visually pleasing Web site with example pieces that remind me of my own work, then I seriously consider sending my work there. Of course, my work needs to satisfy the journal’s submission requirements first. It would be questionable, for example, to submit a 5,000-word creative nonfiction essay to a journal that accepts essays up to 500 words long.

4. Do you practice any other method of art creation, such as painting, filmmaking, or theatre?
 - a. Even though several people have said I should be an actor, I do not practice any other method of art creation. My growing talent and passion lie in writing poems, short stories, and creative nonfiction essays.

5. Are you currently working on a large project, such as a chapbook, a novel, or something else? If so, what is it about?

- a. I am not working on a large project, but I hope to write a short story collection one day. Since I love literary fiction and light genre fiction, the collection might comprise both types of stories.
6. We accepted your story “Lawn Gnomes on Spikes” for the second issue of *The Shallows*. This piece is the epitome of our mission statement, which is discovering family secrets in a moment of trauma. Did you write this piece specifically for *The Shallows*?
 - a. I wrote “Lawn Gnomes” as the second story in my college thesis. So when I first read the mission statement, I was amazed at how well the statement applied to the story. In fact, I was amazed at how well the statement applied to my entire thesis. I even considered submitting my entire thesis to *The Shallows*, even though I knew my thesis would exceed the word count. So I submitted “Lawn Gnomes” as a standalone piece. I am grateful it finally found a home.
7. Where did you come up with such a convoluted, troubling theme for this story? Was it inspired by another work, a song, or the life of someone you know?
 - a. In college I was fascinated with the TV show *Hoarders: Buried Alive*, which sparked an idea for a book: a hoarder kills his wife and child and has lived in remorse, in his house of filth, ever since. (Ah, yes, I love the macabre. Always have, always will. I thank Stephen King, whose prose changed my life.) Eventually I ditched the book idea and instead wrote “Lawn Gnomes.”
8. The two main characters of this story, Danny and Julia, exude a very realistic relationship between disagreeing relatives. Julia’s personality can be summed up in Danny’s line of dialogue which states, “You can’t save everybody, Julia.” If you could, how do you think Julia would summarize Danny’s character in one line?
 - a. She would assert: “You can’t hurt everybody, Danny—not even me.” Which is strange because Danny did hurt her, at least emotionally. Her assertion would reveal how bold, steadfast, and proud she is. In fact, if you read the third story in my college thesis, you will see how desperate, arrogant, and perfectionist she can be.
9. When the reader learns of Liam’s fate, the entire mood of the story shifts. How were you able to reveal such a heartbreaking moment in such a careful, clean manner?
 - a. Professor William Jablonsky and Doctor James Pollock, my college thesis advisors, helped me edit and revise the piece. For example, they encouraged me to simplify the dialogue and the descriptions. Without my former teachers’ help, the story—especially the parts about Liam—would have been lengthy and predictable.
10. The last line of dialogue is spoken by Julia, where she states, “I wouldn’t save him.” This line could be interpreted in two ways: she wouldn’t save Danny, or she wouldn’t save Liam. It takes skill to deliver such a punch to the reader. What reason would Julia have not saving Liam?
 - a. Fascinating question. I never intended the statement to apply to Liam, because by the time Julia finds Liam, he is already dead. I do understand, however, that the final line poses several deep questions that could apply to Liam. To me, the line sparks another question: What does Julia’s refusal to save her brother say about her as a sister, as an aunt, as a protagonist? I will leave this question with you . . .