

THE NEW YORKER

INSIDE THE ANNUAL SUMMER FICTION ISSUE

The New Yorker's annual Fiction Issue, on newsstands and online today, once again brings together a collection of premier literary voices. This year, the magazine looks at American jobs and the working world, through a series of stories and nonfiction pieces. The issue also features the latest reporting from Margaret Talbot, who travels to West Virginia, the state with the highest overdose death rate, and profiles the people who are fighting to save their neighbors—and their towns—from the destruction of opioid addiction. The cover is a 360° scene by Christoph Niemann, “Enchanted Forest,” that can be viewed in a browser, on a device, or by donning virtual-reality goggles. Niemann hid five visual riddles in the trees, one for each of the five short memoir pieces about American jobs.

In “Show Don’t Tell” (p. 62), **Curtis Sittenfeld** introduces us to Ruthie Flaherty, a twenty-five-year-old graduate student at a writers’ workshop, vying for an enviable fellowship while trying to come to terms with both herself and the other would-be writers around her. “A lot of the people in our program were nakedly emotional in a way that, in childhood, I had so successfully trained myself not to be that I almost really wasn’t,” Ruthie explains. “Before entering grad school, I had never felt normal, but here I was competent and well adjusted to a boring degree. I always showed up for class. I met deadlines. I made eye contact. Of course I was chronically sad, and of course various phobias lay dormant inside me, but none of that was currently dictating my behavior. I also didn’t possess a certain kind of feral charisma or mystery, and I didn’t know, though I wondered a lot, if charisma correlated with talent.”

In “Clean, Cleaner, Cleanest” (p. 48), **Sherman Alexie** tells the story of Marie, a maid who spends her entire adult life cleaning rooms at the same seedy motel. Marie recalls the many women she has worked with over the years: Agnes the drunk; Rosa No. 1, who married her high-school sweetheart and moved away; Rosa No. 2, who was undocumented and quit when she heard rumors about an immigration sweep; Olga, who’d come from Russia to marry an American; the college students Karen and Christine; and dozens more. “Over the decades, Marie had worked with two or three hundred women,” Alexie writes. “She’d liked half of them, had hated at least fifty of them, and had truly loved maybe a dozen. And then there was Evie, the most beloved, who had transubstantiated into a postcard from Reno. How does a friend, maybe your best friend, leave you like that?”

In “Crossing the River No Name” (p. 55), **Will Mackin**, a Navy veteran who completed several deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq, portrays a Navy SEAL who nearly drowns in a river in Afghanistan on a rainy night in 2009, while on a mission to intercept a Taliban patrol. “I could feel the Taliban out there, lost in the darkness,” Mackin writes. “I could feel them in the distance, losing hope. This was the type of mission that earlier in the war would have been fun: us knowing and seeing, them dumb and blind. Hal, walking point, would have turned around and smiled, like, Do you believe we’re getting paid for this? And I would have shaken my head. But now Hal hardly turned around. And when he did it was only to make sure that we were all still behind him, putting one foot in front of the other, bleeding heat.”

In “I Have Fallen in Love with American Names” (p. 46), adapted from a 2002 speech, **Philip Roth** reflects on his childhood in a Jewish neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, and the writers who shaped and expanded his sense of America. The writers—such as Sinclair Lewis and Thomas Wolfe—were mainly small-town Midwesterners and Southerners; none were Jewish. Roth writes, “I have never conceived of myself for the length of a single sentence as an American Jewish or Jewish American writer, any more than I imagine Dreiser and Hemingway and Cheever thought of themselves while at work as American Christian or Christian American or just plain Christian writers. As a novelist, I think of myself . . . as irrefutably American, fastened throughout my life to the American moment, under the spell of the country’s past, partaking of its drama and destiny, and writing in the rich native tongue by which I am possessed.” This fall, the Library of America will publish “Why Write?,” Roth’s collected nonfiction from 1960 to 2013.

In a series of memoir pieces on American jobs, **Jennifer Egan** recalls working as a private secretary to a countess in New York City (p. 50); **Richard Ford** describes his work for the Neighborhood Youth Corps in Little Rock, Arkansas, tutoring teen-age boys in manual brush clearing (p. 58); **Toni Morrison** writes about cleaning a wealthy woman’s home as a young girl in the nineteen-forties, and recalls the lessons her father taught her about work (p. 66); **Akhil Sharma** recounts how, as a law-school student, he began lying to interviewers to land a job in finance (p. 80); and **Chris Ware**, in a comic strip, depicts a couple’s trip to Phoenix, which is a mix of business and pleasure (p. 72).



West Virginians Fighting to Save Opioid Abusers—and Their Town—From Destruction

In “The Addicts Next Door” (p. 74), **Margaret Talbot** reports from West Virginia, the state with the highest overdose death rate in the country, where the opioid epidemic has devastated the Eastern Panhandle. “In Berkeley County, which has a population of a hundred and fourteen thousand, when someone under sixty dies, and the cause of death isn’t mentioned in the paper, locals assume that it was an overdose. It’s becoming the default explanation when an ambulance stops outside a neighbor’s house, and the best guess for why someone is sitting in his car on the side of the road in the middle of the afternoon,” Talbot writes. Like the vast majority of residents in West Virginia, nearly all addicts are white, were born in the area, and have modest incomes. Chess Yellott, a retired family practitioner in Martinsburg, told Talbot that many West Virginians self-medicate to mute depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress from sexual assault or childhood abuse. “Those things are treatable, and upper-middle-class parents generally get their kids treated,” he said. “But, in families with a lot of chaos and money problems, kids don’t get help.” Michael Chalmers, the publisher of an Eastern Panhandle newspaper, the *Observer*, lost his younger brother to an overdose. “In my opinion, the desperation in the Panhandle, and places like it, is a *social vacancy*,” he said. Many drug addicts are “trying to escape the reality that this place doesn’t give them anything.” In West Virginia, the number of children removed from parental care because of drug abuse rose from nine hundred and seventy in 2006 to two thousand one hundred and seventy-one in 2016. Shawn Valentine, a foster-care coordinator in the Martinsburg area, says that although the goal is to reunite children with their parents, this happens in “less than twenty-five per cent of the cases we are involved in.”

Michael Barrett, an emergency paramedic in Berkeley County, told Talbot he sometimes has to return several times in one day to the same house—once, a father, a mother, and a teen-age daughter overdosed on heroin in succession. Narcan, a drug that reverses heroin overdoses, was administered four hundred and three times in 2016, up from two hundred and twenty-three times in 2014. William Poe, another paramedic, told Talbot, “The thing about Narcan is that it kind of makes it O.K. to overdose, because then you can keep it in your house and keep it private.” Two years ago, John Aldis became the first doctor in West Virginia to offer free classes to teach the general public how to reverse overdoses with Narcan. But some locals worry that making Narcan easily available could foster complacency about overdoses. “They say we’re enablers,” Aldis said. “Somebody who has a heart attack—are we enabling them by giving them C.P.R.?” He believes free supplies of Narcan should be everywhere: “kitchen cabinets, your purse, schools, gyms, shopping malls, motels.”

In West Virginia, there is a chronic shortage of beds for addicts who want help. Kevin Knowles, Berkeley County’s recovery-services coordinator, told Talbot, “If they have private insurance, I can hook them right up. If they’re on Medicaid—and ninety-five per cent of the people I work with are—it’s going to be a long wait for them. Weeks, months.” Recently, Martinsburg has begun to treat the heroin crisis more openly as a public-health problem. The police chief devised the Martinsburg Initiative, which would direct support services toward children who appeared to be at risk for addiction. The Board of Zoning Appeals voted to allow a detox center to occupy an unused commercial building in town; it will be ready for patients in December. This spring, Berkeley County started its first needle-exchange program. The Trump Administration, however, is likely to resist such approaches. And if the Affordable Care Act is repealed, it is unclear how addicts would pay for treatment.

Plus: In Comment, **Jill Lepore** reflects on the death of Roger Ailes, the chairman of Fox News, and suggests that, as a television producer, he understood better than anyone how to divide the country (p. 37); in the Financial Page, **Sheelah Kolhatkar** examines the “shareholders-above-all” doctrine prevailing at U.S. companies, often at the expense of workers (p. 44); **James Wood** rereads the works of the German writer W. G. Sebald (p. 90); **Joan Acocella** reads Arundhati Roy’s new novel, “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness” (p. 98); **Jill Lepore** reads several new works of dystopian fiction (p. 102); **Emily Nussbaum** watches HBO’s “The Leftovers” (p. 108); **Anthony Lane** watches the latest remake of “Baywatch,” directed by Seth Gordon, and “Letters from Baghdad,” directed by Sabine Krayenbühl and Zeva Oelbaum (p. 110); and poems by **Kaveh Akbar** (p. 69) and **Tracy K. Smith** (p. 82).

Podcasts: **Evan Osnos** and **Dexter Filkins** discuss Secretary of Defense James Mattis; **Evan Osnos** speaks with Gregory Craig, the former special counsel to Bill Clinton, about impeachment and how Donald Trump’s Presidency could end; **Colm Tóibín** reads **Mary Lavin’s** “In the Middle of the Fields,” and discusses the story with **Deborah Treisman**; and **Curtis Sittenfeld**, **Sherman Alexie**, and **Will Mackin** read their short stories.

Digital Extras: This week’s cover, “Enchanted Forest,” features a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree drawing by **Christoph Niemann**; additional photographs from West Virginia, which has the highest opioid-overdose death rate in the country; photographs of books inside Arundhati Roy’s home, in New Delhi; **Kaveh Akbar** and **Tracy K. Smith** read their poems; and **Richard Brody** comments on scenes from Josef von Sternberg’s “Dishonored,” from 1931.

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