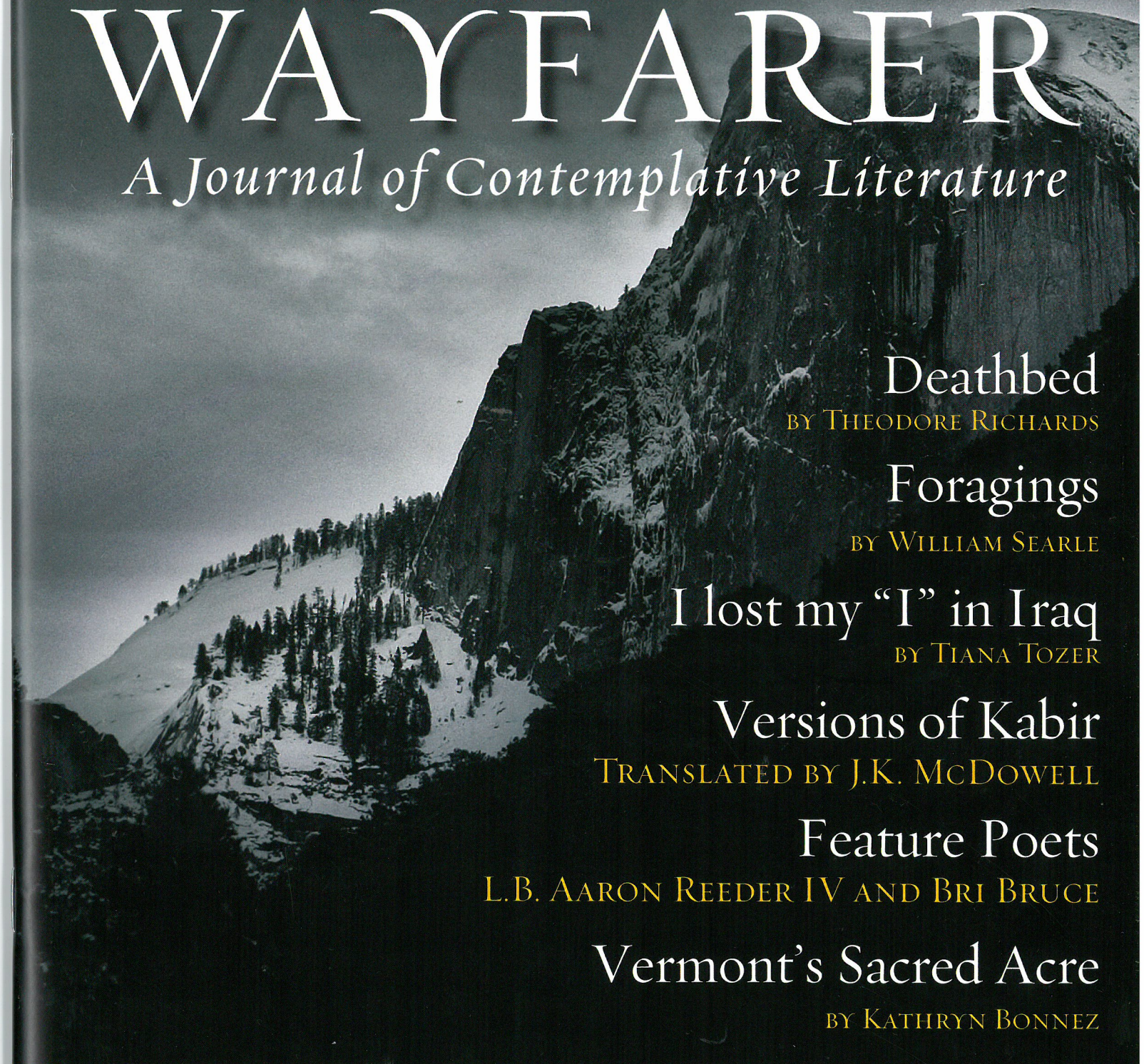
SPECIAL HOLIDAY DOUBLE ISSUE

VOL.2 ISSUE. 4
ISSN 2169-3145

THE WAYFARER

A Journal of Contemplative Literature



Deathbed
BY THEODORE RICHARDS

Foragings
BY WILLIAM SEARLE

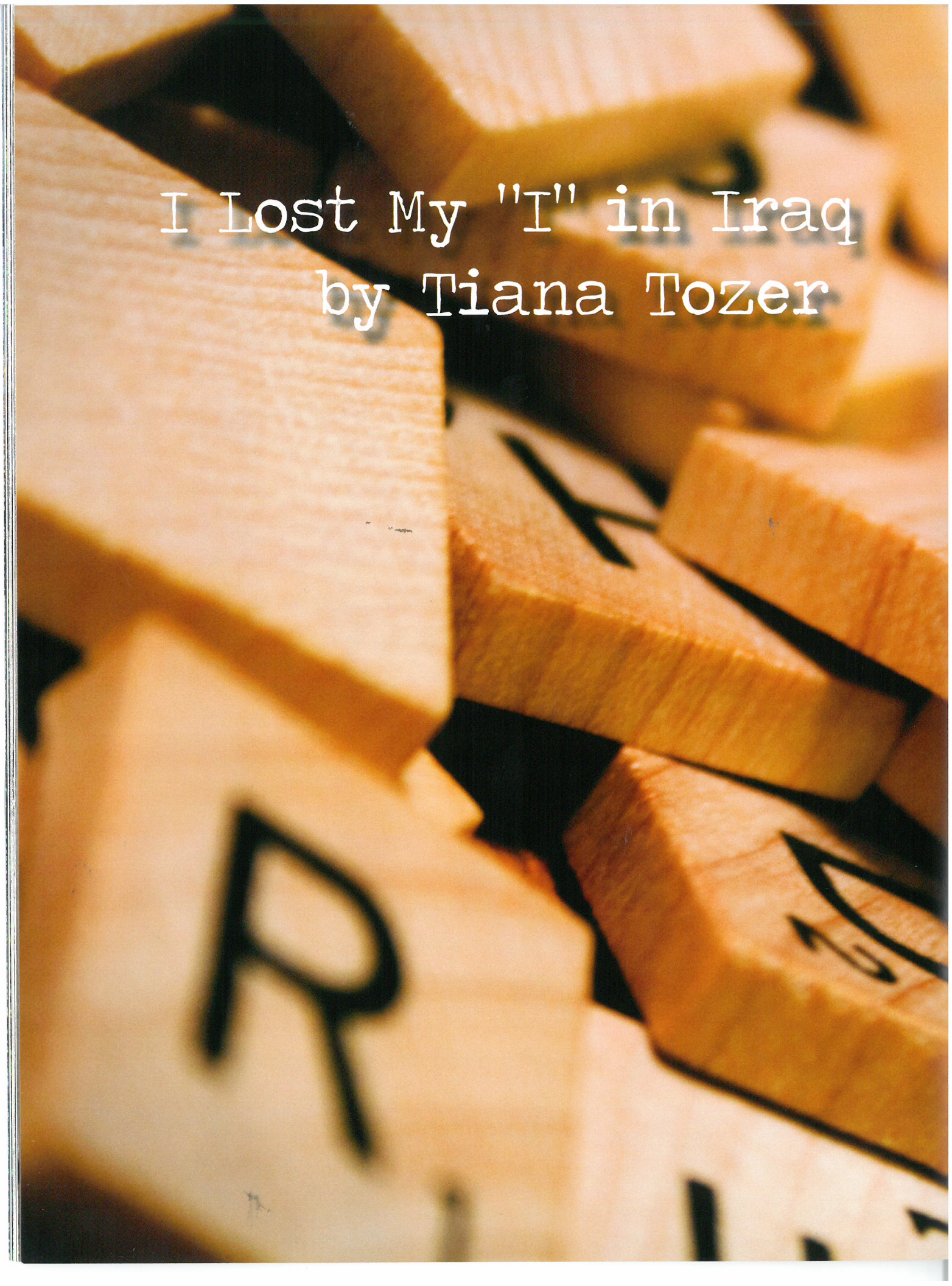
I lost my "I" in Iraq
BY TIANA TOZER

Versions of Kabir
TRANSLATED BY J.K. MCDOWELL

Feature Poets
L.B. AARON REEDER IV AND BRI BRUCE

Vermont's Sacred Acre
BY KATHRYN BONNEZ

FEATURING THE POETRY OF Michael Knowles, Christopher M. Suda, Rebecca Ricks, Rev. Daniel Klawitter, Kari Wergeland, Ariana D. Den Bleyker, Chad Hanson, David Crews, Bri Bruce, Lawrence Eby , Roy Bentley, Donna Collins, Cindy Rinne, Wally Swist, Ariane Elizabeth, and Valerie Westmark. Perle Besserman gives us her thoughts on her latest release, *Yeshiva Girl Stories*. Finally, in the book spotlight we have *Vagabonds and Sundries* by award-winning author L.M. Browning.



I Lost My "I" in Iraq

by Tiana Tozer

I leaned over the Scrabble board and placed the letter "N" at the end of the unimpressive word "turn," just as Jasper yelled "GET DOWN!"

Wow! Competitive! But I was kicking his ass even with my last, lame word. He reached over the board with his short, muscled arm. His knee upended it; and a hail of letters rained down on the bed as he grabbed the side of my head and shoved me to the floor.

We lay in the narrow space between the bed and dresser in the trailer that served as my room on the Basra military base in South Iraq, our noses five inches apart. I held his dark gaze as he counted off the mortars. He tapped his right hand as each mortar hit. One . . . two . . . three. Then silence.

A wry smile crossed my New Zealand friend's dark features. The slight upward slant to his eyes made me think he had tribal roots.

We waited, our stomachs pressed against the floor for the all-clear signal. Our chins rested on our hands. My hip bones scraped against the hard floor. I hadn't heard the warning but I knew that once the first blast sounds you have four seconds to get to a bunker. If no bunker is readily available your best bet is to drop to the ground wherever you are. My flak jacket and helmet sat just out of reach, leaned up against the wall.

The first time I heard the alarm, a week after my arrival, I ran in my pajamas from my trailer to the nearest bunker; it was dark and filled wall-to-wall with Iraqi males. I decided to take my chances outside and ran to the next bunker, occupied by my colleague Roland, a middle-aged man from Texas clad only in his boxers and T-shirt.

After twenty minutes of face-to-face time with Jasper, a hired gun providing private security for another humanitarian organization, who I'd met at the compound gym, we scraped ourselves off the floor and started picking up the tiles.

"You want to play again?" I asked.

"No. We're headed into Basra early tomorrow."

"Okay. See you at the gym." I started to sort all the letters to assess the damage. The "I" was MIA.

Two years later in March 2011, I arrived in Southern Kordofan, Sudan as the new state director. I carried with me a large bag and my one comfort item, a pillow I'd had since I was a kid, one that cradled my head with the perfect amount of flatness. The pillowcase was smattered with yellow-bellied frogs.

I sat in the airport, waiting for our ride while clutching my pillow.

You brought your pillow to Sudan?" Jack, the operations manager asked.

"Don't mock the sacred frog pillow," I warned, as my colleagues, all males, laughed.

I took a lot of ribbing about my pillow, and the housekeeper and I were in a constant battle over it. I was forever looking for the pillow or pillowcase and re-appropriating them to my room after laundry day.

It was March, three months until the country would split in two. Southern Kordofan was a border area characterized by large populations that identified with the Arab north and large populations that considered themselves African and part of the south. The province government was controlled by the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, the South. Elections were scheduled for May.

At a guesthouse run by an eccentric codger, I pulled out my Scrabble board for the expatriate game I had organized with my fellow humanitarians.

"Hi, Baba Joe," I said, greeting him with a kiss on the cheek.

He had the best food in town, not that there was much competition, but he also had whiskey and sub-par beer difficult to obtain in Sudan.

I set out the board and tiles. "I lost my 'I' in Iraq," I explained as I put a small stone on the table that would replace the first "I" played.

Nell, from the UK, scrutinized my face.

"No, no. Not my eye. My Scrabble 'I'. The letter," I said. Laughter rang out as we broke into teams. Kenya and Afghanistan won that night; and UK had a pitiful loss, considering we were playing in English. The U.S. took second, and Indonesia and Burma took third.

Three months later, the entire Scrabble board and the rest of the game letters joined the "I," looted by the Northern army, when I left them behind as I fled the civil war that had broken out over contested election results.

More than a year later, the war rages on. It's not the loss of Scrabble or even the sacred frog pillow that causes me to toss and turn at night, but thoughts of the people that worked with me, cared for me and saw to my safety. The twenty Sudanese staff I left behind.

TIANA'S essays and articles have been published in *The Wittenburg Door, the Idaho Statesman* and *Sports n' Spokes*. She was the subject of a documentary, *The Tiana Tozer Story* and her work on behalf of women and people with disabilities in Iraq was profiled on NBC Nightly News and NPR's Here and Now. A former Paralympian and humanitarian she currently makes her living as a public speaker and has spoken to hundreds of groups nationwide. In 2010 she was named University of Oregon's Outstanding Young Alumni and in 2012 she was recognized by the University of Illinois with the Harold Scharper Humanitarian Award. For more information visit, www.TianaTozer.com. | Photo Credit © Janet Galore CC Flickr