

Birmingham Arts Journal

Volume 9 Issue 1



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\$5.00



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Front Cover: **REFRACTORY**, Acrylic on Canvas - 30" x 40"

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Back Cover: **"As Dry Leaves Before ... the Wild Hurricane ...,"** Photograph

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THE MOMENT BEFORE

Jillian Wriston³

Through a high, circular window, hot
light streams. My father sits across from me
on the burgundy sofa. It is the moment
before disappointment, but the house
knows. The rugs are more coarse, ceiling fans,
paralyzed. The walls catatonic. The sound
of *womb* in my head, or is it *tomb*? The planet
under my skin. Somewhere it must be
monsoon season. Rain cools backs, puddles,
floods other people's houses on the other side
of the globe. Pounds on roofs, springs leaks.
But in this quiet desert, I imagine my father's
head lowered between his broad shoulders.
I remain mute a little longer, stare off
into the mirage, until the heat is unbearable.

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Jillian Wriston earned her Masters of Fine Arts degree from Kent State University, where she currently teaches creative writing and composition. Her chapbook, South, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2010, and she has had recent poems published in Iguana Review and Ekakshara. She lives in Ohio, with her husband and daughter. jpiston1@kent.edu

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RELICS

Guy Busby

Richard Primeau watched the workers clearing wrecked asphalt from the Interstate 10 span over the Pascagoula delta.

Under the bridge, a shrimp boat lay on its side, like a bathtub toy tossed on the lawn.

“What in God’s name is taking so long?”

He supposed that more than 30 seconds peace was too much to ask.

“Road repairs, Mom,” he said. “They’re fitting the whole interstate onto one lane. It’s gonna take a while. The storm.”

He tried to cut off the last words, but it was too late.

“You think I don’t know there’s been a storm?” she snapped.

“My whole life gone because of the storm, but what do you care?” It seemed he’d heard that tone every waking minute for the last two weeks.

She’d shown up at his condo late Sunday night as Hurricane Katrina took aim at the coast.

A dozen years after he’d moved out of the house, he opened the door to find the short, heavy, 55-year-old figure of Evie Primeau on his doorstep. She thought this would be for a day or two; so had about 1 million other people on the road that Sunday.

His father called on Thursday. He’d ridden out the storm in the house where he’d moved after the divorce. It’d taken three days after the Monday storm to get a cell phone signal.

“House . . . gone, son,” Richard had made out as the call faded in and out. “Nothing . . . left to come . . .”

The signal had been clearer when his brother-in-law called over the weekend. “Sorry, man,” he said. “Y’all’s whole neighborhood’s about gone. People sayin’ it looked like a tornado hit on top of the water off Lake Pontchartrain.”

Evie passed the next few days alternating between denial and martyrdom, with a generous measure of rage directed at Richard. He felt blamed for having a house, job and intact life when everyone else’s world had been washed away.

Brake lights flashed as drivers shifted out of park. Traffic crawled forward. Downed trees and mangled highway signs lined the interstate.

Two hours later, new signs warned that the I-10 bridge to New Orleans was closed. That next stretch of interstate lay under the water of Lake Pontchartrain, like much of the city.

At Slidell, Richard took the Gause exit and turned south. Two weeks after the storm, the only signs of post-hurricane activity were spray-painted symbols, crosses and numbers showing which houses had been searched for bodies.

He maneuvered between debris and broken pavement. At the turn to their house, the road disappeared in a mass of mud and upheaved asphalt.

He pulled his Tahoe onto an island of intact concrete that had once been part of a store parking lot. "Might be better to walk from here," he said.

After the air-conditioning of the SUV, the late September heat and humidity enveloped them along with a swamp smell of wet decay.

Richard had walked by an empty lot when his mother stopped. A set of brick steps stood off the street. He remembered his grandfather building the steps. Their house had been attached to them then.

Where the house had stood, green shoots pushed up in dirt covered for decades. He picked his way past mud and broken lumber that might have been the center of the house. Something bright flashed in the mud. He made out a smooth curved shape at his feet.

Richard reached down and pulled. The soil shifted. A gold-rimmed plate came out of the ground.

He brushed away more dirt, finding two other intact dinner plates, a saucer and a few china fragments. The china cabinet, dining room table and the dining room itself were gone. A few fragile bits survived.

"My grandmother got those when she got married."

Richard had not heard his mother walk over. He held out the plates. For a long time, she looked at the pattern, pale roses and some kind of blue flowers.

She sat on the steps where Richard remembered a woman his own age eating snow cones with him and his sister 25 years ago.

"It's funny," she said. "Things that I saved; your Tonka trucks, your sister's Barbies. All gone and this is what's left."

She looked over the ruined neighborhood.

“We shall behold no more our village of Grand Pre,” she almost smiled. “Don’t look at your mama like that. I haven’t lost it, not yet. That’s from the poem. Funny how something comes back. On the way over, I thought about my name, of all things, Evangeline, like the girl in the poem. Maybe this is why.”

Richard nodded. You couldn’t grow up in south Louisiana and escape the poem. The tale of Evangeline’s 18th century exile from Canada to the bayous and beyond was part of your legacy, particularly if you had a name like Primeau.

“She lost everything, not just her home, but the love of her life,” Evangeline Primeau continued. “Hell, I’m lucky. She probably didn’t even have insurance.”

His mother laughed, a soft chuckle but the first Richard could recall in weeks. “And I’ve still got you and your sister and the grandbabies. The rest is just stuff.”

She looked up at him. “I don’t guess I’ve been great company or too good a mama in the last couple of weeks. I’m sorry.”

Richard sat next to his mother. “Hasn’t been the best time for much of anybody I don’t think.” After all this, he could feel that it was his voice starting to break.

She nodded and stood up, the plates leaving a dirty smudge on her chest, the only relics of their lives that survived.

“What do you want to do now, Mama?”

Her laugh that time echoed on the silent street. “Damned if I know,” she looked over the wrecked neighborhood. “But I think it’s gonna be all right, baby. Long as we remember we got each other.”

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Guy Busby is a writer and newspaper reporter living in Baldwin County, Alabama, since 1986. In that time, he has covered and experienced hurricanes Erin, Opal, Georges, Ivan, Dennis and Katrina as well as the Silverhill Ash Wednesday tornado of 2011. guybuz@gulftel.com

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TWISTER -- JOPLIN, 2011

Peter Pereira

Warm air rises
all afternoon, the tension building
like an ocular migraine.

Until it punches
a hole in the ceiling
of cool cloud cover,

erupting like an argument
you've been avoiding for weeks until now.
Soon the gush of air begins to cyclone

up, up, up,
whirling faster and faster,
taking everything not nailed down

or hanging on for dear life.
Later a woman will tell how she survived
curled in the hollow of her bathtub,
hollering on the telephone to her sister.
How a neighbor's dog got loose
in the yard and was found

with two broken paws six
miles away.
How a couple was left
standing
in a stairway closet

amid a jumble
of lumber and pipe,
their baby ripped from
their arms

but found safe
in the branches
of a lone
sycamore tree.

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Peter Pereira is a poet and family physician in Seattle, Washington. His books include Saying the World, and What's Written on the Body, both from Copper Canyon Press. His work has also been featured in Best American Poetry 2007, and on Garrison Keillor's The Writer's Almanac.

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**AT NIGHT I DREAM HOT SHOWERS, ELECTRIC
LIGHT**

Jeremy M. Downes

It is too soon to write,
to whisk our letters

on the page as if neatness
counted for anything now.

It is too soon to toss words
into the whirling sky, into the screams and deep thumping

of oak and toaster, of sweetgum, dryer, shopping mall, of your Dodge or
Mazda, SUV
tumbling helplessly, of sodden checks and all the damp pornography

of infinitely tender, infinitely painful lives exposed
in moments of terror and suffering

to the sun's eyes, to the world's eyes, to the neighbors' eyes.
It is too soon to write.

And yet, how quickly
the world and we ourselves forget.

How soft the sun feels today.
How pale and light the wind.

How delicate the air. And yet,
how quickly even we must choose

to memorialize and move on,
to say *God's will*, or *c'est la vie*

or *destiny* or *chance*; we cannot bear
to live with this too much.

One writes *it is too soon*
to write, but if not now, fresh in our pain
and our shattering witness, when?

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Jeremy M. Downes is the author of two full-length books of poetry, The Lost Atlas of Desire (Blazevox 2006) and the forthcoming Poems Too Small to Read (New Plains Press). His Dark Village Haiku won the 2007 Morris Chapbook Prize. He has also authored two scholarly studies of epic poetry, The Female Homer and Recursive Desire. He writes and teaches at Auburn University.
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Bad taste is simply saying the truth
before it should be said.

--Mel Brooks



STORM CHASER

Oil on Linen, 16" x 20"

Judith Peck

Judith Peck's award winning work has been exhibited in venues nationwide, including the International Arts & Artists' Hillyer Arts Space in Washington, D.C.; the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia; and the Rhonda Schaller Studio in New York City. Her paintings have also been featured in Ori Soltes' book, The Ashen Rainbow, the San Francisco City Concert Opera Orchestra's announcement for Die Weisse Rose and the John Rawls' Theory of Justice conference announcement for the College of New Jersey. She holds a degree in Fine Arts from the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. judithpeck@prodigy.net

STORM CHASING

Noah Milligan

They approached the storm system from the southwest, trying to get behind the back draft and out of harm's way. Dianne snapped photographs of the funnel cloud and worked the maps as Coulter's father drove. The sky burned a green Coulter had never seen before, a mixture of mint and grey and algae, and ominous clouds drooped and rotated as if obeying laws of nature all their own. In his eleven years, Coulter had never seen anything like it.

Coulter's mom was in Pawhuska with her mother, had been for a while now; otherwise, he'd have been in a closet, dozens of blankets overhead as he gripped a flashlight and a battery-powered radio humming low, static-y warnings in his eerily lit sanctuary. Now he was with his father, chasing after an F3 that Dad said was moving faster than anything he'd ever seen. Coulter had never been so excited in his life. He was in awe, how quickly his father gunned the reconfigured Bronco down the dirt roads, how the rain seemed to strike their windows sideways, how the wheat outside stood at attention. Inside, the laptop computer analyzed the data streaming in from the Doppler radar bolted to the roof, a map showing the opacity of the storm in real time as it moved north-northeast at about 60 miles per hour. The noise was unbelievable, like being trapped in a vat with thousands of yellow jackets.

And the adrenaline—a million times better than any roller coaster he had ever been on. It was Coulter, Coulter's father, and his intern, Dianne Fienstein, a young graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. She was a pretty young thing, lithe, with athletic legs—she'd played on the tennis team in high school—that even Coulter, despite his young age, felt a longing to touch. Many years later, Coulter would learn to his dismay that Dianne had died in a house fire, lit by an angry neighbor because Dianne's cat kept pissing in her begonias, and, unexpectedly, after hearing of her early demise, Coulter would feel this strange, juvenile attraction once again, twisting his insides.

A funnel snaked its way out from the clouds and hovered above the earth, trailing dust and debris behind its vortex.

“Here it comes,” his father yelled, “Get it, get it, GET IT!” He was nearly jumping out of his seat, hardly keeping his eyes on the curvy and potholed road. The tornado touched ground, and Coulter’s father grasped Dianne’s knee. It was the first time Coulter’d ever seen his father touch another woman besides his mother. Well, he’d hugged Grandma before, but that didn’t count. This was different. This was something intimate, like a shared, lucid dream.

Coulter had to cover his ears as hail began to pound the car, and Coulter’s father slammed on the brakes. The tornado twisted in front of them, a giant snake spinning up into the sky and heavens above. Coulter leaned his head against the window, palms glued to the glass, as he tilted his head up to see where tornado and cloud met. It was like peering into the destructive nature of God. It was transcendent. It was the most glorious thing Coulter had ever witnessed.

The tornado loomed not a hundred yards away; it then turned and headed away from them. As it receded, the rains quieted, and so did the hail. Dianne opened the door and stepped outside. Before she walked toward the tornado, though, she turned back.

“You coming?” she asked Coulter.

He nodded.

“Here, take this,” she said as she handed him her camera. “And take my picture, too, will ya?”

When Coulter snapped it, he’d never felt so close to someone before.

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Noah Milligan's work has appeared in New Plains Review, American Polymath, Four Paper Letters, and Minnetonka Review. Recently, his story Jesse James's Revolver received an honorable mention in Best of American Horror Fiction 2010, and he earned a Masters of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from the University of Central Oklahoma. noah@arcadiamagazine.org

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WHEN MAMA TALKED OF STORMS

Sue Walker

"He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how..."

Viktor Frankl

I remember, Mama, when you talked of storms.

The weather this year has been a killer—
earthquake in Japan, the tornados
in Alabama, the Mississippi over-reaching
its banks. I don't know what to say.

It's not just the 200 mile an-hour winds in Tuscaloosa,
the sound--as if the maw of hell had spewed
forth evil, the howl, the shrieks, the cries,
the silence after the storm had passed.

It's not just the rising water, the fear:
pictures of people stranded on rooftops,
snakes swimming in fetid waters
beside the bloated body,
of a mother, a child.

We can rebuilt houses, restock kitchens,
buy a new second-hand car, go places,
but what do we do about the outrage of loss—
all the lost things that meant so much—the photograph
of Dad, the one that sat on the mantle
next to the book autographed by JFK?

You say Mama, that when we think we can't carry on,
it's memories we shore against our ruin. Truths of the heart
can't be destroyed, blown away. They are bits of eternity
held in our fingers, and so we pick up a pen
and tell the story that shows us how to live.

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Dr. Sue Walker, Poet Laureate of Alabama, is a poet, playwright, professor, scholar, author, and publisher of Negative Capability Press. She has eight published books of poetry, an on-line chapbook published by Dead Mule, has edited four national literary anthologies, had work published in more than fifteen anthologies, published more than forty critical articles and is known for her critical work on Southern writers, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, and James Dickey. Walker teaches English in the creative writing department of the University of South Alabama in Mobile.

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IMAGES OF TORNADO DEVASTATION INCLUDE HORROR, HOPE

Jackie Romine Walburn

From the blog: <http://jackierwalburnwrites.blogspot.com>

Posted May 16, 2011

The images of the devastation of the tornadoes of April 27, 2011 and the aftermath come to me in many ways:

- Real time video of the tornado in Tuscaloosa we watched on television that afternoon, knowing people are dying and going to die. The weather tower-cam video showed a swirling, angry storm so large and so menacing that we blinked and thought it looked like a Hollywood-manufactured tornado. But this storm was Mother Nature's deadly creation that tossed houses, bodies, vehicles, buildings, neighborhoods and lives.
- My daddy and stepmother, aged 83 and 74, when they finally made it to our house the day after, Daddy gasping for breath and Emily exhausted but still caring for others.
- Emily and Daddy's place in Pleasant Grove, where his almost 100-year-old home of 40 years still stands, a wounded warrior with scars on its roof, siding and ceilings, surrounded by debris piled up like fortifications in an on-going battle.
- The homes and lives that didn't make it through the storm, some 238 people in Alabama, including my niece's mother in law, Gayle McCrory, whom Dawn says two weeks later she still picks up the phone to call. But then she remembers. The McCrory family's loss was multiplied across the state and south in what will now forever be known as the tornadoes of April 27, 2011.

The images of the storm also include the debris collected from Daddy's yard in Pleasant Grove, symbols of the lives forever changed, including:

- A picture of a young black woman holding her baby, probably minutes after it was born. We posted the picture on the Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/#!/PicturesandDocumentsfoundafterAprilTornadoes>. People replied, "I hope she and the baby are okay." So do we.

- One size 12 men's yellow dress shoe.
- A W-2 for a teen-ager who worked a summer at Alabama Adventure.
- A Christmas ornament and most of a ceramic wise man.
- A torn section of Bo Jackson's book, *Bo Knows Bo*, four pages of the chapter called: "Set Your Goals High – and Don't Stop." Bo, who we Auburn people love, grew up in McCalla, not far from some of the storm's worst devastation in Pleasant Grove, Concord and Tuscaloosa. Bo's advice to "don't stop" is council everyone affected by the storm, as victims or volunteers, must have as a mantra. So much has been done to help and care for others by regular folks from all over, and there is still much work to be done.

Other images follow me, here and now more than two weeks after the storms:

- Daddy, Emily and Dreama, their adopted daughter and the little sister I always wanted, telling the story of riding out the storm in the hall of their house.
- A blanket on top of Dreama and Prancer the Chihuahua, they held onto each other as the storm raged outside, the windows shattered and the bathroom door blew out and the sucking wind grabbed Emily. Daddy recalls hanging on to Em, his wife of almost 50 years, as the wind grabbed her. They heard trees falling and ceiling crumbling, but they walked out of the hall, the only injury a nasty cut to Daddy's arm and bruises that still shine purple on his right arm. They spent a miserable night in the house that night – trapped by the fallen trees, power lines and devastation, and watched their neighbors walk out of the chaos – "like refugees from a battle," Em said, folks clutching a few possessions, a garbage bag of treasures saved.

Images of volunteers, helpers, saints, who came to help:

- The young man Cody, who helped Emily get panels and tarps in place on the house the day after, so that Daddy would leave it without worrying too much about looters or rain taking what the storm had not.
- The folks at their church, Pleasant Grove United Methodist, who checked on them, sent volunteers to help clear the driveway,

retarped the roof and are still helping. Em and I stopped by the church after meeting the insurance adjuster last Thursday, and we had a hot meal with volunteers from all over. I was amazed at the expert-level coordination of help and services and the caring, a front-line “faith-based” rescue. Churches have been the backbone of on-the-ground help in affected communities, and we praise the Lord for them.

- A man named Kevin and two helpers, who came Saturday before last, sent by the church, armed with chain saws and a diesel-powered loader to clear the rest of the drive way. They cut and piled and toted. We had a small family work party that day -- Frank, Will, Mary Claire, Em and Dreama. We shoveled insulation and dry wall in the living room and bedroom; Frank and Will cut and dragged limbs and piled debris that used to be the tool shed and tools, and they took down the pecan tree that pierced the roof. And, because of Kevin and helpers, angels from Daphne, we left another step closer to the new normal.

Daddy and Emily, Dreama and Prancer, the yipping Chihuahua (or is that redundant?) spent two weeks with us before taking the invite to live in the basement apartment of friends Jeff and Tina Lindsey, nearby in Hoover. They are settling in and nearer to that new normal state, in this one-level apartment with kitchen. We have my list of what the adjuster said insurance will cover, expect the official one next week, and next on our list is getting bids from roofers, drywallers and painters. A reliable contractor to coordinate it all would be another wished-for miracle.

Meanwhile, like others whose lives were scrambled and tossed in these storms, my folks just keep going. They’re still shaken, but thankful, sometimes sad but happy to be here, and they do the next thing. They “Don’t Stop,” just like Bo advised in the four-pages that flew into the Romine yard in the storms of April 27, 2011.

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Jackie Romine Walburn is a career writer, former corporate communications manager, editor and award-winning reporter. She lives and works in Birmingham, Alabama, and writes the blog <http://jackierwalburnwrites.blogspot.com>.
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LIGHTNING'S LETTER TO THUNDER

Carol Berg

I am the gladioli flexing in overheated
pink, and you the cumin scent of desire.

I am hummingbird, hatchlings of tiny fighter
planes, and you the opinionated ozone rattling

ontology. You my inclinometer finger, you the indiscretion of rain
on rain. I am the trout slickly slanting among your shadows.

You the story strumming my divertimentos.
I your plummet, your penumbral, your summoner.

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*Carol Berg's poems are forthcoming or in Weave, Pebble Lake Review, Fifth
Wednesday Journal, qarrtsiluni, blossombones, and elsewhere. Two
chapbooks, Ophelia Unraveling (dancing girl press), and Small Portrait and
Woman Holding A Flood In Her Mouth (Binge Press), are forthcoming. Her
web-site is located here: <http://carolbergpoetry.com/wordpress/>
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Acting is merely the art of keeping a
large group of people from
coughing.

--Ralph Richardson

THUNDER

Jacob Oet

Old thunder,
your white cane
precedes you.

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Jacob Oet lives in Solon, Ohio. He has loved writing and making images since he was little. Jacob's poetry and images appear in Cicada Magazine, Palooka, Straylight Magazine, Floorboard Review, The Honey Land Review, H.O.D., The Jet Fuel Review, Superstition Review, OVS Magazine, and The New Verse News. A student by choice, Jacob Oet is never sure which language he speaks. You may spot him in a park, forest or beach, with planted feet, arms stretched up and shaking in a breeze. But don't let him see you; he likes to sing to strangers. He takes photos of snow, and hates winter.

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GLOBAL TWISTER

Mixed Media on Found Board

Paul Wilm

Paul Cordes Wilm is a Southern painter, born and raised in Mobile, Alabama, and currently residing in Birmingham, Alabama. His painting style has been dubbed "Folk-Pop," mixing elements of both Folk Art and Pop Art styles. His works are noticeably colorful and one reason for this is the fact that he is red-green colorblind. paulcordeswilm@gmail.com

THELONIOUS RISING

Judith Richards

Sound from the radio in Grandmama's bedroom was too low to understand and too loud to ignore. Monk lay beside his opened window and the willow swished under gusts of wind. Rain lashed the roof and swept the walls. Lightning streaked across black clouds and in each flash he could see debris blowing in the street.

He got up to go to the bathroom and Grandmama called, "You all right, baby?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am."

He hurried back to bed and lay with his face at the windowsill. Sometimes during summer rains the air filled with chemical smells, as fertilizers washed down from the sky or got stirred up from the earth. Right now the rain smelled like freshly cleaned vegetables.

A jagged tongue of flame flashed brightly and the concussion was so strong it slapped him in the face.

The electricity went off. Fans whined down and quit. In the kitchen the refrigerator stopped. Absolute darkness engulfed the house and the street.

He heard Grandmama switch to the portable battery-operated radio. The announcer's voice came alive again.

"We have unconfirmed reports of minor flooding in St. Bernard Parish along the MRGO."

MRGO – the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. Monk heard of but had never seen the waterway. It was five miles east of here.

A limb cracked and for an instant he thought it was a gunshot. The next glimpse by lightning revealed the willow tree had split down the middle. He loved that tree. He liked to climb into the branches and sit in a crotch hidden from everybody, surrounded by green leaves and lost in his own world. One of the broken limbs lay up against the house. It blocked the wind that had been coming through his window. Wet leaves were plastered against the screen.

He heard a bumping, rattling noise and in a lightning flash he saw a garbage can bounce across the street. Monk felt his way down the hall to Grandmama's bedroom door. "I'm going to sit on the back porch, Grandmama."

"Stay out the wind, Thelonious. Don't get hit by flying trash."

"I'll be careful."

Down the street he saw flashlights wagging as people gazed out of their windows to see if there was damage. Despite the wind he heard voices, and then laughter. The flashlights extinguished. Rain came harder, striking the roof with

such force it sounded like hail. Water poured from the eaves and blew on him in the swing. He didn't care. It was better than being too hot.

"Thelonious?"

"Yes ma'am?"

"You all right?"

"Yes I am, Grandmama."

"All right then."

A bird flew onto the porch and hit the screened kitchen door. Monk sat up, waiting for the next bolt of lightning. The creature clung to the screen and even when he walked over to it the bird did not fly.

"Did you lose your nest?" Monk asked.

He was tempted to stroke it, but decided it might scare the bird into flying. For the time being, right here was the safest place to be. He eased open the door and let himself in.

He passed Grandmama's room. "I'm going to bed," he said.

"I love you, Thelonious."

"I love you, Grandmama."

Monk dozed off and on, snoozing during the cool steady flow of wind pushing through the house. He awoke once to find Grandmama standing over his bed, her flashlight directed aside so the light wouldn't disturb him.

Things slammed into the outside walls, rain hit the roof like a handful of pebbles; now and then the eaves moaned and the house creaked. But half-asleep in his bed, Monk was not afraid. He had imagined monstrous waves coming over the levee, a hiss of foam flung from whitecaps. None of that happened.

It was time for dawn but daylight had not come. A gray veil had been draped over the world, half-light without shadows. He went to check on the bird and the terrorized creature still clung to the screened door. Beyond the porch, Monk saw the garden was underwater and ruined. The split tree covered part of the back steps; willow branches thrust onto the floor and touched the swing. He was glad he'd been inside when that happened.

He paused in the hall at Grandmama's door. The man on the radio said, "At seven o'clock the eye is still south of New Orleans. The storm surge has topped levees in St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish. Our man in the field says there is minor flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward due to overtopping along the Industrial Canal. Power and telephone lines are down. Hold on a minute..."

"Are you awake, Grandmama?"

"More or less, babe. Do you need something?"

The announcer came back on the air, "In the past fifteen minutes," he said, "there has been rapid flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward."

"Grandmama, there's water in the house."

"Where about, Thelonious?"

“Right here on the floor.”

He heard the bed creak as she swung her legs over the side of the mattress. She turned on the flashlight. “Lord,” she said.

She was a dark hulk moving ahead of him toward the kitchen. She said again, “Lord!”

Through the opened back door he saw limbs of the broken tree floating in water. The bird held fast.

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Judith Richards is a Midwesterner gone south. She has written five novels about the south and has often drawn on the childhood experiences of her husband, author C. Terry Cline. Her recent novel Too Blue to Fly was on the short list for the Lillian Smith Award. Thelonious Rising is from chapter 9 of her latest. www.judithrichards.com

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HAIKU (TORNADO)

Jerri Hardesty

Tempestuous boy
Tosses and scatters his toys
Category five.

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Jerri Hardesty lives in the woods of Alabama with husband, Kirk, and too many animals. They run the nonprofit organization, NewDawnUnlimited, Inc. (NewDawnUnlimited.com) dedicated to poetry publishing, production, performance, promotion, preservation, and education. Jerri has had over 200 poems published, and has won numerous awards and titles in both written and spoken word/performance poetry at the local, regional, national, and international level. Wytrabbit@aol.com

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CURRENTS

debbie w. parvin

Well, ain't you the weatherman
calling me "sunny" like I was blue sky in June?
Don't men know that flirty words do no more good
than candles in monsoon?

Then yesterday when, for the umpteenth time, you
come dragging muddy feet on clean floors and talking what's for dinner...
when I pop out that mop and push it into your hands...then
you roll those eyes at me and pronounce,
storm brewin' in here...

Well, ain't you the weatherman?

Listen.

Women aren't weather fronts. We don't come at ourselves
like cold and hot currents meeting and colliding.
We aren't some random mix of hormones stirring
like gusts of wind you register on some radar.

It's just that some days
in the middle of wet clothes and meals,
bill paying and checking homework,
carpooling and doctoring,
somewhere
in the squeeze of who you want
me to be and who I am,
there's a thirst to be understood
instead of predicted.

Grown women aren't held in words any better
than grown children in cradles.

You may think
you know my every season, but...

you *ain't* no weatherman

.....

*debbie w parvin is a poet who lives in a rural area near Lewisville, North Carolina,
where she shares daily life with her husband, Bob, and their three cats, Cee-Cee,
Wheatfield, and Pumpkin. dwpflw@juno.com*

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If you want your children to be
intelligent, read them fairy tales. If
you want them to be more intelligent,
read them more fairy tales.

-- Albert Einstein

THUNDERING

Marcia Molay

Thunder storms in Dallas are different.
They amble into town like cowboys in wild west days
hang around like guys on a street corner or bar
exchange tall tales.

Boasts get longer and louder
fade,
then start up again with a new story
or argument till the ground shakes
and the bartender throws them out.

Quiet for awhile
then one or two return
without warning
for a violent confrontation
guns blazing--
bad times for bystanders.

In the east, storms are more
predictable, patterned,
business men or preachers.
You hear them approach the podium
softly clear their throats
get ready for the big speech,
the presentation.

But once up there
they sock it to their audience--
heavy stuff threatening Armageddon
deep depressions.
Then they are gone
to deliver a message of fear
to new places--
new faces.

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Marcia Molay has been writing poetry for about 10 years and has been published in several college journals as well as in state poetry contests. She writes mainly of loss and remembrance but also indulges in humor when the subject permits. Marcia likes Thundering and hopes you feel the same way. silverball@nii.net

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There is only one name for any child,
and that name is All Children.

-- Carl Sandburg



KATRINA – THE AFTERMATH

Three panels 22" x 30" each

Acrylic on Canvas

Richard Russell

From the collection of Jewish Family Services of Birmingham

*I painted this while watching the news to see if our home was destroyed. We stayed at my brother's lake house in Cullman (Smith Lake). At night I would listen to 870 AM in New Orleans. Could only hear it at night for some reason. Night after night people called in saying they are OK, but they were looking for friends and family that got separated from them. The phones didn't work for months, so we had no way of knowing who lived and who perished. Some of these calls were gut wrenching. Mothers whose children were ripped from their hands, prayed to God on the air that someone had saved their child and could tell her they had their child safe and sound on the radio. Unfortunately there were not many children found alive in that situation.
rrgallery@aol.com www.allthingsgallery.biz*

LIGHTNING AT THE AIRPORT

Carolyn Rhodes

At first our flight was delayed by 3 hours later. We waited to board a second time. Passengers stepped in line following a designated letter and number, as we did a few hours earlier. This time we boarded. Boston to Baltimore is a short flight and my connecting flight to Birmingham, Alabama would also be late due to the lightning storm in Maryland.

A pretty blond lady (Kathy), around 35, with a long pony tail sat next to me. She had a Barbie doll look and wore Capri jeans trimmed with a paisley pattern which matched the trim on her jeans jacket. I would soon find out she was anything but a plastic doll with a perfect petite figure. A tall heavy set man with a laptop, probably in his fifties, sat in the aisle row. The three of us shared a few introductory words and settled in, seat belts buckled.

Bill, the aisle man, handed Kathy and me a stub for a free drink. I noticed the date was not for that day. He chuckled and invited us to use it anyway.

“I do it all the time, it works, they never look,” he said.

I thought it was plain creepy.

Bill was a salesman and Kathy was going to her new job orientation in Baltimore as a supervisor for a big medical facility in Boston. I was on my way home to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, after a family reunion in New England and New York.

Bill was one of those confident smiley grinners. He kept Kathy and me amused.

I'd let Bill hand in the outdated “free” drink ticket and wondered if the stewardess might call him on it. However, we found out there would be no service on the flight due to the late departure.

Ding Dong

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We will be delayed on the tarmac for about an hour due to weather conditions in Baltimore. You may use your electronic devices. We will be up as soon as we get word from the tower--sorry for the delay, folks.”

Within seconds the cell phone chatter began and the questions began. “Can we return to the terminal?” “Will we be making our connections?” The endless simple questions churned in rhythm to panicky tones of desperation.

Kathy said, “What I want is to get out of here and go home. We just bought a \$3,000 mattress and my husband is watching a movie, alone, taking care of our seven kids! I am ready to bail out, down that shoot, and run back to the gate, like the male stewardess did last year. I’m serious!”

Bill and Kathy and I agreed she would end up in jail or a mental hospital--would be bad press for her new employer.

“I love your wedding ring set, Kathy. Is it a blue sapphire and white diamonds?” That ring had to be a story.

“Oh no,” she answered as she held her hand to the light, “They are blue diamonds and half-carat white diamonds.”

(Stunning, I thought)

Ding-Dong

Bill tells us he sells coffee machines, the ones you can buy exotic coffees for and make a cup at a time, before the next pilot announcement. It’s equipment I’ve seen in the kitchen of the Housewives of Beverly Hills reality TV show, not in my kitchen.

Ding Dong

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are cleared for takeoff; however, new federal regulations will not allow pilots to fly overtime. We will return you to the terminal where a new crew, on the way, will take you on to Baltimore. We are sorry for the delay and thank you for flying Southwest.”

Kathy was elated and Bill said he’d attend the sales conference the next day. We’d all return to Boston having never left the tarmac.

“Carol, if you want a good story, it’s my life. Stay at my house until tomorrow. You won’t get home tonight because of the weather delays. Bill, I will give you a ride home.”

“Kathy, be careful offering strangers rides home,” was all I could offer before I had to decline her offer.

She smiled, “I can handle it, Carol. Believe me, I can take care of myself.” She nodded with a certainty I trusted.

Kathy and Bill took off into the sunset never having left Boston and I never got her phone number or her last name. What if her story was one in a million? Why blue diamonds for a wedding ring? Could she have been married to someone famous or infamous? The questions rolled off my head for the next hour or so until I met the Tennessee gentleman. He died for several minutes and when he came back, it changed his life. But, what made that story different from others who saw the white bright light? There was no time to find out.

After we booked our new connecting flights and Southwest offered us free beverages and peanuts, we boarded at 2:00AM.

I left my netbook charger and my phone charger in the suitcase, and my smart phone needed to be charged, as did my netbook. (Never pack the wires!)

The Baltimore Washington airport was dark and quiet at 3:30AM. I met an attractively dressed, charming, African American lady who was a teenager during the civil rights era but moved out of Alabama to begin her life in the north before the riots began.

After the sun came up and the storytellers disappeared, the stores opened for business and the smell of fresh brewing coffee woke me up,

I finally boarded my early morning flight and arrived in Birmingham at 10:00A.M.

A few days later, Southwest sent me a \$100 voucher. It came on the day of the earthquake and long before the onset of hurricanes Lee and Katia.

Tomorrow it's blue skies and I'm ready for a smooth non-stop flight to Tampa, Florida.

I'm not going to worry about the return flight just yet.

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Carolyn Rhodes' work has appeared in the University of Alabama's Alumni magazine, Alabama's PrimeLifeStyle Magazine as well as American Libraries, Antiques News, Tuscaloosa News, Northwest Prime Time and others. She lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. writegems@gmail.com

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WORTH

Midori Chen

The sea is boiling, and every pop of bubbles, every hiss of steam is cold. Cold, like the bodies on this boat, like the eyes on those bodies. It's hard to feel when the water tosses you numb, when no matter how much you hit your head against the side of the boat with the rush of the waves, the ringing in your head is still drowned by the storm outside. I try hard to focus in times like this. Every thousand taps of rain against the boat I think of you, reading to me an Italian book of lovers at a balcony, tossing pebbles against the glass. Every rumble of thunder I think of the big French drum you used to play, hoisting it over your shoulder and banging with all your might. Every lift of the burning sea, I think of your favorite English tea kettle and the whistle it makes to tell you it's ready. The damp wood of the boat reminds me of your eyes, a shade of brown that becomes all I know. The brush of my only blanket reminds me of your touch, a warm caress I never have enough of. The smell of the sea reminds me of your heat, concentrated and permeating every inch of the room, making me lightheaded. In times like this, I focus on you, and the love that we share, pulling me across these waters, gravitating towards you. In times like this, I look out at the ocean, and wonder if it is as big and endless as my love for you.

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Midori Chen attends San Francisco Ruth Asawa School of the Arts. She reads everything from Shakespeare to Lovecraft to Keats, and she enjoys all mediums of writing. hyuuganeji11@gmail.com

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TYPHOON

Marcus Cumbie

This is an actual letter written on October 11, 1945, by eighteen-year-old Marcus E. Cumbie aboard an LSM moored at Buckner Bay, Okinawa, Japan. A fierce typhoon hit on October 9, raging for two days. The storm blew the LSM ninety miles out to sea. After the young sailor returned safely to Buckner Bay, he penned this account in a letter to his family in Conecuh County, Alabama.

Dearest Folks,

Well Mom, Dad, and Sisters, I am about to unravel the story of Oct. 9 through to the night of the 10th, about as close to losing your son as I have or ever hoped to be again.

Well, we all waked up as usual on the morning of the ninth. There was a slight difference in the atmosphere. The wind was blowing about 40 miles per hour. Everything went on as usual. I wrote a letter, I wasn't scared then. We fixed chow. After chow the wind started harder. It got up to about 80 miles per hr. We couldn't even clean up the galley the ship was rolling so bad. The wind was blowing so hard by 1:30 that you couldn't see 20 ft. away. It was picking up spray so much it looked like heavy rain. When the spray hit you it felt like air rifle shot.

By 2:30 the wind was up to over a 110 miles per hr. By then we had radio messages that 26 ships were on the reef, beached high and dry or blown up on land. They were small ships. A few K.A.'s (cargo transport) and liberty ships. Some had to abandon their ships. The radio messages were like this –

“Sleepy one, calling Sleepy two, how are you doing?”

“This is Sleepy two answering Sleepy one. We are beached high and dry. Come over and join us.

“Sleepy one to Sleepy two, we would like to but it seems that we are astraddle of a hell of a reef out here. Hope we can stick. Signing off. Good Luck.”

That is about the way they came in all day.

Back to us. About a little after three one of the small tugs that was drifting around ran into us then veered off and came in on our stern. To

our bad luck they cut our anchor chain. So that set us adrift. We were barely able to bring the ship about and head out. The wind was blowing us one way then the other. Finally we did what we were expecting, we hit a reef. We stayed on it about 30 minutes. The big swells and wind took us off. We were no more than off when we hit another. There we stuck. We emptied about 40,000 gals. fuel oil into the sea so we could get off before it tore the bottom out. We finally got off.

We all had our life jackets on since we were adrift. I think everybody was scared stiff. Some were praying. I couldn't think of a prayer I was so scared. I wished a hundred times I was more like you, Mom, that I could pray without any difficulty. As I said I couldn't pray so I sat down and read most of St. Luke and the 23rd and 42nd Psalms. It seemed to quiet my nerves or something. Some of the so-called toughies snickered when some prayed and others started pulling out Bibles and New Testaments. Later one was in his sack so sick and scared he couldn't get out. He was praying for his Rabbi to help him. He was a Jew.

All drifted around and they decided to drop the bow anchor. Just as they dropped it and was testing the chain we heard a "crunch." We had run up the anchor chain of a liberty or tanker. I stuck my head out of a hatch. The bow of the big ship was looming out of the storm like a big grey ghost. I was so scared I couldn't move.

The Radar showed us other ships, land and reefs. We can thank God that our Radar man was on the ball with his machine. You can believe me that radar is a wonderful invention.

We drifted around awhile. Everybody just waiting for something to happen. It did. We hit another reef. We seemed to be pretty well steadied into it. We all thought we may be able to stay there. We filled the fuel tanks full of water to weight us down into them. We thought we were until we waked up to the fact that we were about 20 miles out to sea.

By this time everybody had kind of gotten over their scaredness some, and sleeping somewhere. The other mess cook and I stayed in the galley and made coffee. They drank about 15 gallons of coffee that night.

When we hit the reefs and were trying to get off we damaged the screws and screw shafts. The port screw was damaged so badly that it was vibrating the engine until you could feel it all over the ship. The men could hardly stand up in the engine room.

The other mess cook and I carried coffee down to them men in the engine room a couple of times. This was about 9:30. About 10 I hit the sack.

We drifted around until about 3 and the wind died down some. Then we got in touch with LSM 94. It was undamaged. It stayed with us so they could pick up survivors if we had to abandon our ship which looked like what we would have to do as one of the reefs had dented both sides of the engine room and knocked one engine out of line. We could barely control the ship.

One of the cooks and I got up to fix chow. About 7:30 a D.E. came along. She stood by while the 94 went to take the men off a yard oiler. The D.E. was going to try to tow us in. They tried about 5 times before they finally got a line across to the D.E. They towed us about an hour then the cable broke. We decided to try to get in under our own power.

The seas were high. The bow would go over a wave and come down in the trough with a bang. The stern would go up in the air and slap and bounce. I think an L.S.M has hinges in it.

We got back in and tied up about 5:30. Everybody let out a big sigh when we tied up in calm water.

I had better close for now. Everybody is o.k.

Love
Mark
Marcus E. Cumbie F

1/c U.S.N

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Marcus Cumbie, now eighty-five years old, is a retired medical and x-ray technologist, living in Grove Hill, Alabama, with his wife of sixty-one years. He is a member of the Grove Hill Writers' Group. In 2010, he won an honorable mention for a piece submitted to the Alabama Writers Conclave. gglala9@gmail.com
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THE BIG ONE

Oil on Canvas

Nancy Lloyd

Birmingham, Alabama resident Nancy Lloyd paints landscapes and figures in oil. She sees painting as an opportunity to revisit a moment in time, a rare chance to relive a memory, to communicate a feeling or emotion beyond words. Nancy's work can be seen at Littlehouse Galleries in Birmingham, and at www.nancylloydart.com. mendocinomama@yahoo.com

A FEW QUESTIONS FOR THE TORNADO ADJUSTER

Carolynne Scott

Sure we lost one-fourth our roof
and the gingerbread across the porch,
but worse, our trees met the Memorial Day tornado,
whirlwinds toppling thirty four in all.

And your policy reads
We've no right to claim those trees?
Fourteen pines, seven fruit, one white oak
plus hickories, maples, walnuts, cedars.

About those pines we sold
a pulpwood cutter for seven bucks:
newsprint won't shade us or
send over a scented breeze.
Isn't there some value in just being trees?

And those peach, plum and apple beauties
already nipped by a late freeze
sleep recumbent now along the stream.
What about their blooms, their fruit, their seeds?

Who could replace
the scratchy caress of our white oak
on the tin roof under the moon?
That stump had two hundred rings at least.

Its limbs will only go to ashes
on a winter night, never to veil the bird bath.
feed the squirrels
or shade the dog.

How can I explain this
to my shade-loving garden --
this glare, this intensity,
this cropped green dream?

Are you certain there's no recompense
somewhere in the fine print?

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Carolynne Scott lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with her cat, Ringo, who turned up on the deck after a tornado one time. Her poems have appeared in Southern Poetry Review, the Azorean Express, Nocalula and Alalitcom. She teaches fiction writing at the Homewood Senior Center. carolynnescott@hotmail.com

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MY AUNT MATTY'S STORM

Jim Reed

From the time I was three years old, the living room of my family's home on Eastwood Avenue in Tuscaloosa prominently displayed two large, very dramatic paintings: one of a great big moose whose profile gazed into the distant wilds of an unfamiliar landscape, the other of Old Ironsides, a ship listing bravely through a storm.

Both these paintings were created by my Aunt Matty Reed Wooten, who lived in West Blocton, and who was the first adult artist in my life.

I'd often lie on the floor of our home, gazing deep into the stormy seas, feeling the damp spray on my forehead, becoming queasy from the list of the ship, bravely lashed to the mast to keep from being swept away, from dream to nightmare to oblivion.

Much of the artwork I was to see through life somehow had to live up to what Aunt Matty had painted, and I couldn't help comparing her images to all those that came later. Aunt Matty's paintings were straightforward and largely self-taught, but you could read the emotion that she had poured into them from her paint-stained fingers. Nothing ever looked static in her pictures--Something was about to Happen at any moment in both of them.

Aunt Matty was kind of a gentle, no-nonsense person who always found just the right positive note to inject into any conversation. With her almost mid-western twang, she would pronounce things a bit differently from other Southerners. The word "battery" would become BATT-tree, the word "fetch" seemed exactly accurate and more descriptive than mundane words like "carry" or "retrieve." And she used words that country people still use: a suitcase was a "grip" or a "tote," for instance.

Aunt Matty lived in the house her father, James Thomas Reed (my grandfather), had purchased near the local coal mines at the time the 19th century became the 20th, and the foyer of the house was a shrine to any child who entered and saw a wonderful old foot-pedal organ just waiting to be played.

Old books and papers and other essential ephemera abounded in Aunt Matty's house, and visiting her always made me remember the wonderful times I spent there as a child.

There would be wild turkeys in the back yard, a no-longer-used out-house to the side, kerosene lanterns left over from the days when the house had no electricity, and a genuine wood-burning kitchen stove always in action.

Even in the days after the house was electrified and plumbed, and heating did not depend upon chopped wood or coal lumps, the house still had the feel of being primitive, of existing in another time when little luxuries were great big

luxuries and nobody had yet learned about Television and Computers and Space Travel and Muggings in the streets.

The hand-hewn house in which Aunt Matty lived still lives fresh and strong in my memory as a symbol of all the simple, pleasant pleasures we enjoyed long before we learned to compare what we had with what our neighbors had.

It was a time when we took each joy separately and with reverence and placed it in special nooks of our minds to be dredged up on days like this, a day when I need to remember the purity and strength of Aunt Matty's paintings in our little living room, paintings of things I'd never see in the flesh, paintings of things I'd never have to see to believe, because those paintings were much more real to me than anything like them I've seen in the best galleries of Atlanta, New York and Chicago.

Aunt Matty and I shared the same Scotch-Irish-Native American bloodstream, and it was good to know that she represented my father's family a good ten years beyond my father's death.

It was good to have an Aunt Matty, a gentle, witty and artistic soul whose purpose among us was in part to remind us of what we, too, have deep inside: the ability to depict a large moose or a mighty storm in any way we feel them, and no matter what anybody else would ever say about our depictions, they would always be exactly the way we saw them, and to Aunt Matty that's all that was important.

Down the many years of my life in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, I've weathered many storms as ferocious as Aunt Matty's Ironside storm, most of the time emerging unscathed, feeling guilty because I had avoided injury and loss while so many others did not. The Eastwood Avenue home is exactly two blocks east of the intersection of 15th Street and MacFarland Boulevard, where storms wreaked havoc in 2011. But the old house which once housed Aunt Matty's paintings still stands, thus proving that being lashed to a mast in the midst of a whirlwind can sometimes bring you through to live another day...another day best used to comfort the storm-afflicted, to nurture their stories and make sure no-one forgets the really important things

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Jim Reed writes from Birmingham, Alabama, where he curates the Museum of Fond Memories at Reed Books. <http://www.jimreedbooks.com>

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LOST

Linda F. Willing

They were in Utah and it was snowing. Mary had experienced snow only once before in her life—the thrill as a ten year old walking along the canals in the Lower Ninth Ward; the wet, fat flakes splatting against her face. It had lasted for twenty minutes, and was a miracle.

This storm had gone on for two days already, wind-driven snow coming down sideways, stinging like needles on her exposed skin when she ventured outside.

Her four-year-old daughter Margaret had never seen snow before. She was delighted at first, watching the drifts pile up outside their flimsy trailer. But by the end of the first day, Margaret sat in front of the television, staring straight ahead. It was cold. New Orleans got cold too, but not like this. In New Orleans, the cold was substantial; it engulfed you. Here it drilled right through your chest and taking a deep breath felt like inhaling broken glass.

Years ago, someone had given Mary a pair of mittens as a gift. It was silly, because who wore mittens in New Orleans? She had put them away somewhere, and now they were lost. It was all lost—the knit scarf her grandmother made for her, the fringed bag from the French Quarter market, the shiny black shoes with skinny heels.

At first, back in August, it seemed that everything might be all right. But then the water began to rise and in a few hours, they were huddled in Margaret's upstairs bedroom. Margaret had laughed when the boat arrived—it was like a fairy tale to be rescued that way.

After weeks in shelters they suddenly found themselves on an airplane, and then here. Utah. Mary did not know where Utah was. She had never seen it on a map. It was a bright, dry place, where even the snow was dry as dust. The local people were cheerful and brought them boxes of things: canned food and puffy coats and odd colored shoes. They invited them to go to church. Margaret had been excited by the toys, which made her forget about Po and LeeLee and Big Bunny, all left behind. It's like Christmas, she said as she grasped the plastic horse with the chipped ears.

But it wasn't Christmas. It was November and the snow came down relentlessly, the sides of their trailer bowing in the wind. Mary put on another sweater. Margaret crawled into her lap.

"Momma?" she said, her face close to Mary's chest. "Why are we here?"

"Don't you remember?" said Mary. "There was a big storm. And we had to go away for a while. And be here."

"A storm like this?" The wind lashed at the windows; Mary saw ice crystals reflected in the light.

"Yes, just like this." Mary shivered, pulling her cast-off sweater around her.

Margaret frowned. "But will Santa be able to find us here?"

Mary pulled her daughter closer. "Oh baby, I hope so. I sure hope so."

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Linda Willing writes in Fairhope, Alabama. She is a retired firefighter who divides her time between the Gulf Coast of Alabama and the mountains of Colorado. Linda just published On the Line: Women Firefighters Tell Their Stories.

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More than any other time in history,
mankind faces a crossroads. One
path leads to despair and utter
hopelessness. The other, to total
extinction. Let us pray we have the
wisdom to choose correctly.

--Woody Allen

ANOTHER WORD FOR GONE

P.T. Paul

She needs another word for gone
because the one she knew already
meant that something can come back.

She needs another word for home
because the one she used before
has just been wiped off the map.

She needs another word for fear
because the one she knew before
was not nearly big enough.

She needs another word for sorrow
because the one she knew before
does not go nearly deep enough.

She needs this new vocabulary
because a monstrous wind
has obliterated her world.

She needs new words,
a new home, and someone
to hold her close.

But she cannot ask
because the aftermath
of a tornado is silence

And an emptiness
that no words
can ever fill up.

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*P.T. Paul is a graduate student at the University of South Alabama, Mobile,
Alabama, where her work has received numerous awards.*

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TUSCALOOSA TRAGEDY

Charcoal on Paper

Fred Marchman

Fred Marchman is a multi-media artist living in Fairhope, Alabama, where he is an instructor in visual arts at Faulkner State Community College. In November 2011, wmCM Studio in Fairhope presented a 50+ year retrospective of his work. Marchman has cast iron & bronze sculpture at Sloss Furnace in Birmingham for the past 10 years. He also wrote and illustrated Word in Space & Duets with Erato (poetry) 2008. Marchman earned a Master of Fine Arts degree at Tulane University, 1965 (sculpture); and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Alabama, 1963 (painting & sculpture). fredmarchman.com

TWISTED

Jessica Temple

the day after

Plastic cups
still in their dispenser,
rest in the rubble where a restaurant was.

The hospital saw 600 patients in the first 5 hours.
40 children arrived alone.
Don't come if you only have broken bones.

Red X's on cars,
just additional scars
added to those already torn through the skin of the city.

A mailbox,
the day's delivery still in place,
displays the address of the house that should be behind it.

A dog still chained to a tree uprooted
from another plot of land,
must have surfed through the wind.

One man swears he was 30 feet above the ground,
riding in his iron bathtub,
Wizard of Oz style.

A cat found in a neighbor's apartment
hid under the wrong bed
since no walls are left between the two.

A student saw arms waving,
pulled a pregnant woman from under her house.
Then her child.
Then her mother.

My father saw a picture of a front door
with no house behind it.
Good thing you weren't home, he says.
The girl nods, says,
I was.

A young man threw his nearly-naked body
over his neighbor. Not to be a hero,
but because he thought the world was ending
and he didn't want to be alone.

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*Jessica Temple received her Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of
Alabama. She is currently a master's student in English and creative writing at
Mississippi State University, but she still considers Alabama home. Her latest
publication was in decomP magazinE. jjt131@msstate.edu*
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Whoever is in a hurry shows that the
thing he is about is too big for him.
--Lord Chesterfield

PIGS WILL FLY

Deb Jellett

Will and I were driving to Atlanta when we decided to get a divorce. We had been married three and a half years. It was March of 1993 and March is normally my favorite month. Cool mornings, warm afternoons. And you get that fresh yellow green on the trees and the Azaleas burst out of nowhere. But that March was something, well, out of the ordinary.

We were listening to NPR as we drove up the Interstate and I was sulking. I liked country music and besides the people on NPR were Yankees and Democrats. That's what Grandma Wiggins had always said and I never knew her to be wrong about anything important. Except maybe that time she told Grandpa Wiggins not to invest in the crazy McDonald Brothers' loopy idea to sell burgers and fries. He never let her forget that one. Until the day he died, he had a Ronald McDonald figure stuck to the dashboard of his truck. Its neck bobbed back and forth.

"Susan." Will was poking my arm. "Listen to me. Listen. Weathermen are saying we're going to get hit by a blizzard."

"Wh-a-t." I snarled, rubbing my arm. I shook my head and kind of snorted... "Snow in Alabama in March. Pigs will fly before that happens. I listened to the weather before we left home. If John Edd says it's going to be a fine day, it's going to be a fine day."

"No, listen." He turned up the radio.

I turned it off. He turned it back on.

"Atlanta is expected to get 16 inches ...parts of the Northeast declared a disaster area." The NPR announcer whined. He was probably wearing a bow tie.

"It must be a radio play or something," I put in. "You know, like that thing Orson Bean did. I remember Grandpa Wiggins talking about it. Everybody thought we were being invaded by Martians. Folks panicked."

"Susan." Will had that "she is thick as two planks, but I will be patient" tone in his voice. "Susan, it is not a play." "It is not a play."

"It is not a play. It is not a play." I sang to the tune of "Happy Birthday."

I think Will said something like shut up. But I stuck my fingers in my ears and kept singing. I was singing and he was yelling. It was kinda fun.

We came off the Interstate just before dark and pulled into the parking lot of a Holiday Inn. The lot was jammed with cars.

And when we got out of the car, it was downright cold. I mean Frigidaire freezer kind of cold. And a few flakes of snow drifted along in a light breeze. I shivered and Will put an arm around me.

“What’s that, up yonder.” He said pointing to the sky.

I looked up. “I don’t see ...”

“Oink, oink.” Will said with a smirk and then, avoiding the thump I was about to give him, fled into the hotel lobby.

We got the last room. Will stood in line for over an hour. And by then, the snow was coming thick and fast and people without rooms were bedding down in the lobby. The manager was handing out cups of coffee and stoking the fire in the fire pit that sat in the middle of the room. One kid was singing “Frosty the Snowman.” Folks chatted and swapped snow stories, while outside a little girl ignored the pleas of her mother and fashioned snow angels on the ground.

Will and I slept little that night. By the next morning, a foot of snow covered just about everything and the electricity was out. It was a clear, bright day and the sun reflected on the snow was so bright you had to wear sunglasses. We could see the Interstate, empty, silent, the snow which covered it smooth and untouched. Outside, kids were building snowmen and whooping with delight as snowballs flew. Parents huddled under blankets, watching, their frosty breath visible on the air.

The funny thing was nobody was worried or upset and there was a lot of laughter. We took turns keeping the fire pit supplied with wood and shared what food there was and a few enterprising souls retrieved coolers full of beer and soft drinks from their car trunks or the backs of their trucks. During the day, we would sit in the lobby, talking, the women exchanging addresses and phone numbers and the men swapping lies about fish and deer and mostly good naturedly talking about college football. Someone took a picture of me and Will standing in front of a snowman. We were holding hands. It was, it was like a time out from the real world.

At night, Will and I piled every blanket in the room onto the bed and cocooned ourselves to stay warm. A few days later, we were able to drive home. And nine months later our daughter was born. And, before you ask, no we didn't call her Blizzard. Not even Will is dumb enough to inflict that on an innocent child. We called her Holly. You know, as in Holiday. Will says he thanks the Lord we didn't stay at a Motel Six. I will admit he can be funny at times. We never got that divorce. We still talk about it sometimes.

And that picture of us and the snowman still sits on the mantel piece. Every time Will takes it down to retell the story to someone, Holly screams and leaves the room. I always poke him in the side when he talks about our cocoon. And when he gets to the part about Motel Six and everyone laughs, a loud guttural grunt emerges from Holly's room. Will thinks she is putting it on. But, I'm a girl and know better.

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Deb Jellett was born and raised in Alabama, but spent half her life in England, then Washington, D.C. She said she'd never return to the South, "but I am happy to say I am alive and well and living in Daphne, Alabama." She's starting a limited residence Master of Fine Arts program with Spalding University.

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Art is the unceasing effort to
compete with the beauty of flowers--
and never succeeding.

--Marc Chagall

CONFESSIONS OF A HURRICANE

Irene Latham

It's not every year one gets named a hurricane. So when Hurricane Irene appeared as a swirling mass on the screen in 1999, the novelty of hearing my name tossed about in the Wal-Mart check-out line made me grin with secret pleasure. Those people didn't know it, but they were talking about *me*.

My sister and I set right to work collecting newspaper headlines. We scoured the stands at the bookstores and snatched up the ones that applied: *Irene Smacks Cuba, Heads for Keys; Georgia Glad Irene is Swinging Wide; Irene give NY feeling of 'oh no, not again'*

I liked being a hurricane. Especially since it was, as my grandmother said, a "sweet" hurricane. Because, she said, *I* was sweet. And when it was over, I dedicated a double-page spread in my scrapbook to the experience.

Then along came another Hurricane Irene, the 2011 version. For all the delicious hype, the slow progression from tropical storm to genuine hurricane, the endless and exhausting predictions culled from interactive storm tracker maps charting its course, this Hurricane Irene turned out to be a sweet storm, too. Which was, in today's tragedy-hungry culture, ultimately a disappointment.

Once again, there were great headlines. But these were of the digital variety, and not nearly so snippable: *Hurricane Irene surges ashore in North Carolina; Irene, a bit weaker, begins its destructive run; Philadelphia prepares for Hurricane Irene's fury.*

Or maybe this new Irene, the 2011 version, isn't so easily entertained. Maybe she's seen too many sensationalistic news reports, too many boards on windows and grocery shelves empty of bread. This Irene understands the inconvenience of evacuation. This Irene has tasted salt and pain and fear and doesn't need a storm to feel grateful.

And oh how quickly the headlines abandon and fade.

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Irene Latham is a poet and novelist, writing in Birmingham, Alabama. She is poetry editor of the Birmingham Arts Journal. Her latest novel, Don't Feed the Boy, will be published by Macmillan in 2012. irene@irenelatham.com

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INSULATION

Liz Winn

Spring, April, the month of storms for this region of the South. I went to college in a city that's got its back to a river. It's a generational thing: my mother went there, my uncle went there, my grandfather, my great grandfather and now at last: me. After graduation, I moved back to my hometown a couple hours away to live with the folks, and a year and a half later, the city by the river got scoured clean off the map by a tornado. It was an evil storm that used the area's geography against it, eased itself down the river where there was no resistance, taking its time. All this I got second-hand. I haven't been back there since graduation, and I figure that as long as I don't see it, the campus where my mother used to saunter to class and the post office where my grandfather got his draft notice back in the Forties will still be there. I didn't count on the fallout, though, debris of all sorts landing in my town carried aloft by the wind: a Styrofoam cup from my family's favorite BBQ restaurant 60 miles away, a driver's license, a car tag, a torn photograph of two dark-haired children.

In our yard, I found bits of pink and yellow insulation clinging to the branches of trees. On the way to the library, I found what looked like cardboard, but wasn't. It was stiffer, heavier, pierced with crooked staples, and had traces of blue and yellow wallpaper that clung like cobweb. Part of a wall in somebody's house. I thought: Somebody once loved this wallpaper, some little old lady whose favorite colors were navy blue and goldenrod yellow, somebody's mother who saw that gold and blue striped pattern in a store and thought it would just do wonders on her living room wall.

I thought of a Holocaust exhibit I once saw: a glass case full of shoes on display, shoes that were no longer shoes, but instead withered shells of leather that once molded to feet. Where are the feet that once filled these shoes?

And what about this scrap of wallpaper here, a crooked sculpture left in the street? But some things you just got to put out of mind. I chucked it in a trash can and didn't look back.

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Liz Winn received her Bachelor of Art degree in English and Creative Writing from Hollins University, and went on to obtain her M.L.I.S. degree in Library Science from the University of Alabama. In addition to writing book reviews and looking for a job, she is also at work on a novel. ejwinn@gmail.com

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The non-profit Birmingham Arts Journal is sustained by its editors, donors and readers, with additional support from

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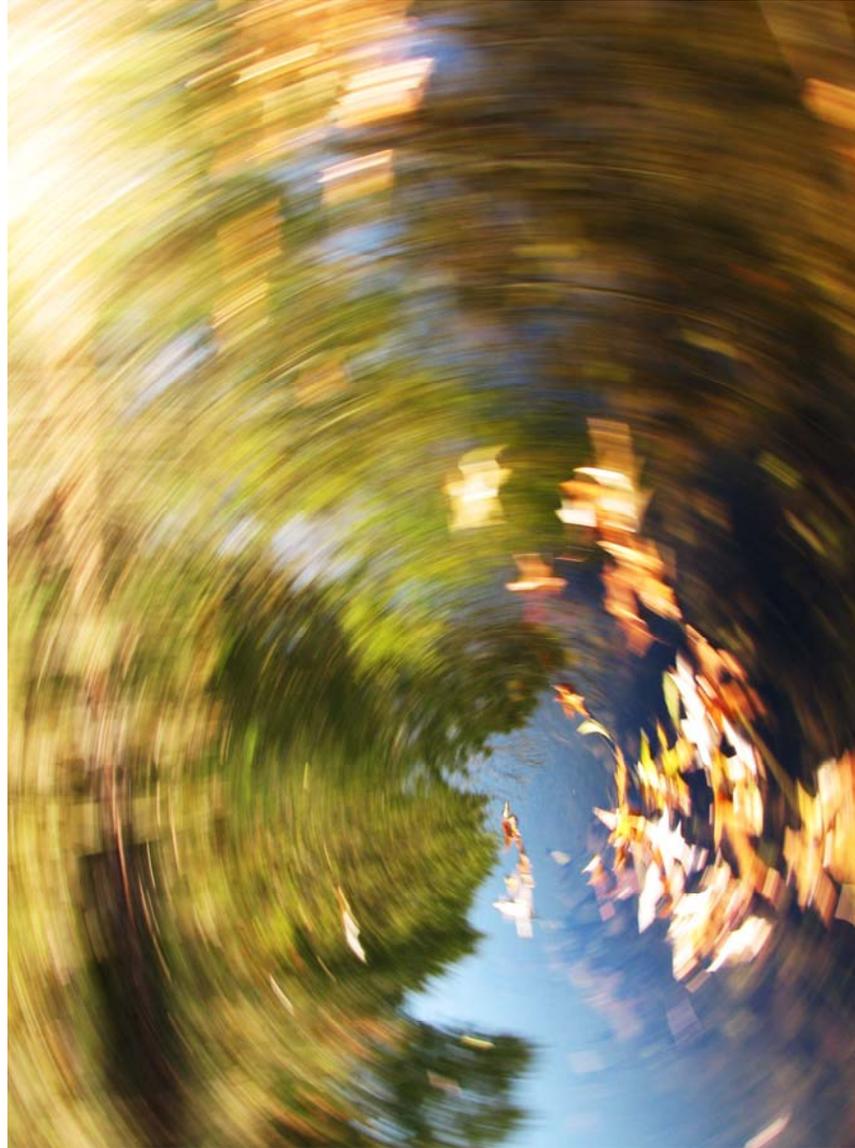
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