Birmingham Arts Journal

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Produced without profit by dedicated volunteers who believe that exceptional works by the famous, not-yet-famous, and never-to-be famous deserve to be published side by side in a beautiful and creative setting.

$5.00

Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **SOMETIMES I HEAR MY VOICE -** Digital Collage, 12" x 18"
Beth Conklin is a photographer and digital artist from Birmingham, AL, primarily self-taught in the area of digital collage. She shows work locally at Magic City Art Connection and Moss Rock Festival. Her blog, Here on Earth, *showcases her work and has been featured in* Artful Blogging *magazine.*
www.bethconklin.blogspot.com

Back Cover: **THE YELLOW BICYCLE –** Oil on Canvas - 12" x 9"
Libby Pantazis is retired from practicing law in Birmingham, AL. Now devoting full time and full energy to painting, her work can be seen in private collections, arceneauxgallery.com and area art shows. **www.arceneauxgallery.com/libby-pantazis.html**

THE PACE OF THINGS

Christine Poreba

And now another time had come.
—Wendell Berry

On some street near the white cat's house,
where we slowed to see if she was there

to scurry to the curb, throw her body on the sidewalk,
purr and turn as our dog sniffed, wiggling, paw out,

tail wagging, curious for whatever came next,
I looked up to see only the back of you:

your legs like branches of some other time,
your back a field, and above the wide distance

from shoulder to shoulder, a little stalk of hair held
to your whole round head, lifted softly with each step,

and fell again, lifted and fell into the air, again and again
in a rhythm that most nights on our walk is hidden

as the last parts of ourselves make a quiet phrase
behind us in the dark. Is this how growing old together goes—

after half a thousand evenings on the same route,
there'll be still another part of you to see, to know by heart?

.....

This poem is from Christine's first full-length collection, Rough Knowledge*, which won the 2014 Philip Levine Prize for Poetry and is just out from Anhinga Press. Her poems for adults and children have appeared in numerous publications. She writes and teaches English as a Second Language in Tallahassee, FL.* **www.christineporeba.com**

GRAPHIC MIGRAINE

Allen Johnson Jr.

One evening, after watching Fox News for too long I realized I had a migraine. I don't get migraines. After some thought, I began to suspect the garish, swirling, jagged, imploding, exploding, constantly changing color graphics of the Fox News Channel. The more drastic graphics were coupled with a sound effect like a jet plane flying over at about fifty feet. On an impulse, I decided to try to lodge a complaint. I picked up the phone. Information gave me the number for Fox News in New York City but I must have misdialed because I didn't get a computer. Someone answered.

"Evans. Production," the voice said.

"Is this Fox News?"

"Right," he answered, "Production Department."

"Can you tell me who's in charge of graphics?" I asked.

"That'd be Julia," he told me.

"May I speak to her?" I asked.

"Nope . . . can't talk."

"Busy?" I said.

"No, she can't talk . . . can't say words . . . she's a chimp," he said.

"Chip?"

"No, no . . . chimp . . . she's a chimpanzee."

I started to laugh.

"It's not so funny. How'd you like it if your boss was a chimpanzee? I mean . . . I'm for animal rights and all that, but this is going too far!"

"Why, did they make a chimpanzee your boss?" I asked him.

"Well . . . to tell you the truth, she is very good with graphics . . . Better'n me. I have to admit it. But here's the thing . . . she wasn't worth a damn before the LSD."

"LSD?"

"They put it in her bananas"

"I got to go," I told him. "I was gonna complain, but I don't suppose there's any point in that . . ."

"Nope, none at all," the guy said. "I tried it once. She just climbed up in my lap and gave me a big wet kiss in the ear. She's really a very nice boss; it's just kind of demeaning having to report to a chimpanzee."

I hung up the phone and checked out the convoluted, exploding color graphics and jet engine sound effects one more time.

"Well, that explains that," I said, groping for some Advil.

.....

Allen Johnson Jr. is storyteller, writer, poet and jazz guitar player. This story was previously published in the Huffington Post. He lives in Mercer, WA. **allenacree@gmail.com**

"You are capable of more than you know. Choose a goal that seems right for you and strive to be the best, however hard the path. Aim high. Behave honorably. Prepare to be alone at times, and to endure failure. Persist! The world needs all you can give."

—Edward O. Wilson

FRIDAY WITH DOTS AND GLASS
Digital Photograph
9.5" x 14.25"

Melanie Faith is an online writing instructor and tutor in rural Pennsylvania. Her photography was recently published in The Sandy River Review, *Fall 2015 issue. She enjoys spending time with her nieces, still-life and collage photography, and collecting quotations and shoes.* **writer@pa.net**

WHEN DEATH CAME

Karen Kurtz

Death stalked the halls of the nursing home
like a hungry bear in springtime
as Eleanor prepared for her journey.
“I’m not afraid,” she pointed to the ceiling.
“Do you see those shoes lined up?”
“Yes,” I lied.
“What if I don’t like any of them?”
“Oh, you won’t have to wear them.”
Eleanor’s thin, wasted body visibly relaxed.

The next night Eleanor’s face radiated amazement.
“I won’t need the shoes!
I may be going on a traveling horse!”
Curiosity overtook my deep sadness.
“Where are you going?
Are you going to meet God?”
“Quite possibly. Quite possibly.”
She extended her arms, full length,
Murmuring.

Her eyes turned inward.
She saw other realities,
more awesome,
more captivating,
and more decisive
than any I might glimpse.

At the moment of death,
Eleanor surrendered to faith and
rode a traveling horse through the door of darkness.
I still wonder if she saw Pegasus,
a mighty stallion with chariot,
or a dappled bay.

Three weeks after Death came
Eleanor's spirit returned from the mists.
The spicy, damask smell of old English roses
swirled around my bed,
growing stronger and stronger,
then fading away as gently
as she'd come.

.....

Karen Kurtz is former elementary school teacher, college administrator, editor, publisher, and consultant. Merit Winner in children's literature, Sophia's Gift, *2015 Writers-Editors Network International Writing Competition Merit Winner for previously published nonfiction article*, Comfort and Sanctuary: Dolls Along the Underground Railroad, 2015 *Writers-Editors Network International Writing Competition*. **kkurtz@bnin.net**

"Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it's tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."

— Antoine de Saint Exupery

BREAKING

Robert McDaniel

When I was ten, my brother Richard broke the rule mama gave us about playing outside. We weren't supposed to follow the trail through the lot beside our backyard. It wasn't our land, she told us. It wasn't safe. There were plenty of other woods to play in.

"They should have capped that old well. Things like that shouldn't be left for children to stumble over and fall in. I'll pick me a switch if I find ya'll out there."

He was eight years old then and not used to listening. When he was three or four mama found out that he needed tubes in his ears. She knew from the get-go he couldn't see. The eye doctor gave him glasses thick as an old Coke bottle and told her he'd only be able to make out shapes and colors without them. Mama wouldn't let him leave the yard to play without me, in case he lost his glasses.

At the far end of the trail was an old trailer full of trash. A woman lived there with her son. His name was Alex. We weren't allowed to play with him like the other kids on our street were. He was sixteen.

When he came into our backyard from up the trail, Richard and I were collecting pinecones into one of our daddy's plastic potting tubs. We almost had enough to win the pinecone fight we planned for when our cousins came to visit next. Alex had tried to join the last one, but mama sent him away.

"Y'all are wasting your time. Y'all won't be able to carry those buckets. They're too heavy," he said.

"We won't have to. We can throw them from the top o'the hill," I replied.

"But see here. These pinecones don't throw far enough for that."

He picked one out of the tub and threw it at the nearest tree. The pines that grew in our neighborhood shed fluffy cones the size of man's fist. They were the female cones; the ones that hold the seeds close to the stem to hide them from birds. During the summer, some of the cones get torn by squirrels, who peel away the hide, and scatter more seeds than they eat, wasting the ones who can't survive on their own yet.

The cone he threw rolled through the air in a lazy arc and bounced from the tree. We liked our pinecones. We would wait in the bushes for our cousins to come down the driveway on the days they would visit. We would try to be still so they wouldn't see us. Headshots were the best, especially when we got them from behind. We would lob a couple to the back of their heads. Our cousins would get mad and run inside to tattle. Mama would know it was true when she looked out of the window and saw me jumping around and hollering at

our cousins to come back out and fight with the cones that lay along their path to the house.

"Our cones are the best," I told Alex.

"Nah. Watch this."

He pulled a cone out of his jacket and held it up for me to see. Though it was early fall by then, it was still green. It hadn't opened. I didn't know why. He threw it at the same tree and it didn't hum or roll through the air like a fat bee. It struck the tree and ricocheted. It flew so fast that I couldn't tell the sound of it in the air from the sound of the bark peeling from the tree. When it ricocheted, it struck our daddy's aluminum sided tool shed and left a dent. He told me that he knew where to get more.

"Y'all won't need more than a hand full. We can run up there and back before your mama knows y'all're gone."

All of us in the neighborhood had a rule that we wouldn't throw rocks or anything else that drew blood: only sticks and pinecones. But these pinecones would draw blood, and I didn't want Alex to join our next fight with them. He was the only one that cheated; he threw rocks at the younger kids and dared them to not flinch. I asked him where they were.

"You know that tree with the thorns on it up past the big rocks?"

"Yep."

"That's where we're going."

"Our mama told us not to go that way because of the old well."

"There ain't no well. She just wants you close so she can make you do chores. I've seen her make you cut grass."

"I cut grass 'cuz I'm the oldest."

"Then maybe Richard wants to go."

"He's not allowed."

"You just don't want him to get the pinecones first."

"If you don't leave I'll go get my mama."

I told Richard to go get her, but I don't think he noticed. Because of his ears, I learned to talk in a shrill voice so he'd hear me better. Done it since we first started talking together, but this time I was trying to make my voice deeper so Alex would know I was in charge.

"Have it your way," Alex said.

He stomped on one of our pinecones on the way out. It left a pile of flakes in his footprint. I can't remember the name we had for those flakes, the ones the squirrels left behind when they feasted. I hated them because they stuck in my feet,

so I never went barefoot on account of how many there were. Richard went barefoot always and they never bothered him. He'd work his way through the yard one step at a time, glasses down on the tip of his nose because they were so heavy, and never step on one.

After a while I took off through the woods on an old deer path I'd found. It ran broadside of the trail, and skirted the lot we weren't allowed to use. I knew the spot Alex was talking about. It was just inside the open patch of grass where the trail blended into wild parts of the forest. Deer grazed there in the spring. Does let their fawns play in the thicket just beyond it while they ate. It was as close as they'd come to Alex's trailer. In the spring, I'd find tracks of fawns inside a doe's tracks. I'd seen them follow in pairs, nose to tail after the doe, stepping in her tracks (deer always have twins). It was instinctual. It hid the scent of the young in the scent of the mother. You can see their tiny prints just inside hers.

I made the end of the trail and stepped beneath the canopy of young pines. My grandfather told me that all the trees fight it out among themselves over who would rule the forest, and I knew it was true. They would shove each other out. Their roots would rob the others of water. Kind against kind: hardwoods against the rest. The pines sprung up faster on account of how weak the soil was when the logging companies cleared the forest long before the land was auctioned off to the poor. The topsoil washed away in the rain. The pines have shallow roots, he told me. He cut pulpwood when he was young. Pines can grow into soil that runs shallow because their roots grow out, not down. Once they had sprung up thick, they'd choke each other out, and the dead would rot to make new soil. They'd open into a canopy once they got to full height, and other trees would come into the space beneath. Trees would come that shed their leaves in the fall. More soil would come from the rotting leaves and it would be anybody's soil after that. Any seed could sprout. It would be back and forth for centuries between the pines and the hardwoods, nobody winning, just circling around one another in groves, growing in wherever the seeds took, leaving soil behind to feed the other's saplings.

I found the tree. This one was different. I didn't know what it was. It gave no seeds that I ever saw. No cones or fruit. The birds didn't flock to it. The squirrels didn't climb it when they heard me coming. It was in a void under the canopy where the pines and hardwoods mingled. It smelled like wet dirt. The wind was muffled by the surrounding forest and the canopy kept all but a few shafts of light from hitting anything directly. The tree didn't grow straight up towards the canopy to get at the light. It bent around in an upward spiral like a rope in your

hand when you curl it. It stopped short at the height of a grown man. It was grey-green with patches of brown like a paper birch. Black thorns the size of a nail grew out of its bark in random places on the trunk and branches. They were the only things on the tree that grew straight.

I looked around and didn't see any pine that still had green cones, but decided it might've been because I couldn't see high enough. I ran over to where the big rocks were. They were old chunks of granite that jutted out in places in the woods. They'd been worn smooth by the rain. Green moss covered them all. I stood on top of the tallest and looked up. I thought Alex may have lied to me so I couldn't find them on my own. I didn't see any green cones.

I heard mama call for me through the woods, so I hopped off the rock. I landed on some small stones that must have broken off the larger one. They were smooth. I put a few in my pockets and headed towards the house along the deer path.

Halfway there I heard footfalls along the other trail. I turned aside and broke through the brush along the deer path to get a look. I saw Alex and Richard through the trees on the other side of the one acre lot. Alex pointed to a small, lean-to shed propped up against a pine tree. It looked like it was made of boards from the old well-house. Richard followed him into it.

I broke into a trot towards the lean-to. I tripped over a fallen branch. Halfway across, I spotted a bit of rock sticking out of the ground. I came to it at a full run and jumped over it, landing on leaves that made me slip and fall again. When I got up I saw that it was concrete, not rock. It was what remained of the old well. The top gaped at the branches above it.

I fell only a few paces from the lean-to. When I pulled away the sheet Alex had tacked over the opening I saw Richard sitting cross legged. Alex had his glasses in his hand. There was another boy I didn't know standing

behind Richard. He looked like he was older than me. There was an open knife on the ground and a few pages from a pornographic magazine scattered beneath Alex's feet. There was a Ouija board and a few colored dildos on top of a milk crate in the furthest corner.

I know what these things are now. I know what to call them, but I didn't have words for them then. I just remember being too hot to breathe, even though it was October and cool. I wanted to spit. No words came when I tried to tell Richard to come away with me. Alex glared at me through the opening and I tried to run. I could only walk. Mama was still calling. Every time I heard her through the trees, I quickened. I was at a full sprint when I reached her at the edge of our backyard.

"Robert, where is your brother?"

I pointed and told her he was with Alex.

Mama has the loudest footsteps I've ever heard. The woods around us echoed with branches snapping beneath her. She tore a small bush up by the roots when it snagged on her shoe-strings. They had to have heard her in the lean-to, because Alex was standing outside pointing her way when she got there. Richard was beside him. Richard was quiet the whole time. I'm sure he couldn't see anything but mama's shape when she got close enough. The sheet blocked the inside of the lean-to.

"Oh, I was just showing him where Robert was," Alex said.

"You have until the count of three to give me his glasses."

Mama didn't come for an explanation. She didn't switch Richard when we got back to the house. When daddy got home from work, she let him know what happened. He spoke to me over dinner.

"The next time you run off and leave your brother like that, I'll blister your little ass." It never happened again.

A few days later, Mama took the car and went grocery shopping because daddy was off work. He was inside playing a board game with Richard. I was in the front yard. I was sitting on the trampoline with the stones I'd gathered in the woods. There were five of them. They were different sizes, but the water had worn them equally smooth. I saw Alex cutting through our backyard as a shortcut, as I knew he would if he saw the car wasn't there. When he came down our driveway towards the road, I put the biggest stone in my pocket and jumped off.

"Do you wanna throw this new football with me?"

"Where is your mama?"

"At the store with Richard."

Alex jumped over the fence and we walked up to the top of the hill near the house were Richard had left his ball. I picked it up and told Alex to run down to the bottom of the hill to catch it. I pulled the rock from my pocket once his back was to me. I threw it at him as hard as I could when he was halfway down the hill. I watched the hill drop beneath it. It looked as if it were going to go to high and miss him.

"Catch!"

Alex turned around and threw his hands up to catch. The rock struck his elbow. He let out a cry that smothered the sound of rock against his bone. He grabbed his arm at the elbow and started up the hill. Daddy heard him from inside and stepped onto the porch. I rushed to the top step. Alex came to the bottom.

Daddy didn't wait for an explanation. I could see the yellow knob of bone jutting out where the rock had cut Alex's skin.

"Best thing you can do is take your ass on, boy." He said to Alex.

Daddy stood behind me and the sun was setting behind him. He stood so close he cast his whole shadow over me. I imagine Alex saw more silhouette than anything, looking up at him from the bottom step, directly facing the light. His mouth twisted with pain and rage.

"Go on inside and play with your brother," he said to me. I don't know what he told Alex, but I never saw him again.

I'd thought to ambush him on the way back from the lean-to with mama and Richard. I felt the rocks knocking in my pocket and pulled one out to look at it. I thought to trick him like he tricked me.

I looked up from my hand and watched mama walking with Richard. She'd put his glasses back on him. He worked his way carefully through the woods after her, glasses down on the end of his nose because they were heavy. He was barefoot. He stepped in her footprints silently, one after the other.

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Robert McDaniel was born along the Fall Line of Georgia's Piedmont. He studied English at Georgia College and State University. His stories are of being whittled to manhood from his half-wild youth. He dedicates his work to his wife, Alyce, and their future children.
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UNBOUND

Willie Williams
7.5" x 13"
Intaglio Print

Around the age of 4, Willie Williams began to learn how to draw and paint with the help of his father. In the 8th grade, he attended Alabama School of Fine Arts and graduated from the Visual Arts Department. Currently he is an art major at Birmingham-Southern College.
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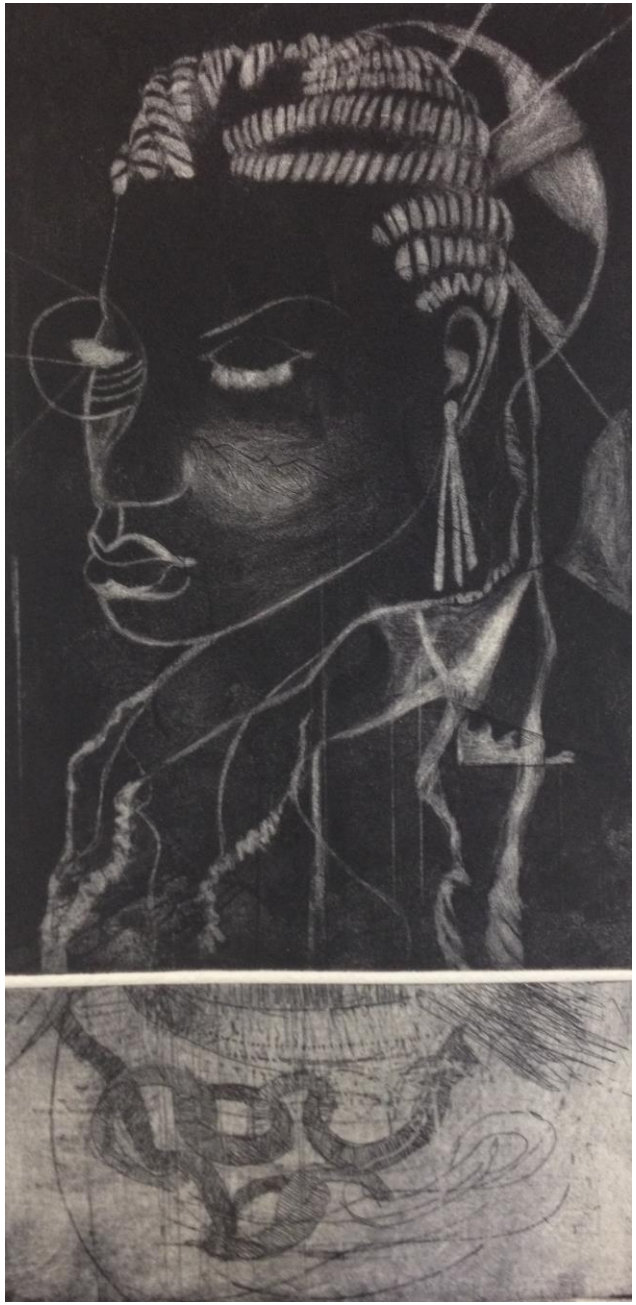

HIGH TIDE

Marian Willmott

Last night we sat on the ocean beach until dark,
lulled by the hugeness of it all,
our bodies still vital enough to seek one another,
lives entwined, almost inseparable,
our time waning.

Tomorrow we will return to the home
that holds our past like a skin –
a clay horse our daughter made,
a spot on the ceiling
where our kids threw spaghetti,
a wooden spoon with a carved handle
I've held for over half a century.

I've been excising - scalpel and forceps,
drawings the mice got into,
years of old Christmas cards,
a palomino pony bleeding its stuffing,
love of my childhood.

Morning sun ignites the dunes
as we return to the beach.
High tide has erased our footprints,
the place we sat last night holding hands.

We walk in silence
letting icy waves break
over our bare feet
and sand warm them again.

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Marian Willmot, an artist and writer in Vermont, enjoys the solitude of mountains and a vital artistic community. Her work has been published in Calyx, Denver Quarterly, Salamander, Worchester Review, Louisville Review, Karamu (Bluestem), *and* Comstock Review*, as well an anthology,* Unbearable Uncertainty. Turnings*, a poetry chapbook, was published by Pudding House Publications, and her poem,* In Velvet *was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is currently working on a full length manuscript.*
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DOUBLE DIP SUNDAY

Donna Richards

Dinner on the grounds has always been a part of the south. Sunday dinner after church is always a smorgasbord of delight. A buffet of carbohydrates that would make an Atkins eater change religions. Sundays in the seventies in Jacksonville, Alabama, at the Dead Sea Baptist church were not for the faint of heart. None of this candy-coated motivational speaking religion like we have today, beginning at 8:45 and you're home free by 9:45 with your week's duty done. No sir, this was hard core speaking in tongues, stay all day and half the night religion with an overweight preacher sweating up a storm, galloping all over his church, mopping his brow and shouting the word of God for all the sinners in six counties to hear. We were at church Sunday morning, Sunday night and at least two other nights a week. At our church there was power in the blood and magic in the potato salad!

It was 1972, the summer I and my best friend Dew turned 13. Now I know what you are thinking, what a cool name, right? Actually his God given name was Franklin Longfellow Wadsworth Stamper. His mother was a North Carolina mountain girl with big dreams for her first born son. She figured with a name like that he could not fail. She could turn any word into a four syllable one and every time he got into trouble, which was every day, you could hear her all over the neighborhood, "Franklin Longfellow Wadsworth Stamper! DEW YOU HEAR ME TALKING TO YOU?" Obviously he did, hell, we all did; therefore he became known as just Dew to all us boys. This was a double dip Sunday, which meant we had breakfast and lunch at church because the morning service had also included a funeral. Brother Sanders had passed away most inconveniently in bed. Not his own, you see, but his neighbor's wife's, while her husband Tom was on a dedicated run to Atlanta with some R.C. Cola. A little bit of a predicament, but he was a good Baptist all the same and we intended to bury him that way.

Boys back then were not like boys now. We didn't have video games, iPhone and laptops. We had bikes, skateboards and *Playboy* magazines. The hottest car around was still the '69 Camaro. Our parents all drove big Buicks and station wagons with no seatbelts, and eight-track tape decks. "Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress" was the hit of the day, *The Godfather* won every award for movies that there was, and we were still two years away from hearing what would become our state's anthem, Sweet Home Alabama by Lynyrd Skynyrd, for the first time ever. We also had fathers who would beat you with a belt if you were in trouble. The dads back then thought time out was what they needed after beating the brakes off your butt. Spare the rod/ spoil the child was the most quoted scripture in town.

Me and Dew were all dressed up in our miniature leisure suits of lemon yellow and pale blue. We looked like a couple of damn polyester Easter eggs. White shirts and plaid ties with white patent leather shoes to match. If nothing else that Sunday morning, we were looking forward to eating the great food made by the hands of good Christian women. Of course we were also hoping that Mrs. Jules Redwood Davenport would wear that most inappropriate cut all the way up to heaven dress she wore two weeks ago. My mamma said it was a sin. Dew and me was sure thinking about sinning that summer. Mrs. Jules Davenport had become our math teacher this year and you never met two boys who loved math any more than we did after meeting her. Long dark hair and miniskirts were just two of her attractions.

That Sunday turned out to be a red letter day and not just because of the words that Jesus spoke, neither. All went well with breakfast and with the morning service. The funeral went by pretty fast and then the real hell fire and brimstone preaching began. About an hour into it I noticed that Dew's mamma was making little birds and cups from Juicy Fruit wrappers trying to keep his little sister entertained. Keep in mind, churches back then didn't have air conditioning and we were all sweating like slaves. Finally, the benediction music started around 1:30 and my stomach was rumbling. As we made our way to the fellowship hall my mamma grabbed me by the collar and said, "Boy, remember, let the grownups eat first." That's how it used to be—grownups ate first and kids were to be seen and not heard. My mamma was dressed to the nines in the Simplicity baby doll dress that she had sewn last week, with her hair in a beehive bouffant. In the south, the higher the hair, the closer to God. Mrs. Davenport's lime sherbet chiffon dress and her wedding pearls both spoke of class. As she passed in front of us, her sling back high-heeled sandals clicked importantly down the linoleum-tiled floor. A whiff of JOY perfume followed in her trail.

At the buffet table, first thing I noticed was three bowls of potato salad. All Tupperware with burp-able lids in harvest gold, avocado green and bright sunrise orange. There was also ham, and fried chicken, which we all called the gospel bird because it was always served to the preacher on Sunday. There was a mountain of biscuits and gallons of gravy. I adored gravy. There were casseroles galore, mashed potatoes swimming in a sea of butter, ambrosia and green Jello molds with pineapple chunks. Snow white coconut cakes, pound cake, and my favorite, orange cake with real orange slices caught my eye. Some people have a sweet tooth, all 32 of mine were sugared up. I rubbed my hands together with anticipation, my mouth was watering, and I was praying hard that I got through the line before all the cake was gone.

Southern women are the best cooks in the world and true ladies until football season starts each year. Then the redneck starts to show. Last year we had a shooting at the Piggly Wiggly, one sister shot another one's husband over the Alabama and Auburn game. It was my mamma's second cousin's daughter. In the south there is always craziness in the family; you just have to find out whose side it is on. War Eagle and Roll Tide, now that's serious business down here—like fighting for the North or the South you got to choose a side and stick with it. But I digress, dear reader. Let me get back to what became known as the Southern Lady Smack Down at the Dead Sea Baptist Church. I am not really sure how it got started. Seems that someone made a comment about one of the potato salads having sweet pickles instead of dill cubes, which we all know is a culinary mistake. Then it progressed to the preacher's wife, Mrs. Sadie, asking Mrs. Johnson why she did not use Blue Plate mayonnaise. Somehow in the mix my sweetheart Mrs. Davenport, proud maker of avocado bowl potato salad made with Bama Mayonnaise, was called a cheap floozy. When she said, "Bless y'all's heart, you ought to not be gossiping in the house of the Lord." My mamma spoke up and said, "Well, honey, it is not gossip if everyone knows it: if your dress was a hair shorter we could all see what God gave you!" I guess my daddy had been eyeballing that dress more than he should of. Like father, like son.

Next thing I knew there was food flying, hair pulling and potato salad wrestling in the floor! Dew and me did what any good boys would do, grabbed the two biggest cakes, half a ham and a jug of tea and headed outside. By the time all was said and done there was food in the fans, on the floor, and all over the walls. The preacher and the men broke up the fights and all the women left for home looking worse for wear, except my mamma —she came out of the fight looking cool as a cucumber without a hair out of place. That half can of Aqua Net she used every morning was worth its weight in gold during a brawl. Later, I overheard Daddy calling her One Punch Wynonna. Apparently, the only woman that had tried to slap my mamma had got laid out cold. My mamma was half Cherokee, raised up with three brothers by the meanest moonshiner in all Calhoun county and would just as soon fight you as look at you. Luckily most of the women got over it pretty quick and things went back to normal. Or as normal as they can be in a small, southern town.

As for me and Dew it was the best lunch and entertainment we had all year. Thirty years later we still go to the Dead Sea every Sunday. Dew, his wife and four kids, me and the former Mrs. Davenport, now Mrs. Randall, much to my mamma's amazement. They actually like each other now. At first it was not pretty. She was 10 years older than me, my math teacher, and divorced, but like

everything else a little bit of time makes everything go down easier. Now make no mistake, my mamma will still call her out on too short of a dress, too much make-up, or too much sage in the dressing but all in all they get along.

The Dead Sea has not changed too much and if you look real close in the corner of the ceiling in the fellowship hall one remaining dill cube is still suspended in time, a testament to the day that southern women went over the edge and I had an entire orange cake all to myself. Amen and Roll Tide! A few more Sundays like that and the south may rise again.

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Donna Richards lives in Gaylesville, AL, with her five sons. She attends Gadsden State Community College, majoring in English. **Donnarichards@bellsouth.net**

"Most of what happens in our lives takes place in our absence."

–Salman Rushdie

WHAT SAVES YOU

Ann Gengarelly

…and what saves you is a single light
Lighthousekeeping, Jeanette Winterson

She was born from the womb
of a woman who couldn't wholly love,
a woman splintered like cracked wood.

And as she aged she dreamt
herself back in time, dreamt
she could meld the different shapes
of mother into a new geometry;
a different equation of light, but

the mother who loved Schubert and flowers
embraced the dark figure
whose nails
tore at her heart.

Light and Shadow.
Shadow and Light.

"A poultice on the heart…" that's what
might have grown had all her parts
come together like different movements
in a sonata

whose composer hears light every ten
seconds, radiating from a distant lighthouse,
light within the vast dark sea.
But the mother listened
only to *The Death and the Maiden,*
while outside thorns grew on daisies and tulips.

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Ann Gengarelly is a poet/teacher. She lives in Marlboro, VT, where she writes and teaches the art of poetry. Over the past fourteen years she has been invited to lead poetry workshops at Little Singer Community School on the Navajo Nation. Her background includes an MA from Goddard College and an honorary Doctorate in the Fine Arts from Marlboro College for teaching excellence. **agengar@sover.net**

BACK AT THE UNIVERSITY

James Miller Robinson

In Ferguson Cafeteria
I glimpse
from the corner of one eye
the black
of a thin man's suit coat
several tables away
across the years
and think
for one absurd instant
it's Everette Maddox
bowed over a book of Berryman,
sipping coffee from a Styrofoam cup,
letting his thoughts play
with the sly and melancholy
before he goes to teach a class.
It is when he was still on fire
with possibility and promise
with recent poems
in *The New Yorker* and *Paris Review*,
before he left for New Orleans
and propped himself on a stool
at the Maple Leaf where
they dubbed him “the professor”
as he presided over the poetry
readings in the courtyard
where the granite marker
and bronze plaque
that bear his name
and the epitaph lie flat
beneath the dusty leaves
of tropical trees.

I even catch a whiff
of the incense of his pipe,
and am absolutely sure I see
a question mark of smoke
hovering above the empty chair.

.....

James Miller Robinson *has been published recently in* Texas Review, Rio Grande Review, BorderSenses, Maple Leaf Rag IV and V, Xavier Review, *and others. He has two chapbooks of poetry:* The Caterpillars at Saint Bernard *(Mule on a Ferris Wheel Press, 2014) and* Boca del Rio in the Afternoon *(Finishing Line Press, 2015). He is a legal/court Spanish interpreter/translator with the Alabama Administrative Office of Courts.* **jmr815@comcast.net**

"More than anything else, I'd like to be an old man with a good face, like Hitchcock or Picasso."

–Sean Connery

BUTTERFLY MUMMIES, LONG AGO LOVE AFFAIRS, AND FOUR-LEAF CLOVERS

Jim Reed

A lone customer sits huddled in the shadow of the old post office in the Museum of Fond Memories. She peers intensely at the open letter in her hands, a letter dated in pen and ink, "August, 1909."

The carefully structured letter recounts, in several pages, a day in the life of the long-gone author, a narrative intended for the eyes and heart of the reader, who is simply named James. It's a love note.

Earlier, the customer finds a postcard dated 1899, with "Wish you were here!" cheerfully signed by Alice, who is visiting St. Louis. One small notebook reveals a four-leaf clover, pressed there in 1933. A butterfly wisps its way through the air and onto the floor. It is perfectly preserved inside a pamphlet on Manners, dated 1889. A 1952 telegram in the letter box announces with regret the death of a family member, an old dance card lists the signatures of men who once whirled the light fantastic with a seventeen-year-old girl, an envelope yields its contents–one silky bookmark with tassel, a tattered photograph from 1922 forever freezes in place the smiling faces of two young swim-suited moms at the beach with kids amok.

The customer, now lost in time, is in her third hour of trolling the generations. She is beginning to feel hunger, she knows there is much else to do outside this old bookstore, but she is reluctant to leave, now that these foundlings are begging to be adopted and nurtured.

She adds the love letter to her small affordable stack of paper ephemera, stands up to stretch, folds the metal chair and leans it in its place, then walks dreamily to the counter where the elderly proprietor awaits.

Her smile is sad and jubilant. "I love these things. I wish I could buy them all!"

The shopkeeper glows. "I'm so glad you appreciate these lives, and I'm even more glad that you plan to adopt them and keep them safe"

It is an idiosyncrasy of the owner that he views the contents of his shop as orphans awaiting the protection of adoptive parents. He is grateful that at least this one customer "gets" it.

The woman pays for her selections and clutches package and purse to her chest as she slowly heads for the front door. As she moves, she tenderly touches and examines other old memories, a frayed book, a newspaper clipping, an ancient valentine…and eventually exits the shop.

The proprietor walks over to the metal post office boxes, straightens up their corner a bit, moves a couple of potential obstructions, and thus prepares the area for a new customer.

He wonders what the next dreamer will be like

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Jim Reed curates the Museum of Fond Memories and Reed Books in Birmingham, AL. His blogs and podcasts are available at **www.redclaydiary.com** *and his museum/bookshop.* **www.jimreedbooks.com**

"Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort.

—John Ruskin

JOON BUGS

Jerome Vason

36" x 24"

Mixed Media

Jerome Vason holds a BA degree in Art *from Berea College in Kentucky. While serving in the U.S. Army, he provided artistic expertise whenever the opportunity arose and retired after over 20 years of service. He is a board member of Artists Incorporated in Vestavia, AL; his art is displayed there as well as art festivals throughout the U.S.* **vasonb@bellsouth.net**

Vol. 13 Issue 1

SUCKER PUNCHED BY THUGS

Michael Calvert

I was sucker punched in the gut. The TV screen showed an angry crowd blocking the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and North Avenue in West Baltimore and flames engulfing a block on Gay Street in East Baltimore. CNN's Anderson Cooper was "live" as young, Black men ran forward and hurled bricks at phalanxes of police hunched behind Plexiglass shields. Helicopter searchlights swept the streets. Fleeing looters and burning buildings filled the screen. I was surprised that the CNN pictures hit me so hard—like an uppercut to the stomach I didn't see coming.

Some 47 years before, as a 24-year old city planner in Baltimore, I had watched from my downtown apartment as plumes of smoke rose above flames from these same neighborhoods after Martin Luther King's assassination. Police and fire sirens rose and fell as I witnessed chaos then. Those sounds and images came rushing back and nauseated me all these years later.

During the next twelve years, I labored to make plans to rebuild stores, houses, and playgrounds in the burnt neighborhoods. On several nights of each week, I met with residents in church basements, recreation centers, and community centers. I cajoled the bureaucracy, city councilmen, and even the mayor to build the projects inscribed on maps during those neighborhood meetings. The revival of Baltimore's inner city was a cause I still cared about 47 years later.

I hesitated, but I came to Baltimore for our scheduled visit three days after the riots of 2015 to see Finley, my two-year-old granddaughter, and her parents. On a perfect day in May, children squealed as they chased each other up ladders, across platforms, and down corkscrew slides on colorful equipment with a carpet of wood chips to cushion them should they fall. Parents and grandparents dutifully pushed swings while children demanded they go higher and faster. Johns Hopkins University was nearby, and the playground looked like a UNICEF brochure with children from China, India, and Africa.

My granddaughter's twin blonde ponytails flew while I pushed her as high as I dared. A thin African-American man in a purple Ravens jersey and sweatpants entered the park with a boy clutching his hand. Although

the boy, who wore a Ravens tee shirt, seemed too young to swing safely, he was soon chortling with glee on the swing next to us.

"They never seem to get tired of swinging," I ventured.

"Little ones love it. Raven's my only son, but I remember my daughters couldn't get enough of the playground. They in high school now."

"Finley's my granddaughter. I'm long past having teenagers in the house. They can be difficult."

"My girls live with their Momma, but I hear some stories. Now this little man is my only son. I'm sure he's going to be a ballplayer. Football, I hope, but basketball would be OK."

Finley had to scream to get my attention. She said she was ready to go to the sandbox. Raven announced, "Me, too, Daddy."

Once the kids were settled in the sandbox with shovels and buckets, we sat on a bench and I introduced myself.

"Reggie Jones here. I bring my boy here most afternoons. His mother picks him up when she gets off work in the cafeteria at the Loyola dorm. I work at Alonzo's right up the road here on Cold Spring Lane."

"I've been to Alonzo's. Really good burgers."

"You're right about that. I work the grill."

"You probably grilled those good burgers."

"I reckon I did, but I'm moving up. Now I'm tending bar," he said with a slow nod when a low-flying, police helicopter clattered by. Our eyes followed its path until it hovered to the southwest.

"It's over the Sandtown neighborhood. That's where I live, but I don't want any part of that foolishness that's been going on there. Them punk kids stealing, burning, and carrying on."

"Bad for the neighborhood," I replied. "Especially losing the CVS."

"Right. Where old people going to get their medicine now? CVS was the only drug store we had. Now, I don't care much for them Koreans."

"Koreans?" I asked.

"They run all the corner stores. Sell liquor, cigarettes, and lottery tickets mostly, but some got some groceries, clothes, even toys. Prices all sky high."

"No supermarkets and other stores, I guess."

"Nah, only the Koreans, and they don't give a damn about us," Reggie said louder.

"I been going to Mr. Kim's near my house for years, mainly to cash my paycheck, and I always buy some things. He knows me, but the night I

needed a white shirt to start working behind the bar, Mr. Kim wouldn't let me have one until I could pay him. That slant-eyed bastard pissed me off good." He paused. "Still and all, it ain't right to tear up their stores and burn them out."

"All this is sure giving Baltimore a black eye," I replied and immediately wondered if the phrase was offensive.

Reggie was unfazed. He said, "I'm right there with President Obama and our mayor. Those bottle throwers and store burners are nothing but thugs. I hope they arrest them all and put them in jail for a good long time."

"Me too. Those thugs destroyed the CVS and a lot of progress that's taken years to build. A God-damned shame," I replied with more fervor than I intended.

The modulated thump of the helicopter had become the bass line for the rise and fall of the children's shouts and shrieks for a couple of minutes.

"You're a big Ravens fan," I said, motioning toward his jersey.

"You bet! Named my son Raven. He watches their games on TV with me. He's going to be a big fan like his daddy. Maybe he play for the Ravens someday. Who knows?"

He looked at his watch and said, "Time for me to hand off Raven to his Momma and go tend bar. My white shirt is pressed and waiting for me in the back room. Later, man."

Reggie coaxed Raven out of the sandbox, and then walked with him slowly towards the Loyola dorms on Cold Spring Lane. I extracted Finley, brushed sand off as best I could, and buckled her into the stroller for the walk home.

My daughter-in-law was on the porch swing scanning the *Baltimore Sun* and took Finley inside for a snack before dinner. I sank into a wicker chair on the porch and picked up the paper. As I read stories about how the peaceful protests were overwhelmed by thugs looting businesses and torching buildings, my grip on the newspaper tightened, and I shook my head in sad disbelief. Along with many others in city government and in the community, I had pushed to spend millions of dollars, probably hundreds of millions, in Sandtown and other neighborhoods for new apartments and houses, modern schools and recreation centers, additional playgrounds and
ball fields, and new stores like the CVS that was now a charred shell. How could there be riots once again after all that rebuilding?

"Hello," said Roger from the porch of the adjoining row house.

"How are you doing?" with a benevolent smile.

"Fine, I guess. Just reading about these thugs destroying their neighborhoods. Very distressing."

"I agree, it is very troubling," replied Roger, a kindly neighbor who was a retired child psychologist from Johns Hopkins University.

"Thugs! That's what the president and the mayor called the rioters, and they got it right," I said with a surge of emotion that surprised me.

"I understand. Didn't it begin with high school students trying to get home on the subway at the Mondawmin Mall Station, but the subway was shut down?" asked Roger.

"Yeah, someone started trouble in the mall and they all ran inside. Some of them broke windows, grabbed merchandise, and the riot was on," I snorted.

"Do you think some of the students were just curious and wanted to see what was happening?"

"I suppose so, but CNN showed lots of young people running out with their arms full of clothes, sneakers, and whatever they could carry in their arms. Clothes on hangers, bottles of liquor, window fans…" I squinted and scowled at Roger.

"Yes, hard to understand," said Roger as he stroked his chin like the counselor he was. "How valuable were the goods that each of the looters carried away? Probably not worth much. Maybe it was a statement. More likely, I suspect, most of those young people were caught up in the frenzy. Mob psychology is powerful."

"Well, thugs threw rocks and bottles at the police and firemen. Several were hospitalized. They even cut the fire hoses when the firefighters were trying to save the CVS for the neighborhood. Serious crimes. I hope the police identify these criminals on videos and put them behind bars."

"Maybe some of the students and other young people were just watching all the excitement and making pictures with their cell phones to show their friends. You know how people stop to take photographs of approaching tornados, slow down to see what they can at highway accidents, and gather outside bars to watch fist fights." Roger offered tentatively.

"Yeah, but I saw lots of young people on TV, yelling slogans and cheering on the thugs destroying their own neighborhoods. The young people should have made them stop."

"Hard to stop a mob. It's asking a lot to have someone step in front of a mob," said Roger evenly, and continued, "You're right, there were definitely some awful crimes committed, especially the assaults on police and firemen, but I suspect that most of the young people on the streets were not thugs."

"You're probably right, just a few were smashing glass, grabbing merchandise, and throwing stuff at the police," I conceded reluctantly. "But the others should have gone home."

"As a psychologist, I always told parents that their teenagers may do some appalling things, but they are not irredeemably bad kids. There were surely some who had very bad behavior out there, but I don't think most of those young people are thugs," Roger concluded with a shrug and a smile.

Finley came out to tell me dinner was ready. I scooped her into my arms and said, "You're never going to act like a thug are you?"

"No, Granddad," she replied with her head cocked slightly. I squeezed her tightly.

The next afternoon, Finley and I arrived at the playground and found Reggie and Raven at the swings. Raven was excited to see Finley, but Reggie responded to my cheerful hello with a grunt. When the kids moved on to the sandbox, I tried again, asking Reggie, "How you doing today?"

He stared silently, sighed and said, "Been waiting in lines down at the police lockup. My daughters got caught up in that mess at Mondawmin. They said they were just standing around watching and trying to get me on my cell to come and get them because the transit was shut down. They don't like the police, especially them at their high school, but I sure don't see them throwing stuff at the police. My girls are good kids—not thugs, you hear?"

"Yeah. I'll bet they were just trying to get home and got caught in a group that the police grabbed and took downtown. Maybe someone in the group said something or threw something, but even if your daughters did something, they're not thugs."

"You're right about that, man."

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Michael Calvert, a native of Columbus, Ohio, is a retired urban planner who labored for 28 years to revitalize downtown Birmingham, Alabama. He is pursuing memoirs for family and friends under the tutelage of Carolynne Scott and Denise Trimm. **michaelalancalvert@yahoo.com**

VAPOR FROM A GRATE

Jason Walker

I am springswept,
though it's not spring
yet. The last
needle

falls.
I seek
what may
be left of you. Lord,

I seek what
may be left.
.....

Jason Walker teaches composition at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His poems appear or are forthcoming in Measure, ThinkJournal, Cellpoems, Hawaii Pacific Review, The Great American Wise Ass Poetry Anthology, *and elsewhere. He also writes fiction and plays bass in Limbs, a local rock band.*
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"I still climb Mount Everest just as often as I used to."

–Dr. Seuss

YOU CAN ALWAYS CHANGE YOUR MIND

Sarah Burns

This meant as encouragement
from my father, to stride forward
confidently into the unknown
as we kids balked, indecisive
at certain key
or not-so-key points,
the luxurious heaviness of
choice.

And so I often did:
swapping universities,
frequently jumping cities,
moving breezily
from man to man,
sampling jobs,
begging friends to
lug my belongings to yet
another apartment.

I am grateful
for his permission to risk
and the practiced ease
to morph when necessary
or simply desired,
although I have often been
a rock skipping lightly on the
waters of the world
until
two small people materialized
and it comes as a relief, rather,
to be held fast to a choice.

This morning
my three-year-old son announces
I don't want oatmeal
I changed my mind.

Sarah Burns is a writer, personal historian, polar explorer and mum. She writes the blog ShineMemoirs.blogspot.com *and lives in Seattle, WA.*
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SHOP CLASS

Joey McClure

Now I ain't no educated main, not in schooling noways. However, I's larned a lot in all my years in dealing wifs folks. And one thang I can tells ya bout 'um. You jest can't never know 'bout what they's gonna do, an' jest what might set somebody off.

See, I's born Isiah Rufus Jackson in Sycamo,' Alabama in 1932. Momma and pappy called me Rufus, everybody else called me Izzy. Pap share-cropped de fields an' worked cows an hogs fo old man Barnett most his life. Momma cleaned houses and took in arning fo de white folks around. I helped pappy an' worked de garden an took care of what little livestock we had when we could afford some. I lubed to hunt an' fish but dere wusn't much time for dat 'cept on Sundays, an' I had to sneak off den, cause momma wouldn't have none a dat on de Lord's day. But I always knowed one thang: dis waten de way I wanted to lib when I growed up. So by de time I's 12 years old, I done larned to read an' write an' do some 'rithmetic an' figured, dat's mo dan momma and pap had done put together. I figured hit wus bout all I'd need to get along in dis world so I quit school.

Momma wus mad as a old wet hen when I told her I dun quit an' wus gonna a find a job. Den she run me out de house wif her broom. I knowed thar warn't no jobs to be had in Sycamo,' so I walked de ten miles or so to Sylacauga. Den I walked up and down ever street in town, an' in an' out every stoe an' hit wus soon clear, dere warn't no jobs fer a 12 year-old-black boy to be had nowhere. Feel'n' tared an foloned, I sot down on de long marble steps dat rised up to de big front doors of de Newnited States Post Office building. As I wundered what to do an' whar to go, dose big doors opened an' a man in a uniform began to sweep de poch steps. I looked up at him an' said, "'Cuse me sir, I can do dat fer ye." I grinned at 'im caus dat's what I'd been taught to do.

He looked down at me an' said wif a little smirk, "Well alright den. I got plenty to do dat I'm behind wif." He handed me de broom den said, "When you gets done, come in an ifn you takes out de garbage, I'll gives you a nickel." Now a nickel might not sound like much to you'ens, but back den, to a kid dat never had mo den a few pennies in all his life, I figured I'd done alright. I could at least get me a little sompin' to eat. I swept dat poch an dem steps cleaner dan days ever been swept. An' de sidewalk in front, too.

Afer I got de garbage cans out, I found de man at one ob de big winders wif de iron bars across hit. I showed him de poch an' de steps an' axed em ifn he had anything else I could do. I told em, "Mister, I sho nuf do needs me a job. I'll do mos anything."

He handed me a whole dime den ax me, "What's yo name son? You live round hea?"

I said, "My name is Isiah Rufus Jackson, but erebody calls me Izzy. I stays in Sycamo.'"

What he told me den set my life fo ever. "Well Izzy, I'm Grady Bracket an I'm de Postmaster here. Since it looks like de war's gonna take every able-bodied man in town, I could use some help round hea." Mr. Grady rubbed his chin while looking at de ceiling. "Tell you what I'll do. Today's Tuesday, I'll let you work here fer de rest of de week an I'll pay you what I thank you're worth, an I'll be fair. If I thanks you've done a good job, I'll let ya stays on for a while." He wus fair. I got a whole dollar bill.

Well, I worked dare until 1972, when de building wus tore down. But back den, when Mr. Grady found out I's walking back an foth ever day from Sycamo,' he gave me a room in de basement to stays in. He let me build a little kitchen an' a toilet wif a shower an' I wus 'bout as content as a man could be fo' bout 28 years. Dat's when I's had to move so dey could tear down de building, fer nofin'.

But bout '61, theys built a new post office an de city got ahold ob de old post office building, an' dey got me wif it. On de main level, theys had de chamber of commurs an' all kind of meeting rooms. In de basement, I only lived in parts of it, dey put in a bunch of 'lectric tools an' wood working stuff fur a shop class fur de high schools. Den, Mr. Ward wus brought on as de shop class teacher. He'd worked around town fer years as a carpenter an' cabinet maker, a purty good one, too. Which brangs me to what started me on all dis to begin wif.

L.O. Ward wus de nicest feller you'd ever want a meet. Became a close friend ober de yeas, I's sot wif'm when he died. But he weren't no listener. I'd say, "LO, I wouldn't go pushing dese school boys so, 'specially sum of de blacks an sum a dem country boys." But LO jest had to have everthang his way an' purfect. When a boy built somepin' in his class, you could see de pride an happy in de eyes. Some dese boys ain't never made nothing afo' in dey's lives, much less made sompin' outa dem selves. But LO would walk round on gradin' day an find some little old thang wrong dat didn't make a hill of durt but dat he didn't lack, den he'd take dat big old hamma' of hisun an bust whatever hit wus dat boy had built to kingdom come. I'd look on as de blood rund out of de faces of dese kids den fill back up wif either despair or anger. I'd say after de boys lef, "LO, you gonna 'ventually be sorry fo doing dat to one of dese kids.

He'd just say, "Izzy, it's good fer 'em. Makes um stronger. Learn um to take disappointment an' do thangs right."

Den, back oh, I guess around '67, dere wus dis kid dat weren't like de other boys. Seemed like he might be techt in de hade. But I leart later on dat he wus de

smartest one, never made a grade in all his school days any less dan an A. Sure wouldn't know it to look at 'em. He wus kind of short an' walked funny, he sorta looked de-formed. An' he didn't talk right neither, kinda tongue tied. If ya didn't know 'em, he wus hard to understand. His name wus Larry but all I ever heared him called by de kids wus Colonel Worm. Now most ob de time, chilens dat wus differnt, 'specially dat differnt wif dat kinda nickname, wus mostly made fun of an de other kids wouldn't have nuffin' to do wif em. Not de Colonel, he wus a friend to erbody an lubed by erbody.

Now, on dis particular day, Jim wus gradin de kids on de burd houses dat day had been workin on. De Colonel had what looked to me da perfect burd house he made an' he wus as proud as anybody I er seen. He wus just beamin'. De bright red paint had dried an' he had just glued de purch on just below de hole when LO walked up to grade his burd house.

LO looked it over den started lookin' at sumpin' under de purch. Den, yelling over all de noise of saws and hammers, axed, "Well what's dis?" De Colonel leaned over to look what he was pointing at an' dere wus a little drap a glue dat rund down from de purch. An befo Colonel could take de rag dat wus dun in his hand to clean it off, Mr. Ward's big hammer smashed through de top busting it to a million pieces. Colonel Worm just froze. He's mouth hung open and tears came to he's eyes. I never saw a mo sorry face; I felt so bad fur de boy, I had to look away.

But den, when I looked back at 'em, dere wus tears, but it wus tears of angry. De boy's face was all squinched up tight an' blood red, he wus shaking all over. He spun round, grabbed a book offen de table an' stomped off. LO wus grading de next boy's work, an' I's watched dem. Amid de cuttin' and hammerin' of kids remaking deir busted burd houses, deir wus a odd sound coming from de band saw. LO looked up at de ceiling ta see bits
of paper floatin' to de flo all round de room. De odd sawing noise jest kep on an kep on. Den I hurd LO yellin, "Colonel, what's you doin, is dat my grade book? What is you doing to my grade book?" Colonel jest kept on runnin' de book through de band saw as smaller and smaller bits of paper fill de room. I looked at de boy's face I saw and through his tears a big smile and heard a crazy laugh bouncin' over de noise of dat shop.

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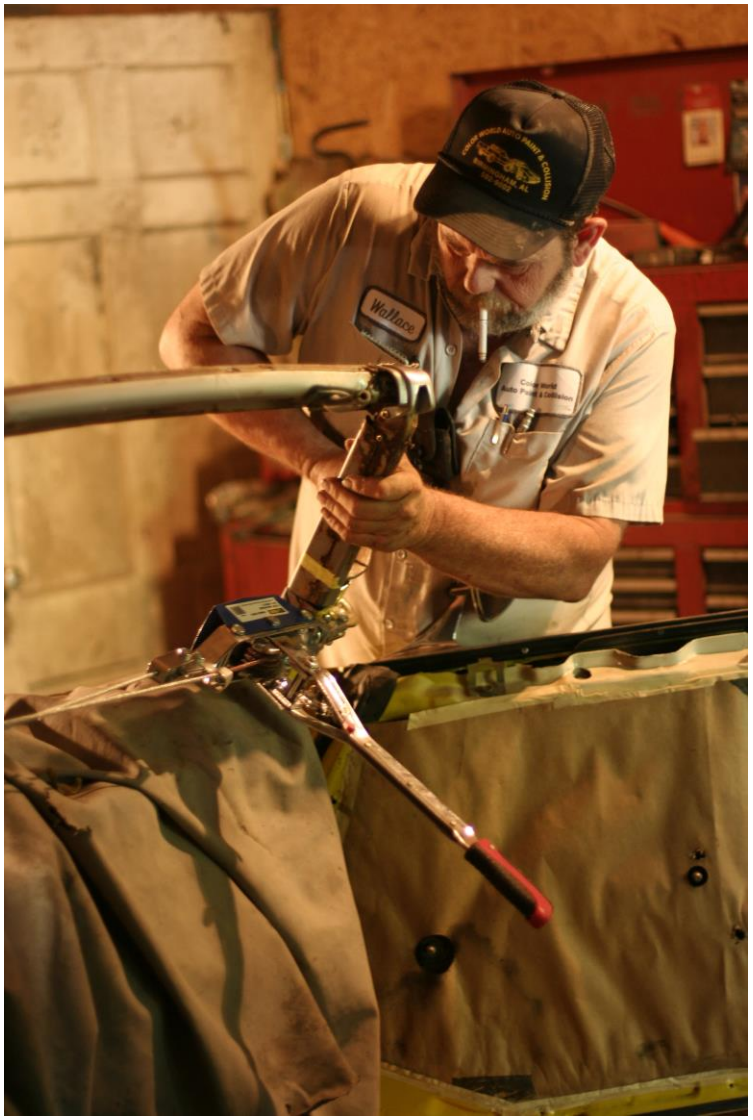
Joey McClure spends his days saving and renovating Birmingham's historic buildings. Free time is spent playing with his train display and photographing the world. He also tells about old times in Coosa County, Alabama. **joey@jmcre.net**



ANOTHER WORKER
Digital Photograph
Raymond Mears

Raymond Mears studied nature photography with award-winning photographer, Beth Young, and drawing with medical illustrator Floyd Hosmer. His work has been published in the Annual Report of the Cahaba River Society, Alabama Sports Festival, *and* Birmingham Arts Journal.

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF RADIANCE

Daniel Moore

for Laura

A hawk hovers above the fields dying edge,
like a laying on of hands, like yours,

always, so steady, benevolent,
unlike claws fouled with flesh, more

like the calloused palms of a saint
praying the rosary of my spine.

The light's decision to shine here too,
content with the radiance of different degrees

is why firtrees agree with a frozen sky
to stand till the ice says kneel.

The luminous, calm, daily vow
of four muddy feet on the middle path,

brings an end to the power of hungry ghosts
fed from wings of delusion. Unlike yours,

so wild with deliverance, that force
me to worship the ground.

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Daniel Moore's work has been published in many journals. He has poems forthcoming in Dewpoint, Atticus Review, Wayne Literary Review, District Lit, Columbia Journal of Arts and Literature, Red Savina Review, *and* YAY!LA Magazine. *He lives in Washington on Whidbey Island where he is working on his first book,* Waxing The Dents."
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TO LAY IT DOWN

Roger Barbee

While walking the hound one recent morning, I noticed that the sun had yet to clear Short Mountain which was shrouded in a soft apricot-like glow. A heavy frost lay on the grass and roofs. It was a chilly, but clear November morning with promises of a warm afternoon that would offer time for some late gardening chores before real cold arrived. Waiting on the hound and beagles to finish their business, I thought of how, as I age, I identify more and more with the month of November.

Sitting at the table with a cup of coffee, I looked over the back acres watching the sun creep over Short Mountain, heating the grass and roofs. Before long a mist rose out of the warming frost and birds began feeding at the feeders. The morning looked better from the warmth of the coffee at the breakfast table because it was still cold outside, but as I had observed earlier, the bright, clear sky promised. I resolved to make good on that promise, and I told Mary Ann that I hoped to dead-head the roses and other plants, mow the grass, and perhaps putter about in my shop.

The morning was not the first novel association with November that I have recently experienced. A few weeks ago I re-read Robert Ruark's memoir, *The Old Man and the Boy,* in which he tells of growing up under the mentorship of his grandfather, the old man. Late in the book, the old man says to the boy: "… I like November. November is a man past fifty who reckons he'll live to be seventy or so, which is old enough for anybody—which means he'll make it through November and December, with a better-than-average chance of seeing New Year's…."

Way past fifty like Ruark's grandfather, I have learned to take the days as they come. I have realized that, no matter how capable I think I am, some things such as a chilly November morning can't be rushed. When I was younger and more foolish than now, I would have been out the door after the first coffee to make the day begin. I would have grabbed gardening implements and worked in the damp chill. Being uncomfortable would not have mattered because I was "getting it done." You see, for me during my younger years, getting something done or something accumulated was the measure of my life. It mattered that each day produced something tangible.

Drinking more coffee, waiting for the day's warmth to arrive, I pulled down Ruark's memoir and read more words of the old man: "A man don't

start to learn until he's about forty; and when he hits fifty, he's learned all he's going to learn. After that he can sort of lay back and enjoy what he's learned.... His appetites have thinned down, and he's done most of his suffering, and yet he's still got plenty of time to pleasure himself before he peters out entirely."

Finishing the last cup of coffee and eating some oatmeal, I held that observation as I prepared to go out into the warming day. There was no need to rush, for the chores were there, waiting to get done or not. The journey of the day was what mattered, not the deeds done.

Growing older here at Red Hill with Mary Ann is an interesting process that is sometimes quite easy, but at other times, such as when taking new medications, difficult. However, it does seem that the old man is right—somewhere along this path, I have learned to let go and enjoy what I have. For me life is not the struggle that it seemed to once be. Yes, I have problems and concerns, but they don't seem to be as daunting as they were when I was thirty.

Outside in the garden, I soon removed my jacket because of the day's warming. As I pruned and dead-headed, I thought of these things and the day. There was no hurry and it mattered not if all was finished because the sun made its continuous arc across the sky, oblivious to my puttering. But that was okay for it was nature's rhythm.

In his book, *Far Appalachia*, Noah Adams recounts his journey on the New River. Early on, in the mountains of North Carolina, he stops at the farm of an elderly couple to ask directions. He compliments the woman on the flowers she is carrying, and she waves her hand toward the field above the road, saying, "Used to be I had all that in flowers, too, but there comes a time when you have to lay it down."

Moving from plant to plant in the November warmth, I thought how right that woman is—we will all come to "a time when you have to lay it down." But, I had this afternoon and the roses and the plants and the shop. It's not yet time.

.....

Roger Barbee is a retired educator who lives in the Shenandoah Valley with his wife Mary Ann, six cats, and three dogs. All but for Mary Ann are rescues.
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A HELPING HAND

James Kincaid

FALSTAFF Strike; down with them; cut the villains' throats: ah! Whores on caterpillars! bacon-fed knaves! They hate us youth: down with them.

Henry IV, Part 1, II, ii

"I wouldn't say 'smart,' exactly, more like 'clever.'"

All agreed, every teacher crammed into the ridiculously-small, ill-appointed lounge, seven of them. Kyle was 'clever.' That was the word. Close proximities— "intelligent," "gifted," "original"—didn't fit particularly well, sent one off on the wrong scent.

Stephen, who taught social studies and coached soccer, agreed heartily but felt distanced from the note of cynicism creeping in and the finality of the verdict, the self-congratulatory and conclusive flavor of the tag. Kyle certainly was clever, no doubt about that, but there was more there, much more. Other teachers might be satisfied with a dismissive label. Not he.

It wasn't that he was what he would call close to Kevin, or to any other student. He didn't fool himself on that score. He kept his distance not for the usual reason (fear of accusations of sexual tomfoolery) but because he regarded students as equals, really he did. He didn't think they were a species apart, occupants of a different (and inferior) developmental stage. He saw no difference between students and others in his life.

He'd said that to Agnes (really and truly her name), English teacher and, like him (he thought) respecter of private student space.

"You see no difference between little Cathy over there and your wife?"

"That's hilarious, Agnes. You know what I mean."

"Yeah, you don't want to meddle in their lives, just teach them about Asia Minor and whatever else you do."

"I don't condescend. I don't see it as my job to get inside them and drill or plant things."

"Nice metaphor."

"You know what I mean."

"No. You think these little s---s are equal, these half-formed walking Ids, these contemptible cocky know-nothings."

"Exactly."

Not all students viewed Stephen as he viewed himself. Most, of course, had no view of him at all, saw him as just one of the indistinguishable herd of uglies their f---ing parents and f---ing society had forced them to endure for a short time, pretend to respect, and convince of their deep-down interest in their subject and, God help us all, them.

Kyle was different.

"Let's go on a camping trip, get to know one another real well."

"What do you mean, Kyle?"

"We get four or five of us, those of us who really understand, and head off for the mountains for the weekend, form intimate bonds."

"Intimate?"

"You object?"

"No, Kyle, I just don't know what you mean."

"You will."

"OK. Jason and Mike? That it?"

"They'll do."

"This weekend?"

"Right. If you say so. You corral Jason and Mike. Friday at 5."

"Well, I don't know. I'm supposed to. . . . OK."

"That's good. And ask Mr. Beatty. Tell him to come."

"The teacher?"

"No, the Mayor, stupid. Yes, the teacher. Tell him."

"OK."

"Camping, Brad?"

"You'll come, right? Just us four and you, all together. Camping. Kyle's organizing it. He said to tell you to come."

"I don't know if that's altogether. . . ."

"Altogether what, Mr. Beatty?"

"Where?"

"Mountains."

"Kyle said to **tell** me, right?"

"Yes, he did. So I did. You'll come, right. Just us four and you. Intimate and all. Form bonds."

"That what Kyle said?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, how can I resist being told to do something so idiotic?"

"What?"

(Continued on Page 43)

LITTLE GHOSTS
Digital Photographs
Peter Schwartz

After years of writing and painting, Peter Schwartz has moved to another medium: photography. In the past his work's been featured in many prestigious print and online journals including: Existere, Failbetter, Hobart, International Poetry Review, Red Wheelbarrow, Reed, and Willard & Maple. *His mission is to broaden the ways the world sees art.*

All kids need is a little help, a little hope, and somebody who believes in them.

—Magic Johnson

"Sorry. OK, I'll do it. What time? What do I need to bring?"

Kyle called a meeting of just the four of them, minus Mr. Beatty, who wanted to be called Stephen, which was OK by three of the four and not by Kyle. "Why don't you want to call him Stephen?"

"That's exactly what makes him our enemy, don't you see, Mike?"

"No."

"He says we're equals but he really wants our space, our beings. Friends? Friends my ass! Equals? The way a vampire is equal to his prey."

"You think he's invading us?"

"I know he is trying to, Brad. He's the most dangerous kind of enemy: secret and fierce, operating in the dark. Invisible. Before you know it, he's inside, sucking everything out that's you. Then you don't exist."

"I sorta see."

"Of course you see, all of you. He wants to kill us. That's what it amounts to. Before he does that. . . ."

"Before he does that, what, Kyle?"

Kyle knew this great spot up near Carter's Leap, a ridge with a sharp drop-off, cliffs with no angle, just straight down. It wasn't a huge precipice, maybe only a hundred feet or so. But it'd do.

The plan was simple.

Friday night they spent telling stories, the first stage of intimacy, and drinking that brew of true togetherness, iced-tea.

"Have more iced tea, Mr. Beatty."

He hadn't told them to call him Stephen and they didn't.

"I'll flood my sleeping bag, if I have any more."

The boys were silent, Stephen at once sensing he had embarrassed them. He rushed to cover his mistake.

"Sorry."

Kyle laughed: "No, Mr. B, we aren't shy about pissing. But try not to piss on one of us, when you wake up in the night, not if you can help it. There's that ridge back there, where you can pee right down the mountain, like a beautiful waterfall."

And, along about 4 a.m., that's what Stephen did, walked the twenty or so yards up to the crest, carefully turned his back on the sleeping boys, and let fly.

Only they weren't sleeping, were they? What they were doing was creeping up behind the drowsily urinating Mr. B and using gloved hands to push him gently over the cliff.

Then they went back to their bedrolls, after making plans for a short morning hike before returning to town and the idiot officials.

.....

James Kincaid has published many non-fiction and academic books, several short stories, and 2 novels, one of them co-authored with Percival Everett. He taught for years at University of Southern California and is now at The University of Pittsburgh. **Kincaid@usc.edu**

"Many very fine writers are intimidated when they have to write the way people really talk. Actually it's quite easy. Simply lower your IQ by fifty and start typing!"

–Steve Martin

WINDOW AND SUNLIGHT

Digital Photograph

Lisa Oestreich

Lisa Oestreich sought a career in photography but was discouraged by what she perceived as fierce competition in the field. She followed her other love, medicine, and practiced neurology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, until 2002, when she took a leave to pursue her passion of documenting light, form, and texture. **lisaoestreich@charter.net**

TWO POEMS ABOUT LIGHT

Ivan de Monbrison

1

la pensée
 comment ne pouvez vous
entendre?
le mur s'efface
dans le miroir
où ton reflet abandonné
  ne reflète plus ton visage
il faut partir un jour d'été
faire un pas de plus vers la
lumière
qui brille cachée tout au fond
   de la nuit
on sort de chez soi
c'est une petite maison blanche
   peinte sur la colline
à l'automne
   mais tes mains sont si frêles
   qu'elles pourraient se briser
   d'un seul coup
par la fenêtre
chaque jour je vois
  les animaux qui paissent dans
le pré
et quelque chose en moi
          se déplace pas à pas
     et me fait tomber de côté

1

thought,
can't you hear?
the wall getting erased
in the mirror
where your forsaken reflection
  doesn't reflect your face
anymore
we must leave on a summer's day
do one more step toward the light
still shining hidden in the bottom
    of the night
we get out of our place
it is a small white house
    painted on a hill
in the fall
   but your hands are so frail
   that they could break
   at any time
by the window
each day I watch
  the animals grazing in the field
  and something now slowly
moving
     inside of me
      makes me fall side-way

2

aujourd'hui
le monde a fui dans la nuit
on ouvre une porte
sans crier gare
        la mer
le noyau du soleil qui se
déplace
          dans la lumière
flotte à la surface
sa chaleur fait fondre mon
regard
 je ne me souvenais plus de toi

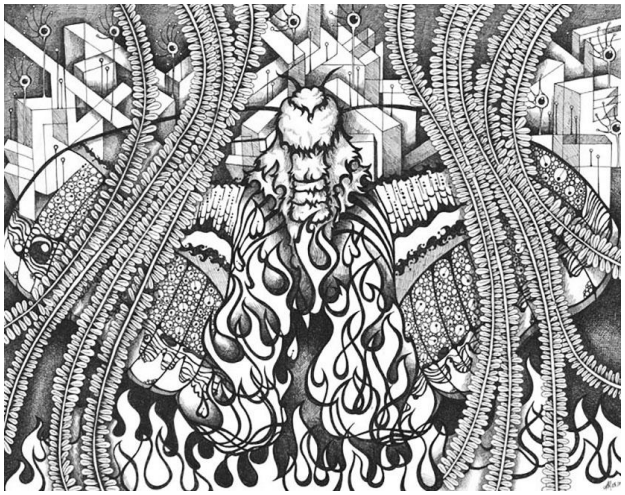
2

today
the world has escaped in the night
we open a door
unexpectedly
    the sea
the pit of the sun moving
          within light
floating over the surface
its warmth melting my gaze
     I had forgotten you

.. *Ivan de Monbrison is a French poet, writer and artist who lives in Paris. His poems and short stories have appeared in literary magazines in France, Italy, Belgium, the UK, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, and the US. His first illustrated poem-novel* les Maldormants *was published in 2014.* **i.demonbrison@gmail.com**

"The best proof of love is trust."

—Joyce Brothers



BURNED BY THE FIRE

April Muschara Harris

20" x 16"

Pen & Ink

April Muschara Harris attended Auburn University Montgomery and graduated with a degree in Fine Art. She is a professional graphic designer and an award-winning artist working in acrylics, pen and ink, chalk, and pencil.

aprilmuschara@gmail.com

HAIKU DIPTYCH

slowing Niagara
falls down to
a freeze frame

the face
lifted
from the clock

Michael Virga is a cyber-poet in Birmingham, AL, and an instructor in the Museum School for Poetry at the Birmingham Museum of Art. His haiku verses above were award winners in haiku competitions sponsored by the Birmingham Public Library in 2015 and 2016. Virga is a graduate of Birmingham-Southern College and a native of Birmingham. **mavbuon@hotmail.com**

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