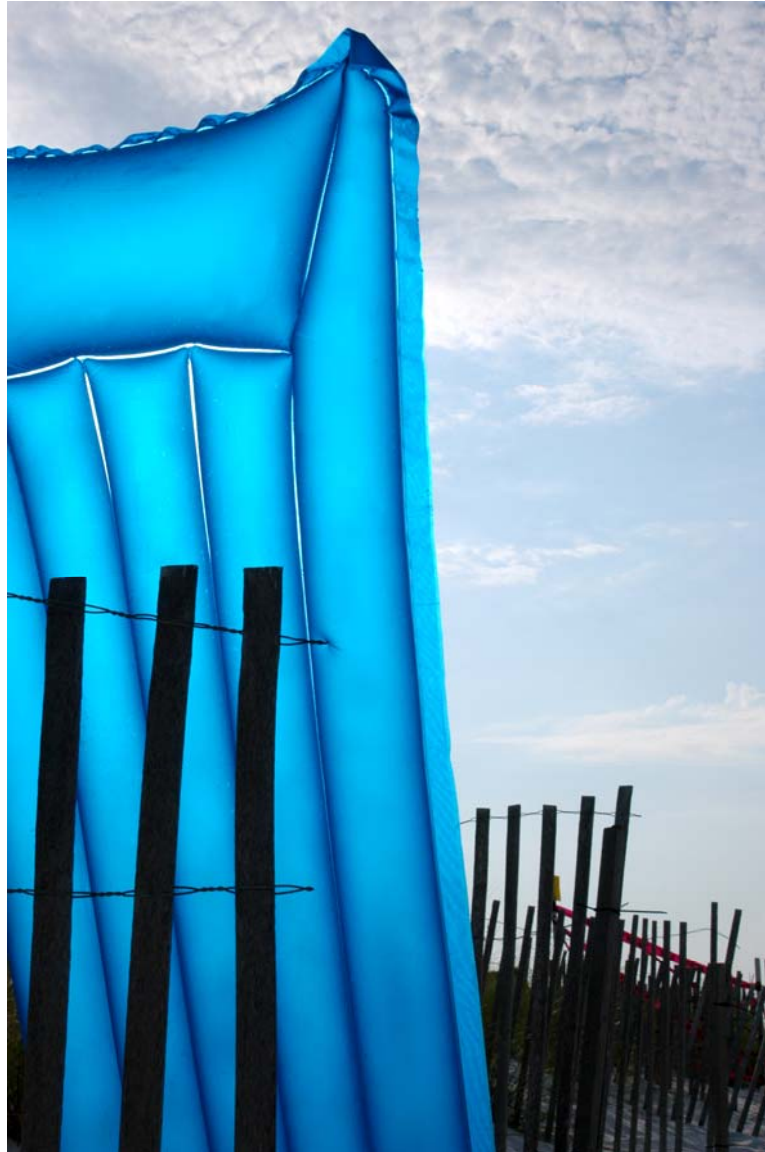


Birmingham Arts Journal

Volume 5 ~ Issue 1



A Birmingham Art Association Publication
with generous support from the Hackney Literary Award Committee

\$5.00

Table of Contents

		Page
THE OLD GUY	Wayne Greenhaw *	1
MOTHER'S BEDSIDE TABLE	Sandy Tilt	4
GREEN APPLE ON BLACK PLATE	Lois Parker Edstrom *	16
COUNTRY BRAWLER	Steve Cartwright	17
CURSE #1: THE ACCURSED TAKES THE FORM OF A CAT IN THE COLD	T.J. Beitelman	18
SOUTHSIDE BARBECUE	Jim Reed	19
SOMETHING LOST	Shelia Smith Mau	21
AND FEAR	Tolu Ogunlesi	23
BATH	Stephen Smith	24-25
THE DRIVER'S LICENSE GODDESS	Hannah Givens	26
FORGIVING BILLY	Lauren Wolk *	27
YELLOW WINDOW	Christopher Woods	32
LETTER #3	Alex Stolis	35
FACING THE WATERS	T. Mozelle Harris *	36
FEEL COLD STANDING BESIDE THESE FLAGS	Julia Otxoa	37
HOLY GROUND	Ruth Faulkner Grubbs	38
ALL THAT JAZZ	Billy O'Callaghan	39
BLOWFISH	Frank Haberle	42
SPRAY CAN	Humberto Valle	45
MOVING OUT	Darren Griffin	46
TETONS	Irene Latham	48

* indicates 2007 Hackney National Literary Award Winner

Front Cover: **BLUE RAFT.** Lisa Oestreich, 35mm photograph.

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 UAB until 2002, when she took a leave to pursue her passion of documenting light, form, and texture. lisaoestreich@charter.net

Back Cover: **HEAD GAME.** Marcia Mouron, 12" x 16", Mixed Media

Marcia Mouron, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, is new to the local art scene. Encouraged by Kay Vinson, a good friend and Birmingham artist, Marcia is busy learning to combine her many interests into her art. mamouron@bellsouth.net
For "Head Game" key, see page 39.

THE OLD GUY

Wayne Greenhaw, 2007 Hackney Literary Award Winner

Like the Lowenbrau clock or beer signs on the back wall, the old guy became a fixture at El Rey's Burrito Lounge. Bubba the bartender liked repeat customers, and for months he waited for him every afternoon.

Entering, he lifted the black Akubra hat from his head. Thin tufts of gray hair rose unruly before he pushed it down with a swoop of his gnarled hands. He glanced toward the back booths where Schlitz and Budweiser signs shone dimly. He examined the stools. Each time was like the first. He seemed to decide through some mysterious logic that the second stool was perfect, then he approached it, turned it a half-rotation, and mounted it with precision.

Seated, the old guy muttered, "Sour, Old Forester, not too bitter, not too sweet."

As Bubba poured the bourbon, simple syrup, lemon mixture, the old guy watched. The first day, last May, he instructed, "A touch more sugar, please," his voice growling deep in his throat, like an ancient cowboy home from the range.

After he came in Monday through Friday, Bubba started checking the Lowenbrau clock when he saw the slow gait of the angled body round the corner. Each day the old guy creased his thin lips into a smile and sipped. Each day he had two. When the first was drained down to the last sip Bubba started the second.

When the younger men, Bubba's friends who worked at the college, the newspaper, and the Shakespeare Festival, came in and talked loudly, telling Internet jokes, or gossiping about some of the local waitresses, the old guy's head would pivot, his eyes showing recognition of some obscure fact or nodding almost imperceptibly. Bubba began to notice the subtle movements -- tiny tells of emotion, a nearly hidden smile, a narrowing of gray-hooded eyes. Being Bubba the bartender he knew things. Rather than interjecting facts or ideas, he remained silent, until he was asked. Then he began thinking about when to make his move to learn more about the man who appeared one Wednesday in May and who reappeared the next day but who stayed away on Saturdays and Sundays, when Chris worked part-time. On a Thursday afternoon in the office behind the kitchen, when

Chris came in to pick up his paycheck, Bubba discovered his weekend absences. “Who’s the old guy?” Chris asked. “He’s not here on Saturdays and Sundays?” Bubba asked. Chris said he had never seen him.

One afternoon at four-forty-five, after Bubba mixed his second sour and poured it into the chilled glass, Bubba inquired, “How’s the world treating you, Mr. . . .”

The old guy looked up, stared into Bubba’s eyes. “Crockett. I’m Sam Crockett. Samuel T. Crockett. T for Tecumseh.”

“Timothy O’Neill. Everybody calls me Bubba.”

The old guy nodded.

“I’m originally from Boston,” Bubba said. “But I’ve been down here in Montgomery for twenty-more years. I like Alabama. It’s home now.”

Sam Crockett said no more. He didn’t seem unfriendly, just silent. He drank sip by sip, now and then looking down into the murky yellow-orange liquid as though staring into a crystal ball.

After the old guy left, leaving his usual ten-dollar bill, eight for two drinks and a two-dollar tip, Bubba picked up the empty glass and gazed into the remaining foam. He raised his brows and shook his head and smiled.

**“You’re the
Colorado Kid, but
I’ll wager we’ll
never know much
about Sam
Crockett.”**

“What’cha see?” asked Clay Lawrence, the Colorado Kid, because he was born and raised in Denver before he came east, where he now worked with the Shakespeare theater.

“Nothing,” Bubba said, putting the glass into a rack.

Clay, six-foot-four two-hundred-and-fifty pounds,

looking like an aging NFL lineman, said, “The old guy never says anything, does he?”

“Name’s Sam Crockett,” Bubba said. He looked out to see him disappear.

“He seems like a good old guy,” Clay allowed.

“Yeah,” Bubba said, glancing down at the upside-down glass, wondering if Sam Crockett really could see things other people couldn’t.

The next day at four Bubba was anchored behind the cash register, watching the corner through the glass panel in the door. After he routinely straightened paperwork and placed it carefully into its proper places, he returned to his stand. Knowing instinctively that it was later than four-fifteen, he nevertheless checked the Lowenbrau clock. It was a few ticks past four-twenty. His eyes roamed the sidewalk from Ella's Gift Shop to Tomatino's Pizza Parlor to Cafe Louisa, where several spike-haired, tattoo-covered kids in obscene tee-shirts sat at sidewalk tables and smoked. Bubba looked to the front of Fronduti's Style Shoppe, down the narrow alley with its overfilled garbage cans to the entrance to Bud's Sports Bar, wondering if the old guy had wandered away. Perhaps he had pried into a secret corner that the old guy guarded, afraid that if his identity was made known something precious might vanish. But surely, Bubba told himself, he would know that Bubba the bartender would not tell. Yet the first thing he'd done, when the old guy had disappeared around the corner was to inform the Colorado Kid that the old guy's name was Sam Crockett.

Just when Bubba was thinking such thoughts, the old guy showed up, lifted his hat, pushed down his hair, and stepped to the stool. This time, however, when he glimpsed Bubba's smile, he said, "A Manhattan, Old Forester, on the rocks."

Bubba pivoted, grabbed the bottle, brought it to the bar, and poured a shot into the stainless steel shaker with half as much sweet vermouth, a dash of Angostura bitters, and filled the container with ice. He shook seven times, strained the liquid into a chilled cocktail glass, and dropped in a bright red Maraschino cherry.

Sam Crockett brought the glass to his lips, kissed the brown liquid, slurped a taste, gazed up over the rim into Bubba's face, and winked. "Perfect," he pronounced.

Bubba beamed. His short-clipped reddish-blond hair bristled. His pale stubble glistened where he'd eaten a loaded burrito for lunch. A spot or two of chili had dribbled down and he hadn't successfully wiped it clean.

Half-finished with his second Manhattan, the old guy grinned and said, "You're a fine mixologist, Timothy O'Neill," and peeled the double-sawbuck from his roll and put it on the bar.

After he walked out, Clay Lawrence said, "The old guy was talkative today."

Bubba, grinning, said, "Yeah, he was."

"I wonder what his story is," Clay said.

"You're the Colorado Kid, but I'll wager we'll never know much about Sam Crockett."

"I like the name," Clay said. "It has a good ring to it. Kind of poetic."

"Yeah, like the Colorado Kid."



**MOTHER'S
BEDSIDE TABLE**

Sandy Tilt

30x15

Oil on Canvas

Sandy Tilt is a self-taught artist who fell in love with oil palette knife painting while taking a course in the United Arab Emirates.

Using a mixture of palette knives and brushes, she creates impressionistic, abstract and realistic art.

sandytilt@aol.com

“I wonder if he’s kin to Davy.”

Both chuckled.

Bart and Kirk and Jim came in, sat on stools next to Clay, and finished their conversation about the new novel by Tom Franklin about violence in the backwoods of southwest Alabama. “It’s a strong, dark tale,” Kirk said. “Tom’s a good writer,” Bart allowed. Jim nodded and added, “It’s a biblical allegory.”

“Did y’all see the old guy who just left?” Clay asked. Although he still had the mountain twang in his voice, he’d picked up enough Southern idiom to make him fit into the humid atmosphere of Montgomery, where even in mid-October streaks of heat washed across the central Alabama flatlands in the sun-filled afternoons.

“Who is he?” Bart asked.

“Sam Crockett,” Bubba said, putting two Bud Lights and a Guinness on the bar.

“Any kin to Davy?” Bart asked.

Bubba grinned.

“That’s my line,” Clay said.

“I don’t know much about him,” Bubba said. “He drank whiskey sours until today.”

“What’d he drink today?” Kirk asked.

“Manhattan,” Bubba said, glancing outside and seeing that the old guy had disappeared. “Not many people drink Manhattans.”

“That’s a drink out of the 1950s,” Clay said.

“Yeah,” Bubba said. “I bet it’s the first one I’ve mixed in three, four years.”

“He ancient?” Bart asked.

“Old,” Clay said.

“He doesn’t talk much,” Bubba said and looked again toward the distant corner.

The next afternoon Bubba started looking toward the corner at five-’til-four. Every minute he stopped his setting-up process and glanced toward the east. At two minutes after the hour the figure appeared. Today he wore a black windbreaker, causing Bubba to notice the breeze that swept autumn leaves from the trees outside.

The old guy put his hat on the rack. He unwrapped the windbreaker and draped it next to the hat. He moved in slow motion to his stool.

“Manhattan?” Bubba asked, already twisting the glass into a bucket of shaved ice.

The old guy nodded.

Less than halfway through his cherry-topped drink, the old guy settled his blue-gray eyes on Bubba’s pinkish face that had gotten slightly sun-and-wind-burned during a fly-fishing trip out west, where he visited annually with his mother and stepfather.

As the old guy focused on Bubba’s features, the bartender waited.

Then the drinker asked, “Remember me?”

Bubba, who prided himself on his encyclopedia knowledge of sports trivia, flickered mentally through his almanac of Heisman winners and runners-up, his extensive memory of football and baseball greats from the past century, and even his secondary list of unusual happenings, but after entering Samuel T. Crockett into the equation he came up blank. It was Bubba to whom Clay Lawrence went to discover Lehigh was the Mountain Hawks and Wagner the Seahawks and James Madison the Dukes. Now the bartender’s emerald eyes showed empty frustration, which he seldom displayed, having come up with minute details to answer the Colorado Kid’s questions or Warren Ligon’s inquiries from Trivia Night at the Capitol Hill Lounge downtown. It was Bubba who informed them that the College of New Jersey was formed in 1746, the nation’s fourth oldest school that became Princeton in 1896.

When Bubba seemed totally baffled, the old guy asked, “You sure?”

Next Bubba turned the pages of his family memory book, knowing that Mama had been a Fowler from Deland, Florida, before she met and married his father, Sergeant Major Frank Patrick O’Neill, who retired and settled in Boston, operating a neighborhood bar before he died of a heart attack thirty-some-odd years ago. Since then, Alma Marie O’Neill met and married Thomas Leon Hardy, who’d pulled a reversal by coming south from his native Ontario in the heat of the Vietnam war to join the U.S. Air Force. Tom Hardy had grown up believing that everything U.S. was great and good. After his plane went down over Hanoi he was a prisoner of war in a six-by-four cage until he was freed and flown to San Diego, where he stepped off the transport carrier, dropped to his knees, and kissed the

runway. After her husband died, Alma Marie ventured west, found her heroic second husband standing on a corner in Berkeley cursing long-haired hippies demonstrating against President Nixon. They were married, bought a camper, and had been traveling ever since, fishing every well-spawned spot in the Pacific northwest. As far as Bubba could determine, after exploring the tattered pages of his memory, no Crockett was listed among his kin.

After he mixed a second Manhattan, Bubba slipped back through the kitchen to the office, where he extracted a sports almanac from a shelf and perused its index. Exasperated, Bubba anchored himself opposite the old guy and confessed, “I’m sorry, but I don’t remember you.”

The old guy wrinkled his pale brow. His mouth creased into an enigmatic smile. But he said nothing.

As he finished the last sip of his second Manhattan, enjoying it to the final drop, he pulled out a bill and handed it to Bubba.

He slid from the stool,
straightened his khakis,
found his hat and
windbreaker, and moved
through the door.

Turning to Clay
Lawrence, Bubba said, “I’ll
be damned.”

“What’s wrong?” Clay
asked.

Bubba told him exactly
what the old guy said and how he said it, after which Clay said, “Reckon he’s some kind of sports great? Somebody we’ve never heard of?” But Bubba frowned and shook his head. “How could that be? I’ve gone through everything I can think of, and I can’t find any reference to Sam Crockett.”

“Did you try the Alamo?” Clay asked.

Their eyes met and they grinned. Bubba shrugged. “I’ll look it up tonight,” he said. And in the minutes after midnight he sat at his wife’s computer, sending out Google searches, but no answers from the Alamo returned positively. The only Crockett was Davy, who’d gone to Texas from Tennessee.

**Reckon he’s some
kind of sports great?
Somebody we’ve
never heard of? But
Bubba frowned and
shook his head.**

The next day Clay Lawrence arrived at the bar early. “I was wondering,” he said. “What about that guy who used to be on the old TV show Miami Vice?”

Bubba frowned. “He was fictitious, wasn’t he?”

“A product of Michael Mann’s imagination.”

“Don Johnson,” Bubba said. “James ‘Sonny’ Crockett.”

Clay quipped, “His sidekick was Philip Michael Thomas. He played Ricardo ‘Rico’ Tubbs. When he was undercover his names were Rico Cooper or Richard Taylor. Edward James Olmos played Lieutenant Martin Castillo and Olivia Brown played Detective Trudy ‘Big Body’ Joplin.”

The Colorado Kid knew as much about movie, TV, and theater trivia as Bubba knew about sports. Warren Ligon came to him when he wanted to know Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman’s film names in Casablanca, which Clay listed as Rick Blaine and Ilsa Lund and added that Paul Henreid played Victor Laszlo, Claude Rains was Captain Renault, and Sydney Greenstreet Signor Ferrari. “And you know who played Sam the piano player? As in ‘Play it again, Sam’? Although Bogart never said, ‘Play it again,’ only ‘Play it, Sam,’” Clay said with his knowing expression. “His name was Dooley Wilson.”

“By the way,” Clay said, remembering. “You know the subtitle on the original poster in 1942 of Casablanca?”

Bubba, still exasperated, shook his head.

“Mysterious City of Sin and Intrigue. Isn’t that great?”

Bubba smiled. When the door opened he knew it was the old guy, who was already taking off his hat. As he stepped to the bar, Bubba said, “Did you know that, Sam Crockett?”

The old guy looked slightly irritated. He said nothing as he negotiated the stool.

“The subtitle of Casablanca was Mysterious City of Sin and Intrigue,” Bubba said.

The old guy said, “Making it mysterious was Sydney Greenstreet as Signor Ferrari. Making it sinful was the exotic and delicious Joy Page playing the quietly smoldering Bulgarian bombshell Annina Brandel. Joy’s father in real life was Jose Paige, spelled with an ‘i’, whose screen name was Don Alvarado, the famous Latin lover from silent pictures. After her

parents divorced, her mother married Jack L. Warner, the movie mogul who made her a star. She was magnificent in *The Bullfighter* and *The Lady* opposite Robert Stack. By 1951 she'd matured into a sexy creature who could mesmerize an audience with her very presence. She smoldered."

Staring into the old guy's face, Bubba nodded, then began fixing a Manhattan. Sam Crockett outstretched his spotted hands, stopping him. "It's time for a martini," he said. "Beefeaters. Straight up. Dirty. Very dry. Icy, please."

Astounded, having heard more words from his customer than he'd heard in the past six months, Bubba filled his shaker with ice. He glanced toward Clay Lawrence, who was trying to hide a chuckle. When Bubba finished, he placed the frosty glass in front of Sam Crockett, who extended shaky fingers, grasped the glass, lifted, bent his head down to meet the rim, spilled two drops onto the napkin, and sipped. Glancing up into Bubba's face, he raised his bushy brows, winked, and smiled. "Perfect," he said. "As I said before, you're a fine mixologist."

Bubba gazed incredulously into the old guy's face.

"I know a good martini when I taste one." With a twinkle in his watery eyes, he glanced toward Clay Lawrence and raised his glass.

Clay grinned and nodded.

The old guy sipped. "Tasty. Very tasty. Now, let me tell you, the best martini

on earth was made by Oscar Ephram Richman, who ruled the mahogany bar at Musso and Frank's. A heavy-set square-built man with a muscleman's biceps, O.E. Richman was a Jewish refugee who came to this country in the early days of the Twentieth Century. He worked his way westward with a vaudeville company and began tending bar at M&F's in 1923. O.E. put his trademark on gin when it was illegal. By the time I made his acquaintance, he was a California treasure. Hell, a national treasure. He mixed in individual goblets, poured into an icy glass, and

**Making it mysterious
was Syndey Greenstreet
... making it sinful was
the exotic and
delicious Joy Page**

you always had some left over after your glass was full with an onion-stuffed olive on the stem. Now that was the king of martinis.”

Bubba stared at the sharp chin above the turkey neck, the deep lines across his brow, red-rimmed eyes sunk into bruised, bony sockets. “I’ve heard of Musso and Frank’s,” Bubba said.

“Of course you have,” Sam Crockett said.

“You would love Musso and Frank’s,” Sam Crockett said.

“I’m sure I would,” Bubba allowed.

“Opened on Hollywood Boulevard in 1918. Everybody who was anybody frequented the place: Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, the beautiful and vivacious Jean Harlow. I wrote in The Hollywood Gazette that she was a classy dame.”

Bubba glanced over at the Colorado Kid and found him glued to every word the old guy said. Clay’s eyes shifted toward Bubba and smiled and nodded.

“In Dinner at Eight, Miss Harlow was gorgeous, just like she was in real life.” The old guy sipped and nodded. “Everybody thought the most handsome man in the movies was Clark Gable, but he didn’t hold a candle to Errol Flynn. Do you know the story?”

Bubba held a playful smile and waited.

“Ol’ Errol met this gorgeous gal at a nightclub in Santa Monica. She was a knockout. Had nice-sized bazooms, a kisser that’d stop a streetcar, and legs from her waist to the floor. They came out of everywhere back

**The trial is
headlines across
the nation. The
girl says she’s
only sixteen.**

then, covered the streets of Beverly Hills, sashaying to the beat of a good jazz band, waiting for a guy to buy ‘em a square. That’s what this little broad was doing. She was waiting. And along came the debonair Mr. Flynn. He picks her up, carries her out on his yacht, and they do the number under the light of a full

moon, right there on the deck. A few days later Errol is sitting at the bar in Musso and Frank’s and along comes an L.A. deputy who drops legal papers in his lap and fastens cuffs on his wrists. Of course, outside next to the curb, photographers made the arrest public business. The trial is

headlines across the nation. The girl, now dressed like a cute little teenager with pigtails and a demure dress buttoned to her neck, says she's only sixteen. She testifies as to how the handsome movie star lured her aboard his boat and seduced her with promises of a starring role in his latest hit. On the stand, she swoons like her heart as well as her hymen has been broken.

"Well, do you know what the jury does?"

Bubba's eyes twinkled. Clay leaned forward, waiting.

"They find ol' Errol not guilty. Innocent. He walks out of the courtroom a free man with a grin on his kisser. In that night's Gazette, my column is titled: In Like Flynn. Someone picks up my original thought, it bounces across the globe, and now it's a universal expression: In Like Flynn." The old guy's face stretched into a broad grin.

"In like Flynn," Bubba repeated, grinning. When he looked toward Clay he saw that his friend was equally thrilled with the old guy's tale.

While Sam Crockett ordered his second Beefeater martini, dirty, straight up, in walked Kirk, Bart, and Jim, talking about last night's reception. Clark Walker showed watercolors he'd sketched along the Alabama River. "It's really eerie, the way Clark portrays the dark, mysterious quality of Spanish moss in the old oaks," Bart said. "He uses shadows to create suspense," Kirk added. "It's like each canvas is a short story," Jim said.

Settling back, sipping, Sam Crockett said, "I was a fixture at Musso and Frank's every Friday afternoon through the forties and into the sixties."

As Bart, Kirk, and Jim continued their repartee, Clay wiggled his brows and shifted his eyes toward the old guy. Within a moment they too were listening.

"In the early forties my drinking pal was Billy Faulkner, out in Hollywood writing for his buddy, Howard Hawks," the old guy said,

**The first time he
spoke, I thought it
was pure
affectation, but
soon I realized it
was real as
Mississippi mud.**

looking directly at Bubba, seemingly unaware of his gathering audience. “When they weren’t working on a film, Faulkner and Hawks were hunting and fishing. Hawks was this big tall guy, handsome as a Greek god, square jaws sculpted. He was from the Midwest, his family had big money, and he had hunted and fished all over. I think he recognized pure genius in Faulkner and took advantage of it.

“Oh, I don’t mean he exploited him. To the contrary, he discovered how to dig out the best dialogue. In the forties, it was Faulkner who whittled the essence from Hemingway’s novel, *To Have and Have Not*, and Hawks took his splendid rawboned screenplay, put Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall into the parts of Steve Morgan and Slim Browning. Genius, pure genius. But you wouldn’t know it to sit and talk with him.

“Faulkner was a little runt of a guy. The first time he spoke, I thought it was pure affectation, but soon I realized it was real as Mississippi mud.” Sam Crockett chuckled lightly, like crinkling paper. “His voice was tinged with Prince Albert, soaked in moonshine, and dry as an Oxford August.”

“I didn’t know Faulkner wrote the screenplay to *To Have and Have Not*,” Bart said.

“He didn’t get full credit,” the old guy retorted. “Screenplay’s listed under the name of Jules Furthman, but the Brit just wrote the first draft. The final was Faulkner, right down to the doll prissing across the floor, stopping at the door, turning and staring at the guy for a half-beat, and saying, ‘You know how to whistle, don’t you? Just put your two lips together and blow.’ Now, you tell me that’s not genius.”

Bubba, Clay, Bart, Kirk, and Jim all glanced at each other, smiling.

Between sips, Sam Crockett said, “It was a sight: lanky Hawks and little Faulkner walking into Musso and Frank’s. Hawks wore British-tailored western-style suits and a Stetson, Faulkner tattered old tweeds with worn leather elbow patches and a slouchy felt hat.” He chuckled a tin laugh. “When they talked it was always about the perfect fly tied by some Chipawa Indian in Montana or the best pheasant scout in North Dakota. Neither ever mentioned movies or movie-making, but there was this hint of something sexual always playing at the edge of their conversation.” He held up his drink, “Now, Hawks, he liked his martini, especially the way O.E. Richman fixed ‘em. Old O.E., he’d mix your drink, then he’d stand

back and watch. When he saw your look of satisfaction, he'd just blend into the woodwork." His eye caught Bubba's. "You know."

"What about Faulkner?" Bart asked. "What'd he drink?"

"Anything," the old guy replied. "He preferred sour mash. Jack Daniels."

The younger men nodded.

Sam Crockett drained the last drop from his glass. He finished with a little sigh, glanced into their faces, and smiled softly.

As the old guy made his move to withdraw, Bubba said, "Hey, Sam, will you have another? On the house?"

Sam Crockett glanced around, shrugged, and said, "Well . . ."

"Who else famous did you know out there?" Clay asked, while Bubba prepared his third martini.

"My favorite of all at Musso and Frank's was the most complex thinker in Hollywood. A man who had no equals. He was king over all that he surveyed and territory beyond. His thought processes had no limits. We had many enjoyable Friday afternoons together. With a big head, a huge voice, a presence like a Nobel laureate, Orson Welles filled the room without trying. It came natural to him, as it does with few people. John Wayne had that aura. John Huston had it. Now there was a man for you. If he stepped through that door, women'd look at him like he was a god in disguise.

"You know all about how Orson Welles got famous doing War of the Worlds on radio. And he made probably the best motion picture ever produced with Citizen Kane. The second greatest, The Magnificent Ambersons, was snatched from him by studio bosses who ripped it to shreds. He brought Shakespeare to life with Othello in 1952. And he married the most beautiful high-priced call girl in Hollywood and loved every moment he ever spent with her."

Crockett sipped, raising his brows, glancing over the rim of his glass toward his listeners.

"Rita Hayworth?" Clay asked.

Sam Crockett winked, took down his glass, slid it toward Bubba, and whispered, "One more, if you please."

Bubba answered his request with prompt action.

As the new martini took shape, the old guy continued. “Orson Welles had so many sides, he could have played triplet octopi. While we drank a dozen martinis on a Friday afternoon, we consumed calamari, crabcakes, and a side of fried onion rings, Orson’s brain would float from subject to subject. We’d end the afternoon with sixteen-ounce sirloins, blood rare, served with M-and-F’s famous creamed spinach. All the while, Orson talked and I listened.”

Sam Crockett’s watery eyes, now filmy and slightly unfocused, swept over the faces. “He was magnificent! If you’ve never seen Vassili Silovic’s 1996 documentary, *One Man Band*, you should do yourselves a favor. It’s an enormously valuable piece of work. Believe me! It shows the essence of what I heard on Friday afternoons with the man.

“As a comedian, Orson Welles rivaled Chaplin. In a show called Orson’s Bag he plays all roles: an arrogant British tailor, a London policeman, the Chinese owner of a striptease club, and an old woman selling sweet violets and pornographic postcards. Then he impersonates Prime Minister Winston Churchill practicing a patriotic speech that turns sour. It’s hilarious.”

Halfway through his fourth martini, Sam Crockett looked around the room, where mothers and fathers and children were being seated in booths, where a college-aged couple were holding hands across the table, and where a three-year-old began screaming.

When he turned back to the bar, he tried to straighten his crooked body, lifted his head higher, and blinked. “Did you know Orson Welles wanted to make a film of *Don Quixote*?”

Bubba shrugged.

Clay Lawrence said, “No, I didn’t know that.”

“It was a dream,” the old guy said. “A dream,” he half-whispered. “To Orson, Miguel Cervantes was the world’s greatest novelist and *Don Quixote* the greatest novel. He wanted to make it the world’s greatest film. He had that dream until the day he died.”

Awkwardly, Sam Crockett slid off the stool, steadied himself for a moment, then walked stiff-legged to the rack where he retrieved his hat, stood still again and negotiated the front door.

Moments later Bubba watched as the old guy did not walk down the sidewalk along his usual path but stepped out into Fairview Avenue. Bubba

started to go after him, to navigate him toward the corner, but when he got to the door Sam Crockett had disappeared down the alley between Fronduti's and Bud's.

"The old guy was sure talkative today," Clay said. Another said, "He was full of himself." Bubba said, "First time he's ever really talked." Bubba smiled brightly. "Maybe he'll come back tomorrow and tell us more about life in Hollywood."

Two weeks later Clay and Bart and Kirk and Jim sat on their stools at the bar in El Rey's Burrito Lounge. Warren stood at the end with his blue bottle of Miller's Lite. Clay asked Bubba, "Have you seen the old guy since that day he talked all about knowing Orson Welles."

"He called Faulkner Billy," Bart said.

"I haven't seen him," Bubba said. "For a while he came in every day. Four o'clock. Regular. Never said but a word or two until that afternoon when he started telling stories."

"What was his name?" Kirk asked.

"Sam Crockett," Bubba said. "Samuel Tecumseh Crockett."

Thoughtfully, Bubba said, "I miss the old guy," glancing through the window, looking toward the corner. He added, "Warren went looking the other day but couldn't find him." Warren shook his head. "There are no Crocketts listed in Cloverdale," Bubba said. "If he has any kinfolks around, we couldn't find 'em."

.....

Wayne Greenhaw's 19th book, GHOSTS ON THE ROAD: Poems of Alabama, Mexico and Beyond was published in 2007 by River City Publishing of Montgomery. His newly revised novel, KING OF COUNTRY, was brought out in paperback, also in 2007. In 2006, Greenhaw was given the Harper Lee Award as Alabama's Distinguished Writer by the Alabama Writers Forum. In 2005 he was given the Clarence E. Cason Award for Nonfiction by the University of Alabama. He lives with his wife Sally in Montgomery and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. waynegreenhaw@mac.com.

.....

GREEN APPLE ON BLACK PLATE

Lois Parker Edstrom, 2007 Hackney National Literary Award Winner

1921; Oil on canvas

Georgia O'Keefe 1887-1986

Birmingham Art Museum, Alabama

You look upon this apple as a god -
reverential washing, one sacrificial slice
exposing moon-white halves,
four brown seeds cupped in translucent pods.
Then careful paring and separation,
thin green-rimmed crescents fanned on black plate-
communion offered to those of us who wait.

I consider past transgressions -
the pleasure of a lusty bite,
the crunch and slurp of apple gouged
by teeth and ravished to the core,
to the stem and withered blossom end.

.....
Lois Parker Edstrom's poetry has appeared in Arnazella and Cascade and in the anthology, Tattoos on Cedar. She received the Benefactor's Award from the Whidbey Island Writer's Conference, 2006, and Grand Prize in the Spirit of Writing Contest, 2005. Her poetry has been choreographed and performed by the Bellingham Repertory Dance Company. Lois is a retired nurse who lives on Whidbey Island, Washington.
.....



COUNTRY BRAWLER

3.14" x 2.5"

Steve Cartwright

pencil sketch colored in Photoshop

Steve Cartwright creates art for several magazines, newspapers, websites, commercial and governmental clients, and books. He has also contributed art pro bono for several animal rescue groups. He was awarded the 2004 James Award for cover art for Champagne Shivers and recently illustrated Cimarron Review and Stories for Children covers. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia. SCCART@aol.com

CURSE #1: THE ACCURSED TAKES THE FORM OF A CAT IN THE COLD

T.J. Beitelman

Love you are such a small small thing to exist
Perfect and miniature | Impossible to resist

The dozen or so cats of my appetite loiter in the bushes
My steps covered in a dusting | It drives a dagger

In me | You, among such beasts | Scrawny, blinking
Away flakes that kiss your eyes | *Hush*

I say | You are already quiet | The wages
Of a former life in a green place | Hot & alive

.....
T.J. Beitelman's work has appeared in Indiana Review, New Orleans Review, Quarterly West, and other literary magazines. He has received fellowships from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Cultural Alliance of Greater Birmingham. He teaches writing at the Alabama School of Fine Arts and edits Red Mountain Review (www.redmountainreview.net).
.....

“The only thing better than singing is more
singing.”

--Ella Fitzgerald

SOUTHSIDE BARBECUE

Jim Reed

The Western Supermarket Impulse Ritual is nearly the same each time.

Liz and I are splitting up and going our separate ways--that is, she is headed straight home and my car is headed straight home via Western Supermarket to pick up half and half for her morning coffee.

It's dusk, we've just left work, gone to an art gallery opening. It's been a long day for both of us, since we multi-task so much these days. Liz has prepared a grant report all day till a 2:30 pm meeting time, whizzed by the shop where I am clerking till 5:30, then zoomed off to the gallery. I started my day at the former shop, where I sorted through several boxes of valuable relics and detritus, hardly able to tell the difference between the two, then, brushing off the century-old plaster dust, I head for work and run the new shop for seven hours prior to the art show.

Now, I'm on the last leg of the day, trying to get into and out of Western and aim homeward to peace and quiet. As I pass the cafeteria line on my way to the dairy section, a clerk asks whether I want to get supper. I brusquely tell him "no" without pausing, then glance quickly at the prepared food and see that there are three small barbecue ribs remaining, floating in their burgundy sauce and calling out to me. We need to eat something besides the cookies and dip we've just had at the reception, so I say, "Uh, sir, I think I just changed my mind." He walks over and I point to the ribs. "Can I just buy what's left, and nothing else?" I figure that Liz and I can have a nice meal with leftover cole slaw and the ribs before collapsing into our long-day stupor at home.

While the clerk is weighing and pricing my order, the pleasant woman who usually works the counter walks up. "Long day," I say. "Yes, long day," she says. We always speak. A woman and man pass behind me, heading for the produce section, and the clerk's eyes flash. She looks at me knowingly and says something I don't quite understand, nodding toward the couple. I ask for a repeat, she says the same thing, which I still don't get, but it's obvious she's had an emotional PING and wants to share an opinion and a confession. It's her body language that tells me this.

"Nobody's going to do that to me," she says. I turn around but can only see the backs of the couple.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

“Her eyes all wide like that, it’s not right,” she says.

I finally figure out that she means the woman has two black eyes. I say, “That’s terrible,” acknowledging the fact that she thinks the woman has been abused.

“No man will ever do that to me,” she says. I cluck sympathetically and mouth some platitude in empathy. She goes on, “My ex-husband beat me up.”

“That’s terrible,” is all I can say, and mean it. “He beat me with a hammer,” she continues.

“Holy Moly,” I say to myself and lean forward to learn more.

“But I got him good,” she brags. I wonder how a small woman like this could stand up to an abusive male probably twice her size. “I taped him up and set him on fire,” she says, proudly. “He’ll never do that to anybody again.”

I can only do what any writer might automatically do. I ask what happened next. There’s always a sequel, since no story ever really ends, you know.

“Did they do anything to you?” I ask. Both of us know who the they is I’m referring to.

“Heck, no, why would they?” she says.

I can only nod sympathetically again, mumble something about how glad I am she lived to tell me the story, and walk on over toward the dairy section for the half and half for Liz. I pass by the couple and see the woman’s eyes for the first time. I know why they triggered the cook’s story. I wonder if this is what happened to her.

Later, writing this down for you to read, I wonder about barbecued wife-beaters and barbecued ribs and what kind of celestial relationship they might have to one another in this enormous universe.

.....
Jim Reed has authored hundreds of true and actual stories about his life in Alabama. He is editor of the Birmingham Arts Journal and president of the Alabama Writers’ Conclave. www.jimreedbooks.com
.....

SOMETHING LOST

Shelia Smith Mau

Barns will never be the same
for me again.

It almost happened
when the old John Smith barn burned.
It stood brown against the sky,
bedrock monument to Branchville's times past,
rooted to horses, to harvests of field hands stacking hay
to the top of strong oak beam rafters,
and it all went up in huge red flame,
in billowing black smoke –
memories melted in a moment
with wagon, wood and iron.

It was after you told your memory
that stopped mine cold.
My eyes saw back to tag through the stalls,
newborn kittens in wooden feed troughs.
Yours to a cruel summer afternoon
streaked with hand muffled screams,
when a cotton-top teenage cousin
led you to things you didn't understand.

Tears tell how he
took the hand innocent,
a child ten years old,
and led you to shame,
in that loft
in that hay.
Now your nightmare
is mine.

Barns will never be the same
for me again

.....

Shelia Smith Mau, Cropwell, Alabama, is currently secretary of Alabama State Poetry Society, is past president of William J. Calvert Writers, member of Alabama Writers' Conclave and Mountain Valley Poets. She has been published in Harp-Strings Poetry Journal, Soundings, Three O'clock at The Pines, and Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology of Alabama Poetry.

jmau4@cs.com

.....

“Anybody who goes to a psychiatrist should
have his head examined.”

--Robert Bloch

AND FEAR

Tolu Ogunlesi

(Crater Lake, Kenya, March 2006)
is that thing, all-eyed, slithering
around time-locked mountains.
it is iron john & his green crayon
at the bottom of a kenyan lake
conversing in a dialect that fails
to move the waters.
it is cellphone waves watching
from a safe distance the tourists who stand
at a bar stammering for whisky.
and it is a blank page, ten days old
riding on the bus that forgot
its swimming trunks.

.....
Tolu Ogunlesi was born in 1982. He is the author of a collection of poetry Listen to the Geckos Singing From a Balcony (Bewrite Books, UK, 2004). His fiction and poetry have appeared in Wasafiri, The Obituary Tango (Caine Prize Anthology 2006), Sable, Orbis, Eclectica, and elsewhere, and are forthcoming in Conceit Magazine and Absynthe Muse Review. In 2007, he won a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg poetry prize. He currently lives in Lagos, Nigeria.
.....

“To travel is to take a journey into yourself.”
--Danny Kaye



BATH

Stephen Smith
20" x 16"
Oil on Canvas

Stephen Smith is an oil painter who works in a traditional glazing technique. He is also a busy commercial artist whose work has appeared in numerous books, magazines and advertising campaigns. More of his art can be seen at www.threemagi.com.

THE DRIVER'S LICENSE GODDESS

Hannah Givens

The clock ticks loudly, over and over and over again. When I look at it, the hands don't seem to have moved an inch. The room is cold, like any waiting room, and just as impersonal. These plastic chairs were designed by chiropractors without enough business, I can tell. But all worship has to have an element of sacrifice. I don't look over my shoulder, that would be too irreverent, but I know what's there. A series of windows, behind which the priests and priestesses scurry about like roaches, dealing with the poor souls the Goddess herself hasn't deigned to deal with.

The Goddess sits in the center behind her desk, her sheer bulk attracting everyone's respect and her sheer disdain for anyone else's relevance only driving her own further home. Her beady eyes squint out from behind ample, pockmarked cheeks, ready and more than willing to condemn.

I shrink down in my chair, not wanting her gaze to touch the back of my head. I clutch my thin, ragged piece of paper between my fingers - fifty! It screams at me every time I look at it. I sneak a look around the room at the others, craning my neck low in an attempt to see their papers, but we are all hunkered down over them like threatened animals over a meal. I crinkle my paper between my fingers again. Fifty!

A few wide-eyed, shrinking teenagers slink out of the room behind me as quickly as they dare, murmuring "I failed again..." in tones of abject terror. They gather up their belongings and entourages and hurry out, the sound of their quickly flapping footsteps echoing long after they disappear. The rest of us clutch our numbers tighter, hoping and pleading for better luck than those poor souls. A few make covert glances behind, desperate attempts to find reassurance in the priests' unsmiling faces. They all cower again at the sight, the priests plodding along with scowling, disdainful expressions while the Goddess surveys the hopefuls.

I have to look behind again, I can't help myself. She is drumming her large fingers together slowly, her cheeks pulsing in an approximation of a thin smile. Like a fat spider in her parlour, I can't help but think, before hushing my own thoughts hurriedly. The Goddess might hear them. Her eyes are glinting in bitter delight as she reaches for her microphone. My eyes widen, the words "Fifty! Fifty!" hammering and screeching in my brain. I cling to the number in a panic. The speaker grill above my head scratches itself to life tiredly. "Forty-nine..."

.....

*Hannah Givens is a student in Calera, Alabama, and a librarian in Helena, Alabama.
screamingicecube@bellsouth.net*

.....

FORGIVING BILLY (First chapter of a novel-in-progress)

Lauren Wolk, 2007 Hackney National Literary Award Winner

Chapter One

Somewhere in this world, right now, one giant dog barks madly at the breathy thump of a bottled comet taking flight while a girl still a bit shy of a yard gazes into the crannies of an old boat, thrilled to catch the eye of a simpatico spider. At the same time, thirty-seven years later, this girl finds herself sitting at a stop light, bemused by the bumper sticker on the truck in front of her: “If you can read this,” it says, “thank a teacher. If it’s in English, thank a soldier.” She screams herself silent, her face bathed in blood, while the sky crackles with meteors, the sea rises, and white worms fall from nowhere like fat, voracious seeds. How can she stomach the smile exacted by an iron bit? How can she watch the slow demise of her own best inventions? At every turn, she is baffled by something, not least the endless confusion of being here. But as her experiment unfolds, she feels herself preparing to breathe again. And she finds herself at the bottom of the pool with Billy, forgiving him.

Her name is Ophelia, but she hasn’t called herself this since reading Hamlet in high school. She was often known as Oph when she was little, but for years she has gone by Lia. Everyone spells it wrong, of course—

Leah, they write—and she always corrects them, even though she feels a certain kinship with Jacob’s homely, weak-eyed wife. “It’s like Mia,” she says, “with an L.”

Lia’s an observant woman, always the first to spot the bushy spout of a humpback or to save the wooly bears that tumble like furry marbles in the teeth of her rake. Her eyes are the color of winter moss, their lids lazy, the skin beneath them inclined to pouch, but they’re sharp as a

**At every turn, she is
baffled by something,
not least the endless
confusion of being
here.**

giraffe's. She wonders if this anatomical blessing makes her aware of what others miss, but how can she see that there are things she doesn't see?

Much more obvious is the loveliness of the forests and bogs and beaches of Cape Cod where Lia's made her home. Now, while the leaves are dying beautifully all around her, she tramps through the woods saying goodbye. She loves the slowly rusting oak trees. The steadfast pines. The waxy white Indian pipes and ruddy teaberries that quietly, humbly offer up their persistent beauty.

She worships the vivid blare of toadstools. The cool moss green as limes. The umber necktie the black snake sports at his sunbath. She allies herself with them all.

She remembers watching, in second grade, a film about how to survive a nuclear blast.

Lia believes that she so values color in part because she herself feels so drab. Despite the lumpy, purple scar that keeps her from wearing bikinis, or the fact that she sees ghosts frequently, spending, as she does, nearly one third of her life lying in their

flight path, Lia considers herself very ordinary. When she once said that she felt drawn to anything that glittered, her friend, Corina, suggested that perhaps, in a former life, Lia had been a queen. To this, Lia said, "Either that or a crow."

At the sight of a red bird at its bath, or an acre of orange ditch lilies craning their slender necks toward the sun, she is therefore overcome if not with envy, then certainly with longing.

Lia counts her blessings when she wakes one October morning to a salmon-pink sky and clouds pearly as nacre, but she also laments the fact that so many of the earth's creatures will never even know that color exists. She wonders, then, whether there are similar miracles of which she herself will never be aware.

As she enters the high school where she teaches English, she's thinking of the zinnias that her older son, Sam, planted among her tomatoes when he was little. How they bloomed all summer and beyond, spangles of pure, persistent color, like a lasting, particulate rainbow.

Lia's juniors have become accustomed to her frequent excursions off the beaten path and therefore take it in stride when she asks, on that October morning, if they've ever considered the nature of color.

"What do you mean?" asks a diminutive boy named Aaron who wears his pants so low on his hips that he often falls when walking up stairs. In this, he's like many boys. In his gift for earning the trust of other children, he's unique. It is to Aaron that they come when they have a problem. He always seems to know what to do.

Lia wonders what she would have done if she'd had an Aaron in her life when she was a child and feared nearly everything.

She remembers watching, in second grade, a film about how to survive a nuclear blast. It was simple, really. All she had to do was get under her chair and then, after the explosion, throw her desk through the classroom window and climb out. If she was hungry, all she had to do to avoid radiation poisoning was tip over a loaf of bread and slit open the bottom of the plastic sleeve. The bread in the film was Wonder Bread. The woman demonstrating how to avoid the radioactive dust on the top of the bag was wearing a pretty dress, but it was impossible to tell what color it was because the film was in black and white.

Lia learned much later, in college, that these films were meant to convince Americans that they had some control over their fates when they had, in fact, no such thing.

The films didn't work on this particular American child.

While Lia lay in bed each night and waited for the nuclear missiles that were surely arcing up over the Pole from Russia, headed for a house in Plymouth, Massachusetts, she also imagined that a fire

was starting at that very moment, somewhere in the house. And what if there really is a fire but I don't do anything about it and we all die? she'd ask herself. Then it would be my fault. Despising herself but helpless in

**The light in this
classroom is
florescent. It makes
the students appear
jaundiced and
raccoon-eyed.**

the face of her relentless imagination, she would then creep through the house, sniffing the air, listening for the crackling of flames.

Lia never told her parents about her nightly excursions. She was afraid they'd think she was crazy.

Thirty-five years later, she tells Aaron, "I'm not completely sure what I mean, but given the million other trivial things that occupy our attention every day, the nature of color has to deserve at least a little of our time. Start with what you know."

The light in this classroom is florescent. It makes the students appear jaundiced and raccoon-eyed. The tables at which they're clustered are a white dirtied by pencil dust and fingerprints. In the center of the room, a large garbage can on wheels catches a slow drip from the ceiling. Because the intake vent for this classroom is located in an alleyway next to a gas station, the air inside smells vaguely of petroleum. Nobody wants to be in this room.

**She used to have
skin like a Dresden
doll. Now, her face
is edged in sunspots.**

But they're willing to discuss the refraction of light and the properties of the human eye and the inability of most mammals to see color and to listen when she says, "Suppose

color's a matter of perception and the world is really a place of whites and blacks and grays, like it is in the dark, like it is to many animals, and that other colors exist only in our brains."

Lia spends time on such topics because she's learned that if one is willing to look at the world from a fresh perspective, one can be changed forever.

She remembers an episode of *The West Wing* in which a delegation of mapmakers petitions the White House to reconsider standard depictions of Earth. To make their point, they present the continents as they actually are, in their true dimensions, which aren't accurately reflected on most maps. They then flip the whole thing upside down and ask the simplest of questions: In a universe as vast as ours, with no real up or down, top or bottom, who decides that the earth should be viewed as we view it? Northerners, presumably.

Taping an upside-down map of the world to the white board, Lia now asks her students this very question.

"Try to think of the planet from this new perspective," she tells them. "And ask yourselves why that's so hard to do."

As Lia and her students consider the world's paradigms, she finds herself feeding a beautiful bonfire on a sand bar that is quickly being consumed by the tide. She doesn't know what will happen when the sea submerges the fire, but she's about to find out.

To her students, she says, "Now I want you, in your groups, to come up with a definition of 'the present.'"

They've just started reading *Slaughterhouse Five*. Lia has alarmed them a little with her attitude towards its author, Mr. Vonnegut. She appears to love him. "Wait until you've finished the book," she says, "and then you'll understand."

Rereading the novel has made Lia newly aware of the passage of time. She used to have skin like a Dresden doll. Now, her face is edged in sunspots, and one of her pinkish moles has risen into a dome. So why does she continue to think of herself as a younger woman, even when she sees evidence several times a day to the contrary? How is she going to feel when she's old? Will her mirrors make her leap with surprise?

She often thinks about Billy Pilgrim, the boy in Mr. Vonnegut's book, who comes to be convinced by aliens that there's a fourth dimension in which time ceases to be relevant and one is, simultaneously, newborn and corpse and everything in between ... and that it is up to each of us to visit ourselves in the moments we like best, or to escape from those we like least. Everything is already decided. Everything's already happened. Which makes struggle unnecessary. Even foolish.

Lia doesn't believe this alien philosophy. Like Billy Pilgrim before his conversion, she believes in free will. She believes there's a way to control almost everything, even if she herself doesn't always know how. She believes in the struggle, although she is sometimes the first to give in, and even if she didn't, she wouldn't like the idea that everything's already etched in stone. If that were true, she'd have to believe that the one holding the chisel was either a madman or a monster. And she doesn't.

But Billy's glad to embrace such ideas because he's learned that everything hurts less if he believes it's all beyond his control. If he looks away from what's disturbing and focuses instead on something pleasant.



YELLOW WINDOW

Christopher Woods

Digital Photograph

*Writer and photographer Christopher Woods lives in Houston, Texas. His photographs have been published in Cezanne's Carrot, Clapboard House, Sein Und Werden, Perigee, Verdad, The Sylvan Echo, Sunken Lines, Numinous Spiritual Poetry, Cell 2 Soul and Ken*Again. His credits include a prose collection, Under a Riverbed Sky, and a collection of stage monologues for actors, HEART SPEAK.*

She thinks about such things as her students are discussing the nature of time.

"The present is where we are at the moment, in between the past and the future," says a girl named Stephanie who has a Hello Kitty handbag and a Happy Bunny journal.

On the board, Lia draws a horizontal line with an arrowhead at either end. At the left arrowhead, she writes "past." At the right arrowhead, she writes "future." In the middle, she makes a circle on the line and writes "present."

A boy named Jason, distinguished from the other Jasons in the school by his bottle-blue hair, says, "The circle needs to keep moving into the future constantly or it'll become the past."

"Or it's fixed and everything else is moving," Stephanie says.

"Either way," Jason says, "the present is almost too small to measure. Like a split atom."

The class talks about this for a little while, whether the present even exists at all or is simply where the past and future abut.

"We'll be talking about perception, and time, and reality as we read Mr. Vonnegut's book," she says, erasing the line from the white board. "But don't worry about arriving at any absolute conclusions. Just consider the possibilities, even if in the end you decide the whole thing's a big, frustrating tangle with no solution you can pin down for more than a second or two. Like the view through a kaleidoscope in motion." She dusts off her hands. "I'd like you now, in your groups, to list all the different types of reality you've experienced in your lives."

Lia Wayne is forty-two years old. She's been teaching for only four years. This is her fifth. She had reasons for starting late. In the past couple of weeks, she's had occasion to entertain several reasons for quitting early. One of them involves white worms falling through thin air.

The students, looking at her, know nothing of the white worms beyond the fact that one of them appeared on Lia's arm in class one day. It seemed to have materialized out of nowhere. As she stands before them now, she seems to be buzzing slightly. They attribute this to her passion for Mr. Vonnegut. They are only partly right.

As the students are working, Lia finds a bag of Popsicle sticks hidden in her son's room. She knows without asking that he has kept them so no

one will be able to steal his DNA and clone him. The question is: does she laugh at this, or cry?

Five minutes later, Lia wipes her eyes and begins to construct a master list of realities with her students. In the end, it includes physical existence, emotions, dreams, fantasies and imagination, hallucinations (at least one student has had a high fever, another admits to using drugs), memories, theories, hopes, and illusion.

"What about music?" says a guitarist named Stephen whose left hand has elongated fingers because he plays a '56 Les Paul. "Music's a kind of reality."

"Then so is dance," says Sarah, a girl who can't possibly see the blackheads inside her ears or the long hairs matted in the armpits of her sweater.

There's a discussion about art and reality, and the students agree that art can go on the list. And they're all prepared to admit that in almost any given day, they experience nearly all of the realities on the list, except for, perhaps, hallucination (which draws a snort from the boy who has confessed to using drugs).

"Then this homework assignment should be easy for you," she says as she hands it out. "I want you to keep a log of every time you migrate from reality to another. For at least one full day." When everyone has a copy, she says, "Since Billy Pilgrim experiences so many types of reality, I hope this exercise will help you to become more engaged in the novel."

Because Lia hasn't conducted this experiment before, she's decided to do it along with her students.

She doesn't know that doing so will save her.

This is the story of where she goes.

.....

In 1999, Random House published Lauren Wolk's first novel, Those Who Favor Fire. Her second novel, Forgiving Billy, was recently nominated for the 2008 Pushcart Editor's Book Award. She is the Public Relations Director at the Cultural Center of Cape Cod and is working on her first book of poetry.

wolkhall@comcast.net

.....

LETTER #3

Alex Stolis

8358 Sunset Boulevard
West Hollywood, California 90069
April 2, 19__

Dear J_____,

In this dream we are on water, you search for my hand, I see an empty bottle spin in the kitchen while waves cover the sun. Your words are rain clouds, there is a half pack of cigarettes on the counter—salt burns a hole to the ocean floor as my hand moves up your thigh. You tell me the sea is unforgiving and words turn empty and light—there is no time to question why our sails are full but we remain still and broken.

In this dream you are tired of being low—would rather be dark and lonely, unafraid to bury a stranger's hand in your back pocket. The cigarettes, gone and the pavement shines black from leftover intentions and broken truth.

My name will be forgotten and I will barely be able to remember the curve of you—the only thing left will be the hiss of fire, the taste of ash and a chalk outline that looks pink when the light hits it just right.

Yours,

L_____

.....
Alex Stolis lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as a chemical dependency counselor. Some previous publications include Chiron Review, Snow Monkey, Poetry Motel, Black Bear Review, The German Niederngasse, Illya's Honey, Unwound, Nerve Cowboy, Lynx Eye and Staplegun. In the fall of 2002, RoseWater Press published his first chapbook, Obsidian Butterflies. In 2004, FootHills Publishing released his second chapbook, The Latest News From Home and Little Poem Press released the third, Drowning Ophelia. In 2005, Pudding House publications released his fourth chapbook, Playing Cards With Houdini. A chapbook is forthcoming from Rubicon Press. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize three times, in 2004, 2006 and 2007.
.....

FACING THE WATERS

T. Mozelle Harris, 2007 Hackney National Literary Award Winner

“And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

This is the story
waves whisper
to the shore:
*God once felt
my face,
seeing the way
the blind see.*

This is the chant
rain repeats
on rooftops:
*I was here first—
this is my world.*

This is the groan
of ice:
*I stretch, I grow
stiff, but I can't
find enough room
without nudging
and shifting earth.*

This is the grumble
of water turning
down the drain:
*Why must I fill
this void, why
must I take this
shape, why
didn't I leave
or He leave
well enough
alone?*

This is the hiss
of steam, the sigh
of dew:
*God might not be
everywhere,
but I am.*

.....
T. Mozelle Harris teaches English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and directs the Ada Long Creative Writing Workshop for high school students. Her poetry and essays have been published in a variety of journals including Red Mountain Review, Santa Clara Review, PoemMemoirStory, StorySouth and the anthologies, Family Matters: Poems of Our Families and As Ordinary and Sacred as Blood: Alabama Women Speak. Her personal interests include creating pottery and exploring the outdoors.
.....

FEEL COLD STANDING BESIDE THESE FLAGS

Julia Otxoa

Translated by Toshiya Kamei

I feel cold
standing beside these flags.
Their anthems
chill my heart
like the black memory
of a never-ending war.

Tengo frío junto a los estandartes

Tengo frío junto a los estandartes,
el rumor de sus himnos
hiela mi corazón
como la negra memoria
de una guerra perpetua.

.....

Julia Otxoa was born in 1953, in San Sebastián, Spain. She is the author of many books, most recently Un extraño envío (2006). Translations of her poems have appeared in Sleepingfish and Illuminations.

Toshiya Kamei is the translator of The Curse of Eve and Other Stories (Host, 2008) by Liliana Blum and Collection: Ekphrastic Poems by Ericka Gheri (Canvas Press, 2007).

.....

“We have no art. Everything we do is art.”
--Balinese saying

HOLY GROUND

Ruth Faulkner Grubbs

I built a house
an easy peaceful place
mortaring the foundation
with the slapping, sucking pull
of concrete. A rasping saw sang
and I hammered home
resounding echoes
a frame of timber groaning
under weight of shingles
melding finality upon the roof.

Paint swooshed onto the walls
goldenrod and deep forest green.

Wrap-around porch slats
slice wind into song.

Windows open on gardens
watered by tears
and curious peonies and hollyhocks
whisper *where does love go*
when it leaves your soul
and swirls away
a maelstrom gone forever.

I do not know
yet this house, I treasure
and gave so much to build.

.....

Ruth Grubbs resides in Knoxville, Tennessee. The publication Greyhound Collection: A Trip to Remember included one of her short stories. She placed third in a poetry contest by The American Society on Aging, received a short story Honorable Mention from WRITERS' Journal, and is a member of Knoxville Writers' Guild.

.....

ALL THAT JAZZ

Billy O'Callaghan

"I'm from Russia," she says, then immediately regrets it.

"Oh, really? What part of Russia?"

"St. Petersburg." This is a lie, but it is better to lie than to say Samara, because people have heard of St. Petersburg and having heard of it they think, or feel, that they know it somehow. Recognition always dawns across their faces. Samara would just invite conversation, and lead to complications.

Jazz drips from the walls, stuttering piano that clears the way soon enough for a brushy, convoluted drum solo. It is live, but echoey here in the bar, leaking through the wall and the crowded doorway from one of the hotel's four performance rooms. This is a room for the serious Jazz, the eclectic stuff that she just adores. But the bar is crowded and nobody seems very bothered about what the musicians are doing up on stage.

She tells them St. Petersburg, any who ask, because it is a game, a way of keeping the predators at bay.

"Can I buy you a drink?" This one is an overweight, ruddy-faced man in his forties and maybe even his fifties, which makes him ten years or even double that too old for her. He has red hair clipped short. Tufts of it rise, a copper shade somehow pale, from the ugly puce flesh of his scalp. He leans in as his kind always do; penned into this barroom there is nowhere to go. She nods, not wanting a drink at all, but this too is the way it always is.

Five or ten minutes later, there is a hand on her hip, drawing her close again and again, despite her polite efforts at struggle.

Every move is a leading question. When he speaks it is right in her ear, and he shifts his weight so that he can rub some of his weight against her shoulder, a gesture he seems to consider is an apology for having no choice but to push this close in order to make himself heard above the noise of the room. The words don't matter though; all she wants is to be away. Every word she utters to a man in this place is taken for an invitation.

He asks for her number, then thinks better of it and pushes his own at her, ornately embossed on a little saffron business card, and asks outright

for a date. "Call me," he says, "and we'll do something." But that is not the end, his hand is still on her hip and maybe her gyrated efforts at escape have only encouraged him more, because he hasn't given up on tonight. Then he leans in again and she braces herself for more words, some other sordid invitation or proposition, but he chooses to forego words and instead presses his face into the hollow of her neck. His hot damp breath coats her throat and cheek with a stale Guinness stench. She wants to cry out, but doesn't. She is here for the music, maybe the only one in this room who is. But she is lonely too, and after a second or third glass of beer she begins to feel a creep of exhilaration at the idea that someone wants to know her, even someone like this, a man old enough to be her father and one whose only attraction to her is his heartbeat. It is easy to push away the thought that he would be happy to know any woman tonight. Russian just seems a little more exotic to him, she knows, some small detail that can be bragged about to his work-mates on Monday, and with just a little more enthusiasm than usual.

In comparison with the other women in the barroom she is dressed very modestly. A couple of girls push past, arm in arm and swapping gales of laughter. They can't be more than twenty, and in skimpy too-short too-low-cut dresses their exposed flesh seems to glisten. They laugh the laugh of the drunk and uninhibited, tossing their long strawberry blonde and brunette hair and baring their perfect teeth and then the enticing flicker of their tongues. They are on a night out, and the jazz festival is the place to be tonight, the place that has drawn an influx to the city from all over Ireland and even beyond. It is a place to be seen, the perfect Sunday night platform for their talents. They laugh, a little bit drunk, and totter along on stiletto heels, knowing they have the attention of everyone they pass.

His breath is slick against her neck and she tries to shrug him off. She is not those girls; for one thing, she is thirty, and beyond such needs. Even when she was twenty though, she was never them. She is simply dressed, in black faded denims and a light grey wool sweater. It is warm in here, but it is late October too. Her style is simple, but alluring too, in its way. She is slim and fit and the clothes hug her shape and emphasize it to all who care to look.

"I have to go," she says, suddenly angry. With effort she pushes him back and if he is slow to understand then at least he yields. "I have to meet

a friend upstairs at ten." She has lived here seven years. Her accent is still instantly noticeable but her English is excellent.

Seven years here, a mother of one, the best mistake that she has ever made and the price she has paid and still pays for the foolish illusion of love. She has been through this before, nobody gets into her bed through the pity door anymore.

.....

Billy O'Callaghan's fiction has appeared, or is soon to be published, in Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, the Bellevue Literary Review, Elysian Fields Quarterly, Ireland's Own, Southword, the Taj Mahal Review, and Versal. He has won the George A. Birmingham Award and the Lunch Hour Stories Prize. His address is Douglas, Cork, Ireland. billyredster@gmail.com

.....

HEAD GAME (on back cover)

Marcia Mouron

KEY – from top left corner to this mixed media piece:

Signal ahead
Swelled head
Egg head
Headlights
Headlines
Compass headings
Head strong
Headquarters
A head taller
Red head
Get ahead
Headstand

BLOWFISH

Frank Haberle

Patrick wakes up to the screams of some other family's lawnmower. He lies in bed for some time, trying vainly to remember what he did wrong. He then pulls yesterday's t-shirt on and descends to the kitchen.

Rickey's bare feet swing beneath the kitchen table. Captain Crunch pellets scatter the surface. Patrick reaches for the box.

"All gone," Rickey says, looking into his bowl filled with orange milk.

Patrick picks loose pellets. He puts them into his mouth, pressing them against the back of his teeth.

"Mommy says you have to go with Daddy," Rickey says.

"What?"

Patrick panicks. He's done something bad. It concerns Dad.

"She says you have to go with Daddy in the car."

"Oh."

"You need to wake Daddy up. Mommy says so. He's on the couch."

Bowl to chin, Rickey laps orange milk, like a cat.

Dad's car stinks of other men. Angry cars shuffle around it. Patrick peers over the dashboard.

"Where are we going?"

Dad's white hands grip the wheel.

"I got to see some people."

Dad pulls into a parking lot in front of a grocery store. Men in white butcher aprons march in a circle, holding red-lettered signs. The men watch Dad walk painfully to them, like his feet hurt. They all start talking to him at once. Dad shrugs a lot. One big man looks angry. He pushes his chest out and waves his arms. Dad says a few things, and the big man's arms drop. He smiles. He shakes Dad's hand, hard. The other men clap Dad's back. They return to their circle. Dad returns to the car.

"Who are those men?" Patrick asks.

"Some men I used to work with."

"What did you tell them?"

Dad swerves back into traffic. A truck just misses them.

"I told them they should go back to work," Dad says.

Patrick's stomach aches with hunger. Maybe they'll head home. He's done something bad. Dad doesn't seem to know or care.

Dad pulls onto the Eastbound lane, toward the end of the island.

"Where are we going now?"

"Fishing," Dad says. Patrick's heart sinks. "I think we need to go fishing."

The car swerves back and forth. Dozing, Patrick remembers the bad thing. The huge stuffed blue marlin, covered in dust, standing above Dad's desk. There's a photo next to it, framed in silver. It's Dad, in a bathing suit, a grinning young man standing next to the marlin. The marlin hangs from a hook, on a dock, in front of a big white boat.

Yesterday, staring at his father's smile, Patrick pressed his thumb against the marlin, gently at first, then as hard as he could. Suddenly it broke through, leaving a thumb-sized hole in the tail. Patrick tried to pull the piece back into place, but the marlin's dried flesh ripped further.

"I'm telling," Rickey said, but hasn't yet, or so it seems.

They drive for a long time down a two-lane road surrounded by potato fields. The sour potato odor overpowers the smell of the car. The road ends at a pier. They drive onto the deck of a white ferry.

Patrick wants to climb out and drink the ocean air. The ferry blows its horn and pulls away from the dock. Patrick looks at his father. His eyes are pressed shut. Patrick reaches for the door latch. Dad's arm stretches out suddenly and presses the lock down.

"Forgive them," Dad says. "Lord, forgive them all."

Forgive who? From the car seat, Patrick can barely see tips of white sails over the ferry sides.

"Where are we going now?" Patrick asks.

His eyes shut again, Dad doesn't answer.

They stop at a dock-front store lined with lobster traps. Behind the store, tied to a dock, is a row of big white power boats.

"Are you coming?" Dad says.

Patrick's empty stomach folds over itself. He stares at the boats.

"No?"

"Suit yourself."

In a minute, Dad hobbles out with two bamboo poles. Lines attach to little red bobbers. In the other hand he holds a white box coated in ice.

"What's that?"

"Minnows," Dad says.

On a causeway surrounded by grassy dunes, Dad pulls the car onto a sandy track. The wheels sink in the sand. Dad unbuttons his shirt, and

drops it in his seat. Patrick pulls his t-shirt over his head, throws it on his seat, and follows Dad onto a slick rock jetty. Dad's walk is sturdier now. He pulls two minnows from the box. He pokes hooks through their eyes. He hands a pole to Patrick. Dad swings the bait into the water.

"Like this," Dad says.

They stand on the rocks and toss their lines. Gulls fuss and tumble from the sky. The smell of rotting sea vegetation dizzies Patrick. Nauseous, he watches the sun sink lazily toward the sea.

"Lord help them," Dad says.

Patrick should tell Dad, but he can't. His line tugs. He panics, afraid to be pulled in the water. His arm jerks. A six inch fish spins from the water and back onto the rocks at their feet.

"Huh," Dad says.

They put down their poles and crouch to look. The fish stares up at them, the hook looped firmly through its lip. The fish is green and brown, and a little blue, and there's a spot of red around the mouth. Maybe, Patrick thinks, it's a baby fish.

The fish takes a deep breath, then exhales. It takes a deeper breath, and inflates like a balloon. It exhales, making a hissing noise. On its fourth breath, it pops like a balloon. Fish meat and entrails splash across the rocks.

Patrick jumps back, terrified.

"What is it?"

"Blowfish."

Patrick looks up. The young man in the marlin picture is smiling down at him. Startled, Patrick bursts into laughter.

Dad laughs back. It's a rare sound, the roar of the ocean, the tinkle of sea glass.

"It's nothing to be afraid of, son," Dad chuckles. "It's just a fish."

.....
Frank Haberle's stories have appeared in journals including Adirondack Review, Hot Metal Press, Melic Review, Johnny America, Broken Bridge Review, Smokelong Quarterly, SN Review and 21 Stars Review. Frank is Board Chair of the NY Writers Coalition, a community organization that provides creative writing opportunities for disenfranchised New Yorkers. raiseplow@aol.com
.....



SPRAY CAN

Humberto Valle
Acrylic on Canvas Board
28" x 30"

Humberto Valle, an artist/illustrator in Phoenix, Arizona, was drawing cartoon characters when other kids were drawing stick figures. He now focuses mainly on painting, primarily abstract, modern expressionism and pop art.
hvalle@owpp.com

MOVING OUT

Darren Griffin

Like most nineteen-year-olds, I am ready for some independence. 18 months ago I graduated high school, and have been taking some courses at the community college which coincidentally holds night classes at my old high school. I am still living at home and still going to the same campus. My parents just got divorced last summer, and the emptiness of the house, with just me and my mother, is more than I can handle. I have this overwhelming desire to just leave, to go wherever my just-above-minimum-wage job at a sandwich shop will allow me to go.

Saturday afternoon, my mother and I are home alone. I am in the den watching television and she is at the kitchen table paying bills. The phone rings, I answer it, and it is one my mom's friends, so I tell her to pick up the phone in the kitchen. She asks me to come hand her the phone, even though it is less than 5 feet away from her. I walk into the kitchen, pick up the receiver, and as I go to hand the phone to her, the base of the Princess phone crashes on the green and yellow linoleum. Mom yells about how much of an idiot I am, loud enough for her friend to hear it. Having a temper similar to hers, I yell at the top of my lungs for her to shut up, and I call her a word I almost never use. I storm off and she follows me, still angry and yelling. "Either apologize to me right now or get out of my house!" I don't speak another word, and simply walk past her, calmly, to my bedroom and start packing my clothes.

After about an hour, she comes into my room. She asks what I am doing, and I respond that she had told me to get out of her house, so I am obliging. She tries to change her words back around, saying that she asked for an apology, and I tell her I am not prepared to apologize for responding to her anger. She pleads with me not to leave. I have to be at my job in a few minutes anyway, so I agree not to take my suitcase until we can talk more about it.

When I arrive at work, I am still angry about the situation. My manager, Leigh, a very attractive 21-year-old college student, asks me what's wrong, so I recap the afternoon's activity. Leigh calls her

boyfriend, Ross, who has just moved into an apartment on Southside, to see if he needs a roommate. Luckily, Ross has a 2-bedroom, and his rent payment is half what a normal tenant would pay. After Leigh talks to him, he is open to the possibility of my living there. Plus, Ross works the graveyard shift at a hotel, so we won't really be there at the same time. While it seems too good to be true, it is the best news I have heard in a long time. Leigh leaves for the night and I keep working, with a smile on my face for once.

Around 2:00 AM, I lock the doors and make my way home to get my suitcase, my cassette deck and my cassette case, and a few other things. Leigh is at Ross's apartment, so I call and tell her I am on my way. I walk out the front door, down the walkway in front of our aging 60's ranch-style house, and make it to my car without anyone's watching or knowing, and drive away. A feeling of relief, and of invincibility, consumes me as I head towards the bright lights of Birmingham.

It is still early morning at the apartment complex when I pull into the parking spot. I grab my belongings and walk up the narrow staircase to my new living quarters. Leigh answers the door. She is nocturnal, with beautiful, almost too-pale, white skin. She could pass for a vampire. Her natural blond hair has been dyed several times, and is currently black with maroon streaks. Her bright blue eyes are perfect round pools I want to swim in. She shows me the room, I drop my belongings, and she meets me in the hallway. Without a word she hugs me. I have never been romantically interested in her, but tonight, seeing her out of the polo-shirt and khaki pants of our work uniforms, and in a nightgown, my thoughts change. I take Leigh into my arms and we stand there for what seems an eternity. After a few minutes, she reaches for the light switch, afraid the neighbors will see us.

.....
Darren Casey Griffin is a deposit operations manager for a community bank in Birmingham, and resides in Center Point with his wife, Amy. A native of Hueytown, Griffin attended Jefferson State Community College and the University of Montevallo, and received his Bachelor's of Science degree from Birmingham-Southern College in 2001. darren.griffin@gmail.com
.....

TETONS

Irene Latham

blurred world
suddenly sharp

peaks rise
like prayer

boot after
clumsy boot

we climb

.....

Irene Latham was named the 2007 Alabama Poet of the Year, and What Came Before, her first book of poems, was selected as the Poetry Book of the Year by the Alabama Poetry Society. She is Vice President of the Alabama Writers' Conclave and Poetry Editor of Birmingham Arts Journal. Irene lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband, Paul, and three sons. www.irenelatham.com

.....

"There is no harm in charging oneself up
with delusions between moments of valid
inspiration."

--Steve Martin

**BIRMINGHAM
ARTS
JOURNAL**

Copyright ©2008 by
the Birmingham
(Alabama) Art
Association, a non-
profit organization
for the encourage-
ment of emerging
artists and authors.

Unsolicited
contributions of
fiction, non-fiction,
poetry, photographs,
and visual art, all
submitted in digital
form, are welcome.
All authors/artists
retain rights to their
respective works.

Full submission
guidelines at our
websites (see above).

Editor:

Jim Reed

Poetry Editor:

Irene Latham

Art Editor:

Liz Reed

Production Editor:

Kathy Jolley

Photographer:

David Murray



**Support
Birmingham Art Association
www.birminghamartassociation.org
&
Birmingham Arts Journal
www.birminghamartsjournal.com**

Circle one: New Member Renewal Member

Membership Level (Circle one): Family \$70 Individual \$50
Student \$30

I wish to make a gift of (Circle one): \$ 300 \$200 \$100
Other \$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Ph/Home: _____ Ph/Work: _____

Ph/Cell: _____

Email: _____

Website: _____

Circle Payment Type:

CHECK CASH VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS
DISCOVER MASTERCARD

Card
Number: _____ Exp: _____

Signature: _____

Make Checks Payable to Birmingham Art Association
Box 425
Birmingham, AL 35201-0425

Birmingham Arts Journal



www.birminghamartsjournal.com